

Grzegorz Niziołek

Warlikowski: Extra Ecclesiam

Translated by Soren Gauger

**Polish Studies -
Transdisciplinary Perspectives**

Edited by Krzysztof Zajas / Jarosław Fazan



PETER LANG
EDITION

Krzysztof Warlikowski's work stands among the most remarkable phenomena in post-1989 European theater. This book joins Warlikowski's theater with the dynamic changes in Polish society following 1989, using strategies borrowed from psychoanalysis, theater anthropology, performance studies, and cultural poetics. This book is not only about an artist of the theater, but above all about the theater production as an object of the audience's desire, an object evoking fascination, revulsion, aversion, and opposition. This is why the performances are analyzed as a series of flash-points, constellations with powerful affective impacts. It focuses on fragments of social rituals, material objects with major potential to spark audience emotions, and gestures of violence. The piecemeal narrative serves to cull out aspects of Warlikowski's performances that could be read as symptoms of social drama.

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Warlikowski Is Us

Provocative as our title may sound, Krzysztof Warlikowski is among those artists who have generated the most conflicting opinions, who have met with resistance, or even indignation. Small wonder, at any rate, given that his theater has aimed to expose what is perceived as different, other, and even hostile in Polish culture and society, and what has come with the transformation processes after 1989. He has stubbornly been labeled a “provocateur.” It has swiftly turned out, however, that Warlikowski did not seek to identify with the model of the provocateur, that he was trying to mobilize processes whereby bonds were forged and empathy created in the theater, that he longed for understanding, not to create scandals, though his self-expression also led to extreme, uncompromising, transgressive situations. By “understanding” we mean less superficial acceptance, tolerance, or other gestures of this sort than, on the one hand, building a personal, capacious, and biting theatrical language, and on the other, attempting to evoke a lively and multi-tiered reception process, taking into account various perspectives, approaches, and experiences. “Understanding” here is a readiness to take on the task of reading speech which is initially strange, incomprehensible, and foreign. Another thing that seems indispensable in reading them is the hermeneutic strategies of psychoanalysis – the classical rhetorical figures of the language of the unconscious developed by Sigmund Freud. Strategies like condensation, displacement, repetition, transference and working-through, idealization and sublimation, repression and resistance. In the psychoanalytical process speaking and understanding are lined with traps, at risk of overuse, erroneous interpretation, they are always a live, one-time, and unique situation – this is why the psychoanalyst or therapist must have a high degree of self-consciousness, responsibility, and knowledge of the phenomena of projection and transference. Freud was convinced that, however shocking the truth about a man that was revealed during a discourse of the unconscious, it was always part of the experience of a “common unhappiness,” whether a person liked it or not. I cannot find a model that would better grant us an idea of how Warlikowski’s theater functions, its social situation and resonance, though I do realize that here the psychoanalytical process occurs in a spontaneous, unstructured fashion, full of abuses, enduring compulsions, unexpected breakthroughs, faulty interpretations

and blind alleys; as such, it demands a non-dogmatic, even somewhat eclectic approach – and, ultimately, must remain a metaphorical depiction.

Perhaps the protagonist of this book ought to be clarified at once. It is not Krzysztof Warlikowski – the man, the artist, the theater director, not even in a very limited sense. Warlikowski stands as a fascinating event in Polish theater and culture as such, a field affected by many phenomena: theater, psychology, culture, society, politics, and religion. This book shifts the center of gravity toward the dynamics of reception, it ties Warlikowski's theater into the process of Polish society's transformation after 1989, using tools developed in the anthropology of theater, performance, and cultural poetics. Warlikowski's theater is an event in which actors, viewers, and critics have taken part, and still do – this living interhuman constellation is, after all, constantly changing, much as assessments of this phenomenon are changing, individual attitudes are being revised, and interpretations are becoming more profound. Warlikowski is a process, a field, and a space – and one that seems ever-expanding. This shared space includes the woman who demanded that Jacek Poniedziałek put his underwear back on during the performance of *Hamlet*, and the girl who, during a performance of *The Bacchae*, crawled into the swimming pool built on stage. These are only two spectacular examples of audience reactions, ones that are widely known and described; they perfectly render the problematic nature of the border between stage and audience in Warlikowski's theater, which is always sharply drawn, so that it can be questioned and transcended. This explains, for example, the obsession with scenes that mirror the audience. Thus the fondness for the conventions of the Classicist theater with no fourth wall, demanding the actors perform facing the audience, and that every question directed at their partners be first planted in the audience space to ascertain the power of its resonance.

As such, this is not a book about Krzysztof Warlikowski the theater artist, but a book about “Warlikowski” – the object of the audience's desire. A fetishized object, but also one who stokes revulsion, aversion, and opposition. This is why I proposed a different kind of narrative in this book, one that departs from ambitions to replicate a coherent artistic structure. The plays are analyzed as a series of trouble spots, a constellation of sites with a particularly powerful emotional and affective impact. I have tracked fragments of social rituals in Warlikowski's performances, used as tools to activate the audience's attitude (wedding scenes), I have indicated material objects with great potential to affect viewers' memory and emotions (tables), violent gestures with clear cultural origins that evoke anxiety (the cultural imagination of liminal “monsters”), and situations where actors undress and change clothes (problematizing the experience and image of the body from a queer perspective). The book's fragmentary narrative is meant

to help extract those elements of Warlikowski's performances which could be treated as symptoms of the social drama, the crisis of identity to date, the collapse of stabilized rituals, an approach to the sphere of phantasms. Though I have made reference to Victor Turner's concept of the social drama, I have tried to dilute its "optimistic" conclusions, which mark out dialectic processes to overcome all the crises of collective life. I have placed the emphasis more on liminal aspects, on the effect of dispersed significance, on the materiality of the world on stage, which we struggle to assign unambiguous meaning, and on the "unhappy" aspects of the performative acts.

Krzysztof Warlikowski made his debut in 1992; his first play at the Stary Theater in Krakow (*The Marquise of O.*, based on the novella by Heinrich von Kleist) was a spectacular catastrophe, rejected by audiences, and even mocked by some. Warlikowski swiftly, however, found support at the Nowy Theater in Poznań, where he made three premieres which met with a very lively response (Marie-Bernard Koltès's *Roberto Zucco*, in particular, was given ovations by the young audiences). At the same time, he began working abroad, at first mainly in Israel and in Germany. We ought also to mention his efforts to tackle Shakespeare's most difficult dramas at a very early stage: *The Merchant of Venice* (Wilam Horzyca Theater in Toruń), *A Winter's Tale* (Nowy Theater in Poznań), and *Hamlet* (School of Drama Beit Zvi in Tel Aviv).

But Warlikowski's theater which concerns us here begins at the premiere of *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Dramatyczny Theater, 3 January 1998, and includes the next few performances, which were made at the Rozmaitości Theater (sometimes coproduced by other theaters), a place where Grzegorz Jarzyna, who ran the stage, broke with the conventions of theater institutions. At this point began a cultural process in which, as many believe, Warlikowski reconfigures the consciousness of the Polish theater, exerting a profound influence that went well beyond artistic categories. These productions were *Hamlet*, *The Bacchae*, *Cleansed*, *The Tempest*, *Dybbuk*, *Krum*, and *Angels in America*. The last of these premieres was staged on 17 February 2007. Proof of this profound effect is the scattered opinions, the reactions during the performances, the readiness to take up lively and personal discussions with the artists. And though this impact defies reliable description, I would not risk denying its existence, power, and vitality. In this book, however, I can only consider the mechanisms that provoked such a reception of Warlikowski's theater.

I do not say that "Warlikowski is us" in a sentimental fashion, whether personally or through any other kind of identification. Divergent processes are at work here: displacement, going beyond one's own "I," the unpredictable endowment of meaning, the disarming and inspiring opportunity to find oneself alligned with the other.

The last chapter of the book was written specially for this English-language edition: it presents the situation of Warlikowski and his ensemble after leaving the Rozmaitości Theater and creating a separate institution – the Nowy Theater. As it turns out, this was more than a change of address; it was also a chance to reformulate the dramaturgical rules and to make an attempt to redefine the relationship with the audience on new grounds.

The Master of Revulsion

The Revelation of the Theater

Krzysztof Warlikowski's theater first came to light in *The Taming of the Shrew*, a performance directed in the fall and winter of 1997 (premiering January 3, 1998) at the Dramatyczny Theater in Warsaw. This was Warlikowski's fifteenth play (six years after his debut), and his fourth take on Shakespeare. Everything that came before might be seen as sketches, rehearsals, or variations on a theme, sometimes fascinating, but often also half-baked, and sometimes merely unaccomplished. Almost all of his early works were focused on the myth of the outsider, the social outcast, whether incarnated as Louis IV, Josef K., The Marquise of O., Kien, or Hamlet. For a long time, Warlikowski explored the well-trodden paths of Romantic and Modernist mythologies; and if his theater could be said to have been a space for self-expression, it was chiefly in the aesthetic and existential sense.

The Taming of the Shrew was a true theatrical revelation, with its multifarious strengths, shifting rules, and unmarked borders. In this performance the search for an aesthetic form of expression that had utterly consumed Warlikowski emerged as a much more radical gesture, uncovering spheres of live conflicts, both personal and social. By the same token, this play evoked an extraordinarily lively and polarized response, like none of Warlikowski's previous works. On the one hand, there were accusations of bad taste, vulgarity, the use of cheap effects, and on the other, admiration for the director's courage and for the play's remarkable beauty and its power to move. Warlikowski had risked an incredibly personal statement that left him open to attack, though he must also have felt that a community of like-minded viewers had formed around him, or else that there were simply those who understood and appreciated his artistic act and independence of thought. The director had the right to suppose that a theatrical presentation could acquire the gravity of a social event, and that prosaic and untamed emotions experienced in real-life situations can invade the realm of aesthetic experience.

Conflict Exposed

The linear development of events changes into a composition of scenes based on variations. Krzysztof Warlikowski dismantles both the structure and the farcical intrigues in Shakespeare's comedy. He introduces various conventions and styles. He changes or shifts meanings. The Katherina and Petruchio plot is broken into various conventions and images derived from a slew of cultures. It walks a winding path and takes a long time to find its feet. We less follow the taming of Katherina the shrew than watch variants built around the male/female relationship, or to be more precise, the relationship between masculinity and femininity. On the one hand, we have sharp contrasts dividing the genders (the brutal macho man and the submissive whore), and on the other, the blurring of clear gender divisions (various shades of homosexuality and transvestitism). We observe submission to cultural models (the Bianca and Lucentio subplot), but also attempts to challenge them (the Katherina plot). No image, paradigm, or mechanism exists without its opposite or obstruction.

In *The Taming of the Shrew* Warlikowski repeatedly reveals the same conflict, orbiting around it as though sensing the difficulties in solving it or probing the power of its social resonance. He is interested not in plot development, but in the symbolic power of an unresolved conflict, suspended action, and repeated gestures. He extracts them with such intensity and clarity that the course of action ceases to interest us. At best it remains a somewhat shaky scaffolding for theatrical images and episodes whose inner logic is organized by something else: a subversive play on signs and stock situations, a powerful use of the atmosphere of the image, and an accentuated rhythm of construction and deconstruction. Every situation is assembled and collapses before our eyes: each carries a weight, and as such, a significance.

Aleatorism

The decor changes with a revolving stage. Before the actors and the requisite props turn to the front of the stage, we see the arrangement of a new situation in the depths; out of the corner of our eye we see the removal of the props from the previous scene, and the actors moving toward the wings. The whole theatrical machinery is in motion: the stage decor descends, the house lights come up, the actors walk through, the door to the foyer slams, chairs and desks on wheels spin about the stage. Musicians enter and exit – the sound of the saxophone and the accordion *ostinatos* create a sensual, disquieting texture of sounds. It is these sounds that take the stripped space of the stage and evoke images of the

circus, the street, or the night club, places that are generally more elemental and spontaneous than the theater. Movement occurs almost incessantly in the center and on the peripheries; it is only partly structured and composed. We might say that the aleatorism of this living theater is always throbbing with the subject of Shakespeare's drama: taming the elements of life, providing them with form, assimilating them, and killing them.¹

The rhythm of repetition is imposed by the revolving stage and the frontal composition of the scenes built around props that are repeatedly carried on and off the stage: a desk, a sofa, and a table. It can also be heard in the recurring musical motifs. It reveals itself in the aggressive monotony of the endlessly identical situational models.

The profound impression that we are moving about inside a dismantled theater metaphorizes the situations and images, stamping them with meaning after meaning. We feel that this stripped space of the stage has a great signifying potential; it becomes capable of mobilizing reams of associations and immediately discarding them. This sustains the loss of narrative continuity, and subjects cultural signs to the pressure of changing contexts. Significance is born in the act of violence. The lack of continuity and the shifting of contexts, however, set in motion a contrary mechanism. They create a system of ruptures, fault lines, incoherence, fissures, suspended or reversed meanings, releasing the viewers' capacity to view things ironically, soberly, skeptically, but also subversively, and, in a sense, poetically, with a capacity for rebellion, for endless shifting of meaning. The motifs of violence and rebellion are inscribed in and activate the very process of reception.

Appearing amid the viewers and entering through doors not intended for them, the actors unceremoniously infringe upon the boundary between stage and audience. The relationship between the signifier and the signified collapses, words come to nothing, or designate only approximate meanings. Instead of the lute we are promised, we see a dilapidated piano; instead of a horse, a scooter; instead of a roast, a raw chicken. When Bianca's father orders her to her room to do some embroidering, the audience bursts out laughing. No one believes that such a modern girl could busy herself with embroidery! Distrust emerges toward signs and meanings. The actions collapse into loose-knit episodes, nothing holds together or creates momentum, things increasingly fizzle in melancholy images, and the images increasingly dislodge from the situation.

¹ We might say that through mobilizing this aleatorism of living theater the play goes beyond the symbolic order. It opens itself to the semiotic level of language, which, in the psychoanalytic concepts of Julia Kristeva, is tied to the feminine, to what lies in the pre-symbolic sphere, to what can be repressed in culture. It can be a source of power for rebellion and sabotage, but also for creative approaches that transfigure the patriarchal symbolic order.

Pulling off Pants

Eighteenth-century costumes (crinoline dresses, tuxedos, buckled shoes, powdered wigs) appear in the opening sequences of the play in all the glory of their anachronistic excess, devoid of any relation to Shakespeare's drama. They appear mostly in the prologue, then gradually disappear. They mix with costumes from other epochs, from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from the 1940s, 1960s, and 1990s. A historical costume appears only to remind the viewer of the presence of costumes outside of the theater as well, in everyday social life, to reveal its aggressive phenomenology, which penetrates practically every sphere of human existence.

One motif in particular, that of dressing and undressing, is worth analyzing from this perspective. This motif is, in essence, both metatheatrical and non-theatrical. It recurs in the play repeatedly, almost obsessively, at key moments and in full illumination. Nudity and costumes do not appear in a dialectic of opposition, nor do they build a coherent discourse on the conflict between nature and culture; they create a series of poetic epiphanies, both sensual and ambiguous. Dressing up ceases to be an element of intrigue, a theatrical signifier. Unbuttoning clothes, pulling off pants, and putting on shirts break free from the order of simulation, enactment, and symbolizing. They are utterly real gestures, occurring in the here and now. The act of undressing always has a sensual dimension, a gravity, and reality. Layer after layer of clothing is peeled away: jackets, shirts, undershirts, underwear, socks, slippers, bras. The human body is stripped of its erotic allure, it is strangely awkward and embarrassing.

In the Prologue, a boy dressed as a woman flees from the persistent Sly. The boy's violent movements are not girlish, his back is visible through his unbuttoned dress, and male shoes protrude from under the torn crinoline. The image breaks with the farcical convention of cross-dressing and has a hint of rape, an aftertaste of brutal initiation. Another example: Hearing of her father's matrimonial plans, Katherina tears her dress from her body and stands there provocatively in no more than a slip, her legs splayed awkwardly, tangled in her discarded clothing. Nakedness is ugly here, devoid of the erotic. Katherina discloses the real meaning of her father's words (treating her marriage as a transaction of commodities), and, at the same time, attempts to strip them of their power (commodities lose their appeal when put up for sale). The scene in which Lucentio and Tranio exchange clothes (the servant poses as master, the master disguised as the servant wins the affections of the woman he desires) serves less to set the plot in motion than to play on the delicate sensuality of the intimate brotherhood between young men. It emanates the melancholy of repressed homosexual fascinations. Petruchio tears the wig from Katherina's head, transvestites dress Katherina in clothes they strip from their own bodies. The costume does not fit the body, making it a mockery,

extracting its ugliness, its partiality; furthermore, in passing from one body to another, it is as if the feminine and the masculine belonged to a sphere that was never closed, of ever-unstable and necessarily semi-illicit exchange.

A Crippled Form of Social Drama

According to Victor Turner,² a social drama always begins by revealing a conflict; it can occur on every rung of the social ladder – in the family or at the summits of power – and it is never resolved or closed once and for all. When the conflict is revealed it liberates us from social discomfort, and unearths a problem that has long been suppressed. It can be harnessed through conventional rituals, such as a court hearing, wedding, divorce, or a vendetta. Revealing and resolving a conflict in a social drama has numerous phases: disrupting order, crisis, upsetting the balance, and a positive or negative resolution. Much more frequently, however, we find a lack or suspension of resolution. Krzysztof Warlikowski's play concerns precisely such crippled forms of social drama.

The performance begins with an incident: a tardy audience member quarrels with a ticket woman, who is trying to block the way to his seat. The man becomes vulgar and aggressive, he insults and demeans the woman: "I won't let some chick order me around! I've never even been to bed with you! Go wash your husband's Jockey shorts!" We recognize the actors: Danuta Stenka and Adam Ferency, soon to step into the roles of Katherina and Petruchio. As such, we are certain that this is only theater. Nor does the director try to hide this; he is clearly telling us that the play will draw its energy from the sphere of social frustrations, impulses, and low, ugly emotions. Even if the gesture is purely rhetorical, it is significant: the conflict is revealed *here*, in the audience, as a minor, though unfortunate and significant incident.

Schechner's Diagram

Turner presents the relationship between a social drama and a cultural representation (such as a stage drama) with a diagram created by Richard Schechner. The diagram resembles a sideways figure-eight, cut in half with a horizontal line. Everything above the line represents the visible sphere of public life. Everything below it is the hidden and unconscious reality. The left loop symbolizes the social drama, and

2 Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play*, Performing Arts Journal Publications, New York 1982.

the right one, a cultural representation. Turner explains that an overt social drama strengthens a latent realm of the stage drama, that it does more “than entertain – though entertainment is always one of its vital aims – is a metacommentary, explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting, on the major social dramas of its social context (wars, revolutions, scandals, institutional changes). Not only that, but its message and its rhetoric feed back into the latent processual structure of the social drama,”³ making it susceptible to ritualization.

The effect of Schechner’s diagram is revealed in Warlikowski’s performance in full force, not only in the subconscious spheres of the social drama and the stage drama, but also in the very flow of energy between them. The play’s basic gesture of exposure, with its hidden dimensions and function, also comes to embrace the theater. The set design alone tells us a great deal: theater balconies, imitating mirror reflections of the real audience, enclose the semicircular stage. The actors repeatedly appear amid the audience, and their energy activates the viewers. The viewers’ emotions, revealed in laughter or a tense silence, stimulate the actors’ activities: the buried spheres of the social drama and the play on stage, hidden beneath the horizontal line of Schechner’s diagram, are divulged. It is not by chance that Warlikowski draws from the lower performance genres, such as the circus, the revue, or the gangster film, which accept more spontaneous viewer responses, less subject to severe cultural censorship. Warlikowski heats up the viewers’ emotions, provoking and prompting them to react more openly. The Prologue announces the play as “uncensored”: a television set is slowly rolled across the stage, showing scenes from pornographic films. They are accompanied by descriptions of mythological images: “We’ll show thee Io as she was a maid,/ And how she was beguiled and surprised,/As lively painted as the deed was done.” This is not only a radical attempt to demythologize a cultural image or to replace it with one more contemporary, but also to establish a living bond between “image” or play and event – even if we initially suspect that a gulf divides them. The pornographic image becomes a subversive model of such an approach to theater: it shows what cannot be censored, it ignores aesthetic aims, it does not bother with fiction in the traditional sense, it operates strictly with phantasy.

Phantasmata

A phantasmatic theater, combining therapeutic and social effects, turning signs into symptoms, was Krzysztof Warlikowski’s dream from the outset. His very first plays testify to this. The phantasmatic is situated between the “true” and the

3 Ibid., p. 107.

“false,” the “real” and the “imagined;” it establishes a series of endless mediations, draws copiously from myth and popular culture, uses a glaring theatricality, blurs the boundaries between “interior” and “exterior,” and “individual” and “social.” It both conceals and reveals. On stage the phantasm is revealed and deconstructed promptly thereafter, so as to unveil what is real, i.e. the material of its symbol and the energy of its mechanism. Ronald David Laing has described a similar phenomenon in the therapy process: “If Paul begins to wake up from the family phantasy system, he can only be classified as mad or bad by the family since to them, their phantasy *is* reality, and what is not their phantasy is not real.”⁴ After the premiere of *The Taming of the Shrew* Krzysztof Warlikowski found himself in a similar situation: by revealing and unveiling cultural phantasies of femininity and masculinity he opened himself up to accusations of cynicism and immorality.

Images and Culminations

The very first performances betrayed Krzysztof Warlikowski’s penchant for extreme, paradoxical, or eccentric situations, and refined forms with Mannerist plots. He was interested in events that removed the protagonist from everyday life, which challenged shopworn conceptions, conventional moralities, and social routines, and always in a stark and daring fashion. Such was the case in his productions of Kleist’s *The Marquise of O.* (Stary Theater in Krakow, 1993), Dostoevsky’s *White Nights* (State Drama School in Krakow, 1992), Gombrowicz’s *Lawyer Kraykowski’s Dancer* (Powszechny Theater in Radom, 1997), and Klaus Mann’s *Barred Windows* (Kammerspiele in Hamburg, 1994).

In all these works, more or less prominently, we find a society prepared to pass sentence on outsiders of all types, to make harsh judgments on acts of excessive eccentricity, to condemn forbidden passions. In each appears the motif of the stigma, a feeling of guilt and humiliation that casts new light on the generally accepted structure and turns it upside-down. This humiliation is tied to bold attempts to reveal emotions and one’s personality, a readiness to take risks, and even, in some cases, to build new social bonds. The Marquise of Kleist’s novella appears not only to gain the love and respect of the family, but also to renew and reinforce family ties, stripping them of their veneer and laying bare moral norms based on hypocrisy, to salvage essential values. In Warlikowski’s performance this theme was subverted. The play focused on the motif of trauma, which the Marquise found in her own body (pregnancy and her incredulity toward the situation) and

4 R. D. Laing, *Self and Others: Further Studies in Sanity and Madness*, Tavistock, London 1961, p. 25.

society (which stigmatizes her as a “modern girl” who “got knocked up”). Her stoked imagination creates a series of fantasies around the conception and the approaching due date. Warlikowski’s interests lie in the protagonist’s situation (and the possibility of imagining a contemporary context for it) and her presumed inner life, on which Kleist is silent.

Warlikowski’s fondness for the novella as such is worth examining. As a form, it is short, compact, and structurally refined. It is indeed the novella, with its use of plot parallels, motif contrasts, reversals of expectations, and the introduction of a narrative or psychological plot twist, that served as the training ground for his experiments (whose fruit later appeared in his splendid stagings of Shakespeare’s dramas), even if at present Warlikowski is given to demean his early work. “Those were the grandiose projects of a young man. I took on some strange literature: Klaus Mann’s *Barred Windows*, about the three final days of Ludwig II of Bavaria, and Kleist’s *The Marquise of O*. at the Stary Theater. It was like watching a man jump into the deep end and drown.”⁵ In the form of the novella, he must have been allured by the musical structure, based on the recreation of a few basic motifs, and how the necessity of condensing the time and the narrative theatricalized the events. At the time he stated: “When I prepare an adaptation I think up images – you might say that in my imagination I ‘catch’ the characters in a culminating moment.”⁶ He was also interested in the mechanism of provocation inscribed in the genre of the novella, coming as a result of the human experience it contains, which must be somehow extraordinary, unusual, sometimes even extravagant or appalling, going beyond the sphere of the everyday, upsetting or breaking its rules. The novella is partial to fantastical and highly dramatized events, while serving as a tool for social or moral education.

This “educational” element is almost imperceptible in Warlikowski’s early work. His first directorial efforts are more about exploring the substance of the play itself than how it affects audiences. His choice of texts from outside the dramatic repertoire was inspired by his need to shape the dramaturgy of the play in a “real-time” creative process, while working with actors – and here we see the need to break the convention in which the text was written. This was how *White Nights* was created; according to the director, “the personalities and sensitivities of the actors gave it shape”⁷ (the actors being Anna Radwan and Jacek Poniedziałek, with whom Warlikowski often worked during his directorial studies). The idea was to search Dostoevsky’s characters for the mindsets of contemporary young

5 “Burza we mnie” [The Tempest within Me], Roman Pawłowski speaks with Krzysztof Warlikowski, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2003, No. 55 (in the “Duży Format” No. 10 Insert).

6 Krzysztof Warlikowski, “O adaptacjach: reżyserzy” [On Adaptations: Directors], *Didaskalia* 1995, No. 5.

7 Ibid.

people, for psychological “gaps” in their outlines, in the vein of French New Wave cinema. During rehearsals of *The Marquise of O*. “sessions” were held on what Kleist’s laconic narrative passes over in silence, to “delve into the protagonists’ psychologies, searching for relationships, uncovering motives for their behavior, sketching the character’s path.”⁸ This was more than a routine task for a director and his actors, more than the building of psychological motivations. It was closer to the methods of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, it was a concentrated effort to break into the sphere of unconscious impulses. The result was a total change in poetics: the tone of the news report that characterized Kleist’s short story now disappeared, replaced by a powerfully dramatized, expressionistic, oneiric narrative, rapacious in its contrasts and its blend of the realistic and the symbolic.

Perhaps the most critical of those early experiences was his meeting with German actors while working on *Barred Windows*. “On many occasions the actors surprised me, going deeper into the issues in the text, as with the subject of homosexual love, for instance, which is discussed openly in Germany, unlike in Poland. There were a few homosexuals in the cast; not only did they not conceal their sexual orientation, they even fought with me to bring out this theme. The subject turned out to be quite vital in the society.”⁹ This was an extraordinary experience for Warlikowski; working abroad, in the sphere of another culture, gave him a feeling of security, and, in this case, the actors inspired the director to take a more direct and provocative approach to the subject matter.

The need to reveal painful regions, experiences repressed in the first plays, is a fundamentally egocentric urge, expressed in the creation of outsider protagonists (to the above-listed characters we might add Kien, the protagonist of Canetti’s *Auto da Fé*, State Drama School in Krakow, 1992; Josef K. from Kafka’s *The Trial*, School of Drama Beit Zvi in Tel Aviv, 1995; and Hamlet from the play prepared in 1997 in Tel Aviv). However, Warlikowski was still unable to infuse the myth of the outsider with social resonance. He was creating encrypted artistic statements, in which the density of the message and the unexpected shifts in stress might be associated with Freud’s dream sequences; often, however, he was unable to grasp the direct impulse of the imagination, to reveal its workings. Warlikowski’s theater became a space for self-expression, and this is its strength; at the same time, it remained the closed region of the dream, and this was its greatest weakness.

The situation of entrapment in ready-made aesthetics and Warlikowski’s first attempts to cut through them is tied to the fact that he made his debut in a theater with a very stable hierarchy of artistic values and an established rank. In the early 1990s the old masters held sway in the Polish theater as they did all across Europe. Warlikowski was capable of finding a foothold, drawing inspiring strength from

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

their work, and then overcoming them, going beyond aesthetic emulation (though this is visible in some of his productions). He learned from the greatest (Lupa, Brook, Strehler, Bergman) as a student, intern, or assistant. Lupa and Brook mark two courses in this education: subjective and objective, a theater of individuation and a theater of transcultural exploration, a theater of unbridled matter and a theater reduced to the most basic signifiers, a theater of great narratives and a theater of parables.

The Ethical Mission

A great reevaluation and transformation of artistic approach occurred in Warlikowski's theater while working on *The Taming of the Shrew*. The notions of beauty he had theretofore cultivated came under attack. The resulting performance was accused of poor taste, vulgarity, kitsch, and even pornography; but it was in this performance that Warlikowski freed himself from his mentors, above all, from Lupa and Brook. It must be confessed that a great deal had happened in European theater since his debut. Sarah Kane's *Blasted* premiered at London's Royal Court, there was the tragic death of Werner Schwab and the birth of his legend, and Thomas Ostermeier had taken over as artistic director of Berlin's Die Baracke. The pantheon of European directors had also changed – the ranks were joined by the provocateur Frank Castorf.

The greatness of Warlikowski's theater begins when the barrier between the theme of the play and the experience of the actors and audience begins to burst, when the performance becomes difficult, painful, and requires courage from the actors – even such basic courage as undressing on stage. Our concern here is not for mere physical nudity, of course. It is rather for a totality of authentic human experience, of which nakedness must be a part. The temperature in Warlikowski's theater began to rise when he openly admitted that he had scores to settle with society, when he dared to strike out, to accuse, to say what hurt him, what revolted him; and above all, when he felt sure that theater was a social act that could involve the collective.

The first sign of this breakthrough was his work on Koltès's *Roberto Zucco* (Nowy Theater in Poznań, 1995): "I remember the first rehearsal – we read the play through and all the actors unanimously refused to perform it. The actors cried: 'How are we supposed to perform this, we have children!' But a few months later we were finishing rehearsals with a sense of a special mission: We, the actors of the Nowy Theater in Poznań, were taking on the mission of this text."¹⁰

10 "Burza we mnie," op. cit.

Working abroad was another important experience, as it allowed Warlikowski to realize how the different spaces of taboos could be situated in various societies, and that it was possible to tackle them head-on. I have already mentioned the rehearsals of *Barred Windows*. Another, perhaps more powerful experience came while working in Israel, where Warlikowski first staged *The Trial* and *Hamlet*, and then Euripides's *Phoenician Women* (Municipal Theater in Beer Sheva, 1998). The choice of a play about a fratricidal, devastating war could only have been inspired by a desire to forge a live and emotional dialogue with the audience. Jocasta's opening monologue was staged and performed with moving immediacy, spoken directly to the audience by an actress who sat on the ground. The story of social and family traumas was enacted in the here and now. Warlikowski's first rendition of an ancient drama (Sophocles's *Electra* at Warsaw's Dramatyczny Theater, 1997) was, after all, an attempt to respond directly to a political situation, i.e. the war in Yugoslavia, which was raging at the time. Warlikowski dared to speak out, but drew accusations of hopping on the bandwagon. This must have taught him something about the social hypocrisy that binds work in the theater. "In the reviews for Sophocles's *Electra* in Warsaw (...) there was a condescending attitude toward the play's references to the war in Yugoslavia. (...) If the modern-day director, and the viewer by extension, does not associate the tragedy of the Atridae with familiar cases of the escalation of hatred, the drama will always hover in a vacuum. (...) Unless we consider Yugoslavia or other contemporary examples of widespread hatred, *Electra* remains a bloody fairy tale."¹¹ Małgorzata Dzięwulska was correct in these observations, but Warlikowski drew his own conclusions from this experience: the social impact of theater must be more directly tied to the emotions and attitudes of the audience.

For some reason, the subject of the war in Yugoslavia had no social impact: it was met with indifference, or evoked conventional and "morally correct" responses. The sense of guilt tied to personal indifference toward the evil raging hundreds of kilometers from Warsaw was too weak for the images in the play to rise above the stylistic. It soon turned out that Warlikowski required social trauma and the powerful mechanism of repression to raise the temperature in the creative act and in the reception of his plays. It suffices to read a few of the interviews he gave to see how forceful his views of society are: they are ruthless, accusatory, laconically phrased, often simplified, and perhaps not always just. Warlikowski lays bare the basic theme of the play he stages and seeks to see it at once in the harsh light of live social experience. The social becomes personal to the extreme. Warlikowski's theater operates in the sphere of the Shadow archetype: (s)he who is rejected and condemned by society, subjected to mechanisms of internal

11 Małgorzata Dzięwulska, "Po premierze" [After the Premiere], *Didaskalia* 1997, No. 17, p. 7.

ensorship, who appears as “evil.” It is the cultural verification of this “evil” (not to be confused with relativism) that would seem to be Warlikowski’s ethical mission, one pursued with the utmost gravity.

That is why, among all the insults showered upon Katherina in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, Warlikowski highlights one in particular: “demon.”

The Deal

The matrix for practically all the events transpiring in Warlikowski’s *The Taming of the Shrew* is the deal, the transaction, the exchange, the negotiation that accompanies the preparation and signing of a marriage contract. What follows is a game of pressure, persuasion, camouflage, and rivalry. We see situations that require changing tactics, cleverness, and swift reflexes. We are struck by the movement and changeability of perspectives at every level of reality. Warlikowski skillfully extracted this aspect of the all-encompassing deal from Shakespeare’s comedy, lacing it with a menacing violence, plunging it into an atmosphere of semi-legal procedures, into a world of *mafioso* negotiations. He tainted these situations of inter-human transactions with violent gestures and micro-gestures: a slap in the face, squeezing into someone else’s costume, mockery, and commands. Bernard-Marie Koltès has defined the deal as a transaction of prohibited goods,¹² a melancholy reflection of human relationships as such, as if seeking to safeguard himself from any kind of sentimental impulse and to state, once and for all, that man’s only mystery lies in the depths of his gloom and in the experience of unfulfilled desire. Having directed Koltès’s *Roberto Zucco* two years previous, Warlikowski makes a similar diagnosis in Shakespeare’s comedy, creating a vision of a world stripped of illusions, in which the principle of revealing theatricality concerns both the shape of the performance and every inter-human situation.

The cuts in the text might well be described as injuries; to such a degree is the fabric of Shakespeare’s work manipulated. All the descriptive and narrative parts that take the viewer into the intrigue and the world of stage fiction have vanished, leaving only the most indispensable signals: who is vying for whose hand and who is impersonating whom. Emotional motivation, for instance, is utterly discarded. Tranio and Lucentio immediately get down to executing their plan: the seduction of Bianca is seen as a game, perhaps a way of killing time. Lucentio’s description of his impression of Bianca is cut. The pair appears on stage as if in a fashion show, handsome and self-confident. We have no dialogue to help us

12 Bernard-Marie Koltès, *In the Solitude of the Cotton Fields*, trans. Jeffrey Wainwright, Methuen Drama, London 2001.

establish who is master and who is servant, their costumes indicate no difference in status, but do have a feminine touch: Lucentio has a fox-fur scarf, while Tranio wears loose-fitting pants that hang almost like a skirt. They are exhibited, or rather narcissistically exhibit themselves, to the viewers' gaze, appearing almost like cultural objects, anthropological specimens, constructs of civilization: wealthy, bored young men, big-city dwellers, bisexual and metrosexual. Warlikowski utterly changes how characters present themselves on stage.

This example alone reveals the director's strategy toward the text: the psychological and narrative contexts have been removed. The scenes begin harshly and obsessively, particularly in Act One and Act Two. In the very first words we find out what is going on: Lucentio and Tranio are making a pact to conquer Bianca; Signor Baptista, Bianca's father, clearly sets the rules of the game, while Petruchio specifically states his intention to marry rich. Warlikowski begins the various scenes from the middle, without superfluous introduction, getting down to business at once. The competition for the woman and the marriage pact very nearly boil down to a business deal (Katherina's first issue is significantly changed: She does not speak of having been made a laughing-stock, but accuses her father of putting her up for sale). All the scenes of matrimonial negotiations, business talks, to which only men are allowed, take place in front of the desk. Katherina and Bianca always stand off to one side. The dealings are suspenseful, emotional, a struggle to gain the upper hand, while the aggressive *ostinato* on the accordion goads the transactions and the quarreling sides, urging them on. The music and rhythm of the dialogue rings in a similar fashion – abbreviated and punctuated, it keeps time, beating out the words about the signing of the marriage contract, the possessions, and power with *ostinato* persistence. The director not only exposes the cynical calculation that lies behind all this, but also the tribal archaism that continues to hold sway in the rituals of a patriarchal society.

The Ugly Word “Performative”

Warlikowski extracts the brutal pragmatism of human speech, sharpening its effect. We are in the realm of pressures, requests, vows, commands, and prohibitions, or, to borrow Austin's terminology, of perlocutionary and illocutionary acts, persuasive and establishing. In sum: we are in the realm of verbal phrases with the power to affect, not in the sphere of conflicts between standpoints and feelings, but of strategies and interests. John L. Austin, the creator of the theory of performative speech acts, explained that the categories of true and false cease to hold in the world of the performative, replaced by the categories of effectiveness and inappropriacy. He also wrote that performative statements less relate the circumstances that

socially sanction them than merely gesture toward these circumstances. Moreover, the pragmatism of human speech (its effectiveness) is supported by the ideological discourse that disciplines social behavior: the illocutionary factor, which establishes social relationships between people, depends on it.

Warlikowski's performance inquires into the social sanction of violent speech acts. This is why the director so radically cuts the narrative and psychological contexts. It is also why he uses the effect of suspended or incoherent historicity (in the costumes). The context sanctioning or undermining the efficacy of speech as action has been shifted from the stage to the audience – for it is here, and not on the stage, that the real mechanisms of ideological discourses are at work. The power of the stage dialogue, its laconic and obsessive nature, suggests the authority of powerful cultural models, which allow the father to sell the daughter and the husband to humiliate the wife. By the same token, this authority is undermined by many signals. We might add that symptoms of authority and mechanisms of rebellion create a map of sorts in the sphere of the performance. Powerful ideological discourse always appears front and center: in the stage as a space, and in the dramatic situation as such. Sabotage strategies appear on the periphery of the stage and the narrative.

Austin called “performative” a “new word and an ugly word.”¹³ This is what makes Warlikowski's performances, which parody and sully marriage rituals to create a powerfully affecting mechanism, fit the term so perfectly. The violence of the performative casts a shadow on an event as consecrated and sublime as a wedding. Seeking to explain the power of the performative statement and the conditions of its efficacy, Austin most often referred to marriage vows. Drawing from Austin and from this example in particular, Judith Butler calls attention to the conventional aspect of the performative and the consequent opportunities for its deconstruction and the appropriation of its power in the struggle with society, which turns heterosexual relationships into the sole, highly ideologized norm. She puts the marriage vow, therefore, in the same category as other acts of authoritarian speech, “implicated in a network of authorization and punishment.”¹⁴ The act of deconstruction in *The Taming of the Shrew*, much as in Judith Butler, reveals a spectacle of humiliation and the presence of a chorus society, armed with insults to paralyze all behavior that diverges from the norm. One of these insults is the word “queer,” a powerful performative that stamps a person with sexual difference; it is “always an imaginary chorus that taunts ‘queer!’”¹⁵, it always carries the image of an aggressive collective. This helps explain the chorus that appears in Warlikowski's performance as a mirror reflection of the presupposed attitudes of

13 J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford Press, Oxford 1979, p. 233.

14 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, Routledge, Oxford 2011, p.171.

15 *Ibid.*, p.172.

the audience. The demeaning force of the insult can, however, be stored within by the person humiliated, used to sabotage and liberate, because there is a powerful tie between the performative “I hereby declare you...” of the marriage ceremony and the performative “queer” that serves to establish the same normalizing sanction.¹⁶

The suppressed space of “the queer” is revealed in Warlikowski’s work as a dream, appearing in transvestites, signs of perversion, and make-up on men’s faces. “If the term ‘queer’ is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage, and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes.”¹⁷ This “queered from a prior usage,” in fact, concerns all of human behavior, which appears on stage in *The Taming of the Shrew* with an odd, almost oneiric flagrancy.

The Wedding

The play focuses on some simple images with a powerful impact, above all the wedding and the party. These serve to close the first part, and the whole of the play. Three plots of Shakespeare’s comedy all lead toward marriage. Warlikowski flagrantly stresses this theme, while stripping it of its farcical intrigues, inscribing it directly into the context of contemporary emotions and images, setting up a harsh confrontation with the viewers. He less stages Shakespeare’s drama than creates fields of forceful emotions and phantasmatic projections around its deconstructed story line.

Katherina (in a wedding dress), her father, the priest, the best man, and the bridesmaid appear on stage. The sight of Katherina in her wedding dress causes astonishment, and at the same time, sparks emotions in the audience. How did it come to this? How was her resistance broken? The wedding party is set center stage, *en face* to the audience, as if intending to pose for a photograph. But the groom refuses to arrive. A silence falls in the theater. The image on stage freezes, as does the audience. This lasts a dangerously long time: the expectation that the show will go on knocks the viewers from their secure sense of certainty as to where the fiction begins and ends. The action and the theatrical illusion are suspended; there is the general impression of onerous consternation, that the

16 Agata Adamiecka-Sitek has written compellingly on the links between Krzysztof Warlikowski’s productions and Judith Butler’s thought in her text “The (De)construction of Femininity” (*Dialog* 2006, No. 10), focusing on questions other than those discussed herein, above all concerning gender identity.

17 Judith Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

audience's real emotions are being obnoxiously toyed with. Only the viewers' laughter and applause reanimates the actors. The forming of this bond, perhaps the riskiest sequence of the play, has significance for the further development of the situation. What then takes place continues to develop in the dangerously ambiguous zone of interplay between fiction and reality.

Shakespeare's comedy only describes the wedding of Katherina and Petruchio; in Warlikowski's performance it takes place, with all the requisite pomp and ceremony, before the eyes of the audience. The real words of the wedding vows are spoken, the young couple kisses, the guests throw rice. A disquiet is felt, especially when the vows are exchanged, as if the theater is overstepping its boundaries. These words in particular are spoken in an atmosphere of a skillfully disrupted sense of reality. It all has the unbearable aftertaste of a hallucination. There are many signs of offensive parody. After a long wait the groom makes his appearance, entering on a real scooter. He is, however, dressed in a white gown. The priest, prompting the bride on her vows, says, "I take thee for my husband," and pauses in consternation as he casts a quizzical gaze at Petruchio. The altar boy's lips and eyes, painted like a woman's, make for a face that resembles a mask of derision. Before the stole is tied Petruchio brutally takes hold of Katherina's hand, causing her pain. The marriage becomes a parody of the ritual and an act of violence. The throwing of the rice almost resembles a lynching, a jeering stigmatization. Here theater takes advantage of its age-old, hazardous right to deconstruct social rituals, but it also adopts the cunning strategy of usurping their power. Laughter erupts many times over the course of this scene, revealing an ambivalent stance toward a time-honored ritual in this sphere of real social emotions.

This performance was the first time Warlikowski directly tried to settle his old scores with society, drawing in both the actors and the audience. His basic premises are clear: we live in an anti-feminist and homophobic society which is frustrated and anxiety-ridden. Anti-feminism and homophobia are, of course, *pars pro toto*, though the director makes no attempt to hide that intolerance sparks his special fury and emotions. All the events on stage take place where gazes intersect – between the viewers, the characters on stage, the chorus, and the other, mirror-image audience hidden in the box seats built onto the stage. The mirror audience initially responds in a more animated fashion, goading the actors into acts of violence, jeering the "deviants," as if wanting to impose the "proper" response upon the real audience, building ties based on a community of aggression and satisfaction from humiliating someone else. This mocking chorus first makes its appearance when a boy dressed as a woman flees the aggressive courtship of Christopher Sly. Nor is it silent during Katherina's and Petruchio's wedding scene. The response of the real audience is less predictable and uniform. This makes the theater a site where bonds are formed – fragile, utopian, based on empathy and

solidarity with the humiliated. But the play facilitates nothing, stirs no sentimental impulses; on the contrary, it irritates, exasperates, and provokes.

In this production Warlikowski strikes out hard at all visions of social harmony, where sentimental impulses come the most readily – in the wedding ritual. A person's gender is connected, on the one hand, to the experience of being torn (the struggle between male and female is waged in every human soul), and on the other, to rape (gender is imposed by the body, nature, the Creator, a partner in a loving relationship, culture). It is not tied to a vision of harmony, complementarity, or unity, or to the gift of life. Other associations are generated: gender is tied to the domain of violence, vulgarity, humiliation, and death. Warlikowski opposed the Biblical "God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" with a nihilistic revision of cultural images of women and men, replacing love with a spectacle of humiliation and degradation.

Rape

Katherina is dressed as a whore in front of Petruchio, who is now her husband. Warlikowski's play replaces the tailors scene with a transvestite scene. In Shakespeare's play, as but one example of Petruchio's twisted lessons in humility, Katherina does not get the beautiful outfits specially sewn for her, though we know that she will receive them shortly. In Warlikowski's play, Katherina is degraded once and for all after her wedding night. Dressing her in a whore's outfit summons associations of rape; and it is rape.

Men dressed as women surround her. They wear wigs, stockings, high-heeled shoes, tight miniskirts, make-up, and clip-on earrings. They swing their hips, speaking in soft, affected voices. They are not just transvestites – they are "fags," "fairies," prostitutes. They belong to an unfamiliar and stigmatized world hidden in dark corners and filthy bathrooms, into which they drag Katherina, evidently incited and overseen by Petruchio. They not only "teach" her femininity, they also demonstrate that so-called femininity is a cultural form of rape, as well as something that occupies a bad place in the cultural structure – it is easily parodied and somehow unstable. This is one aspect of initiation that Katherina undergoes in this scene. We join her in entering a liminal realm that is concealed in everyday social life, a realm where hierarchical structures fall apart, contradictory orders blend, oppositions blur. Dressing Katherina in tawdry rags (a skintight black skirt, red shoes, a short faux-fur jacket) and painting her mouth in bright red lipstick evokes ritual violence, and the whole event calls to mind a rite of passage, or perhaps a parody or profanation of such. Katherina gains a new identity: she becomes a wife, a whore, and human trash. She struggles to move in her oversized shoes,

loses her balance, sways, bends, like a victim of a rape or a beating. When she is meant to pronounce the letter “p” so that her lips pout erotically, her mouth and cheeks puff out as if to vomit. At the same time, Petruchio puts on a snow-white shirt, a fine suit, overcoat, and hat. His face is cold, oddly pale, expressionless. Katherina has been fully tamed.

The very first scene between Katherina and Petruchio is an act of violence: it is spectacular and brutal. To the sound of aggressive, almost circus music Katherina, motionless as a gigantic doll, in an enormous crinoline dress and a tall white wig, enters to the front on the revolving stage. Petruchio, also dressed in an eighteenth-century costume, awaits her. They look like the protagonists of Laclos’s *Dangerous Liaisons*. An actor hidden from viewers in the box seats on stage accompanies their verbal battle with shouts and laughter. Society appears as a raucous, malicious rabble from the perspective of the humiliated person. Katherina defends herself valiantly, deflecting Petruchio’s vulgar abuse. Ultimately, she strikes him in the face, prompting a murmur of disapproval from the hidden chorus. He tears off her wig as the chorus eggs him on with laughter and cries. Though mocked, Katherina does not give herself up for lost; she pulls down his pants. Then Petruchio pushes her brutally and Katherina falls upon her back, as if shoved onto a bed. The image of sexual rape continually suggests itself, though it never comes to pass. Now the legs are seen helplessly flailing from under the crinoline, like those of a beetle flipped onto its back. The laughter and egging grow stronger. The image is powerful and almost archetypal for Warlikowski’s theater. It is among the gestures of violence and exposure that haunt the director’s imagination, revealing a person who is humiliated, terrified, and shamed. Violence in Warlikowski’s theater is ugly and untheatrical, appearing suddenly and disrupting any aesthetic aspect of the play. The plot breaks down, the fiction shatters, aggression and fear make their entry. The most compelling acts of humiliation occur in chaotic, disorderly scenes that are seemingly undirected, where the acting breaks down.¹⁸

Actors older than their characters play the parts of Katherina and Petruchio. This gives their duel a sense of drama, sharpens the reactions, keeps them from sliding into farce. This also helps Petruchio fit into the circle of father figures who fill the play. He is also a “godfather” (this is how Warlikowski reads the Italian flavor of the play), a mafia head, a ruler of women, a gangster, and a guardian of

18 Krystian Lupa noted this ability of Warlikowski’s back in his student work, writing the following about the party scene he directed in *In Search of Lost Time*: “The person who is mocked and exposed does not cease to be beautiful – he even charms and hypnotizes in his exposure. (...) Human dignity, bourgeois dignity fluttered in him like a scrap of cloth in brisk, though utterly invisible wind, beneath which a nakedness lurked, a nakedness for which the artist seemed to yearn.” (K. Lupa, “Krzysztof W.,” *Notatnik Teatralny*, Nos. 28-29, p. 36).

traditional values, a person who not only likes to prove his power, but also to play with it. He has an experimental streak, a demonic sense of humor; he is a mentor and a forceful narrator of victorious discourses. His vitality, potency, and ribald humor not only strengthen male dominance, they exemplify the mechanisms that create it with ironic and snide impunity. This ruler need not hide the fact that he is a usurper. In Shakespeare's play, Katherina keeps her spirit even when she succumbs to Petruchio's caprices. Never tongue-tied, she knows how to argue, request, and fight for what is hers. Katherina has significantly less dialogue in Warlikowski's performance, and she succumbs more easily. Her submissiveness and silence make an odd impression – after all, she is a beautiful, sensitive, intelligent, and mature woman. The gulf between her appearance and her behavior is profound. It is as though speech and language are not hers to possess. Katherina responds only in impulsive acts of rebellion or when she is asked for something. This is a person who has never gained a sense of her own dignity and value. Katherina is always being created or degraded by someone. The final rape of Katherina occurs in the finale, in the monologue that seals her servitude. The ambiguity of Katherina's final monologue has always caused unrest and prompted viewers to ask how much is ironic, how much feminine wiles, and how much authentic oppression. Warlikowski has no such doubts; he turns the monologue into a resounding *forte* for the entire production. Katherina enters in a wedding dress, approaches the edge of the stage, only a step away from the stairs leading to the audience. She utters words that do not belong to her, which have been forced into her mouth. Her monologue is filled with howling, screams, tears, torment, rebellion – but Katherina does not have the words to express these feelings, for she knows only the words of slavish servitude. Sometimes she spits them out with revulsion, sometimes she rolls them about in her mouth, finding them almost delectable. Her eyes fill with tears, her lips tremble in an uncontrolled grimace, her face appears to swell. The expressiveness of the acting here, stripped of all restraint, seems to verge on pornography. After a long pause we hear the word “love,” resounding powerfully in the silence, yanked from its context, torn from the speech as a whole. It no longer belongs to its sentence (“But love, fair looks and true obedience”); it emerges from Katherina's humiliation like the holiest and most soiled of dreams.

The Break-in Artist

I will call Warlikowski's method breaking into the text. He achieves this with radical stage and dramaturgical tactics and bold casting decisions. One example of this is how he casts men to play female roles (as in *Twelfth Night*). This is how

he opens the play, getting inside it. It surely results from his fear of interpretive stereotypes and a dominating paternal presence. This is more evidence of the anti-paternal nature of Warlikowski's theater. The text must therefore be demolished from the outset, so that nothing can be taken for granted, whether in the convention, tone, staging, the force and distribution of the stress, or the personalities of the characters. This freedom from the text is vital and is clearly demonstrated to the audience. Shakespeare, his stage tradition, and the authority of his interpreters could very well paralyze both sides, the artists and the viewers.

In *Pericles* (Piccolo Teatro di Milano, 1998), which he directed immediately after *The Taming of the Shrew*, the title character ends his magical journey through the fairy tale countries of the East and the South as a vagrant, shielding himself from the cold with a scrap of plastic. In this clash of styles I see more than an aesthetic strategy – it is an attempt to force theater into the living, contemporary space of society.

The story line is mercilessly hacked apart and turned into freeze-frames. The structure of the plot lines is exposed, as are the relationships between people, the composition of motifs, and the metaphors. The director dismantles the drama and then reassembles it, extracting the motifs and reifying the metaphors. One principle of Shakespearean dramaturgy, analogy, is given pride of place. Warlikowski tears apart the text, freely playing with its construction, placing the stress where it is least expected, juggling various conventions, while trying to make the drama cohere on another plane. The most frequent association is a theater within a theater. This motif, which is present in the text itself, is ostentatiously foregrounded in his productions. *The Merchant of Venice* (1994), staged in Toruń, was inscribed into the architecture of the theater: one box seat was Shylock's apartment, while the Venetian Doge heard the citizen's complaints on a platform which cut into the audience. Landings play a part in almost every production, creating various levels to the stage and dividing it into central and peripheral areas. Sometimes they appear to be purely functional, as in *Hamlet* and *A Winter's Tale*. At other times they acquire a symbolic dimension. In *Pericles* the landing evokes an enormous boat, in *Twelfth Night* an island, mandala, or fragment of the globe. The action of the drama develops inside the metaphor, the *topos*, giving it breadth, expanding the field of imagination, and less helping us to follow the plot than the play of images and motifs, which encompasses the viewers as well.

Warlikowski's troupe of actors dazzles with its varied physiognomies, temperaments, and sensitivities. In the delightfully colorful finale of *Twelfth Night* the human species appears before the audience in its whole range of types, ages, genders, and skin colors. The director likes to stress that he looks for outsiders in his performances, people in conflict with the social norms, capable of taking risks, gifted with unusual experiences. His intention seems clear enough: he

would like to make the subject of Shakespeare's dramas almost tangible to the senses, a real human truth of the theater. He breaks into these dramas to find space both for himself and for his actors, to build his own reality from the elements of Shakespeare's world. The exhibition of theatricality serves to expose it, not to reinforce it. The aim is not to multiply the levels of the play, but the opposite: to strip it of illusions.

The degradation of Katherina is all that remains of the ribald farce. Marina, the protagonist of *Pericles*, finds no miraculous salvation – she gets dressed as a prostitute and is brutally raped on a filthy mattress. The scene of unification in *A Winter's Tale* seems hastily cobbled together and sloppily acted. *Twelfth Night* concludes with the humiliation of the lovers: Viola, Sebastian, and Antonio are outed as homosexuals, their persecutors paint their lips, yank down their pants, and, with derisive chants of “Kiss! Kiss!”, force them to kiss. Ultimately, the Prince orders them castrated.

What to think about such a violent subversion of these dramas' meaning? This is particularly striking in the stagings of Shakespeare's later plays, generally read as dramas of forgiveness, reconciling the contradictions of human nature, and affirming goodness, purity, and youth. Happy endings in Shakespeare can indeed be conventional and ironic (as in *All's Well That Ends Well*), though they remain improbable: in *A Winter's Tale*, *Pericles*, and *The Tempest* the endings are saturated with the poetry and truth of human dreams. Warlikowski salvages only scraps of these dreams, revealing their futility. The world he shows us is cold, steeped in melancholy, and helplessly exposed to all sorts of brutality. Warlikowski does not turn to the Shakespearean plays that would seem closest to his image of the world (such as *Troilus and Cressida*, for instance). The gesture of stripping away illusions and dreams must come from him. Aimed at reality, Shakespeare, and the theater itself, his work strikes the viewers with doubled strength.

Melancholy and Revulsion

In *The Taming of the Shrew* Warlikowski reveals himself to be a master of repulsion and melancholy. Human actions of every sort are enveloped in an aura of ridicule, disgust, and disappointment. Emil Cioran called people who are only capable of feeling passion for the unresolvable and who can take a merciless perspicacity for negation to unimaginable extremes “masters of repulsion.”¹⁹ Like a purebred melancholic, Warlikowski can be ruthless, ironic, derisive, but

19 *Rozmowy z Cioranem* [Conversations with Cioran], trans. I. Kania, Wydawnictwo KR, Warsaw 1999, p. 152.

also movingly elegiac. Katherina's and Petruccio's wedding ceremony has all the hallmarks of a cold and cruel mockery. Not a detail escapes the director's attention, everything is maliciously brought to the fore: the sublime church music; the chaplain's presence; the exchange of rings; the collection of tithes on a tray; the wailing, sustained "amen" at the close of the ceremony, the operatic pathos of the religious songs. By the same token, we sense the gravity of the event and its finality. The priest's blessings sound solemn and unsparing, like a life sentence. The viewers' responses are a mixture of deep emotion, laughter, and terror, which both bond and separate the audience.

Were it not for the touch of revulsion and melancholy, one might say that Warlikowski apprehends the rituals of his own society from a distance, like an ethnologist. Revulsion allows him to expose the violence that various ceremonies veil and sanction, i.e. the violence of words, norms, costumes, and bodies. Melancholy, in turn, reveals the vacuity of the forms, the absence of love and sanctity, the lack of vitality in bonds and faith. Warlikowski sees no more than a facade in affirmative rituals, and a compact of silence surrounding their futility. He seeks a community of melancholics in the theater, people who experience this sense of loss with like suffering; he creates a new ceremony on the foundation of this experience.

Melancholy leads us to the realm of the unconscious, of symptoms, of the epiphany of the unspeakable. A tense drama lurks beneath the surface of powerlessness, immobility, and theatrical posturing. Freud believed that the melancholic is forever enacting scenes from the past in his/her unconscious; namely, the loss of the love object. The aggression the melancholic feels toward a loved one is redirected toward himself/herself, transformed into an endless series of self-degradations. The trauma of loss and rejection releases the most elemental sorts of aggression (pre-Oedipal, in Freud's terminology), which is subject to the most powerful mechanisms of repression. Violence and desire are united: striving for the other always concludes with the desire for his/her annihilation. The melancholic does not want to identify with this aggressive drive, which is why (s)he destroys and humiliates himself/herself, submitting to the paternal authority of the conscience, though unable to be released from the sense of guilt. (S)he begins to see relationships with others (and, consequently, social relationships as such) as a play of facades and masks.²⁰

In this internal theater the melancholic enacts both the roles of perpetrator and victim. Warlikowski's first play to reveal the cultural and social aspect of melancholy was his staging of Koltès's *Roberto Zucco*. Koltès made the "unmotivated" murderer, rapist, and killer of his own parents into a sacrificial animal. The

20 Cf. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholy," *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. John Rickman, New York 1957.

backdrop of Warlikowski's play was an enormous graffiti painting of arms spread in a gesture of either crucifixion or blessing. Zucco enacts a traumatic scene of crime before the collective, the desecration of prohibitions that lie, repressed and forgotten, in the archaic deposits of the collective and individual unconscious. Rooting the criminal myth in the reality of the contemporary Western world, Koltès shocked audiences and exposed the foundation of collective melancholy as a sphere of repressed aggression. In Warlikowski's earlier performances we might more properly speak of an external theater of melancholy, with its props and moods, of psychological analyses of depressive states, as in *The Marquise of O.*, or the adaptation of Klaus Mann's novella. The staging of Koltès's drama made melancholy a much wider and more capacious category.

This performance demonstrated a proclivity for the disconsolate way in which art photography can frame reality. If captured and photographed correctly, ugly side streets of the world, concrete deserts, railway stations, and collapsing ruins give us a certain aesthetic shudder and the sense of a melancholy distance from reality. Such was the paradox of this production: it fascinated with its cold beauty, simultaneously painting a ruthless image of the world. In the scene where Roberto is beaten, every blow sends him falling onto a metal ramp, which is there to supply the event with its "music," i.e. the clatter of metal. The beauty of this scene intensifies its cruelty. Reality was a cold trap in this performance (all we can expect from others is violence). It also became a hallucination, phantom, or illusion through the images projected on the transparent curtain. Staticity, the expressiveness of gestures, the rhetorical flow of dialogue, and the chilly atmosphere of the situation revealed that the opportunity to draw closer to another person was long lost and rejected – only rape could be experienced as a direct and vital relationship. Zucco rapes the girl whose family has dressed her as a bride; as such, the rape becomes a dreary ceremony, a chance for renewal in a mortified and narcotized world.

The Taming of the Shrew can also be read as theater of melancholy. The sound of the saxophones is melancholy, as is the relentless movement of the revolving stage, mechanical and impersonal, removing all hope. The initially lively rhythm of the play grows slower and slower, the threads of time snap, and the images on stage get mired in a barren idling. The gestures of violence and scenes of humiliation, so abundant here, also have their place in the inward theater of melancholy. Katherina, who directs her "anger" at herself and destroys her reflexes of life-giving aggression, reveals its most deeply rooted mechanisms. Her sudden inability to resist resembles a neurotic symptom. In submitting to Petruchio's aggressive desires, she abruptly finds herself in scenes of rejection and abandonment, and, in true melancholic fashion, she loses her love object after it is blocked from her memory. She reenacts it in order to arrive at the final self-debasement.

Phantasmata

Warlikowski's production casts a dark shadow upon the action of Shakespeare's comedy in the form of a pornographic phantasy: prostituting a woman makes her the ideally passive sexual object. A rowdy group of men, gathered around a table, smoking cigars, drinking whiskey, fired up by the two women having an arm-wrestling contest nearby, is part of this phantasy, bearing no resemblance to guests at a wedding ceremony. It is more like a scene from a brothel: dark, dirty, revolting. The image of male domination and female submission is not only found in the cultural stereotypes in Warlikowski's play, but also in the phantasmata stimulating and shaming the erotic imagination.

Here the dark tones of the performance reach their deepest saturation and lead the director's intentions beyond the social and moral arguments of feminism. Warlikowski seems unrestrained, insatiable in his pessimism. All the themes and situations lead to the other (dark) side of the mirror.

The Story of a Table

The table appears after the wedding scene, at the very close of the first part of the performance. Wedding guests are gathered around. We hear muffled music, seemingly from a night club. A dark, transparent tulle screen falls. The voices become somewhat muffled. The image of the wedding reception fades and darkens in an odd, melancholy image.

Earlier, the action took place around a desk or a red sofa. Negotiations were held here and there: they spoke of money by the desk, on the sofa bodies embraced (or not). After the wedding the table, a large one with leaf extensions and its own family history, appears. People quickly gather around it; they sit down and prepare to celebrate, to talk, to joke, to eat. The bride and groom, however, have yet to arrive. The ritual has been disrupted from the outset. The stifled laughter around the table appears to mock the limping ceremony. The lights fade.

After the intermission, other people sit at the same table: the newlyweds, Katherina and Petruchio. She is in her wedding dress, now without the veil, he is in a tuxedo. The long table divides them as well – they sit at the opposite ends in silence. The lights are on. This stylized image hangs there motionless for a long while, reminiscent of a scene from Bergman or Visconti. It is a study of marital alienation, remoteness, and emotional burnout, saturated in silence, as if years on end of marital spite had passed between the wedding ceremony and this dinner – a brilliant ellipsis! The guests are gone. There are only two empty plates on the table. Petruchio begins a prayer, reciting it loudly, coldly, mechanically: “Bless

us and these gifts, and those who prepared them. And teach us to share our bread and our joys with those who do not possess them. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” There is a chasm between the meaning of these words and the image on stage. There is no bread on the table, there is no joy. The prayer only suggests the experience of the void, lack, alienation, coldness. The servant removes a raw chicken from the old, dirty refrigerator, curtly tossing it on the plate in front of Katherina; the audience hears the unpleasant slap of the raw meat. Then something shameless and hideous occurs. Another servant puts an apron over Katherina’s wedding gown. She is being taught her new role.

Another scene has the real and stand-in fathers and the real and stand-in sons gathered round the table. Warlikowski is only minimally interested in the farcical plot of dressing up and swindling; he plays it out in shorthand, only to supply the requisite information, reducing the characters and dialogues to a minimum. On the other hand, he invests scathing attention to detail into the scene of a small, frightened man, a passer-by accidentally embroiled in Lucentio’s intrigue, being taught the role of the father, i.e. patriarchal self-confidence (slapping the shoulder of the future son-in-law, the condescending embrace). When this ersatz father sits down at the table, we see he is quite capable in his new role; all it takes are a few gestures and a self-assured voice. Here again the play deconstructs a social role.

The plot swiftly unravels, revealing the real identity. Two newlywed couples emerge: Bianca and Lucentio, and Hortensio and the Widow. Only Katherina remains in a prostitute’s garb. At length, the young couples and guests all come together around the table. Everything concludes with a bit of humor via a duel of bawdy allusions. What in Shakespeare (and in Stanisław Barańczak’s Polish translation) is meant to sound like ribald wit becomes vulgar in Warlikowski’s production. The cigar smoke thickens. We are in a loud and filthy hovel. The profanation of the sacred family table is complete. The stage slowly revolves, and with it, the table and the boisterous gathering. The entire image hovers in a ghostly, dream-like space.

Diseased Costumes

Roland Barthes once wrote of the diseases of theatrical costumes.²¹ At the time, he was an advocate of Bertold Brecht, and as such, emphasized the functional aspect of the costume, its social *gestus*. Everything that went beyond functionality, which was an aesthetic, historical, veristic outgrowth, he called a disease. He demanded

21 Roland Barthes, “The Disease of Costume,” *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1972.

that the costume be an argument subordinate to intellectual intention, inscribed in the space of the *écriture*: that it could be read, that it communicated an idea, a conviction, and a sensation. This intellectual intention is visible in the costumes by Małgorzata Szczęśniak, who flawlessly captures the relationships between the characters and the emotional tensions, rooting the events in cultural contexts. The costumes' logic, their thoughtful combination and evocative power are quite admirable. At the same time, they go beyond the horizon Barthes demarcates: they are marked by disease, arouse sensuality, appeal to the subconscious, and go far beyond a social *gestus*. In the opening scenes, Bianca wears parts of a nun's garb: the wimple and the white neckpiece, securely concealing the bosom. In this we might see signs of the upbringing that prevails in her home: the imperative to be utterly subservient to her father, the postulate of humility and purity. The perversity mechanism works much more powerfully here, however, for such a costume intensifies Bianca's aura of erotic sensuality. Barthes once suggested: "We must never feel the human body flouted by the disguise."²² The costumes in *The Taming of the Shrew*, meanwhile, almost always overdo it, overstep their functions, seeming like late additions. The clothing parodies the body, shames it, replaces it, becomes an erotic fetish, and titillates. Its material, layering, and unfastening arouse the senses. The fur collars, for example, appear both in the men's and the women's costumes, their sensual material creating a sexual ambivalence. They also focus our attention onto a peculiar prop: a taxidermized fox, which Signor Baptista keeps on his desk. This is another minor epiphany in the play: sensuality emerges in an atmosphere of death and in the form of a crafty animal.

The costumes create tension, the expectation of nudity, which becomes legible and visible in the realm of sexual desire. All here succumb to the mechanics of lust. Bianca immediately discovers a strong and attractive male in the costumed Lucentio: she clings to him as soon as they meet, seeking his closeness and his touch, and is most visibly aroused. Their kisses are long and passionate; the actors do not fake them. Their mutual fascination, however, has nothing to do with youthful infatuation; rather, it strongly betrays the egoism of the body, the manipulation of the other's reactions. To make himself more attractive, Lucentio flexes his muscles and lowers his voice an octave. There are also examples of corruptive behavior: the sexual acrobatics on the bright-red sofa recall an erotic comic strip from teenage magazines. When Bianca and Lucentio appear immediately after their wedding, we see that there is no bond between them: She has managed to escape her father's dominion, he has received the dowry, and can now appear with an attractive wife at his side.

22 Ibid., p. 48.

Nor does Katherina's and Petruchio's relationship lack a sensual aura. Their kiss after the wedding ceremony lasts about half a minute, and delights them both. When we see Katherina after her wedding night in bed with Petruchio, we are left in no doubt that she has been erotically sated. And it seems as though her sense of guilt brings her to dress up once more as a prostitute a few moments later, to express her consent to the masochistic system. In this production sensuality and carnality lead to a sickness of human souls, traumatic dependencies, the experience of violence, egoism, cynicism, and servitude to vulgar patterns of behavior and repression. This is why human nakedness, so emphasized by the costumes, emerges from within as a dangerous and forbidden force, albeit perpetually desired.

Lust becomes a scattered, multi-directional, ambivalent sensation, capriciously whirling in space – a glow, an aura, a monologue of bodies between the cracks of the action on stage. At one point the plot hangs suspended, and musicians enter playing saxophones. The three men playing Lucentio, Tranio, and Biondello dance alone, succumbing to thoughtless sensual impulses, their innermost thoughts. Their dance has a trance-like rhythm and the sadness of autoeroticism, joyful sensuality, and melancholy meditation.

The Gender of the Shrew

The prologue of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the clownish scene with Sly dressing up as an aristocrat, has often been struck from the stagings of this comedy. Here it is key to everything. It shows man as a creature entangled in a game of masks and phantasmata, and demonstrates how easy it is to construct his identity and to release hidden fantasies. The scene begins like an agonizing dream. Men in eighteenth-century costumes are holding other, half-naked men on strained leashes. Shakespeare's text speaks of a hunt, whereas the image on stage is of lusty aggression, man's animal nature. A drunken man, the same late viewer who had chided the ticket lady and who also plays Sly and Petruchio, is sleeping in the middle of the stage. "O monstrous beast! How like a swine he lies! Grim death, how foul and loathsome is thine image!" – the theme of revulsion is declared at the very outset. Others appear moments later. The drunkard is dressed in different clothing. He is shown pornographic pictures. Later they will hunt a young man dressed as a woman. Sleep, costumes, aggression, lust: all these motifs overlap and softly blend.

The scene contains a discreet allusion to the conventions of Shakespearean theater, wherein men played all the roles. A boy dresses as Sly's wife, only later to accompany Petruchio as his page, maintaining a sexual ambivalence in his appearance and behavior. It is easy to imagine that in Shakespeare's time, this

same boy would have played the roles of Katherina or Bianca. Warlikowski does not go so far, though within the prologue he stirs some powerful and subversive connotations. He brutalizes the dress-up motif as a rape scene, the homosexual fantasy of a sleeping man. Katherina could well be a boy. Read from the point of view of the prologue, the entire play reveals an even stronger ambiguity, a shiftability of all signifiers.

The Theater of Neurotics

A State of Readiness

February 9, 2001 saw the premiere of Euripides's *Bacchae* at the Rozmaitości Theater in Warsaw, a year after *The Tempest* in Stuttgart (Staatstheater, 2000). In December 2001 Warlikowski was finishing work on Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*, and on January 4, 2003 a new version of *The Tempest* premiered at the Rozmaitości Theater. These premieres were therefore spread about a year apart. The rhythm of Warlikowski's work had unequivocally changed. In 1997-1998 Warlikowski directed nine performances, traveling between Warsaw, Radom, Poznań, Tel Aviv, Zagreb, and Milan. He produced two plays from Antiquity (*Electra* and *The Phoenician Women*), four takes on Shakespeare (*A Winter's Tale*, *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Pericles*), two versions of Koltès's *Quay West* (Gradsko dramsko kazalište Gavella in Zagreb and Studio Theater in Warsaw, 1998), and one of Gombrowicz's *Lawyer Kraykowski's Dancer*.

Between *Bacchae*, *Cleansed*, and the second *Tempest* he only created three performances: two chamber operas and an adaptation of *In Search of Lost Time*, directed over the course of nine weeks in Bonn (Schauspiel, 2002). Warlikowski was working less haphazardly and almost exclusively in Poland, in Warsaw, searching for a place to call his own, choosing his texts carefully. He was staging dramas that had long been on his mind, dramas to which he had matured and which demanded courage and great skill. It was then that a strong group of actors began to form around him at the Rozmaitości Theater. At the same time, the process by which his performances evolved was changing: he was focusing on the actors' work, in smaller, more intimate spaces. The creation of a play became an integrating experience for the director, actors, set designer, and composer alike. It is this shift of emphasis from the aesthetic effect to the creative process that is among the clearest indicators of studio or laboratory work. Warlikowski managed not only to involve the actors in working on the play, but also to convince them to participate in creating a joint statement and a bold confrontation with the viewer. For perhaps the first time Warlikowski was able to feel what it meant to have a close and lasting bond with a theater ensemble. This is one reason why the social bond, the interpersonal bond, became the basic theme in his performances, formulated less as a message than as the foundation of the artistic act.

From Warlikowski's first premiere at the Rozmaitości Theater onward (*Hamlet* in 1999), an audience began gathering around him for whom his theater was an important event, and not only in terms of art. Perhaps it more involved experiences of initiation, and processes of self-awareness powerfully stimulated by art. Warlikowski's work in theater, after all, verges on therapy, the course of which leads to revealing inner conflicts, mechanisms of repression, and neurotic compulsions, all of which occur through posing radical questions about the species of social space that perpetuates neurotic behavior. Warlikowski sees the social space as a minefield, a sphere of wounds, of painful and repressed memories. Traumatic experiences are either utterly negated or frozen in involuntary images. An innovative metaphor allows us to reassimilate them, assign them a direct emotional value, and stir inner activity. In the therapeutic process such an intervention is called a "state of readiness"²³ – a linguistic metaphor supplied by the therapist at the right moment initiates a new stage of self-awareness in the patient, sparking a change in the organization of his internal world. Work on *Hamlet* was, in part, centered on destroying interpretive clichés and revitalizing metaphors. As such, the art was in mobilizing creative powers, releasing energy, and cleansing self-awareness. This also necessitated a confrontation with the viewers, who are not always eager to delve into personal mechanisms of repression, and who reject the reality of the evil and suffering uncovered by theater, accusing the artists of wanting to stun them with cruelty.

Extra Ecclesiam

Warlikowski approached *Hamlet* like a family story, stripping away the scaffolding of the royal court and pushing the political intrigues far into the background. In his own words: "I had no desire to stage *Hamlet*. So many performances had already been made that it seemed there was nothing intelligent left to say on the subject. I wanted to touch the people in *Hamlet*, capture them in their extreme reactions and emotions."²⁴ With just over a dozen actors he began working in very modest studio conditions, beginning to confront the themes of the play, primarily those concerning family and myth. The set was stripped to a minimum, to a landing opening to the audience on two sides. The props were minimized, the costumes simplified. This *Hamlet* was made contemporary not through complex theses and interpretations, but through the actors' responses: "This handful of actors is a

23 This term comes from a book by Murray Cox and Alice Theilgaard, *Mutative Metaphors in Psychotherapy: The Aeolian Mode* (London, 1987), and is linked to their concept of Aeolian therapy.

24 "Grzech Pierworodny" [Original Sin], Joanna Targoń speaks with Małgorzata Szcześniak, Jacek Poniedziałek, and Krzysztof Warlikowski, *Didaskalia* 1999, No. 34, p. 11.

part of Polish reality, as am I; theater exists in a concrete world and in time,"²⁵ Warlikowski explained. The family story, practically a model illustration of the family romances of neurotics described by Freud, thus had to become a social story, as well as a political one.

This *Hamlet* was stripped of a strong father figure: a young man from the troupe of actors plays the Ghost, Claudius is strongly influenced by the powerful and much older Gertrude. Hamlet lives in a world where his forebears have left no real mark, which has led him to try to trust his own instincts. His lively, aggressive, and polarized response to the play proves that Warlikowski's premises are justified. The social drive, according to Freud, has no primitive origin of its own, but is always shaped within the family. The social drive that emerges in Warlikowski's *Hamlet*, based on an impulse to flee from greater political issues, is aimed at attempts to find private spaces of freedom in which to make the first gestures to break religious, social, and sexual prohibitions. This was Warlikowski's subconscious reading of the Polish reality of the late 1990s, of the initial coming to terms with the decade of political freedom and the spontaneous aspirations toward integrating with the West.

Hamlet is deprived of some of his motivations: he does not make the attempt to set the "broken bones in their joints," he does not hold an image of a just and harmonious world, and thoughts of revenge do not even enter his head. This irritable and cruel Hamlet openly displays his importunity, anxieties, revulsion, and moods. Jacek Poniedzialek played this figure based on scraps of text, images, and situations, without sealing in the character. Around him was a small cast who varied widely in their expressions, physiognomy, and tones. Women played the roles of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Laertes was a boy, Ophelia a beautiful and somewhat androgynous woman, and Horatio a dark-skinned man. These human physiognomies, full of dissonance, grotesque, sublime, and vulgar, clearly reflected the world surrounding and engulfing Hamlet. Such "miscast" actors gave this vision of the world its verisimilitude: life, after all, is not a cast of beautiful players. The amplitude of this play was strung between revulsion and a keen desire to expose a shared evil and misfortune.

Freud saw *Hamlet* as the first modern drama which made the neurotic experience a source of pleasure. Here Freud defined "pleasure," however, as a "sense, which [people] so much desire, of raising the potential of their psychical state."²⁶ *Hamlet* is theater for neurotics. A conflict between outward and repressed sources of suffering emerges in this drama. Only a neurotic derives pleasure from exposing a repressed impulse; in a non-neurotic it evokes revulsion and the desire

25 Ibid., p. 8.

26 Sigmund Freud, "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. James Strachey, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1997, p. 87.

to force it back into repression. The neurotic, on the other hand, experiences both ecstatic liberation and resistance – this is why (s)he is powerfully affected by dramas based on a conflict between these two stances. Warlikowski revealed the neurotic basis of *Hamlet*'s dramaturgy: he fragmented the structure of the play, changing it into a space of impulses, symptoms, and reflexes, making the text a field of semantic interference, micro-climaxes, subterranean tension, and therapeutic metaphors.

If we might risk the statement that Warlikowski creates theater for neurotic audiences, we ought also to bear in mind that neurotic suffering became a widespread and near-universal condition in the twentieth century, and that it is closely bound to transformations that occurred in the theater.²⁷ Jung, for his part, feared stigmatism tied to psychoanalytic and psychiatric discourse: “But it is neurotic to talk when one says that this is a neurosis. As a matter of fact it is something quite different; it is the terrific fear of loneliness.”²⁸ Jung saw his contemporaneous Western European society as a collection of extremely alienated, terrified, anxiety-ridden people, cut off from the symbolic sphere that delineated relationships between man and himself, or others, because of how civilization had transformed. In Jung's view, the disappearance of certain forms of religious life had left man with an unbridled and simmering sense of guilt. “Your soul has become lonely; it is *extra ecclesiam* and in a state of ‘no-salvation’.”²⁹ Ricoeur, too, writes of the symbols of the sacred and hierophany falling into oblivion: “losing hold of man himself belonging to the Sacred.”³⁰ From this sense of loss, however, a longing to regain a full and symbolic speech is born. Lacan tells us that the discoveries of psychoanalysis, and in particular Freud's concept of language, have made the primary language of symbols, which had seemingly been lost, “liv[e] on in the suffering of civilized man.”³¹

27 It will suffice, perhaps, to recall a figure key to this tradition: Antonin Artaud. “The theater is the only place in the world, the last general means we still possess of directly affecting the organism and, in periods of neurosis and petty sensuality like the one in which we are immersed, of attacking his sensuality by physical means it cannot withstand” (Antonin Artaud, “No More Masterpieces,” *Theater of the Avant-Garde, 1890-1950*, eds. Professor Berto Cardullo and Robert Knopf, Yale University Press, New Haven 2001, pp. 386-387). This thread is picked up by Leszek Kolankiewicz in his *Święty Artaud* [Saint Artaud], particularly in the “Rewolucja obłądu” [Revolution of Insanity] chapter.

28 C.G. Jung, “Psychotherapy or the Clergy,” *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, Chapter V, CW 11, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1970, pp. 519-520.

29 Ibid.

30 Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, trans. Denis Savage et al., Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1974, p. 288.

31 Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1981, p. 44.

It is this phrase *extra ecclesiam* which seems central to Warlikowski's theater. It opens both a melancholy and wide-angle perspective on the loss of spirituality (in *Hamlet* a wall on the side of the landing is the wooden wall of a Jewish temple). It is a political and passionate protest against forms of Polish Catholicism (the parody of the wedding scene in *The Taming of the Shrew*, a woman acting the role of bishop in *Hamlet*). Observing the collapse of traditional forms of religious life, Jung suggested a hard, gnostic, and alchemical road to individuality. His vision of the exertion that creates an individual is very optimistic. Firstly, it is based on transcultural and timeless symbols of transformation; secondly, it tempts us toward the attainable goal of a wise man, the prospect of liberating self-awareness. The theater of Krystian Lupa owes its optimism to Jung. Warlikowski does not, however, take the same path as his mentor, but is closer to Freud's bitter pessimism and his vision of unhealed trauma, the heroism of unwavering quandary, of taking wounds inflicted in the darkness into the bright light of day. This world is no longer governed by the archetypal dream of transformation, but by phantasmata, the individual myth of the neurotic.

The Pleasure of Being Uprooted

Warlikowski creates theater for neurotics in the same sense as Jerzy Grotowski and Konrad Swinarski did before him, and as Krystian Lupa does to this day. Swinarski wanted to make Kazimierz Dąbrowski's appeal to psycho-neurotics the motto of his staging of *Hamlet* at the Stary Theater in Krakow.³² Grotowski wrote that he made theater for the spectator "who has genuine spiritual needs and who

32 "Hail to thee, psycho-neurotics: for having sensitivity in the insensitive world, and uncertainty in certainty; for so often apprehending others as you do yourselves; for feeling the disquiet of the world as bottomless narrow-mindedness and arrogance; for being afraid to cleanse your hands of the filth of the world; for your fear of the seclusion of the narrow-mindedness of the world; for your fear of the meaninglessness of existence; for your reticence in telling others what you see in them; for your practical incapability and practicality in the unfamiliar; for your transcendental realism and your lack of realism in living your life; for your exclusivity and dread of losing those near to you; for your creativity and ecstasy; for your inability to adapt to what exists, and your adaptability to what should exist; for your great untapped abilities; for the fact that you discover your greatness too late, and do not allow those who come after you to see your greatness; for the fact that you are cured instead of curing others; for the fact that your heavenly strength is always repulsed by brute strength; for what can be sensed in you, but not described or captured; for the solitude and strangeness of your paths. Hail to thee!" Quoted from: J. Opalski, *Rozmowy o Konradzie Swinarskim i o Hamlecie* [Conversations about Konrad Swinarski and Hamlet], Krakow 1988, pp. 191-192.

really wishes, through confrontation with the performance, to analyse himself [*sic*].”³³ Lupa’s theater often returned to the experience of the individuation of a catastrophe, the neurotic identity breakdown of too-hastily-constructed social personae.

Warlikowski’s theater, on the other hand, was shaped in entirely different political circumstances, i.e. after 1989, in a period of hasty integration and confrontation with the West. During this time, Warlikowski traveled frequently and often worked abroad, chiefly in German theaters. He broke with Poland’s complex of belonging to an “inferior part of Europe.” He consistently built his image as a student of Europe’s greatest directors, working with the source texts of the dramatic and theatrical arts (the ancient Greeks, Shakespeare), disregarding the touchstones of Polish culture (Romanticism, Wyspiański), and dipping into the most controversial of contemporary Western European playwrights (Koltès, Kane). He is neither attracted to Adam Mickiewicz’s *Forefather’s Eve*, nor to twentieth-century Polish literature, as they are too bound up in political issues which he sees as no longer valid. This is why he chooses the Greeks and Shakespeare, masters of the theater, “pure and eternal.”³⁴ It is this “purity,” precisely, which is worth stressing and exploring: it not only corresponds to the aestheticism of Warlikowski’s theater, but by way of contrast, it points toward the “dirty” and “murky” sphere which his theater tried to circumvent at the time. His *Hamlet* of 1999 could be regarded as a discreet attempt to support the idea of the “end of history.” It could be regarded as expressing the belief that the present task of theater is to record the sufferings of people living in liberal-democratic countries, those who are almost exclusively preoccupied with deconstructing the fossilized mental structures of the patriarchal system and its oppressive cultural models. In the late 1990s Warlikowski saw a chance to use this approach to form a live bond with an audience of young and educated people who were not entangled in settling old scores. The signals he sent were clear and simply formulated.

The Polish experience tied to the breakdown of the collective solidarity myth following 1989 long remained a realm which Warlikowski did not want to directly confront. He always saw himself as an outsider in terms of national aspirations and emotions. He appreciated, however, Milan Kundera’s stance in the famous essay “The Tragedy of Central Europe” – especially the contrast between the Western soul and the Eastern body, between the Central European societies’ attachment to European culture and the political reality of the countries of the Soviet Bloc. Kundera stressed that the values of European culture lived on in Central Europe,

33 Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba, Methuen, London 1980, p. 40.

34 “Lunatyk teatru” [A Sleepwalker in the Theater], a conversation with K. Warlikowski, in: P. Gruszczyński, *Ojcobójcy* [Patricides], Warsaw 2003, p. 147.

and not in the West. In the Poles' collective manifestos of the 1980s, Warlikowski did not perceive, however, a defense of collective values (such as freedom and democracy), but rather worrisome herd instincts that revived xenophobic national myths. He stressed his empathy for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, and his distance from the national myth tied to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 (a statement which sparked outrage from the right-wing journalists). Kundera's way of apprehending the relationships between Central Europe and the West helped Warlikowski, however, to create his own image in the West — particularly in France — as an artist meditating on the spiritual dimension that had vanished in European culture. What ties Warlikowski and Kundera would seem to be a distrust of history, perceived as a sphere of trauma, the stance of a melancholic attached to values that have been lost, a flight into the realm of the private, and an anxiety of unrecited love for the West. Warlikowski categorically severs himself from the Martial Law experience of his generation (though he came of age after August 1980),³⁵ revitalizing stereotypical Romantic standpoints.³⁶ At the same time, he did not join those critical voices from the West which stressed that no new ideas had come from Eastern Europe after 1989. He perceived a creative unrest tied to the spiritual, religious, and ethical sphere in Polish society. He wanted to make this unrest the basis for vital contact with the audience. By the same token, however, he liked to signal his belonging to the culture of the West,³⁷ showing an elegant contempt for the Polish reality and the local quarrels. It is both fascinating and significant that the only "Polish" subject formulated in *Hamlet* was the tendency

35 "My high school friends were all spending their days distributing pamphlets, but I never did that, I was too busy studying and reading." ("Lunatyk teatru," op. cit., p. 147). "During Martial Law my friends were hatching conspiracies, while I was sitting in the banned books section and reading the whole library of the Instytut Literacki, Gombrowicz, and Miłosz." ("Burza we mnie," op. cit.).

36 Kundera's essay can also be read as striking out against Romantic Slavic and national myths: the roots of Central European culture, in Kundera's view, are in the universal models of Latin culture.

37 "To my mind, the Bible is the basis for contemplating Poland. My life only began to get interesting when I went to high school. My first-year history teacher tested us on the map of Ancient Greece. In defiance of the prevailing attitudes at the time, we were also taught the history of the Jews. My fascination for ancient history came when I began studying at university. At the Jagiellonian University we were instructed to believe that our belonging to the culture of the Mediterranean Basin frees us from the yoke of the East. Shakespeare became my mentor. I value his refusal to compromise and his urge to name the entire world, not just a scrap of reality. Memory of the Holocaust, in turn, defines my thinking about the present." ("Do jutra" [Till Tomorrow], K. Mieszkowski in conversation with K. Warlikowski, *Notatnik Teatralny* 2003, Nos. 28-29, p. 230).

toward brutal interference in the private sphere: “In Poland, more often than elsewhere, people reach their dirty fingers in your business and muck around.”³⁸

Working on *Hamlet*, Warlikowski skirted the edge of powerful historical trauma and provocatively avoided perceiving it. This created a tension in his theater. He consciously played with the mechanism of certain subjects’ repression, using the new spheres of freedom created by the disintegration of the traditional paradigms of Polish culture. He calculated the resulting dangers, such as those described by Maria Janion,³⁹ in the radicality of his approach. The fear of losing one’s roots, which most often inspires conservative and right-wing thinking, becomes its opposite in Warlikowski’s theater: “I am in favor of learning from the West. We should examine what happens there very carefully, to learn to find our feet better in the contemporary world, in which we are often utterly lost.”⁴⁰ Being uprooted is a radical proposition – it frees us from sentimentality, sharpens how we view our own culture, and provokes a merciless clash with the viewer. It exposes many spheres of hypocrisy, but also sets in motion one’s own repression mechanisms, which Warlikowski will sooner or later be forced to address. For the time being, whether consciously or not, he makes them a latent source of energy for his artistic gestures. This allows him to uncover points of suffering, which Poland continues to see as “Western luxuries” or “the perversions of prosperity.”

In speaking of his work on *Hamlet*, Warlikowski often stressed the need to find a myth, the original sources of evil; he indicated the connections between Shakespeare’s play and Greek tragedy or the Bible. He tried to take questions concerning evil, or “values,” far beyond the scope of any political debate, and in particular, those that presuppose and stimulate the clash between “values” and modernization, tradition and progress, the right and the left. This may also be why he has so conscientiously avoided Polish literature, which is almost entirely stamped with these oppositions. He attempted to make religious experiences lock horns with pre-Christian sources, above all Judaism and the theology of Greek tragedy, to flee as far as possible from blending political or national affairs with religious issues, as is so often the case in Polish culture. In *Hamlet* he sketched out his project for his work in the years to come.

38 “Grzech pierworodny” [Original Sin], op. cit., p. 11.

39 Cf. Marian Janion, “Romantyzm blaknący” [Fading Romanticism], *Dialog* 1993, Nos. 1-2, pp. 146-154. Maria Janion wrote, in part, of a “sense of impunity and helplessness born from the crumbling of the paradigm of Polish culture before our eyes.” She also inquired if Polish culture, “wounded within,” would hold the power to attract other cultures, particularly many nations of Central/Eastern Europe.

40 “Lunatyk teatru,” op. cit., p. 149.

Meat

Extra Ecclesiam

The modern consciousness associates Dionysus less with the god than with the Dionysian. It is the Dionysian not Dionysus that has become the object of worship in modern European culture. Warlikowski makes the myth of Dionysus the archetype of the religious experience, and Euripides' text a gauge for contemporary religious sensitivity – scattered, diffuse, intuitive, and almost involuntary. This is most apparent in how he directs the chorus and constructs the space of the stage.

The stage design imitates no place in particular. It is made from parts of various worlds and systems: a bridge that runs above the stage, the small pool of a Jewish mikveh, a table covered in sheet metal, a metal milk jug, a garbage bin, a patterned carpet, sand, and an old sink. It somewhat resembles the landscapes of Heiner Müller's ancient dramas. Some props are there for little more than a single event: the carpet for the religious meditations of Cadmus and Tiresias, the bridge for Dionysus' crossing, the pool for Pentheus' leap, and the sand for the dust cloud that rises when Pentheus is dragged to the slaughter. All of these components are closed within the frame of a cold, abandoned place with metal walls: a slaughterhouse, a bathhouse, a temple. The instability of meaning, decisive in how we apprehend the staged events (such as the cruel death of Pentheus), goes hand in hand with the sharp, powerful construction of the theatrical image. The metal bridge locks the stage in place; the backdrop, reminiscent of Classical or Renaissance architecture, evokes the endurance of ancient beauty. This space bears the marks of harmony, order, and structure.

The chorus of *Bacchae* is made up of three women who, like the three Marys in *Visitatio Sepulchri*, will testify to the power of the god who tears the shackles and topples the walls of the tomb cell. They appear dressed for the occasion, in black furs, with prayer books, and one carries a Dionysus statuette. For a Greek tragedy, the image is strangely familiar – these could be religious women headed for church. At the same time, it is disarming and remote: the women have colorful bows in their hair, and their faces are painted. They could belong to a hippie commune, a New Age cult, or a tribal group. The entry of the chorus is accompanied by gently pulsing trance music. Every song is different in color, mood, and dynamic. Each woman's character has a slightly different shade. One

most emanates the motif of ecstasy and madness, another, rage at human impiety, and the third, human dreams and earthly cares. As through a prism, the religious experience is diffused into hundreds of reflections, colors, and shades. It flows in a wide, fluctuating current of prayerful meditation, joyful celebration, fear, horror, and ecstasy. The chorus is a mighty source of lyrical power: three women sit on three chairs, directly in front of the audience, as though a part of it, representing it, expressing its shared desire for the sacred. The association wrought by their constant presence is a forceful one: we are inside of a church.

Warlikowski's rendering of Euripides' tragedy is not about an ancient religious cult; it does not reconstruct its forms and implications. This performance is no throwback to cultural and religious roots, and is not a product of the anthropological trend in contemporary theater. Warlikowski is a poet of uprootal, disinheritance, and alienation. His performances take place in abandoned spaces, frozen as if in the flash of a camera, and they speak of a great rift in culture, consciousness, and civilization. The three Bacchae are reminiscent of pious women praying in a Catholic church; but the words of their prayers are different, their gestures are sometimes too bold, thus the dream-like impression, the shifting signifiers, the dislocation of familiar symbols. At one point the women bare their breasts and fall half-naked into an ecstatic prayer. When Dionysus' childlike sob is heard, they clutch their breasts in their hands, ready to feed him, like the Madonna. A new cult is born on the ruins of the old church; it is emotionally unhindered, and it uses religious props and gestures in a free and artistic way.

Dionysus casts a spell on the stage. First he himself appears in the gloom, and then his followers: the three pious Bacchae, King Cadmus, and Tiresias, the booze-swilling derelict and former hippie. The only one who resists the spell is Pentheus, who chases two meditating old men from the stage, disrupting the hypnotic, trance-inducing rhythms. He moves about firmly and energetically, his voice loud and mocking. He puts the stage in order, as if moving about on the verge of the stage illusion. There is an age difference, a generation gap between the substantially younger Pentheus and the adherents of Dionysus, whose clothing and gestures identify them as the children of the counter-culture, the older generation. He, on the other hand, comes from a civilization that fetishizes the eternally young body, whose muscles are sculpted at the gym. There is nothing literal here, however. He delicately alludes to the framework of the cultural space in which we operate.

Warlikowski uses Euripides' tragedy to reveal the subterranean current of the West's religious consciousness in all its garishness, wanting to free itself from the shackles of any sort of theology, and having declared the end of Christianity as an accomplished fact. As such, he openly ponders the non-existence of God, while adding a melancholy sense of loss – and from this he makes the new basis of spirituality. He reverses the signifiers between the spiritual and earthly. He makes

the body a residue of truth and holiness. He does not believe in transcendence because, to his mind, the greatest mystery is corporeal existence. It can be a mask of revolt against all figures of bourgeois reality, drawing strength from individual opposition, and creating fleeting, fragile social configurations. It has no fear of syncretism, and it appropriates the religious symbols of various times and cultures. The sense of holiness feeds on the dark, threatening, cruel, and perverse, unearthing flashes of divinity in destructive sexual impulses.

Warlikowski is too ironic and aware as an artist to join his Bacchae uncritically and unabashedly, even if he sees them as allies in his version of the truth. His ironic distance gives him no desire to moralize, however – his anxiety toward a fundamentalism that combats all forms of anarchic religiousness is too strong. He also has too strong a sense of tragedy to become a New Age prophet. This is why almost the entire performance walks a thin line. A ritual with no basis in religion or even anthropology courts aestheticism or parody. There is, of course, no shortage of comedy in the production, accompanying Dionysus and his followers like a delicate shade; but the tone of the whole is different, it is dark, intense, fiery.

Warlikowski managed to assemble a group of actors ready to share their truths with the audience, believing in a theater that requires psychological exposure, the intensification of truth that allows no compromise with bourgeois morality. It is this faith that powers the ritual forms that appear in this staging of *Bacchae*. It is not ritual that revitalizes theater, reinforces its existence, sanctifies its status, but theater that brings ritual to life, or, in fact, recreates it, through the rigors of form and the temperature of the actors' presence. Warlikowski has gained access to the sphere of the sacred, which delves into the intimate mystery of man. This sphere of sanctity entirely belongs to existential drama; it is not identified with religion, but emerges through art.

Warlikowski seeks texts that give him room for cultural transgressions, for exiting the Christian world. This is why he so often draws from Greek tragedy, and why Shakespeare fascinates him. Di Lampedusa, for one, has written of the unchristian notion of mercy in *The Tempest*.⁴¹ The same holds true for Koltès and Kane. His fascination for Jewish culture is another expedition beyond the frontiers of Christianity.

41 Di Lampedusa writes as follows on the Sonnets: "And now it is not a masterful genius with whom we are dealing, but a poor fellow whose heart is filled with torments, his conscience taxed with bitterness, but who, nonetheless, found relative peace in his despair, and was able to speak the words of reconciliation and unchristian mercy that conclude *The Tempest* and all of Shakespeare's writings." Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Szekspir*, trans. Stanisław Kasprzysiak, Warsaw 2001, p. 23.

The Murderer God

In Warlikowski's performance Dionysus is not a god, but a dramatic figure who is situated in the structure of the text in an interesting way, though the source of his power is not pinpointed. Dionysus uses the power of irony, turning words in on themselves, giving them deceptive meanings (here he resembles Tinker – who, like him, swears by the discourse of the unconscious). He also has the gift of a powerful libido, allowing him to attract and destroy his victims. Dionysus rules the sphere of the *communitas*, as represented on stage by the chorus of Bacchae and the terrified messengers from Mount Cithaeron. Pentheus is his opposite – he belongs to the sphere of the evident, the social, the conscious. His words have the force of a command: there is no disparity between intention and outcome. Pentheus' reasoning is through common sense, and the audience is the chorus that supports his arguments. And indeed, it is from the audience that Pentheus first enters the stage. Both in his conversations with Cadmus and Tiresias and in his quarrels with Dionysus he repeatedly aims his arguments directly at the viewers, seeking their support. He sets his chair as close as possible to the audience as if wanting to blend in with them and become their spokesman, yet he is unaware that he speaks in a voice appropriated by the collective *usus*, the *doxa*, the status quo. The director exposes this fact.

Such a symmetrical placement of characters inclines us to think more in terms of doubling than a relationship between god and man. Dionysus brings out hidden places where identity and language collapse; he is the “monstrous *doppelgänger*”⁴² of a rite of passage. The relationship between Pentheus and Dionysus is irreconcilably suspended for a long time. Dionysus always seems soft, unassertive, naive. He does, however, know how to stress a word so that we immediately sense his intelligence, perceptiveness, and talent for being devastatingly ironic. He speaks with Pentheus in passing, fiddling with his hair, twisting it into coquettish curls. Animal, child, homosexual – this character is created from such attributes; he has a powerful aura but is hollow inside. Is this a god, or merely a creature capable of killing in cold blood?

Rape

Warlikowski has always been fascinated by the moment in which the action and the identity of the protagonist break down. When Pentheus comes to identify

42 René Girard explains that, in many myths and tales, the ambiguous and primitive Sacred (combining the cursed with the blessed) extends between the perfectly good hero and perfectly evil monster who destroys the community. “The monster inherits all that is detestable.” René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero, Johns Hopkins University Press, Maryland 1986, pp. 81-82.

with a forbidden desire, discarding all else and succumbing to the pressure of phantasmata, he falls into his trap. One such dazzling phantasm is his final encounter with Dionysus. Pentheus emerges from the depths of the stage, no longer seeking ties with the viewers but intent on confronting them – he stands center stage, fixing his gaze on the audience. Wearing a long white dress with a finely embroidered fish pattern, he is now adrift in the sea of his unconscious. Pentheus is not playing a woman; his shaved head and exposed arms are those of a masculine body. Our sensation is, however, that he has appeared internally transformed, and has become quiet and gentle. His feminine garb prompts no laughter. Pentheus' whole posture is strikingly serious, showing a ritual readiness to be a sacrifice. Now it is Dionysus who is man and executioner, murderer and criminal, all in one, a minor god of violence, an amoral creature devoid of his own illusions and taking them from others. Leaning nonchalantly on the tabletop, he is cold, observing his victim from afar. In his dress Pentheus crawls to Dionysus, who gives Pentheus a short, sharp slap, which makes him reel. Pentheus takes it with the devotion of a lover, and gives himself a second slap, thus sealing the act of humiliation. He experiences this liberation from the fetters of his "I" as sexual delight. Lying on the ground at Dionysus' feet, he cuddles up to his calves.

Pentheus' entrance is accompanied by the muffled sound of bells calling the faithful and ringing for a holiday, perhaps even the bells of the Resurrection. They verge on inaudible, as if on the edge of Pentheus' subconscious; the sound guides him, conducts his gestures, builds the tension in his body. When Dionysus intimates the death of Pentheus we first hear the sound of a stadium filled to capacity. Moments thereafter, Dionysus drags Pentheus onto the slope of Cithaeron to be executed. Clouds of dust rise to the air, and we hear the roar of a throng.

The suggestion is clear: this is the hidden voice of the audience, the collective, which demands the spectacle of violence. We are returning to the origins of the sacred: the original scene of violence, the founding crime, the image of the crazed horde murdering its ruler.

The Story of a Table

The table stands to one side, close to the audience. It seems somewhat haphazardly placed, or superfluous, like a prop from a rehearsal that someone forgot to take backstage. A towel, a knife, whole wheat bread, a bottle of vodka, a helmet, and a sword create a rather slapdash composition of objects, both on and off the stage. It is a still life that does not want to be a work of art; an impure zone where theater ceases to be theater, where the reality from the wings transgresses, somewhat unstructured and prosaic. This layout of objects will constantly change: as the

action proceeds, a second bottle of vodka will appear, along with a tomato and a glass of milk. The helmet and the sword will vanish.

The table is heavy and clunky. It has thick legs of rough wood, with clear traces of knotholes and rings, and a heavy top covered in sheet metal. It has never been the center of family life, a place for home-cooked meals. It evokes no festive or intimate associations. It comes from a much lower sphere of reality: Perhaps from a workshop, a school cafeteria kitchen, a slaughterhouse?

In almost all of his productions, Warlikowski isolates and extracts family situations that are strange, sick, and extreme. We also have a family of sorts in *Bacchae*: Cadmus is Agauë's father, and the grandfather of Pentheus and Dionysus. Pentheus is the son of Agauë and Dionysus' cousin. But we know from the very beginning that we are dealing with broken bonds, in a sphere where destructive, dark, and unconscious forces are at work. And although we are almost always dealing with family situations, they almost never appear in the space of the home. Even if home-related objects enter this cold and comfortless stage reality, it is always in a warped and degraded form. They do not create an asylum. The table is a place for deals between gangsters, a space for solitude, or, in the best case scenario, for hasty and provisional family rituals. It appears on stage almost exclusively to make us mindful of the lack of ties. For this reason, however, it holds enormous potential for negative epiphany.

In *Bacchae* one sees the table, as it were, out of the corner of one's eye, as something that disrupts a beautifully composed space, reminiscent of an ancient bathhouse, a temple, or a palace atrium. The table does, indeed, initially seem unnecessary. No one sits at it, though there are three chairs nearby. Pentheus is the first to approach the table. This occurs during his first confrontation with Dionysus, who is, in this scene, coquettish, soft, and kind. Pentheus surely suspects that this is a homosexual trying to seduce him. He approaches the table and cuts a slice of bread with a decisive gesture, then sits on a chair. He speaks with Dionysus as he eats. He is sprawled out on the chair, confident, ironic, and aggressive. This moment works like an electric shock of alienation. Pentheus changes the tone of the play, taking the reality down to earth, to the regions of the everyday, the prosaic. His gestures and actions are not theatrical – he usurps the right to act as the representative for the audience, trying to impose his own ironic gaze upon them, to express their common-sense convictions. The table is Pentheus' zone – it is heavy and down-to-earth, providing a safe foothold in a tough reality. Yet, it is also a place for the disillusionment that Pentheus covets, a fragment of the off-stage reality, as it were, familiar, quotidian, predictable.

In the gloom a figure wearing a thick red jacket and a helmet who strikingly resembles Pentheus approaches the table. But this is not Pentheus. Dionysus repeats Pentheus' gesture: he takes the knife, hangs the blade over the bread

momentarily, and cuts a slice. This repeated gesture means something different. It holds a powerful dose of tragic irony. In Dionysus' hand, the knife insinuates murder. The cutting of the bread might foreshadow a crime. Bread is a symbol of the human body. Nonetheless, this symbolism remains intriguingly subdued for the time being; we feel only the subterranean horror of simple gestures.

The Bacchae seat themselves by the table after a long, exhausting trance. They have washed the make-up from their faces. Now they are terrifying and powerful, indeed. Their faith is determined, and does not conclude with their trance. Upon hearing of Pentheus' cruel death, they make no effort to hide their joy. One kisses the messenger loudly on both cheeks. In deep concentration they hear out the graphic details, but their terror does not inspire them to revolt. They remain faithful priestesses of their god. They slice bread and share it. They drink milk from the glass. They behave like actresses after a performance.

This is not the first meal at the table, and, as always, it occurs surreptitiously, modestly, discreetly, almost on the verge of the theatrical illusion, at the edge of the stage. However, given the bloody off-stage acts of tearing apart bodies and of devouring raw meat, slicing and eating bread seem to be increasingly significant gestures, despite the director's measures to ensure that no symbolism, intrusive or otherwise, should enter the picture here. The destruction of the symbolic bonds between the image of tearing the body and the gesture of slicing bread is a consciously artistic device. It brings in the none-too-present sphere of Christian symbolism – it is as if this sphere had disappeared or had been forgotten.

The Bacchae carry the table center stage, close to the audience. With a great deal of concentration, they remove all the objects from it. Then they collect their clothes and exit the stage. They are clearly conscious of the fact that a scene is transpiring here to which they do not want to bear witness.

The Mass

This time there is no denying the symbolism: this is a table for sacrifice. There is violent tension between the “high” symbol and its bearer. The table becomes an ugly, heavy, brutally real object. The symbol is exposed, and thus restored. The shifting of the table from the periphery to the center, from the gloom to the light, from a sphere of insignificance to the sphere of the symbolic recreates the dramaturgy of the play and takes it to its climax. Dionysus, a homosexual and a criminal, comes from the margins of social reality. The three pious women come from the margins of the great Churches. Phantasms, heretofore suppressed in the unconscious, begin to conquer Pentheus' mind. Messengers come from outside the city bringing news of what goes on in the valleys of Mount Cithaeron.

The table, which has become a place for a sacrifice, loses none of its thick, clunky authenticity; on the contrary, we sense it even more powerfully when it stands center stage. It is strange, alien, illuminated with a dead, white, unpoetic kind of light. Thus exposed it becomes the site of the final epiphany and the final disillusion. The reality of the Cithaeron messengers creeps in during the final sequences of the play.

Mortally exhausted from her triumphant hunt, tormented, yet happy, Agauë is lying on the table. When she realizes that the hunted animal is her son, she recalls his birth and her agonies. She strikes her bare heel on the metal tabletop. Her body is tense and powerless, given over to powers beyond her control. Short, sharp breaths punctuate her speech. In this extreme state her body experiences the polar contradictions of life.

Now Agauë is standing behind the table, her hands raised like a priest. She calls upon Dionysus, begging him for forgiveness for her blasphemy. She empties raw meat, the remains of her son, from two buckets onto the table. Here is the whole truth. The sacrificial table has become a butcher's table. This radical act of disillusion, however, is no display of mocking cynicism or radical atheism. It comes as a shock.

Waste

The final image of the play leaves a powerful and lasting impression and takes us to other realms of associations. A rolled-up carpet, a table, two chairs, and a pair of black shoes remind us of the interior of a home. We see father and daughter, Agauë and Cadmus, helpless and terrified – it is a broken family relationship. Somewhere off to the side is a man holding a broken child's toy; he is the silent and intimate witness to the whole event. The space of the audience is subtly dimmed. Is the family catastrophe the most moving epiphany of the play, and the religious symbolism merely a retrospective by-product? What emerges from the Dionysian myth, from Euripides' tragedy, is a suppressed family trauma with an aura of the uncanny.

For the entire course of the play a garbage bin stands beside the table. In one of the first scenes, Pentheus throws into it clothing discarded by Cadmus and Tiresias while they undress for prayer. This obvious gesture of dismissal and contempt is material, like all of Pentheus' early actions. From a staging perspective the garbage bin would seem an utterly dispensable object. Only the logic of tragic irony allows us to guess that Pentheus' bloody remains will end up here as well.

The Trauma of Birth

In various forms and intensities, the image of a blood-splattered person returns repeatedly in Krzysztof Warlikowski's plays. In the first *Tempest*, performed in Stuttgart, Miranda wipes the blood from her nose with the back of her hand. This occurs right after her wedding with Ferdinand. The blood alludes to the honeymoon night, but also to past crimes seemingly long forgotten and forgiven. The bloodstains stigmatize, indicate corporeal suffering, they soil. They summon images of crippling, evoke the image of wounds. In every performance this image inspires a different sphere of associations, though they are generally more tied to the hidden, tangled forces of life than to images of death. Even the image of suffering in Warlikowski's performances has vitality – it stirs the consciousness with a powerful effect, inciting the impulse to rebel. The figure of a bloodstained person evokes forceful and contradictory emotions. “Blood contains an emotional force, spontaneous, purely instinctual, often independent of conscious associations, a force from which no one can escape, and which can manifest itself in the same person through the occurrence of drives in two opposing directions, alternately or at once. It conjures more emotions than any other sort of image, all the more so given that this image is living, colorful, and rapacious.”⁴³

In *Bacchae* the first messenger appears on stage half-naked (in a few performances he appeared entirely naked). His torso, back, arms, and hair are drenched in drying blood. He has come from Cithaeron, where women are performing a wild ritual. The stained body, covered in slime, paint, and blood, returns more than once in *Bacchae*. The women in the chorus have painted faces. Before joining the Dionysian festivities, Cadmus and Tiresias cover their faces and body with a black slime. And finally, when Agauë appears on stage we see traces of blood on her face, hands, legs, and dress. Soiling, dirtying, and hobbling are like the law of gravity in Warlikowski's theater – they simply must take place. From the symbolic, ritual gestures of painting and soiling the body we come to increasingly cruel images, fluctuating between the symbolic and the real. The image of the stain perhaps most powerfully evokes the physiology of birth, of the beginning. A body soaked in blood can be associated with the body of a newborn, just emerged from the mother's womb. In one scene Dionysus becomes a wailing infant, and the women in the chorus, lactating mothers. In the finale Agauë appears with an enormous phallic stick and a stuffed belly; she agonizingly “gives birth” to the head of the son she has torn apart.

Analyzing the concept of the stain, Paul Ricoeur writes that it is associated with breaking a prohibition, including involuntary and unconscious actions, and

43 Jean-Paul Roux, *Krew. Mity, symbole, rzeczywistość* [Blood: Myths, Symbols, Reality], trans. M. Perek, Krakow 1994, p. 28.

evokes a fear of the impure, often linked to the sexual sphere and, as such, it brings to mind the very roots of life. “At the limit, the infant would be regarded as born impure, contaminated from the beginning by the paternal seed, by the impurity of the maternal genital region, and by the additional impurity of childbirth.”⁴⁴ With the stain we cross into the pre-ethical world, in which, as Ricoeur writes, “evil-doing” is indistinguishable from “evil-being,” and ethics blur with the physicality of suffering. With the stain and the forcefully visualized fact of birth, with all its physiology, we come to the origins of man’s ethical experience, i.e. unconscious of his guilt, though experiencing its effects, as a suffering body. Accepting the stain as a basic symbol structuring man’s existential, ethical, and religious experience, we enter a world of changed perspectives: one that is sensual and cruel, and that stirs our “oldest memory.” The god of taboos and prohibitions governs the world of the stain, and blood is a taboo – whether attached to the beginning or the end of life.

Warlikowski’s *Bacchae* orbits around the experience of trauma tied to the act of copulation, birth, and death. This is also where the play begins: When Dionysus first appears on stage, he speaks of his bloody, cruel, and premature birth, which killed his mother (Zeus, the father of Dionysus, was responsible for brutally tearing him from his mother’s womb). He speaks of this with difficulty, as though for the first time, as if only now able to speak – or as if having lost the power of speech in confronting this painful event. The loss of a mother is a tale with a great emotional impact, capable of encompassing all experiences of absence and loss, requiring repeated expression. In the conclusion, the symbolic order of speech finally breaks down when the theretofore absent figure of the mother appears, and in her most menacing incarnation, bearing the death of her child. The massacred body of the man-child is finally returned to the mother, to nature, to the ruthless cycle of birth and death.

In the final scene the lighting changes, the carpet is rolled up, the whole stage grows dim. This is now a different kind of theater – simple, touching, direct. All that remain are the butcher’s table and a woman whose suffering recalls birthing pain. In Warlikowski’s *Bacchae* Dionysus does not appear in the finale. We are outside of the sphere of his worship and his influence, in a world where a man discovers the trauma of his premature birth and his ultimate orphanhood. Warlikowski’s *Bacchae* approaches the Gnostic intuition that the creation of a man is like a miscarriage, an “untimely and awkward initiative,”⁴⁵ and the existence of gender

44 Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, Harper & Row, New York 1969, pp. 28-29.

45 Jacques Lacarrière, “Cień i światło” [Shadow and Light], trans. M. Kowalska, *Literatura na świecie* 1987, No. 12. Lacarrière joins Gnostic teachings with similar themes in psychoanalysis, though he does not refer to Otto Rank’s key title, *The Trauma of Birth* (New York 1952). In birth trauma Rank saw the cause of an internal rift that prevented a person from harmoniously blending with the outside world. Rank undermined the value

is the invention of some deranged creature. The statuette of Dionysus, cobbled together from the parts the Bacchae carry in at the opening of the play, thus turns out to be less the image of a god than a caricature and a parody of a man, an ironic display of the truth of his crippled state.

Dyslexia

Hanna Segal, a student of Melanie Klein, developed the latter's notion of the position of depression as key in shaping a person's identity, his or her sense of independence, and the most important impulse for the birth of speech and for all symbolic systems, including artistic processes. The depressive position appears when the paranoid-schizoid position is overcome, i.e. the point when a person ceases to treat the mother's body as a part of his or her own, with the experience of separation, abandonment, and loss. Then, for the first time, anxiety and a sense of guilt appear in a person's world: a fear of abandonment and a sense of guilt from having discovered the real source of aggression. The object (i.e. the "bad breast") is no longer at fault, but rather the aggressive "I," with all its unrightful claims. The symbol comes to the rescue in the depressive situation, replacing the lost object, allowing the birth of speech; the original, decimated order and sense of belonging to the world are reconstructed in symbolic structures.

Hanna Segal writes that the depressive position coordinate to the symbolic language forever holds the potential for regression into a state of "symbolic equations," in which the symbol is identified with the symbolized, and words are treated as objects. "[E]xcessive anxiety in relation to the mother's body and the onset of guilt bring about a paralysis of symbol-formation,"⁴⁶ Segal explains, mentioning the case of one of Melanie Klein's patients, four-year-old Dick, who was neither able to speak nor play. Such a landscape of an ill childhood appears in the first scene of *Bacchae*: a discarded toy lies buried in the sand at the feet of Dionysus as he struggles to articulate his thoughts. Dionysus is no god in this performance – he represents the reality of psychological damage and its power over people. The place of the Real, as Lacan would have it, stretches from damage to phantasmata,⁴⁷ and this is precisely where Dionysus reigns.

of an individual adapting to his or her surroundings, linked neurosis with artistic work, and stressed the significance of the original sense of guilt tied to the trauma of birth in a person's overall development.

46 Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy, and Art*, Routledge Press, London 1991, p. 26.

47 Jacques Lacan, "Tuche and Automaton" in: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, Book IX*, trans. Alan Sheridan, W. W. Norton and Co., New York 1998, pp. 53-65.

The breaking of the symbolic order creates the special idiom of Warlikowski's theater, a kind of dyslexia arising from the conviction that an orderly and coherent symbolic structure hides something, bears the danger of falsity, takes one from his or her original foundations. Thus, there are the recurring stylistic figures of rupture, separation, and collapse. Segal mentions a notion of Ernst Jones, whereby repressed and abandoned desires find their symbolic expression: the symbol is always born in a field of repressed desires. Here the reverse is true. Desire shatters and cripples speech, destroys symbolic representations, refuses to submit to the sublimation process.

Overcoming the dangers involved in the depressive position is tied not only to the child's recognition of his or her individuality *vis-à-vis* the mother's body, but also to the parents' mutual relationship. Warlikowski's plays never progress to such a situation, however. Family relationships are always frail in his performances, where we see either relationships between fathers and daughters or between mothers and sons. The Oedipal triangle is never closed, and the process of internal integration always seems provisional, crippled, doomed to fail. To provide a few examples: Hamlet and Gertrude, Zucco and Mother, Pentheus and Agauë, Krum and Mother, Perdita and Leontes, Marina and Pericles, Ophelia and Polonius, and Miranda and Prospero.

Tortures

Confession

The first press responses to *Cleansed* were dominated by accusations of the play transgressing what had been acceptable in the theater. Both the play's supporters and detractors wrote of the play in a similar fashion. Indignation and delight were declared for the same reason, jointly creating a basis to suppose that Warlikowski's intention was to attack the prevailing taboos around physicality and sexuality. At the same time, the play was reduced to an anti-bourgeois provocation, a gesture that took aim at social hypocrisy.

It was difficult not to come away with the impression, however, that the play allowed itself to articulate emotions, biases, and attitudes that pertained to more than sexuality. It was read (sometimes half-unconsciously) as a call to create a new social identity and a readiness to confront the post-modern culture of the West, as well as the sources of its suffering, all in a sphere utterly divorced from the pressures of the traditional models of Polish culture. It was this last motif, affirming the experience of uprootal, that charged the reception of the play (and the debate surrounding it) with a powerful dose of energy. The liminal creatures in Sarah Kane's drama allowed the audience to unveil a sphere of anxiety tied to the process of political, social, and cultural transformation; it created them a space of cleansed, radical expression by descending to a realm of extreme experiences. The fuss about *Cleansed* concerned this issue precisely: it explored the depth and irreversibility of the transformations that had been underway for over a decade. Because of its temperature, its personal tone, and its artistic perfection, this play demanded an unambiguous declaration: Am I for or against it? It revealed vast spheres of emotion, as it fell upon fertile ground, i.e. anxiety toward cultural transgression that was perceived as inescapable.

In *Cleansed*, Warlikowski created a precise theatrical language: cool, logical, and stripped to the bone. He managed this more perfectly than in any other performance, though this language was neither required nor sought by him in any other play. This language was a delight, though the reviewers seldom asked up front what purpose it served (it did, however, allow the director to defend himself against accusations of gratuitous vulgarity). Nonetheless, the rigor and formal structure create a special effect in *Cleansed*, one of inevitability and truth, of having

struck at the essence of things, of the cruelty in speaking the truth. Warlikowski called Kane's drama a confession, thus providing the key to his performance. It is not sexuality that is the main theme here, but the situation of confessing that organizes the play on all its tiers, creating the framework. The play begins with an intimate monologue aimed directly at the viewers, shattering a sense of the stage as signifier. At one point the action comes to a halt, both stage and audience are illuminated, and the actors, silent and motionless, look at the audience. This mobilizes the energy of the theatrical act; for many actors, participating in the performance meant overcoming their personal sense of shame. Finally, it creates relationships between the characters; the confession of love becomes a radical act, shattering the conventionality of human contact.

"Truth" would seem to be the word that most often appears in the reviews, though sometimes inferentially, or with sarcasm or irony. All the actors participating in the performance spoke of truth, associating it with such notions as transgression, infringement, opening up, privacy, and intimacy. As such, *Cleansed* became a sort of paradigm of truth in the Polish theater, a model of courage and sincerity in art, both affirmed and attacked.

Michel Foucault analyzed the "discourse of truth" which has dominated European culture since the late sixteenth century, becoming an imposed model, a constant spiritual exercise, and the basis of artwork, therapy, and discipline. In this discourse physicality and sexuality create the most reliable indicator of truthfulness, and are, at the same time, tools of the ever-present and disseminated power structure. Suppression, prohibition, resistance, and censorship are, from this perspective, only tactical strategies to support, and not hinder, the necessity of speaking about sex: "an immense verbosity is what our society has required and organized."⁴⁸ Undermining the popular hypothesis of repression, Foucault describes the various institutions that manipulate the discourse of truth (its model is the confession), claiming that the power mechanisms have been so well concealed that confession is no longer seen as imposed upon us. The illusion is created that truth itself "requires" outing. Foucault's views ought to be compared with the performance of *Cleansed* to remove the danger of a sentimental identification with the suffering of the characters, and ascribing intentions that are too one-dimensional to the director. As if sensing the trap into which naive adherents of the discourse of truth have fallen, Warlikowski creates a refined and poetic language in this play. One might say he exposes its totality and totalitarianism – the language of confession embraces body and speech, the conscious and the unconscious, symbol and symptom, yet seems empty and futile, forever evoking the prospect of death, reducing characters to the same catastrophic calling.

48 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, trans. Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, New York 1990, p. 33.

Kane, and Warlikowski in turn, reveals the violence in the ritual of confession – this is the significance of the ritualized images of torture to which Grace, Carl, Rod, and Robin are subjected. The confession of truth is not an inclusive ceremony, quite the contrary: it excludes and stigmatizes, cripples us and thrusts us into a sphere of boundless liminality. We might come away with the conviction that Warlikowski doubts all established cultural, religious, and social rituals of confession – he exposes the mechanisms of violence inscribed within them, undermines their cleansing power, and simultaneously takes them and builds his theater. The only thing taken on faith is the purity of his own intentions, and those of his actors, proving that theater and art are less an expression of truth than a tragic spectacle that presents the destructive desire to confess, a radical and disillusioned form of psychoanalysis. When Carl opens his mouth to confess his love once more to Rod, blood pours out instead of words, spilling down his white shirt to his crotch, a symbolic sign of castration. The incapacity to speak of love becomes a physical stigma and a double mutilation.

Caravaggio

As one of the protagonists in this play, lighting wields an active power. The contrast between light and dark is primary here – we are constantly mindful and aware of it. The sudden fall of darkness is most often accompanied by a powerful musical motif – an overture of the end, a dramatic pause, and an inkling of catastrophe. Every appearance of light is a distinct and unique aesthetic experience – an unveiling of a meticulously composed picture, a sculpture of human bodies. The dramatization of the conflict between light and darkness, its subjection to musical structure, the blending of theater with its peripheral forms, i.e. music and sculpture, creates the riskiest quality of this play: pathos. A play operating at such a high register is always a challenge to the viewer's sensibility. Warlikowski recalls the original significance of the concept of pathos, tied to a particular experience of the *opsis* of ancient theater, i.e. the portrayal of suffering. Pathos is “an action that is destructive or painful, such as deaths in plain view, as well as tortures and woundings and as many other things as are of that sort.”⁴⁹ The sublime is inextricably linked with pain. The pain comes not only from what we see, but also *how* we see.

The impression is that the light extracts something pre-existing, that was already there lurking in the darkness. We might use an even more radical description: the image is culled from the darkness, a gesture that is tied to determination, courage,

49 Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Joe Sachs, Focus Publishing, Newburyport 2006, p. 35.

and ruthlessness. The intervention of light creates the impression of infringement, violence, and transgression. It is an aesthetic counterpart to transgression, suggesting an entry into forbidden zones. This can be more simply explained: Sarah Kane's drama depicts situations that break prohibitions. Human relationships are born outside of social conventions, i.e. from incestuous and homosexual desires, which the play shows as occupying a cultural nether region, tied to the most primitive experience of family bonds and the bisexuality of every human being, both forbidden and universal. The light not only reveals images, it also sets them in motion – it is only with the light that words, life, movement, and recognition take place. In Samuel Beckett's *Comedy*, the light skitters about according to unclear and unpredictable rules, as capricious as God, giving characters the power of speech then taking it away, toying with them. Things are much the same in Warlikowski's performance: we feel as though the illuminated section of stage is part of a more sprawling landscape, that the light represents a cruel and arbitrary force. It carves up the body, cuts it to pieces, evoking an image of torture and execution, powerfully tied to the gesture of wounding. The stage is set for real mutilation. Speech appears with the light, but, like the body, it is mutilated and fragmentary. The idea of the execution includes the final and incontrovertible effect of the truth of a soul rent through tortures inflicted on the body.

Through the play's shattered narrative and the fall of darkness, our attention turns to speech: its disruption, broken trains of thought, the unfinished or aborted sentences. Warlikowski respects the drama's poetic language, its radical incoherence. The staccato rhythm of the discourse is surprisingly punctuated, precluding routine and simplified psychological analysis. Silence is always equivalent to darkness here, much as the word is closely tied to an illuminated fragment of a human body.

At the very opening of the play, in Graham's death scene, this gesture of mutilating and chopping dialogue adopts the sublime quality of a sacrifice. Graham and Tinker stand very close to one another, in a beam of light, which extracts the shape of a body, the fragment of a hand, of a torso. The lighting techniques inevitably remind us of Caravaggio, whose paintings in the dark chapels of Rome's churches emanate eroticism and cruelty, bringing traces of transgression and narcissistic and homosexual phantasms to these temples. Taking the deadly needle from Tinker, Graham hides it behind his back, and both spread their arms in a gesture of crucifixion. Graham's dying body curves, and his head lolls to the ground like the figure of the *Pietà*. Graham becomes the first victim of an inexpressible desire upon which breaks the dialogue of aborted questions and self-imposed prohibitions to speak. The religious symbolism of this scene is deeply disquieting, arousing our suspicion: we can feel an entrapment in their own imagination, a narcissistic aestheticization of these depictions of suffering.

We are entering a realm, however, in which understanding ceases to abide by simple and unambiguous rules, and, as psychoanalysis puts forth, even if it seeks to deceive, it counts on faith in the testimony.

The Wedding

A small rectangle of light cuts two joined hands out of the darkness; we do not yet see the figures of Carl and Rod, we see only the first impulse of desire and lust. Desire precedes identity, it is the beginning and the conclusion, it creates and destroys. This image anticipates the scene where Carl's hand is cut, as he tries to speak with his hand, writing on the floor, and asking Rod for forgiveness. But the joined hands evoke other associations, mythical and archetypal, i.e. the joining of two human beings in engagement or marriage, united. When the rectangle of light enlarges we see the full shapes of two men, and the mythical image of unity falls apart. This image's culturally positive resonance is subverted, shifted into a world of broken prohibitions or sheer provocation. The first sight of the two hands cut out by the light foretells all the consequences of the destructive desire focused on another person: mutilation, the breakdown of identity, the loss of language, and, ultimately, death.

The conversation between Carl and Rod is their wedding scene, though only a few symbolic traces remain of the ceremony itself: the exchange of rings, Carl's white outfit, the vows, the joining of hands. The image is static and symmetrical. In the rectangle of light we see the two almost motionless figures of the men, turned to face the audience; this hieratic quality gives the intimate scene a ritual aspect. On the other hand, the rhythm of the ritual is corrupted by overt impulses of desire, anxiety, and aggression. The softer and more feminine of the two, Carl, is the one who is determined to get married. He begs, demands, seduces, encountering irritation and resistance from Rod, who mistrusts symbolic gestures and great words. The wedding is not a smooth ceremony. Every symbolic gesture of love and every word of the vows seem threadbare, forced, on demand. Every declaration of love – like the very bond itself – is questioned and doubted (particularly such words as “I love you,” “always,” and “never”). In imposing the form of the love vow upon Rod, Carl evokes a non-existent social ceremony, naively believing in the performative power of stolen words and the symbolic power of emulated gestures. Rod, meanwhile, reveals the rupture between words and their meanings; he wants to create his own language, an individual form of speech, foreign to the ears of society, one that upends traditional meanings. Because of him the wedding ceremony is stilted, threatens to fall apart at every moment, revealing its essence: sublimity and finality. It is Rod who introduces the prospect of death, asking Carl

if he would die for him, thus changing and sharpening the significance of the marriage vows. When the two men hug and kiss in the final scene, Tinker, the witness to their marriage and a covert priest, appears behind their backs. It is he who executes the vows, who stands guard over the performative power of words, or rather, their unforeseen significance. It is he who is the master of the ritual of mutilation – the oft-repeated symbolic gesture and literal castration (the cutting of the tongue, the palm, the hand, the penis) – who displays the liminal nature of the sacrament of matrimony.

Children

The scenes of Graham's death and of Carl's and Rod's wedding are accompanied by sounds of children playing during recess. Much like *Bacchae* and *The Tempest*, *Cleansed* begins in the realm of childhood and its liminality. This sound sinks into the memory: its crisp, high tones create an almost hallucinatory contrapuntal element to both scenes. It becomes a riddle that demands a response. Somewhere close by, nearly arm's reach away, normal life is going on, though for some reason, it is unattainable for the protagonists of *Cleansed*. This sound is the last link with the outside world, and it is soon to be irrevocably broken. The space of the school evoked in the imagination has aspects of the social structure and the liminal *communitas*. The school recess is a perfect example of breaking into liminal experiences in social relationships. At the end of the wedding scene the children's voices grow louder and more aggressive, as if performing an act of violence, weaving into the love scene to form a whole, situating it in the field of social aggression and rejection. This is when Tinker appears.

Difference Does Not Descend from Heaven

In *Cleansed* one of the recurring motifs of Warlikowski's theater appears with oneiric clarity – the placement of two characters side-by-side, faces turned toward the audience. We feel a kind of ostentatious artificiality, posing, as well as a natural impulse to confront the audience; it is also a somewhat narcissistic provocation, and a readiness to face the gaze of another. This is a motif of coming out, a gesture that affirms difference, overcoming anxiety and shame. There is also a fascination for the portrait and its particular capacity to contemplate the human body and face. This may be why Warlikowski so often immobilizes his actors, freezes the theatrical image, so that we can stare at the people until we are sated, considering their existence, their physiognomy, sensing the auras created around them, and

grasping, finally, their inner scars, their disquieting side, their dark secret. The actors' realness, physicality, and unique expression are meant to speak here. This is why Warlikowski often takes care not to let the actor fit the character too perfectly, through differences in age (the actor seems older than the character), gender (men play women and vice versa), and temperament. This means the character does not veil the actor, and the clash or incompatibility sharpens the viewers' attention, trains it on the living presence of the actor in the theater space, creating a field of contemplation whose center is occupied by questions of identity.

Warlikowski is most fascinated by the double, or even triple, portrait. In *Cleansed* the image of human couples is closely tied with the theme of the drama, allowing this formal obsession to be clearly articulated. Carl and Rod, Graham and Grace, and Tinker and the Woman from the Peep Show are seen in various scenes, and their presence seems increasingly touching, significant, and visible, exposed to the essence and setting in motion ever-growing fields of association. The couples are shown through what sets them apart, what joins them, how they complement each other: through interacting aspects of intimacy and distance. Thinking in gender categories, i.e. in terms of basic differences, is both evoked and annulled. The longer we look, the more the doubts occur, the more we perceive in every person a "trace of the other," a quiet stigma, a scar, or a disturbance. Warlikowski might well concur with Derrida that difference does not descend from heaven and does not create a closed system; it is rather born as a result of deferral, lateness, and detour; it is constantly being created before our eyes. This "game of creating difference"⁵⁰ initiates a special mode of seeing. The most powerful opposition of bodies comes from the image of Tinker and the Woman from the Peep Show. He wears a suit, a white shirt, a tie, and she has semi-transparent underwear; his body is concealed, hers is revealed; the dark gray of his suit clashes with the red of her underwear and her light skin. He is older than her; her body is that of a mother, but under his gaze it turns into a sexual fetish. Gender seems an archetypal thing here, but it is forever ambiguous, blurring sexual and mother-son relationships. It is this disturbance that ultimately wins our attention. Carl and Rod are a male couple. One is dressed in white, the other in the more aggressive colors of green

50 Derrida perceives the process of deconstructing binary oppositions in two stages. First is the collapsing phase, which under the seemingly peaceful coexistence of "some sort of *vis-à-vis*," reveals a violence-based hierarchy. Then, to go outside the deconstructed system, a new concept has to be created, one that cannot be comprehended within the confines of the old system (Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1981, pp. 41-43). These two phases of Derridian deconstruction might correspond to Warlikowski's two plays that most radically address the issue of sexual identity: *The Taming of the Shrew*, which marks the collapsing phase, and *Cleansed*, the phase of deviation.

and red. They differ in the sharpness of their gestures and in their manner of speech. The castration wounds dealt to the softer and the more feminine of the two come to light, tragically highlighting the initially concealed differences. Graham and Grace, meanwhile, wear the same costume, the red color of their hair is also similar, as is the milky shade of their skin, but the woman in this relationship seems more predatory, more decided. Her male *doppelgänger* ultimately vanishes from the stage, and Grace contemplates her now transformed, male body. One could get lost in observing the differences, shades, and variants, one could lose all certainty regarding the norm and the deviation, surrendering to the endless game of colors and possibilities.

Warlikowski makes the human body an object of studious contemplation, culling it from the darkness and from its costume. Robin gives Grace the clothing of her deceased brother; she takes off her dress, and for a moment they stand naked opposite one another. Grace swiftly dresses, while Robin stands there in embarrassment, covering his genitals with his hands. The change of costume allows them to reveal nature's tragic error: Grace is a man, and Robin a woman. As a result, physical gender appears as a stigma of sorts, amid shame and rejection. Once again Grace stands naked before a naked man, her brother Graham. This time the image is full of harmony, stripped of its shameful aura. First Graham touches her breasts, then she touches his member, at which moment there appears an image of a meadow of paradise, cornflowers whirling about the naked couple. The beauty of this image is not only fleeting, it is less than reliable, remaining imaginary, a mirage of a fulfilled desire.

It comes about as a mirror-image effect, an illusion of the imagination. Grace summons an image of Graham. When he awakes he sits on the edge of the bed, uncovers her, and notices the remarkable resemblance between their clothes. Slowly, with small gestures and movements, he submits to the rules of the mirror image. Both stretch out their hands, touch each other, wrestle, laugh, sit on the edge of the bed with their backs to the audience. They rise at the same moment, go into the depths of the stage with the same steps, swaying their bodies in the same way. Grace becomes a man, like her brother, but the difference remains apparent: in the dance she lays her hand on Graham's arm like a woman, her male gestures are delayed, and always copied. The idyllic image of their nakedness ultimately exposes this difference, and for Grace reveals less harmony than lack.

Supplement

Graham, Grace, and Robin form a mysterious triangle in which gender opposition and complement appear as no more than remote echoes, as vanishing shadows,

lost once and for all. Robin's character introduces a disruption – he cannot commit to any relationship. His desire to create a bond with another person finds no stable form. He is neither woman, nor man, nor child, nor adult. He always supplements something, while seeming dispensable himself.

In one scene Graham, Grace, and Robin sit together on a gym mat, motionless and near the audience. Grace is in the middle. Graham and Grace have the same outfits, they wear shirts with an androgynous face, revealing the secret of their ambivalent identities. Robin is dressed in Grace's old dress. Their brightly lit faces are inclined over the sheets of paper upon which their names are written, as if over mirror images. It somewhat resembles a preschool drawing lesson. We can sense a mental and emotional regression. This motionless image contains an almost intangible process of identity disturbance. The dialogue also makes it sparkle with various possibilities, flowing capriciously, surrendering to sudden impulses. Grace and Robin speak of their desires. Robin desires Grace, Grace desires Graham; but perhaps, Robin desires the Graham hidden in Grace, and Grace only desires to destroy herself. Graham and Grace sometimes appear to be one and the same person: the image of original bisexuality, a symptom of a narcissistic cast of the libido, a desire of the mirror image. A boy dressed as a girl, Robin presents another aspect of the same phenomenon: he is stuck in a childish neurosis. When Graham touches him he responds with anxiety, shuddering, while gently submitting to Grace's touch: the sexual impulse is split, exposed in its ambivalence. After all, Graham and Grace are the split image of one person. Grace acts as Robin's surrogate mother, while obscuring the hidden object of his desire.

Gender becomes unstable, fluctuating, shifting, and situated in a field of suffering. Graham and Grace sometimes seem to be a pair of men. At other times Grace and Robin create a joint field of femininity contrasted with the male figure of Graham. It also sometimes happens that only Grace seems to be a woman, between two adoring males. The viewer has to perform these symbolic operations on his or her own, however; this comes from watching one image for a long time and attempting to fill in what the image lacks. This "lack" is the essentialist and stabilized vision of human gender; there is a rupture between word and significance. The scene begins with Grace giving Robin a writing lesson, a lesson in "speaking without words." Robin wants Graham to revive; he also wants to marry Grace. Grace turns every desire that Robin expresses for her toward Graham, involuntarily speaking his name, and leaning her head on his arm. Robin says that he wants to marry Grace, but he wears a white dress in this scene. The idea of a wedding, the joining of two human beings, falls apart amid difused and ambiguous desire. We are far from desire turned into a mirror image, from the myth of paradise, that is, from the first meeting between Graham and Grace. We are also far from the attempt to appropriate the social performative, i.e. Carl's

and Rod's wedding. Here desire stumbles upon resistance or evasion; it provokes speech and demands silence. It is Tinker who ultimately reveals this in taking away and burning the piece of paper on which Robin has drawn a flower, the naive symbol of his love for Grace.

The *Bricoleur*

The compositions of human bodies become increasingly radical. The protagonists of *Cleansed* lose their subjectivity, their distinctiveness, and become "vocables of a new, strange language, in which it would be quite licit to use one word for another."⁵¹ Their bodies begin to belong to a structure of speech, language, discourse, and not nature: they communicate with the code of their differences and the secret of their mutilation; they become artifacts, fragments of sculptures. Bruno Bettelheim pointed out the cultural function of mutilation, its positive, integrative, symbolic, and not entirely destructive and symptomatic nature.⁵² In Tinker's laboratory such an attempt at new articulation occurs, one whose veracity is tied to descending to a corporal level, to shattering the language of consciousness.

The world of *Cleansed* is ruled by the notion of *bricolage*, of the original mythic narrative assembled before our eyes from crumbs, fragments, single images (The word "tinker" is similar in meaning to "bricoleur"). According to Levi-Strauss, a mythical tale is always assembled from ready-made parts that are skillfully broken apart and manipulated. It resembles a raw and naive sort of art, somewhere between perceptions and concepts, wherein the distance between signifier and signified has been radically abbreviated: here the signifier is a concrete being, but one that is capable of evoking references and associations. "His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand'."⁵³ There is no advance plan; the tools are gathered as a result of the present occasion: "it could always come in handy." In *Cleansed* we are dealing with precisely such a closed world: there are a few human bodies, a few costumes that change owners, there are words reduced to the most elementary expression of desires, a few narrative formulae, and a couple of symbolic props. Tinker manipulates what he comes across, though not in a random or arbitrary fashion: he fulfills desires, reveals the truth behind what people say, and accommodates himself to the weight of the mythic (but not mythical!) structures. In Warlikowski's performance Tinker is soft and gentle, not

51 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard, Harper Collins, New York 2001, p. 228.

52 Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds*, Collier Books, New York 1962.

53 Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, p. 17.

a pathological butcher; he accompanies the other characters, spends a long time listening to their words, and observes them before he himself begins to act. Much like Lévi-Strauss' *bricoleur*, he "interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could 'signify'."⁵⁴ The *bricoleur* is no master of his tale; he carries out no intentions, and has to reconcile himself to the fact that his work will achieve autonomy, albeit in a provisional, cobbled-together reality. Nonetheless, *the bricoleur* does participate in his story, inserting, as Lévi-Strauss would have it, "a part of himself." Tinker personally gets involved in the world he creates. At one point in the action he begins meeting with the Woman from the Peep Show; he brings in parts of other stories, checking their myth-creating transferability the hard way, and thus setting in motion the basic narrative principles of the myth – analogy and permutation. Warlikowski mythologizes this plot line even more powerfully. In Warlikowski's performance the Woman from the Peep Show is the figure of the mother, even Mother Nature. In the beam of light that falls from above, her body recalls ancient sculptures of nurturing and maternal deities. Here the representation of the sexual act is a dream of returning to the womb, of holy and incestuous marriage with the mother. In their final scene Tinker and the Woman from the Peep Show do not imitate the sexual act; they clutch each others' hands, as in the act of marriage, or merely in a natural gesture of every amorous longing and fulfillment. This image of joined hands recurs continually in the performance; it is one of the expressions of language created here. This is how Carl and Rod touch in the first scene, this is the pose in which Grace and Graham freeze, in an attempt to create a mirror image, and it is with this picture, finally, that the play concludes. After all, a mythic narrative, even if it speaks of wounds and destruction, always ultimately recalls the most rudimentary bonds.

Ecclesia

Warlikowski's *Cleansed* begins with an attempt to create a community through the opening monologue, its growing rhythm, the atmosphere of intimate confession, the bright and sincere face of the woman speaking, the unconditional affirmation of love. Moreover, it is a foreign woman speaking this difficult monologue, and we follow her phonetic difficulties. Her joyful excitement in conquering the effort to speak unites the actress and the audience. Everything takes its effect: the words of the monologue, the situation of the actress, her concentration, and the intimate relationship with the audience.

54 Ibid., p. 18.

In a moment this community will be put to a radical test, where the sublime images of the culture are confronted with what the culture is meant to keep in the shadows. Warlikowski provocatively plays with associations in the space of the temple. The suicidal drug addict dies in the Christ pose. A gay couple takes a marriage vow. After a long sequence of scenes, after the tortures to which Carl and Grace are subjected, after the first stations of their Golgotha, the light exposes the whole of the stage. All the actors are there, sitting or standing, looking at the audience, intensely, but without clear intent. They create a strange sense of suspension. Do the viewers and actors suddenly make a community? Are we looking at ourselves from two sides of reality?

Persephone's Dress

In both the performance and in Nan Goldin's photography this dress is a mystery. It is ceremonial, though no one can say for what occasion it was worn. It seems a foreign element that fits neither the situation nor the surroundings, and at the same time, it is an extravagant creation by this woman plunged in melancholy, a theatrical expression of her inner state, an outfit that stigmatizes her, that seems to have permanently grown onto her. In Nan Goldin's photographs Trixie smokes a cigarette, her head hung, sitting on a fold-up couch in a shabby room. Clearly lost in the theatricalized life and in a melancholy trance, a transgression in a void, the void of transgression, Trixie is from the big city, its subculture.

Grace appears in a similar dress in *Cleansed*. It looks as though she has just returned from a party: she holds a can of beer in one hand, a cigarette in the other. She has painted red lips and a red ribbon woven in her red hair, colorful strings on her wrists, black tights, and red high heels. Grace moves about abruptly, awkwardly, aggressively. Her clothes are an even greater mystery. Grace herself has changed her femininity into a costume and, as it were, has put it on display to be mocked. The dress is white with two layers: the outer one of chiffon, the slip of satin. Cut at the waist, the top reveals the bosom and the arms, and is finished with red and green trim. The wide bottom of the skirt is sewn from a strip of red-and-yellow material. Red poppies painted on the satin skirt show through the semi-transparent chiffon. The dress is beautiful, it catches the eye and it intrigues. It resembles a doll's dress.

Robin will wear it later. Fitting him much better than it does Grace, it underlines the delicacy of his body, the lines of his face, his girlish charm. It also binds him with Grace. Robin expresses the femininity, naivete, and child-like quality she has lost, the side of Grace's personality she would so like to lose, but which remains a part of her. Robin longs to marry Grace, and the white dress

expresses this constant readiness. In a long scene where Tinker physically and psychologically torments Robin, the latter represents what is most fragile and defenseless in human nature. He is an innocent sacrifice to an evil and merciless deity, perhaps an Iphigenia, a child, a little girl, an oversensitive boy, a young woman. After Robin's suicide the dress ends up with Carl, a severely crippled creature. Carl appears in the dress in the final scene, alongside Grace, who has now conclusively changed into Graham. They are holding hands, walking toward the audience, with the hope of returning to the world of social bonds: brother and sister, husband and wife, mother and child.

The white dress with the red poppy pattern is not only a theatrical costume, it is also a sign, a symbol, a stigma. It marks one of the possible roads through the labyrinth of plots in *Cleansed*, tying them together, extracting their metaphorical significance, and deconstructing everyday notions of masculinity and femininity. It is a wedding outfit, a sacrificial outfit; it is associated with a ceremony, signifies a liminal point of a ritual, and is tied to the loss of a previous identity. It could be the dress of Iphigenia, but it could also belong to Persephone, whose wedding was held underground in the kingdom of death. The poppy motif, a trace of the Eleusinian myth, gives us this indication. "The poppy symbolizes nighttime; forgetfulness; ignorance; a dream state; a reverie; lethargy; indifference; silence; the head; slowness; laziness; a narcotic, intoxicant, madness, enchantment, spells; resurrection; purity, lack of odor, cosmetics; rumors; discord; unhappiness; fleeting pleasure; comfort; regeneration; flirtation, love; blood; summertime; fertility, abundant harvest, plenty; a trifle."⁵⁵

Castration

A work both simple and perfect, *Cleansed* is point zero for Warlikowski's theater. The play is made up of over a dozen tableaux, which, to various approximations, attempt to grasp the truth of the inner experience, to extract the sign of the most painful region. These attempts come crashing up against the impossibility of finding expression, and reveal the contradiction between the metaphor of the image and the physicality of the symptom; they pursue the thing and create a symbol, they speak of pain and produce beauty. At the same time they inevitably draw near the verge of phantasmata, "a scenario filling out the empty space of a fundamental impossibility."⁵⁶

55 Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli* [A Dictionary of Symbols], Warsaw 1991, p. 217.

56 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, New York 1989, p. 126.

The key phantasm in this performance is the transformation of Grace into Graham, the final gesture of multiple losses. Embroiling Grace in relations of dependency, responsibility, and empathy, Robin imposes upon her the roles of mother, caretaker, and love object, and is the first to disappear. Grace stands bent over the bathtub where the books with which she taught Robin to read are burning; now she is holding her hand over the fire in quiet ecstasy. She frees herself not only from social bonds and emotional dependencies, but also from alienation, from language. This explains Grace's trite comment ("how beautiful") that rounds off the image of fire burning out in the dark. She will accompany Robin's suicide in the same frozen posture. Her farewell to Graham before Tinker operates on her is another gesture of loss. The cold, surgical, cadaverous light pulls only Grace's head and abdomen from the darkness. Tinker hides in the gloom, Graham's profile verges into the light. The transformation that Grace demands ("Remove it! ... Burn it off!") is meant to free her from Graham's relentless presence, from the desires with which Grace has utterly identified. Graham touches Grace where it hurts most – in the crotch.

A similar image appears once more: Carl and Rod are naked alongside one another. The light cuts off their legs, and Carl's hands are invisible. These fragmented human bodies are unremitting in their attempt to join, however, as if surrendered to the fatalism of the Platonic myth of a double existence. Rod touches his own genitalia with one hand, and Carl's with the other. He makes the vow of eternal love, which Carl had begged for in the first scene. When Tinker, who is presiding over their wedding, asks which of them is to die, Rod chooses his own death.

Tinker takes Carl and Grace, victims of the Platonic myth, discarded and mutilated halves, and recreates the image of a man and a woman, parodying the work of creation. He castrates Carl and stitches his genitalia to Grace. Both lie on a hospital bed, bloody bandages cover their wounds. The glittering metal construction of the hospital bed is reminiscent of a torture machine. Each element of the tableau speaks clearly and expressively. Tinker, now in no more than a shirt, his tie and one shoe scattered nearby, lies on the floor resting, like God after the creation of the world. The image is bathed in a green, paradisiacal light. The movement of the phantasmata, aimed relentlessly toward the non-existent object of desire (the basis for the opening monologue), allows us to draw a Gnostic myth from the finale, which perceives the creation of mankind as the most flawed part of God's creation. "The Gnostics would surely have been fascinated by the discovery of Freud and the Freudians, as their entire cosmology and anthropology are marked with that cosmic trauma that was the *premature*

appearance of mankind.”⁵⁷ In *Cleansed* this Gnostic myth is articulated in an aura of suffering and terror, in a form of hallucinatory authenticity. Grace looks at her body, and Carl’s piercing shriek is heard from behind her, expressing either horror at the sight of this human monster, or terror at his own castration. The image is unsparing, drawing its strength from a rejection of any comforting alibi for human existence. It evokes the most obsessive motif in Warlikowski’s theater: the figure of a person who is branded. This branding can be anything: make-up, a tattoo, a wig, a costume, nudity, gender, blood. The branding theatricalizes the image of man through gestures of stigmatization, screaming, and wounding. They all point toward a creature that has been torn apart, unfinished, or ineptly finished, botched, unharmonious, exposed to the torments of humiliation and suffering without catharsis. Man is revealed as an oddly garish being, cut off from any other sort of existence. We recall the sharply drawn outlines of people contrasted against yellow, green, and red lights, with backdrops of panes of glass, tiled walls, and vertical and horizontal lines. Man can never blend into this space, never feel at home in it; he has a powerful sense of his alienation.

The scene of Grace’s transformation into Graham is the point to which Warlikowski’s theater inevitably tends: a point that cannot be avoided, cannot be passed over in silence, but which also cannot be expressed. It is a point zero, the Freudian navel of the dream, the Lacanian “thing.” This is the source of the explosion of the “pure and hollow ecstasy” that illuminates the theatrical tableau. It is the purgatory of monochromatic floor and wall surfaces, the emptiness of the mirrors, the flawlessly clean lights, the horrible rhythm of the showers, the composition of human figures – real and reflected, crippled and beautiful, joined by a delicate web of broken ties.

Lacan’s Diagram

The diagram of sexual difference was developed after many years of contemplation and a sudden revelation. “The idea of the diagram appeared in Lacan’s mind like a bolt from the blue that strikes a scholar who has labored for years over the solving of a problem and, in a single moment, it becomes simple and clear.”⁵⁸ Jacques Lacan presented it to his students during his twentieth seminar in the 1972/1973 academic year; he “whipped [it] up in a flash the very morning before he drew it

57 Jacques Lacarrière, op. cit., p. 65.

58 Paweł Dybel, *Zagadka “drugiej płci”. Wokół różnicy seksualnej w psychoanalizie i feminizmie* [The Riddle of the “Second Sex”: On Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and Feminism], Krakow 2006, p. 219.

on the blackboard at his seminar.”⁵⁹ It is made up of four rectangular fields: two define the male side, the other two the female side. The fields are symmetrical; in the upper ones are two pairs of equations, describing either the formula of the male subject or the female formula. Three arrows pointing in various directions crisscross the larger lower fields, the proper part of the diagram, though there is no symmetry here. The abstract mathematical chart somewhat recalls a naive drawing, depicting the sexual act in a contrived fashion. A diagonal arrow goes from the male field, ending in the female field at point “a,” entering the field at a sharp angle that creates the two female vectors. Point “a” is the imagined object of male desire, which has nothing in common with the real woman, or signifies the woman playing the male imagination of her. Two arrows depart from the female field from a single point (marked by a crossed out “La”). One enters the male field, pointing toward the symbol of the phallus, the other goes to another point in the female field, which ought to be read as a “significant lack in the Other.”

Without going into detail about the diagram, we ought to note a few basic observations. Firstly, Lacan undermines the notion that the genders are complementary. Secondly, he wrests the symbolism of sexual difference from its biological grounding. The woman can replace the male function of the subject: this always occurs when she ceases to appeal as an object of male desire and gains autonomy in speech. The biological male can appear in the role of the small “a,” when he is situated in the female field as an imagined object of the male subject’s desire. In the female field, however, woman appears as a crossed-out sign – she always exists beyond language, pointing us toward the realm of the Other, in Lacan’s concept exclusively experienced as a Lack, as something we can neither name nor know. Only a woman thus conceived has access to the symbolic phallus, interpreted as an experience of unity and fullness – this means that the participation of both the male subject and the woman as imagined object of desire is a shared experience of castration. As such, the symbolic phallus becomes a signifier without a signified: the experience of loss and castration initiates the birth of the human condition, of a language, of symbolic systems – the diagram places us in the very center of the Lacanian anthropology.

The diagram also helps us see Warlikowski’s performance with much more clarity. The graphic purity of the situations on stage, their staticity, appears to be an endlessly renewed attempt to grasp the puzzle of sexual difference in a clear image, becoming the subject of meditation and further revelation. Lacan once declared that “sexual relations do not exist,” because a fault line, a lack, or a rift exists between the male and the female subject. All the phantasmata point toward this fault line, though at the same time they attempt to obscure it. Warlikowski’s

59 Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995, p. 108.

Cleansed could also serve as proof of the non-existence of the sexual relationship. We are exclusively dealing with the reality of desire and its metaphorical conversion (it would therefore seem that the lack of naturalistic scenes in *Cleansed* is for reasons that run deeper than a sense of good taste). Lacan's diagram also throws Grace's tragic mistake into sharp relief, as she desperately strives to become a man, her own brother, to fill the tormenting sense of lack within her. However, she mistakes the symbolic phallus, which inevitably points to a lack "which cannot be filled," for a real sexual organ. With the male organ stitched onto her, Grace becomes doubly castrated, doubly mutilated, first because of a lack that everyone shares, and then because of her self-destructive efforts. She becomes the victim of a phantasm, which she has made a reality.

Pleasure without Limits

In Warlikowski's theater the creative process becomes an experiment in radical psychoanalysis, i.e. suspicion toward conventional language, liberation from narcissism, the destruction of neurotic dependencies, and the forging of real bonds. A fascination for the work of Shakespeare, the necessity to return to his plays, as well as to the process of radical psychoanalysis, all create something like a wounded family relationship where the play is being created. Shakespeare becomes the father figure, the author of all scripts, an incontrovertible authority, the measure of all things. The director who takes on Shakespeare's dramas chooses to confront the model of the father, especially if he dares not only to bring his own interpretation to this model, but, moreover, tries to make the reading of the text a "pleasure without limits,"⁶⁰ a field for the unbound libido to roam, liberated from the paternal authority of the author. Theater allows Warlikowski to take this family relationship into the social space, to reveal it, and to provoke harsh judgments,⁶¹ while simultaneously providing messages that undermine the norms that inform these judgments. He exposes the mechanisms by which family wounds are transferred to our approach toward culture. Harold Bloom has described the relationship between the strong poet and his outstanding precursor in categories of paraphrased psychoanalysis, in the context of the anxiety of influence, creating a paradoxical formula: the son desires to conceive his father. Bloom describes a few

60 A concept introduced by Roland Barthes in his famous "From Work to Text," in: *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Noonday Press, New York 1999.

61 Joanna Targoń writes about reviewers' responses to Warlikowski's plays in her article "Film o kurze" [Film about a Hen] (*Didaskalia* 2004, Nos. 61-62), revealing the discrepancy between the critics' projections and the reality of the performances, depicting the phenomenon of aggression that these projections evoke.

revisionary maneuvers by which the legacy of the past becomes less assimilated than conquered, wrested, made one's own. "We are fools of time bound for the undiscovered country, more than we are children of God returning to heaven."⁶² And once again we return to traces of Gnostic heresy in Warlikowski's theater. The reading of the old text has to be subjected to a strategy of blundering, misreading, going one's own way, additions, complementation, discarding its assumptions or conclusions, and, ultimately, it must be appropriated. Much is available to tell us that Warlikowski sees tradition in terms of a tense rivalry. Like Bloom, he seems to oppose the mechanism of sublimation, and he is rather prone to reveal regions of traumatic danger, libidinal aggression, narcissistic regression, and buried desire.

In *Cleansed* Warlikowski found a contemporary version of *Twelfth Night*: the same motif of the loss of the brother, of the girl dressed as a boy, of homosexual love. Sarah Kane's drama is *Twelfth Night* following a psychoanalytic diagnosis, after the knots of intrigues have been examined, the masks of conventions have been torn off, and the comic scaffolding has been removed. This does not mean the conflicts are rationalized, or given a psychoanalytical grounding. The symbolic events of the dramatic action retain a poetic and ambiguous appeal, but they emerge directly from basic mental and physical impulses. "In *Twelfth Night* Viola has undergone a catastrophe; convinced that she has lost her brother, she decides to be a man, to begin life all over. Of course, one can see this from the perspective of convention, and basically this is always how it has been treated. If we analyze this fact from a psychological point of view, however – a woman, given the chance to start her life again, decides to become a man – it seems quite significant. Hard to say if we oughtn't put this kind of inner need, this need of the entire body, in psychiatric categories, as Sarah Kane does."⁶³

In staging *Cleansed*, Warlikowski subjected the Polish theater and Polish culture to a sort of psychoanalysis. Observing how attitudes have radicalized since 2001, one might say that he has liberated Polish Theater from a great many anxieties. Let us try to trace, very naively, the mechanisms of this psychoanalytical

62 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford University Press, New York 1997, p. xxviii. The list of six revisionary operations opens with *Clinamen*, or poetic misprision, a purposefully faulty interpretation. Next comes *Tessera*, completion through antithesis, attributing other meanings to borrowed terminology. *Kenosis* signifies a break with obligatory repetition, which indicates that Bloom reads the powerlessness of tradition in terms of neurotic symptoms. *Daemonization* is the discovery of one's own powers and the negation of sublimity attributed to one's precursors. *Askesis* is linked to the notions of purgation and solopsis, even at the cost of abandoning one's imagined riches. The final stage, *Apophrades*, is tied to the return of the dead – the precursor appears to be the emulator of the later poet.

63 "Skondensowany strach" [Concentrated Fear], A. Fryz-Więcek in conversation with Krzysztof Warlikowski, *Didaskalia* 2002, No. 47

cure and the traces of family drama inscribed within it. Shakespeare was often mentioned on the premiere of Kane's production; he represents the paternal authority, tradition, the super-ego. Sarah Kane is his bastard daughter, a woman, a lesbian, and a suicide, i.e. stigmatized by society for multiple reasons (Kane's biography became an important argument in the quarrel over this play).⁶⁴ The director turns out to be her brother, her ally, a participant in her humiliation: "As a lesbian, Sarah Kane must have had the feeling that when she spoke of love she could get a response tainted with mockery. At the premiere of my performance, this was also the response of the audience, who seemed more shocked by the sight of a pair of kissing boys than by the amputation of hands and feet."⁶⁵ Their revolt, however, is the path to rebuilding family ties, because the father is an ally of the children. Like them, he is an outsider, a radical rebel, an authority on revisionary mechanisms and traumatic family dramas. "From the very beginning I felt that I had to make Shakespeare of her plays, and I had to make Shakespeare into Sarah Kane,"⁶⁶ Warlikowski explained. In the end it was not the director's revolt against the father, but the attempt to build a living and direct bond with him that evoked the most forceful aggression toward this play.⁶⁷ The institution of the public theater in Poland is based on the cult of the canon, the classic repertoire – comparing the young author to Shakespeare had an almost blasphemous resonance.

64 Her suicide, depression, and stays in a psychiatric ward served as a rationale for discrediting the artistic value of her plays, and their patronizing dismissal as the fruit of a deranged mind. Kane's age (reviewers condescendingly wrote of "juvenile dramas") and gender (sympathetic references were made to the "unfortunate Miss Kane") were also held against her. The reception of Sarah Kane in Poland (including the responses to Warlikowski's production) has been thoroughly described in Inga Iwasiów's *Gender dla średnio zaawansowanych* [Gender for the Semi-advanced], Warsaw 2004, pp. 196-224.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 The comparison between *Cleansed* and Shakespeare's work that appeared, for example, in Piotr Gruszczyński's review ("Brzytwa" [Razor], *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2002, No. 1) and in the first article on Sarah Kane published in Poland, written by Małgorzata Sugiera ("Piszę prawdę i to mnie zabija" [I Write the Truth and It Kills Me], *Didaskalia* 1999, Nos. 31-32), were met with forceful opposition, from Jacek Sieradzki among others: "There are viewers who leave the theater shaken and cleansed – and to them I wish all the best! But please do not try to convince me that we are dealing with a new incarnation of T. S. Eliot, Aeschylus, or William Shakespeare. There is no real reason to compare philosophers who gave tribute to the world and all its complexities with a writer from whose mouth comes the cry of a diseased soul – it is compelling and horribly redemptive, but it simply belongs to a different sphere." "Kochaj mnie, uratuj mnie. Sarah Kane, liryczna skandalistka" [Love Me, Save Me: Sarah Kane, the Lyrical Provocateur], *Polityka* 2002, No. 8.

Murderers

A Family Romance

The play's very first tableau unsettles the viewer with its melancholy and depressive aura. A girl in a chintz summer dress, a pink sweater, and worn runners sits by a table. She is concentrating on cutting out paper dolls, painting their faces black, and setting them on the table. This game of hers seems a neurotic symptom of being trapped in a sad childhood. From far off, in the depths of the stage, the slender figure of a boy emerges: he stands there motionless as if accustomed to being a silent witness in the shadows. The distance and lack of ties between them seems both accidental and significant. The table is large and rectangular, many people could gather around it; it is old and laden with memories of family rituals. The chairs upholstered with faux leather belong to another, ugly, anonymous world – perhaps a world after a catastrophe. Only the stool where the girl is sitting and an old book on the table appear to be memorabilia, traces of a lost and forgotten landscape. This glum world is reflected in the mirrored floor, closing the trap of melancholy, plunging the characters into a strange meditation upon themselves.

Darkness falls, the piercing, shuddering sound of a very low-flying airplane is heard. Is it a war? An air raid? The girl lights matches, following light signals in an unknown direction. Momentarily, another landscape, somewhat differently composed, but equally melancholy, emerges from the gloom. Three people sit by the table: a girl, a boy in a yellow-and-blue track suit, his head hung low, sitting across from her, and nearby, a man in a loose-fitting sweater (Miranda, Ariel, and Prospero). We are struck by the same impression of alienation, inner paralysis, suppression.

The secret of the ailing family comes to light. The father, Prospero, is here, as are his children, Miranda and Ariel; Caliban will appear in a moment. The first conversation with Miranda displays an overt aggression, an impatience, a readiness to swap accusations. Each of Prospero's children is marked with trauma: Miranda has lost her happy childhood, her mother, and her kingdom. Ariel lives in fear of physical humiliation, and Caliban has been made a slave. Shakespeare's text becomes psychologically concrete, graphic. Miranda is an adult woman who never grew up: she is anxiety-ridden and insecure in her femininity, hiding her face behind her long hair. Until this point, her only object of sexual desire has

been her father. Ariel is a boy-transvestite, perhaps a victim of sexual molestation. When Prospero orders him to change into a water nymph, we discover that Ariel, as if waiting to enter into a perverse gender game, is wearing a shimmering dress under his track suit. Prospero pipes up mockingly, provoking him with “gay” emphasis. Caliban, on the other hand, is the rebel child, his arms and face covered in tattoos. He has a speech impediment, but he passionately hurls accusations at Prospero. When he tells Prospero and Miranda that the whole point in learning a language is being able to curse, his words acquire a radical significance in this world. Language, after all, only serves him to hurl abuses, accusations, and aggression, much as the images on stage only evoke the experience of melancholy and loss.

Warlikowski tends to the ambiguity and capacity of the stage tableaux. He maintains the poetry of the phrases, and creates powerful metaphors from the psychological concrete, encompassing various spheres of experience: familial, psychological, historical, and social. Women play all of Prospero’s children, as if all are marked by the lack of a mother, their presence visualizing her absence. Their relationships with Prospero are marked by sexual tension, a sense of submission and dependence, expectation, discontent, anxiety, unresolved childhood conflicts. Prospero has them under his power; he demands they be dependent, speaks of their fates, interprets their experiences, and forbids them from speaking in their own voices. He is the ruler of language; compulsive silence, speech defects, or hysterical exaggeration do not effect his speech alone – the unconscious speaks only in women. Warlikowski’s reference here is to the image of women as weaker, inferior creatures under the authority of men, stripped of subjectivity and language; it is to the image of the abject woman, her semi-existence, her crippled and only partial self-consciousness. Moreover, the femininity of each of these figures is disturbed, mysteriously suppressed. Miranda still behaves like a child, though she ought to have all her initiations into adulthood well behind her, while Ariel and Caliban have androgynous characteristics: One strives to identify with the phantasmatic image of a woman, the other wants to discard it entirely. In their experience the body is a thing that is rejected, ambivalent, enslaved, or subject to rebellious drives. Here physicality is a realm of internal conflict, and, like language, a field of a shattered identity. At the play’s beginning, Prospero’s authority less manifests itself in the sphere of politics, knowledge, or magic than in terms of language, physicality, and sexuality, i.e. on a level of experience that is most deeply buried, inscribed in the familial prehistory of man and cultural unconscious. Prospero appears like an ordinary father of an ordinary family – in creating his image Warlikowski tends to the concrete, the prosaic, and the everyday. His body shape, his clothing, and his way of speaking give us positive associations with masculinity, control of emotions, reason, and firmness. Thus

the theme of trauma as a general experience, part of every family, functions all the more strongly. Beneath this prosaic figure lurks the symbolic and terrifying figure of the father, who tears the bond between mother and child, requiring the repression of original aggression, teaches speech, and demands unquestioned obedience to cultural norms. He becomes the perpetrator of the first and most radical experience of loss, depression, and melancholy. Placed in such a situation on stage, Shakespeare's text seems laden with deep psychoanalytical insight, with the ability to probe deeply into man's most intimate history – the first, utterly forgotten, spectacle of violence.

Though adults, Prospero's children have yet to experience rites of passage, remaining in the liminal zone of childhood, as wounded and damaged creatures. Historical trauma shines through the family trauma: Prospero's house is a shelter, a temporary asylum, an orphanage. Prospero and his children are a family that has been salvaged from annihilation and yet are still living in a time of annihilation, with no living social links to the outside world. Everything here requires reconstruction and repair: language, family and social bonds, symbolic rituals, individual memory, and collective memory.

The Mirror and the Temple

There are two powerfully distinct fields of play in this performance. The first field, the foreground, is created by the mirrored floor, on which there is a table, a chair, and an enormous stump for cutting timber. The background is created by the raised surface of a floor with a simple geometrical pattern, resembling that of a temple. Both these surfaces are more or less purely abstract and have no realistic motivation in this play. The mirrored floor gives a beautiful, clear, and deep reflection. This is where all the scenes of Prospero's house occur: Ferdinand's courtship of Miranda, the blessing scene, and the scene of forgiveness. The reflections create the impression of the frailty of the human constellations, giving them a beauty found in the fleeting and temporary; at the same time they sharpen the outlines, allowing us to see more clearly, making us prone to contemplation, transforming every situation into a sign or a hieroglyph. They strip reality of its shadow and weight, as if all the events were occurring on thin ice, in a dreamscape, or in pure consciousness. The clarity and depth of the reflections become a visual synonym of truth, clear vision, and melancholy insight.

The scenes with the jesters – Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo – and those with the men from Naples and Milan take place on the “temple” floor. The two story lines are joined by the motif of a plot on another person's life. One we see at an oblong bar table in cold neon light, the other on airplane seats; the effect is that of

muddled contexts, the incompatibility of various worlds, a dream-like montage. The temple floor seems a remote and enigmatic symbol, belonging to a world that is absent here. At most it is a trace of memory and culture, a dislocated and empty *signifiant* that whets a desire for meaning. The two surfaces are separated by a set-off, a mystery of discontinuity and incompatibility. They neither complement nor oppose one another, though they mark out the performance's basic horizon of references. One of these horizons draws from the space of self-consciousness, the unconscious, a melancholy rupture in the human psyche, the topic of the human ego. Another takes us to the sphere of the sacred, to social bonds, and the religious community. The floor of the temple does create a higher level, but the fundamental attempts to change the world occur in the mirrored space: the scenes of blessing and forgiveness are significantly located not in the temple space, but in the landscape of the melancholy experience of loss and self-consciousness. This rupture and shift in the sphere of the topic on stage contains an ethical imperative and forecasts spiritual work for which there are no established social or religious rituals.

Narcissism and Imperialism

Warlikowski most unpredictably matched the actors in the farcical scenes with Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo. They meet at night in a bar, where they sit on tall barstools with their heads hung, looking at their reflections in the mirrored countertop. This plot begins on a melancholy note: an image of the alienation of people in each others' company. The topos of the island, upon which the concept of Shakespeare's *Tempest* is based, is radically reformulated in this performance. Warlikowski culls micro-situations of broken bonds and diseased relationships from the contemporary urban landscape, thus reading the theme of the island to portray isolated inter-human constellations. First we see a few characters by the family table, then three odd figures behind a bar counter. The connection between Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo begins with a chance encounter in a bar, as one of a thousand fleeting human contacts, such as are created and fall apart at every moment in modern cosmopolitan spaces, acquiring a sense of drama through unexpressed desires, expectations, and disappointments. This tiny part of the world undergoes a merciless vivisection.

Stephano, a clean-cut man in a uniform, but without any pants, only his underwear, shoes, and socks, sits in the middle. On the right Trinculo, her long blonde hair hanging down, is an older woman in a slip. On the left, wearing garden overalls over his naked, heavily tattooed body, is Caliban. The partiality of the costumes allows us to see their bodies: young and old, male and female. We watch

a world of utterly disturbed relationships. Stephano's drinking buddy is Trinculo, a mother, friend, scapegoat, an inferior and weaker person whose personality makes Stephano feel better, and who is always ready to re-stage the role she has been given. For her, Stephano is an unattainable object of sexual desire, the sincere, disinterested, unspoken love of a woman for her lover, a mother for a son, an older body for a younger one. The appearance of Caliban – a woman hidden under a man's clothing or a man with a woman's psyche – creates a field of open rivalry around Stephano. His masculinity and aggression carry attributes of the fascist phantasm of strength, in the hope of stanching his bisexuality and lack of self-confidence: Stephano has female make-up on his face, he sings falsetto. Caliban succumbs to this image of male strength: she solemnly removes his shoes, then his socks, then kisses his bare foot. Stephano is shaken by a sexual spasm, and Trinculo gives a yell of jealousy and disgust. In *The Tempest's* most farcical subplot, Warlikowski found space for sinister phantasmas, for deconstructed identities based on the destructive projections of familial, sexual, and social roles.

Only men appear in the subplot with the Milanese and Neapolitan politicians, all four dressed identically, with elegant panache, like a string quartet. They are all sitting in airplane seats in single file, facing the audience. Their gestures are restrained, their faces recall masks; their conversation is playful, with everyone trying to outdo the others, in constant competition, almost like improvised music. We follow differences in tone, levels of aggression and cynicism, the ability to mask their intentions. Marcel Mauss once called the rivalry between people of the same sex "the basic imperialism of men."⁶⁸ Gonzalo reveals himself to be the most emotionally and idealistically disposed to the world: something, however, allows him to exist in this political structure and to maintain his position. It could be that his idealism is a necessary part of the game. We swiftly realize that Antonio, the wittiest, the most charming and cynical, has the most powerful position. After Alonso and Gonzalo fall asleep, he has the idea of murdering the king; then the stage is bathed in light, as if in response to the clear view of the situation.

In precisely tuning the trios and quartets of actors, Warlikowski keeps us in suspense as to whether we are moving in an internal or external space. Are we watching snippets of the social landscape, or are we entering the labyrinths of the human mind? The worlds he presents can be located in reality, or appear to be powerful after-images; we have the impression that we are moving inside the human psyche, where all the structures of the human world crisscross and are reflected. The following hypothesis is worth considering: Prospero represents the diseased superego, threatened in his authority, and thus, increasingly stiff, aggressive, and despotic. Stephano and his company take us into the sphere of

68 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. I. Cunnison, Cohen&West Ltd., London 1966, p. 63.

the id and the libido, where scattered, badly allocated energy flows in perverse arrangements: sadistic, masochistic, and narcissistic. As such, Antonio seems the incarnation of the ego and its ruthless, destructive, imperialist claims against the world. Warlikowski took the Shakespearean idea, particularly evident in *The Tempest*, perhaps, of the ties between the microcosm and the cosmos, man and the universe, presented in the Vitruvian model that inscribes the human being in cosmic circles, and brought it to the realm of another, equally myth-creating anthropology.

Traces and Reflections

Every world, every character has a flaw. The reality we are watching is fundamentally disturbed, corrupted, internally at odds with itself: thus the impression of theatricality, melancholy posturing, but also the impression of beauty. Warlikowski delves into regions of inner motionlessness to the point of meditation, brooding on pain, loss, and the sense of non-identification with oneself. Thus, we have the compelling stativity of his play, which unfolds in long cadences, structured in nine sequences; thus, too, the solicitude for the clean lines used to draw the situation, the intimacy of the sound. Here the disruption of harmony becomes a new harmony, retrieved and rebuilt, and thus, more frail and fleeting. This is, at any rate, one of the themes of *The Tempest*, built around something as immaterial, resonating, and fleeting as sound, and around metaphors associated with it, around imaginings of dissonance and harmony. To describe the space of this play, not only in the scenographic sense, but also symbolically, internally, psychologically, we ought to draw upon the category of traces and reflections of what is transitory and what is permanent, what has passed, and what still causes pain.

Sigmund Freud formulated his opinions on art observing the spectacle of destruction during World War One. He then abandoned naive psychological, post-Romantic concepts of the work of art as an expression of repressed desires. Departing from the experience of loss, impermanence, and destruction, he tied the artistic act with his notion of melancholy. He declared that the work of art is essentially the structure of the human memory, a unique arrangement of memory traces held in the unconscious – it is the “memoriness of memory” and the “structureness of structure.”⁶⁹ This is also why the beauty of the work of art affects us differently from the beauty of nature. It does not draw from the sphere of fleeting perceptions

69 Sigmund Freud’s ideas are described by Paweł Dybel in his book *Urwane ścieżki...* [Broken Paths...], op. cit., in the chapter entitled “Przemijalność piękna” [Fleeting Beauty], pp. 175-206.

picked up by the senses, but from the sphere of memory traces; it is registered in the deep structures of the unconscious. From here it is only a small step to the idea of immortality, the indestructibility of the work of art, and the capacity to move from Romantic conceptions to a more Classical approach. The work belonging to another epoch is thus always capable of speaking to us, of being a deep and vital experience, of shaping the bases of our sense of the world. At the same time, it always appears in the field of melancholy, as a thing that is lost and retrieved. By the same token, the aesthetic experience, much like melancholy, becomes part of every deep gaze into oneself, into the social reality, and into tradition.

The Potlatch Ceremony

Ferdinand cuts some wood, demonstrating his strength, stamina, and resilience. The actor's exertion is utterly genuine, the blocks of wood are thick, indeed. This is no longer theater, but a performance that breaks the line between illusion and reality. Miranda likes Ferdinand's masculine strength; she circles about him, allowing herself to uncover her face. This is the play's first face-to-face contact between two people. In all the previous situations the characters face the audience. Only in the first scene, when Caliban recalls the unconsummated rape of Miranda, does he turn to her in aggression, trying to look her in the eye, terrifying her, and making her want to run away.

The meeting scene between Miranda and Ferdinand becomes a spontaneous and impulsive exchange of gifts. She gives him a bracelet, he ties his bow tie on her wrist. They take some old scraps of paper from their pockets and exchange them. The situation is somewhat humorous, a bit embarrassing, almost improvised and semi-private. It is hard to see at first that we have found ourselves at the beginning of a human community, in the realm of a social ritual, where the generous and benevolent human spirit is being expressed. We are in the sphere of the "holistic services" whose regulations encompass women, men, children, and rituals, in a world of circulating gifts, described by Marcel Mauss, and ruled by a forgotten principle of life: "We should come out of ourselves and regard the duty of giving as a liberty, for in it there lies no risk."⁷⁰ This may be the first time that Warlikowski's theater goes beyond the merciless vision of inter-human relationships as a destructive deal, the negated equation between the original gesture and the gesture of violence.

70 Marcel Mauss, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

A Band of Murderers

This movement into the depths of human memory, toward the beginnings of culture, does not, however, have an unambiguous currency. The Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo subplot takes us toward a different sort of image altogether: the primitive horde planning to assassinate the father. This chance constellation is bound by an increasingly strong sense of aggression and resentment. The ties between them become more and more shameless, stripped of cultural masks and inhibitions; their mutual relationships create a space where narcissistic, masochistic, and sadistic needs can be satisfied. They reach the sphere of aggression which Freud called pre-Oedipal, in which aggression is not subject to a censorious and restrictive sense of guilt, and is not separated from the sexual instinct – then the earliest damage to the ego is wrought, which Freud called narcissistic injury.

This threesome is dressed increasingly skimpily in every scene, and they begin to make up a gang, a horde, a primitive pack, a “band of murderers.”⁷¹ Stephano paints himself a mask with lipstick, making the line of a star, in a narcissistic urge to turn himself into an object of worship. In their final scene, Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo appear to the rhythm of pounding music, pounce on Ariel, and tear off her jewelry. It is a scene that evokes a modern-day night club, the prehistory of humanity, and the prehistory of every person. The idea of the potlatch, of voluntary and obligatory exchange, proof of the generosity of the spirit in social relations, is here raped and profaned. At the peak of ecstatic aggression, when Stephano is raised to the altar of the family table and orders his feet to be kissed once more, light shines on the stage and the audience. The trance suddenly breaks and Stephano looks about the audience in embarrassment, but his shame is veiled by aggression: he makes a vulgar gesture toward the audience, and vanishes with his companions into the wings. We have the impression that we have borne witness to the first impulse of self-control, the depressingly pitiful birth of human morality in the fear of social pressure.

In the subplot with the Milanese and Neapolitan gentlemen, the same motifs constantly recur: narcissism, aggression, plundering, murder. Here, however, the civilized form neither cracks nor fall apart for a second. When Antonio and Sebastian plot a murder, it takes place in broad daylight: there is nothing to stop or hinder them.

71 Sigmund Freud used this phrase in his article “Reflections on War and Death,” published in 1915, following the outbreak of the First World War and his cooling of patriotic enthusiasm. “Thus, if we are to be judged by our unconscious wishes, we ourselves are nothing but a band of murderers, just like primitive man. It is lucky that all wishes do not possess the power which people of primitive time attributed to them. For in the cross fire of mutual maledictions mankind would have perished long ago, not excepting the best and wisest of men as well as the most beautiful and charming women,” trans. A. A. Brill and Alfred B. Kuttner, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013, p. 27.

The Real

Warlikowski says that in working on *The Tempest* he had Jedwabne in mind, for the wartime events, the very contemporary anniversary ceremonies, as well as the discussion around Jan Tomasz Gross's *Neighbors*⁷² – a book that described how, in 1941, the inhabitants of Jedwabne chased their Jewish neighbors into a barn and burned them alive. Its publication was cause for the most lively debate on Polish-Jewish relations since 1989. The anniversary marches in honor of the victims of this killing divided Polish society, politicians, and the media. This bloody and shocking image of a small-town community transformed into a band of murderers, a savage horde, a pack of beasts, carries all the markings of trauma, around which circulated discussions of guilt and responsibility. It depicts the evil stigmatizing of the following generations, stamping the consciousness of the whole society, of memory, and of the capacity to forgive. Warlikowski makes no direct reference to these events in his play: drawing upon them complicated the reading of *The Tempest*, tore it from conventional optimism, situated its conflicts in the field of real social emotions. The real social and historical circumstances created a space of conflict, resistance, and discomfort. They allowed the actors to realize what emotions the crimes of the past could evoke, what it meant to have a wedding between the children of a onetime executioner and a onetime victim, and the spiritual exertion in forgiveness. The texture and tension of Warlikowski's *Tempest* comes from real events (and not from the sets, costumes, and color scheme), as well as from a certain kind of post-traumatic space: the melancholy unreality of the mirror image and the compelling reality of the traces that are remembered. A wooden wall with windows located high above encloses the space of the stage in *The Tempest*. It is a wall of memory, the wall of a temple, and the wall of a stable in Jedwabne. "The soul of a burnt wall,"⁷³ as Małgorzata Szczęśniak, the stage designer, called it.

In the post-Freudian psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, the "real" is identified with the field of mental scarring. This is why it evades any sort of symbolic representation and cannot communicate or reveal itself, though it remains active. In mobilizing a symbolic order, it manifests itself strictly through its absence. In Warlikowski's performance, what is real, and therefore leaves a scar, appears in the tension between taut human relationships, in prolonged survival, the roughness of a texture, the cracking of a picture.

72 Cf. *Burza we mnie*, op. cit.; *Do jutra*, op. cit.

73 "Oddech przestrzeni, dusza ściany" [The Breath of Space, the Soul of a Wall], Grzegorz Niziołek and Joanna Targoń in conversation with Małgorzata Szczęśniak, *Didaskalia* 2003, Nos. 54-56, p. 57.

The Illusion of the Real

Light comes up with ceremonious organ music: an audience emerges from the gloom, a flash reflects off the mirrored floor, the whole stage is illuminated; it also reflects off the windows high up on the back wall. Everything is clearly visible: both floors of the stage, the wall, the windows, the bar counter pushed over to the side, chopped wood, an ax, an empty table, and chairs scattered around it. There are also the faces of the viewers surrounding the stage on three sides, as if a crowd of extras, unexpectedly emerging from the darkness, had suddenly appeared in the play. The nuptials, Miranda and Ferdinand, are sitting on chairs. They are proud, surprised, blinded by the glare that surrounds them. "This is a most majestic vision, and/ Harmonious charmingly. May I be bold/ to think these spirits" says Ferdinand, taking a ceremonious look about the faces of the audience. Blinded by the same light, we are moved to different degrees by the unstylized beauty of the image and our live participation in it. Ferdinand is, indeed, speaking for us. He holds in his upraised hand one of the paper dolls Miranda has cut out, as if to demonstrate the gulf between Miranda's old dreams and the reality of the present. Or, it may be the reverse: it is as if he is sending us a warning signal that what we are seeing is but a dream.

The lofty organ music turns into a sweet motif played on the harp. Three women in authentic Łowicz folk costumes enter: two have gray, braided hair, one has glasses in thick frames – every detail convinces us of the reality of this ceremony. They appear in place of Iris, Ceres, and Juno, goddesses from the newlywed spectacle prepared by the spirits, at Prospero's command. They bring in salt, bread, and two shots of vodka. These are not actresses; they deliver simple, raw, rhymed blessings. Their words contain neither sentimentality nor the promise of a happy life. They concern the expulsion from Paradise, the difficulties of everyday life, mutual support, and inevitable death. The stage reality walks a fine line: emotion could easily transform into mockery, tears into laughter, shame into embarrassment. These three women come from a world as remote to the public as Roman goddesses from Prospero's mask. A rarely achieved impression of reality on stage, an intimate bond between audience and viewers, a living community is born from this uncomfortable situation created by the performances of the amateurs. Their simple yet sublime messages, the surprise in the transformation of the reality on stage, the admiration for the beauty of the image all generate emotion. This is why the women in folk costumes appear so easily, so naturally to convince the viewers to take part in the blessing ceremony, to shout "Kiss! Kiss!" and to count out loud while the young couple kisses.

Like everything in this performance, however, this community is supported by the experience of melancholy – the depressing sensation that for the moment of

this miracle an irreversible loss has been resurrected. All it takes is one word, one gesture, from Prospero to make everything disappear: the lights dim, the women in folk costume leave the stage, the audience is engulfed in darkness. The temple vanishes, and once more we are in the theater. “We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on, and our little life/ Is rounded with a sleep.” Each word of Prospero’s famous monologue bursts with meaning and takes on intensity.

The Wedding

The wedding ceremony is the key event in Warlikowski’s theater: it is a point of reference, a field of deconstructive operations, an obsessive image, the aim of jeering attack, and, perhaps, even the object of hidden affirmation. It can be a spectacle of violence, a menacing emblem of the heteronormative society, a theater of oppressive cultural roles, as in *The Taming of the Shrew*. It can become an appropriated performative that reveals its fatalistic, destructive power, as in the Carl and Rod subplot in *Cleansed*. Finally, it can emerge in the melancholy experience of loss, momentarily freeing itself of cultural repression, unveiling the dream of the sanctity of human bonds inscribed within it, as in *The Tempest*. The wedding scene appears in several variants, splinters, or shots in nearly every one of Warlikowski’s performances. It presents its theatricality, it mobilizes living emotions; it allows all the contradictions in the intersecting structures of human experience, whether social, religious, physical, or psychological, to come to the fore.

The Taming of the Shrew might have been mistaken for political theater, in the spirit of Judith Butler, anti-essentialist and deconstructive. In this earlier play, Katherina is subject to rape by the social norms, and was also an actress on a stage of melancholy repression, constantly replaying the trauma of the loss of her loved one. Stigmatization associated with gender roles and sexual behavior is never the relationship between an all-too-visible attribute and a social stereotype in Warlikowski’s theater, as American sociologist Erving Goffman⁷⁴ writes of the phenomenon. That is, it is not something basically functional and, at the same time, dispensable in the process of a social education. The stigma in Warlikowski’s theater runs deeper: it cannot be divided from a sense of one’s own identity, and, through a murky link with Manichaeism, it becomes the very core of human existence. The stigma crosses the boundaries of the social performative, the scope of gender roles. Though Warlikowski has not forgone political activism and the

74 Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Touchstone Publishers, New York 1986.

energy of deconstruction, his theater does not fit in the realm of leftist optimism, the reform of society's self-consciousness. His other side touches on much more conservative categories of the human condition, continually returning to the tragic horizon of human fate.

In *The Tempest* these contradictions were revealed with special force, as here Warlikowski truly inquired into the possibility of a "new world" being born, into its ties with the "old world," and into the possibility of reconciling various structures of human life. This play is an attempt to emerge from the darkness, the gloom, the experience of harm, from destructive trauma. Warlikowski does not deny the love of Ferdinand and Miranda, though he reveals the psychological (or even psychoanalytical) complications of their relationship. Nor does he introduce any dissonance between their feelings and Prospero's intentions, i.e. to settle the scores of the harm he has experienced, or the harm he has dealt to his children, through their marriage. When Ferdinand appears at the end of the first scene, his physical similarity to Prospero is evident; Miranda immediately has feelings for him, sensing the opportunity to tear herself from her destructive family unit. There is a paradox here: Ferdinand is the mirror image of her father, and at the same time, he leads Miranda out of a closed, mirrored world. Prospero gives Miranda to Ferdinand, and, at the same time, sets her free from his authority.

This time, Warlikowski does not present the Catholic wedding ritual (as he did in *The Taming of the Shrew*). Instead he summons up the folk ritual of blessing, which is less official, closer to family and social life, more archaic. Although it is strongly rooted in Polish folk culture, it is also culturally universal, as it is tied to the gifts of the earth and the cult of fertility. Though this ceremony occurs through Prospero, it is not subject to patriarchal authority, is neither repressive nor normative, is more tied to the female element, and evokes the figure of the mother who has been absent in Miranda's life. Prospero less demonstrates his authority than gives the floor to other powers, seeking to rebuild the world by renouncing his patriarchal authoritarianism and despotism, which has been responsible for so much grief. Prospero is conscious not only of the harm he himself has wrought, but also of his guilt.

The Reject

Even if Warlikowski does not undermine the optimism of *The Tempest*, he does not make it the ultimate horizon of the performance. He powerfully extracts all the points of rupture, breakdown, and non-identity. As in *Bacchae* and *Cleansed*, he finds a character in whom all the structures and systems, the simple and

unambiguous oppositions collapse, who skirts the edges of the human world and watches him from afar. In *Bacchae* this character was, of course, Dionysus, in *Cleanness* it was the woman speaking the play's opening monologue and who later often reappeared in the play, creating a musical and emotional commentary to the events. In *The Tempest* Ariel fills this role. This is neither a child nor an adult, neither a woman nor a man, neither a spirit nor a fantastical creature, but a person so wounded and hurt he no longer perceives himself as a human, who feels no links with the human community.⁷⁵ In saying to Prospero, "If I were a human," Ariel painfully exposes a degraded sense of self.

This is a person who theatricalizes existence, situating it at the boundary between femininity and nothingness, existing only through the staging of a phantasm, through wigs, lipstick, shiny dresses, and high-heeled shoes. This phantasm sometimes emerges quite clearly, transforming into the figure of a real woman, a diva, a songstress, and at other times, withers to a single prop or attribute, collapses, breaks down, or nearly falls into parody. Beyond this phantasm Ariel seems not to exist, lying somewhere propped up against a wall, sitting hunched over, in silence, yawning, staring into space.⁷⁶ He is, however, always alert, and knows how to respond – it is Ariel, not Prospero, who knows the real shape of things, mocking the idiots and condemning the criminals. Ariel saves the lives of would-be victims of political murder, and puts in a good word to Prospero for those who have been too severely punished.

When Miranda enters in her wedding dress, Ariel appears and very earnestly asks Prospero if he loves him. His love is, however, unreciprocated. It is hard to say if it is the love of a child for his father, a boy for a man, or a woman for a man. Ariel does not escape this liminal sphere; he does not pull himself from its fog, as Miranda succeeded in doing. For Ariel the rite of passage is a death ritual. Ariel's rejection also casts a shadow over Prospero's attempts at forgiveness.

75 Here we ought to bring up the term "abject," created by Julia Kristeva: "Julia Kristeva refers to what is neither subject nor object as abject. This is, however, a certain sphere of subjectivity, as it gathers what is not socially accepted: impurity, villainy, hideousness. It evokes as much repulsion as fascination. In social life the abject is the focus of hatred and violence." T. Kitliński, *Obcy jest w nas. Kochać według Julii Kristevej* [The Other Is within Us: Love According to Julia Kristeva], Krakow 2001, p. 48.

76 According to Julia Kristeva, the abject belongs to the semiotic, and thus, symbolic, sphere, culturally unassimilated, and linked with the discourse of depression (Here Kristeva draws from the concepts of Melanie Klein, joining the birth of speech with the depressive position), while its confrontation is one of the basic ethical tasks of contemporary culture, the beginning of every work of forgiveness.

The Wolf Man

I cannot resist the temptation of comparing this Ariel figure with one of Freud's most astonishing narratives, the case of the Wolf Man.⁷⁷ A boy who was seduced by his sister in childhood became chimerical and capricious. Trapped in a desire to find himself in a passive sexual role, the object of his desire became his father. The attempt to identify himself with his father, a higher stage of psychosexual development, was replaced with the choice of the father as an object of desire. His attacks of rage and fury were meant to provoke his father to punish him, and, thus, to bring him masochistic sexual satiation, and, at the same time, to ease the sense of guilt associated with this desire. Ultimately this desire to be in the position of the woman, the mother, and to be sexually satiated by the father, was repressed and turned into an anxiety dream about wolves. I have the impression that in the character of Ariel we approach a similar realm, where the positive model of the father as someone who passes on cultural values and attitudes for integrating with society is rendered with fantastical projections. This shows how difficult, if not hopeless, a task is taken up by Prospero in his attempt to restore moral harmony to the world.

The Story of a Table

The table is brought to stage center and covered with a white, carefully starched cloth. The family table once more becomes the center of the world. The white tabletop beautifully catches the light, which almost emanates from it. The impression of brightness, purity, and ceremony is achieved with this one simple signifier, which fires the imagination and the emotional memory. It brings back thoughts of childhood, holidays, family gatherings. This effect is reduced to such purity and power of expression that it almost takes on the quality of a religious image. A second impression, however, immediately joins the first: the white rectangle emanates the void, it is strictly *post-factum* – there is no life here.

Only men are seated around the table: Prospero, Antonio, Alonso, Gonzalo, and Sebastian. This fact alone makes us uneasy and suspicious, though Warlikowski creates this tableau quite matter-of-factly, with restraint and objectivity. He imposes no interpretation; at most he stirs conflicting impressions. Hands resting on the table, and the faces bent forward are sharply outlined against the white, objective light: their motionlessness betrays the tension. Caliban and Stephano are serving the table; the onetime rebels are now elegant and skilled waiters. Trinculo has changed, it seems, through sheer force of will, into a singer, a stage diva. Her

77 Sigmund Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, Abhedananda Press, 2011.

bravura rendition of *Wonderful World* not only receives applause, but also evokes a holiday atmosphere, that of a joyful unity with the world. We do feel, however, that this beautiful image cloaks internal dissonance, unresolved conflicts. The liminal creatures, like Ariel, have vanished or have found themselves in new social roles, though it would be more proper to speak of bitter and superficial compromises with reality. Thus, when Miranda appears in her wedding gown and, staring at the men around the table, speaks of the wonderful world and the beauty of human creatures, the audience bursts out laughing.

The long closing sequence of the play proceeds, at great hazard, in two mutually exclusive tonalities. Prospero knows that he is attempting to reconstruct the order of the world on the ruins of lost illusions, on the naivete of original emotions, on suppressed hatred. As a result, however, his effort is sincere, thorough, convincing. The situation does not progress to a confession of guilt or an act of forgiveness, however. At the end of the scene, only the two brothers, Prospero and Antonio, are left sitting at the table. A long and awkward silence falls between them. Antonio brings his shot glass to his lips with a stiff hand, his throat tense as he takes a long drink. He gets up. He leaves. Prospero remains seated at the table.

The lack of resolution allows us to sense what the experience of guilt and the difficulty of forgiveness really mean; the suspension shatters the conventional and theatrical ease of these gestures, but it is not only a theatrical effect that is at stake here. Jacques Derrida once wrote of the contemporary “staging of forgiveness,” of “all the scenes of repentance, confession, forgiveness, or apology which have multiplied on the geopolitical scene since the last war,” which change forgiveness into a political tool, even if it serves the most noble cause to unite. “Forgiveness,” in Derrida’s opinion, “is not, it should not be, normal, normative, normalising. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible, as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality.”⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur called forgiveness a hymn: “For the **hymn** has no need to say who forgives and to whom **forgiveness** is directed.”⁷⁹

Forgiveness is yet another extreme situation in Warlikowski’s theater. In *The Tempest* it emerges where the protagonists have to capitulate and fall silent. It reveals the mystery of its absence at the family table, it opens a new dimension of the theater of melancholy. This means it ceases to be one of Prospero’s strategic maneuvers, or an elevated manifestation of his nobility. It is another, final act of unearthing empty traces, recognizing the space of absence. The final loss of illusions is crowned by the act of reconstructing the world. As Theodor Adorno once explained, what is irrevocably lost regains its voice only in the consciousness of this irrevocability.⁸⁰

78 Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Routledge, London 2001, p. 32.

79 Paul Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 467

80 Theodor Adorno, “On Tradition,” *Telos*, December 1992, pp. 75-81.

Stories

Confrontation and Violence

The Bacchae, *Cleansed*, and *The Tempest* begin with a monologue: a confession, an accusation, an attack, a comforting. These monologues are inscribed with the experience of suffering, wounding, injury; it is from this experience that human speech is born, along with inter-human relationships, acts of violence, attempts to forge bonds, bodily mutilation, provocation, and transgression. The damaged monologue is the source of Warlikowski's theater, but not its horizon; this is not a theater of the ego, an oneiric theater based on a solopistic world view. Warlikowski establishes the monologue as a social experiment, makes it part of a living relationship with the audience. The injury and wounds pertain to a real, though repressed, situation, begging for exposure, a return, a re-entry into human relationships, an attack on social routines. It is at this moment that Warlikowski's theater begins, born where phantasm reveals a rupture between the real and the symbolic, the injury and the culture, the psychological and the social. For this reason he cannot leave the realm of extreme experiences, constantly pushing them to the foreground, staging them with glaring theatricality, though nor can he abandon the realm of the story, the monologue, human speech inflicted with the expression of a wounded situation.

This powerful presence of the wounded monologue in the structure of the performance leads to a clear sketch of the narrative situation. We discover an "I" who performs an act of confrontation: one story clashes with all the others, violently upsetting it and adamantly insisting on the recognition of a private truth. "Confrontation is a strong but risky medicine for unawareness," as Jerome Bruner phrased it.⁸¹ As he goes on to explain, confrontation can expose the narrative nature of any identity, and thus relativize it, stripping it of all illusions of being natural, robbing the unconscious mechanisms that mask the culture of their power. Confrontation becomes particularly jeopardous when it strikes at the heart of social violence derived from post-traumatic experiences or exposes social mechanisms of repression – and this is precisely what transpires in Warlikowski. This sort of violence often requires repetition, or multiple performances in the social space,

81 Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard University Press, London 1996, p. 148.

because it concerns attitudes which have never been worked through or made conscious, i.e. subjected to social psychoanalysis. In Warlikowski's theater these are homophobic, racist, and anti-feminist attitudes, which most readily resort to violence. Confrontation aims to spark the process of psychoanalysis. And because its very principle contains a powerful component of attack, aggression, and brutal and uncompromising exposure, equally powerful defense mechanisms are immediately engaged on the opposite side of the fence: "Indeed, confrontation is more likely to arouse anger and resentment than to raise consciousness."⁸² In all likelihood we can trace Warlikowski's aggressive attack on the theater to this concept: the theater that reveals mechanisms of violence is accused of using the very same mechanisms, because it seeks extreme situations and powerful images to provoke anger. One of the powerful incarnations of this confrontational action is the monologue of the naked or debased person, the liminal, bisexual creature profaning a traditional ritual. "And, perhaps, the forced actualization in social reality itself of the fantasmatic kernel of my being is the worst, most humiliating kind of violence, a violence that undermines the very basis of my identity (of my 'self-image') by exposing me to an unbearable shame."⁸³

The principle of confrontation has allowed Warlikowski to carve a place for himself in the theater, and to pose a simple question to himself, to the actors, and to the audience: Why is it that, here and now, we are telling *this* story, and not any other? This is why Warlikowski so frequently begins his performances with a monologue, revealing the fact of the story's construction, making us question its origins. The monologue roots the tale in a concrete human experience and establishes direct contact with the audience. It is almost always metatheatrical by nature; the speaker's situation leads us beyond the fiction of the world represented, and betrays the presence of the viewers, who are made ready to exchange the intimacy of a confession for the violence of a confrontation. It betrays a disruption, an anomaly, which is troublesome and with which we cannot contend. The living story is always an infringement of the "canonical script," and gains our attention through its difference. As Bruner says, "to be worth telling, a narrative must run counter to expectancy, must breach a canonical script."⁸⁴ But this breach of norms never occurs once and for all: it is cultural and historical, and it reflects the time and the circumstances in which the tale is being told. "The innovative storyteller consequently becomes a powerful cultural figure, provided his stories take off

82 Ibid., p. 148. Jacques Lacan, in turn, believes that aggression is an irreplaceable factor in initiating the transfer mechanism in the psychoanalytic process (which he calls the "analytic drama"): then the first knot to be unraveled by psychoanalysis is revealed.

83 Slavoj Žižek, "Melancholy and the Act," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Summer 2000, p. 681.

84 Jerome Bruner, op. cit., p. 139.

from the conventional narrative canons and lead to our seeing what had never before been ‘noticed’.”⁸⁵

Between the imposition of a given tale and its acceptance by the society (here: the theater-going public), an ambiguous, dangerous, and tense game is played, which always raises questions concerning the canon of texts considered “alive” in a given society, evoking the eternal question: “But why not *Forefathers’ Eve*?” *Dybbuk* would seem to take the place of *Forefathers’ Eve*, as it addresses similar issues, i.e. memory that lingers through the generations and guilt that outlasts death. *Krum* would seem to be a trivial story about everyday life, and so its staging in the theater required particular justification. *Angels in America*, meanwhile, is based in a reality fairly remote to Polish culture.

The Undoing of Hamlet and Common Unhappiness

In *Hamlet* it is the title character that usurps the right to narrate: he takes the others’ voices or their reliability. In the “stage within a stage” scene the audience at Elsinore sits in a row facing the audience. The composition of the tableau hides a familiar riddle in Warlikowski’s theater: his proclivity for horizontal layouts. “I prefer a horizontal, panoramic space in which there are people joined by pain and saved through tears.”⁸⁶ Though there is a suggestion of severed ties in their frontward positioning, the tendency toward this sort of composition establishes the incontrovertible fact of the community, and draws upon the notion of the shared space. This might be key to Warlikowski’s way of apprehending the theater, as it releases energy through breaking down isolation. This sort of composition is generally linked to an extreme moment, and even has an eschatological appeal, calling to mind images of the courtroom, waiting rooms, temples, and, of course, the theater.

Hamlet strikes out at others, seeking to make the masks fall from their faces, to make them accomplices in his pain and his sense of guilt. He speaks against them, but in their name, for he himself has experienced the rift in the human condition, and has known the flaw they all share. He feels like a therapist and patient wrapped into one – and as such, each of his actions strikes out at himself at the same time. In Warlikowski’s rendering the story of Gonzago’s murder turns into a mythical, archetypal, or biblical tale, delving into the source of evil and its most primordial symbol, the stain. Hamlet makes radical use of the confrontational situation as a

85 Jerome Bruner, op. cit., p. 139.

86 Georges Banu, “Warlikowski z ducha Rimbauda” [Warlikowski in the Spirit of Rimbaud], trans. N. Ponikowska, in: *Warlikowski – Teatr*, ed. A. Tuszyńska, Warsaw 2006, p. 161.

“cure for unawareness.” He pits himself against the audience, his audience against us, his performance against two audiences. All of these confrontations occur in extreme arrangements, either face-to-face, or with backs to one another. The stiffness of this layout, its stark refusal to compromise, surely has great power, but it also sentences Hamlet to his downfall: in his mythical tale of the infection of evil he does not manage to grasp the individual truth of the other characters, of their own tales. He fails to build a community on the radical sense of guilt, and, at best, he gives everyone a sort of traumatic, numb paralysis. Hamlet revealed what Freud called “common unhappiness,” but he did not find a way to speak of it.

This is why the Rozmaitości theater production of Hamlet might be seen as the limit beyond which Warlikowski begins verifying his artistic premises, demonstrating a need to confront the audience in a less predictable manner, pulling them into a live transformation process, in which rituals of separation and inclusion become a multifaceted and living experience.

Storytelling Approach

Dybbuk begins with a similar tableau: the actors sit in a row facing the audience, and yet they show nothing of the previous numb paralysis. They are focused, somewhat solemn, alive, individual. The situation seems rather ceremonial: the play, a meeting, and a story are all beginning. On the one hand, our eyes tell us that we are in the theater; on the other, we sense from the basic impulse to meet, and from the actors approaching with a desire to speak to the audience, that this is the birth of theater as such. One of the actors slowly sets the chairs out in an even row, right in front of the audience. The space is illuminated, becoming open and friendly. Stories are told wherein ordinary things become extraordinary: a blue thread in a white, rectangular vest, a clock, a red-currant bush. We hear the names of local cities and towns: Sochaczew, Lublin, Ropczyce, Kutno, Góra Kalwaria. A world that is strange and somewhat foreign is then situated in this homey, familiar scenery, a world of rabbis and Tzadiks, where the Messiah is still eagerly awaited. Some of the actors are dressed in contemporary fashion, others have *yarmulkes* on their heads, and still others are wearing dresses that appear to come from an old wardrobe. The tension between the familiar and the foreign, the present and the past, has been suspended, defused, thanks to the simple, intimate, and direct narrative, the openness to the audience, and the context of the present (though the latest date heard in these stories is 1939). There is no mention of what separates this world from our own – the cataclysm, the Holocaust, hatred, pogroms. The actors listen intently to one another, to each others’ tales, allowing the words to resonate, and sensitively mark the time; by the same token, they imperceptibly

draw us into their community. We have the impression that they are untouched by the trauma of the destruction of the world of which they are speaking, as though they all belonged to it and consider themselves repositories of its memory. Through words, light, and theater a mirage is created, one almost as beautiful and alluring as the blessing scene in *The Tempest*. The aim, however, is not to build illusion or a false self-consciousness. Here theater summons all its resources – the live presence of the actors, direct contact with the audience, words that create a reality – to deal with what presently seems well hidden.

In this scene Warlikowski's theater is reborn, situating itself on the verge between the present and the past, memory and oblivion, introducing historicity, not as a more or less remote costume, but as a live dimension of existence, and one that the average experience neglects and pushes into the unconscious. An attempt at another tale begins, wherein language and speech become capable of creating a narrative, and, at the same time, of building a link between the present and the absent, the unconscious and the conscious – even if the first scene in *Dybbuk* seems no more than a beautiful mirage, an undeserved moment of holiday and clarity. The purity of tone in which *Dybbuk* begins could suggest that the work of mourning has been accomplished, that the loss of the beloved object has been grieved. The play, however, speaks of something else – of mourning that is impossible, incomplete, and even undesired.

Szymon Ansky's and Hanna Krall's *Dybbuk*, Hanoach Levin's *Krum*, and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* – the three plays that Warlikowski made between 2003 and 2007 – are based on an unveiled narrative gesture, an exposed plot structure, and on the interweaving of the present and the past. It was much the same with Andrew Bovell's play, *Speaking in Tongues*, which Warlikowski directed in Amsterdam in 2004. In these performances the storytelling situation winds through fields with various functions, not naively presupposed, as the evident nature of theater, but quite the contrary, it emerges as an unanticipated form, requiring comprehension, and revealed in clear, rhetorical figures. The capacity to spin a narrative shows itself to be a necessity, located deep in the heart of the human experience. Learning its rules becomes a cognitive act involving one's most basic attitudes toward the world, but also cognition of the very act of cognating, of its structures and limitations. This is precisely the subject of the final tale in the first scene of *Dybbuk*. Told by Andrzej Chyra, who will play Chanan and Adam S., his tale rings different from the others; with every word it accumulates passion, power, and an unsettling, dark tone. Man's great task is to recall what has been forgotten, his own beginnings rooted both in the bases of spiritual life and in the hidden weave of human fates: "From the moment of his birth man begins to forget about higher worlds. From time to time, however, a faint memory of knowledge from before his birth emerges, and then an equally weak recognition of events and

people appears to us. The people we meet in our lives have their own destinies and are entangled in a cosmic plan.”

According to Freud, forgetting is little more than concealment, repression, or denial. It is a memory block, never an erasure, and the obligation to remember becomes a principle of psychoanalytical healing, at the end of which the memory brings forth an event which cannot be forgotten, but which, as it turns out, sticks deep in the core of the patient’s every story. This narrative experiment, this talking cure, goes beyond the horizon of psychoanalytic therapy. Through a radical experience of discontinuity it can become a narrative model both for historical trauma and for a religious experience. This is exactly what occurs in *Dybbuk*: all the discourses (psychoanalytical, historical, and religious) meet in the same structure, which emerges with increasing clarity as the story progresses. This is a strong and universal structure; one would even be inclined to call it architectural and sacred.

Horizontality

A horizontal line, captured in a wide, panoramic frame dominates the space in *Dybbuk*. The situations on stage are created in a similar fashion, according to straight lines that run parallel to the audience. This horizontality seems to contrast the theme of the performance, the return of human souls to the world of the living, religious meditation on the bond between God and man, extracting memories from the murk of oblivion. Each of these subjects is associated with a vertical movement, breaking through the worldly, corporal dimension. The space of the stage imposes its own structure, however; everything here transpires between people, in social relations, rituals, and meetings. The elements of this story are the tale, confession, judgment, parable, myth, mystery, recollections, and conversation. Interweaving voices and various forms, words tied up in interpersonal situations compose the narratives. It is only in horizontal social relationships that the holy, the eternal, the universal can appear, but only as a splinter, a spark of illumination, the flash of a vision, a sensation. Warlikowski, however, sentimentalizes neither these horizontal social relationships nor this barely tangible verticality. The culmination of all the situations is in the moment of loss, discord, dissonance, in the breaking of norms, and in the blasphemous transgression (there can be no doubt that he is a careful reader of Gombrowicz and Proust).

The asymmetry of the space calls our attention. One of the spaces fills almost the entire stage; the second one nearby is much smaller, seemingly superfluous, an afterthought, holding a sort of annex. The former has large surface areas: a red floor and a bright wall in the depths. The latter is cold, monochromatic, and more

cluttered: a table and chair stand on a sloping metal floor. The larger space becomes a *mikvah* and a temple (these two spaces substantially overlap), a wedding house, and a place of visions, heretical investigations, nudity, and amorous ecstasy. The smaller one serves everyday situations, conventional relationships, social transactions, orthodox religiousness, prayer, and the study of books. Movement between these two worlds, the imbalance between them, and the kind of aesthetic and practically ontological leap create the narrative rules in this performance. Myth, ritual, and the bonds between people acquire meaning in moments of breakdown, in spasms of suffering, and through individual searches and a lack of existential humility. The extreme, momentary, and fleeting are shunted into the foreground, while the quotidian and dominating discourses are pushed off somewhere to one side.

The space seems provisional: a light metal construction, in whose depths the outskirts are marked by a wall of light wood boards. The chairs are reminiscent of a waiting room or a cafeteria, as is the neon lighting. The materials and textures are in no way refined. It is only mid-way through the performance that we realize that this provisional, cheap construction replaces something, indicating an absence. As in a dream, a colorful landscape of animals and floral decorations appears on the wooden wall – it is a wall painting from the obliterated wooden synagogue. Unicorns playfully leap from their places and run into the distance, vanishing from the picture. The other parts of the wall painting vanish in turn, until the wall is empty.

Women are seated in a row before five old dressing tables with large mirrors. The preparations for Leah'le's wedding are underway – the collective narrative situation returns. The composition of the stage is allegorical: a girl of only a few years old sits in front of the first mirror, the oldest woman before the last. The tableau evokes numerous associations of family rituals, motherhood, the affirmation of life, the sanctity of everyday duties, ordinary heroism, a multigenerational family, the security of the home. The experience of the passage of time, the road from childhood to old age, becomes a static, horizontal image and a social situation, both traditional and ceremonial. The bond between generations seems perfectly natural and alive here, and memory a common property to be generously divvied up. At the same time, this image is marked by qualities that are radically different: foreignness, death, irreversibly broken ties, and absence. It is the rhythm of the composition, the loneliness of each figure, and the melancholy of the mirror reflections that tell us this. The old, prewar furniture is a compelling, material trace of a world that no longer exists; objects salvaged from annihilation, set in a neat row, practically create a museum exhibition. Leah'le speaks of a life that is suddenly broken, unfinished, of a lost lover. Instead of a wedding dress she wears male clothing, discarded on the stage by a man with a cigarette who eavesdropped

on the women's conversation. Leah'le wants neither the nuptial ceremony nor the ritual of mourning that would allow her to break free from the love that ties her to the deceased. She longs to remain with the consciousness of the wound, the loss, the dilemma. This is why she performs the transgressive combination of the two rituals and the transgression of gender.

The Transaction

Stephen Greenblatt's writings often make reference to the English theater's adoption of liturgical garb and objects from the Catholic Church, which, during the time of Shakespeare, was on the defensive. Their use in the theater was meant to expose the theatrical – and thus fraudulent – nature of the Catholic rituals. Greenblatt ties this in with the widespread cultural conflict that was underway in England at the time. The Anglican Church was striving to destroy its competition, the “geysers of charisma.” “At the heart of this struggle, which eventuated into a murderous civil war, was the definition of the sacred, a definition that directly involved secular as well as religious institutions.”⁸⁷ Greenblatt also writes of the links between Shakespeare's plays, primarily *King Lear*, and the booklet Samuel Harsnett published at the same time, which sought to expose the ritual of exorcisms as an elaborate comedy for the boorish mob. Greenblatt explains that the aim was to “cap permanently the great rushing geysers of charisma released in rituals of exorcism.”⁸⁸ The Shakespearean theater assimilated the costumes, props, and elements of the struggling religion, consented to its desacralization, and, by the same token, confirmed the Anglican Church's view that Catholic rituals were essentially theatrical. This transaction, which was both financial and cultural, acquires a more ambiguous significance. It is not strictly limited to the devaluation of the symbolically sold goods. “Far more than thrift is involved here. The transmigration of a single ecclesiastical cloak from the vestry to the wardrobe may stand as an emblem of more complex and institutional changes [...]: a sacred sign, designed to be displayed before a crowd of men and women, is emptied, made negotiable, traded from one institution to another.”⁸⁹

The act of disillusionment and the loss of significance linked to this transaction confirm, on the one hand, what theater is not (church, religion, ritual). However, in creating the space of a void after ritual and the sacred, it also evokes, on the other

87 Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare and the Exorcists,” in: *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in the Renaissance*, University of California Press, Oakland 1989, p. 95.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

hand, a wide sphere of recollections, associations, and desires. To cite Greenblatt once more, Shakespeare's theater "paradoxically creates in us the intimation of a fullness that we can savor only in the conviction of its irremediable loss."⁹⁰ Greenblatt may be even ready to propose the thesis that Shakespeare's theater owes its greatness, its rank, and its extraordinariness to the destruction of the position of the Catholic Church in England.

The religious experience fascinates Warlikowski in terms of the melancholy of loss; and the signs of the sacred are located, here, strictly in the horizontal perspective of the theater, much as on the Shakespearean stage, as traces or empty signifiers, fault lines, points of discontinuity. Theater becomes a "geyser of charisma" through its uncompromising extremity, the intensity of human experiences, and its sacrilegious courage in using religious associations. Warlikowski does not make a frontal attack on the Catholic Church, however (the derisive scene of the Catholic wedding ritual in *The Taming of the Shrew* is one of few exceptions to this rule). He is far from Grotowski's dialectic of building a blasphemous tension between the corporeality of the actor and the sacred symbol. His is more the strategy of rational deconstruction, decontextualization, and cultural shift. He sees a certain repertoire of sacrilegious and rebellious gestures as outworn and ineffective. He needs a more spacious area for his work, one that is culturally open and somewhat cosmopolitan, one that provides the opportunity to lock horns with other traditions, to play with symbols; on the other hand, he avoids the Polish compulsion of settling scores with Catholic tradition. Rather, he proceeds in terms of established facts, making bold cultural projections to create the impression that we live in a post-Catholic country, in a post-Christian world, condemned to independent spiritual quests and provocative or melancholy attempts to restore our rituals. He seems impatient for social change; he precedes it, arranges it in his theater, and confronts the audience with it. He makes us understand that we are in a region that has lost its traditional source of charisma; he ignores the forms of the ritual life that the Polish Church effectively spreads across a wide spectrum.

Dybbuk speaks of precisely such a religious experience, albeit shifted into the sphere of another culture. This shift remains entangled in a range of sharply contradicting feelings and emotions. On the one hand, it teaches the audience to see their own culture from an ethnographic distance; on the other, it draws from the tradition of Jewish spirituality, and thus, from an authentic experience of loss, which is, moreover, sullied with a sense of guilt born in historical trauma. The finale of Ansky's play thus comes in the contemporary world, amid figures presented by Hanna Krall in the short story of the same title. The transition occurs almost imperceptibly (clearly, in order to provoke our consciousness and memory,

90 Ibid., p. 128.

because this is where the gulf of the Holocaust occurs). Opening the wooden gates, Hannan and Leah'le walk into the depths, find a mattress to lie down, and turn into the protagonists from Krall's story: Adam S. and his wife, an American couple. With one fluid movement we go from a space of tradition, continuity, and memory to one of uprootedness, loss, incurable trauma, and ceaseless wandering between cities, continents, cultures, and times.

This sort of space comes naturally to Warlikowski, who knows how to navigate his way through it. He is ready to perceive disinheritance as a fortunate circumstance that expands individual freedom; and, as he has done before, he would surely like to share the lesson of uprootedness with Polish society, which is stifled by the limitations of its culture. If I read this message correctly, there is a great deal of ambiguity in this stance. Firstly, we know the price of this uprootedness. Secondly, for Polish audiences in particular, the impulse to evoke a collective sense of guilt is inscribed in the reception of the performance. If Warlikowski had not taken this into account he would not have accused us of repressing and forgetting, and he would certainly not have staged *Dybbuk* in the first place. This standard call to wrestle with the conscience (without the essential spark of provocation) might obscure other, more interesting aspects of the performance. Greenblatt has described the story of the creation of the Jewish Museum in Prague, whose collections were gathered during the war on a Nazi initiative, to educate bureaucrats involved in the "final solution to the Jewish question." He calls attention to the "cultural machine that generates an uncontrollable oscillation between homage and desecration, longing and hopelessness, the voices of the dead and silence,"⁹¹ behind any attempt to commemorate Jewish culture and the experience of the Holocaust. Warlikowski's *Dybbuk*, and particularly the final part based on Hanna Krall's short story, appeals, above all, to a simple impulse of sympathy for the victims of historical trauma, without addressing any concrete or uncomfortable questions that could wound Polish audiences. It poses none of the questions which Jan Błoński once did in the pages of *Tygodnik Powszechny*,⁹² nor does it shock by making history tangible, as Jan Tomasz Gross did in *Neighbors*. A more complex meaning is shifted into a different sphere, namely, the experience of people whose cultural dislocation is grounded in their traumatic relationship with culture, who seek new spiritual paths in traditions that are not secure or established, ones that involve personal risk. This is the subject of Hanna Krall's

91 Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Lavine, Smithsonian Books, Washington 1991, p. 48.

92 Jan Błoński called upon the Poles to make an unconditional recognition of their guilt as indifferent witnesses to the Holocaust. Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto" [The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1987, No. 2.

story of an American Jew who, seeking his place in a post-traumatic world, becomes a Buddhist monk. If, however, we begin to metaphorize and universalize these stances, events, and fates, we encounter the danger that Greenblatt described in relation to a permanent exhibition of children's drawings from Theresienstadt at the Jewish Museum in Prague. "It seems wholly absurd, even indecent, to worry about the relative artistic merits of the drawings that survive by children who did not survive."⁹³ The experience of the Holocaust continues to paralyze traditional ways of thinking and aesthetic affinities in making art.

In *Dybbuk* it is not only memory-related issues, subject to obvious and ultimately emotional mechanisms, that astonish us, but also questions pertaining to the source of spiritual charisma, the places where it manifests itself in the contemporary world, and the price of the trauma with which one must pay for it. Here, the game is for charisma: theater, it appears, seeks to be not only its reflection, not only to speak of it, but to become its living and immediate voice. Thus we have a visible attempt to dismantle theatricality from the very first scene onward, a battle for a live and unmediated bond with the audience. This explains the sensuality, the eroticism of this performance, the physicality translated into the sphere of religious experience. The bathhouse that generates erotic tension between Hejnech and Hannan is also a temple where a Leah'le and Hannan, both half-naked, perform a sovereign marriage act.

The theater as a place of profanation provides a sense of fullness and freedom, drawing strength and credibility, because it allows the ritual to be fulfilled in a meeting between people. The sphere of the sacred expands to include what is cursed, implanting it in the body and in the primordial impulse of longing for another person. The religious ritual, on the other hand, is shattered and profaned: a play of possession is created from the wedding costumes, signs, gestures, and props, a play which involves the collective perhaps like no other, which transforms social life into a spectacle filled with the most vital emotions. Dressed in her wedding gown, hiding behind her veil, Leah'le circles the groom in a mad sprint, throwing herself at him as if she were a man, pressing a passionate kiss to his lips, and then violently pushing him away. Submitting to the rhythm of the ecstatic dance, she enters an amorous relationship with her reflection in a mirror. The conventional social ritual grinds to a halt all around her, and the wedding guests view the scene of possession with drowsy apathy. As Jean Duvignaud has noted, the powerlessness of the participants reinforces the symbolic significance of a cultural spectacle.⁹⁴ The entranced theater and body, paying no heed to the costume that belongs to another rite, create their own ritual from one that has been demolished, revealing

93 Ibid., p. 46.

94 Jean Duvignaud, "Teatr w społeczeństwie, społeczeństwo w teatrze" [Theater in Society, Society in Theater], trans. L. Kolankiewicz, *Dialog* 1990, No. 9.

man as a torn creature, vainly striving for fulfillment. It is this negative ritual, with its beauty and powerlessness, that gains credibility. Derrida would say that it reverses the relationship between the original and the stage replica. The ritualistic original makes our experience inaccessible, shifting it into the sphere of absence, regarding its theatrical deconstruction less as an effect of the emulative nature of theater than as a mark of wounded spirituality in the bodies of the actors and the forms on stage. The clear premise here is that a deconstructed and aestheticized ritual essentially unites people around the experience of loss, and is, perhaps, the only ritual in our world that is not falsified or tainted with bad faith.

The Father of Individual Prehistory

The mechanism of shifting charismatic power is even more vivid in the trial scene. Orna Porat, an actress from Israel, plays Rabbi Azrael, who has to free Leah'le's soul from the *dybbuk*. Porat's gray, flowing hair, the beautiful, striking, almost masculine features of her face, the dignity of her bearing, the white of her garb, the melody of the foreign language, the tangible foreignness, all give her a powerful presence in the play. We feel the strength of the person behind the character. Her personality, her thespian and human charisma, which seems to strain out of the framework of the fictional character and its religious function, belong less to the world of traditional religiousness and its symbolic figures than to a real person living in the contemporary world of altered signs and identities. The fact that a woman plays the rabbi shifts the entire event from the realm of stage fiction into the sphere of current events, in the culture where Warlikowski's theater takes place. Strong mothers, bringing hope of rebuilding the world, of releasing it from the fetters of a dead paternal law, always play an important role in his performances. This is how I understand the scene in Gertrude's bedroom in *Hamlet*, for instance: a naked Hamlet goes to his mother to shake her, to appeal to the most primordial of human bonds, to rebuild reality from the ground up. This is also why the Tzadik in *Dybbuk* has female features. In the context of Polish culture, customs, and religiousness, it would seem that stigmatizing the patriarchal figure of a priest with foreignness has a special power, as it operates in several fields simultaneously. It is tied to a change of sex and draws from the bigender figure of the "father of individual prehistory,"⁹⁵ which, according to Freud, is the first identification made in the earliest phase of mental existence and, at the same time, the most primitive ideal of the ego. (This is not the first time Warlikowski

95 Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. James Strachey, W. W. Norton and Company, London 1989, p. 26.

has demonstrated brilliant psychoanalytical instinct, basing a theatrical figure or a staged situation on an archaic psyche, thus ensuring particularly powerful resonance.) Julia Kristeva has made reference to this Freudian figure, seeking to restore an aspect of love, forgiveness, and generosity to the figure of the father, and to join the semiotic with the symbolic, thus breaking down the anti-patriarchal attitude of contemporary culture.⁹⁶ (Warlikowski's intentions are, perhaps, not so clear, but this is the second patriarchal figure in his theater, following Prospero in *The Tempest*, who is entangled in a difficult task of forgiveness.) At the same time, this strong figure is shifted into the Jewish cultural sphere, with its centuries of alienation and religious biases, and ultimately, its ruthless annihilation. Small wonder, then, that she appears in Warlikowski's performance shrouded in an aura of the uncanny, instilling anxiety, combining the familiar and the alien, emerging from the dark realm of the forgotten. At the time of judgment, of forging ties with the world of the dead, the stage is illuminated with a cold, white light. We hear a distant hum and muffled voices; a child cries, the shattered sounds of extermination. Thus we discover that the dead have not forgiven the perpetrator.

96 Cf. T. Kitliński, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

Ritual

Non-theater

Krum begins imperceptibly, gray and unspectacular. A few actors walk across the stage in silence and sit in the first row of the audience. The lights go out. In silence, we see a sentence on a screen hanging over the stage: “Your mother died two hours ago.” It is as though this information were for all of us, audience and actors alike. It is as if it sought to join us all in a universal experience we have shared either in waking, in dreams, or in our imaginations, and now we are experiencing it once more in a compelling silence. On the screen, a man appears, his hands covering his face. We see him in a few sloppily edited and framed shots: the white space of a public toilet, an open door to a cubicle, within which the man sits, smoking a cigarette; he throws it on the floor and stamps it out. He begins speaking softly, intimately even, to his dead mother. Not reconciled to her death, he calls out to her to awake, to rise: “We’ll laugh together about this nightmare we’ve dreamed.” Where are we, in the cinema or the theater? Are we in waking reality or in a dream? Holding a suitcase on wheels, the same man stands under the screen, by a wall. The square frame of light cuts his profile from the darkness: we can see a jaunty cowboy hat and sunglasses. Actors are sitting in the first row, before the audience; we join them in watching the same film and the same doubled figure of the man. His monologue says that the mourning ritual cannot be closed: “I am not yet ready for this sort of weeping.” The camera insistently observes his face, as if to reveal his theatrical tears: indeed, his hands pull back to show dry cheeks on a seemingly indifferent face.

In the first sequence, the *Krum* character is masterfully split in two. We see him on the screen, hear his monologue, and observe his figure, framed in light, remote and affixed to the wall, the reflection of his back in the window to one side, cast far beyond the space of the stage. There is no agreement or coherence between the image, the voice, the live figure of the actor, and his mirror reflection; this portrait of *Krum*, incapable of adopting the task of mourning, reveals his extreme predicament at his mother’s death. This moment hangs in real suspension – the play has not yet begun, its first scattered signs appear in the “here and now” of reality, which remains authentically experienced by the audience. It is hard to establish the temporal and narrative relationships within this image. Is

the on-screen Krum a projection of the Krum standing here with his suitcase? Which is the present Krum, and which the Krum from the past? To which of them does the monologue speak? As such, the mourning ritual spreads over several depths and levels of the narrative, it is an impossible experience, lived in pure negativity and inaccessibility. The work of mourning is social by nature, allowing for the suffering of loss and the restoration of bonds; it has its own cultural forms and gestures.⁹⁷ Here, a mutilated mourning ritual is set against the mismatched backdrop of a public lavatory, becoming a pitifully powerless and solitary act, shattered through the multiple reflections of the same figure. The private attempt to mourn is shown on the screen as in an enlargement, to a double audience, the real one and the actors. We have found ourselves in the cinema, in the temple of new myths; film discovers and sanctifies new cultural codes, unearths the unofficial nooks of life, and changes them into ritualized patterns of behavior. The intimate moment of despair over the death of a loved one (and the inability to mourn) is in danger of becoming comedy and is mercilessly exposed against a backdrop of the cold, white walls of the bathroom. The medium of film turns it into a kind of private ceremony that seems to doubt its own dramaturgy and the accompanying emotions. It becomes a new paradigm of contemporary ritual, feeding on the void in the wake of the old ceremonies and the sincerity of private gestures. This double message, however, has yet another frame – the theater – in which experiences of loss acquire an even profounder emotional resonance, as a result of the live and immediate contact between the actors and the audience.

The screen goes black, a woman in a black lace dress stands in the front row and turns toward the viewers: “The plane has landed. In a moment I shall see my son. He’s already here.” Someone else, as though parodying Krum’s confession, says that he cannot cry, though crying loosens the diaphragm and improves the health. Voices are heard, some of them spoken through wireless microphones; we have the impression that several situations and places are overlapping. The sentimental song from the record that Dulce plays to help Tugati finally cry becomes, at the same time, a musical backdrop for Krum’s meeting with his mother. First they quarrel, then they greet each other warmly. Tugati does not manage to squeeze out a single tear, but the mother weeps as she clings to her son. The actors turn directly to the audience, each of them trying to pull us into his or her story, to gain our sympathy, to make us laugh, to move us. The multiple voices create the same space, set in motion the same tale. Warlikowski allows the plots to interweave, just as he allows the actors to turn directly to the audience.

97 “The mystery play of mourning transforms experiences into inter-subjective relations, weeping is played like a musical composition, and the tension arising from the feeling of pain precisely organizes the combined actions” (J. Kordys, *Kategorie antropologiczne i tożsamość narracyjna* [Anthropological Categories and Narrative Identity], Krakow 2006, p. 140.

Since the premiere of *Dybbuk* the central point in Warlikowski's theater has been the unfinished mourning ritual. The closing of *Dybbuk* is Hanna Krall's story of an American Jew who discovers the unfamiliar voice of a sobbing child within him. The voice is revealed to belong to his half-brother, who cried so loudly that the Jews in hiding put him out onto the street, and he subsequently perished. In search of spiritual aid and advice, Adam S. finds Samuel Kerner, a New York Jew, a hippy who converted to Buddhism and became a monk. A ritual takes place, or perhaps a psychotherapeutic seance, aiming to free Adam S. from the soul of the dead boy living inside of him. Adam S. begins to cry on the monk's couch; after several hours of unrestrained screaming, the soul of the child decides to leave the host, and his half-brother's weeping suddenly falls silent. Unable to break the ties with him, bound by the trauma of his death, Adam S. recalls his soul. In Warlikowski's production, using neutral lighting and only what props are necessary, with all the characters present on stage together the whole time, Hanna Krall's story is more *told* than staged or enacted. In a similar space, where theater is suspended and the house lights are on, *Angels in America* begins with a rabbi's speech at the funeral of Sara Ironson, an old Jewish woman. Her grandson, Louis, a New York gay with leftist convictions, is aloof from the ritual taking place. He is unable to find his place in it, and he mocks its forms, although the rabbi's speech resounds with true strength in this discovered space of the theater. In this performance as well, a woman plays the rabbi. Once again we are dealing with a strong and authentic geyser of charisma, with a shift of the ritual into the sphere of the bare theater that takes over after *Dybbuk*. It soon emerges that Louis is incapable of dealing with the experience of illness and the prospect of his lover's death.

The incapacity to perform the mourning ritual in Warlikowski's theater has two causes: the fear of hollow ceremony and traumatic dependency. Trauma is capable of inspiring the need for ceremony, but ceremony can never free one from trauma. A mourning ritual that cannot be enacted supplies Warlikowski with his main subject, the basic model of his narrative, and establishes the poetic of the undermined and suspended theater.

The Floor

The floor in *Krum*, created from actual old parquet slats of the leveled Praha Cinema in Warsaw,⁹⁸ is reassembled here, in the theater. Sometimes it seems

98 "The play was supposed to be performed in the old Praha Cinema. It turned out, however, that it [the cinema] was slated for destruction. Somehow we managed to salvage part of that cinema: for one thousand zloty we purchased the gorgeous parquet floors and seats. That was how a somewhat clinical, sterile, yet living chamber of memory came to be, a chamber

an utterly ordinary facet of mundane reality, the floor of an apartment, a night club, or a cinema. It marks out the same dull horizon of a tedious reality. On the floor there is the constant movement of the characters, the shifting to and fro of furniture, the daily bustle inextricably trapped in the tight frame of the *theatrum mundi*. The dilapidated, darkened parquet slats bear real traces of such movement. Fan ventilators, their sleepy, monotonous, slow movement bespeaking the same experience of boredom, lingering, vacuity, and futility, hang from the ceiling. This is not the first time the floor becomes a powerful and significant element in one of Warlikowski's performances. On an aesthetic level, it could be that there was the need to build a strong sense of reality on stage, firmly rooted in the authentic, the intent to reconstruct the world from the ground up.

This floor has the power to attract, giving the characters, objects, and situations a firm foothold, creating the illusion of solidity and longevity. It is also easy to slip and fall on, however; the falling motif is one of the understated symbolic motifs in this production, summoning associations with death, and with getting bogged down in hollow, sterile, everyday life. Images of people lying on the floor and observing the world from this angle, or crawling on all fours also recur, as in the scene where the characters search for a button that has fallen from Cica's dress. Here, Warlikowski's horizontal obsession takes on a particular gravity, a tone that is comical and pessimistic all at once. In the second part of the performance the floor is sometimes illuminated by shafts of low, celadon-tinted light, which seeps in through the cracks between the walls and the floor. In this light, the crookedly laid floor creates a landscape of sorts, like the bed of an ocean, full of small depressions and ridges; it is strange and shorn of function, beautiful and abstract. It alludes to a ruined space, both a remnant and a reminder of absence. The indelible stamp of destruction marks the work of reconstruction.

The Uncanny

In his brilliant analysis of the "uncanny" (*Unheimliche*, in German), Freud described a neglected aesthetic category and exposed its deep psychological repercussions.⁹⁹ Through negation, the *Unheimliche* appeals to the imagination associated with the home, the family, the hearth – all that is homey, familiar, and intimate. Warlikowski's *Krum* also draws from this sphere of associations –

which had several overlapping and intermingling spaces, as in a dream" ("W pokoju pamięci" [In the Chamber of Memory], J. Targoń interviews Jacek Poniedziałek, *Didaskalia* 2005, Nos. 65/66, p. 9).

99 Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *The Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, trans. Joan Riviere, Hogarth Press, London 1925, pp. 368-407.

from family relationships, mother-child bonds, childhood friendships and homes. Freud read the negation in this word not only a simple reversal that created an unambiguous, opposite meaning. The negative prefix here also includes, to his mind, the idea of repression, a mechanism that prompts a temporary visit to the sphere of the unconscious and blocked memories. The return of the familiar from the space of repression generally has a powerful impact, releases fear and anxiety, and disrupts a stabilized mental situation. This is the situation inscribed in Hanoch Levin's drama: *Krum* begins with the title protagonist returning to his hometown, to his mother, to the fiancée he does not love, to his childhood friends. For Krum this return means the collapse of his life and the necessity to confront once more what he had struggled so long to escape, what he had tried to forget, which now, terrifyingly enough, seems the sole prospect for further existence. There is no room, it would appear, for the "uncanny" that Freud described. It is Warlikowski who introduces it into the play, making the play's end come at the beginning: the news of the mother's death and Krum's monologue. Thus the play begins with a shock, a jolt, a stimulation of suppressed emotions, an appeal to repressed experiences. It is from this perspective that we join Krum in staring at the world of his childhood, which lingers on in a strange and ghostly fashion. His return is played out from a double time-perspective, in the framework of a double narrative, allowing the banal events to filter through the uncanny and, by the same token, become distorted, illuminated by an unfamiliar, surreal light.

Warlikowski composes ordinary, everyday situations in a peculiar way: he geometricizes them, shatters a sense of natural locations, lights the stage in an artificial manner, and persistently uses analogy, parallels, and mirror images, setting figures in frozen poses and allegorically composed relationships. It somewhat recalls George Segal's installations of plaster images of people placed in everyday situations and surroundings: in front of a television set, in a bar, on a bed, in a half-open doorway. Segal's sculptures evoke the casts of the inhabitants of Pompeii drowned in the boiling lava of Vesuvius, their bodies burned away, leaving hollows in the lava. During the rehearsals for *Krum*, Warlikowski drew upon ethnographic museums which use mannequins and everyday objects to depict images of ancient forms of social and family life, and attempted to approach the theater of daily life from this perspective. This explains the posed quality of this performance. Almost all the actors wear wigs and stark costumes, and are often dressed oddly or inappropriately for the situation. One of the basic rules of the uncanny, an uncertainty in the depth of creatures who are apparently alive, is at work here. In Warlikowski's production this uncertainty cuts through the whole world on stage, where people are actors with a meager repertoire of scripts to live by, slaves to the social customs thrust upon them, participants in pathetically impoverished rituals. None of the characters in *Krum* change their

costumes (with a few spectacular exceptions), they repeat the same gestures, express the same opinions, have the same pitifully banal aspirations. They bring to mind dolls, mannequins, or automatons, producing the repetition so often found in the uncanny. Warlikowski almost entirely removes the social drama in Levin's play (at most using emphatically stressed quotes), revealing the neurotic space of everyday drama: a sphere of anxieties, frustrations, revulsion, and obsessive-compulsive behavior.

The uncanny is also tied to what Freud called a "narcissistic overestimation of subjective mental processes,"¹⁰⁰ which presents the consciousness as foreign, external, and seemingly independent from the ego. Krum makes himself neutral, an external narrator on the life going on around him. He intends to write a painfully sincere novel that will compromise everyone around him, about the world that shaped him, which he tried, in vain, to discard. This is why he turns the people near him – people that are alien, but simultaneously obedient to his will – into *doppelgängers* of himself. Tugati, Tactic, and Shkita, grotesque, comical characters incapable of coping with the art of life, seem to enact the scripts for life that Krum has abandoned. They are incarnations of infantile, repressed aspects of Krum's personality, which he despises and mocks, yet for which he feels compassion. In Krum's internal theater all the protagonists slowly turn into ghosts and phantoms. The last of these is Cica, a woman beyond his reach, the personification of his dreams of a better life, of passionate love, and of sexual fulfillment, and a world traveler. In one of the final scenes, Cica lies on the floor like a great, discarded doll, a sleeping mermaid. She slowly awakes to a strange, oneiric life: her movements are stiff, automatic, abrupt, her voice artificially modulated to the lower, sensual, gravelly registers. As Krum reaches the end of his long road, Cica appears and cuts all of Krum's ties with this world: Trude is abandoned and given to Tactic, Tugati dies, Shkita departs. The narcissistic mechanism of cutting ties and creating projections ultimately makes him fall prey to the uncanny: the large doll walks out, abandoning Krum in powerlessness and despair.

Transference

In *Krum*, live and immediate contact is initiated with the audience in almost every scene, as in no other Warlikowski play before it. The actors turn directly to the viewers, provoke them, and wait for verbal or physical responses. After returning to his hometown Krum aims his ritual ("And what do we have here?") directly at the viewers, thus setting in motion all the levels of this relationship: fictional

100 Ibid., p. 394.

(the role of Krum's friend), metatheatrical (breaking the rules of the conventional actor/viewer situation), and real (events on stage are shifted into the realm of the viewers' reality).

The breakdown of fiction occurs in a capricious way in this performance; it is unpredictable, sometimes slightly improvised, its rules constantly change. To Krum the audience represents tedium, superficiality, the hopelessness of everyday life. He turns all his contempt and loathing, somewhat tempered with irony and discreet gestures of fraternity, toward us. All of Krum's male *doppelgänger*s – Tugati, Tactic, and Shkita – also turn toward the audience with many of their questions. Felicia, a middle-class woman who is eternally irate, flustered, discontent, and mean-spirited toward others, seeks support from the audience. She tries to win over the audience by shrugging her shoulders, making knowing faces, and bulging out her eyes in shock, as if convinced that her petty, spiteful actions are the incarnation of normalcy, intelligence, and common sense. For the scene of Krum's mother's humiliation, she dresses like a film star, wearing a sparkling silver dress, entering the stage from the audience, holding a microphone. She tries to build an alliance with the audience by humiliating others. Warlikowski adds a cultural commentary to this scene, staging it like a television show, the kind that appeals to the lowest instincts of a stupid and idle viewership.

A specially devised mechanism of transference is at work here: we are amply endowed with all the misfortunes, sicknesses, miseries, and mental disabilities of this little world. As in a psychoanalytical treatment, an open space is created between the stage and the audience. This becomes a realm of transference neurosis, where repressed impulses can appear in a new context, in altered conditions, in an artificially produced relationship, shifted from a zone of unconscious repetition and reenactment to a sphere of consciousness.¹⁰¹ This is why Warlikowski shifts the social and psychological specifics of Levin's drama into the sphere of the uncanny, i.e. familiarity emerging from a sphere of repression. The mechanism of compulsive repetition and reenactment is born, according to Freud, in “[a man's] inhibitions, and unserviceable attitudes, and his pathological character-traits.”¹⁰² In *Krum* we are almost exclusively in the sphere of these experiences. Tactic is constantly degrading himself in front of others, creating the perfectly developed role of his life out of self-degradation. Tugati keeps grappling with the same absurd issues and sinks further and further into idleness. Dupa lives for her dreams of a superman, but conscious of being physically unattractive, settles for the first relationship that comes along.

101 Cf. Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-through,” trans. Joan Riviere, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 12, 1950.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 151

We can be sure that the idea to stage *Krum* came less from a sentimental desire to get to the heart of “ordinary life” than from cultural reflections tied to processes of social transformation, the construction of new social identities, and new models, i.e. the socio-techniques of success in life, which require the repression of many attributes and the cutting of many ties. The brave new world of success, wealth, luxury, and sex is represented by Cica, Dupa’s friend, who, with her Italian lover, appears to be a goddess beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. Dupa, Trude, Tugati, and Krum are clearly abashed by her presence and dazzled by her free behavior, her lack of prudery, her perfect beauty. Danuta Stenka, a brilliant actress, and a true star, a real face from the glossy magazines, plays Cica. Cica and Bertoldo sit on a couch, their backs to the audience, their enlarged faces visible only on the cinema screen, always at ease and smiling victoriously. The two pairs of eternal losers stare at them with bovine delight. We look at the screen, moved by the appearance of this great star with her walk-on part, and we make a transference of this fictional tale’s bitterly comic situation into our reality, from the private space into the social space.

The evocation of transference neurosis and the application of new transferal significance to the symptoms in newly formed relationships compose the first step in classical Freudian psychoanalysis. What must follow is the second step, working-through, i.e. becoming aware of inner blockages and overcoming them. This is a phase that occurs in solitude, and is often imperceptible to beginner psychoanalysts. This “working-through” process is also hidden in *Krum*, and, it would seem that we are stuck in the sphere of repetition, in a theater of situations, gestures, and behavior, in a realm of the same, universal misfortune. The symbol of this working-through process could well be the novel Krum is preparing to write. He seeks, in this way, to become his own therapist, to create an objective, omnipotent, “third person” out of himself – to perform an auto-psychoanalysis and to free himself from himself, from all his “inhibitions and unserviceable attitudes and his pathological character-traits.”¹⁰³ The intention to write a novel allows him to make the reality he returns to less real, and thus, to break into it, to lay internal waste to it, and to give it a new set of meanings. This is why he reserves himself the right to be an omnipotent and omniscient narrator, and above all, a cynical one. He gives himself the privilege of brutality, allowing him to enter into very direct contact with the world, to rip off its mask of everyday ordinariness, and to free himself, not only from convention, but also from the rules of common decency. The privileges of the narrator extract him from his roles in life, allow him to live on the cusp between two worlds that cannot be joined by a coherent narrative. This, too, is why Krum makes the

103 Ibid., p. 151.

other characters his *doppelgängers*. He orders Tactic to marry Trude. Shkita travels abroad, emulating Krum's path. It is with Tugati, however, that Krum is most powerfully tied; he accompanies Tugati in his death, difficult, arduous, and painful as it may be. Tugati is Krum's odd, "inferior" ego. Krum has the assiduousness of a bureaucrat, always wearing a suit, a white shirt, and pressed pants. Tugati has long, sloppy hair, the sincere smile of a child; he wears shabby, tight sweaters with deep necklines, and the checkered pants of a circus clown. He has never traveled anywhere, marries the ugliest woman, and suffers from hypochondria; and, by a bad twist of fate, his fears come true: struck by a mortal illness, Tugati dies without having known another, better life. Yet it is Tugati who allows Krum to realize how closely he is bound to the world, which he has stripped of all value in an act of cynical desperation, reducing it to a revolting and contemptible thing. Krum senses that he has to return to what he has eliminated in himself, that he has to identify with what he had recalled as dirty, wretched, and hopeless, to which he wants to devote neither love nor emotion.

A Diseased Costume

Dupa has only one dress. It is made of black latex, exposes her shoulders, closes with a front zipper, and has a large number of straps, buckles, and clasps, making it look like a sex-shop item to satisfy a sadomasochistic fantasy. This is paired with patterned stockings, high suede boots, rings, and thick make-up. Nonetheless, Dupa is entirely alone, she has no boyfriends. She wears her outfit like a dare, challenging fate and her surroundings. Her black latex dress adheres to her like a second skin. Even when she marries Tugati she just puts a short white skirt on over it, as if treating her new identity as provisional. As time passes we begin to see her outfit as a stamp or a stigma, something that cannot be removed, torn off, or destroyed, a sign of unending humiliation. This dress lets us glimpse a niggling and unstated phantasm. Nan Golding appears in a similar dress in one of her photographs; but in her photograph the staging of self-humiliation involves a conscious play with convention, a conscious theatricalization of a personal situation, perhaps a sexual relationship or merely a fantasy. It is a play on her identity, on the signifiers of big-city culture, an ironic expression of perversity. Dupa, on the other hand, wears the outfit with grim determination, regardless of the situation or her surroundings, utterly unaware of how ridiculous she is.

The Blank Screen

A large cinema screen, blank for the majority of the play, hangs over the characters in *Krum*. Text appears on it, single sentences, questions that capriciously divide the play into parts. Swept up by the constant stream of situations and their fluctuating rhythms, the viewers are not, however, able to grasp a legible pace to these sequences, or analyze the metaphorical sense of their titles. What remains is the impression that the narrator is intervening in the course of life, chaotically trying to put something in order, but is unable to follow through with his intention, and thus prefers to believe in the power of momentary epiphanies than in stabilized meanings. The blank screen seems to signify the novel Krum has not written, a symbol of a failed process of working-through, or one that ever remains hidden. When Krum, Trude, Tugati, and Dupa go to the cinema, no film appears on the screen. A work light is lit and the actors sitting in the depths of the stage stare at us, the audience, at a collection of unwritten novels, at a silent space of life. There is no tale that could set them free, cleanse them, or give meaning to their existence. The actors and the viewers look helplessly at one another. Here, too, the tale on stage utterly crumbles upon recognizing reality, the void, barren expectation; the visit to the cinema becomes a moment of utter disillusion for the theater, for the artists, for the viewers, and for the protagonists of the play. Here, Krum discovers the ultimate significance of the story he has planned, finding the most pithy formulation, and simultaneously undermining the sense in writing it: "Krum. As a colorful biography. One swallowed you, the other spit you out. Like snot in the garbage pile." The internal narrator, meant to be working through things for himself and for us, to free us from the neurotic mechanism of repetition, utterly fails and capitulates, right here, right now, in front of us.

Films appear on the screen, but only between the various scenes, as if in the cracks of the fiction on stage. Made during a trip to present-day Israel, though it seems they could have been made anywhere, the films show life, real places, and actual people. They show fragments of everyday life, shards of a cityscape, its transcultural space shared by us all. The slight foreignness of the situation only increases the sensation that things are the same everywhere, that experiences of daily life are inscribed in the tangible reality of the world, in the sprawling expanse of the *theatrum mundi*, and are simultaneously subject to a melancholy distortion, turned into decorations for the play being performed on stage. The film on the screen is made up of traces of real life and forms no narrative; it turns the world into ruins and stage decor. Warlikowski plays the tension between the real and on-stage worlds with the off-hand manner of a purebred ironist. He keeps guiding our attention to places where a sense of continuity and the capacity to tell a narrative vanish, where unresolvability reveals its melancholy principle, the

empty space meaning left behind, which has been lost, or never fully achieved, Freud's navel of the dream, the inevitable point of deconstruction. However, the more he assembles those scattered pieces into an organized composition and gives them an aesthetic structure (with all the stubbornness of a melancholic), the more he stresses, by extension, that there is no such thing as a natural rhythm, a natural narrative, a natural order. Meaning, at best, is the need for meaning.

The Mourning Ritual

In *Krum*, Warlikowski observes the human need for ceremony when in the state of greatest depression. This world is consumed by an obsession for marriage and wedding rituals, the focus of almost all the characters' aspirations. Krum's mother dreams that he will get married and beget her a grandchild. Felicia and Dulce wolf down food at strangers' weddings. Only Krum is evasive, and at the last minute ducks out of marrying Trude, substituting himself with Tactic. Trude ultimately consents to this union and is ready to fight for happiness in this slapdash relationship. All the couples in *Krum* are mismatched caricatures, joined by a tangle of accidents, stripped of all illusions, yoked to the ruthless mechanism of the farce. The weddings of Dupa and Tugati and of Trude and Tactic take place one after the other: to the same music, at the same table, with the same shot glasses, with the same guests, like a conveyor belt, hasty and slapped together. The guests leave quickly, with a sense of discouragement, without feeling as though they have participated in a living ceremony that unites people. Krum backs out of his intention to marry and, as the protagonist of the drama, does not fulfill the others' expectations of him; as a narrator of the tale he deprives the wedding ritual of its ceremony and significance. The director, on the other hand, keenly stresses this degraded ritual and discreetly appeals to the melancholy experience of loss, building a subtle sense of human bonds around it.

Krum is relieved to back out of the wedding ceremony, but he does commit himself to accompanying the dying Tugati. He turns Tugati's death into a ceremonial cleansing ritual, freeing him from the shackles of degrading physicality. He pulls the audience in as well, inviting a "happy young couple" on stage so that his dying friend can have his picture taken with them (an improvised scene on every occasion, and authentic in its varying shades of whimsicality and embarrassment). At the wake he treats the audience to some real apple cake. From the moment Tugati has a fall, the first sign of his lethal illness, Krum becomes active and lively, working to build solidarity among the other characters, trying to build a warm bond with the audience, abandoning his former contemptuous irony toward them. Ceremony and champagne accompany Tugati's farewell; it is the last

conversation with him, occurring at the same table where the two failed weddings were earlier held. In this scene Tugati no longer looks like a scruffy loser, but is a young and handsome man full of dreams and strength. Like Krum and the doctor, who accompany him on stage, he sits with his feet nonchalantly propped up on the table. Directly addressing the audience, Krum speaks his moving monologue on the nothingness of the body, life, and human desires, all the while touching his face, legs, arms, genitalia, as if saying farewell to himself, in ecstasy and with no regret. At one moment, in a wheelchair, Tugati slowly moves into the depths of the stage. The swinging door silently opens in front of him, and then closes just as silently, as if to back Krum's argument that death is only a sublime moment of cleansing, a Platonic holiday for the soul.

The mourning process is torn from any kind of routine and is dazzlingly renewed, turned into a living utopia of a human community. The death of Tugati not only liberates Krum from his melancholy paralysis, it reveals the value of life and reconciles him to its passing. Death is inscribed into everyday life, and, in turn, sanctifies the everyday. During the wake, which is a chaos of conversations and the sobbing of Trude's and Tactic's newborn child, Krum pours Tugati's ashes from an urn onto the table, and asks everyone to blow them together. This scene does not occur in Levin's drama; it departs from the story line, but it gains authenticity through brilliant transgression of the laws of probability. It is the moment when the taboo of death is broken, and for the viewer, it is electrifying and deeply moving. It is one of those moments in Warlikowski's theater where we become reacquainted with the horror and sanctity of ritual.

New Life

Human births in Warlikowski's theater are enveloped in a kind of post-traumatic silence. The birth of Perdita in *Winter's Tale* was presented through an empty, transparent baby carriage, a signifier without a signified, a sign linking this fundamental lack to the very beginnings of life. The image of the pregnant woman is often deceptive. In *Roberto Zucco* and in *Hamlet* women with pregnant bellies "give birth" to costumes. In the former, the mother pulls from between her legs a panther-skin costume in which she clothes Zucco, the mythical mother-killer. Ophelia gives birth to a white dress, i.e. her dream of purity, love, and marriage, paved with the very physiology of birthing. The image of biological birth becomes a metaphor for symbolic transformation, and interestingly enough, transformation tied to the act of death, renunciation, destruction, experienced as a wound, a mental rupture, a radical break in identity (essentially, therefore, also tied to the psychoanalytical concept of birth as the original trauma). In *The Bacchae* Agaue

gives birth to the head of her son she has murdered, thus binding birth and death with the same aura of horror and fright, and serving as an echo of sorts of all the play's previous scenes of naked and bloody human bodies.

In *Dybbuk*, as Adam S. speaks of his son's birth, expressing the concern that the dybbuk inside him might come to inhabit the body of the newborn child; a film showing a birth in all its physiology, corporeality, and stickiness, a graphic depiction of live, organic matter is projected onto the back wall. This image lays waste to the metaphorical potential of this scene, not only the hope of breaking free from the phantoms of the past, but also the sentimentalization of the act of birth, as a sign of a true beginning, a profound renewal of life, a transformation of the world so often found in other performances. Warlikowski relentlessly reminds us that trauma must be at the core of spiritual and conscious life, though the routine forms of social life attempt to erase this fact from the social consciousness.

This is precisely what occurs in *Krum*. Trude's and Tactic's child is an ordinary doll, around which a comical and malicious theater of bustling, babbling, soothing, parental vanity and early anxiety are enacted, along with spectacular gestures of tenderness toward the child and irritation toward the surroundings. Trude persistently and infuriatingly demands attention for herself, her motherhood, and her child. The same actress performs the child's loud sobs and the mother's comforting gestures, ruthlessly parodying the sacred bond between mother and child, rendered more in the emotional registers of hysteria than in terms of tenderness and care. Trude less tries to soothe the child than she does her own panic. She invasively arranges everything and everyone around her, unceremoniously pushing aside the urn with Tugati's ashes to make room for the child, the lifeless plastic doll, and performing a solemn diaper-changing ceremony, a pathetic ritual born of repression and forgetting, more a theater of neurotic repetition than a mystery play of the world's renewal. If this scene does have a symbolic clash of images of life and death, they are perfidiously reversed. The ritual of new life is tied to death, while the death ritual invigorates and restores the relationships between people.

Change

The Shared Space and the Third Human Being

Warlikowski's plays attempt to create a shared space for actors and audiences, for the characters on stage belonging to various plots, for the outer and inner world, for theater and life. This shared space is born through reduction, extraction, and retreat. This is visible in the set design itself, and in the way the relationship between audience and stage is composed. There are a great many transparent glass surfaces or half-open, cracked walls, closed spaces which are only provisionally marked, which always have the potential to be universal spaces in the Shakespearean sense, capable of evoking various worlds, allowing them to intersect, open to new plots, characters, and experiences. This sort of space is doubtless the effect of many years of study of Shakespeare's dramas and the ancient tragedies. The space of the stage needs to have a structural logic to facilitate the smooth unraveling of the narrative, it must use multifunctional symbols, and use mental shortcuts, reductions, and simplifications. Yet there is something beyond pure functionality at work here, for it also proposes a living space – exposed, open, clear, and honest. Moreover, it is a design for social space that tends toward transformation. I read a very discreet allegiance to the constructivist utopia here, an art that reveals its rational rules to the viewers in order to incite them, to teach rational attitudes, to encourage people to change the world. The composition of the space of the stage is subject to the rigors of Classical art, tending to the optical independence of each element and does not hide the techtonics of the sketch, grounding the spatial layout in strongly marked horizontal rhythms, where duration takes precedence over monumentality.

The space becomes an ideogram, a record of a clear mental gesture, a conscious dislocation, a retreat from the oppression of local cultural contexts, based on those we stereotypically call "Polishness" or "Catholicness." It is the premises of Classical art that help to give freedom from the Romantic pressure of the *couleur locale*. Warlikowski takes great care to make this gesture simple, rational, stripped of hidden subtext or subconscious entanglement in ignored issues. This is why he builds such universal and open spaces for his theater, constantly traveling between Warsaw, Krakow, Wrocław, Avignon, Paris, Lisbon, New York, and Moscow – a theater inscribed in an ever-changing context. When working in Poland, Warlikowski works strictly with translated texts, and thus always with a

native language that is provisional, temporary, necessarily read in the dual context of the original and the translation. The native language of a literature too strongly rooted evokes uncontrolled resonance, summons a parallel tradition, is a powerful depository of local history, uses idioms and proper names; interestingly, Polish names appear in Warlikowski's work only in the context of the Jewish tradition. I believe this indicates an anxiety toward language, which most powerfully contains what Gombrowicz, with suggestive revulsion, called "steaming domesticity."¹⁰⁴ We might, in fact, say that Warlikowski performs a radical reversal of the typical, average anxiety toward all that is alien, which dwells in the traditional landscape of social attitudes. On the contrary, he feels an anxiety toward the local, despising it and profoundly rejecting it, allowing it to appear only in the aura of the uncanny (as in *The Tempest*, in the scene with the women from Łowicz). In his theater the local becomes foreign, and the foreign local. He is, however, a sufficiently keen observer of life to find realms of dislocation he can relate to in the Polish social reality. He reads a strong temptation for disinheritance in the collective subconscious, and from this he draws, avoiding a head-on collision with all that is local, domestic, and Polish, not wanting to repeat Gombrowicz, whom he has doubtless analyzed carefully. He surely believes that what Gombrowicz called a "third human being [...], a stranger, cold and indifferent, pure, distant, and neutral"¹⁰⁵ would settle into the Polish social landscape once and for all, and even be fortified within it as a new kind of myth, to which Warlikowski's theater is most indebted (or the reverse: the new myth is most indebted to Warlikowski's theater).

Tony Kushner wrote the two parts of *Angels in America* in the latter half of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, registering such political and social shockwaves as AIDS and *perestroika*, documenting the depressive mood of Reagan's America, weaving people from various and often quite orthodox traditions in emotional and psychological binds. Warlikowski maintains the American backdrop of Kushner's play, though he softens and neutralizes it: Belize, for example, a gay nurse, is not dark-skinned, and thus the racial subplot is removed. He also avoids drawing analogies between the America of the time and today's Poland, between the Reagan Era and Kaczyński-Era Poland, pulling back from a confrontation strategy, playing with shifting suspense, shading the relationship between the local and the foreign, zooming in and out, more in search of effective narrative gestures than effective political gestures.

The walls are covered in reflective tin foil – the smudgy reflection of the audience thus becomes part of the world of the stage, integrating the stage and the audience in a simple and almost subconscious way, but purposefully using

104 Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, trans. Danuta Borhardt, Yale University Press, New Haven 2000, p. 280.

105 Ibid.

an image that is blurred. The solid wood paneling of the central wall gives the space a somewhat more official and bureaucratic look, while the side walls with missing paneling are high clearances, revealing the wings. This facilitates passage, shifting props onto the stage, and then partly hiding them once more, because all the pieces of the set are visible throughout the play, anyway. A row of chairs is placed on the line of the proscenium; this is a place familiar from Warlikowski's other plays, where the narrative is revealed, stage characters turn into narrators, creating a zone for actors and audience to forge close ties. On the stage a table, chairs, armchairs, and a sofa-bed form a scattered constellation, the remnants of a family home. The floor is cut in half – the white strip between metal swinging doors, placed opposite one another, suggests a hospital, but also imitates the floor of a television studio, and the black floor with the red-rose motif more belongs to the sphere of dreams, love, and mourning. On one side a hospital bed on wheels, on the other a light-colored wooden coffin on a high, portable frame. Despite these clear indicators of sickness and death, the space is still bright and open, it has movement and action, it creates associations and metaphors, and, above all, it has a narrative capaciousness.

The Storytelling Approach

In analyzing the phenomenon of the person in modern literature, Ryszard Nycz once wrote that a person separated from the majority of social roles finds his/her own integrity only in a sense of the inauthenticity of conventional social bonds, i.e. recognizes him/herself strictly in negative experiences, in the gesture of refusal and rejection. "Consequently, the coherence and the continuity of life lived through one's own experience vanishes (or becomes imperceptible), and as a result, the 'story line' of an individual biography disintegrates into constellations of detached episodes."¹⁰⁶ This is precisely Katherina's experience in *The Taming of the Shrew*: the revue structure of the play itself, its collage style, the psychological incoherence of the main protagonist, and the theatricized creations of the remaining characters were born from a sense of the inauthenticity of social bonds as such. Kushner's drama, on the other hand, sets a great narrative machine in motion, creating a gallery of very individual characters, giving each of them a clear cultural background, granting each his/her own, unique story, and finally, weaving their fates in structures full of paradoxes, coincidences, and emotional breakthroughs. In a final gesture, it transforms them into an epic of

106 Ryszard Nycz, *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości* [Literature as a Trope of Reality], Krakow 2001, p. 79.

a major cultural and social turning point. It is from this sort of narrative that Warlikowski decided to build a kind of extreme experience for actors and viewers both. The very fact of performing this many-hours-long play, based on both parts of Kushner's drama, requires great focus and strength from the actors, as well as a narrative consciousness of creating one's own story and participating in the stories of others.

As ever in Warlikowski's work, the theatrical tasks and those of the actors become a model of a social and ethical experiment, allowing the director to explore the tension between the individual and the society, between the urge for self-contentment and responsibility for others, between fulfilling one's own life and transforming the collective way of living. Warlikowski maintains the epic structure of Kushner's drama, but renders it in a very particular way, placing emphasis on the experience of shared space, revealing the rhetorical figures of this narrative, without concealing them under the guise of "real life." He uses symmetry, reversal, and confrontation, and joins the scenes in larger sequences, playing them simultaneously or binding them with a shared visual motif. Following the dramaturgical solutions of the author himself, he allows the plots to interweave, enabling all of the characters in spaces remote from one another to meet in the context of the same situation, talking with one another in the same dream or hallucination. He also always opens up the space to the viewers, however, drawing them into the sphere of this community created through theater. He appeals to emotions through the intensity of the acting; and through revealing the rhetoric of the narrative he forces the audience to take a creative, critical, and intellectual standpoint, while constantly allowing both these perspectives to overcome one another. The same occurs in psychoanalysis through coupling two linguistic universes, power and meaning.¹⁰⁷

As Harper hallucinates on an overdose of Valium, she meets Walter for the first time and discovers her husband's homosexual tendencies, in a scene that is played out like a television show. Two beams of bright light draw Harper and Walter from the darkness, standing before microphones, and isolate them from one another. The brightness of the lights and the sharp outlines of their figures do, indeed, have the air of hallucination. She enchants with her shyness, he with the seductive charms of a transvestite. The comedic side of their meeting is highlighted with brilliance and precision; we observe each tiny grimace and gesture as if under a magnifying glass, catching every subtlety of intonation. They both belong to different worlds, to different "churches" – he to the New York society of neo-liberal gays, while she is a Mormon, playing the life-long role of the devoted wife. Each of them is experiencing a misfortune. Walter is an AIDS

107 Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage, Yale University Press, New Haven 1977.

victim and his best friend has left him, while Harper is addicted to Valium and unsettled by her husband's odd behavior, which leaves her feeling unloved and alone. The applause of the imaginary television studio audience is audible, as is the laughter of the real audience. The irony the director feels toward television culture in making a spectacle of human misfortunes is most tangible. Yet the irony does not destroy the other meanings behind this scene; on the contrary, it gently gives way to them. The arrangement of this scene divides the characters, makes clear boundaries between them, and simultaneously leads to a final break. There is a bond of sympathy between Harper and Walter: in saying farewell after their appearance, Harper impulsively kisses him on the cheek. This gesture is full of shame, sincerity, and unhampered empathy; the audience greets it with a burst of laughter, thus supporting the fresh bond of solidarity between the characters. This private moment between Harper and Walter is, admittedly, in the sphere of dreams and hallucinations, but the actors, in creating a believable event enacted here and now in front of the audience, succeed in fighting for its absolute authenticity. The climax, therefore, in the public space of the television studio and the real space of the theater, is the forging of a bond between two people who, because of their experiences, origins, and private misfortunes could forever remain alien to one another. Almost from the opening of the performance the actors and the director manage to create something like a minor catharsis, revealing the mechanism by which the whole play operates. It marks out the territories of utopia and reality, allowing them to intertwine, to leave the sphere of anxiety and hallucination, and to enter the sphere of life.

Working Through

Quite possibly Warlikowski had never made such a brightly-colored play. He was even accused of being melodramatic, of succumbing to American optimism, and to the equally American fondness for the sentimental happy ending. It is certain that we can feel a constant movement toward activity in this performance, toward clear decisions and resolutions, toward a desire to know and to voice the truth. Warlikowski's plays had never before been set in such a clear and open social space, as if ignoring the existence of powerful mechanisms of resistance and repression in our society. He does not attack the audience, nor does he accuse; rather, he appeals to the impulse of empathy, the sense of humor, and rational criticism, without stripping the world of its dark, ominous, and irrational aspects.

We might well get the impression that Warlikowski is proposing a surprising shift in hermeneutics, similar to Paul Ricoeur's analysis of Sophocles' two Oedipus tragedies, in which he expands the Freudian interpretation of the myth:

from the tragedy of the sex, the body, incestuous feelings, the unconscious, the night, regression, and destiny, to the tragedy of truth, the day, consciousness, and historicity, from archeology to teleology, from Genesis to the Apocalypse.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, Ricoeur stresses that neither of these hermeneutics creates separate halves; each is entirely contained in the other, because neither withstands a compromise or tolerates eclectic attitudes. This time round Warlikowski is more fascinated by the process involved in forming the consciousness, which, as Ricoeur explains, does not appear at the source, but at the limits. It is less granted than “a task for a being who is somehow bound to those factors, such as repetition and even regression.”¹⁰⁹ Here we ought to recall, once more, psychoanalytic therapy as a model for Warlikowski’s theater. Ricoeur writes that, in analyzing the relationships between the consciousness and the unconsciousness, we too often forget the presence of a third instance, the witness, i.e. the consciousness of the therapist setting in motion the hermeneutic process. What is unconscious reaches the consciousness through the other person who accompanies the process: “it is only for someone other than I even *possess* an unconscious.”¹¹⁰ Here a field opens up for the formation of the consciousness which “makes no sense unless I can reaffirm the meanings which the other elaborates about and for me.”¹¹¹ This is also where the field of theater opens.

When introduced to the theater this model becomes substantially more complicated, of course, though its basis remains the idea of the consciousness as a task, a mutual obligation, the acceptance of responsibility and risk, the entry into an unconventional social situation with the aim of self-recognition. (Ricoeur passionately fights against pigeonholing the concept of psychoanalysis in terms of psychological introspection.)

In *Angels in America*, it is the process of “the other developing meaning for me” that is key, and even thorny and hazardingly opaque. Firstly, Warlikowski is forever breaking the psychological course of the situation, instructing the actors to play to the audience, extracting reflection, albeit of the most banal sort, drawing out the rhetoric of the treatise, the dissertation, the sermon, the admonition, or the confession from the narrative plot. Both parts of Kushner’s drama begin with such a situation. The first part has the rabbi’s speech at Sarah Ironson’s funeral, and the second begins with a speech by the world’s oldest Bolshevik. In both cases Warlikowski attempts to eliminate the theatrical signs; each part begins with the house lights up. The rhetoric of speaking directly to the audience is not only

108 Paul Ricoeur, “Consciousness and the Unconscious” in: *The Conflict of Interpretations*, trans. Willis Domingo, Athlone Press, London 1989.

109 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

111 *Ibid.*

difficult for the actors to play, but in situations of powerful, emotional tension between the characters it seems “unnatural,” and the audience sometimes reacts badly to it, not wanting to accept substance that someone else has prepared for them.

To Warlikowski it is critical that the actors take accountability not only for the characters they play, but also for the text as a whole and its message; he sees the resistance of the audience and the capacity to overcome it as the basis for a living experience, not only for the viewers, but for the actors as well.

The psychoanalytical relationship presupposes imbalance as a problem to be conquered; the therapeutic situation is only a forecast of freedom, a task. The very fact of staging Kushner’s drama could raise many doubts. This is only partly a matter of the text belonging to another culture and being created in very particular political circumstances. Writing about Warlikowski’s play and stating that the transposition of American reality into a Polish context was only partially successful, Rafał Węgrzyniak pointed out what he saw as a few discrepancies: “In Poland, Reagan is perceived as a conqueror of communism and an advocate of the free market. The errors of which Kushner accuses the Republicans and the distortions introduced by the McCarthy committee cannot match the crimes of Stalinism. And the phantom of the Soviet agent, Ethel Rosenberg, executed in the electric chair and praised as a martyr of the communist movement in the People’s Republic of Poland, summons only negative memories. Finally, the subject of equal rights for homosexuals was not, until recently, a significant element of the public debate or a subject of political discussion.”¹¹² The change in context in Warlikowski’s play and its disruption of the customary way of viewing the world is always, however, revitalizing; it draws its energy from communication, demanding an internal shift in consciousness, criticism, approval, or opposition. This shift in context was designed at the very foundation of the artistic creation. Another problem emerges, however. To use psychoanalytical categories, Kushner’s drama is a result of American society having worked through new forces of political pressure, politicizing the debate surrounding all forms of diversity (ethnic, religious, sexual, cultural). Kushner himself played an important role in this working-through process with his plays and public statements. In neutralizing the political immediacy of Kushner’s play, Warlikowski established an image of a society which would seem far better prepared to confront otherness of all kinds than that which we have in Poland, and which independently developed a new language and new models of behavior. This sort of social and ethical readiness is the hidden mechanism of Kushner’s play. Warlikowski treats this as natural, a moral given, and not something that has been acquired by a civilization, and thus,

112 Rafał Węgrzyniak, “Anioły w Nowym Jorku i Warszawie” [Angels in New York and in Warsaw], *Odra* 2007, No. 4.

once more uses the mechanism of cultural projection, as if seeking to prefigure real transformations, to confront Polish audiences with them at once. Ricoeur proposes that in such an event we speak more of a formative than a projective function, thus evoking the notions of *Bildung*, *paideia*, teaching, the idea of perfecting one's consciousness of oneself.¹¹³

Sacred Bonds

One of the play's first scenes presents a man and a woman, Joe and Harper, sitting center-stage in armchairs, facing the audience, holding hands. This is a sacred and mythical image of harmony and togetherness, an image of the first human couple, the parents that originated the human species. The image is plain, simple, direct, and powerful. But the rectangular frame of light illuminates only the man, while the woman remains shrouded in darkness. Joe meets with Roy Cohn and is to receive a splendid job in Washington. Suddenly, the meaning of the image changes entirely. The woman holding his hand is a burden to him, an obstacle in his career, and a weight on his conscience. Furthermore, Joe is concealing his homosexual inclinations from her. In the next scene the light is aimed at Harper. We find ourselves in the world of her thoughts, fantasies, and anxieties. From her hallucinations, we see a figure, Mr. Lies, and along with him, the prospect of her dream journey to Antarctica, a continent without people, countries, or societies. It is white, pure, and cold. Sitting nearby, in the shadows, the figure of Joe appears as a source of suffering, emotional unfulfillment, Valium dependency, and compensatory hallucinations, hidden from all, including Harper. Suddenly this pure, holy, mythical image is severed, broken apart, becoming a picture of isolation, solitude, an existence in remote worlds and destructive entanglements. This image evokes yet another association, of people about to start a long journey, sitting next to another in a waiting room, before heading into the unknown. From here on in, the Joe/Harper and Louis/Walter plots are tied, joined by the motif of departure, of abandoning a partner in poverty, misfortune, and sickness.

113 Paul Ricoeur, "Consciousness and the Unconscious," op. cit., p. 114. "In a sense, a single symbol possesses two vectors. On the one hand, it is a *repetition* (in all the temporal and atemporal meanings of the term) of our childhood. On the other, it *explores* our adult life. 'O my prophetic soul,' as Hamlet says. In this second form the symbol is an indirect discourse on our most radical possibilities, and in relation to these possibilities it is prospective." To this Ricoeur opposes the regressive analysis of the "emergence of a *Bildung*" – the movement of a symbol in two directions is felt with particular force in Warlikowski's theater, if we compare, for example, *Krum* and *Angels in America*.

First, however, Warlikowski brings together the foursome for a collective portrait in the same, intimate space. All four, for example, are placed on chairs in a straight row: they are watching television, and we watch them a moment before their departure, betrayal, illness, or a collapse into neurosis. Another image: two couples are sitting on two parallel couches, the dialogues occur simultaneously, in the same space, with the actors observing each other carefully. Joe and Harper observe the scene between Louis and Walter and vice versa. In fact, they less watch than participate in the same experience, i.e. the separation of loved ones, the growing isolation. The experience is allegedly the same, and yet it differs – different reasons divide Harper and Joe, and Louis and Walter. The borders between people, the borders between dream and waking keep being delicately drawn and then erased: it is no accident that these borders are built and crossed through lighting. No one's truth is ultimately denied or compromised, nor is any accepted and acknowledged as incontestable. Warlikowski spares us no moving and direct scenes, nor does he avoid metaphor. Harper lies under the sofa bed where Joe and Louis sleep, embracing one another. She wipes her face on the dangling hand of Louis, her husband's lover; she consents to humiliation and even yearns for it. In another scene, Louis dreams he returns to Walter as a fiery dancer from a gay club; then this image of glamor and physical vitality suddenly turns gray. Walter is lying on the floor, sick and alone. In the Antarctic hallucination Joe appears as a man with his face veiled, holding the hand of Louis, who is visible only from the waist down. His new relationship seems crippled and phantasmatic, devoid of the bonds which still tie him to Harper.

The foursome meet one more time as figures in a museum diorama, and Warlikowski's play turns into a prayer scene. Louis, Joe, Harper, and Walter are kneeling at the edge of the white floor. Between them are the mannequins of three children and a woman who bears a striking similarity to Harper; this is a holy family bound by love, betrayal, self-inflicted pain, and unborn children. The dream that shines through is of blessing, of human relationships such as they are, in all their complexity and ambiguity, of transporting sanctity into the real world, and of building a church where people truly and profoundly experience their lives. A vision of a temple emerges in the here and now; through light and music, we see a few mannequins and actors, and hear the words of the psalm *The Lord Is My Shepherd*. The sight of the characters kneeling on the white floor might summon an image of people praying on the banks of a river or seashore, by the River Jordan or the Red Sea; it depicts a community awaiting a great transformation.

In the finale Louis returns to Walter. Harper, who remains abandoned by Joe, takes his credit card, and sets off on a great journey. In this scene all the actors in the performance, sitting in armchairs right before the front row of the audience, comment on the events, and drop their roles. We are left with a powerful sense of a

bind: the protagonists' stories are left hanging, anything can happen to them, their futures are wide open. In this case, however, this bind signifies something else as well: the fates of this foursome have been entwined in an intricate pattern, in images with a great emotional payload, combined with an inextricable, that is to say, an ultimately sacred bond. Our thoughts return once more to the image of Joe and Harper holding hands, and we discover that the play has not entirely negated its original meaning.

Extra Ecclesiam

The diorama scene creates within the play the vestiges of a church, a field for religious symbolism, a place of stillness, and a powerful breakdown of the theatrical illusion. There is no story happening here, only the present time, a state of meditation and a readiness to abandon roles (at many points we have the impression of private and improvised conversations between the actors). The straight beams of light extract each of the kneeling figures from the darkness. From a certain perspective, all these figures resemble crippled dolls without legs, beings who suffer, victims of the metaphysical scandal of creation. It is hard to fight the impression that this beautiful scene is an excess, an overabundance; it is too bountiful, it crosses beyond the play's horizon. It seems that in this performance religiousness is reduced to much simpler gestures and attitudes, utterly divorced from the space of the church, and brought into the sphere of the profane, into the realm of human relationships and the most elementary experiences of living. Only in the space of the diorama does a shard of metaphysical thinking emerge, or rather, a melancholy attachment to the gesture of loss, which explains the momentary attempt to reconstitute the space of the temple. The image of the temple swiftly collapses, the actors scatter, the light changes, the sacred music dies. Sitting on a chair in the depths of the stage, Harper places her mannequin on her lap, as if wanting to bid farewell to herself, to her love for Joe, to her dreams of children and a family. In a sudden wave of Manichean intuition Harper perceives the absurdity of creation, the comedy of sexual organs, and the whole machinery for the biological perpetuation of humanity.

One could very well gather the impression that in *Angels in America* Warlikowski is also bidding farewell to the idea of the anti-temple built on the experience of transgression, the idea upon which both *The Bacchae* and *Cleansed* were built. "If it is true that there is no salvation outside of the Church then there also remains the fact that, among the shapeless mass of those whom we regard as irreligious, the aspiration to depart from this amorphousness is, in some cases, an aspiration to be saved: this concerns souls who experience their lives *extra*

ecclesiam as disincarnation and who go in search of a body which they cannot find in the Church as a result of what they feel inside.”¹¹⁴ Thus Pierre Klossowski writes about anti-Churches that have their eyes set on the Church, that permits all things, but which, nonetheless, “pays testimony to Truth.” This time Warlikowski does not make a great fuss about Harper’s Manichean epiphany; he allows her inside *this* human experience, and no other. Even the Christ-like characterization of Walter Prior, undergoing the Golgotha of his illness and abandonment, works more through its irrelevance and uselessness than by any suggestion of its symbolic depth.

All that remains of the beautiful vision of the temple is the figures of the three kneeling child-mannequins: the remains of this sacred space will accompany the next few dramatic situations. The more impoverished and stripped of its *raison d’être* the vision of the church is on stage, the more moving it becomes. Joe undresses in front of Louis, longing to renounce his entire past for him, simplistically identifying this past with the costume of the model bureaucrat and the lies to which he became accustomed in his everyday life. Harper’s Manichean monologue is accompanied by the image of the kneeling child-mannequins and a naked Joe lying on the floor. This is a brilliant and ambiguous tableau of the collapse of a family that never was. Like a subdued religious chord, the kneeling children also accompany the later scenes, such as the parallel meetings between Roy and Joe and Walter and Louis. What joins the scenes is the moments which reveal a sense of guilt, a request for forgiveness, the first attempt to make up for what has come before, an unconditional ethical impulse. We feel the irrelevance of these kneeling figures, their surprisingly protracted time on stage, more than we do their symbolism. The events happening between people take place outside the space of the church, and in opposition to the church – as such, the term *extra ecclesiam* acquires a new, double meaning. The aim is to assess the capacity for a universal ethics based on caring for another person, empathy, nursing a suffering body. The director tries, however, to obscure this Enlightenment-style thinking in existential details and emotional tension, to reveal the presence of an ethical norm more in the experience of failure than through positive example.

In *Angels in America* Warlikowski abandons – perhaps only temporarily – the mythology of transgression, revealing its hollowness and danger, and how unethical it can be. As Pierre Klossowski wrote of Bataille: “He tore the bonds of solidarity with the concrete realities of existence, the family, the misfortunes

114 Pierre Klossowski, “Georges Bataille’a tęsknota za autentycznością?” [George Bataille’s Longing for Authenticity?] in: *Georges Bataille, Doświadczenie wewnętrzne* [Georges Bataille: The Inner Experience], trans. O. Hedemann, Warsaw 1998, p. 275. Pierre Klossowski, “Le Corps du Néant. L’expérience de la mort de Dieu chez Georges Bataille,” in: *Sade mon prochain*, Le Seuil, Paris 1947, p. 155.

of the nation; he felt sentenced to living as a reflection of what he wanted to be – without taking into account the most basic feelings, which he shared, after all, with other people.”¹¹⁵

Biting Chair Legs and Licking the Floor

The second part of *Angels in America* is in a space stripped of illusions, in a non-theater space, where all that emerges are traces of inner experiences, of the deepest life and death drives, ones that are more real, in Freud's view, than the external reality. Warlikowski discards the quotations and parentheses. Harper's second Antarctic vision no longer has the theatrical charm of the first, with all its falling snow, silver snowsuits, and fairy-tale lights. From beyond the dazzling vision comes the reality that summoned it to life. Instead of pines from her imagined Antarctic forest Harper takes ordinary wooden chairs on stage and bites their legs, as if wanting to get to the heart of the truth, to something certain, solid, and unbending, to get beyond the sway of this illusion, to touch something real. During Joe's first visit to Louis' home both men are dressed in suits: Joe on his side with his legs curled up lies on the sofa bed, Louis on the floor. In Kushner's drama this scene was written entirely differently, and establishes their physical closeness. Louis licks Joe's cheek, then kisses him on the lips; then he slips his hand into Joe's pants, smells it, and licks it, listing the smells and tastes of the human body: "iron, clay, chlorine, copper, earth." In the performance Louis tastes the ground where he lies with long licks. In the drama he tries to tame his lover, who is terrified at the new experience, with the primal force of sexual desire; in the performance he is shown the prospect of death, the end, disintegration, the ecstasy of the body's brief period on the earth. He lies below Joe, closer to the earth, to the life instinct, to the basic substance of nature. Like many of Warlikowski's protagonists, he draws strength from degradation. He also betrays one of the secrets of true and profound melancholy: its symbolic connection with the earth.

In these two images, in these brief moments of stage time, theater is on the wane. It draws from the most basic symbols, the most elementary movements of the actors, from the most primal images of life and of people's most primitive bonds with the earth, tied to taste and smell, to the mouth, the tongue, and saliva. We inevitably recall the oral phase, the first stage of development of the human libido, which is so strongly tied to utter powerlessness and dependency. The regression to these most primitive forms of sexual instinct has nothing pathological about it, however. It is associated with illness, depression, and the loss of illusions.

115 Ibid., p. 162.

However, in this case it serves a therapeutic function. It reminds one of the most elementary bonds and experiences, seeking a basis for the instinct to live; but it also contains a germ of the ethical experience, which, in *Angels in America*, is so closely tied to solicitude, care, and responsibility.

Forgiveness

All of the protagonists' actions, thoughts, and emotions orbit around the capacity for ethical response. First, however, we are presented with a landscape of lost churches, faiths, and ideologies, which allow us to live according to absolute and undeniable norms: the Jewish roots of Louis and Roy Cohn, the Protestant tradition of Walter Prior, the Mormon church to which Harper, Joe, and his mother belong. It is not a simple gesture of breaking with tradition and the past that is at work here, however, but the principle of a melancholy tie with what has been lost. In such a space, every ethical thought finds its backwards reflection in the mirror of melancholy. A sense of guilt arising from undignified behavior comes in conflict with a sense of guilt from having abandoned the legacy of the past. One sense of guilt comes in conflict with another, or one supports the other. As such, melancholy leads to paralysis and an incurable sense of guilt: "in melancholia it is the ego that finds itself in desolation: succumbs to the blows of its own devaluation, its own accusation, its own condemnation, its own abasement."¹¹⁶ Here, complaint blends with accusation, which, because of the very nature of melancholia, takes the form of self-accusation. A believer in the liberal faith of man's self-fulfillment, Louis leaves his ailing lover and immediately reawakens his long-forgotten sense of Jewish "religious guilt." The reality of his behavior indicates more ordinary fear and idleness than a sublime independence from the basic principles of decency. In the name of religious norms Joe stifles his forbidden desires and, in an attempt to save his marriage, brings it to the verge of catastrophe. When he finally succumbs to his desires and finds himself a lover, he feels a loss of self, his "ego" created in the process of heroic repression.

There are two powerful sources of individual charisma in this performance: the rabbi who declares his faith in the unbroken link with the past, tradition, and religion, and Roy Cohn, who turns hard religious strictures into legal codes, and then draws his strength and pleasure from breaking them. Both ultimately meet disaster, though each in a different way. After delivering his impassioned speech the rabbi sits on a chair in the depths of the stage watching the events. He seems helpless; at most, he succeeds in making Louis aware that he will not

116 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, op. cit., p. 73.

escape his sense of guilt, which, at any rate, would doubtless have become clear without his participation. Roy Cohn, on the other hand, begins a heroic struggle with his sense of guilt, which has been utterly repressed and absent in his life. It appears in the figure of Ethel Rosenberg, a powerful, beautiful, and dauntless woman who has, thus far, been minding Roy Cohn's hospital bed. Her bright red coat is a visual sign of indelible guilt. Her old-world appearance (purse, shoes, toque, and make-up faithfully rendered according to the old photographs of Ethel Rosenberg) ironically and deceptively indicates that such concepts as guilt, which have become a legal game and political manipulation in Roy Cohn's world, are anachronistic.

Indeed, in this performance the sources of charisma are dispersed in the decisions and actions of ordinary people, and it is their energy that drives the story. Individual choices and actions create a collective work, the work of the world's transformation, modestly initiated in the private space of their lives and the shared space of melancholy. Like Paul Ricoeur before him, Slavoj Žižek has reevaluated the Freudian concept of melancholy, highlighting its creative and ethical aspects. "Against Freud, one should assert the conceptual and ethical primacy of melancholy. In the process of the loss, there is always a remainder that cannot be integrated through the work of mourning, and the ultimate fidelity is the fidelity to this remainder."¹¹⁷ Contemporary psychoanalysis tells us that moral actions have two levels. First comes the moment of passivity, the decision of another in me, the decision to make a decision, not subordinate to a sense of general obligation, but to a command "of something other than the absolute, which decides about me, in me." It is only then that the decision is made how to proceed. This means recognizing the traumatic origins of ethical acts, as otherness is radically conceived here as the Lacanian thing, i.e. trauma, a scar. The ethical act is neither a response to or a request from a fellow creature, i.e. the imagined other (in Slavoj Žižek's opinion, sentimental humanism), nor is it the symbolic Great Other, the "unpersonified set of rules that coordinates our coexistence." The inner rupture of the ethical act allows us to avoid the trap of ideologizing moral values, just as the true ethical act involves neither subordination to imposed norms, nor the attempt to adapt to their reality. It is always a radical act, appealing to what has been lost, and only to this does it remain true. This is the ethic of melancholia that Harper represents: no cold calculation of profits and losses accompanies her actions. As a true melancholic, Harper does not forgo her attachment to her "lost love object." She leaves Joe, but does not destroy her love for him; she does not forgive him, but nor does she succumb to hatred. Her desire for truth is not justified by anything, and leads her to extreme denigration.

117 Slavoj Žižek, "Melancholy and the Act," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Summer 2000, p. 658.

Harper's opposite is Roy: a battle to the death with Ethel Rosenberg rages inside of him. He dies with the conviction that he has fooled everyone: God, humanity, Ethel, and his own conscience. Ethel also acts deceptively for a long time, with charm, sex appeal, a sense of humor, and above all, tenacity. Only at the end, when it is certain that she will be unable to defeat her opponent, does she explode. In sorrowful despair she beats Roy with her handbag as he dies. Roy knows, however, how to tame her. He begins crying like a little boy, begging her for a lullaby, treating Ethel like a mother. Ethel stares at him in astonishment, incredulous, and finally gives in, cuddling the weeping Roy to her breast, and begins singing him a Jewish song in a powerful voice. Roy snorts with derisive laughter. He has managed not only to vanquish his sense of guilt, but also to mock and denigrate the act of forgiveness, perhaps, not unfairly, as this particular act of forgiveness was merely a sentimental and almost atavistic impulse. Roy Cohn is not a dark character in this play. He cures himself from sentimentality with his cynicism, breaking all the rules, which have been set too high by the social hierarchy of values, and, by the same token, involuntarily allows us to reach the very core of ethical behavior.

The prospect of forgiveness is outlined only in a later scene. Persuaded by Belize, Louis refuses to say a *Kaddish* for the deceased Roy. He seems somewhat confused and stiff, hiding behind his sunglasses, stumbling over the words of various Jewish prayers. From a corner Ethel quietly begins prompting him on the words he has forgotten, and the prayer moves in a beautiful duet. Roy Cohn receives a forgiveness that neither belongs to one figure, nor is the expression of anyone's feelings or intentions. Performed in the space of a melancholy sense of lost ties with a religious ritual, it is a gesture that is half-forgotten, awkward, unprepared, and, as it were, devoid of conscious intention. It is incomprehensible and improper.

Krum and *Angels in America* are twin poles. In *Krum* we see a society that is culturally, ethnically, and religiously uniform, but somehow slumbering, with no sense of bonds or memory, at the mercy of degraded rituals. This is a society with no living relationship to what is different or foreign, and thus, has nothing to challenge it. It is a world in which a lack of authentic experience of difference turns into a monotonous game of dead pawns, in a pure mechanism of neurotic repetition, where, to recall a basic principle of psychology, "we emerge as subjects in response to the Other's call."¹¹⁸ In *Krum* it is Tugati's illness, the only field around which living relationships form, that is the one trace of difference. In the last scene of the performance Tactic appears before Krum as a somnambulist drag queen, a phantom of repressed otherness. In *Angels in America* otherness is the

118 Ibid., p. 665.

basis for all relationships, the melting pot in which people from different traditions and communities with different values and attitudes meet, a field of conflict that opens the prospect of transformation, kindles consciousness, and sets its tasks.

In Kushner's epilogue to *Angels in America*, Walter Prior, Louis, Belize, and Hannah, Joe's mother, meet in front of the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park. They are the only ones granted the mercies of purification and hope. In Warlikowski's finale, however, everyone is gathered together: the living and the dead, the good and the evil, gays both "out" and closeted, heterosexual women, the last communist, and an angel, conscious that the conflicts and oppositions will never end. Kushner believes in the well-executed mourning ritual, and this is how he designed and wrote his drama. Warlikowski's theater, on the other hand, lives solely in the space of melancholy, which radically transforms the ethical significance of *Angels in America*.

There is an inner structure to both *Krum* and *Angels in America*, however, which cannot be grasped outside of aesthetic categories. This is the source of the plays' most powerful experiences, and it most powerfully integrates the stage and the audience. We sense it is something fragile, transparent, and unmotivated. Paul Ricoeur once wrote that sublime sadness becomes its opposite, joy. This is the only compensation for forging a lost object, the most beautiful fruit of mourning, and the greatest mystery of true art. Nonetheless, even here we have no consensus: there are some who claim that sublime beauty is only emanated by traumatic intensity.

A Late Afterword and an Untimely Preface

Some readers of my book on the theater of Krzysztof Warlikowski accused me of finishing it abruptly, saying that the book lacked a conclusion. The cultural process I tried to describe through Warlikowski's plays (from *The Taming of the Shrew* to *Angels in America*) was, insofar as I believed, so sufficiently evident that all conclusions seemed irrelevant, as they revealed themselves in the processes of the social drama I had described.

Five years have passed since the book was released. Much has transpired since then in Warlikowski's biography as an artist. Above all, the institutional framework of his work has changed: he left the Rozmaitości Theater in Warsaw, run by Grzegorz Jarzyna, and with his collaborators founded the Nowy Theater. The latter was conceived as a place to carry out artistic projects, and not as a repertory theater obliged to perform daily. Most of the ensemble (the actors, set designer, composer, lighting director, technical director, assistants, stage manager, and costume people) worked with him at the Rozmaitości Theater. Warlikowski's and Jarzyna's parting of ways was one of the major events in Polish theater life in the past few years. It closed an epoch for the Rozmaitości Theater, which had been identified with the cultural transformation of the city, creating a generational shift in stage aesthetics, and the first attempts to remodel the institution of the theater as their audience grew.

This change allowed Warlikowski to side-step various inconveniences that he had felt in "someone else's" theater, though he had applied the same long-term working model, using a selected ensemble of actors, creating personal bonds, with an intense and unhurried pace of rehearsals at the Rozmaitości Theater. The director's uncompromising demands of the institution, in addition to the substantial costs of producing and staging his performances (partly owing to the lack of his own space, and the necessity of renting large, expensive venues), limited the Nowy Theater's capacity to stage other productions. This caused an evident hierarchy in the work and in the projects. In terms of production momentum, scope of promotion, and the level of participation of the theater's contracted actors, Warlikowski's plays have no equals. They all have been created in co-production with international festivals and theater institutions. This has sometimes had a significant impact on the artistic shape they acquire. The panoramic space of *(A)pollonia*, for example, crucially defines the apprehension of the play; it

was the result of a commission Warlikowski received from a festival in Avignon, to perform a play in the monumental courtyard of the Palais des Papes. The participation of Isabelle Huppert imposed an operatic structure on the dramaturgy of *Streetcar*, placing the main female figure in the center of the action (in the tradition of *Tosca*, *Aida*, *La Traviata*, or *Carmen*). In both cases the artistic effect was superb, indicating Warlikowski's capacity to reconcile artistic aims with institutional circumstances. This was also a period in which Warlikowski confirmed his position as a director of opera. Every year Warlikowski prepares at least one project for a prestigious European opera theater (Paris, Brussels, Hamburg, Madrid, Munich). Among the titles have been some first-rate classics: Wagner's *Parsifal*, Cherubini's *Medea*, Szymanowski's *King Roger*, Verdi's *Macbeth*, Stravinsky's *Rake's Progress*, Monteverdi's *Coronation of Poppea*, and Berg's *Lulu*. This affords him the luxury of directing one play a year with his actors, who lead diverse lives in the arts and media outside of their work with Warlikowski (performances in other theaters, television series, films, photo sessions, interviews in magazines with high print runs).

The clearest artistic shift in Warlikowski's work concerns the dramaturgy of his performances. After *Angels in America* Warlikowski abandoned ready-made scripts. He has joined Piotr Gruszczyński, the dramaturg at the Nowy Theater, in creating scripts on the basis of dramatic texts, prose pieces, films, and poetry. *(A)pollonia* was based on several Greek tragedies (*Oresteia* by Aeschylus, and *Alcestis*, *Heracles*, and *Iphigenia at Aulis* by Euripides), Jonathan Littell's novel *The Kindly Ones*, Hanna Krall's short story *Fields*, J.M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello*, and a drama called *The Post Office* by Rabindranath Tagore; he also used poems by Marcin Świetlicki and Adam Czajkowski, and Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Mother*. All of Warlikowski's subsequent plays have been based on complex and hybrid literary material: *Streetcar* (Williams, Wilde, Plato), *The End* (Koltés, Kafka, Coetzee), *African Tales* (*The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* by Shakespeare, *Summer* by Coetzee, but also Dante, Cleaver, Krall, and Garcia), *Warsaw Cabaret* (the films *Cabaret* and *Shortbus*, Justin Vivien Bond's autobiographical novel *Tango*, as well as Coetzee, Littell, and Van Druten). According to Georges Banu, this dramaturgical shift in the rules is linked to a creative crisis, Warlikowski's attainment of artistic maturity, his need for autonomy, and his shift from being a "director" to that of an "artist of the theater":

This is about transgressing his status to date – the status of the director – and the need to demonstrate his 'ego' with even more determination, to climb to the level of the 'author,' in the full sense of the word. Did not Grotowski experience the same sensation in staging *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, when he introduced the 'aesthetic of the archipelago,' which led to combining the Bible with Dostoyevsky and Simone

Weil? It is the last stop along a certain road.... Kantor found himself in a similar bind after *Dandies and Dowdies*; Brook, at the age of forty, only a few years younger than Warlikowski, left the theater, to consider which road was best traveled by.¹¹⁹

There can be no doubt that Banu would like to see Warlikowski's artistic biography as yet another variant of the artist's modernist emancipation. This is also why he immediately adds an ongoing theme in Warlikowski's work, regardless of the content of the play:

Nothing lasts in Warlikowski's theater, everything seems to succumb to erosion; the outlook is less a brutal catastrophe or a sudden collapse than a slow degradation, decay, gradual debasement.¹²⁰

We ought not to overlook the clear contradiction between the Faustian impulse in the artist's biography and atrophy as a subject of his work. We will return to this contradiction.

I believe that the transformation of the dramaturgy in Warlikowski's plays was, however, chiefly tied to the exhaustion of a model which had defined Warlikowski's theater *vis-a-vis* collective or public life. Banu is correct in one thing: Warlikowski began to be attracted by modernist traditions. He lost sight of the fact, however, that Warlikowski's theater does not belong exclusively to Warlikowski, but rather is a network of relationships, reflections, projections; that it was and is created through the collective effort of the artists, the audience, and the critics. As a result of this effort he gained "significance;" and it is precisely this "significance" that is collapsing. Appealing to the modernist position of the artist helped hasten this collapse.

The Social Drama

Warlikowski: Extra Ecclesiam was an attempt to link Warlikowski's theater with a social experiment which I will join Victor Turner in calling a social drama,¹²¹ even if it was, as I said quite directly, a crippled, incomplete drama with no unambiguous solution.

This was a tale of the Polish transformation and the performative powers of theater. It dealt with liminality, and liminal beings. It concerned neurotic audiences and spontaneous acts of therapy through art. It was about a wild form of

119 Georges Banu, "Elegia i horyzont" [Elegy and Horizon], trans. Renata Niziołek, *Didaskalia* 2010, No. 96, p. 78.

120 Ibid.

121 Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play*, Performing Arts Journal Publications, New York 1982.

psychoanalysis. Warlikowski's theater subjected everyone, including audiences and critics, to a process ("Warlikowski Is Us" is the perhaps overblown statement that appears at the opening of my book). The idea of the social drama that emerges on the horizon of Warlikowski's theater resulted in equal parts from the ambitions of the director and the audience. Theater was seen as a site of collective and individual projections. These projections belong as much to the history of the stage as to performances conceived as intentionally composed scenes in spacetime, made up of actors, objects, costumes, music, movement, rhythm, and the recitation of text. A living reception of theater must, by its very nature, interfere with this spacetime (psychoanalysis calls such phenomena "transference"), perform distorted senses, and dictate discursive hybrids (combining, for example, the lyricism of personal confession and the simplification of journalism). The interference that constitutes Warlikowski's theater, which was decisive in his position in the Polish culture of the last two decades, bears the mark of the social drama.

Victor Turner's notion of social drama is, in itself, a powerful projection of conservative ideological consequences: it less serves to describe living cultural processes than supplies rules for their legitimization. In Turner's world there are no ultimate events, traumas that destroy social life and its institutions, or irreversible system changes. A social drama might bring change, but always through the durability of institutions tied to religion, law, or art. Society is, to this way of thinking, a layering of past and present experiences, which is why the old myths and rituals maintain their relevance and efficacy if we are capable of enacting them correctly. The institution of the theater also supplies models for collective and individual experiences, becomes a place to legitimize such ways of apprehending the ties between art and public life, and weighs each affective experience (for Turner a symptom of a vital social drama) with the potential for positive and socially accessible change. In Turner's anthropology, which sketches an image of life and art from an event-based and dynamic perspective, there is nothing that can actually happen. The same thing is always occurring under the guise of transformation. From Turner's perspective, we do not see, for instance, the complex relationships between modernity and experience (the loss of experience, the total transformation of the forms of experience, traumatic repetition). Every movement of concepts and experiences transpires in the sphere of stabilized frameworks and formulae. Social life is a drama and is expressed through drama. The self-reflexive loop generates an uninterrupted flow between the energy of social life and the institutions that resolve the conflicts of social dramas. These institutions that participate in overcoming social crises, such as the church, the court, or the theater, are, in the framework of this concept, utterly legitimized in their work. Meanwhile, what Turner calls an experience both produces the whirl of life, and is consumed by it. At the *Rozmaitości* Theater in Warsaw, Krzysztof Warlikowski

gathered viewers in search of self-exploration and transformation, but also those seeking live participation in cathartic theatrical experiences, and, at the same time, a powerful stake in social life; those wanting to be part of something repressed in Polish culture, and underrepresented, but also to experience something new, often shockingly so; in other words, those wanting to participate in the process of working through the models of Polish culture, for which Warlikowski became an emblematic figure, both in and beyond the theater. Having gained the status of a rebel and a provocateur, he generated viewers' desire to be "on his side," and his theater created the possibility for various declarations of identity. Theater criticism and the media also required the model of social drama as a legitimization of its activities, whose social relevance had paradoxically weakened through cultural and economic transformations. The presence of art in the media requires participation in social drama. Seen from such a perspective, theater is talking about issues, serving a purpose, taking a stance, or helping others to take a stance. Warlikowski's plays were compared to the crisis of faith in the Polish Catholic Church, to debates on the crimes Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne committed on their Jewish neighbors in 1941, to struggles with stereotypes of gender and sexual roles in Polish society, and to the discrimination of minorities.

The transgressive nature of Warlikowski's theater legitimized the social transformation processes, and created its micro-mythologies, though the transformation process itself undermined the bases of theatrical work designed in this way. At a certain point, Warlikowski had to make reference to his own position, and strengthen his authority, in order to create a new institution. The actors, enjoying star status, also declare that they want to work in "Warlikowski's theater." Thus modernist mythologies of art have been set in motion, so soon after having been undermined (not to say, compromised) by Warlikowski and his ensemble in his *Sturm und Drang* phase at the Rozmaitości Theater in Warsaw. Warlikowski's stance as an artist became the only real political ace up the Nowy Theater's sleeve.

All that was left for the idea of the social drama, therefore, was to supply the institution of the theater with sentimental (or cynical) self-justification. Turner's anthropology does not take into account modern and postmodern forms of collective life, which depart from or feign the model of the drama. A good example of this is the "media" careers of Warlikowski's actors, supported by the power of the theater institution in which those actors work, which does not detract from their attractive images as rebels and figureheads of high culture. As such, Warlikowski ultimately decided to resolve the contradiction between his own institutional situation and his work. We might provisionally call it his strategy to reactivate the modernist stance.

As a highly probable hypothesis, we can assume that Warlikowski's theater lost some of its audience that, only a decade ago, saw him as their ally in perceiving social reality. The recent premiere of *Warsaw Cabaret* is instructive in this respect, as it neither matches the success of the musical *Cabaret*, nor the radical provocation of the film *Shortbus*. The artists themselves, at any rate, have no desire to identify themselves with commercial art, nor to risk a real conflict with the audience. The rebellious message here is an opportunity to demonstrate intimate, friendly relations with the audience. Yet how can we be sure that these relations are truly so close if they are not put to any test? We might respond thusly: They are close *because* they are not put to any test. I should note immediately, however, that the case of *Warsaw Cabaret*, though symptomatic, does not fully describe the complex situation in which Warlikowski and his ensemble have found themselves in recent years.

We can often observe a clash between Warlikowski's artistic language and the discourse he constructs for media purposes. Małgorzata Dziewulska has insightfully revealed this.¹²² The metacommentary which Warlikowski and some of his critics have written to his performances carries a political message that is much more clear and compelling than in the plays themselves. The art discourse which remains present in Warlikowski's theater has allowed him to dodge, retreat, or back off when the moment is right. On the basis of *(A)pollonia* Dziewulska has tried to show that both the ideas voiced by the director and the media message collapsed in the same play: the artistic language became much more complex and ambiguous. *(A)pollonia* described a conflict between two discourses, while in *Warsaw Cabaret* we have the risk of the cynicism of a theater enacting its position toward the audience. Instead of a conflict, there was a promise of a double gratification (a pleasant performance and a sentimental political gesture).

In his *Rozmaitości* Theater performances Warlikowski mainly worked through emotions, raising their intensity, creating astonishing montage effects. Significantly, however, he worked on classical dramas (Greek tragedy, Shakespeare) or based his work on classical dramaturgical conventions (Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*, Hanoch Levin's *Krum*, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*). The powerful dramatic structures orchestrated the effects, while the powerful effects enlivened the drama, and gave it the force of topicality in intensifying the reception. When Warlikowski stopped staging dramas this balance began to falter. Then the time came to abandon the notion of the social drama – the idea which had theretofore socially, politically, and institutionally legitimized the significance

122 Małgorzata Dziewulska, "Ukryte/odkryte. Gry z pamięcią w teatrze obiecany" [Concealed/ Revealed: Memory Games in the Promised Theater], in: *Zła pamięć. Przeciw-historia w polskim teatrze i dramacie* [Bad Memory: Anti-history in Polish Theater and Drama], eds. Monika Kwaśniewska, Grzegorz Niziołek, Jerzy Grotowski Institute, Wrocław 2012.

of Warlikowski's theater. Warlikowski does not assemble his new plays into a sequential transformation process, which is a condition of the Turner model. He is not so confident of his own effect on the audience, nor are the critics as ready to polarize their opinions around Warlikowski's plays, nor does the audience feel compelled to take an emotional stance toward Warlikowski's provocative gestures.

The breakdown of social drama necessitated new critical formulations of Warlikowski's theater. The first responses can be described in three formulae: "the betrayal of past ideals" (the voice of Warlikowski's disappointed longtime fans), "false greatness unmasked" (the response of opponents who kept declaring that the "emperor has no clothes"), and the "departure from the wrong path" (the approach of Warlikowski's onetime critics who appreciated his new direction). As such, the old division between viewers and critics endured through the power of inertia, causing, at most, minor quarrels. As such, the conflict about Warlikowski's performances presently seems to be more generated around his strong, stable position than the plays themselves.

A fine example of such a critical attack on Warlikowski and his theater was in *Rainbow Stand* by Paweł Demirski and Monika Strzępka. It mocks the director's hermetic and anointed position, the mindless cult of his performances ("how many times have you seen them"), and the salon atmosphere of the theater, which would like to consider itself independent. Above all, however, any kind of link between Warlikowski's theater and the real world of society is radically and arbitrarily discredited:

you sell the people your fucking shit
with your fucking oneiric lights
where are my real conflicts that brought
me storming into this theater
you're all sick in the head or fucked up
and then you vomited chocolate
what the fuck is that all about?¹²³

Striking at the snobbery and elitism of Warlikowski's theater did not reveal, however, the causes of the fascination for his plays (particularly *Cleansed*). Strzępka and Demirski allowed an audience that was becoming more politically radical, most often with left-wing convictions, to come to an easy rejection of their onetime fascination for Warlikowski's transgressive and "over-aesthetic" theater, currently a source of embarrassment. The makers of *Rainbow Stand* jeered at the modernist discourse of Warlikowski's theater ("you don't listen, you just up and find that lack / that alienation in you, you find it, but it can't be just ready and

123 Paweł Demirski, *Tęczowa trybuna* [Rainbow Stand], Polski Theater, Wrocław 2011, p. 36.

fucking waiting there / so you just fucking know that it isn't fucking yours, that it's a relationship you can't just coast through"¹²⁴), clearly not taking into account the possibility that modernism is an unfinished project.

Late Modernism

The temperature of Warlikowski's performances in the *Rozmaitości* era made critics link his work to all that seemed radical at the time (postmodernism, postdrama, the performative turn, critical art). This came at the cost of ignoring what was traditional, and even conservative in these plays. What counted was the emotion involved, the need for conflict, and the glaring visibility of the excluded figures, elements that made Warlikowski's theater "progressive." Warlikowski's work undoubtedly caused a ferment in Polish theater, encouraging other directors to make bold decisions, more direct statements on political and historical subjects, to become openly provocative. Warlikowski backed away, however, from confronting directors of the younger generation. While they reinforced the "critical discourse," he returned to the "discourse of art," i.e. to his own modernist fascinations, which he had repressed some time in the past.

It is easiest to grasp this transformation in Warlikowski's theater by surveying the category of liminality. In Victor Turner's model, liminality is an institutionally demarcated zone of identity transformation, a place and time of resolving a social conflict, the most difficult and creative phase in a ritual of passage. These sorts of ritual and initiation structures surely fascinated Warlikowski in the dramas he produced (particularly visible in *Bacchae* and *Cleansed*). In recent years, the significance of the concept of liminality changed in his work, or, rather, revealed a significance that had been heretofore overlooked. To grasp the essence of this transformation, we ought to recall "Before the Law," a short story by Franz Kafka, and the reading that Jacques Derrida proposed.¹²⁵ The protagonist of the tale stands before the court, before doors watched by a guard. He waits in vain to enter, spending his whole life there. Only at the moment of his death does he dare to ask the guard why he has been waiting alone, since everyone yearns for the law. It is then he discovers that this entry was designed solely for him. After the protagonist's death, the guard closes the door and leaves. The experience of Kafka's protagonist standing before the threshold (*limen*) is no longer tied to the prospect or the hope of a transformed identity, but to a desire to know the law and

124 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

125 Jacques Derrida, "Before the Law," in: *Acts of Literature*, Routledge, New York – London 1982, pp. 181-220.

to its inaccessibility. Derrida interprets the prohibition of crossing the threshold as a dual principle of the law, which sets a prohibition and simultaneously becomes the subject of the prohibition. The law should not be known, its genealogy must remain secret: only then does the prohibition established by the law achieve the status of an effective (universally binding) prohibition. For Derrida liminality is found in the field of an ongoing crisis, and not, as Turner believes, in a phase where the crisis is overcome. Liminality is a situation where one finds oneself before a threshold, not after having crossed it. It is an unresolvable relationship between the law of singularity and the universal essence of the law, between the capacity to tell a story, and the law, which is located beyond any kind of story. It is not only a man who stands before the law in Kafka's story (in Derrida's reading), but above all, the story, literature, and, to some degree, the law itself. The preposition "before" pertains not only to the situation of the man standing before the law, but also to the capacity to pose questions concerning the origin of the law, and ultimately, to the story itself, before which stands the title of the story, excluding the possibility of its utterance.

In returning to the modernist fascinations that began his theatrical work (Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Canetti, Klaus Mann, Gombrowicz), Warlikowski revises questions that postmodernism has shifted from the sphere of the impossible to authenticate a sphere of imposed practices. All of his plays (and in particular *(A)pollonia*, *The End*, and *African Tales*) at the Nowy Theater wrestle with the subject of the law and the insufficiency of its metaphysical justifications. Let us recall the scenes in which the Righteous among the Nations medal is handed posthumously to Apolonia Machczyńska in *(A)pollonia*, the interrogation of Elizabeth Costello before crossing to the other side in *The End*, or the trial of Shylock in *African Tales*. Even if the law has been compromised in these events and proves itself powerless, absurd, or based on pure acts of violence, its compromise never detracts from a desire for the law. Each of the protagonists trusts the law, or, at any rate, makes an existential attempt to find himself or herself "before the law."

The subject of the Holocaust, reappearing in each of these scenes, is the context in which the law appears in Warlikowski's theater. In *African Tales* Shylock represents millions of murdered Jews, the crowd of them growing dense through projections, filling the stage. The cruelty of the Jewish merchant, demanding the fulfillment of his law before the court, does not come from his lack of humanity, but from the deceitful nature of the law. The shelter in which Elizabeth Costello awaits her trial is reminiscent of a concentration camp, a place of torture and humiliation. The clearest allusions are found in *(A)pollonia*, where a trial upon the Righteous is held, upon a woman who lost her life in saving others. The seemingly obvious moral resonance of saving another's life and sacrificing one's own is shattered in this event that is a "trial" upon the past. To borrow Derrida's language,

the universal essence of the law capitulates before the law of singularity. In his analysis of Kafka's story, Derrida draws from Sigmund Freud's ideas concerning the law. Freud attempted to locate the birth of morality in a response to events that involved pointless crime and which were repressed, thus acquiring the status of a "non-event" or a "pseudo-event." Derrida, however, insightfully analyzes Freud's tale of the birth of the law and declares a basic doubt: if there is a moral response to an event, does this not demonstrate that the law must have been active in this sphere? If, however, law, indeed, has a universal basis, what would be the sense of prohibiting knowledge of its origins?

In *(A)pollonia* the Holocaust is not a liminal event that changes an identity (as in *Dybbuk*), but a shock that less produces a new law than becomes the law itself and the site of its disintegration. Though Warlikowski's modernist project looks kindly on all the harmed and debased (and thus, would surely serve to compromise the universal principles of the law, behind which is the void of its genealogy, the principle of violence, and the act of excluding otherness), it supports Derrida's doubts. The law in Warlikowski's plays establishes nothing, though it does become, as Małgorzata Dziewulska opines, a condition for practicing a "state of exhausting disorder in the field of rational, and, perhaps in particular, sentimental justifications for various collective and individual illusions."¹²⁶

Derrida's thought, I believe, reached Warlikowski's theater through the novels of Coetzee, particularly *Elizabeth Costello*. From *(A)pollonia* onward, Coetzee appears in almost every one of Warlikowski's plays. He has become Warlikowski's authority on the use of irony and sober wisdom. It is worth noting that Coetzee's dealings with the worlds of politics and society are found at the polar extreme of the notion of social drama. In his novels, unlike in Turner's anthropology, an irreversible event has occurred, something which cannot be healed, forgotten, or worked through. The certainty he has gained concerning the facts of the suffering of all living creatures blurs the boundaries of the human world, casting doubt upon the functioning principles of human institutions that aim to deal justice, broaden knowledge, and make art: "I, as a person, as a personality, am overwhelmed, that my thinking is thrown into confusion and helplessness,"¹²⁷ the writer admits.

Derek Attridge (a literary critic and student of Derrida) postulates reading Coetzee's novels literally, and not allegorically, focusing rather on the individual experience of the book than the political messages of the work. He proposes

126 "Teatr potrzebuje upiorów" [Theater Needs Ghosts], Małgorzata Dziewulska in conversation with Paweł Soszyński, *Dwutygodnik* 2009, No. 6, <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artkul/232-teatr-potrzebuj-e-upiorow.html>.

127 J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell, Harvard University Press, London 1992, p. 248.

using the term “late modernism” with regards to Coetzee’s work.¹²⁸ When asked about the capacity to create metalanguages to “interpret the world” and “provide motivation and significance,” Attridge responds: “All anyone can do is work in the language (in the broadest sense of the word) that has constituted him as a subject.”¹²⁹

Let us follow this lead and ask ourselves, firstly, in what does Warlikowski’s language consist? Is it more than the “blather” which the authors of *Rainbow Stand* parodied?

African Tales was declared to be a play about exclusion. The allegorical figures of this exclusion were meant to be three Shakespearean protagonists: Shylock (a Jew), Othello (a black man), and Lear (an old man). This is an example of an allegorical reading, of which Attridge spoke, in the context of Coetzee’s work. Was this message part of a cynical game, or did it belong to the compelling logic of a social drama? It seems fairly evident that it was not a language “constituting a subject” as described by Attridge. If, however, we follow the paths of exclusion and otherness indicated by the artists, the only “other” in Warlikowski’s play is, in fact, the figure of the father, who appears in three incarnations in the play. This is the only character whom Warlikowski is incapable of “breaking into” to reveal his experience. In Warlikowski’s earlier plays the father appeared as an obscene guardian of the patriarchal order, a gangster, and a pornography enthusiast – as, for example, in the figure of Petrucchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. In *African Tales* the same actor who once played Petrucchio (Adam Ferency) plays the father figures. This time, however, the father figure has no symbolic weight, not even such an oppressive presence as in *The Taming of the Shrew*. His every action turns against him. The laws he defends degrade him in every tale. The masks of the Jew, the black man, and the mortally ill man smuggle in the notion of how the father was humiliated by the law which he attempts to guard. The political project to reveal exclusion has made an about-face to reveal its own principle of exclusion. We ought to regard this as one of the greatest achievements of the modernist turn in Warlikowski’s theater.

In his book on Coetzee, Attridge proves that the distance from the symbolic order is part of the paradigm of late modernism, staging the conflict between political art and the demands of artistic creation. This former attempts to make

128 Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading Literature in the Event*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2004, pp. 1-31.

129 *Dobrowolna nieprzejrzystość. O działaniu i zabieraniu głosu* [Voluntary Opacity: On Acting and Taking the Floor], Derek Attridge in conversation with Paweł Mościcki and Waldemar Rapior, in: *Wyostrzyć wzrok. J.M. Coetzee: sztuka, świat i polityka* [Sharpening Your Sight: J. M. Coetzee, Art, the World, and Politics], eds. Anna R. Burzyńska, Waldemar Rapior, Malta Foundation, Wydawnictwo Homini, Poznań-Krakow 2012, p. 24.

visible real acts of the exclusion of otherness in social life, while the latter demands the shaping of the “voluntary opacity” which otherness makes into an event, i.e. the individual, unique experience of the reader or the viewer. Thus we have the deconstruction of postmodern concepts of the politics of aesthetics in the spirit of Rancière, ready to identify aesthetic, political, and ethical discourses with one another, only to subject their identity to a critical reading. A brilliant example of such a deconstruction is Coetzee’s discussion with Catharine MacKinnon on pornography.¹³⁰ Making the center point the accusatory discourse of “male desire,” the American researcher prohibits differential questions on the status of this desire, refusing to take its “opacity” into account. To MacKinnon’s mind, the political, aesthetic, and ethical are always differentiated by a single, unnegotiable line of division.

Warlikowski seems to value most Coetzee’s struggle to exist beyond a context, to live without the resentments that difficult experiences in society feed us (here, in fact, lies the crux of Strzépka’s and Demirski’s quarrel with Warlikowski’s theater). When Piotr Gruszczyński asked if Coetzee’s writing proves that after the cataclysms of the twentieth century “we are witnesses to the definitive collapse of utopian aspirations,” Warlikowski replies:

No, Coetzee has no such opinions, and that is what is so marvelous. He deals strictly with the collapses of singular lives, or even with the sensation of having lost; he shows a life which is barely touched, just grazed, and then slips into chaos. Each one of us, sooner or later, is plunged into chaos, and ceases to understand the world.¹³¹

We are struck by the connection between Warlikowski’s words describing Coetzee’s work and the way in which Georges Banu described the basic theme of Warlikowski’s performances (“slow degradation, decay, gradual debasement”). Banu, however, grasped this theme too one-dimensionally, in the spirit of the “old” modernism, without the amendments that Derek Attridge introduced to the concept of modernism. Warlikowski’s modernist *modus* serves the collapse of the communal codes and alliances created through resentment and undermines the certainty that his plays participate in the social drama.

In building his theater on a modernist gesture of separating the artist from his context, Warlikowski repeats the *aporia* of the law described by Derrida. Here, too, questions of genealogy are prohibited (the modernist language of art shifts many of these prohibitions to the level of aesthetics), and, at the same time, the

130 J.M. Coetzee, *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1996, pp. 61-82.

131 “Zycie poniżej równika” [Life below the Equator], Krzysztof Warlikowski in conversation with Piotr Gruszczyński, in: *Wyostrzyć wzrok. J.M. Coetzee: sztuka, świat i polityka* [Sharpening the Gaze: J. M. Coetzee, Art, the World, and Politics], ed. Anna R. Burzyńska, Waldemar Rapior, Fundacja Malta, Wydawnictwo Homini, Poznań-Kraków 2012, p. 87.

prohibition keeps leading our thoughts back down genealogical paths. It would be interesting, for example, to trace from this perspective how Małgorzata Szczęśniak reshapes the “indexicality” of photography that inspires her set designs into artistic signifiers that contain no traces of their sources:

Four stories are combined in *African Tales*. We needed to find something that linked them and was a universal space for them – the space of the head. My first source of inspiration was the photography of David Goldblatt, who photographed South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. This is a very strange space, full of abandoned concrete houses, recalling bunkers with holes for windows. On stage you could see my reflections of those abandoned houses from South Africa. I also found Goldblatt’s photograph of a concrete interior with a door that had long cracks, which let in an intense light. It somewhat resembled neon, which I later used in our play. It gives the impression of a world that exists somewhere outside. [...] I like set designs which begin to have lives of their own. They bring a transformation of how we see, and the reception of a given performance. It is no longer an image, but a mechanism that pulls you in and out, changes something, and makes you enter a different world of the imagination every time (Szczęśniak, 2013).¹³²

With an affective gesture Warlikowski continues to break his own prohibitions, allows himself to reveal his genealogy in a literal, melancholic, or epiphanic way. In this way he establishes the “law” before which he puts his theater. This is how he recalls his first contact with Coetzee’s work:

It began before (*A*)*pollonia*. I was in search of a new way – not of writing perhaps, but of speaking or making contact with the viewer. I began reading *Elizabeth Costello*, which is less a novel than a collection of lectures, and every lecture is a remarkable monologue. That is what struck me in this book: a new form that departed from fiction, simply *speaking*. I thought it would be ideal for the theater: monologues that were not monologues, taking us outside of the theater, from which I sought an escape. I also sensed that audiences in Poland needed something like this: to be spoken to directly, a collective experience that is heard, and contemplation and diagnosis in this shared experience.¹³³

The next step in exploring this relationship came with *The End*. The closing sequence of the play is based on the last chapter of *Elizabeth Costello*, which is a travesty of Kafka’s “Before the Law.” The writer stands before the gate, and before being granted the privilege of crossing the threshold she has to respond to one question: “What do you believe in?” To avoid the necessity of responding, Costello appeals to the modernist dogmas of art: its autonomy (art is distinct from life) and its sublimity (art shares the voice of the Other). These responses are rejected by the guard or treated as evasive. For the ironic Costello, the need to

132 *Teatr magiczny* [The Magic Theater], Małgorzata Szczęśniak in conversation with Katarzyna Niedurny, *Reflektor* 2013, <http://www.rozswietlamykulturę.pl>.

133 *Życie poniżej równika*, op. cit., p. 85.

declare a faith is a kind of torture, an expression of totalitarian violence. She agrees to this trial, however, treating it seriously, as a kind of internal experiment. Her behavior shows no trace of religious fundamentalism, nor the political pragmatism of postmodernity. Costello does not abandon her modernist stance, but she does try to rethink it. Observing that this trial scene recalls bad theater, based on clichés, sham, and inauthentic identities, she tries to ensure that it remains vital, delving into the person, and not the role. Ultimately her questions concern not faith, but the law which it serves.

The law of survival and the desire for experience becomes Costello's basic ethical approach. This is why no ritual or ancient authority can justify the slaying of a ram, which Odysseus commits in Homer's "immortal" epic, to summon the souls of his deceased loved ones with the smell of spilled blood. Costello's (seemingly!) sentimental argument explodes the foundations of culture. The question only remains as to whether the psychological foundations of Warlikowski's theater are capable of shouldering such a radical gesture, of reformulating it in terms of its own rules. *The End* was, to my mind, such an attempt.

Ewa Dąkowska played Costello in Warlikowski's performance. In an interview she spoke of a quarrel she had with the director: "If I play the woman before the Gate in *The End*, I don't want to tell myself that there is nothing beyond the Gate."¹³⁴ The actress ignores the fact, however, that the logic of the speech of Coetzee's protagonist addresses no metaphysical issues, that its problem lies elsewhere. Costello devotes little attention to whether something or nothing exists beyond the Gate. Being "before" the Gate is sufficiently problematic. The actress's battle for the right to metaphysics was not, however, entirely irrelevant. Recalling the right to live in the sphere of art did a good turn for the law of the theater in breaking its rules. Nonetheless, no social drama is born of this conflict. Warlikowski sees the event thusly:

Nothing attracts me as much as what might be called Costello's ignorance, in the conceptual sense. This lack of involvement, in which nothing that has transpired, has a chance to resound. We, meanwhile, adhere to what is or what once was. This is how we live. We join with an apparent community, which gives us apparent points of reference, and these, in turn, design our way of thinking. But Costello goes forward, undermining even that which had recently been important and sacred to her. [...] And in this undermining she undermines even herself.¹³⁵

In Warlikowski's three subsequent plays – (*Apollonia*, *The End*, and *African Tales* – Ewa Dąkowska was given the riskiest roles in the director's "non-theater." Is this because she was a new actress in the ensemble, exciting the director's interest

134 *Perypatetycy* [The Peripatetics], Ewa Dąkowska in conversation with Dorota Buchwald, *Notatnik Teatralny* 2011, Nos. 62-63, p. 83.

135 *Życie poniżej równika*, op. cit., p. 93.

in the untapped potential of his theater, introducing a note of confusion into its symbolic structure? Suffice to say that this is neither a mother (like Stanisława Celińska), nor a victim (like Magdalena Popławska), nor a woman in search of transgression (like Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik), but a woman who led Warlikowski's theater to an excess of heterosexual desire in Julia's brilliant monologue in *African Tales*, taken from Coetzee's *Summer*. Her vivacity is turned neither into a sign of consolation, nor a symptom of transgression, nor the promise of a coming utopia.

List of the Performances Described in the Book

William Shakespeare *The Taming of the Shrew*

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; music: Paweł Mykietyń; choreography: Wojciech Misiuro.

Teatr Dramatyczny in Warsaw, premiere 3 January 1998

cast: Lord/Baptista – Marcin Troński, Christopher Sly/Petruchio – Adam Ferency, Page (Bartholomew)/Grumio/Tailor – Janusz Wituch, Hostess/Katherina – Danuta Stenka, Huntsman/Vincentio – Zbigniew Bielski, Huntsman/Pedant – Wojciech Wysocki, Gremio – Leon Charewicz, Lucentio – Marcin Dorociński, Hortensio/Tailor – Paweł Tucholski, Tranio – Andrzej Szeremeta, Biondello/Tailor – Sławomir Grzymkowski, Bianca – Małgorzata Kozuchowska, Widow – Jolanta Olszewska

William Shakespeare *Hamlet*

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; music: Paweł Mykietyń; choreography: Saar Magal; lighting design: Piotr Pawlik.

TR Warsaw, premiere 22 October 1999

cast: Claudius – Marek Kalita, Hamlet – Jacek Poniedziałek, Polonius – Mirosław Zbrojewicz, Horatio – Omar Sangare, Laertes – Adam Woronowicz, Rosencrantz – Maria Seweryn, Guildenstern – Jolanta Fraszyńska, Players – Maria Maj, Cezary Kosiński, Robert Więckiewicz, Gertrude – Stanisława Celińska, Ophelia – Magdalena Cielecka

Euripides *The Bacchae*

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; music: Paweł Mykietyń; lighting design: Felice Ross.

TR Warsaw, premiere 9 February 2001

cast: Chorus – Stanisława Celińska, Magdalena Kuta, Maria Maj, Dionysus – Andrzej Chyra, Pentheus – Jacek Poniedziałek, Cadmus – Aleksander Bednarz, Teiresias – Lech Łotocki, Agauë – Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik, Messengers – Maciej Wojdyła, Piotr Nowak, Robert Więckiewicz, Servant – Waldemar Obłoz

Sarah Kane *Cleansed*

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; music: Paweł Mykietyń; lighting design: Felice Ross.

TR Warsaw, Wrocławski Teatr Współczesny, Teatr Polski in Poznań, premiere 15 December 2001

cast: Tinker – Mariusz Bonaszewski, Grace – Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik, Graham – Redbad Klijnstra, Woman – Stanisława Celińska, Rod – Jacek Poniedziałek, Carl – Thomas Schweiberer, Robin – Tomasz Tyndyk, songs – Renate Jett

William Shakespeare *The Tempest*

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; music: Paweł Mykietyń; lighting design: Felice Ross.

TR Warsaw, premiere 4 January 2003

cast: Alonso – Zygmunt Malanowicz, Sebastian – Marek Kalita, Prospero – Adam Ferency, Antonio – Andrzej Chyra, Ferdinand – Redbad Klijnstra, Gonzalo – Lech Łotocki, Caliban – Renate Jett, Trinculo – Stanisława Celińska, Stephano – Jacek Poniedziałek, Miranda – Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik, Ariel – Magdalena Cielecka, Iris – Marianna Orłoś, Ceres – Teresa Owczynn timer, Juno – Maria Świerszcz, Musician – Fabian Włodarek

Szymon Anski / Hanna Krall *Dybbuk*

adaptation and direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; music: Paweł Mykietyń; lighting design: Felice Ross.

TR Warsaw, Wrocławski Teatr Współczesny, premiere 6 October 2003

cast: Leah/Adam S.'s Wife – Magdalena Cielecka, Frida/Narrator – Stanisława Celińska, Meshulah – Renate Jett, Woman – Irena Laskowska, Reb Azrielke – Orna Porat, Menashe/Adam S. – Andrzej Chyra, Mikhoel – Marek Kalita, Meyer/Menashe's Father/Waiter – Zygmunt Malanowicz, Henekh/Samuel Kerner – Jacek Poniedziałek, Sender – Jerzy Senator, Reb Mendl – Maciej Tomaszewski, Menashe – Tomasz Tyndyk

Hannoch Levin *Krum*

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; music: Paweł Mykietyń; lighting design: Felice Ross; film: Paweł Łoziński.

TR Warsaw, Sary Teatr in Cracow, premiere 3 March 2005

cast: Krum – Jacek Poniedziałek, Mother – Stanisława Celińska, Trude – Maja Ostaszewska, Dupa – Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik, Felice – Anna Radwan-Gancarczyk, Cica – Danuta Stenka, Tugati – Redbad Klijnstra, Tactic – Marek Kalita, Dulce – Zygmunt Malanowicz, Bertoldo – Adam Nawojczyk, Shkita – Paweł Kruszelnicki, Doctor – Miron Hakenbeck

Tony Kushner *Angels in America*

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; music: Paweł Mykietyń; lighting design: Felice Ross; film: Paweł Łoziński, songs: Adam Falkiewicz.

TR Warsaw, premiere 17 February 2007

cast: Roy M. Cohn – Andrzej Chyra, Joe Porter Pitt – Maciej Stuhr, Harper Armaty Pitt – Maja Ostaszewska, Prior Walter – Tomasz Tyndyk, Louis Ironson – Jacek Poniedziałek, Belize/Mr. Lies – Rafał Maćkowiak, The Angel/Emily – Magdalena Cielecka, Hannah Porter Pitt/Rabbi Isidor Chemelewitz – Stanisława Celińska, Martin Heller/Aleksii Antedilluvianovich – Zygmunt Malanowicz, Ethel Rosenberg – Danuta Stenka, Doctor – Bogusława Schubert

(A)pollonia

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; adaptation: Krzysztof Warlikowski, Jacek Poniedziałek, Piotr Gruszczyński; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; dramaturgy: Piotr Gruszczyński; music: Renate Jett, Paweł Mykietyń, Piotr Maślanka, Piotr Stankiewicz; lighting design: Felice Ross; video: Paweł Łoziński, Kacper Lisowski, Rafał Listopad.

Newy Theater in Warsaw, premiere 16 May 2010

cast: Andrzej Chyra, Magdalena Cielecka, Ewa Dałkowska, Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik, Renate Jett, Marek Kalita, Wojciech Kalarus, Zygmunt Malanowicz, Monika Niemczyk, Maja Ostaszewska, Jacek Poniedziałek, Magdalena Popławska, Anna Radwan-Gancarczyk, Danuta Stenka, Maciej Stuhr, Tomasz Tyndyk

The End

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; adaptation: Krzysztof Warlikowski, Piotr Gruszczyński; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; dramaturgy: Piotr Gruszczyński; music: Paweł Mykietyń, Paweł Bomert, Piotr Stankiewicz; lighting design: Felice Ross; choreography: Claude Bardouil; video: Denis Guéguin.

Newy Theater in Warsaw, premiere 30 September 2010

cast: Stanisława Celińska, Magdalena Cielecka, Ewa Dałkowska, Marek Kalita, Wojciech Kalarus, Mateusz Kościukiewicz, Zygmunt Malanowicz, Maja Ostaszewska, Jacek Poniedziałek, Magdalena Popławska, Anna Radwan-Gancarczyk, Maciej Stuhr

African Tales by Shakespeare

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; adaptation: Krzysztof Warlikowski, Piotr Gruszczyński; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; dramaturgy: Piotr Gruszczyński; music: Paweł Mykietyń; lighting design: Felice Ross; video: Kamil Polak; choreography: Claude Bardouil.

Nowy Theater in Warsaw, premiere 5 October 2011

cast: Stanisława Celińska, Ewa Dałkowska, Adam Ferency, Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik, Marek Kalita, Wojciech Kalarus, Zygmunt Malanowicz, Maja Ostaszewska, Piotr Polak, Jacek Poniedziałek, Magdalena Popławska

Warsaw Cabaret

direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski; adaptation: Krzysztof Warlikowski, Piotr Gruszczyński, Szczepan Orłowski; set design: Małgorzata Szczęśniak; dramaturgy: Piotr Gruszczyński; music: Paweł Mykietyń; lighting design: Felice Ross; choreography: Claude Bardouil.

Nowy Theater in Warsaw, premiere 22 September 2013

cast: Claude Bardouil, Stanisława Celińska, Magdalena Cielecka, Ewa Dałkowska, Bartosz Gelner, Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik, Marek Kalita, Wojciech Kalarus, Redbad Klijnstra, Zygmunt Malanowicz, Maja Ostaszewska, Piotr Polak, Jacek Poniedziałek, Magdalena Popławska

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