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AVANT-GARD POETICS OF LIFE WRITING

We are not interested in every example of a radical transgression of the conventions of life writing but only in the intersections – between the avant-garde, autobiography, archives, and artistic experimentation – created by artists associated with one of the nearly sixty experimental and ground-breaking aesthetic trends.

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The Avant-garde Poetics of Life Writing

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It would seem that there is no more conventional, (in Schiller's understanding) naïve, and exhausted poetics than European confessional writing and other related forms of life writing, traditionally called écriture intime (in the French academia) or simply life writing (in the English and American tradition). Most artistic interventions in the autobiographical question the confessional convention and its means of expression and destroy the transparency of pacts entered into in good faith. Gertrude Stein's The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, André Gide's The Counterfeiters, and Roland Barthes's Roland Barthes are all classic texts which almost exhaust the ways in which life writing can distance itself from the memoir, autobiography, diary and other related forms. Distance is created by another distinction – between literature/literariness and writing (or in the past: written texts). Life writing belongs to the latter. Biography, however, is (more and more) often an exception; as a traditional genre of life writing, it transmutes and absorbs the modern and postmodern techniques of narrative dispersion, heteroglossia, and fragmentation. In the recent decades, we have witnessed an increased "autobiographization" of biography. In humanistic discourse, this process comes hand in hand with autotheory, autoethnography, and intimate ethnography.

Therefore, it is not true that life writing and the avant-garde – defined very broadly as artistic trends of the 20th and the 21st centuries which center on experimentation¹ – do not have much in common. The connections and relations between them have so far not been discussed in much detail² but it is beyond the scope of this short essay to explain why. Instead, we want to ask questions that will inspire retrospective analysis, new interpretations of “classic” texts, and archival research – questions about the intersections between life writing and the avant-garde. Such questions – concerning the relationship between experimental aesthetics and life writing – were asked by Julia Novak³ and Irene Kacandes,⁴ and they inspired us to investigate such forms of life writing in which the emphasis on formal innovation leads to the readerly reflection on transgressing/breaking conventions. Indeed, Novak leaves room for further investigation because, in her opinion, experimental aesthetics can either emphasize the value of the auto/biographical or challenge it.⁵

We pursue a different route. Our starting point are the concepts of the avant-garde (Anatol Stern, Guillaume Apollinaire, Franciszka Themerson, Leopold Buczkowski, Aleksander Wat), the neo-avant-garde (Witold Wirpsza, Andrzej Falkiewicz, Tadeusz Kantor, B.S. Johnson, Philippe Sollers), the post-avant-garde (Blixa Bargeld, Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik), as well as the modernist (Marcel Proust). The intersections between life writing and experimentation are therefore discussed in the theoretical context of the 20th-century European avant-gardes.⁶ We are not interested in every example of a radical transgression of the conventions of life writing but only in the intersections – between the avant-garde, autobiography, archives, and artistic experimentation – created by artists associated with one of the nearly sixty experimental and ground-breaking aesthetic trends.

Moreover, we study not only published works but also all kinds of archival materials, be it institutional, private, or digital. The status of these sources is at times ambivalent, which allows us to discuss both planned and accidental discontinuities and departures from conventions. Archival materials also encourage us to ask questions about fundamental principles: to what extent are we dealing with the destruction of order and to what extent with archival chaos, an accidental collection,

¹ See discussion on the meaning of the “artistic experiment” in avant-garde art: Tradycje eksperymentu / eksperyment jako doświadczenie [Traditions of experiment / experiment as experience], ed. Krzysztof Hoffmann, Jakub Kornhauser, Barbara Sienkiewicz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019).

² One of the most important Polish studies on life writing of Polish avant-garde is Aleksander Wójtowicz's monograph, in which the author discusses the majority of memoirs and autobiographical novels of the experimental artists. See: Aleksander Wójtowicz, “Kronikarze i «fałszerze». Powojenne wspomnienia twórców z kregu «Zwrotnicy» i «Almanachu Nowej Sztuki»” [Chroniclers and ‘counterfeitors: Post-war memories of artists from the circles associated with the magazines ‘Zwrotnica’ and ‘Almanach Nowej Sztuki’], in idem: Nowa sztuka. Początki (i końca) [New art: Beginnings (and endings)] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2017).

³ Julia Novak, “Introduction”, in: Experiments in Life-Writing. Intersections of Auto/Biography and Fiction, ed. Lucia Boldrini, Julia Novak (New York: Springer, 2017).

⁴ Irene Kacandes, “Experimental Life Writing”, in: The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature, ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, Brian McHale (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

⁵ Novak.

⁶ See in particular: Teorie awangardy. Antologia tekstów [Theories of the avant-garde: An anthology], ed. Iwona Boruszkowska, Michalina Kmiecik, Jakub Kornhauser (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2020); Mark Lipowiecki, “Modernizm i awangarda: pokrewieństwa i różnice” [Modernism and the avant-garde: Affinities and differences], Teksty Drugie 5 (2018); Renato Poggiali, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. G. Fitzgerald (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968); Matei Călinescu, “Idea awangardy” [The idea of the avant-garde], in: Teorie awangardy. Antologia tekstów, ed. Iwona Boruszkowska, Michalina Kmiecik, Jakub Kornhauser (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2020), 115–170.

a failed endeavor to preserve one's legacy, or a mere incidental convergence of artistic and archival aesthetics? Does the concept of formal innovation used in the context of the archive really provide inspiration for the analysis of the collection?

In the Theories section, we feature three articles which take specific case studies as their starting point and offer a broader reflection on the status of experimentation in avant-garde life writing. In turn, the Practices section is devoted to case studies that go beyond universalizing interpretations. The five articles in this section discuss a number of artistic practices in which avant-garde artists expand the possibilities and impossibilities of different forms and genres of life writing in a truly unique way. Last but not least, in the Criticism section we feature two authors who draw on an avant-garde doctrine and polemically argue "against" the state of research, proposing a new understanding of the two existing orders.

This issue of Forum of Poetics opens with essays that re-interpret canonical texts from the perspective of life writing studies (Marta Rakoczy's article), look for writing formulas, figures, and tropes that point to the intersections of the avant-garde/the experimental and life writing (Marta Baron-Milian's article), and discuss irreducible tensions and differences in authorial poetics (Piotr Bogalecki's article).

For Marta Rakoczy, the key theoretical category that reopens the interpretation of Aleksander Wat's My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual is the art of the word. We may better understand the avant-garde and experimental character of My Century by comparing Wat and Miłosz's conversation with the achievements of the oral turn(s), oral history, and witness accounts and testimonies. While the ideology of "truth" which is part of the binary opposition between the spoken and the written should be approached carefully, Wat's meandering "recapitulations," as he himself referred to his conversation with Miłosz, had preceded the reflection on the complexity and limitations of oral narratives and testimonies of survivors and witnesses by several decades. By discussing My Century in the wider framework of cultural policies, identity-related projects of the 1960s and the 1970s, and the ever-changing concept of the autobiography, Rakoczy proves that political subversiveness, reflection on identity, and the form of Wat and Miłosz's conversation are closely related to the search for an aesthetics that satisfies the need for the rhetoric of the testimony. It must both account for local experiences and match the expectations imposed on Central and Eastern European dissidents in the West. Leaving aside the most frequently discussed and well-known circumstances surrounding the creation of My Century as well as Wat's physical and mental health, Rakoczy discusses Wat's audiobiography as an element of a broader discursive formation which transforms our understanding of history and production of the 20th century.

Avant-garde approaches to life writing also concern strictly autobiographical dimensions and identity politics. Marta Baron-Milian argues that prosopopoeia and the transversal typography play a key role in Anatol Stern's experimental biography Dom Apollinaire'a. Rzecz o polskości i rodzinie poetry [The House of Apollinaire: The poet's Polish Heritage and Family History]. Both are, in a way, crypto-autobiographical in nature, insofar as Stern had worked on Apollinaire's biography for years

and this prompted him to address and conceal his own family history, albeit inexplicitly. Following Alicja Stern's suggestion, Baron-Milian exposes Stern's Marrano mask and at the same time emphasizes the avant-garde aesthetics of Dom Apollinaire'a, which brings together poetry, essays, and genealogical investigation. Unlike Stern's numerous memoirist texts, in which he recounted the legend and the history of the avant-garde in a rather orderly and traditional manner, without referring to his own biography, in his experimental book about Apollinaire Stern addressed and concealed key questions about the self and the history of exclusion. This notwithstanding, it should be noted that the focus on Apollinaire's legendary Polish origin in biographical fiction, the phantasm of the beginning that emerges from Stern's text, anticipates agnotology, that is the study of cultural significance of ignorance, gossip, and doubt.

Piotr Bogalecki proves that it is not a coincidence that Witold Wirpsza, who opposed the confessional convention and challenged écriture intime (Spożytkować pisarsko [Use it in Literature], Sama niewinność [Pure Innocence]), also wrote a number of works in which he marked the exact dates and places of their creation. If we interpret dating as an existential trace and an autobiographical signature borrowed from diary writing, we can notice Wirpsza's discontinuous yet intense need to refer to the confessional convention. We can find notebooks filled with personal accounts and the beginnings of diaries in Wirpsza's archive. Although the poet always abandoned diary writing, the autobiographical model of writing, which in a way defined the entire 20th century, undoubtedly influenced his writing not only as a counterpoint or a per contra. Zapiski datowane. Bez porządku [Dated Notes. Unordered] can be interpreted as the experimental artist's mature response to the simultaneous need and reluctance towards diary writing. Wirpsza is therefore, paradoxically, both unique and typical in his struggles – in a way, he exemplifies the (neo)avant-garde's tense relationship with the tradition and convention of life writing. What in experimental poetry can be used in literature, insofar as one can openly distance oneself from and problematize the convention of life writing, takes a surprisingly traditional form in the case of intimate notes which were never meant to be published. There are many senile illness diaries (and Wirpsza's text is one) or generalizing reflections in the history of diary writing but very few have been written by avant-garde artists. The network of tensions between the literary and the intimate remains active and cannot be abolished by immersing oneself in the archive and the notes. However, we can trace the consequences of the implosion and explosion of different modes of writing and conceptualizations of the self.

In the Practices section, we present texts that discuss diaries (Anna R. Burzyńska's article), quasi-diaries (Dorota Kołodziej's article), experimental autopathography (Honorata Sroka's article), the relationship between exhibitions, performance, and life writing (Justyna Michalik-Tomala's article), and finally the status of avant-garde art in archival institutions (Katarzyna Biela's article).

For Anna R. Burzyńska, the starting point is Marc Augé's concept of non-place. Burzyńska analyzes the life writing of the German composer, musician, and performer Blixa Bargeld, who has been narrativizing his experience as a touring musician since the 1990s. The long hybrid journal/list kept by the artist shows how visiting thousands of places, paradoxically, has little to do with travelling. Inspired by avant-garde aesthetics, Bargeld has created a series of photographs showing hotel bathrooms (Serialbathroomdummyrun), experimental prose (Europa kreuzweise. Eine Litanei), and compositions rooted in the tradition of concrete music (the album Perpetuum Mobile). He also draws on the strategies of restriction and proceduralism devised by Dadaists and OuLiPo.

Dorota Kołodziej discusses three works by Andrzej Falkiewicz (*Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze* [*Fragments about Polish literature*], *Takim ściegiem* [*Using this Stitch*], *Ta chwila* [*This Moment*]). With the help of traditional theories of diary writing (Philippe Lejeune, Małgorzata Czermińska, Paweł Rodak), Kołodziej shows how Falkiewicz engages the reader in an experimental game with the autobiographical. Drawing on the findings of other critics of these (rather obscure) works, Kołodziej emphasizes that she analyzes strongly intertextualized texts filled with self-referential allusions and crypto-references to Falkiewicz's other works. Such poetics allows us to ask questions about the nature of the relationship with the reader established by the author. It also allows Kołodziej to trace the characteristics of this "self-referential" life-writing experiment.

Honorata Sroka, in turn, presents a comparative analysis in which she discusses autopathographic tactics used by Franciszka Themerson in her art and letters. Sroka analyzes previously unknown materials stored in the Museum of Art in Łódź, which are a rare example of the avant-garde artist's life writing. The concept of experimental autopathography which Sroka employs helps highlight that avant-garde experimentation in both the visual arts and life writing may have an ethical dimension (undermining the dominant and simplistic ways of talking about illness). Sroka further shows that the artist talks about her illness, both in private correspondence and in her drawings and monochrome paintings, using a coherent "poetics" based on self-ironic deconstruction, lack of pathos, and wit. The topic of illness, relatively rarely addressed by avant-garde artists in their art, is in this case an example of a transformational strategy in which two contradictory orders unite. Similarly to Alfred Jarry in *Ubu Roi*, Themerson introduces us to the aesthetics of the difficult and the terrible, using unpretentious satirical language.

Justyna Michalik-Tomala focuses on one of the leading Polish avant-garde autoarchivists – Tadeusz Kantor. However, Michalik-Tomala does not analyze the legacy of the founder of the "Cricot 2" theater, which has been discussed in great detail already, but instead discusses Kantor's more obscure project – Multipart (1971) – which preceded the artist's extensive documentation efforts. The scholar takes the concept of the "living archive" as her starting point and analyzes the Multipart project, which was in equal parts an exhibition/performance which engaged the audience, a form of life writing, and a form of theoretical reflection on the tasks and goals of the archive. Entering into a dialogue with Luiza Nader, Michalik-Tomala sees in Multipart not so much a prelude to the avant-garde artist's later works but an example and a model of an experimental performative archive, which further informs Nader's conceptual reflection on the processes of historicization, construction of inadequate and alternative histories as well as the status of documentation itself.

The Practices section ends with Katarzyna Biela's article devoted to the organization of two avant-garde archives: B.S. Johnson's archive (The British Library in London) and Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik's archive (Jagiellonian Library in Cracow). The comparative analysis is built around the term "liberature." Biela shows two different models of institutionalizing avant-garde, or more precisely, "liberatic" archives. She shows how the private and the public collection conceptually differ, describes the history of both archives, and addresses problems related to their multimodal nature. Biela's article is therefore, on the one hand, a meta-archival reflection on the reception of collections and, on the other hand, it profoundly shows that the restructuring of the English neo-avant-garde writer's collection was not only meant to protect it but also posed a threat to it.

In the final section, Criticism, we feature polemical texts by Maciej Libich and Katarzyna Thiel-Jańczuk. Libich investigates the dating of Leopold Buczkowski's war diaries. The scholar does not agree with Sławomir Buryła and Radosław Sioma who believe that the diaries are final drafts from the 1980s (copies of the original diaries). Libich proves that the manuscripts stored in the Museum of Literature in Warsaw are originals from the 1940s. The article analyzes the materiality of the diaries – unusual punctuation, notes on the margins, drawings, and “blank pages.” Such an anthropological reading successfully leads Libich to an original conclusion about the status of Buczkowski's writings which for the past two decades have been seen as copies of the original.

Katarzyna Thiel-Jańczuk, respectively, enters into a dialogue with Philippe Sollers's Oeil de Proust. Les dessins de Marcel Proust. She notes that while the number of studies on Proust's works and the number of novels which perpetuate Proust's myth in contemporary Francophone literature is enormous, the essay she discusses presents an original perspective, especially against the background of all the other works. Sollers, who is himself a neo-avant-garde writer and founder of the magazine Tel Quel, writes about Proust's relatively obscure legacy, that is drawings in the margins of his manuscripts or letters. Thiel-Jańczuk convincingly discusses the idealistic interpretations of the gaze and draws attention to the important role Proust's drawings play in the formation of his myth in contemporary French literature.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

“The best spoken book”. Aleksander Wat, the avant-garde, and “testimonies” of Central and Eastern Europe

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Wat's “voice from the past”

In *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (2012), a conversation between Timothy Snyder and Tony Judt covering a number of topics, Snyder stated that “perhaps the best spoken book is *My Century*, the magnificent autobiography of the Polish-Jewish poet Aleksander Wat”. I would like to investigate possible reasons behind such an interpretation of Wat's memoir. I also want to understand the phenomenon of *My Century* as an account which (I believe) only seems to have little in common with the avant-garde experiments from the poet's youth, as it is in fact a product of what Daniel Bell defines as the radical, angry sixties, and which refer to various avant-garde movements, propagating – just like them – apology of individual experience¹. Analyzing a spoken memoir as something more than just an account by an engaged witness of events taking place in Central and Eastern Europe, I would like to reveal the experimental potential of *My Century* as a book based on (according to Czesław Miłosz's and many readers' intentions) assumptions closely resembling avant-garde aesthetics and the related spoken turn in historiography of the second half of the 20th century, processed in various ways in social memory practices.

¹ See Daniel Bell, *Kulturowe sprzeczności kapitalizmu* [Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism], especially the part “Sensibility of the sixties”, translated into Polish by Stefan Amsterdamski (Warszawa: Aletheia, 2014), 161–187. English version: Pennsylvania: Basic Books, 1978), 144.

Obviously Wat's autobiography has a recorded, written and edited form, and formally it has little in common with the avant-garde of the first half of the 20th century. During his recorded conversations with Miłosz, Wat dissociated himself from aesthetic and political experiences from his youth. Contrary to Anatol Stern, he did not want to make the literary experiments from his youth seem more artistic than they were. He spoke rather fondly of futurism, although with no nostalgia². At the beginning of *Dziennik bez samogłosek* [A diary without vowels] Wat also dissociated himself from the avant-garde poetics of experiment and formal-intellectual innovations:

This is what I need, I, once an adventurous ex-avant-garde representative: to know, touch, feel that what is now has already been, that what I am experiencing at this moment has already been experienced and lived through, that it is within human power, within my power to experience it. [...] I am not a copyist or antiquary – I am not looking for the latest and newest, I am constantly seeking validation of new orders of objects, words, rhythms of the past, experienced time and time again³.

Another reason why *My Century* is a spoken and (seemingly) non-experimental book is that in the sixties Wat suffered from physical pain which became worse after he came to the USA. Invited by the University of California, Berkeley, he was unable to write his own memoir, let alone give it a literary form. However, according to Miłosz, this was not the only reason Wat did not feel good in the USA: he was “completely blocked”, he would forget about his pain and cheer up only when he “told stories”⁴. Additionally, the post-war period – a time when biographies dealt with two totalitarianisms – was also the time of return to the poetics of personal testimony as one that allows to adequately conceptualize historical experience. Miłosz constructed this testimony rhetoric around *My Century*, which demanded means other than literary. He dubbed this book “a moving panoramic picture”⁵, stressing that in the editing process he was mostly concerned with “future historians’ interest”⁶, “holding the tape recording in reverence”, and attention to “preserving the language spoken by Warsaw’s intellectual environment”. He explained that this was the source of the numerous repetitions of words, sentences, situations (the same event was presented slightly differently, i.e. each time with a new shade of judgment”. Miłosz had no doubt that *My Century* was first and foremost a testimony. His conviction affected later historiography, as evidenced by Marci Shore’s *Caviar and Ashes. A Warsaw’s Generation of Life and Death in Marxism* based on (among others) Wat’s accounts. It was also present in Polish literary studies, e.g. in Małgorzata Czermińska’s *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie, wyzwanie* [Autobiographical triangle. Testimony, confession, challenge]. Czermińska writes:

Wat treated his work on a spoken memoir as both a testimony about a century which he witnessed, and an auto-interpretation of a personal story of a man who experienced evil and suffering. Both the testimo-

² See Marci Shore, Kawior i popiół. Życie i śmierć pokolenia oczarowanych i rozczarowanych marksizmem [Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw’s Generation of Life and Death in Marxism], translated into Polish by Marcin Szuster (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2019), 385.

³ Aleksander Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek* [A journal without vowels], transcribed and edited by Michałina Kmiecik (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2018), 19.

⁴ Aleksander Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1990), 14.

⁵ Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, vol. 1, 18.

⁶ Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, vol. 1, 17.

nies about twentieth-century history and auto-analysis are inseparable and intertwined in Wat's narrative. It is difficult to talk about proportions, however, the testimony seems to dominate in *My Century*⁷.

Poetics of testimony was highly popular in Central and Eastern Europe. However, spoken memoirs by intellectualists who emigrated to places where they constituted a cultural and social minority becomes understandable when we place it in a broader, geopolitical context. A methodological revolution was taking place when *My Century* was recorded: growing popularity of oral history and lively archival work for collecting, recording, and studying the voice of witnesses of history, put in specific cultural and social policies of western liberal democracies. Such voices, according to the principles of oral history (formulated by Paul Thompson somewhat later, in 1978), were supposed to reveal the historical truth of minorities' experience. Their representation in academic discourses was to be emancipatory in terms of contents, as well as the spoken form. In *Voice of the Past* Thompson writes that "oral history certainly can be a means of transforming both the content and the purpose of history", because – as he stresses – "it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place"⁸.

Inspired by Marxism, Thompson perceived oral history as something close to the revolutionary postulates of the avant-garde, although this category does not explicitly appear in his book. This is because Thompson – in contrast to Marx, who believed that an utterance alone is unable to establish or subvert social order⁹ – assumed that speech is emancipatory, a view he shared with representatives of the avant-garde. Speech – as a means of spontaneity, grassroots movement, energy and folklore – was supposed to be a tool for liberation, democratize experience, and disturb poetics and media of talking about historicity in an egalitarian way, in order to give significance to everyday experiences of common people. Thompson perceived emancipation in terms of universalism; it was subject to a teleologically understood progress – the pro-democratic change for the better, in favor of freedom of individuals, groups, and communities.

Miłosz perceived his conversations with Wat in similar terms, although (contrary to the British historian) he was no longer fascinated with Marx. According to Miłosz, Wat's account was supposed to reveal the universal significance of totalitarianism supported by a biographic story, and indirectly legitimize western ideas of liberal democracy and personal freedom. Wat clearly did not appreciate the formula of dissident testimony which Miłosz in part imposed on him, such an account could be met with understanding in America at the time of the Cold War. Eugenia Ginzburg's shocking memoir was published in the USA already in 1967, Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales* – in 1970, the same year as the first volume of Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoir was published, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn received the Nobel Prize in literature.

⁷ Małgorzata Czerwińska, Trójkąt autobiograficzny, Świadectwo, wyznanie, wyzwanie [Autobiographical triangle. Testament, confession, challenge] (Kraków: Universitas, 2020), 40.

⁸ Paul Thompson, Joanna Bornat, Głos przeszłości. Wprowadzenie do historii mówionej [The Voice of the Past. Oral History], translated into Polish by Paweł Tomanek (Warszawa: Centrum Archiwistyki Społecznej, 2021), 283. English version: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 3

⁹ See Sebastian Michalik, Przemoc i mowa w nowoczesnej myśli społecznej. Przyczynek do pojęcia negatywności politycznej [Violence and speech in modern social thought. A contribution to the notion of political negativity] (Warszawa: PWN, 2014), 213.

However, in Europe the revealing function of *My Century* was not so clear. Due to recession and failed expectations of the sixties, which produced the 1968 counter-culture, the following decade was a time of unrest in Europe. Attitudes to communism were far from unambiguous, which Wat criticized: "westerners do not have the code to break the devious semantics of any communist statement"¹⁰. Many European projects of revision and concealing history of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes – especially ostentatious silence of some representatives of the French left in the face of Stalinism's crimes – could be met with criticism by intellectualists behind the iron curtain. Meanwhile, many European intellectualists saw anti-capitalism rather than anti-communism as the right direction for a cultural revision post 1968.

Many critical observers of the seventies defined that decade as depressingly aware that it followed great expectations and ambitious ideas, not offering anything beyond empty and unconvincing repetition of past ideas¹¹. According to Tony Judt, contrary to the sixties, the seventies proved to be individualistic rather than communal. Perhaps a turn in the form of oral history – which he believed to be not only a methodological revolt, but also a grassroots, non-academic movement with an influence on cultural and social policies – was a reaction to that individualism. On the one hand, it was supposed to appreciate the unique voice of individuals as material for constructing a historical narrative, and on the other – it was based on a conviction that this appreciation should emancipate not only individuals, but also communities.

Wat and Miłosz's joint venture is an original, clearly central-eastern-European version of thinking about oral history. Although Wat was far more reflective in thinking about his own narrative, which was somewhat in defiance of the intentions Miłosz imputed to him. For Wat, a diary – "spiritual autobiography", as Czerwińska put it – was a deeply personal expiation for his short-lived fascination with communism, for which he could not forgive himself, and which he interpreted in terms of personal guilt, metaphysical rather than historical.

In his attempts at describing and interpreting totalitarianism Wat relies on his own, direct experience, and on theoretical generalizations provided by his versatile erudition. However, at some point psychological, sociological, and historical explanations prove insufficient, and Wat resorts to metaphysics in order to answer the question: why evil¹²?

In other words, the spoken diary was a personal, expiatory performance – a form of agency via words, which was an important (if not fundamental) aspect of life-writing¹³. Its significance may have escaped western audiences towards whom Miłosz was oriented. For Miłosz, Wat's diary was obviously a unique document. However, it belonged to the recognizable genre of testaments by central-eastern-European intellectuals scarred by totalitarianism. This was a vision Wat could not ultimately accept.

¹⁰Michalik, 278–279.

¹¹Tony Judt, Powojnie. Historia Europy od roku 1945 [Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945], translated into Polish by Robert Bartołd (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 2008), 560.

¹²Czerwińska, 100.

¹³Paweł Rodak, Miedzy zapisem a literaturą. Dziennik polskiego pisarza w XX wieku [Between record and literature. A diary of a Polish twentieth-century writer] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011). See also Paweł Rodak, „Nie istnieje tu nic, zanim nie zostanie wypowiedziane». Rozmowa z Philippem Lejeune'em» [Things only exist once they are spoken. An interview with Philippe Lejeune], *Teksty Drugie* 2-3 (2003).

Perhaps this is why he dissociated himself from being a politician or historian in the foreword. He stressed that contrary to them, he is not a person who “makes history” or “describes historical acts” – instead, he has “a certain specific way of experiencing all experience”¹⁴. But at the same time, he did not resist being considered one of many witnesses of history – in fact, he stressed it in numerous documents referring to his biography, aware that this was the only interpretation that would be understandable for western institutions. Hence in one of his grant applications for his post-war works he described his political orientation: “My 1942 article in the London government’s magazine in Kujbyszewo, where I write: «we are eyewitnesses... of apocalyptic shattering of cultures and civilizations, which would like to be governed only by the rules of human reason»”¹⁵. This quote subtly highlights the significance of his own expiation, and at the same time avoiding any political self-definitions which require categories which – according to Wat – are no longer useful.

Not a politician, not a historian

Narratives of oral history were supposed to demystify dominating discourses based on criticizing social and political hierarchies – both in Paul Thompson’s and Czesław Miłosz’s works, and only partially in Aleksander Wat’s project. This is the reason why – similarly to the avant-garde – they fetishized everyday life, voice as a medium of unmediated, authentic communication, and the ultimately ambiguous figure of “a commoner” as the main subject of historical events. According to Thompson and French historians associated with “Annales”, everyday life constituted a potentially emancipatory category, allowing an insight into things which escaped literary or scientific regimes. The fight for unofficial, local, personal testaments, ignored by the machinery of power structures¹⁶, which shaped the past in their image, resembled many of the postulates of the inter-war avant-garde. Thompson’s postulates were later radicalized by Alessandro Portelli, who worked with oral histories from the seventies, collecting testaments from residence of Rome’s slums, and studying (among others) Italian workers. After many years he tried to present his research in the form of sound essays, almost completely eliminating text as a tool of privileged experts.

Wat’s ideas regarding his own accounts of “history happening” was often close to that, which is why he stressed his attitude – lay, open, non-professional – in terms of disdain to “politicians’ language” and a sense of alienation inspired by strange, precise, and concise academic language¹⁷. Miłosz seems to have been even closer to this way of thinking. He stressed that apart from Wat’s unprecedented biographical and literary experience, *My Century* owes its unique character to “a certain current, difficult to name, that flowed between when we talked”¹⁸. That current – a specific coexistence in a conversation – was what Portelli later defined via a “conversation is a dance” metaphor:

¹⁴Wat, Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony, t. 1, s. 19. English version: *My Century. The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual*. Translated into English by Richard Lourie. (New York: New York Review Books, 2003), xxv-xxvi.

¹⁵Ryszard Zajączkowski, “W archiwum Wata” [In Wat’s archive], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1 (2007): 154.

¹⁶Thompson, Bornat, 284.

¹⁷Wat, Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony, t. 1, 20.

¹⁸Wat, Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony, t. 1, 16. English version: XXIII.

Your moves and your partner's moves impact each other – in a sense, it is about partnership. And in oral history, it is about co-authorship; cooperation in creating something¹⁹.

Miłosz stresses that the spoken form of *My Century* renders it “more active and energetic”, addressed directly at listeners: full of repetitions, free flow of thoughts, circularity of contents returning in different variants, which Miłosz considers to be the diary’s great value. To some extent, it also suited Wat’s ideas, who insisted in *Dziennik bez samogłosek* that he “DOES NOT LIKE WRITING ABOUT HIS LIFE”: “Think about it, imagine my situation: once again recalling, faithfully reviving experiences which almost seem forgotten, almost or seemingly healed”²⁰. Obviously “energy, movement, freedom and action” – a whole selection of values imputed by Miłosz to Wat’s diary – closely resembled historical avant-garde’s way of thinking. This was similar to Thompson’s works, who elaborated on the question of various consequences of oral histories (not always valuable), only in later editions of *The Voice of the Past*. Later research revealed that oral histories do not always “liberate”, nor do they provide therapeutic consolation. To the contrary: they can traumatize, and by providing a way of expression, they allow a safe channel for anger or resistance, and thus hinder constructive social changes.

Contrary to oral history’s attempts at regaining the voices of those who are poorly represented, Miłosz and Wat’s project involved outstanding authors, who influenced twentieth-century discourses, and who – as dissident intellectuals from Central and Eastern Europe – were against any totalitarian or authoritarian regimes. However, Wat’s influence – contrary to Miłosz’s – was never major. Even Miłosz considered Wat’s literary career as somewhat failed, although through no fault of his own. Moreover, *My Century* was written by a man who represented an unprecedented cultural formation, i.e. Polonized Jewish intelligentsia from Central and Eastern Europe, extremely scarred by the 20th century. Contrary to many intellectuals from Western Europe, that formation was never privileged, and its identity dilemmas were marked by unique tragedy, as evidenced by Wat’s archive. There is a file with biographic entries he collected, which includes a note about not only Wat and his wife, but also unknown fate of their Jewish families.

They lost a 5-bedroom apartment in 1939 (and for the second time now) with antiques, library, paintings. His wife lost real estate she inherited from her father, Abram (Adam) Lew: tenant houses in Warsaw at Nowostalowa 6a and a villa in Otwock (“Meran”). His wife’s parents, Abram and Sara (Salomea), as well as her sister, Rita Grinstein, died in Treblinka. Wat also lost his two brothers with their families: Arnold (Aron) Chwat – in Treblinka, and Dawid Chwat – probably in Oświęcim²¹.

The unique status of the Polonized Jewish intelligentsia in Central and Eastern Europe made it even more unprivileged than most representatives of the intelligentsia from the same region. It also rendered its experiences incomprehensible for western audiences at the time when Pierre Bourdieu announced that “academic discourse” is only an expression of “the dominating frac-

¹⁹Alessandro Portelli, “Oczekuj nieoczekiwane” [Expect the unexpected], in: Opowiedziane. Historia mówiona w praktykach humanistycznych [Told. Spoken history in humanities], edited by Agnieszka Karpowicz, Małgorzata Litwinowicz-Droździel, Marta Rakoczy (Warszawa: Instytut Kultury Polskiej, 2019), 9. Translation into English mine, PZ.

²⁰Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, 285.

²¹Zajaczkowski, 153.

tion of the dominating class”²². Wat recognized that historical specificity of western intellectuals. He considered a completely different discursive-social foundation of Western intellectual circles, which he saw as subjected to “the dictatorship of France’s elders”²³, “doomed to the chair of apathy”²⁴. “Thus the French youth have to rebel”, because “by the time they get a university degree or a specialist position, they will have been trained, molded into routine”²⁵.

Moreover, the unique “grassroots” character, and at the same time “commonness” of Wat’s experience also concerned the fact that his dealing with communism, followed by his “private war with it” resulted from the experience of a laborer sharing prison camp life with people from the bottom of the social ladder, rather than that of an intellectual:

There is ample literature on soviet labor camps [...]. What makes Wat’s experience peculiar is the fact that apart from 11 prisons in which he dealt with soviet people of all ranks, professions and formations [...] he also experienced the common life of unprivileged working classes for three years, on the lowest levels of existence. This allowed him to watch and experience first-hand the mechanisms, course, and shape of soviet reality²⁶.

Miłosz also believed Wat’s biography to be special. In the introduction, he highlights that Wat’s story, whose awareness (including that of social hierarchies) is the main protagonist, serves as a tribute to “illiterate Ukrainian peasants, Polish workers from the Polish Socialist party, Jewish shoemakers from little Galician towns, and even Russian bandits.”²⁷

Interestingly, Wat’s account could resemble a “witness narrative”, i.e. the basic genre of oral history, which John Beverley later defined as an account of a “direct narrator”, “affirmation of the authority of personal experience”, and that contrary to someone who writes their autobiography, such a narrator cannot affirm their own identity as separate from the subordinate situation of a group or class whose story they narrate²⁸. Although Beverly stressed that a “witness account” belongs to those who are either “functionally illiterate”, or are not “professional writers”²⁹, his insistence that a witness is outside “privatized, modern identity” and “forms of western literary and academic writing”³⁰, allowed to see a relationship between Miłosz and Wat’s project (Wat genuinely suffered because of his cultural alienation among Berkeley intellectuals), oral history, and witness narratives as “the art and strategy of subordinate memory”³¹. However, contrary to Miłosz, Wat did not like being a victim of oppression: a subordinate, oppressed subject demanding support and empathy. This is why he highlighted the agency of people who made autono-

²²Cited after Judt, 562.

²³Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, 273.

²⁴Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, 273.

²⁵Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, 273.

²⁶Zajączkowski, 153–154.

²⁷Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, t. 1, 17. English version: xxiv.

²⁸John Beverley, *Narracja świadka, podrzędność i autorytet narracyjny* [Testimonio, subalternity and Narrative Authority], in: *Metody badań jakościowych* [Methods in qualitative research], edited by Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln (Warszawa: PWN, 2009), 763.

²⁹Beverley, 762.

³⁰Beverley, 763.

³¹Beverley, 769.

mous moral decisions, independent of historical circumstances throughout his story – perhaps in opposition to Miłosz's biographical revision from *The Captive Mind*.

Wat was aware that his testimony was commonly incorporated in broader discourses (also, to some extent, by Miłosz) which affected the interpretation of his autobiographical experience, making it more like dissident testimonies protecting him from the status of an "idle beggar"³² in the USA. In *Dziennik bez samogłosek* he complained about the poetics of "automiserabilism" which he felt was imposed on him also because of his migrant status. "Those myths about me, «poor, beaten by communism, oppressed» because it «matches the image», when it was in no way obvious or apparent that it was actually me who picked that fight"³³. This is how Wat saw his entrance into American environment: "What a relief: to be able to show myself in a world without those myths always surrounding us like a curtain which becomes thicker and darker and more impenetrable with time"³⁴. However, he was disillusioned as to his own situation: „And what if you are constantly watched, touched, probed: should we accept him as one of us? Or spit him out?"³⁵. He concluded: „How was one to expect that after thirty years they will still play the role of a comical newlywed, secretly photographed for fun and entertainment"³⁶.

Regardless of their differences, it seems that Wat and Miłosz managed to create a peculiar policy of evoking historical experience sooner than academics did, which is why Wat refused to consider it an autobiography or diary interpretable in terms of genre categories suggesting either literary, or historical-memoir interpretation. He stressed that it is neither an autobiography, nor a confession, nor a literary-political treaty; he meant it as a "recapitulation of personal experiences of more than twenty-five years of coexisting with communism"³⁷. "Recapitulation" signaled that he did not think of his memoir in terms of genres and formal issues – he was more concerned with its functions. Recapitulation suggested practice; the process of summarizing and organizing memory. Within its frames, "politics" was not a separate, rational subject domain – it was "fate"³⁸. It was almost like destiny deprived of any providential connotations; however, it should be stressed that in this case politics was far from the avant-garde perception of it as a personal domain, or collective creation. One could also say that Wat's way of thinking about spoken narratives, contrary to Miłosz's, resembles what has evolved in Polish humanities only recently.

Piotr Filipkowski's project, critical of Thompson's tradition, is one of its variants. According to Filipkowski, oral history as "hermeneutics of fate" is not about historical truth or its emancipatory potential, but about reclaiming individual "sense that people give to their past experiences – always in the context of present-day experiences – and to their life as some completed closed unit which they reflect upon. And about communicating that sense"³⁹. Wat consciously

³²Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, 288.

³³Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, 289

³⁴Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, 291.

³⁵Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, 292.

³⁶Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek*.

³⁷Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, t. 1, 20.

³⁸Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, t. 1, 19.

³⁹Piotr Filipkowski, "Historia mówiona jako hermeneutyka losu. Doświadczenie przedtekstowe" [Spoken history as hermeneutics of fate. Pre-textual experiencing], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2018): 47.

put a similar idea of an existential hermeneutic circle into practice a long time before that. Provoked by Miłosz's questions, he avoided answers by resorting to anecdotes, or snapshots of his own biography, consistently returning to certain issues or discussing them from different angles. The episodes he remembered would be meaningful in the context of the whole recapitulation (which did not set off the work of sense), but for minor, random memories. Similarly to Filipkowski's conceptualization: "like in a hermeneutic circle – remembered and evoked episodes gain a deeper meaning in the context of the whole biography. And that complete biography, equipped with some surplus of existential meaning, is but a constellation of those meaningful elements, episodes, memories, images, and experiences"⁴⁰. Thus one could see a meaningful, mature, narrative and political experiment in Wat and Miłosz's project. Its significance will be extracted by discourses developed in the west only in the 1980s and they are implemented in European humanities until today.

Testimonials and confessions

Reasons governing the form of *My Century* is thus complicated. In order to understand it, it is necessary to confront Wat's stories with contemporary historical discourses, as well as avant-garde (although going as far back as Rousseau) ideologies of the spoken word. Such a broad perspective combining different discourse fields allows an insight into life writing questions of oral and written practices of twentieth-century Central and Eastern Europe. The rhetoric of testimony constructed around oral history and spoken autobiographies of intellectuals from that region requires a critical consideration. Although it has a lot in common with at least some of the avant-garde's foundations, it dates significantly further back – specifically to *The Confessions* by Rousseau, which caused an aesthetic and moral earthquake, and inaugurated modern voice ideology, which later resonated in the imagination of the twentieth-century artistic avant-garde on the one hand, and on the other – in social policies of oral history and testimony concepts realized by Miłosz⁴¹. The rhetoric of oral testimonies and the accompanying voice ideology – foundations of Miłosz's concept – thus have a long tradition. They were also developed locally by Polish Romanticists, as evidenced clearly by Mickiewicz's literary silence. In his Parisian lectures, Mickiewicz dreamed about the living word as an embodied, collective act. He claimed that "in folk language, to vouch with your word is to vouch with yourself"⁴², "word is man", and "in Slavic languages, the words «man» and «word» share etymology"⁴³.

According to Michalina Kmiecik, a similar mythology of speech and (more broadly) word can be found in Wat's early work from 1930s. Kmiecik juxtaposes young Wat's speech philosophies with that of old Mickiewicz, defining them as "rigorists of acting". It was in the 1930s when Wat became fascinated with communism, and at the same time – disillusioned with literature and its fictionality; he dreamed about a democratic, emancipatory gesture of "leav-

⁴⁰Filipkowski, 47.

⁴¹Mary Chamberlain, Paul Thompson, "Introduction. Genre and Narrative in Life-Stories", in: *Narrative and genre*, edited by Mary Chamberlain, Paul Thompson (London-New York: Routledge, 1998), 15.

⁴²Adam Mickiewicz, "Literatura słowiańska. Kurs IV" [Slavic literature. Course IV], in *Dzieła* [Collected works], vol. XI (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1998), 77.

⁴³Mickiewicz, 149.

ing the narrow guild of professional writers”⁴⁴. At that time, he was highly skeptical of book culture and its social background. When editing “Miesięcznik Literacki” [Literary monthly] – a magazine with communist inclinations – he valued “reportage”, based on “observation and conversation”, “without embellishments and a formal suit”, for its apparent direct character which refers to orality and testimonies. Just as later representatives of oral history, Wat wants to reach “genuine testimony of specific experiences”⁴⁵ of the proletariat. Even in 1964 he defined his own writing as “chained speech”; he also mentioned people who stimulated him intellectually as the form of “logorrhea” which – contrary to internal monologues mirrored in writing – is less “banal, sloppy, shapeless”⁴⁶. Conceptualized in a broader cultural field, an autobiographical story, available via the voice of the reader or teller, proves to be a subversive genre, far from written and literary autobiographies. Similar interpretations can be seen in contemporary realizations of autobiographical stories. For example, in the context of the 1970s in Poland, Przemysław Czapliński observed that when they take the form of an extended interview, they can be treated as “an opening to social integration and incorporating knowledge [of Stalinism] into social strategies of producing dialogue culture”⁴⁷. What is more, a spoken autobiography is a strictly political project demanding “dialogue as a cultural rule”, and “more reflexiveness and equality in social communication”⁴⁸. Another example showing that spoken autobiography – consistently read through the lens of confession and testimony – is still treated as a strictly political act, comes from Timothy Snyder, cited at the beginning of this paper. In a 2012 interview with Tony Judt, Snyder mentions Wat’s memoir. Snyder not only claims that spoken diaries have a glorious tradition in Central and Western Europe; he thinks that as spoken testimonies of an era and simultaneously individual histories, they belong to grassroot movements for democracy and communal engagement. Snyder associates them with the socially- and politically-engaged intelligentsia from the former Eastern Bloc, as well as with collective and individual emancipation⁴⁹.

Such thinking about speech as a reference to the truth, coupled with the conviction that the ultimate civilizational crisis happened because of the alienation of the spoken word (which could mean anything in totalitarian regimes, according to the government’s decision) is also apparent in his autobiographical story. When talking about his time in a soviet prison, Wat said: “*Jenseit der Wahreit und der Lüge*: this is what I said to myself, paraphrasing Nietzsche. And, as is typical of moments of illumination – actual or imagined – the walls of my tight cell disappeared, and I **saw** that every human utterance since the dawn of speech had been either true, or false, either honest, or a lie. It could be beauty-poetry, and a prayer, but also then the human mind was like a shepherd separating one flock from another”⁵⁰. Wat discovered

⁴⁴Aleksander Wat, “Jeszcze o reportażu” [More on reportage], Miesięcznik Literacki 10 (1930): 425.

⁴⁵Michalina Kmiecik, “Paradoksy awangardowego zaangażowania. Milczenie artysty i rewolucja. Przypadek Aleksandra Wata” [Paradoxes of avant-garde engagement. Artist’s silence and revolution. The case of Aleksander Wat], Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich 2 (2019): 76.

⁴⁶Wat, Dziennik bez samogłówów, 270.

⁴⁷Przemysław Czapliński, “Rozmowa przeciw ekstazie. O kłopotach z autobiografią (nie tylko) komunistyczną” [Conversation against extasy. On issues with (not just) communist autobiography], Teksty Drugie 6 (2018): 26.

⁴⁸Czapliński, 26.

⁴⁹Tony Judt, Timothy Snyder, Thinking the twentieth century, translated into Polish by Paweł Marczewski (Poznań: Rebis, 2021).

⁵⁰Wat, Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony, t. 2, 40.

the essence of totalitarianism via the alienation of “the human speech”. Its distortion and detachment from any truth criteria unrelated to the oppression of the regime seemed to him the most horrendous thing to ever happen to civilization⁵¹.

The spoken idiom of the works by the intelligentsia from Central and Eastern Europe – an unprecedented formation in terms of the continent – was also suggested by Miłosz. In the introduction to *My Century* he wrote about Wat's adoration for intellectual disputes, that “what he wrote always seemed like a fraction of what he would say”, and that “paradoxically, and contrary to his intention, his longest book was not written – it was a collection of tape recordings”⁵². That spoken character of Wat's works – transcending text towards apparently authentic experience – was also suggested by his later interpreters. In the excellent *Aleksander Wat: forma życia. Studium o pisaniu, doświadczeniu, obecności* [Aleksander Wat: A form of life. A study in writing, experiencing, and presence], Paweł Paszek stresses that “an encounter with Wat's poetry is an encounter with a text and texts, with literature and a literary universe, and first and foremost, it is an encounter with life which calls towards stories, just like stories call towards life”⁵³. For Paszek, Wat's memoir was a story understood as a form transgressing literature. This opinion was shared by Przemysław Rojek, who considered Wat's post-war writing “a bio/bibliography, i.e. writing about self, and simultaneously a constant attempt at finding a better way of storytelling”⁵⁴. Krystyna Pietrych highlighted the “continuous writing process, characterized by directionless potentiality and constantly postponed finality”: “in a phase of permanent birth”⁵⁵. This process resembled living speech more than a closed text. Wat declared: „I am unable to finish, perhaps I do not believe in the logics of finishing, I keep starting and abandoning my projects”⁵⁶.

The orality ideology always associates orality with a testimony of truths or senses (both individual and collective) which are closest to actual experiences. This curious characteristic meant that even if someone's speech was mass-reproduced (as a recording or book), it was treated as a record of time; by definition a moment of a living, authentic encounter with that person. Autobiographical pact in the case of audiobiography (Philippe Lejeune) looked different than in its written versions. If writing an autobiography was treated as obliging readers to treat it as the truth⁵⁷, then a spoken autobiography was interpreted as an emanation of truth. Voice seemed to abolish all literary and paraliterary conventions in the form of pacts innate to the genre.

⁵¹Wat, Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony, t. 2, 41.

⁵²Wat, Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony, t. 2, 9. English version: xvii.

⁵³Paweł Paszek, Aleksander Wat: forma życia. Studium o pisaniu, doświadczeniu, obecności [Aleksander Wat: A form of life. A study in writing, experiencing, and presence] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2021), 25.

⁵⁴Przemysław Rojek, “Historia zmącona autobiografią”. Zagadnienia tożsamości narracyjnej w odniesieniu do powojennej liryki Aleksandra Wata [History stirred by autobiography. Narrative identity issues in reference to Aleksander Wat's post-war poetry]. Kraków: Universitas, 2009, 38.

⁵⁵Krystyna Pietrych, Aleksander Wat – (re)lektry. Nowe konteksty, inne perspektywy [Aleksander Wat – (re) reading. New contexts, different perspectives] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2022), 13.

⁵⁶Wat, Dziennik bez samogłosek, 219.

⁵⁷Rodak, “«Nie istnieje tu nic, zanim nie zostanie wypowiedziane». Rozmowa z Philippem Lejeune'em”, 221.

Obviously, equating spoken histories and spoken audiographies with a unique testimony (clearly done by Miłosz in the introduction) made it difficult to notice sophisticated practices of the art of word: living, variational improvisations of life writing, at a given moment constructing a story about life as an example of a unique, oral creation, using specific means (linguistic and extralinguistic). It also made it difficult to notice how the medium as a form of record, as well as instruments for playing, archiving, classifying, and documenting voice change ways in which a spoken, edited, and written autobiography is understood. Any autobiographical stories result from the time, situation, and place of telling the story, and the social field related to the unique experience of interlocutors, what their audience is used to in terms of genre, the infrastructure of research or literary projects and the accompanying ideology. Their variants and intentional choices behind them are subject to rules which are from Rousseau's "truth".

Therefore, Wat's spoken memoir is not a fictional creation, nor a living, unique, non-fictional "testimony". It was an oral genre⁵⁸ *sui generis*, demanding a deep consideration regarding its social positioning and significance, also for the contemporary memory policies and their institutional background. In the case of *My Century*, it was necessary to see events taking place between the interlocutors, and the story genres which they set off. Those events were full of ambivalence, tensions, and negotiations taking place in the field of speaking experiences, institutions initiating them, and their politically-, socially-, and culturally-rooted actors. They were also based on culturally- and socially-defined policies of obtaining, evoking, or passing over Wat's memories and genre choices, who – together with Miłosz – chose "dialogic discourse", "rich heteroglossia", and complexity inscribed in "sequences of verbal processes", and 'constructs generated by cultural and personal encounters'⁵⁹.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

⁵⁸Agnieszka Karpowicz, "Poławianie gatunków. Twórczość słowna w antropologicznej sieci" [Hunting for genres. Literature in the anthropological network], in: Od aforyzmu do zinu, Gatunki twórczości słownej [From aphorism to zin. Literary genres], edited by Grzegorz Godlewski, Agnieszka Karpowicz, Marta Rakoczy, Paweł Rodak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014).

⁵⁹Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as genre", in: Narrative and genre, edited by Mary Chamberlain, Paul Thompson (London-New York: Routledge, 1998), 23. See also Anna Witeska-Młynarczyk, "Can the Children Speak. Voice, Children and an ADHD Diagnosis in an Ethnographic Research", *Revue de Science Sociale* 63 (2020): 47.

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CZESŁAW MIĘOSZ

ABSTRACT:

Analyzing Alexander Wat's *My Century* as more than an account of an engaged participant in the events of Central and Eastern Europe, I would like to show its experimental potential, close to avant-garde aesthetics. This potential, in my opinion, was part of an extensive institutional-discursive field, as it was related to the oral turn in historiography of the second half of the 20th century processed in various ways in the social politics of memory. In my interpretation, Wat's oral memoir was neither a fictional creation nor a non-fictional "testimony". It was a genre of verbal creativity, which demanded in-depth reflection on its social location and meaning. In the case of *My Age*, it was necessary to perceive in the events happening between the actors negotiating the conversation with each other and the various story genres they activated. These events were full of ambivalence, tensions and negotiations that took place in the field of genres of uttering experience, the institutions that initiate them and their politically, socially and culturally empowered actors and discourses. They were also based on culturally and socially defined policies of retrieving, reclaiming, restoring, evoking or silencing memories, and the intentional and genre choices of Wat himself. Wat and Milosz opted for, as Alessandro Portelli characterized oral history in 1998, "dialogic shaping of discourse", "rich heteroglossia" and "sequences of verbal processes and [...] constructs generated by cultural and personal encounters". In this article I want to show that this heteroglossia provoked different memory policies. It also constructed different ideologies of the voice of Central and Eastern European intellectuals.

Central and Eastern Europe

Aleksander Wat

VOICE

VERBAL CREATIVITY

oral memoirs

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Avant-garde in earnest! Stern's biographical experiments with Apollinaire*

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"There seems to be hardly anything less romantic and exciting than a footnote. And yet, it was a short commentary at the bottom of a page that directed me onto the path of exciting adventures¹". Thus James L. Clifford begins the story of one of his biographical investigations. Even though the footnote (as a textual figure) has more attraction for the contemporaries than it did for Clifford, still, this story begins with a similar adventure, which paved the way for a few future undertakings. The difference lies in the fact that "a short commentary" was not found at the bottom of the page, despite its footnote-like nature.

¹ James L. Clifford, *Od kamków do mozaiki. Zagadnienia biografii literackiej* [From Puzzles to Portraits. Problems of A Literary Biographer], transl. by Anna Mysłowska (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978), 24.

Footnotes to Anatol Stern's *Dom Apollinaire'a*² [*The house of Apollinaire*] – this is probably the most appropriate “genre” classification of the fragment of Alicja Stern's³ reminiscences, which are, unlike Clifford's convictions, both romantic *and* exciting. That is not only because they are molded from figures of the discourse of love and full of passion, but also because they reveal the clues which inevitably direct one onto pathways of literary adventures. I am particularly interested in a specific footnote commentary, from which a volatile intertextual scaffolding originates; an intertextual relation of two auto/biographical stories, one of which tries to shed light onto what the other one always seeks to conceal. This is how a multilayered, unstable construct of mutually enlightening texts of *life writing* is created; one which is becoming more and more uncertain, as it is more and more closely and confoundingly related to that which is auto-bio-graphical with what was meant to remain in hiding. Before we discuss the above-mentioned “footnote”, however, let us devote some attention to the “main text”.

The main text, which was

This role is taken up by a book mentioned above, i.e., Anatol Stern's, *Dom Apollinaire'a. Rzecz o polskości i rodzinie poety* [*The house of Apollinaire. On the poet's Polishness and family*], published in 1973 as a collection of essays, devoted to the author of *Alcools* [*Alcohols*]. It was in print till the late 1950s, both in Polish and European journals and prepared for publication after Stern's death by his wife Alicja. In a way, *Dom Apollinaire'a* is a report on an elaborate genealogical investigation, concerning the origin and family history of Guillaume Apollinaire. For many years this investigation remained Stern's obsession, pushing the author to embark on subsequent journeys, strike up numerous acquaintances, engage in arduous letter-writing, assemble seemingly disparate jigsaw elements, search for the missing elements of the puzzle, and finally – prepare consecutive texts which, definitely crossed the boundary of biographical genres, becoming literary works, oftentimes crossing even the boundary of literature. Despite the impressive amount of materials on which *Dom Apollinaire'a* is built, it is impossible to get a sense of how much of Stern's life was devoted to his studies on the life and work of the author of *Calligrammes* without consulting the Sterns' Archive, which comprises six thick folders of documents related to his work on the book.⁴ This immense multiaspectual collection includes documents, articles, critical works, notes, tens of letters, pictures and drawings, all of which were simultaneously clues in a genealogical investigation, the foundations of stories written subsequently and biographical *ready mades*. Interestingly enough, a considerable part of the collection are other people's reactions (published and private) to Stern's texts on Apollinaire, which he painstakingly collected. Ultimately, Alicja Stern included them in the book as an appendix, which aligns the text of *Dom*

² Anatol Stern, *Dom Apollinaire'a. Rzecz o polskości i rodzinie poety* [*The house of Apollinaire. On the poet's Polishness and family*], prepared for print by Alicja Stern, edited by Zygmunt Czerny (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973). Henceforth citations from this edition are indicated by „DA”, followed by page number.

³ Alicja Stern, *Życie i wiersze. Pamiętnik liryczny* [*Life and poems. A lyrical memoir*] (Warszawa 1979), The Sterns' Archive, sg. no. 11854. Henceforth citations from this edition are indicated by „PL”, followed by page number.

⁴ Materiały warsztatowe do Domu Apollinaire'a [Workbook for „The house of Apollinaire”], vol. 1–4, The Sterns' Archive, sg. no. 14305; Różne materiały dotyczące Guillaume'a Apollinaire'a: prace krytyczne, materiały dotyczące biografii [Various materials on Apollinaire: critical works, biographical materials], The Sterns' Archive, sg. no.. 17407; Listy od rodziny Kostrowickich [Letters from the Kostrowiccy family], The Sterns' Archive, sg. no. 14356.

Apollinaire'a along a particular “axis of time”, thus allowing one to trace both biographical pre-texts and post-texts, arranged together in a single unit.

This heterogeneity of form, genre and medium in the collection is a product of Stern's disparate, programmatically “unprofessional”, biographical practices. One is thus encouraged to adopt a perspective informed by the concept of *life writing*, especially useful where genre-specific divisions prove insufficient in the face of modern experiments with biographical forms. This perspective contextualises auto- and biographical practices in a broad spectrum of “life-writing”, operating in-between what is real and what is fictitious, without ever reaching either of the two points of reference. Most importantly, the *life writing* framework helps to see Stern's *Apollinaire*-project (and everything relating to it) in a broad perspective of dispersed and diversified intermedial auto/ biographical forms, which enter with one another into multidimensional relations, mutually attracting or repulsing, enlightening, and obscuring, trespassing each other's boundaries and interfering with each other's tissues. *Dom Apollinaire'a* most certainly cannot be termed a biography, as the book turns into a strange experiment in “life writing”, which puts a life story into literary use. This feature relates the book to the maximal inclusivity of “life-writing”, which in Zachary Leader's words incorporates not only “memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, diaries, autobiographical and biographical fictions, but also letters, documents, testaments, recorded anecdotes, testimonies, court documents [...] marginalia, poems, scientific as well as historical texts and digital forms”.⁵ They all become a part of the “life writing” universe in and of themselves, but they also prove to be an easily transformable material, operating not so much as sources of facts, as in the role of material artefacts, “ready-mades”, which undergo a biographical recycling, producing surprising biographical collages and montages. Montage – this domain of the avant-garde – is one of Stern's most visible practices.

In the course of his genealogical investigation Anatol Stern develops a special bond with his protagonist, which impacts both the manner of his research (which sometimes becomes incredibly intense) and the form of his texts. Overwhelmed by his obsession with Apollinaire, Stern oscillates between fact and fiction, fascination, and critical stance, underscoring his peculiar biographical narratives with a discussion on the past and future of the art of the avant-garde and the forms and rationale for his own experimentation. As stated by Julia Novak, experimenting “with the auto/biographical form will almost automatically render suspicious the ontological status of the represented life, i.e., the position of the text on the fact/ fiction continuum, that is – its authenticity”⁶. From this point of view, Stern's texts devoted to Apollinaire's biography and reworking familiar biographical techniques in scholarly and essayistic pronouncements as well as in literary texts become particularly interesting. Amongst these artistic reworkings we can find both the long epic poem *Dom Apollinaire'a* as well as two projects of a screenplay for a film biography of the author of *Calligrammes*. In each of these works the reader can follow the permanent movement of the narrative along the axis of factuality and fictionality.

Dom Apollinaire'a – not a novel *sensu stricto* – often reads like detective prose, which, incidentally, was a frequent inspiration for Stern. In subsequent essays he reveals new clues in his investigation

⁵ Zachary Leader, „Introduction”, in: On Life-Writing, ed. by Zachary Leader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11.

⁶ Julia Novak, „Experiments in Life-Writing: Introduction”, in: Experiments in Life-Writing, ed. by Lucia Boldrini, Julia Novak (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 6.

on the Polish ancestry of the French poet and the confusing history of the family of Kostrowiccy. His witnesses are Apollinaire's friends and the living descendants of the family. Their stories gradually help to uncover an astonishing hypothesis on the ancestry of the author of *Alcools*. At first it sounds like spectacular literary fiction, which (to pick up on a wonderful metaphor used by Julia Hartwig with reference to a different hypothesis) "was released with plumes of a black smoke by demonic surrealists"⁷. But the biographical investigation, reinforced by Stern's persuasive narration, unexpectedly turns the hypothesis into a probability. Stern follows the clues left all over Apollinaire's documents, which had not raised much interest before, but inevitably lead to the Polish element of his history. These clues can be found, among others, in Apollinaire's own words about his Polish heritage. Stern initiates a parallel (both literary and real) search: on the one hand he focuses on biographical aspects in Apollinaire's works, on the other – he carries out an actual, detailed investigation, researching the history of the Kostrowiccy family. The investigation is driven by Apollinaire's legendary mother and the unknown identify of his father, which puts into question earlier hypotheses that the father of the poet was either an Italian magnate or an important church official. However, a different hypothesis can be gleaned from the analysed documents and letters received from the descendants of the Kostrowiccy. This hypothesis, to which Stern refers as "imperial", is the most surprising one, as it argues that Apollinaire was the great-grandson of Napoleon. Stern proposes this hypothesis, relying on Jan Kostrowicki's telling of a story of the illicit liaison between Napoleon II and a Vienna lady in waiting, Melania Kostrowicka, which produced a son, born and raised in secrecy, probably under the protection of the Vatican. Apollinaire himself, or Wilhelm Apolinarius Kostrowicki, was supposed to be the fruit of a romance between that secret descendant of Napoleon with Angelika Kostrowicka, famous for her gambling and fondness for nightlife. Melania was supposed to be her distant aunt.

Even though Stern's hypothesis, first introduced in a series of articles, sounds like a biographical fiction, causes stir amongst contemporary scholars of Apollinaire's works and his friends, many of whom actually confirm these suspicions, volunteering further pieces of evidence. Some of the reactions to Stern's essays, published in Poland, France and other countries are reprinted as an appendix to *Dom Apollinaire'a*, and constitute peculiar "evidence", which is an interesting example of international reception (interestingly enough, dissenting voices are ignored). Leaving aside the issue of ancestry, biography and works of Apollinaire, the reconstruction of the Kostrowiccy's entangled lives, the investigation and its confusing history, let us focus on Stern's approach. He does not seem to investigate or aspire to the role of a professional biographer, because he does not abandon a writer's role even for a moment. The strategy of Stern's biographical research clearly is not typical for what a good biographer does, because its aim is not, as the author repeatedly declares, to establish what "really" happened, what the facts are, who the real father was. The aim is something else – not to discover the truth but to discover the gossip, rumour or legend of Apollinaire's ancestry, which the latter (as Stern claims) knew about, but never verified yet always concealed. Stern argues that the influence of this legend on Apollinaire's creative imagination was immense and flowed like an elusive, deep undercurrent in all of the works of the author of *Calligrammes*. This undercurrent supposedly revealed subsequent images which, thanks to the "imperial hypothesis",

⁷ Julia Hartwig, *Apollinaire* (Warszawa: PIW, 1961), 60. As written by Hartwig, in a clear allusion to Stern's hypothesis: „one of our writers led a skillful genealogy of Apollinaire from the Little Eagle of Napoleon. Indeed, the Apollinaire legend is still alive and encourages new hypotheses, unfortunately all of them are untestable, but their great advantage is their vividness and the unrelenting interest in the poet's biography [...].” Hartwig, 60.

for the first time could be seen in an autobiographical perspective. Thus, it can be said that the aim of this “semi-biographic” investigation is not realistic but literary in nature.

Stern thus acts a little like a biographer, a little like a literary scholar, and a little like a writer, combining the three roles, now aiming at facts, now looking for fiction, blending the two in a literary narrative. A case in point is Stern’s main argument in his genealogical investigation, which is a piece of literary fiction rather than a fact. The issue concerns Apollinaire’s short novella, entitled *La chasse à l'aigle* [*The eagle hunt*], whose interpretation in the light of biographical elements, collected by Stern is the most interesting point of the detective plot of *Dom Apollinaire'a*. The main protagonist, while walking the streets of Vienna, is reminded of Napoleon’s son, nicknamed Little Eagle, who must have walked those same streets at some point. Moments later he bumps into a man wearing an eagle mask, who explains to the terrified passer-by that the reason he is wearing the mask is that people would be horrified by how much he resembles his grandfather. Moments later it turns out that the masked man is being chased by a crowd of soldiers and butlers who eventually murder him in the street. In his last cry for help calls himself Napoleon’s descendant. The novella ends with a host’s retelling of a legend about the romance of Little Eagle with a young aristocratic woman, the consequence of which was a son raised in total secret, as a potential heir to the throne. Apollinaire, through the words of his narrator, calls this legend “in every way too absurd to be believed by anybody in possession of common sense”. The person met in the street is called “a painful ghost of an old Eagle...”. It is not hard to see how Stern turns the novella legend into a literary piece of evidence, confirming the existence of the legend about Apollinaire’s ancestry, which the writer knew about, and which was to become his secret obsession in life and literature.

The appendix to *Dom Apollinaire'a* contains a letter by René Clair, who thus comments on Stern’s investigations: “[...] What a shame you are a poet! The story of Apollinaire, the grandson of Little Eagle, is so beautiful that it seems to be the product of a poet’s mind. Now, since you are indeed a poet, everybody will think it is a figment of your imagination. Everybody, except those who know that a poet never makes anything up, but always guesses. Let me number you amongst the latter...”. (DA 198). This poetic “guessing” comes to fruition in Stern’s lyrical poem, which became the title of the entire book.⁸ Alicja Stern calls the text “a poetic amalgam”, which combines “enchantment with the legend of the house of Kostrowiccy” and Paris, which was “supposed to create a conviction that the boundary between the fantasy of life and its realism is very fluid”.⁹ The fluidity of this boundary *post factum* is also manifested in the book in which a poem appears next to scholarly articles, essays, letters and numerous factual assertions.

Stern’s “familiarising” himself with Apollinaire acquires a transmedial character, as it were. Possessed by his Apollinaire obsession, Stern does not stop at continuing with his investigation and

⁸ Dom Apollinaire'a was first published in fragments under different titles: Anatol Stern, „Dom na drugim brzegu” [„The house on the other shore”], Nowa Kultura 1 (1961): 3 and his, „Dom poetry (fragmenty)” [“The house of a poet (fragments)”), Twórczość 1 (1971): 5–14. It is then published in its entirety in Stern’s, Widzialne i niewidzialne [The visible and the invisible] (Warszawa: PIW, 1964), 35–62, as well as in the book Dom Apollinaire'a, 29–52. See Andrzej Krzysztof Waśkiewicz, „Dodatek krytyczny. Komentarz do tomu 1” [„A critical appendix. Commentary on vol. 1”], in: Anatol Stern, Wiersze zebrane [Collected poems], vol. 2 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986), 375.

⁹ Stern, Wiersze zebrane, 154.

biographical and literary projects concerning the author of *Alcools*. In the Sterns' Archive one can find, among other things, a few projects concerning a biographical movie on Apollinaire. Stern was planning to write a screenplay¹⁰ for that movie, which he pitched as a film about "the greatest poet of our times"¹¹, whose life "was not only full of violent passions but it was also shrouded in mystery. He was the son of an unknown father and everything we know about him so far has been based on suppositions. The latest documents are proof that there was the blood of Little Eagle, the duke of Reichstadt, in his veins, and that Apollinaire suspected as much"¹². The premise of the envisaged movie –which Janusz Lachowski refers to as "very likely Stern's final film project"¹³ was supposed to be based on and propagate the findings of Stern's investigation. In the final paragraph of a short introductory commentary to the draft of the screenplay one reads: "In this movie Apollinaire should say everything he didn't dare and wasn't allowed to say in his lifetime".¹⁴ The documents contain two versions of a plot outline, and the working title of the movie, included in the typescript is *An eagle-hunt....* Apollinaire's novella was then to become the main axis of the screenplay and include a recurring character of a ghost wearing an eagle mask. That character was also to appear in one of the final scenes, in which the movie version of Apollinaire sees the ghost yet again on his deathbed, only this time the spectre takes off his mask, which conceals the poet's own face.¹⁵

The main text, which was not

But why exactly does Stern choose Apollinaire? The answer seems obvious: one avant-garde author is fascinated by another great avant-garde poet. This explanation, however, is too simplistic, as it ignores the complex relation which begins to connect the author with his protagonist. Stern is not actually writing a biography; rather, he wants to "align himself" with Apollinaire through literary practice, the writing process, and new forms of re-writing his history. According to Alicja Stern's account, appended to Stern's book, Apollinaire was Stern's first youthful fascination and his last love (DA 194–195). In his poem *Reflektory [Headlights]* Stern, too, refers to the author of *Alcools* as his "first fascination" and somebody particularly close: "a panther with a wounded muzzle and head covered in azures"¹⁶, and one whose arm is "a brother's arm". Also, the "last love" finds its, indeed symbolic, manifestation. As mentioned by Alicja Stern:

Anatol's final essay entitled *Matka Apollinaire'a [Apollinaire's Mother]* was finished on the last day of his life. I rushed to Warsaw with the typescript in my car. It was important for Anatol to bring the

¹⁰Anatol Stern, [Film o Apollinairze] [A movie about Apollinaire], in his Projekty scenariuszy filmowych oraz konspekt pracy o polskiej awangardzie literackiej [Projects of screenplays and sketches of work on Polish literary avant-garde], The Sterns' Archive, sg. no. 14303.

¹¹Stern, [Film o Apollinairze], [no page no.].

¹²Stern, [Film o Apollinairze], [no page no.].

¹³Janusz Lachowski, Anatola Sterna związki z kinematografią [Anatol Stern's relationships with cinematography] (Kraków: Universitas 2021), 347. The project of the film definitely came into being after the publication of Stern's most important article about Apollinaire in „Les Lettres Françaises” in 1959 r. After this publication Stern was invited by Jacqueline Apollinaire, whose acquaintance he mentions in film description. It is certain, then that the project came into being between 1959 and 1968, but it is hard to come up with a more specific date. See Lachowski, 348–351.

¹⁴Stern, [Film o Apollinairze], [no page no.].

¹⁵Lachowski, 7.

¹⁶Stern, Wiersze zebrane, t. 1, 89.

essay to the editorial office of "Przegląd Humanistyczny" before the submission deadline. I made it. I then phoned Anatol's health resort from there. It was too late. In his final days he would repeatedly say: "As soon as I'm well again, I'm getting down to work on the book on Apollinaire" (PL 160)¹⁷.

Anatol Stern never wrote an autobiography; we will not find in his archive any notes and brullions of personal memories, journals, diaries or notebooks which would contain any unprocessed writing about his own life. In the documents preserved in his archive, Stern adopts multiple personae related to artistic creations: that of a poet, a prose writer, a screenwriter, a dramatist, a critic, a historian of literature and avant-garde, etc. We will find there numerous versions of his retellings of the history of Polish futurism, and hundreds of published pages of memoirs¹⁸, which Stern used for creating his own legend of the avant-garde and a narrative on its futuristic beginnings. He does not shy away from telling his own history, yet his is a peculiar history – one in which the author almost always presents himself as a writer, and one which is centered on artistic practices and creative activity, collective actions, literary journeys and anecdotes. In Roma Sendyka's account of the relationship between "diachronics" and "episodics"¹⁹ Stern definitely belongs with the former, building a compact, consistent, "hermetic" narrative about himself. The boundaries of this narrative are clearly outlined and non-negotiable. Most interestingly in Stern's case, the boundaries of this story are self-creatively sealed around the creator. They refuse entry to any traces of daily life, "private" history or anything which could elude the author's working overtime. Stern seems to believe unreservedly in the integrating and creative powers of his narrative about the beginnings of the avant-garde, which also prefigured his own, surprisingly monolithic identity. This is an identity founded on casting oneself in the role of a former futurist, an avant-garde creator, who would go on to construct and establish the avant-garde legend, which he pointedly referred to as "the legends of our days" in the title of one of his memoir essays. He shies away from stories about his own life in its private dimension and traces of his own family history, including his most significant silence: the one concerning his own ancestry.

Stern undoubtedly belongs to a numerous group of writers in Polish People's Republic who – as Artur Hellich says – "wrote about their past as if their ethnicity was not an issue".²⁰ One can say that Stern's self-narrative always begins from his avant-garde debut, which he presents as the beginning of his meticulously construed legend. But even when the author of *Futuryzje [Futurisations]* decides that a crucial element of his "personal myth" is his blasphemy lawsuit (a result of a notorious futuristic meeting in Vilnius, which led to his arrest), he prefers to call himself "a martyr of the avant-garde" rather than a victim of antisemitic witch-hunt. No doubt a strategy of tabooisation, enforced by the socio-political context of the PPR,

¹⁷Alicja Stern also writes about this in *Wprowadzenie do aneksów w Domu Apollinaire'a [Introduction to the appendices to the House of Apollinaire]* (DA 193).

¹⁸They include, among others, a collection of texts from the volumes *Poezja zbuntowana [Rebel poetry]* (Warszawa: PIW, 1964), *Legendy naszych dni [Legends of our days]* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1969), *Gód jednoznaczności i inne szkice [The hunger of definitiveness and other essays]* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1972), as well as numerous press articles, interviews or radio broadcasts (which are mentioned or transcribed in entirety in the Sterns' Archive)

¹⁹Roma Sendyka, *Od kultury ja do kultury siebie. O zwrotnych formach w projektach tożsamościowych [From the culture of I to the culture of oneself. On reflexive forms in identity projects]* (Kraków: Universitas, 2014), 384–385.

²⁰Artur Hellich, *Gry z autobiografią: przemilczenia, intelektualizacje, parodie [Games with autobiography: silences, intellectualisations, parodies]* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018), 76.

Stern's silence about his Jewish ancestry must also have a different meaning for him, as it is related to a difficult family history. Is it not surprising, then, that the one who glosses over his origin and family story in his own works made the decision to devote himself to an obsessive investigation into the mysterious ancestry of another poet and chose an autobiographically oriented reading of Apollinaire's texts, which supposedly encode the legend of that poet's father? Even though Stern devoted the final decades of his life to work on *Dom Apollinaire'a*, we learn almost nothing about "the house of Stern".

A footnote to two main texts

This is where the above-mentioned footnote should appear: in a place where answers to the questions posited above are hard to come by. Such footnote is a surprising link between the already existing (semi?)biographical text with a non-existent autobiographical text. In her diary Alicja Stern sheds light on this strange relationship, when comparing her husband's apollinearean search to a search for oneself:

What was that book supposed to be? Formally, it was to be an analysis of the poet's works, viewed from the perspective of what he learned about the mysteries of the Kostrowiccy family and his awareness of his Polish ancestry, encoded on the cellular level. And informally? I suppose he would have made the undercurrent of the volume the same thing that became the undercurrent of everything created in the final decade of Stern's life. The loneliness of a man, the loneliness of a poet, unable to think in established patterns [...] The main theme of a volume on Apollinaire would probably have been the tragedy of "the other"; a stranger to the poetic liturgy in which one refuses to participate, even though the tragic condition of the intruder is only deteriorating if the intruder cannot prove his biological affinity to the nation he is turning to. After all, Polish futurists at the beginning of our century were also greeted with enmity, as "the others". They too, made their own uncomfortable bed by "inviting to their literary salon the wild animal of irrationality, released from the burrow of subconsciousness" (PL 160-161) ²¹.

So, is it "the tragedy of the other"? Alicja Stern is writing about the state of being 'the other', which was well known to Stern, and connects it to the fate of a misunderstood innovator. But at the same time, she is also writing about Apollinaire, who remains an intruder, unable to "prove his affinity with the nation he is turning to". Perhaps when she claims that the futurists were also treated "with enmity, as the 'others'", she means something else – Stern's Jewish heritage, who, alongside Aleksander Wat, debuted in 1918 in the atmosphere of an antisemitic witch-hunt. Does this mean that Alicja Stern links his husband with Apollinaire through "the tragedy of 'the other'", which Stern refuses to acknowledge and about which he prefers not to speak or write; which he covers up with different narratives about himself? Perhaps then *Dom Apollinaire'a* could feature a "pseudo-autobiographical" component of its own²².

²¹Alicja Stern publishes a very similar fragment of a commentary in *Wprowadzenie do aneksów w Domu Apollinaire'a* (DA, 193-194), but she focuses on the fate of the innovator, abandoning the fragment on "the tragedy of the other".

²²See Hellich, 67.

On numerous occasions Stern writes not only about the problems with his own history, experienced by the author of *Calligrammes* (an unknown father and a search for his identity), but also about antisemitic attacks. In the book there are numerous mentions of Apollinaire's being troubled by "a sense of national alienation" (DA 64). These are accompanied by Stern's depictions of Apollinaire's life, pivoting around a constant fear of being "taken for a Metic". This word, derived from Greek *mētoikos*, meaning a foreigner, somebody settled on a land they do not own, is surprisingly recurrent in *Dom Apollinaire'a*. Combining his story about the tragedy of the other with the motif of an absent and unknown father, Stern makes these two the central themes of the entire biographical narrative about Apollinaire, dominating over everything else.

Is it possible then, that Stern, under the apollinairean mask, is writing about himself and his own hidden drama of the "other"? In this perspective the most interesting element in Stern's biographical practices concerning Apollinaire, is no longer the genealogical investigation but the relationship between the author-biographer and his protagonist. This relationship shows itself to be a complex combination of fascinations and identifications, resulting from a shared avant-garde vision of art and from his personal experience, which, although seemingly different, bears uncanny resemblance to that of Apollinaire's. Perhaps we are dealing here with what Marek Zaleski referred to as "the author's own biography overwriting the biography of his protagonist"²³, which "simultaneously becomes a text we are supposed to read, too"²⁴. Undoubtedly, this is how Alicja Stern views the relationship between these two texts, when she is establishing a pseudo-auto-bio-graphical relationship, in which "somebody else's biography becomes a mirror in which our own biography sees and recognizes itself"²⁵.

Marcin Romanowski applies Roland Barthes' concepts of *studium* and *punctum* to describe the relationship between the biographical practice and an autobiographical recognition. Transplanted from image interpretation onto biography, *studium* refers to the life story of the biography's protagonist, whereas the biographical *punctum* becomes "a plane on which the personal dimension of the biographer's involvement is revealed", according to Romanowski. "*Punctum* establishes a particular perspective, from which the biographer considers their subject. This position transforms the biography understood as an ideographic representation of the life-story of a specific person into a symbolic story, in which the experiences and life problems of the protagonist become transposed autobiographical clues, which express problems pointing towards and punctuating the biographer"²⁶. In the case of Stern, possessed by his detective-like, storytelling passion, gradually discovered facts from the family history and biography of Apollinaire seem to include a number of these "transposed autobiographical clues", which both concern and affect the biographer in a peculiar way, turning the biography into a symbolic story.

²³Marek Zaleski, „Kłopoty z monografią” [„Troubles with a monograph”], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2008): 117.

²⁴Zaleski.

²⁵Zaleski.

²⁶Marcin Romanowski, „Biograficzne punctum. Pisarstwo biograficzne Joanny Olczak-Ronikier w perspektywie tożsamościowej” [„A biographical punctum. Biographical writing of Joanna Olczak-Ronikier in the identity perspective”], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2019): 126.

In one of his essays Stern tries to capture the nature of Apollinaire's silences, and concludes his musings with a very short paragraph, which, as I believe, might just as well describe Stern himself: "There is only one thing he will not write or speak about: his ancestry and his father. He does not want to be hurt again by the hostile, cruel world" (DA 124). And perhaps it is in this fragment that the biographical *punctum* is revealed, simultaneously becoming a pseudo-self-reflection, a pseudo-autobiographical recognition, a transposed clue, in which, hidden under an apollinairean mask, Stern writes about himself, and the biographical text unexpectedly opens an autobiographical wound. Viewed from this perspective, Stern's biographical text about Apollinaire seems to be punctured with the former's own history, leaving behind a visible but very loose thread. On the one hand Stern would like to leave as few traces as possible on the visible side of the textual fabric, but on the other – even though he could probably conceal all of them, he does not seem to want to.

Alicja Stern definitely does not want to do it, as she is the one who sheds some light on the spot purposefully darkened by Stern. Her narrative unravels in a series of complex textual concepts and allusions and operates a language of figures and clues. The recurrent motif of this story is (never explicitly stated but obvious from the very first pages) the issue of the Sterns' Jewish heritage – hidden both as a fact and as a word, yet peculiarly exposed thanks to the properties of the literary language. Meanwhile, one of the obvious topics not mentioned in Stern's works is the story of his absent father, who is named only once in the poem *Cmentarz mojej matki* [My mother's cemetery]

I will not find you, even though you are lying here
like I will not find my father (though maybe somewhere in the clouds?...) [...]

My father was a fairy-tale wind– or maybe a fairy tale itself.
He flew and he rustled. Then he went silent²⁷

Paul Murray Kendall writes about a doubly engaged biography, to which he attributes the ability of creating a "life-giving symbiotic relation", in which the distanced researcher and investigator into the biographical truth can immerse him- or herself, making it possible to find a different life, which is gradually taken over by the author and his or her affects. But ultimately, in the case of biography, "emotion must be translated into understanding and commitment into introspection"²⁸. This, however, is not the case with Stern's texts – the further the closer, the later the deeper, the longer, the more precise. This continues right up to the most meaningful gesture: a literary prosopopoeia, in which Stern will lend his voice to Apollinaire, putting on his mask and hiding his own face. But maybe he is doing this so as to be able to say something about himself.

²⁷Stern, Wiersze zebrane [Collected poems], vol. 1, 354.

²⁸Paul Murray Kendall, *The Art Of Biography* (London: Norton 1965), 149. See Anita Całek, *Biografia naukowa: od koncepcji do narracji. Interdyscyplinarność, teorie, metody badawcze* [Scholarly biography: from concept to narrative. Interdisciplinarity, theories, research methods] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013), 28–34.

A footnote to a footnote

If that really were the case, the poem *Dom Apollinaire'a* could perhaps be read as a text woven with this pseudo-autobiographical thread, and as a Marrano-text, constructing a complex structure of secretiveness, in which a broken Marrano identity is revealed – as the editors of the volume *Marani literatury polskiej* [The Marranos of Polish literature], Piotr Bogalecki and Adam Lipszyc refer to it – an unstable hybrid subject²⁹. A surprisingly chosen mask conceals an intense expression of a sense of estrangement as well as numerous emotions which are triggered by the need to live in hiding, in the shadow of a “mystery” of one’s own origin. But in this case the Marrano-like structure of the secret crosses the boundary not only of a single text but of a single subject as well. As a multilayered, intertextually hidden secret – between the biographical text by Stern and the auto/biographical text by his wife; between what is hidden in the private archive and in what is exposed in the well-known publication – is revealed thanks to a wobbly intertextual scaffolding of the hidden traces of “life writing”. Our guide down the Marrano path, which leads to the *house of Apollinaire* is yet another Marrano text, Alicja Stern’s diary, in which the secret is hidden in much more shallow deposits, purposefully made visible from the level of the narrative.

Stern writes the poem *Dom Apollinaire'a*, captivated by the legend of *Apollinaire*, when a positive reception of his essays in *Apollinaire*’s circle, featuring scholars, friends and family of the poet (including his wife) “pushed Anatol to penetrating the depths of the mystery” (PL 158). To this Alicja Stern adds that “*Dom Apollinaire'a* is probably the most spontaneous remark of a poet about a poet, about the glory and dark secrets of poetry. It is probably no accident that the cesarian legend of the “Metic” thus captivated Anatol” (PL 158). This idea is supported by a fragment in which Stern, through an elaborate prosopopoeia, lends his voice to *Apollinaire*, who now speaks in the first person and on a few occasions defines his “I” in parallel constructions: “I, the destroyer of the past [...] / I, the destroyer of tradition [...] / I, the destroyer of relics / I/ a Metic [...]” (DA 49). The enjambment, separating the final two words, suspends them in the air: highlighted, exposed, problematic. After all, it is “no accident” that the Metic appears so many times in Stern’s texts; it is no accident, as will be stated, almost as an aside but in a very clear allusion by Alicja Stern, because “it often happened that a poet of foreign blood, carrying the genetic code of his own tradition became the poet of the land where he saw the light” (PL 159). Perhaps the other “I’s”, “suspended” in Anatol Stern’s text, draw our attention to the peculiar “I”, sylleptically connecting the textual and the empirical “I”, which is an unfamiliar voice, introduced through prosopopoeia, and the “I” which assumes the mask of the poem’s subject, a particularly integrated “I” of the mask and the “I” of the face hidden underneath it: the “I” of *Apollinaire* and the “I” of Stern. This is where the etymological clues of the term *prosopopoeia* lead us; derived from the Greek *prosōpon*, it refers both to

²⁹Piotr Bogalecki, Adam Lipszyc, „W skórze Ezawa” [„In Essau’s skin”], in: *Marani literatury polskiej* [The Marranos of Polish literature], ed. by Piotr Bogalecki, Adam Lipszyc (Kraków–Budapest–Syrakuzy: Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2020), 15–17. Agata Bielik-Robson provides an in-depth overview of the maran subject in her introductory text to the above-mentioned volume. See her „Fenomen maranizmu” [“The phenomenon of Marranism”], in: *Marani literatury polskiej*, 37–40. In the context of Stern and Aleksander Wat’s futuristic actions the most important reference point for a Marrano-reading (only outlined here as a possibility), which connects the earlier and later works of Anatol Stern, would undoubtedly be Bogalecki’s interpretation of the figure of a Marrano in Wat’s texts. Piotr Bogalecki, „«Usługi bezimiennie». Figura marana w twórczości Aleksandra Wata” [«Unnamed services». The figure of a Marrano in Aleksander Wat’s works], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2019).

a face and a theatrical mask, a face revealed and hidden through camouflage, the thing that is both a truth and a lie. Prosopopoeia establishes these two – the mask and the face – in the position of a never-ending and unresolved game. The game and invitations to it return in *Dom Appolinaire'a* – one might say, annoyingly, just as annoying are the returns of the prosopopoeia.

It comes as no surprise then that Stern's poem is at its most intense when it discusses a secret. There are many such spots but two of them are especially evocative, as they are clearly marked out from the rest by the expanded font, the fragments (one in the 11th, another – in the 13th part). On two occasions the text loses its typographic "stability", it falls apart in the expanded font, which, by introducing light in between letters, seems to shed light on the entire text. Maybe these two fragments too refer to each other, maybe they are connected by a self-reflective typographical clue? The first of them refers to Apollinaire; it is formulated in the third person, woven – importantly – from a pseudo-citation from Apollinaire, in which Stern adopts the poet's words as his own: "he figured it out a long time ago/ he always knew / this heavy secret was buzzing within him like a rattle" (DA 44). The other fragment is uttered in the prosopopoeia with the voice of the "I" – Apollinaire's voice, dramatically reminiscing the "dark holes springing from the crevices of memories" (DA 46): "don't make me break this seal / I've said enough/ for a man who hates symbols / our feet leave the ground in vain / where the dead lie! (DA 47).

In this surprising trans-verse correspondence of expanded typefaces, the "buzzing secret" turns into a shared secret of "our feet", which undoubtedly is the secret of one's origin that cannot be silenced. "It buzzes like a rattle" but it has to remain in hiding because of the "seal" imposed on it; an image which returns in the poem a few times as a warning:

the seal must not be broken
 sometimes a perverse genie is released
 one who disfigures everything
 one had better not examine the terrible eye in the triangle
 through the ophthalmoscope
 one can turn into a bunch of algae or a medusa
 don't make me do it
 don't make me break the seal [...]

(DA 45-46)

This incredible fragment, permeating with the dread of breaking the seal and revealing the secret, is separated from the shortest, twelfth part. Even though ends with the image of a mother, clearly recalling Apollinaire's story, also seems to concern something else, as it concerns such dilemmas as could also be experienced by Anatol Stern. The thing that should perhaps not be inspected with a tool is perhaps the omniscient divine eye. The risk here lies not only in revealing the secret but also in a surprisingly metamorphic property which such inspection releases, fraught with the danger of losing an old, familiar, safe and domesticated character, guaranteed by "maintaining" the seal, protecting "the secret". The risk of disclosing it – articulating what is "real" – is thus related to the risk of releasing "the perverse genie" of

change, who “disfigures everything” and because of whom “one can turn” into nobody knows what – “a bunch or a medusa”. So maybe it is better, in Stern’s words, not to risk the loss of the current shape, not to release the metamorphic potential of the disclosed secret, to leave “the eye in the triangle” alone, not to inspect, “not to break the seal”. The address to the reader, expressed by the textual “I”, maybe accompanied both by the “I” of the mask and the “I” of the face, helps us break away for a moment from the world of the poem. They all speak with one voice, both familiar and strange: “Don’t make me break this seal/ I’ve told you enough / for a man who hates symbols”. Symbols seem to be tools of an ambiguous textual game: they are despised by the avant-garde anti-symbolist poets, and they refer us to the “main movement” of this story about a poet-revolutionary. As “despised” figures they also attract the readers’ attention. Thus, the actual address to the reader should perhaps read along the following lines: don’t make me break the seal but look for symbols because I’ve told you enough. But this is just a “footnote”, which – despite the threat of turning into “a bunch or a medusa” – undoubtedly pushes one onto the path of future adventures.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

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KEYWORDS

Anatol Stern

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

ABSTRACT:

The article is devoted to a genealogical investigation, undertaken by Anatol Stern, in his attempt to reconstruct the origin story of Guillaume Apollinaire. The effect of his research is a book entitled *Dom Apollinaire'a. Rzecz o polskości i rodzinie poetry*, published in 1973, which is a collection of essays, previously published in Polish and European journals, prepared for publication after the author's death by his wife, Alicja Stern. The subject of analyses in the paper are not only the published texts but first and foremost an extensive archival collection of materials devoted to Apollinaire, collected by Stern, as well as different forms of literary practices, within which Stern carried out artistic biographical modifications of his findings concerning the author of *Alcools*. The theoretical perspective adopted for the analysis a wide range of auto/biographical texts here is the concept of *life writing*. In the course of the study the value of Alicja Stern's commentary, found in her unpublished memoir, comes centre stage, as it indicates the possibility of a "pseudo-auto-biographical" reading of some of Stern's texts devoted to Apollinaire. This line of interpretation – exposing the situation of "the other" – opens up the possibility of looking for a "Maroon-like subject" and places in which Stern's own situation of "the other" along with various forms of masking his own "interrupted", "unstable" identity.

life writing

avant-garde

biography

ARCHIVE

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Unstructured, unprocessed, unused. Witold Wirpsza's journals

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We can treat the opening lines of a poem by Witold Wirpsza – the protagonist of the present paper – as the research question:

How to make use of a literary-broken
Biography, which arts should be used, to
Make it work, which moments should be scraped off
With a rhythmic scraper, so that the fragments
Fit together, and are
Useful for the future reader?¹.

¹ Witold Wirpsza, "Spożytkować pisarsko" [Make use in literary ways], in: Witold Wirpsza, *Przesądy [Superstitions]* (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2011), 11.

The subsequent verses elaborate on this topic, and its transformations are characterized by an accumulation of lexemes from the same semantic field as the initial “breaking” – the “evening squeezes / into the morning”, youth “blows old age apart”, and a melody seems “creased”, “crushed”, “plundered”:

A biography, where an evening squeezes
Into the morning, where cardinal
Directions are mixed up, where youth
Blows old age and its moral coherence apart?
Where melodies are creased, and tempo
Is crushed, and rhythms are bulging, and pauses
Are plundered from their hollows? How, I ask,
To make useful use of
A biography rich in
punctuation marks, and lacking in grammatically closed
periods?

Not to do it. Wait for
Disappearance; there is a chance that all that
(And some more) will be organized according to
A horrifying order and that someone will make use of it².

The final, suggestive, graphically separated answer can be read as a confession of a lack of faith in the ideal of life writing, understood broadly in terms of spontaneously recording oneself, organizing one's life via writing, an autobiographical re-creation. This ideal is rejected in two ways, on two levels of the text. The first one is obvious: no, the biography should not be utilized, it should disappear, or be utilized by somebody else. This “somebody” (biographer, researcher, God?) will have to deal with the richness of “punctuation marks” tearing the existential *continuum* into heterogenous parts – too many to see “grammatically closed periods” in them. The fact that life can be “punctuated” is a blessing; as long as a person is alive, they can only be “horrified” by organizing it. The second level is deeper; it concerns Wirpsza's creative concept; the phrase “make use of” provides an insight into it. Making use of something means ‘to use something that is available’; this utilitarian aspect is highlighted by the somewhat tautological phrase “make useful use of” and introducing the category of “usefulness” to the poem. Thus Wirpsza considers his biography as potential material for a literary work, however, in creative work it can only be used on condition that it is artistically processed. He expresses this idea directly in the foreword to his 1964 novel *Pomarańcze na drutach* [Knitted oranges]: “When I got down to writing prose in the 1940s, soon after liberation, I was not actually aware what artistic shape this prose would ultimately take”³. It was not enough to write down his Oflag experience; it required “an artistically efficient linguistic net” made of deforming “ways of combining words and meanings”, which later underwent “syntactic and

² Wirpsza, “Spożytkować pisarsko”, 11.

³ Witold Wirpsza, *Pomarańcze na drutach*, edited by Dariusz Pawelec (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski 2021), 25.

compositional transformations based on the variation technique”⁴. As a result, instead of an Oflag autobiography, collection of memories, memoir or account, after fourteen years he completed an “experimental novel”, considered as “the most peculiar prose published in Poland as of late”⁵ (Rafał Marszałek), and “an utterly pioneering, European-class novel”⁶ (Edward Balcerzan). The conclusion seems obvious: life writing should be done without any artistic aspirations, using traditional autobiographical genres. And if they are to be “made use of” in literary ways, in an “artistically effective” manner, then this should be achieved through experimenting and pioneering, rejecting traditional autobiographical forms – even if it takes significantly more time. The avant-garde ways are not autobiographer’s ways. Experimenting excludes intimacy.

The poem *Spożytkować pisarsko* [Make use in literary ways] was published in 1966 in the book of poems *Przesądy* [Superstitions], i.e. in the “experimental” and “linguistic” phases of Wirpsza’s work (1960-1971) according to Dariusz Pawelec’s classification⁷. At that time Wirpsza became famous for being “heroically consequential in his experiments, even risking misunderstanding” (Jan Witan), a poet tirelessly “testing possibilities offered by the avant-garde” at the same time “heralding postmodernist games”⁸ (Joanna Grądziel-Wójcik). Wirpsza was also accused of formalism, scientism, *mise en abyme*, antisemitism, hermeticism, mannerism, “stylistic calculation”⁹, and “schoolboy conceptismo”¹⁰. In that period he clearly shunned autobiographical genres, which makes his neo-avant-garde works seem detached from personal, everyday experience, and deprived of any attempts at reflecting its directness in writing – contrary to what can be observed in works by Miron Białoszewski, Krystyna Miłobędzka, or Leopold Buczkowski. As we learn from *Przerób* [Process], which can be considered an ingenious attempt at an autobiography of poetic work (as proposed by Philippe Lejeune¹¹) using cybernetics language, – an experience can end in a text only once it is transformed into “a structure, i.e. something shaped and having a shape”, thanks to which “impulses” of some experience cease to be “noise” and become “an informative surplus”¹². This conviction does not necessarily mean questioning the whole idea of life writing. However, for Wirpsza – who proposes to treat theory of literary art as “a game of meanings”, and who is attracted to the formal rather

⁴ Wirpsza, Pomarańcze na drutach, 26.

⁵ Rafał Marszałek, “Eksperyment Wirpszy” [Wirpsza’s experiment], Nowe Książki 9 (1965): 402.

⁶ Edward Balcerzan, “Człowiek Witolda Wirpszy” [Witold Wirpsza’s man], Nurt 2 (1965): 48–49. Balcerzan was correct – there have been two German editions of the novel, under the title *Orangen im Stacheldraht* (1967, 1987).

⁷ See Dariusz Pawelec, *Wirpsza wielokrotnie* [Wirpsza repeatedly] (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2013), 48–69.

⁸ Joanna Grądziel-Wójcik, *Poezja jako teoria poezji* [Poetry as theory of poetry] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo UAM, 2001), 201.

⁹ Marta Wyka, “Poeta – filozof” [Poet-philosopher], *Życie Literackie* 34 (1967): 10.

¹⁰ Jan Józef Lipski, “Autotematyzm, ekspresja i koncept” [Mise en abyme, expression, and concept], *Twórczość* 12 (1967): 114.

¹¹ See Philippe Lejeune, “Autobiografia i poezja (fragmenty)” [Autobiography and poetry (fragments)], translated into Polish by Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska, in: *Wariacje na temat pewnego pactu. O autobiografii* [Variations about a certain pact. On autobiography], edited by Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 299–301.

¹² Witold Wirpsza, “Przerób” [Processing], in *Wirpsza: Gra znaczeń. Przerób* [Game of meanings. Processing] (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2008), 213, 223.

than existential-experiential pole of the experiment¹³ – life writing is not engaging. Processing life writing artistically is an interesting possibility, which must be pioneering in Wirpsza's case (e.g. *Pomarańcze na drutach*). Out of the two types of experiment distinguished by Julia Novak in the introduction to *Experiments in Life-Writing*, Wirpsza is definitely closer to “negating” than “expanding” the possibilities of an auto/biography; he does not try to present readers with a more complete and faithful representation of his life – he explores its artistic possibilities and limitations, which brings his works closer to “ironic and self-aware games” with assumptions about the genre characteristic for postmodernist “antibiographies”¹⁴.

Literature as autobiography (about resistance)

Considering Witold Wirpsza an author who rejects biography in favor of experiments may be controversial. One might even say that in the socialist realist period he was a model example of an autobiographical author, often resorting to first-person prose based on confessional lyrics. This is especially evident in the 1953 *List do żony. Wiersze* [A letter to wife. Poems], which concludes with 9 III 1953¹⁵, a poem about „joining the Party”, as well as in the 1956 *Z mojego życia* [From my life]. The latter book of poems opens with *Pamiątki rodzinne* [Family memorabilia], and it also contains *Grób rodziców* [My parents' grave], *Przyjacielowi młodości* [To my childhood friend], or *Dziewczynie, którą kochałem* [To a girl I loved], as well as *Szczęście* [Happiness], dedicated to his wife, Maria Kurecka, in which subsequent sections are entitled with years. At the time Wirpsza also wrote autobiographical prose, such as *Na granicy* [On the border] and *Stary tramwaj* [An old tramway], and he favorably referred to life writing genres, e.g. in the 1952 *Dziennik Kożedo* [Kożedo Journal], in which daily dates are highlighted in the titles of subsequent texts, such as 22 V 1952 *Strzępy koszul* [Shreds of shirts], 26 V 1952 *Łączność, strzały* [Communication, fire] or 4 VI 1952 *Riots – Gun*. In his 1981 essay *Dzieje rymopisa czasu swego* [History of a versifier of his own time] published in “Kultura” [Culture] he openly criticized “emotionalism” and “kitsch” of his own poetic texts written “in a phase of common graphomania”, which he dubbed “monstrous poems”, “even worse than kitsch”: “Utter, unheard of, graphomaniac rubbish”¹⁶. However, when arguing with Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, he resisted the temptation of an autobiographical confession, and the argument he presented throws light also on his model anti-autobiographical works from the 1960s and

¹³This is also a conclusion from analyzing Wirpsza's score-poems, see Piotr Bogalecki, *Wiersze-partytury w poezji polskiej neoawangardy* [Score-poems in Polish neo-avant-garde]. Białoszewski – Czyzcz – Drahan – Grześczak – Partum – Wirpsza (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2020), 147. We should add that distinguishing two “poles” of this experiment would be problematic for Wirpsza, because in his works there is no contradiction between stressing the form and cognitive and axiological function of literature; however, there is some distancing from life writing which forsakes the form.

¹⁴Julia Novak, “Experiments in Life-Writing: Introduction”, in: *Experiments in Life-Writing. Intersections of Auto/Biography and Fiction*, edited by Lucia Boldrini, Julia Novak (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 3.

¹⁵Biography plays an important role in the socialist realist poem: “I told my biography. And hands were raised: /It was a day which comes back. And which is back again. // Here, in the same room, the secretary gave me / The rectangle of my party card among heated congratulations”. Witold Wirpsza, *List do żony. Wiersze* (Warszawa: PIW, 1953), 38. The disdain for closing a “broken” existence in “grammatically closed periods”, articulated in *Spożytkować pisarsko*, can be therefore seen as self-criticism regarding earlier works.

¹⁶Witold Wirpsza, “Dzieje rymopisa czasu swego” [History of a versifier of his own time], in Wirpsza: *Gra znaczeń*, 257–258.

1970s: "Publishing the results of an introspection through first-person narratives is in fact a dangerous game; it is easy to get trapped in self-delusion, if not in something even worse, when self-control fails"¹⁷. Instead of a "psychological mess" he advised to stick to "tangible facts", which – when it comes to literature – refer to "texts and nothing beyond them, [...] nothing beyond texts from the discussed period, and these texts need to be analyzed"¹⁸. For example, a linguistic analysis of "subsequent phases of linguistic moral decay in Borowski's prose will tell us more about those times and author's decisions than a mawkish story about his tragedy, even if he dictated it from beyond his grave"¹⁹. Wirpsza is consistent in his choice. As an old poet who leaves his socialist realist youth behind, and who is forced to emigrate for political reasons, he could write a wonderful, poignant "life story" in the poetics of a parable about a convert – and yet he forbids himself from doing it, because of "self-delusion" inscribed in autobiography.

Therefore, instead of the "self-delusion", Wirpsza writes *Sama niewinność* [Pure innocence] – an experimental novel about the impossibility of writing a credible biography, which takes the form of notes written by a shorthand typist employed for this purpose by a fifty-year-old, nameless man, defined in the text as a "socialist millionaire". She confesses: "Ultimately, my work was about crossing out, adding, putting together what was non-linear by its nature, about making the incomplete complete, [...] in short: my work was about falsifying peculiarly false material"²⁰. Indeed, in such a "falsified" autobiography everything proves to be a lie: lies, i.e. a "dominating thread [...] of contact and conspiracy" (134) transpired from stories about the protagonist's life from the very beginning; lies turned out to be "subtle" and "sophisticated" to such an extent that one can even "delight in them, as if they were a good dish, good love, good sleep" (101), whereas the biography can be easily "invented" (which the protagonist does on several occasions) depending on the overall situation and current needs, and thus "reinvent oneself from scratch" (77). This means that also the final effect will inevitably be "falsified", which the protagonist senses from the beginning, admitting that "there was something like lying in that story about falsifying" (94). However, we should add: there is something like lying also in the fact that Wirpsza, who uses several autobiographical facts such as being imprisoned in an Oflag or his post-war involvement with communism and the resulting financial benefits in his story about lies in an autobiography. Dariusz Pawelec observes at some point "the biographies of the author and protagonist of *Sama niewinność* [...] start to run parallelly", and so "the biographical context shapes the vision from the novel, although the autobiographical perspective is determined here mostly by the role of a witness, perhaps with the exception of the way of presenting an Oflag"²¹. Pawelec continues, adding that "descriptions of Oflag life in the novel clearly correspond with analogous descriptions from *Listy z oflagu*" [Letters from an Oflag]²². In a way, after all, Wirpsza incorporated his life in that text, although he did it perversely, entering a level of falsifying which we refer to as

¹⁷Wirpsza, 265–266

¹⁸Wirpsza, 266, 263.

¹⁹Wirpsza, 263.

²⁰Witold Wirpsza, *Sama niewinność*, edited by Dariusz Pawelec (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2017), 25.
Quotes in that paragraph are referred to directly in the text via page numbers.

²¹Dariusz Pawelec, "Posłowie" [Afterword], in: Wirpsza, *Sama niewinność*, 198.

²²Pawelec, 198–199.

fiction; not lying directly, but telling the truth via lying – and at the same time confessing to lying. Likewise, in some perverse way he “made use in a literary way” the falsification of his biography in the poem cited at the beginning of this paper – an in many other works. There is no other way, and in each of his texts (and by any other author, for that matter) one can search for biographical elements, some form of life writing. The question is: is it worth it²³? Wirpsza’s – a representative of the neo-avant-garde – answer is simple: no, it is not. There are more interesting and important things to do in life, and definitely in literature and art, than the “self-delusion” of autobiographical “graphomania”, such as questioning by deconstructing autobiographical conventions, which Wirpsza does also in many of his poetic works, such as *Dziennik pokładowy* [Logbook] from *Przesądy* [Supersitions], *Monolog Amadeusza Mozarta* (1756–1791) [Amadeus Mozart’s monologue] from *Spis ludności* [Census] or in the poems *In verrem* and *Odchodziącemu* [To the person leaving] from the final, unfinished *Przypomnienie Hioba* [Reminding about Job]. *Odchodziącemu* is based on a perverse call for action: “Sit down and write memoirs [...]. Write whatever you like. You can embellish / make things up; use a graph-ruled notebook, / So that you write evenly”. Comparing writing a memoir to a confession, he adds ironically that confessionalists are “penetrated by sins confessed honestly, / Or left unsaid, lied, which is not important / In the end”²⁴. The supposed honesty of autobiographical writing, in which organizing the story eventually proves to be more significant, is equally unimportant. We have not wandered far from “grammatically closed periods” from a poem written at least fifteen years earlier...

One seemingly irrelevant fact should attract attention when comparing those texts from the perspective of *life writing*: contrary to *Spożytkować pisarsko*, *Odchodziącemu* is annotated “Berlin, 18.9.1982”. This is the case with the whole *Przypomnienie Hioba*, whose structure – even more significantly – is based on dating: the poems are arranged chronologically, from the earliest *Przypomnienie Hioba* [Reminding about Job] (Berlin, 19.06.1982) to *Rozmyślania (luźne)* [(Random) considerations] (“Berlin, May 1985), written four months before Wirpsza’s death. Wirpsza used this device – absent from books published and written in Poland, as well as in early emigration days – for the first time in *Apoteoza tańca* [Dance apotheosis], a book of poems written from “the spring of 1973” to the fall of 1975; the final poem, *Prognoza (Prognozy), czyli historia naturalna smoków* [Prognosis (prognoses), i.e. a natural history of dragons] was annotated: “Berlin, 12 November 1975 (on my name day)”. Wirpsza became increasingly more consistent with adding dates to his poems: in *Apoteoza* most poems are undated, whereas in the following *Spis ludności* there are only three undated poems, and in the final *Przypomnienie Hioba* each poem is dated. Dates connect poetry to biography, each time forcing us to think – like Derrida reading Celan – not just about the “date itself”, but about “the poetic experience of the date, that which a date, *this one*, ordains in our relation

²³On a different level this doubt also refers to the functionality of the notion of life writing in research into Wirpsza’s (and similar authors’) work, and, more generally, its functionality in literary studies. Novak admits that it functions as a “loose umbrella term” which refers to genres absent from autobiographical studies (Novak, “Experiments in Life-Writing”, 2). Zachary Leader’s popular definition of life writing includes letters, court records, scientific and historical texts, poetry, etc. See Zachary Leader, “Introduction”, in: *On Life-Writing*, edited by Zachary Leader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

²⁴Witold Wirpsza, *Utwory ostatnie* [Final works] (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2007), 51.

to it”²⁵. And since in Wirpsza’s later works almost every poem is dated, we could perceive them even as journal entries (following Philippe Lejeune’s simplified definition of a journal as a “series of dated traces”²⁶), even though Wirpsza clearly keeps off such simplified, direct record of experiences²⁷. It is also significant that the most direct references to actual events from Wirpsza’s life can be found in the dated annotations to poems written in cursive (three such examples in *Spis ludności*). The annotation to the already mentioned *Monolog Amadeusza Mozarta* contains information about hospitalization: “Berlin, started in February 1980 in hospital, finished in April of the same year at my own desk”²⁸. The reason for hospitalization is revealed in the annotation to the next poem, *Zabijanie* [Killing]: “Berlin. Started in November 1979, finished in April 1980. A break lasting three months and a half following a car accident, in which I wasn’t killed”²⁹. The last hospital gloss can be found following *Monolog w samym środku centrum* [A monologue at the very center of the center]: “Excogitated in hospital in July 1981, finished at home on 18 August, when I already had titanium in my bone. / Berlin, 1981 (Symmetry: 18.8.81)”³⁰. There is no doubt this information can impact interpretation; for example, the annotation to the last one can explain why the text was about molybdenum – a transition element used e.g. in the production of medical implants. However, does the status of annotations accompanying indexes of reality – date and place – make them a privileged space for autobiographical expression? Even if not, they have a special place in Wirpsza’s works, who generally clearly distanced himself from autobiographicalism; they can be read as an experiment in life writing which induces Derridean reflections regarding the institutionalism of personal confession literature, the date phenomenon, the role of a supplement and limits of text.

There is also an unmarked cycle of nine poems from *Granice wytrzymałości* [Limits of endurance] (which did not contain any dated poems) written in the late 1960s and early 1970s (published posthumously as *Częstkowa próba o człowieku i inne wiersze* [Fragmentary notes about man and other poems]). There are two distinguishing criteria which allow one to classify those poems – from *Rok rozpoczęty* [A year begun] dated “January 1969” to *Spiętrzenie; koniec roku* 1972 [Accumulation; end of the year 1972] – as one poetic cycle: yearly dates in their titles and a similar tone, resembling a chronicle or report. These poems are an example

²⁵Jacques Derrida, Szibbolek dla Paula Celana, translated into Polish by Adam Dziadek (Bytom: FA-art, 2000), 9. English version: Shibboleth: For Paul Celan, in: Sovereignties in question: the poetics of Paul Celan, edited by Thomas Dutois and Outi Pasanen (Fordham University Press, 2005), 1-64, 6.

²⁶Philippe Lejeune, “Koronka: dziennik jako seria datowanych śladów” [Diary as a series of dated traces], translated into Polish by Magda and Paweł Rodak, Pamiętnik Literacki 4 (2006): 21. However, it should be noted that in his earlier texts Lejeune stressed the difference between using a clearly biographic “I”, guaranteed by the author’s own name, and using a traditional, lyrical “I”, observing that in “pure poetry”, for various reasons, the “autobiographical pact” loses its credibility” (Philippe Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Pact”, translated into Polish by Stanisław Jaworski, in: Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu [Variations about a certain pact], 195, 192).

²⁷In his later works, Wirpsza writes down his memories (e.g. in *W jednej chwili* [At one moment], *Palisander i skóra* [Rosewood and leather], or *Trudności* [Difficulties]) and dreams (*Ostatnio pojawiające się motywy w snach* [Recent themes of my dreams], *Cztery talerze* [Four plates], *Ciemność* [Darkness]) far more often than before. A more detailed analysis of Wirpsza’s dreams deserves a separate paper, especially that some of his final works, which do not contain direct oneiric references (e.g. *W świątyni* [In a temple] and *Efekt Dopplera* [Doppler effect] can be interpreted in the same vein.

²⁸Witold Wirpsza, *Spis ludności* (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2005), 38.

²⁹Wirpsza, *Spis ludności*, 51.

³⁰Wirpsza, *Spis ludności*, 62.

of a perverse, intertextual game with two types of non-fiction literature: historiography and autobiography. Although the former, responsible for the general theme and stylistic orientation of the whole cycle, dominates, autobiographical and metapoetic fragments related to them (referring to e.g. the *topos* of a chronicler-poet) also play a significant role in the cycle. Contrasted with historical and historiographical considerations, next to reflections regarding the essence of politics and significance of Apollo 11 mission, they are at most “punctuation marks” known from the 1966 poem *Spożytkować pisarsko* and returning now in *Rok rozpoczęty* in order to inaugurate the cycle – I believe this is not a coincidence.

It is common knowledge that punctuation marks are small and seemingly insignificant, but locally they can change sense, set off a game of meanings. And so if Wirpsza ends *Lato 1970* [The summer of 1970], which is about “an epidemic of cholera / on the Black Sea”, the Danube flooding, and the situation of “small countries / sentenced to snow: / Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia” with a distich separated from other verses: “That steamy summer and as if you put on a pot on your head: / Dark, stuffy, sleepy”³¹ – he almost provocatively highlights the separation of the course of an individual life from general history, individual experience from facts, memory from history. Contrary to history, individuality of existence (in subsequent poems of the cycle gradually, but ineffectively organized) is impossible to nuance, gain symbolic meaning, be organized. Wirpsza writes about this suggestively in *Początki roku* (1970):

In the long run everything is
Unbearable; I am unable to organize
My life. And moreover this is out of tune with
Everything, it is not a symbol or metaphor of
Psychological, political, etc. events
This year starts with emptiness, confusion and
Is climatically obscure. I'm curious, what will
Come out of it, if the principle of entailment exists at all.
Doctors say that climate harms people³².

A diarist poet (second resistance)

The portrayal of Witold Wirpsza as an author rejecting biography in favor of experimenting may be resisted for another reason, which allows us to study his works from the perspective of life writing studies. If creation is “processing”, and the creative process “processes” experiences, then instead of focusing on the effect of that processing, perhaps we should seek what is being processed, i.e. personal material prepared by the author for artistic processing – existing *in crudo*, and so far “artistically ineffective”. Such an opportunity is offered by archives, which allow us the most direct insight into Wirpsza’s biography. *Listy z oflagu* published by Pawelec in 2015, are letters sent by Wirpsza to his future wife; also Wirpsza’s correspondence

³¹Witold Wirpsza, *Częstkowa próba o człowieku i inne wiersze* (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2005), 130.

³²Wirpsza, *Częstkowa próba o człowieku i inne wiersze*, 122.

with Heinrich Kunstmann was published in the same year, which made Dorota Cygan and Marek Zybura publish a several pages long memoir, a dialogue with a journal, *Ein Pole in Westberlin*, which they believe was written in 1971. Although that interesting document – found in the Berlin section of Wirpsza's archive, deposited in Akademie der Künste in Berlin – is subtitled *pages from a journal*, it is clearly a memoir. Starting with a brief account of his “first trips to West Berlin” from the 1950s, Wirpsza describes the circumstances surrounding his year-long stay in the city due to the DAAD scholarship he received in 1967, adding: “If I had followed Witold Gombrowicz's suit and written a journal, it would probably contain notes like these”³³. This is followed by a chronological list of memories from that period, dated using names of the months. The memories are about different events significant for Wirpsza's later biography, such as being awarded by the Darmstadt Academy, his attitude to student protests following Benno Ohnesorg's death, participation in the interrupted concert conducted by Pierre Boulez, or a long conversation with Paul Celan by “a bottle of Polish vodka”³⁴.

It was therefore likely that since it is more extensive, the Szczecin department of Wirpsza's archive deposited in Książnica Pomorska³⁵, would hold numerous documents full of life writing content, beyond correspondence – which has its own rights and is beyond the scope of this paper (apart from the observation that it was probably not a coincidence that the poem *Listy* [Letters] opens with “A lie”³⁶). And indeed, apart from notebooks with literary works, the Szczecin archive holds many notes written on individual pages, margins of manuscripts and typescripts, random, loose pages³⁷, as well as in numerous notebooks: apart from thirteen address books and calendars (signature No 1480)³⁸, there are also fourteen A5 notebooks: six under signature No 1481, and eight from file No 1823. The number of notebooks, privileged in journaling due to their “promise of continuity”³⁹ could indicate potential major autobiographical discoveries. Unfortunately, the notebooks mostly contain drafts of poems, excerpts from books and magazines, random dated notes, conspectuses, reference lists, among which personal reflections and memories are far and between.

³³ Witold Wirpsza, “Ein Pole in Westberlin (kartki z dziennika) [pages from a journal]”, in Witold Wirpsza, Heinrich Kunstmann, “Salut Henri! Don Witoldo!”. Witold Wirpsza – Heinrich Kunstmann. *Listy* [Letters] 1960–1983, translated and edited by Dorota Cygan, Marek Zybura (Kraków: Universitas, 2015), 309, 310.

³⁴ Wirpsza, “Ein Pole in Westberlin (kartki z dziennika)”, 315.

³⁵ All subsequent materials discussed here are from that archive. Many thanks to Leszek Szaruga, Wirpsza's son, for kindly allowing me to work in the archive and cite Wirpsza's journal here. I would also like to express my gratitude to Jolanta Liskowacka and other staff members of Książnica Pomorska for their assistance.

³⁶ Witold Wirpsza, *Drugi opór* [Second resistance] (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2020), 12.

³⁷ Although they contain quite a number of interesting biographical materials, I would like to mention only one type, whose form is interesting from the perspective of life writing. Whenever Wirpsza left home, he would leave jocular, sometimes illustrated notes with information for his family; one of them, written in green ink (which suggests 1980s) on a piece of paper torn out from an A5 notebook, says: “13.30. / Disgusting, repulsive, atrocious, / ghastly, revolting, monstrous, / dreadful and horrifying / enormous, multicellular / and multiatomic // Sleepyheads: // I am leaving. When I'm back, I would like: 1) the hay to disappear / 2) conifer needles to disappear. / We will serve Zagajewscy / tea and treats”.

³⁸ From today's perspective, Wirpsza's annotations referring to illustrated advertisements in Orbis calendars attract attention; in one case he added “as far as he does NOT demand anything from us” to the slogan “the customer is king”, and to “We invite you” – “but not to stay, we are full!”.

³⁹ Lejeune, “Koronka”, 18. Lejeune adds that a notebook is supposed to guarantee that everything will come together; a notebook – sewn or glued together, in a cover or on a spiral binder, often with the author's name on it – is a promise of at least minimum unity, what Paul Ricoeur refers to as «the narrative identity».

However, there are some exceptions – the analysis of the collected material reveals that Wirpsza started writing a journal four times, but each time he did it irregularly, ultimately giving up. The first diary⁴⁰ opens proudly: “Journal / begun 13.VI.50”, and covers one year over... seven pages. Wirpsza’s notes are irregular, sometimes very short, mostly about everyday affairs (“I am waiting for a letter from Różewicz”, 6). From today’s perspective, those notes look like a record of a writer’s block and atrophy of personal reflection at the height of socialist realism. For example, on 17th August Wirpsza wrote: “After two months I am returning to the problem from 13.6.50” (3), but after a few days he abruptly stops his notes. On 20th February 1951 he wrote: “It’s been six months. I have only written one poem over that time – *Hymn narodowy* [A national anthem]. Numerous started projects (*Poemat polemiczny* [A polemics poem], *Towarzyszem niemieckim* [To my German comrades], *Do syna* [To my son], *Dzieci* [Children]) – everything got stuck halfway through. Plenty of ideas which cannot be utilized – because I am not good enough” (5). In the following paragraph, he only wrote: “An idea for a play”, repeated after a few months: “23. IV. 51: 1) An idea for a play:” – again, without writing anything... Probably the first journal failed because of socialist realism, and a few years later the same situation happened again. His second journal (signature No 1823, A5, brown cover) bears a more humble title: “Notebook I”. There are six pages of notes dated from 7th April to 5th June 1955; there are also several poems. Most notes are excerpts from the press, often humorous, mostly from “*Trybuna Ludu*” [People’s Tribune], whereas all personal notes are short. For example, on 24th April he wrote: “A trip with L.: Białego valley, path over Regle, Patyki pass, Kalatówki, Kuźnice”. In the next attempt (signature No 1481, A5, navy blue cover signed “W. Wirpsza”) there are only four dated entries without any general title: the first one was written on 13th September 1957, followed by three more written six months later (22nd, 25th, and 26th February 1958); additionally, similarly to the other notebooks, that one also contains random, undated notes.

If the archive is to be trusted, after those three unsuccessful attempts, Wirpsza gave up until 1980s, when he started writing what would later become his most extensive, proper diary⁴¹, from 31st August 1981 to 29th July 1982. At first it was kept quite regularly. The whole journal is only twelve pages long, but written extremely densely, in tiny handwriting. The title suggests some distancing from the diary genre: “Dated notes, not in an order” – nonetheless, the entries are disciplined, polished (there are surprisingly few erasures) and genuinely engaging; they could be published. Occasionally Wirpsza starts a new topic under a working title and returns to it after a few days; the most extensive notes are: *Kant i Peiper* [Kant and Peiper], *Gombrowicz i Miłosz* [Gombrowicz and Miłosz], *Determinizm* [Determinism], *Religia* [Religion] and *Etos Beethovena* [Beethoven’s ethos]. There are also shorter notes, some with titles, such as *Racjonalizm* [Rationalism], *Hegel*, *Manicheizm* [Manicheism] – or the worrying *Apokryf* [Apocrypha] from 1st September 1981, an important intext of *Liturgia* [Liturgy], a poem Wirpsza started writing in the same year:

⁴⁰Signature 1823. This document survives in the form of seven pages torn out from an A5 notebook. The pages are hand-numbered; I refer to that pagination in the main text.

⁴¹Signature 1823, a 16-page A5 notebook with a turquoise cover and yellow back, on the first page a handwritten title: “Dated notes, not in an order”, numbers (corrected) written in top right corners of each page. All subsequent quotes are from this source.

Let's say: a text of some previously unknown Gospel has been found, which implies that Christ was crucified not at the age of 33, but much later. Meaning: he had lost his mother, the political situation of the Holy Land had changed (Pontius Pilate no longer ruled), different people were responsible for his Passion, older apostles had died (so Peter, Paul and St. Andrew would not become the Church Fathers). Nonetheless, Christ's sacrifice would be essentially the same, theologically nothing would be different, Sermon on the Mount would be the same Sermon on the Mount. What would be different then? History? – External crust of history (4).

When it comes to untitled notes, there are some considerations regarding the last *Lament* by Jan Kochanowski, criticism of modern pedagogy, polemics with Marx's *dictum*: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to *change it*", as well as a curious aphorism from 1st November 1981: "Only God, some women, and no man are grown-ups" (10). And what about intimate, personal notes that would give insight into the life of the avant-garde author, who could write in a eulogy-confessional style? Only two notes from September 1981, i.e. the first phase of writing the journal, can be considered personal. On 6th September Wirpsza wrote:

Something that has been neglected, forsaken, forgotten to do. Here memory fails, it is unclear what it is (was). What if it was (the most) important? What will the consequences be? Maybe it was something that cannot be a reason, nor have consequences; whose significance lies only in existing.

Is there still a tree that was supposed to be touched? If it still exists, then if it is touched too late, will it matter? – Etc. (6).

Is this a personal confession, or a general reflection? Is this an account of an experience, or a concept in which considerations regarding the mystery of causality play a role? Does metaphor not win with a memory here? Another fragment, written on 1st September under the title *Rodzinne* [Family] is less universal, although no less literary:

If M. is a Cancer, and L is a Capricorn [this refers to Wirpsza's wife, Maria, and daughter, Lidia – P.B.], then I should situate myself in the middle, as the equator. Can a Sagittarius be an equator between two tropics? I think that he could play like this. And what about Pisces (A) [Wirpsza's son, Aleksander, i.e. Leszek Szaruga – P.B.], a double sign? One fish splashing between the equator and Cancer, the other one – between the equator and Capricorn. All that a mixture of water and fire. Not quite a family! Couples in a weird dance, changing their partners based on similarity, and then – oppositions. Is it cosmic or comic? Anyway, no chaos: an intertropical order (4).

Is it personal or peculiar? Autobiographical or autothematic? In any case, "no chaos" is an interdiscursive order. "Intertropical" too: Wirpsza uses his biography not in an autobiographical convention, but in forms "splashing" between the tropic of life and the tropic of creative work, between the turn to biography and linguistic turn – key to his writing and distrustful of any form of direct expression. Therefore all things biographical need to be aesthetically utilized, metaphorized, artistically encoded, made poetic, in short – processed into a structure.

According to Wirpsza's note on Beethoven from 18.11.81⁴², a structured note is better than a spontaneous one due to the presence of internal "tensions" which can "express internal joys, and not just aesthetic ones" (11). Wirpsza compares them to "directional tensions in Witkacy's works", making a reservation that "these are not limited to painting", and adding: "Directional tensions can arise on a surface, generally in space, and in time. So let's say that directional tensions in a poetic or musical space-time as a result of execution (?) (11). In the next entry, from 25th December, he analyzes *Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli*, adding that although "the area of activity and tension is not [...] closed like in Witkacy; it is open, tension is directed in the sense of «approaching infinity». This is Beethoven's ethos – a passionate, even religious ethos. There is also humbleness: subordinating to the form despite everything" (11). I believe that Witold Wirpsza had a similar ethos, and the postulate to subordinate to form, understood as a manifestation of humbleness towards the world and faithfulness to "internal values" meant that even his diary is governed by form – which would mean that his notes are not prisoners of dates, they "approach infinity".

Inevitably, Wirpsza transformed some of the diary entries analyzed here into articles. For example, the consideration about Beethoven, Kant and Peiper ended up in an article entitled *In dubio pro arte* from "Tygodnik Powszechny" (1982, No 37), whereas the notes about Gombrowicz – in an essay *Święte krowy* [Holy cows] from "Archipelago" (1984, No 3). *Zapiski bez porządku* were thus organized, they found their place in the superordinate construction of a coherent discussion, they were discoursed, and – as theoretical considerations – they gained new titles and audiences. It could not be any other way, given that in the only meta-journal entry, from 11th March 1982, under considerations following reading Aristotle and Wittgenstein, Wirpsza wrote: "Writing a journal. Some do it to consolidate psychological states, others – to consolidate considerations. Those two purposes are not mutually exclusive, but I prefer the latter. Analyzing my own soul? – neither do I need it, nor does anyone else" (12). It is also symptomatic that the moment Wirpsza stopped writing his *Zapiski datowane* coincides with the beginning of his work on *Przypomnienie Hioba*. Dating made its way into poetry for good. But in all truth – was there ever any other place for it? In the end, for Wirpsza a personal archive cannot be creative. It therefore seems that we can approach the truth about his biography (the truth about biography in general? the truth of biography?) through tracing the direction of tensions in his literary texts, and the mechanisms and strategies of "processing" the original lexical material, then through hope in what is allegedly unused, unprocessed, unfeigned and innocent, unfalsified and unhidden, indisputable and unquestionable, and ultimately inevitably... untrue.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

⁴²Wirpsza comments on the symmetrical date ("Again, symmetry in the date. Funny", 11), just as he did in *Monolog w samym centrum*.

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KEYWORDS

journals

WITOLD WIRPSZA

Zapiski datowane, bez porządku

Witolda Wirpsza's archive

ABSTRACT:

The paper explores the question of autobiography of the neo-avant-garde literary works by Witold Wirpsza, trying to determine the significance of journal as a genre to it. Wirpsza's meta-literary comments present him as an author who rejected biographism in favor of experimenting. It is simultaneously shown that some of his poems (especially from *Granica wytrzymałości* and *Przypomnienie Hioba*) and novels (*Pomarańcze na drutach*, *Sama niewinność*) can be read as results of experimenting with life writing. The analysis of Wirpsza's unpublished journals, especially the notebook entitled *Zapiski datowane, bez porządku* confirms the poet's disdain for intimate writing and consolidating psychological states.

eksperiment

NEO-AVANTE-GARDE

life writing

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Perpetuum Mobile. Non-places in Blixa Bargeld's journals

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Word games

Philippe Lejeune has this to say about the unlimited freedom that the diary offers: “Everyone feels that they have the right to use language they want to use. [...] You can choose your own rules of the game. Keep several notebooks. Mix genres.”¹ It means that life writing is a very broad category, one which inspires people to invent their own literary (and intermedia) formulas and impose rules and limitations on themselves. Recording life experiences and reflections actually becomes a kind of a game played that the writer plays – which makes sense insofar as the combination of chaos and order is a feature of both play and life.

Many avant-garde movements used games and play to foster creativity and inspire (self-) reflection. Mel Gooding emphasizes that surrealists used games to challenge conventional ways of speaking and behaving in order to reach hidden meanings: “it was through games, play, techniques of surprise and methodologies of the fantastic that they subverted academic modes of enquiry, and undermined the complacent certainties of the reasonable and respect-

¹ Philippe Lejeune, “Drogi zeszycie...”, “Drogi ekranie...”. O dziennikach osobistych [“Cher ecran”: Journal personnel, ordinateur, Internet/ “Dear Diary...” Dear screen”: Personal diaries] trans. Magda and Paweł Rodak (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2010), 42. The quote was translated into English from Polish.

able. Playful procedures and systematic stratagems provided keys to unlock the door to the unconscious and to release the visual and verbal poetry of collective creativity.”² Avant-garde game strategies helped one rediscover the world and allowed one to explore what was hidden behind the veil of reality and consciousness.

Considering the above remarks on avant-garde games, the following quotation from an interview on jazz, alternative, and experimental music published in *The Wire* in 1999 sounds surprisingly familiar. The German artist Blixa Bargeld talks about his artistic strategies, located at the intersection of music, literature, and performance art, moving in-between rigid rules and a game of chance: “It’s a particular method that developed within me and it opened up channels where the words that just came in were outside of my direct responsibility. [...] They would form patterns and, if you’re lucky in the end, you could talk about a text.”³ Bargeld talks about *Rede/Speech* vocalizations and performances (both “Rede” and “Speech” refer to the same thing), also called “pseudo-scientific entertainment,” in which he used a microphone and a mixing console to break down spoken or hummed words and phrases into sounds, demonstrating how words (including those in the local language, “suggested” by his audience) gradually transform into music. However, the artist uses exactly the same method in his other artistic endeavours, that is composing music, writing song lyrics and experimental prose. In all of the above-mentioned cases, he works with the autobiographical, and as such his music, literature, and photography are *life writing*, alas in a decidedly avant-garde perspective.

The avant-garde tradition: *Geniale Dilletanten*

The artistic path of Blixa Bargeld, born in 1959, is both original and characteristic of the most creative minds of his generation, which is referred to in the history of German culture as the generation of *Geniale Dilletanten*. The name refers to the event called *Festival Genialer Dilletanten* which took place on September 4, 1981 in (West) Berlin’s Tempodrom, during which a big audience (over 1,400 people) were introduced to a group of young, previously unknown, artists who had worked on the margins of mainstream culture (including the bands Die Tödliche Doris und Einstürzende Neubauten, Gudrun Gut, Christiane X and Alexander von Borsig).

A spelling error (“Dilletanten” instead of “Dilettanten”) was apparently made when a festival leaflet was being prepared but the effect was so “dilettante” that the name was soon used to refer to the entire movement/subculture of the early 1980s, active both in West and East Germany.⁴ Most *Dilletanten* were associated with different art schools and explored independent means of artistic expression – manifestos and poems in photocopied fanzines, Super 8 films, happenings and performances, photographic collages, installations, painting and sculpture

² Mel Gooding, “Surrealist games”, in: *A Book of Surrealist Games*, ed. Alistair Brotchie, Mel Gooding (Boston – London: Shambhala Redstone Editions, 1995), 10.

³ Louise Gray, “Invisible Jukebox: Blixa Bargeld”, *The Wire* 8 (1999): 37.

⁴ The following year, Merve Verlag, a publishing house founded in 1970 which specialized in contemporary philosophy, art, and left-wing political thought, published a book that summarized the goals of the generation: Wolfgang Müller, *Geniale Dilletanten* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1982).

which deliberately challenged conventional aesthetics – as well as created noise and experimental music using sounds of everyday life. According to Joseph Beuys, who famously argued that art was not craftsmanship, “emphasis was placed on expression rather than technical perfection, artistic impact rather than skill” (as explained in the catalogue which accompanied the exhibition devoted to the movement organized in 2015 at the Haus der Kunst in Munich⁵).

When it comes to musical inspirations, *Geniale Dilletanten* were influenced by first-wave punk, new wave, and the sound of British Industrial music. One of the most important points of reference was the English industrial band Throbbing Gristle, whose members were originally visual and performance artists; the band had evolved from the COUM Transmissions performance art collective, which organized exhibitions and happenings inspired by Dada, Surrealism, Beat writers, and the New York artistic community in the second half of the 1960s. COUM Transmissions operated from 1969 to 1976.

Geniale Dilletanten also continued the long tradition of the avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde, with particular emphasis on German and Swiss achievements in this field. The name pointed to the most important reference. The cover of the first (and only) issue of *Die Scham-made* published in 1920 in Cologne read: “Dilettanten erhebt Euch gegen die Kunst!” (Dilettantes, rise up against art!); the same slogan was painted on a wall during the *Erste Internationale Dada Messe* (First International Dada Fair) in Berlin in 1920. Devising new strategies of challenging, and not making, art turned out to be the long-term goal of young German artists, both in the 1920s and in the 1980s.

Einstürzende Neubauten

Strategien gegen Architektur,⁶ that is “Strategies against architecture,” is the title of a four-part anthology series by Einstürzende Neubauten, a group whose controversial name (“collapsing new buildings”) was inspired by the partial collapse of the Berlin Congress Hall in 1980. From the perspective of over forty years which had passed since the *Festival Genialer Dilletanten*, Einstürzende Neubauten turned out to be the most important, innovative, and influential band among the invited groups. The group still (with only some line-up changes) records and performs, and its current and former⁷ members boast significant achievements not only in the field of music but also film, theater, performance art, radio art, visual arts, and literature.

⁵ “Geniale Dilletanten: Subculture in Germany in the 1980s”, E-Flux, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/29393/geniale-dilletanten-subculture-in-germany-in-the-1980s/>, date of access 8 Feb. 2023.

⁶ Einstürzende Neubauten, *Strategien gegen Architektur I-IV*, Mute, CD, 1984, 1991, 2001, 2010.

⁷ The achievements of one of the co-founders of Einstürzende Neubauten, F.M. Einheit (Frank-Martin Strauß), are particularly important. He left the band in 1995 and pursued a career as a composer of contemporary music and film soundtracks. He is also involved (together with the writer Andreas Ammer) in radio plays. See: Lukáš Jiříčka, *Zdobywcy scen akustycznych Od radioartu do teatru muzycznego* [Conquerors of acoustic stages: From radio art to musical theater], trans. Krystyna Mogilnicka (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2017).

From the very beginning, the band drew on eclectic avant-garde and neo-avant-garde inspirations, including concrete and industrial music. However, the lyrics, the singing, and the performative aspects of live shows (which focused on destruction, physical pain, and fear) were also inspired by Artaud's Theater of Cruelty and its focus on screams.⁸

The futurist tradition, especially "The Art of Noises," is equally important for Einstürzende Neubauten. Luigi Russolo argues in the manifesto that: "Ancient life was all silence. In the 19th Century, with the invention of machines, Noise was born. Today, Noise is triumphant and reigns sovereign over the sensibility of men."⁹ The reconstructed *intonarumori* – fanciful futuristic instruments used to produce hums and noises – were featured in the music video for the song *Blume*,¹⁰ which was a re-enactment of the iconic photograph showing futurists with their noise machinery in the background.¹¹ The band's instruments point to the futuristic heritage: instruments which are usually used in rock music, such as electric and bass guitars, are not as important as found objects (metal and plastic pipes, oilcloth bags, or shopping carts used as drums) and DIY instruments ("pipe organs" made of actual pipes which come to life thanks to a compressor, bags filled with small objects which imitate the sound of sea waves). Objects from degraded construction sites, garbage dumps, and supermarkets are used in a new and surprising way; they become musical instruments and as such refer to avant-garde *objets trouvés*.

However, Dada remains the most important source of inspiration for the band. The nickname of Einstürzende Neubauten's frontman – the singer, guitarist, co-composer and lyricist Blixa Bargeld – is a tribute to Dada. Born Christian Emmerich, he borrowed his surname from Johannes Theodor Baargeld (Blixa was a type of pen; the fact that it sounds like a female name was also important). The Cologne painter, graphic artist, poet and satirist Johannes Theodor Baargeld (real name: Alfred Emanuel Ferdinand Grünwald), although not as emblematic of Dada as Marcel Duchamp, was one of the founders of the Dada group in 1919 (together with Max Ernst and Hans Arp) and the publisher of *Der Ventilator*, *Bulletin D* and *Die Schamade*.

⁸ Cf. Jennifer Shryane, Blixa Bargeld and Einstürzende Neubauten: German Experimental Music. 'Evading do-re-mi' (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

The interest in Artaud was probably strengthened by the band's long-term cooperation with Heiner Müller, who has repeatedly referred to Artaud in his work. The band, among others, prepared the musical score for Müller's radio play Hamletmachine; Blixa Bargeld played Hamlet (Einstürzende Neubauten & Heiner Müller, Die Hamletmaschine. Hörspiel, Ego 1991).

The band was also asked to cooperate with artists interested in butoh (the bodies of dancers are not only "post-Artaudian" but above all conceptualized "after Hiroshima") which further confirms their interest in Artaud: Sôgo Ishii in 1985 (documentation: Einstürzende Neubauten, Halber Mensch, directed by Sôgo Ishii, Atavistic, VHS, 1992) and Anita Sai's company Nordic Butoh Dance Lab in 1995.

⁹ Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto", trans. Barclay Brown, in: *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox, Daniel Warner (New York-London: Continuum, 2004), 10.

¹⁰ Einstürzende Neubauten, *Tabula Rasa*, Potomak, CD, 1993.

¹¹ Blixa Bargeld also took part in Luciano Chessa's *Music For 16 Futurist Noise Intoners*, where he performed original and new compositions on the intonarumori (New York 2009).

Representatives of the first avant-garde proved inspirational in discovering the visual and audio aspects of literature. For example, Richard Hülsenbeck¹² argued that the 20th century would mark the end of the Gutenberg era, in which poetry would no longer be read (privately, in silence) but performed live. References to the history of Swiss and German Dadaism may often be found in Einstürzende Neubauten's lyrics, for example in *Let's do it Dada*,¹³ which refers to many Dada artists, locations, and works of art – from Baargeld, Ernst, and Hülsenbeck to Schwitters and his *Merzbau* as well as the poet Hugo Ball. Einstürzende Neubauten also draws on sound poetry (for example in *Nnnaaaamm*,¹⁴ which stands for “New no new age advanced ambient motor music machine” and has been inspired by the frequency and voltage of electric power – and *Hawonnnti!*¹⁵) and random poetry.¹⁶ The band also experiments with various languages sound (not only German, English, and French but also Japanese and Latin).

Projects such as *Blixa liest Hornbach*¹⁷ (a series produced for Arte TV as part of a thematic evening devoted to poetry) may also be considered literary and performative equivalents of Dadaist *objets trouvés*. In these short films, Bargeld can be seen standing against the backdrop of post-industrial spaces, wearing a suit and a hat, and expressively reciting specifications of tools and materials one could order from a catalogue. Bargeld brought to life the semantic and acoustic potential of German technical vocabulary (words such as Bohrlochschwämme and Quarzitpolygonalplatten). The “patron saint” of this particular project (apart from Dadaists) was most likely the post-Dadaist Ernst Jandl. This notwithstanding, Bargeld still performs live with Einstürzende Neubauten, and he has for many years also toured with Nick Cave's band The Bad Seeds. Indeed, the most important part of Bargeld's career (and the main source of income) is performing live.

Non-places

European and world tours do not have a specific goal (artists often do not use the shortest route to travel from one city to another; due to logistical reasons, they often move like a knight in a game of chess) and they actually never end (artists such as Bob Dylan no longer set the beginning or end of their tours – they “tour” non-stop; the tour may be sometimes in-

¹²Richard Hülsenbeck would recite poems from his collection *Phantastische Gebete* (1916) at Cabaret Voltaire, often accompanying himself with a riding crop or a drum. See: Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 28. See also: Richard Hülsenbeck, “About My Poetry (1956)”, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, in: *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, ed. Hans J. Kleinschmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

¹³Einstürzende Neubauten, *Alles wieder offen*, Potomak, CD, 2007.

¹⁴Einstürzende Neubauten, *Ende Neu*, Potomak, CD, 1996.

¹⁵Einstürzende Neubauten, *Musterhaus 7: Stimmen Reste*, Potomak, CD, 2006.

During the band's anniversary concert in 2010, one of the musicians, N.U. Unruh, recited the sound poem *Hawonnnti!* dressed in a white tube cap and a stiff coat, a replica of the “magic bishop” costume immortalized in the iconic photo from 1916, in which Hugo Ball recited *Caravan* at Cabaret Voltaire.

¹⁶Bargeld designed a system called Dave, a pack of six hundred cards with various suggestions regarding the choice of the instrument, the structure of the song (verse, chorus, intro and outro), lyrics, tempo, emotions, etc., used in collective songwriting. Each musician would pick a card, and the resulting combinations were the starting point for new compositions.

¹⁷All videos can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kdLmXRmEec>, date of access 8 Feb. 2023.

terrupted by random events such as the coronavirus pandemic). Musicians often describe life on the road *not* as an exciting artistic adventure, full of surprises and antics, but as a “Groundhog Day” – the setlists are (mostly) the same and the daily schedule is mostly the same: travel, rehearsal, performance, night spent at the hotel, travel.

We may ask whether “being on the road” can be defined as a journey at all, especially when we think about how this experience may be translated into an artistic medium, for example into a work of literature. The American scholar John Joseph, who analyzed Romantic travel journals after Chateaubriand, thus defined the features and goals of such writing:

The travel literature of a given period shares the aesthetic and philosophical undercurrents shaping fictional writing, along with some of the same goals: to instruct and entertain by transporting readers, through the printed page, into contact with settings, circumstances, and characters unfamiliar to them, of a sort they have likely not encountered in actual experience and may or may not in the future. By reading about other places and persons, readers will come to an improved understanding of humanity and the world in general, of themselves, and the places most familiar to them.¹⁸

Although what Joseph described may still be found both in “professional” literature and “private” texts (as evidenced by the popularity of different guides to creating travel diaries and notebooks, with a particular focus on the use of multimedia, combining words and images or archiving artifacts such as tickets), today the meaning of the word “travel” has become somewhat unstable.

The ethnologist and cultural anthropologist Marc Augé has argued that we need to redefine the relationship between place and identity in the era of excess time and space, marked by transportation boom and the development of places which only serve travel purposes (airports, stations, hotels). Augé calls spaces that cannot be described as identity-defining, familiar or historical “non-places.”¹⁹ Seemingly, non-places do not meet any of the conditions that make a given space worthy of description. However, according to Augé, people are still looking for symbolic orders and thus non-places can also be included in broadly defined travel literature or simply “travel” as a genre.²⁰

Joseph refers in the title of his article to the “I-Tinerary,” placing emphasis on the pronoun “I” as part of the word “Itinerary.” When we change how we think about the subject’s identity, we change how we write. Irene Kacandes, who studies such developments in life writing, observes that different experimental techniques are used in contemporary literature to reproduce “the layers of the human psyche, split subjectivity, or the human experience of time

¹⁸ John Joseph, “I-Tinerary: The Romantic Travel Journal after Chateaubriand”, *South Central Review* 1 (1984): 40.

¹⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London-New York: Verso, 1995).

²⁰ Cf. “Podróż” [Journey], in: *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms], ed. Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2007), 394–395.

and space.”²¹ She argues that texts which rely on such experimental techniques should still be classified as *life writing*. The contemporary diarist who travels through non-places may employ various avant-garde strategies to map his experience, translating it into a specific form.

The everyday in photographs

Bixa Bargeld estimates that as a touring musician he visits two hundred hotels a year. He decided to immortalize this, for him crucial, experience of visiting non-places in a way that is a negative of travel photography, insofar as it highlights repetition, lack of individuality, ugliness, and claustrophobia (although the artist has been active on Instagram for several years, he does not document his private or professional life online²²).

Bargeld started taking photos with cheap disposable cameras (considered to be the opposite of classic “artistic” SLR cameras) in 1990 and decided to immortalize each of his hotel stays. He did not want to photograph hotel beds because they easily lend themselves to metaphorization;²³ instead, he decided to photograph every hotel bathroom because, to paraphrase Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes’s famous observation about Dada, they do not mean anything. However, the musician believes that it is impossible to fully escape from meaning-making, because the recipient of a work of art will always look for it, look for associations, or at least for structure, rhythm, and organizing principle. So, he set clear rules for himself: he took one or more photos, and he always photographed the washbasins first. There is usually a large mirror above hotel washbasins, but Bargeld tried to take photographs in such a way as not to appear in them. However, he did not always succeed and sometimes he appears in the photograph as a reflection in the mirror, akin to Jan van Eyck’s *The Arnolfini Portrait*. When his flash-lamp broke down in Chile, the photograph was almost black. Still, Bargeld included it in the collection because it was important for him to follow the established and newly discovered rules. He also emphasized the importance of repetition, and not the photograph itself or its quality. According to Bargeld, collecting such images helps maintain a balance between chaos and order.²⁴

²¹Irene Kacandes, “Experimental Life Writing”, in: The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature, ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, Brian McHale (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 382.

²²<https://www.instagram.com/blixa.official/>.

In this context, it might be interesting to mention other artists who use Instagram to document their experiences as touring musicians. One of them is Mick Jagger, who, unlike Bargeld, cultivates the myth of the musician-tourist, mainly by taking photos during his walks, mostly at night and after the shows, and posing in front of monuments. See: <https://www.instagram.com/mickjagger/>.

²³For some people, this aspect (reinforced by the cultural memory of Tracey Emin’s *My Bed* (1996)) is important. The choreographer and dancer Leszek Bzdyl has photographed all his hotel beds after waking up for several years. He posts his photographs on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/bzdyl>.

²⁴The “collector’s” theme of Bargeld’s works could probably be discussed in the context of one of Bargeld’s favorite critics, Walter Benjamin. Benjamin tried to restore subjectivity to mass-produced objects by creating collections in which these objects would be “liberated from the compulsion to be useful.” Walter Benjamin, “Paris: Capital of the 19th Century (1935)”, in idem: Selected writings: Volume 3, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 39.
Cf. also: Beata Frydryczak, *Świat jako kolekcja. Próba analizy estetycznej natury nowoczesności* [The world as a collection. An attempt to analyze the aesthetic nature of modernity] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, 2002).

The first exhibition of Bargeld's photographs, *Serialbathroomdummyrun*, opened in 1997. The exhibition catalog was published the same year.²⁵ The collection grew with each tour; a question arose as to whether, when, and how the project should end. A journal or a diary, at least in its most classic rendition, does not end on a date that has been set in advance; writing is interrupted by death. However, Bargeld decided that the project should end on a special night: the night he spent at the world's tallest hotel in Shanghai celebrating Chinese New Year.²⁶

Bargeld's project is neither nostalgic (aseptic, impersonal hotels where the musician spends most of the year in isolation fade in comparison with his home, family, pets), nor does it serve to provocatively overturn any hierarchies (as is the case, for example, in Jean-Philippe Toussaint's famous novel/quasi-diary entitled *The Bathroom*, in which the protagonist moves to the most inconspicuous room in the apartment, taking all his possessions and, gradually, his entire life with him²⁷). Bargeld does not mind the fact that chain hotel bathrooms are all the same; he refers to Howard Hughes, who, as a billionaire and aviator, could afford to have identical copies of his house erected across the United States.²⁸ He is fascinated by the fact that in their "natural state" such places are marked by anonymity and unremarkability – they lack individualization; when you live in hotel rooms, even for a short period of time, you in a sense desacralize these spaces, and after temporary residents leave, the staff must return the room to its original state of asepticity and transparency. The hotel bathroom turns out to be not only a non-place but also a space exempt from the laws and the passage of time. It thus becomes something of a *pars pro toto* for touring.

The everyday in words

In 1993, shortly after he began his "bathroom" project, Blixa Bargeld started writing every day; he says that many authors (and musicians) advised him to write regularly, day by day. This habit, on the one hand, helps document everyday life, and, on the other hand, it is intended to make creativity almost automatic. As the artist says, it helps develop individual style and fosters freedom of expression: "The less you write the more you are inclined to worry about each and every word. If you write a lot, you stop doing so."²⁹ To draw on Paweł Rodak, it can be said that in and through *life writing* Bargeld combines "existential aspects" (the desire to record life) with "professional" artistic endeavors.³⁰

²⁵Blixa Bargeld, *Serialbathroomdummyrun* (Berlin: Juliettes Literatursalon, 1998).

²⁶Quote after: Max Dax, Robert Defcon, *Nur was nicht ist ist möglich. Die Geschichte der Einstürzenden Neubauten* (Berlin: Bosworth, 2006), 299.

²⁷See: Jean-Philippe Toussaint, *The Bathroom*, trans. Nancy Amphoux and Paul de Angelis (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008).

²⁸Cf. Blixa Bargeld, "Das Spiel wird erfunden, die Regeln werden entdeckt", in idem: *Serialbathroomdummyrun*, 8.

²⁹Quote after : *Einstürzende Neubauten, Perpetuum Mobile*, tourbook (Berlin: minus Verlag, 2004), 10.

³⁰Cf. Paweł Rodak, "Dziennik pisarza: między codzienną praktyką piśmienną a literaturą" [A writer's diary: between everyday writing practice and literature], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2006): 34–35.

Still, the German artist distances himself from the diaristic tradition: "My notes are a form of writing which prevents me from writing a diary. And it takes a clear formal shape: Place, comma, date, then two lines down I will note what I intend to write. This ranges from poetry to essays, from notes to lists."³¹ Perhaps Bargeld's notes are in fact what Philippe Lejeune calls "a series of dated traces" [série de traces datées];³² such notes are both continuous and discontinuous.

Bargeld's notes from one particularly long European tour with Einstürzende Neubauten in 2008 (Alles Wieder Offen Tour) were published in a book which he edited and ironically described as "Bildungsroman in der erst besten Person"³³ (a Bildungsroman in the first best person). The book describes, rather peculiarly, Bargeld's "Journeyman Years;" the musician describes life on the road as an experience that offers nothing (in the sense of experiences or knowledge gained about the world or people) and yet at the same time also as an experience which does not deprive him of anything (he does not portray himself as a martyr, as an emotionless craftsman). Being on the road, being in constant motion, consumes life energy as much as it generates it: it is like a perpetual motion machine (*perpetuum mobile*).

The book is titled *Europa kreuzweise. Eine Litanei* (Europe Crosswise: A Litany). The subtitle refers to the fact that the book is a long list of dates and cities, with repeated comments (e.g., playlists which are practically identical throughout the entire tour or descriptions of routine activities during sound checks). In-between, Bargeld places variations: in particular, notes on the least routine element of being on the road, i.e. food,³⁴ and his reflections of a specific or general nature.

In a sample entry about Gothenburg, we read about the musician's taxi ride from the airport to the hotel, about herrings (prompted by news of the death of *The New York Times* food critic), the hotel room (a bottle of Bordeaux wine, a cookie), TV channels, ENT medications taken. Later, we read about a dinner at a restaurant:

Biff-blomkål-lök-aska
 Beef-cauliflower-onion-ash
 Långarygg-bönor-mandel-lakrits
 Ling fillet-beans-almonds-liquorice
 Långa? Ling? Fishes can't be translated, they have a different name every 50 miles;
 Carl Linnaeus, and he was definitely Swedish, classified this one as follows:

³¹Quote after: Einstürzende Neubauten, *Perpetuum Mobile*, tourbook, 11.

³²Lejeune, 36.

³³Marcus, "Blixa Bargeld – Europa kreuzweise. Eine Litanei (Rezension & Lesung)", Mainstage Musikmagazin, <https://mainstage.de/blixa-bargeld-europa-kreuzweise-eine-litanei-rezension-lesung/>, date of access 10 Feb. 2023.

³⁴The topic of food was also at the center of another autobiographical publication about life on the road – a book by Alex Kapranos, the frontman of the Scottish band Franz Ferdinand, originally published in the form of weekly columns in *The Guardian*. However, Kapranos, unlike Bargeld, emphasizes the unique nature of each place, meal, circumstances, and people with whom he shared the meal. He is also clearly aware of a certain literary tradition/context (many dishes function as a kind of Proustian madeleines, the taste of which inspires one to reminisce and reflect). "Food is an adventure," the musician writes. See: Alex Kapranos, *Sound Bites. Eating on Tour with Franz Ferdinand* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 9.

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Class: Actinopterygii
 Order: Gadiformes
 Family: Lotidae
 Genus: Molva
 Species: M. molva
 Molva Molva is its name.
 Good meal.³⁵

An excerpt from the menu comes first, and then we read about what Bargeld found out about on Wikipedia (most likely using a smartphone or a laptop). At this point, his notes trigger associations with a collage or *silvae rerum*.³⁶ Bargeld collects and systematizes more or less important information, including detailed train and flight schedules, blood test results, and what the Swedish musician and writer Carl-Johan Vallgren told him about literature at dinner.

The description of that evening becomes even more condensed: the list of ingredients smoothly turns into a playlist, without any comments, and then we come across a short note about a trip to a different Swedish city:

Lingon-havre-mjölk-lingonsorbet
 Lingonberries-oats-milk-lingonberry sorbet
 Die Wellen
 Nagorny Karabach
 Dead Friends
 Let's Do it a Dada
 Weil Weil Weil
 Unvollständigkeit
 Tagelang Weiß
 Rampe / Von Wegen
 Die Befindlichkeit des Landes
 Sabrina
 Susej
 Ich Warte
 Gothenburg -> Stockholm. Roadworks on the highway. Huge machines, each operated by a bored worker, motionless in the sun, very focused.³⁷

In the end, we find a summary written from the perspective of the finished tour. In a sense, this is another instance of draining one's memory, which does not retain much: names of cit-

³⁵Blixa Bargeld, *Europa kreuzweise. Eine Litanei* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2009), 56.

³⁶On the influence of contemporary “scattered” multimedia forms of reading and writing (from paper books to smartphones) on the development of *silvae rerum* cf. Jarosław Płuciennik, “Sylwicznost nasza powszechna i metakognicja” [Our everyday use of *silva rerum* and metacognition], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2012).

³⁷Bargeld, *Europa kreuzweise*, 57.

ies, sometimes some words or events.

Europe – summary: what's missing?

Zurich, Venice...

Reykjavík: "What problems are you dealing with here?" "Drug addiction and suicides in winter"

Madrid, Manchester, Rennes in Brittany ...

Rotterdam: Amid a hail of bullets, opening for U2...

Florence, Bratislava, Århus, Antwerp ...

Klagenfurt: Almost arrested for imitating taxi driver radio ...

Malaga, Krems, Nantes, Reggio Emilia.

Bolzano: Our instruments had to be carried upstairs ...

Potsdam, Ljubljana, Ghent, Leeds ...

Turin: The tour bus on a raceway on the roof of a former futuristic Fiat factory ...

Thessaloniki, Belgrade, Glasgow, Strasbourg ...

Dublin: No, I didn't break the glass door, please watch the security camera footage again... I didn't break it.

Istanbul, Salzburg, Venice, Krakow ...

Rome: I dreamed about my death, purgatory and what happened next ...³⁸

Bargeld's book seems to confirm Marc Augé's observations about "supermodernity." Touring, as described by the German musician, "empties the landscape, and the gaze of which it is the object, of all content and all meaning (...) and becomes the object of a secondary, unattributable gaze," while his notes show how "the individual consciousness" is subjected to "entirely new experiences and ordeals of solitude, directly linked with the appearance and proliferation of non-places."³⁹

The everyday in sounds

Bixa Bargeld has been keeping his notes on a computer from the very beginning, clearly distancing himself from the mythologized status of a paper diary. He emphasizes that he uses the search engine in text files to easily find, for example, all instances in which the word "alcohol" has appeared in his notes in the past ten years.⁴⁰ He has been inspired by Arno Schmidt, a German writer and translator of English and American literature, who was very experimental in his prose; for example, he constructed maze-like plots or based them on game theory. Schmidt used index cards; today, technology makes it much easier to navigate one's private archive.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their analysis of life writing archives emphasize their dynamic and metamorphic character: "A written life entering the world as a book, manuscript, blog, or the like, is filtered through other kinds of archives and may be changed by subsequent

³⁸Bargeld, Europa kreuzweise, 122–123.

³⁹Augé, 93.

⁴⁰See: Einstürzende Neubauten, Perpetuum Mobile, tourbook, 19–20.

editions or translations into different media and languages. That is, a published ‘life’ enters into circulation as new reading publics access different versions of it over time; and it acquires an ‘afterlife’ that shifts its relationship to archival material and generates other versions of the subject.”⁴¹

Bargeld has, in a way, recycled his *life writing* archive. Many of his songs are based on the notes he writes every day. He often reaches for them in the final stages of working on a new album, when all the songs have been written but some still lack lyrics, and the lyrics have to be written fast. The rhythmic structure of the song imposes certain limitations: for example, twelve lines are required, each of which should consist of fifteen syllables. The notes provide inspiration and sometimes ready-made phrases.

One of the songs created in this way is the almost fourteen-minute-long title track from the album *Perpetuum Mobile*.⁴² It talks about the world and man in motion but Bargeld, born and raised in West Berlin⁴³ – such a mythologized space strongly saturated with history – is interested primarily in non-places, transitive spaces in which stability or symbolic significance fade.

Perpetuum Mobile has the structure of, as Bargeld puts it, the so-called moving poem – it describes each section of the journey from point A to point B, focusing not so much on the place but selected aspects of reality: colors and shapes, sounds, but also, for example, the means of transport. Musically, it consists largely of non-musical sounds, paying homage to Pierre Schaeffer, the father of *music concrète*, who in his 1948 *Cinq études de bruits* [Five studies of noises] used, among other things, the sounds of trains and canal boats. The remembered sounds are further “processed” musically, and ultimately the composition turns into a life writing archive.⁴⁴

In the first half of the composition, Bargeld recites a detailed list of all the means of transport he used to get from his Berlin apartment, through Berlin Tegel Airport and London Heathrow, to his London hotel:

Fahrstuhl [elevator]
Taxi [taxi]
Gepäckwagen [baggage cart]

⁴¹Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, “The Afterlives of Those Who Write Themselves: Rethinking Autobiographical Archive”, *European Journal of Life Writing*, Vol IX (2020): 11.

⁴²Einstürzende Neubauten, *Perpetuum Mobile*, Potomak, CD, 2004. All quotes from the song are from the CD booklet.

⁴³Berlin, seen through the prism of lieux de mémoire, features in the albums *Berlin Babylon* (Ego, CD, 2001) and *Alles in Allem* (Potomac, CD, 2020), which includes, among others: songs dedicated to Landwehrkanal or Tempelhof.

⁴⁴When asked about his “actual” diary, as opposed to his notes, Bargeld says: “My memories are engraved in the music. I can only hear myself and the others in the time that we have made the music. I can still hear the sound of the recycling bottles we brought back when we recorded Kollaps in the studio or how I fell asleep in the bath tub when we recorded Abwärts. When I hear our songs, I hear the circumstances in which they were born. I can’t get rid of that. I just can’t listen to the music in the unbiased way everyone else can”. Quote after: Einstürzende Neubauten, *Perpetuum Mobile*, tourbook, 11.

Flugzeug [airplane]
Gepäckwagen [baggage cart]
Rolltreppe [escalator]
Rolltreppe [escalator]
Zug [train]
Flugzeug [airplane]
bus [bus]
escalator
moving walkway
moving walkway
escalator
baggage cart
limousine
elevator

The means of transport are recited rhythmically against the musical background (interestingly, after “landing,” that is starting with the word “bus,” Bargeld switches from German to English; later in the same composition he describes another, longer, journey from San Francisco to Berlin (with one layover)).

The way in which Bargeld uses strategies of restriction and proceduralism brings to mind not only Dada games but also OuLiPo, for example Georges Perec’s notes/catalogues.⁴⁵ In a different part the song, the musician recites a long list of answers to questions routinely asked at the airport. He has heard them so many times that he replies almost automatically (he does not even have to hear the question first):

- Yes, this case was sometimes left unsupervised.
- Yes, others had access to it.
- Yes, I was asked to carry presents.
- Yes, there are electronic appliances in the case.
- Yes, many batteries.
- No, not everything belongs to me.

In non-places, a non-language is spoken; any attempt to go beyond its narrow framework is considered sign of emancipation. In the lyrics to *Perpetuum Mobile*, dull phrases (such as the ones quoted above) are juxtaposed with lyrical parts that constitute an attempt to enter the world of thoughts and experiences of the moving subject.

Bargeld’s intermedial notes probably should be described in terms of mapping experiential space. Not least because the artist constantly moves “crosswise” through Berlin, Europe, and the world. As Mikołaj Madurowicz writes, the cartographer must first consider what kind of space he wants to map – and differentiating oppositions (“my – somebody else’s,” “close

⁴⁵Cf. Georges Perec, *I Remember*, trans. Philip Terry & David Bellos (Boston: David R. Godine, 2014); Cf. also Jan Baetens, “OuLiPo and proceduralism”, in: *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, Brian McHale (London – New York: Routledge, 2012), 115.

– distant,” “known – unknown,” “everyday – unusual,” “public – private”⁴⁶) play a key role in experiential space. In strictly cartographic terms, a map reflects the real using the principle of equivalence: each point on the map corresponds to an actual place;⁴⁷ alas, not every autobiographical element corresponds to a real object, phenomenon, or event in time and space. However, this may not be necessary. As Madurowicz writes, the map is essentially an “intersection of several axes: between memory and imagination, between thought and experience, between mapping the world and its projection, between objectivity and intentionality.”⁴⁸ This could be the definition of *life writing*.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁴⁶Mikołaj Madurowicz, “Mapa jako optyka” [Map as optics], *Łódzkie Studia Etnograficzne* 60 (2021): 14–15.

⁴⁷Wprowadzenie do kartografii i topografii [Introduction to cartography and topography], ed. Jacek Pasławski (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Nowa Era, 2006), 16.

⁴⁸Madurowicz, 13.

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Blixa Bargeld

GENIALNI DYTLETANCI

ABSTRACT:

The article analyzes life writing strategies of the German composer, musician and performer Blixa Bargeld, who has been documenting his life on tour since the 1990s. The experience of moving between successive identical, impersonal, as Marc Augé puts it, non-places, such as hotels and airports, turns out to be the opposite of traveling. As a result, Bargeld's travelogue takes unusual forms: from a series of photographs showing hotel bathrooms (*serialbathroom-dummyrun*), through experimental prose (*Europa kreuzweise. Eine Litanei*), to concrete music (the album *Perpetuum Mobile*).

life writing

moving-poems

non-places

TRAVELLOGUE

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Quasi-journals as a laboratory – the case of Andrzej Falkiewicz

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“(Let’s say that honestly here, in this place, at this moment)”

“I cut like a diamond through disciplines, compartments, and classifications”¹ – states Andrzej Falkiewicz in *Takim ściegiem* [Using that stitch]. Indeed, the works by this critic, essayist, and author, who passed away in 2010, is difficult to classify as one specific genre, trend, or topic. Perhaps we should take a marginal position, and instead of focusing on the central *Ledwie mrok* [Hardly darkness] (an essayist epistolary novel which some critics consider to be Falkiewicz’s peculiar *opus magnum*²), we should take a closer look at his other works, which are more private and rarely analyzed.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze three books by Falkiewicz: *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze* [Fragments on Polish literature], *Takim ściegiem* [Using that stitch] and *Ta chwila* [That moment]. Although it is not obvious which genre these books belong to, for the purpose of this paper I define them as quasi-journals. First of all, the notion of a journal has been a significant

¹ Andrzej Falkiewicz, *Takim ściegiem. Zapisy z lat 1974–1976, przepisane w 1986, przeczytane w 2008 roku* [Using that stich. Notes from the years 1974-1976, rewritten in 1986, reread in 2008] (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2009), 7.

² The phrase “peculiar opus magnum” reflects the way *Ledwie mrok* is written about. According to researchers, Falkiewicz’s only novel is both his “failure in terms of literature”, and “greatest achievement” (Andrzej Skrendo, “Czytanie Falkiewicza. Prolegomena” [Reading Falkiewicz. Prolegomenon], in: *Nie przeczytane* [Not read], edited by Jarosław Borowiec, Tomasz Mizerkiewicz [Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT – Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, 2014], 38), an attempt at “creating an alternative language of new humanities” (Karol Maliszewski, *Mój Falkiewicz* [My Falkiewicz], <https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/recenzje/moj-falkiewicz/>, date of access: 2.02.2023), which sounds “extravagant or pretentious” (Skrendo). Nonetheless, such ambivalent opinions do not change the fact that “*Ledwie mrok* has a unique place in Falkiewicz’s works” (Skrendo).

reference point for scholars writing about those texts. For example, Marta Koronkiewicz observes that “*Takim ścigiem* gives an impression of a coherent, intimate journal – not just due to the reader’s effort and will”³, whereas Jakub Skurtyś claims that “*Takim ścigiem* and *Ta Chwila* are two quasi-journals, full of intimate confessions and erudite considerations, governed by rationality, authenticity, and poetry”⁴. Secondly, the texts in question match Philippe Lejeune’s definition: “a diary is a series of dated traces”⁵ – indeed, dates play an important role in them, to a greater or lesser extent. In *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze* text modules are organized either by titles, or by dates; the subtitle of *Takim ścigiem* reads “notes from the years 1974–1976, rewritten in 1986”, *Ta chwila* opens with a date (30th October 1961), and the book concludes with the date of death: “That moment of writing started for the Author in January 2006, and ended in June 2010 – one month before his death. Andrzej died on 22nd July 2010”⁶. Therefore, Lejeune’s claim that the date seems to be of utmost importance⁷ is significant in reference to the analyzed texts. Another conclusion by Lejeune – that apart from text, also an image, an object, or some private holy thing”⁸ – allows to observe how the traces left by Falkiewicz in quasi-journals changed over time. *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze* are completely rooted in text (although his experiments with punctuation and tables already slowly begin to attract attention); in *Takim ścigiem* graphs and more complex punctuation solutions appear; and in *Ta chwila* visual elements (such as photographs, postcards, plans, leaflets, partiture, scans of hand-written notes, collages) are at least as significant as the text, which also undergoes an evolution as a result of experimenting with various possibilities offered by text editors. Although research-wise, *Ta chwila* it is a more interesting text than *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze* due to its formal devices, we should not create a linear narrative illustrating how Falkiewicz’s project developed. Again, as Lejeune advises, we should rather notice that perhaps a diary is a story, but first and foremost, it is music, the art of repetition and variation”⁹. This thesis seems especially significant in the case of Falkiewicz, not only because sound metaphors play an important role in the auto-descriptions of his works (“*Ledwie mrok* is an Allegro for prepared computer and dynamized harpsichord”¹⁰), but also because the rule of variation and repetition describes relationships between different texts. For example, one text module in *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze* contains a fragment which could belong to *Ledwie mrok* (such as the text *Trzeba mieć ciało* [Having a body is necessary]). In *Takim ścigiem* (see e.g. pp. 84-85) traces of work on that novel can be found (e.g. an outlined idea on page 174), and in *Ta chwila* – of renewing and republishing *Takim ścigiem*. At the same time when Falkiewicz was working on *Ta chwila*, he published *Znalezione* [Found], where he reprinted an essay from *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*. Additionally, in *Ta chwila* there are fragments interpreting *Ledwie mrok*, *Świetliste* [Luminous] and

³ Marta Koronkiewicz, “Uniemożliwić średniość. Strategie pisarskie w «Takim ścigiem»” [Making mediocrity impossible. Literary strategies in «Using that stitch», in: Nie przeczytane, 113.

⁴ Jakub Skurtyś, “Niepoliczalne Jest” [It is uncountable], in: Andrzej Falkiewicz, Jeden i liczba mnoga [One and the plural], 2nd edition (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT – Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, 2016), 4.

⁵ Philippe Lejeune, “Koronka. Dziennik jako seria datowanych śladów” [A diary as a series of dated traces], translated into Polish by Magda and Paweł Rodak, Pamiętnik Literacki 4 (2006), 21.

⁶ Andrzej Falkiewicz, *Ta chwila* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2013), 446.

⁷ Lejeune, 21.

⁸ Lejeune.

⁹ Lejeune.

¹⁰Falkiewicz, *Ta chwila*, 89.

*Takim ściegiem*¹¹. The last publication has been republished with a different subtitle: “notes from the years 1974-1976, rewritten in 1986, **reread in 2008**” (highlight mine – D.K.), and a few but significant changes in contents. The same book also contains fragments of the unpublished *W trybie pragnienia* [In longing mode], which... were published in *Jeden i liczba mnoga*.

The relationships between Falkiewicz’s works listed above are only a modest part of all the possible combinations, but perhaps they reveal at least some pathways through the density of texts, and justify the analysis of quasi-journals. However, at the same time I believe that *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*, *Takim ściegiem* and *Ta chwila* require interpretation not only in the context of their relationships with other works by Falkiewicz, but also as individual artistic endeavors. So what is the experiment conducted in the quasi-journals about, and was it successful?

Piotr Bogalecki’s concept of “c(i)ałopisanie”¹² can be a good starting point for considerations regarding Falkiewicz’s works. In simple words, this neologism reflects how the body [ciało] and the Whole [Całość] interact in Falkiewicz’s works. Let us begin with considering what happens with those spheres in the quasi-journals.

The author’s body

Falkiewicz wrote in *Takim ściegiem*: “And I – I am. For the reader, one thing is beyond doubt: these notes all take place in the author’s body and soul”¹³, later adding that “To be more protein than culture – this is all an artist has to do. Their attitude to people is the substance of their art”¹⁴. Therefore, in the space of quasi-journals, the body is the author’s body, and the author’s privacy is the foundation of the creative process¹⁵. This idea returns in Falkiewicz’s evaluation of other authors. For example, he wrote about Jerzy Pluta:

Either way, first the author’s privacy. If there is any. Because if there is not, neither an absolute ear for language, nor excellent proficiency in writing, nor persistent avant-garde experiments will save the work from oblivion. After some short period of interest or admiration for means of expression, only intimate traces of personality are left from cultural sifting. It is not important “how it is done” – in

¹¹This is by no means a complete list of relationships between Falkiewicz’s texts. Skurys and Skrendo found interesting relationships between different texts (see Skurys and Andrzej Skrendo, “Stanisław Brzozowski i Andrzej Falkiewicz – fragmenty o powinowactwie” [Stanisław Brzozowski and Andrzej Falkiewicz – fragments on affinity], in: Stanisław Brzozowski – (ko)repetycje [Stanisław Brzozowski – (co)repetitions, vol. 2, edited by Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, Andrzej Skrendo, Krzysztof Uniłowski [Katowice: FA-art, 2013]]). However, their findings do not exhaust the topic, which requires additional research.

¹²See Piotr Bogalecki, “«Powiedział mi się Bóg». Andrzej Falkiewicz w perspektywie postsekularnej” [God told himself to me. Andrzej Falkiewicz from the postsecular perspective], in: Nie przeczytane, 261.

¹³Falkiewicz, *Takim ściegiem*, 226.

¹⁴Falkiewicz, *Takim ściegiem*.

¹⁵In a broader, more philosophical sense, the author’s body is the necessary connector between the whole and a part: “Probably a “segmenting” experience taking place in the external world is accompanied by my internal, “unifying” experience, taking place via external senses which I use – likely through contact with me-body, my internal body – to get in touch with reality in some fundamentally different way. Probably – through my own living organism, its desires and anxieties – I reach “the world’s life”, to the desires and anxieties of being (but across the five hundred pages of my *Ledwie mrok* I was unable to tell this myself in a comprehensible way)”. See Andrzej Falkiewicz, *Być może* [Perhaps] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2002), 38. A more detailed analysis of the relations within the part – body – whole system is beyond the scope of this paper.

terms of linguistics, postmodernism, in line with current fashion, not in line with it, or against it. The only thing that matters is the strong, varied relationship of the author with their work. Literature is playing an internal instrument, which every reader has inside them – but it is possible only on condition that the author uses their own instrument. Because ultimately, what a person seeks in literature is the author's testament contained within it. This is what readers will find – the author. They are the form and contents of a literary work. They are sought in catalogues and dusty library shelves.

And so the author's privacy – elementary, undivided, undefined. As much as one person should and can communicate about themselves to others¹⁶.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that Falkiewicz equipped his quasi-journals in – as Sergiusz Sternawachowiak put it in an interview with him – “your gut prose, in order to show what you expect from Polish literature, forever immature and constantly dishonest. Like in laboratory preparations”¹⁷. The three texts analyzed here constitute the essence of literary honesty produced in a laboratory of personal experiment, not an intimate journal, but rather – as observed by Małgorzata Koronkiewicz, “a journal of experimenting with intimacy”¹⁸. And this begs the question: how do “extreme honesty” and “exhibitionism”, “auto-vivisections” impact readers?

The characteristic rhetoric used to write about Falkiewicz's works may shed some light. Jakub Skurys describes Falkiewicz's works as “an equivalent of a real conversation, as if the reader entered in the middle of it and slowly tried to understand what they heard”¹⁹, whereas Koronkiewicz observes that *Takim ściegiem* “is a unique opportunity to peek behind the scenes”²⁰. Therefore, the reader plays an active part – the author's radical privacy is connected to the reader's radical engagement. This is especially evident in Janusz Drzewucki's review of *Takim ściegiem*:

If it is easier to say what Falkiewicz's book is not than what it is, any style of reception is acceptable. Moreover, *Takim ściegiem* actually forces readers to choose their own way of reading²¹.

The rhetorical contradiction of this fragment (the choice implying freedom and coercion suggesting its deficiency) shows what Falkiewicz's strategy does to readers. The honesty of quasi-journals, stressed multiple times, forces readers into a sort of a game. Conversing with the author, having a look behind the scenes, participating in work in progress are all possible, because the author uncovers himself in front of readers, with his advantages and disadvantages. The body of the living author is the only means of reaching the Whole. We can recognize it only by noticing the relationships between repeated variations of fragments. In this sense Falkiewicz's work would be about (over)presence of what Małgorzata Czermińska calls “an autobiographical attitude”²², and

¹⁶ Andrzej Falkiewicz, *Cztery szkice* [Four sketches] (Wrocław: Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Warstwy, 2014), 61.

¹⁷ Sergiusz Sternawachowiak, “To nie jest kultura to jest żywe białko” [This is not culture, this is living protein], in: Nie przeczytane, 342.

¹⁸ Koronkiewicz, 113.

¹⁹ Skurys, 6.

²⁰ Koronkiewicz, 113.

²¹ Janusz Drzewucki, “Kretyństwo i mądrość, czyli «stan ciałoducha»” [Idiocy and wisdom, i.e. the state of bodyspirit], *Twórczość* 3 (1992): 116.

²² Małgorzata Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt* [Autobiographical triangle] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2020), 8.

so in order to understand it, “socially functioning knowledge about the author obtained from beyond a given text”²³ is necessary.

In order to capture the relationship between losing one’s vision and the difficulties walking (crucial in *Ledwie mrok* and *Świetliste*), and the ability to think, one needs to know the story about a girl met in a military hospital, described (among others) in *Ta chwila*, which the author reminisces over numerous times²⁴. In order to comprehend some of the experimental notes from *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*, written using feminine inflectional endings, clearly different from the critical-interpretative sketches which the book mostly consists of, one needs to read *Ledwie mrok*. Without knowledge about the planned novel, linguistic and topographic solutions from other texts may seem completely out of place. Therefore, in order to understand the function of fragments of one of Falkiewicz’s work, one needs to have a good knowledge of all his texts, and the ability to hear the constantly developed and transformed motifs which comprise them. Regardless of the stitch selected by the reader, they must be aware of the tangle of references, often very personal.

In this sense the first sentence of a review of *Takim ściegiem* by Piotr Skórzyński is unfortunate: “Andrzej Falkiewicz, once an original critic and essayist, decided to publish his private notes”²⁵ – because the autobiographic element had functioned in Falkiewicz’s texts long before that. At the time when subsequent quasi-journals were published, the function of this element in text changes. In my opinion, neither the fact that Falkiewicz presents himself in the context of the external world, nor that he describes his own internal feelings is the most significant here, but the fact that he invites readers to what seems to be his private sphere; he does not just invite to talk to him, he actually “forces to choose one’s own stitch of reading”. In reference to Czermińska’s idea from *Autobiograficzny trójkąt*, it can be noticed that Falkiewicz’s texts are dominated by a challenge²⁶ rather than by a testament or confession, which is “a provocation addressed at the reader”²⁷. Falkiewicz invites us to play a game under the supervision of “Karpo”, “Buczko”, “Gombro” and sometimes “Ró” accompanies “K”, this place is, among others, “ta ście”, the Whole is the stake, and the ability to decipher those and other abbreviations, dependencies, and references in a specific way, defined by the author – the condition to enter the game.

The intended Whole (by the author)

Andrzej Falkiewicz writes in his essay *Nie-przeczytane*: the path walked by the author needs to be walked by the reader, even more attentively in order to understand each word, notion, image. To understand correctly – i.e. how the author meant them to be understood (the understanding they arrived at in the formulation process). To understand correctly – i.e. from the perspective of the whole to which a given part

²³Czermińska, 9.

²⁴“This scene returned to me in the 1990s, and it was reflected, considered, constructed in terms of the plot, experimentally tested in the 2000s, which led to the creation of a previously unpublished novel-poem *Świetliste*” (Andrzej Falkiewicz, *Świetliste* [Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2011], 89).

²⁵Piotr Skórzyński, “Popruty ścieg” [Ripped stitch], *Nowe Książki* 4 (1992): 33.

²⁶In the autobiographical triangle Witold Gombrowicz – one of the most important authors for Falkiewicz – is the patron of the challenge attitude. A comparative analysis of journal practices of these two authors would require a separate study.

²⁷Czermińska, 9.

belongs. This is how I understand reading, and I believe that the most representative, the most eloquently appreciated works of thought and art have not been read like this, they have not been understood²⁸.

In the context of this fragment it turns out that the reader does not need to make a choice regarding the way of reading; instead, there is only one correct choice: the author's, in whose footsteps we need to follow. The whole intended by the author is the destination. However, here we are faced with another aporia, i.e. Falkiewicz's tips cited above come from a text about the impossibility of both reading and making whole from the book *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*, whereas the other quasi-journals are divided into loosely connected paragraphs. In *Ta chwila* Falkiewicz comments on such a composition: "(ATTENTION! SHORTER SENTENCES! Convenient for the reader – having a glance, they can immediately decide whether they want to read a given fragment)"²⁹. How should the tension between the desired whole and realized fragment be understood? It seems that this binary opposition should be supplemented by one more significant element – the notion of a collection: "one manifestation (of this fragmentariness which unsuccessfully strives towards the whole) is collecting"³⁰. A similar declaration can be found in *Ta chwila*:

A moment is the protagonist of this book. In other words: the momentariness of a moment is the protagonist. This is the reason for the great number of digressions, illustrations. This abundance of snapshots, fleeting images. My personal doodles, nonsensicalities, and the scrupulous collector's factography transpiring from them [...]. I collect through writing³¹.

Quasi-journals (especially *Ta chwila*) are thus a mixture of everything: philosophy with physiology, footnotes to unwritten books with a recipe for potato soup. It may be then assumed that Falkiewicz pushes his experiments with polyphony, discontinuity, and using the visual layer symbolically the furthest in the space of personal writing; that we are dealing with a journal which constitutes – as Paweł Rodak put it – "a laboratory of creative work", i.e. a place:

where fragments of potential, started, planned literary texts are noted down ad hoc. In extreme cases, daily journaling can become daily literary production, where the distance between personal and literary notes will gradually diminish, and then completely disappear³².

However, I believe that this understanding of the collecting strategy does not give it justice. Although Falkiewicz's works are generally a space of "snippets from many cultures, languages, environments"³³ colliding with each other, contrary to appearances, collecting is not about combining as many idioms and dictionaries as possible, in order to artistically take advantage of the resulting dissonances – although the collage structure of the quasi-journals makes this interpretation possible. However, I would like to stress that this understanding of the strategy would be opposite to how Falkiewicz

²⁸Andrzej Falkiewicz, *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1982), 271.

²⁹Falkiewicz, *Ta chwila*, 13.

³⁰Falkiewicz, *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*, 277.

³¹Falkiewicz, *Ta chwila*, 21.

³²Paweł Rodak, "Dziennik pisarza: między codzienną praktyką piśmienną a literaturą" [A writer's journal: between everyday writing practice and literature], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2006): 41.

³³Karol Maliszewski, "O «rozpiętości wyrazowej człowieka» – «Ledwie mrok» Andrzeja Falkiewicza" [On «people's lexical range» – «Ledwie mrok» by Andrzej Falkiewicz, in: *Nie przeczytane*, 136].

conceptualized the idea of a collection, which is first and foremost based on (often failed) attempts at organizing. His fear of entropy is especially evident in *Esej na Boże Narodzenie* [A Christmas Day essay], which opens with a story about a trip for a unique postage stamp, and considerations regarding a collecting mania, in part inherited from his father (there are many fragments about collecting and Falkiewicz's social class in *Ta chwila*). However, to me the fact that he states openly in that essay that motivations behind collecting and creating are very similar, is the most interesting:

a collector tries to gain control over growing entropy. They are motivated by resisting entropy, and the fear of the collection becoming dispersed is the fear of own energy becoming dispersed. There is only one motif of action, the same in collecting and writing essays³⁴.

And so the motivation is to try to control chaos. If we read into the already cited essay *Nie-przeczytane* from *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*, we will see that the organizing gesture completely replaces reading.

We do not read and we do not watch. So what do we do? We organize. Everything is constantly organized anew, always differently. Each fragment "refers" to another one, but before they make the (whole) text, this (text) "refers" to other (texts), and those texts – to some other, which I cannot get to know – hence it refers me to myself, it returns me to my always incomplete unrelated (convictions), which I, hopeful, pass on to others; which I always "refer" to someone else: a friend will watch, a friend will read and put together (a text), a friend will deliver (me). But this is it: he will not read, he will not deliver³⁵.

I find this fragment interesting for a few reasons. After almost thirty years, Falkiewicz decided to reprint it in *Znaleziono* [Found], with a foreword: "I read selected fragments more carefully, and later restructured them and placed them here"³⁶. I believe that this gesture reveals something significant about Falkiewicz's attitude to creating; he constantly proofreads, restructures, reorganizes his work. *Takim ścigiem* is a great example of that; already the title suggests restructuring, which contradicts the spontaneity of journal entries. Lejeune wrote clearly that:

a diary should not be corrected *post factum*. When the clock strikes midnight, everything must remain as it was. The value of a diary is precisely about it being a trace of a moment. If I correct yesterday's entry, instead of adding something new to my diary – I kill it. Retouches are forbidden, like with watercolors painting³⁷.

Meanwhile *Takim ścigiem* are "notes from the years 1974-1976, rewritten in 1986", which were later "reread in 2009", re-selected, supplemented with Errata I, which was supplemented with its own Errata II. Falkiewicz keeps trying to complete, add, but no additional text is finite, and each addition creates the need for more additions. Moreover, systematizing does not lead to organization. To the contrary, as Falkiewicz himself put it in *Być może*, he "further complicates by trying to

³⁴ Andrzej Falkiewicz, Teatr, społeczeństwo [Theater, society] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich Wydaw., 1980), 242.

³⁵ Falkiewicz, *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*, 278.

³⁶ Andrzej Falkiewicz, *Znaleziono* (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut – Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, 2009), 115.

³⁷ Lejeune, 24.

organize”³⁸. Constant corrections lead to a given text having numerous versions dispersed across different books, all referring to each other, thus creating a thick textual network. How to find a way through it? In his analysis of works by Ewa Kuryluk, Maciej Mazur observes that she “does not write about herself – she writes herself, complicating the difference between the person speaking and the person spoken. Where should we seek real identity? On margins, in the linguistic order (lapses, omissions)”³⁹. Let us return to Falkiewicz’s thoughts on organizing, especially its second part:

it refers me to myself, it returns me to my always incomplete unrelated (convictions), which I, full of hope, pass on to others; which I always “refer” to someone else: a friend will watch, a friend will read and put together (a text), a friend will deliver (me). But this is it: he will not read, he will not deliver⁴⁰.

The referring relationship is self-referential: it refers me to myself. And when it seems that there is some space for the other, or even a necessity to refer to something external, it turns out that it is not true. In reality, as Koronkiewicz observes, “the reader is constantly being erased, they receive a text which was long ago sentenced to not-reading – therefore they are a reader «in spite of everything», whereas the author keeps showing them where to charge”⁴¹. Falkiewicz pretends to completely uncover himself, however, on closer inspection it is revealed that composition-wise we are dealing with an accumulation of emphasis, ellipses, and a surplus of pronouns whose function is to conceal rather than reveal. This way of composition is visible in the titles. *Takim ściegiem* [Using that stitch], i.e. what stitch? *Ta chwila* [That moment], i.e. which one? Pronouns replace words necessary for describing objects, but do not actually mean anything in themselves. The autothematic fragment of *Takim ściegiem* is especially interesting from this perspective: “each day those notes are resembling more and more... oh, What Not”⁴² – this could mean anything.

However, at the same time Falkiewicz is impossible to be read, because he had already been read by himself. Attempts at saying and organizing the same thing, explaining his own texts and excusing himself for his texts all leave little to read. It is significant that Falkiewicz is so reluctant to discuss Błoński’s writing strategy in *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*:

I have promised myself so many times to read what he wrote carefully, and I gave up after the first few pages feeling that my participation was superfluous, because everything there had already been thought through and told without me, and what is more, topped with a good-hearted face whose only purpose was to intimidate me⁴³.

Falkiewicz treats his readers in a similar way. He seems to be offering an exciting perspective, he pulls readers into his private space (in quasi-journals) or intimate correspondence between protagonists (in novels). However, in fact readers have access only to comments about texts rather than to those texts.

³⁸Falkiewicz, *Być może* [Maybe], 74.

³⁹Maciej Mazur, “Encyklopedierotyk jako (auto)biofikcja Ewa Kuryluk a Roland Barthes” [Encyclopedia-periodical as (auto)biofiction. Ewa Kuryluk and Roland Barthes], *Er(r)go* 2 (2021): 190.

⁴⁰Falkiewicz, *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*, 278.

⁴¹Koronkiewicz, 119.

⁴²Falkiewicz, *Takim ściegiem*, 110.

⁴³Falkiewicz, *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*, 285.

Although the need to get closer to readers is great, it needs to remain unfulfilled. In the novel Falkiewicz seems to be giving voice to a woman, but in reality he speaks through her, and everything the female protagonist says is analyzed by an embittered critic, leaving little space for readers, who typically have nothing to interpret, e.g. when the fictional correspondence is about films which they do not have access to. Falkiewicz also wrote about this process in quasi-journals, providing specific page numbers and explaining his ideas, only to eventually write a double erratum. His interviews indicate that he was aware of too much commentary in his texts:

The reader wants to demolish on their own. The recipient is constructed in such a way. They can feed on a rubble heap they prepared. Unfortunately, this [i.e. *Znaleziony* – D.K.] and my other two books are burdened by my need to share my doubts with readers. Yes, do have your doubts, but allow readers to have their own, because this is where the demolition and completion of the author's judgments take place⁴⁴.

The formula proposed in *Polski kosmos* [Polish cosmos]: "I find myself completely on the other side of the text – the side you read"⁴⁵, outlines the field of readers' freedom rather well. Falkiewicz challenges himself with an impossible task of communicating everything (hence footnotes, additions, Errata I and II etc.) in such a way as to leave nothing to say.

The reader's place is designated also in the subtitle: "notes from the years 1974-1976, rewritten I 1986, **reread in 2008**" (highlight mine – D.K.). Falkiewicz read himself, re-read himself even – the reader has nothing left to do here. Because this subtitle belongs to the second edition of *Takim ściegiem*, it is tempting to analyze the differences between *Takim ściegiem* unread (first edition) and read (second edition). In the next edition Falkiewicz not only resigned from Errata, but he also did the same thing as with the new edition of *Nie-przeczytany* [Un-read]: he wrote parts of the text with the Wingdings font, which changes letters into different shapes (e.g. symbols for zodiac signs, telephones, envelopes, flags, etc.), which renders the text impossible to read without using a computer⁴⁶.

However, before we translate those fragments, we should consider what changes are introduced by the need to use a computer. Despite declarations regarding private, physical contact with readers, the text is doing everything to distance itself from them. The body is replaced by a symbol, which replaces other symbols, text – by an interpretation, which takes it all even further away from the "protein"⁴⁷, so significant for Falkiewicz, because it functions in the digital space rather than in a manuscript bearing traces of the hand that wrote it. This mediation seems to me especially significant, because it appears in his other works. The protagonist of *Ledwie mrok* communicates with her mentor until she receives a floppy disk with a computer virus, which destroys the novel's text – words disintegrate on our eyes.

The computer is also among key starting points in planning a novel. A note with the idea for *Ledwie mrok* in *Takim ściegiem* contains two construction elements: the protagonist ("some

⁴⁴Jarosław Borowiec, "Autor prywatny" [A private author], in: *Nie przeczytane*, 366.

⁴⁵Andrzej Falkiewicz, *Polski kosmos*, 2nd edition (Wrocław: Agencja Wydawniczo-Reklamowa, 1996), 266.

⁴⁶Krystyna Miłobędzka also explored artistic possibilities of that font around the same time (see Krystyna Miłobędzka, *Wszystkowiersze* [All-poems] [Legnica: Biuro Literackie, 2000]) – a poem written in it turns out to be wiersz głęboki [deep poem] from the same book of poems. Relationships between Falkiewicz's and Miłobędzka's experimental work require a separate analysis.

⁴⁷See e.g. Falkiewicz, *Takim ściegiem*, 226.

rather specific disabled woman”⁴⁸) and the tool allowing her to communicate (“A tape recorder? A pencil stuck to her hand? A computer keyboard operated with the left hand?”⁴⁹). For Falkiewicz, solving that issue is essential⁵⁰. Fragments of *Ta chwila* also allow to notice that in terms of his own work, Falkiewicz sees the computer not only as a transparent mechanism, which does not significantly impact the process of thinking about a text, but also as an important instrument which allows edition – e.g. adding new contents⁵¹.

The medium’s opacity results mostly from the fact that for Falkiewicz, the computer is not a handy tool, as evidenced by his comments from *Nie-przeczytane* (“Here are attempts at creating new punctuation marks which either stop the reader, or carry them away. One needs to use the computer with caution one false klick destroys sweeps of text”)⁵² and *Ta chwila* (“We are all victims of the modern computer. It confounds us. And us in it, together with it – all mixed up”⁵³), as well as a description of his own experience of working on a book (“yesterday I left the computer nightmare, I was in seventh heaven – and today again, anew, the computer mess. The computer part of my nightmare”⁵⁴). Following Heidegger, the computer’s presence (*Vorhandenheit*) manifests itself in its lack of handiness (*Zuhandenheit*)⁵⁵. How do difficulties using a text editor translate into the practice of writing those personal notes?

The computer seems a dream come true for anyone writing a journal: it allows to write a continuous, endless document – as opposed to traditional notebooks:

It should be possible to write in an endless notebook. As it does not exist, experienced diarists hoard on notebooks to never run out of them. Although stationary notebooks are not endless, information technology is promising. Thanks to the capacity of modern hard drives, I can write my journal in one file, without being faced with the end of the medium⁵⁶.

However, having a tool allowing to continuously write down his experiences at his disposal, Falkiewicz wrote mostly about his difficulties with closing and saving files, and “the nightmare of disconnections”. Those technical difficulties could allow readers to finally take a more active position, encourage them to interact with the text, co-create it. Fragments informing

⁴⁸Falkiewicz, *Takim ściegiem*, 174.

⁴⁹Takim ściegiem, 175.

⁵⁰Falkiewicz’s notes about Ledwie mrok clearly show that he was mostly interested in his protagonist’s disability. He tries to “map her sensory and sensory-motor disorders” (Falkiewicz, *Takim ściegiem*, 174) and work out “styles of emission” (Falkiewicz, *Takim ściegiem*). It is unimportant who this woman is and what she is like (“some rather specific disabled woman”). The way he writes about her would confirm Koronkiewicz’s diagnosis that “in Ledwie mrok – mostly written using feminine forms – rather than give the protagonist voice, the narrative takes it away from her” (see Koronkiewicz, 116).

⁵¹Falkiewicz’s interest in possibilities offered by the computer is also clear in his analyses of Jerzy Pluta’s works. I think it is significant that he interprets fragments describing how Pluta learned to use a text editor, especially that they are preceded by a quote by Marshall McLuhan “The medium is the message. The way of transmission (editing, publishing) is a message” (see Falkiewicz, *Cztery szkice*, 58).

⁵²Falkiewicz, *Znalezione*, 138.

⁵³Falkiewicz, *Ta chwila*, 281.

⁵⁴Falkiewicz, *Ta chwila*, 117.

⁵⁵See Martin Heidegger, *Being and time*, translated into Polish by Bogdan Baran (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994), 94–118.

⁵⁶Lejeune, 18.

about mistakes – or written in a way that makes them impossible to read – require a different mode of reading. Seeing them we hope that finally, we will discover something new. However, when we reformat the text into a legible font, it turns out that this fragment already appeared in the text. For example, such a fragment from *Nie-przeczytane*:

Zaś..... ja...? ⁵⁷
R□•&◆er✓ mzmNy□e✓ m□ g□ O■m
•m□•●m□ m□ m□■m□O◆m m□m
m□m□O m□■m□m□O ■m□&m□■m□ m□■m□
O◆m m□m□m□ m□m□m□m□m□m□

turns out to be a sentence from *Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*:

I am looking for something that would set me free from cynicism – and I do not necessarily mean making some drastic judgments public although⁵⁸.

And an “encrypted” fragment from *Takim ściegiem*:

R○C•mzm□m□ m□ m□m□m□ m□ m□m□ . 59
m□m□m□m□m□m□m□m□

is written in a traditional font one verse below:

THEY BUSTED MY EARDRUMS OR THWARTED⁶⁰.

The dialogue between the added fragments is an internal conversation. What is rewritten refers only to what is already in the text. The game is completely self-referential. It is therefore unsurprising how Falkiewicz summarizes technical difficulties from *Ta chwila*:

The computer is a huge conversation with self, conducted in the diction of your computer. So do not complain, because it is your own voice. Work on your answer [...] listen to yourself carefully. You will understand. This is a quiet game with self, like solitaire. But it takes place through your computer⁶¹.

Ultimately, the game proposed by Falkiewicz – regardless of the tool used – is about the author playing, and the reader (at best) watching.

Henryk, a protagonist of *Ślub* [Wedding] analyzed by Falkiewicz, announces: “Let’s say that honestly here, in this place, at this moment”⁶² – Falkiewicz could add: “I am writing it down here, now, because I don’t know if I’ll manage to write a separate book – in which I will say more or less the same thing”⁶³. However, the reader knows that there will be no communication – even if a text makes an impression that now, in a moment, it will finally reveal its mystery. In Falkiewicz’s

⁵⁷Falkiewicz, Znalezione, 132.

⁵⁸Falkiewicz, Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze, 285.

⁵⁹Falkiewicz, Takim ściegiem, 91.

⁶⁰Falkiewicz, Takim ściegiem.

⁶¹Falkiewicz, Ta chwila, 119.

⁶²Witold Gombrowicz, *Ślub* [Wedding], as cited in Falkiewicz, Polski kosmos, 103.

⁶³Falkiewicz, Takim ściegiem, 72.

quasi-journal laboratory there is only one point of arrival – the same as the starting point. Writing more or less the same thing about oneself, only to read, rewrite it, and reread it once again.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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KEYWORDS

journal

FALKIEWICZ

ABSTRACT:

The aim of this article is to interpret three works by Andrzej Falkiewicz (*Fragmenty o polskiej literaturze*, *Takim sciegiem*, *Ta chwila*), which were not analyzed before. They are referred to as quasi-journals due to their experimental character and intimate tone. The article uses Philippe Lejeune's definition of a diary to show the connection between its musical and variation form and the principle of repetition, which organizes Falkiewicz's works and Małgorzata Czermińska's attitude of challenge idea to present how the reader is pulled into a game by author. An analysis of the texts and the importance of computers in this experiment suggests that quasi-journals require a different approach, pointing out that reader is not as vital in Falkiewicz's project as it was assumed before.

life writing

intimacy

EXPERIMENT

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

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The Great Boredom of Contemplation: Franciszka Themerson's Experimental Records of Illness*

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Illness, suffering, loss are not the most obvious topics for the avant-garde art – in fact, at face value, they seem to be its very contradiction. Yet, publications like Roland Barthes' *Roland Barthes* or Han Kang's *The White Book* are proof that experimental techniques are successfully used, not only by the artists of the avant-garde, to present a whole range of issues related to the problem of crisis. The purpose of this article is to discuss the conventions featuring in Franciszka Themerson's illness-related life records (her letters, drawings and paintings). The goal of the analysis is to arrive at an active, interpretative reading of the visual artist's illness-time life-writing records and develop a definition of these experimental materials.

Franciszka Themerson's archival materials – a short introduction

Before we turn do detailed analyses it is worth outlining the context for the life-writing records under discussion. Importantly, there is an imbalance between the extant number of archival records of Franciszka and Stefan Themerson respectively (the Themerson Archive is stored in the National Library of Poland in Warsaw). The sheer count of copies and versions of traces left behind by Franciszka's husband, Stefan stands in stark contrast to the relatively scant number of records left by Franciszka herself. The avant-garde artist rarely copied her letters, and she clearly did not write any draft versions. What we do find in the collection are the remains of her life and work, sketches for her illustrations or party photos, rather than an intentionally structured archive. Stefan Themerson's correspondence archive includes both the letters he received as well as traces of his letters to individual addressees, as he would often create draft versions of or rewrite already existing letters. In Franciszka's case, we can only access traces of the received correspondence: she clearly did not intentionally prepare anything for the archive.

There are, however, two notable exceptions to this pattern. The first one is her correspondence with Stefan Themerson, including the post Second World War correspondence and the letters, as well as telegrams, from the 1940's. Both corpora maintain similar proportions of materials preserved by the addressees, which I am able to conclude from the frequency and coherence of the records. The other exception – which will be the focus of this article – is the avant-garde artist's correspondence with Irena Grosz – the Editor-in-Chief of the Polish magazine entitled: "Gromada. Rolnik Polski" [The Cluster. Polish Farmer]. As already mentioned, Franciszka did not produce any copies of her records, which is why the Themerson Archive only contains Irena's answers. The artists' letters and postcards are deposited – likewise without any copies thereof – in the Museum of Art in Łódź¹. These documents were handed over more than a decade after the death of the Themersons' friend as "a donation from Bronisława Siedlecka". Besides the correspondence², they also contain copies of books signed by the two avant-garde artists³ and three works by Franciszka⁴.

It was impossible to establish beyond reasonable doubt the nature of the relationship connecting Irena Grosz with Bronisława Siedlecka, who inherited the collection after the former's

¹ Archiwum Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, sygn. DS/1013. The Archive of the Museum of Art in Łódź, sygn. DS/1013.

² A hundred and thirteen archival objects (letters, postcards and epistolary drawings) have been preserved; these were created in the period 1959-1979 by Franciszka Themerson and Irena Grosz. The biggest part of these materials – postages to the avant-garde artist – comprises seventy-four artefacts from the period 1959-1979, which are deposited in the Themersons' Archive in the National Library of Poland in Warsaw. The painter's responses, thirty-nine documents from the period 1964-1978 are held in the collections of the library of the Museum of Art in Łódź. Franciszka's correspondence is deposited in the Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: "Franciszka's and Stefan's letters to Irena Grosz", The Archive of the Museum of Art in Łódź, sygn. DS/1013.

³ See the books with catalogue numbers: DS/874, DS/875, DS/880, DS/882, DS/889, DS/890, DS/894, DS/931.

⁴ These are: Franciszka Themerson, „Szkic jednej z figur do przedstawienia „Opera za 3 grosze Brechta” [„A sketch of one of the characters for ‘Brecht’s ‘The Threepenny Opera’”], 1976, cat. no. MS/SN/RYS/1639. Franciszka Themerson, „Bez tytułu” [„No title”], 1972, MS/SN/GR/1908 and Franciszka Themerson, „Między dwoma aktami dramatu” [„Between two acts of a tragedy”], 1962, MS/SN/M/1859. I would like to thank Paulina Kurc-Maj and Paweł Polit for their help in establishing the details of this donation.

death. Both women rest in the same grave⁵, and some fragments of Irena's correspondence show they may have been life partners, but it is equally possible they were close friends or family members. I tried to contact Irena's family and left messages with my phone number on her grave, but for many months there was no response to my requests for contact. The employees of the Museum of Art in Łódź were helpful but not able to provide any more information than what I have indicated in the footnote.

Just as unclear are the circumstances under which the journalist made the artists' acquaintance. Letters exchanged between the two women and the Themersons' mutual correspondence indicate that Irena had been Franciszka's friend since the '30s, which can be read both from the familiar tone of their first letters and a few allusions to pre-war Warsaw. Moreover, I am not at all convinced that the records which were preserved first are indeed the first instances of their correspondence, even though the entire corpus has a consistent structure and there is little evidence of the "accentuated lack" (in other words: that any letters were lost or removed). But the most important piece of evidence here is Irena's mention of *Droga do Owidza* [The Way to Owidz] - a text which was supposedly written by Stefan before the war⁶. If it is not the case that the women met in the '30s, then the artists may have contacted Irena in the '50s for pragmatic reasons and become acquainted through mutual friends from Poland, which is suggested by the coincidence of dates and mentions of the journalist in the artists' letters to each other. Franciszka's letters to Stefan date back to the time when the avant-garde artists were organizing their first arrival to Poland (1957), after more than two decades spent away from their home country. Irena not only helped them with the formalities during their first visit (she organized the majority of the Themersons' visits to Warsaw), but Franciszka also often stayed at the journalist's home during these visits.

Notably, Grosz mediated between the artists and the Polish art market, handling professional issues (contacting the authors' association ZAIKS, organizing exhibitions) or sending to the Themersons journals and books published in Poland⁷. She also organized for Franciszka a comprehensive rheumatology treatment at the National Institute of Geriatrics, Rheumatology and Rehabilitation in Warsaw, which was probably related to the political situation in Great Britain and the financial crisis of the National Health Insurance in the '60s⁸.

⁵ A gravestone at the Powązki cemetery in Warsaw, see Military Cemetery, Plot: B 37, Row: 2, Grave: 1. According to information obtained at the cemetery, Siedlecka was a near-contemporary of Irena Grosz and the Themersons (she was born: 01.04.1909), but she died as the last one of them 12.07.1991.

⁶ See Irena's letter to Franciszka, dated: 7.02.1962.

⁷ See, e.g., Franciszka's two letters to Stefan: „Nothing special here, a letter from Piw [State Publishing Institute] that they have my 500 but they refunded you in total. It's hard to understand what it's all about – but it doesn't matter, there is enough money there anyway, which means Irena is keeping an eye on things” (KW2, vol. 1, c. 86r, 05.08.1959, see: <https://polona.pl/preview/6bb91cc7-1c03-4696-b316-ffb3daee3269>) and “Irena already has the permission to buy tickets” (KW2, vol. 1, c. 90r, 07.08.1959, see: <https://polona.pl/preview/6bb91cc7-1c03-4696-b316-ffb3daee3269>). As well as Irena's letter to Franciszka: „One more thing – the exhibition. I talked to Samborski and Lonia: we still need to talk to the Ministry blokes. I'm not very resourceful and I can't be charming – I always tell it like it is, but I'll try” (The letter dated 13.08.1961, see: the Irena Grosz box).

⁸ See Martin Gorsky, “The British National Health Service 1948–2008: A Review of the Historiography”, *Social History of Medicine* vol. 21, issue 3 pp. 437–460.

As well as: “1968–1977: Rethinking the National Health Service”. Online access: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/chapter/1968-1977-rethinking-the-national-health-service-1>

That was all possible thanks to Grosz's political position and her influences in PZPR (the Polish United Workers' Party)⁹.

Part one. Correspondence

On April 10th 1969, Franciszka Themerson wrote a letter to Irena Grosz, which is worth quoting as a longer fragment:

I am so bored with this [bold type in all examples - by H.S.] because it has been a year now, and everybody is asking how I am doing, as if I have just had a newborn, and then I reply that I do, it's just it hasn't started walking yet. **Medical history:** In March 1968! we went (unawares) to the so-called Arts Laboratory, where **the youth (is it 40) throw [?] performances, exhibitions, read poems and play the guitars, which they subsequently set on fire.** The performance was dreadful, we had to sit on boxes [a drawing of a cube, captioned with "Fig. 1" and "75 cm" next to the three sides of the cube – H.S.], painted in different colours. In what was probably meant to be a dramatic moment in the performance the lid underneath me collapsed and, for fear of what could have been inside the box, I saved myself with the help of my leg – Fig. 2 [a drawing of a person falling inside a box and a flexed leg with the caption "bruise FIG 3" – H.S.]. N.B. my box was small (a psycho-somatic injury with serious implications.). The bruise, however, was huge and green. Then it passed and healed completely. Or maybe something entirely different passed and healed completely. Because after this traumatic incident – two years prior I had polymyositis and I was **gobbling on „indoeiel”** for three months – I am

⁹ Based on the women's correspondence as well as the reminiscences of Grosz's former subordinates, one might assume that Irena's political position allowed her not only to be administratively efficient, but also it allowed a fairly individual approach of the authorities in her work. "Gromada. Rolnik polski" ["The Cluster. Polish Farmer"], whose Editor-in-Chief she was in the period 1949-71, was one of the most influential newspapers in Polish People's Republic and an interesting phenomenon of a journal whose mission was not always consistent with the party line. We can see it in the reminiscences of her co-workers at "Gromada. Rolnik Polski". The quotes here are from a book published in 2002 and of course they are subjective portraits created by her subordinates more than two decades after the journalist's death, but the recurrence of narrative schemes is worth noting and it overlaps with the image of Irena evident from her correspondence with Franciszka. "The editor in chief – Irena Grosz – did not always agree with the censors at Mysia street, believing she was better suited for establishing what was politically right and what was not. In cases of conflicts with Mysia, she would contact the building on the other side of the Nowy Świat street, where she usually gained support for her ideas (p. 105). Also: „Of course, it's because of Irena Grosz, whose position in the then party-government establishment was secure, she could do more than others. Here is another example: after some meeting in the Committee of Planning, when the Editor-in-Chief was standing in line to get her coat, Jaroszewicz – the then deputy PM – walked up to her and asked her how she liked his speech. You know – she answered – I don't like it when somebody discusses something they have no idea about. In response to that, the deputy PM mumbled a few words, said goodbye and left. Jaroszewicz wasn't surprised at this comment, because he knew Irena Grosz wasn't an enthusiast of the government's policies then and had low opinion of many people who were in office. Here's an example: to a huge propaganda fanfare they announced a new decoration – the Standard of Labour. This decoration was accorded to two journalists: Irena Grosz and Henryk Korotyński. –The day and time of decoration at the prime minister's has arrived and the Editor-in-Chief doesn't seem to be going anywhere – as told by her secretary, Irena Gembicka. When the boss came to pick something up from the secretariat, Gembicka asked her: – The decoration ceremony at the prime minister's begins in half an hour; shouldn't you be on your way? To which the boss, with a typescript in her hands, answered – You know, Irenka? In the light of such agricultural policy, I won't know which body part to expose for that decoration" (p. 108). Irena's need to "mix things up in the social life of the village, so that it doesn't rest in immobility, a sense of impossibility, in cronyism" (p. 42), which she expressed both in her press articles and letters to Franciszka, was related mostly to her ambition to co-create the journal with farmers. In practice, her employees would go directly to see the farmers, collecting information about current issues of individual communities, at the same time encouraging people to write texts which were later published in the magazine. On the one hand it was a bottom-up paper, on the other hand, it produced educational content, created by the contracted journalists: from pragmatic advice on how to grow sugar beet, through posters promoting fitness and hygiene among children, to information on politics or culture. See "Gromada - Rolnik Polski". Była taka gazeta [, "The Cluster. Polish Farmer" There used to be a paper like that], ed. by Wojciech Borsuk, with co-operation by Henryk Borzęcki, "Nowy Świat", Warszawa 2002.

also **the happy owner of a chronic** [muscle?] **infection** and **staphylococci use me as the Nicea's „Promenade des Anglais”**, roaming from one place to another, causing all manner of trouble. **Now that the artistic part is over, the treatment begins.** First, I went to osteopaths – they did an x-ray on me – it showed nothing bone-related, no sign of arthritis – and **the chief osteopath** said that since the inflammation was serious and there was “water in the knee” – osteopathic manipulations could not be performed, but if I came to him for a private visit he would treat me “homeopathically”. **And since he was Indian, I'm sure he would've added a bit of “contemplation”, which is very boring.** So, I went to see a rheumatology specialist – who was relatively young, but he was already the chief of the ward in one of the hospitals. Between May and December I went to see him on private visits. Seven times he drew some fluid from my knee (fluid analysis showed no infection) – and in the end he announced he had no idea what it was - because two gigantic shots of “cortisol” [?] he gave me didn't help so he offered that his **colleague could have a look** inside – i.e., he would operate on the knee. (Oh! before that I'd had physio 3 times a week – short [?] waves and exercises) I said **Thank you and went to another “TOP” specialist** – Dudley Hart – (**December 68**) This one is our age and he knows that a leg can be useful even in one's sixties, so he said – nonsense just to cut. For the first few months - inflammation (pain like in periostosis – at nights – severe and less so during the day. **3 weeks** He gave me indoeid [?], high dose (8 pills a day) and three weeks ago he gave me a high dose of antibiotics [?] Cloxaillon-aulistepilococs – for six days. I'm feeling much better now – that horrible fatigue is gone but my knee hurts and still won't let me walk longer than 5 minutes at a time. But there's an upside to it, too. Because then I'm home and I work on, imagine this, a “comic strip” for UBU. I have to finish it by the end of June. Lots of work so I work all day long and when I don't work, I sleep¹⁰.

The fragment above is a rare example of the avant-garde artist's illness correspondence. Iwona Boruszkowska described such records in the following manner:

The defective subject is **a subject afflicted by illness, forced to reformulate the idea of one's own “I” because of a psychosomatic event (affecting the subject or somebody else)** and made to include into their life space-time the new factor of illness. Biography and illness are thus combined in the defective identity. As a result of a medical experience changes occur in the subject's perceptions of the “I”, the body and the world. These changes impose onto individual elements of reality new, different meanings. Incorporating the medical experience into the biography of the subject **influences their identity and implies its re-construction**. Depending on the extent of that incorporation and the “patient's” ability to make sense of this new role, the consequence is either a re-construction of the identity or the disintegration of the patient's “I”. Contextualising the illness leads to a more or less conscious reintegration of the identity into a new wholeness of a defective subjectivity. **A defective subject may employ various strategies, including or excluding the illness from their own biography: incorporation, fusion, transformation, rejection, silence, concealment**¹¹.

Following this, it is worth pointing out that textual strategies featuring in the visual artist's illness correspondence adopt the form of not so much rejection or concealment as a skillful balancing act on the boundary of **distance** and **engagement**, reflected through the con-

¹⁰Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: „Listy Franciszki i Stefana do Ireny Grosz” [“Letters of Franciszka and Stefan to Irena Grosz”], catalogue number DS/1013. The letter dated: 10.04.1969. .

¹¹Iwona Boruszkowska, Defekty. Literackie auto/pato/grafie: szkice [Defects. Literary auto/patp/graphies: sketches] (Kraków Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2016), pp. 16–17.

vention of **jokes** and **self-irony**. In the light of the typology proposed by the scholar these records are an example of the convention of “transformation”. The artist’s compositional consistency is particularly interesting because it concerns not only her illness correspondence with Irena Grosz, but also her drawn and painted self-portraits.

The above-quoted Franciszka’s letter is clearly spontaneous, as suggested by the sweeping handwriting as well as verbal declarations: “Darling, I read the letter again, please forgive the incoherence and scrawl. I’ve no patience for rewriting it, so suffer. Kisses”¹². The artist rarely interfered with her correspondence with Irena by means of erasures and corrections – her records are short and specific. Franciszka moved smoothly from one topic to another, often quite literally announcing subsequent parts of her composition: “The artistic part is over, now the treatment begins” or “Medical history”. A characteristic feature of these illness narratives is ambiguity, playing on the semantics of foreign language phrases, to name but the Promenade of the English in Nice (“staphylococci are using me like the «Promenade des Anglais»”), or the term “orders”, which, used in her correspondences to Stefan may mean in Polish both “military decorations” or “purchase orders”. Her casual mixing of Polish and English orthographic norms is reflected, e.g., in her capitalizing the names of the months in Polish (following the rules of English orthography). There are also recurrent instances of code-switching, even though the author probably knew Polish equivalents of the English terms she was using (e.g., “polymyositis” or “comic-strip” instead of their Polish translations. Abbreviations like “fig.” (from English ‘figure’) instead of Polish “rys.” (for Polish *rysunek* ‘drawing’) are likely a reflection of the fact that on a daily basis the author was using English rather than Polish, in which she writes her letters. In this context it is also worth pointing out that the author relays her dialogues with doctors, which the avant-garde artist parodied with gusto: “my colleague could have a look”, “the chief osteopath”, “but if I come to him for a private visit he will treat me «homeopathically»”, “I said Thank you and I went to another «TOP» specialist”. All these phrases are examples of an ironic joke, through which the painter distances herself from everyday expressions and linguistic schemes of medical communication.

We can learn a lot about the convention of transformation used by the painter from what she writes about the (forty-year-old) youth, burning guitars on stage. In this manner Franciszka not only expressed her distance from the performative practices of the punks, but crucially, she archly portrayed herself as a clumsy senior. The sixty-year-old is thus far from being matronly and purposefully eschews any sense of eminence. A similarly construed self-irony can also be seen in the other letter of the painter:

Irenka, Darling,

Happy, happy, happy New Year 1977! [the original opening lines are in English - translator’s note] Do feel better, love, and see you in spring. I hope we too will be strong enough to come and give you a hug! For now, we diet on painkillers and try to work. It’s all going very slowly. Old age [original phrase in English – translator’s note] is a silly thing. Stefek is just finishing his Polish translation of “general

¹²Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: „Listy Franciszki i Stefana do Ireny Grosz”, catalogue number DS/1013. The letter dated: 10.04.1964.

Piesc" – for Twórczość¹³ – soon you will be able to read it in Polish – it is even more moving! – And I'm - also - slowly trying to make a few more canvas for the New York exhibition next year. If there is next year – so "sursum corda" – which in Polish means "chin up" – and that's it! We miss you a lot, we keep thinking and talking about you. Now a funny scene to illustrate the state of my old head: two days ago I went to Gaberbocchus¹⁴ to check the morning post. It was cold as hell, so I was wearing sheepskin, scarf, etc. etc. I was just going to go back home when I noticed I'd lost my glove. For fifteen minutes I was walking around the office, I looked inside drawers, bins until finally I gave up and decided to go home. The phone rang. **I picked up the receiver to say: hello – and suddenly I noticed I was holding that ridiculous glove with my teeth!** So as you see – life, while uncomfortable, is still funny! [a drawing of Franciszka holding a glove with her teeth with the caption "It's me!" – H.S.] We love you terribly – with a glove between our teeth or without... [a symbol of two hearts – H.S.] Franka & St. P.S. Darling, please stop paying that unfortunate ZAiKS for me. Stefan wrote to them to have them pay my dues from his account, as there's still income transferred to it. Love, F¹⁵.

The previously parodied interaction with the wooden box is here replaced by the artist with an item of clothing. The misplacement of the glove – again – is for Franciszka an impulse to create a self-ironic narrative about her own absentmindedness. It is worth noticing that the woman used the opportunity to neutralize all the events she is writing about, including her description of the ailments which require her to take painkillers: "old age is a silly thing". The painter's record concerns not only her own experience of illness, but also it morphs into forms in which include her husband:

Meanwhile, despite that famous drought, we have had some flooding here. The main water pipe burst underneath Warrington Crescent¹⁶, blew up the street, causing an amazing fountain to shoot up to the second floor. And then it bent and smacked right into our balcony, and cascaded down a river underneath the doors to my studio and Stefan's room. All of this happened at 4 a.m. and from four till six a.m. we had a dozen firefighters and all our neighbours bucket the water out onto our kitchen patio. It's still wet, the floors are all twisted and we're both dead tired. But I can now sit at the table and write to you because they have already turned the light on (and it's warm). I think it's ridiculous to have such adventures in old age. But besides the floors everything is alright. It was like on a sinking ship. Except the ship didn't sink. And poor Stefan then had (and still has) problems with his spine. That same "slipped disc" [original in English – translator's note]¹⁷.

We are here constantly dealing with records of illness, dominated by the tactics of distancing oneself from the experienced bodily states, which the author consciously construes by means of hyperbolic imagery, paradox, anecdote, by which the subject's self-creation is aiming for a self-ironic joke. Franciszka's letters are then a space in which the fountain is "amazing" and it "blows up the street", driving a huge, unstoppable stream of water, like a killer whale in the ocean.

¹³The Polish literary magazine.

¹⁴The Gaberbocchus Press was a publishing house founded by the Themersons in 1948.

¹⁵Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: „Listy Franciszki i Stefana do Ireny Grosz”, catalogue number DS/1013. The letter dated: 8.01.1977.

¹⁶The home address of the Themersons.

¹⁷Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: „Listy Franciszki i Stefana do Ireny Grosz”, catalogue number DS/1013. The letter dated: 17.09.1976.

That same stream of water ultimately “breaks and smacks” right onto the artists’ balcony, which concludes with the firefighters’ intervention, aided by many neighbours woken up in the middle of the night and encouraged to participate spontaneously in a rescue mission. A series of these visually described events is summed up by the artist by means of a water-related metaphor of the sinking ship, which ultimately managed to survive the storm thanks to the help of its crew. Everyday language is mixed with vivid descriptions of events, which on the one hand demonstrate the dramatic nature of the event (a flooded studio), on the other – they repeat anecdote-based narratives. Even though the record was created shortly after the event it describes, as we can learn from the letter (“It’s still wet, the floors are all twisted and we are both dead tired. But I can now sit at the table and write to you because they have already turned the light on”), we do not really notice any meaningful compositional differences between the reconstruction of a months'-long treatment and this report, created immediately after the event it describes.

In these vivid “ridiculous old age adventures” one can constantly hear signals of the author’s impatience: “everybody is asking how I am doing, as if I have just had a newborn, and then I reply that I do, it’s just it hasn’t started walking yet”¹⁸. Franciszka thus emphasizes not so much her suffering as her impatience: “I am so bored with that”¹⁹; “And since he was Indian, I’m sure he would’ve added a bit of “contemplation”, which is very boring.”²⁰ It is therefore worth emphasising that the subject construes herself through constant expression of dissatisfaction with her unfitness for regular work, which the author presents as a state of utter boredom. In this sense it is quite characteristic that the painter sidelines her experience of pain and avoids directly describing her health, occupying herself with visual narrations of events coinciding with her illness instead. Similar **conventions of transformation** can be observed when Franciszka’s writes to her husband from the rheumatology hospital in Warsaw. In those letters Franciszka described her daily life²¹, devoting very little space to the details of diagnosis or her experience of pain; rather, she focused on recounting conversations with the visitors she had, or on discussing daily issues with her husband. The contrast between Franciszka’s records and Irena’s extensive pathogenic letter to Stefan, written on the latter’s request, is remarkable:

My Dear,

I promised therefore I must. Here lies the problem – to give you a matter-of-fact account of Franciszka’s health with some kind of forecast. Both she and everybody around her, doctors in particular, declare a significant improvement in her general health, which was poor when she arrived: immense fatigue, increased allergic symptoms, big ecchymosis/ bruises/. One proof of improvement is, for example, the fact that Franka enjoys her baths. Of course, even with the best of care it is that hard to cure somebody in a month of an ailment they have been suffering from for five years, especially that the origins of some of her complaints were traced in all the wrong places, it

¹⁸Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: „Listy Franciszki i Stefana do Ireny Grosz”, catalogue number DS/1013. The letter dated: 10.04.1969.

¹⁹Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: „Listy Franciszki i Stefana do Ireny Grosz”, catalogue number DS/1013. The letter dated: 10.04.1969.

²⁰Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: „Listy Franciszki i Stefana do Ireny Grosz”, catalogue number DS/1013. The letter dated: 10.04.1969.

²¹National Library of Poland in Warsaw, The Themerson Archive. Franciszka and Stefan Themerson’s mutual correspondence from the period 1947–1974, catalogue no.: Rps akc. 20241, vol. 2, c. 173r.-201r. See: <https://polona.pl/preview/9921deca-b613-49f2-9f25-d0726903c331>

seems. Franka will bring the detailed medical report with her so I'm not mentioning the diagnosis, which the doctors believe they have finally established. It doesn't mean that they determined the causes of the allergy or of the hemorrhagic diathesis; these are issues which require months'-long diagnosing, and even, when it comes to allergies, many years. But one can live with them "till one dies", that is, until very old age, it's just that these ailments are troublesome, which can be relieved in a manner of ways. As for the weakening of the cardiac muscle, which is a mild complaint of all of us over 45-50 years old, there has been some improvement but... This "but" concerns both this and the condition of the leg: dr Szpilmanowa, during **a long conversation** / and she is not just a wonderful, inquisitive, sensible and knowledgeable doctor, but also someone very kind to Franciszka/ emphasized the need to lose weight – both to spare all the organs, including the heart, as well as to relieve the knee, that's why she removed all carbohydrates from Franka's hospital diet; she prescribed a meal plan which / I think/ is not at all cruel, but which Franka doesn't like because your wife doesn't like cooked meat or salads and **fruits "already make her puke"**. What is one to do? **She is also saying, probably rightly so, that this diet would require a lot of involvement from her – she would have to do the cooking, grating, peeling, so... and supposedly dr Szpilmanowa told her "ok then, if she can't..."** but she shouldn't be starving herself. That much is obvious, but we must find some solution. Because it's a vicious circle: one of the reasons for Franka's dislike of movement is/ to simplify the reasoning here/ her being overweight, and the reason for her being overweight is lack of movement. Could you not reach an understanding with your Kali? after Franka's return on how to decide on her façon d'être, of course, in accordance with her medical record and decide on a menu which wouldn't be too much for her; we don't know, here in Warsaw, your opportunities, but the doctors prescribed a diet for her. It's just that **one cannot be too pushy with her**, you know Franciszka better than I do. And I think I offended her, even though I wasn't pushy, I really wasn't, I was only looking out for her, for her only. Now, as you know, she is in Obory, where she's "**bored white**" [**"bored white" is a language game that is invisible in translation - H.S.**], even though she is relaxing, especially in such nice weather. Lonia and Gwen visited her today, I'll probably go on Thursday because today I've finally picked up my car and I've got a thousand errands to run²².

It is worth pointing to the expressions of care²³ and the tenderness in the journalist's manner writing: "It's just that one cannot be too pushy with her, you know Franciszka better than I do.

²²National Library of Poland in Warsaw, The Themerson Archive. The Department of Manuscripts, Irena Grosz folder. The letter dated: 22.09.1971.

²³See also: The National Library of Poland in Warsaw, The Themerson Archive. The Department of Manuscripts, Irena Grosz's Folder. The letter dated: 24.08.1970. I quote: „What do you need? Unfortunately, I wrote we don't have your «Europa» here, only photos – the film itself is in some South-American republic. Jaleuna [?] was promised to find out where but I've already written about that”. In her letters to Franciszka, Irena was more casual than in the case of the letter to Stefan, quoted in the main text. What is constant in Grosz's writing are calm and matter-of-factness, as well as compositional structure, which in this case was reinforced by her using the typewriter. In the material sense the above-quoted letter is unique because the majority of letters by both correspondents are handwritten. A choice of this form provokes questions concerning the functionality of the document and allows one to suppose that this was a purposeful choice on Irena's part. On the one hand the journalist may have been aware that the document would be a useful supplement to the medical report, which the painter probably received on being discharged from the hospital. Such interpretation in some way could help explain such cold – in comparison to the remaining letters – tone of the letter. On the other hand, I suppose – on the basis of my readings of letters written by the avant-garde artists of that period and on the basis of Irena's joke reflecting Franciszka's attitude towards her illness („Could you not reach some kind of an understanding with your Kali?”) – that adopting the poetics of a detailed description of the treatment in Poland was closely connected to the need for agency on the part of the author and her care, as she was well aware of the fact that the artist might not inform her husband about the details of her recuperation.

And I think I offended her, even though I wasn't pushy". Despite the rational poetics of her letter Irena was no stranger to a refined joke, e.g., by referring to a series of Franciszka's white paintings: "she is bored «white»." The allusion is proof of Irena's linguistic facility, as she aptly combines Franciszka's personal trait, her art (through a reference to the monochromatic technique, i.e., the white colour used by the painter) and a spin on the phraseological meaning of "make somebody see red". **As a consequence of this tactic we are given a provocative phrase: "to be bored white" is then a state of being forced to rest, which creates a sense of impatience.** The painter addressed this reversed principle of organizing her own life in another letter:

So, you can see unf we are **unfit for rest**. On the contrary, we work a lot, somehow, we (maybe I shouldn't be saying "we" because it is very subjective), so I am beginning to be in a hurry. Not that I think that what I do is so important, quite the opposite, but my exhibition is in September 1975 (!) – a big one because there's lots of space in Whitechapel Gallery so I'm trying to produce a few more "perimortem" paintings. (to explain where this madness is coming from – Jasia is now the head of the Whitechapel – and you might be interested to know that right before me she is doing a big exhibition of Abakanowicz)²⁴.

It is symptomatic that the adjective "unfit" is combined here via a paradox – or a break up with the logic of the expression "unfit for work" – with the word "rest". Franciszka, who is unfit for rest, is busy creating "perimortem" paintings, which she is doing with the involvement represented by the pronoun ("I am") and the verb phrase ("beginning to be in a hurry"). Her drive for action is noticeable not only in what she is literally expressing in the fragment of the letter but can also be discerned in her output. Indeed, in the '60s and first half of the '70s the artist was experiencing a meaningful stage in her artistic development²⁵. This artistic boom was interspersed with her hospital stays, many hours of sleep as cure for her fatigue, drug treatment, and – let us not forget about it, because the painter herself remembers – the need to cook healthy meals, which might have contributed to her improving health (or so dr Szpilmanowa said), but in this correspondence they prove to be synonymous with a waste of time, another embodiment of boredom.

Part two. The drawings (correspondence-related and others)

A common practice of both women's illness records was commenting on their motor-movements by means of correspondence-related drawings. For example, the stick-man, drawn by Franciszka in ball-pen, represents Irena, absentmindedly sitting on a chair, which is followed by an invitation to movement: "it is very important to transport one's buttocks from the bed onto the chair and I'm sure soon enough you'll be carrying them with your own hands, or actually – legs" [a drawing of a woman,

²⁴The Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: „Listy Franciszki i Stefana do Ireny Grosz”, catalogue number DS/1013. The letter dated: 22.07.1974.

²⁵See: Honorata Sroka, „Co warto widzieć na pierwszy rzut oka? Zarys praktyki dydaktycznej Franciszki Themerson (1963–1968)”, [„What is worth knowing at first glance? An outline of Franciszka Themerson's didactic practice (1963–1968)”, Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media 1 (2022). An interesting coincidence here is the initial date of Franciszka's correspondence with z Irena, which was simultaneously the last day of the initiative Gaberbocchus Common Room and the moment when the Themersons visited Poland for the first time after the war. A year later one of the avant-garde artists' movies was rediscovered (*Przygoda człowieka poczciwego* [*The Adventure of a Decent Man*]).

a bed and a chair with the caption “Irenka”]²⁶. One should point here to *Ostatni autoportret*²⁷ [*The last self-portrait*] with a drawing, accompanying a letter to Irena, dated “April 4th, 1971”. That correspondence sketch represents Franciszka in two poses: in one she is proudly standing on her own, on a plinth of an antique column, whereas in the other she is walking on crooked and crumbling pillars, which substitute for her legs. The contrast between the two states of the same physicality is similarly presented as a caricature in the above-mentioned drawing, created six months before the painter’s death (*Ostatni autoportret*). That work depicts images of two faces, with some kind of tension between them – the smiling one is painted *en face*, whereas only the left profile of the crooked and wrinkled one can be seen. The relationship between the sickness stages in the artist’s body also features in her work from a year prior: *Self-portrait with a stick* (1987)²⁸, which the painter layers with intertextual overtones, painting her likeness on top of a painting produced more than twenty years before²⁹. There is no coincidence in this gesture, given that while Franciszka created countless self-portraits over nearly sixty years of her professional activity, and these can be grouped on the basis of their similarities and differences, however, only once did she repeat the outline of her own face present in the *Topography of Aloneness* (1962). This non-accidental reference opens up a new field of interpretation. On the one hand, there is the difficulty inherent in discovering ‘aloneness’ in one’s illness. On the other, there is the recurring issue of an individual’s autonomy in the world and search for the desired aloneness, which Stefan mentioned in his own description of that painting³⁰. The body divided into two parts correlates with the division of the subject – this points not so much to the fight between youth and old age, as to the tension between the communal act of being ill, the need to rely on others and desire for aloneness and self-reliance, which the painter is unable to fulfill. Considering, e.g., *Self-portrait with a stick*, it becomes clear that while on the one hand Franciszka often sneered at the fact that she had to walk with support³¹, on the other hand she did reveal her inner organs, confrontationally highlighting their colourful joyfulness with chalk, at the same time emphasising the face of a woman she had been twenty years earlier.

In order to understand better the importance of this reference let us point out that Franciszka implements a completely different intertextual technique in her letter to Stefan from 1955³², in which the painter draws the recipient’s attention to a series of her self-portraits in a reversed position³³. When she writes to Irena, both in the drawings which are related to her illness and

²⁶The Museum of Art in Łódź, collection: „Listy Franciszki i Stefana do Ireny Grosz”, catalogue number: DS/1013. Letter date: 10.07.1975.

²⁷Ostatni autoportret [The last self-portrait], December 1987, black oil crayon, 42 x 29,5.

²⁸Self-portrait with a stick (1987), black and coloured chalk, 42 x 29,5.

²⁹Topography of Aloneness (1962), oil on canvass, 122 x 183.

³⁰I am referring to an interpretation of this painting present in Stefan’s letter to Franciszka from 24.02.1964.

See: The National Library of Poland in Warsaw. The Themerson Archive. Franciszka and Stefan Themerson’s mutual correspondence from the period 1947–1974, catalogue no.: Rps akc. 20241, vol. 2, c. 15r. See: <https://polona.pl/preview/9921deca-b613-49f2-9f25-d0726903c331>.

³¹Nick Wadley, Franciszka Themerson (Gdańsk, Londyn, Łódź: Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Themerson Estate, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2019).

³²Zob. The National Library of Poland in Warsaw. The Themerson Archive. Franciszka and Stefan Themerson’s mutual correspondence from the period 1947–1974, catalogue no.: Rps akc. 20240, vol. 1, c. 33v. Online: <https://polona.pl/preview/6bb91cc7-1c03-4696-b316-ffb3dae3269>

³³Am I standing on my head? Or, is the world upside down? (ok. 1949), pen and ink, 15 x 10,5. Middle-aged woman on a flying trapeze, oil on canvas, 63 x 76,5. 1952, Emportez moi sans me briser, oil on canvas, 62 x 75. Composition with a grey square, oil on canvas, 76 x 101. 1959, „Comme la vie est lente comme l’esperance est violente” (cytując Apollinaire’a), oil on canvas, 101,5 x 151.

those which are not (for instance numerous examples of “hugs from the Themersons”), self-visualisation is the author’s signature move, an appendix to her signing off with “Franka”, at the bottom of the letter. Such sketches are created using the same tools as the text (most frequently – ballpoint pen). The function of the painter’s correspondence drawings was then not only to underpin the literal message, but also to construe subjectivity by means of diversifying means of expression. Differing from “draw-writing” [Pol. *rysopisanie*], problematized by Bożena Shallcross, or genetic concept of “doodles”, or Adam Dziadek’s “semiography”, Franciszka’s correspondence tactics is a category in itself. As Shallcross explains, referring to Czesław Miłosz’s documents:

In a different sense, in the sense of a trace element of the author’s presence, all these fragments sometimes dispersed over the manuscripts of his most beautiful poems reveal the psychic content, which can be described as the shifts of focus from the currently ongoing process of writing to the sense or expectation of the incoming writing moment. Visual notations are supposed to bring this moment closer and reinforce the weakening will of writing, renew the creative energy with every new symbol committed to paper. Therefore, the poet’s drawings are something different than a pause in writing and a withdrawal into idleness, because they talk about persevering at draw-writing, at a sheet of paper³⁴.

In Shallcross’ approach the basic tenet of a co-dependence of text and image is the processual nature of writing itself, whose dynamism is linked to a smooth transition from word to image. Franciszka’s case is different because rather than composing the correspondence record by “draw-writing”, i.e., removing the boundaries between the dynamics of writing and drawing, the painter comments on the written part by means of a drawing, she complements the text. Both techniques are similar by virtue of a non-hierarchical relation of text and image, but they differ in purpose, which – in the case of Themerson’s life records is relevant for the process of constructing the subject. A doodle, however:

Is something that is created next to a manuscript of a given text, and is coequal with the record, it may be analysed just like the text, as something accompanying the text, not as something separate from it. It is something that **allows us to take a closer look at the act of writing, recreate the order of activities, movements of thoughts, the formation of the rhythm of utterance**, something that allows us to reveal at least a fragment **of the mystery of its creation**. The drawings make us aware of the temporality of the creative act, its longevity, pauses necessary to think about words, the layout of the entire text, and on finding the most appropriate word for a particular phrase or verse³⁵.

In the above-summarised framework it is the very processuality of the creative act that is highlighted, which is irrelevant in Franciszka’s correspondence drawings. Semiography, in turn, is thus described by Dziadek (with reference to Aleksander Wat’s documents):

As for drawings in the manuscripts, **it is difficult to talk about their artistic value, because usually they have nothing to do with works of art**, they have no meaningful esthetic value. These are not the situations described and analysed by Michel Butor in his book *Les mots dans la peinture*; it is not about the words which appear in images and supplement their meaning, **it is not**

³⁴Bożena Shallcross, „Poeta i sygnatury” [„The poet and signatures”], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2011): 59–60.

³⁵Adam Dziadek, „Mój wiek Aleksandra Wata – uwagi do przyszłej edycji”, [„Aleksander Wat’s «My century» - issues for a future edition] *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2020): 214–215.

about the way in which the painter's signature is embedded in the painting, all that is the subject of entirely different analyses. It is not about the author's signature either, even though in every analysed case drawings are an element confirming the uniqueness and individuality – a drawing, like handwriting, is a trace of a unique identity, even if the handwriting changes under the influence of numerous external conditions (irritation, nervousness, the experience of pain, illness, etc.)³⁶.

Franciszka's correspondence drawings related to her illness are her authorial signature, which creates for the painter space to mold her subjectivity in the state of illness and, as I have been trying to demonstrate, they are closely related to her art. In the light of the above-mentioned approaches, one should view this strategy of correspondence drawings as a phenomenon distinct from the above-outlined concepts of "draw-writing", "doodles" and "semiographics".

Parallels between techniques used by Franciszka in her self-portraits in the correspondence-related and artistic space are numerous and too intriguing to be ignored. I argue that this coherent manner of visualizing herself, in particular her subjectivity under the condition of illness, is a purposeful and consistent autobiographical strategy. The painter created a thick network of connections, through which she narrated her life, presenting meanings she chose not to express directly, but whose traces she needed to leave behind. Following the clues left by this avant-garde artist, we can see an image of subjectivity fully consistent with what we can read from her artistic manifesto and the only autobiographical text she wrote with publication in mind³⁷. **Joke, self-irony, anecdote are in all these cases figures of active self-control, an expression of the convention of transformation.** That is why Franciszka's illness records are an example of **active silence**, purposeful conventions of not so much talking about herself as indicating meanings.

Part three. Experimental illness records

Franciszka Themerson's war drawings (1940-1942) are typically viewed as her key autobiographical works³⁸, demonstrating an interesting contrast between Franciszka the little girl and the background portrayed in the drawings, i.e., a world burning with innumerable acts of violence. On the other hand, I interpret the illness life-writing records (letters, paintings, drawings) as expressions of a broken subjectivity, torn between the need for aloneness (self-sufficiency) and the loss of ability to work (agency), as well as a trace of a disharmonious individuality stitched together from a mosaic of states experienced in the past as well as traces of subjectivity, which – not without effort – yet constantly, chooses joy.

³⁶Adam Dziadek, „Semiografia rękopisu”[„The semiography of a manuscript”], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2020): 226.

³⁷Franciszka Themerson, „Bi-abstract paintings, in: Nick Wadley, Franciszka Themerson (Gdańsk, Londyn, Łódź: Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Themerson Estate, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2019).

³⁸See: Paweł Polit, „Franciszki Themerson gry z narracją” [„Franciszka Themerson's games with the narrative”], *Czas Kultury* 3 (2020): 154–160. Honorata Sroka, „The Experimental Avant-Garde Art of Franciszka and Stefan Themerson A Way of Dealing with Crisis”, in: *Crisis*, ed. by Sascha Bru, Kate Kangaslahti, Li Lin, Iveta Slavkova, David Ayers (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022). Nick Wadley, Franciszka Themerson (Gdańsk, Londyn, Łódź: Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Themerson Estate, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2019).

Amongst all the embodiments of the artist's subjectivities (always plural)³⁹ the illness-related one highlights the vacuum between Franciszka and empty background. It is remarkable that the background, which is always filled in her drawings from the '40s, remains a monochromatic, seemingly unoccupied sheet in her illness-time works. Whiteness proves to be here, for the last time, the painter's metonymic pronouncement about the devastation she is experiencing or **a self-ironic deconstruction of liminal emotions and states.** Insofar as we accept – following Łukasz Żurek's suggestion – that spatial arrangement in *Self-portrait with a stick* can be interpreted differently still, the foreground positioning of a hand clenching a walking stick proves to be of key importance⁴⁰. The shape of a skinless shin, understood to be a reference to Franciszka's rheumatism, may also be read in contrast to the rest of the body. Despite its enlarged size the rheumatic hand proves to be a suspended, limp shell, unbound to the space by any contact points. Our entire attention is then focused on the ironic-confrontational colourful stick-shin, which is the only fulcrum, as well as the basic break for action, a counter-levitational burden.

Franciszka's visual and textual (or a combination of the two) autobiographical tactics are connected to what Aleksandra Grzemska described as Ewa Kuryluk's strategies of documenting and transforming one's life in art:

Artistic expression is **a consequence of work on personal** memories, **experiences**, and these, multiplied, encrypted, rhetorised or turned into figures, are embedded in always planned and never accidental forms of autobiographical practices, whose effects are **transposed by Kuryluk to the public sphere, in encoded contents** and contexts⁴¹.

Covering one's tracks through self-ironic **tactics of one's own (non-)presence, confusing the clues with rhetorical techniques of the ease of expression in talking about the most difficult issues, multiplied autobiographical games**⁴², engaged in by Themerson, just like in Kuryluk's case (nb. the author of interesting memoires on the Themersons⁴³), are neither coincidental nor consistent. Franciszka's illness records contain a dialectic argument between "beginning", "remnants" and (in her final works⁴⁴) "regression". Styling manners of representing her internal organs to look like children's manner of using coloured chalk, the artist **dismisses any pathos** – understood here as stylistic opulence – when discussing her own illness. On the other hand, this directional and coherent convention of transformation may be

³⁹See: Aleida Assmann, Między historią a pamięcią. Antologia [Between history and memory. Anthology] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014).

⁴⁰I would like to thank Łukasz Żurek for suggesting a wonderful interpretative clue, as well as the students attending my course on life writing of Polish avant-garde, with whom I had the pleasure of discussing these drawings and Franciszka's letters.

⁴¹Aleksandra Grzemska, „Praktyki autobiograficzne Ewy Kuryluk” [„Ewa Kuryluk's autobiographical practices”], Autobiografia 2 (2016): 95.

⁴²I am adopting Artur Hellich's concept of „autobiographical games”, see: Artur Hellich, Gry z autobiografią. Przemilczenia, intelektualizacje, parodie [Games with autobiography. Silences, intellectualisations, parodies] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018).

⁴³Ewa Kuryluk, „Radioklub poszukiwaczy przyzwoitości” [„Radio-club for the hunters of decency”], Gazeta. Magazyn 16 (1999).

⁴⁴See: Adam Dziadek, Projekt krytyki somatycznej [A project of somatic criticism] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2014).

interpreted as a sign of the deepest honesty⁴⁵ in turning her own condition into a narrative. All these tactics are undoubtedly characterized by a critical reflection on the esthetic possibility of presenting the body in the state of illness. That is why we are approaching what Julia Kristeva defined as abjection, a concept thus described in the context of the avant-garde art by Hal Foster:

[W]ith scarred sacks for breasts and funky carbuncles for noses; these bodies **break down the upright lines of proper representation, indeed of proper subjecthood** [...] This body is the primary **site of the abject** as well, a category of (non)being defined by Julia Kristeva as neither subject nor object, but before one is the former (before full separation from the mother) or after one is the latter (as a corpse given over to objecthood⁴⁶)

The abjection status of the subject from the artist's final works, to which her correspondence serves as introductory notes of sorts, is Themerson's way of manifesting her refusal to simply dichotomise youth and old age within the framework of illness narratives. What is at stake here is to mould a targeted message, an avant-garde mindset to adopt an innovative gesture, which in the case of those life-writing records depends on a surprising juxtaposition of the figures of youth and impatience and suffering, as well as on the experimental form of her drawings, which are stylized like a child's drawings. The transformation thus happens both on the level of a self-ironic distancing in the contents of the records, as well as on the level of visual esthetics of the works of art themselves. In the case of both of these types of autobiographical traces we are dealing with a connection of two orders, captured in Agnieszka Taborska account of the parallels between the works of Franciszka and Alfred Jarry. Both artists make the decision to "talk about horrible things using a «naïve» language⁴⁷. Adding a small corrective to the term "naivety", I would add that here we encounter tragedy represented by means of unpretentious, blunt humour, conveyed with the help of experimental techniques.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

⁴⁵I am using here the notion of honesty in the common meaning of the word, but I am aware of the complexity of this term in the context of studies on life-writing records, see: Agata Sikora, *Szczerość. O wyłanianiu się nowoczesnego porządku komunikacyjnego* [Honesty. On the emergence of a modern communicative order] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2020).

⁴⁶Hal Foster, *The return of the real. The avant-garde at the end of the century*. (Cambridge, MA, 1996), p. 148.

⁴⁷Agnieszka Taborska, „«Początek sytuacji». Rysunki i obrazy Franciszki Themerson” [„The beginning of a situation”. Franciszka Themerson’s drawings and paintings”], *Literatura na Świecie* 9-10 (2013): p. 242.

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KEYWORDS

FRANCISZKA THEMERSON

archive

ABSTRACT:

The article discusses the concept of experimental and illness-related life-writing records on the basis of Franciszka Themerson's correspondence, and her correspondence-related drawings and works of art. I have established that the avant-garde artist was using coherent compositional methods in taking up the topic of her illness both in her life-writing records and in her avant-garde art. The tactics of "transformation" in her correspondence, drawings and paintings assumed the form of self-irony, joke, distancing herself from her own body in the state of illness. The analysed correspondence is one of few cases of the painter's autobiographical records we know of; they were stored in the Museum of Art in Łódź, as well as in the National Library of Poland in Warsaw (The Themerson Archive).

life-writing

correspondence

the avant-garde

EXPERIMENT

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

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The Performativity of Tadeusz Kantor's *Multipart*

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Analyzing the discourse of conceptualism in the Polish People's Republic, Luiza Nader argues that it "consciously reflected on history and historicization, and the creation of alternative, inadequate histories" as well as "the controversies which surround the archive and the status of documentation" that it triggered and created.¹ Nader employs this critical perspective to discuss selected works and projects of Polish and foreign conceptual artists in the 1960s and in the 1970s, focusing on three most important Polish art galleries at that time – including the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw. Focusing on conceptualism and its interest in history as repetition,² Nader writes her history of the gallery which actively promoted Tadeusz Kantor at the time. It comes as no surprise that the *Multipart* project, which Kantor exhibited in the Foksal Gallery in 1971, is also described in her book. However, it seems that Nader reads *Multipart* as a prelude, as something which merely announces the explosion of mature conceptualism in the Foksal Gallery that is yet to come. Indeed, such a vision was also advanced by other critics – Wiesław Borowski, Anka Ptaszkowska, Mariusz Tchorek and Andrzej Turowski – who helped establish the Foksal Gallery as the center of the avant-garde in Warsaw. I argue that such an interpretation of *Multipart* is not only a mistake but, more importantly, a gesture that makes it impossible to see the deeper meaning of the project. What is more, it reduces its interpretation to the discourse created by Kantor himself, which has been consistently repeated by critics and scholars to this day. Indeed, I propose to look at *Multipart* from a dif-

¹ Luiza Nader, Konceptualizm w PRL [Conceptualism in the Polish People's Republic] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2009), 299.

² Nader, 301.

ferent perspective – to treat it as an example and a model of an experimental performative archive that corresponds to Nader's vision of conceptualism as a repetition and production of histories. This archive is, on the one hand, a collection and materialization of artistic ideas and experiences, and, on the other hand, it is also an "artistic" documentation of reality.

Multipart: Multiplication + participation

In order to fully understand *Multipart*, we should analyze both how the project unfolded and the broader context behind it. In the fall of 1969, Tadeusz Kantor, who was then staying in Rome, wrote in a letter to Wiesław Borowski:

Dear Wiesław, I respond to your reminder about multiples with a complete project that came to my mind when I was sitting on a corner – we always sit there – (in a cafe, of course) – and staring mindlessly at the inscription on a rather ugly, pompous tenement house which read *Italiae fines promovit bellica virtus / et novus in nostra funditur urbe decor*¹³ What rhythm and impeccable refined Latin – it referred of course to the poor Haile Selassie [Selassie]¹⁴ – because the year was *anno domini 1937 imperii primo*.⁵

Later, Kantor described the project in detail:

So: you need to buy 100 canvases, 100 umbrellas (or less, depending on the funds). When attaching umbrellas, follow the instructions⁶ (5 students can do it in 2 days). The cost of materials and labor should be PLN 500 per piece, the cost of the painting should be PLN 1,000 – then 30 paintings should be exhibited and sold to galleries, museums, and private collectors.⁷

The buyers were required to sign a document that specified the scope of their interventions in the work of art. Kantor wrote:

The buyer is obliged to hang the painting in his apartment – the painting will be like a family album. Guests, friends, and acquaintances should sign the painting and write on it their opinions about the painting, about the artist, about art, aphorisms, *rendezvous*, words of appreciation for the artist, insults, curses, lovers should write their names, memories, accusations, farewells (you can write so many things), it should be a verbal assemblage.⁸

³ The frontiers of Italy have been advanced by the valor of war/ and new beauty flows into our city.

⁴ Emperor of Abyssinia [Ethiopia] from 1930 to 1974; he left the country during the Italian occupation which began in 1936 and ended in 1941.

⁵ The year 1937, the first year of the empire. On September 28, 1936, Benito Mussolini, having won the war with Abyssinia, proclaimed the Second Roman Empire. "List Tadeusza Kantora do Wiesława Borowskiego" [Letter from Tadeusz Kantor to Wiesław Borowski], Rome, 1 October 1969, quote after: Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal [Tadeusz Kantor. From the Foksal Gallery archives], ed. Małgorzata Jurkiewicz, Joanna Mytkowska, Andrzej Przywara (Warsaw: Galeria Foksal, 1998), 376.

⁶ See: "Projekt wystawy MULTIPART przesłany Wiesławowi Borowskemu" [The MULTIPART exhibition project sent to Wiesław Borowski], in: Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal, 378–381.

⁷ "List Tadeusza Kantora do Wiesława Borowskiego," 376.

⁸ "List Tadeusza Kantora do Wiesława Borowskiego".

Kantor's project was presented on February 21, 1970, in the Foksal Gallery at the *Multipart*. *Wystawa jednego obrazu w 40 egzemplarzach* exhibition [Multipart: Exhibition of one painting in 40 copies].⁹ At the vernissage, all paintings were sold at a fairly low price, equal to the cost of production. Kantor also stipulated that all buyers¹⁰ must sign a contract which obliged them to handle the painting in a specific way. Indeed, the contract gave the buyers the right and encouraged them to act "on" and "with" the multipart. However, it was strictly forbidden to paint something else on it, although one could "use one's favorite color to paint over the canvas."¹¹ In addition, the buyers were obliged "to send the painting to an exhibition and possibly take part in a meeting of all buyers after engaging in spontaneous creativity for half a year."¹² Kantor also stipulated in the contract that "in case of emergency, the owner of the painting may write to the author or the gallery for advice;" at the same time, the artist reserved the right to "comment on each painting during the vernissage and exhibition."¹³

On February 20, 1971, the exhibition *Ostatni etap "Multipartu" Tadeusza Kantora* [The Last Stage of Tadeusz Kantor's Multipart] opened, with 34 *parapluie-emballages* on display, all of which had been transformed by the buyers in the past year. Six paintings were missing – they were either destroyed, resold, or the buyers did not respond to the invitation to participate in the exhibition. Although the buyers mostly filled the white canvas with notes and different objects, creating collages and assemblages, we can divide their artistic interventions into different categories.

Most buyers expressed their opinions about *Multipart* by writing and/or drawing directly on the canvas: "ciekawe – akceptuję – Ciotka nr 2" [interesting – I approve – Aunt No. 2],¹⁴ "ten Tadeusz Kantor chyba świeżo wypuszczony z Tworek" [Tadeusz Kantor must have been discharged from Tworki psychiatric hospital], "dobre, przypuszczalnie początek nowej ery w sztuce [it's interesting, probably the beginning of a new era in art]. Respectively, we also find notes about the everyday life of the buyers and their relatives: "już niedługo urodzi się Karolinka lub Michał" [Caroline or Michael will be born soon] (an inscription which was most likely added later reads

⁹ Zaproszenie na wystawę Multipartów [Invitation to the Multipart exhibition], quote after Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal, 203.

¹⁰The buyers were Kantor's friends and acquaintances, people known in the artistic circles, as well as "regular" people: Anette Ahrenberg – Chexbres (Switzerland), Theodore Ahrenberg – Chexbres (Switzerland), Idalia Bargietowska – Warsaw, Walter Baran – Frackville (USA), "Druga Grupa" [Second Group]: Jacek Stokłosa, Wacław Janicki, Lesław Janicki – Kraków, Jerzy Frycz – Toruń, Wojciech Fałkowski – Warsaw, Georg Friede – New York, Inessa Jeleńska (PAP) – Warsaw, Jerzy Kałucki – Kraków, Teresa Kelm – Warsaw, Alicja Kepińska – Poznań, Józef Kulesza – Warsaw, Adam Mauersberger – Warsaw, Ewa and Grzegorz Morycińscy – Warsaw, Katarzyna Markowska – Warsaw, Ewa Pape – New York, Julian Pałka – Warsaw, Pierre Pauli – Lausanne, Achille Perilli – Rome, Hanna Ptaszkowska – Zalesie Górnne, Georg Posner – New York, Erna Rosenstein – Warsaw, Marek Rostworowski – Kraków, Krzysztof Rusin – Warsaw, Janusz Skalski – Warsaw, Ryszard Stanisławski – Łódź, Janusz Strzałecki – Warsaw, Janina Ścieszko – Warsaw, Zygmunt Targowski – Warsaw, Bronisław Tomecki – Warsaw, Anders Wall – Stockholm, Wanda Wedecka – Warsaw and "Zuzanna i Spółka" [Susanna and Co.]: Joanna Lichota (née Golde), Krystyna Gutowska (née Kobylińska), Professor Witold Krassowski, Krzysztof Kubicki, Stanisław, Marek Młodecki, Krzysztof Ozimek, Krzysztof Pasternak, Krzysztof Sroczyński, Zuzanna Trojanowska – Warsaw.

¹¹"Warunki umowy Multipartu" [The Multipart contract terms], quote after: Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal, 208.

¹²"Warunki umowy Multipartu", 202–203.

¹³"Warunki umowy Multipartu", 203.

¹⁴The entire description is based on the information and reproductions of paintings found in: Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal, 236–253.

that after all “urodziła się Karolinka” [Caroline was born], “nie wiem czy to dobrze, nie wiem czy to źle, wszystko tu zdrożało za wyjątkiem mnie” [I don’t know if it’s good or bad, but everything has become more expensive here except for me], “ja chcę prywatkę a mama utrudnia” [I want to throw a party and my mother is making things difficult for me], etc. There are also inscriptions in foreign languages, such as “I love you Ann,” and expressions of personal views and feelings: “niech żyje Salvador Dali” [long live Salvador Dali], “Kocham Miszę i mój obraz” [I love Misza and my painting]. Various objects were also attached to the paintings, including tickets, letters, keys, threads and ribbons, fragments of newspapers, clothes, postcards, photographs. Some were transformed into artistic compositions, but the Foksal Gallery archives inform us that they were “the least interesting from the point of view of *Multipart*.¹⁵

We should also, at least briefly, discuss “actions involving the use of the painting in everyday or ‘artistic’ situations.”¹⁶ Ewa Partum, then a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, exhibited two *Multiparts* wrapped in paper as part of her diploma thesis at the Faculty of Painting (she received a very good grade). The *Multipart* project allowed or even provoked owners to use the painting in an unusual way. The most spectacular example of this was a series of actions undertaken by a group of students at the Faculty of Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology. “Zuzanna i spółka” [Susanna and Co.], as this was the name the students chose for themselves, decided to use the painting as a banner during the May Day parade. A white umbrella was paraded through Warsaw city center, surrounded by red banners, red flags, and portraits of party and state leaders. This event was recorded on film by Krzysztof Kubicki and Marek Młodecki, members of the group.¹⁷

An umbrella – a broken sign

According to the commonly accepted interpretation, which was to some extent confirmed by Tadeusz Kantor, *Multipart* was an attempt to question the concept of a work of art seen as an original and creative work. Kantor did not produce *Multipart* himself – he only came up with a concept and a detailed technical description – and thus he challenged the work of art’s unique status as an artifact. He thus also challenged the role of museums, galleries, and collectors. The artist argued that:

The author transfers the numerous prerogatives of the so-called creativity to other people, whom he does not deprive of hope and the illusion of owning a work of art. However, since the object they possess turns into an everyday, almost utilitarian, object, the author questions the naive and fictitious concept of a work of art.¹⁸

¹⁵This opinion was (most likely) expressed by Wiesław Borowski in his essay published in the post-exhibition catalog Tadeusz Kantor. *Multipart* [Tadeusz Kantor: *Multipart*]. Considering the fact that Kantor closely cooperated with Borowski during the *Multipart* project, it can be assumed that this was also Kantor’s opinion. After all, the contract stipulated that it was strictly “forbidden to paint something else” on the canvas. See: Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal

¹⁶Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal.

¹⁷*Multipart*, a black and white movie directed by Krzysztof Kubicki and Marek Młodecki, produced by: Stodoła Filmmaking Club in Warsaw, 1971, running time: 14' 6".

¹⁸Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal, 211.

Wiesław Borowski emphasized Kantor's rather ambiguous role in the entire project, which he did and did not create:¹⁹

The *Multipart* project is also a new “meeting” between painting and psychic reality, marked by the participation of “other,” unknown, “ready-made” people from outside the artistic circles. The end result of this procedure is also a “ready-made” object that found its way into Kantor’s painting, and it is not a painting of his.²⁰

Luiza Nader noticed a similar ambivalence in the artist’s actions, drawing attention to their ironic and grotesque character:

Multiparts as fictional works, the sale and collection of which can be described as absurd, gave rise to absolute uselessness. Appearance and absurdity turned out to be elements of the strategy of resistance to models of reception and interpretation that look for functionality, usefulness, or aesthetic gratification in the work of art, that set epistemological and ontological goals for art, or that see it as a form of sublimation.²¹

Still, we can reject this interpretation and try to reflect on the possible “functionality and usefulness” of *Multipart* – perhaps it will turn out that the actual ambivalence of this project transcends the ontology of a work of art.

From the formal point of view, multiparts, paintings purchased by “collectors” which today do not function within a single collection, constitute the “archive of *Multipart*,” which was an artistic project carried out by Kantor at the Foksal Gallery, testifying to its history with their materiality. At the same time, a single painting is a stand-alone archive of individual or group buyers – many micro-histories of individual works may thus be reconstructed. Following this line of reasoning, *Multipart* can also be seen as an archive that allows one to discover Kantor’s inspirations, artistic ideas, designs, and actions; in other words, it is an archive that makes it possible to (to some extent) reconstruct his creative process or philosophy of art. Small clues, the ones which often go unnoticed, thus become important. If we were to engage in such a reconstruction, we should start by saying that *Multipart* is yet another project in which the artist used one of his favorite motifs, that is an umbrella. In one of Kantor’s numerous texts devoted to an umbrella we read:

1964. The first umbrella attached to the canvas. The very choice of this object was an unexpected discovery for me, and the decision to use this utilitarian object to replace the sacred artistic painting practices was then, through profanation, an act of emancipation. Certainly greater than gluing a piece of a newspaper, string or matchbox to the canvas. I wasn’t looking for a new object to use in a collage but rather an interesting *emballage*. The umbrella is a kind of metaphorical

¹⁹ The current status of multiparts is really interesting in this context: officially recognized as Kantor’s works, they are subject to copyright protection. The rights to Kantor’s works now belong to the artist’s heirs.

²⁰ Wiesław Borowski, “Kantor. Ambalaże i Multipart” [Kantor: Emballages and Multipart], *Współczesność* 28 (1970).

²¹ Nader, 265.

emballage, it is a “packaging” for many human affairs, it contains poetry, uselessness, helplessness, defenselessness, selflessness, hope, and ridiculousness.²²

The umbrella as a metaphorical “*emballage* for many human affairs” often appears in Kantor’s paintings and theater performances, and its ambiguity and varied, as the artist wrote, “content” is always palpable. According to the principle of *emballage*,²³ the umbrella provides shelter, allows one to survive, but also makes one inaccessible and sets boundaries that cannot be crossed.

In this context, let us recall once again the circumstances surrounding the creation of *Multipart*. The tenement house mentioned by Kantor in the letter to Borowski still exists today and is located at Piazza di Sant’Andrea della Valle in Rome. Erected, according to the Latin inscription, in the year Italian fascism began, it actually brings to mind the shape of an umbrella. The vault above the see-through double front gate is in the shape of a perfect semicircle, as if cut off from the rest of the opening by a horizontal beam. The shape of an open umbrella created in this way further extends into a handle formed by a line between the gate wings. Apart from this purely iconographic inspiration, the emperor of defeated Abyssinia, Haile Selassie, also comes to mind. According to protocol, a servant always carried an umbrella to protect the emperor. The emperor’s umbrellas were richly decorated, encrusted with jewels, and often trimmed around the edges with a decorative trim. The reference to an architectural detail is surprising, because a trim may also be seen on the horizontal beam above the gate, in the form of small decorative elements. The emperor’s umbrella – apart from its obvious utility functions – also symbolized power and status. Interestingly, not only the Ethiopian court saw the umbrella as a symbol of power. Similar interpretations may be found in Tibetan Buddhism, the culture of China and Japan, and the Catholic Church.²⁴ Such unusual contexts recorded in this unique archive definitely expand the field of interpretation of the project. In Kantor’s *Multipart*, the umbrella – a symbol of power, strength, and individuality – becomes a broken, useless, ridiculous object, unceremoniously and anonymously attached to the canvas. Its uniqueness is additionally negated by multiplication. And since the project “questioned the concept of a work of art” and “deprived it of its dignity,” as Kantor argued, the umbrella also became a “broken” sign – a sign which questioned its original meaning. This is particularly clear in the context of Krzysztof Kubicki and Marek Młodecki’s movie – a broken umbrella paraded in front of a grandstand points to the inevitable fall of (any?) power.

²²Tadeusz Kantor, “Parasol” [Umbrella], in idem: *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974. Pisma [Metamorphoses. Texts about the years 1934–1974. Writings]*, vol. I, selected and edited by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz (Kraków – Wrocław: Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki Tadeusza Kantora CRICOTEKA – Ossolineum, 2005), 313.

²³On the idea of emballages, see: Tadeusz Kantor, “Manifest ambalaży” [Emballage manifesto], in idem: *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974*, 300–304.

²⁴I wrote more about this topic in: Justyna Michalik, *Idea bardzo konsekwentna. Happening i Teatr Happeningowy Tadeusza Kantora [A Very Consistent Idea. Tadeusz Kantor’s Happening and Happening Theater]* (Kraków: Universitas, 2015). I repeat these observations for the sake of clarity of my argument.

Living archives

Archiving and documenting his artistic legacy became extremely important for Tadeusz Kantor in the 1980s; it almost bordered on obsession. Eventually it materialized in the form of the Cricoteka²⁵ together with its most important part – the archive. Importantly, Kantor never held any official function (in the administrative sense) in this institution. It was run by the people chosen by the artist; they were usually connected with his theater performances in some way. This does not change the fact that Kantor, as (as he put it) the “spiritual patron saint” of the center had a say in the way it operated. In one of his numerous letters to the director of Cricoteka, he thus commented on its structure:

The main goal of the Cricot 2 Theater Center is to provide the next generation of theater people with years of experience collected by myself and my team [...]. The archive is the CENTER of the entire institution [...].²⁶

The artist wanted the archive to be constantly expanded (even after his death). Moreover, as Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz noted, it was supposed to be a *Living Archive* – it was meant to preserve Kantor’s artistic legacy “not in a stiff librarian system but in the minds of the generations to come.”²⁷ Kantor wrote that:

The idea of the “Living Archive” [emphasis, T.K.] guided
all my efforts and the work I devoted
to the organization and functioning of the Documentation Center
Cricot 2 Theater.

The role of the “Living Archive” is and will be [emphasis, T.K.]
in the future:
preserving the idea of this historically significant center,
for these ideas will (should) become
part of the foundation on which the theater
and our successors will create further advancements in the future.
Probably by opposing them.

But it is precisely in such cases that one must have full knowledge of their ancestors.²⁸

Kantor was actively involved in creating his archive – both in the ideological and technical sense. He described in detail what was to be collected and cataloged and how. He also took care of the artistic *emballage* of the collection – he designed special boxes, tables, cabinets,

²⁵The first and main seat of Cricoteka was located at ul. Kanonicza 5 in Kraków; in 2014 the institution (and the Archives) was moved to a new building at ul. Nadwiślańska 2-4. On the history of the center and the archiving methods used there see: Anna Halczak, “CRICOTEKA: «konieczność przekazywania»” [CRICOTEKA: the need to document and inspire], in: Dziś Tadeusz Kantor! Metamorfozy śmierci, pamięci i obecności [Tadeusz Kantor today! Metamorphoses of death, memory, and presence], ed. Marta Bryś, Anna Róża Burzyńska, Katarzyna Fazan (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014), 303–313 and Natalia Zarzecka, “«Cricoteka» – żywe archiwum” [«Cricoteka» – a living archive], Zarządzanie w Kulturze 3 (2002): 159–176.

²⁶Letter from Tadeusz Kantor, typescript kept in the Cricoteka.

²⁷Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Kantor. Artysta końca wieku [Kantor: Artist of the end of the century] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1997), 301.

²⁸Tadeusz Kantor, “Oświadczenie” [Statement], typescript kept in the Cricoteka Archive, I/000604.

and other furniture for storing artifacts. Kantor wanted his archive to fulfil two important functions – it was to be a museum and an academic institute:

The Archive must function as a museum – it is essential and necessary. Without it, art and culture do not advance. The museum stores works, achievements, experiences, and ideas. It preserves the past and tradition. It ensures the continuity of cultural development. The Center serves these purposes, as a museum it preserves Tadeusz Kantor's theatrical and painterly legacy and the artistic output of the troupe.²⁹

Kantor's personal involvement in organizing the archive turns the archive into an art project, the artist's "last, unfinished work."³⁰ Karolina Czerska analyzed the performativity of Kantor's archive, conceived of not only as a collection in the Cricoteka archive but also as "different 'voices' of individual archives of broadly understood performance, where [Kantor] was an actor and a creator."³¹ Drawing on Jacques Rancière, Czerska emphasized that the artist was the one who originally "created the perceptible" and made visible what was/could be accessed. After Kantor's death, his co-workers ensured that the archival message would be kept intact, and that Kantor's ideas would live on undistorted. We should point out that Kantor had come across the concept of the *Living Archive* much earlier, in the early 1970s, during the *Multipart* era, although he probably had not realized that he would use this concept in the future. I am, of course, referring to the critics associated with the Foksal Gallery with whom Kantor worked closely. Wiesław Borowski, Anka Ptaszkowska, Mariusz Tchorek and Andrzej Turowski asked questions related both to the functioning of an art gallery in general and the documentation or the gallery in the context of their own understanding of the *Living Archive*.

In August 1971, during a meeting in Kuźnica on the Hel Peninsula, Borowski and Turowski presented two important texts: *Żywe archiwum* [Living Archive]³² and *Dokumentacja* [Documentation].³³ According to Luiza Nader, they responded to the "uncontrolled proliferation of documentation – both in conceptual art and the history of the Foksal Gallery."³⁴ In *Żywe archiwum*, both critics "emphasized a breach between ephemeral experience and its inherently fragmentary and manipulable documentation. They noticed that collectors and museums absorbed, objectified, and commodified artistic documentation, and also pointed to the logic of the document itself, insofar as the document demands to be transformed so that

²⁹Letter from Tadeusz Kantor to the Minister of Culture and Art, the Cricoteka Archive, c. 1987 r.

³⁰See: Małgorzata Paluch Cybulska, Archiwum Tadeusza Kantora. Wprowadzenie [Tadeusz Kantor's Archive. Introduction], lecture delivered at the symposium Kantor-Archiwum. Konteksty i transformacje [Kantor-Archive. Contexts and transformations] [video], <https://www.cricoteka.pl/pl/sympozjum-kantor-archiwum-konteksty-transformacje/>, date of access 31 Jan. 2023.

³¹Karolina Czerska, Performatywność archiwum Tadeusza Kantora [The performativity of Tadeusz Kantor's archive], in: Performatywność reprezentacji: widzialne/niewidzialne [The performativity of representation: visible/invisible], ed. Karolina Czerska, Joanna Jopek, Anna Sieroń (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013), 21.

³²Wiesław Borowski, Andrzej Turowski, "Żywe archiwum" [Living archive], in: Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal, 425–426.

³³Wiesław Borowski, Andrzej Turowski, "Dokumentacja" [Documentation], in: Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal, 424.

³⁴Nader, 310.

it can become part of an institutionalized collection or a bureaucratizing archive.”³⁵ Expressing the belief that “DOCUMENTATION is more difficult to destroy than museums and collections,” both critics wished to “challenge it.”³⁶ Indeed, Borowski and Turowski argued that the *Living Archive* should not so much as disseminate facts but isolate and neutralize them. It was not the work that was accessible but only the information about it. These ideas gave rise to the *Living Archives* exhibitions at the Foksal Gallery, which presented both the materials owned/archived by the Gallery and those sent especially by artists. The project was ironic, or mocking, in nature, because the artists who wanted to share their documents with the public and at the same time prevent anyone from accessing the living archive laminated all the materials. From today’s perspective, this undoubtedly reminds one of Kantor’s *emballage*.³⁷

In this context, we can think of *Multipart* as a response to questions related to the status of a work of art and its documentation. These problems were undoubtedly discussed in the Warsaw artistic circles to which Kantor belonged at that time. This response is therefore both ironic and paradoxically ambiguous.

Finally, we should pay attention to one more aspect, namely a kind of aporia inscribed both in *Multipart* (as already mentioned) and in Kantor’s version of the *Living Archive*. Nader claims that the critics associated with the Foksal Gallery challenged the “archive of death,” as described by Jacques Derrida, an archive determined by structures based on repression and prohibition. And Kantor’s archive is an almost exemplary implementation of what Derrida warns against when he writes about contemporary “archive fever.” In this approach, Kantor functions as an *archon* – he creates and controls a clearly defined and formatted discourse about himself. At the same time, the archive at Cricoteka was meant to be “living,” that is, on the one hand, constantly supplemented with new materials (which could at times probably disturb the coherence of the message, of which Kantor could and should have been aware) and, on the other hand, “living” in the minds of young people who would like to use and transform Kantor’s ideas (they must be able to use the archive freely). The ambivalence and liminality of Kantor’s *Living Archive*, therefore, repeats the ambivalence and liminality of *Multipart*, in which almost every artistic situation created by Kantor was immediately stopped and questioned – both as regards his own and other people’s participation in the project. Therefore, *Multipart* is not so much a response to questions related to documentation and the archive as its performative model.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

³⁵Nader, 310–311.

³⁶Borowski, Turowski, “Dokumentacja”.

³⁷Wiktoria Szczupacka writes about the living archive of the Foksal Gallery in the context of institutional criticism in: “Galeria przeciw galerii i żywe archiwum, czyli teoria i praktyka Galerii Foksal z perspektywy krytyki instytucjonalnej” [Gallery against gallery and the living archive, or the theory and practice of the Foksal Gallery from the perspective of institutional criticism], *Sztuka i Dokumentacja* 19 (2018): 169–185.

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KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT:

The article is an attempt to analyze the *Multipart* project as an example and a model of an experimental archive. This archive is, on the one hand, a collection and materialization of Kantor's ideas, previous experiences, and inspirations, and, on the other hand, an 'artistic' documentation of the everyday life of the buyers and 'users' of these peculiar works. In particular, I focus on the extent to which *Multipart* may have been an inspiration for Kantor, or a stimulus, to create a 'living archive' of his work, on which he principally focused towards the end of his life. I read such attempts in the wider context of critical and theoretical texts written by the critics associated with the Foksal Gallery at the time, who discussed the way in which an art gallery was run and posed questions about documentation or the gallery as a 'living archive'.

KANTOR

Multipart

ARCHIVE

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Liberatic archives: Materials collected by B.S. Johnson as well as Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik*

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In the past couple of years, I have intensely studied the works of the English avant-garde writer B.S. Johnson and the Polish authors Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik, who pay attention not only to content but also to the materiality of the book. They believe that the material aspects of the text, such as the format of the book, the font, and the page layout, have a significant impact on the reading experience and should correspond to the textual message. Willing to pin down and share their approach, Fajfer and Bazarnik coined the term “liberature,” which describes “a kind of creative writing that fuses text with its physical form into an inseparable whole in the space of the book.”¹ The interest in the materiality of the book is visible both in their academic essays and articles² as well as in their literary works, such as *(O)patrzenie* [Ga(u)ze] and *Oka-leczanie* [Mute-I-Late] (co-authored by Fajfer and Bazarnik), as well as in Fajfer’s poetry³ and plays.⁴

¹ Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Liberature. A Book-bound Genre* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2016), 13.

² See, among others: *Od Joyce'a do liberatury. Szkice o architekturze słowa* [From Joyce to Liberature. Essays on the Architecture of the Word], ed. Katarzyna Bazarnik (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2002); Zenon Fajfer, *Liberature or Total Literature*, ed. and trans. Katarzyna Bazarnik (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010); Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Joyce & Liberature* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2011); Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Liberature. A Book-bound Genre* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2016); *Refresh the Book: On the Hybrid Nature of the Book in the Age of Electronic Publishing*, ed. Viola Hildebrand-Schat, Katarzyna Bazarnik, Christoph Benjamin Schulz (Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2021); Katarzyna Bazarnik, “Liberature as World Literature”, in: *Polish Literature as World Literature*, ed. Piotr Florczyk, K.A. Wisniewski (New York, London, Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

³ See: Zenon Fajfer, *Powieki* [Eyelids] (Szczecin, Bezzrecze: Wydawnictwo Forma, 2013); Zenon Fajfer, *Widok z głębskiej wieży* [A View from the Deep Tower] (Szczecin, Bezzrecze: Wydawnictwo Forma, 2015); Zenon Fajfer, *Pieśń słowronka* [The Wordbird’s Song] (Szczecin, Bezzrecze: Wydawnictwo Forma, 2023).

⁴ See: Zenon Fajfer, *Odlot* [High] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2019) and Zenon Fajfer, *Uwolnienie* [Liberation], in: *Konkurs Dramaturgiczny STREFY KONTAKTU. Baza Sztuk* [CONTACT ZONES Theater Competition. Plays database], https://strefykontaktu.pl/sk/Baza_sztuk,82, date of access: 11 Aug. 2023).

I was inspired to compare the poetics of liberature with the work of Johnson when I read Fajfer and Bazarnik's 2004 article *A Brief History of Liberature*,⁵ in which they point out how many writers have engaged with the space of the book. Fajfer and Bazarnik mention Johnson, among others, as one of the key figures who greatly contributed to understanding of the book as a medium: "Johnson's *oeuvre* deserves special attention because of its consistently liberary⁶ character. Practically all of his works challenge the format of the traditional novel and instead are characterized by a liberary approach to text, where the format, layout, and typography of the book are subordinated to its demands."⁷ These observations became the starting point for my research on how, on the one hand, we might read Johnson's works through the perspective of liberature and, on the other hand, on how his texts illuminate Fajfer and Bazarnik's concept.⁸

Since not all the works of these authors have been published or studied, I have conducted a significant part of my research in the archives of respectively Johnson and Fajfer and Bazarnik. The materials they collected, and their organizing strategies, allowed me to observe different archival strategies as well as reflect on how their respective collections represent the multimodal nature of their work. It is worth taking a closer look at this in order to devise ways of navigating the respective collections, especially because both have been transferred from private spaces to national libraries and are now accessible to a wide range of readers: the British Library acquired a large archive of B.S. Johnson's papers in 2008 and Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik's papers have been part of the Jagiellonian Library collection since 2022.

Given that liberature is an ahistorical category, insofar as it can also be used to describe works that had been published before the concept was coined,⁹ I shall describe both collections as "liberatic." Let me emphasize, however, that Johnson was not familiar with Fajfer and Bazarnik's poetics and the Polish authors discovered his works only after their first texts on liberature had been published. Hence, the three writers have explored the space of the book in a similar, yet independent, manner. Correspondingly, their archival strategies will share many similarities but also differences, which mostly stem from their unique approaches to multimodal collections.

B.S. Johnson's archive

Before Johnson's collection was made available to the public, his biographer, Jonathan Coe, spent hours in the artist's apartment, trying to make his way through vast amounts of documents and texts.¹⁰ As a result, his biography of Johnson was published much later than he had planned,¹¹ but ultimately the publication brought him well-deserved recognition and encouraged others

⁵ Zenon Fajfer, "A Brief History of Literature (with Katarzyna Bazarnik)", in: Zenon Fajfer, *Liberature or Total Literature*, ed. and trans. Katarzyna Bazarnik (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010), 85–92.

⁶ At first, this form was used as an adjective deriving from the word "liberature". With time, it was replaced by the form "liberatic", which I also use throughout this article.

⁷ Fajfer, "A Brief History of Literature (with Katarzyna Bazarnik)", 90.

⁸ Katarzyna Biela, *Encounters in Theatre and Liberature: B.S. Johnson and Zenkasi* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2023).

⁹ Fajfer, "A Brief History of Literature (with Katarzyna Bazarnik)", 85–86.

¹⁰ Interview with Virginia Johnson, 5 March 2017.

¹¹ Jonathan Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant. The Story of B S. Johnson* (London: Picador, 2004), 202.

to study the experimental writer's *oeuvre*.¹² In 2008, that is four years after the publication of *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B.S. Johnson*, the British Library acquired a large archive of B.S. Johnson's papers and now registered readers can study them in the manuscripts reading room. Items are sorted alphabetically by title and often also by date and type (e.g., first draft, second draft, final draft, press cuttings, correspondence on a specific topic).

The collection of B.S. Johnson's papers consists of, among others, handwritten and typed texts, which allows one to trace the writer's avant-garde creative process. In some cases, for example when a double-column layout is used, the page in the manuscript looks similar to the one in the final publication. Sometimes, however, the manuscript differs from the final form of the work. *The Unfortunates'* unique blank spaces,¹³ which can only be systematized at the typesetting stage, are indicated in the manuscript by dots which separate individual sentences.¹⁴ Although as a published work *The Unfortunates* takes the shape of a novel-in-a-box which resembles a standard book in size, the manuscript is stored in a solid large container, whose size can be comparable to an average shoe box, as it must accommodate handwritten A4 pages.¹⁵ This artifact demonstrates how the writer developed tools that influenced the layout of the page and the format of the book, and then refined them in cooperation with the publisher.

Additionally, in the British Library archives we may find materials which help contextualize Johnson's creative process: newspaper clippings, reviews, playbills, movie scripts as well as production budgets for plays and recordings. Letters to publishers provide insight into the process of publishing books and staging plays while letters exchanged with other writers show British literary life in the 1960s and 1970s. A letter from the Nobel Prize winner Harold Pinter, written in large handwriting, and Samuel Beckett's postcards (which are virtually impossible to decipher) are especially worth noting. Letters exchanged between Johnson and his friend Tony Tillinghast, the prototype of the character of Tony in *The Unfortunates*, have also survived. This part of the archive, although decidedly more traditional, is a useful supplement to manuscripts and typescripts, as well as to Johnson's published and widely available works. It allows one to draw conclusions about the socio-economic conditions in which individual works were created and makes one reflect on how communication with publishers, reviewers, and other writers could have influenced Johnson's creative process.

Both the British Library and the writer's relatives were instrumental in making the collection open to the general public. However, the size and scope of the archive was also determined by Johnson

¹² Publications published after Coe's biography include Re-reading B.S. Johnson edited by Philip Tew and Glyn White (2007), Miriam Havemann's The Subject Rising against its Author. A Poetics of Rebellion in Bryan Stanley Johnson's Oeuvre (2011), Well Done God! Selected Prose and Drama of B.S. Johnson edited by Jonathan Coe, Philip Tew and Julia Jordan (2013), B.S. Johnson and Post-War Literature: Possibilities of the Avant-Garde edited by Martin Ryle and Julia Jordan (2014), The B.S. Johnson – Zulfikar Ghose Correspondence edited by Vanessa Guignery (2015). In 2014, 2015, and 2017, three issues of "BSJ: The B.S. Johnson Journal" were published. In Poland, a special issue of "Literatura na Świecie" [World Literature] was devoted to Johnson in 2008; we find in it, among others, fragments of his works translated by Ewa Kowal. Selected works by Johnson –The Unfortunates and House Mother Normal – were translated into Polish by Katarzyna Bazarnik and published in the Korporacja Ha!art's liberatic series (Nieszczęśni (2008) and Przełożona w normie (2012)). Johnson's works and biography have also been translated into French and Italian.

¹³ B.S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (London: Picador, 1999). Polish translation: B.S. Johnson, Nieszczęśni, trans. Katarzyna Bazarnik (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2008).

¹⁴ Manuscript in The British Library archives: MS 89001/1/4/2.

¹⁵ See manuscripts in The British Library archives: MS 89001/1/4/2 and MS 89001/1/4/4.

himself - as we know from his biography, he carefully collected and organized materials in his home office. Coe draws attention to the bar charts on which the writer marked the number of words written each day, which demonstrate his desire to organize the avant-garde material and monitor his work pace.¹⁶ Likewise, in his letters and budget plans, Johnson comes across as a pragmatic economist and a responsible breadwinner. Still, his emotions also played a role in the creative process, as revealed in the preserved manuscripts. In handwritten plays and letters, Johnson criticizes the conservatism of the church¹⁷ and the sluggishness of publishers – such comments were written with greater panache and frustration than others. The letters exchanged with publishers also show that Johnson wanted to present his works in a very positive light, and that he got understandably irritated when he was rejected or had to introduce radical revisions to his texts.

The archive is also a testament to Johnson's interest in multimodality. It reinforces the image of Johnson as an avant-garde writer, as propagated in widely available books and literary studies¹⁸ – a writer who constantly looked for new ways of conveying meaning through the layout of the page and the format of the book. The collection reveals the variety of media that the writer used at various stages of his artistic career, allowing us to see him not only as a novelist but also as a playwright, director, journalist, and literary critic. This perspective corresponds to the one found in his published works – the collection prepared by the British Film Institute and the *Well Done God!* anthology – which seem to focus on multimodality so characteristic of Johnson's oeuvre. Thanks to such publications, Johnson's broadly available works are no longer limited to prose and poetry but also include plays, films, and press articles.

Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik's archive

The archive of Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik gradually underwent restructuring similar to the one observed in the case of Johnson's collection. At first it was a private archive but since coining the term liberature in 1999, Fajfer and Bazarnik have made the materials available to the public in cooperation with state institutions, specifically public libraries. The collection includes their own works as well as works by the authors who were/are interested in the materiality of the book.

In 2002, the Liberature Reading Room was opened at the Małopolska Institute of Culture in Kraków, whose motto is: "Culture lives in circulation or it does not exist."¹⁹ The collection systematically grew thanks to, among other things, a grant awarded by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.²⁰ Initially, the reading room only had a paper list of books, and not an online catalogue, which limited search options. Over time, a dedicated subpage of the

¹⁶Coe, 193–194.

¹⁷See B.S. Johnson, "Whose Dog Are You?" play for Royal Shakespeare Company (1967), manuscript MS 89001/3/1/13 in The British Library archives.

¹⁸See footnote 11.

¹⁹The history of this archive was recounted during a conversation with Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik on December 15, 2022.

²⁰The project "Wstęp do liberatory!" [Enter liberature!] as part of the "Promoting reading culture. Priority 2 – Development of the book sector and promoting reading culture. Call 2 – May 2008" program.

Małopolska Institute of Culture website was created, and the online catalog was launched; however, it was not completed. Importantly, cooperation with the Małopolska Institute of Culture enabled Fajfer and Bazarnik to promote liberature during meetings organized by the Institute.

In 2010, the Małopolska Institute of Culture library became part of the Voivodeship Public Library in Kraków and was transferred to a new building. Fajfer and Bazarnik agreed to change the location of the liberatic collection on the condition that a separate reading room be arranged for it. The Voivodeship Public Library then decided to house the materials in a brand new building – the Arteteka. The three floors of the new building were labeled respectively “sound”, “image”, and “word”, and the “word” floor was dedicated to Fajfer and Bazarnik’s collection. The new reading room opened in 2012. Books from the catalogue of the Voivodeship Public Library that can be considered liberatic because of their authors’ care for form were also moved there and added to the publications brought by the founders of the liberature concept. Some of the books were made available to the readers on open shelves; other materials were presented in showcases designed especially for this purpose. The exhibition strategy refers to the Unconventional Book Exhibition (*Wystawa Książki Niekonwencjonalnej*) of 1999. During this event, Fajfer and Bazarnik presented their collection several days before the publication of their essay/manifesto *Liberature. Appendix to a Dictionary of Literary Terms*.²¹

Since the liberatic books were displayed in showcases, apart from its documentary value, the archive also had “added” visual value. The arrangement of four showcases reflected the structure of the Italian sonnet: each of fourteen shelves corresponded to one of fourteen lines. In the first showcase, one could see books published before the term liberature had been defined; the authors of these books worked with the traditional codex, experimenting within its format. Such books include, for example, William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, where poetry and images intertwine; Stéphane Mallarmé’s non-linear poem “A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance”; Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, with the famous black page showing the protagonist’s death, or James Joyce’s novels which referred to various forms and genres. The second showcase with four shelves also presented works published before 1999 but in addition to liberatic codices, it also displayed books that went beyond this traditional form, including books-in-a-box: Marc Saporta’s *Composition No. 1*²² and B.S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates*.²³ In the third and fourth showcases (with three shelves each) we find materials created after the publication of Fajfer’s liberatic manifesto; those are mostly texts which transcend the format of the codex, including works composed by Fajfer and Bazarnik themselves. Importantly, all shelves were made of glass, which made it easier to view books from different angles and look at many books at the same time. The curator Tomasz Kalita also suggested that a quote from *Finnegans Wake* should appear at the top of the showcases.

The collection grew and new books were purchased, as recommended by Fajfer and Bazarnik. In addition, the curators independently ordered new books which fit the profile of the reading room. Thanks

²¹Zenon Fajfer (2010 [1999]). “Liberature. Appendix to a Dictionary of Literary Terms”, in: Zenon Fajfer, *Liberature or Total Literature*, ed. and trans. Katarzyna Bazarnik (Kraków: Korporacja Halart, 2010), 22–28.

²²First edition: Marc Saporta, *Composition no. 1* (Paris: Seuil, 1962). English editions: Marc Saporta, *Composition no. 1*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963); Marc Saporta, *Composition no. 1*, Visual Editions, 2011.

²³Johnson, *The Unfortunates*.

to this, the collections began to expand even without the direct involvement of Fajfer and Bazarnik. Furthermore, during the *Iconicity in Language and Literature* conference in 2005, Fajfer and Bazarnik met Professor John White from University College London, who offered to supplement the archive. Professor White kindly gifted, for example, the original German edition of the collage-poetry collection in a box, Herta Müller's *Der Wächter nimmt seinen Kamm* [The Guard Takes His Comb].²⁴

However, the question of the catalog remained unresolved. Fajfer and Bazarnik were the owners of most publications, which caused some legal problems: the books were catalogued and put in a deposit, but, unfortunately, they still could not be included in the catalog of the Voivodeship Public Library on the same basis as other works. They could be read in the reading room, but they could not be borrowed and taken home. Still, such a method of disseminating literature was considered and actively pursued. It proves that the collection was treated as an integral part of the public library, and not as an archive whose goal was to store books and make them available to the readers in the reading room only.

The relocation of the liberature reading room to Arteteka also changed the way the collection was promoted. Fajfer and Bazarnik began to actively present it abroad. Their artistic and academic endeavors were increasingly interrelated, as they began to establish contacts with different universities. Fajfer and Bazarnik promoted the collection through exhibitions and performances, and also discussed it during guest lectures and conferences. They attended festivals and organized workshops, traveling throughout Europe as well as the United States and Asia.²⁵ Numerous trips meant that the liberatic archive began to function in a new way – the collection was housed in the Voivodeship Public Library and at the same time a part of it was used to promote the concept internationally. For this reason, Fajfer and Bazarnik decided to purchase two copies of each new book, so that one copy could travel internationally and the other could be stored in the library. At the same time, as a result of the promotional activities more and more people visited Arteteka. Participants of international conferences and exhibitions who were particularly interested in the books presented by Fajfer and Bazarnik often came to Kraków. The archive was also visited during conferences organized at the Institute of English Studies at the Jagiellonian University, where Bazarnik popularized liberature as Assistant Professor.

In the spring of 2022, the collection was moved to the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków. By that time, it had been almost completely catalogued. Similarly to Johnson's papers, Fajfer and Bazarnik's collection was made available to the public in one of the largest libraries in the country and in a reading room dedicated to rare prints (the Old Prints Reading Room). However, what distinguishes the Kraków archive from that in the British Library is that it was prepared in cooperation with its creators and owners, Fajfer and Bazarnik, who had a say in how materials were catalogued and promoted. Moreover, Fajfer and Bazarnik's archive has

²⁴Herta Müller, *Der Wächter nimmt seinen Kamm* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rewohlt, 1993).

²⁵The list of Fajfer and Bazarnik's travels includes: 2009 – exhibition in Bristol; 2010 – stay in Belfast; 2011 – exhibitions in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Oakland, exhibition and festival in Taipei, Taiwan, lecture in Tokyo, representing Poland at the European Culture Congress in Wrocław (exhibition and workshops); 2012 – conference and exhibition at the University of Kent in Canterbury (England); 2013 and 2014 – Elias Canetti festival in Ruse (Romania), exhibition at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia (Bulgaria), sound poetry festival in Craiova (Romania), exhibition and performances at the Polish Culture Festival in Toulouse (France); 2015 – underground poetry festival in Brussels, Electronic Literature Conference in Bergen.

a more complex function than the one storing Johnson's materials. On the one hand, the Kraków collection shows the work of its owners through their books, manuscripts, programs from the festivals they attended, and documents related to the Zenkasi Theatre Association they founded. On the other hand, it is a collection of works that engage with the spatiality of the book, including examples of world literature. The materials are therefore international, with works written in various languages, by people of different gender, both well-known and debuting authors. In addition to widely available texts, the collection also proudly features some unique works, such as B.S. Johnson's *Travelling People*²⁶ or, as has been pointed out above, Herta Müller's *Der Wächter nimmt seinen Kamm*. Moreover, it also features academic publications, which are not necessarily liberatic in nature, but they touch upon the question of multimodality – they discuss the poetics of liberature and related genological issues as well as analyze the works found in the archive. We must also mention the visual aspect of the collection, that is the fact that it also functions as an exhibition. Fajfer and Bazarnik have always seemed to recognize the exhibition value of the liberatic books and the Jagiellonian Library is also planning to add a showcase in which selected publications can be displayed – it will be featured in the part of the building open to the general public (outside of the archive of rare and experimental texts). In Johnson's archive, by contrast, we mainly find documents, manuscripts, and typescripts which are not displayed as part of an open exhibition.

Fajfer and Bazarnik's archive, especially once it was supplemented with academic publications after it had been moved to the Jagiellonian Library, is therefore a comprehensive space for learning and researching liberature; it is a place that unites readers and researchers, offering a wide selection of materials that help one better understand the liberatic unity of content and form as well as experience such unity in the process of reading avant-garde works. On the one hand, this collection is cross-sectional, transcending chronological and geographical divisions and, on the other hand, it demonstrates who Fajfer and Bazarnik are as artists. In this way, it differs from the British archive, which shows primarily Johnson himself - especially his manuscripts, typescripts, and private documents, not his published works. The Polish collection helps one understand Fajfer and Bazarnik, their materials, and their craft, and it also provides insight into the concept they described and the poetics associated with them.

Despite these differences, Fajfer and Bazarnik's collection is similar to Johnson's in the way it documents the unconventional creative process of writing liberatic texts. We also find manuscripts in Fajfer's archive: some of them date back to his work on the triple codex titled *Oka-leczenie*,²⁷ and others include the poem *Widok z usypanego wzgórza* [A View from a Built-up Hill] published in *Odlot* [High].²⁸ The materials also demonstrate how experimental books change over the years. One example is Fajfer and Bazarnik's (*O*)patrzenie, which was first printed in the A5 format²⁹ and later republished in a smaller size to be sold along with *Oka-leczenie*.³⁰

²⁶First edition: B.S. Johnson, *Travelling People* (London: Constable, 1963). Edition available in Fajfer and Bazarnik's liberatic archive: B.S. Johnson, *Travelling People* (London: Transworld, 1964).

²⁷Zenon Fajfer, Katarzyna Bazarnik. *Oka-leczenie* [Mute-I-Late] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2009).

²⁸Zenon Fajfer, *Odlot* [High] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2019).

²⁹Katarzyna Bazarnik, Zenon Fajfer, (*O*)patrzenie [Ga(u)ze] (Kraków: Krakowska Alternatywa, 2003).

³⁰Fajfer, Bazarnik, *Oka-leczenie*.

Another case is the poetry collection *dwadzieścia jeden liter/ten letters*³¹, which was officially released in 2010 but the prototype had already been published five years earlier. The poem in a bottle *Spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę* (*But Eyeing Like Ozone Whole*)³² was also published in two editions, in 2004 and 2009, respectively. Although after the publication of the second edition, the first was not reissued and the prototypes are not publicly available, all stages of the creative process that led to the final format can be traced in the Jagiellonian Library. In addition, the archive is a testament to Fajfer and Bazarnik's versatility and their interest in multimodality, which corresponds to Johnson's search for the right medium and form of communication. Fajfer is the author of poems, essays, theater plays, and articles. Bazarnik, on the other hand, has most recently been active as an academic, but she also worked as Fajfer's assistant in theater in the 1990s. Last but not least, we must also remember about Fajfer and Bazarnik's international presence. The Jagiellonian Library also features audiovisual materials, for example a recording of a lecture given in Japan or the poetry evening at the Rialto Theater.

As we can see, all three artists (Johnson, Fajfer and Bazarnik) share a similar sensitivity, which allows them to combine unconventionality and creative freedom in their use of media with meticulous organization and documentation of their works, early drafts, and publications. Johnson archived and carefully numbered subsequent drafts of his texts as well as his letters, cost estimates, and other materials, which made it easier for Jonathan Coe to study the sources and recreate various events from Johnson's life to describe them in the writer's biography. As a result, the materials stored in the British Library are also arranged thematically and chronologically, which makes research easier and effective. Similarly, Fajfer and Bazarnik have been collecting liberatic publications for many years. They have also been documenting their own work and its reception, for instance in the form of newspaper clippings and reviews of their plays. Their collection shows that the way of thinking about books and their materiality has changed over time; it also demonstrates Fajfer and Bazarnik's artistic development and the growth of the liberatic series published by the Ha!art publishing house.

Conclusions

Fajfer and Bazarnik, similarly to Johnson's heirs, want to open their unconventional collections to the public and promote them, even though the collected materials with their non-codex formats and fragmentary structures pose challenges in terms of storage and conservation. Both Johnson's as well as Fajfer and Bazarnik's materials may be found in public libraries. The archives present their liberatic books and essays as well as texts which document the publishing process, the production process (in the case of plays), and participation in festivals. The materials made available to the public have similar characteristics, which is why Johnson's collection with its unconventional documents may be consulted in the Manuscripts Reading Room in the British Library and Fajfer and Bazarnik's collection of liberatic books may be viewed in the Old Prints Reading Room of the Jagiellonian Library. Moreover, Johnson's as well as Fajfer and Bazarnik's organizational

³¹Zenon Fajfer, *dwadzieścia jeden liter/ten letters* (Kraków: Korporacja Halart, 2010).

³²Zenon Fajfer, *Spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę* (*But Eyeing Like Ozone Whole*) (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2004). Second edition: 2009.

strategies are similar; they all try to preserve as much as possible and arrange the material carefully as if they felt that it was their responsibility to document the publishing process, their achievements, and reviews. Although Johnson arranged his papers in the 1960s and 1970s, and Fajfer and Bazarnik have been doing it since the 1990s, they all seem to believe that readers do not yet know everything and that they need to be guided through avant-garde collections.

The liberatic archives also show the variety of media and tools used to convey meaning. As it turns out, B.S. Johnson as well as Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik are avant-garde artists who, as collectors, make sure that their archives offer a wide variety of sources and faithfully document the development of their multimodal artistic practices. However, the Polish collection is slightly different in nature because it testifies not only to who its owners are but also to how the concept of liberature they coined can be (re)interpreted in the context of world literature and academic research on the materiality of literature. Therefore, Fajfer and Bazarnik's collection is both an archive and a reading room – it also features works by other authors, including those written before their own debut, as well as critical and academic texts. We may then distinguish between two strategies of organizing liberatic archives: the Polish collection both documents Fajfer and Bazarnik's work and offers additional materials which help understand the book as a medium, while B.S. Johnson's archive focuses on presenting the writer's achievements and the context in which his works were created, showing British literary life in the 1960s through the prism of his personal experiences.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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KEYWORDS

B. S. Johnson

LIBERATURE

ABSTRACT:

The article summarizes four years of my research conducted in the archives of liberative avant-garde authors: the post-war British writer B.S. Johnson and the Polish artists Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik. Tracking the history of their collections, I pay attention to their multimodal character, corresponding to the authors' unconventional works. I illustrate how Johnson, Fajfer and Bazarnik organise their materials, so as to examine similarities and differences between their ways of handling avant-garde collections.

Zenon Fajfer

Katarzyna Bazarwick

ARCHIVE

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Leopold Buczkowski's war diaries: an anthropological reading*

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A word of introduction

There are only a few writers as mysterious in the history of literature as Leopold Buczkowski (1905-1989), the author of *Czarny potok* [The black brook] (1954), *Dorycki krużganek* [A Doric cloister] (1957) or *Pierwsza świetność* [Former glory] (1966) – shocking, experimental novels about World War Two and Shoah. Despite the passage of time, his works never cease to surprise and continue to be relevant, which is proved by new generations of readers and researchers, attracted to them¹. Yet, it is hard to resist the impression that the meaning of Buczkowski's writing remains elusive: hardly anybody studies his considerable archives², which comprise barely legible notes and extensive correspondence. Little is being said about his non-literary artistic activity: paintings, drawings or sculpture³. Besides (or perhaps:

¹ Among the youngest generation of scholars studying the works and visual arts of Leopold Buczkowski it is worth mentioning, among others, Piotr Sadzik and Dawid Skrabek, quoted in the ensuing parts of this article, as well as Justyna Staroń, who studies Buczkowski's archives and visual arts. See: Justyna Staroń, „Przejawy uczuć w zapisie doświadczeń. Między kartami listów męża do żony” [„Expressions of emotions in the record of experiences. Between the pages of a husband's letters to his wife”], *Konteksty* 3 (2015): 7-16; Justyna Staroń, „Dialog sztuk. O twórczości artystycznej Leopolda Buczkowskiego” [„The dialogue of arts. On artistic works of Leopold Buczkowski”], in: (Dy)fuzje. Związki literatury i sztuki w Polsce po 1945 roku [(Dif)fusions. Links between literature and art in post-1945 Poland], ed. by Magdalena Lachman, Paweł Polit (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2019), 87-118.

² Leopold Buczkowski Archive is held in Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature in Warsaw, cat. no. 1617-1663. The catalogue numbers for diaries, notebooks and memoirs are 1641-1643. War diaries are catalogued under numbers 1641.1-1641.3.

³ Fortunately, this happens more and more often. A portent of change is the exhibition of Buczkowski's art works in the Museum of Art in Łódź (29.10.2021-13.02.2022). See. Leopold Buczkowski. *Przebłyski historii, przelotne obrazki* [Leopold Buczkowski. Reflections of history, fleeting images], ed. by Agnieszka Karpowicz i Paweł Polit (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2021).

most crucially), the writer's biography remains something of a mystery, especially its wartime part, including the unsubstantiated participation in the September campaign, as well as his involvement in the resistance in the region of Podlasie, mentioned only in passing, participation in the Warsaw uprising, and his imprisonment and escape from a filtration camp Dulag 121 in Pruszków⁴. It is hard to overestimate the importance of Buczkowski's war notes from the period 1943-1945 (published in 2001 as *Dziennik wojenny* [War diary⁵]), because they prove to be not only a bridge connecting the pre-war, structurally organised *Wertepy* [Rough terrain] (1947) with the linguistically and narratively fractured *Czarny potok*⁶. This document can also shed more light on the writer's occupation-time biography. Hitherto, however, Buczkowski's notes have not provided any answers to scholars' numerous questions.

The main question concerns the authenticity of the manuscripts of three notebooks of Buczkowski's diary. In his introduction to *Dzienniki wojenne* Sławomir Buryła (the editor and one of the most important scholars of Buczkowski) claims that the manuscripts are not the 1940's originals but clean copies, which Buczkowski prepared in 1987. The evidence for this claim is supposedly revealed in the notes „I.87”, „II.87” and „III.87”, visible on the first pages of the notebooks. According to Buryła, these are “the dates on which the diary was being organized and rewritten”⁷. Less than a decade later the scholar revisited this claim, supporting it with an additional argument – lack of deletions, which are only to be expected in a text written on an ongoing basis⁸. At the same time, Buryła mentioned possible counterarguments, which might actually suggest that the manuscript is an original: illegible fragments, irregular handwriting, variable dating system⁹. The scholar, however, glosses over these reservations in his later essay devoted to Buczkowski's diaries, and reinforces his support for the clean copy claim: “How much of the notes that Buczkowski was writing on an ongoing basis went missing? Without access to the 1987 clean copy it is impossible to answer this question [...] Without the original version of the diary the only reference for the issue of materiality is the 1987 manuscript¹⁰.”

⁴ Buczkowski's proclivity for multiplying versions of his biography is evident. Hanna Kirchner said that the writer treats his life story like „a text which he can creatively use, imposing a kind of a poetic net upon trivial details [...].” See: Hanna Kirchner, „Pan Leopold. Rysunek z pamięci” [„Mr. Leopold. A sketch from memory”], in: *Wspomnienia o Leopoldzie Buczkowskim* [Remembering Leopold Buczkowski], ed. by Jan Tomkowski (Osska: Dom na Wsi, 2005), 75.

⁵ Leopold Buczkowski, *Dziennik wojenny* [War diary], introduction and afterword by Sławomir Buryła, edited by Sławomir Buryła, Radosław Sioma (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, 2001).

⁶ Sławomir Buryła, „Miedzy «Wertepami» a «Czarnym potokiem»: zagadnienia ewolucji prozy Leopolda Buczkowskiego” [„Between «Wertepy» and «Czarny potok»: issues in the evolution of Leopold Buczkowski's prose”], *Teksty Drugie* 2 (2001): 265–273.

⁷ Sławomir Buryła, *Wstęp* [Introduction], in: Leopold Buczkowski, *Dziennik wojenny*, 18.

⁸ Sławomir Buryła, „Edytorskie aspekty twórczości Leopolda Buczkowskiego. Rekonesans” [„Editorial aspects of Leopold Buczkowski's works. A reconnaissance”], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (2008): 174.

⁹ Buryła, „Edytorskie aspekty twórczości Leopolda Buczkowskiego. Rekonesans”, 174–175.

¹⁰ Sławomir Buryła, „«Dziennik wojenny» Leopolda Buczkowskiego – wyzwanie dla (młodego) edytora” [„Leopold Buczkowski's «Dziennik wojenny» - a challenge for a (young) editor”], in: *Zapisywanie wojny. Dzienniki z lat 1939–1945* [Recording war. Diaries from 1939–1945], ed. by Maciej Libich, Piotr Sadzik (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2022), 117–132. The text first appeared in English in 2019, see Sławomir Buryła, „«Dziennik wojenny» by Leopold Buczkowski. A challenge for a (young) editor”, *Acta Universitatis Lodzienensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica* 4 (2019): 183–200.

The issue of the diary's authenticity will likely never be resolved: what we know about that source is fragmentary and derived from the notes themselves. Therefore, the problem requires special care. I do not mean to say that I reject Buryła's claim. I do believe, however, that both the intermittent, chaotic form of the diary and numerous traces of re-readings (e.g., additions or examples of underlining) suggest a need to revisit the established knowledge, dating back to the beginning of this century. What is at stake here is more than the ability to access crucial information about Buczkowski's writing practices¹¹. The primary objective is to establish the status of the diary itself. Reproducing the notes might be related to the accompanying process of editing the diary, i.e., abridging, correcting, and censoring the text¹². Thus rewritten diary is no longer a diary (at least not in the anthropological meaning of the word) but it takes on the function of an edited literary work, which means one needs to raise the issue of appropriate methodological approach to studying it¹³. Therefore, I would like to describe the materiality of the notebooks – a first attempt of this kind in the history of studying the diary – and then attempt to answer the question whether Buczkowski's diaries are an authentic record of the war experience or maybe a text of an uncertain genre-genetic relationship, written by the author many years after the war.

The manuscripts of war diaries

What I mean by Leopold Buczkowski's war diaries are the three notebooks mentioned above, which were the basis for the publication of *Dziennik wojenny*. They cover nearly the entire diaristic legacy of the writer, which also includes a handful of scattered notes, mostly from the second half of the 1940s and from the 1950s: musings on the history of art, calendar entries, simple bills and accounts. The Warsaw collection also contains (typescript copies of) loose sheets with quasi-diary entries, which in many respects are similar to Buczkowski's prose from mid-20th c. - most likely materials, which were provisionally edited, possibly with a view to being published in the future¹⁴. Judging from these documents, one can conclude that the author of *Czarny potok* was not in the habit of making notes daily, and the practice of diary writing was his reaction to the dismantling of the pre-war world and the shaping of a new socio-political reality.

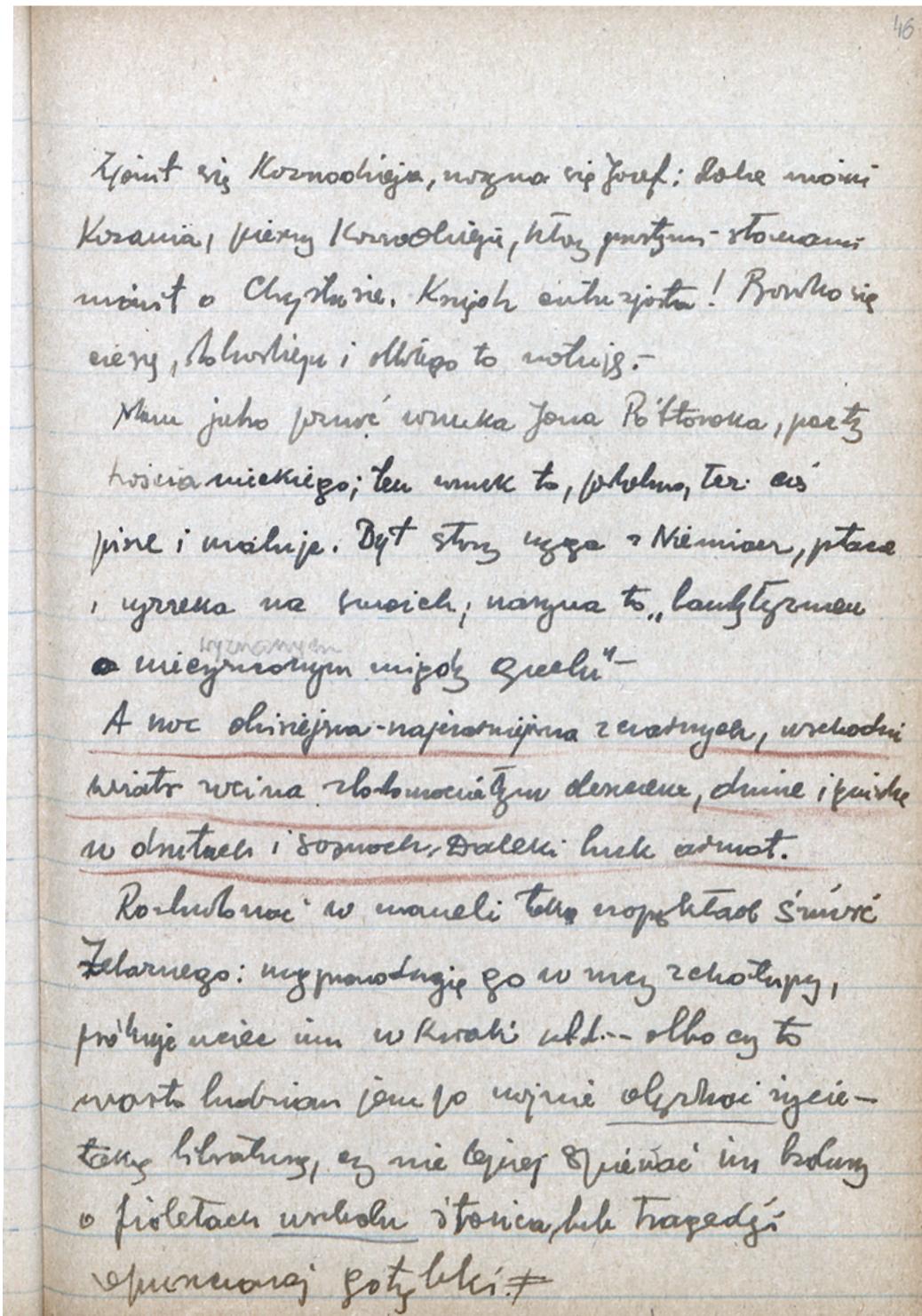
Buczkowski's diaries differ from war-time notes of the majority of Polish writers, not only because they use crude, vulgar language to document the savagery and brutal atrocities committed

¹¹Zob. Paweł Rodak, „Wojna i zapis (o dziennikach wojennych)” [„War and record (on war diaries)”), *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2005): 39.

¹²This is a common practice amongst diarists. Preparing his intimate records for print, they corrected and edited them – quite significantly – to name but Leopold Tyrmand or Andrzej Bobkowski. See: Łukasz Mikołajewski, „Pamięć fabularyzowana. Powojenne poprawki w «Szkicach piórkiem» Andrzeja Bobrowskiego” [„A fictionalised memory. Postwar corrections in Andrzej Bobkowski's «Sketches in quill», in: *Buntownik – cyklista – kosmopolak. O Andrzeju Bobowskim i jego twórczości* [Rebel – biker – cosmo-Pole. On Andrzej Bobkowski and his works], ed. by Jarosław Klejnocki, Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk (Warszawa: Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza, Więź, 2011)].

¹³Paweł Rodak, *Miedzy zapisem a literaturą. Dziennik polskiego pisarza w XX wieku* [Between record and literature. A diary of a Polish writer in the 20th c.] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011), 11–12.

¹⁴See Piotr Sadzik, „— Traumatografie Leopolda Buczkowskiego” [„— Leopold Buczkowski's Traumatographies], *Rana. Literatura – Doświadczenie – Tożsamość* 1 (2020): 74–75.



Card from the first notebook of Leopold Buczkowski's diaries ("Grzański sad"), November 22, 1943. Source: Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, Warsaw.

on Poles and Jews. Their heterogenic form also requires addressing. To begin with, Buczkowski only took notes on odd pages of his notebooks, leaving the even ones blank (a few of them contain isolated, hardly legible words, mysterious drawings and doodles or graphic symbols, like "X" or "XO"). In Boczkowski's archive one can find literary materials arranged (or perhaps composed) in the same manner, e.g., a folder with a typescript entitled *Rafał Bajc* (cat. no. 1643), as well as his letters to family and friends, sometimes written on odd pages of an A4 sheet, folded in half¹⁵. Moreover, Buczkowski used a peculiar system of punctuation. The symbols he used are #, =, ≠, +, −, and their variations, impossible to represent in a word-processed document. The 2001 edition of *Dziennik wojenny* did not include Buczkowski's original punctuation because the editors decided to regularize and simplify it, in order so as not to complicate further an already complex reading. Years later this decision was re-evaluated as a wrong one¹⁶. This reconsideration was influenced by, among others, Dawid Skrabek's Ph.D. dissertation, in which the author pointed to the importance of the traumatic texture of Buczkowski's notes¹⁷. Less than a decade later Piotr Sadzik followed in the steps of Skrabek, and analysed the interrupted punctuation in Buczkowski's writings¹⁸. Finally, Buczkowski – as I will try to demonstrate – repeatedly returned to his diaries: he underlined some fragments, added words and short sentences, introduced small changes. From this point of view, it is impossible to treat the diary only as a textual witness of the war; rather, it is a visually varied, experimental work of art to which the author of *Czarny potok* would come back throughout his entire life – not only in search of inspiration.

Let us now turn to a detailed description of the diaries. The first notebook is 179 pages long. Out of these Buczkowski only fills 82, but since he was only writing on every other page, the notebook is almost entirely completed. This ruled notebook has no label markings; it is well-preserved, its pages are not crumpled or torn; none of them is missing. The cover is in a slightly less good condition: it is crumpled and creased, with a small bright stain a few centimeters in diameter in the middle. Besides that, in the bottom corner of the notebook there is an ink blot. The notebook bears clear signs of use; most likely it would have been moved from one place to another, as indicated by its ragged, worn-down edges. Still, Buczkowski undoubtedly took good care of the notebook and its contents: we will not find dirt or stains which could make the reading hard or impossible; we will find no traces or food or drink or bodily fluids inside. The notebook includes notes covering the period between October 7th, 1943, and March 8th, 1944. The diarist gave them the enigmatic title of *Grząski sad* [A muddy orchard]. The title returns in Buczkowski's diaries and notes as a concept for some kind of artistic project (perhaps a screenplay), which never came to fruition.

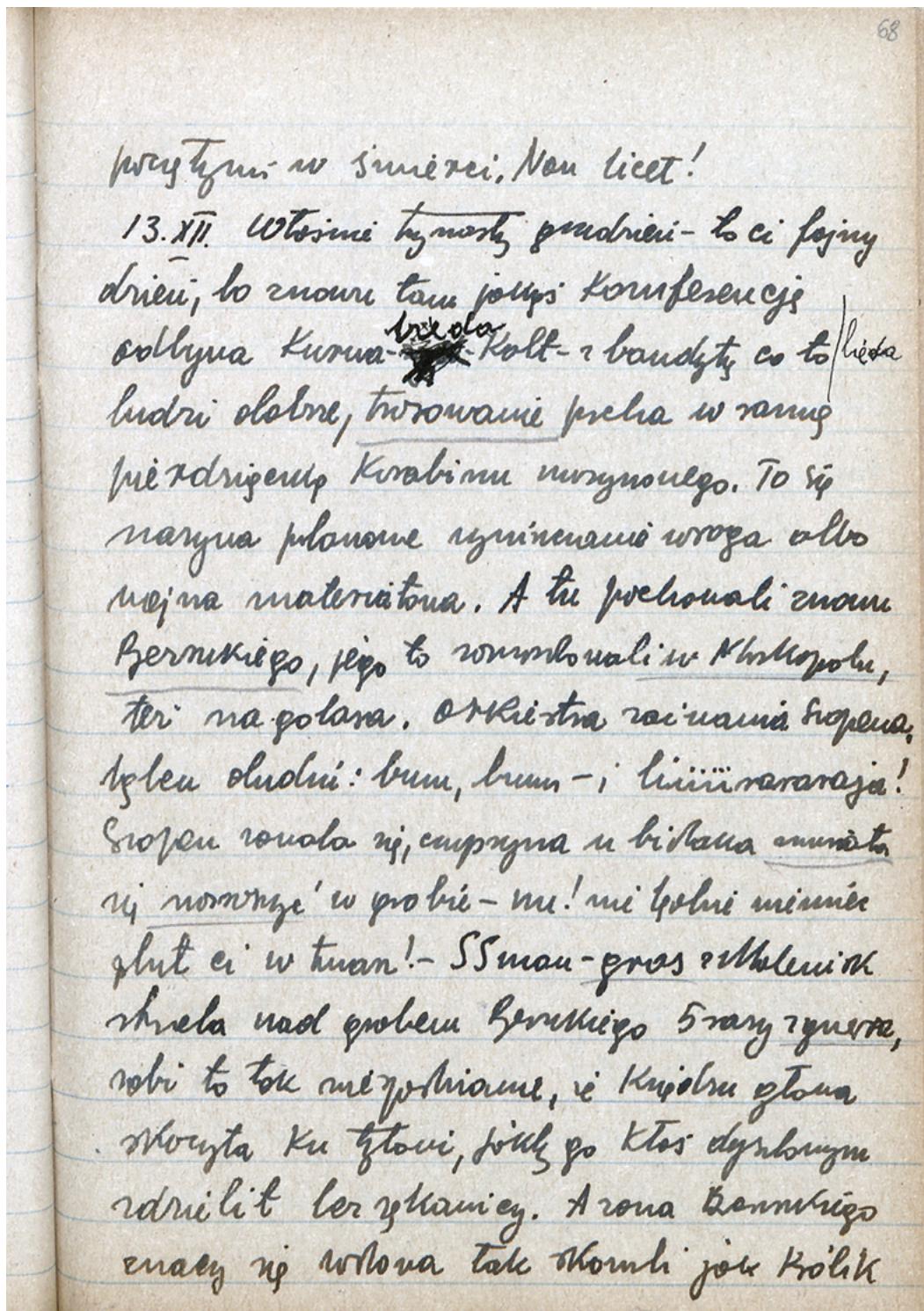
The first page contains the above-mentioned notation "I.87", written in blue ballpoint pen. The title "Grząski sad", underlined with two parallel lines, appears on the second page. These words and all the remaining ones in this notebook were written in black ink. On the third

¹⁵One must remember that Buczkowski was not alone in this practice. It is worth recalling, e.g., Miron Białoszewski's manuscripts.

¹⁶Buryła, „Dziennik wojenny Leopolda Buczkowskiego – wyzwanie dla (młodego) edytora”, 126–128.

¹⁷Dawid Skrabek, *Traumatyczna tkanka sztuki* [The traumatic tissue of art.] Unpublished M.A. dissertation, under the supervision of prof. Anna Burzyńska, Kraków 2011. A copy of the dissertation can be found in the library of the Faculty of Polish Philology of the Jagiellonian University.

¹⁸Sadzik, 69–88.



Card from the first notebook of Leopold Buczkowski's diaries ("Grzański sad"), December 13, 1943. Source: Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, Warsaw.

page Buczkowski's diaristic notes begin. As remarked by Buryła, the lack of any corrections, erasures or even spelling errors, typical of writing on an ongoing basis, is quite peculiar. Instead, underlining is a recurrent feature: it sometimes concerns single lexical items (perhaps when Buczkowski wants to signal an important fragment of the text), sometimes – a few final words in a line or the entire line, when the diarist wants to separate two paragraphs from one another. Besides this, one can encounter numerous underscorings in pencil, not in Buczkowski's hand. These were introduced by the editors of his diary, who used this method to highlight illegible words (some of them remain undeciphered until today; in *Dziennik wojskowy* they are indicated by square brackets). Editorial interventions are also the likeliest explanation for blue ballpen underscorings on pages 22, 23 and 24 (more about this will be said in what follows). The red vertical line, extending over half of page 22, is of unknown origin. Red crayon was also used to underscore a three-lines' long sentence on page 46: "And tonight – the darkest of the dark nights, the eastern wind is blowing frozen rain, whistling in wires and in pines. A distant thunder of cannons".

On page 31v two words were written and underscored in pencil: "Szapiro" and, right underneath it, "Durmianka". Most likely they are surnames, but they do not appear in *Wertepy* or in *Czarny Potok*, nor do they recur in other parts of the diary, so it is hard to say why Buczkowski wrote them down¹⁹. The same question relates to other surnames: "Szonort" on page 59v and "Riess" on page 60v (underneath there is the addendum "on the porch", at the top a mysterious doodle, which looks like two curly brackets, i.e., „{}"). The meaning of three words on page 81v are clear enough: „Dudyn”, „Sańska” and „Werchobusy” are names of villages from the Brody region. In the top margin of page 32 Buczkowski drew five big "X" symbols. He also drew one such symbol in the bottom margin of page 35, two more symbols on page 45v, one on page 47v, three in the top margin of page 48, three more on page 49, whereas at the top of page 80 one can see the symbols "X O !". One might venture a claim that this is how the diarist highlighted the most important parts of the text while re-reading his diary. On page 66 the sentence "I'm chopping wood with Zygmunt in the forest" is highlighted by means of thick boxes in pencil on either side of the sentence. This is the only time Buczkowski mentions his youngest brother Zygmunt, who was murdered in the massacre perpetrated by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in Podkamień. The highlighting must have been added later, because a different writing instrument was used for it. This point becomes more meaningful when considering Buczkowski's entry for August 1944: "Last night again I had a dream about [...] Zygmunt. The Podkamieniec crime overshadows everything".

It is worth considering page 58, which includes as many as two corrections. In the sentence "The fine ones are dying and the ever-shittier shits come center stage and fill up the s.-c. «goblet of life» = by rejecting, putting into graves with the best of hearts, goblets of life = one would need to produce something like Tuwim – a «sensitive antenna of human stupidity», the diarist crossed out the word "Tuwim" and right next to it wrote "Winawer"; a bit lower down the page he corrected the word "mieniany". Another correction – probably the most interesting one – is on page 68. On that page one reads: "It is December the 13th, what a great

¹⁹ „Durmianka” is also the name of a Ukrainian village; but this place is in the Chernihiv district, more than 500 km away from Podkamień, where Buczkowski was born.

day, because there's another conference or something between the fucking-poor-colt [Pol. *kurwa-bieda-kolt*] – with the bandit, who's training people right into the fartage of a machine gun". Buczkowski is making a reference to the Cairo conference, which took place on December 3rd-7th, 1943. It was a meeting between Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, who were discussing, among other issues, a possible cooperation with China against Japan. "Fucking-poor-colt" is, of course, Roosevelt, but in the original version Buczkowski wrote "fucking-Jew-colt" [Pol. *kurwa-żyd-kolt*]. The word *żyd* 'Jew' is almost entirely blurred but the following elements are clearly visible: the initial letter "ż", the bottom half of one of three letters, which can only be "y", "g" or "j" (it has to be a vowel in this context) and the top part of the third letter, which can only be a "d" because it ends (rather than begins, as with "b", "h", "k" "l", "t") with a vertical line.

One more typographic feature is noticeable in the first notebook i.e., the changing style of handwriting. Quite regular until page 70, the handwriting unexpectedly changes and Buczkowski begins to write small, narrow letters. He returns to the original letter size on page 74, which marks the beginning of a longer, undated note, probably from December 31st, 1943 or January 1st, 1944 (it concerns the New Year). Another entry is from February 18th, 1944 and the next one – from February 19th; the handwriting of both is similar to the entries on pages 3-70. In his final note – from March 8th 1944, the handwriting changes again.

Finally, one also needs to mention changes in the manner of dating. An example of this are the dots that the writer uses in his dating system in order to separate the day from the month, sometimes the month from the year. Sometimes he purposefully skips the year or forgets about it, then returns to marking it, only to abandon this practice again; the notation lacks consistency in this case also.

Let us now turn to the second notebook. This one is checked, with no label markings. It consists of 149 pages, but the notes fill only 50 of them. The entries cover the period between August 1st and September 19th, 1944. This one is in a much worse shape than the first notebook. Its pages are crumpled, creased, and yellowed, some of them have large stains of transparent substance, probably water. The notebook is frayed and it is falling apart; the four metal staples are rusted, colouring the pages brown. This means that the second notebook was in all likelihood exposed to humidity. The notes themselves seem to confirm this: during the Warsaw uprising Buczkowski was hiding in the basements of Żoliborz, which were often flooded. "There is water in the basement, almost up to the knees. The little one caught a cold yesterday" [August 1944, no specific day date]. This notebook was probably moved around more often than the previous one. Its cover seems to sustain this possibility: very frayed at the front, with numerous stain marks (both bright and darker, smaller and bigger), it has visible scratching marks at the back. In the middle of the first page of the cover there is a stained, worn sticker, on which Buczkowski wrote in black ballpoint pen: "POWSTANIE NA ŻOLIBORZU" ['THE ŻOLIBORZ UPRIISING']. Between the words "powstanie" ('uprising') and "na" [lit. "on"; the preposition used in the phrase 'na Żoliborzu'] he wrote in pencil (probably earlier): "Bucz 44".

On the first page there is a note "II.87", written in blue ballpen. The same pen was used to indicate – like in the previous notebook – three words on pages 4 and 5: "raining", "rapid-fire"

and “etc.”. These words are not particularly important for the meaning of the text, and it is hard to assume that Buczkowski saw something particularly interesting in them, but at the same time their purpose is difficult to interpret, so it is probable that the markings in ballpen were made by one of the diary’s editors. The likeliest candidate is Bogusław Żurawski, who was preparing for publication the first two parts of the diary in the 1990’s²⁰. One can also see numerous symbols written in pencil, which – with a degree of probability – can be ascribed to Buczkowski (e.g., a thick vertical uneven line running through half of page 23). On page 24 the first sentence of a new paragraph is highlighted by means of slanted lines; similar symbols appear on pages 25, 26, 27, 38, 52.

Bukowski’s notation is not consistent here either: both in terms of the manner of handwriting, its slant, writing tools and the dating system used. Notes on pages 3-10 were made in black ink. The final three lines of page 10 were written in pencil, which remained in use until the end of page 13. On page 14 he reached for a black-ink pen again but having written less than a whole paragraph he switched back to blue ink; the notes then assume dark-blue colour, turning purple a few lines below. Starting with page 17 Buczkowski wrote in black ink again, but on page 18 the colour returned to blue. In the middle of page 27 Buczkowski picked up a pencil again, and used it till the very end of the notebook (although not without exceptions). On page 27 he corrected the ending of one of the paragraphs - first using a pencil to cross out repeatedly a sentence written in blue ink, then overwriting it with another one, this time in black ink. It is very hard to decipher the original words: “«The dawn [Pol. *zorza*] of freedom is flashing» - just think about it, listen, flashing (there is flashing, but of grenades and bombs, incessant, unstoppable for over a month now) = and now the dawn [orig. *żorża*] (shoepolish *żorża*) we can see the dawn [orig. *żorża*], it is a five-pointed one, from the direction of Lublin, it celebrates its [three illegible words]”. The new version is less problematic: The dawn [Pol. *zorza*] of freedom is flashing» - just think about it, listen, flashing (there is flashing, but of grenades and bombs, incessant, unstoppable for over a month now) = and now the dawn [orig. *żorża*, i.e. the shoepolish by the name of *Żorża*] we can see the dawn [orig. *żorża*], it burns the city, it burns us, it burns the girls, it burns the chickens and it doesn’t mean anything, this dawn [orig. *zorza*] – Bolek is smiling”. Right next to it Buczkowski drew a pictogram representing the sun, which he added on the blank page next to it: “Sugar on the tongue, Satan in the throat →”, and underneath: “A brawl at the parachute: who has the right to steal it?”. He also used black ink to write one of the sentences finishing the uprising-time diary: “We will avenge Pawiak!” (II, p. 60)²¹, a list of twenty-one streets of Żoliborz (p. 59v), as well as a nugget of (an unfinished and unpublished) article *Na tropach sztuki* [Tracking art] (II, pp. 61–61v) and a piece of short prose, whose fragments were later incorporated into *Czarny potok* (II, pp. 68–73).

One also needs to mention the dating system. This time Buczkowski begins with Arabic numerals: „1.8.” (II, p. 3). The date „2.8” is written immediately after the unfinished final sen-

²⁰Leopold Buczkowski, „Powstanie na Żoliborzu”, edited by Bogusław Żurakowski, Regiony 3-4 (1992) and Leopold Buczkowski, „Grząski sad”, „Powstanie na Żoliborzu”, edited by Zbigniew Taranienko, Bogusław Żurakowski, Ex Libris 57 (1994).

²¹Unless stated otherwise, in the brackets I list the number of the diary’s notebook, then page number, following the Museum of Literature’s foliation.

5

i w tzwiały kolibice.

Czterozęgi żubry żarnikij; zepsaj-

I chwycią jisi w gorniemi czerwono-białyem, gonią wylotnione-wsi tam obiegają - podwony do punktu walki. Tego, kogo munc, rybko - sanitarnie dwiegały samoch - do tego skończo. Również te / sprawski / piec one w rogu /; le - w most. Chiu Fj: 2.8. Minęły wili oblegoje ten szpital - ventila mi kolibele samoch uciekło. Obecnie - co tam ci toto munc potem? Z ugrindoroli upłas, jak na Kolibie?

Rygnoun żurawie, bo stwini lipp cesar u ty. chwili przez mordnie 40 cm. lipp na Stare Miasto (stol). Niem botwina jest. Wszelko w Kolibanicie razy dwie nie - bombardujące ver wrośle, pięciu naleg! - & te klorij!

Dziś myta katedra sw. Jana i inne kreski!

Nou licet! Ale! Mój ter-dris - Ech mrochen; i ornat ar gloria puchnie. Cztery rzezaj

Card from the second notebook of
Leopold Buczkowski's diaries ("The
Uprising in Żoliborz"), August 1-2, 1944.
Source: Adam Mickiewicz Museum of
Literature, Warsaw.

na kie tą, eponi, wiej stonca, biote
gotobie leg. bokę leg. Napewne
zg prawdziwe, hardzię. folkie; naprawd
symbolum urodkiego, na ogromie =

A na wonateli whiszy
ter kolka jst ter biat' gotyb: jekis
primita zg myilit olla tego plakatu:

„Wolnosci' btyśka żorza” - ponyileć
tylko, stnajcie: btyśka / btyśkaj, ale granaty
i bomby, ter żony; żenkid jui mierzej =
a teraz żorza / pasta iona / urodziny z iony,
~~prali mrosto poli was~~
~~poli. dudugta, poli, Kuregta i nie wie~~
~~żerocząt żorza - Bolek usmiecza się~~

31. VIII. Tu o godz: 11³⁰ myśletem ool kolka
i ranar wodociąg hombowce zglianicz nare
obieci', urodkie: urodko os rije: pny, Kanałek: kły
i ptactwo. Po i tak - u kolka g'mi jys
iona; jes? milli jys am shawl. Kanałek
jego jakiegos obaru snakartem u śniegu skiego.
11. sierpnia. Zgryta ter p. Kanałeksa. Je syn

Card from the second notebook of Leopold Buczkowski's diaries ("The Uprising in Żoliborz"), August 30-31, 1944. Source: Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, Warsaw.

tence of the entry for the previous day (II, p. 5), and the entire note is separated from the following paragraph with a green long horizontal line. Another date marks August 20th (II, p. 7). The publishers of *Dziennik wojenny* assumed that all the notes Buczkowski wrote between August 2nd and 20th 1944 (II, pp. 5-7) are actually part of an August 2nd entry, but, rather than recording the specific dates, the diarist substitutes them with lines – perhaps on purpose, in order to emphasise the inadequacy of normal dating systems in war conditions, or maybe this happens by accident, because he forgot what day it was. This manner of dating should be revisited and a division of the notes should be introduced in future editions. On page 5 Buczkowski begins a new paragraph with the words: "Today St. John's Cathedral collapsed! And other churches too!"; this happened on August 17th, not at the beginning of the uprising. A similar verification is needed for the notes written between 20th and 29th of August. If one assumes that all of them date back to August 20th, after less than three weeks of fighting, Buczkowski would have had to write: "Today it's been 4 weeks since our W-saw was turned to ashes" (II, p. 10). This dissonance is striking, because the above-quoted sentence is written in pencil, and the previous one – from a different paragraph – in pen. A similar notation appears on page 14. Buczkowski then substitutes pencil for pen and begins a new paragraph from the words: "It's been already 29 days of fighting in W-saw [...]" . This entry, however, raises some doubt, because the number "29" only appears in the top margin of page 18 (four pages later). The following page includes the number "30". Interestingly enough, "30" will return twice more: the first time – on page 22, then again (with the addendum "time: 12") on page 24. Could it be that all these notes were written on the last but one day of the month, just before noon? Or maybe Buczkowski made a mistake in his notation? Future editors should look into this more closely. Subsequent dates are similar to the ones from the first diary: 31.VIII", then „7.IX", „8.IX", „9.IX", „10.IX", „12.IX", „13.IX" and „14.IX".

The third notebook is 188 pages long, but Buczkowski only filled 33 of them. These are notes written sporadically between December 27th 1944, and October 22nd 1945. The cover is virtually intact (except for a small dent at the front); the pages do not feature any crumbling or stains (except for the few initial ones, especially 3-5). In the bottom right corner of page 1, which contains the note "III.87" (and above it - a vertical pencil line), there is quite a big stain, probably left by the pencil lead or black ink). Page 2 contains a few unclear letters in a child's handwriting. This was done by Tadeusz Buczkowski – Leopold's son – born in 1945. Buczkowski's notes begin from page 3, but they are not dated. The first dated entry only appears on page 7 and was written on December 27th, 1944. Buczkowski then begins to write with a pen. He uses a dark navy-blue ink, which on the initial pages gradually changes colour into a brighter one, blue, so one can surmise that when he began to write some there was some leftover black ink in his pen. He used the blue ink right up to page 24; then he switched to black, and probably replaced the pen itself, because the writing became narrower.

Pages 3-24 contain a few additions. In the top part of page 11 Buczkowski wrote two words in pencil: "menthol – mendol!", but this addendum has no logical relation to the contents of his notes. At the bottom of page 13, under the reconstruction of a poem which is a motto of Buczkowski's first novel, he wrote in black ink: "But then the *Rough terrain* was found, in a grave at Żoliborz, during the exhumation ... of Sołtan's acquaintance..." At the top of page 18 he wrote in black ink: "Fever 39,2". It is interesting that in the bottom margin of page

20 he sketched three "Xs" with a black ballpoint pen (as indicated by traces of ink – he only used black ballpoint pen once besides this instance – when he indicated the title of the second notebook using majuscule script: "The Żoliborz uprising"). On page 34, the first one not filled by Buczkowski, there are two crooked letters "b", written in pencil by Tadeusz, and traces of his learning how to write return at the end of the notebook, on pages 82v-92v (e.g., words "grandpa and grandma and Tadeusz", "Tadeusz Buczkowski and daddy Leopold and mummy Marysia"). One should also point to irregular dating conventions: "27.XII", „Year 1945”, „9.I”, „10.I”, „11.I”, „12.I”, „May 7. 1945”, „8.V”, „5.VI. Still Kraków”, „Kraków 12.VI.945”, „Kraków 21.VI.945”, „14 July 1945”. Clearly, format-wise, the third notebook of the diary is not uniform.

War diaries: a clean copy or a manuscript?

Sławomir Buryła points to lack of deletions as the main argument for his claim that the diary is a copy. Indeed, numerous pages of the diary – especially its first notebook – bear no trace of corrections, but Leopold Buczkowski's notes are not free from revisions. These do not really comprise insignificant, orthographic or punctuation errors, whose presence can be expected even in a rewritten text, but they concern more significant changes, which sometimes modify the meaning of the entire sentence. Perhaps it would be more justified to enquire about the condition of the notebooks: how did they manage to survive the turmoil of war in a not-so-bad shape? This is unusual, especially when it comes to the first notebook; after all, it contains notes from the period of UPA's most brutal persecution, and contain the description of Buczkowski's flight from Ukrainian armed forces, and relocation from his family home to the crowded monastery in Podkamień. The reason for this near-perfect condition of the notebook might be very simple: the diarist took good care of his notes. He also could have hidden the diary or left it with somebody for safekeeping, only to reclaim it after the war. It is easier to explain the good condition of the third notebook: Buczkowski only used it in the final months of the war when he was hiding in the village of Gacki and did not actively participate in fighting. The second notebook – from the Warsaw uprising – does not require a similar explanatory commentary, as it clearly shows signs of war-time fatigue.

Let us now turn to the arguments against the clean copy hypothesis. The pages of the notebooks are dull or discoloured, the covers are wrinkled, the ink is faded (unlike other manuscripts or typescripts by Buczkowski from the second half of the century – these are well-preserved). These physical features confirm the suspicion that the notebooks date back to the pre-war period. One might of course assume that towards the end of the 1980's the frugal Buczkowski turned to his notes from a few decades ago in order to rewrite his war diary, but this accounts neither for the faded ink nor for the illegibility of his pencil notes, which vanished entirely over time. Anyway, it would be hard to say why the writer would again use a pencil and pen if from the 70's onwards he mainly relied on ballpoint pens and felt-tip pens. Particularly problematic are the notes „I.87”, „II.87”, „III.87”, written in blue ballpoint pen, which – apart from a few above-mentioned cases of underscoring by the editors – do not appear on the diary pages. Is it possible that Buczkowski, having written these notes, put down the ballpoint pen and reached for a pen or pencil? The writing tools raise other doubts, too.

13

szczególny moje chłopcy; jedni kierzą do kwater
wojskowych żarnów. - Co kto uśpi w powiemianach;
co piasek? Wiel pan ballady! Oponiaskam
Kieśku panom, że uogniotem mierze okiełborze.
- co? - O okiełborze uogniotem ballady! -
- Czy pan niezgubicie? / Przednie kohutki zawsze im
w oczach kurka!.

W recentym roku już mówiąc o poetytceku Tacie
zwróciłem: „świat w marzeniu”, „za kominiakiem”
„wokietek o śmiertku”, „o mojej pytanym sonie”, Tkt.
gotowe sonaty z cyklu „śmigły wakki; bojki śmigły”
albo „bojki śmigły; wakki śmigły”

wsiąga	{	stoczę wokietek od września
do mówić		i świat potokiem obiega, a na wiecior w mona na Kopiec Kościada.

S. L. Tawia

Wertepny	{	Teera, na kontakcie wiadomości Kyniernego, z mówiąc, jenior i wiec wiele i pod wieko na okres ugnosi =
		dzień

Alle uż potem znaliśmy Wertepny, w grobie
na Zoliborzu, przy ekumenacji ...

Card from the third notebook of Leopold Buczkowski's diaries, 9 I 1945. Source:
Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature,
Warsaw.

In the first notebook Buczkowski used a fountain pen, which he often needed to dip in ink – this can be seen in the changing colour and ink saturation. After he wrote a dozen or so lines the ink began to fade again. The uncertainty related to this concerns the dates and first words of the entries, because they are never written in a faded ink. If Buczkowski really had been rewriting his diary after many years, would he have – without any exception – dipped his pen in the inkwell every time before beginning a new entry?

Let us also consider the underscoring in the first notebook. Definitely, the thickened annotations in pencil are Buczkowski's, e.g., the already mentioned boxes next to the sentence considering his brother Zygmunt. I assume, however, that the ballpen underscoring was made by the diary editors. Even though these occur only in a few words' long, semantically coherent fragments of the text, they are similar to underscorings from the second notebook, which only appeared next to three illegible words. But who was using the crayon? Probably it was Buczkowski himself. I believe this to be the case not only because these underlinings cover bigger portions of the text: entire sentences and paragraphs. I arrive at this conclusion having read Buczkowski's other archival materials, also underlined in red crayon. These materials, not processed by the editors in the '90s, are, e.g., quasi-diary notes from a file entitled *Rafał Bajc*. Moreover, it would be even possible to establish the precise moment in which Buczkowski drew these underlinings: it was probably during his work on *Czarny Potok* (ca. 1945-1948²²), because in that story there are numerous sentences lifted from *Rafał Bajc*. In this sense *Grząski sad*, i.e., the first notebook of the diary, bears traces of at least four readings by Buczkowski: the first one in late '40s or early '50s during his work on *Czarny potok* (red crayon), the second and third – perhaps during his query or work on *Dorycki krużganek* (pencil and black ballpoint pen), the fourth one – in 1987 (blue ballpoint pen). Is it possible that the diarist would have managed as many as four readings of his diaries between 1987 and his death in 1989, each time using a different writing tool?

Another issue are corrections. Surely, while rewriting his diaries Buczkowski would have taken proper care to ensure some neatness to his notation. Would he have allowed for the traces of the name of Julian Tuwim to remain visible after substituting it with the name of Bruno Winawer? Most importantly, would he have left a trail of such a significant change as crossing out the word "Jew" (I, p. 58)? We can speculate, of course, on the reason for this correction: this antisemitic remark, probably written in a fit of anger, must have seemed deeply inappropriate on the second reading, which likely happened already after the war. Let us not forget that a huge part of Buczkowski's literary heritage concerns Shoah; the correction in his diary then demonstrates a crystallization of his views and ethical stance. Probably for the same reasons he crossed out a sentence from the Żoliborz uprising (II, p. 27). Even though three words are carefully erased and illegible, we can assume that the diarist, when writing about the five-pointed star coming from the direction of Lublin means the Soviet Union and the Red Army. It is hard to say why Buczkowski decided that the sentence requires change, but it is certain that this correction changed the tone of the entire paragraph. A clean copy would not bear the traces of such a change.

²²Specific details can be found in Sławomir Buryła's article, in which he reconstructs the origins of *Czarny potok*. Sławomir Buryła, „*Czarny potok* i archiwum” [„*Czarny potok* and the archive”], Forum Poetyki 21 (2020): 167–169.

The second notebook presents an even clearer case. Uneven slant of the hand, regularly changing writing instruments, a few ink colours, poor condition of the notebook – all of these seem to be evidence that the manuscript was written in the 1940's. Buczkowski, who actively participated in the Warsaw uprising²³, was constantly changing locations, taking the notebook with him. He was writing with whatever he could use: a pencil or pens (viz. the discernible difference in the thickness of nibs). The notes were clearly made in a hurry and difficult conditions, which is why they are sometimes illegible – sentences break off in the middle, frequently they are written in a form understandable only for the diarist; Buczkowski often does not care about writing the date. It seems impossible to procure this form of notation under "home" conditions. Another argument against the clean copy hypothesis can be a fragment of prose, which appears on pages 68–73. Some parts of that fragment, in a revised form, made to *Czarny potok*. Would Buczkowski have rewritten this prose fragment in the '80s, knowing it had been published in a novel, in a revised form at that, forty years prior?

The same is true of the third notebook of the diary. Buczkowski initially wrote in it when he was in the village of Gacki (blue ink) and then – five months later – in Kraków (black ink). Change of ink, slant of the script, as well as the manner of dating are clearly related to the change of the diarist's location. Also, in this case there is no reason to suppose that a few decades after his initial inscriptions Buczkowski tried to recreate their graphically varied form. One more point is worth recalling: Tadeusz Buczkowski's childhood notes. Leopold's notes end on page 33, and Tadeusz's begin on the following one. One might assume that Tadeusz reached for one of the notebooks of the diary, which Leopold was using while working on *Czarny potok*, he flipped the pages right until the final inscriptions and he began drawing on subsequent blank pages. The converse seems much less plausible: it would require Buczkowski to retrieve from his archive a decades' old notebook, used only by Tadeusz, and use it for note taking right up to the page on which the first letters written in his child's hand appear.

A record of an experience?

A detailed description of the three notebooks supports the idea that they are original manuscripts of the diary: an unprocured record of experience, whose authenticity is best supported by its heterogenous, interrupted form. At the same time, this peculiar structure of notation (or at the very least its individual elements) encourages one to treat the diary as if it were an experiment: an attempt to create less a new language and more new manners of expression. Leopold Buczkowski was undoubtedly a man marked by war: a soldier, a freedom fighter, and an insurrectionist, who described some of his traumatic experiences in his notebooks. And yet, he never stopped being a writer; even in a liminal situation he would undertake a literary and philosophical reflection, problematizing in his diary issues concerning not just the language of his notes but also of their form. In this context the reading of the diary helps to understand a radical change of poetics that occurred between *Wertepy* and *Czarny potok*.

²³See Leopold Buczkowski's insurrectionist bio: <https://www.1944.pl/powstancze-biogramy/leopold-buczkowski,4857.html>, accessed 11.09.2022.

Hitherto, the diary has been read mostly from the structuralist perspective (this also concerns Buczkowski's fiction), which means that these readings need to be supplemented with anthropological approaches, especially in their critical-genetic aspect, which is concerned with the search of senses hidden in the material layer of the notes. It is only through combining these two methodological orders that we will be able see the intention behind the diaries. Buczkowski's love of neologisms, archaisms, dialectal expressions, scatological humour, profanities, and surreal metaphors, as well as his attempts at intervening into the syntactic order are combined with an unusual choice of punctuation symbols. These, in turn, are part of the asemantic layer of the notation, which also includes also graphic symbols in the margins. This layered combination of interrelatedness prevents one from viewing the diaries merely as a record of the *hic et nunc* experience; nor can they be approached as a mere literary experiment. Buczkowski's records occupy a space which is hard to define, i.e., at the crossroads of 'life writing', literature and visual arts.

Simple answers cannot be provided for other questions raised in this paper, e.g., the reason for using only the odd pages of the diary. Did Buczkowski leave the even pages blank to use them for other types of notes (an example of which could be surnames, placenames, and street names)? Perhaps he was planning to use them for future corrections and editorial comments? And maybe he was afraid his notes would shine through? This answer, however, brings about other problems: paper was hard to come by in war conditions, so how to explain such uneconomical use of the notebooks? One should also question the symbols and drawings in the margins. Was it really a way of highlighting important passages or rather a form of selecting the material? If so, why did he do it?

I leave these questions unanswered, hoping they will spark future queries and research, which will help to continue debates on the diary and solve at least some of the dilemmas signalled above. This discussion seems important for future considerations of Leopold Buczkowski's works, especially in the light of the two envisaged new editions of his notes. Sławomir Buryła plans to revive *Grząski sad* and *Powstanie na Żoliborzu* (to be published by Instytut Literatury), and the present author wants to publish three war notebooks, which will be accompanied by dispersed fragments of semi-diarist and prosaic nature, including *Rafał Bajc* (to be published by Marginesy).

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

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KEYWORDS

Leopold Buczkowski

war diaries

ABSTRACT:

This text presents an anthropological reading of Leopold Buczkowski's war diaries (1942–1945), as well as a polemic against claims made by Sławomir Buryła and Radosław Sioma. The author of the article argues that the three notebooks deposited at the Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature (Muzeum Literatury im. Adam Mickiewicza w Warszawie) are not re-written, final drafts from the 1980s—as the editors of *Dziennik wojskowy* (War Diary, 2001) claim—but original manuscripts. The researcher describes the material aspects of the diary, especially those elements that distinguish it from other wartime diaries—these include unprecedented punctuation, enigmatic notes made in the margins, and illegible drawings on the blank pages of the notebooks.

Czarny potok

GENETIC CRITICISM

trauma

EXPERIENCE

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

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The avant-garde in the archive: Towards Proust's spectrology (in dialogue with Philippe Sollers's *Oeil de Proust: Les dessins de Marcel Proust*)*

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*Philippe Sollers, *Oeil de Proust. Les dessins de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Stock, 1999). This article is an extended version of a paper delivered at the “Life Writing of the Avant-Garde” conference held at the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw on September 28–30, 2022. Sollers’s work is not available in English. References are provided directly in the text. All quotations from works not available in English have been translated by MO from Polish.

In the late 1970s, Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky drew attention to the “avalanche-like nature” of culture, which, not necessarily positively, contributes to its accumulation and makes one activate new type of memory reservoirs in the form of “secondary metalinguistic systems.”¹ I draw on Lotman and Uspensky’s findings to describe the contemporary reception of one of the most important works of French literature, that is Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*. Numerous studies devoted to this text have reached a critical “tipping point” and today intimidate rather than inspire contemporary readers and writers alike. For example, the young French poet Julien Syrac recently stated: “It is foolish to presume that, if we were asked to, we would have something innovative and intelligent to say about Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*.² At the same time, there is a widespread belief that we simply cannot free ourselves from Proust’s legacy. This sentiment was expressed by the 2022 Nobel Prize Winner Annie Ernaux – in a lecture delivered at the Collège de France, she observed that: “To-

¹ Lotman, Yuri and Boris Uspensky, “On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture,” *New Literary History* (1978) 9: 231-232.

² Julien Syrac, « La joie du réel retrouvé », *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 654 (Automne 2022): 108.

day, one cannot be a French or Francophone author without referring to the author of *In Search of Lost Time*.³ Proust's myth is still prevalent in contemporary French literature, as proved by the publication of a significant number of works, most often in the form of biographical essays or biographical fiction⁴ which focus on the personal relationship to Proust. They have been published in recent years (the beginning of the 21st century actually marks a turning point) and together create a kind of "literature in the second degree," which tries to address both the existing body of critical works and (the still seemingly unaccounted for) modernist legacy. Ultimately an intertextual dialogue with the work itself, which we might think of when we refer to Gérard Genette's well-known concept, is not the goal. The goal is to engage with both the novel and its author as well as to explore a unique relationship that the authors of Proust's biographies have with the brilliant French writer as readers of *In Search of Lost Time*, insofar as they feel the need to address Proust's myth. What comes to mind here is the category of the specter which, as Jakub Momro puts it, "forever haunts individuals and communities in various incomplete, impermanent, radically time-inconsistent, asynchronous, and transitional ontological forms."⁵ All biographical works in question make use of the great writer's archive. The goal is not to reach biographical truth but to deconstruct certain myths about Proust. Such archival disputes have been very lively in recent years.⁶ In this article, I wish to analyze a rather unique work, unique insofar as it describes Proust's somewhat obscure works, namely his drawings, which the writer drew in the margins of his manuscripts or attached to his many letters. These drawings were discussed in an essay by the contemporary writer, literary critic, and founder of the avant-garde magazine *Tel Quel* Phillippe Sollers in the essay entitled *Oeil de Proust: Les dessins de Marcel Proust* [Proust's Eye. The drawings of Marcel Proust]. I draw on Sollers's notion of "inner experience," which he, in turn, borrowed from Georges Bataille, to discuss idealistic interpretations of Proust's eye. Then, referring to the Derridean category of "specters," I wish to analyze the significance of Proust's drawings in the process of forming Proust's legacy in contemporary literature.

Proust's lesson

The publication of the manuscript of Marcel Proust's now famous essay *Contre Sainte-Beuve* [By Way of Sainte-Beuve] in 1954 marked a new era in the reception of his works, not to mention the impact it had exerted on the development of literary studies,⁷ but other documents that we today include

³ Annie Ernaux, Proust, Françoise et moi, lecture delivered at Collège de France on 19 February 2013 (<https://www.college-de-france.fr/agenda/seminaire/lire-et-relire-proust/proust-francoise-et-moi>, date of access 22 Jan. 2023). Ernaux was asked to deliver her lecture by Antoine Compagnon to celebrate the centenary of the publication of Swann's Way.

⁴ These include, for example, Michel Scheider's *Maman* (1999) and *L'auteur, l'autre. Proust et son double* (2014), Jérôme Prieur's *Proust fantôme* (2001), François Bon's *Proust est une fiction* (2013), Eveline Bloch-Dano's *Une jeunesse de Marcel Proust* (2017) and many more.

⁵ Jakub Momro, *Widmontology nowoczesności. Genezy [Hauntologies of modernity. Genesis]* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2014), 8 and 50.

⁶ I refer to the argument between the Proustologist Antoine Compagnon and the writer Patrick Mimouni regarding the misdeeds of the publisher of Proust's letters Philip Kolb. Kolb allegedly concealed traces of Jewish heritage in Proust's biography. The discussion had taken place in the journal "La règle du jeu" founded by the philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy from 2018 to 2022.

⁷ I have in mind, among other things, new approaches to the autobiography and the literary subject, or the development of genetic criticism. Certainly, in the 1960s the research on *Contre Sainte-Beuve* was considered crucial for the development of New Criticism. See, for example, Kazuyoshi Josikawa, "Du «Contre Sainte-Beuve» à la «Recherche»", in: *Proust, la mémoire et la littérature*, ed. Antoine Compagnon (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009), 49–71.

in Proust's archive have been somewhat forgotten. I have in mind, in particular, some of Proust's letters (and, as we know, Proust wrote several thousand letters) published only two years later (in 1956) by the American Romance scholar Philip Kolb⁸ under the title *Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn* [Letters to Reynaldo Hahn]. The original copies of these letters, addressed to Proust's lover – the composer Reynaldo Hahn, had been sold separately at various collector's auctions and their contents had not been taken as seriously as the aforementioned manuscript of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. The collection published by Kolb contains about thirty of Proust's drawings. As we know today, Kolb included these drawings in some of the published letters arbitrarily; he changed their original location, ignoring, among other things, the fact that they were most often executed on separate sheets of paper. However, the worst part is that critics had for a long time either disregarded or dismissed the drawings. For example, the British Romance scholar Richard Bales wrote in 1975: "They are largely concerned with Proust's reaction to Hahn himself [...] As we have said, however, these drawings are of no far-reaching importance."⁹ In France in the 1960s and the 1970s, critics and publishers did not want to address these drawings because of the widely spread myth/vision of Proust as a great writer as well as because of the modernist understanding of literature as the art of the word. Since then, the approach to these visual documents has changed significantly, especially thanks to the pioneering essay by Claude Gandelman, in which the researcher identifies, among other things, which drawn characters correspond to characters and scenes in Proust's novels.¹⁰ Philippe Sollers's essay, published in 1999, discusses two kinds of Proust's drawings:¹¹ found in the abovementioned letters to Hahn (importantly, Sollers discusses and publishes many more letters than Kolb), currently kept in The Kolb-Proust Archive at University of Illinois in the United States, and the famous *carnets* and notebooks archived at The Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.¹² Still, Sollers did not discuss Proust's drawings from the perspective of an archivist or a literary expert, as had been the case so far, but from the perspective of a writer. Inspired by the drawings, he reflects on (the myth of) Proust and a specific vision of literary history that had been consistently created for many years.

Born in 1936 in Bordeaux, Philippe Sollers was a very prolific writer with many different interests. French readers have known him for decades; he belonged to the generation of critics which also boasts Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva. They contributed to the post-war discovery of Proust and the popularization of his works. Sollers's interest in Proust had been also shaped by the relationship with his literary mentor, François Mauriac. Mauriac was also born in Bordeaux, and he met Proust in person. Ever since *Une curieuse solitude* (1958), Sollers's debut novel dealing with memory and its role in literature, Proust had been an important writer for the French critic, even as he himself turned to more experimental forms of writing, as manifested by the rejection of traditional narrative structures, use of repeated sequences, or non-existent punctuation. However, it is not Proust as a writer of memory and regained time that Sollers was ultimately interested in, but rather, especial-

⁸ Marcel Proust, *Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn*, ed. Philippe Kolb (Paris: Gallimard, 1956). The basis for their publication was the collection of Marie Nordlinger, a British friend of Marcel Proust, whom he met in Paris in 1898. Nordlinger helped Proust translate John Ruskin's works.

⁹ Richard Bales, *Proust, and the Middle Ages* (Genève: Droz, 1975), 145.

¹⁰ See, for example, Claude Gandelman, "The drawings of Marcel Proust", *Adam International Review* 394 (1976): 21–57.

¹¹ Notes which explain the origin of each of the published drawings in the book in question were composed by Alain Nave. He is a teacher and a renowned editor of many publications on art.

¹² These documents were presented during an exhibition devoted to the origins of *In Search of Lost Time* titled *Marcel Proust, la fabrique de l'œuvre*, held at The Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris at the turn of 2022 and 2023.

ly since the launch of *Tel Quel* magazine in 1960,¹³ it was Proust as seen through the lens of Bataille's "inner experience."¹⁴ Recalling in one of the interviews from this period the famous scene from *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, in which the narrator fails to identify the memory that haunts him at the sight of the trees he passes by while riding with Mme. de Villeparisis in a carriage,¹⁵ Sollers points directly to this affiliation:

[T]hose extraordinary moments in which Proust finds himself in the presence of a world that is not a world of memory, but, one might say, a world of a kind of ecstatic fear, as well as those moments of *in-satisfaction*, [allow him] to explore a mystery that is much more compelling than moments in which he literally resurfaces the past, for example. [...] If I refer to Bataille, it is because it seems to me that there is something most essential about Proust [...], there is a certain lesson that can be drawn from Proust's total and unconditional engagement, which seems heroic, as we read his works filled with emotions which we cannot help but feel in the face of this fight which must end in death. It is a concept of the book, an attitude towards language and the world, which seems to me fully modern and interesting.¹⁶

Heroism that stems from inner experience, heroism that consists in completely surrendering one's life to one's work is not exclusively, Sollers further writes, a feature of Proust's writing. It may also be seen in the lives and work of many other writers and artists whom Sollers cherished, including Dante, Mallarmé, or Mozart. What they have in common is a critical approach to the legacy of their era as well as total dedication to their craft. Sollers was in that respect similar. He was, on the one hand, extremely, at times controversially, independent and, on the other hand, unconditionally devoted to literature. The rejection of one's legacy constitutes a paradoxical principle, which Sollers describes as "innovative regression" (16). As we will see, it will be the foundation for Sollers's memory of Proust.

The embodied gaze

Visual documents collected in *Oeil de Proust* are virtually worthless from the perspective of an art or literary historian. They are certainly not intentional works of art, as it is difficult to consider sketches on the margins of a novel as such. Respectively, copied (even, as some researchers believe, using carbon paper) engravings from Émile Mâle's work on medieval art in France,¹⁷ which Proust includes in his letters to one of his friends, are also not considered to be of significant

¹³The quarterly "Tel Quel" was a magazine strongly associated with the literary avant-garde of the 1960s, the defense of the French "nouveau roman" and generally with the promotion of texts by authors who were either less known or considered controversial at the time, such as Lautréamont, Artaud, Joyce, Bataille, Derrida, Foucault, and Barthes.

¹⁴Cf. Georges Bataille, *L'expérience intérieure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), especially the chapter: "Digression sur la poésie et Marcel Proust", 128–145.

¹⁵"I looked at the three trees; I could see them plainly, but my mind felt that they were concealing something which it could not grasp, as when an object is placed out of our reach... Where had I looked at them before?" Marcel Proust, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, trans. J. Grieves (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 2002), 297.

¹⁶Cf. *La leçon de Proust par Philippe Sollers*, a radio show made in 1963 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Swann's Way*. Transcription available at: <https://www.pileface.com/sollers/spip.php?article2597>, date of access 20 Jan. 2023.

¹⁷The art historian Émile'a Mâle is the author of *L'Art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France. Étude sur l'iconographie du moyen âge et ses sources d'inspiration* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898). The book significantly influenced the structure of Proust's novel. See on this topic: Luc Fraisse, "Du symbolisme architectural au symbolisme littéraire: Proust à l'école d'Émile Mâle", *Studia Romanica Posnaniensia* 1 (2011): 81–101.

artistic value. For this reason, as has been mentioned, they had not been of interest to previous researchers of Proust's works. Unlike Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, or George Sand who in addition to their writing were also successful artists, Proust is not considered a writer-artist. At the beginning of his essay, Sollers recalls that Proust noted with great regret that he had no artistic talent. So what status do these drawings have in relation to both the manuscript of the novel and the final published work? Do they only have documentary value? Does "Proust's eye" refer to Proust's metaphor of a book as an "optic instrument"?¹⁸ Or, as Michel Erman argues, perhaps it is an optic metaphor through which the novel's narrator reveals his repressed desires?¹⁹ It seems that Sollers abandons such idealistic interpretations of Proust's eye. In the aforementioned scene from *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, the narrator has the impression that the trees which grow by the side of the road make him identify a memory or give it a name, thus ensuring their survival:

But I saw them as ghosts from my past, beloved companions from childhood, sometime friends reminding me of shared moments. Like risen shades, they seemed to be asking me to take them with me, to bring them back to the realm of the living. In their naïve and passionate gesticulations, I read the impotent regret of a loved one who, having lost the power of speech, knows that he will never be able to let us know what he wants, and that we can never deduce his meaning.²⁰

The memory of the trees, demanding the narrator's attention, is defined by him as *dessin*, a drawing, because he wished to match (which, as we know, he failed to do) this visible "drawing" of the trees to a different, albeit vague, impression or memory. A similar scene can be found in *Oeil de Proust* when the writer tries to identify figures which appear unexpectedly between the lines of the manuscript using graphic notation (il. 1):

The hand moves across the page [...], scenes and characters are created, and from time to time a character moves between the lines, resists, inhabits the page. He is a specter that has not yet been reduced, an apparition, one conjured up during a *séance*, a grimace, a wink of the eye (8).

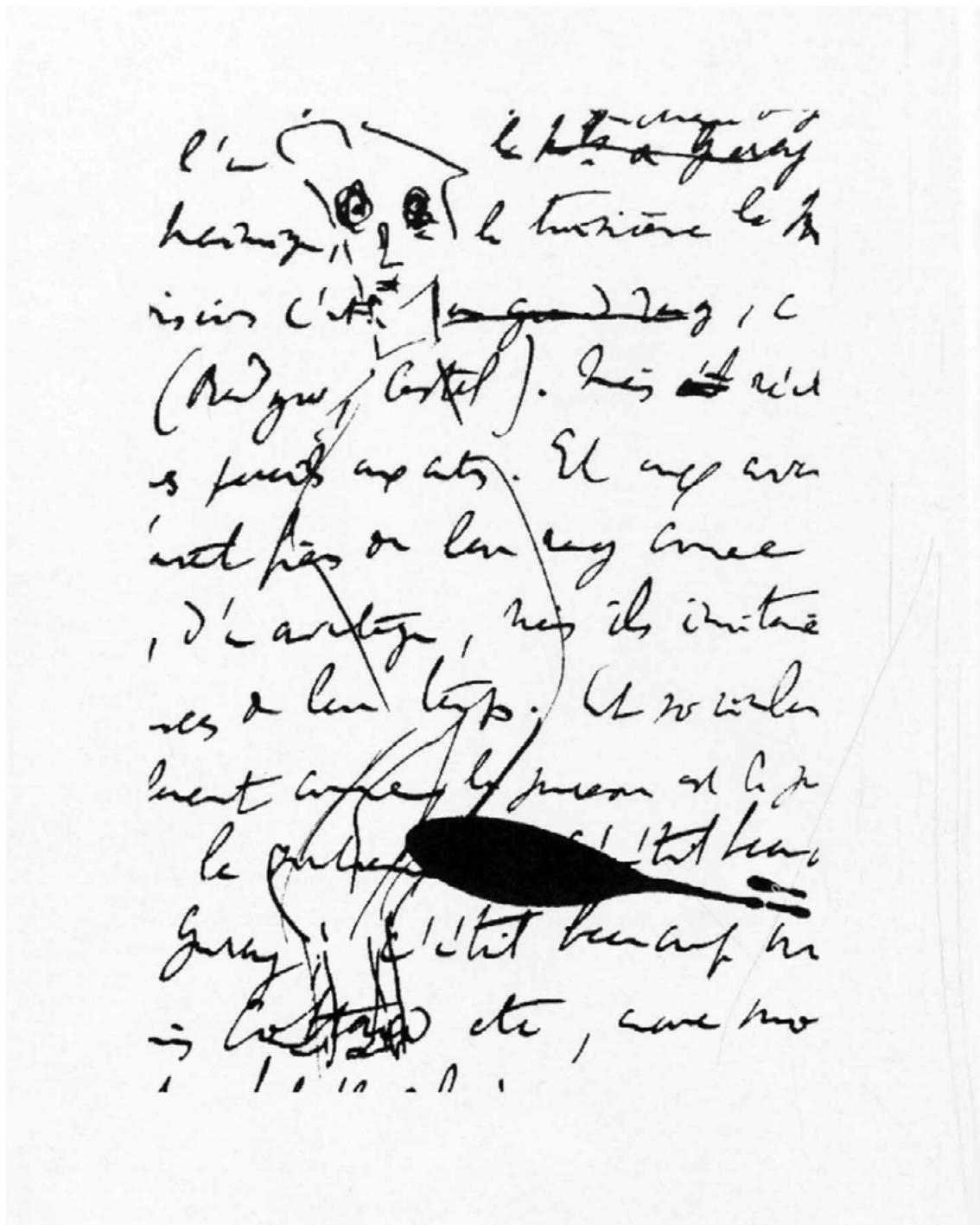
In both cases we see that the effort to capture the elusive reality is based on the internal work of memory or the work of the narrator's/author's body. At the same time, both texts make us realize that, as Sollers states in the above-mentioned radio show, "the deepest reality is the reality of internal experience [...]. It is within this experience that find the real world." Sollers finds confirmation of this observation in Proust's work; in *Time Regained* the narrator states: "I perceived that to express those impressions, to write that essential book, which is the only true one, a great writer does not, in the current meaning of the word, invent it, but, since it exists already in each one of us, interprets it."²¹ Since the book in a sense "already exists," since "literature [...] is the only life which is really lived," the role of the writer changes fundamentally: "The duty and the task of a writer are those of an interpreter." As Sollers states: "It's about reading signs, it's about deciphering, decrypting. In

¹⁸In *Time Regained* Proust writes: "The work of the writer is only a sort of optic instrument which he offers to the reader so that he may discern in the book what he would probably not have seen in himself."

¹⁹Michel Erman, *L'œil de Proust. Écriture et voyeurisme dans «A la recherche du temps perdu»* (Paris: Éditions A.-G. Nizet, 1988).

²⁰Proust, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 299.

²¹Marcel Proust, *Time Regained*, trans. Stephen Hudson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970). Henceforth quotations come from this edition.

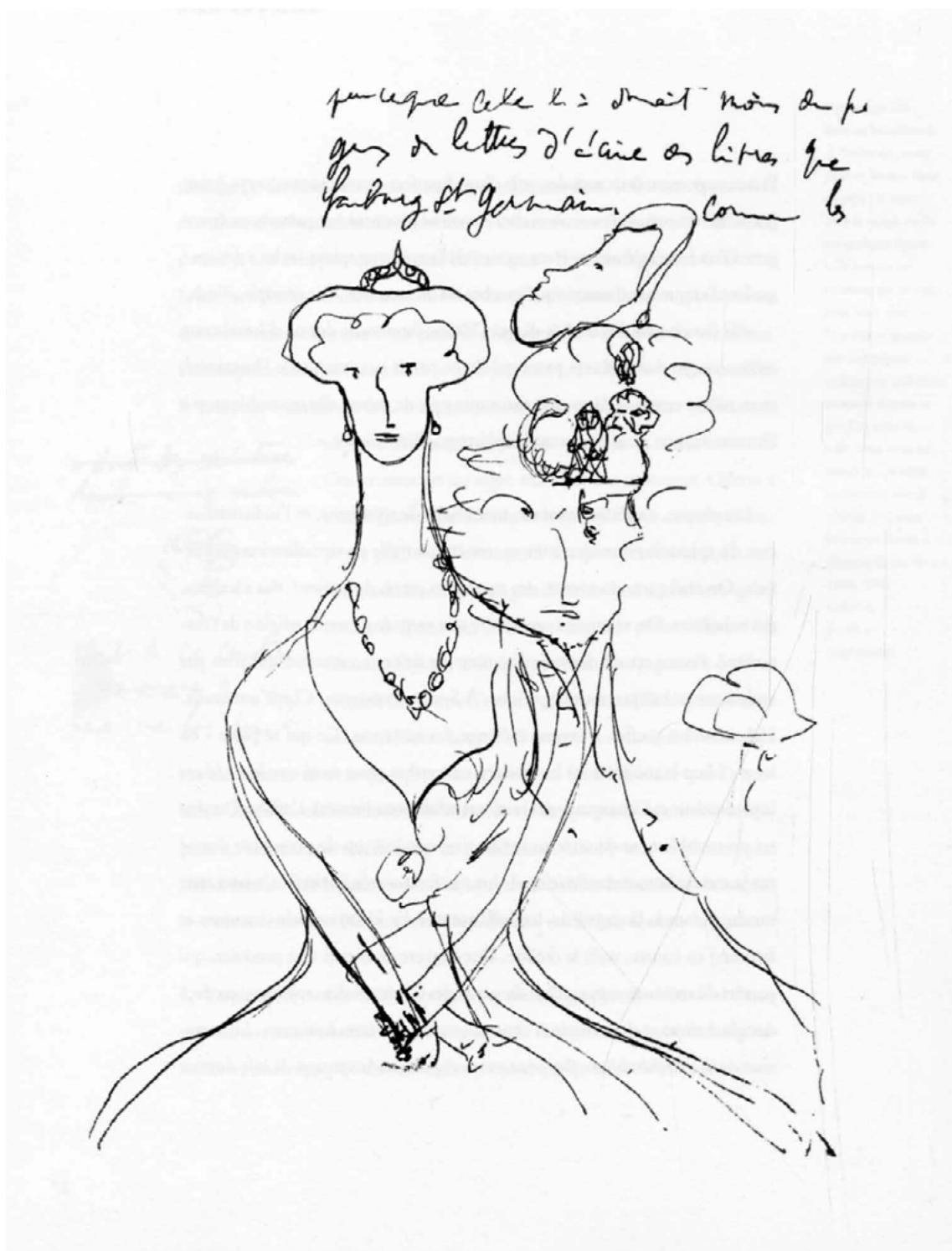


il. 1

this sense, Proust is one of the first writers, at least modern writers, who talked about it so openly.”

This observation, which brings to mind Gilles Deleuze’s famous essay,²² certainly shows that the writer is rooted in the modernist literary tradition. In *Oeil de Proust*, however, Sollers proposes

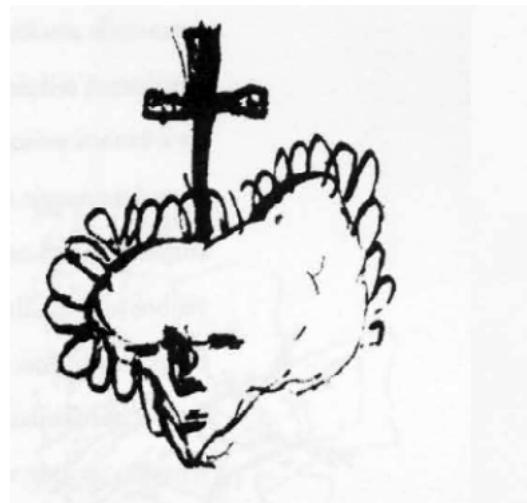
²²I have in mind Gilles Deleuze’s 1964 essay *Proust et les signes*; English edition: *Proust and signs*, trans. Richard Howard (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).



il. 2

its new version. He argues that this almost automatic form of writing, which oscillates between letters and drawings, stems from the writer's body, his seeing eye and writing hand. "Proust's hand writes constantly," Sollers states, "his brilliant brain makes use of his increasingly tired body, which has become embodied and living writing" (7). However, as we saw above, the author of *La Guerre du goût* is interested not so much in the success of this form of writing as in the

writer's attempt, or even failure, to capture inner reality (to which the titular "search," in his opinion, refers). This attempt can be seen in the unique way in which the characters are presented; the narrator shows their various aspects, or "perspectives" (11) (their appearance, gestures, and diction, which reflect their social standing or function), in the same "portrait" simultaneously. Sollers also identifies a similar way of presenting characters in some of Proust's drawings, in which the details of the characters' faces or clothes are shown fragmentarily or without observing the rules of perspective, which creates a cubist effect (il. 2).²³ By playing with the perspective and combining various "viewing angles" (8), these avant-garde drawings, which, as some critics argue, could be considered autonomous works of art,²⁴ provide a contrast to the works of art mentioned in *In Search of Lost Time* and the impressionistic scenes found in the novel. However, Sollers does not think that they are simply artistic experiments but rather manifestations of a more general principle that applies to both the drawings and the impressionistic scenes found in the novel. This principle is akin to what Bataille calls the "holocaust of words" ("L'holocauste de mots"), which marks the "immoral" horizon of poetry.²⁵ "All the different techniques are used," Sollers writes, "fragmenting, cutting, cutting out, gluing, putting back together. The truth is carved with a chisel, like a sculpture" (22). In the case of Proust's manuscripts, "immorality" does not refer to content, although there are many drawings with erotic or even sadomasochistic themes, but rather to the form – the skewed perspective, clumsy lines, and fragmentation, which makes these drawings acquire a primitive or even primeval character. In other words, Sollers seems to claim that only an "immoral" drawing, that is, a "bad" drawing, one devoid of banal beauty, may capture the elusive inner reality. This impression is intensified by some terrifying drawings, which depict, for example, a female head with a dagger in the shape of a crucifix stuck in it (il. 3), or drawings of figures with bird beaks (they represent both the subservient relations in Mme. Verdurin's salon as well as queer erotic rituals). In Proust's letters to Hahn, we also find drawings of sculptures from medieval cathedrals, whose religious symbolism is actually eliminated when Proust recognizes in them the gestures of people he knows or when he renders them erotic, referring to the intimate relationship with his friend.²⁶ This effect is further enhanced by Proust's



il. 3

²³On cubist effects in Proust's drawings see for example: Claude Gandelman, "The Artist as Traumarbeiter. On Sketches of Dreams by Marcel Proust", *Yale French Studies* 84 (1994): 131–132.

²⁴As suggested by, among others, Claude Gandelman, "Proust caricaturiste", in: *Le regard dans le texte* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1986), 124.

²⁵Bataille talks about the "holocaust of words" as a feature of poetry that rejects known and established meanings, moving towards meanings that are inaccessible to ordinary language. See: Bataille, 130.

²⁶Françoise Leriche argues that Proust's drawings in his letters to Hahn show that he could not understand the meaning of these medieval sculptures; as a result, they were read anachronically through the prism of psychologism. Cf. Françoise Leriche, "Proust's Eye", in: *Proust and the Arts*, ed. Christie MacDonald, François Proulx (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 169. Fraisse, however, notes that these drawings, inspired by the works of Emile Mâle, allow one to discover the principles of montage, a technique that played an important role in the architectural structure of the novel. Cf. Fraisse, 99.

language, filled with distortions, erotic undertones, spelling mistakes, and infantile terms of endearment or “pet names” used by the lovers.

However, Sollers mainly juxtaposes Proust’s clumsy or even primitive drawings with photography. As we know, when it first became popular at the end of the 19th century, photography was supposed to fulfill the dream of perfect artistic imitation. It was, in a sense, the opposite of what Bataille calls “a state of unfulfillment.” Still, despite its groundbreaking role in the modern era, Sollers criticizes photography. He argues that photography marks the beginning of, as Guy Debord put it half a century later, the “society of the spectacle:”

Photographs are, in fact, spiritualistic operations, and the industrialization of the spectacle is a new era of widespread virtualization. Life, death, past, present, identity, and birth will be bought and sold (17).

Sollers does not criticize photography because it imitates reality but because it is detached from physical reality.²⁷ It also establishes a new temporal order that focuses on the present and the momentary (*instantanéité*), as seen in Mme. Verdurin’s obsession with novelties. In this sense, her salon and worldly life anticipate the era of the industrialized image, which for the essayist is an era of falsehood and illusion. In the emerging new media context, Proust’s drawings, due to both their style and “immorality,” turn out to be anachronistic. As Proust’s embodied gaze, they also introduce a biographical element that points to him as both a real person and a historical persona. In one of his earlier essays, Sollers wrote:

A writer is not pure spirit, he is not born out of nothing, his family story is by all means important, just like the events around him. Biographical curiosity is completely justified, if only to show that it is based not so much on mystery (there is nothing mysterious about creation) but on living in a different way.²⁸

Described by Deleuze as the “body without organs,” the novel’s narrator finds in Proust’s archive his physical *analogon*, a real author who uses his senses to, just like an ethnologist or a biologist, register and analyze signs produced by others. In contrast to the idealistic understanding of inner life found in the modernist *Contre Sainte-Beuve*,²⁹ Sollers emphasizes the physical aspects of Proust’s gaze. The physical counters the virtual offered by the modern world:

The real novelty, therefore, is the profound renewal of the body in History. A different retina, a different eardrum, a different smell, a different taste, a different touch, a different breath. In spite of Sainte-Beuve, in fact in spite of everyone, our true self has nothing to do with the social image created by others (24).

With his, paradoxically, “outer inner eye” (9), Proust appears as someone radically different, someone who comes from a different era. He insists on the real, challenging the increasingly unreal world.

²⁷Thus, Sollers does not seem to partake in Barthes’s phenomenology of the photographic image, as expressed by the famous “it-has-been.” Cf. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 85.

²⁸Philippe Sollers, “L’écrivain et la vie”, in: *La Guerre du goût* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 324.

²⁹Proust famously wrote: “a book is a product of a different self from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices”. Marcel Proust, *By Way of Sainte-Beuve*, trans. Sylvia Townsend Warner (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), 76.

The “visor effect” and memory

This otherness, revealed in clumsy drawings, certainly confirms the myth of Proust as a solitary writer devoted entirely to his art, which is already very popular in French culture. Interpreted anew, as I have described it in the first part of this article, this myth is used by Sollers, on the one hand, to criticize the contemporary “society of the spectacle,” and, on the other hand, to stop a certain “idea of literature”³⁰ from “coming to an end,”³¹ as announced by different critics. Instead, Sollers reflects on the role played by both the novel and its author in the modern world and in literature. Indeed, for Sollers literature and culture are a site of competition or even struggle. What is at stake in this struggle is “taste” [*goût*],³² as defined by the 18th-century aesthetics. Writers and artists who do not have any partake in the massification of culture, while those brilliant few who, like Proust, wish to develop an individual style of artistic expression, see writing as the ultimate goal/meaning of life. Sollers also locates Proust in this context when he writes that:

The great question of literature, which we will understand more and more as it disappears, is not to find out “What is it about?” or “What is the story about?” but “Who tells whom?” In other words: who controls the story? (26)

However, as we already know, the quest for the new is not the goal. In *Oeil de Proust*, the idea of inner experience, which allowed Sollers to discover Proust’s anachrony in relation to his era, also seems to refer to Proust’s impact, or influence, on contemporary literature. Basically, it refers to a certain form of remembering Proust, one which goes beyond the traditional history of literature and takes into account not only the novel as a product of the writer’s imagination but above all how the writer was/is remembered. Derrida’s metaphor of the “visor effect” in which vision is combined with domination and a unique understanding of time illuminates this idea:

This spectral *someone other looks at us*, we feel ourselves being looked at by it, outside of any synchrony [...] according to an absolute anteriority [...] and asymmetry. **Here anachrony makes** the law [emphasis mine – K.T.-J.]³³

Distinguishing between the specter and the spirit, Derrida treats the specter much more materially and individually. At the same time, the French critic emphasizes the lack of historical continuity between the specter and those it observes:

To feel ourselves seen by a look which it will always be impossible to cross.³⁴

³⁰I refer to the title of Alexandre Gefen’s essay, *L’idée de la littérature: de l’art pour l’art aux écritures de l’intervention* (Paris: José-Corti, 2021).

³¹The “end of literature” has actually become a topos of both contemporary literature and literary criticism in France. See, for example, Henri Raczymow, *La mort du grand écrivain. Essai sur la fin de la littérature* (Paris: Stock, 1994); Dominique Maingueneau, *Contre Saint-Proust où la fin de la Littérature* (Paris: Belin, 1996); Antoine Compagnon, *La Vie derrière soi. Fins de la littérature* (Paris: Editions des Équateurs, 2021).

³²See in particular the collection of essays *La Guerre du goût* [War of taste].

³³Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 7.

³⁴Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

All these issues are discussed in Sollers's essay. Sollers (as has been mentioned above) belonged to the first generation of writers who could not meet Proust in person,³⁵ although he eagerly listened to the stories of people who knew the writer. In this context, the documents presented in *Oeil de Proust* seem to Sollers to be something more than a historical testimony of the writer's unique way of looking at the world.³⁶ They become a material substitute for his absence. They embody Proust's gaze, in turn structuring how we look at the world. "To see [*adopter*] through Proust's eyes," Sollers writes, "is, for example, to see that everything that is presented to us as 'new' immediately becomes obsolete; it is to see that new generations rapidly adapt to older ones without even being aware of it" (32). In the light of the previous findings, these documents even seem to challenge Proust's metaphor of the book as an "optic instrument" that was supposed to help the reader discover "what he would probably not have seen in himself." "The truth is spectral," Derrida writes, "and this is its part of truth which is irreducible by explanation."³⁷ For Sollers, Proust's spectrality seems to be related primarily to what could be described, as Derrida put it, as the "sensuous non-sensuous" of his manuscripts. The novel does not explain what life is to the reader; it is a call to action which may be found in archival documents which makes the reader chase the new and *de facto* triumph over time. Proust's lesson is ultimately an invitation to live in real time and not in the "false time of death" (48) imposed by industrialized modernity. Time regained is not time remembered, as modernist interpretations of the novel suggest, but embodied time. This "lesson" which Sollers finds in Proust's manuscripts which function as "embodied and living [life] writing" (9) reverberates in *Time Regained*. In the famous episode of "Le Bal des têtes" (death-masks' ball), the narrator looks at the faces of his old friends and notices that they have changed over time. The faces show the passage of time.

But the "visor effect," the gaze embodied in archival documents, also concerns the impact that Proust wanted to have on future generations and the way in which Sollers approached Proust's documents. Proust's letters, published posthumously, show that he actively pleaded with critics and publishers; he wanted his novel to reach a wide audience and to enter the literary canon.³⁸ Indeed, in one of his letters he is critical of his literary pastiches; he did not want to come across as a writer devoid of individual style:

For me everything was a matter of hygiene, I had to cleanse myself of my natural tendency towards idolatry and imitation. And instead of pretending to be Michelet or Goncourt [...] instead of doing it openly in the form of pastiche, I had to become Marcel Proust again when I wrote my novels.³⁹

³⁵For example, Roland Barthes, born in 1915, still during Proust's lifetime, feels this direct, almost physical bond with the writer, when he says: I was beginning to walk, Proust was still alive, finishing *À la Recherche du Temps perdu*. See Roland Barthes, *Œuvres Complètes*, volume IV, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 603. This is the caption under Barthes's photograph from March 1919.

³⁶This is how Françoise Leriche looks at Proust's drawings from a genetic perspective. He emphasizes that research on Proust's gaze and drawings is more widespread in the United States than in France, where the visual aspects of the novel itself are studied more than the author's way of looking at the world. Cf. Leriche, 161–178.

³⁷Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 87.

³⁸Proust's attempts to influence literary criticism have been discussed, among others, in the abovementioned biographical essay by Michel Schneider: *L'Auteur, l'autre. Proust et son double*.

³⁹Quote after: Yves Sandre, "Pastiche et mélange. Note sur le texte", in: Marcel Proust, «Contre Sainte-Beuve» précédé de «Pastiche et mélange» suivi d'«Essais et articles» (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Pléiade, 1971), 690.

In fact, the same can be said about *Time Regained*. The narrator reflects on the work of the painter and the writer and comes to the conclusion that writing is a form of drawing. In the context of visual documents published in *Oeil de Proust*, the following quote may be considered a trick intended to fool the reader into believing that the writer is devoid of other artistic skills:

The writer envies the painter, he would like to make sketches and notes and, if he does so, he is lost. Yet, in writing, there is not a gesture of his characters, a mannerism, an accent, which has not impregnated his memory; there is not a single invented character to whom he could not give sixty names of people he has observed, of whom one poses for a grimace, another for an eyeglass, another for his temper, another for a particular movement of the arms. And the writer discovers that if his aspiration to be a painter could not be consciously realised, he has nevertheless filled his notebook with sketches without being aware of it.⁴⁰

Sollers realizes that these efforts to remember often led to the need to conceal those aspects of Proust's biography that were socially unacceptable, especially his Jewish origin or homosexuality. However, Sollers uses them to remind himself that Proust was primarily a writer. For this reason, he views Proust's letters to Hahn, in which the writer's homosexuality was exposed and confirmed, primarily through the prism of Proust's artistic growth as a writer. Sollers does not search for biographical truth, although, as we have seen, he also recognizes the value of referring to the author as a person. Still, reduced to sensational revelations, biography belongs, in his opinion, to the order of the "spectacle." Despite the aspirations of the modern world, in which political correctness triumphs over literature, and despite attempts to turn Proust into an icon of trendy interpretations,⁴¹ Sollers sees Proust primarily as a "prophet of a new law" (48), which refers to the universal order of literature. And it is precisely in its, from today's perspective, anachronistic understanding as well as more generally in the paradoxical "innovative regression" (16) of literature and art, that, in his opinion, there lies a common principle which structures the community of artists and writers. It is "outside of any synchrony," in "[...] true, living and vertical, history of art and literature; a movable ladder which you can traverse in both directions."⁴²

Summary: Archival fiction

In *Oeil de Proust*, which transcends genetic criticism, Proust's drawings are read as material records of the way in which Proust was/is remembered. The title of the essay, in which the eye intersects, as we have seen, with the idea of power, also refers to the memory of the writer's actual eyes, which supposedly could reveal his Jewish origin.⁴³ Entangled in this "unfulfilled fulfillment of modernity,"⁴⁴ which the specter ultimately is, Sollers activates different literary

⁴⁰Proust, *Time Regained*.

⁴¹In his essay, Sollers alludes to Cultural Studies, and specifically to Gay and Lesbian Studies, which he treats essentially as a manifestation of American pragmatism.

⁴²Philippe Sollers, *La Guerre du goût* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 9.

⁴³Paul Desjardin, a schoolmate of the Proust brothers, described Marcel Proust as "a young gazelle-eyed Persian prince with sleepy eyelids." Cf. Jean Recanati, *Profils juifs de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1979), 9.

⁴⁴Momro, 8.

and cultural associations connected with the legacy of modernism (whose, let us add, favorite body part was the eye⁴⁵) and uses his authority as a writer to comment on it in the context of literature. By blurring the boundary between document and literature, he abandons the modernist “phantasm of origin” (Momro), which in Proust’s case meant that these drawings were considered worthless. Sollers does not provide the reader with conclusive interpretations of Proust’s archives; still, especially in its material dimension, the French critic’s book is also included in the Proustian “corpus,” and two meanings of the word are at play here, in terms of both the body and the text. When read outside the strictly historical context, these drawings are open to various interpretations, in line with Derrida’s observations about the archive: “There is no meta-archive. [...] The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out for the future.”⁴⁶ As such, they do not only preserve the memory of the writer but also the memory of the “idea” of “literature.” Indeed, as Jean-Luc Nancy said: “the art we call ‘contemporary’ is not simply art from the present day. It is called ‘contemporary because [...] [i]t inherits only the enigma borne by this word—art [...].”⁴⁷ And perhaps it is a certain idea of literature that is ultimately the specter that haunts Sollers.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁴⁵Tomasz Swoboda writes wonderfully about this topic in his book *Historie oka* [Stories of the eye] (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2013).

⁴⁶Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 68.

⁴⁷Jean-Luc Nancy, *Portrait*, trans. S. Clift and S. Sparks (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018). Quote after Momro, 18–19.

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KEYWORDS

Philippe Sollers

MARCEL PROUST

Georges Bataille

ABSTRACT:

This article analyzes an essay by the contemporary French writer Philippe Sollers in which Sollers analyzes Marcel Proust's drawings found in the French writer's private letters and manuscripts. I draw on Sollers's notion of "inner experience," which he, in turn, borrowed from Georges Bataille, and discuss the idealistic interpretations of Proust's eye/gaze as found in the metaphor of the book as an "optic instrument." Then, referring to the Derridean category of "the specter," I analyze the significance of Proust's drawings for the understanding of his legacy in contemporary literature.

Jacques Derrida

specter

ARCHIVE

inner experience

OKO

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