

I'll get rid of my body

On Marcin Koszałka's and Jerzy Nowak's *Being*

SEBASTIAN LISZKA

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.

Oscar Wilde

There is a motion present both in nature and in human being that is always crossing the borders and that could be reduced only in small part.

Georges Bataille

Malicious tongues say that these days the hundreds of dead artists, authorities, scientists etc. buried in Krakow have more to say than those who actually live and work in Krakow nowadays. Krakow as seen in Marcin Koszałka's documentary is a dirty city with cracked, old buildings; this unpleasant view is far from the well known postcard pictures of colourful, renaissance sights. Even the views of Old Town Market Square or Wawel Castle seem intentionally spoiled by elements such as antennas, devastated roofs or poles around the Cracovia Stadium. The buildings and interiors filmed are dark, with little sunlight coming in through dirty windows, and mouldy green is the dominating colour they are filled. This image of a decaying city covered with mould, lichen, a film of humidity and age is similar to the way Luchino Visconti created his image of Venice. These unfamiliar views of Krakow make the symbolic borderlines of the story told in the film.

Jerzy Nowak is an actor. To be more specific it should be emphasized that he's an actor who had spent sixty years of his artistic carrier in Krakow. In his stage work as well as in the films he worked for the best Polish directors of his times: Swinarski, Wajda, Kieślowski. Still, Nowak laughs when he says that Koszałka's documentary is the first film in which he is about to be the main character. The collaboration of these two artists – the old actor and a relatively young filmmaker – results, according to press materials, from a common obsession: death. Nowak defines his obsession as the obsession with what he calls “the ultimate verdict”, an exact date of one's death encrypted and hidden in some special place or dimension. Koszałka is also obsessed with the idea of death, but it is death meant as a scandal of disintegration. His obsession concentrates on the fury death carries within itself when interrupting an average order of everyday existence, causing neurosis and anxiety. Those slightly different and partly shared views are the two poles between which the field of what is being said in the movie was created.

The final effect of this collaboration (which lasted for more than a year) was surprising to many. The film was expected to be scandalous and, as in Koszałka's previous film projects, breaking social taboos. Before the release there were also some voices criticizing Jerzy Nowak. The idea that the director will be with his character to his very last moments, filming his last months and consequently – his dying, with a final image of an autopsy performed on the actor's body as a lesson on medical academy – that seemed to many as morbid, disgracing, and outrageous. What *Being* was expected to be was simply an image of disrespect to human dignity, a proof of the main character's mental disease and/or an act of violence on the ethical standards of documentary film maker and the actor's profession.

The film opens with a view of Zakrzówek – a lagoon with an artificial lake created in a former quarry. Divided into exact halves, the frame shows deep water reflecting the sky. The camera is sweeping around in vertical motion from right to left – this type of motion is obviously alluding to the *contra passu*: moving counterclockwise, inversely, *contra naturam*. In such counterclockwise direction Dante was wandering through the infernal world. The association with Dante is not very far off as the next scene is an impressive presentation of the exhibits from the Florentine Museo La Specola. Images of beautiful, perfect bodies the colour of alabaster, opened and showing their viscera, intestines, femoral veins prepares the viewer for the strongest visual element in the film, that is the first scene taken in the Institute of Anatomy. In the Institute corpses immersed in formalin are kept in special steel tubs, a poor equivalent to sarcophagus. Bodies kept in the Institute are nothing like the Italian exhibits. As an employee of the Institute presents one of the cadavers we see that they make for an unpleasant view; they're darkened, shrunken, and appear wizened. The employee quickly washes the excess of formalin from the body and immediately covers the cadaver with a rag.

Then we see Jerzy Nowak. He is filmed during the summer holidays he spent with his wife. Next scenes link together in a kind of quasi-symbolic order: we see the actor while he's passing a bridge, when he's awkwardly trying to row the boat or walking in slow motion, as if he was about to face his final destination; the last frame shows him asleep. The impact of these very clear images grows even stronger as we hear Jerzy Nowak chatting naively with his wife Maria about life after death; Mrs. Nowak discusses her fear of the presumably imminent death of her husband, who is much older than she is. Simultaneously the actor is explaining the very core of his obsession. Those sincere and intimate confessions are divided by moments of the couple glancing at one another in mute silence. Once the Nowaks return from their holidays, Mr. Nowak has an appointment with a lawyer, during which Nowak declares his will to donate his dead body for scientific purposes. We learn (at the same time as he learns it) that once the body is donated it is also "discharged from any material use". We can presume that this is a kind of allusion that the body will be excluded from any symbolic use. It will be out of the market, out of what is common, and out-of-joint (using Jacques Derrida's term). In such a case the funeral understood as a symbolic exchange between the dead person and his relatives, can only take a ritualistic, symbolic form. The actor nods – accepting what he just heard.

Back in the Institute of Anatomy we can see further stages of the procedure. The corpses are covered and taken to another room. And in the another room we see another important person entering it, namely professor Konstanty Ślusarczyk,

a lecturer of the Institute. Camera focuses alternately on his face and his disfigured body. In this scene Professor is giving a lecture. He states that in the Institute death is useful and meaningful, that this is a place in which a person's death gives one the opportunity to teach others how to save a human life. His speech concentrates on the essence of the medical profession, which he sees as sharing medical knowledge that can save a life. And that it would be impossible without corpses being donated to the Institute.

In the next scene Nowak visits his parents' grave. He is visibly stirred. We learn that this is the place where he is likely to be buried. Then he talks to his friend, the composer Zygmunt Konieczny. Their conversation clarifies the question of the origin of the musical theme repeated throughout the movie. It is a melody composed by Konieczny to the collage of Stanisław Wyspiański's ¹ poems. First we see the composer playing the theme on the piano, then we hear it performed by an orchestra in the studio, where the recording is being finalised.

The scene is cut with an intermission during which we are taken back in time. We can see Nowak training a candidate before an exam to the Krakow State Drama School. Then the scene smoothly shifts to a recording of a poem in a studio. Both the girl wanting to be an actress and the woman working as a radio presenter are not able to meet Nowak's expectations as to the interpretation of the poem. Suddenly, a musical piece appears with a rapid cut – camera is back in the Institute. Nowak is talking to professor Ślusarczyk. The professor briefs the actor on the procedures applied to the treatment of donated corpses.

The images that follow are rather surprising. Another interlocutor of our character is Jerzy Turbasa, a famous tailor. The conversation about choice and cut of a suit to be made in Mr Turbasa's workshop, runs in a calm and reflexive manner. Mr. Nowak needs a suit for his church wedding ceremony. The quiet, filled with simplicity and intensive emotions scene taken during the ceremony in the small church seems so different from what might have been expected by the spectator.

Nowak, just like the Little Prince from popular Antoine Saint-Exupery's novel, is visiting other places, other planets inhabited by friends. He pays a visit to his fellow actor Jerzy Adamski who is in a nursing house. The scene consist of a number of situations filmed during this visit. Adamski, an old man abandoned by his family tells his life-story remembers the years of his professional activity. He's also recites a poem by Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński ². At the same time the dramatic tension of the scene is obtained by moments of meaningful silence, maybe embarrassing for spectators yet natural for these two people who had known one another for years. Another scene depicts New Year's Eve party mixed with images from Konstanty Ślusarczyk's class. Ślusarczyk, together with his students is examining the cadavers while continuing his speech on the basics of medical ethics.

Just after the New Year's day, Nowak visits another long-time friend, director and screenwriter Andrew Konic. At the moment Konic is staying at a sanatorium, grieving for his late son. To distract those mournful thoughts Nowak tells the director about the journey he recently made to Bogorodchany in Ukraine, the place where he was raised. The actor's father once was a mayor of the city. Instead of sentiment, Nowak's impressions are filled with bitterness: the land of his childhood is lost forever. And even though he met some people who still remembered those who used to live in Bogorodchany before the war, their memories are just plain

words. The images of the journey are introduced as a retrospective and partially substitute the spoken part of the story. Memories are also represented in arranged, black and white images depicting the interiors of Mayor's Office and its facade. Back in the sanatorium we see Konic commenting his friend's story with an opinion that such journeys are against the natural continuum of being, that they are only disturbing.

Next is the sequence of frames showing Nowak at the church or undergoing a specialist CT scan. The image of Nowak's motionless face is again somehow associated with the presence of death, passing, mortality. This impression is even stronger as it is followed by the frame from inside the Institute of Anatomy, where another body had just been delivered and now is being prepared. The viewers might very well think that it is the body of Jerzy Nowak. Then the series of shots: Nowak acknowledging professor Ślusarczyk for his help during the making the film. A prepared corpse is being immersed in a vat full of formalin. Students are taking their exam, body parts used during it are being put in special containers, some are thrown away as medical waste. Nowak is on a merry-go-round, he is watching his reflection in distorting mirrors, strolling with a little boy (probably his grandson).

The film is concluded with two scenes. The remains of the body used in the Institute are being put in a coffin. The remains are iso light that two gravediggers carry the coffin with no trace of weariness. The second frame is metaphorical: it presents Jerzy Nowak falling into a shallow swimming pool and swimming in it.

Although getting the permission to film an autopsy and anatomy class was not easy, we are not actually told that these scenes show something which is not usually meant to be seen by anyone except the very exclusive group of students and lecturers. Medicine is still an exceptional domain of knowledge accessible to only the few. It is also exceptional for it is a kind of combination of science, philosophy and art. The secrecy of medical knowledge is visible in some regulations present in statutes of many universities. It is quite usual that attending forensic medicine classes is restricted to medicine students only while all the other lectures are open to the public. For centuries the Catholic church had laws punishing any kind of examination of the dead human body. Nowadays, when medical art is no longer in danger of this kind, these regulations have only symbolic, ethical meaning. They suggest clearly that the dignity of human existence, including the dignity of the human body, requires special treatment and that cadavers should not be exposed only to satisfy one's curiosity.

Let this brief encounter with medical discourse mark our first attempt to deal with analysis of the meaning of Koszałka's work. I would like to focus on one gesture, that is on the movement of professor Ślusarczyk's hand leading his student's hand, showing her the way inside the human body. They are getting inside the human being. This transgression is one of a complex nature, as the cadaver is no longer a human being, a person, yet it is still a sign of human being, as the body is what remains of a man who passed away. Even more important is that the body was donated voluntarily by a person who believed in the sense of scientific research. The professor's speech discussing those matters, is distorted by the disfigurement of his body, the speech itself is also chaotic, but it only makes what is said sound deeper. These simple words contain the very essence of the idea of humanism, the core idea of medicine as an art of saving human life is accompanied by

the simple observation that the use of donated bodies, learning through exploring real human organism may be the only good thing resulting from one's death. The image of the Professor's crippled body bent down over cadavers might be seen as a symbolic figure, a modern *Pietà*. I suppose that it is no other way to describe this scene than by evoking the idea of the sublime.

The classical model of the sublime, as described by Burke and Kant³, states that there is a relation between it and the subject; first it terrifies the subject and overpowers it, then the influence of it stimulates the rise of the inner power which is finally to overcome the impact of the external. The sublimation as described above is present in different moments during the movie and is a power that elicits and establishes several different subjects. One of them is of course the Professor who works with corpses on day-to-day basis, another is Jerzy Nowak who is shown the cadavers inside the tubs; the third subject is the spectator himself, who is also the first subject forced to be confronted with the view of the cadavers. The shocking impact of discussed images is reduced by Koszałka as the first images to be seen present wax anatomical figures from the Florentine museum and only after that, one sees a corpse being literally thrown onto the dissecting table. Emotionally stirred by what is witnessed, the spectator experiences a kind of awakening. Yet it would be wrong to state that this awakening is provoked by the sudden presence of the figure of death coming from extra-diagenetic order and its consequences. The main stimulus is the eye-contact with the dead, abandoned bodies. Cadaver seems left behind, an object with no form; an anonymous corpse reveals its ontological independence from the human body. There is no isomorphism between a cadaver and the living body, between the human body and the body left behind, or quoting Adam Mickiewicz, the body one "took off".

Further procedures seen in the film, which are: the detailed explanations given by a lawyer, Nowak's act of signing away his own body, meeting the Professor and listening to his explanations about the procedures applied in the Institute of Anatomy, and finally burying what is left of the body after it was used in the Institute, reveal great effort of many people who are making their best to create a proper order in the situation of the renunciation of the body. "Getting rid of", "abandoning", "renunciation" – no matter how we call this act, what matters is the fact that this entire process is modern and secular, it is being carried out by specialists and described in specialist discourses of medicine, ethics and law. What happens, happens between the people, it is designed by the people for the people, all of those regulations and procedures are free of the element of the sacrum. The lack of the supernatural, or the agnostic (or merely atheistic) character of Nowak's decision might be surprising as it is not usual for this kind of narrative to be free of religious aspects.

The idea of the body, as it is discussed in the movie, is never associated with the idea of divine creation. More, there is not a single word about the sense, vocation or even soul. Finally, there is a question of the title; the word "being" is ambiguous, there are no obvious clues how to establish correlations between the language of metaphysics and this concrete film. This being present in every aspect of the film and connecting these dimensions altogether into one whole is neither something which makes the situations and problems meaningful, nor is it an instrument of sublimation, nor even is it a source of any help. Being is just a bare

fact (one of the characters calls it an “average human thing”). This intensity of the circumferential reality was developed by strict and very original organization of space. Everything we witness is taking place in Krakow⁴ with the highest point on the top of the tower of Saint Mary’s church and the lowest being the surface of the lake on Zakrzówek (there is also the surface of the shallow pool Nowak is swimming through – we’ll say more about this scenes below). The space narrowed to one single city is a factor of the limitations of existence, still at the same time it is also a factor of metaphorical image of human existence. Yet this metaphorical process consists of what is not seen on the surface; it is a creation of inclusive space, out of worldly order, in a way a-temporal, surely not related to current social and political situation. There’s no way this space could be an arena for any human *agon* with Fate, Life, Meaning, God, Evil or Good. Neither is this space filled with lacking; it is not the world abandoned by God, a world coming to its end, marked with some kind of an error, craving or longing. The film is nothing more than a pure record of reality as it was visible. Death and leaving are natural and specifically human domains. Opposite to Walter Benjamin’s idea there is no difference between the matter of what is being lived-through and the matter of experience⁵. Continuous presence of death combined with specific course of time make this film also impossible to be interpreted as just an illustration of Heideggerian idea of *sein-zum-Tode*. All such attempts to dissolve the being (and the Being) in the meta-theoretical philosophical discourse or to over-interpret the movie are prevented by just one sentence we hear from one of the characters: *It is life that counts, life itself and only life*. One might say that the quoted sentence sounds trite. Maybe that is true, still this one sentence makes any unilateral interpretations impossible to develop.

As we can see from the above, what seems to be important (not only as corporeality) is the relation established between the man – the body – the cadaver. The entire film is based on this fundamental difference between Jerzy Nowak – the human being and Jerzy Nowak’s body. The importance of Nowak’s profession – it is clear that he’s a prominent actor – remains an open question. As an actor Nowak has strong difficulties with remaining neutral to the camera, he can’t help to stop acting, performing, the documentary character of the film once in a while is being disrupted. It is clearly visible in the scenes showing conversations. Voices of Nowak’s interlocutors sound more natural and they are not as clear as the voice of an actor who sounds clear and strong even when what he is saying are platitudes and clichés. The director from time to time attempts to subordinate Nowak to the camera, for example in quasi-transitions when Nowak is inefficiently rowing the boat, passing the bridge, staring into the space with an empty look on his face, in the moments of mute silence, finally – when he is asleep. The distinction separating an actor from a person, a performer from someone filmed in neutral situations is hard to mark. This duality results in scenes filmed incorrectly from the point of view of a documentalist; among others, such premeditated mistakes are made in the scene of Nowak’s conversation with Konic (Nowak’s pose is dramatic, unnatural) or in those sequences when daily routine is being presented without any commentary – the commentary is made by the spectator, inside his own head.

Polyphonic, varied narrative is one of Marcin Koszałka’s hallmarks. In *Being* this complexity is almost garish, as there is one more dimension added on the meta-level of the film language. I mean the fact that *Being* is also a film depicting the

making of a film. One hears Nowak discussing a film on his dying, witnesses his chatting with the composer about the soundtrack composed for that movie, that film is a subject of the conversation between Nowak and Konic. Also the mentioned above non-documentary, fully directed sequences showing the District Office in Bogorodchany, Nowak alone, Nowak in the pool – they all seem to be materials made for that “other” film. That “other” film was sure never meant to be really made; the non-existing film widely criticized a year before it was released; film which some journalists warned about before anyone had even seen it.

Of course there are other ways to define Koszałka's film technique. There is something very specific about his strategy of making things visible. Koszałka's idea is to show something by not-showing it; not-showing becomes showing-otherwise. Let us once again recollect opening frames presenting naturalistic wax models of bodies revealing their insides. They are shocking – but only for a while. They are like real, yet they are not real at all. This confrontation with paradoxical representation is neutralizing the shock caused by the view of real corpse just a while later. Similar means are used to present Zakrzówek. The landscape around the lake is dark, formidable, it immediately brings one to thoughts of death and Nowak's obsession with “the ultimate verdict”. And all of a sudden those sinister, gruesome pictures are replaced with the images from inside of the church where the Nowaks are getting married. Framed this way frightening visions are no longer disturbing. There are several scenes in which the director pans the spectator. For example the scene where it appears that we are witnessing the moment of Nowak's death and yet in the next scene Nowak is still alive and apparently in a very good shape. There is enough of such scenes to elicit intended effect, but there are no more than it is necessary. It is really impossible to accuse Koszałka of any kind of excess.

Being conceals one more mystification: apparently Koszałka is directing his narrative in a way that suggests that Jerzy Nowak is dead. From this point Koszałka is creating a suggestive illusion of himself being left alone with all the collected material while his character is no longer alive, like the director was the keeper of the memory Jerzy Nowak. Ambivalence that results from such a manipulation is at the very core of the entire film.

Alongside with the slow passing of Jerzy Nowak another passing takes place. We can easily identify Nowak with a cultural code that does not exist outside of Nowak's generation. Nowak himself is very kind in an old fashioned way, the reverence he treats women with is from another time, another world that passed and is never to return. If we look closely we may find many other signs of presence of this cultural formation. We find those signs on the surface (for example Konieczny was a long time collaborator with the legendary cabaret Piwnica pod Baranami), in our associations (cadavers look just like the mannequins created by Tadeusz Kantor for his spectacles in the so called “theatre of death” period), finally, in the deep layers of cultural continuum with roots in the first three decades of 20th century – in meditations on the time lost echoing Marcel Proust or Bruno Schulz. Presented contexts all belong to a highly modernistic paradigm, and as such they mark the film itself, its aesthetics and characters. But there is something unusual about the kind of modernism emanating through Koszałka's documentary. What I would like to emphasise is the role of life, of living. Different aspects of vitality are hardly noticeable, they are distributed throughout the film but remain fundamental to its

meaning. They are also not entangled in external contexts: Stanisław Wyspiański's poem recited several times is not a key to the hermetic, hidden meaning or a message encoded in the web of signs. It is not a code of substitution; it is a code legible to the people portrayed in the movie, it is their private way of communicating with one another and if it remains unclear, unexplained that is because it has nothing to do with the subject of the film. Still, it is what represents life itself: vivid speech, communication, sharing of a cultural code. The aesthetics of the visual are also convergent with the state of characters' consciousness. Koszałka remained deeply aware of the importance of compatibility between different layers of work.

Nowak's point of view is revealed widely in the Ukrainian sequence. Nostalgia accompanying the recollection of the journey is contrasted with tough recapitulation that what is gone is gone forever, there is no way back to the world as it was. In Wyspiański's words:

*It is such a long time since I've given up
On dreams of the paradise lost* ⁶.

In my opinion this imagination, with no doubt founded on modernistic base, is not of modernistic genus. Its genesis reaches further than modernism, romanticism or 18th century enlightenment. It is more of what notable historian of Polish literature, late professor Jan Błoński named a "stubborn persistence of the baroque". Baroque as a category of cultural order seems to me as relevant to symbolic structure of *Being* for several reasons. Nowak, for instance, it is suggested, descends from an aristocratic, noble family. Highly rhetorical character of depicted relations between people, their meaningful gestures, theatrical form of expression – that is clearly what is inherited from baroque. From this point of view Nowak's childish deliberations on heaven and hell sound as entwined with morbid and ludicrous poetry of Józef Baka ⁷.

Although we are still discussing a documentary it is obvious that the film, containing several feature elements, might be as well analysed as a work of art. By shedding light on the baroque patterns in the narrative we reveal other spheres of meaning. What is fictional and what is documentary grow from one root. All the scenes, one by one, might be seen as a motion picture of *danse macabre*. Every single person one sees is involved in the great chain of death, an ageing actor as well as the student of medicine learning to consider cadaver not as a piece of dead meat, but material remainder of human existence. Baroque *modi* of creating and re-creating the reality are based on acts of saving material aspect of things and happenings from perishing. Ananke, the goddess of fate and necessity is not welcomed to this world. Yet she is waiting calmly for the right time to come. She is waiting on the edge of the swimming pool.

The last scene of *Being* needs a separate periphrasis. The camera, submerged in the shallow pool, is observing Jerzy Nowak as he is falling into the water with his whole body, swimming using his arms and then just drifting peacefully. This scene is mesmerizing. It is hard to forget. It makes a splendid coda sewing all the elements of the film together and also saving it from sinking in modernistic mannerism. This image establishes third great metaphor of life present in Koszałka's film. The first is the idea of life as a theatre, of living-as-performing (emphasis on

performative acts such as getting married or signing a will). The second metaphor is the image of life as a great journey (Nowak visiting his close ones, friends and relatives, the living and the dead). Swimming creates the third and final metaphor.

Nowak's body, tacit, inconspicuous and small resembles a tadpole or a tiny frog drifting on the surface. An allusion to Wisława Szymborska's poem *In Heraclitus' River* might seem far too obvious:

In Heraclitus' river
a fish fishes for a fish,
a fish quarters a fish with a sharp fish,
a fish builds a fish, a fish lives in a fish,
a fish escapes from a besieged fish.

In Heraclitus' river
a fish loves a fish,
your eyes – says she – glitter like fishes in the sky,
I want to swim together with you to the common sea,
oh, most beautiful of the school of fish.

In Heraclitus' river
a fish invented a fish beyond fish,
a fish kneels before a fish, a fish sings to a fish,
asks a fish for an easier swim.

In Heraclitus' river
I, the sole fish, I, a fish apart
(say, from the fish tree and the fish stone)
at certain moments tend to write small fish
in silver scales so briefly,
that could it be the darkness is winking in embarrassment? ⁸

According to the poet, “the other fish” from Heraclitus' river, same as any other fish is able only to designate the borderlines of its own existence. Quoting Szymborska's poem we face the question of the form of existence as shown in the last scene of *Being*. One could see it as Heideggerian throwing a being into its existence, no matter that it is shallow and monochrome as it is the only possible one. On the other hand, the scene could be understood as a negative epiphany – or an epiphany of negativity. As such it shall be nothing more but a manifestation of emptiness or nonentity. There is no (deep or illusionary) truth to be unveiled, nothing to learn, not a single clue which way to go.

But the super-mundane, celestial post-modern beauty of this scene contains a suggestion to take the opposite direction. Distorted, diffused light, focusing on the aura, laying emphasis on the unsaid and then darkening – all these means are used to multiply possible meanings instead of giving any definite answers. Final frames reunite what was divided, it is an act of repealing (the Hegelian *Aufhebung*). *Being* is merged into one, even if it turns out to be absurd. Reunion of all aspects of being as we see it is not a metaphysical conclusion. Conclusions do not fold in any ethical or metaphysical project. It is just a story of being, a story of one old

body in its last days and as such, Koszałka's work finds a way to every single spectator unless he lost his ability to remain sensitive. The kind of sensitivity need is left undefined. We do not know whether it is absolute, religious, ethical or aesthetic? Those questions are left unanswered.

What more can one expect from a documentary?

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¹ Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907) was a Polish playwright, poet, painter and architect. As one of the main early modernists (he was a member of Young Poland movement) and a devoted patriot Wyspiański created symbolistic, often hermetic works. His stage writings and poetry concentrate on national themes and frequently have prophetic character. Wyspiański spent his life in Krakow. His major drama, *Acropolis* is a series of visionary, mythological and biblical scenes taking place inside the King's Chapel on the Wawel Castle.

² Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński (1905-1953) was a notable Polish poet of 30s and 50s. In his youth Gałczyński was close to the right-wing, fascist movement. After being released from the stalag and coming back to Poland Gałczyński became loyal to new authorities and wrote several poems in the socialist realist convention. Czesław Miłosz depicted Gałczyński in his famous *Captive Mind* as “Delta”. One of Gałczyński's most acclaimed poems, *Magical Carriage* is a love poem set in Krakow; the city is described as place of magic and wonder.

³ See also: I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement. Second Book: Analytic of the Sublime*, translated with Introduction and Notes by J. H. Bernard, 2nd ed. revised, London 1914. Kant defines such *stimulation* as *affections* (*energetic, sensitive*) and *feelings* (*brave or gentle*). Burke's idea of sublime is connected with what Kant would call a negative affection: the *urge for self-preservation* and *fear* and as it is so, what is sublime is connected to what is *empirical*. As we can see in the description above, mentioned scene contains a suggestion of co-existing of both aspects of death being at the same time two sources of sublime: Kant's

transcendental and Burke's *empirical* sublimation.

⁴ Although the Institute of Anatomy is actually in Zabrze, not in Krakow, as well as the sanatorium where Nowak was visiting Andrzej Konic is in a different city, yet it is not indicated in any way.

⁵ See also: W. Benjamin, *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire* in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften. Band I.1, Herausgegeben von Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser*, Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt am Main, 1974. According to Benjamin, an *event* can be assumed for consciousness only *momentarily*, that is without any relation to the space-time and as such it is something close to the *shock*. It is clear that when it comes to *Being* no such thing occurs and yet we're still coping with modern and secular vision of reality.

⁶ S. Wyspiański, *Wybór poezji*, Kraków 1979, p. 19. Trans. by M. Placzek.

⁷ Józef Baka (1707-1780) was a Jesuit priest and a prominent author of highly imaginative, usually strictly rhymed poetry. His writings consist rhymed treatise on death, several latin occasional poems composed for Baka's protectors, commentaries on Loyola's works and many other. In the past misunderstood and recognised as ridiculous scribbler, nowadays Baka is considered to be an author of masterpieces of Polish and Lithuanian baroque.

⁸ Translated by Joanna Trzeciak, source <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1221626.ece> (accessed: 16.12.2013). Compare bilingual edition: W. Szymborska, *Nothing Twice. Selected Poems / Nic dwa razy. Wybór wierszy*, transl. S. Barańczak, C. Cavanagh, Kraków 1997, pp. 52-53.