

Paweł Stangret

Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego (PL)

ORCID: 0000-0002-5162-4804

Machines for Communication

New Media and New Theatre in Avant-Garde Conceptions

Abstract

The Avant-Garde art of the beginning of the twentieth century had its nascence alongside that of the mass media. The parallelism of the languages of these two phenomena is also important for the modern perception of performativity, which has been reflected in modern theories of theatre. The new media fascinated modern artists because they created completely new styles of communication. New media changed the sender–receiver relations, particularly in the context of demands, explicit in manifestos of avant-garde art (especially of the theatre), of the participation of the viewer and audience. However, the most important issue of the avant-garde fascination with new media is their mechanical nature. The avant-garde saw in the machine its performative capabilities. The article, whilst addressing issues seemingly widely analyzed, specifically draws out a connection between poetry and

theatre manifestos to show an avant-garde conception of art which is very similar to observations on contemporary media.

Keywords

Avant-Garde, machine, modern theatre, media

Abstrakt

Nowe Media i Nowy Teatr w koncepcjach awangardy

Twórczość awangardowa z początku XX wieku zbiegła się chronologicznie z powstającymi wówczas masowymi mediami. Bliskość i pokrewieństwo języków tych dwóch zjawisk jest istotne również dla postrzegania nowoczesnej widowiskowości, co znalazło odzwierciedlenie w koncepcjach teoretycznych nowoczesnego teatru. Awangardiści fascynowali się mediami, bo wytworzyły one nowe sposoby komunikacji. Media zmieniły charakter relacji nadawczo-odbiorczych, głównie w kontekście obecnego w manifestach nowej sztuki (a zwłaszcza teatru) postulatu uczestnictwa zarówno widza, jak i publiczności. Najważniejszym aspektem awangardowej fascynacji mediami jest ich mechaniczny charakter. Awangarda dostrzegła w maszynie jej potencjał performatywny. Artykuł porusza kwestie, które były często opisywane, jednak, wskazując na związek między poezją a manifestami teatralnymi, przedstawia podobieństwo awangardowej koncepcji sztuki do współczesnych mediów.

Słowa kluczowe

awangarda, maszyna, teatr nowoczesny, media

The avant-garde creativity of the early twentieth century coincided chronologically with the emergence of the mass media. This emergence of a new art was the result of the start of a new culture in which one of the main elements was the epitome of novelty as a positive category. In addition to artistic concepts that found their audience (despite many critics), technical inventions were also created at the time, which quickly became mass marketed. A similar process involved new media. A situation arose in which culture had to internalize hitherto unknown phenomena and objects. Hence, a situation arose that provoked novelty, to which it was impossible to remain indifferent. This is well illustrated by Andre Breton's famous statement that from then on no one would write the sentence "the Marquise left at 5 p.m." in a novel. One can see in this the typical insolence of the avant-garde artist and activist and, at the same time, a new situation for which even a modern artist has no explanation. This remains today's culture, and new-art artists also know not how to respond to this reality.

Such an idea of art lies very close to the development of media—hitherto unknown means of communication emerging and made possible by modern technological inventions. The main thesis of this argument is that modern art is focused on issues which would not be possibly have emerged without modern machines. New art theory and media development are closely connected to the newly defined theatricality as a way of communication. It is for this reason that all of the avant-garde groups wanted to create a new theatre. On the one hand, it is synthetic art (so in an important category for the avant-garde), and on the other, stage art dovetails all of the tendencies of modern communication.

It is necessary to add mention of the avant-garde's characteristic fascination with momentum, which stems from a feeling that life flows without a concrete plan yet created.¹ The crises of the First World War, about whose consequences for art and ethics Modris Eksteins wrote, were of course responsible for this state of affairs. What is important, however, is that the direction of this unknown, new life was to be given by two elements—the machine and poetry. But creators of new art meant poetry to be useful for performative use and to lead to the theatre and visual art. Two aspects are important here: the machine and art began to merge not only in avant-garde manifestos, and provocations calling for the fecundation of dynamo-children, but also in the parallelly emerging, developing and increasingly widespread mass-media machine and poetry.²

¹ Barbara Sienkiewicz, *Poznawanie i nazywanie: Refleksja cywilizacyjna i epistemologiczna w polskiej poezji modernistycznej* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych "Universitas," 2007).

² Sienkiewicz, *Poznawanie i nazywanie*, 185.

It should be noted that the authors of the early twentieth century, thinking about mass media and communication in today's sense, had in mind primarily the press. Diagnosing the communication crisis of the newspapers at the time, they constantly had to express themselves in the media—those they knew well and criticized at the same time. Avant-garde artists, especially the Futurists, from the earliest speeches of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, understood by the term “newspaper” not only as an institutional press, but treated it as a medium of mass communication; hence the term also embraced pamphlets, daily newspapers, poetry almanacs, etc.³ They used the press as a medium with which they were familiar, but very soon they also became interested in new ways of conveying information. The most important elements in this fascination are two: their total novelty (i.e., they were a hitherto unknown element, but necessary for enculturation), and their mechanical nature, with an existence made possible by a machine, a technical invention.

The element of media novelty dovetails perfectly into the whole concept of avant-garde art and theory. The new art brought with it the need for a new language of communication. Wanting to demolish tradition and start art anew, artists—both in their manifestos and works—had to descend once again to the elementary level of the materiality of art. Hence, poets spoke of words and even syllables (in Poland, it was not until 1924 that Tadeusz Peiper formulated his theory of the poetic sentence). Painters reforming the visual arts spoke of color, composition, solid, line, etc. (defining them in their own new way, of course). The main slogan in theatre became its theatricalization. On the other hand, the invention of cinema, the creation of a new genre of creativity, completely from its beginning forced a redefinition of such classic categories as character, action, plot, etc., and also forced a new reflection on reception.

The media constitute, of course, part of the avant-garde fascination with 3×M (in Polish: *miasto, masa, maszyna*—city, mass, machine). For all these categories, the question of mass was important. Mass (and after the First World War, one can also add the shock of the massification of killing and death) was defined not only in quantitative terms, but above all in qualitative terms. José Ortega y Gasset, critical of the modernist fascination with the crowd, sees precisely in the mass understood as a new quality of culture a threat to the contemporary world. What the avant-garde perspective had in common with Gasset's concept was the observation that the consequence of mass is participation. Walter Benjamin pointed out that modern media had changed the nature of the

³ Paweł Graf, *Automobil w pędzie: Studia o futuryzmie i futurystach* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, 2018).

broadcaster–receiver relationship.⁴ The postulate of the viewer’s participation, the activation of the viewer, was a cornerstone of avant-garde creativity. This is particularly evident in the manifestos of theatre makers, in which the participation of both spectators and audiences was a given, and the major disputes concerned only the ways to achieve this goal.

With this in mind, they tried to exert press communication. They emphasized the speed of communication and the complicity of the audience.⁵ Newspaper communication was by then already traditional, but had been modified, becoming faster and more interactive.⁶ What was important to them was the combination of machine-produced newspapers and the fact that these prints had artistic value and were not merely a medium. The tension between technology and communication activated the reader. This fits into the whole philosophy of new art, for which the idea of simultaneity is parallel to the principle of collage.⁷ Hence, simultaneity would be central for avant-garde artists. It can be seen in manifestos designing the new poetry and in the inherently synthetic art of theatre.

However, the most important aspect of the avant-garde fascination with modern media is their mechanical nature. This treatment of media has several consequences. First of all, it is part of the avant-garde fascination with the machine and a redefined relationship between man and object. The obvious technological development of the early twentieth century also coincided with a change in the perception of the machine and its role in human life. Once seen as unnatural, alien, and threatening to humans, it began to be more than tolerated. The avant-garde took it a step further and observed that it was technology that determined a new culture (not just aesthetics). Hence Marinetti’s famous phrase that a speeding car is more beautiful than the Nike of Samothrace.⁸ This is not just a provocation, but exactly what the Futurists leader noted.

Marinetti diagnoses a new (and, of course, future) culture in which the machine becomes not only an indispensable part of human life, but, above all, determines the contemporary culture of the people. “Man’s spiritual attitude to the

⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Twórca jako wytwórca*, trans. Hubert Orłowski and Janusz Sikorski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1975).

⁵ Tadeusz Kłak, ed., *Materiały do dziejów awangardy* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975).

⁶ Graf, *Automobil w pędzie*, 117.

⁷ Kamila Rudzińska, *Między awangardą a kulturą masową: Wokół społecznej roli pisarza* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978), 198.

⁸ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Manifest futuryzmu,” in Tomasz Kireńczuk, *Od sztuki w działaniu do działania w sztuce: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti i teatr włoskich futurystów* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2008).

new products of his hands has changed,”⁹ wrote Tadeusz Peiper, seeing that one of the elements of the First World War crisis was the fact that European culture had been destroying itself with the tools created within it.¹⁰ Furthermore, the “pope of the avant-garde”—as he was called in Poland—states that the modern machine was abhorred when it was seen merely as one of the elements of life, an addition to the human perspective.¹¹ Peiper, of course, directs his criticism against the realistic and naturalistic novels and aesthetics of the nineteenth century, which described the machine precisely as dehumanized, and this contrast is even more evident in art forms—novels that speak of the consequences of the appearance of the modern machine in human culture. Peiper goes on to state that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the machine was not an addition to the reality of man, but created a new reality, and thus became close to man and consequently to art. He immediately gives the example of film, in which the whole world exists because of the machine and in the machine. The obvious consequence of his argument is that the machine must become part of art.¹²

Peiper’s example shows that the avant-garde did not stop at anthropomorphizing and aestheticizing the machine. Metaphors linking the human organism to the machine had been appearing since the Enlightenment,¹³ especially in philosophical thought, and also in relation to the projected shape of societies. Of course, the machine also had to appear as part of the creative process; art could be created with the help of machines. In addition to the aforementioned cinema, for which the technology is organic, Ezra Pound noted that a machine can produce art, and the consequences were described by Walter Benjamin in his famous essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.¹⁴

It is worth noting that the nature of the Polish avant-garde helped in the process of bringing man and machine closer together. Tadeusz Kantor once said that the Polish (as well as Russian and German) avant-garde was definitely constructivist.¹⁵

⁹ Tadeusz Peiper, “Punkt wyjścia,” in *Tędy: Nowe usta*, ed. Teresa Podoska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1972), 26 (unless otherwise noted, all translations P.S.). Tadeusz Peiper (1891–1969) called “the pope of the avant-garde.” He was a poet and art theoretician, and first of all editor-in-chief of *Zwrotnica* (The Switch) magazine. He was also a leader of a society called “Awagarda Krakowska” (The Cracovian Avant-Garde). His ideas were shaped by Constructivism—he strongly criticized futurist art for what he saw as a lack of intellectual foundation.

¹⁰ Peiper, “Punkt wyjścia.”

¹¹ Tadeusz Peiper, “Miasto, masa, maszyna,” in: *Tędy: Nowe usta*.

¹² Peiper, “Miasto, masa, maszyna.”

¹³ Emiliano Ranocchi, “Mitość maszyn: Antynomie maszyny w polskim modernizmie,” *Studia Slavistici* 8 (2011): 137–160.

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, transl. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217–251.

¹⁵ Paweł Stangret, *Kantor pisarz: “Lekcje mediolańskie” jako tekst literacki* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, 2014).

He mentioned these three cultures because, in my opinion, they were very strongly influenced by romanticism—not only in their aesthetics, but in the whole shape of their cultural discourse. This is important because romanticism, especially Polish romanticism, constantly combined realist and metaphysical issues, and was able to see Christian psychomachia in every element of life.

Of course, a consequence of this understanding was the fascination with the cyborg, as mentioned by Emiliano Ranocchi.¹⁶ Suffice it to mention the work of the poet, painter, and drama writer Tytus Czyżewski, which is filled with “electro-mannequins” and such creatures that combine mechanical and organic elements. Even more important is that the leader of Polish futurists, Bruno Jasiński, in spinning out a typology of futurisms, pointed out that Italian futurism perceived the machine as an element of fascination, up to eroticism, while Russian futurism saw technology as a servant for man, mainly in its economic aspects. For Polish futurism, on the other hand, “the machine is an organ of the body that is necessary at the present level of development.”¹⁷ He is echoed by Tytus Czyżewski, who in his manifesto “Od maszyny do zwierząt” (From Machine to Animals) proclaims: “We love machines and do them no harm.”¹⁸ The metaphorical juxtaposition of the concern for animals with the approach to machines is relevant here, as it shows that machines are not only part of human life. Czyżewski’s slogan shows that the enculturation of machines is to see in modern technical inventions a new form of materiality, separate and new entities.

The avant-gardists raised the problem not only of the development of machines, but above all of their mass use, their universality. This coincides with ideas of the massification of art. The slogans “everyone is an artist” and “art is in the head” are not only the results of democratization. Bruno Jasiński explains this postulate with the claim that art is to be mass and universal because it is “above all human.”¹⁹ In this, it can be seen that a new culture is created by communing with inventions and is also linked to a new art. Modern man is thus to be shaped by avant-garde aesthetics and technology at the same time.

This can also be seen in the form of the tram and the fascination with it. It was a modern element that appeared in public space and was accessible to the masses, and at the same time to each individual resident. Paweł Graf noted that

¹⁶ Ranocchi, “Miłość maszyn”

¹⁷ Bruno Jasiński, “Futuryzm polski (bilans)”, in *Antologia polskiego futurizmu i Nowej Sztuki*, ed. Helena Zaworska (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1978), 60.

¹⁸ Tytus Czyżewski, “Od maszyny do zwierząt”, in *Antologia polskiego futurizmu*, 42.

¹⁹ Bruno Jasiński, “Do narodu polskiego: Manifest w sprawie natyhmiasowej futuryzacji życia”, in *Antologia polskiego futurizmu*, 11.

the tram is the quintessence of movement. The electric vehicle invades the city space by moving.²⁰ At the same time, it makes the passengers inside move, and thus they can move inside the vehicle.²¹

At the same time, it is a dangerous vehicle. This can be seen well in the short story *Nogi Izoldy Morgan*²² (The Legs of Isolde Morgan) by Bruno Jasieński, in which a tram cuts off the (extremely beautiful, erogenous) legs of the titular character as a result of an accident. Anyway, there are more combinations of erotic and mechanical elements in this short story. One can see here not only the fascination with technology, such as the tram, but also that what is human is unerasable by technical novelty.

A similar situation can also be seen in Jerzy Jankowski's poem, "Tram w popszek ulicy" (Tram Across the Street).²³ In the text, the overturned vehicle becomes a barricade behind which people gather against political power. The modern approach to the state system, the new social organization is here very strongly correlated with technical invention. The use of modern machinery shows that man and machine are not strangers to each other.

The avant-gardists defined the new culture precisely in this way. Unlike the modernists of the nineteenth century, they did not see their materiality as foreign elements, but precisely as organically connected—both at the cultural and precisely a material level. Hence the emerging slogans of the machineization of man. They correspond perfectly with the idea of the machineization of theatre and acting in modern theatre. Provocative slogans like "love electric machines, marry them and give birth to Dynamo-children—magnetize and educate them so that they grow up to be mechanical citizens"²⁴ were not only a projection of the new art, but also a statement that the new culture, the culture of machines, had already become a fact. Thus, the provocation was not that the creators assumed such a future, but that the new situation forced the viewer to reflect on such a state of affairs.

This is well illustrated by the theses of Tadeusz Peiper, who noted that, after all, technical invention is the work of the whole man—his rational mind, but also his desire to know, the work of his hands, as well as his intellect and imagination. He concludes by stating that critics of technology bring a de facto "feud of man with himself."²⁵

²⁰ Graf, *Automobil w pędzie*.

²¹ Graf.

²² Bruno Jasieński, *Nogi Izoldy Morgan*, (Kraków: Spółka Nakładowa "Odrodzenie," 1923).

²³ Jerzy Jankowski, "Tram w popszek ulicy," in *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu*.

²⁴ Tytus Czyżewski, "O Żelonym oku i swoim malarstwie (autokrytyka-autoreklama)," in *Wiersze i utwory teatralne*, ed. Janusz Kryszak and Andrzej Krzysztof Waśkiewicz (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz/terytoria, 2009), 113.

²⁵ Tadeusz Peiper, "Radio adwokat," in *Tędy: Nowe usta*, 245.

Peiper concludes that the source of the misunderstanding is not the acceptance or criticism of modernity; he is primarily interested in the question of changing mentalities in the approach to machines. Relevant here is his work on education and social consciousness. Peiper, as a constructivist, shies away from a futurist fascination with the machine. He notes that “if the work of the sewerage worker were done with a telegraphic apparatus, the hierarchy of labor would lose some of its psychological basis.”²⁶ So it can be seen that the category of machine novelty is not so important to him. For the early avant-garde, it was the novelty that overwhelmed all previous culture. The second stage is to show the closeness of man and machine.

This newly formulated relationship does not imply the inferiority of the human (as a traditional element) to the machine (as something new). Already Marinetti has noted that

the non-human and mechanical kind, created by omnipresent speed, will naturally be cruel, omniscient and belligerent. It will be equipped with unexpected organs: organs adapted to the demands of a space whose construction results from the constant collision of alien bodies.²⁷

The brutality of the new world was not only due to the nature of machines. Also, the new man-made world was brutal, primarily due to the changes brought about by modernity. The main aspect of the threat was precisely the massification that led to physical changes in space. This is most evident in the city, where the changes in the shape of space were the biggest. Thus, it can be seen that machines do not change an entire culture.

The horror of the combination of the organic and mechanical element is also recognized by Tytus Czyżewski, who saw machines as lethal. This is very evident in dramas, including *Włamywacz z lepszego towarzystwa* (The Burglar from a Better Company), where the electro-mannequin kills all the other characters (basically without plot justification), and man remains on stage with the courtesan, becoming a pimp. In the modified myth of Orpheus, on the other hand, Dionysus manifests his menacing and demonic, but fertile power only when powered by electricity. The relationship of mutual threat and, at the same time, almost material affinity (a drawing of a “Dynamophallos” is placed in the Orpheus drama) forces a redefinition of the moral approach to machines. Of course, the avant-garde does not create new ethical systems. However, it

²⁶ Tadeusz Peiper, “Hierarchia pracy,” in *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu*, 107.

²⁷ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Człowiek zmnożony i Królestwo Maszyny,” in Kireńczuk, *Od sztuki w działaniu do działania w sztuce*, 308.

is very evident here that Czyżewski's approach to machines is guided by an analogy to relational ethics, which contemporary feminism calls care.

It is worth mentioning that Tytus Czyżewski was also the author of futurist nativity plays. This is significant because the poet nevertheless sees in the human-mechanical relationship the advantage of the human. It is, of course, about transcendence. It's parallel to the Anatol Stern's poem "Czcicielowi maszyn" (To the Worshipper of Machines):

infinity
that you cannot see
in the most modern
American machine.²⁸

Obviously, this text is a poetic attempt to settle accounts with futurism, but above all with the ideology glorifying machines and the excessive cult of modernity. By introducing ethical categories, Czyżewski departs from the primary cult of cyborgs. He shows that the proximity of man and machine is a fact and therefore necessary, but it does not mean that man is subordinated or that he will be replaced by machines.

The opposite is true. In the civilization of machines, the avant-gardists saw opportunities for man, including the possibility of a new understanding and definition of him. Jerzy Jankowski in "Spłon lotnika" (Burning the Aviator) writes:

listen to the pulse of the blood
listen to the heart,
how hurriedly the little engine works there.²⁹

In the organic-mechanical metaphor they perceived above all the communicative abilities of the human organism. In 1922 Czyżewski wrote:

I went out with my hands full
at dawn kaleidoscopes of uranium-storms
lightning flashes of Morse telegraphs of souls
mute communicating with the light of the hereafter.³⁰

²⁸ Anatol Stern, "Czcicielowi maszyn," in *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu*, 223.

²⁹ Jerzy Jankowski, "Spłon lotnika," in *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu*, 78.

³⁰ Tytus Czyżewski, "Noc-dzień: Mechaniczny instynkt elektryczny," in *Wiersze i poematy*, 77.

In “Hymn do maszyny mego ciała” (Hymn to the Machine of My Body), the bloodstream is compared to a transmission belt. Characteristically, the organicity of the body has the same properties as the machine, and the most important converging elements are the transmission possibilities, precisely the possibilities of the medium. In a poem with such a title (“Medium”), Tytus Czyżewski explicitly writes: “veins of electric currents.”³¹

The postulates of the avant-gardists coincide with contemporary new materiality (especially with the conception of interaction). Karen Barad points out:

matter and meaning cannot be severed. In my agential realist account, matter is a dynamic expression/articulation of the world in its intra-active becoming. All bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity, its performativity. Boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted through the intra-activity of mattering. Differentiating is not about radical exteriorities (we saw that in the experiments I just talked about) but rather what I call agential separability. That is, differentiating is not about Othering, separating, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments. So the very nature of materiality itself is an entanglement. Hence, what is on the other side of the agential cut is never separate from us. Agential separability is not individuation. Ethics is therefore not about right responses to a radically exteriorized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming, of which we are a part. Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities. Even the smallest cuts matter. Responsibility, then, is a matter of the ability to respond. Listening for the response of the other and an obligation to be responsive to the other, who is not entirely separate from what we call the self. This way of thinking ontology, epistemology, and ethics together makes for a world that is always already an ethical matter. ³²

Thus, the fundamental relationship between man and machine in the new culture—according to Rosi Braidotti: the post-human³³ culture—was the awareness

³¹ Czyżewski, “Medium”, in *Noc-dzień*, 90.

³² Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, “Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers: Interview with Karen Barad”, in Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 69, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11515701.0001.001>.

³³ Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, “The Transversality of New Materialism”, in *New Materialism*, 93–114.

of one's own separateness and at the same time closeness. The plane on which man came closer to the machine is precisely performativity. Importantly, the old division between the machine as a service to man, as a tool, disappeared. Man with a machine can act. At the same time, a whole new culture emerged in which actions are only possible with and in machines. Film or photographic art show that both the represented world and the materiality of the art work exist only in and with the help of the machine. Suffice it to recall the importance of photography for the development of Surrealism. Artists of this trend practiced photography, but did not consider it art. The machine had just enabled a space of performativity, where vitality mixes with creative activity. They used the camera because they believed that this tool is capable of capturing the super-reality that the human eye does not perceive. That is why their favorite tool was the automatic ID-photo machine,³⁴ which completely displaced the traditional portrait, while at the same time not erasing what is characteristic of this genre of iconography—through the imaging of a human being together with his or her character.

It was in the machine that the possibilities of mediation were perceived. Viewed in this way, the machine is very close to modern media. The similarity lies not just in the physicality of the media, but precisely in the understanding of new modes of communication. Peter Bürger has pointed out that the novelty and value of the avant-garde was the “change in reception”³⁵ when not hiding the artificiality of the message.³⁶ So, not only traditional art was challenged, but also the basis of communication, and in this aspect the convergence between modern art and media is apparent. Several aspects of both the machine and the media can be seen here. First of all, the machine is responsible for communication, which is, after all, organically human. And at the same time, it is massively received, and has an impact on society. Joanna Orska, by Eysteinnsson, defines the avant-garde attitude through the category of experiment.³⁷ At the same time, the technical novelty of the media can be treated precisely as an experiment, as new communicative possibilities, the use of which has to be made only through conventionalization.

The new communication media (combined with electricity and radiation, recently discovered) generated new energies, created hitherto unknown

³⁴ Agnieszka Taborska, *Spiskowcy wyobraźni* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz/terytoria, 2013).

³⁵ Peter Bürger, *Teoria awangardy*, trans. Jadwiga Kita-Huber (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych “Universitas,” 2006), 37.

³⁶ Bürger, *Teoria awangardy*.

³⁷ Joanna Orska, *Przełom awangardowy w dwudziestowiecznym modernizmie w Polsce* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych “Universitas,” 2004).

perceptual practices, multiplied the object seen. They modified hitherto existing perception. Momentum became the substance of a new art.³⁸

The media significantly accelerated communication. Thus, they are highly correlated with the avant-garde obsession with movement. Moreover, the common point is that both art and media thematized this speed; it became a metatextual discourse.

Joanna Orska notes that avant-garde art is “non-media, it does not submit to the laws of transmission.”³⁹ This is precisely where its main provocation lies, that it ostentatiously, metatextually alters the relations of transmission and reception. She characterizes the new art as autonomous

because it transfers the drama of the communicative rift between subject and world to within the work of art, where the psychomachy of the subject corresponds: the creative ordering power of the intellect—and the all-powerful, chaotic forces of Nature.⁴⁰

She goes on to point out that representation is meant to become reality, to performatively become a part of it.⁴¹ That is why these artists were interested in the fastest possible communication, because they noticed that the fast, one-day press, dailies, aestheticize reality and fictionalize it at the same time.⁴² It is the possibilities of mediation that are proximate to that which the avant-gardists saw in machines.

The Surrealists saw in photography not a realistic mimeticism, but precisely the possibility of producing a double, a dummy,⁴³ of reality. As in the case of the machine, the avant-gardists did not perceive in the media the tension between fiction and reality, but were fascinated precisely by mediation, the creation of a state in which the world of machine communication does not at the same time cross out human, organic qualities. This can be seen very clearly in the poems, the subject, and, at the same time, place of action of what is both the cinema and the world depicted on film. Cinema is not only thematized here. An important aspect of these works is that the new media here encroaches on the

³⁸ Graf, *Automobil w pędzie*, 177.

³⁹ Orska, *Przełom awangardowy*, 161.

⁴⁰ Orska, 145.

⁴¹ Orska, 414.

⁴² Ryszard Nycz, “«Cytaty z rzeczywistości»: Funkcje wiadomości prasowych w literaturze,” in *Tekstowy świat: Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1995).

⁴³ Taborska, *Spiskowcy wyobraźni*.

ostentatiously shown traditional issues—both artistic and ethical. “Nie wiedziała” (She Didn’t Know)⁴⁴ by Tytus Czyżewski is a ballad maintained in the spirit of urban folklore. It depicts the amorous adventures of two lovers, but through machines—he is a chauffeur, she is a seamstress (working on a sewing machine). A similar situation can be seen in the poem “Na bis” (For an Encore),⁴⁵ which tells the story of a lift-boy and is maintained in the traditional modernist critique of the bourgeoisie. “Płomień i studnia” (The Flame and the Well),⁴⁶ on the other hand, is the story of Don Juan rewritten for robots. Anyway, the subtitle is “electro-cinema-aero-dramo”. Also, in the poem “Sensacja w kinie” (Sensation in Cinema)⁴⁷ we see a traditionally shown romance, but on a movie screen. The poem shows that both in the depicted world and in the cinema audience the protagonist is engaged in “nesting in a box” with a cocotte.

There are several levels of provocation here. The traditional, realistic style is parodied here by juxtaposing it with the modern machines used to create the depicted world. In such a juxtaposition, one can see how outdated this realism is. Furthermore, a critique of the first attempts at filmmaking, which modelled themselves on nineteenth-century plot patterns, is evident here. Avant-garde artists wrote film scripts, radio plays, dramas, etc.; however, they were maintained in a modern poetics (most of them did not even plan their realization in cinema or radio).

One of the most important aspects, however, is that cinema, whether understood as a medium, as a new field of art, or as a new institution—totally dependent on the machine—is not able to overrule human behavior. One goes to the cinema with a lover. This is why traditional, realistic artistic solutions should not be used in poetry, because the very existence of cinema has shown that organic, human behavior is able to fit perfectly into the culture created by modern media.

The avant-garde fascination with pornography stems from similar premises. I am leaving aside the obvious aspect of moral provocation. However, the proclamation of “unmasked pornography,”⁴⁸ as they themselves termed it, is closely linked to the development of the media. Maciej Tramer emphasizes that the very concept of “pornography,” although it has existed for a long time, was not used in public debate in Poland until the nineteenth century, and became widespread in

⁴⁴ Tytus Czyżewski, “Nie wiedziała,” in *Wiersze i utwory teatralne*, 86.

⁴⁵ Bruno Jasieński, “Na bis,” in *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu*, 153–155.

⁴⁶ Tytus Czyżewski, “Płomień i studnia,” in *Wiersze i utwory teatralne*, 96.

⁴⁷ Tytus Czyżewski, “Sensacja w kinie,” in *Wiersze i utwory teatralne*, 81.

⁴⁸ This schematicity is noted not only in the form of reproduction, but also in communication. See Anatol Stern and Aleksander Wat, “Prymitywiści do narodów świata,” in *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu*, 4.

the following century.⁴⁹ (It is worth recalling that accusations of pornography were one of the main arguments of the opponents of the avant-garde.) This prevalence of the term is clearly linked to the media and media culture, when society already knew how to communicate in and through the media. It is in pornography that the combination of the organic, biological aspect of human sexuality and the machine, the medium, de facto, in which it exists at all, is most evident.

Kitsch romances (taking place simultaneously on the screen and in the cinema) stem from a fascination with low regions of culture. However, it is worth noting, following Greenberg, that one of the main characteristics of kitsch is its mechanicality and schematicity. And that is what “technical reproduction” is. Małgorzata Baranowska, analyzing Surrealist postcards, notes that this is a very kitsch form of art. at the same time,⁵⁰ she emphasizes that it is safe precisely as such.⁵¹ These artists hid behind the convention of kitsch, emphasizing its fictionality and mechanicality. And these are the markers of the avant-garde work according to Bürger.⁵²

In “Pieśń o głodzie” (Song of Hunger) by Bruno Jasiński we read:

all the newspapers write about it.
 they write more.
 In the column of extraordinary accidents
 there are small, indistinct mentions,
 about the deaths
 of some unknown people,
 which end with the words:
 “... an ambulance doctor summoned to the hospital diagnosed death by
 starvation.”⁵³

The poet criticizes all elements of media communication, not only journalists, but also media audiences who fail to analyze causes, schematically reproduce information, and at the same time shape public opinion. This is even more strongly evident

⁴⁹ Maciej Tramer, *Literatura i skandal: Na przykładzie okresu międzywojennego* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2000).

⁵⁰ Joanna Winnicka-Gburek, “Awangarda, kicz a filozoficzna krytyka artystyczna,” in *Wiek awangardy*, ed. Lilianna Bieszczad (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych “Universitas,” 2012), 90.

⁵¹ Małgorzata Baranowska, *Surrealna wyobraźnia i poezja* (Warszawa: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza “Czytelnik”, 1984).

⁵² Bürger, *Teoria awangardy*.

⁵³ Bruno Jasiński, “Pieśń o głodzie,” in *Utwory poetyckie: Manifesty; Szkice*, ed. Edward Balcerzan (Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1972), 72, 78.

in “Drzemka w kawiarni” (Naptime in Café) by Tytus Czyżewski.⁵⁴ Café customers read newspapers and fall asleep (after all, the whole country is plunged into such a slumber). “Sleepy fools” dream about what has been written in the newspapers—they shape their opinions, but in fact they determine the relevance of facts, create reality and the ethics of media reception. At the same time, these newspapers are so boring that they drive you to sleep. Thus, it can be seen that Czyżewski not only criticizes the unreflective consumption of the media, but above all shows the sterility of this communication. On the other hand, it is the media that creates reality.

The massification of the media is also an important element. Avant-garde creativity grows out of a culture in which there is a loss of “interiority”⁵⁵ in favor of the mass, social problems, and so on. The interest in the masses is well demonstrated by Vsevolod Meyerhold’s criticism of nineteenth-century realism for, as he put it, the “drama of men,” of individuals rather than of whole societies. The avant-gardists noticed the disintegration of communities, and criticized their institutionalization; hence they sought “extra-corporeal” communities.⁵⁶ The tension between the mass and individuality is one of the main characteristics of avant-garde art. Tadeusz Peiper writes that radio reflection poses a similar problem.

“Thanks to the radio, in the world of the machine it became the room for solitude.”⁵⁷ However, as he notes, it is solitude “connected with the social awareness.”⁵⁸ The listener is both an individual receiver and part of the mass, because the radio schedule is the same for all—everybody receives the same content at the same time.

Mass communication at once to a receivership of individuals bears great similarity to the communication with a theatre audience. The main issue for the new theatre was the mobilization of the viewer, participation of the audience and the stage. Of course, engagement of audience is organic for the theatre as itself. Because theatre is syncretic *ex definitione*, as well as collective, theatre was the only element of traditional forms of communication that the avant-garde didn’t fight against.⁵⁹ After defining the crisis of communicative possibilities of the book, focus shifted to oral poetry (claimed on the streets). But the theatre “is a great telegraph center, eternally alert, eternally listening and observing, catching already

⁵⁴ Tytus Czyżewski, “Drzemka w kawiarni”, in *Wiersze i utwory teatralne*, 85.

⁵⁵ Sienkiewicz, *Poznawanie i nazywanie*, 199.

⁵⁶ Grzegorz Sztabiński, “Idea wspólnoty sztuk w wieku awangardy”, in *Wiek awangardy*, 56.

⁵⁷ Peiper, “Radio adwokat”, 245.

⁵⁸ Peiper.

⁵⁹ Ewa Guderian Czapliska, *Szara strefa awangardy i inne szkice* (Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2021), 333–334.

the problems which lie in the future, which are in the pulsing blood of life.”⁶⁰ In the organic elements of theatre relations—the sender and the receiver, and also the spectator and the audience—avant-garde artists saw the possibilities of a new communication through a medium (which it was already necessary to reform).

Theatrical communication was very similar to that postulated in theories used by the avant-garde in other genres of art. When the scenographer Feliks Krassowski was designing his “cumulative stage,” he noticed that a “graduality of cumulating of the stage will help the spectator, the penetration of the construction intentions of the builder of the stage.”⁶¹ The problem wasn’t the communication of the senses, but first of all, metatextually and performatively created rules of communication. This was visible in Andrzej Pronaszko’s ideas: when he was thinking about changing the architecture of the stage, he had to note the changing shape of the audience, because every spectacle needs newly-built theatrical space.⁶² The audience in emotional relation with the stage is in permanent alertness and tension. “There is a room for the hunch, sensing, feeling, empathy in this alertness.”⁶³

For avant-garde artists, communication at the represented-world level was not important, but the most important thing was that theatre is a performative genre of art, that the audience and actors use the same cultural discourse. Thus the theatre seemed to be a remedy in case the book lost its communicative possibilities. Speed, synthesis, and medium, organic for the theatre, fascinated all of the avant-garde groups. Importantly, they were more interested in theatre than drama.⁶⁴

In the theatre, beyond the traditional shape, they saw a machine-like possibility. Of course, it was obvious that the theatre needed to be modified with new equipment, new architecture, etc. In 1930, the Syrkus couple noticed that theatre was no longer a model for cinema, but saw that “the movie is one of the necessary aids of the theatre.”⁶⁵ The most important thing is that they saw theatre as a machine. The nature of theatrical art is that its fundamental, its way of communication, is its performativity. It works by the entirety of the theatrical space (understood according to Patrice Pavis as common for the audience and stage).⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Andrzej Pronaszko, “O teatrze przyszłości,” in *Myśl teatralna polskiej awangardy 1919–1939: Antologia*, ed. Stanisław Marczak-Oborski (Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 1973), 75.

⁶¹ Feliks Krassowski, “Scena narastająca: Zasady i projekty,” in *Myśl teatralna polskiej awangardy*, 127.

⁶² Andrzej Pronaszko, “Odrodzenie teatru,” in *Myśl teatralna polskiej awangardy*.

⁶³ Jalu Kurek, “Widownia teatralna śpi,” in *Myśl teatralna polskiej awangardy*, 317.

⁶⁴ Guderian-Czaplińska, *Szara strefa awangardy*.

⁶⁵ Helena i Szymon Syrkusowie, “O teatrze symultanicznym (fragmenty),” in *Polska awangarda teatralna 1919–1939: Antologia*, ed. Dorota Fox and Dariusz Kosiński (Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2021), 146.

⁶⁶ Szymon Syrkus, “Teoria,” in *Polska awangarda teatralna*.

Such an understanding of theatre is similar to the treatment of machines, also in material aspects. The main problem was the materiality of the sender and the receiver. According to Erika Fischer-Lichte, the basis of this genre of art is that materiality depends on the semiotic.⁶⁷ In the theatre, the materiality of receiving is most strongly influenced, because the receiver is on the same level as the actors. At the same time, the presented world is on the border of fictionalization. And thus theatre was of such interest to the avant-garde, the nature of this genre of art being closest to that of communication machines.



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⁶⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (London: Routledge, 2008), 148.

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PAWEŁ STANGRET

Assistant Professor in the Institute of Literary Studies at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University. He specializes in the theatre and literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, particularly in regard of textuality in visual art.