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Emblematic Space

Abstract

In this article, the author traces the connections between the art of the theater and the art of the emblem. Revisiting the work of Albrecht Schöne and referring to the present theories of the emblem, the author claims that both art forms employ performance, which inseparably connects them. Emblematic structures can be found both in the beginnings of a theatrical performance (the play or the script) and in its remains (the documentation of the performance). The emblem is therefore the ultimate medium of the theater's influence and transmission at the longest social distance, when any direct link of the audience with the original performance has already vanished. We can observe that theater more oriented towards social impact tends to utilize emblematics all the more willingly. Finally, the author introduces the notion of the "emblematic space": an abstract categorial space, which is constituted and transformed through performance, containing it as its "stage." Theater's task is creating such spaces; in everyday social life, they arise spontaneously as emanations of the collective hopes or expectations; they are also set up by individual efforts

Abstrakt

Przestrzeń emblematyczna

W artykule autor śledzi związki sztuki teatru ze sztuką emblematu. Wychodząc od dzieł Albrechta Schönego i posiłkując się współczesną teorią emblematu, stawia tezę, że obydwie sztuki wykorzystują zjawisko performansu, z którym wiążą się nierozerwalnie. Strukturę emblematyczną można odnaleźć zarówno w trwałych zaczątkach teatralnego performansu (dramat lub scenariusz), jak i w jego pozostałościach (dokumenty dzieła). Emblemat stanowi więc ostateczne medium oddziaływania teatru na najdalszy społeczny dystans, kiedy zanikł wszelki żywy kontakt odbiorców ze zjawiskiem. Teatr szczególnie nastawiony na społeczną misję najchętniej sięga do środków sztuki emblematu. Tytułowa „przestrzeń emblematyczna" – to abstrakcyjna kategorialna przestrzeń, którą ustanawia i w której zachodzi performans życiowy, społeczny czy sceniczny. Otwiera się ona w powszechnej świadomości jako jego „scena". W teatrze takie przestrzenie powołuje się programowo; w życiu powszednim tworzą się one samorzutnie, jako emanacje zbiorowych oczekiwań lub nadziei, albo poprzez działania jednostek.

> Thus by the end of the 17th century, emblematics and iconology had become the point of departure for an attempt to group together all the arts.
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> Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*[1]

Gesamtkunstwerk! Tatarkiewicz views the art of the emblem as the realization of the postulates formulated in the realm of theater, for instance in Richard Wagner's world famous vision,[2] in countercultural theater's dream of "more than theatre,"[3] and especially in the aspirations for "the triune choreia,"[4] sustained for millennia, the aspirations for recovering the lost synthesis of all forms of art, all forms of transfer and expression; a dream that continued to inspire new waves of reformers and restorers throughout the entire modern age. It is no wonder then that the competition between theater and the art of the emblem within this field inspires reflection.

Since the early 20th century onwards, interest in the art of the emblem, progressively waning over the previous two centuries, has been rekindled. New works were published in that early period concerning the history of the emblem, as well as its structure and effects, and today they are considered to be foundational for the whole discipline. The first impulse came in 1930 from Mario Praz with his *Studi sul concettismo*.[5] In 1959, the *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte* first included the important and widely commented upon entry

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[1] Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 3: *Modern Aesthetics*, trans. Chester A. Kisiel and John F. Besemeres (The Hague: De Gruyter, 1974), 230.

[2] Richard Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, Blackmask Online, 2002, 18, http://www.public-library.uk/ebooks/11/97.pdf. It should be noted that the broad sense ascribed to *Gesamtkunstwerk* by Wagner was reduced to the strictly structural dimension in Craig's polemics. This narrow view was then adopted by Polish theater studies, emerging in the early 20th century and heavily influenced by Craig. See for example Stefania Skwarczyńska, "Narodziny i drogi rozwojowe polskiej teatrologii," in *Wprowadzenie do nauki o teatrze*, ed. Janusz Degler, vol. 1 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1976), 35–44, especially 38–39.

[3] The phrase introduced by Zbigniew Osiński in his article "Gardzienice: More than Theatre," *Le Théâtre en Pologne—The Theatre in Poland*, no. 6 (1980): 21–23, and popularized by Aldona Jawłowska in the title of her monograph about the Polish fringe theater: *Więcej niż teatr* (Warszawa: PIW, 1986).

[4] The term introduced and popularized in Poland by Thaddeus Zieliński, see: Thaddeus Zieliński, *The Religion of Ancient Greece*, trans. George Rapall Noyes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 85.

[5] It was then widely circulated in the English translation released in 1939. Praz kept expanding his work for decades after its first publication. Cf. Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1964).

"Emblem," penned by William Heckscher and Karl-August Wirth.[6] In the 1960s, when Tatarkiewicz first formulated his assessment of the historical importance of emblematics, Albrecht Schöne published his *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock* (1964) and *Emblemata: Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts*, co-authored by Arthur Henkel (1967).[7] The former remains the primary reference as far as the functioning of the emblem in theater is concerned; both works can be seen as model examples of how to interpret the entire *ars emblematica*, whose premises are still being reiterated, discussed, and disputed.

The same decade saw the publication of a number of works dedicated to emblems—including the first texts by Janusz Pelc, who was to become the chief propagator and expert on all things emblematic in Poland, and the author of two canonical books on the topic. *Słowo i obraz* (2002),[8] summarizing his reflections, remains the most exhaustive commentary on the emblem in Polish. We are also indebted to Pelc for his detailed reports on the scholarship relating to the emblem in Poland and abroad. Jan Białostocki was, in turn, responsible for organizing the memorable exhibition *Ars Emblematica: Hidden Meanings in 17th-century Dutch Paintings* at the National Museum in Warsaw in 1981.[9] A year 2002 saw the publication of the Polish translation of Andrea Alciati's book of emblems,[10] the famous 16th-century work that gave a name to the whole genre based on the combination of text and image, triggering a veritable "emblemania" throughout the following century. The most recent comprehensive work reporting on the current state of research on emblematics is that by Peter M. Daly (2014), a major contributor to the discipline since the 1970s. Not only did Daly initiate and conduct research on a wide range of source materials, as well as write and edit books on the topic,[11] but in the

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[6] Cf. William Heckscher and Karl-August Wirth, "Emblem, Emblembuch," in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1959): 85–228, https://www.rdklabor.de/wiki/Emblem,_Emblembuch.

[7] See Arthur Henkel and Albrecht Schöne, eds., *Emblemata: Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1976).

[8] Janusz Pelc, *Słowo i obraz: Na pograniczu literatury i sztuk plastycznych* (Kraków: Universitas, 2002).

[9] Bożena Steinborn names it one of the three European exhibitions in the period between 1976–1981 where "juxtaposing . . . paintings with . . . literature (including books of emblems, hitherto studied solely by literary scholars) revealed their hidden . . . meanings. Ever since these museum studies were released, it has no longer been possible to ignore the ways in which literature . . . permeated into old paintings," Bożena Steinborn, "Czy muzealnik jest naukowcem? Kilka uwag praktyka," *Muzealnictwo* 55 (2014): 20.

[10] Known also as Alciato or, in the latinized form, Alciatus. See: Andrea Alciatus, *Emblematum libellus: Książeczka emblematów*, trans. Anna Dawidziuk et al. under the supervision of Mieczysław Mejor (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2002). An extensive and noteworthy introduction was written by Roman Krzywy.

[11] Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem: Structural Parallels between the Emblem and Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

mid-1980s he also launched the journal *Emblematica* together with Daniel
S. Russell. According to Daly,

> There has in fact been something of a boom in emblem studies. I estimate that
> alone in the two decades 1990–2009 over 1,400 articles, essays and books were
> published in Western European languages on emblem studies.[12]

Historical Links between Theater and *Ars Emblematica* according to Albrecht Schöne

Although interdisciplinary by definition, discussion on the multi-media art of
the emblem are usually conducted exclusively among art and literary scholars.
Significantly less has been written on the emblem in terms of its potential
deeper affinities with theater. Pelc merely mentions that "emblematic composi-
tion . . . was often used in the baroque period and also later as the basis for the
construction of various genres of drama and types of contemporary theatre."[13]
Further he notes that:

> The role of emblematics and emblematic inspirations in German baroque
> drama and theatre is discussed in a wonderful book by Abrecht Schöne. No
> similar work has been available as of yet concerning baroque theatre and
> drama in Poland. Since the present work is pursuing a different objective, it
> cannot accomplish this particular task. Nevertheless, mindful of the role that
> emblematic forms performed in our theatre and drama, we could not possibly
> ignore . . . this aspect completely. Still, we will only present a brief overview
> and the most notable examples.[14]

And this is precisely what Pelc does. He faithfully follows the list of emblematic
symptoms identified and labelled by Schöne forty years earlier, identifying them in
Polish baroque theater. He thus discusses all the "personifications, allegories and
emblematic symbols . . . in the plays put on . . . in Jesuit colleges."[15] He analyzes the
plays' imagery encoded in and drawn from emblem collections, such as "crocodile

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[12] Peter M. Daly, *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe: Contributions to the Theory of the Emblem* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 2.

[13] Pelc, *Słowo i obraz*, 45.

[14] Pelc, 288.

[15] Pelc, 289.

tears." He also mentions the custom of closing each scene with a counterpoint phrase summarizing the action (compared, by Scaliger, to pillars supporting the play), often taken directly from emblem collections. Finally, Pelc makes a valid point that:

> Schöne finds structural analogy to the emblem in the way in which baroque drama combined each act with a subsequent choral part. The act itself was equivalent to an imago, while the chorus performed the role of a commentary. Within this analogy, the structural correspondences are especially striking between the choral utterance and emblematic subscription. The chorus became a signification, a verbal commentary on the image presented in the act.[16]

Similar constructions could be seen on stage in Poland. Instead of dwelling on Pelc's further enumerations of the obvious influences of the emblem on theater, it is worth looking at their source, namely, at Schöne's text. A major part of the book is dedicated to presenting the catalogue of emblematic features of baroque theater[17] adopted by Pelc. Schöne also points to the common practice of combination titles, creating an emblematic composition where the main title would serve as the *lemma*, and the subtitle as the epigram (while the stage action would, of course, serve as the *imago*). He mentions the examples of Gryphius's *Catherine of Georgia, or Armed Constancy*, and *Leo Armenius, or the Assassination of the Prince*. Moving beyond Schöne's book and the German context, one could such add titles as Molière's *Tartuffe, or the Impostor* and Marivaux's *The False Servant, or the Punished Villain*. In the later period, there were also Bogusławski's *Cud mniemany, czyli krakowiacy i górale* (The Presumed Miracle, or Cracovians and Highlanders) and Fredro's *Maidens' Vows, or the Magnetism of the Heart*—emblematic titles were truly in abundance.

Schöne also describes a specific type of utterance which he labels *genetivus emblematicus*; namely, a coined abstract phrase involving an emblematic attribute, with the abstract concept always used in the genitive case, such as "the wings of courage," "the snake of jealousy," "the flame of love," etc. Similar constructions are frequently applied in flowery speech, including in drama. Yet another rhetorical construct popular in 17th-century drama was the *argumentum emblematicum*, where characters evoke emblematic situations or images as commonly known facts (cultural facts, at least), thus justifying their claims

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[16] Pelc, 291–292.

[17] This part of the book is best known in Poland, since it was reported on before Pelc—it was summarized and commented on as a new publication in 1969 by Marian Szyrocki, who based an entire chapter of his book on it. See Marian Szyrocki, *Dzieje literatury niemieckiej*, vol. 1 (Warszawa: PWN, 1969), 175–184.

or exposing the falsehood of their opponents. For instance—yet again moving beyond the set of examples presented by Schöne—in his sharp retort to Claudius in act III, scene 2, Hamlet casually evokes the well-known emblematic image of a chameleon eating air, which is described as "promise-crammed."

Schöne's catalogue, albeit useful, exhaustive and frequently cited by theater historians, may appear ever so slightly dry, potentially inviting suspicion that the author may have ventured too far in his emblematic associations and suggesting that extending these so far as to span both stylistic figures and dramatic structure may be a tad excessive. At any rate, his catalogue creates an impression that Schöne is merely characterizing a certain curiosity of baroque poetics, a kind of a special "calligraphy" of the bygone area, to use Mario Praz's turn of phrase.[18]

And this is most probably a mistaken notion. *My own reflections are fueled by the intuition that the art of theater and the emblem are linked by much deeper and timeless bonds, both structural and functional in nature, which can be observed especially in the social functioning of both art forms.* My goal is to identify and name these links. In the following essay, I present a preliminary analysis; consequently, I will not do justice to all the extensive scholarly literature on this topic. Rather, I will refer to the most instructive publications, allowing my reasoning to unfold without fear of missing out an important argument or a whole thread.

I will adopt Schöne's book, unparalleled to this day, as my point of departure. However, in reinterpreting Schöne's theses, I shall use concepts which emerged after the first publication of his work; I shall also make reference to sources from the era which he discusses. Such a reinterpretation will then become the basis for reflections on the links between emblematic art and performance, in accordance with my understanding of the term. I will explore the field of performance while looking for affinities between the emblem and theater, in order to ultimately formulate the idea of the emblem as a potential medium of theatrical action in the widest social context. Or, going even further than that—as the furthest-reaching medium, on both the temporal and spatial scale, for transferring ideas through human performance.

Schöne's Concept of the Emblem

First, we must go back to a fundamental definition of the emblem, which is both canonical and continually disputed. In Schöne's work, it precedes and provides

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[18] Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne: The Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 25.

the foundation for the morphology of the baroque theater emblem. As early as in 1968, Schöne's perspective was criticized by the influential Dutch scholar Hessel Miedema.[19] On the other hand, Daly admits that "Schöne's characterization of the emblem embraces formal, ontological, semantic, and functional elements. While remaining clear in focus and conception, it is broader and more tolerant than any view advanced to date."[20]

Acknowledging the proliferation and diversity of historical emblematic forms, Schöne stresses the three-part construction of the emblem (*emblema triplex*). The aspects in question are labelled the *inscriptio* (also referred to as a *lemma* or *motto*), the *pictura* (*imago*, *eikon*) and the *subscriptio* (*epigramma*). According to the author, "It seems reasonable to focus on describing the central, ideal type; based on its characteristics, it will then be possible to present a systematic approach to all others, more or less peripheral emblematic forms."[21] Schöne was not the first to attempt this—a similar emblem structure was described in the 17th century by Claude-François Ménestrier, subsequently referenced by many scholars, including Tatarkiewicz and Pelc. Nevertheless, such a definition may, arguably, appear somewhat limited.

After all, Alciati did not illustrate his emblems—the images were supplied by the publisher. The three-part form was a long time in the making before it was sanctioned by Ménestrier. Simultaneously, there existed the so-called *emblemata nuda*, lacking images altogether. In others, the word-image association was preserved but the text did not necessarily appear in two different segments that could be identified as *lemma* and *subscriptio*. Once we move beyond the category of printed emblems and delve into works in which individual aspects of the emblem can only be found through analogy, the matter becomes even more complex.

Alciati did not define his new multi-modal genre; he created it almost by accident. He only intended to use *Emblemata* as a title for his own works; however, the concept of juxtaposing an image and different kinds of text proved so appealing that many others decided to continue the experiment. In the 17th century, according to Daly, the total print runs of all the books of emblems reached millions of copies—an astounding number, considering the publishing and readership rates at the time.[22]

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[19] Cf. Hessel Miedema, "The Term *Emblema* in Alciati," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31, no. 1 (1968): 234–250, https://doi.org/10.2307/750643. Similarly to Schöne himself as well as many younger scholars, Miedema criticizes the ideas of the skeptics (including Heckscher and Wirth), based on certain *exempla* found in Alciati which do not correspond with their views.

[20] Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem,* 44.

[21] Albrecht Schöne, *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock* (München: C. H. Beck, 1964), 29.

[22] Cf. Daly, *Emblem in Early Modern Europe,* 43.

The production of emblems evolved without any supervision and grew to include many different guises, spanning numerous fields of creative activity, including theater. "Perhaps the time is right for a synthesized definition of the emblem,"[23] Daly wrote in 1998; nevertheless, no such definition is available as of today, and in his later book Daly no longer calls for it, observing instead that "with over 6,500 books of emblems and *imprese* to choose between, it would hardly be difficult to find some books that appear to support any critic's assertions."[24]

According to Schöne's opponents, his "ideal type" is an arbitrary concept that constricts, distorts, and diminishes the field of study rather than systematises it. Methodologically speaking, however, Schöne's proposition is perfectly sound. When dealing with a fuzzy set—and this is certainly the case with emblems—one needs to focus on its core elements, whose membership is unquestionable, hence Schöne's "center."

It is also worth mentioning that in the early modern period emblematics was embedded in a host of similar and potentially competing disciplines: the older field of heraldry, its derivative form of iconology, and hieroglyphics. Allegory, ecphrasis, hypotyposis, and symbolism all offered different ways of conveying meanings and creating mimesis, linking images and words as well as creating images through verbal meanings as well as the other way round; all these forms occupied the same space as the emblem, blending together, complementing and supplanting one another. The space surrounding the emblem was full of more or less cognate forms, and in such tight company boundaries are neither convincing nor particularly useful. Instead, it is better to focus on more obvious landmarks, such as the aforementioned "centers," helping us navigate the specific domains with each individual example.

It seems to me that this "center," Schöne's ideal, or even the very essence of the emblematic form, the distinguishing feature of all the elements belonging to the set, can be found in the way in which emblems explore several different ways to name or refer to the same thing. These ways may include word and image, or different kinds of words or linguistic characterization. Yet it can also be live stage action, which may in turn be juxtaposed with both image and different linguistic forms—the potential combinations are nearly endless. Heterogeneity is the key to the emblem.

It is therefore possible that Schöne's basic error lay in his use of the heavily charged adjective "ideal," which exposes him to criticism for alleged bias. Had

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[23] Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem,* 7

[24] Daly, *Emblem in Early Modern Europe,* 120.

a more neutral, methodological term been used instead, such as "normative," "basic," or "standard," stressing the technical character of the concept and its arbitrariness, the outcry may have been much reduced.

The same applies, to a certain extent, to the second pillar of Schöne's argument. In his words (he uses the terms *subscriptio* and *epigram* interchangeably):

> In comparison with . . . the epigram . . . the emblematic *pictura* belongs to a different level of reality, which represents—especially and immediately, because first-hand—a certain element of reality, more or less adequately represented by the author of the image and explained through the *substricptio*. . . . Every emblem contributes to a better explanation of reality. It is therefore of little importance which part is created first—whether it is the epigram, as was the case of Alciati, or . . . the *pictura*, as was the case with subsequent creators of emblems; at any rate, the emblem feeds meaning into the picture through the *subscriptio*, thus compelling the viewer and the reader to acknowledge the primacy of the image.[25]

Then, without any further explanation, two pages later this postulated primacy of the image is described as "ideal." This description must raise doubt, even when compared with other scholarly literature from the same era. Interpretations of the emblem that were rooted in Platonic or medieval thought saw the *pictura* as the "body" of the emblem, stressing its "corporeality" and materiality, while the more abstract verbal commentary, especially the *lemma*, was compared to the soul. There are many sources confirming such a perspective, and while Schöne refers to them himself,[26] he does not seem to realize that they in fact suggest something opposite to his own view: that it is not the *pictura*, but rather the other aspect, that approaches the ideal.

To sum up—although the concept of *ideelle Priorität des Bildes* forms another pillar of Schöne's theory, if the said theory is to retain its broad scope, the concept must be at least partially redefined. But what if the "ideal" aspect is removed? If we talk instead about the "presumed" or "factual" primacy of the image? In that case, we will notice two secondary notions that serve to justify the concept of *ideelle Priorität des Bildes* in the above mentioned excerpt. First, the emblem is used for understanding and interpreting reality—it is a tool of

[25] Schöne, *Emblematik und Drama*, 25.

[26] Schöne, 179.

cognition. Second, the image is closer to reality than the text, since it represents it "directly." And these qualities may determine its primacy.

As far as the latter proposition is concerned, in theater Schöne's views are possibly seconded by Aristotle. Schöne perceives the dramatic action as an equivalent of the *pictura*, and in Chapter Three of *Poetics* (1448a) action is described as being dominant over text. Yet, Aristotle frames this dominance in strictly structural terms, viewing action as the distinguishing feature of drama as a genre, rather than linking it with any external truth.

Now let us examine the third pillar of Schöne's concept, which summarizes the previous two:

> It is then evident that the emblematic *pictura* and its corresponding textual elements, coexisting in the emblematic act, depict things that either exist or may be possible in the future; an aspect of reality which does not always—or perhaps not yet—appear to us, but it may still enter our visual field. Therefore, next to the ideal primacy of the emblematic *pictura* (with respect to *subscriptio*), and as a necessary condition of this primacy, the emblem creates a certain potential factuality.[27]

The most fervent criticism of this perspective has come from Bernhard F. Scholz in his comprehensive study *Emblem und Emblempoetik* (2002).[28] Scholz links this "potential factuality" predominantly with the sphere of the image (*res picta*), relating it directly to representations of mythological scenes and explaining to Schöne that 17th- and 18th-century viewers knew perfectly well that mythical creatures were products of the imagination and thus they surely did not consider their factuality, even if only potential.[29] It is clear that Scholz misinterprets Schöne's idea, reducing it to a conviction of the factuality of *res picta*, whereas

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[27] Schöne, 27.

[28] It is difficult to find any line of argument in the "systematic" part of Scholz's study which is not fueled by his vehement opposition to Schöne's views and grounded in negating his ideas. And it is not that far from criticism of his ideas to antagonism towards the author himself—like in Scholz's exclamation conveyed in a footnote, claiming that Schöne's "essentialist and evaluative" approach (referring, of course, to the infamous "ideal") "tells us more about the author than his topic," see Bernhard F. Scholz, *Emblem und Emblempoetik: Historische und systematische Studien* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag 2002), 248.

[29] Just a page earlier, Scholz criticises Schöne for referring to the poetics of the period in his quest to understand the emblem's structure and function. He ironically suggests that Schöne might just as well look to nature books from the same era and use them as scientific evidence, quoting their incorrect representations of animal bodies. The argument is painfully unjust—after all, it is obvious that progress is measured differently in science and in the humanities, and while we definitely possess a far superior knowledge of animal anatomy today than a couple of centuries ago, historical views on semantics may be just as valid as modern theories on the topic. Moreover, it is a questionable practice to support one's points with historical evidence, while criticising another scholar for doing the very same thing. See Scholz, *Emblem und Emblempoetik*, 251 ff.

in fact Schöne does not imply that our ancestors in the 16th and 17th centuries really believed in the possibility of the Lernean Hydra actually coming to life, or of ever seeing a winged foot on a turtle, as pictured in *Peristrom XVII* by Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro.[30] Schöne's point was not about factuality—he says so himself. So what was it about?

Defending Schöne's Views through Reinterpretation

Let us try to defend Schöne—not his wording, perhaps, but the intuition that underlies it. One might half-jokingly say that we owe it to him as the first spokesman for theater in the field of emblematics. More seriously, however, it could be suggested that it is by no means incidental that Schöne's diagnoses have been providing food for thought for half a century, and they continue to intrigue to this day. Perhaps it is his willingness to venture beyond the duality of literature and visual art, dominant in today's emblematics, which allowed Schöne to see the emblem as a cross-genre, or even genre-defying cultural phenomenon. But above all, it helped him to grasp the very aspect stressed by Tatarkiewicz: the emblem's aspiration to lay the foundation for a universal work of all arts.

The phrases formulated by Schöne—despite all their shortcomings, the imprudent flashing of "ideal" notwithstanding—should thus be viewed as an attempt to voice impressions and insights gained thanks to a broader perspective; insights so profound that they sometimes evade verbalization, due also to a limited conceptual framework. Half a century later, it seems that we have finally moved away from that position—at least with regard to the "potential factuality"—owing to a new set of theoretical tools. We may therefore very well make an attempt to reformulate Schöne's ideas applying more contemporary discourse.

Albrecht Schöne published his *Emblematik und Drama* in 1964, just two years after John Austin's seminal work *How to Do Things with Words*. It is unlikely that he knew about Austin's book, since it belonged to a different field of study, and he certainly could not have been familiar with the fantastically rich and ever-growing performative theory, which sprouted from it. Nevertheless, from the present perspective, Schöne's crucial and at the same time most contested claim that the emblem "creates a certain potential factuality" immediately directs our gaze towards this particular field. In today's terms, Schöne's message is: "the

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[30]   Andrzej Maksymalian Fredro, *Peristromata Regum seu Memoriale Principis Monitorum, Symbolis expressum* (Gdańsk, 1660), http://polishemblems.uw.edu.pl/index.php/en/e-collections/33-first-e-collection/129-fredro-eng.

emblem is a variation of the performative." And if so, he compels us to analyze emblems with an eye to what we could describe as performative processes.

The Emblem and Performance from Today's Perspective

One need not look far. The reflection on the processual character of the emblem—a reflection concerning the extent to which the emblem generates, provokes, activates and summarizes certain sequences of human actions—has accompanied contemporary research on the emblem from the very outset. For Heckscher and Wirth, the riddle inherent in the emblem was evident: how to link the *inscriptio* and the *pictura*? In such an arrangement, the *subscriptio* could be viewed as a hint.[31] Schöne disproves this interpretation using the oldest trick in the emblem researcher's book, namely by arguing that there is ample evidence to the contrary in Alciati's work.[32] Yet in Alciati, the interplay of the three elements of the emblem is also supposed to guide the viewer/reader towards a certain mystery—a glimpse of reality peering through, a perplexing truth. Such a riddle does not come with a ready answer; instead, it is a fundamental problem whose solution is unknown to all.

It needs to be stated clearly that the truth which is served by the emblem is enigmatic and volatile in nature. The reality, framed by the emblem in the mode of performative potentiality, cannot be fully verbalized or represented, hence the necessity of juxtaposing words and representations, image and action, names and descriptions—in other words, different categories of mimesis—constituting, to borrow Simone Weil's turn of phrase, pliers with which to reach the truth. According to Daly, this aspect is unanimously agreed upon by emblem scholars:

> I believe that the emblem writer was intent on conveying what he or she regarded as truth, the truth of a moral or religious position, rather than a fragment of knowledge. The emblem writer uses knowledge to transmit that larger truth.[33]

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[31] "As far as the emblem is concerned, we are dealing with a union of words (lemma) and image (icon), forming a riddle whose answer can be found through the epigram." See Heckscher and Wirth, "Emblem, Emblembuch," section 1c.

[32] Schöne, *Emblematik und Drama*, 19–20.

[33] Daly, *Emblem in Early Modern Europe*, 83.

The opposition of truth and knowledge, the truth understood ontologically as that which *exists*, and knowledge interpreted as the cluster of beliefs that we apply in order to gain the best possible access to the truth. Apparently, the conviction that the truth exceeds any human knowledge of it is an essential characteristic of the emblem. "But is an emblem a product or a process?"[34] asks Daly, forty years after Schöne. Daly clearly leans towards the first option; in his view, the contrary approach:

> presumes a certain leap of faith if modern scholars are to accept that the emblem represents a "reading process" that helped readers take a step towards the more active and independent role in the production of meaning.

Daly thus ends with a rhetorical question: "Where is the evidence of reader response?"[35]—though he clearly collects it himself. The thousands of titles, and millions of copies that he references, all provide ample evidence of reader response. These are further accompanied by countless, equally energetically pursued echoes of books of emblems in various areas of culture. The "production of meaning," by general consensus, was determining the main function of the emblem—what else could possibly be needed?

It is the process that provides the main context for Frances Yates's discussion of the emblem. The critic views the emblem as a mnemonic prop, assisting in the process of memorizing and therefore also in rhetorical demonstrations, public disputes, as well as scientific and religious arguments; in other words, manifold processes occurring between people.[36] Mario Praz comments on the *impresa*, a special instance of the emblem, being

> nothing else than a symbolical representation of a purpose, a wish, a line of conduct (*impresa* is what one intends to *imprendere*, i.e. to undertake) by means of a motto and a picture which reciprocally interpret each other.[37]

Then, drawing on Torquato Tasso's arguments, Praz explains that the "*impresa* does not mean the action itself, but the express thought, or the intention, of

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[34] Daly, 16.

[35] Daly.

[36] "Amongst the most characteristic types of Renaissance cultivation of imagery are the emblem and the *impresa*. These phenomena have never been looked at from the point of view of memory to which they clearly belong." See Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 124.

[37] Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, 58.

undertaking it."**38** This conviction refers directly to Richard Bauman's views on performance, defined as "the actual execution of an action as opposed to capacities, models, or other factors that represent the potential for such action or an abstraction from it."**39** The emblem would belong to this group, definitely evoking action and providing a point of reference. And while, according to Tasso, the emblem "postulates a difficulty,"**40** performance, in Jon McKenzie's view, always rises to the challenge**41** in order to defeat it.

The Emblem as the Root of Performance According to Harsdörffer

As exemplified by Tasso, we can identify views placing the emblem within some kind of process—be it human behavior, understanding, or categorization—not only today, but also in the works of scholars from the past. The most distinguished among the latter is the German writer, thinker, and activist Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, who inspired all the scholars cited in the present article. Most of his life coincided with the Thirty Years' War, and his lasting commitment was to cultivating native culture during the catastrophe of the war and in the immediate aftermath. The most lasting, albeit unscripted testimony to his exertions can be found in the German language itself—Harsdörffer purged it, replacing macaronic expressions with newly coined words that caught on and are still in use today, such as *Aufzug* and *beobachten*.

Among his numerous writings, it is worth mentioning the six-volume *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*. These slim volumes alluded to Erasmus's *Colloquia Familiaria*, hence the Polish translation by Szyrocki appeared under the title *Rozmówki białogłowskie* (Women's conversations). Yet, the translated version abandons one important element: *-spiele*, which means "game." A more accurate rendition would thus be something like "women's conversation games," or simply "conversation games," since the female aspect is abandoned after the first two volumes, with later ones addressed to the general reader.

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38 Praz, 59.

39 Richard Bauman, *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 41. Cf. Marvin A. Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), 5.

40 Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, 59.

41 Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3 ff.

One of the earliest "conversation games" proposed by Harsdörffer is a game of emblems:

> One can . . . devise conversation games based on emblems (*Sinnbilden* [!]). For instance:
>
> I. Try setting topics and then finding emblems to match.
> II. Choose an image and then together select an inscription (*Obschrift*) for it.
> III. Create an inscription and then select an image or a figure to match.
> IV. Depict a whole scene from the Holy Scripture.
> V. If one analyses all the elements and deduces emblems based on them, as was done by Camerarius and Aldrovandus, who thusly described animals, or by taking everything that can be seen, one or more emblems can be created.
> VI. Take from a poet everything that can be used for emblem inscriptions.[42]

Even in this short excerpt, Harsdörffer's passion for the Germanisation of foreign words is evident. Instead of the Greek word "emblem," he introduces a native word *Sinnbild*,[43] while the Latin *inscriptio* is replaced by *Obschrift*.

The first three points of the instruction depict the emblematic process as a human or inter-human game of meaning production. Its initial nugget (point I) is the subject of the emblem— a "thing" that appears ungraspable and unspeakable to such an extent that several different systemic categories are needed to grasp this "thing," "peculiarity," or, as at the center of a black hole: "Singularity." The same enigma inherent in the emblem has been remarked on by contemporary theorists. The process (game) can also be initiated in other ways, for instance by the simple challenge of inter-category translation (points II and III) within one single medium of predetermined content. Here as well, of course, the "thing" included in point I is implied as the common designate created through the emblematic game involving the visual and linguistic complex. It is possible that this "thing" can only be discovered through playing the game. Its main rule may

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[42] Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, *Frauenzimmer Gesprechspiele, so bey Ehr- und Tugendliebenden Gesellschaften, mit nutzlicher Ergetzlichkeit, beliebet und geübet werden mögen: Aus Italiänischen, Frantzösischen und Spanischen Scribenten angewiesen* (Nürnberg, 1644), 50–51, http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/lo-2622-1/start.htm.

[43] This translation choice was overlooked by the otherwise brilliant Polish translator of another fundamental work on German baroque theater, which served as an important source for Schöne. In the Polish version of Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Kopacki translates Harsdörffer's term *Sinnbilder* using the euphemism "images carrying meaning" or "illustration of meaning" instead of "emblems," see e.g. Walter Benjamin, *Źródło dramatu żałobnego w Niemczech*, trans. Andrzej Kopacki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2013), 247, 314. John Osborne, on the other hand, translates *Sinnbild* as "emblem," see Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2003), 186, 232.

be based on points i and ii or i and iii—there are many potentially enriching combinations and nuances at the source of the process.

While points i–iii set out the procedure, points iv–vi offer an interesting and precise indication concerning the zones where the Singularity (so crucial in the emblem) can be identified. Point iv refers to transcendence, which can be accessed through the Holy Scripture. This way was pursued by, for instance, Zbigniew Morsztyn, whose *Emblemata* take for their mottos Biblical verses, supplanted by matching epigrams (these being, of course, *emblemata nuda*). Point v looks for the emblem's source in nature, experienced directly through the senses. Point vi explores people's inner worlds, elusively expressed in poetry[44]—vast expanses of human psyche or imagination.

Transcendence—nature—identity: these are three fundamental spheres of the inexpressible, the unrepresentable, the unspeakable. Spheres with which human individual, categorizing consciousness struggles and can never come to grips. The game proposed by Harsdörffer helps us understand why people needed the emblem so much in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The Emblem and Performance: Close Links

At this stage, we should revisit Daly's dilemma: "is [the emblem] a product or a process?" But, is this the right question? Are we really facing an alternative here? Is it not true that the emblem, in its material form, constitutes both a prop and an instruction for a process, through which it may formulate a self-explanation and self-justification? Since the emblem gives us a set of disjunctive elements that need to be juxtaposed by the viewer, either in their own mind, or in dialogue with others, are we not dealing with a feedback loop? And, the flaws of such an analogy notwithstanding, if we were to take a product such as a deck of cards, could we meaningfully analyze it independently of the process in which it is used? And what about the other way round?[45]

In the sentence cited above, Schöne defines the emblematic process as a heuristic phenomenon: "every emblem contributes to a better explanation of reality." In this process, the image or dramatic action is to be prioritized, since—according to Schöne—these are more adjacent to "raw," uncategorized reality. In other

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[44] Of course, poetry may also allude to any of the remaining two spheres (or anything else, really); nevertheless, its topic is always mediated by the poet's personality and subjectivity.

[45] Suffice it to mention various emblematic dimensions regularly ascribed to cards—spanning both Tarot Arcanas and more plebeian monikers such as the "Beer Card" or "One-Eyed Jacks."

words, they may serve as intermediaries between this reality and more abstract elements of the emblem; or rather, they represent it in their context. This may be the source of Schöne's subsequent controversial and rather obscure claim—the fourth pillar of his theory, which has not yet been mentioned here. It is an assumption that the emblematic *res picta* is endowed with both existence and meaning (*Sein und Bedeutung*); the contents of an icon both depict a concrete, discernible scene (Fredro's winged foot… on a turtle among flowers) and point to a more abstract "thing," a Singularity that is transcendental with respect to the emblem itself. This ambiguous, hazy status, probably intended to encompass the symbolic and allegorical dimension of the *pictura*, is probably best compared to a dream.

Nevertheless, the double meaning of the *pictura* notwithstanding, today it is impossible to endorse Schöne's hierarchy of precedence. It seems that he was heavily influenced by the tendencies of the previous era, with its adherence to Rousseau's conviction regarding the secondary status and falsehood of writing in comparison with more spontaneous forms of representation—the belief that thoughts fly swiftly in the soul but become broken when framed in words, especially in writing. In fact, Schöne's book was released just three years prior to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*; the vision of the world which Schöne presented had already begun to crumble. From today's perspective, any attempts at forming hierarchical structures of the emblem are pointless, especially those rooted in the belief in the primary character of its individual components.

Since our goal is to preserve as much of Schöne's argument as possible, it seems reasonable to assume that the emblem allows us to capture a certain element of reality—potentially factual reality—by juxtaposing various category systems, diversely expressed through language, action, and image (maybe even in sound or smell?), interwoven in many different ways and sometimes also embedded in one another. Both the selection of these systems and the very moment of their juxtaposition testify to the incredible wealth of variations, combinations, and modifications (which further impedes the formulation of a clear, unambiguous definition of the emblem).

The emblem can thus appear as an incubator of new categories, shaping and reshaping our understanding of reality in all its guises. The emblematic process is dynamic in nature, focused on observing actual and potential realities. Such an understanding of the emblem concurs with the above mentioned definition of performance according to Richard Bauman, formulated in my book *Reguła Nibelunga*[46] (The Principle of the Nibelung) and subsequently developed in my

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[46] Tomasz Kubikowski, *Reguła Nibelunga: Teatr w świetle nowych badań świadomości* (Warszawa: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza, 2004).

other publications. While in its broadest sense performance can be described as an active comprehension of reality, its purposeful categorization in all its potential variants, as well as situating within it the performing subject, the emblem could be viewed as a part of performance—provoking and stimulating it, or serving as a documentation of one of its stages. It could be helpful in the universal human performance, both on the individual and—especially—social level. This would explain its popularity.

If we assume that performance always takes place in the narrow zone between awareness and what lies beyond it, the same rule applies to the emblem. Its conscious elements, categorized in word, image, or behavior, point to the unconscious Singularity, which we are hoping to reach but (still) are unable to grasp. Assuming that theater in its various guises assists in daily human performances, and positing these human performances as the Singularity,[47] we may use these analogies to gain a better understanding of many phenomena. For instance this one: both theater and the emblem take so many historic forms that it is virtually impossible to distill their core characteristics and formulate definitions which cannot be questioned or accused of absolutism. Finally, these analogies explain the dream of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, common to both these art forms, which serves as our point of departure. Since both theater and the emblem gather and orchestrate various processes and hierarchies, juxtaposing them through varied dissonances and counterpoints with the immense, ungraspable reality of nature, our selves and transcendence, it is no wonder that so many attempt to enhance this process, intensifying the pursuit of reality and revealing an increasing number of different systems, incorporating more and more of these until one succumbs to the dream of running as many of them, at once, as is possible for a human being.

The Emblematic Character of Theatrical Scenarios and Documentation

"Thou, Nature, art my goddess," declares Edmund in *King Lear* upon his first appearance on stage. "Nature, hear, dear goddess," seconds Lear merely two scenes later. Yet according to Edmund, this goddess favors the stronger individual, the one who is more cunning and ruthless; it is she who prompts him to dispose of his senile father and inept brother. Lear, in contrast, claims that

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[47] See Tomasz Kubikowski, *Przeżyć na scenie* (Warszawa: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza, 2015).

nature requires of children that they support their parents, even to the point of giving in to their elderly despotism. Nature is thus presented as a zone of fluid anomie and survival of the fittest, as well as a sphere of fixed hierarchical rules and intergenerational solidarity. This struggle, one of the core conflicts in the play, is obvious, forthright and perfectly familiar.

Let us now examine it from our present formal angle. Are not Lear's and Edmund's perspectives in fact expressions of their individual, personal, and mutually exclusive epigrams attached to the concept of "nature," equally ungraspable for both of them? Are not they both talking about a nature which makes us grow old and die, links us through family bonds, and unevenly distributes talents, capacities and sensitivities? Nature, which is both inscrutable and overwhelming? It is the very same nature which Harsdörffer saw as a source of *Sinnbilder* topics; a sphere of Singularity, which can never be exhausted, even by the most condensed nodes of epigrams, icons and mottos. The ever-bewildering conflict between Lear and Edmund, or rather the above mentioned aspect of their complex, multi-layered conflict, remains but one of the infinite number of problems that can be derived from nature. Moreover, it may serve as a central element of both an emblem and a dramatic action.

If we now follow Schöne's proposal to treat dramatic action as a legitimate *pictura*, will we not arrive at the bold supposition that the dramatic scenario/drama reflects an emblematic structure? *King Lear* merely provides a notable, well-known example, but the matter in question is of a broader nature: does a dramatic scenario, a drama as we know it, bear the characteristics of emblematic structure? An emblematic structure, let us repeat this, which uses action to replace the *pictura*, and which juxtaposes all the textual matters with the said *pictura* as well as with one another, interweaving them in varying, nebulous, and occasionally purposefully vague roles of *in-*and *subscriptio*? If so, then the entirety of the drama as a structure of actions—provided it is well made—intrigues and provokes one to attempt to figure it out through *Aktionspiel* rather than *Gesprächspiel*—in other words, through staging it.

Would then the emblem become a kernel of performance, including theatrical performance? An instruction for the performance? Let us try to look at the matter from another perspective: what remains after a theatrical performance? Living memory, of course, which continues to move and inspire the viewer, but which fades with time, making one want to preserve it and share it with others. In both these circumstances, namely the passage of time and communication, the living fleeting memory itself becomes the Singularity, hard to retain and convey—the harder, in fact, the more time passes.

Of course, one can rely to some extent on documentation, referred to by Stefania Skwarczyńska as "documentation of the piece." Iconographical documents—hand sketches, photographs, and video and audio records all help to partly preserve the visual aspect (or aural, in the case of audio recordings). Schöne would probably view these as being closest to the Singularity of the theatrical event, supplanting it with various *picturae*. There are also textual documents. Is it not true that critics, while relating a performance which they have seen for other people, and viewers who note down their impressions and responses for themselves or others, attach their own epigraphs to the fleeting, passing event?

At the foundations of a theatrical performance—aside from the living memory and consciousness of its creators—lies a polyphonic dramatic text or an ensemble of texts collected and combined by the playwright, as well as certain icons which inspired the author or were created by them—static or movable *picturae*. When the performance is over and its living memory begins to fade, what remains is a set of static or movable images and a collection of texts. Consequently, both at the beginning and at the end of the performative process we encounter an emblematic set. Initially, it serves the wider process, metaphorically speaking, as dry yeast or kindling does; ultimately, it encompasses all its material remnants. It is also the only remaining, possible medium for its social transmission.

The larger the time gap, the more evident this phenomenon becomes. Today, there are still some people alive who saw Jerzy Grotowski's *The Constant Prince* performed live;[48] nevertheless, the majority only access the performance through iconic photographs depicting Ryszard Cieślak in the main role. The focus is on the forever fixed *picturae* of Cieślak's Passion-like, baroque poses, his body captured mid-movement, clothed in a perizoma, as well as on the ever-proliferating corpus of texts and commentaries on those texts, and commentaries on the commentaries, and various syntheses of earlier texts—a plethora of varied, increasingly removed epigraphs. This has not changed despite the reconstructed video recording, made available decades after the premiere and the final performance. Of course, the video has its value as yet another icon, possibly endowed with a higher level of *ideelle Priorität* than the preceding ones, but that is all.

The example of *The Constant Prince* is especially convincing, given that it is a piece of theater which intentionally avoided verbalization and iconization, prioritizing those elements which were beyond categorization. And yet even this

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[48] *Książę Niezłomny* (*The Constant Prince*), based on the play by Calderón adapted by Słowacki, dir. and stage play Jerzy Grotowski, architecture Jerzy Gurawski, prem. (1st version) April 25, 1965, Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows, Wrocław.

performance did not escape ultimate emblematization. A very different example of interpersonal ephemera preserved through emblems is Kazimierz Dejmek's performance of *Forefathers' Eve*, which immediately became a poignant social event of historical importance, paying the price of being almost instantaneously cancelled.[49] In this case, the arrangement of the usual written epigraphs is rather different. Due to communist censorship, few proper reviews by critics were made available (the most detailed ones are by Zbigniew Raszewski); these are, however, accompanied by an important selection of social records. To this we may add a set of iconic photographs, a few video excerpts and, again, an audio recording of the first performance restored after fifty years. Together, all these materials constitute an emblematic set, helping us to reconstruct the performance and, especially, its rapturous reception—on the opening night on 25 November 1967 and the final performance open to the public on 30 January 1968.

The drama inherent in this kind of transition—namely, from a live event or process, a living memory, to a dry compilation of iconic and textual records—was explored by The Wooster Group in their performance *Poor Theater*,[50] based on Grotowski's legacy. The show was centered around the impossibility of recreating the actual original performance (of Grotowski's *Akropolis*) based on its emblematic remnants (including, especially, its television recording). The sad conclusion was similar to the reflection voiced by Elizabeth LeCompte, as part of her reminiscences of visiting, many years later, the venue in Wrocław where *Apocalypsis* was performed: the only remnant of the site of her youthful ecstasies was now the floor, whose touch allowed LeCompte to reconnect with that past experience. However, it is better to express the same sentiment in a different way. LeCompte's words were not necessarily the conclusion of the performance. Rather, they are the *lemma* of an emblem, emerging from the memory of a spectator who saw the performance a long time ago. And it is this emblem that is conveyed by the spectator, the author of the present text, at this particular moment in time and in this particular form.

The Constant Prince, *Forefathers' Eve*, *Poor Theater*—the audiences and some of the actors participating in these performances are still alive. Their emblems have not completely solidified yet, other aspects are still preserved in living memory. Yet, in the longer time frame—considering the time lapse separating us

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[49] *Forefather's Eve* by Mickiewicz, dir. and text setup Kazimierz Dejmek, prem. November 25, 1967, Teatr Narodowy, Warszawa.

[50] *Poor Theater: A Series of Simulacra* by The Wooster Group, dir. Elizabeth LeCompte, prem. November 19, 2003, The Performing Garage, New York. Performed in the Dramatic Theatre of the Capital City in Warsaw on November 16–20, 2004.

from the actual performances by the Reduta Theater, or of plays by Wyspiański, Bogusławski, Shakespeare, or Aeschylus—the emblematic character of these theatrical remnants becomes evident. There remains nothing but emblems.

The art of the emblem developed and flourished in the same era as the foundations of modern theater. Simultaneously, the theatrical metaphor encompassing a growing number of spheres of human life and cognition, propagated, for instance, by Giulio Camillo or Francis Bacon, was putting down roots. Indeed, as Julie Stone Peters convincingly points out, it was a moment that saw a large-scale "reinvention of theatre." A mass effort was made to communicate and experiment in order to come up with a new meaning and purpose for this ancient institution. The "reinvention" was only partly based on existing contemporary genres of performance. Much more often inspiration was sought in the enigmatic "theater" of bygone cultures, their remaining texts and images forming an emblematic set.[51] Then, as Peters explains:

> those who thought of themselves as experienced in modern aesthetics came to feel that a printed dialogue read aloud by one's neighbors was not real drama, that animal shows or gymnastic gags with songs were not really proper plays, but that theatre involved actors in stage space with certain kinds of paraphernalia performing certain kinds of texts.[52]

A few paragraphs later, she thus summarizes this special moment of cultural transformation:

> Theatre became such a crucial metaphor for the Renaissance not only because of its institutional centrality in narrating history and mirroring culture, but because of its role in relating speech and writing, performance and the book.[53]

The emblem performed precisely the same function. Therefore, the question must be asked: is not this affinity between the emblem and theater—both flourishing at the same time, both ostentatiously woven into the main thread of cultural revival, both incorporated in the current of an intense civilizational performance, facing numerous challenges—yet more evidence that these two art forms are in fact related? If, as Peters's book shows, the roles of theater and

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[51] See Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book 1480–1880: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), especially 93–129, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199262168.001.0001.

[52] Peters, *Theatre of the Book,* 104.

[53] Peters, 106.

emblems in the culture of the period can be described in similar terms, is it not fair to say that together they served the same function? Is it not possible that performative processes occurring in various *theatrae*—improvised theaters in public squares, deliberately erected theaters based on ancient models, theaters organized by aristocrats in their mansions, or those imagined by philosophers in their memory palaces—combined and communicated with one another, influencing the outside reality through a web of emblems? Should this be the case, Schöne would not have been able to grasp the entire process while he was describing the symbiosis linking theater with the emblem in the 17th century, focusing instead on its beginning and end.

To return to our main line of enquiry: is it not true that in fact the only remains of a theatrical performance are emblems, and these emblems are the only way that it can be shared socially, transformed, and enriched? Could not these emblems be used to create new performances, since the performative process of a theatrical show stems from an emblematic starter? Is it not true then that the emblem inevitably accompanies the performative process as its starting point, side effect, end product, or dream goal? In other words, since we view performance as a "melting pot" and "incubator of new categories," is it not true that the categories serve as material in the melting pot as well as an end product and by-product set into emblems? Are not the emblem and performance but two different sides of the same phenomenon? If so, the shared pretensions of theater and the emblem to develop *Gesamtkunstwerk* do not in fact amount to competition, and Daly's dilemma—"product or process?"—has finally found a satisfactory answer.

The Emblem in the Social Circulation of Performance

The main questions need to be elaborated on, with some minor comments. First, "theater" much more than the "emblem" encompasses a plethora of capricious, shapeshifting phenomena, thoroughly distinct from one another, evading all attempts at categorization. The resulting set is much fuzzier than our initial example. In fact, it is difficult to find any broad theory of theater which would not be immediately questioned as an arbitrary creation or a sanctioning of an "ideal type." Escapes from theater, exits from theater, departures from theater—all these actions constitute an integral part of the theatrical landscape, especially in the modern era.

Self-negation is an inherent part of the history of theater in the last century, which is quite understandable—if we believe theater to be a performative melting pot for reshaping all world categories, then it must follow that also the categories

defining the pot itself must end up in the fire. Indeed, sometimes they should be the first to melt in order to gain credibility. As a result, a theater scholar feels surprisingly at home when making an excursion into emblem theory, as they discover familiar aporias. They also recognize familiar despondencies, obstinacies, and dispiritedness about the ever-elusive subject of study, similar to those to which they are well accustomed in their own field. Paradoxically, this only corroborates the feeling that these two areas of study are interconnected—one remains submerged in the same sphere of shimmering fluidity.

Secondly, similarly to theater, the emblem is definitely a social phenomenon. It emerges and fulfills its purpose in a community. Even its creation often requires collective effort. Harsdörffer turns it into a parlor game, but even Alciati's *Emblemata* combined the author's texts with images selected by the publisher. The collective authorship of emblematic works seems to baffle emblem scholars; theater scholars, however, are much more accustomed to such circumstances, since a work of theater usually consists of multiple individual creative efforts, overlapping in time and space.

Moreover, the success of the emblem is admittedly a social success. There were no emblematic masterpieces, and no one has attempted to identify them in the vast collection of 6,500 volumes because the art of the emblem was never concerned with masterpieces. Their value was measured in terms of their scale of impact; namely, the intensity of their social transmission and the scale of their readership. In the early modern period, emblems were, as we have already established, extensively reproduced. To borrow one critic's elegant turn of phrase, their authors "borrowed from one another's books when the ink was scarcely dry," and the resulting creations were subsequently "plagiarized by everyone in sight: armorers, bell-casters, clothiers, cabinet makers, jewelers, weavers and so on."[54] In the same period, the circulation of stage plays, dramatic motifs, and individual *lazzi* was characterized by equal spontaneity and intensity.[55]

Thirdly, the emblems' intensive circulation and overwhelming opulence allows emblems to perform various functions, both subversive and normative in character (again, similarly to performance). The emblematic and performative game of categories enables the emergence of new clusters, turning against the previous ones. They are invigorating and attractive; they enter the broader social circulation and then transform into *loci communes*, congealing into clichés and banality that one subsequently wants to escape. But the

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[54] Robert John Clements, *Picta Poesis: Literary and Humanistic Theory in Renaissance Emblem Books* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960), 226.

[55] Cf. e.g. Monika Surma-Gawłowska, *Komedia dell'arte* (Kraków: Universitas, 2015), 144–164.

emblematic game of categories can be manipulated: it is possible to impose solutions and view it, according to Heckscher's proposition, as a riddle with a predetermined answer or an encoded instruction for the viewer. The emblem achieved its most normalized form in iconology; in Cesare Ripa's book, the epigram always presents a predetermined, unambiguous, and the only correct interpretation of the *eikon*.[56]

Finally—assuming our conjecture voiced in the previous section is accurate and the emblem through its inextricable link with performance indeed determines the form of its social circulation as the easily distributable "dry product" of performance—are not the socially engaged forms of theater especially symbiotically related to the emblem?

The Emblem in Political Theater—the Brechtian Tradition and Agitprop Theater

Schöne concludes his argument with a remark that the emblematic construction (namely, action accompanied by the summarizing choric epigraph) subsequently developed into *Singspiel*. As Marian Szyrocki aptly points out in his commentary on Schöne, the same pattern can be discerned in the construction of Bertolt Brecht's plays, combining verbal and musical elements.[57] Would it not be possible to broaden the scope of this remark? Could we not say that, in his theater, Brecht triggers an intense, multi-layered emblematic game, "alienating" from one another various category systems operating within a theatrical performance: spoken and written text, action, music, and image? All the "images" (*Abbildungen*), whose production is, according to Brecht, the ultimate goal of theater? The famous isolated *Gestus*? After all, Brecht wants to incorporate into theater all heterogenous artforms, and "and their relations with one another consist in this: that they lead to mutual alienation."[58] Brecht's theater is a great emblem collider, as well as a brilliant manufacturer of them. The silent scream of Mother Courage (with Helene Weigel's face), the epigrammatic endings of the songs in *The Threepenny Opera* ("Erst kommt das Fressen, dann komt die Moral"), the Shakespearian-cum-Hitlerian speech by Arturo Ui whilst subduing a city (in Polish theater, this character will forever be associated with Tadeusz

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[56] See Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, or Moral Emblems* (London, 1709).

[57] See Szyrocki, *Dzieje literatury niemieckiej*, 1:177.

[58] Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1964), 204.

Łomnicki's silhouette and voice), all still retain their emblematic power. In Brecht's theater, the emblematic social process found its most distinguished generator; nevertheless, it is easy to identify earlier examples in the work of the precursors to 20th-century political theater: in Piscator's multi-modal art, best embodied in the intrinsically emblematic performances of *Hoppla, We're Alive!* and *The Good Soldier Švejk*,[59] and earlier in the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold. How else can we classify Meyerhold's practice of holding discussions with the audience after the performance, if not as Harsdörffer's *Gesprächspiel* in its second aspect? After all, their aim was to collectively find a motto for the action they had just experienced, collecting various epigrams that might be useful in this process and collectively negotiating the emblem which would endure after the performance was over.

The first point on Harsdörffer's list, in turn, was potentially realized in one of the most famous creations ensuing from Brecht's project: Augusto Boal's Forum Theater. In Forum Theater, participants ("spectators") select as their topic a Singularity, unimaginable *in concreto*, consisting in a "potentially real" solution to a conflict or social tension. Next, in a shared performance, they use both actions and words to create an emblem constructing this very reality, making sure that it does not clash with everyday circumstances. Boal's primary goals are: producing a socially profitable, dynamic emblem which assists in the daily performance of the "forum participants," as well as initiating and moderating such actions in the "invisible theater" as would be conducive to the creation of such emblems.

We know the event which inspired Boal's model of theater: it was the paradoxical failure of the performance in which a normative emblem rooted in the old agitprop system was successfully imposed on the audience. When the farmers watching the performance attempted to use it as a starting point for another performance, now beyond theater, namely, seizing power in their region, Boal realized that the emblematic model developed on stage would inevitably result in bloodshed when it collided with reality; in other words, the performance thus generated would become a catastrophe.[60]

Agitprop, by the way, is the perfect example of an extremely emblematized form of theater, nearly blended into one with its posters in order to convey a fast, clear, and effective social message; it was also extremely normative. The aspects linking the emblem with political theater and socially engaged theater definitely merit closer inquiry.

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[59] Cf. Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre*, trans. Hugh Rorrison (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980).

[60] See Augusto Boal, "Without Symbols There Would Be No Civilisation," *European Journal of Arts Education* 2, no. 2 (1999), 9–10.

The Emblem in Postmodern and Postdramatic Theater

Emblematization seems to be one of the characteristic features of the theatrical formation that gained popularity forty years ago. Initially linked to postmodernism or described as the "next wave," towards the end of the 20th century it was labelled "postdramatic theater." In contrast with the dominant trend in the 1970s, accentuating the category-less phase of the performative process (according to Grotowski, "a performer deals with action, doing, rather than thoughts or theories"),[61] the postdramatic format highlights the categorization phase, or emblematic phase, as we shall name it for the purpose of the present discussion. The title of the first chapter of Jon Whitmore's *Directing Postmodern Theater*,[62] one of the important early attempts at describing this new format, reads "The Director Uses Semiotics." Indeed, the semiotics of theater, the chief line of enquiry in theater theory at the time, proposing the segmentation of a living performance into individual, specifically defined and codified category systems, not only tied very well with this particular direction of theatrical explorations, but also potentially inspired and legitimized it.

Hans-Thies Lehmann, the author of the term "postdramatic theater," openly refers to "heterogenic theater," which actively combats synthesis, engaging in synaesthesis. The "auto-sufficient physicality" of performers, formerly regarded as the reservoir of category-lessness, is now stripped of the halo of cultural legends and is instead endowed with endless "gestic potential"; it becomes but one of many elements of the performance text. Moreover, "postdramatic theater again and again transgresses the pain threshold in order to revoke the separation of the body from language"![63] Corporeality thus gains the "ideal primacy," previously ascribed to *pictura*. Theater as defined by Lehmann thus appears to be emblematic *par excellence*.

If one puts books aside and looks at the works of, among others, Robert Wilson, Pina Bausch, Frank Castorf, Jan Lauwers, Heiner Goebbels, or Romeo Castellucci—to name but a few of its most distinguished practitioners—through the right lens, the theater at the turn of the new millennium suddenly appears to be the equally multi-layered and many-winged *Emblematisches Gerüst*—albeit,

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[61] Jerzy Grotowski, *Teksty zebrane*, ed. Agata Adamiecka-Sitek et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2012), 812.

[62] Jon Whitmore, *Directing Postmodern Theater: Shaping Signification in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1–30.

[63] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 95–96.

of course, in an entirely different way than the European theater of the 17th century seemed to Schöne.[64] This aspect also merits further study.

Emblematic Power and Emblematic Space

The "emblematic power" mentioned in the above discussion of Brecht points to one inherent aspect of the relationship between theater/performance and the emblem. It is a delicate aspect in the sense that it is evaluative in nature, and hence rather elusive. If we are right to assume that the emblem is inextricably linked with performance, we need to surmise that, like performance, it can be felicitous or infelicitous. Consequently, we should perceive an emblem as felicitous if it successfully triggers a performative process, and as infelicitous if it does not manage to do so. Since we assume the playscript (traditionally, but not necessarily taking the form of drama) to be an emblematic creation, its felicity depends on whether it successfully generates a living performance. The emblem, in turn, which remains the cultural trace of the performance, should be deemed felicitous only if it catalyses and stimulates further performative processes.

When does this occur? Well, there are certain necessary conditions. First, the emblem must indeed be referring to the Singularity rather than banality. It must point to an aspect of reality which we truly *want* to discover and observe, though we are as yet unable to do this fully. The emblem should point to an aspect of truth that evades human cognition; it needs to continually and successfully aim towards the Singularity. In order to do so, to not slide off the performative mark, it is necessary to carefully select the right category systems and category-combining (heterogenous) messages. Moreover, these must be truly distinct; the tension between them cannot be resolved. The tension between Lear's and Edmund's epigrams still lingers. Both epigrams clashed against the iconic action of the tragedy and a plethora of other epigrams, mottos, and lemmas contained within the same Shakespeare's text, and an emblematic leaven emerged, which for the next four hundred years has continually stimulated minds and sparked new performances. For four hundred years, we have been trying to *name* the Singularity which *King Lear* indicates—a contest is afoot for the best *inscriptio* for this tragedy. The capacity for encouraging the viewer/reader to perceive the

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[64] A separate topic emerges with performances which do not use either living actors or personifications and which rely solely on transforming stage spaces, such as Leszek Mądzik's performances at the Catholic University of Lublin's Plastic Arts Theatre in the 1990s, or, to cite a more recent example, Heiner Goebbels's *Stifters Dinge*. Can these be viewed as moving emblems from our present perspective?

background elements, for stimulating the realization of the matters hovering in that evasive background—this is precisely the constructive potential that is ascribed to the emblem regardless of the disputes concerning its composition. It was this very conviction that prompted Diderot to exclaim in the famous passage from his *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* that "all poetry is emblematic" and explain that in a work of poetry the word should evoke sensory images and the thought, directly conveyed, needs to be pervaded by the hieroglyphic tissue (*un tissu d'hiéroglyphes*), which contributes to the emergence of *l'esprit* that animates all sounds and touches the reader's soul.[65] According to Diderot, it is precisely this transcendent, animating aspect that forms the essential feature of the emblem. The hieroglyphic tissue. Hieroglyphs, as they were perceived in that era, represented transcendence in an earthly form. Let us then reiterate: the emblem can be viewed as felicitous, as a true emblem, only if it successfully unlocks this sphere of transcendence. It can be revealed by the symbolic or, as they used to be called, hieroglyphic, properties of the *pictura*. It may emanate through the cracks between the image and text, or between different discourses forming part of the emblematic construction. Each of these elements points to a dimension or an extremity of the newly opened multidimensional space. In this space, performance may thrive—producing, transforming, and issuing new categories, which in turn can rearrange the space itself. This should be called the *emblematic space*, filled and created by performance.

The Emblematic Space in the Social Theater

The concept of the emblematic space has already been introduced in my book *Zjadanie psów* (The Eating of Dogs),[66] albeit without detailed explanation; nevertheless, it occurs to me to be a useful cognitive tool. In the book, I focus on the specific cultural performance of expeditions to the North Pole. In the 19th century, these expeditions exerted immense influence over the Western imagination, attracting enormous audiences despite the fact that the spectators never had direct access to the performers. The performance of the North Pole expeditions was therefore neither watched nor listened to; its reception was firmly located beyond direct sensory perception. First, the audience learned about the beginning of the performance and then they were faced with several

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[65] Denis Diderot, *Lettre sur les sourds et muets: À l'usage de ceux qui entendent & qui parlent* (Paris, 1751), 55–56, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86262546/f7.image.

[66] Tomasz Kubikowski, *Zjadanie psów* (Warszawa: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza, 2019).

years of silence (which could be filled at will by one's own imaginings). Finally, the performance was accessed *ex post* through images and various kinds of written statements—in other words, the classic combination of emblematic media. As a result, the performance followed the procedure described in the earlier sections of the present article, with the sole reservation that the audience could only access the performance upon the completion of the performative process—namely, when its "liveness" was replaced by the "dry" emblem.

In other words: when a 19th-century North Pole expedition commenced, the audience was informed about the opening of the emblematic space but they did not have access to that space. Finally, they received a resulting emblem, which could then be used as a starting point to create one's own performance—and this occurred on a massive scale. In *Zjadanie psów*, I describe the twists and turns of this process, its variants, catastrophes, and successes. I also stress the importance of the creation of the emblem within the performative process, which would then remain as the sole token of the performance. I pause to comment on the characteristics of the emblematic space, especially linked with the fundamental goal of any performance: survival. This survival can be interpreted in a number of ways: from the biological survival of a particular person, family, or population, through continuity within a chosen profession or social group to which we aspire, to the cultural endurance of individual people, communities, and ethnicities. In all of the above mentioned dimensions, the endurance is achieved through performance which takes place within the emblematic space. The specific relationship between the emblem and "cultural performance" as well as the characteristics of the emblematic space in the latter merit a separate study. For our present discussion, suffice it to mention that these 19th-century polar expeditions constituted an example of the performance of "everyday life" in one more, possibly metaphorical sense: a certain event having an audience. These "audiences" do not access the event directly through any sensory experience; instead, they learn about it via emblematic means. Possibly it could be stated that the performance has "witnesses." These "witnesses" should not be defined, however, in the legal sense, in which the word refers to individuals who were present there and then, and who perceived the event directly. The expedition had their "witnesses"—people who registered the event as it unfolded, live, in the process of becoming. It occurred through the easiest possible route, namely through emblems. In a similar sense, most adults today witnessed the 9/11 attacks, whether or not we were present in Manhattan on that day, and whether or not we watched the event live on TV within the next couple of hours. In a similar sense, in 2022, most of us are witnessing the war in Ukraine.

Emblem, Theater, Society

There are two different ways of understanding "social theater," overlapping to some extent in a central continuum, which is perhaps best described using Andrzej Falkiewicz's old concept of "Theater-cum-Society" (*teatr społeczeństwo*).[67] The line between actors, aiming to gain the widest possible social resonance through their acting, and activists resorting to performative action in the name of their cause, often becomes blurred (to which category, after all, did Augusto Boal belong?). It seems beyond doubt, however, that the path to "existing" in the public imagination leads through the emblematic space and to creating felicitous emblems by word, gesture, and image—pointing either to the performer themselves as the Singularity, or to the cause that they support.

What pops into our heads immediately upon hearing the names included in the following impromptu list of people with radically different goals, achievements, and motivations: Siddhartha Gautama, Diogenes of Sinope, Herostratus, Saint Francis of Assisi, Napoleon Bonaparte, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Joseph Beuys, Osama bin Laden? Do we not think of the emblems of their actions? The only element that connects these people is the fact that each of them through their own efforts opened a certain emblematic space—be it simple or complex, more or less multidimensional and meaningful, variously assessed by their contemporaries and generations to come. But each of these figures has become firmly rooted in the public imagination through their emblematic space.

In the end, it seems, the difference between the emblematic space formed by special institutions, usually referred to as theaters, and the space created spontaneously by various social and everyday performers lies in the fact that we go to the theater with a conscious intension of finding ourselves in the emblematic space and partaking in its benefits—we are also disappointed should this space fail to unfold during the show. In our everyday lives, in turn, we keep looking for these emblematic spaces, which may (and do) open up in all sorts of places. Whenever it happens, we are mindful of this fact; we also notice those who manage to initiate and expand these spaces, as well as those who succeed in entering them to seize control or, on the contrary, lose themselves completely. Regardless of the character of these spaces, each of them is a gift to society. A token of life, no more no less.

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[67] Andrzej Falkiewicz, *Teatr, społeczeństwo* (Wrocław: Zakład im. Ossolińskich, 1980).

Just to clarify: the "society" to which I am referring, in whose consciousness these real or dramatic characters become rooted, is a big word. I do not need to stress, I am sure, that the "success" or "felicitousness" of the emblem is not measured in absolutes. What to some people presents access to the breathtaking perspectives of the purest Enigma, to others may appear to be hackneyed and banal, an act of manipulation or self-deception. The efficiency of an emblem, as well as its failure, are relative concepts. In recent years, in large social circles, we saw the re-emergence of totalitarian emblems, which we had believed to have been compromised and rejected a long time ago—and yet here they were, re-entering the social discourse and revealing their power to inspire. Today, to the horror of some and delight of others, they continue to unfold their own spheres of intense performance, bewildering and shocking with their efficacy.

Conclusion

What remains of a theatrical performance in the widest social circulation, where the living memory of witnesses, and participants in the event, does not extend? Apparently, it is the emblem, which may then become the starting point for new performances. The emblem constitutes a residuum, a material starting point and end product of human performative processes, occurring, among other spheres, also in theater. Consequently, it constitutes the main medium for their social transmission, especially across large distances, when all living, direct access to the performance is no longer possible.

Consequently, it is my contention, which I have attempted to support with select historic examples, that socially-oriented forms of theater eagerly employ emblematic means, fostering and spotlighting the relationship between the emblem and performance. Next, I have investigated the issue of the "felicitousness" of the emblem, understood—in the light of the preceding discussion—as the capacity for evoking live performance (which itself is viewed as felicitous so long as it produces an enduringly intriguing emblem).

Finally, I have introduced the titular concept of the "emblematic space," defined as an abstract categorial space whose dimensions are then inscribed into emblems which serve as the starting point for the performance unfolding in this space. The performance both creates and reshapes the emblematic space, which is defined by extensive categorial transformations. The resulting dimensions of the emblematic space are then inscribed into the emblem which emerged from the performance taking place in this space.

To use a vivid comparison: the emblematic space opens up in the public consciousness akin to a stage, on which an intriguing performance then unfolds. The institution of theater can thus be viewed as a place where such spaces are intentionally created based on a social contract. The successful creation of emblematic spaces is the success and responsibility of theater. In everyday life, in contrast, emblematic spaces emerge spontaneously as a result of communal action (emanating from public hopes or expectations), or through the actions of individuals who command public attention. The actions conducted in these spaces can be viewed as social performances.

Translated by Aleksandra Kamińska

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