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Dorota Sosnowska
University of Warsaw
ORCID: 0000-0002-6073-460X

The Dark Continent

African Tales by Shakespeare and the Experience of Transitional Community

When we grasp the speech of the existential object, then being is communicated
in the existential community, which itself is revealed as a value.
We uncover a dialectic of separateness and belonging, of opposite values,
of which each is precious and capable of giving direction to our existence.
Each is worth being embodied in its existence.

Jolanta Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia* (Cracks in existence)

In Bryce Lease's book *After '89,* the British scholar inquires into the function of political theater in Poland after 1989. The fall of Communism with its social, economic, and political structures; the end of (struggles with) censorship, oppression,

propaganda in theaters, all required new theatrical language and aesthetics, involved this time with democratic but also capitalist changes. Lease finds a formula for this new, politically engaged theatricality, quoting its domestic critique and naming strategies employed by its artists "a permanent cultural revolution." He states:

> I argue that it is the role of political theater to activate . . . "a permanent cultural revolution" that does not find closure through adherence to a particular and substantive cultural identity that obscure precisely the elusive demarcations on which it is grounded.[1]

From this perspective, the stakes for post-1989 Polish theater lay in the destabilization and deconstruction of Polishness, in contesting nationalism, in visualizing differences, and in emancipating the marginalized. As Lease argues, political theater should "encourage dissensus" and be "constitutively disruptive and skeptical of communities that are not heterogeneous and coalitional."[2] He thus offers an operable distinction between theater that, while rooted in the struggle against Communism and in some cases continuing counterculture traditions or alternative aesthetics, is nonpolitical, and the one that, while often present in the mainstream under state support and generating contemporary theater stars, is indeed politically engaged: this difference resides in the community models that frame the respective theater scenes and their audiences. One—post-Communist Polish society—is homogenous, based on cultural identity, common history, and normative values; the other—audience—is heterogeneous, critical, celebrates differences, is self-organized, attentive, and revolting.

One of the key theatermakers for Lease's concept, even a major protagonist in his book, is internationally renowned director Krzysztof Warlikowski. In the introduction to *After '89*, Lease states:

> I give particular attention to Warlikowski's interventions into historical narratives and normative identities. Having explored the limits of cultural taboos through his feminist and postcolonial reworkings of Shakespeare, the performativity and elasticity of gender in Sarah Kane, and the decline in religious faith in Euripides, Warlikowski's later work dealt directly with Polish/Jewish relations, contested legacies of the Holocaust, Polish anti-Semitism, gay rights and AIDS, queer identities and alternative sexualities.[3]

Shifting theater's focus from "transcendental spirituality" to embodiment and sexuality, Warlikowski provides conditions, in Lease's view, for the rise of such

[1] Bryce Lease, *After '89: Polish Theatre and the Political* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 2.

[2] Lease, *After '89*, 3.

[3] Lease, 13.

a new public (even for Michael Warner's counterpublic), to whom the "address must be extended impersonally and be available for co-membership based on attention and not on bounded or restricted and exclusive notions of identity."[4]

There is an exception, however, a production that Lease sees as Warlikowski's failure in the field of political theater. *African Tales by Shakespeare* premiered in 2011 in Liège at Théâtre de la Place, its coproducer together with the European Theater Project Prospero.[5] *African Tales*' main producer was Nowy Teatr in Warsaw. At over five hours with intermissions, the performance was called by its creative team a "trilogy of the excluded." The main protagonists (or protagonist, as these characters were played by a single actor, Adam Ferency) were a sick Old Man, a Jew, and a Black Man: Lear, Shylock, and Othello. *African Tales*, blending Shakespeare with J. M. Coetzee and adapting motifs from Eldridge Cleaver and Jonathan Littell, also introduced soliloquies by Cordelia, Desdemona, and Portia written for the play by the Lebanese-Canadian writer Wajdi Mouawad, as well as visual quotes from Art Spiegleman's *Maus* and a host of other references. The play was meant to be a study of otherness rooted in the reality of contemporary Polish society, relevant to that domestic context while being universally comprehensible.

But Lease presents *African Tales* as a failed attempt to face the postcolonial consciousness of exclusion mechanisms and to transcend impulses to racialize the Other. At the heart of this reading lies the way in which Africa and Othello are conceptualized in the play. Lease points out that Africa—not directly present in *Lear* or in *The Merchant of Venice* and used as a vast metaphor—becomes a referent for all exclusion and foreignness, which renders it "at once indefinable and overdetermined."[6] He also states that Othello, played by Ferency with black makeup on his face and hands, is the only character physically distinguished "with any attributes to mark their social exclusion,"[7] or to put it even more directly: the only one whose exclusion is explained with theatrically visualized body features. Although Lease doesn't say it, as this makeup's spectacularism is so blatant that its use can be read as a conscious, critical gesture, it also provocatively recalls theatrical blackface rooted in nineteenth-century US minstrel shows and used in depicting racial stereotypes.[8] Lease sees the way Othello functions onstage in terms of "uneven equivalencies." In the casting decision linking Lear, Shylock, and

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4 Lease, 21.

5 *Opowieści afrykańskie według Szekspira* (*African Tales by Shakespeare*), directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, adaptation Krzysztof Warlikowski and Piotr Gruszczyński, set design Małgorzata Szczęśniak, Nowy Teatr/Prospero group, Liège/ Warsaw, 2011, https://nowyteatr.org/en/kalendarz/opowiesci-afrykanskie-wg-szekspira.

6 Lease, *After '89*, 186.

7 Lease, 187.

8 It could be also argued that Othello's makeup directly references blackface as it was analyzed by the culture historian Eric Loth. In his 1993 book, he examined contradictory meanings of the practice, showing how blackface frames ambiguities of white relations with Black culture, even today. See Eric Loth, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Othello as if one character, Warlikowski denies "each experience of exclusion . . . its own cultural particularities,"[9] instead framing each as universal. This is especially visible, Lease states, when comparing the construction of race against the ways in which gender is treated. In his view, Desdemona, Portia, and Cordelia, equipped with their passages written by Mouawad, gain a tool to restitute their marginalized voices. Othello doesn't get this chance. The "racial masquerade," while it might be read as a way to divorce "the referent of race from actor's body,"[10] renders impossible the character's emancipation, gained by equal representation. Lease sums up:

> Warlikowski . . . is . . . guilty of universalizing race . . . . Unlike Warlikowski's important work in the establishment of gay and queer counterpublics that establish historical trajectories of gay identities, new modes of feminism and the opening out of constrained and fragmented Polish/Jewish relations, race is dehistoricized in *African Tales* and used as a means to express a universal social marginalization of otherness that required more nuanced adjustments to notions of positionality.[11]

I propose to change the perspective in analyzing *African Tales*—not as a failed attempt to establish a critical, heterogenous, and coalitional public engaged in problems of exclusion, unsuccessful in this attempt due to the "lack of critical discourses on race and racial masquerade in the Polish cultural field,"[12] as Lease attributes the apparent indifference of domestic theater critics to the subject. I will instead look at the production as consistently addressing an experience of community that I would call transitional, as I find it both transient and shaped by anxieties, imageries, paranoias, and crises, as well as the artistic gestures of Poland's post-1989 transition. I will show that not only Othello but also Shylock, Lear and Cordelia, Desdemona, and Portia do not gain any agency or their own voices in the production, as otherness remains subsumed to strangeness. This materializes in the former's black makeup, but also in theatrical images of violence, sexuality, and cruelty, all of which are framed in the offensive, connoting the impassably foreign metaphor of Africa. I will use the methodological strategy of following the associations with art and philosophy that are put in motion by the production. I will show how those associations offer not only important contexts for the play, but also alternative communitarian projects, and show different potentialities of otherness. First, I will analyze the poster accompanying Polish premiere of *African Tales* by renowned visual artist Zbigniew Libera. Then I will focus on mice and pigs—visual references to Spiegelman's *Maus*, along with

[9] Lease, *After '89*, 187.

[10] Lease, 189.

[11] Lease, 191.

[12] Lease, 186.

its reiteration by the painter Wilhelm Sasnal. To conclude, I will reflect on raw meat used in the performance and in the feminist art of Alicja Żebrowska and in Jolanta Brach-Czaina's writing from the 1990s. I aim at proposing a perspective on Polish political theater in which *African Tales* is not an exception or blind spot in an otherwise successful emancipatory practice, but rather a crack revealing deep, underlying, and unresolved crises. To distinguish this, as I will argue, it is necessary to look at theater in the context of art and through the prism of thinking about impossible community: of imagining, dreaming of, fearing, willing toward change, embodying, and experiencing it.

Black Desert

After *African Tales*' premiere in Liège in October 2011, the production traveled to Poland, for Nowy Teatr's performances in December. But first, the public was confronted with the poster advertising the show. It was based on a photo by Zbigniew Libera and commissioned as a first project in the Artists for the Theater initiative. Nowy Teatr planned to invite Libera to design posters for chosen productions. The idea behind the initiative was to provide a space where art and theater could enter into dialogue, to feed and influence each other. Małgorzata Szczęśniak, the company's scenographer, originated the initiative and later explained to the media: "We asked Zbigniew Libera for his vision, with the understanding that we would neither hold him back nor censor him."[13] Szczęśniak formulated this diplomatic phrase because the poster had caused a scandal.

Libera, renowned for his installation LEGO *Concentration Camp* (1996), in which he used original LEGO blocks to build a model of a Nazi camp with prisoners and guards, is often seen as controversial, engaging with political and social problems. He is associated with the critical-art movement defining the cultural landscape of Polish politicality in the 1990s and 2000s. Embodiment lies at the center of Libera's multimedia, interdisciplinary work, as well as drag, imitation, transformation, and body image. His photographic work is represented by series including *Positives* (2002–2003), in which he restaged famous images depicting war and violence, changing them into "positive" scenes. Among them, the tortured and killed Che Guevara is replaced by a man whose cigar is lit by soldiers, while smiling people in striped costumes replace prisoners behind the barbed wire of a concentration camp, and in the last of the series, *Bush's Dream*, an Iraqi woman embraces a US soldier, revealing how media-circulated roles of heroes and enemies are essentially racist. For his poster representing *African Tales*, which he

[13] Wojciech Staszewski, "Penis na Dworcu Śródmieście," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Duży Format*), December 5, 2011, http://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/128571/penis-na-dworcu-srodmiescie.

Nowy Teatr

Krzysztof Warlikowski Opowieści afrykańskie według Szekspira

Koprodukcja z grupą Prospero: Théâtre de la Place, Théâtre National de Bretagne, Emilia Romagna Teatro Fondazione, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém, Tutkivan Teatterityön Keskus oraz Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, Théâtre National de Chaillot

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www.nowyteatr.org

attended in Liège, Libera chose a similar strategy of reversing an image to reveal the formative power of the gaze.

In it, one sees three figures posing for the photo. It is explicitly staged with makeup and props. Two male characters are naked, their recognizably white bodies painted in patterns reminiscent of African tribesmen. Before them, a slight woman with discernibly Asian features stands in a gray hoodie emblazoned with ARMY and jeans, a large camera around her neck. She's a stand-in for the stereotypical Japanese tourist. One man carries a red shoulder bag with flowers and hearts, evidently belonging to the tourist. The group stands on rocks in a gray, gloomy landscape. They all smile; one man is even lolling his tongue, indicating that they all play roles, rather than representing given identities. This whole scene resonates with racial (or racist) and cultural clichés. Europeans—Poles, to be precise—take the place of "natives," in a tourist attraction providing the background and pleasure for a dominating, invading Other, racialized as Asian and gendered as female. At the same time, the two men's degraded status is constructed with the use of visual reference, at least at first glance, to a stereotypical and imprecise "Africanness" that, as in the title of Warlikowski's play, makes Africa a token of exoticism and tribalism, and a paradigmatical object of the tourist gaze. But due to the organizational act of posing, reinforced by the explicit theatricality of the photo, I see it as an image of a racist image, and at the same time an important commentary on *African Tales*.

The poster, as I have indicated, caused a scandal, readily fueled by the press. What proved so provocative was that a naked body and a visible penis were being put on display on a poster in the public space. Libera explained to journalists about the poster and reactions to it:

> I watched the play and I took it as a tale of the death of the white man and his fear of the "black dick." . . . I think that's how it's expressed in the play. This interpretation was all the more pronounced because the play's premiere, which I saw, was in Liège. That's a Belgian city where the white man certainly no longer rules. There are more dark-skinned than white people on the streets.[14]

This offensive and, as Bryce Lease rightly states, "glaringly racist" phrasing reveals "a real anxiety about the end of the current world order predicated on white privilege and domination."[15] But dismissing it along with Libera's work does not permit the underpinning reference to the experience of watching *African Tales*, and to the experience of community offered by production.

[14] Staszewski, "Penis na Dworcu Śródmieście."

[15] Lease, *After '89*, 185.

Talking about "black dick" and fear, Libera referred directly to how Othello is named and shown onstage and especially to a projection shown in the middle act. On the stage, viewers see only Othello's body on a hospital bed, covered with a white sheet; on the screen, Desdemona (Magdalena Popławska) performs fellatio on her newlywed husband. The projection is blurred and sketchy. An animated black penis fills the entire frame. Before long, however, two men enter the restroom into which the lovers have slipped. They put guns to their heads. "You thought you saw a white woman giving head to a Black man—so? Did it drive your little white dick crazy?" asks Desdemona. The assailants press on, shoving and harassing her. Othello apologizes and prostrates himself before them. They relent. The projection drops its "sketch" filter. Now the audience sees Othello and Desdemona in evening dress, in the restroom, trying to pull themselves together after the assault. She tears her purse from his hands. She's angry.

The motif of obsession with the body of Black man and his infuriating erotic potential returns in Othello's soliloquy based on the Omnipotent Administrator / Supermasculine Menial sequence in *Soul on Ice* by Eldridge Cleaver, one of the Black Panthers' leaders.[16] This excerpt, translated into Polish for *African Tales*, was also in the program and constituted a vital context for the play's authors. In it, the Omnipotent Administrator reduces the Supermasculine Menial to pure physicality. He strips him of his intellectual potential, agency, and mind. He allows him to survive as long as he is merely a body.

> By and by, the Omnipotent Administrator discovered that in the fury of his scheming he had blundered and clipped himself of his penis (notice the puny image the white man has of his own penis. He calls it a "prick," a "peter," or a "pecker"). So he reneged on the bargain. He called Supermasculine Menial back and said: "Look, Boy, we have a final little adjustment to make. I'm still going to be the Brain and you're still the Body. But from now on, you do all the flexing but I'll do the fucking. The Brain must control the Body. . . . I will have access to the white woman and I will have access to the black woman. The black woman will have access to you—but she will also have access to me. I forbid you access to the white woman."[17]

Cleaver continues explaining that this solution couldn't work. The penis can't be separated from the body—no one, not even a white man, is capable of doing that. In a burst of rage, in a fury of hatred, he grabs "the Body" and hangs it from the nearest tree, to "pluck its strange fruit, . . . pickle it in a bottle and take it home

[16] Important in this context is that Cleaver, while being a leader of the Black Panthers and in emancipatory struggle, served time in prison for convictions including rape. In *Soul on Ice*, he explicitly acknowledges raping on Black women (for practice) and then whites (as an insurrectionary act). The choice of this particular text in the context of Othello and the portrayal of racial exclusion by a white actor becomes even more problematic.

[17] Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Delta, 1992), 193–194.

to a beautiful dumb blonde and rejoice in the lie that not the Body but the Brain is the man."[18] Repeated by an actor in black makeup, playing a Shakespearean character on a theater stage, this story loses its original, potentially emancipatory meaning. It rather frames blackness as violence performed on the body, as cruel and primitive sexuality, as exaggerated and simultaneously castrated masculinity. As this scene, like the onscreen scene of assault, does not give voice to Othello's experience but remains defined by the makeup constituting part of his costume—an element of "racial masquerade"—it leaves Othello's blackness as oppressed, degraded, violent, reduced to sexuality and physicality, and impossible in terms of representing the Other. The audience is turned into the source of a racializing gaze by actually watching a penis on the screen. No room is left for a creative, politically motivated, heterogenous public, no hope for emancipatory gestures, no strategy of being together. As Agata Tomasiewicz concludes in her review of the play, "Once again, we are convinced that there is no getting back to communality."[19] What remains is violent strangeness.

I propose to return to Libera's poster, to uncover another layer of the image he created. In interviews, he mentioned finding the main inspiration for the photo shoot in the photographs from Africa by Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler's favorite film director—specifically those depicting the Nuba people of Sudan.[20] One of those photos is almost explicitly present in Libera's repetition. A slight woman in light clothes and a hat—Riefenstahl, with a large camera around her neck—carefully crosses a rock outcrop, holding a naked local man by the hand, who carries her leather camera bag on his arm. Afternoon sunshine fills the frame. The photo comes from Riefenstahl's *Die Nuba,* published in 1973 and showing their agricultural communities living removed from the broader Sudanese civilization, as the new nation underwent rapid changes after gaining independence from British colonial rule.

In Libera's photo, as in his *Positives* series that preceded it, bodies are transformed. Riefenstahl is replaced with the Japanese tourist, and in place of one Nuba man there are two Polish models. The original image is updated and deconstructed at the same time. I see the visual configuration Libera created—in contradistinction to Lease's interpretation of this poster as "unfortunate" and "glaringly racist"[21]—as a gesture highly critical of the discourse of otherness framing Nowy Teatr's production. In looking at these two photos together, it becomes recognizable how Riefenstahl emerges from behind the tourist and how the naked Nuba man appears

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[18] Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, 194.

[19] Agata Tomasiewicz, "Odnalezione peryferia," *Teatr dla Was* (website), February 23, 2012, http://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/133805/odnalezione-peryferia.

[20] Mike Urbaniak, "Ten teatr jest skandalem," magazynwaw.pl, November 28, 2011, http://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/128195/warszawa-skandal-czy-skandalik-z-plakatem-nowego.

[21] Lease, *After '89*, 185, 191.

from behind the body-painted figures, how the gray Wrocław landscape is shot through with the Sudanese landscape—beset with a history of colonization, literal violence, and exploitation. In this, I detect a radical commentary on *African Tales* and the experience it offered: the trilogy of the excluded uses figures of otherness and especially racialization, not so much to critically deconstruct them, but rather to update and confirm the questionable identity of its public as white Europeans. As appearing from behind the fear of cultural and economic domination framed by the tourist, typical for the post-1989 transition and obscenely shown by Libera, is the nationalistic impulse of othering represented by Riefenstahl, *African Tales* is founded on colonial imagination. Warlikowski explained in an interview with Marek Kędzierski what he meant by Africa in his play:

> The word "African" in this case means *continent noir*. In her last soliloquy, Cordelia speaks about the black continent: "Le continent noir. Il noir de plus en plus. Noir est un verbe. Tout noir comme tout brûle. Tout flambe. Tout noir." This is our continent, which became black, African. A scorched continent, a desert—that strikes me as a significant metaphor.[22]

Referring to the Mouawad text for Cordelia, citing it in the original French, this phrase depicts Europe as black, scorched, destroyed, apparently with processes of exclusion reinforced by patriarchal politics. But what it really does is construct Europeanness with the use of the Other—an abstract African. That way, it updates a point of view or historically identifiable gaze—represented by the Leica camera in Libera's photo—still retaining the power to brand foreignness, whether as fascinating, erotically stimulating, or as a difference to be loathed, repressed, and even exterminated. Libera makes what was to be for Warlikowski a metaphor into an image laden with a very literal history and violence. Introducing Riefenstahl's specter into the presentation of *African Tales,* with all the contexts her work evokes, spotlights the perils in considering Africanness, blackness, or brutishness as processes responsible for Europe's degeneration and collapse. By using those metaphors, the play not only produces and reproduces colonial and racist frameworks, but also addresses its audience, which is supposed to recognize itself as Others from the others, and is only in that way able to form a theatrical community.

In the play's final scene, after over five hours of performing excessive violence and suffering, all the actors appear on stage in sporty outfits. Shylock, Othello, and tyrannical Lear, who died in the previous scene, are gone. Stanisława Celińska begins giving a salsa lesson in Spanish. The audience is invited to take part. It is supposed to open "new horizon of community embodied by joy and amusement

[22] Marek Kędzierski, "Czarna pustynia: Rozmowa z Krzysztofem Warlikowskim," *Teatr*, nr 2 (2012), https://teatr-pismo.pl/4078-czarna-pustynia-rozmowa-z-krzysztofem-warlikowskim/.

in a shared space that is transnational and feminist."[23] But from the point of view established by Libera's photo this can be read as a scene using culturally appropriated dance, stripped of its history and available to learn in almost any Western city, a contemporary entertainment for privileged people. Dance symbolizing the phantasmatic society of dominating cultures and social classes that can repeat others' steps, imitating others' bodies without losing their position.

Transitional Images

When asked by the critic Paweł Goźliński about the role of Africa in his new production, Warlikowski responded in yet another way. He stated it is "just as abstract as Poland in *King Ubu*,"[24] revealing that in *African Tales*, Africa in fact consistently meant Poland. It confirms that, along with colonial imagination, it is the post-1989 political transition that shapes the community, or rather its imaginings, generating figures of exclusion and otherness. Croatian scholar Boris Buden investigated the fundamental significance of violence toward otherness in understanding post-communist reality in his *Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus* (Zone of transition: on the end of post-communism), published in 2009. In justifying the necessity of telling the story of post-communism from the end, Buden writes:

> In this way, we spare ourselves a few illusions, such as the one that post-communism was a historical transitionary phase that begins at a certain moment and ends at another, filling it up with its meaning. It is the exact reverse: the end, where our story begins, is the point where it lost all meaning and slipped into nonexistence.[25]

The primal scene of post-communism—at once its beginning and end—is an event from 1993, when a Serbian paramilitary group stopped a train going from Belgrade to Bar at the Štrpci station. After the cars were searched, twenty men were forced to disembark. Eighteen were Muslims, one was a Croatian; the age and name of the twentieth remain unknown—Buden writes that "we only know he was 'black.'"[26] While we know that the others taken from the train were tortured and cruelly killed, the fate of the man only known as "black" remains unknown. "Why do we know nothing?" Buden asks. "Because no one asked what happened to the man, not even the investigating judge. As if no one

23 Lease, *After '89*, 191.

24 Paweł Goźliński, "Pan Lear umiera," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Duży Format online*), October 10, 2011, http://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/125188/pan-lear-umiera.

25 Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2009), 9.

26 Buden, *Zone des Übergangs*, 9.

missed him."[27] According to Buden, this violent gesture, reduplicated through forgetting, foreshadowed today's migrant crisis, and various walls dividing the world. He views post-communism as a dark night descending over the world, not a sunrise of renewal. The limits of exclusion and violence have not vanished—they've only been shifted and reinforced. The logic of the transition, breaking with the past and surging off toward an inescapably capitalist future, did not leave room for social structures, taking us instead into a post-social epoch. The community became an empty category, with politics replaced by ideology or, in fact, a modernized religion.

Looking at *African Tales by Shakespeare* from the point of view of the post-communist crisis identified by Buden, Shylock seems to shift to the foreground, as do—perhaps even more so—the mice and pigs from Spiegelman's *Maus* that haunt the world adapted from *The Merchant of Venice*.

An actor in a mouse mask and a rabbi costume enters the stage after Shylock, portrayed as a butcher, makes deal with Antonio (Jacek Poniedziałek) that entitles the former to the pound of Antonio's flesh in case he doesn't return the money he just borrowed. Jessica (Magdalena Popławska), Shylock's daughter, has just told him that she is leaving his house to get married with a non-Jew. The tyrannical father observes an onscreen procession of identical mice. An onstage mouse is standing behind a butcher block laid out with raw meat, and speaks of a curse that has fallen on the Jewish nation. The mouse also declares that Antonio (sitting at stage front on a couch, holding a bottle of whiskey) has lost everything. "Welcome, king of the bankrupts," says Shylock. An oneiric, ambiguous dialogue unfolds between him and Antonio, with the two separated by a transparent Plexiglas wall. At the same time, actors dressed in only black underwear and pig masks enter the stage. They surround the mouse, who ducks under the table. They swap Jew and Holocaust jokes. They copulate on the butcher's table, acting out Jessica's violent conversion to Christianity. They leave when Antonio exits, having interrupted the conversation with Shylock, breaking the intangible bond, sealed by vodka the butcher drank while Antonio drank his whiskey. The mouse comes out from under the table and begins reciting a kaddish in the dark. By introducing characters from *Maus* to the world of *Merchant of Venice* Warlikowski is establishing the Holocaust as a context for Shylock's position in the play. He is recalling at the same time communal memory and problematic discussions about the role of Poles in extermination of Jews, which marked Polish post-Communism with aggression and violence towards otherness.

As culture and memory researcher Katarzyna Bojarska recalls in "Wilhelm Sasnal's Transitional Images," when Spiegleman's *Maus* appeared in 2001 in Piotr Bikont's translation, it was met with aggressive protests, including demonstrations

[27] Buden, 11.

outside the offices of *Przekrój* magazine, where Bikont was editor-in-chief. *Maus* (1986), the graphic novel, tells the story of its author's parents, who survived the Holocaust. The characters are depicted as animals: Jews are mice, Germans are cats, the Poles are pigs, the Americans dogs. In the novel, Poles' approach to Jews during the Second World War and the issue of Polish anti-Semitism appear very differently from the mainstream domestic narrative, in which only the story of Poles' heroism and their rescuing of Jews from German-run ghettos and camps is presented. Bojarska sees the publication of *Maus* among a series of "narrative shocks,"[28] according to the term memory researcher Elżbieta Janicka and literary historian Tomasz Żukowski[29] had used to mark grappling that took place during post-Communist transition with collective memory and the political discourse of the community.

The artist Wilhelm Sasnal, about whose work Bojarska wrote, had responded to the protests against *Maus*. During the *Zawody malarskie* (*Painting Playoffs*) exhibition organized by Adam Szymczyk, Sasnal showed a series of paintings accompanying a large, *Maus*-inspired wall graffiti at BWA Gallery in Bielsko-Biała. Among them was a portrait of one pig that in the book was a *shmaltsovnik*, a blackmailer of Jews. Spiegelman drew this character only partly visible, with part of his face outside the frame. Sasnal painted what the original left out—as Bojarska states, "less borrowing a motif from *Maus* than taking responsibility for it."[30] That pig becomes a portrait of a Pole during the occupation years, as well as the artist's self-portrait, indicating the entanglement of collective memory with a harrowing, shameful past. The curator and critic Szymczyk called this gesture "a desire to touch the shame." Bojarska develops this concept:

> Sasnal is not communicating shame, nor is he trying to shame the populace he belongs to as an exception rather than as a representative. His pictures seem to be coming to life through an encounter with shame that is neither staged nor reproduced for others. . . . this painterly practice offers everyone their own shameful moment, yet at the same time, because the images Sasnal works/plays with are public, shared images, this moment is never merely individual, always already in relation to others and their moments. Hence this self-reflexivity related to shame also becomes an experience (or potentiality) of intersubjectivity.[31]

[28] Katarzyna Bojarska, "Wilhelm Sasnal's Transitional Images," *Miejsce* 6 (2020), http://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/english-wilhelm--sasnals-transitional-images/.

[29] See Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski, *Przemoc filosemicka: Nowe polskie narracje o Żydach po roku 2000* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2016).

[30] Bojarska, "Wilhelm Sasnal's Transitional Images."

[31] Bojarska.

Wilhelm Sasnal, *Maus 5*, 2001
SADIE COLES HQ, LONDON

Around these "transitional images,"[32] a term she adapts from the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's transitional objects, Bojarska can thus engender a new kind of community that touches shame instead of denying or embodying it. While addressing the memorial and societal crisis revealed by violent protest against *Maus*'s publication, Sasnal's gesture does not require that it be resolved. The experience of community it offers does not form a public looking at the others and called to empathy, attentiveness, action. It rather embraces the gaze of the Other that materializes itself by framing the one who looks and by allowing the touch of this shameful, doubled self.

Quite significant here is the fact that *Maus* was Sasnal's impulse to act—a reckoning with wartime history and with Polish identity brought to Poland from the US, the very part of the world where, like in Western Europe, post-1989 political-transition fantasies of accessing free, democratic, consumerist society were being located. It means that the community arising from touching the shame finds itself a mirror image of Western politics and Western society that places its experience within the logic of transition described by Buden as a "teological process determined by its goal and consisting of climbing the democratic scale till its top."[33] The steps are also strictly determined by what has already happened in Western history. Societies in transition need to become like those in the West. In consequence, another kind of otherness arises. Post-communist society becomes, as Buden states, void, impossible, as it is estranged from itself. It sees itself as the Other of the Western world, which it is trying to recreate but is not able or allowed

32 Bojarska.

33 Buden, *Zone des Übergangs*, 39.

to do this. That's why, while "touching shame" might bring relief, the community it forms is still shaped in fearful relation to otherness—this time its own.

Violent and obscene pigs in Warlikowski's play would seem to come less from *Maus*'s pages and Holocaust post-memory[34] than from tormented communal imaginings of a society in a transitional phase, from the post-communist night described by Buden. They are incarnations of the nightmare of past that has not been worked through, now subjected to a collective illusion of progress and unhindered consumption and winding up at the mercy of the moneylender. *African Tales'* pigs speak more about the transition than they do about the Holocaust—or rather about how unvoiced trauma and unprocessed memory in the form of images co-opted from the West have tainted collective self-portraits. About how—to return to what Buden stated in the introduction to his book—they allow the repeating and replicating of acts of violence against others. The pigs onstage, unlike in Sasnal's painting, don't let the shame be or even a temporary community to be formed. They're that shame in a funhouse mirror.

Actors taking to the stage in sportswear project the public. The play's concluding "relaxing salsa lesson,"[35] intended to present another way of coexisting, as Paweł Soszyński writes, becomes more of a preening session, "a tipsy dance of flaunting and convulsing."[36] In Soszyński's view, it arises, as in Joseph Rouch's documentary short *Les maîtres fou* (1955), after a ritual afflicted by a debased colonial deity, by oppressors and executioners, colonial administrators and generals, colonial ladies. Yet in *African Tales*, Africa is metaphor, and the others on stage are haunted by the spirits of the transition. Dressing them up in costumes of great universal Shakespearean figures precludes the public, however, from "touching the shame"—which remains, even during the salsa scene, on the other side of the transparent Plexiglas screen dividing the audience from the actors throughout the play.

Raw Meat

"The performance doesn't spare viewers the sight of meat and blood," writes theater critic Anna Czajkowska of *African Tales*.[37] Shylock, clad as a butcher, chops raw

[34] See Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[35] Ewa Wohn, *Warlikowski doceniany w Paryżu*, rmfclassic.pl, https://www.rmfclassic.pl/informacje/Obraz,12/Warlikowski-doceniany-w-Paryzu-za-Opowiesci-afrykanskie-wg-Szekspira,16435.html.

[36] Paweł Soszyński, "Uwięzieni w Szekspirze," *Dwutygodnik*, no. 71 (2011), https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/2953--uwiezieni-w-szekspirze.html.

[37] Anna Czajkowska, "Życie jest to opowieść idioty, pełna wrzasku i wściekłości, nic nie znacząca," *Teatr dla Was* (website), June 16, 2012, http://encyklopediateatru.pl/artykuly/141471/zycie-jest-to-opowiesc-idioty-pelna-wrzasku-i-wsciekloscinic-nie-znaczaca.

meat and longs to cut a pound of flesh from Antonio's body. Lear has cancer, and a hole in his throat. An epileptic, Othello shows off his white belly with a huge scar. Yet "meatiness," both literally and metaphorically, more fully describes the positions of the women, Portia, Desdemona, and Cordelia. In soliloquies written by Mouawad, the line between body and meat is often blurred.

Portia eats raw meat, then vomits it up. In the soliloquy she delivers all the while—which sounds as if it had been lifted from Sarah Kane's *Blasted*—there is defecation, throat slitting, dismemberment, and necrophilia. "The origins and the designation of things are a secret. This is the body. You have to feed the gods of our times. Entire kilograms," Portia says. "A pound of flesh is not enough."[38] Not enough to talk to gods, not enough to gain agency or voice one's truth. The body and the pound of flesh in this scene is a significant of violence, castration, and eternal lack framing the female body as desiring and deprived of a phallus.

In the "Desdemona's Arm" soliloquy, Desdemona bids farewell to life and sees her body as if already dismembered. Resting her head on the taxidermied dog that accompanies her throughout the scene, she says: "Thank you, my skin, for covering me. Thank you, my mouth, thank you, my eyes, thank you, my face. Compassion for you. Don't be afraid. I will be here in this terrible moment."[39]

Finally, Cordelia, leaning over the bed of Lear, her tyrannical father who has expelled her from the kingdom when she refused to profess her love, now unconscious after a tumor's been removed from his larnyx, says:

> I wanted to bring you the heads of your daughters. I couldn't. . . . They cut open your throat. You have a wound there. A hole. You've lost your voice. Does my voice cause you to have a boner, father?? . . . Your cock shoved itself into our faces. It seemed like a purple scorpion made for raping.

Then she says: "You've become a woman. You have a hole. It would be enough to enter you. To moisten the edges of your wound and go inside it, in the top and the bottom, to pour semen into your throat. You'd drown in sperm."[40]

These new-brutalism images are meant to build three female characters denied space to express themselves by Shakespeare. "I wanted to get to those women, to hear their voices," Warlikowski has said. "I think they're incomplete in Shakespeare, that they hold a great mystery about something that disturbs us a great deal today, but which they can't put into words."[41] All three characters experience unrequited love, all three are subjected to violence by the great excluded figures,

[38] Wajdi Mouawad, Portia's soliloquy, trans. Barry Keane, in *African Tales*, unpublished script provided by Nowy Teatr.

[39] Wajdi Mouawad, Desdemona's soliloquy, trans. Barry Keane, in *African Tales*.

[40] Wajdi Mouawad, Cordelia's soliloquy, trans. Barry Keane, in *African Tales*.

[41] Kędzierski, "Czarna pustynia."

all three see in their partialities, their lacks of subjecthood, a position where they can't even take the place of the Other, remaining beyond the scope of the community. "We're nothing," says Cordelia. "That which is shaking us to our core is everything."[42] The only language they have is the language of violence, reducing reality to the relations of executioners and victims.

Yet it is hard to deny associations, triggered from onstage by these soliloquies, between the meat Portia vomits up and the critical-art movement or, as the philosopher Monika Bakke termed it in 2000, abject art. In Bakke's book *Ciało otwarte* (The open body), she analyzed works by Alicja Żebrowska. A photograph of 1993, *Rodzaj* (Sort), depicts a boy with blond hair, only a few years old, dressed in a white shirt with a collar. His head gently leans toward the lens and from his mouth dangles something that initially seems to be a long, monstrous tongue. Upon closer inspection, it turns out to be a piece of raw meat. Bakke writes of the traumatic nature of the picture, of what the philosopher Julia Kristeva calls the oral abject, which is graphic and stirs profound unrest.[43] Yet a key to Bakke's investigations is a viewpoint formulated in the early 1990s by philosopher and feminist Jolanta Brach-Czaina in *Szczeliny istnienia* (Cracks in existence): the metaphysics of meat. Brach-Czaina writes:

> You must touch raw meat. Hold it in your hand. Squeeze it. Let it squish between your fingers. And you must touch the body of a dead person. The metaphysics of meat should aim to uncover the essence of meat, imperceptible to our consciousness, with which we are forever mingling, however unconsciously. . . . And considering that we too are slowly becoming meat, or perhaps we already are meat, we should strive to analyze the hidden existential essence of meatiness, as this is our destiny.[44]

From this perspective, the shocking photo of the child with meat in his mouth not only points toward a sense of revulsion or the power of the abject, but also toward one of the key formulations of the metaphysics of meat: meatiness is the Other that emerges from inside, from the body, during the existential experience of giving birth that Brach-Czaina describes.

One also observes a birth in what may be Żebrowska's most renowned work. In the video component of the installation *Grzech pierworodny*: *Domniemany projekt rzeczywistości wirtualnej* (Original sin: A supposed virtual-reality project), a vulva fills the image. In the first sequence, a button appears within it. This is an allusion to initial erotic experiences, girlish games, it changes the vulva into an eye reflecting and rendering the viewer's gaze mediated through the camera.

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42 Mouawad, Desdemona's soliloquy, in *African Tales*.

43 See Monika Bakke, *Ciało otwarte: Filozoficzne reinterpretacje kulturowych wizji cielesności* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2000), 50.

44 Jolanta Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia* (Warszawa: Dowody na Istnienie, 2018), 189.

Alicja Żebrowska, *Grzech pierworodny: Domniemany projekt rzeczywistości wirtualnej*, 1993

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Then comes a masturbation scene, peloid operations that call to mind the water breaking in a birth, until finally, when a rubber-gloved hand again uncovers the frame, one sees the birth of a Barbie doll. The motionless plastic face, painted eyes staring right at the viewer, emerges from a living, moving, flexing vulva.

This work has been interpreted in various ways, primarily aligning it with the feminist-art movement, showcasing the female body, forcing the viewer to confront female physiology, pleasure, and pain. Bakke, calling attention to the play of gazes integral to Żebrowska's video and largely in keeping with Kristeva's theory of abjection, writes of conquering shame and femininity, which becomes a way of learning about the world, an additional sense.[45] The art historian Izabela Kowalczyk, in turn, in *Ciało i władza* (The body and power), analyzes Żebrowska's work in terms of writings by Luce Irigaray, among others. Recalling Irigaray's 1977 book *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (*This Sex Which Is Not One*), Kowalczyk asserts that female sexuality doesn't have its own language and remains confined to a rhetoric of masculine terms. What is feminine "remains unexpressed, silent, dead."[46] Żebrowska, according to Kowalczyk, by skirting the periphery of pornography, opens a space of visibility to female sexuality, exposing gender-repression politics, giving expression to what is silent and consigned to the private sphere.

Curiously, these authors don't reference a 1975 text that came out in Polish in 1993, practically concurrent to the Żebrowska works, though like Irigaray's book belonging to the key French feminist statements of that decade: Hélène Cixous's "Le Rire de la Méduse" ("The Laugh of the Medusa"). Creating a project for women's writing, Cixous asserts that:

> Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes . . . .
> . . . bombarding [Freud's] Mosaic statue with their carnal and passionate body words, haunting him with their inaudible and thundering denunciations, dazzling, more than naked underneath the seven veils of modesty.[47]

Cixous sees a parallel between the drive to give birth and the desire to write, "to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood"[48]—which provides an interpretation of Żebrowska's work, the gender, physiology, and meatiness it contains, as a gesture of appreciating another otherness. An otherness expressed through the metaphor of Medusa's laugh—from whose gaze one "does not die" and who must be stared in the face.

45 Bakke, *Ciało otwarte*, 52–54.

46 Izabela Kowalczyk, *Ciało i władza: Polska sztuka krytyczna lat* 90. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2002), 220.

47 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 886.

48 Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 891.

Here I propose a comparison between the significance of meatiness in Żebrowska's art and in the Warlikowski play from two decades later. Cixous, picking up on Freud's colonial metaphor from *Die Frage der Laienanalyse* (*The Question of Lay Analysis*), where he called female sexuality a "dark continent," a phrase echoed in Mouawad's soliloquy for Cordelia, writes:

> Here they are, returning, arriving over and again, because the unconscious is impregnable. They have wandered around in circles, confined to the narrow room in which they've been given a deadly brainwashing. You can incarcerate them, slow them down, get away with the old Apartheid routine, but for a time only. As soon as they begin to speak, at the same time as they're taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. . . . We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevies—we are black and we are beautiful.[49]

When Cordelia recites Mouawad's words in the play:

> The black continent is blackening. Blackening? Blackening more and more. To blacken is a verb. One should say blacken. Everything is blackening, the same way that everything is burning. Everything is burning. Everything is blackening. Am I repeating myself? Am I rambling? Talking nonsense?[50]

—then the meaning of this metaphor is inverted. The dark continent, for Cixous, although equally inattentive to particularities of exclusions based on racialization and departing from universalizing Africa as exclusion's metaphor, is nevertheless meant to expose links between sexism and colonialism, violence targeting the female body as well as political, racist, classist violence, while indicating that ability inherent in the female position to extract the Other from herself, giving birth, as the most powerful tool in building another community outside of a racist framework.[51] Cixous thought-travels from Freud's colonial and colonizing female-body formulation towards emancipation of the dark continent from phallocentric, patriarchal, colonial rule. The female dark continent in Warlikowski's penis-dominated play reverts to the metaphor of Africa, actually repeating Freud

[49] Cixous, 877–878.

[50] Mouawad, Cordelia's soliloquy.

[51] The colonial metaphors in Cixous's language were criticized as "universalizing and orientalist maneuvers that pervade Western, patriarchal conceptions of the self and the cultural same." See Sue Thomas, "Difference, Intersubjectivity, and Agency in the Colonial and Decolonizing Spaces of Hélène Cixous's 'Sorties,'" *Hypatia* 9, no. 1 (1994): 53–69. With that in mind, in the context of Warlikowski's reusage of feminist tropes and strategies as well as the "Africanness" the director puts onstage, it still seems crucial to refer to Cixous's understanding of "dark continent" in contrast to his.

and conceiving the Other as a stranger. The meat in *African Tales* doesn't exude meatiness and, in entrusting us with its secret, doesn't reveal to us a mystery of existence;[52] it stands as a sign of the body's degradation, the torment of sexuality, the destructive power of desire that cannot bring any fulfillment. Strikingly, however, while for Lear, Shylock, and Othello, their exclusions and humiliations, their diseases and deformed bodies are what makes them Shakespearean characters, Portia, Desdemona, and Cordelia, with only scraps and chunks of feminist discourse of body and meat at their disposal, remain beyond language, beyond the gaze, beyond even the negative capacity of existing in an excluding community. As English literature and Shakespeare scholar Małgorzata Grzegorzewska states in her review of the play:

> The image of a woman in Warlikowski's performance has been determined by repulsion, although it was not (perhaps?) an intended effect. The gibberish monologues of women are also disappointing. Written into predictable patterns, they do not hit any sensitive point; they do not hurt, but bore.[53]

Although apparently shocking, the words put in female characters' mouths are not transgressive. They do not allow their femininity, their bodies, the meatiness to appear but instead restrict their presence and discipline their sexuality with masculine discourse warping feminist metaphors, which is reinforced by the "images of deformed female bodies: crumpled faces, swollen legs, sagging breasts"[54] present in whole performance. Portia, Desdemona, and Cordelia are not subjects, as they are not even among the excluded who perform a strange onstage union due to a casting decision that make them into one body. Women are shown as victims, oppressed and denied any agency by the monstrous Other, the focus of the trilogy. They are solely a function of his otherness.

In the final scene, Stanisława Celińska leads the salsa lesson in Spanish. In Goźliński's reportage, we have this description of a rehearsal:

> "Krzysztof [Warlikowski], this isn't going the right way." That was Stanisława Celińska after watching the scene in which Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik struggles with the text and a plate of [steak] tartare. Yet a moment later, taking advantage of a break, she begins practicing her role—she does this everywhere . . . . She turns into a salsa instructor. The steps go faster and faster, the rhythm of the words speeds up: "*Y uno, y dos, y tres, y cuatro, y cinco, y seis, y siete, y ocho*…"[55]

52 Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia*, 190.

53 Małgorzata Grzegorzewska, "Cena funta mięsa," *Teatr*, nr 2 (2012), https://teatr-pismo.pl/4079-cena-funta-miesa/.

54 Grzegorzewska, "Cena funta mięsa."

55 Goźliński, "Pan Lear umiera."

In the designed, rehearsed, constructed, and codified moment of the dance, there is no room for experience of meat and the "existential community" it ushers in, one which, in Brach-Czaina's book, seems not so distant from a *communitas* based on a dialectic of separation and belonging. Touching the meat, using floor rags, making the bed, eating cherries, but also experiencing suffering and pain, and finally, in giving birth, in sex and in death, Brach-Czaina discovers a center of experiencing both the self and the Other in the body. This would make the existential community a project with political potential; when this project appeared, at the threshold of the transition era, it pointed toward other extra-societal and extra-national forms of coexistence drawn from female experience. In *African Tales by Shakespeare*, twenty years later, the community reveals itself to be in crisis, an experience that inspires no involvement except for phantasmatic participation, if not directly racist and sexist pleasures. The contemporary world Warlikowski put on stage, set in a metaphor of Africanness and blackness that reproduced racist paranoia, can only wallow in degeneracy and violence. Yet as Cixous wrote, appropriating colonial discourse but at the same time transcending it by the power of embodiment, which allows seeing the otherness as a part of self, not as the stranger:

> The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack.[56]

It's sufficient to look Medusa in the face and hear her laugh.

African Tales by Shakespeare, when read through associations and images that the production refers to, reveals the complicated, ambivalent paths of politicality in Polish theater and art. The public addressed by this play is neither heterogenous, attentive, and coalitional nor homogenous or normative. It is deeply unstable and transitional—in the process of becoming something else. This process, as emancipatory as it can be, as proven by other Warlikowski productions, is also putting community at constant risk of following phantasmatic identities, creating numerous exclusions, and subsuming otherness to strangeness. In the liminal space between communism and capitalism, between its totalitarian past and its democratic future, a transitional community was formed through experience of lost fundamentals and a search for new ones. This loss opened a void that became a trigger for radically new forms of togetherness and at the same time caused fear of others and of oneself as the Other. The community *African*

[56] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 884–885.

Tales is addressing is shaped by this void, this contradiction, the ambivalent status of the post-Communist subject. Communitarian rituals and images the production recalls, transgressive gestures it offers, the critique of social order it attempts to enable are all marked and compromised by the way the exclusion is metaphorized and narrated—as a condition of violent and unsurpassable strangeness and foreignness, of unresolved existential crisis framed by racialization and sexuality. In consequence, it slides into the phantasmatic fears and oppressive gestures it was supposed to unpack, paradoxically obscuring radical ideas of community and otherness present in the experience of transition. This is also one of the ways politicality functions in Polish theater: as a misguided effort to address otherness of others or rather to be someone else at the expense of others. That's why it is worth returning to the feminist discourse from the beginning of the 1990s and, following Brach-Czaina's thought, see how the Other is in fact always a part of experience of self, how belonging is necessarily paired with separateness. Existential community, that community experiencing life through embodiment, is also a part of transitional experience.

Translated by Soren Gauger

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Abstract

The Dark Continent: *African Tales by Shakespeare* and the Experience of Transitional Community

This text is an analysis of Krzysztof Warlikowski's 2011 production, *African Tales by Shakespeare*, tracing the project of community taken up in the performance. The central thesis takes this to be neither a national community nor a dispersed, intersectional coalition, as Bryce Lease has formulated the difference between Polish political and traditional theater, but rather a transitional community—unstable, unsuccessful, and rooted in the experience of political transition. The author, by invoking references to the visual arts present in the performance, points to other community projects emerging from the experience of transition while showing how, when appropriated for the purposes of performance, their meanings change radically. In the masculine, phallic, and violent world of *African Tales*, art and philosophy born of the experience of femininity are lost, twisted, and forgotten. Among the most important threads of analysis, however, is the way racialization and racism function in the play. From this perspective, the problematic status of the community the play establishes is most clearly seen: as a community of phantasmic, aspirational, transitional whiteness.

Keywords

African Tales by Shakespeare, Krzysztof Warlikowski, dark continent, feminism, Other, transition, critical art

Abstrakt

Ciemny kontynent: *Opowieści afrykańskie według Szekspira* i doświadczenie wspólnoty transformacyjnej

Tekst jest analizą spektaklu Krzysztofa Warlikowskiego *Opowieści afrykańskie według Szekspira* (2011) śledzącą projekt wspólnoty wpisany w przedstawienie. Zgodnie z zasadniczą tezą autorki nie jest to ani wspólnota narodowa, ani też rozproszona i intersekcjonalna koalicja, jak różnicę między polskim teatrem politycznym i niezaangażowanym formułował Bryce Lease, lecz raczej wspólnota transformacyjna – niestabilna, nieudana i zakorzeniona w doświadczeniu ustrojowej transformacji. Przywołując odniesienia do sztuk wizualnych obecne w spektaklu, autorka wskazuje na inne projekty wspólnotowe, które wyłoniły się w latach dziewięćdziesiątych XX wieku, by pokazać, jak zawłaszczone na potrzeby spektaklu, radyklanie zmieniają swoje znaczenie. W męskim, fallicznym i pełnym przemocy świecie *Opowieści* sztuka i filozofia zrodzone z doświadczenia kobiecości zostają utracone, wykrzywione, zapomniane. Jednym z najważniejszych wątków analizy jest sposób, w jaki w spektaklu funkcjonują urasowienie i rasizm. To właśnie z tej perspektyw najwyraźniej widać problematyczny status wspólnoty ustanawianej przez spektakl: wspólnoty fantazmatycznej, aspiracyjnej, transformacyjnej białości.

Słowa kluczowe

Opowieści afrykańskie według Szekspira, Krzysztof Warlikowski, ciemny kontynent, feminizm, Inny, transformacja, sztuka krytyczna

DOROTA SOSNOWSKA

Assistant Professor of Theater Studies at the Institute of Polish Culture (Department of Theater and Performance) at the University of Warsaw. She is a co-convener of the Historiography Working Group of the International Federation for Theater Research and an editor of *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej.* In her research, she focuses on the theoretical status of sources, archives, and documents in performance studies, as well as the problems of performance and memory. At present, she is working on conceptualizations of the body in the art and theater of the decade of the Long '90s in Poland.