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Summary of professional accomplishments

The work pointed as the most important achievement of the postdoctoral program:

Ophelias. Iconography of Madness

composition for eleven actresses, 50 min.

presented in Museum of Art in Lodz, Wroclaw Contemporary Museum and Gdansk Shakespeare Festival.

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Introduction

My doctoral degree conferral procedure commenced in June of 2011 and ended in January of 2013 with the defense of my PhD dissertation. The theoretical part concerned the relation between music and visual arts in 19th and 20th centuries, which was the background for me to present my own creative experience.

Since then I have produced about ten premieres, both musical and theatrical, but as a base for my habilitation thesis I would like to use a project which was fundamental for developing and consolidating my understanding of theatrical form – a performance named *Ophelias. Iconography of Madness* shown in different forms and contexts in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. While my PhD dissertation was about the relation with music, and the subject of the defense of the dissertation was a series of concerts in public spaces and concerts composed for architecture, this time I would like to refer to - and confront - broadly defined theatre, which has always been an inspiration for my creative work.

For the research and carrying out the project, which took me two years (from 2012 to 2014) I was awarded a grant by a fund created to promote creative work by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The Museum of Art in Lodz and Wrocław Contemporary Museum were partners of the project¹.

In this dissertation I would like to present the genesis and my process of work and put it in a broad context of theory and practice of art events directing.

I have also taken the liberty of enclosing, though in a rough form and just to show the range of the project, the results of the research carried out at The Warsaw Theatre Institute during the preparation of the show, the video documentation of two performances and video material from the rehearsals.

Komentarz [Danielle 1]: Relation of what to music??? The is is not clear to me??

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The curators of the project were Jarosław Lubiak (Museum of Art in Lodz) and Piotr Stasiowski (Wrocław Contemporary Museum) and the coordinator was Sonia Nieśpiałowska-Owczarek (Museum of Art in Lodz). The video documentation was prepared by Małgorzata Mazur.

Description of the project

Ophelias. Iconography of Madness is a one hour performance in different spaces of museums.

More than ten Ophelias, more than ten creations of different actresses, met in one place and time.

In empty spaces of museums, chosen actresses, who have played Ophelia in stage productions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, were recreating the final scene of madness.

The idea was to confront different approaches of directors and actors in order to show in which ways the madness of a woman can be depicted on stage.

The four performances of the spectacle were quite different in form – the actresses were present on stage at the same time but ‘coming to life’ in different moments, or (as in Wrocław) the spectators were following a guide and meeting the ladies one after another. In the case of every actress, the soliloquy was prepared individually and was based not only on the final scene of madness, but also on the preceding scenes in which Ophelia had appeared. The work on the spectacle consisted of individual meetings and rehearsals, work in the spaces (with planning the choreography taking into consideration the architecture), and the final compilation of all the scenes during the group rehearsals.

Komentarz [Danielle 2]: If this word is being used in place of show or performance it isn't what native speakers would normally use.

The *Hamlet* productions in which have acted the actresses who took part in the performance:
Iwona Bielska — directed by Jerzy Krasowski, Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego, Cracow, 1978;
Monika Dąbrowska — directed by Jolanta Donejko i Piotr Borowski, Studium Teatralne, Warsaw, 2005;
Ewa Domańska — directed by Jan Englert, Teatr Telewizji (Theatre on Television), 1985;
Gabriela Frycz — directed by Waldemar Śmigasiewicz, Teatr Nowy, Poznań, 2007;
Anna Ilczuk — directed by Monika Pęcikiewicz, Teatr Polski, Wrocław, 2008;
Marta Kalmus-Jankowska — directed by Krzysztof Nazar, Teatr Wybrzeże, Gdańsk, 1996;
Marta Kalmus-Jankowska — directed by Jan Klata, Teatr Wybrzeże, Gdańsk, 2004;
Elżbieta Karkoszka — directed by Jerzy Wróblewski, Teatr Rozmaitości, Cracow, 1967

Krystyna Łubieńska — directed by Andrzej Wajda, Teatr Wybrzeże, Gdańsk, 1960;
Karolina Porcari — directed by Radosław Rychcik, Teatr im. Stefana Żeromskiego, Kielce, 2011;
Agnieszka Radzikowska — directed by Attila Keresztes, Teatr Śląski im. Stanisława Wyspiańskiego, Katowice, 2012;
Małgorzata Rudzka — directed by Andrzej Domalik, Teatr Dramatyczny, Warsaw, 1992;
Bożena Strykówna — directed by Jan Machulski, Teatr Ochoty, Warsaw, 1985.

Relation between visual arts and theatre

The theatre is, for visual arts, a constant provocation. Theatre, and the strongly defined forms of the institution of theatre, stir very strong and diverse feelings in artists because it represents certain attitudes to which they feel obliged to refer to while constructing goals of their art, forming thesis or writing manifests about the essence of artistic actions.

Komentarz [Danielle 3]: I dont understand??? Are they setting themselves goals within their artwork???? We use the verb set with goals

Komentarz [Danielle 4]: This is a verb..... you cant write a manifest so I suggest changing to reports or articles???

The theatre operates as poetics of another field, it's strongly related to literature but not only does it use a different structural language, but it also has very complex instruments of production and its strong position in cultural discourse attracts wide audiences. At the same time it has many features that couldn't be accepted in art based on the freedom of every individual: it can be oppressively didactic, strongly related to political writing, and it's also a very authoritarian institution, based on a hierarchical system of employment, with financial issues strongly depending on authorities and governments. With all that, it still claims the right to be a moral authority.

Since the moment when the position of theatre in cultural life became unquestionable (because around the 18th century literature and theatre overtook the collective imagination, which had been previously filled by pictures), artists have been questioning its legitimacy.

For that reason the theatre can be seen as an enemy of art. It was seen that way by surrealists (as well as universities and museums, who were “canalizing human intelligence”). Not only was the narrative way of representation controversial, which they were setting against freedom of imagination, but so also was the fossilized institution itself, which was appropriating the understanding of culture by the society and gathering terrible bourgeoisie and the rest of the dying out noblesse, together with their awful way of depicting and understanding life.

Nevertheless theatre could be in possession of instruments which are worth taking over. It was seen this way by dadaists, much more focused on working with the form, for whom often the medium of expression involved working with text, sound, word and costume. Dadaism was the first artistic movement for which the role of the performer was so important, as well as direct contact with the audience, which was an introduction to the following development of performance art.

The theatre could also, as an institution with a better access to wide audiences, be an ally whom nevertheless you would have to convince first to accept your arguments (I would mention here the German expressionism and Young Poland modernists). It could also be just one more medium of artistic expression without exceeding the abilities of one person (as a playwright, scenographer and director), and that was the approach of Witkacy.

Futurists or constructivists saw in the complex theatrical machinery, which was almost a parallel reality, the potential for a revolution - a form which can be used to test new ideas which could be later implemented in the real (off stage) life of the community.

Therefore theatre, as a benchmark, became a characteristic attribute of artistic vanguards of the first half of the 20th century.

In the fifties and sixties in visual arts (and earlier in music) there was a performative turn. The art had created its own form of direct communication with the spectator, using some stage instruments (the presence of a performer, emotionalism, accessories, word and movement), but looking for an inspiration in religious and secular rituals of various cultures and undertaking striking radical actions – so radical, that they would not fit in the hierarchical machine of theater. Also the goal was different. It was not anymore about representing ideas and attitudes, but touching the essence of what is the power of life and creative personality.

Space for an experiment of such a wide range could only be found in art, whose fundamental characteristics is a belief in the individuality of every person and the absolute freedom of expression. After all, it was the start of very radical experiments on the fragile human body (Viennese Actionism), disrupting an accepted chain of events and questioning the sense of existence in the world by brutal action (Chris Burden, Bas Jan Ader), questioning boundaries (separation) between human relations in stage reality and in social reality (Abramović – Ulay), conquering new territories and unacceptance for marginalizing activities essential for society (actions in public spaces), and what is more, insolently arbitrary choices of audience or even (Allan Kaprow) persuading spectators to take part in the creation of a work of art.

It would also be beneficial to add here the final acknowledgement of the role of shame in building an oppressive and hierarchical society, and challenging it. What I have in mind is

performing in the nude and showing the most intimate activities. (Which is especially important to understand the role of feminine performance in the feminist movement).

Dance turned out to be an ally of the arts, because on one hand it discussed the topic of the cultural image of the body and on the other it included movement in its pure form. Since Merce Cunningham until now, development of choreography and artistic performance takes place in a mutual inspiration. Just look at the close relation between contemporary performance represented for instance by Tino Sehgal and the work of dancers and choreographers such as Jérôme Bel or Xavier Le Roy ²

It seems that only the turn which happened in the seventies was the moment when theatre stopped disregarding art. Because until then performative artistic research was taking place on the very margin of this immense and unmoved institution. This time the theatre had to admit that there, behind its walls, started a trend which was developing much more radical, maybe much more contemporary means of expression, oriented to a more courageous spectator and attracting considerable audiences. Because the structure and the awareness of the society had changed significantly (music and visual arts had played an important part in this change), together with the appearance of subcultures and the idea of an alternative culture, a new type of spectator (numerous enough) appeared, and the theatre just couldn't ignore it.

This is because in the meantime the theatre lost the collective imagination to the cinema, which at this time had turned the western society back towards a picture. Suddenly then art, which has currently not only the power of creating pictures but also the will for having a direct impact on the spectator, became an ally with valuable means of expression. For me, that would be the reason for the 'performative turn' in theatre, which started in the seventies but was especially broadly described and also entered the area of critique at the turn of the century.

In Poland in the 21st century the theatre insists on keeping its unmoved institutional position, what causes noticeable envy of museum institutions. At the same time theatre watches with attention visual arts, seeing in them an inspiration for a constant refreshing of its own image.

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Whereas for the contemporary art the place of performance is on the periphery, because of its too obvious relation with bourgeoisie theatre (most of all, the tendency to create a complex narration, supported by costumes and accessories). It survived in closed enclaves of performance festivals.

Komentarz [Danielle 5]: OK so here I feel like we are still talking about the seventies so I changed the tense to reflect the past if it is talking about now then change it back. It wasn't clear to me

Komentarz [Danielle 6]: This verb means to 'watch attentively' and I am not sure if it is in the right context here as it is not making sense

Mutual influence of art and theatre can be also seen in the example of young Polish directors who take a lot of inspiration from contemporary art (ex. Michał Borczuch, Łukasz Twarkowski), and also artists willing to use theatre as the subject of their work. We can take the actions of the Sędzia Główny group and their series of artistic interventions carried out in Teatr Nowy, dramas performed by artists (ex. Bogna Burska) and events organized together by theatres and museums as examples.

This is the background through which I would like to present *Ophelias. Iconography of Madness*. In my understanding my production is a work of art which has chosen theatre as a substance to create from.

***Ophelias...* - genesis of the project**

The starting point for creating the project was my interest in female roles in the main theatre performances. I was interested in the contact of the actor with the character they were playing and their construction of that character, but also the theatre parts seen as a reflection of social classes, cultural codes existent in Polish shows, as well as and the cultural and stage symbols related to madness.

Before *Ophelias* were created, I had worked on various projects related to theatre, and two of them were directly inspired by a female part in a play. What I have in mind is *Lucia Mad*, a work with the same title as the drama by Don Nigro (directed by Tomasz Wysocki, Juliusz Słowacki Theatre, Cracow 2007), and *Lulu* inspired in the drama by Frank Wedekind (directed by Michał Borczuch, Teatr Stary, Cracow 2008).

The first of those pieces of work refers to the message of the drama and it deals with madness as a form of expression in a situation when access to free creative expression is limited in a cultural and social way, because of the sex of a person. What remained of Don Nigro's drama in my work was only the title, the new characters of the monodrama written by me were Polish artists. The soliloquy, declaimed by an actress as a narration to the movie, is a compilation of statements (letters, diaries, interviews) of female artists who are talking about the connection of creative work by women with madness. The madness and the fear of going insane appears there as a personal problem, affecting mostly creative women, who, after all, oscillate on the edge of safe social

convention, and not uncommonly which they use as the basis on which to create their art. In the monodrama you can find statements of over a dozen Polish artists. Some of them were considered insane by their loved ones, due to their way of expressing their personality (Maria Komornicka) or their way of life (Zofia Stryjeńska) didn't fit into the commonly accepted models of their times. The work had a strong feminist message and its relation with theatre was marked by the inspiration in drama, the form of monodrama and the participation of an actress playing the main part as a person telling the story.

The second of the previously mentioned works went much deeper into the theatrical form of production and the complexity of making a spectacle.

The original drama *Lulu* by Frank Wedekind tells a story of a girl who, passing from hand to hand, every time changes completely in order to survive. Starting from a father to a child molester, for every man on whom she depends Lulu plays a different role and is being confronted with all the spectrums of masculine iconography concerning women (girls, lovers, wives, students).

The starting point for my project was the stage production by Michał Borczuch in the Stary Teatr in Cracow, and my original idea (not carried out because of the lack of permission by the theatre management) was to divide the show into two separate performances, played one after another, on the same evening.

In the first version I wanted to show only the character of Lulu, moving alone between decorations and costumes and going through all her parts on her own. In that version male actors would have been removed in order to take a closer look on what the successive incarnations of the character are if we eliminate the male perspective, if we eliminate the cruel social context.

The second version was supposed to be 'a show with a hole after Lulu' in which all the male actors would be projecting their images, the authoritarian or submissive gestures into a void. Lulu is only a mirror, only a maquette, they have never let her come to life as a real person made of flesh and blood. (That aspect might remind us of *Ivona, Princess of Burgundy*.) The two shows arranged this way were supposed to primarily demonstrate the cruelty of social games and dependencies as well as the forms and simplifications as ways in which people see one another, and also show the sadness and desperation of both of the confronted sides. Within this play I have seen a great potential to talk about theatre itself. I saw in it, above all, the most complete expression of Gombrowicz's idea of the 'becoming' of a person using for it another person and a tragic impossibility of running away from the form as such, being condemned to act for life and forever playing different versions of oneself. I was planning to base the work *Lulu* - or the play cut in half -

Komentarz [Danielle 7]: I am not sure what you are meaning here but I think it is related to a construction?? A simulation?? She isn't played by a real person???

completely on the production of Borczuch and make only some subtle adjustments related to dynamics and reception of the changed stage production. The lack of approval of the theatre management forced us to act differently.

So, consequently, I invited the actress Marta Ojrzyńska to perform the whole play as a soliloquy, in her private space, having her own apartment as the decoration. We created a 40 minute long film. What is more important, is the way the focus also changed and the relationship between the actress and the character became the most important part. What you can see in the film *Lulu* is the ways of ‘turning oneself into a character’, building the narrative tension and changing a living space into a symbolic space. It’s a story about what is the theatre in all its richness, a story told by just one actress. But it’s also a film about a mad woman. What makes her mad? Taking on different roles and poses even in a space of her own home (which seems to be safe). Constant confrontation with phantoms of social relationships and connections.

After carrying out that work, I was only one step from studying the question of Ophelia. Nevertheless I decided to work for a few more years knowing that to deal with such a monumental subject I would need to gather the necessary knowledge and directing experience and then construct a complete show. This required, from me, the assumption of a mature attitude towards the whole machinery of the institution of theatre, the heritage of the form, the methods of production and above all to the directing in theatre. For that reason I only came back to that topic in 2012.

***Ophelias*: objectives of the project and process of production**

The project *Ophelias* had three phases. First of all it required research within the archives of theatres. One of my questions was pure statistics: how many actresses in Poland have until now played the part of Ophelia and how many of them are still active in their profession?

Getting this kind of information wasn’t an easy task – complete data had only been gathered (ex. by Theatre Institute in Warsaw) since the eighties and in relation to the earlier productions we only had some rudimentary information and it was impossible to see any pictures or read reviews.

Because the aim of my research was to choose the actresses for my performance, I spent many hours going through the archives and reading the texts. Especially in the cases of older productions I had to rely mainly on my own intuition, and eventually on the position of directors

and actresses to decide if a certain production was interesting and could be useful in composing my archival show. My goal was to present the whole spectrum of approaches to acting and to the character of Ophelia, so I tried to check not only the main and broadly discussed shows but also those created in smaller towns and with a less known cast.

Finally I had a list of forty actresses / creations. The oldest productions I wanted to explore were from the sixties – some of the actresses happened to still be active professionals. The most recent shows I could check with their video documentations, which made my work of choosing the performers much easier.

The next step was getting to the actresses, contacting them by phone and, after that, direct meetings in order to explain to them the idea and talk about a potential co-operation. About twenty women accepted to have the conversation. During three months I visited nine cities meeting with actresses, talking about the idea of the project and collecting the cast. Finally more than ten women accepted to work with me on the project.

The second phase was an individual piece of work with every actress, every Ophelia. My aim was to present the attitudes and ideas the directors had on how to show the madness of a woman. The base for me was the original scenes from the performances. I also tried to get to the directors and obtain their permission to paraphrase the soliloquies. However, especially in the case of the older productions, the project had to be based mostly on the memory of the actresses and for that reason the project also gained a dimension of work about memory. With each one of the ladies we worked through the mad soliloquy starting with the original show and gave it a new shape – understandable without the rest of the cast, without the context, without accessories, without costumes. The rehearsals, which usually lasted two days, were held in rooms put at our disposal by theatres.

The last phase of the work was the gathering of more than ten Ophelias on one stage (in the space for exhibitions of Museum of Art in Lodz) and ‘setting the composition’. An important question for me was that the confrontation of actresses should not happen too early, because the show was meant to be a meeting point of their individual attitudes and solutions. I wanted the acting energy of every one of them to stay varied and separate. There they were, mad women existing in their own worlds, remembering some memories of a long gone (though some more recent) moment, the most important one, which established their further existence or provoked them to take some drastic decisions.

The choreographic planning of the show in the Museum of Art was a question of two days. I

had already worked on the order of the soliloquies and the dramaturgy before, using the material recorded during the individual rehearsals. This uncommon way of directing was possible because of my artistic experience which I gained in visual arts. I was composing a collage, a mosaic of figures and texts, I was planning the emphasis, visualising a three hundred square meter empty space of the museum. I would say that calling it a theatrical found footage is justified. Above all, what came into existence was a piece of art, which uses theatre and art of acting as its substance.

***Ophelias...* – set of questions:**

1. Actresses passing from theatre to performance art:

The questions in the project *Ophelias. Iconography of Madness* are related to image, visuality and theatrical form. Another issue is the space of an art institution understood as a performative space and also the problem of directing performative events.

Let's start with the work involving the actresses. The first question we were asking in the case of every one of the actresses was if the part was still important for them, if they still found some potential in it worthy of development, in the end the answers varied. Ophelia is another person for a young actress and another for a women who comes back to the part after fifty years. Nevertheless, most of them agreed that it was a crucial part in their careers and for that reason they remembered it well. While working with the actresses, the starting point was the original production and step by step we were cleaning the scene from scenography, accessories and costumes and we were focusing on how the rest, which remained, was changing. The most important section for us was the moment when Ophelia goes insane: was it the scene when the father forces her to give the souvenirs back to Hamlet? Or was it during the conversation with Hamlet?

I have decided that the main substance of the soliloquies are the attitudes of the actress towards the character played by her and her acting memory. The memory of movement, gesture and text. I asked some of the 'Ophelias' not to refresh the text of the drama and base their monologue only on what they remembered from the part.

Some of the actresses decided not to go back to the production at all and talk about Ophelia through their own feminine experience. For them the original show didn't matter anymore. They understood the character only sometime after they had already preformed it. Małgorzata Rudzka wanted to show a state in which a person can find oneself when suddenly deprived of points of reference they used to have. For Krystyna Łubieńska, an actress who lives through her characters, an eighty year old Ophelia is just one of many incarnations and all of them are equally important. Bożena Stryjkówna took Ophelia and her story as if it were one of her own experiences. For that reason it was above all a meeting with women who have different approaches to acting as a profession and as an instrument of expression. For those actresses Ophelia, performed out of stage, was an opportunity to work through their own life experience in a performative way. It was possible because of the context of visual arts, the fact that the performance was not taking place on a stage in a theatre, that the decorative elements were eliminated and as well as the fact that the focus was on

Komentarz [Danielle 8]: I didnt wanna change this incase it was a term from the subject area I didnt understand but I dont understand it's meaning here : cleaning

just one character and its expression. In this way the actresses passed from theatre to performance art and became performers.

I understand a performer through one definition given to the word by Jerzy Grotowski: as someone who undertakes an action and through this action they recognize themselves in a deep humanistic context. Then performance art is a form of active understanding and existence in the world. A performer is very different from an actor – an executor, a medium for the character, a representative for visions or ideas, or even, as claimed by, for example William Wauer, “a living mean of stage expression” in the hands of a director.³

In *Ophelias* the actresses were at the same time the portraying and the portrayed. They were playing a part, representing a show once played, and simultaneously talking about their approach to acting, their understanding of the character and about how they find themselves in the context of the current situation. It could probably be compared with the work of Jérôme Bel *Véronique Doisneau*, in which the dancer, and the title character at the same time, were telling the audience about her work simultaneously presenting fragments of once played parts. This kind of work with an actor, which has its source in the experiments of the seventies, but which doesn't disregard picture as an important part of a performance, is very close to my approach.

2. Madness?

The foundation of this project was to study how the madness of a women is perceived, or rather depicted, in culture. The main question stated by me was: is there still something like ‘feminine madness’ which exists today? We live in times of high emancipation, where there is no space for religious ecstasy or madwomen exiled to the attic, after hysteria and dealing with ‘great lack’. And if it doesn't exist – because personally I'm convinced that this kind of assumption is not justified anymore – how do the directors deal with the character of Ophelia, the great madwoman? And other great madwomen in theatre? This characters are based on a different understanding of madness in the times when the dramas were created. Or maybe the madness is for theatre too attractive as a phenomenon to replace it with gender equality and pragmatic depression, anxiety and

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Author's own translation. In Polish “żywy środek wyrazu scenicznego”. Wiliam Wauer in the essay „Reżyser” (in English: “Director”), translated by Małgorzata Leyko, *Ekspresjonizm w teatrze niemieckim*, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2009

other disorders of psychological nature? After all, madness is a part of great narration, really necessary for the theatrical form – a show related to riot and revolution. It's madness indeed, as understood in romanticism, not a 'harmless lunacy'. The madness in romanticism has its force, so needed by the theatre. It isn't madness for which social consequences are indifferent and which is described – with a tone of envy – by André Breton in his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, where he says: “[The mad] may be, in some measure, victims of their imagination, I am prepared to concede that, in the way that it induces them not to observe certain rules, without which the species feels threatened, which it pays us all to be aware of. But the profound indifference they show for the judgement we pass on them, and even the various punishments inflicted on them, allows us to suppose that they derive great solace from imagination, that they enjoy their delirium enough to endure the fact that it is only of value to themselves. And, indeed, hallucinations, illusions etc, are no slight source of pleasure.”⁴

The romantic madness stays in contrast to that ecstatic vision and it doesn't lack awareness of the context from which it originates. That madness – revolutionary and rebellious – is so precious for the theatre because it is a madness *in the face of* the social convention and not a madness to which that convention is just indifferent. It has its sources in the oppression of social conventions (which are distributed asymmetrically between the two sexes) and it contrasts them with a great power of imagination and a body deprived of shame. Also Foucault separates in his analysis 'stupid madness' from 'wise madness', describing the latter as a kind of dangerous and often deliberate playing with nothingness.⁵

Does it mean that women have at their disposal a powerful weapon to which they turn when driven to the edge? In the Middle Ages, women experiencing ecstasy in mysticism were considered saints and in this way they were the only women considered equal with men. They were famous, they wrote and they were read, they had a voice in the cultural debate. Mad female rebels, questioning the law, became a symbol of revolution, because revolution is, after all, a woman (as stated by ex. Maria Janion)⁶. Later the society, constructing itself again, again in a patriarchal way, worked a lot on questioning the power of madness and degrading the idea, reducing it to the clinical cases of hysteria – Sigmund Freud ended the dispute by saying that women simply envy the men their causal power.

The possibility of expressing themselves in defense of their own cause was at the time

⁴ André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism* (I), translated by A. S. Kline, accessed through <http://self.gutenberg.org/>

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Historia szaleństwa w dobie klasycyzmu*, (in English: *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*) translated by Helena Kęszycka, Wydawnictwo Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1987

⁶ Maria Janion, chapter: Rewolucja jest kobietą (in English: Revolution is a woman), in: *Kobiety i duch inności*, (In English: *Woman and spirit of dissidence*) Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 1996

Komentarz [Danielle 9]: Here I am not sure if you want to say that women envy men's casual social power.... as in they want it for themselves or something completely different.... are the women jealous of the men's power???

particularly severely limited for women (particularly when taking into consideration the development of individualism in the male part of the society). Surrealism was the only trend of those sullen times that changed somewhat the proportions. Agnieszka Taborska in her book *Spiskowcy wyobraźni* ("Conspirators of imagination"), proves that surrealism did a lot for the emancipation of women (even though it was women seen through the eyes of the men, the cultural image of women). Is it related to the fact that surrealism paid so much attention to different forms of madness as a power which liberates the imagination?

I could risk a thesis that surrealists are claiming the right to madness for men as well. They came after romanticists, who were the first ones to see its incredible power, and before the artists of the seventies, whose postulates, for both sexes, were made real by emancipating the art, as a social activity unlimited by any convention, and who in consequence disarmed the madness.

The most favorable for madness as a protest of soul and body, unreservedly expressed, turned out to be the post-revolutionary romantic period, together with its concept of illness (of body and soul), as an expression of non-adaptation of sensitive individuals to the body of society, which might be healthy, but is primitively rational (or rather aspiring to rationalism).

The romanticists introduced for good to literature a figure of a mad woman who incarnate an internal and dangerous power, strictly related to death, crime, love and the strength of nature.

Together with the development of drama and also of the theatre as a cultural institution, the work of Shakespeare became a lot more popular and we can find many references to it also in stage productions of Polish authors. According to Foucault, Shakespeare bore witness to a tragic feeling of madness, especially when constructing female characters. The madness in his work occupies the final, irreversible place. Foucault says that the sweet joy regained by Ophelia in her madness has nothing to do with happiness and mentions also the situation of Lady Macbeth⁷. Lady Macbeth and Ophelia are precursors of mad women in romantic dramas and the great mad who inspired so many stage productions.

How romantic then still is Polish theatre?

More than fifty *Hamlets* performed in the last few decades have proven that the themes that appear in the drama and attitudes there presented are still attractive. It's also a great material for an analysis.

In the subheading of my project appears the word 'iconography' because it turns out that the set of gestures, glances and emotions depicting woman's madness is limited. During my work, together with the actresses, we were able to compile a complete collection of gestures; spitting,

⁷ Michel Foucault, op. cit, page 48.

Komentarz [Danielle 10]: I dont understand this whole section sorryyy.

So what do the artists of the 70's postulate??? Did they emancipate the art??? Or was it the romanticists or surrealists?? I think it is the sentence structure as there are a lot of commas so breaking it down would be beneficial I didnt want to change this as I dont want to mess with the content. I think it just need shuffled around by the writer.

Komentarz [Danielle 11]: Rational is an adjective and primitively is an adverb.... these cannot be used side by side in a sentence without a noun..... but I cannot identify the noun...??? did you mean rationale (the noun of the verb: to rationalise)????

obsessive repeating of words, scratching the body, putting a hand in between the legs...

Due to the focus on just one character, we were studying nuances which could easily stay unseen in a huge stage production. The show we were creating was mostly built with details.

We have to remember that the part of Ophelia is just a few pages, two conversations that precede the great entrance. Let's add to that the elimination of the costumes and accessories and also the glances of the others, the comments of the rest of the cast. The means we had at our disposal were very limited. The lack of objects put the focus on the body as the first and the basic instrument of work for an actor. Autoeroticism and related to it auto-aggression became the basis of the new soliloquies and they turned out to be, once again, fundamental for understanding feminine madness.

Nevertheless, some of the actresses stepped out of that scheme and put more emphasis on an imaginary outer world and a deep introspection. In the performance as a whole, those Ophelias were perceived as women who didn't burn in madness and didn't commit suicide, but they turned out to be strong enough to work through the social conventions (maybe thinking them through in the shelter of a monastery), and all they were left with was deep sorrow coming from the understanding that in every society which is subjected to strict rules, and more even in a small community, some more sensitive individuals will be exposed to breakdowns and often will play the role of victims.

From that position they confront a pubescent girl who the young Ophelia above all is. That was the attitude of Bożena Strykówna, Małgorzata Rudzka and Elżbieta Karkoszka. From the acting and psychological point of view, those are the creations which are perceived as the most contemporary. A creation by Karolina Porcari is also worth mentioning. It was almost totally recreated from the production by Radek Rychcik. The director interpreted the characters of Ophelia and Hamlet as going through a teenage riot and problems of adolescence – the time when the social games are felt in the most painful way. Due to this kind of interpretation by Porcari, an important element of Gombrowicz's work appeared in my performance⁸.

The madness in this approach is above all a refusal to take part in society's game, the rules of which are seen by the individual as unfair.

I must admit that I myself, after the work was over, considered its subject a bit archaic, and my production as a piece with the archives of culture. Nevertheless, the madness in Polish theatre is still quite important. Does it mean that this theatrical form (stage production of Shakespeare) is

⁸ Talking about Gombrowicz, it would be interesting for me, because of the contrast, to analyse the character of *Ivona, Princess of Burgundy*, because of her perfect indifference, due to which, the madness of the rest of the characters can be seen clearly, as well as the madness of society's game as such.

archaic? This is related to the next question:

3. *Ophelias*... as a short history of Polish theatre:

More than ten actresses of different ages, active on stage from the sixties, seventies until today took part in the project. There were actresses related with theatre, TV theatre (Ewa Domańska), dance theatre (Monika Dąbrowska). They acted for various directors, they incarnated different visions of theatre. The audience of the performance could see all of them, one by one, repeating the same text, recalling the same character.

At the beginning I didn't pay enough attention to this matter, because the main aim of the project was to take a look at feminine madness in culture. Although when you watch the final show, the fact that it's a performance about theatre becomes much more obvious. Having the example of about a dozen women, professionals of acting, you can perfectly trace the changes of theatrical forms in Poland over the last fifty years.

A huge part of the performance is based on repeated sentences, repeated gestures, declamation. It causes the attention of the spectator to be mainly focused on the differences in declamation, different emphasis, the approach to the word, the freedom of interpretation, the involvement of corporality, the expression of body. It also proved that showing the work in a museum was a strong and important operation. In this way every one of the actresses became not only a performer but also a museal object, another piece of the collection. It persuades the spectator to look carefully, to compare the details. Due to that *Ophelias* can be watched as an overview of techniques and tendencies according to which the Polish theatre worked and which it developed in the last five decades.

In the cases of older actresses (Krystyna Łubieńska) we can see the habit of clear declamation, following the rhythms of the verse and emphatic dramaturgy of the word. Younger generation (Anna Ilczuk) "talks Shakespeare" adding some colloquial words, joining the words together, domesticating and refreshing the sentences of the drama. The actresses form productions by contemporary vanguard directors (Karolina Porcari) and act according to the rule where pronounced words sound indifferent, what stays in contrast with their meaning and the behaviour of the speaker.

In a similar way older actresses are more devoted to the idea of acting as working with a text and the representation of the character by the actor, whilst the younger generation is more obedient to the postulation of 'incarnating' where "the body of an actor doesn't serve as a medium and symbol for a character constructed with words, because the figure on stage exists as one of a kind, it

Komentarz [Danielle 12]: Not sure what this word is???

exists only and exclusively when you take into consideration the specific being-in-the-world of the actor/performer. It cannot exist apart from their individual and phenomenal body.”⁹ The most distinctive example can be the creation by Monika Dąbrowska, whose experience from the dance theatre, in a unique way, embodies the idea that “culture can be rooted in a human body” (Thomas Csórdas)¹⁰.

Also the contents of the speech of Ophelia were slightly different in overtone depending on the translation on which the Polish version was based. In our performance we had five different translations and listening to every Ophelia you could also compare the poetics proper for every period or decade (the oldest translation that we used was the one by Wojciech Bogusławski, from 19th century). What attracted attention was putting different emphases, changing the meaning of some sentences, or even an ethical censorship applied to the original drama in more prudish times.

Hamlet itself as a drama talks about the question of theatre. Motives referring to theatre as such are a permanent element in the work of Shakespeare, so it is hard to make a production based on his texts without taking part in the discussion about what theatre can and should be. It is not surprising that this motif was quite dominant in my production.

4. Museum as theatre:

Another starting point for the *Ophelias...* was my reflection on the quality of the appearance of the performers in space. At first I imagined *Iconography of madness* as an outdoor show. It was a picture of a park in the winter, where the spectator would enter the white and meet the Ophelias already existing in nature. It would be twenty insane women lost in their soliloquies declaimed in loop.

However, while working on the subject I understood that I couldn't confront the actresses, who already work with their character, also with a public space. The experiment was strongly emotional and it needed a safe space within an institution. A project in a public space could only be a further stage and it was finally carried out when we presented the production on the Gdansk Shakespeare Festival. We cannot talk about the *Ophelias...* without underlining the context in which they were created, location of the show in a museum being an important part of it.

Let's start with the title - ‘iconography’ – taken, after all, directly from the history of visual

⁹ Author's own translation. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Estetyka performatywności*, (English title: *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*) translated by Mateusz Borowski, Małgorzata Sugiera, Księgarnia Akademicka 2008, page 144.

¹⁰ Author's own translation. Ibidem.

Komentarz [Danielle 13]: Again I dont know this word

arts. Iconography is certain fixed images of personages and their symbols. The simplest understanding of iconography in the context of a museum sends us back to the object and its symbols. The lack of theatrical objects is one of the decisions I made during my work.

It isn't hard to imagine that in a museal context we could focus especially, or only, on the accessories and costumes. Composing the 'iconography' we could have gathered in the museal space all the objects belonging to mad women. This kind of thinking about Ophelia could have been inspired by similar productions created in visual arts by Polish artists interested in collections of archives (ex. Robert Kuśmirowski). That sort of collection in case of Ophelia could turn out to be pitifully small. Iconography of madness? Very poor, if to look only through Shakespeare's prism. We would have flowers, a knife, letters or notes, 'few little souvenirs' and blood¹¹. Indeed, the madness of Ophelia can be described with just a few accessories. So what was much more interesting was not using them at all and changing the focus to performance studies; relation actor-character and theatre-museum.

'Iconography' in my work refers to the gesture, the body, striking poses, attitudes. It gives them some more universal character, the actor allows us to 'read' him, exposing the art of acting as an object to be studied and analysed. Actresses also become living pictures, but the movement and constant change allows the exposure of different layers of those pictures, there is the possibility of moving freely from one to another, each time putting emphasis on some other aspect of madness. The presentation itself as well as the character being represented can fall apart, reshape and form again. The spectator has an opportunity to watch and compare different incorporations of the same idea, presented as if on a panoramic painting.

The body in a museum has already been a subject of my interest in works such as *Museum* (2006), *Polish Walk* (2007) and *Six Silhouettes* (2009). The topic I worked on there was the power of the impact of the institution which can even enclose the visitors inside itself and reduce them to just a mark in space, a "total institution" (as understood by Erving Goffman).

Directly before starting the production of Ophelias I also produced a mini-performance *The Museum Theater* (in Abteiberg Museum, 2012) based on choreography and sound. The topic of the production was the way in which the museum organizes, archives and ritualizes the actions taken in its space. The thesis that I stated and defended was that the power of "cultural base" which the museum is, dragging into its circulation the actions of people who work there as well as visitors. It

¹¹ At the beginning of our work together, one of the actresses, Anna Ilczuk, refused to work only and exclusively with her own body saying: "my character and the interpretation of that director can't be read without blood, more than ten liters of fake blood, it's the only way to show the absurd and the theatricality of Ophelia's suicide."

Komentarz [Danielle 14]: I dont know what this word means or what it could be

also produces a special kind of context in which all the pronounced phrases become a narration. The life of a museum can be read as a well-written drama, with its main characters (the guardian, the curator, the manager), the choir and scenography (for which we used my specially composed exhibition). So we can say that museum has huge potential of theatricalization. |

In the work, I exposed all the references which relate my actions with the trend of institutional critique. Museums as institutions fascinated and inspired me long before that and actually what led me to the theatre was analysing how museums work. I was comparing its subtle narrations and neatly hidden attributes of power, divisions and hierarchy with the institution of theatre that openly exposes all those relations.

What comes out of moving theatre into a museum? Showing the Ophelia's drama as an iconography? I wanted to confront these great forms and institutions with one another, so that the features of each of them could be seen more clearly. I know now that every museum has a theatrical potential. This time I used means created by visual arts to analyse, study and observe closely every element of theatre and acting as a cultural phenomenon; a collection of objects and signs, an archive of gestures, fixed images and new compositions.

Four performances of the production:

All the issues here presented could be fully exposed due to four performances of the production where every one of them was of different character. *Ophelias. Iconography of Madness* was shown in four, completely different, spaces. Only while watching the show in Wroclaw I suddenly fully understood what the nature of the event in Lodz was. I realized that in an museal context the performance could be seen as a historical exhibition. And that in The Museum of Art *Ophelias* had a curator (motives were put together so they completed one another and the problems could be properly exposed), while in The Contemporary Museum in Wroclaw they had a director (there was a narration which the spectator could follow in a natural way).

The first performance, in Museum of Art in Lodz, took place in an empty space of one room. All the actresses were present on stage from the very beginning and they existed in space simultaneously for the whole duration of the show. Individual figures were "set in motion" in a more active way in a proper order. The place for the audience was situated in the middle of the room, so the auditorium was in the very middle of the stage and of the events happening there. The nature of the work exposed in this way was of a theatrical installation. The quiet and kinked mechanism of it was only broken by Iwona Bielska who abruptly entered the space from the place

she was occupying in the auditorium and entered in direct contact with the audience.

Later the *Iconography of Madness* was adjusted to the space of the Contemporary Museum in Wrocław. The museum building is an air-raid shelter and it has the form of a labyrinth in which people can move in circles. In there the audience, following a guide, was visiting dark corridors and finding on their way one mad women after another. Some of the actresses were addressing the spectators directly, telling them their story, some others existed in space independently of time and the spectators passing by.

According to the spectators who saw both performances, with regards to the differences noted between the *Ophelias* from the Museum of Art and The Contemporary Museum it was evident that a division between the sensual and the intellectual exists. In Łódź the audience could intellectually analyse the technical solutions, because they were surrounded by *Ophelias* who, set in motion one after another, made it possible to come back to any of them at any moment. A spectrum of attitudes of *Ophelias* was shown there. *Ophelias* in Wrocław was an emotional blackmail – in a narrow labyrinth of the museum also the distance (which makes people feel secure) between the spectator and the actor was shortened.¹²

Ophelias were also shown at the 17th International Shakespeare Festival as a plein-air performance. The original idea of a garden full of mad women was made a reality.

In my opinion in this show the context was slightly broadened. The *Ophelias...* performed on dunes which exposed especially the contact between women and nature, which is so characteristic for romanticism. The next exposition of the project was shown at The Gdansk Shakespeare Theatre during its construction. In the unfinished building the fragmentariness of the show, the fragility of the body and the decomposition of the character's personality were revealed in the most intense way. In another location of the work also the tenor of madness was different.

An additional aspect of the project is the existence of video documentation of the performances. The video of the show in Wrocław was presented at the New Horizons Film Festival as part of a review of movies related to art. The video documentation was also shown as part of thematic exhibitions of contemporary art (in 2015 in The Zachęta National Gallery of Art and in The Galeria Manhattan in Łódź) introducing the work again into circulation in visual arts and in a museum, this time as a complete work of art.

***Ophelias...* and the question of directing**

¹²Anna Herbut „Długo i z bliska” (in English: *For long and from close*) in: Dwutygodnik.com, March 2013, Wydawnictwo Narodowy Instytut Audiowizualny

Komentarz [Danielle 15]: If this was an open air performance then you can call it open air.. Otherwise I am not sure what this word is

Were the *Ophelias*... directed by me? How can it be directed when my concept was to make the actresses become performers and to expose the subjectivity of an actor? It's a very important question, not only in the context of dispute about directing which has taken place in theatre in a quite passionate way since the beginning of the 20th century. In my opinion, some contradictory postulates of German expressionists are especially interesting in this context. On one hand we have the director as a visionary, whose presence makes the drama become more contemporary, who refreshes the word and is a guarantor of coherence of the production – since the twenties the director starts to be seen as a personality and figure around which the theatre and its critique turn. On the other hand (ex. according to Max Reinhard) the director is seen as an unavoidable transitional figure – a person who will lead theatre from a lifeless text of an old drama and limited capabilities of actors educated according to the methods of 19th century to what dramaturgy is today, where the presence of a director becomes unnecessary. The lesser need for a presence of a director is due in large part to the fact that he authors of the dramas produce their pieces themselves, or alternatively an actor takes the responsibility for a stage production of dramas with interesting parts for them (this postulate of a director-playwright was probably best accomplished by the Italian theatre at some moment, and in Poland by Witkacy).

Komentarz [Danielle 16]: Please review this section closely as I changed the sentence structure and added some vocab. It wasn't clear to me if the presence of the director had become unnecessary over time???

Let's add to that a concept which appeared slightly later, of a director as a person whose main task is to work with actors, to educate them, to form them almost in the way in which a sculpture is formed. It's a project whose aim is to create an extreme quality, which will let an actor become a medium incarnating one character after another. I am talking about the Russian school, from Konstantin Stanislavsky to Polish laboratory of Jerzy Grotowski. The word "school" itself refers to a person who defines the methods of action.

In the seventies the actor was also emancipated and became a partner of the director and often a co-creator. But didn't it happen due to the performative turn in contemporary art? I am not talking about the star system, but about the interest in an actor as a person through which the author, or the director, communicates with the audience. It happens parallel to (or even in the face of) the emancipation of the performer in music, which started in fifties and sixties by the composers of experimental music.

Nowadays in Polish theatre the clearly dominating concept is that of director-demiurge and a principle of a production as a whole, where the scenarist, the actor, and even the dramatist (as a new, separate position) support the director in the accomplishment of his individual vision and his authorial concept of theatre.

There are also some enclaves faithful to the concept of theatre as a ritual, but they are

nowadays quite marginalized¹³. The actors are eagerly looking at performance art as a medium which gives them a possibility of auto-directing and another emancipation, often they write monodramas themselves, maybe trying to set free form being labelled as “the actor of Lupa”, “the actor of Warlikowski”.

There are finally visual arts, with their concept of performance art and “drama” so contemporary, that it's action is written by taking action in real time.

If *Ophelias...* were directed by me, then for sure it's a form of directing which originates from the happenings of John Cage and Fluxus, it draws conclusions from the work of Grotowski and has a lot in common with choreography, in the way it's understood by Jérôme Bel.

What *Iconography of Madness* has in common with events organized by Cage is the organization of time. Every one of the actresses-performers was given a couple of minutes, marked by a clear beginning and end of a phrase, composed chronologically with other events, but the filling of this time depended greatly on the individual suggestion of every one of them. Due to having studied the work of Grotowski I can work individually with every actress and find a way of presence on stage characteristic for every one of them. There was looking for the source of madness, the proper rhythm and gesture, focusing on the detail, the possibility of looping every etude in a specific ritual. Whereas, Jérôme Bel inspired me through the way in which he looks at individual biographies and using the personal story of an actor-dancer to create a persona and a universal narration, with a very humanitarian message.

I have also already used the expression that the *Ophelias...* were curated, meaning that independent, filled with meaning elements were put together to create a picture of some problem (madness). But maybe the *Ophelias...* are above all a work of art which uses the theatrical formula in order to create a moving picture, a panoramic painting, a collage composed of texts and gestures?

After going through all that adventure I tend to see *Ophelias. Iconography of Madness* primarily as a painting composition.

¹³ For example Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych Gardzienice (the Centre of Theatre Practice ‘Gardzienice’) or Teatr Chorea (Chorea Theatre).

Recapitulation

Beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all.

André Breton

Ophelias. Iconography of Madness made me search for the idea of a theatre with which I could identify my creative work. I might be close to the idea of Antonine Artaud. Some of his postulates I could relate also to created by me | compositions for architecture which I sometimes call 'acoustic theatre' or 'choreography of music'.

"A scream let out in one extreme of a room will be able to pass from mouth to mouth, transforming and gradually modulating, to the other extreme. The action will get complicated and untangled, shifting its flight from level to level, from one point to another, sudden paroxysms will be born, lightning up in several places as fires [...] physical means of action will equal several simultaneous actions or several phases of identical action, in which the figures, interlocked as swarms of insects, will face up to the attack of the situation."¹⁴

I also feel that I understand dada theatre, surrealism and futurism, but it is no wonder, given that those movements are closely related to imaging proper to visual arts. I also believe that Polish theatres should be burned down, because every institution that lasts for too long becomes its own caricature. What should burn is the decorations, the costumes, the accessories (especially the furniture from the seventies), the screens, the projectors and all the technical resources. It is because the works produced by theatre are related to time, and so it doesn't have to store anything and could demonstrate more instability.

I understand well the sources and the need behind the sudden turn which western art did towards the performance art.

Some of my inspirations (Artaud, Witkacy, dadaists) support the idea of a spectacle, some other (Grotowski, Schechner, Bel) of a performance and ritual, claiming that the spectacle (Grotowski) is its main opposition. Nevertheless, there is one postulate which for me is common for both attitudes. It is the unacceptance of what is in the middle. Because between a spectacle and a performance, both extreme but equally "real", there is representation, reflexion and journalistic commentary - or the characteristic features of bourgeois theatre.

¹⁴ Author's own translation. Antonine Artaud, *Teatr i jego sobowtór*, (in English: *The Theatre and Its Double*) translated by Jan Błoński, Wydawnictwo Czuły barbarzyńca, Warszawa 2010

Komentarz [Danielle 17]: I don't understand what was created here..... should it be creations by me???

The spectacle, as I understand the thought of Artaud, but also Witkacy, is a transgression of representation by taking the image to the level of idea and meta-narration. That which is related to the reality of the moment and its material aspects gets contrasted with what is universal. It is also related to the idea of carnival, entertainment, suspension of law.

The performance and the ritual are the being here and now, getting closer to the essence of events by taking action. According to Grotowski or Schechner by other way, a way inside, one can also get to the sources of the universal. However, it is primarily an encounter with one's own personality, filled with creative power, and with the spectator, due to whom the image of the event can be created.

It is like pointing a direction up, over the heads of the crowd, or down, towards the inside, so the beauty will be convulsive (a brutal spectacle) or will not be (as a point of reference) at all.

What I feel closer to, is probably the idea of poor theatre and performance as an encounter. I could also add the contextual art of Jan Świdziński. If I was supposed to write a manifesto, it would sound more or less like that:

The forms, such as concert, show, exhibition, are for me an equal part of the same reality. They start a dialogue with the reality, they exist only in a context, they come into existence in time only once, they cannot possibly be repeated. They are not imitation or transgression, or critical theory. The form and the content must go hand by hand, coexist and harmonize, so that they can create/provoke a complete, overwhelming event, in which not only the senses but also the intellectual sensibility of the audience will get involved and which will let them experience itself as the reality existing in the given place and time. My main postulate, as for the theatre, as for my parent visual arts, is the lack of separation of sensuality form intellectualism. Reflection is a sensual activity. This is the principle I attempt to adopt while composing site-specific music or while creating collage shows, and recently also rustle concerts with elements of choreography.

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