In the Maze of Culture

Edited by:
Przemysław Rotengruber
& Juliusz Tyszka

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SHORT SUMMARY
The process of globalization turns our world into a kind of stage where many plays are performed side by side. For the first time in human history, we can choose between different ideas for our own lives. However, this possibility entails tangible costs. Those who cannot distinguish between performances aimed at expressing themselves or initiating dialogue with others, and performances prepared for manipulative purposes, fall prey to their own incompetence. In a sense, they are trapped in the old world of institutions that create (socially, politically, economically) accepted patterns of behaviour. In order to get out of the vicious circle of "ready-made solutions", these people need the help of cultural educators. This role is played today not only by (independent) representatives of the performing arts but also by representatives of performance studies, cultural studies, cultural anthropology, and other social sciences.
Those who thought that caring about the authenticity of their performances was enough for them are revising their beliefs. It is not enough that they follow the changes taking place around them, or that they shape their attitude to these changes. They must now take responsibility for the whole theatre of everyday life. This theatre is culture and (all) its participants.

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Autors

Jan Cohen Cruz
lecturer at Master Fine Arts in Performance Creation at Touchstone Theater/
Moravian University at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA

Stephen Dersley
Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland

Maciej Dudziak
Jacob of Paradies University at Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poland

Francesco Martino
Italy

Marcin Oleś
Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland

Rad Pereira
freelance artist and cultural organizer, USA

Przemysław Rotengruber
Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland

John Schranz
Professor emeritus, University of Malta

Juliusz Tyszka
Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland

Introduction

In the Maze of Culture

Przemysław Rotengruber[1], Juliusz Tyszka[2]

[1] Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland, ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9354-7379
[2] Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6801-5837

Despite the differences in our attitude towards contemporary culture, three things do not raise the slightest doubt. First, no one doubts that the world is changing at an unprecedented pace. Secondly, it is being changed by people looking for solutions that are good for themselves. Thirdly, and finally, their inspirations go far beyond the familiar patterns of local culture. This is for obvious reasons. The process of globalization not only deals with new political and economic challenges, but also turns our world into a kind of stage where many plays are performed side by side.

Today, after the collapse of the so-called "grand narratives" it is clear that a significant part of what is cultivated, mastered and rationalized by us escapes our control and functions in the zone of "secondary nature" – named, uncontrolled,

not subject to the criteria of rationality, although existing outside nature, in the strict sense. In the postmodern era, the view that ambiguity and uncertainty are permanent attributes of human existence has finally prevailed – the firm conviction that nothing can be definitively and precisely defined, catalogued and placed in a cabinet of universally accepted concepts. The social and moral imperatives of postmodernism impose on the individual a great burden of responsibility for her/himself and others, in the name of values expressed in the slogan: contingency (in the most general sense: consent to indeterminism)-irony-solidarity.

These values and assumptions pose a great problem for us – people living in this era, because nothing and no one can replace us in the construction of our original, individual identity. Neither religion, nor ideology, nor totalitarian regime, nor custom, nor closed society limit our choices to such an extent as, say, forty years ago. Therefore, we must impose on ourselves some framework of existence, subordinated to certain values. Now it is our private task, our private concern. However, on our way to self-definition and self-fulfilment, we still encounter numerous institutions that, thanks to advanced technologies, operate in a way that is ultra-modern, striving to consolidate the assumptions of modernity, i.e. to level out ambivalence and uncertainty. Operational thinking, characteristic of the modern status quo, still strongly influences our way of thinking and being. It is directed at the assumed goal, not at the essence of things, at mastering nature, not at cooperating with it, at intensively shaping human beings to be more efficient and effective.

Thus, in fully defining our "authentic identity", we are hindered not only by postmodern ambivalence, our laziness and conformism, but also, and perhaps above all, by the oppressive and still overwhelming pressure of modern institutions and authorities. In the late twentieth-century phase of modernity – marked by the convulsions of two world wars, industrial genocide, the dominance of scientifically and technologically oriented "operational thinking", as well as the rapid development of mass culture – the precise definition of one's own self became much more complicated. The mechanism of operation in the institutions of late modern society, regulating our entire life – from ideology to banal everyday life – was and is based on a vision of the world subordinated to science and technology. And the way of perceiving the world imposed by the methodology and pragmatics of these disciplines dehumanizes the world and the human being , pushing higher values to the margin. We realize more and more clearly that the "rationality" of the development of the mass, industrial-consumer society is characterized by irrationality, e.g. the consequence of the scientific conquest of nature is the scientific conquest of the human being.

For the first time in human history, we can choose between different ideas for life – especially for our own lives. However, this possibility entails tangible costs. Those who cannot keep up with the multitude of these ideas, who cannot distinguish between performances aimed at expressing themselves or initiating dialogue with others, and performances prepared for manipulative purposes, fall prey to their own incompetence. In a sense, they are trapped in the old world of institutions that create (socially, politically, economically) accepted patterns of behaviour. In order to get out of the vicious circle of "ready-made solutions", these people need the help of cultural educators. This role is played today by (independent) representatives of the performing arts. In a constant polemic with the products of cultural industry, they remind us of the multiplicity of rules and the multiplicity of challenges that the changing world brings. They are not alone in this task. The role of cultural educator is also performed by representatives of performance studies, cultural studies, cultural anthropology, and other social sciences. After all, it is their job to find out why so few of us can write good roles for ourselves and play them in the theatre of everyday life.

This book is an attempt to answer that question. In the considerations of its authors, the problem of the cognitive and decision-making autonomy of large social groups was referred to two main threats. On the one hand, a constant source of threat to people seeking their (individual and collective) identities are the dominant participants in public life. It is in the interest of political, economic, cultural, sports or religious organizations (and their leaders) to attract the attention of the social masses and win their obedience. To use the simplest explanation, these organizations have to choose between the particular goals they want to achieve and the (communication) standards of liberal democracy. It is hardly surprising that in the game of dominance, all too often the winners are those who were dominant before the game began. Especially when the stake in this game is the possibility of living your own way, the thesis of Michel Foucault, who wrote that *Society Must Be Defended*, gains in importance.

On the other hand, a threat comparable to that of exerting symbolic pressure on contemporary societies is their integration and educational deficits. Undoubtedly, one is related to the other. It is easier to manipulate people who cannot make decisions regarding their life preferences or even current needs. This does not change the fact that difficulties of the second kind deserve a separate examination. Moreover, they deserve it for the same reason. If we assume that the lack of knowledge and skills is the cause (or one of the main causes) of society's vulnerability to manipulation, then raising its critical competences must be considered a necessary condition for its "defence". Before its members learn to

make a choice between their own life preferences and the "ready-made solutions" prepared by others, they must first make a careful assessment of these preferences. In the case of people devoid of criticism, many ideas with which they identify often turn out to be a tool for their self-manipulation. We do not have to look far for examples of conflicts between the beliefs of individuals and groups and the knowledge from their daily experience. Political and economic doctrines turning into ideologies or religious dogmas used in public debate with the ostentatious omission of the (epistemological) claim to truth, are the most obvious illustrations of this regularity. When we combine them with the sentiments, stereotypes and prejudices nurtured by supporters of the "only right" principles of organizing the public sphere, then we get a picture of a society that requires deep interventions from cultural educators.

Following this line of reasoning, the order of the work of representatives of performance studies and cultural studies, ethnologists, sociologists, etc. (those who help cultural educators) results from the order of tasks that these educators have to perform. It follows that the action plan defining the tasks of both groups is the product of theoreticians. By prioritizing what needs to be done, they engage in a dialogue with practitioners about their daily work. This does not mean that cultural educators have nothing to say in the dispute with scholars. Rather, it means that the voice of educators becomes meaningful when they do their work in the right order. With this in mind, the editors of this monograph decided to arrange its texts (chapters) in just such an order.

The author of the first article, entitled *Merchants of Dreams, Plyers of Nightmares, Searchers for Truth*, is John J. Schranz. The subject of his research is the disturbed relationship between three spheres of human activity – sport, art (especially the performing arts) and the market. Schranz begins by analyzing the effects of the commercialization of the sports spectacle. Referring to Richard G. Mitchell, the author states that "sport is no longer autotelic. Its *telos* is no longer that of personal growth and finding fulfilment in the event. It debases itself, instead, into an alloy minted in the market of dreams, molding multimillionaires from the crushed failures of millions of aspirations." Schranz complements this observation with Mitchell's thesis that in this field "*ludus* replaces *paideia*". This statement raises Schranz's doubts about the scale of this phenomenon. Under their influence, the author asks: "Could this be a key territory for culture studies, as the market of dreams extends its spawn's invasive and infectious reach? We are building dreams, but dreams that are fast becoming our nightmares (...)." The similarities between the sports spectacle and the plays performed on the stage of the theatre of everyday life justify such a fear. For this reason, Schranz devotes the second part of his article

to considerations of cultural performance and the possibility of defending it against the pressure of the market... and its institutions.

Maciej Dudziak, unlike Schranz, focuses his attention on identity problems rooted in local culture. The theme of his article, entitled *Identity in process. Performative cross-border contexts*, are so-called "pendlers" (eng. commuters). This colloquial term refers to the inhabitants of the Polish-German borderland working or studying in Germany and living in Poland. This phenomenon deserves to be investigated not only because pendlers live in parallel worlds, but also because the world of their origin – for themselves – remains unrecognized and symbolically undeveloped. The Western Territories became part of Poland after World War II. The mass expulsions of Germans were accompanied by equally massive resettlements of the inhabitants of the territories that Poland had lost to the USSR. In the post-war circumstances, the process of re-rooting the new inhabitants of the post-German lands was extremely slow. In one place there were people who wanted to return to Poland and those who were forced to live there (for example, Ukrainians replaced by force during Operation "Vistula"). Even worse, the administration of the socialist state directed the process of reintegration of the so called "repatriates" as part of a plan to create a mono-national society. The effect of these historical perturbations is that the mechanism of reproducing cultural memory does not work (correctly) in resettlement regions. In short, these regions are devoid of local identities. What can we expect from the changes initiated after 1989? Will the "pendlers" manage to reverse the negative trend? The author of the article seeks answers to these questions.

In the article titled *Polyphonic Stories. Słowacki Theatre in Krakow – "In Fire" directed by Wojtek Klemm, based on Mateusz Pakuła's drama of the same title*, Marcin Oleś complements Dudziak's research with reflection on the possibility (conditions?) of participation in the public debate on the content of collective memory. Oleś's attention is drawn especially to those components of memory which some of the participants in the debate consider to be symbols that require special protection. Oleś goes a step further than Dudziak. The problem of collective identity, in Oleś's view, concerns a community capable of collective recollection of the past, but giving different meanings to its components. To illustrate this case, Oleś uses the example of a theatre group involved in the preparation of a historically controversial play. The attitudes of the group members to what the play is about were extremely different. Oleś compares their attitude towards the play and each other to voices in a fugue. These voices should remain autonomous from each other even when this autonomy leads to dissonances. Has the principle of freedom of voices been preserved in the Kraków theatre? Unfortunately not. Oleś concludes

his story with the statement that in the case of a fugue whose main theme is of political or historical significance, the voices that do not compose spontaneously are muffled by the leading voice.

Another author dealing with the problem of obstacles hindering the free shaping of individual and collective identity is Stephen Dersley. In an article titled *Mutating Scepticism – the strains and determinants of UK Euroscepticism, Lockdown Scepticism and Vaccine Scepticism*, he presents the case of British society. This case differs significantly from the example given by Oleś. While Oleś studied the phenomenon of "polyphony" in the public dispute over history, Dersley focuses on a similarity of views of the UK journalists, activists and politicians who agitated for Brexit and those who articulated various forms of "lockdown skepticism" in opposition to the UK government's coronavirus restrictions. The subject of Dersley's research is UK Euroscepticism and lockdown scepticism as discourses that articulate opposition through the construction of antagonistic identities. In both cases, the discourses strategically identified multifaceted enemies that manipulated and acted against "the people". The author attempts to identify the systemic determinants that shaped the development of UK lockdown scepticism from Euroscepticism, and the former's subsequent mutation into vaccine scepticism and strains of scepticism that either questioned or opposed support for Ukraine following Russia's invasion. Particular attention is paid to the similarities between Euroscepticism and lockdown scepticism, and to the differences in the construction of the enemy and the subject that led to the emergence of distinct discursive strains. Lastly, Dersley considers the meaning of "scepticism" in the context of lockdown scepticism's engagement with non-consensus science.

The second part of the book contains articles about our ability to resist the people and institutions exerting symbolic pressure on us, and our thinking habits that make it difficult for us to react to the world around us in a way that is consistent with our (current) ideas about the roles we would like to play in it. The author initiating these considerations is Francesco Martino. In an article entitled *The First Chair of Professor Grotowski. A glimpse at the 1982 Rome seminar*, Martino seeks an answer to the question of the conditions (rules?) of authenticity of actors playing roles on and off stage. Extending Martino's considerations to off-stage criteria of authenticity is justified by two premises. The first one refers to Jerzy Grotowski's idea of using fundamental anthropological clues in the search for techniques to protect and develop human aesthetic sensitivity. The second premise is related to Grotowski's intention to go beyond the scientific findings on the spectacle understood as our on-stage and off-stage practice. "Theatre, ritual and other performative contexts – explains Martino – are seen just as 'fields of experience' where it is possible to look

at a human being at work upon him/herself." Grotowski analyzes these techniques transculturally, by grouping them into sets, using opposing pairs of criteria. For each and every technique where one aspect is emphasized (for example, immobilization or breath manipulation), there are others in which the opposite action is called on for the freeing of natural processes. However, the sets are not separable but intersect variously. Grotowski's aim is by no mean a classificatory one, the criteria he uses function just as highlighters, placing the accent on one of the possible aspects at a time. "In a highly developed technique, all aspects are present."

The authors of the penultimate article, entitled *Meeting the Moment: Socially Engaged Performance, 1965-2020 by Those Who Lived It*, are Jan Cohen-Cruz and Rad Pereira. This article combines two – mutually correlated – threads. The first group of issues raised by the authors are the historical, economic and cultural obstacles that have divided American society. These obstacles hinder not only participation in public life, but also the free shaping of individual identities. The second topic that catches the attention of Cohen-Cruz and Pereira is the experience of cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to both authors, the time of fighting the plague also became a period in which new possibilities for organizing socially engaged performances emerged. Restrictions on personal contact made it necessary to introduce new forms of communication. They turned out to be a useful way to promote independent art, civic education and integration of communities involved in the fight against various forms (manifestations) of social injustice. Cohen-Cruz and Pereira illustrate this with examples justifying the conclusion that the means of communication and integration used in connection with the pandemic threat should remain in use even though the threat has passed. They turned out to be useful tools in the process of (re)building a civil society.

Finally, the last article, entitled *Perform a play – your own play! Between Discipline and Performance*, by Przemysław Rotengruber, deals with the relationship between freedom to perform and discipline. Rotengruber draws on Jon McKenzie to discuss whether the success of the process of disseminating performative practices characteristic of contemporary societies depends on their rejection of discipline (used until recently as a social-creating tool) or, on the contrary, requires the use of a new kind of discipline. Rotengruber uses two types of arguments. On the one hand, he reminds us of the symbolic pressure exerted by the dominant institutions of public life on their social environment. Today, this pressure takes the form of "ready-to-use" individual and collective performances. Symbolically dominated people believe that they are actors choosing their own roles in the theatre of everyday life. Meanwhile, they act in plays written and directed by someone else. On the other hand, these people fall into the age-old trap of their own normative

beliefs. Confusing what they believe with what they know, they lose their cognitive distance to the world around them. According to Rotengruber, the remedy for both these problems is the rules of critical thinking. Only with their help is it possible to sort the wheat from the chaff. Unfortunately, this sorting cannot be done by those who need it most. That is why Rotengruber entrusts cultural educators with this task, calling them ambassadors of critical thinking.

From the juxtaposition of texts that make up this monograph, a picture of culture as a maze emerges. This metaphor contains the following ambiguity. Culture as a maze can evoke associations with Stephen King's novels. It is full of paths that lead astray those who follow them. This makes wanderers who are unable to find their own way want to leave this place. They are looking for a structured reality – free from doubts about the rules of moving around in it. Unfortunately, they do not know that such a reality does not exist. Their escape from a world full of challenges they cannot face becomes their escape from freedom. Could they have done otherwise? It's very doubtful. They run away from freedom of choice because they cannot use it in a world full of unknowns.

However, this is not the only consequence of their escape. People who get lost in the maze of culture leave those who make use of their freedom. This causes tensions that threaten both of these groups. Those fleeing from the world of culture (imaginatively) abandon it along with those who decided to stay in it. While for the latter, culture is an invaluable source of knowledge about themselves, the former are convinced that this information should be sought outside of it. It's not hard to see them as hostile or indifferent to each other. How to correct this relationship or at least keep it under the control of those who have not abandoned responsibility for the quality of collective life? The answer to this question is complex. It requires taking into account those dominant participants of public life who decided to take a "shortcut" – who found their social environment permanently incapable of partnership (participation in dialogue) or cynically used their integration and persuasive advantage over this environment.

This practice needs to be thoroughly investigated, not only because of the interests of the (dominated) social masses. This threatens in equal measure individuals and groups conducting their existential quests along the winding paths of culture. To clarify this thought, those who have been able to take care of themselves meet a double obstacle on their way. It is, on the one hand, an uneducated and confused society, and on the other hand, those who would like to manipulate this society. Confronted with these threats, those who thought that caring about the authenticity of their performances was enough for them are revising their beliefs. It is not enough that they follow the changes taking place around them, or that they shape

their attitude to these changes. They must now take responsibility for the whole theatre of everyday life. This theatre is culture and (all) its participants.

Whether this theatre will function properly and even whether it will exist depends on those who – here and now – either occupy a place in the audience or play in other people's performances. Therefore, the task of those who want to retain the freedom to perform cannot be limited to the development of their creative skills. It is as much about defending society from itself as it is from those who want to dominate it. Educational and integration performances are of no less importance here than unmasking activities aimed at recognizing the enemies of the (future?) performance community. Performers who undertake such activities achieve an additional goal. They give a dialogic character to the actions that initially served to construct their temporary identities. Or maybe they just remind themselves that their actions have always been (or should be) like this...

Merchants of Dreams, Plyers of Nightmares, Searchers for Truth

John J. Schranz

Professor emeritus, University of Malta

1. Merchants of Dreams

On one of my earlier visits to Poznań, at the beginning of this century, en route from the airport to the city by car in the early phase of a collaboration between the University of Malta and Poznań's Adam Mickiewicz University, my colleague,

Professor Juliusz Tyszka, was pointing out sites, in between our discussing the programme and exchanging usual pleasantries. When passing by the Poznań International Fair, which Juliusz informed me was launched in 1929, he told me that when, as a child, he used to be taken to the fair he used to collect publicity brochures from the various stands. I remember replying, amused, that the International Trade Fair of Malta was launched in 1948, adding that I too used to be taken to our fair as a child and that I too used to run about, from one stand to another collecting those exciting brochures.

Europe was then starting to emerge from the war's havoc and poverty, it still was the pre-dawn of mass media: no TV, no computers, no colour printed newspapers, no huge street billboards, no mobile phones. Those brochures were tangible; they still are, but back then they were unchallenged, visible dreams, dreams a child could touch, hold, possess, spread around one's room, stick them to walls, to chest of drawers, windows and wardrobes, organise and re-organise them: you suddenly have two possible cars, four possible side-car motorcycles... or more down-to-earth (and realistic), a bigger tricycle, two pairs of skates! When you have the brochures, the objects are no longer merely in your imagination: if you hinted you wished to have them your father's money will somehow buy them... pushed by your mother, aunt, grandmother… Everything, it seemed, could be had. Nor is it only when you are a child, either. "Desirable" is so malleable – it soon transmogrifies into "available" – it seems.

In a lecture he delivered in Volterra in 1994, Walter Branchi, top Italian composer of electronic music, told us he had stopped recording his compositions – no tapes, no records, no cassettes – "I now compose a piece of music for that day, that place, those people, after which it is never played again." He made it clear he was not expecting others to do likewise – he had taken that decision in order to dispel the illusion that "*one could now possess all the music of the world.*" Subconsciously, we think we could – I can immediately order any a piece of music I like, if it catches my fancy. Indeed, I could buy all the music of South America, India, Japan, should I want to. One can have everything provided one has the money. And Branchi stopped recording. Somebody in the audience stood up, angrily: "All right, but that is elitist. How can I hear your music?" he challenged, plying the familiar dilemma: what is, and what is not, "elitist" in culture? Branchi's response cut deeply: "I don't know you, personally; nor do you know me, personally. Maybe you play music, as I do, but I couldn't hear your music before you addressed me, now. If we go on to get to know each other, then yes – you can get to hear my music and I can hear yours. Because music is

relational, it **is** relationships."[1] Relationships can be lived, but not possessed. They changes, they grows, all the time – in the encounter, inherent to the encounter, thus going beyond being possessed by any one party to an encounter.

Our drive kept providing stimuli, as we passed by what Italians would call a *tentopoli* – a vast open-air market, huge tracts of land covered with a vast, sprawling sea of canvas tents covering myriad stalls. It was a post-1989 phenomenon, Juliusz told us, that was sprouting everywhere; the Polish market had been empty, so such markets had come in. Gradually, things become more complicated, and such markets started hosting gangs, contraband. In itself, this is already interesting: when the market is empty, the "markets" come in.

More interesting, however, was a second factor: another empty space bordering the tent market – a large abandoned football stadium. It so happened that the day before I left for Poland I had watched a non-spectacle – a quarter final of the FIFA World Cup finals then being played in Japan. Pathetic matches like that one are the thermometer's mercury, flagging contexts leading to abandoned stadia – voids akin to the illusion Walter Branchi draws our attention to by his reply to the challenging question. Both live in the same street. As fortune would have it, that evening the undercurrents of my thoughts were brought to the surface in sharp clarity, when I was taken to a theatre performance that embodied that illusion. Teatr Strefa Ciszy's performance, *Pressing*, savaged the market of sport, that market of dreams that become nightmares.

Pumped up by powerful forces, that market generates dreams of becoming "the best" at some sport or other – whichever – attaining boundless popularity, that translates into fabulous salaries, fringe benefits, "perks" for featuring in advertising campaigns that further inflate other markets. It is the cornucopia of lucre, accessible only to the élite enthroned on a gilded platform, its solid base cemented on a vast plinth, enormous. And that plinth? It is the crushed sporting dreams of millions of youths – sad human debris compressed into this Golden Calf of our times, which all of us elevate for adulation: the World Sport *Kermesse*.

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[1]   Walter Branchi is an exceptional musician. The richness of his work on complexity and on electronic music is considerable, seeing humankind as "not being at the centre of things but comprised by them, listening to music, to the environment". He has lectured and held residences in various universities and music conservatories, amongst which Rome's *Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia*, Stanford University, Wesleyan University, Rhode Island School of Design... His other passion is cultivating antique French roses – his (equally exceptional) nursery garden in Terni, where he carries out his research, making him one of the world's top experts in roses. One of his remarkable statements brings his two disciplines together: "I create music to amaze roses"... https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Branchi

Teatr Strefa Ciszy from Poznań, *Pressing* (2002), direction: Adam Ziajski

R G Mitchell[2] studies developments in sport, including commercialised adventure packages, where whoever takes part can have little, if anything, to do with the outcomes. Mitchell then studies parallel developments in computer versions of tennis, hockey, football, etc., to which millions are addicted, dubbing them mere, "ersatz games", that is inferior imitations "that disregard the energy, skill, and determination required for their full-scale counterparts". These counterparts he then refers to as "full-scale sport", highlighting the fundamental difference between them and "virtual sports". That done, he moves in to take the lid off what happens in the competitive sports arena. The first (retrograde) step occurs soon – and the performance *Pressing* presented to its audience precisely that first scenario: competition very quickly ends up discouraging young aspirants, as trainers' unspoken evaluations marginalise those lesser equipped from playing. One soon realises, painfully, that one is not of the level of excellence "The System" demands; deprived of the joy of *ludus* one gives up, dejected and crushed.

Mitchell warns: the initial experience of Ludus is crucial for breeding true enjoyment. Deprivation of it leads to the next step: rationalisation creeps in, "occasioning a shift in many forms of play – away from the achievement of immediate enjoyment, to an insatiable desire for ultimate success, from means to ends. Competition becomes the dominant form of play, and winning becomes the pre-eminent goal".

2. Plyers of Nightmares

Mitchell proceeds, removing the heavy glitz and glamour layers of spectacle (the word many sport scientists use when referring to such phenomena) that now betray sport's erstwhile noble nature: "Rationalised play is eminently self-conscious and fraught with potential deviance (...) rewards grow in importance; when scholarships, prizes, bonuses, and political advantage ride in the balance, the temptation to rule deviation grows".

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[2]   Richard G. Mitchell, professor of sociology, OSU, co-editor of *Exploring Society*, author of *Mountain Experience: The Psychology and Sociology of Adventure* (1983), *Secrecy and Fieldwork* (1993), *Dancing at Armageddon – Survivalism and Chaos in Modern Times* (2004).

Mitchell points out that, as a result, decisions about whether players' behaviour in play is fair or not become critical. They cannot be left in the hands of the players themselves. Rules are invented. Special roles (judges, referees, umpires) emerge for decisions, adjudication, awards, prizes, inflict punishments. Special boards and commissions supervise events and endless other factors (such as regulations specifying the materials rackets, skis, boots, are made of... all the way to VAR, the Video Referee Assistance tool) in order to evaluate the effects new developments have on the sport. They are tasked to ensure that innovations do not favour some players or groups over others. Mitchell proceeds: "Finally, rationalised specialisation extends beyond play to participants themselves (...) suited players are chosen and trained to be best at a single game. Their talents are not usually transferable to other kinds of play (...) Winning is of such importance, competition so keen, players so specialised, that the chances of an average individual performing adequately are so remote and the chances of being criticised are so likely, that it is no longer worth the risk."

The risk, of course, is that of having devoted years of one's life hoping to break through, get to the top and become a household name (with all its perks), but after all that time and effort finding oneself looking cold reality in the face. As Mitchell says: "It becomes easier to join onlookers than continue a halting and unappreciated participation. Actual play is abandoned in favour of discussion and comparison of other's performances" – as watched in stadia or on TV.

That scenario is worrying enough, but Mitchell words its darker point of arrival. "For some", he warns – and I suggest that, now, forty years later, we sadly can say "for many"[3] – "sport undergoes a last transformation – into a game of chance, a gamble, in which onlookers in no way influence the action but wager on outcomes in the office football pool or at the bookies. The metamorphosis nears completion. Through the process of rationalisation, play is transformed. *Ludus* replaces *paideia*"[4] – and *Pressing* crystallised this chillingly, as we shall see.

That year the FIFA World Cup Finals were on – and in Poland I saw Mitchell's transformation in practice, sadly.

For the first time, the only matches transmitted live were Poland's– rights cost the State TV about €6,500,000. Other games could only be seen on Pay

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[3]   Mitchell did not know what would follow, forty years later, with "gaming" running rampant.
[4]   Richard G. Mitchell, *Mountain Experience: The Psychology and Sociology of Adventure*, University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp. 207-225.

Teatr Strefa Ciszy from Poznań, *Pressing* (2002), direction: Adam Ziajski

TV. In many knock-out matches, teams clearly wanted draws, preferably 0-0, opting for penalty "shoot-outs". Interestingly, in French a draw is *match nul*: "a match that wasn't". The Spain-South Korea quarterfinal was revealing: extra time confirmed full-time's *match nul* – but at the whistle Spain's players, trainer, reserves and supporters, erupted in wild celebrations. The TV commentator illumined us: in their last 20 matches Spain never missed one penalty – so they played for *match nul* – and the shoot-out. Poetic justice intervened, however; in **that** shoot out they did miss a penalty… and were eliminated. Their market of dreams crashed, concretely, unlike in the fictive world of *Pressing*.

The concrete transformations Mitchell identifies are highly regrettable – sport is no longer autotelic. Its *telos* is no longer that of personal growth and finding fulfilment in the event. It debases itself, instead, into the alloy minted in the market of dreams, moulding multimillionaires from the crushed failures of millions of aspirations. In a revolting parallel – and as with all parallels they never meet – at the other end of the scale we find more nightmares: the *tentopolis* we drove by, the bookmakers sprouting across Poland overnight, the abandoned football stadium, all best represented, perhaps, by Mitchell's summing up discourse – heaps of pathetic coins paid in gaming, into pools, slipped into dream machine slots – all fantasising many more pouring out in lieu of those put in.

Instead of tapping one's unique treasures, the abilities one is born with, others one joyfully develops, those dreams bet everything on the one hope/dream humankind seems unable to dismiss: the possibility of somehow possessing everything one desires, as Walter Branchi put it. It does not matter that one will never possess all that one desires, whatever size one's wealth is – what comes into play is the mere, tempting *possibility*, the carrot: fulfilling whichever desire may somehow next sprout. Should it fail, then one makes do with fifth rate substitutes, of which there is legion flooding markets.

Lucifer knew all too well which temptation mere mortals are unable to resist. That is why he left it for last.

For his most tempting offer, he took Christ to the highest mountain peak.

His arm swept majestically across the entire world.

And he goaded: "All you can see I can make you have." The ultimate test, bound to show him how truly God this "Son of Man" was[5].

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[5]   Matthew, 4.1-4.11.

To borrow the words of that other incarnation of evil, Shakespeare's darkest villain, one asks: which "one of woman born"[6] could conceivably be able to turn down an offer like that? The potent draw of lucre, Lucifer's bait, rarely fails, whichever the context drawing us to its siren call... and one does bite the bait. The slightest bite suffices; one bite and the pall spreads, obfuscating everything else, ensuring its hold does not capitulate.

In such a pall of darkness, Walter Branchi's words are a powerful bea-cl'l'on.

Do we prioritise building one's own abilities, and, by those abilities, build relationships, hopes, human bridges? Or is it, instead, the amassing of illusions (and, sometimes, billions) that is prioritised?

I offer another window for us to look through, one that affected me deeply when it occurred, the power of its message coming from the mouth of a child.

In his early years, our son used to play football in the nursery of a very good amateur club; he was not brilliant, but he was very good. He loved training days, looking forward to them excitedly. When he was twelve, we started noting his excitement diminishing. "Something wrong at training?" we asked, casually. His reply was clear: "Not 'wrong'... but I end up sitting on the bench, waiting to be called in to play; very often, however, the trainer does not call me." He had started sensing that either one is "the best", "better than the others", or one does not play; so he was losing interest in playing. It is very sad to lose interest in play. It is sadder still losing it when one is twelve. In Mitchell's words: "*ludus* replaces *paideia*" – even in trainers.

One might be tempted to change that couplet, using Caillois' terms[7], "**agôn** replaces **alea**". One could frame it that way. In so doing, however, one loses something intrinsic to Mitchell's development of the concept, which feels more to the point in this discourse, in that Mitchell's "*paideia*" is even more removed from the idea of "competition", than Caillois' terms are: Mitchell's terms refer to pedagogy, the act of guidance in the phase of a child's upbringing, that of leading,

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6   Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (V.viii), "I bear a charmed life, which must not yield, to one of woman born."

7   Roger Caillois *Man, Play and Games*. Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2001. French original edition: *Les jeux et les hommes*. Paris, Librairie Gallimard, 1958, where Caillois makes his point with sharp clarity, saying (p. 13): "One *plays* football, billiards, or chess *(agon);* roulette or a lottery *(alea)*" – a crystal clear counterpoint.

Teatr Strefa Ciszy from Poznań, *Pressing* (2002), direction: Adam Ziajski

a leading that is playful, a leading that thus succeeds in teaching – succeeding, therefore, in teaching healthily.

Could this be a key territory for culture studies, as the market of dreams extends its spawn's invasive and infectious reach? We are building dreams, but dreams that are fast becoming our nightmares – when we ought to, instead, strive to build dreams that would help us push our way out of the nightmares we have encaged ourselves in – tight pigeonholes, constricting non-spaces, paths leading only to gilded nothingness.

3. Searchers for Truth

Pressing tried to give flesh – literally: its performers' flesh – to the failures of the sporting system. It fell short, however, of incarnating the corrupt, nightmarish process Mitchell reveals. Instead, timed to World Cup fever, it staged institutionalised sport's glamorous packaging, a "presentation pack" with the glitz and flashy razzle-dazzle of the FIFA/Olympics merry-go-round, hung with gold and silver trophies and medals for twenty-first century gladiators ravenous for covert perks – crowning it all with a hilarious parody of the banal world-tour of... *The Torch*.

The performance would have done better to present Orwellian style "seed-beds" where lab-engineered "seedlings" of World Sport are made to sprout and grow in the glamourous, sterile, nurseries Mitchell attacks. We would have seen "seedlings" being sieved by a selectivity process that kills aspirations of millions who yearn to enjoy healthy sport but are, instead, classified as "unsuitable material". We would then have seen those selected helped to grow *further faster*, many ending up pruned, the onslaught survivors then pushed further, until those remaining are finally coddled in bubbles where, anointed as geniuses, they become indifferent to anything outside those bubbles. So many stages, coldly breaking millions of youths on too many steps ostensibly leading to stardom. The performance could have gone further, presenting the "Stars" abounding in the "scholarships, prizes, bonuses, and political advantage" that Mitchell exposes = not those of 1983, however! That was forty years ago, forty years equivalent to hundreds, given our present context's breakneck speed of change resultant

to internet, technology, globalisation, the all-powerful multinationals, crypto currency, the anaesthetising power of the media, the so-called "Social Media" and more, much more.

Had *Pressing* chosen to do that, it would have thrown us between Scilla and Charybdis: laughing uproariously one moment, cowed to silence the next.

Instead of doing so, however, it just about allowed us to glimpse the cold, clinical setup in which, finally, after the *Übermensch(en)*[8] are anointed, comes the coddling period and its concomitant "fine-tuning" maintenance work: the system's gruelling pressure (thus the title, *Pressing*) which produces the stunning wonders that thrill and grip us all while cowing us, subdued. We ogle them, somehow sensing how impossible it is for us to even think of making *their* wonders ours. Some of us might merely sense that unawares, not even wondering why; could something, at some deep, genetic level, be suggesting our being mere, sub-human mortals?[9]

That is the problem *Pressing* had. The few, weak and comparatively ephemeral glimpses of the System's gruelling pressure which it presented us with were more than eclipsed by its constantly regaling us with uproariously staged "flops" of the "sportsmen-competitors". The brilliant banality of ludicrous non-achievements in all discipline had us in stitches. *Pressing* parodied breakdowns mercilessly[10], excelling in broad humour, irony and satire, fêting us on the rotten fruit of the System's extreme pressure – miserable sport failures presented in fiendishly comic doses of burlesque.

The performance went further, staging "star" sportsmen "going public" in media interviews – not speaking only of their discipline, however, but also outside

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[8]   "*Übermensch*, the goal Zarathustra posited as humanity's aim, in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1892)*.

[9]   *Le double sens du spectacle sportif* (The double meaning of Sport as Spectacle) – a 2004 research programme that sounded 900 secondary school students from the French region *Provence-Alpes,* regarding their admiration or repudiation of sport celebrities. The (grave) results showed, on the one hand, that the favourite celebrities were those conveying a tribal, communitarian and nationalist culture (largely exacerbated by the media, the entertainment world and political speeches), which confers upon them the status of heroes. On the other hand, the reasons the interviewees hate those sportsmen are rooted in that same imaginary processes (tribalism, communitarian, nationalism) – in the sense, now, of their being impure, unacceptable and sham. [*That is, in projecting those images. One has, indeed, serious grounds to worry…*]. (My translation from the French) https://www.persee.fr/doc/agora_1268-5666_2004_num_37_1_2196

[10]   Such as a "competitor" throwing the hammer being spun by and coiled in the rope and finally knocked out by the ball.

of it, those farcical moments where stars feel they need to (and are sure they are able to...) inflate their image further by demonstrating their wisdom and broad knowledge of "*The World Situation*" – and they fail pathetically, pronouncing inane statements abounding in clichés.

Audiences at satirical performances encounter both the performer's work *and* each other – directly, physically. *Pressing* banked on the powerful effect satire has on shared presence, repeatedly knocking beholders off balance, its strategy of hilariously mad logic catching us by surprise, throwing us into fits of laughter. Well-crafted satire provokes collective, uncontrollable waves of laughter – unbroken, infectious, its beholders rocked by the illogical twists and turns.

Guffawing at warped logic, one recognises the staged incongruities, at the same time confessing, by open laughter, that those incongruities are not so alien to one's own doings and thinking.

Satire is a complex series of double takes, more often than not reinforcing the rejection of incongruities. Recognising this, one laughs at one's own flaws, accepting and – crucially – confessing those shortcomings to oneself. Given that, however, the open laughter is shared, that "confession" no longer remains private to oneself. It is inevitably shared, openly, to and by all caught likewise. "Yes..." one's (wordless) laughter says "...one does fail... sometimes... lured... not refraining from putting principles aside... a bit..." One finds oneself wondering whether one's "little slips" can be as uproarious as those in the performance: "These are hilarious... they're not about principles, really – ehm... or are they... Are they?" In *Pressing*, we see the "athletes" skive, cheat on each other, aim pretentiously high, only to fail miserably, pathetically – and we laugh and wince.

We the audience attain catharsis by our irrepressible laughter, openly recognising those strategies (not the events themselves, but the strategies) as being ours too, as we collectively share our laughter and our recognition. Satire works that way. Its rollicking humour helps one look inwards, learning by collective admission, with laughter certifying both our fickleness and – by our recognising and accepting that fickleness – our facadism, therefore. Satire cuts us down to size, with Aristophanes its absolute master.

That is what happened to me, as the performance was drawing to its close. Something clicked, suddenly, in my mind. Satire had started working.

That click brought me to remember that for quite a period of my life, years ago, I too was taken in by what now was making me laugh: the gaudiness, flashiness, the mediatic adrenalin pumping, the "global" imagery, the bombast

of "The World is watching..." – all the garishness of the opening ceremony parades: flags galore, national anthems in blaring brass, thousands of roaring voices and twice as many hands clapping, hysteria... and yes – *The Torch*, its travel almanac. In my fourties came the day when I learned. I opted out, quietly and calmly. Not overtly. Nor immediately and totally. Simply opted out; gradually.

My rocking laughter at *Pressing* struck some chord, stirring images of my distant past. I was grappling with something I needed to understand about my rollicking laughter. At the same time, a vague, distant sense of rejection seemed to be building, slowly subduing my laughter.

It was many weeks later that I suddenly recognised it, shocked, as it dawned upon me in cold clarity. What I had laughed at was not some much needed satirical interpretation of the gruelling, inhuman pressures that break and discard millions while fabricating the select few. I knew that process– and I hated and rejected it passionately. It is that process that ought to have been satirised grossly.

Neither had I seen a satirical version of the hidden, corrupt motivations which Mitchell exposed as having driven the 1980s process – in itself naïve nowadays, given the darker truth of today's goings-on, 40 years later. Both those ugly truths would have indeed been fertile ground for satire – in biting, forceful ribaldry. The performance had, however, failed to bring us to consider how shocking those two realities were.

What shocked me, instead, was my sudden realisation, its blow: the performance was making me laugh at hilariously staged failures of the (performer)-athletes – at the victims, therefore. I had laughed at *victims*!

Undoubtedly, those hilariously staged failures were finely crafted, as theatre goes. It had taken me weeks, however, for that truth to hit me: I had been laughing at victims! As everyone else in that audience had probably done.

Pressing did well to lambast pretentiousness: idols proliferate and satire wrenches them off pedestals – marble or imaginary. Still, we had laughed at victims – those millions of world-wide, collapsed dreams, the debris idols stood on... the Colosseum comes to mind. Our focus here is not on a "kind" of performance or another, if, that is, "kind" should feature when speaking of Performance. As with the nature of Performers' formation process, the *character* of performance demands a context way beyond the scope and breadth of the present discussion – space allows only brief hints, signals.

Without forfeiting humour and satire, *Pressing* could have allowed us space to sense there are victims, not only pretentious climbers – also to question and

challenge the regimens dehumanising them, unmasking those regimens' veiled, background interests. It could even have stirred in us a wish to see those covert forces' wings clipped – a cursory glance at two notorious instances will show us how much this wing clipping needs to happen. Two law court sagas, leaving a bitter taste in lovers of sport, hit nearly at the same time in 2022, providing a most unwelcome, inside view of the unpleasant face of the reality in the backstage of organised sport.

17-year-old Boris Becker's brilliant Wimbledon triumph and sensational tennis had made him an international idol; he retired from professional tennis in 1999, aged 32, having had a brilliant career. By the time he was 27 he had amassed a huge fortune from tennis; at one stage, his assets totalled €43,500,000. In 2002 a Munich court found him guilty of a €1,700,000 tax evasion. In April 2022 a UK court found him guilty of four offences under the Insolvency Act, hiding millions in assets from his creditors, "his name synonymous with not only his successes but a series of disastrous financial mishandlings, lavish living and allegations of shady deceit."[11] I too was a great fan of Becker, rooting strongly for him.

The Platini-Blatter case followed bans and arrests of several officials by FIFA's Court of Sport Arbitration (CAS), others by the FBI, followed then by that of the FIFA Secretary General, as well as (of course) Blatter's twelve-year suspension by the CAS. All are stunning – text book cases for the context here discussed. The Blatter-Platini saga intensifies the shock; it has been declared closed by the Bellinzona court. Still, a bitter taste lingers in one's mouth – not part of the legal issues addressed by the court case – the court dismissed all those. It is in a sequence of events regarding Platini's original request for one million Swiss francs per annum, which figure, Blatter said, was impossible for FIFA, offering Platini, instead, 300,000 Swiss francs per annum and adding that the difference would be paid to him later. Platini said in the trial that he subsequently heard that (his own words at the trial) FIFA "was broke"[12], so he settled for the 300,000 per annum with an arrangement for the initially unpaid amounts to be paid to him later. What leaves a bitter taste is that deal's *context*, setting those payments *to be made from funds of a **sport** organisation that was* <u>*broke*</u>. Sportsmen looked up to, admired and widely considered exemplary, as Platini is, are made role models by youths aspiring to take up any sport. Role models sculpt aims, intentions and visions of younger generational aspirants.

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[11]   https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/apr/08/boris-becker-from-tennis-greatness-to-financial-disaster, "The Guardian", 8.04.2022.

[12]   https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/62081675

Sadly, Mitchell's pattern returns: sport risks becoming an ever more gleaming carrot for youth to look at, wide eyed, to be drawn on one path or on another, which could lead far from what sport needs to be seen as. Many are the wings that, sadly, need clipping in the backstage settings of Organised Sport.

The performance had a golden opportunity to defy that, given the energy and conviction it had applied to the task. There was an important factor, however, one *Pressing* failed to recognise: there was one, particular window which, had it been opened, would have enabled the performance to grasp that opportunity.

What *Pressing* needed to do was a revolutionary gesture – one that would have been much more than merely a gesture, as it would have involved taking extraordinary action. The performance needed to elevate Theatre and Sport, together, as disciplines, to a new, uncharted level. *Pressing* needed to engage, in one performance, excellent practitioners of each of the two disciplines: practitioners of sport and practitioners of theatre, working together, in a joint, celebratory manifestation[13] on the altar of being Human.

Had *Pressing* done that, it would have drawn us into a celebration of one of Mankind's major achievements, its essence, probably: the complexity and refinement of shared, celebratory, collective Human **presence**.

Stimulated by that vision, we the audience, drawn by our cerebral abilities, would have experienced the enriching physicality of shared presence even on the symbolic level. Theatre performers and sport practitioners (athletes, ideally, as the discipline of athletics is recognised as "the Mother of all Sport") would have generated a unique joint presence. That collaboration – unheard of as it is – would have revealed how profoundly affinal those two disciplines are.

It would have moreover revealed how equally affinal their practitioners are – an affinity that is, in part, thanks to each one's respective work, in part to his or her very nature: that which would have drawn each to choose, learn and practice the specific discipline she or he would have chosen.

We would then have found ourselves in an encounter which we, their beholders, would not have imagined before – thus coming to recognise that

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[13]   It is what we experience in Eugenio Barba's *Odin Teatret*, where musicians Kai Bredholt and Ulrich Winter, in practically all performances, play their instruments *qua* musicians, at a degree of fully accomplished musicians while contributing, at the same time, to the performance by their extraordinarily organised and designed presence, more often than not, by express design, at the highest level of the art of theatre.

event as defying the vested (and exploitative) interests of the covert forces Mitchell chastised.

Had practitioners of both disciplines worked together on and in the performance, *Pressing* would have afforded its beholders a unique insight. In working together, each in her/his own discipline, each practitioner would have been seen to have practically dissolved the frontiers of her/his own specific discipline, both suddenly seen as being at one – Performers, melding their disciplines.

Had *Pressing* seen and adopted that revolutionary shift, every performer would still have been governed and supported by her/his own discipline, while crucially relating to each other's stimuli – as *both* are fully trained to respond to stimuli.

It is much as in an emulsion, where the separate components remain separate – while, at the same time, what seems a new entity appears to our eyes. We all surely remember in our childhood how wondrously surprising we found that phenomenon. In each performer, we beholders, initially disoriented, would see dissolving the frontiers that, over the years, generated and defined the characteristic labels of each. Labels tend to erect barriers, impenetrable ones, incommunicable, often. They sadly seal in bubbles that which we label, which is the antithesis of the human being's open-endedness. All too often, labels end up sowing antagonism. Our ability to discern endows us with the skill to intuit and comprehend the obscure, helping us to sense differences that are crucial, recognising the wide range of each, thus guiding us out of and beyond labelling.

Had *Pressing* grasped that opportunity – and had we, then, its beholders, been initially disoriented – our discernment would have gradually moved in to help. It would have enabled us to see – and we would have "seen" with much more than solely the eyes; we would have seen as the blind seer of Greek tragedy, Tiresias, "saw". We would then have recognised each practitioner for what s/he would have thus been revealed to equally be: in his/her discipline and beyond it.

We would have seen both categories of performer – those of theatre and those of sport – as *belonging* to that one category: that of Performers – a newly elevated embodiment of all aspects, facets, qualities, abilities and potentials (tapped or still untapped) of the wonderfully aesthetic nature of being Human Beings.

Ah then – then much would have been more meaningful, as we would have seen things differently. Moreover – and more importantly – the performance would have spurred us to ask ourselves a crucial question, subliminally, but still asking it. What does it mean to be Human?

Discobolus – Marble copy of Myron's original, V B.C., Glyptothek, Munich

This illustration of a 2nd century A.D. Roman statue is one of many ancient bronze and marble copies of Myron's *Discobolus*, "the discus thrower". Made at half way through the 5th century BC, Myron's bronze original was lost. Its beauty, however, left, a considerable number of copies of itself, made in Roman times, some of the same dimensions as the originals, others smaller, some in bronze, some in marble.

This splendid work is the most helpful (and the most beautiful) concentration possible of our above discussion. Curves, straight lines, angles, verticals – everything swirls… except one horizontal: his right foot, giving him the needed stability while every cell of him dances. Through our eyes, we feel a breath-taking dance leading us to flash around too, mesmerised, his aura transfixing us, our eyes caught unawares in the fast, gyrating flow of countless energy points he unleashes, this immobile, quivering, bronze athlete, this Greek god, whirling us with him in a dance of eyes – making us experience the speed at which he, *Discobolus*, gyrates, beamingly as he holds us, spins us, in a spiral of mesmerising ellipses, curves, angles, ovals… innumerable geometric forces.

In this heady visual experience, fusing with *Discobolus*, we may get to sense (not only "see": "sense") the truth of that "discovery" *Pressing*'s beholders would have made – as this dancing athlete's spirit would have spoken.

Our readership experience of being gripped by and heaved into his spiralling dance is at one with what would have happened to *Pressing*'s beholders – had they shared the experience of practitioners of sport and theatre working together in that – potentially – joint performance.

Each Performer in it – each being an exponent of one or the other of the two disciplines, Theatre, Athletics – would have been recognised by us, their beholders, for what s/he would have thus been revealed to *equally* be: a newly elevated embodiment of the possibilities and potentials (tapped or untapped) of Humankind's wonderfully aesthetic nature.

Recognising that – even if only fleetingly – would have made us, though mere beholders, sense how truly within reach those possibilities and potentials are... if only we were to help ourselves and each other to develop our human potential, instead of dissipating our energies in endless arrays of antithetical efforts, the one towards the other – even each towards oneself – if we could empower our insight sufficiently to realise how sadly true that often is for each of us.

Both actors and sportsmen need but one factor: a highly trained, embodied, physical presence, sensitised to respond to stimuli.

If a sportsman does not respond instantly – say, to the wind, to a nearly invisible glimpse of a competitor about to catch up with him, or to the starter's pistol –

he's had it. Responses cannot be "after". They must be "in the now". Response in performance cannot be deliberated. It must be biological; and it needs to be acquired with hard work. What does a theatre performer need to respond to? Many would answer glibly: "The verbal cues fellow performers give". Far from it. Stimuli and response are continuous – and they are at one. They know no pause. Even a silence or a stillness would be contiguous to something... a word, an action – when the silence would break, when it would hold. It is a continuous flow. Many are at a non-conscious level – faster/slower colleague's actions, shifts of position, imperceptibly varied tones, the slightest of difference, interminably, in each performance, some so ephemeral as to escape awareness though still responded to. Performer sometimes asks things like: "Did you vary that bit today? It was interesting…" getting, in reply, some "Did I?!" Refinedly trained performers resonate to such shifts unawares, mostly. What is at play is neither logic, nor reasoning, alertness, conscious memory those are in the preparatory stages – in performance, it is how one resonates, empathises, how one's system transcends the limits of conscious action (as in everyday life often enough, obviously)[14].

Every cell constituting the embodied presence of performers of theatre and of those of sport is and must be exceptionally trained to the extent of having, at any instant, complete control over – and absolute freedom in – one's embodied action. It is the sole requisite of each. Anything else would be a mere addendum, vis à vis the truth of that fundamental reality.

Eschewing other requirements makes Performers what they are. *Pressing* brought this out clearly, highlighted by its economy, driving us to face truths we perhaps had not looked fully in the face before (maybe also kept tucked away in some closet). Such insights disturb, which is what is often needed.

Theatre is the art of the performer – the creative artist who generates art observed "in the now". The instant his creative act ends, nothing is left. In performance, Performer is the creative force, creative act, medium and artistic outcome. Performer creates by his own presence, and in shared presence with the beholder. Hardly anything is needed, barring the human being and that which keeps him alive, trained, alert, his creativity not prejudiced. Apart from those everyday, basic, human needs, Performers can do without all the paraphernalia the market of Theatre indulges lavishly in: opulent stage settings, outlandish costumes, electronic lighting systems, thrilling sound effects, sensational PR drives – the works; and in that suit of armour, the actor struts in. The catch phrase "a space, light, a performer – and an

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[14]   We shall later see Stanislavski announcing "In life, it is pot luck!" – a landmark, in performance.

audience" spells out what truly is required. Anything else is incidental, all too often superfluous. Except when one is dealing in spectacle... but that's another matter.

On the contrary, what one needs to *do* is endless, highly complex, infinitely so. This is not the context for engaging the detailed discourse of performers' formation processes – it is that which Performers truly cannot do without.

In sport, the situation is analogous. As with the Performer, the Sportsman is the creative force, the medium, the creative act, and the outcome. In sport, too, the means whereby one generates the creative event is one's own presence, shared with beholders equally present. Often enough, hardly any extraneous material is needed, particularly in the mother of all sport, athletics.

The Sports Practitioner is pitched to outdo – at one level, to outdo others; at a deeper level (and it is this that is truly important to sportsmen who are true to themselves) it is pitched for one to outdo oneself[15], one's own doings, spurred and aided, precisely, by the challenge fellow practitioners provide, thus spurring each other to achieve, in what can be seen as a collaborative effort. Sport's measured results however, mark a fundamental difference vis a vis the theatre performer – one's target in sport is to be better than others, a truth that, as a factor, is in no way applicable to the theatre Performer. For one thing there are no measured results, no judging bodies sanctioning outcomes, no awarding of idiosyncratic "points" – (except in marginal, banal competitions, generally amateur... and, of course, the "Oscars"...).

We are here discussing idealised scenarios highlighting Performers' unique nature. This extraordinary artist is at once Daemon, material medium, creative act and resultant "outcome" – which however is transient, not fixed, as it is in painting, drawing, sculpting, writing, composing.[16] This Work of Art – the Performance – is in itself nothing but Performers' live actions, their displacement in space and time, sound patterns, tempos and rhythms they generate, giving flesh and voice to what they sense of the times and places and relationships and doings we are living, to their concepts, concerns, doings, silences, sounds, to words they transmit, looks their eyes give, meeting each other's eyes, and the eyes of those present at a performance, sharing time and space, in proximity, at a distance. All is, crafted with utter precision – and yet, it is *and has to be* free alive, unpredictable, open to change, to development – because it is a work of art that is alive. Failing that – it would be sterile.

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[15]   The theatre performer too is pitched to outdo her/himself – in the sense of one evening's performance being as good as or possibly better than one's performance on a previous evening's, or than one's best performance of a different work.

[16]   The resonance with Walter Branchi's approach is notable.

4. What is Performer? What is Theatre? What is Performer? What is Th

"Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" That riddle worried many generations, till evolutionary biology settled it: the chicken. Another "*which came first*", which "Performer" which "Theatre"? Which preceded which? To reply we need to ask "What is Theatre?" "What is Performer?"

"Performance" and "Theatre" – two words we have come to know so well. The primeval factors which, millions of years ago, were at the primordial origins from which, eventually, those two words/concepts emerged, may seem to us now, millions of years later[17], to have been lost, somewhere in our species' most ancient roots. Those germen, we might think, ceased to exist, annihilated. How wrong we are, we – their inheritors.

On first meeting someone we do not know, we automatically launch verbal overtures with which each may assess the other. "It is natural; we all do that", we say.. The ancient, pre-linguistic members of our "human family tree", however were unable to do that – they did not speak.

Consider therefore, millions of years ago, two pre-linguistic members of our "human family tree" having a sudden, first encounter, both unknown to each other, as they chance to go round a huge rock and come face to face, seven metres away from each other[18]. Let us call them A and B (of course, they had no such thing as a name). The meeting happens suddenly, totally unexpectedly. They froze. In such a time/space context (unimaginable to us) both would have seen the other as a threat. Let us take A. If A were to sense that B was posing no threat, he may have felt it would be good for B to *feel* accepted, hoping that B would also consider *him* accepted; he then may have striven to be considered as accepting B – hoping B would then reciprocate.

If, on the contrary, in such a hypothetical first meeting, A were to sense that B was transmitting aggressivity while striving to keep its extent covert, A may have felt in danger, urgently considering options.

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[17] "*Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, one of the oldest known species in the human family tree, lived sometime between 7 and 6 million years ago in West-Central Africa (Chad). Walking upright may have helped this species survive in diverse habitats, including forests and grasslands. […] Human-like features included small canine teeth, a short middle part of the face, and a spinal cord opening underneath the skull instead of towards the back as seen in non-bipedal apes." *The History of our Tribe – Hominini*, Barbara Helm, Open Library, https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/hominini/

[18] Meeting a lion would be different – they know the lion, and the knows the lion sees them as food.

Being ready and able to defend himself from B's possible aggressivity, but refraining from transmitting that to B, A would have sensed two favourable possibilities:

(1) that of B judging A to be absolutely sure of himself, thus opting to tone down his own aggressiveness;

or, alternatively,

(2) that of B led to believe that A is unaware of the imminent danger – in which case, should B, due to that error of judgement, decide to launch a "surprise" attack, A would be ready and able to respond immediately, taking B unawares and by surprise, thus having the upper hand.

In such borderline circumstances, our pre-linguistic ancestors would have striven to indicate or conceal, whichever clues they would have deemed best for themselves: the looks in their eyes, facial expressions, tensions of abdominal and/ or facial muscles, straightening the spine, maybe emitting slight vocal sounds or loud ones – restraining visible actions of the limbs, and other tell-tale signs. Their non-linguistic status could have alternatively driven them to quickly doing exactly the opposite – launch the fray.

Non-speaking Man soon engineered how to perform his intentions, sharing, hiding or nuancing them –in a range of infinite shades. Performer was there.

* * *

Since ancient, historical times much of that "preamble" (let us call it so, for now) is adopted as a practice – in war. In that case it is referred to as "posturing", right up to the present, unfortunately and so tragically. It is also called sabre-rattling.

We could also see that usage as a complex, warped form of "performance", sadly. Perhaps that may be one reason why, when writing about Performance in Theatre, nowadays, we often choose to write it with a capital "p" – so as to save the true value of the word we love from that aberration.

To bring us back to base, the point from where we started: what *Pressing* sought to stand for and against can also be seen as a form of war – as in it we clearly identify the destruction of hopes and dreams, the killing of aspirations and a shamefully powerful way of dehumanising youths.

Theatre and the "Theatre of War" (as that vicious doing is often called), are thus seen to be somewhat related. They both are great things Man has generated – great, yes, both of them, but their greatness is worlds apart, as that of those ancient ancestors

of ours was different to how we meet now (well... in a way). Both those theatres seek change, though the way Performance searches and the nature of War's "searching" (if one could apply the word "nature" to War's way of "searching") are worlds apart.

Those unrecognisable, ancient ancestors of ours passed through all the experiences we know (differently, of course, but close enough) – striving to somehow communicate, to read intentions, to play, fight, to seek sustenance and comfort, to struggle against the environment's fickleness, fear, hope, desire, despair, anger, joy, bonding, group behaviour, collective patterns, rituals, awe, a sense of a faith, the making of images, of symbols, of sound producing instruments... so much more, so much.. and then: the descent of the larynx. Vocalisation. The evolution of voice production and, finally, language: vocal, then written, typed, morsed, telegraphed, telexed, faxed, emailed, SMSed, vinyled, radio-transmitted, taped, cassetted, CDed... It is breath-taking. Awe-inspiring, this Human Being. And still – he kills; physically and mentally.

Mankind's inventiveness broke all bounds when language dawned. These steps led, gradually, to what "theatre" and "performer" now mean. There cannot have been a "before" or an "after" – in discussing one, we inevitably and unavoidably discuss the other. Developing on our preceding discussions of Performer, let us proceed to touch both – Theatre, as well as Performer.

Vsevolod Meyerhold leaps in, with his splendid dictum, "*Theatre is the art of Man*"[19]. "So are all the other arts," one might protest, "...as no animal indulges in any art form." Meyerhold's words go straight to the core of the matter; his statement does not indulge in that kind of word play. A man like him, executed (on 2 February 1940) for his theatre work, his wife, Zinaida Reich, stabbed, for the same reason, seventeen times, twice in her eyes, in her apartment, (on 15 July 1939) – 25 days after her husband was arrested (on 20 June 1939), her murder widely held to have been organised by the notorious NKVD, probably with Stalin's direct intervention (as Meyerhold's was). A man like Meyerhold simply does not play around, facetiously, with words. The sense of those words of his is brilliantly clear. As with all arts, Theatre is the art form whose maker is Man. Uniquely, however – which is where the vision and richness of his statement is – its subject is, infallibly, Man and its medium is, inevitably[20], Man – Man and Man's great invention of

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[19]   Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Two Puppet Theatres*. In: *Meyerhold on Theatre*. E. Braun (ed.). London, Methuen & Co., 1969, p. 130.

[20]   One may be tempted to point out *Rin Tin Tin*, *Black Beauty* and other films featuring animals. Our subject is live performance in theatres, not cinematic works where editing is crucial and decisive, able to make that which does not happen seem to have happened – much more so when featuring animals, as animals can in no way be party to the narrative itself.

Language. Theatre is, indeed, the art of Man. To render that dictum's insight even clearer, other forms do share that title with the art form Meyerhold identifies: the song, dance and declamation of beautifully originated *and* spoken words. There needs to be a qualification for that to hold true, however: all three need to be performed via no other "instrument" but the human being presenting them: that is, by someone dancing, someone declaiming, or someone singing. No hypothetical "pre-eminence" is intended by that qualification – it simply is a linguistic demand, requiring Meyerhold's wording to be fully respected and not manipulated. To make that clear: no other material body must be involved. That would be how rites, rituals and communal events must have been at "the dust of time".[21]

That opens an infinite mental landscape of crystalline clarity: it is not paraphernalia and theatre buildings that make theatre. In ancient Greece, the festivals of the *Great Dionysia* and its later introduced, lesser offspring, the *Lenaea*, were held in winter, in January and March respectively. In Athens, those months have snow and rain, temperatures range from 6C to 10C – and yet: the festivals were held in a huge open-air theatre, staging the great Greek Tragedies and Comedies, attended by big thousands. Significantly, the Greeks opted for the open space, all built of stone, ashlar, with no pretentious adornments: a circular, central arena with a rectangular platform at its edge, a restrained stone façade standing on the platform's rear end, and – interestingly its dominant feature – the vast, tiered, semi-circular stone seating, plain, uncovered, open to the elements too; that of the Theatre of Dionysus, seating an audience of 17,000. The name they gave the entire architectural concept was θέατρο, pronounced "théatro", the significance of the name/word being "The Place Where One Sees".[22]

The great performances of the Middle Ages, then, were a major peak of theatre, starting from the High Middle Ages, with performances held in the cathedrals then being built all over Europe. The remarkable performances of the Late Middle Ages followed, moving out of the cathedrals to take over squares and streets of towns and cities, performing in those highly complex works. How far removed from what today's theatres think of themselves: out goes the Greek ideal, "*The Place Where One Sees*"! Theatres are now "*The Edifice Everyone Must See*", repudiating the wisdom, aesthetic sensitivity and values ancient Greece whispers, till today, in our ears.

In his *Beyond the Floating Islands* Eugenio Barba flags this distressing shift: "To claim that theatre must once again become a popular art would be to show that one is ill-acquainted with its history. We find only two eras in the past when theatre represented a social event embracing the entire collectivity: Greek drama

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[21] *The Dust of Time* – Theodoros Angelopoulos's fine film (2008), written and directed by him.
[22] This is discussed earlier, see page 35.

and the passion plays of the Middle Ages." [23] Our today is profoundly different: no close-knit collectivities; what rules is difference, its norm is fragmentation, extreme and ubiquitous: political, educational, economic, cultural, religious, generational, interpersonal. Barba stresses he has no truck with those harbouring facile illusions.[24]

Only six years later he cuts the ground from under our feet with words that shock us – not the words as such, but their being *his* words: "Sometimes it seems to us that all *meaning*[25] has drained out of the reality of theatre, leaving only dry stones and mud. Perhaps it had some meaning, once, before the performing industry, mass culture, and the new myths and rites of the younger generation robbed the practice of theatre of its legitimacy and effectiveness. These are historical moments of greater significance than we are. That is why we are bewildered; that is why we don't seem able to recapture the motivations which drove us on in the early days of our work."[26]

The words themselves did not shock: their historical implications were alas clear and well known to us then. Even more so now, 36 years later, the world having "progressed" as it has. The shock was reading "we are bewildered" written by Barba, black print on paper, lines we (at the time) read and re-read, while we knew him to be endowed with a source of endless inner strength, but seeming to us, then, to have been pushed to such an edge as to be *bewildered*, as he wrote.

However: resilient human strength resides – *precisely* – in that seemingly irreconcilable duality, rooted firmly in feeling, realising and knowing that those two truths could, and undoubtedly do, coexist in our being Human.[27]

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[23] Eugenio Barba, *Beyond the Floating Islands*. New York City, Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1986, p. 24.

[24] One may legitimately ask whether two major events discussed earlier, where the world's disparate and fragmented societies may seem to cohere (FIFA's World Cup Finals and the Olympic Games) could have been discussed in more depth. Yes, certainly, but it would have pushed us well outside the scope and parameters of our focus. An interesting question arises: do societies cohere in those events or do eliminated nations' citizens end up in "alliance pockets" (continents, language groups, ideologies, religions, historical links etc.) to feel in wider "support groups" against competing rivals? Also: the burgeoning "Ultras" element – isn't that "support" element a contaminating force, undermining the unifying potential of sport? Graver still, as I write this, are the Iran tragedies related to the Qatar World Cup. Pointing at them in the beginning was intended as a signal: the roots of the malady of lucre and alienation are spreading much wider than thought, far from only afflicting Performance.

[25] The italics are Barba's.

[26] Eugenio Barba, *The Third Theatre: a Legacy from Us to Ourselves*. "New Theatre Quarterly", Vol. 29, 1992, Part 1, p. 3.

[27] Kept fixed with a rusty drawing pin to the inside of one of my book-cases, is a small fragment of paper I had torn roughly off from a sheet some sixty years ago. That tiny fragment's creased surface, now touched by those faint rust stains paper develops as it ages, still bears, just legibly,

Initial shock over, reading the full "New Theatre Quarterly" article well, one quickly sees its sharp thrust at the Theatres that have "robbed the Practice of its legitimacy". What he discusses in a dense perspective are Performers, their motivations, hard realities, needs, craft, aims, audiences... all the way to their searching existence and more – a panorama crucial to our present discourse but too wide to engage here. A memorable metaphor he creates for it comprises some seven constituent metaphors, hereunder listed:

- Saturn, the planet, with its rings careering around it ad infinitum;
- Its rings, a myriad solid bodies lacking uniformity, on their own cycles, impelled by their energy, the planet's attraction holding them;
- Tiny, divers worlds in apparent disorder;
- The rings – not forming compact masses – being the sum of all that escapes the one, compact mass;
- They resist the pull of attraction to the crust or to the central world;
- Each nucleus is a world in its own right, solid, well defined and independent.
- Each follows its own course in an orbit in connection with others.

Barba's vision, first launched in a1976 manifesto published in a UNESCO Paris issue of *International Theatre Information,*[28]charts the path for the metaphor to come – 16 years later. It posits the possibility of divers, autonomous *theatre organisations connected in a world-wide* network of shared questions*,* aspirations, a *network that shuns the forceful "pull" of the "centre". That network spread, stimulated by its vision and by the first organisations joining it, all retaining their autonomy – a mental, financial, ideological, aesthetic, technical and praxis autonomy. Those diversities respond to diversity, retaining and widening* intentions, aspirations, personal needs, shunning the powerful centre, seeking to encounter pockets of audience, kindred spirits that do likewise: Performers, seeking fulfilment with other such seekers.

One may find oneself thinking of them as misfits, rebels, immature, "youths" lacking a compass, a north pole. A quick look at the long list of great names in the arts who, early in the 20th Century, did something similar to the peregrinations of those in Barba's network, will make us think otherwise.

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something that, in my late teens/early twenties, I had perceived: "One does not approach quality by being at one end or another, but by touching both ends at the same time and striving to fill the space in between."

[28] Reprinted in 1979, in Barba's *The Floating Islands. Thomsens Bogtrykkeri Publishers*, Denmark. This was later reprinted in the "New Theatre Quarterly" article referred to earlier (see full bibliographic details in footnote 26).

The late 19th Century second industrial revolution wrought profound social upheavals all over Europe. In Germany (where the number of big cities rose by 700% in the 40 years between 1870 and 1910), youth movements proliferated, breaking boundaries in their search for a new world order – at least in their own country: *Körperkultur*, the strong *Jugendbewegung*, *Lebensreform, Wandervogel* – all rejecting the Centre's centralised "culture" and "arts". All over Europe, practitioners of the arts saw an "entertainment industry" boom and mushroom overnight, suddenly commandeering spaces formerly home to the arts – theatres, concert halls, discussion fora. Searches for meaningful contexts led to dispersal, a wave of migration of the arts, guiding some of the restless ones, those on the move, to discover Monte Verità.[29] The first names known to have been there (in 1902) and to have stayed there for some time are those of a group of about eight, including Hermann Hesse, Emil Jacques Dalcroze and Ida Hoffmann. We find D. H. Lawrence, also Rudoolph Laban, there, on several occasions, the great Isadora Duncan, who ran summer schools there, for six consecutive summers, from 1913 to 1918, the great dancer Mary Wigman in 1935... the list is endless. Artists are so often profoundly admired and profoundly respected; sometimes (perhaps all too often...) admiration may remain, but respect vanishes. That is what the Monte Verità exiles show us – and we need to keep it in mind when considering those who are perhaps cast out, rather than think of them as "lacking a compass", which, in fact, is something that happened to none of the following examples.

Jacques Copeau

Among those who escaped the centre we find Jacques Copeau: theatre critic for "L'Hermitage" and "La Grande Revue" between 1904 and 1909. Together with André Gide, Henri Ghéon and others he launched in 1909 what now is France's top literary journal, "La Nouvelle Revue Française". In 1911 he realised his theatre criticism could not bring about the change French theatre badly needed: he had to make theatre. Offered a theatre, he felt dubious of its central location: Paris was then dominated by the bourgeoisie's Belle Époque tastes and commercial Boulevard theatres. He turned the offer down. Fortunately, he happened on the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, away from it all, on the Seine's left bank. Its April 1911 launch brought immediate success with its "new" audience – the press raging at the mediocre boulevard theatres'

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[29]   The hill (not a mountain at all, it is just 380 m above sea level) is in the Swiss *canton* of Ticino, in Italy. In English, its name would be *Mountain of Truth*.

pandering to cheap, banal commercial tastes. He laid out his aims: training was key, education paramount, the be all and end all was the Human Being Performer and those seeing his work. His success was great – and it remained so for twelve years of great success.

In May 1924 he shocked his closest circle and Paris, announcing he was closing Le Vieux Colombier to move with his group to the Bourgogne countryside. He needed his (very successful) performers to rediscover meaning in their work: his Catholic upbringing was guiding him. That autumn they left for rural life and personal, rural encounters – evening performances and improvisations shared with farmers over beers in warm, welcoming village bars. It was a search for the meaning of their work. Discussing it as it deserves needs more than this "listing" allows – let's call it: "Escaping from the Centre – The Story of Copeau".[30]

Konstantin Stanislavski

Stanislavski did not leave Russia; indicatively. However, after directing *The Armoured Train 14-69* (a propaganda text the state officially commissioned Stanislavski to direct[31] for the celebrations of the revolution's anniversary in 1927) he declared openly he would never accept another state commission. He invested most of his energy and time in pedagogy, opening a record number of seven studios and accommodating theatre students and performers in them during Russia's disastrous economic collapse. In those worst of times his vision remained focused: his struggle to fulfil the Performer's primacy by achieving freedom from the authors' dominance, conceived a revolutionary idea: "I invite you actors to work on a new performance with no first reading. I go one further – you could even rehearse a performance of which no written text exists: I suggest a storyline with some episodes and you will perform them. I'll take notes of your most interesting improvisations. Our joint effort will see us write and perform a still unwritten work. Of course we'll share the script's copyright."[32]

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[30]   That is the title of a paper I asked the late, Professor Fabrizio Cruciani, to deliver at the University of Malta. It is published as *Scappare dal Centro: Storia di Copeau*. In: Fabrizio Cruciani, *Registi pedagoghi e comunità teatrali del Novecent*o. Roma, Editori & Spettacolo, 2006, p. 195-215.

[31]   Stalin admired Stanislavski; one should however remember that the curtain in the Moscow Art Theatre's State box was kept shut when Stalin was not in it officially. A hole had been worked into that curtain, known to be often used by Stalin (mostly in rehearsals) to observe goings on unobserved. "Big Brother is watching you."

[32]   Konstantin S. Stanislavski, *Il Lavoro dell' Attore sul Personaggio*. Bari, Laterza, 988, p. 20. (My translation from the Italian).

Gordon Craig

Even Gordon Craig wanted (and sought) – to free performers from dominance and oppression. One can hear his anger in a 1917 letter to Ellen Terry, stressing he wants "...the Liberation of the actor. Would he rather expect us to demand from him a perfect, completed work of art in the first years of his trial? How can a child be asked to race like a man, or even to walk like a youth? Always, and now, here, again, I ask only for the liberation of the actor that he may develop his own powers, and cease from being the marionette of the playwright."[33]

Jerzy Grotowski

When he took over *Theatre of the 13 Rows* in Opole, Poland, in Summer 1959, Grotowski knew the constricted space would not give him problems – it was the institution that would. The theatre was at the very beginning officially labelled as "professional experimental" and in March 1962 was renamed the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows. Soon Gurawski joined, to become the great designer of almost all Grotowski's major works, while Cynkutis and Cieślak joined, later becoming superb performers.

The first four years saw nine new performances, including *Mystery Bouffe*, *Dziady, Kordian, Akropolis* and *Dr Faustus*. Training intensified, until each performer became responsible for a specific line of training.

The venture soon became one of Poland's most important theatres, drawing international fame – and then it happened; and it was expected. A sector of Opole's community intensified its earlier objections, citing "elitism", local state backing them. Communist party representatives joined in: the risk was closure. A "*Friends of the Theatre of 13 rows*" was launched, disseminating information, publicising activities, organising small festivals; goodwill seemed possible, but the authorities' criticism returned – and increased. The theatre tried all possible compromises, even founding a Primary Party Organisation of the ruling communist Polish United Workers Party. It failed. The company gave in. It closed the theatre by the end of 1964, packed up and left.

Many new lines were started later on when the company moved to Wrocław in January 1965, but we need to follow the migrant. In the night of Sunday 13 December 1981 tanks roared through Poland's streets – the sudden birth and mushrooming strength of "Solidarity", the only free, 15-month-old, Trade Union in the entire Soviet bloc posed "the system" huge danger. Martial Law was declared

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[33] Edward Gordon Craig in: *Craig on Theatre*. M. J. Walton (ed.). North Yorkshire, Methuen, 1983, p. 101.

to neutralise it and arrest its leaders. Soon after, in Summer 1982 Grotowski left Poland, first settling down in the U.S. and then, in 1986 in Pontedera, Italy, a small, inconspicuous, industrial town with a population of some 27,000.

In December 1982 he wrote to the former company members telling them he would be staying abroad, asking them to disband the organisation. A vote was taken and the company was officially disbanded in August 1984. In Pontedera, Grotowski set up the *Workcenter*, where, together with my group, Groups for Human Encounter, I had the signal honour of being invited by Grotowski and Thomas Richards for a three-day encounter with the Workcenter, presenting our then current work, *Inkoontri Possibbli* (*Possible Encounters*). Unfortunately, Pontedera was to be Grotowski's last journey.

Ingemar Lindh

This last name is a memory of my colleague and friend, a great director-pedagogue, founder of *Institutet för Scenkonkonst*. He paid dearly for resisting the Centre and its magnets.

At age 21 Ingemar went to study mime at Etienne Decroux's Paris school, soon becoming Decroux's assistant. Returning to Sweden in 1970 he taught mime and dance in universities, when a seemingly damascene moment in 1971 saw him move 400 km away to a settlement of 100 people in the core of two huge forests, setting up his research centre: *Institutet för Scenkonst*. Though it was gaining international recognition, the local authorities lost interest in it. In 1974 he had to close down and move – starting a debilitating series of such blows. Eugenio Barba's early 80s recognition of his work saw him involved in ISTA's earliest sessions and working at the *Odin* studio.

We first met after a 1993 Bologna conference we both attended. Over several espressos, we discovered shared views on the Performer. My research in performance and neuroscience excited Ingemar. Another chance meeting followed. 15 August 1994, Urbino: I delivered a lecture in a packed hall, went out to smoke a cigarette – and I saw him dashing out and rushing towards me. "When did you arrive?" I asked surprised. "I heard your presentation. We must speak". We spoke. Over many coffees and cigarettes we conceived our joint research programme.

Meanwhile, the Pontremol Council, its eyes set on his company's *Teatro della Rosa* for its own use, was determined to kick them out. A years long battle suddenly became a major crisis – their base, their many properties in it, years of work and investment. Our joint University of Malta based and financed, nascent research programme seemed a safety net.

Late one evening Ingemar and I were considering logistics in a loggia on the terrace of my home, leaning on the parapet of a large arched window, giving onto

an extensive, hushed, dark summer's night landscape of fields, hills; in the distance, the Mediterranean. A silence of a few minutes had developed, when… "If I do not do pedagogy, then what do I do?" his hardly audible thought asked, maybe to himself, though the next exchanges showed he had shared it with me.

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October 1996 saw a change of government in Malta – a new university rector was appointed; the *x*HCA programme is blocked. Some seven months later, just before he left Italy for Malta to lead the programme's last international seminars, Ingemar received a terrible blow. His interminable, exhausting efforts, political and financial, to prevent the Pontremoli Council evicting the company from *Teatro della Rosa* had failed. Ingemar and his company arrive shattered, envisaging, moreover, the immense task of moving all their company and personal possessions, artefacts, no destination envisaged.

A day or two later Ingemar finished giving the opening session of the seminar's first morning – the seminar with which the University of Malta's **xHCA** programme was scheduled to officially close down, it having been blocked by Malta's political changes. He went upstairs to drink some water. We heard a glass fall and shatter. He had died. It was June 26 1997. He was only 52. Once again in theatre history, the Centre got what it wanted.

5. What is Performer?

Earlier, we proposed a scenario of two primordial ancestors, non-linguistic, unknown to each other, finding themselves face to face, sensing each other as potentially deadly, fearing the slightest move, wondering what would follow it.

We cannot even imagine the immensity of the leap from them to us – now, in our many, complex, pleasant (or otherwise) daily meetings.

We shift expressions, juggle word interpretations, in milliseconds, thousands of times. We are now so complex and adroit at it, our encounters miniature performances taken glibly. We are learning machines of why, what, how and when to do – or not to do – for, with, to and because of others. Parents start teaching it the very moment a child is born. Before that, moreover, our genetic baggage is there, waiting to join in our "communication games" through our epigenetic dance.[34]

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[34]   See: Denis Noble, *Dance to the Tune of Life. Biological Relativity*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. We would do well to look into Epigenetics,

Are we discussing performance? Not yet; it's about how one is alive, interacting, learning the unique way we are present to others. One may be tempted to shout: "Exactly! You're saying in life we improvise! And we say actors do nothing different! So? What's special about them?!" Don't rush; we are getting to it. An analogy for the "*In life / In Theatre*" juxtaposition may help: audience on one side, performer on the other.

It is somewhat as with small contiguous countries sharing the frontier dividing them. Different in their histories (old wars, maybe?) they are identical in what constitutes them: climate, geology, topography, environment, flora, fauna, landscape – all mirror each other's. Even their buildings are similar: homes, offices, shops, schools – but that frontier is there. Marked clearly.

Scene 1 – we are in **Country A**. Early Evening, a mountainside bar, just one client, elderly, citizen of country **B**, first time ever "abroad" (he crossed the frontier...), sipping a beer: "I feel at home here – it's all so similar to my country", he ventures. The barman smiles, opens two beers, walks over and, still smiling, "Try this – our premium beer!" he sits and pours, they clink glasses. And the barman starts; he evokes unique practices of theirs, centuries old recipes[35], their dubious politicians, customs born of time, their dubious politicians, unique community celebrations, a famous name, a splendid monument to her (the visitor had seen it, "...it's in a square..."), a vast, underground lake – a rolling list, and he from country **B** joins in, evokes his land, a stream of differences. Evening settles, they part, set to meet the next day, for the barman's offer to guide him around. Without that, our visitor would have remained a mere passer-by, filling a couple of hours, consuming routines, whiling time away, scanning facades, meaninglessly, lingering briefly at *divertissements* he pays for.

Drugged by the market's mediatic, power, negligible is the number of those who consider performance (even less, the performer's work) at anything but its surface. Ensconced in soft theatre seats, one skims the "topography" of a performance one is attending, seeking the "spectacular" maybe, or the (in)famous "slice of life", or even a "divertissement", diverting one's attention from life's unsavoury reality, or some parody of it, preferably hilarious – gross, even, instead of Theatre's vibrant, throbbing roots, the potent force of works presented two and a half millennia ago in Dionysus' "place where...". "What the... what are you raving about?" someone would probably hit back, confused, and honestly so, unable to understand – "What

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[35] UNESCO's food authenticity label, marking food products as being unique to a certain country, was recently accorded to Ukraine's bortsch, for instance, differentiating it from Russia's bortsch.

on earth do you mean by '*Theatre's vibrant, throbbing roots*' ... '*potent force of works presented two and a half millennia ago*' ... '*Place where One Sees*'?! Are you raving, man?!"

Indifference to something one perceives as irrelevant soon becomes intolerance – an intolerance of what others may be striving to do, in our confused and so confusing and upsetting times, charged as they are with ominous signs of upheavals, natural phenomena brought about by our hands and others most unnatural, fired by Man's evil urges. The once beautiful expression "the Future beckons" rings facile, bringing to mind the Vienna of the last weeks before-World War I. All signs and signals were there in late June 1914 in that magical city bathed in the honied nights of midsummer – they were there for all who could and wanted to read them. Still, every night, as revellers drinking champagne at pavement tables used to stand up, feeling they had drunk enough, and that night had advanced too much, smiled, wished each other a pleasant night... and poured the champagne remaining in their bottles straight into the gutters. Then they turned and made their way home. In those gutters, champagne flowed every night. Came the night when they stopped; then those gutters flowed with blood. Indifference works like that, when signals are ignored.

The potential of us Human Beings collectively beholding events, experiencing them, reflecting together on them, in shared spaces, physically – the force of such reflection is unparalleled. The difference is considerable, instead of only and ever on one's own, subjected to cold, digital, pixelated isolation... or dancing, together but alone...

All too often, unfortunately, those who sit for an hour or two in those comfortable theatre seats, end up taking for granted not only the events performed, but even each other. Also "forgotten" are the creative lives who perform those events, their demanding work, their giving themselves to every person in the audience – hoping that those sitting there might know how to relate to their work. Not so much to the performers as such. No, but to their work, their work as performers, how to relate to it, together, sharing it among themselves, sharing it with others who would not have found it – how it touched them, that is.

To those with a history of theatre, Eugenio Barba provides a warning into how the "Centre" works. Odin Teatret is the only theatre reality in the world where actors and their director worked together for over 60 years. On 22 September, as I was writing this, came his sudden announcement, shaking the world of theatre: Odin Teatret's new work "will be the last performance within the context of *Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium*, which I founded in 1983. This comig November, Odin Teatret and I leave *Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium*, as the new management has made choices that no longer correspond with the vision and values that guided my worked with

my Odin companions for more than half a century. We shall go on with our work elsewhere."[36]

To those in the Studio, about to take up theatre, Stanislavski sounds a warning regarding the hard work they will face in the studio. It probably is a double warning: what they may later face "out there", from those having no notion as to what Performance entails, thinking it is "a holiday". The warning he gives is a mere six words: "In life, it is pot luck!",[37] meaning in theatre it must not and cannot be so

Those six words are a synthesis of all he wished to change in life – and all he wished to do to theatre for it to become the path for that change. In those few words Stanislavski compresses his lifetime's work.

Two brief episodes will help us see where Stanislavski's foresight was directing him. One is quite plain – a simple conjectured example of many possible; a stage hand is walking in the wings to start giving the last touches to that day's stage set. He steps out onto the stage and – a shirt sleeve gets caught on a nail protruding from the set; he would simply stop, pull the sleeve off the nail, it, mutter some imprecation at the ruined shirt and keeps going to where he was heading – "pot luck". Were it a performer, however, Stanislavski would expect him to stop and pull the nail out, to ensure he would not get stuck on it coming on stage for an important scene. Even more, perhaps: had he himself been about to make his entrance, his sharp attention would have noticed that nail. Unable to do anything about it himself at that point because of the running rehearsal, he would have immediately notified a stage hand to warn others. At the interval, then, he would have ensured that that nail would have been removed.

The other episode did happen to Stanislavski. It can be seen as his vision for performers, apart from revealing his genius as performer... it also invites us to never allow ourselves to fall victim to pot luck. He was making his first entrance in a performance – a critical moment which knowing audiences await, expecting a great actor's first entrance to grip them.[38] He stepped out – and his silk, pocket-

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[36]   Emanuela Bauco, interviewing Eugenio Barba in *Liminateatri*, 22 September 2022.

[37]   Konstantin S. Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*. London and New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 573.

[38]   Eleonora Duse, the great, internationally admired Italian actress of the late 19th to early 20th century (she launched many of Gabriele D'Annunzio's works internationally) used to make her first stage entrance of every performance surreptitiously, ahead of when the script would have required her to be on stage; she then used to move along in the most inconspicuous parts of the stage and its scenery and furniture, self-effacingly, not to be noticed, so as not to detract the audience's attention from the work of the other actors. When her involvement in the action approached she used to then start moving differently so as to gradually be noticed.

square handkerchief slipped out of the jacket's breast pocket, to float down to the ground. A collective, shocked gasp came from the audience, fearing such a slip would undermine his whole performance. Stanislavski stopped in his tracks, immobile, except his eyes, his head then started tilting gently down to see the handkerchief land. An infinitesimal stillness... and then he bent, calmly, easily, picked it up, returned it very properly into the pocket and resumed; incident over. That's what the relieved audience thought. Far from it – from then on it kept falling, an extraordinary number of times, seemingly on its own, or slipping down after he had used it... all at chosen moments, but seemingly by accident; inconsequential moments, key moments of tension, playing on timing, the tempo of picking it up or trying to stop it from falling changing all the way – some "falls" he "failed" to see, thus later finding it missing and having to "looking for it". The audience ended up expecting the event, trying to anticipate it, thinking that at some point there would be some crucial drop, their attention and tension rising, caught by his development in the role, the handkerchief becoming a foil and a chart of his development. For the audience, that dropped piece of cloth became a masterly prepared dramaturgy – indeed: it ended up being so. "In life", Stanislavski would have told them, "it is pot luck, but in performance chance should be no part of you; your work should be mapped and charted, yes, but allowing you to bring it to life, and not to present it dead, fixed, choked from developing."

Improvisations are acceptable only as the fruit of contexts one discovers and develops technically and aesthetically, choosing to discard them or to keep them. If you choose to keep them, he may have told the actors, then provide for them to become dramaturgies that are alive, with the word "alive" showing you that they must be open to develop, as all living things are, until they die. The word dramaturgy, we must remember, come from the Greek *dramatos*, an action, a deed, rooted in the word *drāo* "to do, to make", especially when that deed is a great one, even if it is evil. When so developed by the art and craft of performance, then one must orchestrate those improvisations, in complex work.

Those six words distil his work. They capture its essence. One then needs to develop and design a praxis, a personal one, built on a shared base but specific to each individual performer, thus emerging from one's work in the context shared with others. Importantly: that praxis must exclude "pot luck". Performer considers possibilities of potential action that, when they occur in one's work, one notices them, particularly those that draw one's attention "from the corner of the eye" – and yet they still provoke, suggesting they are rich in potential. Human action is extremely sophisticated – working on those potential actions must live up to that. One allows them to work upon one, gauging them, sometimes drawn to work

with possibilities one senses in them. That work is an iterative process; through his doings, the work itself suggests variations, nuances, tempos, rhythms, forces, complex distribution of energy. It is a work one does, one carries out – still, at the same time, it is a work that teaches him. Stanislavski's sister tells us some of his last words, and we are not surprised: he was sad at not being able to finish the most important book of all, the book on ethics for the performer. A key footnote in that unfinished book says "of what use is it to create beauty on stage, only to then go out in your life and destroy it?"[39] Even that last bit is about "pot luck" and "life". The lesson he leaves us with crystalises his vision of theatre praxis and of living one's life.

In the praxis, one's early stages of work would little envisage designing or organising images. That comes later; the jargon in the practice places that as "when images come". At the stage here discussed one would work on *patterns of* action, *potential* actions, *possibilities of* action – grounded in the early formation process, enabling flexibility, sharpening senses, stimulus response, loosening joints, breathing techniques, extending vocal range, balance, equilibrium, empowering the eyes' look, extending their mobility, resistances, opposition... That gives some idea of the daily studio ground work. The early formation process is extensive. It can be daunting. Then comes what needs to follow when performance material comes in.[40]

As the performers work on a performance, fine variations multiply, each her own, his own, working together in the same space. Variations are personal, rarely recognised (if ever) by one's colleagues. The dramaturgy's weave subsuming those variations is engaged collectively, shared in the work but not discussed – ever. In collective performances, variations, though subliminally sensed by one's colleagues, are not recognised – yet they still elicit subliminal responses, unawares, generally changes of dynamics: tempo, proxemics, rhythm, shifts of direction. Each has one's own "landmarks", perhaps even one's own (unrecognised) way for responding to subliminal stimuli. The training process' many layers aim precisely at honing such responses. Though shifting, those landmarks chart performers' journeys in each evening's performance, occurring

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[39]   *L' Attore Creativo*. Fabrizio Cruciani and Clelia Falletti (ed.). Firenze, La Casa Usher,1989; the note quoted above is note number 21 of a 23-part footnote on pages 164-165. (The words quoted are my translation from Italian.) The entire (though unfinished) book of ethics is reproduced in full in *L' Attore Creativo.*

[40]   A *sine qua non* in this process is a strong grounding in the work of the great late 19th and 20th century and current masters, in direct contact with their work where possible and definitely with their writings.

as they happen– ephemeral in their constant varying. In working on possibilities of action, one allows them to develop in one's work, inspiringly. Some are evaluated: timing, rhythm, tempo, amplitude, vectors, shades, forces, counter-forces, where one looks, how limbs coordinate, voice joining in, volume, tone, pitch, accents – affecting the action. All are rigorously structured, but abounding in variations, and thus: alive.

It is not pre-planning; the context guides, letting possibilities develop – and images occur. That is where key elements of what is (often facilely) called "improvisation" happen. Differently to what is often understood, it occurs in dynamics. A violinist playing *Méditation* from Massenet's opera *Thaïs*, "improvises" no notes; she *does* improvise however – in *every* performance. She improvises with tempo, dynamics. That is the beauty of performance.

As the work matures more images and variations emerge. Recognised, they are developed, worked into one's work, nascent, open-ended dramaturgies – established, mastered, physically "catalogued"; still open, however.

Each variation is indeed ephemeral, a fleeting, "miniature dramaturgy". An impressive reality emerges. Consider the entire performance: all performers are engaged in the unpredictable dynamics of their many variations, while rendering the text's constancy. The freedom of each single, personal variation never violates the text, the sanctity of its source, while dialoguing with those of its fellow performers. Whichever variants occur, all performers resonate to each other's actions in an unfolding, creative cycle, developing and renewing the ever-open structure while respecting its finer details. Failing that, all would be lost. As Grotowski says, conjuring a vast, infinite landscape of possibilities: "...the song sings me".[41]

Rebellious Gordon Craig words his potent (and prophetic) aphorism: "Today they impersonate and interpret; tomorrow they must represent and interpret, and on the third day they will create."[42] Craig's words suggest near-limitless discoveries of a performance's value to each performer, enriching its meaning to each audience

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[41]   The following analogy is from Fractal (see https://fractalfoundation.org/), with its terms "events", "elements" (in our case "actions"): "The process of sequential generation of events – with elements unfolding in others ever 'smaller' than that from which they started yet as rich in their complexity – could potentially keep unfurling ad infinitum, ever increasing in number though ever smaller than its preceding one." In performance, such actions could outgrow their direct source. Grotowski's assertion is remarkable, referring to ancient chants, suggesting the awe-inspiring fractal process. Gregorian chant comes to mind, evoking its mystical richness and potency

[42]   Edward GordonCraig, *On the Art of the Theatre,* 1911. Reprinted: London, Heinemann, 1980, p. 61, a 110 years old prophecy.

member, rewarding performers and their audiences – each performance a self-renewing process.[43]

The discourse on what the theatre performer does, how one works, can be faced in various ways. One is that aired earlier (sometimes merely implied, presented grudgingly, sometimes hotly debated) that the theatre performer does nothing different to what we do in everyday life. A provocative line of thought (more implied, rather than presented, though if one is called out it is hotly defended)[44] is that Performers' creative act "produces" nothing tangible – irrespective of whichever discipline of performing it may be.[45] Performer generates no product that can be given, taken, received, exchanged, possessed, stored, stolen or purchased (except when recorded of course). Looking into the etymology of "perform" may surprise us, with what may seem to be an incongruity between the words listed and the practice of the various disciplines of performance – a seeming incongruity that then becomes illuminating.

Ernest Klein[46] discusses "Perform" thus: 'ME. *Parfourmen, performen*, from Old French *parfournir',* instantiating its use in the English language: "to **finish**, **accomplish**, **furnish**, **complete**"**.** It is widely held that the shift from "four*N*ir" to "four*M*ir" was a 13th/14th C. scribe's error that ended up taking over. Much would have been so different, had it not occurred!

Walter W. Skeat[47] locates the word "Perform", interestingly, in a paragraph subsidiary to the one that discusses the etymology of the word "**Furnish**", thus: '**perform,** to **achieve'**. (F. – O.H.G.; *with* L *prefix*).[48] Corrupted from M.E.

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[43]   https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/media/releases/want_to_learn_a_new_skill_faster_change_up_your_practice_session This sense of achievement through freedom is confirmed by recent cognitive science research carried out on practitioners of the disciplines of music and sport. To improve one's performance, learn better, achieve one's aims and achieve them better and faster, then one would best insert a series of slight variations in training, and not insist on continually repeating that which one desires the precise end result to be.

[44]   The line of attack (rather than defence) taken is "Especially theatre – everybody can read the script!".

[45]   The oldest, most primitive recordings of people performing date back to 1887/8, growing exponentially in later years and burgeoning today. The escalation is recognised, clearly, although the discourse engaged here is concerned exclusively with performances shared live, with an audience present, relating to the performance, responding and co-responding.

[46]   Ernest Klein, *A comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*. Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1969, p. 1157.

[47]   Walter W. Skeat, *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*. Ware, Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995, p.166.

[48]   The abbreviations render as: "French – Old High German with Latin prefix".

parfournen, later *parfourmen*. – O.F. *parfournir*, 'to perform'; L. *per*, **thoroughly**; and O.F. *fournir*, to **furnish**, **provide** (as above).

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology[49] posits "**Complete**, **finish**; **†bring about**, **effect**; **carry out** (an order, etc.) XIV; **†construct** XV; **go through** formally XVIII. — AN. par-, performer, alt. of OF. *parfournir* (in medL. *perfurnīre*), f. *par*- PER- 2, 4 + *fournir* **furnish**".

One might think there would hardly be any relation between the word "Perform" and verbs as *to furnish*, *provide, complete, effect, go through, achieve, accomplish, bring about, construct, finish.* Even less, then, would one apply to those verbs the adverb *thoroughly*. That is precisely the significance of that prefix "per-". That is what "per-" does: to "*per*suade", to convince completely, *per*forate, to pierce right through, *per*turb, to disturb completely. In the theatre performer, the sense is obvious to those fully aware of the rigour Performers impose on themselves in their formation process and in generating performances. How wrong one would be to imagine otherwise. Space precludes discussing that, given its breadth and complexity, nor can words alone project well its complex physicality.

Performer is highly demanding in generating, developing and constantly reviewing his material before offering it in performance. Each evening's presentation illumines one's work, developing it, in constant flux, stable only at its core. Few of those in an audience, if any, realise that that is what happens, and that it is fundamental – as a performance is and must remain in flux, each night. Failing that, the performance would be dead.

Performer's formation process defies easy verbalisation – observing that process would initially make one feel it cannot be a preparation for theatre performances. It would take lengthy observation for an outside observer to forget assumptions and start grasping relevance. Unlike that of any sport, – it does not consider, for example, fresh or established Performers working on, developing a set of muscles more than or instead of another set, as is done in sport. Neither does it set food regimens to determine one's prescribed body mass. One could follow that line, but let us consider also classical dance; one works on a number of standard, recurring set positions or patterns in dance, but not in theatre; one also strives to achieve prescribed joints formations, ones that never occur in everyday life. One such formation is that of aligning the foot, vertically, with the leg, for the dancer to stand erect, balanced on the supported tip of ballet shoes. If such an alignment

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[49]   *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. T. F. Head (ed.). Oxford University Press, 1993.

were to happen to someone in a street accident, it would mean that one would have sustained serious injuries. Theatre performers do work to strengthen knees, ankles and other joints; that is a different matter, however: one would be seeking the suppleness and flexibility of joints needed anyway in everyday life to avoid injuries.

Performer's most demanding work is that of empowering the seeming contradiction of, on the one hand, intense concentration, while, on the other hand, an openness to stimuli, at a level below one being actively conscious.

Extensive scientific research on what science refers to as "the Cognitive Unconscious" has for years been burgeoning. In the field, terminology is clearly very different to that of performance. Researchers investigate the possibility of detecting stimuli that are *below* the lowest possible level of being perceived by the Sensory-Perceptual System. Research, however, shows that stimuli below that threshold are still *processed* by our Sensory-Perceptual System. Subliminal Perception (the scientific term for it) investigates and discusses stimuli that, although too weak, "still have an impact on perceptual and cognitive functioning".[50]

This sheds light on the phenomenon great theatre makers identified, addressing it in their discipline's terminology: "being absent and present", the quality performers desire and aim for. It taps a level below that of perception, recognised and named by science in its terminology – while performance, recognising it, generates its own terminology, making it clear that the performer is no Zarathustra, but a human being.

It is observed in training, in studio work, and in generating performances – crucially, during performance.[51] Gradually a term emerged, applicable to each of those contexts. When it is noted, a Performer is said to be "Present".

It shares nothing with "a strong stage presence", a phrase used glibly for one who, in some performance, is said to "tower above the rest". "Presence" refers to a stage reached – then attainable both throughout a performance, as also for a moment, one then saying "She had Presence in that scene!" Importantly, all performers may "have presence" in a particular night (a desideratum).

In how it is used it is a powerful word – "powerful", because seen as a quality of being. Its use presumes to identify a state of being that can be perceived as

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[50] J. F. Kihlstrom, *The Cognitive Unconscious*. "Science", Vol. 237, September 18, 1987, p. 1448.

[51] This was touched upon earlier, when we spoke of generating variations and of the subliminal responses to them.

affecting (positively) performers' actions and vocalisations. Crucially, in so doing it intensifies the attention of all those present, a focused, heightened attention. It may be experienced lightly throughout a performance – or recognised briefly, when felt to ease. It could sharpen fellow performers' attention, generally unawares. "Having Presence" has complex implications in Performance. It synthesises a state of being awake, conscious, in control of oneself, able to at will "exit" that state immediately (albeit with disappointment, even annoyance if due to extraneous causes). It is also worded as "one's own presence to oneself". Defining it would limit it. Seeing a performer attain it, one senses it profoundly. Stanislavski shares with us one such instance,[52] Tomaso Salvini, in the role of Othello, in the Bolshoi theatre – obviously Stanislavski does not give a name to the remarkable phenomenon.

Presence is discussed as a *quality* of being present. It is a powerful word, powerful in how it is used; even more, in what it is presumed to identify.

Saying that, *at some point*, performer *X* "had presence" implies that *X*'s vocalisations and actions, *at that point*, acquired a certain *quality*, a quality difficult to identify, more so to verbalise. On the other hand, it is very often crystal clear, perfectly identifiable. That quality is such that it establishes a particular relationship with members of an audience. At a number of performances audience members were posed a question, specific and clear, clear and with no hidden meaning – whether at any point one had sensed some notable change in the quality of work of any performer/s. In each performance, a considerable number of audience members answered in the affirmative, most of them strongly emphasising their reply.

Most of those so responding, immediately identified specific occasions, generally extensive. Some such identified extensive occasions were identified by many respondents (separately). Man of them then quickly shifted to trying to define the quality of the difference experienced. That, however, often proved difficult.

When those respondents were asked to name the quality of work in which they had noticed the change, respondents came up with the usual elements of a

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[52] Salvini's ordinary makeup, costume, hair, moustache, eyebrows left everyone untouched. Then... he approached the Doge. He concentrated, and "unnoticed by any of us, captured the entire Bolshoi audience. It seems he did this with a single gesture; he stretched out his hand without looking at the public, grasped us all in his palm and held us there, as if we were ants or flies. He closed his fist and we felt the breath of death, he opened it and we knew the warmth of bliss."
Konstantin S. Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*. Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, (no date of publication) pp.193-194. Translated from the 1928 original, it is a 1962 gift to the University of Malta by the Soviet Republic of Ukraine.

performer's work, voice, rhythm, energy, clarity, and so on – also saying how one felt *it*: "deep", "strong", "contact", "at one with", "I felt there", "like sharing what had happened", among others similar. Nobody evaluating the experience sensed a need to find some term to encapsulate all others... all mentioned several aspect, in fact. Crucially, nobody said "everything".[53]

In our discipline, that is a state of being. "Presence" identifies it – a word that, therefore, is an important keyword. The word implies much more than when used in other contexts. For our purpose, let us put it as "the presence of oneself to oneself". It thus is not a matter of paying one's attention to one's context.

Rather, it is an attention one *lends* to oneself being *within* one's context, while also "Present" to one's fellow performers – all equally present, together, each present to oneself, thus not selectively attentive. All are thus, collectively, "in the flow". Corollary to that is the inevitable implication: in being present to one's fellow performers, one is also present to those attending the performance, the audience – an important "corollary".

The key is being "present". We refer to it as "Absent-and-Active-Presence".

The performance is reborn each time it is relived. Never static. Never repeated; remaining itself, however.

We know this well in our everyday interpersonal relations. It is that not so rare instant when an infinitesimal shift occurs in someone facing us – even in ourselves. It is as if a wall collapses – and we "know". Intentions appear, previously hidden, perhaps merely unrecognised, even by the someone facing us. Wariness, honesty uncertainty, fear, relief, doubt, worry, resistance, all in a flash. In an instant, everything is clear; and then a smile (or otherwise...). We know that sense. Human Beings know it, since the beginning of Time, when we had climbed up the scale.

Each performance's developments occur that way. Variations happen. Inevitably so: nothing can be repeated slavishly, exactly as it is – even less so is that desirable. We fool ourselves thinking it is possible. Learning is not like that: each time the brain does something it learns, overwriting what was; it does not merely "learn the learnt"[54]. Recent cutting-edge research shows that to learn something well, and faster, the best way is not to keep repeating it, but to generate

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53   This suggests one's experience was recalled clearly, in considerable detail, not merely as "a special moment".

54   See: *Motor skills strengthened through reconsolidation.* "Current Biology" 2016. The authors show that increased sensorimotor variability strengthens a *reactivated* consolidated skill. Strengthening requires initial consolidation and time for changes to reconsolidate. Rapid adjustment to variability was seen to be proportional to reconsolidation improvement.

variations around it and work with them – that way, one learns quicker and, more importantly, better.[55]

Consider a member of a day's audience who returns the following day to see the performance again. Consider then, that on that second day, a new, minor change occurs, nothing very consequential, but to the performer a meaningful change, different to the previous day's score – a variation. The chances of that member of the audience noticing that change would be liminal, if at all. Performer, however, would – and for him, each development needs investigation, consideration, discarding or retaining it... and then: sustaining it. Possible variations keep emerging and queuing as one works. It is demanding, yes, but also profoundly fulfilling.

Performer's subsequent and equally fulfilling task comes next. The many variations in the score await him in performance. Performer's task, then, is to allow whichever to occur. The variations lead him. He needs to be "present" in qualitatively executing the fragments constituting his score. At the same time, however, he must be "absent" from the task of identifying **which** variants of those alive in him will emerge that evening, conveying to his work each variant's own uniqueness.

One crucial factor needs to be stated, emphasised and brought unerringly clear and unequivocal.

No variation is anywhere near being monumental, impressive, breath taking, a *coup de théâtre*. Far from that – each is humble and organic in its way. What is key to their being is the freedom they bestow together on the Performer – a well-reined freedom resulting in the unpredictability of life's every second. I present, it grasps those beholding the performance, holding them in the grip Stanislavski recognised – retrospectively! – in Tommaso Salvini. When that is absent there is no performance. It would be dead – the antithesis of what the etymology of "perform" reveals. Efforts to compensate for the absent "presence" often go for the monumental, the breath taking, and are best forgotten.

Performer's freedom is in the games his freed (and never sterile) variations play each evening, a creative continuum.[56] The beauty of that freedom, the uniqueness of

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[55]   See footnote 43: "Do you want to learn a new skill? Faster? Change your practice sessions".

[56]   Shanks D. R., Malejka, S., & Vadillo, M. A., *The Challenge of Inferring Unconscious Mental Processes*. "Experimental Psychology", Vol. 68 (2021), No. 3, pp. 113-129. This paper's rich contribution is that of evaluating research approaches to the Cognitive-Unconscious. It analyses a considerable number of publications, its comments on them shedding strong light on what one's approach best needs to focus upon –also upon what would best be changed. It thus guides the reader towards acquiring a better sense of this wonderful territory – which has much to do with what it is to be Human.

each night's performance – as all performers work off each other, each responding, alive, to each other's responses, generating each night's unique developments and revelations.

Each performer is alive, not a slavish CD churning out its digital path each time one turns it on. Recorded music is beautiful, fulfilling, there's no gainsaying that. Nothing, however, can replace the wonder of each live performance. With it, it is also we that are alive. Just as we are alive in our daily life – with no pre-elaboration. "In life, it is pot-luc k" and there is much beauty in that – the beauty of freedom, of the unknown and unexpected. One never *tries*, however, to avoid breaking a leg *at every step one takes* – in life. "In life", one simply *takes* each step, just trusting in "the best", not even thinking of "pot luck". One does it without even considering it. Generally, it works.

Perhaps the most impressive evidence I know from Performance regarding the brain, innovation and being creative within the firm rigours of a discipline is that of India's top exponent of Bharata Natyam, probably the most refined and exquisite of India's performing arts, Bharati Shivaji.

Brought over by the Indian Embassy in 1994 to perform in the Biennial Festival of research theatre I used to direct in the early 1990s, Bharati Shivaji also gave a two-day seminar, oriented toward the praxis. A day before, I was driving her, her singer daughter and her musicians back from their performance in Malta's 6000-year-old megalithic temple of Mnajdra. While driving, I asked her what I thought was a simple question: "What is the Indian word for performance?" The smiling answer was immediate and brief: "*Karja Krum*", and I innocently followed that with "If you were to translate that into English, how would you put it?" The huge and intense discussion that exploded took me completely by surprise; not at a linguistic fluency level – her English is perfect, but I never expected the fast, vociferous, fiery debate that broke out between the four of them in the car. The cause was the profound meaning and implications of that couplet, she later told me. What it implies is too big to translate off the cuff and they wanted it to be perfect. The complexity of the word "Perform" comes to mind.

The discussion was intense and fiery, lasting some seven minutes. Silence fell, then a fiery, explosive brief exchange, and then another silence. And then she spoke: "We have it. It translates as *Doing **exactly***[57] *what has to be done*." Her answer also dwelt on the extreme rigour of the form, its complex training, the profound

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[57]   She stressed that word very markedly, lengthening and enforcing the "*exact*" bit considerably.

work with one's guru, one's daily reworking on set pieces and exercises. The most exciting revelation, however, came in the following day's seminar. Having heared of the previous day's discussion, someone posed another question: "But if everything is so firmly fixed and rigorous, how are you creative when you perform?" It is her reply that is crucial here, in the light of her previous day's translation of *Karja Krum*.

In a brief, simple narrative she spoke of a year before, a shock she had when working on Bharata Natyam set pieces – she caught herself performing a passage of a dance differently to how it is prescribed in the discipline's rigorous canon. She was shocked and profoundly upset, fearing she was losing her grip on the work. Days later, after much reflection, she had a sudden flash.[58] It was not a "mistake". It was beyond that. Tracing the process in her memory (the discipline is impressively strong, we cannot imagine it) she gradually realised she had been performing it that way for five years, a variation, developed gradually over a number of years, a series of minute variations, progressing to how she now performs it. She went to speak to her guru about this, worried he would be displeased; he asked her to perform the variation. She did – and he said the new form was much more than acceptable – indeed, commendable – he advised her it should be kept.

Where are they born, these "renewals", these variations? That is what Stanislavski was always seeking, discovering, discarding and seeking from the beginning again. Grotowski provides an insight into perhaps the deepest level of Performer's work (perhaps even more than that): "A photo, a memory of wrinkles, the distant echo of a colour of the voice. First the corporality of somebody known, and then more and more distant, the corporality of the unknown one, the ancestor. Is it literally the same? Maybe not literally – but yet as it might have been. You can arrive very far back, as if your memory awakens. That is a phenomenon of reminiscence, as if you recall *Performer* of the primal ritual. Each time I discover something, I have the feeling it is what I recall. Discoveries are behind us, and we must journey back to reach them. With the breakthrough – as in the return of an exile – can one touch something which is no longer linked to the beginnings – but, if I dare say – *to the beginning*? I believe so. Is essence the hidden background of the memory? I don't know at all. When I work near essence, I have the impression

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[58]   Also very interesting is that to arrive at the realisation, she worked her memory path back through memories of five years of working on that dance. She had succeeded in tracing her memories back through a five year period of work, in a "rewind", tracing the progressive changes and (she said "probably") the first moment of the change she had brought about.

that memory actualises. When essence is activated, it is as if strong potentialities are activated. The reminiscence is perhaps one of those potentialities."[59]

Our genetic baggage is there. It is patient. Endless possibilities wait in each and every one of us. Dormant. They know no urgency; epigenetics makes it clear. The myriad possibilities were deposited along the millennia in what eventually became each one of us. They wait – each possibility waits. It waits for the context that is right for it – that specific one. Waiting; inactive. Each one waits for us to let each find itself in that one, single, context that is right for it. And if we happen to put ourselves in a particular context, putting ourselves there seriously, then *that* one possibility, in that one context perfect for it, will start doing what it ought to do.[60]

At that point the new version of us starts becoming. We would have started our journey. That is the territory Performer inhabits… well, we all inhabit it, as we are all Human.

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[59]   Jerzy Grotowski, *Performer*. In: *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (ed.). London and New York, Routledge,1997, p. 376-377.
[60]   See: footnote 34, Dennis Noble's book on epigenetics.

Identity in process.
Performative cross-border contexts[1]

Maciej Dudziak

Jacob of Paradies University at Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poland

In this article I attempt to outline the cultural background of a new form of identity in the Polish-German borderline. The term "pendler" has been used to explain the phenomenon. I regard this notion more as the result of a search for a consistent and meaningful naming link rather than as a respected internal socio-cultural identification of the group.[2]

It should be stressed that after 1945 the so-called Western Territories, colonised by the socialist authorities using more or less forced migrants, were the subject of a sophisticated social engineering project, which was supposed to bring the "new soloist man, as an element of the new socialist order". This project was to a large extent implemented, resulting in heavily homogenised communities that, after the political transformation in 1989, lacked any particular regional distinctiveness. It is worth paying attention to local initiatives which sprung up after 1989 and which

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[1]   The findings presented here are discussed in more detail in the book *Tożsamości rozmyte. Stowarzyszenia i towarzystwa na pograniczu polsko-niemieckim w latach 1989-2019* [*Fuzzy Identities. Societies and associations in the Polish-German borderland in the years 1989-2019*]. Gorzów Wlkp., 2022.

[2]   The official German name of a cross-border employee is the *Grenzgänger*.

intentionally, through their own searching, tried to seek a local identity, in particular in the context of the German cultural heritage.

Richard Schechner wrote, in his to *Performance Studies. An Introduction*, that

> while globalization allows, even encourages 'cultural differences' at the level of daily behaviours, spoken languages, foods, clothes, lifestyles, artistic works, and so on, its underlying system is unified and transcultural – and its underlying goal is to bring all subsystems into harmony and under control. Whether this is good for most of the world's people in terms of eliminating poverty, disease, overcrowding, wars, resource depletion, and the other threats to the planet is, of course, debatable."[3]

The outcomes and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. temporary lockdowns, closures and restricted access to the German side of the borderland, revealed the scale of a new cultural phenomenon. Dictionaries define a "pendler" as someone who commutes daily to work or school, or who, in the case of a cross-border employee, crosses an official state border[4].

Cultural identity, as an outcome of the socio-cultural experience resulting from the past and individual choices and practices, simultaneously answers the needs of the individual and community questions regarding differences and similarities. A cross-border identity is dynamic, multi-layered and multi-faceted. It cannot be described using tools and features established and proposed in the 20th century, tailored to (more or less) traditional rural communities.

Paradoxically, the founding myth that should obviously underlie the Polish-German borderland is not expulsion or migration in their broad sense. In fact, it is difficult to find any founding myth that would have the quality of being universally recognised[5]. The absence of such myth in the socio-cultural imagination is rooted in the absence of a common perception of history: for some colonisers it was expulsion

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[3]   See: Richard Schechner, *Performatyka. Wstęp*. Wrocław, Instytut im. Grotowskiego, 2006, p. 19.

[4]   The municipal authorities of Szczecin noticed the problem and drew up a publication called *Broszura transgraniczna. Życie i praca na polsko-niemieckim pograniczu. Podstawowe informacje o porządku prawnym i administracyjnym w Polsce i Niemczech* [*A Cross-Border Brochure. Living and working on the Polish-German border area. Basic information on the legal and administrative order in Poland and Germany*]. Szczecin, 2019.

[5]   I am using the understanding of the founding myth as presented by Claude Lévi-Strauss in: *Struktura Mitu* [*Structure of Myth*]. In: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Antropologia strukturalna*. Warszawa, PIW, 1970, p. 186-208.

and forced settlement, for others repatriation or voluntary migration or flight. The diverse motives and sources of migratory movements translate into the differentiated transmission of individual and group experience, and thus into memory.

As Rajmund Bulawski, one of the scientific co-ordinators of one of the largest social engineering projects in history, put it:

> At the to-date sessions of the Scientific Council for the Recovered Territories, both in the presentations and, above all, in the discussions, there were voices filled with deep concern for the coexistence of the various groups of people in the newly annexed territories. At the moment there is not homogeneous, tight Polish society to speak of. The current state of affairs in the Western Territories is rather characterised by the existence of several communities side by side, as it were, and these communities are unfriendly to or even hostile to each other. What divides people is, first and foremost, origin. The local population is contrasted with the arriving people, and even among those people different regional groups are distinguished. Stating this fact at this very moment, when there are more and more speeches by Western politicians questioning our rights to the borders on the Oder and the Neisse and the Baltic Sea, makes it tragically clear that a great, responsible task is waiting to be completed as soon as possible[6].

Hyden White, in *The foreword to the Polish edition* of his famous *Poetics of History* points out, very aptly, that "[t]he past is a fantasy land onto which we project our desires and hopes for the future. This applies both to the past studied by professional historians and the past as imagined by writers, poets, detectives and other neurotics"[7]. The sentence in question significantly condenses the essence of the so-called historical method, reducing it *de facto* to the level of what Clifford Geertz presented in *The Interpretation of Cultures*[8]. There, Geertz positioned the anthropologist, and by extension basically every representative of culture studies , in the role of "writing after the fact"[9]. Obviously, he meant "doing anthropology"

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[6] See: Rajmund Buławski, *Nowe zadanie* [*New Job*]. "Polska Zachodnia. Ilustrowany Tygodnik dla Wszystkich", no. 45-46 (67-68), 10-17.11.1946, p. 6.

[7] Hyden White, *Przedmowa do wydania polskiego.* In: Hyden White, *Poetyka pisarstwa historycznego.* Kraków, Universitas, 2000, p. 37.

[8] Clifford Geertz, *Interpretacja kultur. Wybrane eseje.* Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005.

[9] See: Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries*, *Four Decades, One Anthropologist.* Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996, and the Polish edition: *Po fakcie. Dwa kraje, cztery dekady, jeden antropolog.* Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010.

through writing, which always takes place after the actual cultural situation has occurred, making the act of writing primarily represent a specific and conditioned interpretive projection of the anthropologist, rather than a set of empirical ontological truths. Geertz wrote:

> The world is what the wide-awake, uncomplicated person takes it to be. (...) The really important facts of life lie scattered openly along its surface, not cunningly secreted in its depths (...) one cannot do so by cataloguing its content (...). One cannot do so, either, by sketching out some logical structure it always takes, for there is none. And one cannot do so by summing up the substantive conclusions it always draws, for there are, too, none of those. One has to proceed instead by the peculiar detour of evoking its generally recognized tone and temper, the untravelled side road that leads through constructing metaphorical predicates – near-notions like "thinness" – to remind people of what they already know.[10]

The juxtaposition of the thoughts of these two interpreters of culture and knowledge leaves no illusions about the effect of naïve intentions to frame cultural reality as objectified and bearing the mark of a universal explanation of reality. The anthropologist, after all, always presents the results of his/her proposals after the fact, and his/her cultural interpretations are more or less entangled in the socio-cultural world of ideas about the past and the present. Although Geertz is often counted among the post-modernists who place the researcher and their entanglements as their main object of inquiry, he is – in my opinion – not a "classic" representative of this trend. The author of *After the Fact* may be regarded as more of an anthropologist who is conscious of his own entanglements and cultural conditions that affect the end result of his work, i.e. the text. As an aside, it may be noted that the awareness of the lack of objectivity seems quite obvious: no thought, theory, or school of thought has stood the test of time and become a valid doctrine akin to an ideology .

The above caveats are methodological limitations, as I do not claim the right to impose a single research perspective, I would move to an earlier paragraph. I suggest putting the remaining text as follows:

1. The term "Western and Northern Territories" used in the literature to describe a specific area of post-war Poland also functions today in the vernacular. People who use it generally do so taking into account at least one of four

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[10] Clifford Geertz, *Wiedza lokalna. Dalsze eseje z antropologii interpretatywnej.* Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005, pp. 96-98.

perspectives that overlap and intermingle in unequal proportions and emphases: the role of local associations and their way of interpreting reality, often in the spirit of classical humanism, drawing comprehensively on a variety of sources as inspiration for explanation. An example is the Polish-German "Educatio" Pro Europa Viadrina Association and its way of dealing with reality. As Zbigniew Czarnuch wrote:

In reply to the question of our identity, here on the Oder and Warta rivers, a formula, inscribed by the pioneers of Polish settlement in the 1940s on an erratic boulder in the forest of Lemierzyce, has so far sufficed: "We did come here, we returned". So we searched wherever possible and impossible for traces of the Piast era,[11] effectively trying to obliterate all remnants of the German presence in these lands. This can be understood and explained by emotions triggered by the war experience, the memory of injustices suffered and the fight against the manifestations of Polish culture during the Bismarckian *kulturkampf* or the Nazi policy of exterminating everything Slavic. Emotions, however, have the property of dying out over time, giving way to a calm analysis of phenomena, a sound assessment of facts. If one does not want to build one's life on lies, one has to accept that we live in cities founded and built by Germans, that we often work in factories also built by Germans, that many of the villages along the Oder, Warta and Noteć rivers were created in the 18th century as a result of gigantic undertakings by the Hohenzollerns. Naturally, there are some geographical and historical subtleties here. This problem has to be seen differently in the case of Międzyrzecz, Skwierzyna, differently in the case of Międzychód, and still differently in the case of Gorzów, Witnica, Dębno and so on. In all cases, however, when looking for an answer to the question of our cultural identity, the inhabitants of the entire territory of the Gorzów Voivodeship will encounter the German problem.[12]

2. A research (academic) perspective in which a sometimes even doctrinal methodological formalism plays an important role, by exerting under-standable pressure to embed the results of inquiry in a particular intellectual school or trend. As White states: "It is impossible to define, once and for all, how people are to relate to the past, primarily because the past is a fantasy

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[11] Piast – the dynasty of princes and kings ruling in Poland from about 960 till 1370.

[12] Zbigniew Czarnuch, *Pytania o naszą – tu nad Odrą – tożsamość* [*Questions about our identity here on the Oder*]. Op.cit., p. 222.

land. The past does not exist. It can only be studied through things that remain as effects of its past existence."[13]

A similar position is presented by Zygmunt Bauman in *Legislators and Interpreters*.[14] Zbigniew Czarnuch also seems to agree with such a methodological caveat:

> The researchers of the history of this part of Poland, the fragments of which once bore the names of Pomerania, Silesia, or Greater Poland, Lubusz Land, and then Neumark, Brandenburg, Prussia, Recovered Territories, Western and Northern Territories, the poznańskie, zielonogórskie, szczecińskie and gorzowskie voivodships, when starting their work on formulating and defining their little-homeland identity, must answer a series of questions. These also include the following: "Is our post-war presence here above all an act of historical justice, i.e. the recovery of lands lost ages ago, or mainly an effect of the post-war power shifts in Europe?" Depending on the answer to the first question, the relevant definition will have to be chosen: in 1945 were these lands liberated, recovered, conquered, or incorporated? When we live on the border, do we choose the concept of a Europe of independent states or a Europe of homelands, of regions? Do we insist on the concept of hard borders or a soft borderland according to the concept of Stanisław Vincenz, for whom the borderland is a meeting place of bordering cultures, permeating patterns of behaviour, customs, economic and family ties? Or do we regard any fraternisation with the enemy as an act of state treason? So are we in favour of a vision of an open society, or of a ghettoised ethnic one? Are we willing to grant the Germans – born here, in the houses we live in and on their former farms and workshops we work in – the right to participate in deciding the fate of their cultural monuments? (...) In totalitarian systems, everything is quite clear and simple. Also when it includes what is called patriotic or nationalistic behaviour, when we use the calque of "ours" and "foreign". But how should these issues be addressed in a pluralistic society?[15]

Political perspective: there is an undeniable correlation between the narrative reality of the macro-level political world interacting with the micro-level reality.

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[13]   See: Ewa Domańska, *Biała tropologia: Hayden White i teoria pisarstwa historycznego* [*White Tropology: Hayden White and the theory of historic writing*]. "Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja", 1994, no. 2 (26).

[14]   See: Zygmunt Bauman, *Prawodawcy i tłumacze.* Warszawa, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 1998.

[15]   Zbigniew Czarnuch, *Pytania o naszą – tu nad Odrą – tożsamość. Op.cit.*, p. 224.

During his visit to Gorzów Wielkopolski in 2015, Bronisław Komorowski, President of the Republic of Poland, admitted that his family's roots are also in the Eastern Borderlands:

> I respectfully bow my head to all those who, in the post-war period, across Western and Northern Poland – In Lower Silesia, Pomerania, the Lubusz region, Warmia and Masuria – lent their hand to putting down the roots of the Polish life. I respectfully bow my head to all those who have allowed the nation to find its new place assigned to us by difficult history. To all those who consciously worked to make, here in the Recovered Territories, Polishness the best, most attractive and convincing, such that, having found itself in the new realities, consciously tried to be an element of continuity and development of these lands."[16]

3. A socio-cultural perspective in which everyday coping strategies in the life of the German-Polish border region, where culture, as an operating system resulting from thousands of unrecorded interactions, shapes behaviour, attitudes and values.

The fourth perspective is at the same time a proposal to perceive a new quality in the German-Polish cross-border area, which I referred to as "pendler" in the introduction to this chapter. The COVID-19 pandemic, which reached Poland in the first quarter of 2020, in particular its consequences in the form of restrictions and bans, highlighted the scale of everyday German-Polish relations. Hours-long waits in traffic jams on both sides of the border, hundred-metres long queues for the daily test allowing a short and supervised entry to Germany and Poland, deserted border shops and markets, showed how many people move daily to Germany from Poland and vice versa. For it is mobility and regular movement that are key to understanding the essence of being a pendler.[17]

The four planes outlined above interpenetrate each other and are equal, although not proportional.

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[16] See: *O polskości na ziemiach odzyskanych* [*On Polishness on the Recovered Territories*]. 26 March 2015, https://lubuskie.pl/wiadomosci/4782/o-polskosci-na-ziemiach-odzyskanych (date accessed: 29.06.2022).

[17] As a matter of fact, the term "pendler" was not coined in German specifically for Poles or Germans coming to work in Poland on a daily basis, but stems from an earlier term used to refer to people who commute regularly, i.e. daily, to work.

To allow a fuller understanding of the condition of the pendler's cultural identity, reference should be made to the findings of Anna Zielińska, who studies linguistic diversity in Western Poland and notes that:

> The speech of bilinguals in Western Poland is characterised by intensive code-switching, the use of phonetic transposition rules and the transfer of patterns from one language to another. These processes are active in all the types of bilingualism I researched, but to varying degrees. In the case of contacts between closely related languages, the tendency towards code-switching and the use of phonetic transposition rules is strong, while pattern transfer is weak. In contrast, in the contact between Polish and German, there is a strong tendency to transfer patterns from one language to the other. From the speakers' perspective, it is the course of communication that is important, not the distinguishing of languages.[18]

Zielińska builds on Sarah Thomason's[19] findings and points to three processes characterising communication in the Polish-German borderland that correspond well with the description of a pendler:

1. Code-switching – this definition highlights the function of combining elements from different systems in the speaking process. Switching falls into the category of transitivity and occurs at the level of systems (*langue*). One switches, i.e. 'transits' from one system to another.
2. Phonetic transposition rules – this is the search for simple ways to quickly adapt a form from one language and use it in another. This practice is fostered by knowledge of the principles of phonological substitution in closely related languages and the routine of borrowing.
3. Pattern transfer – speaking using two languages. This process results in calques, i.e. words, expressions, phrases, syntactic and grammatical constructions built from elements of one language according to the semantic pattern or syntactic scheme of another. This process is very active in German-Polish bilingualism. (...) "border speech", is not an ungrammatical chaos, but a coherent and understandable way for bilingual people to communicate.

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[18] See: Anna Zielińska, *Mowa pogranicza. Studium o językach i tożsamościach w regionie lubuskim.* Warszawa, Instytut Slawistyki PAN, 2013, pp. 236-237.

[19] See: Sarah G. Thomason, *Language contact: an introduction*, Edinburgh University Press, 2001.

This means that the process of bilingual speaking is governed by some mechanisms that speakers use.[20]

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed a problem that until now, due to the absence of readily available records, had been difficult to grasp, if not completely invisible. An important element in the pendler's identity condition is that history and current political narratives have little meaning for him/her. It is not history that counts, but the present. The pendler is mobility, cultural competence, being in two realities on the same day. Finally, it is the creation of networks and relationships that are one, let me stress – one, of the possible identity forms of the German-Polish cross-border area.

Identity in the sense of being or becoming a pendler is inseparable from mobility, which means that it cannot be constructed without movement. Unlike simple non-European communities (known from ethnographic descriptions) or peasant communities that lived in isolation, strictly assigned to a specific space, the modern individual in the cross-border area (but not only) is in constant motion, moving both physically and virtually.

The basis of cross-border identity is founded on **meeting**, in the broad sense of the word. Traditionally understood sedentariness is the opposite of what forms an identity condition in cross-border space. It is important to note that this type of identity is built not only around ethnicity, but around multiculturalism and localism, as well as mutually shared views, even if only through shared activities of a non-ethnic nature.

Hanna Mamzer, recalling the views of Jerzy Kmita, writes about this as follows:

> Jerzy Kmita's (…) socio-regulatory conception of culture also encourages us to think of human identity as detached from place. It regards culture as a mental reality made up of the normative and directive judgements respected in a given community. This extremely intellectually enticing proposition allows identity to be detached from direct links to ethnicity or nationality. In an age of all-encompassing globalisation, such thinking about culture has become very attractive, for it has shifted the understanding of culture from references to specific cultural artefacts to the level of thinking about values and their behavioural respect. In this way, it was possible to speak of culture as a phenomenon that allowed people to identify with it even beyond the borders of the one's country of origin. Thus, it could be argued that moving

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[20] Anna Zielińska, *Mowa pogranicza…*, p. 232.

in space, changing one's place of life or long-term residence, does not necessarily erode one's sense of belonging to one's culture of origin and, consequently, cultural identification.[21]

In the light of research and observation, it is possible to argue that, at least among some of the local communities in the western border region, such attitudes are fostered by the post-immigration cultural character of western Poland and by historical and cultural conditions. Indeed, it should be emphasised that the area of the current Polish-German border region, with its rich and documented naming tradition, has in principle been a multicultural area since the earliest recorded historical times. Influences from Pomerania, Lower Silesia, Greater Poland and, above all, Neumark clashed here.[22]

The radical cultural-ethnic change that took place after the Second World War and its effects can also be seen in the 21st century. Przemysław Rotengruber, Beata A. Orłowska and Marcin R. Słowiński define the problem as follows:

> What, on the other hand, can be expected from individuals and groups who lack a sense of belonging to their place of residence? If they do not have the relevant social skills, the integration deficits in question condemn them to silence. They do not protest when politicians and social activists urge them to be (more) active. They accept the verdicts on their history, local identity and the rules of participation in collective life without resistance. However, these verdicts are made over their heads.[23]

Later in the paper, which is an extremely interesting synthesis of a cultural studies perspective, hitherto poorly recognised in the literature on the subject, its authors state:

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[21] Hanna Mamzer, *Ludzka tożsamość wobec ekokolonializmu* [*Human identity in view of eco-colonialism*]. "Człowiek i społeczeństwo" 2017, vol. XLIV, p. 59.

[22] See: Zbigniew Czarnuch, *Witnica na trakcie dziejów. Wydanie jubileuszowe*. Witnica, Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Witnicy, 2000, and Edward Rymar, *Historia polityczna i społeczna Nowej Marchii w średniowieczu (do roku 1535)*. Wojewódzka i Miejska Biblioteka Publiczna im. Zbigniewa Herberta w Gorzowie Wlkp., 2015.

[23] Przemysław Rotengruber, Beata A. Orłowska, Marcin R. Słowiński, *Warunki powodzenia debaty publicznej w subregionie gorzowskim. Analiza kulturoznawcza* [*Determinants of Successful Public Debate in the Gorzów subregion. A cultural studies analysis*]. In: *Międzynarodowe i lokalne problemy współczesnego świata* [*International and Local Problems of Contemporary World*]. Red. Przemysław Rotengruber, Beata A. Orłowska, Paweł A. Leszczyński. Akademia im. Jakuba z Paradyża, Gorzów Wlkp., 2018. pp. 12-13.

> The Gorzów sub-region, like the Lubuskie Voivodship and other resettlement regions (located in the Western-Northern stretch of Poland), suffers from integration problems as a consequence of the erroneous or biased social policies pursued by the communist authorities. Two groups of issues are dominant. Firstly, a significant number of the inhabitants of these regions come from the Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic. Having been uprooted from remote places, for three generations they have been looking for (symbolic) equivalents of familiarity – that which would give them a sense of belonging to a new local community. Yes, newcomers rich in knowledge and social skills, above all residents of Wrocław and Gliwice, coped with it. All the rest, meanwhile, fell victim to communist propaganda.[24]

Understanding the process nature of the identity of local communities in the Polish-German border region at this stage of development seems to elude the traditional instruments of conceptualising identity problems as such.

Hanna Mamzer, cited above, states that:

> patterns of thinking about the identity of the human subject: as a human identity in anthropocentric terms and an identity detached from place in space, are at least weakened. One might be tempted to put forward a more radical thesis that requires serious thought. This has already been reported by Francis Fukuyama (...), who suggested that "post-modern" man, lost in a world of atomised individuals, sooner or later will have to turn to small local communities that provide a foothold, a sense of connection and community, and thus a sense of security. According to Fukuyama, they were also meant to be an antidote to the unifying influence of globalisation, leading to a degree of cultural homogenisation that destroys the subject's conviction of his uniqueness, agency and the sense of taking action indicative of individual worth (although the same can be applied to the level of community functioning). Fukuyama's proposal to develop local communities became a prophetic call to invest in the development and strengthening of interpersonal relationships, based on immediacy (symbolic) and relating to specific others and to place. I expect that few people, when reflecting on Fukuyama's proposal, saw it as heralding the development of local communities of the kind we see in Poland today. It is the small communities that counterbalance

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[24] Ibidem.

the "mainstream" activities and processes today. A growing movement of small groups can be seen in contemporary Polish society, representing local communities and their interests, effectively resisting top-down imposed solutions.[25]

It seems that the process of forming a cross-border cultural identity will not have a uniform character in all border communities. Much depends on the dynamics of micro-communities, including local communities, and their intercultural competence.

The issue of new migration is not to be overlooked here, especially in the context of the latest influx, resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In the Polish-German border area, as in the whole of Poland, it is fundamentally changing the existing ethnic and cultural make-up. It is interesting and puzzling to note that among the migrants (especially before the start of the Russian aggression in Ukraine), the choice of Gorzów Wielkopolski and its surroundings as a destination was influenced by the awareness that this region is home to the descendants of forced migrants brought here after the Second World War. This topic requires a separate study.[26]

Both the dynamics of cultural interaction and the culture itself are more readily apparent in crisis situations. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the cross-border area can be counted as just such an event, facilitating observation. In a situation of free movement and settlement without the need for specific administrative registration, the hundreds of thousands of daily acts of being in two realities at the same time were difficult to grasp and their scale was not easy to estimate. It was not until the outbreak of the pandemic that researchers and local authorities alike realised the enormous proportions of the phenomenon of pendlerisation. René Wilke, Lord Mayor of Frankfurt (Oder), was interviewed by Deutschland.de about the situation:

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[25]   Hanna Mamzer, *Ludzka tożsamość wobec ekokolonializmu...*, pp. 52-53.

[26]   This theme is highlighted by Krzysztof Wasilewski in his text *Między Nową Marchią a Wołyniem o lokalnej polityce historycznej i pamięci zbiorowej mieszkańców Gorzowa Wielkopolskiego* [*Between Neumark and Volhynia on Local Historical Policy and Collective Memory of the Inhabitants of Gorzów Wielkopolski*]. "Przegląd Zachodni" 2019, no. 3, p. 26), who writes about the collective memory of the inhabitants of Gorzów in a post-migration context: "...where the terms 'Neumark' and 'Volhynia' should be understood not directly, but as a metaphor expressing the accepted thesis of the two foundations underlying the researched collective memory, i.e. the sense of continuity with the German history of the city and the borderland narrative, increasingly often used to build local identity."

(D) Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Polish-German border was almost completely closed from March to June. Early this year, could you imagine that such a closure could ever happen again on the Oder?

(RW) No. I didn't think it was possible, and I was really shocked about it. Considering in particular, that I viewed the border closure completely unnecessary. The question was: what is the specific benefit of this? Infection rates were similarly low on both sides and we were able to use the same methods to combat the virus. So for us in Frankfurt (Oder) it didn't matter whether someone from Fürstenwalde or from Słubice came to us. Nevertheless, one trip was possible, the other was not. It was a devastating experience.

(D) How did the closing of the border affect your daily life?

(RW) With Słubice, we see ourselves as a twin city, as a shared living space in which we do many things across borders. Overnight, this was no longer possible. In administration, where possible, we switched to digital ways of working. But retail, for example, has only been able to do this to a very limited extent. In Frankfurt, some shops have up to 40 per cent Polish customers. Same applies to the other side of the border. Or think about those many commuters. They had to decide whether they wanted to stay with their families or in the workplace. Interrupting the contact between people was the worst possible experience. We have many Polish-German friendships, civil partnerships and marriages with family ties on both sides of the Oder in the region. Because of this, people suffered a lot.[27]

Particularly noteworthy is the section dealing primarily with people referred to by the term 'pendler', entitled *Osoby regularnie przekraczające granicę (pracowni-cy, uczniowie i inni)* [*Regular border crossers (employees, students and others)*]:

The impact of the pandemic has significantly affected all groups of people who regularly cross the border for various reasons. The movement of cross-border workers, students, young people and children attending educational institutions in the neighbouring country was halted or impeded. The situation was particularly difficult for cross-border workers in the medical sector and

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[27]   See: Ulrich Krökel, *30 lat polsko-niemieckiego traktatu granicznego: rozmowa z René Wilke o przyjaźni między Frankfurtem nad Odrą a Słubicami* [*30 years of Polish-German border treaty: discussion with René Wilke on friendship between Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice*], www.deutschland.de 13.11.2020 (date accessed: 24.11.2020).

in the field of education, as well as for students in the final grades of schools who had final examinations ahead of them. We therefore call for:

- avoiding border closures and taking measures to mitigate the effects of restrictions on movement to the other side of the border,
- creating effective legal regulations for workers (and others who regularly cross borders) to enable them to continue their employment or studies,
- providing free testing opportunities for cross-border workers (in particular critical infrastructure services, medical professionals, etc.), as well as students, pupils and children attending schools and kindergartens on the other side of the Oder and Neisse rivers and their carers,
- recognition of documents drawn up in the language of the neighbour certifying the results of tests and vaccinations in the border region.[28]

The document in question provided a pretext for a broader account of the uniqueness of the Polish-German cross-border area, which was overlooked by the central authorities. It is worth noting that the appeal was addressed to both the President and Prime Minister of Poland and the Chancellor and President of Germany. In the section called *Cross-border cooperation*, the authors and signatories state that:

> Border regions are places of special interaction that capture the essence of the European community: bringing people together. Our aim is to improve people's living conditions by overcoming prejudice and physical, legal and administrative barriers.

> We therefore call for:
>
> - the conclusion of a bilateral agreement between Poland and Germany, on the basis of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between communities and local authorities of 21 May 1980, which will significantly expand the possibilities for cross-border cooperation between local and regional authorities,
> - facilitation of the cross-border provision of services of general economic interest,

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[28]   Ibidem, pp. 3-4.

- keeping the Small Project Fund, financed by the INTERREG programme, within the Euroregions and strengthening its specific role for the border region in times of crisis in order to meet the European Commission's call for a Europe closer to its citizens,
- allowing cross-border projects to be financed also from European Structural and Investment Fund programmes other than INTERREG,
- stepping up cooperation between national institutions in all areas, particularly with regard to transport infrastructure (rail, road), emergency services (e.g. conclusion of regional cooperation agreements) and other crisis events (e.g. avian flu and African swine fever), and maintaining such contacts during a pandemic.[29]

I have mentioned on several occasions that the COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst which, in the Polish-German cross-border region, made it possible, with varying degrees of intensity on both sides of the border, to expose many phenomena and problems that had hitherto remained on the margins of public discourse or were so blurred that they were not perceived as a problem.

Firstly: the authors and signatories of the appeal draw attention to the difference between the problems of the cross-border area and those in other parts of the country, which in itself gives a clear indication of the awareness of this difference. It is worth noting that, except for the representatives of the Polish districts, the representation status of the signatories is based primarily on direct election (through local elections).

Secondly: the appeal draws attention to the actual functioning of a symbiotic and interdependent Polish-German cross-border region, which was directly and indirectly one of the main horizontal goals of both the German-Polish association "Educatio" Pro Europa Viadrina and the Association of Polish Municipalities of the Euroregion Pro Europa Viadrina, and is part of a broader discussion, and presents

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[29] Ibidem, pp. 6-7.

The main principles of the *Polish-German Border Region Appeal* were approved on 15 and 16 June 2021 in Gubin-Guben and Frankfurt (Oder)-Słubice by more than 90 representatives of municipalities, cities, districts and Euroregions in the Polish-German border region, including: the district of Vorpommern-Greifswald, the city of Pasewalk, the municipality of Police, the city of Gorzów Wlkp, Kostrzyn nad Odrą, municipality of Słońsk, municipality of Górzyca, city of Frankfurt (Oder), municipality of Słubice, district of Słubice, district of Märkisch-Oderland, district of Oder-Spree, municipality of Brieskow-Finkenheerd, municipality of Cybinka, municipality of Ośno Lubuskie, municipality of Schenkendöbern, city of Forst (Lausitz), municipality of Brody, municipality of Łęknica, district of Görlitz, district of Zgorzelec.

one of the attitudes of cross-border regions in the European Union in the face of a threat.

Does a multilayered identity, and in this sense a blurred one, therefore imply the surrender of part of the cultural competences rooted in ethnic or national identity in favour of another? Surely not. Blurred identity is the coexistence of multiple life strategies, conditioned by cross-border cultural geography.

Polyphonic Histories
On the spectacle staged at the Słowacki Theatre in Kraków – *W Ogień* directed by Wojtek Klemm, based on Mateusz Pakuła's drama of the same title

Marcin Oleś

Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland

Although the play *W Ogień* (*Into the Fire*), directed by Wojtek Klemm and produced at the Słowacki Theatre in Kraków in 2017, is the main subject of this essay, it is at the same time merely a pretext for revealing certain hidden or covert mechanisms that not only contributed to its realisation, but were the actual *spiritus movens* of bringing it to life. I found it legitimate to reveal these mechanisms, to unveil the machinations, not only because of the subject addressed by the play, but also because of the side effects to which this particular choice led. The play, based on Mateusz Pakuła's drama of the same title, is not restricted to the subject of the "żołnierze wyklęci" ("the Cursed Soldiers"[1]), a topic which, it must be stressed, is

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[1]   The "Żołnierze wyklęci" (the cursed, accursed, damned or doomed soldiers) is a name given to the anti-communist Polish resistance movements that were hunted down by the NKVD after the Second World War.

not subject to unambiguous unambiguous assessment. It also seems to evoke the almost anthropological space of legends and poems, touching upon the ethics of resistance and stubbornness, and by treating an otherwise fashionable subject of the time, it enters the territory of the "art of conjuncture",[2] as Michel de Certeau would like to call it. The latter, classifying theatre as an "aesthetics of tricks",[3] focuses on the category of memory reproduced from the perspective of the individual and his or her everyday life. Perhaps this is where the answer – or rather the hint – lies that can guide us through the meanderings of this story.

Although this text takes a theatrical *case study* as its main subject, its aim is by no means to review the effects of the troupe's work, let alone to analyse the performance as such. Moreover, this text significantly shifts the focus from effect to process, while attempting to reveal the mechanisms hidden behind the theatrical curtain, which in my opinion played, if not a decisive role, then certainly a significant one. In order to avoid being biased, I took the position of an observer who had access to first-hand information through personal relationships with the spectacle's creators. In reporting on this polyphonic story, I have chosen to use the metaphor of musical polyphony, which I employ as the exponential machinery of this story and which forms the axial element of this text. However, in order to ensure that the story is not hermetic, I found it necessary to give an overview of the proper significance of polyphony not only in Western culture, but also to outline the broader context of its origins and current theories concerning it. Indeed, if we were to stick to the popular opinion concerning it, understood interchangeably as multi-voicing or multi-phony, this text would be about a different story. The same goes for the English word performance, which, having many meanings, can also be used to describe a theatrical spectacle. In this text, I will consequently use the word spectacle to refer to theater, and performance to refer to organizational or political performance.

In view of the fact that *Polyphonic Histories* has several threads and several textual-meaning layers (starting with the choice of the main theme of the "Cursed Soldiers", through the attitudes of the creators of the drama and the performance, to the final effect and its perception), it will also be necessary to explain how these voices complement and overlap, creating a polyphony of meanings and interpretations. Finally, following in the footsteps of Mikhail Bakhtin's proclamation that polyphony is "an unresolved dispute of equal and full-fledged ideological

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[2]   Magdalena Pancewicz-Puchalska, *Ekonomia daru, estetyka sztuczek, etyka uporu. Praktyki życia codziennego według Michela de Certeau*. „Prace Kulturoznawcze", Vol. 20. Wrocław 2017, p. 110.

[3]   Ibidem, p. 114.

subjects"[4] (and therefore each of its voices is a different worldview of a given subject), it seems necessary to present each of these worldviews as a separate and equal voice in this *fugue*. In order to navigate through the meanderings of this fugue, to introduce its composer, initiator and performers, let me first persuade you to take a short lesson on music and its history, without which *Polyphonic Histories* would become merely the story just of a single spectacle.

This text would not have been possible without my personal relationship with the creators of the show, whom I would hereby like to thank for their willingness to share their sincere accounts of its creation.

Polyphōnos[5]

Before moving on to the main subject of our considerations, it is necessary to give an overview of the phenomenon of polyphony and its significance in Western culture. And although its origin and occurrence is not a strictly European concept[6], it is here that its presence seems to be most strongly marked. Moreover, it is in Europe that polyphony reflects content that is representative of the philosophy of culture. It was established on medieval foundations. This edifice will prove so solid that it will survive the next millennium almost unscathed. It will not even be toppled by recurring waves of loss of popularity. Polyphony, understood as a performance practice, is known and practiced virtually all over the world, although it should be added that its occurrence is not global. The Georgian-Australian scholar of traditional polyphony, Joseph Jordania, one of the leading contemporary scholars of the subject, writes of it as follows:

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[4]   Henryk Markiewicz, *Polifonia, dialogiczność i dialektyka: bachtinowska teoria powieści.* „Pamiętnik Literacki", Vol. 76, No. 2, Wrocław 1985, p. 89.

[5]   From *polyphōnos* "having many sounds or voices", from *polys* "many" + *phōnē* "voice, sound". *Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com/word/polyphony (accessed: September 14, 2022).

[6]   "German musicologist, M. Schneider argued in his book *History of Polyphony (*orig. *Geschichte der Mehrstimmigkeit,* Berlin 1934) that although Europe developed polyphony very well, Europeans (or Caucasoids) did not 'invent' polyphony. According to Schneider, polyphony was invented somewhere in the Southeast Asia and it reached Europe via South Asian and Caucasian rout. Schneider's conclusion, that a new cultural trait, polyphony was not invented by Europeans, was not warmly greeted by Nazi ideologists, and according to the available information, Schneider's book was publicly burned by Nazis among other books that contradicted Hitler's ideology." More: Joseph Jordania, *Who Asked the First Question: The Origins of Human Choral Singing, Intelligence, Language and Speech*. Tbilisi, Logos, 2006, p. 382.

> The distribution of vocal polyphony shows an uneven and puzzling pattern. It is quite safe to say that some continents and major regions of the continents are predominantly monophonic, while other continents and major regions are predominantly polyphonic. Predominantly polyphonic continents are Africa (more precisely sub-Saharan Africa) and Europe (particularly the mountainous and island parts of East Europe and Mediterranean region). Another very important polyphonic region (not a continent), is Oceania (particularly Polynesia and Melanesia). On the other hand, the major parts of North, Central and East Asia, Australia and most of North and South America are monophonic. [7]

It is worth noting at this point that the origins of polyphony in traditional music far predate its appearance in European music (understood here as compositional oeuvre). In fact, in order to distinguish the two practices, it is more appropriate (for the Polish language, in which I think and write) to use the term polyphony for European practice, and multi-voicing for traditional practice, as there are significant formal differences. The English language is a bit more complicated, as it almost interchangeably uses the terms: multi-part music, polyvocality, plurivocality and multiphony. For the purposes of this text, I will use the terms polyphony (to emphasise the pluralistic nature of certain phenomena) and multi-voiced (to accentuate the multifaceted nature of the story and the dispersion of the main voice/theme). In addition, recent studies in evolutionary musicology seem to question the commonly held opinion that the development of music progressed from single-voice forms to more complex ones,[8] and that polyphony is by no means a higher developmental stage of single-voice. However, as the respected Polish musicologist Bohdan Pociej notes, polyphony is "a characteristic manifestation of the 'pluralistic' and 'dialectical' European mindset: it arises, namely, from the intersection of theoretical-speculative and practical-empirical tendencies"[9]. These tendencies stand on the strong philosophical and theological foundations of both St Augustine and St Anselm of Canterbury. It was these, coupled with the support of the Church, that brought polyphony to European art music for good and for a

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[7]   Ibidem, p. 176-177.

[8]   "To sing in parts for a group of people is generally more difficult than to sing in unison. Therefore, if we look at this commonly accepted fact from the evolutionary point of view, we may conclude that humanity must have come to the idea (and ability) of polyphonic singing later, after the long period of initial monophonic singing." Ibidem, p. 205.

[9]   Bohdan Pociej, „Organum". „Meakultura. Muzyka, edukacja, artyści", http://meakultura.pl/artykul/organum-605 (accessed: September 14, 2022).

long time, and with it, Europe became a place for a pluralistic exchange of ideas and thoughts, of which polyphony is the musical equivalent.

Punctus contra punktum

Polyphony, which presupposes the equivalence of voices taking part in a polyphonic creative process, is entangled in several contradictions, and these, paradoxically, constitute its value. As we shall soon see, the main value of polyphony is the polyphony of values. However, with the assumed equal distribution of votes, ambiguities and vagueness arise, and the main voice (*vox principalis*) is weakened. The intersecting voices not only complement and supplement each other, but are also in constant dialogue with each other, and often in dissonance/conflict. The complexity grows as the number of participants increases, which is exacerbated by the ambiguity of the symbolic transmission of language, or even languages. Complexity and ambiguity, in fact, are not so much the main features of polyphony as its value. In fact, as Jorge L. Borges writes in the preface to the volume of short stories *Doctor Brodie's Report*, "there isn't anywhere on earth a single page or single word that is simple, since each thing implies the universe, whose most obvious trait is complexity".[10] (Bakhtin even introduces the category of "two-voiced word"[11]). And further in this context, where we begin to talk about polyphony in relation to language and its transmission: "While human communication is inherently symbolic and thus potentially vague, ambiguous and polyphonic, there is a growing emphasis on certainty, accuracy and consistency in everything contemporary organizations say and do".[12] How, then, in the modern world (that is, in today's theater as well), do we speak accurately and coherently, yet allow ourselves to maintain a polyphonic multiplicity of values? How to speak, to engage in dialogue and to argue, so that the values and achievements of polyphony do not cross the thin border separating polyphony from the *agon zone*? If, following the example of other cultural fields, theater is the artistic equivalent of phenomena of a socio-cultural nature, it is impossible to forget the trends constantly present in mass culture and politics. These seem to side with the Olympics (*agon zone*) – favoring all kinds of races, competitions and rivalries. The worldview has become the main theme of the

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[10] Jorge Luis Borges, *Doctor Brodie's Report*. A Bantam Book, New York, 1973.
[11] Henryk Markiewicz, *Polifonia, dialogiczność...*, p. 93.
[12] Lars T. Christensen, Mette Morsing, Ole Thyssen, *The polyphony of values and the value of polyphony*. "Essachess. Journal for Communication Studies", Vol. 8 (2015), No.1, p. 10.

"fugue" of modernity, and the polemics generated by it increasingly refer to its Greek prototype (*polemos*, from Greek: war, demon of war). Meanwhile, the relationship between polyphony and *agon* resembles the one between a discussion and a duel. Of course, polyphony can take different forms, and the aforementioned "fugue" rather belongs to the peak development of this texture/form/genre (understood here as equal and equivalent categories). What is most significant from the point of view of European polyphonic music composers, however, is the emergence of counterpoint (the *punctus contra punctum* technique). Its emergence meant that European polyphony, as the only one, ceased to be solely a performance practice and became a compositional technique – an intellectual creative process (Latin *componere* = to combine, to fit all the parts together). *Punctus contra punctum* is from now on "the fundamental property of the future musical composition of Western culture, (...) the core and essence of all compositional technique".[13] Counterpoint is henceforth a vehicle for heteronomous principles in the pluralistic reality of polyphony, and a tool in the hands of artists. It sets the rules of movement and priority, teaches discipline by modeling a polyphonic communiqué. In order for this communiqué to be possible, it is necessary to introduce the main theme, which is called *cantus firmus* (from Latin: fixed or rather established singing; a pre-existing melody). *Cantus firmus* becomes not only the subject of a given polyphonic form, but above all a reason for "discussion" within the framework of the principles of *punctus contra punctum*. Each of the introduced and led voices is equal and autonomous, although they all remain in close connection and correlation with each other.

With the terminology in the above, it is time to bring the main actors of this text to the stage, assigning them the conventional roles of the protagonists of our polyphonic stories.

Cantus firmus

The main theme of Mateusz Pakuła's drama and at the same time Wojtek Klemm's play entitled *W Ogień* (*Into the Fire*) is the character of Józef Kuraś, alias "Ogień". The problem touched here is therefore "Żołnierze wyklęci" (the *Cursed Soldiers*), or as the post-war communist government would have put it, *bands of the reactionary underground*. The Polish post-war pro-independence and anti-communist underground, or *soldiers of the second conspiracy*, as they are also

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[13] Bohdan Pociej, op. cit.

called, was an anti-communist, independence-oriented partisan movement resisting the Sovietization of Poland.

Many myths have grown up around the Polish underground operating after the so-called liberation. Many half-truths were told about it, and it was repeatedly subjected to falsification. Communist propaganda called members of the independence underground fascists, traitors, reactionaries, collaborators, betrayers, at best – lost people.[14]

So much for the website of the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation's (IPN), whose very title *Cursed Soldiers – Forgotten Heroes* leaves no room for doubt about their moral and political evaluation. In the meantime, the slogan "Żołnierze wyklęci" "has evoked extreme emotions among Poles for many years. Some glorify them as flawless heroes, sacrificing their lives in their fight with the communists after World War II. Others deny their honor and glory, claiming that they were common bandits, murderers and hoodlums, anti-Semites and geocidaires."[15]. The case is therefore not as clear-cut as the IPN would like (this fact will be our *agon zone* below). In addition, there is something that has come to be known as Polish *hurrahpatriotism*[16], which, as Filip Bogaczyk writes, "unfortunately has more in common with shabby folklore tinged with red and white glasses than with the history that actually took place more than seventy years ago"[17] (this coarseness will be used by the director in his performance – his characters are dressed in national colors, with the addition of symbols of quasi-masculinity in the form of plumes). This peculiar fashion is due, among other things, to the decisions of the Sejm (lower chamber of the Republic of Poland's Parliament), which on February 3, 2011 passed a law to establish March 1 as the Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers. Józef Kuraś, a.k.a. "Ogień" ("Fire") as a representative of this group, fits into this fashion and, as a hero-anti-hero, appears in the mind of the dramatist Mateusz Pakuła

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[14] *Podziemie Zbrojne IPN, Żołnierze Wyklęci – Zapomniani Bohaterowie*, https://podziemie zbrojne.ipn.gov.pl/zol/historia, (accessed: September 14, 2022).

[15] Filip Bogaczyk, *Żołnierze Wyklęci – próba oceny*, https://twojahistoria.pl/2020/03/11/zolnie rze-wykleci-proba-oceny/ (accessed: September 14, 2022).

[16] "A distinctive feature of the specific remembrance of the 'Cursed Soldiersp' is the clothing. Markets, patriotic clothing stores and Internet portals are awash with the motifs of wolves, insurgent anchors, eagles, slogans, the most popular of which is: 'Death to the enemies of the fatherland' and 'We remember' with dates added, most often the Warsaw Uprising. There are also quite a few portraits of the Outlaws, with 'Łupaszka' and 'Bury' leading the way. On the other hand, one can also spot the images of Pilecki or the characteristic figure of the Little Insurgent. All printed on tracksuits, T-shirts and hoodies." See: Filip Bogaczyk, *Żołnierze Wyklęci – próba oceny*. Op. cit. (accessed: September 14, 2022).

[17] Ibidem.

as a catchy theme, *cantus firmus*, of the text to be written. Pakuła, like a polyphonic composer, composes *punctus contra punctum* the stories of "Ogień", placing them in the realities of Poland in the immediate aftermath of the war, remaining in the shackles of chaos (let me leave the following quote without comment):

> The war and occupation itself left a morally unpalatable legacy: widespread illegal vodka drinking and the resulting drunkenness, thievery combined with banditry, encouraged by the widespread availability of weapons. This was exploited by people with no profession or employment, derailed by the war.[18]

Vox principalis

As Pakuła himself admits – fascinated by the tangibility of the story (his wife's family lives next door to the son of "Ogień"), and influenced by family history (Pakuła's father-in-law, Jorgos Skolias, is the son of Kuraś' Greek counterpart) – the text was commissioned by the *Genius Loci* festival, which was meant to "remind us of the duty to resurrect memory, to dig up repressed topics, to awaken dormant heroes, to revise distant and less distant events"[19] as Bartosz Szydłowski, curator of the festival where the 2017 the play premiered, mentions in its program. However, before this premiere could take place, Pakuła's text had to clash with the weight of its theme and the politics that were evoked in passing, so to speak. We can let Pakuła speak for himself:

> The curators who first read the text found it mega-right-wing. They stated that Klemm, with his left-wing views, would be a great counterpart for it. However, my assumption was that the text was meant to be dialogical, not right-wing. Meanwhile, I was under the impression that I was being accused of being a rightist and that I was trying to whitewash a thug, rapist and someone guilty of genocide. And as much as I think of the spectacle with a lot of sympathy, I have the feeling that what I assumed or intended completely failed.[20]

However, before Klemm appeared on the horizon, Pakuła was rejected by two other directors (Radek Rychcik and Małgorzata Warsicka) – both after they had

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[18]   *Podziemie Zbrojne IPN, Mjr Józef Kuraś 'Ogień' (1915-1947)*, https://podziemiezbrojne.ipn.gov.pl/zol/biogramy/90846,Mjr-Jozef-Kuras-Ogien-1915-1947.html (accessed: September 14, 2022).

[19]   Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego, *Genius Loci*, https://teatrwkrakowie.pl/genius-loci (accessed: September 14, 2022).

[20]   Mateusz Pakuła interviewed by Marcin Oleś (author's archive, Cracow, 2021).

read the text of the drama. As Pakuła speculated, "due to the controversial nature of the topic of the Cursed Soldiers".[21]

But the text itself appears as a polyphonic story – or as Bakhtin would have it, a multi-voiced narrative – about a man who, according to Pakuła, cannot be judged unequivocally. And it is precisely this – the lack of an unambiguous assessment of Kuraś – that will be the trigger for the conflict with Klemm. This is because Pakuła shows "Ogień" from all sides, but does not take a stand, does not judge – his point of view remains beyond our perception.

Vox polemos

The director Wojtek Klemm found Pakuła's lack of a clear stance "graceful [to work with – author's note], because the conflict he created at the beginning was about finding a certain crackle, a kind of two-voicing, in this whitewashing story".[22] It soon became apparent that the two-voicing mentioned by Klemm would become a pretext for the creation of five-voiced polyphony:

> Five actors as a choir of Polish ghosts suspended in purgatory. As in Kafka, they wait for the gates of justice to open. And as in Dante they burn with their story. Five Kuraśes. Five ghosts. Or the five indigenous people of a strange tribe that has existed in these lands for more than 30000 years. Kuraś runs into the mountains. Further and further – burning, full of revenge. Who is this man? Is it really worth worshipping a murderer?[23]

This chorus, as we read in the theater's press materials, begins its stories in a distinct rhythm with the phrase "The story of Ogień is so...". The five actors and actresses playing the title character, like the five voices of a polyphonic puzzle, *punctus contra punctum*, begin a kind of dance of motifs and threads that never meet, but complement and supplement each other. A muted witness of the story is the spectacle's composer, Dominik Strycharski, who is locked in a kiosk booth, and whose performative actions seem to be the historical sonic background to this multi-voiced tale. This kiosk, symbolically referring us to Poland category C, to small

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[21]   Ibidem.
[22]   Wojtek Klemm interviewed by Marcin Oleś (author's archive, Cracow, 2021).
[23]   Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego, *W ogień!*, https://teatrwkrakowie.pl/spektakl/w-ogien (accessed: September 14, 2022).

towns and villages, where – like in the Polish TV series *Ranczo* – such buildings are the only center of entertainment for the locals, takes us geographically to forgotten and unwanted places; places where time has stopped; ghostly places, about which the creators of this spectacle can have at most a vague idea and not necessarily without prejudice. It was places like this that were the backwoods/motherland for "Ogień" and other the Cursed Soldiers, it was there that abuses, murders and appropriations of property could take place, but also heroic deeds. This is what the author of this multi-voice construction, director Wojtek Klemm, is talking about:

> I find the topic of the Cursed Soldiers interesting, although personally for me they are scabrous criminals and none of them are worth remembering. Today we would call them terrorists. I will never acknowledge any of them as heroes. In the case of "Ogień", it was murdering Jews, forcing women to be his sex-servants; living in lawlessness and ruling by fear. Approaching this text, I had a clear attitude and knew what I wanted to say. It was an interesting experience, because, in my opinion, Mateusz has written a total pro-PiS[24] text, moreover, sucking up to the IPN and, in my opinion, not worthy of a man so young. I was scared when I read it! On top of that, I consider this text not to be this author's best. And that was my starting point.[25]

And here it would seem that the divergent attitudes of the two artists would lead to the eventual performance being a fiasco. This, however, did not happen. The premiere took place on a cold summer evening on September 15, 2017 in Zakopane, at the Solidarity Square, some distance from the city center (on March 3, 2018, the premiere was held on the MOS Stage of the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków, in the Małopolska Garden of Arts). This is what Witold Mrozek wrote in "Gazeta Wyborcza" right after the premiere, which seems to confirm the polyphonic construction of the play:

> The play does not relativize the crime, but complicates the story and multiplies points of view. [...] it is also a street theater of attractions that throws the casual viewer into confusion – the actors set off flares, chant slogans familiar from nationalist demonstrations, and wear Indian plumes to their uniforms, a symbol of the alluring boyish adventure for which the cruelty of war is nowadays disguised.[26]

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24   PiS – Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice), the name of political party ruling in Poland in 2005-2007 and from 2015 till now.

25   Wojtek Klemm interviewed by Marcin Oleś...

26   Witold Mrozek, *Festiwal Genius Loci. Psychodelia, neolit, rabacja i 'Ogień' w pióropuszu.* „Gazeta Wyborcza", https://wyborcza.pl/7,112395,22403682,genius-loci.html, (accessed: September 14, 2022)

Vox populi

In view of the fact that theater is a domain of culture, it should come as no surprise that it reflects, as if in a mirror, the reflections of everyday life observed offstage. Klemm settled on a spectacle with the character of a performance rather than an intellectual debate. He moved it closer to the street and staged it on the street. He knew that the subject of the "Cursed Soldiers", as part of the politics of remembrance, divides more than it unites. Being the target of this policy, the *vox populi* is much more likely to appeal to values than to facts, as Pakuła noted in an interview with me. Taking a stance, choosing one's own truth, as if it were a substitute for facts, makes the conflict a final state, and the war demon *Agon* is the blind judge of this conflict. This is how the phenomenon of one truth is summed up by Zygmunt Bauman:

> "Truth" is an idea that is, in its origins and its inalienable nature, agonistic – a concept that could only emerge from the encounter with its opposite; (...) The concept of "truth" wouldn't make any sense without polyphony or multiplicity of beliefs and perspectives, and so also a temptation to compete and a fight for dominance among contenders. The need for such a concept emerges at the moment when the claim "It is how it is" has to be supplemented with the proviso that "It isn't how others (whoever they may be) think it is." [27]

Yet, telling stories and telling stories about history is much more complex, multi-layered and ambiguous. Wojtek Klemm's spectacle proves to us that multithreaded, polyphonic storytelling is possible, though not easy. It requires constant dialogue, not the discovery of the only truths. Let me invoke Bauman again:

> Indeed, using the word "truth" in the singular in a polyphonic world is like trying to clap with one hand... With one hand you can give someone a rap on the head, but not clap. With a single truth you can hit (and for hitting the adversaries it was invented), but you cannot use it to launch an investigation into the human condition (an investigation that in its very nature must be conducted only through dialogue, or in the explicit or tacitly presumed – but always axiomatic – assumption of alternatives).[28]

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[27]   Zygmunt Bauman and Stanisław Obirek, *Bauman, Obirek: Politeizm i polifonia*, "KrytykaPolityczna.pl", 7 June 2013, https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/czytaj-dalej/bauman-obirek-politeizm-i-polifonia/, (accessed: September 14, 2022).

[28]   Ibidem.

Meanwhile, the question arises of the extent to which the invocation of the subject of the Cursed Soldiers into Polish social life was an axiomatic assumption of the alternative. To what extent was it a dissonance in a polyphonic reality or the bringing to life of a new *cantus firmus*? And to what extent was it the announcement of a new truth, and therefore, almost a provocation? If so, then with the suspension of what social norms are we dealing here? Doesn't the challenge to the norms themselves become *nomen omen* normative here? It seems paradoxical that political performance here precedes the theater performance, which is placed in the role of commentator and being commented on. As Wojtek Klemm's spectacle shows, and even more so Mateusz Pakuła's drama, the blade of artistic criticism has become considerably blunted and lost its target. The *hurrahpatriotism*, the ignited flares and plumes I mentioned, have become just one more instance of cleverly used decorum, and the textual layer itself, relativizing the historical reality, is no longer only an insufficient tool to fight an undisclosed enemy, but even contributes to identity and cultural confusion. It is the spectator who is put in the role of a judge, and it is the spectator who is to decide on which side to place the blade of criticism, but it seems that he also has no tools to do so. We are dealing here with what Jon McKenzie would call organizational performance,[29] or rather, administrative performance, for it is to be seen in political decisions. It was political decisions, implicitly and discreetly, that imposed the will on both theater makers and audiences. Thus, under the mask of the demiurge hides not the theatrical curator of the Genius Loci festival (Bartosz Szydłowski), nor the author of the text (Mateusz Pakuła) or the director (Wojtek Klemm), but a political creature with no face or name, who imposes his will on his subjects. The contesting impact of the theater in this case is therefore illusory, even bogus. Following the principle that "*performance challenges*, it provokes, contests, stakes a claim"[30] it should be noted that the main performance here is a political administrative decision. The decision provokes, contests, demands – the theater makers merely submit to it. If one were to follow McKenzie's thought further, which argues that the measure of the value of a performance is its effectiveness, then the performance which brought to life the subject of the Polish "Cursed Soldiers" in Anno Domini 2011 seems to have been an extremely successful performance. If

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[29]   "Like cultural performance, the field of organizational performance is a highly contested one. Similarly, it must be understood as a construction: its performances are not simply 'out there' in the world, but have been generated by a paradigm of research, which we shall call 'Performance Management'." For more detailed discussion, see: Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. London and New York, Routledge, 2001, p. 55.

[30]   Ibidem, p. 32.

one were to remain in the polyphonic nomenclature, one would consider that in the case of the performance *W Ogień* the *cantus firmus* was imposed on Pakuła and Klemm from the outside (the artist may or may not undertake it, but must work on the imposed theme). This is not far from the contemporary model of financing artistic activities and cultural projects, based on the concept of short-term and targeted activities. Government patronage sets goals and imposes themes, whether in the form of patrons of a given year (let's take the Chopin Year 2010 as a symbolic example, in which almost all activities in music on a yearly basis were either related to Chopin or had no financial support), or determines quasi long-term goals (currently it is, among others: the promotion of Lech Kaczyński's thoughts in the world, the theme of "Cursed Soldiers", etc.). The Słowacki Theater's staged production of *W Ogień* directed by Klemm, is neither different nor unique here.

Quasi stretto

As I mentioned before, it is neither my role nor my purpose to evaluate this theatrical project. Rather, by looking at theatrical rituals and the rehearsal process, commenting on theatrical expression and drawing the relationship between the script and the director, I have tried to zoom in on a certain phenomenon in which theater is reduced to the role of a subcontractor of organizational performance assumptions. This is not surprising since, as the aforementioned Jon McKenzie wrote, "cultural performance does appear within Performance Management"[31] and "art and educational institutions have for the past decade or so been subject to reorganizations, downsizings, restructurings, TQM programs, cost-effective budgeting, and other applications of Performance Management".[32] Being in a close relationship and financial dependence on government funding, theater in contemporary Poland does not have an easy task, and patronage expects such "cultural performances that do not challenge social norms but support and extend them".[33] The effects of this are visible to the naked eye, and the erosion that is taking place in censored-theaters is likely to be permanent. Government patronage, which sets precise goals, also expects efficiency from cultural institutions, and the domain of theater has long ceased to be free from political influence. Just a few years after the premiere of *W Ogień*, another premiere at the Slowacki Theater

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[31]   Ibidem, p. 84.
[32]   Ibidem, p. 83.
[33]   Ibidem, p. 83.

led by Krzysztof Gluchowski (*Dziady* directed by Maja Kleczewska) led to a crisis with the Małopolska voivode,[34] and the theater itself to financial collapse. Political intrusions have also previously affected Krakow's Stary Teatr (the position of artistic director, filled without the required competition, was entrusted to a person without artistic competence, which led the theater company to conflict, and ultimately to disintegration), and other theaters in Poland, although this is not the place to cite more institutions and names. The polyphony of values seems to be giving way to a monotheism of beliefs. The process of disintegration has been taking place for a long time, and its emergence should be linked to the effectiveness of the organizational performance I mentioned earlier. In medieval music, the first indications of impending change and similar decay were the emergence of the *fauxbourdon* technique, which displaced medieval modality, replacing it with a tonality that was hierarchical in nature. What was considered false (*faux*) in the short term, in the long-term process consequently led to the emergence of a new tonal system, and polyphony had to give way to homophony.

If we are dealing with a similar process now in Poland's institutional theaters, in the near future they may become places without the possibility of polyphonic discourse. This will take place to the harm of the discourse itself, and theater will lose one of its tools of performative influence on reality and begin to occupy the zone of *decorum*. As in music long ago, *fauxbourdon* will bring to life new entities, a new truth, and certainly a new reality.

Finally, let's use the words of the classic philosopher, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, which seem apt at this point, and let them be the punchline of this text: "Against positivism, which halts at phenomena – 'There are only *tacts*' – I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact 'in itself': perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing."[35]

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[34]   The President of the voivodship – region of Poland. The Voivod is nominated by the Prime Minister.

[35]   Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power. Section 481*. London, Penguin Books, 2017, p. 267.

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Mutating Scepticism – the strains and determinants of UK Euroscepticism, Lockdown Scepticism and Vaccine Scepticism

Stephen Dersley

Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland

1. Introduction

This article attempts to describe the relations between statements such as the following:

Nigel Farage (broadcaster, former MEP, former leader of UKIP and the Brexit Party):

> 19 September 2014, Speech to UKIP Conference: "We know that only by leaving the union can we regain control of our borders, our parliament, democracy and our ability to trade freely with the fastest-growing economies in the world."

> 01 November 2020, "The Telegraph": "We're relaunching the Brexit Party to fight this cruel and unnecessary lockdown"

> 12 October 2022: Twitter: "The truth about the vaccine is coming out at last."

> 18 November 2022: Twitter/*GB News*: "Do we really, wholly trust Volodymyr Zelenskyy?"[1]

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[1]   Accessed 17.11.2022 https://twitter.com/Nigel_Farage/status/1592979825043468288

Daniel Hannan (author, former MEP, founder of *Vote Leave*, member of the House of Lords):

> 22 June 2016, "The Telegraph": "Forget Project Fear. Be positive. Choose dynamism. Choose Brexit".
>
> 31 October 2020, "The Telegraph": "A lockdown is a delaying mechanism. It doesn't reduce the number of deaths; it pushes them into the future".
>
> 12 August 2022, "The Telegraph": "Britain is in crisis because of the arrogance and delusions of the lockdown fanatics".

Dominic Cummings (political strategist, director of *Vote Leave*, former Chief Adviser to Prime Minister Boris Johnson):

> 3 July 2016, Vote Leave HQ: "WE TOOK BACK CONTROL! Last week you changed the course of history. Vote Leave took on almost every force with power and money and we won. Britain chose to Vote Leave".
>
> 4 July 2022, Substack: "We have a disastrous war seen as existential by the world's biggest nuclear power where our own leaders are comically bad and our 'ally' is literally led by a comedian, propped up by his own oligarchs and a faction of the UKR intel services".

Toby Young (commentator, director of the Free Speech Union, creator of the *Lockdown Sceptics/Daily Sceptic* website):

> 19 March 2016, "The Telegraph": "EU deal: Any self-declared Eurosceptic must now campaign for Brexit".
>
> 18 April 2020, "The Telegraph": "What happened to the British people's bulldog spirit, our instinctive libertarianism? Judging from how we've reacted to the lockdown, we've become a nation of authoritarians."
>
> 10 November 2022, *Twitter*: "A striking correlation has appeared between excess deaths and autumn Covid booster doses in England, raising new questions of safety as total non-Covid excess deaths hit 23,287 since April".

Brendan O'Neill (columnist, former editor and currently chief political editor at "Spiked"):

> 24 June 2016, "Spiked": "This was an uprising, a polite, quiet one, not only against Brussels but against the political class here at home, against those who rule".

> 01 May 2020, "Spiked": "The very politicos and observers who spent the past four years demonising public opinion and seeking to overthrow the largest democratic vote in the history of the UK – the vote for Brexit – now cheer the public for supporting the lockdown and feeling fearful about going back to normal life."

Drawing on the assumptions and techniques of discourse analysis, this article connects various statements made on the topics of the European Economic Community (EEC/EC), the European Union, the COVID-19 lockdowns, the COVID-19 vaccines, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Statements made by Enoch Powell in 1971, Tony Benn in 1974, and Margaret Thatcher in 1988, can be related quite straightforwardly with statements made by Nigel Farage, Daniel Hannan and Boris Johnson in the run-up to the 2016 Brexit referendum, since they can be assigned to the distinct and recognised discourse of British Euroscepticism.[2] Somewhat more problematically, this article also posits that statements on the EC and EU are also related to various statements made between February 2020 and November 2022 (the time of writing) on the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and vaccines, and the war in Ukraine – by various UK politicians, authors, broadcasters and activists, such as Daniel Hannan, Nigel Farage, Toby Young, Brendan O'Neill, Julia Hartley-Brewer, Dominic Cummings, Mark Harper (MP), Steve Baker (MP), James Delingpole, James Melville, and Maajid Nawaz. Constructing these relations requires the characterisation of very recent or emergent discourse: lockdown scepticism, vaccine scepticism and Ukraine scepticism.

It goes without saying that these disparate agents have not articulated the same positions on the issues in question: while expressing similar positions on the EU, Brexiteers such as Farage, Cummings, Hannan and O'Neill have articulated divergent and opposing conceptions of Brexit: most notably, there were crucial differences between Hannan's 'free market' vision of Brexit and Farage's 'populist Brexit', and now a gulf is emerging between Farage's strategically populist rhetoric and the populist Brexit advocated by O'Neill and signalled by the philosopher John Gray.[3] In the case of lockdown, Hannan's rational liberal-economic criticisms of the UK lockdowns contrasted with Young's doubt-generating lockdown scepticism that drew on non-consensus science. Lastly,

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[2]   For example, as defined by C. Gifford, *The Making of Eurosceptic Britain*, Ashgate, 2008.

[3]   B. O'Neill, Brexiteers, we did it, "Spiked", 24 December 2021; *John Gray Part I: Revenge of the technocrats*, "Unherd", 27 October 2022 (Accessed 20.11.2022).

Hannan's active support for Ukraine is diametrically opposed to the hard Ukraine scepticism disseminated by Cummings.[4]

In addition to conflicts between authors who staked out consistently adversarial subject positions, some authors and activists changed their positions in response to other articulations and unfolding events: in March-May 2020, Farage supported the first UK lockdown, suggesting that the best response to the crisis would be nationalist rather than globalist, but then adopted a Trump-inspired anti-lockdown position in November 2020; Farage also switched from supporting the COVID-19 vaccine in 2021 to a vaccine sceptical position in 2022, in alignment with the vaccine scepticism propagated through the *GB news* media channels.[5] As

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[4]   Obviously, since he was involved in implementing the UK lockdowns and the vaccine programme, Cummings cannot be classed as a lockdown or vaccine sceptic. However, as soon as he was fired in November 2020, he has been unable to unleash his opposition in an uninhibited manner (on Twitter and Substack). Since March 2022, Cummings has consistently framed Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a response to NATO provocation, accused the West of escalation and seeking to prolong the war, and recommended that Ukraine cede territory. Since his Substack is subscription only, this summary can be supported with a quotation: "Instead of encouraging the war to continue, it would be better for the UK to push NATO members towards supporting UKR in seeking a peace deal, and this means accepting the unpleasant fact that a) Russia is going to take territory in the east/south and b) UKR is never joining NATO (which we should have agreed before, and instead of, encouraging the war). We should drop all our nonsense about any new NATO members. No more trying to humiliate Russia by pushing it around regarding NATO encroachment on its own borders" (March 27, 2022) (Accessed 16.11.2022: https://dominiccummings.substack.com/p/snippets-2-ask-me-anything). Cummings also deploys a strategy characteristic of Ukraine scepticism – describing Zelensky as a corrupt puppet – see the quotation in the main text above from *Snippets 5: No10 farce, UKR, Tory 'strategy', AGI ruin, daycare, Direct Instruction, do shares only go up at night?!, NSN, abortion/US...* Accessed 16.11.2022: https://dominiccummings.substack.com/p/snippets-5-no10-farce-ukr-tory-strategy – and draws an equivalence between the Ukrainian and Russian governments: "Treat UKR gangsters same as Russian", https://twitter.com/Dominic2306/status/1592861141084303362 (accessed 20.11.2022).

[5]   Farage's pro-lockdown articles: *Yes, protecting us all from an epidemic should be prioritized over the economy*, "Newsweek", March 9 2020, *Respond to coronavirus with more nationalism*, "Newsweek", May 28 2020; Farage's Trumpist turn: https://twitter.com/Nigel_Farage/status/1323344626707648512, and anti-lockdown position: *We're relaunching the Brexit Party to fight this cruel and unnecessary lockdown*, "The Telegraph". November 1 2020; Farage announced that he got the AstraZeneca vaccine on 16 March 2021, but had adopted a vaccine sceptical position in 2022, e.g. https://twitter.com/nigel_farage/status/1580214077128724480?lang=en (accessed 16.11.2022). For examples of vaccine scepticism on *GB News*, see Neil Oliver, *Just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean they're not out to get you*, *GB News*, 19 February 2022, https://www.gbnews.uk/gb-views/neil-oliver-just-because-youre-paranoid-doesnt-mean-theyre-not-out-to-get-you/229899 (accessed 20.11.2022); *Covid-19 response may be the biggest scandal in living memory, says Fr Calvin Robinson, GB News YouTube Channel*, 16 October 2022, https://youtu.be/kDEUgeb8ZGw (accessed 20.11.2022).

an example of discursive drift away from mainstream positions, Maajid Nawaz stood as a Liberal Democrat in 2015, voted *Remain* in 2016, and hosted an LBC radio show from 2016-2022, but was taken off air after his conspiratorial strain of lockdown scepticism evolved into vaccine scepticism; Nawaz, like James Melville, now espouses Ukraine scepticism.[6]

This internal heterogeneity and conflict can be identified as a key driver of discursive splintering and mutation. Statements can be identified as belonging to and articulating a discourse if they contribute to the regular, systematic articulation of opposition to an external enemy that is differentially constructed as the 'other'.[7] At the same time, however, this article emphasises that two factors determine the emergence of new discourses or discursive strains: firstly, events that lead to the appearance of new or transformed enemies (e.g. 'Leavers' became 'the pro-lockdown left'), and secondly the development of intra-discursive conflict (Soft vs. Hard Brexit, lockdown scepticism vs. COVID-19 denialism, Ukraine scepticism vs. explicit opposition to Ukraine).[8]

This article follows Chris Gifford in treating 'British Euroscepticism' as a discourse focused on opposition to integration with the EC and EU from the 1970s to the 2000s,[9] but identifies a distinct form of English nationalist/populist Euroscepticism that emerged in the run-up to the 2016 Brexit referendum and articulated an adversarial position, on the one hand, to the EU and the Remain campaign (external discursive struggle), and on the other, Vote Leave's free market position on Brexit (intra-discursive struggle).

The same mechanisms of emergence and differentiation can be identified in the case of UK lockdown scepticism, which developed into a wide spectrum of positions through both contrasting definitions of the external enemy and

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[6]   Nawaz's Ukraine scepticism: *Republicans take the House, Pelosi is out & so the crook Zelensky has lost his ability to money-launder using war as an excuse*, Twitter, November 9, 2022. Accessed 16.11.2022: https://twitter.com/MaajidNawaz/status/1590305424460648448. Melville's Ukraine scepticism: *The first casualty of war is the truth. It is possible to condemn Putin's actions in Ukraine AND ask questions about money laundering, FTX, Hunter Biden, neo-Nazis, biolabs, Nord Stream, Zelensky and NATO. In war, nothing is black and white*, Twitter, November 14 2022, accessed 16.11.2022: https://twitter.com/JamesMelville/status/1592061636034052097

[7]   C. Gifford op. cit., and F. Panizza, *Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, in "Populism and the Mirror of Democracy", Verso, 2005, p. 3.

[8]   The conception of discourse and discursive formations applied in this article is developed from Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). See Section 2 for more detailed elaboration.

[9]   C. Gifford, op. cit.

internal discursive antagonism. Thus lockdown sceptical positions ranged from the moderate parliamentary pressure of the COVID Recovery Group (CRG) formed by Conservative Brexiteers who deliberately echoed the acronym of the hard-Brexit European Research Group (ERG) and focused on legislation, legislative tools and government policies,[10] through O'Neill's attack on the political class identified as seeking to reverse the populist Brexit and incarcerate 'the people' during the lockdowns,[11] and Lord Sumption's scathing critique of the lockdown measures as the UK Government's assault on liberal democracy,[12] to the Great Reset theorists such as Delingpole and the Patriotic Alternative, who framed COVID-19 as just one stage of 'a globalist coup' aimed at controlling and dispossessing the majority of the (English) population.[13] At the same time, more moderate forms of lockdown scepticism distinguished themselves from the 'conspiracy theory' extremists by acknowledging that COVID-19 posed a serious threat and rejecting COVID-19 denialism.[14]

From December 2020, the COVID-19 vaccination programme and mandates triggered further splits in UK lockdown scepticism and ultimately led to a decisive mutation: while many lockdown sceptics (most notably Conservative MPs) hailed the vaccines as the quickest escape from lockdown, sceptics shifted the focus of their opposition to the vaccines and the associated policies. With the lifting of lockdown and restrictions in first half of 2021, UK lockdown scepticism at first focused on the overly-cautious roadmap out of lockdown, but then inevitably became a retrospective discourse – focused on the harm that had been caused by lockdowns.[15] Pundits and activists who had attracted followers and media attention during the lockdowns refocused on the vaccines to maintain their relevance and urgency.[16] As with Euroscepticism and

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[10]   M. Harper, *Lockdowns cost lives – we need a different strategy to fight Covid-19*, "The Telegraph", November 10 2020.

[11]   B. O'Neill B, *Unlock the people*, "Spiked", May 1 2020.

[12]   J. Sumption, *The simple truth is that lockdowns do not work*, "The Telegraph", December 19 2020; *Liberal democracy will be the biggest casualty of this pandemic*, "The Telegraph", February 15 2021.

[13]   See e.g. J. Delingpole, *Lockdown Britain steps closer towards totalitarianism*, "Breitbart", November 4, 2020; *The green agenda is the great reset*, "Breitbart", November 24 2020; M. Haynes, *Is the Coronavirus 'pandemic' an excuse for the great reset?*, "Patriotic Alternative", December 22 2020.

[14]   See e.g. B. O'Neill, *Don't you dare call us 'Covid deniers'*, "Spiked", January 27 2021.

[15]   B. O'Neill B, *The problem with Boris's slow march to freedom*, "Spiked". February 23 2021, D. Hannan, *It was lonely opposing the first lockdown, but the day will come when no one remembers backing it*, "The Telegraph", February 05 2022.

[16]   Perhaps the best example is the broadcaster Neil Oliver, who made regular appearances on Mike Graham's talkRadio show during lockdown, from his home in Scotland, and was subsequently given his on show in the GB News studio in 2022. See: *Neil Oliver warns 'winter is coming' as the coronavirus pandemic enters 'the long dark of winter'*, "talkRadio" YouTube, September 30 2020, https://youtu.be/d7AO85QLGV0 (accessed 22.11.2021); "Maajid Nawaz exclusive interview

lockdown scepticism, opposition to the vaccines was expressed in a wide spectrum of positions, ranging from neutral or positive attitudes to the vaccines themselves but opposition to the mandates and vaccine passports (which drew on arguments for bodily autonomy and civil liberties),[17] through soft vaccine scepticism (which questioned the safety of rolling out an 'experimental therapy'),[18] to hard vaccine scepticism (which, for example, depicted the vaccines and mandates as part of a nefarious globalist plot to control and eliminate the majority of the world population).[19]

Needless to say, UK lockdown scepticism was not an isolated national discourse – from the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 UK-based authors, broadcasters and publications interacted with anti-lockdown positions articulated in the US and Europe. Analysis of this interaction lies outside the scope of the present article. For now, it will suffice to make a few points. Firstly, with the almost synchronised rollout of the vaccines in Europe and North America, which contrasted with the previously divergent lockdown policies, opposition to the vaccine mandates and vaccine scepticism became more global discursive phenomena, reaching a peak in the support for the Canadian truckers' protest of January 22-February 23 2022. The discursive enemy was redefined as the collusion between governments, big pharma, tech companies, the WEF etc. that aimed to curtail fundamental freedoms (speech, bodily autonomy, movement, employment rights). Secondly, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, COVID-19, vaccines and the protests abruptly ceased to be the primary concern of the mainstream media. Predictably, the harder edges of vaccine scepticism immediately refocused their attention on Ukraine and President Zelensky. The positions adopted in North American sceptical discourses are consistent with UK scepticism: conservative lockdown critics (e.g. Sohrab Ahmari[20]) and vaccine sceptics (e.g. Jordan Peterson, Tucker Carlson, Rand

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with Neil Oliver Live on GB News about vaccine mandates", February 19 2022, https://youtu.be/NSEsa7l6Lk4 (accessed 22.11.2022).

[17]   See, e.g. K. Kissin, *Why Don't They Believe Us?*, "Tablet", August 11 2021, and his Tweet of October 12 2022, "We told you the vaccine shouldn't be mandated. We told you vaccine passports are wrong and immoral. We told you threatening to sack healthcare staff was wrong and likely to backfire", https://twitter.com/konstantinkisin/status/1580105710834442240 (accessed 21.11.2022).

[18]   See e.g. W. Jones, *The Great Betrayal*, "The Daily Sceptic", July 21 2021, https://dailysceptic.org/2021/07/21/the-great-betrayal/ (accessed 21.11.2022).

[19]   J. Delingpole, *Compulsory vaccine totalitarianism – No longer a crazy conspiracy theory...*, "Breitbart", December 3 2020; M. Yeadon and J. Delingpole, *Dr Mike Yeadon. The Delingpod*, The James Delingpole Podcast. April 02 2021, https://delingpole.podbean.com/e/dr-mike-yeadon-1617215402/ (accessed November 15 2021).

[20]   *Sohrab Ahmari's anti-lockdown position: Lockdown is a class war by proxy*, "Spiked", July 27 2021; On Zelensky: "I can't but respect Zelensky's sheer hustle: If I were in his place and trying to

Paul, Matt Walsh [21]) have also articulated various degrees of scepticism or outright opposition with regard to Ukraine and Zelensky.

Whilst bearing these broader international alignments and later developments in mind, the present article is a preliminary attempt, firstly, to identify the discursive correlations between the various strains of UK Euroscepticism, lockdown scepticism, and vaccine scepticism – in terms of argument articulation and media distribution; and secondly, to consider the factors involved in the mutation and splintering of discourses, and thirdly, to consider the contemporary meaning of 'scepticism'. As a work of discourse analysis, the article attempts, at this stage, to be descriptive rather than evaluative.

2. Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of the subsequent analyses, discourse is primarily understood, following Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, as an articulatory practice that creates a meaning-system through "a differential and structured system of positions".[22] Subjects produce texts whose meaning is constructed differentially and relationally, through the adoption of positions that are defined in opposition to other discourses and their representatives. If a discourse is established in the social field, subjects can draw on this system of consolidated meanings and relational identities to construct new subject positions, employ tactics and strategies, and convey messages concerning social practices.

In Laclau and Mouffe's conception, discourses are necessarily grounded in antagonism. Collective identities are discursive constructs formed relationally through the creation of a 'we' defined in opposition to a 'they'; and since antagonism is assumed to be an "ineradicable" dimension of social life, collective identities tend

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internationalize an intra-Slav conflict, I'd do PR exactly the same way. And he's VERY good," March 26 2022, https://twitter.com/SohrabAhmari/status/1507708581772238851 (accessed 21.11.2022); for a more nuanced take on the American and European response to Putin's invasion: *The Return of Liberal Nationalism*, "Compact", May 12 2022.

    [21]   See e.g. T. Carlson, *Tucker: We are at war with Russia,* "Fox News YouTube"*,* March 8 2020, *Why are we still funding this?*, "Fox News YouTube", July 28 2022; J. Peterson, *Article: Russia Vs. Ukraine Or Civil War In The West?,* "Jordan B. Peterson YouTube", July 10 2022; M. Walsh on Twitter: "Zelensky is one of the most dangerous psychopaths on the planet right now. He is determined to start another world war", November 12 2022 (https://twitter.com/mattwalshblog/status/1592879821771616257).

    [22]   E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, 1985, op. cit., p.105.

to be formed through differentially demarcating enemies.[23] Nations, classes, social groups, political parties and movements, etc. are thus collective formations and identities that are dynamically and continually constructed in the social field, where meaning is constantly contested and discourses "attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences".[24] When people articulate positions from within a discourse, they inevitably participate in a "discursive struggle".[25]

In Laclau and Mouffe's monistic conception, which eschews the Foucauldian distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic practices,[26] discourse is not limited to linguistic communication: the system of meanings constituted by a discourse has a material reality that is disseminated through the social field,[27] and non-articulatory social practices that involve meaning systems can be described as discursive practices. The meanings produced and disseminated by competing systems, and the practices they endorse or criticise, are subject to incessant contestation. Thus, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the rituals associated with hand sanitisers, social distancing and mask-wearing, and the significance of phenomena like the SARS-CoV-2 virus, masks, ventilators and vaccines, were continually contested by competing discourses, and by different strains within discourses. In other words, certain forms of behaviour, like voting in a referendum or standing outside a shop in a socially-distanced queue, only have meaning by virtue of discourse, and the ultimate aim of certain forms of discourse is to persuade and encourage certain practices (e.g. voting in a certain way, flag-waving, compliance with restrictions, getting vaccinated, spreading vaccine hesitancy, vaccine refusal).

However, there are some aspects of this model of discourse that are no longer fit for purpose. The conceptions put forward by Foucault in the 1970s and 1980s tend to depict discourse as a political "technology of power" used by nations states and the neoliberal military-industrial complex to subjugate and control life (individual bodies and the human species);[28] while Laclau and Mouffe's conception suggests discourses are articulated by formations that make a range of (intersecting) positions available to subjects, which thereby constitute their identities. In both cases, the emphasis is on how discursive formations construct, control and position subjects, whereas the agency of those on the receiving end of discourse is de-emphasised.

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[23]   C. Mouffe, *On the Political*, Routledge, 2005, p. 1-7, 15.
[24]   E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, 1985, op. cit., p. 112.
[25]   M. Jorgensen and L.J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and* Method, Sage Publications, 2002, p. 6.
[26]   M. Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, Editions Gallimard, 1969.
[27]   E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, 1985, op. cit., p. 108.
[28]   M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, "Picador", 1997, p. 239-264.

This imbalance in agency was captured in Jacques Derrida's hauntological analyses of the violent dissymmetry in the mass media's control of public opinion and the public space in the late 1980s/early 1990s.[29] Any hope that the daily rhythm set by the press would give way to a new day and a more balanced public space, tantalisingly hinted at in *Call It a Day for Democracy* (1989), was quashed by the gloomy diagnosis and prognosis of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1993), which described the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of cyberspace as part and parcel of a more sinister reassertion of control: the techno-economic power of neoliberal capitalism "installing an unprecedented form of hegemony".[30]

However, since the mid-1990s, a combination of technological innovation and geopolitical developments have led to a structural transformation of the public sphere comparable to the impact of the printing press during the Renaissance and Reformation, and the literacy explosion in 18th and 19th century Europe.[31] The internet, personal communication technology and the rise of decentralised social media have fundamentally transformed the production and control of information, allowing the public to become actively involved in the production of discourse. Yochai Benkler, Clay Shirky and Martin Gurri have argued – with varying degrees of optimism – that the arrival of the networked public sphere has fundamentally shifted the balance in favour of 'the public'.[32] The disruptive challenge of the new media platforms and channels (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc.) has led to the devaluation of professional journalism and the collapse of expert authority, with the corresponding rise of user-generated content, amateur/citizen journalism, and the increasing ability of ordinary people to access data in order to conduct and disseminate their 'own research'.

This tectonic shift in the field of discourse production necessitates reconsidering the assumptions, focus and tools of discourse analysis. The Foucauldian model

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[29]   J. Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, "Indiana University Press", 1992; *Specters of Marx*, Routledge, 1994.

[30]   Ibidem, 1994, p. 63.

[31]   Of course, the classic account of a revolution in the production and consumption of media that led to structural transformation was J. Habermas's 1962 *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, 1989.

[32]   Y. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press, 2006; "A Political Economy of the Origins of Asymmetric Propaganda in American Media", In: W. Bennett & S. Livingston (Eds.), *The Disinformation Age: Politics, Technology, and Disruptive Communication in the United States*, Cambridge University Press 2020 pp. 43-66; C. Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The power of organizing without organizations*, Penguin Books, 2009; M. Gurri, *The Revolt of the Public and the Crisis of Authority in the New Millennium*, Stripe Press, 2018.

of one-way discourse transmission and control of subjects has to give way to a more interactive model wherein 'ordinary', 'amateur' and 'anonymous' people are actively involved in the production of discourse; Laclau and Mouffe's model of identity construction and identification with subject positions has to allow for the interactive co-constitution of identities; and Derrida's model of neoliberal hegemonic discourse – monopolistically produced, disseminated and controlled through a techno-economic alliance between the political, academic and media powers – has to broaden its scope to consider the ongoing challenge posed to this hegemony by the multi-directional onslaught of rival discourses, such as nationalist-populism and various forms of oppositional scepticism.

Between 1992 and 2009 Norman Fairclough and Teun A. Van Dijk developed approaches to discourse analysis which emphasise the specific social contexts in which discourse is produced, distributed and consumed.[33] Since then, with the explosion of independent content creation (blogs, podcasts, video sharing, social media feeds) and entirely new functionalities for interaction and distribution (liking, commenting, resharing), the passive consumer of media has been transformed into an active redistribution node, a commenting and evaluating consumer, as well as a peer or rival producer. The recently defined phenomenon of 'audience capture', i.e. when authors and broadcasters tell their audience what they want to hear and adopt increasingly extreme positions to match the expectations of their followers, provides an illustration of how contemporary audiences have transformed into 'prosumers' that actively contribute to and shape the discourse they consume.[34]

At the same time, however, while content creators and their interactive audiences exercise their agency to co-articulate positions and co-construct identities, there are nevertheless discursive mechanisms and determinants that lie outside the scope of this agency, such the constraints associated with the place and mode of articulation. For instance, a commentator writing a Eurosceptical or anti-lockdown piece in "The Telegraph" was constrained by the norms of polite discourse when framing the enemy, and, due to payment and the institutional shield provided by the newspaper, was less susceptible to audience capture than an independent YouTuber, columnist or podcaster who relied on subscriptions, ads and clicks to make a living.

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[33] N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change,* "Polity Press", 1992; T.A. Van Dijk *Society and Discourse*, "Cambridge University Press", 2009.

[34] For an account and examples of audience capture, see J. Howard, *Audience Capture: When COVID Influencers Follow Their Followers*, October 21 2022, https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/audience-capture-when-doctors-follow-their-followers/ (accessed 24.11.2022).

In turn, increased audience agency, combined with the decentralised distribution of relatively extreme or radical positions through independent channels, also exerted pressure on the mainstream/legacy media, and ultimately reframed and reshaped the hegemonic positions articulated through the media and government power complex. The splitting of sceptical discourses into softer, mainstream-friendly positions vs. harder positions beyond mainstream respectability served to make the softer strain appear as a reasonable alternative to both the consensus and the harder extremes, thus facilitating the gradual shift from 'lunatic fringe' to acceptable alternative, and ultimately to consensus capture.

British Euroscepticism and UK lockdown scepticism initially emerged as fringe discourses and positions, predominantly articulated through established legacy media publications (e.g. "The Telegraph", *The Spectator*), yet in time both discourses pulled the mainstream towards their position and presented an increasingly acceptable challenge to the consensus. With the second wave of Euroscepticism, this process took decades – from Thatcher's 1989 Bruges speech to the 2016 Brexit referendum and Johnson's 2019 election victory, while UK lockdown scepticism moved from a fringe journalistic position to a position articulated by MPs and Lords within a matter of months, and it is likely that an anti-lockdown position will be retrospectively installed as the post-pandemic consensus within three years of the pandemic's outbreak.[35] At the same time, while UKIP's explicitly anti-immigration Euroscepticism staked out a position to the right of the Conservative Party and destabilised the British party system, the articulation of harder and unpalatable forms of lockdown scepticism and vaccine scepticism on social media and more independent media channels further destabilised the media field and loosened the already-weakened grip of the legacy media.

To draw on the conceptual framework of Pierre Bourdieu, the COVID-19 lockdowns and vaccines appeared in a pre-structured field of cultural production that was already structured along lines of entrenched polarisation and bitter antagonism, in which the authority of experts – scientists, politicians and professional journalists – had already been steadily undermined. From this perspective, sceptical and populist discourses can be described as heretical forms of cultural production that challenge and seek to displace the dominant discourses and modes of cultural production.[36] In response, the mainstream consensus responds by vilifying the

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[35]   See, for example, D. Hannan, *It was lonely opposing the first lockdown, but the day will come when no one remembers backing it*, "The Telegraph", February 05 2022; J. Sumption, *We're all now paying the terrible price for lockdown*, "The Telegraph", November 18 2022; E. Oster, *Let's declare a pandemic amnesty*, "The Atlantic", October 31 2022.

[36]   P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, "Columbia University Press", 1983.

representatives of sceptical positions, presenting them as a threat to society, and calling for regulation and censorship (of specific content creators and the general mode of cultural production – i.e. unregulated, decentralised social and independent media).[37] Bourdieu's conception of heretical discourse and modes of production, and his image of culture as a battlefield in which agents compete for various forms of capital, seems to be capable of accounting for problematic phenomena such as increased audience agency and intra-discursive struggles.

In terms of research material, it is necessary to mention that although Twitter is perhaps the main channel through which the various strains of scepticism were – and continue to be – disseminated, unfortunately many tweets and threads are now inaccessible, due to deletions (often automated). Furthermore, due to the Twitter's aggressive censorship of 'vaccine misinformation'[38], alternative platforms (e.g. Telegram) became the preferred channels for the more radical strains of vaccine scepticism, and many posts and accounts were anonymous and locked. For these reasons, the research material is generally drawn from newspaper articles, blog posts, podcasts and videos that remain accessible on the internet and that can be attributed to clearly identifiable authors.

3. British Euroscepticism

3.1. First wave opposition: cross-party rebellion

> The prime motive of the hostility is not economic; it is not the fear either of more intense competition or of higher food prices and consequently higher cost of living, though both these are voiced. The motive is political. It is repugnance or incredulity towards the possibility of being politically integrated with continental Western Europe. Enoch Powell, 12 February 1971.[39]

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[37] For example, N. O'Brien, *I'd love to ignore 'Covid sceptics' and their tall tales. But they make a splash and have no shame*, "The Guardian", January 17 2021; G. Monbiot, *Covid lies cost lives – we have a duty to clamp down on them*, "The Guardian", January 27 2021; O. Jones, *Dangerous, shameless and wrong – and why they can't get away with it* "Owen Jones" YouTube. February 10 2021, available at: https://youtu.be/ffpiV1NNUEA.

[38] Twitter Safety, "COVID-19: Our approach to misleading vaccine information" available at: https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/covid19-vaccine.html (accessed May 7 2021).

[39] E. Powell, *Britain and Europe*, in: *The Eurosceptical Reader*, ed. M. Holmes, Palgrave, 1996, p. 80.

> Britain's continuing membership of the Community would mean the end of Britain as a completely self-governing nation and the end of our democratically elected Parliament as the supreme law-making body in the United Kingdom. Tony Benn, 29 December 1974.

If British Euroscepticism is defined as a "distinctively British national discourse rooted in opposition to European integration",[40] then the two above statements clearly illustrate that, from the outset, the issue of political integration with European Community cut across the traditional oppositions of the British parliamentary system and united ideological enemies against a new enemy. It was the 'right wing' anti-Common Market Conservatives Neil Marten and Enoch Powell who called for a consultative referendum after the UK acceded to the EEC under the Conservative government in 1972, but it was hard 'left wing' EEC-sceptics, such as Tony Benn and Michael Foot, who saw the EEC as an obstacle to socialist policies, that supported the 'No campaign' during the 1975 European Communities membership referendum.[41] Thus the two edges of the political spectrum – radical free-market conservatism and hard-left socialism – were united in their opposition to the EEC and in their defence of national and parliamentary sovereignty.

Gifford described the British political class embarking on the path of European integration in response to a post-imperial crisis involving weakened geopolitical standing, economic decline, and failed modernisation. Integration with the European Community was viewed as a solution to these multi-dimensional ills: "It was a liberal strategy of economic modernisation aimed at improving the competitiveness of the British economy by exposing it to the market forces of a European common market".[42] The fundamental weakness of this strategy was that it focused on the benefits of economic integration while postponing any serious consideration of the inevitable political integration which would come further down the road. As can be seen in the quotes above, both Powell and Benn zeroed in on the implications of political integration for British – or in Powell's case, English – sovereignty. The emergence of Euroscepticism as a national discourse was thus inseparable from the construction of the European Community as the enemy of British/English national sovereignty. As Britain transitioned from an imperial state to a nation state, Eurosceptic discourse seized upon Europe as the enemy against which a new

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[40] C. Gifford, op. cit., p. 2.
[41] A. Glencross, Why the UK Voted for Brexit, Palgrave, 2016, M. Westlake, *The Increasing Inevitability of That Referendum*, in: *Brexit Sociological Responses*, ed. W. Outhwaite, Anthem Press, 2017 pp 3-18.
[42] C. Gifford, op. cit., p. 52.

Britain could be redefined: "'Europe' was re-imagined by Eurosceptic forces as the 'other' of British political identity and interests. It was symbolically constituted as a threat to Britain's exceptional social and political development".[43]

According to Gifford, the pro-European consensus formed by the Conservatives and Labour during the 1975 European Communities membership referendum managed to succeed by emphasizing the benefits of economic integration (in the midst of stagnation and crisis) and downgrading the issue of political integration to a "secondary discourse".[44] The incoherent and divergent positions on political integration held by pro-European politicians escaped analysis and were kicked down the road to the second wave of integration in the 1990s. With the success of Edward Heath's pro-European approach and Margaret Thatcher's free market vision of the Single Market, after the 1975 referendum and into the 1980s the Eurosceptic position of opposition to the EC was maintained by the Labour Party and the left. For example, the 1983 Labour Party Election Manifesto pledged to withdraw from the EEC for the sake of British economic, industrial and political interests.[45]

4.2. Second wave opposition: intra-party rebellion

> My first guiding principle is this: willing and active cooperation between independent sovereign states is the best way to build a successful European Community. [...] To try to suppress nationhood and concentrate power at the centre of a European conglomerate would be highly damaging and would jeopardise the objectives we seek to achieve. Margaret Thatcher, The Bruges Speech, 20 September 1988.

Thatcher's 'Bruges speech' reactivated the theme of a European threat to British national sovereignty in response to Jacques Delors' project of monetary, political and social union (which had been asserted in opposition to Thatcher's neoliberal free market vision of the Single Market). Thatcher's speech established a set of

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[43]   Ibidem, p. 11, see also p. 10.

[44]   Ibidem, p. 58.

[45]   1983 Labour Party Manifesto: "But the European Economic Community, which does not even include the whole of Western Europe, was never devised to suit us, and our experience as a member of it has made it more difficult for us to deal with our economic and industrial problems... We are not 'withdrawing from Europe'. We are seeking to extricate ourselves from the Treaty of Rome and other Community treaties which place political burdens on Britain", labour-party.org.uk. Available at: http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1983/1983-labour-manifesto.shtml (accessed February 3 2021).

evaluative binary oppositions which would come to structure Eurosceptic discourse right through to the present day: distinct national customs, traditions and identities vs. the Federalist European super-state; freedom, initiative and enterprise vs. regulation and centralisation; practicality vs. intellectual abstraction; deregulated markets vs. inefficiency, bureaucracy, government intervention and protectionism; free movement of goods vs. free movement of immigrants.[46]

The position of the Bruges Speech can be classed as 'Soft Eurosceptic'[47]: it did not question or reject membership of the EC (as the Labour Manifesto of 1984 had), but instead opposed the federalist trajectory and philosophy that was perceived to be emerging within the Community and gaining dominance. The speech initiated decades of conflict within the Conservative Party over Europe, between the 'Europhiles'[48], Soft Eurosceptics and Hard Eurosceptics, which continues to divide the party today (i.e. November 2022).[49] A detailed account of this conflict and discursive struggle lies outside the scope of the present study, so a few key points will be highlighted that have particular relevance for later discursive developments.

Firstly, the increasingly Hard Eurosceptic rebellion within the Conservative Party, which positioned Thatcher as a victim of Europhile betrayal, led to the construction of two enemies: the enemy at home (the Conservative Europhiles, the pro-European cross-party consensus), and the enemy abroad (Delors, Maastricht, Brussels, the EU etc.). The informal organization of the Conservative Maastricht Rebels in the 1990s led to the emergence of factional Hard Eurosceptic groups and think-tanks (the European Research Group, the Bruges Group) and ultimately to the destabilising impact of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which simultaneously attacked the Conservatives and Brussels. A central, unifying demand of all these groups and parties, from the Maastricht Treaty onwards, was that a referendum should be held on European integration, and ultimately on EU membership.[50]

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[46]   M. Thatcher, *Speech to the College of Europe* ("The Bruges Speech"). Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 20 September 1988, available at: https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332 (accessed May 7 2021).

[47]   A. Szczerbiak and P. Taggart, "Introduction: Opposing Europe? The Politics of Eurocentrism in Europe, in Opposing Europe?", *The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism,* Volume 1, *Case Studies and Country Surveys*, 2008, p. 8.

[48]   In her autobiography, Thatcher consistently uses the term "the timorous Europhiles in the Party" to describe the pro-European faction. M. Thatcher, *The Autobiography*, "Harper Press", 1995, Chapter 36.

[49]   See e.g. the Twitter feed of The Bruges Group: https://twitter.com/BrugesGroup

[50]   A. Glencross, 2016, op. cit. p. 9-11; M. Westlake 2017, op. cit., p.8-10; S. Knight, *The man who brought you Brexit*, "The Guardian", September 29 2016.

Secondly, in the late 1980s, the UK right-wing press began to espouse a strident form of nationalist Euroscepticism. Boris Johnson was "The Telegraph's" Brussels correspondent from 1989-1995, and began a tradition of exaggerated reporting on European regulations. Brussels was cast as the enemy to be resisted, best exemplified by *The Sun's* 'Up Yours Delors' frontpage from November 1990 – the same year that *The Sun* also called for a referendum on Europe.[51] Henceforth, any government negotiations with Brussels would have to contend with consistent opposition from *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Express* and "The Telegraph", with editors and columnists setting the news agenda and seeking to shape the public perception of European integration.[52]

Aleks Szczebiak and Paul Taggart have argued that, as a politics of opposition to the EU and European integration, 'Hard Euroscepticism' tends to be articulated from the periphery of party systems.[53] Gifford subsequently highlighted systemic characteristics of the British political system that made it particularly susceptible to pressure from the Eurosceptic fringes: while countries with coalitions and power-sharing governments have managed to suppress or filter out Hard Eurosceptic positions, countries where governments operate in a system of one party rule, like Britain, "have to give greater consideration to backbench Eurosceptic opinion than PR systems that tend to produce broad centrist governments".[54]

One of the main reasons that Conservative MPs articulated increasingly Hard Eurosceptic positions was the external pressure applied by UKIP to both the British parliamentary system and the European Parliament (e.g. UK MEPS elected in 2014: Conservative 19, Labour 20, UKIP 24[55]). The United Kingdom Independence Party originated from the right wing of the Conservative Party and was founded with the sole objective of bringing about the UK's withdrawal from the EU.[56] By contesting Conservative seats, this external rebellion applied continual pressure

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[51]   O. Daddow, *The UK media, euroscepticism and the UK referendum on EU membership*, "The UK in a Changing Europe", February 29 2016; S. Hinde, *Brexit and the media*, Hermès, "La Revue", 2017, 1 (77): 80-86.

[52]   F. Zappettini, *From Euroscepticism to outright populism: the evolution of British tabloids*, "LSE Brexit", 2019.

[53]   A. Szczerbiak and P. Taggart, *Opposing Europe, Party Systems and Opposition to the Union, the Euro and Europeanisation*, "Sussex European Institute Working Paper" No. 36, University of Sussex, 2000, p. 5; 2008, op. cit., p. 7.

[54]   C. Gifford, 2008, op. cit., p. 6-7.

[55]   R. Cracknell, *European Parliament elections: How has the UK voted in the past?*, "House of Commons Library", 21 May 2019.

[56]   R. Hayton, *The UK Independence Party and the Politics of Englishness*, "Political Studies Review", 2016, 14(3): 400-410.

to Conservative MPs – both when they were the Opposition to the New Labour government (1997-2010) and in power with the Cameron-Clegg coalition (2010-2015) – and intensified the intra-party rebellion. The threat was also exploited by Eurosceptic Conservative MPs and donors, for example by strategic defections (Knight 2016) (Shipman 2016).[57]

Thus, while the rise of the Hard Eurosceptic position from a peripheral and 'unthinkable' backbench position to the central, divisive and all-encompassing issue in 2014-2016 and beyond can be attributed to numerous factors, such as: the characteristics of the British party system, the arrival of migrants from the new EU Member States of Central and Eastern Europe after 2004 and 2007, the austerity policies adopted after the 2008 financial crisis, and the EU's notorious intransigence with regard to its integration program. However, with these factors borne in mind, this article argues that the nature of the sceptical discourses disseminated by the UK legacy media, and increasingly through social media, played a crucial role. In particular, the mechanisms of intra-discursive splitting and the construction of multi-faceted enemies contributed to the success of Eurosceptical discourse.

The 2016 Brexit referendum involved two critical splits and antagonisms: between the Leave and Remain camps (across the political spectrum, but also within the Conservative Party), and then between the official Vote Leave campaign and the Leave.EU campaign. The former was mainly associated with Conservative 'paleosceptics' and a new generation of activists and strategists, chiefly Daniel Hannan and Dominic Cummings; while the latter was driven by UKIP's Nigel Farage and Arron Banks. This double split entailed that at the start of the referendum campaign two distinct and ostensibly opposed forms of Hard Euroscepticism were articulated: the liberal, free market Euroscepticism of Vote Leave, grounded in Daniel Hannan's Thatcherite arguments for parliamentary sovereignty, democracy, free trade and deregulation;[58] and the pseudo-populist[59] Euroscepticism advocated by Leave.EU, based on Farage's core anti-immigration message.

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[57]   T. Shipman, *All Out War*. Harper Collins, 2016; S. Knight, 2016, op. cit.

[58]   D. Hannan, *Why Vote Leave*, Head of Zeus, 2016.

[59]   Farage's populism can be described as 'pseudo-populism' because it draws on anti-immigrant sentiment but is grounded in free-market liberalism, as his support of Liz Truss's premiership clearly illustrated. As John Gray has highlighted, the working-class communities that voted for Brexit wanted a strong state that would protect them from the markets, rather than a Singapore-on-the-Thames style Brexit. See *John Gray Part I: Revenge of the technocrats*, "Unherd", 27 October 2022.

4.3. Constructing the enemy

The discursive construction of enemies became increasingly extreme in the run-up to the 2016 referendum. Piotr Cap has convincingly demonstrated that between 2013 and 2016 Farage's rhetoric, while being consistently grounded in an 'Us vs Them' distinction that emphasized British (or English) exceptionalism, incrementally broadened the attack on 'the other'. His speeches of 2013-14 cast 'them' as the institutions of the EU, and immigrants from Bulgaria and Romania;[60] while in 2016 the focus shifted to immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa, characterised as "Muslim criminals" (Cap 2019).[61]

In addition to constructing a unique liberty-loving British subject ("We think differently. We behave differently") in opposition to the deceptive 'they' of the European Union ("They lied to us") and opportunist immigrants ("I'd come here myself if I was in their position"), Farage also constructed both the narrow subject of UKIP party members and the broader subject of the "Normal, decent people" of Britain.[62] Crucially, this identity was defined in opposition to "the establishment", which had two main faces: "the London commentariat" and "the cardboard cut-out careerists in Westminster".[63] Hence the UKIP discursive war was waged on two fronts: against external enemies (the EU and immigrants) and an internal enemy (the London-centric political-media establishment).

In the early phases of the campaign, Vote Leave sought to distinguish its message from Farage's focus on immigration. For instance, there are scant references to immigration in Hannan's *Why Vote Leave*, and the author tended to avoid the issue.[64] However, as the EU referendum drew nearer, Vote Leave strategically incorporated UKIP talking points into its media messaging. The prime example of this was Boris Johnson's speech of 9 May 2016, which positioned immigration control as the number one issue and obliquely referred to Cameron's broken promises:[65]

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[60]   N. Farage, 2013 Speech to UKIP Conference. *UKPOL.CO.UK.* September 19 2013; Nigel Farage keynote speech, UKIP 2014 spring conference, *YouTube*. February 28 2014; *The main parties don't listen to the working classes*, "Evening Standard", March 10 2014.

[61]   P. Cap P: *'Britain is full to Bursting Point', Immigration themes in the Brexit discourse of the UK Independence Party*, in V. Koller, S. Kopf and M. Miglbauer M (eds) *Discourses of Brexit*, Routledge, 2019, p. 69-85.

[62]   S. Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit: How Britain Talked Its Way Out Of The European Union*, Bloomsbury, 2018.

[63]   Farage 2013, op. cit.

[64]   D. Hannan, op. cit., 2016; S. Knight, 2016, op.cit.

[65]   A. Glencross, 2016, op. cit. p. 9-10.

It is deeply corrosive of popular trust in democracy that every year UK politicians tell the public that they can cut immigration to the tens of thousands – and then find that they miss their targets by hundreds of thousands, so that we add a population the size of Newcastle every year, with all the extra and unfunded pressure that puts on the NHS and other public services. [...] we have absolutely no power to control the numbers who are coming with no job offers and no qualifications from the 28 EU countries. I am in favour of immigration; but I am also in favour of control, and of politicians taking responsibility for what is happening.[66]

By foregrounding immigration, invoking the betrayal of popular trust, and casting the EU as controlled by "European elites", Johnson and Vote Leave were briefly and opportunistically aligned with UKIP's opposition to Cameron and "the Westminster establishment".[67]

The issue of "popular trust" invoked by Johnson was also articulated and developed by Michael Gove's now-infamous assertion, made in an appearance on *Sky News*, that "people in this country have had enough of experts".[68] Gove's suggestion that the public should "trust themselves" rather than politicians or economists drew on the theme of 'Project Fear': a depiction of enemy tactics from the *Yes Scotland* 2014 independence campaign, subsequently redeployed by Brexiteers to dissuade the public from giving credence to pessimistic predictions made by economists. The 'experts' could thus be straightforwardly identified and dismissed as government-backed Remainers.

4.3. Discursive victory and the aftermath…

In a nutshell, the Brexit referendum grew from "a revolt" within the Conservative Party and spread to "the country at large".[69] The dual Leave campaigns actually served to broaden the appeal of the Brexit option, since the two camps attracted

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[66]   B. Johnson, The liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave, "Vote Leave". May 9 2016. Available at: http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/boris_johnson_the_liberal_cosmopolitan_case_to_vote_leave.html (accessed May 8 2021).

[67]   This hardened Eurosceptic anti-establishment stance became most explicit when, one week before polling day, Michael Gove and Boris Johnson signed Vote Leave's *Letter to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary – Getting the facts clear on Turkey*, June 16 2016, which echoed UKIP's claim that Turkey was set to join the EU and flood the UK with immigrants, UKIP Party Political Broadcast, 3rd February 2016.

[68]   M. Gove, Michael Gove – *EU: In Or Out?*, "Sky News" YouTube, June 3 2016.

[69]   A. Glencross, 2016, op. cit., p 37.

identification from disparate demographic groups and regions. The success of the Leave campaigns can be construed as a victory in a discursive struggle: the construction of an English-national subject (normal, decent people), and the simultaneous construction of a broad, nefarious enemy (the EU, immigrants, establishment politicians, London, Westminster, media elites, experts etc.), at which a range of frustrations (e.g. with austerity measures, immigration) could be vented, ultimately proved more effective than the Remain campaign's focus on economic arguments.

Of course, the Hard Eurosceptic rebellion did not die out with the success of the Leave campaign: it eventually led to a hard-Brexit takeover of the Conservative Party; a former *Telegraph* journalist being installed as Prime Minister on the back of a 'Get Brexit Done' campaign; the UK leaving the EU on 31 January 2020, just as British people began succumbing to COVID-19 symptoms; the UK and the EU negotiating during a pandemic and concluding a trade deal days before Johnson announced the UK's third lockdown; the UK-EU 'vaccine wars' of early 2021; the fiasco of the Truss premiership; and – at the time of writing, November 2022 – Farage threatening to reactivate his Reform Party and destroy the Conservative Party if PM Rishi Sunak "betrays Brexit".[70]

In light of the subsequent emergence of lockdown scepticism, it is evident that success of Hard Euroscepticism entrenched the following phenomena as effective discursive strategies: internal party rebellion leading to increasingly vocal opposition to key government policies; the use of legacy media and new social media to articulate 'unthinkable' non-consensus positions; the use of 'Us vs. Them' binary polarities to construct enemies; scepticism aimed at the generation of doubt (e.g. mistrust of experts); and the interaction between ostensibly conflicting campaigns which were ultimately united in purpose aimed at the same outcome – influencing the social practice of voting.

5. Lockdown Scepticism

5.1. A timeline of lockdown scepticism

Subsequent sections will extract the key arguments and strategies of UK lockdown scepticism. The following selective timeline aims to structure the analysis.

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[70]   G. Davies, *Nigel Farage hints at comeback to crush Tory Brexit betrayal*, "The Telegraph", 21 November 2022.

Pre-lockdown: January-March 2020

- 31 January: the first coronavirus infections are reported in the UK.
- 19 February: Daniel Hannan's article 'Alarmism, doom-mongering, panic – and the coronavirus' appears on the *Conservative Home* website.
- 8-16 March: in response to the pandemic, European countries (e.g. Italy, France, Germany, Spain) introduce quarantines, school closures, travel restrictions etc.

The first national lockdown: March-June 2020

- 20-23 March: Boris Johnson announces the first 'stay-at-home order'.
- 20-31 March: the first anti-lockdown articles are published, by pro-Brexit/anti-EU authors in *The Spectator*, "The Telegraph", *The Mail on Sunday*, and Spiked.[71]
- 26 March: the 'Oxford Study' published as a preprint in March 2020 by Dr Sunetra Gupta (Oxford Professor, infectious disease epidemiologist) et al. suggests the UK is already close to herd immunity.[72]
- March/April: Julia-Hartley Brewer begins interviewing lockdown sceptics on talkRadio.[73]
- April 6: PM Boris Johnson is admitted to hospital with COVD-19.
- April 15: Toby Young sets up the *Lockdown Sceptics* blog/forum.[74]
- 21 May: Dr S. Gupta suggests Covid-19 is on the way out'.[75]

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[71]   E.g. B. O'Neill, *The closure of pubs makes this a dark day for Britain*, "The Spectator", 20 March 2020, *Dissent in a time of Covid*, "Spiked", 23 March 2022; P. Hitchens, *Is shutting down Britain – with unprecedented curbs on ancient liberties – REALLY the best answer?*, "The Mail on Sunday", 21 March 2020, D. Hannan, *This unprecedented curtailment of our freedom must end as soon as possible*, "The Telegraph", 28 March 2020; T. Young, *Has the government overreacted to the Coronavirus Crisis?*, "The Critic", 31 March 2020; A. Lilico, *Britain needs to have a less cowardly debate about the lockdown trade-off dilemma*, "The Telegraph", 31 March 2020.

[72]   S. Gupta, P. Klenerman and J. Lourenço et al., Fundamental principles of epidemic spread highlight the immediate need for large-scale serological surveys to assess the stage of the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic. Epub ahead of print March 26 2020.DOI: 10.1101/2020.03.24.20042291.

[73]   See e.g. *Brendan O'Neil and Julia Hartley-Brewer discuss police response to coronavirus*, talkRadio YouTube, 30 March 2020, *Coronavirus lockdown is 'Project Fear Mark 2'*, talkRadio YouTube, 29 April 2020. For Julia Hartley-Brewer's stance on Brexit, see J. Hartley-Brewer, *You don't need to trust politicians to vote for Brexit. Just trust yourself*, "The Telegraph", 22 June 2016.

[74]   T. Young, "Latest News", *Lockdown Sceptics*, April 15 2020, Available at: https://lockdownsceptics.org/2020/04/15/latest-news/

[75]   F. Sayers, S. Gupta, *Covid-19 is on the way out*, "Unherd", May 21 2020, Available at: https://unherd.com/2020/05/oxford-doubles-down-sunetra-gupta-interview/ (accessed March 6 2021).

- June: restrictions are gradually lifted.
- July 1: at this point a total of 40,781 deaths in the UK are attributed to COVID-19.[76]

Local restrictions and the Tier-system June-November 2020

- June: lockdown sceptics announce the COVID-19 pandemic is over/in retreat.[77]
- August-September: Professor Carl Heneghan, from The Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine at Oxford University, co-published a preprint that questioned the PCR test used to confirm cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection.[78]
- September-November: 'false positives' and 'casedemic' become key themes of lockdown sceptical discourse on Twitter and the Lockdown Sceptics website.[79]
- September-October: Dr Mike Yeadon, a former CSO at Pfizer, supported the false positive theory, argued the UK had already achieved herd immunity, and suggested that the UK government and its scientists were deliberately lying to the British public.[80]
- 4 October: The Great Barrington Declaration, authored by Dr Martin Kulldorff (Harvard), Dr Sunetra Gupta (Oxford), and Dr Jay Bhattacharya (Stanford). The declaration essentially recommended that a strategy of "focused

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[76] See: https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/deaths, and for other subsequent mentions of deaths.

[77] T. Young, *Day by day, the coronavirus edges ever closer to extinction. Time to get back to normal*, "The Telegraph", June 25 2020, M. Ridley, *Forget the doom and gloom. The retreat of Covid-19 is a great cause for optimism*, "The Telegraph", June 2020.

[78] J. Brassey, C. Heneghan and T. Jefferson, et al., *Viral cultures for COVID-19 infectivity assessment – a systematic review (Update 4)*, Epub ahead of print September 29 2020. DOI:10.1101/2020.08.04.20167932.

[79] C. Craig, *When is COVID-19 not COVID-19?*, "Lockdown Sceptics", 9 September 2020, available at: https://lockdownsceptics.org/when-is-covid-19-not-covid-19/ (accessed April 6 2021); *We are in a false positive pseudo-epidemic*, "Lockdown Sceptics", 17 November 2020, available at: https://lockdownsceptics.org/dr-clare-craig-false-positive-pseudo-epidemic-coronavirus-testing-pcr-lateral-flow (accessed April 6 2021).

[80] M. Yeadon. *How Likely is a Second wave?*, "Lockdown Sceptics", 7 September 2020, available at: https://lockdownsceptics.org/addressing-the-cv19-second-wave/ (accessed April 8 2021); *Lies, Damned Lies and Health Statistics – the Deadly Danger of False Positives*, "Lockdown Sceptics", 20 September 2020, available at: https://lockdownsceptics.org/lies-damned-lies-and-health-statistics-the-deadly-danger-of-false-positives/ (accessed February 25 2021); M. Yeadon and J. Delingpole, *Dr Mike Yeadon*, "The Delingpod". 22 October 2020).

protection" should be adopted, since lockdown policies and restrictions were having devastating effects.[81]

- August-November: significant anti-lockdown protests on 29 August, 19 September, 17 and 24 October, 28 November. The 24 October 'Stop the New Normal' protest, organised by the Save our Rights UK group, was attended by tens of thousands of people.[82]
- 12 October: Boris Johnson announced the three-tier approach.

The second national lockdown: November 2020

- 31 October: Boris Johnson announces the second national lockdown, following the failure of the three-tier-approach.
- 1 November: Nigel Farage announces in the Telegraph: 'We're relaunching the Brexit Party to fight this cruel and unnecessary lockdown'.[83]
- 8 November: the European Research Group (ERG) reforms as the COVID Recovery Group (CRG), led by the Brexiteer Conservative MPs Mark Harper (former Chief Whip) and Steve Baker (former Brexit Minister). The stated aim of the group was to oppose lockdowns, demanding 'a full cost-benefit analysis of restrictions on a regional basis, and an end to 'the monopoly on advice of government scientists'.[84]
- 2 December: return to the tier-system and end of national lockdown.
- 8 December: the first UK vaccination with the the Pfizer–BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.
- 19 December: Jonathan Sumption, Lord and former Supreme Court judge, attacks lockdowns in the *Telegraph*.[85]
- 20 December: Boris Johnson prohibits household mixing over Christmas due to the appearance of 'the Kent variant'
- 30 November: total number of UK deaths attributed to COVID-19: 60,618

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[81]   J. Bhattacharya, S. Gupta and M. Kulldorff, *Great Barrington Declaration*, 4 October 2020, available at: https://gbdeclaration.org

[82]   See e.g. D. Gayle, *Police disperse fourth anti-lockdown march in London*, "The Guardian", 24 October 2020.

[83]   N. Farage, *We're relaunching the Brexit Party to fight this cruel and unnecessary lockdown*, "The Telegraph", November 1 2020.

[84]   M. Harper, *Lockdowns cost lives – we need a different strategy to fight Covid-19*, "The Telegraph", 10 November 2020.

[85]   J. Sumption, *The simple truth is that lockdowns do not work*, "The Telegraph", 19 December 2020.

The third national lockdown: January-July 2021

- 5 January: England and Scotland enter strict lockdown.
- 22 January: The British government launches the controversial 'Can you look them in the eyes?' campaign, guided by the Behavioral Insights Team (or 'Nudge Unit').[86]
- January: Post-Brexit vaccine nationalism articulated by Nigel Farage ('Finally, the country is seeing the EU for what it is: nasty, vindictive and nationalistic') and Daniel Hannan ('Europhiles have finally had their eyes opened to the hideous reality of the EU').[87]
- 19 January: the total number of UK deaths attributed to COVID-19: 97,078; the 7-day average of daily deaths reaches a peak of 1,291.
- January-February: splits among lockdown sceptics – between those who support the third lockdown during the vaccine rollout (e.g. Alistair Haimes, Andrew Lilico, Christopher Snowdon) and those who maintain their scepticism throughout the third wave (e.g. Toby Young, Brendan O'Neill, Peter Hitchens).
- January-February: debate between lockdown sceptics and critics, e.g. between Christopher Snowdon and Toby Young;[88] and between Peter Hitchens and Dan Hodges (2021).[89]
- January-February: backlash against lockdown sceptics – from the Conservative MP Neil O'Brien, and from the left-wing activists Owen Jones, Paul Mason and George Monbiot.[90]

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[86] Department of Health and Social care, *New hard-hitting national TV ad urges the nation to stay at home*, GOV.UK, 22 January 2021; "Nudge Unit", Institute for Government, 11 March 2020.

[87] N. Farage, *Finally, the country is seeing the EU for what it is: nasty, vindictive and nationalistic*, "The Telegraph", January 27 2021; D. Hannan, *Europhiles have finally had their eyes opened to the hideous reality of the EU*, "The Telegraph", January 30 2021.

[88] C. Snowdon, *Rise of the Coronavirus Cranks*, "Quillette", January 16 2021; *Do lockdowns work?*, "Velvet Glove, Iron Fist", 5 February 2021; *The lockdown debate – a further reply to Toby Young*, "Velvet Glove, Iron Fist", 7 February 2021; T. Young, *The case against lockdown: A reply to Christopher Snowdon*, "Quillette", February 5 2021; *Replying to Christopher Snowdon – again!*, "Lockdown Sceptics", 7 February 2021.

[89] P. Hitchens and D. Hodges, *The great lockdown debate: Peter Hitchens vs. Dan Hodges*, "talkRadio" YouTube. February 11 2021 Available at: https://youtu.be/yjTk4djCveY (accessed May 8 2021).

[90] N. O'Brien, 2021, op. cit., "The Guardian", January 17 2021; O. Jones, op. cit., February 10 2021; G. Monbiot, op. cit. "The Guardian", January 27 2021, P. Mason, *The Covid deniers have been humiliated but they are still dangerous*, "The New Statesman", January 6 2021.

- February-March: criticism of the government's Exit Strategy, described as overly-cautious and squandering the advantages of UK's vaccine rollout,[91] including a letter from the CRG to Boris Johnson signed by 63 MPs.[92]
- February-March: criticism of Zero Covid policies and description of the UK's cautious approach as a covert Zero Covid strategy.[93]
- April-to present: retrospective assessments that question the efficacy of lockdowns[94] or that lockdown did more harm than good.[95]
- May: Laura Dodsworth's *A State of Fear: How the UK government weaponised fear during the Covid-19 pandemic* is published.
- 13 June: *GB News* launches, with regular shows, slots appearances featuring Nigel Farage and vaccine-sceptics, such as Neil Oliver, Calvin Robinson, Laura Dodsworth, Dr Aseem Malhotra, and Mark Steyn.
- 19 July 2021: most restrictions are lifted in England (but in August in Scotland and Wales); the total number of UK deaths attributed to COVID-19: 129,724.

5.2. The arguments and claims of lockdown scepticism

From the outset, lockdown scepticism drew on the tactics of the Leave campaign. In February 2020, even before the first national lockdown, in the article "Alarmism, doom-mongering, panic – and the coronavirus",[96] Daniel Hannan suggested that the new coronavirus was unlikely to be more lethal than influenza, highlighted that the WHO and Chief Medical Officer had been wrong during the H5N1 (bird flu) scare of 2005 and the swine flu outbreaks in 2009, and reminded readers that the media thrives on exaggeration and panic. Thus Hannan took two pages from the Vote

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[91]   F. Nelson, *Is the UK about to squander its vaccine miracle?*, "The Telegraph", February 18 2021; D. Hannan, *We're leading Europe on vaccinations, but we're well behind on ending the lockdown*, "The Telegraph", February 27 2021.

[92]   M. Harper and S. Baker, Letter to the Prime Minister. February 13 2021. Available at: https://twitter.com/Mark_J_Harper/status/1360713436179673099

[93]   E.g. F. Myers, *Zero Covid is an authoritarian fantasy*, "Spiked", February 15 2021; R. Dingwall, *This policy is zero Covid by another name*, "The Telegraph", February 24 2021.

[94]   S. Knapton, *Science has proved Boris Johnson wrong – vaccines are reducing deaths and cases*, "The Telegraph", April 21 2021; S. Wood, *Covid and the lockdown effect: a look at the evidence*, "The Spectator", April 14 2021.

[95]   Editorial, *Today sees the belated lockdown reckoning*, "The Telegraph", 17 November 2022.

[96]   D. Hannan, *Conservative Home*, February 2020, op.cit.

Leave playbook: 1) the attack on 'doom-mongering' media (Project Fear), and 2) undermining trust in experts.

Perhaps most importantly, Hannan acknowledged "I am not an epidemiologist, an immunologist or a pathologist". Behind this admission lies one of the key differences between Euroscepticism and lockdown scepticism: when arguing for Brexit, activist-journalists like Hannan stood on solid ground. They were able to reach back to centuries of conservative and liberal thought, draw on Roger Scruton's political-philosophical arguments against the EU,[97] appeal to an established body of Thatcherite-paleosceptic discourse, and cite their own experience of working or reporting on Brussels. But SARS-COV2 was an entirely new enemy – there were no established conservative positions on novel coronaviruses. Hence, from the outset Brexiteers who sought to protect the economy and personal liberty from this mysterious new virus found themselves having to grapple with unfamiliar scientific fields.

The key arguments and claims of lockdown scepticism can be reconstructed from the plethora of articles published between March 2020 and July 2021. Unless indicated otherwise, all the authors cited below had previously articulated anti-EU positions, and, with the exception of Hitchens, were pro-Brexit. [98] Furthermore, "The Telegraph", "The Spectator" and "Spiked", the publishers of the majority of the cited articles, had all publicly backed Brexit.[99] It should be stressed that the arguments made during the first national lockdown were continually reiterated through subsequent lockdowns and restrictions.

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[97]   R. Scruton, *How to be a Conservative*, Bloomsbury, 2014.
[98]   See e.g. B. O'Neill, *Brexit: a brilliant revolt against the political clas*, "Spiked". June 24 2016; P. Hitchens, *Like a rattlesnake, the EU can bite us long after it gets the chop*, "The Mail on Sunday", June 10 2018, *Goodbye to the European Union*, "First Things", January 31 2020; T. Young, *The political pact that could save Brexit*, "The Spectator", September 7 2019; D. Hannan D, *Why Vote Leave*, Head of Zeus, 2016, *Forget Project Fear. Be positive. Choose dynamism. Choose Brexit*, "The Telegraph", June 22 2016; A. Lilico, *Why leaving the EU could actually be to our economic advantage*, "The Telegraph", May 25 2016; M. Ridley, *The Business Case for Brexit*, "Wall Street Journal", 21 June 2016; R. Clark, *Why can't we have an amicable divorce with the EU?*, "The Spectator", 26 June 2016; F. Nelson, *With some sadness, I'll vote to Leave an undemocratic and decaying institution that stopped helping Europe some time ago*, "The Telegraph", 23 June 2016; A. Evans-Pritchard, *Brexit vote is about the supremacy of Parliament and nothing else: Why I am voting to leave the EU*, "The Telegraph", 13 June 2016; J. Delingpole, *I want my Brexit good and strong*, "The Spectator", 8 October 2016.
[99]   Telegraph, *Vote leave to benefit from a world of opportunity*, "The Telegraph", June 20 2016; The Spectator, *Out – and into the world: Why The Spectator backed Brexit*, "The Spectator", December 26 2016; Spiked, *For Europe, Against the EU*, "Spiked", June 7 2016.

March-July 2020

- **Liberty and freedom of speech are absolute values:** our liberties should not be sacrificed in the fight against COVID-19 (O'Neill) (Hitchens); there should be no restrictions on questioning and criticising lockdown, even during an emergency (O'Neill) (Young).[100]
- **Big Brother**: lockdown is a form of authoritarian tyranny; the country has been put under house arrest (O'Neill) (Hitchens)(Hannan).[101]
- **The return of Project Fear:** fear makes us statists (Hannan); the pandemic has exacerbated a pre-existing culture of fear (O'Neill); government scientists are Remainers (Young).[102]
- **The cure will be worse than the disease:** the damage caused to the economy, education, mental health, social relations and collateral deaths will be worse than the harm caused by the pandemic itself (Hannan) (Hannan) (O'Neill) (Lilico); a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted – it is possible to put an economic value on human life and assess the COVID-19 measures in terms of QALYs (quality-adjusted life years) (Hannan) (Lilico) (Young).[103]
- **Lockdowns don't work:** compare deaths in Sweden and the UK (Hannan).[104]
- **Science and the experts**: the decision to go into lockdown was based on the faulty Imperial College Model (Young); lockdown was contrary to the accepted science, the containment measures introduced prior to lockdown

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[100] B. O'Neill, *The closure of pubs makes this a dark day for Britain*, "The Spectator", March 20 2020; P. Hitchens, *Is shutting down Britain – with unprecedented curbs on ancient liberties – REALLY the best answer?*, "Daily Mail", March 21 2020; B. O'Neill, *Dissent in a time of Covid*, "Spiked", March 23 2020; T. Young, *I was 'cancelled' for criticising the lockdown – but now more than ever we must hold the government to account*, "The Telegraph", April 3 2020.

[101] B. O'Neill, *The lockdown has done untold damage to this country*, "Spiked", May 20 2020; P. Hitchens, *There's powerful evidence this Great Panic is foolish, yet our freedom is still broken and our economy crippled*, "The Mail on Sunday", March 28 2020; D. Hannan, *It's time to start loosening the lockdown*, "The Telegraph", April 11 2020.

[102] D. Hannan, *This unprecedented curtailment of our freedom must end as soon as possible*, "The Telegraph". March 28 2020; B. O'Neill, *We need an antidote to Covid hysteria*, "Spiked", May 11 2020; T. Young, *The return of Project Fear*, "The Critic", May 2020.

[103] D. Hannan, ibidem; B. O'Neill, *The lockdown is killing people, too*, "Spiked", April 16 2020; A. Lilico, *Britain needs to have a less cowardly debate about the lockdown trade-off dilemma*, "The Telegraph", March 31 2020; D. Hannan, *Coronavirus has us weighing one set of lives against another*, "Washington Examiner", March 30 2020; T. Young, *Has the government overreacted to the Coronavirus Crisis?*, "The Critic", March 31 2020.

[104] D. Hannan, *It's time to start loosening the lockdown*, "The Telegraph", April 11 2020.

were sufficient (Young); the exit strategy cannot be decided by 'the experts' alone – all of society must 'have a say' (Lilico).[105]

- **Herd immunity**: the UK is already close to herd immunity (Hannan) (Young).[106]
- **Our future liberty is at stake:** governments like to cling to emergency powers after the emergency passes (Hannan).[107]

June-December 2020

- **Focused protection and natural herd immunity** are preferable to lockdown (Farage) (Young) (Hannan).[108]
- **The first lockdown was ineffective and unnecessary, the same will apply to further lockdowns**: the first and second waves were already under control before the lockdowns were imposed (Ridley) (Young).[109]
- **Government scientists cannot be trusted, neither can PCR tests or official case numbers** (Clark) (Yeadon and Delingpole) (Young) (Yeadon).[110]
- **Lockdowns are undemocratic**: the executive branch rules by decree; the right to protest and free speech are infringed (Young).[111]

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[105] T. Young, *How convincing is Imperial College's COVID-19 model?*, "The Daily Sceptic", 8 May 2020; T. Young, op.cit. "The Critic", May 2020; A. Lilico, op.cit. "The Telegraph", March 31 2020.

[106] D. Hannan, op.cit., "The Telegraph". March 28; T. Young, op.cit. "The Critic". March 31 2020.

[107] D. Hannan, op. Cit., "The Telegraph". April 11 2020.

[108] D. Hannan, *The anti-lockdown arguments have failed. Where next for its opponents?*, "The Telegraph", October 31 2020; N. Farage, *We're relaunching the Brexit Party to fight this cruel and unnecessary lockdown*, "The Telegraph", November 1 2020; T. Young, *10 reasons why a second lockdown is a terrible idea*, "The Critic", November 2 2020.

[109] M. Ridley, *Six reasons the new lockdown is a deadly mistake*, "The Telegraph", 31 October 2020, *The second wave peaked before lockdown began*, "The Telegraph", November 7 2020; T. Young, ibidem.

[110] T. Young, *Should we be worried about the uptick in Covid cases? Almost certainly not*, "The Telegraph", September 7 2020; M. Yeadon, *Lies, Damned Lies and Health Statistics – the Deadly Danger of False Positives*, "The Daily Sceptic", September 20 2020; M. Yeadon and J. Delingpole, "Dr Mike Yeadon", *The Delingpod. The James Delingpole Podcast*, October 22 2020;R. Clark, *The problem with Downing Street's covid projections*, "The Spectator", November 2 2020.

[111] T. Young, op. cit., "The Critic", November 2 2020.

December 2020 – April 2021

Note: Jonathan Sumption criticised the Brexit referendum and Johnson's 2019 prorogation of Parliament and thus cannot be described a Eurosceptic or Brexiteer.[112]

- **Liberal democracy is under threat**: in terms of government coercion, a threshold has been crossed (Sumption); the virus has killed the liberal order (Hannan).[113]
- **The public needs to be involved in the debate on risk** (Sumption) (O'Neill).[114]
- **Lockdowns are immoral,** in terms of their impact on the young and healthy (Sumption); the government's Covid-compliance messaging is cruel and unethical (Walker).[115]
- **Vaccines and Zero Covid:** vaccines should free us from the scientists (Lilico); the vaccines are being used to justify lockdown (Sumption); the vaccine programme means Zero Covid is an authoritarian fantasy (Myers).[116]
- **The Vaccine War:** the vaccine rollout vindicates Brexit (Hannan) (Farage); the UK is wasting its vaccine advantage with its cautious route out of lockdown (Nelson) (Evans-Pritchard) (Hannan).[117]

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[112] See J. Sumption, *Brexit and the British Constitution: Reflections on the Last Three years and the Next Fifty*, "The Political Quarterly", 91(1), 107-115, January-March 2020, doi:10.1111/1467-923x.12826.

[113] J. Sumption, *Liberal democracy will be the biggest casualty of this pandemic*, "The Telegraph", February 15 2021; D. Hannan, *The Virus Has Killed the Liberal Order*, "John Locke Institute", February 23 2021.

[114] J. Sumption, *The simple truth is that lockdowns do not work*, "The Telegraph", December 19 2020; B. O'Neill, *We must never surrender to the New Normal*, "Spiked", February 4 2021, *The problem with Boris's slow march to freedom*, "Spiked", February 23 2021.

[115] J. Sumption, ibidem; C. Walker, *The Government's campaign to terrify people into compliance with Covid rules was shameless and cruel*, "The Telegraph", February 24 2021.

[116] A. Lilico, *Now we have vaccines, the Government must take back control from overly cautious scientists*, "The Telegraph" December 9 2020; J. Sumption, op. cit., "The Telegraph", February 15 2021; F. Myers, *Zero Covid is an authoritarian fantasy*, "Spiked", February 15 2021.

[117] N. Farage, *Finally, the country is seeing the EU for what it is: nasty, vindictive and nationalistic*, "The Telegraph", January 27 2021; D. Hannan, *Europhiles have finally had their eyes opened to the hideous reality of the EU*, "The Telegraph", January 30 2021; F. Nelson, *Is the UK about to squander its vaccine miracle?*, "The Telegraph", February 18 2021; A. Evans-Pritchard, *Economic and social cost of delayed reopening can no longer be justified*, "The Telegraph", February 24 2021; D. Hannan, *We're leading Europe on vaccinations, but we're well behind on ending the lockdown*, "The Telegraph", February 27 2021.

- **The Great Reset:** Covid-19 is just part of a bigger conspiracy to install a global eco-fascist medical tyranny; the vaccines are part of a plan to cull the population (Delingpole) (Mueller and Delingpole).[118]

5.3. Redefining the subject and the enemy

The core arguments shared by the various strains of lockdown scepticism all drew on the key binary oppositions and antagonisms that had been articulated and entrenched by UK Euroscepticism: both discourses constructed subjects that were threatened and controlled by various malign entities and actors.

As was previously shown, UK Soft and Hard Euroscepticism constructed a collective 'we' (the sovereign nation, the people, etc.) threatened by the control of two distinct enemies: the primary enemy of the European Community then Union, increasingly defined as the undemocratic superstate and the technocratic elite located on the Continent; and the secondary enemy at home, variously targeted as the Europhiles, the political class, Westminster, the metropolitan elite, the experts, the media classes, the London bubble, the Enemies of the People, traitors and saboteurs, etc., and accused of colluding with the EU and betraying national sovereignty, attempting to intimidate the people with Project Fear, seeking to overturn the result of the Brexit referendum, etc.

UK lockdown scepticism drew on this fundamental antagonism but redefined the subject as the individual who had been deprived of liberty, locked up, and controlled by the British State. Ironically, it was a Conservative government that was imposing the draconian restrictions: Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister who had *got Brexit done* was telling the nation *you must stay at home* and closing down the economy; and Dominic Cummings, one of the masterminds behind the Vote Leave campaign was now, as Chief Adviser to the Prime Minister, one of the masterminds behind lockdown. Eurosceptics who had spent years depicting the EU as an interfering mega-state bent on controlling individual nations were suddenly confronted with a Brexiteer cabinet using the machinery of the State to regulate how many times a day individuals could leave their home, to stop businesses from operating etc. However, just as Eurosceptic and Hard Brexit discourse identified a collection of malign actors at work behind Project Fear and the Remainer plot to overturn the

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[118] J. Delingpole, *Compulsory vaccine totalitarianism – No longer a crazy conspiracy theory...*, "Breitbart", December 3 2020, *German economist says 'Great reset will cause a crash worse than 1930s'*, "Breitbart", December 26 2020; A.P. Mueller and J. Delingpole, *Dr Antony P. Mueller*, "The Delingpod: The James Delingpole Podcast", December 24 2020.

referendum, UK lockdown scepticism identified an assortment of enemies behind lockdown. Johnson's government was depicted as not solely responsible for these policies: the Prime Minister and his cabinet had supposedly succumbed to the scaremongering of 'the Scientists' and the pressure of the pro-lockdown media. Lockdown sceptics asserted that – echoing a key Brexiteer concern – sovereignty was ceded or usurped: a cluster of actors had undue influence over the Prime Minister when he pulled the levers of the State.

Due to the core code inherited from classical liberal, neoliberal-Thatcherite and Eurosceptic conceptions of the State, all forms of lockdown scepticism were predisposed to treat any restrictions introduced by the State and its representatives as tyrannical encroachments. However, lockdown sceptics split and diverged both in their construction of the enemy to be opposed and in their representation of the subject under control. The following sections consider these divergences and the factors that determined them.

5.3.1. Redefining the enemy

Lockdown Scepticism in Westminster

Proximity to the enemy determined the intensity and the radicality of the articulated scepticism. When MPs criticised lockdown, enemies were identified diplomatically, through implication: a weak government ceded sovereignty to the scientists and their models, and buckled under pressure from the media.

During the first lockdown, Hannan charitably cast Johnson as a libertarian who reluctantly imposed lockdown under pressure from "a hectoring media campaign".[119] In the run up to and during the second and third lockdown, Conservative MPs addressed issues associated with sovereignty and control with reasoned arguments. In September 2020, Steve Baker criticized the government's use of statutory instruments to curb liberties, arguing that parliamentary approval must be given "before liberties are taken away", and putting a new spin on the Vote Leave slogan: "Parliament must take back control".[120] By February 2021, Baker was calling for a new Public Health Act to prevent government overreach: public health measures should require impact assessment by economists as well as health

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[119] D. Hannan, *It's time to start loosening the lockdown*, "The Telegraph", April 11 2020.
[120] S. Baker, *Parliament must take back control of Covid laws*, "The Telegraph", September 26 2020.

experts, and "Parliamentary approval before coming into effect".[121] In a similar vein, Mark Harper presented a point-by-point refutation of the government's lockdown strategy, again emphasizing that expert groups should be multi-disciplinary, but also arguing for greater transparency and democratic involvement: "Government should publish the models that inform policies so they can be reviewed by the public".[122]

Lockdown sceptic MPs in close proximity to the government had similar concerns to those expressed by more radical sceptics, but when they articulated them publicly, they did so tactfully, with definite pragmatic aims. Their comment pieces, Twitter feeds and radio interviews provide a clear example of how a professional role determines discourse as a social practice.[123] A backbench MP opposed to government restrictions came face-to-face with 'the enemy' in the chamber and the corridors of Westminster, and represented constituents in the public sphere, and this inevitably had an impact on the positions they articulated publicly, and on the tone they adopted. Furthermore, their critical positions were tested and refined in the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate, where the norms of respectful deliberation were still enforced.

The journalistic critique of the political class

In contrast, independent journalists who rely on donations, subscriptions and page visits for their income are free to stake out more radical and scathing positions, and to construct the enemy with more outright hostility. During the first lockdown, Brendan O'Neill and Toby Young identified the resurgence of a familiar enemy: the Remainer elite and "the return of Project Fear".[124] In *Unlock the People*, O'Neill drew a direct comparison between 2016 and 2020: where the Brexit Project Fear of 2016 had failed to cow the public, the Covid-19 Project Fear fulfilled the wildest dreams of "the pro-lockdown left", "the public-sector left", "the woke-leaning elites", "the Remainer wing of the establishment".[125]

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[121] S. Baker, *Ministers must never again be free to impose crippling restrictions without proper scrutiny*, "The Telegraph", February 14 2021.
[122] M. Harper, *Lockdowns cost lives – we need a different strategy to fight Covid-19*, "The Telegraph"*,* November 10 2020.
[123] Fairclough, 1992, ibidem, p. 63-7.
[124] T. Young, *The return of Project Fear*, "The Critic", May 2020
[125] B. O'Neill, *Unlock the people*, "Spiked"*,* May 1 2020.

As an avowed Marxist Libertarian,[126] O'Neill identifies the State as being under the control of an amorphous class that can only be caught by casting a wide net of designations: the political class, the media class, the establishment, the elites, the pro-lockdown left etc. The hegemony of this formation is said to be maintained through the intimidation, manipulation and repression of 'the public'. Thus, while Johnson's government defeated the Remainer establishment to implement the democratic, popular will of the public expressed in the Brexit vote, it was then swept up by Covid-hysteria and was unable to resist realigning with the liberal political-media class to reassert control over the public. In O'Neill's diagnosis, the hysteria and authoritarianism that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic merely intensified and exacerbated tendencies that were already developing: "the pre-Covid cultures of fear and illiberalism", which manifested in safetyism, environmental apocalypticism, and a loathing of "ordinary people".[127]

O'Neill's position is explicitly populist – he lauds Brexit Britain as "the populist rebel on the outskirts of Europe".[128] This is a demos-oriented populism that seeks to identify itself with "the ordinary working people" who have been betrayed by the Labour Party and the "middle class, urban based, liberal and cosmopolitan" left-wing intellectuals[129] Since the positions of Labour and "the soft Tory set"[130] were basically indistinguishable on the key issues of Brexit and lockdown, as were the editorial positions of "The Guardian" and "The Times", the ostensible left-right polarity of the political-media class is treated as smokescreen hiding a homogenous enemy.

Following Peter Oborne's *The Triumph of the Political Class* (2007), which identified the main divide in British public life as "no longer between the main political parties, but between the Political Class and the rest",[131] O'Neill's framing of the political class can be situated at the left edge of a broad international discursive field that has deployed this designation to construct its enemy: ranging from Farage's right-wing English-nationalist populism, through Roger Scruton's cultural-nationalist populism, to Thomas Frank's take on US democratic left-wing populism.[132] The unifying thread of all these strands is the depiction of the ruling

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[126]   B. O'Neill and D. Rubin, *What is a Marxist Libertarian?*, "The Rubin Report", 30 November 2017.

[127]   B. O'Neill, *The hibernation of democracy*, "Spiked", 23 March 2021.

[128]   B. O'Neill, *Why this feels like an unhappy St Patrick's Da*, "Spiked", March 17 2021.

[129]   P. Embery and B. O'Neill B, *Wokeness is no substitute for political campaigning*, "Spiked", December 7 2020.

[130]   B. O'Neill, *Assembly for me, but not for thee*, "Spiked", March 14 2021.

[131]   P. Oborne, *The Triumph of the Political Class*, Simon and Shuster, 2007, p.xvii.

[132]   T. Frank, *People Without Power: The War on Populism and the Fight for Democracy*, Scribe Publications, 2020; T. Frank and B. O'Neill, *We should all be populists*, "Spiked*",* September 22 2020.

class as a constellation of actors – politicians, technocrats, university academics, scientists, journalists – who are bent on maintaining their positions and safeguarding their interests at the expense of 'ordinary people', or 'the public'.[133]

O'Neill's recent emphasis on 'the public'[134] also aligns his position with the hypothesis put forward in Martin Gurri's *The Revolt of the Public* (2018), which depicts history as a Manichean conflict between the public and the elite institutions of hierarchized authority, in which the control, access to and dissemination of information are crucial factors. In Gurri's account, ostensibly disparate phenomena, such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, the London riots of 2014, Ukraine's Euromaidan, Brexit, and the Trump presidency, are all manifestations of the public's rejection of the elite establishment and experts – all triggered by the collapse of elite authority after the financial crisis of 2008 and driven by the explosive impact of personal communication technology from 2011 onwards.

Social and alternative media were crucial factors in the spread of lockdown scepticism. In contrast to the lockdown sceptics in Parliament and the House of Lords, who tended to publish in "The Telegraph", O'Neill and Young published the bulk of their content through the channels afforded by new media, on sites that operate on a voluntary contribution basis ("Spiked" and The Daily Sceptic – formerly *Lockdown Sceptics*, respectively). Furthermore, with *The Brendan O'Neill Show* and *London Calling* both authors take advantage of the long-form podcast format, which allows uncensored and uninterrupted conversation, in contrast to the time-limits, interruptions and steering that characterizes mainstream TV interviews. Many other lockdown sceptic journalists, activists and broadcasters used Facebook, Twitter and YouTube channels to bypass the mainstream media, e.g. the former Brexit MEPs Martin Daubney and Ben Habib, and the author Laura Dodsworth, via the *Unlocked* media channel, and Julia Hartley-Brewer and Mike Graham at *talkRadio* (now *talkTV*)

To sum up, this journalistic-activist critique repurposed the Manichean people vs. the elites framing from populist Eurosceptic discourse to refocus on the actors operating within or on behalf of the British state – the government, scientists, public health officials, and the mainstream media – as the malign enemy of the people/ public. In doing so, this discursive strain claimed to be aligned with a public that had been deceived, intimidated by hysteria, and put under house arrest. The primary

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[133]   M. Gurri, *The Revolt of the Public*, Stripe Press, 2018.

[134]   In *Unlock the People*, O'Neill uses the term 'the people' four times, while using the term 'the public' (or 'a public', as in 'a proper public') nineteen times, and the adjective 'public' twenty-three times. This seems to constitute a definite shift, since in his celebratory article from 24 June 2016, *Brexit: a brilliant revolt against the political class*, O'Neill used the term 'the people' six times, 'the little people' twice, while the term 'the public' was not used.

practical aim of this strain of lockdown sceptic discourse was to express dissent and opposition, and to support protests and campaigns aimed at lifting lockdown, opening up the hospitality industry, opposing masks in schools, and resisting the introduction of vaccine passports.

The 'Great Reset' theorists

The outer edge of lockdown sceptical discourse, which bled into vaccine scepticism, took Klaus Schwab's declaration of the need for a Great Reset after the Covid-19 pandemic – made at a meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in June 2020 – as proof that 'the globalist elite' were using the COVID-19 pandemic to usher in a new world order which aims to bring about "the deliberate crashing of the world economy, the crushing and destruction of small businesses, and the creation of a new cash-free society in which no one (save the technocratic elite) owns private property".[135] The use of the slogan 'Build Back Better' by both Boris Johnson and Joe Biden – identified as pro-lockdown 'Covid bedwetters' who are also enthusiastic supporters of sweeping green policies – was adduced as proof that the US and UK governments have been captured by a globalist coup bent on the destruction of Western civilization.[136]

From this end of the lockdown sceptical discursive formation, the enemy of Eurosceptic discourse, i.e. the EU and UK Remainer elite, is reconstructed more broadly as the 'globalist elite'. This designation situated lockdown policies and vaccination programmes within the broader culture wars and framed the enemy as having a far more sinister agenda: the COVID-19 pandemic provided the globalist elite with the opportunity to install an 'eco-fascist tyranny' and impose medical fascism. The pandemic is viewed as just one 'theatre' in the civilizational war: woke politics is destroying Western Culture, eco-policies and lockdowns are destroying the economy, and the purpose of vaccines is to control, divide and eliminate the population.[137] The COVID-19 lockdowns were viewed as a precedent for eco-lockdowns further down the road.[138]

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[135] J. Delingpole, *Bojo tweets praise for the great reset. Strap in everyone, 2021 is going to be a wild ride*, "Breitbart", January 1 2021.

[136] Delingpole J. (2020g), *The green agenda is the great reset*, "Breitbart", November 24 2020, *German economist says 'Great reset will cause a crash worse than 1930s'*, "Breitbart", December 26 2020; M. Haynes, *Is the Coronavirus 'pandemic' an excuse for the great reset?*, "Patriotic Alternative", 22 December 2022.

[137] A.P. Mueller and J. Delingpole, "Dr Antony P. Mueller", *The Delingpod: The James Delingpole Podcast*. 24 December 2020; J. Myles-Lea and J. Delingpole, "Jonathan Myles-Lea" *The Delingpod: The James Delingpole Podcast*. March 22 2021.

[138] J. Delingpole, *Lockdown equivalent every two years to save planet, claim 'experts'*, "Breitbart", March 5 2021.

This strain of lockdown scepticism was particularly virulent on Twitter and Telegram, and was less inclined to engaged in debate with opposing views, tending to direct abuse at more moderate lockdown sceptics (such as those who got vaccinated[139]). This strain also had more specific and radical aims in terms of the social practices it advocated. First and foremost, the aim in January-March 2021 was to dissuade people from getting vaccinated, for example through reporting negative reactions to vaccinations and celebrating examples of refusal. Other aims were similar to those espoused by moderate lockdown scepticism, e.g. dissent, protest, but with an emphasis on more overt and performative refusals and disobedience, e.g. 'Mask Non-Compliance Is a Moral Duty'.[140]

5.3.2. Reconceiving the subject

The construction of the public was a complex and fraught issue for Brexiteer lockdown sceptics, since the bold 'people' that resisted Project Fear in 2016 seemed to have simply submitted to house arrest in 2020-21.

Age was a key issue with both Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic: those most likely to vote for Brexit were over 45, and particularly over 65;[141] while those most at risk from SARS-COV2 were over 65. Furthermore, readers of "The Telegraph", the main legacy media disseminator of lockdown scepticism, are probably on average over 60.[142] Thus Brexiteer lockdown sceptics had to be careful with their tone and arguments when addressing this audience. For example, Hannan made extensive use of the inclusive 'we' to explain and bemoan the public's fearfulness, its embrace and internalization of Big Brother, and the emerging "snitch-culture": "We are thinking primevally, not rationally. Our lizard brains respond to an unfamiliar illness by wanting to shut everything out";[143] and "[...] crises of this kind make us more authoritarian. We demand the smack of firm government".[144]

In contrast to such gentle admonitions, Young used the inclusive 'we' to berate his readers: "What happened to the British people's bulldog spirit, our instinctive libertarianism? Judging from how we've reacted to the lockdown, we've become

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[139] See e.g. the replies in this Twitter thread: https://twitter.com/JuliaHB1/status/137287049388 8520193

[140] J. Delingpole, *Mask non-compliance is a moral duty*, "The Daily Sceptic", 24 October 2020.

[141] *EU referendum: The result in maps and charts*, "BBC News", June 24 2016.

[142] Our Audience, "The Telegraph", 2013, Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/01863/Digital_Media_Pack_1863797a.pdf

[143] D. Hannan, *Globalisation brought us unprecedented riches. Now we're throwing them away*, "The Telegraph", March 14 2020.

[144] D. Hannan, *It's time to start loosening the lockdown*, "The Telegraph", April 11 2020.

a nation of authoritarians. [...] It's tempting to think the feminisation of British culture has left us bereft of manly virtues".[145] In a subsequent *Telegraph* article, Young derided the notion that the UK public is complying with the lockdown out of solidarity with those most at risk: the public had simply become incapacitated by irrational fear, encouraged by a government that brought out the worst in people: "we've been infantilised by our government".[146] Young's use of English-nationalist rhetoric – "a nation of indomitable yeoman (sic)", "the rights of every freeborn Englishman", "bulldog spirit", Magna Carta, Dunkirk etc. – links his lockdown scepticism directly to Nigel Farage's pre-referendum appeals to British (i.e. English) exceptionalism and love of liberty (mentioned in **Section 4.3**). Yet, while Farage was buoyed by the conviction that the English public would cast its vote to leave the EU, Young articulated a position of despair: the public was not what he thought it was. In his reflection on the anniversary of Johnson's stay-at-home broadcast, Young assigned blame to the public: Britain's elites fell into mass hysteria, but it was the public that allowed it: "I blame that, in part, for the British public's willingness to surrender their liberty and hope they will recover their good sense once the propaganda ceases".[147]

This despairing tone can be heard in much lockdown sceptical discourse, especially as poll after poll revealed that there was overwhelming public support for the lockdowns and the draconian punishments for rule breakers. Ross Clark acknowledged that lockdown sceptic MPs and commentators were out of touch with the wider population, and in particular the pro-Brexit segment, when it came to the proposed 10-year sentences for concealing visits to 'red-list' countries: "The poll shows that support for stiff jail sentences for people lying about travelling is especially high among older, Conservative-voting, Brexit-supporting voters in socio-economic groupings C2DE, outside London"[148]

Rather than blame the public, O'Neill argued that "the elites decommissioned the public, forced us into house arrest, and insisted our role was to be passive, atomised and compliant".[149] At this point, O'Neill's argument has Althusserian overtones: asserting that the full force of the state and its ideological apparatus were brought to bear on the public, in a concerted campaign designed to induce fear and

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[145]   T. Young, *Where has the British love of liberty gone?*, "The Telegraph", April 18 2020.
[146]   T. Young, *Coronavirus has turned us into a nation of scaredy-cats*, "The Telegraph", May 9 2020.
[147]   T. Young, *The darkness and the light*, "The Daily Sceptic", 23 March 2021.
[148]   R. Clark, *Critics of the 10-year Covid jail sentence are right, but out of touch*, "The Spectator", February 11 2021.
[149]   B. O'Neill, *The hibernation of democracy*, "Spiked", March 23 2021.

hysteria. The Conservative MP Charles Walker also criticized the government's messaging during the third lockdown, highlighting the impact it was having on the public's mental health and describing it as shameless, cruel and unethical.[150] It has to be recognised that the UK government's 'Can you look them in the eyes?' campaign was particularly grim and terrifying, especially when compared with the more light-hearted German 'Be Lazy, Save Lives campaign'.[151]

Thus, in contrast to the Eurosceptic positive conceptions of the people that would take back control in the Brexit referendum, and then of the nation that did indeed express its will, lockdown scepticism characterized the people as victims at best, and, at worst, as weak and timid 'sheeple' who desired and were complicit in their own repression. One the one hand, consistently hard lockdown sceptics (Hannan, Young, O'Neill, Delingpole) viewed the restrictions *imposed* during the COVID-19 pandemic – i.e. any measures that were not a matter of individual *choice* or *responsibility* – as authoritarian interferences. On the other hand, they seemed incapable of considering people's compliance with the restrictions as motivated by genuine care, solidarity, altruism, or any kind of communitarian spirit – regardless of how weird and interfering many of these restrictions were. In other words, even if the UK government, public health officials and mainstream media sometimes behaved appallingly during the pandemic, it is conceivable that 'the people' behaved rather well, on the whole, by doing their best to protect those around them.

7. Scepticism as doubt production

In the run-up to the Brexit referendum, the Leave campaign famously dismissed the gloomy economic forecasts that constituted the basis of the Remain campaign as the tactics of Project Fear. Michael Gove's notorious 2016 assertion that "people in this country have had enough of experts", mentioned in **Section 4.2**, perhaps best sums up the Brexiteer attitude to science and expertise. However, the sceptical response to the UK government's COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions required more sophisticated strategies, since Johnson was flanked by experts in his televised announcements and the measures were performatively based on scientific models, charts and forecasts.

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[150] C. Walker, *The Government's campaign to terrify people into compliance with Covid rules was shameless and cruel*, "The Telegraph", February 24 2021.

[151] *'Be lazy, save lives,' young Germans urged in comic COVID video*, "Reuters", November 16 2020.

Since the government categorically prioritised public health over economic prosperity, evidently refusing to conduct any cost-benefit analysis in the midst of a perceived emergency, sceptics focused their opposition on the science and scientists behind the public health policies and measures. While some sceptics of a scientific-analytical bent, such as Andrew Lilico and Christopher Snowdon, eventually abandoned their sceptical positions and supported the third lockdown as the vaccines were rolled out, Toby Young stands out for his relentless questioning of the science behind the lockdowns, his indiscriminate appeals to a plethora of preprints and studies, and his efforts to undermine trust in the COVID-19 vaccines.

Aside from lockdown sceptical columns in "The Telegraph" and The Critic, his podcast with the more extreme Eurosceptic, vaccine sceptic and Ukraine sceptic James Delingpole, and an active Twitter feed, Young's main contribution to lockdown and vaccine scepticism has been through *Lockdown Sceptics* (renamed after lockdown as "The Daily Sceptic"), which he started as a blog in April 2020, but which, due to the contributions of a wide array of authors, soon evolved into a forum and database-repository. Young explains the purpose behind his sceptical site as follows:

> So the *Daily Sceptic* includes sceptical articles by disaffected journalists and academics – including citizen journalists and independent scholars – about a range of public policies that are supposedly based on science or data or evidence, where 'the Science' is being invoked as a source of unassailable authority, but which often appear to be rooted in a covert political agenda. The idea is to challenge the new powerful class of government scientists and public health officials – as well as their colleagues in universities, grant-giving trusts, large international charities, Silicon Valley and the pharmaceutical industry – that emerged as a kind of secular priesthood during the pandemic, providing not just 'scientific' advice but moral guidance, too.[152]

Although Young offers no definition of scepticism, it can be inferred he equates it with challenging the prevailing consensus. Analysis of the strategies that Young adopts when disseminating "sceptical articles" and of the range of content he has published on the site would suggest that his scepticism is more focused on generating doubt than on the pursuit of knowledge or truth. Detailed analysis of Young's (strategically) copious engagement with non-consensus science lies beyond the scope of the present work, so a few key points will have to suffice.

Young employs deliberate discursive practices that make him difficult to pin down: firstly, many of his early posts on *Lockdown Sceptics* were anonymous and

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[152]   T. Young, *About the Daily Sceptic*, "The Daily Sceptic", 2021.

his Tweets from 2020-2021 have been deleted; secondly, when recommending controversial texts on *Lockdown Sceptics*, Young tended to provide a brief summary and end with the hyperlinked phrase 'Worth reading in full', thus stopping short of full endorsement;[153] and thirdly, Young adopted an ambivalent or ostensibly moderate position himself when referring readers to more extreme arguments, or simply refrained from offering any opinion while referring readers to controversial anonymous content.[154]

Furthermore, while Young made a point of emphasizing the credentials of contributors if they are PhDs, Doctors or Professors, he also published controversial posts by academics, doctors and nurses who need to remain anonymous. Thus, alongside well-argued pieces criticizing the Imperial Model,[155] which provoked a response from Professor Ferguson himself,[156] and some serious lockdown sceptical and Ukraine sceptical articles by the controversial researcher Noah Carl,[157] "The Daily Sceptic" also provides a platform for the crankier edges of sceptical discourse that bleed into conspiracy theory. For example, *Lockdown Sceptics* published articles by Dr Michael Yeadon, who insisted that the UK government has deliberately deceived the public with regard to PCR testing, claimed the UK had reached herd immunity in September 2020, denied the existence of a second wave, questioned the transmissiblity of new variants, and suggested that the vaccine program is part of a sinister and dangerous international plan to create a database and platform for totalitarian control.[158] Although Young once warned contributors to avoid conspiracy theories (of the 5G masts and Bill Gates vaccine-microchip variety) – in a post which has now been deleted – he did not and does not specify any demarcation criteria for distinguishing between, on the one hand, valid

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[153] T. Young, *What Would a Focused Protection Strategy Have Looked Like?*, "The Daily Sceptic", 2 April 2021. Young continues this practice on Twitter, where he tweets, for example, "A major new autopsy report has found that three people who died unexpectedly at home with no pre-existing disease shortly after Covid vaccination were likely killed by the vaccine", (https://twitter.com/toadmeister/status/1599816142067060736) and links to an article by Will Jones.

[154] T. Young, *How Closely Does the Trajectory of the Epidemic in Each Country Resemble a Flu Season?*, "The Daily Sceptic", 23 March 2021.

[155] D. Winton, *The Imperial Model and its Role in the UK's Pandemic Response*, "The Daily Sceptic", 18 February 2021.

[156] N. Ferguson, *Neil Ferguson's Response to an Article in Lockdown Sceptics*, "The Daily Sceptic", 21 February 2021.

[157] Noah Carl's articles are available at: https://dailysceptic.org/author/noah-carl/

[158] M. Yeadon's articles on "The Daily Sceptic": *How Likely is a Second wave?*, 7 September 2020, *Lies, Damned Lies and Health Statistics – the Deadly Danger of False Positives*, 20 September 2020, *How Worried Should We Be About the Variants?*, 11 March 2021.

or acceptable lockdown scepticism, vaccine scepticism and Ukraine scepticism, and on the other, unacceptable conspiracy theories, shoddy amateur research, and outright crankery.[159]

When engaged in debate on the efficacy of lockdowns, Young referred to a bewildering set of sources, which Snowdon describes as follows:

> Of the 30 (actually 31) 'studies', only seven have been published in journals in the last twelve months. Many of them are pre-prints that have not been peer-reviewed. Some are self-published PDFs. Three are newspaper or magazine articles. One is a blog post. Many of them have only a tenuous relationship to the question of whether COVID-19 lockdowns have worked. One of them was published in 2006, another in 2008.[160]

This indiscriminate use of non-consensus science adopts the same strategies as climate change scepticism. According to Dunlap and McCright,[161] the main aim of climate sceptic discourse is to obfuscate and manufacture doubt, and this goal was achieved in the US, to the extent that the media treat the issue as unsettled, and the public have come to believe "that climate science is characterized by considerable uncertainty".[162] Ganesh et al. argue that the discursive resources and tactics of climate sceptics primarily attempt "to introduce doubt into the scientific consensus", and that the very use of "tactics of disrupting commonsense arguments" actually accomplishes ideological work.[163]

This is obviously not to suggest that the efficacy of lockdown could not be questioned or analysed by 'amateur' researchers. As the researcher Philippe Lemoine has demonstrated, it was possible for 'a non-expert' to present rigorous critiques of

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[159] See, e.g. C. Snowdon, *Rise of the Coronavirus Cranks*, "Quillette", January 16 2021; *The downward spiral of Aseem Malhotra*, "The Snowdon Substack", 6 October 2022; for an example of a demarcation criterion, see B. O'Neill, *Don't you dare call us 'Covid deniers'*, "Spiked", January 27 2021, where he argues that one can distinguish between lockdown sceptics who acknowledge Covid-19 is real, dangerous, "a very significant health challenge" and Covid sceptics who insist the pandemic is fake virus crisis.

[160] C. Snowdon, *Do lockdowns work?*, "Velvet Glove, Iron Fist", 5 February 2021.

[161] R.E. Dunlap and A.M. McCright, *Defeating Kyoto: The Conservative Movement's Impact on U.S. Climate Change Policy*, "Social Problems", 50(3), 2003, p. 348-373.

[162] R.E. Dunlap and A.M. McCright, *Anti-reflexivity: The American Conservative Movement's Success in Undermining Climate Science and Policy Theory*, "Culture & Society", 27(2-3), 2010, p. 124.

[163] S. Ganesh, J. Roper and T.E. Zorn TE, *Doubt, Delay, and Discourse: Skeptics' Strategies to Politicize Climate Change*, "Science Communication", 38(6), 2016, p. 776-799.

lockdown policies.[164] On the basis of comparative analyses, Lemoine demonstrated that lockdowns did not have noticeably large effects, and suggested that steep declines in case incidence following the introduction of lockdowns were largely due to populations modifying their behaviour "in response to changes in epidemic conditions" – a factor which the key models[165] failed to consider. Lemoine provides an example of how an independent, freelance analyst can, firstly, highlight genuine flaws in the assumptions baked into the expert models relied on by governments and, secondly, initiate more serious consideration of cost-benefit analysis.[166]

The key point is that Young's conception of scepticism as simply challenging the consensus, his underhand discursive strategies, the prioritising of quantity and controversy over rigor and quality, and the lack of any demarcation criteria to distinguish between scepticism and denialism or conspiracy theory, entails that in effect Young's *Lockdown Sceptics* tended to obfuscate, produce and disseminate doubt, and undermine trust. This is a far cry from more positive uses of sceptical questioning and the corrosive power of doubt. The classical scepticism of Cartesian rationalism and British empiricism was always a tool, not an end-in-itself; doubt was carefully deployed as part of a method aimed at establishing the truth, demarcating ignorance and arriving at solutions.

8. Conclusion

This article has shown that as Euroscepticism developed into lockdown scepticism in 2020, even though the target of opposition changed dramatically, the following core characteristics were maintained: the fundamental stance of opposition and dissent; the construction of a multifaceted enemies; the construction of a controlled subject in need of liberation; the articulation of 'soft' and 'hard' positions beyond the consensus; dissemination through conservative, neoliberal and libertarian legacy media; skilful use of social and new media; and resisting and undermining the authority of professional experts (politicians, academics, scientists, journalists etc.).

Then, just as lockdown scepticism appeared in a discursive field that was already bitterly polarised, so that the Leaver-Remainer divide was smoothly replicated in

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[164] P. Lemoine, *The case against lockdown*, CSPI, 4 March 2021.
[165] S. Flaxman, A. Gandy, S. Mishra et al, *Estimating the effects of non-pharmaceutical interventions on COVID-19*, "Europe Nature", 584, 2020, p. 257-261.
[166] P. Lemoine, *The lockdowns weren't worth it*, "Wall Street Journal", March 11 2021.

a new anti-lockdown/pro-lockdown binary disseminated through the exact same media channels (e.g. "Telegraph" vs. "Guardian"), vaccine scepticism emerged into a networked public sphere riven by even deeper discursive trenches and rancorous splits. Efforts on the part of Twitter, YouTube and Spotify to ban and police vaccine scepticism led to the adoption of alternatives and anonymity, entailing that large swathes of non-consensus discourse have gone dark, as they operate in imperceptible public squares, or they operate imperceptibly in the networked public square, which makes the study of such content problematic, to say the least.

Nevertheless, it bears repeating that, despite all the chaotic chatter and confusion sown online, sceptical discourses are ultimately communicative practices that are aimed at persuading people to adopt or refrain from certain social practices: voting in referendums and elections, compliance with public health restrictions, getting vaccinated, helping Ukrainian refugees, supporting the Ukrainian people and armed forces. Awareness of how sceptical discourses replicate and mutate, and how they are targeted at social practices, can help us understand why some UK Eurosceptics and UK and US vaccine sceptics have turned their scepticism and opposition on Ukraine and President Zelensky.[167]

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[167] For example, see the cartoon by the lockdown and vaccine sceptic Bob Moran, former "Telegraph" cartoonist: https://www.bobmoran.co.uk/other-work/scrubber-original-artwork

The First Chair of Professor Grotowski

A glimpse at the 1982 Rome seminar

Francesco Martino

Italy

The changeling suit of a shape-shifter

Today he name of Jerzy Grotowski is regarded in the theatre milieu with the respect and devotion that is due to the greatest masters. His work for and in the theatre has often been considered as the second "great reform" of the twentieth century, after the first one undertaken by the first-generation director-pedagogues such as Stanislavski, Copeau, Meyerhold and others. His influence has even reached wider cultural and academic fields: the performing arts, anthropology, sociology, and performance studies. However, an exhaustive and rigorous analysis of his work is a task that is still far from completion.

Grotowski himself is perhaps the first person that can be held responsible for such incompleteness. Throughout his life and research work, especially after the dissolution of the Polish Laboratory Theatre, he kept up the habit of – to quote Osiński – "blazing the trails". He progressively isolated himself and often refused real-time documentation. By doing this, he tried, understandably, to protect his research from the risk of external interferences and biases, aware that his research could be easily misunderstood or placed in wrong contexts; at the same time, he

fought against the danger of seeing his words transformed into an orthodoxy, being made into "a Verb".

Nowadays, the international community of scholars, pupils, colleagues and collaborators is also not free of blame; despite the numerous publishing enterprises, what a researcher faces today is the presence of huge publication voids and problems in accessing materials. One of the most sought-after texts is the transcription of the three-month course given by Grotowski at La Sapienza, University in Rome in 1982. The course represents the largest series of lectures Grotowski ever delivered in his lifelong research and collaboration with academic and scientific institutions all over the world, including America, Italy and France.[1] Performing for the first time the role of the lecturer, he also chose a new lecturing modality, which entailed viewing and commenting on classical ethnographic videos and other filmed documents. Although the entire transcription is still strictly inaccessible[2], a selected typescript of the Italian transcription, edited by Luisa Tinti, is available for students at the theatre department and it has also circulated (though to a limited extent) outside. An analysis of this typescript is extremely important, and not only for strictly philological reasons. For the reasons I listed above, I am dubious whether a philological approach is appropriate for such a text. The Rome lectures were given in French and subsequently translated into Italian. To deal in English with an oral speech translated and transcribed into Italian, given by a Polish man who was speaking in French, is a somewhat disorienting experience. A Ph.D. dissertation could be written on the linguistic issues involved. For example, Grotowski often uses the French word *esprit*, but what does he mean by *esprit*? Does he mean mind, or soul? Sometimes the context can steer our choice and make us understand, but let us ask, what does Grotowski really think, in his Polish mind, when he uses this words: *dusza* (individual soul), *duch* (more impersonal soul, spirit), *myśl* (thought)? They all mean different things. Matters are particularly complex because Grotowski was cunning and used different words according to the context and the audience he was facing!

Finally, there are different versions and editions of in Grotowski's texts in English, Italian, French, Polish... As Leszek Kolankiewicz once brilliantly remarked, there is no "canon" in Grotowski's texts! That's why I think that in analysing this material

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[1]   It is curious, for example, to notice that in one of the most detailed chronologies of Grotowski's life and works, edited by Janusz Degler and Grzegorz Ziółkowski, the Rome course is not even mentioned. See: *Essere un uomo totale. Autori polacchi su Grotowski. L'ultimo decennio. A cura di J. Degler e G. Ziółkowski.* Corazzano, Titivillus, 2005.

[2]   The quantity of material recorded is huge: more than 100 hours of audiotape which produced about 800 typewritten pages of transcription, never revised by Grotowski.

one cannot rely on a pure philological approach. Philology deals with the dead, sculpted and fixed word of written documents;[3] it may be tricky to use the techniques of this discipline with Grotowski's living, strategic, spoken word, for all the reasons I listed above. However, the richness of these materials is such that they deserve to see the light of day, not to establish once for all Grotowski's truth, but to let everybody draw, with the required carefulness, inspiration for his/her own research. Even though it represents just a small portion of the whole transcription, the selected typescript I focused on gathers the lectures in which Grotowski discussed the core issues of his research in those times, both on the theoretical and practical level of investigation: the techniques a human being applies to him/herself; *trance* as the locus of achievement of the organic, primary experience of life; and the analysis of ritual and theatre in terms of performative behaviour. I believe Grotowski's views can enlighten the long-term discussions between disciplines such as theatre anthropology, performance studies, and the anthropology of performance, on these classical issues, and thus provide non-Italian speakers with a first but intriguing glimpse into the rich material of those lectures. I think Grotowski's research constitutes a wonderful example of how art and science can merge, overcoming mutual aphasias and teaming up for more integrated and systemic knowledge.

Between waves and quanta

The above-mentioned course was titled, erroneously, *Tecniche originarie dell'attore*, meaning the "actor's techniques of sources", even though the topic was indeed *man*'s techniques of sources,[4] i.e. those techniques, developed in each culture, that a human being applies to her/himself in order to decondition perception and achieve a more intense, organic, primary experience of life.[5] To have an idea of these techniques we are talking about, it could be useful to mention some of them directly: yoga and all its subsets, Haitian possession rituals, dervishes' zikr, Zār therapeutic proceedings, Zen meditation and martial arts techniques, i.e. all those

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[3]   See Valentin N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1986

[4]   The circumstances of being invited to lecture in a theatre department and the difficulties that the external public could have had in understanding his research outside of the theatre framework probably induced Ferruccio Marotti and the organizers to adopt this title.

[5]   See: Zbigniew Osiński, *Symposium "The Art of the Beginner" and Theatre of Sources*. "Le Théâtre en Pologne/Theatre in Poland" 1978, No. 9-10, p. 19-20.

mystical and ritual techniques which we find difficult to locate unless we categorise them under religious or spiritual frames, perhaps better described by some oriental concepts such as *tao*, *do*, *yoga* or *kung fu* (path, way, discipline, or mastery). Some of those techniques have turned into, or are embedded within, performance techniques, but they are not oriented towards a show; they are oriented towards man himself, in order to work upon his own flesh[6]. To give an example, the work of the actress/actor upon her/himself as Stanislavski described it, (just like Cieślak's[7] training techniques, or Beijing Opera actor's technique) is included by Grotowski in a wider context of techniques that a human being applies to her/himself. Theatre, ritual and other performative contexts are seen just as "fields of experience" where it is possible to look at a human being at work upon him/herself. Grotowski analyses these techniques transculturally, by grouping them into sets, using opposing pairs of criteria. For each and every technique where one aspect is emphasized (for example, immobilization or breath manipulation), there are others in which the opposite action is called for the freeing of natural processes. However, the sets are not separable but intersect variously. Grotowski's aim is by no mean a classificatory one, the criteria he uses function just as highlighters, placing the accent on one of the possible aspects at a time. In a highly developed technique, all aspects are present.

The first, most important pair that Grotowski designs is organicity/artificiality. Organicity is, according to Grotowski, a process in which all the reactions and impulses arise spontaneously, like in a flow.[8] Artificiality, on the other hand, refers to the articulation of reactions in recognizable and reputable signs. Artificial techniques are those "founded upon a system of signs". Stanislavski's method of physical actions, and Haitian and Afro-Caribbean possession rituals, are reference points in organic techniques; the classic Asian theatres, like the Indian kathakali, Beijing Opera or Japanese NÔ, are extraordinary examples of the highest level in artificial techniques. As we said before, these aspects are not opposed, organicity is involved in artificial techniques, and artificiality is involved in organic techniques; we can emphasize one aspect or the other.

In artificial techniques, organicity is in the underlying stream of energy and in the sudden decisions the performer can take, subtly changing the order of the signs.

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[6]   See: Jerzy Grotowski, *Tecniche originarie dell'attore*. [Unedited typescript, not revised by the author, edited by Luisa Tinti.] Rome, Università La Sapienza, 1983, p. 2. [All quotes from this text are translated by the author].

[7]   Ryszard Cieślak (1937-1990), actor of Polish Laboratory Theatre.

[8]   In a previous seminar in 1981, Grotowski said: "It's like watching the life process passing like a wave" See: Francesco Martino, *Jerzy Grotowski's Seminar – Rome 1982. Steps towards an anthropology of performative processes* (MA thesis, University of Malta, 2009)*,* p. 23.

Grotowski recalls the Indian Odissi performer Sanjukta Panigrahi: the elements of her action are precise signs, but at the same time she is able to improvise, thanks to her high vigilance and decidedness. In organic techniques artificiality is in the montage, the articulation of actions in a partition, and in the social codification of the actions too. For example, the actions a possessed Haitian performs are clear, articulated signs of the *loa*, the mystery mounting him/her, for the present community. Nevertheless s/he is in a clear organic process. Organicity and artificiality are thus the two polarities of a full, complete technique.

A second distinction Grotowski makes is between interhuman and personal techniques; interhuman techniques are linked to "what happens in front of others, with the others and what is beheld by the others", whilst personal techniques concern "what man does with his own solitude".[9] Interhuman techniques are thus ritual (or theatrical) techniques, always applied in relation with the community, and they can also be called 'techniques of expression', since wherever there is the element of the other and his/her reactions there is expression and the problem of expressivity. In the personal techniques like some forms of yoga, or zen, or even the individuation process in psychoanalysis, one looks for the process, for a wholeness of being, without striving to express anything. Here again the distinction is relative, there are always elements of social contacts balancing the personal techniques, like the master-pupil relationship, and elements of personal techniques within the realm of interhuman phenomena. This distinction was made by Stanislavski as well, once he separated the work of the actor on him/herself, the personal side of the technique, from the work on the character, which is the interhuman side, oriented towards the social context of the performance. It is almost evident in Grotowski's

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[9]   Other descriptive pairs are in-static/ex-static, and immediate/sophisticated techniques. Unfortunately they are not treated in the partial typescript I had access to, therefore I cannot deal with them. From C. Guglielmi's thesis, we know that in the first pair the distinguishing factor is the way attention is directed. In the ecstatic, attention and energy are oriented outwardly (what Grotowski defined in the period of Theatre of Sources as the ecological element), whereas in the in-static the energy is utilized for the immobilization of the body and focus on the interior space. Sport psychologists use the terminology 'broad external attentional focus' and 'narrow internal attentional focus'. (See: Cécile Vallet, *Why I Love / Hate Watching Penalty Shoot Outs – Cognitive Faculties at Work.* In: *Proceedings of the EMA-PS Conference, Malta – November 24, 2004.* Msida, 2004, p. 2.*)* Again the distinction is only operative, in the two poles, in-static and ex-static, watchfulness and attention are present. The distinction between immediate and sophisticated techniques refers to the modality of application and the time required to be effective. Immediate techniques can have an immediate effect if applied properly, but may not have any long-lasting or permanent result. Sophisticated techniques, or manipulation techniques like classic hatha yoga, are highly developed techniques and require a long apprenticeship and the constant supervision of a master to produce results.

research too, especially in the difference between the Paratheatre phase, a more interhuman phenomenon, and Theatre of Sources project, which was more focused on individual work, even though it took place in group conditions.

To sum up, in these lectures Grotowski provides an enormous empirical basis and an interesting conceptual grid to untangle the performative, technical level from such a variety of phenomena. A fascinating and vast field of investigation, which he calls the technique of sources, i.e. the techniques that a human being applies to him/herself, suspending the habitual conditioning of the body, directing perception towards an organic, primary experience of life. Performative phenomena, including theatre, are seen, in this way, as human experience in this technical domain. On the other hand, techniques, rituals and proceedings are analysed from a practical, technical point of view with the tools and the methodology of the actor and director's craft.[10]If on the theoretical level the scope/focus is that broad, on the practical level Grotowski narrowed down the focus to those techniques which are *performative*, i.e. "related to the organism in action", and *ecological*, in the sense of "being not cut off face to what is outside"[11] (whether it be in a natural environment or in an indoor space). To express it in the Rome seminar terms, he chose organic and interhuman techniques.The organic process is something Stanislavski was already searching for; actually Grotowski borrows the term from him. According to Grotowski, Stanislavski is the only theatre master in the Western tradition that started research in the domain of the organic process, even though he didn't push it to its extreme. He chose to focus on the realist actor, with whom the signs expressed and the organic reactions are not in contradiction; they are attuned to everyday behaviour. Grotowski, as he always acknowledged, started his research where Stanislavski had stopped, going further along the line he had traced, i.e. developing the work on impulses outside the daily conditions, represented by the realist convention. For Grotowski a true organic process can happen only outside the daily context, because one must break the habitual conditioning of everyday

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[10]   Grotowski will say in a later text: "I try to analyze it [the ritual] from a practical point of view on the basis of the acting methodology of the actor and of the director work." Jerzy Grotowski, *Teatro e Rituale*. In: *Il Teatr Laboratorium di Jerzy Grotowski 1959-1969*. Ed. Ludwik Flaszen, Carla Pollastrelli. Pontedera, Fondazione Pontedera Teatro, 2001, p. 435.

[11]   Jerzy Grotowski, *Theatre of Sources*. In: *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. Richard Schechner, Lisa Wolford (Eds.). London and New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 251. To be precise, on the practical level Theatre of Sources was a research for the techniques of sources. What was sought was an extreme simplicity of actions, like walking, breathing, in such a way to touch the points that precede the differences, transcending language and cultural differentiation. But in the successive phase of research, Objective Drama and Art as Vehicle, Grotowski chose some performative elements from Haitian and Afro-Caribbean traditions, and encapsulated them in the structure of its work.

behaviour, which anyway does not mean to tear oneself from one's social context. Once that happens, something more than just organicity arises, getting us close to that primal experience often called *trance*.

When a performance sounds good and another does not...

Grotowski had a suspicious attitude towards the word trance, aware of all the multiple meanings and misunderstandings it generates in the West. Trance for him is not an altered state of consciousness producing an explosion of unchained behaviour, but rather an expansion of consciousness, a state of complete watchfulness and alertness in which a performer reacts gently to everything that happens in the space or in the partners. A performer in trance does not experience a loss of consciousness, but rather an expansion, his consciousness becomes light, like water, 'transparent'. The main feature of this transparent consciousness is that it is immediate; reactions are not mediated by verbal thought:

> Is this consciousness the same as the everyday one? No, there is a difference. Primarily this consciousness is much more awake; secondarily this consciousnessis is as if it were transparent. Then, everything that happens passes through this consciousness, which means that it does not stop to get articulated in a verbal form of thought. Therefore this consciousness is... "to react in a very quick way".[12] In everyday life we have one more intermediate stages: I see an obstacle, I think: it is an obstacle, what to do? Maybe this, maybe that. I decide and avoid the obstacle.[13] But in a moment of everyday life that is extremely intense, like in a moment of danger for life and also in the moment of the healthy [*sain* in the original French] trance, the phenomenon of the obstacle is perceived by the mind [*coscienza* in the Italian typescript] in a very rapid way and the reaction is immediate. It is like in the moment of a car accident, when one says, afterwards: "I have seen everything in a much stronger, precise way."[14]

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[12]   As a part of an oral discourse, the phrase has not a normal syntactical structure. The pause emphasized by the three points is indicative of Grotowski's attempts to find the right word each time.

[13]   This example reminds us of two similar ones: one given by Meyerhold discussing reflex reactions ("I see a bear, I am afraid, I flee" reversed into "I see a bear, I flee, I am afraid"); the other by Eugenio Barba about the decided body (Niels Bohr's opinion about the cowboys' duel in western movies: the one who shoots first always loses, since he decides to shoot, whilst the other who reacts by shooting always wins, for he does not decide to shoot, he is decided).

[14]   Jerzy Grotowski, *Tecniche originarie dell'attore*. op. cit. p. 73.

For Grotowski, to achieve such a state requires 1) the operation of a strong energetic source, similar to what in running sports is called a "second" or "third wind", meaning the state achieved when one overcomes the limits of fatigue, and 2) a "passive attitude", giving up any resistance, reacting effortlessly to the stimuli. In other words, a true, powerful organic process is the springboard for trance, which in addition brings the transparent consciousness. Such a state is rarely accomplished in theatre, though momentarily it can be achieved even by actors who are clearly organic, but still experiencing the mediation of the verbal thought, like the Stanislavskian realist actors.

The Haitian voodoo possession filmed in 1948 by Maya Deren, an experimental film director, and edited after her death in the movie *Divine Horsemen*, is, for Grotowski, the most powerful example of a sound trance. There one can see an almost inhuman fullness of the organic process, which nevertheless testifies to the alertness and watchfulness of the participants. For Grotowski, the fact that possessed people say they have no memory of the possession is not the sign of a loss of consciousness. The precision of their actions (not falling onto each other even when dancing in a narrow space, for instance) testifies to their alertness. Amnesia can arrive later, says Grotowski, as confirmed by psychiatrists. This is what Grotowski calls the "healthy" trance. However for him the phenomenon can also exist in an "unhealthy" mode.[15] These symptoms of the unhealthy trance appear often, says Grotowski, in Western theatre workshops and improvisations. Western people want to *show* possession by acting out a wrong, imaged spontaneity, which turns into wild and unchained behaviour. But the clearest exemplification of this state, for him, is found in the film *Les maîtres fous* by Jean Rouch. The film shows a group of marginal workers in Accra, Ghana, belonging to the sect of the Auka, the gods of power. During a ceremony in which they impersonate various characters (representing both natural forces and colonial powers) they fall into an impressive trance, drooling, letting torch fires envelope them without getting burnt, performing a council-like reunion and eating a sacrificed dog. For Grotowski the images fit with the Western people's dream of a wild, unchained spontaneity; there is an enormous tension in the persons' movement, which is almost convulsive; the rhythm is *staccato*, but far from the punctiform, musical *staccato* that emerges in the sophisticated Oriental techniques. The movement starts from the body periphery – i.e. hands and feet – the march is broken at the knee level; they look like walking puppets and, more importantly, the spinal column is stiff, making the strongest

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[15]   In the Rome lecture, Grotowski uses the French words *sain*/*malsain*, translated into the Italian *sano*/*malsano*. In the 1981 seminar, he spoke of a *simulacrum*, an "ill version" of trance.

arches back and forth. In Grotowski's words, here we are confronting a *hysteroid* phenomenon.

The distinction Grotowski makes between a sound, healthy version of trance and an unsound, ill version, lead us to the question of whether in analysing these phenomena he applies our western categories ethnocentrically to cultural facts which are regarded in their own milieu as perfectly integrated into their social norms. Is it correct in this context to distinguish psychophysical processes and mental states into normal and pathological? Is Grotowski abstracting too much the performative levels from their sociological context and meaning, unwilling to admit the therapeutic, stabilization effects that even the Auka ritual might have on its participants?

The authors of the films *Divine Horsemen* and *Les maîtres fous* confirm Grotowski's empirical observations: in her book, Maya Deren describes the bodies mounted by Damballah, the snake-loa, as follows:

> The dance was similar to water. Before me the bodies of the dancers wavered in the rhythm of the streams that, starting from the shoulders, divided to flow separately along the arms and the spinal column before reuniting again where the hands leaned on the bent knees and finally flew along the legs into the ground, while in the shoulder the successive wave had already originated.[16]

On the other hand, in *Les maîtres fous* the narrator comments: "And the possession begins; slowly, from the left foot, then from the right foot it rises up along the hands, the arms, the shoulders and the head."[17] The former is clearly organic, it starts from the centre, undulating; the latter is peripheral, not fluid. Moreover, Maya Deren's description of her own possession experience seems to match exactly Grotowski's transparent consciousness: "How clear looked the world in that first whole light! Pure form without meaning. I was seeing everything at once, without succession, and every detail was equal and equally lucid."[18] And further on:

> As it happens sometimes in dreams, I could observe myself, notice with pleasure the hem of my white dress fluttering rhythmically, I could see, as in a mirror, my smile that began to pacify, to dilate imperceptibly in a radiant light, surely more beautiful than anything I had ever seen.[19]

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[16]   Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti*. New York, Vanguard Press, 1959, p. 297.

[17]   Jean Rouch, *Les maîtres fous, text of the film*. In: *Materiali per un'antropologia del teatro*. Guido Di Palma (Ed.). Roma, Università di Roma "La Sapienza", 2002, p. 32.

[18]   Maya Deren, op. cit., p. 303.

[19]   Ibid., p. 304.

However, in his descriptions Grotowski put aside all the critical, dangerous moments that one has to surpass to achieve a complete and serene state; moments of tremendous resistance, fear of losing consciousness, agony as if dying, when convulsions, falling and sudden paralyses of limbs are frequent, as Maya Deren reports.[20] On this point, Grotowski stated:

> [about] the distinction between healthy trance and unhealthy trance [*sain et malsain*]. Evidently the terminology is suspicious. For instance, if for the persons who act in *Les maîtres fous* this type of trance has its cathartic function, then to say that it is "unhealthy" is perhaps too strong.[21]

Thus, he is aware of the cathartic, therapeutic effects that a ritual like the Auka's one can have on their participants. The risk comes from Western amateurish attempts to easily recreate or reproduce trance states without the discipline and the social control which can channel the psychic tension in a healthy way.

Anyway, we must keep in mind that Grotowski is primarily an artist, a theatre artisan[22] who looks at these phenomena with the tools (i.e. with the eyes) of a trained and expert director; on the one hand, Grotowski is concerned with the practical consequences that such a trance image can have in theatrical research, reinforcing Western stereotypes about wild spontaneity; on the other hand, he recognizes in the Auka ritual an incomplete, not yet integral ritual form. His analysis grounds its methodological validity in the same "sensitivity to the form" that Maya Deren was claiming for her investigation of Haitian culture through the filming of their ritual dances. Does this aesthetic sensitivity authorize the use of psychopathological categories like hysteria?

As we know, the use of psychopathological categories like hysteria in understanding trance phenomena gave a strong bias to all the Western attempts to understand them, and it has been criticized at length in the history of anthropology. However, Georges Lapassade, classifying the historical types of trance in his classical study *Essai sur la trance*, interestingly reverses the perspective:

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[20]   Actually, according to Vito Di Bernardi, Grotowski homologates two different processes, the ritual possession, wherein a preliminary phase of total loss of the self is institutionally present, and the actor's trance, for whom the loss of the self is luckily absent. See: Vito Di Bernardi, *Il paradigmo rituale. Una ricerca di antropologia teatrale*. In: *Il libro di teatro. Vol. II*. Roberto Ciancarelli (Ed.). Roma, Bulzoni, 1990, pp. 357-8.

[21]   Jerzy Grotowski, *Tecniche originarie...*, op. cit. p. 71.

[22]   "I am neither a scholar nor a scientist. Am I an artist? Probably yes. I am an artisan in the field of human behaviour in meta-daily conditions." Zbigniew Osiński, *Grotowski al Collège de France. Prima lezione, 24 marzo 1997*. "Teatro e Storia" 2000, No. 7, p. 44.

> Instead of saying, as sometimes it is said, and as above all has been written around 1900, that the ritual trance is a form of individual and collective hysteria, we must understand, on the contrary, with the genealogic procedure, that hysteria is *a* trance. Hysteria, in the capitalistic mode of production, substituted the diabolic trance.[23]

Hysteria was the trance form of an atomized society, the one coming up after the first industrial revolution, which had no ritual means to respond to the alienation and the disaggregation of individuals (specifically women). Grotowski recognizes the same social symptoms in the Auka ceremony, a transfigured ritual of colonial times: the disintegration of a community, the migration from villages to city, a certain rooting out and the struggle against this rooting out, at the same time the adaptation to a new context.

Indeed, what constitutes the real difference between the Haitian voodoo ritual and the Auka one is history: Haitian voodoo is a traditional ritual system that refined itself through almost four centuries in Haiti, even more if we consider its roots in the West African vudu, or juju as they call it in Nigeria.[24] The Auka ceremony originated in 1927, inside a Songhay group of marginal workers who came from Niamey, Nigeria, and who migrated to Accra, the then capital of the Gold Coast; according to the film narration, the ritual was recorded during an expedition in 1951-54. The same narrator says at the end of the ceremony:

> But Djerba, the Locomotive, doesn't want to leave, he has been undressed. He is still there and evokes Mukyayla. He says: "Mukyayla! Mukyayla! This year the feast has been very good, next year we must repeat two feasts like this one in the year, and we, the Hauka, will be very happy/pleased!"
> And in this way, from ceremony to ceremony, the ritual get fixed, and defined.[25]

Grotowski's association of the Auka trance with hysteria then, lightened by the suffix "oid" and depurated of psychopathological connotations, has a certain validity if we take into account a socio-historical perspective. On top of this issue, what is interesting for me is how in analysing trance Grotowski uses different approaches

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[23]   Jean Rouch, *Les maîtres fous...*, op. cit. p. 29.
[24]   Let us keep in mind that during the realisation of the *Theatre of Sources* project Grotowski and his team of collaborators went on expeditions both in Haiti (1979) and in Ife and Oshogbo, Yorubaland in Nigeria (1980).
[25]   Jean Rouch, *Les maîtres fous...*, op. cit. p. 24.

in accordance with research necessities: horizontal, i.e. more synoptical approaches based on the variation of forms and the similarities between performative genres; but also vertical approaches – genealogical or vaguely historical approaches to understand peculiar realities. Whenever an approach serves the line of thought of his practical investigations, he uses it. The same tactical attitude is present in his analyses of the ritual/theatre *querelle*.

Theatre and ritual, or horizontal and vertical paths

Right at the beginning of the lectures, Grotowski warns about the relativity of our concepts of "theatre" and "ritual".

> First of all, non-European theatre is not homogenous: in extremely sophisticated cultures like, for example, the Indian culture, we have the dissociation between ritual and theatre, but in other cultures, like for instance the African culture or the Haitian one, somehow of African origin, this dissociation between ritual and theatrical forms is difficult to find. A European often considers the voodoo rite as traditional theatre, for example, but for the people who are bound to this ritual, it's a ritual, despite the fact that many elements of theatricalization appear.[26]

Furthermore, during the course Grotowski acknowledges ritual as just one among the many possible "sources" of theatre, the others being games and play-disposition, storytelling and therapy[27]. However, right after the screening of *Les maîtres fous*, Grotowski speaks of certain forms of ritual as *root* forms of theatre, qualifying them as deeper, richer in human quality than theatre forms. The famous genealogical hypothesis of a progress from ritual to theatre is relativized, reversed into the decadence of ritual into theatre. The "vertical" approach, looking for the origin of phenomena, is not denied then; rather it is admitted in both its version of progress/decadence:

> There is a phrase that is almost a banality: the source of theatre is the ritual. Is this banality sure? *No*. But there are many reasons to treat it very seriously.

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[26]   Jerzy Grotowski, *Tecniche originarie dell'attore*, op. cit., pp. 1-2.
[27]   Ibid. pp. 169-171. Grotowski's words in this case mirror amply with Schechner's perspective, both in the methodological approach and in the recognition of different possible theatre sources. See for example Richard Schechner, *Magnitudes of Performance*. Routledge, London and New York, 1988.

> There are many arguments to believe that it is true. And so, if ritual is the
> source of theatre, one can believe that theatre is something better; it is good
> that ritual is over, and it is good that theatre has begun. This was Brecht's
> attitude. He took again this banality, saying: it is true, the source of theatre
> is ritual, but he added: theatre started where the ritual ended. Many others
> drew completely different conclusions, like for example Artaud: if ritual
> is the source of theatre, the living theatre will maintain always this ritual
> background – it is another attitude. Who is right? Both. Why both? Because
> for Brecht it did work and it produced remarkable works and because for
> Artaud it did work and it gave an equally remarkable vision of the possibilities
> of theatre.[28]

According to Grotowski, the validity of both Brecht and Artaud's genealogical
hypothesis is grounded not on historical or archaeological evidence, as some Victorian
anthropologists tried vainly to demonstrate, but on the power and productiveness,
on the practical level, of the vision they generate. We can draw a parallel with the
Cambridge school leader, Sir James Frazer, and his masterpiece *The Golden Bough*,
a sort of manifesto of cultural evolutionism[29]; the book has been scientifically and
philosophically questioned, nonetheless it had an enormous influence on modernist
artists and has been recently reappraised also by anthropologists and cultural
critics, as a wonderful example of the "aesthetical method", which brings back
to the surface symbolic and imaginative elements buried in the deepest layers of
Western culture.[30]

Grotowski's remark on subjective choice in selecting one area of research
instead of another shows his deep commitment to praxis: he is not a detached,
neutral scientist looking at these phenomena from behind the same glasses; he is
implicated, committed in practical research. His preference for organic ritual rather
than artificial, goes hand in hand with the choice, for example, of performative
techniques rather than meditative, ecological instead of introspective ones; aware of
the multiple possibilities and routes that can be undertaken in facing an issue, he is
very transparent in admitting that his personal interests drive his choices. We could
say that Grotowski sees the genealogical hypothesis of ritual as a source of theatre
as valid, at least if we take into account certain historical and cultural contexts,

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[28]   Jerzy Grotowski, *Tecniche originarie dell'attore*, op. cit., pp. 65-66.
[29]   See: James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. Robert Fraser
(Ed.). Oxford University Press, 2009.
[30]   See: Fabio Dei, *La discesa agli inferi. James G. Frazer e la cultura del Novecento*. Lecce,
Argo Editrice, 1998.

but then he sees the views of an evolution or a decadence as legitimate subjective judgements, which could orient one's research towards one pole or another. Rite and theatre in fact, become in his view two polarities suitable for analyzing every "performing art", overlapping partially with the polarity organicity-artificiality and anticipating the successive *Art as Vehicle* (called initially *Ritual Arts* or *Objective Ritual*).

Subjective judgements in orienting research are linked to one's aesthetical sensitivity. Indeed, Grotowski evaluated and compared *aesthetically*[31] Haitian voodoo and Auka ritual, and in the former he found a performative milieu which could serve as a model for its research in organic techniques, and in the latter he recognized an incomplete, not yet integral ritual form. Nonetheless, *Les Maîtres fous* deeply influenced the French art milieu: the film director Claude Chabrol thought it was a wonderful mise-en-scène, Peter Brook screened the film to his actors during the making of the performance *Marat-Sade* (here, again an association with madness and asylum... just a coincidence?); a critic coined for it the expression "cinema of cruelty", equivalent to Artaud's "theatre of cruelty", and according to Jean Rouch, Jean Genet wrote the play *Les Nègres* after having seen the film.[32] The old querelle of art versus science comes back here, and in my opinion Grotowski incarnates perfectly a possibility of its overcoming.

Grotowski's aesthetical comprehension, differently from pure artists, has little to do with beauty in the common or contemporary sense; it is an aesthetics more related with the sacred, carefully avoiding the danger of aestheticism, as he appreciated in Gurdjieff's research.[33] Trying to describe his experience in witnessing *Action*, a performance structure enacted by the performers from Grotowski's workcenter during the *Art as a Vehicle* phase, Piergiorgio Giacchè says:

> It is like to watch a painting or a fresco of pre-Renaissance times and modalities: it has not been painted or devised in order to be looked at frontally, horizontally: one must instead look at it vertically and ideally connect oneself to that same vertical point towards which the painting itself looks at, and this

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[31]   I am using the word "aesthetical" in its etymological sense, from the Greek *aisthesis*, sensation. Aesthetical judgments are part of our perception, as part of human cognition they precede any rational reflection, and in the refined sensitivity of an artist they are even more primary. "Æsthetica est scientia cognitionis sensitivæ" in Baumgarten's definition. See: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's article in: *L'Estetica*. Salvatore Tedesco (Ed.). Palermo, Aesthetica, 2000.

[32]   See: *Il cinema del contatto*. Raul Grisiola (Ed.). Roma, Bulzoni, 1988, pp. 9, 84.

[33]   Gurdjieff affirms: "Dans certains éléments composés – qu'on peut comparer a des gestes liturgiques, on a évité le danger d'esthétisme. Dans ce type de formes, le danger est de chercher la soi-disant beauté." In: G. Panafieu, *Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff*. Lausanne/Paris, L'Age d'Homme, p.104.

verticality is the sacred. (...) because it's this fundamental vertical *alterity* that gives certainty and prime measure of our human identity, nearly in all histories and cultures of the world.[34]

Horizontality and verticality are thus two perspectives in approaching the performative, both on the theoretical and practical level. I think that in the way Grotowski approaches those rituals during the Rome lectures, he already opens up space for an investigation in the vertical dimension, that is, in the depth and height of performative process, perceived intensely in some ritual traditions during the *Theatre of Sources* phase, and sought for practically in his next research project, *Art as a Vehicle*.

Somehow *Theatre of Sources* represents the most horizontal phase of his research, in which he approaches a huge variety of phenomena from different cultures, carefully equipping himself with instruments from anthropology and performance studies in order to better comprehend diversity and not misunderstand cultural manifestation. But he already started to concentrate on a specific area, letting aside the analysis of rituals and performances as cultural manifestations, but focusing on his own practical research of performative possibilities.

The preference for certain rituals, qualified as *root* forms, deeper, richer in human quality than some (not all) theatre forms will develop into his research on Afro-Caribbean chants. As we know, Grotowski will link the origin of those chants in what he calls the Mediterranean cradle. I believe this is just a vision, a hypothetical explanation, a way to illustrate his choice to focus on this line of research, not a philological assertion; what testifies to its intensity, I think, is the peculiarity of that ritual form and the *living* experience of being touched, moved by that form. An intensity moving us as if by induction, says Grotowski with another brilliant metaphor borrowed from electrostatic physics.[35]

Grotowski's line of research, looking for what precedes the differences, has been criticized for example by an important scholar in performance theory, namely Richard Schechner. He said he couldn't see wisdom *before* cultures, in "old practices", he asks provocatively if Lucy's prehistorical performances were purer and more refined than anybody else's[36]. With all due respect, I think prof. Schechner

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[34]   Piergiorgio Giacchè, *La verticalità e la sacralità dell'atto*. In: *Opere e sentieri. Testimonianze e riflessioni sull'arte come veicolo*. Antonio Attisani, Mario Biagini (Eds). Roma, Bulzoni editore, 2008, p. 125. [My translation from Italian].

[35]   See : Jerzy Grotowski, *Tecniche originarie...,* op. cit., p. 220.

[36]   Richard Schechner, *Exoduction: Shape-Shifter, Shaman, Trickster, Artist, Adept, Director, Leader, Grotowski*. In: *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. Richard Schechner, Lisa Wolford (Eds). Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 466.

is missing the point here, because Grotowski was a researcher of living phenomena, not an archeologist in search of bones and the footprints of ancient dance.

In my opinion, Schechner and performance studies, following anthropological studies, tend to be trapped in their horizontal perspective. Keeping themselves at a level of description of different performances in different cultures, carefully avoiding aesthetical judgements, they reaffirm the diversity and incommensurability of cultures again and again, whilst maybe as Piergiorgio Giacché wonderfully remarks, what links every human being is the verticality, that elemental bed upon which lie differences, the 'elementally human' which Ernesto De Martino,[37] an ethnologist Grotowski openly admired and quoted in the lectures, was talking about. It is the way each culture goes, the ways each culture chooses to go along the vertical line, that constitutes the differences. To retrieve a vertical dimension, to recognize the validity of vertical inquiries into our own alterity is the only way Western disciplines ought to do in order to recover a dialogue with what they lost due to their colonial, horizontal voracity. Such a process implies the recuperation of historical, religious and aesthetical perspectives as legitimate modalities of knowledge. It means to think aesthetics as inseparable from the other domains of one's research, the craft, the ethos, the scientific level, the interhuman aspect. An aesthetics belonging to a system of knowledge wherein disciplines are not completely separated and incommunicable with each other, but are linked in an untangled manner, along an organic, perhaps more vertical line.

To conclude, we have had a look into the vast material of Grotowski's seminar at La Sapienza in 1982. We have seen how he prepared the way for an interdisciplinary study of techniques that a human being, in any culture, can apply to her/himself, which is a task Marcel Mauss was already calling for in 1934 in his famous "body techniques" essay. Its conceptual grid can be more than useful for scientific disciplines eager to walk that way. We have seen how Grotowski approached trance and possession rituals, using multiple approaches with a strategic attitude, hunting concepts and perspectives from different disciplines to clarify his pathway. Through his analysis of the theatre/ritual issue, we have eventually seen how the vertical dimension of investigation, the core of his next research phase, begins to peep out. The seeds of that choice are in his peculiar aesthetical sensitivity, and the way in which aesthetics and science merge in his research constitutes a wonderful example of knowledge integration, in my humble opinion.

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[37]   Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo*. Torino, Einaudi 1977, p. 391.

Meeting the Moment: Socially Engaged Performance, 1965-2020, by Those Who Lived It

Jan Cohen-Cruz

lecturer at Master Fine Arts in Performance Creation at Touchstone Theater/Moravian University at
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA

and

Rad Pereira

freelance artist and cultural organizer, USA

Preface
by Jan Cohen-Cruz

From my journal, January 2020:

I'm sitting at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, in an audience of four hundred people, for a three-hour presentation on *Transforming Community Development Through Arts and Culture*. Being here is uncanny for people like me, who've been on the ground with socially engaged art as practitioners, scholars, and teachers for many years. Those of us in our sixties and seventies began at a time when most community development professionals considered art and culture "the icing on the cake," if they considered it at all. Now it's got a name – creative placemaking, simply defined as using arts and culture to help improve communities. Witness its status here and now as a serious and useful approach nearly on a par with the contributions of other disciplines.

Leaders from the worlds of finance, municipal government, and public policy attest to creative placemaking's virtues. Serious funding streams – though still not

enough – support it, with the rejoinder to get over the endless call to justify the use of money for art and culture; one simply has to look at what's been accomplished. Powerful people from civic sectors are becoming more conscious that not only the artists involved but also residents from the communities meant to benefit must be at the table with civic professionals, helping shape initiatives from the onset. Roberto Bedoya's critique has served as a reminder that the people who have lived in a place made it; it is a matter of creative place *keeping*, not making, and supporting the people who have lived there.

Like the presenters at the event described above, many people have found meaning in socially engaged art. This type of art has regularly appeared all across the United States, but its various manifestations are often unknown by anyone beyond the immediate participants. Sometimes the cause has been a lack of information – teenagers making work together on social justice themes have had no idea, and were not likely to learn in school, about the long tradition of political theater. Sometimes it is terminology – people who identify with social practice, creative placemaking/place-keeping, ensemble theater, or grassroots or community-based performance do not realize that they have a lot in common with one another. It may be the place-based nature of the project, made for its specific locale. Race, class, and cultural differences have kept people apart, with few artists from one tradition knowing much about the practices of the others. The exception is a largely White Euro-American canon that formally educated artists were supposed to have studied but that, as defined, has outlived its historical moment. I decided to write a book to explore parallel concerns and interrogate differences between 1965 & 2020, through the reflections of practitioners who have lived it.

My mental tagline was fifty-five artists in fifty-five years, which grew to inter-views with sixty-seven people and substantial email exchanges with another half a dozen.[1] Through direct accounts of people who were involved, I hoped to come up with a big picture (though certainly not conclusive; a book, not an encyclopedia) of what has constituted U.S. socially engaged performance over these years, with attention to values in the field and how dynamics that are commonplace today came to be as they are. I was interested in how the field has changed and how it has stayed the same. Through conversations with a range of people, the hope was to capture the excitement of learning that is generated from what bell hooks describes as "our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence",[2] and to expand available sources of field knowledge.

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[1]   All interviews and e-mail exchanges took place between January 2020 and April 2022.
[2]   bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*. London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 8.

Having begun the interviews in February 2020, I found myself, a few weeks later, in conversation with performance makers also responding to the pandemic, the quarantine, and, over the months that followed, the spotlight on exacerbated police violence against people of color.

Around thirty interviews in, I realized that I could not write this book alone. I have not kept up with the field in its more recent manifestations. I have had racial (White) and class (middle) privileges that have gotten in the way of seeing all that was around me. I sought an artist/thinker who could complement my effort, from the perspective of a much younger generation, and grounded in different culture experiences. I found that in performer and thinker Rad Pereira.

Rad describes what drew them to this project:

I perceived a lack of connection between artists and community leaders doing this work – from urban planners to architects to journalists to dancers – those who are looking for ways to use the arts toward self-determination to build, heal, deepen, and/or keep their communities alive and thriving through upholding values of sovereignty, justice, and joy. This seemed to result in an *invisibility of possibility* to enhance their efforts through coalition and collaboration. Socially engaged art, to me, is a way to walk as we dream our way through many of our current social issues: alienation, isolation, privatization, and dehumanization by corporate globalization, which often manifest through destructive systems, behaviors, and catastrophes in our world. It both saddened and emboldened me to hear my theater students, various LGBTQIA2+[3] youth, and fellow professional artists complain about their career prospects, the solitary life that pursuing it might bring, the lack of financial security, and their inability to articulate the beautiful value they brought to the world. Socially engaged theater and performance makers deserve to be valued for our transformative impact, power, self-created knowledge, and potential to empower our communities to articulate and enact a caring, nurturing world.

Writing this book was for Rad and me a strong anchor in 2020. Talking with people whose lives have intertwined with such work and reflecting on its practices and ideologies over these 55 years landed us squarely in a year that rocked everyone's world: 2020. What follows is a slightly edited version of the last chapter of the book that came out of this work, *Meeting the Moment: Socially Engaged Performance, 1965-2020, by Those Who Lived It*, which was published in May 2022 by New Village Press.[4]

Jan Cohen Cruz and Rad Pereira

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[3]   An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit.

[4]   The permission to publish it in this book has been kindly granted by the editor of New Village Press, Lynne Elizabeth.

The Year Was 2020

A riot is the language of the unheard. (...) [I]n a real sense our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention.

– The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Other America*, speech first given at Stanford University, April 14, 1967.

Uprisings need artists to access that felt sense of the world, like communicating with images, and opening up your own and other people's hearts because you have a vulnerability and a truth seeking that can be contagious. It's important to (...) resist and protest along with building and creating.

– Artist Caroline Woolard.

In January 2020, the first murmurings of a potentially deadly virus hit U.S. shores. At first, there was denial. Then panic and fear dropped in, with a sprinkling of doom. Quarantine began with the uncertainty of being sheltered in place indefinitely. Face-to-face human contact beyond one's immediate "pod" disappeared, from the simplest interactions to the shuttering of what were considered all but "essential services": schools, most businesses, live arts and sports events, unnecessary medical procedures, sit-down restaurants... the list goes on. Many who continued working outside the home risked serious health consequences and were left without child care; many who could not keep working faced eviction. Many created interdependent mutual-aid networks.

Tectonic reverberations were set off by the extraordinary reality of every person on Earth impacted by the same threat... but unequally: the extent of our nation's polarization was displayed, and great uprisings against state-sanctioned racialized violence unleashed, generating enough force to open a portal into the next world, as novelist Arundhati Roy writes:

> Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. (...) We can choose to walk through [the portal it opens], dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.[5]

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[5]   Arundhati Roy: *The pandemic is a portal*. "Financial Times", April 3, 2020. https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca

In the sudden space of suspended life as we knew it arose calls for institutions to transform themselves and create systems of accountability. Mass protests followed the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others; we experienced the rancor of a divisive presidential election, witnessed public gestures of racial reconciliation, and lived through the spiral of loneliness caused by the inability to observe important markers in our lives and the need to spend a holiday season in isolation. As the New Year commenced, we careened from the insurrection at the Capitol to the glimmer of a functioning government returning and the readying of mass vaccinations.

We write to you from inside the whirlwind of this portal, this liminal space between worlds. It is a space of reckoning that is restoring collective memory from the historical amnesia of the structural inequities and social division caused by decades of extraction of wealth and labor from people of color; the dispossession of lands and genocide of Native peoples; the displacement of peoples from the global South; the mechanisms of disfranchisement; the epic growth of prisons and detention centers; the terrorizing governmental policies; and the privatized public schools, hospitals, and public resources that have produced scarcity, environmental health hazards, poverty, and underground economies regulated through violence. We are gasping for air in a country built on intersectional oppression.

With this epic-scale backdrop, we present a glimpse of how theater and performance makers have been navigating through this portal, questioning what came before, and imagining what could come after. Catalyzed by the events of 2020, numerous artists have been compelled to situate themselves in a context that is larger than their individual aesthetic visions or even their previous community and social engagement. We begin with a scan of immediate performative responses to the circumstances of the pandemic, artists' growing consciousness of the possibility of seeing their work on the world stage, and the rise of resistance and loss. We culminate in the sense of the future that we heard from many of our interviewees. Please note that being based in Brooklyn, New York, all of the seasonal references below are Global North. Additionally, all quotes are from interviews or emails with the artists unless otherwise noted.

Performance During the Pandemic (Winter/Spring 2020)

At first, many artists just tried to continue being artists. Some chose to ignore the form of the computer screen and pretend they were in a theater with people in front of them, while others fused theater with digital storytelling. Those who

had been working digitally already flourished in the new environment. Kevin Gotkin, disability justice advocate and artist, remarked, "When everyone started using Zoom, it allowed us to use our community's knowledge, because [people had] done a lot with technology and remote access, and taken it to the next level." Prior to the pandemic, they had had no choice but to organize virtually, as much cultural programming is not accessible to people with disabilities. So many cultural organizations moving into digital technology during this period was nonetheless a bitter reminder that accessibility could have been chosen a long time ago.

Some theater makers adapted works in progress to the digital environment. Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw's *Last Gasp,* intended for the stage, became a film set in an empty house in Haudenosaunee territory (upstate New York). Superhero Clubhouse, led by Lanxing Fu and Jeremy Pickard*,* partnered with the Bushwick Starr, an experimental theater venue in Bushwick, Brooklyn, to create a digital version of *Big Green Theater* program.

For over ten years, members of Superhero Clubhouse have been teaching eco-playwriting, "a holistic approach to theater-making that centers climate and environmental justice in content, process, and production," to public elementary school students in Lenapehoking (Bushwick) impacted by environmental racism. Guests ranging from Native knowledge keepers to climate scientists and Bomba musicians have helped bring students' ideas to life. At the end of every school year, the plays are performed at the Bushwick Starr by professional actors for a public audience, the young playwrights, and their communities. But in 2020, they made a live-action Zoom film, guided by Sadah Espii Proctor, that utilized the Zoom square as a multidimensional stage by smartly playing with angles and entrances. The amazing props, puppets, and sets by Yijun Yang and Lexy Ho-Tai were made from garbage in people's apartments.[6] Written by kids, for kids, the digital performance was a loving reminder of the "before times" and a welcome escape for kids who so acutely bore the weight of being sheltered in place.

For You Productions has addressed the often-tragic consequences of quarantine on elders in isolation by creating beautiful collaborative performance films. The Artists & Elders project connects elders and artists of many different mediums from around Turtle Island, creating and exchanging art in the spirit of gift giving.[7] Melecio Estrella and Panching Pedrin cocreated a film that weaved together Melecio's movements with Panching's memories, prayers, and poems set at some

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[6]   Superhero Clubhouse. (2020, June 14). P.S. 196's Big Green Theater: The Movie! [Video] YouTube. https://youtu.be/5-0uxlq7Skw

[7]   www.foryou.productions/march-october-2020.

of their favorite places to commune with nature. Beatriz Escobar & Berta created a *Zoom Carnaval* in a living room in Rio de Janeiro by learning the traditionally performed dances and songs.

On the web platform Twitch, River Ramirez, a comedian, performer, and visual artist, hosted *Art Is Easy,* bringing a jolt of humor and pathos to a participatory digital art piece. The live-sound composer engaged participants in story making via a chat room by offering questions, prompts, and improvised contextual connective tissue.

For years, nightlife has provided a go-to therapeutic, community-building, and safe way for many LGBTQIA2+ people to interact. With all such interactions curtailed by the pandemic, many parties moved online. Body Hack utilized the digital commons to transform their QTBIPOC[8] and sex worker-centered performance and dance parties into an act of international solidarity with an artist and DJ lineup that brought folks together from around the world for collective catharsis and camaraderie aimed at mutual aid and structural material change. Along with the weight and the losses that the pandemic brought, the conditions of quarantine also brought some unexpected pleasures. People had access to live performance and art experiences from all around the world, albeit now mediated over the Internet. More broadly, for those with the privilege to work from home or to collect Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the quarantine was also a welcome relief. Many interviewees recounted the space they had to reflect on their pre-quarantine lives, the positive impact the time had on their wellbeing, and the opportunity to imagine the lives they wanted to live. We are aware of the contradiction that something so painful for many also bore unexpected fruit for others. We hold the contradiction of something so painful for many bearing unexpected fruit for others.

Some made substantial life changes. A number of artists sought to participate in making pandemic-related policy decisions at the city, state, and national level and lent their efforts to various political organizing endeavors. Shouting into their virtual megaphones about an arts sector and governing body that failed them, some artists stepped into new roles as community organizers to fight for systemic changes in their industries and/or the larger world. Some were propelled to divest from unresponsive institutions they had been attempting to build relationships with and instead shifted their energies toward grassroots movements and coalitions. Carolina Dỗ, cofounder of the Sống Collective, shares her experience:

> When the lockdown happened, we heard crickets from the people whom we
> had invested so much of our souls and creative and intellectual power in. No

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[8]   *An acronym for Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous People of Color.*

one was, "Hey, are you guys okay? Can we take the bonds that we've been hoarding to help you pay rent?" None of that.

In some ways, artists are realizing we've been complicit in machines [that don't serve us]. Like Hollywood: How many cop shows? How many prison shows? How many projects that you do as an artist so that you can get paid but that put [negative] images of our people out there, that inform how we are treated on a societal level?

Artists were coming out with statements like, "This is how I've been exploited. This is how I feel." For so long the consensus was, "Keep your head down, do the work, because without these institutions you are nothing," instead of realizing, "Wait a minute, we make these institutions. We're the reason they get those diversity grants."

Some artists left big cities, returning to smaller hometowns to lower their expenses and start again. An actress we know left New York City with a renewed purpose to be of service and became a social worker. A stage manager who had been frustrated with the inequitable theater industry found joy in his new meditative routine as a mail person. Youth theater maker, scholar, and single parent Dana Edell recounts:

I lasted two months in a 1,5-bedroom apartment with my one-year-old and three-year-old while trying to work full-time, terrified to get in the elevator with the stroller to go outside because my kids did not understand "Do not touch anything!" So, much to the likely horror of the teenage version of me who had left Wilmington, Delaware, for life in the "big city," I accepted my parents' generous offer to spend the summer in the house I grew up in, with plenty of indoor space and a wondrous backyard filled with fox, deer, and fireflies.

I slowly began seeking to find partners to make theater. The racially segregated city I left in the 1990s had not changed much, though looking at it through my 2020 vision, I saw opportunities to engage with privileged white teenagers – like I had been – and became more and more inspired by the connections and solidarity I felt with them, and the urgency to use my privilege, resources, and twenty years of experience creating activist theater to create a new project here, where I'm from. As a white woman who has spent most of my adult life collaborating with Black and brown teenage girls in New York City, connecting with white girls to rehearse in the same Jewish Community Center where I went to elementary school, I feel a sense of belonging and solidarity that is new to me, and deeply powerful.

Freedom Dreaming (Summer 2020)

Is it possible to share the feeling of being lonely or alone as a way to make new forms of collectivity? Loneliness is endemic to the affective life of settler colonialism. It is also an effective commons that demonstrates a world that isn't quite right. Loneliness in fact evinces a new world on the horizon.
  – Billy-Ray Belcourt[9]

BREONNA TAYLOR. GEORGE FLOYD. BRAYLA STONE. MERCI MACK. SHAKIIE PETERS. DRAYA MCCARTY. TATIANA HALL. BREE BLACK. We say their names.[10]
Axé[11]

For many artists, it became impossible to keep their professional lives separate from the world in which such violence is commonplace. Throughout history, artists have pumped hope back into spirits by working in tandem with movements – civil rights, LGBTQIA2+, Occupy, #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, to name a few. Artists aligning with the prison abolition movement are now in that historical tradition.

The call for abolition has existed since the slave trade began, but the current fight for prison-industrial complex abolition finally has its spotlight on a national stage. The fires of resistance that had been tended by a few on the ground turned into a wildfire spread by many, a burn that was necessary and a long time coming. We imagined the day would come when calls for abolition would enter the mainstream, in maybe five or ten years, but here it was being debated and discussed on the evening news.

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[9] Billy-Ray Belcourt, *This Wound Is a World*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2019, p. 59.

[10] George Floyd was a 46-year old African American who was murdered by a policeman in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020. Floyd was arrested under suspicion of having spent a forged 20 dollar bill. He was handcuffed and then the police officer knelt on his back for more than 9 minutes so that Floyd could not breathe. This murder caused huge mass protests against police brutality, especially against people of color, both in the U.S. and in many other countries.

Breonna Taylor, a young African-American woman, was fatally shot in her apartment in Louisville, Kentucky on March 13, 2020 by several police officers. Their forced entry was part of an anti-drug dealing operation. Taylor's apartment had never been searched before.

The bodies of six African-American transwomen: Brayla Stone, Merci Mack, Shakiie Peters, Draya McCarty, Tatiana Hall and Bree Black were discovered between June 25 and July 3, 2020. Their death was a result of violence.

[11] Axe, another spelling of *Ase* or *Ashe* (from Yoruba *àṣẹ*) is a West African philosophical concept through which the Yoruba of Nigeria conceive the power to make things happen and produce change.

"Prison-industrial complex abolition is a vision of a restructured society in a world where people have everything they need: food, shelter, education, health, art, beauty, clean water, and more (...) things that are foundational to our personal and community safety."[12]

Through various creative and education initiatives, Chicago-based abolitionist, scholar, and educator Mariame Kaba invites people to question why these systems exist at all and believes especially that the hip-hop theater gives "the message a common heartbeat, a rally cry, a conversation starter, to 'disrupt patterns and old ways of thinking.'"[13]

Minneapolis was a focus of this national reckoning. Meena Natarajan and Dipankar Mukherjee, co-artistic directors of Pangea World Theater in Minneapolis, describe how the killing of George Floyd in their very neighborhood and the pandemic more generally affected them:

> Dipankar Mukherjee: How is it different now? Our sense of immediacy. We don't have front and back burners, only one burner. Reenvisioning.
>
> Meena Natarajan: Everyone has to help develop policies. We need to have a percentage of BIPOC[14] ownership, make sure these buildings, over this three-street area [much of which got burned down by White supremacists during the protests following Floyd's murder], where people of color can own land that was historically denied.

There were also arts administrators that manage cultural spaces who mobilized their resources to support the needs arising in 2020. Performance Space 122 (PS 122) in New York City, for example, paused all public programming to redirect their budget to artists and organizers to do with as they saw fit. Both PS 122 and JACK, "a performance meets civic space",[15] in collaboration with We Keep Us Safe Abolitionist Network, turned their spaces into food-distribution centers and mutual-aid and information hubs. These actions birthed new narratives of possibility for cultural centers as bridges between people, community organizers, the city, and the world.

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[12]   Mariame Kaba, M. *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*. Chicago, Haymarket 2021, p. 8.

[13]   Madden, S., Leeds, S., & Carmichael, R. *"I Want Us to Dream a Little Bigger": Noname and Mariame Kaba on Art and Abolition*. "NPR Music". December 19, 2020. https://www.npr.org/2020/12/19/948005131/i-want-us-to-dream-a-little-bigger-noname-and-mariame-kaba-on-art-and-abolition

[14]   An acronym for Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

[15]   www.jackny.org, JACK is located in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. Its mission is to fuel experiments in art and activism.

In response to community organizers who wanted artists in their work but who perceived them as lacking understanding of justice movements or thorough systems analysis, Rad Pereira organized Media Tools for Liberation with Izzy Sazak, Lilleth Glimcher, and Francisco Perez. This was a workshop series on how artists could support economic justice and abolition movements with good propaganda. Through presentations, discussions, think tanks, and creative experiments with radical economists, abolitionists, healers, and water protectors, over 350 artists utilized their skills to offer creative solutions to build steps toward our shared goals. Playwrights initiated collaborations with graphic designers to make abolition comics for kids, illustrators partnered with poets to make other graphic formats for adults that reached millions, and harm-reduction workers collaborated with comedians to make videos that broke down hard-to-understand concepts into digestible formats. JACK and You Are Here provided support. These collaborations made it clear that there is an inextricable necessity for artistry in organizing and organizing in art.

Reg Flowers facilitated *12 Steps to Anti-Oppression*, a virtual creative improvisational exercise modeled after the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. It invited folks to begin to heal from internalized White supremacy by admitting that they "suffered from symptoms of White supremacist beliefs and internalized racism and were in recovery through this process".[16]

Together with many other grassroots cultural organizations and groups, the Black Visions Collective not only articulated a "People's Budget", proposing cuts to the Minneapolis Police Department, but also generated graphics, videos, popular assemblies, social media campaigns, TikTok presentations, and participatory performance mourning rituals. It organized a beautiful mourning celebration for George Floyd that included a giant multiblock-long altar where people could add their offerings to honor those lost to police brutality.

Daniel Park gives an example of creative support to protests in Philadelphia:

> One of the best moments that I had last year was seeing the Bearded Ladies Cabaret. They're a queer cabaret performance company. During COVID, they got a truck and converted it into a traveling cabaret venue. They brought it to one of the big rallies and drove along with the protest, so that folks who were chanting had this quality sound system to amplify their voices. Music was playing, and it turned the protest into a parade in this really beautiful, energizing way. It was like, "Yes, this is a place where I want to be." It's not just a bummer and sad.

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[16]   https://jointheprogram.org/

Responses to Loss (Fall/Winter 2020)

In the wake of the great uprisings, the level of unprocessed grief in this portal between worlds that was 2020 emerged thick and palpable. Some friends who live near hospitals could see the trucks piled high with bodies and smell the pungent odor of death. These ripples of grief seemed to grip many of our spirits, a reminder of the thousands of lives lost.

Larissa FastHorse describes the devastation that COVID has wrought on her people:

> We're losing languages in this country because so many elders have succumbed to COVID. They live in these incredibly remote areas and because of COVID, people didn't know that they needed help. Our reservations often lack electricity and Internet. It's just crazy. I hear people talking about the positives of this time: "So many good things have happened. It's been a reset." If you mean that it killed off thousands and thousands of our people, then I guess it's a reset. If you mean that our children are even further behind and have been abandoned by the school system (...) that in South Dakota, a friend's nephew on the Pine Ridge Reservation had to be flown to Denver because they had no ICU COVID beds left in the state (...) If you mean that, then I guess it's a reset – of some horrible thing.

Our ceremonies for mourning were inaccessible in person and the leaders of our country offered no days of national mourning. Live-streamed funerals felt far away and alien. How can we honor a life in the absence of our rituals? Some artists created virtual spaces to process this grief: dance-based vigils to move grief through the body led by BUFU: By Us for Us; the virtual Dia de Muertos altars; digital games like Animal Crossing, where people create altars, shrines, and community cemeteries to honor someone they loved and lost. Death doulas Alua Arthur and Lashanna Williams recommended making playlists, videos, tangible touch-based memorials, meditations, and story circles.[17]

By late 2020, live performance was returning at a growing scale (beyond the occasional performances in parking lots and in large open spaces with small groups of masked spectators that had continued throughout the pandemic). In New York City, council members, led by Laurie Cumbo, worked in conjunction with the Parks Department to create an inclusive process for artists to perform outdoors, even as

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[17] https://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/funerals-dying-in-absentia-inspiration-tips-during-covid-19

the winter winds still blew. Permits had previously been difficult to access for individual artists who are not part of formal groups or institutions.

A few months later, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the City Artist Corps, a New Deal Works Progress Administration-style program providing $25 million in funding for about fifteen hundred artists creating outdoor performances and other forms of public artwork around the city.[18] We'll see how it pans out. This isn't system change and it isn't a long-term solution, but we hope it can bring some solace and joy to people who have been in grief and isolation for over a year, and perhaps be extended and expanded.

States, too, are initiating programs to support artists in their full humanity rather than only on a project-by-project basis. In New York State, for example, the following initiative was announced in spring 2021:

> Creatives Rebuild New York is a three-year, $125 million initiative that will provide guaranteed income and employment opportunities for up to 2,700 artists throughout New York State. These two components will work to alleviate unemployment of artists, continue the creative work of artists in partnership with their communities and arts and cultural organizations, and enable artists to continue working and living in New York State under less financial strain.[19]

Emboldened to Imagine (January – May 2021)

Fueled by the pent-up energy of ten months of quarantine, the manifestation of what people imagined and hoped for was as devastating in some cases as it was inspiring in others, depending on one's worldview. Indeed, 2021 began with the U.S. Capitol insurrection on January 6, manifesting compounded feelings laid bare by decades of perceived entitlement coupled with resentment for what hadn't delivered ebbing even further away, and bursting forth in a performance-level tantrum. It vividly demonstrated that even those with political power are not immune from the wrath of those who feel themselves wronged.

For some, the needle was moving from *if* abolition was possible to *when and how* to begin the transition to a culture of abolition. By May 25, 2021, one year after George Floyd's death at the hands of Derek Chauvin, more than thirty states and

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[18] NYC: The Official Website of the City of New York, 2021.
[19] https://www.creativesrebuildny.org/

dozens of large cities had created new policies limiting police tactics or enforcing those already on the books (e.g., banning neck restraints, like the kind that Chauvin used on Floyd, and requiring police officers to intervene when a fellow officer uses extreme force, which did not happen in the situation with Floyd.[20] Some went further. The mayor of Cayuga land (Ithaca, New York), Svante Myrick, for example, developed a plan to abolish the city's police department and replace it with an agency made up of armed "public safety workers" and unarmed "community solution workers," which would dispatch certain calls to people trained in mental health.[21] Rad's mother had been working for years on initiatives toward abolition with the Black Lives Matter movement in Broward County, Florida. In the spring of 2021, BLM Broward finally saw some results when a Black woman, one of their leaders, was appointed as the new "emergency call liaison." Her role is to build out a system and task force that diverts 911 calls to their appropriate social services providers, which will result in a significant decrease in the policing of Black and brown people. These are some tiny steps toward dismantling the system of incarceration and punishment on Turtle Island.

The calls to abolish police and prisons and to shift those resources to housing, universal health care, living-wage jobs, universal basic income, green energy, and a system of restorative/ transformative justice were once a pipe dream but are materializing into reality. They are now a generative driving force in a massive network made up of many movements that have been hard at work for decades. It makes beautiful sense that in a land made up people from so many nations, this growing network of movements, which addresses a broad range of struggles, would take root through decentralized, *emergent strategies,* adrienne maree brown's term for "building complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions" and as "an adaptive, relational way of being."[22] There's a place for everyone when the small is seen as a building block for the large.

Here's what some of our interviewees imagined coming out of the pandemic:

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[20] See: Leonhardt, D. & Philbrick, I.P., *One Year Later. The Morning Newsletter.* "The New York Times", May 25, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/25/briefing/george-floyd-legacy-anniversary.html

[21] See: Lowery, W., *The Most Ambitious Effort Yet to Reform Policing May Be Happening in Ithaca, New York.* "GQ", February 22, 2021. https://www.gq.com/story/ithaca-mayor-svante-myrick-police-reform

[22] brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent Strategies: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds.* Chico, AK Press, brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent Strategies: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds.* Chico, AK Press, p. 2.

Sharee Clark:

> My vision is for community centers to have gymnasts, karate teachers, photographers, and others, all teaching our youth something that may enhance their talent, the gifts that they already have, or show them something different. Show them that they are valued. There are resources in the community that can do that. During the protests, we linked with the directors of a White children's theater that our kids have been priced out of. They said they want to make what they do accessible to our community.

Arlene Goldbard:

> Most of my livelihood has come from speaking engagements and consulting projects, virtually all of which were canceled during the pandemic. The upside was that I got to focus on a series of paintings and essays that will be part of a new book. Now I'm noticing colleagues here and abroad questioning whether they want to go back to expending carbon, time, and resources flying somewhere to gather for a conference, and organizations questioning whether they'll have the resources to engage a consultant. So post-pandemic, my big question is whether to embrace the change, cut back, and focus on my solo work – is this the right time in my own life as well as our collective life to do that? I trust the answer will emerge.

Larissa FastHorse: "I would [like to see] every theater answerable to the people on whose lands they're standing."

Leslie Ishii:

> I imagine our healing circles continuing, supporting each other to be fully healed from internalized oppression. But what if we didn't have White supremacist culture constantly pressing? Can you imagine? We must strive for what we can imagine – for our liberation.

Ricardo Gamboa:

> We don't live in Earth. We don't live in the present. We live in infinity, and that means all possibilities are possible. It is really important to move without certainty. Often movements break down, artistic or activist ones, because of the insistence on certainty. (...) We think of the radical as a static position, when I think it's a relation and a response to the context that you're given.

Carlton Turner:

> 2020 is the year never to be forgotten. Many organizations and businesses closed their doors, some of them for the last time. The impact of the pandemic on Black and brown communities exacerbated the inequity that we already knew existed. As most organizations struggled to find their footing in this new and temporary reality, I feel like Sipp Culture doubled down on our mission to provide food, support, and strategic thinking to Black southern folks. 2020 brought the entire country to a pace that is native to Mississippi. At this pace we thrive.

Some artists look forward to picking up work they had been absorbed with before the pandemic, which already had a socially engaged component. Others want to reenvision what theater and performance can do in the world that they want to live in. Others are in an in-between space, as expressed in this exchange:

Mike Lew:

> "I've noticed that throughout COVID there's been this funny sense that we miss theatre, but we don't miss a lot of the lifestyle around theatre. Why is that?"

Rehana Lew Mirza:

> It's like a relationship that was not equal in a lot of ways. And when you're forced to break up, you start to have the distance to analyze what wasn't working and why. So then you're like: "Do I even want to take theatre back?"[23]

We heard three approaches to arts and culture system change that, while not new, had intensified over 2020:

1. Holding (predominantly white) cultural institutions that have not only done harm in the past but also are funded by "dirty money" (war, weapons, prisons, etc.) accountable by disrupting and dismantling them as they are, with calls for equity and justice through material redistribution of money and power. An example is the Strike MoMA movement, a coalition demanding a more equitable institution and

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[23]   Mike Lew and Rehana Lew Mirza, *What Theatre Do We Want to Return To?* May 27, 2021 (https://howlround.com/what-theatre-do-we-want-to-return)

seeking to end the Museum of Modern Art's dependence on private donors such as Leon Black, whose financial ties to war profiteering and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein led to his resignation as board chair (though he remains a trustee).

2. Institutions themselves looking to diversify proactively. Some of these efforts began well before 2020. For example, the National New Play Network (NNPN) contacted arts consultants Lisa Mount and Keryl McCord in 2017, wanting to become a more equitable organization. Together, they worked on a strategic plan through an antiracism lens, and as a result, NNPN completely changed their board structure. "Core Members" – many of whom were NNPN founders and who were nearly all White – had received the majority of the benefits of organizational membership and had guaranteed seats on the board. Core Members are no longer guaranteed seats on the board, half of which are now occupied by people of the global majority. NNPN continues to work on power sharing, more equitable grant-making structures, and other efforts to realize the vision articulated in its strategic plan.

Of the other organizations that McCord and Mount work with, some are still in the learning phase, some are changing policies and practices, and a few are rebelling against this work (usually quietly) and maintaining the status quo. How will we choose to engage with those who refuse to transform? In sum, notes Mount: "Most organizations are finding some way to 'hike the horizontal' – borrowing Liz Lerman's phrase – and engage with both staff and community in ways that are much more egalitarian."

Proactive organizations are generating new models, infrastructure, and processes that center communities in their wholeness; see the description in chapter four of our book on Charlene Caruthers and BYP100's community accountability process toward transformative justice as an example.

3. Developing equitable and expansive cultural funding nationally. Groups focusing on this effort include Creating New Futures, The People's Cultural Plan, Cultural New Deal, Decolonize This Place, Art.Coop, Workers Arts Project, Hollywood Labor, and Ways and Means of We Economy.

The efforts described above require artists to know about more than their art. In his course Anticapitalism for Artists, self-taught educator and theater maker Chris Myers warns:

> Without a careful analysis of what's going on, arts workers risk internalizing the same destructive ideologies that ultimately undergird the problems we cry out against. (...) It's high time we acknowledge that the politics of all artworks, including theatre, are not just the content of the art – the characters and the story, in our case – but the values of the institutions that present them, the behavioral norms of those on stage and especially in the audience, the

finances of access and influence, and who's in the physical building and how they were invited in, not to mention the building itself and the land on which it stands. These are all matters of class.[24]

Despite all we do not know about what comes next in what we hope is an emerging post-pandemic landscape, we believe that artists will continue to show up for their communities in unique ways: bridging divides, through strategies of shock or awe; offering story medicine; singing beauty into the crevices; dancing across dimensions; and enacting what they want to be impossible and possible. They will continue to imagine alternative futures and offer humorous escapes, to connect the dots and make spaces and structures in which more and more of us will feel seen, heard, and validated as part of a great mosaic that holds us in all our complexities and humanity.

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[24] Chris Myers, Class Consciousness and the Transformation of the World. *Art at Work*. Howlround Theatre Commons. April 20, 2021, https://howlround.com/art-work

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Perform a play – your own play!
Between Discipline and Performance

Przemysław Rotengruber

Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznań, Poland

1. Freedom and discipline. Introduction

"Know thyself" (γνῶθι σ (ε) αυτόν) was the motto inscribed on the pediment of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. More than sixteen centuries after the ban on worship in Delphi by Emperor Flavius Theodosius I (347-395) and the destruction of the temple by his son Flavius Arcadius (377-408), this maxim has lost none of its topicality. On the contrary, it is gaining importance in our time. In the era of liberal democracy, the principle of (better) self-understanding applies not only to individuals who want to live their own way, but also to the political community to which they belong. This community is forced to face communication difficulties resulting – first of all – from our individual freedoms. Another obstacle that makes it difficult to implement this principle is our cultural heritage. Until recently, we lived in a world full of hierarchical dependencies and rules considered "eternal" or "holy". Discipline was a prerequisite for the adaptation of individuals and groups to the world of that time. Meanwhile, the opposite is now expected of us: in order to function properly in our cultural environment, we must make an effort to critically distance ourselves from the previously held beliefs.

Easier said than done... The problem is not the lack of (methodological) tools to evaluate social or political doctrines, but the deficits in the critical skills of mass

societies. This feature of contemporary societies becomes visible when we compare them with the (earlier) societies of discipline. It is worth recalling that the societies of discipline were also mass societies. (Their origins date back to the Industrial Revolution in England 1750-1830 and the French Revolution 1789-1799). However, they differed from contemporary societies in that they shaped their identity under the control of the nation state – which played the role of the guardian of "history, language and fate".[1] Rightly, constructivists of various theoretical orientations focus on the cultural turn involving such phenomena as the development of mass media, multiculturalism, nomadism or globalization. In the contemporary world, earlier identity criteria are giving way to changing points of reference. That is why it is so important that its inhabitants develop the skills (1) of formulating private views on the world and (2) participating in the public debate on the rules of collective life. While earlier these decisions were made (on their behalf) by political, economic and other institutions, today they have to perform these tasks themselves. This does not mean that these institutions cannot be a dialogic partner of civil society (or even its leader), but rather that members of this society must not forget that the interests of these institutions do not always harmonize with their individual and collective interests.

Therefore, the question that should be asked is whether the same constructivists rightly treat discipline as an obstacle to our decision-making autonomy. Yes, they are right when it comes to discipline justified by the authority of public institutions. Along with this, however, some of them forget that modern culture has promoted a different kind of discipline, which is obedience to the rules of critical thinking. Should we also give up this kind of discipline? This term is ambiguous because it refers both to what makes it difficult for us to "know ourselves" and to what is required to achieve this goal. It is true that the social sciences and humanities since the times of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud have revised the notion of critical thinking several times. Despite these changes (including our attitude to theory as an authoritative description of the reality), we do not lose faith in being able to make choices in line with our beliefs and our needs.

The theme of this article emerges from the combination of what we want to achieve with what we "should stick to" in the face of everyday challenges. In order to avoid another ambiguity, I would like to clarify this declaration. The representatives of performance studies point out that neither our efforts to get to know ourselves, nor our attempts to express what we are currently interested in,

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[1]   cf. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*. Cambridge University Press 2009.

allow us to finally determine what constitutes our (axiological) identity. The wealth of inspiration, their constant influx, and the contradictions between them simply do not give us such an opportunity. The difficulty lies not only in the necessity to choose between them, but above all in the fact that, in response to the existing state of affairs, we change it, creating a new frame of (axiological) reference. What was supposed to be our "final choice" becomes the starting point for the next search for ourselves. This is another difference that distinguishes us from the old type of mass society.

The presented results of performative research on changes taking place in contemporary culture require reflection on two doubts. Firstly, if in the world after the performative turn we do not have the possibility to finally establish who we are, why should we engage in activities that may lead us – at most – to temporary identity choices? This question corresponds with Socrates' position in the dispute with the sophists. To Protagoras' claim that "Man is the Measure of All Things", Socrates replied, "I know only one thing: that I know nothing". Socrates thus established the boundary that separated knowledge (*epistḗmē*, ἐπιστήμη) from beliefs (*doxa*, δόξα). In seeking principles of a good life, it is easy to confuse one with the other. When this happens, we become dangerous not only to ourselves but also to those who, under our influence, make a similar mistake.

Should we then follow Socrates' advice to give up seeking "our own measure of all things" because of the epistemological status of such a measure? Yes and no. Yes, if in everyday practice we are unable to distinguish (sufficiently justified) knowledge about the world from our imaginations about it. No, if we consider all the consequences of such an opt-out. Epistemological obstacles do not justify transferring the initiative to the creators of social and political projects guided by the criterion of their own organizational interest. It's hard to resist the feeling that this would amount to the proverbial jump from the frying pan into the fire. This observation leads to the second doubt accompanying the cultural diagnosis of representatives from the field of performance studies. What functions – after the performative turn – can the discipline fulfill? This time the answer is simple. In the light of the findings so far, self-discipline as obedience to the rules of critical thinking turns out to be a necessary condition for maintaining a shaky balance between, on the one hand, the fundamental need of each of us to seek our own identity and, on the other, the obligation to keep a sceptical distance from the conclusions that this search may lead us to. The matter is serious. Without this balance, we can easily fall victim to the manipulation of the dominant participants in collective life, as well as to cognitive disorientation caused by claims of metaphysics, historical sentiments or political fears. This article will discuss both of these threats.

2. Individual freedom and organizational interest, individual freedom or organizational interest. In whose plays do the actors of the theatre of everyday life perform?

The representatives of performance studies are right to say that we belong to a culture in which we have to make identity choices without hoping that one of them will turn out to be the final choice. The only way to make the ancient postulate of better self-understanding a reality is our participation in the (never-ending) search for new versions of ourselves. This problem is something new in human history. Until recently, we were guaranteed axiological stability by the institutions with which we simply identified. We believed that we owed them obedience. Our discipline towards their rules and recommendations gave us a sense of stability (resulting from our belief in the supremacy of the rules of the institutional order). Meanwhile, what was once good for us turns out to be an obstacle today. Old habits make it difficult for many people to make decisions about their own lives. They find it difficult to accept the fact that no one can replace them in the search for what is important to them.

This does not mean the final loss of authority by economic, political, cultural or religious institutions. Rather, it means that they must build their authority taking into account the dialogic (liberal-democratic) criteria of their credibility as participants in the public sphere and as candidates for leadership. Unfortunately, they may use these criteria in different ways. The dialogue between these institutions and their social environment is characterized by a far-reaching asymmetry in access to intellectual resources as well as integrative and persuasive skills. On the one hand, ordinary people are not always able to make independent choices between competing projects recommending certain ways of life. On the other hand, the authors of such projects are organizations whose interest is to promote their products, programs, doctrines, etc. This inequality has two consequences. First, individuals participating in public life who do not possess sufficient critical skills are constantly at risk of disguised violence by their "dialogue partners". Second, the victims of this type of violence believe that their choices are in line with what they "really want". It seems to them that in the theatre of everyday life they play in their own art, or at least play a role that suits them. Instead, they perform a play written and directed by someone who has shaped their beliefs about "what they like". Liberal democratic standards cannot help them in any way. In line with these standards, the lost participants in the performance make "sovereign choices".

According to John McKenzie, this game between and scattered performers and the dominant institutions of collective life takes place in three dimensions.

McKenzie distinguishes between cultural performance, organizational performance and technological performance. Whether or not we accept this distinction, McKenzie is right to separate the spheres in which the game takes place. It is not difficult to imagine people acting autonomously (as performers) in one of these spheres while being symbolically dominated in the others. Does this mean that their freedom to perform is pure illusion? This question has attracted the attention of cultural researchers since at least Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895-1973). For example, Michel Foucault (1926-1984) – referring to the Frankfurt School – claims that contemporary culture is a state of war of all against all. What Thomas Hobbes referred to the state of nature, Foucault sees as the key to understanding modern man, who is permanently engaged in the struggle for power. Since knowledge is a weapon in this fight, and its goal is symbolic domination over others, achieved by taking control of their beliefs (biopower), it is easy to guess who these others are. Incompetent and dispersed large social groups – In Foucault's view – simply cannot distinguish between the freedom to perform and the appearances of this freedom created by dominant performers.

McKenzie has a different opinion on this. Yes, he agrees with Foucault and other deconstructionists that changes in contemporary culture expose us to the risk of "symbolic seduction" by dominant political or economic institutions. At the same time, McKenzie believes that these institutions help us achieve our performative goals. He explains this as follows:

> While some theorists have applied Foucault's reading of discipline directly to contemporary society, other have dismissed it as inadequate to today's power arrangements. Rather than quickly embrace or dismiss Foucault's model of discipline, let us take a cue From Deleuze, who stresses that 'what Foucault recognized as well was the transience of this model.' In *Postscript on the Societies Control*, Deleuze writes that 'the disciplines underwent a crisis to the benefit of new forces that were gradually instituted and which accelerated after World War II; a disciplinary society was what we already no longer were, what we have ceased to be.' (...) let us deviate a bit from Deleuze and call things another way: we're living, dying, on the tip of a massive formation that I call the performance stratum.[2]

Jürgen Habermas situated himself between Foucault and McKenzie. He does not share Foucault's conviction that the communicative and instrumental actions

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    [2]   Jon McKenzie, *Perform Or Else. From Discipline to Performance*. London and New York, Routledge, 2001, pp. 175-176.

undertaken by participants in public debate are indistinguishable. Habermas – a witness and participant of the events initiated by social movements in '68 – believes that thanks to the ability to distinguish actions of both types, Western societies are able to assess the impact of public administration and free enterprise on their everyday practice.[3] At the same time, Habermas does not share McKenzie's optimism about culture as a factor that spontaneously liberates Western societies from the power of economic and administrative subsystems. Habermas focuses on their state-building role. They are important to its citizens for obvious reasons. The conditions for the proper functioning of civil society, in addition to the individual rights of its members, are state guarantees of welfare and collective security. Therefore, the effective implementation of these goals is not possible except through the constant balancing between the requirements of the state (identical to the concept of discipline) and the individual desires and needs of citizens. In order to achieve this balance, a symbolic space is needed where individuals and groups can talk to each other, communicate their expectations, and establish rules for living together. Habermas calls this space the life-world (German: *Lebenswelt*).[4]

Regardless of which of these descriptions of contemporary culture we consider the most credible, each one explains why we should develop critical skills. Even McKenzie – convinced of the benevolent influence of the changes initiated by the performative turn (the performance stratum) – warns the beneficiaries of these changes about the far-reaching consequences of their lack of vigilance. Yes, performance is a useful way for us to express ourselves. Unfortunately, it does not protect us from the possibility of external interference in our – nominally personal – decisions about what to wear or how to live. What in daily practice is considered by many to be an expression of their freedom is often shaped (or inspired) by "institutions of discipline". The problem is not the choice of a specific pattern of behaviour, but the reasons why it is in line with the interests of the organization involved in the promotion of that pattern. The motives of radical political or religious groups are a good illustration of this ambiguity. Apart from their leaders, it is in vain to look for people who can (comprehensively) justify their choices there. At the same time, the emotions that bind them to the group show that they are capable of desperate acts.

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[3]   Jürgen Habermas, *Modernity: An Unfinished Project*. In: *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Craig J. Calhoun (ed.). Blackwell, Hoboken, NJ, 2007, pp. 96-111.

[4]   See: Przemysław Rotengruber, "Nomadic ambivalence, monadic nostalgia. In search of a model of culture where the future meets the past." In: *Cultural Course Correction or Back to the Past?* Ed. P. Rotengruber, J. Tyszka, Kontekst, Poznań 2021, pp. 171-185.

Another example is contemporary consumers, convinced that with the help of material goods they can not only distinguish themselves from their social environment, but also create their own identity. The mistake they usually make is that they treat these means (products) as "ready-to-use" ingredients of their "personal style". This does not mean that these products (ingredients) cannot be used in a creative way. Rather, it means that the creative use of someone else's ideas or products requires prudence on the part of individuals looking for useful means of self-expression (in a changing world).[5] Then there is the problem of scale. In the case of contemporary societies, it concerns the imbalance between their members' entanglement in consumption[6] and their (decreasing) skills of integration and participation in collective life[7]. The combination of both factors causes these people to fall into a state of performative ambivalence. Their freedom to perform is being replaced by illusions of freedom (created by others).

How can we protect ourselves and our social environment from the influence of institutions that, according to Habermas, belong to the administrative and economic system? What is discipline as obedience to the rules of critical thinking? The findings so far show that we should not fight the system, but rather distance ourselves from it in a way that takes into account as much the benefits as the costs that we incur due to its existence. We can limit the impact of certain institutional solutions, abandon them, or replace them with others. Unfortunately, wanting is not enough. To achieve this level of social development, we must first learn two things. First, if we want to avoid the "or else" that McKenzie warns us against, we must perform. Only when we find out what – here and now – is important to us, will we be able to oppose others and/or negotiate with them the conditions of living together. Secondly, in order to perform in a way free from the influence of external factors ("or else"), we must create – with joint efforts – appropriate conditions for this.[8] The juxtaposition of both rules allows us to define what critical thinking

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5   See: Victor Turner, *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press 1967;Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press 1969; Cf. H. Wels, K. van der Waal, A. Spiegel, F. Kamsteeg, *Victor Turner and liminality: an introduction*. "Anthropology Southern Africa", 2011, 34(1&2) pp. 1-4.

6   See: George Ritzer, Jeffrey Stepnisky, Jon Lemich, *The 'Magical' World of Consumption: Transforming Nothing Into Something*, "Berkeley Journal of Sociology", Vol. 49. Regents of the University of California, 2005, pp. 117-136; Naomi Klein, *No Logo*. New York, Macmillan, 2009.

7   Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 2001.

8   See: Przemysław. Rotengruber, *Znaniecki's Reflection on Culture in the Light of Performance Studies*, "Journal of Applied Cultural Studies", Vol. IV, Poznań 2019, pp. 117-133.

is. It is a criticism of what each of us wants to achieve, taking into account social limitations and social needs. At the same time, it is a criticism of these needs carried out with the help of knowledge about our rights and obligations towards ourselves. Richard Schechner characterizes the relationship between the two principles as follows:

> Any action consciously performed refers to itself, is part of itself. Its "origin" is its repetition. Every consciously performed action is an instance of restored behaviour. Restored behaviour enacted not on a stage but in "real life" is what poststructuralists call a "performance". (...) In all circumstances, there are conventions, rules, and laws: social behaviour is never free and unbound. (...) Should we, as Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) advised, listen to our own internal drumbeat, or ought we tune ourselves to the demands of social life? There is not correct answer. There are only varying degrees of response.[9]

3. The metaphysical drift of the social sciences and humanities. Epistemological self-control as the forgotten precondition of critical thinking

One more principle should be added to the above-mentioned rules of critical thinking. In our considerations so far on the possibility of ordinary people making decisions about who they want to be and how they want to express it, we have taken into account the (negative) influence of dominant actors in public life. Meanwhile, it is not only external factors that may threaten individuals and groups making the choice of their own idea for life. A threat comparable to that posed by political or economic institutions is the prejudices within us. Despite the changes initiated by modernity – sometimes called the epistemological turn in culture – we do not give up descriptions of the reality devoid of cognitive justification. We do not give up on them despite the knowledge of the works of Hume, Kant and their many outstanding successors. That's not all. It is hard to resist the impression that these descriptions are gaining popularity not only among ordinary people, but also among representatives of science. It is true that the task of science is to reconstruct the laws that govern both nature and social life. However, this is not its only task. It is equally important that the scientific reconstructions of the laws governing reality are supplemented by (solid) justification of the claim to their validity.

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[9]   R. Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction*. Routledge, London and New York 2002, pp. 141, 176, 182.

This is the distinguishing feature of science. There is no need to be concerned when poets or theologians speculate about these laws. They express their beliefs based on religious revelation or their own intuition. They are allowed to do this because they are not scientists. The situation is different when representatives of science use a similar justification. After all, something different is expected of them. Their task is to acquire knowledge about the world accessible within the limits of human cognition. This is undoubtedly an imperfect criterion. (The dispute over it has been going on since time immemorial.) Despite reservations about its usefulness, it helps us to critically evaluate what we call knowledge. The omission of the epistemological rigors accompanying its acquisition would make our needs, desires and prejudices indistinguishable from what we have been able to establish on the basis of empirical evidence. This means that without this criterion, we would lose (cognitive) control over ourselves and our surroundings.

The postulate of maintaining epistemological discipline may provoke resistance from the representatives of performance studies. From their point of view, the distinction between faith and knowledge in relation to culture is false because cultural practice – dynamic and heteronymous – does not fall within the limits of a (coherent) scientific theory. Participants of culture should make their own decisions about who they are or who they would like to be. Otherwise, the tribunal of science – instead of the promised protection against appearances of knowledge – will resemble those political, economic and other institutions which impose their own criteria of rationality on their social environment. Can representatives from the field of performance studies be right in this matter? Definitely not. Epistemological critique of knowledge serves today primarily to justify their theses. Knowing the limits of human cognition is precisely the premise that should encourage us to search for what is important (for each of us individually and for all of us together), and at the same time help us distance ourselves from authorities when they try to play the role of self-appointed leaders in this search.

Here we come to the heart of the problem. It is a metaphysical drift of the social sciences and humanities. It manifests itself in the loosening of cognitive discipline by their representatives, caused by the intention to defend their ontological preferences. The less discipline they maintain, the more they need "the authority of science" to justify the results of their research work. Unfortunately, this leads not only them astray, but also those who trusted them. The considerations on the subject of the cognitive status of scientific theory were initiated by the fathers of modern humanities. At the beginning of the 17th century, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) warned against "idols" – false concepts or images misidentified by the human mind as an object of scientific knowledge. Bacon divided these false concepts into four

groups, calling them idols of the tribe, idols of the cave, idols of the marketplace and idols of the theatre.[10] He considered them to be the main source of error in scientific research.[11]

The considerations initiated by the author of the *Novum Organum* were continued by his many successors. In the twentieth century, Karl Popper and Ernest Gellner took a similar position on the cognitive status of scientific claims.[12] Both authors were interested in theoretical propositions (concepts, hypotheses, doctrines), the truth of which cannot be denied by confronting them with facts. This vague formulation refers to descriptions of human reality that are considered correct and universally applicable, regardless of what their users experience on a daily basis. Popper and Gellner rightly criticized this "practice of science". In this way, science can become the cradle of ideology.

At the same time, both authors – contrary to their own research intentions – proved that excessive expectations regarding the empirical verifiability of social theory can lead to a comparable exaggeration. This is evidenced by their highly critical attitude towards Marxism and psychoanalysis. Taking my own position on this matter, I believe that in eliminating metaphysics from scientific practice, the attitude of the collective participant in this practice is more important than the theory itself. We know from John Locke (1632-1704) that there is no (cognitively) valid transition from "simple ideas" reflecting our everyday impressions to "complex ideas" such as political doctrines or economic concepts and principles.[13] The line between scientific cognition and its appearances (idols) is thin. Therefore, it must be well protected. How to do it? A critical approach to scientific theory does not entail the abandonment or marginalization of ontology... even if it drifts towards metaphysics. We must accept the fact that our speculations about the principles governing reality are never sufficiently supported by empirical data or even personal experiences. There is always room for doubt here. We do not know whether we

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[10]   Fr. Bacon: *The New Organon*. L. Jardine, M. Silverthorne (eds). Cambridge University Press 2000 pp. 7-15.

[11]   Regarding human affairs, Bacon was convinced that "idols" deprived us of the possibility of a bias-free interpretation. Therefore, he believed that solutions to the problems we argue about on a daily basis should be sought by initiating a discussion on a model (imagination) of collective life that would be accepted by everyone. Thus Bacon joined Thomas More (1478-1535) – author of (the first) *Utopia*.

[12]   cf. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press 2013; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Hoboken, NJ, Blackwell, 2006.

[13]   John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding. (Book II)*. Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 116-525.

should agree with the Marxists, who say that economic capital rules the world, or with the liberals who believe that decisions about how to use it are made by free participants in economic life. The same is the case with Sigmund Freud. We cannot conclusively decide whether he was right in taking the unconscious mind as the primary source of human behaviour. Both doctrines (as well as other scientific theories) apply in explaining certain sets of events and are (relatively) useless for other events.

Scientific theory is our key to understanding the world of facts. Along with this, however, we must not forget that the world of facts provides data to help us distinguish this key from pseudo-scientific picklocks. The effects of ignoring this two-way dependency can be devastating. A theory without a safety valve in the form of our critical skills threatens us more than radical political agendas or advertising campaigns. It is more dangerous to us for two reasons. First, our consumer tastes and political preferences are often shaped by science. Second, our (cognitive) control over the content of scientific proposals is more difficult than keeping our distance from economic or political institutions. This is because metaphysically infected theories are embedded in our hearts and minds. We have no other way to defend ourselves against them than by developing the skills of self-irony. Of what do such skills consist? Richard Rorty believes that we become "ironists" when we are able to question especially those beliefs we identify with.[14] Unfortunately, this is where the problem of scale returns. Contemporary societies are unable to recognize and satisfy the need for decision-making self-control. Rather, their members are susceptible to external control ("the other-directed individuals"[15]). Therefore, they need guides or leaders who will teach them to distinguish between freedom to perform and McKenzie's "or else...". They need guides, but where to find them?

4. Ambassadors of critical thinking. Conclusions

Can a performance exist without the performer's interaction with participants or witnesses of his/her actions? The answer to this question seems obvious... and yet it is not. The history of outstanding artists proves that they could not always count on the understanding or even interest of the public. Respect and appreciation for their work came with a delay, sometimes exceeding the time frame of their

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[14]   Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 73.

[15]   David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001, pp. 17-26

lives. Only after some time, observers of their achievements became convinced that they had previously participated in something important. These cases confirm that performance is possible as a communicative act – here and now – directed at "empty space". This allows us to narrow down the problem we are interested in to the question of whether performance is possible as an activity that does not take the form of a message addressed to others. There is no difficulty in answering them in relation to the two deformed types of performance described in this article. Both performance as a kind of persuasion aimed at achieving goals consistent with the interests of the person or organization exerting it, and performance resulting from the performer's excessive attachment to beliefs and ideas that take the form of dogma, are activities involving the participation (presence) of other people. In the first case, it is about persuading these people to act in accordance with the performer's expectations, in the second case, about defending the standards of conduct recognized by their defender as "universally valid".

Is it different with performers whose activities are subordinated to the ideal of "getting to know themselves"? Definitely not! In order to achieve the goal of finding their own place in the world, they constantly need new knowledge of the changes taking place in it. These performers must not forget that the alternative to their empirical sensitivity is their resignation from the freedom to perform, which manifests itself in the two previously described ways. How can they save their freedom to perform? They can only do this through contact with other people. Apart from the aforementioned need for the performer to orientate himself in everyday realities, the attitude of his or her social environment to what he or she does is of no less importance. The individual freedom to perform is difficult to implement without the social and political guarantees of its inviolability.

Unfortunately, these guarantees take the form of "wishful thinking" in the case of a performer whose social partners are hostile to both the performance as a performing practice and the performances in which they participate on a daily basis. Therefore, it is in the interest of the performers to educate their social environment. They can satisfy their identity, artistic or communicative needs only in an educated and tolerant society. Even in the case of performers who want to keep the greatest distance from other people, this principle remains valid. Creative people will not achieve their goals if others do not let them (for fear of what is new or because of a lack of communication skills). Hence it follows that performance originally defined as an activity subordinated to the ancient postulate of "know thyself" is permanently connected with the requirement of caring for the quality of collective life. This thesis is justified not only by the self-interest of people with sufficient skills to act freely. Besides protecting their right to live their own lives, it is just as important

that their ability to find themselves in the world where they want to live safely be accepted and (sometimes) understood by others. But for that to happen, the authors of plays performed in the theatre of everyday life and their audience must master the difficult skill of cooperation and responsibility for each other. It won't happen by itself!

One of the main obstacles making it difficult for contemporary societies to act in line with performative practice are the pseudo-performances in which they participate. On the one hand, the illusion of free choice created by the producers of economic, political or cultural performances, on the other hand, metaphysical prejudices (Bacon's "idols") reduce the empirical sensitivity of ordinary people to almost zero. This justifies the following ethical question. Can performers free from the influence of these factors achieve their goals regardless of the shortcomings of their social environment, understood as the primary space for performing? It is very doubtful. Their abandonment of responsibility for others makes their performance come dangerously close to an act of narcissistic expression. That's not all. The extreme form of "performative solipsism" reveals the third threat. Free and creative performers may lose touch with reality almost as much as their "seduced" social partners. The former do not want to see what the latter cannot see. Therefore, it is necessary to consider what connects individual freedom to perform with the cultural education of people incapable of exercising this freedom.

The keystone connecting one and the other is the rules of critical thinking. They are synonymous with discipline maintained in the name of openness to what happens to us. Its opposite is obedience to rules or ideas justified by the belief that they retain cognitive validity even when contradicted by the content of everyday experience. People who are aware of this alternative can choose between both groups of principles. Even if they choose to follow traditional values, they exercise their freedom. In this (limited) sense, they make their own choice. The point is to make a similar choice possible for the rest of society. How to make this happen? Today, cultural educators deal with the implementation of this task. They transform (former) societies of discipline into a community of performers able not only to express themselves, but also to care for a common space for performance. To paraphrase the title of McKenzie's book, the path these educators are walking leads first from obedience to the old type of authority, to replacing obedience with the principle of individual creativity, and then adapting this principle to the needs of societies struggling with communication and integration difficulties caused by the performative turn in culture.

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The process of globalization turns our world into a kind of stage where many plays are performed side by side. For the first time in human history, we can choose between different ideas for our own lives. However, this possibility entails tangible costs. Those who cannot distinguish between performances aimed at expressing themselves or initiating dialogue with others, and performances prepared for manipulative purposes, fall prey to their own incompetence. In a sense, they are trapped in the old world of institutions that create (socially, politically, economically) accepted patterns of behaviour. In order to get out of the vicious circle of "ready-made solutions", these people need the help of cultural educators. This role is played today not only by (independent) representatives of the performing arts but also by representatives of performance studies, cultural studies, cultural anthropology, and other social sciences.

Those who thought that caring about the authenticity of their performances was enough for them are revising their beliefs. It is not enough that they follow the changes taking place around them, or that they shape their attitude to these changes. They must now take responsibility for the whole theatre of everyday life. This theatre is culture and (all) its participants.