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Zofia Rosińska
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Warsaw, Poland
zrosinska@uw.edu.pl

Boundaries, Transgression, and Resistance

Abstract:

In this essay I analyze the phenomenon of boundary and the mode(s) of human experiencing of it. I claim that it is essential, or even foundational, to culture. Humans encounter boundaries positively or negatively virtually everywhere, in all forms of experience of reality and of themselves. To experience a boundary is, obviously, not identical with a simple acceptance of our limitations, but is equally constituted by a pursuit to transgress it. There is no boundary without at least possible transgression, and there is no transgression without a boundary. In this sense one cannot be understood without the other. This paradoxical relation is constitutive – as we know from the great narratives of our culture – for culture and humankind in their essential entanglement. But this picture is to be supplemented by a moment of resistance – even if we were able to transgress all boundaries, does that mean we should? It is this question which draws our attention to creative and normative aspects of our experience of boundaries. It is this question which constitutes a challenge to our thinking and acting whenever we encounter a boundary. In my analyses I pay some special attention to boundaries in contemporary art.

Keywords:

boundary, transgression, resistance, culture, humanity

The category of “boundary” has become central in philosophy of culture. Social and individual forms of behavior invite questions regarding boundaries, how they are transgressed and what resistance this meets. Boundaries concern war and peace, suffering and pleasure, poverty and affluence, work and rest, as well as tolerance, boor-

ishness, and cynicism. As it turns out, reflection on boundaries entails enquiring about culture and humanity including processes in which the latter is shaped.¹

In my case, these considerations have been inspired by a specific memory from the time when I was a student of philosophy. We held conferences with representatives of other research fields and practices. One time when we met with biologists, Professor Goldfinger-Kunicki responded to the possibility of genetic engineering by asking “we may be capable of everything, but should we really do everything?” His answer has become imprinted in my mind. Interestingly, it is provided in the form of a question – one that we have to live with and can never abandon. Should we reject it, human life would cease to be what it is, although it could be more comfortable and even happier.

The scrutinizing of the phenomenon of boundaries and transgressing them is something we encounter regularly, even in everyday life. From overcoming idleness or aversion to controlling desires and exercising forgiving (perhaps the greatest spiritual effort), these processes are part of the repertoire of life skills we creatively practice on a daily basis. This aspect certainly deserves a separate discussion, but this is not the kind of transgression that constitutes the subject matter here.

In my view there is no better book about transgression than Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. He argues that “there is a fine line in everything which is dangerous to overstep; and when it has been overstepped, there is no return.”² These are the kinds of boundaries this article focuses on. It is their transgression that I wish to examine.

Transgression oscillates between two extremes, one represented by the “common man,” as Ortega y Gasset termed him, and the other by the so-called “libertarian.” “We distinguished the excellent man from the common man by saying that the former is the one who makes great demands on himself, and the latter who makes no demands on himself.”³ Certainly, the latter type does not perform any transgression.

Libertarianism is exemplified best in novels by Marquise de Sade, whom Georges Bataille described as the one who “questioned everything that had been for centuries considered unshaken and inviolable, shaking the most cherished notions and beliefs ... he craved for the obverse of life ... there was nothing worth respect that he would not mock, nothing pure he would not taint, nothing joyous he would not fill with terror.”⁴ Sade indulged in transgression. He craved prohibition and normativity only to violate them. Crossing boundaries brought him joy. In the eighteenth century, he was mostly the object of interest for psychiatrists. Since de Sade’s transgressions appear pointless, the above two extremes are excluded from the following discussion.

Of primary interest here is transgression understood as a moment of desire. It is not a goal in itself but part of another process that consists in striving toward something other than transgression. The pleasure and happiness it may entail are merely incidental and usually experienced *ex post* as neither comprises the ultimate goal.

Transgression defines humanity, at least in its European form. Pensive yet insatiable, people strive for completion through needs, desires, and ideals. Transgression involves both internal life and the external one we have within culture: vibrant with symbols and myths, past and future, as well as moral instructions. This life is about hoping, despairing, and doubting as well as cultivating questions and rebelliousness. Internal and external life seem inextricable; after all, there would be no culture without humanity and no humanity without culture, which forges them into an inseparable unity. No one can pull themselves away from culture as if they

1) To recall, the earliest legal codices defining boundaries and punishment for transgressing them, determining what is just and unjust, proper and improper, are the Code of Ur-Nammu (prior to 2,000 BC) and the Code of Hammurabi (eighteenth century BC).

2) Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 746.

3) Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, 63.

4) Bataille, *Inner Experience*.

were podding beans. Culture would die without humanity. All sensations and experiences are cultural as well, including moments of creativity and mystical connection, even psychotic ones, as long as they are expressed or communicated, leaving some kind of trace. Among these encounters we find transgression and resistance.

That transgression has become fashionable in both life and reflection could suggest it is a new way of experiencing the world and oneself, providing new ideas to consider. Indeed, this is partly true along with the loosening of norms and prohibitions, rapid technological development, extended access to such material, and the creation of a new quality of experience. These transgressions encompass extreme sports, biotechnological pursuits, and relaxed social norms inviting reflection on identity. This has been done by philosophers since ancient times and is not novel in the field having been endlessly reconsidered by both professional philosophers and artists.

Consider the 1960 poem “What Does It Mean” [“Co znaczy”] by Czesław Miłosz:

It does not know it glitters
It does not know it flies
It does not know it is this not that.

And, more and more often, agape,
With my Gauloise dying out,
Over a glass of red wine,
I muse on the meaning of being this not that.

Just as long ago, when I was twenty,
But then there was a hope I would be everything,
Perhaps even a butterfly or a thrush, by magic.
Now I see dusty district roads
And a town where the postmaster gets drunk every day
Melancholy with remaining identical to himself.

If only the stars contained me.
If only everything kept happening in such a way
That the so-called world opposed the so-called flesh.

Were I at least not contradictory. Alas.⁵

Contemporary philosophy considers language to be crucial for the formation of identity. Although language is certainly vital in this process, it cannot be absolutized. In fact, belief in the creative powers of language allows one to experience their impotence. Camus delivers one touching account of this in *The Fall*:

I thought I was in love. In other words, I acted the fool. I often caught myself asking a question which, as a man of experience, I had always previously avoided. I would hear myself asking: “Do you love me?” You know that it is customary to answer in such cases: “And you?” If I answered yes, I found myself committed beyond my real feelings. If I dared to say no, I ran the risk of ceasing

5) Miłosz, “What Does It Mean,” 164.

to be loved, and I would suffer therefor... Hence I was led to ever more explicit promises and came to expect of my heart an ever more sweeping feeling. Thus I developed a deceptive passion for a charming fool of a woman who had so thoroughly read “true love” stories that she spoke of love with the assurance and conviction of an intellectual announcing the classless society. Such conviction, as you must know, is contagious. I tried myself out at tallying likewise of love and eventually convinced myself. At least until she became my mistress and I realized that the “true love” stories, though they taught how to talk of love, did not teach how to make love. After having loved a parrot, I had to go to bed with a serpent.⁶

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In the 1980s, Maria Janion and Stanisław Rosiek, later joined by Stefan Chwin, edited a five-volume series *Transgressions*. Notably, it was shrugged off by Warsaw philosophers who deemed it non-philosophical. Forty years on, transgression is actually a trending subject, with numerous MA papers and even professorial dissertations being devoted to resistance and rebellion, prohibition and taboo – in short, boundaries. Finally, lectures on these topics attract the greatest number of students.

Why did this subject not draw a broader response earlier? As is usually the case in history, there are multiple reasons for this, but an important place among them is held by the Polish profile of philosophy as a discipline. Existentialism made transgression its primary object of reflection but it developed most intensely in France and Germany taking a variety of forms ranging from fideism to atheism. In Poland, however, other philosophical theories prevailed including analytical philosophy (the Lvov-Warsaw School), Thomism, Marxism, as well as hermeneutics and phenomenology with existentialism being important to Henryk Elzenberg, Zbigniew Herbert, Witkacy and Witold Gombrowicz. This does not mean that existentialism was unknown in Poland. In fact, it was even fashionable, but primarily as a lifestyle, not a philosophical approach. Reflection on human existence, which Karl Jaspers argued to shed some light on life, was taken up in literature and art rather than pure philosophy.

Just like the Slavic deity Svetovit, philosophy looks in four directions: toward science, art, everyday life, and finally itself. It traces existential problems of humanity that these fields pose before us, analyzing and shaping them. In other words, it originates in culture and participates in its development. In this sense, it is invariably a philosophy of culture.

Philosophy of culture assumes that the human mode of existence is relational. This means that due to being culturally determined, people connect with more than empirical facts by asking about their *arche* and *telos*. Humans inquire about their origins, the beginning of the world and culture, the meaning and purpose of reality, and lastly – about their own identity. Earliest traces of these investigations are contained in myths, books of wisdom, and Holy Scriptures. Myths are no fairy tales concocted from a recipe in order to achieve certain educational goals. They are rather, as put it Schelling in his *Erlangen Lectures*, a “pre-memorial, pre-reflexive body of existential contents.” As such, do they reveal something about transgression? Do they allow us to include it among the “pre-memorial existential contents” and thus strip it of all coincidental and historical aspects which became fashionable either accidentally or due to postmodernist transformations?

Let us turn to the biblical story of creation and the beginnings of humanity described in Greek mythology. In the former we read: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die’” (Genesis 2:15).⁷

6) Camus, *The Fall*, 31.

7) All quotations from the Bible after the New International Version, accessed through biblegateway.com.

As is easily recalled, the cunning serpent found a way to stir Eve's desire and make her doubt God's prohibition. She transgressed and plucked the fruit, then encouraging Adam to follow. He did not resist Eve, nor would she oppose either the serpent or her own passion. It was the divine prohibition that resisted their desire to acquire the "knowledge of good and evil." God cursed the serpent and subordinated the wife to her husband: "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (3:16). At the same time, God sentenced Adam to hard and painful work: "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (3:17). Then, "after he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life" (3:24). While reading this account we cease to doubt that the very beginning of human life involved transgression. After a prohibition is violated by overstepping it, consequences follow. This tripartite pattern comprises an existential structure that expresses, embodies, and shapes human life in culture.

Fashionable transgression has only one stage, which can be repeated multiple times. Because it may be revisited again and again, this kind of transgression seems to lose the metaphysical dimension and shift to the domain of aesthetics. The wisdom of Genesis seems clear on this issue: there can be no return to innocence; once lost it is irretrievable and cannot be reclaimed. Is the wisdom of Moses no longer our own? Do we really believe that innocence can be regained? Perhaps only in virtual reality.

Let us turn to the foremost mythical rebel: Prometheus. In *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus explains that his name means "forward thinking" or "sagacious." In his account, the titan stole fire from Zeus and gave it to humanity. "It is for this reason," Zygmunt Kubiak comments, "that Zeus torments him: he transgressed the order of the world defined by the deity."⁸ This situation is analogous to the one described in Genesis, revealing the same triad of prohibition, transgression, and consequence which reflects the inescapable human condition.

Why did Prometheus steal fire? Let us recall that after overcoming Cronus Zeus divided honors, gifts, and prerogatives among gods, neglecting humans. He wanted to destroy people and start a new humankind. On the other hand, during the Golden Age of Cronus's reign people lived alongside gods and could even marry them. As Prometheus says, "no one dared stand up against this thing but me! I alone had the courage. I saved humanity from going down smashed to bits into the cave of death. For this I'm wrenched by torture: painful to suffer, pitiable to see."⁹ Prometheus remains faithful to himself until the bitter end. He is not persuaded to ask for Zeus's forgiveness. Further, he neither falls in love with violence, nor renounces his friendly disposition toward humanity. He transgressed and boldly suffers the terrible consequences.

One example of anthropological transgression is provided in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by Friedrich Nietzsche. In this book he argues that human beings are bound to overcome and transgress themselves. Nietzsche's man is constantly in passage, going beyond himself. The meaning of being human is captured in the movement "from – to": transgression. However, what is in fact transgressed here? Man is being transgressed, but he is himself a transgression. "Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman – a rope over an abyss," Zarathustra explains, "a dangerous on-the-way ... a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over* and a *going under*."¹⁰ Certainly, Nietzsche's words can be variously interpreted, leaving the question of the overman open. Discovering the overman within the human constitutes a process of revealing the meaning of existence. Still, it is not disclosed in some other world but in the very bowels of human existence. "Once people said God when they gazed upon distant seas," Zarathustra

8) Kubiak, *Mitologia Greków i Rzymian*, 110.

9) Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 41.

10) Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 7; emphasis preserved.

notes, “but now I have taught you to say: overman. God is a conjecture, but I want that your conjecturing not reach further than your creating will.”¹¹ Who is Zarathustra? Is he a metaphor of the overman? If this is true, then he would be stripped of all identity. He would not just be self-contradictory, as Miłosz shows in the poem quoted above, but virtually a nobody, a polymorphous being, omnipresent yet placeless, moving from nowhere to nowhere, and insubstantial.

Is it possible to identify in this case the triad present in the metaphysical model of transgression? It is man who is transgressed in this case and consequences include loss of identity, entailing breakdown of community and communication, and creating loneliness. “And all the people jubilated and clicked their tongues... And now they look at me and laugh, and in laughing they hate me too. There is ice in their laughter.”¹²

In the above examples, the consequences of transgression are negative because it involves crossing boundaries whose violation carries serious consequences. After murdering the usurer, Raskolnikov visits Sonia, arguing desperately:

It was not the money I wanted, Sonia, when I did it. It was not so much the money I wanted, but something else... I know it all now... Understand me! Perhaps I should never have committed a murder again. I wanted to find out something else; it was something else led me on. I wanted to find out then and quickly whether I was a louse like everybody else or a man. Whether I can step over barriers or not, whether I dare stoop to pick up or not, whether I am a trembling creature or whether I have the right... “To kill? Have the right to kill?” Sonia clasped her hands. “Ach, Sonia!” he cried irritably... “Listen: when I went then to the old woman’s I only went to try... You may be sure of that!” “And you murdered her!” ... “Did I murder the old woman? I murdered myself, not her! I crushed myself once for all, for ever.” ... “Suffer and expiate your sin by it, that’s what you must do.”¹³

Suffering is, after all, a weighty thing.

Transgression of psycho-social loyalty is addressed in the novel *Mephisto* by Klaus Mann, son of Thomas Mann. The eponymous Mephisto is Hendrik Höfgen, an outstanding and ambitious actor “typecast as an elegant blackguard, murderer in evening dress, scheming courtier.”¹⁴ Engaged with the communist movement in 1930s Germany, “comrade Höfgen” becomes involved with national socialism to keep working. In the end, he

Sees nothing, hears nothing, notices nothing... Nothing but stages, film studios, dressing rooms, a few nightclubs, a few fashionable drawing rooms are real to him. Does he not feel the change in the seasons? Is he not aware that the years are passing – the last years of that Weimar Republic born amid so much hope and now so piteously expiring – the years 1930, 1931, 1932? The actor Höfgen lives from one first night to the next, from one film to another, his calendar composed of performance days and rehearsal days. He scarcely notices that the snow melts, that the trees and bushes are in bud or in full leaf, that there are flowers and earth and streams. [He is] encapsulated by his ambition as in a prison cell.¹⁵

11) Ibid., 65.

12) Ibid., 10–11.

13) Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 1018–1021.

14) Mann, *Mephisto*, 726.

15) Ibid., 726–27.

Convinced that he serves only art, Höfgen prefers not to know whose stage he works on and what his role is. Nevertheless, an old companion seeks him out and sneers: “We don’t forget anyone! We know exactly who we should hang first!”¹⁶ This shakes Höfgen;

What an evening! He thought of all that he had gone through. Surely such ordeals overwhelmed even the strongest men, he thought self-pityingly... . But there was no point in shedding tears that nobody would see. I have lost them all, he whispered. Barbara, my good angel. And Princess Tebab, the dark source of my strength. And Hedda von Herzfeld, my faithful friend. And even little Angelika. I have lost them all.¹⁷

There is no guilt and redemption here, only psychotherapy. His mother calms him down: “But, Heinz!’ she whispered. ‘But Heinz – quiet now. It isn’t as bad as all that... . At the sound of the name of his childhood – the name that his ambition and pride had rejected – his weeping first became more violent and then began to subside.”¹⁸

Transgression always entails consequences, but their character does not have to be negative. The biblical story of the good Samaritan provides one example.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. “Look after him,” he said, “and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.” (Luke 30:35)

The transgression exemplified here primarily concerns overcoming distrust of others as well as one’s own indifference (the priest and the Levite were unconcerned), and the unwillingness to change plans. The Samaritan was travelling somewhere yet decided to cause trouble for himself.

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Although transgression accompanies all forms of creativity, it constitutes a hallmark of twentieth-century art. What boundaries are crossed there and how? Even a simple answer may outline certain directions, though definitely not all of them. Art transgresses the frameworks that exist within its own limits as well as the boundary between art and reality, the latter traditionally not assumed to be artful. This kind of transgression is two-way: from Dadaism to Warhol, art brings reality into art, at the same time opening art onto reality.

Another poignant example of overcoming limitations, steering them toward reality, and then upon meeting with resistance returning them to its own field, is F.T. Marinetti and the Futurist Manifesto. We read in this text:

16) Ibid., 1317.

17) Ibid., 1320–21.

18) Ibid., 1330–31

It is in Italy that we are issuing this manifesto of ruinous and incendiary violence, by which we today are founding Futurism, because we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries... We want to get rid of the innumerable museums which cover it with innumerable cemeteries... Public dormitories where you sleep side by side for ever with beings you hate or do not know... To admire an old picture is to pour our sensibility into a funeral urn instead of casting it forward with violent spurts of creation and action... For art can only be violence, cruelty, injustice.¹⁹

Such claims expectedly raised concern and caused outrage, meeting with resistance. Marinetti's friend Lucini declined to sign the Manifesto on February 14, 1909 because he would not accept and endorse the kind of extravagance that limits and mocks art.²⁰ Admittedly a revolutionary, he was no nihilist, possessing a battered yet living conscience that forbade him to go down this road. Another poet and critic, Enrico Thovez, argued the Italian audience would not understand any of this, while Ugo Ojetti ironically remarked that Futurism was not a literary school but one of morality; still, he held that it should be praised for being incomprehensible.²¹

However, the younger generation interpreted the Manifesto in its own way, opening the possibility to consider Futurist propositions not as a barbaric call to destroy received culture but as an artistic program. Its key tenets would include instilling in intellectually active youths a special disdain for imitativeness and pedantry as well promoting free, unbounded inspiration that defies sentimentalism and embraces risk in both imagination and practice.²² Such postulates would probe the limits of art, referencing present-day culture and life ("Our goal is to vigorously fight the cult of the past and destroy it; in this, we follow the instinctual need to protect our vital powers that wish to be unrestrained and develop freely before they are spent.")²³ Ultimately, the Futurist Manifesto has been understood in a way that foregrounds primarily artistic activities, pushing it back into the realm of aesthetics. However, it remains unclear if such claims, although limited to the domain of creativity and imagination, would not also shape non-aesthetic aspects of consciousness.

The Polish artist Katarzyna Kobro took a keen interest in crossing internal boundaries in art. With each work, she would address a unique artistic problem. She was the first to treat sculpture as an open entity, although Henry Moore is usually credited with this.²⁴ Władysław Strzemiński, her beloved and then hated husband, commented on the influence she has exerted on Western visual art. Since the 1928 "Spatial Composition" we can clearly observe a shift in attitude among the Neo-plasticists. Previously focusing on the overall shape of sculptures and their internal space, they would now open their works to space, seeking to connect with it.²⁵ As Kobro herself put it, "those unable to think in generalized terms always regard sculpture as a monument, a portrait-like bust or memorial. They stand before artworks, discussing at length and with absolute authority ... whether a sculpture is meant to be the pinnacle of artistic achievement or a supplement to rudimentary education meant to instruct and stupefy the ignorant masses."²⁶

19) Marinetti, "The Futurist Manifesto."

20) Baumgarth, *Futuryzm*, 36.

21) *Ibid.*, 38.

22) *Ibid.*, 44, 46, 47, 50.

23) *Ibid.*, 52.

24) Strzemińska, *Miłość, sztuka i nienawiść*, 33.

25) Baranowicz, *Posłowie*, 114.

26) *Ibid.*, 113.

Clearly, Kobro did not lack in either rebelliousness or heroism. For her, the boundary between life and art was clear. As her daughter reminisced, when there was nothing else to light the stove to prepare a meal for the child, the mother, shocked or in despair, would chop and burn all of her wooden sculptures from the years 1925–1928.²⁷ In this case, the outer barrier of art was crossed – it would be difficult to find a stronger example of subordinating art to life.

Surrealists also attempted to cross the boundary of consciousness by investing in the unconscious, trying to assume its perspective and act in its name. In their own cultural context, they wanted to speak from the position of irrationality and madness, not that of order and reason. Showing the other side of modernity was their goal: to reveal the psychic underside, one that is full of surprises, rife with desire and unintelligible, remaining closer to dream vision rather than forming clear patterns. In surrealism, the unconscious was associated with femininity, which represents desire and constitutes its object. Many surrealist works connect women figures with machines in protest against a purely rational view of reality. Eroticism and femininity as incarnations of otherness and surrealist centerpieces, would be closer to the unconscious than the demoralized masculine world. Finally, surrealism looked to the past and myths in the attempt to question the present, seeking ways to cross traditional boundaries in representation.

Another compelling example is provided by Russian constructivism and the group OBMOKhU (Society of Young Artists). Without going into detail regarding various tendencies in Soviet culture at the beginning of the 1920s, let us focus on the ambivalence they would attribute to art. In the manifesto published in March 1921, Konstantin Medunetsky, Alexander Rodchenko, and Varvara Stepanova claim that constructivists do not consider themselves to be conventional artists. While the objects they produce are not made like art, they are rather experiments or laboratory works. They would not employ traditional materials or tools, viewing the brush as the hallmark of the anachronistic model promulgated by illusionistic art. Instead, they used industrial materials typical for factory space such as iron, glass, or nails. Therefore, their works were not sculptures or compositions but constructions, while their artistic process would not involve creativity but ceaseless redefinition. In this way, art would shift its own boundaries, transforming itself by changing its own terms. Finally, art would be then located somewhere in between artistic expression, experimentation, and production while artworks would occupy the middle space between work and product. Something that was made as a work of art can easily stop being one. Thus, artworks became “amphibious.” It seems difficult to gauge the extent to which this was authentic exploration and expression of engagement in revolutionizing the world, or an indicator of pressure and anxiety about destruction.

Apt illustration of transgressing this boundary is found in body art, which reflects on limits themselves. In fact, this approach involves double transgression. It encouraged crossing boundaries in a way similar to Duchamp’s gesture of displaying a urinal at an art exhibition, leading to the introduction of a non-artistic element of reality into art. He pushes the boundary between art and non-art, greatly expanding the scope of the former. From that moment on, art would not be defined by a certain kind of effort, specific rules, and poetics (or its standalone aesthetic value), but by the eye and will of the artists. From this perspective, more insight is provided by the exhibition “Antyciała” [“Antibodies”], which opened in 1995 in Warsaw’s Centre for Contemporary Art (CSW). Let us consider some of the reactions it elicited among viewers as well as the aesthetic goals outlined by the organizers.

The exhibition included works by the likes of Katarzyna Kozyra, Grzegorz Klaman, Alicja Żebrowska and Zbigniew Libera. It met with opposition rather than praise, forcing the gallery to close it before the planned end. As the organizers emphasized, the body occupies a special place at the crossroads between public and private

27) *Ibid.*, 63.

discourses, where topical social issues are debated, including abortion, euthanasia, in vitro fertilization, genetic engineering, and sexual preferences. Body art would also express the anxieties of its time, referencing AIDS, transvestitism, bodybuilding, organ trade, and many more. These artists address and question commonly held views as well as dominant patterns of representation. Let us only add that body art involves reflection not only on aesthetic canons and state policies but also the body as a boundary. In this case, artistic expression facilitates reflection and criticism.

A similar ambition can be identified in works by Jerzy Ludwiński. Troubled by the question of the boundary between art and reality, he focused on the artistic process, specifically the thought patterns that resist reconstruction. Author of the coinage “absent art,” Ludwiński traced the boundary between art and internal reality, not the one between art and the outside world. He aimed to reconstruct the artistic process using a special language. In this way, he argued, creativity could become both art and reality. Conceptualism and body art not only probe boundaries but also thematize them, making them the object of artistic reflection.

A lengthy volume could be filled with various examples of transgression and resistance. It seems difficult to find a sphere of life that would be free from transgression. It permeates politics, morality, art, and even sport. It is experienced in spiritual life, in sickness and in health, comprising an essential part of creativity.

translated by Grzegorz Czemieli

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