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The Space of a Book. The Images of Words

Introduction

In 2005 Fundacja Odnawiania Znaczeń. Polka [Foundation for the Revival of Meanings. A Polish Woman] was set up, managed by Agnieszka Zawadowska. Since that time we have been running scientific and artistic projects together with the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. We consciously seek new ways for the Polish humanities, revising their basis and, at the same time, preserving what is the most valuable in them. Our initiatives and research works in the fields of history and history of idea taken by us are open to new phenomena both in science and contemporary art. The horizon of these actions is the combination of the humanities, the reflection on history, and artistic undertakings, which means, on the one hand, a desire to meet intellectual challenges of postmodernity and, on the other hand, an attempt to maintain sensitivity to specific historical determinants of the country.

In 2005 we developed the exhibition *Polka – Medium, Cień, Wyobrażenie* [A Polish Woman – Medium, Shadow, Image] in cooperation with the Centre for Contemporary Art. In 2008 the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Foundation for the Revival of Meanings, the Jewish Historical Institute, the Jewish Theatre, and the National Theatre collaborated on the occasion of the anniversary of the March 1968. Within the framework of the project *Marzec 1968-2008* [March 1968-2008] the scientific conferences were held in the Jewish Historical Institute and the National Theatre, as well as the meetings with the March emigrants took place in the Jewish Theatre. For the first time the Polish and Jewish environments jointly celebrated the anniversary of the March '68, recognising the act of expulsion of Polish citizens of Jewish origin from Poland as one of the most important and tragic moments of the post-war history of Poland. After the conference on the March events two albums were created: *Honor. Bóg. Ojczyzna* [Honour. God. Homeland] and *Żebro Mesjasza* [The Rib of the Messiah]. In 2015 the exhibition *Ludzkie/Nieludzkie* [Human/Inhuman] was organised, the curators of which were Agnieszka Zawadowska and Małgorzata Uszyńska, on this occasion a catalogue was also issued.

Basing on the artistic experience of the 1960-1980s and the works by such authors as Robert Massin (*La cantatrice chauve*) or Anselm Kiefer (*Livre en plomb*), and referring to the freedom of digital design, we treat a book as a space in which

we are eyewitnesses of essential redefinitions and cultural changes. Experiences of artists and works of researchers, including Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin, allowed us to create an integral multidisciplinary method, the essence of which is fragmentation, and a part is always more important than the whole¹.

The main category important for our works is an archive. In the book *Mal d'archive* Derrida extends the concept of archive understood as a place where documents and things are stored. A look at the archive is deepened with the contexts of politics, technology, ethics, law, psychoanalysis, and Judaism. According to Derrida, due to the Holocaust archives changed their nature – they became “archive du mal” (archive of evil, archive of pain). All the remains, photographs, things involve fever, disease and pain: they will never be voiced and it will not be possible to put them in order. In the context of the Shoah, we have to acknowledge the silence of the archives to be the deepest and the most secret reality. We act at the edge of a possible discourse.

According to a traditional research action, photos/images were explained, they had to be interpreted and comprehensible in some way. In our works we depart from this perspective, we prefer Derrida's approach, who contested the possibility that words can express and translate something. It is therefore necessary to maintain the difference of languages, so in our archive photos/images stop at the threshold of untranslatable. To some extent they are told by us, but anyway they remain foreign and unadoptable.

We also ask the question about the final meaning of repetitive pictures that are available on the Internet, broadcast on television and presented in other media. As regards this issue, we refer to Benjamin's thought who noticed that reproductions, though detached from its original, have a multiple strength and create newer and newer contexts.

In our books we were guided by double logic of the material selection, we tried to present what is left in complete silence and, at the same time, the most meaningful. We believe that thinking by means of an archive allows for thinking through images, which also means a return to archaic thinking and, simultaneously, creating the language of the future. The scientific discourse, enriched with a reflection which treats images as a basis of reasoning and experiencing, allows for formulating questions that have never been posed, and perhaps will remain unanswered.

Pictures, pictures

What can we see? Fuzzy pictures are showing faintly behind the semi-transparent glass pane of time, dusty junk, remains that are impossible to blend together. What can we feel? That not everything can be expressed.

¹ Y.A. Blois, R. Krauss, *Formless*, Zone Books, New York 1997; R.E. Krauss, *L'Inconscient Optique*, transl. by M. Veubret, Au Même titre, Paris 2002; K. Elam, *Grid Systems*, Princeton Architectural Press, Princeton-New York 2004; R. Bolton, *The Contest of Meaning*, MIT Press Cambridge-London 1992; D. Bounoux, *L'image entre le spectre et la trace*, INA edition, Bry-sur-Marne 2014; J. Derrida, *Cinders*, transl. by N. Lukacher, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota 2014; J. Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I am*, ed. by M.L. Mallet, transl. by D. Wills, Fordham University Press, New York 2008; C. Guillomin, *Sexe, race et pratique du pouvoir, l'idée de nature*, Édition iXe, Donnemarie-Dontilly 2016; G. Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout*, Edition de Minuit, Paris 2003.

The four books-albums: *Polka*, *Honor. Bóg. Ojczyzna*, *Żebro Mesjasza*, *Ludzkie/Nieludzkie* form a specific archive, not based on any hierarchy or structure². Entering it causes anxiety, sadness, sense of incredibility, uncertainty, and ambivalence. They are accompanied by the state of visitation. The cold, grey, and steel tonality dominating here makes us think of a crypt where dust and ash are hanging in air and falling down, and underneath the disintegrating body of our history is hidden. Blurred images, out of focus, blend in the black background like corpses decomposing in the ground. A multi-layered story begins here, and it is difficult to say what its main topic is.

Although these four volumes fall into the extremely extended canon of the order determined graphically, they express untidiness and chaos. One can get an impression that on each page words are getting lost, images are blurring, and senses are slipping by. Excerpts of texts, fragments of photographs, quotations printed there show some fundamental deficit signalling/indicating that a crux is always absent. Therefore empty spaces situated between and beyond photos/texts/objects play a huge role. This fluid space not only resembles the air, which sets objects in motion while wafting, but also is a touchstone of their corporeality. From a formal point of view, the albums resemble drawers or old cabinets from which long-forgotten junk is spilling out.

Sheets of paper set in motion are moving like a funeral procession, followed by our attention even beyond the margins of the book. Shreds of words and images are circling above us in the emptiness in which blurry contours are emerging; objects in photos are often hardly visible, thanks to which we have a feeling that another type of vision is necessary, reviving inside us at dusk and opening to other dimensions. None of the pages is the most important one. The whole should be treated as an invitation to participate in mourning and funeral ceremonies, and, simultaneously, it is associated with exhumation that has never taken place but it should have (and maybe it is too late for it).

On the pages, in their deeper layers the dark heart of the past is pulsating and we feel that it resonates with our internal darkness. Between these overlapping shadows the signature of oblivion is hidden, therefore the mourning has to be of messianic character in order to be effective, because its purpose is the salvation of our past, bringing it to daylight, and meeting our dead people. As Walter Benjamin wrote:

The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption. Doesn't a breath of the air that nerved earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn't there an echo of now silent ones? [...] If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then our coming was expected on earth. Then like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak messianic power [...]³.

² Cf. J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by E. Prenowitz, Chicago-London 1996.

³ W. Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, in: Id., *Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938-1940, transl. by E. Jephcott et al., ed. by H. Eiland, M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge-London 2006, p. 390.

Book-crypts/cemeteries loosen chronology and thanks to it the oppression of time is broken, and they allow us to move in different directions, return to events that call us and wait for our gesture of remembering. In a book ritual of celebrating *dziady*⁴ events are evoked without distinction between large and small ones⁵. We can see their past existence in the form of shadows, tracks, dust, ash, specks of dirt – scattered in the space between the first page and the last one.

We notice that historical truth is often supported by phantasmic truth. The images evoke everything which is driven out or repressed in our individual and collective history. The looks coming from many photos – stubborn, slightly surprised as if they were on the alert – are directed straight at us; figures are looking and are not looking, which provokes anxiety and uncertainty. The trace of this vision remains in us, a gesture made simultaneously by them and by us. This happens in our internal time, more present than historical time⁶. We realise that those who looked, waited long for us to call them. One of the ways to recall their first name is quoting. Benjamin wrote that to quote a word is to call it by name⁷. In books we make an effort to meet Benjamin's requests and we call a word by its name, break it out of the context and, at the same time, call it back to its beginning⁸. In the designed scenery, which is a specific type of montage, countless names and pictures called repeatedly seem to follow one another, we may have an impression that so many of them cannot be squeezed in a book, they almost go beyond margins, and meanings left by them are arranged in every reader in a different manner. An important predominant feature here is the silence appearing in central places and at the edges. The quiet that prevails is painful, undefined, and vibrating. What is bygone, emerges from it. To our despair, nothing is able to stop these images, they are flowing through and sinking into the emptiness, and only sometimes our attentive look can prevent them from moving for a while.

An internal order of books does not impose one orthodox way of reception upon a reader, however, it watches over him unpersuasively. Different modes of reading reveal new meanings, every time they leave new marks inside us in the form of painful cuts on our sensitivity, slightly torn pages of our memory. The structure of the text divided into columns stabilises the look which oscillates between opposing forms and contradictory directions, which cause anamorphic chaos. The game of these forms is to guard unprinted pages against the annihilation of the whiteness and this what remains unuttered.

The albums refer to the convention of a newspaper, focused on the current events going by, and thanks to it pictures keep circling in newer and newer contexts⁹. This circulation does not allow for continuous reading, and also

⁴ Polish name for a pagan festival in honour of ancestral spirits.

⁵ Benjamin, op. cit., p. 390.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 396.

⁷ W. Benjamin, *Karl Kraus*, in: Id., *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2: 1931–1934, transl. R. Livingstone et al., ed. By H. Eiland, G. Smith, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge–London 2005, p. 453.

⁸ Benjamin, *Karl Kraus*, cit., p. 453.

⁹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London–New York 1991, p. 32–35.

quotations slow reading down or stop it, whereas graphical elements mixed with main texts disturb the reception of the whole. Books have not got clear beginnings, and illustrations come from different orders, their positions in a book are subject to some graphical order or the logic of a newspaper composition.

Between images and texts the relationships full of tension develop, they correspond one with another, and sometimes push off from each other or contrast. This scenario is a kind of a musical score giving a reader an opportunity to initiate a kaleidoscopic motion of pictures. A reader, holding these books in their hands, becomes a user of a quadruple archive widely understood. Therefore, in accordance with the intention of the authors, the aesthetic value plays a minor role here. Books are not intended to be pieces of art, but an archive seriously collecting documents and photos, not allowing for easy interpretation. Moving around this place requires effort, time, consideration, and attention. However, the archive means also exceeding, makes available things that should be hidden, because often something past does not want to be shown. During the process of disclosing secrets, surprising and often unexpected transitions usually appear between private and public, individual and collective, past and present. At the same time, the archive remains an unfamiliar space – it denies itself in its basis, disintegrates, not creating a unity, since all its structure is ghostly, and constantly refers us to other stories.

From our perspective, catalogued scraps of paper, cuttings, remains, which stuck at the present time of the archive, are repulsive and fascinating. Their fragmentation, essential deficiency produces imperfect senses and a multitude of contradictory narratives. But any attempt to organise them has to end in failure, because it is impossible to suspend the operations of accident and chaos, which determine their incompleteness. All of these books will be infinite forever, stratified, fragmented, and will strive for self-denial. An internal motto of these albums is Derrida's sentence¹⁰ "The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence"¹¹.

In the archive we touch these remains or residue and in spite of a temporal distance they evoke extreme emotions, because pictures – the remains of remains and their afterimages are stuck inside us. Defective phantom images of imperfect bodies, unestablished identities and disabled/crippled figures have got blurred borderlines, which always violate our subjectivity and disturb the spaces of social taboo. In the fragments of photos and documents every now and then our eyes meet the remains of death, disintegration, annihilation. Here a photo is a tort.

Flicking through a book faster and slower in turns, forward and backward, each time newer and newer tracks appear, which cannot be put together. Turning the pages, we exhume images and rebury them. The corporeality of an object plays a special role in it. A book is a crypt in the literal sense, one can get inside it by opening its cover. Then our body is engaged, our fingerprints remain on each page.

¹⁰ <<http://14.139.206.50:8080/jspui/bitstream/1/1875/1/Derrida,%20Jacques%20-%20%20Writing%20and%20Difference.pdf>>.

¹¹ J. Derrida, *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, in: Id. *Writing and Difference*, transl. by A. Bass, Routledge, London-New York 2002, p. 289.

Polka

Polka. Medium. Cień. Wyobrażenie (2006) is the catalogue of the exhibition, which took place at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw in 2005. The book is divided into five sections: *Ciało, Dom, Miejsce, Wojna, Wiara* [Body, Home, Place, War, Faith]. Next to the photographs from the collection of Stefan Okołowicz, Marta Kubiszyn and others, the catalogue presents the reproductions of the works which were part of the exhibition, and were created by the following artists: Anna Baumgart, Krzysztof Bednarski, Katarzyna Górna, Anna Janczyszyn-Jaros, Zuzanna Janin, Paulina Orłowska, Jadwiga Sawicka, Piotr Wyrzykowski. In addition, the book was enriched with the essays that were to complement the idea of the exhibition, but they also have their autonomous value.

This catalogue should be treated as an appendix to *Księga* [Book] by Bruno Schulz¹². The last few pages that survived from the Book, which were used by Adela to wrap lunch for her father, were an object of endless delight for the hero of the short story. Unfortunately, these ecstatic times are gone forever. Perhaps those days have never happen. It is certain that Schulz was shot in the back of the head in Drohobych in 1942, and Zuzanna Ginczanka, betrayed by a Polish neighbour, was probably shot on the courtyard of the Cracow prison in Montelupi street in 1944. In *Polka* the pages of *Autentyk* [Original], formerly describing things "that cannot happen fully"¹³, because they were too "wonderful", and hair restorers and medical treatments were used to wrap the meat of history in the remains of torn pages.

The album is designed as an archive of negatives – photographic plates on which a ghostly presence emerges, a "shadow" of what we describe as national identity, and what we consider to be feminine. Photographs, documents and texts reveal the fragility and uncertainty of this identity, often undermining it, showing that its boundaries are blurred, open, and its shape is unspecified or irregular. A woman's body symbolises home, homeland, place of graves, often anonymous, forgotten. A territory is always disabled as well, sick, full of secrets and spectres.

Reality is unstable here, dark as thick, muddy gunk between the eastern and western borders of Poland where spectres hide. A collection of these archival remains is a starting point for exploring the unknown and non-standard order. In the entire book a story spins about the situation that a perfect body, which is so desirable because of its national character, covers imperfections, disease, disability and indeterminate gender symbolised by a Mermaid. Its water singing, which calls for the non-time and the state of non-birth, is drowned out by Poland, symbolising culture in which the major role is played by a dead mother living a post-mortem life. Imprisoned and chained up, she gives birth to successive generations of conspirators and brings them up, and they make sacrifices of their lives on the altars of homeland. Its vampiric voice raises many demons, tenebrous lookalikes, witches, and female terrorists. A woman of Semitic features follows it like a shadow. A Polish-Jewish woman is an object is the artistic

¹² B. Schulz, *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą*, in: Id., *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1989.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 119.

fantasies of cruelty and sexual violence, presented in numerous canvasses of Polish painters, among others, Henryk Siemiradzki. Stereotyped notions and clichés concerning her inhuman and animal nature. A Jewish phantom is the longest mourning shadow of a Polish woman.

Honor. Bóg. Ojczyzna

Honor. Bóg. Ojczyzna, Żebro Mesjasza (2009) are those books-albums which are a testimony to the commemoration of the anniversary of the March '68 in Warsaw in 2008. They are an attempt to tell the Polish-Jewish history from the perspective of the March events, and in particular the Holocaust. The first of these books consists of three parts: *Honour* (topics: Berek Joselewicz, ghetto uprising, Kielce pogrom), *God* (legend of murders, anti-Semitism), *Homeland* (Jewish mother, anti-Semitic incidents, expulsion of the Jews from Poland after 1968).

Honor. Bóg. Ojczyzna is the book about our oblivion in culture and the manners of the existence of language and pictures, which, although do not reach the unuttered, are circling around it. A reader faces their own inability to encounter history, even its remains. In fact, the album is devoted to phantom pains after the Jewish community disappeared from Poland. It was prepared for the 40th anniversary of the March '68, when the fact of the expulsion of the last small Jewish community from Poland was discussed openly for the first time and the trauma of the post-war events was frankly mentioned. In 1973 Wojciech Jerzy Has directed *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, a mourning story after World War II and the last wave of Jewish emigration. In one of the scenes Joseph (Jan Nowicki) says to Dr. Gotard (Gustaw Holoubek): "Is my father alive? Yes, he is, naturally. Of course, within the limits conditioned by the situation. You know as well as I do, that from the perspective of your home, from the perspective of your homeland, my father died. It is impossible to fully make up for it. This death casts a shadow on his existence here"¹⁴.

The quotations from the works created by Bogdan Wojdowski, Améry, and Celan appear and break unbearable silence for a moment, but they also cannot veil the pictures – they stuck brutally and fill our field of vision¹⁵, while we cannot change anything. As Zofia Nałkowska wrote, the fate of these people is far, the fate of these people is nearby. They died, they are dead¹⁶. On the pages of this book the question asked by Błoński is repeated in different configurations: how was it possible to look calmly at the Jewish death?¹⁷

The basic matter of this book is ash which is and, at the same time, "is not" – this is a mark that does not exist. The formlessness of ash prevented from writing this book, but also forced to write it. The Jewish ash is "here", in Poland, without honour and God, in the country which has never become the homeland of the Jews. There is no Jewish history here, there are no Jewish heroes, and Berek Joselewicz and

¹⁴ *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą*, 1973, dir. W. Has.

¹⁵ E. Pontremoli, *Nadmiar widzialnego*, trans. by M.L. Kalinowski, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2007.

¹⁶ Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1939-1944*, ed. by H. Kirchner, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1997, p. 445.

¹⁷ J. Błoński, *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2008.

many others remain the unknown and unwanted figures in our history. Marshall Berman wrote that our past turns out to be baseless and elusive, we look back to seek a solid point to lean on, only to find out that we are embracing ghosts¹⁸.

Żebro Mesjasza

Żebro Mesjasza (2009) is also the result of the conference *Marzec '68*, which took place in Warsaw in 2008. We can find here the articles on the Polish and Jewish messianisms, as well as the history of the Jews in the Polish lands, starting from the times of the establishment of Jacob Frank's sect until the anti-Semitic riots in 1968. The juxtaposition of the Jewish messianism and the Polish one is the frame for the whole book. Although the ideas come from different religious traditions, in the national dimension their symbolic vectors intersect in the concept of a beautiful death, a necessity to make an offering for the sake of national community. Patriotic poetry (of Tyrtæus style) is also common, it played a significant role in inventing of the founding myth of the state of Israel, which sacralised dying at war, and was the keynote of the Polish nationalism. The starting point is a reflection on the Polish and Jewish messianisms as a union of memories of defeat which is a source of its strength.

The narrative of pictures and words circulates not only around messianism, but also raises the question about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. The legend of the ritual murder and the crucified Christ are the ideas manipulated by culture for centuries. The scenes of symbolic and physical bloody violence perpetrated on the Polish Jews are adjacent to the images of sacrifice for the homeland, and among them the dark sides of our history pulsate in the form of black substance in photographs.

The pictures of the Christian Messiah do not appear here as a provocation, but an incentive for deeper reflection. The wounded, mutilated and, finally, dead body of the Messiah is the most important image in Christian iconography; his blood which is the bodily and spiritual food, life-giving liquid leaking out from wounds was regarded as the ink with which history was written down. The album includes these images of Christ on the cross that were to convince the believers that the death of God-Man is a source of strength and a new life. Among other illustrations the following elements are to rivet attention: a phenomenon of mystical ecstasy, corporeal nature of the Messiah, his relationship with his mother's body, and religious madness. Afterimages – the worrying images of women on crosses – should be perceived as a dark reflection of the Messiah nailed to the cross, feeding his followers with his blood

From our perspective it was necessary to compare Christ's suffering of with the uniqueness of Auschwitz, where death blurred all the boundaries between human and inhuman, annihilating humanity in living bodies. Therefore Auschwitz should be our memory of the Holocaust, of the Polish-Jewish history, and the reflection on a faith. In this context another question was also raised: what is waiting for the Messiah? The question becomes an obsession when we look at

¹⁸ M. Berman, *Modernism in New York*, w: Id., *All That Is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, Penguin Books, New York 1988, p. 333.

the photos of the ruins or the images of the burning ghetto. We wonder what sense the words of Stephane Moses bear, saying that redemption can therefore both come at any time or not come¹⁹, and we recall Gershom Scholem statement that the messianic idea is not only solace and hope²⁰.

Ludzkie/Nieludzkie

The book *Ludzkie/Nieludzkie. Na granicy ciała* is the catalogue of the exhibition held in Galeria Studio [Studio Gallery] in 2016. Apart from texts, quotations, drawings, photographs, it includes the reproductions of the paintings of such artists as Jan Dobkowski, *Smutna* [Sad Woman], Jerzy Tchórzewski, *Macierzyństwo* [Maternity], Robert Beuchamp, *Bez tytułu* [No title].

The book is a question about the standard and its consequences, the statements of philosophers, poets, bioethicists are cited who undermine the thesis dominant in our culture that "something is standard when it establishes standards". We can observe here numerous ideas concerning monstrosity and normativity which underwent different changes and transformations over the centuries. The reference point is a human body; Michel de Montaigne wrote in *The Essays* that he himself was the most peculiar monster and miracle²¹.

An important category linking not only this album but also the rest of the books, is a category of boundary. Different strategies of its operation are shown: infringement or blurring – an example of which are the images of bodies connected with the umbilical cord, fetuses physically joined together, both male and female organs in the case of hermaphrodites. The borderline moved culturally in fashion is shown as a counterpoint; it is no accident that clothes take on a form of animal shapes or camouflage, and the most shocking example is a striped uniform worn in camps.

The album opens with the series of drawings from Główna Biblioteka Lekarska im. Stanisława Konopki [The Stanisław Konopka Main Medical Library] in Warsaw, presenting the medical documentation of deformed organisms incapable of living, removed from women's wombs and saved for science. Illustrations coming from different eras depict the representations of female anatomy, which in our culture was often treated as an anomaly. Pregnancy, menstruation, childbirth – for centuries treated as taboos – were intimidating and disgusting. On the other hand, however, the drawings, on which gynaecological tools appear: forceps, special labour chairs and beds resembling instruments of torture, make us aware of the fact to what extent a woman's body was victimised. Anatomical illustrations showing a woman's body split open, despite their scientific nature, are not able to hide the notions of a woman's abdomen which is a place of death, interment, living crypt. Deformed fetuses considered to be curiosities also come from it. Here, in the archive, they have a status of rejected dead remains without identity. The problem of a boundary and real gender, as tools used for

¹⁹ S. Moses, *Mesjanizm czasu terażniejszego*, transl. by J. Czerwińska, in "Teologia Polityczna", n. 4, 2006-2007, p. 112.

²⁰ G. Scholem, *Judaizm – parę głównych pojęć*, transl. by J. Zychowicz, Inter Esse, Kraków 1991, p. 163.

²¹ M. de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. by Ch. Cotton, Mifflin and Co., Boston-Houghton, p. 121.

controlling a society, is depicted by the topic of hermaphroditism and its tragic exemplification: Herculine Barbin described by Michel Foucault in *Dits et Écrits*²².

Photographs, drawings and texts also focus around the borderline that demarcates a human being and an animal, as well as a human being and a machine. Bodies that differ from the approved biological, ethical and aesthetic standards were perceived as partially animal. The alligator man, the mermaid, the monkey woman were treated as monsters, beasts, freaks. These degenerated features resulted in the situations that they were often shown in circuses and open-air markets as curiosities. These people belonged to the world of nature and, similarly to "the savage" transported from Africa, exhibited in human and animal zoological gardens. Women with beards, Julia Pastrana, Marie Bartel, Saartje Baartman, Hottentot Venus, giving performances in circuses, with often tragic biographies, recover their subjectivity and history in the album.

Barbarism of our culture leads from famous villages at colonial exhibitions presenting savage creatures (people and wild animals) to experiments taking place in concentration camps, carried out on people with dwarfism, as in the case of the famous Ovitz family examined by dr. Mengele. The contemporary response to the "barbarism of eras" seems to be the exit from the epoch of Anthropocene and the recognition that people, animals, plants, machines, and all the "misfits" are a community where everyone should have the same right to exist. Daily slaughter of animals on a global scale is an event still invisible and inaudible. This applies also to forests, jungles and all our green brothers cut down and cleared before our very eyes. Until our sensitivity becomes more emphatic with the surrounding world, we will know nothing about the human-animal-plant order.

Turning pages forward and backward, trying to connect discontinuous thoughts and reconstruct threads, we perform uncertain and intuitive reading. There is not one correct stand here, no ethical assessment has been made. Each reader has to do it on their own.

Pictures and texts circle around one another and activate our imagination, which reveals our own unknown spaces to us. There is a flash of conscience that everything included in the book is known, it has been somewhere inside us for ages. Key acts of this reading are: turning pages – looking at texts, "reading" the pictures only, and leaving our own marks on the texts. Each meaning may also lead to another one. Memory is a movement of imagination juxtaposing seemingly irrelevant fragments of our culture, the power of which often leads to the destruction of those who are considered as misfits. Almost every hybrid or inhuman creature can be exterminated. In our culture the potential of death lurks everywhere, waiting only for a signal to come out. Photographs, pictures, quotations, and shrouds of texts together with them, form tracks leading us to dark places of our bodies, history, homeland, etc. They reveal the awkwardness, grotesqueness, peculiarity of the forms belonging to our phantasmic world.

Looking at the forgotten faces, abandoned by history, we are cognizant of our incomplete existence. This is the moment when we start to understand

²² M. Foucault, *Introduction*, in: H. Barbin, *Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, transl. by R. McDougall, Vintage Books, New York 2010, pp. VII–XVII.

the work of double force: memory and oblivion, comprehensibility and incomprehensibility, track and erasure.



Ani całość, ani znak nie mogą pasować. Trzeba wyjść od samego wydarzenia, które jest akosmiczne i bezprawne, nie łączy się z żadną całością i nie jest znakiem niczego.

ALAIN BAÏDIU, *Święty Paweł*, przetł. Julian Kutyla, Paweł Mościcki, Kraków 2007

Fig. 1. Illustrations from the book *Żebro Mesjasza* [The Rib of the Messiah].



Polska, która przez wiele lat sama wisiała na krzyżu, nie pozwoli, by podpisy za nią składał jakiś odszczepieniec. Liberalna mniejszość krzywi się z niesmakiem, telewizja kręci się na tyłach. Ciekawe, całe jego życie było dotąd ustępstwem, myśli Katarzyna, wyszarpując mikrofon Matce Polce i jej czworgu dzieciom.

IZABELA FILIPIAK, *Ska*, w: *Magiczne oko. Opowiadania zebrane*, Warszawa 2006

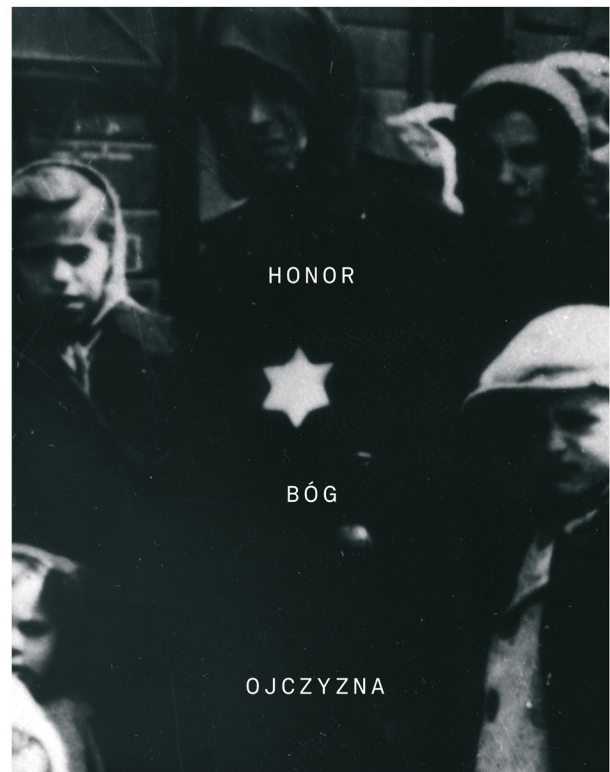


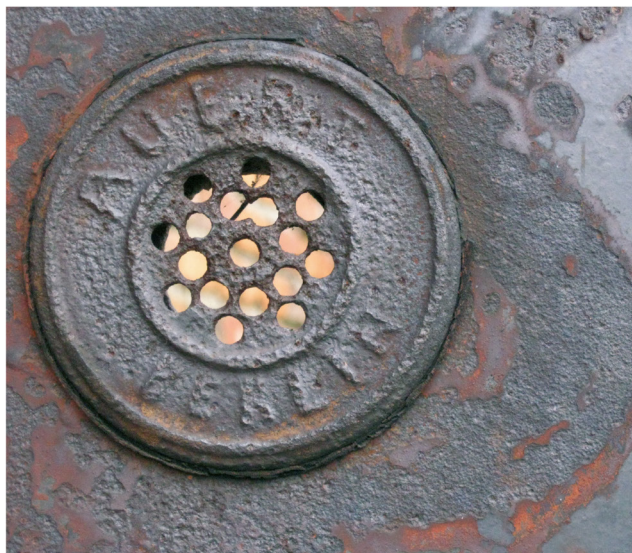
Fig. 2. Illustrations from the book *Honor. Bóg. Ojczyzna* [Honour. God. Homeland].



274. Płoc zabier na sąpadołojym z getta w placu Krasnolickim, Warszawa, czerwiec 1942. Fot. Jan Lisowski, ze zbiorów ŻIH
 Playground of Krasnolicki square, the border of the Warsaw Ghetto, June 1942

byliśmy, jesteśmy, będziemy,
 kwitnąć pozostaniemy –
 różą niczego,
 niczyją różą.

Jacques BÉREBIDA
 Scribbolet, dla Paula Celana, przeł. Adam Dziadek, Bytom 2000



300. Wykonany przez więźniów napis nad drzwiami prowadzącymi do Stajni Aschmitta, ława B ustawiona przed drzwiami, Hagen, fot. ze zbiorów ŻIH
 The door made which was placed at the entrance to the Aschmitt's stable, Hagen, photo from the collection of the ŻIH
 301. Widok w metalowych drzwiach do komory gazowej od strony zewnętrznej, Paryż, koniec Muzeum na Majdanku, fot. Marta Kubiszyn, 2008
 Door to a gas chamber

Lepsze widzenie nie jest możliwe.

Eduard PONTREMOLI
 Nadmiar widzialnego, przeł. Marian Leon Kalinowski, Gdańsk 2006

[...]nie dające się usankcjonować zabójstwo, które każdy na nim może popełnić – nie pozwala się zakwalifikować ani jako ofiara, ani jako morderstwo, ani jako wykonanie wyroku, ani jako świętokradztwo.

Hannah ARENDT
 My, uchodźcy, „Przebieg Polityczny”, 2002, nr 55

Fig. 3. Photographs from the book *Polka* [A Polish Woman]. We thank Marta Kubiszyn for her permission to publish the photo of the peephole in the metal door of the gas chamber in Majdanek.