

Jolanta Brach-Czaina's micrology

Lucyna Marzec

ORCID: 0000-0001-6478-3997

For Agnieszka Wolny-Hamkało

Detail analyzed from up close, as a poetological notion – although it makes a difference, and making that difference is its main task – functions in such stylistically and ideologically diverse texts as *Listopad* [November] by Henryk Rzewuski, *Locus Solus* by Raymond Russel, *Lód* [Ice] by Jaek Dukaj and *Rzeszot* [Sieve] by Bartosz Sadulski. Highlighting similarities is just as crucial. Detail makes the past present, it authenticates fantasy, or vice versa: it breaks down the cohesiveness and credibility of a message, making it unpleasant for the reader. Poetics of detail goes beyond literary types and genres. It also suspends the problems of mimetics and fictionality, as it refers to ontology, but it also touches them at the hottest spot: it binds together a score of epistemological issues, which have dominated literary theory for decades.

In the present paper I will be analyzing texts by Jolanta Brach-Czaina, which Grzegorz Grochowski accurately dubbed “textual hybrids” characterized by vague genology and complex

affinity: meditative, essayistic, poetic¹, in order to understand the poetological function of detail. Brach-Czaina loves detail, minutia, specificity. In her work, she combines the philosophy of existential risk with literary experiments. Her conceptual projects can be loosely connected with micrology, knowledge that is not universal, but also “strikingly subtle and insightful”, requiring to “reflect upon one’s sensitivity to nuance, to maintain vigilance and passion for detail, and moreover to be ready to accept what seems elusive, ineffable”² – as put by Aleksander Nawarecki, the greatest Polish apologist of micrology. Why *loosely* connected? Because Brach-Czaina’s micrology is not “representative”, it is a unique project. Sławomira Walczewska, who was her publisher, student, and friend, wrote that “Brach-Czaina fascinated people with her independence in life and in thought. She was a total, rather than desk thinker. Thinking was her life’s function; not abstract life, but specific, her own. Her philosophy stemmed from her passions and fascinations, as well as her traumas”³. The present paper does not concern biographical issues; the main focus is on thinking and concrete-oriented writing, as well as an “organic” vision of thinking, writing as a function of life.

Detail and longing

In answer to Barbara N. Łopieńska’s question about the role of philosophy in the modern world, Brach-Czaina confessed: “I do not distinguish philosophy as some extraordinary field of thought, and I do not think of it as humanity’s lifebuoy. I only think that there is intellectual effort, and certain changes in ways of thinking, which is the domain of philosophers as well as authors, poets, or academics specializing in empirical sciences”⁴. Equating forms of cognition, expression, and discourse, immersed in ancient Socratic philosophy traditions, was related to the desire to cognize. “And if someone is haunted by the need to dig deeper, one has to act on it” – she said to Łopieńska. Over a decade earlier, she wrote in the introduction to an edited volume *Estetyka pragnień* [Aesthetics of desires]: “we do not externalize our desires to put the down, but to make ourselves aware of them, testify to their existence, as well as to fuel them”⁵. In the first essay of the volume, *Sofa*, originally entitled equally briefly *Uczta* [Feast] (“Twórczość” [Creativity] 1984 No 12, pp. 75–89), Brach-Czaina analyzes Plato’s dialogue, arriving at similar conclusions as those published not long after by the philosopher, classical philologist, and interpreter Anne Carson in *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986).

For both scholars erotic desire leads to spiritual longing, longing for bittersweet knowledge, and the postulate of perfection and self-cognition. Carson goes into far greater detail in uncovering the poetic and philosophical senses of Eros, but nonetheless the final conclusion remains the same, personified in Socrates. She writes: “A power to see the difference between

¹ Grzegorz Grochowski, *Tekstowe hybrydy. Literackość i jej pogranicza* [Textual hybrids. Literariness and its borderlands] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2014).

² Aleksander Nawarecki, *Miniatura i mikrologia literacka. T. 2* [Literary miniature and micrology] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2001), 12.

³ Sławomira Walczewska, „Konkret i dotyk” [Specificity and touch], *Szum* 34 (2021): 35.

⁴ Jolanta Brach-Czaina, „Kabaczek, piasek, liście, pazury” [Aubergine, sand, leaves, claws], *Res Publica Nowa* 11 (2001): 55.

⁵ *Estetyka pragnień*, edited by Jolanta Brach-Czaina. Lublin: Wydaw. Lubelskie, 1988.

what is known and what is unknown constitutes Socrates' wisdom and what motivated his life-long search for truth. The activity of reaching out for that difference is one with which he said he was in love"⁶. Brach-Czaina enquires:

According to Socrates, what power does Eros ultimately constitute? He is the highest desire. He leads through direct, full experience of life towards what is experienced as its most profound sense, to which a (difficult) road leads through meanders of life experiences rather than through their rejection and ascetic sublimation. [...] The erotic state is a potential one, the state of a yet unfulfilled possibility⁷.

Desire needs imagination, it is the key to the world of imagination.

Hence both sensual love and the desire to cognize focus on differences and detail. Brach-Czaina reminds that "creating stimuli for the movement of feelings and thoughts, for the strenuous effort of imagination breaking into the sphere of super-consciousness, is the basic function of the erotic atmosphere of *Uczta*"⁸. Carson provides a detailed explanation of the Socratic method, as reported by Plato:

He tells us exactly where Eros is located in the process of knowing or thinking. Eros lies at the intersection of two principles of reasoning [...]. We think by projecting sameness upon difference, by drawing things together in a relation or idea while at the same time maintaining the distinctions between them⁹.

Eros would thus be a figurative element of every thought which goes beyond a formalized language. An impulse which sets metaphorical thinking in motion, or – as modern cognitive studies claim – thinking in general¹⁰.

Eros would also be a metaphor of a metaphor, which can only be described using metaphorical languages, obviously metaphysical. Both Carson and Brach-Czaina reworked deconstruction for their own purposes and, agreeing with Derrida about the fruitless self-characteristic of philosophy as a discourse which transgresses metaphor in favor of notions, they remained faithful to metaphysics which "should penetrate to the horizon or to the depths of the proper, and in the end, there regain the origin of its truth"¹¹. In *White Mythology* Derrida cites Lautréamont, who is baffled with and jocular about figurativeness: "It is an extraordinary thing, generally speaking, that force of attraction which leads us to search out (in order later to express) the likenesses and differences that lie hid in the natural properties of

⁶ Anne Carson, *Słodko-gorzki eros*, translated into Polish by Renata Lis (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2020), 199. English version: *Eros the Bittersweet* (London: Champaigne, 1998), 172.

⁷ Brach-Czaina, *Sofa*, in: *Estetyka pragnień*, 17.

⁸ Brach-Czaina, *Sofa*, in: *Estetyka pragnień*, 26.

⁹ Carson, 197-198. English version: 171.

¹⁰ Dorota Rybarkiewicz, *Metafora w działaniu* [Metaphor in action] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2017).

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy", translated into Polish by Wiktoria Krzemień, *Pamiętnik Literacki* [Literary diary] 77/3 (1986), 315. English version: *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 1, On Metaphor (Autumn, 1974), pp. 5-74, 71.

objects that are quite disparate, and quite unsuited in appearance to take part in this kind of sympathetically curious combination”¹². For both Brach-Czaina and Carson, metaphors – similarities and differences – offered a risky opportunity rather than posed a threat. By writing they acted against using up metaphors, for renewal and transformation. The syncretism of genres, discourses and fields extracted by Carson and Brach-Czaina from ancient texts, and at the same time practiced, immersed in contemporaneity, also results from subjecting to the rhythm of the desire to cognize, intellectual work whose main goal is determined by absorption of the world.

In terms of metonymy

When Kafka's philosopher from the parable “The Top” goes in pursuit of the toy, hoping that “the understanding of any detail, that of a spinning top, for instance, was sufficient for the

understanding of all things”¹³, he insults Brach-Czaina's particles of being and cognition. He is convinced that a piece, excerpt, synecdoche gives an accurate picture of the whole, and that the most proper way of cognition is to immobilize an object. “And whenever preparations were being made for the spinning of the top, he hoped that this time it would succeed: as soon as the top began to spin and he was running breathlessly after it, the hope would turn to certainty, but when he held the silly piece of wood in his hand, he felt nauseated”¹⁴. The philosopher is spinning around in one place because he cannot recognize that its motion is the essence of the top, and that when children play with it the point is to set it in motion and enjoy watching it spin. Kafka implies that if the philosopher watched instead of seizing it, and if he was able to think in terms of analogies, he would uncover many secrets. However, he keeps trying using the same method, possessed by his longing and deaf to warnings.

Similarly, Jolanta Brach-Czaina argues with the fragmentation method and looking for general laws in trifles. In *Szczeliny istnienia* [Slits of existence] she diagnoses a problem behind Kafka's protagonist's suffering:

when philosophers despair about the silence of an entity, it results from not understanding the its language, which does not address us as a whole, but through existential concrete, meaningful particles. It is true that they are able to suggest the voice of a whole, but always sonorant in the particles of existence¹⁵.

Brach-Czaina remains consistent in her dislike for the scalpel, microscope, and synecdoche, which takes her away from micrology conceptualized as “splitting hairs”. They make, for example, a spinning top “a stupid piece of wood”, silent and unwilling to be known:

¹²Derrida, 305. English version: 57.

¹³Franz Kafka, “Bąk” [The Top], in: *Opowieści i przypowieści* [Stories and parables], translated into Polish by Lech Czyżewski et al. (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2017), 477. English version: *The Complete Stories by Franz Kafka*, translated into English by Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books), 491.

¹⁴Kafka, 477. English version: 491.

¹⁵Brach-Czaina, *Wiśnia i rozumienie* [Cherry and cognition], in *Szczeliny istnienia*, 8.

by fragmentizing the world we do not allow it to speak with its own voice, whereas when we allow something to catch our attention, we take a more modest stance through which we are allowed an insight into what surrounds us and depends on our will. Fragments of reality are parts arbitrarily cut out from the whole with our decision, typically motivated by inattention or short-sighted convenience¹⁶.

Brach-Czaina remained skeptical about fragmentation in her later *Błony umysłu* [Mind membranes], just as she did in *Szczeliny istnienia*, written in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, she reduced her dislike for synecdoche, as if she eventually agreed for the figurativeness of philosophical language and intentionally played with academic conventions. For example, when commenting on Marzena Morozewicz's exhibition *Łuski* [Scales] in 2001, she warned about the dangers of perceiving photography as a trace of life, testament, and experience. At the same time, she opposed photography with sculpture, that is, a cast of a body part: metonymy which slowly transforms into metaphor – dried scales, a plaster cast are discarded in favor of thin, frail imprints. This gesture – controversial, arranging media in a clear hierarchy – is difficult to interpret, although it is inspiring¹⁷.

In *Błony umysłu* – a collection of micro essays first published in magazines – Brach-Czaina managed to find a form against fragmentation. It is characterized by condensed content, concise syntax, graphicness, and focus on detail: often small, minute, inconspicuous (heather, drop of water, armpit). Her conclusions take the form of jocular yet elevated paradoxes, charades, adages: “If I were to indicate a field of guaranteed boredom, I would look for it in intrusive visibility (*Wrzos* [Heather]); “Holding on to air makes you a realist” (*Nie ptaki, ale powietrznicy* [Not birds, but air chambers]); “Cognition is a caprice – fascinating and often useful – but existence is the foundation. And it is interesting that it seeks support” (*Śliski piec* [Sleek stove]); “Fragility of a cup forces to show ultimate respect for the collision moment” (*Małe ręczne pranie* [Small hand wash]). Scattered in different places in a text, paradoxes seldom take a conclusive form – and yet Brach-Czaina's writing skills exclude chaos and coincidence, which leads us to another trace of Socrates, also present in *Szczeliny istnienia*, as observed by Maria Cyranowicz: “The logical argument leads the reader, like maieutics, through questions and answers”¹⁸. According to Stanisław Borzym, in the case of Socrates, a bunch of similar characteristics: rigor of thought, restraint, and non-conclusiveness resulted from the fact that he did not have access to theory understood as a cognitive system¹⁹. The same thing can be said about Brach-Czaina: asystematicity, eclecticism, and independence make her philosophy indifferent to attempts at “explaining the world” completely. It is difficult to undermine the “applicability”, or even “virality” of term-metaphors which we associate with her.

¹⁶Brach-Czaina, *Wiśnia i rozumienie*, in: *Szczeliny istnienia*, 11.

¹⁷Marianna Michałowska, „Filozofia w edukacji wizualnej: «Błony umysłu» jako ćwiczenie z fotografii” [Philosophy in visual education: Mind membranes as an exercise in photography], *Czas Kultury* [Time of culture] 1 (2022): 85.

¹⁸Maria Cyranowicz, „Wkroczenie w tajemnicę” [Entering a secret], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (1996): 101.

¹⁹Stanisław Borzym, *Obecność ryzyka: szkice z filozofii powszechnej* [The presence of risk: on common philosophy] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1998).

Brach-Czaina's figurative language does not refrain from characteristic epithets, comparisons, metonymies, and metaphors which have been absorbed by literature, culture, as well as the language of broadly understood theory as in Mike Bal's "traveling concepts", Derrida's proliferation, or Irigaray's blooming. How is this possible? Once again, Anne Carson suggests the answer. Her interpretation of *The Top* differs from mine: "The story is about the delight we take in metaphor. A meaning spins, remaining upright on an axis of normalcy aligned with the conventions of connotation and denotation, and yet: to spin is not normal, and to dissemble normal uprightness by means of this fantastic motion is impertinent"²⁰. Carson suggests that the philosopher from Kafka's parable does not seek cognition, and that looking for a lost toy constitutes the essence of philosophy (and his desire). In reference to language dissemination, Brach-Czaina would thus be saying that seduced by words, we let ourselves be carried away by the whirl of audacious thought. There is something to it, since analytical philosophy does not accept Brach-Czaina as a thinker precisely because of the interpretative potential of tropes and figures. Beata Szymańska, who is the same age as Brach-Czaina, enquired in her review of *Szczeliny istnienia*:

How should one argue with metaphor? Does man become a cogitative reed? [...] Or is Zhuangzi right when he says that to live means to travel joyfully, hopping? Does Minerva's owl indeed set off at dusk? [...] But whoever would be bothered with [...] the rules of ancient philosophy? It is far wiser to agree with this book; to accept that crevices through which existence manifests itself appear in metaphor, in the language of objects, in everyday activities²¹.

Szymańska – although not without reservations – is convinced by the figurative language of *Szczeliny istnienia*. However, she does not refer to its aesthetic qualities, but to *fronesis*, practical knowledge, cognition related to the postulate of ethical perfection. The ethical message of *Szczeliny istnienia* and *Błony umysłu* stems from *fronesis* understood in the spirit of Socrates. Figurativeness – similarly to the erotic symbolism of *Uczta* – has higher practical purposes. Brach-Czaina suggests that casual scenes conceal the more "bashful" desire of perfection, cognition, holiness. "The wave-like motion of the erotic atmosphere, its development, retreat, accumulation creates an equivalent of forms of supraconscious spiritual life in the formal structure"²².

This is why I believe that Carson's reading of Kafka's parable – even though its glamorous effect is difficult to ignore – lies on the opposite end of Brach-Czaina's thought. Brach-Czaina offers a trope language without being carried away by it, favoring catachresis out of all tropes. She found words, phrases and expressions which fill in lacunae in both colloquial and philosophical dictionaries, which however does not mean that "fussing"²³, "crevice"²⁴, "meatiness"

²⁰Anne Carson, *Słodko-gorzki eros*, 7. English version: xi.

²¹Beata Szymańska, „Problem zła i ścierka do podłogi” [The issue of evil and a floor rag], *Dekada Literacka* 5/6 (1999): 18.

²²Brach-Czaina, *Sofa*, 23.

²³Grażyna Latos, "Krząctwo", in: *Encyklopedia gender: płęć w kulturze* [Encyclopedia of gender: gender in culture], edited by Katarzyna Czeżot et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2014), 253.

²⁴Grażyna Latos, „Szcżeliny istnienia”, in: *Encyklopedia gender: płęć w kulturze*, edited by Katarzyna Czeżot et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2014), 523.

can be clearly defined. They cannot – their whole potential is based on probing the unknown and seeking forms for characterizing spiritual life. Nonetheless, they have numerous interpretations, which testify to their longevity²⁵.

Representation of existence

What does Brach-Czaina look for in particles of being and existential concretes if not the synecdoche of Fullness, Completeness, and detailed definitions? Aleksander Nawarecki suggests that melancholic solemnity is at stake here:

Why do we need romantic abysses, if every crevice in everyday existence can be the most horrible abyss? [...] Brach-Czaina seems to say that the elevated, solemn, inexpressible remains within reach!²⁶.

Brach-Czaina states clearly that this is about “representation of existence”. *Szczeliny istnienia*, to which Nawarecki refers, focused on dramatic and tragic issues, *Błony umysłu* shifted the focus to the inconspicuous, “the world as a background” and experience of “everyday life”. However, sublimity and melancholy prefer the approach of individual distance, focusing on self and own experiences confronted with the world, whereas Brach-Czaina called for engagement, and at the same time withdrawing claims of dominance, especially intellectual. According to Eelco Runia, since metonymies are used on everyday basis, they stem from the need for presence and sense of discontinuity of experience, life, history²⁷. Brach-Czaina’s “representation of existence” is more related to metonymically making particles of being present than metaphorical “meaning-giving”.

Why did she select touch and haptic metaphors out of all corporal and sensual experiences? Why can the essay *Dotknięcie świata* [Touching the world] be considered her *credo*: “touching is a bilateral phenomenon. The world touches us when we touch it”²⁸. In essence, the bilateralism of corporal experience – swallowing hot potatoes, kissing a body, lying on grass, cleaning the floor – allows Brach-Czaina and her readers to set off basic issues of feminist criticism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis and posthumanism. The consequences of careful reflection upon touch lead to questioning the difference between the inside and the outside, familiarity, and strangeness, appreciating sensuality and corporeality. Brach-Czaina resigns from discursive language of “explaining the world” via theories, methods, or worldviews – and the academic habit to base thought on tradition and history of science. She multiplies visual variations about touching in order to highlight the simultaneous inevitability, inalienability,

²⁵Katarzyna Lisowska, *Metaforyczność w dyskursie genderowym polskiego literaturoznawstwa po 1989 roku* [Metaphysics in the gender discourse of Polish literary studies after 1989] (Kraków: Universitas), 2019.

²⁶Aleksander Nawarecki, „Czarna mikrologia” [Black micrology], in: *Skala mikro w badaniach literackich* [Micro scale in literary studies], edited by Aleksander Nawarecki, Monika Bogdanowska (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005), 22.

²⁷Eelco Runia, „Obecność” [Presence], in: *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki: antologia* [Theory of knowledge about the past and modern humanities: an anthology], translated into Polish by Elżbieta Wilczyńska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010).

²⁸Jolanta Brach-Czaina, *Dotknięcie świata*, in: *Błony umysłu* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2003), 59.

and extraordinariness of experience. By shedding the weight of footnotes and references she keeps her thoughts light. She suggests that lives goes on beyond academia, which “touches reality only via paper”²⁹. The concise form and sensuality of descriptions of “representation of existence” encourage to give up on reading in favor of experimenting in nature.

Inga Iwasiów demonstrates convincingly that Brach-Czaina’s essays are characterized by “a symbiosis of great and small narratives”, and she calls her style and method of writing “a crevice-membrane narrative”:

A membrane is something that overgrows, and as such it is similar to overgrowth, another type of language multiplication, wildness of life restrained by the rigor of a comprehensive examination. These categories can be considered creative poetics, a cognitive postulate, and at the same time an instruction for a view of me-in-the-world. The crevice strategy requires constant supplementation by its very nature, it cannot stand imitation³⁰.

The crevice-membrane narrative relies on detail and concrete. At the same time, it tries to generalize observations and seek for the essence. It needs accuracy, which should be understood comprehensively (following Italo Calvino) as a feature of construction that is well thought out (composition), vivid (able to describe in detail), and language that is both precise and subtle³¹ – all of which can be said about Brach-Czaina’s works. By comparing classics, such as Leopardi with Marianne Moore, and *Dinggedicht* poetry he shows that the motion between ambiguity and multiplicity, intellect and sensuousness define the key value: “The poet of vagueness can only be the poet of precision, able to capture the subtlest sensations with quick and reliable eyes and ears and hands”³². Precision is about producing, capturing, describing, and finding unobvious similarities and differences. Speck and detail have an equally strong effect in the crystallization process and entropy.

Vagueness and multiplicity lead to imagination and a mysterious, erotic ambiance in *Uczta*. Since Brach-Czaina did not seek the bliss of metaphor, but “existing in the form of existential concrete”, I believe that looking at a spinning top she would see a material object which sensually affects both children and the philosopher, entertaining the former, and annoying and disappointing the latter. Interpreted via *Szczeliny istnienia*, the toy from Kafka’s story would thus be a phenomenological object, as it “has the ability to affect others and attract attention”³³. It is a *punctum* – the opposite of a *studium* from Barthes’s famous distinction – but it refers to reality rather than photography (or some other medium). The centrifugal movement of a toy, which brings joy, bothers and worries – is completely “normal”, characteristic, peculiar. From the perspective of studies into objects it is this movement that establishes the relationship

²⁹Brach-Czaina, *Dotknięcie świata*, in: *Błony umysłu*, 60.

³⁰Inga Iwasiów, „O narracji szczelinowo-błonowej: lekcje pisania na podstawie Jolanty Brach-Czainy” [On crevice-membrane narrative: writing lessons based on works by Jolanta Brach-Czaina], *Czas Kultury* 1 (2022): 12.

³¹Italo Calvino, *Wykłady amerykańskie: sześć przypomnień dla przyszłego tysiąclecia* [Six Memos for the Next Millennium], translated into Polish by Anna Wasilewska (Warszawa: Czuły Barbarzyńca, 2009).

³²Calvino, 71. English version: *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, translated into English by Geoffrey Brock (Boston: Mariner Books), 70.

³³Brach-Czaina, *Wiśnia i rozumienie*, in: *Szczeliny istnienia*, 12.

between objects and subjects (human and non-human – such objects can also attract animals). However, in *Szczeliny istnienia* the question of whether the spinning top was made by hand or produced by some machine, whether it was a collectible toy or a thousand-year-old museum artifact, is irrelevant, because it tells us nothing about its makers, owners, or users. From the perspective of Brach-Czaina, objects, phenomena, or natural elements have little in common with objects-metonymies of identity, life, characters. They are strangers to the status of testimonies or traces, and thus to historical, archival, or biographical conceptualizations. In *Błony umysłu* it is different: a cup opposed to a mug and the corporate culture of working in an isolated cubicle encourages a face-to-face meeting or a moment of reflection. A recipe for Galicia-style aubergine in tomatoes which need to be peeled with boiling water refers to a more menacing analogy – torture and skinning. Black mallow is compared to a Buddhist priestess (due to the color of her robes), and immediately afterwards with folk Easter palms (due to their shape). A stroll down an empty riverbed inspires considerations about the attractiveness of dead things and difficulties caused by changes. Brach-Czaina's associations are not coincidental. Sometimes they are driven by a synesthetic or intellectual association (similarity), and sometimes a paradoxical reversal, contrast of juxtaposition (difference), but they are protected from unambiguous reading by the camouflage of vagueness. A walk down a historical route was probably related to a trip abroad, and the Buddhist priestess who taught meditation was known by her name. Brach-Czaina blurs biographical signatures – third parties are required to read them.

Absorption

Brach-Czaina's writing method is subtle in its essence, and at the same time typical for all figurative transformations. In line with the metaphysical tradition, Brach-Czaina asks about "the possibility for the sense to show through, to go beyond physical facts, despite being tied to them"³⁴. At the same time, she believed in the transformative and emancipatory power of language, despite all her reservations about inexpressibility. She connected physical facts with a realistic concrete, experience, or some state she lived through. Walczewska reminds us that:

Everyday life is Brach-Czaina's element. It is not abstract, but concrete, full of fields outside of seriousness of words, or taboo. Concrete is one of the notions which Brach-Czaina opposes to philosophical abstractions³⁵.

Absorption is a technique of the crevice-membrane narrative: absorption of the abstract into the concrete, saturating concrete with abstraction.

In order to combine precision with vagueness, Brach-Czaina apprentices among artists who are sensitive to existential objects:

³⁴Brach-Czaina, *Nie ptaki, ale powietrznicy*, in: *Błony umysłu*, 19.

³⁵Sławomira Walczewska, "Konkret i dotyk" [Concrete and touch], *Szum* 34 (2021): 35.

I do not think that anyone needs to be convinced to the aura of meanings surrounding a sausage, since Rafał Wojaczek demonstrated that clearly. Also Miron Białoszewski has put many objects in the right place in the order of being. And the fact that philosophers temporize is not poets' fault³⁶.

If putting objects in the right place in the order of being is a shared task of poetry and philosophy, it is rarely an order of social *status quo*, "common sense", or dictionary definitions. Brach-Czaina relies on the following poetic techniques: contrastive comparisons transforming into juxtapositions, rescaling (size of objects), focalization (zooming in and out), and synesthesia. We should also remember that syntax plays a major role in making her descriptions dynamic.

Mit rodzinny [Family myth] by Wojaczek, dated to 1965, to which Brach-Czaina refers, contains a blunt identification: "This is a sausage / This is my edible mother" and creates a suggestive vision of a man/child who craves a sausage/mother. Although the juxtaposition of hunger and emptiness, the pleasure of consuming and childish sexual fantasies is not revolutionary in any way, Wojaczek's poem is striking due to its apparent directness. Apparent – because juxtaposing a mother with a sausage directs readers not towards consumption, but towards a trivial resolution of a family myth – a founding myth. A coincidence leads to great expectations. The irony of the poem which was written when food production in People's Poland was down, also lies on connecting "my childish hunger" with scarcity economics and an oppressive legal system with show trials: early in 1965 a former manager of a state-owned company for trading meat was sentenced to death for bribery, four other defendants got life sentences, and several others – shorter prison sentences³⁷. Looking at a sausage – processed, minced meat of poor quality and mixed source – triggers off existential feelings of mediocrity, randomness, hopelessness. At the same time this sausage is desired and dangerous. It encourages risk and obstinacy – as has been shown, it may even cost a life.

A common cloth that can be found in any household attracts Brach-Czaina's attention because "it is a primeval object which has accompanied our existential efforts to build everyday life"³⁸. In philosophical meditation, the unattractive appearance and prosaic function of a cloth allow an insight into ontology and epistemology:

Sometimes people throw up. [...] Then we learn that what cleanses may become disgusting and also require cleansing. We reach processes which do not have a clear ending³⁹.

Out of tasks which comprise everyday cleaning – a repetitive chore whose results are not lasting – it is possible to pick one, cleaning with a cloth, and ask not only about the inevitability of decomposition of matter, but also about our hope for erasing the past and cleanse oneself of evil. Brach-Czaina contrasts the language of existential questions (seemingly universal and

³⁶Brach-Czaina, *Wiśnia i rozumienie*, in: *Szczeliny istnienia*, 36.

³⁷Dariusz Jarosz, „Mięso”, *Polska 1944/45-1989. Studia i Materiały* 17 (2019): 318–319.

³⁸Brach-Czaina, *Wiśnia i rozumienie*, in: *Szczeliny istnienia*, 14.

³⁹Brach-Czaina, *Powaga ścierek*, in: *Szczeliny istnienia*, 128.

impersonal) with images of a dirty cloth which – although clearly sensual – disgust. This sensual analysis of a cloth is conducted “with a magnifying glass”, directly: this is the only way we can notice the fibers, dirty and clean, which “are mixed, permeate each other like black and white in the grey of cloths”⁴⁰.

A detailed description of black mallow, a wild flower that embellishes country gardens, used in herbalism and industry as a dye, refers to Eros – god of love and sex:

You just need to trace the flower crown with your middle finger, its corrugated, endless circle. At first it may seem difficult, as it requires focus. You are not touching a stiff hoop, but wobbly edges of overlapping petals. Gradually you begin to experience the softness of touch, and the buzz of unnecessary thoughts fades away. Any careless and abrupt behaviors are ineffective, and because of the mallow they should be seen as brutal, as they cause destruction, or even irreversible damage. You cannot squeeze mallow petals between your fingers. Only subtle touch can lead to mallow initiation and experiencing the liberating power of touches. Ideally you should mimic insect legs, which step on flowers without leaving a trace⁴¹.

Although mallow and vulva rhyme [in Polish – PZ], the subtlety of Brach-Czaina’s language facilitates a montage of transparent, overlapping images rather than making them metonymically present or identifying them. Handling mallow/vulva is described impersonally on purpose in order to make identity the act ambiguous. This is how a detailed description produces vagueness, and similarity and difference spin together on the shared axis of cognition.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

⁴⁰Brach-Czaina, *Powaga ścierek*, 128.

⁴¹Brach-Czaina, *Czarna Malwa*, w: *Błony umysłu*, 50.

References

- Borzym, Stanisław. *Obecność ryzyka: szkice z filozofii powszechnej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1998.
- Brach-Czajna, Jolanta. *Błony umysłu*. Warszawa: Sic!, 2003.
- . „Kabaczek, piasek, liście, pazury”. *Res Publica Nowa* 11 (2001): 50–55.
- . „Powaga ścierek”. W: *Szczeliny istnienia*, 127–128. Kraków: eFKA, 2006.
- . „Wiśnia i rozumienie”. W: *Szczeliny istnienia*, 7–21. Kraków: eFKA, 2006.
- Calvino, Italo. *Wykłady amerykańskie: sześć przypomnień dla przyszłego tysiąclecia*. Tłum. Anna Wasilewska. Warszawa: Czuły Barbarzyńca, 2009.
- Carson, Anne. *Słodko-gorzki eros*. Tłum. Renata Lis. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2020. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/1241588626>.
- Cyranowicz, Maria. „Wkroczenie w tajemnicę”. *Teksty Drugie* 5 (1996): 101–104.
- Derrida, Jacques. „Biała mitologia: metafora w tekście filozoficznym”. Tłum. Wiktoria Krzemień. *Pamiętnik Literacki* 77/3 (1986): 283–318.
- „Estetyka pragnień : praca zbiorowa | WorldCat.org”. Dostęp 7 listopad 2022. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/19998545>.
- Grochowski, Grzegorz. *Tekstowe hybrydy. Literackość i jej pogranicza*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2014.
- Iwasiów, Inga. „O narracji szczelinowo-błonowej: lekcje pisania na podstawie Jolanty Brach-Czajny”. *Czas Kultury* 1 (2022): 8–16.
- Jarosz, Dariusz. „Mięso”. *Polska 1944/45-1989. Studia i Materiały* 17 (2019): 313–330.
- Kafka, Franz. „Bąk”. W: *Opowieści i przypowieści*, tłum. Lech Czyżewski, Roman Karst, Alfred Kowalkowski, Juliusz Kydryński, Elżbieta Ptaszyńska-Sadowska, Anna Wołkowicz, Jarosław Ziółkowski, 477. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2017.
- Latos, Grażyna. „Krząctwo”. W: *Encyklopedia gender: płęć w kulturze*, red. Katarzyna Czechtot, Agnieszka Mrozik, Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska, Anna Nasiłowska, Monika Rudaś-Grodzka, Ewa Maria Serafin, Barbara Smoleń, Kazimiera Szczuka, Agnieszka Wróbel, 253. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2014.
- . „Szczeliny istnienia”. W: *Encyklopedia gender: płęć w kulturze*, red. Katarzyna Czechtot, Agnieszka Mrozik, Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska, Anna Nasiłowska, Monika Rudaś-Grodzka, Ewa Maria Serafin, Barbara Smoleń, Kazimiera Szczuka, Agnieszka Wróbel, 523. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2014.
- Lisowska, Katarzyna. *Metaforyczność w dyskursie genderowym polskiego literaturoznawstwa po 1989 roku*. Kraków: Universitas, 2019.
- Michałowska, Marianna. „Filozofia w edukacji wizualnej: «Błony umysłu» jako ćwiczenie z fotografii”. *Czas Kultury* 1 (2022): 85–98.
- Nawarecki, Aleksander. „Czarna mikrologia”. W: *Skala mikro w badaniach literackich*, red. Aleksander Nawarecki, Monika Bogdanowska, 9–24. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005.
- . *Miniatura i mikrologia literacka. T. 2*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2001.
- Runia, Eelco. „Obecność”. W: *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki: antologia*, tłum. Elżbieta Wilczyńska, 75–123. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010.
- Rybarkiewicz, Dorota. *Metafora w działaniu*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2017.
- Szymańska, Beata. „Problem zła i ściierka do podłogi”. *Dekada Literacka* 5/6 (1999): 17–18.
- Walczeńska, Sławomira. „Konkret i dotyk”. *Szum* 34 (2021): 32–38.

KEYWORDS

Anne Carson

sensuality

JOLANTA BRACH-CZAINA

micrology

detail

ABSTRACT:

The paper discusses the writing and philosophy of Jolanta Brach-Czaina, connecting it to micrology and maieutics. This poetological reflection considering the function of detail and work of similarities and differences in Brach-Czaina's most significant works (*Sofa, Szczeliny istnienia, Błony umysłu*) identifies two tendencies of her philosophy: searching for a textual "representation of meaning" and a sensual description of "particles of being". The paper discusses Brach-Czaina's ambivalent approach to metonymy and synecdoche, and characterizes her style, which combines a focus on inconspicuous detail and non-conclusiveness of paradoxes. Absorption of concrete and abstraction, creating an impression of precision, and at the same time vagueness are key features of Brach-Czaina's poetics. Her philosophy has much in common with Italo Calvin and Anne Carson, whose parallel way to seeking the essence of cognition and poetic language has led to the Socratic theory of Eros.

SOCRATES

figurativeness

metonymy

Eros

M E T A P H O R

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Lucyna Marzec – assistant professor at AMU Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology, editor of “Czas Kultury”, member of the scientific board of AMU Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies and Life Writing Working Group. Her research interests involve Life Writing, feminist criticism, and 20th-century literary life. |