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March Minusivity: Strategies of Immunising and Counter-Immunising in the Atmosphere of the Polish 1968

The article discusses mechanisms of social immunisation in the context of the Polish 'March 1968'. Whereas immunising strategies are a normal part of sociality, I argue that around 1968 a growing anxiety about the mechanisms of being-in-common led to an autoimmunitarian dissociation of the Polish society, which I conceptualise as an atmosphere of minusivity. Strategies to counter exclusions and discriminations were trapped in this immunitarian paradigm as well. A crisis of communication arose from the dissonance between the reality created by the official language surrounding March 1968, and the reality experienced by many people, as this latter reality was silenced and repressed. Mistrust in language resulted in an immunitarian retreat from affective communication, which was replaced by impersonal communicative scripts. This communicative crisis widely prevented the March experiences from being conveyed in the cultural production of the time; nonetheless, I will try to retrace some of the immunitarian and counter-immunitarian strategies in literature, film, and retrospective accounts.

Keywords: March 1968, PRL, immunisation, atmosphere, minusivity, commoning, language, communication

The notion of 1968 in Poland marks a specific moment that is often seen as a turning point in the project of Polish communism. Whereas up to the late 1960s, the communist project despite the Stalinist experience appealed to parts of the older and younger generations, political historians detect a general negation of the belief in communist ideas after 1968, leading to the formation of oppositional movements (Gawin 2013; Siermiński 2016; Szacki 1988). This was due to the disappointment rising gradually after 1956, when the de-Stalinisation process introduced by Władysław Gomułka seemed to promise a more liberal and prospering society. However, in the 1960s it became clear that without reforms, the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) would intensify political pressure on society while the system slid deeper into economic crisis (Zaremba 2004). Thus, youth protests for more social, cultural and political freedom broke out, but were soon crushed by political oppression and a clampdown by the militia, beginning on 8 March 1968. These events coincided with an officially encouraged anti-Semitic campaign after the Six Day War in 1967, in which Poles of Jewish descent were accused of a cosmopolitan "Zionism" that was said to be corrupting Polish socialism from within. The media discourse in the years 1967-70 closely associated "revisio-nism," the allegedly elitist call for reforms, with anti-Polish "Zionism." Both accusations affected the Warsaw intellectual sphere most, but reverberated in intellectual and Jewish circles throughout Poland, as they were picked up by broader sections of society. Apart from social isolation, dismissals, and sometimes the internments of suspected individuals, a generational shift in the Party's power structure and other institutions emerged (Eisler 1998; Grudzinska Gross 2011; Osęka 1999; Osęka and Zaremba 1999; Tych 2014).

The unwillingness for reform, paired with power play and a contradictory racist campaign, revealed the corruption of the socialist system in the Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL). Many of the "March" generation's new functionaries showed a mostly careerist, socio-hierarchical interest in the system (Szacki 1988). The events known as March '68 thus reveal an instrumental intermingling of socialist class-struggle arguments with ethnic and social delineations and resentments. The image of an elite privileged and hostile to the socialist system was constructed as a negative contrast to an idealised socialist Polishness. The latter consisted of citizens of the ethnic Polish working-class or peasant lineage that were now able to socially and politically advance, occupying the positions abandoned under pressure (Checinski 1982, 229; Friszke 2007, 134). March 1968 as a dispositive

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is thus closely tied to the image of a “proper” (Campbell 2011) community, while identities defined as improper or alien were excluded and othered. The anti-Semitic campaign and resentment against intellectual circles in the late 1960s thus furthered *ex negativo* the imaginary of a proper and “closed,” ethnically homogenous nation (Michlic 2006, 248; Steinlauf 1997, 65–71; Zaremba 2011, 271–358).

Autoimmunitarian reactions

Around March 1968, strategies of social immunisation were omnipresent, both on micro and macro levels. The two intertwined strands of anti-“revisionism” and anti-“Zionism” articulated the dynamics of inclusion through exclusion, inscribing people into the categories of “us” and “them.” Political arguments intermingled with identitarian definitions, as ethnic lineage figured as a proof of one’s ideological stance, while political convictions could easily be understood as an indicator of improper descent. Many ethnic Poles thus felt pressed to procure their certificate of baptism (Osęka and Zaremba 1999, 237). Even though the slogans of the March campaign were rather simple and pithy, it became clear that a negative definition and exclusion could affect almost anybody, at least in the centres of power such as Warsaw. Wojtek Lamentowicz, then a student at Warsaw University and member of the party-dependent Union of Socialist Youth (Związek Młodzieży Socjalistycznej, ZMS), commented on this later, as follows:

In the general climate two paradoxically complementary emotional trends dominated. The anti-repression shock reduced the issue of system change to the condemnation of the compulsion apparatus and to the demand for the rule of law; while the nationalist-communist frenzy searched for the enemy in its closest environment, tracing something alien and secret, reduced itself rather often to seeking out victims among Jews without regard to their stance. People affected by the shock of police-propaganda state aggression perceived themselves as victims of the system. The other ones, affected by the frenzy, tried to find for themselves a safe place in the institutional order by actively pointing out victims. This dramatic alternative – to be a victim or to co-create victims – produced due to its emotional consequences a whirl that drew in an awful lot of even very rational and experienced people. I perceived the emotional infection by this narrowed field of choice as something humiliating, offending reason and the elementary rules of common sense. Those who participated in the creation of victims can be divided into two groups: those who did it voluntarily and with

conviction, and those who lacked the civil courage to oppose it unambiguously. (Lamentowicz 1988, 44)

This lengthy quote is relevant for several reasons. It not only draws attention to the omnipotent division of society into two groups, the “victims” and the “victim-makers.” It also points out the performative aspect this dividing had, as by pushing others into the excluded group, one could claim a space in the included group oneself. Of course, as these strategies of othering worked in many directions, this “safe place in the institutional order” was precarious and had to be continually re-created, while the “frenzy” (*amok*) lasted.

Another very important notion introduced by Lamentowicz is his term “emotional infection” (*emocjonalne zarażanie*). The notion of infection brings to mind the strategies of social immunisation that would prevent infection. However, according to Lamentowicz, preventing infection was not possible after March 1968: either one was a victim or one participated – willingly or unwillingly – in the creation of victims. Everybody was infected or affected. The immunisation then took place on the concrete level of categorising people and the self-installation on the proper side. Immunisation itself, so to speak, was the infection. As in autoimmunitarian reactions, the “disease” attacking the organism were the immunising mechanisms put into motion for protection. Thus, the enactment of divisions and delineations in the state apparatus and in society in the period of March 1968 led to a further disintegration of society, instead of a “communitarian” consolidation of the “proper” group. This social crisis was reinforced by economic stagnation, a disintegration of the family sphere and a perceived destabilisation of the gender order (Czerwiński 1969, 91–93; Kosiński 2006, 235–69; Seiler in preparation; Sokołowska 1975, 165–69; Zaremba 2004). Survivalist pragmatisms that had to be staged again and again and on almost all levels of social life made it difficult to entertain unbiased relations to others, be they family members, colleagues, neighbours, officials or complete strangers in the streets.

Yet the other component of “emotional infection,” namely emotions, are just as important. The autoimmunitarian crisis of 1968 played itself out, as Lamentowicz notes, on a level that contradicted “reason and the elementary rules of common sense.” Its mechanisms annulled the intentions of “rational and experienced” (*rozumni i doświadczeni*) people. The emotional level brought into play the anxiety about the self’s integrity and wellbeing, thus eventually leading people to contradict their own convictions. As Sara Ahmed notes, in contrast to fear, anxiety is not tied

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to a visible object, but is characterised exactly by its non-containment in a specific object, by the delocalisation of its source (Ahmed 2017, 1318). As noted above, in 1968 the need to re-perform social delineations could arise at any time and from any direction, depending on the dynamics that the accusations developed. While the object of this demarcative anxiety dissolved, its bodily repercussions were intensified. Anxiety was incorporated; increasingly so, as the biopolitical strategies used to include people in the proper, or to exclude them from it, were also tied to bodily features and an imagined Jewish physical appearance, and to suspicious behaviour. The immunising strategies, thus, were for the most part strategies evoked affectively, in order not to be affected by othering.

The atmosphere of minusivity

While the time of the PRL is retrospectively often described as a specific “atmosphere” or “climate,” both these terms appear with obsessive frequency in the time after March 1968. Wojtek Lamentowicz several times mentioned the atmosphere of events propagating “authoritarian-nationalist thinking,” when he came into contact with “that which already is drawing close, stamps its feet and shouts” (Lamentowicz 1988, 44). His formulation invokes an atmosphere of threat – not (yet) physical violence, but a potentiality of violence represented in the physical approaching of something obscure, and in yet undirected gestures of violence like stamping and shouting. Lamentowicz, having experienced the atmosphere in the hall during a speech by Mieczysław Moczar – a key figure in propagating ethno-nationalism around 1968 and aspiring First Party Secretary –, intended to “transmit” (*przekazać*) this uncanny atmosphere as a warning (Lamentowicz 1988, 43). While we do not have Lamentowicz’s actual report at our disposal, in his retrospective we can recognise strategies of verbally transmitting an atmosphere as well: in the reconstruction less of the content of the speech than of the bodily reactions of the audience. The literary staging of atmosphere relies on the introduction of material elements, an additional *staffage* entering interaction with its surrounding. Similar to the notion of anxiety, an atmosphere does have both a bodily dimension – it can stick to or soak into bodies and things – and an immaterial characteristic that cannot be pinned down exactly but has the most astounding effects on bodies and behaviours. According to Gernot Böhme, an atmosphere can be understood as an “indeterminate spatially extended quality of feeling” entering the “bodily economy” (Böhme 2017, 15). Around 1968, the

notion of atmosphere mirrors the notion of something invisible yet highly affective (for affect, see Ahmed 2004; Brennan 2004; Leys 2017; Shouse 2005), of a certain force that disempowered the members of society without being explicitly verbalised or embodied, and that yet found its sedimentation in people's bodies and practices. Precisely because of its effects on the mechanisms of human homeostasis (Muhle 2014, 85), the concept of atmosphere – as difficult as it might be to grapple with – is key in the analysis of the March experience.

In order to grasp the atmosphere that dominated during the March “frenzy” terminologically, I want to discuss the term “minusivity” (*minusowość*) that the reporter and writer Ryszard Kapuściński introduced in *Cesarz* (The Emperor, 1978).¹ The term “minusivity” (translated as “negativism” in the English version), as introduced by Kapuściński, perfectly describes the atmosphere of anxiety that was predominant around March 1968.

I have trouble pinning it down, but you could feel negativism all around. You noticed it everywhere on people's faces, faces that seemed diminished and abandoned, without light or energy, in what people did and how they did it. There was negativism in what they said without speaking; in their absent being, as if shrunken, switched-off; in their burnt-out existence (Kapuściński 2006, 82).

Kapuściński portrays a general atmosphere of brooding, an atmosphere that is difficult to pin down, that wafts in the streets and affects all citizens. As a neologism, minusivity nominalises this atmosphere, thus creating a *thing* that is both striking in its conspicuous image and its abstract, mathematical vagueness. The term underscores an element of alienation, while at the same time objectifying the immaterial source of anxiety. In my opinion, the term helps to discuss the mechanisms of immunisation and commoning in the March atmosphere. In Kapuściński's definition, minusivity is physically tangible in people's faces, and “in what they said without speaking; in their absent being, as if shrunken, switched-off.” They appear as if they had retreated from public life, from interacting with each other, in order to keep clear of the atmosphere. Both in its name and description, minusivity translates into the

1 The book, though set in Ethiopia and dealing with the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie around 1973/74, was often read as a criticism on the Polish situation in the 1970s and the rule of First Party Secretary Edward Gierek (Domoślawski 2012, 240–43; Ziątek 1996, 171). Kapuściński might not have had 1968 precisely in mind when writing *Cesarz*; however, his description of minusivity is embedded in the general post-March Polish atmosphere.

realm of the absent, of retreat and repulsion, in both verbal and bodily communication. To work with the concept of minusivity in the analysis of March 1968 can thus support our understanding of how media discourse, social behaviour, and bodily repercussions interacted.

Immunitarian exclusions and refusals such as those that occurred in response to the events of March 1968 in Poland are, according to the political philosopher Roberto Esposito, to be understood as the counterpart of *communitas* (Esposito 2010, 12).² Esposito strips both terms – *communitas* and *immunitas* – to their common linguistic core of *munus*, pointing out the two-sidedness of the mechanisms of being-together. He states that society is based on the exchange of *munus*, which knits an invisible net of ever-flowing needs, dependencies, and debts; but *munus* should not be denoted solely as a gift but rather as the debt that arises when receiving a gift or service (Esposito 2010, 4–11). *Munus*, Ruggiero Gorgoglione adds, is neither a duty nor a gift, but “the interaction of these two forms of social practices [Handeln]” (Gorgoglione 2016, 193). In discussing Esposito’s terminology, Greg Bird notes the contradictory senses in the word *munus*, which at the same time denotes opening up and closing off, and thus inherently points towards “lessen[ing] (lack, diminish, minus)” both of the self and the common (Bird 2016, 161). The subjects, Bird concludes, are “each [...] commonly exposed to the lack, which Esposito argues is the common” (Bird 2016, 161). The common implies a sort of negative “valency,” a minus that opens the space for the relation to the other.³ The minus derived from *munus* is thus the quality of social being as a being-with: it indicates the impossibility of completely isolating the subject that is always entangled in a network of relations and dependencies. The subject’s social homeostasis is based on mechanisms of commoning and immunising, opening and closing the fluctuating borders between the self and the other, and thus installing the liminal sphere of the common and mutual affect (Massumi 2002, 214).

An autoimmunitarian crisis, however, destabilises the homeostatic balance. Whatever the motivation behind it, the attempt to reach a “pro-

2 *Communitas* figures as community installed not by identitarian similarities and exclusions, but by acknowledging affective relations and difference. While *communitas* flourishes on communication that transgresses borders, *immunitas* translates as the withdrawing from communication, as the refusal to acknowledge a common denominator allowing for interaction and association.

3 Understood in Eliasian terms, valencies determine the relations between human beings and constitute the (structured) need to associate; thus, Norbert Elias calls them “affective valencies” (Elias, n.d., 131 f.).

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per” entity inevitably works through mechanisms involving the immunisation and exclusion of the other. We are living in “conditions of unwilled adjacency” (Butler 2004, 134), and the thought of being affected, associated, contaminated, or touched by an other, of something occurring that is beyond direct control of the self, threatens the self-image of motility and individuality. Yet the struggle to disengage from the other and to function as a self-sufficient entity that has no share in the doings – and especially the wrongdoings – of others, at the same time discloses mutual interconnectedness and entanglement. The self’s being-in-minus is a function of being-together. The more the common space is diminished, the more threatening it becomes; intensified immunisation enhances the impression of precariousness and anxiety about the self. Thus, the rise of immunitarian mechanisms around 1968 provoked a potentiation and branching out of further strategies of immunisation in order to withdraw from the threat of the common. This spread of immunitarian processes as a response to the awareness of a common being-with is what I call minusivity – the autoimmunitarian “disease” resulting from and attacking the common being-in-minus.

In a novel published in 1969, we can find a similar reasoning about the pathogenesis of an atmosphere of minusivity. I have in mind Wiesław Jażdżyński’s novel *Sprawa* (The Case, 1969), a not very well-known text by a writer associated with Kielce and Łódź.⁴ The novel revolves around a case of denunciation due to career motives; its connection to the March affairs would seem to be wholly absent, were it not for the obstinate parallels to what was happening after March 1968, parallels that lie exactly in the mechanisms of exclusion, immunisation, and anxiety about the self. The main figure Wojciech recalls: “I don’t remember many details, but I remember the heavy, thick atmosphere of abandonment and probably fear; I don’t even know how to call that kind of feeling.” (Jażdżyński 1969, 139)⁵ The quote shows how the novel connects the impalpability of the phenomenon experienced with its strong emotional dimension; it points out the almost physical tangibility of the atmosphere translated into terms of “materiality.” When Wojciech muses about his case, he also reflects on the workings of a common sphere.

4 The author’s position is an ambivalent one if seen in the light of the March events. Jażdżyński joined the PZPR in 1968 (Duk 2001, 203) but seems in his novel neither to follow the ethno-nationalist paradigm nor to treat the communist framework instrumentally. He directs his critique rather at society and careerism than at the state apparatus as such.

5 “Nie pamiętam, już wielu szczegółów, lecz pamiętam gęstą, zawieszistą atmosferę opuszczenia i chyba strachu, sam nie wiem, jak nazwać tego rodzaju uczucie.”

I'm not an isolated and independent being [...]. I'm a man who lives among people and cases. [...] What limits my freedom in the most absolute way? The fear of the other man that could do me harm and procure a case? Yet in this case, the meaning of life would be the flight from people, and in the end the lonely death of Narcissus. (Jażdżyński 1969, 141)⁶

The realisation of common interdependencies is here immediately complicated by the focus on “cases” that work in-between subjects and which they might employ to “do harm” to each other. These elusive yet powerful cases separating and binding together subjects – “a negative system [...] operating between people and things” (Kapuściński 2006, 83) – are moreover closely tied to the impersonal bureaucratic system that can be instrumentalised in the processes of immunisation. The fear about one’s own subjectivity (“what limits my freedom?”) is thus “the fear of the other man.” The result of this anxiety and fear of affection would be the “flight from people” and the attempt to immunise, even though at the beginning of the quote there is the realisation that the self cannot be “an isolated and independent being.” The effects of an atmosphere of minusivity – the need to immunise in view of a threatening commonality – are thus autoimmunitarian reactions that cut into the immunising subject’s very own flesh, destroying its sociality.

Countering minusivity

In view of the dead end that a “flight from people” inevitably leads to, *Sprawa*’s protagonist Wojciech ultimately comes to the conclusion that “[l]ike that, of course, it cannot be.” (Jażdżyński 1969, 141)⁷ He turns minusivity around, stating that one has to live with the minus-quality, the fact that every subject is open to others and will be affected: “it’s impossible to live without suffering failures from which you have to recover, without dragging weights. There is only one way, the way of engagement that may be painful” (Jażdżyński 1969, 141).⁸ The narrator

6 “Nie jestem bytem wyizolowanym i niezależnym [...]. Jestem człowiekiem, który żyje pośród ludzi i spraw. [...] Co moją wolność ogranicza w sposób najbardziej bezwzględny? Lęk przed drugim człowiekiem, który może mi wyrządzić krzywdę, wytoczyć sprawę? Ależ w takim wypadku sensem życia byłaby ucieczka od ludzi, a na końcu samotna śmierć Narcyza.”

7 “Tak, oczywiście, być nie może.”

8 “[...] niepodobna żyć bez ponoszenia klęsk, z których trzeba się podnosić, bez dźwigania ciężarów. Jest jedna tylko droga, droga zaangażowania, może i bolesnego [...].”

in *Sprawa* morphs the mechanisms of social immunisation – of distancing – into a form of immunisation that could be called biological, working through contamination, engagement and transformation (Mohan 2020, 11:07 ff.; Muhle 2014, 86). Even if the “positive” turn in Jażdżyński’s novel might be narratively abrupt or even implausible (Duk 2001, 221), it shows the effort to reevaluate the depressing atmosphere of the figure’s “personal” minusivity into an edifying episode that allows total immobilisation to be eluded. However, if we look at some examples relating directly to March 1968 in Poland, we rarely see the effects of social minusivity really come to a halt, even if countering measures of commoning or “engagement” are undertaken.

When the writer Anna Kowalska noted on 18 May 1968 in her diary: “Call from Ania Linke. She’s coming on Monday. Under these circumstances I can’t refuse anyone who is a Jew,” (Kowalska 2008, 521)⁹ she was well aware that she was supposed to avoid inviting a Jewish person over to her place. Kowalska instead staged an ostentatious reversal of this mechanism of exclusion. Being Jewish would in this case imply automatic *inclusion*, without regard to the actual sympathies the writer had for the specific person or considering her own well-being (she was ill at that stage). Kowalska thus took over the over-signified identitarian markers, as both the social exclusion and her personal inclusion focused upon the Jewishness of the given person. Yet given the affectivity of the March categories, Kowalska’s invitation to Linke would have enhanced the inviter’s “otherness” and lessened the invitee’s exclusion, bringing them closer and thus destabilising the ethnic delineations performed around March 1968. This case of positive discrimination was played out on a small-scale level; it was intended probably as a signal for Linke and their common social environment. Its notation in the diary might have functioned as a reminder for Kowalska herself, and as a testimony for potential readers of the diary. When viewed in terms of the general scale of the March crisis, however, her gesture was isolated in a specific and small circle of critical intellectuals who were, as a liminal group, already residing on the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion.

A similar, yet more demonstratively “public” approach was shown by the Polish scholar Maria Janion. We learn from an interview published in 2012 that she was strongly affected by the immunitarian propaganda following the student protests in March 1968. This resulted in an effort of “engagement”:

9 “Telefon Ani Linke. Przyjdzie w poniedziałek. W tych okolicznościach nie mogę odmówić nikomu, kto jest Żydem.”

In the morning I was listening to the radio, I understood what was going on, the direction in which all of this was heading. I went to my courses and gave a fiery speech condemning anti-Semitism. I remember that I was really shocked; after sharing this with the students I felt a bit better. And yet a student [...] told me, that she and her colleagues had been talking and had come to the conclusion that I must be a Jew after all, since I had spoken like that about anti-Semitism. (Janion and Szczuka 2012a, 1:141)¹⁰

Considering this quote, we can recognise two conflicting strands of immunisation: the exclusion of the “other” conveyed in the March propaganda, and Janion’s subsequent attempt to immunise her students against these social mechanisms. Similar to Kowalska above, Janion’s engagement resulted from the atmospheric intensification of immunitarian requests to dissociate from alleged Jewish revisionists. The radio broadcast itself intended to be socially contagious, to infect the listeners with minusivity and to set loose the exclusionary, anti-Semitic “frenzy.” The news affected Janion bodily, as she felt a “shock” (*byłam naprawdę wstrząśnięta*). The state of shock, related to paralysis or a certain loss of control over bodily and mental reactions, connects to the way Lamentowicz described the effect of the March propaganda: many people who passively consented, but also the development of a “frenzy” that did not rationally connect to the convictions of the given person.

Even though Janion later also described her reaction to the March events as a frenzy (*mania*), she managed to translate the immunitarian mechanisms into a frenzy of commoning (Janion and Szczuka 2012b, 2:32 f.). Her impulse of engagement could be called “self-transgressive” (Muhle 2014, 85) as it reached out and exposed her in place of and for the ones pushed out. Simultaneously, Janion had set out to unveil and deconstruct the logic of exclusion and social categorising. Thus, her strategy of immunising from immunitarian tendencies would be not a simple act of solidarity, but a commoning that referred to a *communitas* of “infinite singularities that are plurality” (Esposito 2013, 55; Magun 2012, 142), perceiving the common being-in-minus as a chance.

If we understand Janion’s resulting speech as a performative act, there are two levels of performance visible in the quote above. There are, first,

Her impulse of engagement could be called “self-transgressive” (Muhle 2014, 85) as it reached out and exposed her in place of and for the ones pushed out.

10 “Rano wysłuchałam radia, zrozumiałam, co się dzieje, jaki jest kierunek tego wszystkiego. Udałam się na swoje zajęcia i tam wygłosiłam płomienną mowę potępiającą antysemityzm. Pamiętam, że byłam naprawdę wstrząśnięta, po podzieleniu się tym ze studentami trochę mi ulżyło. A jednak studentka [...] powiedziała mi, że koledzy i koleżanki rozmawiali między sobą i doszli do wniosku, że jednak muszę być Żydówką, skoro tak przemawiam w sprawie antysemityzmu.”

transformations on the corporeal level, induced by speech acts. The inter-reaction of spoken word and bodily repercussions in the quote demonstrate the processes through which commoning and immunising work on the affective level. The radio broadcast induces a shock, but the effort of translating this shock into a speech and delivering it to the students has physical effects as well. The sharing of anxiety that Janion undertakes in her lecture, a sort of commoning of her shock and sorrow while at the same time engaging with the perceived atmosphere verbally, bring alleviation and dissolve the paralytic shock. This self-transgressive element of her reaction is however pushed back by her students in a secondary performative step that lies contrary to Janion's immunising intents. Instead of immunising themselves to the contagious propagation of strategies of excluding "others," the students immunise from being-in-common. They intuitively decide upon an immunitarian locking-up of their lecturer in the "other" group, distancing themselves from her. It seems that in the atmosphere surrounding March 1968, the categories of in- and exclusion were permeable enough to threaten everybody; to think beyond these provided categories and labels must have been almost impossible. If someone was confronted with a negative, excluding label, the first impulse was rejection. To close this line of thought, a short glance at a note by the writer Józef Hen, who was heavily pressed by anti-Semites around 1968, confirms the effects of these immunitarian exclusions. Hen subsumes his March experience as following: "The debate boils down to defend oneself from false charges, that one is a Zionist, revisionist, cosmopolitan or someone of the like." (Hen 1992, 108)¹¹ Hen, confronted with this attempt to write him off, did not question the erected borders, deconstruct such labels or even embrace them. Instead, strategies of immunisation were again met with strategies of immunisation, thus in the end contributing to the spread of minusivity.

Crisis of communication

I have hinted above at the entanglement of language and the contagion with minusivity. The processes of immunising, employing the labels of exclusion and discrimination, were most effectively spread by verbal communication, as social behaviour and the occasionally displayed phy-

11 "Polemika sprowadza się do tego, żeby wybronić się od nieprawdziwych zarzutów, że się jest syjonistą, rewizjonistą, kosmopolitą czy kimś podobnym."

sical violence had a limited range. The March discourse was performed as a socio-aesthetic method on a communicative level. It created an official reality that constantly adjusted, redefined, and hierarchically ordered certain terms and labels (Głowiński 1991, 32). Even so, the mechanisms in language worked on an affective level as they hurt people, revived Holocaust traumas and led to socio-physical exclusions. In the interplay between language, emotions, and bodily integrity, the toxic atmosphere of minusivity developed. And yet, while language translated into affect, this affect could not be practically translated into language.

The reality “told,” defined by propaganda and pre-scripted communicative patterns, claimed the whole discursive space. However, the reality “experienced,” as personal impression, feelings, anxieties, even certain social situations or events one participated in, could not find an expressive dimension (Lamentowicz 1988). The official March speech blurred out the expressibility of personal experiences – and thus their social existence began to vanish. Instead, they sedimented in the affected people’s bodies and memories. Their “namelessness” made them into an eerie un-presence enhancing the March anxiety. Many participants in the student protests, or people affected by the media campaign against revisionism and Zionism retrospectively speak of an isolating moment and a huge uncertainty as to what had actually happened (Kuroń 1989, 306). They came to distrust their own experience and memory, beginning after some years to believe in the “official” reality.¹²

The impact of March minusivity did not leave many visible and recognisable traces in the cultural production after 1968. The atmosphere itself was co-produced by a massive coverage of March discourse and language in media; its less publicly known side manifests in snippets of denunciations and inter-institutional notes, letters and other information found years later in the archives. But there was hardly any material that reflected the March events and atmosphere from the perspective of personal experience, or as an important phenomenon of the time. The finding of a language for the events and atmosphere was difficult or impossible, precisely because of the sub- and suprarational character of the March “frenzy” playing out on emotions; but also because the immu-

The official March speech blurred out the expressibility of personal experiences – and thus their social existence began to vanish.

12 That is what several participants who had been contemporary witnesses expressed in the symposium “Doświadczenie (auto)biograficzne a tożsamość. Zapisy literackie pokolenia Marca ’68” (The (auto)biographical experience and identity. Literary notes of the March ’68 generation) and the conference “March 68. Fifty years later” held in March 2018 at the University of Warsaw and POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. See also (Modzelewski 2013, 144).

The clash and dissonance of two realities was the nourishing ground for the March minusivity.

The opening that communication created was translated as the space where the outer world could enter, where violations could happen.

nising mechanisms had cut interpersonal bonds and the possibility for verbal exchange. Cultural, literary and film scholars have stated that the March events in terms of content appeared only later in the arts, especially concerning the “victims” side (Buryła 2013; Majmurek 2018; Molisak 2008).¹³

The language paradigm installed in 1968 dominated the structuring of reality, of economic and political dynamics as well as “private” matters like family or friendship. It operated through communicative scripts that organised the interaction in almost every situation (Barańczak 1975; Burska 2013; Molisak 2008). “Language began to be regarded as a means of disowning reality and an instrument of political propaganda. This was [...] a declaration of mistrust in speech.” (Molisak 2008, 280 f.) The strongly marked semantics of the terms used by the media and officials sometimes drastically shifted; together with the official discourse’s incongruity with the reality experienced by many, this reformulation of language produced an “atmosphere of absurdity and falseness” (Sitkowska 2008) following March 1968. According to the art historian and curator Maryla Sitkowska, this atmosphere had an even “stronger influence on the consciousness and morale” (Sitkowska 2008) of the youth than the very events themselves, which remained uncommunicable. If we understand atmosphere as the “common reality” (Böhme 2017, 20) of the experiencing subject and its environment, we realise that the March atmosphere was torn; it characterised by an atmospheric dissonance. The clash and dissonance of two realities was the nourishing ground for the March minusivity. The refusal to be in common mirrored in a crisis of communication; the mistrust in language as a means of interpersonal exchange was the flip side of the anxiety of being affected by an other.

Communication is a form of exposure – with communicative performance, an opening towards the world or the other is taking place – and is thus always “insecure” and at “the risk of being rejected or lost or not received” (Blanchot 1988, 12, 22). This insecurity of the communicative act became crucial in minusivity. The opening that communication created was translated as the space where the outer world could enter, where violations could happen. Hence it seemed advisable to organise communication in its most formal way, conveying as little personal “content” as possible. The scripts offered by official language

13 There are some exceptions, but they keep their alignment with the dominant language, serving the ethno-nationalist paradigm, e.g. Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski’s *Głupia sprawa* (“Too bad”, 1969) or Roman Bratny’s *Trzech w linii prostej* (Three in a straight line, 1970). (Molisak 2008, 283 f.)

became the instruments of minusivity that allowed subjects to retreat from affective contagion because of their impersonal character. They shielded off the self, leaving the involved subjects untouched in their mere enactment of communication. In the late 1960s, communicative scripts not only gained momentum because official language enforced them, but also because personal affective interaction was perceived as perilous to the self and its social position.

This is vividly present for example in the comedy film *Rejs* (The Cruise, 1970) by Marek Piwowski, where an “entertaining” get-together of ferry passengers turns into a series of incorporated verbal “meeting” patterns. The passengers prefer to act out something like a badly learnt theatre piece instead of exposing themselves with personal content – when that happens, the other passengers frame it by misunderstanding or blunt ignorance. However, the bodies of the passengers in the assembly betray their unease to the film viewers in twitches, sweating, or nervous glancing about. The uneasiness of the bodies confronted with a scripted speaking in slogans, which is maintained throughout almost the entire film, produces an atmosphere of staging, where the personal information conveyed in affective outbursts is painted over at once by a scaffolding of “correct” behaviour acted out mainly through verbal reprimands. This analysis of *Rejs* thus suggests that while the official reality is present in verbal language, the experienced, affective reality surfaces solely in non-verbal communication that is harder to control (Kurz 2015; Łuczak 2002; Seiler 2019; Talarczyk-Gubała 2007, 101–11).

While film is a medium that can easily play with the dissociation of verbal (auditive) and body (visible) language, literature needs to express both layers in verbal language. Yet here, too, the split between the two communicative layers can become evident. When the protagonist in Jażdżyński’s *Sprawa* wants to find out who meddled in his “case,” he actively preys on non-verbal betrayals in-between verbal scripts. Neither he nor his communication partners mention his case; instead, Wojciech offers the “small talk” scripts of former friends who have not seen each other for a long time:

– As you see, I’m still alive! Does that surprise you?

That should have been a very clever question, cunning and carefully prepared. If he had a hand in my case, he should feel confused; after all, he’s a simple lad, so something will show on his face. But nothing shows. (Jażdżyński 1969, 62 f.)¹⁴

14 “– Jak widzisz, jeszcze żyję! Dziwi cię to? To miało być bardzo chytne pytanie, podstępne, starannie przygotowane. Jeżeli maczał palce w mojej sprawie, powinien się zmieszać, to przecież prosty chłopak, więc coś się zaznaczy na jego

Wojciech fails to find any decisive information either in verbal or non-verbal communication. Instead of aiding in his quest for truth, his mistrusting way of communicating intensifies his own insecurities, doubts and (false) presuppositions. The quote shows how this operating in scripted “traps” produced cumulative layers of mistrust in communication and Wojciech’s paranoid state of mind. This state is even conceptualised in the book by another former fellow, now psychiatrist. Wojciech oscillates between taking the psychiatrist’s explanations for what they are – a description of a “psychogenic disorder,” called “negativism,” (Jażdżyński 1969, 75) of one of his patients – and reading them as a hidden diagnosis for himself.

Wojciech’s case is not verbalised for “us” – the reader and the protagonists – in the book until very late. Yet, it is rooted in a verbalisation: in the verbal denouncement by his former boss. Even though the information delivered to the authorities turns out to be irrelevant if not false, Wojciech’s work and social life collapse, as does his own mindset or “social belief” (Duk 2001, 220). This confirms the danger emanating from verbal language and its affective power, which eludes the control of the subjects. Other than Wojciech himself, his acquaintances

learnt immediately about my case and preferred not to meet me. [...] Around me, an emptiness crept up. [...] [B]ecause of this information they were somehow better than others, they could already inform further without risk, while I was hurled about by the darkest premonitions. (Jażdżyński 1969, 139 f.)¹⁵

Information about others, irrelevant if true or not, seems to have been the currency in this atmosphere. The ones in possession of the information had the (immunising) power over others who were worse informed, and vulnerable or already hurt. The distribution of information construes barriers between the informed and the uninformed. But these barriers are precarious. The informed are at risk of losing their temporary immunity – gained by informing on others – and to have their vulnerability realised when information about them begins to circulate, as the later downfall of Wojciech’s former boss demonstrates. So, even if *Sprawa* is not a novel dealing with the March 1968 events, it retraces the immunitarian strategies used when social anxiety of being

Information about others, irrelevant if true or not, seems to have been the currency in this atmosphere.

twarzy. Ale nic się nie zaznacza.”

15 “[...] oni dowiedzieli się momentalnie o mojej sprawie i woleli mnie nie widywać. [...] Wokół mnie przyczaiła się pustka. [...] byli wskutek tej informacji jakby lepsi od innych, bez ryzyka mogli już sami informować dalej, a mną miały najczarniejsze przecucia.”

negatively affected is heightened and shows the autoimmunitarian social dissociation under the conditions of minusivity.

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Tytuł: Marcowa minusowość: Strategie immunitarne i kontr-immunitarne w atmosferze roku 1968 w Polsce

Abstrakt: CNiniejszy artykuł dyskutuje mechanizmy społecznej immunizacji w kontekście wydarzeń i dyskursu polskiego ‘Marca ’68’. Podczas gdy strategie obronne są normalną cechą społeczną, rosnące obawy wokół ‘Marca ’68’ dotyczące mechanizmów wspólnotowości doprowadziły do autoimmunitarnej dysocjacji polskiego społeczeństwa, co konceptualizuję jako atmosferę minusowości. Również strategie przeciwdziałania wykluczeniom i dyskryminacji zostały uwięzione w tym immunitarnym paradygmacie. Z dysonansu pomiędzy rzeczywistością stworzoną przez oficjalny język Marca 1968 a rzeczywistością doświadczenia wielu ludzi wynikał kryzys komunikacji, ponieważ ta ostatnia została wyciszona i wyparta. Nieufność do języka spowodowała immunitarny odwrót od komunikacji afektywnej, którą zastąpiły bezosobowe skrypty komunikacyjne. Ten kryzys komunikacyjny w dużej mierze uniemożliwił przekazanie doświadczeń marcowych w ówczesnej produkcji kulturalnej; mimo to spróbuję prześledzić niektóre strategie immunitarne i kontr-immunitarne w literaturze, filmie i relacjach retrospektywnych.

Słowa kluczowe: Marzec 1968, PRL, immunizacja, atmosfera, minusowość, język, komunikacja