

Poetic Performativity

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The author examines the performative status of a poetic work. Following T. Różewicz, he points to non-textual and potential forms of poetry's existence. As a counterbalance to excessive adherence to textocentrism, he proposes functionalizing the tools of the new humanities (R. Nycz) and the theory of affect (B. Massumi) in the analysis of the creative act. The author indicates ways of studying the poetic experience with reference to the performative actor model (W. Baluch). Demonstrated voice recordings of poetic performances in the context of Dramatic Theory of Literature (A. Krajewska) are examples of gaining special insight into experience and dramatic self-discovery.

KEYWORDS: poetry, text, performativity, affect, drama

*Poetry is not the art of verse*¹

A. Ważyk

The claim that poetry is not a text (even in the broadest sense²) and that it should not be predominantly associated with texts seems to be as obvious as difficult it is to justify. For Aristotle, connecting the word "to create" (Greek *poiein*) with verse and identifying poets as creators of texts written in verse was an overgeneralization.³ In modern times, the process of imitating (mimesis) has strongly shifted to the level of text construction. Enlightened normativism and formal faithfulness to genres according to modernism have all transformed their character in order to allow for artistic games with various versions of literariness to appear in the semantic field of poetry.⁴ In *Wesele* [The Wedding], Stanisław Wyspiański aptly demonstrated the process of formalization, but also the degradation of

¹ A. Ważyk, *Esej o wierszu* [An Essay on Verse], Warszawa 1964, p. 5.

² See M. Rygielska, *O "tekście kultury"* [On a "Text of Culture"], "Zeszyty Etnologii Wrocławskiej" 2015, no. 1(22), pp. 27–43.

³ Aristotle, *Retoryka; Poetyka* [Poetics and Rhetoric], trans. H. Podbielski, Warszawa 1988, p. 315.

⁴ E. Kraskowska, A. Kwiatkowska, J. Grądział-Wójcik, *Ars poetyka* [Ars poetics], "Forum Poetyki" Summer 2015, <http://fp.amu.edu.pl/ewa-kraskowska-agnieszka-kwiatkowska-joanna-gradzial-wojcik-ars-poetyka/> (accessed: 20.05.2023).

poetic language, reduced to empty textual talliers.⁵ Orhan Pamuk clearly distinguished between the narrative efforts of novelists and poets, pointing out the latter's unique ability to perceive truth and "burning up" in its name in the creative act.⁶ Towards the end of his life, Tadeusz Różewicz said that he would let poetry pass him by increasingly more often, without the need to write it down.⁷

Różewicz signaled perceiving and seeing poetry as a fluid, transubstantiation phenomenon that permeates space and things, an object which circulates in a fluid shape and elusive colors. Such a conceptualization is not popular with scholars – in this case, philological studies into texts struggle with the lack of a tangible object of their analyses.⁸ Nonetheless, we should note that appreciating unwritten but observable poetry confirms both the oldest and the latest traditions of thinking about poetry, depending on the aesthetic and theoretical perspective.⁹ We inherit the aspect of agency in dramatic poetry in this appreciation we refer to Horace's poetry of closeness and image, or to the Romanticist tradition of inspiration and Mickiewicz's complaints regarding the inconsistency between words and experience. Artur Rimbaud's famous "I is another," modern issues with the inexpressibility of experience and narrative concept of agency only complete the many more emerging contexts, opening a whole abyss of methodological problems and references, rather impossible to discuss in a short essay which is far from claiming that "everything is poetry."¹⁰ Modern philology

⁵ See E. Miodońska-Brookes, "Mam ten dar: bowiem patrzę się inaczej". *Szkice o twórczości Stanisława Wyspiańskiego* [I have this gift: for I look differently': Essays on the Works by Stanisław Wyspiański], Kraków 1997, p. 186.

⁶ O. Pamuk, Wywiad dla "Paris Review" [An interview for "Paris Review"], [in:] *idem, Inne kolory. Eseje i opowiadanie* [Other Colors], trans. A. Akbikie Sulimowicz, T. Kunz, Kraków 2012, p. 481.

⁷ See Tomasz Kunz's comments on that subject: "Also the paradoxical, negative presence of poems never written, which Różewicz often refers to, which he himself seems to perceive as an integral part of his own work, is peculiar to him. Różewicz has occasionally written poems about "unwritten poems", called himself "a silent poet" and "a poet without poetry," mentioned numerous unfinished projects, created "plays consistently unwritten," thus expressing his desire to also conceptualize things which – for various reasons – went beyond the scope of linguistic expression, or simply of what can be done." T. Kunz, *Próba nowej całości. Tadeusza Różewicza poetyka totalna* [An Attempt at a New Whole: Tadeusz Różewicz's Total Poetics], "Przestrzenie Teorii" 2006, no. 6, p. 127.

⁸ Miron Białoszewski could be one of many subsequent examples of "literaturizing" poetic observations which become a peculiar task to be recorded.

⁹ See A. Krajewska, *Dramatyczna teoria literatury. Zarys problematyki* [Dramatic Theory of Literature: An Outline of Problems], Poznań 2009, pp. 14–15, 211.

¹⁰ E. Stachura, *Wszystko jest poezja. Opowieść rzeka* [Everything is Poetry: An Extended Story], Warszawa 1975.

and its textological orientation is probably the biggest obstacle here. The results of such a dependence of a discipline on its tools are interesting in themselves, and they are a good example of uncovering what hides inside or beyond a poetic text. After all, in a way, every philological study leaves the space of textual worlds to explore the so-called subject of creative activities and their way of participating in the world, but in the name of academic clarity and expectations regarding the clarity of discourse it happens with respect for academically-accepted concepts.

In the past two decades, numerous turns in literary studies have profoundly reconfigured the practice of twentieth-century literary studies. The anthropological interpretation of poetry has opened perspectives for exploring the poetic experience beyond the textual form.¹¹ Studies which contributed to subsequent turns have offered fascinating conclusions and led to the discovery of aporias in the application of modern and postmodern theories. They stop us on the verge of linguistic expression and access to epiphany, facing us with what is simultaneously “text-internal and text-external”¹² in the organization of poetry, assigning to us another interpretative task. We are unable to enter the area of a poetic event,¹³ although we have a sense of intensely approaching cognition made present in literature.¹⁴

However, if we were to ask the poets whose worries about the hegemonic impact of theoretical-cognitive tools were dispelled by the power and faithfulness to their experience, then (against the concepts of inexpressibility, “unachievability” of facticity, aporias, contradictions of e.g. structural and phenomenological methodologies), the here and now of an artistic moment could be accessed and revealed on the stage of embodied interpretation.¹⁵ The oppression of theory overcome by the power of personal experience and the energy of its impact would shift those doubts to the margins of attention. What is experienced/seen/perceived in an act subjected to a performative analysis would become the basis of talking and making present.¹⁶ A performer-poet could thus prove the functionality of Guattari and Deleuze’s ideas with their actions, actions revealing the processes of creative activity

¹¹ See R. Nycz, *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* [Literature as a Trope of Reality: The Poetry of Epiphany in Modern Polish Literature], Kraków 2001.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 170.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 257.

¹⁴ M. Koronkiewicz, *Flâneur? Po polsku: przechodzień* [In Polish: A Passer-by] [in:] *Nauka chodzenia. Teksty programowe późnej awangardy* [Learning How to Walk: Program Texts of Late Avant-garde], vol. 1, eds. W. Browarny, P. Mackiewicz, J. Orska, Kraków 2018, p. 66.

¹⁵ A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

¹⁶ Stanisław Wyspiański’s works already provide protests against poetic speech which neither expresses transformation, nor co-creates it, see E. Miodońska-Brookes, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

from a situational rather than textual level, through percepts and affects compensating for the experiencing stage.¹⁷

Tools adapted from studying the textual existence of poetry have made it difficult to consider poetry in other terms than a poem, text, form, discourse, space of meanings, narrative, structure, composition of meanings, etc. It is difficult to introduce the perception of poetry to the area of modern interpretative procedures as an omnipresent phenomenon requiring an affective opening, observable yet elusive and vague, sneaking into our consciousness.¹⁸ The performative and affective turn have encouraged studies into ways in which poetry exists “from the other side”. However, we should also remember Gilles Deleuze’s 1980s concepts,¹⁹ in which he located the cooperation of the sensual and material in a specifically understood immanence fold. Moreover, there are later conceptualizations of cultural performances by Jon McKenzie,²⁰ or new-humanities understanding of text as a network incorporated in reality, “actively interacting with its surroundings, in which both objects and cognition of objects take shape and profile their form.”²¹ Affective realism, presented as a method of recording a “performed structure of feeling, experiencing, and understanding reality”²² also makes it easier to recognize poetry in the experience aspect.

Scholars who position themselves between experience and its understanding allow intuition to gain momentum and follow the trace of poetry, excluding (if we watch the beginning of a creative act) a textual object which continues to exist only potentially. They allow themselves to follow what is

¹⁷ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Co to jest filozofia?* [What is Philosophy?], trans. P. Pieniążek, Gdańsk 2000, p. 227.

¹⁸ This is why in her studies into modern poetry Joanna Orska proposes to use (among others) theories related to film reception, at the same time indicating the direction of development of contemporary verse, which belongs to “mechanisms different from those traditionally associated with compositions peculiar to literature’s properties. Here I would point out to the significance of representation techniques specific for film. Among other things, they constitute significant means of the artistic experiment in works by poets who follow the surrealist tradition”. J. Orska, *Materialność ruchomego języka* [Materiality of a Moving Tongue], “Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” 2019, vol. 62, no. 2, p. 143.

¹⁹ G. Deleuze, *Fałda. Leibniz a barok* [The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque], trans. M. Janik and S. Królak, Warszawa 2014, p. 9.

²⁰ J. McKenzie, *Performuj albo... Od dyscypliny do performansu* [Perform or Else... From Discipline to Performance], trans. and introduction T. Kubikowski, Kraków 2011.

²¹ R. Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura* [The Poetics of Experiencing: Theory – Modernity – Literature], Warszawa 2012, p. 61.

²² A. Dauksza, *Laboratorium artystyczne: realizm afektywny. Praktyki Joanny Rajkowskiej* [Artistic Laboratory: Affective Realism. Joanna Rajkowska’s Practices], [in:] *Nowa Humanistyka: zajmowanie pozycji, negocjowanie autonomii* [New Humanities: Securing Position, Negotiating Autonomy], eds. P. Czapliński, R. Nycz et al., Warszawa 2017, p. 240.

poetically felt, “seen with oneself,” taking place in the process of self-cognition and recognizing one’s own poetry in one’s surroundings.²³ The affective cloud of poetry – observed in this way as a result of finding and collecting data made visible due to higher concentration – has a chance of becoming an embodied, artistic cultural object. The perspective on uncovering and creating poetry discussed here would resemble forms of cultural improvisation in terms of participation and the performative ability to delineate ways of action and meaning,²⁴ but it would also be about culture interrupting us – culture too often speaking in our name.²⁵

However, we should ask whether the concepts indicated here actually help interpreters or artists remaining faithful to the autonomy of affect from before “seizing” with emotions and cognition, as Brian Massumi puts it,²⁶ show its transition into what remains in the form of a textual testament? After all, not much is left from affects “translated” into texts. Poets creating extensive narratives from stories about the creative process diminish the value of poetic experience; this is because they always side with knowledge, discourse, argumentation, representation, cognitive distance, analyzing the artist/poet (also as an objectified self), creative engagement, description of life – and not just creation in its original character:

When the continuity of affective escape is put into words, it tends to take on positive connotations. For it is nothing less than the perception of one’s own vitality, one’s sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as “freedom”). One’s “sense of aliveness” is a continuous, nonconscious self-perception (unconscious self-reflection). It is the perception of this self-perception, its naming and making conscious, that allows affect to be effectively analyzed – as long as a vocabulary can be found for that which is imperceptible but whose escape from perception cannot but be perceived, as long as one is alive.²⁷

Noticing artistically analyzed self-perception is a condition for seeing and recording experience in a selected preservation of poetics of an expe-

²³ See A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

²⁴ R. Nycz, *Nowa humanistyka w Polsce: kilka bardzo subiektywnych obserwacji, koniektur, refutacji* [New Humanities in Poland: Some Very Subjective Observations, Conjectures, Refutations], [in:] *Nowa humanistyka...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²⁵ See A. Barcz, *Realizm ekokrytyczny. Od ekokrytyki do zookrytyki w literaturze polskiej* [Ecocritical Realism: From Ecocriticism to Zoocriticism in Polish Literature], Katowice 2016, pp. 48–49.

²⁶ B. Massumi, *The Autonomy of Affect*, trans. into Polish by A. Lipszyc, “Teksty Drukie” 2013, no. 6, p. 124. The English version used here: “Cultural Critique” Autumn, 1995, no. 31, *The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II*, pp. 83–109, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354446> (accessed: 18.07.2023).

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

rience, which always takes place at the moment of capturing affect, i.e. at the moment of “observable escape.” How does one remain faithful to this experience without entering linguistic areas and a narrative betrayal of oneself, without mediating one’s own affect? This problem has already been signaled in reference to Tadeusz Różewicz and his interpreters: Różewicz often pointed out the unbreakable connection between his poetry and somatic experiences. This is related to the question of taming and reducing the endless potentiality and virtuality of affect to cultural communicativeness, with the skill of avoiding dictionary/language traps too easily, or in an over-sophisticated and aestheticizing or ideological way blurring poetic inventiveness. Let us return to Massumi:

Concepts of the virtual in itself are important only to the extent to which they contribute to a pragmatic understanding of emergence, to the extent to which they enable triggerings of change (induce the new). It is the edge of virtual, where it leaks into actual, that counts. For that seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found.²⁸

Literature offers many examples of insight opening into the potential, many reports of other worlds peculiarly orbiting poets. Unwritten poetry, more significant than verse, hymns praising the one that comes “like a May night” are a recurring story told by poets, who discover the participatory connection or incompatibility of experience and its textual representation in various ways. In this context, let us consider the process behind Tadeusz Różewicz entering the first stages of creation of *Kartoteka* [File] (at the time – unwritten) with the poem *Rozebrany* [Undressed]:

All the memories images feelings messages
notions of experience which comprised me
they are not inter-connected they are not some complete whole
inside me²⁹

In this poem, as well as in his other works, already a year before he started working on his play, Różewicz thematized his sense of being internally broken, unable to unite his identity with himself, his memories and experiences.³⁰ Discovering a different version of himself to the one told/suggested

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 105.

²⁹ T. Różewicz, *Rozebrany* [Undressed], [in:] *idem*, *Kartoteka* [File], Wrocław 2002, p. 80.

³⁰ As Tomasz Kunz points out: “The paradox here is that in order to be in touch with oneself and go beyond one’s own disintegration, one needs to mediate their experience through symbolic forms, for only they can give experiences a significant form. In a disintegrated world, outside of literature the «I» is but a bunch of perceptive-memory processes, which is showcased perfectly by the protagonist of Różewicz’s *Kartorteka*, unable to merge the stream of

by existing narratives was transferred from the biographical-semantic level into the poem, which in turn opened the space for seeing himself in a completely unconventional stage position: “The author’s voice merged with the character’s voice, the character’s voice intertwined with the author’s voice, the antagonist and protagonist merged into one.”³¹ As we know, in *Kartoteka* the poet went beyond the dominating dramatic models, and today it is considered to be one of the most important Polish plays of the 20th century.

In this context, we should mention that Ryszard Nycz concludes his study of new contemporary Polish poetry with a quote from Czesław Miłosz, whose predictions from *Nieobjęta ziemia* [Vast Earth] Nycz associates with the courage of bad taste and the need to break free from accepted norms: “for this is the only chance for going beyond the world of received forms and received knowledge of the world, which does not require any engagement from us.”³² Such a transgressive subject in itself becomes a place where knowledge of self and the world is found and formulated:

he testifies to the authenticity of the experience he describes with himself. And indeed, he has some characteristics of a contemporary witness, for whom the past, neutral, external position is no longer possible – to the contrary; he can bear witness precisely because he participates in this reality and in the experience of the other. A participation thanks to which he gains access to his active, subjective knowledge expressed in the text.³³

If we were to search for a way to conceptualize the creative experiences discussed here in terms of how they are received by readers and researchers, we need to forget about the categories and conceptualizations of poetry distancing us from performative thinking/action; in some way we need to break free from modern literature’s way thinking and its rationality. For example, below there are three audio files recorded in three different places: a path in a forest, a city, and inside a building. They were recorded in May and June this year, but they are part of a collection comprising over 7,000 *wiersze bez tekstu* [textless poems], which I have been creating for fifteen years beyond paper, written record, the need to print them. I have explained my reasons for foregoing “textual worlds” in a few of my earlier articles and

memories, experiences, and impressions flowing through his mind.” T. Kunz, *op. cit.*, p. 131. See A. Ubertowska, *Tadeusz Różewicz a literatura niemiecka* [Tadeusz Różewicz and German Literature], Kraków 2001, p. 82.

³¹ A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

³² R. Nycz, *Zaangażowani i niezrozumiali. Kilka uwag o młodej polskiej poezji współczesnej* [Engaged and Misunderstood: Some Remarks on Contemporary Polish Poetry], “Teksty Drugie” 2020, no. 5, p. 25.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

book chapters,³⁴ as well as in the present paper. The three audio files are only a fraction of various examples of listening for poetry which comes from anywhere, from the body and its affect, from the moment of being, hesitantly changed into words that do not want to be a narrative, nor an index of a moment, nor a text or a form. It is a question of whether there is any possibility of an answer that the subject can give to themselves – a subject who is a mystery for themselves.³⁵ This happening, by itself, foundationless and unrooted in anything, observed and felt in words and many possible images, afterimages, links, appears as a phantom of a mystery approaching us in this experience (Fig. 1):



Fig. 1. Links to audio files of poetic performances. M. Pieniążek, 2023.

The audio files are an example of an attempt at meeting the challenges which come from existence happening all around us, which also proves to be a peculiar challenge. It is very difficult to engage in a dialogue with it, as anxious gestures, intuitive commotion, words, emotional images, ad hoc metaphors, classifications and conventions put over situations are everything that we have at our disposal at the moment of such a meeting. In order to record one's reactions, one can use a smartphone, camera, the ability to videorecord a fraction of circumstances, talk, add words to the mental-physical action recorded using multimedia. When it comes to the effects of such mechanical notations, the less they are focused on the affective presence of a performer, and the more on the realism of record, the more they will prove to be disappointing and unsatisfying compared to what was felt and experienced at a moment of being completely absorbed by one's surroundings. Encounters with poetry emerging from subsequent moments, especially when it is e.g. a unique, unrepeatable experience – in which we feel close to the mystery of being, or like living

³⁴ M. Pieniążek, *Na granicy pisma: o technologiach poetyckiego wydarzenia* [On the Borders of Written Record: On Technologies of a Poetic Event], [in:] *Teksty, obrazy, performanse: zapisy doświadczeń i doświadczanie zapisu* [Texts, Images, Performances: Records of Experiences and Experiencing Record], eds. W. Doliński and D. Wojakowski, Kraków 2020, pp. 163–185. <https://rep.up.krakow.pl/xmlui/handle/11716/6979> (accessed: 20.05.2023).

³⁵ A poetically realized vocal opening to contacting reality that is still incomplete, in the process of constant creation, is also close to ecocritical conceptualizations of living, natural environment. See A. Dillard, *Pielgrzym nad Tinker Creek* [Pilgrim at Tinker Creek], trans. M. Świerkocki, Kraków 2010.

poems,³⁶ moving next to a reality described according to the rules and demanding to respect its narratives – require a special form of dialogue and authenticity.

A person, despite being aware of ambiguous manifestations of present-day authenticity,³⁷ striving for a performative answer to the mystery of their existence, seems to be a precious source of self-knowledge, especially when they share themselves with themselves and others in a radical performance,³⁸ in one of the closest forms to events preserved in the audio files above. A voice, breath, natural pauses and the possibility to place the presence of the creative subject in direct speech comprise one of the most interesting opportunities for analyzing poetic affect. The value of this experience is high, we feel it intuitively when, awed, we watch similar experiences on the stage or screen. A well-directed play thematizing internal experiences can be a successful repetition of the subjective experience indicated above, as well as remedying a poetic message. In the recent *Wymazywanie* [Erasing]³⁹ by Thomas Bernhard, directed by Klaudia Hartung-Wójciak at the Old National Theater, the protagonist is rendered present by the words and actions of many characters; he speaks with their voices, he is created by them, for “Franz-Josef Murau’s internal monologue was re-written for a dozen mostly female characters, who move in a delirious trance, encircling a big, dead deer.”⁴⁰ On stage, we see a special repetition triggered by the polyphonic dramatization of the source material. Franz, Bernhard’s alter-ego, is a product of multiple voices of his close, family surroundings. The repetition of many voices in the dramatic action shifts processuality onto the audience, who, just like the writer and the protagonist, construct a spatially received message about themselves and the world. Franz becomes available via a cloud of sensations and words, he is produced from a polylogue of lines and affects, he reaches us and happens like a cloud of

³⁶ This observation can be associated with statements by other poets, such as Tadeusz Peiper talking about a blooming poem. However, the poetic opening discussed here resembles an embodied, transmedially documented experience, in which text is not the goal of poetic activity.

³⁷ See O. Szmids, *Autentyczność: stan krytyczny. Problem autentyczności w kulturze XXI wieku* [Authenticity: Critical State. Authenticity in 21st Century Culture], Kraków 2019, pp. 124–125, 218.

³⁸ See N. Romaszkan, *Performans radykalny w Polsce* [Radical Performance in Poland], <http://kocur.uni.wroc.pl/natalia-romaszkan-performans-radykalny-w-polsce/> (accessed: 20.05.2023).

³⁹ *Wymazywanie* [Erasing] according to T. Bernhard, directed by K. Hartung-Wójciak, Narodowy Stary Teatr w Krakowie, premiered June 18, 2022.

⁴⁰ P. Zarychta, *Bernhard pauperum*, “Dziennik Teatralny. Kraków”, June 25, 2022, <http://www.dziennikteatralny.pl/artykuly/bernhard-pauperum.html> (accessed: 12.06.2023).

conceptualized affect which brought him into existence, i.e. “the performance repeats the act of writing.”⁴¹ The agency of this process results from the right exploitation of a creative situation, which becomes an area of a repeated experience, demonstrated from many sides and inviting to co-create it.

In a way, opening oneself to such situations is like waiting for a special activity which takes place in a poetic action, waiting for a form of turning off existing narratives and turning on the epistemological lights to reveal individually uncovered paths of cognition. Turning oneself into a subject able to escape ready-made rationalizations, becoming – like J.M. Coetzee’s protagonist in *Life and Times* – an “escape artist,” escaping from imposed meanings, allows to avoid interpretative traps set by power and factors governing various systems of producing meanings and constructing history.⁴²

Surely such an opening to the world has little in common with producing literature based on some ready-made textual formula. This is not producing textual worlds, in which, just as in the concept developed by OuLiPo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle/ workshop of potential literature), stories flow from one text to another, without worrying about the moment of taking root in the experience and existential position of the writer. Being able to see literature, or rather some space resembling a cultural installation surrounding a subject, requires submitting to what is impossible to describe, record, preserve, and yet it is the only possible form that can be owned for the sake of a defective testimony of a subjective form of existence. The sense that a project of literary record appears in experiences of the world’s opacity is put forward by Joanna Orska, when – in line with Adam Ważyk – she stresses that the organization of verse resists entropy:

The way in which the representatives of the Polish avant-garde see verse not as a motionless structure imprisoned on a piece of paper, a “lyrical situation” understood as a mimetic representation of some previously recognized whole and simultaneously a representation of the lyrical “I”, but as a changing, fluid, aesthetic value, which resists entropy with its organization, entropy that is constantly drowning the world we experience and all its manifestations in chaos. The structure of a poem is like some mythical fortifications – and there seems to be more to this metaphor than just a simple analogy.⁴³

⁴¹ See A. Krajewska’s references to Deleuze’s theater of repetition, which is the opposite of the theater of representation: A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁴² J. Franczak, *J.M. Coetzee i sztuka przemiany. Życie i czasy Michaela K. w perspektywie antropotechnicznej* [J.M. Coetzee and the Art of Transformation: *Life and Times of Michael* from the Anthropotechnical Perspective], “Wielogłos. Pismo Wydziału Polonistyki UJ” 2021, no. 2(48), p. 30.

⁴³ J. Orska, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

Looking at the process of constructing own space from the energy of poetry from today's perspective, at its power to raise barriers against too many voices and influences of the dynamically changing world, we should stress the value of opening to one's own experiences rather than the value of poetic syntax. This is an especially valuable form of the natural interface connecting the subject via an affective channel with what is still shaping this subject and its reality. This connection allows one to observe the chaos of cultures, languages, images as matter which can be shaped just by looking at it, in line with modern physics' suggestions. Using it would bring us closer to obtaining meaning without reducing rationality to genological reproductions or rhetorically sanctioned ways of writing/speaking. Slightly adjusting Adam Ważyk's conceptualization, one could say that taking a position in one's poetically constructed city/place would also allow to lean towards shapes of what is coming next, potentially possible to uncover.

Becoming a speaking and acting performer, being the body and word simultaneously intertwined in action is a task for both poets and their recipients, who might see a guide in the creative action taking place, a guide who experiments with tangible shapes in the space of experience. Creating poetry would therefore entail not only seeking forms for verbalizing it, but "waiving perceptual habits,"⁴⁴ searching for a relationship with time and the subjective aspect of action which could possibly take place within it. Poetry would require a non-ontological textual status, treating the literary as a mere cultural lesson in potential meanings found in a constellation of experiences, beyond the need for continuity and coherence resulting from the target construction or any other theory of verse.

Meeting the need to name one's world – stripped of ready-made conceptualizations, and non-textual for this reason (among other things) – a performer-poet constructs tools for a new rationality, creating opportunities for a dialogue with the experience of the present day. They also look for themselves in other people's testaments of action on the stage of today's culture.⁴⁵ The process in which an experimenting poet shifts from narrative to dramatic and performative aesthetics is convergent with contemporary considerations regarding the changing ways in which the subject participates in culture, and it is also connected with new types of theater acting and dramaturgy. After the experience of post-dramatic, post-media, and

⁴⁴ A. Dauksza, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁴⁵ As Ryszard Nycz points out, the testaments of what is currently shaping reality can be found in literary works from "more or less the past twenty-five years." See R. Nycz, *Zaangażowani i niezrozumiali...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

post-performance theater,⁴⁶ the stage (not necessarily theatrical) telling oneself does not require using knowledge of literary genres; instead, it invites one to freely remediate, and the role of the multiplicity of styles is to activate transmedia identity narratives.

The power of such works lies in the participatory presence of the subject in what is done and attested in a piece of art. Eschewing ready-made ways of talking in favor of searching for a language for oneself, i.e. one's own experiences, seems as obvious as it is available to artists who are aware of their objectives. Creating poetry would become more than a linguistic effort – opening oneself to a dramatic situation, the potentiality of a moment in which existence opens to time and looks for a new meaning for itself, which is not defined here and now yet. The poetic opening is an absolutely momentary reaction with one's surroundings, set off in a situation of cognitive helplessness, realized without preparation and a ready workshop full of words, notes, dictionaries, philosophies and aesthetics, without all the tools highlighting the experience of speech against the background of ready knowledge. This process opens us to the world most, and at the same time, the more readily it drifts away from realizing well-known judgments about ways of writing, aesthetics, philosophy, metaphysics, anthropology, the more cognitively attractive it becomes.

A significant aspect of this opening reveals a way of referring to a text of an actor playing a role as a task, and an actor striving towards performative acting, based on their own body, presence, reactions, processuality of existence. The performer-actor interacts with the stage of existence, whereas the task-oriented actor reproduces conventions. This difference is discussed in detail by Wojciech Baluch:

The credibility criterion is key in defining the difference between the two types of acting. In the case of traditional acting it is the ability to stay in character (doing the assigned task); even if it sometimes means going beyond previously established limits, it should be done with awareness and in a way that is meaningful or aesthetically significant. The performative actor constructs their credibility with their openness and – first and foremost – their readiness to set off processes whose sources lie mostly in themselves and their lively presence on stage.⁴⁷

Similarly to what the performative actor does, the poetic process of intercepting poetry discussed above is rooted in its own credibility, a special

⁴⁶ See *Post-teatr i jego sojusznicy* [Post-theater and Its Allies], ed. T. Plata, Warszawa 2018, p. 122.

⁴⁷ W. Baluch, *Po co dramaturgowi aktor performatywny?* [Why Does a Playwright Need a Performative Actor?], "Przestrzenie Teorii" 2021, no. 36, p. 142.

time revealed and functioning in the author's affect. A poet enters the area of their lively presence in order to activate all the means leading to capturing the twinkling phenomenon of his participation in the world forming in it. They become a medium for moments; indeed, they use the words of natural languages and cultural symbols, but in a given situation they transform into metaphors connecting somatic qualities with semiotic ones. To put it simply, in the performativity aesthetics meanings lean towards participation in an event⁴⁸ in order to break free from some previously adopted cognitive attitude, someone else's poetic form, and to follow time, avoiding ready lines/roles to be said/performed, which take credibility away from participation in an experience.

In these actions, style, aesthetics, writing ideas are a secondary result. This is because performative interception of poetry also means consciously setting oneself free from everything that enslaves in terms of aesthetics and ethics, everything that obliges and punishes in some way, for someone, something, or because of something. One could say that ideas and aesthetics come later, in Freud's *Nachträglich*, as in a post-traumatic consequence of experiencing the world and, at the same time, a moment and a language which either hurts the subject with its painfully disappointing forms, or awards them for the effort with a voice of participation in being, right after experiencing a poetic event. For the creative subject, words and ways of pronouncing them are last resorts found in the nick of time, which allow them to escape excessive sensations, at the same time feeling the artificiality and relativity of this seemingly life-saving gesture. Opening oneself to poetic affect resembles the work of a performative actor, thanks to whom, as a result of "shifting the main line of drama towards affectivity, the rules of discursive reception are no longer the leading element."⁴⁹ A poetic performer takes on cultural roles and achieves artistic goals on the mental stage, not "interpreting characters"⁵⁰ from the cultural canon or social scenarios, but activating and incorporating in his toolset the energy coming from their behaviors and answers. This creative entrance into a dramatic situation and attempts at naming one's own event can be illustrated with the performative actor who takes advantage of their acting skills in terms of improvisation and confrontation with the matter of art and life in order to extend the theatrical experience. His subjective presence on stage, the unexpected closeness of his enlarged face on screen, as well as the unusual energy which controls the whole performance – these all initiate processes

⁴⁸ See E. Fischer-Lichte, *Performatywność. Wprowadzenie* [The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics], trans. M. Borowski and M. Sugiera, Kraków 2008.

⁴⁹ W. Baluch, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

of affective and mental experience rather than close them. The actor must let go of their fear of text in order to help the audience turn off their learned inclination towards interpreting everything around them.⁵¹

A performative actor opening themselves to a stage experience so that the audience feels in touch with what shapes this shared experience and co-presence typically also requires suitable words, i.e. some amount of skill of a performance poet. “Fear of the text” can be transformed into its performative enactments, when they take place without fear of external and earlier interpretative pressures or obligations. However, such freeing reactions and relationships with culture need to be learned. Approaching oneself using well-known cultural scenarios, according to cognitive and interpretative patterns, often turns away from the intensity of one’s own experiences, whereas their most precious present “interceptions” can comprise convincing forms of an innovative and brave break-up with the post-modern doubts in being in touch with reality.

If we become performers of our experiences, we gain access to our own space in an area which is multi-perspective and very predatorily contemporary. The protagonist of J.M. Coetzee *Life and Times of Michael K* will be an important partner in the process of personal conversion “aimed at defending subjective sovereignty,”⁵² leading to delineating the area of individual ontological safety. As Jerzy Franczak (citing Peter Sloterdijk) points out, Michael K. combines the driving force of an escape and staging, and in his secession he “transforms [...] into a small state for whose inhabitants they must find the right constitution.”⁵³ Coetzee, by not offering a ready scheme of metanoia, indicates the need for an exercise experiment, similar to the one discussed here:

to single-handedly face the imperative inscribed in Rilke’s poem: “you must change your life.” Epiphanies of otherness are therefore accompanied by endless critical work focused on a profound revision of exercise practices which have dominated modernity.⁵⁴

If we were to see a poetic performer exercising in terms of existentialism, intercepting the creative affect would have a dimension of actions taking place inside culture rather than on some safe artsy training ground beyond

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

⁵² J. Franczak, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁵³ P. Sloterdijk, *Musisz życie swe odmienić. O antropotechnice* [You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics], trans. J. Janiszewski, Warszawa 2014, p. 314. English version: Cambridge 2013, p. 228.

⁵⁴ J. Franczak, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

society and culture, though in an act of intentional secession, which sets the poet free from preventative tools (for a moment), lethal to their social desires. Analyzing the conditions and possibilities of transforming oneself and one's cultural environment is not safe.

Therefore it is difficult to perceive any poetic activity as exploitation and reproduction of genres, knowledge of discourses, and organization of plots, even in the dimension of structural genericity of new meanings. If a positive verification of poetic affect resulted from knowledge of texts, the credibility of poetic "play for text" would be guaranteed by how faithful or unfaithful it was to other texts. However, if we expect something more than a rhetorical repetition or banal negation of commonly accepted discourse from poetry, we wait for signals of a special form of freedom, an agon with canonical or popular manifestations of culture, a gift made of seeing and acting beyond discourses and the reality they create.⁵⁵

This metaphorical "beyond" would mean here that poetry intercepted from the endless potentiality of affect would be an ability to see not through texts, but rather through what created them out of various potential situations. The aesthetics of a piece of art would thus be replaced with the aesthetics of an event.⁵⁶ For humanities, this would mean that we should teach poets the process of reading performances which are manifestations of the poetic experience, rather than poems, texts, and their construction. Poetry's agency is visible not in unfaithfulness to some letter, but in faithfulness to the poetically seen world shining through its black contours (or phonemes). A performer-poet demonstrated in action would prove to be a modern personalization of cognitive drama,⁵⁷ the more independent from any written text, the more profound.

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⁵⁵ See A. Bielik-Robson, *Duch powierzchni. Rewizja romantyczna i filozofia* [Surface Spirit: Romanticiest Revision and Philosophy], Kraków 2004, p. 469.

⁵⁶ A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

⁵⁷ See K. Fazan, "Hamlet Wyspiańskiego: scena grozy jako dramat absolutny" [Wyspiański's *Hamlet*: Horror Scene as Total Drama], [in:] *Sztuka słowa sztuka obrazu: prace dla Ewy Miodońskiej-Brookes* [Art of Word, Art of Image: Essays for Ewa Miodońska-Brookes], eds. J. Zach and A. Ziłowicz, Kraków 2009, pp. 97, 100.

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