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*Constitution for the Chorus of Poles***

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1.

'Why didn't I think of that?' Maciej Nowak, artistic director of the Polski Theatre in Poznań, asked enviously.¹ Enviously, because the director Marta Górnicka's *Konstytucja na chór Polaków* [*Constitution for the Chorus of Poles*, premiere Nowy Theatre in Warsaw, 10 April 2016] was an effective artistic and social event and, in addition, it had been initiated by what Nowak termed a 'childishly simple' idea. Górnicka, along with the Chorus of Poles she assembled in the Nowy Theater for the occasion – the anniversary of the ratification in 1791 of the first constitution of Poland (and the first in Europe, now known as the Third of May Constitution) – read the text of the constitution, but of the contemporary document, in force in the present day, from 1997.

Or in force theoretically: Poland in late 2015 and early 2016 had been overshadowed by a dispute in parliament over the Constitutional Tribunal [the top judicial body overseeing government adherence to the Constitution]. The right-wing Law and Justice party, newly elected with a majority in the Sejm, the lower parliamentary house, moved to appoint new judges to the tribunal, though the previous Sejm had already appointed other judges to those positions. Later, amendments to the law on the tribunal were rapidly introduced, intended to justify the decisions by the ruling party. This was quickly protested by the opposition, and the entire affair (which remains on-going) sparked a series of anti-government demonstrations.

With her production, Górnicka struck the very heart of those social tensions. But the matter was more complicated than a simple demonstrative reading of the text, as had been the case with collective readings of Argentine playwright Rodrigo García's *Golgota Picnic* in 2014, for example. That had been a spontaneous act of protest against censorship when Michał Merczyński, director of Poznań's annual Malta festival, had cancelled performances of García's own production of his controversial work at the last minute, (supposedly) out of fear of riots. At that time, those who disagreed with Merczyński's decision decided to take to the

¹ Maciej Nowak, 'Nowak pyta: Dlaczego sam na to nie wpadłem?', *Gazeta Wyborcza – Stołeczna*, 4 May 2016, <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/222114.html> [accessed on 6 February 2018].

streets and read the text of the play – sometimes in unison, and sometimes dividing up the roles.²

The stakes for *Constitution for the Chorus of Poles* were different. The audience received a strong, precise production, similar in this respect to the Górnicka's earlier achievements in productions with her Chór Kobiet [Chorus of Women]. The political nature of the show didn't surprise anyone; after all, politics, understood seriously, is what Górnicka addresses in most of her works. The two previous Chorus of Women productions, *TU MOWI CHÓR: tylko 6 do 8 godzin, tylko 6 do 8 godzin* [*This Is the Chorus Speaking: 6 to 8 hours only, 6 to 8 hours only*] [premiered at the Theatre Institute in Warsaw, 2010] and *[,hu:r kobjɔ+] II: MAGNIFICAT* [premiered at the Theatre Institute in Warsaw, 2011], addressed questions of the objectification of women, the influence of the Roman Catholic Church's ideology in Poland, and the public and private spheres of women's experience. The later *RequieMaszyna* [*RequieMachine*, premiered at the Theatre Institute in Warsaw, 2013], in which men were included in the chorus, was based on the poetry of Władysław Broniewski and primarily concerned employment and social questions. The international trilogy of *Matka Courage nie będzie milczeć. Chór na czas wojny* [*Mother Courage Won't Remain Silent: A Chorus for Wartime*] [premiered at the Museum of Modern Art in Tel Aviv, 2014], *(M)other Courage* [premiered at the Staatstheater Braunschweig, 2015] and *Hymn do Miłości* [*Hymn to Love*, premiered at the Polski Theatre in Poznań, 2017], dealt with nationalism, war and refugees, always fit to the local context of the respective countries where the productions premiered. But even against that backdrop, *Constitution* gave the impression of being a particularly advanced statement. At the very least, Górnicka had never before been so close to current politics.

Nor did the director ever before try to break the fourth wall. More than once, she has faced accusations that although her productions have revolutionary messages and boldly experiment with theatrical forms, the situation of the audience remains unchanged. 'Well, yes, but still we buy tickets, we have seats, the division into actresses and public remains in force', the critic Ewa Guderian-Czaplińska noted when describing how the Chorus of Women operates – 'so how is this a new model, since so many cultural frames have been maintained?' Guderian-Czaplińska immediately added: "This normal" mode of participation is also an element of the game. [...] The "ordinariness" of participation in the production says only that here there is no thinking up a completely new world, but an attempt to fit into its framework."³ Meanwhile, Górnicka had decided to play with the 'rules of the game' more intensely than she had to date.

2 See Agata Adamiciecka-Sitek, Iwona Kurz, 'Democracy: Do It Yourself' *Polish Theatre Journal*, 2/2016, <http://www.polishtheatrejournal.com/index.php/ptj/article/view/67/377>, and *Piknik Golgota Polska. Sztuka – religia – demokracja*, eds. Agata Adamiciecka-Sitek, Iwona Kurz (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2015).

3 Ewa Guderian-Czaplińska, ['hur:a'], *Didaskalia* 105, 2011, p. 96.

2.

Constitution for the Chorus of Poles comprises three parts: a performance by the Nadarzyn Volunteer Firefighters' Wind Orchestra, which plays patriotic songs; the aforementioned reading of selections from the 1997 constitution (combined with other texts, including songs and football-fan chants); and a dance party, *Patriotic Disco*, in which everyone participates, audience and chorus members alike.

At the beginning, the Nadarzyn orchestra plays 'Witaj, majowa Jutrzenko' ['Welcome, Maytime Dawn']. The song, also known as the 'Third of May Mazurka', was written during Poland's November Uprising of 1830 against Russian occupation, by a participant in the rebellion, Rajnold Suchodolski; it pays homage to the Third of May Constitution and is sustained by images directly from the messianic-Romantic imaginarium: 'Poland arises from the loins of the grave / The proud murderers flee'. Referring to the mythos of the Third of May Constitution has an ambivalent effect. As Nowak notes, that famous document was 'adopted under suspicious circumstances',⁴ meaning that under fear of repressions, the vote was rushed through, taking advantage of the fact that some senators and deputies hadn't yet returned from the Easter break; no legislative session was convened, only individual parliamentarians were summoned; the constitution was signed at night, and its adoption set off huge protests and drastic scenes in the legislative chamber. All of this – first and foremost the practice of legislative night sessions and the rush to sign documents – is dangerously similar to practices of the governing right-wing parties in Poland since 2015.

A similarly disturbing impression is left by the other songs the musicians play. In 'Sobieski's Triumphal March', extolling the Battle of Vienna in 1683 and the Polish king who led the relief, echoes of nationalism return, along with xenophobia, racism and pride in historic Poland, once the 'bulwark of Christianity', using its 'Sarmatian sword' to block the invasion by the Ottoman Empire. The idea of a 'bulwark of Christianity', of Poland defending Europe against Muslim refugees, is openly returning today in nationalist rhetoric.

But in *Constitution*, significantly, nobody sings these songs; the orchestra only plays the familiar melodies, while the Chorus of Poles has not yet begun its reading. The whole thing has more of the character of a good-spirited celebration, something like a sentimental parade (a strong impression – particularly during the second performance production, on 2 September 2017 on Warsaw's Plac Defilad, in front of the landmark Palace of Culture and Science). Only those who recall the words of those songs would fully recognize the ambivalence inherent in the orchestra's performance.

3.

After the overture, the Chorus of Poles takes the stage: men and women, children, older people, heterosexuals and homosexuals, foreigners, refugees, disabled people. There's also a soldier in uniform and the drag queen Kim Lee; interestingly, this star of the Polish drag scene with Vietnamese origins wore full makeup and a huge piece of floral folk

⁴ Nowak, op. cit.

headgear, but worn, baggy jeans and a faded men's shirt – as if to emphasize the performative, equivocal nature of her onstage persona's identity? There are amateurs and experienced actors, some known from the covers of glossy magazines.

At first glance, the audience sees that Górnicka's Chorus of Poles (in part selected by open casting) is a heterogeneous, diverse group, containing various othernesses within itself. For close observers of the director's work this is no surprise: Górnicka's work has from the beginning always been in some sense emancipatory, of course. In the case of the Chorus of Women ensemble, we must appreciate that it is women who are performing and 'taking back' the chorus for themselves. In the productions *This Is the Chorus Speaking* and *Magnificat*, an important function was played by the texts of ancient tragedies: *Antigone* and *The Bacchae*. This is how Chorus productions' references to ancient tradition established justification. At least in the concept of John Gould (to whom Ewa Partyga refers in her monograph on the dramatic chorus), who states that 'the choir is most often an embodiment of "otherness", created primarily by marginal social groups (seniors, women, slaves, foreigners), who can in no way be described as the guardians of the values of the civic community, and thus their voice cannot be an authoritative voice of the democratic *polis*'.⁵ But Gould neglects that ancient drama was written by men, presented and acted by them and, in the end, watched by them alone.

The critical-studies scholar Sue-Ellen Case introduces a different perspective. Case believes the chorus was often a collection of marginalised figures, specifically developed to silence women. Case recalls that until a certain moment in ancient Athens, the only permissible public form of women's expression of anger or grief was the lament. 'In banning the laments, the Athenian state introduced tragedy as a mechanism of control with a strictly defined form, remaining exclusively in the hands of men. Greek theatre's far-reaching rigor of form literally concealed engagement under a tragic mask, to clean up the streets'.⁶

In referring to those words, we can state that Górnicka has returned the chorus to women, using the ancient matrix to blow the system of patriarchy apart from within, not only by using the forms and bodies of the singers – here the role of choreographer Anna Godowska must be emphasised, who has worked with the director from the very beginning, crafting movement in the majority of her productions) – but also through the texts, which are manifestly feminist. And through the very act of women taking the floor, which, as authors Joanna Krakowska and Krystyna Duniec note, is obscene: 'What's obscene is the presence of twenty-five different women, who say "I", yet what is heard is "we"'.⁷ It is precisely in the obscene (understood as a revelation of hidden carnal practices and experimenting with the materiality and image of the body) that the performance theoretician Dorota Sajewska sees the power of art:

5 Ewa Partyga, *Chór dramatyczny w poszukiwaniu tożsamości teatralnej*, (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2004), p. 56.

6 Sue-Ellen Case, 'Aktywista w masce. Greckie strategie walki ulicznej', *Didaskalia* 2008 84, p. 84.

7 Krystyna Duniec, Joanna Krakowska, *Soc, sex i historia* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014), p. 205.

'I am convinced that art – particularly obscene art – can drag into the light of day content that is pushed aside and rejected by the culture, and bring it once again into the space of public debate'.⁸

In the case of *Constitution*, it was ostentatiously obscene to invite those who usually don't have the opportunity to speak as a Chorus of Poles to join the project: refugees, disabled people. This intention is given an edge by specific accenting of words in the preamble of the legal document. After the entire text had been read by Borys Jaźnicki, the chorus repeated the text slowly and loudly, getting 'stuck' at times on specific words. 'We, the Polish Nation – all citizens of the Republic / all / all / all...?'

We? The Polish? Nation? Each of those words could in fact be questions, not only from the person who pronounces them. Because what kind of 'we', what kind of community, can we speak of in the Poland of the second decade of the twenty-first century, when social, economic, political and worldview polarisation seems insurmountable? What exactly is this imagined nation, if its symbols are appropriated by extreme right-wing and nationalist groups? On the other hand: how can we maintain faith in the category of nation in a world of accelerating globalisation?

'We, the people' – these are of course specific words in the recent history of Poland (and, in Polish, also infer 'nation'). Lech Wałęsa's quoting of the first words of the US Constitution during his address to Congress in Washington, D.C., in 1989 – immediately after the first partly democratic elections of the postwar era in Poland, which ended the era of Communist dictatorship, delivering a crushing victory for representatives of Solidarity – had exceptional symbolic significance, stating (or heralding) the Polish transformation, with all its brilliance and with its shadows. Interestingly, and also very perversely, the director Radosław Rychcik played with this during the concluding concert of the Thirty-Sixth Actors' Song Festival in Wrocław, titled 'Wielkie przemówienia' ('The Great Speech', 2015), in which about a dozen actresses and female vocalists sang famous speeches by 'great' (male) leaders. The cast, dressed in elegant dinner jackets, appeared on a stage designed like the Kodak Theatre during the Oscars. Wałęsa's speech was performed by Anna Mierzwa, who whispered 'We, the people' sensuously into the microphone, then powerfully sang the rest of the speech – often in a manner recalling the white-voice folk tradition, which added a folk element to rhythmic electronic music by the band Natural Born Chillers, accenting Wałęsa's particular character – 'a simple electrician from Gdańsk', who recalled the principle of 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'.

Górnicka's chorus stands in one long row (numbering about fifty performers), and after reciting the beginning of the preamble, gets stuck on the words 'Republic of Poland', repeating them in an even rhythm. Then individual chorus members step forward, repeating in a loop other words from the preamble: 'We the nation', 'Believing in God', etc. With time, there are ever more of these 'individual' voices; they begin to create a cacophony, as if each demonstratively announces something and does not hear other voices next to them. Górnicka has used a similar device

8 Dorota Sajewska, *Pod okupacją mediów*, (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2012), p. 191.

several times in other productions, to show that a community doesn't necessarily have to speak with one voice, uniting itself in a common cause. 'The Chorus is not a simple story about a community [...] we don't simply affirm such community movements, because the Chorus also shows the dangers of joining such categories; it demonstrates the mechanisms governing the emergence of a community, which always also encompass exclusion',⁹ Górnicka said in an interview. For the director, this imagined 'We, the nation' is deconstructed into a range of individual voices which, shouting out specific selections from the preamble ('believing in God', etc.) demonstrate that there can be no talk of a common 'we'. And that the category of nation is in this case as inadequate as it is dangerous.

This cacophony of voices begins at a certain point to form itself into two choruses, shouting at different tempos 'we, the Polish nation' as if each group were usurping the exclusive right to this description. It appears that this strong polarisation resonates perfectly with the political moods of the audience, in a situation where the division of society into two mutually exclusive camps is clearly seen: one from the government, the other from the opposition. It's hard to see a third way. Any differentiation of attitude becomes impossible; the only thing that counts is who has the right to declare themselves 'the Polish nation' and who can rule that nation. Those loud cries call to mind nationalist definitions, of which one slogan is 'Poland is here!' 'Here' meaning where 'we' are, and not where 'they' are.

One constant element of community is exclusion, or perhaps the exclusion of certain social groups is essential for the consolidation of the community, the people. But as Judith Butler argues in her *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*:

The point of a democratic politics is not simply to extend recognition equally to all of the people, but, rather, to grasp that only by changing the relation between the recognizable and unrecognizable can a) equality be understood and pursued and b) 'the people' become open to a further elaboration. Even when a form of recognition is extended to *all* the people, there remains an active premise that there is a vast region of those who remains unrecognizable, and that very power differential is reproduced every time [in] that form of recognition.¹⁰

Thus the community by nature cannot be homogeneous, but it can operate by the discourses of authority and recognition. For Górnicka, this problem is complex, because on one hand she constructs a maximally diverse community, but in fact she's the one constructing it. She also conducts the chorus [typically from the front rows], as a result of which the only recognisable 'star' of the show is Górnicka herself (as noted by the critic Agata Adamecka-Sitek, who regularly collaborates with Górnicka as dramaturge).¹¹ Of course, she doesn't hide her authority; on

9 Justyna Stasiowska, "I sing the body electric". Rozmowa z Martą Górnicką, *Didaskalia* 2013, 115–116, p. 127.

10 Judith Butler, *Zapiski o performatywnej teorii zgromadzeń*, trans. Joanna Bednarek (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyka Polityczna, 2017), p. 5.

11 'How Far Can You Go in an Institution? On a Feminist Turn That Wasn't: Agata Adamecka-Sitek Talks with Milena Gauer and Weronika Szczawińska', *Polish Theatre Journal* 1, 2015, <http://www.polishtheatrejournal.com/index.php/ptj/article/view/57/114> [accessed on 8 February 2018].

the contrary, she displays it and makes it a subject of her productions. Nevertheless, after a few such premieres, it is necessary to ask: 'And what now?' Górnicka's authority as a conductor, director and scriptwriter has indeed been clearly delineated and declared. In future projects, perhaps the structure of work within the Chorus will become more democratic, and Górnicka's authority will diminish.

Also significant in this respect is the function of Godowska's choreography, perhaps not so clearly in *Constitution* as in other productions. Very geometrical, mechanical movement, the arrangement of groups in concrete figures (rows, wedges), acting very precisely, based mainly on strong hand gestures and straightened bodies. In many moments, it calls to mind military rigor, drill: the movement is disciplined, there is little space for free bodily expression. Although Górnicka has dissented from this comparison on many occasions, there are still moments when her productions recall works by Einer Schlee – though the German director has much more pageantry and much more rigor. Such associations arise of their own accord: troops being mustered, showcase parades from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, the automation of the human as in Chaplin's *Modern Times*. Paradoxically, in the Chorus, in this 'collective figure', the border between subjectivity and objectivity is very thin, almost elusive. Górnicka emphasises the individuality of the participants (in appropriate selection during casting, at least) on one hand, while on the other, this form of theatre blurs that, with the result that on more than one occasion chorus members become simultaneously mass and machine.

This choreographic precision can be seen in particular in another scene in *Constitution*, where chorus members line up in the shape of a cross (surely an allusion to the power that the Roman Catholic Church wields in Poland as an opinion-forming and lobbying organisation – an unconstitutional one, of course). The group in the centre rock rhythmically from side to side, intoning the abbreviations 'RP – PL' (both mean the same thing: one is the initials of the country's official name, the Republic of Poland; the second is the widespread abbreviation, for example in Internet addresses). Against the background of those sounds, excerpts from the Constitution concerning the structure of government are read out: that the people exercise power directly or through their representatives. Later (still formed into a cross), the Chorus begins to read Article 13, prohibiting the establishment of political parties and other organisations that are racist, totalitarian, Nazi, fascist or communist, or those which promote racial or national hatred. This sounds like a bitter irony: in April 2016, the National Radical Camp (ONR), a political group that is manifestly nationalistic and fascistic, had celebrated the eighty-second anniversary of its establishment with marches throughout Poland, during which slogans were chanted such as 'Down with the European Union', 'Smack the Red scum with a hammer and a sickle', 'Poland for the Poles'.

The production's next sequence concerns 'freedom'. Initially, that word is repeated in various ways by chorus members, so many times that it slowly becomes something of an incantation. Later, from the common long row, individual people step away and recall sections of the Constitution that discuss various freedoms and equalities: equality before the law, personal freedoms, freedom in raising children, the freedom and equality guaranteed to Polish citizens who are representatives of ethnic

minorities. But every so often these calm declarations are interrupted by a sharp, fast interjection of male voices: 'The freedoms in question may be subject to limitations specified by statute'. After some time, everyone is repeating this phrase, as if more significant than those freedoms is the limitations regulating them.

Some chorus members begin to emit hisses that drown out the selection from Article 79: 'Everyone whose constitutional freedoms or rights have been infringed, shall have the right to appeal to the Constitutional Tribunal for its judgment on the conformity to the Constitution of a statute or other normative act'. This cannot be stated so surely: the current political crisis surrounding the Tribunal, along with its many tragic effects, has also affected social consciousness. Faith in the Tribunal's independence has been lost, as has faith that the Tribunal can actually guard the law and the Constitution.

4.

The second part of *Constitution* ends with the sentence: 'Loyalty to the Republic of Poland, as well as concern for the common good, shall be the duty of every Polish citizen' (Article 82). Individual performers repeat those words, looking at the audience. Though one should add that the chorus is looking at the audience the entire time. It's worth appreciating this simple fact. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche recalls that the chorus in ancient tragedy has the task not only of commenting on and supplementing the action onstage – its basic function is watching. The chorus is by nature an ideal audience, although, as Partyga adds, this is not about seeing when understood as rational perception, because 'it is enough [...] to be aware that in a tragedy, the subject of such watching is the emotionally engaged chorus, caught up in song and dance'¹².

But can we flip the perspective? Maybe those who only watch are also a chorus? Perhaps, in fact, during the reading of *Constitution* two choruses have met: one on stage and one in the audience. But while the former had been working together for several weeks, the other one contained people who were strangers to each other, connected by little more than the fact that on that day they found themselves in the same space, concentrated on the same action: watching and listening to the Chorus of Poles.

It is only that in the context of the political events mentioned above that a decision to go to director Krzysztof Warlikowski's Nowy Theatre that day and watch *Constitution*, arranged by Marta Górnicka, was a purely political choice. Mladen Dolar, writing about the political nature of voice¹³, refers to Aristotle's *Politics*, which points out that humans differ from animals in that we have a voice (*phone*) and speech (*logos*). But perhaps a purely bodily presence is enough to demonstrate something? Butler writes:

So when people amass on the street, one implication seems clear: they are still here and still there; they persist, they assemble, and so manifest the understanding that their situation is shared, or the beginning of such an understanding. And even when they are speaking or do not present

¹² Partyga, op. cit., p. 38.

¹³ Mladen Dolar, 'Polityka głosu', *Teksty drugie* 2015, 5.

a set of negotiable demands, the call for justice is being enacted: the bodies assembled 'say' 'we are not disposable' [...].¹⁴

Can a theatre audience during a performance be treated as a public gathering of a political nature? Certainly not always, but in the case of this project, such a prospect seems justified; it certainly was during the second performance of the production in September 2017. Rain, cold wind, darkness – and still a large audience came. Two choruses of Poles met, although only one read aloud from the Constitution. After the reading, the two choruses mingled: the concluding event, *Patriotic Disco*, was a dance party for all, to the rhythm of hits (not only Polish ones).

We could certainly recognise this idea by the creators as an unpretentious gesture that created no obligation. After such an intense, contradiction-filled experience, an ordinary party followed – though perhaps this was in fact a movement 'from words to action'. Because if the Chorus ended with the phrase 'the common good', perhaps the creators determined that it should be brought to life at the simplest level: Let's party so everyone will feel good.

The problem was that not everyone wanted to party. *Patriotic Disco* turned out to be a kind of trap, set not only for audience members whom the actors pulled onto the dance floor. Insofar as the clear division between audience and performers was in some sense 'safe' and well known to both sides, this later unification of the two groups laid bare the artificiality of the entire situation. It's cold, the wind's blowing, the government's actions are increasingly oppressive, radicalism among citizens is growing – and here we're supposed to dance and pretend that 'there's hope, because for a moment we're united'? Dance on the decks of the *Titanic*, though the whole audience knows the ship is going down? Why are we forced to party, though a more natural form would be to form up in a funeral procession? Is real audience engagement in the production impossible without interaction? And is community possible in theatre, or is it simply being together without traces of manipulation and/or coercion?

In *Constitution*, no definitive answer is found. Possibly because, in this production, the game is about something else. What can be grasped and artistically recreated here are lines of political tension describing the situation in contemporary Poland. The creators make no attempt to build some kind of alternative reality on stage; they don't slip into realism. They create the simplest situation in theatre: somebody talks, somebody listens. As a result, the Chorus leads the audience into the very heart of political controversy. Simultaneously – and here, I believe, Górnicka's art reveals its post-theatre potential – the Chorus is constantly redefining itself, creating meanings, then radically reshaping them.

In reshaping words and selections of discourses, Górnicka returns to the original definition of performativity: the one that suggests that one can 'act with words'. Simultaneously, the director knows perfectly well that the framework of the theatre gives everything an element of fiction/distance, and performativity need not necessarily function according to the logic of immediate action, effect or product. The Chorus's texts mix various languages and elements of discourse, revealing their oppressive and ideological significance – and, simultaneously, through the very act of

14 Butler, op. cit., p. 25.

reciting them on the stage, they are somehow rendered invalid, placed in parentheses. The words look for communication, but communication that is consciously one-sided and subject to constant interruptions.

The Chorus's actions are post-theatre, because they reveal the performativity of words and the discursiveness of bodies, while simultaneously problematising that condition. The Chorus, made up of a diverse group of people, most of them without experience in theatre, suggests a democratic type of community, yet is simultaneously subjected to a director's oppression, which in fact is ostentatiously revealed. The unceasing game of questioning the Chorus's position is simply post-theatre, because it reveals the frames of the theatre situation in which all of us (both performers and audience) find ourselves. As a result, we see clearly that theatre is not only a place for a 'community meeting' oriented toward a session of impressions and affect, but also a concrete institution, working in a defined way, creating a certain kind of ideological discourse. Górnicka's choruses seem to be precisely 'post-theatre' in this sense: they use the convention of theatre (very traditional, of ancient pedigree), while simultaneously signalling that this fun is not innocent, and every act of speaking carries with it defined consequences. Post-theatre is here simultaneously a reference to tradition and a transgression beyond it; it is an activity, an artistic act and a critical reflection. In terms of aesthetics, simplicity and minimalism dominate (including in chorus members' clothing, which has no special distinction); music is used rarely, the lighting barely changes, there are almost no props or scenery on stage. But what is created at the intersection of texts, voices and bodies is roiled by shifting meanings, conflicts, agonies, intellectual contexts and emotional engagement.

The most important attribute of Górnicka's work is what the theatre historian Agata Łuksza has pointed out:¹⁵ a chorus, by nature polyphonic, questions all categorisations and goes beyond binary aesthetics and thinking. To that attribute, I would add: insatiateness, insatiability. In his text, Dolar refers to the words of Freud, who believed that there are three professions 'that are not capable of delivering satisfactory results: governing, child-rearing, psychoanalysis'.¹⁶ Dolar points out that what unites all three professions is voice – and this is precisely what does not allow full definition, a satisfactory result and simple explanations. And this also seems to be an attribute of Górnicka's theatre: nothing here is simple, least of all that which is said simply. Górnicka's projects, though seemingly simple, provoke a great number of questions and often yield contradictory or opposing responses.

Translated by Nathaniel Espino

¹⁵ Agata Łuksza, *Glamour, kobiecość, widowisko. Aktorka jako obiekt pożądania* (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016), pp. 361–369.

¹⁶ Dolar, op. cit., p. 258.

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ABSTRACT

Stanisław Godlewski

We? The People? On Marta Górnicka's *Constitution for the Chorus of Poles*

The author looks into *Konstytucja na Chór Polaków* [*Constitution for the Chorus of Poles*], a production directed by Marta Górnicka (premiere 1 May 2016), analysing it both with reference to Górnicka's previous works, and in light of Poland's political situation – particularly the crisis surrounding the Constitutional Tribunal, the country's highest constitutional court. Godlewski examines subsequent parts of the production, demonstrating the extent to which Górnicka's work endeavours to abolish all manner of hierarchies, while itself falling into discourses of dominance and power. The post-theatrical nature of the production is revealed in consciously referencing tradition, while escaping illusoriness and exposing the performative mechanisms relevant to the presence of a text or of a body in space.