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Revolutions versus Participations:
Participation Strategies and Performative Tactics
in the Wielkopolska: Rewolucje Programme

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‘The actual order of things is precisely what “popular” tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon. Though elsewhere it is exploited by a dominant power or simply denied by an ideological discourse, here order is *tricked* by an art. Into the institution to be served are thus insinuated styles of social exchange, technical invention, and moral resistance, that is, an economy of the “*gift*” (generosities for which one expects a return), an aesthetics of “*tricks*” (artists’ operations) and an ethics of *tenacity* (countless ways of refusing to accord the established order the status of a law, a meaning, or a fatality)’.¹

Michel de Certeau

When Agata Siwiak, the curator of the programme Wielkopolska: Rewolucje [Wielkopolska: Revolutions], was nominated for the annual Passport award by *Polityka* magazine (among Poland’s most prestigious cultural awards) in 2013, Anna R. Burzyńska explained the nomination as follows:

For consistent grass-roots based curatorial work demolishing the fossilised hierarchies of Polish theatrical life; an artistically and conceptually unique project, Wielkopolska: Revolutions is a template for modern, engaged and at the same time non-dogmatic thinking about the role of art in today’s society.²

The uniqueness of the Wielkopolska: Revolutions initiative lies not only in the unquestionable artistic value of the events that took place under the auspices of the programme, which facilitated the collaboration of avant-garde artists with small local communities in the rural areas of the Wielkopolska region (Wielkopolska is one of Poland’s 16 administrative districts, or voivodeships). Another unique attribute, perhaps the most important, is the new, very invigorating model of cultural collaboration at work in the programme, one which is decidedly exceptional in the context of the ‘fossilised hierarchies’ of Polish theatre and culture.

This is because the Wielkopolska: Revolutions initiative has come about between fairly set dividing lines that still persist in Poland. On one hand, it is managed on the project-to-project basis, but on the other, it had run concurrently for three years, pointing to a long-term commitment, a determined effort to promote culture in the region. The programme is free of the customary links to repertory theatre (which continues to define the theatrical mainstream in Poland), but it was not born at the grass-roots level or modelled on independent theatre groups

1 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 26.

2 ‘Teatr 2013. Nominowana Agata Siwiak’, *Polityka*, 3 December 2013, <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/paszportypolityki/1563345,1,teatr-2013-nominowana-agata-siwiak.read>, [accessed 22 August 2014].

such as Gardzienice. It is also difficult to define its affiliation to a specific area of artistic activity, given the marked though lately increasingly blurred division between theatre and the visual arts; along with theatre artists, the programme has employed musicians, architects and visual artists. It also crosses a comparably marked aesthetic-social boundary, a division into mainstream urban centres with galleries and repertory theatres and provinces with village halls and community centres. It locates itself between the notion of national culture, aspired to by centres of high culture, and the local: that is, between the centre and the periphery.

Although this division – into the high culture of the city and the popular folk culture – as well as other ‘dividing lines’ in the sphere of aesthetic and artistic discourse have long been coming under attack as redundant, binary oppositions, *Wielkopolska: Revolutions* is the first cultural programme to be consistently implemented in Polish theatre which from the outset blurs and crosses such lines from an ideological standpoint.

The programme also stands out for its conceptual orientation towards the social potential of artistic activity that can come about between these ‘dividing lines’. In this essay I would like to look at *Wielkopolska: Revolutions* as a successful artistic endeavour: not to focus on its skilfully conducted process of unhinging, fracturing and creating new spaces within the framework of an established artistic-aesthetic model in Polish theatre, which the programme has forced through, but to emphasise its social potential.

The centre and the periphery

“Those who hold power are loath to give it away – the best example is Poznań, where the authorities carry out ‘consultations’ before relinquishing even a scrap of their power”,³ said Krzysztof Nawratek, a theorist of urban space, in an interview with the magazine *Autoportret*. The main theoretical framework and the point of reference in the magazine’s “Participation and Participation 2012” issue was a set of reflections by Markus Miessen, whose ardent treatise *The Nightmare of Participation* would be published in Poland in 2013. Miessen’s book included a foreword by anthropologist Kacper Pobłocki who, expanding on Miessen’s reflections, added Polish examples and referred to Poznań, the capital of the Wielkopolska region, as a city whose authorities used participation as a ‘double scam’, superficially legitimating both investments which were against the best interests of their citizens and decisions which had already been taken.⁴

The resulting widespread negative opinion of the Poznań authorities in left-wing circles and the press was cemented, characteristically, by a matter of the city’s cultural rather than social policy, when in 2014 city authorities cancelled performances of the play *Golgotha Picnic*, directed by Rodrigo Garcia and scheduled on 27 and 28 June as part of the annual Malta festival. The widely criticized decision to cancel the production was taken by Malta’s director, Michał Merczyński, who justified it due to the threat of riots in Poznań by ultra-Catholic circles. This followed

3 Dorota Leśniak-Rychlak, ‘Nadzieja na uczestnictwo’, *Autoportret. Pismo o dobrej przestrzeni*, 37. 2, (2012), pp. 32–34 (p. 32).

4 Kacper Pobłocki, ‘Prawo do odpowiedzialności’, in: Markus Miessen, *Koszmar*, trans. by Michał Choptiany (Warsaw: Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, 2013), pp. 7–35.

a declaration⁵ by Ryszard Grobelny, the mayor of Poznań, which was a de facto withdrawal of support for the festival by the city authorities (concealed in democratic rhetoric) and was understood as such by the directors of the festival and in public opinion.

While *Golgotha Picnic*⁶ was not performed in Poznań, the Lisówki Care Home, some twenty kilometres outside Poznań, held the premiere of the first production of the third edition of the Wielkopolska: Revolutions programme, the play *Jakiż to chłopiec piękny i młody?* [*Who Is the Lad so Comely and Young?*], written by Jolanta Janiczak and directed by Wiktor Rubin. This coincidence was no accident: the organizers of Wielkopolska: Revolutions have consistently ensured that the programme, which takes place in outlying areas of the Wielkopolska region, makes an impact on public consciousness and mainstream culture at the national level. This impact was strengthened by the arrival of many representatives of Poland's 'arts scene' due to the cancellation of Rodrigo Garcia's play in Poznań, making circumstances even more favourable. Had *Golgotha Picnic* been performed, two traditionally separate strategies in the politics of art would have manifested in Wielkopolska on the same day: the critical strategy (which had instead been cancelled) and one of the finest "undertakings of participatory culture",⁷ as the Wielkopolska: Revolutions project has been called by Roman Pawłowski, one of its earliest commentators.

I did not mention this local context in order to discursively juxtapose the big city on one side, inefficient and conservative, and on the other the romantic provinces, the countryside, isolated margins and peripheries where 'revolutionary' social micro-projects can take place. This is not only because the idea of the counterposition of 'urban' with 'rural-provincial' is ahistorical, as shown by Wojciech Józef Burszta⁸ who wrote of the crisis of post-traditional society which this juxtaposition reveals. Neither is it because the problem with views on artistic-social projects is that for ethical reasons commentators typically renounce aesthetic

5 Ryszard Grobelny, 'Nie wezmę w nim udziału', *Głos Wielkopolski*, 17 June 2014, <http://www.gloswielkopolski.pl/artykul/3476439,ryszard-grobelny-o-spektaklu-golgota-picnic-nie-wezme-w-nim-udzialu,id,t.html>, [accessed 31 July 2014].

6 It is worth mentioning that the decision to cancel the performance of *Golgotha Picnic* resulted in grass-roots protests from artistic circles across Poland. Readings of the play took place i.e. in Warsaw, Gdańsk, Białystok, Jaworzno, Katowice, Lublin, Łódź, Szczecin, Wrocław; in addition, performance recordings were screened. In Poznań a public reading took place in plac Wolności, which was open to all and brought together thousands of people.

7 Roman Pawłowski, 'Awangarda w gminie', *Dziennik Opinii*, 11 December 2012, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/kultura/20121211/pawlowski-awangarda-w-gminie> [accessed 31 July 2014]. *Gmina* designates a basic unit of administrative division of Poland; this title alludes to a non-urban setting.

8 Wojciech Józef Burszta, "'Wieś utracona" dzisiaj', *Autoportret. Pismo o dobrej przestrzeni*, 39.4, (2012), pp. 41–45. 'Wieś utracona' was a lecture by Leszek Kołakowski delivered at the Collège de France and published in 1986 ('Le Village introuvable', Bruxelles: Éditions complexe, 1986).

judgements, as Claire Bishop argues in *Artificial Hells*⁹; characteristically, they do not compare them with social activities but with other artistic projects, almost as if such projects functioned as a secluded social paradise, a laboratory or a no man's land.

These two reasons are linked to the essential assumption of this essay: that both the social and the political potential of Wielkopolska: Revolutions are played out within and with reference to this specific local nexus (reflecting other Polish tensions between cities and provinces), at the root of relations between 'hidden scripts'¹⁰ and official performances of power, the imposed strategies and the differentiating tactics¹¹ of the viewers and/or participants, 'revolutions' and participations, fundamentally countercultural critical strategies and Antonio Gramsci's concept of a 'long march through the institutions'.¹² There is no room here for a romantic, countercultural vision of 'rural-provincial' counterposed to the urban system and power, which does not mean that the social and political potential of the project is blocked.

Frameworks, strategies, institutions

The second edition of Wielkopolska: Revolutions,¹³ in 2013, comprised a variety of artistic events and social projects: the plays *Lepiej tam nie idź* [*Better Not Go There*]¹⁴ directed by Michał Borczuch (Szamocin Station 2013) and *Projekt: Noce i dni* [*Project: Nights and Days*]¹⁵ directed by Mikołaj Mikołajczyk (Zakrzewo 2013), journalism workshops at the prison in Leszno that culminated in a reading in Poznań (*Listy na wolność* [*Letters on Freedom*] directed by Roman Pawłowski), a concert by Marcin Masecki and the Słupca Volunteer Fire Department Wind Orchestra (*Rozmowa z medium* [*Conversation with a Medium*], Słupca/Poznań 2013) and the founding of a community culture centre in Zarzew, designed by Paweł Grobelny. The choreographer Mikołaj Mikołajczyk's project was the continuation of work begun in the first edition of Wielkopolska:

9 'This uneven inclination towards the social component of this project suggests that contemporary art's "social turn" not only designates an orientation towards concrete goals in art, but also the critical perception that these are more substantial, "real" and important than artistic experiences. At the same time, these perceived social achievements are never compared with actual (and innovative) social projects taking place outside the realm of art; they remain on the level of an emblematic ideal, and derive their critical value in opposition to more traditional, expressive and object-based modes of artistic practice'. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

10 See: James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

11 My differentiation between strategies and tactics is taken from Michel de Certeau.

12 Rudi Dutschke, a student of Antonio Gramsci, rephrased the ideas contained in Gramsci's philosophy of cultural hegemony with his famous assertion 'The Long March through the Institutions' (an allusion to the Long March of the Communist Chinese People's Liberation Army in the early 1930s).

13 I attended the second edition of Wielkopolska: Revolutions as a theatre critic. Two of my reports were published in *Didaskalia*. Some theories and conclusions contained in this essay were conceived while working on those articles. See: Joanna Jopek, 'Partycypacje (I): Święta czy fabryki?', *Didaskalia*, 117 (2013), pp. 108–111; Joanna Jopek, 'Partycypacje (II): Paradoxy wolności', *Didaskalia*, 120 (2014), pp. 96–98.

14 Based on the H.P. Lovecraft short story 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1928).

15 Based on the Maria Dąbrowska novel *Noce i dni* (1934).

Revolutions with the performance *Teraz jest czas* [*Now Is the Time*] in 2012. Michał Borczuch's project with children from Szamocin was continued in the programme's third edition. The first premiere of the third edition took place in June 2014 at the Lisówki Care Home with the above-mentioned performance project by the writer-director team of Janiczak and Rubin. A significant majority of the projects, with the exception of the community culture centre, had a dual resonance: presented first in the places where they were devised, they were later shown in Poznań and other Polish cities (*Better Not Go There* was also performed in Kraków, *Project. Nights and Days* in Warsaw).

These were all very different projects, but they were all linked by a distinct institutional framework and curatorial strategy which, in the second edition, somehow crystallised into an idea of a programme. Wielkopolska: Revolutions was initiated by the Regional Government of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship (represented by Agata Grenda, Director of the Department of Culture at the Voivode Marshall's Office), created as part of the Cultural Alarm Clock. A programme of activities to promote and activate culture in the Wielkopolska region, Wielkopolska: Revolutions is operated by the Regional Government of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship with funding from the European Fund for Regional Development as part of the Wielkopolska Regional Operational Programme 2007–2013.¹⁶ Agata Siwiak, the curator, describes the programme concept as follows:

Wielkopolska: Revolutions is a meeting of two distinct realities that function in different forms of socio-cultural order. The experimenting artists, stars in their own circles, travel to small towns to work with their inhabitants. No nepotism, no preferential treatment. [...] We blur the divisions between the educators and the educated, we do not subscribe the idea of 'furthering knowledge' which assumes a hierarchal division into an elitist art and a provincial audience incapable of appreciating it. [...] Like the characters of the Wachowski Brothers' film *Matrix: Revolutions*, which is referenced by the title of the project, artists and residents of the towns and villages of Wielkopolska change the reality in which we live. They free their thought from formulas, go outside of the system and show that in art there are no impossible confrontations.¹⁷

The conspicuousness of the institutions involved, the participatory assumptions and the promotional effects for the region are very clear – the involvement of representatives of the Regional Government of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship was highly visible at the premieres of the events. On the other hand, Siwiak's programme concept brings together three different narratives: the participatory (democratic) dimension of the project, the concept of artistic encounter (and its value) and a slightly critical or countercultural background marked by notions of revolution and change (although in a specific cultural packaging as the 'revolutions' carry associations with the Wachowski Brothers' blockbuster). All three are far from the aim of promoting the region. Roman Pawłowski noted this potential tension between the two strategies after the first edition: the creative output of avant-garde artists is in apparent conflict

16 *Wielkopolska: Rewolucje*, official website, <http://www.wielkopolska-rewolucje.pl/budzik-kulturalny/>, [accessed 28 June 2014].

17 *Wielkopolska: Rewolucje*, official website, 'Idea programu', <http://www.wielkopolska-rewolucje.pl/>.

with the assumptions of government officials, as the promotional effect (mentioned by the representative of the Marshall's Office) is in apparent conflict with social change for which Siwiak is fighting.¹⁸

These narratives are only superficially contentious and I do not see a genuine area of conflict between them (this will be addressed below). They seem to be governed by a post-nostalgic adversarial dynamic, the 'friendly enemies'¹⁹ discussed by Markus Miessen, who is disinclined towards romantic illusions of complete autonomy which underpin the principles of superficial participation. This is why Miessen attributes greater value to a collaboration strategy, cognizant of the complexity of real-world issues, in comparison to co-operation,²⁰ underpinned by what Florian Schneider calls 'romantic notions of common grounds or commonality'.²¹ Miessen sees the curator's position within this game as follows:

The 'notion of the curatorial' by default presents us with the opposite of what one might call 'the romantic participatory', as it embodies decision-making from the outside – some might say top-down: it is about exclusion and the act of 'ruling out'; rather than thinking about what to show, it is about what not to show.²²

In the case of *Wielkopolska: Revolutions*, I understand the notion of 'what not to show' in two ways. First, it is simply a question of choice: the curator serves as an intermediary (perhaps a buffer zone), her transparent strategy emphasizing her choice of an anti-positivistic perspective and artists who can adopt it without building a relationship between the educator and the educated: 'No nepotism, no preferential treatment'. On the other hand, 'what not to show' could also point to an area that is actively concealed in the curator's narrative or masked in the official script: here, romantic notions of community and revolution are decidedly incongruous to this 'collaboration', and yet the curator uses the countercultural notion of getting 'outside the matrix' but in a context (the Wachowski Brothers' film) that deprives it of its discursive edge. This edge, undermined in the official narrative, is contained not in the curatorial declarations but in more covert tactics which differentiate themselves and bounce off these strategies and which are used by other 'actors' in this undertaking. The political potential of the project is the result of two factors intended as part of the strategy, though impossible to plan in practice: the influence of creative personalities and the responses and tactics of the project participants.

18 Roman Pawłowski, 'Awangarda w gminie', <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/kultura/20121211/pawlowski-awangarda-w-gminie> [accessed 1 August 2014].

19 A term used by Chantal Mouffe.

20 Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation* (Berlin, New York: Sternberg Press, 2010), p. 117.

21 Florian Schneider, 'Collaboration: the Dark Side of the Multitude', in: Monica Narula, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Ravi Sundaram, Jeebesh Bagchi (eds.), *Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence* (Delhi: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2006), pp. 572–576 (p. 572), http://fls.kein.org/sites/fls.kein.org/files/01_florian.pdf, [accessed 12 February 2015].

22 Miessen, p. 49.

The ‘Uninvited Outsider’: the artist

The collaborators who took part in the Wielkopolska: Revolutions programme – invited almost without exception from among existing communities, organizations or institutions – are governed by their own laws and form micro-communities centred around an activity (the Wrzos Chorus from Zakrzew, the Słupca Volunteer Fire Department Wind Orchestra, the Szamocin Station theatre group), a location, living conditions or a twist of fate (the short-term prison in Leszno, the care home in Lisówki). On one hand then stands the powerful organizational structure of the programme (the Regional Government of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, the curator) which is strongly and unequivocally linked to the ‘city’; on the other, ‘province-bound’, close communities (though not necessarily harmonious) in which even conflicts are certain to have a pre-determined dynamic and dramaturgy. The third component of this situation/exchange is not at home anywhere. The avant-garde artists invited by the organizers to work within their Wielkopolska micro-communities do not work within their familiar framework of locations – mainly art galleries or theatres in cities. Neither were they selected by the communities themselves. They therefore found themselves in a position which Markus Miessen described as the ‘uninvited outsider’ and ascribed them a specific role in the sphere of politics understood as a form of ‘conflictual consensus’:

[...] instead of breeding the next generation of facilitators and mediators, we should encourage the ‘uninterested outsider’, the ‘uncalled participator’ who is unaware of prerequisites and existing protocols, entering the arena with nothing but creative intellect and the will to provoke change. [...] it is crucial to think about a form of commonality, which allows for conflict as a form of productive engagement: a model for bohemian participation in the sense of an outsider’s point of entry, accessing existing debates and discourses untroubled by their disapproval.²³

Two projects from the second edition which best highlight the outsider status, alienation, otherness, idiosyncrasy or hidden conflict contained in the programme concept itself – but which also accentuated the coarseness of the encounter as opposed to the smooth accord of participation (such encounters, just like any other encounter, never take place on completely equal terms and positions) – were at the same time the most interesting from an artistic perspective and because of their subversive social potential. These characteristics were shared by the works of director Michał Borczuch and musician Marcin Masecki.

Borczuch came to Szamocin with three regular collaborators: stage designer Dorota Nawrot and actors Marta Ojrzyńska and Krzysztof Zarzecki. The introduction of these additional ‘uninvited outsiders’ set up the relations within this encounter somewhat differently: the outsiders were also a group, a new front, they created a constellation of artists who organised the work of the children involved in the project (these children were connected with the Stacja Szamocin company and came from the Szamocin children’s home). Together, they spent their summer holidays on lengthy activities indirectly linked to the staging of the performance – such as photography workshops, shooting a film in the

²³ Miessen, pp. 103–104.

woods and marshes around Szamocin inspired by the H.P. Lovecraft tale 'The Call of Cthulhu', preparing costumes and set designs and taking part in rehearsals. The project-performance was a product of activities not focused on practicing lines or working towards a final conclusion. The creative framework and leitmotif were taken from the conventions of role-playing games which added a new, different, fantastical filter to this work, and this playing a game with fiction – making fictionality viral, freeing the imagination and using art to create a micro-world in the children's difficult reality – seemed to be the crux of the project.

This did not mean that the performance was merely a form of finished presentation – quite the opposite. *Better Not Go There* revealed distinct qualities, crystallised in theatre, thanks to which the viewpoint of the child-misfit-outsider not only bravely examined the world of adults (for example, by creating a form of capitalist murmur about money in the crooked mirror of the children's onstage improvisations) but also asked questions about the legitimacy of the established order. In working with the Szamocin children, Borczuch was clearly inspired by that energy in children which is difficult to confine within patronizing narratives: unpredictable behaviour, even aggression; the dark side of the imagination that does not submit to processing by morality. *Better Not Go There* went beyond the jibes intended to discredit the 'reporter from Warsaw' who, representing the metropolitan public, came to visit the fictional factory.

During the audience's walk from the Szamocin train station to the children's home, it was those adults who were subjected to rebuke, reprimand and derision – as if the normal roles of socialization were reversed to suddenly reveal the framework described in *Discipline and Punish* by Michel Foucault. In Borczuch's creation, subversive power, closely coupled with artistic quality, came from bravely mining and bringing to the surface not social cohesion but the incredible diversity and underlying conflict within society. After all, despite declarations of democratic participation and consensus, society contains both the apparatus of power and its subordinates, the educators and the educated.

A different conflict was revealed by Marcin Masecki in his work with the wind orchestra of the Słupca Volunteer Fire Department (assisted by Antoni Beksiak, a scholar of traditional music). Their approach was also different. Masecki, a classically trained musician, has devoted himself to 'revitalizing' forgotten popular music genres such as the polonaise so that his encounter with the Słupca wind orchestra was not challenging, unfamiliar ground. Their collaboration was in effect the continuation of Masecki's longstanding research and interests – yet it also served as an impulse to directly confront high culture with professional though non-mainstream regional music. Masecki exposed the cultural conflict which is written implicitly and unavoidably into the conceptual programme of Wielkopolska: Revolutions – a tension that can be seen in categories of 'distinction' set up by Pierre Bourdieu, the stratification of 'taste' which highlights class divisions.

Masecki wrote a composition for the wind orchestra that refers even in its title to the grand tradition of classical music, with its established apex of the magnum opus. The work is entitled *Symfonia nr 1. Zwycięstwo* [*Symphony No.1: Victory*], suggesting an avant-garde composition firmly rooted in contemporary philharmonic circles. As such, it no doubt presented a challenge for the wind orchestra and the 'habitus' of their music, but the Słupca was up to the challenge. More

importantly, the later presentation of the composition that followed at the Poznań Philharmonic took place in a specific context: as part of the concert *Rozmowa z medium* [*Conversation with a Medium*] which began with a performance by the Philharmonic (with a new version of Masecki's *Wolność* [*Freedom*]) followed by a solo 'precognition' performed by Masecki on piano then concluding – triumphantly – with the wind orchestra. The 'conversation' of the title is a euphemism, since Masecki used the Philharmonic to open up a field of almost direct conflict between high culture, with its pretensions and mechanisms of distinction operating within the setting of the Philharmonic, and regional culture, with the Słupca wind orchestra approaching the symphonic form not only with exceptional professionalism but with an energy that transformed the institution of the Philharmonic, high culture and aesthetic-class divisions.

The dancer and choreographer, Mikołaj Mikołajczyk, with his second production with the Wrzos Chorus took an opposing strategy to generating otherness and diversity while undermining the covenant of the established order and exposing the framework of the 'consensus' at the same time. I did not see his first project in Zakrzew (*Teraz jest czas*), which had perhaps allowed those tensions and creative conflicts to come to the fore. But in the second, *Project: Nights and Days* what emerged was a familiarity resulting from the continuation of a working partnership. The project ended up being claimed into the space of 'familiarity' and 'homeliness' in Zakrzew because – as was often reiterated – Mikołajczyk became 'one' with this community and lost his status of the 'uninvited outsider'. This familiarity seemed to rule out the possibility of a confrontation between different priorities of the parties involved or a creative challenge for either side. The resulting performance contained references to questions of ageing and reflections on life, but also embodiment and sickness, which clearly stopped short of a certain boundary about 'what not to show'. It indulged in a type of respect that Claire Bishop recognized as a form of ethical stoppage that benefits neither art nor any primary ethical goals, mobilizing the mechanism of ethical generalization and omission of the specificity of the practice.²⁴ The performance universalized the interesting idiosyncrasies of that experience and members of the Chorus, declaring that 'in life there are nights and days'; it sought a truce with every type of audience by referencing universal musical and cultural tropes.

Project: Nights and Days could be seen as an interesting work only to the extent that another aspect of the performance shone through: the Wrzos Chorus took over the event for its own purposes (to promote its community, local district and the choir itself), clearly demonstrating another incalculable force resisting the programme strategy: the insubordinate tactics of its participants.

Tactics: appropriation by participants

Michel de Certeau 'tactics' as a means of passive resistance in the form of tricks and reactions to 'strategies' imposed by others with the aid of a subversive 'getting along' (*faire avec*) were described in *The Practice*

24 'This line of thinking has led to an ethically charged climate in which participatory and socially engaged art has become largely exempt from art criticism: emphasis is continually shifted away from the disruptive *specificity* of a given practice and onto a *generalised* set of ethical precepts'. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 23.

of *Everyday Life*. For de Certeau, strategies signified a set of imposed laws, the space owned by power, a realm that regulates social life, comparable to Foucault's theoretical toolkit, continuously organizing the everyday lives of individuals. De Certeau introduced the notion of tactics, confronting his reflections with the thought of Foucault to show the potential and practice of acting within the confines of a strategy imposed by another, in an unfamiliar space – not by overthrowing the system or through active resistance, the tactics of the participants nevertheless transform, manipulate and get around the law and transform the space instituted by the other.²⁵ 'Even the field of misfortune is refashioned by this combination of manipulation and enjoyment',²⁶ de Certeau wrote.

In the events of *Wielkopolska: Revolutions*, the importance of 'tactics' was great, with their presence in the 'encounters' clear. If the delineation of the strategy was the job of the curator and the organizers, then, the 'unfamiliar' space fell to the participating artists and communities from *Wielkopolska*. Both sides were greatly skilled in 'getting along', being able to intercept and differentiate strategies. This was seen most clearly at the premiere of the third edition of *Wielkopolska: Revolutions*, in a performative event that could be called a virtual opposite of the mentioned above performance by Mikołaj Mikołajczyk. The two events were closely linked thematically, but they took completely opposing approaches to specifics and to discursive obstacles.

The work of director Wiktor Rubin and dramaturge Jolanta Janiczak focused on the Lisówki Care Home, a residential facility for elderly people which is far from the nearest town and which, situated in the middle of a field, is also remote with respect to the nearest villages. There are no shops in its vicinity, no post office, school or homes. The care facility is managed with great professionalism and precision: the home itself and its surroundings are adapted to the needs and 'habitus' of the elderly, reminiscent of an artificial paradise with lifts, a roof terrace, lawns neatly framed by tidy pathways, a landscape pond and an interior adorned with artificial flowers. But this place can not fulfil one of the chief needs of the residents: their need to interact with different surroundings, to exist within a network of social contacts. As de Certeau observed, it is in line with the ubiquitous dictates of productivity, effectiveness and functionality which force society to place those who do not work in seclusion outside of shared public spaces, for example the sick, who are 'foreign to everyday life [in their family] and language'.²⁷ Apart from

25 'Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other's game (*jouer/dejouer le jeu de 1 autre*), that is, the space instituted by others, characterize the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have. In these combatants' stratagems, there is a certain art of placing one's blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space. We see the tactical and joyful dexterity of the mastery of a technique'. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 18.

26 De Certeau, p. 18.

27 'Driven out of a society which, in conformity with the utopias of earlier ages, cleans out of its streets and houses everything that is parasitic on the rationality of work – waste products, delinquency, infirmity, old age – the sick man must follow his illness to the place where it is treated, in the specialized enterprises where it is immediately transformed into a scientific and linguistic object foreign to everyday life and language'. De Certeau, p. 191.

family life, however, it is also important to be part of stories which may help establish identities, which is only possible in the presence of others, the listeners.

In their 'performance' *Who Is the Lad so Comely and Young?* Janiczak and Rubin gave the stage in large part to the residents of the home, who made use of the event to mobilize their pool of stories, confronting them with an unknown public, in the mode of 'getting along'. But the dramaturge and director did not hand over the stage completely, giving the event a distinct framework: at the beginning, as if in answer to the expectation of a 'performance', an introduction included the staging of a scene based on the ballad 'Świtezianka' by Adam Mickiewicz, known to all who have passed through the Polish educational system. The performance was in the conventions of school performance, with artificial flowers and with the women in theatrical costumes. Later, the organizers distributed maps of the building marked with the locations of simultaneously performed scenes. The costumes remained largely the same: ostentatiously artificial, theatrical, as fairy godmothers and princesses (while the men 'performed' in their normal clothes). The activities of the 'actors' were also clearly governed by the overriding adaptive framework of the 'actors' activities, but the viewer's journey through the rooms of this isolated building comprised for the most part listening to stories, conversing and being put in the role of the other.

This served to invert the customary relationship between actor and audience, and deprived the audience of the comfort of passive viewing. At the same time its presence was clearly used to expose the greatest weakness of this social institution, which condemns its residents to a form of passivity and impasse, deprived of mobility, exchange and meetings. It was equally important that, by using the production framework to highlight the intersection of various tactics, needs and narratives, the director and dramaturge did not reduce this encounter to easy sentimental emotions that would have left the viewers in the state of a moral satisfaction.

In this sense, *Who Is the Lad so Comely and Young?* was in contrast to the final performance, the reading of another project that set its sights on the institution of alienation from society: Letters on Freedom, based on journalism workshops hosted by the Large Format supplement of the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, with female inmates of the Leszno Remand Centre. The reading, directed by Roman Pawłowski and involving professional actresses, leaned towards a sentimental, universalizing story about difficult lives of female prisoners. But as well as the presence of female prisoners and representatives of the remand prison the resulting article²⁸ and the debate which followed the performance tactically rendered the story asunder, negating its glibness and this tone is 'difficult to judge' making it difficult to judge. Paradoxically, Letters on Freedom showed that 'freedom' in a society whose institutions, such as the Catholic Church, social services or family, are ineffective, can create a trap from which one can be freed by the institution of prison (highlighted by individual cases of prisoners serving sentences for financial crimes).

28 Włodzimierz Nowak, Mirosław Wlekły, 'Finansówki', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19 November 2013, <http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,134721,14976526,Finansowki.html>, [accessed 1 August 2014].

This project showed directly something evident in other productions in Wielkopolska: Revolutions, bringing into focus the kind and character of the social potential that the Wielkopolska project reinforced on various levels and through different means (through artistically courageous gestures, most frequently). This is not a romantic vision of 'freedom' in the provinces, counterculturally motivated fantasies about total independence from public and social institutions or directly critical strategies. On the contrary: the condition of social institutions (family, school, children's homes, care homes, local communities, prison) has been brought under close scrutiny and critical examination, but with the clear intention of highlighting the possibility for change, for instance through the 'long march through the institutions'. The intention was the creation of possibilities for change and improvement rather than destructive negation, of mobilizing discussion, 'settling differences', even with a conflict of truths, which shows the potential of new and different social mechanisms.

Thanks to the strategic-level encounter of different, conflicted perspectives within the scope of these productions and their openness to the unpredictable – choice of artists, audience tactics – the Wielkopolska: Revolutions programme avoided the danger of the sort of superficial participation so passionately criticised by Miessen. Putting these subversive tactics into motion took place with the help of the strategic manoeuvre of leading in the Trojan Horse (the artists, in this case). They illuminate beneath the smooth surface of social cohesion the hidden conflicts, the framework of social exchange, an institution at work and 'mechanisms' normalising everyday practice – it is here rather than in the active critical strategy that we find the social, creative and in the long term political potential of Wielkopolska: Revolutions. The determined running of the programme does not allow its events to sink to the level of a one-off cultural 'event', which means that Wielkopolska: Revolutions can be seen as a catalyst for bigger changes through the act of empowering the voices usually contained in the 'hidden script' and absent from official accounts. Perhaps this is a greater revolution for Wielkopolska than the essentially reassuring publicly declared rhetorical formula of 'breaking out of the matrix'.

Translated by Aleksandra Sakowska

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