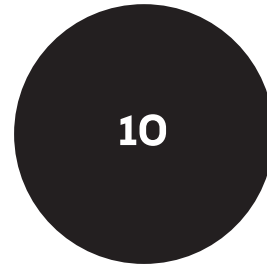




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Geschichtsbilder. Prospect(s) for a theory of theater

translated by Jan Pytalski

Stanisław Wyspiański wrote to Lucjan Rydel on the 2nd of May, 1897: "Pawlikowski promised me to stage *Varsovian Anthem* next season, in October, and release it along with Maeterlinck's *Intérieur*, for All Saint's Day.¹" It is easy to imagine that the idea of juxtaposing a political drama about the death of a young insurgent with an existential play about the death of a young girl would excite Wyspiański. He was thrilled not only at the prospect of his long-awaited theatrical debut – alongside the already acclaimed Belgian poet – but most importantly with the concept that underlay the decision to show both pieces together, of highlighting, during a single performance, the relationship between a gesture and an image. This is a crucial relationship for Wyspiański's and Maeterlinck's texts, as well as for the theory of theater. Tadeusz Pawlikowski brought his idea to life only in 1901 in Lviv, and in a distorted manner since the entire event was framed by a patriotic context.² But the project – exactly as an unrealized idea – survived in the history of theater thanks to its stage reconstruction by Jerzy Grzegorzewski. While staging *Interior* and *Varsovian Anthem* at the Stefan Jaracz Theater in Łódź in 1976 the director above all drew attention to the relationship between gesture and image, expressed through the division of the stage space into two parts by means of a massive window supported by two white columns – in the classicist style of 19th century architecture. By placing the action of *Interior* behind the window and by having *Varsovian Anthem* play out in the foreground, directly in front of the audience, it would seem that Grzegorzewski based his show on the accurate observation that the plays represent complementary commentaries on the theatrical situation, reduced to mere action and observation.

Interior reveals a border placed between the stage and the audience, by means of two characters (The Old Man and the Alien). They possess knowledge and comment



Poster designed by Stanisław Wyspiański for Maurice Maeterlinck's *Intérieur*, 1899 (National Museum in Warsaw)

on the events that take place outside the stage as well as on the pantomime of characters (a Mother, a Father, Two Girls, a Child) performed onstage in the closed space of the house and observed together with the audience. In Maeterlinck's drama, image is not exclusively coextensive with the visible since there are images existing in the form of words. As a result a certain regime of images emerges which, as Rancière would say, "presents the relationship between the sayable and the visible, a relationship which plays on both the analogy *and* the dissemblance between them,"³ and due to which the stage becomes a place where a play between the dissemblance of two identities – of word and image – manifests itself. The constant permeation between the two replaces dramatic action, or more precisely leads to a fundamental transformation of the essence of drama – towards stasis. As a result, the category of time becomes problematized and, what is even more significant, the relationship between dramatic time and stage time is presented in reverse order: while typically audiences encounter the time of the drama's action in condensed form (for example, many years in Shakespeare's *Chronicles* are reduced to several hours on stage), in *Interior* an extremely short dramatic time (one can already see the approaching party, which is about to inform the oblivious family locked inside the house of the daughter's and sister's death) is mercilessly stretched out and, in a sense, spatialized. Both history and space are drawn apart; as Jean-Luc Nancy put it, one witnesses the "spacing of time, of *time*, that is, *as a body*."⁴ The viewer, as a witness of the play's action during its suspension, becomes that body in Maeterlinck's *Interior*. However, she is not understood as a passive onlooker but as an active subject, an "emancipated spectator" who transgresses the opposition between looking and action through the realization of her own position as a participant in the power structure expressed in the distribution of the sensible.⁵

One encounters a static drama in Wyspiański's *Varsovian Anthem* as well – it encapsulates its action in a seemingly non-dramatic image. However, the relationship between image and action works a little differently than in Maeterlinck's work. Here, the order of the images is based on a confrontation between the compositions of twenty-one characters, immobilized in poses inside



Photos from Jerzy Grzegorzewski's staging of *Intérieur*, 1976, photo by Andrzej Brustman (Source: [Encyklopedia Teatru Polskiego](#))

a mansion and directly observed by the viewer, and the dynamics of a battlefield, no more than evoked by atmosphere, gesture and music – while the battle itself takes place outside the frame of the stage. The static image is not, as in the case of *Interior*, subordinated to the narrative of characters who see and know, but is torn apart by the sudden intrusion of the realities of war, expressed onstage in the mute scene with The Old Man. Based solely on physical elements – The Old Man enters, salutes, hands over the package with a bloody ribbon, salutes again and leaves – it also tears apart the aesthetic dimension of the image, revealing its fundamentally political aspect: in the safe space of the mansion (within the frame of the image) there are the generals of the uprising, whilst on the actual battlefield, outside of the frame and facing immediate danger, there are the regular, nameless soldiers. Although the The Old Man is an embodied character, and the entire scene is in fact a rhythmically (and musically) organized *musical score* without the support of the spoken word, he is primarily a discursive sign of an insurgent, marking the boundary between the brutality of the war (against the oppressor) and the safety of the mansion (homeland, home) and at the same time mediating between history and myth. That is how Wyspiański creates, in *Varsavian Anthem*, a model “image of history” – a *Geschichtsbild*. The term denotes a flexible construct which transgresses the opposition between looking and acting, and which does not need to conserve a particular version of memory, or interpretation of history, but within which – due to the particular relationship between perception, interaction and different media – an image reveals its own mode of being and its role in constructing memory and history.⁶ The sense of that image has been brilliantly analysed by Jan Nowakowski who called *Varsavian Anthem* a “synthetic vision of a real historical moment, and the staging of the content of that moment, such as its character, atmosphere, and crucial internal tensions.”⁷ The meta-medial, and meta-historical potential of the image discovered in this early drama became, in my opinion, a foundation of Stanisław Wyspiański’s stage practice, based on the reenactment of “images of history.” By making the theater into a place and a tool for researching the strategies of images of history – the ways of viewing the past, transmitting history and staging memory – the works of Wyspiański can be recognized as a kind of historiosophy in



A poster for Jerzy Grzegorzewski's staging of Maeterlinck's *Intérieur* and Wyspiański's *Varsavian Anthem*, 1976 (Source: Encyklopedia Teatru Polskiego)

practice. His works often attempt to employ strategies of reenactment which serve the purpose of revealing relationships between action and image and a uniquely understood dynamic of the theater: as always already being a site of repetition and furthermore as a machine of memory and of remembering. Maybe that is why the Spirit from *Hamlet*, which plays such a crucial part in that particular understanding of theater, disappears in Wyspiański's work uttering the words which – repeated with a punctuation so characteristic of the Polish poet – become a meta-commentary, bringing out, and much more emphatically than in the original, not so much the question of individual memory as that of memory in general: "I bid you farewell – Remember me! – – – /Remember – about me! / (disappears)."⁸ From that perspective disappearance comes to determine not only the process of remembering, but also of all appearing, thus becoming for Wyspiański not just a loss of source permeated by nostalgia, but the most solid foundation of theater.

The second act of the play *Wyzwolenie (Liberation)* is in point of fact a particular philosophical treatise on emergence and disappearance, with an agonistic game, the essence of drama, taking place between Konrad and the 'embodied Other' – The Masks. It is here that the appearance of each consecutive Mask is conditioned by the disappearance of the previous one and only this dynamic allows for grasping the *continuum* of time not as a natural course of history but as a performance staged by Wyspiański that problematizes the linearity of duration. Let us recall a few comments which are exchanged between two Masks:

Ledwo, że larwa gdzieś przepadła, / Barely one maggot has disappeared,
inna się już na scenę wkradła [...] / already a new one on stage must be
revealed [...]

Zaledwie maska ta gdzieś znika, / Barely that mask has disappeared,
już nowa za nim się pomyka. [...] / a new one follows him in speed. [...]

Zaledwie ta ze sceny schodzi, / Barely the old one leaves the stage,
już nowa drogę mu zagrozi. [...] / already a new one crosses his way [...]

Precz znikła; nowa już się skrada, / Gone to hell; a new one sneaks around,
już za nim tropi, śledzi, bada. [...] / follows him, traces, peeks [...]

Znika, a nowa już powstanie, / Disappears, and a new one takes its place,
by nowe zadać mu pytanie: [...] / to spew demands in his face: [...]

Już nowa, – ledwo tamta pada – / A new mask – last one barely hit the
ground –

znów nieodstępna od Konrada. [...] / again, can't be reached through
Konrad's mind [...]

Znikła; już inna jest i bada / Disappears; yet a different one is there
niepokojącą myśl Konrada. / examines Konrad's thought so frail.⁹

In the act with the Masks Wyspiański seems to be performing a reversal of the traditional historiographical logic which recognizes past events as belonging exclusively to the past; and at the same time of the traditionally understood archive that identifies the disappearance of matter/body as their respective absence. The dynamic of the appearance and disappearance of Masks transforms the ephemeral into an act of remaining, of gathering thoughts as traces, as remnants of an encounter, while revealing itself as a particular medium of communication, which is based on the always already interactive, bodily memory. That memory has to be "read through genealogies of impact and ricochet."¹⁰ Konrad, as a complex intertextual character, constitutes a kind of bodily archive of the history of Polish drama and theater (or more broadly: of Polish culture). The Masks, on the other hand, as a foreign surface knit with one's own face ("Masks in this act will mark / those who hide their thoughts in the dark / and never state them clear, / hence, while theirs, they claim many heirs"¹¹) perfectly illustrate the relationship between man and object, between animate and inanimate matter. Due to that fact in each subsequent collision between Konrad and a new Mask, there appears not so much a presence as a past encounter, understood in terms of a "resonance of the overlooked, lost, muted, clearly unacknowledged."¹² From that perspective, the body in Wyspiański's theater becomes a medium that saves those aspects of event which escape traditional forms of recording and preserving history, and documents that which is marginal and marginalized in culture. However, the bodily archival practices are not aimed at complementing the traditional archive in order to create a "full documentation," but, on the contrary, they highlight the incompleteness and fragmentariness of memory as well as the relativity of historical narratives based on memory.

It is worth highlighting that what Wyspiański practiced in his theater work, deeply immersed as he was in historical-cultural reflection, constituted a subversive application of pre-modern strategies of manifesting national awareness, based on "ethno-linguistic, cultural premises substituting for an independent country."¹³ It is known that one of those practices – *tableaux vivants* – fascinated and inspired him

since his early childhood. That incredibly popular form of entertainment in the 19th century, taking place on a massive scale in private homes, entertainment venues and even outdoors, entailed reconstructing a painting, literary work, or sculpture by both amateurs and professional actors who would replicate a scene captured in a particular work of art by means of scenography, costume and above all pose, that is by facial expression and appropriate disposition of the body. These spectacles, in which living pictures, first arranged and then enlivened on stage, were “treated as if they were almost documentaries”¹⁴ could be seen as a kind of didactic art, whose revolutionary potential was later discovered by Bertolt Brecht, as well as a prototype of contemporary historical reenactments, conserving the image of the nation and its past. Barbara Markiewicz stresses the fact that within the technique of *tableaux vivants* and its history, it is possible to “recognize the emergence of a fundamental institution of modern democracy – the public sphere,”¹⁵ which makes it imperative for any research on the essence and function of *tableaux vivants* to also include, apart from aesthetic considerations, reflection from the field of political theory. “Political philosophy mustn’t only describe political systems, institutions or structures of power. It also has to take into account the ways in which they are understood. This is to say, it should consider the ways they are presented, particularly the images associated with them.”¹⁶ It is beyond any doubt that *tableaux vivants*, based on assumptions shared by a given community, reveal their potential to translate existing, socially sanctioned connections between images and concepts into desired political relationships, and hence to remodel the socially established ways of thinking. From that perspective, what becomes crucial is the reconstruction of specific (living) pictures, with reference to distinct political concepts in order to reveal the ongoing changes in the meaning of those concepts and images in specific political-historical conditions.

Wyspiański was interested in *tableaux vivants* as a cultural phenomenon in which the society freely staged carefully selected images from Polish history (from works by Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, Grottger, or Matejko), which allowed for the survival and preservation of Polish culture – at the time under the constant threat of being uprooted and ultimately annihilated – outside of the state’s official circulation. At the same time, Wyspiański saw *tableaux vivants* as a cross-media artistic practice which focused the spectator’s attention on the relationship between the stage and painting, between action and its disruption, a performing body and an immobilized

one. Wyspiański based already *Varsovian Anthem* on the model of *tableaux vivants*; he attempted to probe the 'buoyancy' of the spectators' participation in a suspended dramatic action, thus analyzing time (duration, history) itself and arguing that its structure is not linear, but always that of actualization through repetition. Already in that early drama, the past appears as the present in the form of material residue, a remnant of history.¹⁷ It is symbolized by a bloody ribbon, thanks to which the crowd of immobilized characters on stage becomes penetrated by the dynamic of the battle that takes place in the distance. However, it was in his later works – particularly in *Liberation* and *Acropolis* – where *tableaux vivants* acquired the status of a research subject and underwent critical and historiosophical reflection in which images of the past must first undergo deconstruction and only then be reconstructed. That twofold move in the epistemic process allowed Wyspiański to show *Geschichtsbilder* as interpreting the culturally dominant paradigm of looking at historical events – often politically instrumentalized in the name of a particular politics of memory.

Liberation occupies a special place among Wyspiański's works in the context of the relationship between memory and disappearance, history and the present, image and action, as well as between the substance of the theater and the body. It was in this particular work that Wyspiański employed a reconstruction of "images of history" (including the history of theater) as a kind of epistemic action in the most extensive way. Even though formally it resembles a three-act drama, the text itself has very little in common with the 19th century take on dramatic literature. As a text that was written for stage (and so "always already repeated") it underwent numerous transformations due to the ways in which it was produced and received. Furthermore, the various book editions constituted – as Leon Schiller stated – "the most complete scripts for those who know how to read them."¹⁸ What is most important, however, is that the genealogy of that text is connected to theater, not to literature, to particular stagings that have become important events in the life of society – such as the world premiere and reception of *The Wedding* by Wyspiański that took place on March 16th, 1901, or *Dziady (Forefather's Eve)* by Mickiewicz, adapted and directed by Wyspiański on October 31st, 1901. After all, *Liberation*, which "takes place on the stage of Cracow's theater," begins with a scene recreating a theatrical event that had taken place a year earlier, and was still alive in the minds of the spectators. It is not Konrad as a literary (and mythical) construct that

enters the stage but the actor Andrzej Mielewski, who was playing Konrad in the very *Dziady* Wyspiański had rewritten and staged. That fact of theatrical repetition was crucial for contemporary spectators, who, while reacting with reservation to Wyspiański's new work, were enthusiastic about the "performer playing the part of Gustaw-Konrad from *Dziady*," being able to "transform into Konrad from *Liberation* during the second night."¹⁹

It was the memory of spectators of the (recent, past) event that Wyspiański cared for the most. The entire structure of the play attempts to convince us of that fact by resting on the interplay between what has been seen and overlooked, remembered and forgotten and what has been recalled, repeated, and recreated. *Liberation* is composed of a spectacle (interrupted for the period covered by the second act) entitled *Contemporary Poland* which, being a reconstruction of the Polish national theater and a political spectacle at the same time, constitutes the proper *reenactment* in Wyspiański's play. However, it is preceded by a particular process of its establishment, recollection or perhaps reanimation. For the first minutes of the play one witnesses something like a rehearsal of the spectacle, together with the demonstration of the mechanisms and means required for its creation, or rather – its recreation on a scene of very specific dimensions: "[...] twenty steps in width and length / Quite an extensive space, / in which to enclose Polish thought."²⁰ With this clash of acting and reenacting we are able to fully understand the words of Robespierre on the essence of political reconstruction as a "spectacle of spectators."²¹ *Contemporary Poland* is a play based on the repetition of already existing cultural (and theatrical) patterns, words, situations, objects, and characters – internalized and forever revisited in the bodies of the audience members. There is a reason why Konrad-Mielewski states already at the beginning: "This soil I loved / with rage / burned by desire I consumed this earthly stage! – / I'm in every man, I live in every heart"²² (these words are a travesty of Konrad's words from *The Great Improvisation*: "Now, I'm soul-bound with my motherland; / With my body I swallowed its soul").

But before Konrad is able to undertake the challenge of restaging the national spectacle, or more precisely, even before he is to appear on the stage, the spectators have to confront the workers present within the space of the theater. Wyspiański's play begins with a reflection on their status, work, and their material conditions.

Wielka scena otworem, / Expansive stage wide open,
 przestrzeń wokół ogromna; / With vast spaces around it;
 jeszcze gazu i ramp nie świecono. / Gas and ramps have not yet been lit.
 Kto ci ludzie pod ścianą? / Who are the men by the wall?
 Cóż tu czynić im dano? / What are they here for?
 Czy to rzesza biedaków bezdomna? / Is it a band of homeless souls?
 Głowy wsparli strudzone, / Resting their tired heads,
 cóż ich twarze zmarszczone? / Why are there frowns on their faces
 Przecież pracę ich dzienną płacono. / When their wages have been paid?
 23

These men of labor – always present and indispensable, but invisible – are first presented in a theatrical “degree zero,” outside of any kind of “as if” and only after the appearance of – or rather confronted by – Konrad’s thought and work do they become actors who play Polish workers hailing from peasantry. The situation with the w(W)orkers that opens *Liberation*, one based on a radical reduction of theatricality, reveals an understanding of the theater highly characteristic of Stanisław Wyspiański; an understanding where, one is tempted to say, theater is defined as “poor,”²⁴ and the actor as “deprived.” That very understanding determines, I believe, the development and expression of the play: the mass of men (“The force is you”) of which Konrad will demand that they do the right thing – throw away the shackles and to spill blood off stage (“Sit on the sidelines and in the corners until I summon you to action”). That is why *Contemporary Poland* – based on gesture, which is then set against an act – takes place after the w(W)orkers have left. They will later come back on stage as a Chorus, but only after Konrad reveals the “as-if-reality” of the theater, and will remain with him after he has been left “alone on a vast and empty stage.” Despite the lack of physical presence of w(W)orkers during the spectacle of *Contemporary Poland*, the alienation of work at a theater – marked at the very beginning by means of their bodies – comes to determine the intransigent conflict between the director and actors on the one hand, who perform roles based on “pretending,” and Konrad on the other hand – who believes that acting is about revolutionary action and forsaking the “as if.” It is that very fact that makes *Contemporary Poland*, understood as a “reconstruction of images of history,” a means of showing the meta-theatrical and meta-political dimension of theater, in which actors not only play actors, but rather “are actors being actors working,”²⁵ and as such reveal themselves to the audience of

Liberation.

Reading *Liberation* from the perspective of reconstructive practices aims to show that, for Wyspiański, debunking the myth of the ephemerality of the theater did not mean – as it did for the Romantics and the heirs to the Romantic tradition like Jerzy Grotowski – retrieving theater for ritual. Instead, we were to lead theater back to politics. That is why, in *Liberation*, Wyspiański contrasts the Actor-courtesan not with the actor-saint but with an actor of the revolution. This take on Wyspiański's work allows us to see him as an entirely modern artist of the theater and as a philosopher of modernity, conscious of the deep connection between the myth of the uniqueness of a theatrical performance and the economic-production processes as well as matters related to technical reproduction. When it comes to establishing the relationship between economy and culture, it is not history that turns out to be the key, since the question is not – as Walter Benjamin claimed – about the economic origins of culture, but about presenting the “expression of the economy in its culture.”²⁶ So one could claim that the theatrical reconstruction created by Wyspiański in 1902 – which revealed the economic process as “evident pre-phenomenon” of the subsequent signs of (stage) life – brought to light the conclusions which Benjamin summed up in his most famous 1936 essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*:

[...] for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever-greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. [...] But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice-politics.²⁷

That conviction is most fully expressed by the character of The Old Actor who keenly confronts the ephemerality of theater with the permanence of revolution and importance of politics:

Mój synu – mówi matka – ho, to twój ojciec z bronią / My son, says the mother, it's your father with a rifle
walczył za świętość naszą i zdobył się na czyn... / he fought for our virtues and took action...

(Legł w sześćdziesiątym trzecim; dziś zapomniany grób). / (He fell in sixty three; today his tomb forgotten).

nikt wieńców mu nie dawał, nie rzucił kwiatu, świec... / no one brought him wreaths, flowers or a light...

Mój ojciec był bohater, a ja to jestem nic. / My father was a hero, and I am merely nothing.²⁸

The ephemeral in the theater resonates in a particular way in this context, something radically different from the "hard" theatrological interpretations that highlight the essential fleetingness of a theatrical event in time and space. However, in Wyspiański's work ephemerality does not signify ontological fragility or the nostalgic transience of theater (an event). On the contrary, it bespeaks the mediocre and illusory character of a socially established image based on the logic of consumption, only apparently able to guarantee lasting recognition:

Sława artystów! Nie dziwne mi wieńce. / Glory of artists! Wreaths are no surprise,

Miałem ich pełne dwie, o te dwie pełne ręce, / I had these two hands full of them,

gdy mój święciłem dzień trzydziestu lat na scenie. / when I celebrated my thirtieth year on stage.

Oklaski miałem ich, uznanie i znaczenie. / I had their applause, recognition and respect,

Efemeryczne to, przez jeden wieczór lamp, / It's ephemeral, for one night in the light of lamps,

a gaśnie, gdy pogasną skrecone rzędy ramp. / and goes dark, along with rows of ramps.²⁹

Like Benjamin, by allowing history to decay into images and not stories within his works, Wyspiański shows that historical truth emerges from the collision between our reality and the past events which reveal themselves in the light of an image that flashes here and now.³⁰ Within the historiosophy practiced in the theater, Stanisław Wyspiański awakened a yet unrealised knowledge of the past. He "dissolved," as Benjamin would say, "mythology into the space of history," and tried to find a "constellation of awakening"³¹ based not on progress but on the actualization of the revolutionary body. Benjamin argued that "the first stage in this

undertaking" would be for a historian to adapt the principle of montage or "to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components"³². The goal would be to break with historical naturalism and instead grasp the structure of history through a montage of its debris: "But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own; by making use of them."³³ What is more, this gesture of montage is never hidden or masked. On the contrary – following the example of the critical, epic theater of Bertolt Brecht – it should serve the purpose of separating gestures and breaking the stickiness of images.³⁴

A congenial example of historiography understood in this manner can be found in Wyspiański's *Acropolis*, which is both a reconstruction and a montage from the remnants of history. That particular drama was created in response to an initiative to renovate the Wawel Cathedral undertaken between 1895 and 1901. Already at the preparatory stage, Wyspiański set out to scrupulously document all the ancient architectural details, intending his sketches as a point of reference for the work of future renovators.³⁵ At the same time, when Wawel was being brought back to life and to the nation, he closely followed the debate on the shape of the Polish Acropolis, as well as deliberations on the social, symbolic and utilitarian value of specific elements of the Cathedral. By consistently employing his optics of seeing what is overlooked and marginalized, Wyspiański made the works of art that had been expelled during the national reconstruction from the archive of memory and history into the protagonists of *Acropolis*. Ewa Miodońska-Brookes reminds us of the truly political method of reclaiming history's leftovers: "All of the works of art that were criticized in the press, but also those that were discarded, moved or destroyed during the restoration process have become the blueprints for Wyspiański's characters in *Acropolis*."³⁶ Removed from the archive of Polish culture, the sculptures are granted a second or even a doubly second life in Wyspiański's drama: personally connected to the art and architecture of the Wawel, the playwright³⁷ not only retrieves their material presence by introducing them on stage, he also reanimates them, giving them the power to act, vitality and physical strength. As a result, the Wawel, which for a long time had merely been – as Leszek Kolakiewicz rightfully observes – a "dead object of cult, a souvenir and a document," reveals its "secret, dramatic structure."³⁸ Hence *Acropolis* becomes a philosophy of theater recorded in the drama of reconstruction, based on examining the boundary

between life and death, organic and non-organic matter, man and object and, finally, between an event and the process of its documentation. In conclusion, Wyspiański suggests the possibility of a complete detachment of the copy from the original, as well as of discovering – in repetition – a life that is sovereign and autonomous vis-à-vis the original event.

Maybe that is the reason why it was only the 2004 reenactment of Jerzy Grotowski and Józef Szajna's 1962 staging of *Acropolis* by the Wooster Group that was able to illustrate the concept of body-as-archive – which in my opinion is fundamental for Wyspiański's theater. The play's reconstruction was executed not through a bodily-spiritual reminiscence of sources – the method demanded by Grotowski in his concept of body-memory – but instead via the naively mimetic recreation of gestures on the basis of a set of available audio-visual materials.³⁹ In this way, the New York artists managed to reach Wyspiański's understanding of history as a montage from pieces of its debris. Leszek Kolankiewicz observed this phenomenon in his article entitled "Kłóczyce *Acropolis*":

[when] actors from The Wooster Group get together to imitate actors from Laboratorium Theater, who performed in *Acropolis* – and they imitate with great mastery – their copy contains only what was caught by the camera: if there were only heads and arms, they would repeat that very composition and movement of the limbs and heads, while sitting down, because the imitation didn't involve legs, since the image didn't preserve it.⁴⁰

Wyspiański was convinced that the character of the relationship between humans and objects is physical and active, and also that objects possess an autonomous power of preserving memory. To him, the 'here and now' of theatre was not in danger of disappearing, since he understood the present as the material record of the past. As a painter, however, he knew perfectly well that there is a fundamental relationship between matter and perception and that – as Henri Bergson would say – things act within us, because we are part of what we perceive: "My body is, then, in the aggregate of the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement,"⁴¹ more so, "[t]he objects which surround my



Scott Shepherd in the Wooster Group's *Hamlet*, against the background of the cinematic adaptation from 1964 by John Gielgud, starring Richard Burton (Source: The Guardian)

body reflect its possible action upon them.”⁴² From that particular perspective, reconstruction turns out to be not only an exercise in recollection but, most importantly, a reaction to instructions delivered to us by other bodies, and objects.⁴³

By employing the perspective of reconstruction in researching the theatrical work of Stanisław Wyspiański, one is able to see him as a seminal figure not only for modern theater, but most importantly for contemporary theatrical historiography – the latter based on a complex relationship between body and image, an event and its documentation. This perspective also forces one to review the history of 19th-century Polish theater, as well as encourages to break the pattern of framing it as based solely on drama (traditional, logocentric approaches), or as yet another cultural spectacle providing a manifestation of Polish culture. Wyspiański, viewed from the perspective of reconstruction practices, is not a performer, restorer or potential deconstructor of the paradigm of Polish national theater created by the Romantic writers. Or at least, he is not only that. He turns out to be more of a reconstructor of 19th-century images of history that informed the paradigm of Polish culture also in the 20th century. He might well be the creator of the “anthropology of reconstruction” – a modern branch of the humanities which emerged out of the rubbles of the Great War⁴⁴ and where the categories of *fragment*, *remnant*, *remains* and *mediation* have become dominant as the only possible forms of experiencing reality and history.

Hence, it is not surprising that it was only on the occasion of the stage production of *Liberation* from 1916 that it was noticed that the author of the play is, in fact, a “historiosopher, who expresses himself through poetry.”⁴⁵ The context of the war led also to a different interpretation of the hierarchy of Wyspiański’s works – *Liberation*, always considered only as a “minor” play, became the key work among his plays.

Liberation is one of the most intriguing plays for anyone wanting to learn about Wyspiański’s national ideology. [...] The drama seems to be placed behind a kind of a glass wall where one can see it, but never touch it with the nerve of our sensibility. While in *The Wedding* we have living people for protagonists, people who kept the Polish suffering, shame, desperation and hopelessness inside of them – in *Liberation* we are presented with the

non-biological categories of poetry, politics, apathy, or willingness to act as protagonists in human form [...].⁴⁶

Those were the words of Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki from an article published on 27th April 1916 in *Kurier Poznański*, in which he reported with great perceptivity on the latest news from Teatr Polski, or Polish Theater (at the time based in German-occupied Warsaw), right next to the letters of the Polish soldiers fighting on the front lines, while serving in the Prussian army.

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Footnotes

1 Following: Maria Barbara Stykowa, *Teatralna recepcja Maeterlincka w okresie Młodej Polski* [‘The Theatrical Reception of Maeterlinck in the Young Poland period’] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1980), 43.

2 Maria Barbara Stykowa writes on the subject in greater detail: *ibid.*, 59–60.

3 Jacques Rancière, “The Future of the Image,” in *id.*, *The Future of the Image*, trans. G. Elliott (London, New York: Verso, 2009), 7.

4 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. R. A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 41.

5 See Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” trans. G. Elliott (London, New York: Verso 2009): 42.

6 See Jacques Rancière, *Geschichtsbilder*, trans. R. Voullié (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 2013).

7 Jan Nowakowski, Introduction to: Stanisław Wyspiański, *Warszawianka; Leleweł; Noc listopadowa* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1967), LIV.

8 For comparison it is worthwhile to recall translation used by Wyspiański by

Józef Paszkowski, as well as the contemporary one by Stanisław Barańczak.

Paszkowski's version: „Żegnam cię, żegnam cię; pamiętaj o mnie. / Znika”.

Barańczak's: “Żegnaj mi, żegnaj. I pamiętaj o mnie / Znika.”

9 See Stanisław Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie (Liberation)* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1970), 64–160.

10 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains, Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 102.

11 Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie*, 62.

12 Ibid.

13 Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od „Melancholii” do „Pasji”* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 13. Piotr Piotrowski interprets painting by Jacek Malczewski entitled *Melancholia* as a classical example of manifestation of the national awareness at the end of the century.

14 Małgorzata Komza, *Żywe obrazy. Między sceną, obrazem i książką* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1995), 292.

15 Barbara Markiewicz, *Żywe obrazy. O kształtowaniu pojęć poprzez ich przedstawienie* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 1994), 11.

16 Ibid., 16.

17 See Rebecca Schneider, 37. “As past and yet present in varied remains.”

18 Leon Schiller, *Wyspiański w literaturach zachodnioeuropejskich*, in id., *Na progu nowego teatru*, (Warsaw: PIW, 1978).

19 Stanisław Dąbrowski, “Sceniczne dzieje *Wyzwolenia*,” in *Wyspiański i teatr: 1907–1957* (Kraków: Państwowy Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego, 1957), 107.

20 Stanisław Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie*, 11.

21 See Daniel Gerould, “Historical Simulation and Popular Entertainment,” *The Drama Review* 33 (1989): 163.

22 Stanisław Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie*, 5.

23 Ibid., 11.

24 Reference to Grotowski's conception of a *poor theater*. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards A Poor Theater*, trans. T. K. Wiewiorowski (London: Simon & Schuster, 1968) (Translator's comment).

25 Compare Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains...*, 114.

26 Walter Benjamin, "N [On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]," in id., *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, K. McLaughlin (Cambridge Mass, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 460.

27 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 224.

28 Stanisław Wyspiański, *Wyzwolenie*, 197.

29 Ibid.

30 See remarks on the subject of dialectic image in, for example: Adam Lipszyc, *Sprawiedliwość na końcu języka. Czytanie Waltera Benjamina* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Universitas, 2012), 515.

31 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 458.

32 Ibid., 461.

33 Ibid., 460.

34 See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Strategie obrazów. Oko historii 1*, trans. J. Margański (Warsaw-Kraków: korporacja halart, 2011), See also remarks by Grzegorz Niziołek in id., *Polski teatr Zagłady* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), 421.

35 See Maria Prussak, "Pieśń Wawelu," in eadem, *Wyspiański w labiryncie teatru* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2005), 101.

36 Ewa Miodońska-Brookes, Introduction to Stanisław Wyspiański, *Akropolis* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1985), XVII. Among the rejected works were included: "allegorical characters from the monument of Sołtyk who had been transformed into Clio, Lady, and Time in Act I; a female character from the moved,

and destroyed, monument of Skotnicki, condemned for being stylized as ancient characters from the tombstone of Ankwic: Maiden and Cupid; or the monument of Włodzimierz Potocki (removed from its original location, it spent three years packaged before it was set up in queen's Zofia's chapel); characters from the Trojan and Jacob Tapestries donated to the diocese museum; and finally the much critiqued monument of David from which the Harpist was born.

37 Maria Prussak recalls the influence of Wawel Cathedral on the majority of Wyspiański's work – "from the legend of his debut to an unfinished *Zygmunt August*, written on his death bed." Maria Prussak, *Pieśń Wawelu*, 100.

38 Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Kłóczy Akropolis", *Dialog* 1 (2015): 124.

39 These materials included TV recordings of MacTaggart from 1968, rehearsals of the play, as well as secretly shot conversation with Stefa Gardecka, former secretary of the Laboratorium Theater.

40 Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Kłóczy Akropolis," 122.

41 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 19.

42 *Ibid.*, 21.

43 See Bjørnar Olsen, *W obronie rzeczy. Archeologia i ontologia przedmiotów*, przeł. Bożena Shallcross (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2013), 181–183.

44 The thesis concerning the connection between the experience of war and the birth of the philosophy of fragments was presented by Marta Leśniakowska in her paper, "The Experience of War, Anthropology of Reconstruction," presented at the conference "First World War – It's influence on art and humanities. Summary on it's centenary," which took place on the 14th of October, 2014 at the Institute of Arts at the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) in Warsaw. The author used a concept of the anthropology of reconstruction in her paper mainly in the context of a prosthetic body, discussed on the basis of visual materials – photography and film. My proposed research perspective – which I call the "anthropology of reconstruction" – has been developed independently on the basis of theoretical-theatrical reflection.

45 Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, "Wyzwolenie' na scenie warszawskiej," *Kurier Poznański*, April 27, 1916, supplement.

46 Ibid.