

SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Upon my artistic journey I focused on various subjects. Completing my master's degree (at the Leon Tarasewicz studio at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw) and during the years that followed I dealt with the aesthetic aspect of suffering and the puzzling clash of what is beautiful with what is painful. During my experiments I became interested in the phenomenon of using the material obtained via the found footage technique. This method intrigued me so much I dedicated the subsequent years of my work to it - I used pre-existing film footage to create my own movies, analyze certain subjects within the visual culture, and search for the emotional states I was interested in. My PhD thesis was a study of the film as a spacial representation of time and was mostly composed of pre-existing footage. Working with a medium that unfolds in time - the movie and its composition (or editing) - attracted my attention to the methods of building a story and got me interested in the narratology. I used my experiences with the movies to write theatre plays, where the dramatical text is understood as a text happening in a certain space (it's meant to be presented onstage or at an art gallery) and, as any text, unfolds in time. At the same time, working with pre-existing footage inspired me to wonder about auto-thematic artistic strategies - the actions of the artists who deal with artistic issues and comment on them using the language of art itself rather than the language of artistic critique or academical discourse. I would like to point three of such auto-thematic artworks of mine as my postdoctoral dissertation: a found-footage movie, *A thousand deaths* (2010/2011), a living installation, *What do nymphs eat?* (2013), and a drama, *The nest. A play about how to use things in an improper way and yet not waste them* and it's reenactments at the Zachęta National Art Gallery and the Theatre Institute in Warsaw (2013/2015).

Before elaborating on my postdoctoral dissertation I would like to describe my earlier artistic interests and the subjects they dealt with.

1. About pain and the beauty enclosed in it.

Or how beauty is not always good

During the second year of my Master's Degree I painted less and less. I was interested in geometrical abstraction, which I derived from the landscape - especially urban - as well as from the aspects of perspective. In terms of techniques applied during the creation process, I barely painted anymore. I would build multilayered constructions out of glass tiles glued together in a variety of ways. I mastered drilling and colouration of glass surfaces, building tall and complex glass structures, as well as moving huge glass tiles around in a perfectly safe manner. I thought about studying stained glass techniques and visited stained glass workshops. I realized glass is a flexible, mellow, lasting and graceful material. Supposedly, when one of my tall glass towers, held together by pieces of transparent scotch tape, collapsed in the studio at Krakowskie Przedmieście street, it was audible in the whole building.

During the May open-air painting workshop at the romantic manor near Warsaw, on a meadow which formed part of a romantic park complex, I was working on my next creation. I had about 280 rectangular pieces of glass at my disposal, each of them about the size of a regular brick. At one point I got distracted and slightly cut myself with one of them. Droplets of blood began to move between the two adjacent glass tiles. Illuminated by the sharp springtime sun, laced by the vivid colour of the omnipresent greenery, a mobile, ruby-red, laboratory preparation-like object appeared before my eyes. As the wound wasn't a serious injury, my attention was entirely dedicated to the visual aspect of the incident. It was in that moment when blood struck me as the most interesting kind of paint, although I didn't need real blood - various shades of red paint would suffice. Initially I painted on glass, then on plastering nets, paper, canvas and the plaster itself. At certain point I started to paint exclusively with my bare hands. My paintings became mostly large-format. At times I would have been able to construct a room for myself out of them. Sometimes it was a room or a gallery hall that became my canvas. I also began using epoxy or polymer resins, staining them red. I would dye the resin or, combining the hardener and quickener, I would have objects crack before pouring semi-transparent paint in the

fissures. I mostly cast body parts and tinged them red. My Master's Degree at the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle comprised of:

- A series of paintings (acrylic on canvas), *Untitled*, 300 cm x 190 cm, painted with red and black colours using my hands. As the paintings were bigger than me it was easy to notice a figure hinted by the traces of the gestures.
- A series of resin casts, *Untitled*, connected by loops of transparent tubes filled with red-stained water. The sculptures resembled springs or a set of mini water ponds in a closed circuit powered with concealed garden fountain pumps.
- An *Untitled* installation depicting a 9m long blood-spattered corridor lined with a Persian carpet. This work was inspired by a scene in Brian dePalma's *The Untouchables* from 1987, in which a character that has been shot multiple times crawls across the whole corridor in his home so he could write down an essential information before he dies.
- A white wall imitating the wall of a room, with irregularly placed holes. Behind each of the holes, connected by a string, was a container filled with red-stained water which drained slowly, staining the wall red and rusty orange.

At that time, the points of reference most significant to me were: the works of an American artist Ann Hamilton, prehistoric cave painting (in Pech Merle or Lascaux, for example), symbolical hand contours left on the rocks by the Aborigines using ochre and animal fat, Viennese Actionism, the Christian tradition of portraying suffering and the Judeo-Christian symbolics of blood. The fascination I felt towards blood viewed as paint made me ponder the spectacular aesthetic attractiveness of the images of suffering, wounds, mutilation and traces of crime or tragedy. The discrepancy between my observations and the traditional, thoughtlessly accepted juxtaposition of good-beautiful and bad-evil proved to be an important subject and provided an important source of inspiration. I was also interested in the mechanisms of rejection or acceptance of certain images, categorizing and labeling them as desirable or as ones that should be repressed. As I acknowledged the classical Platonic triad of truth-beauty-goodness which shaped our way of thinking, it seemed obvious that rejecting the images which might remind us of pain and difficult aspects of our existence is a natural defense mechanism. Yet at the same time I found this impulse fascinating. The tendency to label the depictions of suffering as ugly seemed to be a result of the

spectator's hypocrisy - whether he realized it or not. I was haunted by the phrase: 'If something fills us with fear, we should have enough courage to admit it, instead of saying we're rejecting something because it is ugly. We should also have courage to face the painful things.'

Having defended my Master Thesis I wanted to face the real images of pain. Until then I only hinted blood using various types of paints or fabric dyes. I decided to face the sight of real suffering, to test my imagination and courage - to work with hospital patients. That meant having to obtain permission from a medical institution and resorting to photography - a new medium I was completely unfamiliar with. I decided to document the formation and cicatrization of the wounds, the transformation and the triumph of the body over the illness - or its utter failure. After quite a long period I have been cleared to work at Grochowski Hospital in Warsaw. I was surprised to see the patients willingly allowed me to photograph their wounds. I visited some of them for months, several times a week. Most of the wounds and injuries I photographed were a result of negligence. One of the patients I used to visit died unexpectedly. After the cesarean section, her wound wouldn't heal for many years. She was very afraid to go to the doctor. She told me many times: 'The hospital is a place where you die'. When her wound was almost completely treated, all of a sudden she died overnight. In my photography I used medium and small format, sometimes I worked with borrowed cameras. I learned all about taking pictures - the focus, the shutter speeds, and the sensitivity of the film. I would bring halogen lamps to the hospital and test various types of photographic films. One of the patients had been homeless for quite a long time and his legs, already mutilated as they were, got frostbitten. I was invited to the operating room to witness and photograph his leg being amputated. While in there, I couldn't use the flash lamp and after developing the pictures it turned out that underexposure caused a fascinating aestheticization of the images. The photographs of amputation were beautiful. That's how the work *Life is beautiful* (2002), and later *Algorithm* (2002) came to be, as well as the rarely displayed series *History of one love*, *Flowers* and many photographs I either never put on display or only did it once. Once again, the unexpected beauty of the painful events has taken over the initial artistic intention.

For the next few years I photographed blood and - less frequently, but regularly - created installations in which the most important emotional substance was either blood or another beautiful, yet distressing accent. I did *untitled* installation at the White Gallery in Lublin (2002) and *Arachne* at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein in Berlin (2003). Though rarely, I still painted. My former fascination with stained glass and the posterior interest in catholic-

influenced pain aesthetic came together in the work *Stained glass windows* (2002) which I did in a desacralized Mariavite church in Pogorzel near Warsaw. I painted the church's windows using my hands dipped in red paint. Upon passing through the glass, the light turned red. Its reflexes, filtered through moving leaves of the trees, created new and shifting patterns on the walls. In my understanding, it was a synthesis of the traditional imagery of suffering in the name of the faith and the christian repression of the body. At the same time, the visual effect was yet again surprisingly attractive. I read once in a book on stained glass art that in the medieval times the colorful light was believed to have an extraordinary enlightening powers. My following works explored the meaning and visual aspects of blood. I used photography most of the time. By accident I photographed blood splattered over snow - that started a series of pictures titled *The road* (2003), and later came other 'bloody landscapes': the series *Vazante - The Ebb, The Lagoon, The Well, The Trail* and other photos from that series (2004-2005), *The Thaw* (2004), *The Book* (2004), and then a series of pictures showing blood that froze over the window panes forming fanciful flowers: *Crystals 1* (2005) and *Crystals 2* (2006), which were some form of pondering the stained-glass windows and the light coloured by a massive, semitransparent screen. The videos *Flashback* (2004) and *Margaret* (2006), as well as my first found footage movie *The rain in Paris* (2004) evoked the aspects of blood understood as the embodiment of guilt, sin, purification and, as always, beauty. I started collecting stills from feature films which showed blood staining objects, interiors, spaces and landscapes. At the time I understood it as a 'visual material'. I would print the collected stills and display them as *Recollections* (2004-2008).

The red paint and blood have unwittingly become my 'artistic trademark', which I thought was a silly simplification and reduction. I was fascinated by the complexity of meanings evoked by blood - the symbol of life and death, defilement and purgation, an organic, physiological paint which might have been the first paint ever used by man. Blood brings to mind both the light filtered through a stained glass, the stigmata, the insufferable loftiness of the church's nave as well as the shameful filth of the darkest human affairs. According to the anthropologists it is a 'dominant ritual symbol' which means it has very strong and sometimes contradictory meanings. It is also a visible sign of the discontinuity of the human body, it may mark our path, be a trace or record of a tragedy. Menstrual blood, however, is proof of health and fertility, although in the patriarchal culture it is, paradoxically, most tabooed as it is related to feminine physiology and sexuality.

Soon I was haunted by the thought that anything stained with blood and cleverly photographed will become attractive to the onlooker - as a controversial, meaningful and potentially spectacular object. Any landscape featuring traces of blood will, if properly shown, become unsettling and surrealistically beautiful. It was then when I decided to make my second found footage movie under working title *The washing*, which was supposed to be my farewell to the blood imagery. Eventually that film became a part of a second series of my found footage movies *The game of shifting mirrors* and was titled *A heart so white*. It is composed of images of blood being washed away, taken from 67 feature films. The title is a quote from Lady Macbeth: 'My hands are of your color, but I shame/ To wear a heart so white.' She is obviously speaking about the blood upon the hands of her husband and about the heart which shouldn't pale when confronted with a crime.

2. Dismantling and reassembling.

Or how the world is made of pieces arbitrarily put together.

In 2004 I created my first found footage artwork - a piece made using a pre-existing material recorded by someone else. I was invited to the exhibition of Polish artists at the Espace Confluences in Paris. I realized I don't have any close relationship with the French culture, I've never been to Paris or stayed in France for a longer period of time, I don't speak French, I never wanted to learn it and I even skipped the fascination of the French *Nouvelle Vague*. I wanted to go to Paris and create a piece as an alien, coming from a different part of the world which was just then 'entering Europe' as it was thoughtlessly and slightly arrogantly put by the representatives of the rich countries of Western Europe. Though it soon dawned on me that for a francophonic abnegate that I considered myself to be I know surprisingly a lot about Paris. Not only do I know the stereotypes about 'the city of love', I also know authentic sights, monuments, works of art, both the fashionable and unfashionable neighborhoods, the stories of kings, queens, flaneurs and tramps. I'm familiar with some fantastic tales and concepts as well as with entirely true images of Paris. They both amount to such numbers it's sometimes impossible to tell the difference. So I decided to make a movie about Paris from the perspective of a person who has never been there before - to put it together using pieces of other films taking place in that city. It was feasible back then, over ten years ago, but not as easy as it would have been nowadays, in the era

of movies available on the Internet and very powerful personal computers. I would take VHS tapes from the video rental. I started my cooperation with Michał Januszaniec who was then studying editing, shooting and had access to all the necessary equipment. We copied parts of the movies on a mixer so old it wasn't even capable of recognizing the anti-piracy security features. Later on we recoded them and used a computer program for the editing. Michał was editing and I learned all about the movie-making process. *Rain in Paris* is a movie about passions that get out of control. It's about love, anger, jealousy, pleasure and violence. It's about water which sometimes turns into blood. It is also a found footage video which features the overused images of the city, love and violence. It consists of visual cliches, colloquial associations and universally available knowledge. It's a movie which, in my opinion, shows just how omnipresent the modern visual culture really is.

Rain in Paris, initially intended for one screening only, was very warmly received by the audience. It was shown multiple times at various exhibitions and video art festivals and from time to time it is still being shown up to this day. I was very intrigued by the interest the audience showed in a simple movie composed of pieces of 14 other films. Similarly, I was intrigued by images of blood in the cinematography, I would note them down and later assemble them in the form of still frames. That way I created *Recollections* (2004-2008) - a series of 250 printed, thematically grouped stills, and a video *Chronicle* (2008) - a collection of stills put together in a slideshow, where I put the time and date according to the movie timeline on some of the pictures of interiors stained with blood. Although a lot of the frames did not look realistic or were entirely improbable (for instance the ones from Kubrick's *The shining*), the audience would often receive this work as consisting of authentic footage from the archives of the criminal police. After the *Rain in Paris* I still worked with the subject of blood for a while. At the same time I paid more and more attention to the pre-existing film materials. I was fascinated by the repeated images of washing the blood-stained hands, which is how I came up with the idea for the above-mentioned *A heart so white* movie, which shows a whole variety of meanings of blood. That film was supposed to be my farewell with this material and eventually became the last work I did on the subject. Simultaneously I began collecting movie images of flight and jumps, as well as of mirrors and reflections. Ultimately I planned three films: a goodbye to blood, a movie about flying and suicidal jumps and a third one about looking in the mirror. I also thought about a movie which would show all roles of an actor and chose Al Pacino as the main character. I spent my time browsing the movies I already knew and watching new ones in order to gather as much material as possible. I also looked through all of Al Pacino's output in

terms of the three above mentioned subjects. Ultimately I saw and cut over 300 future films. I cut and collated the scenes involving the three motifs which interested me. During that work I found several reiterations which intrigued me immensely. That's how the first part of the forthcoming series was created - *The game with the shifting mirrors: A piece of jade, Another one* and *A very bad dream of Count of Monte Christo*. *Another one* is a mashup of two movies in which the same racist joke is being told. The two versions differ in details and are being told by immigrants of different ethnic origin. *A piece of jade* consists of pieces of various movies whose main character is played by Jeremy Irons. In each of the movies the actor is voice-over narrating an unhappy, fatal love. Each time he does it in a strikingly similar manner, the only difference being the faces of the women he remembers. I put this material together in one, coherent tale of love to show that the protagonist always tells exactly the same story in the same way. The third movie, *A very bad dream of Count of Monte Christo* shows one actor being identically made-up and put under similar circumstances in two different films - as Jesus in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and as the title character in Kevin Reynold's *TheCount of Monte Christo*. In the movie I edited one character dreams the story of his other self in another situation and wakes up relieved to find he is the count. The three works were created using the accidentally found similarities which seemed fascinating to me. They show recurrence of measures used by screenwriters, directors and actors as well as the unintended similarities as in the case of the politically incorrect joke about the immigrants. The second part of the series are the movies *A heart so white, Wind* depicting the motifs of the human dreams of flying and death, and *God is vain* showing the motif of looking in the mirror, reflecting the image of oneself and same-sex couples being the closest to the mirror reflection of a human figure. Each of the movies features the same takes so that the spectator can switch from one video to another.

As I was buried in the movies, watching new ones everyday, I began to perceive the film world as a full-fledged parallel reality. I mostly used mainstream films as I wanted the spectator to be able to recognize from which movie certain scenes were coming from, and for him to evoke connotations with the images and stories he is familiar with. I put emphasis on good editing and wanted to maintain the seductive magic of the cinematography which would get the spectator more involved in the stories I put together. I was fascinated by the opportunity to work with the common consciousness, the collective imagination which is the popular cinema and film, interacting with the infinity of iterations of the same myths and legends. The faces and characters playing different and yet unfailingly similar

roles time and again. The possibility of extracting some pieces and putting them together to form new coherent wholes. The possibility of both giving and taking away certain meanings. It was then that I read Jorge Luis Borges's *A Personal Anthology* and found the title for the whole series of movies. Then, in 2007, I wrote about it quoting mostly Borges:

.(...) Obviously if the doctrine saying that all authors are in fact one author is correct, individual facts don't matter. In fact, one needn't go that far; the pantheist who declares that the plurality of authors is illusory finds unexpected support in the classicist, to whom the plurality means but little. For classical minds the literature is the essential thing, not the individuals. George Moore and James Joyce have incorporated in their works the pages and sentences of others; Oscar Wilde used to give plots away for others to develop; both procedures, although they appear to be contradictory, may reveal an identical artistic perception — an ecumenical, impersonal perception. Another witness of the profound unity of the Word, another who denied the limitations of the individual, was the renowned Ben Jonson, who, when writing his literary testament and the favorable or adverse opinions he held of his contemporaries, was obliged to combine fragments from Seneca, Quintilian, Justus Lipsius, Vives, Erasmus, Machiavelli, Bacon, and the two Scaligers.

One last observation. Those who carefully copy a writer do it impersonally, do it because they confuse the writer with literature, do it because they suspect that to leave him at any one point is to deviate from reason and orthodoxy. For many years I thought the almost infinite world of literature was in one man. That man was Carlyle, he was Johannes Becker, he was Whitman, he was Rafael Cansinos-Assens, he was De Quincey.'

The Coleridge Flower from *A Personal Anthology*, Jorge Luis Borges

If we treat the film world the way Borges described the world of literature in the essay above, and omit the names of the writers and poets, we will obtain something like a parallel reality - the world made up of all the existing and nascent film narratives. The individual who tries to put the film bits together so they would form coherent stories, becomes, rather than the author (a director or screenwriter) - a detective recreating the story, a collector of traces and analogies, an investigator who assumes that any resemblance to actual persons and events

may not be coincidental. The ultimate task of a detective isn't to discover the perpetrator, but to reconstruct and reveal the tale itself - the situation, the story or the character.

Individual films seem to be windows which allow us to have a glimpse of the parallel world. Each movie appears to be a flat reflection of a fragment of a multidimensional reality whose diversity, internal dependencies and laws remain hidden. Yet sometimes peeking through enough windows allows us to see a fragment of a reality in its flickering, impossible wholeness.

Bogna Burska, 2007

,The editio princeps of *The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim* appeared in Bombay toward the end of 1932. (...) Thereupon Bahadur issued an illustrated edition of the book, which he now titled *The Conversation with the Man Called Al-Mu'tasim* and handsomely subtitled *A Game with Shifting Mirrors*. (...) The general argument is thus glimpsed: the insatiable search for a soul through the subtle reflections which this soul has left in others; in the beginning, the faint trace of a smile or of a word; in the end, diverse and increasing splendors of reason, of the imagination and of good. In the measure that the men questioned have known Al-Mu'tasim more intimately, in that measure is their divine portion the greater - though it is always clear that they are mere mirrors. Mathematical technicality is applicable: Bahadur's burdened novel is an ascending progression, whose final end is the presentiment of a "man called Al-Mu'tasim." (...) After many years the student arrives at a gallery "at the rear of which there is a door hung with a cheap and copiously beaded mat curtain; from behind it there emanates a great radiance." The student claps his hands once, twice, and asks for Al-Mu'tasim. A man's voice - the incredible voice of Al-Mu'tasim - urges him to come in. The student draws back the curtain and steps forward. The novel ends.'

The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim from *A Personal Anthology*, Jorge Luis Borges

Having finished the second part of *The game of shifting mirrors* I began thinking about the third one. Initially it was supposed to be just one movie - a fictional biography of an actor, put together with all of his movie impersonations up to date. I chose Al Pacino as the main character. My inspiration was the paradox of perceiving a modern protagonist in the world

full of media coverage: the better an actor impersonates a character - becomes 'someone else' - the more recognizable he will become. This work took me over half a year. Using pieces of movies I tried to guide the protagonist as precisely as I could through various stages of life, social roles and romantic relationships until his death. I chose Michelle Pfeiffer to be his life companion - they starred together twice as lovers (in Brian De Palma's *Scarface* and Garry Marshall's *Frankie and Johnny*). In my movie they also meet and split up two times. My found footage film *The Star* begins with a scene in which three witches (George Miller's *The Witches of Eastwick*), one of the played by Michelle Pfeiffer, cast a spell - a wish for a wonderful, new man to arrive in their town. It ends with a scene in which three different witches (Matthew Vaughn's *Stardust*) are looking for a fallen star, in which Al's soul has transformed after his death. Once they find it, the witch played by Michelle Pfeiffer devours it and regains youth. I took the material for this movie from 37 feature films. While ordering the material I found that in William Friedkin's *Crusing* starring Al Pacino some gay pornography stills were edited in, only to be perceived subliminally. After a short investigation I discovered a sinister story in which the movie mixes with reality, the authentic crimes mix with those made up by the screenwriters and the actors with the culprits of real-life dramas. I tried to show this story in an interactive video installation titled *Found Footage*. It joined the third part of the series *The game with shifting mirrors*.

After finishing that found footage cycle I did *Remake* (2009), *A thousand deaths* (2010/2011), *Battle of Grunwald* (2011) - works which I will describe in the part dedicated to my post-PhD achievements, as well as a series of works about a spacial representation of time - the series *Clocks*, which became part of my PhD work. I learned editing techniques from Michał Januszaniec, who helped me with most of the films. Jointly we work out the language of my video works. Michał still keeps working with found footage technique and is a co-author of various important visual essays on modern art, history of there and film. At this year's *Found footage in modern art strategies* conference, which I organized, I summed up that period the following way:

Working with pre-existing film material, using it for my own purposes, was initially simply a way to go where I couldn't or was afraid to go creatively. Sometimes it often occurred that a material seduced me, and a feeling of déjà vu has become unbearable. Slowly I realised that there existed a finite world, comprising all of the film plots that were ever conceived, and that we, the audience, are

looking into this world through tiny windows of specific film stories. Later my fascination with the work of J.L Borges only confirmed my realisation. An idea found in a book called *Searching for Al-Mutasim - Game of Moving Mirrors*, of finding a sequence of a person's presences in other persons, has become my credo ever since. I was looking for characters, essences, an escalation of moods, a secret of repetition, the mystery of legends. All those relevant and objective arguments presenting found footage as a working on interpretative cliches, overabundance of images, engineering of mass imagination, or the analysis of contemporary visual culture I treated as an elegant pretext, or an intellectual alibi, enabling me a position in the world of gallery and art discourse. But a moment has come when I literally couldn't look at editing another, this time commissioned, film. My headache became unbearable and I had less and less time for my work. I felt very bad and one day I realised that if I'll fragment yet another myth, if I'll disparage another blueprint, to put it together as another, my mind will fall apart as well. Emotionally, those images were less and less attractive to me anyway.

For me, this conference is not looking back, even if it was inspired by my past experiences. It is a reflection over a simple and obvious fact for anybody who deals with culture, that you can't take from where there's nothing to be seen. To me, found footage is nothing else but a working method, which is making this fact obvious. For that reason I allowed myself to expand this notion beyond the film medium usually associated with it. The work of documentarists, archivists and artists devouring the archives, ready-made, collage, ideas of montage and sampling, quotation, appropriation, or even site specific and field recording is nothing but working "with", "in relation to", and "over" the found material. We should even risk distinguishing this material into the one produced by a man and the one created independently from him. The former ways of understanding and using it are the real topic of our meeting. The latter concerns using anything that is not material culture and makes us think of, say, the most expensive diamond in the world Pink Star, of prehistorical flint blades or Adam's rib. It's opening our perspective of endless attention on the material being a substance to all things. Transferring the understanding of the found material into the realm of ideas would mean that even a landscape artist can be called a found footage artist.

Are the mountains in Caspar David Friedrich paintings a found material? Is any realism nothing else than just found footage? The professor of painting I studied with used to say that abstraction doesn't exist because the human mind is incapable of rendering anything it hasn't seen before. Maybe it's only one of many names for contemporary practices or a new form for contextualising thought.

The idea of unity between reality and its image, map and the territory it demarcates appears often. We could add to our inspirations *On Exactness in Science* by Borges (1935). "In this Empire the Art of Cartography reached such perfection, that the Map of one only Province took over the whole City, and the Map of the Empire the whole province. With time, those Immeasurable Maps has become unsatisfactory and Colleges of Cartographers made a map of the Empire, which was of the size of the Empire itself, and overlapped with in at every point. (...)'" In the book *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* Stephen Wright writes that 20th century art, similarly to today's post-conceptual practices used to operate on a much smaller scale. Art was practised as something smaller and different from reality, which was the object of its interest. He quotes a fragment from *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* by Lewis Carroll (1883): "Quickly we developed a six yards to a mile scale. Next we tried a hundred yards to a mile. But after that we had the greatest of ideas! We made a map of the country in the scale of mile to a mile! (...) It has never been unfolded yet. (...) It was opposed by farmers: they claimed it will cover the whole country and will cut off the sun! So now we are using our own country as a map, and I can assure you that it's succeeding just as well.", Further he says: "whatever 'using your own country as a map' means and however you can achieve such a thing, one thing is for sure: it gives us a very concise description of a 1 to 1 logic" (...) The practice of using material created by another person, editing it for one's own purposes, changing or extracting sense thanks to a new context or editing, seems to be a work over reality in its given/original form. Or at least using fragments of a map in their original size and creating collages out of them in a 1 to 1 scale. Artist's work using found footage strategy is nothing else than reality itself, which was its starting point of interest, it is its repetition as carefully selected fragments, sequences and juxtapositions. It won't be then a map giving away the shape of

the Empire, but will keep its scale and the depth of its reality. In many cases it will also preserve its panache. It can become the Alternative Empire. A Neighbouring Territory.

Bogna Burska, 2015

3. What does time look like?

Or about film over and over again.

As it befits a person who spent a few years analyzing feature films, the inspiration for my PhD thesis dawned on me at the cinema. In *Pride and Prejudice* (dir. Joe Wright 2005), pieces of which I used in the video *God is vain*, the main character, visibly outraged, runs across a bridge. The shot is panoramic. It's raining, there is the stone bridge, the river and the English landscape are grey and the girl just keeps running from one bank to the other. I remembered philosophy class on Henri Bergson's views I had as a college student, during which a very basic thing occurred to me - up until very recently, we could only measure time by space. Until the discovery of digital clocks (electric, electronic, quartz and atomic) there was no other way to do that. The way the hand of a clock travelled on the dial, the spacial measure of the sand fallen in an hourglass or the water flowing in a water-clock, the scope of the moon shade or sunshine. Two- or three-dimensional spacial measurement and movement were the means of measuring time. I thought that by expanding the bridge scene into a longer rectangle and connecting its shorter sides one would obtain a circle similar to a dial. That would make the running girl an arm of a clock. Her sprint through the bridge would become a repetitive time unit. The space of the projection and the variability of the movie image allows to create a mechanism working similarly to a clock with a dial. The light from the projector seemed to make a modern analogy to the old clocks measuring time using the sunlight or moonshine. The contradictory terms of time being measurable and subjective, linear and unpredictable seemed to perfectly impose over the understanding of time in the motion picture media - the technical time of frames per second, the takes, pieces or shows, compared to experiencing unrestricted travels through time and space caused by the emotional illusion of the film. Since then I began thinking about a series of movie clocks.

My PhD work titled *The spacial image of time - a series of video sculptures*, defended in December 2009, is a result of that idea. It consisted of the following artworks:

- *12:30* (2009 in cooperation with Michał Januszaniec) is a video projection on a two-sided, round screen. The video footage also has a circular form and is made according to the following description: expanded rectangular stills have been connected with their shorter sides. The elements move within linearly but also irregularly, sometimes entirely contrary to the movements of the hand of a clock. This film is an attempt to reflect on linear and non-linear perception of time. It also draws upon my previous experience with found footage, it is composed exclusively of fragments taken from existing film works to draw the viewer's attention not only to the mechanics of how the motion picture forms in time, but also to the so-called 'magic of cinema' that is the subjectivity of reception of a film and the time of experiencing it. *Clock 12:30* was presented for the first time at *Spojrzenia 2009* exhibition (an exhibition of artists nominated for the Deutsche Bank prize at Zachęta National Art Gallery).
- *The Cone of Light* is a video-object I made filming a seashore and what was happening on it. In a static frame, divided by the lines where the land meets the water, and higher above - where the water meets the air, the strollers and sunbathers move from right to left and from left to right. There are movements in other directions, it is most often children and birds. This image has been transformed into a circle like the previous work, so that most of the movements would now describe a circumference. It was then projected vertically over a tall, white cone. That way we could watch the video landscape wrapped around a cone while walking around it. The video-object created something like the inverse of a panorama. As in the case of a panorama, the viewer would deal with an image stretched horizontally in space and surrounding a portion thereof. Contrary to the panorama, the viewer, in order to see the whole work, had to move in the space surrounding the object.
- *Lunar Clock* is also a projection of the moving image vertically on a cone. This time, however, a small cone has been suspended from the ceiling and the image projected from the bottom was a circling moon in different phases.
- *Sundial* was a contemporary interpretation of the old clocks, where the shadow is cast on a still image thanks to the vertical hand placed within the space of the projection and the light shed by a projector.

- *Musical Boxes* is a series of works depicting several short shots (between few seconds and several dozens of seconds) of different films, converted (the same way as in other Clocks) into round images similar to the dial, presented on multiple monitors. For this series I picked shots in which the moving objects travel all the way from one to the other side of the frame, thus completing the circle. I also kept the original audio which repeated periodically.

My PhD work was presented and made public in the studio. By this way presentation I wanted to create the impression of a visit at the studio or workshop of a contemporary watchmaker who not only looks for solutions with the aid of computing and film technologies, but also tries to take into account different understandings of time and space. I was interested in currently coexisting concepts of linear, measurable newtonian time and the Bergson's subjective time. In my thesis I signaled the radical changes which have occurred in the understanding of time during the end of the nineteenth and the whole twentieth century. The Albert Einstein's special and general theory of relativity as well as Henri Bergson's concept of experienced time and intuitive cognizance have expanded a set of concepts we use when dealing with experiencing the time and in the face of temporality of our own existence. The film and dual medium - mechanical and subjective - experiencing the time while getting familiar with a film seemed to me to be an important analogy for these issues. I also wanted to make the permanent temporality of the moving image very apparent to the viewer.

4. Auto-thematic artistic practices

Or what is common for the legends, butterflies and dramas.

Working on the film medium, repetitions and time implications in relation to the moving picture made me come back to found footage. Since I was working on a phenomenon of one actor doing a number of film roles (found footage video *Star*), I started to think a lot about remakes - cinematographic repetitions of the same story. It puzzled me why in our culture, there is such a strong need to re-shoot the same story. Are there any other reasons apart from the commercial one? How is each subsequent version different, and what do they have in common? To what extent are directors inspired by the earlier adaptations? Up to which point do they wish to create a completely new version, and how much do they copy the previous solutions? My artistic question and research was: is it possible to assemble a

version of a story made up of all its screen adaptations? Edit it so that the viewer can understand it, so that it is coherent enough for him to want to see it?

I chose the story of Elisabeth I. I figured the biography of a very famous person is also a collection of historical facts and legends. That it will be a pleasure to work on a story about the fate of the character I liked. I was also interested in the might of a woman who had enough power to successfully rule a country at a time when putting the state affairs in a women's hands was unimaginable. I remembered two or three films about Elizabeth, but I started reading some of her biographies. Elizabeth I Tudor, Queen of England and Ireland, the last of the Tudor dynasty, known as Elizabeth I The Great, the daughter of Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII, called Gloriana or Virgin-Queen, lived for 70 years, out of which she spent 44 reigning. In order to be able to marry her mother Henry VIII created a new religion - Anglicanism. Elizabeth was to be the awaited son and heir to the throne, but her female gender and subsequent miscarriage of her mother became the cause for which Henry VIII had Anne Boleyn sentenced to death by beheading with a French sword. The girl had to survive bereavement, orphanhood, dishonor and relative poverty, followed by her father's death and the short reign of Lady Jane Grey. Elizabeth was a puppet in struggle for power, accused of involvement in conspiracies against the life of her younger half-brother Edward VI and her older sister Queen Mary I Tudor, also known as Bloody Mary. Elizabeth was reportedly amazingly intelligent, received a good education and knew English, Scottish, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek and Latin. She took the throne at the age of 26 and within a few years, inter alia, through the knowledge of foreign languages, began to exercise real power. Raised as a Protestant she became an anglican queen and the Head of the Anglican Church, which was a thorn in the side of the Catholic parts of Europe. Having witnessed a cruel reign of her older sister, Mary I, who had hundreds of "enemies of the Catholic faith" burned at the stakes, Elizabeth did not persecute neither Catholics nor Protestants. However, she forbid the public practice of their cults thus making Anglicanism a state religion. She never married, and the marriage games have long been an important part of her international and internal politics. She was an unmarried woman on the throne of a country managed exclusively by men. Aware of her ambivalent position determined by her sex, she deliberately created her own image of the Virgin Queen, the immaculate mother of the English and Irish nations. She fended off three Spanish Armada attacks, thus devastating the Spanish might on the sea and significantly weakening the power of the Catholic religion in Europe. She survived countless conspira-

cies against her life, and punished the conspirators with the most sophisticated tortures and death. She imprisoned and killed her Catholic rival, Mary Queen of Scots, which made her a regicide. She suppressed the uprising in Ireland brutally and ruthlessly and, like all other monarchs, led skillful intrigues at all political levels. She assured a bloodless succession to the throne for James I, the son of Mary Stuart, after his childless death, thus uniting England, Ireland and Scotland. The time of her reign, the English Renaissance, brought the elizabethan theater and its greatest representative - William Shakespeare. Although the last years before the death of the queen were not particularly happy for her subjects, in the next two decades the period of reign of Elizabeth I of England was already being called the Golden Age and the legend of the Virgin Queen was born. Hundreds of speculations about her life were made later on. It was written that she had many lovers, or that she did not have them at all, that she was a lesbian, the mother of Shakespeare, or even a man. Still, most often it is assumed that she remained unmarried bearing in mind the story of her parents and not willing to share power.

I titled my found footage biography of Elizabeth I of England *A Thousand deaths*. The heroes of stories are born and die in our minds every time their story is being told. About the time the Queen lived in it is often said, not without reason, that human heads were cut more often than the heads of cabbage. The scaffold took her mother from her, then many of her relatives and fellow believers, and eventually became an effective tool of governance for herself. In one of the films Mary Stuart says before being sentenced to death: *I am not liable to do not obey the law. I'd rather die a thousand times than consider myself a subject.* A quote from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, simplified by popular culture, reads: 'A coward dies a thousand times, a hero only once.'

A thousand deaths consists of 6 independent parts and lasts for a total of 109 minutes. The parts tell successively: the birth of Elizabeth and her mother's death, the span of the reign of her sister Mary I and imprisonment, the coronation of Elizabeth and her taking over the power, the last matrimonial attempt and the religious conflict, the execution of Mary Stuart and battling the Armada, and in the sixth part we see the story of the Queen's last love and her death. To carry out my work I used films and TV series: *Anne of the Thousand Days* dir. Charles Jarrott, *Elizabeth* dir. David Starkey/Mark Fielder, *Elizabeth* dir. Shekhar Kapur, *Elizabeth I* dir. Tom Hooper, *Elizabeth R* dir. Roderick Graham, *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* dir. Shekhar Kapur, *Fire Over England* dir. William K. Howard, *Gunpowder, Treason and Plot* dir. Gillies MacKinnon, *Henry VIII* dir. Pete Travis, *Mary of Scot-*

land dir. John Ford/Leslie Goodwins, *Mary, Queen of Scots* dir. Charles Jarrott, *Orlando* dir. Sally Potter, *The Other Boleyn Girl* dir. Justin Chadwick, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* dir. Michael Curtiz, *Shakespeare in Love* dir. John Madden, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* dir. Mary Cranitch/ David Starkey, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* dir. Naomi Capon/ John Glenister, *The Tudors* season 2 dir. Michael Hirst, *The Virgin Queen*, dir. Coky Giedroyc, *Young Bess* dir. George Sidney. The role of Elisabeth was played by, among others: Judi Dench, Glenda Jackson, Helen Mirren, Anne-Marie Duff, Cate Blanchett, Maisie Smith, Bette Davis, Laoise Murray, Flora Robson, Jean Simmons and a gay icon, a British writer and actor Quentin Crisp.

I worked on this film for more than a year and a half (2010/2011), also during the scholarship of the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia. First I read and collected the material, then I divided the collected movies into parts and scenes, which I then filed thematically according to the important events in the story of the queen. Having completed this arduous process came the time to decide what scenario will my story have. Which materials and facts need to be discarded and what to include. It became obvious that my work will be searching for the quintessence of the legend - in order to create a logical whole I could only combine internally coherent material. I had to reject one-off fantasies of directors or screenwriters and focus on what was similar. After some time, I would establish thematic parts and events that must necessarily be shown. I constantly segregated, chose and edited the scenes so that I could gradually clear up their content. I tried to remove all that was unnecessary, though I felt very sorry for many of my favorite scenes. And yet the story still seemed too long for me.

A Thousand Deaths was first presented at a show of my found footage movies at the Kino Lab at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw in May 2011. Without a doubt it was the most difficult movie I've ever done. Sorting out the legend, whose matrix are actual events, and the sources are in the royal archives in London which stores letters, documents and speeches of the Queen and other documents of the era, was almost more than I could bear. The legend of a personality, about which it is no exaggeration to say she was one of the most distinctive figures of the last millennium, seemed to me almost impossible to fathom. To get to know all the facts one should know having this artistic intention, I would have to study the Elizabethan era for many years. The Myth of the Great Queen kept rising since her death, innumerable novels and short stories were based on it. It was repeatedly translated for the cinema and television screens. The first film about Elizabeth I was created in 1912, and while I was working on *A Thousand Deaths* another two actresses

played her role. For me, this work was a manifestation of fascination with a personality and the strength of the myth built around her, the exploration of the core of the legend and a hopeless attempt to find the countenance of the queen hiding behind faces of many wonderful actresses. It was also a study of the narrative as such. I constantly analyzed how certain films portrayed the fate of the heroine. I was looking for cuts and narrative structures. I followed threads and checked how the same story was shown in another film. I tried to understand why a particular work has been assigned a specific way to build stories. Why some events were discarded for the benefit of others. I checked it on the level of construction and editing of the scenes and in macro scale of the construction of the whole story. In the end I had to make similar decisions dictated by the type of found and selected material. Judging by the reactions of the audience and critics, my goal has been more or less achieved - a watchable and understandable story of one character with many faces was created, and also a kind of a study of a legend. I myself learned a lot about the secrets of storytelling, but the Queen has remained a mystery to me.

My first post-doctoral work was carried out on request. Inspired by the construction of *A Thousand Deaths* the curator of *Alongside. Poland-Germany. 1000 years of history in art* exhibition Anda Rottenberg has ordered a found footage film combining the movies showing the Battle of Grunwald. Initially, I had serious doubts, because I could not remember other films showing this battle apart from the famous *Knights of the Teutonic Order* by Aleksander Ford (1960). But I started looking and, although I could not find a feature-length production with this motive, I found there are a lot of amateur movies depicting the battle. What is interesting is that many of them used fragments of soundtrack from Ford's film. It was also clear that the authors based their depictions on the course of battle showed in the film. I gathered stop-motion animations, inter alia the ones made using Lego bricks, the footage of reconstructions of the battle taking place every year on the fields of Grunwald, videos trying to use photos of the reconstruction as pictures of the battle, 3D animation, recordings of computer games, sometimes carried out in order to recreate the battle and sometimes in order to win, advertisements of playing bricks and of Lithuanian vodka, spots advertising the recent 600th anniversary of the battle, animations and a music video, which also was made to celebrate the anniversary of the battle. I also used fragments of *Alternatywy 4* series in which well-known painting of Matejko is being brought into the apartment at a block of flats, and the material showing how a 3D version of this painting was created. My final found footage movie lasts 19 minutes. I was ex-

tremely proud because it hung in a space which presented other images relating to the Polish-Teutonic relations and the famous battle. Eventually the *Battle of Grunwald* by Jan Matejko did not make it to the exposition in Berlin for conservation reasons. Instead, a cross stitch copy was shown.

This time I wasn't looking for a consistent image of a person but for one of the historical event. As in *Thousand Deaths*, I had to deal both with the facts and with a legend. But it was the first time I worked with materials created by non-professionals: enthusiasts, restorers, players or fans. I had the impression that many of these home movies were created out of nostalgia, a dream of a "great victory". Thus, I think that this film meets my earlier concept of the work with found footage understood as work with common social fantasies.

At that time, I was asked to make two new movie-clocks. After completing my PhD work and showing the first clock, *12:30*, at the lobby of Zachęta National Art Gallery I decided to do a series of watches to be shown in public spaces. The *12:30* clock hung in the lobby of the National Art Gallery the way clocks are hung in the halls of railway stations, at town halls and other public places. I was thinking about a series of works dedicated to places that might use some reflection on time. But this time I wanted these clocks to be made of footage shot at the location where they were being displayed. First I got invited to Kraków, where I was to make and show a clock as part of the ArtBoom Festival, the 2013 edition of which took place in Podgórze district. I decided together with the curator Stanislaw Ruksza that we will film Podgórze and its everyday life. I filmed the streets, traffic, pedestrians, panoramas of the squares, athletes on a small stadium. We travelled by tram recording the view from the windows and voice-over announcing the next stops. The views of the river and bridges at different times of day and night. Finally, using the process described above I turned the moving images into circles and edited *The Clock for Podgórze*, which lasts 21 minutes. It was shown as a projection on the Independence Square in June 2013. Shown at night, as a projection on the pavement which lines the square, it seemed to be an extension of the projects of lunar and solar clocks. Passing residents of the district sometimes associated it with ... UFOs. Probably because of its, at first glance mysterious, luminous, round form and shape.

I was invited to do the second clock by the Centre for Contemporary Art 'Chronicle' in Bytom and Imago Mundi Foundation, which jointly operate Metropolis Project which aims at

challenging the stereotypical image of Upper Silesia and the Dąbrowa Basin, seeking to create a contemporary iconography of the region. The project was supposed to initiate a discussion of visual and sound artists who treat art as a learning tool. This time I decided to use the existing material and the regional TVP Katowice made their archives available to me. I chose from archival materials dating from the '60s which document the lives of Silesia in two plans: above and below ground. The views of life of the cities and its' streets, pit heaps and mine buildings are interspersed with images of miners working underground and of various mine levels - the rhythm is set by the pace of extraction and transportation of coal. The clock is supposed to be a reminiscence of a region vibrant in the years of economic prosperity, which in the last two decades has undergone a dramatic transformation. Archival materials will be complemented by contemporary images of Silesia, whose landscape has already been altered by a huge amount of disappearing mine shafts and waste dumps, as well as by the buildings collapsing as a result of mining damage. It is also important for me to grasp a social change in the region in which a profession dangerous to health and life, but widely available, has been replaced by widespread unemployment. I think that the images of time and changes are very relevant in the narration about modern Silesia. TVP Kultura took the patronage of the creation of the *Clock for Katowice* which will be made and displayed in the city of Katowice most likely in 2016.

One of the recurring themes in my work is trying to include the animals in the process of creating art. I did not do a lot of such works, but the introduction of a living - and thus in its way unpredictable - element in the process of creative work always seemed very interesting to me. I do not, however, associate these works with a current in art called bio-art, because my work does not focus on defining the problems of biology and vital processes. Rather, they introduce a living element with his processuality and purely human associations induced by specific animals. I did first such work shortly after graduating in 2003 - the installation *Arachne* was created for the exhibition of women's art *White Mazur* at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein in Berlin. In a space fenced off from the rest of the gallery a large glass room was created - a feminine boudoir with a bed, a dresser, a nightstand and a small TV. In this space, together with Michał Januszaniec, we filmed a Mexican Rustleg tarantula, who traveled carefully all its nooks and crannies - the bed and the crack behind it, the corners behind furniture; he walked on all the trinkets and even the mirror. That film was played on a small TV, it could've been seen in the reflection of the mirror through the glass wall from inside the gallery or looking through the window from the outside, from the

sidewalk adjoining the building. Most of the audience was convinced that the spider is still hiding somewhere in the room, someplace dark and inaccessible to the eye. My intention was obviously to refer to the myth of Arachne, a rebellious spinner that Athena turned into a spider spinning its spiderwebs. I also wanted to combine feminine kitsch with a stereotypical women's fear, which takes the form of a big spider. The natural beauty and tranquility of these animals came to my aid - the spider, whose abdomen was about 7 cm. long, and including the legs her size exceeded 20 cm., looked like a beautiful, fluffy animal. Her long brown, orange and white hair brought to mind the associations with mammals rather than with arachnids. Mexican Rustleg tarantulas are a very peaceful species and it was not easy to persuade her to explore the pink boudoir. When she finally decided to walk, her movements proved to be gentle, slow and precise. I wouldn't associate them in any way with something that can arouse fear. Only when at one point she ran, I felt beads of sweat running down my back. My own arachnophobia made itself felt. Meeting with a big, though surprisingly beautiful and delicate spider in an intimate feminine space was essentially a meeting with disgust and fear, the cause of which may at the same time be fascinating. The video installation became a separate work, to be found both in public and private collections, and is shown to this day.

In 2011, I decided to work with animals again. I was invited to prepare my exhibition at the Gablotka Gallery at the Gdańsk Shipyard. Gablotka Gallery was created in the cabinet which once served as a notice posting place, in a building whose many rooms have currently been allocated to the artists to use as studios. I had my own studio there, I was a member of the shipyard's community of artists and preparing my own exposition for Gablotka was important to me. The flat, glazed space reminded me of an aquarium or a terrarium. I decided to put inside some plants and live crickets. As with most aquaria, I decided to decorate this one, and guided by the simplest associations asked the curators for clippings from erotic magazines. Finally, selected parts of erotic photos showing mostly ridiculous, unnaturally posed parts of the body rather than sexuality, decorated the terrarium for crickets. We put a microphone inside the cabinet and connected it to big loudspeakers lined up outside in the corridor. This way, the crickets played "at full volume". The association path I followed while creating this small work dates back to the time when I was a student. In my workshop led by prof. Leon Tarasewicz there was a terrarium for crickets and a set of still lifes in the coffers, which professor would compose using the most surprising elements. The crickets tended to compete in the volume of their sounds

with those from their surroundings, the conversing students, and above all the playing radio. Sometimes they could be heard at the entrance to the Faculty of Painting two stories below. Here, in a building where dozens of artists were working at a time and which no doubt was an important point on the cultural map of the Tricity, the artificially enhanced music of the crickets evoked those memories. The work „*Crickets*“ (which also means ‚dirty magazines‘ in polish) also introduced a certain mood, associated rather with the warmth of summer than with the ‚cricket behind the fireplace‘, and focused the attention of the artistic community which took turns taking care of the insects.

My next work was the screening of a large format, found footage *Swarm*, commissioned by the program Open Resort of Culture and was shown on a ten-story block of flats in Kamienny Potok in Sopot in the summer of 2011. It was an assembly of short fragments of nature- and feature films showing swarms of nocturnal insects, combined with a soundtrack composed of the chirping of crickets and other similar noises. The sounds almost unnoticeably overlapped with the environment intertwining with the sounds of a summer night on the outskirts of the resort. The moon shining on the block and the enlarged, unrealistic images of insects at the same time fit the place and made it extraordinary. Although in this work I didn't show live animals, it seems to combine my fascination with forms of animal life and the found film material.

Two years later I decided to work with other insects - butterflies. I was again invited by the Centre for Contemporary Art Kronika in Bytom and Imago Mundi Foundation, also within the Metropolis Project, to complete a second work in the field connecting art and the Silesian region. Ever since I made *A Thousand deaths* I dedicated much thought to the methods the artists use to reflect on art in the language of art. Because of using their artistic tools their reflection has a different form and communicative scale than the usual art criticism or academic discourse. I decided to set up a butterfly house at the CCA Kronika. A little, initially, in spite of non-ecological, post-industrial Silesian stereotypes, and partly because I was struck by the convergence of the process of breeding a butterfly and the process of making and presenting an artwork. I have just shortly finished writing a drama *Nest* on the environment of contemporary art, and the auto-thematic threads in art interested me enormously. I started my research at Bytom by reading about butterflies autochthonous to this region. First I learned that it was in Bytom where in 1992 the Silesian Entomological Society was founded and that it holds its meetings in the Upper Sile-

sian Museum's branch in this city. Through the Museum I made contact with its' representatives and, together with the curator Stanislaw Ruksza, went to one of the meetings of the society. There we have presented our project to create a butterfly house in the gallery and asked for expert help and advice. Eventually I started working with Mrs. Katarzyna Klois, a keen entomologist from Chorzów, a nurse by profession. First, I tried to determine which butterflies could be bred in Kronika. I planned on going with the local species, which we could release into the wild after the end of the project. Together with Ms. Kate we chose two common and beautiful daytime butterflies - the Red Admiral and the Common Brimstone, a Garden Tiger moth and a rare in Poland, more common in Southern Europe, spectacular Death's- Head Hawk moth, the largest species among european butterflies, which owes its name to the pattern similar to a skull on its back. It was important to get the butterflies through the longest cycle possible - from caterpillars, to chrysalis and finally to the beautiful imago. I bought the appropriate books, special terrariums with a suitably small holes punched in the casing, and finally, with the help of Mrs. Kasia, the Red Admiral caterpillars and the Garden Tiger chrysalises. The insects also needed a suitable accommodation, with a sluice at the entrance and constant flow of fresh air. A small room in the gallery was allocated for the butterfly house. I planted some flowers in the pots and after the butterflies hatched I also regularly provided them with freshly cut flowers. Their nectar was supposed to be the food for the butterflies, along with sweet fruits and a liquid made with with diluted honey, prepared by entomologists specifically for the Garden Tigers. Hence the title of the project *What do nymphs eat?*, which is a play on the polish name of the butterfly (Nymph) and the name of a mythical, non-corporeal being, which is hard to suspect of such a mundane activity like eating. The animals pupated, fluffy and voracious caterpillars turned into chrysalises, which, regularly moistened and carefully looked after, eventually became butterflies. Visitors were only able to come to the Butterfly House in very small groups so they wouldn't do the insects any harm. The first Garden Tiger hatched on May 21, 2013. Pretty soon it turned out that although the moths were happy to sit on their flourishing favorite, a privet, they ate very little. Another amateur entomologist, Mrs Kate' friend, would come to feed them. I watched this process, though I did not have the courage to touch the butterflies - I was afraid I would not be gentle enough. The process lasted until September, and most of the butterflies died along the way. It also turned out that a butterfly house in Silesia is not such an unrealistic idea - several years ago and avid silesian entomologist founded a butterfly house on his recreational lot and used it as a base to run, inter alia, educational activities for children and adolescents. I

was mostly interested in the analogy of the process, which I witnessed together with the gallery staff and spectators. Museums of art and nature, and even zoos, have a common ancestor - cabinets of curiosities. Anything that strongly attracts the attention could be shown there - the strange, special, sometimes very beautiful or very ugly things. After a very long time, these institutions have begun to develop and specialize. They have also become publicly accessible. Managing them, creating specific methods of presentation and making contact with the audience became the field of a new science and studies - museology. At the same time the working process of the artist - the first inspiration lacking a clear source, the creative process which may at any time be interrupted and abandoned, its fragility and unpredictability reminded me of the very delicate phases of the insect life. The final result - final only from the point of view of people who specifically appreciate the beautiful wings of imago - is delicate and fragile as well. For a butterfly the imago is only one of the phases of life. Some of them do not even have the digestive system, because their only mission is to just go and reproduce. The final result of the work of an artist, the artwork, may also sometimes be unstable, fleeting and only briefly displayed. It is fragile, susceptible to interpretations and easily falling into oblivion.

I was aware, of course, of the analogy with the work of Damien Hirst, who exhibited a room full of tropical, incredibly colorful and large butterflies at London's Tate in 2003. This work has faced criticism of the environmentalists, who found that it was harmful to the insects - they did not have proper conditions and often got lacerated. At Kronika, however, our main point wasn't to exhibit butterflies, but rather the process of their breeding, searching for a way back to a primordial museum and the associations of the creative process that can end in a fiasco at any moment. I was inspired by a trivial wonderment - looking at a butterfly, it is very difficult to imagine that it was a caterpillar just a while ago. The transformation process inside the cocoon is well studied, but it still holds some mysteries for the scientists. Eventually, life processes, though observable and describable, always carry a secret - the question of spiritus moves - the driving force and purpose. Similarly to the manifestations of human creative and driving forces.

The last work where a living element plays an important role was also executed within the Project Metropolis this year. Looking for material for the Silesian film clock I began filming the dogs barking behind the fences and wickets of the houses in Bytom. Just before the opening of the exhibition summarizing the Metropolis project and also inaugurating the newly constructed building of the Silesian Museum in Katowice, came the idea of greeting

the audience with barking dogs. A short and simple video *Dogs* was created, in which randomly met dogs were barking directly into the camera lens - straight at the viewer. Just the way it happens when we visit the neighborhoods that are unknown to us or when we go to someone's house for the first time. The guests of the new cultural institution were literally and figuratively barked on, as the film was placed in front of the stairs at the entrance to the museum. This work does not contain a living element, it is not processual, and was created as an offshoot of another project, but similarly to the previously described works it was inspired with the unbridled and ever surprising animal life.

In 2012 I wrote my first theatre play, titled *The nest. A play about how to use things in an improper way and yet not waste them*. Writing has been my "personal practice" for a very long time, but I never treated it as part of a professional artistic work and didn't think about publishing it. This time, the first impulse to give voice to the visual artists drew me in so much that I wrote a full-length dramatic text. *The Nest* is a tragicomedy that takes place in the world of contemporary art, all the characters are grotesque and exaggerated. The language is deliberately pathetic and discredits both the environment it is about, and its own form. The absurd situation of exhibiting contemporary art while an electricity shortage occurs serves as a pretext to unravel artistic critique of the contemporary art environment. The text creates a grotesque picture of human types, professional roles and social behaviors in the closed environments of the artists. The irony, grotesque language, expressive characters and the absurdity of the whole situation is supposed to facilitate noticing a dangerous spot in which the openness of definitions and rich ambiguity of discursive concepts allow the abandonment of any purposefulness of action, auto-reflection and intellectual or professional honesty. It is also a drama of characters who became so entangled in their own roles, they can not abandon them regardless of the circumstances. The coercion of being noticed forces the characters to paradoxically try and show themselves in the dark, and paralyzes any healthy reflex of rebellion or even escape. We are in a place where one can do anything without any intentions, and then cover it up with an incomprehensible critical text. It is a story about a world in which the total lack of reference points makes irrelevant whether the emperor is naked or clothed, because in the dark you can't see it anyway. *The Nest* is also just a maliciously distorted portrait of artists, curators, critics and other professionals in the field of art. Leading figures include the Old and Great Artist, A Young Artist, A Feminist Artist, Critical Artist, Curator, Director, Technical Service, The Ho-

stess (of a sitting-room), Lolek (critic), Professor (of the Academy of Fine Arts), Korzeń (intellectual artist).

The text was published by the *Dialogue. A Monthly Dedicated to Contemporary Drama* magazine in the 9th issue of 2013 as the first Polish drama dedicated to the contemporary art environment. It was also published in book form by the CCA Kronika in 2013. It met with quite lively and positive feedback in my professional environment and made me start to think about the text as an important medium in the intermedia and interdisciplinary area. I realized that dramatic text, is in fact nothing else but a spatial form of the text.

The next text also arose in relation to art, ordered by Stanisław Rukszy, curator of *Your city is a battleground* exposition presented as a part of *Warsaw Under Construction 6. City of Artists* festival for the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. The exhibition concerned the ways in which economics and politics create urban space. And a feedback mechanism - the way this space shapes the citizens and our understanding of reality. My one-act dramatic text is set in Warsaw. On her future ruins we meet the Salesman - a Polish post-transformation entrepreneur, the Radio listener - an old female listener of Radio Maryja, the Feminist - a woman trying to fight for her emancipation, the Socially Committed Artist - a young boy presenting radically left-wing views, the Young Insurgent - a child who descended from the monument at the Warsaw's Old Town and the Jew who sleeps and never wakes up. The cause of the destruction of the city is not known, and a few people, completely different from each other, are trying to somehow put life on track using the remaining artifacts, objects the dug out and their own ingenuity. Having to coexist and support each other, they are arguing constantly about the worldview and values. The text was read and interpreted by the actors in the Museum of Modern Art on finissage of the festival. Read in the museum, it gained a three-dimensional, visual form. It was, in a way, imposed on the space and built another layer of meaning of the exposition.

Another dramatic text of mine, *The Stool*, tries to combine the visual and the theatrical, putting together in a structurally coherent manner, a dramatic text, images and objects, which are all equally important and full-fledged protagonists of the story. *The Stool* is a story about relationships in which the parties involved objectify or humanize each other, depending on their skills and dysfunctions. Some of the characters have either been replaced with objects or projections, or aren't even physically present, despite the fact that the actresses are supposed to act addressing them. The drama tells the story of a family

in which the men were objectified or are literally absent. Women, bound by ties of blood through men, try to solve everyday problems, and finally all come together to find the youngest member of the family. It is a story about a family in which neither women nor men coped with the roles assigned to them by the culture. The men standing on a patriarchal pedestal "above" everyday issues have, with time, become passive and dumb like things, images or empty space. Women pushed the need to bustle around, control and care about others took over the entire active side of life. The Mother is angry because of the passivity and weakness of her sons and husband, but on the other hand her overprotectiveness does not allow any possibility of changing the roles. Above all, she is trying to set up younger women in a trap of a kind, expecting them to continue the tradition. The language of the text refers to the folk romance and pop culture banality, it shows the forms we assign to women's confessions of love and frustration. *The Stool* was published in *Dialogue* 7/8 2015 and in the future I plan to develop it into an intermedia work in which visuality and spatiality coexists with dramatic text and acting.

The work - action *Everything* made in 2015 at the invitation of Arteria Festival in Częstochowa is another piece relying on text. The idea was to copy all the words and sentences told by women in the second part of Jerzy Hoffman's *The Deluge* movie, telling the story of the defense of Częstochowa monastery. I wrote the texts, along with time codes, in chalk on the sidewalk in the Avenue of Henryk Sienkiewicz - the author of *The Deluge*. Placing the texts from the film adaptation of the book in its author's avenue leading through the park to Jasna Góra monastery is kind of a complement to the cycle, a closure of the road that famous threads, themes, quotes or pictures travel through culture. *Everything* is inspired by the Bechtel test - this test has its origin in the comic *Dykes To Watch Out For* by an American writer and cartoonist Alison Bechdel, where one of the characters declares that she only watches the films in which there are at least two women who with talk to each other and talk about something other than men (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechdel_test). Of course in my work there is not a single case of women talking about anything other than the stereotypical roles attributed to the genders. One can only collect everything that women say in order to measure by the amount of the lines and qualitatively describe their presence in the national founding narrative.

In the beginning of 2015 I was invited to participate in a festival of visual arts Artloop held in Sopot. This year's edition was titled *Night Shift* and was to address the life of the resort

and its night side. I decided to continue the thread of the relationship between visual arts and theater. I wrote a drama and implement it as an intermedia art project combining performance and installation experience in the area of visual arts, the expression of a theater actress and the dramatic text. I invited actress Clara Bielawka, with whom I've already worked with before, at the reading at the Museum of Modern Art. I decided to write a text about seasonal work in the resort. Eventually it turned out to be about different types of poorly paid jobs that barely allow people to survive, but do not give hope for a better future or even a perspective of some minor savings. The main topics of seasonal work in a Sopot night club and Sopot Grand Hotel intertwine with the work of a teachers, an academic staff member, a summer job in Western Europe, a domestic help in England, the waitress in the Warsaw bars and the work of Ukrainian immigrants in Poland. The main character and narrator tells the story of six sisters, each of which is trying to cope with the reality of Polish mature capitalism. Preparing to write this text I spoke with employees and seasonal workers from various places in Poland and abroad, I tried to collect a variety of stories. The title *Pleasant and useful* relates directly to work, but also refers to Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* quoted in the text. It is about the collision of faith in education and social justice with Polish economic realities. It's also about growing up, feelings and dreaming about leisure time.

The monodrama was shown at the Theatre on the Beach in Sopot, where we opened the backstage to the beach. We gave up stage design in favor of a garden of a café, the beach and the sea visible behind the empty stage, thereby situating the play in the artistic tradition of site-specific, rather than than scenographic thinking. We lit the whole stage proportionately, giving up theatrical lighting effects as well. We didn't try to hide the technical equipment and the show took place soon before dusk, when the beach slowly darkens and colorful lamps light up in the bar's terrace. Realizing that the only work relation which the viewer will be looking at is the work of the actress, we decided that the text telling the story of fatigue must show the authentic bodily fatigue. Klara Bielawka used her acting skills in order to recall and convey emotions, and also successively put her body in a repetitive motion, running and jumping, which gradually hampered her speaking. The structure of the text has been inspired by the Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Little Mermaid*. Since a certain moment the actress dons a very narrow, silvery, quasi-evening gown that makes her look like a mermaid, while impairing the movements and increasing her effort. Working with authentic fatigue of the body, counterproductive to the necessity of finishing the show, means that the play fits equally into the tradition of performing activities outside

the field of visual arts as well as into the tradition of actors' roles in theater performance. In my understanding, *Pleasant and Useful* makes use of the traditions of both disciplines - visual art and theater - to a similar extent, becoming an interdisciplinary intermedia activity.

My latest work were two performative readings of *The nest. A play about how to use things in an improper way and yet not waste them*, a tragicomedy about contemporary art, written in 2012. One of them took place at the Zachęta National Art Gallery and the other at the Theatre Institute in Warsaw. The intention of confronting the text with the spaces of the gallery and the theater was a continuation of my intermedia and interdisciplinary artistic pursuits. The dramatic text understood as an event taking place in a certain space was to be tested out in two locations with different traditions of creating meanings and cognitive tools.

The roles were assigned to 9 actors, so that none would have to appear in a scene all by himself. The first act, where the artists, curator, director and the technical staff mount the exhibition, and eventually a power shortage occurs, was read in Zachęta's upper chamber in front of the staircase, occupied by an exhibition of works nominated for the Deutsche Bank's most interesting young Polish artist *Looks 2015*. The works presented there - conceptual installations *And Indescribable outline* by Alice Bielawska and *Turba, Turbo and Arena* by Iza Tarasiewicz - became a very good background for a text dealing with contemporary artistic discourse, difficult to understand for an ordinary viewer of. Act 1 ended by turning off the lights, and the actors and audience approached to the staircase, where the next two scenes were shown - the Critical Artist writing a manifesto and his conversation with the choir, and the opening of the exhibition. The opening, with participation of director, Superintendent, Sponsor, Ambassador and the Minister was conducted exactly the same way and in the same place where actual exhibitions are usually inaugurated in this institution, thus fitting the roles of the actors into real places and characters familiar to all patrons of the gallery. Some of the actors impersonated the viewers who have difficulties coping with the exhibition that is being displayed in the dark. The next two scenes were shown on the ground floor among objects making up the *Gardens* exhibition (curator Magda Godlewska-Siwerska). The conversation in a luxury beachfront villa of the Old and Great Artist was read by the actors standing within Paweł Matyszewski's *Gardens of oblivion*, which consisted of a pond, plants and a rock garden. The last scene, taking place at the sitting room of intellectual aspirations of the Hostess, was read in the exhibition hall with Paweł Matyszewski's painting *Ravings* and sculptures *Untitled* by Małgorzata

Niedzielko and *My little bathtub* by Marzanny Morozewicz, its design ultimately resembling a bourgeois living room. Performative reading of *The nest* gives up set design. Instead, it makes use of the existing space, current exhibitions and the works they comprise of. That way, similarly to the earlier staging of *Pleasant and Useful*, it forms part of a site-specific artistic tradition - the use of and adaptation to the actually existing space. Overlapping the text about working in the field of contemporary visual arts and the actual exhibitions of contemporary art is kind of a test of the adequacy of the drama to the reality it describes. Assigning the scenes to the ensuing gallery halls created a unique sequential drama. The actors involved also had to face the difficulties of working outside the theater, in heterogeneous areas which often had difficult acoustics, and facing objects created by artists. Many of them regarded this experience as unique and enriching.

The second reading of *The Nest* took place two days later at the Theatre Institute. This time the dramatic text was to be presented in a classic way - on a small theater stage. The first scene of the first act was shown as a projection of a documentary of the reading in Zachęta. The second and third was read by actors with a projection in the background, showing the technical installation of an exhibition 10 years ago. The parts of the text that were taking place in the dark were read by the light of the personal mobile phones of the actors, which gave a very simple, but surprisingly interesting aesthetic effect. The scene of the opening of the exhibition was accompanied by the projection shot at a vernissage at Zachęta. The spectator could confront the text and the actors' characters with authentic footage. After the reading there was a discussion about the relationship between the visual arts and theater, which was attended by curators, theater critics and artists who combine both fields of art.

My intention was to confront my own text with two spaces in which the traditions of creating meanings in visual arts and theater make us understand artistic gestures differently and assign them different meanings. Diverse, clear and complex space of the gallery allowed me to use the strategy of narration close to installations and site-specific. A small, black, centered space of the theater, where the actor and the spectator have strictly defined and limited spaces, made me look for other means of expression and reach for the video projections. My impression is that despite difficult acoustics, the drama has become more interesting in Zachęta, more multi-layered because of the associations arising between the text and the art and architecture. Another important factor was the opportunity

to, using a grotesque text, reenact an opening ritual at a place assigned to it by the traditions of the institution.

As my habilitation thesis I would like to appoint the found-footage movie *A thousand deaths* (109 min., 2010/2011), a living installation *What do nymphs eat?* (CSW Kronika, 2013) and a dramatic text *The nest. A play about how to use things in an improper way and yet not waste them* (Dialog 9.2013) and its two reenactments at the Zachęta National Art Gallery and the Theatre Institute in Warsaw (2015). Their common denominator is auto - thematicity - the artist's activity consisting of identifying specific problems in by means of personal artistic expression. Auto - thematic works of art, using the language of art, try to contextualize or change it. This may be a conscious striving to break down the existing formal canons, but also a commentary on specific events in the area of art, developing, exposing or criticizing them. In general terms, the so-ranging activities include the spectrum of attitudes of the twentieth-century avant-garde and neo-avant-garde, which subsequently and deliberately undermined the existing artistic paradigms. Hal Foster's *Return of the Real: The avant-garde in the late twentieth century* (1996), is an important theoretical work on this issue. Practical self-reflexive action not only allows the artists to speak about their own artistic and professional issues in the way most appropriate for them, but also enables immediate implementation of its expression in the circulation of ideas and discussion in the field of art. In case of purely theoretical reflection the time between its emergence and real interaction with the world of art production is usually quite long. Another advantage of this method is the possibility of using the ways of expression possibly closest to the topic it concerns - to involve the language of art to address the problems of art, which can increase the intelligibility of the problem in an artistic environment. The following examples of such actions in the area of art and theater may be mentioned: Antoine Prum's movie or video *Mondo Veneciano*, a series of works *Champions* by Zbigniew Libera, *Prince* by Karol Radziszewski and Dorota Sajewska, Karol Radziszewski's *America Is Not Ready For This*, Jerome Bel's *Veronique Doisneau* performance and the very famous dramatic text *Six stage characters in search of an author* by Luigi Pirandello.

The work identified as an achievement postdoctoral *A thousand deaths*, *What do nymphs eat?* and the readings of *The nest* show different aspects of auto - thematicity in art, they are also interdisciplinary works. As an artist, I was interested in raising important issues related to working and functioning in the field of art or film, applying the tools of one artistic

discipline to the other, or "borrowing" methods of operation of the natural sciences and using them in the space of a gallery. In *A thousand deaths* the freedom of "borrowing" material from others, characteristic of the strategies of contemporary art, from ready made through collage to the found footage, was used to analyze the film medium and the structures used to build commonly known stories. *What do nymphs eat?* used the knowledge of biology, entomologists and insect breeders' practice - usually used in zoos or butterfly houses - to create a different perspective on the process of creating and displaying works of art, the work of the artist and the institution of a museum or gallery. *The nest* uses the language of the theater to criticize the environment dealing with contemporary art and shows it in a distorting mirror of grotesque. Performative implementation of the text - the readings in the gallery and theater - also allowed to see how the same content behaves in areas semantically marked in a different manner.

My current area of interest are the interdisciplinary practices connecting different fields of art. The opportunity to work with actors in the contemporary art gallery spaces opened up to me a whole new field of associations, similarly to how looking at the theater from the perspective of the visual arts creates new intermedia tools. Interdisciplinarity and intermediality, defined as a combination of different media (technologies, techniques and materials) within a single work of art, is an important and fairly common phenomenon in contemporary art. But interdisciplinarity understood as a combination of artistic disciplines, along with their theoretical areas and interpretative habits, still seems to be rare and under-recognized. Such work at the junction between areas of human thought, attempts to combine distinct traditions, may also be called a search for the boundaries of art.

dr Bogna Burska

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bogna Burska', written in a cursive style.

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