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It went like this: on one of Poland's most important stages (Krakow's Stary Theatre), just a few years after the political and economic transformation (specifically in 1995), one of the country's most important directors (Krystian Lupa) put on a play that, despite being based on literary fiction in historical costume, referred directly to the reality of the time. The play showed the uncertainty and sense of being lost of people at a historical turning point, and their fruitless efforts to find meaning in the chaos of reality changing in a previously unimaginable way. The most important character in the production was a gay man. And a filthy rich one at that. A capitalist with a wide sphere of influence, dressed in a white suit. The intrigue, meanwhile, resulted from the attempts of the eponymous hero to denounce and convict the homosexual.

The production could have marked an important contribution to the discussion on emancipation and homophobia. It could have constituted a contrary and subversive interplay with what Magda Szcześniak calls the 'norms of visibility', i.e. the visual representations of the horizon of middle-class aspirations (the rich, dapper man) and their queer transgressions (overt homosexuality).¹ The answer to the question of why *Lunatycy* (*Esch, czyli anarchia*) [*The Sleepwalkers: Esch, or Anarchy*]² was not in fact such a production will constitute one of the subjects of this essay. Its main objective is to examine how queer aspects are manifested and operate in the work of Krystian Lupa. I will therefore first discuss the difficulties associated with queer research and Lupa's theatre, before focusing on aspects of the director's queer biography, and then finally, taking the example of the first part of *The Sleepwalkers* (while also referring to other plays), point to the specific characteristics of Lupa's queer strategy.

1.

I understand 'queer' to mean tactics in defiance of heteronormativity. In the case of queer analyses of theatrical work, the political and social contexts of the plays become the heteronormative reference point

1 Magda Szcześniak, *Normy widzialności. Tożsamość w czasach transformacji* [*Norms of Visibility: Identity in Times of Transformation*] (Warsaw: Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana, 2016).

2 *Lunatycy* (*Esch, czyli anarchia*) [*The Sleepwalkers: Esch, or Anarchy*], directed by Krystian Lupa, Stary Theatre, Kraków, based on the novel *Die Schlafwandler* [*The Sleepwalkers*], by Hermann Broch, premiere 11 February 1995.

– the reality in which the theatre functions. Poland post-1989, the period when Lupa enjoyed his greatest successes, is a homophobic country where the subject of homosexuality in public debates is either deftly avoided or treated with contempt, where there is still no law on civil partnerships. Yet at the same time, it is a period in which the LGBT+ community itself is developing various strategies in the new reality. As Szcześniak³ shows in *Norms of Visibility*, these stretch from creating the image of the ‘normal gay’, i.e. a homosexual man who is no different from any straight guy apart from the fact that he sleeps with other men, to the ‘fag’ identity of a homosexual who makes radical gestures of resistance to normalization.

In Poland, however, one cannot speak unequivocally of ‘queer theatre’ in the American sense. As Laurence Senelick writes:

To speak in general terms, queer theatre is grounded in and expressive of unorthodox sexuality or gender identity, anti-establishment and confrontational in tone, experimental and unconventional in format, with stronger links to performance art and what the Germans call *Kleinkunst*, that is revue, cabaret, and variety, than to traditional forms of drama.⁴

Owing to the country’s contrasting history, completely different emancipation strategies and politics, this type of queer theatre has not developed in Poland (and indeed, some researchers even doubt whether the category of queer as such is suitable for application to Poland). Nevertheless, following Marcin Bogucki, we can discern a certain potential and call Poland a ‘laboratory of emancipation – a place where various strategies and ideas for fighting against misogyny, homophobia and transphobia can be tested’.⁵ Krystian Lupa’s theatre commands a unique place in this laboratory.

2.

The fundamental challenge in critical analyses of the theatre of Krystian Lupa is Lupa himself. It would be hard to find a more modernist Polish artist working today. He produces exceptionally consistent plays, both aesthetically and thematically (in which he is often responsible not only for the directing, but also for the script and stage design, and sometimes the costumes and musical selection), as well as embellishing them with his own commentaries (manifestos, passages from diaries written during rehearsals published in the programmes, his own books, interviews). Almost all of his works have at least something of the *auteur* about them, resulting from biographies or individual creative enquiries. His texts also employ a unique idiolect: using frequently complex, elaborate sentences full of unexpected adjectives, comparisons and metaphors verging on exaltation (ubiquitous ellipses and exclamations). And crucially, it is almost always he, Lupa, who is the protagonist, the speaking, writing, creative subject, agent and

³ Szcześniak, *ibid.*

⁴ Laurence Senelick, ‘The Queer Root of Theater’, in *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theater*, ed. by Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla (New York: NYU Press, 2002), p. 21.

⁵ Marcin Bogucki, ‘Queer po polsku’ [‘Queer in Polish’], *Dialog* 2019, no. 5, p. 35.

creator, ostentatious administrator of ideas and meanings, and reservoir of sensitivity and aesthetics.

This situation, incidentally, is not unique in Polish theatre, whose long tradition was founded on the myth of (male) artist-geniuses attending to every aspect of the production. Yet it would be hard to find a more flagrant example than Lupa, mostly because of his sky-high position in the Polish theatrical hierarchy (consolidated with numerous awards and the esteem of critics from throughout the world) as well as his use of all available forms of expression to ensure a very consistent creation of his own image. This is not to say, of course, that Lupa's plays are just about Lupa, although it is very possible that they are mainly about him. Yet the director exercises meticulous control over the elements of his biography accessible to the wider public. This was noted by Maria Maj, an actress who worked with Lupa from the very beginning of his directorial journey:

Krystian Lupa really doesn't like people talking about his private life. I once said in a film that there'd be no Krystian without Piotr Skiba [actor and costume designer, and Lupa's partner]. He left my words in, although he could have cut them out, because he had an influence on the editing, but added a comment that he wasn't happy with people talking about his private life. But in the same film he himself talks about his childhood, his father, his mother.⁶

What we do know about Lupa, we usually know from the man himself. It is a similar case with the reception of his plays. These are seldom interpreted by using tools different from those the artist himself suggests. As a result of the long years of Lupa's fascination with the theories of Carl Jung, reference to Jung's texts and use in Lupa's productions of symbolism related to Jung's philosophy, many articles and reviews use Jung to interpret the plays.⁷ If Lupa is inspired by Arnold Mindell, critics apply this key to reading his productions. A 'lexicon' has even been written to explain certain terms from Lupa's theatrical theory.⁸ This phenomenon has gone long beyond a simple (and essential) attempt to 'better understand' the artist's works. It has become more of an unthinking homage that blocks any reading 'against the grain'. Although recent publications have offered a different (above all feminist) perspective on the director's practices (especially articles by Agata

⁶ Maria Maj, 'Kultura i natura' ['Culture and Nature'], interview by Paweł Dobrowolski, *Notatnik Teatralny* 66–67 (2011/2012), p. 298.

⁷ Two books focusing on Krystian Lupa's work are written in this key: Grzegorz Niziołek, *Sobowtór i utopia. Teatr Krystiana Lupy* [*The Double and Utopia: The Theatre of Krystian Lupa*] (Kraków: Universitas, 1997), and Uta Schorlemmer, *Magia zbliżenia i tajemnica dystansu. Krystiana Lupy poszukiwania 'nowych mitów' w teatrze* [*The Magic of Approach and the Mystery of Distance: Krystian Lupa's Quest for 'New Myths' in Theatre*], trans. by K. Jablecka-Mróz and T. Jablecki (Kraków: Universitas, 2007).

⁸ See Anna Zalewska-Uberman, 'Słownik Krystiana Lupy. Perspektywa reżysera' ['Krystian Lupa's Lexicon: The Director's Perspective'], *Didaskalia* 96 (2010), pp. 16–30.

Łuksza,⁹ Monika Kwaśniewska,¹⁰ and, indirectly, Katarzyna Waligóra¹¹), much remains to be done. For example, a queer response.

3.

The dominant model of representation of otherness on Polish stages has been inherently patriarchal and patronizing (we should add that Lupa breaks away from this model, as it were). In the newly democratic Poland, homosexuality was usually presented as a type of blemish, a stigma of social exclusion. The Polish theatre of the first years of the new millennium in particular took a liking to all kinds of excluded groups (women, the poor, homosexuals, old people, those with a different colour of skin or non-Catholic faith). This was something of a fashion, or perhaps an aesthetic, whose sources lie in the dramas of the British brutalists, Russian documentary theatre, and the productions of German directors such as Frank Castorf and Thomas Ostermeier, whose influence on Polish theatre was especially strong. These 'excluded' people were usually presented as victims, as a result of intolerant Polish society and the oppressive mechanisms of rampant capitalism. Additionally, the burden was almost double for people with non-normative sexuality, as in principle homosexuality or transsexualism did not permit a happy or fulfilled life. In her book on Polish theatre after 1989, Joanna Krakowska cites sentences from reviews of plays with homosexual protagonists referring to the characters' 'uncertain identity'.¹² In this way she demonstrates the operation, until recently (and, owing to the increasing strength of the right, increasingly even today), of the idea of a 'normal', 'stable' (heterosexual) identity, showing how a society unable to deal with homosexuality transferred the problem to homosexuals themselves, imputing to them problems with identification.

Theatre therefore reproduced images of violence and exclusion, while hardly offering any alternative to the image of the unhappy victim (disregarding, of course, the representations of 'flaming' gays present in farces and comedies). Despite staging several plays tackling the subject of the 'excluded' (such as *Azyl* [*Asylum*], based on Gorky's *The Lower Depths*¹³), Lupa proposes a different way of representing difference. I shall return to this issue, but first it is worth examining the director's biography in terms of its influence on his oeuvre and Lupa's own self-creation.

9 Agata Łuksza, *Glamour, kobiecość, widowisko. Aktorka jako obiekt pożądania* [*Glamour, Femininity, Spectacle: The Actress as an Object of Desire*] (Warsaw: Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, 2016).

10 Monika Kwaśniewska, 'Między wolnością a manipulacją. Sytuacja aktorek i aktorów w *Factory 2*' ['Between Freedom and Manipulation: The Situation of Actors in *Factory 2*'], *Didaskalia* 150 (2019). This article is reprinted (and translated into English) in Issue 7 of *Polish Theatre Journal* (www.polishtheatrejournal.com).

11 Katarzyna Waligóra, 'Homolobby i społeczne paranoje' ['The Gay Lobby and Social Paranoias'], *Didaskalia* 149 (2019).

12 See Joanna Krakowska, *Demokracja. Przedstawienia* [*Democracy: Presentations*] (Warsaw: Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute 2019).

13 *Azyl* [*Asylum*], directed by Krystian Lupa, Polski Theatre, Wrocław, premiere 24 January 2003.

4.

That Krystian Lupa is gay was never any great secret, although he in fact came out publicly in 2007 in an interview with Łukasz Maciejewski, incidentally with the telling title 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'¹⁴ (or at least, this was when he referred to his sexual identity in public clearly and emphatically). This interview also features numerous radical declarations from Lupa:

Ł.M.: A gay issue has appeared in this conversation a few times. Have you ever had a problem with your homosexuality?

K.L.: I think I'm going to say something rather radical. I really wish I had met someone who would have helped me in my early youth. When, let's say, a twelve-year-old boy is looking for help because he wants to determine himself in this matter. He wants to know what is going on with his body. It causes a huge uproar about depravation. And I believe that if I had been offered help in explaining what was happening with me at the age of twelve it would have been much easier for me.¹⁵

On life in the closet:

And I have known that horror well. I've lived in it. However, apart from all the other arguments, it's not a human who makes such a decision. It happens by itself. Maybe in his early youth a homosexual man thinks it doesn't concern him because after all he also finds girls attractive, he wants to live 'normally'. [...] Nonetheless, after a while he leaves home and finds himself as a totally different man. Like Mr Hyde.... Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde was a typical figure of a homosexual from that epoch [in past centuries].¹⁶

During his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków in the late 1960s, Lupa developed an intense attachment to the hippie community. In a conversation with Marcin Kościelniak, he recalls:

Zbyszek Maciejewski, my friend and partner at the time, and I revolved around the fringes: the fringes of the hippie community, the homosexual community. We didn't particularly make friends with anyone. From time to time we'd let in some stubborn creatures who'd follow us around. On one hand we made homosexuality into a religion; on the other it was outsiderism, and, doubtless, also shyness.¹⁷

With time, Lupa began to ostentatiously affirm his homosexuality. In the conversation with Kościelniak, he describes the colourful erotic life of the early 1970s (nudism, orgies, sex in public places, the excitement that came from defying prohibitions). He also mentions his expulsion from the Łódź Film School (he studied film directing before opting for

14 Łukasz Maciejewski, 'Doktor Jekyll i Mr Hyde. Rozmowa z Krystianem Lupa' ['Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: An Interview with Krystian Lupa'], in Krystian Lupa and Łukasz Maciejewski, *Koniec świata wartości/The End of the World of Values* (Łódź: PWSFTviT, 2017). Interview first printed in *Machina* 2007 no. 5.

15 Ibid., pp. 511–12.

16 Ibid., p. 512.

17 Krystian Lupa, 'Poza wspólną wiarą' ['Outside the Common Faith'], interview by Marcin Kościelniak, *Didaskalia* 125 (2015), p. 49.

theatre directing) for homosexuality, on the pretext of submitting a poor coursework study. His further work in the theatre did not bring a halt to his exuberant erotic life, as he mentioned in an interview with the similarly telling title 'Jak zostałem wodzem' [How I Became a Leader]:

[In Jelenia Góra] the other actors and I formed a commune. A real one. Everyone could sleep with anyone else; group sex was a beautiful, pure experience. We lived through art, read together, wrote a novel, treated drugs like Witkacy – we used them to get things done, not for 'the futile pleasure of experience'. For example to get to the bottom of the secret of Franz Schubert's Piano Sonata No. 21. We listened to it while smoking marijuana, and then everyone went home to write up their discoveries. Yes, I was the leader, as in childhood, inherently and spontaneously, I simply had the most rampant imagination and was able to inspire others.¹⁸

Establishing a creative utopia is Lupa's objective with each of his theatrical ventures. It is typical that this is a utopia, and not, let's say, a collective. Lupa creates the utopia; he is the one who invites the actors and assumes the position of leader. Many actors very much appreciate such situations.¹⁹

The period of dandyism, or narcissism, as Lupa calls it, finished in the second half of the 1980s with the beginning of the AIDS epidemic:

At first it was like a kind of spectre. Joy, light-heartedness, the old permanent excitement vanished. It's not even about sexual practices, but mental development, the feeling of ease and happiness. Suddenly, the homosexual community was blamed. [...] I remember the moment when I felt it for myself. I thought I was infected. [...] That coincided with a period of professional crisis, something had fallen through at the theatre, and I interrupted rehearsals for *Musil's Dreamers*. It was 1987. [...] Later I finally dared to get an HIV test done, which came back negative. The day I got the result, my father died. Something ended for me then. The era of my dandyism ended. I changed. Eroticism was burdened with a new sin, blame, burden. It no longer amused me. I preferred to have the sense of being uninfected than to sleep with someone.²⁰

Prior to the interview with Maciejewski, Lupa did not speak publicly about his homosexuality, arguing that he found it idiotic to admit or disclose something that ought to be the norm. A few years later,

18 Krystian Lupa, 'Jak zostałem wodzem' ['How I Became a Leader'], interview by Jacek Tomczuk http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/269259.html?josso_assertion_id=-53CA74190C68901A [accessed 20 April 2019].

19 See *Notatnik Teatralny* 66–67 (2011/2012), dedicated in full to 'Lupa's actors'.

20 Kościelniak, p. 54.

after the notorious ‘gay lobby in the theatre’ affair,²¹ the director said in an interview with Kościelniak:

There are people who think that a homosexual mafia exists, that homosexuals promote each other, meet, conspire and rule the world. Looking from the inside, I can’t understand that, I can’t see the motives that make them believe in it so much. People think that I’m a dangerously influential man, whereas in fact I’m essentially alone and don’t have influence on anything.²²

This is partly true. It is hard to envisage anyone with greater influence than Lupa in Polish theatre, and it is also hard not to notice that, while (perhaps) there is no ‘gay lobby’, the Polish theatre community is homosocial in nature, as well as simply patriarchal (more on which in a moment). Asked about homosexuality in his theatre, Lupa responds:

I’ve explored that subject to the extent that it interested me. I don’t remember ever not taking on a homosexual motif because it wasn’t appropriate or I was embarrassed. I’ve never been a follower of homosexual literature. Human dramas concerning eroticism are equally fascinating for me in the homosexual and the heterosexual form. This is a kind of sublimation. I have a great fascination with women within me, I like to tell stories about women, and no doubt I transfer certain homosexual motifs into women, although I’ve never felt a woman, or rather maybe I didn’t want to, it’s probably not fully entered me... I’ve made lots of drawings with naked men, but I wouldn’t say I was doing mass homosexual art in secret. I did it, of course, but personally I didn’t regard those drawings as artworks. They were inconsequential. I didn’t hide any important drawing away just because it was homosexual. There’s as much homosexuality as I needed in what I wrote and what I did on the stage. No more or less. I didn’t apply any censorship to myself.²³

Is that all?! Confirmation of tackling homosexual themes, but at the same time distancing himself from focusing on homosexuality. Drawing naked men, but also an interest in ‘general’ eroticism, of both the gay and the straight variety. Fascination with women, partial identification with female characters, yet on the other hand distance and the essentially misogynous admission that ‘I never wanted to feel a woman’ (why not?). Determining that his own work contained as much homosexuality as was needed – so how much, then?

21 The ‘gay lobby’ affair concerns comments made by the actress Joanna Szczepkowska. At the premiere of Lupa’s play *Persona. Gialo Simone* [*Persona: Simone’s Body*], in which she was playing the title role, Szczepkowska made a Heil Hitler gesture and bared her buttocks to the audience, against the director’s wishes and without his approval. Lupa removed her from the production. Later, in a column referring to an interview with the actor Grzegorz Małecki, Szczepkowska claimed that a homosexual lobby (and more specifically, a gay lobby) existed in Polish theatre. For more on this issue, see Katarzyna Waligóra, ‘Homolobby i społeczne paranoje’ [‘The Gay Lobby and Social Paranoias’], *Didaskalia* 149 (2019).

22 Kościelniak, p. 55.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

5.

Joanna Krakowska, analysing the reception of the productions of Lupa's protégé Krzysztof Warlikowski, discussed their aesthetic dimension:

All those visual elements together constituted something that one reviewer called 'the homosexual beauty of images'. Regardless of a certain comic quality this phrase has, since homosexuality is not (it would seem) an aesthetic category, and regardless of the fact that the phrase errs towards stereotype, it would appear to make it possible to raise an extremely interesting question: do erotic choices influence the thematic and aesthetic shape of a play, and how? And regardless of the intuitions we all have on this subject, as yet nobody seems to have examined it thoroughly.²⁴

What about in Lupa's case? And is it possible to give an unequivocal answer, since the man in question himself struggles to do so? It is quite easy to talk about queer motifs and characters in theatre productions. Lupa's plays have featured protagonists with non-heteronormative sexuality (mostly men), such as Bertrand in *The Sleepwalkers*,²⁵ James and Joyce in *Wycinka* [*Woodcutters*],²⁶ a number of characters in *Factory 2*,²⁷ and Pontius Pilate in *Mistrz i Margarita* [*The Master and Margarita*].²⁸ One can point to ambiguous relationships between characters (for example Franz Josef and Gambetti in *Wymazywanie* [*Extinction*])²⁹. It is much more difficult to analyse more subtle matters such as aesthetics or recurring male nudity, which is much more frequent in Lupa's theatre than female nudity. This is not simply about the simple assertion: sure, a homosexual undresses men on stage for his own pleasure. A more pressing question is why the image of a naked man is so significant that it is in fact essential? Why is a naked male body so important, and not a female body? What does male nudity communicate?

Lupa admits that from the beginning of his creative career, he often undressed actors (in the 1970s, he says, this constituted something of a continuation of the hippie movement, strategies of rebellion against the prevailing dictates of decency and propriety).³⁰ Nudity in Lupa's theatre is often a metaphor or symbol, an expression of a condition, a necessity resulting from the material of the play (at least this is the director's explanation). It is linked to eroticism, but eroticism understood in far broader terms than sex or sexuality, as a kind of

24 Joanna Krakowska, *Democracy*, p. 166.

25 *The Sleepwalkers: Esch, or Anarchy*, Stary Theatre, Kraków, premiere 11 February 1995.

26 *Wycinka Holzfällen* [*Woodcutters/Holzfällen*], directed by Krystian Lupa, Polski Theatre, Wrocław, based on the novel by Thomas Bernhard, premiere 23 October 2014.

27 *Factory 2*, directed by Krystian Lupa, Stary Theatre, Kraków, premiere 16 February 2008.

28 *Mistrz i Małgorzata* [*The Master and Margarita*], directed by Krystian Lupa, Stary Theatre, Kraków, based on the novel by Mikhail Bulgakov, premiere 9 May 2002.

29 *Auslöschung / Wymazywanie* [*Auslöschung/Extinction*], directed by Krystian Lupa, Dramatyczny Theatre, Warsaw, based on the novel by Thomas Bernhard, premiere 10 March 2001.

30 Krystian Lupa, 'Nagość jest koniecznością' ['Nudity Is a Necessity'], interview by Łukasz Maciejewski, *Notatnik Teatralny* 74 (2013/2014). –

mystical/sensual sensitivity. Of course, in the reception of his productions, nudity – especially male – was controversial as it violated the norms of representation. According to Paweł Leszkowicz, author of a monumental monograph on the male nude in Polish art after 1945, on the one hand male nudity provides an insight into the social constructions of male identity, as ‘the male nude is the most radical medium of exhibition, confirmation and transformation of masculinity’.³¹ On the other hand, it is closely related to political turning points (the author argues that the appearance of male nudes on a wider scale from the 1980s onwards is a sign of revolution and opposition to political oppression, as well as struggle for emancipation). Again, Lupa’s case is not clear-cut: nudity in his plays was seldom met with such controversies as those seen with Dorota Nieznalska’s *Pasja* [*Passion*]³² or Warlikowski’s *Hamlet*,³³ perhaps because he was generally able to achieve an aesthetically sophisticated theatrical image or encase the nudity in his own contexts and interpretations in such a way that the physiology on show transformed into metaphysical symbols. This was therefore nudity that, though visible, did not fully exploit its emancipatory potential.

Also significant is the question of patriarchy. *Kuszenie cichej Weroniki* [*The Temptation of Quiet Veronica*], based on a short story by Robert Musil, begins with the image of the naked Johannes (Adam Szczyszczaj), who stands before the audience in the pose of the Vitruvian Man. He is the ideal of harmony of spirit and body, symbolizing, according to critics, maturity, perfection, and sensuality based upon beauty. At the other extreme is Demeter, played by Mariusz Kiljan, wild, uncouth, and unbridled in his eroticism, while Veronica (Ewa Skibińska) goes back and forth between the two men. In this case, Johannes’s naked body is a symbol of the ideal. Nudity in Lupa’s work may also denote spiritual exposure, honesty, innocence, and eroticism, but to become part of all these universal themes it must be male nudity. *The Temptation* is interesting material as it contains the potential for a different topic played out by Lupa. And yet this is probably an example of what he has called ‘partial identification with female characters’. From a certain point (more or less the beginning of the millennium) his productions feature recurrent scenes in which older or mature women play a strange kind of erotic-intellectual game with young men. In the renewal of *The Temptation*, Johannes was clearly younger than Veronica. In *Extinction*, the poet Maria (Maja Komorowska) provokes Aleksander (Waldemar Barwiński) to undress.

31 Paweł Leszkowicz, *Nagi mężczyzna. Akt męski w sztuce polskiej po 1945* [*Naked Man: The Male Nude in Polish Art after 1945*] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2012), p. 31.

32 An artistic installation from 2001 comprising a film showing a man working out in a gym as well as a cross with a photograph of a penis superimposed. This was the first case in Poland of an artist being accused of offending religious sentiments, and Nieznalska was initially sentenced to community service (the appellate court subsequently acquitted her).

33 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, Rozmaitości Theatre, Warsaw, premiere 22 October 1999.

In *Persona. Marilyn*,³⁴ the young, naked janitor (Marcin Bosak) makes love to his idol, Marilyn Monroe (Sandra Korzeniak). In *Persona. Ciało Simone* [*Persona: Simone's Body*],³⁵ Elżbieta Vogler (Małgorzata Braunek) improvises on the subject of a mystical-erotic meeting of Simone Weil with Christ along with the young actor Max (Adam Graczyk). In *Poczekalnia 0* [*Waiting Room 0*], a bored wife whose marriage is falling apart (Halina Rasiakówna) allows herself to be seduced by a young graffiti artist (Adam Szczyszczaj). In *Miasto Snu* [*City of Sleep*],³⁶ Arkadina (Maria Maj) faces up to her lust for the character Blue Eyes (Jakub Gierszał). This could be treated as the motif of maturity being enchanted by youth that crops up in many queer works (the most distinct example might be Thomas Mann's 'Death in Venice', or in Poland selected works by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Witold Gombrowicz). Youth (the young man) promises a lack of care, freedom, strength, joy; in short, the life desired by old age – mature, aware and embittered, with the spectre of death looming ever closer on the horizon. But this is perhaps an uninteresting and rather trite trope. A far more interesting interpretation is suggested by the notes that Lupa himself made on the production of Chekhov's *The Seagull* at the Alexandrinsky Theatre.³⁷ *Notatnik Teatralny* magazine reprinted a passage from Lupa's diary featuring Arkadina's internal monologue³⁸ when she tries to hold on to Trigorin, declaring her love to him (he later used this monologue when awakening the character of Arkadina in *City of Sleep*³⁹). It is a monologue in which mysticism blends with eroticism, and acting with sacrifice: Arkadina sacrifices her body and her desire to the younger man, overcoming her shame and embarrassment, and says that her beloved is God to her, and that his presence becomes the air that she breathes. Simultaneously in this monologue, according to Lupa, Arkadina is also an exultant actress who overacts when playing the role of Phaedra in real life. Erotic desire soon turns into a desire for allurements and mastery using her art. The vampiric desire for youth attains its objective through theatre. For theatre to be effective, there must be a sacrifice: of one's body, one's love, one's eroticism, one's shame. And in this way, a potentially socially revolutionary topic – the sexuality of mature women – turns into a narcissistic aesthetic treatise.

This, incidentally, is something that Lupa has often spoken and written about: the creative act has its sources in and is similar to the erotic act. How? It is hard to say, because here we approach the

34 *Persona/Tryptyk. Marilyn* [*Persona/Triptych: Marilyn*], directed by Krystian Lupa, Dramatyczny Theatre, Warsaw, premiere 18 April 2009.

35 *Persona. Ciało Simone* [*Persona: Simone's Body*], directed by Krystian Lupa, Dramatyczny Theatre, Warsaw, premiere 13 February 2010.

36 *Miasto snu* [*City of Sleep*], directed by Krystian Lupa, TR Warsaw, based on Alfred Kubin's novel *Die andere Seite* [*The Other Side*], premiere 5 October 2012.

37 Anton Chekhov, *The Seagull*, directed by Krystian Lupa, Alexandrinsky Theatre, Saint Petersburg, premiere 15 September 2007.

38 Krystian Lupa, 'Teksty z "Dziennika" – "Mewa" petersburska' ['Texts from the *Journal: The St Petersburg Seagull*'], *Notatnik Teatralny* 66-67 (2011/2012).

39 See Maria Maj, 'Arkadina z Arkadii' ['Arkadina from Arcadia'], interview by Joanna Targoń, *Didaskalia* 112 (2012).

metaphysical-esoteric reflections of Lupa himself. Yet several things in this theory boil down to simple truths: erotica for Lupa is synonymous with creation. The need for creativity results from erotic urges and desire:

A play [...] before it becomes an autonomous reality, transforms into a strange entity, a parasitic semi-entity [...] connecting the people revolving around it with slowly emerging fictional events into the only relations of their kind. The existence of the developing play, image, text, in this sublimating, profoundly hidden meaning is very closely linked to eroticism. In any case, that's how I see it. The erotic permeates the work and begins to become its blood. This addiction of the creator to the work suddenly becomes the slavery of an obsession of love, similar to that which appears towards a specific person or towards any other object of longing.⁴⁰

And although Lupa insists that he is just as interested in heterosexual as in homosexual eroticism, his individual preferences can hardly be viewed as immaterial – particularly as he claims that heterosexual eroticism often comes with various types of norms and restrictions attached, which block reflection and the possibility of true (not only erotic) cognition. But he then immediately adds that the majority of homosexuals concentrate excessively on their own difference, leading to the ‘infertile [*sic*] myth of the homosexual’,⁴¹ which threatens to produce a homogeneous enclave focused entirely on proving that a gay person is different from a straight one.

Lupa walks a remarkably fine line with an appreciation for difference, subjective perspectives and the primacy of individual experience on one side, and an inclination towards universality worthy of a monumental philosophical system on the other. Perhaps this is where the secret of his success lies: he is able to transfer margins and minorities into higher fields and registers. To lend universalism to the individual, and insert the radical and distinct into the framework of myth. This theatre is defined by transgression rather than subversion, mysticism over camp, rituals and not confrontation, aura and landscape instead of beliefs and views, and peripheral utopias in the place of local activism. Lupa's theatre is seldom outright political, addressing the current problems of social debate. It is also seldom humorous. It is hardly ever self-mocking. Lupa treats theatre deadly seriously. Even if he sometimes permits himself and his actors to conduct silly experiments, to stray and fail, this is always motivated by a much more important goal that can be summed up as the aspiration to fuller/truer existence. This is no laughing matter.

6.

Joanna Krakowska calls Lupa's (and Warlikowski's) theatre ‘homosexual theatre’, accusing it of ‘an excessively essential attachment to gender categories with a concurrently loose treatment of its cultural representations. In other words, one might venture the argument that

⁴⁰ Beata Matkowska-Święś, *Podróż do Nieuchwytnego. Rozmowy z Krystianem Lupa* [*A Journey to the Unattainable: Discussions with Krystian Lupa*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003), p. 230.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 237–38.

this is theatre of gender transgression and sexual essence.⁴² This is hard to argue with, considering Lupa's patriarchalism and his stubborn reversion to a universal (male) perspective and to turning women characters into models or extensions of his own beliefs or quandaries. The queer nature of Lupa's work would therefore comprise exhibiting the subject of non-normative sexuality, the naked body, and creating protagonists with a complicated and unconventional erotic life. At the same time, however, this is all shifted into the sphere of myth, metaphysics or exotica. This mechanism is rather clear in the first part of *The Sleepwalkers*, a play which had a huge potential to become radical, political, queer theatre. Yet this did not ensue: Lupa decided upon a historical costume, laying great emphasis on what, after the premiere, Jan Błoński called 'genericness',⁴³ meaning simply the tribulations of characters without any broader historiosophical context (many reviewers disagreed with this opinion).

Particularly significant in *The Sleepwalkers* is the character of Bertrand (Piotr Skiba). In Hermann Broch's novel, he is a deserter and financier, the president of Central Rhine Shipping, and a homosexual. The programme for the production included a reprinted comment by Broch, who wrote the following about his character: 'The radicalization of erotic fiction, until the choice (acceptance) of homosexuality, from which others flee, or which they fight against, had to end in failure, conscious and yet shameful, just as the realization of the drive to infinity through travels had to endure failure.'⁴⁴ Failure here denotes the character's suicide following a conversation with Esch, who has threatened to inform the police of his orientation. In Lupa's play, Bertrand is there at the beginning with Elisabeth (Katarzyna Gniewkowska) – this is part of a discussion from the previous volume in Broch's trilogy, *Pasenov, or Romanticism*. The man professes his love to a woman, yet at the same time bids her farewell forever, because for him the ideal of love is realized in abandonment, in 'eternal apartness'. Later in the play, which concentrates on the fortunes of Esch (Jan Frycz), Bertrand is referred to only as an influential capitalist. Arriving at an establishment for homosexuals, Esch also learns of Bertrand's orientation. This is a unique scene. In the background, the rhythmic music⁴⁵ of Jacek Ostaszewski resounds, strongly ornamental with a distinct clarinet solo that might evoke associations with klezmer music. The mood is rendered well by a description by a reviewer from *Teatr* magazine:

We hear Marek Kalita's 'tacky', affected, stretched-out vocals, which clash with the cabaret-like, strongly rhythmic phrasing of the accordion; we watch the apparently perverse, yellow-and-black costumes of the

42 Krakowska, *Democracy*, p. 337.

43 Jan Błoński, 'Po premierze' ['After the Premiere'], *Didaskalia* 5 (1995), p. 5.

44 Hermann Broch, 'Komentarze' ('Commentary'), in the programme for *The Sleepwalkers: Esch, or Anarchy* (Kraków: Stary Theatre, 1995), p. 5, http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/programy/2013_12/57337/lunatycy_teatr_stary_krakow_1995.pdf [accessed 16 July 2019].

45 This piece of music is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLf2O-2JRXs4> [accessed 16 July 2019]. Ostaszewski himself said of this music that he wanted to create a 'narcotic/preentious atmosphere, to produce a suspicious and at the same time exotic place', quoted in Schorlemmer, p. 288.

musicians, gossiping lovers frozen at their tables, unexpectedly allowing the (after all almost unbearably kitsch) image to be sucked in.⁴⁶

On one hand, then, we have an exotic atmosphere created by music and costumes, verging on the Orientalization of homosexuality, while on the other we observe a certain camp exaggeration, visible in particular in the character of the effeminate gay Alfons (Marek Kalita). These two extremes – radical otherness and subversive stereotype – are revealed only for a moment, as the central point of the scene is the character of Harry (Paweł Miśkiewicz in bracelets and with sidelocks attached to one side of his face), whose monologue about his love for Bertrand universalizes the question of homosexuality and elevates it to the heights of mystic experience.

One of the final scenes features a meeting between Bertrand and Esch, realized in the convention of an oneiric dream. Bertrand is stylized as a demonic Christ, a semi-divine being, holy sacrifice or Antichrist. Again the homosexual is clad in a modernist imaginarium which Lupa evidently cannot escape. As a result, queer elements in *The Sleepwalkers*, as throughout Lupa's work, are subject to a mechanism of depoliticization, universalization, sublimation and exotification. Of course, it is only right to ask whether it is indeed queer we are speaking of here. Just a decade or two ago one might have argued that these productions were a counter to heteronormativity.⁴⁷ Yet today this is perhaps too little. To return to Bogucki's metaphor, in the Polish queer laboratory, Lupa's theatre is a partially successful experiment, which on the one hand introduces non-heteronormative eroticism, characters and themes to repertory theatre, and on the other strips them of politicism and individuality and immerses them in a narcissistic/metaphysical discourse.

Additionally, rather than defining queer in Lupa's work, we might use a metaphor. In a conversation with Bertrand, Elisabeth has a shawl with a unicorn embroidered on it. This queer emblem⁴⁸ in Lupa's oeuvre has the status of an alchemical symbol. In the sketched design for the shawl, the director noted: 'Something like a religious flag. Between alchemical metaphysics and the kitsch of devotional articles.'⁴⁹ This is what the queer aspects look like in Lupa's work: 'something like a flag', and at times 'something like a banner'. Locked between metaphysics and kitsch, distinctly visible, but never literal, always with a symbolic charge.

Translated by Ben Koschalka

46 Paweł Łopatka, 'Konstelacje' ['Constellations'], *Teatr* 1995, no. 7–8, http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/17513.html?josso_assertion_id=5F3078779F2120C7 [accessed 17 July 2019].

47 In 1995, when *The Sleepwalkers* premiered in Warsaw, Katarzyna Kozyra, Artur Żmijewski and Grzegorz Kowalski produced the exhibition *Ja i AIDS* [*Me and AIDS*], which, despite stereotypically linking AIDS with homosexuality, was a much more radical and politically current project concerning queer issues than Lupa's play. This confirms what critics have noted on a number of occasions: in post-transformation Poland, the visual arts surpassed theatre in the context of queer investigations.

48 On the queerness of unicorns, see Łukasz Jaskuła and Kornelia Sobczak, 'Z podniesionym rogiem' [With Raised Horn], *Dialog* 2019, no. 1.

49 Krystian Lupa, *Rysunki* [*Drawings*] (Olszanica: BOSZ, 2009), p. 99.

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ABSTRACT

Stanisław Godlewski

Devotional Articles and a Unicorn: Queer Aspects in the Work and Bibliography of Krystian Lupa

The author analyses queer elements in the work and biography of Krystian Lupa. Owing to the director's unique philosophy and distinctive aesthetic, this is a subject that has not previously been researched. Godlewski analyses selected topics in the director's productions as well as some of his remarks on eroticism, politics and homosexuality. The author notes that queer aspects in Lupa's work are usually bereft of direct references to the socio-political reality, and that what was once revolutionary may today seem reactionary.

Keywords: Krystian Lupa, queer, homosexuality, biography.