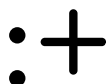


Between Encounter and Change of Reality, between
Participation and Emancipation

—In Conversation about Challenges Facing Social Theatre:
Agata Adamiecka-Sitek, Elżbieta Depta, Agnieszka Jakimiak,
Mikołaj Lewicki, Martyna Peszko Tomasz Rakowski,
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The discussion that follows was recorded on 28 November 2015 at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw.

The occasion was the conclusion of the 'Pop-Up' project prepared by Agata Siwiak and Grzegorz Niziołek – an anti-theatrical installation where often-ephemeral actions took place in a purpose-built tent, located on the campus of the University of Economics in Kraków, in the public space of the city. The project lasted from 17 October to 15 November 2015. An important current presented within its framework involved artistic practices focused on interaction with various communities including Polish Roma (Romville, directed by Elżbieta Depta, performed by Martyna Peszko and others), children from the orphanage in Szamocin (Stay, Stay, directed by Michał Borczuch, performed by Krzysztof Zarzecki and others), and the Polish-Ukrainian community of Volhynia (Swarka, directed by Katarzyna Szyngiera, co-written with Michał Wlekły, performed by Martyna Peszko and others). These productions constitute the starting point for this discussion – with the event in the public space of Kraków entitled Spleen, organized as part of 'Pop-Up' by Wiktor Rubin and Jolanta Janiczak.

These works are important to Polish social theatre in recent years. This conversation had the goal of outlining broader perspectives of this current of artistic practice in Poland, therefore along with these ventures the panellists reference the three-year project 'Wielkopolska: Revolutions' (developed by Agata Siwiak in villages of western Poland), in which artists mentioned above had taken part, along with Agnieszka Jakimiak, who participated in the discussion and who collaborates with director Weronika Szczawińska. Another endeavour that is discussed is the anthropological-artistic project 'Prologue' carried out by the Kolektyw Terenowy (The Field Collective) under the supervision of Tomasz Rakowski in Broniów and Ostałówek, villages in central Poland. The discussion also touches upon Dorota Ogrodzka's project Brides, produced as part of 'Prologue' (see Dorota Ogrodzka's article in this issue of PTJ). Tomasz Rakowski also cites the action Tears Purchase by visual artists Łukasz Surowiec and Alicja Rogalska, carried out in Lublin as part of activities of the Socially Engaged Art Laboratory 'Rewiry', led by Szymon Pietrasiewicz.

These projects, of course, do not exhaust the subject of community-work oriented art or social theatre in Poland at present. The subject is complemented by focuses on other ventures which are discussed in articles published in this issue of Polish Theatre Journal. Meanwhile,

problems outlined in this discussion seem to lie at the centre of current reflections on the place of art in emancipatory social activities in Poland; conclusions drawn from it also apply to problems and phenomena discussed in other articles in the present issue, focussed upon productions, actions and performances in the field of social culture.

Igor Stokfiszewski: Our discussion serves the purpose of characterizing social theatre in Poland. We shall talk about participatory enterprises, social impact oriented theatre, art focused on community, about practices that have established a noticeable 'social turn' in culture. We want to focus on issues relating to the influence of our practices on the quality of life and on the transformation of reality through art. In the background of our discussion lie questions about the role of the artist in process of social emancipation, as well as dilemmas associated with experiences of successes and failures of such initiatives.

Recent years have brought about a series of ventures in the field of social theatre, which have shaped a distinct trend within theatrical and socio-theatrical practices. Those of us involved in this discussion are among curators, directors, actors, and dramaturges – among people who co-create this trend. But in my opinion a discussion about the social impact of theatre should not be conducted solely among artists. The presence of sociologists and anthropologists is in order – people who can look at theatre from the outside perspective as a part of a network of social institutions and practices, a structural element of the reality of human, social and political experience.

I'll start therefore with a question to Tomasz Rakowski. Tomasz, you're an anthropologist and an ethnographer, and for years you have conducted your action research in collaboration with artists who animate local communities, among other places in villages of the south of the Mazovia region. Society-oriented practices frequently call for the empowerment of the involved participants and for the dissemination of culture through transcending divisions between professional and non-professional artists. They refer, therefore, to emancipatory and democratisation ambitions. In your opinion, how should one approach work with communities in a manner that would empower them and transcend cultural distinctions?

Tomasz Rakowski: Let me begin by recalling the experiments of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner and their concept of the transition from ritual to theatre, or from the sphere of happening culture to theatre. Turner cites an event described by Bronisław Malinowski in his *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, in which one of the young people climbs to the top of a tree and threatens suicide, because matrilineal cousins of his father intend to expel him from the village. It is an event which for an ethnographer has many meanings as well as a theatrical dimension, but also contains a kind of human drama. Turner claims that as ethnographers we cannot relate such types of experience in the form of field notes, anthropological texts, description or journalistic features. We need to perform such a reality. Then he began experimenting, in theatre communities; on academic campuses or theatres, he would arrange re-enactments of situations he had experienced during his fieldwork.

Bryant K. Alexander worked similarly, re-enacting along with colleagues in Los Angeles the behaviour of street vendors. These for the most part included Mexican immigrants, who would approach cars, trying to sell oranges or some trinket. The drivers approached would react very aggressively at times. Alexander decided to perform this situation on his academic campus, with all the elements of uncertainty, aggression and danger. It was material that could only be tapped into via a paratheatrical situation. Both examples refer to the practice of performing reality or culture.

Theatrical performances taking place in institutions, in which representatives of different communities are invited to participate, determining a different direction. They refer to thinking about an artistic or theatrical project that opens up to an encounter with a given social group, and creating for it an opportunity of expression, of providing a comment within the framework of a theatrical institution. In a sense, this is a step further from the examples I've cited.

Still, I would also like to speak about a third direction, the one closest to me. Which concerns what happens when a theatrical situation moves inside a given environment, within a given group. During ethnographic and animation projects in villages of southern Mazovia, we worked with theatre artists including Wojtek Ziemilski and Dorota Ogrodzka, a director who has worked in the Polski Theatre in Bydgoszcz and most recently in Warsaw's Powszechny Theatre. Dorota worked with rural women. It turned out that those neighbours did not know one another, did not meet or work together in public space; they took care of their children and homes. Dorota began by talking with them about their experience of their wedding day; together, they looked through wedding albums, at wedding dresses hanging in the closet. Often they were already divorced, or in very difficult family situations. Dorota had only been married a few months before. Finally, they came up with the idea together of putting on their wedding dresses again and parading through the village as 'brides'.

And so things happened. It was about reclaiming the moment of going out among the people, the moment of their wedding ceremonies and receptions, about using their own biographical repertoire. A procession through the village was held, there was a huge wedding cake prepared and offered around by these 'brides'. The moment of the procession of the 'brides' through the village in their wedding dresses, already damaged or no longer suiting the woman's current figure in many cases, was performative in nature. It drew on their own biographical repertoire and took place within a rural community, and finally made those women present as a group within that community.

I cite this example to draw your attention to resources we draw on while working on an artistic event, and to biographical, cultural or social equipment we reach for, often very problematic in its nature. In such cases, the problem of constructing a stage on which all that would take place appears. It is a key issue for me. That stage should be produced via cooperation. By truly collaborative work, not in the shadows of an institution or of the project of a person who is ultimately directing or steering a given situation. The situation should take control over what is happening. It is very important for me to construct a stage in a way that the event's dynamics develop such power as to take control over the event in question.

IS: Tomasz outlined three approaches to theatre operations in contact with communities: performing cultural practices of a given society, involving its representatives in institutionalised artistic activities such as a theatrical performance, and an expression from one's own repertoire of cultural behaviours in collaboration with an artist. Let's look closer at the second of the discussed approaches. *Romville* is a famous production including a Roma community, directed in 2015 by Elżbieta Depta at the Polski Theatre in Bydgoszcz.

Elżbieta Depta: Yes. That was the main premise of our work: to include the Roma community of Bydgoszcz in the show's creation.

IS: How did the work on the production progress? In what way was the Roma community included?

ED: The material for the journalistic feature, on the basis of which the script was created, was collected throughout Poland. It consisted of conversations with Roma people and non-Roma people on two topics. The first was a racist incident, which had taken place during a Miedź Legnica football match, where some people wore scarfs saying 'Gypsy Hunters'. The second topic was mixed Polish-Roma married couples.

The material was first presented in the form of a press feature to the actors, then we proceeded to performing stories of Roma and of Poles who had become a part of Roma culture and community through marriage. We attempted, therefore, to get closer to the culture, to get to know it, but with the assumption that we would never become Roma. A playful aspect, shall we say, was inherent in our work. At a certain point, the actors dressed up as Roma, playing with convention, stereotypes and imagined ideas about the Roma.

Most important moment in creating the production was involving the Roma community from Bydgoszcz in the show. We invited a band, Jamaro Sveto, to collaborate with us, and subsequently an audition was held for a Roma actress, who performs in the production. We were able to actually involve Roma in the work on the production. They are part of the cast. Roma from Bydgoszcz come to see the performances, a large part of their community attended the premiere.

The most important cultural problem in working with these communities is that Roma don't go to theatre. For instance, part of the Roma community walked out of a performance of the show in Kraków after ten minutes. They felt offended by its content. One could say they protested in this way against an event that was culturally foreign to them. The question is, can theatre become culturally close enough for them to find their place in it? It seems to me that for a large part of the Roma, the answer is no. They are closer to music. The cultural inadequacy of theatre in the case of work with the Roma community manifests itself very strongly.

IS: For whom does theatre exist? And to whom does it belong?

ED: Exactly.

IS: While speaking about *Romville*, Elżbieta has acknowledged the practice of opening theatre up to different communities, of formulating

an invitation for such communities to be at the theatre, of creating a stage for them, of giving them a voice. And Tomasz, in explaining for us the *Brides* event organized by Dorota Ogrodzka in the village of Broniów, has placed emphasis on constructing a stage or 'theatre' within the space of these communities. The *Brides* project reminds me of another theatre endeavour in a non-institutional environment, well known recently. In October 2015 this event took place, prepared by Wiktor Rubin and Jolanta Janiczak, titled *Spleen*. It was a procession through the city centre of Kraków. It was to be guided by the idea of celebrating spleen and mourning. City authorities denied the procession access to the central market square; in their opinion, it was too associated with the funeral procession of the late president, Lech Kaczynski, who died in a catastrophic jetliner crash on 10 April 2010 near Smolensk in Russia, and was then buried in Kraków.

According to the creators of the project, this was an instance of censorship. However, the example of the 'brides' procession has us pose a question about the adequacy of the approach of Rubin and Janiczak. They placed their artistic experience over rules governing a given public space, over its own repertoire, in this case the human saturation in Kraków's Market Square with celebratory activities, but also over the everyday practices of its regular users – residents, merchants, and so forth.

Ogrodzka, on the other hand, drew on the rules and personal repertoire of the community of women from Broniów, ultimately placing this over her artistic experience. Which of these approaches is more valuable from the point of view of the social impact of art? Should work with communities take place within the framework of principles of art or of cultural rules of a given community? How would sociology answer such a question?

Mikołaj Lewicki: There is a tension between what has been described as the logic of the artistic field – that is to say, something that happens within a theatrical space, within a theatre's walls and on its terms – and the rights governing public space. This tension can be understood in various ways. It can be reduced to a question as to which way artists are to transmit their content in a space other than theatre, but it can also be shown in the example of the Rubin and Janiczak march you have cited in very practical – one might even say brutal – terms. Suddenly in a public space there are rules functioning that are non-transparent, which are not solely linked to what is determined by the law protecting artists from direct censorship, for instance. Here there was no explicit censorship; there was a kind of informal pressure from the municipal office. Those two logics – artistic and public – could not agree with one another.

My impression is that they cannot agree with each other often, when art is committed to ambitions beyond the dimensions of the representation and discussion of reality and once it enters the realm of some kind of intervention. We are discussing two approaches. One involves artists going out into public space to be inspired and to invite this space to their domain, to the theatre, for example. I would add that this approach has often been regarded as avant-garde, innovative, stepping beyond the boundaries of art. But perhaps we are missing something that Tomasz Rakowski mentioned, rather provocatively. I mean here the limitations

of this strategy. Tomasz has suggested that by employing it, one neither obtains a good picture of social reality nor does one achieve the effect of changing it. One only tries to feed the reality of theatre by what happens outside of it, and tries to open theatre up to experiences from the outside.

It seems to me that if the focal points of this kind of experiment are groups that have trouble expressing themselves in their own space, then letting them in, inviting them to the theatre, is a very big challenge and is often associated with huge misunderstandings. I say this based on what I have noticed as a researcher in the functioning of cultural institutions. One of the basic problems of culture institutions in Poland is the issue of non-participation. More and more rich repertoires of events are created – not only in theatres, but also in municipal culture centres in small towns. The facilities at the disposal of these events are ever better in the sense of physical space and organisational resources. But people still don't want to come. Why? Because that space is defined by the rules of a social group or social groups that are not necessarily in symbiosis with groups being invited to participate, or whose voice the aforementioned groups would like to hear. Theatre space remains foreign to excluded, marginalized groups or for the rural class, which is to say farmers, workers or shop employees, for instances. It is not their space. What's more, it is a space in which rules apply that they associate with repression. The question is, how can one move past that?

The gesture of stepping beyond theatre, of diagnosing social problems and inviting communities marked by those problems to the theatre to give them voice, is not enough to diffuse the tension I'm speaking of. This stepping beyond, I feel, either ends up with artists concluding that they became the victim – that is, they entered a space they don't understand, a space which proves coarse, which generates conflict, and they fail in that space – or ends up resembling a landing by Martians. In the latter case artistic activities are conducted with very good motives, artists and culture animators make a great effort to include local communities in their work, but they generally do it in their own language and on their own terms. They do it fragmentarily, in the end result. They care about performing one activity, which proves a success or not. It is evaluated from various perspectives – from the perspective of actors, critics, etc., as successful or not – and that's the end of it. While the community in which the said events take place often ends up having an 'artist-shaped hole' once the Martians have returned to their planet.

I would therefore put the issue posed by Tomasz Rakowski in sharper perspective. I would say that if an intervention is not thought through and if it is not clear what it is really about, that is, if the relation between the artistic field and public space is not problematized and if those two languages are not translated into one another, it will always end up in failure for both the sides.

ED: Referring to *Romville*, I have a feeling that what you are talking about did not occur. The material was a journalistic feature story, it concerned stories of the Roma, it concerned their matters. We looked for interlocutors in order to intervene on their behalf. One more thing: these were stories of ordinary people and we made an artistic decision to speak with the language we picked up in conversations. It was not a literary language. The text had no literary value. Those were everyday stories of

people we had spoken with. And as it came about that text was understood in two cultures. When Roma came to the performance, they identified with what it contained of their sense of humour, with references to their culture. Many Roma said that it was authentic for them, that it accurately presented their social structure, and that they identify with the characters. And for us some of those jokes, for example, were completely incomprehensible and we didn't know why they were laughing. That was possible only because we really wanted to intervene on their behalf and we began speaking their language.

Krzysztof Zarzecki: I'd like to refer to the issue of parachuting, to the Martian-invasion issue. We worked with [director] Michał Borczuch and with children from the orphanage in Szamocin in the Wielkopolska region. Three times. When we first went there with the whole team, we actually had a plan for change. We have no therapeutic background; none of us is a teacher. Within a week of starting the work, we decided that we wouldn't continue to ask ourselves what we could give them, how we could change their world, because we'd never be able to do it anyway. We would return to our Berlins or LAs and they would still be there. So we adopted a different position: what they could offer us, not what we could offer them. Then this work turned into honest, open fun. We stopped pretending that we'd do anything for those children except that we could become friends and show them some technical innovations, Canon cameras. We simply stopped pretending that we'd be able to offer them anything.

Agata Siwiak: I believe that both of these strategies being discussed are fraught with dangers because socio-artistic practices are a difficult space in which one must move with great sensitivity and be one's own biggest critic. It is a field in which false intentions might manifest themselves – on both sides, the creators and communities – as well as a lack of empathy, attention and communication. An artist or a curator enters an order that is foreign to them, an anthropological perspective switches on – and that community might become chiefly a field of research, a space of practice for artistic strategies. That is dangerous because that anthropological distance can't prevent honest, open interpersonal relationships.

However, I wouldn't dismiss all strategies of working with communities. In the case of Romville, the artists, being in a privileged social position, having a theatre at their disposal, invited Roma people so that their voices could resound in a place that resonates. A third of the audience at the premiere was Roma – it was a very symbolic, socially important situation.

In the case of working with communities, aiming to save the world is certainly erroneous thinking. We can learn something from a given group, and that given group can learn something from us; we can try on the basis of this work to work out something completely new. For me, a measure of authenticity in encounters I have curated has been that artists with really small budgets, often in poor conditions, agree to this adventure. Therefore on that side there exists the need for such encounters.

For a community, in its turn, the use of infrastructure to which we have access, that is theatres, galleries, having their voice heard there, is very important. When we travelled with performances from Szamocin, presenting works created as part of the 'Wielkopolska: Revolutions'

project, it was very important for the participating children that their voice could resound at Studio Theatre in Warsaw, for example, and at the National Stry Theatre in Kraków. Over the course of three years of implementing projects within 'Wielkopolska: Revolutions', we worked with fourteen groups; for all of them, entry to places that had previously been inaccessible, remote, was important. Some of those people had never been to the theatre.

IS: Agata mentioned the missionary criterion: the imperative of social work which lends authenticity to participatory undertakings carried out within institutional frameworks. Would you agree?

Martyna Peszko: Both in *Romville* and in *Swarka* – a show broaching the subject of Polish-Ukrainian relations by touching upon the history of the Volhynia massacres in 1943 when Ukrainian nationalists murdered their Polish neighbours – the dream was to give voice to the Other. Whether it was Roma in the case of *Romville* or people who had survived the Volhynia massacres in the case of *Swarka*. All the production problems along the lines of 'we have no money to implement this or that artistic idea' were of secondary importance to us. The real problems involved communicating with the Roma community, for instance. No one came to the auditions. Newspapers ads turned out not to have reached the Roma because they don't read the newspapers in which we had placed ads. We had to go to them and personally invite them to take part in the show. In the course of our work, we had problems resulting from the fact that we had to go out of the theatre to the people on behalf of whom we wanted to speak, or for whom we wanted to create a space of expression.

ED: I think that production problems really always arise from the subject. They appear in the moment in which the final objective is some artistic effect. Our goal was to give voice to a community. In that moment, production problems – the questions of how to manage to stay within the budget, to buy the cheapest trainers – didn't constitute a barrier.

TR: From what I said, one might get the impression that some secret knowledge exists about community and that if one prepares well enough, if one discovers this knowledge, one learns the needs of children from Szamocin or other environments, for instance, then on that basis one will be able to create a project that will be adequate for that community and which will respond exactly to how that environment works. For me, a remarkable discovery was that those who are paratroopers, the landing Martians, have a much greater sensitivity and understanding while using artistic tools than researchers do, ethnologists and sociologists with their detailed preparations.

Such activities paradoxically create a more real situation resulting in partner cooperation. This fact does not in any way invalidate pre-knowledge of the environment resulting from journalistic, ethnographic or sociological work. Neither does it invalidate the fact that those environments should retain their own cultural repertoire and modes of behaviour. But I have noticed that during the implementation of projects, a kind of an encounter occurs that produces a new quality, a third logic.

Something happens that exceeds both the expectations and mode of behaviour of the local environment as well as expectations and behaviour brought by theatre people or artists from other areas of art. A new kind of collaboration is created, changing those who arrive with their project and also changing and affecting the environment in which they arrive.

IS: So far our discussion has been bipolar. We spoke about inviting communities to the theatre, or about artists going out to communities, into public space. Tomasz, in turn, has noted that in the process of translation between the field of art and a community, a certain autonomous space appears. Let's keep that observation in mind.

Mirosław, we are talking about social theatre but also about documentary theatre, non-fiction theatre. In journalistic work, the distance between the author and the protagonist seems to be shorter than in the case of art, where the institutional environment creates a certain surplus. How do you, from a journalistic perspective, view the issues of lending a voice, of empowerment of the subject or other goals that stand behind activities involving other people? You have experience in short journalistic distance as well as in the extended one, if one may say, through your dramaturgical work in theatre productions.

Mirosław Wlekły: *Swarka*, directed by Kasia Szyngiera, which I co-wrote, was neither a direct going out to the community we were discussing nor an invitation, in the full sense of the word, to the theatre. None of the protagonists of our reportage, our show, have seen it so far, and perhaps they never will due to their old age. In spite of our invitations to come and see the show in Bydgoszcz, Warsaw and Kraków, our subjects often do not have the strength to leave their homes.

When we were starting our work, I did not think in theatre terms. At that stage, I was only interested in journalistic material. Kasia, meanwhile, worked all along with the idea that this textual material would soon have to be translated to theatrical language. I wasn't thinking about that yet, at that point. I was just preparing another journalistic feature report, like the ones I had been preparing for years for magazines. Actually, only once the report was ready, once the material had been collected, only then did I begin to wonder what one could do with it on stage. In Kasia's case, I think, this process was reversed: during research, she thought in terms of theatre and it was probably only later that she focused on the fact that from the collected material we would have to write a report. Only later did we make it into a script together.

Agata Adamiecka-Sitek: But you're not talking about the protagonists. I understand that the question concerns strategies of lending a voice. This issue also remains unclear in what we have heard so far about *Romville* from its creators, Elżbieta Depta and Martyna Peszko. We have not learned anything about what seems the most difficult aspect, that is, how can one define the terms on which one can lend a voice in institutional theatre to someone from the outside, from beyond the 'theatre of a cultural city' community, let's call it, without objectifying them.

MP: In *Romville* and *Swarka*, the same strategy was applied. Voices from the protagonists of reports by Justyna Pobiedzińska in *Romville*

and Mirosław in *Swarka* were quoted literally in performances, word for word. We watch the recorded statements on video, one to one. In the case of *Romville*, we also have actors who tell how they understand what their characters have to say, attempting to look at the world through their eyes. Also attempting to respond to this as artists, not remaining passive in relation to it. We also feature Roma actors who also have a voice in recorded statements, and the chance to express what it is for them to experience theatre and how they feel as Roma in Polish society. Such an effort has been made in both cases.

AA-S: Theatre in fact is an institution that has quite rigidly defined rules. Artistic language is highly codified; people who are associated with this medium can read it fluently. They know what a performance is, what its cognitive, social and aesthetic functions can be, how it constructs reference to the world and so on. The inclusion into the structure of a production of the voice of someone radically external is, in fact, a quotation. We can do anything with a quotation, we can also completely instrumentalise such a voice. Perhaps direct quotation is the least safe, relatively – the least empowering strategy.

AS: In *Romville*, we have Roma actors on stage.

AA-S: Excuse the comparison but that sounds like the description of a nineteenth-century ethnographic exhibition. Those also had ‘real Indians’. The question is how can we open up theatre space so that it could become a space for a special kind of encounter?

Agnieszka Jakimiak: I don’t agree that in *Swarka* materials are used on a one-to-one basis. I also don’t agree that this production is in any way trying to include a community into theatrical language. It’s not about that. Journalistic material is a source for the creation of a production about languages, discourses and prejudices that are in force in Poland against Ukrainians.

AS: This is true. It seems to me that for this reason this production is very much needed. It includes relations from both Polish and Ukrainian sides, which appear both as source text spoken by actors and through video projections, in which we see participants in those events. However, it is not a documentary in a pure sense – those stories are deconstructed through the experience of theatre, memory, as well as personal attitude of artists towards those events. For instance, the actors do not simply perform characters but enter into relations with them. This production does not demand truth – the creators knew such a desire would be doomed to fail, but perhaps it can help include the Ukrainian perspective into the knowledge of Poles about the Volhynia massacres, which as we know has been strongly appropriated by right-wing discourse.

AJ: It is indeed a very inter-theatrical narrative. Here we activate critical procedures intended to open us, bring us closer or, as you’ve said, prepare us for some process of exclusion. Therefore, we are not dealing de facto with an encounter.

AS: This took place at the level of journalistic work. In the theatre, in turn, this encounter became transposed, translated into theatrical strategies. I think each of these projects is different. In *Romville*, rules of encounter are appointed by the director, guided by her theatrical strategies and within the framework of those rules she grants voice to the Roma. The production involving the children from Szamocin is something altogether different. I feel, besides, that the third encounter with the children from Szamocin itself is also different from the two previous ones, in which a slightly different creative team took part.

KZ: That was because composer Marcin Masecki didn't want to integrate with the team. He claimed he wouldn't go to Szamocin because he was afraid.

AS: That's not the point.

KZ: I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that.

AS: Marcin Masecki declared from the beginning that he would compose music and conduct rehearsals with local musicians playing live in the production. Along with Antek Beksiak, who was responsible for musical dramaturgy, they included with this a different community from the region. While Masecki said from the beginning that he was not interested in working with children, he had the right to do so. The fact that this project was different from previous productions lay in the employment of different theatrical aesthetics, a different way of working. The previous productions came mostly from improvisation, and with this one we're practically dealing with an opera. For the children it was also an interesting new adventure. They learned to use different theatrical conventions.

One can't always expect that the creative team's only task that's motivating a project is to give a voice to a community. These are not documentaries but multi-layered artistic works created through mediation and in a social process, but also marked by strategies and artistic conventions brought by the artists. They're the ones who should propose clear rules of that cooperation, because they're the ones inviting everyone into it. Let's remember, however, that such projects are dynamic processes, resulting from relational tensions...

MP: *Romville* is really about intolerance. When we've performed it after events around the current problem and issue of refugees, it's clear that it concerns not so much the Roma community but us, Poles, and our various attitudes towards a community that's different from us.

ED: I placed the greatest emphasis on experiences of actors confronted with a foreign culture. In this sense, this is not a show about Roma, poor Roma and their terrible and sad position, but about actors trying to become Roma, trying to recreate their story with the assumption that it's impossible. Other documentary materials in that production are excerpts from footage recorded in rehearsal, statements of actors from the beginning of the process to the very end, the premiere. It is also a documentary about the change in those actors, about their evolution from people who never took any interest in that culture into experts in the field.

MW: The press story which formed the basis for *Swarka* was constructed a hundred percent from statements of our interlocutors. It contains not a word of commentary. But the statements are, of course, chosen solely by us. We used ten or even just five percent of the material we'd collected for months. Already at that stage, our protagonists had been excluded from the creative process. They had no influence over which of their statements would make it into the text. But we tried to be honest in this selection, to present everything they'd tried to convey. A feature story is not press information, where objectivism is the most important aspect, which even in this most minimalist genre of journalism is difficult to achieve. This doesn't mean, however, that the feature, even though it is always subjective, should not be honest.

ML: I think it's time we unpacked the notion of social engagement in theatre. That contains an awful lot. It contains criticism, mentioned by Martyna. I have the impression that you spoke in fact about the critical function of theatre, about the fact that theatre actually locates certain experiences that are marginalized or difficult: it takes conflicts out into the open and shows them to the public. I think Polish theatre is in this comfortable position that this voice is also heard, this theatre resonates and, what's more, in various places and various groups, institutions. However, what seems to me crucial in a discussion of social engagement in theatre is the question of conditions under which entry to a given environment can succeed.

In the research we conducted, 'Culture and Development', we asked ourselves about participation. We concluded that participatory quality of culture is minimal, if it's understood in a way that people who're recipients of an action or, in a broad sense, local communities, should have a say in the formulation of the message, in the creative process or in defining the function of institutions that operate on their behalf, for example. Regardless of whether it's a municipal culture centre or a theatre, participation practically doesn't exist. Rarely are audiences heard, very rarely are they put in different roles than that of, bluntly, recipients. At times they can be participants, in the role of amateur artists collaborating with professionals in a professional space, but I understand stakes are highest in a situation when amateurs have the same impact on the final shape of the message as the professionals.

Participation gets started in a very particular place. It's already underway when one's trying to diagnose the problem that the message of the venture is aimed to refer to. Here, in my opinion, the real problem begins. Is a professional artist ready in fact to agree to a collaborative definition of problems that a given venture aims to concern its other participants with, those of a community they are working with? This can be problematic because it means that it is hard for them to define the vision, hard for them to control it, hard for them to set out a clear goal at the very beginning.

There's one more very important aspect. Even if one invites amateurs, groups, communities for co-creation, and one creates a production in a theatre, the question that remains is what will we do with it later? The effect of withdrawal, of the departure of the spacecraft, appears once more. Theatre has a structural problem, because in theatre you can't only perform shows about the unemployed, if one defines the problem of a local community as huge unemployment, for instance.

I will refer to what [director] Krystian Lupa has recently said. He claims that he wishes theatres were not only theatres but culture centres. It seems to me that the answer lies here. When theatre pursues objectives leading to participation and social engagement, it must stop thinking only about the stage space, about the stage-audience relationship. If it truly is an enterprise that is to have a high level of participation, then the boundary of the stage has to be exceeded, it must be supplemented by other ventures in which cooperation with groups recognized as valid, with local communities, is really treated seriously. Otherwise the effect of the gap that remains once the artists have left is crushing. Sometimes it's better to leave those people alone.

AA-S: You touch upon the question that's recently been under lively discussion in relation to public theatre. It was very strongly articulated in Dragan Klaić's *Resetting the Stage: Public Theatre Between the Market and Democracy*, published in Polish translation by the Theatre Institute. The author states clearly that the formula we'd call today a culture centre would be very close to him as a basic, precise understanding of public theatre. In Poland, theatre is still understood more in terms of high modernism. Public theatre in Poland is still repertory theatre, very reluctant to share its position with places defined otherwise, and not especially prone to internal reform. It attempts instead to fortify its high position, fearing that a step towards becoming a culture centre would lead to loss of its identity.

TR: It's a key methodological problem. In the field of participatory art, working as Claire Bishop presents in *Artificial Hells*, we're simply caught up in different regimes. There's the regime of the artistic field, where the point of arrival is some effect, some product. And it's a completely incredible hindrance because even in projects assuming first and foremost that it's the interaction that counts, the relation with people, some common road, the demands later for institutions, galleries or the path of artistic career are for a product.

On the other hand, Claire Bishop says quite clearly, there's the ethical regime which primarily requires that this action makes ethical, social, participatory sense – and at that moment what was critical and artistic somehow disappears. There's a moment, for example, in building social knowledge, when we discover that someone we're talking to, with whom we are collaborating, is producing their own theory, is producing their own social knowledge, they're simply a very strong subject, they're a person that in some way is able to see through our plans. I'm thinking of what two authors, Douglas Holmes and George Marcus, have described. They're ethnographers who conducted interviews with politicians including an interview with Jean-Marie Le Pen. It turned out in the course of that interview that he took control of the conversation, that it was him who really ran the interview, he was the one drawing the information out. His version of understanding of the social, the political, was more dominant and stronger than theirs. In connection with this event they created a theory of para-ethnography.

Perhaps we need to expose ourselves to a situation in which we have to deal with very strong subjects and the language of description in formulating research problems or formulating creative problems is on the side of the environment we work in, to the same or to a comparable degree

as it is on our side. There's this honest moment when many of these problems with lending a voice, with the illusion of participation, can be exceeded. What happens when we're dealing with an environment that actually co-creates a research problem or a creative project and takes control over it? Such creative situations are very difficult, but for me this is a path I want to follow.

A paradigmatic example for me is Tears Purchase, prepared by Łukasz Surowiec and Alicja Rogalska. They set up a kind of a spot where you could sell your tears. In Lublin, near the train station, in a space where we deal with the presence of numerous pawnshops, service points, life-insurance offices, various strange businesses with things for sale of unclear origin. There they installed a spot where they bought tears and simply paid for them. They put up a big sign on the glass: a hundred Polish złoty for three millilitres of tears, with an asterisk and by that asterisk in fine print: 'cried on the spot'. Of course, they employed various underhand methods including onion and a nose stick. But I spoke at length to people who'd taken part in the project and many found in this way a real space for crying which they didn't have anywhere else. I spoke to people from various environments who ended up there and these were ethnographical conversations very different from the ones I'd led until then.

Because the starting point was a really undefined situation. Was it about the money? Or was it about something more? How should one even name this operation? The spot was designed so it resembled a bank or shadow-banking system or a beauty parlour. So people started coming there to offer their services as one does with any newly opened premises. Someone came with an offer to help advertise Tears Purchase, convinced that they were collecting them in order to produce cosmetics. Someone of course alerted sanitary-epidemiological authorities, an evaluation was carried out then the sanitary-epidemiological office issued a report permitting Tears Purchase to operate. For me, it was a make-believe situation which at the same time caused my conversations with people to be ethnographical conversations in which I did not feel like the director or author of the questions – I didn't feel like the one who knew what he was driving at, it all came from the other side.

IS: Krzysztof Zarzecki stated something about his work in Szamocin that I discussed a couple of times with him and with director Michał Borczuch: the desire to arrive with the ambition to achieve change, then the rinsing away of this desire and a dedication to the situation on completely different principles. Krzysztof spoke several times about the sensibility of this approach and I fully agree with that. It seems to me that this work by Michał Borczuch is organic or adequate in the sense that it delivers what it promises. It doesn't promise more than it gives. It is work on children's imaginations, based on fun. Any ambition for change evaporated somewhere, but what remained was very reliable participatory work which actually empowers its subjects. Associating with that event brings lots of emotions. Then we talked about it and I was convinced that projects with the Roma community, towards the Roma community, and *Swarka*, have their massive weight but I would agree with the fact that perhaps it makes no sense to pull, to drag these ventures forcibly towards participation and social theatre.

Mikołaj pointed to that, and research results suggest that cultural institutions extinguish the participatory momentum of such activities. They have their own protocols and are so highly structured that they destroy participation. This is an experience we see in public institutions, whether it be theatre or institutions of another type. Certain participatory energies become lost, diminished. I've the impression therefore that we are talking about participation-oriented enterprises which have nevertheless lost the principle of change, the emancipatory value. We've been carrying out these projects for years, it's not the moment of their conception, it's not a pioneering situation.

Consequently, we can look at our ventures as projects from the field of participation or from the emancipatory field. Frankly, I've the feeling that though we've long since mastered these issues of participation, empowerment of the subject, listening, lending voice, when it's done within an institution – that's fantastic. Yet somehow in the meantime the question of achieving change got lost. The entire machine works exactly like Krzysztof described in speaking about his work in Szamocin, in that by now we're essentially speaking about the pleasure arising from the encounter. The encounter's very important and has individual emancipatory qualities undoubtedly. However, when we speak about social change, we're speaking about something altogether different.

I have the impression that this has something to do with the institution and that our conversation might give the impression that the institution itself generates resistance to participatory processes. Is it possible to resume emancipatory hope through art, through institutions, and if so what kind of institutions?

AS: Krzysztof spoke of the fact that the children in Szamocin didn't experience change. How do we have the right to such an assessment? How do we know what these children experienced and how it'll affect their fate? It'd be good to examine that in the future.

IS: I've no doubt as to individual emancipatory aspects. But we're back to the level of anecdote, about individual lives of children from certain backgrounds. Today, it seems to me it's no longer enough.

AS: They always interfere with the social experience, the individual experience, that is, translating into a social one, and a social to individual one – and in participatory work it is impossible to separate these.

IS: Wishful thinking, I suppose.

AS: I don't understand your dreams of emancipation. Roma have huge problems finding employment: stereotypes about their community are the problem. Romville employed two people of Roma origin, and the production remains in the theatre's repertoire. I don't understand the dream of emancipation that underestimates these specific situations. This is a starting point; we must practice it and share experience in order to proceed to systemic solutions. Granted, those two people are drops in a ocean, but one must start somewhere. This is where the phenomenon of good practices lies – at first individual and incidental but later extending to ever-wider circles.

Swarka, in turn, takes on the subject of Volhynia massacres through testimony of individual people. It doesn't demand systematizing or re-ordering history. The audience comes, encounters this tragedy and, indirectly, people who'd experienced it. Systemic change is highly necessary and one should strive towards it – but while entering a given community, we can't carry with us an omnipotent mission to save the world. That's narcissistic.

AJ: I've an impression quite contrary to your own. It's about an absolute lack of structural change and a programme which has perhaps brought individual changes in our actions, yet doesn't translate into collective emancipation. We worked with [director] Weronika Szczawińska as part of the 'Wielkopolska: Revolutions' project in Jarocin, and I'm certain that the lives of many people there with us changed. That's undeniable. Yet no structural change was achieved. Perhaps someone will no longer re-enact some life habit, or perhaps they will but in fact we remain in a quite a vicious circle of theatrical activities, in any case.

AS: But I agree with what you're saying. One would have to completely exclude other factors here for structural changes to occur. Perhaps one should organize certain political, media, activist circles around artistic activities that would allow certain content to resound. But I think that structural change requires a lot of time and these projects that become implemented are drops in the ocean of Polish art. There are simply very few such projects – also because there's no funding for them, they aren't taken seriously at the level of state and municipal culture policy.

ML: In the 'Culture and Development' project – to return to it once more – we pose questions that in the context of our discussion may sound brutal. From the perspective of people managing public institutions, the question of whether one should spend a hundred thousand on theatre that will change the life of three Roma, or spend that money on a clinic, a social-welfare centre or so forth, is absolutely accurate. I'm under the impression that here we edge near the trap that defends the autonomy of culture institutions. This defence runs along the lines that here in theatre we lend voice to various communities, we represent problems, we discuss important things but you must leave us alone, we must have our field where we'll carry out our activities.

Yet once theatre actually touches real problems, external rules begin to interfere. In response, theatre appeals to liberal principles of law, regarding creative freedom, for instance, but it frequently turns out that it's not enough because other interference mechanisms exist, financial, for instance, with the help of which pressure is exerted over the arts.

But if cultural institutions attempt to define social problems or solve them, then in such a case they must be able to demonstrate effectiveness in these areas, which is very difficult. In such cases, cultural institutions have two strategies at their disposal, which we've noted in our research. One is that an outside look can be very productive for local communities; it's a perspective that can appreciate practices that exist there but remain unnamed, and due to the dominance or hegemony of a given language are considered non-existent or unimportant. The second concerns the need to de-hermetize the so-called critical language of art. Such ventures as *Swarka* or *Romville* might be important insofar as they are a moment

in which one listens to another language, other categories. It seems to me that in this sense the critical or emancipatory function remains.

IS: It isn't easy to summarize or to conclude our discussion. I'll therefore leave its ending open, noting only that I have the impression that we're witnessing a tectonic shift in artistic and social paradigms, in which a new formula of art politics is emerging beyond its institutional dimension, stepping forth beyond the ambition of merely representing reality.

Thank you all for outlining crucial problems that this formula will have to face in order to allow theatre and art to extend to the next level of their social impact.