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IN DEFENCE OF LOST CAUSES: COUNTER(F)ACTUAL RECASTING OF BIOGRAPHIES IN POLISH CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

Summary. This article considers the impact of counterfactual strategies on the most recent Polish theatrical practices dealing with biographies of “historical” figures. The re-occurrence of these past agents on the stage will be viewed in light of the biographical turn in the humanities as well as from the perspective of Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology. Seemingly, both trends share a need to create an alternative space for the expression of a contemporary self which is marked by disunity and disintegration. Subjects of current semi-biographical projects are those whose voices have once been neglected, marginalised, or oppressed because of their gender, social background, or political views. This account examines the ways in which counterfactual strategies enable us to grasp the polyphonic condition of a modern subject and to see, in traces left by different Other(s), touchstones for social and political change. By taking the play *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* (No Versailles over here!) by Rabih Mroué as the core case study of the analysis, I aim to demonstrate how counterfactual strategies animate emancipatory potential ascribed to the arrival of the phantom of controversial Polish politician Andrzej Lepper. His death in unknown circumstances becomes a point of divergence in which Lepper’s existence layers into counterfactual scenarios. Counterfactual strategies enable many approaches to view Lepper’s figure without the ethically dubious act of speaking in his name. By unsettling claims of truth, counterfactual strategies unravel how “facts” about Lepper resurfaced in mass media, thereby constructing his stereotyped and over-generalised image. The play has a form of investigation which, by employment of counterfactualism, reenacts the oppression of a mainstream media discourse against the disturbing Other epitomised by Lepper.

Keywords: hauntology, spectres, counterfactual strategies, biography, otherness, mass media.

SPECTRALITY AND THE VOICE OF OTHERS

Landscape of Polish theatre from the turn of the twenty-first century is diversely haunted by spectres from beyond the grave.¹ Main focus of the present article is placed on said hauntological² dimension of recent theatrical productions, dealing with past figures’ life stories, to provoke questions about identity and representation of subjects whose voices were neglected in the past. Thus, hauntology is not merely a metaphor for the invasion on both mainstream and alternative stages of “historical” figures from the past that are “neither present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive”³ but a theoretical and conceptual approach creating space for the return of the dead. The concept of hauntology developed by Jacques Derrida evokes the liminal status of identity and history that are in a constant process of

becoming.⁴ The term “hauntology” is composed of the verb “to haunt” and the philosophical term “ontology” to highlight that every sense of a self is haunted by multiple temporalities and therefore it is impossible to ever enclose it in definite frames.⁵ For the French deconstructionist, the figure of the ghost appearing in the present became a subject of enquiry. Derrida argues that hauntological heritage of the past influences the scene of the present and stimulates projections of possible futures yet to come. Therefore, Derridean spectres operate in different tempo-realities and fluctuate across margins of our factual reality demanding our attention. Moreover, an encounter with the ghosts haunting our present causes a sort of cognitive crisis which requires that we look for new techniques of recognising full critical potency of spectres as well as for new means of

producing and defining knowledge.⁶ Otherwise, the ghostly return will only be understood as a negative—ghastly—experience. Therefore, I propose a line of thinking in which counterfactual strategies allow the living to take up the challenge of resurrecting phantoms and to regard it as a source of social and political change. Recent theatrical productions dealing with biographical contents are artworks haunted by what eludes simplistic, binary categories. For example, presence of the spectral is one of the characteristics of the play *Komornicka. Biografia pozorna*⁷ (*Komornicka. An Apparent Biography*) by Bartosz Frąckowiak and Weronika Szczawińska. The play is devoted to Polish modernist transgender poet Maria Komornicka. The protagonist of the play, named The Sculptor (Rzeźbiarz), captures aptly in one verse how past agents still have an impact on actual reality and seek attention from the present: “The deceased eat at least as much as the living.”⁸ Historical figures arrive from the past and re-appear in the current factual context to challenge the status quo of stereotypical and over-generalised images of past agents. While an exemplary selection of Polish theatrical biographies is the source of analytical material in this article, counterfactual strategies are its mode of exploring and critiquing the content of old life stories. What I allude to when I use the term “biography” is not a biographic drama, but rather an account of a subject’s life story re-cast through theatrical means. According to Michael Benton’s research on forms of biography, in a conventional biography it’s the author who imposes stories on the subject’s life by creating “order, continuity, coherence, and closure” from the raw source material of the subject’s life.⁹ The focus of the present analysis is on those re-cast life stories whose particular agenda is to undermine projects that aim to represent the self as a fixed and easily definable construct. Authors of such alternative counter-biographies employ counterfactual strategies to evoke the spectral effect of discontinuity and originary alterity that resides at the core of every self. Moreover, starting from the premise that counterfactual strategies introduce various dimensions of others, they contribute to restoration of images and portrayals of identity that comprise all their conflicting heterogeneities.

Therefore, by uncovering the space of otherness, hauntology and counterfactual strategies can be used to disturb customary habits of perception of neglected historical figures and evoke new possibilities for the ethical representation of a self.

COUNTER(F)ACTUAL RECONCEPTUALISATIONS OF HISTORICAL EXISTENCES AND DOCUMENTARY TRADITIONS

Despite overly antagonistic attitudes towards counterfactualism, considered by many prominent historians (e.g. by E. H. Carr) as a proverbial “red herring”, imagining things that may have happened is among the most intuitive modes of human thought. Based on the premise that it had expanded beyond the field of rigorous and fine modal logic, counterfactualism has recently been re-evaluated as a useful method of encompassing the liminal zone between facts and fiction.¹⁰ An understanding of counterfactual strategies proposed for this analysis underlines their affective and emancipatory potential. By demonstrating the complexity and variety of past situations and existences, counterfactualism becomes a useful tool to reflect on the past and, more specifically, on the past of historical figures without using deterministic chains of causality.

As Małgorzata Sugiera aptly states in her definition of counterfactual strategies,¹¹ the latest research does not so much focus on the speculative and probabilistic dimension of counterfactualism as, rather, concentrates on its performative potential to question actual knowledge and to tease out our critical attitude towards it. Moreover, the performative character of counterfactualism can be understood in two ways—as its agency and/or its constructiveness. Thus, theatrical practices employing counterfactual strategies also become a means of critical examination of the world around us. As Sugiera elaborates, the changing perception of counterfactualism as an instrument critically operating on the actual status quo becomes more clearly visible in the preferred form of spelling of the notion, wherein the letter (f), standing for facts, is bracketed. This way, the factual dimension of the notion is relegated into the background and focus is transferred to actual critical potency. Facts therefore become haunted by

current needs of contemporaries to investigate and deconstruct procedures lying behind image- and knowledge-making.

Exposed to dynamics of counterfactual strategies, a biography can act as a counter-biography and, in this sense, is an intervention into the hegemonic discourse of identity (re)construction. This intervention can be realised when a life story of a historical agent turns out differently to what we previously understood as true. Moreover, as recent theatre productions dealing with biographies of official figures assert, it is also a useful tool in enabling re-evaluation of documentary traditions that are based on facticity as well as in inspiring new modes of approaching individuals' polyphonic existences by opening us to the acceptance of the essential unknowing of what is true.¹² Alongside counterfactualism, phenomena and notions discussed with similar intensity are possibility, existence, non-existence, congruity, and cross-world identity. Applying counterfactual framework serves not only to speculate on socio-political benefits of evoking a sense of alternative-ness and openness but also to prove the "collapse of traditional distinctions between the real and the mediated in documentary forms".¹³

New thought and research trends have permeated contemporary artistic and theatrical practices that nowadays focus rather on regimes of feelings and socially constructed emotions (regret, rumination, reward, etc.) than on the factual dimension of empirical reality. In an era of infotainment and globalisation, the very notion of documentary has undergone transformations caused by the hybrid nature of reality on which the "theatre of the real" aims to reflect. Documentary theatre looks for trajectories to capture constantly emerging new realities (socio-political, geo-political, virtual, etc.) and shifts in its poetics towards semi-, post-documentary, and mockumentary practices which express the blurring of the binary distinctions between reality and fiction, high and low (culture), centre and margins more accurately. Works that foreground creativity and fantasy, thereby stimulating production of new alternative scenarios, have strongly affected the tradition of fact-based theatre. In these cases, unreliable content has oftentimes been affirmed by

the form. In *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, American critic Fredric Jameson provides a helpful framework for thinking through this problem. In order to accommodate a variety of unreliable contents—and there is an intrinsic "claim of truth" in documentary theatres—"only form can fill the bill. Form becomes content—in that overarching plan which is the Imagination—while the formerly tainted sets of opposites sink to the level of decoration or Fancy."¹⁴ This subversive process of reconstruction within documentary poetics inherently connects to the growing popularity of counterfactual thinking. Indeed, constant circulation of counterfeit phenomena not only relates to global markets of material goods—fake news, profiles, and statistics—but also colonises both virtual and actual reality, causing cognitive dissonance among contemporaries. However, thinking of "what may have been" can also evoke some therapeutic effects. A conceptually related notion of looking for potential benefits in possible future scenarios has recently been proposed by Ruth Levitas, a British sociologist internationally credited for her studies on utopia, who views utopia as a method for the Imaginary Reconstitution of Society.¹⁵ In her *Utopia as Method*, Levitas rehabilitates the utopian imaginary and treats it as "a source of grace".¹⁶ Social dreaming becomes, in her interpretation, a source of real transformations and so can be perceived the role of counterfactual strategies in the quest for counter-biographies to be contesting the status quo. The same diagnosis is repeated by authors of *Reality Strikes Back #2*, a thematic volume of the magazine *Theater der Zeit* focusing on an intersection of theatre and politics, who propose that new means for the future of documentarism in globalised reality should be looked for in the potential of imagination. One of authors, Frank M. Raddatz, claims that creativity and inventiveness are the most basic dispositions of human beings. In the current socio-political context, they can reveal themselves as subversive strategies helping to confront infected factual reality:

Certainly, history will not return as an antidote ... Only willingness to confront the spectres of history, to fight against vampires

(or even as a vampire?) in order to start shaping the future offensively, turns out to be the mark of the seal which leaves its stamp over the phantasmagorical field of the Real as well as that of the Simulated. Possibly, authenticity to the second power—the one in which awareness of reality will be enhanced by conjunction of poeticality, imagination, and impossibility, will be able to match future transformations of the Historical.¹⁷

Raddatz's documentary practices and reflections on the condition of a modern self are of an evident spectral undertone. Raddatz suggests that constantly changing coordinates of modern subjects force them to confront ghosts from the past creatively and innovatively. It goes hand in hand with implications of counterfactual ontology that, according to one of its understandings, has a scientific background and "has emerged as a ripple effect of quantum physics into the field of history, and is an aspect of a broader emphasis in science on chaos, random changes, and *punctual equilibrium*."¹⁸ The ontology of counterfactuals implicates the subordinated in a diverse multiverse of alternative interpretations. Consequently, a subject immersed into multiverse also becomes a sort of multi-subject open to pluralistic representations, views, and interpretations.

CELEBRATION OF LOSS AND FAILURE

Despite undisputed popularity of counterfactual reasoning in various fields of study (e.g. alternative histories, allohistory, and the so-called geography of happenstance or possible geography) and extensive scholarly research on it, surprisingly, until now theoretical reflection rarely made use of this mode of thinking. An attempt to apply counterfactual strategies to theatrical biographies not only satisfies the desire of plotting but also promises real benefits to the socio-political actual reality. It is to said benefits that the initial part of the title of this article metonymically alludes. Given that we will never arrive at an essential understanding of these real historical selves, various re-cast biographies do not aim at familiarising the audience with coherent visions of their subjects as found, for example, in traditional

biographical dramas, but rather at demonstrating their many facets. The heterogeneous contemporary subject must face anxieties of its own self as well as unexpected catastrophes occurring in the empirical reality. This need to project better life scenarios proves to be aligned with the renaissance of the biography in one form or another (be it life writing or biographical drama). Aforementioned Michael Benton expands on reasons behind this re-emergence as follows:

The commercial high profile is responding to an evident, if unfocused, need to look at other lives and understand them. Individual reasons for the popularity of biography range from prurient interest and hero worship to, perhaps unrecognized, search for coherence and purpose in an age that is often disinclined either to accept institutional values or to respect traditional authority. The motives for this search usually include the desire for recognizable success, to which end the invention of a convincing identity is essential. Biographies offer models of how others live, face challenges, and cope with change; they are prime sites for studying ourselves.¹⁹

A popular counterfactual pattern discernible in current artistic practices is arranging fictional meetings of historical figures for the sake of the common good, showing that every self is not only a social and historical construct but also a relational one, that under impact of others one can, for example, change one's cemented views. In the play *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka* (Thoughts of a Modern Pole)²⁰ its director – Grzegorz Laszuk imagines an "unauthorized biography" of Roman Dmowski, Polish founder of the National-Democratic Party, and confronts radical statements of Dmowski with the political theory of philosopher Hannah Arendt. By making this encounter of ghosts from the past possible, the author of the play pose a question: in what way would this encounter change Dmowski's views on the notion of the nation and the nature of power? Another possible application of counterfactualism is present in the play *Sprawa Gorgonowej* (The Case of Gorgonowa)²¹ by Jolanta Janiczak and Wiktor

Rubin, in which the authors radically re-imagine the infamous true case of Rita Gorgonowa that took place in interwar Poland. Gorgonowa was accused of murder of her stepdaughter and subsequently sentenced to death. However, due to many legal mistakes and mounting social pressure, the sentence was mitigated. The re-cast life story uses counterfactual scenarios to ask if Gorgonowa's trial would have turned out differently if her accusers had not been males and if Rita had not been a stranger from Dalmatia, an unprivileged mistress of a white man in a strong social position, and a governess of his children. Furthermore, counterfactual strategies are also fertile in plays that seek to reverse the common opinion on vilified politicians, like in the case of the iconic and much commented-on play *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* (No Versailles over here!)²² by Rabih Mroué about Andrzej Lepper, the controversial leader of the Polish Samoobrona Party. Counterfactuals are at work in the production whenever there is a need to undermine repeated and simplistic platitudes. A play with a meaningful title celebrating failure and loss, *Zapolska Superstar (czyli jak przegrywać, żeby wygrać)* (Zapolska Superstar, Or How to Lose in Order to Win)²³ by Aneta Groszyńska and Jan Czapliński, is devoted to underrated naturalist Polish playwright Gabriela Zapolska who was known for portraying social taboos such as prostitution and venereal diseases in her narratives, thus giving voice to voiceless and marginalised social groups. As the production suggests, unlike her masculinist writer's environment, Zapolska paid attention to existences of average people, which made her a sort of twisted super-heroine. The play aims to subvert the cemented image of the playwright enforced through Polish language classes and reveals unknown episodes from Zapolska's life that would prove to be her unofficial driving forces—namely, the defence of lost causes. Discrepancy between the amount of artistic productions and that of their critical investigations requires us to do some theoretical justice to the enormous work of theatre practitioners. Recent theatrical biographies advocating for imaginative visions of subjects' lives prove that there is a lack of reflection in the theoretical field of biography as a genre. Despite this, in this paper I do not attempt

to propose a theory of biography that would bring us up to date either with features of social reality or with the latest trends in its artistic realisations. However, in *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies*, British postmodern historian Alan Munslow, writing from a “deconstructive epistemological perspective”, argues that biography as a genre can be a valuable mode of producing new histories that would reject its imperialistic discourse of neglecting ordinary people.²⁴

Using the example of the play *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* by Lebanese director Rabih Mroué, I will demonstrate how Andrzej Lepper's biographical continuum stratifies and diverges into alternative scenarios, as well as reverberations of this procedure. The play follows the pattern of alternative narratives, in which a counterfactual narrative unravels from an identifiable factual moment, in this case, Lepper's death, that becomes the point of divergence for fabulation. The term “point of divergence” (POD) was coined by Paul Alkon in his research on alternative narratives.²⁵ By driving facts and counter-facts, POD becomes a tipping point of provoking fabulation and enables the audience to see biography both as a retro- and as an extra-polation (that is, importing of some future events to the past and vice versa). POD, also termed “the nexus point” by Catherine Gallagher,²⁶ is therefore a handy tool to disentangle the components of a supposedly coherent biographical entity. These nexus points result in anti-chronological trajectories, followed by theatre makers to re-configure marginalised sides of different historical agents and/or to show them on the stage as their possible doubles who can find themselves anew in new existential alternatives.

THE CHALLENGE OF A SPECTRAL RETURN

The spectre of Andrzej Lepper challenges actual reality and confronts its living agencies with the difficult task of deciphering the message encrypted in Lepper's spectral return. I see Mroué's *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* as an answer to this challenge. Artistic practices of Lebanese director, dramaturg, and visual artist Rabih Mroué focus on the complex intermingling of fictional and authentic elements.²⁷

Acknowledged author of the highly acclaimed piece on Lebanon's painful contemporary history *Who's Afraid of Representation?*²⁸, together with a dramaturgical team (Marta Keil and Piotr Grzymisławski) he has in this case investigated the reactions provoked by Lepper during his political career of over twenty years.

At the heart of the performance there is a process of reconstruction of Lepper's images based on authentic material taken from media accounts. Nonetheless, this reconstruction will never come to an end and will not combine into a single coherent and univocal vision of his life that would respond to the needs of any of the concerned interpretative communities entirely—be it Lepper's former party colleagues, his political opponents, or proponents of conspiracy theories, for whom puzzling circumstances of his death went on to be an endless source for speculation. Thus, the authors apply counterfactual strategies in order to exclude any clear ideological identification and produce further biased assumptions about Lepper as well as to open the audience for multifarious standpoints. In their artistic vision, counterfactualism fulfils a double function. On the one hand, it enables us to look for a space in which the spectre can emerge in the actual context (thus, it positions the spectre and helps it to complete its unfulfilled existence through different existential scenarios). In consequence, counterfactuals take part in deconstruction of official narratives about Lepper. On the other hand, they help to express a modern longing for solutions encrypted in past existences. Since the spectre arrives from beyond a different order, it disturbs the current course of events, provoking us to critically unveil the lining of the actual status quo. The purpose of the spectral return of Andrzej Lepper in *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* is thus to reveal the rhetoric of mass media that doggedly described him as a troublemaker and a boor.

On the domestic political scene, Andrzej Lepper epitomised the figure of a disturbing Other. According to Bernhard Waldenfels, who proposes a conceptualisation of the condition of the Other and otherness above topographical terms, the Other is that who goes beyond the limits of a certain order:

"There are as many othernesses as there are orders. That which is exceptional accompanies the orders like a shadow."²⁹ Employing this formula borrowed from Foucault, Waldenfels explains the plurality of otherness, as well as numerous possible reactions towards the Other. Each invasion upon a territory established within a dominant group arouses its objections. The Other is a disturbing element because he/she infiltrates a space and destabilises its rules, causing cognitive dissonance within an existing socio-political group. Although the leader of the Samoobrona Party strongly influenced the domestic scene of politics and went far in his political career (the apogee was his appointment as the Deputy Prime Minister), in the eyes of the political class to which he aspired Lepper was never equal. The Samoobrona Party and its leader were famous for breaking the rules of the existing socio-political status quo and for their loutish behaviour. Although Lepper's political career was not regarded by some as a triumph—its trajectory was that of spectacular success to failure—Lepper was also considered an advocate of a marginalised and neglected social class. Initially, "Lepper's effect" indeed rested upon his uncompromising attitude and wilfulness. However, his increasing aspirations in the world of politics led him to ask for professional help of image specialist Piotr Tymochowicz. Thus, Lepper himself became an overlap of fiction and image-making and his famous spirit of rebellion was annihilated.

Contrary to Julia Kristeva's famous "Étrangers e nous-mêmes"³⁰ (Strangers to ourselves) Waldenfels stresses that inherent to every otherness is its bipolarity—the Other shapes and renegotiates its own self in relations with others and at the same time shapes the unfamiliar space of the Other³¹. The essence of this bipolarity of otherness impacts the positioning of historical figures. Waldenfels clarifies this phenomenon of changing attitudes towards both real and fictional characters by using an example of figures such as Socrates, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and nephew Rameau³². These examples clearly demonstrate the way in which the perception of the Other very much depends on whose standards become mandatory in the actual context. Therefore, the Other can be regarded either as a

challenge that facilitates changes within a group or society or as an obstacle to be excluded or silenced. Current socio-political context proves that Lepper still occupies the space of otherness—to apply Waldenfels’s topographic phenomenology of the Other. So it was in Lepper’s case, as he embodied the “fears, needs, and obsessions”³³ of various social groups. Just like in Waldenfels’s example of Socrates who led his contemporaries out of the kingdom of the shadows, Lepper brought out the elites that took part in the Round Table Agreements out of the comfort of the shadow realm. Rapid transformation of Poland’s economy from socialism to capitalism in the early 1990s brought immense social changes, causing distrust amongst a significant portion of Polish society which could not catch up with the challenges of this new economic framework. The capitalist conviction of the Polish ruling political elite of the time—that everyone is an architect of their own future—led to the exclusion of weak and economically unprivileged subjects. Lepper successfully confronted the problems of rapid economic transformation. Therefore, for the authors of *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!*, political exclusion and enforced solitude of Lepper is not merely another lens through which to view him but also the space of the claim that the Other addresses a certain privileged majority and obliges it to revise its convictions and go beyond the familiar order. In this sense, the challenge of the Other proves to be well aligned with the spectral call for changes. For the authors of the production, counterfactual strategies become a means to articulate different possible positions of the Other without monopolising one particular standpoint. What is common for both counterfactual thinking and topographical account of the Other is that they put the openness of “ways, borderlines, connections, and crossings” above all “systematic connections of dispersed standpoints”.³⁴ Counterfactual strategies democratise the discourse as they remind us that positions of the Other and the Familiar are never fully defined, since they depend on the location of current binding measures. Gavriel Rosenfeld, a historian applying counterfactualism to his research on history as a scientific discipline, states in his text devoted to the functions of counterfactual thinking:

Alternate history is inherently presentist. It explores the past less for its own sake than to utilize it instrumentally to comment upon the present. Based as it is upon conjecture, alternate history necessarily reflects authors’ hopes and fears... Biases, fears and wishes, the desire to avoid guilt, the quest for vindication—these and other related sentiments all influence how alternate histories represent how the past might have been.³⁵

In Mroué’s play, this utilitarian attitude towards counterfactualism manifests itself as an attempt to understand how media functions and how it creates the shape of contemporaneity.

The title of the play refers to one of Lepper’s early parliamentary speeches in which he addressed the elite of the transformation period and stated: “You turned the country into ruins, and the nation into poverty, and now you’re dreaming about Versailles? In this chamber there’ll never be such a thing.”³⁶ Undoubtedly, Lepper’s applied savage thought and language could have been regarded as crude and primitive and therefore strange and brutal. The authors of the play do not pretend that they can ever reveal “the real Lepper” that was once symbolically buried under piles of newspaper cuttings. Thus, the protagonist of the play and a guide through the world of competing narrations is a self-taught detective played by Jan Sobolewski. The lead character is trying not only to reveal the circumstances of Lepper’s death but also to chastise the power of mass media and its impact on the way in which Lepper has been positioned in official media narratives. Therefore, Lepper’s case could be interpreted as an allegorical indictment of the contemporary mass media. As Carol Martin has accurately stated in her *Living Simulations*:

Media on the documentary stage is not secondary—not merely a recording of live events that hold more importance—but primary to the degree that today media is a key arbiter of truth. Media is ‘evidence’ that what is purported to have happened actually did happen. As a means of testimony, media can be an unquestionable witness or a witness that need to be cross-examined.³⁷

Although Mroué fills his three-phase investigation with newspaper cuttings, interviews, Piscatorian scene titles, and Brechtian songs, his play is rather an invitation to question these material documents. *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* contests the function of media as “a key arbiter of what is true”. For Mroué, the documentary play about Lepper is a counter-discursive medium that examines actuality and thus becomes an extra-theatrical device. It powerfully indicates the strength of media in the process of image-making in everyday life. Conversely, Mroué reminds us that the image of “the horny-over-power mulatto”³⁸ once inhabited a flesh-and-blood person.³⁹ Thus, the detective leading the investigation uses estranging elements that create distance between the epistemology of investigative journalism and the epistemology of theatrical production. In the first part of the investigation, entitled “Andrzej Lepper. In the eyes of himself and others”, Sobolewski draws a stereotypical portrait of Lepper wearing his indispensable wide tie in white and red stripes—a symbol of political affiliation to the Samoobrona—on a blackboard. Impersonated Lepper is only spectrally present on the stage. At any time, his portrait can either be removed from the blackboard or drawn anew. In contrast to muck-raking, immersion in the “real world” documents that Mroué proposes demurs to the shady side of journalism and contests the primitive empiricism that takes any written statement as true. Thus, with this production the Lebanese director explores how instances of fiction can deter the “pornography of representation”⁴⁰, to use Rosi Braidotti’s term.

The subjects of Sobolewski’s interests in the second part of his investigation are “Troublemaking, lies, and tapes”. Clearly, in Lepper’s life there were several scandalous moments. Over the course of the investigation, it also transpires that material documents, such as tapes, in the contemporary digital era can become just one more version of an event and thus an artefact of the actual reality. However, the counterfactual dimension of Mroué’s play is expressed most fully in the third phase of the investigation that allows us to reconsider what happened right before August 5, 2011, when Lepper was found dead in his office. Factual reception of

Lepper’s death in the public sphere for Sobolewski is a catalyst to examine three central hypotheses about the tragic death of the Samoobrona Party leader: suicide, murder, and mystification. To bring order to the collected data, Sobolewski draws a table and looks for answers to questions that are vital to his investigative process, such as *who; where?; when?; why?; what?* At first glance, all the collected material leads him to a conclusion that Lepper committed suicide. However, after a while and with the same degree of conviction, he states that Lepper was obviously killed. Over the course of the investigation, on the basis of newspaper cuttings, Sobolewski draws more and more surrealistic conclusions that reach their peak when, after reading an obituary written by nurses, he starts accusing them of murder. To make the mystification-scenario even more surrealistic, Mroué repeated crude jokes Lepper knowingly made about prostitutes in a different context. This was done to provide a basis of evidence for a scenario in which prostitutes dressed as nurses take revenge on Lepper, thereby killing him. Would nurses or prostitutes and, finally—prostitutes dressed as nurses have wanted to kill Lepper? If we bring the confusingly similar but authentic conclusions about Lepper’s death into the same realm of consideration, we can come to understand how broad the scale of official media reports on the same event can be. Melding of authenticity and fiction reaches its subversive apex when, in the final scene, a woman sitting among the audience wants to take the floor. Her action confounds the audience as it appears that she is an authentic former member of the Samoobrona. Statements of Małgorzata Trofi-miuk, who is a professional actress, are emotional enough to convince some of the present members of the Samoobrona Party that she really knew their leader. However, with this act Mroué decisively aims at breaking the pact of commitment between creators and audience. This faked encounter shows that even (ostensibly) “existential authenticity” cannot ensure political or any other form of legitimisation. Last but not least, Mroué helps the viewers to recognise that Lepper’s mediated and post-produced images always remain incomplete. Different counterfactual scenarios of Lepper’s death afford

the Lebanese director to question our every habitual conviction about what we count as a verifiable fact. Counterfactualism also reveals mechanisms of image distribution. The topographical concept of the Other proposed by Waldenfels resonates with the function of counterfactual strategies that, when applied concurrently, enable the creators of *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* to disrupt official media narratives and to liberate Lepper's image from unfair platitudes. Therefore, the play becomes a counter-discursive medium through which Lepper's spectre finds a space for its return.

CLOSING REMARKS

Although *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* refers to forensic documentaries, its creators remain aware of procedures of knowledge production and image-making. By employing counterfactual strategies, Mroué's play helps us to recognise representational strategies permeating everyday culture and to examine our actuality. Mroué's *modus operandi* results in a progressive, reactionary, and critical theatre that, by using counterfactualism, paradoxically bypasses documentary theatre procedures traditionally based on material documents. Mroué's work proves that counterfactual reasoning is not only a way out of the fact-based epistemology of the documentary but can also be understood as a bastion of utopian thinking and criticism.

In addition, counterfactual strategies are a crucial element of our "affective labour." In today's post-fact societies they give rise to new models of coping with constant changes of the actual world and dilemmas of a self. Counter-facts help to decode regimes of what Linda Hutcheon calls "realist imperialism"⁴¹ in the field of documentary forms that still prefer material documents.⁴² Investigation conducted in *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* clearly demonstrated how misleading this tactic may be. Contrary to this, a biography exposed to counterfactual strategies can become an important source of re-evaluation of past historical figures that have once been silenced or neglected. Also, the spectral return of the controversial Polish politician in the name of experiencing alternative destinies becomes an interesting

perspective of viewing broader context of the Polish transformation from socialism to capitalism. Socio-political circumstances are what we actually revise whenever imagining alternative destinies of individuals. Alternative revisions of the past have an evident psychological effect—namely, they show seemingly lost causes as changeable and anti-deterministic. Furthermore, as Catherine Gallagher stated, alternative assumptions "allow ordinary people to access the policies of the recent past and decide whether to continue, revise, or abandon them."⁴³ Thus, many contradictory destinies of Lepper show what went unrealised in the historical process and became consequential, although still variable in the factual life of contemporaries. Counterfactualism helps to demonstrate new orientation points for the sake of future agents as well as to strengthen their ability of critical reflection and re-action.

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- ² The neologism "hauntology" was coined by Jacques Derrida in his *Spectres de Marx* (1993). See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1993). It should be noted that an interesting work on potency of past historical agents to control and influence the present in different ways, not directly referencing Derrida's theoretical approach, is being done, see, for example: Dorota Sajewska, *Nekroperformans. Kulturowa rekonstrukcja Wielkiej Wojny* (Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2016), and Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
- ³ Colin Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms". *French Studies*. Volume 59. Issue 3, 1 July 2005: 376.
- ⁴ Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter". In *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker. (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 26–67. (39).
- ⁵ Edyta Lorek-Jezińska, *Hauntology and Intertextuality in Contemporary British Drama by Women Playwrights* (Toruń: Nicolaus Copernicus University Press, 2013), 8.
- ⁶ For a more detailed account see, for example, Edyta Lorek-Jezińska and Katarzyna Więckowska, "Hauntology and Cognition: Questions of Knowledge, Pasts and Futures". In *Theoria et Historia Scientiarum* (Toruń: Nicolaus Copernicus University Press, 2017), 7–23.
- ⁷ Bartosz Frąckowiak and Weronika Szczawińska. "Komornicka. Biografia pozorna". In *Transfer! Teksty dla teatru. Antologia*, edited by Joanna Krakowska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2015). Reflection on the biography in its generic understanding reflected in the subtitle "an apparent biography" refers to the problematic questions about ownership of personal life stories. The aim of this amplifying information is also to question veracity of "authorised knowledge" and definite categories applied to identity.
- ⁸ Ibid., 8.
- ⁹ Michael Benton, "The Aesthetics of Biography—And What It Teaches". *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 49 (1), 2015. 1–19.
- ¹⁰ This tendency can be illustrated by recent publications of professional historians. See, for example, Jeremy Black, *Other Pasts, Different Presents, Alternative Futures* (Indiana University Press, 2015); Gavriel Rosenfeld, *The World Hitler Never Made* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Niall Ferguson, "The Kaiser's European Union: What if Britain had 'stood aside' in August 1914?" In *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals*, edited by Niall Ferguson (London: Picador, 1997).
- ¹¹ Małgorzata Sugiera, "Kontrfaktywność" ["Counterfactuality"]. In *Performatyka. Terytoria*, edited by Ewa Bał, Dariusz Kosiński (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2017), 101–107.
- ¹² Davis, 377.
- ¹³ For a more detailed account please see: Carol Martin, "Living Simulations: The Use of Media in Documentary in the UK, Lebanon and Israel". In *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, edited by Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 74–90.

Notes

¹ The concept of hauntology has been vital in the fields of both theatre and performance art practice and theory. Hauntological perspective has been employed, for example, in researches on the nature of theatre, acting, and performing. Thus, it has also significantly influenced theatre anthropology and many performance theories, alluding to spectral nature of every form of representation. See, for example, Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001), and Benjamin D. Powell and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer, "On the Haunting of Performance

¹⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 212.

¹⁵ Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of the Society* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 188–189).

¹⁶ Ibid., 6–17.

¹⁷ Frank M Raddatz, “Authentische Rezepte für ein unvergessliches Morgen”. *Reality Strikes Back II. Tod der Repräsentation. Die Zukunft der Vorstellungskraft in einer globalisierten Welt*, (ed.) Kathrin Tiedemann, Frank M. Raddatz. In *Theater der Zeit. Recherchen* 70, 2010, 139–162 (p. 161). Citations of this source employ my translation from German.

¹⁸ Jeremy Black, *Other Pasts, Different Presents, Alternative Futures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 203.

¹⁹ Michael Benton, “Literary Biography: The Cinderella Story of Literary Studies”. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 39(3): 44–57. September 2005. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236820993_Literary_Biography_The_Cinderella_Story_of_Literary_Studies (accessed April 24 2018).

²⁰ The play *Mysli nowoczesnego Polaka. Roman Dmowski (nieautoryzowana biografia)* (Thoughts of a Modern Pole – an unauthorised biography) by Grzegorz Laszuk had its premiere at the Polski Theatre in Poznan in November 2016.

²¹ The play *Sprawa Gorgonowej* (The Case of Gorgonowa) by Wiktor Rubin had its premiere at The Stary Theatre in Krakow in March 2015.

²² The play *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* (No Versailles over here!) by Rabi Mroué had its premiere at the Polski Theatre in Bydgoszcz in June 2016.

²³ The play *Zapolska Superstar (czyli jak przegrywać, żeby wygrać)* (Zapolska Superstar, Or How to Lose in Order to Win) by Aneta Groszyńska had its premiere at The Dramatyczny Theatre in Walbrzych in October 2015.

²⁴ Alun Munslow, “Biography and Life Writing”. In *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 46.

²⁵ Paul Alkon, “Alternate History and Postmodern Temporality”. In *Time, Literature and the Arts: Essays in Honor of Samuel L. Macey*, edited by Th.R. Cleary (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1994), 70.

²⁶ See Catherine Gallagher, *Telling It Like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

²⁷ The aforementioned article of Carol Martin explores the way in which media impacts authenticity and authority of documentarism by analysing another emblematic work by Rabi Mroué (and Elias Khoury) *Three Posters*, devoted to representational strategies of Lebanese suicide bombers. See: Martin, “Living Simulations”.

²⁸ The play *Who's Afraid of Representation?* by Mroué was written in 2004 and had its premiere in the same year in Berlin.

²⁹ Bernhard Waldenfels, *Topografia obcego. Studia z fenomenologii obcego [Topography of the Other. Studies in the phenomenology of the Other]*, translated by Janusz Sidorek (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Oficyna Naukowa, 2002).

³⁰ This and following quotations from this book are translated into English by myself unless otherwise specified.

³¹ Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

³² Bernhard Waldenfels, *Topografia obcego*, 25.

³³ Bernhard Waldenfels, *Topografia obcego*, 41–42.

³⁴ Information taken from a programme produced for the play *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* See Marta Keil, *Pogarda. Oswajanie Leppera [A contempt. Taming of Lepper]*, 4–8.

³⁵ Waldenfels, 26.

³⁶ Gavriel Rosenfeld, “Why Do We Ask ‘What If?’ Reflections on the Function of Alternate History”. *History and Theory*. Vol. 41 No. 4, Theme Issue 41: Unconventional History (Dec., 2002), 90–103; 93.

³⁷ Andrzej Lepper's words cited from Keil, *Pogarda* and translated into English by myself.

³⁸ Martin, “Living Simulations”, 74.

³⁹ One of many pejorative descriptions of Lepper. See Piotr Najsttub, “Napalony na władzę mulat” [“Horny-over-power mulatto”]. *Przekrój*. Nr 30, 2003, 26–30.

⁴⁰ Martin, “Living Simulations”, 77.

⁴¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory and Nomadic Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press 2011), 200–206.

⁴² The term “realist imperialism” was coined by Linda Hutcheon to describe prevalence of high realism in most influential theoretical approaches in the 20th century. See Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁴³ Martin, “Living Simulations”, 89.

⁴⁴ Gallagher, 5.

GINANT BEVILTISKUS ATVEJUS: KONTR(A)FAKTINIS BIOGRAFIJŲ ŠIUOLAIKINIAME LENKŲ TEATRE PERKONSTRAVIMAS

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama kontr(a)faktinių strategijų įtaka ir reikšmė neseniai sukurtiems lenkų teatro pastatymams, kuriuose reprezentuojamos istorinių subjektų biografijos. Straipsnyje šių praeities veiksmų atkūrimas teatro scenoje pristatomas remiantis Jacques'o Derrida hauntologijos konceptu ir biografiniais pokyčiais humanitarinių mokslų perspektyvoje. Regis, abiem kryptims būdingas polinkis kurti alternatyvias erdves šiuolaikinės savasties išraiškai, kuriai būdingas nevientisumas ir dezintegracija. Šiuolaikinių pusiau biografinių projektų subjektu tampa tie, kurie buvo marginalizuojami, engiami ir nutildyti dėl kultūrinės lyties, politinių pažiūrų ar socialinio statuso. Dėl šios priežasties tekste analizuojami aspektai, kuriems tirti pasitelkiamos kontr(a)faktinės strategijos, sudaro galimybes atskleisti daugialypę modernaus subjekto situaciją ir užčiuopti socialinių, politinių pokyčių pagrindus, kuriuos paliko tie, Kitokie. Analizuojant *Tu Wersalu nie będzie!* (No Versailles over here!, „Čia nebus Versalio“), sukurtą Rabiho Mroué, šio teksto autorė siekia parodyti, kaip kontr(a)faktinės strategijos suaktyvina emancipacinį potencialą, priskiriamą kontroversinio lenkų politiko Andrzejaus Lepperio vaiduoklio pasirodymui. Politiko mirtis neaiškiomis aplinkybėmis tampa išskirtine aplinkybe, kuria remiantis Lepperio egzistencija gali būti išskaidoma į kontr(a)faktinius scenarijus. Kontr(a)faktinės strategijos suteikia galimybę pažvelgti į šį politiką iš skirtingų pozicijų, kartu atmetant etiškai abejotiną kalbėjimą jo vardu. Ardant ir abejojant tariamais teisingais argumentais apie politiką, kontr(a)faktinėmis strategijomis atskleidžiama, kaip masinė žiniasklaida konstruoja tariamus faktus apie Lepperą, kaip iš naujo sukonstruoti įvaizdžiai leidžia stereotipizuoti ir supaprastinti politiko įvaizdį. Pažymėtina, kad nagrinėjamam spektakliui suteikiamas tyrimo (tardymo) formatas, kuriame, įveiksminus kontr(a)faktiškumo strategiją, sudaromos galimybės iš naujo atkurti žiniasklaidos diskursui būdingą dominuojančiojo ir engiamojo privilegiją prieš nustatytą tvarką trikdančius Kitus, kuriuos spektaklyje įkūnija Lepperio įvaizdis.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: hauntologija, šmėklos, kontr(a)faktinės strategijos, biografija, kitoniškumas, žiniasklaida.

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