

## **RESUMÉ**

Artur {Arti} Grabowski – **DREAMLINER** – performance

## RESUMÉ

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### **1. Diplomas and academic/artistic degrees obtained (including their name, the place and time of their completion, as well as the title of the doctoral dissertation):**

**Doctor of Plastic Arts** in the field of "fine arts", Faculty of Sculpture, course: Intermedia (18 March 2011 – defence of a doctoral dissertation entitled "StatykAkcja – studium o statycznych aspektach w sztuce akcji" ["StaticAction – a Study of the Static Aspects of Action Art"]), thesis advisor: Professor Artur Tajber. Reviewers: Professor Antoni Porczak, Professor Kamil Kuskowski.

**Master of Arts:** 1998 – 2003, Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, Faculty of Sculpture, (June 2003 – MA (diploma cum laude) at the Media Action Studio of Professor Antoni Porczak, reviewer: Dr Michał Ostrowicki).

**2002** Socrates Erasmus scholarship at Universidad de Castilla la Mancha, Faculty of Multimedia, in Cuenca, Spain.

**1998 – 1999** studies at the State Teacher Training College, Department of Plastic Arts, in Częstochowa.

**1991 – 1996** studies at the Tadeusz Kantor State High School of the Plastic Arts in Dąbrowa Górnicza – specializing in Exhibitions.

### **2. History of employment in academic and research institutions**

#### **2a. Employment in academic institutions:**

**2010 – present** – Assistant Professor, interim Head (from 2017) of the Performance Art Studio at the Department of Art Phenomena at the Faculty of Intermedia of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków.

**2009 – 2012** – Assistant Professor at the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, Department of Information Technology in Bytom, Drawing Studio.

2010-2012 – Assistant Professor at the Performance Art Studio at the Department of Intermedia of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków.

**2007 – 2010** – Teaching-and-research Assistant at the Performance Art Studio at the Department of Intermedia of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków.

**2004 – 2007** – Teaching-and-research Assistant at the Interfaculty Intermedia Studio of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków.

**2b. Employment and contracts in art institutions:**

**from 2013** – Member of the Program Committee at the National Gallery of Art in Sopot.

**from 2012** – Curator of the International Bipolar Performers' Meeting at the National Gallery of Art in Sopot.

**2003 – 2004** – Art Curator at the BB Gallery in Kraków.

**1999 – present** – Independent Artist – creation and presentation of more than 100 artistic, social, educational and research projects in art galleries and institutions in Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Ukraine, Hungary, Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Lithuania, Russia, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Canada, India, Japan, China, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil and other countries.

**Achievement selected in accordance with art. 16 point 2 of the law of 14 March 2003 on academic degrees and academic title and on degrees and title in art (Journal of Laws (Dz. U). no. 65, item 595 with amendments):**

Work selected as the main achievement in the habilitation process:

**DREAMLINER** – performance

{A series of artistic performances}

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## 01. Introduction

*Dreamliner*, of which I am both the author and the performer, premiered at the Centre en art actuel Le Lieu in Quebec City, Canada, within the framework of a program entitled "Art performance Pologne Quebec – hommage à Jan Świdziński" that took place on 4-7 April 2013. The program was co-organized and co-funded by the Le Lieu centre, the Polish Institute in New York, the Faculty of Intermedia (my workplace), and the National Science Centre in Poland. Recorded in a digital format, it was released on DVD-video by the Le Lieu centre, under the title "Art Pologne Quebec – Polska/Quebec, performance art" (publishing agency: INTER/Le Lieu), in 2014.

By the middle of 2017, the program had been presented twenty-five times in fourteen different countries. **I decided to select it for presentation as the main achievement in my habilitation process because of its crucial role in my oeuvre as a whole;** the performance weaves together many seemingly divergent formal and thematic threads I have picked up in the past decade and represents their intermedia synthesis.

I began my career in art as a performance artist. Even though I graduated from the Faculty of Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, I had already declared my interest in performance at the stage of specialization and the graduate diploma project (title: "Ja w performance" ["Me in performance"]). Between 2007 and 2010, I completed my doctoral studies. My theoretical dissertation was devoted to the phenomenon of statics in the tradition and practice of action art ("StatykAkcja – studium o statycznych aspektach w sztuce akcji" ["StaticAction – a Study of the Static Aspects of Action Art"]), while the practical project included recordings of six performances of mine. Since completing my doctorate, I have considerably expanded my artistic practice. Considering the nature of the discipline, it is important to keep in mind that my output includes several dozen works of various themes and different forms, all created in person (from preparation all the way to public presentation), and performed in more than ten countries around the globe (see: artistic biography); these also include art workshops, i.e. works created collectively under my supervision, and curatorships, where my own artistic practice and experience have served as a basis for the presentation of other authors. Ever since my graduation, I have also been involved in an effort to create a dedicated program, and then an organizational unit, to conduct research and teach intermedia art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, first as a research-and-teaching assistant at the Interfaculty Intermedia Studio and the Performance Art Studio at the Department of

Intermedia, and then, from 2012 onward, as a research-and-teaching assistant and later assistant professor at the Faculty of Intermedia at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. In September 2017, I was appointed to serve as an interim head of the Performance Art Studio, created in 2007 by Professor Artur Tajber as the first university unit in Poland to focus on contemporary action art.

## **02. Context and sources**

Performance art came into its own as a separate discipline at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, based, on the one hand, on the avant-garde currents of artistic action (Dadaism and surrealism, futurism, Gutai, happening, Fluxus...), and, on the other, on the counterculture revolt of the 1960s. Its sources can be found in many different artistic genres and traditions. The first performance artists were originally groomed as musicians, composers, poets, writers, painters and sculptors, but the current also featured figures educated beyond the world of art.

Entering this complex environment at the end of the 1990s, I took its legacy as my own and shaped my interests in direct dialogue with the performance artists of earlier generations, beginning with the pioneers of the genre. And thus, my successive experiments always referred to the present day, to the world around me, as well as to the peculiar opposition in which the short tradition of intermedia and performance art had placed them with respect to other currents of culture.

What is the greatest challenge for a performance artist? Common definitions prevalent in ordinary discourse would define it as an attempt to "transcend the barriers of psychophysical condition". To my mind, however, this statement not only merely scratches the surface, but also seems overly technical, based on a line of thinking rooted in the tradition of studio-based art.

Similar challenges are faced by athletes, whose achievements are much easier to measure and whose effort to hone their skills often brings superhuman results. Art and sport, however, are not one and the same.

*Art encompasses the life of the artist, his spirit, his prayer, his delight, his concern, his love, his despair, his worry, his helplessness, and his fear. It embraces his eyes, his nerves, his suffering, and his joy.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Zbigniew Warpechowski, "Podnośnik", p. 54, 2001, ISBN 83-86983-39-6

Unfortunately, despite the lessons of counterculture, conceptual and contextual art, and the world-encompassing intellectual ferment of the 1960s and 1970s, many artists continue to treat their art one-dimensionally, as a mere craft, and pursue it with the predefined objective of achieving success or following current trends. As a consequence, an excessive exhibitionism of personal trauma and cloying sentimentalism expressed in the maltreatment of one's own body can be witnessed even within various post-avantgarde idioms.

I believe that the huge potential of performance art, one of the freest and most informal disciplines, lies elsewhere. The supreme challenge for the artist is to try his hand at new tasks every day. To cultivate Authenticity and Sincerity. To be sincere toward himself and the viewer, while maintaining a healthy critical distance. To make sure his work tells the truth. To believe in its Justice, its meta-ethical value, the need to build the message with Honesty and promote dialogue, understood as a *continuum*, a process. To believe in Systematicity. To reconcile himself (*a priori*) to the fact that what we do is irrelevant, non-utilitarian and pretentious: that it is a claim placed on the world. To realize the need to give up on profits, approval and accolades.

It is a great challenge to be able to oscillate between reality and fiction, physical proximity and intellectual distance, staying put and transcending boundaries – to exist in the miasmas of the absurd, in the realm of whimsical imaginings, pierced with the sting of provocation and painful questioning. It is a tough call to face the crowd as a hostage and messenger of higher values. The task of the artist, understood not as a creator of indeterminate content, but as an author of works with an unambiguous moral compass, always pointing toward the future, is to ennoble the viewers' sensitivity to their environment, including current social issues, interpersonal relations, and the needs of the weakest among us, to boost empathy and openness to the problems of others, to create a strong emotional charge and release it by the skilful sharing of emotions. The artist must make a systematic effort to shape his skills of instant adjustment to various dynamic situations, develop critical attention skills to reduce redundancies, avoid mechanical repetition and hackneyed patterns, showy tricks and ornaments. He needs to persist in tracking down the ephemeral, fleeting signs of festivity that lift up and bring light to the everyday. And, above all, he is called upon to cultivate a childlike, primal curiosity about the effects of his actions. I am well aware that this sounds pompous and overly romantic, but it is the only attitude that can keep us alive, full of fervent creative fury, and free from frustrated dissatisfaction.

The strong emotional and existential tension, verging on sentimentality, clashes with the image perceived in the act of introspection and engenders distance; the drama of this fissure provides us with a language and a style, the main tools of communications with our fellow man. Energy released through this dramatic inner conflict, and the awareness of one's own pretences, gives rise to burlesque, to black and perverse humour, to the absurd. The goal, however, is not derisive satire, but, rather, an interplay of paradoxes infused with (self-)irony.

Several features of performance art set it apart from studio art and other time-based arts. Importantly, it does not have a separate, constant repertory of means that define its artistic practice. No clear formal elements or features distinguish it unambiguously from other forms. Performance is ephemeral, unique, and can never be reproduced in the strict sense of the word. Neither is it subject to the strict principles of script, score or rendition – far from being a detailed plan, the outline or script of a performance is rather a series of context-dependent instructions.

As an intermedia formation, performance art may draw on tools developed within other creative disciplines, but, in the act of performance, these cease to belong to painting, music, theatre or literature proper. The creative process neither begins nor ends with a work of art external to the author; rather, it concerns the person of the artist as such. Another defining feature of performance art is its social dimension, namely, the fact that its practitioners tend to create an environment, a separate community or subculture of their own. Most know one another in person, hold meetings and discussions and, most importantly, have seen one another's performances first-hand, which is unprecedented in other circles. Relations between members of orchestras, music groups, and theatre or film crews are completely different; performance artists do not rely on hierarchies and division of labour – each is at once the author and performer of his own work.

### **03. Description**

Inspired by the insights of my "ancestors", I wish to begin with a question asked in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by John Cage: what is necessary in a work of art, what can be negotiated and which elements can or should be subjective, individual and original? How does that affect *Dreamliner*, and how is the work, with its unique and ephemeral nature, related to its multiple performances over several years? Further still

(and following John Cage), what is its structure, form, method and material...and, last but not least, how can its lifeline be described?

The background premises and performance instructions are easy to spell out:

Duration: 45 minutes, assembly time: 120 minutes, disassembly: 60 minutes.  
Setting and equipment: two spotlights, a wireless microphone, a video projector, a screen, a sound system (min. 1000 W); a sound mixer with a delay/echo effect; an empty theatre-like room; in the middle of the room, a 0.5 m-high platform with an area of 1 x 2 m. On the platform, a black tripod supporting the wireless microphone (with the delay/echo effect switched on) is connected to a mini camera and a small black box that contains a pack of paper tissues; a leaf blower (2500 W) is placed under the tripod, and a spotlight in the floor throws a vertical column of light that illuminates the tripod, the performer, and the ceiling; a large (4 x 6 m) screen is mounted behind the platform.

### **Scene 1**

The author stands by the microphone, wearing a buttoned-up white shirt, well-ironed black trousers, and glossy patent-leather shoes. He is trying to speak. The camera projects a live image of the stage onto the screen behind; the video magnifies and zooms in on the situation, emphasizing the presence of small props, gestures and performance details. In this scene, the camera is mostly focused on the mouth of the author. The character begins to cough up clouds of tiny particles of golden brocade. Every now and then, he silences the audience with a telling gesture; at one point, he puts a finger on his mouth and goes on to cover his face with a black body spray. As he moves his finger away from his lips, an unpainted "vertical trace of silence" is revealed. He hides the black finger under the collar, then takes it out to point at the area of the ceiling illuminated by the spotlight. The author attempts to establish dialogue with the audience; he coughs repeatedly, gesturing to make it clear he is waiting for an answer. To elicit a reaction, copious amounts of air freshener are sprayed into the air. After a few minutes, the entire audience begins to cough in an act of communication. End of scene one. Lights out.

### **Scene 2**

A pine board (60 x 180 cm) is placed vertically on the platform, covering up the figure of the author. Digits 3, 2, and 1 can be seen on the wall in the background. From behind the board, the black finger of the author once again points toward the ceiling (the gesture will be repeated at random in successive scenes). A fuse fitted to the board is ignited and burns, dividing it in half with a black line in the middle. Its movement simulates the take-off of a rocket, directed toward the flood of light. The author changes

his position, gradually moving from number 3 to number 2 and then to number 1. At last, the rocket flies off into the air. End of scene two. Lights out.

### **Scene 3**

The author stands on the board with a large axe in his hands and points its handle toward the ceiling. After a while, he fixes his feet (shoes) to the board with 10 cm nails. He makes sure to put the nails in between his toes. Thus immobilized, he uses the axe to divide the board in half along the black line and thus produces a pair of "skis". Now able to move again, he jerks his body to simulate the take-off and the long flight of a ski jumper. The two skis are burning and a slowed down version of the song *I believe I can fly* is heard from the loudspeakers. The scene ends with a "Telemark" turn and a loud thud against the floor. After a few skips, the author takes off the "skis" along with the shoes. Then he strikes a pose for the press. End of scene.

### **Scene 4**

The scene opens with an "obstinate search for a new way to turn the dream of flying into reality". The author switches on the leaf blower, places it on the floor, facing upward, and moves closer to stand over it. With one quick movement, he tears his shirt open and throws it off. It turns out he is wearing another one underneath, and then another, and another still. The empty space between the shirts is stuffed with feathers. The loudspeakers play Michael Jackson's *Beat It*. The powerful current scatters the rags and the feathers around and lifts them up in the air. The author takes the blower and tries to use the stream of air to keep the shirts from falling. Dancing around like ghostly apparitions, shreds of fabric descend to the floor and are immediately thrown up again by the audience. The scene lasts until the end of the song.

### **Scene 5**

With one thrust of the axe, the author cuts the collars off his shirts, one by one, and then puts them in his pocket. His finger signals "to be continued". He folds the microphone tripod in half and switches on the leaf blower. From the off, the audience can hear a music theme from Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon*. The author approaches the black box attached to the tripod and, to the tune of the song, takes out a handful of white paper tissues. The blower throws them high up into the air. End of scene.

### **Scene 6**

The performer seems tired, he is sweating, half naked. Again, as in the beginning, he begins to cough, but the audience now responds immediately. The author uses the camera to search the floor for a button that has fallen off one of the shirts and then projects it, rescaled, on the screen. He takes up the button and, with a needle, sews it onto

his bare throat (the procedure is hygienic and completely painless, but may elicit mixed feelings when viewed close up). As a consequence, the author is now naked, wearing nothing but the "last button". He stands next to number 3 and begins to hyperventilate, desperately gasping for air. As he moves on to number 2, his breathing begins to slow down. By the time he reaches number 1, his breath is completely calm. He holds it until the room becomes silent. Lights go out. The end.

The above outline is not a script but, rather, a synopsis. Its contents are instructions whose temporal aspect is first fleshed out in preparation for the premiere and, in a sense, only fixed and corrected on the stage. Each individual performance needs to adapt the template to the circumstances at hand: to another audience and to the different physical parameters of the props, the venue, and the time (outside light, specific moment). A reproduction of this kind should be viewed not as a copy of the original pattern (template), but as an act of its actualization. Successive performances modify the weak and reinforce the strong aspects of the synopsis, inducing its gradual evolution and self-purification. The formula of the performance is processual in nature.

And thus, paradoxically, performance is typified by its uniqueness, ephemerality and the restless changeability of contextual parameters, such as time, place, culture and language... Banal as it may sound, thanks to its open and interactive formula, a work of performance art remains in a constant state of tension and ongoing improvement. Each show overwrites the one that came before. Modifications of the central concept, stage movement, duration time and the quantity, quality and type of props and materials are nothing short of natural and, in some contexts, may even become desirable. The flexibility of the synopsis allows it to be adapted to any conditions. The work can be shown in the theatre, in a gallery space (*white cube*), or in an open-air setting. I have performed in various locations, including Latin America, North America, Asia, Europe and the Indian subcontinent; such variety of venues helps weaken our cultural fixations and neutralize our habits, casting the artist in the role of a negotiator of meanings. He needs to show openness and distance; he must be able to find his bearings and play it by ear in any circumstances, including difficult situations when improvisation is called for and props must be replaced with substitutes or new materials with a different colour, density and structure. For instance, the fuse used in the first scene needs to be ordered separately for each performance, since, for obvious reasons, it cannot be taken on board and transported by plane. Depending on the type, producer and local legal regulations, the fuse burns with different intensity: sometimes at a speed of one centimetre per second,

sometimes as much as a metre. Accordingly, the duration of the first scene may be long enough to encourage contemplation or go by in an instant before it is even registered; sometimes, it may be almost explosive in nature. In other words, the premiere often has little in common with the final performance, even though the motifs and the principles outlined in the synopsis are honoured throughout. The most interesting discrepancies arise as a result of cultural differences between the venues in which *Dreamliner* is performed. Its reception, including people's reactions, emotions, perceptions and interpretations, varies depending on geographic latitude and longitude. No matter the planning, the performance can never be fixed in a rigid frame; its interpretations are dynamic and constantly move in different directions, and this is precisely what makes the message so unique.

#### **04. Interpretations**

When Westerners watch a Beijing opera, they come across an immense wealth of meanings conveyed by even the smallest elements of gesture, costume, dance and sound. The discipline of the genre and its formal tradition provide an elaborate array of expressive means in the form of singing, recitation, dance and even martial arts. The character resembles a statue in which the actor is walled up. Emotions and roles are represented by countless means and conventions that a "foreigner" simply needs to learn; for instance, a red mask symbolizes an honest man, a purple one represents a brave person, a white one identifies a liar, a yellow one stands for a warrior (barbarian), and a golden one is appropriate for gods and spirits. Each gesture is fraught with symbolism and subdued emotion. Since we are not Chinese, however, many layers of the message elude us even though we are still able to participate in what feels like an absurd and extremely hypnotic cultural phenomenon. Interestingly, the number of people able to fully comprehend the performance and understand the language (Mandarin) is also relatively low in China. The performance of Beijing opera requires a guide, a manual for use, in order not to violate historically sanctioned meanings, symbols and allegories; the show should not deviate an inch from the original and the actors keep their roles for a lifetime. Performance art avoids such hard-and-fast rules like the plague; if it did not, it would lose its authenticity. I do not mean to say that Beijing opera is not authentic. What I try to emphasize is the subtle difference in the way that truth is told onstage and maintained in an emotional register that speaks, above all, to the performer himself. Performance artists learn the difference first-hand, mostly when they first perform for an audience shaped by

the conventions of Beijing opera. The forced contrast between the two traditions helps to point out their differences, as well as their emotional and interpretative intentions.

*Art involves acting within the context of reality; this does not mean that reality should be accepted or opposed no matter what. Rather, it is about taking ownership of one's own actions, a conscious participation.*<sup>2</sup>

The cultural differences in interpretation were particularly clear for me in South Korea, where I performed *Dreamliner* under the pressure and burden of a heavy historical context. The organizers of the Biennale decided to locate my performance at an intersection of two roads in the city of Gwangju, a site where the army bloodily crushed an uprising against the dictatorship of General Chon Doo Hwan (the *Gwangju massacre*) in May 1980. It was obvious that despite its universal message and political neutrality, any performance in that setting would be seen through the prism of the traumatic event. The emotions of my truly moved Korean spectators were necessarily filtered through the context of the place.

My performance of *Dreamliner* in Caracas, Venezuela, is another case in point. The country has recently been going through a serious crisis: it has the highest inflation rate in the world, and dictatorship and violence are the order of the day. On my second day in Caracas, I witnessed a murder. A man was killed in front of me just because he refused to give up his iPhone. The event made me rethink my entire life, but it also changed my inner energy and perception then and there, considerably altering the temperature of the show and its main points of emphasis. I did not intend to introduce any changes, nor did I correct the synopsis – certain emotions surfaced when I entered the stage. The weight of the performance shifted to the mystical realm of feeling; the tragic pushed burlesque to the background and the comic became the backdrop for genuine drama. The separate status of each performance can be observed on many levels, in many layers and fragments: those related to the quality, nature and properties of individual props and materials, to differences in customs and culture, as well as to elements that have to do with the physical volume of the venue or, for instance, the height of the stage.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Świdziński, "Konteksty", p. 172 ISBN 978-83-932239-0-9

## 05. Language of the absurd

OBS ORDINE – out of place, inappropriate, improper. In music, the term may mean a lack of harmony in the composition. In logic, it refers to REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM, i.e. reduction to absurdity, already used as an "indirect proof" by Socrates as part of what is known as the Socratic method. It shows up in Soren Kierkegaard, whose conception of the "absurd" departed from the situation of the biblical Abraham, commanded by God to prove his faith by sacrificing his only son on Mount Moriah.

*The absurdity that existentialist philosophers attributed to human life and all human endeavour involved a number of mental states (such as terror or a sense of purposelessness), which they considered as the foundation of what it means to be human.*<sup>3</sup>

I am attracted to situational absurdity, as well as its deliberate kind, which can be found in art. The absurd allows one to transcend the boundaries of concepts and ideas, prevents hierarchies from becoming ossified, and effectively stimulates creative powers. Its seeming irrationality transcends nearly all boundaries, but never crosses over into the realm of kitsch, banality and senselessness. While nonsense is the emanation of silliness, the absurd juggles sense and allows us to approach wisdom. It requires time; the "miasmas of the absurd" must be highly concentrated to intoxicate us. The absurd looks like a trifle, seemingly without purpose; it is hardly useful or utilitarian, it does not force anything – and that is its greatest strength. Reduction to absurdity. How many elements need to be given up, and which elements need to remain, to achieve that power? Is a pure NOTHING (vacuum) already the same as the absurd? Not at all.

My "thinking through the lens of the absurd" has been shaped by the oeuvre of Roman Signer, Harrison and Wood, Roi Vaara, Cezary Bodzianowski, and the work (or rather the attitude) of the American comedian Andy Kaufman, the Monty Python group, Terry Gilliam, Christoph Schlingensiefel, the Theatre of the Absurd, the Theatre of Cruelty, and the Zero Theatre. Throughout the years, these sources have moulded my sense of topsy-turvy perception, creative improvisation and critical distance to the final product. I was particularly impressed by the eccentric, Dadaist figure of Andy Kaufman. The comedian played with all accepted conventions, proposed an innovative approach to television, stand-up performance and cabaret, and even went as far as to modify (and even

<sup>3</sup> Antoni Bohdziewicz WikiCytaty

try to annihilate) his commercially successful persona. At the acme of his success, he called to life an alter ego (Tony Clifton), whose role was to destroy Kaufman's popularity. He found humour in phobias, consternation, embarrassment, manipulation and repetition, often performed a balancing act on the edge of taboo and morality, and, above all, never shrank from exposing human foibles. He alienated spectators by wrestling with women in a boxing ring and drove the public mad by reading Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* from cover to cover. During the live broadcast of one of his shows, he deliberately caused a technical glitch and considered it the most hilarious prank to play on millions of television viewers (they would jump up from their seats to adjust the quality of the broadcast, helplessly tapping on their TV set). All these outside-the-box gags and ideas, I believe, bear a strong affinity to performance art, or at least to my own fascinations and endeavours. The same can be said of the work of Roman Signer and the Harrison and Wood duo. These artists fall back on unconventional methods to work primarily with the object as a prop and space as an integral part of performance. In their work, props take on new meanings, they constitute "extensions of the performer's hand"<sup>4</sup>. In traditional theatre, they are one-dimensional objects used according to their common use or function. For Harrison and Wood, however, they go beyond their original role and often serve for an alternative, often much more interesting, purpose. I look for similar effects in my performances; a plank can also act as a window sill, an ironing board, a pair of skis, a rocket or a trampoline. A shirt, as well as its collar and its buttons, all have a different role to play. They cease to be mere pieces of clothing, a work uniform, a costume. Animated by the puffs of the compressor, they enter "the stage" as equal partners with a new function; they become metaphors for the spirits of the above-mentioned artists, a scalped skin dyed in an act of *tabula rasa*. Last but not least, Roman Signer inspired me to pay more attention to the physical context of the performance, to nature, surroundings, architecture, as well as to natural elements, such as fire, water and wind. He taught me partnership, openness and flexibility with respect to outer reality; he showed me how to use it. The artist yields to the potential of his environment and thus subjugates his ego, at the same time strengthening it with the authority of reality. The above are all valuable insights and reflections I eagerly draw on in my own work (*Dreamliner, Sędzia boczny, W samo południe*).

The roots of the absurd go back to the Theatre of the Absurd, an innovative current in contemporary drama, born in France, which enjoyed its heyday between 1950 and 1965. Its main feature was referred to as the RECONCILIATION OF OPPOSITES.

<sup>4</sup> Zbigniew Warpechowski "Podnośnik"

The principle entailed a reversal of roles between the tragic and the comic, where the former became the vehicle for the latter, and the latter took on the shape of the former. At the same time, the theatre of the absurd questioned the existence of a single ontological solution to the problem of the world. Its dominant themes include the uncertainty of whether anything that surrounds contemporary man is real; it focuses on man as the tragic hero of the cosmic and existential play of appearances. Interestingly, it was also the first to introduce the motifs of a double and a mirror, which soon became one of the most important symbols of the absurd. This kind of theatre often relies on the repertory of the farce (e.g. a slip on a banana peel repeated multiple times), and the only thing that helps distinguish one from the other is a high IQ. The goal, however, is not to "comprehend" the play, but, rather, to gain distance toward ourselves and the world around us. The purpose is to feel empathy for a particular political view or have a religious experience, not to show "brilliance" for brilliance's sake. The absurd is located somewhere on the peripheries of art and logic; it could even be said to be the last circle of initiation beyond which no more than the echo of silence can be found.

*...they were characterized by a reversal of the social order, paving the way for various eccentricities, profanations, blasphemies, and misalliances. The topsy-turvy world encouraged actions that most participants would usually shrink from under normal social conditions. It was a highly eccentric show; it consisted of several successive and overlapping performances, all linked together through carnivalesque laughter. In Bakhtin's view, laughter was a safety valve with an important therapeutic role; it was an indispensable element of cultural behaviour that counterbalanced the seriousness associated with mourning, fasting, and asceticism. As a reaction to everything serious, elevated, and stately, laughter resembled an act of exhalation, a moment when flexed muscles are finally relaxed.*<sup>5</sup>

## **06. Conclusions**

*Dreamliner* is an original performance, in the sense that the concept, the synopsis and execution were all created by the author, who is the sole owner of all associated copyrights. A tragicomic work written for the stage, *Dreamliner* flirts with the conventions of the theatre, *commedia dell'arte* and Dadaist cabaret. It reconciles two

<sup>5</sup> Jacek Wachowski, „Performans”, *Refleksja kulturowo-społeczna*, pp. 29-30. ISBN: 978-83-7453-684-4:

conflicting elements, two polar emotions that complement each other in the conventions of drama and farce. Successive scenes pulsate with absurdist humour, only to do an about turn and culminate in a tragic punchline. The formula is typical of my oeuvre as a whole and also represents a synthesis of the stylistic means I have used over my twenty years as a performance artist. It was directly inspired by a number of sketches, quotations, dreams, absurd mini etudes and experiments I had engaged in before and which, over time, had come together to form a catalogue of narrative themes and associations ready for creative use. Through a process of reduction, the synopsis was finally trimmed down to six scenes, which contain what I like to call narrative digressions. These are largely based on improvisation and enable interaction with the audience. The sequence of individual scenes provides a solid scaffolding for the work as a whole; the pauses between them and their structural elements are deliberately left empty, ensuring ample latitude for context-based improvisation, interaction with the audience and the influence of the features of time and space.

*Dreamliner* is a performance idea realized in 25 equivalent versions, each of which should be viewed as a complete and autonomous work of art and which, taken together, form a single whole. This presentation aimed to describe the basic premises and inspirations of my endeavour, as well as discuss selected aspects of its formal analysis. It is supplemented by documentation of all the performances, including representative samples from video recordings, visual documents and information materials, including press releases and reviews.

## **07. Afterword – sources of my work**

I was born in Dąbrowa Górnicza, a sleepy town plagued by social realist complexes. My interest in art was first sparked by my Father, Marek Grabowski, a painter, sculptor, music lover and graduate of the State College of Fine Arts in Poznań, and it was only natural that I should take up studies at the Tadeusz Kantor State High School of the Plastic Arts in Dąbrowa Górnicza. In retrospect, I can say that the school's eponym has spread his protective wings over me ever since. I was fervently interested in theatre, live art and action art. Their processual and dynamic approach to form was a stark alternative to the drawing, painting and graphic practice I had imbibed at home. I took an equally strong interest in various phenomena I saw in the media, such as Monty Python's Flying Circus and Andy Kaufman. I explored surrealism, abstract art and improvisation, as well

as various techniques that mixed different media, styles and forms of expression. In 1997, I was admitted to the State Teaching Training College to study plastic arts, and, a year later, I decided to pursue a course at the Faculty of Sculpture of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. At that time, sculpture seemed particularly well-suited to my needs, skills and objectives; what I looked for in my work was space and friction with matter. An emotional craving for physical effort was no less important. However, even in my freshman year my interest in the very process of shaping prevailed over my need to shape sculptural forms. My first video footage was created at night, at the sculpture studio of Professor Bogusz Salwiński. The camera filmed me as I moved clay from a full to an empty box all night till dawn. Professor Salwiński's words still ring in my ears: "You will not be a sculptor. Go to the Media Practice Studio, there's refuge there for those who are different". The studio was run by Professor Antoni Porczak.

From that moment on, my interests have been firmly focused on performance art and theatre. I already knew Tadeusz Kantor very well at the time, but I still had to discover Jerzy Bereś, Zbigniew Warpechowski, Władysław Kaźmierczak, Jerzy Grotowski, the Laboratory Theater, Gardzienice, the Living Theatre and the Academy of Movement Theatre. My first performance, entitled *HvatBra*, premiered in 1999 at the Dariusz Gorczyca Theatre of Situation. The theatre was located in the Main Market Square in Kraków, at the back of the legendary Pod Jaszczurami Club (the former theatre 38), and ranked as one of very few venues open to public experimentation by students. I then moved on to found a paratheatre group called Bałdaki (Anna Łątka, Marcin Boni); together, we created a performance entitled *Producto* (Klub pod Ręką), devoted to the objectification of human beings and the reduction of women to the role of commercial products. We performed in Kraków-based clubs alongside the Ładnie Group, whose activity dates back to the same period. It was at the Theatre of Situation that I met Bartolome Ferrando and, which was meant to prove even more important for my future, Artur Tajber, the organizer of the *Performance hiszpański [Spanish Performance]* show and the guru of the Kraków performance circles. Persuaded by Artur, I soon joined the Fort Sztuki Association as its youngest member, which allowed me to meet representatives of the local alternative art scene and learn how to manage a formal institution, such as an association, gallery, or art venue. In 2000, as one of the first students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, I embarked on an Individual Course of Study. This choice allowed me to pursue parallel studies in sculpture, animation and intermedia at the Interfaculty Intermedia Studio, founded and managed by none other than Professor Artur Tajber himself. I graduated from the studio of Professor Porczak with a diploma devoted to the

issues of performance art, the first MA thesis to be written on the subject in Poland. I received a distinction awarded by the Council of the Faculty of Sculpture.

After graduation, I applied to work as Professor Artur Tajber's assistant at the Interfaculty Intermedia Studio, and thus started out on my academic career. An intense period followed, including individual work with performance art, teaching duties at the Academy, and a cooperation with the Poznań-based Body Snatchers Theatre, where I worked as an actor for five years, staging four plays: *Wszystkie grzechy są śmiertelne* [*All Sins Are Mortal*], *Rekord* [*Record*], *Parada śmiesznych twarzy* [*Funny Face Parade*], and *Tajemnica wg Gombrowicza* [*Mystery According to Gombrowicz*], and several happenings. All premiered at the legendary Eight Day Theatre, whose crew appreciated my individual performance practice; I also staged my performance *Sukcesor* [*Successor*] with them. In the same period, I got to know the theatre circles of Poznań (Sphere of Silence Theatre, Travel Agency Theatre, Mouth to Mouth Theatre), performers Zbigniew Warpechowski, Janusz Bałdyga (Teatr Akademia Ruchu), Jan Świdziński, Black Market International, as well as the members of Fluxus, La Fura Dels Baus, and their oeuvre. These are the legends that inspired and supported me at the same time.

Ten years later, I had nearly 100 performance shows to my name, along with approximately 50 theatre plays staged with the Body Snatchers Theatre, several video movies and participation at major performance art festivals in the world (including in Japan, Mexico, Europe, USA, Canada, China and the Philippines). In 2001, I witnessed the explosion of a car bomb planted by ETA in Madrid. My performance entitled *ETA – Bum Tratata* [*ETA – Kaboom*] was shown only once, immediately upon my return to Poland, during the Interakcje Festival at the BWA Gallery in Zielona Góra. Its narrative structure alluded directly to the event; I used artificial blood, looped sounds of explosions and sirens to stimulate an overwhelming sense of danger. I followed a similar approach later with my *Materialoza* [*Materialasis*] performance, shown during the *Breaking News* Festival at the Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw. Before the show, I retreated into isolation to fast for seven days. I was deeply fascinated by Buddhism and rejected the values of consumerism; I strived to reduce my needs to the minimum. The attempt to shock the public with my traumas was of paramount importance to me at the time, and form, structure, craft and props were treated superficially and chaotically. The performance played out in an accidental and improvised manner, determined by my act of entering the stage and clashing with reality.

In 2007, the Intermedia Studio merged with the studio of Professor Porczak to become the Department of Intermedia and a new academic program was inaugurated.

From then on, I have worked at the Performance Art Studio (as of 2017, as its Head), the first academic unit of this kind in Poland. In the same year, I also started out on my PhD dissertation, entitled "StatykAkcja – studium o statycznych aspektach w sztuce akcji" ["StaticAction – a Study of the Static Aspects of Action Art"] and supplemented with a series of on-camera performance etudes: *Sędzia boczny* [Side Referee], *Nie trzaskać drzwiami* [Do Not Slam Doors], *Jedna tona na godzinę* [A Ton Per Hour], *W samo południe* [High Noon], *Earl grey* [Earl Grey]. All these performances analysed the phenomenon of time and the boundaries of the concepts of action, activity and stillness.

With time, my interests moved from one-dimensional, predictable forms to ones that allowed for a broader spectrum of interpretive freedom. I focused on maintaining balance and proportion, on contrasting different, often contradictory, emotions, as well as distance, ironic expression, interaction with the public, allusions and contents picked up from the street, the media and the internet. I often took on the role of a naive child blithely playing with a loaded gun. Magdalena Kownacka (art historian, manager of the Fait Gallery in Kraków) thus described my work:

*What Arti does resembles the pranks of a hyperactive child; it is a form of play which in itself, however, is the foundation and factor of culture<sup>6</sup> and the basic way of knowing the world. According to Huizinga, play differs from normal life in that it takes place in a well-defined setting of place and time and is governed by its own set of rules. Playing implies unconstrained action. It complements everyday life and serves the purpose not of pleasure but of knowledge, allowing reality to manifest itself<sup>7</sup>. What particularly stands out in Grabowski's performances is action – activity, a hunger to live and experience the matter of the world, a striving to create conflict between the individual layers of the performance, its meanings, as well as between the artist and the environment. Arti often provokes with the simplest means. His aim is catastrophe, buffoonery. He introduces chaos. He resorts to gestures and numbers, which seem symbolic at first blush, but in reality have no meaning at all. His actions are often based on physical effort, a combination of art and sports, an activity valuable in and of itself. However, Grabowski's work is not merely rebellion. He takes great care to select the appropriate props, arrange the space where he performs and choose the clothes he wears. There is a marked contrast between his uncontrolled action and his attention to detail. Arti's extensive artistic education no doubt had an important role to play in shaping his approach. He is the son of an artist and*

<sup>6</sup> J. Huizinga, „Homo ludens. Zabawa jako źródło kultury”, Warszawa 1985, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-24.

<sup>8</sup> This is how Robert Nickas described the oeuvre of J. Beuys, paraphrasing Roland Barthes' term – "loud writing". Za: M. Jankowska, op. cit., p. 169.

*experienced painting and sculpture in his early youth; they left him unfulfilled, but he respected their aesthetic values. As he moved on to his mature work as a performance artist, the influence of sculpture and painting continues to be present in his works. (...) For Grabowski, it is the poetry of the scream. "Loud sculpture"<sup>8</sup>. A combination of stage precision and acting skills with intuitive action, accident, cumulative tension and a peculiar symbolism.*

My post-PhD oeuvre is outlined in the portfolios attached to this resumé, one devoted to teaching, the other to art.



*Artur (Arti) Grabowski*

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