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“Observe, Decrypt, Inform” – Working on a Walking Performance

Abstract: The article deals with the creative process of creating a so-called walking performance. The analysed case study is the performance *Skrót. Krakau Files* [Short Cut. The Krakau Files, 2003] produced by Goethe-Institut in Kraków and created by the Swiss theatre director, Stefan Kaegi. The work on the performance is described from two perspectives. The first is internal (creative) – the author co-created the dramaturgy of the project and supervised its proper exploitation. The second is external (critical, exploratory, research-related). It includes references not only to existing theories of walking performance and audio walk but also to ideas such as flâneurism (as seen by Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin), psychogeography, the drift, the writings of Michel de Certeau, Guy Debord and the Situationists.

Keywords: creative process, walking performance, audio walk, dramaturgy of performance, flâneurism, psychogeography, Stefan Kaegi

Initial assumptions

One of the most intriguing juxtapositions of language and space in Polish literature appears in *Cosmos* by Witold Gombrowicz “How many sentences can one create out of the twenty-four letters of the alphabet? How many meanings can one glean from hundreds of weeds, clods of dirt, and other trifles?”¹ One of the novel’s most important themes is the human “propensity for congruity” – to seek meaningful links between letters and words, but also between the objects that make up the landscape as shaped either by nature or, especially, by humans.

Cosmos is a self-referential novel, a meaning-making record of the creative process and, at the same time, something like a philosophical description of a game of hare and hounds. Entirely accidentally (and prophetically), Witold Gombrowicz also succeeded in grasping the essence of a comparatively new

¹ W. Gombrowicz, *Cosmos*, transl. D. Borchardt, New Haven–London 2005, p. 31.

artistic phenomenon known as walking performances. How does such a performance come into being? Is “propensity for congruity” really the central binding agent of its dramaturgy? And finally, what in the case of a walking performance is the relationship between the letters of the alphabet and weeds or clods of dirt? To attempt to answer these questions, I must first clarify a number of issues of central importance to me.

The first concerns the perspective from which I have written this text. It is both external (critical, exploratory, research-related) and internal (creative): I base it on my own experience of co-creating the dramaturgy of walking performances – both in cooperation with artists and as an element of teaching and workshop practice (mainly during the *Ruhrtriennale* festival). The first and most important project within which I acted as a member of the dramaturgical think-tank, and later, with Julia Kluzowicz,² was responsible for coordinating the course of the performance through the successive months of its run, was *Skrót. Krakau Files* [Short Cut. The Krakau Files, 2003] produced by *Goethe-Institut* in Kraków and written by the Swiss director, Stefan Kaegi. Kaegi, along with the *Rimini Protokoll* collective he helped found, is regarded – alongside the duo of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller – as one of the pioneers and most important creative forces of artistic walks. The experience of sharing in the creation of *Skrót. Krakau Files* is the main inspiration for this article.

The second issue concerns the choice of the term “walking performance”. I am aware that the phenomenon I am writing about has yet to be precisely named and defined. Reference is instead made to a constellation of related phenomena, whose names include art walks or audio walks. In the latter case, the role of the soundscape is key, as participants are usually equipped with headphones. The broadest and perhaps most commonly used term today, however, is walking performance. Izabela Zawadzka, a Polish researcher who studies, and is also a practitioner of, this phenomenon, defines it as follows:

Walking performances constitute an activity in which the movement of the participants and/or performers is the fundamental element of the performance. They assume diverse forms (group and individual walks based on the aural and multisensory realms, walks with a guide, and with a map or script in the form of instructions), use various locations (the interiors of buildings and open space), are tied to a specific place or can

² Julia Kluzowicz wrote of her experience working on the performance in the article “*Skrót w Krakowie. Mariaż teatru i przestrzeni miasta*” [*Skrót. Krakau Files: The Marriage of Theatre and The City’s Space*], *Autoportret* 2004, no. 6, pp. 24–25 and in the book *Teatr codzienności. Animacyjne i samokształtujące funkcje twórczości Alvisa Hermanisa i Stefana Kaegiego* [Theatre of the Everyday: Cultural Animation and Self-Formation in the Works of Alvis Hermanis and Stefan Kaegi], Kraków 2017.

take place anywhere, and activate urban spaces and rural areas. They are connected by the use of walking as a central design element.³

For the purposes of this article, however, I would like to make a further clarification that remains within the definitional framework, as it were, proposed by Zawadzka. I am interested only in original walking performances whose processes of coming into being involve a continuous mediation between narration (or performance) and urban space. Performances that adapt already existing works of art, for example the insertion of a suitably abridged audiobook of James Joyce's *Ulysses* into a stroll about the streets of Dublin, are therefore excluded from my thinking.

Forerunners

Three contexts are usually invoked in the context of walking performances. The first is the tradition of flâneurism: the texts of Charles Baudelaire and their later interpretations (especially those of Walter Benjamin). Krzysztof Linda's observation, that the "flâneur desires to experience the street and its nooks and crannies like fragments of a theatrical performance, in which he himself is simultaneously the actor, director and, above all, the spectator"⁴ would appear ideally attuned to the situation of participants in walking performances, who actually do combine the competences of spectators and actors (and to some degree of directors). A second context is provided by the writings of Michel de Certeau. For this French researcher, walking is a substitute for legends that open up space to otherness: "the stories of places are bricolages";⁵ and the body of the walkers "obeys the narrow and broad ducts of the urban 'text', which they write, and which they cannot decipher".⁶ A third point of reference is to the action and theoretical writings of Guy Debord and the Situationists, including concepts such as psychogeography or the drift. Remapping the city by means of leisurely drifting has a strong political subtext in this case: it is an anarchistic action, a smashing of the order imposed by the authorities. The drifting

³ I. Zawadzka, "Współbycie w chodzeniu – ćwiczenia z intymności dostępności" [Intimate Presence in Walking: Exercises in Access Intimacy], *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna* 2023, no. 178, DOI: 10.34762/svb1-dh59.

⁴ K. Linda, "Flâneur – dystans jako forma uczestnictwa" [Flâneur: Distance as a Form of Participation], *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 2010, no. 1 (7), p. 228. Linda's text is a review of a book by Blanka Brzozowska entitled, *Spadkobiercy flâneura. Spacer jako twórczość kulturowa – współczesne reprezentacje* [Walking as Cultural Creation: Contemporary Reinterpretations], Łódź 2009.

⁵ M. de Certeau, *Wynaleźć codzienność. Sztuki działania* [The Practice of Everyday Life; original title: *L'Invention du quotidien*], transl. K. Thiel-Jańczuk, Kraków 2008, p. 108.

⁶ M. de Certeau, *Wynaleźć codzienność...*, op. cit., pp. 94–95.

individual becomes a “knight of a mythical western” characterised by “a great ease in losing himself in the game, in fascination with the journey”.⁷

The so far few academic examinations of phenomena that can, broadly, be categorised as walking performances have therefore been dominated by philosophical, anthropological, ethnographic, sociological or memory studies approaches.⁸ Other than in interviews with artists and practitioners,⁹ however, the creative processes underlying the construction of such performances have hardly been addressed. Meanwhile, the dynamics of these processes are unique, which is not to say that they cannot be compared to creative processes in literature or theatre.

What was *Skrót. Krakau Files*?

The formula of *Skrót. Krakau Files* fully corresponds with Zawadzka’s definition cited above. Participation in the performance involved negotiating a trail that began in the then headquarters of *Goethe-Institut* at *Pałac Potockich, Rynek Główny* 20 in Kraków. From there, the walk led through the areas of the *Piasek*, *Kleparz* and *Krowodrza* districts, including the streets *Karmelicka*, *Garbarska*, *Łobzowska*, *Szlak*, *Długa* and *Wrocławska*, before the participants completed its final stretch by taking a taxi to a bunker in the *Azory* district. The walkers left *Goethe-Institut* alone and at sufficiently long intervals to prevent them meeting on the trail. The navigation of the walk was reminiscent of a pervasive game or of hare and hounds: by reaching successive stops on the trail (there were thirty-eight in all), the participants learned the next piece of the story and, at the same time, received successive clues about where to go and where to look for the next pieces of the plot puzzle. Most of the information was conveyed via slips of paper, hidden in places such as the underside of window ledges or in various other hiding places, but also, for example, inside a stuffed snail in a second-hand shop. Some information was given out verbally by people working in the places visited (a *kiosk* or

⁷ *Ulica Morillons 36*, transl. M. Kwaterko, in: *Przewodnik dla dryfujących. Antologia sytuacjonistycznych tekstów o mieście* [Handbook for Drifters: An Anthology of Situationist Texts about the City], Warszawa 2015, p. 59.

⁸ For example, the doctoral thesis of K.J. Darby, *Pedestrian Performance: A Mapped Journey*, University of Exeter, 2012, <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/9924>; T. Butler, “Memoryscape: How Audio Walks Can Deepen Our Sense of Place by Integrating Oral History and Cultural Geography”, *Geography Compass* 2007, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 360–372; R. Mock (ed.), *Walking, Writing & Performance*, Bristol 2009; T. Ingold, J.L. Vergunst (eds.), *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, Aldershot 2008; J. Tompkins, A. Birch (eds.), *Performing Site-Specific Theatre: Politics, Place, Practice*, London 2012.

⁹ For example, “Zdania, których nigdy nie usłyszysz w Krakowie. Rozmowa z Anką Herbut i Łukaszem Wojtyśko” [Viewpoints You Will Never Hear in Kraków: Interview with Anka Herbut and Łukasz Wojtyśko], *Dwutygodnik* 2013, no. 117 (10), <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/4795-zdania-ktorych-nigdy-nie-uslyszysz-w-krakowie.html>.

bar mleczny [milk bar], for example). Part of the story was recorded, and excerpts from it could be heard in places such as a hotel or a bathroom fittings showroom.

The narration of *Skrót. Krakau Files* was provided in first person and second person versions; the participants followed in the footsteps of a fictional character named Marek Wiewióski, who told them about his life in Kraków, showing them places of central importance to him, asking them questions, and asking them to do particular things. The protagonist communicated with walkers by letter and through messages left on an answering machine, while the task of the walkers was to assume the role of his siblings trying to find their missing brother, or at least to understand the reasons why he disappeared:

How good of you to come. I'm sorry that I've asked you to such an unpleasant spot, but I myself lived for three years in a place that was just as horrible. I think that if you're ever going to feel what it's like to be me, I'll have to show you the places where the scenes of my personal Kraków drama played themselves out. If you put yourself in my shoes you'll understand me better and get to the bottom of what I've been through.¹⁰

Invisible and elusive, Wiewióski spun an autobiographical story: seemingly humdrum, but growing gradually denser and moving into the realms of phantasmagoria. The young man had come to Kraków five years earlier to study, but his stay in the big city proved to be a string of setbacks, disappointments, humiliations and losses. During the first two years, he lived through the abandonment of his studies, the death of his only friend, the break-up of a relationship, disappointment in his artistic creativity, the loss of a job, homelessness, illness and, finally, a stay in hospital. After fleeing from his hospital ward, he was declared missing. Walkers following his route not only visited the places he frequented, but were also forced to interact with Wiewióski's "friends and acquaintances" and repeat some of his actions (often engaging their senses of touch or, in the case of the milk bar, of smell and taste). As a result, the protagonist's experiences became more and more their own experiences. From being spectators and listeners, they were gradually transformed to become more and more like actors and performers.

Anja Haelg Bieri's process for creating a walk

One person who has described step by step the possible workflow of a specific sub-genre of walking performance, the audio walk, and then made her findings available in the form of instructions, is researcher (sociologist) and practitioner (audio-walk creator) Anja Haelg Bieri.¹¹ In a presentation published online in 2013

¹⁰ I cite this and subsequent quotations from the script from a typescript kept in my private archive.

¹¹ Her website is here: <https://anjahaelgbieri.wordpress.com/>.

entitled *Making Audio Walks: A Creative Research Method for Urban Geography, Planning and Design*,¹² Bieri distinguishes four stages of work: preproduction, production, postproduction and analysis. Preproduction is the preparatory phase: a time of gathering information and clarifying ideas. This stage involves learning about the city – both the concrete, physical city and its envisaging in the human imagination. In this way, those working on a performance should “study and contextualise people’s imaginaries and practices in order to better understand the social, historical, and spatial relations that constitute the city”. To this end, Bieri proposes taking as many as possible free, aimless, “drifting” walks and journeys (along pavements, streets and tracks; on a boat sailing on a river) through the city and practising attentiveness to your surroundings: “Collect. Observe. Imagine. Open your mind and senses”. The key categories here are “place” and “theme”: observing and listening to people in a park may suggest a particular theme, while the desire to find answers to questions about a city’s past, for example, may lead the creators to a particular place. Yet in the case of walking performances, place and theme condition each other, so that it is often difficult to state which came first. Once the widest possible spectrum of possibilities has been identified, it is time to make a decision and enter the production phase:

After your initial collection phase of walks, strolls and field-trips through the city, choose:

Topic and area

Theoretical framework, working question and hypothesis

Style of audio-walk

Go for an area that is not too big

Go for a topic that is not too superficial, explain the bigger context through small observations and relations

Going closer into something is probably more interesting than scratching – and remaining – at the surface

Your theoretical framework helps you with the angle and analysis of your work

Working questions and hypotheses help you to stay focused

You can revise them during the creative process of research and composition

Stressing the importance of theory, Bieri writes: “Just like in Plato’s allegory of the cave, there is a need to mediate between what you sense and imagine to see and hear, and what you can understand by problematising reality in a defined epistemology”. It is exactly theory that enables the reinforcement of the foundations of a performance or lends it coherence where coherence is lacking.

As far as spatial issues are concerned, a walk can be fully “controllable”. In this arrangement, the information guiding the participants step by step is written on pieces of paper, drawn on a map or provided via headphones and that which is

¹² <https://prezi.com/iucqerposom6/how-to-make-an-audio-walk/>. All quotations are from the presentation.

artistic is constantly interwoven with that which is geographical. A walk can have a discontinuous structure, so that in selected places – much like the knowledge provided by a museum’s audio guides at the most important exhibits – a series of narrative or performative elements appear, but in between there is a certain freedom of movement. A walk can also have a completely free, undirected geographical and artistic course. One interesting example of this is Wojtek Kiewer’s *Oneiro*.¹³ Here, non-linear fragments of the recordings were “attached” to the sculptures in *Park Krakowski* using the Echoes geolocation application, and participants moving around the park between the sculptures “composed” the entire musical and verbal story in any way they wished. The literary form, for its part, can – according to Bieri – resemble an essay, a collage, a short story or reportage. Art walks of a politico-social nature are often similar to the latter. Their aim is to guide participants through unfamiliar districts or towns and reveal the lives of their “invisible” inhabitants. One way this is achieved is by telling the individual stories of immigrants living in a particular area. Indeed, this is the form that was taken by numerous walking and “driving” performances (experienced from inside trams) presented as part of the 2022 and 2023 editions of the *Ruhrtriennale* festival under the common name *Wege* [roads/ways].¹⁴

The production stage involves mapping out the final route, creating a narrative, recording sounds and voices, combining all of the elements and fine-tuning the details. This “editing” of a sketch of a walk, which also involves the actual sketching of a route on a map and of a text on a piece of paper, flows freely into the postproduction phase. In the case of an audio walk, this means processing the soundtrack, uploading the audio walk to an application or website, followed by “rehearsal runs”, which are the equivalent of dress rehearsals. They usually involve invited friends, who are unfamiliar with the performance, but able to give critical feedback to the artists.

The final phase, which encompasses the entire lifetime of an audio walk, is the analysis. The flaws in a walking performance only become apparent when it is negotiated by spectators, who by definition do not know its course. Furthermore, owing to the changeability and unpredictability of city life, many walking performances require constant monitoring and adjustment to changes if they are to be exploited without error over the long term. In most cases, these changes entail the disappearance or modification of landmarks along the route (posters, trees, benches, for example), changes in the functions of specific places and spaces (closed restaurants or shops, for example) and modifications to the operation of specific institutions, such as opening hours. In fact, it is in the nature of walking performances that although the “instructions” (maps, recordings, scripts) remain available long after the premiere, they are often no longer walkable because the spatial part of their dramaturgy has ceased to match the narrative part. It could

¹³ <https://explore.echoes.xyz/collections/MrtqnMc6G3Zl5Q2Z>

¹⁴ <https://2023.ruhrtriennale.de/de/programm/genre: Wege>

also be said that participating in a walking performance is a constant negotiation between two orders of reading: text and space and jumping from one order to the other – even if walking and listening/reading seem to take place simultaneously. It is only by superimposing these two planes that this particular kind of artistic work can be perceived. When there are faults in one of the two “texts”, this also prevents proper perception of the other “text”.

Preliminary work on *Skrót. Krakau Files*

The earliest stage of Stefan Kaegi’s thinking about the performance, and the first stage of exploring the performative potential of the space of Kraków, was focused on windows. The director took this theme from his favourite film, Jean Cocteau’s *Orphée*, whose protagonist looks into other dimensions of reality through mirrors and windows. The team¹⁵ that worked on *Skrót. Krakau Files* conducted its search for people willing to make their apartments available via the *Goethe-Institut*. The information on the leaflet produced to find potential locations read:

Kraków becomes a backstage area to slip into. Householders standing at their doors dispense information; they are heralds with shady, indeterminate messages, casting a mysterious, conspiratorial shadow over the city. Pay particular attention to the windowsills. The trails lead from windowpane to windowpane. Every view is a document. Suspicion falls upon a certain glazier, who from the beginning of the 1990s has been replacing old, wooden window frames with double-glazed, aluminium ones. Another trail leads to a curtain shop.¹⁶

By framing slices of reality, the window becomes a kind of cinema screen. Soundless images of people and vehicles moving in different directions could, through the insertion of different soundtracks – sad or happy music, dialogues, excerpts read from literary or journalistic texts – become fragments of a tragedy, a comedy, a music video or a documentary. In the end, however, the potential of a window was exploited only in a single passage of the performance – the moment when a walker settles down in the lobby of a hotel (which for some time was Wiewiórski’s place of work) and, sitting behind a huge pane of glass, peeks into the street, while the recorded voice of the protagonist suggests to him that random passers-by are in fact not random figures in his biography. At the same time,

¹⁵ The dramaturgy think tank and coordinating team consisted of people from theatre, activist, journalism and university circles working in various ways with the *Goethe-Institut*. Full list of contributors to the performance during all stages of the work: Marta Bębenek, Anna R. Burzyńska, Julia Kluzowicz, Piotr Ratajczak, Rafał Romanowski, Kuba Szreder and Michał Zadara.

¹⁶ Own archive.

this peeking becomes a way of entering the psyche of the alienated Wiewiórski (“There’s a curtain between myself and the street. Through the curtain, the world looks even stranger. People are moving quickly. They’re looking for the shortest routes available, they want to go through their lives taking short-cuts”¹⁷). However, the windows of shops and workshops, which, according to the narrative, the protagonist liked to look through to inspect the interiors of buildings, and into which it was also intended for the walkers to look, played a very big role in the project. Perhaps coincidentally, this chimes with one of the most salient dimensions of the flâneurs’ imagination, about which Beata Frydryczak wrote as follows:

Flâneurism, whose space is constituted by arcades, begins on the street, at the window of a shop: that opening in the street oriented to the interiors of shops, department stores and arcades. Glazed shop windows function as magnets and ornaments of the street; gateways to an enchanted world, they tempt with colours, seduce with forms, and enchant with displays and with lighting; they impress with the quality of their goods, packaging and design.¹⁸

By contrast with the freedom of the flâneur, however, Kaegi’s walker was, as it were, condemned to follow a single “route of visits”, in pursuit of an elusive guide. Relatively early on in the pre-production phase, an idea emerged that would define the final shape of the performance: “Three to five hours of hidden text as a pathway through public and private spaces”.¹⁹ The inspiration for the form in which this “hidden text” would thread together successive locations and episodes came unexpectedly. The director, who was brought up in Zürich, was very struck by the number of notices and advertisements – very often handwritten and reproduced as photocopies – that were slapped onto walls, lamp posts and bus stops. He spoke of this in an interview a few years later: “those adverts and notices were a material prefiguring of the Internet before it came into use. The many thousands of death notices also made a deep impression on me – that they not only appeared announcing a death but also on its anniversary, and continued to be put up years after the death”.²⁰ Kaegi felt that this form of communication would be the most appropriate for the impoverished protagonist of his story.

¹⁷ Own archive.

¹⁸ B. Frydryczak, “Okiem przechodnia: ulica jako przestrzeń estetyczna” [Through the Eye of the Passer-By: The Street as an Aesthetic Space], in: *Formy estetyzacji przestrzeni publicznej* [Forms of the Aestheticization of Public Space], eds. J.S. Wojciechowski, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Warszawa 1998, p. 109.

¹⁹ After: <https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/de/project/skrot-krakau-files> [access: 29.02.2024]. Own translation.

²⁰ J. Kluzowicz, “Miasto jako scena. Wywiad ze Stefanem Kaegim” [The City as a Stage: Interview with Stefan Kaegi], in: *Rimini Protokoll. Na tropie codzienności* [Rimini Protokoll: On the Trail of the Everyday], eds. M. Dreyse, F. Malzacher, Polish edition A.R. Burzyńska, transl. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Poznań–Kraków 2012, p. 203.

At the same time, he appreciated the potential that would arise from the blending of fiction and reality when Wiewiórski's desperate “appeals” are affixed to the noticeboard alongside real-life advertisements for flat rentals or instant loans.

Early work on the performance proceeded along two lines: in the space of cultural and social narratives and in the space of the city. The films that individuals suggested were watched by the whole team together. The first was Cocteau's *Orphée*, which has already been mentioned. Here the theme of the mysterious clues given by Death to the eponymous protagonist proved especially important to the way the film was received by the team. The second film of importance to the project was David Fincher's *The Game*, whose protagonist takes part in a game set in an urban space, in which the boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred. Yet, with its evocative portrayal of feelings of claustrophobia, alienation in the big city, the paranoia of feeling constantly spied upon and its convincing portrayal of a descent into madness, it was Roman Polański's *The Tenant*, based on a text by Roland Topor, that became the most significant cinematic inspiration. The nascent character of Marek Wiewiórski (his personae were meant to suggest a Polish everyman; Kaegi liked the sound of the word “*wiewiórka*” [squirrel], which he could not pronounce) was taken to have more in common with the unassuming, browbeaten Trelkovsky than the poet from *Orphée* or the businessman from *The Game*. One of the key themes and one of the key activities envisaged for the performance was, after all, to be observation. On the role of the tension between observing and being observed in Polański's film, Marcin Kempisty wrote:

The chief motif running through the whole film is furtive observation of various kinds – Trelkovsky peeps at people in the bathroom opposite his window, he himself feels watched and characters often peek through the peephole in the door. What is more, there is also a scene in which Simone Choule, a woman who formerly lived in his flat, watches him during a hospital visit. Simone had attempted suicide, but did not die until a few days later. In the meantime she glanced up with one eye at Trelkovsky, who had come to the hospital to check on her. [...] The longer Trelkovsky furtively watches the residents of the tenement house, the more he himself feels furtively watched. The more he allows himself to be drawn into paranoid suspicion, the more his fate comes to resemble that of Simone. Having been a spectator – a visitor “from outside” the setting – the man becomes an actor.²¹

The Tenant was precisely the film that sparked my interest in first discussing the new French novel (It was in this way that *La Jalousie* by Alain Robbe-Grillet found itself within the group's orbit of interest), and then in presenting Kaegi

²¹ M. Kempisty, „Lokator”. *Podglądactwo, klaustrofobia i autotematyzm od Romana Polańskiego* [*The Tenant: Furtive Observation, Claustrophobia and Self-Referentiality from Roman Polański*], <https://film.org.pl/a/lokator-podgladactwo-klaustrofobia-i-autotematyzm-od-romana-polanskiego>.

with an English translation of *Cosmos* by Witold Gombrowicz – a book which first tired and irritated him, but later fascinated him as a singular “detective novel” and as a supremely precise description of the workings of human reason. Kaegi was captivated by the dynamics of searching for meaning, of finding something that appears to be this meaning, of losing the scent, of the teeming of meanings, of arrows leading in different directions, of misleading indicators ... What he found in the novel was probably most fully expressed by Jerzy Jarzębski in a text written for the programme of the theatrical adaptation of *Cosmos* directed by Jerzy Jarocki:

The most obvious way to read *Cosmos* was as a text that expresses the novel as a tale of constructing meaning from a plethora of facts and objects. The protagonist attempts to understand what is going on: why the sparrow was hanged and the meaning of the other “signals” found in collaboration with Fuks (the arrow on the ceiling, the hanging stick, the nib stuck in lemon peel). It soon becomes apparent, however, that the ranks of facts are not closing, because in the meantime new ones – equally open – are emerging. Worse still, the protagonist does not quite know what he is actually looking for: Is it a similarity linking the various facts? But what of facts being similar to each other? The ranks of these “similar to each other” facts are meant, as it were, to lead to something, but that something is poorly defined and unimaginable. Once again, we find that the seeker is in fact always looking for what was already known to him before. Otherwise, the seeker gets immediately lost.²²

Going out into the city

The online training sites of anti-globalists practising guerilla gardening or setting various traps for tourists in the busiest parts of the city were another set of texts that accompanied the team in the early stages of their work. Kaegi was interested in the various tactics of resistance deployed in respect of safe and ordered modern cities, which at the same time are subject to unending monitoring and surveillance (cameras, alarms, patrols) and to the capitalist diktat of profit. To some extent, *Skrót. Krakau Files* was intended as an anarchist project, as an anti-guide to Kraków.

The first stage of work out in the field, which would eventually lead to the mapping of the route to be walked, served as a kind of warm-up for the team members. Beginning from *Rynek Główny* [Main Market Square], each of us had the task of designing a trail made up of five stops, which would guide potential walkers around *Stare Miasto* [Old Town] and, at the same time, of telling a particular story – or simply compelling the walkers to co-create this story. This stage

²² J. Jarzębski, *Dwanaście wersji „Kosmosu”* [Twelve Versions of *Cosmos*], in: program spektaklu *Kosmos* [Programme for a Performance of *Cosmos*], Teatr Narodowy, Warszawa 2005, p. 16.

also tested various forms of clandestine communication straight out of a game of hare and hounds, geocaching or spy films (pieces of paper hidden in flowerpots and fountains, maps hidden between the pages of a book in the nearest bookshop, prevailing upon a hairdresser from a nearby establishment to reveal further clues when given a password). One important rule was that instead of including the names of streets or buildings, logistical clues should contain other information making it possible to identify specific places.

This simple device proved to possess great potential in freeing the imaginations of the team and in teaching them to look at Kraków in a different way. Each member of the think-tank approached the task differently (my walk began alongside the sculptures of lions lying before *Wieża ratuszowa* [Town Hall Tower] and then linked a variety of images of animals – bas reliefs on the walls of tenement buildings, pictures on advertising placards, toy animals in the windows of souvenir shops – that are present in the space of *Stare Miasto*. As each walk was then tested by the others in the think-tank, it quickly became apparent where the inadequacies and mistakes lay. For example, unclear logistical cues (the walker got lost), or an insufficient level of covertness (slips of paper used for communication had been removed or destroyed; the “strange” behaviour of walkers attracted too much attention from those around them).

In the next stage of investigating and exploring the city, testing possibilities and trying out walk-creation tools, each member of the team was allotted one section of *Śródmieście* circle [inner city circle]: from *Planty* [Planty Park] to *Obwodnica II* [Ring Road II]: *Aleje Trzech Wieszczów* [Avenues of the Three Bards] and *ul. Józefa Dietla* [Józef Dietl Street], where they sought out interesting places that harboured narrative (and walking) potential: mysterious gates, strange little shops, forgotten roadside statues and puzzling graffiti. They then attempted to connect these places by the thread of a story. Very often, the best dramaturgy emerged by chance. For my own walking performance project, for example, it proved inspiring to discover huge rubbish containers in one of the courtyards, which bore the intriguing name of a company: *Bracia Strach* [The Fear Brothers].

As a result of these exercises, the location of the walk was chosen: the northern (and north western) section of Kraków. On the one hand, not touristy, plain and concealing a sufficient number of secrets and surprises to inspire the easy spinning of narrative fantasies. On the other, suffused with various cultural codes: *Klasztor Karmelitów na Piasku* [Carmelite Church “Na Piasku”], *Teatr Bagatela* [Bagatela Theatre], whose windows happened to be displaying photographs from *The Three Sisters*, with Jan Nowicki in a guest role, and *Szpital Wojskowy* [Military Hospital] on *ul. Wrocławska* [Wrocław Street] – all of these places with their histories lent themselves more to being “inserted” into the script (or possibly “overwritten”) than to being “written” anew. At this stage of the work, we realised that it was essentially a kind of montage: creating a puzzle not only from the twenty-four letters of the alphabet, but also from the letters (or perhaps ideograms) that make up the city (churches, hospitals, shops, flats).

An analogy can be drawn between this and the process of constructing the protagonist-narrator, as he too was to be assembled from cultural stereotypes. Inevitably, certain patterns imposed themselves when thinking about who Wiewiórski should be: patterns from the realistic novel, the naturalistic novel, but also the modernist novel, with its explorations of the nuances of the human psyche. Indeed, at a certain stage of the work, we consulted a psychologist and asked her to diagnose the protagonist's emotions based on his symptoms and trajectory of movement. Yet it was hard not to notice that it is the city itself and the route it lays out that writes the protagonist, that he emerges from the places the team discovered, rather than being fully consciously invented (here again, chance played a huge role – for example, encountering a death notice with a Ukrainian name “brought into existence” Marek's deceased friend). In the final version of the text, there were many references to successive layers and regions of the city as a counterpart to successive layers and regions of the protagonist's brain. In this way, *Skrót. Krakau Files* was also a shortcut through a degraded “palace of memory”.

The final configuration

Once the route had been fully decided (and photographed – as key locations had been captured on photographs and video footage so that location details could be quickly recalled if necessary) and the first sketch of the plot and psychological outline of the protagonist established, a division of responsibilities took place. The team that remained in Kraków took care of the logistics, which involved obtaining permits to enter various enclosed spaces and negotiating with those who were to interact with the walkers (answer their questions and give out letters, props and recordings). Contrary to our fears, almost all of the staff at the venues along the planned route took an open and enthusiastic approach to this ostensibly strange proposal. During this time, Stefan Kaegi travelled to Frankfurt to work on the final version of the script, or more precisely, on the text, which was to be read and listened to by those taking part in the performance.²³

The framework for the narration of *Skrót. Krakau Files* entailed exploiting the convention of a mysterious letter – in this case, one found in the *Goethe-Institut*. The first snippet of the story was conveyed to the walkers by *Goethe-Institut* staff. The clues it included directed performance participants to a series of sites

²³ The narration of *Skrót. Krakau Files* was accomplished in two languages. The work was carried out in English and the successive versions of the script were also created in this language. The “test run” too was conducted in English. It was only the final version that was translated into Polish. The letters and recordings were produced in both languages, while people working in places that required interaction received instruction in conducting conversations in English. The spectator-walkers selected the language version. In most cases the narration was in Polish, yet owing to Kraków's popularity as a tourist destination (and interest shown by critics from abroad), the English version was also used regularly.

and enabled them to discover successive elements of the puzzle constituted by the fate and fortunes of Wiewiórski:

I've left you a notebook and pen, take them with you.

You have to make up your own sign system. The map you draw of the route you take will also be a picture of my brain. That probably sounds complicated to you, but I've met a lot of people in this city who use this kind of language. I seldom understood them, but they always served me a great cup of tea.

I'd like you to listen to the first tape, recorded five years ago, right after I moved to Kraków.

Turn the handle behind you and go out the door. Then turn left and go up the nearest flight of stairs. If you should see anyone, don't let anything give away what you're doing. Sit in the armchair on the first floor. You'll find a tape player there, play the cassette that's inside it.²⁴

The choice of a second-person narration was not driven by a desire for interactivity or to make the performance more like a role-playing game; it was primarily about enhancing the empathetic aspect. As Monika Fludernik has observed, second-person fiction “enhances the options already available to conversational narrative and extends the boundaries of the nonrealistically possible in emphatic ways”;²⁵ at the same time “Second person texts are ‘open’ in several respects. They can accommodate a variety of ‘you’s’ and a variety of ‘I’s’ and a combination of these”.²⁶ She also notes that second-person texts “tend to move along and across another boundary line. That between the discourse and the story”.²⁷

It was intended from the beginning that the script of *Skrót. Krakau Files* would be not only a particular story, but also that it would possess a certain meta-level (hence the strong presence in it of black humour, the grotesque, irony and elements of parody). In a similar vein to *Cosmos*, it was intended to function as a kind of reflection on the human “propensity for congruity” and the dangers that arise from it. And after all, there was a clear political dimension to Wiewiórski's paranoia. One of the first “stations” was to be found in *Księgarnia Akademicka* [Academic Bookshop] on *ul. Św. Anny* [St Anne's Street]:

Go into the next courtyard and through the door on your left, then go right, until you hit the bookstore there in the middle. In the window straight ahead, you'll find

²⁴ Own archive.

²⁵ M. Fludernik, “Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism”, *Style* 1994, no. 3, p. 460.

²⁶ M. Fludernik, “Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues”, *Style* 1994, no. 3, p. 288.

²⁷ Ibidem.

my favourite book, *Opozycja Małopolska* [The Małopolska Opposition]. Open it to page 615! [...]

The contents of the books fascinated me, but the diagram was what I liked the best. It shows how to smuggle secret information in church. How to observe, decode and inform. At that time I thought that this was how the opposition starts. People who buy books here have some kind of hunch, but they still don't know anything. Look out the window. A crooked road sign and an equally curved window. It seems like everything's been turned upside-down. And the people? The curved window is right in the middle of that massive wall. The walls seem to be chock full of some strange force... You have to be on guard against such forces. In another book, I once read that "In a city where everything is under supervision, we also must conceal that which is not private to us, so give our supervisors more work".

On the right there's a church. Remember that tower.²⁸

Walkers were encouraged to perform strange actions as they made their way along the route, including hiding from other passers-by, walking on bent legs along a wall and pulling women's underwear (allegedly belonging to the protagonist's ex-fiancée) out of a basket hanging from a window. On the one hand, this was to avoid the risk of turning the walkers into privileged tourists in a human zoo, peeping into the life of a neglected neighbourhood and its inhabitants, who would be unwittingly drawn into the performance (for Kaegi, as a Swiss, the concern was that, for Western viewers, a wander around *Kleparz* could turn into just such a "safari"). On the other hand, the idea was that the walkers – like Wiewiórski, but also like his much more literarily sophisticated cousins, Witold and Trelkovsky – would get into a paranoid mindset. The role of spectator-actor-walker had already been defined on a leaflet prepared for the earliest stage of the work:

Every spectator is a detective for themselves. Everyone conducts the investigation on their own. Everyone tries to camouflage the clues and leave them behind for the next participant, who is also conducting an investigation. Each unfolding event represents a particular task. Each observation is a piece of the puzzle. The dramaturgy develops continuously on the principles of a remotely controlled hunt for a simulated fox. The audience observes from their hiding places. What lies behind the last window?²⁹

It was the walkers themselves who were responsible for answering that last question, for it was they who were really writing, each time afresh, the final narrative variant of the fate and fortune of Wiewiórski.

Translated from Polish to English by Mark Aldridge

²⁸ Own archive.

²⁹ Own archive.

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