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Helena Hejman*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2568-2015

"Who of us has never traced light over these walls"?: The archaeology of Stanisław Grochowiak's poems

The close relationship between Stanisław Grochowiak's poetry and fine arts reminds one about the things hidden behind words, or the **pretextuality** of objects. A pragmatic approach to the pervasive manifestations of material culture makes them inconspicuous – less so in poems, which carefully weigh every word, and more so in everyday life; their presence only becomes evident in 'crisis' situations, i.e. when they malfunction, when they are moved, or when they perish. The personal approach to objects – ontologically unstable as they are tangible yet almost transparent in habitual usage – has long been absent from the humanistic discourse. It now has its proponents, who speak on its behalf, yet its emancipation – i.e. its separation from people and its gaining autonomy – is still uncertain. Since it is impossible to suspend the human perception of the world, "the discourse of objects will always be inserted into our human discourse, into our needs and expectations."[1] The researchers of the 'material turn' have been developing an alternative to the anti-materialistic concepts of culture, in which the "solid physicality of the world" is reduced to the "subject of discourse, or to a «phenomenon» subjectively experienced by an object."[2] As Bjørnar Olsen indicated, even in archaeology – a domain which continues to be the closest to objects – material culture traditionally fulfilled the function of "a hallway to the

* M.A., University of Gdansk, Institute of Polish Philology; ul. Jana Bażyńskiego 8, 80-309 Gdańsk; helena.hejman@gmail.com

1 E. Domańska, "Humanistyka nie-antropocentryczna a studia nad rzeczami", *Kultura Współczesna* 2008, issue 3, p. 13. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish]

2 B. Olsen, "Kultura materialna po tekście", trans. P. Stachura, [in:] *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki*, E. Domańska (ed.), Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2010, pp. 563–564.

true non-material culture"[3]; it constituted a pretext for reconstructions of its underlying principles, or for spinning narratives on civilisational processes which caused its forming. I shall leave aside the project of non-anthropocentric humanities. Grochowiak's poetry remains within the orbit of the subjective treatment of objects. By moving 'along' the wall through the poems titled "Płonąca żyrafa", "Malarstwo", "Zejście", and "Ars Poetica", one will not be able to find objects as they are. Nonetheless, one might reach the results of a poetic study of the personality and agency of 'extra-human factors'. One cannot free walls from text as they are inscribed in a poem as way points, and as way points they are perceived by poetic personas; yet one will see in them the mediators of actions, thoughts, and experiences. I shall apply Grochowiak's archaeological reading to Bruno Latour's exercise: "Specific tricks have to be invented to *make them* (objects – H. H.) *talk*, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making other – humans or non-humans – do."[4] This task is difficult as (verbal) artefacts mediated by prose have little in common with the empirically available referents.[5] Let us assume, then, that the walls are ontologically real – within the universe of individual poems.

"Płonąca żyrafa" ["A Burning Giraffe"] exists in the pre-university education interpretative canon as an ekphrasis of Salvador Dali's famous work. Even this course book banality should stimulate readers' imaginations and put them not only in front of the surrealist painting or a projection of a scene in which Grochowiak, the supposed speaking person of the poem, studies the surrealist vision, but also in front of a wall. Unlike modern consumers of culture – who have access to virtual museums and digital copies of a vast majority of art works of all time – Grochowiak viewed the painting not through the cybernetic void but in a material, tangibly present form. The poet never saw the original; he did, however, possess a reproduction of Dali's masterpiece.[6] One could use this fact and venture a 'materialisation' of poetic reflection, i.e. move with the poem to the space of an art gallery or a room in which a copy of the painting is present. Before doing that, please consider the fact that Grochowiak's poems were presented, just as traditional framed painting, on the walls within the Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature in Warsaw twice.[7] "Płonąca żyrafa" – as a gallery exhibition of the same title – has

3 Ibid., p. 568.

4 B. Latour, "Przedmioty także posiadają sprawczość", trans. A. Derra, [in:] *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki*, pp. 549–550. [English version: B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005].

5 I shall leave this issue aside, recommending further discussion. Vide M. Heidegger, *Pytanie o rzecz. Przyczynek do Kantowskiej nauki o zasadach transcendentalnych*, trans. J. Mizera, Wydawnictwo KR, Warsaw 2001.

6 M. Grześczak, "Staszek zapamiętany, cząstki elementarne", [in:] *Dusza czyśćcowa. Wspomnienia o Stanisławie Grochowiaku*, collected and edited by A. Romaniuk, PIW, Warsaw 2010, pp. 92–93.

7 In 1986–1987 (*Stanisław Grochowiak*) and in 2016–2017 (*"Rozbieranie Grochowiaka". Pokaz rękopisów i rysunków ze zbiorów Muzeum Literatury w 40. rocznicę śmierci Poety*).

a potentially dual representation: a plastic arts representation and a literary one. Both 'versions' appeared within the exhibition domain, which mediated in their reception.

A gallery wall is not neutral, neither is a museum. They both constitute territories into which the presented works are fitted, basically inscribed. Every exhibition applies its own rhetoric, it structures viewers' perception as the distribution of works indicates their importance, chronology, and ideological backgrounds.[8] The structure of a poetic collection is similar – there, too, the progression of works defines the dramatic flow of reception; the contexts of neighbouring poems extract the significance of the central work; there form polyptychs, nooks and crannies, corridors of titles in which readers can find their own niches. Yet, their ritual adventures with the collection, often in an unrealised manner – assuming that they read the poems one by one, as if following "the direction of viewing" – reproduce the route devised by the poet/curator. The semantic empire of a museum or a poem collection appropriates individual works. They demand individuality, an individual approach which would parenthesise the voices of other works. Extracted from the multitude, a work that is special for an individual takes a place in their private spiritual sanctuary.

Once placed within this contextual frame, Grochowiak's "Płonąca żyrafa" reveals a previously unknown face. Most of all, that placement requires readers to trace the instances which affix the poem to the material environment. "The poor structure of human fear,"[9] a line in the first strophoid, does not have to refer one to the anthropomorphic figure in the foreground from Dali's painting, nor does it need to concern the giraffe burning in the background. It raises the association with the structure which is formed in notional and physical terms by the space enclosed within walls, i.e. a museum or a room. The anthropomorphising "poor" epithet reveals a merciful attitude towards human spaces, which are supposed to stabilise existential or cultural identities. Those places offer the pretence of durability and safety; they fulfil the function of storages of humanistic and sociological values; they develop against the fears related to the passage of time, impermanence of artefacts and the human body, and they can subversively contain the unnerving creation of self-awareness, e.g. Dali's painting or its reproduction. The "giraffe oozing smoke so slowly" seems, in this case, a circumlocution of the title of

8 "The more aesthetic art is, the easier it is to apply the desired context to it (...). For those specific reasons works of art become elements of planned arrangements; exhibition or museum halls are not only filled with works waiting to be discovered, but their arrangement, the devised route and the meaning conveyed by the architecture are all a system of meaning." M. Popczyk, "Wstęp", [in:] *Muzeum Sztuki. Antologia*, M. Popczyk (ed.), TAiWPN Universitas, Kraków 2005, p. 24. To learn more about the "jostling" of paintings on the wall, vide B. O'Doherty, "Uwagi o przestrzeni galerii", [in:] ibid., pp. 454, 464.

9 All fragments of Stanisław Grochowiak's poems are quoted from the National Library edition: S. Grochowiak, *Wybór poezji*, J. Łukasiewicz (ed.), BN I 296, Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, Wrocław 2000.

the painting, which was placed in a "poor structure", "saving man", i.e. a museum/room. Yet, instead of obscuring and furnishing the space, it produces a flaw; it constitutes a semantic crack in the storage of works of art and an anarchic damage to the phantasm of a coherent and stable identity.

The second strophoid includes the passage: "Something from that wall of aspirin and sweat." According to Jacek Łukasiewicz, this paradoxical heteromorphic line would be the poetic equivalent of the "shabby structure" of visual works which draw from the Dada tradition,[10] while Anna Filipowicz argued that it resembled a recipe for a peculiar *papier-mâché*.[11] From the wall's perspective, there might not be so much of art, creative matter, or poetic alchemy. If Grochowiak's "Płonąca żyrafa" is not a simple ekphrasis but, rather, an alter ego of Dali's painting, it utilises a method of articulation related to it – one which employs not only the array of painting means, but also an oneiric conceptualisation. The structure of the poem, the words spilled from the poetic persona's sensory gut, and the obtrusively recurring expression "Yes/That's something" all resemble, in fact, the surrealist technique of automatic writing, in which "the (some)thing" hidden deeply in a human being flashes on the surface through words, namely a mark of association.

It seems that the phrase "Something from that wall" could be a response to Bruno Latour's invitation to seek objects which defy cognition and intermediation through speech[12]; in fact, the indefinite pronoun ("something") and the deictic pronoun ("that") cancel each other out, blurring rather than sharpening the image. "Something from that wall" could also be a periphrastic metonymy of a painting viewed during a creative delirium, which becomes perceptively confused with the somatic feverish states of the poetic persona (aspirin and sweat). What is important, though, is not only the supposed image, but the wall itself, an object which is familiar yet foreign (the more time one spends considering it), and which through extended viewing begins to sparkle optical illusions. The wall is only itself as long as human vision slides over it mindlessly. If, however, one looks at that ordinary surface with more inquisitiveness, it appears to be a text, though one apparently recorded in a foreign language, the ideograms of which require anamnestic study. That surface – usually not occupying people's minds as it normally limits the material field of view and delimits enclosed space – becomes the palimpsest of everyday obtrusive observations, as is the case with the almost falling asleep narrator of Marcel Proust's novel, as in Georges Perec's work:

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10 J. Łukasiewicz, *Grochowiak i obrazy*, Wydawnictwo UW, Wrocław 2002, p. 12.

11 "The material for that «structure» includes objects and substances taken directly out of the repository of everyday life – a mixture of plaster («something from that wall») and aspirin powder mixed using the sweaty binder," A. Filipowicz, *Sztuka mięsa. Somatyczne oblicza poezji*, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2013, p. 121.

12 Vide E. Domańska, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

> You count and you organise the cracks in the ceiling. The conjunction of shadows and stains, and the variations of adjustment and orientation of your gaze, produce effortlessly, slowly, dozens of nasty shapes, fragile coalitions that you are able to grasp only for a fleeting second, fixing them on a name (...)[13]

The ephemeral associations give meaning not only to the writing method of *écriture automatique*, but also to the plastic arts technique of frottage, discovered for surrealism by Max Ernst and consisting of pencil-copying of mysterious textures of walls, floors, bark, fabric... This paper recording of the "dream of matter", i.e. the abstract arabesques of holes, cracks, dents, and bumps – offers a "meditation/hallucination" potential, provoking the eye to seek out figurative signs and marks, the shapes of which would reveal the hidden inclinations of the imagination.[14] Perhaps this is the extra-utilitarian agency of objects! Is it possible that Dali saw his "Burning Giraffe" on a wall while daydreaming? Did Grochowiak notice the meaning of his anti-giraffe looming on the plane of the ceiling?

The figure of the wall brought to the foreground directs attention to allusions to an enclosed space which resembles a room – that could be a vision of a skull as a bell tower ("What tooth tolls in your empty skull") or, based on the same line, a head which constitutes a projection of the flat of human existence, cluttered with visions, thoughts, recollections, and anxiety. There also appears an outline of the body as a construction:

Coś co nas czeka	Something that awaits us
Użyteczne i groźne	Useful and menacing
Jak noga	Like a leg
Jak serce	Like the heart
Jak brzuch i pogrzebacz	Like the stomach and a poker

The enumerated elements define the somatic and prosthetic (poker as support) structure of a human being. The line "The dark grave of human sky" seems to be the crowning of this vision. If one considers that the "human sky" indicates the centres of exclusive humanity – i.e. the stomach, the head, and (at a different level) a museum – then the "grave" is their opposite, i.e. potential death, the annihilation of the 'institutions' in which a human being places their hopes and which constitute the prosthetics of their naked existence or cultural identity.

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13 G. Perec, *Człowiek, który śpi*, trans. A. Wasilewska, Wydawnictwo Lokator, Kraków 2011, pp. 49–50. [English version: G. Perec, *Things: A Story of the Sixties and A Man Asleep*, David R. Godine, Jaffrey 1990.]

14 "Know thyself! By turning frottage into an irrational key to equally alogical contents of his own inside, Ernst stood half-way between psychoanalysis and magic," J. Gondowicz, *Trans-Autentyk. Nie-czyste formy Brunona Schulza*, PIW, Warsaw 2014, p. 125.

The final consequence of the encounter with the wall is a reinterpretation of the "flesh" strophoids of "Płonąca żyrafa":

Bo życie	Because life
Znaczy:	Means:
Kupować mięso Ćwiartować mięso	Buying meat Cutting meat
Zabijać mięso Uwielbiać mięso	Killing meat Loving meat
Zapładniać mięso Przeklinać mięso	Fertilising meat Cursing meat
Nauczać mięso i grzebać mięso	Teaching meat and burying meat
I robić z mięsa I myśleć z mięsem	And make out of meat And thinking with meat
I w imię mięsa Na przekór mięsu	And in the name of meat Against meat
Dla jutra mięsa Dla zguby mięsa	For meat's tomorrow For meat's detriment
Szczególnie szczególnie w obronie mięsa	Especially especially in defence of meat

The required cognitive effort consists of rejecting the graphic vision of meat and reading the word declined throughout the two strophoids as a common term of *substance*, *content*, and *meaning*. That procedure seems abstract yet feasible. Grochowiak thought similarly when he wrote about the metaphor – which he referred to as a "flash for the eyes" – that it can be an "interesting structuring of meanings of words into images which we perceive through the eyes of our souls."[15] That which the eye cannot grasp is perceived by the imagination: thus, one sees the 'poor' structure which cannot be itself in its own matter, because *homo symbolicus* demands references from it, transforming material space into a space of references: a museum/room. Those premises are filled with live "meat", i.e. content, yet not only notional (rhetoric), but also fundamentally material (exhibits, items, tokens, devices, pieces of furniture), which serves pragmatic needs and 'higher level' needs. The phenomenon-based consideration exposes the discursive manipulation with the references of the products of culture, which are treated as commodity, fodder, fetish, propaganda tools, and the focus of adoration or protest. The walls of a museum or the walls of the mind (the skull) enclose a slaughterhouse where the constantly reworked content becomes eventually worn down, burning with the meaning torn out of it.

May the poem titled "Malarstwo", dedicated to Jerzy Stajuda, serve as an argument in the debate about whether it is possible to remove the human element from

15 S. Grochowiak, "Jedno spojrzenie", *Poezja* 1986, issue 10/11, p. 61.

the discussions of the material identity of objects.[16] According to Marek Karwala, the poem got into polemics with the works of the representatives of neo-figurative art, who intended to liberate common objects from any literary content and lift the varnish off of textuality from them.[17] The initial strophoids of the poem ironically report on the poetic persona's attitude towards that stream:

Jest teraz moda w malarstwie mówić	There is now a trend in painting to say
Zrobiłem obraz	I did a painting
To jest ładny kawał	That's a nice joke
Ściany lub muru albo rzecz wycięta	Walls or brickwork, or an object cut out
Z jakichś zbytecznych zielonych parkanów	From some unnecessary green fences

Polish artists who belonged to the neo-figurative art movement proposed a non-artistic approach to their own production, calling it "doing painting", and the objects presented on canvas (e.g. by Grzegorz Moryciński and Barbara Szubińska) were supposed to suffice as the entire content.[18] The carelessness of those authors regarding the symbolic outcomes of their work mocked in the poem exposes the intention behind the modern project of non-anthropocentric humanities: presenting objects as they are, in their realities. A similar intent applied to the principles of Tadeusz Kantor's "poor object" and "lower rank object"; the point was to tear objects from their functional contexts in order to expose their object nature saturated with reality.[19] It would seem that "doing paintings" – or an assemblage made of worn everyday objects, some useless remains, and ownerless fragments of walls – does actually restore the objects' non-human identity. This is why the poem's poetic persona says: "I, too, agree to this." Yet, his consent is only virtual as it is followed by an acquiescent justification: "These are only layers/Of broken walls," and the final enjambment of the strophoid crushes: "Of broken walls/With a purple trunk." The literary metaphor of a recipient of art does consider the intentions of creators; it exposes the futility of their concepts to offer the audience literal images, specific items which do not require interpretation. The following lines prove that language and the artefacts presented under the banner of art are immersed in an a priori mode in the symbolic order, which cannot be lifted even by a straight-forward neutral description:

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16 Vide "Rzeczy. Rekonesans antropologiczny (dyskusja)", *Kultura Współczesna* 2008, issue 3, pp. 73–90.

17 M. Karwala, "Słowo i obraz w poezji Stanisława Grochowiaka", *Annales Academiae Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Historicolitteraria III* 2003, folia 15, p. 197.

18 Ibid.

19 Ewa Domańska considered Kantor's approach as an example of non-anthropocentric practices, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–20.

I ja się godzę	I too agree to that
To sztachety płotów	Those rails of fences
Deseczki trumien	The boards of coffins
Grobowców tapety	The wallpapers of tombs

Short descriptions which could constitute dull titles for ready-mades become – in poetry – referents to anthropological topics (fence, coffin, and tomb). These descriptive equivalents of a "no name" caption involuntarily pretend to carry the status of a title. Neither words stop at their lexical meanings – i.e. on their silent forms – nor fragments of objects do. Viewers accustomed to the textual nature of objects of plastic arts – suspicious when it comes to "literal" messages – are still going to attempt to 'read' them. The remains of objects stripped of their functionalities are interesting for the imagination due to their individual biographies[20] (even the very selection by artists determines their uniqueness and the personality of works of art, i.e. objects which are not only aesthetic, but also meaningful). And these are, after all, related to human biographies.

W ścianach z purpury	In walls of purple
Mieszkał przecież starzec	There lived an old man
O spuchniętej nodze	With a swollen leg
W ścianach z żółcienia	In walls of yellow
Miotała się złość	There tossed the anger
Nierozprawiczonej do śmierci brunetki	Of a non-devirgined till her death brunette
W ścianach szpitalnych białych do zachwytu	In hospital walls, delightedly white
Stał człowiek nagi ze strachu przed bombą	There stood a man naked for fear of a bomb

A similar 'reconstruction' of life can be found in "Malte" by Rainer Maria Rilke, where the protagonist (at this stage a *flâneur* wandering the streets of Paris) views the remains of the internal wall of a demolished building – with traces of wallpaper, flooring, and with hardly an admirable ornament of a toilet pipe:

> But the most unforgettable were the walls themselves. The tenacious life of these rooms had not let itself be stamped out. It was still there, it hung on the remaining

20 Vide E. Domańska, "Problem rzeczy we współczesnej archeologii", [in:] *Rzeczy i ludzie. Humanistyka wobec materialności*, J. Kowalewski, W. Piasek (eds.), Olsztyn 2008, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii UWM, pp. 41–43.

> mails, it stood on the hand's breadth of floor that was left, if had shriveled into the stubs of the corners, where there was still a little bit of interior space. One could see it in the paint that had slowly, year after year, transformed this space: blue into moldy green, green into gray, and yellow into an old, stale white that putrefying. (...) And from these walls that had been blue, green, and yellow, framed by the trusses of the destroyed inner walls, the air of these lives stood out, the tenacious, sluggish, moldy air that no wind had yet dispersed. There remained the noons and the illnesses and the exhalations of the smoke of years, and the sweat that breaks out in the armpits and makes clothes heavy, and the bad breath of mouths and the oily smell of yeasty feet. In it remained the sharpness of urine and the burning of soot and gray potato odor and the heavy, smooth stink of rancid fat. The sweet, long smell of neglected infants was in it, and the odor of fear from children going off to school, and the sultriness from the beds of pubescent boys.[21]

Houses gutted and stripped to bare walls shamelessly display the "physiognomy" of their structures; those splanchnic-exhibitionist dilapidated residential spaces become – for the most careful of viewers – the most important of logs which contain the soul of the atmosphere of secretion and excretion of the human body. The anthropologically-focused poetic persona of Grochowiak's poem also sees the proof of life sickness in the remains of matter; snapshots of individual stories are composed of a symbolic backdrop of the walls, the colours[22] of which bring to mind the dampness which conditions Hippocratic temperaments, and of a flat as in a photograph of figure, barely defined by any features: age and ailments (an old man with a swollen leg), sex, hair colour, and a psychiatric complex (a non-devirginated brunette), or the object of fear (a bomb). "In walls of purple," red paint resembles blood (*sanguis*) and, as a result, the colour of the room seems to trap the old man in a cage of the somatic experience of his sickness. "In walls of yellow," the colour of the sun – the bright over-presence of which in van Gogh's paintings was sometimes viewed by critics as a symptom of his mental disorders[23] – amplifies the feverish tension in the room's occupant. Then, the white scene, basically a photograph taken in a museum of modern art (and yet in a hospital) – a naked man as if standing at the order of death, reduced by fear to an anonymous figure, is

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21 R.M. Rilke, *Malte. Pamiętniki Malte-Lauridsa Brigge*, trans. W. Hulewicz, introduction M. Jastrun, 2nd edition, Czytelnik, Warsaw, 1979, pp. 52–53. [English version: R.M. Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Dalkey Archive, 2008] Similar descriptions of the ruins of houses are so common in Polish and international literature that one could devote an entire book to them.

22 Cf. P. Łuszczykiewicz, *Książę erotyku. O poezji miłosnej Stanisława Grochowiaka*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Latona, Warsaw 1995, pp. 32–34.

23 M. Rzepińska, *Historia koloru w dziejach malarstwa europejskiego*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1983, pp. 519–520.

actually a philosophical category, a *homo sacer*. The fragment of the wall demands understanding and contemplation, which uncovers a document of an archaeological[24] and biographical[25] value:

Malarstwo wasze	Your painting
[…….]	[…….]
Zostanie w czasie	Will become in time
Ogromną pompeją	A huge pompeii
Gdzie ludzie milczą	Where people keep silent
Jak w popiele dzwony	Like bells in ash

Therefore, it is not the objects that are silent – people's stories, whose walls were the witnesses, only waiting to receive a breath of life. Grochowiak's poetic persona does not prompt anything either to biographies, or objects, or even people; "Malarstwo" is a story of mutual agency of human and extra-human factors: an artist extracts an object from a multitude of trash which he (involuntarily?) elevates to the level of art; and the object, in turn, provokes the recipient to read its object/human identity.

In the poem titled "Zejście", walls define the area of secular *sacrum*, the mine of ego:

Byle do wiosny	All's going to be better in spring
A wiosna?	And spring?
Gdzie ona?	Where is it?
Więc schodzę w siebie po kamien	So I descent into myself on stone steps
Byle do wiosny	All's going to be better in spring
A wiosna?	And spring?
Gdzie ona?	Where is it?
Więc schodzę w siebie po kamiennych stopniach	So I descent into myself on stone steps

24 Przemysław Czapliński saw the poem's meaning differently; for him, "Malarstwo" was mainly a pretext for the question about the durability of art. Vide P. Czapliński, "Śmierć albo o znikaniu", [in:] *Lektury Grochowiaka*, T. Mizerkiewicz, A. Stankowska (eds.), Wydawnictwo Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, Poznań 1999, p. 188.

25 A wall – once again as a token of Home – is like that for the poetic persona of *Spojrzenia* by Różewicz, who keeps watch in front of it.

Ze soplem w dłoni jak z mieczem lub lampą
Której nie zgaszą
Podmuchy tych pustek

Kto z nas nie schodzi w kopalnie dzieciństwa?
Kto z nas nie błądzi światłem po tych ścianach
Gdzie w czarnych rzeźbach węgla kamiennego
Pełno odcisków
Paproci
I zwierząt

Tu ptak wiosenny – z której wiosny? – zastygł
Tu pocałunek – nieśmiały czy grzeszny?
Tu własna postać
Rozpięta w podskoku
Do czarnej wiśni na węgielnym drzewie

Byle do wiosny
Więc dalej w pokłady
Na dno dzieciństwa gdzie nagle – za rogiem
Jest tylko echo
I szum nietoperzy
Jakby ktoś miotał kule czarnej wełny
With an icicle in my hand like
a sword or a lamp
Which cannot be put out
By the gusts of these voids

Who of us has never descended the mines of childhood?
Who of us has never traced light over these walls
Where in the black sculptures of black coal
Full of impressions
Of ferns
And animals

Here, a spring bird – from which spring? – solidified
Here, a kiss – coy or sinful?
Here, own figure
Stretched in a leap
To a black cherry on a coal tree

All's going to be better in spring
So off we go, to the beds
To the bottom of childhood when suddenly – around the corner
There is only echo
And the hum of bats
As if someone hurled balls of black wool

The poem should be quoted as a whole as the wall of the archetype mine becomes in it the canvas of an expansive archaeological narrative, tracing the sources of own and universal stories inscribed on the walls of existence, as well as a record of psychosomatic introspections. The (self-)probing of the poetic persona hibernated in wait for spring also fulfils the script of a childhood experience, which corresponds to the concept of oneiric home, i.e. a pattern of human psyche ("I descent into myself on stone steps"). Gaston Bachelard once wrote:

> If alone, in reverie, at a home which carries the marks of depth, we descend narrow dark stairs winding sharply about a stone pillar, we soon feel that **it is descent into the past**. (...) To descend in reverie into the world of depths (...) – that means to both descend into ourselves."[26]

Traces of memories have been immortalised in coal, a stone-like organic material. If one remembers that coal is the chemical building block of all living organisms, they are going to notice the ambiguity of the mine to which the poetic persona ventures – it carries the trademarks of a rock recess and the gut depths of the human body. Therefore, Grochowiak's poetic persona can be imagined as the explorer of beds of a prehistoric cave, of own memories and of identity imprinted in the body. The first one extracts from the darkness of oblivion the fossils of organic life (plants and animals). The second one penetrates one's own biography, trying to reconstruct the chronology and the context of the images imprinted in it, i.e. of a bird, a kiss, and a leap. Finally, the third one fulfils a journey to the somatic basis of one's own existence; it chooses a path of regression to the bottom of childhood, a projection of an empty womb, outside of which there is only the lack of the human being – non-existence or pre-existence. The psychosomatic walls of human existence carry the biological (pre)history of animate creatures, among which a human being is only one possibility of evolution. At the same time, the poem elevates the rank of a fleeting moment – seemingly meaningless moments which do, however, become stored in the unconscious (psycho-corporeal[27]) in order to be able to speak during an oneiric referential journey. The material of the somatic walls does not appear to be a prison of the soul; to the contrary – a personally (though this is not an evaluative adjective) considered human body annexing and consolidating existential experiences constituting the truest *liber vitae*. The archaeology of "Zejście" offers a pretext for yet another story, i.e. one about what objects mean to us, what we say about them, and what truths about us they reveal. A cherry appears in the poem. A cherry with which, mind you, Jolanta Brach-Czaina's *Szczeliny istnienia* begins. That small fruit reveals its phenomenological uniqueness: "Shiny. Ripe. Filled with juice. The skin is tight and sparky. Bright red. Thick brown. Unnerving mirrors of blackness."[28] It constitutes something existentially concrete, which encourages one

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26 G. Bachelard, "Dom rodzinny i dom oniryczny", [in:] idem., *Wyobraźnia poetycka. Wybór pism*, trans. H. Chudak, A. Tatarkiewicz, selection H. Chudak, foreword J. Błoński, PIW, Warsaw 1975, pp. 326–327.

27 Psychoanalysis is, in fact, a philosophy of "thinking through the body" – vide M. Bakke, *Ciało otwarte. Filozoficzne reinterpretacje kulturowych wizji cielesności*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii UAM, Poznań 2000, p. 15. For a commentary regarding the continuity of the psyche, vide: J.-L. Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. M. Kwietniewska, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2002.

28 J. Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia*, Wydawnictwo eFKa, Kraków 1999, p. 8.

to uncover the sensory mysteries of existence, and it convinces one that the thought about the existence of an item[29] "breaks the silence of existence and appeals to our understanding."[30] There is also a tree; moreover, a coal tree. Even if one was to omit its archetypal connotations[31], it still conveys a stabilising identity of the role it plays in the world of human material culture.

Finally, I shall say a few words about "Ars poetica". Within this poem one can easily recognise the metaphor of an occupied room endowed with personality, a room of poetic art:

Oto wiesz na pewno: za twoją kotarą Jest tylko ściana, nie ma Poloniuszy	Here is surely a poem: behind your curtain There is only a wall, there is no Polonius

The vision of enclosure, a prison, and stagnation gives way to the metaphor of a safe refuge, which evokes trust in the stoic durability of the poetic world of values inhabited by the persona and their objects (tools of creative work). As Olsen argued:

> Things are normally in place, at least enough for them to make our existence predictable and secure. When we wake up tomorrow, the bed, room, and house are still there. So are our private belongings (...) They constitute our incontestable acquisition. We do not wake up to a completely new world every morning, having to start all over again from scratch.[32]

Thus, an object is the culture-forming node which collects, connects, and endures while intertwining in itself the qualities of time and space.[33] A wander down the route of the wall through Grochowiak's poems resembles a journey in time – not because it leads through archaeology, art history, and the layering of ahistorical universal biographies towards the nooks of the recollections of the origins. It also presents, within a linear order (from 'poor structures' to 'only the wall'), the evolution of poetic illuminations, fears, imagination-based fixations, moving towards a consoling stabilisation which is guaranteed by an object – the wall.

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29 Brach-Czaina focused on objects endowed with agency as these draw people's attention. "Items are beings which have lost their anonymity," ibid., pp. 12–13.

30 Ibid., p. 8.

31 Vide G. Bachelard, *op. cit.*, pp. 320–321.

32 B. Olsen, *W obronie rzeczy. Archeologia i ontologia przedmiotów*, trans. B. Shallcross, IBL PAN, Warsaw 2013, p. 242.

33 B. Olsen, *Kultura materialna po tekście*, p. 588.

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Helena Hejman

„Kto z nas nie błądzi światłem po tych ścianach", czyli archeologia wierszy Stanisława Grochowiaka

Streszczenie

W prozaicznej ścianie, transparentnym elemencie scenerii życia, wiersze Stanisława Grochowiaka pozwalają odkryć konkret egzystencjalny, materię obdarzoną niesamowitym potencjałem hipnagogicznym, kronikę „przedmiotowości". Ściana w imaginarium poety stanowi zarówno obiekt empiryczny, jak i fenomen, wykraczający poza ontologię materii, co warunkuje jej semantyczną płynność: raz przypomina antropologiczny dokument (miejsce inskrypcji kulturowej/biograficznej), kiedy indziej – substrat surrealistycznej wizji lub tworzywo artefaktu; może jawić się granicą strefy psychicznego komfortu bądź unaoczniać wewnątrzcielesną płaszczyznę, którą – niczym ściany prehistorycznych jaskiń – pokrywają archetypowe obrazy z epoki dzieciństwa (ludzkości). Szkic ten, zainspirowany kontekstami z pola historii sztuki, psychoanalizy oraz zwrotu ku rzeczom, jest próbą rozpoznania znaczeń koncentrujących się „na ścianie" w utworach: „Płonąca żyrafa", „Malarstwo", „Zejście" i „Ars Poetica".

Słowa kluczowe: zwrot ku rzeczom, konkret egzystencjalny, inskrypcja

“Who of us has never traced light over these walls”?: The archaeology of Stanisław Grochowiak’s poems

Summary

Through a simple wall, a transparent element of everyday life, Stanisław Grochowiak’s poems enable one to uncover the existential concrete element, matter endowed with an amazing hypnagogic potential, a chronicle of ‘objectness’. In the poet’s imagined world, the wall constitutes both an empirical item and a phenomenon, which transcends the ontology of matter, which determines its semantic fluidity: at one point it resembles an anthropological document (a place of cultural/biographical inscription) only to, a moment later, resemble the basis for surrealist visions or the material of an artifact. The wall seems to be the limit of the zone of mental comfort or, e.g., expose the in-body plane, which, like the walls of pre-historic caves, is covered with archetypal images from (the) childhood (of humanity). This study, based on contexts in art history, psychoanalysis, and a material turn, is an attempt at identifying the references which focus “on the wall” in the following works: “Płonąca żyrafa”, “Malarstwo”, “Zejście”, and “Ars Poetica”.

Keywords: material turn, existential concrete element, inscription, Stanislaw Grochowiak