

COMMON SPACE AND INDIVIDUAL SPACE COMMENTS ON A GROUP TASK FROM THE FIRST HALF OF 1993

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Common space and individual space—a task with a tradition, which we heard about during the meeting with G.K. at the Center for Contemporary Art. And we were served a corpse . . . but wait! Back to the beginning: we are waiting in front of the workshop, a certain tension is in the air, we are conjecturing. We know about the chest, but what is inside? Who? We enter. G.K. and R.W. are already standing at both ends of the chest; we place ourselves around it. In previous tasks of this kind, your place was important and designated to everyone (a photo of your face, a hole in the table in which you could put your head); now there is no such thing. The arrangement regarding the chest and the model is random. I have too hastily anticipated the events again. We are standing around a wooden, raw pinewood chest, with handles on top, placed on two trestles. Ta da. Unveiling, the lid is removed, and inside there is a nice, familiar one could say, model, it is M., lying naked with his eyes closed. Death is in the air. I was shocked. The chest occluded everything for me, ending exactly at the line of my horizon. When I stood on my tiptoes I saw the genitals, and I stopped at that. Lesson for next time—I need a form of elevation. A huge ladder worked perfectly. My solution for the corpse was water-cress. I wanted to bring life, a green springtime vegetation, at the same time sanctioning the status of M. He turned from a corpse into a fertilizer and a ground, a base for a new being. Naturalism? And

why plant watercress on the genitals, around the penis? There are several answers:

- to acknowledge (despite myself) what I had under my very nose, but which I was so diligently overlooking.
- we were given the chest with M. as a common space (but maybe it was the eponymous “individual space” – M.’s “individual space,” and we around him were the “common space,” emphasized by our constant shifting of places). As the points of departure for individual spaces were not specified, we were looking for them in the chest, on M.; G.M’s move is salient here – a “sartorial” division of the corpse into parts.¹ The genitals then were in “my zone”;
- due to the erotic-fertile function of this spot;
- and finally, due to the formal similarity between the penis and the watercress.

The act of offering to the participants sandwiches with watercress, watercress that had been savagely mowed with big scissors from my penis-adjacent crop, was a trigger for the beginning of the feast. M. [is] like roasted pork, and we are exchanging courtesies. Overly conscious of the religious overtones of the act of distributing bread (even if it’s a baguette with watercress), I chickened out of serving wine. The similarity of the feast in the task discussed here to “The Supper” from 1991² is strong enough and this similarity came into play time and again (for example with the lattice cage, which isolated the chest from the workshop). The consumption of M.’s pubic wig is a straight continuation of a cycle of actions beginning with growing the vegetable, eating it (the peristaltic work of digestive systems), M.D.’s move (the golden feces), G.K.’s actions with the jars full of water, and the drowning of the polychromatic excrements.³

MONIKA ZIELIŃSKA

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1 This refers to Matusiak’s work. All footnotes are the translator’s, and not part of the original document.

2 “The Supper” was the seventh edition of “Common Space and Individual Space,” undertaken during the 1991–92 academic year.

3 This refers to Dzik’s work. Zielińska evidently means to think of it as a natural conclusion of the same “cycle of actions,” not just in the sense that they came sequentially after the growing and eating of the watercress, but that M.D.’s “feces” represent a bodily consequence of that act.

I was “dragged” into Prof. Grzegorz Kowalski’s workshop through a group task from 1989. Joining the “Common Space, Individual Space” task four years ago was an attempt to find myself among people focused on a continuous quest. In the current “edition” of the task, I took part more as a documenter than as someone who speaks from the inside. What stays in the memory? A group around the chest with a naked man lying inside. From my perspective, the center (the lying model) determined an unambiguous definition of all the relations around it. A situation silencing the movement, pushing away from the impetuosity, causing a slow start to the actions. A strongly determining start, too strong for the beginning of a cumulative task, which affected the next moves for a long time. For me it was hard to separate myself from the feeling that I was participating in a funeral ritual or a necropsy. This is how I understood the first statements: gallows, a surgical scission of the body in the chest, the shaving of the deceased. The second group of moves is a separation from the center—marking each participant’s place around the chest or on it, a subtle accentuation of each person’s ME.

The first action that disenchanting the situation was the turning of the coffin into an incubator, a warm light on a naked body, a return to life. The hex melted away during an action uniting the participants with the object of the encounter: cultivated and cumulatively consumed, the pubic watercress worked as a catalyst, it was a symptom of an acceleration and of a growing impatience with slow, stroking movements. What I was waiting for happened: several moves abruptly changed the character of the event. The coffin turned into an incubator, this, in turn, into a bathtub, a bathtub into a rotating device exposing the model, at the end the placement of a lattice box on the wooden chest and on the audience. A tram-like/prison-like tin can/an arbor that contains a black-and-white crowd,⁴ which is careful so as not to step on anyone’s foot, in a slow movement from one stop to another. Everything ended before it really started and gained speed. For a number of reasons. Because the task is an action that is integrative and that quickly reveals everyone’s individualities against the backdrop of the group, it might have been scheduled for the beginning of the academic year, not

4 Here Stoykow refers to later moments in the task – a lattice cage put over the chest and the participants by Niestrój, to which Leczew stuck green leaves, and the conclusion of the task, during which the faces of the participants were painted black and white.

the end. It was preceded by a long process of building the nude, from precisely this same model who was participating as the center of the meetings by the chest. The second reason for the fading was the propriety of a courteous question addressed to the others, addressing whether what one intends to do would not by chance destroy someone else's barely sprouting idea for the next step. The respect for the work of the colleagues then dominated in many ways the desire for expression and expansion. I was surprised by the cumulative coming to terms with the situation, the lack of rebellion, the lack of attempts to isolate oneself from this specific situation. Everyone [was] polite and very calm. Only the preparation for the last "actor" meeting⁵ brought any sort of spontaneity and carelessness, which I have been waiting for since the very beginning.

What interests me most in a meeting of this sort is not the artistic effect, not the object, but the energy that can be released by the group. The energy that can be echoed during this meeting—after it, commonly—and in each of the participants individually. I felt tired from the self-control, despite having engaged [in] some kind of fun, something like a birthday party organized by the family, [I had wanted] more than that, a meeting of friends after which I wake up, I don't know when or why, on a park bench, full of weird images, full of the will to return, to explain [and] build something new. This is what I had been looking for when the previous common action sucked me into the circle of this workshop. And this is what I am still looking for—rebellion and speed.

JANE STOYKOW

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What is it – a wooden dumpling filled with cold meat?

The situation is "cadaverous," amazingly, impossibly zealously cadaverous. 10 people concentrated around a wooden box with a naked guy lying inside. Prolonged silence, motionless. At that time still nothing, some distraction, a bit of astonishment. Only later the cadaver came out, crawled out, poured out onto the mind and started to putrefy. Obviously remotely, in the imagination. The putrescence itself and the fetor of putrescence were surrogates, and as such unobtrusive, not

5 Although unclear, "the last 'actor' meeting" may refer to the "theatrical" character of the conclusion of the task.

much present, but at the same time blunt. First associations (not mine – overheard) with Stajuda’s “cadavering,” his slow fading and foretold death.

The first impulse and need—to deny the situation, to do away with the cadaver (taking care of the carrion). Hence heating lightbulbs, as an attempt to dry a parchment mummy into powder. Melting the snow in the box was an image of drying the cadaver out. This attempt to be liberated from the cadaver—was completely unsuccessful.

Monika Zielińska plants watercress on the boy’s genitals. Is it from her perspective a desire to stand up against the deadness, a suggestion of a transformation on a biological, even “wormish,” level? The release of the cycling of matter, living, dead, and so on. All this for nothing, as the cadaver was assisted; it can be said that Grzegorz Kowalski a-reanimated it, he pushed the cadaver stronger into its “cadaverity.” The contour of the feet, like an uncanny coffin portrait, was hung on the box’s planks. Contemplation. Trapping the foot in plaster. Ostentatious opening of the last phase of the cycle.

It is like waiting for liver spots to appear on the back of the hand. Who knows, maybe even digging in the mouth with the tongue, touching the gums, now softer than they once were, looking for the traces of an elderly periodontitis, for the first slackenings in the tongue pores, for the buccal mush.

Roman Woźniak’s private box. A private coffinette? Perhaps, if it wasn’t for this playful peeking in from the bottom, poking the head in and out, a spine exercise of some sort, flirting maybe. With the corpse?

The watercress is growing, fresh green. In this instance it is an ambiguous green—the color of spring, but also kitchen mold on an old piece of lunch meat.

But it is in a genital place, nurtured, watered by the girl’s delicate hand. . . . How it tastes in this box. Like a necrophiliac flower bed.

Mitaś shaves the guy in the box. He is wearing white gloves, he scrapes his face, cutting his facial hair imprecisely. An apotheosis of the disgust of the cadaver. Apogee. We are pressed into an open grave, alive.

Grzegorz Kowalski sits on a little chair. Shoulders stooped, feet dipped in a slowly stiffening plaster. Felt skullcap on his head. An almost cadaverous stillness, a rehash. A seated cadaver, as if it were Incan.

Jane Stoykow drives huge nails in the box, on each side. He

climbed on the lid and by driving the last nail in the coffin he has converted it into a tool for a circus magician, a box of a charlatan who thrusts swords through a bearded woman.

Time for water. The box, overspread with foil, fills with water. The boy floats in it, moistening. Nothing else but “the womb opening and the dark,”⁶ the cadaver soaked in putrid juice, but also a fetus dunked in a mother’s juice. So we are piercing the foil in the box’s walls with skewers. The fluid squirts on the clothes of crouching people, on white folded sheets in which they are wrapped. Some are putting their heads under the streams. An assimilation of the corpse, an inclusion of it within oneself, an anointment with the dead, and at the same time a revitalization, a release from the placenta’s moistness. What else? He, this boy, has dissolved in the water – his sweat, his spit, the grease of his skin, his smell. And we drank it, swallowed, sucked it into ourselves, absorbed, we have all copulated with this water. His nakedness, his wet corporeality, we savored.

(Jędrzej Niestrój’s action)

Grzegorz Kowalski sits rapt in a precious delusion of death, which penetrates the proceeding spans of reality. In the slowly stiffening plaster an invisible movement takes place, hidden like an internal transformation of the congealing matter of a numbing body. A hollow footprint equal to the obtrusiveness of a died-out body/thing, and at the same time equal to a void space.

We are eating the genital watercress plantation. Monika in white gloves and with the help of weird, quasi-tailor’s scissors cuts the exuberant, intensive-green stems. The blade operates near the baby-like vulnerable penis. Slices of fresh bread sprinkled densely with pubic grass are lying on a tray. Helping oneself. And it tasted good, this offal-turned-green, especially good, given that, well (though it was second-hand and through a middleman) we took it in the mouth.

The mourning voice from the speaker speeds up the decay of the meat. It simply stinks from the box, the cadaveric poison settles with moisture on the planks. I am going away from the coffinette, slayed by the cadaver’s stench and funeral obscurity that materializes itself with the plaintive whining.

(Monika Leczew’s action)

6 A reference to Dylan Thomas’s poem “Vision and Prayer” and the title of an interview with Krzysztof Bednarski published in *Czereja* 3 (1993).

The sound of the hammer, poignant and unpleasant, dully blending into gray brain matter, turns out to be substantial.

I hear it abruptly and post-factum. It is reenacted in the mind with its dull intrusiveness. Its mechanical lasting, clocklike fluidity, releases it from the dead actuality, from a human repeated but cold. The knocking has something from algebra, the sonoristics of metal. It is in explicit opposition to the fickle interior of the box.

Monika Leczew's and Mariusz's action

They dumped the cadaver out. Until now, he was rather hidden, camouflaged. And they dressed him in a funeral suit, stuck him into the box and served him like potatoes are served, adorned with a funeral mourner's weeping. They turned out to be a couple of secret informers—they denounced the situation. They picked out its flimsy, undefined metaphor and turned it into a tangible, palpable CADAVER. They replaced the hardly discernable smell, or rather stench, of death, with the smell of a mating rotten corpse, with a contagious poison of virulent anaerobes. This is the peak of the situation, the hypothetical cadaver was replaced with a "real" one.

What more is possible here? The ordeal, it was tiresome, vexing with its bluntness, intrusiveness, and noise, with its deeply morose and funerary scream. It turned into death, and the cold/corporeal corpse softened in gray-blue without even a little discretion.

Immediately after, dancing in the box, and from the megaphone, instead of wailing – jolly music (slightly deviant). Anna Mioduszezewska with Mariusz—figures, thumping. In explicit opposition to the cadaver, crossing him out, a passionate attempt to turn one's back on the coffinette, an outburst of dancing aversion to the box. A CORPSE and its DENIAL, funeral noise and wedding noise, and confetti. A party in a dissecting room.

Before the above happened, there was a beach, sea and beer. Monika L. stepped into the box filled with water. Together with Mariusz she was drinking beer, smoking cigarettes. It was promising, tasty—she in a blue swimsuit, he naked, and next to her even more carnal, his nakedness, carnality, came back to life thanks to her, it became insistent, demanded the fulfilment, the consummation. She retouched this blasé nudity, she emphasized it with her undressing. And it became autonomic to me, dwelled inside me, so I let it go, I let the imagination go, and I waited without controlling it. Will it end only with beach, beer, idle and sweet? She wanted to do so little

with him! His wetness and her wetness, their common wetness, wetness uniting them, he indolent, somehow swollen, and she soaking in this water, wet.

And that was the end.

So I—remotely, inside me, in my secret desire, in the abyss of my own debauchery, in a voyeuristic dissipation—mated the two of them.

And they were copulating for me for a long time, were curling up . . .

To be honest, I will say that I was guided by a heartfelt aim. I wanted to use what they did to crumble the death, to throw it into debauchery, to turn the box into a pay-by-the-hour motel and, in this way, outwit the cadaver. To install a tireless copulator on his gray-blue carcass.

Caesura. An almost two-hour-long session of the professor's commentary and conversations. A clear demarcation, a division and explanation occurred. The maelstrom and chaos of the actions were organized, classified as phases and cycles, series and sequences. Then the cadaver slipped out of my hands. The cadaver in me could not stand the strength of the epiphany of others, alien threads. Because of Grzegorz Kowalski, who divested the participant's actions of some elements of chaos and confusion, arranging them in sequences of logical successions.

What is he looking for? It looks like he is creating a vocabulary, searching for an alphabet, consecutive actions assigned to letters, signs. So he favors language, sequences of interrelated forms, he looks for a coherent, metalogic transformation, result from a result. I was looking for a sequence in the content, in the meaning of shapes, interpretations of the actions. What kind of knowledge did he and Roman Woźniak want to squeeze out of it? Maybe the knowledge regarding to what extent the relations are reciprocally dictated within the group, about how aggressive the members of the group are to each other in the signs evinced, about how a mutual understanding emerges from the chaos, how it is created from brain junk, from the mess of consciousness. Then the content would be only an illusion, and the essence of the things would be the philological observation. Watching how we are mutually shoving in each other's faces our own different realities, how we are poking each other with them, how the reality is piling up for us, the matter is organizing—itself.

How do we make this matter real to ourselves, providing for it the

continuity of being in subsequent moves/answers, how the elusive, ephemeral actions are slowly turning into a hard, tight billow, into the perpetually affirmed “THERE IS.”

But I will get back to the corpse. I wanted to deny the cadaver, to take it out of the box carrying it on a welded, metal bed, and then rotate by 225 degrees and place it perpendicularly to the box’s axis. I wanted to weaken the cadaver with a swing ride, to treat it with a fairground, with a funfair, and then to elevate it into some kind of a halfway, dwarfed Assumption, “entering heaven” straight from childish hallucinations, from “heaven-inflated” imaginations. By this action I wanted to cross the box out with the axis of the body hanging perpendicularly, to elevate it and lift my own brain from the box. To excrete the dead from the box and excrete it from my body, to defecate.

Jane Stoykow turns the device upside down. The steel bed lies on the floor and the bottom of the box stands in front of us like a table, the platform of our community. This table, seized by Stoykow’s chess-like move, reanimated the attendees as a group, who were concentrated around it. And this smells like lunch, like a nap after lunch, like weakening, like the announcement of the end. We’ll have to bend hard now, so that the whole thing doesn’t get too deflated. But this little table is somehow not very table-like, more than anything it’s a suddenly exposed heel, a sole devoid of the cadaver like of a shoe, moreover, a flat, flatfooted one.

During the comments session mentioned above I said that in this entire situation (arranged by Kowalski and Woźniak) I had seen a CADAVER, I noticed a dead body lying in the coffinette and the cadaverous character of the participants’ actions. Roman Woźniak responded, how so[?], responded that he didn’t see a cadaver, of course not, no cadaver, maybe at most various individual actions of the participants. Therefore also for him a new thread got revealed, a thread that he wasn’t aware of before. So he was a virgin, and I popped his cherry with a corpse, with a CORPSE I took his virginity from him. Just like I got deflowered by Kowalski with ALGEBRA. And somehow brainwise we were DEFLOATED.

Before Stoykow played chess with the box, Anna Mioduszevska poured dough made from flour and water on the lattice of the steel bed elevated above the box, on its entire length. And it leaked through like icicles, poured through broad wire openings, swelling with slowly softening stalactites, with extending white excrescences. The entire

bed got adorned with moist, wobbling fringes. A little pastry shop with a runny, undercooked cake. The return of taste as a sense. Human/cake association. Flavor rather sweet and sour. Tempting? And at the same time the cadaver started to wane, slowly, and drop by drop it was soaking in, completely decayed, being eaten up . . .

At last Jędrzej Niestrój enclosed the box and the participants in a wire mesh cube. He limited the situation, isolated it. Maybe he did it because Stoykow deprived the situation of vectors, of references in the forms of the naked boy, the open box, the bed. It all started to slither, pour out like dough, it threatened with some insubordination, with unexpectedness, with the possibility that it would sprawl on the entire workshop, or even further, by some peristaltic movement, with an impetus. So he wrapped it, protected it, so it wouldn't get spoiled, squandered.

The task ought to be strongly eye-opening, in a pedagogical sense of course. Indeed we gave birth, this delicate plant, a brain creature, sprouted in between us. Unwittingly, a lump of matter was formed – straight from the pulp. Thoughts emerged, or rather we, like shepherds, corralled those woolen rams from the wildernesses of associations, from leavened personalities, to one pasture. And there they turned into matter, they grew satiated with gravity, they started to weigh down. IT already is, so only the importunity is left, to pack something in, to push into it, to add, to write in. The LANGUAGE is being born, on an artificial ground, like bacteria on a culture medium. Real.

Anna Mioduszevska cuts 12 round openings of around 5 cm diameter in a box turned upside down. Each one is a kind of peephole, a viewer for heartfelt peeking. And it was something you could do: peek into the suddenly ambiguous interior of the box, glance at it bashfully, in passing. It is possible to control them in an amazingly wary way. Those openings like slivers in changing room walls, give access to the unforeseen revelations of the inside.

In the openings 8 lightbulbs, lighting up the space isolated by the wire mesh, appear. It is a zone of life, a human zone, a zone of a sentient being. A light blue light from a blue vacuum bubble hung above their heads, it is an ejaculation of a phantasmagoria directly from the gyruses into an emerging metaphorical reality. This is simply a naïve heaven, pure immortality on which we clung with tram handles made from steel, from a thick wire. And this is how we were lasting in a vac-

uum and the idiocy of a trolleybus journey, hanging above the zone of hell, the red light at the feet which emanated from a red lightbulb lying on the floor. This tripartition of the world into hope, existence, and dying clamped our hands tightly and with a peristaltic twirl was squeezing furious transcendence out of the guts.

Stoykow smashes 5 out of 8 white lightbulbs. He does it vulgarly—with a hammer. His actions are accompanied by a clamor and the falling of broken glass. The gesture is dramatic, it has something of a fierce elimination of being. It is an impulsive fucking-up of the order, of the symmetrical arrangement that resides at the table. Stoykow violated the prettiness by destroying it with the smashes of a hammer. It was an action demolishing the harmony of a staged interior, dictated by the unstoppable desire to RUIN. Satiated with a vibe of sexual dissolution, when each erotic spasm increasingly fractures the inviolability of the bitchy beauty.

From the two sizable round openings in the top of the box, paper ribbons come out radially, hung further on the wire walls. On the paper bands are photos of Mariusz, who left the box in this simple way, he crept out of it in a spiritual/steam-like, paper way. There are photos, meanwhile he is not there. It reeks of mess and prattle. Grzegorz Kowalski sets fire to the ribbons and the flames cleanse more than half of the interior occupied by paper. A radical division of the interior in two parts emerges, the one charred with a pile of black ashes, black, and the one untouched by fire, virginally white.

Monika Leczew's arbor, as in, it had green leaves stuck on the outside wall of the cage. [Suddenly] it all felt garden-like, almost like at an allotment garden. Surely the steel of the cage was softened, let's say familiarized. The cage was turned into an arbor. Mitaś's attempt, based on festooning the interior with inflated balloons, was similar. He was dissolving steel with rubber, while Leczew [did so] with chlorophyll. It is a sign that the wire mesh was a painful insult for the peripatetic inclinations of their brains. It is at the same time a desire to "warm up" the cage's interior, to make it homely. The cold prison transforms itself into a hospitable place. Coldness into warmth.

And finally the end, conceptualized and directed by Grzegorz Kowalski. The participants, dressed in black and white with painted faces + G.K.'s red nails, were placed in the interior on their selected sides: white and untouched, or black and burned out. The drinking of the champagne from disposable cups. This is what it looked like on the

two sides of the box— R. Woźniak in lilywhite among paper sashes and G. Kowalski with radiant red nails against a black suede background, and the students freshly subjected to brain disembowelment by a two-some of procreators. An almost operatic finale, subjected to artificiality, contrasts with the impulsive, intuitive character of the previous actions. For sure it is a spectacular end to the task. On the other hand, it is a pedagogical product, an amputation of an unfolding chain of reality in creation, a kind of consensual inside-the-brain abortion.

ARTUR ŻMIJEWSKI