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ABOUT THE FUTURE, ABOUT SOURCES AND THE FOUR ELEMENTS

1.

In the performance *Water 2030* we are asking questions about the future. About the future of water resources on the planet, and, more broadly: about our responsibility towards the future generations. We started the work on the show from the observation that before our very eyes, some dangerous crack is being made. Sociologists call it a lack of inter-generation solidarity. The same thing was said by Albin Krajewski, sculptor, inhabitant of the Social Care House in Jonkowo. His words we treated, with a grain of salt, as words of a guru. With some rarely found internal strength, clearly and simply he said that we are not preparing the world for our grandchildren. Quite the contrary – we destroy it, we spoil it, we create a worse Earth. This is how the idea for the next performance came about – *Earth B*.

This time, however, we tried to bring our thinking about the future to the present moment. During our work on *Water*, our attempt to imagine what the world is going to look like in twenty years proved a challenge both to the audience and to ourselves. It is not easy to think about the future. One has to learn first how to get through, to tear through, to the future. One way to do it is to try to get the future forms of the world out of those which exist already. So, preparing *Earth B* we were taking care that the performance, again turning towards the future, should at the same time be a search of its seeds in the present day. Degeneration of agriculture, degeneration of the relation of man to animals in the dying traditional farms and in massive farming became the subject of the masks created for the purpose of the performance, and of the masking scenes which belong to it. The scenes of the “carnival of animals”, human-animal, absurd confusion.

This is what it was like in previous seasons. In the present season, the season of *Fire*, we are actually focusing on what is here and now. Such is, one could say, the nature of fire. And theatre as well. It is important what is going on at the moment, between people. It began from the New Year show, entitled *New Year's Eve at the Central Station*. The participants of the January carolling workshop had a special task: to bring along records of their talks with homeless people. Their subject was to be “crisis”. Again, the impulse was a thought of the sociologist Ulrich Beck. The awareness of a crisis became, in his opinion, so wide-spread that one can talk about it with the homeless. It turned out that the workshop participants prepared their material mostly in the last moment. Many talked to the homeless on railway stations, on their way to Węgrajty.

We composed the text of the show out of records realized on stations of Cracow, Wrocław, Berlin, Szczecin and Olsztyn. A quotation from one of the talks: "Crisis? What crisis?!" became an outset slogan of this year's work on the carnival show, and at the same time – a seed of work on *Fire*. The subject of the performance works, here sketched lightly, is one thing. The other is the fact that the performances form a series. The fourth sequel will probably be called "Air", somebody will say. Right, at the stage of "Earth B" we didn't know that. Finally, though, we allowed ourselves to be carried away. Let there be four elements, long live Empedokles!

2.

The pra-premiere of *Fire* took place during the carolling expedition. Somebody asked then in what way this element was present in the tradition of early spring rituals. The matter is, however, much broader than the search for direct and specific allusions at tradition. It is, first of all, the question how theatre performances relate to rituals and to the local context.

A few years ago we made a brave decision. We decided to end every season of Different Theatre School, that is the season of carolling, carnival and alleluia, with a new performance. It is almost three times that we have managed already. Almost, because *Fire* is still a baby. Every time we show the new performance in Dziadówek, in Suwalszczyzna, on the Hańcza Lake.

In 2010 year, on Easter Sunday, in other words – Water Sunday, we played *Water 2030* in Dziadówek. In one of the scenes, the ballad of the dragon found its place – a story which takes place on a lake, a mysterious lake, as deep as Hańcza Lake. A year later, we showed there *Earth B*.

Dziadówek is a place where over twenty years we have been working to revitalise the tradition of *volotchebne*, a custom very much connected with the element of earth. It is an early-spring rite. One walks on the earth, inhaling its smell, which was absent earlier, during the winter. One looks at a newly ploughed field and sometimes it is as if you saw the very nakedness of the earth. There is a curious tradition, an anthropological foundation myth, a story of the first *volotchebnik*, who was dragged, in horizontal posture, over the fields. Imitating love-making gestures, he fulfilled a magical task, giving fertility to the earth and good harvest to the people. So much for mythology and old rituals. Today's Dziadówek is decadent agriculture and old villagers, growing steadily older. In this world, which cannot catch up with the present day, we showed a performance which draws at its roots, but whose clear horizon is the future. It is an action which goes in two directions at the same time, in accordance with Jane Goodall's "roots and shoots" philosophy.

3.

Symbols, ritual motifs, anecdotes are only one layer of the performance, a kind of an aesthetic game. It is worth, however, to work with the very experience of an element, in the case of our actions – first of all, the earth.

A theatre fieldwork expedition is getting down to earth, standing on the earth in the sense of getting away from everyday entanglements, of a vital simplification, focusing on what is happening here and now. Nowica in the Low Beskid Mountains, January. We come and immediately we are drawn into a whirlpool of carolling. And here we stand, face to face

with people, we come into houses, we rub sides with somebody's life.

On one side: getting down to earth in metaphorical sense, relating to a deepening of communication and being among people, on the other – earth in a very concrete sense, experienced sensually. The latter opens the way to other experiences. One element calls forth the next ones. Everything depends on internal readiness, and the readiness appears when our determination is accompanied by affirmation of the world around. Several times during Easter expedition there were swims in the lake. Water, on which here and there there still are floes of ice, burns like fire. So far, nobody has caught pneumonia.

4.

Remaining in the circle of first and elementary things, one should gather some thoughts on the subject of tradition. An expedition is a meeting with tradition. How is one supposed to make this meeting fresh and authentic? Among us, there are new people, who come here for the first time – what we can do is we could simply accompany them, without any interference. And we too, “the elders”, have a chance to taste the expedition in a new way, provided we keep an attitude which shall be at the same time open and critical. We will loose the authenticity of being here if we are too polite, if we start pretending anything. For example – an unconditional acceptance.

For many years, we did not know what to do with the presence of the Jew character in ritual theatre. Is it really a character or a stereotype? Can it exist outside of the context of humiliation, of beating? Is it necessary that he has a hunch, stuffed with pea-stalks,

and a staff raised above his head, as if in ritual? Earlier, the staff appeared in our carolling props set as the equipment of the shepherd, the leader of the goat. I observed how deeply the gesture of raising the staff, the stick is rooted in our genes, even on seeing an animal. What is biologically and scenically exciting, with time had become disgusting to us. We didn't want the shepherd scare the animal with violence any more. Impulsive reactions of this kind and the way of thinking which stands behind them in traditional society, are still lingering now, also in relation to women. Does our refusal to accept these phenomena mean we get away from reality, become idealistic? What shall one do with the language of violence in the verses of folk songs? Are these songs in danger of extinction if we, after all, resign from some of the verses?

Such doubts concern mostly the attitude of the new man. Something tells us that we should treat the material with the greatest care and never skip a verse. We must remember, however, that nothing really frees us from choosing. And penetrating. What appears as unity to us, used to be sewn from many different matters in the past.

Once we found a beautiful song which was sung to us by a very old lady in Podlasie region, in Szczęsnowicze. We wrote down all the verses. The next day, in the neighbouring village, her brother showed us a record of the same song, with a different set of verses. He was much younger than his sister, who was born at the beginning of the century, he went to school in the thirties. That time added to the existing verses anti-semitic ones.

Not only that time, anyway. Similar sense had the last verse of the canticle carol „Żydzie, Żydzie...” (“O Jew, O Jew...”) (M.M. Mioduszeński, *Pastorałki i kołędy*, Kraków 1843). The carol starts beautifully but in the last verse the peasant threatens the Jew: „Żydzie, Żydzie wnet ja cię nauczę, jak cię z tyłu, jak cię z przodu tą pałką wymłóć!” (“O, Jew, O, Jew, soon I’ll give you teaching, when from the backwards, when from the frontwards I’ll give you some beating”) What for? For the fact that he “knows the old Lord God fine, but the little one, he doesn’t understand” „starego Pana Boga jak należy umie, ale tego maleńkiego jeszcze nie rozumie...”?

We tried to cut the last verse out, yet it did not seem enough. Something wrong was hanging in the air. The solution came when the carolling expedition was joined by a young adept from Israel. Together, we created a new verse, in which we put another theological thought about the Messiah, now a Jewish one. Now, the song became something like a dispute. It stopped to be the old song. What relief!

5.

We need a space which shall give some breath to the meeting, to the confrontation. Here we have to look for the fourth element, air.

With the passage of years, our carolling becomes more and more inter-cultural. People from different continents come to the workshops, from different religious traditions. Actually, we should not be surprised that usually they find themselves brilliantly well in our actions. The field of expeditions is borderland, Lemko-Polish (Beskid Niski, the Low Beskid

Mountains) and Polish-Lithuanian-Belarussian (the Suwalki region). The ground of the borderland is elastic, it more easily adjusts to the changes and the needs which in the times of globalisation come everywhere. Not only to great metropolises, where they are perhaps more clearly defined and classified.

Alleluias, *volotchebne*, also belong to the sphere of borderland. An expert on the subject, Janina Szymańska, calls them borderland phenomena (*Etnolingwistyka* 5/92, p. 97). Easter becomes in this framework an ecumenical tradition, a little detached, rachmanian. In this space, shamanist *lalymkas* fly around – strange songs, like the one about nine horns of the deer. Animal characters walk around which come from pre-Christian times. Yet, in spite of apparent fairy-tale-ness, everything here has a concrete dimension.

This borderland space, after twenty-three years of exploring, has a special meaning to us. There mix and cross different time vectors. Bread baked in the house and other healthy, village food do not belong only to the past. They also are a clearly forward-pointing vector.

Not only cities can be creative, also traditional and village space gives such possibilities. Recently, inhabitants of many world metropolises passionately try to build a new kind of community. In our activities, there appears the caroller, animator of culture, well grounded, acting with a plan, with a purpose. He comes into a village house, stands with his back to the TV set and blocks people from seeing the screen.

In a difficult area he practices his „minimal art”.
Something like scattered, single gestures, etudes,
constant dialogue.

Let us not stop at that. We are about to sketch out
a performance.

29 IV 2012