The Postmortal Life of Savages

Witkiewicz and Malinowski Disinterred

Dorota Sajewska



On 26 November 1994 in Zakopane, the winter capital of Poland, an exhumation was performed to recover the remains of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (commonly known as Witkacy), the father of the "Pure Form" concept in Polish Theatre (Witkiewicz 1977). The casket holding the remains of the Polish playwright and theatre philosopher, who many hold to be the only Polish theatre artist of note before Jerzy Grotowski, was wrapped in foil and transported to a morgue where paleopathologists, designated by then minister of culture and legendary stage

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director Kazimierz Dejmek, conducted tests to determine the true identity of the person buried in the casket. Was it really Witkiewicz?

In fact, the analysis revealed that the remains were not those of a 50-year-old male but rather of a young woman who most likely died in childbirth. This was confirmed in subsequent studies when, following the scandalous discovery, it was decided to examine Witkacy's original grave in the village of Jeziory Wielkie in Ukraine, where his body was believed to have been interned after his suicide on 19 September 1939. Yet instead of the bones of the Polish writer, the grave in Polesie contained those of an infant, the child of the Ukrainian woman whose remains were inadvertently found in Zakopane.

This was not the first time doubt about Witkacy's postmortal whereabouts had surfaced. His so-called remains were first exhumed in 1988 in preparation for a grand public funeral planned by Wojciech Jaruzelski and Mikhail Gorbachev with the aim of rekindling Polish-Russian amity. Doubts as to the identity of the person buried in the Polish cemetery, however, were not rigorously addressed at the time. The national ceremony for Witkacy went on as planned, and the unidentified Ukrainian woman was buried as "Witkacy" once again.

At the cusp of the political transformation that would sweep Poland into the European Union, the ceremonial exhumation/reinterment of "Witkacy" might be read as necropolitical performance. The replacement of the material remains of the national poet were explicitly enacted in and as the borderlands. Once Polish, then Soviet, and eventually Ukrainian, the ground itself was opened to exhume and re-receive the traveling bones; a battle was waged for the remains, and by extension for their material correlation, the territorial boundary. It was a battle in which it was no longer a writer and his words at stake but his organic, material remnants—bones. And because of the deeply complicated problems with confirming the definitive identity of those materials, we should, as historian Ewa Domańska suggests, "abstain from speaking of the artist's posthumous life as an idea or spectre." Wherever he is, he is not gone. Domańska prefers this materiality of Witkacy, finding hauntology to be "quite limited, rejecting his constant material presence":

> The organic memory of bones should constitute a particular field of interest and their biography (necrography) could be redefined as an account of the biological and organic dimension of Witkacy's existence, both anti-mortem and post-mortem. (Domańska 2010:49)[1]

In writing about the problematic history of Witkacy's burial, Domańska rightfully notes the historical-political aspect of the repatriation of remains, emphasizing that "the choice of forebears is an important element in political transformation," and also pointing out the material agency of remains and their organic transformation. "Transhumance," Domańska writes after Dante, can be "understood as migration (or rather being driven away)" and transhumanization can be understood as "the change of an organic substance into dust." In this case both "start to converge" (49).

Here, Domańska insists upon the agency of material remains, and reflects the neologism in the Italian word *trasumanar* coined by Dante Alighieri in *The Divine Comedy*. In the first canto of *Paradiso*, Dante uses this word to define the inner transformation that Glaucus, the poet's

1. The basic translation of my essay, originally written in Polish, and of all quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are by Simon Wloch.

Figure 1. (facing page) Krzysztof Zarzecki (Witkacy) and Jacek Poniedziałek (Malinowski) onscreen in the tunnel, with Justyna Wasilewska (Aria) in Życie seksualne Dzikich *(The Sexual Life of Savages) by Marcin Cecko, directed by Krzysztof Garbaczewski. Nowy Teatr, Warsaw, 2011. (Photo by Magda Hueckel; courtesy of Nowy Teatr)*

alter ego of sorts, experiences as he ascends from purgatory to paradise. In the "fisherman-turned-god" story, Dante examines the relation between that which is human and that which is nonhuman and simultaneously underscores the insufficiency and inadequacy of language to express the experience of "transhumanization": "Trasumanar significar per verba / non si poria" ("To represent transhumanise in words / Impossible were"; Alighieri 1867:256). In doing so, he also voices opposition to the verbal representation of something understood as a process, a transition, a transformation of the body, kicking the chair out from under Domańska's suggestion that bones can retain organic memory, thereby recording and describing the biological aspect of existence. So, how is it possible then to escape the mortifying effect of language? How do we let remains live? Is infringing on the sanctity of the dead with a necroperformance devoid of an ethical dimension the only way to do it? Can the dead revive only through an objectification/reification, as in the case of the dislocation and relocation in Witkacy's double exhumation?

> Throughout [the] ritual, the unfortunate remains of the man are constantly worried. His body is twice exhumed; it is cut up; some of its bones are peeled out of the carcass, are handled, are given to one party and then to another, until at last they come to a final rest. And what makes the whole performance most disconcerting is the absence of the real protagonist—*Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. For the spirit of the dead man knows nothing about all that happens to his body and bones, and cares less, since he is already leading a happy existence in Tuma, the netherworld, having breathed of the magic of oblivion and formed new ties. (Malinowski 1929:148–49)

These are the words that Polish anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski used to relate the funeral ritual of Trobriand Islanders in his 1929 book *The Sexual Life of Savages* as he attempted to convince European readers that the Trobriand Islanders' burial ritual contained "a most interesting complex of ideas—some very crude and quaint—concerning kinship, the nature of marriage, and the purely social ties between father and children" (148). Interestingly, Malinowski's account of Trobriand burial might be likened to the double exhumation faced by one of his own close social ties, his friend, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz more than half a century later in a different hemisphere among an entirely different people. It might be more comfortable to interpret the similarities in description as simply a matter of coincidence. But what if we grant Malinowski's account a kind of prophetic power, even as we note the coincidental as contingent? Might we see in this utterly strange recurrence something we might call the organic memory of bones? Or, looked at another way, might we locate operations of memory within the materiality of the ritual necroperformance itself? As Malinowski patiently explains in *The Sexual Life of Savages*: the exhumation, manipulation, dispersal, and reburial of bones are accepted as "normal" in the Trobriand Islands and Malinowski's academic success as an anthropologist and fame in Poland, in nearly equal proportion to the fame of his poet friend, meant his work would have been well-known, circulating as a classic of Polish social science. And yet, when a "practice" of double exhumation, manipulation, and dispersal recurs across the body of Malinowski's friend Witkacy, the event returns as "scandalous."

The peculiar game with "Witkacy's" bones upsets the linear biographical order. "Normally," in the Polish imaginary, *ante-mortem* precedes *post-mortem*. But "Witkacy's" multiple exhumations and ultimate dislocation impels many in Poland to think of him as someone/something that is still *intra vitam*. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that artistic takes on the repatriation of Witkacy's remains were multiple and almost immediate. One was the play *Grzebanie* (The Burial), based on Witkacy's writings, directed by Jerzy Jarocki, and performed at the National Academy of Theatre Arts (1995) and the Stary Teatr in Krakow (1996). Another was the film *Zdziczenie obyczajów pośmiertnych* (Savagery of Posthumous Habits, 1995), a documentary reconstruction of Witkacy's burial directed by Konrad Szołajski. An indirect effect was the remarkable reinvigoration of Polish theatre itself, largely at the hands of Grzegorz Jarzyna with his *Bzik tropikalny* (Tropical Madness) staged at Teatr Rozmaitości in Warsaw in 1997, based on two of Witkacy's dramas from 1920: *Mister Price* and *Nowe Wyzwolenie* (The New Deliverance).



Figure 2. Krzysztof Globisz and Szymon Kuśmider in Grzebanie *(The Burial) based on writings by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, directed by Jerzy Jarocki. Narodowy Stary Teatr, Kraków, 1996. (Photo by Stefan Okołowicz)*

Inspired by Witkacy's descriptions of his experiences with drugs and by contemporary movie aesthetics (mainly Quentin Tarantino's), *Bzik tropikalny* quickly became a cult favorite and is today considered by many to be a turning point in the history of Polish theatre, clearing the way quite effectively for a new generation of artists, many of whom had been trained by Krystian Lupa, the "father" of new Polish theatre directors. As if referring to Witkacy's multiple deaths at multiple hands, these directors, born in the 1960s, have been dubbed the "patricides" (Gruszczyński 2003). Thus the twice-exhumed Witkacy returned to the stage with the peculiar force of the undead, a force that both raises from the dead and re-slays, again and again—a force transforming theatre by the repetitive patricidal impulse of a gang of brothers.

The return of Witkacy to the stage in the hands of the fratri-patricides was unsettling to some. *Tropical Madness* was Witkacy's play, but was it really Witkacy? The penetrating exploration of narcotically and sexually induced altered states in Jarzyna's rendition of the Witkacy plays shocked even Lupa himself, who had began his own search for new dramatic forms and performing aesthetics in the late 1970s with adaptations of Witkacy's *Nadobnisie i koczkodany* (Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes, 1978), *Pragmatyści (*The Pragmatists, 1981), and *Maciej Korbowa i Bellatrix* (Maciej Korbowa and Bellatrix, 1986). As Lupa describes Witkacy's postmoral analysis in his student's hands:

> From the very beginning, it was a shock that this was Witkacy [...]. So different was the world and so differently did the people interact with each other than in the so-called Witkacy-esque plays that were essentially a part of the canon by then. But it was Witkacy, and in a captivatingly intimate way. Perhaps it was from somewhere beyond the reach of his stage directions and theory of Pure Form, that I almost furtively discerned Witkacy in the play—almost privately—him and his tropical journeys and the experience of the "sadness" and strangeness of the tropics. How could it be that until now, all of that had gone unnoticed in those writings? (1997:23)

The "tropical journeys" refers to Witkacy's journey to join Malinowski who had gone to the Trobriand Islands in summer 1914 for research and in 1915 had begun to observe and document the lives of the inhabitants. Lupa's last question should actually be worded a little differently: Why had the Polish theatre community *buried* Witkacy's journey to Australia and New Guinea to join his closest friend Bronisław Malinowski?

It is actually remarkable that the tandem expedition by the anthropologist and budding playwright did not become a creation myth for a Polish theatre that would later, between the 1960s and '80s, and especially through Jerzy Grotowski, become enamored with anthropology. But perhaps the Malinowski/Witkiewicz expedition had been excised from collective memory because of the personal and deeply intimate motivations that surrounded it like a set of ghostly secrets: the trip was Witkiewicz's attempt to resume life after suicidal thoughts troubled him in the wake of the suicide of his (possibly pregnant) fiancée Jadwiga Janczewska. Was the Witkiewicz who spent his days with Malinowski photographing and drawing scenes of the

seemingly lively "lives of savages" somehow less than believable or even untranslatable for the stage in the years before the patricides' sudden recall of the trip to the tropics? The truth is that Witkiewicz's stay in the tropics lasted only a couple weeks;[2] upon getting wind of the outbreak of World War I, he immediately decided to abandon the foreign territory to join the ranks of the Tsarist army, which could be seen as a patricidal gesture against his father, who was a follower of Józef Piłsudski's Polish Legions of the Austrian Army. Or perhaps the reason the relationship was buried was the conflict that ensued between the two friends, likely over differing political positions on the war as well as personal disagreements.

Interestingly, the failure of the friendship between the theatre artist and the anthropologist may have been buried in the Trobriands, but it might also register as something of a prophesy for the founding of the field of performance studies 50 years later on a different continent, when the friendship of theatre artist Richard Schechner and anthropologist Victor Turner had such enormous influence (in part inspired, it should be added, by Schechner's interest in and friendship with Jerzy Grotowski).

But perhaps the real reason the Malinowski/Witkiewicz expedition went so long interred is, ultimately, because Grotowski's universalizing and ahistorical anthropological project came to be predominant in the Polish theatre, overwhelming any other disinterred intersections between theatre and anthropology.[3]

To reconstruct the influence of anthropology on the modern theatre at the beginning of 20th century I propose a new term — necroperformance. In contrast to the concept of culture rooted in a metaphysics of presence, in the completeness of the myth and the efficacy of the ritual, necroperformance is based mostly on fragments and remains of history, which could be understood as any mediated form of living past — such bones, relics, material objects, as well as documentation. I consider necroperformance to be the essence of the anthropological project, which was rooted in the experience of WWI and developed in the theatre of modernity,[4] and use this term also to describe the uniquely Polish enactment of the (European) idea of modernity. Necroperformance does not place the Polish experience of death in conversation with the transcultural research of rituals, but rather it locates "Polishness" in the "savagery" at the center of European culture, its history, and its politics. From this perspective Malinowski and Witkiewicz can be seen as emblematic of the reconfiguration of the idea of the human being, which was a consequence of the experience of the extreme violence of the war. However, it should be added that the radical experience of the first "modern" war, which eventually brought about Polish independence, has been largely repressed and forgotten — buried in the Polish collective memory till today.

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2. Witkiewicz's journey lasted less than three months, until 5 September, when he parted with Malinowski and boarded a ship back to Europe in order to join the war effort. Witkiewicz never reached New Guinea; he spent seven weeks with Malinowski in Australia and two weeks in Ceylon. Malinowski's stay, meanwhile, lasted four years, two of which he spent doing fieldwork in New Guinea.

3. The effects of Grotowski's fundamental influence beginning in the 1970s, when he abandoned theatre and began the program of active culture, were twofold: (1) Ongoing attempts, steeped in the metaphysics of presence, to carry on Grotowski's tradition; and (2) a local, Polish iteration of performance studies — *antropologia widowisk* (the anthropology of performances), inspired by Grotowski's Anthropologie théâtrale, the academic version of his research on rituals in the form of lessons held at the Collège de France in 1997–1998. Antropologia widowisk aimed to study cultural phenomena as dramas that provide metacommentary on social life and, consequently, on history. Over time, as it became an institutionalized academic discipline in the 2000s, antropologia widowisk metamorphosed into a research methodology rooted in a vertical paradigm that ignored class, race, and gender's impacts on the body and history.

4. A systematic explanation of my term "necroperformance" will find its place in my forthcoming book, *Nekroperformans. Kulturowa rekonstrukcja teatru Wielkiej Wojny* (Necroperformance: Cultural Reconstruction of the Great War Theatre; forthcoming 2016).

This is why the onstage revival of the relationship between Malinowski and Witkacy in Krzysztof Garbaczewski's 2011 performance, *Życie seksualne Dzikich* (The Sexual Life of Savages) can be viewed from the perspective of Freud's "uncanny." In 1919, Sigmund Freud developed his psychoanalytical concept of death, again deeply rooted in the European experience of WWI, and identified the "uncanny" as something that is at the same time *heimlich* (familiar, like home) and *unheimlich* (unfamiliar, unlike home, foreign). The uncanny is also an opportunity for the return of the repressed. Garbaczewski's performance, based on Cecko's play, was not only the first instance in which Malinowski's legendary *The Sexual Life of Savages*, along with his *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, were adapted for the stage but it was the strongest attempt to animate and verify in (live) practice the (dead) writings of the social anthropologist from the early 20th century. The artists' collaborative aim was to pose a question about the status of the "savage" in contemporary mass media and, simultaneously, to undertake a critical review of temporality and history, specifically reflecting on the peripheral status of Poland in the current era of globalization. Garbaczewski and Cecko, born in the 1980s (a generation after the patricides), are shaped by global rather than local knowledges. It may be that this globality enabled the return of the anthropological-theatrical paradigm. But unlike Grotowski's theatrical allusions to rites of passage or rituals of sacrifice, or Jarzyna's tropically ecstatic altered states, Garbaczewski and Cecko critically and reflexively dismantle essentialism, testing sedimented relations as they excavate habits of gender, race, sexuality, animacy/inanimacy, and habitual boundaries between human and animal and human and machine.

"Savages. There was such a tribe. I remember. I used to be a part of it"—these words set in motion the exploration of the memory of the Other as a part of oneself (Cecko 2011a:1). For this purpose, Garbaczewski and Cecko cast a group of uncompromising young actors who formed a kind of artistic tribe in a laboratory of sorts, as well as in their private lives. They adopted the post-industrial space of the old Dom Słowa Polskiego printing house in Warsaw as the stomping ground for their savagery. Its labyrinthine architecture is incredibly suggestive of an overwhelming sense of entropy, decay, and energy loss. The space is as ruthless and uncomfortable for the actors as it is, without doubt, for the spectators. This rather untheatrical setting generates a feeling of emptiness that is impossible to fill and resembles some kind of underground tomb or basement. But augmented by the dim light given off by low-hanging lamps the space proves to be ideal for studying the memory of a futuristic, savage tribe who are discovering their own primality through the radical use of network technology. The faintly seen and barely heard actors move about like shadows with a monotonous, hypnotic rhythm. Ironically, their presence is only ever fully discerned when they use projectors and screens. Their work directly challenges the twin myth that theatre is a mode of "live experience" and new media a "non-living technology."

In the opening monologue delivered directly to the audience, Aria, an androgynous young woman, describes herself as a part of the Grey Zone once inhabited by a tribe of the Savages, and defines the performance space as the territory of mutated Savages of contemporary civilization. The performing area and audience section are both dimly lit, and the entire darkened space gradually fills with computer-processed sounds, creating a unified space and a sense of community between the spectators and the (returning) Savages. With the performance space thus defined, a media-aided (re)transmission that imagines the 1914 death of Malinowski and Witkiewicz's friendship in the tropics is projected on the wall of the otherwise empty space with only the silent Aria lying on the ground. The projection shows the two men together in some unidentified underground, a tunnel suggesting a space of being in-between. Malinowski is trying to convince Witkacy to stay with him on the island, luring his friend with the possibility of the artistic and sexual freedom. Witkacy's refusal to stay in the tropics and his decision to return to the Old Continent immersed in the war is considered by the anthropologist as "European Hysteria."

Examining the fallout between Malinowski and Witkiewicz ("Nietzsche breaking with Wagner," as we read in Malinowski's *Diary*), Garbaczewski and Cecko force the anthropologist to become a refugee in the territory of mutated replicant Savages: the Malinowski character, still only on the screen, is trying to pass through the open doors he has found underground. Each time he tries, an alarm sounds and a man and a half-naked woman, observing him from the stage, stop him from leaving. Only when Malinowski finally strips naked is the theatrical rite of passage possible. Only then can he leave the screen and enter the territory of the Savages — the performance space. Witkacy meanwhile disappears from the screen to return later, also as one of the inhabitants of this territory (Zetto), and as a double of Malinowski at the same time.

This opening segment of Garbaczewski and Cecko's performance interprets the actual falling out between the two friends, who are also complimentary figures representative of modernity — the father of social anthropology and the creator of modern theatre — does less to identify the points of contact between anthropology and theatre than to present the inherently antagonistic nature of the relationship. The outbreak of war seems to be an absolutely key event for the emergence of Malinowski's notion of "live experience." As a subject of Austria, considered an "enemy alien" of the British (and the Australians) his research was permitted to continue only in a restricted area of the Trobriand Islands, where he consequently invented the ahistorical method of direct observation and objective recording, making it the basis of field research at large (Young 1998:2–3; Czermińska 2009:19).[5] In the case of Witkiewicz, who immediately decided to return to Europe to fight in the Tsarist army as a Russian subject, direct experience was connected with participation in history. The outbreak of war awakened in Witkiewicz — as he wrote in a letter to his family from 6 August 1914 — a sense of a "revocation of the sole ability in life." He considered serving in the war "the only act he was capable of after being deprived of art." In contrast to the thoughts of death and suicide that interminably accompanied him during the expedition in the Trobriands — thoughts he termed "as disgusting as life" — the war gave him hope of a "purposeful death" (Witkiewicz 2013:371). To Witkiewicz, such a death represented a hope of overcoming his philosophical-aesthetic crisis by politicizing his own existence.

Witkiewicz's desire to be a part of history (and touch death), on the one hand, and Malinowski's to separate from history by creating an aseptic laboratory for studying man (by participating in his life), on the other, suggests a fundamental dissonance between theatre and anthropology. Both experienced the feeling of disintegration soon after WWI, but in very different ways. Witkiewicz, "seeing by accident the real face of the 20th century" (Puzyna 1999:57), recognized his own transformation into a permanently divided self, which found its expression both in his 1916 photograph *Portret wielokrotny* (Multiple Portrait), taken during his stay in the Tsarist army, and in the ironic interpretation of his transformation after the Russian Revolution, described in the 1919 novel *622 upadki Bunga* (622 Downfalls of Bungo; 1972): "Obiit Bungo, natus est Witkacy" (Bungo died, Witkacy was born; Degler 2009:12). Whereas Malinowski endured his own split between the objective "I" and subjective "I" in order to be able to continue his research, revealed in the documentation of his scientific and personal life conducted on the islands. This diametrical opposition was brilliantly articulated, in relation to Malinowski and Witkiewicz, by Michael Young:

> For Malinowski, "the purpose in keeping a diary and trying to control one's life and thoughts at every moment must be to consolidate life, to integrate one's thinking, to avoid fragmenting themes." Witkiewicz, in contrast, sought and relished "fragmenting themes" as essential kindling for his creative art (his experiments in drug taking were sim-

5. Michael W. Young corrects the myth about the internment of Malinowski in the Triobriands during the First World War: "The facts are that Malinowski was not interned but merely kept under light surveillance, and that he spent only two years in Papua, not four" (Young 1998:3).

ilarly motivated). He was intrigued by masks and multiple identities (he coined hundreds of nicknames for himself), seemingly indifferent to the "unified personality" for which Malinowski so earnestly yearned. In a word, Witkiewicz sought dislocation rather than integration. (1998:14)

This asymmetry between the two friends—an anthropologist and a theatre artist—seems to have defined the status of both fields of activity: the foundations of anthropology—depoliticized, ahistorical, striving for a complete image of reality; and the historical-political imperative and fragmentary paradigm of 20th-century theatre. Could it be, then, that the lives of Malinowski and Witkiewicz constitute a symbolic bedrock for the conflict between theatre and anthropology, with its driving force of history revealing the notions of live experience fostered by both fields to be false, nothing more than a cultural construct?

Garbaczewski and Cecko's performance also sees anthropology—personified in Malinowski as an indifference towards history and historical reconstruction in fear of falling victim to excessive fictionalization and a loss of "scientific objectivity"—unravel as a fallacious vehicle in search of lasting structures of reality and universal paradigms. Malinowski is the exemplar of rationality, of the ability to use language and even to direct one's own energies as if they were something fundamentally distinct from naturalistic instinct—a trait that lay at the foundation of the Western notion of what separates man from the world of animals (Mościcki 2009). He is confronted with the tribe of Savages who evade all efforts to emancipate them from their transient state, who had been hitherto occupied by the civilized world "as its negative point of reference" and now are "overcome with fear and clinging to the other, the unexpected, unpredictable and perhaps animalistic" (Cecko 2011b). The humanity represented in Garbaczewski and Cecko's play, or rather acted out by the modern Savages, falls outside the scale differentiating man from animal and man from machine. Here, nature does not exist without technology, nor hyperconsciousness without instinct. Studying the ontological status of savages is, however, not an abstract pursuit but one entrenched in history. "History as fur means a lot," Aria tells the character Outsider. "With time, your hair grows, becomes thicker. It all comes from knowledge, which you place on this gelatinous mass right here. Through experience forming the shapes underneath the fur" (Cecko 2011a:31). The land of the Savages, therefore, exhibits a temporal dimension as well as a historical one—it is a Gray Zone, a settlement of "civilizational fugitives" who deliberately isolate themselves from economic structures based on production and reproduction. At a crucial point in the performance, Garbczewski's actors, as the mutant-figures belonging to the territory of Savages, expose their naked bodies, submerge them in a water-filled copper basin, and engage in an elaborate cleansing ritual. By joining other bodies in the water and earth they seek a form of community based on love and free from possessions. The Savages, critical of modern civilization and opposed to the values promoted by the capitalist system, yearn to recover the remains of the *kula* ritual—their only pursuit is contemplation



Figure 3. Aria (Justyna Wasilewska) addresses the Outsider (Maciej Stuhr) in Życie seksualne Dzikich *by Marcin Cecko, directed by Krzysztof Garbaczewski. Nowy Teatr, Warsaw, 2011. (Photo by Magda Hueckel; courtesy of Nowy Teatr)*

and free exchange, including offering up themselves and their bodies. They take from others and share what is their own, creating "a network of entangled senses, tender, lazy bodies, minds hungry for stimulation" (Cecko 2011a:1).

This tribe of human copies, animalistic mutants, technological beings thus undermines Malinowski's extremely rationalistic, biologically based stance as a researcher on sexuality. In *The Sexual Life of Savages* Malinowski assigns the key issues of "unknown paternity" and "ignorance of the physiological aspect of paternity" to animism (Malinowski 1929:179). He lamented that awareness of physical and physiological facts was supplanted by a belief in myths involving reincarnation—beliefs that are closely integrated with the entire animistic system of the Trobriand Islanders. Malinowski could not be fully convinced of the Trobrianders' complete ignorance of "the fertilizing virtue of seminal fluid," and he postulated that the natives' understanding of physiological fatherhood "may be overlaid and distorted by mythological and animistic beliefs" (1929:180–81). In Garbaczewski and Cecko's performance, this "ignorance of paternity" that Malinowski treats as a primitive mental state is replaced with a level of technological advancement in which reproduction may occur independently of biology. Here, animism takes the form of techno-animacy, where spirits, memories and the past could be made to return with the use of technology, cloning, and a network-structured reality.

"We can never be sure what our leased bodies will do. And we're left only with lingering traces, disappearing imprints," says one of the play's characters, suggesting that physiological processes are inseparable from the spirit world, and life from death (Cecko 2011a:32). Knowing that, it is evident that new life begins from death (of the entity, of civilization), which is when old spirits are given the possibility to be reborn. This resounds most strongly in a scene where Malinowski, unable to grasp the amorphous nature of the Gray Zone inhabitants, tries to abandon his own cognitive processes: he sheds his clothes and plunges himself into the water with the Savages in order to be able to succumb, even for a moment, to the unclear ontological circumstances and the unclassifiable sexual behavior of his subjects. That ritual bath is strikingly reminiscent of a scene in which the body is immersed and cleansed in salt water at the edge of the sea in a quest for regained youth, which Malinowski described in *The Sexual Life of Savages* and also appears in his *Diary* as a personal experience when he admits that, at the seashore, "overcome by sadness" he "bellowed out themes from *Tristan and Isolde*" ([1967] 1989:52). In the play, the anthropologist Malinowski, in fact, moves to the rhythm of the song "Human Sampler," melodically recited by the Savages, which examines the boundaries of identity in language and verse; being different—an animal, a machine—his intellect still resists amorphousness and the loss of subjectivity. He attempts to regain control of himself in this identity exchange by chanting the word "I" repeatedly. That suggestive scene is likely the one that most intensely reflects the Anthropologist's fundamental dilemma in general—how to reconcile the attempt to regain animism with the constantly recurring fantasy of a free entity? In that perspective, Garbaczewski and Cecko's play is redolent of James Clifford's essay "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning." As the object of his analysis, Clifford focuses not so much on Malinowski's research as on the fictitious "I" taking shape in the anthropologist's writings, which, like in the case of Greenblatt, "is always located with reference to its culture and coded modes of expression, its language" ([1988] 2002:94). Like it or not, that subjectivity "maneuvers within constraints and possibilities given by an institutionalized set of collective practices and codes" (94). And it is exactly the articulation of this kind of subjectivity that Clifford analyzes in Malinowski's work, in defiance of the earlier assertions of critics, treating his *Diary* and *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* jointly as specific literary experiments in which that "I" comes to the fore. In doing so, Clifford astutely notices the Trobriand Island researcher's refugee status and, consequently,

> a peculiarly Polish cultural distance, having been born into a nation that had since the eighteenth century existed only as a fiction—but an intensely believed, serious fiction—of collective identity. Moreover, Poland's peculiar social structure, with its

> broadly based small nobility, made aristocratic values unusually evident at all levels of society. Poland's cultivated exiles were not likely to be charmed by Europe's reigning bourgeois values; they would keep a certain remove. This viewpoint outside bourgeois society [...] is perhaps a peculiarly advantageous "ethnographic" position. (98)

Though Clifford asserts that despite Malinowski's rational mask he was exceptionally theatrical in character and that his work in ethnography was a kind of pose, a role allowing him to prevail over himself; and though he does rightfully point out that "Malinowski flirted with various colonial white roles," he fails to reach conclusions that connected the white man role-play with the above-cited accurate description of Poland's social structure so distinct from the rest of Europe's (105).

In an "autobiographical sketch" from the early 1930s, titled "Culture as Personal Experience," Malinowski mentions his childhood years spent among peasants in the isolated village of Ponice in the Carpathian Mountains, treating it as an introduction to the "duality, multiplicity of the world of culture":

> As a child, I was surround by racial and cultural differences. They formed part of the background of my earliest experiences. There were the lowland peasants of the plains, an inferior 'cast' of *chłopi* [peasants] described in the works of Reymont, and there were the Carpathian mountaineers, the Górale. There were also Jews, and Russians and Austrian Germans. The Jews were always on the social horizon with their different religious and occupational character. They looked different. They wore "corkscrews" and long gabardines. They also smelled differently, of garlic, onion, goose and goat, and they were afflicted with scabies.... But every child brought up within a national minority in the U.S.A. must have had experiences similar to mine: living at home within a transported migrant culture and at school in the American culture. (in Young 2004:16)

This passage gives us an informative picture of the social stratification still prevalent in Poland at the threshold of the 20th century while also demonstrating how Malinowski, already as a respected anthropologist, constructed this revisionist version of his position as a member of white colonial Poland, in which the role of "blacks" was assigned to peasants, highlanders, Jews, Ruthenians, and Austrian Germans. Looking at it from this perspective, Malinowski's works are not, as Clifford would have wanted, simply "records of a white man at the frontier, at points of danger and disintegration," but rather records of a Pole as a European "savage" attaining the position of a white man through the increasing legitimacy of his study of "other savages" at a European university using the English language, which enjoyed a privileged position in the field of anthropology.

This indicates that Malinowski's state of disintegration should be understood rather as a historical-cultural fact instead of psychological or existential. The words of another Pole looking to gain recognition—Joseph Conrad—cited in *Diary*, reflect a desire to "exterminate the brutes," but may not actually refer exclusively to the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands or indicate a professional crisis faced by the anthropologist. We can try to understand this in the context of Malinowski's decision not to return to Poland in 1914 after the outbreak of war, taking into account the fact that, in *Diary*, the anthropologist admits to being haunted regularly by "a terrible melancholy" connected with his passivity towards the cruelties of war sweeping through Europe: "I could hardly believe that I was among neolithic savages, and that I was sitting here peacefully while terrible things were going on *back there* [Europe]. At moments I had an impulse to pray for Mother. Passivity and the feeling that somewhere, far beyond the reach of any possibility of doing something, horrible things are taking place, unbearable" (Malinowski [1967] 1989:54). However, in his desire to exterminate the brutes, we can perceive, above all, a yearning for self-destruction, a need to eliminate the barbaric "Polishness" in him; Malinowski himself stated in the preface to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* that "the Slavonic nature is more plastic and more naturally savage than that of Western Europeans" (Malinowski [1922]

1932:21). He attempted to eliminate the amorphousness in the cultural identity of Poles, which, resulting from the nation's geopolitical, economic, social, and cultural placement between the East and West, was rooted in a desire for modernity while living in what Malinowski perceived to be an uncivilized setting; in existing between being colonized and being the colonizer, as demonstrated by the feudal social structure and the attitude towards Jews and Ukrainians that still characterized Poland in the early 20th century.

Witkiewicz's journey to the tropics affected him differently as a man of the theatre. In contrast to the rationalism that Malinowski acted out in his work and to his objectifying classifications of the Trobriand Islander's rich sexual lives, Witkacy from the outset attempted to construct what Clifford Geertz describes as "I-witness style ethnography" (Geertz 1988). As Anna Micińska claims, the exotic journey in 1914 was the starting point for the artist's subsequent inner disintegration as well as a key reference in his later output and philosophical deliberations on art and reality: "[his] metaphysical strangeness of existence, a voracious and insatiable hunger for form, the helplessness of his own Individual Existence, and in relation to reality, which cannot be understood in rational, logical, or philosophical categories nor captured with existing and available rigors and conventions of artistic expression" (Micińska 2000:207). In a letter from June 1914, Witkacy described the Ceylon landscape to his father, a great nature writer, in these words: "Ever more rabid flora and more garish people, but wonderfully dressed—violets, yellows and purples, sometimes emerald green—which, on their chocolate brown bodies and against the wild plant life, creates a devilish effect" (Witkiewicz 2013:362). Witkacy's postwar paintings, fiction, and plays emphasized the striking differences he saw in the tropics, visually accentuating the "wildness" and looking for the absurd and surreal. Rather than simple descriptions of the inhabitants of unfamiliar lands, Witkacy's descriptions suggest the unease he felt as a European and Pole in a world of dark-skinned people. The experiences from his travels were soon compounded by those from the Great War and the Russian October Revolution of 1917, which undoubtedly became fundamental to Witkacy's life and to a large extent contributed to the crystallization of his views—his sense of being a multiple, splintered entity and the persistent feeling that reality was disintegrating.

It was his experience of history (the war) and not his personal traumas that led Witkacy to become the first to seriously criticize Malinowski's field research and anthropology (Baker 2000:339).[6] In *622 Downfalls of Bungo*, written from 1910 to 1919, published postmortem in 1972, Witkacy ironically described Malinowski's stay on the islands as the exploitation of "savages" for the sake of an academic career in the United Kingdom:

> The Duke was deported to New Guinea for certain unheard of crimes which he committed in the byways of White Chapel with a pair of Lords and while he was there he wrote such a brilliant work about the perversions of those supposedly savage people contemptuously called Papuans, that he returned to England as a Member of a British Association for the Advancement of Science and a Fellow of the Royal Society. (Witkiewicz [1972] 1985:423; translation by Gerould 1981:43)

Witkacy was particularly trenchant in *Metafizyka dwugłowego cielęcia* (The Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf) from 1921 in his condemnation of Malinowski's sociological concept of religion (see Skalnik 1995:138). The plot of *Metaphysics* directly references Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and *The Sexual Life of Savages*—it takes place among Papuans, where Western "civilization" meets a most primitive society and its black magic, which serves as an alternative to Western medicine. The play, and especially its recurring motifs of death and reincarnation, the ties of kinship, and the unknown paternity of the protagonist, exhibits the author's inspira-

6. For more on Witkacy's polemic with Malinowski, especially concerning the latter's scientific treatment of religious beliefs, his persistence on their biological basis, and the resulting overly pragmatic interpretation of them, see Stuart Baker (2000:339).

tions from animism and totemism, and above all, from the concept of *mana*—a force present everywhere and in everything, tantamount to a faith in the power of objects and animals. The conviction that a child's spirit enters a woman's body without the involvement of a man is probably the strongest way of challenging the bases of family relations as perceived by Europeans. Stuart Baker accurately points out that "[t]he position of the father is especially strange to the European point of view because he ceases to be a father at all in our sense of the word, but merely the husband of the mother" (2000:344). As he rightly points out, the family ties in *The Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf* are really a "wild surrealistic parody of the family structure that actually exists in the Trobriand Islands" (344).

In one of his most important essays, "Niemyte dusze" (Unwashed Souls), a kind of psychoanalysis of the collective consciousness of the Polish nation, Witkacy reconsiders his youthful fascination with ethnology and anthropology, in particular with Malinowski's master and friend Sir James Frazer. He attempts to understand Frazer's distinction between magic and religion in relation to his own life. In this text, written in 1936, he returns to his experience of the WWI and the Russian Revolution. Witkacy expresses his fascination with the "wild" and "barbaric" East, where he saw possibilities for the social and cultural transformation of Poland. "While other populations, roughly national, have developed their cultures, thus creating grounds for an already self-conscious civilization of the contemporary international tendency [...,] what has been going on here?" ([1936] 1985:718). He perceived greater potential in the transmission of Eastern values than in the combination of the Polish nobility tradition and European democracy, unable as it was to take into account the very foundation of Polish society: "its very basis—the peasants" (723). "Primitive" Russia could play a strategic role for Poland, as both states belonged to the Slavonic community, but Russia—unlike Poland, the country of "mock people, mock labour, mock state"—had a "structure" (716). The revolution of 1917, which transformed ordinary citizens into a nation with a bold presence in world history, "an experiment on a fantastically grand scale, marking again the beginning of the end of the deceitful era of democracy and the domination of capital" (715), confirmed for Witkacy his youthful decision to abandon the tropics and join the war effort. However, none of these philosophical ideas, deep-rooted in his political experience, impacted his own theatre work.

As representatives of higher social status, both Malinowski and Witkacy—albeit each in his own way—were ingrained with the Polish feudal-patriarchal social structure, which is evidenced by their aristocratic haughtiness towards peasants, ethnic minorities, laborers, and women. Malinowski sublimated his feelings of superiority by spending time among "savage" peoples, where his sense of belonging to a different status as a white man determined his views of the other race. This attitude made it possible to resist being aroused by the naked bodies of the natives and fostered a disapproving stance towards relationships between white women and black men (Malinowski [2002] 2007:638). Witkiewicz, meanwhile—after his stint in the Tsarist army and involvement in the 1917 revolution in Russia—returned to Poland, where he ironically and rather cynically processed the social, class, and gender inequalities of the day through his art. Conversely, both Malinowski and Witkacy became paragons of science and modern art, or more precisely, of the union of both fields. In that, as Poles, they stood for the enlightened modernist agenda which, on account of the country's "colonization" by the empires of Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary, could not be fulfilled in the 19th century.[7] In Poland, the age of

7. In 1795, the state of Poland disappeared from the map of Europe for 123 years. The nation's complete political, economic, and cultural independence was restored only after WWI. General history concerning this period of imperial dominion over Poland, however, is not referred to as colonization but as the "Partition of Poland" ("Teilung Polens," "Partage de la Pologne"), as if the neighboring states annexed only what was rightfully theirs. Polish history, meanwhile, speaks of a gradual "stripping" of the country (in three phases: 1772, 1793, 1795), paving the way for the victim metaphor that is so key to Polish identity—Poland as a naked Christ suffering for other nations.

Europe's most intense modernization, industrialization, and urbanization passed by as a time of national messianic struggle to maintain cultural continuity and, concurrently, of susceptibility to the various cultural, social, and political influences from the occupying empires. This left a lasting mark on Polish national identity (the consequences of which are still felt today)—the constant balancing act between modernity and remaining a backwards civilization, emancipatory movements and the preservation of traditional values, secularization and maintaining the religious status quo.

This vector of contradiction runs through the pursuits of Malinowski, who died suddenly of a heart attack in 1942 after having just finished his *Freedom and Civilisation*, which somewhat atoned for his lack of involvement in WWI; and of Witkacy, who committed suicide two days after the Soviet attack on Poland in 1939. It is well expressed in the aporia in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This influential tome, published in exile in 1944, carried an underlying thesis asserting that, in a nutshell, progress is regress:

> Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge. (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002:1)

The disenchantment of the world directly led to bestial world wars, as the German philosophers believed, and to attempts to eradicate animism, barbarism, chaos, fire, and the body. This is the world of those who would become master of the unpredictable and attempt a totalitarian appropriation of myths themselves. As we read in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,

> Enlightenment has always regarded anthropomorphism, the projection of subjective properties onto nature, as the basis of myth. The supernatural, spirits and demons, are taken to be reflections of human beings who allow themselves to be frightened by natural phenomena. According to enlightened thinking, the multiplicity of mythical figures can be reduced to a single common denominator, the subject. Oedipus's answer to the riddle of the Sphinx—"That being is man"—is repeated indiscriminately as enlightenment's stereotyped message [...]. (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002:4)

Meanwhile, the myths that fell prey to enlightened thinking were, in fact, products of that thinking. Like science, myths strove to tell stories, give names, identify beginnings, and thus present, preserve, and explain. This language-fuelled totality, whose claim to truth supplants beliefs in magic, folk religions, or the patriarchal solar myth is, to the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in itself an enlightenment. It was mythology itself that—creating a system that began with a hierarchy of gods and the twilight of deities—commenced the interminable process of enlightenment. And since myths themselves drive enlightenment, then paradoxically, enlightenment becomes entangled in mythology. It draws upon myths in order to destroy them, and, as the instance of judgment, enlightenment itself falls into the circle of myth. The fundamental myth of enlightenment is produced when the inanimate is equated with the animate by the objectification of nature and the phantasm of a free entity. As two antagonistic yet complimentary figures in modern science and art, Bronisław Malinowski, standing behind a scientific treatment of religious beliefs, and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, striving for the aesthetic reanimation of dead beliefs and myths, are wonderful embodiments of Adorno and Horkheimer's paradox concerning the enlightened modernist project, which at the dawn of the 20th century was reapplied in different cultural and political circumstances in a European periphery—Poland.

This very historical-political aspect of the modernist subjectivity project at the heart of Polish anthropology and theatre, as well as the pessimistic philosophical vision put forth in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, are the essence of the performance that Garbaczewski and Cecko created in 2011 at the periphery of the global world. The discussion undertaken in the play is

presented through its testing of visual limits, and by extension, its game of being live and in memory, of seeing and sensing, of the animate versus the inanimate, of matter and dematerialization. The issue of sight, after all, constitutes one of the key aspects in the sexual life of Trobriand Islanders that Malinowski studied. The anthropologist wrote that the eyes are "the seat of desire and lust (*magila kayta*, literally 'desire of copulation'). They are the basis or cause (*u'ula*) of sexual passion. [...T]he eyes are the primary motive of all sexual excitement: they are 'the *things* of copulation'" (1929:166).

In Garbaczewski and Cecko's production, Malinowski, in his efforts to understand his research subject—the Savages—does not become a part of their community, but remains a researcher controlling their behavior: he asks oppressive questions, and above all he directs on the stage (with sentences taken from the original text of *The Sexual Life of Savages*) several situations (including erotic ones) between the inhabitants of the Grey Zone. The Savages submit to his manipulations and execute his commands (they strip, touch each other, smear each other with mud, submerse themselves in the water)—all except for one: Zetto. Played by the same actor who played Witkacy at the beginning, he enters the scene as the most mutated Savage—he is aggressive and speaks in a language almost impossible to understand, more like an animal's howl. When we see Zetto's face projected on the wall, we recognize in this image the face of the returning Witkacy. Zetto-Witkacy confronts Malinowski's disciplining gaze, which he sees as the human overpowering of the natural world and proclaims the truth about the blurred boundaries between man and machine, man and animal. Zetto initiates a number of improvised scenes with the Savages, expressing their struggle to free themselves of the rigor of anthropological research and the objectifying gaze of Malinowski.



Figure 4. Zetto-Witkacy (Krzysztof Zarzecki) howls like an animal in Życie seksualne Dzikich *by Marcin Cecko, directed by Krzysztof Garbaczewski. Nowy Teatr, Warsaw, 2011. (Photo by Magda Hueckel; courtesy of Nowy Teatr)*

The control and power wielded by the anthropologist was pointed out by James Clifford in *The Predicament of Culture*. In a photo depicting a ceremonial act of the kula, he notices that among the figures concentrating on the rite of exchange "one of the bowing Trobrianders may be seen to be looking at the camera" (2002:21). The glance of the participant in the ritual (like the glance of Witkacy-Zetto, which remains projected on the wall for a long time as he looks from the screen directly at us—the spectators) "redirects our attention to the observational standpoint we share, as readers, with the ethnographer and his camera. The predominant mode of modernist fieldwork authority is signaled: 'You are there... because I was there'" (22). In this way, a critical analysis is applied to participant observation—the eye of the observer being at the center of the events. The eye reflexively monitors the scientific status of the observation, the facts are always put in the frame, in a specific place and time and told from the perspective of the given observer. At the same time, in the vision theme addressed by the 30-year-old theatre artists, we can discern performative repetition and a seemingly unwitting, if only partly, paraphrasing of an exhibition titled *Between Science and Art: Malinowski–Witkacy*, which took place more than a decade prior at the National Museum in Krakow. The exhibition of photos by



Figure 5. Życie seksualne Dzikich *by Marcin Cecko, directed by Krzysztof Garbaczewski. Nowy Teatr, Warsaw, 2011. (Photo by Magda Hueckel; courtesy of Nowy Teatr)*

Malinowski and Witkacy and the extensive companion catalogue, a four-issue edition of the ethnographic periodical *Konteksty*, offered a multifaceted and complex picture of the friendship and output of these two complimentary figures of European modernism. Malinowski and Witkacy were presented as living proof—documentation of the blurred border between art and science, exposing anthropology's fictional-creative side and the scientific-philosophical paradigm of modern art. One could not exist without the other; the first is the alter ego of the second and vice versa. The revolutionary character of their work is thus shown to be an effect of their reciprocal inspiration as well as, especially in the case of Witkacy's criticism of Malinowski (Skalnik 2000). A subplot running through the ethnographic exhibition entertained speculation on what would have transpired had the outbreak of WWI not triggered the rift between the two men: would Malinowski's work finally have found a commensurate visual counterpart in Witkacy's photography, had Witkacy, as initially intended, continued to travel with the anthropologist and serve as his photographer and draftsman (Young 1998:13)? Or, perhaps, would the coexistence of two personalities as strong, eccentric, and unstable as theirs on a small exotic island have ended in some unimaginable tragedy (Wright 2000:17)?

In Garbaczewski and Cecko's production, this speculative undercurrent was expressed in a literal fashion, but also conceptually in the set design produced by the visual artist and architect Aleksandra Wasilkowska, who created an autonomous installation—the Black Island, modeled after the map of Papua New Guinea from the year 1600 that Malinowski had described in *The Sexual Life of Savages*. The enormous Black Island has a unique presence in the production: it is a key performer, suspended above the stage and audience, moving throughout the course of the play on the basis of a precise algorithm applied to the movements of the actors and the behavior of the audience. The fictional territory of the Savages was thus conceived as an inverted island; living, migrating, and dominating the entire space, *the island itself* "oversaw" the entire production. Thanks to this "concept of a metamechanical anti-utopia that is the Black Island" undermining the boundary between the "living bodies" of the audience and cast and the "lifeless objects in the set," there emerges a certain post-anthropocentric reality dominated by the energy of the earth and territory, as opposed to people and machines (Papuczys 2011:89). The creator of the installation explained it this way:

> The island came about through my fascination with inanimate matter and its ability to self-organize. [...] I am fascinated when I imagine a future situation in which not machines but territory reigns supreme. The mineral world's rule over human beings. Therefore, I wanted to show that it won't necessarily be man controlling the territory but rather the territory—its fluctuating magnetic fields, the oil and radioactive waste concealed within it, all of the hidden mineral energy—will start to control us. (Papuczys 2011:89)



Figure 6. The Black Island, omnipresent, hovers over Malinowski (Jacek Poniedziałek) in Życie seksualne Dzikich. *Set design by Aleksandra Wasilkowska. Nowy Teatr, Warsaw, 2011. (Photo by Magda Hueckel; courtesy of Nowy Teatr)*

And so, here, the island presides over the Savages while, at the same time, it is a material manifestation of their "savage" minds. Hovering overhead, the Black Island's presence is oppressive, but, because it is outside the typical theatre spectators' perspective, it remains, in a way, invisible. It invites critical commentary on the way in which white society is still "in the dark" regarding its own actions that "map" and control a "savagery" that is "other" and black; by feminizing the black body, white society objectifies and, in effect dehumanizes, blackness. It is, therefore, no wonder that an installation created by a female artist shows us how in classical anthropology and the theatre of modernity the Other was presented as conventionally feminized (much as Freud referred to women's sexuality as a "dark continent"), a sexualized (unbridled) energy and force—one that both gives life and takes life.

As a thing of animate matter, Wasilkowska's migrating Black Island is not only an ironic commentary on the (white) human being, as per European philosophy and psychoanalysis through the construction and simultaneous separation of the Other—(feminine and black) nonhuman. At the same time, it reinstates the status of the thing—that existence outside the borders of our modern world—as an object that always stands on guard for the past and memory (Olsen 2010). In Garbaczewski and Cecko's play, the Black Island is also a material construct of Witkacy, who conjures it at the very beginning of the story: "I dreamt of an island, a black island, a migrating territory above the heads of the Unpeople. The island coexists with its inhabitants, changing its topography to match their behavior, imaginations and knowledge" (Cecko 2011a:2–3). The living cloud hovering above the spectators is not merely a ghostly trace of history but lasting and tangible matter that makes the past present, audible, and tactile despite our conviction in the ephemeral and fleeting nature of time. But we must not assume that this past, taking shape as present matter, is only the past of human nature and speaks only of human time. It is also the memory and past of things in and of themselves, autonomous from man and his perception and understanding of history.

Cut off from our direct experience and pushed outside of the borders of the world known to us (Olsen 2010), things start to be reminiscent of bones removed for a memory archive (Schneider 2012)—for both things and bones have their post-mortal lives, which affect the

earthly lives of humans. "The relic (*kayvaluba*) brings the departed back to our mind and makes our inside tender," Malinowski writes in *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929:156). In describing the burial rites of the Trobrianders, he reminds us that upon exhumation, a body is removed from the grave so that certain bones can be taken and used as things of a specific status—as relics. The process of objectifying human remains is preceded by the act of sucking the bones dry to clean them of the decaying flesh of the deceased. Such a picture, so suggestively painted by the anthropologist, not only demonstrates how remains achieve autonomy but also offers an apt reflection of the role bones and things play in that which I call necroperformance. After all, a necroperformance does not pose questions concerning the ways in which the deceased's remains are utilized by the living. It is not the living who handle the bones of the dead, but the opposite—the migrating remains perform transformations in the world of the living.

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