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## Theme of Terrorism in Art of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### 1. Introduction: Terrorism as a form of Political Theatre

Contemporary art is a reflection of reality, of the world outside our window. The phenomena of contemporary culture are meaningful only when they relate and refer to the issues, which are current and relevant to us, issues which demonstrate that the substance of art is not detached from the life of society. Artists themselves tend to avoid topics that are not connected with the present-day world. An artistic creation has more to it than only offering entertainment, with greater goals than purely portrayal of beauty or presentation of artistic skills. The main aim of artistic works is to refer to social phenomena that affect the life of both the local and global community. Artists, being part of these communities, react to their maladies and in their artwork they depict the world as they see it. Referring to the life of other citizens as well as topicality constitute important elements of artistic life. Thus, the notion of political theatre should be mentioned here. It is commonly believed that political theatre was first introduced by Erwin Piscator,<sup>1</sup> a German stage artist and producer, one of the exponents of the great transformation of theatre that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century – the Great Reform of Theatre. It was then that the stage producer became the key person in theatrical production. Those artists staged plays with all means available, making actors, scenery and music work toward a single goal, namely – a spectacle. Piscator chose to fill the stage with current politics. His style of work was rooted in his historical experience. His performances were in the form of graphic collages showing the absurdity of war, social inequality as well as injustice and denigration suffered by the man in the street. From then on social issues were widely present in the world of theatre of the day. “Truth and nothing but the truth” became the theatre’s main motto. Theatre portrayed the rhythm of the streets, its pounding and atmosphere. This pulsating rhythm and topicality started to take more and more space of the stage. All contemporary technical novelties were employed – screens, cinematographs, light and shadow effects. This convention echoed newspaper pages, full of political slogans and brutality of everyday life. It became increasingly common to grip the audience with extremely suggestive images, in order to depict the

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1 See: E. Piscator, *Teatr polityczny*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warsaw 1982.

maladies of the contemporary world. This picture forms the basis for a definition of political theatre. According to a dictionary, it is “a theatre form dealing with specific political events and representing a specific political agenda. Artists practicing this form of theatre use various stage means and types of text. (...) A radical form of political theatre is *agit-pop*, propaganda theatre. (...) In its broad, metaphorical meaning, political theatre encompasses works and performances portraying the mechanisms of political life and concerning the moral aspects of power, etc. Through an analysis (...) they invite the viewers to look at the reality from the political perspective.”<sup>2</sup> At the time the above definition was created, that is in the 1990s, the issue of terrorism, signaled in this article’s title, was not among the most urgent political concerns of the world. It was not a global but a niche phenomenon, and hence treated as marginal also by the artistic world. The experience of the attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 caused artists to take a closer interest in this area. The theme of terrorism was broadly introduced to the public debate.

In order to specify the scope of the theme of terrorism, for the purpose of this article the definitions described below have been adopted. The word *terrorism* is derived from the Greek word *treo*, which means to tremble, to fear, to funk, to escape, the Latin word *terreo* – to inspire alarm, and *oris* – to inspire fear. This demonstrates that the aim of terrorism is to inspire dread and fear. Intimidation. In the contemporary perspective, terrorism should be distinguished from terror – that is methods used toward own citizens in order to operate a system of repression, use of violence by government bodies and security services, invigilation. Terrorism, instead, involves planned and long-term use of violence toward specific government structures and social groups.<sup>3</sup> Its victims are defenseless people, regular citizens and random passers-by that happen to be at the place of the incident. Its objective lies not in the sheer use of violence. An important aim of terrorism is spreading specific ideas through mass media which provide a broad commentary on any terrorist attacks.

The issue of international security is nowadays in the forefront of the minds of contemporary politicians all around the world. The strategies to ensure common security and fight terrorism are discussed among politicians of the highest rank and each incident is instantly covered by the mass media. This issue affects and inspires artists as well as art critics. Violence, conflict, abuse of force have

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2 M. Semil, E. Wyśińska, *Słownik współczesnego teatru. Twórcy, teatry, teorie*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warsaw 1990, p. 357.

3 See: W. Dietl, K. Hirschmann, R. Tophoven, *Terroryzm*, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warsaw 2009.

indeed always been an important motif in artistic work. This may be viewed from a twofold perspective. On the one hand, in terms of inspiration to artists who in their works deal with the subject of brutal social phenomena. One of the first to use war trauma as an art motif was Francisco Goya, a Spanish painter working for the Bourbon dynasty. In his series *The Disasters of War* he showed the consequences of Napoleonic battles. The works by Pablo Picasso or poet Blas de Otero, inspired by the bombing of Guernica in 1937, are in a similar spirit. Both of them created anti-war pieces in homage to the murdered. Analogically, nowadays artists in their works make artistic use of acts of terrorism. However, there is also another aspect of violence in art. It concerns limitations imposed on controversial work. In such a situation it is the art of work that falls victim to violence. For instance, *Olympia* by Edouard Manet, painted in 1863, portraying a nude prostitute wearing only expensive jewels and a pair of shoes slipping off, meeting the viewer with a provocative stare. Such a thing could not be accepted by the audience in the second half of the nineteenth century. The outraged audience in protest stabbed the painting with umbrellas. Similar behavior was observed in Poland, and already after 1989. The exhibitions in the National Gallery of Art "Zachęta" should in particular be mentioned here. In November 2000, a famous Polish actor, accompanied by journalists, damaged with a sabre some works being part of the exhibition by Piotr Uklański, *The Nazi*. The installation combined 164 photos of famous actors wearing Nazi uniforms from the movies they played in. The photos were displayed without any caption or commentary. A month later, during a jubilee exhibition an installation by Maurizio Cattelan, *The Ninth Hour*, was presented. It consisted of a sculpture of Pope John Paul II smashed to the ground by a meteorite. This sparked an outrage among right-wing journalists and MPs. At first, the figure was covered with a white sheet (shroud) by a journalist and traveller, Wojciech Cejrowski, and later the rock was removed by members of the Polish Parliament – Halina Nowina-Konopczynna and Witold Tomczak. Thus, the work of art was damaged.<sup>4</sup> The incidents described above reveal a broader tendency to limit freedom of artistic expression in Poland. They can be deemed violence against artistic activity. They are a consequence of interpreting and assessing art according to moral and religious standards instead of aesthetic categories. This results from an insufficient level of cultural education. Artistic events are analyzed in a direct manner, without necessary perspective or

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4 The account of actions aimed at limiting the freedom of artistic expression in Poland can be found in: J. Miñałto (ed.), *Kronika wypadków cenzorskich. Ostatnie lata*, „Notatnik Teatralny” no. 39–40, 2006, pp. 9–23.

background. Though it is an important problem related to artists' freedom and independence, it does not constitute the central topic of this article. The main subject of this article is artists' involvement in the analysis of phenomena from the world of politics, namely the issue of terrorism.

This concern stems from several reasons. The modern world is full of anxieties and dangers and thus a fertile source of inspiration for artists. Social consequences of terrorist attacks constitute an important feature of emotional and personal accounts as well as a significant factor behind motivation and behavior of individuals – both victims and terrorists. In this way they create one of the forms of political theatre – the theatre of fact, presenting real events filtered through emotions of the artist. The analysis presented below will focus on modern forms of artistic activity referring to the acts of terrorism that took place in Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will refer to the works by Torsten Buchsteiner, Simon Stephens and Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, who in their plays deal with the issue of the threat posed by terrorism to the contemporary order of our part of the world. In their works they invoke the events related to German terrorism, the conflict between Chechnya and Russia and the events that took place in London in 2005.<sup>5</sup> Their works do not constitute, however, a grand political variety show, characteristic of Erwin Piscator, but are rather intimate dramas aimed at showing the emotions and behavior of individuals. What they all have in common – although one of the works bears some grotesque undertones – is an attempt at drawing the viewers' attention to the struggle experienced by individuals, their feelings and attitudes toward the tragic events.

The thesis points out that artists, being part of society, in their works deal with various problems that are crucial to the way the community functions. The diagnoses formulated by them, conveyed through multi-layered metaphors, significantly add to creating social awareness and constitute an important element of the discourse on contemporary terrorism, as well as its place and meaning in relation to art. It is also extremely relevant and important documentary work, performed far ahead of the efforts of historians and journalists. Such plays take on a deeper meaning during onstage performances, when the presented facts are clashed with the interpretation proposed by the stage producer, and with its reception by the audience. Thus, the works enter the public domain and become a lasting element of culture. This, in turn, develops awareness among the viewers.

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5 The analysis of plays presented below includes theses and arguments from a dissertation written under my supervision: E. Borowska, *Obraz terroryzmu w europejskich dramatach XXI wieku*, Warsaw 2011.

Hence, a social bond is created, demonstrating that the issue of terrorism does not concern only the narrow circle of politicians but affects also artists and audiences of artistic events, and in a broader perspective – the entire society.

When analyzing the phenomenon of terrorism in the context of art, one more possible interpretation is also worth mentioning. The words by an American expert on security, Brian Jenkins, will form a good starting point. Jenkins claimed that: “Terrorism is theatre (...) directed at those who are watching (...). Terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and international press.”<sup>6</sup> An act of terrorism becomes a spectacle which through its form is aimed at drawing the attention of public opinion to certain facts and demands made by attackers. Based on the above observation, terrorism, under a radical approach, may be called performance art. Indeed, it is a demonstrated, exhibited activity and its actual presentation. It is a specific behavior, that is, what people do when they are actually doing it. This thesis was put forward by an American performance studies professor, academic, editor, theatre director and critic, Richard Schechner. According to Schechner, terrorism is a specific kind of multicultural social drama, and in the globalized world it affects more and more people.<sup>7</sup> It involves actors, a clearly planned scenario and, as a result of media coverage, a mass audience.

The phenomenon of terrorism was fittingly presented by a Lebanese artist Rabih Mroué, who translated it into the language of theatre in a form of a performative lecture, with elements of film, editing and documentary work. His trilogy is a fascinating unmasking of terrorists, showing how their political activity is based on self-creation. The video footages with the last words of terrorists who were about to make a suicide attack show how they manipulate with words for the purpose of self-creation. The posters with jihadists placed around Syria turned out to be fabricated. Photos of uniforms were used as a base, and smiling faces of dead militants were pasted on them. Not only are acts of terrorism performances but they also inspire further performative action. The same happens in the context of writing drama. The real events of terrorist attacks become an inspiration for drama works and later on, staging activity in the form of a theatrical performance. Thus, a double performance appears. The one from the real life, being a presentation of certain activity in the form of a terrorist attack becomes an artistic phenomenon

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6 W. Dietl, *Terroryzm...* op.cit., p. 14.

7 See: R. Schechner, *Performatyka. Wstęp*, Ośrodek Jerzego Grotowskiego, Wrocław 2006, pp. 299–318.

within a closed space of the theatre building. It is worth underlining how real events become fictional and affect social attitudes.

Acts of terrorism are the subject of theatrical pieces more and more often. As already mentioned, this theme should be viewed as related to political theatre, however, a certain difference may be observed. The model of stage activity practiced by Piscator was aimed at social change. His performances were supposed to inspire the viewer, make him rethink his opinions. This was the objective of the various forms of propaganda or revolutionary theatre which propagated specified values or were directed at transforming the old order. In this context, in the contemporary theatre the theme of terrorism functions as a commentary, as presentation of certain phenomena. It is not used as an important component meant to influence the audience or achieve specific attitudes. One of the first plays dealing with the issue of the attack on the WTC in New York is *Happiness* by Laurie Anderson, written in 2002. It is by no means an enthusiastic propaganda work, but rather an account of feelings experienced by society after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Contemporary plays dealing with the issue of terrorism do not create the same universe as the historical political theatre used to do. Here, art is supposed to caution against the idea of combat and its consequences. It becomes a warning, a question mark. These artworks are also an effect of fascination with specific figures involved in terrorist organizations. An example of such an object of fascination may be Ulrike Meinhof, co-founder of the German Red Army Faction. Today, she is treated as a pop-cultural phenomenon and an inspiration for playwrights.

## 2. Rote Armee Fraktion in Pop Culture

The way the terrorist movement developed in West Germany at the end of 1960s derived from the social landscape of that country. On the one hand, during years 1966–67 the country suffered an economic recession, which significantly challenged the myth of it being an economic miracle and disturbed the sense of economic stability among its citizens. At that time, one of the most urgent problems, both for the Western Europe and the United States, was the birth rate – a consequence of the end of the Second World War. The young generation had its ambitions, dreams and own idea of how their life should look like, and they expected broad access to education, more liberal moral and social rules and more places at universities. This type of mind-set gave rise to the student movement of the 60s. Moreover, there was one more unresolved problem with which the Federal Republic of Germany struggled – namely, the attitude toward the past. The young were very suspicious toward the generation which had been involved in

the functioning of the Third Reich. Denazification had not eradicated all former Gestapo officers and SS members from society. Some of them still held public offices, with the tacit approval of the community. History was a taboo and many pretended not to remember the times of war. Eventually, children turned against their parents, demanding to hear the truth about the past.<sup>8</sup> The youths expressed their protest against their teachers and role models. The state authorities were castigated as incapable of introducing changes in the country, and the foreign policy was criticized as well, for the lack of a clear stand condemning the US operations in Vietnam. In such a climate, on 2 June 1967, Ulrike Meinhof, a 33-year-old journalist, published an article in which she objected to the visit of the Iranian shah, Reza Pahlavi. As a result, a student protest was organized, during which Berno Ohnesorg was shot to death in unexplained circumstances. It was this event that the first terrorist organization in Germany named itself after – the 2 June Movement. As an act of revenge, this extremely leftist group set fire to several shops in Frankfurt am Main. This is the origin of the Red Army Faction, led by Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. Meinhof joined the group in 1970 and became their main theoretician. She gave up her quiet life of a mother of twins and went through a training organized by the Palestinian organization of Al Fatah. Engaging in bloodshed combat, proclaiming radical, extremist slogans, robbing and murdering, at the same time she maintained that all this was in defense of oppressed and unaware masses. This left-wing journalist underwent an incredible transformation. Once renouncing violence as a means of political strife, she then turned into a symbol of one of the most savage gangs which considered armed struggle the only just method of action. A criminal act thus became a political act. And since combat required victims, innocent people were killed in the name of more and more radical slogans. In 1976 Meinhof committed suicide in a cell after being sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>9</sup> The history of the RAF is a source of many legends and myths but it also became a mirror of certain trends which can still be found in the mass culture. Evil has always been appealing. Medieval witches burned at the stake or public executions by beheading always attracted crowds of onlookers. Baader and Meinhof are a contemporary version of Bonnie and Clyde – young, risk-seeking, breaking all the rules and ready to commit to an all-or-nothing fight in the name of some abstract ideas, vague to all but themselves. The aura of unlawfulness, defiance and madness impressed the young and

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8 See: M. Tomczak, *Terroryzm w RFN i w Berlinie Zachodnim*, Instytut Zachodni, Poznań 1986.

9 See: V. Grotowicz, *Terroryzm w Europie Zachodniej. W imię narodu i lepszej sprawy*, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warsaw 2000.

stimulated their imagination. There was one more reason. As observed by Ewa Wójciak, actress and leader of the student Theatre of the Eight Day which performed at the same time the RAF first terrorist acts were carried out: "Our small group disapproved of the fact that there was a general acceptance of the way the system treated people. There is this sort of helplessness and despair which creeps into the minds of young persons when they cannot reach out to society to voice their dislike for certain things. In such a situation, any action aimed at helping people shake off indifference and apathy seems worth considering."<sup>10</sup> These words appear extremely fitting as they point to the profound powerlessness experienced in everyday life when the only thing left is the struggle for the cherished ideas and values, even if most people do not share them. The aura of unlawfulness, rebelliousness and lunacy the RAF was surrounded by stirred the minds of the young. The spectacular form of terrorist attacks, their bravado and creativity, attracted a growing audience, and also guaranteed media coverage. In this way the media boosted their profits and ratings among their audiences. The popularity of the Baader-Meinhof gang has had its impact also on artists who today still refer to this story. However, a certain pattern can be observed. In Poland, emphasis is put on the figure of Ulrike Meinhof, her life story of a person forced to take decisive actions and stand up in the name of certain values. In Germany, the RAF is seen from a different angle. It is considered one of the unresolved problems regarding own history and identity. Similarly to the awareness that the Nazi period was not properly accounted for, the terrorist incidents are analogically interpreted as a result of the process which breeds violence. Individual motivation is treated as of secondary importance. What becomes important is the sole terrorist activity – however, devoid of any deeper interpretation or reasoning. Coercion and abuse of force are pictured as a pastime enjoyed by the gang members. This has been well interpreted by Elfriede Jelinek. Her play *Ulrike Maria Stuart* directed by Nicolas Stemann at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg<sup>11</sup> suggests that the ideological combat was not given primary importance at all. The play focuses instead on the conflict between Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin, representing the figures of Maria Stuart and Elisabeth I, who clash not over political ideas but rather over the attention of Andreas Baader. In one of the scenes the director chose a satirical musical form to portray the heroines as two giant vaginas arguing over whom of the two the terrorist prefers. This depicts a certain struggle for femininity and the right

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10 Statement by Ewa Wójciak from an interview with E. Wójciak, Ł. Drewniak, Z. Jakubowska, G. Laszuk, M. Liber, *Jak nie być Ulrike Meinhof*, "Dialog" no. 5, 2007.

11 See: A. Krzemiński, *Dzieci Hitlera?*, "Dialog" no. 5, 2007.



to express one's sexuality. Madness and private goals obscured the once valued ideals. Jelinek's text was one of the voices in a wide-ranging discussion on the real motivation behind the RAF's activity, which opened new areas of interpretation. This also demonstrates how well-rooted the phenomenon of the German terrorist group is in the public memory. However, its perception bears no insight – it is rather an element of pop culture. Just as t-shirts with the image of Che Guevara or Lenin are a common sight, there is a whole clothing line named "Prada Meinhof". These promoted products generate profit as part of the capitalist system, which Meinhof, paradoxically, once combated. What is left today in the collective memory is just the imprint and the gang's logo, yet, without any awareness or knowledge about the terrorist group and atrocities it committed. The traumatic experience of the 70s has been trivialized. The way the RAF is perceived may resemble the medieval image of Robin Hood who robbed the rich to give to the poor. This perspective is of less interest to politicians but remains an inspiration for those creating music, visual arts and plays. Despite the noticeably superficial, and possibly negative, reception, this should be considered a success, since this creative work points to the real role and meaning of this terrorist organization. It builds social awareness – not through a factual account though, but through a metaphorical narrative.

In Poland, the figure of Ulrike Meinhof has received particular attention. In 2006, theaters Usta Usta from Poznań and TR Warszawa, in cooperation with the Artistic Centre M25, announced a competition for the best play under a title: *Being Ulrike M.* The winning work was by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, a playwright and scriptwriter. Her play, titled *The Death of the Squirrel Man*,<sup>12</sup> is a grotesque piece, echoing the style of *Monty Python* or the animated sitcom *South Park*.

The play by Sikorska-Miszczuk presents a vision of budding evil which originates precisely from a distorted idea and which transforms its followers into killing machines. However, violence returns to the protagonists and hits them twice as hard, leaving them only shadows of who they used to be. The presented story poses questions about the reasons and results of aggression visible in society, politics or the theatre. The play's central figure is the eponymous Squirrel Man. He is a law-abiding, hard-working and obedient citizen. He pays his taxes, worries about his loan and unwittingly supports the regime. He dies every day but then every day he is reborn, full of trust and love toward his tormentors. Just as in the real world, the terrorists show no mercy to their victims. The Squirrel Man has to suffer, for the common good. He represents the society which, especially at the beginning of

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12 The text was published in a monthly "Dialog" no. 5, 2007.

the 70s, admired the members of the Baader-Meinhof gang, secretly wishing they would have enough courage to follow in their steps. Germans were simply willing to compromise, happy to live their consumerist lives and create their everyday reality. A reality that was built on the harm inflicted on many nations.

Similarly as in Jelinek's work, here Ulrike and Ensslin also discuss the sexual aspect of their lives. Although Ulrike wants to renounce the physical needs, she admits that at nights she longs for their satisfaction. At the end of the play, Ulrike starts to be fond of the Squirrel Man. She confesses that she did not listen to him earlier, and smiles at him flirtatiously. At this moment it probably starts to dawn on her that something has gone wrong – that the fight she is fighting and the way it is handled are not right. Together with her victim they tie a rope which Ulrike plans to use to hang herself but eventually this does not happen. Instead, the Squirrel Man hangs himself with his tie, captivated with Ulrike till the very end. The RAF has more victims. One of them is a soft-hearted Policeman – he is later shot in his soft heart but at the end has a new one. Despite being repeatedly mocked and laughed at by Andreas Baader and both women, at the beginning he sides with the terrorists. He carries out his duties meticulously but at the same time smiles at the terrorists and chats with them. The Policeman is delighted to have the honor of arresting the famous Andreas Baader, a great thinker and visionary. At first, Baader introduces himself as a Anti-human, a person from whom no one and nothing can hide, an all-knowing being.

The author has thus in an interesting way demonstrated how the RAF terrorist attacks affected the police actions. At first, these were indeed limited. In the first years of its activity, the group had many supporters among academics and high-rank figures. Meanwhile, after the Second World War German police did not enjoy much respect among the citizens, similarly as was the case in Poland after 1989. For Germans, a police uniform still cast the shameful shadow of the SS, SA and Gestapo officers. This possibly explains a certain slowness and clumsiness of the actions taken against the gang members. Only later, when the terror escalated and the number of victims increased, decisive steps aimed at reinforcing the system were adopted, this time with the full approval from society. Analogically, in the play the Policeman first expresses his affinity and admiration, only to be denigrated and later shot in the heart. Then, a new Policeman is born – with a new heart. And this one knows no pity or compassion. He performs a brutal X-ray on Ulrike and then locks her in a cage, as well as feeds Andreas and Gudrun the corpse of their political enemy.

The play by Sikorska-Miszczuk searches for the truth about the source of evil and about what lies hidden in the human soul. The Squirrel Man is not merely

one of the RAF's victims – he is the sum of all victims, a society that is being experimented with. He believes in the lofty goals of the Baader-Meinhof gang and tries to understand what drives its members. However, after some time he realizes that something is wrong, something has failed. How can thus the world be healed if even such restrictive means have come to nothing? This question is addressed to every one of us and each of us has to find an answer to it on one's own. How do we want to protect ourselves against aggression and break the vicious circle of hypocrisy, of turning a blind eye on own sins and wrongdoings. The play does not dwell into the motivation of Ulrike, Andreas and Gudrun. It only prepares the ground for further discussions on aggression which lurks somewhere deep in every one of us.

Are we able to function without violence? As mentioned above, violence attracts people and many find it fascinating. The Baader-Meinhof myth would not be a lasting mass culture phenomenon if the same ideals were presented during peaceful protests. This is a recurring topic of the performance by Natalia Korczakowska, prepared at the Cyprian Kamil Norwid Theatre in Jelenia Góra in 2007. The spectacle is like a revolution, full of surprises and unexpected turns. It involves a play within play, with a multi-layered plot. On the one hand we witness theatre rehearsals, on the other hand – the story of Ulrike Meinhof (Lidia Schneider), Andreas Baader (Piotr Żurawski) and Gudrun Ensslin (Magdalena Kuźniewska). A new figure is also introduced – a rather shallow female director (played by Anna Ludwicka) who continuously tries to control what is happening at the stage. Korczakowska does not attempt to justify the use of force – be it in everyday life or in the theatre. She poses a question though: is there anything that is inherently evil and corrupted? She tries to compromise the myth of 'Prada Meinhof' precisely with a peculiar fashion show. The actors flirt with the audience just as the terrorists at first flirted with society. However, the aggression spirals and is incessantly re-enacted. The terrorists look as if they have just left the catwalk as well – they are hip, well-dressed, confident. This underlines how the legend of the RAF is depicted in the contemporary pop culture.

The presented portrayal of the German terrorist organization shows that dramatic art seeks to study and understand how a group functions. These works do not provide factual accounts or documentary view on the events. Their main purpose is examination of individual motives and their social impact. Theatre, being an intimate meeting between the artist and the audience, employs real events to create own narratives, precisely as in the case of the RAF story. While historians interpret the events, the stage becomes the place where legends are forged or demythologized.

### 3. Women's Tears – Dubrovka 2002

The Chechen-Russian conflict dates back to the late eighteenth century, when Tsarist troops began to subjugate Chechen territories. The Russian determination to maintain domination after the collapse of the Soviet Union provoked a severe conflict that officially ended in 2002 in a victory for Russia which then introduced a normalization plan. The Republic of Ingushetia, while formally stabilized, continued to witness guerrilla warfare and terrorist attacks. Drive for independence as well as a sense of pride and freedom are characteristic of communities of the Caucasus. The right to self-determination gave rise to one of the most dramatic terrorist acts of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On 23 October 2002, a Chechen commando of 42 militants led by Movsar Barayev seized the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow, with 800 spectators watching the musical *Nord-Ost* as well as 122 performers and staff members inside. Apart from Russians, there were several dozen foreign nationals among the audience. The terrorists planted explosives throughout the theatre, threatening to blow up the entire building unless Russia withdrew from Chechnya. On the third day of the siege, the Russian special forces stormed the theatre, having pumped unknown paralytic gas into the building shortly before the raid, which sedated the terrorists, rendering them unable to detonate the explosives. Apart from the Chechens, the operation left 130 hostages dead. The Russian government acclaimed the operation as a great success.<sup>13</sup> Initially, it was not the theatre but the buildings of the State Duma and the Federation Council that were targeted for the onslaught, as admitted by Shamil Basayev, who had conceived the attack and trained the commando. The operation had been prepared since the spring of 2002. The choice of play was not a coincidence; it was symbolical, as the musical cheerfully evoked fond and nostalgic memories of the Soviet times. Prior to the attack, the terrorists conducted reconnaissance while attending other performances held at the theatre. Their equipment was perfectly prepared and could kill everyone inside.<sup>14</sup>

The incident has also a different, purely theatrical, dimension. Invoking the principles of performance art, one should note that the terrorist attack on the

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13 As cited in: M. Wojciechowski, *57 godzin strachu*, available at: <http://www.gazeta.pl>, accessed 21 December 2015; Theatre programme for *Motortown* by S. Stephens; Buchsteiner, *Nordost*, directed by G. Kania, Teatr Polski in Bydgoszcz, Bydgoszcz, 2007, p. 15.

14 Noteworthy publications on the 2002 Dubrovka theatre attack include: A. Zaucha, *Moskwa Nord-Ost*, Wydawnictwo Bosz, Olszanica, 2003, and M. Kuleba, *Szamil Basajew: rycerski etos a powinność żołnierska*, Fundacja Odysseum, Warsaw, 2007.

theatre evolved into a particular kind of spectacle. The audience who came to see the play unknowingly became heroes of a wholly different piece. The terrorists directed a new drama, with the entire world watching in the belief that the tragic event would reach its happy ending. This is what served as the basis for a drama by Torsten Buchsteiner. A German actor, playwright and scriptwriter, he named his work after the musical staged on that fateful October day at Dubrovka, *Nordost*. However, it is not a musical spectacle, but an understated small-audience piece focused on presenting the characters and their motives; a close-up of the attack as seen from three different angles, three points of view, three pairs of tearful eyes. Three women, which was not a coincidence, given their involvement in the terrorist attack, of different social status and views became entwined by the drama of the place. Different reasons brought them there. Zura is a Shahid participating in the terrorist attack and a widow of a Chechen named Aslan. The second woman is Tamara, a Latvian-born internist, widowed by a Russian named Nikolai; she helps the victims of the attack. The third woman is Olga, a Russian accountant, married to a Russian named Oleg, who came to watch the play with her husband and daughter. While each story is unique and personal, they share certain similarities. All will become widows, and tragedy and despair is identical for all three women, regardless of their nationality and social status.

Zura used to be a laboratory assistant back in Chechnya. A Shahid with the same name was involved in the actual attack of October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2002. She was Movsar Barayev's aunt, a widow and a strictest Muslim, who even did not reveal her face. The heroine, much like the majority of women from that region, got married very young; however, she was lucky to marry the love of her life. Her husband was gunned down by a Russian in Grozny in wartime. The trauma that she experienced was severe, her husband being everything to her; and not only because she loved him dearly, but also because a widowed woman is hardly worth anything in Chechnya. After being rejected by her husband's family and society, she met Sela, a long-lost friend of hers. Because of her, she became a terrorist. She was motivated by one thing only, and that thing was love. Chechen women tying explosives to their hips want to reconnect with their husbands, restore their honor and secure themselves a place in heaven. When her husband died, she experienced her own death as well. A sense of helplessness took her straight to the Moscow theatre. Deep in her soul, however, she wanted to live a normal life. The story of that Chechen demonstrates the everyday dilemmas of women struggling with the reality, which only seemingly is a realm of men.

Tamara is a doctor from Moscow. While she was born in Latvia, she lives in this city because of her Russian husband, Nikolai, who served in Chechnya.

As a result of wartime bloodshed and atrocious reality, he could not cope with himself any longer, ultimately committing suicide. Her story illustrates to what degree a lack of physical intimacy and, most importantly, a lack of acceptance and reciprocity in a relationship may affect the human psyche. Every woman wishes to be satisfied, which includes intimate sensations, although it may sometimes cause embarrassment.

Olga enjoys the most settled life of the three, working as an accountant and, like thousands of other Moscow women, living a simple life together with her beloved husband and daughters. The play is a long-awaited event for her, and an important moment for each family member. Her marriage is peaceful and based on trust and mutual respect. Dedication to her family is the joy of her life rather than great sacrifice.

The tragic events of the Moscow theatre unite the anonymous women in spite of many differences between them. The strength of the drama manifests itself in how it shows that while people may be different, they all react identically and experience the same when their loved ones' lives are at stake. After the peaceful initial part, full of melancholic reflection and reminiscences, the true spectacle begins. Surprise and disbelief among the audience is striking; initially, it is neither fear nor hate. Who are the terrorists? For Muscovites, the war in Chechnya is a remote campaign, which, according to official communications, has been concluded. The play brings a clash between the two sides, the oblivious Russians and the resentful Chechens. They do not understand each other, with words unspoken and silent mutual accusations, signaled by nothing more than meaningful glances, permeating the atmosphere. No one feels understood. The spectators are terrified, having no idea of what is expected from them and what they have to do with all this anyway. The problem remains, however, that it is impossible to tell the villain from the innocent. People believe that they are safe at home and, again, their sense of security is shaken. A crucial issue addressed by the play is shame, a human reaction. Both the shame of a woman, when Barayev demands that Zura take off her chador, and the shame of physiology, when the hostages need to relieve themselves into the orchestra pit. In order to do so, they have to stand in a long queue and endure other people's stares. A person is thus subjected to humiliation and animalization.

In *Nordost*, the author raises an important problem of humanity. One may ask: where does the fight end? Where are the boundaries for the fight against terrorism and the fight for freedom? The conclusion one may arrive at while watching the play is hardly optimistic. Human nature is so cruel that there is no such boundary. There is always someone for whom the other person means nothing. One of the central issues of the drama is the fight for another person; both the fight during

the theatre attack and the struggle put up by Tamara for her husband's acceptance. The women fight for their husbands and children. At that moment, nothing is more important, even their own lives. Looking closely at the terrorists, one can notice that women are those who are ready to make the ultimate sacrifice. Men, conversely, have an escape route planned. The drama shows women who, in the name of Allah, are ready for the ultimate sacrifice and for 12 months had been trained to lay down their lives. A woman who fights for her loved ones thinks of nothing else, being entirely devoted to the fight, and fights until the end. Like Tamara, who fought for her daughter Tanya and her mother; like Olga, who fought for her husband and her daughter Maya; like many other women on that day. This is often a lost fight, but the fighter does not surrender. Many people died upon the raid, children included. Although the separatists released foreigners, they did not want to free children. Twelve-year-old boys were once taken by Russian troops; likewise, Russian children were to suffer punishment for government policies. Most of them had been separated from their parents and located in the upper circle. Thus, given the chemical agents used by the special forces in the raid, many of them were saved, as the heavier gas did not manage to make its way to the balcony so rapidly. Eventually, almost two days into the siege, it became clear that the attack from which the Chechens were supposed to benefit became a trap. The men were prepared for the escape, while the women had no idea what to do, being entirely objectified. They have been exploited, no one was going to care about them. Zura took it very personally, as treachery. This bitterness and disappointment gave her strength to run away and take revenge on Movsar, who seemed very close to her not a moment ago. As the Russian Spetsnaz proceeded to pump the gas into the building, she gave in to panic and started to fight for her own freedom. The final scenes are truly abrupt, with the entire play gaining momentum and spinning fast. After the special forces rush into the building, the execution follows, no captives spared; the order was to kill the militants subdued by gas and show no mercy to those who were still conscious. Tamara is looking for her daughter and mother. She no longer suppresses her emotions, looking for what is dearest to her — her loved ones. The epilogue poses the question whether the special forces were right in their actions. Once again, Russia has proved that it will yield to no one. The Russians, in turn, will not be able to rise from their knees for a long time. It would appear that the "Black Widows" took their revenge. Russian women lost their husbands and children. More women to be widowed and more tears of suffering to be wept.

Buchsteiner's play constitutes a very realistic image of what transpired in the Dubrovka theatre in October 2002. The author incorporated memories of those

who took part in the attack. It is a classic theatre of fact, where the real events have only been minimally amplified by the author's fiction. Rather than recount the events themselves, it presents an account of feelings accompanying the attack. We are looking at the same event through the eyes of a terrorist, a hostage and a rescue worker. Three women, three equal stories and the same pain caused by the loss of love. With all the differences in character and experiences, the ability to experience feelings is similar. Initially, the narrative is cold and distant. As the story unfolds, it continues to gain momentum until it becomes a cry of women entangled in the terrorist attack. In Buchsteiner's play, a woman is a reflection of the entire society. We believe that the husbands are the victims, but for terrorists those who die are only a means to inspire panic and fear. Victims are not those who lose their lives, but those who survive and must live with the trauma. That women are heroes of the play is not a coincidence, as they are capable of bringing out the deepest meaning of tragedy, the social pain, not to mention the political causes and effects. A view on violence and aggression gains greater sharpness. The questions posed concern morality of some moves, the ethic behind actions of policymakers rather than technical means. One can see the simplicity of the motives that drive the women when they rescue others, make sacrifices or take revenge. It is a story about love, despair and pain.

In Poland, the task of staging the play was taken on by Grażyna Kania at Bydgoszcz Polish Theatre. The play premiered on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007 as part of the project entitled *Terrorism/The Prisoners of Despair*. A theatre without theatre, a minimalist performance, it offered the audience a matter-of-fact account and rhythmical monologues. The first part features three displays and a dry account from three women. Each tells her story, complementing one another, thus allowing the audience to understand their message. Actual acting is only introduced in the second part. Kania primarily shows people, their emotions and feelings, rather than a problem of the contemporary world, namely the Russian-Chechen conflict. A depiction of the issue of terrorism, unfamiliar to most spectators, was combined with what everyone could relate to, i.e. the feelings of commitment, anxiety, regret, fear and anger – emotions experienced by people who are intimate with each other. The spectacle terrorized the audience, forcing them to listen to the three women and their stories; making them reflect on their own sense of security, which turns out to be, in fact, very shaky. It is a psychological drama which appeals to the deepest and simplest impulses behind human actions. The audience are being emotionally blackmailed and forced to feel, at least for a while, as if they have lost everything of value in life.

A woman as a victim and a culprit, the entanglement of feelings and individual sensations become one of the most interesting artistic experiences when it comes



to employing a terrorist act in the theatre setting. Pain and tragedy of the individual participants of the events deeply affected the audience. In a quiet theatre room, the voice of three women for whom love and sacrifice means more than life revealed the trauma of a terrorist attack.

#### 4. Terrorism and Pornography

Thursday, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005 shook London with a series of terrorist attacks that occurred on public transport. The suicide bombers were British citizens; three of Pakistani descent and one Jamaican. They all came from the industrial city of Leeds in West Yorkshire, Northern England. It is a very peculiar city. Of all ethnic minorities, the Pakistani account for a staggering 40%. Despite a well-developed manufacturing sector, almost a half of these people are unemployed, the reason being predominantly a lack of relevant experience. Each of the attackers grew up in penury; it follows that a certain kind of isolation, a lack of prospects and the stark contrast in the standards of living in Britain led those practicing Muslims to confront their reality. Britain does not pursue any detailed minority assimilation policy. Certainly, a major cause behind the 2005 attacks were the international affairs as well. A shift in policy following the September 11 attacks on the WTC resulted in the 2003 invasion of Iraq and intensified operations in Afghanistan. Many European Muslims fell victim to false accusations, profound distrust and derision. Such treatment, as in many other situations where worship is threatened, prompted Muslims to improve their knowledge of the Quran and deepen their perception of faith as well as to strictly observe the top-down principles of religious conduct. This time, a sense of alienation from the particular community triggered off the massacre of July 2005.

The four young suicide bombers are commonly referred to as the new independent generation of Al Qaeda, the so-called third generation. A Scotland Yard investigation helped establish the identity of each of the suicide bombers. The mastermind behind the operation was the 30-year-old Mohammad Sidique Khan, who also recruited the remaining three men to carry out the attack, Shehzad Tanweer, Hasib Hussain and Germaine Lindsay.<sup>15</sup> While preparing the attack, they travelled to Pakistan and studied the Quran assiduously. One should note that their communities pointed out that each of the attackers had undergone a deep spiritual transformation as regards their life and behavior prior to the bombings.

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15 W. Dietl, *Terrorryzm...op.cit.*, p. 163.

Their conduct had diametrically changed, and this re-evaluation resulted in the objective they accomplished on 7 July 2005.

Britain seems to be a country where confrontation with violence is not a distant topic. The combat against Irish extremists has continued for decades. That was not the first time when London witnessed bombings. Yet, despite all the experience and apprehension about the possible strike as a consequence of the British involvement in the anti-terrorist coalition, the attack came unexpected. The main targets were the London Underground network and a city bus. In a time of euphoria and glee, which the Londoners experienced after their city had been declared host of the 2012 Olympics, the trauma of a terrorist act crept in. The timing was perfect, the aim being to intimidate society and appear in the media. Executed in no time, the attack brought four explosions on public transport within an hour; three bombs were detonated on the underground and one on a double-decker. Responsibility for the attack was claimed by a previously unknown Al Qaeda group, the Secret Organization of Al Qaeda in Europe. Devised in response to the British engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq, the attack took 57 lives and left 700 people wounded.

The 7/7 bombings provided the setting for *Pornography*, a play by Simon Stephens (b. 1971), a British playwright and one of the most interesting young-generation writers of the time. As noted by the author, “the play arose from a deep doubt in our culture, from the observation of chaos in which we live: not from honesty.”<sup>16</sup> The drama reflects on what people feel, how to reconcile the knowledge of being alive with the knowledge of death. The terrorist attacks recede into the background, being only a distant echo in everyday life. While affecting individuals, their attitudes and relationships, they are not the main subject of the play, which is full of convoluted thoughts, reminiscences, random dialogue and words left hanging in the air. Unwittingly, we begin to spy on people and their dilemmas. Out of this nonsense, we start to recognize figures, distinguish contours, and define the existing order of things. For the author, information overload, being an inherent part of the contemporary media, has become a reflection of the modern society and human relations. The information revolution witnessed in recent years has significantly depleted our reservoir of ways to communicate. Nowadays, our conversations resemble a fast food meal; they are simple, quick, superficial, and very bland. Idleness and freeloading, so prevalent these days, have caused those meals devoid of nutritional value and those bland and colorless conversations

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16 As cited in the Programme for the spectacle by S. Stephens, *Pornography*, directed by a team of directors, Teatr Dramatyczny in Warsaw, Warsaw 2008.

to become the norm. Simon Stephens sees a great similarity between those conversations and the eponymous pornography. Vulgar and hackneyed formulae, conversations without depth, instant satisfaction of simple needs; this is what conversations now look like, not only between colleagues at work, but also between relatives, married couples and friends. In this hectic world, there is not a moment of respite for a deeper reflection. Our existence comes down to a mere consumerist indulgence of the body, with spiritual fulfillment becoming a rarity of secondary importance. One may venture to call them “controlled conversations.”

The play was written after the London Underground bombings, when the British capital, only just intoxicated by the vision of the 2012 Olympics, suddenly lost stability of everyday life. Society had to redefine its sense of security and reflect on the London events. The heroes are random people who, just as anyone, at the time of 7/7 were struggling with problems of everyday life. Snatches of conversation, while seemingly lacking emotional involvement or sense, are in fact filled with incomprehension, longing, and sometimes sorrow. The play itself is extremely flexible, allowing for any number of actors on stage, which only proves that it is a social analysis rather than a story about specific people. The first piece of dialogue introduces a young couple. Both avoid being honest, and they do not understand each other. Their replies are either arrogant and aggressive or terse. In the next scene, we see a mother. This is the character on whom the author focused most. Once again, a woman was given a central role in a drama. Her words emanate sadness and weariness. Her monologue is substantially more emotional than the preceding dialogue, and yet there is something missing. What is absent is closeness of another person, the father of her child. One can hear her quivering inside, slightly overwhelmed in a rush of everyday matters. The problems emerging in her life are brushed aside and masked with ordinary, trivial everyday concerns. However, she cannot abandon the feeling of suspicion and distrust toward her partner Johnathan. Every day she goes to bed beside him, and yet she does not trust him and cannot muster enough courage to have a candid conversation with him. The completely unrelated strands of thought are intersected by the reflections of her entire relationship, devoid of trust and understanding. The only actual joy in her life is her son, who nonetheless cannot offer her support and with whom she cannot talk. Although she is not alone, she is very lonely. The third act introduces a young half-Italian boy, who lives with his parents and his elder sister. Undergoing puberty, feeling neglected by his family and misunderstood, he is a typical teenager of today. Fascinated by a school teacher, he neglects his education. A sense of being misunderstood, a lack of stabilization, possibly including financial instability, spark his aversion to ethnic minorities he encounters at school

and in the street. There is no place for an open conversation at his home, with his mother sidestepping his questions about his father's violence toward her. They pretend that there are no problems, in the false hope that those will simply fade away. The boy's aggression and anger well up; he does not feel masculine enough and attempts to comfort himself by imagining his power. He retreats into his own world. Then, one day, as he enters the underground with his sister, he finds himself standing next to a boy with a rucksack, the bomber. Thus unfolds a scene of hell, a scene filled with silence. There is also a story of an incestuous relationship. Another couple cannot get along with each other, yet they maintain sexual relationship, seeking physical closeness, since spiritual intimacy is out of their reach. Thousands of people, thousands of problems, reflections and emotions. Everything is incoherent, imprecise, beyond comprehension. What can be sensed, however, are human emotions: anger, sadness, sorrow. When the attacks come, there comes fear. All of a sudden, it turns out that despite the persistent feeling of loneliness, everyone becomes worried about someone, and panic begins to creep inside. A man on a train suddenly feels the need to talk to his wife, make sure that his children are not late for school. Then comes another scene that shows London shortly after the bombings. Everything is calm and quiet. The city seems desolated, a rare view in London. Most amazingly, among this chaos, disorientation and panic sweeping through the city, two people manage to plant a seed of understanding, a feeble sign of healthy communication based on positive human emotions. Each person is full of dilemmas and problems, which represents the contemporary world, brimming with words unspoken and emotions concealed.

## 5. Conclusion

The view on culture we have come to live in makes us doubt whether humanity's internal development keeps pace with technological progress. Superficial conversations are held properly. Somewhere deep down, however, the true emotions are repressed. At the moment of the catastrophe, the barrier cracks slightly, but does not break down completely. The fact is that only some people are able to overcome it. The world today resembles a crystal ball which, granted, does look impressive, but it effectively separates us from the rest, isolating us completely.

Terrorism sobers us up, offering food for thought and acting as a catalyst for certain changes that man needs to undergo in order to heal the entire society. The terrorism presented in Stephens' drama is a background, on which the author raises questions about ourselves. What is crucial this time is the attitude not toward the attack or the attackers, but toward the loved ones. Wondering what the everyday reality looks like in this fast-paced world, and whether one event can

upset what society has laboriously built, the author asks about the things that are most important to us at the moment. In pursuit of material well-being, people irrevocably lose the ability to communicate with each other. One-time shock cannot change and redefine everything, but it certainly is a slight impulse to stand back and reflect on oneself.

The analyzed contemporary dramas show terrorist attacks being used to build autonomous artistic universes. The stories are not simple accounts of events. Brought to the fore is the human being, their motivations, feelings, thoughts and communication with another person. The contemporary drama, in reaction to what reality brings is trying to observe it, yet remains far from being a mere commentator. Authors become creators of our human worlds, for each of us may fall prey to this 21<sup>st</sup> century plague – a terrorist attack.

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