

Urszula Koziół's *Znikopis* (Etch-A-Sketch), or: A Disposable *Ars Poetica*

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One recognizable trait of Urszula Koziół's poetry is undoubtedly her self-reflexive attentiveness, her particular sensitivity to the material nature of the word and tendency to showcase the active nature and consciousness of writing, which has been transposed onto the metaphysical orientation of her work, intensifying with the continued output of her books over the years. Attention has already been paid, in discussions of earlier works from the 1970s, to their discursive layer, the author's tendency to use an abstract, conceptual language;¹ emphasis has been placed on the strong "current of self-referentiality and the related doubts as to the power not only of the poetic word and its adequacy, but also towards experience and 'talkative' inner language."² These tendencies heighten and crystallize, as Małgorzata Mikołajczak has noted, in particular, after the year 1974, and are most explicitly present in *Postoje słowa* (Word stops) and *Wielka pauza* (The Great Pause), in which volumes the "projection of language toward the area of represented reality"³ is powerfully accentuated. Mikołajczak astutely captures the specific quality of Koziół's work when she pronounces the poem to be the "latent protagonist" of her poetry.⁴

¹ See J. Kwiatkowski, "Dialog z ziemią" (Dialogue with the Earth), *Twórczość* 1968, no. 8, pp. 94-112.

² S. Stabro, "W rytmie ponowoczesności. Liryka Urszuli Koziół po roku 1989" (In the Rhythm of Postmodernity. Urszula Koziół's Post-1989 Poetry), in: *Nowa poezja polska. Twórcy – tematy – motywy* (New Polish Poetry. Authors, Themes, Motifs), ed. T. Cieślak, K. Pietrych, Kraków 2009.

³ M. Mikołajczak, *Podjąć przerwany dialog. O poezji Urszuli Koziół* (Picking Up an Interrupted Dialogue), Kraków 2000, p. 98.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

We should remember, however, that this writing, egocentrically preoccupied with its own "self-contemplation,"⁵ at the same time remains cognizant of the materiality of the world it narrates. The poet, author of *Żalnik* (Burial-Ground) has said: "Because making art also means imposing your own vision and form on the world. To be simultaneously the medium of reality and its hypnotizer."⁶ The role of intermediary activates the question of the concept of the subject, which in this poetry shows itself to be remarkably psychosomatic, reasoning but also corporeally determined, perceiving the world from an individual, sensual perspective. Importantly, this subject – she, we should say – with time (age) becomes increasingly expressive of her own corporeal materiality by designating its diminution, elliptical emphasis on its evanescence. Anna Legeżyńska writes perceptively about this:

Thus if the author's poetic sensitivity were based – as in the cases of e.g. Świrszczyńska or Poświatowska – on a sensual relationship to reality, then perhaps the philosophical horizons etched in it would not reveal themselves so far-flung, or so misty. Corporeality and autobiography, typically the two strongest facets of women's poetry, are here relatively faint, a fact for which only one factor could possibly compensate: as in Szymborska's work, a forceful worldview, which in fact has been slowly crystallizing in Koziół's poetry.⁷

– but what seems particularly interesting is the kind of reading of this poetry that uses or decodes its very subtle autobiographical and corporeal stance. The situation undergoes change in *Wielka pauza* (The Great Pause, 1996), where the poet reaches the conclusion, according to Legeżyńska, that "she has long since had no need for the 'attack on everythingness'; a recording of the present seen from an individual, private – and female! – perspective is enough"; now the persona becomes "the transcriber of a small segment of the world, seen from her own perspective."⁸ Stanisław Stabro writes, with regard to Koziół's later work, about the "author's postmodern consciousness of the exhaustion of the creative power of the kind of poetic discourse that [...] was the foundation of her poetry."⁹ Referring to the "poetry of exhaustion,"¹⁰ he locates, among "postmodern strategies in lyric poetry," the "virtuosity of mutilated poetic forms," which are confronted with the still-strong lyrical tendency in Koziół's work, expressing a "faith in art."¹¹

I would like to stop and focus on this last volume, in particular on "Znikopis," one of its modest, inconspicuous poems, included in the cycle *Pestki deszczu* (Rain Seeds), which constitutes a record of not only metapoetic but also deeply human, anthropological, personal and markedly feminine reflection. The work acquires greater expressiveness when read in the context of another self-referential poem from the same book with the unambiguous title "Ars poetica," in which context it is revealed to be an ambiguous and complex declaration on writing and the

⁵ A. Legeżyńska, "Tkanie krajobrazu Ziemi. Liryczne czasoprzestrzenie poezji Urszuli Koziół" (Weaving the Landscape of Earth. Lyrical Time-Space in the Poetry of Urszula Koziół), in *Od kochanki do psalmistki... Sylwetki, tematy i konwencje liryki kobiecej* (From Lover to Psalmist. Silhouettes, Themes and Conventions of Women's Poetry), Poznań 2009, p. 238.

⁶ U. Koziół, "Zamiast posłowania" (In Lieu of an Afterword), in *Stany nieoczywistości*, Warszawa 1999, p. 353.

⁷ A. Legeżyńska, *Tkanie krajobrazu Ziemi...*, p. 248.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁹ S. Stabro, *W rytmie ponowoczesności...*, p. 288.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

writer's understanding of literary art. In *Wielka pauza*, we encounter two ways of conducting self-reflexivity: a conventional, deeply modernist one, harkening back to the tradition of *artes poeticae*,¹² and a second one that deconstructs that tendency, exposing the rupture and the opening toward postmodern, fluid and non-normative solutions. The contrast in the formation of these utterances constitutes, it appears, not so much a testimony to the split between two rival world views or poetics as a signal of the search for varied forms of expression for "body writing" or also a psychosomatically-tinged self-reflexivity shaped by singular life experiences, bringing into high relief the intensity of time's passing and the one-off nature of both transcription and material existence, remaining in the shadow of biography. Before proceeding to my interpretation of "Znikopis," I shall therefore quote the poem-manifesto "Ars poetica" in its entirety:

Ars poetica

Kto przemierza niebiosa długimi susami

jasna gwiazda i jej niewidzialny towarzysz
wymrują cię z osłon snu
zanim ślad łapy bladego lisa
utknie w zapadni mlecznej spirali

Wraz z twoim okiem
równo
budzi się w kolejnym CO
wielkie C

otwarte ku wszechrzeczy
niczym zarodki embrionu tuż przed wysiewem

obmyślasz piłkę ze słów
obrazów
ciężką
najcięższą z możliwych
gęstą

tuż pod jej zwierzchnią skórą
próbujesz upchnąć ciasno zwinięte ziarnka
wieloznaczeń
jakby wreszcie ten oto wiersz –
obraz
miał się stać czymś na kształt
białego karła mowy

wnosisz całego siebie w projektowany przekaz
skupiasz się

¹²See E. Kraskowska, A. Kwiatkowska, J. Grądziel-Wójcik, "Arspoetyka," *Forum Poetyki*, summer 2015 [online], <http://fp.amu.edu.pl/ewa-kraskowska-agnieszka-kwiatkowska-joanna-gradziel-wojcik-ars-poetyka/> [accessed 16.12.2016].

zgęszczasz
 ścieśniasz
 i już sam jesteś w kropce
 w samym jej środku

rozpościerasz się w niej
 rozpychasz
 aż ponaciągasz otok jej domyślnego koła

może już wnet
 może tym razem zdołasz

stanąć w miejscu ugięcia elipsy
 z której wywiną się
 nowe spiralne światy

Wielkie C

otwarte ku wszechrzeczy
 niczym zarodki embrionu tuż przed wysiewem
 łowi cię w swój właśnie otwierający się nawias
 niemal wchłania się
 wsysa w przekrzywioną zdziwieniem
 brew
 w nowy znak zapytania

blade lisy snu z ich pierzchającą kitą
 wzniecają ci obrazy

w mlecznym polu ich możliwości
 – jak zasieki –
 sterczą nastwione uszy rozlicznych cudzysłówów
 jakby krocie niewidzialnych zajęcy
 stawało słupka
 nasłuchując twego zbliżającego się oddechu
 one pomagają ci
 określić miejsce chwilowego pobytu
 choć zarazem
 blokują ci przejście
 poza swój drugi kontur.
 (WP 386–388)¹³

¹³I quote from the following printed versions: U. Kozioł, *Fuga* (Fugue). 1955–2010, Wrocław 2011. In parentheses I use the following abbreviations for these titles: Ż – *Żalnik* (1989), WP – *Wielka pauza* (1996), PS – *W płynnym stanie* (1998), S – *Supliki* (2005), P – *Przelotem* (2007), H – *Horrendum*, (2010). There are also poems from Kozioł's most recent book: U. Kozioł, *Ucieczki*, Kraków 2016 (U).

(Who measures the heavens with long jumps / a bright star and its invisible companion / wink at you from the curtains of sleep / before a trace of the paw of a pale fox / gets stuck in the trap of a milky spiral / Together with your eye / equally / another CO awakens / big C / open to the universe / like the germs of an embryo before seeding / you ponder a ball made of words / images/ heavy / the heaviest of all possible / thick / a bit below the surface skin / you try to cram the tightly packed seeds / of ambiguities / as if to finally get that one poem – / the image / was supposed to become something in the shape of / a white dwarf of speech / you put your whole self into the planned transmission / you concentrate / you condense / you restrict / and now you yourself are in the period / in its very centre / you spread out in it / you push your way through / until you stretch the rim of its conjectural circle / maybe soon now / maybe this time you will manage / to stand in the place of the ellipse's diffraction / out of which new spiral worlds develop / big C / open to the universe / like the germs of an embryo before seeding / catches you in its parenthesis that just opened / almost absorbed / sucks into the brow bent by astonishment in a new question mark / pale foxes of sleep with their scampering tails / stirring up images for you / in the milky field of their possibility / – like grain bins – / projecting the pricked up ears of sundry inverted commas / as if hundreds of invisible hares / stood on their hind legs / listening to your approaching breath / they help you / to define the place of momentary being / though at the same time / they block your path / outside of your second contour.)

ZNIKOPIS (Etch-A-Sketch)

wiersze mi się porozpra-
 szały w proch spro-
 szyły mi się szer-
 sze mi się popro-

(my poems have dissi- / pated on me into dust have pow- / dered on me have dis- / persed on me
 have requ-)

Everything seems to set the two texts apart: the rhetorically lofty sweep of the first and the stylistically and voluminally modest size of the second; the certainty of the demiurge is here opposed to the helplessness of the subject who is “słów niepotraf” (not skilled in words)¹⁴; the instructive and communicative aspects of the longer poem and its perfection in execution clash with the awkwardness, disposability and colloquial speech of the shorter one; the masterful “I” addressing “you” is replaced in the second text by the passive “to me” (mi), centripetally and egocentrically oriented (rendered in the English translation by the colloquial expression “on me”); the finished, closed, perfect sentences and convictions of “Ars poetica” collide here with the evasiveness, lack of closure, and dematerialization of their equivalents in “Znikopis.” In the first text it is possible to find a “telluric conception of being” and the cosmological sensitivity of such poetry, its “sublime, cosmic rhythm of ‘korzeń’ (root) and

¹⁴This is a quotation from Miron Białoszewski's poem “mironczarnia” (mironguish). Białoszewski's linguistic creation provides a good interpretative context, particularly for the small poetic forms proposed by Koziół in her later work, such as *Gamy* (Scales), *Pestki deszczu* (Rain Seeds) or *Wyrzywki* (Chance), and also her most recent collection, *Ucieczki* (2016).

'słońce' (sun)¹⁵; the poem has the "anointed, apodictic tone" that Stanisław Jaworski once wrote about with reference to Koziół's earlier work.¹⁶ The poem also fulfils the basic requirements of the traditional *ars poetica* with its erudition, programmatic thrust and directness of utterance, constituting simultaneously a formulated and a normative poetics.¹⁷ Compared with "Ars Poetica," "Znikopis" may appear on a first reading to be a bungled caricature of verbal art. For Małgorzata Mikołajczak the text is a "recorded mumble"; its "construction conveys the disappearance of meanings through the disintegration of words, the transfer of parts of words to the next line. [...] The poem becomes a mimetic equivalent to the process of dispersal, of the scattering of meanings."¹⁸ Stabro's reading also tends in the direction of postmodernity:

Poetic discourse and the poetic work of art are here submitted to self-questioning. The artist simultaneously questions her own subjectivity and more broadly, the art she makes, in a similar way. The artist takes a position of renunciation, disappears, agrees to the death of poetry and the poet in the modernist style of modernity [...]. This postmodern lack of faith in the traditional power of art, in the social function of poetry, gives rise to doubt in the artist's or poet's role and places him, and likewise his work, from the lyrical subject's perspective, permanently under suspicion.¹⁹

Mikołajczak at the same time underscores the motif, present here, of the "alienated, depersonalized voice of the artist and the disintegrating lyrical subject,"²⁰ supporting her argument with an example from *Suplik*: "Mój nagi głos, bez okrycia bez osłony / beze mnie [...] ubywa nie ubywając" (My naked voice, without covering or shelter / without me [...] diminishes without diminishing; "Traktat o głosie" [Treatise on the Voice], S 485). But what if we were to read the poem not through the theoretical lens of postmodernity, but from the perspective of the self's individual experience? Less dramatically, not so pessimistically, perceiving in it, instead of the universal sense of the "loss of the axiological centre" and the "consciousness of literature's degradation,"²¹ an attempt at a discontinuous personal narrative about the uncertain (because subject to dissolution) identity of the concrete self of these poems, grappling with its own transience and physical limitations?

In the four "awkward" lines of "Znikopis" not only is there invocation and negation of the Romantic conception of poetry that Mikołajczak reconstructs in her monograph on Koziół, but the *ars poetica* also therein becomes a stunted, mutilated form, an anti-song or anti-poetics – "something in the shape of / a white dwarf of speech" ("Ars poetica"). As Mikołajczak writes: "language has a strong advantage over the body," it creates "two positions of the subject of creative activities": the "poet-demiurge, ruler of the word," and the "artist helpless in the face

¹⁵A. Legeżyńska, *Tkanie krajobrazu Ziemi...*, pp. 244, 238.

¹⁶S. Jaworski, "Wybitne zjawisko poetyckie" (Outstanding Poetic Phenomenon), in: *Debiuty poetyckie 1944-1960. Wiersze, autointerpretacje, opinie krytyczne* (Poetic Debuts 1944-1960. Poems, Authorial Interpretations, Critical Opinions), ed. J. Kajtoch and J. Skórnicki, Warszawa 1972, p. 513.

¹⁷"Arspoetyka" is the Polish term, borrowing from the Latin *ars poetica* or "poetic art"; see E. Kraskowska, A. Kwiatkowska, J. Grądział-Wójcik, "Arspoetyka," op. cit.

¹⁸M. Mikołajczak, *Podjąć przerwany dialog...*, p. 126.

¹⁹S. Stabro, *W rytmie ponowoczesności...*, p. 294.

²⁰Ibid., p. 295.

²¹Ibid., p. 296.

of language, overcome by creative impotence [...].”²² There is also a third aspect, however, which seems to overlook that distinction, activating the somatic, corporeal sphere of writing – the *ars poetica* is a hybrid form of *ars somatica*, deconstructing and dissolving the “subject of creative activities” or rather corporealizing its activities, rendering it concrete and complicating it simultaneously. Instead of an abstract disposer of rules, better to speak here of the poem’s authorial subject, the trace of a psychosomatically understood individual, who admits to being the creator of the poem. Language thus no longer in an (exclusively) advantaged position – for now it is the boundaries of the poet’s own, physically felt and changing self that begin to decide the shape of poetry:

Self-referential reflection, formulated and implied, constitutes one of the stronger currents in the poetic works of Urszula Kozioł. A permanent feature of this reflection is the essentially Romantic belief in poetry’s power to influence, for which the writer bears responsibility. The subject of creative activities desires to influence the world, making a reality, by means of the creative power of the word, of an unattainable experience of order and harmony. Its condition is, however, determined by a sense of helplessness; in relation to both the insubordination of language and the reality that fails to correspond to it, the healing of the word takes place through a particular organization of the utterance: its subordination to linguistic procedures and those of instrumentation.²³

Its condition is likewise determined by the insubordination of the body and the helplessness of the variable, somatically defined self, which constitutes the basic reality referenced in the poet’s later works. Kozioł’s self-reflexivity is somaticized, with word and poem becoming corporeal, becoming not only material but also organic and biological. Jacek Łukasiewicz, in his discussion of *Żalnik*, a book released just a few years prior to *Wielka pauza*, turned his attention precisely to the somatic nature of this poetry:

The body ceases to be mine, while continuing to be mine. [...] Corporeality, the object of auto-irony, is felt concretely in this work. How different this is from the 1970 poem “Samoobmowa,” where the body is lived as a play on words, and thus not a part, but a function (similarly to how an uttered word becomes my function).²⁴

We might say the same about “Znikopis”: here, words cease to be “mine” while remaining “mine” (instead of “I” we have “to me”), and writing, understood with the same level of auto-irony, is lived materially, even corporeally, intimately, through and through, being subjected to description in the categories of somatopoetics. Let us consider the text once again, since that is what the poet herself did when she repeated it in *Supliki*:

wiersze mi się porozpra-
szały w proch spro-
szyły mi się szer-
sze mi się popro-

²²M. Mikołajczak, *Podjąć przerwany dialog...*, p. 118.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 144.

²⁴J. Łukasiewicz, “Żalnik,” in: *Rytm, czyli powinność. Szkice o książkach i ludziach po roku 1980* (Rhyme, or Obligation. Essays on Books and People After 1980), Wrocław 1993, p. 174.

On a first reading, one is struck by the incomprehensibility and incorrectness of the phrases in the poem as it slips out of the persona— the fragments “porozpra-”, “spro-”, “szer”, “popro-”. The only words that make it through whole are not, it seems, accidental: “wiersze” (poems), “mi się” (to me) and “w proch” (into dust), which remain at the centre, inside a text which has lost its contour and blurred its boundaries. It is possible to come away from the poem under the impression that it withers away, vanishing on the rocks in a way that is independent of the persona, disintegrating involuntarily, against the subject’s will, slipping out of the author’s control. The particle “mi” (to me), not usually accented in utterances, here takes on special meaning and becomes particularly emphasized by multiple repetition – the self, remaining in the form of the dative case, has problems forming, stopping or sustaining the poem.

“[P]orozpra-,” connotes the verb “rozpraszać,” meaning “to scatter, spill, disperse, deconcentrate, disseminate, dispel, dissipate, diffuse, dissolve, disintegrate, distract,” “to break something unified up into parts, to squander or frivol away.” According to a popular if false etymology, it contains three different prefixes: “po-,” “roz-” and “pra-,” thereby indicating transitoriness – being before and after, as well as spatiality – centrifugal and destructive movement (“rozpraszać,” imperfective, or “rozproszyć,” perfective, also means to spill or crumble, to displace to various places, far away from their source). The word “Sproszyły” in the second and third lines seems to derive from “proch” (ash) – “sproszyć” means to be turned into ash, to decay, to have one’s solid, uniform consistency changed into something fine and powdery; poems similarly become incorporated into the biosphere of the text, like organic material turning to dust, deteriorating, wearing away, like a rock crumbling or wearing away, subordinate to the laws of nature. Thus “rozproszyć” also means to “force someone to turn back, disperse in all directions,” while “sproszenie,” interrupted by the clausula, is paronomastically close to “spłoszenie” (fright) and might be elicited by fear. (*Ucieczki* [Ecsapes, or Flights] is also the title of Koziół’s last published book). “Rozpraszać” also has the meaning of “to distract,” to disrupt someone’s peace, disturb their concentration, but also to dissipate darkness, scatter clouds, elicit the vanishing of e.g. negative feelings or mental states.

Crammed into the framework of the text, the “tightly packed seeds / of ambiguities,” concentrated, confined, condensed in incomplete particles of words, concealed under the “surface skin” of the *significant* of the poem, they here become howitzers of meaning, exploding (under-mined by “dust”), destroying its fabric and simultaneously dissipating its meanings. Strongly accented by evoked connotations of deconstruction, degradation, annihilation of matter, these utterances also call up a supplementary Biblical resonance: ashes to ashes, dust to dust, the poem seems to tell us. The persona, like the reader, in fact, is no longer, as in “Ars poetica,” “w kropce / w samym jej środku” (in the period / in its very center), here everything seems to be exploding or disintegrating, going “outside [its] second contour.” Even the word “proch” is broken up into “pro” and “po-pro” (what comes after). Cultural associations lose against material, literal comprehension: the body is marked by dissolution. Yet it might have been otherwise— poems, the author says, “szyły mi się szer-/sze” (sewed wider for me) – seemed to be bigger, longer, literally “sewed themselves” (wove the text) before they “poproszyły” (turned to dust [for me]), fell to pieces, went bad. In the final line there is also a carefully concealed request: “popro-” sounds almost like “poproszę o wiersze” (may I please have a poem) “poproszę o jeszcze” (may I please have some more)... The work here writes itself

and disappears simultaneously, foregrounding its shallowness and the ephemerality of its recording, which nonetheless has no trace of easygoing smoothness or airy beauty.

The auditory composition of the text has the effect of releasing at the surface level the greyness embodied by the phonetic instrumentation: as we read the initial sounds of the successive lines: “wiersze” – “szały” – “szyły” – “sze”, the rustling sound of the voiceless sibilant remains in our ears. Previously, in *Żalnik*, Koziół used similar repetition of the consonant, as in the neologism “szarowiersze” (greypoems; in “Spoza barwy” [From Beyond the Colors], *Ż* 308), and in the later *Ucieczki* as well: “szarzeją moje wiersze” (my poems—which once “wanted to be blond” – are greying), “w szarą godzinę pewno i ja / powinnam wdziać na siebie / coś tak szarego” (in the grey hour surely I too / should put on / something so grey), “kolejna szara komórka / osiwiła mi tej nocy” (another of my grey cells / went grey [with age] last night; “Mikro makro” [Micro Macro], U-23). Where the poems in the book from the era of martial law took on the coloring of the politically defined world’s “szybko rozpraszającej [sic] się szarości” (quickly dissipating greyness) (“Spoza barwy,” *Ż*, 308), and the persona had to exist in the “[s]zarościanie / prostopadłościanie” (grey walls / perpendicular walls) of an apartment block ([Szaroscian] (Graywall), *Ż* 307), in *Ucieczki* we encounter a distinct homology between the corporeally felt transitoriness of the personally, autobiographically read persona and her biologically perceived, personified poetry – the aging, greying body is incapable of writing poems that are not also grey. The scattering of words at the same time suggests a parallel dispersal of the body “in the grey hour” of twilight – the twilight of the day and of life. “Pod wieczór / dzień mi się zwierszył?” (At evening / the day confided in me?), the poet asks in *Ucieczki*, once again using the form of an impersonal construction with the dative (mi się), subordinating the subject (“Pod wieczór” (At Evening), U 39).

In Koziół’s poetry, words originate or depart from the body and are the body, somatic and personalized: the author is not interested in the *langue* of poetry, but the *parole* of a poem – the ephemeral, transitory, vanishing trace or record of the psychosomatically defined author. The words, letters, and sounds in her poems have their own gender, voice, gaze, laugh – “wypowiedziane niskim tonem / z powściąganą wibracją / dźwięczne” (spoken in a low voice / with a restrained vibration / of sound), “otwarcie furkotliwe na wskroś” (an opening fluttery through and through) really exist, like their subject (“Przelotem” [Passing Through], PS 425). “Znikopis” picks up this thread of the materiality and biological essence of a poem, which in becoming the index of the corporeal self, undergo diffusion or disintegration “into dust.” Koziół consistently applies a somaticization of language and literature, such as with, to name merely a few examples, “naskórek mowy” (the skin of speech; in [“Na początku nie było słowa” (In the Beginning Was No Word)], PS 443), “linie papilarne wiersza” (the papillary lines of a poem), an expression which “pod czaszką trzeszczy [...] / urwany w połowie –” (cracks under the skull [...] / torn midway through) (“Segmenty wiersza załadowanego do wagoników strofek obijają się o stukot własnych kół podczas nużącej podróży” [Parts of a Poem Hitched to the Little Cars of Stanzas Beat Against the Clattering of Their Own Wheels During a Tiring Journey], P 573, 574); among her texts we find “Życie płciowe głosek” (The Sex Life of Sounds) juxtaposed in words (P 578) and “wiersze wykrztuśne” (expectorate poems; in [“Po nałykaniu się abszmaków dnia” (After Gorging Oneself on the Undertastes Du Jour)], U 15), the declaration that a work “zalega nie tylko / napięte myśli / ale nawet żołądek” (fills not only

/ tense thoughts / but even the stomach; in ["Jak by tu wreszcie wydukać ten wiersz" (If Only I Could Find a Way to Finally Stutter Out This Poem)], P 609), while "w drodze do pointy / wiersz dostaje napadu kaszlu" (on the way to the punch line / the poem has a coughing fit; in "Nie cierpię kiedy" [I Hate When], U 16). It could be said that in this poetry the text "stał się mną" (became me; "Wrywki I," S 492) – "jak ja tu weszłam / jak stąd wyjdę" (how I got in here / how I'll get out), the persona wonders ("Wrywki I," S 493). Notations are also themselves endowed with life at times: "robocze frazy niegotowych wierszy / kocim ruchem ocierają się o lśniącą sierść / cudzych fraz" (the working phrases of unfinished poems / rub themselves catlike against the shiny wool / of other people's phrases; in ["robocze frazy niegotowych wierszy"], P 554); "wiersz niczym nazbyt wypasiony łabędź" (a poem like an overfed swan; in ["pod ruchomym naskórkiem gleby" (under the moving skin of the soil)], P 565), "czerw albo wiersz / wiersz albo czerw" (a worm or a poem / a poem or a worm; in "Hymn o zmierzchu" [Hymn on Twilight], H 673).²⁵

Etch-a-sketching thus turns out to be connected with the biological effect; it is a result of "etching the body," directing attention to the problem of the subjective identity of the greying and disintegrating self, expressed at the same time through the mediums of the body and language. This procedure is a recurrent one in women's poetry, for example, in poems by Anna Kamieńska, Krystyna Miłobędzka, or Bogusława Latawiec. Because the more the body described in these poets' works becomes dematerialized, the more intensely corporeal their poetry turns, designating its creative gesture, becoming the flange that connects existence and nonexistence.²⁶ Similarly, in the poetry of Koziół, the written word "jest *simulacrum* mojego bytu" (is a *simulacrum* of my existence; in ["chmury ciężą ku górom i ku morzu" (clouds gravitate toward the mountains and the sea)], P 577, emphasis in the original). The subject might say:

badam zanikający już
choć jeszcze nieco widoczny obszar samej siebie
w trakcie zanikania
i gdzież tu jest miejsce na słowo
bo niby jakie – w tym świetle – mogłoby być
(I test the already disappearing / though still somewhat visible area of my own self / in the process of disappearing / and where here is there a place for the word / for what kind do you think – in this light – there could be)

("Wrywki I," S 494–495)

²⁵We could list many examples of the biologization of the text: "słowa / rzadko używane / jak szkarłupnie / czyli te wszystkie promieniste organizmy / jak rożgwiazdy / jeżowce / fossiles // drobiny szkieletu morza / szkieletu świata // kość z kości mego początku / moje i twoje stąd dotąd" (words / rarely used / like echinoderms / or all those radiant organisms / like starfish / sea-urchins / fossils // corpuscles of the sea's skeleton / the skeleton of the world // bone of the bone of my beginning / mine and yours from there to here; in "Pocztówka z Visby" [Postcard from Visba, PS 454]; a caterpillar as "partykuła / koloru podarowanej mi teraz chwili" (particle / of the colour of the moment gifted to me now; in ["Dzisiaj nie czytam gazet" (Today I Don't Read Newspapers)], PS 456). Somewhere else, a mouse tries "wcisnąć na siebie mój wiersz", (to squeeze my poem on himself), and the "liryczny [...] kret / [...] wlecze mrówkę otumanioną dymem-z-rymem" (lyrical [...] mole / [...] tugs an ant dazzled by smoke-and-rhyme; in "Wiersz do jednorazowego użytku" [Disposable Poem], S 489).

²⁶I have written more on this subject in the book *Przymiarki do istnienia. Wątki i tematy poezji kobiet XX i XXI wieku*, Poznań 2016, pp. 36–37.

In “Sprawozdaniu z końcowych chwil” (Report from the Final Moments) as well, there appears a suggestion of equality: “przemijanie / zanikanie” (passing / vanishing) is “ciężka próba odchodzenia / od samego siebie” (a heavy attempt to leave / myself), “oswajanie z tym / co obce / ale nieuchronne” (familiarization with / what is foreign / but inevitable), “wywłaszczanie samego siebie z własnego «ja» / z siebie / wymazywanie się z bytu” (dispossession of oneself from one’s own ‘I’ / from oneself / erasing oneself from existence; P 559).

Thus in poetic etch-a-sketch forms, as Koziół repeats in other texts, “wszystko rozsypuje się / rozpada albo staje jak wryte / wobec niepojętości tego / co poza nami – ” (everything goes to pieces / crumbles or becomes as if sunken / in the face of the incomprehensibility / that is beyond us; in “Ty i twój świat. A ja?” [You and Your World. And I?], PS 426). But words in a poem can also be “postawiony na sztorc / szorstki kołnierz” (a stiffly upright / rugged collar), protecting the author from the “płynnym stanem” (fluid state) of the world, blurring its contours. Their protection is flimsy, but the only possible kind (“W deszczu” [In the Rain], PS 429). Poems are in fact like “pestki deszczu” (rain seeds) – “otwarte ku wszechrzeczy / niczym zarodki embrionu tuż przed wysiewem” (open to the universe / like the germs of an embryo before seeding), “i już sam jesteś w kropce” (and now you yourself are in the period), “projektowanego przekazu” (the planned transmission; *Ars poetica*). “Znikopis” thus thematizes and shows, as if through a lens, what later preoccupies Koziół’s thought and poems with particular intensity: the dispersal of letters which “odbiegają od siebie” (diverge from each other), and at the same time “świat słowa (a więc twój świat) / rozprasza się rzędnie” (the world of the word [and thus your world] / dissolves in confusion; “Wodne motywy” [Water Motifs], PS 418), “rozwadnia zapis” (the recording gets watered down) and simultaneously dissipates the persona herself – “w tę jakąś kolorową plamę” (into some kind of colored flame), a disorder which perhaps is “wyższym porządkiem” (a higher order). The poet therefore has the task of “na nowo zespolić [...] / związać – ” (joining together anew [...] / tying –). Koziół’s poetry thus shows itself to be a form of resistance to the disorder of nothingness and the great void – she answers: “– non finite, to quote the title of a poem in the book *W płynnym stanie*. Yet this is not a “recorded mumble” – even when taking on the form of an etch-a-sketch or rough draft, it remains heroic, because aware of unavoidable failure, a gesture of grappling with reality, another attempt at putting it in order, liberating rather than liquidating the scattered meanings.

Contrary to the words of Krystyna Miłobędzka, a poet who is close to Koziół both generationally and in her poems’ linguistic and self-reflexive tendencies, texts are not capable of preserving anything or, as Miłobędzka writes, not able to “make lasting” (trwalić)²⁷; the written world – unlike in Wisława Szymborska’s work also – has no chance of becoming “zemstą ręki śmiertelnej” (the revenge of a mortal hand).²⁸ What is being subjected to revaluation here is the aspect of inexpressibility that was fundamental to the modernist conception of the word, the pursuit of the variable and “runaway reality” that Mikołajczak underscores in her

²⁷“Tracisz się, a mówisz że trwalisz” (You are losing yourself, and say that you’re enduring), we read in the poem [“umarła rodząc się” (she died being born)]; K. Miłobędzka, *Zbierane. 1960–2005* (Collected Works 1960–2005), Wrocław 2006, p. 145.

²⁸From the poem “Radość pisania” (The Joy of Writing); W. Szymborska, *Wiersze wybrane* (Selected Poems), Kraków 2010, p. 116.

monograph.²⁹ We might thus look at the etch-a-sketch as a children's toy – a magic drawing board on which we can register, over and over again and without consequences, successive phrases destined for disposal. A poem is thus a specifically understood kind of manuscript or draft, postulating its own authenticity but also its lack of finality – fleeting, incomplete, interrupted, somewhat strange and incomprehensible, it not only does not immortalize anything but itself is contaminated with decomposition at the moment of its emergence. Perhaps it is a "kaprys Boga" (a caprice of God) to join together so many flickering meanings "w coś równie nietrwałego / jak ten dziwaczny zapis" (in something as fleeting as this eccentric recording), the poet says in another poem ("Motto 2," PS 430); "a tak bym chciała / zamieszkać gdzieś na zawsze / choćby w słowach wiersza" (I would so like / to live somewhere forever / if only in the words of a poem), complains the subject of another poem, conscious that only one request is left for her to make: "pisz do mnie więc / na Berdyczów" (so leave me / alone; P 616).

The etch-a-sketch would thus be a form of imperfect, but also the only possible, disposable *ars poetica*, stripped of its universal and normative role, limited in its range to a given, newly arisen text. It seems as if the construction of a newly released text confirms the world in its existence, concentrating matter around itself and opposing dispersal, dilution and disintegration. As long as the poet is still writing her poem – or the poem is writing itself "to her" – the world, her world, endures. She does that differently, however, than Szyborska's character of the milkmaid from a painting by Vermeer van Delft, who stops the world with her scrupulous and tender gesture of pouring milk into a jug ("Vermeer" in the collection *Tutaj* [Here]). Koziół's way of sustaining existence works by other principles – the subject of her poems does not strive for holding the moment in place and stopping time, but desires to condense matter, to make it whole, to tie it together anew – "skupiasz się / zgęszczasz / ścieśniasz" (you concentrate / you condense / you restrict), we read in "Ars poetica" – starting from the premise that "wszystkie rzeczy do siebie powinny przylegać" (all things should belong to each other; in "Pochwała zeszytu w kratkę" [In Praise of the Graph Ruled Notebook], PS 449). The obsessive, and perhaps depressive belief that "próżno [...] wiążę słowa –" (I vainly connect words; in "Motto," PS 453) still does not mean that the persona does it all in vain.

This is the primary, thoroughly modern problem of Koziół's poetry, as it undertakes an effort in later books to bind together disintegrating matter: "podczas gdy czas rozpada się / na nierówne cząstki / [...] i kiedy świat / rozpada się na cząstki" (whereas time is falling apart / into unequal particles / [...] and when the world / is falling apart into particles), the need to bind together "krawędzie od ty – / do ja" (the edges from you – to me), to build poem-bridges, poem-connectors, because "[w]szystko co poza tym – / jakże znikome" ([e]verything beyond this – / is just as transient; in ["Dzisiaj nie czytam gazet"], PS 456). If we look carefully at the way the particular poem under interpretation here is written, we are struck by the absence of capital letters and periods, and our attention is grabbed by the hyphens, the signs that serve to divide words carried over between lines. They also, however, constitute signals of wholeness – connectors, which compel us to read the words bisected by the clausula. The only punctuation mark that the subject maintains thus connotes in equal measure the dispersal and union of words from or with each other, constituting a gesture of opposition to a crumbling,

²⁹M. Mikołajczak, *Podjąć przerwany dialog...*, p. 113.

disappearing reality, both textual and (“really”) real. This can be read as an intentional gesture, intensifying the presence of the author, who dreams in “Ars poetica” of demiurgic power:

wnosisz całego siebie w projektowany przekaz
skupiasz się
zgęszczasz
ścieśniasz
i już sam jesteś w kropce
w samym jej środku

The places where the lines break off in “Znikopis” are anything but arbitrary; contrary to the title’s implication, the poem remains coherent and compact, concentrating, condensing and restricting, defending its essence in defiance of a destructive force. “[Z]ataję siebie w kropce tego wiersza” (I [c]onceal myself in the period of this poem) – the self of “Wyrywki I” will later say (S 490). What is the subject of “Znikopis” hiding in its hyphens? Koziół paradoxically urges toward “skrzykiwania słów” (crying out for words), which “odmawiają posłuszeństwa / nie przybiegają” (refuse obedience / not coming [“skrzykiwanie słów”], P 561). So then what is the poet doing with the “zbuntowanymi słowami” (words in revolt) that “się porozpra-”? “[C]hwyt[a] je za grzywę / trzym[a] mocno / [...] ustawi[a] je w czwórki / w ósemki / w pary / i ćwicz[y] je ćwicz[y] ćwicz[y] / dopóki nie d[a] sygnału / że mogą się rozejść” ([G]rabs them by the mane / hol[ding] tight / [...] leave[s] them in quarters / in eighths / in pairs / and exercise[s] them exercise[s] exercise[s] / until they give n[o] signal / that they can disperse; [“skrzykiwanie słów”], P 561).

The subject (in the dative case: “mi”) does not find support in a divine assurance, so all that’s left for it is uncertainty undergirded by nothingness and the perspective of a pause in existence – “galopująca pustka / zdyszany bieg / powrót do niebytu / prosto w czeluść bez dna / i bez echa”, którą to odległość może związać tylko “słowo za słowem” (galloping emptiness / a breathless run / return to nonbeing / straight into the bottomless abyss / where no echo sounds either; [“dajesz mi różę” (you give me a rose)], S 475). There remains only “the lost grace of faith that what is / is” (*Wyrywki 5*, S 519) and toward this very “nieistniejącemu ty” (non-existent you) the subject directs “trwożnym gestem” (with a fearful gesture) “ciąciwę [...] \ strofy” (strings [...] \ stanzas). It is thus worth asking about what is missing from “Znikopis,” about what has been shaken away, in keeping with the principle that “bezsłowność” (wordlessness) is “bezbyt” (“*Wyrywki 5*,” S 520) or the earlier-cited return to nonbeing. A desire appears in *Wielka pauza* to tilt words toward each other in such a way that “żeby przestały tak odskakiwać od siebie jak oparzone” (they would cease jumping off each other as if scorched); the poet “na trwałe zespal[a] je ze sobą” (joins them to each other for good), “spokrewni[a] je sensami w klany grupy i strofy” (marries them by meanings in clans groups and stanzas; “Inaczej mówiąc” [Put Differently], WP 369). A poem is perceived as “niczym czarna skrzynka” (like a black box), “w jego strofie / skrywa się dowód na istnienie chwili” (its stanza / conceals the proof of a moment’s existence), and the freedom “sprawcy planety wiersza” (of the perpetrator of a poem’s planet) is “([...] uformować ją [chwile] / zatrzasnąć w podłużnej skrzynce czarnej strofy / i zatrzymać / przytrzymać / – ale czy na zawsze? / powiedz / – na zawsze?” ([...] to form it [the moment] / to trap it in the oblong box of the black stanza / and hold it /

hold it fast / – but forever? / say / – forever?; “Inaczej mówiąc,” WP 370). The motif of evanescence returns once more in the metaphor of the thread of a poem, “która płacze się mota i waha” (which falters reels and sways [“Na wzór jesiennego” (On the Autumn Model)], PS 439). A stanza can thus “wyprzedz[ić] mnie w śmierci” (outpace me in death), which is why the persona asks: “pobądź w świecie choćby jedną chwilę dłużej niż ja” (stay in the light at least a minute longer than I; “Apostrofa do strofy” [Apostrophe to the Stanza], P 537). The role of the author is thus to unite this “złoty alfabet kapryśnie rozrzucony po firmamencie” (golden alphabet capriciously tossed about the firmament), “nakłania[ć] ku sobie jego cząstki / pola / żeby zmierzał do sensu” ([to] incline toward myself its particles / so that it tends toward sense; “Przed” [Before], PS 446). The disintegration of the poem signifies the scattering of meanings, but also the grasping of the only state of affairs, the state of the world, “elips kolejnych cisz” (of ellipses of successive silences), behind which drowns “ogrom” (the vastness)– of emptiness (“Przed”). In “Znikopis” it is worth paying attention precisely to those ellipses, to that which is left unsaid, and at the same time is “otwarte ku wszechrzeczy” (open to the universe), to quote once again from “Ars poetica”: to that free space after the shaking of the etch-a-sketch to efface the textual fragments there, “puste miejsca między linijkami” (empty spaces between lines), “bruzdy żyzne dla przemilczeń” (fertile furrows for dissemblings), activating a subtle and ineffective metaphysics of the poem and challenging readers to reach “wyżej” (higher), “powyżej pasma zaczernionego / słowami” (above the strip blackened by words; “Rzut oka na twój wiersz” [A Quick Glance at Your Poem], PS 447).

Let us look once again at the shape of “Znikopis,” at the disappearing edges of the manuscript, keeping in mind the words from the later poem “Pestki deszczu VII” (Rain Seeds VII): “Czasami stawiam rymy w narożnikach strofy / by utwierdzały sens lub jego zamysł / albo ażeby strzegły jego chwiejnych granic” (Sometimes I place gutters at the corners of a stanza/ to strengthen its meaning or intention / or make them observe its unsteady borders; PS 459). The corners of the poem we have been analyzing are distinctly emphasized, in a sense secured by anaphora, instrumentally, and by rhyme. The text might also be considered a potential stanza– we do not know how many similar fragments were previously erased– and the stanza, in Kozioł’s poetry, is still the privileged form of organization for a poem, its basic unit, returning as well in other disposable poetic credos, such as “Rozpinam namiot strofy” (I’m Pitching the Tent of a Stanza; WP 345), “Apostrofa do strofy” (P 537), “Strofowanie za pomocą strofy” (Dressing-down by Stanza; P 538). Dissolution is thus rendering extinct, and etch-a-sketching the loss of existence, in which all we hear is “nerwowy rękopis strofy” (the nervous manuscript of a stanza [“czytam” (i read)], P 540), “zanim pochłonie mnie wielkie / i niepojęte NIC” (before I am absorbed by the great / and inconceivable NOTHING; “Wygazanie” [Extinction], S 532).

At the same time, however, crucially, the corner sounds of “Znikopis” lose their resonance and their edgy noise seems disturbing– all that’s left is the “trwożny łopot” (fearful flapping) of the consonant sounds “r” and “ł,” which uphold the sound of the poem or of existence. “[W]ięc wyparuje język skryty w moich wierszach / i osłupiałe staną bezdźwięczne litery” ([s]o the language hidden in my poems evaporates / and the voiceless letters will stand amazed) the author will say directly and prophetically in another self-reflexive text (“Motto,” PS 453). In another poem, “skrzypi cisza jak śnieg / którym nicość się skrada” (quiet crunches like the

snow / by which nothingness creeps up; [“talerz wypada mi z rąk” (the plate is falling out of my hands)], P 575). Voiceless sounds thus lead, like “blade lisy snu” in “Ars poetica,” into the abyss, nonbeing, the void, which turns out to be “bez echa” (echoless; [dajesz mi różę], S 475).

Kozioł’s modest text thus becomes two-faced, because it submits to the effects of time while opposing the processes of dissolution / disappearance / extinction of material, temporal existence. The threat becomes mastered through its naming, its formulation in the framework of a poem, the corners of form, which produces meaning, even if that meaning is fleeting. It is a “wiersz do jednorazowego użytku” (disposable single-use poem), to quote the title of another text, written “na straty” (written off with expenses / as a sunken cost), which “schodzi mi z oczu / jak piórko” (descends out of my eye / like a feather; S 489). Is the dream of the poet as expressed in “Ars poetica,” to “stać w miejscu ugięcia elipsy / z której wywiną się / nowe spiralne światy,” not then paradoxically fulfilled here? The reader is left in precisely that position, looking again in the poem for what was elliptically omitted, and simultaneously the most important of all, in accordance with the logic of the device: “wierszu / już wiem cię / Po cóż miałabym cię zapisać? / Znikaj” (poem / I already know you / What am I supposed to write you down for?), the poet will declare in *Supliki* (“Wrywki 2,” S 497). Here, too, we find yet another variation on the idea of the etch-a-sketch:

Obłok sam wymazuje siebie z nieboskłonu
 zaciera ślad pierwotnego kształtu
 prze
 kształca się prze
 obraża prze
 ziera znów i po chwili
 staje się czymś na kształt pierzchającego snu
 nie od odtworzenia
 (A cloud wipes itself away from the horizon / wipes the trace of its primal shape / trans / forms
 itself trans / figures trans / fixes and after a minute / becomes something shaped like a vanishing
 dream / not in reproduction)

(*Wrywki* 6, p. 524)

Similarly in *Gamy V*: “Myśli same się myślą / wiersz się roz / wiersza” (Thoughts don’t think themselves / poems shoot blank / verse; H 683); in “Ars poetica” the “blade lisy snu” blocked “przejście / poza swój drugi kontur”; in “Wrywki I” “słowo wystaje poza mój kontur / stwarza poza mną wielość innobyków / wśród nich płacze się i błąka zagubione “ja” / moje-nie-moje” (the word protrudes beyond my contour / creates besides me many otherbeings / among them flounders and wanders a lost self / mine-not-mine; S 490). The boundary quality of the text, its autonomy, is thereby paradoxically evoked and maintained, problematizing the division between what is inside the poem and what lies beyond it. In truth nothing here is dissolved or expanded, nothing is turned to dust, and contours are brought out into relief: “wsluchujemy się w pustkę / po słowie” (we listen intently to the void / after the word; “Na odejście poety” [On a Poet’s Departure], S 517). This shape even seems more important than the content: “daję ci ten wiersz / ale zapisz go po swojemu / rozrysuj go w sobie / jego własny kontur”

(I give you this poem / but write it down in your way / scribble out inside yourself / its particular contour), repeats Koziół ("Wrywki 5," S 522) as in another text she invites us to follow her pursuit "skrajem wiersza jeszcze nie dopisanego do końca" (on the outskirts of a poem not yet written out completely) "tam skąd nagle spada się z łoskotem / w próżnię / odzierającą z czucia i pamięci" (where you suddenly fall with a crash / into the emptiness / replying from feeling and memory; ["Skrajem wiersza" (On the Outskirts of a Poem), P 606]. There, the persona will ask: "czy znikłam" (did I disappear)?

The etch-a-sketch poem is thus effaced from existence by, for, and with the persona, deliberately dissolving the self-subject but at the same time familiarizing that self with the inevitability of emptiness and otherness; it thereby becomes an icon of leaving, of transience, of deterioration and disappearance, as well as an index of the decohesion of subjectivity, evidence of the poet's self-reflexive and simultaneously psychosomatic identity. Urszula Koziół, longing "za całością i jednością bytu" (for the wholeness and oneness of being), builds, in her modest poem, a one-time "płaszczyznę porozumienia" (plane of understanding), trying to counteract the disintegration of existence. For only the consciousness of impermanence, vanishing, greyness, voicelessness, and immobilization can liberate the poetic gesture of opposition. As long as the self has the desire to write and unite, the world will not disappear entirely, it will remain present in the bonds and transgressions of the contour of poem and being. The *ars poetica* thus acquires, in "Znikopis," its own specific, corporeal materiality – the author is able to move away from the stiff, rhetoricized and idealized form of *ars poetica* by virtue of her experience of her own materiality and ephemerality, which leads to the replacement of bronze or marble monuments by their perfect substitute – the etch-a-sketch.

KEYWORDS

contemporary women's poetry

c o r p o r e a l i t y

ABSTRACT:

The subject of interpretation in this article is Urszula Koziol's "Znikopis" (Etch-A-Sketch), a short work from her book *Wielka pauza* (The Great Pause, 1996), read in the context of the poem "Ars poetica" and Koziol's later work. It becomes a form of single-use *ars poetica*, stripped of its universal and normative role and limited in its range to a particular, newly arising text which acquires a specific, corporeal materiality. The process of "etch-a-sketch" drawing here becomes linked to a biological effect, it is a consequence of "etching the body," directing attention to the problem of the psychosomatically understood identity of the vanishing self, expressed on parallel tracks by the media of body and language.

ars poetica

URSZULA KOZIOŁ

selfreferentiality

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

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