

Mambo Spinoza.

The wanted and unwanted traditions of affective criticism

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Discourse on affect as a methodological point of reference has become well established in Polish literary studies over the last decade. It is accompanied by two symptomatic phenomena which prompted me to undertake this critical reflection. One is a methodology characterized by a relatively broad self-identification, a highly inclusive definition of its intellectual influences and genealogies, and, in the long run, by coherence. The second issue inspiring my curiosity is the emphasis placed by this approach on a particular understanding of the relationship between the world and meaning, which makes surprisingly frequent references to the concept of negativity (while claiming inspiration from the non-dialectic thought). With these issues in mind I would like to offer a critical review of the traditions which feed into the now fashionable affective humanities.

These issues are all the more interesting in light of the ongoing debates, questioning the usefulness of the above-mentioned tools. Specifically, I am referring to current theoretical meta-critical disputes concerning the ethics and politics of interpretation, which are being

developed in response to the diagnoses of the American online journal “nonsite.org” (such responses are expressed, for example, by Paweł Kaczmarek and Łukasz Żurek). One of the voices participating in the discussion is that of Dawid Kujawa, who developed his own critique project¹. Notably, both parties involved in the dispute are critical towards the so-called affective research, whereas Jakub Skurtys, who is sympathetic to Kujawa’s project, remarks in his review of *Pocałunki ludu* [*Kisses of the People*]:

Kujawa’s aesthetic thus rests on solid foundations: not on the fuzzy, American metaphors of the so-called ‘affective turn’, but on a firm philosophy, which is several centuries’ old (the Spinozian movements of bodies seem more important here than the mythical and trivialised ‘affects’).²

Skurtys contrasts the two meta-critical projects by referring to the traditions of thought from which these projects originate: he contrasts ‘hard philosophy’ with Western ‘American metaphor’, with which I generally concur. At the same time, I believe that identifying the manners in which affective research approaches its own intellectual sources sheds some more light on the issue of why the methodology it proposes can be deemed ‘fuzzy’. It also helps to demonstrate the affiliation of affective studies to a particular type of literary ideology (namely to modernism, whose place in the contemporary literary field has been diagnosed by Krzysztof Uniłowski in particular³) and to understand why these studies can be highly unsatisfactory for literary criticism.

Massumi and the return of Descartes

In the above-quoted words of Jakub Skurtys, the juxtaposition of ‘affects’ with ‘Spinozian bodily movements’ may be deemed questionable. The invocation of the Dutch philosopher is, after all, among the most frequent quotations in the affective approach, as exemplified by Brian Massumi’s texts, which are considered to be the founding (or at least impactful) texts for this current. Indeed, Massumi alludes both to Spinoza, as the patron of his enterprise, and to Spinoza’s definition of affect: “By emotions I mean the excitations of the body, by which the

¹ Cf. the discussion in the following texts: Paweł Kaczmarek, „Niezule narracje. O pewnym modelu zaangażowania w poezji” [„Insensitive narratives. On a certain model of engagement in poetry”, *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 01-03 (2021), <http://malyformat.com/2021/04/niezule-narracje-o-pewnym-modelu-zaangazowania-poezji/>; Dawid Kujawa, „Czułość i nieczułość w jednym stały domu. Odpowiedź Pawłowi Kaczmarekowi” [“Tenderness and insensitivity shared a single house. A response to Paweł Kaczmarek”, *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 01-03 (2021), <http://malyformat.com/2021/04/kujawa-kaczmarek-polemika/>; Łukasz Żurek, „Wiersz i gumowa kaczką. Odpowiedź Dawidowi Kujawie” [„The poem and the rubber duck. A reply to Dawid Kujawa”, *Small Format* 04-06 (2021); Dawid Kujawa, „Największy mankament poezji. Ciąg dalszy dyskusji z Pawłem Kaczmarekiem i Łukaszem Żurkiem” [„Poetry’s greatest shortcoming. A continuation of the discussion with Paweł Kaczmarek and Łukasz Żurek”, *Mały Format* 07-09 (2021); Dawid Kujawa, *Pocałunki ludu. Poezja i krytyka po roku 2000* [Kisses of the People. Poetry and Criticism after 2000] (Kraków: HHa!art, 2021); Paweł Kaczmarek, „Afekty, intencje, przypadki. Krytyka badań afektywnych w kręgu czasopisma „Nonsite”” [„Affects, intentions, cases. A critique of affective research in the milieu of the journal “Nonsite”] *Litteraria Copernicana* 2 (2022): 47-60.

² Jakub Skurtys, „Percepcje świata jakiego nie znamy” [„Perceptions of the world we do not know”, *Czas Kultury* 21 (2021), <https://czaskultury.pl/artukul/percepcje-swiatea-jakiego-nie-znamy/>.

³ Cf. Krzysztof Uniłowski, „Proza środka”, czyli stereotyp literatury nowoczesnej [„The prose of the middle”, or a stereotype of modern literature”, in: *Granice nowoczesności. Proza polska i wyczerpanie modernizmu* [Boundaries of modernity. Polish prose and the exhaustion of modernism] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006), 156-195.

power of that body's actions can grow or weaken, can be sustained or withheld; these are also ideas of these excitations"⁴. He also signals his intellectual debt to Deleuze and Guattari in his adoption of the schizoid-analytic notion of intensity, which, for the purposes of the text, he explicitly identifies with affects.⁵

The key (and problematic) aspect of Massumi's relationship with these traditions is his description of intensity as entirely disconnected from the order of meaning. To exemplify:

The level of intensity is organized according to a logic that does not admit of the excluded middle. This is to say that it is not semantically or semiotically ordered. It does not fix distinctions. Instead, it vaguely but insistently connects what is normally indexed as separate.⁶

Massumi introduces into Spinoza's monism a multilayered dualism and replaces the concept of the world as a historicised simultaneity of bodies and meaningful excitations with a dialectic based on negativity. The author of *Politics of Affects* mentions at least several pairs illustrating this dualism: semantic/semiotic and affective, content and intensity, reproducibility and novelty, structure and event. Each time the Canadian philosopher gives primacy to the second element in the above-listed pairings and consistently separates them from epistemological explainability. He does this, for example, when contrasting affect with emotion (a problem enthusiastically taken up by Polish literary studies). Meanwhile, a feature that can be ascribed to the affect as defined by Spinoza, is its epistemological openness and intelligibility as a potential for constituting the subject of knowledge:

Nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting is everywhere one and the same, that is, the laws and rules of nature according to which all things are made and changed from one form into another, are everywhere and always the same, and therefore there must be one and the same way of understanding the nature of all things, that is, by means of the universal laws and rules of nature. Therefore such emotions as hate, anger, envy, etc., considered in themselves, follow from the same necessity and virtue of nature as other particular things: and therefore they acknowledge certain causes through which **they are understood, and have certain properties equally worthy of our knowledge as the properties of any other thing** [emphasis mine, MK], the contemplation alone of which delights us.⁷

Massumi reintroduces Cartesian dramatic and spectacular dualism of being and knowledge⁸ (reinstated in some modern critical circles) to the monist conception, which contrasts with the future fate of the Spinozian tradition. This also applies to the texts of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in which, contrary to their superficial readings, anti-

⁴ Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics proved in geometrical order*, transl. Ignacy Myslicki (Warsaw: Fundacja Nowoczesna Polska, 2009), in. 394, <https://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/spinoza-etyka.html>.

⁵ Brian Massumi, "The autonomy of affect", *Secondary Texts* 6 (2013): 116.

⁶ Massumi, 113.

⁷ Spinoza, v. 391.

⁸ Cf. Kate Stanley, "Affect and emotion: James, Dewey, Tomkins, Damasio, Massumi, Spinoza", in: *The Palgrave Handbook of affect studies and textual criticism*, ed. by Donald R. Wehrs, Thomas Blake (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 103. I thank Zuzanna Sala for pointing out that Stanley also critically highlights this thread.

representationalism does not imply a challenge to the possibility of knowledge. One only needs to turn to the French thinkers' book *What is Philosophy?* to see this: in the book the creative activity of art through affects and percepts is allied with the works of philosophy and science: "That which defines thinking – the three great forms of thinking: art, science and philosophy – is a constant confrontation with chaos, delineating a plane, extending it over chaos"⁹.

Anthony Uhlmann¹⁰ (who quips that for Massumi Spinoza's philosophy is but a 'talisman') provides even more convincing arguments for the incompatibility of affective research with adapted traditions, partly supporting Ruth Leys' argumentation¹¹. Uhlmann is skeptical about the titular autonomy, since all traditions implied by Massumi emphasise the interconnectedness of everything everywhere at once, including the world, mind and language. Even though declaratively the affect theory finds inspiration in a vitalist rhetoric, it tends to echo the skepticism and melancholy of postmodernity, a resentment towards rationalism and melancholy of linguistic separation of the subject from the world. I would only add that perhaps it is because of these inclinations that Massumi, while recalling the title of the Dutch philosopher's book (*Ethics: Proved in geometrical order*), consistently truncates it, rejecting the possibility of anything being proved.

In his *Ethics*, Spinoza seems to have anticipated the Canadian philosopher's skepticism in his critique of the anthropological distinction, which depends on excluding humans from the ontological order of other bodies:

Most who have written on the emotions and on the manner of human life, seem to have dealt not with natural things which follow the universal laws of nature, but with things which are outside the sphere of nature: they seem to have conceived man in nature as a kingdom within a kingdom. For they believe that man disturbs rather than follows the order of nature, and that he has absolute power over his actions, and is not determined by anything else than himself.¹²

Indeed, one cannot help noticing that this new form of the theory of affect – in juxtaposition to Spinoza – not only separates, but also distinguishes humans from other entities, endowing them with this "absolute power". It does so, as it were, *à rebours*, placing a Midas curse on human consciousness – everything it touches loses its mysterious aura of affectivity. Meanwhile, neither in Spinoza nor in the Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptions does one notice this kind of dualism and anthropocentrism.

⁹ Cf. Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, transl. by Paweł Pieniążek (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2000), 218. Also in Spinoza: the obscurity of ideas derived from impressions does not mean that they are useless for building knowledge about the world (quite to the contrary).

¹⁰Cf. Anthony Uhlmann, "Affect, meaning, becoming, and power: Massumi, Spinoza, Deleuze, and Neuroscience", in: *Affect and Literature*, ed. by Alex Houen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

¹¹Cf. Ruth Leys, *The ascent of affect. Genealogy and critique* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

¹²Spinoza, v. 389.

Polish affective research and the dominance of modern literature

The above-indicated dualisms of world and meaning, along with the modernist metaphor of the 'trace of a lost reality', have impacted the manner of presenting affective studies in Polish literary discourse. This tendency is evident in Katarzyna Bojarska's presentation of affective studies:

[...] emotion is an elaborated and modified intensity (affect), a conventionalized and consensual mode of incorporating intensity (affect) into a semantic and semiotic network, a narratively structurable dynamic of action and reaction, function and meaning. In other words, it is intensity (affect) which has been recognised and taken possession of. Feelings, on the other hand, are personal and biographical, they belong with personal history (of experiences), emotions are social, whereas affects are pre-personal.¹³

Is this not an echo of another, implicit intellectual tradition? Bojarska, pointing to the 1990s as a time of the expansion of affective research, mentions in passing the parallel flourishing of trauma research. This reference, inconspicuous in the context of the entire article, rightly highlights the essential, paradoxical structure of affective discourse. Affect, declaratively Spinozian, is theoretically molded in the fashion of psychoanalytic (or more precisely Lacanian) trauma, in which that which is Real conflicts with absorption and cognition¹⁴. In this way, psychoanalysis, deconstructed in the anti-Oedipal figurations of Deleuze and Guattari, returns with its attachment to the subject-related singularity through the window cracked open by Massumi and then opened even wider by the Polish current of affective research.

One can discern a particular research procedure, outlined in the above-cited text-manifestos. The primary object of study is defined at the outset as irretrievably lost. What *can* constitute the object of scrutiny are emotions, carefully separated from the affects/arousals/intensities/movements. The relevant subject of interest must, at Massumi's suggestion, be constantly burdened not so much with hypotheticality (which is the ordinary mode of scientific conduct) as with the requirement of non-representationality. It is to remain "an abstract, formless and nameless potentiality"¹⁵.

Therefore, it is the study of trauma that constitutes a secret tradition for affective research, and the 6th issue of "Teksty Drugie" from 2013 (entitled *Zaafektowani* [*The Affected*]) turns out to have much in common with issue 4 from 2004, the theme of which was *Trauma (nie)przedstawiona* [*Trauma (not)presented*]. Agnieszka Dauksza, in the text *Afektywny Awangardyzm* [*Affective Avant-gardism*] published in 2014, also follows the path of affect as a disturbing, trace aspect of reality based on presentation. She does so as part of her polemics with Ryszard Nycz, to whose concept of "the third movement", the movement of "expressing

¹³Katarzyna Bojarska, "Poczuć myślenie: afektywne procedury historii i krytyki (dziś)" ["To feel the thought: affective procedures of history and criticism (today)"], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2013): 13.

¹⁴Interestingly, also Justyna Tabaszewska, when adapting the discourse on affects, does so through their relation to the category of trauma. Cf. Justyna Tabaszewska, "Trauma jako estetyczne, afektywne doświadczenie: próba analizy "empatycznej wizji" ["Trauma as an aesthetic, affective experience: an attempt at analysing the "empathetic vision"], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2010): 221-234.

¹⁵Bojarska, 13.

the inexpressible” in modern literature, Dauksza refers in the following manner:

The enigmatically determined quality, “stateless factuality”, “what is variable and formless”, “shapeless, small, insignificant and elusive”, “persistent reality” – all these refer to, I think, that dimension of affect which interests me: the irrational, emotional-survival amalgam of the human (in this case – the writer’s) experience.¹⁶

Instead of the corporeal-affective world, of which language remains a part, for Dauksza it is the subject and its separation from the primitive world of intensity and melancholy and the tragic desire to overcome this distance through language that becomes a necessary premise, as well as the right focus of thought. I am not surprised, therefore, that Massumi’s theory has run into a lot of flak from criticism oriented towards positive procedures of knowledge, including the already mentioned “nonsite” milieu.

What would an affective research program, constructed according to the logic of trauma or the trace of reality, mean for literary criticism? In my opinion, it would require an institutional extension of the long duration of a modernist understanding of literature. Applying the category proposed by Krzysztof Uniłowski, I would define affective research as one of the forms of crypto-theology of contemporary criticism, namely a negative theology, shaped by modern literature. Referring to the projects of Michał Paweł Markowski and Ryszard Koziołek, Uniłowski presents the spirit of this crypto-theology in the following manner:

[...] all this is characterized by a certain absence, an empty space, resulting from the absence of the source sense. However, thanks to the literary ritual, this empty space acquires immense gravity, more precisely, it acts as if it had an irresistible power of attraction, directing literary and reading efforts towards an eternal search for meaning.¹⁷

Thus, affective research in the above-proposed version would be fashioned according to the literary logic of modernity (or more precisely, a certain trend within it), and basically adapted to it. Perhaps that is why this research direction is the most developed one, resulting, among other things, in Agnieszka Dauksza’s book entitled *Afektywny modernizm. Nowoczesna literatura polska w interpretacji relacyjnej* [*Affective modernism. Modern Polish literature in a relational interpretation*]¹⁸. In contrast, the popularity of or even fashion for affective research in the humanities, along with the humanities’ irresistible fondness for “turns” (admittedly, Katarzyna Bojarska distances herself from such turns¹⁹) only prove the validity of Uniłowski’s claim that modernism remains an official, institutional ideology, if not of literature, then at least of a vital part of literary studies in Poland.

¹⁶Agnieszka Dauksza, „Afektywny awangardyzm” [„Affective avant-gardism”] *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2014): 45.

¹⁷Krzysztof Uniłowski, „Obrońcy literatury i ich (kryptoteologiczne) fantazje” [„Protectors of literature and their (crypto-theological) fantasies”], in: *Dyskursy, w dyskursach. Szkice o krytyce i literaturze lat ostatnich* [Discourses, in discourses. Essays on criticism and the literature of recent years], ed. by Piotr Śliwiński (Poznań: WBPiCAK, 2019), 25.

¹⁸Cf. Agnieszka Dauksza, *Afektywny modernizm. Nowoczesna literatura polska w interpretacji relacyjnej* [Affective modernism. Contemporary Polish literature in a relational interpretation] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2017).

¹⁹Bojarska, 11.

Proposals which critically account for the radical forms of cognitive skepticism accompanying the discourse on affect appear to be the answer to this melancholic stalemate. An example of a wide-ranging critical project from this trend is *Maszynerie afektywne. Literackie strategie emancypacji w najnowszej polskiej poezji kobiet* [Affective machineries. Literary strategies of emancipation in the latest Polish women's poetry] by Monika Glosowicz²⁰ and Dawid Kujawa's²¹ *Pocałunki ludu. Poezja i krytyka po roku 2000* [Kisses of the People. Poetry and criticism after 2000]. Both projects try to develop a context for critical thought on the basis of a different, non-dialectical, machine-based ontology, originating from the Spinozian-schizoid-analytical trend.²²

Within this tradition affect is understood as a defined (i.e., designed, for example, as part of "poetic machinery") shape of body stimulation²³ (by another body), including emotional, sensory and mental qualities. The meaning of affect is that body's certain life possibility, which can be realized in this way, always defined in relation to a larger whole of which this body is part. The central question of affective criticism would be (following Deleuze and Guattari): "What is the body capable of?", along with the ethical-political dimension of this question: an interest in the mechanisms that regulate this ability, and the creation of alternative figurations/life forms of this body ("charges of a different world, always ready to be fired at the recipient").²⁴

From this perspective, literature would be a place for designing and opening up "lines of outlet" for affective arousals and desires, and from the critical and ethical-political points of view, it would allow for the mapping and invention of figures of individual and collective life which could, under favourable conditions, further circulate in culture²⁵. One could say that already at the point of departure, this kind of critique is driven by a different affect than the one described in the previous section of this article. This affect is no longer melancholy, but what Spinoza calls hope: "the unstable joy, derived from the image of a future or past thing,

²⁰Cf. Monika Glosowicz, *Maszynerie afektywne. Literackie strategie emancypacji w najnowszej polskiej poezji kobiet* [Affective machineries. Literary strategies of emancipation in contemporary Polish poetry] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2019).

²¹Cf. Kujawa, *Pocałunki ludu. Poezja i krytyka po roku 2000*.

²²However, they cannot, of course, be reduced to one another - the latter, for example, postulates a complete abandonment of the "paradigm of representation", which Glosowicz is trying to adapt to her purposes.

²³Spinoza himself defines the body as "[...] a mode which expresses in a certain and determinate manner the essence of God in so far as he is considered as an extended thing" (Spinoza, w. 172), which affords a broad application of this category to, generally speaking, all beings described as material configurations. In his discussion of Spinoza's thought, Deleuze points to two dimensions of that description: the capability to arouse and "speed" (cf. Gilles Deleuze, Spinoza. Filozofia praktyczna [Spinoza. A practical philosophy], transl. by Jędrzej Brzeziński [Warszawa: PWN, 2014], 198; Miłosz Markiewicz, „Pomiędzy dziedzictwem Spinozy a wyzwaniem nowego materializmu. Tropy” [“Between Spinoza's heritage and the challenges of the new materialism. Traces”], *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, 20.09.2017, <https://www.praktykateoretyczna.pl/artykuly/miosz-markiewicz-pomiedzy-dziedzictwem-spinozy-a-wyzwaniami-nowego-materializmu-tropy/>). Contemporary post-humanist conceptions make references to this broad understanding of corporeality. For the purposes of the present article I will be applying Spinoza's definition only to human bodies.

²⁴Kujawa, *Pocałunki ludu. Poezja i krytyka po roku 2000*, chapt. „Płacisz, nie płacisz? Adam Kaczanowski” [„Are you paying or not? Adam Kaczanowski”] [e-book].

²⁵I develop this notion of ethics-politics more broadly in the book: Michał Koza, *Asceza, inność, nomadyzm. O dyskursach etycznych literatury polskiej po 1989 roku* [Asceticism, otherness, nomadism. On ethical discourses in Polish literature after 1989] (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2021).

whose outcome we are doubtful of"²⁶. Given the left-wing self-identification of this current's criticism, this hope must be revolutionary in nature. The affective difference is evident in the rhetorical and stylistic layers: the above-mentioned Kujawa's book or Skurtys' texts, which follow in the footsteps of the Spinozian affect, readily implement vitalistic-ecstatic metaphors. This is evidenced in Kujawa's "kisses of the people", which refer to Tomaž Šalamun or in Skurtys' "shot putters of the self".

Two bodies of Janusz Sławiński

In my addressing the question "What is the body capable of?", I would like to abandon philosophical discourse and turn to two instances in which literary criticism meets affect in a non-obvious way: now in line with the melancholic spirit of modernism described earlier, now in defiance of it – mapping and projecting further possibilities of the body and thus referring to a different, vitalist (or perhaps even "gothic"²⁷) model of literature.

The first text I would like to discuss is a 1979 essay by Janusz Sławiński, *Za co powinniśmy kochać Jana Błońskiego?* [*What should we love Jan Błoński for?*]. The second text is *Ciało Profesora Sławińskiego* [*Professor Sławiński's body*] by Stefan Szymutka. In both cases, the critical subject unfolds before the reader an affective image of their protagonist, listing various ways in which the body-critic/critic can be stimulated. However, the former is clearly dominated by an affect shaped according to a melancholic-traumatic logic, emphasising the inexplicability of Błoński's phenomenon and its irretrievable loss at the point of departure. The latter, on the other hand, is dominated by affective criticism as a mapping of its object, which emphasises the ability of the body (here, the body of Janusz Sławiński) to accomplish successive potentialities.

Let us consider relevant examples. The essay *Za co powinniśmy kochać Jana Błońskiego?* begins with the words:

My first impression after reading *Odmarsz* [*The deployment*]: this book is a message from another world. Through the turmoil and noise of that which tires, wears and irritates as hopelessly familiar and commonplace, a voice quite unlike the voices here has broken, clearly sent **from somewhere else**. I was **moved** by this first impression because it was contradicted by the knowledge I had of the texts I had read. After all, they were written right next door, amidst the circumstances and realities that make up everyday literary life we experience together. I knew some of them very well, as they were first printed in the magazine that the author and I edit. **I knew what orders they grew out of, what inspired them, whom they queried and to whom they responded**. And

²⁶Spinoza, v. 207.

²⁷The notion of Gothicity has recently been applied to Julek Rosiński's poetry by Dawid Kujawa, who metaphorically described it as a line "[...] which does not move from one point to another, but always sends us further away, towards the possible" (Dawid Kujawa, "Dzieci skitrane na tyłach katedry" O technice Julka Rosińskiego na podstawie "Streszczenia pieśni") [Children hidden at the back of the cathedral". On Julek Rosiński's technique, on the basis of "Streszczenia Pieśni" ["Summaries of Songs"]", Stoner Polski, 2022, <https://stonerpolski.pl/faza-biezaca-dzieci-skitrane-na-tylach-katedry-o-technice-julka-rosińskiego-na-podstawie-streszczenia-piesni/>.)

yet, in their book-like composition, it seemed to me they shifted into **another reality**, as it were – they turned out to be **out of this world** [emphases mine – MK].²⁸

In the context of my considerations, I will emphasise first of all that the entire essay is based on the presentation of Błoński as a ‘body’ (I refer to it as such, in light of the Spinozian tradition) perceived through the prism of a particular arousal, which Sławiński finds hard to grasp, an intensity mismatched to the present and in this sense – something negative (this is expressed, for example, in the rhetorical use of the phrase ‘not of this world’). Błoński as a body or Błoński’s personalism as affect is above all a vestige of a departing criticism, which is “in its conception a self-proclaimed opinion that needs no endorsements, concessions or institutional safeguards. It is precisely this kind of criticism that we have managed to grow quite weary of”²⁹. Finally, the author defines the position of this affect in relation to other bodies:

What would there be for Irzykowski to do now? Today critics have to act “professionally”. They are experts by appointment and should not for a moment forget that they represent in their judgements the body to which they owe the appointment: the university, the institute, the editorial board, the television, the committee for important matters, the key problem, the school system.³⁰

At least two things are apparent here: Sławiński relates the phenomenon of Błoński mainly to the past (more precisely: to the activity of Karol Irzykowski). Secondly, Błoński appears to be a critic from nowhere, from outside history (or rather: from a history that has already been irretrievably lost) and a system of institutions – ‘bodies’ which are witness to the struggle of the here-and-now-existing criticism. Sławiński does note that the purpose of an institutionally contextualized criticism has not been invalidated. Ultimately, however, his text is dominated by a melancholic tracing of the inexplicable, incomprehensible passing of the affect experienced in Błoński, after which only absence will remain. Indeed, the essay closes with a nostalgic phrase: “We should love Błoński for the fact that he could be the Irzykowski of our days...”³¹, and the figure of the true critic remains an inexplicable mystery, impossible to be reproduced or realised by anyone else. Błoński’s being as affect occurs, as it were, outside history.

What is literary criticism, guided by this kind of melancholy, shying away from? In this case – from a more careful recognition of personalism as a type of practicing criticism and, in the long term, from a better understanding of the conditions and possibilities of criticism, which adopted many individualistic practices of the author of *Romans z tekstem* [An affair with the text] in the post-1989 period. Or perhaps, from co-creating images of new figures of literary life which would be less susceptible to market practices; figures who would include themselves into phenomena foreshadowed by Błoński’s personality and individuality. Thus, Sławiński

²⁸Janusz Sławiński, „Za co powinniśmy kochać Jana Błońskiego?” [„What should we love Jan Błoński for?”], *Teksty* 4 (1979): 1.

²⁹Sławiński, 3.

³⁰Sławiński.

³¹Sławiński, 9.

makes no attempt to answer the question of what a critic's body of work is capable of, opting instead for a dramatic tale of its impotence. Thus understood 'traumatic affect' reveals its conservative face.

The second case is *Ciało profesora Sławińskiego* by Stefan Szymutka³². This text too, this time literally, features a body – one which is alive and intense. Characteristically, this time the rhetorical axis of the text is a series of lists 'parameterising' the activity, character, life and, ultimately, the body of the text's protagonist. Here the story is governed by the present tense, and its rhythm is dictated by subsequently listed potentials of the described body, arranged in a series of affects and perceptions. Szymutko uses the logic of "or..."³³, demonstrating for us an impressive and sometimes puzzling range of terms and perceived potentialities, like in what I call the "tailor series":

[...] Sławiński is almost Carlyle's *sartor resartus*, a tailor of the cosmos, a philosopher of clothing who cuts, tries on and fastens to hide the nothingness of the universe: the skin, the body is also a disguise (the body of an athlete is a text) (T, p. 46), or material for a new piece of clothing: one can combine a *borsalino* with a pair of *kierpce* and the legs of a pinscher with the head of a lion (T, pp. 31-32). Forms of corporeality appear only as metaphors: the corpus of texts (P, p. 132) or the self-impregnation of poetry (T, p. 132)³⁴

This approach to the body and affect differs from the previous one. Instead of a trace of past reality, we are given a renewable figuration, an experiment, a linguistic creation related to the body and the arrangement of bodies (academic and otherwise)³⁵. Sławiński appears as a multiplicity among multiplicities, but at the same time it is a multiplicity that can be defined, named, and one whose meaning can be discovered. Moreover, in Szymutko's version of Sławiński the latter is a critic who actually exists, he is saturated with history from which he grows. In this sense, Szymutko is much closer to Spinozian and Deleuzo-Guattarian materialist proliferation than to nostalgia.

I hope that by way of introducing the reader to both traditions, I have managed to show that affective research turns out to be much more complex (or even disjointed) than one would like to admit. This is in spite of the fact that it draws upon a wide range of traditions: anthropological, psychoanalytic, gender, memory, post-humanist, and so on. The dominant form of discourse on affect (explored, among others, in the above-mentioned issues of "Teksty Drugie"), which has been adopted and shaped in Polish literary studies, no matter how promising the traditions it declares might have been, seems to be a peculiar, melancholic-traumatic variant of the

³²More on this and other texts by Szymutka can be found in Łukasz Żurek, *Filologia lokalna - lokalność filologa. Stefan Szymutka [Local philology - the locality of a philologist. Stefan Szymutka]* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2022).

³³On its schizoanalytic meaning cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. by Tomasz Kaszubski, vol. I (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2017), 88-98.

³⁴Stefan Szymutko, „Ciało profesora Sławińskiego” [„Professor Sławiński's body”], n.d., 50.

³⁵In fact, one can recognise the distinctive style of *Anti-Oedipus* in these phrases, but I would not like to go too far in these comparisons.

poetics of experience³⁶. It is all the more problematic in application, for example within the framework of literary criticism, because it makes specific claims on the creative and critical subject, imposing a peculiar model of art and cognition through literature that is specific to a certain strand of modernism.

I also think that there are traditions that are more inspiring – above all those that go beyond the non-translatability of personal experience, and preserve the connections between affect and the world and affect and knowledge. Taking up these traditions does not mean postulating another turn in the humanities. Yet, our procedures of knowledge would benefit from the question “What is the body capable of?”, which is asked in an inventive, ethical-political context and stimulating a critical mapping of literary texts.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

³⁶Cf. Ryszard Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria - nowoczesność - literatura* [Poetics of experience. Theory - modernity - literature] (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2012).

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KEYWORDS

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SCHIZOANALYSIS

ABSTRACT:

The article deals with affective criticism present in Polish literary studies and the traditions to which this project refers. It shows the discrepancies between the characteristics of this current and the ways in which the issue of affect is operationalized in philosophical traditions, which are embedded into a new context and identified with the discourse on trauma. The article illustrates the difference between the two models of affect in action – through interpretations of texts by Janusz Sławiński and Stefan Szymutka. The comparison makes it possible to grasp the different critical approaches to affect – as a (re)construction of traces of the unrepresentable and as creating maps of social bodies.

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literary theory

Polish literature

affective criticism

affective research

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