On the Margins of Experience: Rubbish in the Works of Miron Białoszewski and Tadeusz Różewicz

by

Lukasz Sicinski

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Lukasz Sicinski 2017
On the Margins of Experience: Rubbish in the Works of Miron Białoszewski and Tadeusz Różewicz

Lukasz Sicinski

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto

2017

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the view of human cognition expressed in the works of Miron Białoszewski and Tadeusz Różewicz. Focusing on the philosophical dimension of these works, I argue that they express two epistemological models of the relationship between human cognitive practices and an objective reality. This relationship is discussed in my dissertation in terms of the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual, and it is developed in the texts of the two authors in the context of but also as a response to a constructivist understanding of human cognition.

I argue that by linking the conceptual and the extra-conceptual, the models offered by Białoszewski and Różewicz seek to escape the confines of epistemological constructivism. The key element in these attempts is the notion of rubbish. Understood as a cognitive category and used as a metaphor for all unassimilable elements that disrupt the pattern-making tendencies of human cognition, rubbish, I argue, simultaneously subverts and maintains the stability of the conceptual order into which it does not fit. This double nature of rubbish links the conceptual and the extra-conceptual in the epistemological models presented in Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s texts.
My study demonstrates that although Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s models exemplify contemporary antirealist tendencies in philosophy, the contributions of these two authors to the philosophical debate concerning the limits of human cognition do not consist solely in rejecting a traditionally understood realism. Rather, they offer reassessments of the antirealist framework and propose a uniquely non-essentialist understanding of the world.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Tamara Trojanowska, for her encouragement, support, and guidance throughout my graduate studies at the University of Toronto. It has been a true privilege to be her student, and I consider myself lucky to have had the chance to work under her supervision. I am also very grateful to Professors Joanna Niżyńska and Taras Koznarsky, who, as members of my thesis committee, have always found time to read my work and provided me with insightful feedback and assistance in the process of writing this dissertation. My gratitude also extends to Professor Bożena Shallcross for her evaluation of my thesis as External Appraiser, and to Joseph Schallert for his careful reading of my work and his valuable suggestions. Lastly, I want to thank my wife, Asia, without whose support I would have never finished this project.
Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION..........................................................................................................................1
Language and Reality.....................................................................................................................7
Rubbish.......................................................................................................................................20

CHAPTER 1 The Conceptual and the World (Miron Białoszewski) ........................................30
Introduction ................................................................................................................................30
A Point of Departure ..................................................................................................................35
Ontological Commitment .........................................................................................................36
Between the Conceptual and the Empirical .............................................................................39
Epistemic Grounds ....................................................................................................................48
Perceptual “Intrigues” ..............................................................................................................50
Rubbish ...................................................................................................................................51
Strategies ................................................................................................................................54
Towards the Extra-Conceptual .................................................................................................61
Conclusions ...............................................................................................................................64
A Strategy from Within .............................................................................................................66
The “Non-Existent Point” .......................................................................................................71
Artificial Authenticity ..............................................................................................................77

CHAPTER 2 The Conceptual and the Body (Tadeusz Różewicz) ........................................87
Introduction ................................................................................................................................87
Diagnosis ....................................................................................................................................92
The Silence of Human Meat ...................................................................................................92
A Broken Whole .........................................................................................................................103
The Body and the Conceptual .................................................................................................109
Depths of Existential Shallowness .......................................................................................110
The Brooding Body ..................................................................................................................119
Conclusions ...............................................................................................................................131
Representation .........................................................................................................................134
Contingency .............................................................................................................................136

CONCLUSIONS ........................................................................................................................141
The Two Models .......................................................................................................................141
Outcomes ..................................................................................................................................147
Future Research .......................................................................................................................154
Works Cited ...............................................................................................................................159
INTRODUCTION

Each man bears in his mind a city made only of differences, a city without figures and without form, and the individual cities fill it up.

Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

The array of imaginary cities described in Italo Calvino’s novel includes two seemingly different cities named Aglaura and Leonia. The city of Aglaura is a construct of language: although nothing said about Aglaura is true, there is little one can say about this city beyond what its own residents have always repeated. As Calvino’s character Marco Polo describes it, “everything previously said of Aglaura imprisons your words and obliges you to repeat rather than say.”1 Made up of repeated stories that create its forceful image, the city of which Aglaurians speak is autonomous – it “grows only with the name Aglaura,”2 but at the same time “has much of what is needed to exist.”3 Because of the lack of words to describe the city as it is in itself, the real Aglaura “exists less” and is no longer noticed by Aglaurians who simply choose to live in its discursively created counterpart.

As opposed to Aglaura, which is created by the repetition of stories preserving its bygone days, the city of Leonia is shaped by repeated attempts to reject the past. Obsessed with novelty, Leonia completely renews itself every day: every morning, its inhabitants wake up in a brand-new world, and while they enjoy their new, pristine possessions, the remains of yesterday’s Leonia wait on the sidewalks for the garbage truck. Hygienically removed by street cleaners, this

---

2 Calvino, p. 68.
3 Calvino, p. 67.
unwanted refuse is piled up outside the city in ever growing heaps. As Calvino’s Marco Polo observes, Leonia is captivated by the “joy of expelling, discarding, cleansing itself of a recurrent impurity.”⁴ Seized by their passion for cleanliness and novelty, the people of Leonia do not concern themselves with where the rubbish is dumped: once things have been cast off and placed outside the city, no one wants to think about them any further.

In this sense, Leonia resembles Aglaura. According to Zygmunt Bauman, who discusses the similarities between these two cities in his Wasted Lives, “following the Aglaurians’ example, Leonians live […] in a Leonia which ‘grows only with the name Leonia’, blissfully unaware of that other Leonia which grows on the ground.”⁵ Like the real city of Aglaura, the rubbish surrounding Leonia “exists less;” expelled outside the walls of the city that “has much of what is needed to exist,” it becomes unsubstantial and invisible.

The example of Calvino’s two cities illustrates the idea that human inquiry into the world is inseparable from a cleansing impulse that involves classifying and ordering the environment to make the world conform to a pre-established idea. This ordering, suggests Calvino’s Marco Polo, is never innocent: to realize a vision of order is to create what the world is known as. In this sense, the stories of Aglaura and Leonia show that the ontology of the human world does not “grow on the ground,” and what is taken to be real is a construct. To remain stable and functional, the order of things thus created must be separated from all the “rubbish” that does not fit into what is accepted as reality. Because the hygiene of world making requires that the streets of Aglaura and Leonia be cleansed of all impurity, such rubbish must be expelled outside their conceptual walls – that is, it must be relegated into the realm of the incomprehensible.

---

⁴ Calvino, p. 114.
Such rubbish is the focus of this dissertation. In the most general sense, therefore, rubbish is understood here as something discarded or repudiated because it is worthless or undesirable. In this sense, rubbish stands for what does not belong and, as such, it always functions within the framework of inclusion and exclusion: the designation of an object as rubbish results from differentiation between things that belong and those that do not. In my dissertation, I assume this basic understanding of rubbish and use this category in the context of human cognition. In this specific context, rubbish is still situated within the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and still results from differentiation between the desirable and the unwanted; the rejection of what does not belong, however, is understood here in terms of cognitive practices. Thus, the term “rubbish” will be used here as a conceptual metaphor for all unassimilable elements that disrupt the pattern-making tendencies of human cognition. The main idea I explore is that human cognition always generates rubbish in that the organizing impulse that governs human cognition unifies experience mainly through processes of exclusion. As a discordant element, rubbish is rejected and pushed outside the domain of what the world is known as, and in this sense it is not a part of the ontology of the human world; at the same time, however, rubbish is an important element of cognitive operations in that its rejection reaffirms the stability of what the world is known as and clarifies the categories according to which the ontology of the human world is organized.

This dissertation uses the category of rubbish to investigate the writings of Miron Białoszewski (1922-1983) and Tadeusz Różewicz (1921-2014). My goal is to analyze the works of these two authors in order to unravel a set of ideas that underlie their understanding of the relation between language (the domain of the conceptual) and what is, or may be, located “outside” of it (the domain of the extra-conceptual). Using this approach, I reconstruct two epistemological models that arise from the explorations of rubbish in these works. My
dissertation demonstrates that these models aim to subvert the dualism between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual, and seek out the possibility of reaching beyond discursively determined boundaries of the human world. Put differently, they seek to break through the conceptual walls of the Aglaurus and Leonias of human cognition.

In the case of Białoszewski’s model, an attempt is made to link the conceptual and extra-conceptual reality. This model is based on the strategy of “world-subverting,” which is expressed in Białoszewski’s works through the perceptual experiments of his narrator. As I will show, the goal of his strategy is to undermine the basic laws of perception and deconstruct the unity of perceived reality. Such world-subverting activity, I will argue, destabilizes the framework of experience and creates the possibility of reaching beyond the conceptually determined boundaries of what the world is known as.

In the case of Różewicz, the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual is developed in terms of the relation between the conceptual and the bodily. This model differs from the one expressed in Białoszewski’s works in that it does not seek to undermine the unity of experience – human experience, Różewicz argues, is chaotic and does not form a meaningful whole – but rather stems from an attempt to anchor conceptual ordering in a stable point of reference. Described in terms of the bodily centered routines and concerns of daily life, this model views the extra-conceptual space of the bodily as an active force that grounds and motivates human sense-making activities and thus allows for the conceptual to acquire stable meanings.

The common key to these endeavours is the notion of rubbish, which destabilizes the dualistic framework of the language-reality distinction and opens up the possibility of linking the realms of the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. As such, I will argue, rubbish in the works of
Białoszewski and Różewicz allows for the development of an epistemological framework that avoids the traps of naïve essentialism on one hand and radical constructivism on the other. As expressed in these works, this framework becomes neither a dualistic metaphysical theory nor a reductionist “textualism” but rather presents a unique and original form of a non-essentialist understanding of the world.

Thus, as much as it deals with rubbish, this dissertation deals with the question of human cognition. In this sense, the works of Różewicz and Białoszewski are read here against the background of a philosophical debate concerning the validity of human inquiry into the world. Thus contextualized, my analysis is based on an approach that might be described as focused on “philosophy in literature.” According to Peter Lamarque, from whom I borrow this term, this approach to literature consists in “mining individual novels and plays for their philosophical insights.” This kind of analysis can be understood as both eliciting the philosophical ideas that are inherent in a literary work and discussing their soundness and relevance to a particular philosophical debate. An example of such an approach, the interpretative strategy I assume in my dissertation not only aims to identify and characterize the philosophical ideas present in the works of Białoszewski and Różewicz, but also seeks to consider their epistemological consequences and discuss them in terms of their contributions to a philosophical debate on the epistemic validity of human cognitive practices. In the remainder of this introduction, I define the key categories of this debate and specify issues at stake.

---

7 This statement requires some explanation. First of all, I am not trying to argue in my dissertation that Białoszewski and Różewicz have developed a unified and coherent philosophical system. Rather, my approach makes the relatively modest assumption that, as Gerald Graff puts it, “there seems no getting away from the fact that literature must have an ideology – even if this ideology is one that calls all ideologies into question.” (Gerald Graff, *Literature against Itself* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 11.) This “ideology,” as I understand it here, does not have to be coherent, and neither does it have to be explicit. It does, however, make literature a means of understanding the world. In this sense, my approach towards Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s texts results from the conviction that literature has a cognitive value, or to explain it differently, that every literary work is based on or
The first section of this introduction focuses on the nature of human conceptualizations of the world. Drawing on the understanding of human cognition assumed by Mary Douglas in her book *Purity and Danger*, I discuss human cognitive practices in terms of “building” – that is, not as an activity of representing the world, but as an activity of creating it – and I view them in the epistemological context of the relation between the conceptual framework of the human mind and an extra-conceptual reality. To prepare the ground for my analysis of Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s texts, my introduction defines this epistemological context by proposing a general typology of models of human cognition, with a special focus on what I characterize as a model of linguistic determinism. A combination of various degrees of constructivism and linguistic pluralism, as well as a typical manifestation of tendencies in contemporary philosophy which followed the “linguistic turn,” this model of linguistic determinism is based on the idea that human conceptualizations of the world are intrinsically connected with language, or to put it differently, that implicit categories and concepts embedded in our language influence our cognitive practices and determine the way we conceive of reality. Such an understanding of human cognition stresses the inability of human cognition to transcend its conceptual boundaries and to capture reality as it is in itself; I argue, however, that this does not necessarily mean that the notion of independent, extra-conceptual reality makes no sense and should thus be abandoned.

The second part of this theoretical introduction focuses on the category of rubbish. In this second part, I contextualize the notion of rubbish within the framework of linguistic determinism offers a set of ideas that constitute a particular understanding of how things are. To be sure, I do not claim here that there is no difference between literary and philosophical discourse. What I assume is that, whatever this difference may boil down to, it should not be considered within a normative framework that regards one discourse as more truthful, more primary, or more effective than the other. Lastly, like any interpretation or categorization, my approach is of a strategic character. Because I am interested here in rubbish as a cognitive category, my analysis of Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s works operates within a specific philosophical framework; quite naturally, therefore, less attention is paid to the aesthetic or socio-historical dimensions of the texts I analyze.
and discuss the status of this category in relation to both the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. The crux of my argument rests upon a definition of rubbish as a rejected by-product of human cognition. On one hand, I argue that rubbish is a product of human cognition in the sense that it can only exist in relation to the conceptual scheme which rejects it; on the other hand, rubbish is independent of human cognition in that it escapes its ordering logic, and in this sense it bears the trace of the extra-conceptual. Drawing on the notion of supplementarity proposed by Jacques Derrida, I elaborate on this understanding of rubbish, and argue that although it cannot be firmly fixed within the dualistic framework of the language-reality distinction, the undecided status of rubbish can be explored to bridge the gap between the conceptual and extra-conceptual. In this context, rubbish functions beyond the logic of representation – it neither represents the extra-linguistic nor makes the linguistic true – but it nevertheless opens up the possibility of reaching beyond conceptually-determined boundaries of what the world is known as.

**LANGUAGE AND REALITY**

The epistemological issues in question as well as the general principles that furnish the theoretical framework of this dissertation can be derived from the following statement made by Mary Douglas in her influential book *Purity and Danger*:

It is generally agreed that all our impressions are schematically determined from the start. As perceivers, we select from all the stimuli falling on our senses only those which interest us, and our interests are governed by a pattern-making tendency, sometimes called *schema* […] In a chaos of shifting impressions, each of us constructs a stable world in which objects have recognisable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence. In perceiving we are building, taking some cues and rejecting others. The most acceptable
cues are those which fit most easily into the pattern that is being built up. […] Discordant ones tend to be rejected.8

The model of human cognition expressed in this fragment rests on two main ideas. According to the first, human cognition is not based on a passive reception from without of ready-made material but consists in “building” – that is, it is not an activity of representing the world but an activity of “creating” it. According to the second idea, during such world-creating operations human cognition is guided by a pattern-making tendency that determines the shape of what is considered real. This model, therefore, assumes that there are certain rules which the human mind follows to make sense of the world, or put another way, there exists a kind of cognitive “blueprint” that influences the ways in which we construe what the world is known as.

The pattern-making tendency mentioned in Douglas’ scenario equates to what in philosophical terminology is often called a conceptual scheme. Needless to say, the notion of a conceptual scheme can be defined in many ways, depending on the philosophical doctrine on which it is based.9 In what follows, in order to avoid both the risk of assuming a one-sided frame of reference (a particular theory) and the necessity of introducing a number of irrelevant details as well as a variety of idioms (to present more than one particular theory), I define the idea of a conceptual scheme typologically

As an epistemological issue, the notion of a conceptual scheme encompasses two main areas of inquiry: the problem of what it consists of and the problem of its relation to external reality. The first area of inquiry centers on the structure of the scheme and the nature of its primary elements; the second revolves around the question of the scheme’s autonomy.

9 It should be mentioned that Douglas’ understanding of what I call here a conceptual scheme is based on the schema theory proposed by the psychologist Frederic Bartlett in his book *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1932).
A wide spectrum of philosophical theories regarding the first issue can be described on an axis with mind-based absolutism at one end and linguistic pluralism at the other. Following Michael Lynch, who claims that “it is only a slight exaggeration to say that the history of conceptual schemes begins with Kant and ends with Quine,” I will label these two extremes as the Kantian model and the Quinean model.\(^{10}\)

The Kantian\(^{11}\) absolutist model rests upon the idea that there is only one possible conceptual scheme, and that its essential components are universal – that is, that they are “hard-wired” into the nature of the human mind. As Kant famously put it,

> What may be the case with objects in themselves […] remains entirely unknown to us. We are acquainted with nothing except our way of perceiving them, which is peculiar to us, and which therefore does not necessarily pertain to every being, though to be sure it pertains to every human being.\(^ {12}\)

In the case of Kant’s transcendental psychology, the world-creating operations of the human mind function within the framework of the two cognitive faculties called “sensibility” and “understanding.” The former structures experience by providing the a priori forms of space and time (forms of intuition), and the latter applies a priori concepts called “categories,” which include such concepts as unity, negation, causality, and possibility.\(^{13}\) According to Kant, the forms of intuition and the categories of understanding form a “grid” through which experience is made intelligible. As such, Kant argues, they do not merely organize experience but first and foremost make it possible; their application is the *conditio sine qua non* of all possible

---


\(^{11}\) The adjectives “Kantian” and “Quinean” are used here to indicate that the two models are not presentations of Kant’s and Quine’s ideas but rather general extrapolations from them. As such, they should be treated as describing certain tendencies rather than specific theories. See Lynch, p. 408.


\(^{13}\) For the full list of categories, see Kant, A80/B106.
experience. Thus, as Kant puts it, “the understanding is [...] not merely a faculty for making rules through the comparison of the appearances; it is itself the legislation for nature, i.e., without understanding there would not be any nature at all.” In this view, the spatiotemporal world (what the world is known as) is nothing more than a construct generated by the framework of the human mind.

The Quinean model of a conceptual scheme stands in opposition to the mind-based absolutism of the Kantian model. First of all, it no longer assumes that a conceptual scheme consists of a priori concepts; instead, it proposes viewing it as a network of sentences. It is noteworthy that, in this, the shift from the Kantian to the Quinean model is symptomatic of one of the important changes that occurred in 20th century philosophy. According to Lynch,

> With the advent in philosophy of the so-called ‘linguistic turn’, the broadly Kantian model of conceptual schemes was gradually abandoned even as the notion of a conceptual scheme itself became more familiar. Just one of many reasons for this change was surely the popularity of the idea that thought was intrinsically connected with, perhaps even identical to, language.

---

14 Kant, A126.
15 Lynch, p. 411. Regarding the linguistic turn, see Richard Rorty, ed., *The Linguistic Turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). It should be noted that although this anthology has come to be seen as a classic representation of the turn, it is limited to the so-called analytic tradition in philosophy. More ecumenical accounts of the linguistic turn can be found in Manfred Frank, *What is Neostructuralism?*, trans. Sabine Wilke and Richard Gray (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 215-228 and Michael Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Losonsky’s analysis is important not only because he goes beyond the confines of analytic philosophy, but also because he argues that there were in fact several linguistic turns in 20th-century philosophy. Because a detailed account of the linguistic turn would be redundant for my purposes, I will delve neither into the question of when and where exactly it took place nor into different forms it assumed. In this context, it seems sufficient to assume a general definition of the linguistic turn as a tendency to regard language as central to philosophy, or as Rorty defines it, to view philosophical problems as problems of language. This tendency, born at the beginning of the 20th century out of various philosophical traditions, led to the gradual shift from the analysis of thought to the analysis of language and resulted in the replacement of the idea of the priority of concepts with the idea of the priority of signs. In this way, of course, the linguistic turn marked an important paradigm shift that, among many other consequences, resulted in a considerable reformulation of the language-reality relation. Contrary to many hopes it gave rise to, however, the turn did not solve (or dissolve) the issues that had haunted previous generations of philosophers. As Ian Hacking aptly put it in his 1975 book, “At any rate, I have one answer to the question of why language matters to philosophy now. *It matters for the reason that ideas mattered in seventeenth-century philosophy*, because ideas then, and sentences
The identification of thought with language led to the identification of schemes with languages. Consequently, Lynch argues, there “came a corresponding shift from concepts […] to sentences as the prime elements of the scheme.”

The Quinean model of a conceptual scheme can be seen as a concretization of these general tendencies. The main idea upon which this model is built is expressed by Quine in the following way:

A triad – conceptual scheme, language, and world – is not what I envisage. I think rather […] in terms of language and the world. I scout the tertium quid as a myth of a museum of labeled ideas. Where I have spoken of a conceptual scheme I could have spoken of a language.

Thus, according to the Quinean model, a conceptual scheme is a “language” – that is, a set of propositions. In the case of Quine’s theory, the main characteristics of these propositions are that they are believed to be true, and that they form a network that stands in relation to the world as a whole. What follows from this is a holistic view of a conceptual scheme as a “web of belief.” According to Quine, the structure of this web can be described in terms of a center and peripheries: deep-seated beliefs are located in the center of the web; beliefs that are more easily revisable in the light of experience are located on the periphery. In this way, the structure of a conceptual scheme does not rest on a fixed foundation. Because a conceptual scheme faces the “tribunal of experience” as a whole, any statement that belongs to it is revisable. As Quine puts it, “any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. […] Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to

now, serve as the interface between the knowing subject and what is known.” (Ian Hacking, Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy? (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 187.)

16 Lynch, p. 411.
Thus, the scheme is understood here as a coherent whole. This whole responds to external reality; at the same time, it no longer rests upon the fixed bedrock of pure concepts. One of the consequences of such a view is that there can be more than one scheme.

As mentioned, the Kantian and the Quinean models provide the defining boundaries for understanding the notion of a conceptual scheme in regard to the question of what it consists of. Thus, our initial scenario – that is, Mary Douglas’ statement regarding the pattern-making tendency that governs human cognition – can now be understood heuristically in terms of two extremes: a priori categorical concepts, on one hand, and a set of propositions provisionally accepted as true on the other. On a more general level, these two extremes can be respectively defined as absolutism (there is one and only one conceptual scheme possible) and pluralism (there can be more than one conceptual scheme).

The second issue concerning the notion of a conceptual scheme – the question of its relation to external reality – has already been touched upon in my account of the Kantian and Quinean models. More specifically, in my discussion of these two models, I have mentioned two metaphors: the Quinean metaphor of facing the tribunal of experience and the Kantian metaphor of the legislation for nature. Generally speaking, these opposing metaphors can be used to describe two main tendencies: one towards empiricism and the other towards constructivism. Thus, if we look at a conceptual scheme in terms of its relation to external reality, the empiricist approach will tend to ascribe the crucial role to experience; conversely, the constructivist approach will emphasize the autonomy of the scheme.19

---


19 Certainly, the label “empiricism” is not used here to suggest that the role of a cognitive scheme can be reduced to mere receptivity. The distinction proposed here is not between receiving and building, but concerns the issue of what validates the results of human cognition.
The extrapolations from these two approaches, which can be more simply labelled as radical empiricism and radical constructivism, represent two extremes on the continuum describing the relation of conceptual schemes to external reality. If this continuum is placed alongside the continuum describing the components of a conceptual scheme, four general types of scheme can be distinguished. To take into account the fact that at the level of concrete philosophical theories, any of these types may be expressed in a variety of ways, I will present this typology in the form of a coordinate system with the continuum between mind-based absolutism and linguistic pluralism as a horizontal axis, and the continuum between radical empiricism and radical constructivism as a vertical one:

The second and fourth quadrants of this coordinate system delineate the conceptual boundaries of what I have called the Kantian and the Quinean models. The third quadrant – a combination of various degrees of empiricism and mind-based absolutism – describes a model that encompasses both the notion that there is one and only one possible conceptual scheme and the idea that the
scheme’s “world-creating” operations are validated by external reality. Significantly, to be operational, this model has to assume a degree of correspondence or harmony between the scheme and reality. In other words, in this case, the tribunal of external reality and the legislating operations of the hard-wired mind must be in sync.

The first quadrant of the coordinate system defines the contours of the model underlying the theoretical framework of this dissertation. Delineated by constructivism and linguistic pluralism, this model is based on the idea that the components of the scheme are linguistic, and that the scheme possesses a high degree of autonomy in its relation to reality. Put differently, in this case conceptual schemes are identified with languages, and their functioning is understood not in terms of responding to reality, but to use the Kantian metaphor again, in terms of legislating it.

Understood in this way, the conceptual framework for the notion of the scheme can be restated in terms of the language-reality relation. While the same, of course, applies to the fourth quadrant, in the case of the first quadrant the relation between language and reality will be described in constructivist terms. To be more specific, let us return to our initial scenario proposed by Mary Douglas. If we apply to it the conceptual framework of the first quadrant, Douglas’ general scenario might be expressed in the following way:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. […] We are thus introduced to a new principle of
relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar.\textsuperscript{20}

Proposed by Benjamin Lee Whorf and known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the model of human cognition expressed above can serve as an example of both linguistic pluralism and constructivism. In this view, language not only comes to be a driving force behind the world-creating operations of the human mind, it also becomes independent of “physical evidence.” In this way, the Whorfian model rejects the idea of the authority of unmediated reality and proposes instead viewing the results of human cognition as always already influenced by language.

Importantly, in the case of Whorf’s theory, the organizing force of language lies in its structures; that is, according to Whorf, it is the internal logic of a given language, or simply its grammar, that encapsulates a particular worldview. The “grammatical background” of our language, therefore, does not merely include the rules for constructing sentences but also governs “the way we dissect nature and break up the flux of experience into objects and entities.”\textsuperscript{21} Because for the most part we are unaware of this background, we tend to think of language as an instrument that reflects an independently organized reality, and do not see that language categories are never “innocent” – that is, that the world-order we perceive is simply a product of our language.

The model of the language-reality relation exemplified by Whorf’s theory is built upon three general theses. According to the first thesis, languages may considerably differ not only in their vocabulary but also in their grammar, which means that the implicit classifications inherent in one language may be different from or even incommensurable with the classification systems of the other language. Linguistic pluralism of this kind \textit{ipso facto} overlaps with relativism, which

\textsuperscript{21} Whorf, p. 239.
in this case can be expressed as the thesis that our worldviews are relative to the languages we use, or to put it differently, that people who use different languages live in different worlds. At the core of this view, however, is a stronger thesis, which claims that language determines the way we conceive of reality. In this case, linguistic determinism means that language limits the scope of what is thinkable and fixes the boundaries of our worldview. Because human cognition is linguistically determined, the limits of our world become coextensive with the limits of our language; on the other hand, because language no longer conforms to the outside world but simply creates what the world is known as, the idea of an independent, non-linguistic reality becomes identified with the notion of the ineffable.

Of course, this way of looking at the thesis of linguistic determinism still allows for the distinction between the real and what is taken to be real. It is important in this case that both the claim that our language is constitutive of what we take as real, and the claim that the results of our world-creating operations do not reflect some ready-made reality, do not necessarily imply that there is nothing outside of language. In other words, the idea that non-linguistic, independent reality is ineffable does not mean that this reality does not exist; in fact, it implies the opposite. In this way, together with the distinction between reality and what it is known as, the model of the language-reality in question assumes what Donald Davidson defines (and criticizes) as the third dogma of empiricism, namely the distinction between language, or a conceptual scheme, and the unconceptualized content that language organizes. As Davidson notes in his discussion of this distinction, “It is essential to this idea that there be something neutral and common that lies outside all schemes.” 22 The assumption of the existence of this “outside” is necessary to distinguish between the organizing force and something that is organized, or put differently,

22 Donald Davidson, Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 190. For a discussion and an influential critique of what has come to be known as the first and the second dogma, see Quine, From a Logical Point of View, pp. 20-46.
between an organizing system and something “waiting” to be organized. Of course, what is organized can be referred to in various ways, depending on the idiom adopted by a particular theory. As Davidson puts it,

As for the entities that get organized, or which the scheme must fit, I think […] we may detect two main ideas: either it is reality (the universe, the world, nature), or it is experience (the passing show, surface irritations, sensory promptings, sense data, the given).  

Thus, in our initial scenario, what gets organized is described by Mary Douglas in terms of a “chaos of shifting impressions” or simply “stimuli.” In a similar vein, Whorf’s metaphors include a “kaleidoscopic flux of impressions” or “physical evidence.” It is important that, regardless of the different ways in which they may be understood, all these categories and metaphors can be classified under the rubric of the “extra-linguistic” – that is, as “non-language” which lies outside the organizing system of language.

This theoretical position can be further contextualized in terms of the distinction between realism and antirealism. Thus, on one hand, the model of the language-reality relation I have presented is based on the idea that the “other side” of language exists, which means that there is an independent reality separate from our descriptions of it. Claims of this kind, of course, suggest that we are dealing here with a form of realism. However, in the case of our model, the thesis about the existence of the extra-linguistic should be clearly distinguished from the claim that our views about reality are determined by it, and that, therefore, we can “get reality right.”

---

23 Davidson, pp. 191-192.
24 Because of their generic character, in my discussion thus far I have also used the categories of “external reality,” “the world,” and “experience.”
Richard Rorty rightly notes, “this is a claim which the typical realist can, sooner or later, be counted upon to make. He or she will say that we achieve *accurate* representation because, sometimes, non-linguistic items cause linguistic items to be used as they are.”26 The model I have described here rejects the thesis of the typical realist in favour of the idea that it is language that determines reality, or to put it differently, that what is taken to be real is a construct of language. This, in turn, may suggest that we deal here with a form of antirealism. Antirealists reject the notion of an independent, ready-made reality whose structure is both discoverable and representable in language, and argue that language does not fit, or conform to, reality. Clearly, these antirealist theses furnish a conceptual framework for this dissertation; it is necessary, however, to distinguish them from a stronger claim, which full-blooded antirealists usually make, namely that it makes no sense to think of reality in abstraction from what it is known as. Such strong antirealist claims are not assumed here. It is assumed that our linguistic frameworks determine the limits of our world and separate us from the extra-linguistic. As antirealist as it may sound, this thesis does not imply that we should abandon the notion of independent reality.

As David Papineau puts it, “the realist will say that belief aims at truth, in the sense of correspondence to an independent reality, whereas the anti-realist will resist such talk of independent realities.”27 The theoretical position described here rejects both of these attitudes and replaces them with a comparatively modest approach: it gives up the idea that reality can be independently experienced, and that it “corrects” our beliefs or simply causes them; at the same time, it rejects what David Schalkwyk calls the “neo-Saussurean” view of language – that is, a view assuming the “dissolution of the real into the linguistic.”28 In this way, our model of the

---

27 Papineau, p. 5.
28 David Schalkwyk, *Literature and the Touch of the Real* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p. 16. To be sure, this radical position is rarely if ever assumed by antirealist philosophers. As I have mentioned, antirealists
language-reality relation does not exclude the possibility that there is a link between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic, or to put it differently, that the results of human cognition can somehow be “in touch” with reality. This is the possibility I intend to explore in my analysis of the works of Białoszewski and Różewicz.

My dissertation, therefore, will deal with attempts to reach beyond the limits of language. Such endeavours, antirealist philosophers argue, are naïve and hopeless; at the same time, however, the history of human thought shows that attempts of this kind have never been entirely abandoned and have always, in one way or another, animated human inquiries into the world. This human tendency to search for something that exists beyond language is suggestively captured by Richard Rorty in his reading of Wittgenstein:

Wittgenstein seems to have thought that the urge to penetrate beyond the effable […] was more than just a relatively uncommon form of obsessional neurosis – one that he himself shared with certain other unfortunates. He apparently believed it to be part of the human condition. He thought that by looking more closely at the results of succumbing to this urge we might come to understand better what it is to be a human being.29

The Wittgensteinian conviction regarding human attempts to reach towards the ineffable can serve as a conclusion to what I have proposed here as a conceptual background for my further analysis. What I have sketched thus far situates the theoretical position I will explore and specifies the issues I will attempt to tackle in my analysis of Białoszewski and Różewicz. The conceptual landscape of this dissertation, however, would be incomplete without one further element. As I have mentioned, in the case of the two authors discussed here, the common key to understanding their methods of overcoming the apparently untraversable gap between the

---

linguistic and the extra-linguistic revolves around the category of rubbish. Needless to say, employed in this context, the notion of rubbish undergoes a considerable reformulation and acquires specific meaning. What follows is the presentation of a conceptual framework for the notion of rubbish as it is explored in this dissertation.

**RUBBISH**

What is rubbish? Taken in its commonsense meaning, the term “rubbish” refers to something we discard or repudiate because it is worthless or undesirable. Understood in this way, this term is not only used with regard to physical objects but also functions as a cultural category; that is to say, rubbish exists both substantively and figuratively in the sense that the label “rubbish” may, for instance, apply to both a bad poem and the piece of paper on which this poem is printed. More importantly, however, the definition of rubbish as something we discard or repudiate points to the fact that rubbish always functions within the framework of inclusion and exclusion: the designation of an object as rubbish results from differentiation between things that belong and those that do not.\(^{30}\) In this sense, the category of rubbish stands for what does not belong, and any study of rubbish, regardless of whether it deals with rubbish in its material or figurative incarnations, functions within a critical discourse focused on the issues of ordering, exclusion, otherness, and excess.

This general definition requires some nomenclatural clarification. I am using the term “rubbish” here because its wide semantic range seems to be most suitable for my purposes. Like the term “waste,” it is general and encompasses more than one type of discarded object. The term

\(^{30}\) As Joost van Loon puts it, “the problem of waste is a universal one. It is the problem of selecting what belongs and what does not, that is, it functions as a focal point for politics of inclusion and exclusion…” (Joost van Loon, *Risk and Technological Culture: Towards a Sociology of Virulence* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 120.)
“rubbish,” however, seems more appropriate than “waste” in that it indicates the process of active devaluation. As Martin O’Brien explains it, to “waste” something is to inefficiently exploit its potential, whereas to “rubbish” something is to actively devalue this potential and render it worthless. The general scope of the term “rubbish” also encompasses more than the semantic fields of “garbage,” which in its material incarnation denotes organic waste, and “trash,” which, as Barry Allen points out, is typically used in regard to items that are more durable and share the characteristic of being used up.

In what follows, I take advantage of the broad applicability of the label “rubbish” and understand this term as a cognitive category. Thus, rubbish is still situated within the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and still results from differentiation between the desirable and the unwanted; at the same time, the separation of what belongs from what does not belong is understood here in terms of human cognition, or in other words, rubbish is understood here as a by-product of the differentiating activity of the human mind.

To be more specific, let us return to the scenario proposed by Mary Douglas. The second part of it is of crucial importance:

In a chaos of shifting impressions, each of us constructs a stable world in which objects have recognisable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence. In perceiving we are building, taking some cues and rejecting others. The most acceptable cues are those which fit most easily into the pattern that is being built up. […] Discordant ones tend to be rejected.

---

33 Douglas, p. 45.
In line with the argument developed in the previous section of this introduction, I understand the world-creating operations described in Douglas’ scenario in terms of linguistic constructivism. Placed in this context, the part of the scenario quoted above adds an important element to the model of human cognition described thus far. The key idea here is that the organizing force of language does not translate into a positive movement that simply unifies experience; rather, as Douglas claims, the construction of what is considered real rests mainly upon the processes of exclusion. As she argues, during world-creating operations, discordant elements are set apart from elements that are useful in building a stable world-order; because these elements are useless (they do not belong), they are rejected. In this sense, the construction of what is taken to be real is inseparable from the mechanisms of exclusion; this, in turn, means that human cognition always generates rubbish.

It should be noted that human cognition can be understood here in terms of both individual and collective cognition. According to Mary Douglas, any given conceptual structure of the human mind is inseparable from and determined by a specific cultural order; as she puts it, “any culture is a series of related structures which comprise social forms, values, cosmology, the whole of knowledge, and through which all experience is mediated.”34 In this sense, culture not only generates rubbish, but also provides in advance some basic categories and patterns of ordering that determine what does and what does not belong. Of course, in the case of linguistic constructivism, the main element tying culture and cognition together is language, which represents the main point of intersection between individual cognitive strategies and a particular cultural framework.

As I will show in following chapters, the idea that culture provides a shared framework of rules, concepts, and beliefs in which all subjective frameworks are anchored does not necessarily

34 Douglas, p. 158.
mean that we are prisoners of our culture and that culturally-determined rules cannot be subverted. What should be noted at this point is that Douglas’ understanding of the relationship between mind and culture provokes a set of questions regarding the issue of cause and effect. If culture shapes subjective frameworks, then what shapes culture? Does collective cognition emerge from individual cognition, or is it the other way around? A detailed answer to these questions would involve an extensive theoretical discussion that seems irrelevant to my purposes here; on the other hand, any clear-cut either/or approach towards these issues would be reductionist. To avoid both redundancy and reductionism, I will assume a perspective that leaves out the “question of origin” and simply views the mind-culture relation in terms of correspondence or parallelism. An example of an approach based on such a perspective can be found in Juri Lotman’s theory of the semiosphere. As Lotman suggests, there is a parallelism between individual cognitive frameworks and culture as a whole, and the structure of the human mind exists as both a part of the whole (culture) and as the whole of parts. As he writes, “Since all levels of the semiosphere – from human personality [...] to the global semiotic unity – are a seemingly inter-connected group of semiospheres, each of them is simultaneously both participant in the dialogue (as part of the semiosphere) and the space of dialogue (the semiosphere as a whole).”

Let us return to the category of rubbish. The understanding of rubbish as a by-product of human cognition rests on two main ideas. According to the first, rubbish is a relative phenomenon that cannot be considered apart from the scheme in relation to which it exists. This stems from the fact that the procedure of selecting what fits ipso facto determines what is rejected. As a result, what is rubbish for one conceptual scheme may not be rubbish for another.

---

In this sense, nothing is inherently rubbish, or to put it differently, rubbish does not exist objectively but is always relative to the conceptual scheme that excludes it. More importantly, by the same token, rubbish is an indispensable element of world-creating operations in that it negatively defines the boundaries of a given world-order. This results from the fact that, as Douglas puts it, “when something is firmly classed as anomalous, the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified.” In the context of world-creating operations, this idea means that the rejection of rubbish is crucial for establishing and maintaining the status quo of what the world is known as: as a discordant element, rubbish is rejected outside the domain of existence; at the same time, the act of its relegation to the realm of non-existence reaffirms the ontological status of what is constructed as real.

This interdependence between the product and the by-product of human cognition makes the ontology of rubbish problematic. More specifically, it renders the ontological status of rubbish undecided in relation to both the linguistic and the extra-linguistic.

Thus, on one hand, rubbish is a product of human cognition in the sense that it can only exist, and be understood, vis-à-vis the scheme that designates it as rubbish. Viewed from this perspective, the claim that nothing is inherently rubbish translates into the thesis that the attributes of rubbish are closely connected with the categories into which it does not fit. It might be said, then, that the defining feature of rubbish – the fact that it does not belong – is grounded in the categories that define what belongs in the very same way the negative category of the “unthinkable” is grounded in the positive category of the “thinkable” and the notion of falseness is related to the notion of truth. As a result, the desired and undesired products of the world-

---

36 I am drawing here on Douglas’ definition of dirt. According to her, the existence of dirt always implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a violation of that order. As she says, “dirt […] is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is a by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.” (Douglas, p. 44.)

37 Douglas, p. 47.
creating operations appear to be two sides of the same coin. In this context, rubbish becomes a peculiar shadow of what the world is known as. Cast by a given world-order, this shadow is inseparable from its source not only in the sense that a world-order gives rubbish its “shape,” but also in that it makes its existence possible.

On the other hand, rubbish appears to be independent of human cognition in that it cannot be appropriated by the scheme. The claim that what is rubbish for one conceptual scheme may not be rubbish for another implies that rubbish possesses certain attributes, or to put it differently, that a discordant element is unassimilable not only in virtue of its relation to the scheme, but also because of its inherent qualities. In short, it does not fit because of what it is. In this case, the fact that what is rejected by one scheme may fit into the pattern that is being built up by another scheme merely indicates that extra-linguistic reality is not rubbish in itself and that to become rubbish, a discordant element must be rejected by the scheme; this, however, does not sever the link between rubbish and the extra-linguistic or make rubbish a purely relative category. In this sense, rubbish bears the trace of the extra-linguistic, and its ontological status appears as independent from the realm of the linguistic. As a shadow of a given world-order, therefore, rubbish also points to something outside of this order: just as every shadow proves the existence of a light source, rubbish indicates the existence of the extra-linguistic.

Taken together, these two aspects of rubbish signal a hybrid ontology that destabilizes the dualistic framework of the language-reality distinction. This ontology, or rather the logic which generates it, can be illustrated by what Jacques Derrida describes in his writings as the logic of the supplement. Drawing on the double meaning of the French word supplément, which means both “an addition” and “a substitute,” Derrida explores a series of oppositions that are at the

core of the Western metaphysical tradition and shows how the notion of supplementarity subverts their binary structure. The binary logic of traditional philosophical oppositions, Derrida argues, dictates that the first element of an opposition – be it the opposition between speech and writing or between inside and outside – is privileged and is considered self-sufficient. The second element, on the other hand, is viewed as inferior and is considered merely a supplement to the first one.\(^{39}\) However, as Derrida argues in his texts, supplementarity operates according to a paradoxical logic that in fact destabilizes the dualistic framework of Western thought. On one hand, the supplement is an addition to something already self-sufficient and complete in itself, and as such it is inessential. On the other hand, the supplement always exists in relation to an internal lack in the entity it supplements, and thus it is necessary. Consequently, the supplement simultaneously adds to and substitutes for something that appears to be complete and self-sufficient. In this sense, as Derrida defines it, the supplement is, “neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence. [...] Neither/nor, that is, \textit{simultaneously} either/or.”\(^{40}\)

As mentioned, the logic of supplementarity can be used to further explain the relation between a world-order and its rubbish. It is important in this context that the supplement is never a simple extra which is added to something complete in itself but always exists in relation to an internal lack in the entity it supplements. That is to say, although it is exterior, the supplement compensates for a lack in the ontological positivity to which it is added, which means that without the supplement this positivity would be incomplete. Importantly, in this way, the supplement subverts the ontological independence it helps to constitute in that its functioning


reveals the fact that ontological self-sufficiency needs supplementary work, or to put it another way, that there is no such thing as an ontologically self-sufficient entity.

Being neither inside nor simply outside, rubbish is a surplus linked to the internal structure of the world-order. Like any supplement, rubbish exists undecidedly between the inside and the outside – in this case, between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic – and, as such, it is both distinct from and connected with a given world-order on one hand, and with external reality on the other. On one hand, therefore, it is an inessential extra that is not an intrinsic constituent of the world-order. However, as mentioned before, this inessential extra is quite essential to the constitution of what the world is known as; it “supplements” the product of human cognition because its exteriority reaffirms the ontological status of what belongs to the world-order proper.

In the context of the language-reality relation, therefore, the supplementary work of rubbish functions in both constitutive and subversive ways. Because the mechanisms of exclusion are crucial for establishing and maintaining the boundaries of what the world is known as, the out-of-placeness of rubbish makes it an essential element in the creation of a world-order. On the other hand, the very role of rubbish as a supplement undermines this world-order because the supplementary work of rubbish points to an internal lack in the structure of what the world is known as. In short, rubbish simultaneously compensates for and reveals a lack within the structure of the world-order. This lack boils down to the contingent nature of the results of human cognition. The term “contingent” is used here to indicate that although they are determined by the languages we use, our worldviews are not grounded in any transcendent ontological structure. In the case of the relation between the world-order and its rubbish, the

---

41 I am aware that by using the notion of supplementarity in the context of the language-reality distinction, I am placing Derrida’s thought into a context which is quite alien to it. What I am concerned with here, however, is not Derrida’s philosophy as a whole but a single idea upon which he dwells. I simply appropriate this idea for my own purposes.
supplementary work of rubbish foregrounds this indeterminacy by rendering the inside-outside distinction undecidable, and thus by revealing that the boundaries of the world-order are simply constructed – that is, by revealing that the boundaries between what belongs and what does not belong are not founded upon, or illustrative of, any universal order.

This point is important because it brings us back to the model of the language-reality relation I discussed in the previous section and summarizes the way in which I adopt the scenario proposed by Mary Douglas. As previously mentioned, linguistic constructivism, as I understand it here, stresses the role of language as a world-creating force, and tends to ascribe to it a considerable degree of autonomy. As a result, the model of cognition I have analyzed here emphasizes a radical gap between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic. The very essence of this gap has been ingeniously expressed by Kenneth Burke in his essay “Definition of Man,” in which he states that “language referring to the realm of the nonverbal is necessarily talk about things in terms of what they are not.”42 In this sense, he notes in the same essay, “in being a link between us and the nonverbal, words are by the same token a screen separating us from the nonverbal.”43 This paradoxical nature of human inquiry into the world can be summarized in the following way: because the extra-linguistic can be part of the human world only when it is appropriated by the linguistic, it can never be experienced as it is in itself.

Importantly, therefore, Douglas’ scenario is situated here within a theoretical context which does not allow it to be read as an example of what Rorty (following Davidson) calls a “building-block theory” – that is, a theory that “starts off by specifying which bits of language tie up with which bits of reality.”44 Although her account of world-creating operations in terms of

43 Burke, p. 5.
accepting the cues that fit and rejecting those that do not may suggest such a reading, this theoretical perspective is not assumed here. The fact that according to Douglas’ scenario some cues “fit” does not imply that the link between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic must be viewed as a relation of reference. As already described, this link is, at best, undecided, and as such it does not make the language-reality relation a relation of “mirroring,” which is to say, it is not understood here as based on the idea that what the world is known as is (or could be) a more or less accurate representation of what the world is really like.

The same logic applies to rubbish. As mentioned, rubbish bridges the gap between language and reality. Because it is simultaneously anchored in both the linguistic and the extra-linguistic, it can be reduced to neither of them: it cannot be seized by language (and thus, it does not dissolve into the conceptual), nor can it be identified with the extra-linguistic (and thus, it does not disappear into the ineffable). In this sense, rubbish functions beyond the logic of representation: it neither represents the extra-linguistic nor makes the linguistic true. In this case, the philosophical potential of rubbish rests in the fact that the contextual aspect of its nature – its dependence on the scheme that generates it through the mechanisms of exclusion – is inseparable from its participation in the ineffable. This is to say, while it lacks self-sufficiency and a fixed place within the conceptual landscape of the language-reality relation, rubbish still bears the trace of the extra-linguistic. As such, the notion of rubbish allows for human cognition to be understood beyond the confines of epistemological constructivism on one hand, and beyond the confines of naïve essentialism on the other. Literary strategies exploring this cognitive potential of rubbish are the subject of my dissertation.
Chapter 1
The Conceptual and the World
(Miron Białoszewski)

INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of Obmapywanie Europy, czyli dziennik okrętowy [Mapping Europe: A Ship’s Log] (1988) – an autobiographical account of Białoszewski’s trip along the coast of Europe on a cruise ship – the narrator describes his visit to the famous temple of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey. Having briefly acknowledged its beauty upon entering the building – as he says, “the Hagia Sophia is surely great [Aja Sofia wspaniała, na pewno]” (IX: 211) – he starts pondering on what makes it different from other mosques he has visited. Interestingly, he identifies some differences, but then he unexpectedly problematizes his perception by asking a provocative question: “Would one notice this if it weren’t known? [Czy to by się zauważyło, gdyby się nie wiedziało?]” (IX: 211).

Left unanswered, the question raised by Białoszewski’s narrator expresses doubt regarding human ability to perceive the world in an unbiased way. Miron asks here if seeing can

\[^{45}\text{Although the autobiographical nature of Białoszewski’s writing invites the reader to assume that Białoszewski’s narrator is Białoszewski himself, I am distinguishing here between Białoszewski-the-author and Białoszewski-the-narrator. By doing so, I do not intend to suggest that interpretative strategies that tend to link the empirical author with the figure of the narrator are in Białoszewski’s case untenable. Rather, I simply want to indicate that my primary focus is on Białoszewski’s text, and that a biographical context plays a secondary role in my analysis of his work. Because with few exceptions the narratorial selves of Białoszewski’s prose writings bear his name, I will simply refer to them collectively as “Miron.” For a concise discussion of issues arising in connection with the figure of Białoszewski’s narrator, see Joanna Niżyńska, The Kingdom of Insignificance: Miron Białoszewski and the Quotidian, the Queer, and the Traumatic (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), pp. 13-17. According to Niżyńska, Białoszewski’s texts invite a reading based on a sylleptic understanding of narratorial subjectivity. As she argues, “sylleptic subjectivity is marked by the use of the author’s real name that needs to be simultaneously understood as fictional and real (i.e., identified with author), textual and empirical.” (Niżyńska, p. 48.) See also Elżbieta Winiecka, Białoszewski sylleptyczny (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 2006).}\]

\[^{46}\text{Unless otherwise indicated, citations of Białoszewski’s works are from his eleven-volume Utwory zbrane [Collected Works] (Warszawa: PIW, 1987-2009) and are noted parenthetically with the volume number followed by the page number. All translations are mine unless differently noted.}\]
be separated from knowing and suggests that what one sees is influenced by what one knows, or to put it in more general terms, that perception is inseparable from, and dependent upon, conception. In this way, his doubt calls into question the idea that human cognition is based on universal experience and can be independent of cultural context. Needless to say, approached from this perspective, Miron’s doubt evokes a range of questions that go beyond a mere distinction between seeing and knowing, and point to the very nature of human cognition and its relation to the world. Is the world we perceive always contaminated by culturally determined beliefs, norms, and concepts? Is this perceived world different from the world as it is in itself? Can we have access to the world as it is in itself? And finally, is there such a thing as the “world as it is in itself”?

These questions guide my reading of Białoszewski’s prose and delineate the theoretical context for my use of the category of rubbish in this chapter. In my approach to Białoszewski’s texts, I focus on the issue of perception and aim to reconstruct the philosophical framework that underpins the model of human cognition expressed in his prose. I argue that, while this framework emphasizes the considerable limits of human cognitive abilities, ways of exploring mechanisms of perception described in Białoszewski’s text suggest the possibility of going beyond the boundaries of what the world is known (and experienced) as.

The body of this chapter comprises three parts. The first part is devoted to dissecting the key ideas that shape how the issue of human cognition is understood in Białoszewski’s prose. In this part, I focus on the narrator’s characterization of visual perception and his comments regarding the validity of human representations of the world. I argue that the model of human cognition that transpires from Białoszewski’s texts rests upon the constructivist idea according to which human conceptualizations of the world do not represent any objective structure of reality.
My analysis shows that the empirical world in Białoszewski’s text is taken to be a construct of the human mind – that is, a product of culturally determined cognitive frameworks – and that external, mind-independent reality is viewed by Białoszewski’s narrator as a domain of the ineffable. I argue that, understood in this context, cognitive structures of the human mind (the conceptual) and external reality (the extra-conceptual) appear to be separated by an unbridgeable gap. My main goal in the first part, therefore, is to establish a point of departure for my reading of Białoszewski’s text, and to root my argument in a specific understanding of the interrelationships among human cognition, the empirical world, and extra-conceptual reality.

In the second part, I develop my main argument, namely that Białoszewski’s texts present attempts to overcome this dualism between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. My analysis focuses on fragments in which the narrator plays with his visual perception and, as a result, generates a distorted image of what he sees. I reconstruct the main tendencies that characterize these experiments, and view the perceptual explorations of Białoszewski’s narrator as attempts to undermine basic laws of perception and destabilize the conceptual framework of experience. My argument is that in this way the narrator’s strategy generates perceptual “rubbish” – that is, it breaks down the spatiotemporal unity of experience and creates an ontologically ambiguous “space” that is no longer assimilable by the ordering logic of human cognition. Rubbish, therefore, is understood here as a metaphor for discordant elements that destabilize the world-creating operations of the human mind. Because of its out-of-placeness, it cannot be part of a given world-order and tends to be rejected. However, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, although rubbish does not belong to what the world is known as, it always exists in relation to it. In this sense, it cannot be appropriated by the conceptual, but it still bears the trace of the meaningful. As such, I argue, rubbish functions in the perceptual experiments of Białoszewski’s
narrator as a transition point that links the domain of the conceptual (the realm of the meaningful) and the domain of the extra-conceptual (the realm of the ineffable).

The third part of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of philosophical implications that follow from my discussion of the perceptual explorations described in Białoszewski’s prose. In this last section, I further examine Miron’s strategies and foreground their philosophical underpinnings through a series of heuristic juxtapositions with some well-known notions of world-making (Mary Douglas, Nelson Goodman, and Bruno Latour). Then, I propose a few conceptual metaphors that further elucidate the nature of Miron’s experiments, and shed some light on the challenges that arise in connection with the very notion of the extra-conceptual.

In my analysis, I will draw on Białoszewski’s prose writings, with a particular focus on his book Chamowo [Boorville] (2009). This autobiographical prose was written from June 1975 to June 1976, after Białoszewski’s move from downtown Warsaw to a new high-rise building in Warsaw’s Saska Kępa district. Located on the right bank of the Vistula River and dubbed “Boorville” by Varsovians, this peripheral part of the city not only lent its nickname to the title of Białoszewski’s prose but also provided a new context for his writing. Białoszewski’s Chamowo focuses on his explorations of the new surroundings, and his attempts to tame the new reality and create a sense of belonging and familiarity. Those explorations, or as Tadeusz Sobolewski calls them, “dates with reality,” are permeated by a playful attitude towards the perceived environment and are often accompanied by the narrator’s comments on the nature of perception and the functioning of human cognition.\(^{47}\)


\(^{48}\) It is noteworthy that, in this sense, the title of the book refers not only to the part of Warsaw to which Białoszewski moved and which he describes, but also to the book’s focus on human perception. The link between the title and human perception is suggested in Chamowo when Białoszewski’s narrator characterizes eyesight as “almost boorish [prawie chamski]” (XI: 149). Similarly, in one of his interviews, Białoszewski summarizes his perceptual attitude during his trip along the coast of Europe – the trip he describes in Obmapywanie Europy, czyli dziennik okrętowy – as “a boorish way of consuming the world [konsumowanie świata po chamsku].” See Miron
This “epistemological” dimension of Białoszewski’s *Chamowo* has been noted by critics and scholars. As Anna Sobolewska rightly suggests, *Chamowo* can be read as “a treatise on the perception of the world.” The narrator of *Chamowo*, she argues, seeks to unravel the “mystery of perception” and ignore the “presuppositions” that guide our habitual ways of seeing. Critics often note that the narrator of this prose, viewed in the context of his perceptual explorations, is “first and foremost an experimenter” who problematizes his ways of seeing the world, and plays with his perception to explore its mechanisms. In this sense, as Andrzej Zieniewicz suggests, the narrative structure of *Chamowo* is anchored in the narrator’s perceptual strategies and revolves around his attempts to investigate the creation of what is considered real.

These perceptual strategies – or, as Białoszewski’s narrator calls them, “intrigues” – are the focus of my analysis. My interpretation of Białoszewski’s prose seeks to offer a new perspective on his “epistemology,” and it goes beyond the existing scholarship, which, as I will argue later, tends to assume an interpretative dichotomy of realist essentialism on the one hand, and antirealist constructivism on the other. As mentioned, my goal is to move beyond this dualism and show that the model of human cognition expressed in Białoszewski’s prose should


Śliwa, p. 158.


It should be noted here that my focus on *Chamowo* by no means implies that this is the only text in which Białoszewski explores the issue of human perception. Although the relocation to the new apartment was for him a life-changing event, and as such it marks a shift in the trajectory of his writing, the epistemological ideas and perceptual strategies expressed in *Chamowo* can also be found in his texts written before the move. (I will refer to some of these texts in my analysis.) My choice to concentrate on this particular text, therefore, does not stem from the fact that Białoszewski’s *Chamowo* introduces the issue of human perception, but rather that it foregrounds it. In this sense, my conclusions in this chapter apply to Białoszewski’s other texts as well.
be understood beyond the confines of both naïve essentialism and epistemological constructivism.

**A POINT OF DEPARTURE**

*Sensation*

*whenever it stays*

*it immediately gets thick-skinned*

*Wrażenie*

*jak tylko pobędzie*

*zaraz dostaje grubej skóry*

Miron Białoszewski (VIII: 170)

To fully understand the nature of perceptual experiments described in Białoszewski’s prose, one needs to situate them within a broader context and look at them as part of, and as a response to, a specific model of human cognition. Expressed in his prose, this model provides a necessary framework for understanding Białoszewski’s goals and for analyzing their philosophical consequences.

The aim of the following section is to reconstruct this broad epistemological framework. I will begin with a close reading of a well-known fragment of Białoszewski’s prose dealing with the philosophical category of matter, and will examine how the view of human cognition expressed in Białoszewski’s texts is always linked with a certain ontology. Then, I will focus on the category of perception, and will analyze how mechanisms of perception are understood in
this prose in relation to both broader cultural processes and cognitive structures of the human mind.

**Ontological Commitment**

In the case of Białoszewski, reflection on human cognition is entangled in a set of ontological presuppositions about external reality; that is to say, the ideas developed in Białoszewski’s texts do not form a purely epistemological model that simply focuses on how we perceive and conceive of the world, but rather often suggest certain ontology. In this sense, the question of what there is (ontology) and the question of what we know about what there is (epistemology) become two complementary sides of the same investigation. The following statement from Białoszewski’s *Rozkurz [Wasted]* (1980) presents a suggestive combination of these two perspectives:

Matter without consciousness. It exists, can exist. A world without a witness? It seems to make no sense. So the spirit? I don’t think so. But there is matter, it seethes, it creates organicity, life.

Does matter want to live?
Does it want to feel? Does it want to be a witness?
The fact is that we exist. But we can’t exist without matter. Matter, on the other hand, can exist without us.


Czy materia chce żyć?
Chce czuć? Być świadkiem?
Faktem jest, że my istniejemy. Ale nie możemy bez materii. A materia bez nas może.

(VIII: 80)
The category of matter without consciousness, on which this short meditation focuses, is approached by Białoszewski’s narrator from both an ontological and an epistemological perspective. This double perspective is introduced by the attribute “without consciousness.” On one hand, the attribute “without consciousness” simply indicates that what is understood here as matter lacks consciousness; on the other hand, it characterizes matter as something that exists independently of human consciousness – that is, independently of what we perceive and conceive. In this way, the category of matter without consciousness acquires an epistemological dimension, and it becomes synonymous with the category of a “world without a witness.”

The main ontological idea expressed in this meditation is that the world without a witness exists. However, as Miron notes at the outset, “it seems to make no sense [wydaje się, że bezsens].” Anchored in the double perspective suggested by the preceding sentences’ identification of matter without consciousness with a world without a witness, Miron’s observation does not merely introduce doubt regarding the idea that there is an objective realm outside of our conceptual frameworks; rather, it further characterizes this realm by suggesting that it is precisely from the perspective of our conceptual frameworks that it makes no sense. In other words, matter without consciousness not only exists independently, it also seems to be ungraspable – that is, it escapes the sense-making activities of the human mind and therefore cannot be seized by our cognitive apparatus. Conversely, the only world of which we can make sense is a world with a witness – that is, the world we witness and know through our senses and our ability to conceptualize.

The nature of the world without a witness is not spiritual; this, however, does not mean that it consists of inert physical matter. The line of thought developed here transcends the dualism of active spirit and inert matter, proposing that we view matter without consciousness as
an active force. Thus, matter is not a stable, unchanging entity but a formless, indefinable source of life.

Interestingly, immediately after it is proposed, the metaphysically charged view of matter as an animating element that “seethes” and “creates life” is problematized by a set of questions. Based on a playful reversal of perspective, which evokes the somewhat humorous view of matter as an entity that may desire to be a human being, these questions reaffirm the separateness of the human world and the “world without a witness” by implying that matter without consciousness is not alive and cannot feel or be a witness. At the same time, these questions mark a shift towards a more agnostic view of matter. In this context, the first question (“Does matter want to live?”) is of crucial significance as it casts doubt on the view of matter as a source of life. Taken seriously, the question presupposes that matter is devoid of life and in this way raises another issue: How can something non-living be a source of life? This issue, however, is neither expressed nor dealt with; instead, as if in an attempt to withdraw from metaphysical speculation, Miron abandons his three questions and proceeds to propose a rather modest conclusion that more or less reaffirms his initial claim. All we know, he states, is that matter exists, and that this “world without a witness” is independent of the human world. At the same time, the idea that matter exists independently is paired with the claim that we cannot exist without matter. The relation proposed here bears the trace of the previously mentioned (and abandoned) idea of matter as a source of life; this time, however, it acquires a more general meaning – that is, it does not simply imply a relation of causality but points to the idea that the ontology of the human world is incomplete without the notion of the world without a witness.

The ideas expressed in this short philosophical meditation on matter characterize the basic backdrop for the view of human cognition explored in Białoszewski’s texts. The main idea
here is that the “world without a witness” exists, which in this case means that there exists a mind-independent reality. Approached in terms of “matter without consciousness,” this reality is not only independent of human cognitive activities but is also, in principle, inaccessible; however, despite the elusiveness of mind-independent reality, Miron views this category as a crucial element in understanding human cognition. In this sense, the epistemological model of the mind-reality relation expressed in Białoszewski’s prose forms a tripartite structure that consists of human cognitive abilities (the conceptual), the experienced world (the empirical), and the “world without a witness” (the extra-conceptual). This structure can be schematically presented in the following way:

```
 the conceptual — the empirical ? the extra-conceptual
```

Human cognition is understood here in terms of two main relations. The first one holds between the conceptual and the empirical, and it defines the ontology of the human world – that is, it defines the limits of the sense-making activities of the human mind. The second relation, or rather the apparent lack of it, is between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. Its problematic nature, which boils down to the incommensurability of the two realms it is supposed to link, is what the perceptual experiments described in Białoszewski’s prose aim to overcome.

**Between the Conceptual and the Empirical**

What is the ontological status of the experienced world? Białoszewski’s prose suggests an answer that reveals constructivist tendencies. As mentioned, the world as we know it is a world whose existence presupposes a witness – that is, it is a world in one way or another
anchored in human cognition. In the context of the relation between the conceptual and the empirical, this means that the experienced world is a function of our conceptual processes. As such, Białoszewski’s texts suggest, the world as we know it is not simply discovered – it is first and foremost created. Białoszewski plays with this idea throughout his writings, mostly in texts centered on self-reflective analysis of perception; often, however, the idea that the experienced world is a construct is also expressed in a more explicit way. The following statement from \textit{Chamowo} can serve as a good example:

I told you once before that sight is rapacious, dominant, expansive, almost boorish. Especially in this current civilization. Cinema, television; but it works quickly, through shortcuts. For example, this store. You don’t see it. You have to ask. But with sight, one seizes everything at once. One selects. One knows. Immediately. Perhaps thought is not quicker than eyes. Sometimes eyes are quicker.


Taken from \textit{Chamowo}, this statement is part of a conversation between Miron and his blind friend, Jadwiga, during which they discuss visual perception. Eyesight is described here as a controlling force that governs the way we see the world. Sight, Miron claims at the beginning, dominates the other senses, and its expansiveness is fuelled by contemporary ocularcentric civilization. It should be noted that this initial remark provides an important context for the analysis of visual perception that follows. First of all, it points to the fact that human perception does not take place in isolation from a particular culture but always functions within a specific cultural context. At the same time, Miron’s remark implies that there is a connection between the
central role of the visual image in contemporary culture and the dominant role of sight in human perception. Put differently, it implies that there is a degree of correlation between the modus operandi of culture and the modus operandi of human perception.

Sight, Miron explains to Jadwiga, works in a synthesizing way. It *seizes* everything, so that the world is “prepared” for us before we can even start thinking about it. Viewed in this way, human perception appears to be guided by an organizing impulse that unifies our experience and constructs a world to which we can relate. Miron suggests here that to be discovered, the world must first be created, or to put it another way, that we can only see what we have made. What exactly does this mean? With sight, Miron says, everything is immediately *known*, which means that our perception is anchored in a set of pre-established assumptions about the world. The results of perception, therefore, are constructs that tend to reflect our conceptual frameworks, rather than reflecting a mind-independent reality.

Significantly, in his description of visual perception, Miron uses the verb “przebierać.” With sight, he notes, everything is not only seized and known, but also *selected*. Translated here using the verb “to select,” the Polish verb “przebierać” further characterizes the process of perception and points to the problematic status of what is experienced as the world. On one hand, the verb means “to sift, to look through,” and this meaning foregrounds the fact that the world-creating operations of human perception are never all-inclusive, but involve both inclusion and exclusion. On the other hand, the verb “przebierać” means “to change clothes; to dress up,” and in this way it suggests that the world we see through our cognitive apparatus is a form of “disguise.” What the world is known as, therefore, is neither the world as it is in itself, nor a representation of it. If anything, the experienced world can only “pretend” to be the world in itself.
In this way, Miron’s comments on the nature of visual perception emphasize its ordering force and point to a split between reality and what reality is known as. According to Miron, the world-creating operations of human perception\textsuperscript{54} are both selective and masking, and as such, they generate an image of reality which appears to be hiding something. In this context, the experienced world becomes inseparable from the cognitive structures of the human mind, which determine what is perceived, or in other words, which determine the what and the how of the ontology of the human world. In this sense, Miron suggests, perception is never pure but is always influenced by cognitive activity.

To be sure, the fact that our cognitive activities consist in constructing the world in accordance with a set of pre-established rules and concepts does not mean that this created world of experience is \textit{fully} known or that it cannot be fruitfully reflected upon. Eyes, Miron tells Jadwiga as he wraps up his description of visual perception, are sometimes quicker than thought in the sense that we can see something without knowing what it is. This final remark further characterizes the relation between the conceptual and the empirical in that it points to the fact that human cognition involves both “automatic” and “reflective” levels of world-creating operations. Thus, when Miron states that with sight everything is known, he is talking about making the world discoverable; when he claims that we can see something without knowing what it is, he is talking about the process of discovering this world. Although Białoszewski’s prose tends to emphasize that human cognition functions within the very same conceptual framework at both levels, the “reflective” aspect of world-creating operations opens up the possibility of agency – for example, the possibility of experimenting with the conceptual boundaries of the experienced world. As I will show, Białoszewski’s narrator often explores this

\textsuperscript{54} Following Miron’s claim that eyesight dominates over the other senses, I treat the characteristics of visual perception as representative of human perception in general.
possibility and seeks to destabilize the conceptual framework of experience and create perceptual “rubbish.”

Moreover, this constructivist understanding of human cognition does not lead to vulgar “solipsism,” according to which human beings remain inside their private, self-enclosed worlds of experience. As Miron points out in his initial comment on the ocularcentric nature of contemporary civilization, perception never takes place in a vacuum but is always anchored in a particular cultural context. This context provides a shared framework of rules, concepts, and beliefs upon which all subjective frameworks rest. In this way, Miron suggests, while a particular culture delimits the scope of human cognition, it also makes human cognition possible. Determinism expressed in this way, it should be noted, is based on cultural relativism. As Miron remarks, eyesight dominates “especially in this current civilization,” which implies that there may exist alternative ways of perceiving and thinking.55

The claim that there exist alternative cultural paradigms, which may in turn generate different conceptualizations of human experience, provides an important context for the idea of the “reflective” exploration of the world and for the ways in which Białoszewski’s narrator explores the category of rubbish, because it suggests the contingency of culturally determined rules and constructs. The following passage presents a more explicit take on this idea of contingency:

55 Miron’s discussion of human perception in terms of the world making brings to mind Witold Gombrowicz’s notion of Form. As Gombrowicz describes his ideas in A Kind of Testament, “man, in his deepest essence, possesses something which I would call ‘the Formal Imperative’. [...] For instance, take our innate need to complete incomplete Form: every Form that has been started requires a complement. When I say A, something compels me to say B, and so on. This need to develop, to complete, because of a certain logic inherent in Form, plays an important part in my work.” (Witold Gombrowicz, A Kind of Testament, ed. Dominique de Roux, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973), p. 69.) Białoszewski certainly knew Gombrowicz’s works, and his take on world making resembles the way Gombrowicz understood human cognitive practices. However, as I will show later, the model of human cognition expressed in Białoszewski’s works differs from the one developed by Gombrowicz in that it is permeated by the spirit of acceptance and rests upon a peculiar notion of “artificial authenticity.”
But how can we then know what existed and what didn’t? Or existed at that time on a different planet, or in Australia, or in the GDR. Well, they talk and teach about it, so one believes... Well, yes, and when they were saying that some generations ago God, as a pillar, led a bunch of people through a desert... they believed in that in the very same way.

Ale jak tu wiedzieć, co było, a co nie? Albo w tym samym czasie na innej planecie, albo w Australii, albo w NRD. No, mówią o tym, uczą, to się wierzy... No tak, a jak mówili, że ileś pokoleń temu Bóg jako słup prowadził kupę ludzi przez pustynię... wierzyli w to na tej samej zasadzie. (V: 92)

These sarcastic comments emphasize the changeability of cultural contexts and the radically different worldviews they generate. The biblical story from the Book of Exodus referred to here exemplifies a cultural paradigm that no longer shapes human understanding of the world and therefore appears to be absurd. Białoszewski’s narrator juxtaposes this “biblical paradigm” with a more contemporary context (evoked by the mention of other planets, Australia, and the GDR) to suggest their incommensurability and to suggest that there is no common background against which their conceptual frameworks could be evaluated. In this sense, he claims, the boundaries between what exists and what does not exist are neither grounded in, nor representative of, any transcendent ontological structure but are always the product of a given cultural context. Our contemporary knowledge of the world, therefore, cannot be regarded as more accurate than a worldview generated by the “biblical paradigm,” or rather, it cannot be proven as such.

Miron’s scepticism goes as far as to suggest that our worldviews are no more than systems of beliefs that we acquire through processes of enculturation. Because the ontology of the human world rests upon a culturally-determined set of beliefs, the validity of the idea that at one point God manifested himself as a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire is in principle the same as the validity of the idea that, for example, the known laws of physics apply everywhere in the
universe. Both ideas are equally valid (within their respective cultural contexts), or to follow the sceptical tone of Miron’s remarks, equally unfounded (outside of their respective contexts). It is significant that this does not necessarily void our knowledge of the world. Our ideas are still functional in that they describe our world (or, more specifically, what the world is known as), and as such they are more or less accurate. What makes them more or less accurate, however, is a certain cultural paradigm, not their correspondence to universal, mind-independent reality. In this sense, we might say that our conceptualizations of the world can no longer be true or false (in the traditional sense) but can only be “within the true” or “outside of the true.”

Miron’s thoughts on culturally shared belief systems foreground the powerful nature of the mechanisms of enculturation. How is it possible that in the past some people treated the biblical story from the Book of Exodus as something that actually happened? The answer is simple: they were told that it actually happened. The very same mechanism, Miron insists, applies to our contemporary knowledge and explains why we believe in something we have never experienced. Importantly, these comments point to two elements that, according to Miron, are at work in the processes of enculturation. The first of these elements is authority, which is indicated here by Miron’s use of the grammatical form of third-person plural (“they”) and embodied as anonymous authority figures who “talk and teach.” The second element is language, which is understood here not as a neutral means of representing reality but as an ideological tool – as a tool used to disseminate and maintain certain beliefs and ways of thinking.

---

56 I borrow these phrases from Michel Foucault. As he says in *The Discourse on Language*: “Within its own limits, every discipline recognizes true and false propositions, but it repulses a whole teratology of learning. […] In short, a proposition must fulfil some onerous and complex conditions before it can be admitted within a discipline; before it can be pronounced true or false it must be, as Monsieur Canguilhem might say, ‘within the true.’” (Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), pp. 223-224).

57 Miron’s use of the third-person plural also indicates his attempt to distance himself from the position of cultural authority and assume the position of a sceptical outsider.
The role of language in the process of internalizing cultural norms and beliefs is also discussed in Białoszewski’s prose from a slightly different perspective. Language, Białoszewski’s texts suggest, is never an innocent means of communication not only because it can be used to authoritatively convey certain ideas, but also, and more importantly, because it is by nature always concept-ridden. Viewed from this perspective, language is not merely a tool of communication but rather an essential element of the world-creating operations of the human mind:

It is important to know the name. A name defines. When one deity wanted to tear away the mystery of the other deity, it would deceitfully find out its name. Moses also nagged God about a name: “But what is your name?” “I am who I am.”

Ważne wiedzieć nazwę. Nazwa określa. Jak jedno bóstwo drugiemu chciało wydzieć tajemnicę, to dowiadywało się podstępnie o imię, Mojżesz Boga też nudził o imię, „ale jakie twoje imię”, „jam jest, którym jest”. (V: 244)

A section of a short prose piece describing Miron’s explorations of the side streets in Warsaw’s Bielany district, the above comments follow his attempt to learn the name of a street he and his friends have happened upon. A name is important, Miron claims after checking a street name sign, because it defines what one sees – that is, the name of a street determines what is to be made of it. Understood in this context, language does not simply mirror external reality but imposes certain classifications on our experience, and in this way informs the way we perceive the world.58 Miron’s initial remark here suggests that a set of implicit categories and concepts are

58 In a sense, Miron’s comment also evokes the issue of the historical context of street naming, or to put it differently, the importance of street naming in changing historical circumstances. Street names, Białoszewski’s narrator suggests, are important because they give us insight into a particular historical context. The topic of street naming is perhaps most ingeniously captured in Ryszard Kapuściński’s Imperium. As Kapuściński describes the Russian town of Magadan: “In 1935 Berzin opened in Magadan a park of culture, giving it the name of his superior, the chief of the NKVD, Yagoda. Three years later Berzin and Yagoda were shot. Berzin Street was renamed Stalin
embedded in our language, and that these concepts influence our cognitive practices. At the same time, his subsequent remarks foreground the inability of language to transcend its boundaries and capture reality as it is in itself. Here, Miron brings up the idea of the ungraspable nature of God, and thus views the relation between language (the conceptual) and external reality (the extra-conceptual) in terms of an attempt to capture the ineffable. Discussed in this context, language initially appears to be able to tear away the mystery of the extra-conceptual; Miron, however, problematizes this relation with his reference to the well-known episode from the Book of Exodus where, as he renders it, Moses nags God about His name only to receive an enigmatic response.\(^5^9\) If read as a metaphor for the epistemological relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual, the biblical story is referred to here in order to suggest the ineffectiveness of our attempts to fully grasp the ineffable, or to be more specific, our inability to do more than merely assert its existence.

Miron’s comments on the role of language in both the mechanisms of enculturation and the world-creating operations of the human mind set forth the view of language as an element of cultural processes that ties culture and cognition together in an unresolvable knot of interrelationships. Never an innocent means of expression, language becomes here the main point of intersection between the cognitive (individual cognitive strategies) and the cultural (a particular cultural framework).\(^6^0\)

---

\(^5^9\) Of course, with the well-known importance of naming in the Bible – be it understood as a process of giving identity and essence or simply defining a purpose – it is not coincidental that the issue of language is discussed by Białoszewski’s narrator in the context of a Biblical story.

\(^6^0\) Because such a view of language blurs the distinction between the conceptual and the linguistic, its analysis may invite the question of the nature of our conceptual frameworks. The issue here is whether the conceptual frameworks...
Epistemic Grounds

To conclude this discussion, the various comments on the nature of human cognition found in Białoszewski’s texts present a constructivist understanding of the relation between the conceptual and the empirical. In this view, the experienced world becomes firmly anchored in a set of culturally determined rules and concepts that guide human cognitive activities and delimit their scope. In this sense, the empirical (the world as it is known and experienced) is inseparable from, and cannot exist without, the conceptual (culture and the mind).

Importantly, this does not mean that there is no “outside” to the conceptual. As discussed, according to Białoszewski’s narrator, the “world without a witness” does exist, and it is independent of the world-creating operations of the human mind. Because it constitutes the realm of the extra-conceptual, this external reality is in principle inaccessible, or to put it somewhat differently, it is “hidden” outside the conceptual walls of the human world. The status of this extra-conceptual reality can perhaps be best summarized with the use of the following fragment from Chamowo:

But this had its origin in being awake. So many old houses and fragments of the city are now being razed to the ground. One would think that some configurations could not be changed, destroyed, that even if they could – the ground underneath them would be different, significant. But it turns out that everything can be changed without a trace. That beneath everything is the same ground.

of the human mind are identical with conceptual structures inherent in the languages that we use, or to take it even further, whether our conceptual schemes can be identified with languages. Białoszewski’s texts do not seem to address any of these issues. His comments emphasize the influence language has on human cognition, and in this way suggest that the conceptual is, in one way or another, connected with the linguistic; it should be noted, however, that the focus of Białoszewski’s texts is not on conceptual structures as such, but rather on how they operate – that is, not on what they are, but on what they do.

This fragment, which follows a passage describing a dream in which Miron sees his old house being demolished, expresses the conviction that any order of reality we may perceive – regardless of how stable it appears to be – is contingent and can be “changed without a trace.” As elsewhere, Białoszewski’s narrator emphasizes here the changeability of our conceptual frameworks and suggests that the world-order they generate (and we perceive) is not grounded in any objective ontological structure. We tend to think that at least some of the “configurations” we witness are anchored in, or correspond to, some structures of external reality – that, as Miron puts it, “the ground underneath them is different, significant;” however, he notes, no matter what we build on it, the ground underneath the edifice of the human world is always the same.61

If we read this as an epistemological statement, Miron’s claim that the ground is always the same regardless of what we build on it implies that our worldviews and the changes they undergo do not represent any mind-independent reality. By the same token, external reality does not affect the ways we see the world and does not make our worldviews true. As mentioned, however, this by no means implies that the “ground” does not exist. Moreover, it does not necessarily mean that the very idea of an extra-conceptual “ground” underneath the empirical world should be abandoned. The edifice of the human world, Miron argues, does not flow in the void. In this sense, the extra-conceptual becomes an indiscardable complement to the model of human cognition presented in Białoszewski’s texts.

61 What I discuss here in epistemological terms can be also viewed in a broader sense as a human belief that the places we inhabit are “saturated” with our experiences, and that what happens in those places matters and changes their nature. For a reading of Białoszewski’s prose through the lens of the category of dwelling (understood as a sense-making activity), see Zieniewicz, pp. 62-85.
PERCEPTUAL “INTRIGUES”

I’m afraid of excessive ordering.

Boję się zbytniego porządkowania.

Miron Białoszewski (XI: 25)

Stemming from a constructivist understanding of the relation between the conceptual and the empirical, the view of human cognition expressed in Białoszewski’s prose reveals a deterministic logic according to which the conceptual determines the empirical. In this view, the cognitive categories of the human mind determine what we perceive and what we make of what we perceive; at the same time, Białoszewski’s texts emphasize that the very cognitive structures that determine the shape of what the world is known as are acquired through the process of enculturation, which is to say that they themselves are determined by broader cultural contexts.

However, as mentioned, in Białoszewski’s case such an understanding of human cognition does not lead to a vulgar determinism that simply reduces all individual cognitive frameworks to a single cultural paradigm. Our culturally determined worldviews are contingent – they are not anchored in any external reality to which they correspond or which cause them – and therefore, just like the cultural paradigms that make them possible, are changeable. At the level of individual cognitive practices, this contingency is paired in Białoszewski’s prose with the possibility of agency, which is understood here in terms of a conceptual leeway that allows for creative (and potentially subversive) explorations of the conceptual boundaries of the experienced world.
In what follows, I will analyze Miron’s explorations of this conceptual leeway. In this section, therefore, the relation between the conceptual and the empirical in Białoszewski’s prose will be analyzed not from the deterministic perspective of world creating, but rather in terms of what could be called “world subverting.” Simultaneously, this change in perspective will mark a shift towards an analysis of Miron’s experiments as attempts to go beyond the conceptually determined limits of experience. As previously mentioned, the key to these experiments is the category of rubbish. I will show that Miron’s strategy generates perceptual rubbish by undermining the unity of experience and creating an ontologically ambiguous “space” that is no longer assimilable by the ordering logic of human cognition. Explored in this context, rubbish destabilizes the boundary between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual, and becomes a point of transition that opens up the possibility of reaching towards the ineffable.

**Rubbish**

The term “rubbish” is used here figuratively and in consonance with the argument I developed in the previous chapter. Rubbish, I argued there, always results from the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and as such can be treated as an omnibus category for what does not belong. Understood in the context of human cognition, the term, therefore, denotes a cognitive category that results from the differentiating activity of the human mind, or to be more specific, an omnibus category for all discordant elements that do not fit into a conceptually determined “order of things.” Because they do not fit into a vision of order, these elements cannot be part of the architecture of the empirical, and as such, do not belong to what the world is known as. At the same time, however, these elements cannot be identified with the extra-conceptual. This is due to the fact that rubbish is a by-product of world-creating operations, and in this sense, it
always exists in relation to the conceptual framework that rejects it as rubbish. As a result, the ontological status of rubbish is undecided: rubbish can be reduced neither to the conceptual nor to the extra-conceptual.

The term “rubbish” is not used in this particular sense in Białoszewski’s texts. This does not mean, however, that its figurative use in the context of perceptual experiments described in Chamowo is untenable. A fragment from Chamowo describing Miron’s trip to Warsaw’s Kawęczyn district, during which he discovers a rubbish dump, is worth mentioning in this context.62

The prelude to his exploration of this rubbish heap sets the tone for what is to come: Miron rides a bus, and suddenly he notices the “huge ridges of rubbish mountains” [“ogromne grzębiety śmieciowych gór”]. This comment places rubbish in the context of nature, while at the same time blurring the line between civilizational waste products and the natural environment. After Miron gets off the bus, he starts walking towards the dump. As Anna Sobolewska rightly notes in her analysis of this fragment, this is the moment at which the narration becomes dramatic, as the mountains of rubbish seem to defend themselves from the intruder, who has to force his way in through the forest and bushes.63 Interestingly, at this point in the story, the rubbish heap is considered a discordant element that disrupts the beauty and harmony of nature; as Miron remarks, the dump is located “in the middle of a paradise” [“w środku raju”] and in the very thicket of nature’s beauty. However, as he approaches the dump and is able to finally see it, his perspective shifts, and he begins to emphasize the indefinite character of his surroundings and the undecided ontological status of certain elements of the rubbish heap. The initial

dichotomy between nature and the refuse of human civilization becomes problematic as Miron encounters various instances of “indistinctness” (“niewyraźności”) that render perceived reality confusing and uncertain. The dump appears here to be a place where rubbish tends to become nature and nature tends to become rubbish, or as Sobolewska puts it, it is a “zone of transition from one form of existence to the other.”

Surrounded by heaps of garbage, Miron sees flying “flocks of burned rubbish” [“stada palonych śmieci”] and climbs up a “mountain chain” [“łańcuch górski”] of garbage that he describes as a “geological phenomenon” [“zjawisko geologiczne”]. One of the last remarks he makes after returning to the bus stop is also important in this context. This remark characterizes the rubbish heap as a “mixture of paradise and exile” [“mieszzanina raju z wygnaniem”], reaffirming the view of rubbish as a space of ambiguous ontological status. Rubbish, Miron’s comment suggests, is no longer an incongruous element in the “thicket of beauty” but is inseparable from it and somehow anchored in the surrounding “paradise” of nature. At the same time, it still retains an air of troubling otherness that evokes feelings of unfamiliarity and alienation.

Miron’s description of the garbage dump corresponds with the general characteristics of rubbish as a cognitive category. This, to be sure, is not to suggest that Miron’s trip to Kawęczyn and his exploration of the dump should be read as a metaphor for human cognition, and that the garbage heap he describes should be seen as symbolically representing discordant elements that tend to be rejected during the world-creating operations of the human mind. Rather, the fragment is brought up here to point out certain parallels that may justify the use of the term “rubbish” in

---

64 “Śmietnik to strefa przejścia z jednej formy istnienia do drugiej.” Sobolewska, “Lepienie widoku z domysłu. Percepcja świata,” p. 82. Worth mentioning here is Sobolewska’s comment that follows this statement. As she says, “Among garbage, the sacred can suddenly manifest itself.” [“Wśród śmieci może nagle objawić się sacrum”]. The connection between rubbish and the sacred that Sobolewska suggests here opens up a space for an interpretive strategy that might correspond to my main argument; it is unclear, however, how Sobolewska understands the notion of the sacred, and what its role might be in the context of the perceptual experiments described in Białoszewski’s prose.
the context of the perceptual experiments described in *Chamowo*. These parallels boil down to the already mentioned liminality of rubbish. Miron’s description shows how rubbish escapes simple dualistic frameworks and clear-cut classifications, and how its status appears to remain undecided. In this sense, the in-betweenness of rubbish subverts and problematizes the very concept of a boundary – be it between nature and civilization, the familiar and the alien, or the conceptual and the extra-conceptual – and makes it a point of transition between seemingly disparate realities.

**Strategies**

How do Miron’s perceptual experiments generate rubbish? First of all, it should be noted that the common denominator of almost all visual perceptions described in *Chamowo* does not lie in what is perceived (the object of perception) but in how it is perceived (ways of perceiving it). Therefore, in order to reconstruct the main characteristics of the “world-subverting” experiments described in *Chamowo*, one needs to view them in the context of Miron’s more general strategy towards perceived reality. In this case, what characterizes most of the visual perceptions in Białoszewski’s text is their dynamic nature. As Anna Śliwa suggestively points out in her book on perception in Białoszewski’s works, “Miron, the protagonist of *Chamowo*, does not belong to those who observe the world having rested their elbows on a pillow placed on a windowsill. [...] Even this seemingly passive activity of looking through the window has been imbued with a latent dynamics.” It should be noted here that the dynamism permeating these perceptual explorations manifests itself in various ways and with varied intensity. The following passage is an example of a rather modest approach:

---

Berbera’s houses can be seen; houses, because it is uncertain which one in a group of tall ones is hers, and one of them digs itself in a mound, and the mound, rising upwards to the left, digs itself into my ten-storey house, sitting across the street to the right. As a result, the mound’s top is taken from me; it is perfectly visible, however, eight times from the eight windows of the lookout gallery on the eleventh floor.

Widać domy Berbery; domy, bo nie wiadomo dokładnie, który jej w grupie wysokich, a jeden z nich wkopuje się w kopiec, a kopiec, idąc w lewo do góry, wkopuje się w moją kamienicę dziesięciopiętrową, tą naprzeciwko, po prawej stronie. Tak, że jego szczyt jest mi zabrany, widać go natomiast doskonale osiem razy z ośmiu okien z galerii widokowej jedenastego piętra. (XI: 16-17)

The view from the window described here evokes what could be a more or less typical cityscape. Miron, however, plays with this image. Rather than seizing the cityscape and making it “known,” his perception sets it in motion. Perceived one by one, the elements of the cityscape appear animated – they grow, press against each other, and, as Miron puts it, dig into one another. As a result, the whole view seems to be transformed into the ambiguous image of a world in statu nascendi. Importantly, however, this is not a result of Miron’s withdrawal. In other words, the dynamism of the perceived view does not have its source in an objective reality that he passively perceives after refusing to seize it conceptually, but rather in his attempt to undermine the principles that guide the habitual ways of seeing. Put in yet another way, Białoszewski’s narrator does not step outside of the conceptual boundaries of world making but simply seeks to break its rules.

The perceptual strategy at work here centers on spatial relations. Miron moves from one side of the view to the other, and as he does so, he focuses on the main elements of the cityscape. As he proceeds, however, the view as a whole loses its three-dimensionality. This effect is achieved through a flattening of perspective. Instead of being positioned in a field of depth, the
elements of the cityscape are seen here as “digging” into each other – there appears to be no space separating them. As a result, the elements of the cityscape are placed on the same plane, and they appear to be pressing against each other.

In this way, Miron’s perceptual exploration of the cityscape destabilizes the unifying logic that guides visual perception. On one hand, the combined elements of the view seem to form a coherent whole, and in this sense the cityscape is conceivable. On the other hand, they are placed on the same plane and therefore appear flattened. This perceptual “experiment” disturbs the holistic logic that generates a unified, three-dimensional view of the cityscape. Because the elements of the cityscape are flattened, the view reveals a tendency towards fragmentation: the elements of the cityscape are perceived by Miron not only as elements of the spatiotemporal world, but also as the overlapping pieces of a puzzle.

To be sure, the dynamics generated by the tensions permeating this particular perception are mostly “dormant” in the sense that they do not achieve full expression. The resulting image, therefore, is comprehensible and more or less coherent. As already mentioned, however, this is not always the case in Chamowo. Consider the following passage:

Most unexpectedly, a dame with a white bag appears, she sways her coat’s flared skirt and its white fur cuffs, waltzes uphill to the church, looks back, keeps climbing, higher, along the slopes, we follow her, farther, higher, here’s ground, stairs, snow, higher, there’s the bag, the skirt, snow, wet, there’s the dame and a turn, and the entrance to… she disappears. Did she enter?

Wieszła? (XI: 261)
This passage arises from a rather simple scenario: during his visit to the city of Wałbrzych, Miron and his friends notice a woman walking up the street; they start following her but eventually lose sight of her. In this case, Miron’s perception is stimulated both by the movement of the perceiving subject (Miron) and by the movement of the perceived “object” (the woman). As he and his friends follow the woman, his perception becomes more and more dynamic; at the same time, it becomes less and less intelligible.

The passage starts with a playful “fictionalization” of reality. Miron notices the woman and observes her appearance and her behavior; however, what may initially seem to be an ordinary situation – the woman simply walks uphill – is perceived by him as if it were a theatrical performance. The woman is described as a “dame,” and the movement of her flared skirt brings to mind a crinoline dress. Moreover, she does not simply walk but “waltzes,” and her behaviour – all of a sudden, she looks back – suggests mystery or intrigue. In this way, Miron’s perceptual strategy playfully removes perceived reality from its ordinary framework of reference. His initial perception becomes a form of fictional world making, which suggests some narrative genres (for example, the genre of mystery fiction) and points to the performative aspect of Miron’s strategy; at the same time, it foregrounds the “fabricated” character of what is taken to be real.

As in the previous example, Miron’s explorations of the conceptual boundaries of human perception center on its spatiotemporal framework. The unity of the spatial dimension, however, is being destabilized in a different way. Miron’s perceptual strategy consists here in unexpected changes in perspective and confusing “close-ups” that separate parts of perceived reality from their context and generate a disjointed image of the experienced world. Importantly, therefore,
although he and his friends physically follow the woman, his perceptual strategy does not center on her alone, but involves a fragmentation of the whole situational framework.

The fragmentation of spatial unity presented here is inseparable from an exploration of the temporal aspect of perception. Miron’s movement and the perceptions that accompany it are based on a linear pattern, in which the random pieces of perceived reality on which he focuses follow one another in sequence. His enumeration of these pieces, however, does not follow the kind of steady pace that would allow for their accumulation within a single unifying framework. As the spatial framework becomes more and more fragmented, the dynamics of the enumeration increase; as a result, the whole perception loses continuity, and the various elements of perceived reality (indicated in the text by a seemingly random combination of nouns and adverbs) follow one another without logical transitions.

In this way, the initial view of a woman walking uphill towards a church disintegrates. The fragmented world tends to lose unity of meaning, and its pieces appear to be freed from subordination to the whole. Through this perceptual strategy, Miron experiments with pre-established patterns of perception, and subverts their underlying tendencies towards unity and coherence. A desired mirroring between the conceptual and the empirical is disturbed and is replaced by a broken image of what was supposed to be seized conceptually. Separated from their contexts, parts of perceived reality are removed from the spatiotemporal framework of reference, which in turn weakens their relation to the whole. As such, they acquire an indeterminate character, escaping the logic of ordering and becoming “rubbish.”

The two quotes analyzed above characterize the general scope of perceptual strategies found in *Chamowo*. Generated from the perspective of both a static observer and a perceiving subject in motion, Miron’s approach is always of a dynamic nature. As shown, this general
characteristic may range from a latent to a more overt dynamism; more importantly, however, regardless of the ways in which they are expressed, the dynamics permeating Miron’s perceptual explorations often render the perceived reality unstable. The main mechanism at work in this strategy is that of fragmentation, which is understood here in terms of a tendency towards the disintegration of norms and rules governing conventional ways of seeing. As such, Miron’s fragmented visions gravitate towards an undermining of the unity of experience and a subversion of the conceptual boundaries of the empirical.

These two examples further illustrate how fragmentation appears in Chamowo in various ways and in varying degrees, from mere evocations and rudimentary tendencies to full materializations and confusing deconstructions. What is generated along this spectrum, and lies at the core of Miron’s world-subverting strategies, is the process of decontextualization. Understood as a tendency to separate parts of perceived reality from their contexts, decontextualization is closely connected to fragmentation; it should be noted, however, that in the case of Białoszewski, the process of fragmentation does not always lead to decontextualization, and conversely, the process of decontextualization does not always result in fragmentation. To be more specific, although some of Miron’s perceptions may be fragmented, they still make sense as a whole. The individual elements of perceived reality he explores through fragmentation may not always be entirely detached from their conceptual context and, therefore, may still function as parts of a whole and contribute to a unity of meaning. On the other hand, Miron’s perceptual experiments at times focus on, and detach from its context, only one element of perceived reality. Although this operation may render the element indeterminate
and thus subvert the conceptual seizure of experience, it does not break the perceived reality into separate parts.66

Taken together, the main characteristics of Miron’s perceptual explorations – their dynamic nature and tendencies towards fragmentation and decontextualization – undermine the world-creating operations of human perception in that they subvert what Nelson Goodman calls “perceptual bridging.” As Goodman argues in his *Ways of Worldmaking*, the laws of nature and the unity that we perceive in the world are of our own making: they do not describe the way the world is, but rather characterize the structure of our cognitive frameworks. Therefore, although there are many different ways our world is (or may be), none of them represents the way the world really is. Put differently: there is no such thing as the way extra-conceptual reality *is*, only ways our conceptually constituted worlds *are*. Understood in this context, perception creates its own facts in the sense that, for example, “we find what we are prepared to find […], and that we are likely to be blind to what neither helps nor hinders our pursuits.”67 Perceptual bridging is one of the main processes at work during such world making. Our visual system, Goodman argues, strives towards uniformity and continuity, and perceptual bridging is an underlying process of human perception that contributes to achieving this goal. It does so by supplying whatever is needed to join separate pieces of perceived reality into an entirety, and build “a unified whole, fixed or moving, stable or changing.”68

As discussed, Miron’s perceptual strategies counter these bridging tendencies. In this sense, his explorations of the conceptual boundaries of the empirical do not center on objects of

66 In this sense, a distinction between fragmentation and decontextualization not only points to an important characteristic of the perceptual strategies described in Białoszewski’s text but also helps avoid unsupported generalizations. For examples of the first type of perception (fragmentation without decontextualization), see XI: 7, 52, and 326; examples of the second type (decontextualization without fragmentation) can be found on pages 169 and 339.


perception but on the very framework that makes these objects possible. The dynamics of fragmentation and decontextualization tend to generate perceptual rubbish, which subverts the unity and continuity of perceived reality and, in this way, destabilizes the spatiotemporal framework that encompasses all experience as well as its objects.

Towards the Extra-Conceptual

The perceptual rubbish resulting from Miron’s “intrigues” upsets the system of norms governing habitual ways of seeing, and as such, it undermines the conceptual framework of the empirical. In this way, Miron’s perceptual experiments sometimes create a “gap” in the conceptual walls of the empirical, and open up the possibility of reaching beyond them:

The hallway upstairs is austere, monastic and cinematic, white, in lamps and non-illuminations, long, long. One walks into a moving harmony of perspective, with only thresholds of dimness and brightness. It is possible to fix one’s eyes on a streak; no, that’s looking at a non-existent point, because it’s not something that comes with my steps. My steps measured themselves, added to themselves, and pull one another along. Looking at the point of concentration, but the concentration of what? Of this void farther, nearer, farther – nearer? Either we meditate almost unknowingly or this is a receding step, with fixation on nothing – can it be on nothingness?

Korytarz na górze surowy, klasztorno-filmowy, biały, w lampy i w nieoświetlenia, długi, długi. Idzie się w ruchomą harmonię perspektywy, tylko progi przyciemnień i rozjaśnień, można się zapatrzeć w jedną pręgę, nie, to zapatrzenie w punkt nieistniejący, bo nie w coś, co nadchodzi moimi krokami, kroki się same poodmierzały, nadały sobie, ciągną jedne drugie, zapatrzenie w skupienie, a skupienie czego? Tej pustki dalej, bliżej, dalej – bliżej? Albo medytujemy sobie, prawie nie wiedząc, albo to jest krok oddalenia, z zapatrzeniem w nic, czyżby w nicość? (XI: 327)
Miron’s perceptual experiment described in this quote takes place in what he often calls a “lookout gallery” [“galeria widokowa"] – that is, in the hallway located on the eleventh floor of his apartment building. This place is frequented by the narrator of Chamowo, and serves as a primary context of, and material for, his explorations.

The fragment is similar to the previously analyzed episode from Miron’s trip to Wałbrzych, during which he and his friends follow a woman carrying a white bag. Like this previous example, it begins with a stable image of perceived reality (in this case, a hallway), which is then destabilized by changes in perspective accompanied by the movement of the perceiving subject. In this case, the experiment begins with Miron walking into a “moving harmony of perspective.” At this point, his perception becomes dynamic, but it is still relatively stable in the sense that it maintains the unity of the perceived surroundings (harmony) and follows the conventional rules of seeing (perspective). The next step, however, marks a change in the visual dynamics, as the harmony of perspective transforms into a series of “thresholds of dimness and brightness.” The shift of focus that is thus initiated leads to a “close-up” that centers on just one of these “thresholds.” When this part of perceived reality is separated from the whole context, it acquires an undecided ontological status – it appears to be unreal and “non-existent.” At the same time, the unitary “harmony of perspective” previously generated by the spatiotemporal framework of reference becomes unstable, and Miron’s perception loses its ordering force (indicated by Miron’s inability to ascertain the distance between himself and the “non-existent point” he perceives).

As can be seen, the world-subverting operations described in this fragment are based on the same mechanisms that characterized the previously analyzed examples of Miron’s perceptual explorations. They counter the bridging tendencies of perception – its tendency to seize the
environment as a unified whole – and generate an unstable image of both the object of perception and its spatiotemporal framework. The dynamic nature of this operation, together with its tendency towards decontextualization, generates perceptual rubbish that resists the conceptual seizure of experience and disrupts the conceptual structure of the world order. The current example, however, reveals more – namely, the fact that sometimes these operations create a fissure in the conceptual boundaries of the empirical, or to be more specific, that the perceptual rubbish they generate transforms into a liminal element that is simultaneously anchored in both the familiar space of the conceptual and the unknowable space of the extra-conceptual.

Miron’s short commentary, which accompanies his description of the perceptual experiment in the hallway, gives us some information as to how he understands this gap and the nature of the extra-conceptual it reveals. The most important aspect of this commentary is the use of negative categories. The extra-conceptual is initially characterized here as a “non-existent point,” and is then described in more abstract terms as “emptiness,” “nothing” and “nothingness.” These designations emphasize that the fissure created by Miron’s perceptual experiment points to something that is not a part of the ontology of the human world – that is, to something outside the conceptual boundaries of the empirical. At the same time, and by the same token, this “non-existent point” is characterized as something that cannot be captured by the sense-making activities of the human mind – as something not (yet) swallowed up by the classifying logic of cognition.

Miron’s further comments reconfirm the extra-conceptual nature of the “non-existent point.” Crucial in this contexts is his claim that it does not appear “with his steps,” which suggests that the extra-conceptual “nothingness” is somehow autonomous and is not controlled by his perceptual strategy. This suggestion indicates that the “non-existent point” he perceives
cannot simply be identified with the decontextualized “threshold” – it is not the perceptual rubbish, but rather something evoked by it. At the same time, the autonomous nature of the extra-conceptual is not understood by Miron as entirely independent from the perceptual “intrigue.” Although it does not come “with his steps,” it does not mean that the epiphany of the extra-conceptual could happen without Miron’s perceptual experiment. In this sense, the extra-conceptual “nothingness” is viewed here as something that cannot be separated from the ways in which it is evoked. The character of this relation is suggestively captured by the narrator when he mentions that his steps “added to themselves.” Miron uses here the Polish verb “naddać” [“naddały sobie’] which means “to generate an extra element” or simply “to create an unexpected addition.” Described in this way, the extra-conceptual “nothingness” is the outcome of Miron’s perceptual “intrigue,” and in this sense is part of it. It does not mean, however, that it is merely a construct. Miron suggests that something new appears here, and while it is created, it is also autonomous.

This description of contact with “nothingness” provides the key to understanding Miron’s world-subverting strategies, as well as an insight into his view regarding the nature of the interrelationship among the conceptual, the empirical and the extra-conceptual. The next section offers further analysis of these issues by means of philosophically contextualized recapitulations.
CONCLUSIONS

always
the world is at the door of nonexistence

zawsze
świat jest w drzwiach niebycia

Miron Białoszewski (VIII: 181)

As demonstrated in the previous section, the range of perceptual experiments described in Białoszewski’s texts share a set of common characteristics that render them potentially subversive. The term “subversive” has been used in this chapter in an epistemological context, and it refers to the ability of these experiments to counter the unifying tendencies of human perception and destabilize the image of the perceived environment. The very epistemological model of which these perceptual experiments are a part, and to which they are a response, has been described in the first section of this chapter as a tripartite structure consisting of human cognitive abilities (the conceptual), the experienced world (the empirical), and the “world without a witness” (the extra-conceptual). The relation between the first two elements of this structure has been understood in Białoszewski’s texts in constructivist terms as a relation in which the conceptual determines the empirical, while the very notion of the extra-conceptual has been viewed in terms of a mind-independent domain of the ineffable. As shown, analyzed in this context, the creative explorations of the conceptual boundaries of the experienced world described in Białoszewski’s prose sometimes generate a perceptual space that escapes the ordering logic of human cognition, and thus opens up the possibility of overcoming the dualism between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual.
In what follows, I will review the philosophical implications of these explorations. First, I will further discuss Miron’s strategy, with a special focus on its complex philosophical underpinnings and its underlying dynamics. Then, I will proceed to analyze how the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual is understood by Białoszewski’s narrator, and will discuss some philosophical consequences that can be drawn from the idea of the extra-conceptual as it is proposed in Białoszewski’s prose.

A Strategy from Within

Although the epistemological model that serves as a context for the perceptual experiments described in Białoszewski’s prose rests upon a constructivist understanding of the relation between the conceptual and the empirical, it does not slide into a vulgar determinism. As demonstrated, Białoszewski’s texts view the ontology of the human world as a construct that rests upon a culturally determined set of concepts and beliefs; this, however, does not necessarily mean that individual cognitive frameworks can be reduced to a single cultural paradigm, or to put it differently, that the conceptual structures of the human mind should be treated as a simple extension of the conceptual structures of culture. Culturally determined frameworks, Białoszewski’s narrators argue, do not correspond to any extra-conceptual reality and are therefore changeable. The human mind, on the other hand, is capable of playing with these conceptual structures and of undermining the rules and norms that determine what we perceive and what we make of it.

As demonstrated in the previous section, the world-subverting operations at work in these playful explorations destabilize the unity of experience by deconstructing the image of perceived reality and rendering its parts indeterminate. Created in this way, perceptual rubbish becomes a
transition point marking an opening in the conceptually determined boundaries of what the world is known as.

The origin of this rubbish requires further philosophical analysis, as it sheds light on the very nature of the perceptual strategies described in Białoszewski’s texts. To avoid unnecessary theoretical expositions, in my discussion I will focus on the theories I have already introduced over the course of my argument. The first of these is the scenario proposed by Mary Douglas.69

The model of human cognition proposed by Douglas has been used as a springboard for conceptualizing the category of rubbish in the introductory chapter of this dissertation. As shown, it rests upon the basic constructivist idea according to which human cognitive activities do not represent the world but create it. As she says, “In a chaos of shifting impressions, each of us constructs a stable world in which objects have recognisable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence.”70 Douglas stresses that what the world is known as is “schematically determined” by a conceptual framework that guides the world-creating operations of the human mind and determines the scope of what is thinkable. These operations, however, do not translate into an all-encompassing motion that seizes all stimuli falling on our senses. Human cognition, Douglas argues, always generates rubbish – that is, the construction of what the world is known as rests upon, and is inseparable from, the mechanisms of exclusion. To put it simply, according to Douglas, during world-creating operations, the “cues” that fit into the pattern being built up are accepted, while those that do not fit are rejected. Understood in this way, the rubbish of human cognition becomes an umbrella category for all discordant elements that are discarded during world making.

69 See Douglas, p. 45.
70 Douglas, p. 45.
The main characteristics of such rubbish stem from its undecided ontological status. On the one hand, Douglas insists that rubbish is a relative phenomenon, which cannot be considered apart from the conceptual scheme that designates it as rubbish. On the other hand, rubbish can also be regarded as independent of human cognition in that it cannot be appropriated by the conceptual scheme. This doubleness suggests a hybrid ontology that makes rubbish a category which is simultaneously anchored in both the conceptual scheme and extra-conceptual reality.

Generally, the dynamics of human cognition suggested by Douglas resonate with the idea of rubbish I have developed in the context of the perceptual experiments described in Białoszewski’s *Chamowo*. It should be noted, however, that Douglas’ model of human cognition presents what could be defined as a foundational epistemic situation: a situation in which the human cognitive apparatus appears to be creating the world *ex nihilo*. Put differently, Douglas’ scenario describes how the extra-conceptual (“chaos of shifting impressions”) is seized by world-creating operations, and is either appropriated by the conceptual or rejected by it as rubbish. While, as previously mentioned, the main characteristics of this rubbish correspond with how rubbish is understood in Białoszewski’s text, the epistemic context in which it is created differs from that explored by Białoszewski’s narrator. To capture the nature of this difference, let us consider the idea of world making proposed by Nelson Goodman.

Like Douglas’ model, Goodman’s proposition is based on a constructivist understanding of human cognition. According to him, there is no such thing as a mind-independent structure of reality, which means that our worldviews have nothing to conform or fail to conform to. In this sense, he claims, “neither the way the world is given nor any way of seeing or picturing or describing it conveys to us the way the world is.”

Understood in this way, human cognitive practices consist in constructing worlds; this world making is anchored in our conceptual

---

frameworks, and there is nothing derivationally prior to our conceptually constituted worlds apart from these frameworks. It is often assumed, Goodman states, that the different worlds we create organize something common and neutral that lies behind them; such an assumption, however, is untenable. As he says, “What is it that is so organized? When we strip off as layers of convention all differences among ways of describing it, what is left? The onion is peeled down to its empty core.”

This last statement marks a difference between Douglas’ notion of world creating and Goodman’s idea of world making in that the latter seeks to overcome what Donald Davidson defined as the third dogma of empiricism, which stipulates a distinction between a conceptual scheme and the extra-conceptual content the scheme organizes. The main consequence of this attempt is a significant shift in the understanding of human cognition. If the notion of extra-conceptual reality loses its philosophical validity, the making of worlds can be simply reformulated as their remaking. Human cognitive activities, therefore, do not start from the extra-conceptual “chaos of shifting impressions” but from worlds already at hand. In this sense, Goodman claims, worldmaking begins with one world and ends with another.

As Białoszewski’s narrator puts it in his commentary on one of the perceptual experiments in his Szumy, zlepy, ciągi [Hums, Lumps, Threads] (1976), “it is known that every miracle or occurrence is always made from existing matter, and that it requires work. [wiadomo, że zawsze każdy cud, zjawisko lepi się z materii zastanej i że wymaga pracy”] (V: 217). This remark provides an apt characterization of the perceptual experiments described in

---

72 Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking, p. 118.
73 See Davidson, p. 190. I briefly discuss this dogma in my introductory chapter.
74 See Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking, p. 97. The search for a necessary beginning of worldmaking, or to put it differently, for the first world from which a successive development of worlds began is, according to Goodman, “best left to theology.” As he says, such a search would be “as misguided as the search for a first moment of time.” (Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking, p. 7).
Białoszewski’s prose. The fissure in the conceptual walls of the empirical world that sometimes appears during Miron’s perceptual explorations is the result of a certain strategy. Importantly, in this sense, it is not generated from outside the conceptual structures of what the world is known as, but from within them. Miron always starts with what might be called a “ready-made given” (the structure of the empirical and its conceptual frame), and this is the “material” with which he plays. The starting point for Miron’s explorations, therefore, is not the “chaos of shifting impressions,” but a more or less coherent image of reality.

In this sense, the initial context for Miron’s perceptual explorations can be described in terms of Goodman’s proposition. However, this does not mean that the “intrigues” described in *Chamowo* result in a rejection of the idea of the extra-conceptual. As shown in the previous section, Miron’s world-subverting strategies create perceptual rubbish that opens up the possibility of reaching beyond the conceptual boundaries of the empirical. Miron’s explorations, therefore, do not lead to “world remaking” – that is, they do not build a new “world” – but rather generate an ambiguous space in which the conceptual and the extra-conceptual confront one another. In this sense, the logic of the perceptual “intrigues” described in Białoszewski’s texts shifts from what I have presented here in a Goodmanian context towards a more basic epistemic scenario that resonates more closely with Douglas’ model.75

The rubbish created by Miron’s experiments is at the center of this contextual shift. As demonstrated in the previous section, rubbish is created by disrupting the unitary spatiotemporal framework of perceived surroundings; that is, it originates from a “given” image of the empirical world. As a result of Miron’s world-subverting strategies, this image tends to lose unity of meaning and disintegrates, and its decontextualized parts become indeterminate. Importantly, the

---

75 I use Douglas’ and Goodman’s ideas as points of reference for explanatory purposes – that is, to unravel the philosophical underpinnings of Białoszewski’s texts, not to suggest that Białoszewski knew their works or was influenced by them.
rubbish that is thus created can no longer be used as a building material for world-creating operations. This is due to the fact that it is by nature unseizable. Białoszewski’s narrator, therefore, does not seek to create new structural patterns, but rather concentrates on foregrounding the space that lies between the processes of disintegration and reorganization. To put it another way, Miron’s goal is not to recycle, but to de-cycle. Understood in this way, rubbish is freed from the domain of the conceptual and becomes unassimilable by the ordering logic of human cognition; at the same time, however, it still bears the trace of ordering and retains some residual properties and fragments of meaning relevant to its original purpose as part of the architecture of the empirical. As such, it transforms into a liminal space that links the conceptual (the meaningful) and the extra-conceptual (the ineffable).

The “Non-Existent Point”

Viewed as a point of transition, the perceptual rubbish generated by the experiments of Białoszewski’s narrator functions outside the dualistic framework of representation: it does not represent the extra-conceptual and does not serve as a point of reference to which the conceptual could conform. What arises as a result of this view of rubbish, therefore, is the very issue of how to understand the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. The vocabulary used by Miron in the course of his “intrigues” can serve here as a starting point. The example analyzed in the previous section represents a general tendency in Miron’s approach to use negative categories. The words “nothingness,” “emptiness,” or “non-existent point” are the most often used items from this arsenal of vocabulary, and as I mentioned, they indicate the separateness of the extra-conceptual as well as the inability of Miron’s conceptual apparatus to seize it. It should be noted here, however, that in this case the use of negative
categories by no means implies that the separateness of the extra-conceptual should be viewed in terms of a gap between two differently furnished worlds, or simply, between two domains that are different due to their properties.

A suggestive elucidation of what this idea of the separateness of the extra-conceptual entails can be found in Rozkurz. As Miron mentions there in the midst of one of his meditations, “Nonexistence is purest. The only pure thing. Incomparable with anything else. Unfortunately. It could be compared to something, but there is nothing to compare. [Najczystsze jest nieistnienie. Jedyne czyste. Nieporównywalne z niczym. Niestety. Byłoby nawet porównywać do czego, ale nie ma czego porównywać.]” (VIII: 125) This short comment foregrounds a paradox that sheds some light on the nature of the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. This paradox consists in the fact that to remain “pure,” or simply to be what it is, Miron’s “nothingness” cannot be seized by the conceptual and be incorporated into the ontology of the human world. In this sense, it cannot exist. Understood in such a way, extra-conceptual nothingness is incomparable in that it lacks features by which it might be compared and therefore fails to serve as a reference point in any relation of comparison.

Approached slightly differently, the extra-conceptual evoked by Miron’s explorations escapes designation. It is a domain to which the familiar categories describing the empirical world do not apply, a domain that is neither ordered nor chaotic and neither possible nor necessary; it is a “world” without motion or rest, without time or space, and without kinds or patterns. In this way, Miron’s understanding of the ontological status of the extra-conceptual suggests that the very question “What is the extra-conceptual?” is wrongly put. It might be said, therefore, that the words he uses to describe the extra-conceptual are non-referential – that is,
that they do not refer to anything in particular.\textsuperscript{76} By the same token, the question “Where is the extra-conceptual?” is equally misleading, not only because the domain of Miron’s “nothingness” cannot be described in terms of space and time, but also because it manifests itself in the context of world-subverting operations that disrupt the spatiotemporal framework of perception.

Regardless of whether it applies to a particular perceptual “intrigue” or is treated as a general ontological statement, any attempt to locate the extra-linguistic simply misses the point, and can be seen as an attempt to talk about a space occupied by something that does not exist. Used in this context, therefore, the prepositions “outside” or “beyond” should not be seen as locating the extra-conceptual in space, but rather as indicators of its ungraspability.

As previously shown, Miron’s view of extra-conceptual nothingness as something that does not exist – that is not part of the ontology of the human world and is independent of human cognitive apparatus – is problematized by his statements suggesting that the epiphany of the extra-conceptual is an unexpected “addition” to his perceptual strategy.\textsuperscript{77} On one hand, he claims, the “non-existent point” does not come with his “steps,” which means that it is not controlled by his strategy, and its appearance cannot be simply recreated by following world-subverting procedures. On the other hand, the “non-existent point” remains an “extra element,”

\textsuperscript{76} This, of course, does not make them meaningless.

\textsuperscript{77} The term “epiphany” has often been used in the scholarship on Białoszewski to describe the revelatory nature of his narrator’s approach towards reality. The prevailing ways of understanding this term could be described in terms of two main tendencies. On one hand, the strategies of Białoszewski’s narrator are defined as epiphanic in the sense that they recognize (and embrace) the contingency of human existence and the instability of what the world is known as. Such a use of the term “epiphany” is, for instance, proposed by Ryszard Nycz, who argues that the epiphanies described in Białoszewski’s mature works convey a sense of “radical temporality of existence.” (Ryszard Nycz, \textit{Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości: poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej} (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), p. 233.) On the other hand, epiphany is often understood as an insight into the essence of true reality. This notion of epiphany is, for example, used by Anna Sobolewska, who describes Białoszewski’s strategies as attempts to reveal the “pulsating wholeness” of external reality and its “elusive eternity.” (Sobolewska, \textit{Maksymalnie udana egzystencja}, p. 22.) It could be said here that the first type of epiphany centers on what the world is known as, whereas the second type seeks to capture the essence of what the world really is. In this sense, the first type functions within the domain of the conceptual and the second one aims to reach outside of it, or to use the characterization proposed by Joanna Niżyńska, the first is self-referential while the second is transcendental. (See Niżyńska, p. 130.) As I will show, my understanding of the term “epiphany” overcomes the dichotomy of these two types and shows that the strategies described in Białoszewski’s texts are both self-referential and transcendental.
and in this it is a product of Miron’s “intrigues.” Certainly, this does not mean that the extra-conceptual is a product of the conceptual. It is a product of subverting the conceptual. The conceptual, however, is needed here because without the collapse of its framework the extra-conceptual could not appear. In this general sense, the extra-conceptual is both autonomous and created.

Such an understanding of the epiphany of the extra-conceptual brings to mind certain ideas proposed by Bruno Latour in his analysis of scientific discoveries. As Latour notes in his *Pandora’s Hope*:

> Most philosophy of science since Hume and Kant consists in taking on, evading, hedging, coming back to, recanting, solving, refuting, packing, unpacking this impossible antinomy: that on the one hand facts are experimentally made up and never escape from their manmade settings, and on the other hand it is essential that facts are *not* made up and that something emerges that is *not* manmade.\(^{78}\)

Latour’s description of the unclear ontological status of scientific facts can serve here as an illustration of how epiphanies of the extra-conceptual are understood in Białoszewski’s prose. Just as a scientist’s contribution is an essential factor in the emergence of a scientific discovery, Białoszewski’s “intrigues” are a necessary factor in the appearance of the extra-conceptual. As mentioned, however, what is “produced” in this way is not merely a recombination of already existing elements. Miron’s “intrigues” are not what Latour calls a “zero-sum game”\(^{80}\) – that is,  

---


79 It should be mentioned here that Latour’s theory proceeds from a philosophical tradition of relationism, and has been developed by Latour as an antirealist position. The philosophical framework on which it is based and within which it operates, therefore, differs significantly from what I have reconstructed as a philosophical context for the perceptual experiments described in Białoszewski’s prose. I simply mention Latour here because of what he says in this particular case, not because his theory applies to the philosophical dynamics of Białoszewski’s texts. For an analysis of Białoszewski’s works from the perspective of antirealism, see: Artur Placzkiewicz, *Miron Białoszewski: Radical Quest beyond Dualisms* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012).

80 See: Latour, p. 125.
the output of Miron’s experiments is not matched by their input, or in other words, more proceeds from his experiments than was put into them. In this sense, Miron’s perceptual explorations generate something independent of their settings.

A good metaphor for this seemingly paradoxical nature of the “nothingness” evoked by Miron’s “intrigues” is that of procreation. In order for procreation to take place, it is necessary that a set of given “elements” – be they of social, cultural, psychological, or anatomical character – are combined by means of certain procedures. In this sense, nothing new is necessary for a child to be conceived. As a result of this “experiment”, however, something new is created – that is, the very output of this experiment cannot be reduced to the initial “input.” To put it differently, a newborn is the offshoot of a set of procedures, but at the same time it is more than that alone. In this very sense, the extra-conceptual in Białoszewski’s prose could not appear without Miron’s perceptual experiments; at the same time, it cannot be simply reduced to them.

While they are useful in elucidating the nature of the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual, the metaphors of procreation and scientific discovery have certain limitations. What may mislead is the word “procedures” that accompanies them. This word is usually understood as a series of actions taken to achieve a desired result, and in this general sense it applies to Miron’s “intrigues.” It should be noted, however, that the word “procedure” does not apply to Miron’s experiments if it is understood as a sequence of repeatable actions that always generate the same results. As mentioned, in the case of Miron’s perceptual explorations, the epiphany of the extra-conceptual is never controlled by his strategies, or as Miron himself puts it, it does not come “with his steps” – that is, its appearance cannot be recreated by following world-subverting procedures. This simply means that Miron’s world-subverting operations

81 I borrow this metaphor from Krzysztof Abriszewski. See his Poznanie, zbiorowość, polityka. Analiza teorii aktora-sieci Bruno Latoura (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), p. 94.
should not be viewed in terms of a pre-established universal method. Although the “intrigues” described in Białoszewski’s prose share certain features (a dynamic nature and tendencies towards fragmentation and decontextualization), not every perceptual experiment that can be characterized by them leads to the appearance of the extra-conceptual. In this sense, the epiphany of the extra-conceptual in Białoszewski’s prose is always contingent – it may or may not happen – and the “intrigues” his texts describe always escape definition in terms of a reliable, unified strategy.

When at one point in *Chamowo* Miron meditates on the nature of time, he expresses a thought that perhaps best summarizes the nature of his perceptual experiments and his general understanding of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual:

> Communication. It has two ends, but one is submerged in the realm of remoteness, ungraspability. It’s like that with Mozart, too. He was transmitting then, I’m receiving now. I’m holding this end, the other one is submerged. It’s not possible to do more.


As demonstrated in this chapter, Miron’s “intrigues” destabilize the conceptual framework of the empirical and generate an ontologically ambiguous “space” of perceptual rubbish. The undecided status of this rubbish escapes the ordering logic of the conceptual, and thus subverts the conceptually determined boundaries of what the world is known as. As such, it becomes a transition point that opens up the possibility of overcoming the dualism between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual, and of reaching beyond the conceptual walls of the empirical.
In this sense, it might be said that Miron’s strategies link two loose ends: the conceptual (the meaningful) and the extra-conceptual (the ineffable). The link between them cannot be established if one of them is not “held” by Miron – that is, it cannot be established without his “input.” The other end, however, goes beyond the grasp of human cognition: although its “signal” can be “received,” it is submerged in the ungraspable. According to Miron, it is not possible to do more than that. Doing more would entail pulling out the submerged end and reducing it to the conceptual.

**Artificial Authenticity**

Miron’s attempts to reach beyond the framework of the empirical and the very nature of the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual generated by his perceptual experiments invite a set of questions regarding the reason behind his strategies. Why does Białoszewski’s narrator attempt to overcome the dualism between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual? As demonstrated, the nothingness that is sometimes evoked by Miron’s experiments cannot be seized by the conceptual, and as such, it is submerged in the ungraspable. Miron’s strategies, therefore, do not reveal the essence of extra-conceptual reality, and they do not anchor the empirical in any objective ontological structure. If the extra-conceptual “cannot exist” – that is, cannot be part of the ontology of the human world – is it really worth fighting for? For what, then, does Białoszewski’s narrator need his strategies?

In order to find answers to these questions, one needs to look at Miron’s perceptual experiments from a broader perspective and approach them in the context of Białoszewski’s writing as whole. In what follows, I will briefly discuss three relevant issues: 1) the formative role of Białoszewski’s wartime experience; 2) ways in which this experience influences his
thinking about the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual; and 3) how it figures within the broader framework of the perceptual experiments described in Białoszewski’s prose.

Mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Białoszewski’s move to a new apartment in 1975 marks an important shift in the trajectory of his writing in that it results in an upsurge of creative activity. Białoszewski’s texts following this move describe his explorations of the new surroundings and his attempts to describe the world _de novo_. As such, they often explore, or explicitly comment on, the mechanisms of perception and the functioning of human cognition. _Chamowo_ is a case in point here; however, the basic epistemological framework explored in _Chamowo_ and in other texts written by Białoszewski after 1975 is not a direct outcome of his relocation to the new apartment. The most important factor that shaped Białoszewski’s writing and is often viewed as the most significant event of his life is his wartime experience, or more specifically, his experience of the Warsaw Uprising. As Jarosław Fazan remarks,

> For Białoszewski, literature is an attempt to rebuild a world destroyed by the war. The need to write reflects his assiduous effort to create a form of life that could stand in place of the one destroyed in the Warsaw Uprising. The annihilation of the city – the physical and spiritual space of Białoszewski’s life – brought out the poet in him.

Fazan’s remark is noteworthy in this context not only because it links Białoszewski’s writing project with his experience of the Warsaw Uprising, but also in that it aptly points to the nature

---

82 As he states in his _Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego [A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising]_ (1988), “it is the greatest experience of my life [to jest największe przeżycie mojego życia]” (III: 46). In addition to the Warsaw Uprising and his relocation to the new apartment, Białoszewski would sometimes mention his first heart attack, which he suffered in 1973, as another important, life-changing event. See Niżyńska, pp. 22-23.

of this experience by describing it in terms of world destruction. World War II in Poland has
often been depicted in terms of a catastrophe that shattered the foundations of reality. The
unprecedented atrocities and ravages of the war that took place on the territory of Poland
shattered the foundations of all that had been considered real, and appeared to mark the end of
the humanly conceivable. As Jerzy Jarzębski puts it in his analysis of realism in postwar Polish
literature,

> Above all, the war dealt a blow to reality itself, or rather to what had been considered
> ‘reality.’ [...] The incompatibility between the mind and the world ceased to be some
distant, theoretical problem accessible only to those who were well-versed in the art of
philosophizing. It became, on the contrary, a common experience of millions of people.84

Looked at from this perspective, the war renders the world incomprehensible and challenges the
epistemic relation between mind and world. The conceptual framework of the human mind is
unable to seize and tame the war, which in turn leads to a “derealization” of reality, or to put it
simply, to the transformation of the cruel reality of the war into something “unreal.” As a result,
the brutal realities of the Occupation are experienced as a “nightmare” or “hallucination.”
Understood in these terms, the crisis of reality described by Jarzębski is inseparable from the
crisis of the conceptual. Both crises are two sides of the same coin in that they destabilize a
realist model of human cognition and call into question the representationalist idea, according to
which the conceptual framework of the human mind and extra-conceptual reality can, in one way
or another, correspond to each other.

---

84 “Przede wszystkim wojna zadała cios samej rzeczywistości, a raczej temu, co za ‘rzeczywistość’ było dotąd
ważane. [...] Nieprzystawalność umysłu i świata przestała być jakimś odległym, teoretycznym dylematem,
dostępnym dla biegłych w sztuce filozofowania. Stała się, przeciwnie, doświadczeniem potocznym milionów ludzi.”
Jerzy Jarzębski, “Między ‘realizmem’ a ‘prawdą’ (proza krajowa po wojnie),” W Polsce, czyli wszędzie (Warszawa:
PEN, 1992), pp. 90, 95.
The main characteristics of this crisis can be found in Białoszewski’s *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego [Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising]*. Published in 1970, the book describes the uprising in terms of chaos and all-encompassing destruction. As Białoszewski’s narrator mentions in one of his oft-quoted meta-commentaries, “You didn’t have to be a poet to have things multiplying in your head [nie trzeba było być aż poetą, żeby troiło się w głowie].” The experience of the uprising, he states in the same comment, appears to be “like one prolonged hallucination [tak jakby jednym złudzeniem],” and although this expression may sound like a “terrible cliché [strasznie oklepane powiedzenie],” it fits with what people felt at that time (III: 45 / 52).\(^8^5\) Also important in this context is the peculiar definition of war mentioned in passing as Białoszewski’s narrator discusses the role of chance in determining death and survival during the uprising. As he says: “the war is like a collection of unfortunate accidents, and the uprising is like an explosion of that collection [wojna jest niby zbiorem nieszczęśliwych wypadków, a powstanie – wybuchem zbioru]” (III: 194 / 177). Both destructive and disorienting, the events experienced during the uprising are in this case defined in terms of an unpredictability that invalidates any attempt to organize the experience into logical sequences and consistent patterns. As such, this definition suggests, the reality of the uprising cannot be conceptualized into a coherent whole that would be both stable and meaningful.\(^8^6\)

As I have mentioned, this fundamental epistemic crisis caused by the world-shattering experience of the uprising is the formative event that gives rise to the very model of human cognition I have explored in my analysis of Białoszewski’s texts. In what specific ways, then,

\(^8^5\) In my analysis of *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, I provide references to both the Polish edition and the English translation by Madeline Levine (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977) respectively. In subsequent quotations, I have occasionally adjusted the translation.

does this experience translate into his thinking about the relationship between the conceptual, the empirical and the extra-conceptual? Consider the following fragment from Białoszewski’s memoir:

Shattered apartment houses. Superstructures. Several stories high. Stripped down to their foundations. Crosswise. Empty. Into shavings, hanging strips of plaster, laths, boards, bricks. There was an awful lot of that stuff. All Warsaw was made of it. Almost. Those five-story buildings, too: laths, plaster, bricks, boards. In other words, splinters. Disintegrated matter. [...] Warsaw was betraying all her secrets. Let’s be honest – at that point, she had already betrayed them. She was already disintegrating. Sinking. She sank one hundred years. Two hundred. Three hundred. And more. Everything was revealed.


This powerful description of the ruined city depicts Warsaw as a space of total destruction. Białoszewski’s narrator focuses here on the processes of disintegration and describes the city as it ceases to exist. Warsaw collapses and falls into “an awful lot of” pieces; it transforms into “splinters” and “disintegrated matter” [“rozsypki”]. Focused on the annihilation of the city, this passage can serve as an example of the crisis of reality generated by the world-shattering experience of the uprising. The commentary that accompanies the narrator’s description of the destroyed city sheds light on the form this crisis takes in Białoszewski’s writing. As the narrator notes, the collapsing city is “betraying all her secrets;” the ruins of the city reveal everything, “giving away” various historical layers of the city’s development and the internal structures and materials that make the city what it is. The processes of disintegration and betrayal are combined here by a skilful use of the words “sypnąć się” and “wkopać się.” On one hand, these verbs mean “to disintegrate” and “to sink; to cave in,” and in this sense they describe the city’s annihilation.
On the other hand, both verbs are often used in colloquial Polish, where they denote the unintentional revelation of a secret.

Described in this way, the ruined city resembles a broken theatrical set which no longer maintains the illusion of objective reality. As a result, what is assumed to be real is defamiliarized and loses its ontological weight. The reality of Warsaw, this excerpt suggests, is a mere construct that is by no means necessary or ontologically justified. This reality developed through history and is therefore changeable and historically contingent. What is more important, however, is that the historical layers that make up the structure of the city do not hide, or point to, any underlying ontological foundation.

Viewed in this context, the origin of Białoszewski’s understanding of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual involves a two-faceted process. On one hand, this process achieves a “derealization” of what the world is known as. The empirical loses its ontological weight, which in turn leads to the idea that the edifice of the human world is a construct. Importantly, however, in the case of Białoszewski this “derealization” of the empirical does not result in a rejection of the notion of objective reality. The real disappears – that is, it is no longer part of what the world is known as – but this does not mean that it no longer exists. Rather, it is moved outside of the conceptual framework of experience and becomes ineffable. And it is to the realm of the ineffable that the ontological weight lost by the empirical has been shifted.

This basic understanding of the relations among the conceptual, the empirical, and the extra-conceptual provides a context for the perceptual experiments described in Białoszewski’s prose. The fact that this understanding is anchored in Białoszewski’s wartime experiences introduces an important factor that further explains the reasons for these experiments. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Białoszewski’s writing is animated by an effort to
build a world that could stand in place of the world destroyed by the war. The natural question that arises here, then, is how world-subverting experiments contribute to this effort. To find an answer to this question, consider the following statement from Białoszewski’s introduction to his 1976 volume *Poezje wybrane* [Selected Poetry]:

> Every form of everydayness generates reality, that is, authenticity. Even if it is artificial. Besides, this artificiality has been developing for ages (cities, civilizations, that is, means of transmission). [...] So, one first needs to get that this Warsaw is not one of the “proto” ones. That all this has grown into artificial mountains. And then one slowly starts unmasking. Everything. And oneself. For writing like mine, everything is noteworthy.

> “Does noteworthy mean worthy of affirmation?” someone asked me.

> I would rather say “of acceptance.”

Z każdej codzienności robi się rzeczywistość, a więc autentyczność. Nawet jeżeli sztuczna. Zresztą ta sztuczność wyrabiała się przez całe wieki (miasta, cywilizacje, a więc sposoby przekazywania). [...] No, więc najpierw trzeba się połapać, że to nie z tych „pra” ta Warszawa. Że to rośło aż w sztuczne góry. No i zaczyna się powoli demaskować.

Wszystko. I siebie. Wszystko jest godne uwagi dla takiego pisania jak moje.


Wolę użyć słowa „zgody”.

This manifesto-like statement mentions the city of Warsaw and the everyday, which are the key categories defining the thematic dimension of Białoszewski’s writing as a whole. Significantly, Białoszewski’s preoccupation with urban topographies and everyday reality is in this case mentioned in the context of world-subverting strategies; the aforementioned effort to rebuild a world destroyed by the war is thus linked with these world-subverting strategies.

The statement makes a connection between the categories of the everyday, the real, and the authentic. Everyday life, Białoszewski claims, creates what is considered real – that is, it

---

generates the ontology of the human world. Constructed thus, the edifice of the human world lacks ontological “ancestry,” which is to say that it is not rooted in any objective structures of reality. At the same time, however, the “artificial mountains” that define the architecture of what the world is known as are described by Białoszewski in terms of authenticity. This paradoxical and somewhat surprising qualification can be understood in two complementary ways. On one hand, the claim that what is taken to be real is authentic suggests that it is not a copy of some hidden reality. What is taken to be real is, therefore, genuine in that the conceptual framework on which it rests does not reproduce, or imitate, the extra-conceptual. On the other hand, the edifice of the human world is authentic in the sense that the way it appears is the way it is. Of course, what is taken to be real is in this case “empirically real,” which means that it is a construct of changeable and culturally determined frameworks. However, the artificiality of this world, Białoszewski suggests, does not make it less authentic. What is also important in this context is the fact that, as I have shown in my analysis of Chamowo, the domain of the empirical is the only “liveable” world. Unlike the realm of the extra-conceptual, the empirical is furnished – it is a spatiotemporal world with kinds, patterns, and properties – and as such is it a space of human existence and the various sense-making activities that can tame it.

The ontology of the human world rests upon a culturally determined set of concepts, rules, and beliefs. The conceptual, therefore, limits the scope of what is comprehensible and fixes the boundaries of what the world is known as. This, however, does not mean that the “empirically real” world we live in should be rejected. One should be aware of its artificiality, but at the same time embrace it, or as Białoszewski puts it, accept it in its contingency and complexity.
Thus, viewed in this broader context, the world-subverting experiments described in Białoszewski’s prose become an integral part of what Fazan calls “an assiduous effort to create a form of life that could substitute for the one destroyed in the Warsaw Uprising.” They operate within this broader project in both negative and affirmative ways. As demonstrated, the goal of these strategies is to break through the boundaries of the empirical and reach towards the extra-conceptual. The processes of world subverting destabilize the conceptually determined limits of human cognition and generate an ambiguous space of perceptual rubbish in which the conceptual and the extra-conceptual come face to face. These attempts undermine the dualism between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual; however, they do not anchor the edifice of the human world in any universal order of reality. The goal, therefore, is not to shift the ontological weight back to the empirical or capture the essence of extra-conceptual reality but rather to foreground the artificial nature of the empirical. In other words, the contact with “nothingness” that sometimes results from world-subverting strategies points to the fact that although mind-independent reality exists, it has nothing to do with what the world is known as.

The subversiveness of perceptual “intrigue” has in Białoszewski’s case a positive side to it. Often playful and casual, the creative explorations of the conceptual boundaries of the experienced world destabilize an established “order of things” and simply show that what the world is known as can be seen in less conventional ways and is more complicated that one may think. More importantly, however, while the perceptual experiments foreground the contingent nature of the empirical, they also maintain its status as the only “human” space, that is, as the

---

88 It should be noted here that some attempts to examine the possibility of capturing the essence of reality can be found in Białoszewski’s early poetry; his later works, however, tend to focus more on “artificial authenticity.” As Placzkiewicz notes in his account of the trajectory of Białoszewski’s writing project: “He starts from testing epistemological and ontological assumptions about the world to arrive at his radical conclusions about the inherent instability of reality and the contingency of life. Since he recognizes this is a natural state, he does not rebel against it but accepts it” (Placzkiewicz, p. 29). I agree with Placzkiewicz’s account, though my analysis is based on a different philosophical framework and therefore takes the problem of “the inherent instability of reality” in a different direction.
sole space of human existence. Of course, approached from this perspective, the realm of mind-independent reality has nothing to offer.

Thus, the oft-noted fascination with everyday reality that is so characteristic of Biała szewski’s writing does not mean that the “empirically real” world of human experience is a fake substitution for the real world shattered during the war. In the case of Biała szewski, the war did not destroy the world but rather exposed its artificial nature. This artificiality, Biała szewski’s work suggests, is worthy of acceptance, and it is so not simply because there is no other choice. The fact that the empirical is artificial is construed here in a positive light, and in fact, in the present case, the empirical world needs to be artificial in order to be authentic. The world-subverting strategies that reach towards the extra-conceptual and defamiliarize the edifice of the human world make this possible.
Chapter 2
The Conceptual and the Body
(Tadeusz Różewicz)

INTRODUCTION

Różewicz’s two-act play *Wyszedł z domu* [Gone Out] (1964) includes a Shakespearean interlude which unfolds in a space described as a cross between a cemetery and a garbage dump, and features three characters: a stranger and two local gravediggers, who, as the stage directions suggest, may also be municipal garbage collectors (T1: 339 / RA: 176). The three characters talk about a body that is buried in the ground. We learn that the identity of the body cannot be established since its fate is being determined by confusing orders delivered by a messenger. It could be the body of a martyr, but it could also be the body of a scoundrel – all depends on how it is defined by a given order. The identity of the buried person, therefore, appears to be nothing more than a discursively constituted artifact. The whole situation, however, seems to be more complex. “What’s in a name?” one of the gravediggers asks at one point, quoting the famous line from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (T1: 341 / RA: 178) and suggesting that regardless of what the body is called, it remains the same. This quote delivered by the gravedigger separates the buried body from its conceptualizations and suggests that it exists independently of the attempts to discursively define it. To our surprise, however, it turns out that both the discursive ordering

---

89 Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to the six-volume edition of Różewicz’s works (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1988-1990) and are noted parenthetically, with the abbreviated title of the volume followed by the volume number and the page number. The abbreviations are as follows: P – Poezja; T – Teatr; Pr – Proza. If an English translation is available, references to the Polish original are followed by references to the English version. I refer to Tadeusz Różewicz, *They Came to See a Poet*, trans. Adam Czerniawski (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2004) (abbreviated as TC) and *Reading the Apocalypse in Bed*, trans. Adam Czerniawski, Barbara Plebanek, and Tony Howard (New York: Marion Boyars, 1998) (abbreviated as RA). In subsequent quotations, I have occasionally adjusted the translation.
of the body and the idea that it can exist independently are based on unfounded assumptions. As we learn at the end of the interlude, the grave is empty, and the body that was assumed to be there does not exist.

The interlude of *Wyszedł z domu* evokes a set of questions concerning the relation between the body and language, or to put it more broadly, between the bodily and the conceptual. The issues at stake here revolve around the idea of the body as a space of the extra-conceptual. In what sense does the body exist, and how is it to be known? Is the body ontologically distinct from, and independent of, its culturally determined conceptualizations? Is there a materiality to the body that is separable from the cultural meanings imposed on it? Can the anonymous universality of the body be linked to the conceptual in a meaningful way?

These questions furnish the main concerns of this chapter and guide my approach to Różewicz’s texts. As they indicate, my goal here is to adopt the theoretical context of the body to explore the issue of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. Similarly to previous parts of this dissertation, the general background against which I develop my argument, and which I seek to probe critically with my analysis, is based on a constructivist understanding of human cognition, according to which the domain of the conceptual – be it understood in terms of language, the conceptual framework of the human mind, or a cultural paradigm – determines the how and the what of the ontology of the human world. In this sense, while the conceptual makes the human world possible, it also limits its scope. In this view, the conceptual does not correspond to anything external to itself, which means that the domain of the extra-conceptual is relegated outside the boundaries of what is meaningful and is considered ineffable.

My analysis of Różewicz’s texts focuses on the possibility of reaching beyond this conceptually determined horizon of the human world. I argue that while his texts emphasize an
ontological gap between the bodily and the conceptual, they also suggest a way of linking these two realms. My goal is to reconstruct the epistemological model that stems from this link.

This chapter consists of three parts. The first part prepares the ground for my analysis of Różewicz’s model. Focusing on his poetry, I first analyze the idea of the bodily as a space of the extra-conceptual. I argue that the body is presented by Różewicz as a realm that escapes signification and exists independently of conceptually defined experience. My reading shows that, as a general category, the body is understood here in two ways. On one hand, it stands for the “surface body,” which is defined by and is considered a part of the conceptual framework of experience; on the other hand, the body is often explored in Różewicz’s works in terms of bodily “depths” – that is, as an extra-conceptual material substance which cannot be cognitively seized. In the second section of this analysis, I briefly introduce Różewicz’s view of the conceptual. Stemming from his critical diagnosis of contemporary culture, this view emphasizes that although the conceptual determines the limits of human experience, it does not operate in terms of stable structures. The conceptual is devoid of any structural center, and therefore, conceptual world making is not guided by unifying tendencies and no longer results in a stable order.

The main part of this chapter focuses on the play The Old Woman Broods. First, I concentrate on the main metaphor of the play – the apocalyptic vision of the world as a growing garbage heap. I foreground the epistemological dimension of this vision and contextualize it in terms of a crisis of the conceptual framework of experience. I argue that the functioning of the conceptual in the play consists in a pointless, chaotic circulation. The unstable quasi-reality that is generated by this conceptual fluidity is devoid of any stable meaning and form, and it escapes any attempts to fix it within a stable frame of reference. My further analysis is developed against the background of this apocalyptic vision and is devoted to a model of the relation between the
conceptual and the extra-conceptual. My focus is mainly on the character of the Old Woman. I argue that the Old Woman functions in the play as a contestatory figure who opposes the expansive proliferation of the garbage heap, and I show that her strategy can be described as a model of sense-making activities based on the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual space of the bodily. According to this epistemological model, the bodily is linked with the conceptual in that it provides motivation for engaging in the world-making activities. Understood in this way, the link between the conceptual and the bodily anchors human sense-making activities and stabilizes the conceptual framework of experience.

In the third and final part of this chapter, I concentrate on some philosophical implications of this model. First, I address the issue of the representational value of the link between the bodily and the conceptual. I argue that although the bodily is linked here with the conceptual, it remains “absent,” existing beyond the framework of representation. Then, I discuss the status of the sense-making activities generated by this link and focus on their contingency.

As indicated by the title of the two volumes of his collected plays, Różewicz tends to describe his dramatic works in terms of theatre rather than drama. However, as Jacek Brzozowski argues in his analysis of The Old Woman Broods, Różewicz’s theatrical plays can be treated and interpreted as exclusively literary works. I adopt this interpretative strategy in my approach to the play. This means that in my analysis, I do not refer to any known staging of the play, and that my reading does not focus on the genre-specific features of The Old Woman Broods.

The goal of this chapter is to reconstruct the epistemological model of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual as it is expressed in The Old Woman Broods.

---

My main focus is on this particular play not only because it suggests such an epistemological model, but also because it encapsulates the set of ideas that permeate Różewicz’s literary output as a whole. This, of course, is not to suggest that the trajectory of Różewicz’s writing cannot be divided into certain phases. Almost all the texts that I analyze in this chapter were published in the two decades between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, and as such, they belong to what Ryszard Nycz has defined as the postmodern phase in Różewicz’s writing.\footnote{See Nycz, \textit{Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości: poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej}, pp. 186-207. A similar periodization of Różewicz’s writings can be found in Michał Januszkiewicz, \textit{Horyzonty nihilizmu. Gombrowicz – Borowski – Różewicz} (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009), pp. 266-280.} This, however, does not mean that the issues I analyze here are not present in his earlier or later works.\footnote{In this sense, it might be said that the various phases in the trajectory of Różewicz’s writing result from a change of emphasis, not a change of content. My approach to Różewicz’s works is in line with the argument proposed by Dariusz Szczukowski. See his \textit{Tadeusz Różewicz wobec niewyraźalnego} (Kraków: Universitas, 2008), pp. 11-12.}

\textit{The Old Woman Broods} is inseparable from Różewicz’s poetry, to which I often refer in my analysis. In his plays, Różewicz often breaks genological boundaries and has his characters switch between prose and verse or even recite his own poetry.\footnote{For an analysis of these tendencies in Różewicz’s drama, see Halina Filipowicz, \textit{A Laboratory of Impure Forms: The Plays of Tadeusz Różewicz} (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 14-21.} This is also the case in \textit{The Old Woman Broods}. It is noteworthy in this context that the play itself is regarded by Różewicz as a poem;\footnote{See Tadeusz Różewicz and Kazimierz Braun, \textit{Języki teatru} (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1989), p. 59.} in this case, however, it is more important that the connection between Różewicz’s play and his poetry also encompasses Różewicz’s understanding of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. In this sense, \textit{The Old Woman Broods} epitomizes and further explores the main concerns expressed in his other works.
This section reconstructs a set of ideas that form the basic philosophical background against which Różewicz develops his understanding of the body as a space of the extra-conceptual. This background relies on the constructivist model of human cognition; it is not, however, developed here in terms of the relation between the conceptual and extra-conceptual reality, but in terms of the relation between the conceptual and the bodily. The first part of this section focuses on how the body is described in Różewicz’s texts, and as such, it centers on the relation between the body and the domain of the conceptual. The second part briefly discusses Różewicz’s view of the conceptual. This part revolves around his critical diagnosis of contemporary culture and approaches the domain of the conceptual in terms of both its “internal” characteristics and its relation to what is “outside” of it.

The Silence of Human Meat

The question of the body is approached in Różewicz’s texts in several contexts and various thematic combinations. To mention only the main areas, the bodily aspect of human experience stands at the center of Różewicz’s examination of human suffering, desire,
sex/gender, and death. Importantly, all these perspectives have a common denominator. What they share is a view of the bodily as a domain that escapes signification, or to put it differently, as a domain that rests outside of the conceptually defined experience of the world. In what follows, I reconstruct the basic philosophical dynamics that underlie this view of the body.

In what sense is the body a domain of the extra-conceptual? The idea of the body in Różewicz’s texts proceeds from the basic intuition that there is an “ontological gap” between the body and the mind. Expressed in various ways, this intuition suggests that the body is an entity separated from the realm of thought. The dualistic framework within which this basic intuition operates is suggestively expressed in the following poem:

I was sitting in an easy-chair
I stopped reading
suddenly I heard
my heart beating
it was so unexpected
as though a stranger had entered into me
and hammered with a clenched fist
some unknown creature
locked inside me
there was something unpleasant
in its pounding with no relation
to me
to my abstract thought

Siedziałem w fotelu
odłożyłem książkę
nagle usłyszałem
biec mojego serca
było to tak niespodziewane
jakby ktoś obcy wszedł we mnie
i łomotał zaciśniętą pięścią
jakieś nieznane stworzenie
zamknięte we mnie
było w tym coś niemiłego
że ono tam wali bez związku
ze mną

(P2: 386 / TC: 207)

This poem explores the otherness of the body, and the rupture caused by the somatic materiality of the body in the conceptually tamed experience of the self. The text begins with a description

95 For a thematic analysis of Różewicz’s view of the body, see Szczukowski, pp. 55-125.
of the context in which this rupture takes place: the speaking subject of Różewicz’s poem sits in a chair and reads. These first lines evoke a sense of familiarity and comfort, and the combination of sitting and reading situates the subject in both the space of domesticated experience (an easy-chair) and the conceptual space of language (reading).

When the subject hears his heart beating, the familiar framework is disturbed. The bodily that is thus brought to the fore is described in terms of otherness. First, the modifiers “suddenly” and “unexpectedly” suggest that the emergence of the bodily destabilizes the causal framework of experience. In this way, the poem suggests that the otherness of the body escapes the patterns of predictability and defies any possible framework of explanation.96

To describe the otherness of the bodily, the speaking subject uses the metaphors of a “stranger” and an “unknown creature.” The bodily, he suggests, is not part of him, but is rather an alien element that has “entered” into him and is “locked” inside him. This use of the distinction between inside and outside sheds much light on how the body is understood here. Thus, on the one hand, while the bodily is “inside,” it in fact belongs to the outside. On the other hand, the subject’s beating heart is described as hammering “with a clenched fist,” which suggests that the bodily is trapped “inside” and cannot be revealed. Both the hammering and the metaphors of a stranger and a creature suggest that the bodily exists independently of the conceptual boundaries of the self. The subject sits in a chair, reads, hears his heart beating and finds it unpleasant, but he never describes himself as a body – in other words, his perspective is locked inside a conceptually defined experience. As a result, the bodily is described in the poem as something radically other. It exists, but it cannot be controlled; that is, it resides outside the

96 This unpredictability of the bodily is somewhat paradoxical. It might be argued that the beating of the heart itself does not escape patterns of predictability in that it is a predictable physiological phenomenon. What is unpredictable is the sensation of it. We normally do not hear our hearts beat – hearing it means there is a problem with it. In this sense, the otherness of the body haunts the “I” and seizes our awareness particularly at times of disturbance.
realm of the conceptual. As Różewicz’s subject puts it, his heart beats with no relation to his abstract thought.

This short poem encapsulates the main ideas that provide a basic philosophical context for Różewicz’s exploration of the notion of the bodily. Viewed as an alien element, the bodily is characterized in terms of an ontological otherness. It does not fit into the conceptual, and in this way, it is absent; that is to say, while the bodily exists, it is relegated outside the domain of the comprehensible. Thus, the ontological gap between the body and the mind overlaps with the epistemic gap: as a domain of the extra-conceptual, the body cannot be cognitively seized.

The epistemic gap that results from the split between conceptual and extra-conceptual is often presented in Różewicz’s works through the lens of the distinction between the effable and the ineffable. Such a perspective links the conceptual with the domain of language and views the bodily as the realm which resists representation. Consider Różewicz’s poem “Pierwsze jest ukryte” [The first is hidden]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Polish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the first tree</td>
<td>pierwsze drzewo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t remember</td>
<td>nie pamiętam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its name</td>
<td>ani nazwy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nor the landscape</td>
<td>ani krajobrazu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>where it grew</td>
<td>w którym rosną</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[...]</td>
<td>[...]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the first animal</td>
<td>pierwsze zwierzę</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t remember</td>
<td>nie pamiętam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its voice warmth</td>
<td>jego głosu ciepła</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shape</td>
<td>kształtu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the thematic level, this poem revolves around what might be called a primary epistemic situation and the fact that the memory of this situation cannot be evoked or preserved. The speaking subject remembers neither the name of the “first tree” he perceived nor the context in which this perception took place. Similarly, he cannot recall his perception of the “first animal.” Thus, the poem suggests that the moment of the subject’s entry into the conceptual order – or simply his first cognitive act – is inaccessible and cannot be recreated.

In this sense, as the poem’s title expresses it, the first is hidden. However, it should be noted that, although both the “first tree” and the “first animal” are hidden from the subject’s memory, they are not the same, or to put it differently, they do not stand for the same thing. The poem’s two-part structure, as well as the terms in which the loss of the memory of the “first tree” and the “first animal” is described, suggest that the speaking subject talks about two “versions” of the epistemic situation. The first one is directed “outside” (towards the world), and the second one “inside” (towards the body). Thus, the “first animal” stands in the poem for the body, and the “first tree” stands for the world. Although not directly expressed in the poem, the metaphorical identification of the body with the animal is a recurring theme in Różewicz’s works and is frequently used by Różewicz to emphasize the physiological dimension of human existence, or

(P2: 135-136 / TC: 139)
as Jan Marx puts it, to degrade *homo sapiens* to the level of a “physiological machine;”97 at the same time, the metaphor of the body as an animal foregrounds an independent, instinctual character of the bodily, and the inability of the self to control it.98

The body-animal and the tree-world differ in their relation to the conceptual. The speaking subject emphasizes that “all animals / have their names;” however, he notes, the first animal is unknown – that is, it does not have a name. The situation is different in the case of the first tree: here, the subject only states that he does not remember its name and thus implies that the tree has a name. This is an important difference since it anchors the “outside” world in the realm of language, or to put it differently, views the world (or rather what the world is known as) as a domain of the conceptual. The body, on the other hand, is viewed in this context as a domain of the ineffable.

Significantly, while the poem distinguishes between the body as a space of the extra-conceptual and the world as a space of the conceptual, it also, in a somewhat contradictory way, illustrates the scope of Różewicz’s understanding of the bodily. Thus, as I have shown, the speaking subject’s statement that the body is unknown suggests that the body is non-existent within the conceptual framework of experience. At the same time, however, when the subject talks about the first animal, he states that he does not remember “its voice warmth / shape.” As in the case of the first tree’s name, therefore, the poem suggests that although the subject’s memory of the animal’s voice, warmth, and shape is lost, the first animal possesses these qualities. In this sense, the speaking subject implies that the body is perceivable, or that it can be anchored in the

---


98 Apart from the two poems I have discussed so far, the metaphor of the body as an animal can be, for instance, found in “Zasypiając” [While falling asleep] (P2: 446-447), “Ciało” [The Body] (P1: 429), and “Et in Arcadia ego” (P2: 71 / TC: 116). For the metaphor of a tree-world (in connection with the notion of the body), see the poem “Drzewo” [A Tree] (P1: 298 / TC: 60). For a commentary on Różewicz’s use of the metaphor of the body-animal, see Henryk Vogler, *Tadeusz Różewicz* (Warszawa: PIW, 1972), pp. 77-101.
conceptual. As a result, the poem seems to invite two mutually exclusive readings. On one hand, the poem suggests that the body is separated from the conceptual, that it is unknown and ineffable; on the other hand, it views the body as part of a conceptually defined experience.

The fact that Różewicz’s texts invite mutually incompatible interpretations has been noted by his critics, and the antinomic character of Różewicz’s works is often considered one of his trademarks. In this case, however, Różewicz’s poem does not necessarily express two mutually exclusive views of the body but, as I have mentioned, offers insight into how far the idea of the ineffable body extends in Różewicz’s works. In short, it delineates the boundaries of how the body is understood in these works vis-à-vis the domain of the conceptual.

We should take note of the way perception of the “first animal” is described in the poem, as it tends to be more intimate than the subject’s description of perception of the “first tree.” Perception of the world, the description suggests, is more distanced and is based on knowing. Perception of the body, on the other hand, tends to be more affectual. To be sure, perception of the body is still perception – that is, it is concept-laden; however, this fact does not simply make the body into an object. The “first animal” is different because it is perceived in a different way.

To further clarify this view of the body, consider the following fragment of Różewicz’s prose poem “Złowiony” [Caught]:

O great silence of human meat. Why has a negative emotional tinge been added to this word. Doesn’t this word contain a great silence. The body. First contact with a body. Its movements. Getting to know one’s own body.


99 For an insightful analysis of the contradictory nature of Różewicz’s texts, see Nycz, Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości: poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej, pp. 186-207.
As in the poem “Pierwsze jest ukryte,” this fragment deals with the split between the body and the conceptual. The first few sentences focus on the idea of the body as meat. This is the body proper, the body viewed as material substance, and it is described in terms of autonomous life and concealed bodily depths. Understood in this way, the body is silent; that is to say, it is beyond signification. Interestingly, the narrator mentions both the silence of the body and the silence contained in what is considered to be the body’s linguistic representation (the word “body”). Paradoxically, therefore, he seems to imply that there is a link between the body and language, and that the bodily can be represented. However, the way this link is presented reveals that the relation between the word and the body is empty, that in this case, the word represents the absence of the body and not the body itself. The body, the narrator states, is silent, which means that it cannot make the word true. The word, on the other hand, contains silence, and in this sense it doesn’t represent the body, but rather represents its own inability to represent it.100

While the narrator views the bodily in terms of extra-conceptual silence, he also talks about the mystery of the body in perceptual terms, using such language as “contact” [zetknięcie] and the more general “getting to know” [poznawanie]. This doubleness was only signalled in the poem “Pierwsze jest ukryte;” here, it appears in a less implicit form, and the way it is dealt with shows that it does not generate two contradictory ideas of the body, but rather suggests where the

---

100 It should be noted here that the phenomenon of silence is often explored in Różewicz’s works, and in many instances it provides a perspective through which Różewicz approaches the issue of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. As Michal Januszkieiewicz rightly observes, Różewicz’s strategy of probing the epistemic potential of silence does not simply consist in using allusions and understatement, or in leaving out some important details, but centers on exploring silence as a domain which points to something that cannot be represented in language. According to Marcin Rychlewski, who suggests that this strategy is of Wittgensteinian provenance, such a view of silence is based on a paradox: on one hand, it assumes that silence stands in opposition to language and can exceed its cognitive limitations; on the other hand, it is based on the idea that silence cannot exist without language in the sense that it can acquire meaning only in the context of language. See Januszkieiewicz, pp. 301-302 and Marcin Rychlewski, “Różewicz, neoawangarda i kryzys logosu,” Logos i mythos w kulturze XX wieku, eds. Seweryna Wysłouch, Bogumiła Kaniewska i Monika Brzóstowicz-Klajn (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 2003), pp. 151-152.
boundary that separates the bodily and the conceptual framework of experience lies. Thus, as has already been mentioned, the body as the extra-conceptual – the body as “human meat” – is silent. These corporeal “depths” exist independently of the conceptual framework of experience and elude conceptualization. At the same time, however, Różewicz’s texts often present various instances of what might be called corporeal perception. Described in more intimate terms, such perceptions are usually contextualized in terms of knowing one’s own body, and as such, they operate within the framework of a perceptual circuit in which the body is both perceiver (the “toucher”) and perceived (the “touched”). Again, viewed in this context, the body appears to be more than a mere object, and bodily perception operates in terms of what we might call an embodied subjectivity.

Thus, regarded from this perspective, the idea of the body in Różewicz’s works extends from the extra-conceptual “depths” (the “great silence of human meat”) to what could be called the “surface body” (the body in terms of bodily perception). Consequently, the split between the extra-conceptual and the conceptual does not always translate in Różewicz’s texts into a clear-cut distinction between the body and the conceptual. The sensory “surface” of the human body functions within conceptually defined experience, and in this sense the boundary that

---

101 I borrow this distinction from the conceptual arsenal of phenomenological studies of the body. Both of these aspects of the bodily are analyzed at length in Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 11-68. Drawing on the works of Merleau-Ponty, Leder rejects the Cartesian view according to which the human body is simply regarded a part of *res extensa* and therefore is no different from any other physical object. The body, he claims, does not simply belong to the physical sphere but is also an intentional entity, and thus it is both subject and object, or to put it differently, it is both perceiver and perceived. Understood in terms of sensorimotor intentionality, this dimension of the bodily – the body as perceiver/perceived – is what Leder calls the “surface body.” The surface body, he argues, cannot be equated with the body as a whole. As he puts it, the body “is far more than perceiver/perceived. Beneath the sensorimotor surface lie the anonymous strata of the visceral.” (p. 62) These corporeal depths are perceptually elusive: although they sustain the surface body and the conscious “I” – as Leder puts it, “the eye lives only by virtue of the stomach’s labor” (p. 65) – they cannot be apprehended and controlled, and as such, they “cannot be properly said to belong to the subject” (p. 65.) In this sense, Leder comments, the body as a whole always bears the “imprint of otherness” (p. 66). See also Leder’s analysis in “Flesh and Blood: A Proposed Supplement to Merleau-Ponty,” *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 200-210, and “A Tale of Two Bodies: the Cartesian Corpse and the Lived Body,” *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 117-129.
separates the extra-conceptual from the conceptual is not located outside of the body but rather at its periphery.

It is important in this context that the way the idea of the “surface body” is expressed in Różewicz’s texts may suggest that while these peripheries of the body belong to the conceptual, they may not be effable. It is noteworthy that Różewicz’s texts tend to present the otherness of the body in terms of a split between the effable and the ineffable – that is, in terms of language rather than concepts – which may invite questions regarding the relationship between the conceptual and the linguistic. As I will show in the next section, Różewicz describes language as being closely connected with human cognitive abilities; hence, he views the conceptual and the linguistic as overlapping. The surface body, which is usually described in Różewicz’s texts as experienced by way of a more intimate type of perception, is not ineffable. Rather, a tension is at work here between making the surface body discoverable (that is, making it effable) and simply discovering it. A good example of these dynamics can be found in Różewicz’s play Wyszedł z domu, where Henryk, the main character who has lost his memory and does not know who he is, is being “reconstructed” and brought back into the domain of the conceptual by means of touching and naming various parts of his body. (See T1: 362-368 / RA: 198-204.)

This basic model of the relation between the bodily and the conceptual can be schematically presented in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the extra-conceptual</th>
<th>the conceptual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the body</td>
<td>surface body</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “surface body” does not function within this model as a link between the extra-conceptual and the conceptual. It belongs to the conceptual, and in this sense it does not eradicate the
epistemic gap between the body and conceptually defined experience. Distinct from the conceptual, the body exists objectively and independently of it.

Thus, the view of the body expressed in Różewicz’s texts can be summarized using the following statement from his short story “Śmierć w starych dekoracjach” [Death in Old Decorations]:

But my body is a whole world, my body is both and simultaneously this only world and its intransgressible boundary, impenetrable outwards and inwards.

Ale moje ciało jest całym światem, moje ciało jest i tym światem jedynym i równocześnie jego granicą nieprzekraczalną, nieprzeniknioną na zewnątrz i do wewnątrz.

(Pr1: 469)

The bodily is extra-conceptual. Because it is mind-independent, it is inaccessible; however, as the narrator of the story puts it, the body is the “only world” – that is, it is the only available domain that exists objectively. This domain is separated from the conceptual in a double sense. The wall between the body and the conceptual is impenetrable inwards, which means that the nature of the bodily cannot be seized conceptually. At the same time, the boundary is also impenetrable outwards, which indicates that the bodily does not validate the conceptual framework of the human mind. In this sense, the epistemological model of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual expressed in Różewicz’s texts is based on the idea that neither does the conceptual represent the bodily, nor does the body substantiate the conceptual.

This view of the body constitutes a basic backdrop against which Różewicz’s texts develop an alternative epistemological model – a model that seeks to overcome the gap between the bodily and the conceptual. As mentioned above, this alternative is based on the idea that in order for the conceptual to matter, it needs to be linked to the bodily. Before I analyze the ways
in which this idea is expressed in Różewicz’s work, however, it is necessary to take a closer look at how the conceptual is understood.

**A Broken Whole**

The view of the conceptual domain in Różewicz’s writings is inseparable from his critical diagnosis of postwar culture. As I will show in the following section, Różewicz describes contemporary culture using a set of suggestive metaphors and images, ranging from the metaphor of old decorations to the metaphor of a garbage heap. What they all have in common is the underlying conviction that contemporary culture is devoid of any foundations and can no longer be viewed as a unifying whole that functions as a stable source of meaning and value. As Różewicz puts it in his “Poemat otwarty” [An Open Poem],

> we go around krążymy
> in a circle dokola
> but there’s no center lecz nie ma środka
> there are many houses which stand jest wiele domów które stoją
> but there’s no center lecz nie ma środka

(P1: 369)

Różewicz’s diagnosis here revolves around the idea that contemporary culture lacks any center. As the fragment suggests, there is no essential core to which cultural practices and other sense-making activities could be linked to acquire a stable meaning and a definite purpose. Looked at from this perspective, human experience escapes any conceptualization in terms of a single coherent narrative, or as Różewicz puts in the same poem, “it cannot be assembled [to się złożyć nie może]” (P1: 364). All that remains are appearances: going around in a circle, as if there were
a stable center, and ignoring the fact that any attempt to anchor human experience is futile. Of course, the lack of a center does not make all conceptualization impossible. As Różewicz’s subject puts it, “there are many houses which stand.” What is important, however, is that these conceptualizations of the human world do not stand in relation to any unifying point of reference. In this sense, they rest on the quicksand of centerless cultural frameworks, and not on stable foundations.102

How does this general diagnosis translate into Różewicz’s understanding of human cognitive abilities? As in the case of his diagnosis of culture, Różewicz’s descriptions of the conceptual framework of the human mind evoke the image of a centerless chaotic structure:

This is the head of the household the head of the world

[...]

this head was a stool a shell a seat

a box a pulpit a tribune a catalogue

a cloakroom a waiting room a magazine

this head has been filled stuffed loaded

with imperative imitation imperialism

import rapport

impotence inscription insurrection intention

idiom...

To jest głowa domu głowa świata

[...]

ta głowa była stołkiem skorupą siedzeniem

skrzynią amboną trybuną katalogiem

szatnią poczekalnią magazynem

do głowy tej włożono wpakowano wbite

imperatyw imitację imperializm

import rapaport

imperium impotencję ineksprymable infułę

idiom...

(T1: 365 / RA: 201)

102 The role of a center explored in this poem (in terms of a lack) resonates with the idea of a structural center proposed by Jacques Derrida. According to him, the concept of structure is as old as western science and western philosophy. As he points out, structure has always been neutralized “by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin.” The function of such a center, Derrida notes, is “not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure [...] but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the free-play of the structure.” See Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 247-248. For a discussion of the symbolism of a center in Różewicz’s works, see Brzozowski, pp. 153-169.
This fragment of the poem “Spojrzenia” [Glimpses] centers around the metaphor of the “head,” which is used here to describe both the content of the human mind and the way it functions. The first line explores the phraseological range of the word “head,” and suggests that the human mind is the source of both individual conceptualizations of human experience (“household”) and the basic framework of the empirical (“the world”). Inasmuch as they view the ontology of the human world as a construct, both the “local” and “global” contexts of world-creating operations exemplify a constructivist understanding of human cognitive activities.

As the poem unfolds, the “head” is characterized in terms of what it was in the past and in terms of what it contains. Both the head’s content and its past are described as lacking any coherent structure: the conceptual framework of the human mind is simply furnished with what resembles a loosely arranged list of random words taken from a dictionary or encyclopedia. This framework, the poem suggests, is acquired through the processes of enculturation – by means of “filling,” “stuffing,” and “loading” – and, like the broader cultural contexts within which it operates, lacks any core. As such, the content of the “head” is entirely contingent: as the ellipsis at the poem’s end indicates, neither the list of words nor their arrangement is final. In this sense, the conceptual frameworks of the human mind are unstable, and they appear to operate in the absence of a set of all-encompassing rules governing the flow of their content.

The way this description of the human mind is developed in the poem suggests a peculiar circularity. The words used to describe the “head” follow their own “logic” and, as a result, are gradually detached from any direct frame of reference; it seems they are no longer bound to the object they describe. In result, the poem seems to describe the human mind in the very same way this mind operates. In other words, the “what” of the poem (the way the conceptual frameworks function) becomes its “how” (the way they are described). This generates a tension: the poem
represents the human mind, and in this sense it unfolds according to the dualistic logic that assumes a distinction between an object and its description; at the same time, however, the poem subverts this dualistic framework by creating a self-referential “vicious circle” that renders the object of description and the description of the object indistinguishable.

This tension illustrates the internal dynamics of the conceptual, and sheds light on how the domain of the conceptual is understood in Różewicz’s writings. Thus, as I have discussed, Różewicz tends to describe the conceptual in constructivist terms. Encompassing both the framework of the human mind and broader cultural paradigms, the conceptual determines the limits of what the world is (and could be) known as, and thus traps human cognitive activity in the vicious circle of conceptual “recycling.” As previously mentioned, this does not mean that human cognition is impossible, but rather that human cognitive activity is limited to the conceptually determined horizons of the human world. In this sense, the conceptual limits the possible scope of human cognition and also makes cognition possible.

At the same time, Różewicz’s texts emphasize that the conceptual does not operate in terms of stable structures. Its various emanations – regardless of whether they are viewed as a framework of the human mind or a broad cultural paradigm – lack a center. As a result, conceptual world making is not governed by, and does not result in, any unifying order.

Thus, the view of human cognition expressed in Różewicz’s texts might be summarized by saying that human cognitive activity is trapped inside the conceptual and consequently fails to represent any mind-independent reality. However, the fact that human cognition is not tied up with any structure of external reality does not mean that it is grounded in, and illustrative of, the structure of the conceptual. The domain of the conceptual lacks any unifying structure: it is fluid and changeable and thus devoid of any essence. Human cognition, therefore, is anchored neither
in the structure of external reality nor in the internal order of the conceptual. The latter does not exist, and the former is inaccessible (which in this context means that it also does not exist).\textsuperscript{103}

Of course, viewed in this context, linguistic practices are no longer considered a neutral tool for depicting external reality. Language does not mirror reality but simply creates it, or to be more specific, it creates what reality is known as. As such, it is self-referential. This self-referentiality is suggestively expressed in Różewicz’s texts through various “tautological constructions”\textsuperscript{104} where “a pearl / is a description of a pearl / and a butterfly is a description of a butterfly [perła / jest opisem perły / a motyl opisem motyla]” (P2: 410 / TC: 215), or where “a woman is like a woman / a flower is like a flower [kobieta jest jak kobieta / kwiat jest jak kwiat]” (P2: 72 / TC: 117). Linguistic practices, as these phrases suggest, function without correspondence to extra-conceptual reality. Words simply refer to other words, or to use the image explored in the poem “Spojrzenia,” they are trapped in the vicious circle of “recycling.”

Because words are independent – that is, because they lack any objective reference and are not organized in relation to any structural center – the worldviews they generate cannot be considered either true or false (in the traditional sense). As a result, the epistemic framework for developing knowledge about the world breaks down into a flow of words and concepts that have no explanatory value. As Różewicz puts it in the poem “Wiedza” [Knowledge]:

\begin{itemize}
\item Nothing will ever be explained
\item Nothing will ever be nothing levelled
\item Nothing will ever be nothing compensated
\end{itemize}

Nic nigdy nie zostanie wytłumaczone
nic wyrównane
nic wynagrodzone

\textsuperscript{103} It should be noted here that the claim that the conceptual cannot be characterized in terms of one unifying order does not necessarily mean that no order is possible. As stated in the discussed fragment from “Poemat otwarty,” “there are many houses which stand,” and in this sense, like the list of words in “Spojrzenia,” the conceptual may be loosely arranged. What is important in this context, however, is that such conceptual orders are contingent and unstable – that is, that they lack foundations and do not exist in relation to any unifying point of reference.

\textsuperscript{104} I borrow this phrase from Dariusz Szczukowski. See his Tadeusz Różewicz wobec niewyrażalnego, p. 41.
In a world where truthfulness and falsity do not matter – or where they are simply impossible – nothing will ever be explained. The statement that the human world cannot be explained means that there is no reason behind its existence, or to put it differently, that it cannot be explained in terms of external causes. Neither can it be “levelled,” which means that it is impossible to fit its chaotic flux into a set of basic principles or rules. As already mentioned, the ontology of the human world is centerless, and as such, it escapes any attempts to view it in terms of a stable, unified whole. Finally, the human world will never be “compensated.” There is nothing outside of the conceptual that might counterbalance, or make up for, the loss of meaning. To put it in another way, there is no external order of things that can eventually be discovered through the explorations of the conceptual, and in this way provide redemption from the vicious circle of conceptual recycling.

Thus, it might be said that the conceptual does not separate human cognitive activity from external reality. To use a metaphor from Różewicz’s story “Śmierć w starych dekoracjach,” the ontology of the human world can be compared to theatre decorations. As such, of course, it is a construct. These decorations, however, no longer maintain the illusion of a stable, objective reality. Made out of recycled materials, the decorations we live in, Różewicz suggests, are of poor quality, and there is nothing hidden behind them. As Różewicz puts it in his explanation of this metaphor, the main secret that these decorations reveal is that there is no secret (Pr2: 230-231). In this sense, there is no wall separating the edifice of the human world from whatever might be located outside of it. The disintegrated human world is all there is.
THE BODY AND THE CONCEPTUAL

I remember that something should connect
with something else
express something
but I don’t know to what end

pamiętam że coś powinno się łączyć
z czymś
wyrażać coś
lecz nie wiem w jakim celu

Tadeusz Różewicz (P2: 223)

The model of human cognition expressed in Różewicz’s texts is based on the constructivist idea according to which the conceptual determines the shape of what the world is known as. The ontology of the human world is a product of both culture and the world-creating operations of the human mind, and as such, it is autonomous – that is, it is not anchored in, nor does it correspond to, any external order of extra-conceptual reality. Significantly, however, this does not mean that the human world mirrors the structure of the conceptual. There is no unifying structure here. The domain of the conceptual is not governed by a set of stable rules allowing cognitive activity to acquire a stable meaning and a cognitive value. What remains is a constant circulation of words and concepts that does not result in any stable world-order.

Różewicz’s texts suggest that no external reality is hidden behind such unstable “decorations.” There exists, however, a domain independent of this conceptual circulation. Różewicz argues that the somatic space of the body resists representation and cannot be seized by the categories of the human mind. The gap that separates the bodily from the conceptual
framework of experience makes the body a domain of the extra-conceptual and, consequently, the only available “world” that exists objectively.

This section is devoted to an analysis of The Old Woman Broods. In what follows, I argue that although the bodily exists beyond the framework of representation, it is explored in Różewicz’s play as a key element of a model of sense-making activities that seeks to anchor the conceptual in a stable extra-conceptual element. In order to reconstruct this model, I first analyze the epistemological context against which it is developed. Thus, in the first part of this section, I unravel the way Różewicz’s critical diagnosis of contemporary culture is expressed in the play, with a special focus on its epistemological dimension. The second part centers on a model of the relation between the bodily and the conceptual. I analyze how this model is suggested in the play, as well as how it overcomes the epistemic crisis detailed in the first part and what structural changes it generates within the domain of the conceptual.

**Depths of Existential Shallowness**

Compared to other plays written by Różewicz at that time, The Old Woman Broods (1968) reveals an unusual characteristic: it appears to be saturated with references to contemporary events. In the play, characters surrounded by a growing garbage dump read and quote fragments from newspapers and mention the names of actual political and cultural figures, often in a confusing way. These vague allusions are combined in the play with information about pollution of the environment, diminishing water reserves, increased motor traffic, and the initial stage of World War III, which is apparently in progress.

This unique characteristic invites a reading of the play as a condemnation of contemporary civilization. Viewed as such, the play presents a world threatened by ecological

and nuclear disaster – a world on the verge of annihilation. As usual, however, Różewicz’s diagnosis is inseparable from his insight into the complex cultural dynamics that underlie this crisis. In this sense, Różewicz’s apocalyptic vision of the steadily growing rubbish dump foregrounds and sheds additional light on the model of epistemic crisis I delineated in the previous section.  

The play comprises two scenes. They unfold in the same place but in two different spaces: the first scene takes place inside a station café, and the second unfolds on the rubbish heap, with only one of the café walls left. This transition from the closed space of the first scene (with garbage located predominately outside) to the open space of the second one (with garbage everywhere) results from play’s general dynamics. As the play unfolds, garbage becomes more and more visible, and thus the play’s overall development seems closely related to the image of a growing garbage heap. Viewed from this perspective, the play’s progression is marked by a new influx of garbage in the play. In the first scene, rubbish pours in through an open café window, and this influx is mentioned three times: before the appearance of the Doctor (T2: 18 / RA: 231), before the appearance of Cyril (T2: 21 / RA: 234), and before the Old Woman gives birth (T2: 25 / RA: 238). Significantly, this third influx of garbage is not even noticed by the characters. In the second scene, two Road Sweepers bring the garbage in on a cart. The first unloading of rubbish (T2: 30 / RA: 243) marks the appearance of the Gentleman and Cyril (who come out of the rubbish); the second (T2: 34 / RA: 247) is followed by yet another turning point: as the stage directions describe it, “everything turns into one huge rubbish dump.”

Thus, while the two parts differ in their respective settings, they are linked by a general pattern that propels the play forward. Importantly, however, the fact that the play unfolds in close

---

106 As Halina Filipowicz rightly notes, “the play is as much about a confrontation with the abyss of meaninglessness as it is about the topical issues of ecology and the arms race.” See Filipowicz, p. 100.
relation to the growing garbage heap does not mean that its plot is linear, and that it can be reduced to a sequence of events described in terms of causal relations. The play consists of a set of episodes that follow one another but do not form a coherent structure.

These inconsequential relations are addressed explicitly in the play itself, when in the first scene Różewicz explains why the Girl had to appear on stage. Paraphrasing Chekhov’s famous saying that if a shotgun is hanging on the wall in the first act of a play, it must fire before the play ends, Różewicz half-jokingly suggests that the Girl “may perhaps play a role in the second or third act, although this is by no means certain” (T2: 16 / RA: 229). Needless to say, there is no second or third act in the play, and the Girl simply leaves a few moments later never to return. This foregrounding of the inconsequential nature of the play is repeated in the second scene, but this time, it is expressed by the characters rather than in the stage directions: after the Three Young Girls – the play’s contemporary version of the Fates – discuss the content of illustrated magazines they have been reading, they conclude that their interaction has not resulted in anything significant (T2: 28 / RA: 242).

Just as in the poem “Spojrzenia,” analyzed in the previous section, the structural characteristics of the play reflect the nature of the things it describes. In this sense, it might be said that the ontology of the human world – the critical focus of Różewicz’s play – does not form a coherent whole and reveals tendencies towards disintegration. The human world described in the play unfolds, but there is no unifying principle that allows it to acquire stable meaning. As a result, it tends to operate in terms of a spiral that is no longer anchored in a central point from which it might emanate and around which it might revolve. As such, it is no longer anchored in any point of origin and has no goal towards which it proceeds. This lack of both an origin and an end is skillfully suggested in the play: the play’s ending does not offer any well-defined closure –
the curtain suddenly falls and cuts the play’s action short (T2: 50 / RA: 262); similarly, when the play begins, the crisis is already well under way.

How does Różewicz describe this crisis? As mentioned, the play begins in the closed space of a station café:

A floodlit stage with no shadows. The light reaches everywhere. The interior of a huge station café. Plenty of red, black, and white tables and chairs. The Old Woman is sitting at one of the tables. [...] Tables and chairs made of metal, glass, and coloured fibres. They gleam, glisten and sparkle.


The main elements of this image are the blinding light and clear colors. Made of metal, glass, and plastic, the shiny chairs and tables evoke a sense of the impersonal artificiality of a waiting room. As such, the café appears to be an example of what Georges Benko (following Marc Augé) calls a “non-place.” As he describes it, “it is a space devoid of the symbolic expressions of identity, relations and history: examples include airports, motorways, anonymous hotel rooms, public transport.”

---

perspective, the café is a space that resists any attempts to make it one’s own and does not allow conceptual world making to take root. In this sense, the closed space of the first scene is in fact open. Because it is a train station café, it is, at least in principle, a public space; more importantly, however, it is also conceptually “open” in the sense that it is anonymous and unseizable – that is, that it cannot be conceptually “owned.”

In this way, the very first image of the play already signals the epistemic crisis that will materialize more fully in the second scene in the image of the all-encompassing garbage heap.

The opening of the second scene offers a suggestive insight into how the metaphor of garbage functions in the play and how it translates into Różewicz’s vision of the ontology of the human world:

A rubbish dump right up to the horizon. Only one of the café walls is left. […] The illumination increases. A space open on all three sides. Perhaps a battlefield. A colossal rubbish dump. A military polygon. A necropolis. But also a beach […] The surface of the rubbish dump cracks in a few places. A Man crawls slowly through it […] Another Man is also digging, starting from the opposite direction. Inch by inch. When they finally meet, it is difficult to say whether they fight each other or fall into each other’s arms, whether they murder each other or embrace.


As this segment of the stage directions shows, the growing garbage heap lacks any stable structural characteristics. This is a space that is conceptually “open” in a double sense. It is open because rubbish is everywhere – that is, it is not limited by anything located outside of it. In fact, there seems to be no outside here. At the same time, it is also open because it escapes any attempt to order it conceptually. The ontology of this world is fluid: simultaneously a battlefield, a beach, and a necropolis, the garbage dump can be everything, but at the same time, it cannot be anything in particular. As in the first scene, the blinding light renders everything visible; paradoxically, however, this visibility does not make the world of the garbage heap identifiable. In other words, this world exists, but it cannot be conceptually fixed.

The way the metaphor of garbage is used in the play points to an important aspect of how an ontology of the human world thus depicted functions. As I discussed it in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the category of rubbish is relative. Rubbish results from the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and stands for what does not belong or fit into a predetermined “order of things.” To produce rubbish, therefore, two conditions must be met: there must be a set of ordered relations and a violation of that order. In this sense, rubbish does not exist objectively, which means that it cannot be considered apart from the conceptual system that excludes it. By the same token, the mechanisms of exclusion that generate rubbish are crucial for maintaining the status quo of a given conceptual order in that rubbish negatively defines its boundaries. Moreover, since classifications depend on exclusion, the rejected elements are essential to the system that excludes them because they define that system’s modes of ordering. As Jonathan Culler explains this interdependence between the excluding and the excluded, “one must consider ungrammatical sentences in order to work out the grammar of a language, or to look at

109 See Douglas, p. 44.
110 As Mary Douglas puts it, “when something is firmly classed as anomalous, the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified.” (Douglas, p. 47.)
what is ‘unthinkable’ in a particular milieu in order to discover its deepest assumptions.”

Thus, to understand a conceptual system, one needs to look at what it rejects. Of course, this general rule applies to all kinds of systems; consequently, one needs the category of chaos to understand order, the notion of the unreal to understand the real, and the idea of falseness to understand truth.

Viewed in this context, the growing garbage heap in *The Old Woman Broods* reveals a peculiar characteristic. As mentioned, it does not form a stable structure and lacks boundaries; more importantly, however, rubbish in the play does not exist in relation to any external order. Put differently, it is not located outside the ontology of the human world but simply constitutes this ontology.

The unstoppable proliferation of rubbish in the play leads to a situation where it is no longer relative to any structure – that is, it cannot be defined in relation to any system of ordering. Because the binary logic between rubbish and an ordered conceptual structure is replaced here by uncontrollable excess and proliferation, the very framework determining what is “reasonable,” “meaningful,” or simply “true” collapses. It is noteworthy that the dynamic of this ceaseless proliferation resembles what Jean Baudrillard defines as “ecstasy.” As he explains, ecstasy is the elevation of an object’s characteristics to the “superlative power,” through which these characteristics cease to be relative to their opposites and appear as if they had absorbed all of their energy.

Thus, it might be said that the garbage heap in Róžewicz’s play is not separated from the system of ordering, but actually absorbs all of its energy: chaos absorbs the

---


energy of order, and the meaningless absorbs the energy of the meaningful. Consequently, all contradictions become fluid. What exists is a chaotic, unstable quasi-reality.

This structureless conceptual landscape is reflected in both the way the characters behave and the way they speak. Thus, to mention only a few examples of the characters’ behaviour: the Doctor in the first scene appears to be some sort of witch-doctor who recites magical prescriptions of traditional medicine (T2: 19 / RA: 232); The Blind Man reads a newspaper (T2: 45 / RA: 258); the Waiter cleans a glass with a dirty cloth (T2: 9 / RA: 223), and then, he uses the same dirty cloth to wipe the Old Woman’s face (T2: 10 / RA: 224). These multiple contradictions exhibited by the characters make their behavior unpredictable. Like the indeterminate conceptual universe of their world, the characters’ inconsistent behavior destabilizes the logic of non-contradiction – that is, it does not follow the “either/or” pattern, but tends to switch back and forth among multiple options. Contradictory elements appear here to be displaced from a stable dualistic framework: they overlap and cross over into the domain of their opposites.

The characters’ linguistic practices seem equally uprooted from any stable framework. Because the conceptual chaos of the garbage heap is all there is here, linguistic practices do not operate in terms of a dualism between the conceptual structure of language and the objective structure of reality. As mentioned, the space of the proliferating garbage is open – that is, there is no “outside” of it. Language, therefore, cannot represent any external order. Interestingly, it cannot represent the conceptual structure of what the world is known as, either. This is because the domain of the conceptual – regardless of whether it is understood in terms of language or the ontology of the human world – lacks any structure.
The conceptual framework of language in *The Old Woman Broods* is part of the garbage heap, and appears in the play in the form of random texts, such as torn-up newspapers, outdated textbooks, old encyclopaedias, and newspaper advertisements. The characters often speak to one another by quoting fragments of newspaper articles, old anecdotes, clichés, and incessantly repeated phrases:

GENTLEMAN: Well, Cyril, humanity’s on the brink again.
CYRIL: Indeed, your honour, it is on the brink. Shampoo?
GENTLEMAN: No, thank you. A few years have passed and it’s on the brink again.
CYRIL: And how is your wife? If I may ask…
GENTLEMAN: Thank you, she is on the brink but full of energy.

PAN: Cóż, Cyrylu, znów ludzkość na krawędzi.
CYRIL: Niestety, panie mecenasie, na krawędzi... czy umyć głowę?
PAN: Nie trzeba... parę latek przeszło i znów na krawędzi...
PAN: Dziękuję, na krawędzi, ale pełna energii. (T2: 31 / RA: 244)

This fragment of the conversation between the Gentlemen and Cyril revolves around a general diagnosis of the world’s predicament. The exchange between the two characters unfolds as, and maintains the appearance of, a casual conversation at the barber’s shop. As the dialogue progresses, the Gentleman’s initial statement about the world being on the brink of some unspecified catastrophe is repeated by Cyril, and then restated by the Gentleman; in in its fourth appearance, however, the phrase is displaced from its original context and somewhat unexpectedly used to describe the well-being of the Gentleman’s wife.

As this short conversation between the Gentlemen and Cyril indicates, the characters’ linguistic practices reveal tendencies towards decontextualization. The unstable framework of conceptual garbage does not allow for language to take root. As the dialogue suggests, the flow
of repeated phrases and statements tends to separate them from their original contexts, which in turn leads to a situation in which linguistic practices lose a well-defined representational value. The phrase concerning the world’s predicament, which is not only repeated in this particular dialogue but reappears throughout the play in various forms and contexts, carries no “weight.”

Like the various forms of address used to describe the Gentleman – he is called both “mecenas” [a lawyer] and “redaktor” [a journalist], and is later referred to as the Baron (T2: 32, 38 / RA: 246, 251) – the words used by the characters lose significance.

In this sense, the proliferation of rubbish throughout the play does not produce any conceptual change. Although the garbage dump grows excessively, it does not transcend its conceptual boundaries. To borrow another term from Baudrillard, the ontology of the heap appears to have reached a “dead point” – that is, “the neutral point where every system crosses the subtle limit of reversibility, contradiction, and reevaluation.”113 Everything is circulating here: as the Old Woman puts it, “we consume what we excrete [wydalamy i zjadamy]” (T2: 40 / RA: 253). In this sense, nothing new can happen. The characters live “on the brink”, but as the Old Woman notes, “the situation is always the same [sytuacja jest zawsze jednakowa]” (T2: 12 / RA: 226). As a result, all that remains is playing with the pieces.

The Brooding Body

Explored in the play through the metaphor of proliferating garbage, the instability of the human world is an important element of Różewicz’s understanding of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. The vision expressed in Różewicz’s play emphasizes the fluidity of both linguistic practices and the conceptual domain within which they operate.

However, at the same time, Różewicz’s play suggests an epistemological model that grounds the

chaos of the conceptual in something stable. Because there seems to be no outside reality here – the space of the proliferating garbage is open – whatever element may ground linguistic practices must itself be part of the dump. As I have mentioned, this stable extra-conceptual element is the body, and the key to understanding this model of the relation between the bodily and the conceptual is the figure of the Old Woman.

The eponymous character of the play, the Old Woman is at the center of the proliferating garbage heap. It is noteworthy that at first she appears to be part of it:

The Old Woman is sitting at one of the tables. She is covered in a heap of spring, summer, autumn, and winter clothes. With brooches, bracelets, watches, chains, earrings, and flowers dangling all over her. Her head is covered with three hats and a variety of multi-coloured hair.

Together with the other characters, the Old Woman is surrounded by proliferating garbage, and the way she looks mirrors the excessive character of the dump. Significantly, she is the only character in the play dressed in such a way. The play thereby suggests that there is a relation between the figure of the Old Woman and the growing garbage heap. This suggestion, however, does not lead to an identification of the Old Woman with the chaos of the heap, but rather emphasizes the fact that despite the various ways in which she differs from the other characters, the Old Woman is not an outsider – that is, that her otherness emerges from within the chaotic world of the dump.
How is the Old Woman different? One of the most noticeable aspects of her behaviour is the way she talks. In her interactions with the other characters she is often confident and in control. She constantly summons them, demands something, and scolds or simply derides them. Because the Old Woman is often sarcastic and irreverent, her linguistic practices differ from the cliché-ridden language of the other characters, and make her appear distanced from the surrounding chaos. In this sense, as Grzegorz Niziołek suggests, the Old Woman’s language does not belong to the garbage heap and has the power to affect her surroundings.114 This distanced position of the Old Woman is sometimes expressed in a more explicit way. Thus, when she asks the Waiter: “what do these papers of yours say [co w tych twoich gazetach],” or “what’s going on in that wretched world of yours [co na tym waszym zakichanym świecie]” (T2: 12 / RA: 225), she is not simply showing her ignorance of the world’s affairs; she is critical of the situation and, as her use of the possessive pronoun “yours” indicates, tends to dissociate herself from it.

As I have mentioned, the Old Woman is located at the center of the growing garbage heap. Her centrality, however, should not be understood solely in spatial terms. In both scenes, she sits at a table, but her table is not necessarily located at the center of the stage: as the stage directions indicate, in the first scene, she simply sits “at one of the tables [przy jednym ze stolików]” (T2: 7 / RA: 221), and in the second, she is situated “at a corner table [w kącie przy stoliku]” (T2: 26 / RA: 240). More important in this context is the fact that she is sitting. For the most part, the Old Woman does not move, and this characteristic distinguishes her from both the other characters and the growing garbage heap. Motionless and “rooted” in place, she appears to be a relatively stable point of reference within the fluid world of the play.

---

This rootedness of the Old Woman is closely related to her body. The Old Woman appears first and foremost as a body, and all her interactions with the other characters revolve around her body. In this sense, her sitting is presented in the play in terms of bodily presence. Thus, the Old Woman’s central position in the play does not merely result from her being fixed in place; rather, what defines her status is the fact that she is a body. As such, the Old Woman is not simply a body-in-space, but rather the “space of the body.” Her presence creates a space of somatic materiality that ruptures the conceptual chaos of the heap; consequently, this space appears to be a domain of the extra-conceptual.

Seen from this perspective, the Old Woman becomes a contestatory figure that opposes the expansive proliferation of the garbage dump. For example, when the Waiter mentions that World War III is already under way, the Old Woman demands flour, and claims that she will eat dough to fatten herself up and to paste the war over with it [“ciastem zakleję wojnę”] (T2: 12-13 / RA: 226-227). Similarly, when she is told that the larches outside the café have been cut down, she responds by saying that the fools who have done it should have had sex with her instead of cutting the trees, and then she orders the Waiter to fondle her (T2: 22 / RA: 235-236). Her response to the repeated clichés about the tense situation in the world is always the same: “One ought to give birth, whoever can ought to give birth [Trzeba rodzić, kto tylko może, powinien rodzić]” (T2: 12 / RA: 225). Noteworthy in this context is also the Old Woman’s constant demand for sugar, which is one of her most frequent reactions to the proliferating garbage. Expressed in the form of a bird-like sound – as the stage directions put it, she “coos like a dove” (T2: 9 / RA: 223) – these calls add an animalistic tinge to her responses, and thus further foreground the bodily dimension of her behavior.

115 As Grzegorz Niziołek remarks, the bodily presence of the Old Woman “radiates throughout the whole play.” [“Obecność Starej Kobiety, tak mocno osadzona w ciele, promieniuje na cały dramat.”] See Niziołek, p. 129.
The basic philosophical framework underlying this approach to the conceptual chaos of the garbage heap is expressed in a more explicit way in the following advice the Old Woman gives to the Waiter:

Sugar-r-r... sugar-r-r! You see, my boy, we must perform our tasks. We have to eat and give birth. [...] We have to sweeten and give birth. Cook, give birth, and sweeten. Without pause. Let them prepare war... Let it be in progress... Don’t care a damn. You have to see to it that the glass is clean. This is your task.

Cukrrru... cukrrru! Widzisz chłopcze, my musimy robić swoje, musimy jeść i rodzić. [...] Musimy słodzić i rodzić. Gotować, rodzić i słodzić. Bez przerwy. Niech szykują wojnę... toczy się... spłuń na to. Ty masz utrzymywać w czystości szklankę. To jest twoje zadanie.

This statement revolves around three categories. The first one is the category of the everyday life. Despite the chaos of the growing garbage heap, the Old Woman states, we should perform our duties, meaning here that we should stick to the mundane aspects of our life and focus on its basic routines and concerns. Importantly, the ordinary life is presented here as bound to the physicality of the body. The category of the body, the Old Woman suggests, anchors the rhythm of daily life: the body eats, cooks, and performs other functions, and in this way opposes the expansive proliferation of garbage. Noteworthy in this context is the play’s title, which defines the Old Woman’s role in terms of brooding, signaling the main elements of her strategy. The Polish word for “to brood” – the word “wysiadywać” – means to “sit on eggs, to hatch,” and this meaning suggests giving life. At the same time, the word denotes the mundane, monotonous activity of sitting somewhere frequently and for a long time, or gaining something through passive persistence. All of these meanings suggest a routine, prosaic activity that is both purposeful and fruitful.
The bodily dimension of the everyday opens up the possibility of rejecting the conceptual chaos of the garbage heap, and in this sense it is linked to the category of order. This third category sheds an important light on the Old Woman’s strategy. As mentioned, the Old Woman is part of the garbage heap and cannot reject its chaos from without. At the same time, her behavior indicates that she is distanced from her surroundings. As I have showed, this distanced position stems from the Old Woman’s bodily presence, which foregrounds the otherness of her status and anchors her actions in a stable point of reference. As a result, the Old Woman is able to order her environment. Arising from basic bodily needs, her constant demands, scolding, and general contempt towards the growing chaos generate a conceptual space that is separated from, and opposed to, the proliferating garbage. Because she tends to order her environment, her “world making” relies on the mechanisms of exclusion. Paradoxically, this means that her strategy creates rubbish.

As I mentioned in the previous section, the growing garbage heap is undifferentiated and lacks boundaries. Depicted in this way, the conceptual universe of the human world is unstable and devoid of structure. Everything seems to be uprooted here from a dualistic framework of reference, and therefore, the world of the proliferating rubbish cannot be defined in relation to any order; to put it differently, it is not relative to any structure that might reject it as rubbish. However, as I have indicated, the Old Woman’s somatic materiality ruptures the chaos of her surroundings and renders this chaos “external.” In this way, her ordering forces the conceptual garbage of the heap into a dualistic framework and makes it relative. It might be said, therefore, that the rubbish in the play exists in a double sense: on a general plane, it stands for the all-encompassing conceptual chaos of the human world; in the particular context of the Old Woman’s strategy of ordering, however, this chaos is “recycled” and thus becomes an important
element of her local “world making”. I use the term “recycling” here to point to the mechanism of adapting the free-floating garbage for a new use in a new context, and to emphasize that the Old Woman is part of the heap and therefore can only use what is available to her within this given ontology of the human world. A more appropriate term to describe the structural shift that results from her strategy, however, might be “de-cycling.” This term seems more accurate in the sense that initially the Old Woman is not surrounded by garbage understood as a relative by-product of ordering. It is her ordering that produces such garbage, and this is achieved by stopping the open-ended circulation of garbage and tying it instead to a stable frame of reference. From this perspective, the Old Woman simply de-cycles the vicious circle of conceptual recycling.

Consequently, the conceptual ordering of the surroundings that radiates from the Old Woman’s bodily presence is both anchored in a stable point of reference and acquires its rubbish. By its nature, the rejected rubbish contravenes this bodily order and reaffirms it, or put it another way, negatively defines its boundaries and modes of ordering. In this sense, this rubbish allows the bodily to be linked with the conceptual.

It should be mentioned here that the other characters also order their environment and in a way respond to the growing garbage heap. For example, upon his entrance in the first scene, Cyril, who is dressed in a “spotlessly white shirt, smoking jacket, and gloves,” reacts to the garbage that has poured in through the open window by sweeping it and pushing it away under the tables (T2: 21-22 / RA: 235); when another pile of garbage pours in, the Waiter brushes a speck off of his dinner jacket (T2: 25 / RA: 238). In the second scene, responses to the garbage heap are even more organized: after the two Road Sweepers bring the second load of garbage, everything changes into “one huge rubbish dump,” but, as the stage directions have it, “life
continues as normal” and all institutions “operate with comparative efficiency” (T2: 34 / RA: 247). These ways of ordering the chaos of the garbage dump, however, differ from the Old Woman’s strategy. What distinguishes them is their peculiar inconsistency. To offer a few examples of how they are inconsistent: After the Road Sweepers unload the garbage, they sweep the whole space; however, once they gather the garbage together, they scatter it again (T2: 36 / RA: 249); the Three Girls weave wreaths and make bouquets out of garbage, but every few minutes they throw everything on the ground and start all over again (T2: 44 / RA: 257); similarly, in the first scene, the Waiter first creates a mess by sweeping various items from the tables onto the floor, and then immediately starts picking these items up and putting them back on the tables (T2: 7-8 / RA: 221). As I mentioned before, the characters’ behaviour does not follow the “either/or” pattern and, therefore, appears to be contradictory. If viewed in the context of their attitude towards the proliferating garbage, this behavior seems pointless and repetitive. As opposed to the attitude embodied by the Old Woman, the other characters organize their environment, but their world making is not anchored in any stable source. It might be said here that while they “perform their tasks” and “see to it that the glass is clean” – that is, while their behaviour tends to preserve the appearance of ordinary life and tends to order the surroundings – their strategy lacks the third and most important element, namely a stable point of reference. In short, unlike the Old Woman’s attitude towards the proliferating garbage, their behaviour is not bound to the physicality of the body. Consequently, they do not “give birth,” but rather merely play with the pieces. As such, their world making seems to belong to the chaos of the garbage heap.

But how is the Old Woman’s ordering anchored in the bodily? In other words, in what sense does she “give birth”? It is noteworthy that the play suggests that the Old Woman actually
gives birth to a child: at the end of the first scene, the Old Woman states that she must give birth continually and asks the Waiter to get the water ready and to prepare the sheets. The curtain that falls after she makes this request is described as a “huge, white, blood-stained sheet [wielkie białe prześcieradło pokryte czerwonymi plamami]” (T2: 26 / RA: 239). Later in the second scene, she also tells the Waiter that she gave birth to one boy and three girls, and lets the Waiter see the boy (whom she is hiding under her dress) (T2: 34 / RA: 247). At the same time, however, as my analysis shows, the play invites a reading of the Old Woman’s childbearing as a metaphor for her strategy of ordering her surroundings and opposing the chaos of the proliferating garbage. Significantly, the metaphorical meaning of “giving birth” is also suggested more explicitly: as the Old Woman tells the Waiter before she gives birth at the end of the first scene, “I am brooding on the eggs, metaphorically speaking of course, you silly fool [wysiaduję, siedzę na jajach, oczywiście w przenośni, gamoniu]” (T2: 26 / RA: 239). It should be added here that, as such, “giving birth” is not gender-specific. As the Old Woman puts it, “Everyone ought to give birth. Greta Garbo and Sartre – and Bertrand Russell – and Cardinal Ottaviani […] Everyone, regardless of age, rank, sex, and worldview [Wszyscy powinni rodzić. I Greta Garbo, i Sartre, i Bertrand Russell, i kardynał Ottawiani [...] Wszyscy bez względu na wiek, rangę, płeć i światopogląd]” (T2: 13 / RA: 227).

As mentioned, the idea of “childbearing” proceeds in the play from a view of the body as a source. The body is viewed here as the domain of the extra-conceptual – a domain to which the conceptual chaos of the rubbish dump is external – and as the source of human cognitive practices. As the Old Woman states in one of her poetic monologues, “our bellies [...] / are true mills / are great white poems [nasze brzuchy / [...] to prawdziwe młyny / to wielkie białe poematy]” (T2: 14 / RA: 228). The Old Woman notes in this monologue that the belly is a
“whole land” [“cała kraina”] – it is a separate ontological domain, but it “does not receive proper recognition [jest traktowana po macoszemu]” in the unstable world of proliferating garbage. As the metaphor of the mill suggests here, this domain is not passive, but functions in terms of an active force generating a certain “product.” Like a mill, the somatic space of the body also operates in a more or less routine way, and therefore, its ontological status and the outcome of its processes are stable. Sense making – here the product of these bodily processes – is in this instance described as a “poem.” The metaphor of a poem suggests that such world making orders the environment into a certain form, and it furthermore foregrounds the conceptual nature of this ordering.

It is worth mentioning that the way the idea of the connection between the body and the conceptual is expressed in Różewicz’s play resonates to some degree with Julia Kristeva’s concept of the speaking body.116 Challenging theories of the body that are based on a dualism between the biological and the social, Kristeva argues that signifying practices are closely connected with bodily processes. According to her, bodily drives have an impact on language through what she calls the “semiotic” element. Generally defined as the bodily drive force in language, the semiotic provides the impulse for engaging in signifying processes and makes signification matter. The semiotic, therefore, links the living body with language; anchored in the bodily, signification is like an infusion of the living body into language.

The semiotic element needs what Kristeva calls the “symbolic” element. The symbolic is the grammar, or more generally, the structure of language that governs how we communicate. Kelly Oliver describes the relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic in the following way:

Without the symbolic element of signification, we have only sounds or delirious babble. But without the semiotic element of signification, signification would be empty […]. The symbolic provides the structure necessary to communicate. Both elements are essential to signification. And it is the tension between them that makes signification dynamic.\textsuperscript{117}

According to Kristeva, the interdependence of the symbolic and semiotic elements maintains the relationship between language and human experience, or to put it another way, it allows our signifying practices to both signify something (through the symbolic) and have significance (through the semiotic).

As in Kristeva’s view, the model of the relation between the body and the conceptual expressed in \textit{The Old Woman Broods} emphasizes the role of the bodily as the source of sense-making activities. In her duel with the garbage heap, the Old Woman opposes conceptual chaos through the bodily anchored ordering of her surroundings. Depicted in the play not only in terms of language but also as a general behaviour, the Old Woman’s strategy subverts the open-ended circulation of conceptual garbage; because it is anchored in the somatic space of the body, her ordering does not belong to the garbage dump and, therefore, has the power to constitute stable meanings.

As mentioned, the strategies of the other characters in the play lack this bodily anchor. To use Kristeva’s vocabulary, it could be said that their sense-making activities are devoid of the semiotic element. As a result, their general behaviour – for example, their futile attempts to order the environment – and their linguistic practices – for instance, in the discussion of the world’s predicament by the Gentlemen and Cyril – indicate that the strategies of these characters can neither signify anything nor acquire any kind of significance.

\textsuperscript{117} Oliver, p. 343.
Thus, the epistemological model expressed in the play rests upon the idea that the bodily extends to the domain of the conceptual. However, this does not mean that the bodily can be identified with the conceptual. The bodily is linked with the conceptual in the sense that it provides the motivation for engaging in the world-making activities and that it guides these activities. At the same time, however, the body is ontologically distinct from the conceptual. Thus, as in Kristeva’s theory in which the semiotic requires the symbolic, the bodily in Różewicz’s play cannot generate meaning on its own, and therefore, it needs the conceptual.

As I have shown, the domain of the conceptual is presented in the play as an undifferentiated flow of garbage. This domain lacks any stable structural characteristics, and it is open, not being limited by or existing in relation to any hidden order of external reality. However, according to the model of the relation between the bodily and the conceptual expressed in Różewicz’s play, the chaotic circulation of the conceptual is “external” to the bodily centered aspects of human experience. Viewed in terms of basic routines and the concerns of daily life, this experience stands in opposition to conceptual garbage and rejects it. In this way, it de-cycles garbage or, to put it differently, makes garbage relative to a system of ordering. Such excluded garbage negatively defines the bodily centered ordering of the surroundings and reaffirms its status quo. In this sense, rubbish stabilizes the conceptual framework of ordering and substantiates its link with the bodily.
CONCLUSIONS

without the body, there will be no spirit and no soul... [...] St. Joan had to have a body.

bez ciała nie będzie ani ducha, ani duszy... [...] św. Joanna musiała mieć ciało.

Tadeusz Różewicz (Pr2: 103-104)

The model of human cognitive activity expressed in Różewicz’s texts originates in the basic constructivist idea according to which the conceptual determines the ontology of the human world. In this view, conceptual world making is autonomous in the sense that it governs the shape of what the world is known as, and in doing so, it does not represent any external order of things. As I have shown in this chapter, the idea that the domain of the conceptual is autonomous often coexists in Różewicz’s texts with the conviction that there is no extra-conceptual reality outside of what is given (cultural paradigm) and constructed (world making). At the same time, Różewicz emphasizes that the domain of the conceptual is fluid and therefore does not generate any stable structures. The conceptual is devoid of any essence: it lacks a center, and its circulation does not operate in reference to any particular goal. As a result, the ontology of the human world can no longer be understood in terms of a single unifying principle. Such a world – whether described in terms of deteriorating theatre decorations, a centerless circulation, or a growing garbage heap – is disintegrated and fails to form a meaningful whole.

It should be noted here that such an understanding of the ontology of the human world has its roots in Różewicz’s wartime experience. As Andrzej Skrendo (and many other scholars before him) observes, “Różewicz’s whole literary output, from the very beginning, can be
understood as an attempt to describe the consequences resulting from the experience of the
war.”118 The war for Różewicz is a turning point in the history of European culture in that it
marks the collapse of the fundamental values of European civilization. As Różewicz says in one
of his interviews, “I treated the war as a catastrophe of European civilization equal to the Biblical
Deluge. Despite various opinions, this crisis has not been overcome to this day.”119

Like Białoszewski, Różewicz describes the war as an inconceivable cataclysm that
destroyed the foundations of reality and shattered the epistemological framework of the relation
between the human mind and the world. As Różewicz writes in his famous poem “Ocalony”
[The Survivor]:

I am twenty-four
Mam dwadzieścia cztery lata
led to slaughter
ocalałem
I survived.
prowadzony na rzeź.

[...] [...]
Concepts are mere words:
Pojęcia są tylko wyrazami:
virtue and crime
cnota i występek
truth and lie
prawda i kłamstwo
beauty and ugliness
piękno i brzydota
courage and cowardice.
męstwo i tchórzostwo

(P1: 21 / TC: 36)

The world understood as a meaningful whole collapsed, and in consequence human conceptual
processes were uprooted from their point of reference. In this sense, the war dealt a devastating

118 “Cała twórczość Różewicza, od samego jej początku, może być pojmowana jako próba opisania konsekwencji
wynikających z przeżycia wojny.” Andrzej Skrendo, Przodem Różewicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN,
2012), p. 16.
119 “Ja wojnę uważałem za katastrofę cywilizacji europejskiej równą biblijnemu potopowi – do dnia dzisiejszego ten
kryzys, wbrew różnym opiniom, nie został przezwyciężony.” Tadeusz Różewicz, “Ufajcie obcemu przechodniowi,”
an interview by Richard Chetwynd, Wbrew sobie. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Różewiczem, ed. Jan Stolarczyk
(Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2011), p. 191. The interview was conducted in August 1990.
blow to the category of wholeness – a category that, as Michał Januszkiewicz points out, allows us to think about the world in terms of identity, unity, sense, and order. As Różewicz’s subject puts it, “concepts are mere words,” which in this case means that they lost their referential value and are no longer able to organize human experience. The domain of the conceptual, the poem suggests, lost its connection with reality, and therefore, it does not describe, explain, or represent anything. As indicated earlier in the poem, the conceptual domain consists of words which are “empty” and “synonymous” [“nazwy puste i jednoznaczne”]. They are empty because they do not refer to anything outside of themselves; they are synonymous because they cannot be differentiated – that is, they are not organized into a coherent, hierarchical structure that might govern their relations and thus render them meaningful.

The war shattered the ontology of the human world; there is no returning to the old order of things – to thinking about the world as a meaningful whole – and, more importantly, it is impossible to build a new order. As Różewicz puts it in his 1956 poem “Poemat otwarty” [An Open Poem], the world of human experience “cannot be assembled [to się złożyć nie może]” (P1: 364).

As demonstrated in this chapter, the epistemological model expressed in Różewicz’s text seeks to stabilize this conceptual chaos by anchoring it in an extra-conceptual element. To establish a link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual, however, is not to reach towards outside reality – that is, towards the world as it is in itself. In the case of Różewicz’s model, the link is to be found in the somatic space of the body. Described in Różewicz’s writings as a domain of the extra-conceptual, the “great silence of human meat” exists objectively, and it

---

120 See Januszkiewicz, p. 266.
121 It should be noted here that, as Michał Januszkiewicz convincingly argues, Różewicz’s early works – from his debut volume Niepokój [Anxiety] (1947) to the volume Wiersze i obrazy [Poems and Images] (1952) – tend to combine his diagnosis of the crisis with hope that a new order can be found. This hope is eventually abandoned and replaced by acceptance of the situation. See Januszkiewicz, pp. 266-280.
cannot be cognitively seized. At the same time, Różewicz suggests, the bodily is linked to the conceptual in that it motivates and guides human sense-making activities.

In what follows, I elaborate some philosophical implications of this epistemological model. My main focus will be on the nature of the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual and on the status of the sense-making activities generated by this link.

**Representation**

Różewicz’s texts emphasize that there is a gap between the conceptual and the somatic space of the body. The bodily is extra-conceptual, and therefore it is separated from the realm of thought. Viewed from the perspective of the conceptual, the bodily is absent, or as Różewicz describes it, it is an “unknown creature,” which exists but is inaccessible. Thus, although the epistemological model expressed in *The Old Woman Broods* links the conceptual and the bodily, the relation between these two domains is not understood here as a relation of representation. This means that, on one hand, the conceptual does not mirror the bodily, or to put it differently, does not “reproduce” it. The bodily, on the other hand, does not confirm the conceptual – that is, it does not make it true. In short, the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual space of the body has no representational value.

What, then, is the nature of the link between the conceptual and the bodily? As mentioned, the bodily in Różewicz’s model extends to the domain of the conceptual. It is the source of sense-making activities, and in this way it is present in them. This presence, however, does not mean that the bodily can be located within the conceptual – the bodily, as it is understood here, is not a part of the conceptual, and therefore it exists beyond the conceptual frame of reference. Understood in this way, the relation between the bodily and conceptual sense
making might be described through the metaphor of nourishment. The metaphor of nourishment indicates that the bodily supplies the conceptual with “food,” which gives sense making its force; in order for this “food” to have an effect, however, it must first be “digested.” Thus, as the source of the “nourishment,” the bodily influences the conceptual, but at the same time, it is absent.

This paradoxical nature of the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual is suggestively signalled in Różewicz’s 1956 poem “Formy” [Forms]. Marked by self-reflexivity, the poem begins with a reference to the war and the crisis of the conceptual. As Różewicz’s subject remarks, the poetic forms used to be “well-behaved” and “obedient” [“dobrze ułożone / posłuszne”]; however, “frightened by fire and the smell of blood / they have broken out and dispersed [przestraszone ogniem i zapachem krwi / wyłamały się i rozbiegły]” (P1: 412 / TC: 74). As the poem unfolds, these forms attack their creator, tear him apart, and feed on his body:

- the still breathing meat
- filled with blood
- is food
- for these perfect forms
- they press so close around their spoil
- that even silence does not penetrate
to the outside

\[ \text{(P1: 412 / TC: 74)} \]

This poem revolves around the crisis of poetic language and the inability of poetry to express the horrors of the war. The relationship between the conceptual and the bodily is described here through the image of predatory forms devouring their author’s body. What is important for my analysis is the basic relation between these forms and their prey. As the poem describes it, the
bodily is the “food” for the conceptual. The forms feed on “meat / filled with blood,” which suggests the idea of the body as an autonomous material substance. As I demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, the body understood as meat indicates in Różewicz’s texts the body proper that exists independently of the conceptual framework of experience and stands for the domain of the extra-conceptual. Thus, it might be said here that conceptual forms feed on the extra-conceptual body, and in this way, they remain “alive.” At the same time, however, the predatory forms are different from what they devour, and therefore they do not represent the nature of their prey: they press so close that even the silence of human meat “does not penetrate / to the outside.” Thus, linked with the conceptual, the extra-conceptual body remains beyond the framework of representation.122

Contingency

The body is silent – it is beyond the conceptual framework of experience – and cannot generate meaning on its own. Bodily anchored sense-making activities, therefore, need the conceptual. As mentioned above, the nature of the link between the body and the conceptual consists in motivating sense-making activities: the bodily provides the “nourishment” that influences conceptual sense making and keeps it “alive.” It is significant, however, that this nourishment is inseparable from a structural shift within the domain of the conceptual.

As shown in my analysis of Różewicz’s play, the bodily presence of the Old Woman ruptures the conceptually open space of proliferating garbage. The Old Woman rejects the conceptual chaos of the garbage heap and thus renders it “external” to her body-centered strategy

122 As I will argue in my conclusions to this dissertation, the nature of this link could be further explored in the context of the hermeneutical notion of understanding. Viewed in this context, the model of the relation between the conceptual and the bodily does not operate in terms of truth and falsity but is situated within the framework of human praxis.
of performing one’s own tasks. *Ipso facto*, this means that her strategy de-cycles the vicious circle of conceptual repetition and renders the rejected garbage relevant. As a result, rubbish in the play functions on two planes: on one hand, it stands for the conceptual chaos of the human world, and in this context, it is not anchored in or relative to any stable order of things; on the other hand, the Old Woman’s strategy makes it an important element of her sense making, and in this context, rubbish becomes a by-product of the bodily centered order that she tries to maintain. Because it stands in opposition to this order, the rejected rubbish negatively defines it and reaffirms its boundaries. In this sense, rubbish stabilizes the conceptual framework of the Old Woman’s ordering and allows the bodily to be linked with the conceptual. As a result, the Old Woman’s strategy is anchored in the extra-conceptual and operates within a stable conceptual framework.

It should be noted that this model of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual is not understood here in essentialist terms. The bodily anchors sense-making activities and motivates them, but the nature of this link does not guarantee that the order it generates remains stable regardless of circumstances. Such a bodily centered order is contingent simply because the link proposed in Różewicz’s play is between the conceptual and the *living* body – that is, a body whose existence is temporally constrained. The resulting order, therefore, is bound to lose its grounding eventually. More importantly, however, this order is also contingent even when it is grounded in the bodily.

This contingency is suggested in *The Old Woman Broods* through the figure of the Young Man, who functions in the play as a personification of the Old Woman’s strategy. The Young Man appears at the end of Scene II. As the Old Woman describes him in her last poetic monologue, “he has issued from me / he has gone away into the world […] / into the cosmos /
into the vacuum [wyszedł ze mnie / powędrował w świat [...] / w kosmos / w próżnię]” (T2: 43 / RA: 256). The Young Man is the Old Woman’s “child;” no longer hidden under her dresses, he enters the world of the garbage heap and becomes a fully realized form: as the stage directions indicate, he is “dressed carefully, neatly, and colourfully. A beautiful matching of colours [ubrany jest starannie, czysto i malowniczo. Piękne zestawienie barw]” (T2: 44 / RA: 257). What is important here is that the Young Man is a result of the Old Woman’s “childbearing” strategy. Thus, although he has gone out into the world of conceptual circulation, the Young Man is still anchored in a bodily “source.” As the Old Woman describes this link, “I have not bitten through / the umbilical cord / I have not allowed / him to be cut off [nie przegryzłam / pępowiny / nie pozwoliłam / go odciąć]” (T2: 43 / RA: 256).

Anchored in a primal bodily source, the Young Man is aware of the surrounding chaos and foregrounds the pointlessness of the other characters’ behaviour and their attempts to organize the environment. Born of a rupture in the chaos of conceptual proliferation, he brings otherness and difference with him, and thus disturbs the vicious circle of conceptual recycling and opens up the possibility of stable meaning. At the same time, however, the play emphasizes that the Young Man’s presence is merely accidental. The contingency of the bodily centred strategy which the Young Man personifies is already suggested after his entrance: although, as the Old Woman claims in her monologue, she holds on to him with her teeth and her claws [trzymam go zębami [...] / trzymam pazurami], the Young Man carries a traveller’s bag and appears to be only passing through the garbage heap. But what emphasizes the contingent nature of his presence even more is his death. The Young Man does not simply leave the stage, but is killed by the Guardian of Order, who accuses him of polluting the ground and air (T2: 49 / RA: 261). Unable to comprehend how one can litter a rubbish heap – he is approached by the
Guardian of Order because he has thrown a candy wrapper on the ground – the Young Man is disarmed by the pointless circulation of the dump, and he simply disappears.

It might be said here that, suggested in this way, the contingency of the bodily anchored order results from the structural shift that this ordering initiates. Personified in the play by the figure of the Young Man, the strategy of linking the bodily and the conceptual introduces otherness, which stands in opposition to the pointless circulation of conceptual garbage. In this way, the Old Woman’s strategy makes the garbage heap relative to the bodily centered system of ordering. This forces rubbish into a dualistic framework of reference and makes it negatively maintain the status quo of the Old Woman’s ordering. Understood in this way, the rejected rubbish supplements the bodily anchored order: its existence is crucial for establishing and maintaining this order; at the same time, however, like every supplement, the rejected rubbish functions in a subversive manner.

My understanding of the supplementarity of rubbish is based on the argument I developed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation. Drawing on Derrida’s theory, I argued that the nature of the supplement undermines the binary logic of traditional philosophical distinctions, which dictates that the first element of an opposition is considered self-sufficient, and the second one is taken to be merely a supplement to the first one. According to Derrida, the supplement is not merely an addition to something ontologically independent, but always exists in relation to an internal lack in the entity it supplements. As a result, while the supplement compensates for the lack in the entity it supplements and in this way helps establish its ontological independence, it undermines this very independence by revealing the fact that the entity it supplements is not self-sufficient and needs the supplementary work.
The same logic seems to be at work in Różewicz’s model. On one hand, the exteriority of rubbish reaffirms the ontological status of bodily centered ordering, and thus rubbish functions in a constitutive way. On the other hand, the supplementary work of rubbish renders this ordering contingent and so undermines it. Therefore, rubbish in Różewicz’s model simultaneously stabilizes the link between the bodily and the conceptual and poses a threat to it. In this sense, the bodily centered order does not have to, but simply may (or may not) materialize. The bodily is extra-conceptual – it is “silent” – and therefore it needs the conceptual. Rubbish stabilizes the conceptual framework for bodily motivated sense-making activities and thus reinforces the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. At the same time, it undermines this link by foregrounding the fact that the order stemming from it is not self-sufficient; although it is anchored in and determined by the bodily, this order is merely made, not discovered, and in this sense, its “form” is not founded upon or illustrative of any extra-conceptual order.
CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions consist of three parts. The first part recapitulates and compares the two epistemological models I have reconstructed in my analysis of Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s works. In the second part, I situate my approach towards the texts of the two authors in a broader context of possible modes of philosophical analysis of literature, and identify the nature of the contributions that my dissertation makes with regard to both its theoretical dimension and the context of existing scholarship. The final part of my conclusions centers on possible ways my work could be further extended. It signals a few additional perspectives that have not been pursued here and some future directions in which my project could be developed.

THE TWO MODELS

This dissertation has attempted to reconstruct and examine two models of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. Both models were developed against the background of a constructivist understanding of human cognitive practices, which stipulates that the conceptual is separated from the extra-conceptual by an unbridgeable gap, and therefore, it does not represent anything external to itself. According to this view, what the world is known as is simply a product of conceptual world making, and as such, it cannot be approached in terms of a traditionally understood truth value. While the conceptual makes the human world possible, it also limits its scope. The two models of human cognition I have reconstructed in my dissertation seek to circumvent this anti-representational epistemology and find a way of linking the
conceptual and the extra-conceptual. As expressed in Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s texts, this link escapes the confines of epistemological constructivism, but at the same time, it does not fall into the trap of essentialist representationalism. These two models of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual can be schematically presented in the following way:

Białoszewski:

| the conceptual (what the world is known as) | rubbish | the extra-conceptual (external reality) |

Różewicz:

| rubbish | the conceptual (what the world is known as) | the extra-conceptual (the body) |

Both models seek to overcome the split between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. In Białoszewski’s strategy, an attempt to link these two domains is explored in the context of the relation between the conceptual and the world; in the case of Różewicz’s model, the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual is developed in terms of the relation between the conceptual and the bodily. In both models, the extra-conceptual is understood as a domain existing objectively and independently of conceptually defined experience. The extra-conceptual exists, but it resists representation and escapes attempts to discursively define it.

As represented by the arrows in the diagrams, Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s models differ in their view of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual. Białoszewski’s model attempts to create an opening in the conceptually determined boundaries of what the world is known as. This possibility is explored by means of the strategy of “world
“subverting,” which is expressed in Białoszewski’s prose through the perceptual experiments of his narrator. The goal of his strategy is to undermine the basic laws of perception and deconstruct the unity of perceived reality. Such world subverting destabilizes the conceptual frameworks of experience and creates the possibility of reaching beyond them. In this sense, Białoszewski’s model of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual is based on a “negative” movement that seeks to undermine, or simply escape, conceptual world making. Różewicz’s model is based on a different approach. The main goal in his case is not to disturb world making but to stabilize it. Expressed in Różewicz’s play through the strategy of the Old Woman, the attempt to link the conceptual and the extra-conceptual is viewed as an attempt to anchor the conceptual in a stable point of reference. To overcome the epistemic crisis resulting from the conceptual chaos of the human world, the play suggests a model in which the extra-conceptual (the bodily) is the source of conceptual world making. Described in terms of the bodily centered routines and concerns of daily life, this model views the extra-conceptual as an active force that grounds and motivates world making and thus allows conceptual ordering to acquire stable meanings. In this sense, Różewicz’s model is based on a “positive” movement that seeks to tie the conceptual with a stable frame of reference.

Expressed here as a “negative” and a “positive” movement, these two versions of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual are closely related to how the two authors envision the functioning of the conceptual domain. As mentioned, both models are responses to the constructivist view of human cognition, according to which the conceptual – whether it is understood in terms of individual cognitive practices or broader cultural frameworks – is never innocent in that it never simply describes the human world but first and foremost creates it. In this sense, what the world is known as is part of the domain of the
conceptual. In the case of Białoszewski, this domain operates in terms of structures. Conceptual world making is guided by an organizing impulse that seizes everything and in this way makes unity of our experience and constructs a stable world to which we can relate. Thus, Białoszewski’s texts suggest that in order to link the conceptual with the extra-conceptual, one needs to reach beyond this constructed world, and this can be done through the strategy of breaking down its conceptual structures. Różewicz’s model is based on a different understanding of the domain of the conceptual. The main idea here is that the conceptual does not operate in terms of structures. Although the conceptual determines the limits of human experience, it is devoid of any stable structural characteristics, and therefore can no longer be viewed as a unifying whole. Conceptual world making, Różewicz argues, is not guided by any set of stable rules, and it does not generate a stable order, which means that the ontology of the human world is fluid. Such a world is open: it cannot be defined in relation to any system of ordering, and there is no outside to it – that is, there is nothing hidden behind its conceptual chaos. Thus, in the case of Różewicz’s model the attempt to link the conceptual and the extra-conceptual does not consist in breaking through the conceptually determined walls of the human world – such walls do not exist – but rather in grounding its conceptual chaos.

This distinction is important because it shows that although both strategies are developed from within the constructivist framework, they belong to two separate models. Thus, the adjectives “negative” and “positive” are not used here to suggest that the two models stand in opposition to each other, and that they neutralize or simply cancel each other out. These are two separate models, and they are based on two different accounts of how things are.

The last element in the diagrams presented above is the category of rubbish. An indispensable element in both models, rubbish has been understood in this dissertation as a
cognitive category, and it has been defined as a rejected by-product of conceptual world making. The main idea behind such a use of the term “rubbish” is that world making is based on both inclusion and exclusion, and as such it is selective: it accepts elements that fit into the order that is being built up, but also rejects all discordant elements that do not fit. In this sense, human cognitive practices are inseparable from the mechanisms of rejection, which means that they always generate rubbish. Because rubbish thus understood disrupts the pattern-making tendencies of human cognition, it is relegated outside the conceptually defined order of things. At the same time, however, rubbish is a product of human cognition and can only exist, and be understood, vis-à-vis the order that designates it as rubbish.

Contextualized in this way, the status of rubbish is undecided. On one hand, as a rejected by-product of the world making, rubbish does not exist objectively in the sense that it is always relative to the conceptual order that excludes it. Looked at from this perspective, rubbish is an important element of world-creating operations in that it negatively defines the boundaries of a given world-order and reaffirms its modes of ordering. On the other hand, however, rubbish is rejected because it does not fit into a predetermined order of things – it cannot be appropriated by conceptual ordering – and thus it appears to be independent of human cognition. In this view, rubbish is subversive.

Thus, it might be said that rubbish simultaneously subverts and maintains the stability of the order into which it does not fit. Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s models explore this double nature of rubbish in order to link the conceptual and the extra-conceptual.

Białoszewski’s model tends to explore the subversive aspect of rubbish. In his attempts to destabilize the conceptual structures of what the world is known as, Białoszewski’s narrator experiments with pre-established patterns of perception and undermines its underlying
tendencies towards continuity and coherence. In this way, his strategy generates perceptual rubbish: it breaks down the spatiotemporal unity of experience and creates an ontologically ambiguous “space” that is no longer assimilable by the ordering logic of human cognition. Because it cannot be conceptually seized, perceptual rubbish disrupts world making; at the same time, this rubbish is a result of the collapse of the conceptual framework of experience, and in this sense, it still exists in relation to the conceptual. In effect, rubbish becomes a transition point that opens up the possibility of reaching outside the edifice of the human world and linking the domains of the conceptual and the extra-conceptual.

Różewicz’s explorations of rubbish tend to center around its positive dimension. Expressed in the play in terms of a model of bodily anchored ordering, the relation between the two domains is in this case inseparable from a structural shift within the conceptual. The Old Woman’s strategy of anchoring sense-making practices results in rejecting the pointless circulation of the conceptual garbage and in this way renders it relative to a bodily centered framework of ordering. The Old Woman’s strategy makes rubbish an important element of her ordering: because it contravenes the order that she tries to maintain, the rejected rubbish negatively defines the framework of her sense-making and reaffirms its status quo. In this way, rubbish stabilizes the conceptual framework of the Old Woman’s ordering and, consequently, allows for the bodily to be linked with the conceptual.123

As can be seen, both strategies of linking the conceptual and the extra-conceptual consist in creating rubbish. They differ in the way this rubbish is created and in the way it functions. In the case of Białoszewski, rubbish results from the collapse of the structures that guide human cognition, and it undermines conceptual world making; in Różewicz’s model, rubbish is

123 In this way, rubbish in the play exists in a double sense: on a general plane, it stands for the all-encompassing conceptual chaos of the human world; in the particular context of the Old Woman’s strategy of ordering, however, it becomes an important element of her local world making.
generated by means of rejecting the conceptual chaos of the human world, and it tends to supplement world making. It is important in this context that both strategies of exploring rubbish are based on “de-cycling.” Białoszewski’s narrator de-cycles in the sense that he seeks to arrest the mechanisms of world making. Although the rubbish he creates originates from a stable image of the empirical, which is to say that it results from the disintegration of this image, it resists structural re-appropriation. As such, it is not being recycled as a building material for some new structural pattern but occupies an indeterminate space in between the processes of dissolution and reorganization. In Różewicz’s model, de-cycling consists in stopping the vicious circle of conceptual repetition. The Old Woman rejects the conceptual chaos of the garbage heap where, as she puts it, “we consume what we excrete” (T2: 40 / RA: 253), and renders it “external” to her bodily centered strategy; as a result, the conceptual garbage acquires a stable frame of reference.

In both models, the creation of rubbish – that is, rubbish understood as a rejected by-product of human cognition – is inseparable from the strategy of de-cycling. In both cases, therefore, to “get in touch” with the extra-conceptual is to oppose the modus operandi of the domain of the conceptual.

OUTCOMES

This dissertation has focused on the issue of human cognitive practices – their working principles, their relationship to language and broader cultural frameworks, as well as the very question of their epistemic validity. The nature of these issues requires a particular type of approach, which has guided my analysis of Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s texts and defined the scope of my inquiry. Exploring a set of philosophical ideas expressed in the works of these two
authors, my inquiry, for the lack of a better term, might be broadly described as focused on
“philosophy in literature.” According to Peter Lamarque, who defines this type of approach
towards literature as “mining individual novels and plays for their philosophical insights,”124 the
type of inquiry designated by the term “philosophy in literature” can be understood in three
different ways. In the first sense, he argues, an approach focused on philosophy in literature can
be exemplified by an analysis that simply aims to identify and characterize the philosophical
ideas that are present in a literary work. At this level, the validity of the interpretation “rests not
on the philosophical validity of the ideas themselves, but on the support offered from the details
of the work.”125 This way of approaching philosophy in literature, therefore, simply seeks to
make sense of the literary work and does not aim to probe the philosophical soundness of its
ideas. In the second sense, one can describe an inquiry into philosophy in literature as an attempt
to analyze literary explorations of philosophical ideas in order to “clarify, deepen, or expound a
philosophical topic.”126 In this case, Lamarque argues, literary works are analyzed as works of
philosophy, which means that the philosophical ideas that are inherent in them are not only
elicited but also discussed in terms of their validity and their contribution to a particular
philosophical debate or area of study. Finally, in the third sense, the term “philosophy in
literature” designates an analysis concentrated on “the very possibility of using fictional works to
expound, develop, or challenge philosophical ideas.”127 In this last sense, philosophy in
literature intersects with philosophy of literature in that it acquires a status of meta-discourse that delves
into the purpose of literature, its values, and its relation to other types of discourse.

124 Lamarque, p. 2.
125 Lamarque, p. 3.
126 Lamarque, p. 3.
127 Lamarque, p. 4.
Although somewhat rigid and normative – it presents these three approaches as three levels of inquiry with the third approach being on top, and the first one being merely a literary critical analysis that cannot be described as a “philosophical exercise” – Lamarque’s typology is useful in that it can help situate the mode of analysis I have assumed in my dissertation. Looked at from this perspective, the scope of my approach towards the works of Białoszewski and Różewicz can be located at the intersection of the first and the second ways of dealing with philosophy in literature. This means that my focus has been on mining Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s works for philosophical insights. At the same time, my analysis has sought to consider the epistemological consequences of the ideas I have extracted from these texts, and to view these ideas not merely as a literary theme but as a contribution to the philosophical debate concerning the validity of human inquiry into the world.

The basic philosophical context for this debate was delineated in the introductory chapter of this dissertation and specified in my textual analysis in the chapters that followed. It has been characterized as a type of epistemological constructivism that incorporates three main theses. The main idea upon which it is built is that the conceptual determines the what and the how of the empirical (the thesis of determinism). In this way, epistemological constructivism stipulates that what we take to be real is relative to the conceptual frameworks we use in our cognitive practices (the thesis of relativism). At the same time, in this view, the conceptual is contingent, which translates into the thesis that there can be more than one way to conceive of the world, or put differently, that there is more than one way the world could be (the thesis of pluralism).

Epistemological constructivism is a typical manifestation of post-World-War II tendencies in philosophy and can be described as a form of antirealism. As I have characterized it in the theoretical chapter of this dissertation, and as it is simply indicated by the term itself,
antirealism stands in opposition to realism. The core of the realism-antirealism controversy is aptly captured by Chhanda Gupta, who claims that it stems from “the deeply entrenched dichotomy between the notion of “the world as it is in itself” and the notion of “the world as it appears to us.” As she says:

“Reality” and “appearance,” or to vary the paired concepts, “world” and “the mind to which it appears,” “objective” and “subjective,” “absolute” and “relative” are terms of seemingly irreconcilable contrasts. Indeed the deep divide these paired terms suggest, draws the boundary between the polarized zones of influence, and makes it look as though philosophical thinking is bound to move between what apparently are the only viable alternatives.

Realism assumes that there is an independent reality separate from our descriptions of it. This objective reality, most realists claim, is not of our making, but it can be conceptualized and accurately represented. Thus, a realist presumes that, regardless of our individual beliefs, a true representation of extra-conceptual reality is, at least in principle, attainable. In this sense, to borrow a metaphor proposed by Crispin Wright, realists want their mountain to be real, but they also want it to be climbable.

For antirealists, the question of whether their mountain is real and climbable is wrongly put. They reject the idea of an independent, determinate reality that would be both discoverable and representable, and claim that all truths about the world are of our own making. Our conceptualizations, therefore, do not fit or conform to any objective reality; the only meaningful reality is the one we create through our conceptualizations. Thus, although there are many different ways our world is, none of them represents the way the world really is. Consequently,

129 Gupta, p. 1.
many antirealists argue that it makes no sense to think of reality in abstraction from what it is taken to be, which means that the notion of an objective reality is redundant and can be abandoned.

A form of antirealism, epistemological constructivism expressed in the texts of Białoszewski and Różewicz may suggest that the literary works I have analyzed simply point to contemporary tendencies in philosophy. This is partly the case in that the ideas I have extracted from these works are clearly antirealist – they reject the idea that the conceptual can represent the extra-conceptual or that human conceptualizations of the world tell us about the way extra-conceptual reality really is, and they emphasize that what the world is known as is nothing more than a product of conceptual world making. What is more important, however, and what has been essential in my reading of Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s texts, is that the contributions of these two authors to the philosophical debate concerning the limits of human cognition do not merely consist in rejecting a traditionally understood realism but rather in the attempt to reassess the basic antirealist framework. As I have shown in my analysis, the models of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual developed by the two authors not only reject realist representationism but first and foremost go beyond the very constructivist framework within which they are developed. In this sense, while they assume the antirepresentationalist framework of constructivism, they do not reject the idea of an objective, extra-conceptual reality and propose a new way of thinking about the relation between this reality and the conceptual. In this way, I have argued, these models avoid both essentialism and constructivist isolationism.

This dissertation has focused on a specific philosophical problem, and its contribution consists in showing the relevance of the ideas expressed in Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s texts to the debate concerning the nature of human cognitive practices. At the same time, while its
narrow scope by no means exhausts the meanings of these texts, my dissertation provides a perspective that redefines prevailing ways of thinking about the “epistemology” they express. It is significant that the main tendencies in scholarship on this topic tend to reflect the basic split between realism and antirealism, and to use Gupta’s terminology, view the ideas expressed in the works of the two authors either as an attempt to capture “the world as it is in itself” or as an acceptance of “the world as it appears to us.” Thus, on one hand, Białoszewski’s strategy is often viewed as an attempt to reveal the essence of reality and to unveil its laws, or as Czesław Miłosz reads it, to intuitively capture the “deeper and more essential reality inherent in things and people.” Such understandings of Białoszewski’s texts stand in opposition to interpretations which operate within the antirealist framework and argue that Białoszewski’s texts are devoid of any “metaphysical gestures” and express a pragmatist attitude that consists in “coping with reality,” or to use a different phrase, in “taming it.” Seen through the lens of the realism-antirealism distinction, therefore, scholarship on Białoszewski appears divided into two ways of reading his texts: one focusing on his search for “deeper reality” and the other exploring his fascination with the “surface of life.”

A similar dualism tends to underlie scholarship on Różewicz. In this case, the dividing line is closely connected with the question of Różewicz’s nihilism. Thus, on one hand, Różewicz works are read as permeated by metaphysical thinking which attempts to unveil the “essential aspect of reality.” Viewed in this context, Różewicz is not a nihilist, but rather, as Grażyna Płaczkiewicz states, “Przeciwnie poezji niezrozumiałej,” *Teksty Drugie* 5-6 (1990), p. 159.

---

131 See, for example, Sobolewska, *Maksymalnie udana egzystencja*, pp. 21-23, or Marian Stala, „Czy Białoszewski jest poetą metafizycznym?” *Pisanie Białoszewskiego*, pp. 96-113.
133 Płaczkiewicz, p. 86.
135 I borrow these phrases from Zieniewicz, p. 105.
136 Rychlewski, p. 149.
Borkowska argues, he seeks to reach towards the “metaphysical roots” of being. On the other hand, Różewicz’s texts are read as a “tragic vision” of a world devoid of a center – a world which cannot be ordered or understood. Viewed from this perspective, Różewicz becomes an “Antichrist of culture” whose works do not express a desire to find the hidden essence of human existence but rather emphasize that the ontology of the human world lacks foundations and that the world of culture is dead and artificial.

Noteworthy in this context are the interpretations proposed by Ryszard Nycz. In his analysis of Białoszewski’s artistic strategy, which as he convincingly argues is expressed by means of a revelatory discourse, Nycz distinguishes two types of epiphany: a traditional one, which is more characteristic of Białoszewski’s early works and is anchored in the “substantiality of objects,” and a modern one, which is the key to understanding Białoszewski’s later works and which does not reveal the essence of particular objects but leads to an awareness of the “radical temporality of existence.” In his interpretation of Różewicz, Nycz argues that Różewicz’s texts are built according to the principle of the “conjunction of exclusive disjuncts” and invite two mutually exclusive readings that cannot be integrated. Nycz’s analysis shows that this principle creates a trap of cognitive impasse: on one hand, Różewicz’s poetry suggests that the “face of essential reality” can be revealed; on the other hand, it suggests that the only reality that exists is

---


138 See, for example, Brzozowski, p. 165 or Stanisław Burcot, “Postmodernistyczne nieporozumienia” *Przekraczanie granic. O twórczości Tadeusza Różewicza*, eds. Wojciech Browarny, Joanna Orska, and Adam Poprawa (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), p. 156.

139 A phrase borrowed from Jerzy Kwiatkowski. See his “Antypoesja i apolońskie gniewy,” *Dialog* 7 (1969), p. 120.

140 An overview of the opinions on Różewicz’s nihilism can be found in Januszkiewicz, pp. 251-265 and Andrzej Skrendo, *Tadeusz Różewicz i granice literatury. Poetyka i etyka transgresji* (Kraków: Universitas, 2002), pp. 48-66. It should be noted here that in their readings of Różewicz, these two scholars seek to go beyond the interpretative bivalence of previous approaches towards Różewicz’s nihilism. Januszkiewicz proposes viewing Różewicz’s works in terms of a new understanding of nihilism (inspired by the project of radical hermeneutics developed by John D. Caputo); Skrendo’s interpretative framework is based on the concept of transgression, which he understands, following Bataille and Foucault, in terms of a “non-positive affirmation.” Although original and inspiring, these readings do not focus on the issue of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual.
the world of common experience. As can be seen here, in his readings of Białoszewski and Różewicz, Nycz incorporates both the framework of essentialism and the framework of antirealist constructivism. His interpretation, however, does not go beyond the dualism of these two approaches but rather tends to focus on the tension they generate.141

Thus, by showing that the epistemological models expressed in Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s texts can be understood without falling into the traps of either representationalist essentialism or antirealist constructivism, this dissertation offers a new perspective on the “epistemology” permeating the works of these two authors. This perspective escapes the either/or approach and loosens the grip of the interpretative dichotomy designated by the idea of the search for the essence of “the world as it is in itself” and the idea of the acceptance of “the world as it appears to us.”

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

Like any interpretation, my approach is of a strategic character. This not only means that it seeks to achieve a certain purpose and to this end assumes a corresponding interpretative perspective, but also that its scope is limited to a certain issue it investigates. In what follows, I propose a few potential ways of expanding the framework of my analysis.

As I have pointed out in my reading of Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s works, the way these two authors understand human cognition has its roots in their wartime experience. The war, I have argued, was a formative experience for both writers and is the source of the epistemic crisis they seek to overcome in their models of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-
conceptual. This basic context for the “epistemology” of both authors might be further expanded by situating their strategies within the broader framework of modernism. Analyzed from that perspective, Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s models might be seen as echoes of two dominating artistic strategies of modernism, which, following Gerald L. Bruns, can be described as “hermetic” and “orphic,” or to characterize them in terms of literary-philosophical orientations, “structuralist” and “hermeneutic.”¹⁴² Both strategies insist on the primacy of language, and they are based on the modernist realization that language is not merely a neutral tool for describing reality and conveying meaning. Language is not innocent: it influences the way we think and in this way determines our perception of the world. As a result, it tends to separate us from extra-conceptual reality and thwart our attempts to unmask its true nature.

In this context, the structuralist strategy seeks to undermine the structures of discourse and “bring language to the edge of an unspeakable kingdom.”¹⁴³ To achieve this end, Bruns argues, this artistic strategy aims to displace the function of signification and reach beyond the conceptual framework of common experience. In this way, the hermetic strategy opposes the transitive order of language – its representational function – and attempts to free language from its dependence on something other than itself. The hermeneutic strategy, on the other hand, seeks to ground signification and thus establish the world “within the horizon of human knowing.”¹⁴⁴ Its goal, therefore, is not to arrest signification but to make it possible by recovering the “ground of intelligibility.”¹⁴⁵ As such, the orphic strategy does not seek to abandon the world, but rather, like the artistic strategy embodied by the figure of Orpheus, to create it.

Adapting this framework would necessitate a detailed analysis of how the two orientations developed and to what degree, or in what sense, they are reflected in the strategies of Białoszewski and Różewicz. What is more important here is that this framework would not only provide an additional contextualization, it would also open up the possibility of extending my interpretation of the works of the two authors. Worth exploring in this case would be a further analysis of the relation between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual, which, as I have argued, is not understood by the two authors as a relation of representation. The conceptual in their models is linked with the extra-conceptual; this, however, does not mean that the conceptual represents the extra-conceptual, and neither does it mean that the extra-conceptual makes the conceptual true.

In the case of Białoszewski, the rejection of the idea of representation seems to invite extrapolations towards the epistemological framework of negative theology. Such a perspective could be explored by situating Białoszewski’s model at the intersection of three main paradigms of thinking about the ineffable: one that assumes that the extra-conceptual is ineffable but is cognizable (in this case, cognition has nothing to do with language); one that stipulates that the extra-conceptual must be effable in order to be cognizable (here, cognition is inseparable from language); and one that assumes that there is no such thing as the extra-conceptual (in this case, the ineffable is “located” in language). Różewicz’s model, on the other hand, seems to warrant further investigations within the framework of the hermeneutical tradition of understanding. According to Bruns, the hermeneutical tradition does not view understanding in terms of a subject-object relationship but situates it in the context of human practices. As he explains it:

---

Understanding always has the implication of living through something as against standing outside of it. *Verstehen* is a form of practical knowledge, less in the technical sense of how to work something or how to apply it, than in the classical sense of *phronesis*, or knowing how to act, that is, knowing what a situation calls for in the way of action.\(^{147}\)

Therefore, the link between the conceptual and the extra-conceptual expressed in Różewicz’s texts could be further explored not in terms of a mental event viewed in the context of the bivalence of truth and falsity, but as a creation of and engagement in a particular form of life.

Finally, a potential way of expanding my work may also consist in probing the moral dimension of Białoszewski’s and Różewicz’s models. In this context, the issue of agency and the category of everydayness would be worth critical exploration. With regard to the question of agency, the main issue would require more than an analysis of why the two strategies seek to link the conceptual and the extra-conceptual – that is, what motivates them and what they intend to achieve – and would point to the very issue of what makes them possible and effective. The moral dimension of everydayness is in this case related to the problem of agency. Although both models are subversive in the sense that they result from attempts to oppose or undermine the existing status quo, they do not reject the everyday. As I have argued, Białoszewski’s fascination with everyday reality stems from his awareness of its artificial nature; his narrator’s strategies expose this artificiality, but he still considers it as “authentic” and, as such, worthy of acceptance. In the case of Różewicz’s model, ordinary life is presented as anchored in the physicality of the body; as a result, sticking to the mundane aspects of life and focusing on its basic routines and concerns is viewed in Różewicz’s text as the only sense-making activity that can oppose the chaos of contemporary culture and civilization. Both authors, therefore, tend to view their models within the framework of everydayness. The questions that might be posed here

would revolve around the issue of how, and in what sense, the everyday can be part of a
subversive strategy, and what the moral implications of such a view of everydayness might be.


