

Between Fun and Politics: Dimensions of Contemporary Children's Theater in Poland

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ABSTRACT

My article considers the functions and consequences of introducing a political dimension to children's theater within the framework of school and out-of-school pedagogy. The main issue from the field of pedagogy is the impact of such theater on the formation of subjectivity of preschool and school children.

In the first part of the article, I present selected classical concepts of human subjectivity and discuss pedagogical concepts of the function of theater in the education of the child. Looking at these concepts from the perspective of the child's subjectivity and from the perspective of political aspects in children's theater, I point out the connections between the three key concepts of my considerations, which are subjectivity, pedagogy, and politics in theater for children. At the same time, I highlight those dimensions of them where they come into conflict with each other.

In the analytical part, I discuss three two selected children's plays and drama for children. Using their examples, I try to prove that children's subjectivity does not grow out of the past, nor is it the result of speculation in metaphysical or ethical space, which is characteristic of adults, but is the result of actions to produce their imaginary world. Thus, children's subjectivity is based less on difference, creating a value that is more affective and communal than individualistic.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Outline of the Research Problem

In this article, I present a proposal for a new look at the formation of the child's subjectivity, through the child's contact with various dimensions of theatrical art. I look at the mechanisms of subjectivity formation within the framework of pedagogy and the political dimension of theatrical art.

I begin my considerations by drawing attention to the contradictions inherent in pedagogical activities, which, on the one hand, constitute a way of socializing children, and on the other hand, take measures for the emancipation of the child. In the remainder of the article, I try to develop such a model for describing the child's involvement in the theater arts that avoids the indicated contradictions. The model I present in this article allows us to look at subjectivity not through the prism of individual autonomy and socialization, but as the result of a community that produces a space of Values.

1.2. Methods

I begin my introduction to the development of the model with conclusions based on the observation of the exemplary behavior of four-year-old children. From a free analysis of the example, which shows the mechanism of the child's construction of subjectivity without confronting another, especially an adult, I move on to considerations in the theoretical field. Referring to the concepts of Jacques Lacan, Erving Goffman and Brian Massumi, I argue that taking into account the affective dimension can contribute to transcending the Symbolic order. In the next part of my essay, I review a selection of pedagogical theories that make it possible to directly and indirectly define the types of pedagogical-child relationships, where any adult can be a pedagogue. The last part of my considerations is a philological analysis of three selected plays, which allow me to formulate final conclusions.



1.3. *Theater for Children: Between Socialization and Emancipation*

I will begin my essay on the dimensions of politicking in theater for children with a somewhat provocative question, which is: Who is playing politics in a theater for children? The slightly accusatory tone of this question is related to the intuition, which I think is shared by most people, that introducing politics into children's spaces is somehow an out-of-place, irresponsible activity. The imperative to protect children from the evils of this world urges us not to hold them responsible for the fate of communities and societies, to keep children away from ideological wars, and finally to abandon intrusive indoctrination. On the other hand, however, educational and pedagogical efforts focus on slowly introducing children to an ever-widening web of responsibilities, the school teaches them how to conduct disputes, and at the same time instills a series of rules and social norms into their heads. Thus, even if modern educational methods focus on self-development combined with the freedom of children to find their place in the world, it is impossible to avoid actions that discipline or bend children's behavior to the rules and principles that enable them to live in a community, the narrower peer one, but also the broader one that includes the order of adult society. On the scale of repression, even if we minimize it as much as possible, we always remain a few degrees above zero that would mark a life of total happiness of childish carefreeness.

The unattainability of the utopian project of a stress-free life, however, can be compensated for by expanding the area of emancipation, the focal point of which remains the subjectivity of the child. In the concept that forms the foundation of my deliberations, emancipation is not limited to freeing an individual or group from structural dependencies (Wielecki, 1989, pp. 30–31), i.e., to the pursuit of autonomy alone. This is because subjectivity, which is both a prerequisite for emancipation and its result, does not stop at changes that allow us to “adapt according to our aspirations, needs or interests, but develops through hypothesizing, planning, experimenting or inferring.” (Gorlach & Seręga, 1989, p. 68). This understanding of emancipatory processes prompts us to see subjectivity as both a source and an effect of research and creative activity. The exploration, characterized by courage, of a reality that is completely unknown to us, liberates human individuals and communities from a regime limited to the degree of our adaptation to the reality around us or the bending of conditions to our goals and expectations. Indeed, courage, experimentation, and trust do not fall on the scale of adjustment but break away from it by strengthening our sense of subjectivity through cognitive passion or creative imagination. Cognitive passion is the realm of science, creative imagination is the source of art.

But does the social space we create for our children allow them to maintain their autonomy both in learning about the world and creating it? It is quite widely believed that children are endowed with an imagination that eludes the thinking patterns of adults. Much is also said and written about the absorptive capacity of a child's mind. However, an overly far-reaching fascination with the otherness of the child's world should not obscure the fact

that even the most open-ended educational projects are moving in the direction of students acquiring more and more standardized cognitive and communicative models.

1.4. *Beyond Symbolic Order: The Subjectivity of the Child Playing*

My own observations of children's behavior, one that allows them to develop their subjectivity without confrontation with adults, include two sister's two children, now three-and-a-half-year-old twins, who occasionally come into my care. Since they began to communicate actively with words, I have remained under the irresistible spell of their own language, which to outsiders was understood only vaguely. The original words and sounds they directed to each other amazed me with their poetic charm, and at the same time with the effectiveness of their communication. The twins not only conveyed to each other precisely what they wanted or explained how the other could cope with the difficulties they encountered, but also contained in a language known only to themselves all emotional states. This example is instructive in that the twins' readily observable ability to communicate is an important part of their empowerment. An individual child also babbles at an early stage of his development, but his message is directed to adults (adult) who are highly competent in using the language of the community in which they live. Thus, the child's individual language is reflected in the mirror of the adult recipient, which can lead to a quicker perception of the foreignness of the language, which affects the formation of individual identity. Meanwhile, twins maintain their distinctiveness to the outside world through, among other things, their own language of communication. Research shows that they acquire the ability to communicate with adults later than singletons, but I find more interesting the issue of their subjectivity, which is strengthened by their micro-community. For unlike in the case of social identity, the value of the twins' community is not so much the acceptance of a group of people for an individual who has inscribed himself in a social role destined for him, but their strength of understanding and cooperation, which builds an area of independence from alienating adult culture. For the power of twins, and perhaps siblings, is also born through a community of actions that are not necessarily exposed to the gaze of those wielding symbolic power of adults. To describe this phenomenon, I will once again refer to my encounters with the now three-and-a-half-year-old twins.

One time I saw the two of them coming out of the shower, where they had previously washed with my sister. They were both animated and focused on each other. At one point they crouched down and, rocking rhythmically, began to mumble (intone) some secret song, in a language known only to themselves. It looked like some ancient ritual. At one point, one of the twins shifted into the familiar yoga dog pose with his head down sticking out his bare bottom toward the sky. The other immediately joined him. After a while they rose and, as if relieved of their duty, moved into the room. The whole event caught my attention because of its unexpectedly theatrical structure. The initially casual entry into the ritual space, however, betrayed a kind of tension that awaited some kind of

completion. The squat dance was attentive and original. The ending was unexpected and certainly open to various interpretations. What is most important, however, in the performance of the twins I recalled was their total focus on each other. They walked one behind the other, then performed the same actions. When they finished dancing, they simply walked away into the everyday.

Unlike situations in which I often joined their game, to the delight of the children, this time I was completely unnecessary in their ritual, although as a theatergoer I followed their every move with admiration.

Perhaps I am going too far in my interpretation of children's behavior in this single case. However, I meant to present a picture of children's actions, which not only on the cognitive-pragmatic ground of language build their autonomous subjectivity of community, but also in creative action create their world, to which access for adults is difficult. At the same time, it is not only the otherness of the children's world, but first of all its importance. As Jerzy Cieřlikowski (1985) noted, children play with full po-weight, because the world, although fictionalized, provides them with full integrity with their environment, their subjectivity returns to the time when the symbolic order did not produce lack, but an idea of unity. What I find most appealing is that more child actors can fit into this authorial world of children's imagination.

In children's groups, of course, there are leaders who can impose their rules on others. Based on observations of children's games and, overblown by now, my own memory of distant childhood, I am inclined to hypothesize that a child entering the play space of a group does not have to affirm its usefulness or occupy a designated position. There are, of course, plays and games in which functions are separated. When we are missing a goalkeeper in a soccer game we look for someone to stand in goal. The resignation of a few key players can cause the balance of power to be shaken and the game to lose the appeal that the coveted ball-kicking virtuosos provided. However, when we go skating together, usually the more of us the better. Later, when more participants in the winter fun on the ice decide to go home, the fun doesn't necessarily lose its appeal. After all, the last two skaters can still continue the fun that was born in the larger community. The subjectivity of the participant in this kind of play grows out of his or her inclusion in the play, which is something casual, but at the same time something absolutely serious. After all, our adult subjectivity is largely based on either being recognized as important to the community or participating in a momentous event. In the modern world, one of the main mechanisms that strips us of our subjectivity is the possibility of being replaced by someone else. There is a legion of new willing workers waiting to take our place, which means that our disappearance will not even be noticed. A sad prospect! Meanwhile, child's play, which can be joined at any time and from which we can leave without harming the group that previously welcomed us, is an experience that liberates us from the ruthless world of symbolic order and pragmatic regime. A child who joins a group of playgroups as one of many does not have to define himself towards other playgroup members, which is the case when he is assigned a specific role or function. Nor

does he make a commitment that binds him to the group by taking away a piece of freedom. This is because when the condition for joining a game is to participate all the way to the end, it may happen that we have to take part even when it turns out that we make ourselves uncomfortable or fail and spoil the fun for others. We will then gain the meadow of clumsiness which will not only distinguish us negatively from the community, but will also burden us with the trauma of entering symbolic reality as Jacques Lacan (Lacan, 2005) pointed out.

The vision of carefree play that simultaneously reinforces our sense of subjectivity is, of course, a utopia. It becomes even more distant the more we grow up. Childish play can seem like the swan song of the remnants of memory from Lacan's distinguished pre-oedipal period, in which the child believes he is part of his mother, and feels no separation between himself and the world. Fortunately, humans have produced tools to revisit this early experience, these tools are used by art. Of course, not every artwork or artistic practice takes us back to the unity of a time when our imagination was not yet constrained and divided by symbolic orders.

In the remainder of my article, I will try to present examples from the performing arts that allow us to look at the mechanisms of emancipation of our subjectivity. However, before I move on to selected examples, I would like to devote a few words to clarify the issue of how I treat subjectivity due to the function of the concept of politicality, which is linked to the issue of theater education. After all, it is impossible to talk about the politicality of children's theater outside the educational context. The idea of subjectivity that I promote, the sense of which is born in the space of unity with the world, is not an alternative to the subject, which, according to Lacan's proposal, comes into being through the matter of occupying a designated place in the Symbolic Order. While the condition for coming into existence as a symbolic subject is to give up the claim of past unity, I would argue that the postulate of giving up the experience of said unity is not absolute. On the contrary, without retaining in memory its unconditional value from pre-oedipal time, symbolic subjectivity remains only an empty role, which, as we know very well from Erving Goffman's (1959) book, can be changeable. Thus, every time we play the chosen role according to the scenario perpetuated by social practice we feel a certain lack, which Lacan points out by explaining that it is a consequence of entering the Symbolic Order. According to Lacan, this lack becomes irremovable as the child enters adulthood. The Symbolic Order is at the same time the source of the repression of the desire for a symbiotic union with the mother. Return to the said union is impossible, while hypothetical full satisfaction means the death of the subject, because as satisfied we no longer desire. In the therapeutic order, satisfaction may indeed mean an impossible but nevertheless final cure. At the same time, unity with the mother implies a return to the pre-oedipal period, and therefore withdrawal from the symbolic order. Meanwhile, in the order of art, there is another path to satisfaction, which, as I will try to show, involves the experience of restoring lost unity, but by transcending the Symbolic Order, not abandoning it.

To illustrate the process leading to the transgression of the Symbolic order, I will cite a text by Brian [Massumi \(1995\)](#), in which he describes the autonomy of affect. Explaining the origins of creation, Massumi defines affect as a state of intensity whose specificity is potentiality. Massumi then draws a picture of a restless soup in which the “bubbling of structuration” continues. On this ground, many researchers referring to [Massumi's \(1995\)](#) influential work present affect as a precognitive phase from which structures, objects, or recognized emotions emerge. Meanwhile, the state of intensity of human experience may not only precede the formation of meanings and impressions, but also be the final result of cognitive processes. Without going into complex theoretical considerations, let me use the example of a captivating lyric poem. The force of its influence, made up of the arrangement of words, rhymes, perhaps rhythms sometimes produces an intensity that allows one to transcend the Symbolic Order. The movement toward transcendence, to which the reading of a lyric poem stimulates us, is often equated in everyday language with a sense of unity or dissolution in time and space. So, the symbolic order disappears, but not so that a new one can emerge, but so that for a moment we can experience the lost unity. At the same time, this experience fills our subjectivity with a deep conviction of its unshakable value. For if there is no difference, the source of which is the Symbolic Order, then the possibility of comparison and lack, which mark our symbolic subjectivity with the taint of unfulfillment, disappears.

Thus, I argue that in order to rebuild our subjectivity, we turn to art seeking a horizon of experience that is not meaning, but high-intensity affective experience. Unlike the impossible return to pre-Oedipal time and death, which symbolizes ultimate fulfillment, art allows us to experience this fulfillment repeatedly and sometimes extend its duration. However, in order to live this experience, we must learn art and develop our ability to interact with it. Therefore, the starting point for my further considerations will be a brief sketch of theater pedagogy.

1.5. Adult-Child Relations in Education by/for Theater: A Review of Pedagogical Concepts

School theater education for a very long time was influenced by the conviction that children are pre-social beings who “have yet to acquire the competencies to function in the adult world” ([Szczepaska-Pustkowska, 2020](#), p. 137). These competencies were taught by the school, which, in the field of art, introduced students to recognized, outstanding works, explained what their value was and how they were constructed. At a later stage of learning, students made their own creative attempts based on imitation of those already recognized. By the end of the twentieth century, the study of children was finally dominated by a current within which “a new view of the child and childhood gradually crystallized, in which a peculiarly ethnographic curiosity about the child's world took an important place” ([Kehily, 2008](#), pp. 123–133). Constructions of thought began to come to the fore, in which children were seen as children and not just as a future generation of adults. They also turned to the possibilities provided by social constructivism, and began to study

children from a tribal perspective, recognizing their independent place in the socio-cultural world, having their own culture, folklore, rituals, rules and normative constraints ([Szczepaska-Pustkowska, 2020](#), p. 137). On the ground of theater, this attitude has resulted in an effort to build theatrical situations that “take into account the full subjectivity of the participants, sensitivity to their individual experiences and needs, and a focus on dialogue and collective exploration” ([Denkowicz, 2022](#), p. 48).

In summary of the transformations that have taken place, it is possible to distinguish three proposals relevant to my further considerations to describe different approaches to introducing children to the art of theater. The first proposal distinguishes “upbringing for the theater,” which consists most generally of introducing the child to theatrical works, to the principles that shape theatrical performance, and teaching understanding of the art of theater. An extension of “upbringing for the theater” is “theater education”, which is based on the child's creative activity, allowing to direct the child's attention to the process of discovering the world around him, other people and, finally, himself. ([Żardecki, 2012](#), p. 186).

The second proposal juxtaposes the hierarchical model of theater education, which is consistent with the old approach to children, with the animation approach appropriate and thus preferred for contemporary theater pedagogy ([Kalinowska, 2015](#)).

The third proposal refers to Margaret Mead's concept of configurationalism, which Maria [Szczepaska-Pustkowska \(2020\)](#) uses in her description of theater for children, distinguishing three cultural perspectives. The first is a postfigurative perspective, directed at the past, its stable continuity, which is guaranteed by the experience and wisdom of older generations and the fact that children learn mainly from adults. The second is related to cofigurativism, which is oriented toward the present and the exchange of meanings between generations learning from each other. The third, prefigurative focused on the unpredictable future, in which children represent what is yet to come. The author of the last of the proposals cited most emphatically points to prefigurative culture as the most promising one. She emphasizes the difference between “post-figurative culture, in which the child's otherness, is seen as a weakness and a stigmatizing, marginalizing stigma, and pre-figurative culture, in which the child appears as a subject full of possibilities and competence, from whom elders can also gain knowledge” ([Szczepaska-Pustkowska, 2020](#), p.142).

2. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED THEATRICAL WORKS FOR CHILDREN

The order of discussing the next three theatrical works reflects the transition from familiarizing the child with the literary values of the plot, to involving him in the theatrical action, to giving the child the stage for his own creation. The text I'm going to start with is an environmental fable with an educational function. Not yet played in the theater, the story of King Pecephalus ([Maciejewska, 2022](#)) makes use of the familiar fairy-tale patterns of a child's expedition to an unknown world, as a whole, however, it is composed

of an original story written in an absolutely perfect way both structurally and linguistically.

2.1. *The Function of the Adult in Reading Drama for the Child: The Ballad of Prince Pecephalus*

The action of the drama begins in a children's room, where a mother reads to her two children the well-known story about a princess who is rescued from a tower on a glass mountain by a prince on a flying steed. The original stylization into children's language of the short story allows young viewers to encounter a narrative of high literary merit right from the start. The words they will hear will be somewhat different from those they may be familiar with from earlier stories about a prince rescuing a princess locked in a tower. The pictorial representation of how tall the mountain is by comparing it to six trees standing one on top of the other captures well the naive child's attempt to convey the astonishing size of the mountain and at the same time the danger of the height to which the prince must rise. The value of the literary language is, of course, in keeping with the more traditional "education for the theater," an important part of which is introducing children to works of high artistic value. It is worth noting, however, that this is not exactly a form of forcing children to adopt forms considered valuable. This is because the evidently affective aspect present in a short story is left to the child's judgment. If the art of words does not emotionally engage the child viewer, the artistic level of literary language will also remain outside his circle of interest. The adult guide of the child in the world of art, therefore, does not need to encourage him to listen to the developing dialogues with additional efforts. This thing, on the other hand, is quite easy to achieve in the theater. A spectacular exhibition and an over-expressive way of speaking will certainly attract a child's attention. But is it worth stimulating a child's interest in mediocre literature or mediocre art. I stand by my opinion that it is not.

The extremely skillfully written story about the prince and the princess does not entirely encapsulate the child's world. Its ending contains a joke aimed evidently in the direction of an adult reading guide. When the princess manages to jump onto a flying steed, she addresses her savior, "My good prince, I'm glad to have met you." To which the prince responds with the somewhat surprising phrase "I am also glad that you have met me, beautiful princess. Now let's live happily ever after!". This is a pastiche of a well-known joke in Poland about the egocentrism of men. In the original, an adult man addresses a woman with words that at first foreshadow a romantic and at the same time deeply tender confession of feelings: "I will never forget the impression... that I made on you." The ending of the drama, however, as we can hear, defies the expectations of the audience, they ironically refer to the naive belief that a man can, if only through politeness, transcend the limits of the center of the world that occupies his ego. This wink towards the adult audience, characteristic in children's literature, is most often classified as a tribute offered on the altar of sacrifice of the adult, who once again reads to the child a story that has most often ceased to stimulate his emotions and imagination. Meanwhile, the inserts for adults serve, it seems to me, another function

besides waking them up from potential boredom. This function becomes apparent if we look at reading literature to children not only from a cognitive-aesthetic perspective, but as a kind of reading performance involving two parties with clearly defined functions. The adult, acting as a guide, can both explain the text being read to the young viewer and step into the role of a meaning-seeker. However, he should not lose control of his performance. The child trusts the adult that even when they enter the mysterious world of art together, the adult is in control of the whole play and knows where it is going. However, the author's single, provocative winks in the adult's direction can shatter this sense of certainty. After all, what to answer a perceptive child who notices that the prince's verbal replica doesn't quite match the familiar and expected pattern? Or when he at least notices the smile on the adult's face caused by a joke that was supposed to go unnoticed by the child? Finally, after all, the very internal reaction of the adult awakens in him the vigilance towards the child's world that he should maintain as a responsible guide. This kind of experience is therefore not limited, it seems to me, to compensating the adult for his sacrifice. Rather, the ironic winks in his direction are a certain type of excesses, which, as I will try to prove later, constitute one of the essential elements of the situation of children's encounter with art. Through such excesses, an adult is put for a moment in a situation in which he falls out of the role of guide and for a moment may not know how to behave, how to react, how to explain to a child a situation that exceeds the established framework of the performance binding them. The adult guide may improvise some explanation violating the language and rules of the work into which he introduced the child, or explain himself frankly that the passage took his attention away for a moment toward his own memories. However, by stepping out of his role as a guide, by agreeing to go momentarily beyond the language, whose display of artistry is one of his pedagogical goals, he builds a space of understanding with the child, who can thus experience that the order of the world into which he is being introduced with the help of high art is not final, since there are disjunctures in it that create the possibility of entering into a relationship with another person, which goes beyond the leading symbolic order. Thus, the experience of trauma and lack that comes with entering the Adult Symbolic Order need not be completely devoid of alternatives. Adult insertions into the world of art for children serve another important function. They also educate the adult, accustoming him to the fact, on affective grounds, that the world of children is not a separate space, as he can find his reality in it as well. This kind of passive education of the adult seems to me to point in the direction of a broader education of parents, who should be implemented not only as guides, but also as participants in children's play, which creates a framework also for adult topics in this case politics. After all, the unexpected formula of the prince's response is nothing more than a critical commentary on the patriarchal order contained in irony.

Further into the plot, children can follow the little heroes' expedition to a kingdom where plastic garbage

thrown by humans lives (accumulates). In a series of adventures, the little sister is captured by a pink top that she thoughtlessly threw away after a few days of use. As can also be guessed, eventually there is a reconciliation between the girl and the blouse. At the end, the rabid trash attacks the real world, and the first battle takes place in the parents' house. The children, with the help of allies, defeat the garbage by loading it into bags used for segregation.

The Ballad of Prince Pecephalus, however, is not only a didactic lesson on recycling, but also a path to a human and more-than-human community. A home from which no one is kicked out and which is collectively cared for creates a space in which everyone is somehow important and needed, which solidifies their subjectivity. The pink top eventually becomes a dish rag and so becomes needed again.

The Ballad of Prince Pecefale thus unfolds on several levels. It teaches about the need to reduce littering in the world. It builds a community, beyond which all instruction essentially loses its meaning. Finally, it provides parents with further opportunities to build deeper bonds with their children. However, such a community, in which the world of the child (the work) parallels the world of the adult. The text of the drama thus becomes a multifaceted vehicle for better arranging the world. At least the one closest to us.

The text of the analyzed drama, of course, comes to children usually in the form of a theatrical performance. The ability to read/listen to dialogues is a rather complex skill. So far, however, I have focused on the linguistic literary layer of the work to show that already at this level instructions and instructions for both children and parents are included. Explanations, smiles or other reactions and interactions that accompany the reading of a text develop its performative dimension, in the case of a text at the level of intentions, these usually refer to the situation in which one adult reads a text for children without going beyond the text's intentions or direct reactions to the content contained in it in the layer of meaning.

2.2. *More than Inclusive Theater: Earthlings*

Theatrical performance is, in its various forms, a much broader development of what grows out of a literary text or dramatic script. The theories discussing the relationship between text and stage comprise an extensive library well known to theater scholars, so I will not return to them. Certainly, however, the theatrical situation exceeds in its complexity many times over the situation of reading, even if it is reading aloud that we listen to. Art education educators point out that theater allows better than many other arts "to take into account the full subjectivity of child participants, sensitivity to their individual experiences and needs, and opens up to dialogue and collective exploration" (Denkiewicz, 2022, p. 48). The above elegant formula accompanies many theatrical ventures, but it is not so easy to extract it from a specific performance. Besides, it seems too placid when juxtaposed with a theatrical event involving children. The manifestation of our subjectivity is not always at all complete, especially in the situation of a play for children, in which, as I have already mentioned, excess is sometimes an important element, and this, by its own nature, is rather rarely fully realized.

In the play "Earthlings" (Frankiewicz, 2017), the main didactic goal was to draw children's attention to the need to take care of the climate. The entire staging folded into a well-structured educational tool. The story presented tended not to develop in a cause-and-effect manner. The main characters were a bee, represented by an actress, and at the same time a tiny model of a bee on a flexible wire, which the actress animated. Her antagonist was Smog, in a black sheepskin coat pushing a fantastically smoky cart, which aroused a lot of interest in the small audience. In between these two characters was located Rosy Gardenia. Although as a flower she belonged to the side of nature, as a woman she had warm feelings for Smog, and therefore throughout the performance her main feature was hesitation.

The show also featured a number of behaviors that the actors directed directly at the children. However, this act of provocation, which is well-known in the theater, works a little differently depending on whether it is directed at children or adults.

When I go to the theater as an adult, I count on the fact that an actor may douse me with water or offer to finish a somewhat vulgar and crude chant. However, I decide the degree of acquiescence or my involvement myself. The child usually remembers that he has his mom or dad behind him, and it is not clear whether finishing a rhyme with a word that his parents forbid him to pronounce will be justified by playing theater with adult actors or will be met with parental reprimand. Actors, of course, do not persuade children to say the so-called "ugly words," but they involve them in various forms of activity, which, as I have already mentioned, produce a kind of dramatic tension that is not present in the theater for adults.

However, the free activity of children during a theatrical performance is not limited only to those activities encouraged by the actors. It sometimes happens that the action in an unplanned way will trigger a reaction that will be a transgression of the rules or the result of a misunderstanding. In the performance in question, such a situation occurred during the performance at which I was present. At one point the Bison entered the stage. The appearance of the costumed actor and the way he moved was only close to the animal he was supposed to portray. That is probably why a child sitting near me asked his mother not about the Bison, but about the gorilla. I looked again at the stage and indeed, the way the actor moved, and the long hairy arms suggested that we were dealing with a gorilla. This is a bison explained the mother, but the child insisted on his own. Thus, the rule of passive viewing of the play was violated, which, by the way, is rarely observed in children's theater. This time, however, the dispute that arose between the son and the mother fit into the framework of theatrical conventions in an interesting way. The mother defended the theatrical convention, which allows artists to deviate from the principle of direct resemblance in favor of other artistic qualities, and guarded the proper recognition of characters, acting as a guide to the world of performance. The son rightly defended his observation, which at the same time carried a critical potential towards the costuming of the animal character. Through entanglement with the important rules of theatrical convention, and at the

same time through the invocation of the right of right to criticism, the little spectator became for a moment an expressive subject. However, not because he stood out among the crowd, but because he formed an important dispute with his mother about art. So significant and interesting that I, as a trained theater scholar, for a moment paid more attention to the dispute in the audience than to the action on stage.

The entire performance ends with a twist from the *Deus ex machina* repertoire. Through the magic of Patek's Philosophy, the natural order is restored. Smog sheds his black costume and remains Gardenia's golden-haired friend. The children, on the other hand, are invited onto the stage and, together with the actors, put back the broken trees, remove trash from the stage, and develop green grass. The play thus unfolds as a depiction of the changes taking place in the world, which, however, can stop the enchantment from the children's fairy tale and join in the reconstruction of the presented world. Ultimately, then, we are dealing with a lightly dramatized picture whose point of arrival is inclusive theater. The minor excesses I've described and the actors' unusual involvement on affective grounds simultaneously reinforce the audience's sense of community and subjectivity, which is essential to trigger the act of including the audience in the action. After all, why clean up a world of which we are mere spectators? Until we are invited into it on the terms of subjective presence, no one is likely to encourage viewers, even the youngest, to assemble "toys" after the adult actors. In this sense, strengthening community subjectivity has a political dimension. After all, joining in the stage action is not just an empty act of transgressing convention, but is the result of building responsibility for a better-ordered world. Such responsibility makes little sense if it is not our world. This is why the theater, in addition to its ability to conjure up worlds, must, in its spatial dimension, become a place with which children feel a sense of unity.

2.3. *Adults in a Theater Created by Children: The Piccolo Coro dell'Europa*

In addition to the function of an audience of the story presented and an "invited on stage" spectator, children can also create their own theater. But what does it mean to make your own? Even when they play theater on their own, they know the framework of this play mainly through their parents or educational institutions. In addition to playing in the theater, children can also play in the theater, become actors who recreate the drama on stage on an equal footing with adults, or using a more open form of theater create a performance in the process of work and rehearsals. However, the juxtaposition of adult actors with child actors is not always valid. Child actors are under-aged people who play roles once worse once better in imitation of adult theater. That's why I used the expression "play theater" earlier, or perhaps I should add "play theater" as an alternative. From an adult's perspective, the expression "play theater" is deprecating. However, children, as cultural researchers note, play with full seriousness. Play not only provides them with entertainment, but also allows them to practice adulthood or act out fictional situations that will define their status. Play as a social game is already

very close to theater. However, I stand by the position that the child's playful dimension sets some important differences to the adult's acting out of events, which provides a meta-commentary on their daily lives. Describing this difference is not easy. However, I will try, using the example of the "Piccolo Coro dell'Europa" (Gańczarczyk, 2013) project carried out by a group of children with the help of adult playwright and director Iga Gańczarczyk, to point out some important characteristics of theater created by children.

Iga Gańczarczyk reveals in an interview that when the Łaźnia Nowa theater approached her with a proposal to create a play with children, "she thought of a sociological fantasy about a children's parliament." However, her plan was quickly verified by a group of young actors. Already at the first rehearsal "there was an unexpected explosion of energy," recalls Gańczarczyk. "Fifteen expressive characters appeared to us. The children began to show off and compete. If one person made a star, in a moment all fifteen were making a star. It was an uncontrollable element. It also quickly became apparent that my plan to make a play about cooperation between children was against their nature." (Gańczarczyk, 2014, p. 12) The observation that Gańczarczyk shared in the interview seems to challenge utopian notions of a community of children's play. In fact, she merely emphasizes a specific aspect of play that combines two opposing elements, the desire to impress others or gain a better position in the group and at the same time to preserve the community guaranteed by the intensity of play. The most prominent manifestation of this intensity is the energy of running or jumping toddlers. However, it can also be seen in the seriousness and commitment during a tea and cookies party to which a child invites siblings and dolls, for example. This melding of two opposing elements seems important in the context of the discussed need to assert one's subjectivity. After all, just standing out from the group does not give one a sense of being a subject, one still needs the elemental acceptance of the group, for the individualistic actions of the individual. But how to ensure the possibility of existence and acceptance at the same time for fifteen children at once. The only way is precisely through play, the intensity and involvement of which make the rules of Symbolic Order, which determine the social structure, dissolve in the children's imagination.

Gańczarczyk was prepared for the work, to which she invited a specialist in inclusive workshops for children. The work thus proceeded along two tracks. The workshops unleashed the children's natural exuberance, and probably because of this the performance was filled with dancing, running, counting, or playing scaring each other's vampires. In this dimension, it fulfilled well the instructions of pedagogues of children's theater, who pay attention to the importance of free expression of small actors. Nevertheless, the need to create a work that could be shown to the audience meant that after some time the workshop activities began to exclude the goals of working on the play. "Agata, who led the workshops, was focused on the process, working through the problems, while the performance is governed by different laws-at a certain point you have to close something, decide on something." (Gańczarczyk, 2014, p. 14) This moment of recognition of the nature of the

project captures a problem that also appears in the work of adult acting groups.

In the models of theater pedagogy cited earlier, one of the models considered more modern and at the same time desirable, draws attention to the need to undertake activities aimed at children, emphasizes their causal function and the necessity of animation activities. These activities in the project in question were provided primarily by workshops. In the work on the performance itself, the children were treated as partners, they contributed with their free expressions and improvisations, the roles grew out of their abilities and often their childish desire to show off. On the other hand, however, Gańczarczyk, from the perspective of a higher-up, repeatedly explained to the children the meaning of the project, which is supposed to be about their issues. So, when the children copied their parents' theses, for example, she looked for another way to eliminate this echo of the adult voice from the children's responses. As in adult theater as a playwright, she introduced the children to literary texts or films, which later entered the play as well. The final result was surprisingly good artistically. Reviewers wrote that they did not expect such a good mastery of the long texts that the children spoke. The dance arrangements and movement in the show were choreographed by one of the most prominent choreographers of Polish theater. So it is hard to believe that during the rehearsals there were no activities aimed at ensuring the high artistic level of the work. The aforementioned selection of literary and pedagogical texts was also part of a rather hierarchical model of theater pedagogy. However, I mention the intermingling of the two models not only to draw attention to the utopian nature of any homogeneous model of theater, but in order to emphasize what I mentioned earlier, namely, that "playing theater" is a game that takes place within the framework of theatrical conventions imposed by adults. This is not just about providing materials and acting techniques that ultimately allow children's narratives and actions to be unleashed. An extremely important and interesting element of the theatrical frame is the space itself and the situation of the performance, in which the child actors are placed between the adult director and the audience who come to watch their performance. From the interview in which Gańczarczyk talks about working with children, we learn that, to her surprise, the children questioned several of her ideas or films as not being right. Leading the rehearsals, the director was not always willing to accept the children's perspective, she tried to explain her choices to them, there were times in the interview when she appreciated the attitude of a child who defied the group by sharing her view of the issue under discussion. Paradoxically, however, this was not a manifestation of her superior attitude. From the interview as a whole, she nails the director's great respect for children, the source of which was evidently also the disputes and skirmishes between them. The children's subjectivity was thus born in juxtaposition with the strong personality of a professional theater maker. The political dimension of considering the role of children in adult society, and the possibility of creating a children's parliament (a concept rejected by the young actors), thus also moved beyond the parallel of the performing world and the real world.

Working in the theater helped to strengthen the children's subjectivity also in the process of building what can be called ensemble subjectivity.

3. CONCLUSION

Aiming to outline a model for describing a child's involvement in theatrical plays, I analyzed my own observations of children's behavior, proposed adopting the concept of intensity as crucial for creating opportunities to transcend the symbolic order, and finally drew attention to the limitations of models of theater pedagogy that, on the one hand, limit children's freedom to develop through socialization practices, and, on the other hand, promote methods that focus on the child's subjectivity as an autonomous value in relation to his preparation for adult life. The analysis of the cited examples of plays, allowed me to identify strategies that contribute to the production of spaces in which the child can feel not only as in his own world, but also perceive this world as important for both children and adults. An important role in producing this importance is played by the political element of the plays in question, which, while coming from the adult world, nevertheless weaves itself into the order of children's play. At the same time, the analyses of the plays and theoretical considerations carried out led me to the conclusion that while an adult cannot completely withdraw from supporting a child on his or her path of development through art, he or she should occupy a secondary position to the child.

In order to understand the peculiarities of the world of children's imagination and the consequences of these peculiarities for the framework within which children's subjectivity is formed, I will present an answer to the question of how the intensity of adult involvement in art differs from that of children. This comparison will lead me to a key conclusion about the difference in the perception of subjectivity viewed through the lens of the order of adult society and through the lens of children's involvement in art, play or games.

For both adults and children, one of the results of the intensity of experience produced through art is a strong community with a strongly subjective character. For art does not so much allow us to return to an innocent pre-oedipal state as it restores the lost idea of unity and with the values born from it fills our individuality lost in the inherently discrete Symbolic Order. Thus, contrary to what Lacan and Structuralism want, art does not have to be merely the result of productivity growing out of the trauma of lack, but can also alleviate this lack by contrasting difference with repetition. For intensity makes it possible to weaken the effect of difference and, for a moment at least, leave us in abiding awe. In my deepest conviction, both adults and children need this balance. However, the path of adults and children to it is somewhat different on the ground of art. For adults, the concepts of breaking out of the Symbolic Order may be transcendence, spiritual openness or a return to the sources. Children, for whom art is combined with play, find community at a much earlier level of activities aimed at producing their world. For just as children do not have a distinct past in which to immerse

themselves as in a source, they do not have a distinct world beyond which they must seek transcendence. The task they devote themselves to is the construction of their world, its magical and political arrangement. This is why it is so important in theater that they can also produce their space. In the role of spectators, this often involves transgressing the norms of behavior instilled in them by their parents. In creative work, according to the recommendations of Jan Dorman, the legendary Polish creator of theater for children, young artists should participate in all stages of preparing a performance. After all, this is what playing theater is all about, first we prepare the stage, then props, tickets for the family, etc. This is our world, which we will play with full seriousness. In the show "Piccolo Coro dell'Europa", the invitations are issued by the theater and some of the scenery was made by a professional artist. However, the development of space or the handling of the media are in the hands of the children. This is one of the elements that confirm their power in the world of theater. Not only in terms of information, but also artistically. I watched with great appreciation as the young actors calmly moved the camera and cables to conduct an impromptu TV debate on the topics of poverty, violence, etc. Their composure confirmed that they were inviting us into their world, which they themselves were creating. Thus, the outlining unity between the space of theater play and their actions solidified their subjectivity not as a difference, but as a value.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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