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Fascinator: collection of practical stories about utopias realized in an image

abstract

According to the procedures related to the defence of a doctorate in the field of visual arts, my work should be divided into two separate parts: a work (practical part, i.e., an exhibition, an artistic event, a collection of specific works, activities) and a description of the work (theoretical part, accompanying dissertation). This document suits both of them; it deals with my creative practice and research assumptions, but at the same time it is a separate and independent whole, from which its future, potential recipient will be able to benefit regardless of the defence itself and other academic formalities. That is why I decided on the form of an essay-story, which, due to the chronology of events and the way of narration, reads like a diary.

I chose the e-book form due to the ease of its future distribution. The document also includes hyperlinks, links to specific works, pages, virtual research and search suggestions.

The document consists of two interwoven layers: texts and images (122 photos, 20 drawings). These contents are the result of my research in the field of artistic practice as a lifestyle or a method of survival, as well as facing the phantasm of the artist's persona figure and the bohemian artistic milieu (galleries, academies, specific artists, groups). The considerations presented here are related to both the practice of building an image and the practice of the observer /viewer / recipient. When writing about practice, I mean not only the method, but also the strategies and motivations for the actions taken, experiences and a description of the co-created or observed activities of other artists, researchers, practitioners and amateurs.

The title *Fascinator* evokes an extremely specific object, the name of which and functional function directly indicate two co-resulting and interdependent states: being fascinating or fascinated or seducing or being seduced. This two-sided fascination is characterized by the relationship between the creation of the work and its reception, as well as the artist-recipient relationship. In my opinion, artistic practice is the practice of seduction, arousing fascination. The artist himself can be a fascinator, but he does not have to, he can also create an object in order to seduce with it. The subtitle "Collection of practical stories about utopias realized in an image" refers to the form I use. Academic considerations are mixed with personal experience and fiction, which sometimes portrays a given problem in an exaggerated or caricatured way, but precisely in order to make it more visible; as in a fairy tale or parable.

Kieszewska

The most important aspect when working on this juxtaposition was for me to confront the recipient as closely as possible with the methods of artistic work presented here and the resulting experience.

The quote that appears before the introduction is anonymous and must remain anonymous because of its origin. I heard this sentence at one of the meetings of the addiction community at the Addiction Therapy Centre, which I have been attending as a patient since 2018. I am writing about it because the fact of my treatment had a significant impact on my perception of the art world and my artistic activity. In 2018 I also defended my master's degree in art, and a written thesis entitled Taming the homeless, which I presented then, came from my drunken creative period. While writing it, I had already attended therapy, but I didn't know much about sobering up as such. Getting out of a drunken reality takes a long time, and getting sober is a process that, in principle, doesn't have a very specific end.

Each addiction is based on a system of illusions and denials and finding them sequentially in various aspects of everyday life is an adventure that stretches over the years. Alcoholism is a disease that requires special attention to the way it functions, uses language, and builds associations, so every person who tries to counteract its progress becomes a special researcher of all his actions. Participation in therapy, apart from the obvious benefit of the therapeutic process, also opened me up to other people, their stories and worlds. Not all of the texts in this document are sober because the accounts they present come from my different states of consciousness. The difference between both theses, this

document, and my master's thesis is mainly in perspective. The artist leaves his world, and the shape of the external one will largely depend on what he wants to notice.

Document images are indexed; next to each I give an approximate date and description that appear at the end of each chapter. The exception is the series of drawings at the end of the document. These are sketches that I made while participating in addiction therapy, and as this is a closed-loop insight, let me leave them without comments or footnotes. The photographs and drawings in this juxtaposition do not serve as illustrations for the texts, but rather complement them in the form of a separate, independent narrative.

Handwritten signature

References to current events appearing in the text, i.e., the pandemic time, the war in Ukraine and the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border, bother my considerations at a specific time. In subsequent stories, it is important for me not only to change the perspective of the narrator-artist, but also the specific events that make up it. I believe that each of the aspects I have touched upon could be told in a much more complex and profound way, but I was driven more by a desire to differentiate them than to translate them.

Chapter one:

The first chapter entitled *The Big Game* is a paraphrase of the initial interview in the context of addiction to gambling, which

I found on the website of the addiction therapy centre. I changed the word "gambling" into "artistic practice" whenever they occurred; while for words: playing and losing, I did not look for substitutes, because the context created when replacing the previous words fully translated them. In this chapter, I refer to the instability and uncertainty resulting from the status of the universally understood artist profession, my own experiences and a series of conversations with my artistic friends and students of the Academy of Fine Arts, with whom I had the opportunity to talk as part of my didactic practice. In recent years, many discussion panels of initiatives devoted to this issue have been created, however, focusing almost exclusively on the aspects of achieving success, acquiring appropriate acquaintances, and the appropriate preparation of applications and writing applications for cultural institutions. Still few events of this type are devoted to the other, particularly important, though more difficult side of this issue, i.e., reorganizing one's everyday life, dealing with failures that are part of this activity, as well as bearing risk and seeking substantive and psychological support.

A significant gain in gambling is a sense of self-esteem, a sense of victory, adrenaline. These feelings are also appropriate in the context of building one's institutional value in the field of artistic activities. Failures are covered up and displaced, and the art market itself and the institutional circuit are also ruthless towards them. Young adepts of art come into a game where the currency is their personal commitment, emotions, experiences, identifying their value depending on whether they win or lose.

Accompanied by the text entitled *The Great Game* features photographs documenting outdoor activities in which I took part



with Olaf Józefowski, initiated by Marek Wodzisławski. We have cooperated artistically with Marek, supporting each other in our projects since our graduate studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice; We met Olaf in 2020 while working on my individual exhibition, and to this day he contributes a lot to our joint activities. We have never decided to formalize this collective in any way, which is also due to the fact that the three of us are rather soloists. Self-help, unless it is officially named, for example, as an art group, generally does not find its place in reports or portfolios. The institutionalization of this relationship, however, would only make illusory sense. Over the years, we have developed a common language, but we speak on different matters.

Chapter two:

Licking the Razor is an essay in which I present my thoughts on the institution of an art gallery (shop), the role of an art curator (distributor), the figure of the artist (supplier), recipient (customer) and the definition of the artistic product itself. I recall the image used by Brian O'Doherty in the first chapter of his book *White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. The satellite perspective presented there inaugurates O'Doherty's reflections on the ideology of gallery space. The journey from over-earth to tame human proportions takes place in one paragraph and brings to mind a long film shot preceding a documentary, devoted to the history of mankind from the perspective of a distant, unknown civilization. O'Doherty gradually gets closer, shortens the distance. He conducts subsequent observations from the level of the street, the road travelled by the recipient of art to be able to peek inside, as well as impersonates his point of view when he is there.

A customer visiting the Store, known as an art gallery, is in a place of transformation. All known scales, proportions and degrees of differentiation of objects and images known to him become in this place exaggerated, maximized, minimized, isolated from their natural environment. On its part, the Store's institution makes every effort to ensure that the goods (artistic material) provided by the supplier (artist) become one of the elements of the previously prepared sales strategy (message, idea, product).

In my essay, I cite Nathaniel Kahn's documentary *The price of everything*, showing the exoticism of the top parts of the art market, which I then juxtapose with the figure and attitude of Piotr Pawlenski, describing him as the Art Slayer from the East.

Kurkiewicz

Chapter three:

The next chapter *My first exhibition* was devoted to the experience of my first individual exhibition, which though finds its actual place in my portfolio, left a lot of confusion between me and Szara Gallery, which organized it with me. It is an artistic product that has been institutionally displaced and does not exist in the register of this gallery, which was caused by my failure to keep my word and breaking the pre-established rules for exhibiting the works that make up the entire project. Specifically, it is a video material containing content deemed inappropriate and pornographic, which I posted, without consulting the gallery owners, on the gallery street exposition. The material was therefore visible directly from the sidewalk in front of the institution. As I wrote in the chapter summary, people, with whom I later had the opportunity to talk about this precedent, were divided into categories: allowed and not allowed. For me, however, the most interesting aspect of this event was its institutional erasure and denial. Showing disagreement through silence, *passing the buck*.

Chapter entitled *My first exhibition* is accompanied by the documentation of the exhibition entitled *I am no longer a person*, realized in the Szara Gallery in cooperation with the curator of Krzysztof Dobrowolski.

Chapter four:

Time of Prevention is a text that was created as part of an invitation to write a text on pandemic topics for the independent art magazine *Nocnik*, edited by Dagmara Cieślca. In it, I refer to my short stay in journalism studies at the University of Silesia and an interesting combination of events: the beginning of the pandemic and my first individual exhibition and the accompanying development of new methods of artistic work. I originally started using the Tinder application to gather material on the pandemic fear and the situation of various professional groups resulting from such a sudden and unexpected catastrophe. My interlocutors were mostly men who willingly told me about their experiences. However, I quickly redirected my interest in the Situation to the interviewees themselves, and the application itself began to serve as a platform for acquiring models for photography and inspiring stories.

Kisielewski

So, I left a safe virtual space, deciding to have real meetings. What pierced most of the narratives I heard was loneliness and a sense of lack of understanding or even rejection, the cause of which, the people with whom I had the opportunity to meet, attributed mainly to their gender. The woman in their stories appeared as capricious and devoid of feelings, prone to hurt men just for fun. Paradoxically, having a woman was treated as a determinant of value. At the moment, of course, I am using a very flattened and devoid of many threads' synthesis, because it was not the aspect on which I finally focused on my artistic work. A characteristic thread that binds many of my actions is an attempt to disarm the existing situations and participation in this process in the form of a medium.

All the rest of the material, resulting from the interaction with models, remained as unused potential, which I may use again someday.

I asked my interlocutors to undress in front of my lens. Both the reactions and the material were interesting. I treated the images of naked men I collected in short video shots as a kind of ornament that I juxtaposed with recordings of landscapes and spoken narrative made of single words.

In the text entitled *The time of prevention*, the above-mentioned experiences are intertwined with covid everyday life, social reactions to subsequent restrictions and a sense of alienation. I also drew attention to a group that was particularly excluded at that time, i.e., people in a homeless crisis and with alcohol problems. Their world seemed to remain unchanged, and the pandemic terror itself, in superficial perception, did not concern them at all.

Chapter five *Żyłekarze* was created from a text that was included in the publication accompanying the exhibition entitled *I am no longer a person under the same title*. It is an autobiographical story in which I refer to children's experiences in the face of sexuality, injustice of the social system and violence. The text is accompanied by, among others documentation of a video-performance that I conducted in cooperation with Olaf Józefoski at the *Odrodzenia* estate in Katowice. The registration shows images of children's play and eroticism, presented in gestures and glances.

Chapter six:



Vaudeville, June 2020 is the next pandemic chapter from the time of the tamed disorder. In it, I touch upon the themes of isolation and information overload, and the resulting feeling of helplessness. The text is accompanied by photographs that I took during routine exploratory trips around the immediate surroundings, i.e., Siemianowice Śląskie, Chorzów and Katowice. The pandemic situation created favourable circumstances for the inspection of plants, abandoned buildings and other generally inaccessible areas. These are both the documentation of the places themselves and the posed photos in which my son Oskar and Olaf Józefoski appear as models. Some of them were created as a planned series (e.g., a series of photographs posed in the hall of the Technical Progress Centre in Chorzów, which has been closed for years), while some, in particular those where Oskar appears, are part of my private archive.

Chapter seven:

The narrator of the story finds himself in a journey that breaks off into the next chapter entitled *Para-artistic*, where I describe the experience of peeping and participating in the creative process of Marek Wodzisławski, related to the video project for the exhibition entitled *Jouissance* for the Gdańsk City Gallery. I wrote participation, not cooperation, because in this case mental support in the undertaken action was an essential element. The aim was to document a specific community, i.e., visitors to the unofficial nudist beach in Gdańsk Stogi, and their behaviour on video recording, without the knowledge of this group. The undertaking was logistically difficult due to the large area, and the process of registering the desired film frames was close to illegal activities.

The eighth chapter is entitled *Rags in the Main aisle of the Grand Palais*, which refers to the exhibition entitled Christian Boltanski's *Personness* at Monumenta 2010 in Paris. As in the previous chapters, here I am recalling pictures from my provincial Silesian everyday life. The world that I present is resistant to global changes and sensations, and the factor that keeps it stable is alcohol. The narrator of the story struggles with relapsing states and focuses the perception of reality around the addiction. A vital information, which I have not included in this document, is the fact that after 2020, a whole group of new, post-Covid patients joined the Addiction Treatment Centre I know. The type of people also changed, during the years when I attended the centre, the greatest number of people reported problems with alcohol and drug addiction. At the moment, there is an extraordinary variety, because these are both cases of infoholism and shopaholics, and people addicted to taking loans.

Kornelius

The soil-debris phenomenon mentioned by me in this chapter takes place in reality and occurs in post-industrial areas and around allotment gardens on the border of Siemianowice Śląskie and Katowice. A specific community is concentrated around illegal rubbish dumps. People and animals benefit from the potential of waste, but at the same time it is a highly contaminated and dangerous area. In the groves, enthusiasts of practices who do not find a place for themselves in the public space meet.

Chapter nine:

The conformist's instigation I have seen as the last chapter closing the story. My first individual exhibition was accompanied by the beginning of a pandemic, while the next one was surprised by an unexpected war. In earlier chapters there is a character of the Postman, who I also call my postman, which is modelled after a real person and appears as a sobering element. My postman tells me the true scale of the problem, brings me information that is supposed to knock me out of the artistic bubble. During the war, he transforms into a soldier. So that you could even hold a rifle, he repeats along the entire chapter, exhorting me to enrol in military training. Meanwhile, I am organizing an exhibition on the issues of gender roles, sexuality in the image, freedom, and self-esteem. At the same time, I receive information about the terror and feel real powerlessness and tear. We organized the *Be a Lady* exhibition together with curator Paweł Wątroba at the

Centre for Contemporary Art Kronika in Bytom, full of doubts. We were self-therapists during long conversations over coffee in the gallery, and we both felt the imposing nonsense of our actions in the face of current events. Questions about the nonsense of frivolous and soft actions in the gallery space in the face of the invariably (and not occasionally) aggressive reality are at the same time questions about the role of art institutions, the artist's mission and the expectations of the audience towards the gallery message.

Chapter Ten:

I wrote *The feeling of the body and the reverse of everything* after a long break, although initially I was content with the open ending of the previous chapter. Situations continue. This is how my narrator's story could end, supplemented with slides of subsequent photos, the indexes of which are supplemented by the actual events hidden behind the images.

Kieślucka

I think that from time to time I could write a new, new ending, and even expand, deepen or shallow the content of the document; replace photos, change examples, write new concepts, add history and multiply heroes; however, the problems that I am describing could lose their power or completely change their meaning if they were stripped of the background of the events on which they were developed.

The tenth and last chapter is entirely devoted to the issue of communication, whether due to cultural differences or experience. While working on this list, I went on a hitchhiking trip to the East, i.e., Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Serbia. It was a risky venture for me as a young woman, but also for less obtrusive reasons. I am still a participant in addiction therapy, and long breaks, full of dangerous adventures, can contribute to a relapse. Maintaining abstinence is a process of constant self-care and is like walking with an egg on a spoon. *We gamblers are not allowed to dream or fantasize.* In this chapter, I deal with this quote and refer to specific situations from the therapeutic process. I paste the definition of feedback contained in the therapeutic contract, which is a confidential document, but this information is not a secret and you can easily google it. I describe how I use this tool in my artistic practice.

The figure of a soldier also reappears, this time bringing me news from the Bug river about the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border.

The creative activities presented in this document are often not without risk; in essence, it is balancing on a fine line.

Magdalena
Kuczyńska

