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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

A Guide to *Transcryptum*

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Wojciech Blecharz

Committee in charge:

Professor Rand Steiger, Chair
Professor Jonathan Cohen
Professor Roger Reynolds
Professor Chinary Ung
Professor Shahrokh Yadegari

2015

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2015

EPIGRAPH

History breaks down in images not in stories.

Walter Benjamin

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VIDEOS AND AUDIO RECORDINGS

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VITA

EDUCATION

University of California San Diego, Department of Music (La Jolla, California) **2008-2015**
Ph. D. in Music

Frederic Chopin Academy of Music (Warsaw, Poland) **2000-2006**
M.A. in Composition

Primary and Secondary Music High School (Gdańsk, Poland) **1996-2000**

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

University of California San Diego **2008-2015**

As Teaching Assistant:
Basic Musicianship, Ear Training
History of Western Art Music

As Instructor:
History of Western Art Music
Opera
Composition

HONORS, AWARDS & GRANTS

Gazeta Wyborcza Daily referendum *Wdechy* (Finalist) **2013**

Opera-installation *Transcryptum* commissioned by Grand Theater National Opera in Warsaw was nominated to *cultural event and place of the year. Gazeta Wyborcza* is the largest daily in Poland since 1989.

Nominated for PKN Orlen Prize "Poles with Verve" in Art and Culture (Finalist) **2013**

PKN Orlen is the largest oil company in Poland organizing yearly contest in arts, science, sport and business.

Polish Radio Channel Three Yearly Award "Culture Man of the Year" (Finalist) **2013**

For curating Festival *Installactions*

IMPULS COMPOSERS' COMPETITION **2012**

Prize, commission and residency with Klangforum Wien
participation in IMPULS Academy 2015 in Graz, Austria

Polish Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ZAIKS) **2012**
Composers' Stipend for *Means of Protections* commissioned by Warsaw Autumn Festival

International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt **2012**
Stipend-Prize for "perfection in music composition" for *K'an for steel drum and ca. 130 sticks*

Nominated for *Passport Award for Classical Music* (Finalist) **2012**
For artistic achievements, *Passport Award* is one of the most prestigious cultural prizes in Poland, organized by *Polityka weekly* for 25 years.

Polish Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ZAIKS) **2011**
Composers' Stipend for *–onym* composed for Ensemble Court Circuit (Paris)

UC San Diego Teaching Excellence Award **2011**
For outstanding instruction in the Department of Music

Adam Mickiewicz Institute Travel Grant "Polish Culture Abroad" **2008**
For appearance at the *International Youngstars* Concert in Hamburg, Germany, Premiere of *Ivory Gate* for violin, saxophone, cello, percussion and piano composed and commissioned by Ensemble Intégrales (Hamburg)

Culture Center Stipend, Gdynia, Poland **2008**
For costs associated with moving out to the US.

Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Warsaw, Poland **2008**
Stipend for outstanding young artist

"Tadeusz Baird Award for Young Composers", Warsaw, Poland **2007**
Main Prize for *dim* for voice, cello, accordion and piano

The POLYPHONOS-ESOTERICS, Seattle, USA **2007**
Honorable Mention for *Ahimsa* for mixed choir

Competition for Members of Polish Composers' Union Youth Circle **2007**
Prize for *Que* for ensemble

Polish Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ZAIKS) **2007**
Composers' Stipend

Competition for Members of Polish Composers' Union Youth Circle **2006**
Prize for *Vespertinus* for piano trio

International Competition for Composers in Jihlava, Czech Republic **2006**
Prize for *Incantatus* for female choir

Adam Didur Competition for Composers, Sanok , Poland **2005**
Third for *Canto* for baritone and string quartet

Ministry of Culture and National Heritage Warsaw, Poland **2005**
Stipend for outstanding achievements as a student of the Frederick Chopin Academy of music

Académie Musicale di Villecroze, France **2005**
Stipend for composers workshop led by Nöel Lee

Musica Sacra Composers' Competition, Częstochowa, Poland **2004**
Third Prize for *Psalmus 82* for mixed choir a cappella

PUBLICATIONS, PRESENTATIONS & LECTURES

International Dance Fair, Düsseldorf, Germany **2014**
Presentation on opera-installation *Body-Opera:* concept, structure and realization.

Stanford University, Music Department, USA **2013**
UC San Diego – Stanford University Music Department Annual Student Exchange. Presentation on *Transcryptum, opera-installation* for Grand Theater National Opera in Warsaw.

Glissando Magazine, Workshop for Young Music Journalists , Warsaw, Poland 2013
Presentation on *Transcryptum, opera-installation* for Grand Theater National Opera in Warsaw, followed by a 2 hours workshop-interview for young journalists and music critics.
Glissando is the most prominent new music magazine in Poland.

Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing, China **2012**
"Polish Contemporary Music is a Woman", lecture on latest Polish music and living female composers.

China Music Conservatory, Beijing, China **2012**
"Polish Contemporary Music is a Woman", lecture on latest Polish music and living female composers.

Frederic Chopin University of Music, Warsaw, Poland **2012**
Lecture on *"10 pieces each young composer should know, works by Alvin Lucier, Frank Zappa, Brian Ferneyhough, Salvatore Sciarrino, Helmut Lachenmann, Beat Furrer, La Monte Young and others."*

Primary and Secondary Music School, Gdańsk, Poland **2011**
National Conference for Music History Teachers
Presentation on selected composers: Salvatore Sciarrino, Beat Furrer, Georg Friedrich Hass, Helmut Lachenmann, and the youngest generation of Polish composers.

"*Made in USA* – a Subjective Guide to Contemporary Music of The United States" 2011

Article published in *Nowa Muzyka Amerykańska.* Korporacja ha!art, Warsaw, 2011

University of Southern California, Polish Music Center 2010

"Polish Contemporary Music is a Woman", lecture on latest Polish music and living female composers.

"Cosmic Pulses, Stockhausen Courses" 2007

Article published in *Ruch Muzyczny*, Vol. 16/17 2007.
Ruch Muzyczny is the main Polish classical music magazine.

FESTIVALS, CONFERENCES & SYMPOSIA

***IMPULS* Academy, Graz, Austria 2015**

Invited guest composer residency with Klangforum Wien featured premiere of *ocean is not enough* composed for the ensemble as a result of a prize in composers' competition IMPULS.

***Kwartesencja* Festival, Warsaw, Poland 2014**

Invited composer for the world premiere of *Liminal Studies,* commissioned by Royal String Quartet.

***Warsaw Autumn Festival*, Poland 2014**

Invited composer for the world premiere of *(one)[year](later) for traditional Chinese instruments,* commissioned by Forbidden City Chamber Orchestra from Beijing

International Summer Courses of New Music, Darmstadt, Germany 2014

Invited composer for the world premiere of *blacksnowfalls* commissioned by the Festival as a result of a prize "for perfection in composition" awarded in 2012. Participation in master classes, festival events and lectures.

International Days of Music, Brussels, Belgium 2014

Invited composer at performance of *Torpor,* performed by Ensmeble *Musique Nouvelle.*

Festival *Installactions,* Nowy Theater, Warsaw, Poland 2014

Curated festival featuring works of: Bradley Scott Rosen, Samuel Beckett, Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri, Particia Alessandrini, Samson Young, Keith Deverell, Ewa Maria Śmigielska, Brigitta Muntendorf, Erik Dæhlin, Simon Steen Andersen, Aleksandra Gryka, Andrzej Kwieciński, Sławomir Wojciechowski, Jagoda Szmytka, Karol Nepelski, Vinko Globokar and James Tenney.
World premiere of *September (the next reading),* commissioned by Quadrophonic Ensemble, conducted project for the festival's audience: performance of *Having never written a note for percussion solo* by James Tenney played by 40 participants.

Polish Composers' Union, Warsaw, Poland **2013**

Invited attendance at a portrait-concert, including a world premiere of *Small Talks.*

***ManiFeste, IRCAM,* Paris, France** **2013**

Invited attendance for master classes and workshop on *Comfort Zone,* composed for Exaudi Ensemble (London).

Festival *Installactions,* Nowy Theater, Warsaw, Poland **2013**

Curated festival featuring works of: Stefan Prins, Johannes Kreidler, Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri, Zimoun, Jagoda Szmytka, Sivan Cohen Elias and John Cage. Conducted project for the festival's audience: performance of *Branches* by John Cage played by ca. 40 participants.

***Forbidden City Chamber Orchestra,* Beijing, China** **20012-13**

Invited residency, extended research on traditional Chinese instruments and music.

***Warsaw Autumn Festival*, Poland** **2012**

Invited composer for the world premiere of *Means of Protection,* commissioned by the festival.

International Summer Courses of New Music, Darmstadt, Germany
2012

Participation in master classes, festival events and lectures.
Premiere of *K'an* for steel drum and ca. 130 sticks.

Festival *Installactions,* Nowy Theater, Warsaw, Poland **2012**

Co-curated festival featuring works of: Peter Ablinger, Jagoda Szmytka, Karol Nepelski, Douglas Gordon, Kwartludium Ensmeble and Maurizio Kagel. World premiere of *Phenotype,* commissioned by the festival. Conducted project for the festival's audience:
2 full performances of *Eine Brise* by Maurizio Kagel for 111 bicyclists.

***International Youngstars Project*, Hamburg, Germany** **2008**

Invited composer for the world premiere of *Ivory Gate,* commissioned by Ensemble Intégrales.

Bebersee Festival, Germany **2007**

Invited composer for the world premiere of *De*, commissioned by the festival.

Académie Musicale di Villecroze, France **2007**

Invited attendance at workshops and the world premiere of Transphérè.

Stockhausen Courses, Kürten, Germany **2007**

Attendance at lectures, courses and master classes with Karlheinz Stockhausen.

DISCOGRAPHY:

Small Talks, Requiem Records for accordion reed box and baritone saxophone without **2015**

Performed by Fluent Ensemble

Torpor for violin, bass clarinet, percussion and piano**, DUX Recording Producers 2013**

Performed by Kwartuldium Ensemble

Hypopnea *for detuned accordion***, Sarton Recodrs 2013**

Performed by Maciej Frąckiewicz

Airlines *for recorders/ four performers,* **Genuin 2012**

Performed by Quartet New Generation

Psalmus 82 for mixed choir**, Acte Préalable, 2005**

Performed by Schola Cantorum Gedanensis, Jan Łukaszewski – conductor

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS:

Polish Composers' Union

Polish Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ZAIKS)

Nowy Theater, Warsaw

International Society of Contemporary Music, Polish Section

Polish Music Center, Los Angeles

SELECTED PRESS:

"Disorientation at the Warsaw Opera; Transcryptum by Wojtek Blecharz"

Musical Opinion Quarterly Apr/Jun2014, Vol. 137 Issue 1499

"Anatomy of Music. Anatomy of theater"

Dissonanze 123, September 2013

"Wyprowadzić widza z sali"

Exklusiv #124, May 2013
http://www.e-teatr.pl/en/artykuly/163079.html

Transcryptum. The Phantom of the Opera.

Newsweek Poland, May 2013
http://kultura.newsweek.pl/-transcryptum---upor-w-operze,104485,1,1.html

"Wojtek Blecharz – interview"

Glissando, May 2013
http://www.glissando.pl/wywiady/wojtek-blecharz-wywiad/

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Guide to *Transcryptum*

by

Wojciech Blecharz

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2015

Professor Rand Steiger, Chair

The following Doctoral Dissertation represents the culmination of nearly three years of work in the UCSD department of music. After completing my qualification exams I started to work on a large-scale composition: *Transcyptum, opera-installation*, which was commissioned by Grand Theater National Opera in Warsaw and premiered in May 2013. This paper combines the most crucial elements of my research, discusses concept of *"opera-installation"* and most importantly explains the realization process of *Transcryptum.*

After one year of working on *Transcryptum* I realized that this opera would certainly transcend the traditional frames of its genre. A strong influence of visual arts, the rejection of setting text to music, and an inability to find an adequate director who would understand the nature of my work encouraged me to combine 3 roles in one: composer, director, and librettist.
Making the decision to fulfill those three positions was inspired by a longtime fascination of interdisciplinary work by one of the fathers of music theater Heiner Goebbles, who creates and supervises most of the layers in his complex stage works from texts, stage directions, and dramaturgy to composing music.

In Warsaw performance of *Transcryptum* the audience was divided into 5 groups, following 5 different trails and exploring vast off stage spaces of the opera house where they encountered performers, objects, and installations. The aim of this dissertation is not only to present and discuss the music composed for *Transcryptum,* but also to explain the structure of the opera's performance and to guide a reader through all the elements of the opera, which were seen and heard by the audience.

CHAPTER 1. Trauma – the impossibility of a comprehensible story.

The mechanisms of psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder became the "concept-libretto" of *Transcryptum.* By concept-libretto I mean a specific topic or a phenomenon, which is explored and transformed to become "the story" of the opera. The phenomenon becomes the concept itself, which is "set to music". In *Transcryptum* the representation of the phenomenon of trauma and its metaphors replaces common operatic devices, such as the aria or recitative, which are used to propel action in traditional operatic setting. Telling a specific story via text is secondary to the representation of a topic, to placing the viewer inside of the structure of the phenomenon.

A traumatic event can be so extreme that it must be repressed from one's memory because it is outside the range of human understanding. Unfortunately such a deep "scar" on one's memory cannot be simply erased, it either stays deeply buried in layers of one's memory or goes beyond it, hiding in a metaphorical "void", "container" or a "black hole". The traumatic event returns despite this amnesia and against the "survivor's will", starting a complex process of integration of associative memories.[1] Because the trauma is so extreme that it cannot be processed by the consciousness while it is happening, it results in a delayed response typical in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Fragments of the traumatic event return to memory and consciousness in chaotic, non-linear order; in repeated, intrusive hallucinations, flashbacks, dissociation states,

[1] Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* London: Hogarth, 1955.

dreams, obsessive thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event. The process of integration and the PSTD symptoms can occur years after of experiencing a traumatic event.

> The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by image or event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality, nor as the lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished.[2]

The traumatized often describe their emotional state by "I felt, like if I were not myself", this phrase returns often in various testimonies to describe psychic numbing, a coping reaction to the shocking facts from one's past.

The traumatized are rarely fully conscious during the event, "a temporal delay carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment".[3] The traumatized can repress an event for years, but it always returns to their memory in defragmented chunks, in multiple asynchronous pieces and can provoke a traumatized individual to irreversible consequences.

---

[2] Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma, Explorations in Memory. Trauma and Experience.* Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995.
[3] Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma, Explorations in Memory. Trauma and Experience.*

1.2. Post-traumatic, post-dramatic and post-structural opera.

"*Transcryptum* is the artobject, or artevent, artoperation or artprocedure, which incarnates transcription of trauma and cross-inscriptions of its traces"[4] The equivalent of *the* Ettinger's *artobject* is opera, a hybrid *per se*, a "mutating" interdisciplinary genre, which has been combining text, music, dance and other theatrical attributes from the beginning of the 17th century. *Transcryptum* is an *opera-installation*, synthesizing operatic heritage with a new formal approach featuring aspects typical for installation art. *Transcryptum* creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, an "operation", which "addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space. Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, *[Transcryptum]* presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision".[5]

According to Richard Taruskin, the simplest explanation of the *libretto* (a little book) is a text that is set in an extended musical work, particularly opera.[6] I perceive the libretto from a post-structural perspective, as a "big book" or collection of texts, as a code, an identification of signs, an intertextual palimpsest[7].

---

[4] Ettinger, Bracha. *The Matrixial Borderspace.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
[5] Bishop, Claire. *Installation Art: A Critical History*. London: Tate Publishing, 2008.
[6] Taruskin, Richard. *The Oxford History of Western Music.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
[7] Derrida, Jaques. *Limited Inc.,* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.

This global approach to interpreting the role of libretto in the opera places it closely to *proto-performance*[8]. The libretto "gives rise to a performance, is a starting point or, more commonly, a bunch of starting points", the libretto becomes the main driving force of the performance. The concept-libretto as the proto-performance may be a "legal code, liturgy, scenario, script, drama, dance notation, music score, oral tradition or various combinations of the above elements; text from Latin *textere* means to weave or to compose. The concept-libretto might be "outside the written realm altogether – as plans, drawings, paintings, diagrams, manifestos, or ideas"[9] or as in *Transcryptum's* case as psychology, music, architecture, installation art, memory and others.

> What is "text"? From a semiotic standpoint, the term /text/ designates not only coherent and complete series of linguistic statements, whether oral or written, but also every unit of discourse, whether verbal, nonverbal, or mixed, that results from the coexistence of several codes (and other factors too [. . .]) and possesses the constitutive prerequisites of completeness and coherence. According to this understanding of textuality, an image, or group of images, is, or can be, a text. A sculpture, a film, a musical passage, or a sequence of sound effects constitute texts also, or rather they can be considered as such. Clearly, therefore, even the units known as performances can be considered as texts, and can thus become the object of textual analysis [. . .].[10]

Transcryptum is a site-specific opera on psychological trauma, an opera that must be "installed" in an existing space, an opera designed for an interactive audience, which physically explores the space of the opera.

---

[8] Schechner, Richard. *Performatyka: Wstęp.* Wrocław: Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Jerzego Grotowskiego, 2006.
[9] Schechner, Richard. *Performatyka: Wstęp.*
[10] De Marinis, Marco. *The Semiotics of Performance.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1993.

Transcryptum has 2 librettos: “the big book” and “the small book." In the former – the concept-libretto is understood performatively: trauma as text, which is transformable and pliable into a metaphor, into “sign and/or symbol systems.”[11] The “small book” was added to the opera relatively late, several months before the whole concept of production had to be submitted in its full shape.

After months of researching psychological trauma and extracting the most significant but abstract traces of it, I realized that *Transcryptum* needed an additional reference, an additional “prism”, which would project selected aspects of trauma through another “lens”. My main goal as the director of *Transcryptum* was to place the viewer inside of the structure of trauma: the multi-layered labyrinth of non-linear chunks of memory; to reenact the process of integration of associative memories, to confuse the viewer and to challenge the memory.
I realized that in order to achieve my goals, to present all the “transcriptions and cross-inscriptions” of trauma I have to follow with one of my favorite visual artists’ statements:
“meaning is created once something can be related to personal experience”.[12]

[11] Schechner, Richard. *Performatyka: Wstęp.*
[12] Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (A Corner of Baci).* 1990, see Bishop, Claire. *Installation Art: A Critical History*.

CHAPTER 2. Libretto as testimony.

The following “libretto”, the “small book,” was written at the end of my entire research on psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, 9 months before the premiere, when I was finally ready to extract a “perfect traumatic memory”, to create an ideal “traumatic exhibit”, which would translate the main aspects of trauma, carry the narrative of the opera and let me transcend the personal dimension of my work. The audience can read the following story (see chapter 2.1.) once in the course of the performance; each viewer gets a chance to remember as much as she or he can. The story is based on chunks of various traumatic events, found in different academic resources, literature and media. Introducing this text to the structure of *Transcryptum* allowed me to present all the fundamental and abstract aspects of trauma in a more expressive and personal way, making the point clear that *Transcryptum* as a genre is placed closer to music theater and drama than to a regular exhibition.

> What ultimately matters in all processes of witnessing, spasmodic and continuous, conscious and unconscious, is not simply the information, the establishment of the facts, but the experience itself of living though testimony, of giving testimony. The testimony is, therefore the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal “thou”, and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself.[13]

[13] Laub, Dori. *Trauma Explorations in Memory: Truth and Testimony.* Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

2.1. The story.

I was driving back home from a shopping mall when I saw smoke above our neighborhood. I heard the fire engines coming. When I got to our street I saw that it was my house on fire. When I was leaving for the mall my husband and son were about to have a nap. Smoke coming out from the kitchen woke my husband up. The kitchen was on fire; the flames were spreading quickly into the hall and the living room. My husband ran into the bedroom and grabbed our crying four-year-old son.

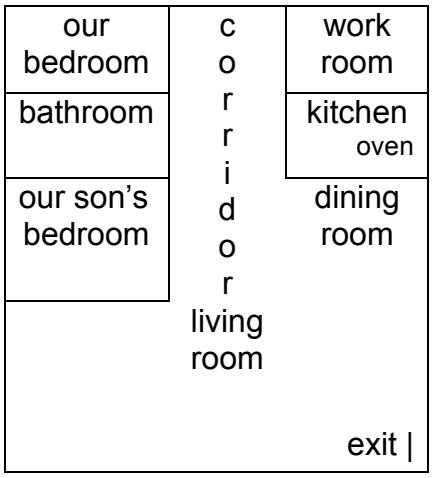


Figure 1. The map of the house.

He heard voices at the main door, someone was calling him. Our neighbor Elisabeth had decided to try to help before the firefighters came. My husband rushed to the door, he was not able to recognize the voice, he was not sure if it was me. Flames and smoke surrounded him and my son, and everything around them was burning. My husband noticed a silhouette at the main door. Elisabeth cleared the way just a little bit, as much as she could, so she was able to see that my husband wrapped our son in the blanket and literarily threw him through the flames into Elisabeth's arms. A second later, the first roof beam collapsed and blocked the access to the main entrance. My husband was trying to get back to the bedroom when the fire engine arrived in front of our house and started to set up the hoses. Three seconds later the second roof beam collapsed straight on my husband's head. He fell. The firemen started to extinguish the fire and were constantly calling my husband. No response.

My son was in Elisabeth's arms on her lawn totally frightened, paralyzed, speechless, watching the flames. I was sitting in my car

in front of the house: still, absent, numb. I could not move. I was not myself. I did not know what was going on.



Figure 2. The Fire.

I don't remember the funeral well; my family helped me out with arranging everything. After the fire my son spent two days in the hospital, he had minor burns and lung damage. One of my cousins took care of him during the service, which took place 10 days after the fire, on Tuesday. I needed a new place to stay; I asked my family to find me a one-bedroom apartment, close to my mother's place. I did not want to see anyone, to be with anyone, except my son. On that Saturday when I lost him, we were getting ready for a trip to a cabin by a lake. My son was very anxious and excited; my husband told him that on our way to the cabin they would buy one of those remote-control helicopters. My son was crazy about this idea, and could not stop asking questions about when he would get it. I was packing, he was bothering me with questions about the helicopter, he wanted it now!

I did not listen to him. I told him he'd better clean his room before we go on our trip. He got furious. He did not want to hear about anything but the freaking helicopter. I yelled at him. He started crying for good, he could not stop. I yelled that I would go to the shopping mall and bring him this stupid helicopter, because I could not stand his hysterics. My husband calmed him down, and put him to bed. He fell asleep in tears. My husband also went to bed to have a nap after this awful argument. I quit packing the last box with my sketches, left some papers on a kitchen counter, put the soup for our dinner on the stove, lowered the flame, took my car keys and went out to the shopping mall. I was angry, I had so much to do before the trip.

When I got pregnant I decided to stay at home and take care of our son with the hope that being at home will allow me to focus on my work. My husband was so happy; he always wanted to have a real,

beautiful family. He was the love of my- life he was everything to me. After my son was born I got postpartum depression, I was alone at home with this crying baby I did not want so much.
My husband was going on frequent business trips, I was freaking out. I felt like I could not tell him what was going on with me.

I wanted him to believe in this idealistic vision of our life. Instead of sketching, painting, and drawing I found myself cooking, washing and cleaning. A week before our planned trip to the lake I had decided to put all my projects together after four years of wishful thinking that I would start making my projects again.
I put all my stuff in boxes: paints, solvents, glues, veneers, mordant, paint reducers, canvases, frames, my drawings, sketches, tons of paper, junk for my installations. I put everything in boxes and I moved all of them from my workroom to the living room. The whole living room was packed with my “previous life” organized in dozens of boxes, stacked along the walls in the entire living room. I really wanted to move this crap to the garage before the trip to the lake, so I could go there with this feeling that when I come back home, I would start a new chapter and rearrange my old workroom into a meditation room, maybe bedroom for guests, maybe another bedroom for our new baby, whatever.
I just wanted to be in the forest by the lake and hang out on this beautiful pier next to the cabin. When I was packing and moving the last boxes toward the living room my son started to bother me about the remote-control helicopter.



Figure 3. Audience reading the libretto of *Transcryptum.*

CHAPTER 3. The structure of performance.

Transcryptum is an opera-installation whose selected parts must be "installed" into a space, which is thematically related to the libretto of the opera. The performance might be also staged in a space, which is especially designed or adapted for the performance's purposes. *Transcryptum* might be performed in a regular stage setting, or in an existing non-theatrical space, for example, an early 20th century hydroelectric power plant, which resembles a gigantic dollhouse; or in a network of basement corridors and crypts; or in a summer campsite with cabins, located in the forest by the lake.[14]

My suggestions about the relationship between the nature of the site and the opera should regard the following aspects: multi-layering, labyrinth, a hidden space, long reverbs, space that cannot be entirely seen, a container, an abandoned or burnt building, a family house, a cabin by the lake, forest, crypts, basements, attics, buildings related to water: power plants, refineries, sewages treatment plants, laundries, dams and mills, sites with multiple doors, old hospitals, psychiatric facilities and other spaces which allow to project at least 5 simultaneous sources of sound without direct interruption.

[14] I discuss those specific examples, based on my experience with festivals, which invited me to visit different sites regarding future coproduction of *Transcryptum.* For instance,
I have visited an old, abandoned train station in Wrocław (Poland), but although the structure itself was fascinating, there was no relation with the site and the actual content of *Transcryptum.*

Transcryptum is scored for 8 performers with a conductor:

- contralto,
- alto flute (female performer),
- thunder sheet with 2 crotales (female performer),
- steel drum (female performer),
- cello (female performer)
- 2 accordions
- contrabass clarinet.

The opera was composed for unique voice of Anna Radziejewska, which encompasses a very wide range from d^3 – e^6, featuring deep, rich and almost masculine timbre of low register combined with bright, crystal coloraturas.[15] Anna Radziejewska plays the main character of the opera: the mother. *Transcryptum* consists of: 3 solos, a duet, a trio and a movement for the entire ensemble:

- *K'an* for steel drum and ca. 130 sticks
- *The map of tenderness* for cello solo
- *Choice to remain silent* for contrabass clarinet solo
- *3rd phase* for 2 accordions and 2 pendulum metronomes
- *WwAoLrLdSs* for contralto, alto flute and percussion
- *Outside* for contralto, cello, alto flute, 2 percussion, 2 accordions and contrabass clarinet

The opera was commissioned by Grand Theater National Opera in Warsaw and premiered in May 2013.

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[15]Radziejewska's unique voice was an inspiration for Salvatore Sciarrino, who has already composed 3 pieces for her: operas *Da gelo a gelo*, *Superflumina* and a cycle of songs *Cantiere del poema* dedicated to Radziejewska.

3.1. Inside of the monster.

Grand Theater National Opera in Warsaw was built between 1825-1833 by Italian architect Antonio Corazzi of Livorno. The building was converted several times but was bombed during the siege of Warsaw in 1939 and almost completely destroyed. When the restored theatre was opened to the public in 1965 after 20 years of rebuilding, “it was one of the most imposing and best-equipped state-of-the-art theatres in Europe”[16]. The Polish National Opera was one of the largest theaters in the world. It was in fact so large that the entire building of the *La Scala* Opera House in Milan could be “inserted” in the area of the main stage and the audience was built to seat 1828 people.[17]



Figure 4. Grand Theater, National Opera in Warsaw.

[16] See Wikipedia: Grand Theater.Warsaw and teatrwielki.pl
[17] Not too mention, that currently the Opera employs ca. 1200 staff members.

However the gigantic stage was not the most fascinating place in the opera house. The entire off-stage part of the self-sufficient opera complex, with its endless halls, corridors, passages, shops, storage spaces, galleries, staircases, elevators, patios, terraces, basements, loading docks and more was “a city within a city”, a psychedelic, “Lynchian”, “Kafkquese”, Escher-like, confusing place. The off-stage area was a place where one could lose one's sense of direction easily, unable to trust logic or memory. This paradoxical architecture, its energy and nature became a crucial element in *Transcryptum’s* narrative.[18]

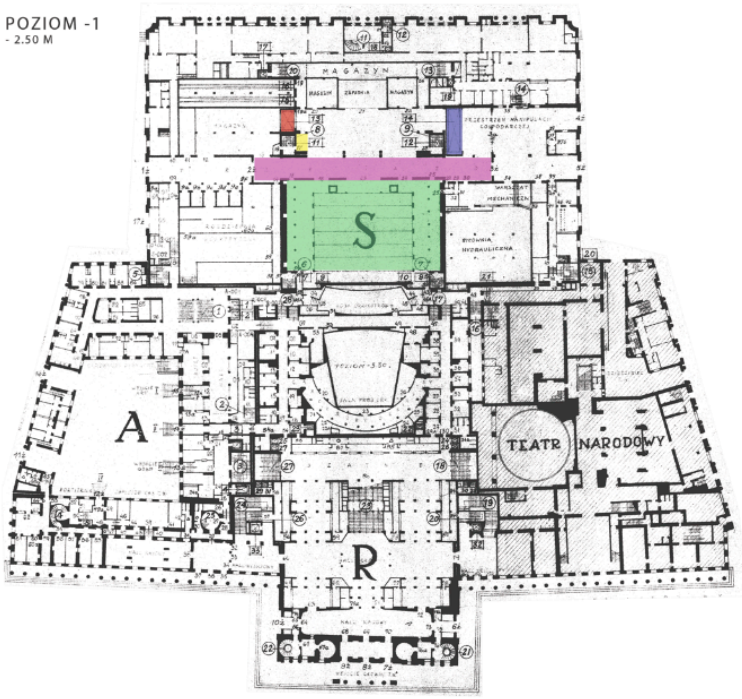


Figure 5. Topography of the Grand Theater, National Opera.

[18] I remember several situations when I simply got lost, because I decided to take a risk and “try a new way”, not to mention, that there are serious issues with wireless reception.

3.2. The role of the director.

My research on experimental opera started by the end of 2011, when I was approached by the Warsaw opera house director and commissioned a new chamber operatic work. Throughout first months of research my vision of the opera had been clarifying up to a certain moment, when I realized that I had to direct the opera on my own to fulfill the coherence of the concept.

By directing I mean projecting sound in space, curating the space and installations assigned to each trail, guiding the spectator's perception, manipulating the level of confusion, and most importantly designing how an interactive audience explores the space of the opera and how this space "unfolds", that is, transforms into a narrative.



Figure 6. The laundry corridor, 4th floor.

Defined concept of the opera's narrative and structure:
rejection of traditional libretto,
rejection of setting text to music.
Focus on relationship between sound and space, abstraction, image, and object.

↓

Inability to find a director, who would fit in the concept of exploring the phenomenon of trauma without referring to a specific, existing text.[19]

↓

Disinclination to stage my opera as a composer/director,
within frames of operatic tradition.
Rejection of the stage as a center space for the opera.
"I say that stage is a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak".[20]

↓

Strong influence of visual arts, installation art and support from my team:
Ewa Maria Śmigielska – "stage set", object-installation,
Wojciech Puś – light installation.

↓

Fascination of the off-stage architecture of the Grand Theater National Opera, which somehow dictated or imposed the way to present
Transcryptum by itself.

Scheme 1. Becoming the director of *Transcryptum.*

[19] The Director of the Opera House kept asking me about "*what is the story of my opera"?* On the other hand, directors I interviewed, whom I presented the main assumptions of *Transcryptum* like: trauma, mother, child, guilt, murder had only one response: "it has to be a new version of *Medea…"*

[20] Artaud, Antonin. *The Theater and its double.* New York: Grove Press, 1958.

3.3. The interactive audience.

The premiere of *Transcryptum* took place in selected off stage spaces of the Grand Theater National Opera in Warsaw in May 23rd, 2013.[21] The audience of *Transcryptum* (max. 250 persons) was divided in 5 groups (max. 50 persons each). Each group explored one of five assigned trails and visited 5 selected sites: the grand trap room, the grand paint shop, tall green corridor, laundry rooms, and the lecture room. Each group was lead by 2 guides (one on each end of a group).[22]

3.3.1. The trails.

One of the biggest challenges of *Transcryptum* was to allow the 5 groups of the audience to visit the 5 main spaces of the opera at the same time, in consecutive order, without interrupting each other. This involves coordinating all of the transitions between the spaces in regards to the specific timings and extremely strict safety rules designated by the space. Each group was assigned to a different trail, each trail lead through the main spaces of the opera, but each trail had a different order of visiting the 5 main sites of *Transcryptum*.

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[21] The premiere was followed by performances on May 25th and May 29th 2013.
[22] I purposely translate Polish adjective *wielki* as *grand* regarding its common usage at the Warsaw Opera House: *wielka zapadnia* (literarily: the grand trap room) or *wielka malarnia* (the grand paint shop) of The Grand Theater… Besides, the use of this word seems reasonable regarding the fact that the Opera House complex is one of largest opera houses in Europe with one of the largest stages all over the world as mentioned before.

The beginning and the end of the performance started at Młynarski Auditorium, a regular hall with seats and stage. The duration of the performance was ca. 1 hour and 10-15 minutes.[23]

The Młynarski Audytorium					
Order	**Group 1**	**Group 2**	**Group 3**	**Group 4**	**Group 5**
1.	The grand trap room Floor -1	Tall green corridor Floor 5	The grand paint shop Floor 7	Laundry rooms Floor 5	The lecture room ***libretto*** Floor 4
2.	The grand paint shop Floor 7	Laundry rooms Floor 5	Tall green corridor Floor 5	The lecture room ***libretto*** Floor 4	The grand trap room Floor -1
3.	Tall green corridor Floor 5	The lecture room ***libretto*** Floor 4	Laundry rooms Floor 5	The grand trap room Floor -1	The grand paint shop Floor 7
4.	Laundry rooms Floor 5	The grand trap room Floor -1	The lecture room ***libretto*** Floor 4	The grand paint shop Floor 7	Tall green corridor Floor 5
5.	The lecture room ***libretto*** Floor 4	The grand paint shop Floor 7	The grand trap room Floor -1	Tall green corridor Floor 5	Laundry rooms Floor 5
The Młynarski Audytorium					

Scheme 2. The order of the trails.

The audience spends from 4 – 6 minutes at each of the main spaces. All musical fragments of *Transcryptum* are being played continuously throughout the entire performance.

[23] *Transcryptum* was performed as the second opera after Jagoda Szmytka's *For voices, for hands.* Both operas were commissioned by Grand Theater National Opera as a part of Project P, a series of chamber operas, composed by young Polish composers.

3.3.2. Five phases of grief.

The decision of choosing 5 spaces of the opera house was determined not only by artistic and logistic means, but also by a conceptual approach found in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' theory about 5 phases of grief.[24] Swiss psychiatrist noted that the process of grieving (which is also crucial for traumatized individuals) can be divided into 5 main emotional stages, occurring in various orders:

denial – anger – bargaining – depression – acceptance.

phase	space	music
denial	the grand trap room	***The map of tenderness*** for cello solo
anger	laundry rooms	***Choice to remain silent*** for contrabass clarinet solo
bargaining	tall green corridor	***3rd phase*** for 2 accordions and 2 pendulum metronomes
depression	the grand paint shop	***WwAoLrLdSs*** for contralto, alto flute and percussion
acceptance	the lecture room	***libretto***

Scheme 3. Main spaces of the opera assigned to the phases of grief.

[24] Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth., and Kessler David. *On Grief & Grieving.* New York: Scribner, 2014.

Each group assigned to a different trail experiences the same story from a different perspective. The lecture room is the only place, where one can read the libretto and then process and associate the information, which has been already seen. The lecture room also “prepares” the memory of the viewer for the rest of the journey throughout the opera. Each group experiences the story in a different order, because a traumatic memory always returns to consciousness in non-linear fragments and flashbacks.

3.4. The beginning of the performance.

After intermission, the audience (which is unaware about is going to happen) returns to the Auditorium and finds a badge with a number pinned to each seat. While seats are being taken the following announcement is played from the speakers multiple times:

> Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have your attention please: Transcryptum is about to start. There is a pass with a number at each seat, please check the number and pin the badge to your garment at sight. Shortly, you will be assigned to a group according to the number on your pass. Please follow the guide assigned to your group number. Leaving or changing the group is strictly forbidden and may impact your safety. Please follow the instructions and remain silent throughout the performance. Thank you.[25]

For the purpose of this paper I will discuss the performance of *Transcryptum* from perspective of group 1, where the libretto is located at the end of the trail.

[25] An English version of the same announcement was handed as a printout while entering the auditorium.

3.5. Oracle in 130 pieces.

The opera begins with *K'an* for steel drum and ca.130 sticks performed on an empty and heavily smoked stage of Młynarski Auditorum.[26] The female performer wears a simple grey dress, has wet, combed hair, and running make up.[27] The way of performing *K'an* is partially inspired by traditional method of consulting *I Ching* oracle, where a fortuneteller tosses and arranges 50 stalks of dried yarrow. The ritual of tossing yarrow stalks is determined by specific rules of counting the stalks as well as by chance. Different configurations of yarrow stalks are assigned to different symbolic trigrams and hexagrams, which allow reading the oracle.

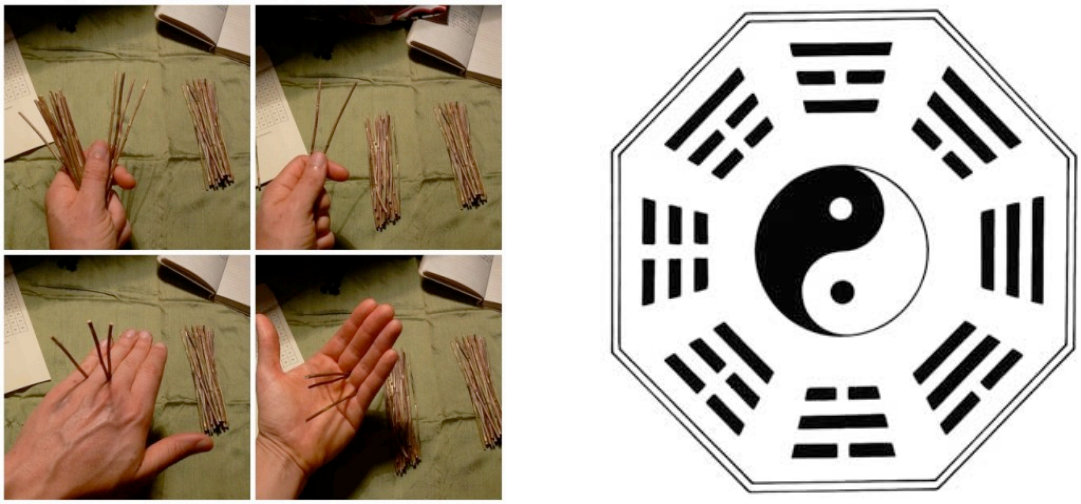


Figure 7. Dried yarrow stalks and *I Ching* trigrams.

[26] The smoke used from the very beginning is not only a visual effect, but an important element of the libretto.
[27] All female performers are dressed, makeup and combed in the same way. They represent the main character of the opera, the mother (see chapter 2.1. page 14).

K'an is performed on a steel drum with a matt surface and about 130 wood sticks (ca. 120 skewers and 10 heavier bamboo chopsticks). The choice of the instrument and the "mallet" was inspired by above images:





Figure 8. The "multi-stick" and a steel drum with a matt surface.

On the one hand *K'an* is a study of the reinterpretation of selected gestures of the *I Ching* oracle, on the other it turns into more abstract ritual choreography. The performer is trying to put the sticks together, arrange the "puzzle", combine elements of the "multi-stick", find the best order, find logic in assembling the 130 pieces which are constantly falling apart and slipping out of their hands. The sticks randomly scatter in the steel drum and create spiky, harmful "sculptures", constellations which are impossible to resolve, paradoxical figures. In I *Ching Book* the symbolic trigrams (different arrangements of short and long lines) stand for changing, transitional states, they are images that are constantly undergoing change.

"In man's world *K'an* represents the heart, the soul locked up within the body, the principle of light enclosed in the dark – that is reason. The name K'an contains two trigrams, which symbolize 'repetition of danger.' Through repetition of danger we grow accustomed to it. *K'an* is related to water, often expressed as a water in ravine, which symbolized danger. It is a situation in which a man is in the same pass as the water in ravine, and, like the water, he can escape if he behaves correctly."[28]

K'an is related both to danger and water, two crucial elements in my opera. The gesture of putting pieces together does not only symbolize the nature of defragmented traumatic memory, but also it "announces" what is going to happen with the audience, which will scatter throughout the off stage spaces of the opera house and gather at the main five sites of *Transcryptum.*

When *K'an* ends:

- A sound of helicopter rotors is played from the speakers,
- 2 guides with group number displays show up on both sides of the stage,

The following instruction is announced from the speakers:

"*group 1, please follow the guide, group 2 please follow the guide…*"

[28] The Richard Wilhelm Translation. *I Ching Book or The Book of Change.* New York: Princeton University Press. 1967.

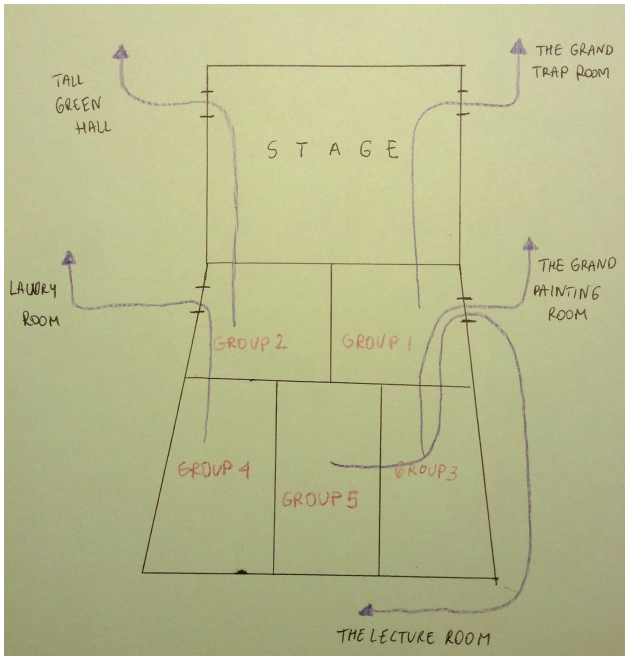


Figure 9. The order and directions of exiting the auditorium.



Figure 10. *K'an* for steel drum and ca. 130 sticks.[29]

[29] The pictures of K'an come from the dress rehearsal when the hair of the performer was not properly styled yet: "the wet hair coiffure" – an iconic element, returning in other moments of the performance.



Figure 11. Assembling the “multi-stick”.

3.6. Transition to the grand trap room.

When group 1 leaves the auditorium located on the 5th floor and heads towards the grand trap room, which is located under the main stage of the opera house (level -1), it passes the following objects and spaces on its way:

3.6.1. Hallway with six windows.

A hallway with six identical, rectangular, transparent tanks filled with muddy water, illuminated with blue light. The last tank additionally contains a floating children’s shoe.

3.6.2. The small paint shop.

- A tall space with large-scale light installation *I WAS NOT MYSELF* and additional screens with videos of gently floating water and the images of the main character of the opera, performed by Anna Radziejewska.



Figure 12. Light installation *I WAS NOT MYSELF*.

- There are 9 hidden speakers in the small painting room projecting a sound installation made of samples of *The Map of Tenderness* for cello solo, performed in the grand trap room (next main space of *Transcryptum*).
- There is a large–scale video installation in the small paint shop, projected on tall metal doors, which is slowly opened and closed by an actress, dressed the same way as the main character of the opera.



Figure 13. The small paint shop metal door.

- There are tables with several folders containing fragments of scores from *Transcryptum* and notes on psychological trauma.

The small painting room is a very important “strategic” place, where each group is prepared to take cargo elevators. The group must be divided in half due to the cargo elevator’s safety protocol (25 persons maximum allowance).
This is also the only place of the opera where 2 different groups pass each other.

3.6.3. The cargo elevators.

There are two impressive cargo elevators at the Grand Theater, located on the opposite sides of the grand stage, designed to carry the heaviest and longest elements of the stage set: the smaller one and the big one which can fit pieces up to 98 feet long.

The first half of the group takes the big elevator to go to the grand trap room, but returns in the small elevator (and the opposite for the second half).

3.6.3.1. The big elevator.

There is a 1-minute excerpt of a soundtrack from Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* played inside of the big elevator while it goes down:

> **He:** If you can't tell me… what are you afraid of,
> maybe it would be easier for you to tell me where you are afraid?
> How would you feel most exposed?
> What would be the worst place?
> An apartment…?
> The street…?
> A store? The park?
> Visiting someone, maybe.
> **She:** …the woods…
> **He:** The woods?
> **She:** …the woods…yes
> **He**: That's funny, because you are the one, who always wanted to go to the woods…
> What scares you about the woods? What frightens you…there?
> **She:**…everything…[30]

When the female character says the last word, the elevator stops, the gigantic vertical sliding door opens and the viewers see themselves projected in a live streaming video, placed opposite to the elevator.

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[30] Trier, Lars von. *Antichrist: DVD.* Criterion Collection, 2010



Figure 14. Live video projection at the big cargo elevator.

3.6.3.2. The small elevator.

There is a soaking wet dress placed on the floor next to the elevator entrance. The dress is lit with a single, long white fluorescent lamp.[31] Inside of the elevator there is the female percussion player who performed K'an. The performer stands with her back to the audience, the sounds of the forest and singing birds are played from the speaker. When the elevator starts ascending, the percussionist performs a whispered fragment of *Means of Protection,* gradually moving towards the audience. The audience returns to the 5th floor.[32]

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[31] This is the same dress worn by the main character in the video, projected in the laundry (see chapter 3.11.1.). Fluorescent lamps are used in many places of the opera for all large-scale light inscriptions and the grand painting room light installation.

[32] *Means of Protection* for voice, cello and prepared accordion (2012), commissioned by Warsaw Autumn Festival is "a study" to *Transcryptum.* Both pieces were composed for the same singer – Anna Radziejewska, who sings the main role in the opera (the mother).



Figure 15. The small cargo elevator.

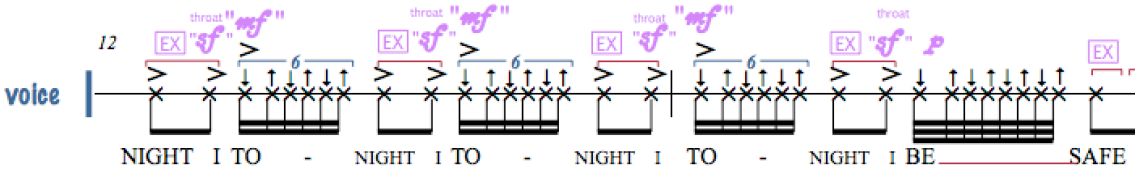


Figure 16. *Means of Protection* – excerpt.

3.6.3.3. Transition between cargo elevators.

There are 2 additional sites at each elevator:

- A platform near the small elevator with an actress sitting on a chair and gazing at a black helicopter toy. The site is lit by blue and white long fluorescent lamps.
- A small patio (skylight) with an actress sitting backwards by the table, chopping vegetables and cooking soup [33]. A video with fragments of *K'an* (sticks inside of the steel pan) next to the widows.

[33] The smell of the soup is also palpable.



Figure 17. *"The kitchen" and "The helicopter"* installations.

All actresses look identical (a gray dress) and occasionally perform the same gesture of combing their wet hair with both hands. This gesture is one of the most iconic elements of *Transcryptum* and will be embodied in the grand trap and the laundry rooms.

3.7. The map of tenderness.

The first main space of *Transcryptum* visited by group 1 is the grand trap room, located at the "bottom of the architecture", in the darkest place of the opera house. This space features another representation of the main character – a female cellist performing *The map of tenderness,* a piece combining a series of physical gestures and sounds.

The grand trap room represents the first phase of grieving – *denial* and a person who is unable to accept the traumatic event and its consequences, that is, someone who projects the past, who wants to remember "the good moments" while who denying someone else's absence.

The main inspiration for composing this piece was Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun,* where she discusses the processes of grieving as well as an *object of mourning:*

> Frequent, even permanent, identification with the object of mourning is nonetheless absolute and inescapable. Because of that very fact, mourning becomes impossible and changes the heroine into a crypt inhabited by a living corpse…[34]

During work on *Transcryptum* it was hard to specify the hierarchy between the different concepts of the opera: trauma, defragmentation, memory etc. I was trying to capture, to name the "meta-concept" of the opera, the *undercurrent* as one of my mentors Chinary Ung would say, and thank to Kristeva and Ettinger I realized almost at the end of my research and directing the opera, that the "seed of trauma" was tenderness, hidden in a crypt, in the darkest place of the opera and memory.

The cello player holds the instrument between her legs; the peg box is located right in front of her face like a mask. Behind the performer there is a large, fluorescent lamp installation *I MISHISM* and 2 additional lamps on each side of the cellist. This is the only place in the opera, where the husband embodiment is present. A male dancer wearing underwear and cozy slippers, like he was about to take a nap, slowly moving around the space, occasionally disappears from sight or seems to listen to the cellist and react to her play. From time to time the male dancer grabs a glass bowl filled with a vegetable soup and eats. He does not dance, he is just present.

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[34] Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia.* New York: Columbia University of Press, 1989.

The audience is not physically located in the grand trap room; the seats are located in a loading dock, next to a 98-foot long sliding door, which create an impression of a panoramic view and let the viewers peek in inside of the “crypt”.



Figure 18. Light installation *IMISHSHIM,* the grand trap room.



Figure 19. *The map of tenderness:* pendulum motion, bars 64 – 66.



Figure 20. The grand trap room, the husband.

3.8. The tip of the iceberg.

To get from the grand trap room, the bottom of the opera's structure (level – 1) to its top, the grand paint shop gallery (level +7), the two half-groups must take the cargo elevators (see chapters 3.6.3.1 and 3.6.3.2), return to the 5th floor, and reunite in the small paint shop (see chapter 3.6.2). From there, group 1 heads to the second main space of *Transcryptum,* assigned to trail 1: the grand paint shop. The opposite sites establish the axis in the entire structure of *Transcryptum's* architecture, the audience moves from the dark spaces of the trap room to the opera's summit, where the audience can see the maincharacter, performed by Anna Radziejewska for the first time in the course of the opera.

3.8.1. The haunted dome.

The grand paint shop was designed to assemble, paint and dry the largest pieces of scenery, including gigantic sheets of backdrops, ground rows, curtains, flats etc. This large circular shop with a gallery around it has an impressive dome with additional circular panels, which play a special role in the acoustics of the space. The dome was designed this way so that 2 painters working on the opposite sides of a 98-foot long piece of scenery do not have to yell to each other to communicate. They can almost whisper and the sound perfectly travels from one end of the space to another despite an extremely long reverberation. On the other hand, when sound is purposely projected from various spots of the grand paint shop at different dynamic levels, timbres and durations, the dome turns the grand paint shop into an unpredictable, overwhelming acoustic environment. The space resonates in a very special way, challenging the viewer's perception. In *Transcryptum*, the singer, who is on the left side of the space, is heard in the upper right part of the shop. Her sounds travel and reflect around the space confusing the eyes and ears of the audience. The most fascinating spot of the grand paint shop is the center of the space, where a singer can hear her voice and footsteps right behind her, like someone would follow her.



Figure 21. The dome of the grand paint shop – view from the gallery.



Figure 22. The dome of the grand paint shop – view from the shop.

3.8.2. Returning voices.

The grand paint shop features *WwAoLrLdSs* for voice, alto flute and percussion (a thunder sheet and 2 crotales).[35] This is the first time when viewers can see "the main character" of *Transcryptum,* Anna Radziejewska (contralto) – for whom the opera is composed. The second space of trail 1 represents *depression: "a way for nature to keep us protected by shutting down the nervous system so that we can adapt to something we feel we cannot handle".*[36] Three performers are placed in front of a large-scale installation made of ca. 3000 black boxes and 30 white florescent lamps placed on top of the boxes.[37]

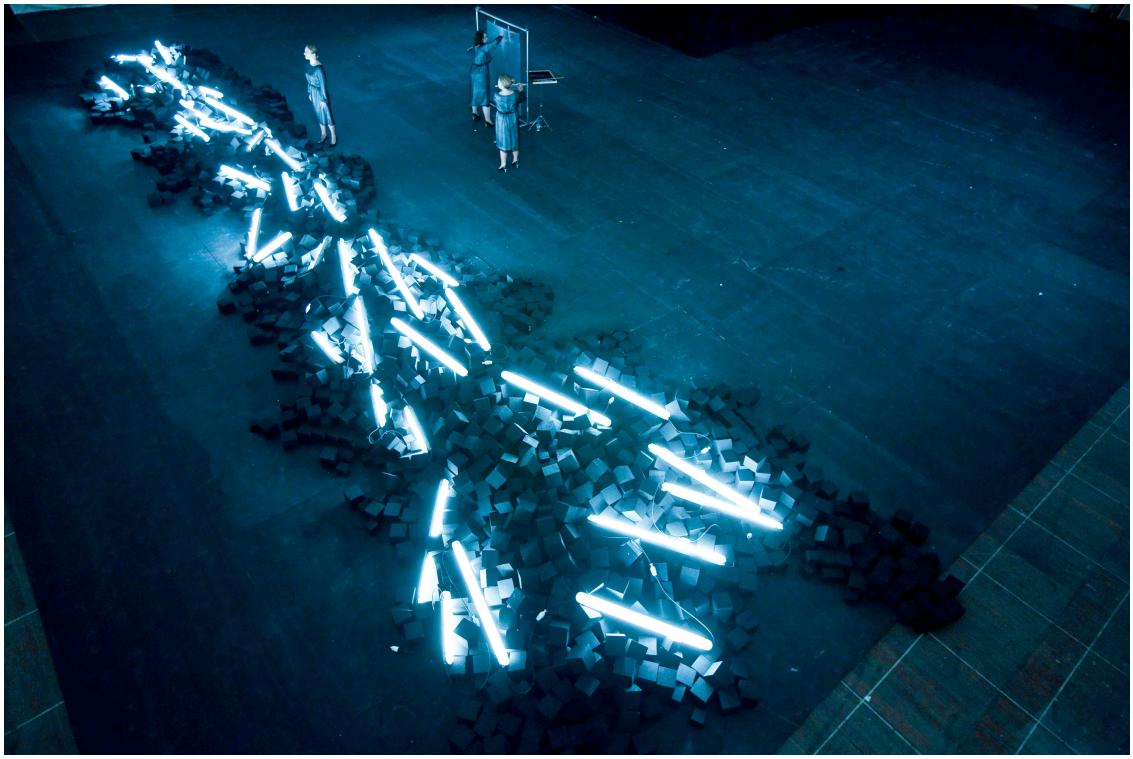


Figure 23. *WwAoLrLdSs* for voice, alto flute and percussion.

[35] Thunder sheet is played with a super ball or 2 thin metal beaters.
[36] Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth., and Kessler David. *On Grief & Grieving.* New York: Scribner, 2014.
[37] The number of boxes matches the number of letters in the libretto.

WwAoLrLdSs was composed as a one-movement trio, but with the intention of separating selected sections of the piece according to the nature of the grand paint shop acoustics. The main goal directing this “act” of the opera was to find the best spot for each section of the piece regarding its intensity, tempo, pacing, timbre in relation to how the space resonates or responds to a defined amount of sound. It took 2 months to rehearse and direct the piece in the shop, finding the most captivating trajectories for the sound: the performers either play a section at different spots or walk through or around the space while playing (singer and flutist). The choice of instruments was also inspired by the nature of the space: an alto flute, which shadows and complements Radziejwska’s contralto, and a thunder sheet, which interferes with clarity of the voice and flute, brining to the space noise, rumble, and resonating “dirt”.

3.8.3. Words. Walls.

As mentioned before in general *Transcryptum* as an opera does not include text set to music, although *WwAoLrLdSs* as a fully vocal piece of the opera contains text represented on two different levels. The text used in vocal part is derived from numbers, counted from 1 – 100: i.e. bar 24 will include syllables, letters, diphthongs found in number twenty-four etc.

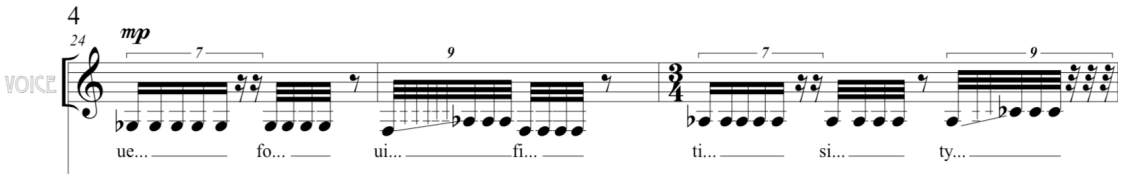


Figure 24. *WwAoLrLdSs,* measures 24 – 26.

> The Counting Method is a clinical technique for the treatment of the symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), originated by Frank Ochberg. Specifically, the procedure aims to desensitize clients to intrusive traumatic memories.
>
> Because traumatic memories are vivid and frightening, and arise unexpectedly, they can cause significant secondary effects on the sufferer, including diminished self-confidence, decreased sense of security, and compromised beliefs about one's own sanity. (Ochberg, 1988).[38]

While the singer is "counting" numbers, the percussionist "calligraphies" the thunder sheet with a super ball, performing a series of gestures which are derived from the libretto, or to be more specific, from the shapes of the letters of the libretto. In other words, the percussionist writes the libretto on the metal sheet, while the singer, followed by an obsessively haunting alto flute, is trying to cope with her memories through the "vocalized" counting method.

> Let us keep in mind the speech of the depressed – repetitive and monotonous. Faced with the impossibility of concatenating, they utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to a standstill. Even phrases they cannot formulate. A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerges and dominates the broken logical sequences, changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies. Finally, when that frugal musicality becomes exhausted in its turn, or simply does not succeed in becoming established on account of the pressure of silence, the melancholy person appears to stop cognizing as well as uttering, sinking into the blankness of asymbolia or the excess of an un-orderable cognitive chaos.[39]

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[38] Johnson, David et al, *The Counting Method: Manual.* New Heaven: Post Traumatic Stress Center, 2007.

[39] Kristeva. *Black Sun.*

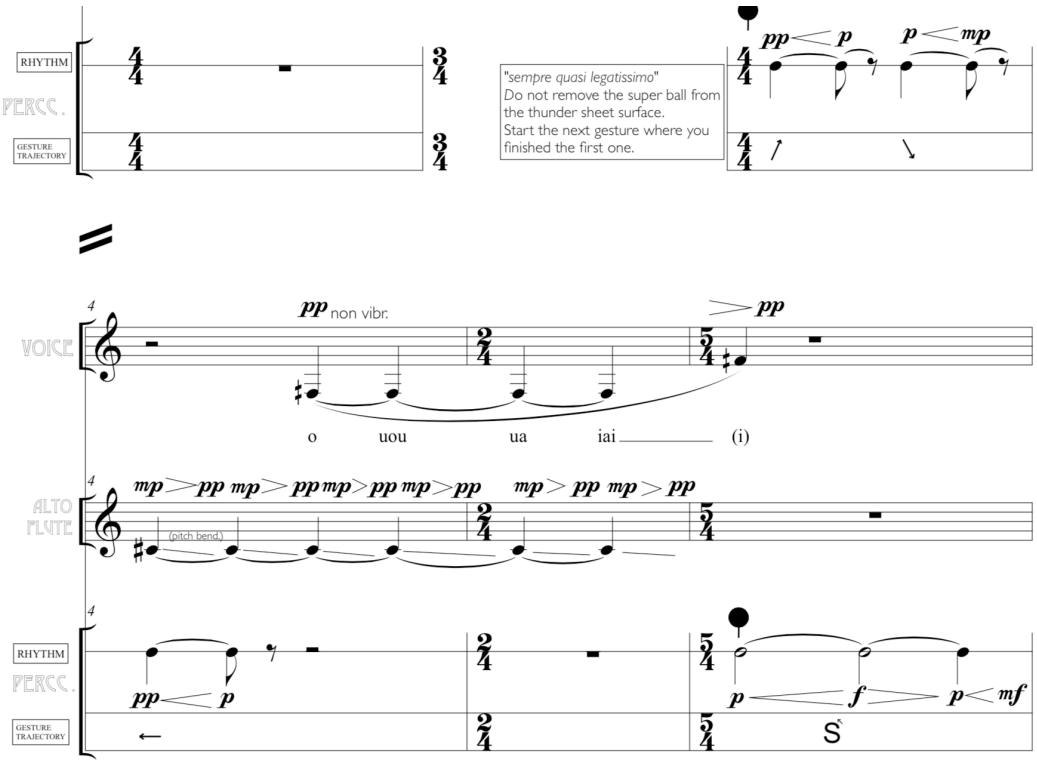


Figure 25. *WwAoLrLdSs,* measures 1 – 6, percussion, “WAS”.[40]

3.8.4. Returning dreams.

The audience enters the grand paint shop, passing the performers on the left side and under the dome while experiencing the sensation of “being inside” of the haunting sounds. Next, the group takes a staircase to get to the gallery above the grand paint shop, passing on its way a metal tank with black vibrating water and an installation called “Forest”, made of large potted plants and saplings and lit with blue fluorescent lamps.

[40] See chapter 2.1., the first sentence of the libretto: *„I was driving back home from a shopping mall…”.*

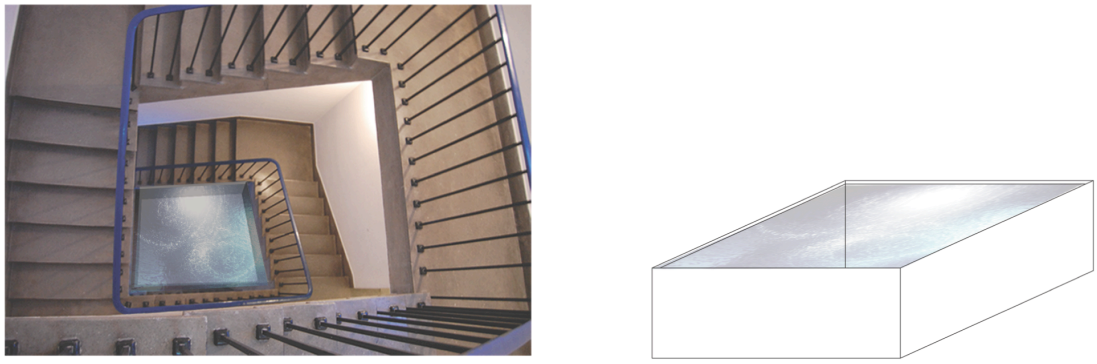


Figure 26. The grand paint shop, staircase with a metal tank.

The audience takes its seat in the circular gallery around the grand paint shop and stays there for the duration of the act of the opera. When finished, group 1 exits the gallery using an identical square-shaped staircase located on the opposite site of the gallery, passing on its way an empty hospital cabinet, looking at an empty bottom of the staircase lit with four fluorescent lamps and listening to prerecorded sounds of dripping water. The floor of the space is wiped with alcohol and disinfectant resembling the smell of a hospital.

The staircase leads to the grand paint shop where viewers once again pass the singer, flutists, and percussionist (on the right side) and exit the space heading towards a long tall corridor filled with smoke and 2 neon installations. The first neon inscription emerging from the smoke says *RETURNING*, then viewers get gradually blinded by a diagonal beam of light causing impression of immersion in water and see the second neon installation: *DREAMS.*



Figure 27. Neon light installation: RETURNING.



Figure 28. Neon light installation: DREAMS.

The sounds of *WwAoLrLdSs* travel with the audience through the smoky corridor until it enters a narrow, dim emergency staircase, which leads to the third space of *Transcryptum.* The staircase is lit with blue fluorescent lights and leads again to the 5th floor of the opera house, encircling an elevator shaft on its descent. While the audience descends down the stairwell, the elevator, which runs up and down within the spiral staircase transports the female singer inside of it as she, dressed identically as the main character of *Transcryptum,* performs fragments of *WwAoLrLdSs:* long, sustained high pitches.



Figure 29. Elevator with a singer.

3.9. The Third Phase: *if only*.

The third main space of *Transcryptum:* a long, tall and narrow corridor with a ca. 12 second reverb, located on the 5th floor, features the most expressive yet abstract fragment of the opera: *3rd Phase for two accordions and two pendulum metronomes.* The audience is seated along the wall between two accordions and two pendulum metronomes, which are located on each end of ca. 132 ft. long hall. Viewers face the wall watching 5 slide projections including series of images depicting a forest, wood, plants, leafs, moss, grass, wet sand etc. Additionally a row of potted ferns is places along the wall with projections. Relatively neutral images help to focus on expressive, intense and aggressive music played by the accordions. Similarly to *WwAoLrLdSs* written for the grand paint shop, *3rd Phase* was composed specifically for the acoustic environment of the long tall corridor. The viewers are immersed in overwhelming sound, which "flows" through ears from one end of the hall to another in constant quasi-dialog/echo between two accordions.

> We become lost in a maze of "if only…" or "What…" statements. We want life returned to what it was, we want out loved one restored. We want to go back in time […] stop the accident from…if only, if only if only.[41]

The long corridor with the accordion duet is the only space of *Transcryptum* without the representation of the main character of the opera. Nonetheless, the music itself, the recurring, looped ascending motif in accordion parts, becomes one of the most expansive links of the overall opera's narrative.

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[41] Kübler, *On Grief and Grieving.*

3.9.1. Theater of sound.

3rd Phase, performed on the 5th floor of the opera house, can be heard by the audience on many levels and at various spots of each designated trail:

- While approaching the small cargo elevator, which is located next to the accordion corridor (but separated with a black curtain).
- In a small cargo elevator, either going down or up, the accordion sound fades away or approaches in a very overwhelming way.
- In the grand trap room, during silent moments of *The Map of Tenderness* the audience can hear a distant echo of the *3rd Phase*.
- In the *RETURNING DREAMS* corridor and in the emergency staircase with a singer in the elevator.
- In the transition from the tall, green corridor to the laundry spaces.
- In the laundry spaces during moments of silence in *Choice to remain silent* the audience can hear a distant echo of the *3rd Phase*.

In all cases the audience approaches the source of sound from different perspectives, for example, group 4 visits the green tall corridor as the last site of its trail and is “haunted” by the sound of accordions for nearly an hour before getting to the actual space. Music of the *3rd Phase* constantly returns in the course of the opera to a viewer’s perception as some sort of obsessive, recurring memory, as a symbol of repeated “*if only”,* constantly echoing and resonating in the metaphor and “structure/architecture” of trauma.

[42]

Figure 30. *3rd Phase* for 2 accordions and 2 pendulum metronomes.



Figure 31. The tall green corridor.

[42] The small cargo elevator is located on the left side of the corridor.

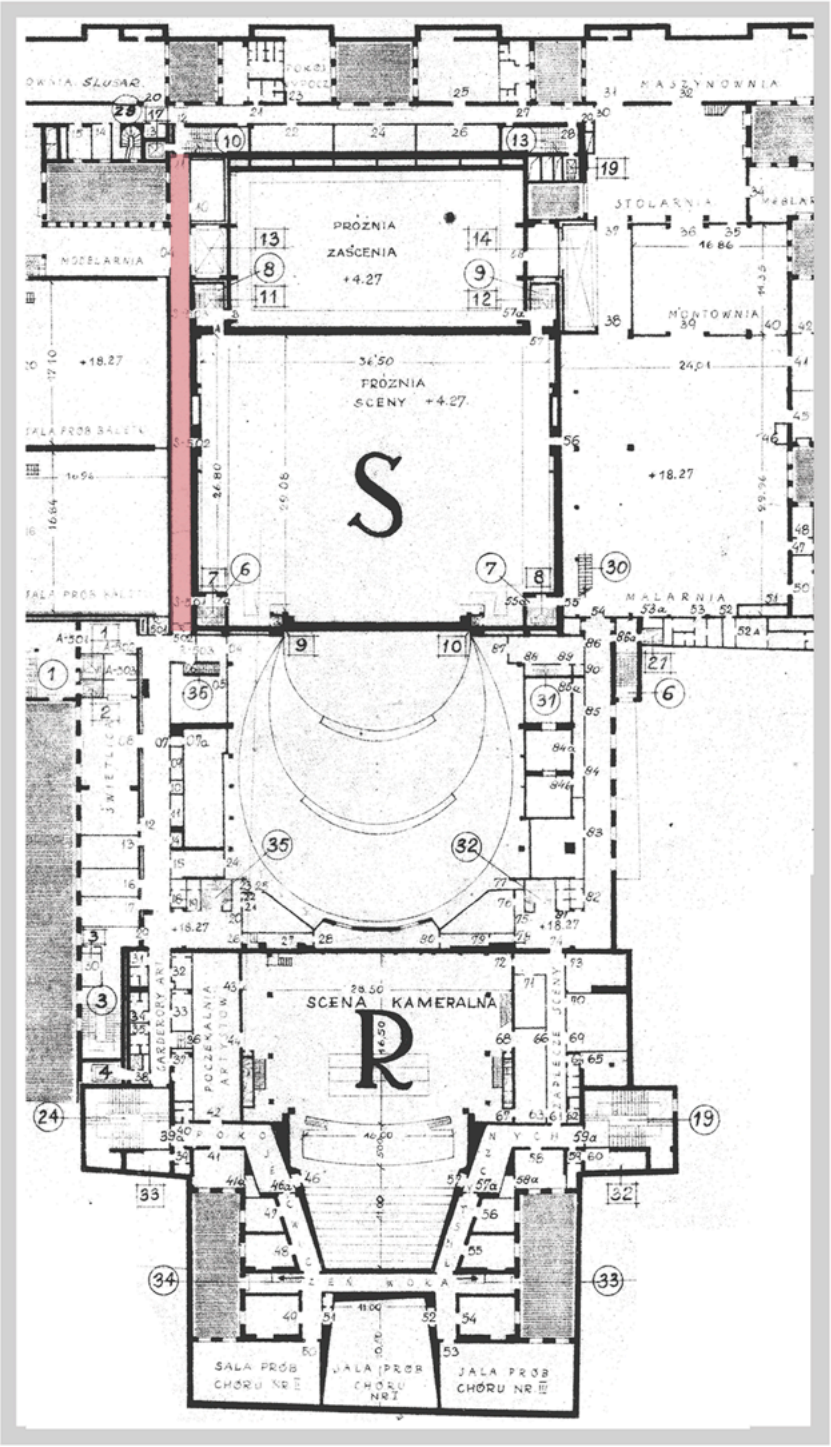


Figure 32. The location of the tall green corridor on the 5th floor of the Grand Theater National Opera house.

3.10. *By the lake* – transition to the laundries.

To get from the tall green corridor to the fourth space of *Transcryptum* the audience must pass a niche with another actress – a representation of the main character who is xeroxing documents and organizing files in folders.[43]



Figure 33. Installation: *documentation of trauma.*

Next, to get to the laundry rooms located on the 4th floor of the opera house, the viewers head to another staircase with a prerecorded soundscape of children playing outside at a kindergarten courtyard. Walking down the stairs the viewers are guided to look down at the bottom of the staircase, where another light installation is located: a double, reflected neon light inscription: *BY THE LAKE.*

[43] The same folders contain libretto and are used in the last space of the opera.



Figure 34. Neon installation: *BY THE LAKE.*

3.11. Choice to remain silent.

On the 4th floor of the opera house the audience enters completely new scenery, different from industrial spaces previously seen: a long, white, tiled corridor with the smell of humidity, resembling some sort of hospital atmosphere. When all the viewers get inside the corridor, the group stands by the wall for a moment listening to a clarinetist performing *Choice to remain silent* for contrabass clarinet. The piece is a metaphorical study (etude) on expression of a scream, which traumatized individuals are unable to perform. The space represents *the anger* – another phase of grieving, anger comes when one did not see approaching danger and that might result in negative consequences:

"the will to save a life is not the power to stop a death."[44] Each section of the piece is performed at a different spot of the corridor, which works as a natural resonator for the contrabass clarinet. The tiled space amplifies the instrument in such a way that the vibrations and resonance are almost physically palpable. After a while the audience enters the fourth site of the opera: the laundries, a series of 3 interconnected rooms, each with open doors, so the sound of the contrabass clarinet gets inside of the spaces.



Figure 35. Laundry corridor on the 4th floor.

[44] Kübler, *On Grief and Grieving.*

3.11.1. What happened in the woods?

During the regular business hours of the opera house, the laundries are run by a group of laundresses, who turned the working-area into a “homey” place; the presence of femininity is palpable around the three interconnected rooms. The first space (the rest area) includes a dining table, a kitchenette, a cozy coach, potted plants, and a TV. The second space has washtubs, washing machines, storage spaces, the third space a series of ironing boards and dryers. The space is clean, organized, humid, and smells like fresh linen sheets and all those site-specific details complement the most dramatic “act” of *Transcryptum.*

The audience spreads around the laundry rooms, exploring all the details, listening to a “lullaby” played from small speakers inside of each room. The lullaby features a series of asynchronous, soft, melodious phrases sung by Radziejewska. The perception of the viewers is captured in the second room on a large video installation made of 20 screens, placed by the wall opposite to the windows, presenting a series of short looped videos. The videos show Radziejewska – *the mother* and her 4-year-old son, both on a small pier, by the lake on a rainy day. All videos look alike but each is taken from slightly different perspective or focuses on a different detail. A gloomy day, the surface of the lake, the boy playing with a toy fishing rod, his little hands hidden in the sleeves, his shoes getting close to the edge of the pier, mother’s pensive face, her melancholy, her hands on boy’s shoulders, the tension in her hands, her hesitation, the slight impression of her numbed hands delicately clenching on the

boy's shoulder, her flowery silk dress. The audience studies the images, trying to capture something meaningful in the looped videos, but with no significant result.

During several performances of *Transcryptum,* the laundry room was perhaps my favorite site to observe the gradual change in the audience's attention: first exploring the space with its attributes, next focusing on the videos until the viewers realize or sense that there is something else in the space, or to be more specific – outside of the space of the laundries. Since the audience is focused on the interior of the laundries and the multiple screen video installation keeps the viewers away from the windows, it takes a while to eventually look through the windows at the large square courtyard of the opera house. There is a large-scale video projected on the wall, opposite to the laundry rooms' windows. The video features one short, looped image: the mother crawling out the lake, on the muddy shore, in a soaking wet dress, terrified, panicked, shocked, combing her wet messy hair with both hands. After noticing the large video on the outside wall the viewers start to look both ways on the multiple screens and again through the window and eventually all the elements of the puzzle start to make sense, all relatively innocent details in the multiplied videos announce the shocking fact: *she pushed him*. In this very moment the energy of the crowd changes, people stop moving and getting excited about various devices in the laundries, there are no more whispers.[45]

[45] The soaking wet dress used in the video is placed next to the small cargo elevator (see chapter 3.6.3.3), the boy's shoe floats in one of the tanks with muddy water (see chapter 3.6.1.), the gesture of combing wet hair with both hands is reenacted by all actresses and the cello player.

The laundry is the only site of *Transcryptum* where 4 different sources of sound played at a different spots of the opera house merge at the same time:

- *Choice to remain silent* for contrabass clarinet solo played in the corridor next to the laundries as a commentary to the mute videos.
- The quiet looped “lullaby” played from speakers inside of the laundries.
- The distant echo of accordions’ duet *(if only)* coming from the right side.
- A sound installation based on ascending Shepherd’s tones, heard on the left side of the laundries.

The laundry is also the only space in the course of *Transcryptum* where the audience is asked to look *outside* of the building, since the traumatic event is so extreme that it goes outside the range of human experience, or that the traumatic memory hides outside the memory in some sort of metaphorical void, container or a black hole.



Figure 36. The courtyard of the opera house.

3.11.2. Towards testimony.

After visiting the laundries group 1 heads towards the last off stage site of *Transcryptum* – the lecture room located on the 5th floor. To get there the viewers must pass 3 screens with videos located at the end of the tiled corridor. The videos include fragments of the multiple screen installation (the son) and the large projection on the courtyard wall (the mother).



Figure 37. Video installations in the tiled corridor.

Next, the audience passes a staircase with a niche filled with black blocks seen in the grand paint shop lit with several white florescent lamps. The space is also filled with a deafening ascending Shepherd's tone sound installation, after that the viewers walk across a small foyer next to the auditorium with 3 videos featuring: tossing wooden sticks (see *K'an),* the surface of the lake and female hands arranging piles of sheets of paper, writing words down. Behind foyer the audience reaches the last off-stage space of *Transcryptum* – the lecture room.

3.12. The defragmented timeline.

In the lecture room the viewers get a chance to read the libretto for the first and only time in the course of the performance (see chapter 2.1.). The text is both printed and hand written on 40 sheets of paper assembled in a simple cardboard folder. The libretto is distributed across the 40 pages in different amounts of text from one sentence to larger chunks. Some selected parts of the text are repeated. The folder starts with a picture of the main character of the opera (Anna Radziejewska, portrait by the lake). Between fragments of texts and various pictures each folder contains pages with attached objects: a strand of blond children's hair, a burnt match, a shred of burnt wallpaper, or a piece of burnt blanket. There is a small LED lamp at each folder and a wireless headset with continuous sound of a female's calm breathing (Radziejewska). On the front wall of the lecture room there is another neon installation inscription: *hapqy.*
On the left side of the lecture room, there is a desk with folders and piles of the libretto sheets, a half empty glass with coffee with a red lipstick mark on its rim, suggesting, that the author of the libretto was here before the audience. The last space of *Transcryptum* symbolizes the most important part of the grieving process: the acceptance.



Figure 38. Folders with the libretto.

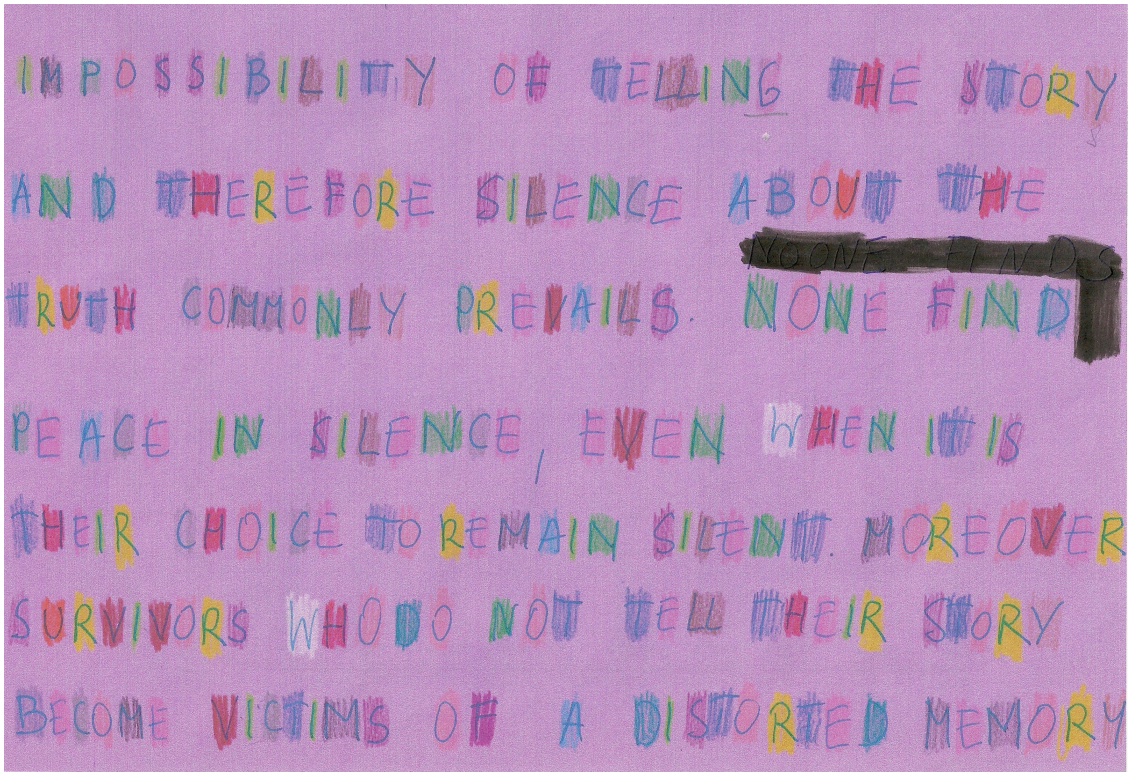


Figure 39. Additional fragment of the libretto.

3.13. Eye Movement Desentization and Reprocessing.

After reading libretto in the last space of *Transcryptum*, the audience returns to the Młynarski auditorium, which is next to the lecture room, along with all other groups to see the final scene of the opera. The space of the auditorium is filled with a sound installation made of multiple, superimposed and continuous layers of the libretto's text read by Radziejewska. At the same time musicians from all spaces of the opera gather on the stage, while the viewers can read the following text projected on a prompter:

- *Follow the big squares movement with your eyes without moving your head.*
- *Continue to follow the big square movement with attention for the following 30 seconds.*
- *Now while still following the big square think about an unpleasant memory a fear or any other feeling you feel is suppressed.*
- *Allow any childish or immature feeling or convictions that may appear to manifest in your awareness while you keep following the big square.*
- *Also allow any self-guidance, consolation or any other self-support that may appear in you awareness while you keep following the square*
- *Keep following the big square while different correlating thoughts or emotions may appear in your awareness.*
- *Keep following the big square until you consider you have effectively assimilated your trauma or you are at a stage when you can safely interrupt the process.*
- *You can use this therapy to help you go to sleep.*
- *This will help you fall asleep faster and feel more rested in the morning.*
- *This concludes the presentation of the method of applying self-administered EMDR. (Eye Movement Desentization and Reprocessing).*

3.14. Outside of the range of human understanding.

The final scene of *Transcryptum* features all musicians on stage together with the conductor who appears to be one of the guides of group 1.

The arrangement of the musicians on stage reflects the relationships between all the female performers in *Transcryptum's "*architecture", who represent the main character of the opera, the mother.

Contrabass clarinet
(repressed scream)

accordion 1
(if only)

accordion 2
(if only)

steel drum
(assembling pieces)

alto flute
haunting echo

thunder sheet
(calligraphy of the libretto)

singer
(the top of the architecture)

cello
(the bottom of the architecture)

conductor
the guide

Outside for voice (performed through a megaphone), cello, alto flute, 2 percussions, 2 accordions and contrabass clarinet synthetizes fragments, motives or gestures from all pieces performed in the course of the opera:

- tossing multi stick in the steel drum,
- performing hand gestures from cello solo
- "calligraphy" on the thunder sheet
- echoing the female voice by alto flute
- ascending motives from accordion duet
- "scream" sounds in contrabass clarinet's part

The text used in vocal part is derived from the most significant fragments related to the libretto: I WAS, PUSH, DROWN, I SAW, MALL, MY, UP, FIRE, I GOT, but also from the psychiatric description of trauma.

> The person has experienced an event that is outside the range of human experience. Categories of symptoms follow: re-experiencing symptoms, nightmares, and flashbacks, avoidance symptoms, the marks of psychic numbing, and the symptoms of heightened psychological arousal: hyper-vigilance, disturbed sleep, a distracted mind. But first and foremost, an event outside the range of human experience. [46]

At the end of the piece all the performers, except the singer and cellist leave the stage repeating selected fragments of their parts, then the conductor heads to the left side of the stage to a black board with a centrally located neon inscription reading **SON** and writes the following text on the black board:

"Any resemblance to events of per**SON**s is entirely coincidental"

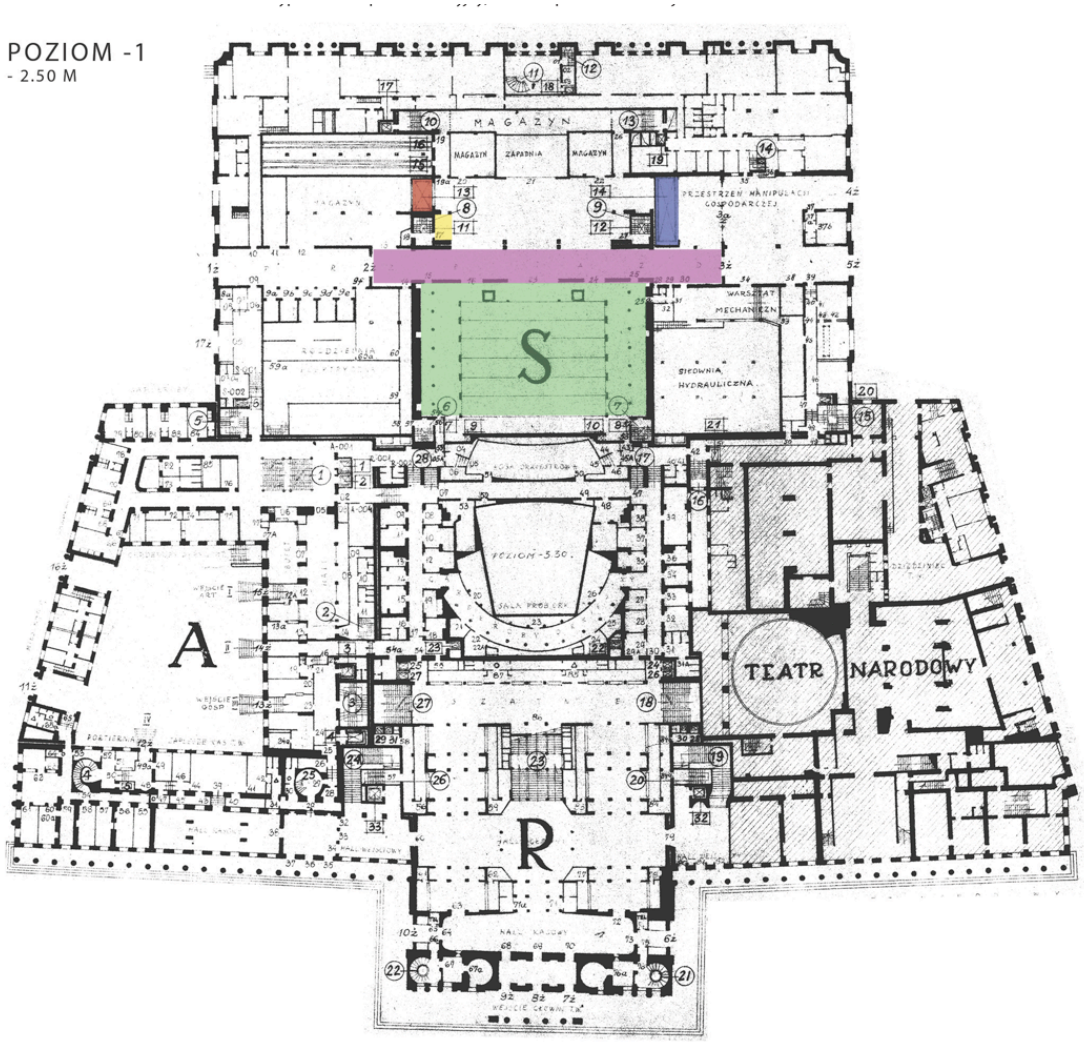
The conductor, singer and cellist leave the stage, lit with two additional neon light installations: PLEASE REMAIN SILENT and YOU CAN GO HOME NOW.



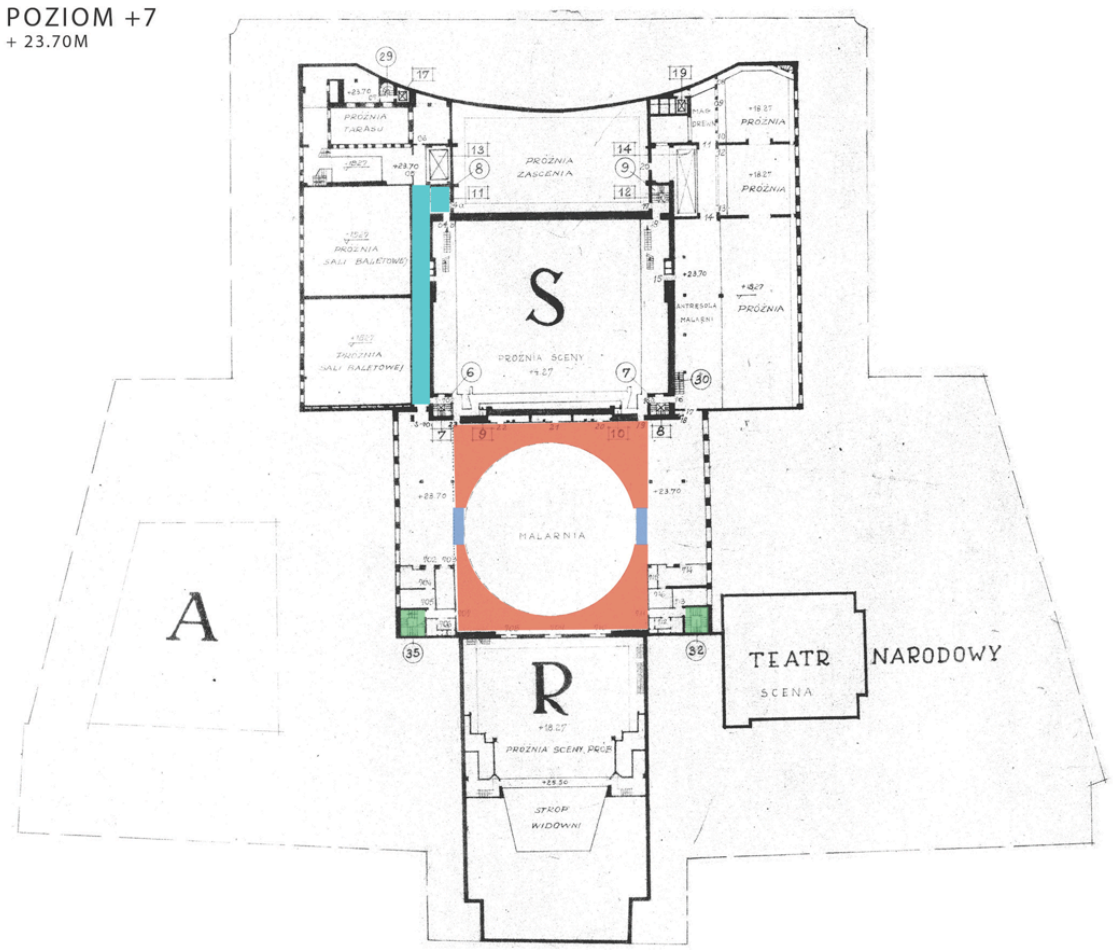
Figure 40. The final scene of *Transcryptum – Outside.*

[46] American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder.* Washington, D.C.,1987

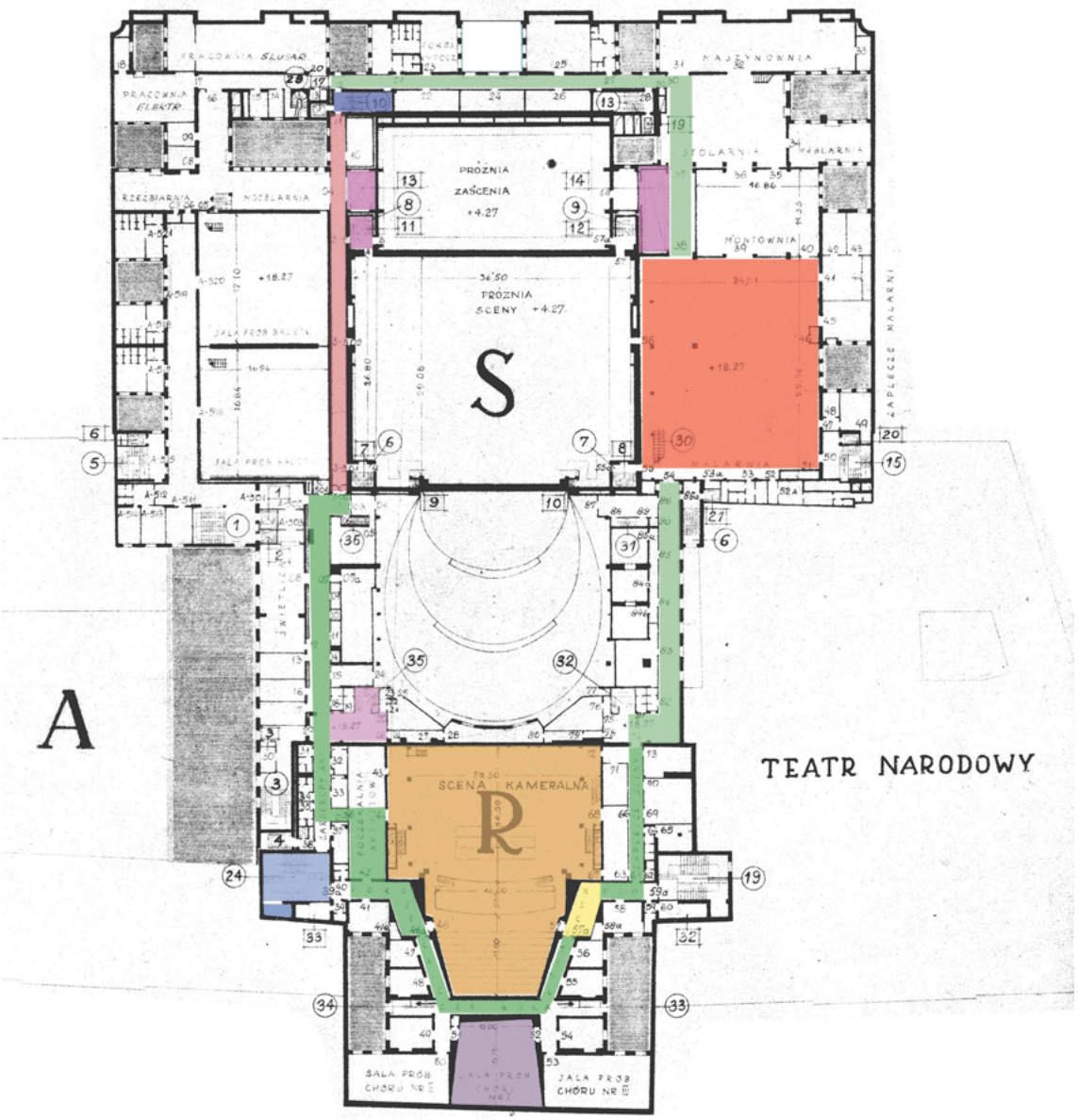
APPENDIX



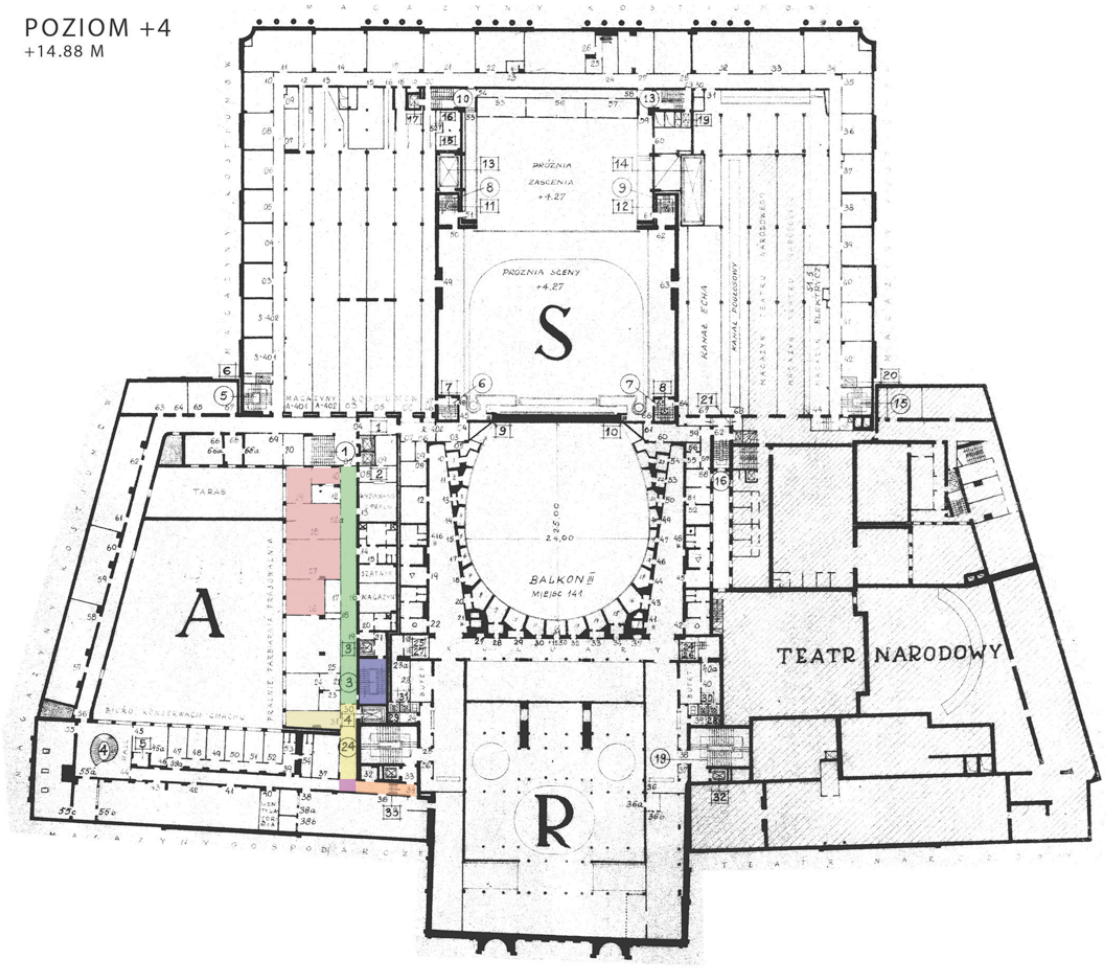
Scheme 4. Location of the grand trap room, level -1.



Scheme 5. Location of the grand paint shop, level +6 and + 7 (the gallery).



Scheme 6. The fifth floor: The Młynarski Auditorium, small paint shop, green tall corridor, the lecture room.



Scheme 7. The fourth floor: the laundries.

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