

*"Artaud taught us a lesson that we should all be open to. That lesson is sickness. Artaud's misfortune is that his sickness, paranoia, differs from the sickness of the times. Civilization is sick with schizophrenia, meaning the separation of mind from feeling, soul from body."*

Jerzy Grotowski

Watching Anna Konik's video installation *Przezroczytosc / Transparency*, I cannot resist the impression that theatre has influenced her thinking. v Konik studied sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in Professor Grzegorz Kowalski's cross-media studio. Simultaneously she worked with Roman Wozniak's Teatr Academia and with other unconventional theatre groups. Above all, however, it seems that the few years she worked with director Katarzyna Winska have been decisive to her choices. v Winska created the Opera Buffo, a theatre with no permanent venue, a theatre whose actors suffer from schizophrenia. Konik organized and arranged performance spaces, simultaneously serving as an actor-animator. Winska does not treat her schizophrenic actors as people with illnesses, but as individuals gifted with a singular over-sensitivity – i.e. in line with the way psychiatrist Antoni Kepinski describes them in his books.

I refer to Kepinski because he wrote of empathy and of the need to extend it to those who suffer and who, because of their otherness, are condemned to live in isolation from so-called normal society. v Empathy seems the key to understanding Anna Konik's most recent video installations, which form a series in progress. *Transparency* consists of the stories of old, lonely people who engage themselves in dialogue. They conduct something akin to confessions, perhaps their only ones, perhaps their last. Not all viewers will find this engaging. Konik's quasi-documentaries might simply prove "boring" to some. Her skillfully perfect videos make no effort to impress viewers. The camera's viewpoint is constant. Her mirrored doubling of images is dispiriting. Everything in this work is specific, referring to what the artist wishes to impart. The communiqué in itself is not strong enough to engage viewers incapable of demonstrating attention for another. v Anna Konik does not scandalize, select drastic subjects, feed on the suffering of others. Her stance differs greatly from the tendencies that have dominated art during the last decade. v The *TRANSPARENCY* of her video record is cruel enough. v In Konik's hand the camera completely submits to these individuals who have been pushed aside, marginalized in our schizophrenic civilization. Those in front of the camera are not actors of Jerzy Grotowski's

Laboratory Theatre committing an "absolute act" for the public, though they have been "completely disarmed," stripped of all artifice, rendered defenseless; they have nothing to hide, nothing to lose. v The artist's approach lies not in finding an interesting "object," placing a camera in front of it and provoking it to exhibitionism. Anna Konik spends months with the subjects of her films, building trust not through cunning, but through honest deference and compassion. This is why her protagonists treat the camera as a confessional. v Anna Konik has abandoned the narcissistic ego of the artist and drawn on her experiences in therapeutic theatre, and in so doing has introduced a new sensitivity to her art. One could argue that *Transparency* embodies empathy not solely in its psychological sense, but also as an aesthetic category.

Krzysztof M. Bednarski

(Translation by Borys Pugacz-Muraszkiewicz)