

to have offered themselves to the camera.... As viewers of the people in all these portraits... we feel the power of their presence" (81).

Summing up his considerations over Helen Post's work, Gidley expresses his regret that her output remains virtually unknown, despite being unrivaled in its extensiveness of documenting reservation life in the mid-twentieth century. As a reader, I am grateful to him for bringing Helen Post and her photographs back into the public realm, because by all means, they deserve it. As the author stresses, she "was committed to documentary photography," and, as she put it in an article quoted by Gidley, to "its democratic language, understood and appreciated by a widely diversified audience" (118). However, as we know, a diversified audience can provide diversified interpretations of various works of art, photographs included. Gidley's book gives us a chance to read and interpret Post's photographs for ourselves.

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Kacper Bartczak. *Materia i autokreacja. Dociekania w poetyce wielkościowej* [Matter and Self-Creation: Investigations in the Poetics of Plenitude]. Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2019, 317 pages.

Kacper Bartczak's latest essay collection, whose Polish title could be translated as *Matter and Self-Creation: Investigations in the Poetics of Plenitude*, apart from chapters on Cormac McCarthy, Witold Gombrowicz, John Ashbery, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Rae Armantrout, and Peter Gizzi (among others), includes also an account of the author's coming of age as a reader, thinker, and writer. It is an important personal introduction, offered "instead of an introduction," mapping memories of early reading experiences that have laid the foundations for the book's conceptual framework, some elements of which Bartczak's readers may trace back to his 2009 *Świat nie-scalony* (Biuro Literackie, Wrocław, also reviewed in *PJAS*).

Outlined in the preface and rooted in the notion of plenitude, it is a proposal to look at certain kinds of texts as a condition for recognizing our numerous and complex entanglements with matter (5). From such literature, or *poems of plenitude*, there emerge models of personhood and states of subjectivity intertwined with the environment of the text and the world, characterized by reciprocity and plasticity, mutually proliferating and allowing for an abundance of interactions and epiphanies. Acknowledging his own entanglement with the discussed material, Bartczak focuses on texts positioning themselves on the borders, animated by language but conscious of the body and subjectivity, partaking in the spaces and events they are concerned with, and far from being external to them (5)—think of Dickinson "pouring her words into the flesh of the world so that they also become flesh, capable of experiencing pain and ecstasy" (Bartczak 280),¹ the excesses of spring in Williams's "Spring and All" or Whitman and his catalogues that "draw in the matter of human interaction, embracing it, absorbing and transforming into a poem" (280). A poetic of plenitude tends to position "the literary text before theory" (10) insofar as the literary text is seen as anticipating

1 Here, Bartczak refers to Peter Gizzi's reading of Dickinson in "Correspondences of the Book," *A Poetics of Criticism*, edited by J. Spahr, M. Wallace et al., Leave Books, 1994, pp. 179-185.

its own theory, exerting certain pressures on the theoretical: Bartczak's introductory essay complements the preface with memories of some of the formative exposures to the "friction of the world, a spontaneous recognition of an authentic contact with the world" (14), whether in the form of Huck's discomfort with freshly starched clothes, glimmers of a larger void in Gombrowicz, or memories of skiing down the Beskid slopes and "the body transformed into a living text" (20), open to the openness of the world, reconfiguring the particles of text and matter into new correspondences and affinities springing from the mutual rereadings.

Bartczak positions himself, again, within the broadly conceived tradition of American pragmatism, with influences ranging from William James, John Dewey, Richard Rorty to Stanley Cavell, but views it, as James famously did reflecting on Papini, as a metaphorical hotel corridor², a passage "in the midst of our theories," and a positive shared space "from which a hundred doors open into a hundred chambers" (James 339). All of these thinkers can be linked to the poetic of plenitude as they recognize that the basic human condition, our recognition of our belonging to the material world, and of its multiplicity, triggers its plasticity, understood as an endless array of interactions, mutual transformations, and acts of signification between the thinker and the matter (6). This pragmatist perspective mentioned briefly in the preface, unites Bartczak's collection but it is not imposed in any way or suggested as the only key to unlock the following chapters which contain attentive and thoroughly convincing readings of some of the most interesting Polish and American authors. Texts found in *Matter and Self-Creation* had been published before, in various volumes and forms, but have been reworked since, some of them quite significantly, revealing now clearer outlines of the corridor in Bartczak's hotel.

Essays in the first part of the book investigate the dynamics of the literary colliding with the material, and the resulting acts of (auto)creation. Bartczak's reading of McCarthy's *The Road* and its desolations, juxtaposed with his studies of the desert and instances of interpretative excess in *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*, leads to a reexamination of realism itself (with which *The Road* experiments in its attempt to present not a world that *is* but one that has ended). In the following chapters, devoted to Gombrowicz's *Cosmos*, *Kronos* and *Diary*—approached, as McCarthy's writing, as *systems of prose* to show that the processes at hand can be traced within the wider category of literature, not just poetry (8)—and the work of John Ashbery, Bartczak emphasizes the cross-pollinating reciprocity of form and life, as a result of which the author, his life and work become one "in an autocreative cycle" (130). The second part of *Matter and Self-Creation* explores the modernist sources of the poetic of plenitude, visiting the status of the object in Wallace Stevens, the pragmatism of William Carlos Williams's poetic and aesthetic—inextricable from the empirical tissue of the lived reality, finally, different visibilities of the voice and of poverty (or, put more broadly, disintegration or degradation) in Williams and Krzysztof Siwczyk, a contemporary Polish poet whose works "store traces, echoes or parallels of the phenomena that are at play in Williams" (185). Part three, searching for the poetic of plenitude in contemporary American writing, returns briefly to Williams in the chapter

2 For instance, in a conversation with Andrzej Frączysty, "Przybornik indywiduacji," *Mały Format* Feb. 2020, <http://malyformat.com/2020/03/przybornik-indywiduacji/>.

on Rae Armantrout but does so in order to highlight the difference in their treatment of the familiar and the local, discussing Armantrout's revision of Williams's minimalism and the resulting special kind of figurativeness that Bartczak conceptualizes as "a reversed metaphor or the inductive field" of poems whose own metabolism and critical agency are offered to the readers instead of the safe harbor of pristine commonness in Williams and the objectivists (227, 247). The work of the poem is also the subject of the penultimate chapter, looking at the imitations of life and threshold singing in Peter Gizzi, who takes up and rewrites the lessons found in Stevens, Dickinson and Whitman, and their engagements with the natural world, oscillating between nothingness and excess in the space of the song that itself becomes a form of life. *Matter and Self-Creation* concludes with a chapter tracing the developments in Bartczak's theoretical inquiries into the status and role of the poetic text. Audaciously argued and supplemented with the author's own poetic work, it charts the journey from the concept of the *poem as a speaking organism* (proposed in "Wiersze, które się zachowują" [Poems that act], *Świat nie scalony*, 2009) through the *poem as an environment* ("One cannot simply say one reads them. These are texts one participates in, and it is a participation in a rich and heterogenous environment the access to which is found precisely in the space of the poem"; 280), leading to the idea of the contemporary poem as *formal field of plenitude*, an "empty formal body" and an engaged "transducer" of energy and matter in a disintegrating world.

It is a beautiful book, and an unobtrusively useful one. Read separately, each chapter will provide a nuanced, erudite discussion of some of the most intriguing American authors of the last century. As a whole, *Matter and Self-Creation* offers a way of reading that may also become a way of being in or with the world "fatally irradiated by the spectacle" (Andrzej Sosnowski qtd. in Bartczak 282), and its increasingly dark plenitudes.

Work Cited

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Małgorzata Myk. *Upping the Ante of the Real: Speculative Poetics of Leslie Scalapino*. Peter Lang, 2019, 312 pages.

Poetry can be a philosophical exercise in a time of crisis, as shown by Małgorzata Myk's monograph on the work of Leslie Scalapino (1944-2010). The author has undertaken an ambitious task of exploring the radically experimental and generically heterogenous oeuvre of the American avant-garde poet, playwright, essayist, prose writer and artist, often associated with West Coast Language poets, but never really fitting this or any other grouping or critical label. The value of Myk's richly theoretical study lies not only in the comprehensiveness of her inquiry—which embraces Scalapino's prolific literary output as well as her numerous visual art projects—but,