



In a posthumously published notebook titled *Les Principes d'anarchie pure et appliquée*, Paul Valéry cryptically observes on the headword "education": "Holy fear before nature. A terror that conforms to national character. Indifference to the rhythm."<sup>1</sup> To be honest, I do not exactly understand what his statements connect to. Most of all, I am unsure what the term "rhythm" is getting at here. But perhaps precisely because of this confusion, these words exercise a peculiar pathos over me. The horror of the holy fear and then that of the nation!

<sup>1</sup> Paul Valéry, *Les principes d'anarchie pure et appliquée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 156.

Though the intended meaning in Valéry's telegraphic utterance remains oblique to me, it offers a way of approaching Karolina Wojtas's *Abzgram* (since 2017), initially perhaps quite simply because Wojtas's photographic practice and aesthetic can, like Valéry's thinking, be best described as anarchic.

<sup>2</sup> See the section "Alignments" in Mike Mearns et al., *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook*, 5th ed. (Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 2014), 122.

If we were to imagine that *Abzgram* was a large-scale role play, then Wojtas's game character's alignment would probably be Chaotic Neutral: an unpredictable figure largely uninterested in the rules of others and equipped with a compass that constantly rotates in a fascinating manner, resisting identification with either the moral poles of good and evil, or the aesthetic poles of beautiful and ugly.<sup>2</sup> In place of the clearly structured world of a school system that marks the starting point of her work, Wojtas's images, videos, and installations construct a school creation that is exciting and dynamic, but at once also unsettling and lawless. Whereby (correction!): first, "work" here is to be understood as unfinished working; second, "construct" clearly sounds too rational; and third, an alternative to "creation" would be the image of a willful, betentacled school creature, not simply because of the weak play on words. "Tentacles are bizarre, peculiar, and overconfident . . . Their strangeness makes them unpredictable. As ceaseless divergences, also from themselves; as a resonant space for sensations; as a poly-perspectival configuration, they are a scene of conflicting forces, multidirectional vectors, axes that are constantly reforming," as Matthias Wittmann put it. "Even if tentacles behave deviously, idiosyncratically, and almost never in mutual symmetry, their association is characterized by a fascinating cohesive force: a cohesion in a state of dispersion."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Matthias Wittmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Tentakel* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2021).  
<sup>4</sup> Translated here by Sylee Gore.

Thematically and aesthetically, Wojtas's photographs jump between sober images of architecture and abstract graphic patterns, snapshots of playing schoolchildren in costumes and makeup, stagings with overly saturated color, found black-and-white material, and digitally manipulated images of (dis)order. One could spend much longer searching for an appropriate categorization without coming to a satisfactory conclusion. There are no captions to orient one in the flashbulb-lit confusion of individual images and small subseries, not least in writing this essay, in which I, accordingly, grope my way forward in erratic motions. What is

the pointer in this odd collage indicating? The school group bundled up in winter jackets? Is this an allusion to a cold-blooded pedagogy, an "education via the cane"?<sup>4</sup>

When *Abzgram* raises questions, it is certainly not with the intention of provoking clear responses. Rather, a certain (but not absolute) obscurity seems to be central and indispensable for the work. Already, the deliberate ambiguity of the title is significant here, which phonetically hints at many things, without clearly pointing toward one in particular. Neither can I, nor do I wish to, somehow solve this constitutive uncertainty. Instead, I will take individual moments in Wojta's work as an occasion to frame this uncertainty.<sup>5</sup> Might frames have something to do with rhythm?

A brief field trip: the first image in *We Can't Live—Without Each Other* shows the artist's younger brother close to asphyxiation. This work is closely related to *Abzgram*, which developed at the same time. The boy has a poisonous green plastic bag over his head, the transparent material resting on his closed eyes, draped disturbingly and peacefully on his round face. A second photograph shows fresh bite marks on an inner arm—hers? his?—and a third shows horrifically burned skin, caused by an equally horrific lilac iron visible in the right half of the image. One can almost smell this last photograph. The images in the series that relate the (im)possibilities of harmony among siblings, are painful, even if posed. Or at least, one hopes they are . . .

In his essay "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" (1954), anthropologist Gregory Bateson tells of a visit to the zoo that had a decisive effect on his research. He observed two apes fighting, albeit only in jest. They were play fighting. As Bateson concluded, the fact that they deliberately did not hurt each other while doing so showed that there must be a kind of metacommunication in how the primates interact, which is defined by the following observation: "these actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand denote." Or perhaps more decisively with reference to the monkeys: "The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite."<sup>6</sup> Bateson was interested in how apes play in the context of his research into the development of complex human communication, because it not only differentiates between two layers of reference—between "map" and "territory," that is roughly "performance" and "what the performance performs"—but also puts these layers into a relationship that is at once regular and paradoxical. Here, to nip is to bite, without the bite strictly denoting a bite.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," *The Game Design Reader: A History of Play Anthology*, eds. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 314–28, here 317.

Gregory Bateson's observations on play may be directly applied to Wojtas's photographic practice. According to him, a more complex form of play is not based on the premise "This is a game" but rather on the question "Is this a game?" "Paradox," according to Bateson, "is doubly present in the signals which are exchanged within the context of play, fantasy, threat, etc. Not only does the playful nip not denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands, but, in addition, the bite itself is fictional." And he adds: "At a human level this leads to a vast variety of complications and inversions in the fields of play, fantasy, and art."<sup>7</sup> So according to Bateson, even in its most primitive form, play is not simply pretending "as if" but a highly complex activity that establishes a sphere of understanding through metacommunicative signals which is neither stable in and of itself nor free from paradox: "The discrimination between map and territory is always liable to break down, and the ritual blows of peace-making are always liable to be mistaken for the 'real' blows of combat."<sup>8</sup> A playground lesson: nip too hard, hit too fiercely, and the fun's over.

What the photographed bitemarks in *We Can't Live—Without Each Other* demonstrate vis-à-vis Bateson is just as true for *Abzgram*. Here too there is a complex, itself questionable game in which the photographic fiction of a chaotic school creature (attention: accident! prank! tentacle!) coexists with the represented—or, better, *played*—Polish school system. Wojtas's at times aggressive use of the flash aesthetically highlights this very paradoxical coexistence, which is ultimately a central problem of photographic documentation in general. As an observer, almost every image makes me newly aware not only of the presence of the camera in the depicted "territory," but above all that, in the moment the picture is taken, the camera/flash/artist triad spawns this territory together with its play-form, its "as if." In the corner of the gymnasium, children turn away from the garish light; the colorful distorting mirror image suddenly throws up deep black shadows. Karl Heinz Bohrer used the term "suddenness" to denote the moment of aesthetic pretense in modernity. He describes its "anticipatory quality" as anarchic, since "the quality cannot be derived, however we twist it, from previous considerations or from the cultural tradition."<sup>9</sup> Suddenness anticipates what could not be anticipated nor expected. "We enter into a basic value relationship, long before we arrive at any intellectually justifiable judgement."<sup>10</sup> Pow!

If we expand on the initial hypothesis that Wojtas is first and foremost a player and *Abzgram* a game, then the camera is to be understood as a toy necessary for this game. "Yet," according to philosopher Vilém Flusser, "photographers do not play with their plaything but against it. They creep into the camera in order to bring to light the tricks concealed within."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Wojtas does not seek out conventionally "aesthetically successful," clean, crisp, harmoniously composed photographs in her work, but rather

<sup>7</sup> Bateson, *A Theory of Play and Fantasy*, 319.

<sup>8</sup> Bateson, *A Theory of Play and Fantasy*, 319.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Heinz Bohrer, "The Fear of the Unknown: On the Structure of Mediation of Tradition and Modernism," in *Suddenness: On the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance*, trans. Ruth Crowley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 70–86, here 83.

<sup>10</sup> Bohrer, *Suddenness*, 80.

<sup>11</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Matthews (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 27.

<sup>4</sup> As described in the following Deutschlandfunk Kultur podcast *Altes Land*, "Eine Geschichte der körperlichen Züchtigung—Erziehung mit dem Rohrstock," *Zeitfragen*, March 3, 2021, <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/leine-geschichte-der-koerperlichen-zuechtigung-erziehung-mit-100.html>.

<sup>5</sup> I am very grateful to Markus Schützenberg for his work on framing uncertainty. See especially *Bild und Spiel: Medien der Ungewissheit* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2016).

makes images with aggressively luminous oversaturated colors contaminating their surroundings, whose lines collapse in all directions and whose chromatic aberrations remain ostentatiously unretouched. In the very negation of photography's "tricks," Wojtas reveals them and thus the complications of the photographic itself. Between highlights and red eyes a girl in a blurry dress jumps out of the image; and when, for whatever reason, a doll burns in a snowy courtyard, it is no coincidence that it recollects John Baldessari's *Wrong* (1966–68), the self-portrait of the patron saint of photographic errors and artistic transgressions. If these indications are still too vague, then perhaps a skewed image of a coordinate system contains the emblem of Wojtas's artistic practice. It is so gleefully destroyed in post-production that not only do all the curves drawn on it dissolve, but also the grid and the coordinates themselves. Central perspective and indeed any form of standardized pictorial coordination are subverted here as mere photographic conventions, or rather are lost, as if in a kaleidoscopic, broken labyrinth. As André Breton remarked: "La beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas."<sup>12</sup> The remnants of my schoolboy French recoil from attempting an equally contorted translation.

In all this there is no scarcity expressed, nothing "unaesthetic." On the contrary, Wojtas gathers a *plethora* of photographic moments and phenomena that reach for intensity rather than equilibrium and harmony: all the dials are set to eleven, more is more. What the flash and the "intense" aesthetic powerfully express is the *presence* of a photographic game that does not simply represent what is already given. "Play is really limited to presenting itself," writes Hans-Georg Gadamer, "its mode of being is self-presentation."<sup>13</sup> Not only in the case of *Abzgram* does the game develop unpredictably for the players between accident and invasion. Wojtas has explained in conversation that she usually waits "for something to fall down" before making a start. That is, she does not start the game, but the game sets *her* in motion and involves her.

In his book *Truth and Method* (1960), in which he develops his art theory out of play, Gadamer emphatically writes: "all playing is a being-played. The attraction of a game, the fascination it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game masters the players. . . . The real subject of the game . . . is not the player but instead the game itself."<sup>14</sup> This alluring loss of self and the immersion in a game is also found in Vilém Flusser, who sees photographer and camera as inextricably connected,<sup>15</sup> as well as in the only implicitly formulated game theory of Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>16</sup> Am I creating ontological disorder here in a philosophical capacity, or has *Abzgram* already kindly done that for me?



Karolina Wojtas gets serious about a form of play the French philosopher Roger Caillois termed *paidia*, distinguished from the somewhat "adult," rule-bound play—*ludus*—by its "primary power of improvisation and joy."<sup>17</sup> Caillois's description of *paidia* reflects a whole series of moments in Wojtas's pictorial world: "This elementary need for disturbance and tumult first appears as an impulse to touch, grasp, taste, smell, and then drop any accessible object. It readily can become a taste for destruction and breaking things. It explains the pleasure in endlessly cutting up paper with a pair of scissors, pulling cloth into thread, breaking up a gathering, holding up a queue, disturbing the play or work of others, etc."<sup>18</sup> Not for nothing did Walter Benjamin characterize the interior of a toy store thus: "The basic atmosphere was one of hellish exuberance."<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless: even Johan Huizinga, whose piece on *Homo ludens* (1938) set in motion contemporary anthropological/philosophical theories on play, dismisses the assumption that play is unserious. On the contrary, he claims: "The child plays in complete—we can well say, in sacred—earnest. But it plays and knows that it plays."<sup>20</sup> Does this "sacred earnest" near Paul Valéry's "holy fear"? Is it its precondition or does it instead stand in opposition?

When Huizinga detaches seriousness from the role of its playful antithesis, the question arises—perhaps because play can always mean *agôn*, or competition—of who or what opposes it and is its adversary.<sup>21</sup> Georges Bataille also poses this question in his review of Huizinga's book, *Sommes-nous là pour jouer? Ou pour être sérieux?* (1951), and finds a clear answer: "Reason itself resists the *spirit of play* that excites us humans, that wells up with in us, and that gives us, if not always joy, at least a feeling of basic contentment. In fact, reason is the opposite of play. Reason is the principle of a world that is the exact opposite of play: the world of work."<sup>22</sup> The latter is at the same time the world of purpose, utility, moderation, and order, whereas play necessarily proceeds freely, purposelessly, and uselessly, excessively and wastefully not managing energy, and throwing the orderly into disorder. With reference to the latter point, Bataille states: "It seems to me that play is confined disorder."<sup>23</sup> Only in its limitedness does he feel it differs from the sacred. Both areas are almost congruent, it is only "necessary to specify that if the sphere of the sacred is that of the rule, it is only so in so far as it is a rule over disorder."<sup>24</sup> Very cryptic. Is this the same sacredness symbolized by the crucifixes in Wojtas's work?

While up to now, the playful has been foregrounded, Bataille also makes it clear that it is always embedded in the dialectic of play/work. He writes, "I believe that work is necessary for the full affirmation of play."<sup>25</sup> It is this

<sup>12</sup> André Breton, *Quadragesima*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 160. On the photographic aesthetic of Surrealism, which *Abzgram* closely resembles, see Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism," in *Jane Livingston: L'Éclaircie de la Photographie et du Surréalisme*, ed. Rosalind Krauss, Dawn Ades, and Jane Livingston (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 13–42.

<sup>13</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. and ed. Joel Myerson and Donald J. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 108.

<sup>14</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 106.

<sup>15</sup> Unlike manual workers surrounded by their tools and industrial workers standing at their machines, photographers are inside their apparatus and bound up with it. See Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Hinman writes on this that "to be a player involves being a play-thing at the same time." See Lawrence M. Hinman, "Nietzsche's Philosophy of Play" (PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 1975), 25. [http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/1584](http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1584).

<sup>17</sup> Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barish (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 27.

<sup>18</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, " Toys and Play: Marginal Notes on a Monumental Work," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1: 1927–1930*, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al., trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2005), 117–21, here 119.

<sup>20</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1980), 18.

<sup>21</sup> By *agôn* Caillois denotes competition, as opposed to other aspects of games, such as: a game of dice, *alea*; games involving illusion or imagination, *munus*; and games wherein one provides a state of exaltation, *ilinx*. See Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 14–20.

<sup>22</sup> Georges Bataille, "Sommes-nous là pour jouer? Ou pour être sérieux?" (*Sommes-nous là pour jouer? Ou pour être sérieux?*), in *Sommes-nous là pour jouer? Ou pour être sérieux?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 112.

<sup>23</sup> Bataille, "Sommes-nous là pour jouer?," 110.

<sup>24</sup> Bataille, "Sommes-nous là pour jouer?," 110.

<sup>25</sup> Bataille, "Sommes-nous là pour jouer?," 91.

<sup>26</sup> See Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Experimentalist: Hans-Jörg Rheinberger im Gespräch über Labor, Mittel und Methode* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2020), in particular 118–59.

<sup>27</sup> The guiding concept in Gadamer's theory is the idea of *gebildet*, a term that renders translation, to refer to the lasting and theoretically replicable product of artistic play. Only as such creations can these products achieve the character of the work, the *Logos* and not just the *Ergon*. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 116.

<sup>28</sup> Didier Deleule and François Guery, *The Productive Body*, trans. Stephen Shapiro and Arthur Barraud (Chichester: Leo Books, 2014), 48.

<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 143.

<sup>30</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 144.

dialectic that resists pinning down—and not “mere” play—that is also found in *Abzgram*. Over and again, school furniture both intact and broken, orderly and disarrayed, indicate purpose and misappropriation. After all, if the standardized, sensible measurements of a ruler are lost, a chair leg will do too. And when plain and strangely distanced shots of teaching objects used in schools (or rather, to reflect their vagueness: teaching things) possibly refer to the experimental and playful moment in exploring and learning, they also, at the same time, point to its hardening, to rational utilization and goal orientation, to the level of production: bees symbolically carry out their work on the honeycomb, and a jar is already waiting for the honey.<sup>26</sup> Even if schoolchildren—and artists—produce nothing that can strictly speaking be described as useful,<sup>27</sup> schools are still societal organs that work “toward the conversion of human material into productive-form,” as Didier Deleule and François Guery determine in *The Productive Body* (2014).<sup>28</sup> Allan Sekula already captured this by photographic means in his series *School Is a Factory* (1978–80). Panels with the headings WORK and PLAY refer here to the pictorial world of the respective opposite, yet inextricably intertwined realm.

■ In *Abzgram*, it is precisely the lens of play that is used to view an environment defined by utility and productivity. The central drama therefore revolves around the children and adolescents depicted, whom Wojtas imagines in a world without adults, but not without adult or even divine reason or supervision: “BÓG CIĘ WIDZI”—“GOD SEES YOU”—warns the eye on the wall, as a drone under the morose gaze of a portrait of a saint delivers a mysterious message. Maybe it’s even the same one. Over and again, the conflict between play and reason is played out particularly clearly on Wojtas’s younger brother. In one portrait his thoughts are constrained by a bulky cardboard structure; in another, his eyes are closed and his face is plastered with stickers reading “nauka,” “uśmiech,” “posłuszeństwo,” “dobroć”—“learning,” “laughing,” “obedience,” “kindness.” They are imperatives that meet his body, the behavior being demanded of him.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1976), Michel Foucault investigates to what extent the eighteenth century introduced a tractability in schools, medical settings, the military, and prisons, which was characterized by a new form of discipline, “which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility.”<sup>29</sup> “[T]he human body,” he writes, “was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy,’ which was also a ‘mechanics of power.’”<sup>30</sup> What was new about these disciplinary techniques was not least the smallness and minuteness with which they ordered time and space, and above all the tiniest movements, gestures, and postures, following the greatest

efficiency and economy, in order to produce not only obedient but also productive individuals.

The *Classroom Entry Procedure* Wojtas introduces in *Abzgram* could stem from Foucault’s source material in its fantasy of regulatory omnipotence. In it, the alphabetical order of students’ entry into the classroom is dictated: where to wait, how to wait, where to place their hands and backpacks, and when not to speak (during the entire procedure). But also what happens if rules are broken and how “good” (that is rule-compliant) behavior is rewarded: “It pays to behave well,” the teacher says and gives the students a token for their obedience. The lesson is unambiguous: playing by the rules is supposed to pay off, at least in the in-house economy that has always been divine. “Whenever a good pupil hears the noise of the signal,” Foucault quoted from an 1816 report, “he will imagine that he is hearing the voice of the teacher or rather the voice of God himself calling him by his name. He will then partake of the feelings of the young Samuel, saying with him in the depths of his soul: ‘Lord, I am here.’”<sup>31</sup>

The *Classroom Entry Procedure*, or *Procedura wejścia do klasy* in the Polish original, is taken from a school in the Lower Silesian city of Legnica and was made public in spring 2015.<sup>32</sup> It documents what Foucault called “the great operations of discipline”: “the constitution of ‘tableaux vivants,’ which transform the confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities.”<sup>33</sup> Although Wojtas’s photographic aesthetic avoids logical ordering, the video *Hymn* makes use of found material that shows Polish students time and again in the form of carefully organized tableaux: in green spaces, churches, assembly halls, and again and again in gymnasiums, they stand wearing school uniforms or dressed in the national colors of white and red, arranged to form living flags and to sing the Polish anthem: “Poland is not yet lost, / as long as we live. / What foreign superiority took from us, / we will take back with the saber.” Wojtas superimposed the soundtracks of the videos she used and the saber rattling is thus lost in a national cacophony: holy terror, adieu!

■ When the right-wing conservative Law and Justice Party (PiS) took over the Polish government in 2015, they made schools in particular the site of a much larger culture war. In his article “Polish Schools as Factories of Nationalism and Prejudice” (2018), Piotr Żuk of the Centre for Civil Rights and Democracy Research at the University of Wrocław shows how PiS has “reformed” the school system since 2015 in a historically narrow nationalist sense, in order to expand its hard institutional power with a “soft power.” This is supposed to aim at cultural control and thus at the self-legitimation of political power.<sup>34</sup> For the PiS, dealing with the country’s own history

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Bernard, “Rapport du 30 octobre 1816 à la Société de l’enseignement mutuel,” quoted in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 172.

<sup>32</sup> Piotr Kowalczyk, “Procedura wejścia do klasy, czyli korekcyjna kara,” 24 *Legnica.pl*, March 9, 2015, <https://24legnica.pl/procedura-wejscia-do-klasy-izyly-korekcyjna-dla-dzieci/>.

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 154.

<sup>34</sup> Piotr Żuk, “Obstern, Nationalism, Remembrance, and Education: Polish Schools as Factories of Nationalism and Prejudice,” *Nationalities Papers* 46, no. 6 (2018): 1046–82, doi:10.1080/009105-392.2017.1381079.

<sup>35</sup> Piotr Żuk, "Oblivion, National Remembrance, and Education," 1053.

<sup>36</sup> Exemplary of this is the recent controversy around a textbook for a high course titled "History and the Present." The most controversial passage criticizes the "decay of the institution of the family" caused by "medical advances and the offense of gender ideology." See Ben Koschalka, "Continental new conservative school textbook to be sold in Polish post offices," *Notes from Poland*, September 1, 2022, <https://notefrompoland.com/2022/09/01/continental-new-conservative-school-textbook-to-be-sold-in-polish-post-offices/>. For more on the patriotic school excursions see Maria Chłosek, "Poland Funds Schools Trips to 'Build Patriotism and Community Between Students and Teachers,'" *Notes from Poland*, August 13, 2021, <https://notefrompoland.com/2021/08/13/poland-funds-patriotic-schools-trips-to-rebuild-community-between-students-and-teachers/>.

<sup>37</sup> See the photographs by photographer Hanna Jabreck, "Patriotic Games," *Hanna Jabreck Photography* (2021), <http://www.hanna.jabreck.com/patriotic-games-hanna-jabreck/>.

<sup>38</sup> Justina Lisa, "The Reception of Education for Patriotism in Contemporary Polish Education," *24th Century Pedagogy*, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 20-25, <https://doi.org/10.2478/pep-2018-0004>.

<sup>39</sup> Edit Inotai and Claudia Cobanu, "Education in Hungary and Poland: Crisis in the Classroom," *Balkan Insight*, August 22, 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/08/22/education-in-hungary-and-poland-crisis-in-the-classroom/>.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in Inotai and Cobanu, "Education in Hungary and Poland."

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin, "Toys and Play," 120.

is ideologically central. The party rejects the "pedagogy of shame," a term used by (ultra-)conservative parts of society to describe any form of self-critical historiography not intended to bolster national identity. Żuk summarizes the broader position of the PiS thus: "The core of this educational model is the predominance of national history over the general history of Europe and the world, the dominance of the national canon of romantic and patriotic readings over world literature and eventually nursing the memory of the nation's past rather than looking for solutions for the future of the whole world."<sup>35</sup> Cultural influence is thus exerted, for example, through the selection of "suitable" textbooks with a thematic focus on a traditionalist/conservative world view over a cosmopolitan/liberal one, which not only idealize and ethnically homogenize Polish history and identity, but are also intended to patriotically shape the language and thinking of children and young people in the same way that state-sponsored school trips do.<sup>36</sup> These developments are supported, among other things, by the Institute of National Remembrance, which coordinates nationalist teaching activities and institutionalizes a crude understanding of history, for example, with regard to World War II. For example, "patriotic games" bear eloquent witness to the PiS's understanding of education. Thus photographer Hanna Jabreck in her eponymous series (2017) labels the state's gun-based military instruction of thirteen- to nineteen-year-olds in collaboration with the Polish army and private paramilitary companies: "Their objective is to develop survival and military skills among the young, but many teachers aim also at strengthening patriotic and religious consciousness, taking 'God, Honor and Motherland' for its motto."<sup>37</sup> Ultranationalist discipline with God's blessing supported by an apologist "science" that advocates the "importance of the topic of love for the homeland in today's world" in open-source articles.<sup>38</sup> For all its ideological appropriation, the PiS, on the other hand, has structurally neglected and dismantled the Polish education system to such an extent that it is currently in tatters following the challenges ensuing from COVID and schooling the influx of children who have fled from Ukraine, as well as the retirement and departure of an elderly and underpaid teaching staff.<sup>39</sup> "We can only empathise with the students," writes teacher Dariusz Chetkowski, "who are forced to learn in such bad times. They are attending a sick school, and the minister is refusing to take any blood tests or apply any treatment."<sup>40</sup>

Walter Benjamin wrote of "the law of repetition ... that presides over the rules and rhythms of the entire world of play."<sup>41</sup> Heart after heart after heart in the exercise book. Where Wojtas's *Abzgram* usually finds new pictorial problems instead of solutions, one subseries of photographs in particular stands out. Always in portrait orientation, the images show trust games in which children and young people form a circle by each lying down on the knees of the student behind them. An ouroboros trust fall, only onto knees instead of outstretched hands. Against the backdrop of PiS educational pol-

icy, the repeated motif provokes the possibly paranoid question of whether the necessary trust in one's "neighbors" (not in "others") might not here indicate the sustainable production of a national identity and community and, by circular reasoning, whether it is at the same time its product and reproduction.<sup>42</sup> Child's play or nationalist team building? With Foucault at least, this repetition can also be understood in the narrower sense as an "exercise": "Exercise is that technique by which one imposes on the body tasks that are both repetitive and different, but always graduated. By bending behavior toward a terminal state, exercise makes possible a perpetual characterization of the individual either in relation to this term, in relation to other individuals, or in relation to a type of itinerary."<sup>43</sup>

If Karolina Wojtas shifts the exuberance of the playground and the schoolyard to within the school in her photographs, and at the same time characterizes them as small penitentiaries in her images and the exhibition thanks to her use of a barred architecture, it can be no coincidence that she is always wields her camera in gymnasiums, places of bodily humiliation—sorry: training—and perpetual testing.<sup>44</sup> Foucault's sentence that "at the heart of all disciplinary systems functions a small penal mechanism" does not only apply to the perfidious exercise on the wall bars.<sup>45</sup> The sanction is already inscribed into the (physical) normalization, and thus Wojtas has her brother recite the decimal places of pi for three quarters of an hour under duress and to the point of exhaustion in the video *M2ŁODY*. It is an absurd, incompletable task of play, or rather work, that is at the same time its own punishment. Is this still a game?

When rereading Paul Valéry's *Les Principes d'an-archie pure et appliqué*, I stumbled across another passage that seems to say more about Karolina Wojtas's *Abzgram*, perhaps because it is so unabashedly romantic without descending into pure kitsch:

Man, that adventure.  
He can barely be anything else.  
And he can only be so when he is seen through mystical, dogmatic, or rationalist eyes. He is a departure, either from animals or from "spirits."  
But, in every case, he is an attempt, a move in a game, an endeavor—a possibility, etc. Adventure.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Paul Valéry, *Les principes d'an-archie pure et appliqué* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 180.

<sup>42</sup> In their article, Lisa generally concludes, "It seems that the only strategy that would make survival of modern civilization possible and that would allow to avoid disaster is development based on human resources, on potential and creativity of individuals that make up the society. Human capital is renewable not only thanks to next generations but also thanks to the fact that man as species possesses an unusual ability to accumulate and pass on knowledge and patriotic values to next generations." From Lisa, "The Reception of Education for Patriotism," 20.

<sup>43</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 167.

<sup>44</sup> Isis Anigalla takes "playgrounds" as a general sociological metaphor for "events and locations of the extraordinary." See Isis Anigalla, "Die Ekstase der Spielplätze. Über die Kulturschöpfung in körperlichen und kognitiven Geflechtern," *Soziologemagazin*, no. 1 (2019): 45-72, <https://doi.org/10.3724/soz.v12i1.05>.

<sup>45</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 192.

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# CLASSROOM ENTRY PROCEDURE

1. The teacher arrives in front of the classroom immediately after the bell.

2. Students are lined up in alphabetical order. The order of students remains fixed until the end of the school year.

3. Students stand still and do not touch each other. Their backpacks are placed on the ground next to the right leg. Their hands are placed along the torso, they look straight ahead, do not make any sounds or movements.

4. From the moment of alignment, that is, beginning with an acceptable state (see point 3), the teacher counts down one minute. If the students last in the position for one minute, the teacher begins to let more people into the classroom. He/she lets the first person in, the first person enters, finds a seat, and sits down. Then the next person enters the classroom, and so on. Students who are waiting to enter stand according to the rules described under #3.

5. The teacher lets in, one by one, those students who meet the requirements specified under #3. Those who do not meet these requirements remain in their places. They do not move or change their positions.

6. For these students the teacher appoints one more minute. If they still do not meet the requirements, he/she lets them in nevertheless, one by one, into the classroom.

# C/O BERLIN TALENT AWARD 2022

rozwiąż nierówność

$$\frac{x+2}{4} - \frac{x-3}{2} < 1 + \frac{x+1}{3}$$

rozwiąż układ równań

$$\begin{cases} 3(x-2y) - (2y+x) = 16 \\ x-2y = 4 \end{cases}$$

rozwiąż równanie

$$2(x-1)^2 = 6 - 4x(3-x)$$

rozwiąż nierówność

$$\frac{1-x}{2} < x + \frac{x+2}{3}$$

rozwiąż układ równań

$$\begin{cases} 3x - (y-2) = 1 \\ 4x + 2(y-2) = 3 \end{cases}$$

This book is published as part of the C/O Berlin Talent Award 2022 on the occasion of the exhibition / Diese Publikation erscheint im Rahmen des C/O Berlin Talent Award 2022 anlässlich der Ausstellung / Niniejsza publikacja ukazała się w ramach C/O Berlin Talent Award 2022 przy okazji wystawy

Karolina Wojtas . Abzgram  
January 28–May 4, 2023 / 28. Januar bis 04. Mai 2023 /  
28 stycznia–4 maja 2023 r.

C/O Berlin Foundation  
Hardenbergstrasse 22–24 . D-10623 Berlin  
www.co-berlin.org

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Limited Edition / Limitierte Auflage / Edycja limitowana  
900 copies / Exemplare / egzemplarzy

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Spector Books, Leipzig

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Published by / Erschienen bei / Wydane przez  
Spector Books  
Harkortstrasse 10 . D-04107 Leipzig  
www.spectorbooks.com

Distribution / Dystrybucja  
Germany / Deutschland / Niemcy, Austria / Österreich /  
Austria:

GVA, Gemeinsame Verlagsauslieferung Göttingen GmbH  
& Co. KG, www.gva-verlage.de

Schweiz / Switzerland / Szwajcaria:

AVA Verlagsauslieferung AG, www.ava.ch

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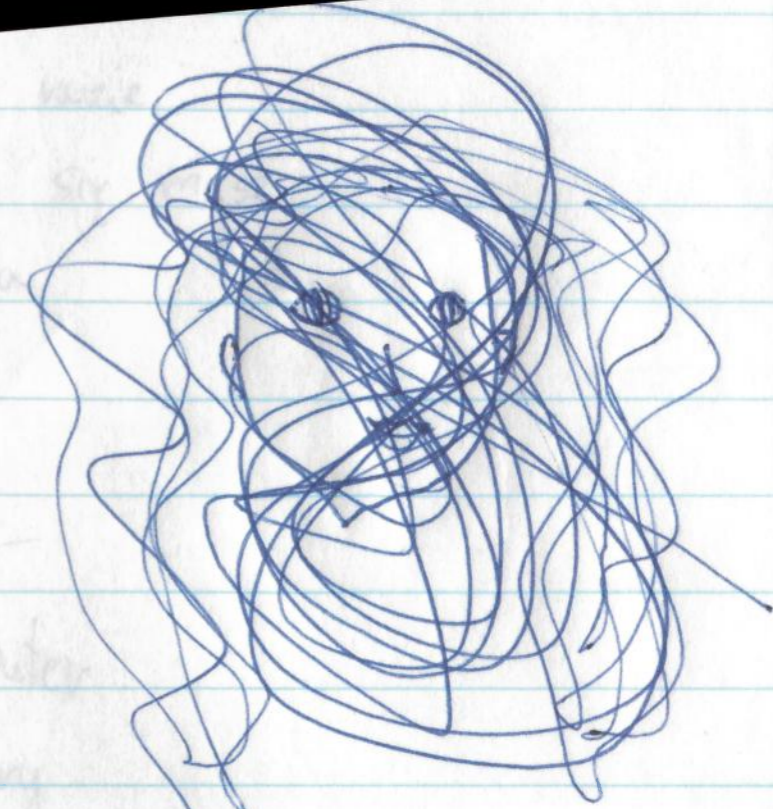
First edition / 1. Auflage Printed in Germany /

Pierwsze wydanie

ISBN 978-3-95905-718-9

Made possible by / Ermöglicht durch / Umożliwione przez

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