

ARTICLES

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CHIMERA AND PEGASUS. THE NEW MEDIA – HOPE FOR GREAT ART

The art of Izabella Gustowska offers to all those who are ready for non-traditional reception not only amazing experience, but also great hope.¹ It may be treated as a message of unique vitality, conveying the impressions triggered by *Gra pozorów* [Game of Appearances] danced by the artist-performer in a small, stage-like room separated by a plexiglass "curtain," and scenes from the movies *A Tango Lesson* by Sally Potter and *La Revancha del tango no. 5* by Gotan Project, passing through a horizontally elongated screen placed high above the audience.² Drawing from memory, Gustowska's art paves the way to some kind of liberation as conscious stepping beyond casual everyday experience.³

¹ Incidentally, as the first note, one may add that this has always directed and attracted to art both its makers and receivers.

² On March 10, 2003 Izabella Gustowska's show *Game of Appearances*, of which that video-performance was a part, was opened at the "Galeria AT" in Poznań.

³ At the same time, "Centrum Sztuki *Inner Spaces*" at Jackowskiego St. in Poznań exhibited Gustowska's installation titled (after Julia Kristeva) *Live is the Story*, in which a video film projected on an old brick wall of a deep, vaulted cellar drew from the repository of memory as well. In that case, memory stretched so far that it bridged the earlier works of the artist (the element of water and its flow related to the female) and an abstract approach to something that may be defined as the beginning of existence – an inauguration of life. This beginning gives sense to a spherical form which flows out of the female

In order to tell about it and to face the difficult task of interpreting art incorporating the electronic media in the spatial arrangement of sculptural forms, I will approach one of the installations which I have admired several times in various exhibition halls, included in thematic shows such as *Uamour passion. Względne cechy podobieństwa II* [*Uamour passion. Relative Similarities II*] (2000) at the Poznań BWA gallery, *Śpiewające pokoje* [*Singing Rooms*] (2001) at the Leon Wyczółkowski Museum in Bydgoszcz, and *Namiętności i inne przypadki* [*Passions and Other Adventures*] (2001) at the Contemporary Art Center in Zamek Ujazdowski, Warsaw. For sure, it is worth returning in one's mind to the impressive exhibition of *Śpiewające pokoje*, occupying the whole second floor of the museum, which – since the reconstructed building used to be a monastery – comprises several levels connected by flights of a few stairs. I would like to focus on the work called *W podróży* [*Traveling*], which could be seen right after another one, *Szepty* [*Whispers*], placed in two rooms connected by an interior passage.

On the other side of the corridor there was an entrance to a big, square room – much bigger than the one with *Szepty*. Its interior, including the window wall opposite the door, would have been empty, if not for an enormous, monumental mechanical contrivance placed along the wall to the right. Beautifully constructed of small metal beams and rails welded together to make balanced triangles, it moved according to the rhythm of its squeaking. I remembered that we were traveling and that the regular sound seemed to measure the time of the journey: years, days, minutes, seconds, splits of seconds, and splits of those splits, though – who knows? – perhaps travels should be measured out of time, in all those incarnations and karmic returns of specific days, hours, and even seconds, just before the ultimate return, dreaming (of what must not be the object of dreams and of what we are not supposed to dream of in such a silly way), that once it will come true.

The cog wheel is so huge that each of its cogs, moving, makes itself conspicuous by putting into motion a powerful and very long arm which fills all the space along the wall. In the middle of the arm there is a wheel, and its metallic, goldish hue does not coincide with our light steps and the arrangement of – absent – marching rhythms, but attracts attention

mouth. Its oval shape reveals something that otherwise cannot be expressed by the mouth: the androgynic existence of the human infant, the deepest pleasure of a cat relaxing in various positions, the steady rhythm of the plunging waterfowl. This is the inauguration of life which eternally enchants us with its oval roundness emerging from the female mouth – again and again, in an endless cycle of return... Gustowska's art may be interpreted in terms of an unfolding narrative of nativity in the world of elements, of relations with them, founded upon our sensitivity to a charm which naturally befits the force of life – the eternal, everlasting love transgressing the actual/seeming beginning and end of every individual existence. Its individual mark is incorporated into the harmony/disharmony of closeness and remoteness which allows us to taste intensity, a passage to the eternal. On the other hand, though, the same passage does not annul any of the fantastic imaginings or ideas combining the experience of living with playing – a game of "life and death" – as the only available appearance. Therefore, memory, opening the access to myth, plays such an important role in the self-revelation and self-manifestation of Gustowska's art. In this sense, myth means first of all the mythic matter ennobled by the eternal knowledge drawn from different times and cultures, which may now be sanctioned by globalization. From such a point of view one might perhaps speak about the instrumental universalization of memory which increases its unquestionable value by its less and less limited accessibility, without the fear of no selection and no specialist procedures constituting a "mandatory" socio-cultural model. This happens to the benefit of even such myth scholars as Zygmunt Kubiak who in his research has used a narrative perpetuated – in a way expected by the reader – by wisdom. This may be seen in his book on the mythology of Greeks and Romans, particularly in a number of references to the course of time and to the present. Cf. Zygmunt Kubiak, *Mitologia Greków i Rzymian*. Warsaw., 1997, esp. the final conclusion.

by the precision of its structure and dependence of what has been, is, and will be in the order of the circular space. The wheel does not stop, it lives thanks to the size of its cogs, their moves, and the squeaking which accompanies every move they make. The sound of the cogs, one after another, after each move ahead, is not monotonous enough to mean that all has been, is, or will be, but it speaks about what is inscribed in the arm's life sustained by that extremely important wheel. That arm is simply a lever moving up and down, with a velocity that differs from that of the familiar children's seesaw. Each part of the arm (on both sides of the wheel) has seven small screens attached one after another, making a sort of linear path along the upward and downward movements of the wheel. The wheel – its movement and pace – directs the line, while the course of action is displayed on the screens.

The screens show feet viewed from the side, moving in different phases of covering distance, making steps, crossing the space. Pictured from the nicely elongated toes up to several inches above the ankle, they have their own, special beauty. Not too flat, with the instep arch not too low, they display their own characteristics of motion, their structural features, their way of raising and putting down the heels, the sensitive area around the ankle and its delicate, shaped protuberance, with no swollen curves, no horny, protruding bulges ruining the effect. These are beautiful, light feet which belong to someone who moves with pleasure and can naturally raise on his or her toes the whole body; long-legged, with the straight back, waving widely the wings of arms so that the air itself starts whirling, but the head stays immobile. It is ready to fly, with the neck craned, with the protruding chin, and the hawk's eye, but we cannot see it. Still, if the body wants it, it will fly, I am sure. These are the feet of someone who can fly, raising the wings of arms, breaking with them the resistance of the air, sliding upward without trying to protect the head by drawing it close to the neck which is flying as well, long and straightened, while the mild, warm wind envelops the whole body and flies along. (We cannot see it on the screens, but I am sure it is there.) The feet keep wandering on all the screens, light, never tired, with no obstacles to stop them, such as big cobblestones, rocky paths, some wild thicket or too dark spruce forest.

Is the liberty of the feet – their light step in the rhythm of wandering which we can watch - conditioned by something else than just their natural predisposition, physical health, and the fact that they do not have to carry the burden of too much flesh? After all, it is also quite important that the feet, moving to the obligatory rhythm imposed on them by the mechanism of the cog wheel, meet on their way no obstacles, as if there were none. How fantastic is such wandering, and on such a surface! Where, then, do those feet go, what is the goal of their movement, filmed in so many changing positions, from so many multiple points of view? It turns out that answering this question is not easy, because the road is indefinite and unmarked. The spectator following the monitor screens can detect no specific rule of motion. This world is not for the feet – it does not determine for them any principles, a specific sequence of movements or set speed. It is just the cog wheel which imposes the course of action. All that we can see and investigate, watching the movement of the feet on the screens, their wandering along the pathless void which has been filmed (it has the substance and lightness of clouds) is rather a negation of such rules and laws. We cannot specify where all that is going on, or even where it may be happening, since one can only say that it is nowhere/everywhere or in the sky/on earth. But the sky and the earth, nowhere and everywhere are also here – in the reality of our being. In our experience. Where

is this place -where we are with no encumbering equipment, no obstacles under our feet? Is this not what Gustowska wants to say by bringing into being *Śpiewające pokoje!* And she speaks about it.

If you have realized and now you know, looking at the screens once again, that consciousness is the sense of living, you also know what gifts make your life full and that they are worth your joy and all your commitment to being in their presence; yours is now the time of caring for them and drawing them – of their most intense cultivation. You are filled with this knowledge and you feel liberated from enclosure, from the limitations of joy and sorrow. This consciousness lets our feet join these ones, overcoming everything so that nothing really is an obstacle, nothing makes them tired. We may enjoy an elevating insight in the untired peace of the feet on the screens – in their journey which is indeed very long, even under the unyielding control of the cog wheel which Gustowska has put into motion. This mechanism must not be analyzed, for it is not worth our insight but the consciousness of transgressing it with our lives – the reality of spiritual knowledge.⁴

Continuing our journey – crossing barefoot its imagined spatial form, so exclusively dedicated to the activity of covering this indefinite, pathless distance, should we not, on our way, grasp what imposes itself upon us? We ought to realize that we do not gain Knowledge, and that there is no Being around us, that the experience of the feet and that slim figure which they carry are non-Being and non-Knowledge. This non-Knowledge (e.g., about clouds as the common background of accessible roads) makes us aware of many abilities of our mind, including those which are inexpressible, which would encompass Being. We should not strive for Knowledge, but – at most – on our way make available what is non-Knowledge, but brings us or directs toward Knowledge, though it cannot be grasped or determined to what extent and how far/near. The Knowledge that we have at our disposal is nothing but inference, premonition thanks to which our feet do not get hurt and we can set them free, seeing on the screens their perfect fitness. However, even that non-Knowledge allows us to bypass thorns and save our hours and days which otherwise we would have to spend on removing them from our soles.

Not by activity but by feeling may we prepare our feet for *Traveling*. We give them support not in Knowledge, but only in non-Knowledge and in sympathy liberated from the mechanism of squeaking gears. They determine the movement of the lever – life – and, what is more, discover the law of that movement, but not here, not in this, not in ignorance should we look for sympathetic response (ineffable, but open to feeling) that has its share in *Traveling*. That is why the journey is more successful, despite non-Knowledge, as

⁴ Therefore we can make a reference to a statement of Alicja Kępińska, closing the diagnosis of the end of the idea of *reality* – its uselessness in the world filled with mechanical and electronic images – and the simultaneous opening to the "realization of the pictorial sphere." I would say that in *Śpiewające pokoje* we are witness to the reality of something that so far, in the history of man-the cultural being, has been considered very important, yet unreal! "Reality and truth provide no background for the media. The seductiveness of photography and electronic images lies in their illusory character which has no original 'source'. The potential of that seductiveness is so great that it has quite effortlessly directed our desires and our imagination to alleged realities, to the autonomous image which is 'better' than reality. It cannot be exhausted and does not know the range of its potential. It does not make us pledge allegiance to doubtful truths. It gives us a chance of change, because it is a chance, movement itself. It does not close anything. It is continuous opening to the unimaginable." Alicja Kępińska, "Realność – zanikająca kategoria" [Reality – A Vanishing Category] in: Alicja Kępińska, Grzegorz Dziamski, S Wojnecki (eds). *Fotografia: realność medium* [Photography: Reality of the Medium]. Poznań, 1998, pp. 107-108.

it unfolds in the right rhythm which it can follow regardless of the mechanism. Flow, flow, you may flow freely... With your feet in the clouds, in the depth of water, in smoke, and in the morning mist... (In *Traveling*, your feet are immersed in ethereal fluids.)

Openness to the universal is possible also thanks to the abstract, which is inherent in the effort to find the superior, internal motion of this art – the immanent knot of that which is marked by an accidental gesture, need, desire, and the subjective voice of all-pervading feelings, reaching to the universe of the artistic/aesthetic forms of representation. And this is what enchants us with its formal abstraction, because it does not refer to places, figures or events, aiming not at man or at a thing, but at an idea, toward *heroic history* and one of the strangest heroes: *chimera*. Is it not precisely Chimera (*chimaira*) which may reveal the original coherence of what is internally complex? The coherence of that which we can find in harmonies, being able to concentrate and enjoy the accidental quality – both relative and absolute power – of artistic forms.⁵

The longer the distance from the beginning of the world, the more differentiated the representations of the Chimera⁶ become – this ancient monster has its paternal origin in the *typhonomachia*, since Typho, the last son of the Earth, begot not only the Hydra slain by Hercules and Scylla, but also Chimera. The Polish myth scholar, Zygmunt Kubiak, remarks that "the cosmic measures of time are not our measures,"⁷ but, following Hesiod, Apollodorus, and Ovid, he emphasizes the rebellious intent and drama of the struggle continued by the last son of Gea, a hundred-headed monster resisting the Olympic gods and defeated in his attempt to seize their power. Struck by Zeus's thunderbolt, Typho lies under the burden of Aetna, unable to set himself free, particularly that on top of the mountain there is Hephaestus's foundry with its dangerous fire proving that not everything is lifeless. Considering the chronological location of Typho's actions in the earliest history of the World, Kubiak makes a reference to Aeschylus, for he believes that they must have taken place before the rebellion and punishment of Prometheus. Thus, Chimera has been with us for a long time, and its image owes a lot to her mother, Echidna, half-woman, half-viper which gave birth to various monsters: Sphinx,⁸ Cerberus, and the eagle tormenting the Titan. One of Chimera's three heads is that of a serpent,⁹ often at the end of a scaly tail; the other two are those of a goat and a lion, naturally, as it were, belonging to the lion's body. Since Hesiod described Chimera quite in detail, it is easy to identify its representations in the art of Greece and Rome. Cesare Ripa, author of the classic sixteenth-century *Iconologia*, shared the standard views in that respect, pointing to the relevant passages in Lucretius, Homer, and Virgil. However, it is not only the physical appearance of the monster, but also its spiritual identity rooted in life experience that contributes to its role and significance.

⁵ In addition, chimera may have an explanatory function, according to an opinion of Robert Graves who in the Preface to his *Greek Myths* remarks that many beliefs concerning the characteristics of myths are untenable and argues what myth is not, distinguishing – by negation – among twelve erroneous definitions and attributions. At any rate, his model of the myth is Chimera.

⁶ Robert Graves has a different opinion concerning Chimera and a mare with a Gorgon's head, known from the painted ornaments on vases. He believes that the former creature was a calendar symbol of the goddess of the Moon.

⁷ Kubiak, p. 79.

⁸ Graves argues that one may have doubts whether Sphinx was a offspring of Typho and Echidna, or perhaps the dog Orthus and Chimaira.

⁹ According to Graves.

Chimera's master was the king of Caria, Amisodarus, who ordered it to destroy the lands of his enemy, Iobates, king of Lycia. To kill Chimera was the first task of Bellerophon, sent to Iobates by his son-in-law, Proetus, who had given the hero a slandering letter, asking Iobates to execute the bearer on the spot. Bellerophon, instructed by the seer Polyeidus to catch and subdue the magic winged horse, Pegasus (*Pegasos*), which by hitting the ground with its hoof opened the Hippocrene spring on the Helicon mountain and became friend with the Muses. The hero caught Pegasus near another Muses' spring, Peirene, and subdued it thanks to a golden bridle, a gift of Athene. Riding the winged horse, he could shoot his arrows at Chimera from above and eventually killed it, using also a javelin, by placing between its fiery jaws a piece of lead which, melting, gradually burnt the monster to death. Consequently, Bellerophon not only won the appreciation of Iobates, but realized his advantage of having Pegasus at his disposal. The magic horse, born near the sources of Ocean of Medusa and Poseidon at the moment when Perseus cut off Medusa's head, jumped out of her neck,¹⁰ or perhaps lap, and since then carried Zeus's thunderbolts. He also served Apollo and Perseus when the latter liberated Andromedę. Still, the relationship of Bellerophon with Pegasus was not long-lasting; thanks to the winged horse he managed to defeat the Solymians and Amazons, but finally, trying to reach the peak of Olympus and join the gods, he was thrown down off Pegasus' back and that was the end of his good luck¹¹. According to Kubiak, Pegasus "must have run along the roads of Asia Minor before the arrival of Hellenes,"¹² since the origin and meaning of its name is ambiguous. The suffix *asos* is pre-Greek, while the Greek noun *pege*, meaning "spring," may be pre-Greek, too, and only by accident related the winged horse to the spring water and Muses dancing at the "Horse's Spring" (*Hippocrene*). This doubt is substantiated by the relationship of Bellerophon with Pegasus, mentioned already by Hesiod in *Theogonia*, while traditional sources make reference to the horse in the history of Perseus.¹³ The connection of Pegasus with springs and the Muses' grove is most important for the semantics of its name, since it makes the mythic animal recognizable on the painted vases as a creature close to the artists – a soaring horse. Its relations with poets have been confirmed by the water from the Hippocrene spring which would certainly bring poetic inspiration. Władysław Kopaliński stresses that Pegasus quite early became one of the favorite motifs of Greek poets and artists – the horse turned into a hero of legends, particularly often those shown on the proto-Corinthian vases and Corinthian coins.¹⁴ As a steed praised for taking poets to the realm of inspiration, it has appeared, according to an encyclopedia of antique culture, as late as in the early modern times.¹⁵

Access to myths through which we may notice a new quality, not only the represented, but also expressed in Gustowska's achievement, allows us to discover a new order in art¹⁶

¹⁰ Cf. *Mała encyklopedia kultury antycznej*. [Encyclopedia of Antique Culture], Warsaw, 1968, p. 668.

¹¹ Cf. Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury* [Dictionary of Myths and Traditions of Culture]. Warsaw, 1985, p. 846.

¹² Kubiak, p. 438.

¹³ Kubiak, pp. 437-438.

¹⁴ Kopaliński, p. 846.

¹⁵ *Mała encyklopedia kultury antycznej*, p. 668.

¹⁶ At this point I would like to make a reference to an essay by Ewa Rewers which was a source of my inspiration as I was working on the present text. Writes Rewers: "I am interested in that form of the presence of myth in the contemporary philosophy of culture which was developed by Kant commenting

– a new "aesthetic sense."¹⁷ Who knows, if what really matters here is not a kind of "motoric activation" within art – as a transfer to the qualities imposing motoric complexity, participation in the myth of Chimera. (By the same token, this "activation" is no longer to be found in the mythic origin of winged Pegasus, the beauty of Muses, pleasure, and relief drawn from the gentle sounds of the spring.) The search for a new power (and expectations which impose a kind of imaginatively active and mentally moving response) qualitatively determines a burden which is difficult to move in a particular direction, knotted and overwhelming with the consciousness of appearances and the superficiality of desired changes. The complexity of Chimera's power does not yield to clear visions, winged enthusiasm as a possible route of escape, and appearances of fruitful transformations – illusively transcending flights of fancy. In the complexity imposed on Chimera's condition, but also in active experiencing of the world, allowing for creative revisions of models designed long ago and based on traditional artistic idioms, there may be a qualitatively specified "aesthetic sense." Chimera may be its expressive representation.

To justify the epistemological purposefulness of that move, one may refer to a text written quite a long time ago, whose author¹⁸ claims (implicitly, though ostentatiously) that art has been directed in its development not by the Muses, but by Chimera. Chimera is a draft animal – in order to grasp the meaning of the creative invasion of the avant-garde (from futurism through dadaism, surrealism, and cubism), one must penetrate the enormous complexity of what is to come, i.e. by proper reading of the artistic programs and manifestoes brimming with illegible, yet significant emotions – *das Welterlebnis* – find the propeller of that complexity in the domain of economic transformations, with all the collateral processes: rapid industrialization, World War I, the inflation of 1922, and the crash of 1929. Since the

on the story of Job, Kierkegaard returning to the story of Abraham, Nietzsche writing about Dionysos as the father of tragedy, and Serres, claiming that if was so, Hermes should be considered the father of comedy, etc. ... To be more precise, I would like to focus on the cases when various philosophical languages make use of the myths of our culture when they search for new epistemological solutions reaching beyond purely conceptual knowledge, or wish to put certain cognitive procedures in commonly understandable terms. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the incorporation of myths in contemporary interpretive discourses not only influences the cognitive procedures, but also reveals new, hitherto unknown and unavailable uses of myths. What is more, it should be shown that by revealing contradictions inherent in myths, we may produce their aporetic interpretations." "Sandaly Hermesa – zwierciadło Narcyza, czyli o zgodzie na aporetyczna obecność mitu we współczesnej filozofii" [Hermes' Sandals, Narcissus' Mirror or, On the Assent to the Aporotic Presence of Myth in Contemporary Philosophy] in: Zbigniew Drozdowicz (ed). *Mity. Historia i struktura mistyfikacji* [Myths. The History and Structure of Mystification]. Poznań, 1997, p. 30.

¹⁷ "The problem of sense in the painter's work – just as, in fact, in any other work of art – may be considered in a double manner, depending on a narrow or broad understanding of the work's sense," writes Władysław Stróżewski, then concentrating on a question related to the structural aspect of the artistic fact: "Why so?" He proposes to understand the question of the qualitative properties of the work of art not in causal, but in teleological terms so that a broader understanding of sense overlaps with our authentic curiosity which connects us to the work and brings us close to it. He claims: "We take an ergocentric attitude and in the work itself we look for the reasons why, in all its analyzable 'dimensions', it is such as it is, and not different." I would like to add that in a footnote to the above quoted fragment Stróżewski notes something **that** may support my own interest in the "chimeric" myth in Gustowska's art He writes: "This question does not have to be limited to the work of art; in its radical variant, it may refer to art as such or art in general." "Płaszczyzny sensu w dziele malarskim" [Levels of Sense in the Painter's Work] in: *Wokół piękna* [On Beauty]. Cracow, 2002, pp. 257-258.

¹⁸ Jerzy Stempowski, *Chimera jako zwierzę pociągowe* [Chimera as a Draft Animal]. Warsaw, 1988. The essay was actually written in 1933.

moment when the "archangel's trumpet" sounded over Wall Street, the avant-garde art – "proceedistic," as Jerzy Stempowski preferred to call it – foregrounding its formal and theoretical aspects and supported by the philosophical ideas of Bergson and the visions of Breton and Marinetti, found itself in the hurricane's eye, competing with the revival of conservatism in fiction and the original works by Papini, Celine, and Malraux. Stempowski writes that "today, just as in the past, literature is a great melting pot in which new criteria, judgments, hierarchies of values, and tastes are forged in the fire of emotional reactions. If the economist, interested in the aftermath of those judgments and tastes, happens to be an attentive reader, he may find as much fascinating material in the poems of the youngest proceedists as in the naturalist novel."¹⁹

This is a progressing process that cannot be stopped, irrational in its course, so that the "advocates and amateurs of the extremist muse"²⁰ incorporate all art, including the avant-garde, into the socially relevant tradition, propagated and, I would say, useful "for the faithful." The socio-economic conditions influence the functioning of art to such an extent that whatever determined their origin and development is non-autonomous as an entity – in its "accidental" complexity it can be very far from the grace and individual beauty of the muses who have their recognized loci and manners of exposition, accepted costumes, and arrangements of gestures, movements, and looks. Consequently, chimera can introduce new art, although not by some specific rupture, but in the harmonious development of the arts which has not been violated or broken. Who knows – maybe it is chimera which is that draft animal, long ignored to the advantage of the muses, even when it fulfilled difficult tasks typical of the periods of transformation. Stempowski realized that in the accelerated "course of history" and the rapidity of changes one must not disregard the power of chimera, invariably concentrating on the appearances connected with the traditional roles of the muses.

Drawing from Stempowski's diagnosis of the causative force of chimera, I was reinforced in my effort by the reflection of Andrzej Szczeklik, also referring to Stempowski's words. Szczeklik realizes that even though much time must pass before fantasists receive a confirmation of their belief that chimera is a draft animal, he himself, as a physician, focuses his attention on the power of that mutant wearing the "cap of invisibility."²¹ It seems that since the art of today is particularly chimerical, profound reflection on the relationship between Chimera and Pegasus may benefit quite a lot once we have realized the eternal character of such perturbations, as well as the fact that we can exploit (and with good results) the power inherent in chimera. And chimera comes, it must have always been with us whatever our mind has been preoccupied with for centuries and millennia...

A microbe as a vaccine not only has influence on the development of immunology, but also on the hopes and expectations related to the new, chimera-inspired art. Relatively recent development of immunology, dating back only to Jenner and Pasteur, has led man as a species to an undoubtful victory – total eradication of smallpox in the 1980s, moreover, it has brought hope stemming from the results of genetic manipulations which can be used as medicine. It is quite interesting, Szczeklik remarks, that the spirit of tuberculosis started

¹⁹ Stempowski, p. 195.

²⁰ Stempowski, p. 197.

²¹ Andrzej Szczeklik, "Chimera," in : *Katharsis. O uzdrowicielskiej mocy natury i sztuki* [Katharsis. On the Healing Power of Nature and Art]. Cracow, 2002, p. 121.

retreating; as it were, by itself about thirty years before streptomycin²² was invented, and the causes of that retreat cannot be explained, since they remain virtually unknown. Who knows, then – maybe the nature of chimera, a hybrid created contrary to natural laws, has something really essential to offer. Chimera – and the "latent memory of pandemia, repressed deeply within us. Black death, leprosy, smallpox, tuberculosis, and the Spanish influenza [which] marked human history"²³ – may become a perfect medicine, to be found in nature and art.²⁴

Such a chimerical hybrid growing in art and the "Spanish flue," also based on chimera, derive from genetic mutations whose power is always overwhelming and, if left outside the system, positively devastating.²⁵ A result of that clash may be – and sometimes is – a new quality, a new kind of the creative disposition of man, penetrating into the areas which used to be – before the catastrophic "chimerical" changes – inaccessible to us. One might say that such potential was inherent in art since time immemorial, and not so much as an eschatological premonition, but as a tension triggering desperate searches which discovered at least some fragmented signals, such as the need for love, the sanctity of life, tender joy, inedible tastes, limitless smells, deliberately tender touches... And this is precisely the object of Gustowska's art.

This line of reasoning may be corroborated by the remarks of Władysław Stróżewski on the "integral sense" which is in many ways supported by the "aesthetic sense," attributed by the philosopher to "beauty." After all, chimera is entitled to be beautiful. Beauty may be chimerical and perhaps for that reason also more attractive. Still, we should wonder to what extent the "aesthetic sense" takes advantage of all the other senses of the work ruled by chimera. Can we really think about "ennobling, splendor, and dignity," referred to by Stróżewski, with which the chimerical art should be suffused? If we make one last reference to his argument, we may say that "we will see it quite easily, once we have realized that the climax of the aesthetic value is beauty – a value which is so dazzling and so difficult to explain. It is beauty that we have in mind in the first place. There is the beauty of color, form, expression, aspect, and object. There is the beauty of a part and of the whole. There is the beauty of metaphysical depth and holiness. Wherever beauty appears, there, in a mysterious way, the sense with which' it is connected becomes more intense. Pervading the whole of the work – all its strata and aspects – beauty not only motivates its value, but also the ultimate sense of its being."²⁶

²² Szczeklik, p. 120.

²³ Szczeklik, p. 118.

²⁴ I do not think that a reference to the analyses of Andrzej Bronk is amiss at this point. The continuators of various traditions of one and the same myth have been "used" in the present essay without motivating the passage from art to scholarship, from the humanistic and scholarly culture. Bronk writes about it, alluding to such motifs in the reflection of Gadamer: "Gadamer wants to build bridges between philosophy and sciences, the natural sciences and humanities, pointing in them to the same ontic structure of understanding in the form of historicity, language, pre-judgments, and circularity characteristic of all types of knowledge/understanding." "Filozoficzna hermeneutyka i kategoria obiektywności" [Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Category of Objectivity," in: Andrzej Przyłębski (ed.) *Uniwersalny wymiar hermeneutyki* [The Universal Dimension of Hermeneutics], Poznań, 1997, p. 20.

²⁵ Szczeklik refers to a detailed analysis of the virus of Spanish influenza, carried out as late as in 2001 (the virus has been found in the corpse of an Inuit woman, preserved in the ice of Alaska). In 1918 that virus, which in a short period of time killed more people than World War I, turned out to be a hybrid of swine influenza with human influenza. Cf. Szczeklik, p. 121.

²⁶ Stróżewski, p. 268.