

Selected passage from **Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, *The Crucified. Contemporary Passion plays in Poland* (*Ukrzyżowani. Współczesne misteria męki Pańskiej w Polsce*)**  
Monografie FNP, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń 2013

### *Communitas*

The experience of community is one of the non-verbalised feelings evoked in religious believers by their participation in Passion plays. In my opinion, this feeling does not get verbalised not because it is inexpressible, but because of its obviousness in the perception of the participants. Obscure allusions and utterances caught in passing indicate that during a play “there is a togetherness”, that “we all experience this, we pray together” and that “everyone feels this equally strongly”. This feeling of unity based on sacramental bond constitutes a basis for experiencing a Passion play; it was described by Taylor (2002: 23) precisely as the platform for a religious experience. In the case of Passion plays, the feeling of sacramental bond is further reinforced by the participants’ being in the same space; there, the perception of community is exceptionally strongly associated with physical presence. Spectators stand or walk in a crowd, pressed against one another, watch the unfolding events together, together they pass from scene to scene, they rub shoulders and stamp on one another’s feet. To put it most simply: everyone feels physically and spiritually not alone.

The communal aspect of a religious experience was presented by Spickard (1991) in the manner which seems most interesting to me. He distinguished three ways of understanding the social character of a religious experience. All three may occur concurrently and during a Passion play they indeed do; this does not mean, however, that their contribution to the interpretation of this phenomenon is equal. Firstly, religious ceremonies usually involve a community and this fact is essential to the success of the whole enterprise; this already reveals the social, and hence communal dimension of the experience. Secondly, rituals utilise elements of a world-view which is shared by the group. Thirdly, which to me is the most interesting point in Spickard’s conception, during rituals the participants attune themselves to one another, to coalesce into a unity: not only with their co-participants, but also with those who participated in such ceremonies in the past (1991: 202). This experience of “inner time”, if I understand Spickard’s intentions correctly, goes beyond the course of history and unites those living now with those who lived in the past in one community of experiencing (1991: 196–197). Spickard borrowed the idea of attuning from Alfred Schutz’s observations concerning involvement in music concerts: that participants in the event begin to “get the vibe”, they are “on the same wavelength”. Applied to Passion plays, this concept seems rather appropriate. Standing (much more rarely sitting) or walking arm in arm, the participants attune

themselves to the course of the event and begin to participate in it TOGETHER. This process is noticed by the participants themselves, as confirmed by the above-quoted statements that it is enough to just come to a Passion play; the play itself forces one to experience strong feelings.

Spickard's idea is to a certain extent parallel to Turner's conception of *communitas*, especially the existential *communitas*, which he also calls the spontaneous one (Turner 1974: 169; 1969: 128-130). Turner's *communitas* is a moment of harmony and community, an experience of togetherness and of exclusion from mundanity that emerges chiefly at the times of contact with the *sacrum*, in liminal situations; it is also the feeling of religious community. In Turner's thinking, this conception has a double function, although this is not stated explicitly by the author, as if he had assumed that both properties of *communitas* occur together. Thus, on the one hand, it involves a type of a communal religious experience: being together in the face of holiness; on the other it presents social relations: "essentially, *communitas* is a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals" (Turner 1969: 131). The majority of scholars, in keeping with Turner's intention in describing *communitas* as such, understands it mainly as a type of a bond evolving in the anti-structure, in a liminal situation. As Turner himself puts it, "*communitas* is spontaneous, immediate, concrete – it is not shaped by norms, it is not institutionalized, it is not abstract" (Turner 1974: 274). Descriptions of *communitas* as a type of a social relationship are prevalent in Turner's text; yet some references make it possible to infer that he saw *communitas* as a type of an experience as well (1974a: 202-203, 258).

I am convinced that the concept of *communitas* as a feature of a religious experience, describing a *sui generis* rapture or a feeling of connection with all the other participants in the event, contributes far more to the analysis of religious phenomena than the attempt to distinguish the anti-structure. Many attempts to demonstrate that *communitas*, understood as a real connection between participants in a religious event, never occurs in a "pure state" have been made (see Eade, Sallnow 1991: 3–9; Bowie 2006: 239–241). Yet the perception of *communitas* as a type of experience invalidates some of the criticism. This category describes the already-mentioned element of the communality of experience, an element which is crucial in my research: although a religious experience unfolds inside the individual believer, it also occurs in a relationship with other believers: it occurs within the Church. Also, although *communitas* not necessarily has to enfold all those present, it may constitute one of the many features of an experience. I would risk the opinion that, to the participants in Passion plays, it is actually the fundamental experience, which provides the framework for other, complementary feelings or constitutes a background to them.

I shall open my description of *communitas* with a truism: without the presence of other people, whose behaviour is similar, who perform the same gestures and pronounce the same words of prayer, participation in a Passion play would never achieve such rank; it would not be an

exceptional event; the element of mystery would be absent from the performance. Catholic religious practice occurs mostly in a group; a Passion play is not an exception. My interviewees found the presence of others at a Passion play natural and necessary in order to feel that it was a religious experience. Not everyone found the encircling, pressing crowd pleasant, of course, but it was generally accepted that at a Passion play, the crowd is a right thing to have.

In his critique of Turner's *communitas*, Deflem wrote that it was "more a matter of faith than fact" (1991: 19). I wholeheartedly agree, but I do not see this as a cause for complaint. Reality, including the reality of Passion plays, being what it is, a want of complete harmony is self-evident. Yet participants of Easter performances – those who enter into the spirit of the event – do have the feeling of a bond with others; they believe in this connection like Turner believed in it (at least so I think) and it constitutes an extremely important aspect of their experience. Perhaps this bond is not as ideal and unsullied as Turner wanted it to be; but since many participants of Passion plays experience it and take part in the performance through it, this seems to be beside the point.

Turner relates the concept of *communitas* to the feelings of pilgrims; the need evinced by participants of Easter plays to experience religious events communally may spring from a similar source. The overwhelming majority of them is thoroughly familiar with the cultural scenario of a pilgrimage, if not directly then from tales told by others. As a root paradigm, that is behaviour pattern touching upon fundamental values that are perceived consciously but also transcend awareness to the level of intuition (Turner 1974: 63–65), pilgrimage is very strongly rooted in Christianity (Turner, Turner 1978: 9). A root paradigm is associated with *communitas* also by referring to fundamental values that lie at the base of both one and the other (Turner 1974: 68). Feelings experienced during pilgrimages, just like during Passion plays, may perhaps refer to "sacramental bond", but also, which in the case of Passion plays is significant, to one's presence, shared with fellow participants, in a holy or sacred place. The root paradigm of a pilgrimage, which after all does refer to the Way of the Cross – the last road walked by Christ and His companions – at least partially sets the framework for experiencing Passion plays in the categories of *communitas*: the community accompanying Christ to the place of His death.

Both Turner and Spickard emphasise that participation in Easter performances is distinguished by the phenomenon of exceeding the time framework and entering a special time, a non-time, in which the present time fuses with the past. "*Communitas* is almost always thought of or portrayed by actors as a timeless condition, an eternal now, as 'a moment in and out of time', or as a state to which the structural view of time is not applicable" (Turner 1974: 238). Actualisation of Passion plays, which I described in the previous section of this study, occurs precisely on the basis of a passage into an "inner time", to use Spickard's phrase: the time shared by the crowd gathered at the play and by the figures from the past. It is a time in which Christ and the saints appear: not only

those on stage, but also the real ones, evoked by the believers' experience (see Eichstaedt 1998: 52–53). Eternity creeps into a present-time experience.

It was at Kalwaria Paławska that I myself experienced *communitas* most wholly, perhaps because it was there that I most strongly felt the physical presence of other people. The audience walks from scene to scene together, as a crowd. It is impossible to choose a different route or take a shortcut. Configuration of the area puts a stop to photographers' (and ethnologists') eagerness to be the first at the next scene; this is a lesson in professional humility. The nearness of people at Kalwaria Paławska is actually annoying; it is impossible to move without touching or even jostling someone. The crowd behaves like a living, undulating organism; it moves forward without breaking (Fig. 12). A thick snake of people crawls with difficulty first down the mountain, then up, fused in a peculiar unity. Having torn one's gaze from the actors or the path, one inevitably meets someone else's eyes to catch a shadow of a smile, a trace of mutual understanding: "We both know what this is about". In my perception, it is this very understanding – an understanding that, in this particular case, we are walking towards God together – that institutes *communitas*.

My feelings at Kalwaria Wejherowska were diametrically different. I expected them to be similar to those I experienced at Kalwaria Paławska (one Way of the Cross cannot be that much different from another, right?), but the reality was very far from the expectations. The crowd at Kalwaria Wejherowska did pray together all the way, but it never created a similarly dense, physical and hence, I would risk saying, a mental whole. People raced one another, trampling the beech copse surrounding the chapels; not everybody walked at a sedate pace along the designated path, some ran along the "hard shoulder" to arrive at the next chapel as fast as possible (Fig. 28). So did I. In order to reach the Crucifixion place and get a "good" place right at the barrier, I even ignored one scene. I did not share in the feeling of *communitas*; but others did. This may have been because I do not feel myself a member of "sacramental bond", or because, not being as attuned to the location as other participants of that Passion play, I was unable to enter the "inner time" encompassing also the participants of many other Way of the Cross events, or finally because I could not reconcile the image of people running up and down the Calvary hills with the vision of harmony and unity so suggestively described by Turner as an element of *communitas*. Perhaps this is exactly where the error lies, not only mine, but also that of Turner's critics: we seek the actuation of *communitas* in reality, whereas it most probably can be found only in the feelings of those who experience it. In other words, *communitas* does not describe external reality, but only a feature of an experience. Having experienced the Passion play at Kalwaria Wejherowska, I am convinced that the believers experience unity, harmony and a feeling of sharing the frame of reference even in seemingly inauspicious circumstances. Thus, *communitas* still remains "more matter of faith than fact".

After all, how can we soberly speak of unity when at each performance someone can be seen

behaving in an astoundingly jarring way: a gentleman walking his dog behind the Golgotha, unheeding that his dog is squatting in the grass just as the Crucifixion unfolds; a couple more involved with each other than with the action on the scene; someone swearing or regretfully crumpling a just-finished beer can. Others find this annoying; it interferes with their participation in the event – but not enough to make experiencing the mystery impossible. Such details threaten the harmony of reality, but do not hinder the process of experiencing *communitas*.

I am only sorry that yesterday at the performance I bumped into quite a few people who came as if to an ordinary theatre show. Swearwords and suchlike, this was their attitude. But I say that with such a huge performance there will always be a handful of those who consider this a..., I met a friend of mine who was standing at the back and he emptied a bottle, because this was the only opportunity for it, but well... during such a show, these things, these situations will inevitably happen.

(actor: a soldier, Poznań)

There are also those who by choice pass from the “inner time” into the present one, causing the embarrassment, or worse, in those who had stayed in that other time dimension.

It was there, I think, at my station. A bloke, in a cap like so, his mobile rings and I hear him going, right there, in the middle: no, I am in Wejherowo, in Wejherowo! Honestly, this is the Way of the Cross, and he keeps talking. Kneeling like everyone else, he still keeps talking.

(actor: Christ, Wejherowo)

I have noticed myself, that everything here in Kalwaria..., so, a bus arrives, a group of people in fancy dress comes out, they begin shouting something and there are smiles, comments, but it very rarely happens that, later, at the Crucifixion, that..., when you look at people, they are very absorbed, and perhaps very emotional too, and unfortunately some people focus so hard and want to experience this so much that they immediately want to evangelise someone, to pass it on, so they pull out their mobiles and start filming or they call their mum. Sebastian told me that today: Listen, Mum, what nice music they’re playing.

(director, Wejherowo)

The power of *communitas* fluctuates during the performance as well. At some moments the perception of religious community grows stronger. One of such culmination points is the already-mentioned sharing of the Last Supper bread by the participants. This is how the union among the

crowd gathered at the performance is reinforced at Poznań and Fordon.

I think that another important moment was... yes, when we were sharing bread.

(actress: Veronica, Poznań)

Passing the loaves from hand to hand, the unavoidable contact with other participants in the event, the requirement of finding a way to deal with their physical presence, but also a feeling of a strange (at least to me) bond with the New Testament characters eating the Last Supper constitute the culmination of *communitas*. This moment engenders a feeling of having touched something primeval and fundamental to religion. The root paradigm engrosses wholly.

### *Sensualism*

Describing the condition of contemporary religiosity, Zowczak noticed that currently sensualism is “holding out; virtually blossoming” (2008: 41)<sup>1</sup>. Here, I shall be analysing sensualism as a feature of religiosity, which in the case of Passion plays is concurrently a feature of a religious experience, because it has an effect on the manner of experiencing the performances. This concept has had a long but uneasy career in the study of Polish religiosity. Czarnowski considered it a “naïve” category, typical to the religiosity of Polish peasantry and barring said peasantry from the “high” practice of religion (Czarnowski 1958: 89–94; see: Kasprzak 1999: 38; Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 227–228). The concept of sensualism came to be persistently associated with magic ritual practices, although many authors have shown that the sensualistic dimension of religious practices has a totally different significance; the Orthodox folk cult of the icons is an example here (Zowczak 2000: 31–39; Lubańska 2007: 14–17). What is more, currently scholars abandon the conception that sensualism is a feature of only folk religiosity, while the religious culture of the elites is devoid of it. They also attempt to demonstrate that the relationship between the sacrum and its representation, as assumed in the conception of sensualism, is not based on the “naïveté” of the believers at all. Reflections pertaining to this concept are dominated by indistinguishableness, identification of *signans* and *signatum* in the perception of the believers, which is a feature of sensualism described by Czarnowski (1958: 92) and later repeated by Tokarska-Bakir (2000: 226–234). Yet Lubańska, referring to the study of Orthodox Christianity, writes that the category of “indistinguishableness” is not always sufficient to determine the sensualistic aspect of religiosity (2007: 17). I need only to repeat her conclusion in reference to my study of participation in Easter plays.

Considerably redefined by scholars (see Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 56; Zowczak 2000: 31–39),

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1 All translations from Polish-language texts have been made solely for the purpose of the current work.

sensualism was transformed from a feature deforming the image of “noble” religiosity to its aspect on a par with others.<sup>2</sup> Tokarska-Bakir’s argumentation in support of sensualism is partially conducted on the basis of material pertaining to the Passion play at Kalwaria Zebrzydowska and on data gathered from research at Kalwaria Pałacowska (not pertaining to the Passion play there, however), which to me makes her interpretation both interesting and difficult to accept in its entirety without making an attempt at confronting it with my own research.

According to Tokarska-Bakir, the already-mentioned indistinguishableness provides the foundation for experiencing sanctity in the categories of sensualism: to her, non-distinguishing is a principle of a religious experience (2000: 55). Indistinguishableness is “an onto-epistemological circumstance (since it pertains to behaviour as much as to the understanding of and image, language, writing etc.), due to which, firstly, presentation of what is shown in an image occurs (also, respectively, in a word – of its meaning, in a text and writing – of the world presented therein); secondly, it is a disposition which produces in the viewer or reader an inclination to their greater or lesser identification” (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 56).

Tokarska-Bakir’s crowning example of indistinguishableness are the statements of performers enacting characters in the Passion play. I have already commented upon this passage from her *Obraz osobliwy*, emphasising that I assume the source of the actors’ religious experiences to lie elsewhere and that I consider the application of the category of indistinguishableness to their statements to be a not entirely justified interpretation. The current section of my study pertains only to the spectators, however, and it is on their experiences that I am going to focus.

Passion plays as a representation of the Passion of Christ might seem to be a virtually perfect example of the sensualistic attitude. Identification of the settings with Jerusalem and the actors with biblical or apocryphal characters should proceed almost naturally, on a hey presto! basis. At this point, following Tokarska-Bakir, I would be able to quote statements which would confirm (misleadingly, in my opinion) the occurrence of indistinguishableness in Passion plays. According to the above assumptions, Passion plays transport their participants to the real Jerusalem (see Eichstaedt 1999: 219). Experiencing this process is partially identical with experiencing a *communitas* that transcends time and space.

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2 Only the assertion made by Natalia Kasprzak, who emphatically contrasts sensualism to mysticism and reduces folk-type and folk religiosity to sensualistic (perhaps even animistic?) religiosity, raises some doubts: “The emergence of sacrum in a folk-type culture cannot occur otherwise than through a concrete phenomenon (THING, ANIMAL [underline K. B.-O.]), because sensual awareness is ruled by this principle of translating the general into the individual and the spiritual into the corporeal. Czarnowski was correct in assuming that Polish folk religiosity is characterised by a virtual absence of any tendencies towards mysticism, because they were replaced by an entire gamut of purely sensual reactions. It is interesting whether the roots of this phenomenon lie predominantly in the Baroque religiosity and the actions of the Jesuits or whether, independently from the Baroque heritage, it is typical to Polish mentality, the degree of sensitivity, the Polish psyche” (1999: 42). I assume, however, that Kasprzak’s opinion regarding the shortcomings of sensualism as a feature of religious attitude constitutes an exception. I cite it because her deliberations on the topic of sensualism are based on research at Kalwaria Pałacowska, where I have not observed any signs of such a “mentality” among the village residents.

It was like Gethsemane, and Lord Jesus in that Gethsemane and the judgement of Pilate, one experienced this inside, one felt like being in Jerusalem. And now those youngsters come and don't even look. Only we are still interested and capable of experiencing it.

(spectator/former actor: Jesus, Zawoja Przysłop)

And I am not very interested in those structures [constructed settings], because here it all happens so..., in such amok, all go crazy, everything works, so afterwards when this crowd seizes this Jesus and runs on, this is catching. One gets transported into that time, that place.

(scenographer, Poznań)

I see him [the actor playing Christ] differently, here we stand with our paws in our pockets and chat about silly things, and then he gets dressed, when he starts going on. The same with all the others. For instance those soldiers, those Romans, they are not the same boys wearing jackets, when they dress up it just is, you feel it totally differently, because you willy-nilly get transported into that time.

(security guard, Poznań)

According to Tokarska-Bakir, indistinguishableness is accompanied by an "isolation of perception", as a result of which real events, although perceived, get erased from the perception framework and the perception is filtered through indistinguishableness. Tokarska-Bakir gives the example of a woman warding off a thunderstorm with the death-candle (*gromnica*), who commented upon her attempt as follows: "Well, maybe it's not stopping [raining], but I see it stopping" (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 92). I have already stated that the actors performing in Passion plays are very aware of their own "distinguishableness" from the characters they enact. I maintain the same in reference to the spectators and their manner of experiencing Passion plays: they definitely do not undergo any "awareness isolation". Yet, if so, the question arises what the above statements actually indicate.

In my opinion, these statements confirm that the mystery of the Passion is experienced through sensualism, but they also indicate that this sensualism is based on a different principle than indistinguishableness suggested by Tokarska-Bakir. Perhaps contemporary religiosity, which is relatively distant from the type she described, requires different interpretative workshop. Materials which she and I present are very similar; what has changed is obviously the *Zeitgeist*, which seems to have transformed not only the forms of religious practices, but also the principle of experiencing them. In both cases the operative principle is sensualism; yet I would seek its foundations elsewhere than Tokarska-Bakir, although I agree with her that there is a sensualistic aspect to experiencing

Passion plays.

Words ‘as if’, ‘like’ etc. appear both in the statements of my interviewees and in those quoted by Tokarska-Bakir. She unequivocally identifies them as markers of indistinguishableness (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 83). Myself, I would be more willing to see them as markers of what Turner describes as the subjunctive mood<sup>3</sup> which is a feature of liminality (1984: 20-21). According to Turner, performances are “performed in privileged spaces and times, set off from the periods and arenas reserved for work, food and sleep” (Turner 1986b: 25). Transition inscribed into the performance is important (Carlson 1996: 21). The performance constitutes a special moment, set apart from the ordinary course of life and retaining all the characteristics of a transitional period; hence it has liminal features. In the case of Passion plays, liminality is additionally reinforced by the fact of the believers’ approaching the sphere of the sacrum: the potential transposition to long-ago Jerusalem. Turner ascribed the concept of liminality to traditional societies and coined the term ‘liminoidality’ (embracing events detached from mundaneness) to refer to modern industrialised culture. Nevertheless, according to his theory, performances associated with liminoidal time also possess that potential for change (Carlson 1996: 23). “Cultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting ‘designs for living’” (Turner 1986b: 24). Liminality of an event offers a string of possibilities; it constitutes an inexhaustible potential. Turner compares this feature to subjunctive mood. As this mood expresses not genuine facts, but wishes, desires and potentialities, so liminality diverges from what is customary or “natural” to express what is possible (Turner 1986b: 25; 1984: 21). In this way, liminality opens a space for the operation of performativity, which in its own way actualises possibilities contained in the subjunctive mood.

In my opinion, words ‘as if’, ‘like’ etc. found in the statements are indicators of liminality and markers of the subjunctive mood which describes the experiencing of it. Liminality is here understood as the sphere reserved for sanctity, located outside the earthly time and space. When described as a manner of experiencing, the subjunctive mood, which expresses wishes, feelings and possibilities, seems to me to describe the nature of sensualism more adequately than indistinguishableness. Each participant in a Passion play is aware that he or she is not in Jerusalem of nearly two thousand years ago, but in Poznań, Fordon or Kalwaria Paławska. Yet the experience of the Passion play permits them to feel AS IF they were there. Liminality of the performance makes it possible to experience the “real” Jerusalem while retaining the awareness that the time and

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3 Subjunctive mood has no direct counterpart in the Polish language; like in Latin, its role is fulfilled by the conditional mood (*coniunctivus*) qualified by appropriate conjunctions, e.g. *jakby, jak gdyby* (= as if).

space have stayed the same. It is thus the fulfilment of a wish to be there.

And watching this play, one took it in with faith. One felt it, it seemed real. That one was simply seeing the Passion of Lord Jesus, this Lord Jesus, as if this was, well, reality, as if one was taking part in it, one went home and afterwards could not sleep, thinking about this, about that.

(spectators/former actors: Claudia and Judas, Zawoja Przysłop)

This here is like the Crucifixion, because when all that crucifixion is being played out, some women, even young ones, tears in their eyes and they cry. As if it was real. It is sad, this is feigned, reenacting, but it draws people in.

(actor: centurion, Kalwaria Paławska)

What is important is, again, the potential (a feature of the subjunctive mood) of experiencing the Passion play “as if it was real”, not the perception of it as real. Participants are convinced that their emotions are the same as those experienced by the people who really accompanied Christ on His last way. Liminality of the Passion play is enough for them to feel this way; they do not need to identify the reenactment with the original or to see Jesus and the saints in the actors (in fact, as much the actors as the other participants firmly avoid this attitude). This, of course, does not mean that there is no connection between the original and its image in a Passion play; neither does it mean that the power of the performance springs from elsewhere than the events which occurred in Jerusalem two thousand years ago, or that the participants do not see Passion plays as a faithful rendering of Christ’s last days on earth. The play is nevertheless “only” a representation, although, by permitting the participants to get transported into the liminal sphere, it offers a genuineness of emotions experienced “as if one was taking part in it”.

It is also possible that the differences between Tokarska-Bakir’s perspective and mine spring not only from the *Zeitgeist*, but also from our interviewees’ divergent religious sensitivities. Those to whom she happened to talk may indeed have based their sensualistic experiences on indistinguishableness. The sensualism of my interviewees, however, seems to be based on features of the subjunctive mood typical to liminality. Yet, not knowing the context of Tokarska-Bakir’s research (or rather Datko’s one which she quotes), I find it hard to ascertain whether the difference lies in his interviewees’ attitude to religion or in the interpretation. Actually, in the light of my own research, I would nevertheless be willing to interpret context-less statements quoted by Tokarska-Bakir in the categories of the subjunctive mood, which permits to retain the awareness of the “here and now” and to experience the “there and then”, rather than of indistinguishableness. Perhaps a

difference in assumptions is the decisive factor here: after all, Tokarska-Bakir construes her “folk-type religiosity” by attempting to discover in contemporary religion forms of sensitivity ascribed to 19<sup>th</sup>-century religiosity. She remains faithful to the object of study defined by researchers of folk religiosity: those are, as she herself wrote, sources “typical to the traditionally perceived ‘religious culture of Polish peasantry’” (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 24). I, in turn, attempt to adjust interpretative tools to the image of religiosity demonstrated to me by present-day participants in Passion plays.

In my research, indistinguishableness has emerged only in the “mythical” sphere, in my interviewees’ idealised manner of experiencing Passion plays, in tales which I have called “legends of Passion plays”. Indistinguishableness appeared there as an ideal of reception, but it did not constitute the character of the experience attained by my interviewees at Passion plays they attended. I gave the name of “legends” to tales about Passion plays which appeared in almost every interview concerning a given play. Some of those tales refer to the idealised reception of the events, which is based precisely on indistinguishableness; interestingly, this type of “legends” has emerged in my research only in reference to Kalwaria Paławska.<sup>4</sup>

The “legendary” character of my interviewees’ statements relied on the fact that everyone spoke about some event, but nobody was able to say to whom it had happened or from where the interviewee had learnt about it. Very rarely someone would admit it was he (or she), but “once”, “a long time ago”, “not now”. An overwhelming majority of those “legends” refers to the participants’ attitude to negative characters, whose actions during the performance were supposed to truly hurt Christ. Although the spectators’ actions, as reported by the interviewees, seem widespread (Trexler 2003: 111), they are in fact extremely difficult to pinpoint.

Even when the Jews are walking and jostling Jesus, there is this granny who is outraged with those Jews: hey, stop pushing Him, leave Him be. Leave Lord Jesus in peace.

(actress: the Virgin Mary, Kalwaria Paławska)

Well, some may say, like one does at the marketplace: hey, it was you who scourged Lord Jesus, and jump him [that actor] somewhere. And the comments start, he scourged Jesus.

(organiser, a Franciscan, Kalwaria Paławska)

This feeling you usually get at the Crucifixion, there – less so, women look at us [the soldiers] askance on the way up, too. A friend of mine almost got cudgelled there.

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4 It is worth adding, however, that another event at Kalwaria Paławska, Funeral of the Virgin Mary, features many forms of behaviour of a sensual nature: touching the dress of the statue of the Virgin, drawing river water, which takes on healing properties at the moment the cortège bearing the figure crosses the river, etc. In contrast to a Passion play, however, the central figure at the Funeral is not a human actor, but the sacred and much revered statue of the Virgin Mary.

(actor: centurion, Kalwaria Paławska)

It once happened that some grannies recognised one soldier in Przemyśl and stated yelling at him why had he scourged Jesus, how could he have scourged Him.

(actor: a soldier, Kalwaria Paławska)

Everyone watches this. Some, you know, even say, you can't yell at God like this, and so on. How are you going to go to Communion!

(female spectator, Kalwaria Paławska)

It often happened that people recognise us, and those old ladies like to yell at us. Oh, I recognise you, sir, it was you who crucified Lord Jesus

(actor: soldier, Kalwaria Paławska)

The "old ladies", who most often appear in my interviewees' statements as those who experience a Passion play on the basis of indistinguishableness, are actually identified with this particular manner of experiencing.

They [old ladies] would like to approach as close as possible. This is it. To some of those people it is as if she touched the edge of that cloak she would be cured, it would bestow some grace. And so some walk and weep, yes, you see it.

(actor: soldier, Kalwaria Paławska)

There are those who very much want to touch this Christ, sure some feel the desire to do so.

(male spectator, Kalwaria Paławska)

The above statements, as well as my own participation in Passion plays, prompt me to relegate the principle of indistinguishableness to the sphere of ideal experiences, stereotypically ascribed to individuals who are more religious and concurrently characterised by a weaker cognitive efficiency, (said "old ladies"), and to interpret sensualism in the categories of liminality and the subjunctive mood associated with it. I am even more ready to do so since in my research I experienced a very sobering interview, from which I have learnt that one goes to a Passion play in order to

See how all this looks like, HOW SOMEBODY HAS IMAGINED IT.

(female spectator, Zawoja Przysłop)

So it is not always that one goes to a Passion play to see “how it really was”. The principle of the subjunctive mood is obviously not always in force; not always shall an experience of a sensualistic nature carry us through the performance.

A sensualistic experience may perhaps be the type of experience most fully embedded in the “living body” (see Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 267–270). Tokarska-Bakir focuses chiefly on the description of particular senses engaged in a sensualistic experience and their mutual relations (2000: 235–267). My own interest focuses on the entirety of sensual perception centred in physical presence at the performance of an Easter play. This presence constituted the basis of *communitas*; it also constitutes the basis of the feeling “as if one were there”.

Tokarska-Bakir points even to the Calvary itself, understood also as an architectural complex, as a place which, following the principle of indistinguishableness, is like Jerusalem (2000: 215–226). I would persevere in replacing indistinguishableness with the subjunctive mood, but this does not change the fact that Calvaries constitute a representation of Jerusalem; the believers actually perceive them as “Polish Jerusalems” – this reinforces the feeling “as if one were there”, as well as significantly influences participation in Passion plays played out at various Calvaries, that is “closer” to the original location than performances organised in towns, parishes or seminaries.

At Calvaries, the sensualistic experience may thus be based not only on watching the vents from the life of Christ at a place which symbolically (some would say: faithfully) represents Jerusalem, not only on one’s presence during His Passion, but also on WALKING the final way with Him (see Kuźma 2008: 292; Baraniecka-Olszewska 2011). To walk the entire Way of the Cross accompanying Jesus on His way to Golgotha constitutes the most powerful type of sensualistic experience – an experience totally fused with bodily practice and perceived precisely through action: walking beside Christ bearing His cross. The action, similarly to presence at a Passion play, compels one to experience.

But you cannot be there out of curiosity, you can come out of curiosity, but afterwards you cannot simply be there out of curiosity, just to see. Because you willy-nilly participate in it. You cannot say you just wanted to see the Passion play and you just looked. It is impossible. The first time I came out of curiosity, too, but then you’re in it, you walk this road beside Christ. This is no longer out of curiosity. [...] The point is to walk instead of standing in one place in the church.

(female spectator, Kalwaria Paławska)

Walking the Way of the Cross is associated with the true, most elevated participation in the

performance; climbing to Golgotha is involving and engrossing. Feelings start to be ruled by action.

Because if you want to participate in holy services... Easter is more than eating the festive breakfast. I see it this way. Instead of the adoration, this crowding to kiss the cross, well, you can watch a film. But like here, to participate directly, is a different thing. You perceive the performance differently. Not as a show, but as something that compels you to feel, this is different. Well, the first part [at the Cenacle] is..., well, it is more for just watching. The scene at Pilate's you just watch, too, but after, from Pilate's judgement on, the Way of the Cross begins, and in this you participate. You just walk and walk with this cross and this is the same Way of the Cross that happens every Friday in the Lent, and on Good Friday it is done differently, some do it in marketplaces now. So yes, it's rather like you are inside it. And these are different feelings.

(female spectator, Kalwaria Paławska)

Yet the believers find it important for the Way of the Cross to happen in the represented Jerusalem and for all the types of stimuli to act in concert. Even an alteration in the path followed as the events in the Passion play unfold changes the experience: it makes it less forceful.

So I say, when once they went along the road, it was not so captivating. Even my husband said they had somehow felt it hard to perform. Some... somehow you did not feel it. And now, when again they walk through the forest, and there are those chapels in the forest too, when they are climbing up, this is when you really feel it.

(female spectator, Kalwaria Paławska)

Sensualism is thus founded not only on contact with sanctity, but also on imitating it. It is based on the opportunity, provided by liminality, to behave in the same way Christ's companions did, to walk the road they walked – or, in the essence, to walk it with them in the non-time, even though walking only in a representation of those events and in a place representing the original one.

Even though I have slightly redefined it, sensualism still constitutes one of the main features of the religious attitude evinced by believers during Passion plays. In the case of these performances, both sensualism and *communitas* are founded on the liminality of events. They spring from a peculiar perception of time and space, which are isolated from mundanity. These two features of experiencing can be mutually permeating, because they are based on one and the same foundation.

Features of other kinds of experiences (or, in the language of my interlocutors, “feelings”)

elude the typicality defined by Abrahams (1986: 49), just as they elude conceptualisation in my attempts to broach this subject in conversations with other participants of Passion plays. I am of the opinion that features of experiencing Passion plays that have been mentioned here constitute no more than a basis for individual experiences, not necessarily strictly religious ones, which depend on personal life stories.

*Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz*

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