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**Teatr Przebudzeni / The Awakened Theatre.  
On some issues related to autonomy, subjectivity,  
self-realisation of people with intellectual disabilities**

**Teatr Przebudzeni/ The Awakened Theatre. Wokół autonomii,  
podmiotowości, samorealizacji osób z niepełnosprawnością  
intelektualną**

**Abstract:** In the presented work I undertake the action of theatre in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities as a tool/means to shape, empower and facilitate autonomy, subjectivity, self-realisation. I present Teatr Przebudzeni / The Awakened Theatre example of support of adult people with intellectual disabilities through activities at the interface of therapy and art, trying to reveal those contexts of the activities of directors and actors with intellectual disabilities that allow to consider theatre / theatrical work in building and/or strengthening autonomy, subjectivity, (one's own) identity, self-education, self-realisation. I will show selected examples of statements made by directors and actors of Teatr Przebudzeni / The Awakened Theatre, as well as by people who review the activities of the ensemble and its productions from the position of journalists or theatre critics. As for the methodological thread, I used a content analysis of found data/secondary data/sources showing the activities of Teatr Przebudzeni / The Awakened Theatre, with particular emphasis on the qualities associated with building and/or strengthening the attributes of subjectivity, independence/autonomy, self-realisation, self-education, which I also try to read in the context of

a particular plot, Mikhail Bakhtin's thought referring to the world upside down and the borderline between oneself and the other.

**Keywords:** actors with intellectual disability, therapy and art, autonomy, subjectivity, self-realisation.

### **Introducing the study area**

In the presented work I undertake the action of theatre in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities as a tool/means to shape, empower and facilitate autonomy, subjectivity, self-realisation. In relation to people with intellectual disabilities, the aforementioned categories seem to be constantly questioned, or at any rate called into question. This is due to the succession of surviving and constantly reappearing knowledge rooted in the objectivist/medical/medicalized approach to (intellectual) disability, according to which the phenomenon of intellectual disability is in its essence associated with dependence on others, numerous limitations on individual decisions, choices, autonomous functioning self - realisation of individual needs and desires. (Krause, 2011; Krzemińska, 2019; Mikrut, 2014; Niedbalski, 2023; Parchomiuk, 2018; Tylewska-Nowak, 2005; Wołowicz, 2021). The last two decades seem to have challenged such a view, to which the gradually established socio-cultural approach to intellectual disability has contributed significantly. (Krause, 2011; Krzemińska, 2019; Pawelczak, 2021; Rapley, 2005; Rzeźnicka-Krupa, 2013; Schalock, Luckasson, and Tassé, 2021; Zakrzewska-Manterys and Gustavsson, 1997; Żółkowska, 2016; Żyta and Ćwirynkało, 2013). The implantation of both the assumptions of the social model of disability and the introduction of the phenomenon of intellectual disability into the field of interest and research on human social functioning has focused attention on such fundamental issues as dignity, subjectivity, autonomy and self-realisation. An important weapon to support people with intellectual disabilities and their allies to achieve autonomy, independence, self-determination, self-realisation and subjectivity to the greatest extent possible is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is a document that clearly states that disability in no way precludes the right to:

- (a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and selfworth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
- (b) The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
- (c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free

society (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006, p. 14).

In the Preamble to the Convention the States Parties to the present Convention,

(...) (n) Recognizing the importance for persons with disabilities of their individual autonomy and independence, including the freedom to make their own choices, (...) Have agreed as follows:

Article 1: The purpose of the present Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. (...)

Article 3: General principles The principles of the present Convention shall be: (a) Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons. (...).

Article 30: (...) to enable persons with disabilities to have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006, p. 2 and 19).

In the paper I present an example of support in building/strengthening the autonomy, subjectivity, independence and self-realisation of adult people with intellectual disabilities through activities at the interface of therapy and art. It is about artistic activities related to the theatre of people with intellectual disabilities as a field where both a kind of careful transformation/transgression (in understanding) of the person with intellectual disabilities as a (non)disabled actor and a shift towards the inclusion of disability as a phenomenon in the theatrical experience could be observed. (Dickinson and Hutchinson, 2019; McCaffrey, 2019; Cassar, 2021). Susan L. Anderson (2019, pp. 153 and 148) points out that:

The variety of bodyminds, impairments, and experiences on display on early modern stages means that there is no singular mode of understanding or presenting disability in the early modern period. These premodern representations of disability nevertheless constitute a foundational moment for the making of modern identities. They offer on the one hand a neglected pre-history of the medicalization and pathologization of whole categories of deviant bodies and minds,

and on the other they offer opportunities for alternatives to abjection for our imagining (and staging) of historical experiences of disability, and new ways of thinking about aesthetics, knowledge, rhetoric, and power. (...) The application of this scholarship to the term's usage in drama will be important in understanding the association between different kinds of marginality and intellectual disability; the difference between 'natural' and 'artificial' fools on stage; the hierarchy of relative value of these different kinds of fooling and the kinds of behaviour that they are associated with (Anderson, 2019, p. 153 and 148).

In Poland, too, there is a shift towards the inclusion of disability and actors with (intellectual) disabilities in the theatre experience and "the approach to theatre with intellectual disability has changed drastically over last twenty years. It gradually evolved from a form of therapy rooted in the medical model to a far more complex activities that defy the traditional understanding of intellectual disability, instead adopting the perspectives promoted by the social and cultural models. Inevitably, this process is tied not only with the evolution of meanings ascribed to intellectual disability, but also, and perhaps more importantly, with the attempts to negotiate and change the perceptions of the skills and abilities of people with ID, their potential of being active and creative, and in short, to their very position in society and culture". (Krzemińska and Rzeźnicka-Krupa, 2020, p.178), including as people who can achieve independence / autonomy, subjectivity and self-realisation. However, the changes that have taken place in the last two decades in the field of theatre of people with intellectual disabilities, which is situated on the borderline between therapy and art, is not a phenomenon that is often taken up by researchers/academics, and thus the stock of source publications is not numerous. As far as the field of special pedagogy is concerned, the research output related to the issue of theatre of people with (intellectual) disabilities is very modest. (Gindrich and Kazanowski, 2015; Krzemińska, 2016, 2018, 2023; Krzemińska and Rzeźnicka-Krupa, 2020; Pawlik, 2016, 2017; Podgórska-Jachnik, 2011; Stefańska, 2015a, 2015b, 2020; Wos, 2019). Slightly more attention, using different theoretical and methodological approaches, is paid to the theatrical art of people with intellectual disabilities by researchers representing (cultural) disability studies, performative studies, cultural critical discourses, theatre history and theory, literary studies, science of theatrical matters (Hasiuk, 2022; Kwaśniewska, 2022a, 2022b; Ojrzyńska, 2018, 2020; Pamuła, 2018; Siedlecka-Dorosz, 2020; Świerkosz, 2021).

**(Towards) autonomy, subjectivity, self-realisation of people with intellectual disabilities in a theatre company in selected statements/narratives by directors, actors and critics**

Some aspects of the theatrical work and achievements of Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre company are presented in this article, trying to reveal those contexts of the activities of directors and actors with intellectual disabilities that allow to consider theatre / theatrical work as an important support for building and/or strengthening autonomy, subjectivity, (one's own) identity, self-education, self-realisation. In order to present the arguments on which my position is based, I will (only by necessity) show selected examples of statements made by directors and actors of Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre, as well as by people who review the activities of the ensemble and its productions from the position of journalists or theatre critics. My intention is not to make a detailed analysis of the performances, but only to make a reference to some of the plays staged, approaching to identify the threads that may testify that participation in theatre seems important for adults with intellectual disabilities in building autonomy, subjectivity, self-education and self-realisation. Thus, in terms of the methodological strand of my work, I use selected excerpts from recorded interviews in the form of visual materials and (newspaper) articles available on the Internet<sup>1</sup>. I understand this type of research activity - in the light of the methodological rules - as a content analysis of found data/secondary data/sources, i.e. a method that allows for a kind of identification and processing of selected sources in order to collect/get information of interest to the researcher and to obtain (and then analyze) useful data directly related to a particular subject area (Angrosino, 2000; Babbie, 2003; Charmaz, 2009; Rubacha, 2008). The content analysis of the collected secondary data showing the activities of Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre, with particular emphasis on the qualities associated with building and/or strengthening the attributes of subjectivity, independence/autonomy, self-realisation, self-education - I also try to read in the context of a particular plot Mikhail

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<sup>1</sup> As I explained in the previous part of the text, the issue of theatre of people with intellectual disabilities is rarely addressed, and the phenomenon of the theatre arts of this community is only just being brought to light. The literature on Teatr Przebudzeni / The Awakened Theatre is extremely modest, limited to a few publications in the press, often local in scope. For the purposes of this study, I have used practically all of them (they are listed in the bibliography), hence the small sample size and the small amount of survey material was collected.

Bakhtin's thought, referring to the world upside down<sup>2</sup> and his idea of "the borderline between oneself and the other" and crossing generic boundaries, which allows for intermingling of cultural phenomena, increases one creative potential, as well as prompts one to create new linguistic forms to describe reality" (Krzemińska and Rzeźnicka-Krupa, 2020, p. 176), but also strongly encourages going beyond one's own boundaries / disability limits, provide circumstances for self-realisation, building and strengthening (the sense of) autonomy, subjectivity, self-worth - achieved through experiences of participation and activity in theatre.

I will provide only the necessary information to introduce the ensemble, in order to later focus mainly on some aspects (concepts) of Teatr Przebudzeni's /The Awakened Theatre's activities and concrete examples of performances and their reception. This will allow me to illustrate the theatrical work of directors and actors with intellectual disabilities, which ultimately affects, among many other qualities, the building/strengthening of (a sense of) subjectivity, independence/autonomy. All of this seems to serve the purposes of self-education and (self-)training, laying the groundwork for "the development of potential and a sense of dignity and self-worth" and "the development of personality, talents and creativity, as well as mental and physical abilities, making full use of their potential" (see United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

In the official presentation of Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre we can read that it brings together adults with (intellectual) disabilities, that it has been running since 2003 at the Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities/Circle in Ostróda, and that it has gradually developed from activities that were initially strongly embedded in therapy with the use of art / therapy through art, to the stage of an "amateur professional theatre". The work with the company is mainly based on movement theatre and music, but has also turned more and more to the use of words. In twenty years of continuous work, Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre has produced eleven original performances and several theatre actions. (Polskie Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Osób z Upośledzeniem Umysłowym Koło w Ostródzie). The company presents itself as:

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<sup>2</sup> I draw attention to a similar issue in considering the theatrical work of people with intellectual disabilities in an article of mine: Krzemińska, D. (2016). Festiwal Akcept w kontekście karnawału M. Bachtina. *Rzecz o dorosłych z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w lokalnych inicjatywach kulturalno-edukacyjnych. Niepełnosprawność*, 24, p. 36-59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4467/25439561.NP.16.003.6829>

A team that brings together personalities who share a common goal: to express themselves on stage in their own language and under their own responsibility. The performances are a kind of manifesto that the ensemble works on together. The theatre, which participates in festivals and artistic events, shatters myths and stereotypes about people with disabilities. The work of the ensemble is part of individual stories that define our mission- To reach people's hearts, souls, emotions, thoughts through performances... so that these stories translate into stories of the audience - to awaken them. The theatre has won many awards and honors, mainly for the truth, distance and message that comes from the stage. We have adopted the principle - "The more obstacles, the greater the creative process" - and we stand by it (Polskie Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Osób z Upośledzeniem Umysłowym Koło w Ostródzie).

In one of the articles summarizing "Kurtyna"/ The Curtain - Marek Hermann's review of amateur theatres in Gdynia, the performance of Teatr Przebudzeni / "The Awakened Theatre" was described as follows:

"Istny cyrk" / True Circus (...) impressed not only the audience of "Kurtyna", but also the jury. The play, which is a story about everyday life of people with disabilities, how they overcome barriers and struggle for happiness, for independence, written on the basis of authentic experiences of members of the ensemble, simply broke this year's "Kurtyna" / Curtain bank (Gdynia nasze miasto, "„Przebudzeni" z Ostródy tryumfatorami VIII „Kurtyny").

Wojciech Szymaniak (2023) adds:

Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre is not only a place of artistic creativity, but also a laboratory of feelings and emotions. It's a place where actors share with their audiences the courage to be themselves, without the rhetoric and mask of societal expectations. Audiences leave with an invitation to reflect on their own prejudices and limitations, to try to understand other people's stories, and to understand that each of us carries our own burden, but also the potential for transformation. Wherever Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre appears, a new perspective on the world can be born. Their performances are not only a chance to interact with excellent art, but also to awaken our hearts and minds, to pause for a moment and reflect on the meaning of our existence. What these disabled

artists offer us is not just a performance, it is a true awakening. Our awakening (Szymaniak, 2023).

But it's not just about awakening the audience, especially the non-disabled. As they work on each performance, the actors with intellectual disabilities "awaken" - tirelessly building their own identity, subjectivity, achievable autonomy, independence, on the way to self-realisation. This is the goal of the directors Monika Kazimierczyk and Dariusz Wychudzki, who lead the ensemble. In an interview, they explain the path they have taken, starting from the theatre workshop/studio:

We transformed this studio into a typical theatre group of passionate people who want to create theatre and speak their language about their problems through the stage (...). And we wanted to show that people with disabilities can be good actors, can create their own good plays. And they don't necessarily have to be extras on stage - they can be creators. And we wanted to awaken this environment through such a trend, and we awakened ourselves. Hence the Awakened Theatre. (...) This is theatre that talks about their problems, about their lives, dressed up in a form that we work out together in workshops. We try not to impose scenic solutions, we only hint at them, suggest them, polish them, and in fact it is a group process, and this is seen later on stage when our actors improvise, even during the play. And it turns out that they add something of themselves, change something (Zbliża się XX. lecie ostródzkiego Teatru Przebudzeni).

It seems to me that the best approach to people with so-called disabilities is when (...) we put them on an equal footing with each other. Then the boundary somehow becomes blurred. We simply see the other person, not through the prism of their disability - adds Dariusz (Zbliża się XX. lecie ostródzkiego Teatru Przebudzeni).

From the quoted statements of both directors it can be concluded that the vision of theatre and the concept of working with actors with intellectual disabilities - the way of defining them as persons and creators, and the effort to create symmetrical, partner-like relationships, to empower the (silent) voice of the disabled, as well as to encourage them to express individual experiences, but also to share ideas and concepts when working on a performance - is a way of empowerment, recognition of a kind of autonomy, freedom to make responsible choices and decisions. It seems to be a direct realisation of one of the definitions of (the concept of) subjectivity, which refers to the understanding "that a person is someone", that he has a certain



“identity” that distinguishes him from others, that his own activity depends to a large extent on himself (Tomaszewski, 1985, p. 72). Placing a person with intellectual disabilities in such a position, sanctioning and reinforcing the formation of the above-mentioned attributes through a kind of “exercise”, promotes the acquisition of an identity of oneself as a person with certain handicaps, but also as a causal person, aware of one’s strengths, not avoiding confrontation with the world and with others.

The relentless search for (building and strengthening) subjectivity, understood as “the ability, available only to man, to recognize the fact of being subject to change and to influence it through one’s own, more or less autonomous actions” (Pietrasinski, 1987, p. 249- 250), is reflected in a special way in the last - and at the same time most recent - performance entitled “Na pohybel!” / On the Doom, created on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Teatr Przebudzeni / The Awakened Theatre (Lesiński, 2023). This is another manifesto in which the ensemble becomes, in a way, the voice of other communities and groups of people with disabilities, demanding an improvement in the quality of life, dignified treatment, access to jobs, material resources, cultural goods and art. The outlined essence and purpose of the performance entitles us to see in its actors - people with intellectual disabilities - subjects in whom the awareness of themselves as causal figures, oriented towards their own life situation and the need to change it, is awakened:

It is an attempt to answer and confront the tormenting question “theatre for life or life for theatre? It is an attempt to resist the infantilisation and objectification of the stage and of life. It is also an attempt to prove that the members of Teatr Przebudzeni / The Awakened Theatre, in spite of limitations and adversities, want to develop, improve, educate themselves, constantly “practicing” for the “role of life”. They write about themselves that “the cyclical workshop, etudes, improvisations, relationships, discussions, conclusions, intellectual games, tears mixed with joy, contact with the audience - all this improves us and makes theatre necessary, necessary and salutary for all of us” (Miejski Ośrodek Kultury w Olsztynie, “Na Pohybel!”).

It can therefore be concluded that the functioning of Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre - as in the case of several other similar theatre groups - is as follows: “(...) various forms of interaction with(in) the group: forming a community, getting to know other people and their abilities, talents, limitations and needs, as well as getting to know their preferences as far as the choice of plays and roles is concerned.” (Krzemińska & Rzeźnicka

– Krupa, 2020, p.179). It is a process of (self-)learning for actors with intellectual disabilities - as persons capable of independent decision making, choices and their consequences, responsibility as activities that are both a path to and a reinforcement of individually accessible autonomy, self-determination, independence and self-realisation, not only in the field of theatre activities, but with the transfer of these competences to function in everyday life.

The actors of Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre seem to be aware of the value of participation in theatre and all the forms and manifestations of activity and action connected with it, often involving effort and hardship, overcoming one's own limitations and difficulties. Although they do not explicitly state it, they clearly refer to subjectivity - as an attribute correlated with self-determination and self-realisation - which is a concept defined as "individuality", one's own "identity" - inherent to a specific person, and activities undertaken and carried out consciously and in accordance with recognised values, goals and standards, serving the self-realisation of a person". (Lewowicki, 1997, p. 597). Małgorzata Kościelska adds that "the sense of agency is strongly connected with the image of one's own ability to influence the environment and the possibility of making changes in it." (Kościelska, 2007, p. 44-45).

In the field of the realisation of support and aspirations to achieve and strengthen subjectivity, autonomy, causality, self-realisation by the actors of Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre, as well as the struggle for independence and happiness, there are other original performances, including "Istny cyrk"/The True Circus, described by Wojciech Szymaniak (2023):

"Istny cyrk"/True Circus (...) is just such a mixture, when disabled artists challenge society's stereotypes and views of their own weaknesses, it becomes an important way to understand and awaken human empathy and acceptance. (...) This is not just a performance, but a demonstration of the courage and strength of the human spirit. The actors in this theatre become an inspiration to all those who struggle with difficulties and limitations, showing that talent and determination can turn obstacles into challenges and dreams into achievements. This is the uplifting lesson they bring to the stage - that we are not defined by our limitations, but by what we set out to achieve and the values that guide our lives (Szymaniak, 2023).

One of the actresses, Iwona, says that participation in Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre, a way of actively working on plays and improving acting skills, plays an important role in building identity, a sense

of subjectivity, provides a basis for autonomous action, agency, is a manifestation of self-realisation of actors with intellectual disabilities and thus increases the quality of their functioning in everyday, non-theatrical life:

The play "Istny cyrk"/ True Circus, (...) was about our experiences, what we struggle with every day, that we overcome blocks, different obstacles. (...) We want to show through this play that despite our weaknesses we can achieve something. A person with a disability, when he wants to function in normal life, has to face a lot of criticism. (...) But we try not to look at the dysfunctions we have because of our disability, only through such obstacles we climb higher and higher to reach our dream goal. This play deals with the problem that people in society want to push people with disabilities away, that they put up some kind of barrier for them (Gdynia nasze miasto, „Przebudzeni” z Ostródy tryumfatorami VIII „Kurtyny).

Monika, the director of the theatre, adds:

They are natural and real. (...) The important thing is that we don't hide the person. (...) In our work we try to let the actors be themselves, even if they are wearing a costume. We are also making a play called "Istny cyrk"/ True Circus. It is about the strength of their weaknesses. It is humorous but bitter. (...) The roles are tailored to personality and appearance, to what the actors like and dislike. The authenticity that comes from the stage is the key to our work (Duch Kantora w „Baju Pomorskim”. Wywiad z reżyserami spektaklu Szatnia – Moniką Kazimierczyk i Dariuszem Wychudzkim).

### **(Approaching) the end (with an inspiration from a thought of Mikhail Bakhtin)**

I think it is important to draw attention to the words of the Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre's director, who says that "in our work we try to let the actors be themselves, even if they are wearing a costume". The importance of authenticity, naturalness, as opposed to the exaggeration/overdetermination of a character, is highlighted by Rosemary Garland – Thomson (1997 in: Anderson, 2019, p. 150) who notes that "(...) characterisation is an "illusion of reality" in which "a few determining strokes" are deployed to create a sense of a character. Thus, disabilities invoked in this way are inevitably overdetermined, and, as Garland-Thomson comments, "literary texts necessarily make disabled characters into freaks, stripped of normalizing

contexts and engulfed by a single stigmatic trait.” (Garland -Thomson, 1997 in Anderson, 2019, p. 150). With reference to this, Anderson suggests that the question of the “characterisation” of the actor should be looked at from a different point of view, looking the other way: “by contrast, then, practice as research can show us what happens when the actor’s body contributes disability knowledge to characterisation. Casting actors with disabilities in roles which are not explicitly disabled brings disability aesthetics into dialogue with the ideas and ideologies of the text.” (Anderson, 2019, p. 150). This is how the performance and roles of actors with intellectual disabilities seem implanted in Teatr Przebudzeni/Awakened Theatre. It can therefore be said that performances involving actors with (intellectual) disabilities open up “several important lines of inquiry here, including what can be discovered about the lives and experiences of performers who may have been disabled in addition to the ways in which bodily difference is represented on stage” (Anderson, 2019, p. 150). At the same time Anderson, in reference to Mikhail Bakhtin, describes the nature of the “quality of human interactions”, warning against reducing them “to their most external facts through an analysis of components of performance and not their holistic effect.” (Anderson, 2019, p. 150). As for the holistic effect Anderson (Anderson, 2019, p. 150) suggests “(...) to focus on the question “to what extent can a disability aesthetic be identified?” Tobin Siebers, in turn, can be quoted as having said that:

disability presents increasingly as the key figure in the production and appreciation of art, one that becomes synonymous with aesthetic value itself. Not only is this evolution crucial because it embeds the perception of disability in some of the most creative and valued practices in human history but because it throws open the door to the work of disabled artists, whose images of themselves and other disabled people must now take their place alongside other treasured visions of beauty” (Siebers, 2008, p. 336).

Siebers seems to equate the work of disabled artists with “the creation and appreciation of new art forms”. But it is not just a look at the art of people with disabilities, but a broader view. Using Bakhtin’s notion of the borderline (Bakhtin, 1970), the theatre creates a space of shared experience that leads to a gradual evolution of meanings, both those that people with intellectual disabilities attribute to themselves, and a disruption of the previous grid of meanings describing them (as socially constructed through people’s perceptions). For it seems possible - in the field of work in theatre - that self-images shift from a position of inferior, weaker, incapable, uncreative, to a position of

strong, capable, creative, independent, autonomous, able to make choices and decisions, self-determination and self-realisation. Theatre, whose subjects are people with intellectual disabilities, becomes a borderline where it becomes real to change and give different meanings to different manifestations of dysfunctions, impairments or defects that are a direct consequence of the actors' disabilities. Theatre begins to appear as a borderline space for actors with intellectual disabilities, where they have the chance to fulfil themselves not only as actors, but in pursuit of their individual interests and passion for acting. The experience of theatre work becomes - as can be read in the excerpts of narratives from the analysed found data quoted in this study - a space for strengthening and/or building (new) competences and a status as a person with the highest possible, individually achievable degree of independence, autonomy and self-sufficiency, while maintaining freedom of expression as one is - sanctioning the various manifestations / effects of the experienced disability. Theatre for people with intellectual disabilities, and therefore for adults with this type of disability, can be seen in a broader context by adopting an understanding of art/theatre as a kind (of act) of empowerment, of self-determination, and in relation to these considerations, an appreciation of theatre as both a way/means and an outcome in building autonomy and self-awareness, self-determination and self-realisation of actors/people with intellectual disabilities. Actors with intellectual disabilities performing for (non - disabled) audiences can be viewed in the context of Bakhtinian carnivalesque world upside down, where it is the non-disabled spectator who remains in the 'darkness' of the audience, while the actor with intellectual disabilities, is a star of the stage. This act of reversing everyday social roles, in which the person without disability usually dominates, empowers the person with intellectual disability as a subject with his or her own attributes: agency, ability, autonomy and independence - if only in the dimension of performing on stage and controlling the performance in whose creation he or she first participates and then plays a part. But not only. The actions of the actors in *Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre*, working on each performance in a possibly symmetrical partner relationship with the directors, speaking in their own voice, as it were, with reference to their individual authentic experiences, is both a means and a result of an activity aimed at building and strengthening autonomy, seeing oneself as a causal and self-realising subject, capable of achieving the independence available to oneself and the possible freedom of choice and decision. The authenticity and truth of the actor with intellectual disabilities in experiencing Bakhtin's carnivalesque world upside down (Bachtin, 1975), - where the dominant (asymmetrical)

relations between the world of the able-bodied and the world of the disabled are temporarily suspended - is presented to the audience. An actor with an intellectual disability appears to be himself, even if he has a costume/characterisation, and the play in which he is performing tells about his experiences - which may ultimately lead to shifts and changes in the meanings ascribed to intellectual disability/a person with an intellectual disability - a kind of awakening may take place. And so it seems to be with the performances of *Teatr Przebudzeni/The Awakened Theatre*. In the light of Bakhtin's views, as interpreted by Pam Morris (2009, p. 5), it can therefore be said that theatre becomes a place that creates „(...) the aesthetic and ethical relations of self and other”, where meaning is created by understanding and knowing the Self, while “(...) at the centre of this investigation is a recognition that meaning must be actively produced in an “aesthetic event” constituted by the meeting of two consciousnesses. (...) The meaning generated by this event is a “self””. (Morris, 2009, p. 5-6). While a “self” of both the actor with intellectual disability, (the director) and the audience meet in a Bakhtinian dialogue, which is the interaction of different voices:

This other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression). (...) As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes .... to annihilate this difference completely, it would be necessary to merge into one, to become one and the same person. This ever-present excess of my seeing, knowing and possessing in relation to any other human being, is founded in the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world” (Bakhtin, 1920-4, in: Morris, 2009, p. 6).

In this context, it can be empowering to note that theatre seems to be a contemporary emancipatory and somehow political movement in which actors with intellectual disabilities - with respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, including freedom of choice, self-realisation and personal independence - are no longer reduced to being seen through the lens of disability, but are on the way to (full) agency over who they are and what they represent.

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