



The Reparative Academy or teaching as healing

A Manifesto

Urszula CHOWANIEC*

PULP PAPER / *brudnopis*, a popular print,
for everyone, a pulp magazine, pulp fiction. Stories.¹

This is my declaration, academic and personal, of the importance of our bodies, our stories and of the fact that they need to find their place in the academy. I ask you to contemplate the inseparable and intimate relationship between creative thinking and gaining a scholarly insight, between art and teaching. I want to give back meaning to teaching. I want teaching to get rid of its paranoid position of omnipresence of norms, measurable and clear, the paranoia of the measurable skills, the paranoia of measurable objectives, the paranoia of measurable outcomes. As Eve Kosofski Sedgwick argues, paranoid reading is the position of systematic and closed theories (Kosovsky Sedgwick, 2002).

¹ This Manifesto was prepared for the performance that took place in Brussels on the 25th of October, 2015. The manifesto was an accompaniment to Małgorzata Dawidek's performance, entitled: *Aporia & Epiphany*. In her description of the performance Małgorzata writes: "The performance takes the form of a hypertextual story, which breaks up with a traditional and conventional linearly structured writing and reading. With the consent of the audience, the artist shares the story with them giving the thread which is unravelling from the sleeve which she wears. The thread will mark the trajectory of the artist movement, the pattern of her contact with others, and the order of the story. It reorganized the given situation by stressing the relation between the artist and Others and between Others themselves. A mesh emerges."

* PhD (habil.), associate professor at AFM Kraków University and affiliate researcher at the University College London, currently (2019–2020) an Amos Oz Fellow at Paideia, The European Institute for Modern Jewish Studies in Stockholm.

Only reparative reading is open to the unknown, the surprise, the mistakes and the Other. The Other that cannot be imagined because it has never been. Not yet. Theories of a better future cannot offer a glimpse of the future; they are based on the now and the promise of change. Yet, change is the theory's antithesis and change devaluates the very theory of change. Perhaps it is better for the theory of change, so that change never comes?

Perhaps it is like this with our feminist and gender and queer theories: a completely equal society could make our feminist research and positions and voices irrelevant?

Do we fear this? Do we see this? Do we talk about it?

These are the questions I ask myself often and I invite you to think about them today.

I have called this text a pulp paper. These are notes, thoughts gathered together, to be carried in the pocket and read on the go rather than to put them away among other books and magazines. This is supportive material. To be changed, rewritten, rethought, corrected, filled with other notes, other paragraphs. A pulp manifesto for reparative teaching. Those thoughts need to be with us all the time. Those are the thoughts of uncertainty and care for the future and a determination that we need to do something.

I call it pulp and they are like *Pulp fiction*, the 1994 film by Quentin Jerome Tarantino, which main idea is based on the paraphrase of the Biblical verse from Ezekiel 25:17 ("And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them", according to the JPS edition of the Hebrew Bible, Philadelphia–Jerusalem in 1985). What a masculine voice of a masculine discourse it is in this film! Yet, I like the method. The character's, Samuel L. Jackson's quote is in fact a montage of Biblical phrases and verses, combined together in imitating the Biblical poetics.² A Frankenstein's monster of Bibli-

The web of the connections joining Others to the structure of the artist narrative and her the-ill-and-migrant-woman to the social structure". (Małgorzata Dawidek is a visual artist, writer and art historian [PhD] and is currently conducting PhD practice-led research at the Slade School of Fine Art / UCL in London). The performance was first shown in London in February 2019 (without the Manifesto), at the Slade Research Centre, UCL at the conference: Sharing Borders. It will also be presented in January 9, 2020 at the Foundry Gallery, in London, at the finissage of the exhibition: Contested Spaces. The Brussels performance was part of the Gender Studies 3.0 conference, organised by the SOPHIA, The Belgic Network for Gender Studies: <http://www.sophia.be/en/2019/09/13/gender-studies-3-0-3> (30.06.2019). Here I wish to thank Małgorzata Dawidek for this opportunity to cooperate and share the experiences and juxtapose our academic expertise to produce something methodologically new. For the conference organizers, special thanks to Elisa Tixhon, Barbara Hermès and Vera Cortese for the invitation and hospitality.

² From the Internet forum discussion between fans of Pulp Fiction: Samuel L. Jackson's monologue with the alleged memorized bible quote before he and John Travolta violently kill the guy in the chair contains what is allegedly a quote from Ezekiel 25:17. Here is Ezekiel 25:17:

cal rhetoric. Partly serious, partly ironic, and partly prophetic. This gesture of rewriting, combining and collecting various voices to express the idea is dear to me. This gesture of appropriating the tradition, changing it, making it mine is close to me. I am here not to rely on one feminist voice, one mother, one teacher, I rather gather them all, combine, without quotations, and footnotes, perhaps without knowing in many places that I have a woman's voice behind me, my predecessor. I do it to reclaim a feminist voice for today. To reclaim the creative force of Arachne, the master of her art, who weaved her own story and who was stopped by Athena, the guardian of norms, out of jealousy and³ in the desire to keep the old hierarchy. Athena destroys Arachne but does not make her useless: she is sustained in her ingenious creativity as a spider. She is invisible, voiceless, she is deprived of any right to the public space for centuries. It isn't surprising that when we:

Listen to a woman speak at a public gathering [...]. She doesn't 'speak,' she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the 'logic' of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she inscribes what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking. Her speech, even when 'theoretical' or political, is never simple or linear or 'objectified,' generalized: she draws her story into history (Cixous, 1991: 338).

These classic words of Cixous are still valid, we need to remember that women still feel the painful transgression between moving from the private and the public, especially in politics, in business, or in academia, unless they pretend to be or become men. But I do not want to speak now about the gendered difference, or the transgression of gendered perspectives which are thrown on human beings as social roles; I want to speak about the right of transgressing the roles with the very awareness of the fact that these roles are

"And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them". What Samuel dramatically quotes as Ezekiel 25:17 is this: "The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he, who in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who would attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon thee". The ending is almost a verbatim quote from Ezekiel 25:17. The rest leading up to that is a hotchpotch of biblical language strung together like a beat poet at a slam: a Frankenstein verse if you will, stitched together from a number of different places. Chilling. Powerful. Fiction at its best.

³ See the description at the interesting blog entry: <http://web.colby.edu/ovid-censorship/censorship-in-ovids-myths/weaving-and-writing-censorship-in-arachne/> (10.08.2019).

often our dreams and our realities. I want to speak about the so often schizophrenic position women are thrown into. Because this is how/who I am. I am a feminist, writing about women's writing and creativity, whose main ambition for most of my life was to be an academic. I am an academic who is and wants to be a mother. And I am so often someone who is hiding the fact that I have kids. I am so often a patriarchal woman, who wants to fit into a patriarchal academy, because such is the academy I know, the rules I know are to be productive, available, happy, fresh, innovative, positive, accessible and sophisticated. I am an academic and I am a full-time mother, because the fact that I want and have to work does not make me a part-time mother. I cannot understand how society even allowed such terms to be accepted into its vocabulary.

And I am a teacher who wants to transgress the limits of normative teaching in a creative way, I seek for the support of the artists who show me how to destabilise the old categories through art, who invite me to experience the incommunicable and I am someone who writes syllabuses, rules, requirements and prerequisites and who thinks about the academic course through the prism of examination, through the old categories. I want to change the system and I am part of the system. I am a guardian of the system.

I am a woman, who does not comply to the heteronormative standards. Who is openly queer and writes about queerness, and so many time I am so happy that I look "straight", because I feel safe in my normative look when walking with three kids in the city where homophobic remarks are possible, and equally, I am someone who thinks twice before putting on the pride t-shirts in such circumstances.

I am someone who rejects religion, and study Judaism.

Will you judge me? Am I a bundle of tangled threads! *Jestem kłębką nerwów?*, as the Polish saying has it. A bundle of tangled threads!⁴

I always have a need of defending my position. I have a need of explaining myself, as if I want to justify the aporias of my identity, but I can never succeed in this because my identity is not a result of a linear story. It is not a gradual attainment of experiences, it is not a progress. It cannot be. Because I have always been too scared. This is the fundamental part of my reality. I have always been scared. As a daughter, as a woman, as a student, as a job seeker, as a lesbian, as a non-lesbian, as a teacher, as a friend, as a wife, as ever a non-religious girl, as a single mother, as a student of Judaism, a frenzied reader of the Bible, as a sexual being, as a sexual object, as a single mother, as a worker, as a migrant, as a Pole, as a non-Pole. A scared person never looks at herself clearly, she

⁴ Here reference to the Polish saying "to be as a bundle of nerves" (*być kłębką nerwów*), partly companionate, mainly patronizing, disabling any conversation statement. My mother's favourite strategy to shut me up.

often allows others to decide for her. She searches for protection. Even though she knows that protection is always a form of oppression.

Let me tell you what I am scared of now, and why I address you with this manifesto? I am scarred, now, looking at the country I grew up, Poland, still my homeland, although I do not have a home there anymore. The country where I grew up and whose language will always be the closest to my skin. In this country the populist government decides to propose a bill to ban and criminalise sexual education.⁵ And that scares me. When a human's body and sex are seen as sinful, when even a talk about sex is for some people a potential wrongdoing, an instance of disobedience, then this is a terrifying world we live in. The government wants to ban sexual education from school, making clear that ultimately the body is seen as shameful and disgraceful. The very thought of the parliamentary discussion on the possibility of prohibiting something that is a basic human right alarms me. It scares me — the renewal of delimitation of the private and the public, a re-creating of taboos, the inscriptions of bodies into normative regulations and making teachers — the responsible delegators of the prohibiting powers. This is frightening.

I am not scared because I am Polish, and I spend my holidays in Poland. I am not scared because my children may one day feel like living there. I am scared because Poland can be anywhere, anywhere where there are people who think their ideology and moral standpoint is better and beyond negotiation. Ridiculous populist propaganda can happen anywhere. It is so easy. Trust me, so very easy!

I am someone who was scared when in 2015/2016 Polish women were demonstrating against the hyper-restrictive abortion law. Not because I am Polish. Not because I may need an abortion in Poland. Because do not be misled, don't feel too comfortable. It is not only Poland, that central, or eastern European country where the polar bears live! It can happen anywhere. Remember.

I am a person, who with a shock looked at the pan-European discussion (Poland, Hungary, Spain) about the "ideology" of gender. Gender became an enemy. Rainbow became a widespread symbol to label those who are suspicious, who stand in opposition to the family, and should be controlled, and definitely deprived of their pride (namely, the Pride Parades).

I am a person, who speechlessly watched all of those populist manoeuvres, creating new enemies, phoney disputes, demonstrations on both sides of the dispute, so much hatred, so many misunderstandings, so much pain. Where is love? I asked in despair. Is there any love in this chaotic, neoliberal society? Where is trust in the human being? Who are those who think that they can control our bodies? Not only women's body (through the control over

⁵ See, for example, the journalistic note at: <https://www.dw.com/en/poland-new-legislation-treats-sex-education-as-pedophilia/a-50853031> (18.10.2019).

abortion rights), not only queer bodies (controlling debates on gender identity and LGBTQ rights), but everyone bodies (by controlling sexual education, controlling teachers)?!⁶

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Scared and angry I need to connect these feelings and my various layers of identity with my teaching. I cannot pretend any more I am there, an emotionless vehicle of expertise. Yet, I do not know how. I even do not know where to start. I feel I need to change it, but I do not know if I am right? I consult it with my friends, I know that they also feel the need for a new teaching, but any alternative methodology is not compatible with the institutional system, the feelings in teaching are risky. So how can I proceed? My quest for change is not paranoid. It has no founding, no solutions. It questions in itself, too.

I look at the web of communications, at the red strings of connections between us all, the academics, researchers, teachers, the students, and the administration. I see the figure of Arachne as an epiphany. I read Jelena Petrovic text and cannot agree more:

Arachne appears today as a lost, censored and forgotten mythological formula, as a political metaphor of marginalization and punishment of all the efforts to confront patriarchal, capitalist and colonial forms of power and exploitation. Arachne's web of resistance as well as many other inherited narratives that remain invisible or weak are blind spots of our common knowledge and politics. Blind spots that need to be revealed and revived through the future ideological transformation of society, transformation that uses art as a powerful tool for affecting political consciousness (Petrovic [no date]).⁷

Let's try it. I am Arachne. I want to be Arachne. She is Arachne. "She" is anyone who comes to me with an invitation for dialogue and understanding. I also see Ariadne,⁸ another weaver, an owner of a perfect, life-saving thread. Oh, Ariadne: why did you condemn the queer body of your brother for your desire of the young beautiful body of a soldier? Was the maze sacrificed in the name of the law? The dark for the light? In the name of heteronormative love? Abandoned by Theseus in Naxos,⁹ soon after she performs her work, Ariadne

⁶ Here I would like to mention a powerful book, one of the first publications openly addressing the situation of teachers and academic in neoliberal society (Gill, 2010).

⁷ On the metaphor of Arachne and the importance of art see also Miller, 1986.

⁸ See, for example, the website: <https://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/Ariadne.html> (10.10.2019).

⁹ See the short story by Olga Tokarczuk, *Ariadne z Nykos*. The film by Agnieszka Smoczyńska (2007) https://ninateka.pl/film/aria-diva-30-minut-studio-munka?fbclid=IwAR3aRlGVwZZt0v_-DvLCXu7h-yCXg2S4mZW2Jm5x7wSYqVueRSzi-qq87aQ (30.06.2019).

becomes later a mother of numerous children, another spider weaving its link, connections, through motherhood. Isn't Athena, the same who changed creative Arachne into a spider, led Theseus away from Ariadne and made him a hero? Absolving the desertion, you, Ariadne, created your life through your children. How many of us live the lives of someone else? Pretending, always, like imposters, fearing that they can be exposed at any time?

Your stories, Ariadne and Arachne, are my stories.

As I — Arachne, in contemplating the story of Ariadne I also ask how many women did Ariadne oversee to be sacrificed before her love for Theseus made her ready to cooperate in liberation from the oppressor? And is the Minotaur an oppressor? I brood upon the Minotaur's queer body, isn't the Minotaur also a victim? Which side should I take? Which thread to follow? When I teach how should I act. Should I behave as:

an academic?

a teacher?

a human being?

a friend?

a speaker?

What can I say about me? Am I acceptable as a nomad? Migrant? Gay? Jewish? Polish? Non-Normative? Single? Mother of Three? Non-English Native Speaker? Eastern European? Catholic? Literary academic? A PhD holder? Which of these identities should I hide? What can I reveal? Which are desirable? What is better left out! How to recognise the situation?

How many times has one to negotiate it? It is like a never ending coming-out. Who should be the one that makes me a teacher; what gender, status, colour, background should be heard? How healthy, what is the ability to have or the disability not to have? Is my health important, my ability to speak up, throat aches, headaches, my weekly visits to hospitals?

These questions need to be with us all the time if we want to create a reparative, healing teaching.

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I had a dream, and I dreamt of my daughter, a 5 year-old, giving me a key to read the Talmud. I am not a great reader of this text. But I know how difficult it is to go through the centuries of scholarly and religious debates. I recognize its masculine and patriarchal power, I try to reclaim it in my feminist reading, like Judith Plaskow and her classic *Standing again at Sinai: Judaism from a feminist perspective* (Plaskow, 1990). In my dream, thanks to the magic key, I would understand the holiest of the books, the totality of knowledge, the Bible and its commentaries. When I woke up, I understood that my scholarly position is paranoid, I want to know even the most impenetrable spheres of human

creations. I looked at my daughter sleeping peacefully, and I cuddled her gently and hoped my warmth would be like a message for her. Me as a teacher to my daughter — as a student, my pupil, my disciple:

My students, my daughters!

Be brave and be safe, try to know, in the maze of information. I, as a teacher, I give you paths, I suggest possibilities. Go with me and see what I build, see where I can take you. Let it be fun, do not stop with the classroom, books, libraries, handbooks, notebooks, pens. Go beyond, to the parks, and galleries, meetings with retired teachers, friends from other countries, other worlds, other planets. Read the books I give you, respect their knowledge, but do never stop there.

Do challenge me.

Do teach me.

Do confront me.

Do use my tools but you do not undo my house with my tools. Search for your own.

Find your own.

Ask.

Comment.

Criticize.

Discuss.

Remember you have the key. The key does not belong to the past, it is always the possession of the future. Another has the key. Another that cannot even be imagined. Because it has not been yet.

It is tough

Yet, this is the hope and

It is

A Reparative Academy.

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However, much as I want the new teaching to come, I am paranoid here. I am the subject of Eve Kosofsky Sedwick's articles. In the reparative academy as in reparative reading, one who describes and discloses various forms of oppression has to recognize how much she wants the oppression to carry on, and not to be repaired. The improvement is a chance of a change and a dangerous test of one's comfortable position within academia. Kosofsky Sedgwick says:

Reparative motives, once they become explicit, are inadmissible in paranoid theory both because they are about pleasure ("merely aesthetic") and because they are frankly ameliorative ("merely reformist"). What makes pleasure and amelioration so "mere"? Only the exclusiveness of paranoia's faith in demystifying exposure: only its cruel and contemptuous assumption that the one thing lacking for global revolution, explosion of

gender roles, or whatever, is people's (that is, other people's) having the painful effects of their oppression, poverty, or deludedness sufficiently exacerbated to make the pain conscious (as if otherwise it wouldn't have been) and intolerable (as if intolerable situations were famous for generating excellent solutions) (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2002: 144).

I have to work hard not to be paranoid, not to see the reparative academy simply (merely) as a change in aesthetics (teaching methods?) or reformist (well, a few more additions, less administration forms to fill in, perhaps?). It is not "merely", reparative teaching is a chance for a new society. I know it is difficult to see it, because reparative teaching can be compared to the workings of the camp, which is:

among other things, the communal, historically dense exploration of a variety of reparative practices is to do better justice to many of the defining elements of classic camp performance: the startling, juicy displays of excess erudition, for example; the passionate, often hilarious antiquarianism, the prodigal production of alternative historiographies; the "over"-attachment to fragmentary, marginal, waste or leftover products; the rich, highly interruptive affective variety; the irrepressible fascination with ventriloquistic experimentation; the disorienting juxtapositions of present with past, and popular with high culture. As in the writing of D. A. Miller, a glue of surplus beauty, surplus stylistic investment, unexplained upwellings of threat, contempt, and longing cements together and animates the amalgam of powerful part-objects in such work as that of Ronald Firbank, Djuna Barnes, Joseph Cornell, Kenneth Anger, Charles Ludlam, Jack Smith, John Waters, and Holly Hughes (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2002: 150).

When contemplating the new method, the new teacher has to always pay attention to the societal circumstance and remember that the democracy around us is masculine. Ten years ago, during the Congress of Polish Women that took place in Warsaw (20–21 June, 2009), in her opening speech, Maria Janion, a Polish scholar and former anti-communist activist, expressed her disappointment with the new Polish democracy:

For years I was well aware of the clear division between serious and non-serious matters: in times of oppression the struggle for independence is considered a serious matter, and the fight for women's rights is not. Political persecutions affect the activists; but repression and violence against women remain their own business. I believed that freedom for the whole society should be achieved first, and then, together and peacefully, we would improve women's conditions. To my surprise, it transpired that a woman was to be a "family creature" in liberated Poland, a creature who—instead of engaging in politics—should take care of the home. It took some time before I realized that democracy in Poland has a masculine gender (Janion's speech at Women's Congress in Warsaw, 2009; quoted after Chowaniec & Phillips, 2012: 5).

In the masculine world we act masculine, no doubt. I will tell you a story about a Facebook post of a feminist art critic who criticized a left-wing

politician elected in the October 2019 election to the Polish Parliament. The politician was criticized in the post by the feminist academic because she mentioned the fact that she has two kids and that she is afraid of the challenges to combine the two roles, as a mother and a high-ranking politician, the PM, but she promised to do everything to cope. The art critic mocked the politician because she saw mentioning family as putting women in the conservative perspective of motherhood (a mother is a conservative concept, apparently), and in a weak position of being a hysterical complainer (progressive politicians use only the rhetoric of optimism, apparently). I know that a mother in Polish society, as in many countries whose identity is based on insurgences, uprisings and wars is an ideological concept, it is a mother of warriors and a mother of other mothers of warriors for independence. But isn't it time to change it? Without a change, we cannot move on, we cannot liberate certain notions from their ideological limits. And we will always remain locked in the past. And we — men and women — will repeat the violence against women. My feminist Facebook friend was violating women's rights. As such she was a guardian of old politics, the old world. She was Athena diminishing Arachne in her work. And we know Athena is stronger, she has the world of power behind it. How is it possible that an openly feminist woman is against another woman, and she cannot even see how masculine she is? How is it possible that after almost 200 years of the feminist movement we see a woman as a public creature only when she pretends that she is without children, without illness, without passion, without a private life, without sexuality, without colour, without background. A perfect politician, a perfect public creature. A man.

Hence, this manifesto is a quest to change that. We have achieved a lot in systematic change, but we cannot pretend that we, public women, are all like Athena, that we are all men. No. Let's give the voice to Arachne.

I am asking: what was lacking in the last 30 years of feminism in Eastern Europe, which reparative practices were missing that the backlash has come so easily? Now, through the rhetoric used in the war against gender, where gender is seen as the monster threatening the safe notion of family, and the so-called normality of life, we have realised that no one understood the aim of contemporary feminism, gender studies and queer politics!

Was it our paranoid reading that has disabled reparation? That has disabled the dismantling of a masculine democracy into a genuine one? Was it our exclusiveness: actually, the desire to remain as the ones who possess the knowledge? Were we like Athenas, acting against the social Arachne-esque desire of the camp, of diversity creation? Was it that feminism has become a guardian of the conservative society?

If so, then time to break it up. There is too much at stake. Otherwise they will silence us, women again. They will shame us, they will make us irrelevant.

A mute spider who spins her web, so perfect and so fragile. Wake up. There is a lot at stake. You are. My sister.

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I call on all my mothers, all my feminist philosophers, writers, poets, thinkers, teachers, artists, friends, women and men to help me, help us to change the way we think about teaching, I was learning and teaching for it to be healing and not a process of inflicting pain. I call on all my sisters: Mary Beard, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Helene Cixous, Małgorzata Dawidek, Ronald Firbank, Djuna Barnes, Griselda Pollock, Joseph Cornell, Rozsika Parker, Kenneth Anger, Charles Ludlam, Jack Smith, Maria Janion, John Waters, Holly Hughes... and many, many others.

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FIG. 1–4. MAŁGORZATA DAWIDEK'S PERFORMANCE *APORIA & EPIPHANY*
WITH ULA CHOWANIEC'S READING THE MANIFESTO (BRUSSELS, 25.10.2019)

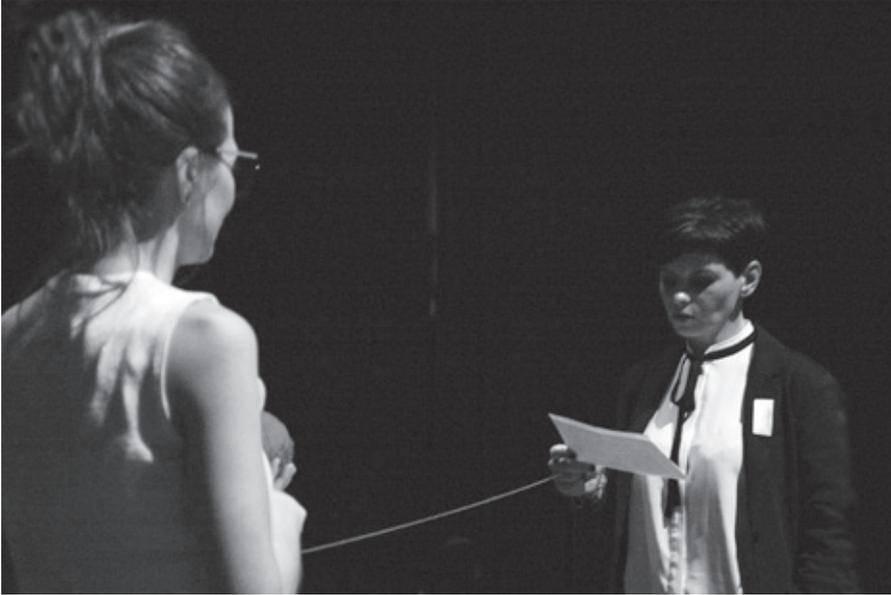


Fig. 1. Małgorzata Dawidek and Ula Chowaniec



Fig. 2. Małgorzata Dawidek, Ula Chowaniec and the performance participants



Fig. 3. Małgorzata Dawidek and the performance participants



Fig. 4. Małgorzata Dawidek

