

## Making the Necessary Theater in Gdańsk: Documenting and Evaluating Carlos Morton's *Trapped in Amber*

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**Abstract:** The article documents and evaluates Carlos Morton's *Trapped in Amber/Zakłęte w jantarze*, a Chicana *teatro* play commissioned and produced by the International Border Studies Center (IBSC) at the University of Gdańsk in 2022. It is divided into two sections. The first sketches the origins of the Chicana Theater, introduces Morton, and explains IBSC's goals. It also documents the production process and, drawing on debates in American studies and border studies, offers an interpretation of the piece and controversy it precipitated. Using social science method of survey reports section two analyses then the viewers' responses to the staged workshop production. The article mixes documentary style with analysis and data study.

**Keywords:** border studies, American studies, Chicana theater, Gdańsk, Chicano *teatro*, Carlos Morton, Günter Grass, accompaniment, audience, survey research

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Though tempted to retreat... hide behind  
simplistic walls of identity, las nepantleras  
know their work lies in positioning  
themselves... in the crack between these  
worlds, and revealing current categories as  
unworkable.

Anzaldúa qtd. in Castillo 263

### Introduction

The International Border Studies Center (IBSC) was founded at the University of Gdańsk in 2021. The center emerged out of the Border Studies Group at UG's American Studies. The American studies' provenience of the IBSC explains the center's frequent cooperation with Chicana and Southwestern scholars and artists. The first artist invited by the IBSC in 2021 was Chicano playwright Carlos Morton. He was commissioned to write a play about Gdańsk as the borderlands. Between June and October 2022 a staged reading of his original play *Trapped in Amber* and a staged workshop production of the Polish translation *Zakłęte w jantarze* took place. This article is offered as a comprehensive report on the *Trapped in Amber/Zakłęte w jantarze (Trapped)* project, historically the first original Chicana theater production in Poland. Therefore, along the analytical and interpretative content it

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1 The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: conception, methodological design, analysis, interpretation and manuscript preparation: Grzegorz Welizarowicz 78%, Wiktoria Pietrasik 11%, Karol Wijek 11%. All authors reviewed and accepted the final version of the manuscript.

includes archival information as well as broad contextualization (Chicano theater, Morton, IBSC, American studies debates, Gdańsk's public memory). Furthermore, by drawing on audience surveys conclusions are offered regarding the quality of impact on the viewers. Overall, it is argued that *Trapped* enacted transcultural methodologies central to recent American studies debates and practice. It is also suggested that the play and the project articulated border thinking or border gnosis (Mignolo) and constituted an important, "necessary" alethic intervention into the public memory of Gdańsk.

## Doing Chicanx Theater in Poland

### Chicanx Theater

Contemporary Chicanx Theater originated in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Jorge Huerta's *Chicano Theater Themes and Forms* (1982) documents that theatrical flowering.<sup>3</sup> A dramatic genre common to most early Chicano *teatro* collectives was the *acto*.<sup>4</sup> In 1970 Luis Valdez, the founder of El Teatro Campesino (ETC) explained: "Actos: Inspire the audience to social action. Illuminate specific points about social problems. Satirize the opposition. Show or hint at a solution. Express what people are feeling" (Valdez, *Early* 12). Valdez adds that the *acto* is motivated by "the social vision as opposed to the individual artist or playwright's vision" (Valdez, *Early* 13). The *acto* makes use of group archetypes useful in building strong connections with the audience, tools of "true expression of... social state and therefore reality" (Valdez, *Early* 13).<sup>5</sup> The archetype became a trademark of the Chicanx theater and appears in other genres in that aesthetic.

The *mito*, or the Chicanx mystery play approaches indigenous mythology(ies).<sup>6</sup> The *carpa/corrido* draws on the tradition of Mexican circus and popular performance and is structured around a continuous musical accompaniment. *La historia* is Valdez's term to designate period plays engaging occluded elements of community history.<sup>7</sup> More broadly, Chicanx theatrical aesthetic draws from

2 The term "Chicanx" is a recent iteration of the earlier "Chicano," "Chicana/o," "Chicano/a," "Chican@," etc. Unless the authors speak of the historical *teatro* movement they use this now widely accepted version.

3 In 1965 El Teatro Campesino (ETC) was formed when Luis Valdez, a former member of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and a graduate of San Jose State College with a degree in theater, joined the farmworkers' strike in Delano, California. For a few years the Campesino served as the cultural arm of the United Farmworkers Union garnering national and international attention. It inspired a theatrical flowering of grassroots Chicanx *teatros*.

4 First defined as such by Valdez to refer to ETC's early short collectively created pieces the *acto* has an urgent, satirical message and didactic purpose. Often explained as a hybrid of sketch *comico* of Mexican popular performance (*carpa*), street theater, Brechtian *Lehrstücke*, agit-prop, and *commedia dell'arte* it was easily adaptable to a variety of contexts by urban and rural *teatros* across the nation.

5 According to Valdez: "Chicanos in general want to identify themselves as a group" and desire "unity and group identity" (Valdez, *Early* 13).

6 *Bernabé* by Valdez is a good example of a *mito* but so is ETC's *Soldado Razo*.

7 A good example of *la historia* is Valdez's *Zoot Suit* (1978). Partly a court drama it can also be

the wealth of world theater. Not infrequently does Chicana theater mix satire and humor with symbolism and mysticism. Often explained as *rasquache* aesthetic it is purposefully playful, ironic, mindful of stance, metatheatrical and interrogates the gaze of the viewers. Because this latter capacity to “stage the audience” is what W.B. Worthen considers “one of the principal innovations of contemporary American performance” (Worthen, “The American” 946) one could say that Chicana theater’s reliance on the dramaturgy of reception makes its concerns central to American theater.<sup>8</sup>

Chicana theater is usually political, advancing the cause of social justice. Born out of labor and civil rights movement its ethos can be broadly defined as internationalist, oppositional as well as informed by the empathy for the lot of the immigrant. It is also paradigmatically hemispheric and informed by *mestizaje* which underscores indigenous spirituality. Theater has been one of the most important outlets for this interest and Valdez’s program of actor’s training known as the Theater of the Sphere or Vibrant Being is but the most prominent example of a larger phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>

Huerta has described the *teatro* as “necessary” (Huerta, *Necessary* 6) to the Chicana community’s well-being in spiritual and socio-political terms.<sup>10</sup> In the 1960s Valdez spoke of the “necessity” of theater: “we use comedy because it stems from a *necessary* situation—the *necessity* of lifting the morale of our strikers” (Bagby 77; emphasis mine). In “Notes on Chicano Theatre” he writes: “Chicano theater... is first the reaffirmation of LIFE” (*Early* 6). In his 2022 book Valdez extends this imperative. He speaks of actors as “vibrant beings” who through performance can

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called documentary theater fused with allegory. El Teatro de la Esperanza’s *Guadalupe* (1974) and Latino Theater Company’s *August 29* (1990) are other seminal documentary dramas. Carlos Morton’s *The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales* (1983) is perhaps the most famous Chicana documentary court drama of the post-*Zoot Suit* era.

- 8 Self-reflexive concerns are central to ETC’s *Los Vendidos*. Valdez’s plays like *Zoot Suit*, *Bandido!* and *I Don’t Have to Show You no Stinking Badges* interrogate the politics of forms by focusing respectively on newspapers, melodrama, and TV sit-com. Founded in 1984 *teatro*/comedy group Culture Clash has continued this vein of dramaturgy of reception with their series of reverse-anthropological plays about such communities as Miami (*Radio Mambo* [1994]), San Diego (*Bordertown* [1998]), Washington D.C. (*Anthems* [2002]), and others.
- 9 A recent publication on the *Latinx Actor Training* (2023) edited by Cynthia Santos DeCure and Micha Espinosa sheds spotlight on the unique actor’s practice pursued not only by Chicana but other Latinx performative pedagogists. Although broad in scope the book overlooks Valdez’s studies of the Maya recently explained in a book form (2022). The Theater of the Sphere or the Vibrant Being program must be seen on par with contributions by Jerzy Grotowski or Peter Brook’s search for sources. Brook and his troupe visited ETC’s headquarters in San Juan Bautista, CA and collaborated with Valdez’s company in July 1973 (Hunt and Reeves 187). Some ETC members had trained with Grotowski before joining the company (for example, Alma Martinez).
- 10 When performed for Chicana audiences, Huerta says, “the relationship between the audience and the performer... is based on grateful acceptance” (*Necessary* 9; emphasis mine). Huerta explains: “It is this special relationship that creates a necessary theater, a dramatic event that means something to its audience beyond mere entertainment.... But it is important to note that these plays are also entertaining and retain their effectiveness as they challenge the creative team; they are not easy to perform” (*Necessary* 9; emphasis mine).

tune their audiences in to the cosmic vibration.<sup>11</sup> In other words, it is the audience that is at the center of this theater's concerns. The "[a]udience participation is... a pre-established, pre-assumed privilege" (Valdez, *Early* 6) and the ultimate goal.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, we arrive at the criteria with which to measure any theater performance against the *teatro* standard. It is bringing "the community together, spiritually, culturally, and linguistically" (Huerta, *Necessary* 6), creating a bond that is founded on generosity and gratitude and manifests itself as exhilaration. Humor, archetypes, and moral affirmation are key. Theater is a life-giving force.

### Carlos Morton

Morton has played a vital part in the history of the Chicano theater for the last five decades.<sup>13</sup> He saw ETC when he was an undergraduate at the University of Texas at El Paso in the early 1970s.<sup>14</sup> In 1976, upon Huerta's encouragement he was accepted into the Master's Program at the University of California San Diego. Today his plays are widely anthologized and shown on college campuses as well as at some of the most prestigious stages.<sup>15</sup> Among his landmark works are, *Los Dorados* (about colonization of California by the Spanish), *Rancho Hollywood* (about Anglo invasion of California), *Many Deaths of Danny Rosales* (about the murder of a young Chicano by an Anglo sheriff and its coverup).<sup>16</sup>

*Los Dorados* is a good example of Morton's aesthetic and political method.<sup>17</sup>

- 11 "At its peak, it touches the body, heart and mind of the audience directly, inspiring them to sense their own vibration or spirituality if only for a moment" (Valdez, *Theatre* 77).
- 12 In a statement echoing W.E.B. DuBois' 1926 manifesto about the theater "about, by, for, near" African Americans Valdez asserts the primacy of the people or the "pueblo" or "La Raza": "The theatros must never get away from La Raza.... If the raza will not come to the theatre, then the theatre must go to the raza" (*Early* 10).
- 13 Professor Emeritus of Theater at the University of California Santa Barbara Carlos Morton was born in Chicago in 1947.
- 14 The company performed a musical piece *Corridos*. He calls it his "'Antoine Artaud' moment as in 'the theater as plague'" when "seeing a remarkable performance that entertained as well as educated" he finally found "precisely what I was seeking." He became "'infected' and watched the show the first night from the audience, and the second night from backstage" (Morton, "Borders" 31).
- 15 For example, *Pancho Diablo* by the New York Shakespeare Festival Latino in 1987, Puerto Rican Travelling Company in NYC produced his *El Jardín* (dir. Jorge Huerta) in 1988, in 1988-89 season Denver Center Theatre produced Morton's *Cuentos*.
- 16 *Many Deaths* won the New York Shakespeare Festival's Hispanic Playwrights Festival Award in 1986. Other Morton's plays include: *The Savior* (about the Archbishop Oscar Romero), *Johnny Tenorio* (about Chicano Don Juan in San Antonio, Texas), *El Jardín* (1974) and its sequel *Pancho Diablo* (1987) tracing New World history from the garden of Eden. *Pancho Diablo* is a play with *musica ranchera* and cumbias, Country/Western, and Techno-banda about a Chicano devil who quits hell and moves to Texas. *The Miser of Mexico*, an adaptation of Moliere's classic and *The Child Diego*, about the life of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera are set, respectively, in Ciudad Juarez and Mexico City.
- 17 In the summer of 1978 this drama about Native Californians and Spanish colonists was staged by a multicultural cast of the California Pacific Touring Company for over fifty (Garlington) to eighty (Fox) times at parks, fairgrounds and in the streets in the San Diego County. This was one of the first commissions for an original dramatization of little-known aspects of San Diego

A *commedia* piece, it uses verbal and bodily slapstick, ribald, lower bodily stratum humor, sight gags and one-liners, allegory. Mixing popular culture references with historical facts and quotations from colonial chronicles (Columbus, Cortez, Serra), riffs on Montalvo (myth of Calafia) and *The Tempest*, throwing into the mix freeways and frisbees the play compresses historical time, collapses history with the present.<sup>18</sup> Morton's play initially foregrounds the Kumeyaay (or "Kemia" in the script) people of the San Diego region. But being an autopsy of California's memory the play's progression leads to the Kemia's transformation *from host to ghost*. This symbolizes the ongoing, if spectral, role of indigeneity in the historical consciousness of the state. At the same time, the play stages the transition of the audience's consciousness: from romanticization of the Indian to the indigenous anxious lacuna. Morton thus calls attention to what we can call, after Alan Lawson, the "colonial anxiety of proximity" (30). This is perhaps best encapsulated by the play's scene in which a Franciscan Padre simultaneously baptizes and rapes Tupipe, a young native woman whom he renames Ramona. Ramona is an American hieroglyph to come in Helen Hunt Jackson's novel of 1884 but in this take it is revealed as the proxy for rape, a misleading signifier which obscures, mystifies, fabricates what we know now about the real Indigenous people of California and their history.

Morton's goal is not to represent history accurately or to mythologize it but rather to critique how representation frames history, to engage history's negotiations in the present. For Morton history is always already pre-mediated and remediated. It is accessible only partially for there are layers of sedimented discourses, narratives, popular legends, and phantasmagorias that obscure the "Truth."<sup>19</sup> Morton is interested in showing these layers and his plays stage a subjectivity, to use Gilles Deleuze, "derived from the outside, conditioned by the fold" (107). Morton not only, as Worthen says, "document[s] Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicano/a histories occluded by a dominant 'American' narrative" ("Staging" 101) and "rewrite[s] the narrative of border history itself, offering a history that both opposes and satirizes the conventional stories of Euro-America" (Worthen, "Staging" 115). He also ghosts them, calls attention to the abject, the unthought. Thus, his plays act on viewers' certainties in historical, histrionic, alethic, and affective ways.

## IBSC

One of the IBSC's goals has been to advance what after Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe we call the "border aesthetics" (2017), to combine research in

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history sponsored through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. Directed by Larry Swerdlove the show was a "serious-minded farce" (McCaffrey).

18 Morton says: "actual quotes were adopted and attributed to characters" and "direct quotes were incorporated like the assassination of the *padre* in Mission San Diego" (Morton, "Interview").

19 Discussing Morton's plays Worthen says: "the production of history always engages in several acts of mediation, involving not only the ways that history has been transmitted, but also the ways in which history is inflected by the ideological, representational, and material modalities of the present" ("Staging" 118).

cultural borders with artistic residencies. The residencies reflect IBSC's founders' heightened sense of "the role of aesthetics in the negotiation and functioning of borders and borderscapes" (Schimanski and Wolfe 8) and of the political potential of art and cultural expressions in relation to regimes of belonging/exclusion, practices of demarcation and differentiation, etc. They are also intended to emerge from and advance a specific type of mindset and epistemic praxis. Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez speaks of the "*pensamiento fronterizo*" producing "a *fronterizo* practice... [which] undermines reifying narratives" (137).<sup>20</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa's "mental nepantlism" (97) has inspired scholars to think in terms of borderlands and contact zones, "hybridities and fluidities" which may shape places and spaces into "less territorially and culturally 'stable' than we may have thought" (Fishkin 21). Walter D. Mignolo introduces the concepts of "border gnosis" and "border thinking" to acknowledge the plurality of sources of knowledge and "build a world in which many worlds will coexist" (Mignolo, *Darker* 58). These are just some thinkers who inspire conceptualizing border aesthetics both as a critical discipline and a practice informed by a differential epistemology.

Concomitantly the intention of the residencies is to interrogate the region of Gdańsk in terms of borderlands, borderscapes, borderculture, etc., to inspire novel ways of thinking and articulating its identity. If, according to Victor Shklovsky, "the work of art has the inherent potential to insert 'difference into our ideologically fixed versions of reality'" (in Schimanski and Wolfe 8) then the IBSC intends the residencies to produce art intervening into our regional self-perceptions. As experiments in border thinking and doing the resultant artworks are to help us think Gdańsk anew.

The Chicana critical discourse and cultural praxis are BSG and IBSC's founding points of reference by way of American studies. The labor movement origins of the modern Chicana culture provoke us to think of parallels with the story of modern Gdańsk and the Solidarity movement. In 1985 Joan Baez came to Gdańsk. At Chaplain Henryk Jankowski's St. Briget's church she sang "Boże Nasz" with Mieczysław Cholewa and Antoni Filipkowski, two bards of Solidarity. Because Chicano Movement combined labor and social justice issues with cultural and spiritual reaffirmation we were curious what bringing to bear this culture's toolbox (beyond Baez's vocalizations) on the story of Gdańsk would produce. Morton is a member of the IBSC.<sup>21</sup> His interest in the complexities of history, his research-based

20 Vaquera-Vásquez takes the concept of "*pensamiento fronterizo*" from José David Saldivar who defines it as a "geopolitically located thinking that 'emerges from the critical reflections of (undocumented) immigrants, migrants, *bracero*/a workers, refugees, campesinos, women, and children on the major structures of dominance and subordination of our times'." Linking it with Aníbal Quijano's "coloniality power" Vaquera-Vásquez thinks of *pensamiento fronterizo* as "a decolonizing strategy for undermining forms of power" (137).

21 Morton has been a Fulbright scholar to Poland and has established relationships with many American Studies programs in the country. In 2019 he was the founding member of The Border Studies Research Group (BSG) at UG's Faculty of Languages. The BSG was launched during the Border Seminar 2019 conference at which a staged reading of Morton's one-act radio play *Endless Border* was presented by American Studies undergraduate. When the International Border Studies Center (IBSC) was founded, Morton became its member.

method, and his portable theatricality allowed envisioning a play about Gdańsk not unlike *Los Dorados*: touring schools and parks, teaching history with ham and wry, showing the invisible, dialoging with the city's literary, hieroglyphic universe.

### ***Trapped in Amber***

In September 2021 the IBSC approached Morton about the play. His keynote address at a conference of the Committee on Migration Research of Polish Academy of Science led to a meeting with Miłosława Borzyszkowska-Szewczyk, a Günter Grass scholar and a member of the IBSC. She was planning a conference for Grass's 95<sup>th</sup> birthday in October 2022. Morton was invited to somehow dialog with Grass and to present the results at that conference.

Over the fall and winter of 2021/2022, the playwright immersed himself in the regional history.<sup>22</sup> He sought out stories about outstanding women of the region. He was intrigued by Anna Krüger sentenced to death for witchcraft in 1659. Krüger was over eighty years old and in good health while an epidemic was raging. This was enough to raise accusations. She was tortured until she confessed. Then she was burnt at stake. The 1980 strike's leader Anna Walentynowicz's story was a welcome find. Morton also read Grass looking for character types, phrases, themes, images.<sup>23</sup> He scanned recent events.

Morton suggested Irwin Appel, a Shakespearean actor and the chair of the Theater and Dance Department of the University of California Santa Barbara, as the director.<sup>24</sup> They had collaborated before. When Appel directed Morton's *Brown Buffalo*, they coined "Chicano Theater meets the Borscht Belt" as a moniker for their aesthetic. Serendipitously, Appel was planning to be in Poland in early June and agreed to direct if actors were found. Contact was made with Studium Wokalno-Aktorskie im. Baduszkowej in Gdynia (PPSWA), a state-run music acting conservatory housed at the Music Theater in Gdynia. These are both prestigious institutions. The Music Theater has a long history (since 1958), the school was established in 1966.<sup>25</sup> The pitched plan included a staged reading in June, a production at the Günter Grass. *Intercultural Dialogues and Encounters* conference

22 Materials sent to Morton included books on the history of Solidarity (Shana Penn's *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* [2005]; Michael R. Dobbs, K. S. Karol, Dossa Trevisan and David P. Baker's *Poland, Solidarity, Walesa* [1981]; David Ost's *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* [1991]; Jack M. Bloom's *Seeing Through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution: Solidarity and the Struggle Against Communism in Poland* [2013]).

23 Morton read Grass' *The Tin Drum* and *Peeling the Onion*.

24 Appel is a Shakespearean actor and director of Naked Shakes, a UCSB company whose method is based on clear and direct presentations appealing to the imagination of the audience through body, language, and bare space.

25 For the history of the Music Theater see, for example, Hanna Dyktyńska's "Galopem przez historię Teatru Muzycznego w Gdyni." *Współczesne formy teatru muzycznego (na świecie, w Polsce, w Gdyni)*. Jan Ciechowicz, ed. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk, 2009. 185-212. For the history of the PPSWA see, for example, Jan Wester, ed. *Oblakani teatrem... 50 lat Państwowego Policealnego Studium Wokalno Aktorskiego im. Danuty Baduszkowej w Gdyni*. Państwowe Policealne Studium Wokalno Aktorskie im. Danuty Baduszkowej w Gdyni, Gdynia, 2016.

in October, and a touring show the following year played at schools, parks, and community centers. Director Marek Kaczanowski expressed keen interest and tasked first year students with the project. A date for a staged reading at the school's theater was set for June 11.

Morton and Appel arrived a few days earlier for three days of rehearsals. The rehearsals and the staged reading were in English.<sup>26</sup> The team included a literary translator Julia Skuza, two interpreters Julita Panasko and Weronika Wianecka, composer Luis Moreno (working from Santa Barbara), PPSWA pianist Artur Guza, and performers Maria Bach, Szymon Czerski, Łukasz Gładysz, Mateusz Górecki, Kacper Jędrzejowski, Natalia Kaczanowska, Paweł Kiedrowski, Weronika Radniecka, Aleksandra Rowicka, Łukasz Szerszeń, Mieszko Wierciński, Karolina Ziętak. Welizarowicz was the executive producer on behalf of the IBSC.

Czerski, a short, witty blond man was cast as as Little Glass. Little Glass is Morton's composite character, part *The Tin Drum's* Oskar Matzerath, part Grass himself (Grass/Glass slippage), the narrator with a drum and participant in the events. Bach was given the role of Amber, a character based on Agnes Koljaiczek, Oscar's beautiful Kashubian mother. Amber is also Kashubian and cannot decide whether she loves Jurek (a Pole) or Fritz (a German). Wierciński, maybe because of his simmering-pot energy, was selected to play Saintly or the Inquisitor.

Structurally, the play is closest to the Chicano *carpa/corrido*, as codified by Campesino: a narrative ballad with fast-moving scenes to musical accompaniment, bilingual (interjections in German), with stock/archetypal rather than individualized characters. Like *carpa/corrido* it announces its own nature with music.

The first stanza of the overture song is taken directly from Breon Mitchell's translation of *The Tin Drum*: "Glass, glass, little glass, / Sugar and no beer, / Mother Hollie runs upstairs / And sheds a tiny tear" (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 57). Morton then builds his own rhymes appropriating Grass' content like the motif of the Black Cook, a mythical bogeywoman. He then suspends an ominous question: "someone's going to die?" (Draft#1 2).<sup>27</sup> The mood of haunting turns carnivalesque. Little Glass mixes tongues ("Mein Mutter was Kashubian, / Mein Pater was a Kraut" [Morton, Draft#1 2]). Gdańsk is a crucible of ethnicities (Jews, Germans, Poles) with a common denominator: they all eat and "all die of gout!!" (Draft#4 2). The song thus announces the show's dialogic nature, signals *The Tin Drum* as a powerful predecessor, and reveals an affinity between Morton and Grass, their predilection for "breaking the dichotomy of the single voice national narratives, by filling them with the 'counter-memory' stories (Michael Foucault)" (Borzyszkowska-Szewczyk 8). Hence the foregrounding of the Kashubians. In the next stanza Morton adapts with a difference the famous insight of Oscar's grandmother, Anna Koljaiczek, that "Kashubes don't move around a lot, they always stay put, and hold their heads still for others to whack, because... Kashubes ain't good enough for Germans or Pollacks.

26 Many observations were made about acting as ESL learning method as well as about English being as essential skill of a contemporary actor. These observations, however, are beyond the scope of this essay.

27 The Black Cook is *The Tin Drum's* leitmotif. Oscar describes it as "*always somewhere behind me*" (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 547; emphasis in the original).

They want everything cut and dried" (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 387). Evoking Homi Bhabha, Borzyszkowska-Szewczyk speaks of Grass' representation of Kashubians as a "społeczność długiego trwania [a community of the long presence]" (7) which functions "between the Germans and the Poles as a 'third space'" (Borzyszkowska-Szewczyk 8). Morton's song rewrites this concisely: "Kashubians stay put, / They never move around. / When Poles and Germans beat them up, / They always stand their ground" (Morton, Draft#1 3). This is followed by Little Glass' direct address to the audience: "*Meine Damen and Herren*, we're going to perform scenes from a region that's been fought over a thousand years. Danzig to the Germans, Gdansk to the Poles." Note the bilingualism, breaking of the fourth wall, self-referentiality, and the announcement of interest: this is going to be a play about the history of a specific and *contested* place told with constant shifts of tone – from "amber" and "woe" (Morton, Draft#1 3).

It unfolds in a series of scenes jumping through time. From 1659 (The Burning of the Witch) Little Glass' narration swiftly takes us to scenes set in the 1900s (Green Wooden Maiden/Amber and Her Suitors, Kindertansporten), the WWII years (The Polish Post Office) and the strikes of the 1980s (The Birth of Solidarity) all the way to the modern Gdańsk (Grass and Jankowski controversy, mayor Paweł Adamowicz' assassination in 2019). This is hardly the whole story of the city. But Morton knew that rather than *telling it all* it was important to *find a unifying theme*. Moreover, this was a work in progress with potential for expansion.<sup>28</sup>

Such a theme is the innocents versus Power introduced in the dramatization of Krüger's trial. Quotes from historical records are incorporated as a dialog. The absurdity and cruelty of Saintly's overreach is enraging. But we understand the Power that stands behind him. It is the Power of the master narrative that decides life and death. Morton contrasts this authority with dignity of Anna's simple lines. She resembles Morton's many strong women like Tupipe (*Los Dorados*), Tonta (*Rancho Hollywood*), or Campesina (*The Savior*) who provoke audience's empathy as well as that of fellow characters like the Gentle Executioner (Górecki's performance queers the part).

The theme informs all subsequent scenes and is developed in two stages. First, in the 1900s through the WWII years it is articulated primarily in terms of tragedy, loss of innocence—Amber's suitors' are clouded by their nationalism, the Jewish Boy will survive Nazism but never see his parents, Little Glass will denounce his Polish father, a letter from Zalewski from Zoppot will inform coldly of his death, Hitler will make Kashubians into second-class Germans only to send them to fight. In the 1980s the theme is rearticulated. People's power finally prevails. The strikers come to higher consciousness and recognize their collective power.

Thus, the trajectory of the play builds up towards this realization of *what binds us*. As Little Glass says in the finale: "Underneath our Slavic, Teutonic skins we are all human beings and citizens of Gdansk" (Draft#1 33). This down-to-earth

28 Appel said that the idea of the reading was "to explore some limited staging ideas and an opportunity for the playwright and the audience to hear the play for the first time and for the playwright to make changes before it becomes the fully staged production" (Appel).

ethos of *history* (lower case, the everyday) is contrasted in the play with ideological projects of *History* (upper case, the Master code) like Counter-Reformation, Nationalisms, Communism, Great Wars and their regimes of subreption (moral high ground, scapegoating, fearmongering) and cruelty. They cast a shadow of “anxiety and dread” (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 541) over people’s lives not unlike the shadow of the uncanny Black Cook which as Oscar says was “now and forever coming toward me” (Grass, *The Tin Drum* 547) and Grass describes as “multiplied, now seeking sweetness, and all the words: blessed, sorrowful, full of grace, virgin of virgins” (*The Tin Drum* 546). Morton tells us that Power operates by the terrifying and the alluring sublime—he creates a Russian Bear who first growls (at least one spectator complained: “for me personally, hearing the actor roar was a bit uncomfortable” [response 15]) and then sings an Italian aria (one viewer found it “quite hilarious” and surprising [response 8] while another found the device of a “bear... singing in a foreign language... very engaging for the audience as they have to put in a little more effort to understand what is going on” [response 12]). He also tells us that the solution to this is not, as Oscar would have it, to “start running” but to come together, forging unity of the people, transcending our differences and *organizing* together for the common good.. This message is consistent with the general pedagogy of the Chicana theater since its beginning.<sup>29</sup>

In effect, Little Glass becomes Gdańsk’s Everyman. And the play is a morality play about the impermanence of ideological projects and endurance of places and human spirit. The June draft finishes with the last words of the late mayor who praised Gdańsk’s generosity. The October draft also includes this speech, but Little Glass speaks later, and in line with Grass’ biography, of his return to Gdańsk and of being “Kashubian at heart” (Morton, Draft#4 33). This prioritization of positive affect, be it empathy manifested as generosity or an emotional attachment to place and local identity, framed by the heart as a metaphor of the core and of utmost inclusivity, stands as affirmation of unity against the fear of the Black Cook’s shadow. The fall draft buttresses this with a chant in the finale: “Gdańsk united, will never be divided!” (Draft#4 37).

### Controversy

The reading’s limited staging with live music was well received. The play was praised for including the Kashubian story. Borzyszkowska-Szewczyk suggested “*jantar*” instead of “*bursztyn*.” Thus, Bach’s character became Jantar in the Polish version. One scene elicited unexpected controversy.

Just as Little Glass is about to say goodbye to the audience, Saintly bolts in. Drawing on an actual scandal from early 2000s Morton has him accuse Glass, now directly conflated with Grass, of not having confessed his “Nazi past, Waffen SS!” (Morton, Draft#1 30): “Relinquish your honorary citizenship of Gdańsk!” (Morton, Draft#1 31). In response Morton adapts a real confession by Grass.<sup>30</sup>

29 For example, Valdez’s *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa* (1964) ends with a headless body and a bodiless head and a call to organize or put the two together (Valdez, *Shrunken* 207).

30 Grass was attacked after his confession to a reporter. In 2006 mayor Paweł Adamowicz, reached out to Grass, the honorary citizen of the city, asking to initiate a conversation. Grass would later

Then, in a strategy Morton used as early as his first piece *El Jardín*, he collapses temporal distance by conflating the Inquisitor with the once famous then disgraced Solidarity chaplain: "Henryk Jankowski, don't you have a little secret of your own...?" (Draft#1 31). He lists accusations of the priest's communist collaboration, antisemitism, vanity. When he mentions "pedophilia" Jankowski runs out.<sup>31</sup> He is brought back on a roller, in his hands "a small white church vestment worn by altar boys" and "[c]hildren's underwear to symbolize the suffering of young people at the hands of pedophile priests" (Draft#1 33). Then, in a direct reference to the toppling of Jankowski's statue in 2019 Little Glass together with Anna Walentynowicz and the Executioner "topple" him (Morton, Draft#1 33).

Coming on the heels of earlier scenes, most importantly the victory of Solidarity, the toppling was framed along a chain of historical events, real and symbolic surges, expressive of and precipitated by popular social movements: Anna says: "After the Fall of the Berlin Wall, we also toppled Lenin and Stalin" (Morton, Draft#1 33).<sup>32</sup> The message is clear: the 2019 act of civil disobedience is a powerful act of people's will indexing *another* moment in the development of people's consciousness towards democratic social change. In other words, Morton charts a phylogenesis of the present. Why else does Walentynowicz assist Little Glass? Thus, the scene was reflective of the theme of the play and enhanced the trajectory of its development. The reprise and revision of the Church motif also stood as a formal frame and highlighted the point Morton has been making about oppression since *Los Dorados'* rape scene: its gendered and sexual dimension. The play's priests embody not only Clarence Darrow's famous argument at the Scopes Trial of 1925 that "[i]gnorance and fanaticism is ever busy and needs feeding" (190). They are also the archetypal guardians of patriarchy.

Catholic Church however is a sensitive subject in Poland. After the reading one of the team members sent an email to the producer informing that the scene was an insult to the memory of the late chaplain. Self-described Catholic the writer suggested that the only purpose of the scene was to stir controversy. The letter asked: "What values are you giving to others? And do you take responsibility?" A later message put it more bluntly: the play was an insult to *all* Catholics.

Despite that, the general positive feedback to Appel's work allowed

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acknowledge that the mayor's efforts to bring him into dialog with his critics like Lech Wałęsa were "exemplary" (Grass, "Keynote" 41).

31 Morton worked with sources. Jankowski died in 2010 before facing a Vatican trial. Hailed for his work with Solidarity a statue of him was erected in 2012. In 2019 however, the monument was toppled in an act of civil disobedience.

32 The December 2023 script renders this this way: "Since the fall, the Berlin Wall / We are free, our own destiny / Polish lands, in our hands" (Morton, Draft#4 31). Although the chronology here is not exactly correct—the Berlin Wall fell months after the first partially free elections in Poland—Morton stands by this phrase. As he says in an email: "The reason: *Trapped in Amber* is not a research paper, it is a work of fiction. Therefore, I am taking 'poetic license'.... The Soviet Empire (symbolized by the Berlin Wall) was crumbling before the Wall actually fell in 1989, *que no?* The disastrous war in Afghanistan, the rise of Solidarity and its blessing by the Pope, Ronald Reagan Star Wars initiative which the Soviets could not match, etc., etc." (Morton, "Re: Syllabus").

planning future collaboration. It was agreed that the American director would return in October to do four shows: two (free) at UG and two (ticketed) at the Music Theater.<sup>33</sup> By late August Skuza had finished the translation and a meeting with actors was held on September 2, 2022. Something had changed however, the young actors were impatient, restive.

We began to learn, never directly though, that the scene which initially troubled only one PPSWA team member had by now created a moral panic. The actor who had played Jankowski pulled out. One person refused to play a part but asked the director not to reveal their identity lest they be “lynched” by peers. Appel commented on the phrasing: it sprang from “cancel culture” anxiety, an idea that if you do something against the grain you will be cancelled or “lynched.” As the chair of the acting school, he was all too familiar with this growing phenomenon. He expressed deep concern about its implications for the profession. Another actor, in a case of whataboutism, asked if the playwright could add a scene which would smear “the other side.”<sup>34</sup> It seemed obvious that the panic could not be divorced from the original alarm nor from the political climate in the country.

By late August PPSWA walked back some of its promises citing concerns with controversial content.<sup>35</sup> The scale of the crisis caught the team off guard and weighed heavily on its spirit. Being forced into a false debate about the play’s relationship to the Catholic Church felt like a lobotomy. As explained above, the play was never about that; one element was blown out of proportion. The zero-sum game binary thinking of “us versus them” in the world at large inadvertently caught up with the art. General skepticism about the script crept in. With a Polish version at hand the actors began to raise questions about the play’s context, aesthetics, jokes, translation’s merits. One addition in the new version bothered them: Putin’s mask on the Russian Bear. The actors were concerned about it in the context of the war and possible Ukrainians in the audience.

The playwright, director and producer tried to approach the crisis pragmatically. Early on Morton wrote to the person objecting and promised a balanced representation of the Church. The October script features the Pope as an ally of the strikers. Morton however refused to remove the toppling considering it integral to the play.<sup>36</sup> The playwright and director arrived on October 5, 2022. A

33 PPSWA promised to participate in the director’s honorarium. They would provide actors as well as a choreographer, a musician, and an assistant director who would be able to take over from Appel in 2024.

34 Welizarowicz: “From an enthusiasm in June, we were now facing a cancellation of the show altogether.... For a moment it felt like the students, that is our actors, were now basically running the show or threatened a coup” (Podciborska 31).

35 There would be no money for Appel. Also, it was communicated that as a state-run institution PPSWA could not risk its funding by showing *this* kind of material. It was suggested that the university as a research institution was a better fit and the two ticketed shows were cancelled. Welizarowicz commented: “The debate raised important questions about the freedom of speech and artistic expression and about censorship and preventive censorship” (Podciborska 31).

36 After all the statue is one of the essential forms of memorialization and spectacularization, creating and sustaining imagined communities, a figuration of in/visibility and b/ordering (Schimanski and Wolfe 166).

decision was made to change the scene in question. Morton spent the night typing and presented it at the first rehearsal the following morning.

Instead of Jankowski in the October draft Morton brings back the Inquisitor. Then Krüger, not Walentynowicz, arrives *deus ex machina* “from the past.” The *acto* thus turns into a *mito* and the characters become archetypes suspended in another time, both now and everywhen. Krüger confronts the Church about its misdeeds like brutal defense of geocentrism, no women priests, antisemitism, witch hunts, and – instead of pedophilia – the “abuse of the parishioners” (Draft#4 34). To this another character from the past bolts in:

EXECUTIONER (*Entering.*)

Oh no, I'm sorry, we can't talk about that!

ANNA

Why not, Gentle Executioner?

EXECUTIONER

It's censored. You cannot proceed.

ANNA

Says who?

EXECUTIONER (*Pointing to the audience.*)

Them! The audience won't stand for it. (Morton, Draft #4 34-35)

This spotlight on the viewers not only reminds them of their role as active interpreters and shakes them into renewed awareness. It also “stages the audience” to use Worthen's phrasing. It makes *their* own subjectivity and positionality visible. The spectatorial agency is mobilized further by the fact that both the crime in question and the local context of the toppling of the statue are now alluded to only, the messaging is not straightforward but ambivalent. Hence, it is up to the viewer to make the necessary connection between stage and life. Once they do, they are also morally implicated. But if Jankowski is present by proxy the theme remains consistent while the scene provides an example of striking efficacy of the dramaturgy of reception. Deleuze says that, “The inside [is] an operation of the outside” (97), that is, meanings emerge not from the work itself but from the social act of interpretation.

Also, Krüger's resurrection constitutes her symbolic vindication and offers a moral closure to the piece. Because she cannot talk about Saintly's misdeeds she casts a spell and turns him into stone, a statue. This act marks her as more than a witch from a fairy tale. She is the figure of the unknowable and the unacknowledged feminine. The fairy tale turn literalizes the epistemic differential. She is the Other, she is *Herstory* of Gdańsk some of which has recently been brought to light by Michał Ślubowski (2020; 2023). The casting of the spell was paralleled by the Polish translation of the title: “zakłète” can signify “enchanted” and a “secret” (i.e.: “*milczeć jak zakłety*”), “zakłęcie” is a “spell.” Thus, the rewrite provided a stronger statement politically, artistically, morally. Welizarowicz commented: “Carlos Morton came through with a force of intelligence so brilliant that the play now acquired another larger, transhistorical frame” (Podciborska 31).

The crisis was averted, Putin's mask dropped by unanimous consent. Challenges remained however: overload of students' schedules and conflicts in

their commitments, dropping out of the PPSWA musical director, no substitute, no assistant director. Some of Skuza's decisions required adjustments on the spot. Overall, there was good energy and Kaczanowski eventually sorted out scheduling conflicts although despite Music Theater's stated mission to tour locally (Dyktyńska 210) the plans to turn the play into a touring operation eventually disintegrated.<sup>37</sup> A choreographer, Aleksandra Szulc, joined the last two rehearsals.

Appel tasked actors to learn Moreno's tunes. Doubling as characters Ziętak (Krüger) and Mikołaj Pancerz (Jan)<sup>38</sup> played piano and Górecki played guitar during the two workshop performances at UG's Jerzy Limon Theater. The grand piano was the only permanent element on the set. The only permanent prop was Little Glass's drum and music, and rhythm became the backbone of the staging.<sup>39</sup>

Appel's guiding rule was "portability." Despite enormous time pressure (five days of rehearsals without a single one with a whole cast) he created a sparse, impressively refined visual poetry of movement, costume, and light. He uses actors spatially and expands the stage to include the audience when actors run up the aisles, leave through (Jewish boy) or enter from (Saintly) the auditorium. Tableaux and chorus scenes are his forte but so are toned-down moments. Simple light changes or additions to black costumes (a shawl, a rifle, the Star of David, a hardhat, a fur coat) transform chorus members into characters.

The piece develops in images: drum in spotlight, Krüger's interrogation, her burning metonymically suggested by Glass' drumstick used like a match, freeze. The scene of Jantar and her suitors (Gładysz, Kiedrowski) moves them momentarily back to Teutonic times and their duel is a dance with drumsticks turned swords. In Kindertransport, Bach is a mother who sees off her child (Midura). Their prop is a little suitcase turned a platform bench, then the boy's legacy. The strike scene was perhaps the greatest visual feat. Its opening premise is taken directly from El Teatro Campesino's *Las dos caras del patroncito* (1965). The worker Anna (Radniecka) is hammering not pruning grapes, but the shipyard boss (Kiedrowski) is demanding like the pig-faced *Patrón*: "Harder!" (Morton, Draft #4 25). When Anna sits down to strike others join behind her. The script speaks only of "passage of time" and Appel shows here his synergy with Morton. Ziętak keeps a steady quarter beat in a minor key while Glass strikes his drum every other bar. With each beat workers

37 Hanna Dyktyńska says that "*Teatr Muzyczny od początku swojego istnienia miał być teatrem objazdowym* [From its beginnings the Music Theater has been intended to be an itinerant theater]" and that by the end of the first decade of this century the theater launched a "travelling [wędrująca] scene" intended to tour the Pomeranian region (210).

38 Pancerz joined the team following Kacper Jędrzejowski's departure. Pancerz was a strong addition. He not only plays piano well but, according to Appel, was the most charismatic actor of the group.

39 The instruments create moods (piano), are stand-ins for other sounds (the drum/firearm discharge), engender time/ethos (folk ballad guitar connotes peoples' movements, from Woody Guthrie to Solidarity). The show starts with Glass beating an introductory salvo. A polka beat comes in which, like in the *teatro*, sets the beat underlying (in flux) the piece, linking Glass' vocalized monologues, adaptations (Bizet's "March of the Boy Soldiers" in the WWII scene and Verdi's "La donna è mobile" in the Solidarity scene), the finale's anthem, chants and Appel's addition, the diminutive coda by an invisible thread.

raise more hands. Eventually an intense tableau of unity in power is created. A similar moment comes at the very end when actors standing in line downstage call tributes to four heroes: Klaus Kinski, Lech Wałęsa, Walentynowicz, Adamowicz.

A special note should be made about Appel's foregrounding of reception which supports and enhances Morton's language. One of key devices is the chorus. It allows the audience to watch others watching others. This removal stages the gaze. So does Little Glass, a character between a neutral narrator, orchestrator of events, mischievous trickster (he puts drumsticks into characters' hands), guilty child, the oldest and the youngest of the tribe. Not only Morton but Appel and Czerski make him much like Grass's Oscar, "the satirist, the clown, the picaro, the innocent, the secular Messiah, the practitioner of black arts, the folklore dwarf and the autobiographical figure" (Keith Miles in Mews 20). In his stage presence (smirking, naïve) he is a cypher with many faces meandering between the divides of history and now, observation and action, reality and fiction, individuality and collectivity.<sup>40</sup> As a mediator between the stage, the chorus, and the audience he is a figure of poly-mediation, crossroads, empty-fullness, ambivalence, transfer, "perpetual transition" (Anzaldúa 78).

### Owning It

Approximately 700 people saw *Zakłete w jantarze* on October 11 and 14, 2022. The first show was for high schools, the other open for the public.<sup>41</sup> Reactions were overwhelmingly positive and, as the audience surveys will later reveal, allow an answer to the question of the show's values: the agency of individuals, common humanity, hope for unity in difference.<sup>42</sup> The second question by the original critic regards the creators' responsibility for the message, that is, their integrity. To answer this, we offer an American studies perspective.

As American studies scholars we situate this work in the tradition of what Janice Radway in her 1999 American Studies Association (ASA) presidential address calls the "alternative American studies" (Radway 6). Rather than being concerned with consensual narratives this tradition amplifies dissent, the subordinated and excluded, and places American history in an international context.<sup>43</sup> One

40 After R.W.B. Lewis we can call Glass in Czerski's take—with his simplicity, naivete, smiles, and trickeries – the "picaresque saint" marked by "roguery" (32) and "impurity" (33) incarnating a "trust in life" and sharing "a 'tragic fellowship' with suffering humanity" (Lewis 33).

41 Morton and Appel also spoke about the production at the *Günter Grass. Intercultural Dialogues and Encounters* conference at UG in October 2023. The organizers of the conference took Morton on a day trip to visit Grass-related places in the Kashubia.

42 Marta Sawicka, member of Warsaw-based theater group The Cheerful Hamlets, finished her appraisal of the show with the following comment: "I think that the ending with this hope, and belief, and conviction of the need and the necessity of talking about such subjects and about people's rights and, yes, people's differences in the views and the need to keep protecting those it really struck a wonderful cord especially right now in our context. It was on the one hand I would say some strong material in terms of how serious the problem was but also very much uplifting I would say, saying that there is a lot of hope in people, and a lot of strength" (Sawicka).

43 It "has tended to focus on practices and structures of feeling that bind people to communities that are larger or smaller than the American nation, communities that have sometimes been

particularly influential sub-field in that tradition has been the borderlands and the Chicano/a studies. In 2004 another ASA president Shelley Fisher Fishkin noted that American studies scholars were “[t]aking cues from borderlands scholars” (21). Fishkin’s own inspiration is Anzaldúa. Such work, “embracing multiple psychic locations” (Fishkin 17), unwilling to silence contradiction (Fishkin 18), transnational and focusing “on historical roots of multidirectional flows... [and] crossroads” (23) has become, affirms Fishkin, “increasingly central to American studies” (32).<sup>44</sup>

For Fishkin the shift was paradigmatic (from monotopic to pluritopic hermeneutics) and carried implications for the future of our field.<sup>45</sup> Focus would have to be placed “on the cultural work that *American literature* does in a range of social and political contexts *around the world*” in search “for *insight into the non-U.S. cultures as well as into the American texts themselves*” (32; emphasis mine). Envisioning American studies in international perspective Fishkin cites Günter Lenz who encourages “*enacting the transnational and intercultural discourses in real dialogues and debates among scholars from different parts of the world*” (39; my emphasis). She speaks of the need of “[c]onversation and collaboration across borders... to improve and build on existing institutional structures” (39) and encourages “student-faculty exchanges” (40).

*Trapped* was intended to be exactly this kind of work. As an overseas commission created by Chicano writer and Jewish-American director with a Polish cast of students it was a transnational and borderlands work in idea and execution. It brought to bear on Gdańsk’s identity a perspective central to modern American studies. Interinstitutional and polyvocal it enacted a multilevel dialog of an American discourse (cultural, linguistic, aesthetic, histrionic, ethical, epistemic) with a local culture/history/real people/educational programs.

But as Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz suggest it is not “*what* work we do [but] *how* we do it” (9). The critics note the crisis in the academia spurred by the dominant role of neoliberal assumptions (like competition, productivity, time crunch, bureaucratization). Inspired by El Salvador’s archbishop Oscar Romero’s message to “accompany” the struggle of the poor and by musical meaning of the term Tomlinson and Lipsitz suggest an alternative: to organize our work around the concept of “*accompaniment*” (10).

After Romero they define “accompaniment” as a recognition of the essential

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international in scope, sometimes more locally based” (Radway 6). This tradition has produced research in, to name but a few areas, Chicano Studies, women’s studies, critical race theory, Black Atlantic studies, post-colonial and decolonial theory, transnational and queer studies, etc. Many of these perspectives have, incidentally, come in recent years under attack of the political right-wing reaction both in the United States and Poland.

44 For a concise problematization of Anzaldúa’s legacy, a critique of her “tokenizing occur[ing] at the hands not just of her critics but also of her friends” and a commentary on Fishkin’s text see Debra A. Castillo’s “Anzaldúa and Transnational American Studies” (261).

45 She speaks of the need for an increased stress on comparative studies on race (23), social movements (32), perspectives from outside the United States (23), accounting for the “comings and goings that create... ties across national borders” (24) and “chapters of the past that have eluded any archive” (25), and acknowledging multilingual and multi-local allegiances (28).

oneness in the society and of “the inescapably and quintessentially social nature of scholarship and citizenship” (10). Accompaniment welcomes “the dynamics of difference” and “allows disagreements to be seen as evidence of problems yet to be solved” (Tomlinson and Lipsitz 11). The musical connotations are procedural; accompaniment calls for “attention, communication, and cooperation. It means augmenting, accenting, or countering one musical voice with another” (Tomlinson and Lipsitz 11), saying less so that others can be heard, in harmony or dissonance.

In a society of soloists, accompaniment is undervalued but Tomlinson and Lipsitz encourage us to adopt it as a “basis of a powerful counterculture inside academia as well as an important bridge to all the creative, critical, and contemplative thinking that goes on outside it.” Because accompaniment cannot be simply learnt but must be practiced through “embodied learning experiences” the university and art institutions can serve as vehicles of disseminating and enacting these ideas. Tomlinson and Lipsitz say: “American studies as accompaniment means American studies as action” (13).

This action, they add, should be built on two axioms derived from the Creole: *konesans* and *balans*.<sup>46</sup> *Konesans* understands knowledge as “more than a matter of mastering empirical facts and abstract theories.” Experience and wisdom gained with age are equally important. *Konesans* places “events in a broader perspective,” “acknowledges *the pull of the past on the present* [emphasis in original].” *Balans* means that “everyone has a part of the truth,” that “moral judgment... cannot be reduced to a set of rules to follow. Moral excellence comes from *reconciling* opposites... appreciating differences and embracing contradictions. *Balans* demands forging unities out of opposites.” Both “*Konesans* and *balans* require discernment, deliberation, and constant decision making” (Tomlinson and Lipsitz 14).

Dedication to “struggle” (fostering connections with other constituencies, enabling bridges between past and future) is one final guideline. Reminding that “American studies scholarship has always been connected to social upheavals and social movements” (22) Tomlinson and Lipsitz want American studies to nurture the “collective capacity for democratic deliberation and decision making,” to foster “new and better forms of association, affiliation, and understanding” (26), to “develop new ways of knowing and new ways of being” (22).

*Trapped* and its implementation should be discussed against these terms. The project—from commission, UG/UCSB/PPSWA's cooperation, the crisis, production, this essay—has been intended and enacted as accompaniment informed by *konesans*, *balans* and struggle. This can explain the play's moral/epistemic center: the present is seen through the lens of the long haul of the past, plural, repressed histories are foregrounded, contradictions are not resolved, judgment is suspended, hybridity and ambivalence (linguistic, cultural, epistemic, humor/pathos) are brought to the fore not least with the eponymous metaphor of amber and its insertions—a stand in for a moment in time and eternity.

Accompaniment “entails our helping [people] find something to do along with us” (Tomlinson and Lipsitz 13) and *Trapped* represented such an opportunity:

46 The scholars borrow these concepts from Haitian studies scholar Claudine Michel.

a cooperation (not competition) which created a forum for embodied learning not only for the production team but the audiences. But accompaniment was realized in more than this sense. *Trapped* was motivated by a desire to forge “unity around the needs of the most oppressed” (Tomlinson and Lipsitz 11). In doing so it precipitated a delicate scandal, but it also provided a *necessary* counter-memory to the contemporary zero-sum moral and logical reductionisms which increasingly manifest themselves not as private opinions but in institutional decision making. The immersive project realized Tomlinson and Lipsitz’s call to “develop a *collective* capacity for accompaniment” (16; my emphasis).

Finally, it was an example of American studies as border studies accompanying (as in midwifing) the birth of the New in Gdańsk, enabling seeing what Ernst Bloch calls the “Not-Yet-Conscious” but that is latently there (Bloch 116) or what Deleuze calls the “unthought” which is at the “very heart” of thought but is rendered as the “impossibility of thinking which doubles and hollows out the outside” (97).

The New may concern the *herstory* of Gdańsk. More broadly, it concerns the public memory in Gdańsk, social discourses framing what and how is remembered and forgotten, organizing ways of thinking and un-thinking about Gdańsk’s past. Analyzing the city’s (under Adamowicz) effort to formulate a historical narrative by creating a fleet of trams named after famous Danzigers Maciej Dajnowski concludes that the campaign propagated a conciliatory narrative and that antagonisms and myths which had earlier defined the local social relations were silenced. For this reason, Dajnowski points out, Grass is not on any tram; “revelations about his wartime episode with the Waffen-SS have discredited him in the eyes of some residents” (82). Drawing on Deleuze Dajnowski thinks of the tram moving around the city as a giant alethic press which, as it irons the *textum* of the city’s space as well as the *textum* of memory and discourse it smooths out the Deleuzian folds and unfolds in the city’s self-identity (87) and self-non-identity.

If the city silences dissonance Morton’s play is an alternative alethic operation not shying away from disharmony and ghostly lacuna (where are the Germans? Jews?) but maintaining utopian longings. If in his historical plays Morton makes visible the pre-mediated nature of history here he problematizes “truth.” Because against the whirlwind of the past only the common human condition is true. All other “truths” are discourses. Morton’s play is thus a topological inquiry which renders the city as an *entanglement* of worldviews, genders, ages, cosmologies, histories, institutions, ideologies connected (trapped) in an asymmetric power differential.

The image of the entanglement and the differential is proposed by Walter D. Mignolo in his critique of universality and discussion of “pluriversality.” For Mignolo the power differential is driven by the logic of domination (coloniality) “covered up by the rhetorical narrative of modernity” at the heart of which lies the “Western pretense to universality.” Mignolo explains universality as, after Humberto Maturana, built “on truth without parenthesis” and “always imperial and war-driven” (Mignolo, “Pluriversality”) and juxtaposes it with pluriversality, “convivial, dialogical or plurilogical” (“Pluriversality”). Mignolo encourages

our recognition of pluriversality and adds that it is conditioned on “a way of thinking and understanding that dwells in the entanglement, in the borders” (“Pluriversality”) or that resides on “/” of the entanglement and power differential” (Mignolo “Pluriversality”). This type of pluritopical thinking, thinking which resides *between* epistemologies (rather than emerging from a single positionality) and which Mignolo variously terms as “border thinking, border epistemology, border gnosis” must be, he insists, the basis for the “decolonial thinking and doing” (“Pluriversality”). This method, he adds further, calls for “reflexive praxis” and one which “combine[s] the body with writing, writing with the body and not just in the body... the heart with the mind, *senti-pensar* (feeling-thinking)” (“Pluriversality”).

It is the alethic problematization and the complex writing-body reflexive *senti-pensar* praxis enacted by the theatrical enterprise that mark *Trapped* as an example of decolonial thinking and doing, of border gnosis in action. In the epigraph to this article Anzaldúa speaks of living in “the cracks between worlds” and Mignolo thanks her for teaching him about those who reside in the border, migrants and queers, adding that “Chicanos and Chicanas... are always dwelling in the border” (“Pluriversality”). It is this type of epistemic orientation, in the cracks or, after Anna Deavere Smith, in the “twilight” (in Perkins and Uno 201), that Morton brings to bear on Gdańsk. It explains the play’s central figure’s slippery trans-ontological status. Little Glass is the embodiment of “/”, he is the border dweller, he resides in the cracks and twilight. It also explains the role the Church is assigned. The church represents the (performative) pretense to universality and the locus of colonial enunciation, of epistemic and ontological hierarchization of knowledge and beings derived from alethic absolutism or what Mignolo, after Santiago Castro-Gómez, calls the “hubris of the zero point” (*Darker* 188).

Finally, the argument that the production was an insult to *all* Catholics overlooks a long legacy of reform *within* the Catholic church including Romero, now Catholic saint. Morton is Catholic and *The Savior* makes clear he has been deeply influenced by Romero’s story. He is also steeped in Caribbean culture.<sup>47</sup> Reading the play through accompaniment, *konesans* and *balans*, concepts derived from Mesoamerican and Creole contexts, allows us to see his take on Catholicism in a larger than local framework. This is a transatlantic perspective, one inevitably informed by what Mignolo calls “the Atlantic detour” (*Darker* 57) and which complicates in myriad ways the definition of “all Catholics.” Lifting the play from the local and immediate context of moral panic this way we may begin to ask better questions, for example, how the play makes itself necessary to the wellbeing of the community?

We argue that Morton lent his work as necessary by creating a theatrical crossroads, a heterotopic space of pluriversality, a space of epistemic pluralism which does not silence differences. In 2016 Gdańsk, launched an innovative campaign “Model for the Integration of Immigrants.” One of the goals of the campaign is to promote intercultural dialog (Łączy nas Gdańsk 77). *Trapped in Amber* promotes an open idea of regional identity. Enacting inclusive historical

47 Morton’s mother was Cuban. In 1981 he visited Cuba with a Chicano *teatristas* brigade and would return there many times since.

pedagogy, the play may become a useful tool of initiating immigrants (both as audiences and performers) to national identity through local history.

But, more importantly, by haunting the *History of Gdańsk* Morton made latently present the potentiality for transforming, pluralizing the status quo not only in social, but also in moral and epistemic realms. As Gdańsk and Poland are undergoing rapid cosmopolitanization many are finding it hard to free themselves from old regimes of truth, old forms of subjectivity, unwilling to let go of stable identity. Border gnosis may be rendered as the *practice* at the twilight which Deavere Smith contrasts with the certainty of both light and darkness. She translates twilight as “an idea before its time” (in Perkins and Uno 201), an area of negotiation, of imagination, conjecture, fuzziness, intersections, challenge, mindfulness. Smith says that “it’s more interpretive / it’s more creative” (233-234) whereas the daylight or, its opposite, darkness might make us overlook important aspects, take the thing presented to us “as it is” and make us merely reactive (Bhabha in Smith 234). Smith’s character Twilight Bey declares “In order for me to be a full human / being / I cannot forever dwell in darkness / I cannot forever dwell in idea / Of identifying with those like me / And understanding only me and mine” (in Perkins and Uno 201). He moves into the twilight, he lives in “limbo” (Smith 255). Morton and Appel build the environment of twilight and limbo. Some may have objected but others, as we shall see in the next section, felt grateful acceptance maybe because they increasingly find themselves to be inadvertent border dwellers in need of coordinates or a sense of shared consciousness. Deleuze says that the “struggle for a modern subjectivity passes through a resistance to the two present forms of subjection, the one consisting of individualizing ourselves on the basis of constraints of power, the other of attracting each individual to a known and recognized identity, fixed once and for all” (105-106). Morton’s play accompanies us in this struggle against the “cut and dried” of the either and in favor of modern subjectivity understood as “the right to difference, variation and metamorphosis” (Deleuze 106), the right to new ways of thinking and doing.

## Viewers’ Responses

### Methodology

Studying people’s beliefs and attitudes is one of the biggest challenges of sociology. As Janet Finch notes, beliefs and attitudes in general are not “merely technical” categories; they are inextricably tied to the intangible, philosophical spheres of our thought. Consequently, our attitudes cannot be easily categorized or measured—they are as diverse and unique as the minds of people who hold them. Any attempt to create a pre-made list of possible reactions to complex experiences would be inherently futile (105). Hence, one of the most common ways to study these aspects is through survey research which allows the respondents complete freedom in forming their answers (Macionis 28, Sinkowitz-Cochran 1159).

Survey research is a method in which the researcher targets a certain group, asks them questions, and analyzes the answers (Macionis 28). This method is helpful when researchers need to analyze something that cannot be noticed immediately,

things such as beliefs/attitudes, or when “the collection of information” must be standardized (Macionis 28, Sinkowitz-Cochran 1159). Every survey research should start with scholars defining the specific aim of their experiment (Sinkowitz-Cochran 1160). They should then decide on the best method to conduct their research (1160).

According to Ronda L. Sinkowitz-Cochran, the two basic methods of survey research are the self-administered questionnaire and interview (1160).<sup>48</sup> In both modes there are two types of questions asked: open-ended and close-ended (1161).<sup>49</sup> To make sure that respondents answer the questions honestly and freely, answers are often anonymized, as was the case during our research.

Keeping all of this in mind, we analyzed the audience reception of the play *Trapped*. The aim was to study the reactions on various levels, in order to find the most positive, negative, memorable, or otherwise salient characteristics of the play as it was experienced during the performance. To examine these reactions, the bulk of our data consisted of anonymous surveys with a self-administrated questionnaire and open-ended questions. In total, we received forty-three responses: thirty-eight anonymous surveys from students, four anonymous surveys from actors and non-student audience members, and one voluntary response from Marta Sawicka. Our analysis of the feedback is divided thematically and focuses on most commonly appearing comments.

### **The Tonal (Im)Balance of the Play**

Humor was one of the most salient (second only to actors' performance) and polarizing aspects of the play. For almost a quarter of the surveyed students, the harmonious interplay between comedy and seriousness is a major point of praise. Respondents express this attitude in several ways; some mention that the play “perfectly combined seriousness with joy” (Welizarowicz, Student audience survey, response 1), others write about the “fusion of comedic elements with dramatic moments” (response 6), yet others simply state that “the play was both funny and moving” (response 4). Whatever the wording, a common denominator is clear—the tone was perceived as balanced by a significant part of the audience. One scene, mentioned specifically by three out of the eleven respondents who praised the play's humor, left the audience with a positive impression: the fight between Jantar's suitors (response 18, response 20, response 22).

Another example of positive perception of the play's tonal balance lies in the comments on the Crystal Night scene. The surveyed audience members are glad that it “[does not] include humor” because of the seriousness of the situation presented (response 16). All of the respondents who focus on this scene describe the moment when a Jewish mother sends her son away to safety as “heartbreaking,” “touching,” “moving,” and shocking, implying that comedy would ruin the effect of this moment (response 1, response 11, response 16, response 28, response 33).

48 The self-administered questionnaire demands that the respondents answer questions on their own, and the interview consists questions asked by researchers who “record the respondents' answers” (Sinkowitz-Cochran 1160).

49 In the open-ended questions respondents provide “their own answer,” and in the close-ended ones respondents choose an answer from a previously prepared set (Sinkowitz-Cochran 1161).

On the other end of the spectrum there is an almost equally large number—nine to be exact—of respondents who criticize the tone of the play. Surveyed students usually open their criticism with general comments about “comedy elements” and “humorous parts” (response 19, response 3). Only one scene, however, is referred to as a concrete example of failed comedy: the testicle injury scene, termed by one of the respondents rather amusingly as the “nut-shot” (response 5).<sup>50</sup> For some of the surveyed students, this episode was, first and foremost, ill-placed; the inappropriate tone is described to have stemmed from the contrast between the joviality of this scene and the seriousness of the closely surrounding narrative of World War Two, heroic acts, and deaths of Polish soldiers (response 3, response 5, response 15, response 32, response 35). The surveyed students make a few other isolated remarks, such as disapproving comments about the “childishness” of the play’s humor or its “tension-breaking” effect, but only the incongruity between the testicle injury scene and an otherwise somber part of the play is criticized across multiple responses (response 25, response 19).

### Workshop Premiere

Comments regarding qualities of the production are as frequent as the ones concerning humor but consist of practically unanimous praise. Several respondents mention the “minimalistic black clothing” worn by the actors as an aspect of the play that enhanced its effect (response 27). Simple clothes “made [actors] more flexible” and allowed them to “show off their skills” (response 27, response 38). This shows that the audience favored expression and emotional charge over visual details. Similarly, minimal stage design and limited number of props are also often described to have heightened the artistic effect of the play, although comments that refer to this lack detailed descriptions of what that effect was (response 1, response 13, response 16, response 21, response 27, response 31, response 35, response 38). This example evinces a tendency among the audience to assign primary value to the contents of the script and its execution by the actors, while surface-level details are considered inconsequential (or even disregarded altogether as distractions). A similar attitude is expressed towards the printed script, held by the actors during the workshop premiere.<sup>51</sup> This further supports the suggestion that, technical perfection (or lack thereof) was secondary to both the dramatic material and the actors’ performance.

Actors receive the most praise from the surveyed audience members as sixteen out of the thirty-eight student responses applaud the acting first and foremost. Besides general comments about acting skills and talent, various abilities and qualities of the cast are mentioned specifically; this includes elements closely associated with the actor’s craft, like “body language” and “intonation” (response

50 It is worth noting that the scene in question is a direct nod to *The Tin Drum*. Morton constructed this scene as an almost verbatim quotation of the corresponding episode in the novel (Morton, Draft #4 21-22; Grass 217).

51 Respondents state that the presence of physical copies of the script either “did not take away anything from [the actors’] professionalism,” or that they “didn’t... notice” them at all (response 31, response 20).

25), as well as more universally positive characteristics, such as being dedicated (response 20, response 32), professional (response 25, response 20), well-prepared (response 24), and expressive (response 32). Like in the case of the play's humor, one element stands out above the rest for the surveyed students: the part of the Inquisitor, played by Wierciński (response 5, response 15, response 16, response 19, response 20). Respondents mention that this performance was particularly effective because of the actor's "energy and power," or, as one audience member vividly describes, a "menacing" feeling aroused by the Inquisitor's voice (response 15, response 16). Thus, the actors are praised for their expressiveness and the resulting ability to excite the viewer's emotions.

Adding to the overwhelmingly positive reception of the actors, Sawicka says—in one of the first points addressed by her comments—that members of the cast "were really nicely prepared" and spoke "very clearly, with a really good pronunciation" (1). This, in combination with the general attitude expressed by the audience and the sheer number of responses that mentioned the cast in a positive context, suggests that the actors' performance and by extension the director's work were not only the most favorably perceived aspects of the play, but also, perhaps more significantly, the most salient and memorable.

Another specific scene featured in the play that is mentioned as important across multiple responses involved breaking the fourth wall with the line "*oni nie chcą tego słyszeć*" ["The audience won't stand for it" (Morton, Draft #4 35)]" directed towards the audience (Student audience survey, response 10). According to the respondents, this device "challenged [the viewers] into accepting the dark reality," at the same time making them "think and reflect on [their own] behaviors and decisions" (response 3, response 10). As Tom Brown writes—primarily in the context of cinema but referring to the device of direct addresses in general and basing his statement on Brechtian theory—breaking the fourth wall "seeks to enable audiences to see the forces of artistic and ideological construction behind the work, rather than being driven 'blindly' by them" (10). The reaction of surveyed audience members suggests that this is precisely the effect that the scene produced; they were effectively taken out of the dramatic illusion and provoked to apply the ideological message of the play to their everyday experience of the world. According to the viewers, this scene (chiefly due to the direct audience address that it contained) inspired feelings of guilt and self-disappointment with viewer culture in general (Welizarowicz, Student audience survey, response 3, response 10, response 22). The responses that mention the direct address suggest that the viewers interpreted this scene as criticism on the cultural phenomenon of the taboo as detrimental to artistic freedom of speech. In essence, audience members felt that, through the device of breaking the fourth wall, they were repositioned from the role of passive observers to the role of an active party, agents responsible for what is allowed in a dramatic text.

Significantly, almost half of the respondents mention the importance of music for the performance. The play starts and ends with a song, and, as one of the respondents notices, this arrangement "tie[s] the whole show together" (Student audience survey, response 12). In addition to that, some of the surveyed students

mention that “music made the play more touching and appealing” or that it “made [the play] more emotional” (response 33, response 36). This emotional engagement helps the audience “[understand] the story more clearly” (response 8). Thus, according to the audience, music not only plays an aesthetic role in *Trapped*, but also helps to understand the overarching structure of the work’s composition.

### Historical Value

One of the key aspects of the play is the history of Gdańsk. Hence, many respondents focus on the historical value of the play. A small number of audience members argue that “the historical events shown in the play can be considered common knowledge,” and that they “have not learnt anything new about the history of Gdańsk” (response 25, response 35). Additionally, one of the respondents mentions specifically that there is not enough said about the Hanseatic League (Welizarowicz, Online survey, response 3). However, the prevalent trend among the audience seems to be that respondents “did not know much about the city’s history” before, and that the play “taught [them] a lot about the history of Gdańsk” (Welizarowicz, Student audience survey, response 33, response 8). As a particular example, six respondents described “the story of Anna Krüger” as “interesting” and something that they had not been aware of prior to the performance (response 2). “The 1980 worker’s labor strike along the Baltic” is another historical fact unknown to one of the respondents (response 17). In general, many of the audience members learnt something new about the history of Gdańsk from the play.

Another recurring aspect of the play mentioned by several of the surveyed students was the impact of a foreign playwright’s perspective on the process of composition. The respondents who mention that this play “was written from the perspective of a person of Hispanic origin” see it as something positive (response 36). For them, the fact that “the theme is foreign to the author” adds more value—in the form of a fresh perspective—to the play (response 3). Also, the surveyed audience members state that this foreign perspective makes the play more interesting because the audience can see “Gdańsk’s history... through a Chicano theatre lens” (response 35).

According to the respondents, another aspect of the play that illustrates a fresh perspective on the history of Gdańsk is the focus on women’s stories. The audience “profoundly appreciate[s]” the choice to present Solidarity’s history through Anna Walentynowicz’s experiences, not Lech Wałęsa’s (response 9). This allows the audience to see the history of Gdańsk “from the perspective of women,” which is “an unconventional approach” (response 12, response 9). For some of the respondents, this approach is “a nod to the still ongoing fight for women’s rights” (response 9). What is more, this “unconventional approach” allows some of the respondents to form an emotional connection with the characters of Anna Walentynowicz and Anna Krüger (response 9).

The historical aspect of the play provoked various emotions. A number of the surveyed students were inspired with feelings of admiration and respect for the culture of Gdańsk (or the Kashubian region in general) and its past (response 2, response 4, response 6, response 8, response 9, response 11, response 17, response

20, response 30, response 33, response 34). Across many of the responses, the play was found to be an effective way of acknowledging the influence of the past on the contemporary world. In an echo of the axiom of *konesans* described earlier in this paper, audience members appreciated *Trapped* as an expression and affirmation of the importance of past events; the surveyed students believe that the experiences of previous generations need an outlet that allows them to influence the world of today and contribute to maintaining the cultural integrity of the Kashubian region (response 6, response 11, response 30). Respondents found the play to be competent as this much needed outlet, and, as a result, numerous members of the audience perceived *Trapped* as instrumental in strengthening community bonds between citizens of modern-day Gdańsk.

Similarly, the second axiom relating to the concept of accompaniment—*balans*—also finds its reflection in the responses. The historical dialog about Gdańsk serving as the main thematic axis of the play is, according to the audience members, an effective way of reconciling the past with the present. This dialog results in a merging (or unifying) of the cultural history of the Kashubian region and the contemporary, often future-oriented attitudes of young citizens inhabiting today's Gdańsk. This merging takes place within the cultural identities of these citizens and results in the creation of a new identity. This identity, in accordance with the idea of *balans*, is modern and not limited by the pull of the past, but at the same time cognizant of the value of regional history. Additionally, student responses suggest that this process is aided by the foreign perspective of the playwright. Morton, as a person not connected to the region featured in the play, provides a point of view that is skewed neither by the influence of the Kashubian history, nor by the modern desire to cut historical ties; as a result, the act of reconciling the past with the future-oriented attitude of today can be performed without either side overpowering the other (response 3, response 5, response 7, response 30, response 36).

In conclusion, the audience located the value of the play mostly in its entertaining way of presenting historical information and Morton's choice of subject matter; technicalities connected with the workshop premiere were mostly disregarded. Both the comedic and historical aspects of the play polarized the viewers, but the overall reception of these elements was positive. The actors' performance, praised almost unanimously, further contributed to maintaining the balance between entertainment and education. Overall, the play emanated values that can be connected with the concept of accompaniment—Morton's unbiased perspective of the Kashubian culture resulted in a text that encapsulates the axioms of *balans* and *konesans*, producing a cultural synthesis of the past and the present experienced by young residents of Gdańsk.

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