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## Witkiewicz-Father and Son: The Double Portrait

For professional literary researchers and admirers of Witkacy's works, the artist's relationship with his father, Stanisław Witkiewicz, artist, art critic, man of ideas and thinker, is a compelling issue. Although extensive research has been carried out in the main on both private family relations and between father and son, little has been done to find common ground in the realm of their thoughts and concepts. The significance of Stanisław Witkiewicz's original pedagogical system in relation to his son has however been covered, particularly with the publication of *The Letters to a Son*,<sup>1</sup> which reveals the inner history of the father-son relationship and reveals Stanisław Witkiewicz's desire to see his son confirm his own artistic theses. The letters constitute an extremely intriguing document of the period; they are, so to speak, a transcript of a turbulent debate on fundamental artistic, literary and philosophical issues, suffused with original concepts on art and life and a reflection of Stanisław Witkiewicz's pedagogy.

Witkacy has always been and indeed will surely remain a focal character in Polish art, with new critical studies and analyses of his works appearing regularly. Stanisław Witkiewicz, his father, however, appears to be a forgotten figure, mistaken for or identified with Witkacy, who both outshone his father and also rejected his authority. This notwithstanding, during his own life-time Stanisław Witkiewicz had been considered a leader of

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<sup>1</sup> S. Witkiewicz: *Listy do syna (The Letters to the Son)*, Warsaw 1969.

the art world, considered by some to be a spiritual guru or even a prophet. Nonetheless, contemporary studies of Witkiewicz are rare. Indeed, the most recent monograph, entitled *The Strange Man*, was published in 1984.

Therefore, I would argue that studies of the memoirs of family members and friends have led to a rather one-sided impression of the matter of the Witkiewiczes', which on the whole emphasize the striking differences in their attitudes and theories. However, it can also be claimed that neither the family nor their groups of friends could objectively evaluate the psychological, characterological and artistic points of intersection and overlap of these two personalities. As such, it is necessary to seek out a fresh and more extensive treatment of their relationship. It is felt that a singularly contrastive approach should be abandoned albeit that, despite the obvious differences, the Witkiewiczes' standpoints may well in fact be reduced to a common denominator. Rather than concentrating only on discrepancies between the two artists, if we would care to approach their relationship from the point of view of similarities, we may be able to form the conclusion that Witkacy shaped his art not so much 'in opposition to his father' but rather 'in relation to his father.' Granted, at the early stage of his artistic development, Witkacy tried to depart from Witkiewicz's theses as far as possible. It would seem that it was during this period that Witkiewicz senior was reduced to the role of antagonist. I would posit that, ultimately, Witkacy did in fact follow Witkiewicz's path.

The Witkiewiczes' intellectual discoveries and strategies dovetailed at many points, and as such, this article will primarily concern the similarities rather than the differences in the works of both artists. Moreover, literature and art historians have usually sought analogy in the area of formal concepts, seeking to trace affinities between Witkacy's Theory of Pure Form and Stanisław Witkiewicz's aesthetic assumptions, in which he emphasized the significance of colour, light and composition. Such conclusions are naturally of a restrictive nature, since the relations between the Witkiewiczes are not merely a question of aesthetics. For example, both Witkiewiczes questioned cultural norms, and the common kernel of their ideas is the assertion of the crisis of culture, understood as the fall of a particular system of values, such as national unity, the notion of high art, and the readability of signs of culture. It is true however that they claimed there to be differing causal reasons for such a crisis, such as on the issue of evaluating our national characteristics. Despite such apparent discrepancies as these their work would seem to be united by several common fundamental features. Here examples could include: the cult of authenticity in the act of creation, of aesthetic sensations and of authenticity in the field of social communication;

the necessity to search for a deeper meaning of reality and human existence; the need for a continuity of culture; faith in the role of artistic and intellectual elites as well as antipathy to certain phenomena, contemporarily termed 'popular culture.' Undoubtedly, the Witkiewiczzes shared the common conviction, albeit arising out of divergent origins, that Poles had become a quasi nation, incapable of functioning correctly and creating a culture which would not only confirm its strength and vitality but would also enrich European cultural output. They observed the disintegration of what one might call 'the form of the Polish character,' the Polish universum,<sup>2</sup> since in the field of the life of national society 'the non-form' was no alternative for form for either of the Witkiewiczzes.

Their pessimistic diagnoses of the crisis of culture also provoked the Witkiewiczzes into taking an active stance. In the text of *Art and Critique Here, Alexander Gierymski, Vallenrodism or Debasement?*, Stanisław Witkiewicz observed the signs of torpor and unmasked the decline hiding behind the economic prosperity and the progress of civilization which, according to his analysis, surfaced after the unsuccessful uprising of 1864. He saw this decline as tantamount to subjugation, thralldom and the devaluation of art as a significant element of social life. Specifying the spheres of life in crisis, Witkiewicz simultaneously created a list of damage to be repaired, losses that were experienced after the defeat of the uprising. He never took the length of the list as a reason to be discouraged. His concept of culture was predicated upon an attempt to break a paradigm and the awareness that the basic component of the Polish national ego is a tendency towards auto-destruction and dwelling upon loss along with the cult of death. After 1864, Polish society was in a critical situation again – the decline of values, of the sense of unity and national uniqueness, pessimism, the lack of faith in the future – but paradoxically, it was on the road to revival and the recovery of its inner energy. Following Nietzsche's philosophy, Witkiewicz wished to see new forces born out of pain, and not just the continuation of frustration, which should rather be seen as the outcome of decline. For Stanisław Witkiewicz, the sense of culture lay in the continual development and enrichment of traditional elements, in the continuous evolution and remodeling of the paradigm.

Whilst not limiting himself to the suggested characteristics of the crisis, Witkiewicz prepared a concept of the revival of culture, attempting to re-

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<sup>2</sup> See Anna Micińska: *Na marginesie „Narkotyków” i „Niemytych dusz” Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza*, [in:] S. I. Witkiewicz: *Narkotyki. Niemyte dusze (Narcotics. Uncwashed Souls)*, Warsaw 1975 and J. Degler: *Witkacy – wychowawca narodu (Witkacy as an Educator of the Nation)*, „Odra” 1976, nr 10.

define the notion of being Polish – an idea which was neither nationalist nor loyalist by nature, but an idea of a moral understanding of the Polish character in the Romantic sense.<sup>3</sup> He viewed Polishness as being similar to a lost text, which he looked for among the people of the Podhale region. He found manifestations of the Polish character in the literary works of Henryk Sienkiewicz as well as in the paintings of Juliusz Kossak, both of whom he considered typical Polish artists and whose works he employed to serve his purpose. In his project, an education based on Nietzsche's philosophy played a crucial role and his ultimate goal was to rear a New Man and to metamorphose humanity spiritually. Such a man would be an artist, a philosopher and a lay saint, concerned with contemporary issues. Architecture and the Zakopane style, presented by Witkiewicz as the national style, constituted the crux of the entire concept, since architecture and art were universal systems of communication and convenient means of influencing the social imagination. Witkiewicz treated Polish culture as a space to manage under the slogan ONE STYLE – ONE NATION. The Zakopane style was utopian by nature, but utopianism was one of the languages of the era.

Stanisław Witkiewicz's diagnoses were a central, although not the sole, point of reference for his son's assertions, who, like his father, attempted to create an aesthetic-cultural system. One of the differences between the Witkiewicz's culture-oriented assertions lies in the accepted perspective. Witkiewicz senior focused mainly on the Polish issue, rarely mentioning the broader context, whereas his son represented a more global standpoint, writing on the crisis of culture as such. For Witkacy, the situation in Poland was a prefiguration of the fall of Europe, which can be seen as proof that he managed to liberate himself from the 'cursed' Polish issues, for example, the national issue, messianism, the need for protection of all that is 'genuinely' Polish, the Romantic heritage, utopian thinking. He was, therefore, able to view culture in a more universal way, something which would be possible only in a free Poland.

Clearly Witkacy's vision of history was based on the triad of birth, development and the inevitable fall. Such an approach, however, did not exclude attempts to defeat the danger of the decline of culture, as it might always be tempting to try once more. Thus, the issue arises concerning the way Witkacy functioned within catastrophe as well as the relationship between his works and the sphere of his diagnoses.

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<sup>3</sup> M. Janion: *Życie pośmiertne Konrada Wallenroda (The Posthumous Life of Conrad Wallenrod)*, Warsaw 1990, p. 605.

The theme of the manifestations of decline grew in Witkacy's works to the rank of a mission, since once you cannot be the guardian of the Mystery of Being, you can only become transfigured into a bard of destruction. Witkacy expressed his cultural abeyance between the 'expectation and experience' of catastrophe in many theoretical articles as well as in literary texts, writing other decline-infected quasi novels under the auspices of Thanatos through the creation of character, the means of creating and the shaping of literary space, the image of the state, language and style, and the form of a 'badly' written novel. Witkacy saw the cause of crisis in, among others things, the democratizing processes of society, and understood them as absolutely irreversible. Since their ultimate outcome was unpredictable, in his *New Forms in Painting* Witkacy proposed a program which could be called one of conscious democratization. The awareness of participation in the evolution or remodeling of the paradigm of culture remained a primary theme, to which Witkacy returned in his works: *Narcotics – Unwashed Souls*. This may be interpreted as a rescue strategy, integrally inscribed in Witkacy's catastrophic concept. *Narcotics – Unwashed Souls* is Witkacy's most important text, the handbook which he employed to conduct a specific therapeutic action and through which he teased his readers, playing with his own biography as well as forms of popular culture. This was the crux of his concept of culture. *Narcotics – Unwashed Souls* indicates the direction in which Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's views evolved and it is precisely at this point where both of the Witkiewiczzes converge again. By the end of his life, Witkacy assumed a role similar to that of his father's – the role of a social activist and a spiritual leader. He became 'socially-oriented' and, striking a moralizing tone, encouraged and preached to the people, all of which he did however in accordance with his own original standards and principles. Only in such a form, when humour is an element introduced consciously, resulting from the assumption that intellectual work also has its humorous angle, did Witkacy intend "[...] to do something tangibly useful"<sup>4</sup> for society. Witkacy can hardly be called an educator of the nation, at least not in the classic meaning of the notion; however, he did also reflect on the condition of the national soul of the Poles, and *Narcotics – Unwashed Souls* is an interesting and original study of the issue.

The question of Witkacy's catastrophism also arises, as his entire cultural strategy was based upon a continuous swinging – between despondency and further attempts to open a dialogue, between the conviction that art, phi-

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<sup>4</sup> S. I. Witkiewicz: *Narkotyki. Niemyte dusze (Narcotics – Unwashed Souls)*, op. cit., p. 53.

losophy and religion were non-existent and a game played with their contemporary forms. Thus, the game undertaken in his avant-garde plays and novels has, by and large, a quality justifying Witkacy's writing. This was a man who once officially declared the death of art and refused to treat the novel as a work of art. His games also have a cognitive purpose and help to embrace and understand the area of *the new* in culture. A game is only possible when its elements, themes, structures and principles are comprehensible.

The same mechanism governed the Witkiewicz's culture strategies – a sense of danger pushed them to produce explicit or even provocative actions. Neither of them looked for a haven in dwelling upon pain. Neither contented himself with the ascertainment of crisis.

Both Witkiewicz's and Witkacy's fears for the future and the form of culture are typical for modernity. According to Anthony Giddens, high levels of fear are not a distinguishing factor of modern times, but each era has had its fears and concerns. What changes is the form and content of the fears, as it is they that distinguish modernity from other epochs.<sup>5</sup> Jerzy Jedlicki adds that ascertaining crisis is inherent in experiencing modernity but, paradoxically, all these crisis related diagnoses and emotions constitute a positive factor:

The crisis of culture, regardless of its definition, is its standard, not unique quality and there is no, and might never be, any charm, [...] or philosophers' stone which will bring release. That's good, as every progress is born out of misery, horror and rebellion. [...] The sense of crisis of values results in willingness to defend them and this will only become dangerous when it aims at perfection.<sup>6</sup>

The essence of Witkacy's catastrophism, which is not so much total or constant as perverse, may just lie in this. Once Witkacy's games with the novel, literature, art or even philosophy become an approved fact, why should he be denied the right to play games with his own culture-oriented diagnoses? It is obviously a situation in which the discovery of the decline, treated quite seriously and experienced profoundly, is accompanied by the conviction that pondering over crises is of a cognitive, existential and preserving value. It should be remembered that the observation went in the name of dying values which, by nature, are ephemeral and require protection and careful handling.

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<sup>5</sup> See: A. Giddens: *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Warsaw 2001, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> J. Jedlicki: *Świat zwyrodniały. Lęki i wyroki krytyków nowoczesności (The Degenerated World. Fears and Judgments of the Critics of Modernity)*, Warsaw 2000, p. 60–61.

Many other 'points of convergence' of the Witkiewicz's thoughts, actions and strategies are evident in their works. Witkacy is well known to have been using the strategy of scandal, but in truth Witkiewicz senior was scandalous in a comparable degree for his own time. It is noteworthy that he dared to engage in a turbulent argument with the respectable and renowned art critic, Henryk Struve, practically mocking his critical methods. He considered Struve's texts the epitome of incompetence, dilettantism and stupidity. Witkiewicz also defied the unquestionable authority of Jan Matejko, the greatest historical painter of the time, pointing out the flaws in his technique and accusing him of excessive exploitation of themes related to Polish history. This act of defiance marked his forceful entry into the area of national taboo and unleashed an enormous wave of criticism. The list of various scandals, on Witkiewicz's instigation or with his participation, is quite long, but even these few examples show that Witkacy's primacy in the field of scandal seems gravely undermined.

An authoritative tone, uncompromising arguments and theses and radical opinions approving of no critique are features which can be applied to both of the Witkiewicz's. Witkiewicz senior's method of formulating thoughts and objections are worth noting. In 1905, he wrote: "The so called monumental structures of society are wretched, stinky, filthy and vile, full of dark nooks which breed crime. This must be fought ruthlessly!" This notion bears a striking resemblance to Witkacy's words from *Narcotics - Unwashed Souls*: "We must begin to bash the mugs, wash the slovenly muzzles and shake the heads, forcefully bang the mucky noggins against walls of some pigsty [...]"<sup>7</sup>

The radicalism of the Witkiewicz's texts, although unquestionable, did in fact differ in approach. Witkiewicz, in striking a militant, bellicose tone, practically never violated the typical forms of communication. He disturbed neither the stylistic principles, orthography nor linguistic etiquette, and yet, his texts evoked violent reactions from his readers, fans and adversaries. He expressed the meaning of his own intellectual discoveries and appealed to people within general standards. Witkacy, on the other hand, did not only cause a stir and 'bang the table', but also resorted to verbal abuse, grotesque jokes and invectives while addressing his readers and enemies, betraying profound affinity for the dramatic potential of language. Neither of the Witkiewicz's abandoned their attempts to establish a relationship with their recipients. Even Witkacy did not forget to reinforce his influence over his

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<sup>7</sup> See: A. Micińska: *Istnienie poszczególne. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (The Particular Being: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz)*, elaborated by J. Degler, Wrocław 2003, p. 214.

audience in his games with popular culture and literature. Witkiewicz senior chose a more serious format which made the reception of his texts more palatable, whereas Witkacy employed palimpsest-based texts, constructed grotesquely, which greatly impedes communication.

The presence of Thanatos, of sickness and death, manifesting itself in both Witkiewicz's and Witkacy's works is clearly detectable. The broadly understood decline is unusually distinct not simply as a motif in Witkacy's works. Approached comprehensively, it can be perceived as a consistent study into decline or atrophy. Metaphors of dying, of diseases or of crumbling buildings had already become quite frequent in Stanisław Witkiewicz's texts.<sup>8</sup> He described the ever more powerful social-national atrophy after the unsuccessful uprising of 1863 with corporal references and comparisons. The decline develops like a disease of the body which is shrinking, vanishing, dying: 'life is suffocating, passing away.' He mentions the disintegration of 'the crux of the soul' and 'a crumbled structure/edifice of the spirit.' Certainly, the presence of the metaphors of dying and disease did not result in the vision of the total annihilation of the fundamental values of culture. The metaphors described the situation of crisis, depicted meanings of the intellectual discoveries of the Polish thinker, remaining subject to his revivalistic concepts. Even a superficial analysis of Witkacy's works leads to different conclusions. The primacy of Thanatos in diverse configurations and schemes is undeniable and inalienable. Its painful, tangible existence can be treated as a figure of Witkacy's catastrophic thought. Witkacy employed the same 'metaphor of dying' more distinctly than his father. "Our blushes are not the blushes of health, but hectic colours, our gleam in the eyes is not a healthy flame, but a feverish gloss, our impetuous movements and agitation are not the sign of excessive strength, these are convulsions, the spasms."<sup>9</sup>

The motif of the body played a more forefrontal role in Witkacy's works; however, the corporal sphere and the distortions in this sphere can still be associated with the recognition of the fall of culture and the expanding decline. The discrepancy in the approach to the body as well as in the treatment of personal corporality of both of the Witkiewiczzes, manifests itself in their epistolography, Witkiewicz's *The Letters to a Son* and Witkacy's *The Letters to a Wife*.

In his theory of art, Stanisław Witkiewicz conducted a revalorisation of ugliness in the name of aesthetic and formal values. He justified and rationalised the presence of ugliness in a painting or a novel with a mastery of tech-

<sup>8</sup> E.g. S. Witkiewicz: *Vallenrodism or Debasement?*

<sup>9</sup> S. I. Witkiewicz: *Nowe formy w malarstwie (New Forms in Painting)*, Warsaw 2002, p. 160.



nique which was not equal to a simple reproduction of nature. Witkiewicz validated themes which were not approved of by idealist aesthetics, such as poverty, the gloom of existence, the ugliness of the body, and immorality. A naturalist himself, he did not want 'a re-mastered, sickeningly sweet image of the world', but was convinced of the fusion of beauty and ugliness, of sumptuousness and asceticism in real life. He thus wanted to transpose this complex interdependence into the field of art, which according to the thesis of naturalism, should reflect the truth of life and incorporate all areas of existence. The arrival of ugliness, deformity and the grotesque in Witkacy's works should be viewed from three angles: the wish to reject realistic tendencies in art, a catastrophic vision of the fall of art and the attempts to evoke aesthetic shock. Witkacy argued that the blasé and empty modern audience, in the widest sense of the meaning, needs shock and an adrenaline rush, and thus should not be influenced by harmonious beauty which evokes pleasant associations. He used ugliness as one of the strongest stimuli, serving the purpose of a kind of aesthetic shock therapy. In both Witkiewicz's and Witkacy's theories, the revalorization of ugliness intended aimed to alter the perception of the role of art.

Abandoning the role is thought to be the Witkiewicz's key specialty. It came to be ascribed mainly to Witkacy, who took on many different roles and put on various masks. However, Stanisław Witkiewicz's personality was also dynamic: a painter by profession, he became a writer, journalist and critic. Later, however, he abandoned the role of leading Polish art critic and iconoclast, responsible for causing a stir in the field of idealistic aesthetics. Witkiewicz eventually decided on a more monumental role for himself, resulting from the conditions of his era, still wrapped up and burdened with Polish problems of the past and identity. He became a teacher, a profound sage, a prophet of the *Zakopane* style.

Such choices resulted from a different concept of becoming mature and the perception of its meanings. The pedagogical system created by Witkiewicz aimed at educating artists who would produce a work of art in the future, who would become the epitome of a perfect creator and transmute into a masterpiece incarnate. In directing the process of his son's education, Stanisław Witkiewicz wrote to Wikacy: 'be yourself,' 'impose yourself,' 'define yourself,' predicting such maturity, the unity of the self, the ease and directness in articulating one's own self in art marks the end of the process of growing up. Witkacy's discoveries led in a different direction as he grew up in a climate of an era which questioned identity in a disparate way and

the main interests of which lay in youth and unreadiness.<sup>10</sup> He took on various pseudonyms, each of which corresponded to a slightly different identity. It was the strategy of a player who experienced the fragmentary nature of reality, who recognized its lack of cohesion and who did not treat life as unified. Such is the point of convergence between Witkacy and contemporary philosophers of culture such as Zygmunt Bauman.

The Witkiewiczzes were bound by a postulate of authenticity. They both searched for its sources in the artist's work and in the art-recipient relationship. For Witkiewicz, authenticity was a prerequisite for realism. The modern fear of non-authenticity manifested itself in his multiple dictates of authenticity in personal and artistic life as well as enthusiastic postulates of uniqueness, addressed to his son in his letters. In both Stanisław Witkiewicz's and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's theories, the artist and his worlds constitutes an ultimate resort and instance of authenticity – he shoulders responsibility. Granting the artist this particular type of power, Witkiewicz felt that development prospects opened up for art. For Witkacy, the responsibility an artist was obliged to shoulder, the awareness of what art should be, is dearly paid for in the currency of despair, as mysterious, metaphysical worlds are going to irretrievably pass away. Therefore, the artist raves, tossed between the sense of mission, the awareness of his own uniqueness and the sense of danger. He is a dying species, not protected by the institutions of the culture of the new era, and who nevertheless does not relinquish his uncompromising stance on acts of creation and art overall. In Witkiewicz's texts, the artist pays for his choices – he is doomed to incomprehension, oblivion, social ostracism and suffering, like the painter Aleksander Gierymski. In Witkacy's texts, the artist's tragedy occurs at a circus arena or in the lunatic asylum, since the ultimate price for authenticity is nothing else but madness and death.

Despite his idealistic perception of the culture of the Podhale region, Stanisław Witkiewicz observed a certain intrusion of mass culture into folk culture. He was aware that the highlanders were sucked into the crucible of the commercial demands of tourists and were keen to accept the new situation quite quickly. They easily parted from the traditional lifestyle and conduct as well as from original models of folk art. The highlander's wooden house, which Witkiewicz almost worshipped practically ceased to be the home of the highlander and became a product for sale, a regional attraction, not a sign of culture or symbol of Polishness.

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<sup>10</sup> See: E. Paczoska: *Dojrzewanie, dojrzałość, niedojrzałość (Maturation, Maturity, Immaturity)*, Warsaw 2004, p. 5.

A problem with Stanisław Witkiewicz's texts consists in their glaring 19th century stylistics and sentimental-romantic mannerisms which overshadow the novelty of some of his discoveries and conclusions. However, it is noteworthy that the artist did not renounce old-fashioned stylistics. Stanisław Witkiewicz wrote and acted as he did, despite his full knowledge of the world. The choice of such a strategy is particular to a utopian way of thinking and Witkiewicz's texts can undoubtedly be classified in the literary trend which builds a utopian image of society and creates a vision of a new man, and may in consequence, indeed be set alongside the works of John Ruskin, William Morris, and many others. It would probably be difficult to prove that building a utopia must be unconditionally connected with the lack of basic knowledge of the bank of ideas contemporary to Witkiewicz.

With all his distaste for popular culture and mass literature, Witkacy was not only aware of what such a form of culture was and could decipher its main principles and unmask its traps, he was also able to use it to his advantage. He constructed an educational situation consisting of the application of patterns of popular literature in conveying his own outlook on life.<sup>11</sup> Witkacy employed such patterns not only in his novels but in his palimpsest-based *Narcotics – Unwashed Souls*, which he formed as a quasi (psychological) handbook, thus using the potential of popular literature. His conclusions about culture anticipate the discoveries of contemporary philosophers, sociologists and psychologists, concerning the presence of narcissism in the 20th century.

The case of Witkiewicz the father and the son transgresses the traditional struggle of generations who stand on opposite sides of the barricade of family and social life, since there is such a significant point of convergence for both artists in the sphere of modernity and Polish Modernism. The Witkiewicz's artistic and literary works, as well as public commitments, fall into different phases of Modernism; however, they reflect its complex, variable character, the logic of development and the dynamics of transformations. Both of the Witkiewicz's were 'boundary' figures, existing at the pass between the generation of the so-called positivists and modernists. Their strategies and conclusions entered into the realm of complicated dialogue of paradigms, not only just between their own concepts. In attempting to understand their own contemporary times, both of them anticipated the questions posed by subsequent generations of artists on art, literature and culture. Witkiewicz was profoundly interested in the achievements of mod-

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<sup>11</sup> See: M. Kochanowski: *Powieści Witkacego wobec schematów literatury popularnej (Witkacy's Novels Towards to the Patterns of the Popular Novel)*, Białystok 2007.

ernists and supported their work; he visited the studios of young painters and wanted to meet futurists and cubists. Witkacy's philosophy met half-way with the aesthetic and philosophical achievements of the 21st century, which allows us to analyze his works in the context of the language of the new media or cyberart. The parallel treatment of the reflections of both Witkiewiczzes creates an opportunity to present the various faces of Polish Modernism as a dynamic space to form models of Polish cultural identity.

## Abstract

In this essay, I describe the relationship between Stanisław Witkiewicz and his son, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy) as a relationship between two artists in the broadest sense of the word. That is both were painters, writers, and thinkers. Initially, I perceived the Witkiewicz's as 'challengers' in the realm of culture issues. I ultimately turn my attention to stress the similarities between both Witkiewicz's rather than the differences because the two artists shared a common view on many ideas, e.g. the crisis of culture, the death of the *Polish Universum*, the ideal of a high and pure art, authenticity in personal life as well as in the field of art. Their artistic works reflect different stages of Modernism, but at the same time they show how complex Modernism was. This comparative work shows Modernism as a 'space' for the formation of Polish culture identity.

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