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The Ritual in Women's Performed Radio „Majdanek”

Rytuał w wykonaniu kobiet „Radio Majdanek”

ABSTRACT

The article provides insight into the historical phenomenon of performed „radio broadcasts” conducted by the female prisoners of the Nazi concentration camp at Majdanek, Poland. Every day over a period of a few months, women played the role of radio announcers and recreated from memory the communication formulas of Polish Radio broadcasts. The prisoners associated the pre-war Polish Radio with a strong message of cultural heritage and humanist values. The re-enactment and listening of the broadcasts evoked positive emotions and stirred the imagination of the women. The „radio” united them and gave them the strength to survive the reality of the concentration camp, promoted adherence to cultural norms, brought back the works of poets and writers, and provided entertainment. The broadcasts became a ritual ordering the mental universe of

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the women, which gave meaning to the everyday, provided a sense of the continuity of time that confirmed the women's identities, their sense of dignity and belonging to a community. The memory of the structure and aesthetics of an electronic broadcast gave the women a communication tool to construct and to preserve their own culture in a death camp. In the broadcasts they performed, the Polish female prisoners constructed a space where they were able to preserve their dignity and humanity.

Key words: communication, death camp, performance, history of radio, ritual, women, II World War

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł daje wgląd w bezprecedensowe w historii obozów koncentracyjnych zjawisko odgrywania z pamięci „audycji radiowych” przez więźniarki nazistowskiego obozu koncentracyjnego na Majdanku. Twórczynie tego szczególnego medium utożsamiały przedwojenne audycje Polskiego Radia z utraconym i niedostępnym dziedzictwem kulturowym oraz wartościami humanistycznymi. Odtwarzanie z pamięci radiowych programów wywoływało u nich pozytywne emocje i poruszało wyobraźnię, jednocząc i dając siłę do przetrwania obozowej rzeczywistości. „Audycje” wygłaszane i wysłuchiwane we wspólnocie baraku stały się rytuałem porządkującym mentalny świat kobiet. Ich systematyczny charakter nadawał sens przepełnionej cierpieniem codzienności: powtarzany schemat audycji wprowadzał poczucie ciągłości czasu i potwierdzał tożsamość kobiet, które w audycjach odnajdywały swoją historię sprzed wojny. Pamięć o strukturze i estetyce przekazu przedwojennego radia dała kobietom niezwykle narzędzie komunikacji umożliwiające zachowanie podstawowych wartości humanistycznych w obozie zagłady.

Słowa kluczowe: komunikacja, obóz zagłady, performans, historia radia, rytuał, kobiety, II wojna światowa

„RADIO MAJDANEK” IN STATEMENTS OF SURVIVORS

Established in July 1941 in the south-eastern outskirts of Lublin, Majdanek was the second largest German Nazi concentration camp located within the territory of today's Poland¹. Research estimates of the number of prisoners who were interned at Majdanek vary between 170,000 and 250,000². On 1 October 1942, a group of Polish women were brought to the camp³. They had been imprisoned at the Warsaw's „Pawiak” for resistance actions against German occupying forces. After a long train journey in cattle wagons, the wo-

¹ T. Kranz, *Unsere Schicksal – eine Mahnung für Euch. Berichte und Erinnerungen der Häftlinge von Majdanek. Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie e.v.*, Lublin 1997, s. 205–231.

² E. Mailänder, *Female SS-guards and Workaday Violence: The Majdanek Concentration Camp, 1942–1944*, tłum. P. Szobar, East Lansing 2015, s. 44.

³ Z. Murawska-Gryń, E. Gryń, *Obóz koncentracyjny Majdanek*, Lublin 1972, s. 39; E. Mailänder, *op. cit.*, s. 23, 30.

men, exhausted and weakened by beatings and hunger, were lodged in the barrack number three. Trying to support each other in these dramatic conditions, the women formed a network of self-help. They shared information about the sick and the most deprived, and collected scraps of bread to help the weakest prisoners. Terrified, they gathered in groups, singing songs and reciting poems in secret. They realized that they found the experience easier to bear when they listened to someone's voice in a group. In February 1943, one of the prisoners, Matylda Woliniewska, decided that the women would recite radio broadcasts they remembered from times before the war. This is how „Radio Majdanek” was created. It was a spoken radio. For several dozen days, at certain times, in the midst of a concentration camp, women listened to the 'broadcasts' created by a group of „presenters”.

The testimony to „Radio Majdanek” survives due to the post-war articles in the Polish press and books. Several dozen lines of transcripts of a „radio programme” broadcast during one week were saved thanks to Danuta Brzosko-Mędryk, who wrote them down with a tiny pencil on scraps of paper. The transcripts were passed on outside the camp in a secret letter and later included in Danuta's brother's diary. Today, we do not know what happened to the diary⁴. A quarter of a century later, Danuta Brzosko-Mędryk included the transcripts in her books, *Niebo bez ptaków* [Sky Without Birds] (1968, 1969) and (shorter excerpts) in *Matylda* (1970)⁵. In 1995 and 1996, Stanisław Fornal, a journalist of the Polish National Radio Lublin, interviewed five survivors⁶. They confirmed the extraordinary history of the camp „radio”.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The phenomenon of „Radio Majdanek”, the subject of this analysis, is thus far the only documented example of systematic quasi-media actions by inmates of a concentration camp. There have been instances of musical

⁴ S. Fornal, *Radio Planety Majdanek*, performed by: M. Woliniewska, D. Brzosko, S. Błońska, W. Grzegorzewska, J. Kozera, 1995.

⁵ L. Ripatti-Torniainen, G. Stachyra, *The Human Core of the Public Realm: Women Prisoners' Performed 'Radio' at the Majdanek Concentration Camp*, „Media Culture & Society” 2019, 41, 5, s. 654–669.

⁶ S. Fornal, *Radio Planety Majdanek*, performed by: M. Woliniewska, D. Brzosko, S. Błońska, W. Grzegorzewska, J. Kozera, 1995; idem, *Historia Radia Majdanek I; Historia Radia Majdanek II*, performed by: M. Woliniewska, D. Brzosko-Mędryk, S. Błońska, W. Grzegorzewska-Nowosławska, J. Kozera-Wąs, 1995; idem, *Zawsze radio, wszędzie radio – Radio Planety Majdanek*, performed by: S. Błońska, D. Brzosko, W. Grzegorzewska, J. Kozera, M. Woliniewska 1996; S. Fornal, *Radio Planety Majdanek*, performed by: D. Brzosko, S. Błońska, W. Grzegorzewska, J. Kozera, M. Woliniewska, 1996b.

works created by camp prisoners, such as the operetta „Le Verfügbar aux Enfer” composed by anthropologist Germaine Tillon and other French political deportees in Ravensbrück in October 1944⁷, but these were one-time events rather than recurrent activities. In contrast, the daily „programmes” of „Radio Majdanek” were „broadcast” between 13 February and early May 1943⁸.

To date, „Radio Majdanek” has been the subject of only one scientific article, which adopted the perspective of the meanings Hannah Arendt gives to the public sphere. Its authors argue that rather than having been an internal survival strategy in the silence of a single mind, „»Radio Majdanek« was a collective practice, a materialization of the shared and therefore public realm in the embodied action of a prisoner collective”⁹. Through the performance, women affirmed their continuing involvement in the world. In this way, „Radio Majdanek” illuminates the definition Arendt¹⁰ gives to the public realm as the shared belonging. „Radio Majdanek” reveals how profoundly meaningful the public realm is to humans. „By providing a shared realm to which human beings can collectively refer, and by providing the presence of others, the public realm holds key to our being and subjectivity as human beings”¹¹.

This study, in turn, seeks to show that „Radio Majdanek” was not just a collaborative activity that restored the agency of the women, but also constituted a ritual, the participation in which ordered the mental universe of the women, giving them the strength to fight for their daily survival. The daily ritual of re-enacting radio stirred the imagination of the listeners, allowing them to be „transported” to the pre-war reality, with its order and habits. Recreating the broadcasts from memory was a mental effort that prevented women from falling into a state of torpor caused by starvation, monotonous toil, violence, and the traumatic images of death in the camp. The radio ritual ordered the internal world of the women amidst the moral disorder of the camp.

The article describes the elements of the women’s inner world ordered by ritual activity: a sense of meaning and the rhythm of the day, a sense of

⁷ A. Brinca, *Reading Germaine Tillon’s Operetta „Le Verfügbar aux Enfers” as a Testimony of Women’s Differential Experience in Ravensbrück*, „International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music” 2017, 48, 1, s. 101–131.

⁸ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 1, Warszawa 1968, s. 91; W. Kiedrzyńska, Z. Murawska, *Kobieta w obozie koncentracyjnym*, Lublin 1972, s. 37–38.

⁹ L. Ripatti-Torniainen, G. Stachyra, *op. cit.*, s. 665–666.

¹⁰ H. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, New York 2005, s. 129.

¹¹ L. Ripatti-Torniainen, G. Stachyra, *op. cit.*, s. 666.

the continuity of time confirming the women's identities; a sense of dignity and belonging to a community; and a sense of beauty and aesthetics.

RADIO IN PRE-WAR TIMES

The golden age of radio was in 1930s and 1940s, before it was out-competed by television. Radio fascinated the listeners with its magic. The voice coming out of the black box evoked associations with the voice of a ghost. Few understood the mechanism of radio broadcasting reliant on electromagnetic waves. Radio broke into the private sphere of listeners with a message that stirred their emotions, something they found difficult to shield themselves from: in 1924, philosopher Viktor Engelhardt went so far as to advise that the radio should be turned off at home¹². At the same time, radio obliterated the spatial and temporal distance between people in various parts of the world. Also in 1924, director general of the BBC, John Reith, remarked during his commentary of the first-ever broadcast speech of King George V that radio had the effect of „making the nation as one man“¹³. When visiting the Berlin radio exhibition in 1930, Albert Einstein praised the resourcefulness of technologists, who gave the world a device that could contribute to reconciliation among people who could now share their experiences¹⁴.

Radio affected not only the conscious activities of people. It also stirred the world of their imaginations. This mechanism has been elucidated by long-running research into mental images¹⁵. These studies have defined these images as quasi-perceptual experiences, or ones that resemble perceptual experiences but arise without an external stimulus. Mental images are generated from information stored in long-term memory, formed by our lifelong experience¹⁶. It appears that imagination, understood as the

¹² C. Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich*, Oxford 2008, s. 182.

¹³ P. Scannell, D. Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting*, vol. 1, 1922–1939, Oxford 1991, s. 7.

¹⁴ K. Lacey, *Radio in the Great Depression: Promotional Culture, Public Service, and Propaganda*, w: *Radio Reader. Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, red. M. Hilmes, J. Loviglio, New York–London 2002, s. 35.

¹⁵ A. Paivio, *Imagery and Verbal Processes*, New York–Chicago 1971; *Images In Mind. The Evolution of a Theory*, New York–London 1991; *Mind and Its Evolution. A Dual Coding Theoretical Approach*, Mahwah–London 2007.

¹⁶ T. Forsslund, *Radio – the forgotten medium for users' creative mental interaction and co-production*, w: *Radio Evolution: Conference Proceedings September, 14–16, 2011, Braga, Uni-*

human capacity to form representations in the mind, is particularly active while listening to the radio¹⁷.

In 1938, just ahead of the outbreak of World War II, the psychological impact of the radio was confirmed by the reactions of American listeners of the adaptation of HG Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds* made by Orson Welles and broadcast by the CBS radio. The broadcast caused an outbreak of panic, as thousands believed an alien invasion was ongoing and fled their homes in a hurry. The emotional immediacy of radio was also utilized as pure entertainment, during the so-called audience participation programs. These were shows with large audiences, broadcast from large exhibition or market venues¹⁸. They resembled cabaret shows and included competitions with valuable prizes.

Listening to the radio became a cultural practice, rooted in the complex realities of listeners' lives. It was a lesson in attentiveness towards others (and their otherness), as well as a pre-condition of civic involvement. In 1930, head of the NBC network in the US stated that radio was a perfect means of consolidating the nation¹⁹. Although it was attacked by conservative intellectuals, such as economist William Orton, who described it as a source of contents that threatened elite standards – as well as by left-leaning thinkers, such as journalist and poet James Rorty, who accused the broadcasting system of centralized authoritarianism²⁰ – the position of radio in the epicentre of the 1930s culture remained unchallenged.

RITUAL AND THE RADIO

Anthropologists used to apply the theory of magic and religion to mass communication. This well-established field of research finds a synthesis in Eric Rothenbuhler's (1998) *Ritual Communication: From Everyday Conversation to Mediated Ceremony*. In the 1970s, communication scholars employed the theory to understand mass media in industrial societies.

versity of Minho: Communication and Society Research Centre, red. M. Oliveira, P. Portela, L.A. Santos, Braga 2012, s. 321.

¹⁷ D.W. Miller, L.J. Marks, *Mental imagery and sound effects in Radio Commercials*, „*Journal of Advertising*” 1992, 21, 4, s. 83–93; A. Gazi, *Mental and Social Construction in the Radio*, w: *Power- Pain- Violence*, red. K. Navridis, Athens 2002, s. 321–333.

¹⁸ J. Loviglio, *Vox Pop. Network Radio and the Voice of the People*, w: *Radio Reader. Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, red. M. Hilmes, J. Loviglio, New York–London 2002, s. 94.

¹⁹ K. Lacey, *Radio*, s. 29.

²⁰ B. Lenthall, *Critical Reception. Public Intellectuals Decry Depression-era Radio, Mass Culture, and Modern America*, w: *Radio Reader. Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, red. M. Hilmes, J. Loviglio, New York–London 2002, s. 47.

Anthropologists confirmed this perspective in the 1980s and 1990s, upholding the assumption that there is no need to modify the concepts borrowed from the analyses of indigenous societies.

Media anthropologists refer to the role of rituals and ceremonies in everyday life. Relations between human beings and the world still utilize their elements. The media as cultural systems that construct reality may affect people in a way similar to rituals and ceremonies²¹. A key element in the concepts of media events and rituals is the recurrence of events as media rituals²² or as mediatized rituals. The differentiation of mediatized rituals is based on „how they serve to sustain or mobilize collective sentiments and solidarities in respect of »the serious life« of societies”²³. Ritual depends on the willing involvement of its participants²⁴. It works when we want it to. The audience has to be prepared to participate in it as symbolically meaningful to them. Particular media perform mediatized rituals for their differentiated „publics” or audiences. Therefore, for the symbolism of the ritual to become valid, it requires the presence of those who practised said ritual. For ritual is action and practice, not theory. Although to Sartre²⁵ radio audience was a group based on an „absence” defined as the impossibility of technologically mediated mutuality, in the perception of its listeners radio has always been a community medium. The phenomenon of this community is subsumed not as much in its factual existence, but in the fact that it is imagined by the listeners while they receive the broadcasts. The concept of an „imagined community” is stressed both in American and British cultural studies²⁶. Benedict Anderson’s original formulation does not mention radio at all. Anderson’s interest was in the intensification of nationalism in the late nineteenth century and in the paradoxical willingness of many to sacrifice their lives for „the nation”, an imagined entity. The imagined community, he concluded, emerged partly as a transposition of reading a newspaper every morning, an act resembling a prayer ritual. Every reader knows that the private ceremony of reading

²¹ M. Coman, E.W. Rothenbuhler, *The promise of media anthropology*, w: *Media Anthropology*, red. M. Coman, E.W. Rothenbuhler, Thousand Oaks 2005, s. 9.

²² N. Couldry, *Media Rituals. A Critical Approach*, London 2003; E.W. Rothenbuhler, *Ritual Communication: From Everyday Conversation to Mediated Ceremony*, Thousand Oaks 1998.

²³ S. Cottle, *Mediatized rituals: beyond manufacturing content*, „Media, Culture & Society” 2006, 28, 3, s. 427.

²⁴ E.W. Rothenbuhler, *op. cit.*

²⁵ J.P. Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, London 1990.

²⁶ M. Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952*, Minneapolis 1997; S. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos’n ’Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern*, New York 1999.

„is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion”²⁷. Similarly, the logic of radio, an outcome of the specificity of radio broadcasting, has resulted in specific social attitudes. The broadcaster/sender was aware of the company of the listener/receiver in the act of on-air communication. In turn, in the mind of the receiver, there was a conviction that he or she is being addressed by the sender in real time. The logic of radio, consistent with „the logic of the media”²⁸ thus affected the social perception of the act of broadcasting as a factor unifying the listeners. They surrendered to the impact of the radio in the psychological sense, since „the media are involved in [...] »the myth of the mediated centre«: the belief, or assumption, that there is a centre to the social world and that, in some sense, the media speak ‘for’ that centre”²⁹. Earlier studies on the psychology of the relations between the audience and the performer (especially on television and radio) showed para-social interactions which evoke intimacy at a distance³⁰. While striving to build close relationships with the audience, the performers employed a mode of communicating „for someone”. By using rhetorical questions, voice modulation, or phrases of direct address they imitate an interaction, „constantly assuming the presence of an individual spectator, who, due to these efforts, feels that he or she is a special partner for the performer”³¹. The repeatability of the „presenters” work became a ritual, an action taking place in a particular social space³². The presenters were masters of ceremonies, presiding over the ritual.

The voice of the radio appeared cyclically (ritually) in the private space of listeners, bringing a culturally rich message. Live broadcasting, taking place „here and now”, guaranteed a mediated participation of the listeners in the ritual that bore the hallmarks of „cultural performance”, as „journalists resonate culturally with their audiences through their media routines [...], producing meaning as social power”³³. Disciplines beyond theatre or performance studies have mobilized the concept of

²⁷ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London 1983, s. 35.

²⁸ D.L. Altheide, R.P. Snow, *Media Logic*, Beverly Hills 1979, s. 9.

²⁹ N. Couldry, *Media Rituals. Beyond Functionalism*, w: *Media Anthropology*, red. E.W. Rothenbuhler, M. Coman, Thousand Oaks–London–New Delhi 2005, s. 60.

³⁰ D. Horton, R. Wohl, *Mass Communication and Para-social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance*, „Psychiatry” 1956, 19, 3, s. 215–229.

³¹ G. Stachyra, *The theory of parasocial interaction (intimacy at a distance) in communication practices of contemporary radio*, w: *Radio Relations. Policies and aesthetics of the medium*, red. G. Stachyra, M. Oliveira, T. Bonini, Cambridge 2018, s. 94.

³² E.W. Rothenbuhler, *op. cit.*

³³ F. Durham, *Media ritual in catastrophic time*, „Journalism” 2008, 9, 1, s. 97–98.

„performance” as „a heuristic tool to account for a broad variety of social interactions”³⁴, from the most intricate artistic activity to minimalist examples of expressive behaviour. In the case of the transient radio message, experienced only fleetingly by the receiver, the essence of the performance becomes particularly powerful, as the performance becomes itself „through disappearance”³⁵, as the „vanishing point”³⁶.

The ritual of „Radio Majdanek”, discussed in this article, had precisely that unique and unrivalled performative power. Its creators intuited the power of radio communication. Deprived of any and all technology, they used their own bodies to project voice, the essence of radio as a medium. As the broadcasts were unscripted, each of them was a spontaneous action; they also varied with regard to how they were performed. We know only about 100 lines of the broadcasts, based on notes taken down by Danna Brzosko-Mędryk whilst still in the concentration camp, and cited in books³⁷. The contents of the broadcasts over the three months of their „transmission” are also described in oral accounts given by the presenters themselves after the war or in other books.

THE RITUAL OF „RADIO MAJDANEK”. REPRODUCIBLE ORDER THAT PROVIDES DELIVERANCE

By studying how ritual affected the inmates and their self-perception in various camps, Moira Rachmani looked for a broad definition focusing on the effect of ritual upon the subject and stated that „ritual is affected and affects, possessing the power to shape social forms”³⁸. Social relations in the context of death camps trauma, where cultural and social identities collapse, was of particular importance in her research. In such situations, reconstruction of the self is achieved via a practice recapturing the internal or external order³⁹. „Ritual served as one tool in the battle to survive emotionally and mentally”⁴⁰.

³⁴ R. Nelson, *Prospective Mapping*, w: *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, red. S. Bay-Cheng et al., Amsterdam 2010, s. 14.

³⁵ P. Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, New York 1993, s. 146.

³⁶ R. Schneider, *Performance remains again*, w: *Archaeologies of Presence. Art, performance and the persistence of being*, red. G. Giannachi, N. Kaye, M. Shanks, Routledge 2012, s. 67.

³⁷ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 3, Warszawa 1975, s. 97–99.

³⁸ M. Rachmani, *Testimonies, Liminality Rituals and the Memory of the Self in the Concentration Camps*, „Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust” 2016, 30, 2, s. 77.

³⁹ H. Pedaya, *Walking Through Trauma: Rituals of Movement in Jewish Myth, Mysticism and History*, [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv 2011), s. 33, 86.

⁴⁰ M. Rachmani, *op. cit.*, s. 9.

The power of the ritual that is the repeatable order of actions was sensed also by the creators of „Radio Majdanek”. They remembered that „radio has always been and will remain the most cultured entertainment of the 20th century”⁴¹. Radio ennobled the art of speech and made it the main tool that had an impact on the audience. The community of the inmates accepted as a consensus the radiogenic potential of the human voice. In the concentration camp, the prisoners were stripped of all property by the Nazis, who took even their names away, replacing them with anonymous inmate numbers. But the voice, an individual and unique characteristic, a symbol of humanity, is what remained. Although the „presenters” of „Radio Majdanek” were aware of the presence of other prisoners in the barrack, their corporeality would become transparent and there was only their voice (the medium). The female prisoners identified the „presenters” with the „radio” to the extent that they would refer to these individuals as „the radio”. Each „presenter” became a specific voice transmitter: „When I oversleep [...] someone calls out: »Block leader! The radio has overslept!«”⁴². Through this volitional act, the women subjected themselves to the magical work of the ritual, expecting the results of the symbolic act in which they were emotionally invested. For this reason, the women used to begin their program with an institutional phrase, like a radio presenter might: „Hello! Hello! This is the new Radio Station Majdanek. Good morning ladies”⁴³. In the morning, the wake-up call was a specific jingle, „the loud call of a rooster, perfectly imitated by Helena Konca”⁴⁴. The women played the roles of radio presenters: „We had a choir with a conductor, reciters, poets, radio presenters and directors”⁴⁵.

The women applied the model of radio communication that they were able to recall in the midst of the technological void of the camp. The isolation from the outside world forced the female prisoners to keep a watchful eye on each other. Their everyday lives overlapped and turned into a collective experience. It integrated them, just like in the oral times, when humans needed a community in order to survive and understand the world. The women returned to the roots of interpersonal communication, to the power of the spoken word. Everyday language praxis enabled them to name and clearly describe what is mental. They succeeded in creating

⁴¹ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 2, Warszawa 1969, s. 97.

⁴² *Ibidem*, s. 115.

⁴³ E. Rosiak, *Niektóre formy samoobrony psychicznej więźniów Majdanka*, „Zeszyty Majdanka” 1971, 5, s. 163.

⁴⁴ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 3, s. 97.

⁴⁵ Archiwum Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku [dalej: APMM], VII/M-476, 1981, W. Grzegorzewska-Nowosławska

a „radio“ with the power of their voices and linguistic descriptions. They used „this capacity that still speaks, mind to mind, and connects us to how life used to sound“⁴⁶. The women used the semiotics of the medium. They applied the elements of communication related to technology only to make them „resemble“ radio, as „the media [...] enable the mind to constitute within itself [...] new ways of thinking“⁴⁷. The radio program scheme enabled the prisoners to see media communication anew in the camp reality⁴⁸. The broadcasts of „Radio Majdanek“ evoked memories and emotions. In its ritual, „Radio Majdanek“ created a bond with its listeners by the „shaping of human sensibility“⁴⁹, and creating mental states⁵⁰. Thus, the ritual of speaking out the broadcasts introduced a specific order in the inner worlds of the women, one that the Nazis could not access. The key elements of that order were:

- the sense of the meaning and the rhythm (structure) of the day
- the sense of continuity
- the sense of dignity and belonging to a community
- the experience of beauty.

The „presenters“ of the camp radio used the artifact of collective cultural memory that was radio communication. Because it was part of media memory, the women were able to create the symbolic order of the radio. Applying this order, they reconstructed the pre-war past and related to it collectively⁵¹. The „radio“ was to symbolize the women's inner freedom: „It is said that whoever has radio, has the power“⁵².

THE SENSE OF THE MEANING AND THE RHYTHM OF THE DAY

Many testimonies describe the prisoners in the camps as automatons⁵³. In the Majdanek concentration camp, the work done by the women was

⁴⁶ S. Street, *The Sound Inside the Silence. Travels in the Sonic Imagination*, Palgrave Macmillan 2019, s. 42–43.

⁴⁷ W.J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word. Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture*, Ithaca and London 1977, s. 46.

⁴⁸ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 2, s. 97.

⁴⁹ S. Maruna, *Reentry as a rite of passage*, „Punishment & Society“ 2011, 13, 1, s. 9.

⁵⁰ R.L. Grimes, *Deeply into the bone: Re-inventing rites of passage*, Berkeley 2000.

⁵¹ A. Erll, *Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction*, w: *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, red. A. Erll, A. Nünning, Berlin 2008, s. 4–6.

⁵² APMM, VII/M-211, 1958, s. 2, M. Woliniewska.

⁵³ Z. Gradowski, *In the Heart of Hell: The Diary of a Prisoner and Leader of the Sonderkommando Revolt at Auschwitz*, [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Miskal, 2012; P. Levi, *If This is a Man*, New York, 1959).

monotonous, and most often consisted in lugging heavy rocks from one end of the camp to another. The roll call could be exhausting, and induced a torpor in the inmates: „We get up at five, sometimes at four in the morning [...] we line up and wait. An hour, two, three ...”⁵⁴. Deprived of all contacts with the outside world, the prisoners lost track of time. The plan of the Nazis was to destroy the prisoners’ faith in human kindness: „German female guards inciting hatred in us – this is what affects our coexistence. We’re walking in a living hell”⁵⁵. Exhausted physically and mentally, the women felt rejected and forgotten by the world. „Will anyone understand people like us? Humiliated, dehumanized and beaten up every day?”⁵⁶. The brutal isolation intensified the emotional void of the prisoners: „I stare thoughtlessly and see nothing. Emptiness”⁵⁷.

Testimonies of the camp’s prisoners convey „the sense of entering a different reality and the collapse of the familiar order of reality”⁵⁸. This context throws into relief the significance of the ritual that was the daily recurrence of „Radio Majdanek” broadcasts. Over the nearly 90 days of the radio’s existence, the women came to expect the wake-up call in the morning and the evening sign-off. For the wake-up call in barrack 3 resembled the pre-war times, when the day began to the soft voice of the radio: „The announcer would say »Good morning, ladies«, and this alone diminished our urge to start the day by cursing. Those who had their birthdays or namedays were then congratulated, and the announcer expressed her wish for us to receive a message from our loved ones and to have a peaceful day”⁵⁹. The announcers relayed whatever snippets of news from the front line were smuggled in by „leufers” [workers from outside the camp – author’s note]⁶⁰. „In an initially sleepy voice, Danusia Brzosko would say: »Hello hello, this is Radio Majdanek. [...] Our block leader would then say prayers out loud«”⁶¹. This ritual provided the women with a semblance of contact with the world outside, and with some control over their present in a place with no clocks, calendars or newspapers.

The morning broadcast ordered and structured the day. The announcer listed the activities to be done that day in order to inculcate in them the thought they would be able to survive the day: „She would give the

⁵⁴ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 2, s. 71.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, wyd. 3, s. 46–47.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, s. 331.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, s. 127.

⁵⁸ M. Rachmani, *op. cit.*, s. 62.

⁵⁹ APMM, VII/M-211, 1958, s. 5, M. Woliniewska.

⁶⁰ APMM, VII/M-476, 1981, s. 12, W. Grzegorzewska-Nowosławska.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, s. 12.

date, the weather, who was needed for which komando, information on items lost, and so on. Then she would always announce it would be better tomorrow⁶².

The several dozen women in barrack 3 submitted to the rules that obtained during the broadcast. The „presenter“ would always perform from the top (third) level of the bunk so that her voice sounded loud. „I am kneeling uncomfortably on my bunk, with my head right under the ceiling of the barrack“⁶³. At the time of a broadcast, the prisoners used to suspend all their activities in the barrack. Nothing was more important than listening to the „voice“, and nothing could disturb it: „The morning programme, just like the other broadcasts, is listened to in silence. After it ends, a flow of words bursts“⁶⁴. The self-discipline displayed by the hungry and exhausted women testified to the real influence of the ritual they experienced. The listeners of „Radio Majdanek“ obeyed a certain external order of signs. They accepted the power of a ritual as if it was some kind of physical force that they could not resist. „I speak with dry lips. I cannot sleep afterwards as I am trying, in vain, to remember what I said in the programme“⁶⁵.

THE SENSE OF CONTINUITY

The study of trauma, based on clinical research of political prisoners incarcerated by the Nazis, analyzes the process of disintegration of their identity⁶⁶. Moira Rachmani highlights „the split between one's identity before and during the traumatic event“⁶⁷. Testimonies of concentration camps prisoners revealed that for many of them, trying to not forget the past and the pre-traumatic self was the way to survive. Rachmani observed the importance of emotional arousal accompanying ritual practices: „In recalling the past, ritual evokes emotions“⁶⁸.

In „Radio Majdanek“, the program that brought back the memory of the women's happier past was *Podwieczorek przy mikrofonie* [Tea time over the microphone.]. It was acted out at the Majdanek camp on those Sunday afternoons when the prisoners did not have to work. It was an ex-

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 3, s. 95.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 115–116.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, wyd. 2, s. 95–96.

⁶⁶ E. Jacobson, *The Self and the Object World*, London 1964.

⁶⁷ M. Rachmani, *op. cit.*, s. 9.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, s. 11.

tended broadcast based on the most popular radio program in the Polish Radio before the war. *Podwieczorek przy mikrofonie* was first aired in 1936 from the Bristol Hotel in Warsaw in front of a live audience. „The programme, which contained a permanent arrangement of humorous messages, monologues, parodies and songs referring to Warsaw folklore, had, by the Second World War, created a specific sphere of radio audience, in which the broadcaster and the recipients were included in the circle of initiation”⁶⁹. A galaxy of the best cabaret artists and singers guaranteed the high quality of performance and recognition of the program throughout the entire country. The exuberance of the show evoked positive emotions. The program was broadcast on air, but it was also played out in front of a live audience in the Bristol Hotel. These two dimensions – radio and stage – permeated each other, creating a space for spontaneous actions by the performers and the audience. This creative and interpretative freedom likely led to *Podwieczorek przy mikrofonie* becoming an inspiration for „Radio Majdanek”.

Each of the broadcasts was unique, and depended on which memories the „presenters” were able to retrieve. „Thanks to my good memory, I used to tell tales and stories a lot. [...] We believed that our listeners forgave us our amateur shortcomings and experienced moments of peace and comfort”⁷⁰. The broadcasts created in the performative act did not merely recall specific poems, songs, or stories. Rather, they allowed the women to recall their past selves, as „performance is unthinkable without memory”⁷¹. Katarzyna Prot posits that „one of the most important things for the sense of identity is the sense of continuity (between past and present) – that is, the feeling of being the same person throughout one’s life”⁷². The inner disintegration of the Majdanek women was precipitated by the clash between the brutality of camp life with the „normal” life they could glimpse outside the fence: „I see the road in the distance. Cars and buses drive along it, someone cycles by at speed. How far away it all is, almost unreal”⁷³. The sense that the situation is unreal resulted from the women being suddenly and forcibly isolated from their social relations, which ruptured the continuity in the construction of their identities. „Radio Majdanek” restored that continuity by consolidating memories that

⁶⁹ L. Ripatti-Torniainen, G. Stachyra, *op. cit.*, s. 661.

⁷⁰ APM, VII/M-476, 1981, s. 13, W. Grzegorzewska-Nowosławska

⁷¹ M. Bał, *Memory Acts: Performing Subjectivity*, www.boijmansbulletin.nl, February 2001, 001, 002.

⁷² M. Rachmani, *op. cit.*, s. 14.

⁷³ *My z Majdanka. Wspomnienia byłych więźniarek*, red. K. Tarasiewicz, Lublin 1988, s. 72–73.

fostered the construction of temporal references: „We recall all the shops on Krucza street [in Warsaw – note by the author] (so many hat shops!), different tram routes [...] or long stanzas from »Pan Tadeusz«“ [a Polish national epic by Adam Mickiewicz, note by the author]⁷⁴. The „broadcasts“ re-created from the presenter's memory the events and places from the pre-war period, when the real radio played. In this way, listening enabled women to communicate to each other the emotions associated with the pre-war world: „Imagination transports us to our Warsaw“⁷⁵. Listening to specific broadcasts of „Radio Majdanek“ stimulated prisoners to be mindful of each other, which is a prerequisite for „communicative activity“⁷⁶. Further, the radio not only referenced the present and the past of the women – it also made them realize there was a future ahead of them: „We gather to listen to the women chatting about the past and their plans for the after-the-war future“⁷⁷.

Restoring the memory about the space and places of the pre-war Poland, reciting poems, and remembering fragments of literary classics consolidated the identities of the prisoners. They came to the realization that if they could recall the artifacts of their pre-camp lives, then they had functioned among them before. As a ritual is „a mechanism of producing a momentarily shared reality“⁷⁸, „Radio Majdanek“ created an environment conducive to the reconstruction of the surrounding world by means of referring to memories. For these were connected to the specific experiences of the women. By listening, they accessed a symbolic mode of experiencing.

THE SENSE OF DIGNITY AND BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY

Moira Rachmani's research on the Holocaust has shown that in the face of the inhuman conditions in concentration camps, people struggled to preserve not only „nomic“ rituals, deriving from religion and tradition, but also „anomic“ ones. These included spontaneous celebrations of one's birthday or imagining food they used to eat, reminiscing about recipes⁷⁹. She argues that the practice of rituals took the form of voluntary and

⁷⁴ APMM, VII-135/160, 1967, s. 49–50, D. Brzosko-Mędryk

⁷⁵ *My z Majdanka*, s. 25.

⁷⁶ K. Lacey, *Listening Publics. The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age*, Cambridge 2013, s. 165.

⁷⁷ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 3, s. 100.

⁷⁸ R. Collins, *Interaction ritual chains*, Princeton 2004, s. 7.

⁷⁹ M. Rachmani, *op. cit.*, s. 102.

spontaneous actions whose power lies in both the transcendental and the realistic levels. Rachmani points to the many aspects of performing rituals, which are: belief in a mystical existence⁸⁰, symbolic communication that determines the order and sequence of words and acts⁸¹, the specific form of behaviour that differs from normal conduct and is shaped by its performer⁸².

For the Majdanek women, recalling the radio broadcasts from the past was an improvised return to the cultural center⁸³. The idea of „Radio Majdanek” was to „own” a medium which connected them to the outside world. „Radio Majdanek” shaped the community of women who voluntarily submitted to the ritual order, even though revealing the practice would have been a death sentence. „No-one ever reported the illegal performances to the guards”⁸⁴. The shared secret consolidated the emerging community of listeners and introduced an element of the extraordinary to the broadcasts. The speakers addressed an audience, and the members of the audience were unified. „Like in most religions the spoken word functions integrally in ceremonial and devotional life”⁸⁵. Using radio semiotics, women in Majdanek blended the spheres of the announcer and the recipient in the symbolic aura of a radio program. The ritual props, words and tunes were subject to interpretation by the listeners who „tuned in”. The participants performed using symbols to create radio community, or, in the words of Eric Walter Rothenbuhler⁸⁶, to achieve social goals. „The fear of being stigmatized in a broadcast results in fewer and fewer thefts. The desire to hear one’s name as a donor increases the modest resources of self-help”⁸⁷. In fact, this order of signs would not have had any power if it had not been accepted by the women. „Participation in a ritual means accepting the limits of one’s free will, a conscious acceptance of an imposed order of thoughts”⁸⁸. The ritual involved both the „presenters” and the audience, who co-created the exceptional ceremony on a daily basis. The „voices” of „Radio Majdanek” created a community of listeners. Any-

⁸⁰ V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Chicago 1969, s. 19.

⁸¹ S.J. Tambiah, *Dramatic Ritual/Ritual Drama: Performance and Reflexive Anthropology*, „Kenyon Review” 1979, 1, s. 80–93.

⁸² J. Snoek, *Defining ‘Rituals’*, w: *Theorizing Rituals*, vol. 1, *Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, red. J. Kreinath, J. Snoek, M. Stausberg, Boston 2006, s. 13.

⁸³ N. Couldry, *Media Rituals. Beyond*, s. 60.

⁸⁴ APM, VII/M-476, 1981, s. 13, W. Grzegorzewska-Nowosławska

⁸⁵ W.J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*, London and New York 1982, s. 74.

⁸⁶ E.W. Rothenbuhler, *op. cit.*, s. 64.

⁸⁷ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 2, s. 159.

⁸⁸ E.W. Rothenbuhler, *op. cit.*, s. 159.

one for whom the 'radio' was out of range felt emptiness and loneliness: „I am walking on the Field. It's crowded and noisy and I feel lost. I pass dozens of nameless prisoners, none of whom greets me. I am a stranger to them. They have no idea who Danka from the »radio« is”⁸⁹. The loneliness resulted from anonymity, as the „reception range” of „Radio Majdanek” was restricted to barrack 3, beyond which the mutually supportive community of women did not extend. It was there that the prisoners experienced the unifying force of the radio, because they were able to recall the media phenomenon that served to mobilize collective sentiments and solidarities on the basis of symbolization and a „subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be”⁹⁰.

Listening to the „radio” unified the women. „Radio Majdanek” constituted proof that only human consciousness enables people to form communities. At Majdanek, it was a community of emotions, intellectual struggles and imagination, as was the pre-war radio. Had the women not been exposed to radio's positive influence on their mental state and emotions, they would never have attempted to reconstruct it. „The programmes had to show some optimism, a quantum of faith that we will survive”⁹¹. The creators of the „radio” thought „orally”, i.e. in a situational rather than abstract manner. Therefore, the „presenters collected thoughts” during the roll-calls and at work: „More and more often you can hear serious discussions among the women who are shoveling, pushing wheelbarrows, scrubbing floors, mending the Germans' underwear or washing it”⁹². Later, they would create their broadcasts alluding to specific events from the camp life. They were „close to the human life-world” and encompassed the „communal »soul«”⁹³ responding to urgent social needs. Because hearing is a „prime analogue for knowing”⁹⁴ – the women acquired the key to inner freedom and the sense of dignity: „We demonstrated our independence of spirit”⁹⁵. Communal listening evoked emotions and united the women, who felt stronger as a result: „A simple reprint will not convey the atmosphere of these concerts, will not show the significance the radio

⁸⁹ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 3, s. 246.

⁹⁰ S. Cottle, *Mediatized rituals: beyond manufacturing content*, „Media, Culture & Society” 2006, 28, 3, s. 415.

⁹¹ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 3, s. 24–25.

⁹² *Ibidem*, s. 160.

⁹³ W.J. Ong, *Orality*, s. 46.

⁹⁴ *Idem*, *Interfaces*, s. 143.

⁹⁵ APMM, VII/M-211, 1958, s. 5, M. Woliniewska.

had in protecting us against the brutalization that the camp regime sought to effect"⁹⁶.

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY. THE LINGUISTIC ORDER OF THE BROADCASTS

Crucial elements of ritual include ritual expression, conveyed through systems of signs. The communicative properties of the ritual, which make it powerful and give it force, are among others the words with which the participant of the ritual voluntarily enters the order of meanings⁹⁷. The peculiarity of the ritual is confirmed by the way of speaking within its duration and by the use of appropriate lexemes. The voice „guides” the listeners, and belongs to the guide, the master of ceremony. The choice of lexemes also guides the interpretations and feelings of the recipients. „If communication is considered a form of ritual rather than of transmission, it is then related more closely to representation than to motion, participation than to consumption, to meaning or beauty than to strategy or outcome”⁹⁸.

The linguistic order of „Radio Majdanek” broadcasts referred to specific phenomena of concentration camp life. The only extant notes from the broadcasts included in all the editions of Danuta Brzosko-Mędryk’s book *The Sky Without Birds* contained 101 lines⁹⁹ from one week’s „broadcast”¹⁰⁰. These valuable records allow us to state that the women referred to the prisoner existence also in a figurative way. An example was the broadcast „Fashion show”. In a manner typical for a radio ritual, its content was to induce a good mood in the listeners. This was achieved by the strategy the presenters adopted of clashing the horrific prisoner life artifacts with the convention of the fashion show. The lexemes used in this broadcast testify not only to the creativity of women but also to the sense of the aesthetics of the entertainment radio broadcast. The convention was subordinated to the escapist function. For that reason, the announcers used the vocabulary that evoked an association with the pre-war period when women were interested in fashion and style:

Last week was full of oddities. It’s the sixth time we’ve been moved with the rest of our magnate’s fortunes to a new block. After a ruthless but not very effective attempt

⁹⁶ APMM, VII/M 210, 1978, s. 18, E. Piwińska.

⁹⁷ E.W. Rothenbuhler, *op. cit.*, s. 53.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, s. 54.

⁹⁹ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 3, s. 97–99.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 91.

to get rid of bed menagerie, we withdrew to the previously set positions in our three-level bunk beds-villas. On Wednesday morning, owing to the possibility of our figures becoming slightly rounder on the Majdanek diet, the powers that be ordered the wearing of slimming greyish-blue dresses or blazers. The lovely legs of our ladies are looking chic in fancy clogs. The height of fashion is to wear »kaisers« – two-coloured stockings. The most exquisite combination is to wear a red stocking on the left leg, and a yellow one on the right. This ends the fashion review¹⁰¹.

Last week was full of „oddities“ euphemistically summarizes some of the most depressing phenomena of the terrifying camp reality: brutal searches and destruction of bunks of prisoners, corporal punishment for carrying a piece of soap or photos of loved ones. Bunks without pallets or with pallets stuffed with prickly weeds are described by the women as three-level bunk „beds-villas“, while bed menagerie is a sarcastic euphemism for the vermin that infested the beds, which the lack of personal hygiene products or toilet facilities made only worse. Exhausted by the hard labour and emaciated by the Majdanek diet (comprising stale bread and stewed weeds), the prisoners were forced to wear „slimming greyish-blue dresses or blazers“. These were striped uniforms made of coarse cloth that got wet quickly and provided no protection against the cold, and at the same time exposed the emaciated shapes of hungry women. The women were forced to wear clothes that did not fit them and of random colours („two-coloured stockings“ in combination a red on the left leg, and a yellow one on the right), and heavy wooden boots („fancy clogs“) that rubbed against the women's feet so badly as to draw blood.

Instead of openly stating their desperate position and living conditions, the announcers skilfully crafted a humorous message. It had a symbolic dimension: „We performed scenes from camp life, mocking the SS-men. This made us more resistant to the fear they instilled in us“¹⁰². The radio made cultural standards (including manners) present in the memory of women. That is why the fashion review included symbols of female care for the aesthetics of the environment.

The linguistic order analyzed here shows that the creators of „Radio Majdanek“ saw the potential of the word in a ritual act. For the lexical profile of the broadcasts signals the intended effect of aesthetic experiences and representations in the minds of the women. Words that conveyed beauty made the women aware they themselves were unique and special. This was the objective of the radio's founder, Matylda Woliniewska, who saw „great potential, many talents, many unique women“¹⁰³. The radio

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, s. 97–98.

¹⁰² APMM, VII/M-211, 1958, s. 6, M. Woliniewska.

¹⁰³ D. Brzosko-Mędryk, *Niebo bez ptaków*, wyd. 3, s. 95.

became a channel for the communication of aesthetic values, which had undergone destruction in the reality that surrounded the prisoners. „We found an antidote to the ugliness that surrounded us, to the permanent fear and uncertainty of our fate”¹⁰⁴. Despite the horrendous circumstances outside, the women regained inner space, where they fostered the values that had marked their status before the war: „One day I find myself declaring *quo usque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra* while moving *scheiss* [excrement] from boxes to barrels”¹⁰⁵.

A radio broadcast, evoking the time of pre-war culture and human dignity, gave the women a new lease of life: „Every evening, Malinka sings Ave Maria. We listen to it together with the sick. Her voice carries so much warmth, faith, love and hope”¹⁰⁶. The hope came to life along with the memory of the cultural richness, whose carrier was radio. Crowded in barrack 3, hungry, stripped of their intimacy, the women listened to the broadcasts spoken out from memory and, in their imaginations, recalled the world in which they were educated, fashionable, and well-groomed residents of Warsaw, responsive to the beauty of the world and other people. Radio nurtured this sensitivity, and so even the tiniest thing could make the women happy. „When Irka Pełka smuggled a couple of flowers from the Gaertneri – that was a holiday for us”¹⁰⁷.

CONCLUSION

The creators of „Radio Majdanek” organized their knowledge taking into account the reality that they were living in. The conditions were as primal as those in the pre-media world. They conveyed from memory messages adapted to a radio program formula and performed them spontaneously in front of other inmates.

The broadcasts performed by the presenters in the ritual (repeatable, ceremonial, symbolic) order evoked the positive emotions in the prisoners. Because the material for the broadcasts was gathered collectively, the women activated their memories, which constituted intellectual effort, and that in turn helped them avoid torpor. Radio embodied culture and was seen as a carrier of humanist values, and so its message ordered the disintegrating psyches of the women with regard to the meaning of everyday

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 100.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, s. 101.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, s. 309.

¹⁰⁷ APM, VII/M-476, 1981, W. Grzegorzewska-Nowosławska.

reality, the creation of a community, as well as regaining their identities and the sense of beauty despite the horrific conditions in the concentration camp. In this way, thanks to the ritual that involved the presenters and the listeners, „Radio Majdanek” was an attempt to restore mental order. In the performative act of doing the broadcasts, the women submitted to the symbolism of the ritual. This is why they sensed a force integrating their inner worlds, to which radio speaks in the most profound way. The women were able to create mental images that referred back to the pre-war reality. These images had a therapeutic function, knitting together the identities of women brutally cut off in the concentration camp from their previous lives. The radio ritual brought back the cultural context, and in so doing, it made women open to mutual help, as well as taught and entertained them.

The creators of „Radio Majdanek” encouraged the inmates to search their memories for formulae of radio messages which could be adopted in a verbal broadcast. The necessity to collect material for the program and organize it in various forms such as the news, entertainment, theatre, songs, distracted the women from their fear of death and humiliation. It strengthened their psyches and gave them the strength to cope with the camp reality. Performing „radio”, using their voices and building a community with the listeners helped form a ritual circle that „magically” transported the prisoners to the very centre of the story – the pre-war world created in statu nascendi by the presenter.

The inmates yearned to escape the camp violence so much that they were willing to sacrifice their free time to the radio: „when you would grab an hour to sleep or on a work-free Sunday afternoon”¹⁰⁸. The camp community, born out of listening to Radio Majdanek and living the shared experience, was also a community experiencing katharsis, like in a ritual. The power of „Radio Majdanek” came from a continuous sense-creating process by the use of spoken word. Speech became the substantial medium which formed basic human relations. The women, deprived of all the conventions and unable to seek help in the „outside world”, turned to each other and to the essence of humanity – communication. Seeking the best way to escape the cruel reality of the camp, they created an imaginary world with their sound-emitting bodies. They made „radio” with their bodies.

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