

УДК 008

**Pawlik Karolina****DO NOT DISSECT MY HEART AFTER I DIE**

*Author of the essay tries to rethink the status of borders and identity in a very personal perspective. She is focusing particularly on growing migration and certain political changes of the contemporary world. This text records own experiences and reflections of the Polish-Russian author who is strongly attached to China since childhood, as well as many conversations she held in Shanghai in 2012-2014 with people of different origins. It is mostly focused on strategies of identification with a place and issues of transculturality, concerning both East-Central Europe and Shanghai.*

**Key words:** *identity, Shanghai, East-Central Europe, transculturality, borders, socialism*

**Павлік К.****НЕ РОБИТЬ МЕНІ РОЗТИН СЕРЦЯ ПІСЛЯ СМЕРТІ**

*Авторка есе в надзвичайно особистісній перспективі розмірковує про статус меж та ідентичності, беручи до уваги особливо інтенсивну міграцію та низку політичних змін у сучасному світі. Текст складає запис власного досвіду і рефлексій авторки про польсько-російське коріння, зв'язок з Китаєм, а також багато розмов, що були нею проведені в Шанхаї у 2012–2014 роках з особами різного походження. Текст зосереджується передусім на питаннях стратегії ідентифікації з місцем, а також проблемах транскультурності, як у стосунку до Центрально-Східної Європи, так і Шанхаю.*

**Ключові слова:** *ідентичність, Шанхай, Центрально-Східна Європа, транскультурність, межі, соціалізм.*

**Павлик К.****НЕ ДЕЛАЙТЕ МНЕ ВСКРЫТИЕ СЕРДЦА ПОСЛЕ СМЕРТИ**

*Авторка эссе в очень личной перспективе размышляет о статусе границ и идентичности, принимая во внимание особенно интенсивную миграцию и ряд политических изменений в современном мире. Текст состоит из записей собственного опыта и рефлексий*

авторки о польско-российском происхождении, связи с Китаем, а также многих разговоров, которые были проведены ею в Шанхае в 2012–2014 годах с лицами разного происхождения. Текст концентрируется прежде всего на вопросах стратегии идентификации с местом, а также на проблемах транскультурности как по отношению к Центрально-Восточной Европе, так и Шанхаю.

**Ключевые слова:** идентичность, Шанхай, Центрально-Восточная Европа, транскультурность, границы, социализм.

1

The day is gloomy, coffee bitter, star of a Kremlin kind.  
Winding lines of taxis, streams of neon lights, urban winter torpidity.  
The star of the Soviet-Russian friendship quietly glows dully red.

It's hard to say how many people, passing by the former Sino-Soviet Friendship Building, actually realize that Shanghai is one of those many cities in whose tissue such pin was added as to a virtual map – apparently indolently.

«Here we used to be friends as well.»  
Or «Here, too, we had to be(come) friends.»

Despite everything, I like this place. For years, it brings me to another of the few Cities particularly dear to my heart, where in the same year 1955 Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science opened. A gift from Soviet people to Polish people, impressive and bizarre structure, which in moments of unbearable longing for Shanghai in Warsaw, can actually evoke also Shanghai colonial building of Custom House with clock, being a British imitation of London Big Ben.

The City becomes dispersed, somehow stirred. Meanwhile it suddenly strikes me after so many years that this place doesn't remind me of Moscow – the city of my birth, which I left as an infant and so far didn't manage to go back.

2

– How was your trip home?  
– Amazing. I realized that deep in me there's still all this European East, which hasn't been replaced by Asia.  
– Wait, what do you mean? I've always thought Europe was West.  
– You've also thought that Polish-Russian marriage was not a cross-cultural one, because we've got so much in common with Russians...

*Perhaps not much of what you've learned about so called West in Indian school would fit my part of Europe.*

\*

*– Sometimes I think what we're lacking here mostly is feeling of the unreasonable, overwhelming and liberating sadness. Nobody ever goes truly dramatic here, neither in sad, nor joyful way. Chinese are so well balanced and concerned about face, foreigners are mostly on the edge anyways, so they are very careful, perhaps afraid to risk immersion in anything exuberant or unrestrained.*

*– What do you mean exactly?*

*– It's so hard to explain exactly, especially for me in English. I guess in essence it would be the very spirit of Emir Kusturica's fabulous «Underground.»*

*– I didn't watch it...*

*– Then think of Tony Gatlif's «Transylvania.»*

*– Sorry, I haven't watched that either.*

*– Then... imagine a klezmer concert in Shanghai, in former ghetto in Hongkou, which saved thousands of Jews from East-Central Europe from Holocaust. One of my greatest Shanghai dreams is that one day I'll listen to Yiddish songs in Ohel Moshe Synagogue.*

*– Why Yiddish?*

*– Why not?*

*– Why not in Hebrew?*

*– Because the language of Ashkenazi Jews in Central Europe was Yiddish, not Hebrew.*

How shall I deal with the fact that this well-educated, well-traveled young man comes from the country, in which back in 1958 Czesław Miłosz wrote in exile «How many times I had remained silent because, having come from those foggy expanses that books, even textbooks, rarely provide information about (or if they do, provide false), I would have had to start from scratch! (...) Even if it is difficult or painful to explain who I am, nevertheless I must try (...) to bring Europe closer to Europeans?»<sup>1</sup>

This casual conversation hurts badly, because, in fact, my dilemma can be reduced to a question of whether I really want to deal with Eu-

---

<sup>1</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-definition*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1968, p.2.

rope, of which Czesław Miłosz was writing more than half a century ago «I felt both a native and a foreigner. Undoubtedly I could call Europe my home, but it was a home that refused to acknowledge itself as a whole.»<sup>2</sup>

In fact, my dilemma can be reduced to a question of what kind of Europe I want to miss, whenever I affirmatively answer to the questions of Chinese, who want to make sure that Poland is a country located in Europe. Do I want to – and am I supposed to – notice and rank my foreignness in a country where everyday someone would anyway shout «Stranger!» upon seeing me? Do I want to – and am I supposed to – notice and enhance my foreignness in a country that won't ever recognize me as local, though I spent here some of the most important and beautiful years of my childhood; though I accepted a Chinese surname and name; though I've almost completely devoted myself to it in writing?

\*

If – as a native of Foggy Expanses – I inevitably remain with legs astride between the so called East of Europe and its West (belonging to which we cannot and don't want to deny), perhaps I might take the risk of moving body weight from Eastern to Western leg?

English and French would take place of Polish and Russian languages. As the core reference point I would take traditions and revolutions of Western Europe, which I know well, because we paid so much attention to them in school. Slope, autumn winds and windows outline of several Western European cities I know well enough to feel at home there and answer questions about Europe using their perspective. I have several lovely memories of summer months which I spent with my Grandmother and my Parents in Provence and Côte d'Azur, so even in nostalgic conversations about childhood, it would be possible to conceal my different origins.

I wouldn't make Chinese confused, talking about Europe which fits neither imageries formed on the basis of news coming before from the Polish People's Republic, nor those more recent ones, originating mostly in the Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea areas. I wouldn't make confused all of those Europeans who constantly need to be reminded that «in their country» does not necessarily mean «in w h o l e Europe.»

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

Finally, I wouldn't make me myself confused, trying to cultivate not only split between Asia and Europe, but also in Europe itself.

I know I would succeed – for sure. It would have hurt much less.

And just in the whole world I wouldn't have anymore any Place where I could feel a native and feel home at the same time.

3

– It seems we're losing trust in our political system and our values though so many other countries around the world so strongly believe in European Union. Perhaps it's time to regain confidence in ourselves and our ideas.

– That's right. Everything what I could ever dream to achieve one day in my life, you had granted by your European country in the moment when you were born: to be respected as a human being and be free, to live a simple, stable life.

– Nothing was granted for my generation of the early '80s in East-Central Europe. Nothing was granted for my Father's generation either – it's just that they kept resisting and fighting to gain their independence, until the regime finally collapsed. Our recent history is very different from those European countries you must be thinking of.

– But European Union...

– What? We've joined ten years ago. But that can't change the past: my generation was born in the socialist block. And if you look out of Poland, at countries such as Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia – this generation was born in Soviet Union. We do remember, more or less, how our countries were gaining independence. One of the silly memories of my childhood is drawing on the recycled '89 election leaflets. I used to color all vowels in the text on the back of the sheet. I guess this is when powerful word «VOTE» was for the first time imprinted in my mind. So as much as I understand your pain and share your hopes for change, both as a young Uyghur and a Chinese citizen, I disagree that we were granted anything. Freedom doesn't come for free.

4

At the table in Vilnius, the Polish-Lithuanian conversation goes on in English till late at night, with no arguments about the complicated history, about to which country particular cities should belong, or the exclusive rights to some famous poets from the past.

No one at this table has been shaped by a single place, nor the same constellation of places – even being a twin cannot assure sameness in this regard.

Some of us were born in a country that disappeared from maps. Some of us know what it means to create home in a country where one has no ancestors or predecessors.

\*

Why does it actually feel so good to speak in English here – again, after a short break, so far from Shanghai where I would speak it every day at work and even home?

Why did it feel so good already a couple years ago, when in the early morning I sat with a Czech friend at his kitchen table, overlooking Prague roofs in the September sun?

Perhaps partly because it will always fill me with certain joy, as it remains one of my mother's languages – a language inherited from my well-traveled Mother, who by her own life story has proved to me, since early childhood, that even most harsh political borders are never completely impermeable. She learned English and spoke it in several different countries before becoming my first English teacher – despite the political situation and language patterns imposed on us by Soviet Union, long time before what couldn't be predicted or wished for would actually become reality.

However it seems there is another significant reason. It only happens once in a while that for my English speaking companions my behavior isn't «like a jack-in-the-box's, governed by some mysterious mechanism.»<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps it feels so good because we talk about the same things in the very same language, which I've used so many times abroad, but this time I don't feel alien, isolated, lonely. There is no need to be particularly convincing, they would still understand everything – we're closely tied with many diverse bonds. We're speaking English, but common background still makes us laugh and fall into reveries at the same moments. No concealed fundamental differences in tone, no need to constantly «go back, arduously, to the very beginning.»<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-definition*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1968, p.2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

We joke and those jokes fill my heart with the unspoken joy, especially those latest and sorely political – it clearly almost never happens in Shanghai. We're laughing loudly, freely and even I try to give up on habit to laugh quietly, modestly and cover lips with hand – a habit which I unwillingly adapted from the well-mannered Chinese girls.

I suddenly realize that language of conversation automatically establishes certain framework for understanding history and politics, as well as talking about it. I realize also less obvious thing: that English, which in Shanghai appears to be a neutral international language, always imposes on everyone – regardless of identity of interlocutors – a certain vision of the world history, which was formed without taking into consideration perspectives of those countries which lack both colonial past and strong political authority.

Speaking in English about these places and from those places may, in fact, mean an attempt to ensure essential counterweight.

5

– *Poland must be a beautiful country.*

– *I know you have this idiom in Chinese 有山有水, depicting striking scenery. We do have both water and mountains.*

– *I would associate it mostly with beautiful sunsets, brown color, wooden fragrance, silence of forests. Romance and sadness – dark blue.*

– *That's quite unusual way to evoke my home country...*

– *That's from Chopin.*

\*

– *Where do you come from?*

– *From Poland.*

– *From Poland?!*

– *Yes...*

– *Really? I've lately seen this great performance by one of your directors in Tianjin. You have so many gifted artists in Eastern Europe! That was «Persona. Marilyn». The actress was excellent. Crowds came from Beijing and all over the country. Of course there was a huge censorship issue, but Lupa managed. I always wanted to go to one of the film festivals in Poland, now I hope I could go to a theatre festival as well.*

– *Thank you so much, that's very kind of you. I've actually never seen Lupa's performance live. I've only seen one by Warlikowski.*

– *I've never heard of him. Please email me his name, I'll check him out online! Do you think art in Eastern Europe is so powerful because you have so much in common with the East?*

– *I think it's because we're torn between this so called East and West. In arts and literature we definitely truly benefit from that.*

\*

Where do you come from? From Poland.  
Perhaps even at least two different Polands.

One is the one that I can proudly share in Shanghai with those, who love Krzysztof Kieślowski, admire Polish Poster School, respect Lech Wałęsa or went to Toruń. It's Poland somehow embodied in very special gift from my American friend of mixed Swedish-Polish origins. A tiny cook book *Polish Heirloom Recipes*<sup>5</sup>, compiled by my friend's grandmother and two aunts, appears as something very familiar and unfamiliar at the same time: my home country's culinary heritage is being told from outside, from far away, using American measures and often unknown English words (such as «kohlraabi»).

To some extent this cook book makes me realize the very mechanism of some kind of compression and distillation our countries must undergo in order to become portable and sharable with international community. Perhaps it's always about selecting and memorizing a number of terms—important, positive and representative elements. Ultimately, however, this tag cloud overshadows the matter which actually shaped us. It overshadows dill fragrance in groceries, potatoes in the cellar of an Art Nouveau tenement house, pattern of tableware, prewar lamp, melody played by the radio, to which Mother listens while being in the kitchen.

There is also a totally different Poland. The other one. The one in which I grew up and which I experience whenever I go back. The one that has also its darker, even xenophobic side. The one which always makes me feel rather uncomfortable immediately after returning. How-

---

<sup>5</sup> Irene Jasinski, Lucille Jasinski, Mary Jane (Sokolowski) Gustafson, Marie C. Sokolowski, *Polish Heirloom Recipes*. 55 good old family-tested recipes for preparing traditional dishes favored and served in America, Brooklyn Center 1971.



ewer, it's also the one, where an elderly woman, sitting in front of me on the train, has on one of her fingers the same ring that my Polish Grandmother used to wear. The one where bottles of beer clatter in worn-out plastic advertisement bags, which in the early 90s used to be a great luxury and one of the many emblems of the Change. The one where with my friends, long into the night, I don't listen to Chopin, but rather songs written by Agnieszka Osiecka and Jeremi Przybora. The one where we leave the cinema disappointed by a bad Polish film about the Polish People's Republic era, but with a laugh we recall dirty gyms of our primary and secondary schools and classes in technics during which we couldn't learn, contrary to those living in Western Europe, operating computers, because we didn't have them, but instead we eagerly sewed buttons and hammered nails.

This is a very different Poland. The one existence of which we wouldn't dare to admit while abroad, so it remains solely ours and mostly personal. The one from which due to specifically conceived patriotism resulting from this self-imposed silence, we ourselves condemn us temporarily into exile, though after all this Poland would remain the most precise and honest answer to questions «Where do you come from?» or «Where did you grow up?»

## 6

Sometimes in Europe I happen to look at Europeans as if they were my foreigners.

They bustle, plan, secure the future and want to keep control, as if they really could have an impact on the world ruled by Change.

Majority of them is so deeply convinced that human rights are something absolutely obvious and universally valid that it is very difficult for them to understand and appreciate how much they already managed to achieve in this regard.

With growing anxiety I observe progressive process of the obsessive legalization and classification of differences which in fact releases Europeans from obligation to individually face the Others. Contrary to popular belief, it does not necessarily contribute to growth of tolerance. The paradox of the process of creating a secure reference groups for those who, for various reasons, are not able to identify with the majority, lies in the fact that, ultimately, it enhances the exclusion of people who cannot find or create a representative group of people with the same identity as theirs.

\*

– *I think the concept of democracy was celebrated too soon. Governments and people have to start looking beyond democracy as we know it today. Times have changed, conditions have changed, people have changed. But we still go on believing that democracy will work somehow, though the whole world is not what it was before. The whole world has been politically stuck – maybe that's what some bigger countries want. Countries and governments are getting more and more scared of changes. The idea that democracy is the best form of government is so ingrained in peoples' heads now that anything different is found evil, before it's even truly considered as an alternative. Nobody wants to risk tampering with democracy, even if we see it's not working. It's silly. Democracy is all about equality, but also majority at the same time... As a result most of the minorities obviously try to become majority. In fact democracy may foster separatism. People, or their representatives, begin thinking only about their own subgroups within a particular democratic community, so in the end we can't say if democracy really brings people together or does it rather encourage them to divide. If people lack will to make efforts and truly devote to this issue, it all becomes very complicated. The way I have experienced it myself in India, the largest democracy in the world, democracy has to keep evolving, just like every other political system. I appreciate what the Chinese have done: communism with Chinese characteristic, or democracy with Chinese characteristic – depends which way you look at things. At least they are trying something new.*

7

\*

– *In fact, everything is very different here – even the communism itself.*

– *People love asking this question, why did I leave illegally Czechoslovakia in 1987, emigrated to Canada and obtained Canadian citizenship, but now I'm back to a communist country.*

– *What is your answer?*

– *I say that as an architect I'm working here for people who belong to world capitalist elite.*

\*

– *What is so hard about China?*

*– Perhaps the fact that staying here for certain amount of time makes you inevitably reach the point, where you can't anymore recognize China you've once got to know and love so much. It happens either due to the transformation of the country itself, or our own inner change, sometimes caused simply by change of the viewpoint.*

*– That's when you leave the country?*

*– That's when you start all over again.*

\*

First I read online that 300 000 people gathered in the Bund – from the perspective of the Lithuanian capital, covered with snow, this number seemed completely unreal. Then I came back to Shanghai and realized that as a result of tragic New Year Eve events all the lights were off over Huangpu. This darkness, somehow essentially political, haunted me.

In That Part of the World we would disagree. We would light up the city from beneath, wouldn't we? Not that such a protest would be particularly smart, or would change a lot, but we would do that. Because this is the way we are. It would feel good in a way.

Here nothing felt good at all.

For some reason so many little things which I've never noticed or I've learned to understand and accept, suddenly became unbearable.

Dozens of police cars and patrols in the streets, red flags, fur military hats with stars... Why did political meanings, like oysters, suddenly overgrew the barricade meant to regulate flow of the pedestrians in the Bund? Why couldn't I smile anymore, when I heard people saying «Government is not happy about it», instead of «Government is afraid of their people, so they've temporarily enhanced censorship»? Why I went mad when people so easily accepted the fact that due to the enhanced censorship Internet was slower than ever and nobody would have his or her work completed by the end of the day? Why simple logic «We'll wait until the Internet is back» did not appeal to me anymore? Why for the first time after so many years it suddenly struck me that girls, posing for selfies with cute faces, are making the same V sign which for us meant resistance against communism? What «love and peace» means here, today, for us was hope for peace and love for freedom-cherishing tiny giants – our invaded countries. Why did the regular stopgap of the electrical installation in fancy hairstyle salon so unexpectedly and so unreasonably make me think that it must be a clear message «There is

no need to set up anything of better quality, regime may again change its mind, annihilate such places and make investigations about its clientele)? Why did I suddenly recall even my Grandmother's story of how at the back of her African house, surrounded by KGB, she burned banned books by Russian emigrant writers before going back to Soviet Union?

Why didn't I rather think of how safe China is? And how it offers us chances to obtain goals and accept intellectual challenges, which in our beloved, democratic countries remained merely a timid dream? Why Chinese red didn't evoke happiness anymore? Why didn't I recall rather the young man who, without surprising or sickening anyone, wailed on a February night in Chinese «Love me, don't leave me», walking against the tide along the edge of the bridge roadway over the Suzhou Creek? How come that I forgot the illegal street art performance we made in Shanghai in November, which after all wasn't banned, though police arrived and requested explanations?

Perhaps, it is because I started to analyze and write too early after I left Europe. I begun storytelling, before I became sure from which point I'm looking at which of my Places.

I violated the taboo surrounding transition moment – one shouldn't write between two places.

I violated the eternal taboo, which made me understand a lot.

But time goes by, I'm calming down. I'm back. To myself, to equilibrium point.

I'm back to all those people who are close to my heart, whom lack of freedom of speech can't stop – they remain free and independent in their spirit and thought, appropriating and modifying interpretations imposed by government and setting discreetly their own rules for life in their bedrooms or dining rooms.

I'm back to this country, to the City beyond the European scale, for which I feel eternal gratitude for everything it taught me throughout these past few years.

Follow the river while walking along the banks and don't try to be faster than its flow.

Don't look back, if it hurts you. Devote yourself to better future.

Be patient and trustful. There is a path that leads you, even if you can't see it.

I'm back to the table at which for many reasons we don't talk politics, but a French friend treats me with cake brought from her native Nantes. *Gâteau Nantais* – a divine mixture of butter, sugar, almonds and rum from the Antilles Islands. Very rum and, as it turns out, very controversial cake due to the centuries of the triangular trade behind it. I tell her about Armenian honey cake, which in Poland is known as *miodownik*, and always went so well with coffee during my university years in Katowice. I tell her also how I was speechless and delighted when one time accidentally I found it here in Chinese Uyghur restaurant, under quite similarly sounding name *mìduōwéi* (密多维).

\*

I'm back. To myself, to equilibrium point.

I let my Places keep their duality and dissimilarity. Just as they let me do so.

8

\*

*Господи, мой Боже  
Зеленоглазый мой,  
Пока земля еще вертится,  
И это ей странно самой,  
Пока еще хватает  
Времени и огня -  
Дай же Ты всем понемногу  
И не забудь про меня<sup>6</sup>.*

\*

– *What are YOU doing here?*  
– *I came for Easter liturgy.*  
– *But why?*  
– *What do you mean: why? I'm Polish, but I'm an orthodox.*  
– *Then why on Sundays you're going to a catholic cathedral?*  
– *Because we don't have regular orthodox liturgies in Shanghai.*

---

<sup>6</sup> O'Lord, You my God Almighty / Emerald green Your eyes / While the earth is still turning / and it is strange even to herself / While she still has enough of both the time and the fire / Give Thou everyone a little bit / And do not forget about me (Bulat Okudzhava, Prayer).

Quite unexpectedly another facet of my otherness becomes revealed, partly also to me myself.

My Greek friend is still surprised. Brief explanation I've provided doesn't make much sense to her, though we've just left old St. Nicholas church, crammed with the orthodox believers of so many different traditions and origins from all over the world. In the crowd responding joyfully to «Христос воскрес!» («Christ is Risen!») I've noticed even a girl from Ethiopia, wrapped in a white veil.

How far should I go in telling her my stories to make her understand? Shall I go back to my illegal baptism in Soviet Union and tell her how my catholic Father would need days to pour little by little all holy water left after the ceremony under the young trees in front of the building, so that even if neighbors noticed, they would assume it's simply some innocent gardening? Shall I explain how did it happen that not all parts of Poland have orthodox churches, though some do, and thus for various reasons we get into the habit of going to catholic masses as well? Shall I name all the churches in the world in which I prayed in different languages with covered and uncovered hair? Shall I tell her that when my Russian Grandmother was alive we celebrated Christmas according to both calendars, which made all children at our Silesian school extremely jealous? Shall I tell her of my Polish Grandmother who brought me a blue rosary from Jasna Góra Monastery and taught me how to pray it?

Shall I try to explain how all of that makes sense together, even the fact that my atheist friend would bring a Christmas wafer to share with me to wish me hope, faith and love?

Or shall I rather make my Greek friend listen to a song, performed in Poland by Ukrainian artist Vitaliy Petranjuk, written in Russian in atheist Soviet Union by Bulat Okudzhava, famous bard of Georgian-Armenian origins? Shall I rather translate last part of the song «Prayer» to English and ask if she can tell who is singing that – a Catholic or an Orthodox? To which One God?

9

\*

*– It was believed that for a moment before leaving this world, the soul had right to look last time at its family site from top of this pagoda.*

– Sounds like a certain kind of mercy, but what if he or she had more than one home? How can you force the human spirit in such a critical moment to make choice of only one place?

– What do you mean: more than one home?

– What if it happens that we have more than one place where we grew up? More than one place which we shared with our parents and siblings? How would I be supposed to suddenly unhome one of the Places, which for a while became a generous and hospitable home?

\*

– Why do you think both Chopin and Pilsudski had their hearts buried in different place than the rest of their bodies?

– I believe it must have been a certain way to show commitment to the place.

– Do you think it had to do with politics as well?

– Perhaps. I generally have a feeling that funerals, gravestones, urns and monuments become too often battlefields for the identity of people of multiple origins. The same concerns for instance one of my favorite writers, Bruno Schulz.

– Who do you think he was?

– To me he is a writer, whose «The Cinnamon Shops» I read in Polish in middle school, after I've lived in China for three and half years. So far I didn't find any other author of any origins, that would have given more fabulous description of what I experience whenever I'm going to a market in Shanghai: «Adela returned on luminous mornings, like Pomona from the fire of the enkindled day, tipping from her basket the colourful beauty of the sun: glistening wild cherries, full of water under their transparent skins, mysterious black cherries whose aroma surpassed even that which would be realized in their taste, and apricots, in whose golden pulp lay the core of the long afternoons. And alongside that pure poetry of fruit she unloaded racks of veal, their keyboards of calf ribs swollen with energy and goodness, and algae of vegetables that called to mind slaughtered octopus and jellyfish – the raw material of dinner, its flavours still unformed and sterile, dinner's vegetative and telluric ingredients with their wild, fresh from the field aroma.»<sup>7</sup> It's far beyond any Polish or Jewish narrative, it's somewhere in between an ancient Roman myth, haiku and Flemish still life, isn't it?

---

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Schulz, The Cinnamon Shops, <http://www.schulzian.net/translation/shops.htm>, p.3-4.

\*

– I believe the only reason to take the heart out of one's body is to transplant it to other human body. Honestly speaking, I'm terrified by all those bodies of saints, fragmented and spread in churches all over Europe. Why would we do that with hearts which aren't even holy relics? Cuttlefish has three hearts and still they don't get separated after its death. Why try to set a different rule for humans?

– It's wild to make comparisons between a mollusk and a human being.

– It appears wild, unless we remain truly humble while facing death. Tell me, has any human mastered art of dying in more than one place? So far we've hardly learned to manage living in more than one place.

– You're going way too far...

– Am I? Tell me, if we can't die in more than one place, what is the logic of being buried in more than one? What is the logic of having one place of conception and one place of birth, but two places of burial?

– What's so wrong about demonstrating bonds with more than one place after you pass away?

– I didn't say it's wrong. I'm just afraid of fragmentation. I'm just afraid that such manipulations may lead to a distortion of the whole process of someone's life. Wouldn't such an attempt to distinguish selected places lead to elimination of all those which were in between? All those places which followed in this journey, contributing to a kind of organic entirety, and which we've trusted one by one – by choice, necessity or accident. Many years ago, my dear friend wrote in a letter from Wieszowa to Xi'an that I may have many homes but I will always have only one heart. It hurt and took me long time to accept it.

\*

– How was your trip back home? Did you miss Shanghai?

– I didn't, actually. I was so happy there and for the first time in my life I almost wasn't looking forward to coming back. Yet at the same time I wanted to be back. I reached the point where I had to check if this is actually true that I have another writing-desk and pillow here. The more I was telling everyone about my students or my streets, the harder it was to believe that I do have such a different life here. At some point all those places and people in Poland appeared somehow too natural and too familiar. Then I came back and I was completely lost for several weeks. I suffered from the greatest jetlag of my life. My friend said it always happens if deep inside one doesn't want to leave the former place... You



*know, I think I always was expecting that one of these Places will finally take over the other one and I'll accept it, but that's not happening at all. It's as if I had two separated lives, one here, one there.*

*– Let me tell you something. I know it's hard, but that means you're entering a new phase in your life. It happens to everyone who doesn't want to simply be a tourist here. You realize you have these two places, these two lives. Moreover you get to realize you can't unite them into one.*

*– So that's a phase you've all been through? What's next?*

*– I don't think there is another phase. Most likely from now on it will remain a permanent state of mind for you. But little by little you'll learn to live with that. I've learned not to talk to people about Great Britain and me there while being here. Whenever I go to Great Britain I remain silent about my life here – I simply live that life. After all why would we expect people there to care about someone they actually don't know? We're different people here and there. You've understood it already. We act differently, we perceive world differently. We even wear different clothes. Don't try by all means to unite your different selves into one. This is what made you suffer and fall in despair.*

\*

The only thing my East-Central European self undoubtedly has in common with my Shanghainese self is body, which I inhabit more than any other place in the world.

I may be wearing different clothes, befriending different people, crying for different reasons, but still all of that would always happen through my fragile body. Only inviolability and integrity of its boundaries can guarantee the final cohesiveness and continuity in my journey above all other, unstable and temporary borders.

10

*– Where do you come from?*

*– From Poland.*

*– Which part?*

*– The one which at some point had indirect access to Yellow Sea through German Qingdao.*

*– What do you mean?*

*– You really cannot be sure of borders. You never know, if they will divide or unite.*

11

Do not dissect my body after I die.  
Even if I died far away from That Part of the World, marked by incomparable and contradictory tenderness.

\*

Do not dissect my heart after I die.  
At least then let it find some peace<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> I dedicate this essay to my brother Ryszard and friends Anna, Anna, Krzysztof and Arnoldas with whom we've shared so many special moments in Vilnius, as well as to Małgorzata and Joanna – incredibly attentive listeners and readers who made me write it all down. I want also to express my deep gratitude to all Friends from different parts of the world with whom during these past few years we held long, honest and often difficult conversations about «issues of cultural identity and contemporary dialogue between cultures».