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Introductory essay for this issue devoted to the relationship of witches and wisdom. It explores the intersection of historical wise women, environmental catastrophe, and anti-capitalist resistance through a predominantly Central European lens. By reclaiming the figure of the witch, the contributors challenge dominant "pseudo-rationalist" narratives and seek alternative forms of knowledge, relationality, and healing in a time of global urgency. The issue as a constellation of texts and images seeks to restore voices to marginalized histories and imagine alternative, more inclusive modes of being human.

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Dorota Sosnowska - Assistant Professor at the Institute of Polish Culture (Department of Theater and Performance) at University of Warsaw. The author of the book about three actresses of the communist period in Poland

entitled “Królowe PRL. Sceniczne wizerunki Ireny Eichlerówny, Niny Andrycz i Elżbiety Barszczewskiej jako modele kobiecości” (2014). She has participated in scientific projects "Sources and Mediations" (NPRH funds), "Performances of Memory" (NCN) and "Mask in the Culture of Modern Europe" (NCN). She has published articles in Polish and foreign academic journals such as "Performance Research" and Czech "Theatralia". She is co-editor of the book Robotnik. Performances of Memory (Theater Institute/KiP, 2017). She is currently working on the project "Odmieńcy. Performances of Otherness in the Polish Transition Culture" (NCN) and is a co-investigator in the project "Epidemics and Communities in Critical Theories, Artistic Practices and Speculative Fiction of Recent Decades". She is a member of the Historiography working group within the International Federation for Theater Research. From 2009 to 2011, she worked at the Dramatyczny Theater in Warsaw.

Magdalena Moskalewicz - Art historian, curator, and editor specializing in postwar Polish and Eastern European art, critical museum studies, and contemporary practices. Her curatorial projects often explore parallels between the postcommunist and postcolonial condition. She published in academic books (from Brill, Routledge, Oxford Univ. Press, MSN), exhibition catalogues (from MoMA, Tate, Berlin Biennale), journals and magazines (Artium Quaestiones, Art in America, The Washington Post). Moskalewicz was awarded Jean Goldman „Literary Lions” Book Prize 2017 (for Halka/Haiti) and Mary Zirin Prize 2020 from the Association for Women in Slavic Studies; her research was supported by A.W. Mellon Foundation, Kosciuszko Foundation, The Getty, The Clark, et al. She worked in higher education and art institutions in Europe and the United States, including: Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, FRONT International in Cleveland, and was the curator of the Polish Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015). Currently Chief Curator and Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs at Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

Witches / Wisdom



Katrīna Neiburga, Ludvigs Eglitis Neiburgs, *Sekretjiki*, 2021. Detail. Courtesy of the artist.

"What time is it on the clock of the world?" – asked Chinese American revolutionary thinker and activist Grace Lee Boggs whenever she spoke in public. To us, this seems to be an all-encompassing question that opens a conversation on alternative forms of approaching time, experience, knowledge, and politics. In this issue of *Widok*, following Lee Boggs, we invite you to take a closer look at a global moment from a local, Central European environmental, historical, and spiritual perspective, and recognize the states of urgency in which we are implicated and struggle to survive. Hence, with Katrīna Neiburga's cover image, we look down at the earth to find grounding and a source, and with her practice in mind, along with many of this issue's protagonists, we encounter witches – "wise women" or *wicce*, who have long been the keepers of knowledge and the bonds between people and the natural world, the healers in their communities. Any pressure on life, such as illness or violence, would demand the rebellious, disobedient force of witchcraft. We follow these perceptive and receptive, caring and healing guides, to analyze without necessarily reconciling the contradicting realities with a masterful act of "understanding."

The structural conditions and pressures of our present moment, "the burning times" of environmental catastrophe and imperial, genocidal wars that surround us, demand a backward look at abuses of power, oppression, growing inequalities, the destruction of the natural world, extractivism, and forms of dissent and rebellion. As philosopher Elisabeth Stengers suggests, catastrophes may also engender new forms of agency,

consciousness, and perception.[1] How do we manage the heritage of the denigration and disenchantment of nature, its control through rationalist technocratic operations, powered by what Indian philosopher and ecofeminist Vandana Shiva calls the "monocultures of the mind," which accumulate power and capital for some while simultaneously degrading, exploiting, and even eliminating others?[2]These forms of rationality do not obsessively eliminate spirituality or theology so much as spiritual and theological diversity, promoting instead fanatical forms of the secularized monotheism of the Father and Capital, both praised by the colonial, patriarchal subject. The latter expands limitlessly and pursues profit at the brutal expense of others, who are left violated and dispossessed. Many claim that there is no alternative to the perpetual capitalist order, and yet many organize and move beyond the limitations of both conservative and neoliberal thinking and acting, refusing the silencing procedures of what Lauren Berlant famously called "cruel optimism."

What we wanted to fathom in this issue of *Widok* is how to overcome these forms and return to nature and the feminine as a means and source of knowledge, creativity, relationality, and resistance vis-à-vis the political, social, and environmental catastrophes. Attuned to Sylvia Wynter's critical concept of the "genres of the human," we have been looking at how the idea of universalism and humanity can be challenged in creative ways, so as to counter the growing racism and fascism in the world as we know it, and how alternative modes of being human can be imagined and enacted.[3]

In her 2019 book *A Decolonial Feminism*, Françoise Vergès examines the counter-revolutionary role of "civilizational feminism," framing it as an agent of present-day imperialism and colonialism. She asks: "Who cleans the world?" aiming to redirect our attention and change our optics in the conversation about women's histories and women's place in global power

dynamics and social struggles. Following in her steps and rephrasing her question, we would like to ask: who heals the world? By healing, we mean a broad concept of producing knowledge outside of existing frames of pseudo-rationalist dominance, master/slave narratives where healing is also undoing environmental and human exhaustion and destruction, countering extractivism and other forms of violence and ruination, and "the repressive norms of hetero-patriarchy."[4] Healing might be achieved by coming together against social divisions, through practices of relationality and care, practical wisdom, and accepting limitations, as well as by embracing insights into the unknown. These can be achieved by creative acts that disrupt yet embrace.

Vergès's seminal book was published in Polish translation a year before Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), which finally reached the Polish-language audience in 2024. The progenitor of *Caliban* was the 1984 *Il grande Calibano: storia del corpo sociale ribelle nella prima fase del capitale*, a book Federici co-authored with Leopoldina Fortunati, which explored the history of reproduction during the transition from feudalism to capitalism. During this process of writing it, Federici took an interest in witch hunts, the phenomenon that became crucial for defining the social position and role of women in societies based on the capitalist mode of production, and the connection it had to the transatlantic slave trade and the colonization of the Americas. Thus, on the one hand, witch hunts can be seen as a foundation for the development of capitalist society, and, on the other, for the formation of the modern proletariat. Federici reiterates what has been present in Marxist feminist thought since the 1970s – namely that the history of women when analyzed as class history, and modern *femininity*, both serve the capitalist order, concealing the exploitation of women's reproductive

capacities under biological determinism.

The equation of *femininity* with a philosophically degraded and rejected corporeality has made the body the central element and defining sphere of womanhood. For women, it became what the factory was for workers – the site of exploitation, but also resistance. This was the origin of the body as a battlefield – a fenced-off, controlled, plundered resource, yet at the same time the source of all force. Placing this concept of the body and the attack on witchcraft side by side allows Federici to see and show how philosophy has been intertwined with state terror, the persecution of witches, and the rationale of capitalist ontologies. People, predominantly women, burned as witches, were accused and put on trial for devil worship, cannibalism, or deviant sexuality. However, the real reason for such cruel punishment was that they undertook practices which eluded the control of religious or state representatives. The same logic backed the policing of European peasants and indigenous peoples in the colonies. Tracing the formation and practice of sexual difference within the capitalist division of labor and reproduction enables her to frame patriarchy historically, combining the optics of gender, class, and race.

According to Federici, the process of separating reproduction from production comes simultaneously with the monetization of labor and the denial of people's access to the basic means of production, predominantly land. Capital accumulation matches the rampant production of differences and divisions within the global proletariat. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the figure of the witch has become so compelling for current anti-capitalist activism, fighting the violence of neoliberal privatization and deprivation, the growing presence of racist hatred, and the domination of neocolonial politics and technocapitalist anti-environmentalism.

It should be stressed that Federici has also recognized the hegemony of capital in medicine and its influence on the

practices of our bodies and subjectivities, the control of women's reproductive capacities, and the use and abuse of drugs in control of the workforce and workflow. She was greatly inspired by grassroots organizations such as ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) which emerged in response to the state's failure to properly address the health crisis. Such practices can also be observed in organizations assisting abortion, offering genuine resistance to the state policing and disregard of the health and lives of its female citizens, and to capitalist logic, which cares only for the health of its female *clients*.

In this issue of *Widok* we present research that delves into feminist and ecological ways of seeing and performing anticapitalist forms of dissent in the face of environmental catastrophe. This seems to be the source of historical and contemporary witches' wisdom. Framing the issue around the nexus of witches and wisdom is meant as an act of epistemic disobedience in the sense proposed by Walter Mignolo.[5] It is this unattainability and resistance to institutional regulations (whether of church or state) that has led to the creation of phantasmatic imaginaries of witches and their prosecution. We are offering you a constellation of texts and images that address the above issues in a variety of ways, especially the Central European experience.

The **Close-Up** section opens with Kamila Dworniczak's essay "Between Magical Marxism and Heresy: Natalia LL's Progressive Spirituality," in which the author proposes a new interpretation of the artist's work through the lens of a hitherto marginalized dimension of her practice – spirituality understood as emancipatory engagement rather than a form of escapism. By situating Natalia LL's strategy within the tradition of feminist reflection on witchcraft (Chollet, Starhawk, Federici), the author demonstrates that the artist's performances and installations, in particular *Pyramid. Art as an Inner Experience* (1979), have been a conscious magical-ritual practice, a gesture of resistance

against the uniformizing discourse of communist-era modernization, and a search for an alternative rootedness in local "heretical" traditions, ranging from psychotronics to the egalitarianism of the Polish Brethren.

In turn, Marta Kudelska's article "Rebels, Herbalists, Activists, and Guides: The Figures of Witches in Contemporary Curatorial Projects" offers an overview of Polish exhibitions from 2020–2025 dedicated to the figure of the witch – from Zofia Krawiec's *I Will Put My Soul into a Magic Storm* to Katarzyna Oczkowska's *Blood of the Roots*. The author, herself a curator and researcher, analyses how this historically marked figure functions today as a tool for addressing violence against women, for knowledge beyond the institutional framework of science, female community, and spirituality. At the same time it is a liminal figure – suspended between past and future, nature and culture, emancipation and melancholy. The text also poses critical questions about the risk of aestheticization and "witchwashing" – that is, reducing the witch to a fashionable symbol stripped of its historical context of violence.

The essay "Lost in the Magical Garden" by the Hungarian curator and researcher Flóra Gadó fits into a similarly practice-rooted current of reflection on witches' knowledge. The author analyses the work of five artists from Central and Eastern Europe – Ana Likar, Jana Zatvarnícka, the duo of Karina Mendreczky & Katalin Kortmann-Járay, and Lőrinc Borsos – who share an interest in the healing power of plants as the key to the forgotten knowledge of women accused of witchcraft. The author situates this work within the context of the broader resurgence of the figure of the witch – understood here primarily as a herbalist, midwife, and folk healer – and links it to the ecofeminist thesis of the inseparable connection between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature. The narrative is held together by the motif of the "magical garden" as a space of reclaimed

knowledge: a place where plants such as belladonna, St. John's wort, and the *Datura* genus reveal the fine line between healing and poison, between memory and erasure.

Joanna Ziółkowska and Agnieszka Raciniewska's article "Magic, Fashion, Alternative Societies and Capitalism" takes readers into other cultural realms, analyzing the figure of the witch on two interlocking levels: as a motif present in designer fashion from the 1980s until today – from Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen through to the Dior collections under the direction of Maria Grazia Chiuri – and as a starting point for reflection on contemporary neopagan and Wiccan groups. The authors argue that the very logic of fashion operates in accordance with magical thinking (the language of spells and alchemy; the performative consecration of designers; the concept of *glamour* derived from Scottish witchcraft practices), while simultaneously subjecting to critical analysis the contradiction arising from the "glamourization" of the witch: this figure, by definition subversive and anti-establishment, is increasingly appropriated by neoliberal corporate capitalism, losing its political edge in favor of a visually appealing aesthetic of individualism.

This section of the journal concludes with a Polish translation of an excerpt from artist and activist Cassie Thornton's project *The Hologram*, which proposes a grassroots model of feminist healthcare based on the principles of mutual aid and social solidarity. Inspired by Greek solidarity clinics, the author proposes a support system that challenges capitalist isolation and the hierarchical approach to medicine. Following the artist's lead, the participants in her activities, by practicing a new form of interdependence, seek to develop post-capitalist models of relationships based on care without transactionality. Ultimately, the text presents a vision of the future in which communal responsibility replaces inefficient and exclusionary institutional

systems – witchcraft for the 21st century.

In **Viewpoint**, we present videos by the Hilma's Ghost collective, who have transformed several works by contemporary female poets into dynamic installations exploring the relationships between matter, memory, and non-linear temporalities. In the text accompanying the presentation, Joanna Mąkowska analyses how, in the artists' visual practice, the written word transcends the confines of the page through rhythm, form, and filmed adaptation. By analyzing the work of artists such as Dorothea Lasky and CAConrad, the essay demonstrates that a poem can function as a ritual anchored in the present, or as an archaeological palimpsest linking the spiritual and physical realms. Poetry, like magic, turns out to be a living, processual structure that engages the viewer intellectually and emotionally, constantly evolving in time and space.

A different context, though equally lyrical, is evoked by the works of the Latvian artist Katrīna Neiburga, whose practice is rooted in affect. She builds an atmosphere of austerity and authenticity through deeply personal iconography, challenging conventional ways of understanding the world and restoring a voice to that which has been marginalized. The presentation of her works is introduced by a poem, *Katerina's Tongue*, by one of Latvia's most renowned contemporary poets, Sergejs Timofejevs, which, in an unrivalled manner, situates the artist's practice within the body as a magical and uncanny experience.

In **Panorama**, Natalia Judzińska evokes a different kind of women's history. In her article "Beyond the Margins: (Why) Do We Need Minority Heroines?" she analyses the story of Rywka Profitkier, a Jewish student from pre-war Vilnius, whose act of defiance against the "ghetto benches" became the starting point for reflections on the nature of minority heroism. The author deconstructs the mechanisms of collective memory, pointing out that official historical narratives often overlook figures excluded on the basis of gender or ethnic origin, unless their deeds fit

into the dominant national canon. By invoking concepts such as *subtenancy* and *nepantla*, Judzińska presents Profitkier's resistance not as an isolated incident, but as a radical struggle for dignity in the face of systemic antisemitism at Polish universities. Contemporary artistic references to Profitkier's fate serve here as proof of the relevance of her rebellion in the process of building a more inclusive national identity. In turn, in his article "The World Is Within Us. *Etos nowej sztuki* and *Szczeliny istnienia* by Jolanta Brach-Czaina as Manifestos of Alternative Epistemology," Jakub Banasiak attempts to reinterpret Brach-Czaina's philosophical oeuvre, shifting the focus from widely accepted feminist interpretations toward an alternative epistemology based on spirituality and cosmic unity. The author argues that the forgotten 1984 book *Etos nowej sztuki* [*The Ethos of New Art*] forms the foundation for the famous 1992 *Szczeliny istnienia* [*The Cracks of Existence*], formulating a vision of the world as a mystical whole, in which individual experience leads to transcendence of the individual's isolation. The analysis traces the author's evolution from scientific description of counterculture to the development of her own meditative philosophical language, which abolishes the Western dualism between subject and object. Banasiak argues that this project was marginalized by the neoliberal political transformation, which supplanted communal and transcendent thinking in favor of individualism. Consequently, the text calls for a "re-enchantment" of Brach-Czaina's body of work, seeing in her concept of penetrating being an opportunity to reclaim values invalidated by contemporary capitalism.

Perspectives open with the text "Witches and Epistemicide. Indigenous Knowledge Between Superstition and Planetary Care," by art historian Anna Markowska, who offers a multilayered analysis of the figure of the witch seen as a symbol of epistemic disobedience and resistance to modern patriarchal rationalism. The author traces the process of the

historical erasure of women's knowledge, termed *epistemicide*, linking historical witch hunts with the contemporary struggle for autonomy and inclusivity. Through the interpretation of artworks – from Dosso Dossi's Renaissance paintings to Polish critical and feminist art – she illustrates the process of re-enchanting the world and the reclamation of agency by marginalized groups. A key element of the text is the shift from the image of the witch as a victim to her role as a creator of salvific narratives, which, in the Anthropocene, promotes a holistic connection with nature and a sense of community. Ultimately, the essay encourages a redefinition of historical categories, and the recognition of indigenous and intuitive knowledge as a full-fledged alternative to dominant systems of power.

Next, "From the Museum to Artistic Research and Back – Mapping the Field of Contemporary Art," brings together Katarzyna Bojarska, Krzysztof Pijarski, and the "witch" of institutional critique, Andrea Fraser. In conversation, they delve into the structure and evolution of the artist's famous diagram of the field of contemporary art. Fraser emphasizes that every participant in this system is inevitably entangled in relations of power and capital, which makes her model a valuable educational tool for understanding the real mechanisms by which the art world functions. The key message of the conversation is the recognition of art as a dynamic field of clashing interests, in which research integrity and the awareness of one's own socio-economic position are essential for responsible artistic practice.

In **Snapshots**, we offer our readers reviews of an exhibition and a book that shed yet more light on witchcraft, esoteric knowledge, and the limits of contemporary fascination with witches. Urszula Ulla Chowaniec critically examines *Häxor* at the Historiska museet in Stockholm, while Jakub Banasiak reviews Joseph Kellner's *The Spirit of Socialism*, which examines the rise of alternative spiritualities and esoteric movements in

the USSR and Russia at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s.

Have a fulfilling reading experience!

1 Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, trans. Andrew Goffey (Open Humanities Press/Meson Press, 2015).

2 Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 166.

3 Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument." *The New Centennial Review* vol. 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257–337.

4 Françoise Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism*, trans. Ashley J. Bohrer (Pluto Press, 2021), viii.

5 Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2011), 54.