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## Religious event as a time machine. On creative power of performance in transforming city space

### Abstract

The article explores the potential within Polish Passion play performances for creating and evoking meanings of a particular city space. It shows that in some particular cases Easter plays can be seen as time machines which transfer the believers into the past, to ancient Jerusalem. Simultaneously, they bring the past into the present by interweaving past meanings into the play. In each of the described Passion plays, however, it is the sacral meanings ascribed to the place in which the play is enacted that enable the believers to make this particular journey in time. Paying special attention to the concepts of creativity and performativity associated with performance theory, the author considers the possibility of creating ancient Jerusalem on stage by means of performance and reviews the particular role of Passion plays in creating contemporary “urban Golgothas” actively enacted in two communities of Poland.

**Key words:** Passion plays, performativity, evoking meanings, Catholicism, Poland

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Artykuł opisuje potencjał tkwiący w polskich misteriach męki Pańskiej do tworzenia oraz wywoływania znaczeń określonych przestrzeni miejskich. Pokazuje, że w pewnych przypadkach przedstawienia wielkanocne mogą być postrzegane jako wehikuły czasu przenoszące wiernych do dawnej Jerozolimy. Jednocześnie też wiążąc przeszłość z teraźniejszością wplatają dawne znaczenia do misterium. W każdym opisanym przedstawieniu to znaczenia sakralne przypisane do miejsca wystawiania pozwalają uczestnikom na tę szczególną podróż w czasie. Przywiązując szczególną wagę do pojęć kreatywności i performatywności związanych z teorią *performance*, autorka z jednej strony rozpatruje możliwość przeniesienia na scenę dawnej Jerozolimy za pomocą przedstawienia, z drugiej zaś – szczególną rolę misteriiów w tworzeniu miejskich Golgot aktywnie konstruowanych w dwóch społecznościach w Polsce.

**Słowa kluczowe:** misteria męki Pańskiej, performatywność, wywoływanie znaczeń, katolicyzm, Polska

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## Contemporary Passion Plays in Poland<sup>1</sup>

In this article I intend to examine two manners of relation to the past in Polish Passion plays presented in cities – both of which stand behind the process of ascribing sacral meanings to the places in which Easter performances are enacted. Focusing on transforming the meaning of the place where Easter plays are staged by means of performances, I show how those events can be metaphorically called ‘time machines’. In the first presented case they transfer people in their experiencing to the ancient Jerusalem, to the moment of actual Christ’s Passion, and in the second case they bring past events to the present making them a context for establishing the meaning of Jesus’ history as presented in the play; in the first case the present (i.e. participation in the Passion play) seems to be transferred to the past, in the second case the past comes to the present. Those two directions of ‘time machine’ activity designate two different ways of evoking sacral meanings, although these are complementary and often extant in the same plays and performed by the same human acts. The first one is a process of creating on stage Jerusalem so it can be experienced as the ancient place of Christ’s death; the second is a process of giving sacral meanings to semi-sacral places – city *Golgothas*. These two processes would not be possible and thus would be non-efficient without the performative power of Passion plays, which is the main subject of my analysis<sup>2</sup>.

In contemporary Poland we can observe an increasing amount of Catholic religious events which, in addition to liturgical services, make religious life more attractive for the faithful. Among such events special attention should be granted to the Passion plays presented in sanctuaries and cult sites all over Poland. Each year hundreds of thousands of people gather and participate in those enumerated by me and others Easter plays showing the last hours of Christ’s life. In addition to noting this increasing popularity, it should be mentioned that those performances are a relatively new phenomenon in Polish Catholic religiosity<sup>3</sup>. Only some of them have a tradition of over sixty years, and the majority have arisen and begun to flourish after the fall of the Communism in Poland in 1989. Nowadays, Easter plays are performed in many Polish churches, sanctuaries, and cult sites, but also

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<sup>2</sup> Detailed description of my research and its results can be found in my book *Ukrzyżowani. Współczesne misteria męki Pańskiej w Polsce* [Crucified. Contemporary Passion plays in Poland] (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013). I explained there my research strategy and I put arguments why I had chosen those particular Passion plays for my analysis (in brief because it deals with particular kind of religious expression). I had no possibility, however, to present there the process of giving to a city space sacral meanings, so this article does not duplicate the content of the book, contrary it is complementary to it.

<sup>3</sup> Although tradition of Passion plays is long and also in Poland there were representations of Christ’s Passion presented on stage in the previous centuries, I argue that Easter plays which emerged or significantly develop in 20<sup>th</sup> century constitute a contemporary phenomenon, both in its form and function and they are not a direct continuation of late medieval theatre (see Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013).

in city squares, streets, and other secular locations. In every mentioned location they are prepared in cooperation with Catholic Church institutions and thus have the status of official religious events. The audience of such plays varies dramatically: from the merely curious to those coming to the performance motivated by religious belief. This paper, however, concerns the second group: the faithful who perceive religious services as an important part of their life; they constitute the majority of viewers of Passion plays. Further, for them the process of giving sacral meanings the place in which Easter performances take place has particular meaning and in a great degree occurs through their deep faith.

What else has to be noted is that Polish Easter performances vary very much. They have different structures depending on the place of their presentation. Those plays which are staged at Calvary chapels<sup>4</sup> have the form of a procession; in others, subsequent episodes from the Passion are presented on stages erected in squares, parks, or churches. Scripts also differ significantly from one another. Some of them present only scenes of the Way of the Cross, some add scenes which precede it – for example, from the entry of Christ to Jerusalem or from the Last Supper. Other performances show apocryphical histories and some present fictional stories combined with the Passion of Christ. Easter plays vary also because of their formal character – some resemble fantastic sound and light displays while others are very modest – one might even say naïve – performances. Despite all of these differences, they all performatively represent Jerusalem – an archetypical town space.

### Creative power of performance

Performance theory generally refers to two kinds of phenomena<sup>5</sup>. Some are everyday processes in which people constantly perform themselves<sup>6</sup>, their gender<sup>7</sup>, or culture<sup>8</sup>. The others are events which have their beginning and end, and can be easily distinguished from the course of life: feasts, rituals, theatre performances, etc.<sup>9</sup>. Concepts dealing with the first understanding of performance usually concentrate on social interactions, while those adopting the second understanding of performance usually focus on cultural aspects of the event<sup>10</sup>. These two approaches to performance overlap with two general approaches in anthropology, namely social and cultural, and such are the double roots of performance theory in our discipline<sup>11</sup>. Interpreting Passion plays I adopt mainly the

<sup>4</sup> Sacral sites called calvaries are numerous in Poland. They consist of complex architectonical systems of chapels which constitute 'paths' – e.g. a path of Christ's Passion or that of Virgin Mary Assumption. Those paths are walked by pilgrims during various celebrations taking place on calvaries.

<sup>5</sup> Madison 2005, pp. 153-156; Schieffelin 1998, pp. 194-195.

<sup>6</sup> See Goffman 1959.

<sup>7</sup> See Butler 1990.

<sup>8</sup> See Palmer, Jankowiak 1996, p. 254.

<sup>9</sup> Madison 2005, pp. 155-156; Schieffelin 1998, p. 195.

<sup>10</sup> Madison 2005, pp. 153-155; Schieffelin 1998, pp. 194-195.

<sup>11</sup> Parkin 1996, pp. XVII.

second way of perceiving performance (which forms a part more of cultural than of social anthropology), since it embraces also the festive and non-mundane character of the phenomenon. Hence I put emphasis prevailingly on cultural aspects of Easter plays, pointing out their relationship with other elements of Polish religious culture<sup>12</sup> – e.g. creating sacral meanings – with less on emphasis the social aspects of organizing and staging Passion plays, which form a separate *corpus* of research topics<sup>13</sup>.

I examine Passion plays in terms of performance theory since performing the last days of Christ's life is the core of the whole event. Analogy to theatre is neither the only nor the most important reason of choosing this theory. Above all it gives the opportunity to show how particular aspects of Easter plays are performed and not given or constantly inscribed in them. Performative theory perceives investigated phenomena above all as creative<sup>14</sup>. My goal is to show how the places where Passion plays are enacted are performed and thus how the process of evoking the sacral meanings of a place depends on the creative and performative power of performance and not e.g. on hierophany in Eliade's terms<sup>15</sup>. The faithful with their acts create the sacral meanings of a place or intensify the feeling of the sacred. It is a process which may result in giving a new quality to the place – or, in some cases, its power of evoking sacral meanings ends right with the performance. I argue that describing Easter plays in terms of performance offers more interpretation opportunities and is more fruitful than any other perspective. And this is directly attributable to the already mentioned notions of creativity and performativity ascribed to performances.

Theorists often link performances with their creative potential<sup>16</sup>. One aspect of such potential, particularly important for my analysis, is evoking meanings by performances<sup>17</sup>. I would like to focus on at least two aspects of creative and performative potential present in performances which designate two possible ways how performances may give new meanings to the place of their enactment. I refer here to the remark made by Henry Bial, who in a short preface to a chapter entitled *Performativity* in *The Performance Studies Reader* (edited by him) distinguishes two possible understandings of performativity: one dealing with theatricality and one with the performative power of words or acts<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> I borrowed the term "religious culture" from Stefan Czarnowski (1958 [1938]), however, I redefined it: it no longer denotes religious beliefs and practices of peasantry which differed from the official Catholic Church religion, instead it describes the whole sphere of religious life notwithstanding its relation to the official Church's teaching (see Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013, pp. 45-47).

<sup>13</sup> I described social aspects of organization of particular Polish Passion plays in my book *Ukrzyżowani...* (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Lubaś 2003, pp. 254-256.

<sup>15</sup> See Eliade 1987.

<sup>16</sup> Schieffelin 1998; Rostas 1998.

<sup>17</sup> See Palmer, Jankowiak 1996, p. 229; Schieffelin 1985, pp. 721-722.

<sup>18</sup> Bial 2004, p. 145.

The first meaning of performativity refers directly to theater dramas and their staging. Using this term in such a way we describe everything that is created or constructed on stage by means of performance – all things which constitute the reality evoked in performance, among others the place in which every drama is enacted. The second notion of performativity deals with changing states or real things by certain performative acts<sup>19</sup>. Putting it briefly: peoples' acts and words have creative power; however, in the case of creating place meanings by means of Passion plays this is restricted mainly by the credibility and ability of performers and the whole performance to engage viewers, drawing them into the play and essentially transforming reality for them at least for the time of performance. Nevertheless, as I indicate later, the aspect of changing status of things to some degree is valid for Easter performances. Nonetheless actions of actors and all Passion plays organizers create a ground for particular experiences and create a special religious stage reality, not always transforming the actual reality, but allowing people to experience the created reality as if it were the actual one.

The success of this creative potential of Passion plays is assumed in characteristics of the performance category. Susan Rostas states that performance is creative and implies individuality of action. "On the whole it is performativity that gives an enactment its zest, that makes ritual and/or performance interesting to watch"<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, performance "often has the sense of putting more into something (in a self-conscious or intentional way) than is absolutely necessary"<sup>21</sup>. This conviction is supported by Schieffelin who writes that "performativity is located at the creative, *improvisatory* [italics E.S.] edge of practice in the moment it is carried out – though everything that comes across is not necessarily consciously included"<sup>22</sup>. He, however, adds to Rostas' stand that some part of performance's creative power comes from the unintended or difficult to plan or foresee elements which he ascribes to the performative potential lying in the interaction between performers and audience<sup>23</sup>. Creating meanings of place where Easter performances are presented it is decisive whether people believe in the Jerusalem presented on stage; only when they believe in it, the performative potential of the event can work successfully. The ancient town has to be performed and thus created as a place for viewers' experiences.

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<sup>19</sup> Two scholars whose works are most often recalled as examples of detailed studies on such understanding of performativity are J. L. Austin (*How to Do Things with Words* 1962) and J. Butler (*Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* 1990). The description of the problem of performativity presented above partially refers to their analysis, but it is more of an analogy than a direct application of their theories to interpret Polish Passion plays.

<sup>20</sup> Rostas 1998, p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Schieffelin 1998, p. 199.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 200.

## Creating Jerusalem

Polish Passion plays can be considered as certain time machines which transfer the faithful to the time of the beginning of Christian era. The places in which Easter performances are enacted become ancient Jerusalems in the moment of the play – not only as a set of stage decorations, but also (and this is even more important) as an arena for the faithful's experiences. The place of performance becomes, however, a very specific Jerusalem, which must be considered on various levels.

The basic level is the stage design for Passion plays. Scenery referring to the original town, Jerusalem, is a very important element of Polish Passion plays, one which strongly influences participation in those performances. A glimpse at the Jerusalem erected onstage may create an impression that stage designers do not pay much attention to historical research in order to attempt to reconstruct the real, ancient Jerusalem, an actual town space. Yet in reality, quite on the contrary, they construct a Jerusalem made up of symbols familiar to them from religious paintings and religious movies. Thus, they manifest that they do not intend to introduce their audience to the carefully reconstructed ancient city, but to the sacral scenery of the place of Christ's death.

Moreover, Jerusalems built by means of stage decorations never represent complete towns, meticulously reconstructed by a stage designer. Even in the case of performances set in the squares, stage designers do not construct an entire town. Passion plays organizers consciously design this space in a different way. This is mostly because of budget limitations, but another important reason is that the structure of Polish Passion plays is based on the Way of the Cross service. Hence, people proceed or follow a Passion play's action from one scene to another, and all the scenes are presented on separate stages (like in medieval theatre<sup>24</sup>). Correspondingly, subsequent episodes constitute separate dramatic wholes. As a consequence, Jerusalem in Polish Passion plays has a fixed general structure. It is fragmentary, with each location separate from another. Viewers are unable to feel any completeness or integrity of the town where the events took place, yet they can experience completeness of the place where the Passion of Christ occurred. Jerusalem created by the organizers of Easter plays is exactly the Jerusalem known from the Way of the Cross service or religious art. It is not a living ancient town; it is a series of locations which were, and during the Passion plays are, a space for all the sites of Christ's Passion. Ultimately, Easter performances reduce Jerusalem to the place of Christ's Passion, to the symbol of Jerusalem present in Catholic religious images. Doing so, organizers of the Passion plays refer to the cultural script of the Passion play, since all performances are culturally scripted<sup>25</sup>. In the case of Easter performances such a script is the "root paradigm" of the Way of the Cross. "Root paradigm"<sup>26</sup> is a founding event for future religious behaviors

<sup>24</sup> See Okoń 2004, p. XCVIII.

<sup>25</sup> Madison 2005, p. 155.

<sup>26</sup> I find the concept of "root paradigm" much more adequate for analysing Catholicism (and in such a way

or rites in which notable religious figures participated<sup>27</sup>. It appears and reappears in numerous religious services. It happens also with Passion plays which recall the original Way of the Cross when Mary, along with St. John and Mary Magdalene, accompanied Christ on his way to Golgotha.

Passion plays staged in Poland very aptly combine the nature of a religious service and that of a popular mass event. Not all do that in the same manner, but as a rule they are formally very up-to-date events which are nevertheless based on a traditional script for a religious service. Even though the stage design and costumes are rather simple and symbolic (since the entire financial support comes from the donations of the faithful), the lighting and soundtrack clearly indicate that popular culture is one of the sources inspiring the way of presenting Passion plays. In that sense, Easter performances in Poland can be seen as a *signum temporis*. As events, they are located on the intersection of various orders: they are concurrently sacral and profane, ludic and solemn, popular and religious. In my opinion, this is precisely the reason why Polish Passion plays meet the taste of their audience<sup>28</sup>. They correspond to the religious sensitivity of the faithful, and this significantly helps the viewers and performers alike to engage in, apprehend, and approve of the performance.

Stage design and visualization of the Passion of Christ only frame the place in which participants may feel as if they were in ancient Jerusalem. This is because this Jerusalem comes into being only during the performance and in what Schieffelin emphasized: the interaction between the actors and the audience<sup>29</sup>. Jerusalem is in fact performed, similarly to other elements of Passion plays. And that what enables members of the audience to feel as if they were witnessing the actual Passion of Christ lies much deeper than in the mere visualization of the place – in a very particular process of its sacralization.

In Passion plays, the religious attitudes and beliefs of the audience meet with the staged reality created by the performance director, the actors, the stage designer, the costume designer, the sound engineer, etc. The organizers of Easter plays make every effort to engage the viewers into their performance. They want to prepare not only an artistic or ludic event, but also to give their audience deep religious experiences. To achieve this goal, some decide to treat the audience as the Jerusalem mob: on the way to Golgotha, Roman soldiers push people away, shout at them, denying them access to Jesus; the person enacting

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it was also used by Turners who introduced this category) than e.g. Eliade's popular idea of the "myth of eternal return" (1991). While the first links the founding event with the present ones not imposing any theological assumptions, the second imposes immanence of gods or their "return" to the world what is contradictory to Catholic religion I investigate. Besides it is common objection to Eliade's work that he did not take into account particularities of various religions (Eade, Salnow 1991, p. 6; Sieradzan 2007, p. 302-304).

<sup>27</sup> Turner, Turner 1978, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> See Zowczak 2008 on contemporary Polish popular religion.

<sup>29</sup> Schieffelin 1998, p. 199.

Simon of Cyrene, who carried the Cross for Jesus, is sometimes recruited, without prior notice, directly from the audience. In some performances, at the moment when Christ is sharing bread with his disciples in the Cenacle, loaves of bread are distributed among the viewers, who are supposed to share it among themselves. That, among other things, is the reason why those who believe in God, and declare themselves to be pious Catholics, feel that participation in a Passion play offers “something more” than a mere visit at a theatre, but also “something more” than liturgy<sup>30</sup>. They come to a performance not only to watch Christ’s death and resurrection, but above all to experience events from the last hours of Christ’s life, to find themselves in a place of his actual Passion.

In my opinion, the way in which a town erected onstage becomes, in the experience of the faithful, the actual place of Christ’s Passion is explained by Victor Turner’s concept of liminality<sup>31</sup>. In Polish Passion plays, the place where the event is located, and the time in which it takes place, becomes liminal – according to Turner’s description, liminal is “a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities”<sup>32</sup>. And as such it has a great potential of performativity and of transforming meanings.

In Polish Church, Lent and Easter are filled with special services and meetings which encourage the faithful not only to reflect upon Christ’s Passion and its meaning to Christianity, but also to revise their behaviour, to adjust their life to Christian rules. For the contemporary believers liturgy is sometimes not enough; they need a stronger, more attractive stimulus to fully appreciate religious substance<sup>33</sup>. In such religiously intense time, people coming to an Easter performance truly expect it to be extraordinary, to be an unforgettable experience. Liminality, as Turner stated, pertains to the non-mundane, to the spectacular, to sacral events<sup>34</sup>. The form of Passion plays itself makes them liminal, but it is the attitudes of the faithful that allow them to fully experience the liminality.

According to some theorists of performance studies, every participant of an event creates it to some degree<sup>35</sup>. This observation is especially important in my analysis of Passion plays. Performances obviously depend on people’s acting and so does every process evoked by performance. Without participants, there would be only an empty stage with Jerusalem decorations. But to create the liminal Jerusalem on that stage, people who would give life to it are necessary: not only the actors, but also, maybe above all, the audience: all those who come with a desire to accompany Christ in his last way. Those who perform as if they were in ancient Jerusalem, along with actors create the liminal Jerusalem, they create the sacral meanings of particular place.

<sup>30</sup> *Droga...* 2007, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Turner 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Turner 1986, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Zowczak 2008.

<sup>34</sup> See Turner 2002, p. 360.

<sup>35</sup> See Schieffelin 1998, p. 201; Palmer, Jankowiak 1996, pp. 240, 245; also Fabian 1990, p. 11.



In describing liminality, Turner indicated potentiality as its particular quality. Potentiality is strongly connected with a subjunctive mood which, according to Turner, rules liminality<sup>36</sup>. Such understanding of the subjunctive mood is evident in the words of the participants of Passion plays. The frequent statement: “We feel **as if** we were there (i.e. in Jerusalem)” expresses exactly the potentiality of a liminal state<sup>37</sup>. A person taking part in a Passion play can experience a kind of transfer to an actual place of Christ’s death. Moreover, he or she can in a particular way participate in the events which happened two thousand years ago, feeling as if he or she was there – as the liminal is different from the natural and the common. Similarly, the subjunctive mood expresses wishes and that which is possible<sup>38</sup>, giving the faithful access to particular experiences.

People participating in Passion plays are aware of where they are and what they are observing. They know that Christ walking along with them is just an actor and not the real Christ. But the place in which Christ’s Passion is enacted, even if it is actually a city square or a park, it is given sacral meanings in the sense that the faithful experience it as if it were sacral. The faithful gathered at a Passion play wholly exploit the potentiality of the liminal and act as if they were watching the death of the real Christ. Such a Jerusalem exists in the human religious experience, not in historical reality. It is made of the believers’ imaginary image of the place of Christ’s death and resurrection enacted on stage. It is a town not erected and reconstructed, but performed and experienced. It endures only in a performance, in a Passion play: it is a liminal reality. It is created exactly by means of performance and may vanish with its end, when the liminal again becomes mundane. Afterwards, often it survives only in the experiences and memories of the faithful.

### Contemporary city *Golgothas*

Passion plays are performed in various places. Their locations not only change into ephemeral known-through-experience Jerusalems, but also *vice versa* ephemeral Jerusalems transform those places. What is more, ancient Jerusalem is not the only past place which may be recalled and sacralized through Passion performance. In two particular cases I want to present, Easter plays work as a different – a reverse – kind of time machines; they do not transfer the faithful to the past, but they bring the past to the present. In this sense they also can be perceived as machines allowing for a kind of time transfer, but they show a different mechanism of evoking sacral meanings of a place, deriving, however, both from the performative power of performance and from reflection upon the past. In two Polish cities, Poznań and Bydgoszcz, Passion plays are staged in places called *Golgothas*. There the influence of performed Jerusalems is particularly visible. In Poznań it is the city citadel called *Poznań’s Golgotha* and in Bydgoszcz it is a place called *Twentieth-century Golgotha*

<sup>36</sup> Turner 1982, pp. 82-83.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 83; Turner 1984, pp. 20-21.

where twelve hundred city inhabitants were executed and buried in 1939. In both places their history overlaps the history of Jesus presented there. Transferring people to ancient Jerusalem, evoking religious emotions through converting performance space into a place of Christ's Passion triggers the possibility of giving the place new meanings. Tragic events which took place on both city *Golgothas* are deliberately recalled and commemorated by staging a Passion of Christ there.

*Poznań's Golgotha* is now a park near the centre of the city; previously it was a military fort (built in the first half of the nineteenth century). Until 1945 there were no bloody battles at the citadel. At the end of World War II, the German army defended itself in a fort, but ultimately was defeated by Polish troops and the Red Army. The citadel almost from its beginning was, however, a great cemetery. Those buried here include Napoleonic soldiers, captives of various nationalities, soldiers of the Red Army and, of particular importance to local history, Polish soldiers from national uprisings and both World Wars. There are also mass graves of prisoners of Nazi camps and graves of victims of Hitler's and Stalin's terrors. It is a place commemorating dozens of battles (which, however, did not take place there), their victims, and victims of totalitarian systems. It thus has become a symbol of recent Poznań's history.

The fortifications are ruined now – in part destroyed during an attack in 1945, and in part demolished in the 1960s. The fort has been converted into a park where there are plenty of historical cemeteries. The citadel has become a location for cultural events, including a Passion play (which apart from its religious character is also a cultural event – an open air performance). Easter performance is organized by members of a parish neighboring with the citadel. Since the very beginning organizers wanted their play to underline the solemn character of the place where it is staged. They wanted also, however, to change unequivocally tragic meanings associated with the citadel and give it a new, more optimistic meaning. They have noticed the changing function of the place; *Poznań's Golgotha* is now a place where mothers walk with their children or young people go on dates. Passion plays organizers wanted to find a way how to embrace through performance both primary significances of the citadel for Poznań's inhabitants: the historical, tragic one and present, leisure-focused one. They decided also to support the changing character of the citadel from commemoration of Polish martyrdom to the leisure and cultural face of the present day. That is why their performance puts emphasis as much on Christ's Passion as on his resurrection. Passion play organizers want not only to recall the local past, to commemorate all of the people buried there, but also to show the audience that the way towards Golgotha does not simply end with the Passion; it leads further to resurrection. In the same way, the local history should be read as a difficult path through Golgotha, through the deaths of many people, to the present, which, even at the city *Golgotha*, carrying the memory of all past tragedies, leads to a more optimistic present and future. The Passion play does not, however, take away the sacral and commemorative aspect from the *Poznań's Golgotha*. Through the Passion play its organizers want to show

interweaving of those two meanings: sacred and leisure do not necessarily contradict, even if sacred pertains to profound spiritual experiences and leisure does not<sup>39</sup>.

We find a totally different situation in Bydgoszcz. A place of execution and burial of over thousand Bydgoszcz inhabitants (primarily local intelligentsia) is called the *Twentieth-century Golgotha*. After these victims were killed by Nazis in 1939, the place, called also the *Death Valley*, was abandoned and overgrown for many years. Ultimately a local parish of the district Nowy Fordon (New Fordon) in which the *Twentieth-century Golgotha* is located took care of this site of martyrdom. Parish members as well as local priests decided to give the place solemn character which it deserves. They perceive the *Death Valley* above all as a cemetery and a symbol of martyrdom and of local history. Although around 400 bodies were exhumed, 800 were left there, and, according to members of the local parish, this rendered everything that took place in the *Death Valley* up to the late 1990s inappropriate. The place was transformed into a park and giant, silver-painted sculptures of male figures were placed there which do not fit the place's martyrdom character. Moreover, for many years country music concerts were organized there – complete with rampant alcohol consumption. The tradition of country music concerts was cut suddenly and tragically when a young boy was stabbed with a knife, joining the long list of people murdered on this city *Golgotha*. The tragic event combined with an idea taken up by the local parish for a project of renewal in the *Death Valley*.

The local parish took two main steps which were supposed to give the *Twentieth-century Golgotha* a solemn character. The first one was to present a Passion play there and draw people's attention both to the meaning of Christ's martyrdom and through it to the people who were executed on the *Twentieth-century Golgotha*. The second was building Stations of the Cross in the *Death Valley* and make it the location for various liturgical services. Now, after years of collecting money for its renovation and after years of work, the park is clean and although giant sculptures are still there, the gate to the *Golgotha* gives information about the history of the place. Further, the Stations of the Cross lead through the whole park. The Passion play presented there, although ending with Christ's resurrection<sup>40</sup>, puts emphasis on the martyrdom character of the place. Its organizers, following the local parish's attempt towards revitalization of the city *Golgotha*, do not try to give the martyrdom place a new meaning like in Poznań, but underline its commemorative character. Both Poznań and Bydgoszcz are, however, examples of the particular efficacy of a performance which realizes itself in constant transformation of the actual place.

In both cities, Passion plays change the character of the place where they are presented. Although they do it in a different manner, they both recall past events and

<sup>39</sup> However, sacred and leisure or ludic often appears together (see Zowczak 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Fordon's Passion play does refer to the joyful aspect of Christ's resurrection, however, in the part concerning the space in which it is enacted it underlines the historical, martyrdom meaning of the place (see also Baraniecka-Olszewska 2014).

their significance for the local history. To do so they use the very popular metaphor (and “root paradigm”) of Christ’s death, often present in a reflection on Polish history, giving a sacral meaning to the martyrdom of all Polish victims buried on both city *Golgothas* as well as the place of their burial itself. Their history becomes somehow sanctified by staging a Passion play in places which are symbols of that history. Easter plays make the *Golgothas* victims’ history present to performance participants. They not only contribute to the continuation of memory about past events, but also they bring meanings of the past to the present and moreover, they confirm them by sacralizing the place in which Passion plays commemorating the martyrdom of Polish citizens are staged.

### Creating sacral meanings by means of performance

Passion plays not only work as specific time machines making people experience the ancient past or transferring past meanings into the present. They also have a special potential of ascribing sacral meanings to the place in which they are presented, yet this process is strictly connected with the first mentioned one, it is done through particular “transfers” in time. Places in which Polish passion plays are presented are not always sacral. Some performances are, of course, staged in church interiors or on calvaries, but others in city squares, parks, and, in the two cases already mentioned, also on city *Golgothas*. In cases where the place is already sacral, Passion plays fit into the situation; they present, however, a potential for increasing the feeling of sanctity of the place. This occurs particularly on calvaries where symbolical imitation of Jerusalem makes the place sacral anyway<sup>41</sup>, but the possibility of experiencing the calvary architectural complex as if it were the ancient Jerusalem, not only its symbol, which I have described as occurring quite often during Passion play performances, increases the feeling of sacrality of the place and allows for particular kinds of experiences.

Generally the time machine “mechanism” present in Easter plays evokes sacral meanings of a secular place at least for the moment of performance, when participants can experience accompanying Christ in his last way through ancient Jerusalem. The sanctity of place, being a part of experience often disappears after performance, unless the place has in itself a potential to become sacral, as with city *Golgothas*. In such a case an Easter play not only increases the sacral character of the place during performance, but also confirms it successfully enough that it lasts after the performance ends. The enactment of Passion plays becomes a performative act which establishes the sacral character of the place where plays are presented and in such a way city *Golgothas* are not only symbols of human martyrdom, but also of God’s. Passion plays, through their performative power, construct the cultural reality to put it in terms introduced by Schieffelin who described the process of constituting meanings by performance<sup>42</sup>. Easter performances staged year by year in the same locations trigger certain changes in perception of those places,

<sup>41</sup> Bania 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Schieffelin 1985: 721–722.

providing them with new interpretations and associations. The process of evoking sacral meanings of particular places by Easter plays shows how strong creative potential ascribed to performances is and how successful Passion plays organizers are when using this potential to engage people into their plays and to transfer them into ancient Jerusalem on board a very particular kind of time machine.

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