Encountering Antiquity in the Work of Zbigniew Herbert: Materiality, Time, and Theory

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ABSTRACT

One of Polish literature's most famous recipients of antiquity, Zbigniew Herbert (1924-1998) has long been presented as using Graeco-Roman history and mythology as a lens through which to comment on authoritarianism or to compare the horrors of the twentieth century to a long-lost moral and ethical ideal. This thesis both resists and expands on this allegorical interpretation by focusing on Herbert's travelogues as spaces of embodied encounters with the material remains of Mediterranean antiquity. For the first time in the study of Herbert's oeuvre, this thesis directly thematises his interest in the process of classical reception, exploring the possibility of constructing a more widely applicable body of reception theory from his travel essays, press articles, and unpublished writings (as stored at the Zbigniew Herbert Archive), supplemented and tested by his travel sketches as embodied reception in practice.

Herbert is shown to interrogate the ideas of distance and mediation (Chapter 1), the place of the past in future-facing socialist modernity (Chapter 2), and the potential of historical artefacts to create cross-temporal connection (Chapter 3). Drawing these reflections together, Chapter 4 suggests four "Herbertian" models of contact between modernity and antiquity: reception as labour, compassion, surrogate victimhood, and incorporation. In its use of embodiment as a methodological framework, this thesis aligns itself with the current turn to everyday life in the academic study of the Cold War period, while simultaneously positing physical and affective experiences such as hunger, food consumption, or traumatic rupture as avenues of connection between Herbert and other reception contexts where his reflections might find application. One of the first studies to treat Herbert's bipolar disorder as a crucial component of his subjectivity, this thesis also addresses the relationship between mental illness and reception as an act of care, both for the self and for the past.

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AZH – *Archiwum Zbigniewa Herberta* (Zbigniew Herbert Archive, National Library of Poland)

BO – *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* (*Barbarian in the Garden*)

DG – *Diariusz Grecki* [*Greek Diary*]

HN – *Herbert nieznany. Rozmowy* [*The Unknown Herbert. Conversations*]

LNM – *Labirynt nad morzem* (*Labyrinth on the Sea*)

MD – "*Mistrz z Delft" i inne utwory odnalezione* [*The Master from Delft and Other Rediscovered Writings*]

MNW – *Martwa natura z wędzidłem* (Still Life with a Bridle)

WG – *Węzeł Gordyjski oraz inne pisma rozproszone* [*The Gordian Knot and Other Scattered Writings*]

ZHCM – Zbigniew Herbert and Czesław Miłosz, *Correspondence*

ZHHE – Zbigniew Herbert and Henryk Elzenberg, *Correspondence*

ZHKZ – *Herbert i kochane zwierzątka* [*Herbert and His Dear Little Animals*], correspondence between Herbert and Magdalena and Zbigniew Czajkowski

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

All translations of archival material (AZH), extracts from interviews (HN), correspondence (ZHCM, ZHHE, ZHKZ), posthumously published texts (MD), press articles (WG), and citations from Polish scholarship are my own, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

All poetry translations are by Alissa Valles, as featured in the *Collected Poetry* (see bibliography). Quotations from the travelogue trilogy are drawn from the following translations, as featured in the *Collected Prose:*

BO: Michael March and Jarosław Anders
LNM: Alissa Valles
MNW: John and Bogdana Carpenter

As I did not have access to Valles' new translation of *Reconstruction of the Poet* (2024), the few quotations from *RofP* in Chapter 1 equally follow my own translation.

Whether a text had previously been translated into English or not is equally reflected by the formatting: where a full English translation exists, the English title will be given in round brackets (and, for the reader's convenience, will be used in all subsequent mentions of the work in question), while an English title in square brackets suggests a lack of translations, see for instance the untranslated *Diariusz Grecki* [*Greek Diary*]. This applies equally to Polish scholarship and press articles.

INTRODUCTION

> *Something strange about Greece. […] [During each stay] I slept badly, usually ate miserly, was physically and mentally exhausted. All my enemies – and there are legions of them – believe that I moved from one five-star hotel to another, surrounded by nymphs or other wet beasts – they don't understand anything about my formula of travelling as wrestling with the world. But most importantly, the rather paralysing feeling that I'm coming into contact with my ideal, pinnacle, paradigm – what am I truly feeling, and what have I allowed myself to be talked into feeling. I do think that Greece "stood the test", all in all.*[1]

In October 1997, hospitalised with severe asthma that would soon take his life in July 1998, Zbigniew Herbert wrote what would be his last letter to his friends Magdalena and Zbigniew Czajkowski. The letter, an extract from which I cite above, was Herbert's belated reply to the postcards the couple had been sending him from their trip to Greece earlier that year – a trip kept in the same spirit of seeking out the traces of "eternal Hellas" that had defined the trio's first journey to Greece in 1964.[2] It is to this first moment of embodied contact with ancient Greece that the terminally ill Herbert returns above, revisiting the anxiety that he had built up over the many years that lay between his study of Graeco-Roman antiquity in a Galician gymnasium in the 1930s and his first glimpse of a Grecian ruin in 1964: the anxiety that he would not be able to sense the *edle Einfalt und stille Größe* ascribed to the material traces of antiquity over centuries, and that the classical tradition would be exposed as nothing but a "conspiracy of delight" (as he would phrase it in his essay on the Acropolis).[3] Herbert's framing of his travels to Greece through the eyes of his "legions" of "enemies", however, is an example of the antagonistic and paranoic attitude towards the people around him that cast a long shadow over his final years, and that seems to sour this declaration of an attachment to antiquity so strong that it occupied Herbert even in this most difficult moment. Yet, to look away from this display of mistrust and the mental disorder that caused it would be a failure to see that for this Polish writer, it was all connected: "wrestling with the world" and producing some of the most culturally influential travelogues in twentieth-

[1] Letter to the Czajkowskis, Warsaw, dated 24/10/1997 (ZHKZ, 225; Herbert's emphases).
[2] Postcard to Herbert, no place, dated 29/06/1997 (ibid, 223).
[3] LNM, 96.

century Polish literature, a suspicion of having been merely *talked into* his life-long fascination with Mediterranean antiquity and reviving the passion for it in an entire generation of Poles.[4] With Zbigniew Herbert, it all starts with contradiction.

Part One: The Myth of Zbigniew Herbert

For the sake of clarity, however, let us briefly return to linear time. Born in 1924 in Lviv (modern-day Ukraine), Herbert publishes his first poetry collection, *Struna światła* (*A Chord of Light*), in 1956, the year of the post-Stalinist Thaw, and immediately follows up on its success with *Hermes, pies i gwiazda* (*Hermes, Dog, and Star*) in 1957. Between 1958 and 1960, he travels to Western Europe for the first time, which he immortalises in the travel collection *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* (*Barbarian in the Garden*, 1962, hereafter *BO*), one of the key texts of the post-Stalinist "essay boom" in Poland.[5] The early 1960s also see the results of his experiments with theatre or, as he calls them, "plays for voices" (*sztuki na głosy)*.[6] From a classical reception angle, we should take note of *Jaskinia filozofów* (*The Philosophers' Cave*), a play thematising the last days of Socrates (first staged in 1961), and *Rekonstrukcja poety* (*Reconstruction of the Poet*), a radio play about Homer (first broadcast in 1960, then staged for the theatre in 1961).[7] Two more poetry collections follow, after which Herbert attempts to publish a second travelogue, the fruit of his 1964 journey to Italy, Crete, and mainland Greece, in 1973. For unknown reasons, however, and despite the fact that almost all its parts had been published in the press between 1965 and 1973, *Labirynt nad morzem* (*Labyrinth on the Sea, LNM*) never appears in print.[8] The publication of Herbert's next collection, *Pan Cogito* (*Mr. Cogito*) in 1974, marks a major turn towards political poetry, a shift most intensely palpable in *Raport z oblężonego Miasta* (*Report from the Besieged City*, 1983), his reaction to the imposition of Martial Law in Poland (1981) and a clear example of poetry-as-testimony. The final

[4] Throughout this thesis, I will be using the more capacious term "Mediterranean" (rather than "classical") antiquity to make room for Herbert's engagement with cultures beyond Greece and Rome, such as the Minoans or the Etruscans.
[5] Lisak-Gębala 2014, 57n.8.
[6] Filipowicz 1998, 18.
[7] Kopciński 2008, 253, 263.
[8] It was published only posthumously in 2000.

part of the travelogue trilogy, *Martwa natura z wędzidłem* (*Still Life with a Bridle*, 1993; *MNW*) on the Netherlands and the Dutch Golden Age, appears in 1993. Herbert's last three poetry collections, published between 1990 and 1998, are linked in their "valedictory tone" and a focus on the ailing, dying body which departs from the stoicism and composure of his earlier poetry.[9]

The discomfort which this final poetry cycle produced in some commentators brings us to the much-contested public image of the individual behind this wide-ranging, highly decorated oeuvre.[10] As Henryk Citko, the former custodian of the Zbigniew Herbert Archive (*Archiwum Zbigniewa Herberta*, AZH) at the Polish National Library, sums up, in the Polish public imagination Herbert's life has long been built around the following cornerstones: his idyllic childhood in interwar Lviv, his literary non-existence before the Thaw caused by his heroic refusal of socialist realism, his rise to the position of Poland's "moral guide" with *Mr. Cogito*, and finally his role as the literary voice of the *Solidarność* [*Solidarity*] movement of the 1980s, whose poems gave its activists strength even in prison.[11] An equally relevant part of Herbert's public persona can be traced back to his first solo appearance on the Anglophone literary market, the 1968 *Selected Poems* published in the Penguin Modern European Poets series.[12] In his introduction to the volume, the British writer and critic Al Alvarez was the first to locate the origins of Herbert's "political dissidence" in his participation in the Polish military resistance during World War Two.[13] By the time the Harvard-based scholar Stanisław Barańczak was publishing his influential 1984 study *Uciekinier z Utopii* (later republished for an Anglophone audience as *A Fugitive from Utopia* in 1987), a comprehensive analysis of the many contradictions governing Herbert's poetic universe, Herbert's belonging to the *Armia Krajowa* [AK, *Home Army*] had grown into one of the most

[9] Anders 2009, 85; Franaszek 1998a, 14-16.
[10] Franaszek 1998b, 16-17. For a selection of the prizes received by Herbert see Alvarez 1998, 22. It is a widely held opinion that Herbert enjoyed greater international renown than the two Polish Nobel Prize laureates of his time, Czesław Miłosz (1980) and Wisława Szymborska (1996), see Van Nieukerken 2022, 382.
[11] Citko 2020, 21; Kay 2012, 121. Whether *Solidarność,* the first independent trade union of the Eastern Bloc, was created with the goal of abolishing state socialism, or more straightforwardly directed at achieving higher wages and better working conditions, is a battleground of Polish collective memory; see Kubow 2013, Bernhard and Kubik 2014, Pearce 2012.
[12] The *Selected Poems* were translated by Czesław Miłosz and Peter Dale Scott, who had already included a few of Herbert's poems in their seminal anthology *Postwar Polish Poetry* (1965).
[13] Kay 2012, 121. As Kay points out, Alvarez's role is sometimes underestimated by Polish scholars analysing the development of Herbert's personal mythology. See also Alvarez' shorter text "A New Voice from Poland. Five Poems by Zbigniew Herbert Translated by Czesław Miłosz", *The Observer* 02/09/1962.

distinctive elements of his biography.[14] After the collapse of the socialist bloc in 1989, when the moral "guidance" offered by Herbert in the Polish public sphere moved from poetic calls to "ethical vigilance", admired by both the propaganda-weary Polish youth and Western readers such as Seamus Heaney, to often unjust attacks on cultural figures who had supposedly "profited from communism", this untainted personal history of resistance became Herbert's main source of public authority.[15]

The collective outrage that ensued when this "exemplary life" started to be slowly exposed as a mixture of fabrication and uncorrected conjecture is easy to imagine.[16] The first biography to seriously shake up the public perception of the poet was Joanna Siedlecka's *Pan od poezji* (2002), a work of investigative journalism whose greatest cultural impact lay in its uncovering of the truth about Herbert's "AK past".[17] To the shock of many, Siedlecka proved that not only had Herbert never joined the military resistance, but that one of his paternal uncles, Ludwik Herbert, was executed by the Polish Underground State for reporting one of its members to the Nazi authorities.[18] This shock was hardly lessened by Siedlecka's assurance that rather than wishing to discredit Herbert and his investment in his role as the "guardian" of the memory of the Polish underground, she offered his complex relationship with the AK as the "key" to understanding this investment instead. It was guilt over his family's actions and his own *in*action during the war, she ventured, that drove Herbert's self-positioning as historical witness later in life.[19] A similar wish to approach Herbert with "compassion", rather than judgement shines through his second biography, Andrzej Franaszek's monumental two-volume work *Herbert. Biografia* (2018).[20] The

[14] Barańczak 1987, 2.
[15] Heaney 1988, 58; Franaszek 1998b, 14. The beginning of Herbert's accusatory, confrontational public appearances is usually considered to have been the notorious interview given to Jacek Trznadel in 1985, "Wypluć z siebie wszystko" ["Spit It All Out"], first printed in *Kultura Niezależna* 14, reprinted in HN, 119-64.
[16] Anders 2009, 86.
[17] Although the Polish Book Institute translates *Pan od poezji* as *Poetry Man*, the Polish colloquialism *pan od…* equally denotes the teacher of a given subject and is used by Herbert in the title of his poem "Pan od przyrody" which Valles renders as "Biology teacher". The title thus matches Siedlecka's colloquial, journalistic tone.
[18] Siedlecka 2002, 96-115. Due to the Austrian origins of the Herbert family, Ludwik was registered with the *Deutsche Volksliste*, as was his brother Roman, another son of Herbert's great-uncle Marian Herbert.
[19] Ibid, 94-5. Herbert's "military past" will be taken up again in Chapter 2 from the angle of collective memory. For a recent exploration of the tight intertwining of (post)memory, guilt, and testimony see Ionescu and Mitroiu 2023.
[20] Franaszek 2018b, 831. Between the two, the historian Rafał Żebrowski, Herbert's nephew, also published a shorter work on Herbert's family background (*Zbigniew Herbert. „Kamień na którym mnie urodzono"* ["*The Stone*

literary scholar based his work primarily on extensive archival research, making his way through the AZH and the archives of Herbert's correspondence partners, publishers, and contemporaries. Upon the work's publication, negative responses to Franaszek's study were mostly centred on its in-depth exploration of Herbert's mental illness, most likely a case of hereditary bipolar disorder.[21] As Herbert grew older, the severe depressive episodes it provoked started to outweigh the "euphoric", creative manic phases so crucial for his writing, and his struggle with the disorder came to dominate his life from the 1970s onwards.[22] While Herbert did also suffer from various physical health problems (such as the aforementioned asthma), many of the "hospital" stays that he justified his prolonged absences on the literary scene with were in fact periods of treatment in psychiatric clinics.[23]

Despite the advances in the understanding and destigmatisation of mental illness since the 1970s, Herbert's friends and colleagues seem to have accepted his bipolar disorder far more readily than many traditionalist scholars today, whose rejection of its existence continues to reinscribe the same prejudice that drove Herbert and his wife Katarzyna's efforts to hide his condition from the public.[24] Already in 1998, writing for an edited volume bringing together influential interpreters of Herbert's work, Alvarez spoke of Herbert's "drinking problem" (another issue that Franaszek's critics would have preferred him to have left unaddressed) as a "signal" of his struggle with "his psyche, interchangeably haunted by bouts of mania and depression".[25] It is to this "terrible combination" of "alcohol and mania" that Alvarez also ascribed Herbert's combativeness in the late 1980s and early 90s, which targeted not just alleged "communist sympathisers", but also some of his Western translators and publishers.[26] Many of those thus

upon which I was born"], 2011). While certainly not without merit, the biased aim of the work ("defending Herbert's good name from defamation", see Kosiński 2020, 251) makes it a difficult one to assess.

[21] In a turn of events most haunting for Herbert, his mother's diagnosis in May 1967 came just when he was starting to recover from what was then believed to be a one-off nervous breakdown (Franaszek 2018, 210-11). For the importance of this episode for Herbert's relationship with antiquity see Chapter 4.

[22] Franaszek 2018b, 206-7, 464.

[23] Ibid, 465.

[24] Fornari 2022, 244. For one, Krzystof Kosiński (2020, 263-264) from the Historical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IH PAN) continues to speak of "alleged mental illness" and calls Katarzyna Herbert's open addressing of it after Herbert's death "a widow's ambiguous confessions". On the gradual destigmatisation of mental illness see Sozańska 2014 (in Poland), Hinshaw 2010 (more broadly).

[25] Alvarez 1998, 24.

[26] Ibid, 25.

abruptly cut off by Herbert, who included his German translator Karl Dedecius and the dissident Adam Michnik (who had once been so vocal about having smuggled Herbert's poems into prison), shared Alvarez's designation of Herbert's "illness" as the reason behind his sudden distrust of his old friends.[27] Despite what some "defenders" of Herbert might say, then, to those closest to the poet his mental disorder was always an important factor in any interpretation of his behaviour, and a recent pioneering article by Francesca Fornari demonstrates that it can be a hugely fruitful framework for the interpretation of his work, too.[28]

In her archive-based analysis of the composition process of the poem "Mr Cogito – Notes from the House of the Dead" (*Report*, 1983) Fornari traces Herbert's gradual transformation of the poem's representation of a "mental asylum" into that of political imprisonment – an experience both in line with Herbert's dissident persona and of very high social respectability in Polish culture.[29] In doing so, Fornari draws our attention to a clear connection between Herbert's mental disorder and his writing, which will be of great importance throughout this thesis, and to Herbert's interest in cultural discourses of madness (evidenced further by his possession of an English copy of Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*).[30] Moreover, she provides us with a concrete example of what Citko identifies as the main driving force behind Herbert's self-creation: namely, what we might gently call aspirational thinking.[31] Both Citko and Franaszek refer their readers to the same interview conducted by Andrzej Babuchowski for the Polish Radio in 1971, where Herbert is surprisingly honest about being dishonest:

> A human being is not just what they are, but what they would like to be. And so, I suppose, in what I do I certainly show what I would like to be, and what I'm unfortunately not.[32]

[27] Dedecius 2008, 278-9; Michnik 2014, 387-88.
[28] *Cf.* Kosiński 2020, 268.
[29] Fornari 2022, 243-44.
[30] Ibid, 252.
[31] Citko 2020, 214.
[32] HN, 29. The interview was reprinted as "Labirynt nad morzem" in *Zeszyty Literackie* 1.73 (2001): 115-118 and in HN, 27-31. Citko 2020, 214; Franaszek 2018a, 211. Herbert repeats practically the same phrase to Renata Gorczyńska in 1986, see HN, 166.

Here, we are again reminded of Siedlecka's emphasis on guilt, and combined with the social stigma surrounding mental disorders, it should not be too far-fetched to conclude that the *shame* of not being who "he would like to be" pushed Herbert to stay silent about never having fought for the AK, or about having indeed written much cultural criticism for journals published by PAX, a "lay Catholic publisher much compromised by its relations with the state", throughout the Stalinist era.[33]

Yet, it is still not as simple as Herbert having merely been a "hostage" of a persona that suddenly spiralled out of control.[34] Active "lies and confabulations" were very much part of the picture, and it is in the face of these that many readers of Franaszek (and equally of Siedlecka) might have felt the same profound "embarrassment" that the literary scholar Ryszard Koziołek described in his review of the biography.[35] Herbert's lifelong professional proximity to and personal passion for visual art, for instance, clearly tempted him to give both his exhibition reviews in the press and his prolific drawing practice a speck of institutional authority through the false claim that he studied painting at the prestigious Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków.[36] Similar claims were made about his acceptance into the State College of Acting (now National Academy of Theatre), where his talent was supposedly singled out by the renowned experimental theatre director Juliusz Osterwa, or about his short stay in cadet school before the war, whence he was soon kicked out for insubordination.[37] A similar, though perhaps less spectacular web of half-truths surrounds Herbert's education in classics which, in contrast to the image painted in Herbert's poetic homage to the close reading of ancient texts, "Livy's Metamorphoses" (*Elegy for the Departure*, 1990), did not start in a "classical gymnasium" in the "Austrian tradition", but rather a more pragmatic "*Realschule* with extended mathematics and sciences".[38] While the historical reality of Herbert's study of Latin (though not Greek) in school will be addressed in

[33] On PAX see Crowley 2011, 355. On Herbert's journalistic activity under Stalinism see Franaszek 2018a, 412-56.
[34] Kosiński 2020, 267
[35] Koziołek 2018.
[36] Franaszek 2018a, 228-230. The best-documented instance of this claim is Herbert's 1998 interview with Krzysztof Karasek (printed in *Rzeczpospolita,* 26-27 July 2008).
[37] Ibid, 232; HN, 209 (see 1994 interview below).
[38] Olechowska 2016, 213. For "the Austrian tradition" see HN, 90 and the discussion of Galicia below.

detail in Chapter 1, let us first lean into the narrative he constructed around it, and examine what tone it sets for Herbert's relationship with antiquity.

Asked about the beginnings of his "interest in the humanities", Herbert tells Monika Muskała about this initial preference for the sciences, above all astronomy:

> It was only Latin that gripped me, something that I had heard in church and didn't quite understand, because it wasn't Yiddish, nor Russian, nor Ukrainian, none of the languages spoken in the street.[39]

Having just expressed his nostalgia for the cultural diversity of interwar Poland, Herbert very firmly situates his fascination with Latin in the context of Lviv, a multiethnic city which had been historically part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, then the Austro-Hungarian empire, after whose collapse it again became Polish territory.[40] While Herbert's nostalgia unmistakably taps into the *dyskurs kresowy,* the cultural discourse surrounding Poland's "borderlands" in the East (*kresy*) lost to the Soviet Union which often assumes a strongly nationalist tone in its longing for Poland's "past greatness", his next reply to Muskała seems to displace the object of Herbert's longing:[41]

> MM: Is it true that your father recounted the *Odyssey* to you?
> ZH: Ah yes, that's true, but I was maybe three years old at the time. He would summarise it for us [ZH and his siblings] with his own words, and then read it aloud in translation. […] The humanities are something that is lacking today. Back in the day, the humanities were more important for social mobility than a science degree. […] And that in Galicia of all places, where there wasn't much work, and where there was great poverty. It was exactly Galicia that was such a den of humanists.[42]

The region of Galicia was created by the Habsburg administration in 1772 as a result of the first partition of Poland and ceased to exist together with the Habsburg Empire in 1918, six years before Herbert was born.[43] Unlike other "formerly Galician" writers such as Bruno Schulz (1892-1942) or

[39] Interview from 1994, printed in 1996 as "Humanistyka to przygoda", *Notatnik Teatralny* 11: 122-31, reprinted in HN 208-22 (HN, 209).
[40] Between 1918 and 1919, Lviv was also part of the short-lived and only partially internationally recognised West Ukrainian People's Republic.
[41] Grzechnik 2019, 1004.
[42] HN, 209.
[43] Wolff 2010, 388. The term "the partitions of Poland" refers to the gradual division of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between the Habsburg Empire, the Russian Empire, and Prussia which was carried out in a series of territorial seizures and annexations until the sovereign Polish state ceased to exist.

Joseph Roth (1894-1939), Herbert had no personal memories of the Habsburg past and thus seemingly little reason to choose the "phantom form" Galicia had left behind as the framework for his first encounter with the Graeco-Roman world – but that is only if we fail to pay attention to the double-distancing he thus achieves.[44]

In her question about the *Odyssey* readings, Muskała refers to Herbert's first mention of them in a much earlier interview given to Marek Oramus in 1981.[45] There, the readings again function as an example of Lviv's culture of "humanism and scholarship", but this time in the context of Herbert's refusal to go back to a post-war Lviv devoid of everything that had made it so distinctive. Elaborating on the classical education of the bourgeois circles his family moved in, Herbert proclaims: "I didn't need to look up in the dictionary who Polyphemus was. It was obvious to me, I was simply growing up in it."[46] As Chapter 1's overview of the Party-imposed changes to the education system will show, in socialist Poland the presence of Graeco-Roman antiquity in everyday life became *anything but* obvious, relegated to closed academic circles and the dusty pages of dictionaries. While grief for an entire lifeworld permeated post-war Polish society as a whole, Herbert's choice to situate his early study of Latin not just in interwar Poland, but in the doubly removed world of Galicia, a world that had already been lost in the 1930s, speaks to Herbert's heightened perception of the rupture WW2 caused in his growing connection with antiquity – a sense of a wound so deep that it denies all continuity between past and present.[47] In light of Herbert's own association of his classical education with an idealised, eternally displaced, and thus unreachable past, it is noteworthy that the presence of antiquity in his poetry was often interpreted very similarly: as the author's way of drawing a demarcation line between the admirable past and the imperfect present.

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[44] Wolff 2010, 397.

[45] "Poeta sensu" ("A Poet of Exact Meaning"), first printed in *itd.* 14 (1981): 3, 16-17, reprinted in HN 98-110 (100). The interview also appeared in the *PN Review* 26.6 (1982): 8-12 in the English translation by Maria Szmidt.

[46] HN, 100 (my translation). Interestingly, Szmidt's translation changes the classical component of the sentence completely: "There was no need to be looking up the word *polis* in the dictionary…" (*PN Review*, 8). For Herbert as the "rare case of a Polish bourgeois writer (*polski pisarz mieszczański*)" see Koziołek 2018. Even if the above quotation shows that Herbert was indeed aware of the severe poverty in former Galicia, once the most deprived province in Austro-Hungary (for its deliberate exploitation see Stauter-Halsted 2001, 24), his mention of it erases, rather than emphasises the gulf between the average Galician and the classically educated middle class.

[47] On the acute sense of loss of the pre-war world already in 1945 see Zborowska 2017, 433.

In his analysis of "Livy's Metamorphoses", Sherman Garnett identifies three main aims in Herbert's poetic engagement with ancient material (such as Graeco-Roman mythology, literature, or figures and events from ancient history): evoking "admiration" for the ancient past, identifying "persistent issues […] of a moral and political nature" in the present, and, lastly, "deconstruct[ing] classical texts" through a "shift in perspective".[48] Although, as will soon be demonstrated, this is hardly a complete picture of Herbert's reception of antiquity, Garnett's summary is helpful in showcasing its most studied aspects and, what is more, in making it easily apparent that two of them – admiration for antiquity and an examination of the present – can be read as two sides of the same coin. While the most famous example of Herbert's representation of classical antiquity as an ideal from which modernity has fallen is the poem "Why the Classics" (*Inscription*, 1969), a juxtaposition of the honourable Thucydides and whiny modern generals, more ambiguous poems such as "To Apollo", "On Troy", or "Nike Who Hesitates" (all from *A Chord of Light*) use antiquity less as an ideal than a set of "questions", to use Karl Dedecius' phrasing, about art after Auschwitz, the trauma of wartime destruction, or the meaning of heroism.[49] While the post-war context often made such ancient references uncomfortably jarring, their very presence as a framework "to think with" assured especially Western readers of Herbert's reverence for the classical tradition, provoking their (arguably somewhat patronising) wonder at his continued "trust" in the "humanist endeavour" the West had long outgrown.[50] Polish readers, on the other hand, were increasingly treating Herbert's ancient references not as an interrogation of modernity, but as a direct code for what could not be stated openly under censorship.

Herbert comments on this difference himself in the radio speech "Wizja Europy" ["Vision of Europe"], written for the Hessischer Rundfunk in 1973 but never broadcast and published only posthumously.[51] Playing with the notion of the poet as prophet, Herbert opens the piece by stating the "impossibility" of the task put to him by the Rundfunk: to share with its listeners his "vision of Europe". As the reason for this "impossibility" he names the existence of not *one* Europe,

[48] Garnett 2007, 475-76, 479. Garnett's last point will be returned to below.
[49] Dedecius 1981, 234.
[50] Heaney 1988, 58, *cf.* Solecki 2022, 234.
[51] The manuscript was rediscovered in 1998 and printed in 2008 in *Zeszyty Literackie* 3/103: 5-7 (MD, 126-8).

but *two*, the difference between which Herbert exemplifies through a thinly veiled tale of a Polish writer "fascinated with Europe, its history and culture":

> During certain periods such a fascination was frankly dangerous. He wrote a good number of works dedicated to the Judeo-Greek-Christian tradition. […] it was rather difficult for him to explain to his Western colleagues that, writing about the Athenian invasion of the kindred island of Samos, about the trials of the Templars and the Albigensians, he had contemporary events on his mind. That is why he set in motion these heavy historical siege engines; that is why he made use of allegory and donned masks – because he could not speak otherwise and did not even want to speak otherwise. Whenever his manuscripts wandered into the West, they were generally favorably received as works demonstrating the author's erudition, culture, and technical merit. To him, these were pitiful complements. It was as if the entire passion and rebelliousness of his work had suddenly vanished by simply crossing a border.[52]

"Wizja Europy" is a fascinating text, and not only because Herbert spends the rest of it painting a picture of Lviv, "a mosaic of cultures and peoples" lying "at the great crossroads from west to east and from north to south", that shaped his "first" vision of Europe as a "great bazaar of languages, customs, and cultures".[53] "Wizja" is fascinating because even though it appears to be handing us the interpretative key to Herbert's engagement with antiquity on a silver platter, it is ripe with ambiguity and, moreover, does so with reference to the part of his oeuvre where allegory-centric interpretation runs up against the greatest difficulties: his travelogues.

Herbert's mentions of the Athenian invasion of Samos, the Templars, and the Albigensians refer to the essays "The Samos Affair" (*LNM*), "Defense of the Templars" (*BO*), and "Albigensians, Inquisitors, and Troubadours" (*BO*), all of which explore historical instances of power abuse and persecution without much reference to Herbert's travels in Western Europe. In contrast to what Herbert's exemplary use of them in "Wizja" might suggest, however, they are not the rule but the exception in *LNM* and *BO*, which both follow the same formula of blending lived experience with fact-heavy digressions on the places and artworks the narrator encounters.[54] For Herbert to describe his "wandering manuscripts" as mere political allegories, then, rather than manuscripts

[52] MD, 126-7. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from "Wizja" are by Alexander Holt, who discusses the text in his doctoral thesis (2020, 177-89).
[53] MD, 128 (my translation).
[54] This rootedness of Herbert's narrative voice in experienced reality disappears almost entirely in *MNW*, which focuses on interpretations of seventeenth-century Dutch art over Herbert's travels through Holland. For a unity of narrator-persona between LNM and BO see also Kozicka 2003, 149.

about wanderings, is to replace one misrepresentation of his work with another, to replace a mask forced onto him by one of his own choosing. Western readers are blind to the "rebelliousness" (*bunt*) of his work, Herbert says, but let us assume that all interpreters would, for instance, follow Seamus Heaney in declaring that the travelogues merely "*masquerade* as 'travel writings'", while the text's most important "journey" takes us to "a domain with which Herbert is already too familiar: the domain of tyranny".[55] That would satisfy the need for allegorical reading, to be sure, but what would it contribute to our understanding of the "passion" Herbert is demanding us to see – that "dangerous" fascination with "European history and culture"?[56]

This is where the text meanders, torn between "not being able to speak otherwise", a mark of living under censorship, and *not even wanting to speak otherwise* (*a nawet nie chciał mówić inaczej*), a mark of desire. While reading Herbert's descriptions of the crushing of the Samian revolt or of the show trials of the Knights Templar as direct allegories of Soviet practices might be one way to acknowledge the political dimension of Herbert's engagement with Western European history, another is to recognise that his travel writing is no less political *as travel writing*, the record of a Polish writer's presence in Western Europe and of his claim to its cultural lineage.[57] To treat the world of Herbert's prose as the reality it points *to,* rather than the reality it points *beyond*, is to treat seriously the challenge it poses to conceptions of "Herbert's classical reception" which, on the basis of his poetry, see antiquity only as a framework, lost ideal, or mirror. From the very beginning, Herbert's poetry was given the label of "classicism" (*klasycyzm*), a stream in Polish literature defined not just by its heavy use of classical references, but also by its exhibiting of the principles the "classical" has been said to represent: a "Periclean" intellectual laicism,

[55] Heaney 1988, 55 (my italics). The pattern of taking "Templars" and "Albigensians" as representative of Herbert's prose continues, for instance, in Djelal Kadir's consideration of the lessons Herbert can teach the discipline of comparative literature, see Kadir 2011, 153.

[56] Another example of such flat allegorical reading is Solecki's (2022, 234-42) analysis of "On the Etruscans" (*LNM*), which completely neglects the real-life impact of the essay upon its press publication in 1965, i.e. familiarising the Polish public with the then-growing discipline of Etruscology (see Dobrowolski 2020).

[57] For a crucial study on *BO* as travel writing see Kozicka 2003. In the preface to *BO*, Herbert refers to its chapters as *szkice* (sketches). Although the preferred English translation has always been "essays" (Lisak-Gębala 2014, 57), the word "sketches" itself is equally linked to the genre of travel writing – on Herbert's affinities with D.H. Lawrence's *Sketches of Etruscan Places* see Chapter 1.

rationalism, and universalism.[58] Although there is also a partial awareness, exemplified by the last point on Garnett's list, that Herbert's poetry equally "deconstructs" some of the classical texts it references (most often through a "shift in perspective" from hero to victim: from Livy's heroic Roman generals to those they conquered, from Apollo to Marsyas), it is this image of "neo-classicism" that most Polish readers associate with Herbert's engagement with antiquity.[59] Anglophone scholarship, conversely, still primarily emphasises the phenomenon of playing ancient models and the reality of totalitarianism off against each other.[60]

A focus on Herbert's prose, then, has the potential to add a new face to Herbert's kaleidoscope of receptions, both resisting and expanding previous interpretations of his relationship with the ancient world. In contrast to the poetry, Herbert's travel writing considers what it means for antiquity to be a material presence to be encountered, looked at, or even touched – a presence that shares a time-space with the living body. Rather than using antiquity as a tool whose conceptual value depends on its distance to modernity, Herbert's travel writing interrogates that temporal distance, simultaneously drawing attention to it and savouring the instances of its collapse: aesthetic rapture in a museum, meeting the gaze of an Etruscan funerary statue. Of course, as Marta Piwińska phrased it in a much-cited statement, there is no separation between "Herbert, the poet" and "Herbert, the essayist", just "the same Herbert, […] finishing in an essay a thought thrown up by a poem".[61] Yet, it is the prose that posits that only embodied encounters with material remains of antiquity have the power of truly testing what of our admiration for antiquity has been "talked into" us, and what can *authentically* be felt. It is the prose, not the poetry, that interrogates this very moment of reception. And it is Herbert's interest in this moment of reception that this thesis takes as its point of departure.

[58] Kufel 2011, 32-33; Kubski 2011, 23; Mikołajczak 2011, 9. In the Polish literary tradition, *klasycyzm* has often functioned primarily as the opposite of the Romanticist focus on emotion, Catholicism, and the nation. Although Herbert vocally distanced himself from Romanticism, his intertextual connections to it have been a central topic in Herbert scholarship (for recent work see Mikołajczak (ed.) 2011).
[59] Garnett 2007, 479. "Livy's Metamorphoses"; "Apollo and Marsyas" (*Study of the Object*, 1961).
[60] Van Nieukerken 2022.
[61] Piwińska 1963, 91.

Part Two: Aims and Methodology

Ever since Charles Martindale put classical reception studies on the "intellectual map of Classics" with the publication of *Redeeming the Text* (1993), the discipline has come a long way.[62] Having already witnessed several significant debates, including the wide-ranging discussion of nomenclature (i.e., whether "reception" or "the classical tradition" more aptly captures the workings of the afterlives of antiquity in later periods) or Martindale and Simon Goldhill's dispute regarding historicism, reception studies now faces new challenges.[63] First, ongoing work towards greater inclusivity in the wider discipline of classics, sharpened by calls for its re-orientation towards practices of decoloniality and justice work, has shed light on the ethical demands and political responsibilities of engaging in scholarship on the ancient world.[64] Growing awareness of the "patriarchal politics [that] underlies genealogy as the controlling metaphor of textual criticism" has motivated many reception scholars to search for new "modes of relation" between antiquity and its modern receptions that do not reproduce "filiative models of inheritance" or "lines of descent" concerned with "honouring a monumental father".[65] Importantly, this search for "pluralist" models capacious enough to hold receptions based on nebulous "affinity" rather than strict genealogy is not just a question of the recent turn towards inclusivity.[66] At a moment in time when the landscape of popular classical reception has been seeing a rise in what we could, after Lorna Hardwick, call "fuzzy connections", such equally "fuzzy" reception models are a historical necessity.

Hardwick defines such "fuzzy connections" as "ancient image[s] or referent[s]" that "creat[e] for the reader a simultaneity of experience that brings together the ancient and the new […] even if the reader does not have detailed knowledge" of what is being referred to.[67] This model has

[62] Butler 2016, 16.
[63] Especially the question of passive vs. active reception, a major driver behind the debate, was recently convincingly challenged by Butler (2019, 391), who pointed to the homophobic resonances of the negative value ascribed to "passivity". For an influential defence of the term "the classical tradition" see Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow (2014).
[64] Particularly forceful here has been the work of the Critical Ancient World Studies collective (Umachandran and Ward 2024).
[65] Haselswerdt 2023, 130 and 135n.4 citing Whitmarsh 2004, 26–29; Bell 2024, 179.
[66] Bell 2024, 190.
[67] Hardwick 2011, 56.

been effectively used in Tori Lee's recent analysis of the "Dark Academia" internet aesthetic, a style of academia-inspired (mostly visual) content across various social media platforms whose reproduction of the idea of the "classical" is as superficial as it is influential.[68] Moreover, in the same way that "Dark Academia" content curators aim to create an "atmosphere" of studying classics through "conspicuously sepia-toned" images of marble busts or leather-bound Greek and Latin textbooks, many users of increasingly common antiquity-themed Virtual and Augmented Reality experiences approach such simulations with equally vague, idealised expectations.[69] As Richard Cole points out in his new study of "virtual antiquity", defined as a spectrum of "reality-like experiences of ancient cultures" facilitated by technologies such as AR and VR, these newly developed possibilities of such complete "immersion" in an ancient lifeworld pose a challenge to our understanding of the "nearness of the past" – and, one might add, to our understanding of the relationship between one's "nearness" to antiquity and the level of specialised knowledge needed to achieve it.[70] Finally, if we now add two more distinctly contemporary modes of classical reception to the picture, namely video games and fanfiction, it should only bear out Hardwick's suggestion that the importance of such "rhizomic relationships" with antiquity lies in the "affective responses" they generate despite their detachment from (or perhaps exactly *in resistance to*) regulated economies of knowledge.[71] In such vernacular modes of reception, antiquity is less a set of historical figures, events, and cultural products to be engaged with in individual encounters than a "supratextual force" whose intergenerationally transmitted image, as James Uden insists, "envelop[s] and precede[s] any one individual's act of artistic imitation or emulation".[72]

It is into this landscape of contemporary classical reception that this thesis introduces Zbigniew Herbert – who is not as distant from it as might initially appear. As Part One of this Introduction has already implied, and Chapter 1 will show in great detail, Herbert was equally

[68] As Lee (2024, 420) evidences, "Dark Academia" content is produced and consumed by millions of users.
[69] Ibid, 422.
[70] Cole (forthcoming).
[71] Hardwick 2011, 57-58. On video games see Clare 2021, on fanfiction Umachandran 2023.
[72] Uden 2020, 231. This application of Uden's Gothic-inspired model of reception as "haunting" to our contemporary context is one of the main arguments of Lee 2024.

writing for an audience whose majority had little knowledge of antiquity, instead making meaning from its broad associations: with the West, with a pan-European identity based on a common Graeco-Roman heritage, or, as was addressed in relation to *klasycyzm*, with a humanist, "enlightened" set of values that stood in glaring contrast to the "injustices and inhuman solutions of totalitarian regimes".[73] While Herbert's poetry overtly, even if sometimes ambivalently, draws on this "supratextual force" of the classical tradition to achieve the specific poetic *atmosphere* that made him stand out among his contemporaries, such as Czesław Miłosz or Tadeusz Różewicz, his prose is an invitation to his readers to look past the "vibe".[74] From the very preface to *BO*, Herbert's travelogue project is centred not on "aesthetic exaltation", but the transmission of "knowledge about remote civilisations", and as private correspondence with Miłosz makes clear, this was a task he took particularly seriously in the case of Mediterranean antiquity.[75] Even if Herbert's execution of his educational mission leaves much to be desired and, as scholars continue to prove, his essays abound with factual mistakes, his persistence alone speaks of a clear awareness of the same gap between the affective grasp of the "classical tradition" and intentional acts of reception addressed by Uden decades later – to return to this Introduction's epigraph, the gap between "what are we truly feeling" and "what we have been talked into feeling".

My usage of the term "classical tradition" above, which will remain consistent throughout the thesis, draws on Peter Osborne's definition of tradition as "intellectual continuity forged by the intergenerational transmission of authoritative texts, principles and procedures" and demarcates the specific chain of receptions of Graeco-Roman antiquity which shaped the abovementioned image of Greece and Rome as the foundation of Western culture and its "core values" such as democracy, liberty, etc. (the so-called "Plato to NATO" narrative).[76] While Herbert publicly voiced his belief in this narrative countless times, locating in Mediterranean antiquity the "source of our

[73] Dutsch 2017, 164; Wołodkiewicz, 2013, 238.
[74] On antiquity as the cause for the "originality of Herbert's poetic universe" see Brzozowski 1992, 89.
[75] BO, 8. Letter to Miłosz from Vienna dated 12/11/1965 (ZHCM, 51). Herbert's attitude towards the "popularisation" of antiquity and the psychological toll this responsibility took on him will be discussed in detail in Chapters 1 and 2.
[76] Osborne 2011, 27. While I am aware of more neutral uses of the term (see n.63), this definition corresponds to similar terminology around "antiquity's legacy" (*dziedzictwo starożytności*) as it still functions in Polish culture and continues to be invoked in introductions to academic work on classical reception, such as Waszak and Wołk 2018, 5.

civilisation", he was equally aware that it was built on a one-sided, artificially constructed image of the Greeks and Romans.[77] As he puts it in "Among the Dorians" (*BO*) with reference to the lack of bright paint on modern reconstructions of ancient buildings and sculptures: "We wish to see the Greeks washed [out] by the rains, white, devoid of passion and cruelty."[78] In "Acropolis" (*LNM)*, this critique of the (literal) whitewashing of the ancient world is expanded to include those whom Herbert identifies as its originators: the "pale" "aesthetes of the nineteenth century" who, "glad in a certain way that Greek architecture had come to us stripped of color", popularised their ideal of Greek art as "discreet", inspiring "intellectual" rather than "sensual" enjoyment.[79] Both the "paleness" of the "aesthetes" in question, no doubt a reference to their northern European origins, and the (now proven to be largely stereotypical) reduction of their relationship to ancient art as driven purely by "intellect" rather than affect allow us to securely identify them as German scholars of *Altertumswissenschaft*, even if the focus on aesthetics suggest the earlier work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (whom Herbert likely misplaced in time).[80] That it was the German academic tradition in which Herbert sought the origin of the "attitude" to antiquity he perceived as "almost universal" in his time is equally evidenced by a crucial passage from "Labyrinth on the Sea" (*LNM*), an account of Herbert's trip to Crete in 1964.[81]

When Herbert encounters the Phaistos disc in Heraklion Archaeological Museum, he grows so fascinated with the object that he starts daydreaming that "maybe one day", if something should "possess [him]", he might become the first person to decipher it.[82] This results in the following dream:

> I stood at a high lectern with a circle of prominent scholars before me—including Humboldt, Schliemann, and…all of them from the nineteenth century, brownish as in daguerreotypes; in the first row I saw my gymnasium Latin teacher who must have been invited to witness the triumph of his brilliant pupil; they were all looking at me, only my teacher had his eyes fixed on the ground. I understood why only when I took out my

[77] For instance in the piece "Psychicznie nigdy z Polski nie wyjeżdżałem…" ["Mentally I never left Poland…"] *Dziennik Bałtycki* 106 (1981), reprinted in HN, 248-50.
[78] BO, 34.
[79] LNM, 104, 106.
[80] On the language of "love and longing" in German scholarship see Güthenke 2020.
[81] LNM, 106.
[82] Ibid, 52. Valles' translation of *zostanę nawiedzony* (lit. "I might be possessed/haunted") as "I might be touched by grace" masks the semantic implications addressed below.

> notes and laid them out in front of me—they were white, terrifyingly blank pages […] I bowed and stood there silent […] whispers and stifled laughter reached me from the auditorium. I took flight suppressing a cry of terror […].[83]

This passage not only confirms Herbert's designation of nineteenth-century German *Altertumswissenschaft* as central to the shaping of the modern image of antiquity, but also speaks volumes about his perception of his own place on this nexus of received authority and personal experience. Herbert clearly recognises that his encounter with antiquity is mediated – and, what is more, that the "tradition" mediating it is nothing but an accumulation of the opinions of historical individuals, whose corporeality and fixedness in the past are palpable in their representation as figures "brownish as in daguerreotypes". That Herbert presents himself as dreaming of speaking in front of this array of scholars, however, is even more important, as it is a clear sign of his self-positioning among them (for in the travelogues, as this thesis will show, *everything* is self-positioning). The passage anxiously downplays this, to be sure: the pages are empty, and Herbert flees with a "cry of terror". Not exactly an accurate image of someone who openly contested the image of antiquity these scholars represented to him, such as by reinstating the cruelty of the Romans (and simultaneously decentring the Graeco-Roman paradigm) by naming "the killed nation of the Etruscans" as one of the "springs" of "European culture" in his famous 1981 interview with Michnik.[84]

Yet, let us return to the anxiety expressed by the passage, and especially to Herbert-the-narrator's implication that his only hope for the decipherment of the Phaistos disc lies in being "possessed" or *haunted* (*nawiedzony*) – language intriguingly close to both Uden's model of antiquity as haunting and to discourses of madness. Very similar phrasing is used in Herbert's private travel notes from his visit to Sparta (1964), collected in the AZH together with more general (and often temporally much later) notes from Herbert's research on its history and

[83] LNM, 52. The presence of the Latin teacher naturally leads us back to the "Galician" beginnings of Herbert's interest in antiquity.
[84] "Płynie się zawsze do źródeł, pod prąd, z prądem płyną śmiecie" ["One must always swim to the springs, against the current, only trash swims with the current"], *Krytyka* 8 (1981): 34-45, reprinted in HN, 75-97 (86).

culture.[85] The note, preserved on an undated loose sheet of paper marked with the letter "N" and starting with the indication that Herbert wrote it at noon, reads:

> Am I not succumbing to some psychosis a dangerous mania which compels me to maunder in the heat through this collection of voids that is Sparta a gallery of frames without paintings is it worth it so that what I write will bear the quality of authenticity[86]

In her study of the image of Sparta emerging from Herbert's unpublished notes, Maria Kalinowska reads Herbert's description of Sparta as a "collection of voids" [*zbiór pustek*] or a "gallery of frames without paintings" [*galeria ram bez obrazów*] through the lens of his assertion that "Sparta offers hardly any aesthetic experiences", i.e. cannot boast any great artworks ("Attempt at a Description of the Greek Landscape", *LNM*).[87] In my view, however, the key to this passage lies not in the "importance" Herbert always ascribed to the "aesthetic legacy" of cultures, but in another note from the same archival file that he took while reading an unnamed work by the French ancient historian Claude Mossé.[88]

Written on a sheet of paper marked with "Mossé, 39" in its right corner, the note starts with two sentences on the "renaissance" of the "Spartan miracle" in nineteenth-century Germany, where "heroic Spartan warriors" came to embody "the virtues of the Nordic race".[89] Then, Herbert continues:

> One cannot [presumably missing: not] ask a question about this extraordinary problem. How [could] this Greek city-state be an inspiration and model/blueprint to the revolutionaries of Year II and Nazi ideologues. To Montesquieu and Rousseau and XVI-century Venetians a model of an aristocratic republic and to English lawgivers […] of a constitutional monarchy.[90]

[85] AZH, akc. 17855 t. 3. The file includes handwritten notes and scans from works such as Oswyn Murray's *Early Greece* (in German translation), Moses Finley's *Aspects of Antiquity*, or Arnold J. Toynbee's *Hellenism: The History of a Civilization*. Toynbee might have also influenced Herbert's interest in the rise and fall of civilisations, see Chapter 2.
[86] Ibid. I have kept Herbert's complete lack of punctuation and only cursory sentence structure.
[87] See LNM, 75 (edited translation), where Herbert cites Thucydides' prediction on Sparta's future reception (Thuc. 1.10) as having been proven right. Kalinowska 2017, 52. Kalinowska's article is a direct response to an earlier study of Herbert's reception of Sparta, Halkiewicz-Sojak 2014, based exclusively on published poetry and prose.
[88] Ibid, 53.
[89] AZH, akc. 17855 t. 3, 43.
[90] Ibid. "Year II" presumably refers to French Republican Calendar. Herbert was highly interested in the Revolution and worked on an essay on Jacques Louis David (see Kluba 2017).

In contrast to the first paragraph, which can be more straightforwardly identified as a factual, clean summary of what Mossé writes on page 39, this passage is again messier, kept in the same stream-of-consciousness format as the travel note above, and thus most likely Herbert's own reflection. Taking into account Herbert's "method" of, as he tells Andrzej Babuchowski, "see[ing] certain things first" and doing in-depth research only upon his return, Herbert's consideration of the "extraordinary problem" of Sparta's reception can be seen as a more informed return to his instinctive experience of Sparta as a "gallery of frames without paintings": an element of antiquity so distorted by contradictory receptions that it appears to be completely devoid of a discoverable essence.[91] With this image of Herbert's vivid interest in the "barnacles of later tradition" in mind, let us now turn to a final picture of his authorial anxiety.[92] In the opening paragraph of "Animula" (*LNM*), Herbert portrays himself as hearing the discouraging question "Why do you toil? Everything has already been written, there's nothing left to contribute in this field." every time he opens a library catalogue already bursting with titles on the topic of classics. "The only role that may fall to you is the role of a compiler", the malicious voice continues, at which point Herbert suddenly discovers a letter from Sigmund Freud to Romain Rolland, in which Freud psychoanalyses his first visit to the Acropolis.[93] Herbert escapes the fate of a "compiler" – by writing about reception.

As a result of his essayistic focus on the immediate experience of art, especially painting, as well as his professional activity as a visual art reviewer, Herbert had a complex relationship with the academic discipline of art history.[94] On the one hand, he vocally positioned himself in an antagonistic relation to art historians and their "boring textbooks", constructing his essays as a celebration of the embodied encounter with the art object no amount of reading can replace.[95] On the other hand, he not only relied on those "boring textbooks" for his writing, but, with his

[91] HN, 28.
[92] Richard Jenkyns' (1989) phrase influentially criticised by Martindale 1993, 4.
[93] LNM, 92. For further discussion of "Animula" see Chapter 2.
[94] Most of Herbert's art reviews were posthumously collected in the volume *Węzeł Gordyjski* [*The Gordian Knot*, WG]. The scholarship on Herbert and art history is vast and has grown especially in the past 15 years. For the pioneering edited volume see Ruszar (ed.) 2006.
[95] In the case of BO, Lisak-Gębala (2014, 65) has linked this stance to the "anti-scientific" framework of the modernist essay more broadly.

immense popularity, came to acquire art-historical authority that (often dangerously) rivalled that of professional art historians.[96] Few of his readers know, however, that in the 1980s and 90s Herbert was working on a second essay collection on Dutch art, a companion piece to *MNW* that would have constituted an even bolder foray into art-historical territory. The collection, preserved as a set of unfinished manuscripts and (perhaps too confidently) published by Barbara Toruńczyk in the posthumous volume *Mistrz z Delft* [*The Master from Delft,* 2006], would have been devoted to a group of Dutch "Golden Age" painters termed *mali mistrzowie*, a direct translation of the French *petits maîtres* ("minor masters").[97] In the unfinished introduction, Herbert justifies his choice of subject matter through an erroneous interpretation of the term as a derogatory label for painters unworthy of "Greatness", reserved for big names like Rembrandt or Vermeer.[98] Aiming to restore the "honour" of the "minor masters", Herbert presents the collection as an exercise in constructing an alternative methodology for engaging with art, capable of capturing its affective core that escapes rigid hierarchies and "classification".[99]

Particularly the frequently re-drafted essay on Willem Duyster, initially titled "The Memory of the Eye", functions as a manifesto for Herbert's concept of a "radically subjective history of art" in which "dates, metrics, schools, styles, themes" are put aside in favour of "individualised empathetic dialogue" with each artwork.[100] It is an impassioned defence of "amateur" encounters with art governed by emotional intensity and "arbitrary judgments" that "resist rationalisation": "like, dislike, reverent adoration, consuming resentment".[101] Herbert concludes:

> With such an art history, I believe, it would be much easier to change traditionally accepted hierarchies – to excavate creators who are forgotten because

[96] The contradiction between Herbert's extensive research and public lampooning of academics has been noted by multiple commentators, such as Ruszar 2020, 39, 41; Tomasik 2018, 204. Oczko 2016 excellently analyses the "textbook status" of MNW despite its creation of a misleading image of Dutch art.
[97] A magisterial study of the manuscripts was conducted by Magdalena Śniedziewska (2014), who takes issue with Toruńczyk's concealment of the extent to which the essays were works in progress (ibid, 299), and offers transcriptions of multiple versions of each of them.
[98] Ibid, 287.
[99] Ibid, 290.
[100] MD, 56; Śniedziewska 2014, 290. For a full translation of this programmatic passage (based on the published version of the essay) see Appendix.
[101] Ibid, 55.

> "unrepresentative" and to question greats who are persisting by sheer force of inertia and monotonous repetition.[102]

There are two ways of reading this text. One is to take literally its blatant anti-academicism, its personal jab at those who engage with art "out of lowly financial motives, meaning professionally", or its fetishisation of "naïve" experience, acquiring a perhaps rather patronising undertone when formulated by someone as erudite as Herbert. The other is to read the Duyster essay not as a rejection of art-historical research, but as an intervention in the discipline aimed at shaking "established canons" and hierarchies "validated as 'natural'".[103] If we dare not to be discouraged by Herbert's voiced impatience with the "theoretical justifications" that he believes to be killing affective authenticity, we can see that *Mali Mistrzowie* is a deeply *theoretical* project, in that it aims to deconstruct "historically determined structures of dominance" and to offer, to borrow Umachandran and Ward's phrase, "alternative modes of knowledge-making that do not pre-suppose unmarked subjects or objective encounters".[104] If "Duyster's" programmatic core feels whimsical, it should remind us that, as feminist theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha highlights, theory can only remain truly "theoretical" as long as it does not "lose sight" of its speculative, "conditional nature", exposing through its own artifice the artifice of "existing power relations".[105] It is only by being "frivolous or even risky" that theory can resist the "standardization and commodification of knowledge" it aims to disrupt.[106]

What is more, this is not the first time Herbert's theoretical potential has been recognised. Writing on the essay "The Gordian Knot" ("Węzeł Gordyjski", 1981), Zbigniew Mańkowski finds "the incisiveness of a cultural critic" in Herbert's attentiveness to the way modern culture legitimises violence, a fact Herbert traces back to Alexander the Great.[107] Attempts to extract a "theory of cognition" from Herbert's writing on embodied experience or to read him against influential theorists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (phenomenology) or Hans-Georg Gadamer

[102] MD, 56.
[103] Minh-ha 1999, 263.
[104] Elliott and Attridge 2011, 11. Umachandran and Ward 2024, 14.
[105] Minh-ha 1999, 263.
[106] Wolfe 2011, 47.
[107] Mańkowski 2006, 204. "Węzeł" was first printed in *Więź* 6 (1981): 40-46, reprinted in WG, 72-79.

(hermeneutics) have already been undertaken by Dorota Kozicka and Marta Smolińska-Byczuk respectively, although both scholars ultimately rejected this endeavour due to the lack of coherence in Herbert's approach to art and experience.[108] Yet, this very "resistance" to epistemological determinacy and "totalising" systematisation has always been one of critical theory's "signature reflexes".[109] Consequently, neither the internal contradictions within his oeuvre (which are also the reason for the inexhaustible polyvalence of his work) nor his habit of "never defining his terms" should obstruct us from approaching Herbert's reflections on reception as a *body of theory*.[110] As Pantelis Michelakis points out, "in the absence of a dominant theoretical paradigm to replace poststructuralism", in the past few years the discipline of classics has become fertile ground for interdisciplinary applications of various scientific fields and schools of theory, and given the new challenges to classical reception scholarship I outlined above, this search for new frameworks of thought is likely to continue.[111] It is in this context, then, that I would like to propose a reading of Zbigniew Herbert as reception theorist, whose writings have the power ask wider questions about the process of reception that transcend the scope of the individual case study.

Unfortunately, however, Herbert never collected his thoughts on reception as programmatically as he was trying to do with art in *Mali Mistrzowie* – like ancient fragments, they must first be assembled into an (in)coherent whole. To do so, this thesis will necessarily devote less space to what I consider instances of classical reception in its most straightforward definition, i.e., modern responses to or reworkings of distinct aspects of antiquity: Herbert's classically inspired poetry and plays (*The Philosophers' Cave* and *Reconstruction of the Poet*). Instead, I will zoom in on the many snippets of theoretical speculation on the *workings* of modern contact with the past which can be found primarily in *LNM* and *BO*, but also in Herbert's press interviews, private correspondence, and, as already featured above, his archive. A conceptual hybrid of

[108] Kozicka 2006, 76-78; Smolińska-Byczuk 2006, 112-15. Dariusz Czaja (2020, 408) similarly rejects the idea that Herbert could be constructing a "theory" of art, however displaying a rather narrow understanding of theory as a "closed system of thought".
[109] Elliott and Attridge 2011, 2.
[110] Kozicka 2006, 78.
[111] Michelakis 2020, 18.

Herbert's own cataloguing system and the order brought into the material by National Library archivists such as Henryk Citko, the AZH constitutes a challenge seemingly opposed, and yet in this case deeply connected, to that of fragmentariness: excess. Next to the expected contents of manuscripts and correspondence, it overwhelms the researcher with hundreds of sketchbooks, dozens of research notebooks, entire folders of scans from Western scholarship, and, above all, a flood of disposables: exhibition flyers, business cards, newspaper clippings, restaurant bills, empty cigarette packs.[112] As Herbert diagnosed his own behaviour in *Diariusz Grecki* [*Greek Diary*], a posthumously published set of intimate travel notes and another crucial source for this thesis: "I'm collecting entry tickets, trolleybus tickets, brochures. At this rate I'll soon be digging in the trash."[113] A classic instance of Herbert using humour to mask what Ryszard Koziołek, reviewing Franaszek's biography, identified as a deeper issue: "Why did [Herbert], lying and confabulating, collect all traces of his real life with such care?" [114] To Franaszek himself, Herbert's obsession with collecting even the tiniest "dregs of existence" was an "attempt at opposing time" – and this is exactly where his archive can be said to embody his understanding of the relationship between temporality and objecthood, one of the most crucial aspects of the theory of reception I will be assembling in this thesis.[115]

Herbert was deeply attached to physical objects – both the ordinary "things" among which "we spend our lives" and the artworks and artefacts to be found in museums.[116] While the former occupy a central place in Herbert's poetry, his encounter with the latter dominates the prose – and thus Herbert's reception theory. As Chapter 3 will show, it is the historical object or artwork that emerges as the locus of communion between the modern receiver and the object's point of origin, as the one thing that can make us experience the "simultaneity of history", a distinct temporal model formulated by Herbert I will juxtapose with Reinhart Koselleck's theory of temporal multiplicity. As Chapter 2 will explore, his affective attachment to the possibility of

[112] Antoniuk 2017, 37.
[113] The DG was published posthumously in the abovementioned *Mistrz z Delft* (here MD, 22).
[114] Koziołek 2018, 66.
[115] Franaszek 2022, 332.
[116] Interview with Marek Oramus, HN, 108.

experiencing this kind of palpable cross-temporal continuity is particularly interesting to think about in the context of post-war Poland, in which both the future-facing discourse of socialist modernity and omnipresent architectural destruction functioned as negations of the "presentness of the past" Herbert so insisted on. Herbert's seeking out comfort in ancient artefacts was, however, not just a question of his geo-temporal situatedness: it was also one of his main strategies of alleviating the mental anguish and depressive episodes caused by his bipolar disorder. While Chapter 4 will address this relationship between mental illness, antiquity, and theory in great detail, Chapter 1 will set up the necessary condition for these healing encounters: that of travel. I will elucidate the key role the discourse of travel writing plays in Herbert's representation of antiquity, informing his self-positioning not as self-indulgent tourist, but as his Polish readers' "envoy" in the West. The figure of the "envoy" also points to the second focal point of the chapter: Herbert's interrogation of distance in its various forms, be it the alterity of the past, socialist Poland's political separation from Western Europe, or the estrangement of post-war Polish classicists from the general public.

As this brief overview of some of my key argumentative strands has already indicated in its focus on objects, physical lifeworlds, and its tracing of the trajectory of the travelling body, this thesis will take embodiment as its main structuring nexus. In practice, this means that it will follow Herbert's own framing of classical reception as a process that happens to a body in the world, rather than in intertextual allusions on the pages of a book – an idea reflected in his "archive of corporeality", a record of travelling, eating, smoking.[117] I will carefully ground Herbert's encounter with antiquity in the historical specificity of the time-space of post-war, socialist Poland, outlining the socio-cultural climate and physical environment from which he set out to meet the Dorians in Paestum or the Minoans on Crete, doing so in the firm belief that this time-space continued to inform those encounters just as strongly as the expectations set by the classical tradition. This does not, however, signal a return to treating the historical context of totalitarianism as the main interpretative key for Herbert's ancient references. On the contrary, I

[117] Jarzyńska 2017, 233.

see the endeavour of assembling Herbert's reception theory equally as a chance to highlight a different, phenomenologically oriented stream of academic readings of Herbert which, due to their situatedness within discourses on art or travel writing, are easy to miss from a classical angle, but present excellent analyses of embodied encounters with museums or the Mediterranean landscape that deserve to be acknowledged.[118] What is more, my focus on lived reality echoes the wider "cultural" or "material turn" in the academic study of Central and Eastern European societies under socialism, which has replaced the emphasis on political history and international relations.[119] Finally, by centring my explications of Herbert's historical experience around affective and physical states such as longing, anxiety, or, in the case of Chapter 4, hunger and food insecurity, I hope to interrogate the role embodiment can play in the wider applicability of individual reception models.

[118] See for instance Brillowski 2006 (Greek landscape), Kruczkowska 2016 (Crete), Śniedziewska 2013 (museums).
[119] For an overview of the "turn" see Crowley and Reid 2002, 6. Some of its recent representatives include Bren and Neuburger 2012, Mazurek 2013, Zborowska 2019, Fidelis 2022, Wasiak 2023.

CHAPTER 1:

A GAME OF DISTANCE

> *A parking lot. A stand with Coca Cola and colour postcards. Those who are not satisfied with the reproductions are led into something of an enclosure, and then into a concrete cellar resembling a bunker. Metal valves, like those in treasuries, close and for a moment one stands in darkness awaiting the initiation. Finally, the second door opens, leading inside. We are in the cave.*
> *The cold electric light is hideous, and we can only imagine what the cave of Lascaux must have been when the living light of torches and cressets set into motion the herds of bulls, bison, and deer painted on the walls and vault. And on top of that, the voice of the guide stammering explanations.*[120]

"Lascaux", the opening essay of *BO* thematising Herbert's visit to the Lascaux cave in the south of France, is presented as a rite of passage. As the reader learns in the text's closing sentences, Herbert's confrontation with the artistic record of a human experience so remote that it might have as well as come from "another world" is a necessary precondition for the journey through Western cultural history that Herbert's essayistic project documents. In order to step on "the road [...] to Greek temples and Gothic stained glass", Herbert must first learn that "what some call the abyss of history" is no hindrance to "feeling the warm touch of the Lascaux painter on [one's] palm" – to a connection with the past.[121] "Lascaux", then, is about distance, the rewards for overcoming it, and the obstacles to doing so. And, very suitably for a text constructed like the hero's journey, complete with a descent into the underworld and subsequent transformation, it is with obstacles that "Lascaux" starts. Upon his arrival at the cave, Herbert does not find the timeless landscape of mystery that one might be led to expect by the essay's opening statement that "Lascaux does not exist on any official map".[122] Instead, reader and narrator are faced with an instantly recognisable *snapshot* of the commercialised, globalised tourist industry, both undivorceable from the year 1958 and (in a twist on Lascaux's apparent geographical indeterminacy) interchangeable with every major tourist site in Europe. In a similar spirit of interchangeability, however, this initial image of the gulf between industrialised modernity and

[120] BO, 10 (heavily edited translation).
[121] Ibid, 21.
[122] Ibid, 9.

the mythical past does little to explicate the "abyss" lying between Herbert and the prehistoric painters, nor does it confront us with the distance between East and West tantalisingly implied by the collection's title *Barbarian in the Garden*. In fact, what Herbert identifies as distancing him from the cave paintings – the design of the site around fast profit-making, the "hideous" electric light, the "stammering" voice of the guide – are symptoms of the same *malaise* of modern tourism that travel writers had been targeting at least since the nineteenth century.[123]

Herbert's sense of alienation is made even less specific by the fact that, as Robert Burden sums up, scholars of travel writing have long identified such critiques of mass tourism as thinly veiled critiques of "all that has gone wrong" with modernity more generally: industrialisation, the commodification of experience, the superficiality (or even "vulgarity") of mass culture.[124] This conflation of mass and modernity is equally palpable in Herbert, whose dismissive mention of "something of an enclosure" (*czegoś w rodzaju zagrody*) into which visitors are led like cattle foreshadows the image of tour groups as herded animals that will remain a constant throughout the travelogues.[125] It is only by disassociating oneself from mass tourism, Herbert suggests, that modernity can be momentarily left behind, whether through the retreat into one's torchlit imagination or, as in "Among the Dorians", through staying in a Greek temple until sunset when all the tourists have already driven off to the next attraction.[126] In its focus on the traveller's escape from the mechanised time of the tourist industry, fragmented into "snapshots" that reflect the fragmentation usually ascribed to "inconstant" or "liquid" modernity, Herbert's notion of ideal travel thus reinscribes the modernist tradition of the journey as an individual's return to "more archaic forms of consciousness" – in this case, of experiencing time through natural markers such as sun and fire.[127] Yet, if we follow Mark Salber Phillips in defining distance not just

[123] As Buzard (2002, 49) points out, the type of the "anti-tourist" started emerging in post-Napoleonic Europe with the rise of popular travel and the death of the Grand Tour as an elite privilege (*cf.* Pemble 1987, 72-75). On Edwardian travellers presenting themselves as "casualties" rather than "representatives" of modernity see Pemble 1987, 12.
[124] Burden 2016, 9, *cf.* Thompson 2011, 122-23. The usefulness of travel writing as a mirror of modern identity is excellently explored by Elsner and Rubiés 1999.
[125] BO, 35, 78, 202.
[126] Ibid, 35.
[127] Burden 2016, 4; Bauman 2000; Porter 1990, 203.

as a position taken up by the individual in the face of history (in this case, Herbert's self-presentation as the modern subject alienated from the past by the very condition of industrialised modernity), but also as a *dimension of representation*, we can move beyond Herbert's standardised polemic against modern travel to uncover a more nuanced image of the distance Herbert's essays are inviting us to cross.[128]

In *On Historical Distance*, Phillips locates his "expanded understanding" of the concept in the following four dimensions of every narrative dealing with the historical past: its "formal structures" (i.e., rhetoric and vocabulary), "affective coloring", "ideological demands", and the assumptions it relies on to create understanding.[129] If Herbert's description of his first impression of Lascaux is revisited with the following criteria in mind, what particularly deserves our attention is his use of the metaphor of being inside a "treasury" (*skarbiec*) to describe his access to the prehistoric paintings. As Agata Zborowska has stimulatingly analysed, the "treasure" (*skarb*) was one of the most influential "cultural fantasies" circulating in Polish society in the immediate post-wars years – a period which, as this thesis will repeatedly return to, had a highly formative effect on Herbert's relationship with antiquity.[130] The social importance of the fantasy of the "treasure" is made apparent through a quick glance at the dramatic shift in relations of material ownership that Polish society underwent as a consequence of WWII. The Holocaust, the mass displacement of the German population from the "Western territories" assigned to Poland at the Yalta Conference in 1945, as well as the general loss of life during the war all resulted in an eerie abundance of potentially "ownerless" objects, flats, and even entire residential buildings.[131] Especially in cities, these often ruined spaces became the target of "treasure hunters" (*poszukiwacze skarbów*) driven by rumours of hoards of valuables hidden beneath the rubble.[132]

[128] Phillips 2013.
[129] Ibid, 1, 6.
[130] Zborowska 2019, 12.
[131] The violent side of his ownership crisis will be explored further in Chapter 4 through the phenomenon of *szaber* (mass looting).
[132] Zborowska 2019, 40-42.

As Zborowska shows in her discussion of the emotionally charged reception of Leon Buczkowski's 1949 comedy *Skarb* [*The Treasure*], which follows a group of strangers sharing a flat in their collective descent into obsession with a treasure supposedly hidden behind one of its walls, even long after the war the "treasure" continued to be a loaded "catchphrase" symbolising a mythicised object of collective, uncontrollable desire.[133] Herbert's use of the image of the "treasury" thus emerges as evidence of his wish to give his contact with the past an affective colouring instantly intelligible to his readers: even at the publication of *BO* in 1962, the implication that the Lascaux paintings are a *treasure* is very likely to have activated the term's associations with collective desirability and high emotional value. Moreover, the post-war context is important to a complete understanding of the contrast Herbert creates between the marketable commodities on the surface and the *real treasure* underground. As Zborowska reminds us, in the immediate post-war years the mass-produced commodity, symbol of industrialised modernity, was virtually absent – not simply because of the introduction of socialism as an economic system, but because destruction and human displacement had resulted in an equal *dislocation* of objects, both from their original owners and their original contexts of circulation.[134] Even the simplest household objects became rare, unique, and difficult to acquire, a cultural shift that culminated in the "excess of meaning" ascribed to the treasure: an object most valuable exactly because least accessible.[135] In its historical context, then, Herbert's representation of the Lascaux cave paintings through the seemingly materialistic fantasy of the treasure can hardly be said to constitute a commodification of the past (that would also ironically resemble the model of the tourist as consumer Herbert so fiercely criticises).[136] What is more, it points to two

[133] Zborowska 2019, 34. Due to the lack of intact housing after the war, especially in Warsaw individuals searching for accommodation were often allocated spaces in already overcrowded flats. Herbert himself thematises this housing issue in his play *The Other Room* (*Drugi pokój*, 1961). While *Skarb* was wildly popular among the Polish public, socialist critics objected to its ideologically "dangerous" representation of post-war reality (see note below).

[134] Zborowska 2017, 427.

[135] Zborowska 2019, 12. Despite the strength of Zborowska's argument that the logic of the treasure ran directly counter to the logic of market capitalism, "treasure hunting" was condemned as anti-communist and "petit bourgeois" by the socialist authorities at the time, see ibid, 29.

[136] On the relationship between consumer culture, "historical tourism", and the past as a commodity see Wieczorkiewicz 2008, 43-52, on Herbert's opposition to this process through his emphasis on dialogue with the past see Konończuk 2013. This notion of "dialogue" will be questioned in this thesis.

important aspects of the relationship between author, reader, and text that this chapter will explore.[137]

First, the very attraction of the treasure lies in the belief that it is *there*, even if we cannot see it. Similarly, as Part 1 of this chapter will show, for most of Herbert's readers, kept behind the Iron Curtain by restrictive state policy and the Cold War divide, "the West" was a myth they could not be sure of ever seeing with their own eyes. As the "genre of thereness", travel writing activates the same mechanism of belief and concealment that is at work in our fascination with the treasure: it capitalises on the distance that lies between the reader and the object of description, its very success as a speech act depending on the fact that the reader believes despite not being able to see.[138] In addition to this context of *geographical* distance and the crucial role it plays in Herbert's construction of his travel essays as spaces of encounters with "remote civilisations", this chapter will equally explore why it is not only the West, but also the ancient past whose place in Herbert's texts is appropriately foreshadowed through the image of the treasure and its association with concealment.[139] In the opening tableau, Herbert presents himself as standing in a metaphorical "treasury", a doubly-guarded room beneath the earth (the implications of protection from assault reinforced even further by the image of the "bunker"), "awaiting the initiation" (*oczekując na wtajemniczenie*) in complete darkness. Despite the commercial nature of the sightseeing tour, contact with the past is suddenly presented as something for the select few, shrouded in secrecy not unlike that of a cult or, in an interesting echo of the Polish Underground State under Nazi occupation (*Polskie Państwo Podziemne*), of an underground organisation existing beneath the surface of public life.[140] As this chapter will explain in detail, this image is not far from post-war reality. While the classically educated Herbert might have been inside the treasury, most of his

[137] Unless explicitly stated otherwise, the term "reader(s)" always refers to Herbert's Polish readers. As Chapter 2 will explore, Herbert's inseverable connection to his Polish readers was a central part of his public self-presentation. Moreover, it was only in Germany that *BO* was translated early enough to play a significant role in his reception (1965, compared to the first English translation in 1986). Herbert's attitude towards his German recipients was marked by the wound of WWII and rather ambivalent, see Zarychta 2010.

[138] I am indebted to Jaś Elsner for this reflection on the "thereness" of travel writing.

[139] BO, 8. The image of the ancient past as a "treasure" is, of course, equally legible outside of the post-war context: on the "lure of the buried treasure" as one of the main attractions of archaeology (and especially Egyptology) see Humphreys 2004, 29.

[140] The Polish *wtajemniczenie*, translated by Anders and March as "initiation", is a direct cognate of *tajemnica*, "secret". The WWII echoes are reinforced by the mention of the "bunker" (*bunkier*).

readers, unable to learn about antiquity within the new socialist education system or from the heavily censored literary market, were left outside – but only until they picked up his travelogues.

If the first moment of passage in Herbert's heroic journey is encapsulated in the sentence "We are in the cave", his mocking approach to the "mass character of the tourist gaze" (to cite John Urry) should put into doubt whether this noteworthy use of the first person plural can truly encompass Herbert's fellow tourists.[141] Instead, I would argue that the "we" refers to Herbert *and his readers*, which hints at the second focal point of this chapter: Herbert's efforts to "initiate" his readers into distant worlds. In order to first define the gap this "initiation" must bridge, Part One will focus on the issue illustrated through the image of the treasure above: the remoteness of both the West and the past. While investigating its political and cultural causes, I will also use a close reading of the essay "Acropolis" (*LNM*) to illustrate Herbert's theoretical interest in thinking about "remoteness" more broadly. This interest will be the point of departure for Part Two, an exploration of Herbert's thinking on the related issue of mediation. Departing from Herbert's journalistic writings from the 1950s and their direct engagement with various forms of presenting antiquity to the Polish public, I will then move to Herbert's own practice of mediating distance: his construction of the travelogues as the reports of an "envoy".

Part One: Defining Distance

I. An Introduction to the Theory of Distance

Before we dive into questions of initiation and multilayeredness of distance, it is worth turning to a text which, although it exhibits the very standardised discontent with modernity and mass tourism already summed up above, holds our interest in its conception as a *theoretical exercise*: Herbert's short article "Monsieur Montaigne's Voyage to Italy", published in the weekly magazine

[141] Urry 1990, 5. Herbert's reversal of Plato's metaphor of the cave (in which descent, rather than ascent, brings illumination) has been commented ~~up~~on by Filipczuk and Filipczuk (2017, 134) in the context of the poem "Path" (*Inscription*, 1969), but also applies here.

Tygodnik Powszechny in 1966.[142] Evidently riding the wave of Herbert's popularity as a travel writer which followed the publication of *BO* in 1962, the article opens as follows:[143]

> When I will have just enough energy left to adjust the pillow beneath my head, a work will have to be written, meaning a book, not a collection of essays, titled: *An Introduction to the Theory of Travel*.[144]

The article then jumps straight to both method and rationale behind this supposed project for Herbert's old age. The method, which instantly recognises the perhaps too ambitious scope of the project, would be to narrow down the "vast" subject matter by focusing only on the "noblest" type of voyage, namely what "the Germans call *Bildungsreise*, that is the pilgrimage to the holy sites of culture".[145] The rationale behind thus analysing suitable accounts, and specifically "descriptions of Italy", "from the Renaissance until, say, the nineteenth century" would be to generate "interesting material speaking of the artistic sensitivities of the representatives of various periods", allowing Herbert to explore "changes in taste, aesthetic canons, dawns and twilights of masterpieces".[146]

This idea for a chronological study of the *Bildungsreise* across the ages, which finds real-life confirmation in a long list of works scribbled into one of the many notebooks held by the AZH, marked "Podróżnicy" ["Travellers"], might come as a slight shock to anyone familiar with Herbert as the poet of "universal values" and "timeless masterpieces".[147] The Herbert of "Monsieur Montaigne" notes the unstable nature of artistic "value", ascribes it to changes of taste across historical periods with truly historicist zeal, and, as is of great interest for reception studies, aims to prove that canonicity and beauty have indeed always been "realised at the point of

[142] "Pana Montaigne'a podróż do Italii", *Tygodnik Powszechny* 10: 6, reprinted in WG, 39-43 (my translation).
[143] For the popularity of BO, see Babuchowski's 1971 interview, where he jokingly nudges Herbert that readers have been "waiting for another *Barbarian* for years" (HN, 27).
[144] WG, 39.
[145] Ibid. Interestingly, Herbert's own mode of travelling has been repeatedly discussed as both a Goethean *Bildungsreise* and a pilgrimage to the "sacrum of art" (for instance by Mazur 2002, 189; Kozicka 2003,146; Ruszar 2014, 70-71; Kruczkowska 2016, 54;). In this, scholars have drawn on the inevitable association between any Polish travel writer and the *topos* of the Polish Romantic pilgrim (see Kalinowska 2008) whose sentimental model of (political) exile as pilgrimage was popularised during the partitions and retains an unwavering influence on the conceptualisation of Polish travel (see Bracewell and Drace-Francis 2008, vii).
[146] WG, 39 (trans. Valles). This treatment of individual travellers as "representatives" of their respective periods foreshadows Chapter 2's analysis of Herbert's self-positioning as a representative of his historical moment.
[147] AZH, akc. 17867. The list is divided into "Italy" (marked *Italia*) and "Greece".

reception".[148] Unfortunately for reception scholars, however, the article quickly gets derailed by Michel de Montaigne's *Voyage en Italie*, an object of analysis so promising and yet so disappointing in his complete lack of interest in acquiring any kind of artistic *Bildung* on his *Reise* that he stops Herbert in his tracks.[149] The rest of the article is devoted to Montaigne's own mode of travel, distinguished by an interest in local curiosities, "unfailing attention" to the "implausible stories told in villages and small towns", and his perception of the work of art as an organic part of its surroundings rather than something to "bury […] in a museum".[150] This jab at modern museal practice already foreshadows the note on which "Monsieur Montaigne" will end, and indeed we soon find ourselves faced with a reiteration of the epigraph to this chapter:

> In those times the sense of melting into the concrete otherness of passing landscapes, people, and phenomena was much stronger than it is for a contemporary traveller. The latter is shielded from the surrounding world by international hotels, the conventionality of tourism, guidebooks, maps, the hasty touching of things worthy of closer attention, the commandment to associate with universal works instead of with the inimitable, individual beauty of life. Spaces are empty (the foam of forests and towns, continents, and seas splashed on the windshield). Nowadays one travels "to-from", without the benign deities of Adventure and Accident […].[151]

Few passages in Herbert's oeuvre are equally qualified to bear out the maxim that, as Elsner and Rubiés put it, "modern travel writing is a literature of disappointment".[152] In this melancholic record of Herbert's discontentment with globalisation, "to-from" tourism as the death of travel as a heroic quest, and, perhaps most strikingly, the emptiness of modern space, we find (almost prophetic) traces of what David Harvey would later define as the postmodern condition of "time-space compression", itself a direct consequence of the "railway logic" of "annihilating" the time-space between arrival and departure through the ever-increasing speed of the journey.[153]

Yet, as the introduction to this chapter has already shown, such formulaic complaints are only the surface of Herbert's travel writing, and the same is true for "Monsieur Montaigne". At this

[148] Martindale 1993.
[149] Herbert abbreviates the full title of the work, *Journal de voyage de Michel de Montaigne en Italie, par la Suisse et l'Allemagne en 1580 et 1581.*
[150] WG, 41.
[151] Ibid, 43 (edited translation).
[152] Elsner and Rubiés 1990, 5.
[153] Harvey 1990, 240; Henrikson and Kullberg 2020, 6. On the "non-place" as a symptom of modernity see Augé 1995. *Cf.* Herbert's construction of "Lascaux" as the "hero's journey".

point, it is worth going back to Herbert's initial plan for his *Introduction to the Theory of Travel* and its interest in the various layers of reception "Italy and its art" had been overwritten with ever since the Renaissance.[154] Although Herbert never wrote the *Introduction* per se, many of the travelogues collected in the abovementioned list of primary sources resurface in another text whose composition process begins roughly a year after the completion of "Monsieur Montaigne": the essay "Acropolis" (1969), later included in the manuscript of *LNM* (1973).[155] Despite obviously not being concerned with Italy, "Acropolis" acts as a window into what Herbert's theory of travel, or perhaps *theory of distance*, could have been, drawing the reader into the very game of presence and absence Joshua Billings has since termed "the erotics of reception".[156] The essay starts with a short description of Herbert's arrival in Athens, littered with doubt as to whether his experience of the Acropolis would be anything but the "repetition of a creed", participation in the "age-long conspiracy of delight" that had elevated this "ruin" to its almost mythical status.[157] Rather than presenting the reader with an answer, Herbert turns his first glimpse of the Acropolis ("high up above – there it is!") into a tantalising cliff-hanger, and in the opening sentence of Section I it is not the narrator, but the ancient Persians whom we witness climbing the hill in their attack on the site during the Graeco-Persian wars.[158] From the slowly vanishing ruin, we have circled back to an act of violent destruction that constitutes both an end and a beginning in the story of the Acropolis – a pattern the essay will repeat over and over.

In his narrative of the site's fifth-century reconstruction, Herbert devotes a significant amount of space to the larger-than-life and yet elusive figure of Pericles, highlighting the biases of ancient authors such as Thucydides, Plato, or Plutarch. Despite ultimately granting narratorial authority to the "touching and human" portrait of the statesman constructed by Plutarch, Herbert uses the uncertainty surrounding Pericles' "true" character to demonstrate that the constructedness of the

[154] WG, 39.
[155] Herbert mentions writing "Monsieur Montaigne" in a postcard to the Czajkowskis dated 29/09/1965 and sent from Kazimierz, Poland (ZHKZ, 87). For the composition history of "Acropolis", begun in 1966 and interrupted by a severe depressive episode, see Chapter 4.
[156] Billings 2010.
[157] LNM, 96.
[158] Ibid.

past begins much further back in time than might initially seem.[159] As if to double down on the warning he had just attached to ancient written sources, Herbert then applies the same care to explicate that even the seemingly direct, material presence of the past constituted by the Acropolis complex itself cannot serve as an entry into the ancient reality it originated in: the reader is reminded that even "leaving aside the condition the site is in […] we now see the Acropolis completely differently than did the ancients".[160] One reason for this is, of course, the tourist industry, "for the convenience" of which "the ancient road travelled by processions to the sacred hill was replaced" by an easily accessible, tree-lined path designed to maximally streamline the process of visiting the Acropolis.[161] But beyond the expected stumbling block of commercialisation, the issue runs deeper. Suddenly surprisingly open about applying the category of tourism even to antiquity, Herbert explains:

> Ancient tourists were less sensitive to the purely aesthetic qualities of architecture […] but they were crazy about these curiosities (like the model of the Trojan horse), monuments, ex vota, trophies, tombstones, reliquiae, trees, and stones of mythical origin.[162]

As his source for this ancient "craze", he cites the "meticulous descriptions" of travellers "like Polemon of the second century BC" or Pausanias, a shameless "lover of curiosities" whose passion for rarities such as the above leads him to neglect objects of greater modern interest, such as the Parthenon itself.[163]

The problem, then, lies not in the changed topography of the Acropolis, nor in the different ways movement through it was regulated – it lies in the difference in expectations, cultural formation, and, as embodied manifestations thereof, different *ways of looking*. While Herbert's

[159] LNM, 98. Plutarch's *Lives* might be the most influential ancient source in *LNM*, both as a primary source and a repository of other sources that Herbert cites independently without indicating their origin, such as Telecleides or Duris of Samos (LNM, 142, 140). Next to "Acropolis", drawing on the *Pericles, Sulla,* and *Demetrius*, another Plutarch-heavy essay is "The Case of Samos" (*Pericles*).
[160] LNM, 103.
[161] Ibid, 102.
[162] Ibid, 103.
[163] LNM, 119. Since no works by Polemon survive, Herbert could have encountered him either in another primary text, a secondary work, or an introduction to a translation of Pausanias. Unfortunately, both the English and the Polish translations listed in the inventory of Herbert's library (Fortuna 2024) are later than "Acropolis" itself (Levi 1971 and Niemirska-Pliszczyńska 1973 respectively).

interest in different orders of the gaze will be investigated in detail in Chapter 3, at this point I would like to focus on the conclusion to which his detailed analysis of the Acropolis' consumption by the ancient gaze ultimately leads:

> The sculptures were polychromatic, covered with gold, painted sky blue, red, and brown — and not at all "discreetly," as the pale aesthetes would have it. Those brightly colored images of the ancient heavens were not made for us, but for the merchant from Delos, the peasant from Boeotia, for the delegates of remote and impoverished cities of the [Delian] League, and they were meant to dazzle them.[164]

The reason why we modern viewers "see the Acropolis completely differently than did the ancients" is clear, Herbert firmly states: it was not built for us, and we are not meant to find ourselves and our own aesthetic preferences reflected in the past. In this passage, sparked by the issue of nineteenth-century whitewashing already mentioned in the Introduction, Herbert addresses the much-debated question of recognition and its "promise of overcoming distance" that reception studies has been scrutinising at least since Goldhill's insistence on the centrality of historicism to the methodology of the discipline.[165] More recently, discussions of the notion of recognising "ourselves" in the Graeco-Roman past have been centred around its difficult reliance on the apparent "universality" of both the classical and the "naturalised category" of an unmarked "we", usually meaning Western culture.[166] In Herbert's case, however, the contents of the "we" do not seem to matter: regardless whether it designates modern tourists in general or Herbert's Polish readers, both groups are separated from the ancient experience of the Acropolis by the same "irreducible difference from the past".[167]

This is, moreover, when we (the readers of this text) might be reminded of "Monsieur Montaigne" and its mention of the "concrete otherness" (*konkretna inność*) of the travelled world that the modern traveller is "shielded from" by "international hotels, the conventionality of tourism", etc. If we follow Herbert in claiming that a slower, less commercialised mode of

[164] LNM, 104-5 (edited translation).
[165] Michelakis 2020, 9; Goldhill 2011 is representative of this approach.
[166] Umachandran and Ward 2024, 13. Formisano and Kraus 2018, 19 argue that transparency about the Western-centric nature of this "naturalised we" allows reception scholars to keep recognition as a useful analytic tool for cultural self-definition.
[167] Butler 2019, 390.

travelling could reinstate the possibility of "melting into" otherness, a clear contrast between geographical (or cultural) and temporal distance emerges.[168] While the former can be bridged through the right behaviour and attitude, Herbert seems to suggest, the latter is trickier to navigate – and the final section of "Acropolis" makes it clear why. Leaving Periclean Athens behind, section II takes the reader through "two and a half thousand years" of "war, siege, pillage, and profanation" lying between the construction of the site and Herbert's modern visit.[169] Drawing heavily on the reading list originally linked to the *Introduction to the Theory of Travel*, the narrative is constructed from direct and indirect quotations from different travellers roughly divided into three categories.[170] First, "enthusiasts" of antiquity, antiquarians, and early archaeologists such as Edward Dodwell or Jacob Spon, who struggle with the Ottoman authorities over access to the site; second, sleazily portrayed diplomats such as count Choiseul-Gouffier or the Earl of Elgin, who abuse their political position to ship antiquities out of Greece; and finally the archetypical "tourists" of the nineteenth century, "romantic pilgrims" such as François-René de Chateaubriand, who sigh over the "enslavement" of beautiful Greece by the Turks.[171] Then follows a military-historical account of the Acropolis' fate during the Greek war of independence, and finally a brief explanation of the reconstruction of the site after its destruction during the latter, learnedly referred to with the archaeological term *anastylosis*.

"High up above – there it is!", with an "almost triumphant" cry, a direct repetition of the phrase that had first heralded a return into the past, Herbert recalls us into the present, inviting us to finally witness his long-awaited confrontation with the "object of [his] dreams".[172] As the careful ring composition cements, the long historical excursion it took him to get there served a specific purpose: to signal a *second*, spatially-coded type of distance that, on top of the modern subject's

[168] This is also where the "theoretical" component of the *Introduction* could be read, despite its planned focus on reception, as designating the text as a theoretical blueprint for the ideal mode of travel (in Herbert's case, the slow, pre-modern journey).
[169] LNM, 109.
[170] The notebook *Podróżnicy* (note 27 above) lists all accounts cited below, with additional overlaps consisting in Pausanias, Strabo, and Jacques-Paul Babin (1674).
[171] LNM, 117-123. Dodwell 1819, Spon 1678, Choiseul-Gouffier 1782, Chateaubriand 1811.
[172] Ibid, 129. The geographical determinacy of Valles' original translation of "high up the hill" forecloses the interactions into which the phrase *wysoko w górze* can enter not only with the wider framework of Herbert's spatial language of distance, but also with the semantic field of canonicity, its "heights", and the clear hierarchy of ancient objects at the top of which the Acropolis exists in Western cultural imagination.

cultural difference from the past, plays a separating role in this encounter. As Herbert spells out with reference to himself and the Acropolis in one of the essay's final paragraphs, this distance lies in the "vast expanse of time [*ogromna przestrzeń czasu*] separating our dates of birth" – or, as the Polish *przestrzeń* could equally be translated, the *space* of time lying between classical antiquity and the twentieth century. Similarly to conceptualisations of "deep time", itself tightly linked to the interconnected languages of archaeology and psychoanalysis, or Reinhart Koselleck's idea of the "sediments of time", Herbert's chronological digression presents this expanse as composed of individual strata, layers of human action that all coexist in the same material object.[173] Herbert emphasises this in the essay's conclusion:

> The Acropolis I had before my eyes, reduced to a skeleton, stripped of its flesh, was for me [*był dla mnie*] equally a work of will and harmony and of chaos, artists and history – the work of Pericles and Morosini, Iktinos and the looters.[174]

Here, Herbert seems to embrace the *fullness* of time lying between him and the "original" Acropolis, using a language of personal connection ("was *for me*") to display his understanding of both the violence the site endured over the centuries and its undivorceability from its current shape.

Herbert's emphasis on such understanding is directly linked to his earlier comment, delivered not without a hint of smugness, that "not many tourists who visit the Acropolis today are aware that what they see is the work of more than a hundred years of drudging reconstruction".[175] Recognising the "expanse" of time between modernity and antiquity and the layers of human interference it comes with, then, is more than just a thought experiment. It is what allows the modern receiver to remain wary of what could be singled out as the *third type of distance* identified by "Acropolis": the illusion of temporal proximity suggested by *material* proximity, particularly if aided by modern reconstruction. While Herbert's fixation on the "unspoiled", *authentic* object will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, I would like to conclude this introduction to Herbert's theory

[173] LNM, 129. On the stratification of deep time see Butler 2016. Koselleck will be returned to in Chapter 3, acting as a point of reference for its discussion of Herbert as a theorist of temporality.
[174] Ibid, 130.
[175] Ibid, 127.

of distance by spotlighting this pose of superiority, and the mocking of the *delusion* of proximity that comes with it. Despite having arrived in the present, with the "real", contemporary Acropolis towering above the text, Herbert-the-author does not end his game of absence, performing textually what the narrator describes himself as doing physically a few lines later: "postponing the moment of encounter with the Acropolis" by "wandering through the city", "writing postcards", "drinking coffee".[176] In the text, this attempt to forestall the encounter takes the form of an equally body-centric questioning of the wish to see the Acropolis in person when so many accounts of it exist already:

> Why then this overwhelming will to confront it, this passion pushing me toward physical proximity [*do zbliżenia fizycznego*], this desire [*pożądanie*] to put my hands on it, to form a bodily union, and then tear myself away, leave, and take with me – what? An image? A shudder?[177]

Taking the "erotics of reception" to a literal level, Herbert goes from double entendre to double entendre, building up an erotic charge that has now been firmly identified as present in almost all aspects of modern contact with antiquity.[178] Unfortunately without an English equivalent, the most heavy-handed innuendo lies in the word *zbliżenie*, signifying both proximity and sexual intercourse, while *pożądanie* can be translated as strongly as lust, and the post-coital implications of the "shudder" (*dreszcz*) have already been noted by Bożena Shallcross.[179]

Yet, in light of Herbert's absolute reticence on the topic of eroticism, let alone sexuality, across his oeuvre, it is doubtlessly clear that this passage is designed not as a serious consideration of the connection between sex and antiquity, but as its parody.[180] Herbert's wide reading within the travelogue genre, as well as his interest in its status as a locus of classical reception (excellently

[176] LNM, 129.
[177] Ibid (heavily edited translation).
[178] Even beyond the inseverable link between antiquity, psychoanalysis, and histories of (homo)sexuality (Armstrong 2005, Orrells 2015, Butler 2019), now retrospectively colouring our engagement with the (often oversexualised) Graeco-Roman world, scholars have equally found "structures of desire" within philological practices (Güthenke 2020, 13) or the teaching context, in which the erotics of absence is mobilised to generate student interest in antiquity (Humphreys 2004, 27-33).
[179] Shallcross 2002, 66. Similarly, in the original Polish of the "high up above" exclamation, the use of the masculine pronoun *on* for the Acropolis allows Herbert to make the sentence end on an almost sensual gasp ("*Wysoko w górze – on!*").
[180] As Tomasik 2018, 211 notes, not a single poem published during Herbert's lifetime thematises romantic or sexual experiences.

exemplified by "Acropolis"), suggest that the target of his cynicism is not just the "erotic classicism" of "pale aesthetes" such as Winckelmann, but also the long tradition of Grand Tourists seeking "new understanding[s]" of antiquity in erotic adventures on "classical soil", as famously captured in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Roman Elegies*.[181] Rejecting the erotic as both a mode of knowledge and a key driving force behind Northern European travel to Italy and Greece, Herbert thus marks his own difference in his capacity as both receiver of antiquity *and* traveller (even if it means putting into doubt the emphasis on the embodied encounter with antiquity that, as this thesis will show, dominates his reception practice). Immediately after his parody of passion, he states categorically:

> I never ceased to believe that the Acropolis really existed; a face to face encounter with it was not necessary to reinforce that faith. The Acropolis was a true miracle. It didn't lead my senses into temptation, it didn't promise that it would be something it was not.[182]

Again rejecting the language of seduction, and now ultimately resolving the game of absence, Herbert presents the "face to face encounter" with ancient remains as a *false* promise of proximity that emerges as insignificant in the face of true "faith" in the continued presence of the past.[183] Yet, this presentation of the existence of the Acropolis as a matter of "belief" in the industrialised age of postcards and mass-tourism might strike one as odd.[184] In order to understand where this rhetoric is coming from, and how it ties into Herbert's exclusion of himself from the pattern of experience established by the tradition of the Grand Tour, we must take a closer look at the paragraph lying between Herbert's triumphant exclamation and his cynical parody of the erotics of the cross-temporal encounter.

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[181] Güthenke 2020, 19; Armstrong 2005, 17. J. W. Goethe, *Römische Elegien,* V. 9-10. That Herbert recognised Goethe's shaping influence on the European tradition of travel and his own place within in is exemplified by his citation of the famous aphorism from *West-Östlicher Diwan*, "*Wer den Dichter will verstehen, muss in Dichters Lande gehen*", as the leading motivation behind his "pilgrimage" to the works of the Renaissance painter Piero della Francesca (BO, 166).

[182] LNM, 129.

[183] Despite his cynicism here, Herbert takes up the notion of being *seduced* by the beauty of the travelled world in his poem "Prayer of Mr Cogito, Traveller" (1983), whose seemingly apologetic tone is abandoned in the final lines: "and if this is Your seduction I am seduced | for good and past all forgiveness". On travel as a source of guilt for Herbert see section II below.

[184] That is unless we have the same psychoanalytic interest in the mechanisms of denial and repression that Freud exhibits in his letter to Romain Rolland, discussed by Herbert in the essay "Animula" preceding "Acropolis" in the *LNM* manuscript.

II. The Abyss of Experience

After finally reaching the Acropolis, Herbert elongates the sense of triumph by explicating the emotional weight of the moment:

> The road was long and winding and the chance that I would reach my destination—negligible. I had to overcome obstacles, office walls, closed doors, corridors, and a whole pack of petty Cerberuses behind desks, hesitating over whether to bring down the magic stamp, holding and braiding the thread of my adventure in their fingers.[185]

It is at this point that we must step out of the impersonal space often ascribed to theory and recognise the reality in which all of Herbert's reflections on travel are deeply rooted: that of the Cold War, and the restrictions on travel it was marked by.[186] Although research following the "cultural turn" in Cold War studies now shows that spatial mobility between the two blocs was "greater than previously assumed", emphasising small-scale entanglements over the rigidity of international relations, it is important to view this retrospective reassessment of "impenetrability" of the Iron Curtain in parallel with the image of frustration above, which dominates both testimonies from the period itself and later reflections on it by Eastern Europeans.[187] Herbert's classicised description of getting a visa, in which bureaucrats become "Cerberuses" or even Moirai, "braiding" (*plątających*) the thread of Herbert's destiny, is an accurate description of the experience of attempting to legally leave the Polish People's Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, hereafter PRL), a country whose citizens did not have passports unless temporarily granted one after a thorough screening by the state authorities.[188] Moreover, the sensation of anxiety and powerlessness emanating from this tableau showcases that the Iron Curtain was "as much a *mental* as a physical barrier": even if numerous individuals managed to overcome the "obstacles" set up by the socialist security apparatuses, whether by privilege,

[185] LNM, 129.
[186] Minh-ha 1998, 263.
[187] Pedersen and Noack 2019, 3-4. For the Iron Curtain as "semipermeable membrane" rather than a "wall" see David-Fox 2014. For a wide selection of passages from east European writings on Cold War travel see the chapter "Europe Divided (1945-1989)" in Bracewell 2022. For comments on the "difficulty" of explaining the "mighty psychological and cultural effects" of the Iron Curtain see Zubok 2014, 1 and Herbert scholar Józef Ruszar 2018, 22, who even insists on their "incomprehensibility" to younger readers of Herbert.
[188] *Cf.* Kruczkowska 2016, 43. Interestingly, the classical imagery here is deeply tied to the underworld, recalling the pattern of the "hero's journey" adopted also in "Lascaux".

persistence, or luck, the existence of those obstacles alone very successfully created a cultural climate in which travel was generally considered "almost impossible".[189]

This "near-impossibility" of travel created a second condition, equally well documented in testimonies from the period: for Poles from the PRL, any *miraculously* approved journey abroad felt like their last.[190] Herbert addresses this sentiment in an 1981 interview by Marek Sołtysik:

> […] that feeling that we are seeing something for the last time. It always accompanies us Poles on our travels abroad. We have to see our fill, so that it can stay with us for the rest of our lives.[191]

Foreshadowing Chapter 4 and its discussion of reception as incorporation, Herbert here speaks of a *hunger-like* intensification of perception that this fear of the impossibility of return results in: a mixture of desire, gratitude, and the recognition of one's precarity. It is with this very sentiment that Herbert closes "Acropolis", devoting the essay's final paragraph to a delineation of the emotional state the contemplation of the complex's "wounds and mutilations" puts him into:[192]

> If I drew from this the peculiar sensation of the happiness of the endangered, it probably was because I was conscious of the extraordinary fact that "I made it" before the Acropolis and I shared the fate of all human creations on the dark promontory of time, faced with an unknown future.[193]

Again using the language of space to write about temporality, Herbert positions himself and the Acropolis on the same "dark promontory of time" (*na ciemnym przylądku czasu*), surrounded by the slowly encroaching tide of the "unknown future".

This image of Herbert and the Acropolis as two endangered "creations" on what, playing with the geographical metaphor, we might call the Cape of Little Hope vividly demonstrates not only why Herbert sets himself apart from his privileged Western predecessors within the travelogue

[189] Pedersen and Noack 2019, 3 (my italics); Burrell and Hörschelmann 2014, 9.
[190] See Wiegandt 1995, 212 for the "paralysing sensation" of seeing the West "for the first and last time".
[191] HN, 116. Sołtysik interviewed Herbert on 10 April 1981, but the publication of the interview was made impossible by the introduction of Martial Law on December 13th. It was only printed in 2001 as "Światło na murze" in *Rzeczpospolita* 175.
[192] This "woundedness" of ancient remains will be central to Herbert's idea of reception as compassion, Chapter 4.
[193] LNM, 131. This passage clarifies that throughout the essay, Herbert uses the term "Acropolis" to refer to the building complex rather than the hill itself.

tradition, but also why he might equally be set apart from modern models of reception focused exclusively on the precarity of the past. Contrary to the modern receiver in Billings' model of the "erotics of reception", for instance, the traveller from behind the Iron Curtain does not constitute a stable counterpoint to antiquity's flickering between presence and absence: their presence, too, is bound to the difficulty of arrival and the improbability of return. In this context, then, the game of absence becomes a game with two variables, both governed by a comparable (though of course in no way similarly caused) sense of precarity and urgency. But most importantly, the fact that for most Poles the other side of the Iron Curtain was either literally "unreachable" or at least considered to be thus adds a crucial dimension to the idea of distance as a factor governing Herbert's work.[194] So far, I have traced Herbert's understanding of the various types of distance lying between modernity and antiquity: our cultural difference from the past, the magnitude of time separating us from antiquity and its stratification into individual, distinct layers of experience, and finally, the illusion of co-presence (taking the form of blind belief in either reconstruction or, historically, the approximating powers of erotic experience). Now, however, we must turn our gaze to a more specific and differently directed type of distance, namely the distance between the world of Herbert's travelogues and that of his readers – a world system in which Herbert himself occupies an ambiguous, difficult position.

While Herbert's descriptions of the precarity of Eastern European travel, equally significant in *BO* as they are in the above-cited passages from "Acropolis", can hardly be dismissed as fiction, it must be emphasised that there is a particular *strangeness* about their presence in the writing of an individual allowed to move between Poland and the West with a regularity both ordinary Poles and many of Herbert's literary colleagues in political exile could only dream of.[195] To give an example, the more common fate was that of the dramatist Sławomir Mrożek, who was denied a

[194] Kozicka 2006, 52.

[195] The accuracy of the bureaucracy passage is confirmed by archival material, such as a postcard sent to the Czajkowskis from Rome (31/08/1964), in which Herbert writes that after 10 days of bureaucratic ordeals that could as well amount up to "working part-time" at the Greek consulate, he has "already grown sick of that Acropolis" (ZHKZ, 63). In unpublished notes kept in the *Diariusz Grecki* file (AZH, akc. 17868, k. 1), Herbert also confesses that since he only received a visa for a few days, most of his stay in Greece was illegal. For the thematisation of precarity in "Siena" (*BO*) see Chapter 2.

renewal of his Polish passport by the authorities after having condemned the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in *Le Monde* and could not return to Poland for decades.[196] That same Mrożek later had a letter exchange on the topic of Herbert's "passport privilege" with the renowned science fiction writer Stanisław Lem, who, after having just met Herbert in Berlin, remarked: "He somehow constantly lives here on a consular passport – but how does he do it?"[197] The question of how Herbert "did it" is a controversial one, and the suggestion that the repeated renewals of his passport and permission to leave the PRL came with the price of "collaboration" with the Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*, SB), the Polish secret police, caused a heated debate in 2005.[198] That the SB in fact interrogated Herbert on his Western literary circles upon his returns to Poland in the period 1967-70 is well documented both in his correspondence and his file in the SB archive, but he never agreed to become an official secret agent, nor did he provide any more information on influential Polish émigrés that the SB did not already have.[199] As Andrzej Franaszek puts it in his balanced, clear-sighted treatment of what can only be described as understandable behaviour in the face of psychological terror and the threat of physical violence, that Herbert shared any information at all would be easier to discuss if it was not for the myth of the "unbroken Polish patriot" that he constructed for himself later in life.[200]

While the states of fear and mental exhaustion in which this constant "dance" with the authorities left Herbert will be discussed as part of Chapter 2's investigation of the link between travel and Herbert's mental health, for now it is important to note the general feeling of guilt that Herbert's relative freedom of movement produced in him. As if to anticipate the criticism he received from both the émigré circles and the Polish press, Herbert often publicly spoke about his

[196] Franaszek 2018b, 272. Herbert did not make any such declaration, a decision he had to defend to his friends, see ibid, 281.
[197] Letter from Lem to Mrożek, Berlin, 27/11/1969, cited in Franaszek 2018b, 278.
[198] Ruszar 2018, 21n.3 provides a good bibliography on this debate despite the insulting tone used to mention those journalists and researchers arguing for SB collaboration.
[199] In a letter from Germany dated 21/05/1969, Herbert tells the Czajkowskis that he "barely got out" of Poland and after having been "intensely" interrogated by the "catchers" (pol. *łapsy,* from the verb *łapać*, to catch), ZHKZ, 149-50. Similarly, in a letter from Berlin dated 18/06/1969, Herbert confesses to Miłosz that the SB was interrogating him on Miłosz himself and his émigré circles. Herbert writes that he was playing the litterateur and analysed Miłosz's poetry instead, but not without "fear for his life" (ZHCM, 104-5).
[200] See Franaszek 2018b, 286-302, who provides ample citations from the original SB files.

travels with a certain defensiveness, or at least *humility*.[201] In multiple interviews, he emphasises his sheer luck in being able to travel, or presents the engagement with Western art and historical sites as simply necessary for the quality of his writing.[202] Conversely, interviewed by Zuzanna Jastrzębska in 1972, in an address to the Polish youth whom he has often heard complain about being stuck in the country, Herbert downplays the value of travelling abroad, saying that although "obviously everyone should get the chance to further their education through travel", it is a "curiosity for the world outside" that is most important and can also be satisfied by travels around Poland.[203] From all the above, it clearly emerges that not only was Herbert's relationship to the Western destinations described in his travelogues completely different to that experienced by the majority of his readers, but he also had a very, if not *distressingly*, strong awareness of that difference in distance. Before we move to the textual implications of that awareness, it must first be outlined that, exactly as was foreshadowed in the chapter introduction through the image of the past as a *treasure*, Herbert's representation of antiquity was marked by the same problem of varying degrees of closeness as his representation of the West. In order to do so, we must embark on yet another journey into the past – this time not to the construction of the Acropolis, but to the period of the partitions of Poland (1795-1918), which is the key to understanding the status of classics in interwar Poland and its secondary schools, in one of which the young Zbigniew Herbert was taught Latin before WWII broke out.[204]

Each of the partitioning powers (Prussia, Russia, and Austria) took a different approach to regulating the education of its Polish subjects, which resulted in the development of three different educational systems that had to be arduously unified once Poland regained independence in 1918.[205] Polish educational institutions in Galicia profited from the political and cultural autonomy granted to it by the Habsburg Empire in 1867, and were able to determine their

[201] See Franaszek 2018b, 275-76 and Mrożek's reply to Lem, in which he bitterly remarks that Herbert "knows very well" what difference the possession of the "magic" Polish passport makes (letter, no place, 02/12/1969, cited in ibid).
[202] HN 37, 52, 86-87, 116.
[203] "Zbigniew Herbert", *Filipinka* 7 (1972): 4, reprinted in HN, 50-53 (51).
[204] Olechowska 2016, 213.
[205] Ibid, 221.

own curricula and keep Polish as the language of instruction. This was not the case under the Prussian and Russian occupations, where schools were the target of severe cultural repressions.[206] Aware of the immense significance of the classical languages, especially Latin, to the tradition of Polish humanism, both Prussia and Russia closed classical gymnasia to weaken their Polish subjects' ties with their cultural past.[207] In contrast, Galicia's cultural autonomy meant that when Herbert entered secondary school in the late 1930s, he became part of an uninterrupted line of students studying Latin at his gymnasium.[208] We should not, however, be too easily swayed by Herbert's memories of his school days, recorded in the essay "A Latin Lesson" (*LNM*). When Herbert writes that, "in those days no one (or almost no one) important questioned the use of teaching classical languages in schools", this should not be seen as reflecting interwar reality.[209] In fact, gymnasia were already being attacked as "out of touch with economic life" and the realities of the job market, as well as for using "old-fashioned" teaching methods.[210] The place of classics in Polish culture, systematically undermined during the partitions, was already precarious, and planned educational reforms were set to replace "controversial" classical education with a more "forward-looking" model oriented towards the sciences.[211]

None of this is reflected in Herbert's *tableau* of his schooldays, which, designed to assign classics an unquestioned place in the shaping of a young man, lies closer to sentimental coming-of-age novels set in the "old world" of traditional Galician schooling, such as Jan Parandowski's influential *Niebo w płomieniach* (*The Sky in Flames*, 1936).[212] Viewed through this literary lens, the "virtually military drill" imposed on the students by the Latin teacher nicknamed "Grzesio" is not "old-fashioned" but appropriate, with Herbert emphasising that the "cruelty of school" was merely preparing him and his peers for the "cruelty of life".[213] Sleepless nights filled with the memorising of conjugation endings like "magic spells" and daunting moments of "gladiatorial"

[206] Olechowska 2016, 215-6.
[207] On the importance of Graeco-Roman antiquity for the culture of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth see Grzeskowiak-Krwawicz 2017; Ruszar 2014, 67; Kalinowska 2013, 326.
[208] Franaszek 2018a, 97.
[209] LNM, 187.
[210] Olechowska 2016, 216.
[211] Ruszar 2014, 54.
[212] Franaszek 2018a, 107; Ruszar 2014, 40. For this double-displacement of Herbert's childhood see Introduction.
[213] LNM, 186. For the teacher as the ideal of manhood and *Romanitas* see LNM, 185.

courage that translating Latin texts in class required are described as not only an "exercise of the mind", but also a "molding of character".[214] In a manuscript section initially cut from the 1973 version of "Latin Lesson" and published posthumously as "Przerwana lekcja" ["The Interrupted Lesson"], Herbert even writes that separating Latin sentences into sub-clauses and grammatical constructions brought equal order into the students' minds, demanding a separation "of good from evil", "truth from lies".[215] This emphasis on Latin and Roman culture as teaching civic virtue, courage, and "stern manhood" demonstrates how strongly the study of classics is tied to the emotional double-displacement of Herbert's childhood addressed already in the Introduction, and to his efforts to place it in the wider picture of the "golden" interwar age.[216] Indeed, if "Grzesio's" Latin lessons were in fact preparing his students for the "cruelty of life", this preparedness was soon to be tested.

When the Soviet forces invaded Lviv in September 1939, schools and universities were allowed to continue operating, albeit with certain restrictions regarding the language of instruction (now Russian) and material being taught: the two banned subjects were religion and Latin.[217] This lesser version of Herbert's education was disrupted again in July 1941, when the Nazis replaced the Soviet army as the occupants of Lviv. In line with their goal to eliminate Polish educational structures, they shut all schools and carried out mass-executions of university professors almost immediately after their entry into Lviv.[218] In this way, Herbert was forced to complete his secondary education within the "clandestine educational network" built by the Polish Underground State.[219] This underground education, which defined an entire generation of Poles,

[214] LNM, 185-86. The work of Christopher Stray acts as an excellent illumination of similar rhetoric in the British context and points to education as a locus of reception, see for instance Stray 2018.
[215] "Przerwana lekcja", *Zeszyty Literackie* 2 (2003): 63. In a recent study, Gruchała (2017) questions the framing of the piece by *ZL*, noting that the "Lesson" manuscript is composed not out of two but three parts, of which the middle part (AZH, akc. 17855, t. 11) still has not been published. The manuscript's final part, a consideration of possible reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire intertwined with memories of Herbert's last Latin lesson before WWII, perfectly fits the narrative that socialist censorship was the reason for the shortening of the essay. The second part, roughly constituting an essay on Rome's dependence on Etruscan city planning, the quality of Roman roads, and art in the Roman provinces lacks the same political thrill.
[216] LNM, 195. Although the narrator admits that the Rome he was taught about was an "idealised Rome" (LNM, 195), he still finds comfort in the apparently straightforward applicability of the lessons imparted by Latin which, in its clarity and order, acts as a contrast to the morally grey reality of life.
[217] Ruszar 2014, 52.
[218] Axer 2013, 190-91.
[219] Franaszek 2018a, 164.

poses a "whole set of research problems" impossible to solve, such as what was taught, by whom, and to what standard.[220] After the war, Herbert chose the "pragmatic" degree of economics at the then so-called Academy of Commerce in Kraków, without pursuing any further formal education in classics.[221] That this would have been difficult under the Stalinist and Communist regimes anyway started revealing itself soon after the war ended. Initially, the surviving part of the Polish academic community set to rebuild higher education, and in this vein, all six pre-war Classics departments were restored by 1946. Under the growing political pressure between 1949 and 1955, however, the Ministry of Higher Education decided to end student enrolment at three of these departments already in 1952. Although academic research remained largely independent due to the efforts of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and to the Communist Party's perception of classicists as politically unimportant, the teaching of Latin in schools was more controversial.[222] Various educational reforms, targeting its "bourgeois" connotations and "backwardness", reduced Latin to an elective that had to compete with modern Western languages and could not be taught unless a practically unreachable number of students was met (25 students).[223]

From this, it emerges that while Polish classicists managed to close ranks and save their research from ideological pressure, which guaranteed a "silent survival" of the discipline, outside of the safety of the ivory tower classics started to fall into irrelevance.[224] It became, in the words of Bibik and Mizera, "condemned to elitism", and a "niche" interest that lost its currency in "public communication".[225] The sensation that it was the socialist regime which completed the disappearance of classics from Polish public consciousness is also dramatised by Herbert in "Latin Lesson". When the adult-narrator finally arrives in Rome "twenty years" after he had hoped to do so in the company of his Latin teacher and classmates, he feels estranged:

[220] Olechowska, 2016, 213.
[221] Franaszek 2018a, 221. Herbert also attended lectures in law and philosophy, but never finished those degrees.
[222] Axer 2013, 191-94.
[223] Brzuska 2016, 270-71. Many classics teachers tried to oppose those changes by speaking out in the media or continuing to hold their classes unofficially.
[224] An example of such academic opposition was the successful blocking of a project to ban Roman law from universities in 1946 (Wołodkiewicz 2013, 241).
[225] Bibik and Mizera 2018, 18.

> The territories where I was born then no longer belonged to the Roman Empire. To be correct, they never had, in the political sense. If they belonged it was in another sense entirely.[226]

Rightly taking a step back from his initial implication that Lviv had somehow belonged to the Roman Empire in the past, Herbert steers his reader's attention towards a different, less "political" boundary – what Józef Ruszar has called the "mental *limes*" that encircles the territories where ancient languages are still taught, and the classical tradition is still alive.[227] Ignoring deeper-running distinctions between East and West, Herbert here creates an alternative cultural geography in which Galicia had belonged to the same cultural unit as Western Europe as long as its connection to Graeco-Roman antiquity had not been externally severed by violent turns of history and socialist cultural policy. Yet, while thus subtly blaming the Cold War world-order for his estrangement from Rome, Herbert equally spells out the conclusion my excursion into Polish educational history has been heading towards.

Even if we assume that acquiring a classical education had been an accessible and popular choice in interwar Poland (which has emerged as rather disputed itself), after the war, "beyond the *limes*", it became a sign of elitism, if not *eccentricity*. As was already repeatedly hinted at, this had major implications for Herbert's essayistic project: as an author, he could not depend on reader knowledge of either the West *or* the past, and, unsurprisingly for someone so strongly occupied with questions of distance, *he knew that*. In 1965, during the composition process of what would become "On the Etruscans" (*LNM*), Herbert wrote to Czesław Miłosz:

> I wrote about the Etruscans. Didn't turn out particularly great. Writing essays in Poland also presupposes popularisation, I have to explain what people in the West can find in any popular booklet. I was most interested in the topic: how the Romans shaped the Etruscan into a model of negative morality (negative meaning different from the Roman one). But I barely touched upon the topic.[228]

On the most practical level, this letter extract confirms Ruszar's argument, made in opposition to earlier academic imaginings of Herbert's ideal reader as equipped with a pre-war classical

[226] LNM, 169..
[227] Ruszar 2014, 70. For an alternative reading the Iron Curtain as *limes* see Pálfavi 2010, 130-31.
[228] Letter from Vienna dated 12/11/1965 (ZHCM, 51). "On the Etruscans" appeared in the monthly *Twórczość* later that year.

education, that Herbert assumed his readers to be equipped only with "cultural stereotypes" or a "high-school level of knowledge" on antiquity.[229] As a result, Ruszar concludes that in his poetry, Herbert "hardly ever ventures beyond those [cultural] templates himself", which he sees as proof of Herbert's efforts to remain comprehensible to his reader.[230] While I do not have the space to dispute this statement in the context of the poetry, in combination with my analysis of the level of theoretical sophistication and historical detail in "Acropolis" the quotation above should make it clear enough that in the essays, leaving the reader in their conform zone of stereotypes and half-knowledge can hardly be Herbert's intent.

What this letter to Miłosz also demonstrates, however, is an uncomfortable sense of split loyalties. On the one hand, there is Herbert's ambition to take his engagement with antiquity to a more sophisticated level; on the other, there is a strong awareness of the systemic lack of public access to knowledge on antiquity and the commitment to combat it, even if it means *estranging his own work from himself*. In Herbert's expression of his dissatisfaction with his Etruscan essay, his annoyance with "barely having touched upon" his topic of interest is thus mingled with an equally strong sense of obligation to push on with such a "popularisation" (*popularyzacja*) of antiquity, despite the flattening or simplifying effect he believes it to have on his writing. In what follows, I will explore this idea of "popularising" antiquity and its relationship with the wider goal of *the collapse of distance* that Herbert's essayistic project will be shown to be pursuing in its representation of the West and the past. Similarly to his interest in the different forms of distance the "abyss of time" can take, I will bring out Herbert's interest in the role mediation can take in the shortening or, if done incorrectly, *widening* of distance. Departing from Herbert's constant flickering between the positions of inside and outside (the Polish context, the classical tradition) established above, I will explore how he understands his own mediating role between the two.

[229] Ruszar 2014, 184. Ruszar defines those "cultural stereotypes" as images of antiquity anchored in popular culture through easily accessible media, such as the image of Claudius popularised by Robert Graves' novel *I, Claudius* and its BBC adaptation (1976).
[230] Ibid.

Part Two: Writing Remote Civilisations

I. Evenings with Antiquity

Although the letter extract above discusses the question of "popularisation" specifically in the context of his essays, in order to fully understand Herbert's efforts in this regard we must equally consider the extensive corpus of his press writings. Before doing so, however, the term "popularisation" and Herbert's definition of it is worth a closer look. While the semantic range of the English word "popularisation" can encompass both the act of making something popular *and* of making something accessible to a wider audience, the Polish *popularyzacja* is more closely bound to the second semantic field and usually used to signify the idea of the popularisation of science or academic knowledge (*popularyzacja nauki*). This is also visible in Herbert's letter to Miłosz, in which he speaks of "hav[ing] to explain what people in the West can find in any popular booklet", thus positioning himself as the very party needing to undertake the action of distilling the large corpus of academic knowledge into small, simplified portions of information – something that has already been done by popular science publishers in the West.[231] This discontent with a lack of accessible knowledge on antiquity both strongly confirms the picture of the postwar state of classics painted in Part One above and makes perfect sense in its context: Polish classical studies after the war was indeed "condemned to elitism", and Herbert perceptively sensed the effect this had on public interest in antiquity. In light of this state of affairs, the selection of short articles with which I will begin this section can be read not just as an expression of Herbert's interest in the workings of reception that drives this thesis, but also as testimony to a layperson's zeal to both draw wider attention to the efforts of Polish classicists to maintain the discipline's presence in public consciousness and to help them improve such efforts through constructive criticism from outside the academy.

[231] Two examples of such Western popularising "booklets" that Herbert cites in his essays and that could have thus inspired this inspired this statement are Raymond Bloch's *Les Étrusques* (1954) from the accessible series "Que sais-je?" (cited at LNM, 160-61) and A.W. Lawrence's *Greek Architecture* (1957) from the *Pelican History of Art* series (cited at LNM, 71), which a reviewer criticised as lacking precision in its "history and philology" (Plommer 1958, 279). To an extent, this also applies to Moses Finley's *The Ancient Greeks* (1963), cited at LNM, 40-41. Herbert's heavy dependence on another popular work, Leonard Cottrell's *The Bull of Minos* (1953), is traced in n.560.

While academic engagement with Herbert's art criticism from the 1950s and 1960s has recently been increasing, slowly lifting this hitherto underanalysed body of press texts out of obscurity, his numerous reviews of new classical translations and events organised by the Polish Philological Association (*Polskie Towarzystwo Filologiczne*, PTF) in the 1950s have still not received much attention.[232] On a whole, these reviews (appearing in outlets such as *Tygodnik Powszechny* [*The Common Weekly*], the monthly journal *Twórczość* [*Creativity*], or the weekly illustrated *Dziś i Jutro* [*Today and Tomorrow*]) share what Marcin Lachowski has identified as the main characteristic of Herbert's "corpus of observations" on cultural life in postwar Poland: the brief, direct form of "eyewitness testimony", eschewing political discourse in favour of the "concrete" experience of an artwork or event.[233] Taking note of this poetics of witnessing and emphasis on autopsy that will become highly important in the next section, let us move to an example of its application: a detailed review of a reading from Kazimiera Jeżewska's translation of the *Iliad*, organised by the Warsaw section of the PTF at the National Museum (*Muzeum Narodowe*) in November 1953.[234] Herbert's text, published under the highly evocative title "Włócznia cień rzucająca długi" ["The Long-Shadowed Spear"], opens with his chance encounter with a figure that can only be identified as Herbert's former Latin teacher, still characterised by the same sharp glance that always accompanied his "startling question[s] about the *plusquamperfectum passivi*".[235] "Shaking like a leaf", the old man "prophesies": "You will see, in twenty years' time nobody will know Greek grammar anymore, and Horace will only be understood by a few people!"[236] Having thus drawn the reader into this vivid vision of the dying classical tradition,

[232] On Herbert as art critic see Mańkowski 2006, Smolińska-Byczuk 2006, Lachowski 2020, Juszkiewicz 2020.
[233] Lachowski 2020, 47. For the political positionings of the post-war Catholic press see Dawidowicz 2013. *Tygodnik Powszechny* marketed itself as an "apolitical" intellectual space for the Polish intelligentsia, while *Dziś i Jutro* advocated for a peaceful integration of Catholicism into the socialist state, a leaning Herbert was aware of (WG, 725).
[234] *Tygodnik Powszechny* 4 (1953): 4 (reprinted in WG, 416-17), signed as "Patryk" (one of Herbert's journalistic pseudonyms). A complete version of Jeżewska's translation was only published in 1972.
[235] This mention of Herbert running into "Grzesio" in the street is particularly interesting in light of the image Herbert later paints of his heroic death in "Przerwana lekcja", where "Grzesio", the modern equivalent of a patriotic Roman general, supposedly falls in battle defending Poland in 1945.
[236] WG, 416.

Herbert instantly dispels it with the image of the "crowds" at the Homer reading, an event so busy many participants had to spend it "patiently standing for three hours".[237]

While devoting much space to praising Jeżewska's translation and its closeness to "Homeric reality", not least because of its direct source in the Greek (rather than English and French, as had been the case with an earlier translation by Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski that Herbert hopes can now "retire"), Herbert takes special care to render the sense of rapture among the spellbound listeners, immersed in this *authentic* experience of a Homeric recital (delivered by the actors Ewa Kunina and Henryk Ładosz).[238] Throughout the article, he sketches a contrast between philologists (*filologowie*), who "regrettably" headline the long list of past translators of Homer (also including "freaks" [*dziwacy*] and poets) and spend years "sweating out volumes" on Homeric epithets, and the "average reader" who does not need such volumes to understand their importance, who instinctively "feels" that "Hector's name […] will outlast the towers of Ilion".[239] This tone of contrast between academy and public is equally upheld in another article from 1953 titled "Wieczory antyczne" ["Evenings with Antiquity"] in which Herbert reviews further PTF events: a reading of selected passages of "Horace in translation, from Jan Kochanowski to modern poetry" and a performance of Stefan Srebrny's translation of Aristophanes' *Peace*, complete with an introduction to Attic comedy (both February 1953).[240] Again, the figure of the philologist emerges as a source of comedic effect, with Srebrny and Kazimierz Kumaniecki, the eminent philologist introducing the Horace translations, being hyperbolically praised for *actually* keeping their "brief" introductions to "10-15 minutes".[241] This time, however, the reviewed events do not fare equally well. Herbert criticises the "not so good quality" of the Horace translations selected for the first event, ultimately doubting whether the poet is really that "translatable" at all – a judgement whose potential snobbery Herbert then tries to mitigate with the slightly awkward,

[237] WG, 416.
[238] All of Herbert's comments on the translation must be seen in a purely comparative light since, despite his insistence on the importance of the Greek, he did not know the language himself (see below).
[239] WG, 417. Jeżewska herself was not a part of the classical academy and had closer links with the world of theatre.
[240] *Dziś i Jutro* 10 (1953): 12 (reprinted in WG, 418-19), signed as "Stefan Marthà".
[241] WG, 419. Kumaniecki was the president of the PTF from 1950 to 1977 and the leading figure of the Polish classical community after the war (see Axer 2013).

presumably democratisingly intended comment that "anyone who read Horace in the original probably feels the same way".[242]

That being familiar with Horace in the original was not necessarily an experience shared by many members of the audience is silently acknowledged by the next point of criticism, namely the sense of disjunction between the individual poems, which should have been "held together" by a commentary giving more information on the source text and signalling the various "changes of mood" between the translations.[243] In this comment, we can sense both the presence of Herbert's interest in the transformations of antiquity across time (the same interest that would then give rise to the layered structure of "Acropolis") and, crucially, the awareness that translation's function as a "mirror" of each subsequent age (as Herbert puts it in "Long-Shadowed Spear" in the context of Homer) might not be self-explanatory to the "average reader".[244] From this, it slowly begins to emerge that Herbert found academic efforts at the *popularisation* of antiquity to be most successful when they combined immersivity with contextualisation: antiquity should be treated as *different* enough to warrant an explanation, but none that would – through its inaccessible form or specialised language – become a barrier itself. In light of this, it is unsurprising that Herbert's review so strongly favours the Aristophanes performance led by Stefan Srebrny, one of the most innovative ancient drama scholars of his time. The first one on the Polish stage to use a dancing chorus and colourful, rather than white, costumes in the staging of a Greek play, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (Vilnius, 1938), Srebrny placed great stress on "faithfulness" to ancient theatre conventions – an approach equally palpable in his choice to abandon rhyme in favour of rhythmic arrangement in his translation, which he saw as crucial to preserve the musicality of Greek drama.[245] The lasting impact of Srebrny's *Oresteia* still resounds in Herbert's review, too, when he describes Srebrny as "transpos[ing] and reconstruct[ing] the mood and the world of Old Attic comedy" with the "same truly poetic

[242] WG, 419.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid, 416.
[245] Bibik 2021, 54, 58-9.

intuition" with which the Hellenist had previously captured the "tone" of Aeschylus.[246] In order to communicate the success of translation and performance, Herbert again draws on the audience's reaction, stating that "there was hardly a listener in the room who did not long to join the merry procession of Harvest".[247]

This image of the "merry procession" (*wesoły pochód*) perfectly captures another aspect of Herbert's favoured model of representing antiquity that shines through his texts: the idea of an antiquity that, in its very openness and emphasis on shared humanity, invites a sense of community across temporal and cultural differences. While the notion of cross-temporal communion will be the subject of Chapter 3, for now let us remain in the 1950s and follow the "merry procession" to a work that can safely be identified as having grown out of Herbert's press activity and the engagement with direct examples of popularisation – or, as we might call it in the language of the twenty-first century academy, *outreach work* – that came with it: his radio play *Reconstruction of the Poet*, written in the late 1950s.[248] The play opens with the monotone voice of the "Professor" who, according to the stage directions, starts his lecture the same way he "always" does, "like a record", and proceeds to drily outline the academic efforts to identify the yet "anonymous" writer of newly discovered fragments.[249] His listless lecture keeps being interrupted by the equally monotonous sound of water dripping from a tap, which creates a soundscape in which the Professor's technically proficient analysis is put on a par with this mundane background noise. Importantly, the lecture is soon put to an abrupt end by a scream uttered by the main character of the play, Homer, who "can't listen to this parody any longer".[250] Lamenting that "all that is left of [him] is a mythology textbook and a sample text for stylistic exercises", Homer introduces himself to the listeners in modern and colloquial terms: "I am forty-five years old. I live in Miletus. Wife, son, house with a garden".[251] After this laconic "debunking"

[246] WG, 419.
[247] Ibid.
[248] *Dramaty,* 79-100. The play was broadcast on the radio station *Polskie Radio* (06/06/1960) and later appeared in print in the journal *Więź* (no. 11/12, 1960). It was directed by Tadeusz Byrski and lasted around 30 minutes (Kopciński 2005, 139).
[249] *Dramaty,* 80-81 (my translation).
[250] Ibid, 82.
[251] Ibid.

of the scholarly theories the Professor had just presented, a scene potentially inspired by Homer's appearance in Lucian's *True Histories,* the listeners follow Homer in his occupation as a rhapsode and its tragic interruption by his sudden loss of eyesight.[252] Herbert then presents the poet's efforts to "relearn" his understanding of the world, reflected in his move from epic to minimalist poetry.[253]

As Jacek Kopciński has analysed in detail, *Reconstruction* is distinguished by a remarkable level of media awareness and paratextuality. By starting the radio play with the Professor's lecture, Herbert initially creates the illusion of popular science broadcast, the non-fictionality of which is then carefully put into question by the dripping sound, only to be fully denied by Homer's scream.[254] It is noteworthy, however, that due to the immersive nature of the radio play, even an openly fictional world stands in a direct relationship of sensory co-existence with the radio listeners – and, in the case of *Reconstruction*, this relationship of sensory co-existence is granted not to the supposedly contemporary Professor, whose voice is quickly exposed as indeed merely a "record" playing in the background, but to *Homer.*[255] In creating the paratextual world of his play, then, Herbert overwrites the conventions of the radio lecture delivered by a "specialist", a clearly insufficient means of generating public interest in antiquity, to replace it with an immersive world of *living* antiquity which, if only for the duration of the play, gives the listener the chance to "join the merry procession" by imaginatively sharing a sensory space with Homer, his son Elpenor, and, in a meta-referential way, the "ancient" audiences listening to his poetry.[256] Yet, despite the congruence of this approach to representing antiquity with the opinions expressed in Herbert's press oeuvre, the continued onslaught on the authority of philology cannot but come as a surprise to any reader familiar with "Latin Lesson" and Herbert's later idealisation

[252] Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 2.20-22. Lucian's influence here is made likely by Herbert's intensive engagement with Władysław Madyda's translation of his work, newly published as *Selected Writings* (*Pisma wybrane*, PIW) in 1958, which Herbert reviewed for two press outlets. See "Z powodu Lukiana" ["Regarding Lucian"], *Twórczość* (1958) 2: 204; "Starożytny Bezbożnik" ["A Godless Man from Antiquity"], *Nowe Książki* (1958) 4: 212. On Lucian's relation to ancient debates on Homer's biography see Kim 2010, 162-68.
[253] Herbert makes Homer recite three poems that he later publishes in his collection *Study of the Object* (1962): "Tamarisk", "Pebble", and "Attempt at a Description".
[254] Kopciński 2005, 106.
[255] Ibid, 107-8.
[256] Bearing no similarity to the Elpenor in the *Odyssey*, Herbert's Elpenor is a stock image of the "well-behaved son".

of ancient language learning as a door to understanding the essence of ancient civilisations, such as the Roman virtue system. Especially startling in this context might be the introductory paragraphs of "Evenings with Antiquity", where Herbert looks back at the time of classical gymnasia – the same one revered in "Latin Lesson" – "when the classical philologist was the personification of erudite boredom".[257]

Herbert criticises the priority ancient languages were then given over the teaching of "what is most important", namely the bigger picture of ancient societies and cultures, irreducible to the "parts of a war chariot" or the "genealogies of the gods". This is described as having changed by 1953:

> Thanks to the great reformers of philology such as Prof Zieliński, who were capable of finding crucial links connecting the ancient world with ours, these days philology is no longer a whimsical prop of a so-called general education.[258]

It would be easy, of course, to ascribe such a radical difference in opinion on classical schooling to the presence of heavy Stalinist censorship in the early 1950s, as well as to the left-leaning political profile of *Dziś i Jutro*. Yet, evidence of a strong distaste for philology as the medium that congeals the past *in the past* rather than moving it into the palpable present also features in Herbert's private correspondence with Henryk Elzenberg, his philosophy professor at the University of Toruń. In a letter from May 1952, Herbert describes himself as "escaping" a boring philosophy seminar for a lecture on the *Iliad*:

> I fled to classical philology, where Homer and Horace were being read. I was listening to Book 6 of the Iliad and attempting to "fish" for the beauty of this incredible poetry, thoroughly buried beneath philological commentary.[259]

Although Herbert's boredom and disorientation here might be primarily rooted in the fact that he did not know Greek, taken together with his press writings this letter can serve as the final

[257] WG, 418.
[258] Ibid. Herbert refers to Tadeusz Zieliński (1859-1944), the most prominent Polish classical scholar of the turn of the century, whose influence is felt in Polish classical studies even today. As a "proponent of classical education" Zieliński advocated for the continued importance of rooting modern thought in lessons drawn from antiquity (see Bibik and Mizera 2018, 21-22). Contrary to what Herbert implies, the debate around the place of classical philology in education continues to this day. For a recent overview see Vereeck et al. 2024.
[259] ZHHE, 33.

piece of the already highly expressive tableau of the young Herbert's relationship with antiquity in the 1950s, a relationship that arguably influenced the shape of the travelogues.[260]

In the Stalinist period before 1956, when Herbert had never been abroad and most likely did not even entertain the thought of ever being able to do so, and with the discipline of classics in a state of constant precarity, antiquity must have seemed *impossibly* distant indeed. In this context, it is easy to grasp the emotional value of accessible representations of the ancient world which, as Herbert wrote of another highly positively reviewed Attic comedy lecture by Srebrny, allowed its audiences to "mentally transport [themselves] south, to sunny Greece, to Athens".[261] It is easy to grasp, too, that given the practical barriers already in place between the Polish public and antiquity, any additional barriers of language or institutional access must have frustrated Herbert beyond compare. This frustrated young man, not yet haunted by the nostalgia for the days of his childhood that would come to colour their image in the early 1970s, was instead driven by a longing for greater engagement with a phenomenological notion of the ancient world as a *world to be in*. As he writes in "Long-Shadowed Spear", a world filled with everything that the "pseudo-classical translators" before Jeżewska had "stamped out": "smell, colour, the hardness of real objects".[262] From that "rhapsodic" evening, it would take another five years until Herbert could first step onto the south Italian soil on which, as he would imagine in "Among the Dorians", the Greek colonisers of Poseidonia listened to their own rhapsodes.[263] Yet, when he later came to write that experience down, he does not seem to have forgotten which representations of antiquity he had witnessed to be most effective in *bridging the distance* between the ancient material and the audience. In what follows, I will trace the questions of immersivity, seemingly transparent mediation, and the textual creation of sensory experience across Herbert's narratorial

[260] Herbert's lack of Greek is confirmed in another letter to Elzenberg, dated 16/12/1951 ("If I were to learn Greek, it'd be for Homer and Plato", ZHHE, 19).
[261] The lecture took place in Toruń in January 1951, see "Odwiedziny u Arystofanesa" ["Paying a Visit to Aristophanes"], *Słowo Powszechne* [*The Common Word*] 61 (1951): 4 (reprinted in WG, 391).
[262] WG, 417.
[263] BO, 23-4.

practice – which means a return to the context of travel and the laws of the travelogue genre that influence its portrayal.

II. An Envoy's Report

In Part One of this chapter, I showed how Herbert uses an array of travelogues spanning multiple centuries both as a reminder of the "timefullness" of all classical sites, overwritten with uncountable layers of reception, and as a genealogy of experience against which to make his own relationship with antiquity stand out. Herbert's insistence on a disjunction between his own experience and those of his predecessors, however, also enables an alternative reading in which Herbert might not want the travelogues' role to be limited to either that of his literary progenitors or of simple markers of temporal layers. To approach the question of how else their place in his text could be read, I would like to turn to *Still Life with a Bridle* (1993, hereafter MNW), the last travel essay collection published by Herbert and decidedly the one least resembling a travelogue. Out of the six essays which constitute it, only the opening piece "Delta" is rooted in a first-person narrative of Herbert's travels in Holland, while all the remaining essays explore the art, history, and cultural exceptionalism of the Dutch "Golden Age" (the seventeenth century) with only cursory references to the event of Herbert's journey.[264] Unsurprisingly, this has led to the latter being read as a mere "metaphor" for his "peregrinations" through various "metaphysical" and "ethical" questions defining the human condition.[265] One such question is the purely materialistic, "mercantile" dimension of art as a "product" or even "capital investment", thematised in the collection's second essay "The Price of Art".[266] It is also in this essay, which does not see Herbert go anywhere, that the number of cited travelogues comes second only to "Acropolis".

[264] Herbert first visited Holland in 1967, after which he kept returning to the country regularly. The essays making up *MNW* were all first published in the press between 1979 and 1990.
[265] Smolińska-Byczuk 2006, 42-43.
[266] Ibid, 59.

After a brief ekphrasis of the painting *The Painter in His Workshop* by Adriaen van Ostade, described as a particularly pragmatic and physical portrayal of the process of art creation, Herbert jumps straight to highlighting the growth of the "little Netherlands" into a "young bourgeois republic" that "*intrigued visitors* with […] the inhabitants' antlike industriousness and inventiveness, as well as their healthy, concrete, down-to-earth attitude toward life".[267] Here, we can already detect what historian of Dutch art Piotr Oczko has called Herbert's "phantasm" of the Dutch "Isles of Blessed, far removed from the reality of the PRL", with their Protestant work ethic and bourgeois culture.[268] Importantly, it is through travellers' accounts that Herbert first anchors this "phantasm" in his readers' minds. Starting with an account by William Temple, the English ambassador in The Hague, to whose idealisation of the peaceful bond between Dutch citizens he admits, Herbert moves to four more travellers (including an anonymous "French traveller") who all address the unique status of paintings in Dutch everyday life.[269] The British merchant Peter Mundy and writer John Evelyn are both cited as exhibiting "wonder" at, or even an inability to comprehend, the presence of paintings in lower-class contexts such as "artisan workshops", "taverns", or fairs where, according to Evelyn, the art objects are exhibited next to "clucking chickens [and] mooing cattle.[270] The French philosopher Samuel de Sorbière, on the other hand, admires the "aesthetic appearance" of shop signs.[271] Even though Herbert points out Temple's bias and describes Evelyn as "[letting] himself be carried away by fantasy" in his claim that peasants bought paintings for the purpose of market speculation, the travelogues are evidently used as valuable sources of information that point primarily beyond themselves.

This can be read as a contrast to "Acropolis", where the cited travelogues do provide information on the appearance and state of the Acropolis in various periods of history, but

[267] MNW, 22 (my italics).
[268] Oczko 2016, 93.
[269] MNW, 22. Temple 1673. None of the travelogues cited here feature in the notebook "Podróżnicy," which cements my reading of "Acropolis" and "Monsieur Montaigne" as a project unit arisen from the same set of thought-processes which Herbert later abandoned.
[270] Ibid, 23. Herbert refers to Mundy as having visited Amsterdam in 1640, although his travel writings were only published by the Hakluyt Society in the period 1907-36 (see bibliography). It is unclear which work by Evelyn (1620-1706) Herbert is paraphrasing.
[271] MNW, 35. Again, no book title or date is given for Sorbière (1615–1670).

simultaneously act as points of interest themselves, with Herbert evidently inviting his readers to take note of changing modes of classical reception, from antiquarian to Romantic. In "The Price of Art", however, where Herbert uses multiple travelogues from and on roughly the same period (the seventeenth century), he appears less interested in tracing the differences between various culturally coloured perceptions of the travelled country than in the construction of *the traveller gaze* as a subject position which differentiates travelogues from other historical sources. This special status of the traveller as an observer of reality is outlined early in "Delta", where Herbert describes himself as experiencing the following when walking through the streets of Veere:

> An attack of alienation, but a gentle one that touches most people transported into a foreign place. A sense of the otherness of the world, a conviction that nothing happening around takes me into account, that I am superfluous, rejected, and even ridiculous with my grotesque intention to see the old church tower. In a state of alienation the eyes react quickly to objects and banal events that do not exist for the practical eye.[272]

In context, this state of heightened attention functions as an impulse for drawing the reader's gaze to everyday objects such as letterboxes, door handles, a strange-looking vehicle cleaning the street.[273] As is widely established (and will be explored in depth in Chapter 3), this attention to and fascination with objects is one of the most characteristic aspects of Herbert's oeuvre, and only fitting for an essay collection named after the genre of the still life. Yet, it must equally be considered that the state outlined in this passage might be the very reason Herbert considers travelogues such valuable historical sources.

In a way that could almost be called contradictory to Herbert's encouragement to travellers to "melt" into otherness, expressed in "Monsieur Montaigne", here he does not seem to view the alienating nature of otherness as something to be bridged, or perhaps even something bridgeable. Paradoxically, the image of the "superfluous" and "ridiculous" traveller seems to recall both the disruptive, rushed nature of modern travel and the tactful Herbertian traveller "melting" unnoticed into the landscape, almost implying that the otherness of the foreign will "reject" the

[272] MNW, 10.
[273] Although Herbert appears to be eschewing cultural specificity here, this hyper-attention should also remind us of the hunger for reality experienced by the Polish traveller in the West.

traveller no matter what mode of travel they choose. Despite its most immediate focus on what the traveller's eyes pick up *in situ*, in light of Herbert's use of travelogues in "Price", I would like to read the above passage as less concerned with the act of travelling than with the subjectivity that travel affords – in other words, less concerned with the traveller than with the travel *writer.*[274] If this *unbridgeable alienation* makes travellers sharper and more attentive viewers of reality, then, by implication, it is only the outsider's eye that can reveal what is truly distinctive about a culture, history, or place – for the first time, it seems, distance is not something that separates, but that can bring closer.[275] Most crucial, however, is what this textual employment of travel writing can tell us about Herbert's ambitions for the reader perception of his own text and its relationship to the distance that lies between the travelling author and the immobile reader, travelled world and fantasy.

Herbert's suggestion that it is exactly a traveller's alienation from the world around him that makes his account of it unbiased and credible taps into one of the many potential configurations of the relationship between distance and *trust*, a relationship already touched upon in the chapter introduction through the proxy-image of belief in a hidden treasure. Distance can breed trust, but it can also undermine it – a risk that, as Michaela Holdenried points out, travel writing circumvents by overtly positioning itself within the discourse of autobiography.[276] Hardly anything can "vouch" for the truthfulness" of a text more convincingly than the "autobiographical pact", and as Dorota Kozicka has argued, Herbert's choice to write within the genre of travel literature (rather than the essay, as is often forgotten) itself constitutes a commitment to the representation of the very "authentic experience" of the West his readers *trust* him to deliver.[277] As if the "autobiographical pact" provided by the travel genre was not enough,

[274] That travelling has a defamiliarising effect on our perception of reality is a truism of the genre (see Eisner 1991, 8) and does not require further debate.
[275] This does not seem to have been confirmed by the underwhelming reception of MNW in the Netherlands themselves (despite the local popularity of Herbert's poetry). Dutch reviewers were divided into those calling Herbert's Holland a self-fulfilling collection of clichés and those reading it more generously within the thematic arcs of his oeuvre and the influence of his own political context (Kalla 2010, 39-42).
[276] Holdenried 2019, 680.
[277] Ibid; Kozicka 2003, 150. On the "autobiographical pact", a term coined by Philippe Lejeune which presupposes an equivalence between the author, narrator, and protagonist of a work see Missinne 2019.

however, we can observe how Herbert uses its representatives to set an example for his own reception: as perceptive historical witnesses, reliable records of *how reality really was*, as if to assure his reader that he, too, will tell them exactly how the reality of the far-away West *really is*. In the transmission of a message as important as his own credibility, however, Herbert did not simply rely on intertextual games: instead, in the years following the success of *BO* he established a persona through which to promote his travel writing, repeatedly reinscribed across press interviews and the later essays in *LNM*. This persona, which might be best called *the envoy of all those who could not travel*, takes its beginning in the author's preface to *BO* (1962).

Herbert opens *BO*, and thus his entire essayistic project, with the words: "What is this book in my understanding? A collection of essays. A report [*sprawozdanie*] from a journey."[278] The Polish word *sprawozdanie*, semantically slightly different from *raport*, the word used by Herbert in one of his most famous poetry collections, *Report [Raport] from a Besieged City*, can mean an account as formal as the minutes of a meeting, and carries strong connotations of reporting back to a superior. Who Herbert saw himself, or at least *presented himself* as reporting to is recorded in his 1971 interviews with Andrzej Babuchowski and Zbigniew Taranienko, in both of which he states that his travelogues are merely a result of his family and friends constantly asking him to tell them about what he saw, which he then tries to do "as this envoy [*wysłannik*]".[279] By the time Herbert published "Animula" (the companion essay to "Acropolis" inspired by Sigmund Freud's epistolary account of his visit to the site) in 1973, this self-presentation as "envoy" had taken on a heavy ethical dimension previously absent in the image of him chatting to his friends.[280] Drawing a clear line between himself and the doubting Freud and once again emphasising his unceasing belief in the Acropolis, with a grave sense of urgency Herbert writes that if he has already been chosen "in the play of blind fate" as the one who could travel, it is his responsibility to give that choice "meaning", "live up to it", and "deprive it of its arbitrariness".[281] To fulfil this obligation,

[278] BO, 8 (my translation).
[279] For the Babuchowski interview, see n. 31 (introduction). Zbigniew Taranienko's interview was first printed in *Argumenty* 48 (1971): 1, 6, 11 and reprinted in HN, 32-41; HN, 28, 37.
[280] "Animula [*Duszyczka*]" was first printed as "Akropol i duszyczka" in *Więź* (1973) 4.
[281] LNM, 90.

Herbert decides to imagine himself as "a delegate or an ambassador of all those who didn't make it", and elaborates:

> And as befits a delegate or ambassador, [I must] forget myself and exert my whole sensibility and understanding so that the Acropolis, the cathedrals, the Mona Lisa would be repeated in me—to the extent, of course, of my limited mind and heart. And […] pass on to others what I had grasped of them.[282]

The passage signals to readers how to conceptualise Herbert's travel writing in the future, but also points back to some of what he has already "passed on": the Acropolis in the essay at hand, the French Gothic cathedrals in "A Stone from the Cathedral" (*BO*), and the *Mona Lisa* in the eponymous poem from the collection *Study of an Object* (1961). Herbert's messenger role thus emerges as an unceasing duty, no matters how much of the world outside he has already transmitted.

This question of transmission has been a vexed one, however, with Polish scholars divided as to how descriptive the travelogues truly are.[283] For texts that aspire to the status of "reports" of reality, the essays are often too overloaded with fact-heavy digressions into history, too metaphorical, and, as Chapter 3 will explore in relation to Herbert's equally fragmentary travel sketches, too strongly distilled to carefully chosen fragments of subjective experience to present the reader with the *repetition* of reality Herbert promises – which raises the question how exactly he imagined achieving this effect at all. That it was not through detailed description is not only suggested by the textuality of the travelogues, but also, again, overtly stated in the programmatic preface to *BO*, where Herbert writes that he consciously avoided the "easier form of the impressionist diary", which would have only resulted in "a litany of adjectives and aesthetic exaltation".[284] Herbert returns to this reluctance in the two interviews from 1971 cited above, telling Zbigniew Taranienko similarly that he does not want to "write down impressions" and

[282] LNM, 90.
[283] For Herbert as merely "referring" to reality see Sendyka 2009, 48. For the essays as a display of "impressive perceptual attention" and commitment to description see Kozicka 2006, 53 and Śniedziewska 2013, 79-80.
[284] BO, 8 (my translation).

explaining his reasoning slightly more broadly to Andrzej Babuchowski, as was already mentioned in the Introduction:

> My thesis or leading thought is to not only recount my impressions, for impressions are very easily exhausted, even in the stylistic sense (one writes: I saw a gorgeous little Romanesque church near Castelvecchio, an awfully marvellous sunset, etc.). So I have this method that I see certain things first, doing a bit of preparation, and then I strive to read into various books on the topic and to not only recount my impressions, which might actually be not all that important, but to transmit a certain sum of knowledge on cultures, especially on cultures or civilisations that no longer exist, that sank.[285]

What makes this passage worth quoting in full is the contrast between sentimentality and reason, scholarship and personal feeling that it meticulously establishes. The style of the average travel writer, rendered through the impersonal form (*pisze się*) as a representative of a wider mass, is presented as the epitome of kitsch, composed of a hyperbolic and, importantly, *colloquial* "litany of adjectives" that limits the text's potential impact in its centredness on the writer's own sentimentality.[286]

Herbert, in contrast, is the epitome of professionalism: like any good scholar, he has a "thesis" (*teza*), a "method" (*metodę*), and the rigour necessary to transmit what is scientifically expressed as "a certain sum of knowledge" (*pewną sumę informacji*). It is only through this adherence to scholarly professionalism, Herbert seems to imply, that a travel text can be stopped from self-indulgently folding back onto itself and instead opened up to fulfil its mediating function between modern readers and *cultures that sank* (*które zatonęły*). In his use of the verb *zatonąć,* "to sink" or "to go down", Herbert seems to directly evoke the image of the Acropolis on the "dark promontory of time", and picturing ultimate disappearance in time as ultimate disappearance beneath the surface of water. Within this imagery, to bring closer thus means to *bring up*, which can only be done through a selfless focus on the act of discovery, rather than selfish *self-discovery*. It is in this context that I would now like to look at Herbert's reworking of the only two twentieth-century travelogues referenced across his trilogy, Henry Miller's *Colossus of Maroussi* (1942) and

[285] HN 37, 28.
[286] All *śliczny* (gorgeous)*, malutki* (diminutive of *mały*, small), and *przecudny* (composed of *cudny*, "marvellous", and the intensifying prefix *prze-,* lit. "over-marvellous") are highly colloquial adjectives.

D.H. Lawrence's *Sketches of Etruscan Places* (1932). While Herbert generally eschews direct comparison with his contemporaries, limiting references to other Polish travel writers such as Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz to individual dedications, he directly name-drops Miller in "Labyrinth on the Sea" (*LNM*) when describing himself as "guided through [Phaistos] by Alexandros, the same whom Henry Miller described in his best book, the *Colossus of Maroussi*".[287] This is the only time across the travelogue trilogy that Herbert locates another travelogue within the same realm of experience as his own, which is made particularly remarkable by the fact that Miller represents the pinnacle of the "impressionist", aesthetically "exalted", and self-obsessed travel writing that Herbert so strongly criticises. In what follows, I would thus like to show that despite his apparent praise of *Colossus*, Herbert uses Miller not as a positive model, but a foil against which to display his ideal of collapsing the distance between his readers and the past.

As with all intertextual resonances, the one between Herbert and Miller, too, depends on reader familiarity with both texts to work – a difficult condition to be met in the Cold War climate of censorship and underground book circulation (samizdat, or *drugi obieg* ["second circulation"] in Polish). Yet, a reference as direct as the one to Miller's *Colossus* allows us the luxury of confirmed authorial intent as a lens through which potential moments of influence can be read.[288] The first and most crucial of such moments is, of course, Herbert's already mentioned creation of temporal and spatial continuity between Miller's journey and his own through the figure of Alexandros – a point of connection that, on second glance, drives the two texts apart rather than bringing them together. As opposed to Miller's foregrounding of the one-on-one intimacy and irrefutable homoeroticism of his meeting with Alexandros, Herbert sets his encounter with him within the normative bounds of a guided tour through Phaistos.[289] Recounting the episode from the subject

[287] LNM, 54. Iwaszkiewicz is the dedicatee of "Piero della Francesca" (BO), and a fragment of his poem "Wieczór późnej jesieni na polach pod Sieną" ("An Evening in Late Autumn on the Fields below Siena") is cited in "Siena" (BO). On links between Iwaszkiewicz and Herbert's portrayals of Siena see Markowska 2017.
[288] In addition to the passage below, other such distinct correspondences could be: a storm at sea leading to a new understanding of Homer (*Colossus,* 61; LNM, 79-80); Greece seen through a painter's eyes (74; LNM, 60). Like Herbert, Miller also mentions watching a butcher in Heraklion (108; LNM, 18), but as my analysis of the scene (Chapter 4) will show, the narrative detail present already in the *DG* makes it unlikely that Herbert did not draw on his own experiences. In the case of other similarities, it is difficult to tell if Herbert and Miller are not playing on the same tropes of the tradition, such as the sharpness of the light in Greece, *cf.* Roessel 2001, 4.
[289] LNM, 54-55. *Colossus*, 154-58.

position of the tour group, represented grammatically by the continuous use of the first-person plural, Herbert marks out his "I" only at the end of the passage, when he calls Alexandros a "charioteer" with whom "at his side" he could "reconcile the dead with the living".[290] Given that throughout the episode, Alexandros not only does not transcend his occupation as guide giving a tour, but also exhibits behaviour Herbert has ridiculed in other guides before (such as telling the tourists to "touch stones"), this elevated, epic outburst is quite surprising, and emerges as a brief intrusion of Miller's "magical" Greece into Herbert's pragmatic reality.[291]

In light of this lack of similarity between the two Alexandros passages, Herbert's decision to explicitly mention Miller could be read as intentionally drawing his reader's attention to his efforts to *open up* the "magical" space of Miller's highly personal narrative, making the transformative experience of Greece it represents more achievable to the ordinary tourist. What is more, the comparison to Miller's *Colossus* points to a feature that I believe to be crucial in Herbert's understanding of the function of his travel essays. While Miller's text brings the reader closer to the author-figure itself, creating an almost exhibitionist sense of intimacy, Herbert tries to make his narrator-persona as transparent as possible – as if anything else would create too much of a barrier between the reader and the described world. In contrast to Miller, Herbert's idea of immersivity seems to involve creating a "proxy-experience" which, given the lack of a strongly individualised narrator, his reader can easily insert themselves into: naturally, none of them will ever meet "the same Alexandros", but anyone can imagine being in a tour group with a charismatic guide who makes the past and its dead feel graspably close.[292] Moreover, even the selection of movements of his travelling body that Herbert chooses to describe make it clear that his text should not be seen primarily as a narrative of his *own* experience of reality, but a transparent window through which his reader *can see it for themselves*.[293] This is well demonstrated by the description of his visit to the Sienese Duomo in "Siena" (*BO*), in which even

[290] LNM, 55.
[291] Cf. *Colossus*, 85.
[292] This connection between Alexandros' personal charm and the closeness of antiquity should also remind us of Herbert's imperative for academics *not to be boring*.
[293] The question of "semantic transparency" will be returned to in Chapter 3. For an analysis of Herbert's archival notes on the transparency of language see Kluba 2017.

a sensually described moment of dozing off in the sun before the cathedral tour is primarily a narrative backdrop for an account of the cultural significance and art-historical assessment of the Duomo.[294] Once Herbert enters the building, this connection between lived experience and reported information becomes even less personal, switching to a guidebook-like first-person plural as Herbert "enters" the Piccolomini Library, his "experience" of which is then composed of a short introduction to the life of Enea Piccolomini and information on the frescoes by Pinturicchio portraying the latter's life.[295]

Rather than recounting the experience of being a traveller, then, Herbert *recreates* it: again, the travelogues textually enact their own subject matter, recreating the typical tourist actions of reading up on the next attraction during moments of rest or moving through sites with a guidebook in hand, perceiving reality in a blended mode of reading and looking up. In this imaginary reader experience, Herbert the traveller, the outlier, or even *outsider* in a largely immobile society, is barely noticeable – it is the authority of the researcher, the populariser of knowledge, that drives the text, all while simultaneously recognising the importance of autopsy and embodied experience for the verification of said knowledge. It is also in this vein that I would now like to return to the aforementioned D.H. Lawrence, whose presence in "On the Etruscans" confirms this conclusion about Herbert's self-positioning. The list of direct correspondences between Lawrence's *Sketches of Etruscan Places* (1932) and "On the Etruscans" is substantial, both in terms of the individual images singled out of the large archaeological corpus left behind by the Etruscans and in terms of the themes addressed by both works.[296] As expected, the greatest difference lies in Herbert's complete sanitisation of Lawrence's emphasis on the deeply erotic physicality and sexual expressivity of Etruscan art – but in light of the parody of eroticism in

[294] BO, 73-74.
[295] Ibid, 75.
[296] Just like Herbert, Lawrence comments on a funerary sculpture of a man "naked to the hip" (*Etruscan Places*, 38), happy slaves on frescoes (46, 56), Etruscan flute players (115), brutal gladiatorial games (126-7), the appearance of a grim underworld in tomb paintings from the Roman period (129-30). Thematically, Lawrence also reflects on mediality (different painting styles at 123-4; how human perception of reality differs from its representation in photography and film, 127), art as testimony as opposed to written history (130-1, 167), museums (34, 39, 152-3, 163), and nineteenth-century reception (144-5, 163).

"Acropolis" discussed above that point hardly needs reiterating.[297] Instead, it is worth remarking ~~upon~~ that when Herbert eventually does reference Lawrence, it is not as a fellow travel writer, but in the context of a long digression on advances in Etruscan archaeology and the paucity of Etruscan written sources. Seeing this freedom from the "monotonous mumbling" of texts as a "magnificent opportunity" for "amateurs" who, as opposed to scholars, "look not for objective truth but for contact" with the past, Herbert cites Lawrence's statement that "the Etruscans are neither a theory nor a thesis" but an "experience".[298]

Given Herbert's didactic ambitions, the importance of the change in Lawrence's value as an identification figure for the author – from travel writer to amateur enthusiast of ancient civilisations – cannot be underestimated. How strongly Herbert shapes the reader reception of Lawrence here, moreover, becomes even clearer when we look at the original quote from *Etruscan Places*:

> The garden of the Florence museum is vastly instructive, if you want object-lessons about the Etruscans. But who wants object-lessons about vanished races? What one wants is contact. The Etruscans are not a theory or a thesis. If they are anything, they are an *experience.*[299]

In this passage, Lawrence laments the move of the contents of the Inghirami Tomb to the Archaeological Museum of Florence, where they merely serve to "illustrate the unsound theories of archaeologists", divorced from the earth, the darkness, and the natural world that so strongly determines his encounter with them in the rest of the *Sketches*.[300] Crawling into bat-filled tumuli in the manner of "rats" is naturally not what we could ever suspect Herbert of meaning by "contact" or "experience", and yet his substitution of "objective truth" (*prawda obiektywna*) for "object-lessons" is telling.[301] As this chapter has shown, there is nothing Herbert found

[297] Other direct dissonances lie, for instance, in Herbert's direct reading of the cruel games Lawrence calls "symbolic" (LNM, 155), or in his skepticism about the represented "happiness" of enslaved people (LNM, 151-52)
[298] LNM, 161.
[299] *Etruscan Places*, 170-71.
[300] Ibid, 171.
[301] *Cf.* Lawrence's description of accessing the tombs at Vulci, ibid, 148-50. Based on Herbert's correspondence with the Czajkowskis, in which he recounts getting a sunburn from "racing around those tombs [in Tarquinia]" (Rome, 27/07/1964), I disagree with Dobrowolski's (2020, 104) judgement that the essay betrays a purely

objectionable about "lessons", as long as they are respectfully and pleasurably taught, nor, as is yet to be shown, is there anything he found more important in the creation of cross-temporal "contact" than the authentic museal object. In his slight tweaking of Lawrence, Herbert does not reject the sterilised, "systematised" space of the archaeological museum: he rejects sterilised modes of knowledge-making that *distance* non-specialists from antiquity through an overly rigid insistence on exactitude and fact.[302] That this rejection is at odds with his own emphasis on information over impression is, it seems, one of the Herbertian paradoxes that we simply have to accept as part of the game.

*

> In the kingdom of pines, crickets, and cypresses, shallowly below ground [*płytko pod ziemią*], feasts, hunts, and dance are immortalised on walls. The funerary sculptures engrave themselves deepest in memory [*najgłębiej w pamięci*]. A man leaning on an elbow, head held high, draped in a garment revealing his torso, as if eternity were a long, hot summer night.[303]

The shallowness of burial, the depth of memory. Saying goodbye to a culture without (decipherable) written sources, Herbert draws attention to the Etruscan sculptures' power to *engrave* themselves in our memory. The Etruscan man (his naked skin a faint echo of the eroticism of antiquity repressed in Herbert's vision of contact) is looking straight at the reader, "head held high", seemingly needing neither explanation nor mediation in this universalist image of the timeless human yearning for eternity. Herbert is absent, and it is easy to forget that it is in *his* memory that the sculpture of the Etruscan man once inscribed itself. To be present in the kingdom of pines and cypresses, palpably resounding with the chirping of crickets, the reader has to *believe*: believe that Herbert's essay gave them an accurate enough image of the Etruscans for them to *recognise* the man facing them across an abyss of thousands of years, believe that accurate information makes such connection possible, believe that the sculpture exists at all, thousands of miles from Poland. Believe that the West in Herbert's texts is more than the "repository for

"museal" engagement with the Etruscans. Nevertheless, given the thirty-year gap, Herbert's experience of the Etruscan tombs was certainly more regulated than Lawrence's.

[302] *Etruscan Places*, 171.

[303] LNM, 163 (edited translation). Valles translates *rzeźby nagrobne* as "tomb carvings", although it is clearly the figures on top of sarcophagi that Herbert means here.

unlimited fantasies" as which it often functioned in the Polish collective imagination during the Cold War.[304] Being called to extend one's belief across time and space can be comforting. It can also, however, arouse suspicion, breed rejection and resistance. It is this interplay of comfort and suspicion and its relation to Herbert's engagement with antiquity that the next chapter will explore.

[304] Bren and Neuburger 2012, 14.

CHAPTER 2:
THE (DIS)COMFORTS OF ANTIQUITY

The contemporary era is without shape
a coexistence of times
those who don't wish to be contemporary at all reflect best on their times

The anxiety of contemporary man to be contemporary
to get on the ever-departing
Danger
[…]
Problem:
reconciling the historicity of one's condition
with interacting with eternal things[305]

These scattered thoughts, kept in the same fragmented, punctuationless form the reader might already recognise from Herbert's notes on the afterlives of Sparta analysed in the Introduction, were jotted down at some point in early 1972 ahead of the ninth edition of *Kłodzka Wiosna Poetycka [The Kłodzko Poetry Spring]*, an unofficial annual meeting of the Polish poetry scene. Following Herbert's stream of consciousness across the often incomplete lines above, we can witness the inception of the lecture he wrote for the occasion.[306] Responding to the discussion prompt set by the *Poetry Spring* organisers, Herbert brainstorms around the idea of *współczesność*, a term used to designate the contemporary era, or the current historical moment we inhabit.[307] While it might seem self-explanatory that every individual inhabiting the contemporary era will be *contemporary* (*współczesny*), Herbert's meandering thoughts turn the adjective less into a fixed historical position than into a set of characteristics one can choose to adopt – something that can be both an aspiration and, in his eyes, a "danger" (*niebezpieczeństwo*). Attempting to be "contemporary" is endowed with the recklessness of jumping on a moving train, with the conceptualisation of history as an "ever-departing" vehicle fascinatingly giving a cold, uninviting air of

[305] AZH, akc. 17955, t. 92, k. 15.
[306] For a detailed analysis of the connection between Notebook 92 and the lecture see Kluba 2017, 446-51. The lecture "Poeta wobec współczesności" ["The Poet vis-à-vis the Contemporary Era"] and the heated debate it caused will be analysed in Part One.
[307] Kluba 2017, 450. Marian Stala translates *współczesność* (as it appears in the title of Herbert's lecture) as "contemporaneity".

industrialisation to the common Marxist image of the march of history.[308] The menacing undertone given to the seemingly neutral term *współczesność* can be explained through the close relationship in which it stood to the related concept of *nowoczesność*, modernity, ever since the late 1950s. While the question of modernity was already touched upon in Chapter 1 in the context of its detrimental effect on the travelling subject's experience of otherness, this thesis has not yet addressed what meanings and social functions the discourse of "modernity" was imbued with in the specific context of socialist Poland – a semantic web crucial for understanding Herbert's decision to write on antiquity in its social and material context.

With the death of Stalin and the accession of Nikita Khrushchev as the First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, thus de-facto leader of the USSR, in 1953, the socialist bloc entered a new era of greater economic freedom and political liberalisation. In Poland, this atmosphere of relaxation was especially palpable after the Thaw of 1956 – a period when Herbert could publish a poetry collection overtly expressing the trauma of WWII (*A Chord of Light*, 1956), travel West for the first time (1958), and then publicly write about it (*BO*, 1962). While these three examples perfectly illustrate the greater cultural openness of the Khrushchev era, one important element of it is still missing from the picture: the "Scientific and Technological Revolution" as one of the period's greatest driving forces.[309] While the goal of the "transformation of the material base" of Eastern Europe was central to the socialist project from the start (through the distribution of land, the nationalisation of industry, etc.), it was from the late fifties onwards that "technological development" became the proclaimed key to "social and economic progress" that should eventually lead to a better future for everyone.[310] Poland's hitherto dark cityscapes, kept monotone by the Stalinist ban on commercial advertising, were gradually illuminated by a growing number of colourful neon signs that both symbolised greater freedom of expression and connected such freedom to one of the most prominent markers of the technological revolution,

[308] Kluba (ibid) similarly interpolates "train" as the missing word after *odjeżdżającego wciąż*, "ever-departing".
[309] Wasiak 2024, 59-60. The post-Thaw change in attitudes towards consumption will be addressed in Chapter 4.
[310] Gille et al. 2020, 6; ibid, 5.

the "mass dissemination of electronic technologies".[311] Another crucial technological step, the development of plastic polymers, similarly transformed the material world to such an extent that plastics came to be interpreted as an "emblem" of modernity and progress.[312]

Naturally, phenomena such as the triumph of plastics or the collective sense of striving towards ever-greater technological innovation were not exclusive to the socialist bloc and, moreover, the very spirit of participating in various "technological races" (the Space Race, the nuclear arms race, etc.) *depended* on the global character of this "technologically driven conception of modernity".[313] Yet, two important distinctions between Poland and the Western side of the Iron Curtain must be drawn. First, it must be noted that across the socialist bloc, this collective orientation towards the future, with its new materials and new technologies, was deeply integrated into the workings of each authoritarian state. With the collapse of Stalinism and the recognition that society cannot run on ideology alone, the "future good life" came to be propagated as the main incentive for all citizens to contribute to the Party's efforts of "overcoming backwardness" and "overtaking" the West in the creation of a better society – a duty based on projected desire.[314] What is more, in Poland's case this sense of "backwardness" that all citizens were called to fight was, besides the deeper-running discourse of the "cultural inferiority" of Eastern Europe (which official socialist rhetoric naturally did not engage with), deeply tied to the material devastation it had suffered during WWII.[315] This leads to the second aspect of the specificity of Poland's relationship with technological modernity: the scale of destruction that had made Poland a *tabula rasa* "without shape" (to return to Herbert's notes) to be shaped into an image of absolute modernity.

[311] Balcerzak 2021, 267. Wasiak 2024, 59.
[312] Crowley and Reid 2000, 9.
[313] Ibid; Wasiak 2024, 60.
[314] Wasiak 2024, 65; Gille et al. 2020, 1.
[315] On the West as "behind" in the "master-narrative of state-socialism" see Péteri 2010, 6-11. For a selection from the large bibliography on the construction of Eastern Europe as culturally inferior (as well as on the constructedness of the term in general) see Wolff 1994, Todorova 2009, Sowa 2011, Schenk 2017. That this material ruination could have been alleviated by the financial aid provided by the Marshall Plan the Soviet Union forced its satellite states to reject was, of course, not mentioned in the official rhetoric of building the future. On the role played by the Marshall Plan in the economic division of Europe see Anderson 1991.

While Western Europe embraced plastics, neons, and other mass produced consumer goods *in addition to* a material fabric with a solid grounding in the historical past, the material emptiness of war-ravaged Poland enabled the socialist government to pursue the project of shaking off the "old world" without much physical resistance. As will be elaborated upon later in the chapter, in particular the problem of rebuilding the almost completely destroyed city of Warsaw attracted international attention as a "singular" opportunity for the realisation of the dream of the "modern metropolis".[316] Polish architects, many of whom had been influential members of Le Corbusier's *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* before the war, became "powerful agent[s] of social change" and "symbol[s] of modernity" in their own right, while the discourse of architectural (re)construction became an ideological battleground.[317] On a micro-level, too, the necessity to create new domestic spaces for millions of individuals left without possessions due to violence or displacement opened up room for the creation of a new *democratising* kind of beauty, embodied by aesthetically pleasing everyday objects and aimed at gradually levelling the "difference in taste" that had existed between social classes before the war.[318] When the interdisciplinary journal *Projekt* [*Design*] was founded in 1956, the architect Jerzy Hryniewiecki used its "editorial manifesto" titled "Kształt przyszłości" ["The Shape of the Future"] as a call for practitioners of the visual and applied arts to embrace the responsibility of putting the "gifts" of modern technology ("the intensity of colour", "the lightness of material", etc.) to the task of showing society the "shape" a "good, just, and happy life" can take.[319] The materiality of buildings and objects, then, was inextricably linked to ideological notions of past, present, and future.

In the same year that Hryniewiecki proclaims in forcefully collective language that "we want to be modern" (*chcemy być nowocześni*), Herbert publishes his debut poetry collection *Struna*

[316] Kohlrausch 2019, 274.
[317] Kohlrausch 2019, 281. Kohlrausch (266-80) points to the inevitable clash between the ideals of modernism and the onset of socialist realism.
[318] Zborowska 2019, 260-61.
[319] Chmielewska 2010, 57. "Kształt przyszłości", *Projekt* 1 (1956): 5–9, reprinted in Jasiołek 2023, 110-11. *Projekt* rose to shape the discourse on design and architecture for years, its influence spanning the whole socialist bloc (Jasiołek 2023, 108). Hryniewiecki led some of the PRL's biggest architectural projects, such as *Supersam*, Poland's first self-service supermarket (1962), and the *Stadion Dziesięciolecia*, a monumental stadium built in 1955 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the PRL.

światła (*A Chord of Light*).[320] As will be analysed in detail in Part Two of this chapter, the collection overflows with images of the burnt, ruined city and constitutes a palpable attempt to grapple with death and survival, often expressed through transformations of Graeco-Roman myth.[321] What it also includes is a poem titled "Architecture" (*Architektura*), whose presence in the collection seems difficult to divorce from the prominence of the topic in the cultural discourse of the 1950s. In contrast to the official tone of discussing architecture and the project of (re)building Poland in the glowingly positive terms of "opportunity", "realised utopia", or the march towards modernity, Herbert's poem intertwines anthropomorphic images of architectural elements ("a brow of stone", "a wall's | untroubled forehead") with expressions of physical pain ("a line with a cry", "a window | with tears of glass"). What is more, the architectural imagery in the poem is palpably *classical*, with light arches, stone, and the figure of a building "pale with its height" (*bladej wysokością*) dominating the picture. In light of the general disillusionment with the classical tradition that permeates *A Chord of Light*, the lyrical subject's self-positioning as an "exile from self-evident forms" (*wygnaniec kształtów oczywistych*) in the penultimate line of the poem can thus be read as an exile from the realm of classical architecture which, up until the rupture in Poland's connection with the classical past caused by WWII and the transition to socialism, was considered a "self-evident" or "obvious" (*oczywisty*) architectural style.[322]

It is not without a note of hope that the poem ends, however. "I the exile of self-evident forms | proclaim your motionless dance", Herbert writes, and if the titular "architecture" and the addressee of the poem is indeed *classical architecture*, then his lyrical promise to "proclaim [its]

[320] "Kształt przyszłości", 5.
[321] For a reading of the collection within the framework of "poetry after Auschwitz" see Popovic 2007.
[322] Mikołaj Getka-Kenig's work on the connection between neoclassical architecture and the democratic ideal of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth elucidates yet another dimension of rupture here, namely with a "free" Polish state, see Getka-Kenig 2019 and 2023.

motionless dance" would soon be realised. The cover of the first edition of *Barbarian in the Garden* (1962), designed by the prominent graphic artist Andrzej Heidrich, shows two sets of arches, one red and one light blue, enclosing the work's title in a reflection-like arrangement.[323] Visually recalling Roman aqueducts or the melancholic neoclassical arcades of the Italian Metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico, the arches on the book cover very interestingly position Herbert within the architectural discourse of the Thaw period: away from the aluminium, concrete, and glass of socialist modernity and towards the stone arches of the classical past.[324] This brings us back to the "eternal things" (*rzeczy wieczne*) of Herbert's notes on the theme of *współczesność*, making it apparent in how strong an opposition Herbert's *turn to antiquity* stood to the cultural climate of the Thaw period – and it is exactly this opposition that this chapter will explore.

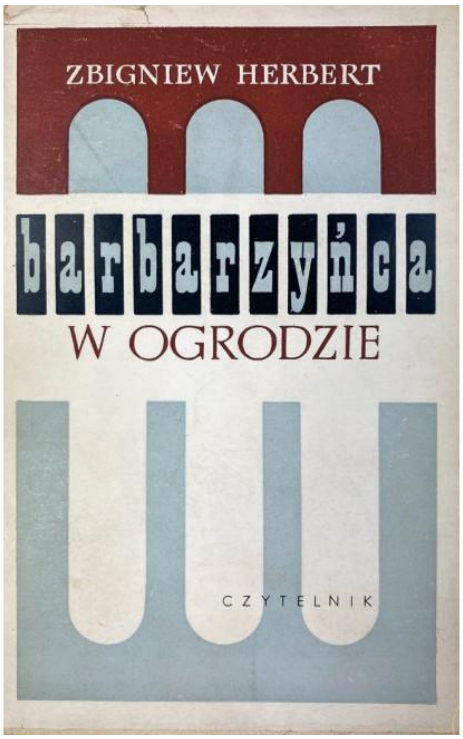

Figure 1: First edition of BO, 1962.

Beginning with the web of cultural and political tensions surrounding Herbert's "interactions" with the past (expressed above through the word *obcowanie*, another erotic double entendre), I will then move on to his line of defence against accusations of "escaping" the present: his idea of the "co-existence of times" (*współistnienie czasów*), used in the *Poetry Spring* notes as a direct contrast to a hyper-focus on the present. As I will demonstrate, it is in the establishment of a connection between this rich temporal fabric and his readership that Herbert locates the collective importance of his writing on antiquity, often denied to it in public discourse. In Part Two of the chapter, I will return to the tight link between Herbert's ancient reception, the materiality of post-war Poland, and the emotional charge of its relationship to architecture. I will

[323] Heidrich, chief designer of the publishing house *Czytelnik*, is most famous for having designed banknotes for the National Bank of Poland.
[324] Unfortunately, the AZH does not hold any correspondence between Herbert and Heidrich that could serve as evidence for Herbert's agency (or lack thereof) in the creation of the cover.

emphasise the importance of reading Herbert's encounter with ancient sites through the abovementioned context of ruins and reconstruction, and finally look at how interactions with *eternal things* can both heal and highlight the post-war Polish subject's ruptured relationship with the past.

Part One: The Dangers of Looking Back

I. The Guardian of Old Stones

Before we look to the question of temporality more specifically, it is essential to situate it within the wider cultural tensions into which Herbert's travelogues were inevitably tied, and that were already hinted at in Chapter 1. As has been analysed, in his travelogues and public appearances Herbert displays a striking insistence on his role as the Polish envoy to the West, possibly motivated by both his private guilt over being able to travel in and out of the country with an unusual frequency and, as Ewa Wiegandt puts it, the "duty" commonly felt by Polish travellers to figuratively "smuggle some portion of [the West] back into the country".[325] Commonsensically, both this self-designation as envoy and the teleological thrust Herbert promises to give to his status as the one chosen by "blind fate" to experience the grace of Western art's masterpieces should imply a joyous embracing of the intellectual labour required by his pronounced mission of transmitting knowledge.[326] Indeed, this labour was exactly what Andrzej Kijowski highlighted in his review of *BO* in 1963. Describing the paralysis that he himself experienced abroad when faced with the overwhelming beauty of cultural treasures he expected to never see again, he praises Herbert's "*industrious* book, in which he passes on the crop of his *industrious* journey to Western Europe", closing the review with the phrase, "Glory to cultural ants".[327] Kijowski's description of Herbert as a "cultural ant", later called a "backhanded compliment" by Wiegandt due to its underplaying of *BO*'s creative and artistic value in favour of almost mechanical

[325] Wiegandt 1995, 212.
[326] LNM, 90 ("[…] I had to give that choice meaning, deprive it of the accidental and the arbitrary.").
[327] "Pielgrzym", *Twórczość* 5 (1963): 59. Interestingly, this emphasis on labour (the Polish adjective *pracowity* is derived from *praca*, work/labour) points to Herbert's conception of reception as labour, analysed in Chapter 4.

knowledge compilation, nevertheless demonstrates the persuasive force of the narrator-persona Herbert himself later defines in the 1972 interview with Zuzanna Jastrzębska: that of the "active" traveller, collecting information for his readers instead of "passively succumbing" to the "charms" of his destinations.[328]

Yet, despite all these assurances, Herbert might have had a far more ambivalent stance towards being a "cultural ant" than his public persona lets on. The first hint in this direction was the letter extract on "On the Etruscans" analysed in Chapter 1, in which Herbert complains about having "popularisation" and didacticism come between him and his true interests in the ancient world, and another postcard to Miłosz shows this even more plainly. Right before boarding his ship to Piraeus in September 1964, Herbert tells Miłosz about his six-week stay in Italy, during which he visited Sicily and the Etruscan sites "between the Tiber and the Arno". He adds:

> I will write about this, because this is what the generous Americans threw money at me for, but I confess that the role of guardian of old stones is starting to weigh me down.[329]

The money so generously "thrown" at Herbert was the fellowship he was granted by the Ford Foundation in January 1964, and which gave him the means for his journey to Italy and Greece.[330] What the cynicism (and even a slight sense of resignation) in this quote points to is the complicated relationship between Herbert's passion for antiquity and his political and economic entanglements in a world neatly divided between East and West. In an undated letter to the Czajkowskis from late 1964, he asks the couple to ghostwrite his letter of gratitude to the Foundation, instructing them to mention that the fellowship allowed him, among other things, "contact with current archaeological work (in Phaistos and Malia, Crete)" and the opportunity to "familiarise [himself] with academic literature" with the goal of "gathering material for an essay collection dedicated to the art and history of antiquity and the Middle Ages".[331] This

[328] Wiegandt 1995, 213. HN, 51. This is, of course, yet another rejection of seduction as a model for the experience of otherness.
[329] Postcard from Brindisi dated 06/09/1964 (ZHCM, 46).
[330] Technically, Herbert received the fellowship already in 1961, but the Ministry of Culture, who had suggested its own "suitable" candidates to the Foundation, prevented him from receiving the money until 1964 (Franaszek 2018a, 823-25).
[331] ZHKZ, 79. The mention of the "Middle Ages" here might refer to Herbert's attempts at writing about the Normans, also mentioned in the postcard to Miłosz above.

demonstrates how strongly Herbert's engagement with antiquity depended on the goodwill of Western funding bodies who then, in turn, expected to see their funds transformed into published writing on the promised subject.

As the Dutch Polish literature scholar Arent Van Nieukerken notes in his recent analysis of Herbert's best-known classical poems and their reception, Western audiences were highly "drawn" to what they experienced as the "underlying pathos" of Herbert's attachment to classical antiquity and his "defence" of it in an authoritarian reality.[332] Andrzej Franaszek, too, soberly remarks that much of Herbert's appeal to the West rested precisely in his status as an Eastern writer briefly "let loose" to bittersweetly roam Western Europe, an appeal he would have lost if he had permanently settled in the West and become just another "hardened" émigré.[333] It is not difficult to imagine that the Ford Foundation, with its focus on championing intellectual freedom and free expression, was also attracted by this very vision of funding a writer who will eventually return to his oppressed country to propagate Western culture.[334] Perhaps unsurprisingly, Herbert was well-aware of this exoticisation and of the role he needed to play. In a card sent to the Czajkowskis from the *Festival dei Due Mondi* in Spoleto, he hyperbolically describes himself as representing "the independent poetry of a conquered country awash with barbarian hordes", humorously tapping into not just the discourse of culture and barbarity directly connected to Cold War debates on "backwardness" and the temporality of progress, but also its performativity.[335]

At first glance, there appears to be little tension between the Western demand for antiquity and Herbert's desire to explore it, even if the reasons for such demand are arguably patronising and the explorations would have to be slightly simplified in writing. So why would Herbert describe himself as increasingly "weighed down" by being the "guardian of old stones", i.e., a public figure immediately associated with the abovementioned "defence" of antiquity against the

[332] Van Nieukerken 2022, 383.
[333] Franaszek 2018b, 273.
[334] "A Legacy of Social Justice", <https://www.fordfoundation.org/about/about-ford/a-legacy-of-social-justice/> [accessed 02/07/2023].
[335] Postcard from Spoleto dated 11/07/1969 (ZHKZ, 152).

onslaught of the modern present? This question leads us back to Herbert's primary publication context, socialist Poland, which most of his Western readers and funders only had a hazy and one-dimensional understanding of.[336] Again, the complexity of Herbert's position is revealed in a letter to Miłosz, sent to him by Herbert at the beginning of his Italian journey in 1964. Mentioning that although visiting ancient sites is currently tiring him out, he will miss it back in Poland, Herbert writes:

> I don't want to pose as Parandowski, not for the world. But I cannot muster up the courage for my own "Bilateral Settling of Scores" […]. In Poland there are only two parties: Professional Slanderers of the West and the Unhappy Lovers thereof. Finding one's own point of view and any attempt at explicating it are just as impossible as entanglement for an employee of Radio Free Europe.[337]

This letter extract brings together multiple strands of the discussion above, as will be revealed through an untangling of its cultural references.

Herbert starts with a dichotomy between the writer Jan Parandowski (1895-1978) and Miłosz's own essay "Dwustronne porachunki" ["A Bilateral Settling of Scores"], published in the Paris-based émigré journal *Kultura* in 1964.[338] Hardly any name is as strongly linked to Graeco-Roman antiquity in Polish cultural consciousness as that of Parandowski, whose *Mitologia* [*Mythology*, 1924], originally written for educational use, continues to be the most widely known collection of Graeco-Roman myth in Polish.[339] Next to reasserting his remarkable awareness of the inherently performative nature of travel writing, then, Herbert's insistence on not wanting to "*pose* as Parandowski" could be read as another admission of doubt regarding the educational aspect of his writing on antiquity. Furthermore, Parandowski's stance towards antiquity was, to use Szczerbakiewicz's term, one of "utopian melancholy", and even in Herbert's day the author

[336] Van Nieukerken 2022, 385.
[337] Letter from Rome dated 28/07/1964, ZHCM, 45. By "entanglement" (*uwikłanie*) Herbert means any kind of contact with or concessions to government politics, as RFE was notoriously strict about not working with individuals who engaged in the latter. The rest of the letter will be discussed in Part Two.
[338] "Dwustronne porachunki", *Kultura* 6/200: 7-34. Herbert already describes the essay as having "torn at him" in an earlier letter from Paris dated 16/06/1964 (ZHCM, 41).
[339] Despite having studied classical philology before the war, Parandowski was primarily a writer of literature, not a classical scholar, and achieved greatest prominence as the president of the Polish PEN Club (1933-39; 1947-78).

already stood for a "stiff reverence for the past devoid of critical reflexion".[340] No wonder, then, that Herbert uses him as a counterpoint to *Dwustronne porachunki*, Miłosz's highly critical meditation on Polishness and its relation to both Western and Russian culture. The essay opens with Miłosz's post-war retracing of his interwar travels in Italy and France, which provokes his realisation that he still feels just as inferior to those two cultures as his younger self did. Miłosz voices his disbelief at the fact that the "cultural structures" of Western Europe were capable of producing two bloody world wars just to "bounce back" and "flourish", while Eastern Europe emerged even more disturbed and "formless" (*bez formy*) than it had already been.[341]

Whether this is an accurate assessment of the arc of Western European culture in the twentieth century is less important than the essay's standing for a critical position which sees an unbroken relationship between present and past as condemnable *indifference* towards the horrors of history – a position Herbert "cannot muster up the courage" for, torn between the two poles of reverence for and criticism of Western tradition. That the polarised climate of the Cold War necessarily turned the above into a binary rather than a sliding scale is evidenced by the next part of the letter, in which Herbert speaks of the impossibility of finding "one's own" stance towards Western culture which falls under neither "slander" nor an "unhappy love affair". Despite Herbert's private doubts on the matter, the act of writing about his Western travels and classical antiquity sealed his fate as an Unhappy Lover of the West. Not even Herbert's transparent narrator-persona, likely designed to counter accusations of too strong an emotional attachment to his "Western" interests, could save him from attracting the label of the "poet of the West, the past, and culture", which was especially sticky in the sharp-edged political climate of the 1950s and 1960s.[342] Drawing public attention to the limiting nature of this label and to the "incurable duality" that exists in Herbert's work between an appreciation for the classical tradition and self-conscious Eastern European subjectivity, the very tension exhibited by the letter extract cited above, was one of the main achievements of the Harvard-based scholar Stanisław Barańczak's

[340] Szczerbakiewicz 2016, 189; Nowak 2009, 162.
[341] "Dwustronne porachunki", 9-11. Herbert later note that the present is "without shape" (*bez kształtu*) might be an echo of this intense engagement with Miłosz's text.
[342] Barańczak 1987, 1.

seminal 1984 study *Uciekinier z Utopii*, which was republished for an Anglophone audience as *A Fugitive from Utopia* in 1987.[343]

What Barańczak's collapse of the categories of the West and the past in his definition of Herbert's "market label" suggests, moreover, is what the chapter introduction has already implied: in state-socialist modernity, Herbert's writings on antiquity were just as contested as his journeys to Western Europe. Most tellingly, one can find the following exchange between Herbert and the journalist Krystyna Nastulanka in an interview from 1972:

> KN: So will this [new book] be another venture [*wyprawa*] into the past?
> ZH: Beautifully said: a venture, difficult journey, expedition, but not an excursion. There's this rather simplified thought pattern in operation here [in Poland] according to which people writing on the past are escaping from the present.[344]

Nastulanka here responds to Herbert's statement that his new book (which, if published in 1973 as intended, would have been *LNM*) would not be a "travel journal", but instead another collection of essays on past civilisations, such as the "Etruscans or Cretans". Remarkably, she employs the vocabulary of travel to refer to Herbert's engagement with antiquity, a turn of phrase which he immediately picks up on to emphasise the anti-touristic, demanding nature of his travels. Then, however, the language of movement takes a rather different turn, and Herbert's "venture" (*wyprawa*) is suddenly presented as an *escape*, not in space, but in time. While there is nothing in Nastulanka's question (which is also only the third one in the interview) to prompt such defensive reflections, the future-facing cultural climate sketched in the chapter introduction (which only intensified in the 1970s with the growing pace of technological development) should give us a good sense of the reason for such immediate defensiveness on Herbert's part.[345] "They often accuse me rather harshly of digging in that old junk", Herbert would admit to Taranienko only a year later, again expressing an undefined, yet acute sense of pressure that, as will now be shown, was coming from every end of the political spectrum.[346]

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[343] Barańczak 1987, 1. Rather than simply being a translation, the 1987 edition is adapted to the non-Polish reader.
[344] "Jeśli masz dwie drogi", *Polityka* 9 (1972): 8 (HN, 42).
[345] On "modernisation" as one of the "buzzwords" of the 1970s see Wasiak 2024, 61. The political climate under the state leader of the time, Edward Gierek, will be explored in Chapter 4.
[346] HN, 38.

On the one hand, there was, of course, the official party line, expressed by socialist media outlets such as the newspaper *Trybuna Ludu* [*The People's Tribune*], whose cultural critic Jan Szczepański regularly wrote dismissively of Herbert's work. *The Philosophers' Cave* (Herbert's play on the last days of Socrates), for instance, was termed "pretentious babble" upon its first staging in 1961, with Szczepański using another more "realist", present-centred play by Herbert, *The Other Room*, to demonstrate that "when Homer and Socrates were not at hand", the author finally "showed a strong, theatrically verifiable 'piece of naked life'".[347] On the other hand, in the early 1970s Herbert was equally criticised by the New Wave, a formation of young poets shaped by the violently crushed student protests in March 1968. That the protests, arising from collective discontent at the core of which lay a deepening financial crisis and cultural stagnation caused by a return of censorship after the relative freedom of the Thaw, were met with even bigger repressions by the government was a "shock" to the Polish youth, pushing the poets towards the necessity of "taking onto themselves the responsibility for expressing the drama of reality".[348] In light of such an imperative, Herbert's poetry struck the poets of "Generation '68" as an "outdated" retreat into metaphor, mythology, and the "purity" of the classical tradition.[349] Barańczak, himself a member of the young generation, came to Herbert's defence, arguing that Herbert was not "*escaping* into the complicated world of symbols and myths", but instead employing it to "say *more* about modernity than he could by 'saying things outright".[350] This defence, despite its rootedness in opposition to the socialist government, can be seen as reinscribing its dismissal of the past by equally seeing the value of antiquity as lying only in its function as a *means* of discussing the present. Furthermore, Barańczak's statement is symptomatic of a highly common mode of reading of the presence of antiquity in Herbert's work, namely its interpretation as a "code" meant to deceive the censors and transmit messages of political dissent.

[347] Jan Szczepański, "Sokrates wezwany nadaremno" ["Socrates summoned in vain"], *Trybuna Ludu* (1961) 39. *The Other Room* (*Drugi pokój*), set during the housing crisis of the 1950s, shows a young couple sharing a small apartment with an old woman whose room they obsessively covet, waiting for her to die. On the two plays as meditations on the same questions, among them the process of perception, rather than opposites see Filipowicz 1999.
[348] Tadeusz Nyczek cited in Pawelec 2020, 15.
[349] Ibid, 36-38.
[350] Barańczak, "Etyka i poetyka. Spór o nowy realizm", *Student* 26/12/1974–8/01/1975: 10.

When asked about this issue directly by Monika Muskała in a late interview in 1994, Herbert plainly replies that, "no, [he] never practised the art of camouflage", but "always liked the past, liked paintings".[351] Yet, he again feels the need to reiterate that he was not "fleeing from the present", but simply struggled to "elevate" existence under socialism to the level of a universally understood "human experience". This is where, Herbert says, "those mythologies" came in to help him draw a "general sense" from a single "grey" life.[352] A conversation moment practically mirroring this one also occurs in Adam Michnik's famous 1981 interview, when the *Solidarność* adviser responds to Herbert's admission that writing about the situation in Poland in a way that would "reach everyone" is "very difficult" by stating:

> This is exactly why there's antiquity in your work. The Antilles [?], Marcus Aurelius, the Greeks, the templars. *I never had any doubt* that you answer the most important questions of your life and your generation in this way.[353]

Michnik then goes on to interpret "To Marcus Aurelius" as presenting Stalinism as "the end of the world", devoid of any "Aurelian" values and completely unliveable in. Interestingly, Herbert never directly addresses Michnik's comment on antiquity as the answer to his generation's "questions": he confirms that yes, he feels "understood" in Poland in a way he does not by his Western readers, but no, "never wrote to trick censorship".[354] Whether Herbert's more coherent response to Muskała years later was modelled on this exchange, we can only wonder. What Herbert's manoeuvring between antiquity not being and being more than itself, or something *instead* of itself, hints at here, however, is what I believe Van Nieukerken misses in J.M. Coetzee's essay "Zbigniew Herbert and the Figure of the Censor" when criticising Coetzee for not doing Herbert's work justice by foregrounding the presence of censorship as the key to reading it.[355]

Analysing the same poem as Michnik, "To Marcus Aurelius", Coetzee asks:

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[351] Printed in 1996 as "Humanistyka to przygoda", *Notatnik Teatralny* 11: 122-31 (HN, 213).
[352] HN, 214.
[353] Ibid, 80 (my italics). Michnik's mention of "the templars", obviously not ancient figures, points to "Defense of the Templars" (*BO*), one of Herbert's essays most readily interpreted as "anti-censorship code" (see Introduction). It is unclear what Michnik means by *Antyle* ("the Antilles"), which does not correspond to anything in Herbert's classically inspired works.
[354] HN, 81.
[355] Van Nieukerken 2022, 388.

> […] in the face of the pressure for an allegorical reading created by the realities of Poland's history and indeed by the paranoia of censorship itself, which is programmatically opposed to innocent readings and spreads its paranoia by contagion to the reading community, how would it be possible to write a poem "genuinely" about Marcus Aurelius?[356]

Michnik's honest enthusiasm, the *certainty* with which he throws his interpretation of Herbert's classical reception into the room, and the relief with which he seems to do so, finally able to voice it in the defiant atmosphere of the *Solidarność* movement, all suggest that no, the poem could have never "genuinely" been about Marcus Aurelius, even if Herbert wrote it solely with the emperor-philosopher in mind.[357] The question Coetzee follows up with, however, is "what is the genuine?".[358] Herbert was *genuinely* interested in antiquity – in a reflection on their journey to Greece, Czajkowska even calls it "astonishing" how much so, and "how often he returned to it" in his writing.[359] Through another letter exchange between the two, we also know how *genuinely* knowledgeable Herbert was on it. When Czajkowska toys with the idea of writing a book on "flowers and plants" in ancient culture, in truly scholarly fashion Herbert recommends her to start by consulting the "the most thorough encyclopaedia concerning antiquity, PAULY-WISSOWA Real-Encyklopödie [sic] der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft". He also advises her that the topic might be "too broad" and that she should be mindful not to make sweeping statements across periods, as "it might turn out that the tamarisk meant something different in the Homeric period than in the Hellenistic period".[360] As was already the case with Herbert's interest in the mechanisms of Othering in the Roman representation of the Etruscans, these scholarly comments on Czajkowska's idea indicate that even if Herbert might not necessarily have had academic ambitions (if we recall this distaste for the figure of the pedantic scholar), he certainly had academic sensibilities when it came to the ancient world.

[356] Coetzee 1990/91, 162.
[357] For Michnik's role in turning Herbert into a "political poet of the masses" by downplaying the (less accessible) "intellectual" side of his work see Kay 2012, 121.
[358] Coetzee 1990/91, 162.
[359] ZHKZ, 66.
[360] Letter from Austria dated 29-30/10/1975 (ZHKZ, 188).

Yet, the strong cultural drive across the socialist bloc to centre the collective sense of temporality around the dimensions of present and future, combined with the Cold War climate of multidirectional paranoia rightly identified by Coetzee, could put even the most *genuine* motivation for engaging with the ancient past into doubt. Across this section, we have observed how the cultural imperative to be present in the present and look towards the future pushed both Herbert and his interpreters to look for *more easily readable* explanations for his interest in the past: the use of political allegory, the socially beneficial goal of "popularising" antiquity, or even political alignment with Western culture (again demonstrating that the "Western bloc" was equally guilty of politicising Herbert's interest in the past, an issue to be discussed further in the next section). This need for comprehension equally points back to the inherent instability and *malleability* of the post-war period, the malleability of a world that was just being constructed, and where every party faced with the sudden presence of *eternal things* (whether censor or resisting reader) needed to give this presence culturally relevant meaning to hold on to. In these attempts at making sense, however, one of Herbert's most *genuine* motivations for engaging with the past might have remained hidden in plain sight, unresponded to by his interviewers (with the sole exception of Taranienko). Multiple times, Herbert explains that he does not believe writing about the past to be an "escape" from the present simply because he does not believe present and past to be separate, *nor the past to be past.*

II. A Co-Existence of Times

When asked by Zbigniew Taranienko why he does not write about the present, Herbert admits that "self-critically, [he] could say that past things appear to [him] as complete". "Subject to description?", Taranienko suggests. "Exactly," Herbert replies, "whereas the present is open". Here, however, he seems to reconsider:

> But equally [open] to its own past. Not only the starry sky above us, but also the abyss of history. For my father the Greeks and the Romans were the limit of civilisation, beyond which no one ventured, Lascaux wasn't known, Mesopotamia was little talked about. All

> that has been opened up now. Beyond us, there's the abyss of civilisation. And more undiscovered things.[361]

Initially, Herbert appears to concede that he has indeed taken the easier path by writing about antiquity, a subject matter that, as a "complete" object so unlike the "open" and changeable present, unresistingly offers itself up to description. Yet, a moment's reflection leads him to observe that the dichotomy of closed past and open present is not just untenable, but also continuously deconstructing itself: the modern vision of the past is changed with every archaeological discovery, which in turn changes the present, so dependent on the past for its narratives of self.[362] While Herbert's mention of Mesopotamia as having been "little talked about" in his father's day is not historically correct, we can see this comment as an attempt to spark interest in archaeological discoveries through the popular rhetoric of scientific advancement. The "starry sky above", clearly referring to the abovementioned Space Race of the 1960s, is thus juxtaposed with a descent into the depths of the earth, which might similarly conceal "undiscovered things" with the power to expand our perception of the temporality of "civilisation".[363]

Herbert takes up the juxtaposition between outer space and the depths of history also in an interview given to the *Polskie Radio* [*Polish Radio*] after the publication of *BO*, in which he concludes his reflections on his journey to the Scottish island of Iona in 1963 by stating:

> And I'm interested in a certain simultaneity of history: right, on the one hand we have those various things that fly around in space […], we live in the 20th century, right, but we carry within us also the 19th century, the 17th century, and I'm very passionate about that.[364]

Again, the limitlessness of outer space is juxtaposed with an interior bearing within it the equally limitless expanse of the past, except this time this interior is nothing but the human self, bearing

[361] HN, 39.
[362] The relationship between past and present has been similarly theorised by Jan Assman in the context of mnemohistory, which sees the past as constantly "modelled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present" (Assman 1997, 9).
[363] This underground language is consistent with Herbert's presentation of his descent into the earth in "Lascaux" as a descent into history, as discussed in Chapter 1.
[364] The interview is part of the virtual exhibition *Zbigniew Herbert. "Bądź wierny Idź"* created by the *Polskie Radio* and the Zbigniew Herbert Foundation, available under <http://herbert.polskieradio.pl/> (extract transcribed and translated by me).

traces of past centuries. The gaze upwards into space, tightly connected to the socialist project of building a bright new future, coexists with the gaze downwards which, in the shared language of archaeology and psychoanalysis, is also a gaze *inwards*. The past is presented as an integral part of human identity and self-understanding, co-existing with the present in a tightly knit fabric that is as impossible to dissolve as the almost *physical* presence of previous centuries in the twentieth century subject. Yet, it is this very dissolution Herbert perceives the march towards the future to be aiming for, as he overtly formulates in the lecture "Die Gegenwart der Geschichte", delivered in 1975 at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin.[365]

There, Herbert is quick to define that it is not a lack of public "interest" in history that he means by the "disappearance of historical consciousness" in "industrial" modernity, but instead a sense of exceptionalism, a "civilisational narcissism", that leads modern society to presume that it no longer has any ties with the past.[366] While this diagnosis of "narcissism" is strikingly similar to François Hartog's concept of presentism, we must recall that in 1973 the "crisis of the future" that Hartog names as one of its causes had not yet been reached.[367] Instead, the future was still bright and expansive – perhaps *too* expansive for Herbert's taste. Once more using the language of the Space Race, Herbert states that:

> The past is receding from us as quickly as the Earth from an interplanetary rocket. Cosmic time is starting to compete with human time.[368]

As Herbert's lecture moves on to discuss questions of historiography, rather than temporality, let us return to the previous quotation and its key phrase, the *simultaneity of history*. While Herbert's observation on archaeological discoveries privileges the literal act of "unearthing" the past as something that is yet to be brought *into* the present, the next two remarks create an image of the past as something that is already either within us, or around us, and that we should be careful to

[365] The lecture, written by Herbert under the German title, was translated for the occasion by Klaus Staemmler and later posthumously printed in Polish as "Czas przeszły teraźniejszy" ["The present past tense"] in *Zeszyty Literackie* 2/86 (2004): 7-11 (reprinted in MD, 109-14).
[366] MD, 109-110.
[367] Hartog 2015, 195-97. At its most condensed, "presentism" can be defined as a regime of historicity that uses the present as the main referent for interpretations of both the past and the future – the present thus "extends" into both and becomes an "omnipresent present".
[368] MD, 110.

keep noticing and not let go of. It is true that, as many scholars have remarked, Herbert's poetry often creates a "clear contrast" between the unsatisfactory present and the absent past, drawing moral lessons from the arch of "civilisational transition" that ultimately led to the horrors of the twentieth century.[369] Yet, one only need open *BO* to discover that the past is still very much present: Siena's streets still resonate with the sound of medieval horsemen "scrap[ing] the walls with their spurs" as modern buses rush through them, Poseidon's altar in Paestum still calls for a sacrificial ox to be slaughtered on it, and the ever-present spirit of the Marquis de Girardin weeps at the sight of tour groups trampling all over his garden.[370] It is this very *simultaneity* that defines the temporal fabric of Herbert's prose.

That this temporal fabric could have in fact been reflective of Herbert's conception of the relationship between present and past is suggested by a key part of his lecture at *The Kłodzko Poetry Spring* the notes for which opened this chapter. In "Poeta wobec współczesności" ["The Poet vis-à-vis the Contemporary Era"], now considered "one of [Herbert's] most important self-definitions", Herbert declares:[371]

> A poet's sphere of action […] is not contemporaneity [*współczesność*], by which I understand the current state of socio-political and scientific knowledge, but reality, a human being's stubborn dialogue with the concrete reality surrounding him, with this stool, this fellow being, this time of day […].[372]

As this fragment shows well, in the lecture Herbert distances himself from the "scientific revolution", instead steering his poetic gaze towards "concrete reality". If we focus on the temporal aspect of this reality, it indeed emerges as a rich tapestry of times in which a distinct temporal unit (such as a "time of day" [*pora dnia*]) can be its own poetic subject matter, yet is also capacious enough to hold the "dialogue" between the temporal vectors of different animate and inanimate beings (e.g., stools) which coexist with human time. Importantly, however, by looking

[369] See for instance Barańczak 1987, 19 and Van Nieukerken 2022, 387.
[370] BO, 78, 35, 202.
[371] Stala 1998, 124.
[372] The lecture was printed as "Spór o nową sztukę" ["The Dispute over New Art"]. *Dyskusja na IX Kłodzkiej Wiośnie Poetyckiej 1972 (fragmenty)*" in *Nowy Wyraz* 1/2 (1973): 10 and, in an extended version, *Odra* 11 (1972). I am here using the *Odra* version, slightly tweaking the translation by Stala 1998, 125. For a comparison of both versions see Kluba 2017, 448.

away from politics, and thus also from politically engaged art, Herbert drew the ire of the members of the abovementioned movement of the New Wave, who had come to the *Poetic Spring* to insist on poetry's active engagement in contemporary life – which, as the reader might recall, Herbert had already been accused of "escaping", only to now add fuel to the fire.[373]

The young poet Julian Kornhauser, who was in the audience together with Adam Zagajewski and Ryszard Krynicki, later published the pamphlet "Herbert: From a Distant Province", in which he gave the "concreteness" of Herbert's conception of reality his own twist.[374] The polemic opens:

> The world of Herbert's poems is not the world of culture. For culture constitutes a dynamic structure, living, incessantly interfering in the sphere of human life, everyday activity. […] Herbert's reality is a congealed world of temples, paintings, books, and myths. […] The culture surrounding the imagination of the author of *A Chord of Light* is merely architecture, "art from stone and fantasy".[375]

Although Kornhauser's critique of Herbert can be safely called rather biased in its misrepresentation of the vivid, pulsating fabric of Herbert's temporality, the connection it establishes between the position Herbert's writing occupies on the past-present binary and its *physicality* is not only reflective of the distinct intertwinement of temporality and materiality in socialist Poland, but also opens a highly productive avenue of reading Herbert's texts. In limiting Herbert's vision of culture to "architecture", as well as by delineating the "reality" created by Herbert's texts as a "congealed world" (*zastygły świat*) of objects, Kornhauser points to a physicality, an undeniable *material presence* of Herbert's writing that unintentionally provokes a reading of it *as* architecture – an association already foreshadowed by *BO*'s architectural cover design and Herbert's poetic declaration to "proclaim [architecture's] motionless dance". What is more, connecting this metaphor to architecture's importance for post-war Polish society sheds

[373] Stala 1998, 124.
[374] Ironically, this could refer to both Herbert's being completely out of touch with contemporary culture and to his Lvivian origins.
[375] Kornhauser, "Herbert: z odległej prowincji", *Nowy Wyraz* (1973) 1–2: 76–83, reprinted in Pawelec 2020, 263-66 (263, my translation). Kornhauser here slightly misquotes the poem "Architecture", analysed in the chapter introduction, in which Herbert speaks of "art from fantasy and stone" (trans. by Valles as "art of fancy and stone").

new light on the social role that Herbert – far from wanting to "escape" from the present – very likely imagined for his writing, and which is directly linked to his idea of the simultaneity of times.

In the 1995 documentary *Potęga Smaku* (*The Power of Taste*, dir. Adam Pawłowicz), produced for the national television broadcaster TVP three years before Herbert's death, his friend and fellow poet Wiktor Woroszylski (1927-1996) is shown as a historical witness to the "importance" of *BO* for Polish culture at the time of its publication.[376] Woroszylski recalls:

> It evoked some other world, not the one in which we had to live, which was often *flat*, difficult, unpleasant. *BO* evoked a world of higher values, *certain eternal things, certain beautiful things* […]. It reminded us that this world existed in various ages independently of the dreadful and bloody things that were happening in those periods, and that it consequently also exists in our age.[377]

As opposed to the critical Kornhauser, Woroszylski here represents a contrasting stream in Herbert's reception that does not see "temples, paintings, books" as symbols of "congealment" and obsolescence, but instead as the very *beautiful things* the collective desire for which was recognised even by socialist public discourse.[378] Woroszylski's account demonstrates, too, how sensitive Herbert's readers were to the different temporal regime that his work embodied and how palpably his assurance of a continued presence of the past stood out in an atmosphere of rupture, in which the world destroyed by WWII was materially replaced by what many perceived as a lesser, "unpleasant" (*nieprzyjemny*) version of reality. Before exploring this material *flatness* of post-war Poland in Part Two of the chapter, for the remainder of this section I would like to focus on this effect of *connecting his community to the past* as something Herbert intentionally seeks out in his writing. In order to do so, I will begin by returning to the impersonality of Herbert's narrator persona and examine the *collective* undertone it often assumes.

[376] Woroszylski, initially a devoted communist and chief editor of the socialist-realist literary magazine *Nowa Kultura* [*New Culture*], became disillusioned with the USSR after witnessing the Hungarian Revolution 1956 first-hand. After his death, he was commemorated by Herbert in the article "Wiktor Woroszylski na tle epoki" ["W.W. against the background of his times"], *Rzeczpospolita* (1996) 227: supplement "Plus-Minus", 1. On the importance of *BO cf.* Pawelec 2020, 39-40.
[377] Also cited in abbreviated form in Franaszek 2018a, 759 (my translation and italics).
[378] Zborowska 2019, 260. The fact that Kornhauser and Woroszylski draw such contrasting conclusions from the same image of ancient temples also reflects what Brooke Holmes (2017, 56) has defined as the "liquidity" of antiquity, "its depthless capacity to enter into relations with contemporary worlds".

As the reader might recall from the previous chapter, even their very form as "envoy's reports" immediately gives Herbert's travelogues an orientation not towards the travelled reality around him, but towards the "homeland" he left behind. His narrational transparency, too, strives to foreground the reader's "proxy-experience" over Herbert's personal experience of travel. What is even more interesting, however, is that even the limited glimpses of personal experience in the travelogues can be said to be pointing not towards individual, but instead *collective* experience.[379] While it is undeniable that Herbert was free from neither the fear of his luck (or favour with the authorities) eventually running out, nor the bureaucratic battles which often left a bitter aftertaste on his journeys, his freedom of movement was rare. Thus, when he seemingly breaks his impersonal narration to "reveal" his anxieties over the impossibility of return and the near-impossibility of travel, it might still not be a case of, as Kozicka suggested, an act of emotional openness with his reader, but of writing himself into a collective consciousness that the reader might already share.[380] That Herbert imagined the authors of the travelogues he read in preparation for "Monsieur Montaigne" and "Acropolis" as "representatives of their historical eras" was already touched upon in Chapter 1, but it has not yet been addressed how strongly this idea reflects his own self-conception. Herbert specifies this in one of his most famous interviews, conducted by the journalist and political activist Adam Michnik in 1981, when commenting on the topic of being "honest" with oneself:

> Even if one is describing the Acropolis, as I would sometimes do… if so, one looks at it with the eyes of a person from Poland and a person who lives in a specific historical moment, and that guides the pen […].[381]

Since the interview is primarily concerned with the politics of the Polish literary sphere, its relationship to Stalinism, and Herbert's position within it, Herbert's bringing up of his relationship to the Acropolis as an example of his historical self-awareness not only highlights

[379] This stands in direct contrast to the trope of English and American tourists "discovering their true self" in Greece, see Roessel 2001, 6-9.
[380] Kozicka 2003, 137.
[381] "Płynie się zawsze do źródeł, pod prąd, z prądem płyną śmiecie" ["One must always swim to the springs, against the current, only trash swims with the current"], *Krytyka* 8 (1981): 34-45, reprinted in HN, 75-97 (80).

the importance of Mediterranean antiquity for his thinking about temporality, but also offers a fascinating interpretative key for his encounter with it.

A similar instance of antiquity-focused self-definition features in "Psychicznie nigdy z Polski nie wyjeżdżałem…" ["Mentally I never left Poland…"], a short piece equally published in the Polish press in 1981 (a few months before the Michnik interview) that can safely be considered the culmination of Herbert's struggle to find a public stance towards his travels.[382] Opening the piece by bitterly asking "Why have I been travelling to Western Europe? Do I constantly have to justify myself?", Herbert then indeed *does* go on to justify himself by stating that the most important reason for his travels has always been his wish to "document, [his], the Polish people's, bond with the sources of our civilisation", which, he believes, "belongs, despite everything that happened, to Mediterranean culture".[383] The running into each other of the words *moją, Polaków* [my, the Polish people's] again points to a *collapse of distance* between individual and collective identity, while the phrase "despite everything that happened" makes reference to the historical context of WWII, the Iron Curtain, and the division of Europe, which are presented as a rupture dividing Herbert and Poland from "Mediterranean culture" no less than the physical barriers caused by the former – again, time and space are inseparable. Of course, both the Michnik interview and the short piece are situated in the highly political context of the peak of the *Solidarność* movement in 1981, which could imply that this overlap in subjectivity construction is simply testament to Herbert's intense effort to establish his place within the movement by reaffirming his devotion to the Polish nation. Yet, Herbert's expressed wish to connect contemporary Poland with the ancient world is deeply in line with his despair at the growing *distance* between socialist modernity and the historical past, which makes his self-presentation as a representative of his historical moment emerge as the necessary final step in reestablishing *proximity* (if I may recall the charged term *zbliżenie* from Chapter 1) between the two.

[382] *Dziennik Bałtycki* 106 (1981), reprinted in HN, 248-50.
[383] HN, 248.

In order to better understand how Herbert's "representation" of post-war Poland functions in practice, let us turn to the following fragment from his Cretan essay "Labyrinth by the Sea", in which Herbert comments on the "cherished myth" of the "pacifism of the Minoan world" with the words:[384]

> But we, the children of scepticism, know too much about the lies of art sugarcoating reality for frescoes with dolphins, flowers, and a goddess with a human smile to dull our vigilance.[385]

Sweepingly, Herbert indicates his belonging to the group of the "children of scepticism", the propaganda-hardened Eastern Europeans who have seen enough "sugarcoating" not to be fooled by dolphins, flowers, and smiling goddesses.[386] Moreover, he also imposes this subjectivity on the reader, or, if the reader happens not to be Polish, creates a fixed image of how the collective "we" of Poles living under state socialism would (or should) react to Minoan art.[387] It is fascinating, however, that while Herbert's idea of bringing not personal experience, but his collective historical moment to his encounter with the past makes perfect sense in the context of the social cohesion required by political resistance movements (such as March 1968, *Solidarność*, or the burst of artistic freedom during the Thaw), Herbert's vision of the *ancient* side of this encounter is equally that of collective consciousness. While this is less visible in the dolphin passage, Herbert's praise of the Hagia Triada sarcophagus earlier in the essay demonstrates it perfectly.[388]

Explaining his reasoning behind calling the sarcophagus a "masterpiece", Herbert writes that:

> its maker [*twórca*] seized and conveyed to us that happy moment of revelatory knowledge and inspired sobriety, when a civilization sees itself whole as if in a mirror, conscious of its boundaries, strength, and shape.[389]

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[384] Gere 2009, 11.
[385] LNM, 40 (edited translation). Despite this performative cynicism, Herbert does eventually liken the Minoans to innocent children, describing the ruins of their civilisation as "the ruins of a cradle, the ruins of a child's room" (LNM, 55).
[386] Reading the above sentence, one is almost tempted to agree with Seamus Heaney's assessment of Herbert as the "grim" eastern European turning "stern brows […] upon the world" (Heaney 1988, 66).
[387] According to Bracewell 2022, 289, an "implied audience of […] like-minded readers" was one of the "conventions" of travel writing from the socialist bloc.
[388] For the sake of consistency, I am using Herbert's spelling of "Hagia Triada" here and in Chapter 3, with the full awareness of "Ayia Triadha" as the currently preferred spelling of the site, *cf.* Cichon 2022 130f.
[389] LNM, 19. Herbert's ekphrasis of the sarcophagus will be discussed fully in Chapter 3.

The Polish word *twórca* can equally have the more artistically inspired meaning of "creator", yet the inspiration and revelation usually associated with the act of creation are not ascribed to the anonymous artist, but instead to the entire Minoan civilisation in its "happy moment" of achieving self-knowledge. The individual artist's role is, according to Herbert, limited to capturing this collective moment of revelation, and if anything, his share in the genius of the "masterpiece" lies in *successfully conveying* what his civilisation had suddenly grasped about itself. Partly, the reason for this can be found in Herbert's idealisation of ancient artists as models for his own "conscious disavowal of autobiographism", a connection most "programmatically" elucidated by "Why the Classics" (*Inscription,* 1966).[390] The poem is divided into three stanzas, of which the first two juxtapose Thucydides' objective, factual narration of the Amphipolis episode with self-pitying modern generals and their refusal to take responsibility for their actions.[391] The third stanza applies Thucydides' "self-effacing" attitude to the creation of art:

> if art for its subject
> will have a broken jar
> a small broken soul
> with a great self-pity
> what will remain after us
> will be like lovers' weeping
> in a small dirty hotel
> when wallpaper dawns

In a commentary on the poem, originally written for the Walter Höllerer Colloquium (Berlin, December 1966), Herbert speaks of his intention to "conjure up the tension" inherent in the "difference in attitude and behaviour" between "an ancient author" and modern "ostentatious subjectivism, the manifestation of the aching 'I'".[392] Just like it is not antiquity that is the "broken jar", but the modern "little broken soul", it is this "ancient" ethics of writing, then, that Herbert presents as most appropriate for the communication of reality.[393]

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[390] Wiegandt 1995, 213.
[391] See Thuc. 4.104-7.
[392] "Dlaczego klasycy?" ["Why the Classics?"], later printed in *Zeszyty Literackie* 3/87 (2004): 5-7; reprinted in MD, 139-42 (141).
[393] The word *dzbanek* can also be translated as "pot", which makes the analogy with antiquity as "broken pots" even more visible. The word signifying the "little soul", *duszyczka*, is also the Polish title of "Animula". On the animula as a topos in Polish poetry see Czermińska 1992.

Yet, if we return to "Labyrinth", it is difficult not to notice a similarity between Herbert's claim that a collective truth about an entire civilisation's self-perception can be expressed by a single artist in a single object and his belief that his point of view, too, can be representative of "the Polish people" of his time. Consequently, Herbert's presentation of ancient art as equally "collective" as his own work (and as "masterful" exactly by virtue of being so) both legitimises his self-presentation and enables him to construct his texts as *loci of connection between communities* rather than an individual's self-involved meditations on the past (for which there was no room in either socialist modernity or cultural resistance movements). That Herbert in fact had the ambition to bring about such connections is cemented by his frequent use of the term "civilisations" in interviews, usually not to discuss questions of culture or its progress but instead to denote communities with a distinct arc of rise, flourishing, and fall. It is especially the latter that interests Herbert, as he says in the 1971 interview with Babuchowski:

> In this new little book there will most likely be an essay about the Etruscans, about the Cretan civilisation, […] because this evokes, very sentimentally speaking, compassion. Those are civilisations that didn't succeed in history. The fate of Poland wasn't always happy either and we were very often on the brink of disappearing from the map.[394]

Again, the collective identity of the twentieth-century Pole takes centre stage and is directly juxtaposed with other collectives such as the Etruscans and Cretans, with the encounter with the past again happening on the basis of a "we": we, the children of scepticism; we who have almost disappeared from the map. In contrast to feeling sentimental about one's own "little soul", feeling sentimental about "failed" civilisations is allowed, but only if it springs from the clearly demarcated limits of "collective historical experience" – and this is where Herbert's mission of tying his community into the fabric of simultaneous time reaches its perhaps most uncomfortable moment.[395]

In this encounter between two historical collectives, one ancient and one modern, both are not only flattened to one, inevitably subjective, interpretation, but also reduced to what Dirk

[394] HN, 28 (my translation).
[395] This is interestingly taken up by Altieri (2004, 82) who describes the "poetry of witness" (discussed in Part Two below) as "provid[ing] a public version of the intimate existential drama developed by confessional writing".

Uffelmann has called "communities of victims" in his postcolonial analysis of Herbert's image of antiquity as "defensive nationalism".[396] While the tight link between Herbert's designation of compassion as the key to connecting with the past and the martyrological conceptualisation of Polish historical experience as victimhood will be critically investigated in Chapter 4, the projection of subjective perception on a supposedly impersonal, collective standpoint already points to the tensions inherent in Herbert's adoption of a "collective" viewpoint through which to frame his experience of travel and encountering the past. On the sheer basis of the "autobiographical pact" of the travelogue, personal experiences and the personal *viewpoint* of the travelling body can never be banished from its pages – something that Herbert appears to both depend on in his emphasis on autopsy and wishes to conceal in his pursuit of safe, publicly approved "cultural scripts" (such as Polish victimhood) with the power to guarantee his acceptance by the national community. As my overview of the many criticisms levelled against Herbert's "journeys into the past" has shown, however, ultimately no persona, neither the envoy nor the historical representative, was capable of fully protecting him from the cultural tensions of the Cold War. Yet, as Woroszylski's comment demonstrates, that does not mean that Herbert's engagement with antiquity was universally condemned, nor that it was socially insignificant – even if the pose of "collectivity" aimed at achieving this significance has not stood the test of this analysis. In what follows, I will revisit the question of the relationship between Herbert's ancient reception and his *historical community* through the framework of the post-war material world and the metaphor of Herbert's writing as architecture.

Part Two: The World of Eternal Things

I. A Cosmic Wax Museum

Addressing the famously slippery and contested concept of "barbarity" in Herbert's oeuvre, Anna Nasiłowska suggests that Herbert's desire to "immerse himself" in the Western "garden of

[396] Uffelmann 2017, 30-32. Herbert's construction of a one-sided view of Polish history will also be addressed in Part Two below.

culture" could have been motivated by his wish to find a counterbalance to the experiences he was subjected to in the "barbaric" part of Europe – not just "poverty" and political repression, but also, as Nasiłowska emphasises, the *physical* experience of the "destroyed space" of Polish cities as a constant reminder of the "rupture in cultural continuity" the country had suffered during the war.[397] When Herbert moved to Warsaw in 1951, the city barely started to rise from the "abject condition" to which it had been reduced during WWII.[398] While it is important to heed architectural scholar Jerzy Elżanowski's warning that the statistic universally used to represent the destruction of Warsaw, 85% of the city's buildings and infrastructure, was an "ideologically motivated" simplification of the meticulous work of surveyors on the ground, it remains undeniable that post-war Warsaw was a "sea of rubble".[399] When the communist authorities started the reconstruction project in 1945, as a result of the propaganda-driven decision not to rebuild Warsaw's "'bourgeois' nineteenth-century fabric" even partially preserved buildings were often razed down to speed up the construction of concrete housing developments from recycled rubble, towering eerily over the empty space around them.[400] Although such a pragmatic building policy must have naturally also been motivated by the post-war housing crisis, its ideological framing gave it a bitter colouring in the eyes of those who did not agree with the project of (literally) building a new socialist future from the "rubble" of the old world.[401]

How deep a mark this period of (re)construction must have left on Herbert, and the interwar generation as a whole, still resonates in "Die Gegenwart der Geschichte" (1975), where he continues to use it as a metaphor for severing all ties with history:

> In the building of the wonderful new world the dark past is a liability, an obstacle, unnecessary baggage – just like an admittedly pretty, but hardly functional and useful building from past centuries is to those who are planning new sunny districts, new

[397] Nasiłowska 2010, 118.
[398] Franaszek 2018a, 845; Crowley 2011, 352.
[399] Elżanowski 2012, 118-125. Elżanowski's fascinating close reading of building surveys reveals that the number makes no distinction between the categories of "completely destroyed" and "unfit for reconstruction", which was subjectively decided.
[400] Ibid, 133. An exception was the historically faithful reconstruction of the Old Town, one of many examples of the Soviet-installed government using nationalist rhetoric to gain popularity, see Crowley 2011, 354 and Elżanowski 2012, 116.
[401] As Kohlrausch (2019, 262) points out, the "window of opportunity" during which modernist building projects could flourish lasted only around three years (1945-48), after which socialist realism cut across all aesthetic ambitions.

> houses with windows open to the future. […] but I should like to think that the past cannot be so easily crossed out with the help of levelling machines.[402]

Very overtly, Herbert equates the governmental approach to "rebuilding" Polish cities, symbolised by "levelling machines", with its efforts to focus the collective glance on the "new future" and away from the past, represented by "pretty" yet "hardly functional" buildings "from past centuries" – an evocative reference to the socialist concept of "functional beauty". This striking interconnection between architecture and Herbert's thinking about the modern relationship with the past is borne out even further in the aforementioned letter to Miłosz from Rome (1964), in which he brings up Parandowski as a model of reception. Herbert begins the confession of his cultural doubts by writing:

> I'm roasting in the inhuman heat, I curse museums, triumphal arches, and catacombs, but I know that when I'll return to Warsaw to my Muranów, where there are only booths with porters and sadness, I will be looking at postcards, checking plans, and this will be my second happy journey (escape).[403]

It should immediately strike us how *architectural* the imagery of Herbert's comparison between Rome and Warsaw is. The three-dimensional texture of Rome, with triumphal arches rising into the sky above and catacombs extending into the depths of the earth below, is juxtaposed with the *flatness* of Warsaw and its vast expanses of levelled ground. The "booths with porters" can be read as referring to the new housing estate in Muranów, a "flagship" residential district erected in 1949 quite literally on top of the rubble that once was the Warsaw Ghetto.[404] The Roman counterpart of this "sad" makeshift reality is the world of "eternal things", triumphal arches and catacombs, both bearing within them the promise of eternity and a persistence of memory.[405]

That Woroszylski's vocabulary of "flatness" and "eternal things" so naturally crept in here demonstrates the importance of situating Herbert's encounters with antiquity firmly within the

[402] MD, 109.
[403] ZHCM, 45. As opposed to his literary presentation of postcards as one of the forms of the modern commodification of travel (see Chapter 1), Herbert loved postcards and, as Czajkowska recalls, often had to be "torn away" from postcard stands by the couple (ZHKZ, 66).
[404] Elżanowski 2012, 131.
[405] The juxtaposition of Muranów with "catacombs" is haunted by the eerie question of human remains, which were not exhumated from the rubble during the building process and remain a repressed presence to this day (ibid, 117-19).

cultural discourse of his time. Yet, the letter's flickering between happiness and sadness, as well as its openness about travelling West as an *escape* (the dreaded accusation Herbert would later spend the 1970s and 80s fighting), suggests that there is also a much more *personal* side to Herbert's interactions with historical architecture – one that, in a rare overlap between collective needs and private desires, also resulted in the solace-bringing function of *BO* outlined by Woroszylski. Herbert might have truly "mentally never left Poland", as he writes in the eponymous defence of his travels, but despite his continued attachment to his country, it was also *mentally* that he struggled to stay there for longer periods of time. In a letter from 1965, he writes to the Czajkowskis that the reality of the PRL "unsettles and crushes" him and would not be bearable without the prospect of going West again.[406] Undoubtedly, and not unknowingly, Herbert was stuck in a vicious circle that, as must now be emphasised to avoid demonising oversimplifications, was not shared by many residents of the PRL (although it certainly made its "mundane" downsides even worse). In order to travel, Herbert had to not only withstand public criticism, but also deal with the state authorities, whose tactics of intimidation and psychological violence put an enormous strain on his mental condition, already made unstable by his long untreated bipolar disorder.[407] Paradoxically, what constituted Herbert's greatest comfort at such mental lows was, again, travel, and the encounters with art and artefacts it entailed – and thus the wheel kept on turning.[408]

At this point, it is helpful to break up the broad term of "Herbert's Western travels" into two more specific categories: longer periods of residence in major European cities such as Berlin, Vienna, or Paris, which often constituted months-long writing residencies, and shorter sightseeing vacations on which Herbert collected the experiences for his travel writing. While the former often involved financial worries, a sense of instability that came from being only temporarily settled in the West, and mental and physical health issues, those short trips "out"

[406] Letter from Vienna dated 25/11/1965 (ZHKZ, 89).
[407] Franaszek 2018b, 276. For Herbert's doubts on how long he can still keep going through ordeal of renewing his passport see ZHKZ, 158 (letter from 1970, no place); ZHCM, 31 (letter from London, 13/11/1963).
[408] This is most beautifully put by Miłosz in an invitation to his house in La Messuguière, France, dated 23/05/1967: "You need *things* – their beauty […] is nothing but salvific. And there are many things to look at here. So think about it!" (ZHCM, 75)

offered a respite from all the above and emerge from Herbert's correspondence as true moments of "healing through heritage".[409] A very telling item of correspondence in this context is a postcard Herbert sent to Miłosz from Spoleto in 1969, where Herbert was participating in the performing arts event *Festival dei Due Mondi* (*Festival of Two Worlds*). Transcribed, the card reads:

> "[…] finally some peace real people real little churches and wine.
> Salute Ula
> Afra saluti
> this was added by Afra, *cameriera* [maid] in my favourite trattoria
> Saluti da Leodovina"[410]

Rendered here in italics are three different types of handwriting belonging to Italian women called Ula, Afra, and Leodovina. It is easy to imagine Herbert chatting them up in his "favourite trattoria", asking them in tentative Italian to sign the card he is just writing, creating short-lived yet joyous interpersonal connection thanks to what Magdalena Czajkowska described as the "irresistible charm" that always helped him abroad.[411] More interesting than Herbert's attempts at flirting, however, is the link between "real people" (*prawdziwi ludzie*) and "real little churches" (*prawdziwe kościółki*), which his handwriting does not separate even by punctuation. Herbert appears both touched and soothed by observing the Italian locals living their unperturbed lives in a state of deep rootedness in their material environment, equally unperturbed by neither destruction nor socialist realist building projects.[412]

This connection between architectural continuity and the enviable peacefulness of local life also emerges from Herbert's literary account of his first visit to Siena, which was similarly enabled by his participation in an earlier edition of the *Festival dei Due Mondi* in 1959.[413] As Anna Mazurkiewicz-Szczyszek aptly noticed, in "Siena" (*BO*) Herbert writes the medieval town "into the cyclicality of night and day", opening each of its three sections with explorations of Siena's

[409] On "healing through heritage" as a crucial concept for indigenous communities and within the repatriation discourse see Wergin 2021. For post-conflict zones, see for instance Giblin 2014. For material heritage and well-being more broadly see Everill and Burnell (eds.) 2022.
[410] Spoleto, 22/07/1969 (ZHCM, 113-14).
[411] ZHKZ, 23; 69.
[412] As Nasiłowska 2010, 120-23 remarks, Herbert never had any interest in any social or political issues his Western destinations might have been facing at the time, choosing to live in the "myth of the garden" instead.
[413] Franaszek 2018b, 851.

past by day and closing it with the enjoyment of its present by night.[414] This distinct, indeed cyclical temporality of the essay invites comparison between its repeated elements, especially the closing tableaux of the Piazza del Campo by night. In the first one, gripped by a "sense of congealed eternity" under the light of the full moon, Herbert offers an image of planet Earth as a "cosmic wax museum" (*kosmiczne muzeum figur woskowych*), in which the Sienese Piazza del Campo, himself, and the other people on it act as artefacts "nobody looks at" – an almost unfittingly melancholic conclusion to this elated tableau of timelessness cleverly built on the language of space.[415] Herbert's second day in Siena ends on an unmistakably euphoric note, however, and it is this description of Il Campo which truly gives us an insight into the reasons for Herbert's awe at the "real churches" above:

> I return to my "Tre Donzelle," but just as I reach the gate, I turn toward the Campo. Everything is as it should be. The walls of the Town Hall persist, etched sharply in the night, and the tower is beautiful, just like yesterday. I can go to bed. Explosions mushroom all over the earth, but maybe we shall manage to make a couple more rotations around the sun – with this salvaged cathedral, this palace, this painting.[416]

Unless the material destruction of Polish cities is kept in mind, one might be quick to wonder at Herbert's sudden detour on his way to his little guesthouse. In its context, however, the immense emotional charge of the passage is difficult to miss.

Travelling from a country that lost so much of its historical buildings and material heritage, and whose cityscapes were often transformed beyond recognition, Herbert finds comfort, if not *hope* in the "persistence" (*trwanie*) of the Sienese town hall. The paratactic composition of the end of the sentence, "and the tower is beautiful, just like yesterday", allows us to stumble from doubt into wonder and then into hope together with Herbert in yet another instance of constructed "proxy-experience".[417] What this "proxy-experience" allows us to understand, too, is what *exactly* Woroszylski meant when he spoke of *BO*'s evocation of "some other world, not the one in which [Poles] had to live", and of the collection's function as a reminder that beautiful and eternal things

[414] Mazurkiewicz-Szczyszek 2008, 142.
[415] BO, 69 (edited translation).
[416] Ibid, 79 (edited translation).
[417] March and Anders' original translation of "*i wieża jest piękna, tak jak wczoraj*" as "its tower as beautiful as yesterday" fails to convey this sense of parataxis.

"consequently also exist[ed] in our age" despite all the destruction, even if they existed *somewhere else*. In a grey reality of rubble and concrete, Herbert offered his readers "art from stone", a text as architecture, the red bricks of the Sienese town hall and the marble of Greek temples.[418] Having found solace in the same cultural continuity in the West that had negatively surprised the Miłosz of *Dwustronne porachunki*, Herbert passed this source of solace on to those who, unlike him, could not "escape" – a bracketed "ghostly truth" that still lingers on the margins of his letter to Miłosz, the margins of consciousness. That Herbert felt like he *needed* the beauty of the art and architecture accessible in the West for his own well-being gives the imagery of stability, beautiful towers, and congealing moonlight an undertone of urgency that this cool picture, overlapping with the confidence and firmness that Herbert projects through his envoy persona, would otherwise not betray.[419] What is more, Herbert's encounters with Western cultural continuity were not exclusively solace-bringing either, as his third tableau of Il Campo suggests.

Herbert-the-narrator's last evening in Siena starts off well. He immerses himself in the beauty of the Italian language spoken around him, eats a lavish dinner, and allows his impersonal narration to be infiltrated by an unusual outburst of joy sparked by a smile exchanged with the owner of the trattoria as a compliment to his house wine: "life is beautiful and people are good".[420] Then, however, the scene becomes tinged with an equally unusual sense of sadness:

> This is my last evening in Siena. I go to the Campo to throw a few lire into the Fonte Gaia, though to tell the truth, I have little hope of returning. […] Returning to the "Tre Donzelle," I have a great desire to wake the maid to tell her I am leaving tomorrow and that I had it good here. If I were not afraid of the word, I would say that I was happy.[421]

While the first Sienese tableau pictured Herbert as an museal artefact "nobody looks at", he now draws attention to his negative emotions for the first and only time in *BO*. At first glance, the feeling of alienation and the emptiness of transitory existence perceptible in the passage could be reduced to a comment on the inherent isolation of the modern tourist condition, but the various layers of experience inscribed in the text quickly complicate this reading. There is, of course, the

[418] Barańczak 1987, 30-36 finds "white vs grey" to be one of the main visual antinomies in Herbert's poetry.
[419] *Cf.* the "coolness" of classical architecture, see Güthenke 2017, 170-73.
[420] BO, 89.
[421] Ibid, 89 (edited translation).

Polish traveller's fear of never seeing Italy again, mixed with Herbert's private fear that personal happiness, too, cannot last – a confession undoubtedly linked to the depressive episode Herbert experienced only a few months before his departure for Italy.[422]

Additionally, there is also a deeply *temporal* sense of anxiety at work here, with Herbert presenting his own precarity in direct contrast to the promise of eternity resting in the continued persistence of the historic square that he had been admiring throughout the essay. As opposed to Il Campo, the temporality of Herbert's presence is not only limited, but seemingly denied both the cyclicality that defines the coexistence of past and present in Siena and the cyclicality of the Earth's movement around the sun, repeatedly used to illustrate the passage of time in the essay. For Herbert, there is no return to the cosmic wax museum of eternity, and the unidirectionality of his temporal axis pulls him away from the trattoria he *happened* to have eaten at, while its regular customers will continue returning to it every night, with an appetite "intensifying from generation to generation".[423] The description of this group of regulars, vividly and melodically discussing the upcoming *Palio,* a horse race that had been happening in Siena for centuries and continues to evoke *real* emotion even in the present, when "history has been reduced to a costume", is filled with unspoken longing, if not to say *envy*.[424] The unbroken connection between people, culture, and architecture that brings Herbert "peace" in the postcard from Spoleto here triggers a wave of sadness. "A week from now", fresh race horses will again circle the piazza, its bricks resounding with centuries of cheers – a week from now, Herbert will be gone. This leads us to the final section of this chapter, which will examine how Herbert's private and published writings testify to the suggestion that encounters with material heritage can not only heal a sense of temporal rupture and the mental anguish it causes, but also deepen it.

[422] Franaszek 2018a, 720-21.
[423] BO, 88.
[424] Ibid. Herbert stresses the *genuine* nature of the men's excitement about the *Palio*, emphasising that it is "not just [a performance] for tourists".

II. A Venerable Rubbish Heap

To begin approaching this discomforting potential of encounters with antiquity, or the historical past more broadly, let us move to another instance of alienation overtly expressed in the travelogues, this time in "A Latin Lesson" (*LNM*). After a vivid picture of his first Latin class, which ends with his teacher suddenly starting to draw up a map of the Forum Romanum on the blackboard to make sure that upon their potential arrival to Rome "in a proconsul's retinue", the boys do not ignorantly "ramble through the emperors' capital like uncouth barbarians", Herbert describes this eventual arrival in the eternal city in a fully different tone:

> I arrived in Rome twenty years later, not in a retinue but alone. […] I directed my first steps to the Forum. It was night, so the Forum was closed. From the Capitol I looked out at the arches, the remains of porches, the stones eaten away by time. It was a ghostly sight. In the cold light of reflectors this center of the ancient world was a vast, venerable rubbish heap […]. Cut off from the night, it was like a photograph, and therefore unreal […].[425]

Rather than allowing his loneliness to slowly infiltrate a picture of joy and beauty, as in "Siena", here Herbert uses it as a framing device to set the mood for his experience of the Forum. Similarly to Il Campo, the Forum is frozen into an image of timeless stillness (a photograph), but contrary to the former, "being captured" in that manner only makes the Forum "unreal" instead of preserving it for eternity.[426] In contrast to the natural light of the full moon above Siena, which preserves historical buildings and people alike as three-dimensional objects in a museum, the "cold light of reflectors" and the medium of photography turn the Forum into a flat, "ghostly sight", emphasising not its beauty but its state of decay. The disruptive presence of modernity in this scene is, of course, reflective of Herbert's general criticism of how it taints historical sites, but it also serves to underscore Herbert's loneliness through the use of disjointed temporality in a similar way to "Siena".[427]

This time, it is not a disjunction between present and future that seems to provoke loneliness, but instead a disjunction between present and past. The immediate textual jump from the pre-

[425] LNM, 169 (edited translation).
[426] Herbert's relationship to photography will be discussed in Chapter 3.
[427] On the "hideous electric light" *cf.* "Lascaux", BO, 10.

war Galician classroom into the dark, ghostly Forum Romanum, from its perfect map on the blackboard to its disappointing state on the ground, very vividly situates the reader within Herbert's experience of the painful clash between memory and reality. Again, even if the uniqueness of "Latin Lesson" as the most "personal" essay in *LNM* is taken into account, this focus on the narrator's negative emotions should strike us as highly unusual in light of Herbert's criticism of the "modern" obsession with one's "broken little soul" – and this is exactly where we are led back to the "unhappy fate" of Poland and Herbert's self-presentation as its historical representative.[428] To explore how Herbert's relationship with Poland's recent history ties into his self-positioning within the post-war discourse of temporality, and how it must affect any discussion of Herbert's decision to *look back,* it is worth turning to "Mona Lisa", published in Herbert's third poetry collection *Studium przedmiotu* (*A Study of the Object,* 1961). In the poem, Herbert shows himself standing in front of the famous painting during his first visit to the Louvre, which he reached "through seven mountain frontiers | barbed wire of rivers" – a clear reference to the Iron Curtain. Lines describing the painting are regularly intercut with the line "so I'm here", which underscores Herbert's disbelief at having truly "made it" to the Louvre. Crucial are the following two stanzas:

> so I'm here
> they were all going to come
> I'm alone
>
> when already
> he could no longer move his head
> he said
> as soon as all this is over
> I'm going to Paris

Identically to "Latin Lesson", Herbert presents himself as the only representative of an absent group, but this time he strongly implies why that is the case. The dying man in the second quoted stanza, hoping to go to Paris when "all this is over", represents all those who lost their lives in the

[428] Ruszar 2014, 39 differentiates between three narrators in "Latin Lesson": "Herbert the pupil, the traveller, the researcher". While I do not see the necessity for a distinction between "traveller" and "researcher" in the present, "LL" remains the only essay which also includes a memoir component set in the past.

atrocities of World War Two and in whose absence the survivor must live out once shared dreams alone.

Herbert spells his survivor status far more directly (and, given the passage of time and his advancing self-mythologising, far more *melodramatically*) in "Animula" (1973, and later *LNM*). Meditating on his "sense of guilt in the presence of masterpieces", Herbert almost ashamedly admits that just like Sigmund Freud, with whose experience of the Acropolis the essay opened, he must now raise "the ghosts of subjectivism" and address the workings of his psyche:

> And so yes: standing on the Acropolis I summoned the souls of my fallen friends, I mourned their fate; no longer even their cruel deaths, but the fact that the inexhaustible splendor of the world had been taken away from them filled me with compassion. I strewed poppy seeds on forgotten graves.[429]

Herbert does not linger on this experience of mourning, however: again quickly distancing himself from Freud, he textually transforms the loneliness of survival from a private experience into a social obligation, designating it as one of the factors behind his drive to act as "envoy" of those absent.[430] While Herbert does not linger, we, as his *analysts*, should, paying particular attention to the feeling of survivor guilt that sparks this almost post-traumatic digression. What *did* Herbert survive? As was already addressed in the Introduction, it took biographers years to untangle the web of half-truths and myths he wove about his life, especially his wartime experiences. Despite what both "Mona Lisa" and "Acropolis" imply, Herbert never took part in military combat, nor was he a member of the *Armia Krajowa* [AK, *Home Army*] – not to mention all the other heroic feats he ascribed to himself over the years, such as partisan warfare in the woods or participation in an execution.[431]

To determine where the heavy emotional charge of the passage above is coming from, then, it is most revealing to compare it to Magdalena Czajkowska's account of the friends' visit to the Acropolis in 1964, part of the commentary that encloses the published edition of the couple's

[429] LNM, 90.
[430] Ibid.
[431] HN, 201; ZHKZ, 23. For an even more outlandish "AK" story see the American poet's Larry Levis' recollection of Herbert telling him about having to take over a getaway car whose driver had just been shot (Levis 1987).

correspondence with Herbert. Czajkowska describes the trio as standing "just where Pericles [...] gave the famous oration for those fallen in the Peloponnesian War", "reading Thucydides without heeding the tour groups pushing [them] around".[432] Czajkowska summarises the oration, drawing attention to Pericles' ascribing the "greatness" of Athens to values such as *męstwo* (the Polish equivalent of *virtus* or *andreia*, equally derived from the word for "man"), a "civic sense of duty", and "honour". Then, she quotes the famous passage on the fallen having human hearts as their monument, concluding: "How important those words were for us – we were still living through the tragedy of the Warsaw Uprising".[433] The only person who could have been "still living through" the Warsaw Uprising (1944) was Zbigniew Czajkowski, who actively fought in the operation together with the celebrated poet Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and later published his testimony of the events.[434] Why, then, would Herbert adapt, if not to say *appropriate* the experiences of his friend?[435] It would be easy to claim that by sprinkling such combatant references into his work, Herbert was simply capitalising on the role of the "freedom fighter" both Polish readers and influential Western critics such as Al Alvarez had already cast him into. While focusing on Herbert's media savviness would not be *incorrect*, neither would it do justice to the pressures of the cultural context in which he was writing.

The application of the term "era of the witness" to the post-WWII period, caused by the rise of legal and literary interest in witness testimony and the emergence of the witness as a figure of historical authority, is not unique to Eastern Europe.[436] Nonetheless, due to the continued presence of authoritarian regimes and political repression in the socialist bloc, especially from the 1960s to the 1980s, it was writers from the region who were designated as the rightful "witnesses

[432] ZHKZ, 68.
[433] Ibid; Thuc. 2.43.3. The Warsaw Uprising was a brief, unsuccessful, and ultimately catastrophic military operation which resulted in the deaths of 16,000 soldiers, over 150,000 civilians (see Meng 2011, 69), and the destruction of Warsaw discussed throughout this chapter. It remains one of the most contested events in twentieth-century Polish history.
[434] See Zbigniew Czajkowski-Dębczyński, *Dziennik powstańca* [*An Insurgent's Diary*] (1969).Upon his death during the Uprising, Baczyński (1921-1944) became one of the faces of Poland's "lost generation" and, due to his literary career having been cut short, one of its most tragic figures.
[435] Franaszek (2018a, 714) identifies Czajkowski as the "blueprint" for Herbert's fictious, idealised biography.
[436] For the term see Wieviorka 2006.

to the horrors of the twentieth century", and promoted as such on the global literary market.[437] As became apparent in hindsight, this label was a double-edged sword and, to use the words of Jarosław Anders, "inevitably led to a one-sided, reductive reading of some of Poland's most complex writers", among them Herbert.[438] At the time, however, the view of Eastern European literature as a "witness to history" was equally embraced by the writers themselves, especially as it often overlapped with each nation's collective imperative to preserve the "truth" of history against Soviet-imposed propaganda.[439] It is this context, too, that is undivorceable from Herbert's attachment to the past and his facing away from the future: the resistant position of *looking back* did not just encompass the ancient past and its links with European culture, but also the *recent* past of WWII and the Polish resistance movement, which the official party line had branded as "fascist".[440] Herbert's inclusion of references to wartime underground activity in his literary works, then, can be read as stemming from the same wish to *preserve a collective connection with the past* that guides his writing on antiquity.

Yet, even if we acknowledge both the national and international pressure to construct a pose of historical witnessing, the *shape* of the past being "testified" to cannot remain unquestioned. As Franaszek points out, only 3-4% of the Polish population were active members of the Polish Underground State during WWII, thus most war survivors would not have had experiences of armed resistance or participation in major military operations such as the Warsaw Uprising.[441] It is highly misleading, then, to construct the "Polish experience of WWII" around this minority experience. The reasons for the birth of this myth are multiple, ranging from the exclusion of Polish Jews and their experience of the Holocaust from "national" experience, to the cultural narrative of heroic self-sacrifice (to be addressed in Chapter 4), to the dominant discourse of

[437] Altieri 2004 provides a highly insightful analysis of this "patronising rhetoric of support" which, although well-intended, reduced Poland to a "land of oppression and suffering", while primarily meeting the need of Western literary circles to affirm their "sensitive righteousness" (85).
[438] Anders 2009, 95-6. A striking example here is Czesław Miłosz, who later deeply regretted having contributed to this trend (on his essay collection *The Witness of Poetry* (1983) see Anders 2009, 96). Already in 1988, Miłosz responded to Alvarez's review of his *Collected Poems* with a resistance to being exoticised as nothing but a "witness" to "horrible events", see Miłosz 1988.
[439] Sikorski 2006, 159. On testimonial literature as "social obligation" in the socialist bloc (equally applied to Herbert) see Carpenter 1987.
[440] Crowley 2011, 355.
[441] Franaszek 2018a, 206.

military masculinity in Polish culture (resulting in the exclusion of women's experiences such as war rape).[442] If Herbert's references to WWII are *testimony* to anything, then, it is exactly to the hegemony of this particular version of events, and to the pressure post-war Poles, especially Polish men, felt to conform to the model of the "wartime hero".[443] The most suitable way to conclude this section, then, is to acknowledge that firstly, Herbert often disrupts his encounters with antiquity and Western cultural continuity with allusions to the "Polish experience of WWII", and secondly, that this experience is in no way as representative of the majority experience, nor even of his own wartime experiences, as he constructs it to be. With this knowledge in mind, it is now possible to return to moments of *discomfort with antiquity*, no longer foreclosed by the narrative of the "fighting Pole", and to read them in the context of Herbert's mental health, as well as through the truly collective trauma of architectural destruction.

To minimise the risk of cultural performance, Herbert's travel notes from his journey to Greece in 1964, collected under the title *Diariusz Grecki* [*Greek Diary*], emerge as most suited for this analysis. Since Herbert made an attempt at preparing the *Diariusz* for print in the years 1969-70 before shying away from the project, it cannot be considered fully unedited, but it nevertheless presents possibly the most *intimate* narrative of Herbert's Greek travels.[444] The greater privacy of the *DG*, which opens up room for doubts and insecurities, becomes immediately apparent when we compare the two accounts of Herbert's visit to the Acropolis, particularly relevant in the context of "eternal" architecture. In *LNM*, Herbert's encounter with the Acropolis is given an epiphanic tone: the curtain woven from centuries of reception is drawn and suddenly "there it is",

[442] The split between the "Polish experience" and the Holocaust has been a subject of major debate in Polish cultural discourse over the last two decades; on the Jewish "haunting" of Polish collective memory see e.g., Dziuban 2019, Baker 2019, Sendyka 2019. Herbert, too, hardly ever explicitly addresses the Holocaust, with only a few exceptions such as the poem "Mr Cogito Seeks Advice" ("Pan Cogito szuka rady"). For the recent resurgence of research on voices hitherto silenced by the hegemonic WWII narrative, see for instance the work of Joanna Ostrowska on forced sex work (2018) and homosexual men (2021).

[443] Franaszek 2018a, 208. The topic of masculinity in Herbert has only recently started to be critically explored from a gender studies perspective, see primarily Tomasik 2013. Czajkowska's self-inclusion in the traumatic community expressed by the "we" above clarifies the hegemony of the military myth, and the central role of the Warsaw Uprising within in, even further.

[444] Franaszek 2018b, 64. Kalinowska (2017, 292-299) has recently argued for *DG*'s status as an autonomous text rather than just the 'preparatory notes' for *LNM* as which it was long considered.

the "true miracle" Herbert has been waiting all his life to see and, in an act of almost religious faith, "never ceased to believe" in.[445] In the *DG*, the picture is wholly different:

> I dragged my gaze over the familiar buildings – and nothing. No rapture, no illumination, not even the kind of simple satisfaction felt by a merchant from Hamburg or a secretary from Buffalo – I am here. I am here, but I might as well be somewhere else, in some insignificant place.[446]

Especially the last sentence stands in striking contrast to the "awkward formula" Herbert keeps repeating to himself in *LNM* to make the "vast expanse of time" separating him from the Acropolis "vanish": "it is and I am".[447]

In the *DG*, Herbert *is there*, to be sure, but he "might as well be somewhere else", an expression that, in comparison to the disbelieving repetition of "I am here" in "Mona Lisa", finds not the traveller, but the place wanting. Later in the journal entry, trying to blame himself for the failed experience after all, Herbert writes that if his "paralysis of sensitivity" had not also "benignly attacked the nerve centres of despair", that would be his emotional state.[448] As opposed to *LNM,* where the only comparable instance of "failing sensitivities" in the Archaeological Museum in Heraklion is quickly resolved through Herbert's realisation that he simply could not have been awestruck by mere reconstructions, Herbert does not find relief for the rest of the entry. He goes to the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, frantically "circling" the same rooms he had presumably enjoyed the day before, only to find that "today the sculptures feel locked in black boxes", making any kind of connection between traveller and artefact impossible.[449] Helplessly, Herbert asks, "What happened to the generous radiance of masterpieces?", a sentence that, as Chapter 3 will clarify further, puts into doubt his entire conception of the art object as the thing most capable of creating intersubjective connection across time. For now, however, let us take a note of this disruptive potential of the *DG* as a document to sentiments that run counter to the

[445] LNM, 129.
[446] MD, 22. The "merchant from Hamburg" and "secretary from Buffalo" are presumably representatives of mindless, fast-paced tourism who, as Westerners, faced no difficulties in getting to Greece.
[447] LNM, 129.
[448] MD, 22.
[449] Ibid. I used the term "presumably" because Herbert does not actually spell out what happened the day before, breaking the sentence off with three dots ("[…] rooms with preclassical art, where only yesterday…") – a lacuna marking unspeakable rapture?

image of "eternal things" that Herbert presented in his travelogues, and return to the question of ruins and architecture by looking at the account of an experience Herbert did not just alter for *LNM*, but fully excluded from it – that of Corinth.

According to Magdalena Czajkowska's notes from the journey around Greece, the trio visited Corinth on the 23rd of September 1964 on their way from Athens to the Peloponnese.[450] In Czajkowska's brief description of the visit, the travellers saw "Roman columns standing in the *rubble* of *venerable* stones" but found it "difficult to grasp what's what".[451] The description of the Greek remains of the city as "venerable" and of the Roman columns as an almost threatening presence in the landscape already foreshadows the tone of Herbert's notes, from which the Czajkowski couple is again absent. Admitting that he felt "immediately uneasy" upon entering the city, Herbert then narrates his efforts to "get his fainting spirit under control":

> One must dispel this first impression in the face of ruins so complete that they arouse neither terror nor even compassion. We'll immerse ourselves in our invaluable Pausanias – I consoled myself – and we'll lead this city out of the dust of non-existence, stone after stone.[452]

Yet, the mission fails: on the agora, "once teeming with life", there is "no trace" of the statues described by Pausanias. "This is not a lack of symbols, a lack of signs", Herbert chillingly notes, "but absolute absence". Even the few stones that are still standing "humanly, proudly" upright are a "mute lyre", producing "no sound, no echo".[453] When Herbert finally thinks he can perceive "the voice of water" coming from the Roman-built Fountain of Peirene, it is "a voice mingled with ash". Herbert concludes that, "mercantile Corinth is not a haunted place. In vain all my efforts, my attempt at resurrection".[454] A brief, separate line follows, in which Herbert summarises his aesthetic impression of the site: "A lack of glow, flatness, dullness, sand, reddish grass". Finally,

[450] ZHKZ, 72. Herbert arrived in Athens on September 6th and spent five days there before taking a ship to Crete. On Sept 21st, he met the Czajkowskis back in Athens, after which they travelled together for a further two weeks (*cf.* ZHCM, 238).
[451] Ibid (my italics).
[452] MD, 27.
[453] Ibid, 28.
[454] Ibid.

taking Lechaion Road, plastered with almost perversely intact "good Roman paving stones", Herbert "[flees] Corinth like a rat".[455]

A comparison of this journal entry to "An Attempt at a Description of the Greek Landscape" (*LNM*), the essay which contains accounts of all other sites Herbert visited with the Czajkowskis (such as Olympia, Delphi, Brauron) is striking: "An Attempt" is saturated with rich blues and greens, light and stone, chasing the colours of olive trees and the sharp contrast between mountain and water.[456] Herbert's picture of Corinth, however, is dull, ashen, reddish, and much closer to the "scale of gray and half-shadow" that Herbert attributes to "the countries of the North".[457] It is also hauntingly post-apocalyptic and, which seems to confirm Corinth's "out-of-placeness" in the South, far more reminiscent of the imagery Herbert uses in *A Chord of Light* (1956).[458] The collection includes multiple poems linked through the image of a city freshly turned into ruins, in which brick-coloured dust still hangs in the air, bringing to mind the recent destruction through fire.[459] As mentioned, Herbert was nowhere near Warsaw during the war, but the capital's symbolic role as Poland's "martyr-city" leaves no doubt that the poems imagine its destruction at the order of Heinrich Himmler in retaliation for the Warsaw Uprising.[460] This similarity in imagery might feel less accidental if we consider that the first sentence of Herbert's account of Corinth reads: "I learn from the guidebook that the city was demolished by the Romans in 146 BC. Mummius did his job well."[461] With its merciless destruction having occurred as a result of resistance to an aggressor, Corinth becomes an ancient equivalent of Warsaw, which might also explain the "dignity" ascribed to what the travelling trio identifies as the last standing stones of Greek Corinth.[462]

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[455] MD, 28.
[456] LNM 82.
[457] Ibid, 60.
[458] Ligęza 2018**,** 11.
[459] Mazurkiewicz-Szczyszek 2018, 76-80. The poems are: "Three Poems by Heart", "Red Cloud", "On Troy", "Warsaw Cemetery". Before acquiring its more symbolic title, "Red Cloud" was originally called "Odgruzowywanie" ("Removing the Rubble"), see Franaszek 2018a, 293.
[460] Ibid, 81; Crowley 2011, 353.
[461] MD, 27.
[462] Fascinatingly, in a note that Herbert did not end up using in his semi-edited version of the *DG*, Corinth "looks as if [levelled] with tanks" (*Miasto jakby sto[?] czołgami*) – jarringly modern phrasing that confirms this connection (AZH, akc. 17868, k. 15).

From the start, the ruins of Corinth are thus framed not as an *ancient* ruin, an aestheticised symbol of the passage of time that radiates the "peace" of the eventual "balance between man and nature", but a *modern* ruin, an "index" of "mechanised violence": rather than continuity, Corinth represents destruction.[463] Next to the imagery of dust, ash, and the colour palette of grey and red, the site is also linked to Herbert's poetic imaginings of the modern destroyed city in *A Chord of Light* through the more subtle metaphor of the "mute lyre". In "On Troy", Herbert writes of

> a fire greater than the Iliad
> for seven strings
> too few strings
> we need a chorus[464]

The poet's lyre is insufficient to express the destruction of the city, and his voice, too, falls silent, until the only song resounding on the page is that played by a "cripple" "on a harmonica", a debased version of the lyre-playing epic singer. The mute lyre is also present in "To Apollo", one of Herbert's most bitter moments of disillusionment with the classical heritage, in which the lyrical subject begs a progressively decomposing statue of Apollo, playing an "instrument without strings" with "arms without hands", to return to him the hope of his youth. The statue, however, remains silent, unable to speak through its "fissured neck" until it is reduced to an "empty pedestal". The mute lyre could thus be said to stand for instances of the classical world's inability to answer the modern subject's attempts at "dialogue" or connection, but also for the inability of language (and especially traditional poetic forms such as epic) to express the unspeakable horrors of destruction and death.

In the case of Corinth, both readings apply, which opens up vast ground for speculation as to why Herbert did not include the episode in "An Attempt". The most obvious suggestion would be that it would simply disturb the image of the modern encounter with the past that Herbert

[463] Crowley 2011, 353. Elżanowski 2012, 137, however, points out that even the modern ruin can again become a "controlled and aesthetically satisfying" way of representing unspeakable human destruction. For the contrast between Georg Simmel's influential essay "The Ruin" (1911) and modern ruins see Giza 2017, 55. For the connection between ruins and modernity see Hell and Schonle (eds.) 2010.
[464] Translation edited by me. The need for a "chorus" also speaks of the need to keep the destruction alive in collective memory.

created in *BO* and continued to "sell" in *LNM*: he wanted to show the past as present, persisting in architecture and objects which, if only given the necessary attention and care (rather than the bulldozer treatment), would allow us to connect with it. Corinth, the "un-haunted" place, a failed experiment in the project of proving the simultaneity of history, had to be erased from the record. Another explanation could be that Corinth, provoking feelings so similar to the modern ruin, simply disturbed the solace-bringing "world of eternal things" too much to be included – it might have disturbed *Herbert* too much to be included. Herbert did not shy away from portraying the cruelty of the ancients, to be sure, as his treatment of topics such as slavery and colonial violence shows, and yet he did not take the opportunity to draw a clever parallel between the sack of Corinth and the destruction of Warsaw – perhaps because he wanted to offer "An Attempt" to his readers as an aesthetic object, the written equivalent of a beautiful landscape, leaving contemporary allusion to other less space-bound writings.[465] It is exactly due to this time-space-boundness of Herbert's travel essays (which the "escape from the present" public discourse utterly fails to acknowledge) that the stakes in representing the modern encounter with antiquity felt much higher, the need to prove its continued persistence in a ruined world felt more urgent. Herbert, with his constantly renewed need for beautiful things, understood this urgency. As he wrote to his wife-to-be Katarzyna Dzieduszycka in 1960: "My eyes are perpetually hungry, like backyard dogs."[466]

Before we approach Herbert's gaze as a crucial dimension of his engagement with antiquity in Chapter 3, and his hunger as one of the driving forces behind his conceptualisation of the reception process in Chapter 4, it is worth pausing to consider the tenderness with which Herbert offers his text to his readers as beautiful, eternally lasting architecture to live in and marvel at, and the close relationship in which this tenderness exists with Herbert's own feelings of mental anguish and depression – the feelings he travelled to overcome, but that also constituted the price he paid for his entry into the world of eternal things. Taking note of Herbert's efforts to draw

[465] See "A Case of Samos", generally read as a criticism of the Soviet Union through Athenian imperialism, which opens with Herbert's admission that he never visited the island.
[466] Postcard from Poitiers dated 10/04/1960, cited in Franaszek 2018a, 696.

attention to the presentness of the past is important not simply because it speaks of a highly complex understanding of the relationship between antiquity and modernity, but also because it speaks of a man's efforts to establish a sense of continuity across one of the most severe ruptures in European history. Constantly accused of "escaping from the present", just like he was "escaping" the PRL when travelling, Herbert nevertheless ceaselessly attempted to demonstrate that it was his *contemporaries* who were out of touch – disconnected from the pulsating fabric of simultaneous time that existed all around them, even if, in Poland's case, the material *replacement* of one lifeworld with another made this simultaneity difficult to see. Rather than "obsolete", Herbert argued in interviews and proved textually in his prose, the past should instead be seen as a carrier of *hope*, our grounding in centuries of past human experience that can be a source of comfort and strength for facing the future.[467] *Hopefully* this chapter has shown, however, how strongly this vision was rooted in Herbert's personal remedy for emotional disturbance and mental suffering: facing an artefact or a centuries-old building, feeling time expand as the present and its problems grew smaller. It is in front of the historical object that we leave Herbert, and will soon meet him back there in Chapter 3.

[467] On Herbert being "worshipped" as a "hope-bringing voice" see Anders 2009, 96. I disagree with Kay (2013, 275) that "Herbert is not a poet [one would] turn to for such solace".

CHAPTER 3:
OBJECT, IMAGE, AND CROSS-TEMPORAL COMMUNION

> *Greek mythology is no dream to me. I regard the gods and myths as concrete, as petrified human experience, and to me that's an object [Gegenstand]. I don't trust ideas very much, nor ideologies, I very much trust objects [Gegenstände], they don't lie. First I make different sketches. That's very important to me, because it is in this way that I swallow my material, so to speak…*[468]

Following his reading at the Akademie der Künste, West Berlin, in 1969, Herbert takes questions from the audience and, presumably, the discussion moderator. Primly dressed in suit and tie, he remains composed in the face of audience questions on his literary silence on contemporary issues, politely insisting on the concreteness of antiquity in response – on its status as a *Gegenstand*, both subject matter and physical object. We owe this image of Herbert to German director Lore Ditzen and her short documentary *Zbigniew Herbert: Ein Portrait* (1969), produced as part of the series *Künstler als Gäste in Berlin*.[469] Privately, he was far less composed, complaining to the Czajkowski couple that a "young revolutionary" accused him of "not writing about the Biafran War and Vietnam" all while draped in an "expensive fur coat", a signifier of their Western privilege and wealth.[470] This snapshot of Herbert's Berlin reading perfectly encapsulates the tensions surrounding his writing on antiquity analysed in Chapter 2, while also pointing to another central dimension of his reception: that of objecthood and contact with artefacts. Herbert's statement on Greek mythology, as well as the real-life context of the reading, are brimming with objects as mediators of cultural connection and conflict. There is Greek myth as "petrified human experience" (*versteinerte Erfahrung der Menschheit*), an almost *geological* artefact, objects (*Gegenstände*) contrasted with ideologies, but also the young person's fur coat, perceived

[468] Quote from the documentary *Zbigniew Herbert: Ein Portrait*, dir. Lore Ditzen (1969). Original German transcribed and translated by me.
[469] The series was produced by the Presse- und Informationsamt des Landes Berlin under the heading "Bericht aus Berlin: Literatur", see Burba 2019, 122.
[470] Letter from Berlin, dated 12/12/1969. In the same letter Herbert also mentions staring in a "twenty-minute 'movie'", presumably Ditzen's.

by Herbert as a sign of their complete lack of self-awareness, and Herbert's own perfectly ironed attire, both an armour of (old-fashioned) elegance and testimony to his struggle to fit in with the Western literary scene.[471]

That physical objects serve as the dividing line between East and West is particularly interesting in light of art historian Zbigniew Mańkowski's grounding of Herbert's "philosophy of objects" in the "lack of things" suffered by the socialist bloc – a contrast to the "materiality fatigue" experienced on the capitalist side of the Iron Curtain.[472] The West was overstimulated by objects, while the East stood in "long, trailing queue[s]" to acquire even basic necessities – thus runs the most popular narrative of the Cold War years, reinforced by the academic dominance of János Kornai's model of the socialist "shortage economy", from which the Eastern bloc emerges as a space of nothing but "absence and deprivation".[473] This narrative of absence is very easily linked to designations of communism as a *spectral* system – and here I do not primarily mean Jacques Derrida's seminal *Spectres de Marx* (1993), but voices of Eastern Europeans such as the influential Herbert scholar Józef Ruszar, who has spoken of a direct opposition between Herbert's idea of the historical past, deeply tied to artefacts and architecture and thus "real, tangible, genuine", and "communism", which "turns the world into its spectre".[474] Herbert himself, too, spoke of "communism" as an "unreal system, a spectral system" in the fiercely political interview given to Jacek Trznadel in 1985, and had already played with Karl Marx's famous metaphor of the "spectre of communism" in the slightly earlier poem "Mr Cogito on the Need for Precision", published in *Report from a Besieged City* (1983).[475]

[471] Stills from the documentary will be further analysed in Part Two below. *Cf.* Franaszek 2018a, 654 on the visual contrast between Herbert's prim physical appearance and the hippie-esque fashion of the poets he met in the West (e.g., Allan Ginsberg).
[472] Mańkowski 2006, 201.
[473] Crowley 2000, 25; Kornai 1992; Fehérváry 2009, 428.
[474] Ruszar 2014, 270.
[475] "Wypluć z siebie wszystko" [Spit It All Out], first printed in *Kultura Niezależna* 14 (1985), reprinted in HN, 119-64 (123). By putting the word "communism" in quotation marks, I distance myself from the incorrect, though prevalent, definition of the PRL as a "communist state", a label never used by the Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*). For a highly precise discussion of the economic and ideological reasons why the PRL could have never been "communist", as well as an analysis of the psychological mechanisms behind the use of the term by "anti-communists", see Mazur 2013. For the terminological difficulties created by its continued popular use see Balcerzak 2021, 256.

In the poem, which ironically recasts the efforts of totalitarian regimes to cover up the numbers of their victims as a "problem in the field of applied mathematics", the move away from "simple arithmetical calculations" done by children is inaugurated by the lines:

> a specter is haunting
> the expanse of history[476]
> the specter of indeterminacy

From a catalogue of battles with uncertain victim counts, starting with Troy and Gaugamela, over natural disasters, Herbert proceeds to instances of mass murder the official denial of which "undermines the reality of the world", leaving the remaining population in

> the diabolical net of the dialectic
> which says there is no difference
> between substance and a specter

The reference to Marxism is unmistakable, and the figure of the spectre does not "problematize dichotomous thinking", as it does within the modern discipline of hauntology, but instead clearly occupies a position on the binary between truth and lies, transparency and deception.[477]

Most important, however, is the remedy Herbert suggests for this spectral "hell". After an appeal to the reader that the victims of covered-up crimes must be identified and "summoned" by their names, Herbert advises that they should also be "read[ied] for the road", presumably to the afterlife, with the following:

> in a clay bowl
> millet poppyseed
> an ivory comb
> arrowheads
> a ring of fidelity
> amulets

This array of objects, strikingly similar to an average display of archaeological finds to be encountered in the prehistoric section of a museum, touchingly recalls the common source of such artefacts: a pre-modern burial ceremony, here given the power to overwrite the pointless brutality the anonymous dead had to suffer. While thus matching the poem's focus on death, in

[476] Valles translates *po bezkresach historii,* lit. "the boundlessness of history", as "the map of history", which in my view does not render the very lack of precision Herbert is thematising in the poem.
[477] Shaw 2018, 6.

its evocation of domesticity this selection of objects is equally strongly tied to the small-scale, mundane actions that sustain life: producing and consuming food ("millet", "poppyseed", and the "clay bowl"), taking care of one's appearance (the "ivory comb"), and receiving and displaying affection (the "ring of fidelity"). Herbert's juxtaposition of the spectrality of totalitarian propaganda with the tangibility of everyday life thus allows us to see what Krisztina Fehérváry has identified as a significant misreading of Eastern European expressions of the spectrality or ghostly "grayness" of the state-socialist system: rather than a "desire for consumer goods", such spectral imagery usually expresses the threatening omnipresence of the state, paired with its shadowy existence behind an impassable bureaucratic apparatus.[478]

This re-consideration of the overemphasis on scarcity does not mean, however, that the sphere of material goods was not implicated in such negative assessments of the socialist state. If the Soviet model of governance treated everyday life as a "fundamental site of ideological intervention", then the citizens of socialist states equally treated state-produced wares as impulses to make political judgements about their governments and state socialism more broadly.[479] While production flaws such as "ill-conceived design", "inadequate materials", or the cheapening of quality in mass production are equally prevalent in capitalist economies, in the totalising state-socialist context they were seen as reflective of the state's "negligence", "malicious intent", or even "dehumanisation" of its citizens.[480] What is more, the standardisation of mass-produced goods, similarly not a uniquely socialist phenomenon, became representative of the state's "intolerance of diversity" and its attempts to "homogenise" its citizens.[481] It is against this background, then, rather than a generalising "lack of things", that Herbert's deep fascination with ancient objects must be read. While, as the beginning of this chapter will show, Herbert's poetry equally privileges mundane, present-day objects, investigating their moral independence (as if wanting to see beyond the popular connection between objects and state), it is in Herbert's prosaic encounters with historical artefacts and artworks that we find intimacy,

[478] Fehérváry 2009, 427.
[479] Crowley and Reid 2002, 8.
[480] Fehérváry 2009, 446.
[481] Ibid, 447.

rather than *distance*, between humans and objects. Against the background of state socialism, experienced by Herbert and many of his contemporaries as deeply *inauthentic* due to its ideologization of the public sphere, use of propaganda, and standardisation of consumer goods, this chapter will show Herbert's contact with the past as driven by a search for "untainted" authenticity, the only thing capable of putting the "simultaneity of history" into motion.

Standing outside of Herbert's "anti-communist" historical positioning, I will attempt to dissolve the static binary between materiality and spectrality, drawing attention to the interactions between Herbert's idea of simultaneous time and his fixation on objecthood.[482] The relationship between Herbert's artistic focus on objects and his conceptualisation of reception and its temporality will be the focus of the first part of this chapter, in which I will explore the tension that arises in Herbert's writings between the contrasting notions of the historical object as a record of one moment in time and as a meeting point of different temporalities. Part Two will give a slightly different spin to the idea of "untainted objecthood", investigating Herbert's pursuit of an immutable medium in the context of his drawing practice, a most crucial and yet underanalysed means of his ancient reception. Herbert will be shown as keen to connect with the maker of an object (the corporeal opposite of the spectre of state production), whose way of *looking at the world* he hopes to approximate through sketching. As a body of visual reception, Herbert's sketches will thus serve to test his conceptualisation of the object as examined in Part One, inspiring questions of the relationship between the verbal and the visual, fragmented representation and fragmented materiality. Both parts will circle around the idea of objects, whether ancient artefacts or personal drawings, as "amulets", gateways to the multitemporal vision of reality presented in Chapter 2 that Herbert believed the ideologically infused material world of state socialism to be obscuring – an idea also strongly resonating with the centrality of museal artefacts to Herbert's mental health practice.

[482] On the spectre as bringing about interactions between times see Blanco and Pereen 2013, 13.

Part One: Time and Objecthood

I. The Object as Moment in Time

It does not need much scholarly analysis to establish that the author of works such as *Study of the Object* (1961, poetry) or *Still Life with a Bridle* (prose), whose most discussed poems include "The Pebble" or "The Knocker", had an interest in material objects.[483] It is more intriguing to witness how, not dissimilarly to the way objects are projected upon by the conscious subject, responses to Herbert's focus on objects are often reflective of the broader approach to his work taken by the reader in question.[484] For Herbert's Western contemporaries consuming his *Selected Poems* (1968) in the Cold War period, the abundance of "object poems" in his poetic corpus perfectly aligned with the "abstract" parable form Western readers expected from dissident literature from the censorship-controlled socialist bloc.[485] Coming from within the bloc, Czesław Miłosz, too, rooted Herbert's object poems in "the experience of life under totalitarianism", reading them as an expression of the poet's envy of objects, which can be neither manipulated, like language, nor morally corrupted by regimes, like humans.[486] Additionally, the impersonality and "hardness" of poems about pebbles, chairs, or a wooden die matched not only the popular image of Herbert as the "stern moralist" condemning anyone "whining" on about their "little soul" (an image, as the reader will recall, Herbert himself liked to perpetuate), but also the "hard-bitten eastern European aesthetic" fetishised by Western writers such as Seamus Heaney.[487]

Further, the "minimalist" descriptions of objects in Herbert's poetry could be a mark of his reverence for "classical geometric order" and thus of his famous "classicism" – an attribute which, as was mentioned in the Introduction, has usually stood for Herbert's attachment to literary tradition, rather than innovation.[488] Despite this, opposing readings have not been lacking, with

[483] Kay 2012, 97f. discusses the popularity of those poems in Anglophone literary circles, especially their reception by Heaney (see also Heaney 1988, 63).
[484] Schwenger 2006, 6.
[485] Kay 2013, 264. On the volume's importance for Herbert's Western career see Introduction.
[486] Miłosz, "Ruins and Poetry", cited in Kay 2013, 273.
[487] Heaney cited in Kay 2013, 267. Coetzee, too, praised Herbert's "hard, durable" style, see Coetzee 1993, 7. "Wooden Die" and "Chairs" are only two examples of more objects poems in *Study of the Object*.
[488] Kay 2012, 109.

scholars such as Sven Spieker or Peter Schwenger highlighting distinctly modernist, or even avant-garde, sensibilities in Herbert's representation of objects.[489] Spieker, importantly, draws his reflections from Herbert's prose just as strongly as from his poetry, pointing to yet another subset of interpretations of Herbert's "turn to the object". In analyses of Herbert's essays, it is often the heightened sensuality of his descriptions of the object world that is emphasised, as well as his attention to the way in which it comes into contact with the moving, sentient human body: the division between humans and objects, which carries most of the moralising force of the object poems, collapses.[490] A vivid example of this is Herbert's visit to Paestum in "Among the Dorians" (*BO*), where stones radiate the warmth of human flesh and the traveller is invited to adapt the stillness of a temple column, watching his shadow follow the course of the sun.[491]

A similar sensory union of human and object, described in "Delta" (*MNW*), occurs in the Binnenhof, a courtyard in the Hague. Herbert is led there by his "master", the French historian Eugène Fromentin, in the form of his text *The Old Masters* (1876).[492] Yet, he quickly abandons his guide:

> The romantic Mr. Fromentin spins out meditations about lofty things, history, beauty, fame. I, however, with all the force of my spirit cling to the brick. Never yet has this angular object awakened in me such fascination and a fever of cognition.[493]

Just as Herbert's description of his union with the stone columns in Paestum served to set him apart from the modern, condemnably hasteful tourist, this encounter, too, serves his narratorial self-positioning. As opposed to the "romantic" Fromentin, too concerned with "lofty things" and caught up in his own discourse, the pragmatic Herbert is open to the *real*, tangible reality in front of him – a picture not unlike the one he paints of his first encounter with the Notre-Dame in "A Stone from the Cathedral" (*BO*), which draws him away from the navel-gazing crowd of modern poets and towards tangible history.[494] Both examples show that just as Herbert's object poems

[489] Spieker 1998 and Schwenger 2006.
[490] Kozicka 2006, 51-2; DiMauro 1998; Shallcross 2002, 44.
[491] BO, 35.
[492] Herbert's reliance on Fromentin is one of the most problematic aspects of MNW, see Śniedziewska 2014, 9-10; Oczko 2016, 294, and the discussion of Herbert's positivism below.
[493] MNW, 11 (edited translation).
[494] BO, 92; *cf.* HN, 30.

contributed to his establishment as self-effacing witness to totalitarianism and a moral authority figure, the sensitivity to objects in his prose tightens the relationship between Herbert's text and reality, subjugating the former to the latter. A proclaimed "fascination" or even *fever* for objects equally aids the temporal displacement of Herbert's text, approximating it to the "craze" about "monuments, ex vota, trophies, tombstones, reliquies" that Herbert ascribes to the ancients and their travel writers, such Pausanias, in "Acropolis" (*LNM*).[495]

An important difference between Herbert's treatment of objects in poetry and prose, however, emerges from a comparison of the following two passages, the first one the opening sentence of the prose poem "Wooden Die" (*Study of the Object*), the second the continuation of Herbert's encounter with the brick wall in the Binnenhof:

> A wooden die can be described only from without. We are therefore condemned to eternal ignorance of its essence.
>
> Dusk was falling. […] All of a sudden there was an unexpected pause, a short-lasting interval in the darkness, as if somebody hurriedly opened the door from a light room to a dark one. It happened as I sat down on a bench several yards from the back wall of the Ridderzaal, the Knights' Hall. […] I started to appreciate the old, warm, close-to-the-earth brick.[496]

In a litany of flowery descriptions of all the colours displayed by the Gothic bricks in the changing sunlight too long to cite here, Herbert reproduces the epiphanic, almost unspeakable moment ("*it* happened") when they reveal their hitherto hidden nature to him.[497] This moment of enlightenment is metaphorically represented by the image of a flash of light breaking up the darkness of a room and serves as a climax resolving Herbert's "fever of cognition", steering the text towards the more mellow tones of warmth and familiarity. Crucially, that this revelation of essence is based on an observation of the object "only from without" does not seem to be an obstacle. Unlike the poem, which maintains "the object's final elusiveness", to use Schwenger's

[495] LNM, 103. The strong link between the Latin root of the word "fascination" (pol. *fascynacja*), likely familiar to Herbert given his knowledge of Latin, and notions of witchcraft or *bewitching* gives an interesting twist to the proclaimed binary between the material and the ghostly.
[496] MNW, 11 (edited translation).
[497] Shallcross 2002 delivers the most authoritative analysis of epiphany as a crucial aspect of Herbert's phenomenology, also pointing to its modernist roots; on the modernist "epiphanic object" *cf.* Schwenger 2006, 16.

words, Herbert's prose radiates the conviction that, through embodied experience, the object can ultimately be known.[498]

Hardly any object encounter in Herbert's travel essays exemplifies this suggestion better than his ekphrasis of the Hagia Triada sarcophagus, located at the Archaeological Museum in Heraklion. Constituting the second section of the Cretan essay "Labyrinth on the Sea" (*LNM*), Herbert's account of his visit to the museum is carefully constructed, following the same model of the multilayered excavation of mystery through which the essay tells the story of the discovery of Minoan civilisation by Arthur Evans. The episode opens with Herbert entering the museum "two hours before closing time" and heedlessly rushing through the collection, only to have his high expectations for the Knossos frescoes shattered by the discovery that they are all reconstructions by the Swiss painter Émile Gilliéron.[499] It is in this mood of despondency that Herbert "stumble[s] on the sarcophagus from Hagia Triada and experience[s] a revelation". In a tantalising cliffhanger the museum closes and Herbert is forced to leave, fighting his desire to be locked up alone with what he believes to be "undoubtedly a masterpiece".[500] The interrupted narrative continues in a food market, where Herbert is eating dinner while watching a butcher quarter an ox, thinking of the critics who will "hack" and "rip apart" his texts – a fate the museal object will not share.[501]

Herbert reflects:

> I think also of the abandoned sarcophagus, of the advantage of works of art over works of literature. The sarcophagus is equal to itself, effectively defends itself against interpretations, doesn't let the noisy and arrogant get anywhere near it, doesn't lend itself to being divided into first causes. It now rests in a glass case in the waxen silence of the museum, alone with its mystery—a motionless procession of people and animals.[502]

In this image of the unknowable sarcophagus "defend[ing] itself against interpretations", Herbert reproduces the inscrutability, the elusiveness of the material object he thematises in *Study of the*

[498] Schwenger 2006, 166.
[499] LNM, 11.
[500] Ibid, 17-8.
[501] Ibid, 18. The butcher scene will be returned to in Chapter 4.
[502] Ibid, 19 (edited translation).

Object. Moreover, the calm, solid artefact also exhibits what Jarosław Anders, reiterating Miłosz's interpretation of Herbert's objects as objects of human envy, has termed the "splendid self-sufficiency of inanimate objects", a trait "infinitely vulnerable" humans can only dream of.[503] The "waxen silence of the museum", juxtaposed with the insufferable chatter of language, is designated as the space of refuge the anxious or depressed Herbert often experienced in real life. But this time, it appears that it will receive neither his body nor his texts, leaving both to be "assaulted by history and nature".[504] After such an opening, Herbert's encounter with the sarcophagus appears foreclosed: the human receiver is divided from the material object, language from visual expression, the glass case is shut.

Yet, this could not be further from what happens on the page. Returning to the museum the following day, Herbert-the-narrator delivers what stands out as the most detailed ekphrasis among the otherwise sparse, cursory evocations of ancient artworks in *LNM*.[505] What is more, despite his initial disclaimer about the "torment of description", the inadequacy of language in the face of visual art, he not only describes the sarcophagus in extensive formal detail, but also delivers a decisive interpretation of its apparent message:

> The sarcophagus is not only a masterpiece, it is also the only surviving Minoan Book of the Dead—an exact portrayal of a funeral ritual; so it has the value of a document, a visual record of an ancient tradition. […] The artist passed on to us something greater than the record of a cult. An untiring faith in immortality emanates from the sarcophagus paintings, the conviction that life is indestructible.[506]

Gone is the language of "mystery" and indescribability: Herbert's careful study of the sarcophagus, rendered on paper by the detailed ekphrasis and aided by a few "more or less convincing" anonymised scholarly theses, has resulted in the knowledge of what exactly "the artist passed on to us".[507] From an object in a glass case, whose three-dimensional physicality was

[503] Anders 2009, 103.
[504] Ibid.
[505] Brillowski 2006, 157. The topic of Herbert's ekphrases will be elaborated upon in Part Two.
[506] LNM, 21.
[507] Ibid. One of the interpretations rejected by Herbert, reading the depicted rite as a celebration of the "return of spring", is identifiable as originating in Jane Harrison's *Themis* (1912, 158-211). Harrison equally touches upon the interpretation preferred by Herbert, that of the draped figure on the sarcophagus as a "mortal" (ibid, 210; although Herbert does not refer to him as a "hero").

emphasised by Herbert's fantasy of carrying it out of the museum in the case of a fire, the sarcophagus is turned into a readable "document", a "record".[508] The importance of Herbert's designation of the object as record should become immediately apparent when we recall that this is exactly how he conceptualises his own text. To put it plainly, for Herbert's text to work as a record of "information on remote civilisations", rather than an "impressionistic diary", the objects he describes must also be records in their own right: credible, comprehensible witnesses to the past that will grant Herbert's discussions of it the necessary credibility.[509]

The mention of witnessing also points back to the definition of the sarcophagus with which Herbert opens the ekphrasis: "untouched by the hands of conservators", it is the "crown witness of the art of the Minoans".[510] This idea of the "untouched object" allows us to see how the "idealization of objects" that scholars such as Anders or Magdalena Kay noticed in Herbert's object poems translates into the area of his classical reception.[511] Instead of the moral "irreproachability" of objects in general, thematised in poems such as "Objects" (*Hermes, Dog and Star*, 1957), in the prose Herbert's admiring gaze focuses on those objects that reached us *untainted* by other times, misguided conservation strategies, and misinterpretations. It is this ideal of the untainted object that drives his disappointment, if not to say irritation, with the Minoan frescoes, and that leads him to declare the superiority of Phaistos, a "pure ruin without pretentious reconstructions", over Knossos, a palace of guesswork and concrete.[512] What sparks particularly patronising comments on Herbert's part is Evans' "will to find in a remote civilization features close to his own age", something he remarks upon both in his notes on Knossos in the *Diariusz Grecki* and the printed version of "Labyrinth":[513]

> Evans spoiled everything that can be spoiled. […] In a thousand years' time this might be an interesting exemplar of how people with Victorian taste imagined Cretan art. [*DG*][514]

[508] LNM, 19. The fire fantasy is of course misguided considering the size and weight of the object.
[509] *Cf.* the preface to BO (8).
[510] Ibid, 19.
[511] Anders 2009, 103; Kay 2012, 87.
[512] LNM, 54.
[513] Ibid, 16.
[514] MD, 34 (my translation).

> Evans knew very well that the layman is most easily moved by the statement: "but they were just like us […]" So Evans read into the frescoes, whose figures are no bigger than your pinkie, a very Victorian atmosphere […].[515]

While this immediately recalls Herbert's thinking on the alterity of the past discussed in Chapter 1, in a typically Herbertian paradox it also appears to stand in contrast to his proclaimed "passion" for the idea that everyone "carries within them" not just the century they live in, but also all previous ones.[516]

The easiest solution to this disjoint between Herbert's interest in the simultaneity of times and his condemnation of any traces of the Victorian in Minoan time would be that he only wishes this coexistence to work in one direction: the past can be present in the present, but the present should be absent from the past. To ensure that Herbert's ideas are not potentially simplified, however, I would like to bring them into contact with a theorist of temporality whose spirit they almost naturally conjure up: Reinhart Koselleck. Members of the same generation, Herbert (b. 1924) and Koselleck (b. 1923) share a scepticism of "utopian thinking and commitment to ideology", which in the eyes of both can only end in totalitarianism, their rejection of Marxism, and an interest in patterns of violence and conflict throughout human history.[517] Herbert's concept of the simultaneity of history, too, recalls Koselleck's theory of sediments of time (*Zeitschichten*), "temporal layers that have different origins and duration and move at different speeds", creating multiple simultaneous temporalities instead of one linear timeline.[518] Despite these similarities, a difference between the two is revealed through Helge Jorgheim's discussion of Koselleck's interpretation of Albrecht Altdorfer's painting *Alexanderschlacht*, the opening image of *Futures Past*.[519] Reaching back to terminology developed by one of Koselleck's early influences, Martin Heidegger, Jorgheim traces Koselleck's exploration of how despite representing a "frozen,

[515] LNM, 16.
[516] See Herbert's previously quoted interview on his trip to the island of Iona, Chapter 2, p. 89.
[517] On Koselleck see Voelz 2022, 1459-60.
[518] Jordheim 2012, 170.
[519] Koselleck 1985, 3-7.

synchronic moment" in time (*Stilllegung der Geschichte*), the painting still participates in its diachronic movement through all the anachronisms committed by Altdorfer.[520]

To Koselleck, the fact that the battle between Alexander and Darius looks like the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1529 is not a detriment to the painting, but what "restores its character of *Geschehen*", the Heideggerian way of saying that while any kind of historical narrative attempts to "freeze" history, it is more appropriately conceptualised as always taking place – even in the historian's own time.[521] Koselleck's interpretation of *Alexanderschlacht*, then, shows that he embraces such nonsynchronicities (*Ungleichzeitigkeiten*) present in historical material and is capable of effectively using them to reinforce his theory of temporality.[522] Conversely, that does not seem to be the case for Herbert. To be sure, an anachronistic painting that offers a misleading image of the history it strives to artistically represent might be difficult to compare to almost fully reconstructed artefacts that are often presented as originals. Yet, interestingly, Herbert and Koselleck assume the same position vis-à-vis their material, claiming to see diachronic movement where Evans and Altdorfer could not.[523] The difference is that while Koselleck reads Altdorfer's lack of self-awareness as a temporal phenomenon, Herbert exhibits a certain glee in what he perceives as his *superior* awareness of temporality and anachronism – even if he is capable of predicting that in the distant future, the diachrony present in Evans' reconstructions will become a historical point of interest in its own right. Nevertheless, for Herbert standing in Evans' concrete palace this future has not yet arrived, and any potential reflections on *Geschichte als Geschehen* are being suppressed by a pulsating feeling of annoyance: everything is "spoiled", everything is *fake*.

The contradictions that emerge from the scene above, with Herbert displaying a clear understanding of the layeredness of time and simultaneously ridiculing any presence of

[520] Jorgheim 2012, 158-60.
[521] Ibid, 159.
[522] In *Futures Past* itself, the painting is used to argue for Koselleck's theory of modernity (more time seems to have passed between Friedrich Schlegel and Altdorfer than between Altdorfer and Alexander; see Koselleck 1985, 5), rather than multiple temporalities.
[523] *Cf.* Jorgheim 2012, 159.

anachronism, demonstrate the importance of a joint reading of Herbert's conceptions of temporality and objecthood. Herbert might freely reflect on plural temporality in abstract monologues in interviews, but in the direct encounter with the ancient object he is looking for the very *Stilllegung* of time that he otherwise opposes in his dynamic conceptualisation of it. While the need for the untainted object to act as a source of credibility for his text could be one reason for this, Herbert formulates another as part of his criticism of Evans:

> Coming into contact with the works of the past, we want to be sure they are authentic, that no one has corrected them, no one barged in to embellish them, perfect them, make them more comprehensible. We want to throw a bridge across the abyss of time to the gods and people of past millennia by ourselves, without the aid of intermediaries. Not being excessively spiritual myself, I have always looked for material traces to establish comprehension and covenant.[524]

In this quasi-programmatic passage (a foreshadowing of Herbert's turn to theory soon to be discussed), it becomes evident that in the context of the past, Herbert's idealisation of the material object as "innocent, pure or objective" is haunted by a spectre which never threatens the objects in his poetry: that of inauthenticity.[525]

In her book on the trade in inauthentic branded objects in South-Eastern Europe, Magdalena Crăciun draws attention to the overlap between the discourses of in/authenticity and centre/periphery, a cultural dimension that complicates the authenticity/propaganda binary sketched in the chapter introduction. The position of the cultural centre as the location of "true" authenticity, she writes, puts the periphery in perpetual anxiety over never being authentic enough. Or, worse, not being able to recognise inauthenticity at all, even in oneself, which leaves the peripheral subject stuck in a shameful cycle of (self-)deception.[526] Given Herbert's status as a traveller from the "other" Europe behind the Iron Curtain, this is crucial context. There is an underplayed, but palpable pride in his description of how he discovered "without special effort" that only tiny fragments of the Minoan frescoes were original – all it needed was a sensory

[524] LNM, 29 (edited translation). Konończuk (2013, 151) discusses the passage as proof of Herbert's faith in a "direct experience" of the past, but without addressing the problem of inauthenticity below.
[525] A fallacy in itself, of course, since, as Elsner (2010, 23) reminds us, man-made objects are never free from subjective human intention.
[526] Crăciun 2020, 110-111.

examination of their texture, colour, and material composition.[527] By highlighting the ease with which he identified the inauthentic object, Herbert is positioning himself not as a gullible representative of the periphery, but the true "expert on the West" as which he functioned on the Polish literary market.[528] Aside from this self-satisfaction, however, there is also barely concealed disappointment that the supposedly authentic cultural centre made him go through this trial at all, when it should have been a straightforward respite from the socialist world of lies. "I don't quite understand", Herbert writes with the disbelief of someone who has been deceived, "why the fantasias of a Swiss [painter] on the theme of Cretan frescoes feature in art history textbooks as originals".[529]

Yet, Herbert's desire for the authentic object expressed in the quote above is too deeply connected to questions of temporality and the relationship between present and past to be fully explained solely through Herbert's disillusionment with state-socialist propaganda or his peripheral cultural position – even if, undeniably, there is an emancipatory defiance in the emphasis on individual "unmediated" agency that could be termed an instance of peripheral "writing back". Equally deserving of our attention are the following two aspects of Herbert's programmatic statement. First, that Herbert's mention of an "abyss" (*przepaść*) between us moderns and the "gods and people of past millennia" directly echoes the "abyss of history" analysed in Chapter 1, yet equally denies the possibility of the "fullness" of time that same chapter found in the layers between antiquity and modernity presented in "Acropolis".[530] Second, the strong conviction, already present in the designation of the Hagia Triada sarcophagus as an "exact representation" of Minoan culture, that if only no human "barged in", the object was not "spoiled" and its authenticity preserved, it is those "material traces" that can establish

[527] LNM, 29. This pride is far more overt in "Siena", where Herbert conducts a similar examination only to later read "with some satisfaction that the value of [Ambrogio Lorenzetti's allegory of] *Good and Bad Government* is disputed" (BO, 67).
[528] Oczko 2016, 114 emphasises this side of Herbert's narrator-persona.
[529] LNM, 11. This contradicts Herbert's presentation of Leonard R. Palmer's attack on Evans' vision of the Minoans in 1960 as a "public spectacle" (LNM, 34). Yet, this in turn contradicts Gere's (2009, 222) claim that none of the Minoan debates of the 1960s left the academic sphere (the first to "make headlines" being the discovery of potential human sacrificial victims in 1979).
[530] LNM, 96-129.

"comprehension and covenant" (*porozumienie i przymierze*) between times.[531] The dangers of the positivism inherent in this approach, which views artworks as "accurate reflections of by-gone reality" and material objects as self-sufficient, rather than always subject to human projection, can hardly be understated.[532] In what follows, I will attempt to flesh out this idea of the object as enabling intertemporal connection, remaining mindful of the issues above.

II. The Janus-Faced Object

The last section of the essay closing *BO*, "Memories of Valois", is titled "Return", although one could hardly imagine a more melancholic image of departure.[533] It shows Herbert-the-narrator getting on an evening bus back to Paris after his trip out into the countryside, where any "sense of time" disappears. The bus journey, then, is presented as a *return into time*, which prompts Herbert to reflect that in 25 years, the Edith Piaf he now hears on the bus driver's radio will be "a dead star like Mistinguette", a point of reference comprehensible only to "the people of [his] generation, the people who survived the same wars".[534] In typically Herbertian fashion, violence and culture are intertwined, and Herbert's "generation" is defined by both their familiarity with Edith Piaf and their experience of survival. Herbert finds solace in the fact that by "casually mentioning" Piaf's name, he will be able to *porozumieć się*, communicate with or be understood by, the people who share his place in history – a derivate of the same word, *porozumienie*, he uses to indicate his desired connection with the "people of past centuries". On the bus, Herbert is "on the move again", driving off the page and into the night with the final words: "I rush towards death. Before my eyes, Paris – the noise of lights."[535] The connection established between movement, time, and death resonates with Herbert's condemnation of the haste of modern tourism, which, unlike his own mode of still contemplation, reinscribes the deadness of the past by rushing past it in the process of endless consumption. Modernity is equally represented by the

[531] *Porozumienie*, translated by Valles as "comprehension" can also mean "agreement" or "understanding".
[532] Oczko 2016, 112; Schwenger 2006, 165.
[533] BO, 202.
[534] Ibid (edited translation). Why Herbert uses the plural here is unclear and can only be another mark of his tendency to mythicise his supposed connection to the military.
[535] BO, 203 (my translation).

"noise" of electric light, a cross-sensory metaphor that emphasises its period-defining overstimulation.

It is in the context of this meditation on the acceleration age, the unstoppable movement of time towards death, and the ultimate ephemerality of popular culture, that Herbert writes:

> In twenty-five years, how many generations of carp will have bitten the slime of the pond near the palace of Chantilly? Only Sassetta will be the same, and the virtue of poverty flying to the heavens will be like a motionless Eleatic arrow. Thanks to Sassetta I shall step into the same river twice, and time, the "boy playing a game of pebbles", will be merciful to me for a moment.[536]

Although Herbert is one of the last thinkers who could be accused of separating the "lofty" artwork from the earthly materials from and with which it was composed, the passage creates a clear contrast between mortal life (the carp in the pond, humans threatened by war and oblivion) and immortal art.[537] A careful reader will notice that Herbert builds this image by subtly recalling multiple essays in the collection: "Memories of Valois" itself ("Chantilly"), "Siena" ("Sassetta"), and "Among the Dorians" (the "Eleatic arrow"). The last one is particularly interesting, as Herbert's use of the arrow differs strikingly from its mention in the original essay. There, Herbert concludes that despite the "consolatory" role the "doctrine of the immutability of the world" potentially played in the perpetually unstable lives of Greek colonists, "the motionless Eleatic arrow of Zeno did not pass the test of history".[538] Instead, history is designated as governed by the Heraclitean vision of time as a "boy playing a game of pebbles", which emphasises its unpredictability and constant flux in contrast to the Eleatic emphasis on fixity.[539] The

[536] BO, 202-3 (edited translation). The passage presumably refers to *Marriage of St Francis to Lady Poverty*, a panel from a polyptych in the convent of San Francesco at Borgo San Sepolcro.
[537] While the idea of the materiality of art already interests Herbert in *BO* (see preface and "A Stone from the Cathedral"), this interest has its peak in *MNW* and essays such as "The Price of Art", which emphasises the "ugly", pragmatic aspects of art creation.
[538] Ibid, 25 (my translation).
[539] Heraclitus fragment 52 (DK 22 B 52). Anders' original translation of *chłopiec grający w kamyki*, "a boy playing with stones", in my view does not suggest strongly enough that the activity in question is a board game, as indicated by Heraclitus.

juxtaposition of those two pre-Socratic philosophies thus allows Herbert to differentiate between the unstable temporal order of mortal humans and the immutability of the art object.[540]

What is more, Herbert's reference to the Heraclitean "boy playing a game of pebbles" presents history as an arbitrary game of luck, reflecting Herbert's (again very Koselleckian!) aversion towards teleological narratives subordinating events to larger ideological visions.[541] The only thing capable of securing the "mercy" of this capricious child appears to be art, which allows Herbert to "step into the same river twice" and, to use Giorgio DiMauro's words, acts as a "'shield' against the inexorable, corrosive progression of time".[542] Indeed, this image has lead Piotr Siemaszko, author of the first monograph on Herbert's prose, to note that Herbert values material objects, including artworks, for "the sense of permanence" that "they afford in an otherwise constantly changing world".[543] DiMauro, reading Herbert's travelogues firmly within the discourse of travel, rejects this opposition between art and the time-space of the "world" on the basis of its neglect of Herbert's construction of a textual "universe of flux and movement", in which the changeability of art's surroundings is met with curiosity rather than fear.[544] While I agree that Herbert's essays celebrate motion through time and space, and, as we have just seen, accept that change is the defining characteristic of human history, I would follow Siemaszko in insisting that the artwork occupies a special place vis-à-vis the temporality of the world – although in a more dynamic way than his interpretation might suggest.

If we return to the Sassetta passage, the grounds for readings designating the art object as a locus of permanence or stasis should become apparent. After all, the solace-bringing function of the artwork is rooted in its continued "sameness", which here can be defined as the *sameness of experience*: in 25 years, Herbert will have been changed by the progression of time, but, he suggests, standing in front of Sassetta's painting will feel exactly the same, as if no time passed

[540] The scholarship on the influence of pre-Socratic philosophy on Herbert's writing is vast, for an overview see Filipczuk and Filipczuk 2017, 123n.1. In addition to the philosophers above, Siemaszko 1996 also discusses Anaximander's four elements as central to Herbert's essays.
[541] On Koselleck see Voelz 2022, 1464.
[542] DiMauro 1998, 36.
[543] Siemaszko 1996, 89.
[544] DiMauro 1998, 36.

between the two encounters with the artwork – or, rather, as if time had circled back to that very moment, the river flown upstream. While these reflections are melancholically focused on Herbert-the-narrator's own mortality and lifespan, a glance back at his "authenticity credo" from *LNM* allows us to see their wider applicability. The "credo", too, relies on the "sameness" of the object in its designation as what allows the modern subject to "throw a bridge across the abyss of time". On the surface, this time this "sameness" is defined as the material integrity of the object, displaying anxieties surrounding reconstruction and conservation that are still absent in the Sassetta passage.[545] Yet, if the passages are read together, it seems unlikely that the continued material existence of the object alone could be the sole basis for the "comprehension and covenant" Herbert hopes to achieve. What such a reading hints at is that in his essays, Herbert argues for the possibility of a sameness of experience not just within one's own personal history of engagements with an object, but also within the history of the object more broadly.

Does Herbert suggest, then, that as long as the object is authentic, the artwork well-preserved, the modern receiver can connect with its time of origin by "reactivating" its original reception, freed from their own historicity?[546] A crucial phrase from the Hagia Triada sarcophagus ekphrasis reveals that this could indeed be the case. Justifying his designation of the sarcophagus as a masterpiece, Herbert claims it to capture "that happy moment of revelatory knowledge and inspired sobriety, *when a civilization sees itself whole as if in a mirror*".[547] While the reader might recall my previous usage of this quotation in the context of Herbert's construction of his text as meeting point of ancient and modern collective consciousness (Chapter 2), here I would like to enrich this conclusion by focusing on the immediate encounter with the object that supposedly leads to this meeting. In this forceful opening to the ekphrasis, the sarcophagus is not just a "record", as claimed later, but also visual testimony to self-perception. In a complete displacement of the gaze, Herbert ascribes his own way of seeing the sarcophagus to the Minoans themselves, using the mirror metaphor to exclude the possibility of a modern gaze coming

[545] For Herbert growing suspicion towards the world and its reflection in the travelogues see Chapter 4.
[546] On "reactivating" an artwork as an event *cf.* Nagel and Wood 2010, 9.
[547] LNM, 82.

between the object and the ancient civilisation reflected in it. In the same vein, he later presents his situating of the sarcophagus in the timeless space of resurrection not as a result of interpretation, but instead as a moment of *comprehension* of an affect already present in the object.

Herbert's manner of reading the sarcophagus as a mimetic self-representation of Minoan culture that allows him to "connect" with the moment of its creation recalls his positivist interpretations of Dutch art in *MNW*, which take paintings as directly reliable sources for seventeenth-century Dutch culture. That Herbert presents himself as capable of building a complete image of the Dutch "Golden Age" almost exclusively from what he sees in paintings, to the point of referring to written sources only to "a limited extent" and only to support his preexisting deductions, was already pointed out by Arent van Nieukerken in an early review of *MNW*.[548] Yet, it took multiple years for scholars to start remarking on the scale of the failure of this enterprise, which is most succinctly presented by Piotr Oczko in his article "Martwa natura w wędzidle stereotypu" ("Still Life Bridled by Stereotype").[549] The text's point of departure are the "over 200 instances" of "distorted facts, wrong dates, names, false simplifications" that the Dutch literature scholar found within the mere "181 pages" making up his copy of *MNW*.[550] What Oczko wants his reader to take away from his analysis, however, is not primarily indignation at Herbert's inaccuracies and misguided methodology, which can be excused both by poetic license and the travelogue form with its emphasis on subjective perception. More problematic, according to Oczko, is the relationship between Herbert and his readers: neither can Herbert resist "seducing" them with his "expert persona", "suggesting historical credibility [and] objectivity", nor can they resist this projected authority, with public opinion almost univocally declaring *MNW* the "textbook on Dutch art" it was never written as.[551]

[548] Van Nieukerken, "Zawiłe dzieje tematów niebohaterskich" [The Complicated History of Nonheroic Subjects] *Nowe Książki* 10 (1993): 43-44. Oczko 2016, 93 cites two more critical reviews by Stefan Kiedroń and Michał Komar, which however flew under the public radar.
[549] Another excellent source on Herbert's distortion of Dutch culture is Śniedziewska 2014.
[550] Oczko 2016, 96.
[551] Ibid 94-96; 114.

Oczko's criticism confirms, once more, both the persuasive power and the layeredness of Herbert's narrator-constructions that this thesis has been unravelling. What it also points to, however, must be one of the greatest difficulties in comprehending Herbert's writings: how can Herbert's wide-ranging research and his passion for it be reconciled with his presentation of faulty, subjective interpretations as moments of connection with the past?[552] Marta Smolińska-Byczuk, who outlines Herbert's vast collection of scholarly literature on the Dutch Golden Age preserved in his library, charitably describes him as "forgetting" about the professionalism of the scholarship consulted in process of creating "his own language", which "in his opinion *guarantees fuller contact* with the artwork".[553] Let us now return to Herbert's idea of the sameness of experience mediated through an object, bearing in mind this privileging of the "fullness" of emotive experience and exhibiting an appropriate amount of caution regarding Herbert's presentation of his "connections" with objects as a revelations of essence. To put it simply, if we consider that Herbert's own responses to historical objects are often incompatible with existing scholarly knowledge on their original purpose, meaning, or reception, the (in)correctness of a modern receiver's reactions to an object cannot be a determining factor in the "success" or "failure" of the desired cross-temporal connection. Rather, Herbert appears to be envisioning a *community of experience*, in which such connection with the past is not dependent upon *a particular* reaction to the ancient object or artwork, but instead on the careful study of the object, an *attempt* at engagement which can elicit numerous different responses, often as simple as aesthetic delight.[554]

Nevertheless, when considering this freedom of experience, we must not forget how strongly it is contingent on the rigid notion of the authenticity of the object. Only an authentic object, Herbert is implying, can guarantee that whatever reaction it produces will be a genuine attempt

[552] The question will be made even more difficult by Chapter 4 and its delineation of the precision of Herbert's research process.
[553] Smolińska-Byczuk 2006, 108-10 (my italics).
[554] This emphasis on Herbert's poetics of the attempt should nonetheless not be conflated with plain mistakes in argumentation and research. A negative example of this is Shallcross 2002, 68-69 who maintains that Herbert "respects the mystery" of Torrentius' painting in "Still Life with a Bridle" (MNW, 93-96) when he simply misinterprets its various elements and reaches a faulty conclusion, see Oczko 2016, 102-4. On aesthetic pleasure as a marker of value see Słodczyk 2017, 28.

at connection – anything else would only result in the aforementioned dreaded cycle of self-deception. Thus, Herbert appears to place two kinds of expectations on the ancient object or artwork. First, that it represents a moment in time, an authentic *Stilllegung der Geschichte* which allows the modern receiver to "look the past in the eye" *just as it was* (allowing a Rankean echo to reverberate here is only suitable in this positivist context). Second, that it retains a continued receptivity to encounters with new receivers, an ability to provoke new reactions that bring about a palpable closeness to the past. In this, Herbert's thinking recalls Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood's conception of the temporal plurality of the artwork, which Rood, Atack, and Phillips have equally applied to ancient objects.[555] In their discussion of Renaissance art, Nagel and Wood theorise the very tension between the "punctual quality of the authorial act" and the artwork's "symbolic reach beyond the historical life-world that created it" that I have just traced in Herbert's essays.[556] In contrast to Herbert, however, Nagel and Wood do not fixate on the authenticity of the original object, a notion that almost stiflingly binds it to the Janus-like obligation to look two ways only, towards its origin and towards the present of the receiver.

Instead, working with the substitutional system of artworks and relics common in the Renaissance (in which worn-out objects were simply renovated or replaced while their status as "originals" remained intact), Nagel and Wood create a truly *pluralistic* model, in which the artwork references not only the temporal categories of origin and continuation, but also of belatedness, anticipation, and remembering, perceived in relation to artistic convention and collective and individual memory.[557] Now, what makes the intersection of their temporal model with Herbert's particularly stimulating is that it allows us to see a similar temporal plurality, rather than binary, in his writing on ancient objects. Applying this lens to the ekphrasis of the Hagia Triada sarcophagus, for instance, illuminates how *temporally displaced* it is despite promising to merely reproduce a "visual record" of Minoan civilisation. Throughout the

[555] In the same way that Herbert and his scholars often conflate his attitudes towards the artwork and historical object (which stands apart from the "everyday object" of the poetry), which has allowed me to use the terms interchangeably in this discussion. Rood, Atack, and Phillips 2020, 177.
[556] Nagel and Wood 2010, 17-18.
[557] Ibid, 8-10. *Cf.* Rood, Atack, and Philips 2020, 177.

ekphrasis, the temporal layers of Egypt and ancient Greece frequently intervene between the time of the object and Herbert's reception of it by functioning as cultural and visual points of reference in Herbert's descriptions of various elements of the fresco. On the first side of the sarcophagus, for instance, the three female figures with upper bodies erased by time are verbally transformed into "bare, flat Egyptian feet", a metonymy that requires reader familiarity with Egyptian painting, while the resurrected man on its other side is anachronistically described as having the shape of a "herm".[558] Additionally, the object as a whole is termed the Minoan equivalent of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, while Herbert's closing of the ekphrasis with a quote from the Petelia tablet constitutes an intermedial translation of the visual object into an Orphic text; a translation based on the presupposition that the latter expresses a "faith in resurrection" identical to that of the Minoans.[559]

Naturally, this comparative language could also be read as a familiarisation device for Herbert's readers, more likely to be comfortable with "big" ancient cultures such as Greece and Egypt, or, in a more complex manner, as Herbert's conscious attempt to position the Minoans at the mid-point of a cultural genealogy reaching from Egypt to Greece.[560] Yet, no matter its authorial intent, Herbert's multitemporal language remains testimony to the fact that contrary to all fantasies of the unmediated encounter, the act of looking, even when directed at the most untouched object, can never free itself from the layers of temporality and meaning lying between receiver and object. Herbert admits to that himself in the case of Etruscan art, which, fascinatingly, is not a described as a "visual document" to Etruscan civilisation, but instead as an amalgamation of different times and cultures.[561] In "On the Etruscans" Herbert writes that, "in

[558] LNM, 20-21.
[559] Ibid, 21-22.
[560] In this rather common conceptualisation of the Minoans, Herbert can be said to follow his main source for "Labyrinth", Leonard Cottrell's *The Bull of Minos* (1953), equally a blend of scientific discourse and travel writing. Herbert frequently copies entire paragraphs from Cottrell, which especially applies to "re-quoting" primary material (Evans' writings, letters) while making it seem like he is quoting from the original source. Copied passages I identified include LNM, 15 (Cottrell, 129-30), 28 (Cottrell, 112), 29 (Cottrell, 133), 31 (Cottrell, 139), 38 (Cottrell, 147). One of Herbert's LNM notebooks in the AZH (akc. 17855, t. 1) further reveals that Herbert had also copied out passages from pp. 132-34 and 92 but did not use them.
[561] Herbert's comment on Etruscan frescoes is also one of the few expressions of scepticism towards mimetic readings in the travelogues. Herbert warns his reader not to trust any "tales of the Etruscans' gentleness told by sentimental novelists or scenes from frescoes (like films of upper-class life)" (LNM, 151-2). See also Chapter 1 for the reference to D.H. Lawrence (*Sketches*, 46, 56).

virtually every Etruscan work three ages are contained: the heritage of a very remote antiquity, a contemporary influence of Greek art, and the anticipation of Roman art".[562] Especially noteworthy is his mention of the "anticipation" of Roman art, which, instead of being condemned as an anachronistic projection, is presented as a property of the object itself, an impossible presence of the future of another artistic period. That this atypical awareness of the plural temporality of art runs counter to Herbert's earlier strictness with the linearity and, importantly, *emptiness* of time between "authentic" origin and reception is confirmed by the clear sense of discomfort it produces in him.

This is especially palpable in the last section of "Etruscans", where Herbert vacillates between recommending engagement with Etruscan art as a "lesson" in "freeing oneself from aesthetic prejudice" and recounting how the impossibility of grasping a "line of development" in Etruscan art led to a "sense of growing chaos" that accompanied him on his explorations in museums and at archaeological sites.[563] Herbert's confusion shows that despite his attempted criticism of "the positivist and by now defeated theory of the 'progress' of art", brought up in the context of the Etruscans and wielded as a weapon against earlier critics such as Bernard Berenson, Herbert cannot let go of his own positivism of a slightly different kind: that of wanting to see an object reflect and communicate one moment in time, even if it needs to briefly defy linear time in order to accomplish this communication.[564] If it communicates too many temporalities, however, indicating that there never was an abyss between it and its modern receiver, and that objects never *speak from* only one moment in history, it becomes uncanny, disruptive, *inauthentic*. It is exactly in this anxiety of inauthenticity, in this fantasy of untainted objecthood, that we can detect an active opposition to Herbert's pluralistic, innovative conception of temporality that almost puts him on a par with twentieth-century theorists such as Reinhart Koselleck.[565] The written thought, however, was not the only medium of Herbert's reworking of the temporality

[562] LNM, 163.
[563] Ibid, 162-63.
[564] Ibid, 161. Herbert dismisses Berenson's rejection of the "'Byzantine' Duccio" in favour of the "'Renaissance' Giotto", almost mockingly tracing the critic's linear conception of art back to his being a "child of a century that valued progress" (BO, 70).
[565] I owe the phrase "the fantasy of untainted objecthood" to Jaś Elsner.

and the physicality of the world. In the second part of this chapter, I will confront Herbert's ideas of the purity of the object and its relationship to time with objects of his own making: his drawings.

Part Two: Making an Object of Experience

I. Reading the Gaze

It is a critical consensus among Herbert scholars that if a "hierarchy" were to be constructed according to the importance Herbert gives to each of the senses in his presentation of a subject's coming into contact with the world, sight would reign supreme.[566] While this might be an obvious conclusion within the genre of travel writing, where authority is almost entirely grounded in the act of seeing, much of Herbert's poetry, too, has been analysed as built around "immediate visual experience".[567] This applies to both the concept of poetry as eyewitness testimony to history (see Chapter 2), and to the primacy of "visual memory" as a frequent framing device, as pointed out by Robert Cieślak in his reading of "Clouds over Ferrara" (*Rovigo*, 1992). While Cieślak uses this idea to discuss Herbert's textual layering of images of seen art (the clouds on "a Ghirlandaio painting") and experienced reality, visuality is also what defines direct representations of memory in Herbert's poetry.[568] A fascinating example is "Photograph" (*Report from the Besieged City*, 1983), in which Herbert describes a picture of himself as a child, taken by his father on a carefree summer's day before WWII. Opened by the lyrical subject's assertion that he has "nothing in common" with the boy in the photograph "apart from a date of birth and the lines on our palms", the poem then turns the photographed boy, "smiling trustfully" and unaware of the upcoming "second Persian war", into a fossil ("an insect caught in amber | […] a fern's cathedral preserved in coal"), forever "motionless like an Eleatic arrow" just like Herbert's timeless museal

[566] Tomasik 2018, 214. The (although lesser) importance of other senses such as touch and taste, especially in BO and LNM, has equally been emphasised, and will be discussed in Chapter 4.
[567] Alù and Hill 2018, 1; Cieślak 2009, 240.
[568] While Cieślak perceptively discusses the East-West binary between the "Greek boats" and the "flying carpets", it must be added that the image of triremes, most likely seen by Herbert on Greek pottery, forms another layer of visual art. Cieślak, too, refers to the "classical white shape of the Greek tradition" (252), while such painted triremes would have been, depending on the period, black, red, or ochre.

objects.[569] This splitting of "self-as-subject from self-as-object", identified by Dominick LaCapra as characteristic of the traumatic phenomenon of "numbing", speaks to the irreparable rupture WWII caused in Herbert's life – a rupture of memory expressed through the failure of *visual recognition*.[570]

For a twenty-first century reader, however, Herbert's rejection of the photograph's "superimposition of reality and of the past" can also immediately open up a web of intertextual interactions with Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980).[571] Looking at a photograph, Barthes writes, we "can never deny that *the thing has been there*", but simultaneously we should not succumb to the "delusion" that it is there still: "in order to look at [History], we must be excluded from it".[572] While, given Barthes' communist sympathies, it is unlikely that Herbert closely followed his work at the time of composing *Report*, the continued relevance of *Camera Lucida*'s elucidation of the "relationship of photography to subjectivity" allows us to entertain this intertextual exercise – particularly since further resonances between the two authors emerge in another poem from the collection, "Mr Cogito and Maria Rasputin – An Attempt at Contact".[573] In the poem, Herbert's poetic alter ego Mr Cogito stumbles across the obituary of the Russian exile turned circus artist in an American newspaper, a setting the poem structurally mirrors in its tripartite division into a narrative of Maria's life, an ekphrasis of her photograph, and Mr Cogito's exasperation at the inadequacy of her American burial place. The second part of the poem, centred around an unidentifiable "leather object" "fiercely clutched" by Maria, presumably a bag, has been read by Cezary Zalewski within the framework of Barthes' model of the difference between the *studium* of a photograph, the study of its contents and cultural connotations, and its

[569] LaCapra 2014, 39-40. Translation of the poem edited by me.
[570] That the photographed boy still stands near a river "called Hypanis on Roman maps" and considers finding safety in Greek colonies "not all that far away" again points to WWII and the Soviet invasion as the point of rupture between the Graeco-Roman heritage and Poland (*cf.* Chapter 1).
[571] Barthes 1981, 76.
[572] Ibid, 65 (Barthes' italics).
[573] Bate 2022, 42. Despite the political chasm between the two authors, in 1987 Herbert did acquire a copy of *Poétique du récit* (1977), co-edited by Barthes and featuring his essay *Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits* (Fortuna 2024).

punctum, the "piercing" element of a photograph that turns its study into its immediate, emotive experience.[574]

With his attention drawn, or, as the literal translation from the Polish would be, *chained* (*przykuwa*) to the leather bag, Mr Cogito attempts to deduce its contents with reference to various more or less exoticising images of Russian culture, only to abruptly declare that since Maria "took the bag | with her", its contents can never be known. In his interpretation of the poem as a "record" of the ultimate unknowability of the Other, Andrzej Franaszek does not address the grounding of Mr Cogito's initial "attempt at contact" in the illusion of knowability produced by the temporality of the photograph, deconstructed by Barthes in his engagement with a 1856 photograph of the failed assassin Lewis Payne captured before his execution.[575] Just as Barthes' *punctum* is the simultaneity of Payne's death at the time of writing and his being-about-to-die in the time of the photograph, the attraction of Maria Rasputin's leather bag lies in the simultaneity of a present of looking in which Mr Cogito can decipher the bag's mystery and in the photograph's foreclosure of such a possibility through its testifying to the fact of Maria's death.[576] Arguably, it is the same "shudder" at a "*catastrophe which has already occurred*" that carries the emotional force of "Photograph", with the exception that its object does not point to "future death" but, as Cathy Caruth puts it, to the "correlative crisis of life" – the survival of the traumatised self.[577] In both poems, Herbert recognises the foreclosure of connection inherent in the "future anterior" of the photograph, as well as the deceptiveness of the eternal present which it suggests to its viewer. Additionally, the Barthesian nexus of photography, Otherness, and death will soon again be helpful in considering Herbert's conceptualisation of the act of *looking at dead civilisations* below.

The question of Herbert's gaze, or at least the mode of looking he ascribes to his narrator-persona in writing, has been discussed with a vigour matching the importance of sight in his oeuvre. Inspired by the poem "Path" (*Inscription*, 1969), which struggles to reconcile the

[574] Barthes 1981, 25-28. Zalewski 2008, 94-99. For another interpretation of Herbert's ekphrases through the lens of the *punctum* see Tomasik 2018, 195-99; similarly Olechnowicz (2009, ii) on the drawings.
[575] Franaszek 1998, 115.
[576] Barthes 1981, 96.
[577] Ibid (Barthes' italics). Caruth 1996, 7.

panoramic view afforded by ascending a hill and the in-depth knowledge of the essence of things granted by the descent to a "spring" (*źródło*), Magdalena Śniedziewska distinguishes between three modes of vision presented in Herbert's prose: attempting to panoramically see the "whole", zooming in on "details", and finally, attempting to see *through* to the "essence".[578] As Śniedziewska carefully traces across *LNM* and *MNW*, the tension between those three modes is never fully resolved, and the essay "Delta" (*MNW*) alone shows an interest in all three – a wide, holistic perspective (supposedly easily realised in flat Holland), small details of everyday life, and the "timeless" landscape of Dutch painting.[579] While Śniedziewska's typology focuses more on the object of the gaze, as well as the question of its capaciousness, the distinction between the "whole" or "detail" and the "essence" of the seen points to another theorisation of Herbert's gaze, namely Dorota Kozicka's distinction between looking (*patrzenie*) and seeing (*widzenie*) inspired by the work *Teoria widzenia* [*The Theory of Seeing*] by Władysław Strzemiński. In this treatise influenced by Husserlian phenomenology, the painter and art theorist draws attention to the "duality" of vision, which can be broken down into the biological act of looking and the "*consciousness* of seeing" – it is only through the latter (i.e., the mental processing of what has been seen) that the human subject encounters the world.[580]

Herbert was deeply familiar with both Strzemiński's writings and his art, calling the "author of the 'theory of seeing'" a "master" teaching young artists "how to see" in his press review of the *Second Exhibition of Independent Art* (1957) at the Zachęta National Gallery.[581] He was familiar, too, with the "master's" philosophical inspiration, and cited "semantic transparency", "a term borrowed from Husserlian aesthetics", as the "logical property" of his writing in a 1972 interview

[578] Śniedziewska 2013, 77. The Polish word *źródło* is strongly multivalent: while reflecting the physical image of a spring or well here, it can also mean "source" or "origin" and is often used by Herbert in the context of the "roots of [Western] civilisation" (*źródła cywilizacji*). *Cf.* the title of Herbert's highly political interview given to Adam Michnik in 1981, "One must always swim to the springs …" (see Chapter 2).
[579] Śniedziewska 2013, 78-80. MNW, 8, 10, 16-17.
[580] Luba 2016, 23. Kozicka 2006, 59-60 (Kozicka's italics). *Teoria widzenia* (1947) was first published in its entirety in 1958 but had been in circulation in the Polish art circles already prior to that.
[581] "Jesienny Salon Nowoczesnych", *Tygodnik Powszechny* 49 (1957): 6, reprinted in WG 226-28. The lack of capitalisation might suggest the official unavailability of the treatise in print at the time of writing. Gogler (2006, 97) reads the poem "Black Rose" (*A Study of the Object*) as a reception of Strzemiński's theory of perception.

with Halina Murza-Stankiewicz.[582] Interestingly, after explaining the term as referring to a verbal sign which does not draw attention to itself, but merely acts as "glass" for the reader to see through, he expresses the belief that "art should be an 'open window' onto something which exists, and the existence of which one must affirm and describe".[583] The image of the "open window", however, is less evocative of Husserl than of Leon Battista Alberti's "famous metaphor" of art as a "transparent window" onto the world.[584] Author of the first art-theoretical treatise on perspective, *De Pictura* (1435), Alberti has been recognised as the "first theoretical interpreter" of Cartesian perspectivalism, which Martin Jay names as one of the most influential "scopic regimes of modernity" (models of visuality dominating Western culture).[585] Defining the perspectivalist tradition, Jay highlights the "abstract coldness of the perspectival gaze" which required "the withdrawal of the painter's emotional entanglement with the objects depicted", as well as the conviction that any three-dimensional space is inherently "rationalised" enough to be transformed into a "two-dimensional" surface, provided the rules of perspective are followed.[586]

If this theory sounds likely to resonate with Herbert's liking for impersonal, transparent art, that is indeed the case: in "Piero della Francesca" (*BO*), he devotes a lengthy and scholarly passage to Alberti and his influence on Piero.[587] One of the first aspects of Alberti's work Herbert draws attention to is his claim that the artist is a "builder of the world" "even to a greater extent than the philosopher", reaching his knowledge of "natural dependencies, proportions, and laws" not through "speculation but through sight".[588] Again, the ocularcentrism of the process of perception is unmistakable, as is the belief that the seen world can be transformed into a body of verbalised knowledge for others to consume. Importantly, this comparison between visual art and necessarily verbal philosophy intertwines the verbal and the visual in the same way that

[582] "Czym byłby świat…" ["What Would the World Be…"], first printed in *Wiadomości* (Wrocław) 20: 8, reprinted in HN 54-57 (55). For Herbert's notes on semantic transparency see AZH, akc. 17955, t. 92, also discussed by Kluba 2017, 446-50.
[583] HN, 55.
[584] Jay 1988, 6.
[585]Ibid, 5.
[586] Ibid, 6-8.
[587] BO, 176-78.
[588] Ibid, 177 (edited translation).

Herbert slips from the semantics of language into the logic of visual regimes in the interview above. This intertwining, however, although equally reflected in the way scholars apply "theories of seeing" to Herbert's texts, is not confirmed by numerous other statements made by Herbert on the matter, as was already touched upon in the first part of this chapter with reference to Herbert's framing of the Hagia Triada sarcophagus ekphrasis. Let us recall Herbert's opposition between the inscrutable, self-sufficient object and the vulnerability of the text to be interpretatively "ripped apart" like a butchered animal and reflect on the strict binary between verbal and visual representation it creates: an unequally weighted binary, too, in which "works of literature" are assigned the inferior position.[589]

Herbert echoes this sentiment in an interview with Marek Sołtysik from 1981, in which he follows up his professing of a "distrust" towards music by saying:[590]

> I think that both poetry and literature have more to do with the eye than with the ear. It's this need for the concrete, the pictorial; the need for a sharp line dividing the good things from the bad. Maybe I'd be happier if I was a painter. It seems to me that if I painted a painting, that painting would be only as I'd painted it. Words, however, are subject to various, as they say, manipulations, treatments, they require interpretation. A beautiful combination of green and red always remains the same. It seems to me that this exactly is immortality.[591]

While this quote establishes a clear connection between literature and visuality, justifying the discussion of Herbert's verbal representations on visual terms, it also puts into question literature's ability to "affirm" the visible world, as well as the supposed "transparency" of writing. What it expresses, too, is Herbert's longing for his texts to exist within the same space of supposed timelessness occupied and co-created by works of visual art – a timelessness, as is once again emphasised, predicated on the notion of untainted objecthood. The link between objecthood and "immortality", or a state of "permanent being" that could resist the changeability of language, also resurfaces in Herbert's commentary on "Why the Classics", where he wistfully writes that

[589] LNM, 11.
[590] Herbert links this "distrust" to his war experience of "people who murder, and then play Beethoven", tapping into the connection between classical music and Nazism present, among others, in Paul Celan's poem *Todesfuge* (1948). Herbert felt an affinity with Celan as a fellow writer from the European borderlands, Franaszek 2018a, 31. For more biographical and, importantly, poetic similarities between the two see Fiut 2006.
[591] "Światło na murze" ["Light on a Wall"], first printed in *Rzeczpospolita* 175 (2001), HN, 112 (my translation).

"old is the poet's dream that his work might become an object, concrete like a stone or a tree".[592] That this desire is destined to remain a dream, however, is reiterated by Herbert in his interviews with both Andrzej Babuchowski and Zbigniew Taranienko, where he similarly draws a strict line between literature and artistic endeavours that "create objects", such as the visual arts or architecture.[593]

In the interview with Taranienko, Herbert concludes: "Written-on paper is something ugly. Hence, I also again return to the object and to painting."[594] While this "return" could easily be interpreted as a metaphorical one, an expression of Herbert's preferred subject matter and his poetic "turn to the object", one should not forget (as many discussions of Herbert's writing within the logic of the visual seem to do), that Herbert was in fact literally constantly returning to visual representation through his activity as draughtsman. The myth that Herbert studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków after the war, perpetuated by Herbert himself and commonly referenced as biographical fact, has now been firmly disproved by Andrzej Franaszek, but even if Herbert's artistic training was limited to evening drawing courses for amateurs (organised by the Association of Polish Artists and Designers in Sopot), his lifelong drawing practice attests to a desire for processing the world through visual representation.[595] That the drawings are no less an extension of Herbert's subjectivity than his writing was already demonstrated by their first and still most authoritative academic study by the art historian Tadeusz Żuchowski, who identifies three "phases" in the archival corpus of about 5000 drawings. The first one, corresponding to Herbert's first Western European journeys and his preparations for BO, contains drawings of artworks mixed with factual notes. The second is Herbert's journey to Greece, which marks a transition to "pure" drawings of the reality around Herbert: not just museal objects and architecture, but also more elaborate landscapes such as the carefully shaded drawing of the island of Naxos in Fig. 2, presumably created en plain air during a sea-crossing. The third type of

[592] MD, 142. For this piece *cf.* Chapter 2.
[593] HN, 29, 36. Both interviews are from 1971, as cited previously.
[594] Ibid, 36.
[595] Franaszek 2018a, 230. For scholarly usage of the myth as fact see for instance Cieślak 2009, 253, Carpenter 1992, 127. That Herbert attended such a course was established by Joanna Siedlecka (2002, 188).

sketches includes drawings from the 1980s onwards, often unintelligible, shaky, and characteristic of Herbert's growing mental instability.[596]

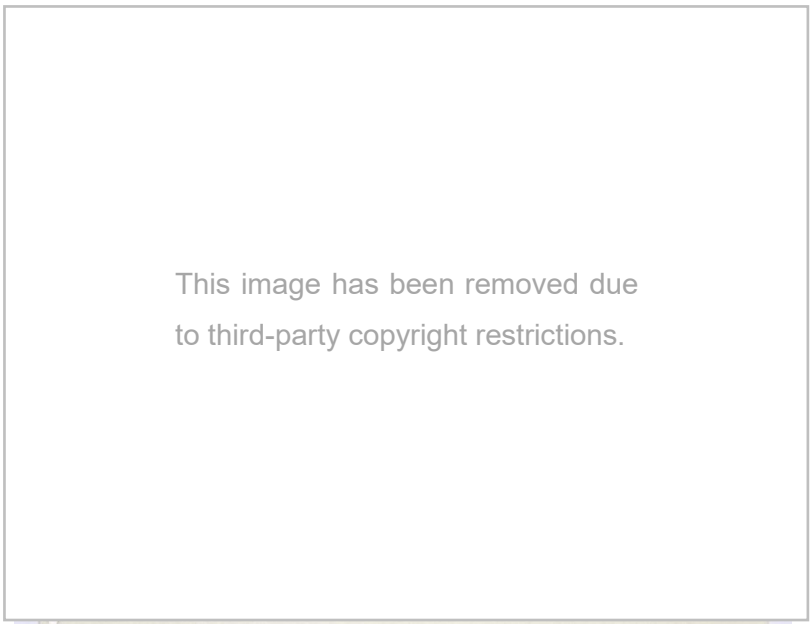

Figure 2: Naxos, 1964.

From the cultural hunger and excitement of his first contact with the West, over the wonder of living in a dream come true that defined Herbert's journey to Greece, to the mental health issues caused by his bipolar disorder, Herbert's drawings thus act as a long-term record of his being-in-the-world in the same way as scholars have read the thematic changes in his poetry.[597] Before I move on to Herbert's own perception of his drawings, a few remarks about their medium and physical properties are in order. Contrary to what one might perhaps expect from drawings often labelled "sketches", Herbert hardly ever used "traditional" drawing materials such as graphite, (colour) pencils, or crayons. Instead, he preferred the modern tools of ballpoint pen (black or blue) and, from the 1970s onwards, marker (brown or black), both "not particularly commonly used by artists" due to their irreversible nature.[598] More professional were his sketch blocks in formats ranging from A6 to A2, which he acquired at suitably high prices in art supply stores in the countries he was travelling through.[599] The question of composition, however, brings us back

[596] Żuchowski 2006, 27.
[597] Ligęza 2018, 11 refers to Julian Kornhauser's tracing of Herbert's emotional journey from the working through of war trauma in *A Chord of Light* (1956) to facing his own mortality in *Epilogue to a Storm* (1998).
[598] Żuchowski 2006, 18-19. The addition of pencil shading in Fig. 2 points to the particular care devoted to the Naxos drawing.
[599] Ibid, 22-23. This was also the case for ballpoint pens and markers, both not easily accessible in Poland. For the financial dimension of Herbert's sketching see Franaszek 2018a, 229.

to the spectre of writing inevitably conjured up by the ballpoint pen: as Żuchowski sharply notes, most of Herbert's sketches reveal visible traces of his having started their composition not at the centre of the page, as a standard rule of drawing would be, but instead in the left upper corner, exactly in alignment with the order of a written text.[600]

While this might be due to the amateur character of his drawing practice, the close relationship between drawing and writing that thus arises is echoed in Herbert's descriptions of the role drawing plays in his process of intellectual production. Herbert explains to Taranienko:

> I once wanted to be, among others, a painter. But to this day I draw a lot. My preparations for a book are first and foremost drawings. I don't take photos, that would simplify my contact with the object. But if I redraw the contours of, for instance, a renaissance sculpture, it is as if I was entering the same artistic rhythm that created that work. I always draw from reality, it's never a composition independent from the impulses flowing from the world.[601]

This practice of "redrawing" can be further clarified by a quotation from Herbert's unfinished essay on Vermeer, in which he specifies that the sketches serve him to "extend in [his] memory the composition scheme or intriguing details [of a painting]".[602] The first thing springing to mind about this conjunction of direct contact with the object, attentive memory work, and drawing is its presentation of drawing as a form of *embodied seeing*, which Kozicka believes to have been potentially inspired by the writer and painter Józef Czapski, a mentor figure for Herbert.[603] In a passage from his later published diary, equally cited by Franaszek to underscore his influence on Herbert's thinking about drawing, Czapski writes that in the act of drawing, he experiences every line "as a living thing", and the object of his art as "suddenly having a livelier existence", too, due to the perceived lack of any gap between "the end of [his] pencil and [himself]".[604]

While Herbert does not use so expressedly a language of *coming alive* as Czapski does, his description of himself as "entering the same artistic rhythm" that created the drawn work of art

[600] Żuchowski 2006, 32.
[601] HN, 34.
[602] "Vermeer", AZH, akc. 17861, posthumously printed in *Zeszyty Literackie* 4 (1999): 68.
[603] Kozicka 2006, 70-71.
[604] Czapski cited in Kozicka 2006, 72n.72 and Franaszek 2019/2022, 238 (my translation).

resounds similarly strikingly in the context of *dead* civilisations and artists.[605] In a manner that immediately finds its place in the larger picture of Herbert's self-effacing persona, drawing is presented not as an act of self-expression, but instead an effort at connection with, or even a *resurrection* of, the creative energy of another, the "impulses" of a world long gone.[606] Rather than works of art in themselves, the drawings are, as Herbert puts it in the unfinished essay "Vermeer", "a kind of reading notes" from his visits to museums, following the same logic as the act of "underlining" something in a book.[607] That the drawings are intended as an attempt at communion, not artistic coherence, and defined as driven by the mechanisms of seeking understanding (sketched details of a painting or object taking the place of markings in a text), can also serve to explain their often perplexing fragmentariness, as demonstrated by the sketches in Fig. 3 and 4 below, both produced in Athens in 1964 and 1975 respectively.

[605] This image recalls Collingwood's (1946/1993) vision of historians as "re-enacting" the thoughts of historical agents in the process of producing historical knowledge.

[606] Further in the Taranienko interview, Herbert adds that he believes himself to have "very little imagination", preferring to create from "heightened consciousness" rather than "subconsciousness" (HN, 35). Potocka (2015b, 29) very rightly reads Herbert's drawings against this self-presentation, emphasising that "such a form of reaction to someone else's work of art was *more appropriation than reception*" (my italics), a notion I will take up in Chapter 4.

[607] "Vermeer", AZH. In her study of Herbert's reception of Dutch art, Smolińska-Byczuk (2006, 110) uses the presence of "underlinings, exclamation marks, and comments pencilled into the margins" as proof of Herbert's engagement with a work of scholarship. My own archival insights into Herbert's similarly marked scans of book chapters and encyclopaedia entries (e.g., AZH akc. 17872, t. 3; akc. 17874) confirm this habit of underlining.

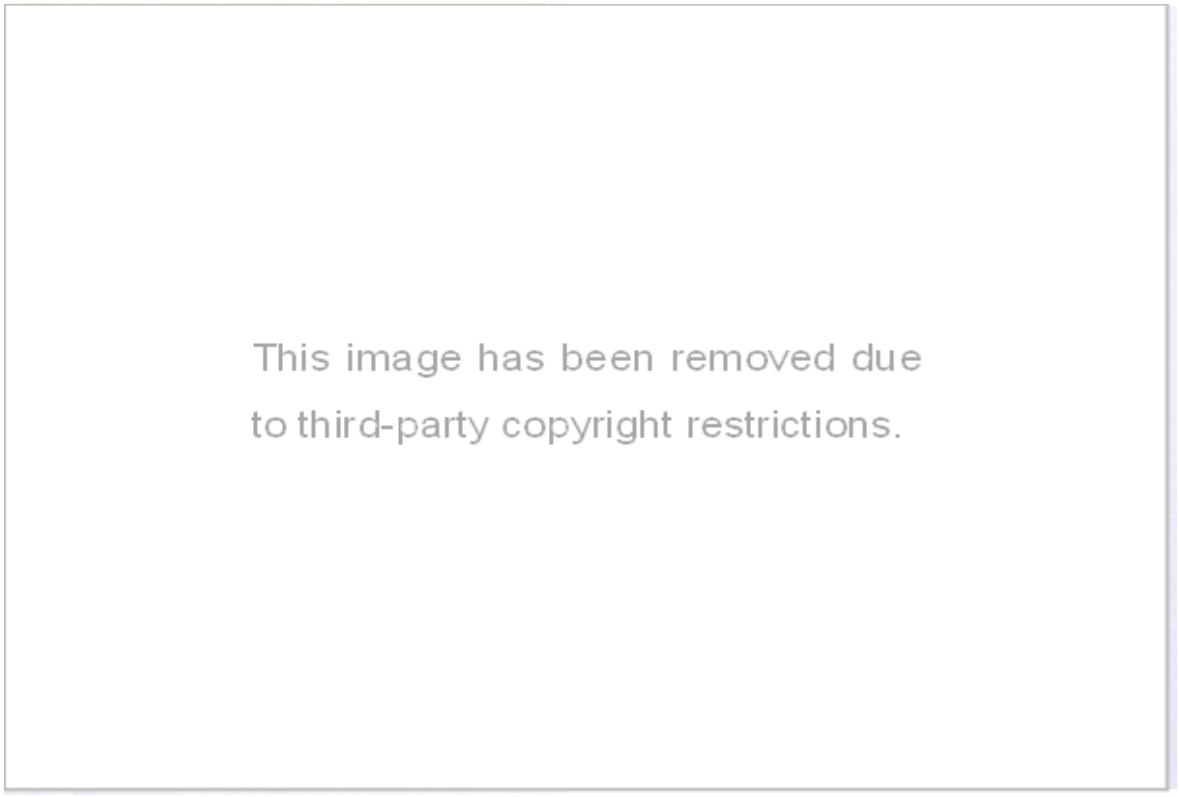

Figure 3: Sketchbook “Athens, Knossos”, 1964. Figure 4: Sketchbook "Athens, Agora / Acropolis", 1975.

While Fig. 3 serves as a great example of Herbert’s habit of extracting “intriguing details”, both their sources and the rationale behind this strange collection of human and animal figures remain obscure. Similarly, the view of the dog at the feet of what is presumably the statue of a male warrior (Fig. 4) is decentred just in accordance with Żuchowski’s remark on Herbert’s text-like image composition and conceals more than it reveals. It is not even clear whether the dog and the male figure are supposed to exist within the same space at all, or whether it is just a case of Herbert sketching physically separate and unconnected details on the same page, as in Fig. 3.

In the preface to her personal selection of Herbert’s sketches, published under the title *Promieniowanie* [*Radiance*], alluding to Herbert’s idea of the “radiance of masterpieces”, Emilia Olechnowicz describes them thus:[608]

> Herbert’s drawings capture what is most characteristic, what is most striking. These totalising, quick drawings possess the sharpness of the gaze of a great poet. They possess the intensity of something seen in passing (*w przelocie*).[609]

[608] On this radiance see LNM, 91; MD, 22.
[609] Olechnowicz 2009, ii (my translation).

Falling into a common, rather fetishising tendency to speak of Herbert's sketches primarily as "the poet's drawings", Olechnowicz's description fails to establish that the drawings merely capture "what is most striking" *to Herbert* – that each acts as a record not of the universal appeal of its subject matter, but, to return to the language of the *punctum*, the "wound to consciousness" it produced in one man at one moment in time.[610] It is exactly this fragmentation of time and its relation to travel, however, that Olechnowicz's words do allude to, accidentally echoing Eric J. Leed's remark that a traveller's mobility "limits" their view of the world "to surfaces, exteriors, lines, and figures quickly glimpsed in passing".[611] This serialised gaze, composing a whole from a collection of instants in the same way that Herbert appears to sketch one object in a museal case and immediately direct his gaze to the next, has in fact been classified by John Urry as one of the numerous "gazes" a tourist takes on.[612] The opposite of this "spectatorial" gaze is the "romantic" one, defined by "solitary, sustained immersion" and a receptivity to "awe" and "aura".[613]

This second gaze is, as the reader might recall from Chapter 1, equal to exactly the kind of anti-modern, slow immersion in one's surroundings that Herbert advocates in his travelogues, and that he presents himself as practising. If we move away from the language of travel writing and back to theories of vision, in Norman Bryson's terms the travelling Herbert can be said to define himself as representative of the Gaze, not the Glance: the first "contemplative", "masterful", even, arresting the seen object "in an eternal moment of disclosed presence", the second "irregular, unpredictable, and intermittent".[614] Mastery of his subject matter is implicit in Herbert's claim to the authority of his text, and we have already witnessed him exercise it on apparently "inscrutable" objects such as the Hagia Triada sarcophagus, which, despite all its "self-defence against interpretation", ultimately becomes subjugated to Herbert's gaze.[615] Crucially, Herbert's reference to his drawings as "preparations" for his books underscores how instrumental they are

[610] Barthes 1981, 26-7; *cf.* Tomasik 2018, 197.
[611] Leed 1991, 61.
[612] Urry 1995, 191.
[613] Ibid.
[614] Bryson 1983, 93-4, 121.
[615] It is noteworthy that while Herbert describes himself as circling the sarcophagus upon his first encounter with it (LNM, 18), the final ekphrasis appears to be delivered from a static vantage point characteristic of Bryson's Gaze (which also deeply links it to Cartesian perspectivalism, *cf.* Jay 1988, 7).

to this process. As he explains to his audience at the Akademie der Künste in the statement that opened this chapter, it is through drawing, the embodied attentive Gaze, that Herbert "swallows" his material (*ich verschlucke mein Material*) before moving to the library, where the thus *incorporated* visual material is decidedly transformed into a text through academic research.[616] Thus, while the "irregular and unpredictable" contents and fragmentary appearance of Herbert's drawings can indeed invite us to read them as the result of the fragmentation imposed upon the gaze by travel (a conclusion to be revisited below), the act of drawing itself, a moment of prolonged, focused motionlessness, stands in direct opposition to the logic of the Glance, securing Herbert's position within the order of the Gaze.

That the drawings were strictly private during Herbert's lifetime ceases to be an obstacle in discussing them as part of his discourse of the self if we consider the emphasis he places on them in public interviews.[617] As Jaś Elsner puts it, "the act of gazing always carries the implicit sense that it may be observed", and in Herbert's case, Lore Ditzen's documentary provides us with one instance of such an observed gaze.[618] Although the documentary as a whole is, to my knowledge, not publicly accessible, the section of it to be discussed (Fig. 5-8) is available to the contemporary viewer through its inclusion in the recent documentary *Herbert. Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* [*Herbert. Barbarian in the Garden*] (dir. Rafael Lewandowski, 2021).[619] Lewandowski's visual "citation" of Ditzen opens with a close-up of Herbert's face against a black background (Fig. 5), showing the author embarking upon the monologue on antiquity as an object which constitutes the epigraph for this chapter. With Herbert's speech continuing in the form of a voice-over, the camera cuts to a close-up of a rapidly flicked through sketching block containing the drawings of various faces (Fig. 6). Another cut brings us to the longest shot in the sequence, in which the camera slowly moves between multiple glass display cases, lingering on the ancient objects therein – we are now

[616] The idea of reception as incorporation will be returned to in Chapter 4.
[617] Franaszek 2018a, 229 refers to a letter from Herbert to Karl Dedecius (Berlin, 18/07/1969) in which he assures his German translator that he could "easily" produce drawings for a mixed-media volume of drawings and poetry, but this idea never came to fruition.
[618] Elsner 2007, xiii.
[619] *Herbert*, 00:18:12-00:28:30. In Lewandowski's documentary, Ditzen's first name is erroneously given as "Laura".

visibly in a museum, identified by Franaszek as the Museum Dahlem.[620] From behind the objects, Herbert's figure is slowly revealed in profile: he is sketching a fragment of a marble relief. A close-up of his sketching hand follows, then a frontal view of Herbert as seen from behind the relief (Figs. 7 and 8).

Figure 5: Herbert at the Akademie der Künste.

Figure 6: Herbert's sketchbook.

Figure 7: Herbert as object.

Figure 8: "Being looked at while looking".

Working in full concentration, Herbert repeatedly rapidly lifts his gaze onto the sculpture just to drop it back onto his sketching block. Once the camera finds itself behind the artefact, however, small glitches in the *authenticity* of the scene begin to occur, with Herbert's raised gaze accidentally, or perhaps inevitably, meeting that of the camera – the scene becomes infiltrated by "*the consciousness of being looked at while looking*".[621] Overall, the sequence is carefully, and artfully, framed. Filmed through the display cases filled with Greek drinking vessels in various shapes, Herbert's dark, motionless figure becomes a museal object in itself, separated from the viewer by

[620] Franaszek 2019/2022, 238.
[621] Elsner 2007, xiii (my italics).

a layer of glass. The presence of the ancient objects in the frame equally visualises the palpable persistence of ancient Greece addressed by Herbert in the voice-over: it is "no dream", but a concrete object existing in our physical space. The initial cut from Herbert's face to the faces in the sketching block, drawn from painting and sculpture, supports this notion of a proximity between the living and those living on in art. What this visual establishing of Herbert as the literal *face* of the past also affirms, however, is the very image of him Western receivers were so fond of: the neoclassical "defender of culture" with an almost *romantic* attachment to distant antiquity. How well Herbert's drawing practice, in itself a reference to the pre-modern era, ties into this vision of the cultured, charmingly old-fashioned Eastern European is easy to spot. Yet, as we have seen already, no element of Herbert's self-creation is ever simply a performance. Despite his awareness of having an audience even for this most intimate of gazes, Herbert's drawings also reflect his own private efforts at finding access to the community of experience he claims the ancient object or artwork to be creating.

II. Image, Text, and the Inner Eye

When discussing Herbert's rationale behind his drawings, as formulated in the Taranienko interview, I have hitherto not addressed the central image Herbert uses as the antithesis of his drawing practice: that of photography. Claiming that he "never take[s] photos", Herbert rejects photography on the grounds that it would "simplify [his] contact with the object" – a rejection that easily finds reflection in the travelogues. As opposed to the attentive eye of the ideal traveller or the embodied eye of the draughtsman, the "mechanical eye" of the camera, mockingly shown in "Siena" as the only active "sensory organ" of disinterested tourists, is incapable of producing anything but "sentiments as thin as film".[622] Similarly, the photographs of the Acropolis Herbert had to feed his imagination with before setting out to see it in person are characterised as "watery sustenance, devoid of smell, color, and background", drawing on the same image of paucity that

[622] BO, 78. Herbert's image of the "mechanical eye" here almost mocks Walter Benjamin's "celebration" of photography as a "prosthetic sensory device" "enrich[ing] the human sensorium" (Hamilakis and Ifantidis 2015, 139).

contrasts with the abundance of sensation provided by reality.[623] This immaterial and translucent air ascribed to photographs has a *ghostliness* about it, too, which is reflected in Herbert's description of the movement of tourist groups "clicking their Kodaks" in the temple in Paestum with a phrasal verb that could equally suggest the incorporeal floating about of ghosts (*snują się tu wycieczki*).[624] In "Latin Lesson", it is again a photograph that becomes the metaphor for the ghostly, "*unreal*" appearance of the Forum Romanum at night, while the photographs taken by the "herded" tourists in Siena are dismissed as "colourful, moving pictures that in no way correspond to reality".[625] What emerges is a reiteration of Herbert's binary between the spectre and reality, the ghostly and the material – and surprisingly, photography and material reality find themselves on opposite ends.

Naturally, this contradicts the most common conception of photography as the medium with the strongest claim to recording reality in a manner so "transparent" that it makes the "visual truth" of its subject matter "inarguable".[626] Moreover, analogue photographs can be, as Hamilakis and Ifantidis put it, "material memories of things", transcending their status as "disembodied visual signifiers" and playing an important role in tactile and multisensory mnemonic practices.[627] Those two functions fulfilled by the photograph, the transformation of vision into an object consumable by others and the anchoring of moments of vision in the memory of the individual, make it clear why travel writers have enriched their accounts with photographs ever since the inception of the medium.[628] Even considering the possibility of (now ever more prevalent) image manipulation, Barthes remains correct that no other form of representation comes equally close to producing a "certainty" of the "having-been-thereness" of a sight or experience.[629] Yet, this is a certainty Herbert markedly chooses not to draw on, neither in his private practice or in the form of his travelogues which, despite their supposed role as "envoy

[623] LNM, 95.
[624] BO, 35.
[625] LNM, 169 (my italics); BO, 78.
[626] Alù and Hill 2018, 9; Bohrer 2015, 95.
[627] Hamilakis and Ifantidis 2015, 139.
[628] Alù and Hill 2018, 1.
[629] Barthes 1981, 115; *cf.* Hamilakis and Ifantidis 2015, 139.

reports", do not contain photographs that could authenticate Herbert's descriptions. In the political context of the time, this decision could be justified by Herbert's desire to distance his travelogues from the then highly popular genre of reportage, lauded for its "realist mode" while being necessarily adapted to the demands of censorship – a partially misleading representation of reality whose reliance on "documentary" photography was often implicated in the abuse of the medium by the Soviet regime, especially under Stalin.[630] There is, too, Herbert's ambition to temporally displace his text from modern forms of travel, to which photography is inevitably linked.[631] Herbert's drawings, however, allow us to complicate this conclusion.

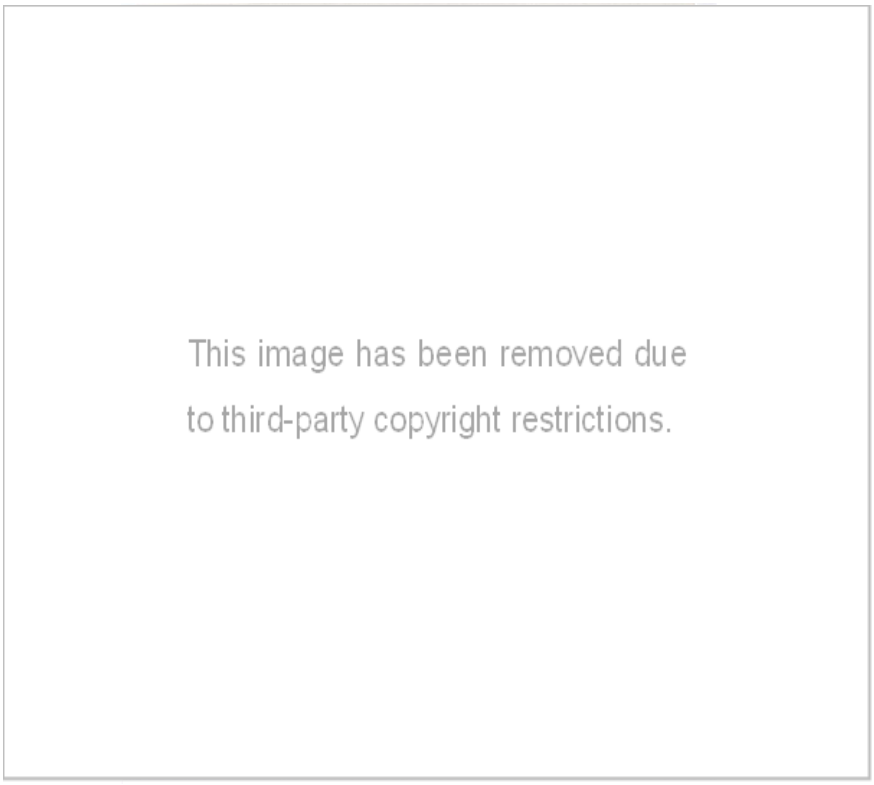

Figure 9: "Grabamfora um 730/920, Attika".

As we have seen, the drawings are defined by their fragmentariness, some even by their seeming incompleteness, such as the funerary amphora in Fig. 9. An incompleteness which, if read more metaphorically than as the simple result of the temporal limitations of travel, emerges as deeply tied to Herbert's idea of connecting with the past. Part One of this chapter has demonstrated Herbert's insistence on an "abyss" between the modern receiver and the ancient

[630] On socialist-realist reportage see Bracewell 2022, 289; on the use of photography in Polish reportage see Siewior 2012; on the difference between Herbert's essays and reportage see Kozicka 2003, 69-74; on Soviet falsification of photographs see King 1997 and Skopin 2022.
[631] On Herbert's drawings as "pre-photographic" see Żuchowski 2006, 29; on "cameras and travelling" as "inseparable" in modernity see Alù and Hill 2018, 9.

past, and from Herbert's comments on drawing as an attempt at contact we now see that this "abyss" is not only necessary to ensure the authenticity of the ancient object, but also to validate the modern receiver's efforts at connection, made more laudable by difficulty and the possibility of failure.[632] Thus, it is perhaps exactly the lack of such an "abyss" in photography, its presentation of the past as easily accessible, that disturbs Herbert about it. As Hamilakis and Ifantidis aptly sum up, photography's singularity lies in its peculiar intertwining of its inseverable association with death and "its ability to bring past and present together in one visual experience", thus bridging the absence it itself points to.[633] It is for this reason that Barthes, drawing on the semantics of madness and, implicitly, of haunting, calls photography a *hallucination*.[634] Yet, as the opening discussion of the poem "Photograph" has shown, this is a hallucination Herbert firmly rejects, in the same way that he rejects reconstruction and its covering-up of the gulf between past and present.

In other words, when Herbert speaks of the photograph as "simplifying" his contact with an object, it is exactly the word *contact* that the emphasis must be placed on. Photography does not simply repel him in its pretension to exactitude in the process of the reification of vision, but in its flattening of the complex experience of encountering the past in its absence. The superiority of drawing in this respect is hinted at in the penultimate paragraph of "Attempt at a Description of the Greek Landscape" (*LNM*), where Herbert concludes his admission that he has not "even managed to articulate the shape and colour of an olive tree" with the words: "But one would have to be Dürer to make an object of experience."[635] Here, Herbert primarily refers to the inadequacy of verbal representations of reality, already implicit in the essay's title (it being merely an *attempt* at description), but ultimately is it not reality which Albrecht Dürer supposedly knew best how to capture, but its *experience*, and it is in the context of this idealisation of drawing as the medium most suitable to capture the elusive nature of experience that Herbert's own elusive drawings must be read. Paradoxically, however, it must be kept in mind that Herbert's distinction between

[632] This emphasis on difficulty will be further discussed in Chapter 4.
[633] Hamilakis and Ifantidis 2015, 139 and Batchen 1997, 92 cited in ibid.
[634] Barthes 1981, 115.
[635] LNM, 82 (edited translation).

drawing and photography is one between two intermediary stages of preparation for the final act of writing: if there are no photographs in Herbert's texts, neither are there drawings. Yet, a strong case could be made that even in the absence of the drawings, Herbert's writing still reflects their fragmentary form and their privileging of the experience of vision over its contents.

To address the privileging of experience first, a fascinating example of such a translation of the experience of reality first into a drawing and then into writing, in this case poetry, is Herbert's engagement with the Dionysus cup by Exekias (Fig. 10). Herbert sketched the kylix, which shows Dionysus lounging on a ship surrounded by dolphins and is often interpreted in connection to the seventh *Homeric Hymn* to Dionysus, at the Staatliche Antikensammlung in Munich at some point between 1968 and 1970.[636]

Figure 10: Exekias, Dionysus Cup, c. 530 BC.

[636] See Clay 2016, 32-34 for her own interpretation and an overview of alternative readings.

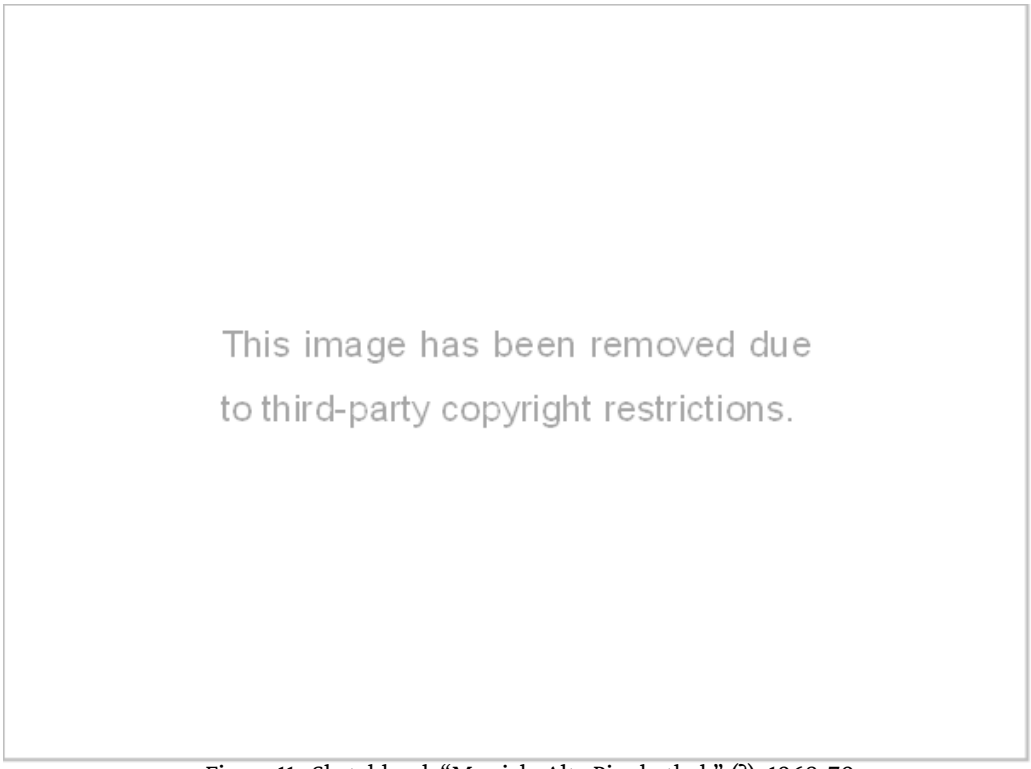

Figure 11 : Sketchbook "Munich, Alte Pinakothek" (?), 1968-70.

Herbert's rather shaky ballpoint (Fig. 11) drawing does not quite render the "elegance" emanating from Exekias' black-figure artistry, and which Clay associates with the "serenity" the god sinks into after his triumph over the Tyrrhenian pirates who initially capture him in the *Hymn*.[637] The seven pirates-turned-dolphins in Exekias' illustration are metonymically represented by one hastily drawn exemplar (whose doubled tail fin exposes the dangers of the unerasable ballpoint pen), just as the number of grapevines sprouting from the ship's mast is significantly reduced. The arguably most carefully rendered element is the sharply drawn beak of the ship. On the reverse of the sheet of paper containing the drawing, we find the following lines in German:

> Von wo führt sein Schiff Dionysos über das weinrote Meer?
> Welche Glücksgüter brachte er herbei im schwarzen Schiffe
> HERMIPPOS[638]

This quotation, which Herbert most likely found in an article celebrating the public opening of the Antikensammlung in its new, reorganised shape, is a transfigured reference to Hermippus fragment 63, which also opens with a description of Dionysus sailing "as a trader over the wine-

[637] Clay 2016, 24.
[638] "Whence does Dionysos lead his ship across the wine-red sea? | Which goods of happiness did he bring hither in the black ship", transcribed and translated by me.

dark sea in his black ship" before moving on to a catalogue of "all the good things" (ὅσσ᾽ ἀγάθ᾽) the god brings to Athens.[639] Interestingly, this "quotation" from Hermippus consists of two questions the fragment does not feature, but to which it acts as an answer, listing in great detail which *Glücksgüter* Dionysus imports from which far-away land.

Yet another shift in the material occurs years later, when Herbert publishes *Rovigo* (1992), which includes the following short poem, incorrectly translated into English as "Black Figurine by Eksekias", where the Polish title "Czarnofigurowe dzieło Eksekiasa" refers to Attic black-figure painting:[640]

> Where is Dionysus sailing across a sea as red as wine
> what islands does he seek under the sign of grapevines
> The wine-drunk one doesn't know—so nor do we—
> where downstream the agile beechwood boat is sailing

The poem is the antepenultimate one in the collection, separated from the closing poem "Rovigo" only by "To Czesław Miłosz", Herbert's "unconvincing" attempt to create a counterbalance to "Chodasiewicz" ("Khodasevich"), a thinly veiled caricature of Miłosz so offensively unfair that it caused a "scandal" in Poland and was read by Miłosz himself as sign of Herbert's worsening mental illness.[641] "Black-Figure Work by Exekias" thus must be read in this context of Herbert's struggle with both his bipolar disorder and the experience of physical illness, which determined *Rovigo*'s focus on facing death, impermanence, and uncertainty – a tone also palpable in the poem.

In the "Hermippus quotation", it is a moment of arrival that sparks the lyrical subject's curiosity and a sense of wonder at his happiness-bringing bounty. There is a strong visuality to the textual fragment, too, and the "wine-red" (*weinrot*) colour of the sea reflects the background colour of the kylix, against which the "black ship" rises to the viewer's eye. In "Black-Figure Work", conversely, the "sea as red as wine" primarily serves as a parallel to Dionysus' wine-

[639] Hermann Jung, "Das neue Münchner Museum "Staatliche Antiken-Sammlungen"" *Keramische Zeitschrift* 12 (1968): 804. Jung uses the quotation to underscore his designation of the kylix as "one of the most beautiful monuments to wine (*Weindenkmäler*) antiquity bequeathed to us" (my trans.). Hermippus, f. 63 = Athenaeus 27e.
[640] Other debatable translatorial choices made by Valles are discussed below.
[641] Franaszek 2015/2022, 312, 308.

drunkenness, and the descriptive "blackness" of the ship is replaced by the materiality of the "beech trunk" the boat was made from (*z pnia bukowego łódź*). What looks like a Homeric epithet in the English, "the wine-drunk one", is simply a description of his mental state in the Polish, "Drunk on wine he knows nothing" (*Spity winem nic nie wie*), a graceless image far removed from the radiant divinity of Exekias' Dionysus.[642] Why Herbert returned to this subject matter after almost twenty years is unclear, but while he completely reworked the textual material, the Munich drawing almost eerily anticipates this tonal shift. Divorced from the round enclosure of the kylix's tondo and deprived of the harmony of symmetry originally created by the placement of the ivy and the dolphins, the ship carrying Herbert's Dionysus floats in the empty space of the white page as if it was one of the "almost motionless" clouds-as-ships in "Clouds over Ferrara", another *Rovigo* poem thematising directionless wandering.[643] It is possible that, having always been prone to revisiting his sketchbooks, in the early 1990s Herbert composed "Black-Figure Work" solely from the *drawing*, without renewed contact with the kylix itself, which would reinforce the drawings' status as the creative basis for (rather than quirky addition to) Herbert's poetic corpus.[644]

Herbert's fragmentary rendering of the Dionysus cup also brings us back to the first characteristic of the drawings which I believe his writing to share. The incompleteness of Herbert's descriptions of his surroundings was already addressed in Chapter One as arguably undermining the status of his texts as "reports", and the same applies to his ekphrases.[645] Especially in *BO* and *LNM*, most of Herbert's ekphrases are what anthropologist Roma Sendyka has termed "mere gestures of referral", evoking the "cultural connotations" of artworks rather

[642] This emphasis on drunkenness and the "sea of wine" could also be said to place the cup firmly within the context of the symposium (*cf.* Henrichs 1987 cited in Clay 2016, 33), a cultural use of kylixes Herbert must have been aware of. In his sketchbook (AZH akc. 17953, t .165), he adds the descriptive label "Attische Augenschale" at the bottom of the page, which demonstrates an attention to the classification of Greek pottery and to the physicality of the kylix (the set of eyes on its outer side).
[643] The second meaning of *lotna*, lost in its translation to "agile", is in fact *airborne*.
[644] For Herbert's fondness of going through his drawings with his wife Katarzyna see Potocka 2015a, 78. The relationship between object and poem is even further complicated by the intertextual links to Jan Kochanowski's *Odprawa posłów greckich* (*The Dismissal of the Greek Envoys,* 1578), an influential Renaissance play on the Trojan War, see Mikołajczak 2004, 95.
[645] Here, I follow Leo Spitzer's definition of ekphrasis as the literary or poetic description of a work of art, see Słodczyk 2017, 25.

than conjuring up thorough images that would be helpful to readers unfamiliar with the works themselves.[646] A great example is Herbert's ekphrasis of one of the panels in Piero della Francesca's fresco cycle *The Legend of the True Cross* (c. 1452-1466) located in the Basilica of San Francesco in Arezzo:

> *Constantine's Victory Over Maxentius* evokes both Uccello and Velázquez, though Piero builds his theme with an ancient simplicity and loftiness. Even the chaos of the cavalcade is organized. Knowing very well the principle of foreshortening, he never uses it for exclamation, never disturbs the harmony of planes. Raised lances support the morning sky, the landscape is dripping with light.[647]

Of course, the opening comparison is useless to anyone unfamiliar with Paolo Uccello's *The Battle of San Romano* (c. 1435–1460) or with Velázquez's *The Surrender of Breda* (1634–1635), and while more diligent readers might connect the references to "the principle of foreshortening" and "the harmony of planes" to Herbert's introduction to Alberti and Renaissance perspectivalism earlier in the essay, they still do little to *visualise* the fresco.

What diligent readers might equally notice, however, is that the comparisons to Uccello and Velázquez can hardly be termed credible instances of spontaneous visual association: both feature elsewhere in the essay as comparisons made by Stendhal and Bernard Berenson respectively.[648] Thus, while Herbert's mention of *Constantine's Victory* as "evoking" or, more closely translated, "bringing to mind" (*przywodzi na myśl*) the later Velázquez could create an anachronism-embracing space of reception that recognises the fullness of time between origin and modern experience, the derivativeness of his comparisons quickly suggests that the ekphrasis is not a record of such immediate experience at all.[649] In its construction of an idealised moment of intellectual gazing, it matches the broader composition and tone of Herbert's textual translation of Piero's fresco cycle, which resembles a tourist guidebook in its atomisation of the latter into handy "information blurbs" on each fresco. Apprehended in this light, the ekphrasis

[646] Sendyka 2009, 48.
[647] BO, 170 (edited translation).
[648] Ibid, 171, 181.
[649] Another anachronistic description of Piero as "figurative painter who has passed through a cubist phase" is again delivered together with Lionello Venturi's opinion of the artist, leaving it open where Herbert's own observations start (BO, 178). On Herbert's illusion of immediacy see Słodczyk 2017, 31.

emerges as a testimony not to looking, but to the experience of *seeing*, that amalgamation of the act of looking with the mental processes that lead to an understanding of the seen.[650] Thus, in its authoritative tone and discreet displays of learning framed as moments of visual engagement, the fragmentary form of Herbert's ekphrases reproduces not the object itself, but the ideal mode of its consumption.

That this "ideal" mode of consumption is ultimately simply Herbert's own is demonstrated by the distinct palpability of his drawing practice in the text's portrayal of Piero in the process of composition. Assuming to know Piero's thought processes ("Knowing very well…"), Herbert conjures up the body of the artist in the act of creation in a way that not only underscores the intimacy between himself and the painter he "would never give up for any other", which is the emotional driving force of the essay, but also echoes Herbert's image of himself as "entering the same artistic rhythm that created the work" in the process of drawing.[651] With an overlap thus created between the gaze of the painter and Herbert's own, it should come as no surprise that the description's only visually evocative elements, the lances "supporting the morning sky" and the landscape "dripping with light", mere fragments of shape and colour, echo Herbert's tendency to draw out one element, his one *punctum*, from a painting. This is well exemplified by Fig. 13, Herbert's mere *allusion* to the dark woods in Jacob Jacobsz van Geel's *Wooded Landscape* (Fig. 12), presumably sketched at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

[650] Gogler (2006, 84, 99) similarly refers to Herbert's ekphrastic poems (such as "Mona Lisa") as records of "what has been read" rather than "perceived".
[651] BO, 165. Piero's embodiment here almost contradicts the principles of the disembodied Gaze as defined by Bryson (1983, 163-71).

Figure 12: Jacob Jacobsz van Geel (c. 1585 – after 1637), *Wooded Landscape* (c. 1633), oil on panel.

Figure 13: Sketch of *Wooded Landscape*, 1971.

A light, airy assemblage of vibrating lines and unbounded empty spaces in-between, with the treetops visually closer to clouds, Herbert's drawing hardly renders the unsettling depth of van Geel's composition, almost liberating the disproportionately copied human figures from the dangers they might be about to face – in the same way that, to return to Piero della Francesca, Herbert's peaceful image of "lances supporting the morning sky" distils them from the violent context of battle. In both text and drawing, Herbert's (highly selective) gaze is thus imposed on the receiver, inviting us to share his moment of communion with the dead artist more than it invites us to imagine the physical object.

In this way, Herbert's ekphrases constitute, to use Bohrer's description of W.J. Stillman's (1828-1901) "intimate, almost phenomenological manner" of photographing the Acropolis, "a fundamental provocation to experience" very much in line with the "proxy-experience" of the West I defined as one of the aims in Herbert's travelogues in Chapter One.[652] This is, however, where an important difference between Herbert's drawings and his texts becomes apparent. Herbert's texts might sometimes well include admissions that material reality always ultimately eludes description, or that moments of connection with ancient objects can foreclose knowledge just as well as open it up – "Black-Figure Work by Exekias" being a suitable example (if Dionysos in his intoxication and aimlessness does not know where he is going, *neither do we*).[653] Yet, the immersivity of Herbert's text, achieved by a combination of the evocative force of his language, his tendency to present personal judgements as objective statements, and a strong sense of unification projected into even his most fragmented ekphrases by the "personal presence of the [speaking] subject" in the textual space of the object, has led scholars to ask why Herbert would "undermine" the success of his verbal representations at all.[654] Commenting on Herbert's expressions of the "essential inadequacy of verbal description confronted with the sheer abundance of images awaiting translation into words", Shallcross even remarks that Herbert

[652] Bohrer 2015, 102. I am grateful to Seb Marshall for pointing out the similarity in composition between Herbert's drawings of the Acropolis and Stillman's photographs.
[653] Within the poetry corpus, Śniedziewska, 2013, 80 identifies "Never of You" and "An Attempt at Description" as key poems for Herbert's idea of the failure of verbal representation. For prose examples, see BO, 12, 49, 68, 168; LNM, 19, 69, 82.
[654] Słodczyk 2017, 29; Sendyka 2009, 47; Shallcross 2002, 55.

merely uses the "traditional rhetorical device of the inexpressible well established in Polish literature" and going back to national bards such as Adam Mickiewicz.[655]

In this reading, remarks such as "Let us try (a hopeless undertaking) to describe the fresco.", made by Herbert in the context of Piero's *Legend of the True Cross* become yet another *pose,* an assumption perhaps justified by the great length of Herbert's description of the fresco cycle, but certainly not by its often inaccessible contents.[656] Importantly, I believe that in the case of the drawings, such conflicting interpretations of the completeness of representation are hardly possible: where the text hides what remains unevoked, the empty areas of the sketchbook page make it only more palpable. Just like the fragment of a physical artefact, a drawn fragment of a missing whole inevitably conjures up its absence. As Miłosz wrote in his interpretation of Herbert's object poems such as "The Pebble", "history is present in an object as an absence: it reminds us of itself by a minus sign".[657] If we look at one of his drawings from the sketchbook labelled "Agora, Acropolis" (Fig. 14), in which one of the columns is sketched so lightly that it appears to be vanishing right before our eyes, this representation of ancient remains through "decorporealisation" (*odcieleśnianie*), to use Olechnowicz's term, threatens to contradict Herbert's insistence on the *tangible* presence of the past.[658]

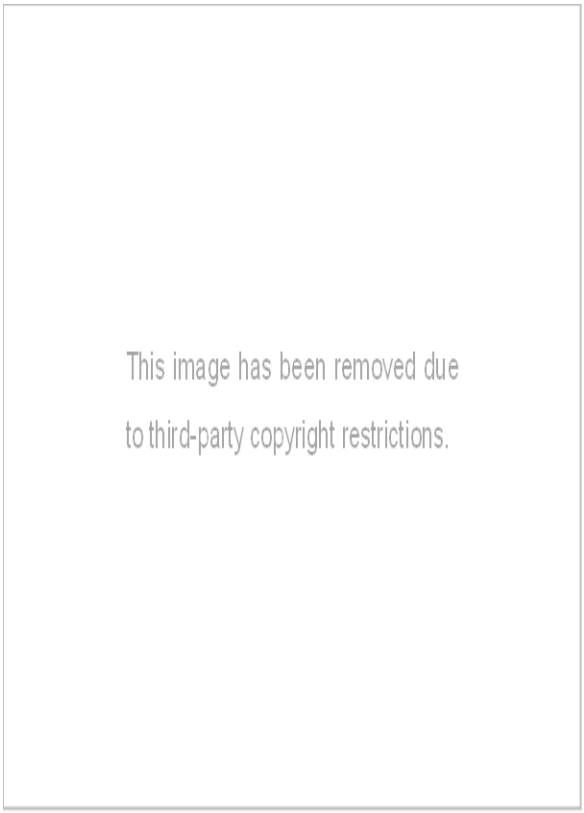

Figure 14: Sketchbook "Athens, Agora / Acropolis", 1975.

[655] Shallcross 2002, 54.
[656] BO, 168 (edited translation).
[657] Miłosz, "Ruins and Poetry", cited in Kay 2013, 273.
[658] Olechnowicz 2009, iii.

In contrast to the sensual, embodied quality of his prose, Herbert's drawings create haunted spaces. They *are* haunted spaces populated by decontextualised figures of humans and animals, isolated from their physical homes in a way reminiscent of the plate sections in nineteenth-century archaeological corpora, often containing "representative samples" of artefacts selected in accordance with the principles of "typological generalization".[659] Sometimes, as in the sample of Minoan vases presented in Fig. 15, individual sketchbook pages seem to be almost directly inspired by them, acting as Herbert's personal typologies of ancient art.

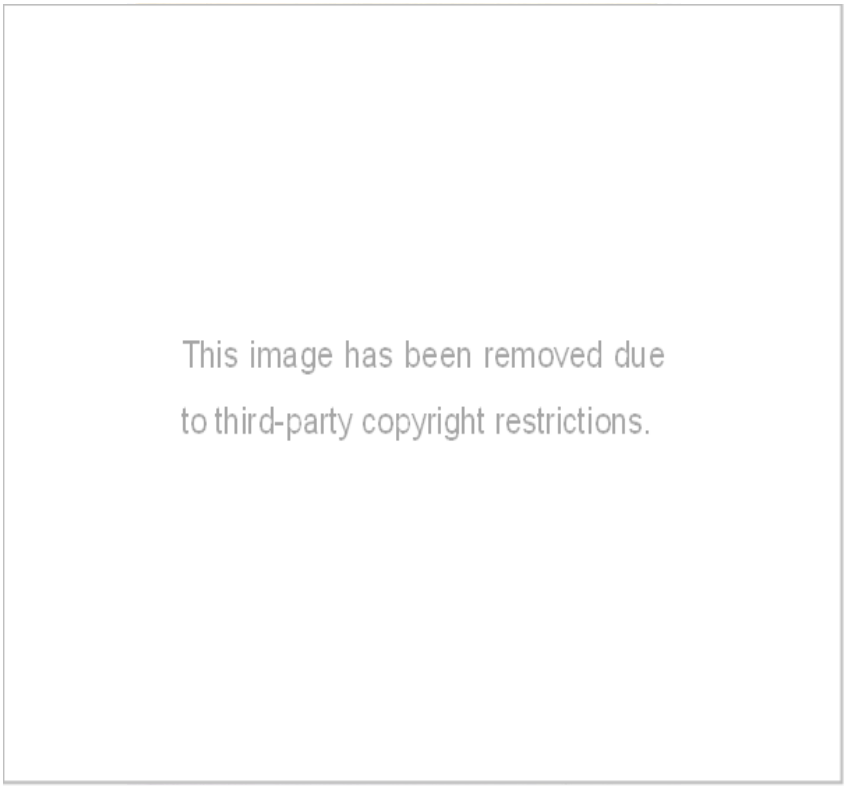

Figure 15: Sketchbook "Athens, Knossos", 1964.

Yet, in their attempt to capture not objective reality, but one individual's experience of it, the drawings also resist associations with the notion of the surveying eye in favour of, to use Schwenger's words, "a phenomenology of the inner eye, with its ability to construct imaginatively beyond the pressure of the preseen world".[660] It is Herbert's very "inner eye" that fills in the gaps, constructs a world beyond the fragment, substance from the void – unavoidably, however, imposing those subjective constructions on the viewer the moment the drawings are

[659] Meyer 2023, 42-3.
[660] Schwenger 2006, 171.

translated into text. That Herbert's texts are not the "transparent window onto the world" he claims them to be is not a new conclusion in this thesis, yet the strictly private nature of the drawings makes them a unique framework for determining just how strongly Herbert's notion of connecting with the past through the material object is rooted in his own intimate practice of experiencing cross-temporal communion through sketching. Next to this relationship of influence, there is one of opposition to be highlighted, too: the undeniable contrast between Herbert's written celebration of solid objecthood and mimetic art and the tentative, spectral shape of the drawings. Arguably, it reflects the more subtle aspects of his reception: not the ethics of the "report", but the aesthetics of the attempt; not the Rankean "as it was" of history nor the Barthesian "this has been" of photography, not even the "what I saw" of Herbert's poetry-as-testimony, but the "*how I saw it*" of ephemeral sensory experience. To the "art from stone" of Herbert's writing, the drawings oppose, to paradoxically apply Herbert's own description of Minoan painting, "that insubstantiality of people, animals, plants without roots, independent of the force of gravity – carried aloft in the air".[661]

661 LNM, 10.

CHAPTER 4:

THEORIES OF CONTACT

> *The record is fine, enigmatic. On a mountain of flowers, a goddess with an outstretched hand and a staff. Two lions. On the left a figure with long hair, bent backwards in an ecstatic dance. But what does it mean, this scene small as a nut, viewed from the enormous distance of four thousand years?*[662]

It is 1964 and Herbert is admiring "small seals made of stone, gemmae, rings" in the Archaeological Museum in Heraklion, alternately recording his impressions in notebook and sketchbook, text and image.[663] At a certain point, captured in the quotation from the *Diariusz Grecki* [*Greek Diary*] above, his gaze rests on what can most safely be identified as the Mountain Mother seal impression, a clay imprint of a ring or seal that has never been found.[664] Although, as one of Herbert's comments on his notetaking habits betrays, the notes that make up the *DG* are not the very same ones taken *in situ*, the passage is still clearly a raw record of his first experience of the object.[665] In contrast to the well-researched final version of the museum visit in "Labyrinth on the Sea" (*LNM*), his observations are tentative, sometimes confused (in the impression, the "dancing" figure is located on the right, not the left, of the goddess), and do not correspond to any existing scholarly readings of the object's visual language.[666] The "long-haired" figure, androgynously described as a dancer in a moment of ecstasy, has been firmly identified as a male votary in a "pose of adoration" since Evans, while Herbert's romantic "mountain of flowers" has been read as evidence for the Minoan practice of worship in "peak sanctuaries" on mountain tops.[667] Archaeological artefacts can be cryptic, of course, but an enthusiast of antiquity such as

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[662] MD, 36.
[663] Ibid, 36-37.
[664] Cichon 2022, 143.
[665] On one of the sheets of paper in the archival file labelled *Diariusz Grecki* (AZH akc. 17868, k. 22), not included by Barbara Toruńczyk in its posthumously published version, Herbert writes in relation to the torso of Apollo, "[…] (in the notes I was taking live I wrote, I don't know why, torso of Napoleon)", confirming that the notes constituting the *DG* are most likely revised versions of these "live" notes. See Kalinowska 2017 for an analysis of the *DG* as a carefully edited literary text.
[666] For a sketch of the seal impression, produced by Jill Robbins, see Nagy 2021 at <https://continuum.fas.harvard.edu/the-so-called-mother-of-the-mountain/> [accessed 15/04/2024].
[667] Cichon 2022, 144-45, 63. This religious practice is later addressed in LNM, 45.

Herbert would have surely been aware that finding an interpretation of the seal was just a matter of a bit of research – so why the melancholic perplexity at the "meaning" of the scene?

It is not frustration at a gap in knowledge, I believe, that lies behind the wistful ending of the note. Through again using the language of distance to express temporal remoteness, Herbert appears to be asking not what the scene means *factually*, but what it means *to him*, the twentieth-century subject, for whom antiquity is just a dot on the horizon of time, as tiny as a seal imprint in a museum glass case. As was already touched upon in the Introduction, it was Herbert's 1964 journey to Greece, the anxiously awaited "meeting with the 'Greek miracle'", as he ironically described it to Miłosz, that first made him formulate such questions about the moment of contact with the past.[668] What should I do with the awareness that the artefact on the other side of the glass is actually thousands of years away? What can the shared physicality of an outstretched hand, of a dancing body do to bridge this distance? While Part One of this chapter will examine why Herbert's attempt at answering these questions took the particular form of theoretical reflections, it must first be emphasised how strongly these reflections are centred not on offering new interpretations *of antiquity*, but on that particular moment of contact in which ancient object and modern subject meet. They are centred on offering a theory of reception.

The meeting of subject and object already occupied Herbert in the poem "I Would Like to Describe" (*Hermes, Dog, and Star*, 1957), which struggles with the impossibility of describing human emotion with words "contained within the boundaries | of […] skin". Instead, to speak about their inner lives humans must resort to metaphorical language drawn from the natural world, which prompts the lyrical subject to confess that:

> so is blurred
> so is blurred
> in me
> what white-haired gentlemen
> separated once and for all
> and said
> this is the subject
> and this is the object

[668] Postcard from Brindisi dated 06/09/1964 (ZHCM, 46).

In opposition to the "white-haired gentlemen", the "experts" he notoriously argues with, Herbert constructs a phenomenology in which the boundaries of the individual body are infiltrated by the world outside in the very act of setting it apart. Complementing this idea, Herbert's travelogues create a world in which, conversely, it is the world outside which shares the physicality of the human subject. From the town of Arles with its "warm, moist skin", over the "warmth of human flesh" radiated by the Doric columns in Paestum, to the draperies of "nerves and muscles" on Luca Signorelli's frescoes in Orvieto, the world through which Herbert's narrator travels is just as much a living, breathing organism as he is, an image opposing all notions of the "deadness" of artworks and historical remains.[669]

It is this enmeshment of subject and object which also determines the approach of this chapter, in which the body of theory I will attempt to extract from Herbert's writings on the modern experience of the past will be deeply emmeshed in the experiences of Herbert's own body-self: experiences of mental and physical strain, of psychological crisis, of hunger. While the previous chapters already started exploring Herbert's theoretical potential in their delineations of his reflections on distance, the simultaneity of time, and the material artefact as a point of cross-temporal communion, this chapter will look specifically at the notion of *connection* present in all three ideas. It will see the two ends of this connection (for, as we have seen in Chapter 3, Herbert does not accept intermediaries in his contact with the past) linked through labour, compassion, projections of victimhood, and incorporation. Positions of subject and object will be transposed, conflated, and ultimately dissolved. In the spirit of Herbertian multivalence, this chapter does not aim to resolve the contradictions that may arise between the four models of contact it will suggest. Instead, it will remain attentive to the ways in which they bleed into each other – for, as artefacts are wounded, nations killed, and food must be hunted for, blood there will be.

[669] BO, 35, 36, 54. On Herbert as "blurring the distinction between the orders of art and life" see Shallcross 2002, 44. Kozicka 2006, 77 has linked this "mutual permeation of subject and artwork" to the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose notion of the "flesh of the world" ("the common tissue" between the human subject and the non-human world) equally springs to mind here, see Merleau-Ponty 1968.

Part One: The Body in the World

I. Reception as Labour

Public interpretations of Herbert's classical reception as "digging in old junk", flying at the author from every end of the Polish political spectrum, as well as Herbert's way of countering such accusations with his model of the "simultaneity of history", or the presence of the past, were already discussed in Chapter 2. In light of this chapter's interest in the physicality of reception, it is worth returning to the wider context of this archaeological phrasing, namely Herbert's 1971 interview with Zbigniew Taranienko:

> They often accuse me rather harshly of digging in that old junk. It seems to me, however, that obtaining tradition [*zdobywanie tradycji*] is the same kind of work as obtaining the future. It's the same effort when it comes to the amount of work [required].[670]

Herbert's discourse here follows the same binary between past and future that Chapter 2 showed to be a resistant response to the socialist language of the undesirable old vs. the desirable new.[671] A noteworthy addition, however, is the imperfective verb *zdobywać,* whose semantic range stretches from proactive effort, such as in the idiomatic phrase *zdobywać wiedzę* (to gain knowledge), to straight-up uses of force, as in "to capture" or "to conquer".[672] While this potentially violent side of Herbert's reception will be explored in the next part of this chapter, for now I would like to focus on the idea of "obtaining" the past as *work*, elaborated upon in Herbert's introduction to a collection of selected poems published in 1973, titled "Rozmowa o pisaniu wierszy" ("Conversation on Writing Poetry").[673]

Written in the almost autoethnographical form of an interview with himself, "Conversation" addresses the questions of, *inter alia*, Herbert's literary beginnings, his identity as an "intellectual poet" (which he rejects together with any definition of his work as a showcase of erudition), and

[670] HN, 38.
[671] Tomasik 2016, 180-81.
[672] The noun *zdobycz* can mean "acquisition", but also "booty" or "prey".
[673] *Poezje wybrane [Selected Poems]* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza), pp. 5-19. Reprinted in HN, 19-26; WG, 47-54.

his uses of history and mythology. "Asked" by the fictional interviewer whether he is (again!) "proposing an escape into the past", Herbert replies:

> I don't propose this at all. I said, an active relationship to tradition, the recognition that we are a link in a great chain of generations, that's an obligation. We often colloquially use the phrase "cultural heritage". But culture is not inherited mechanically like – let us say – a house bequeathed by one's parents. On the contrary, it must be worked out by the sweat of one's brow, conquered for oneself, affirmed with one's own being.[674]

Despite the initial use of the first person plural in the context of the "great chain of generations", this is a deeply individualistic image, picturing engagement with culture not as a collectively directed endeavour, but as effort put in solely for individual gain. Although this labour does seem to return into the web of social relations in Herbert's final imperative for the subject to "affirm [tradition] with one's own being", this is still not an approach one might expect from someone trying to counter accusations of setting himself apart from his less cultured readers.

Before elaborating on this close link between the individual body and the working out of culture, already implied in the metaphor of manual labour, it is important to clarify that although Herbert uses the terms "tradition", "culture", and "heritage" seemingly interchangeably, his definition of the term "tradition" very specifically relies on T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent", which he engages with in *BO* (1962). In "Siena", he relates Eliot's essay to his visit to the local Pinacoteca through the following introduction:

> The Sienese school was an example of how to develop individual talent without breaking with the past. It achieved what Eliot writes about when he analyzes the concept of tradition which we Poles associate, not only in theory but also in practice, with academicism.[675]

Herbert then cites Eliot at length and, as multiple scholars have noticed, in his own translation.[676] He chooses the essay's key argument that any poet must "obtain" tradition by "great labour",

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[674] HN, 25. I am here using the translation by John and Bogdana Carpenter for *The Manhattan Review* (1984/85) 2: 11-17 with minor changes. Herbert's use of the adjective "active" (*aktywny*) here brings to mind the debate on the "active" vs. "passive" stance implied by the term "reception", already addressed in the Introduction.
[675] BO, 87.
[676] Hryniewicz 2014, 70n.172. The first Polish translation of "Tradition" by Helena Pręczkowska appeared only in 1963 in a collected volume of Eliot's essays (see Eliot 1963), whose temporal proximity to the publication of *BO* itself is not accidental: as a "decadent" and "bourgeois" Western author, Eliot was a banned author before the Thaw (see Majak 2022, 217-18).

which requires "the historical sense", an amalgamation of the awareness of the "presence" of the past and of one's place in the present. Herbert then breaks off the citation, adding one more sentence about the necessity to set any artist "among the dead".[677]

It should strike us how closely Herbert's choice of passage is reflected in his own model of temporality, both in its simultaneity of times and in its presentation of the artist as speaking from his particular moment in history. Yet, to claim that Herbert's model is thoroughly Eliotic, and thus simply derivative, would paint only an incomplete picture. As Alexander Holt remarks, an important element of Herbert's translation is his use of the verb *wypracować* to render Eliot's "to obtain", which foregrounds the effort of "labouring out" not immediately implied in the original English.[678] That Herbert is actively building on Eliot, *incorporating* him into his own thinking in a way that foreshadows the next part of this chapter, is similarly demonstrated by the placement of the quotation between the supposed association of tradition with the nineteenth-century painting style of "academicism" [*akademizm*] and the tableau of the eternal return of generations of Italians to their favourite trattoria discussed in Chapter 2.[679] In this setting, Eliot's poetry-centred concept is broadened out to lend authority to Herbert's own project of propagating a "lived" continuity with the past rooted in the sensuous, embodied experience of everyday reality.[680] More important for my argument than Herbert's reliance on Eliot, then, is his setting of their joint position against the background of "academicism" and accusations of the stale imitation of models, as the term was derogatorily used in post-war Poland. Still rather subtle here, this self-presentation by means of contrast becomes gradually more insistent in the Taranienko interview and in "Conversation", where Herbert directly juxtaposes the labour of obtaining cultural heritage/tradition and the ease of material inheritance.

[677] BO, 88. *Cf.* Eliot 1921, 43-44.
[678] Holt 2020, 226.
[679] To those familiar with "Tradition…", Herbert's incorporation of Eliot might have already become apparent in the image of working out tradition "in the sweat of one's brow", an echo of Eliot's dictum that "the more tardy must sweat for [knowledge]" (Eliot 1921, 43, my emphasis).
[680] For a study of Herbert's further use of Eliot in his political and late poetry (1974-98) see Dudek 2008.

Crucially, this contrast occurs in almost identical phrasing in another text first published in 1973, the highly programmatic "Animula".[681] As discussed in Chapter 2, it is in "Animula" that Herbert outlines his self-effacing envoy mission and rejects a subjectivist approach to art. In the same place in the text, he condemns modern society's "arrogant conviction" that it can "do without" both the "aesthetic and moral" guidance of artistic "masterpieces" and the humbling grace of "honey and light" he has always personally experienced in their presence.[682] Then, however, Herbert takes a turn from lamenting the modern rejection of the artistic canon to castigating his contemporaries for taking it for granted:

> There exists a false view to the effect that tradition is something akin to an estate [*masa spadkowa*] and that you inherit it mechanically, without effort, and that's why those who object to inheritance [*dziedziczeniu*] and unearned privileges are against tradition. But in fact every contact with the past requires an effort, a labor, and a difficult and thankless labor to boot, for our little "I" whines and balks at it.[683]

Just in case this thinly veiled allusion to communists as those "objecting" to inheritance and tradition is not clear enough, later in the text Herbert launches another attack on the "poor utopians, history's debutants, museum arsonists, liquidators of the past" who, caught in their vendetta against tradition, "cannot forgive" masterpieces "their serenity, dignity, and cool radiance".[684] To unravel the abyss that appears to lie between Herbert's sensual celebration of the Eliotic idea of tradition in the soft glow of a Tuscan evening and this militant defence of it eleven years later we must consider two factors: "Animula's" historical context and Herbert's mental health at the time.

When Herbert was writing "Animula" and "Conversation" in 1973, the early "Gierek era" was in full swing. Upon his ascent to power as the First Secretary of the Party and de facto leader of the state in 1970, Edward Gierek presented himself as a champion of Poland's entry into the era of globalisation, initially allowing for a "depoliticization of the transnational imagination" and a

[681] Originally published in *Więź* (1973) 4.
[682] LNM, 90.
[683] Ibid, 91. I chose "estate" over Valles' translation of *masa spadkowa* as "legacy" to underscore both the materiality of the term and the legal terminology used by Herbert, a law graduate himself. Similarly, Herbert's use of *dziedziczenie* (lit. inheriting) does not imply "inherited wealth", as per Valles' original translation.
[684] Ibid.

benevolent political climate similar to that of the post-Stalinist Thaw of 1956, of which the publication of a text as Western-facing as *BO* is now considered symptomatic.[685] Despite the continued presence of censorship, the degree of "openness" in the Polish cultural sphere was "astonishing" compared to other socialist countries such as East Germany or Czechoslovakia.[686] Yet, between the hopefulness of the Thaw and the 1970s lay the brutal events of 1968 (the crushing of the Prague Spring and the Polish March protests), which left many Poles unconvinced by Gierek's politics and pessimistic about the possibility of lasting democratisation within the socialist system.[687] To many members of the intellectual opposition, the high of Gierek's globalised "consumer socialism" only made the lack of genuine civil liberties harder to bear – among them was Herbert, who had just moved back to Poland from an extensive stay abroad, punctuated only by absolutely essential visits to the country.[688]

After almost six years of travels and writing residencies in Western Europe and a teaching position at California State College, Herbert returned to Poland with a newly found "American" drive to direct action and a lack of understanding of the moral grey zones that necessarily came with negotiating life under an authoritarian government on a daily basis.[689] Notoriously prone to alcohol abuse, he fell into a habit of drunkenly picking fights with old friends and acquaintances from the cultural sphere alike, quick to judge the choices they had made in the face of the socialist regime and throwing around allegations such as "collaboration".[690] Restlessly, he returned to the period of Stalinism (1948-56), drawing a sense of superiority from his absence from cultural life at that time – and it is perhaps through this fixation on reopening old wounds that the above "defence" of tradition should thus be read.[691] While the Gierek regime was more concerned with constructing its "propaganda of success" in the mass media (i.e., television and newspapers) than

[685] Fidelis 2022, 201. Lisak-Gębala 2014, 57n.8.
[686] Dehnert 2014, 168.
[687] Ibid, 172-3. For March 1968 see Chapter 2.1.
[688] Franaszek 2018b, 400.
[689] Over the academic year 1970/71, Herbert taught on the undergraduate courses "Modern European Poetry in Translation" and "Modern Continental Drama in Translation" as "visiting professor", see ibid, 329-43.
[690] Ibid, 369-75.
[691] In the public sphere, Adam Michnik's 1981 interview with Herbert (HN, 75-97) marks the beginning of a long line of interviews during which Herbert bases his right to judge others primarily on his non-participation in socialist realism. As both the Introduction and Chapter 1 have already shown, through his journalistic work Herbert was not *fully* absent from cultural life either.

attacking high culture, Stalinist cultural policymakers such as Stefan Żółkiewski or Tadeusz Kroński had indeed pursed a strategy of control over contemporary culture through control over the canon.[692] It must be emphasised, however, that while efforts were undertaken to break the cultural dominance of Polish Romanticism, whose focus on religiosity and national messianism contradicted communist principles, and to create an "anti-aesthetics" (socialist realism) to stand against the established order of "refined culture" based on class distinctions, the reformers never targeted the concepts of "tradition" or "the canon" per se.[693] In fact, as Leszek Szaruga argues, intellectual actors such as Żółkiewski actively worked on promoting more or less fictive genealogies for socialist realism that would position it as an "evolutionary outcome" of the Polish national literary tradition and historical consciousness rather than a Soviet import.[694]

By now, it should be clear that Herbert's establishment of a connection between the idea of cultural contact as labour and his defence of the canon of masterpieces against the onslaught of "liquidators of the past" can be seen as neither a response to any particular government policy, nor even based on a thorough understanding of Stalinist cultural politics. Rather, Herbert's formulation of his theory of reception as a *theory of opposition* in 1973 should be considered in the light of his increasingly combative mode of being in the world, deeply linked to – or even at the root of – the growing politicisation of his cultural activity (of which the next step would be the publication of *Mr. Cogito* in 1974).[695] While Section II below will fully explore why Herbert decided to formulate his model of cultural contact in a more theoretical format specifically in the early 1970s, the reference to T.S. Eliot in "Siena" discussed above demonstrates that Herbert's thinking about the workings of his engagement with culture reaches back to his early prose. This makes it possible to read not just *LNM*, but also *BO* as "theory in practice", or Herbert's own textual enactment of the lived experience he would theorise elsewhere – which, in lack of any pronouncements on *how exactly* Herbert envisioned the labour of reception, is much needed textual evidence. Before scanning the travelogues for the presence of cultural labour, however, it

[692] For Gierek's propaganda-machine see Sowiński 2009. Chmielewska 2019, 12-13.
[693] Chmielewska 2019, 15.
[694] Szaruga 2016/2006.
[695] Franaszek 2018b, 400.

is worth stepping back from the final product and, in true Herbertian fashion, considering the moment of contact through material artefacts instead. As the archival corpus of the AZH shows, Herbert did not exaggerate when calling his travels "research trips" for his writing process, and neither did he spend his time in Western libraries, to use his words to Miłosz, just "reading clever books".[696]

In terms of preparatory materials for Herbert's writing process, next to the sketchbooks and numerous drafts of poetry and prose the AZH also contains dozens of notebooks [*notatniki*].[697] Often accompanied by entire folders of pages scanned from Western texts not available in Poland, Herbert's notebooks are the physical embodiment of his engagement with scholarship, marked with tantalising titles such "The Celts" [*Celtowie*] or "A Tribal War and its Hero" [*Wojna plemienna i jej bohater*] on their covers. Contrary to their promise of revelatory unpublished musings on antiquity and its reception, Herbert's notes resemble the exam revision notes of a classics student, both in thoroughness and in dry factuality. This is particularly well illustrated by "Tribal War", a folder dated 1992-1996 containing the research for a planned essay on the Peloponnesian War.[698]

[696] MNW, 95; HN, 28; BO, 92, 67. Letter to Miłosz from Pisa, dated 29/05/1980 (ZHCM, 118).
[697] Parts of the archival analysis below have since been published as Leszczyk 2024 together with material from Part Two Section II, "Reception as Incorporation".
[698] AZH, akc. 17874. A post-it on the folder's cover testifies to Herbert's development of the title, going from "~~PELOPONNESIAN WAR~~" to "~~CIVIL WAR~~" to "TRIBAL WAR" [~~*WOJNA PELOPONESKA;*~~ ~~*WOJNA DOMOWA;*~~ *WOJNA PLEMIENNA*; caps in the original]. The file is also discussed by Kalinowska 2017 in the context of Herbert's reception of Sparta.

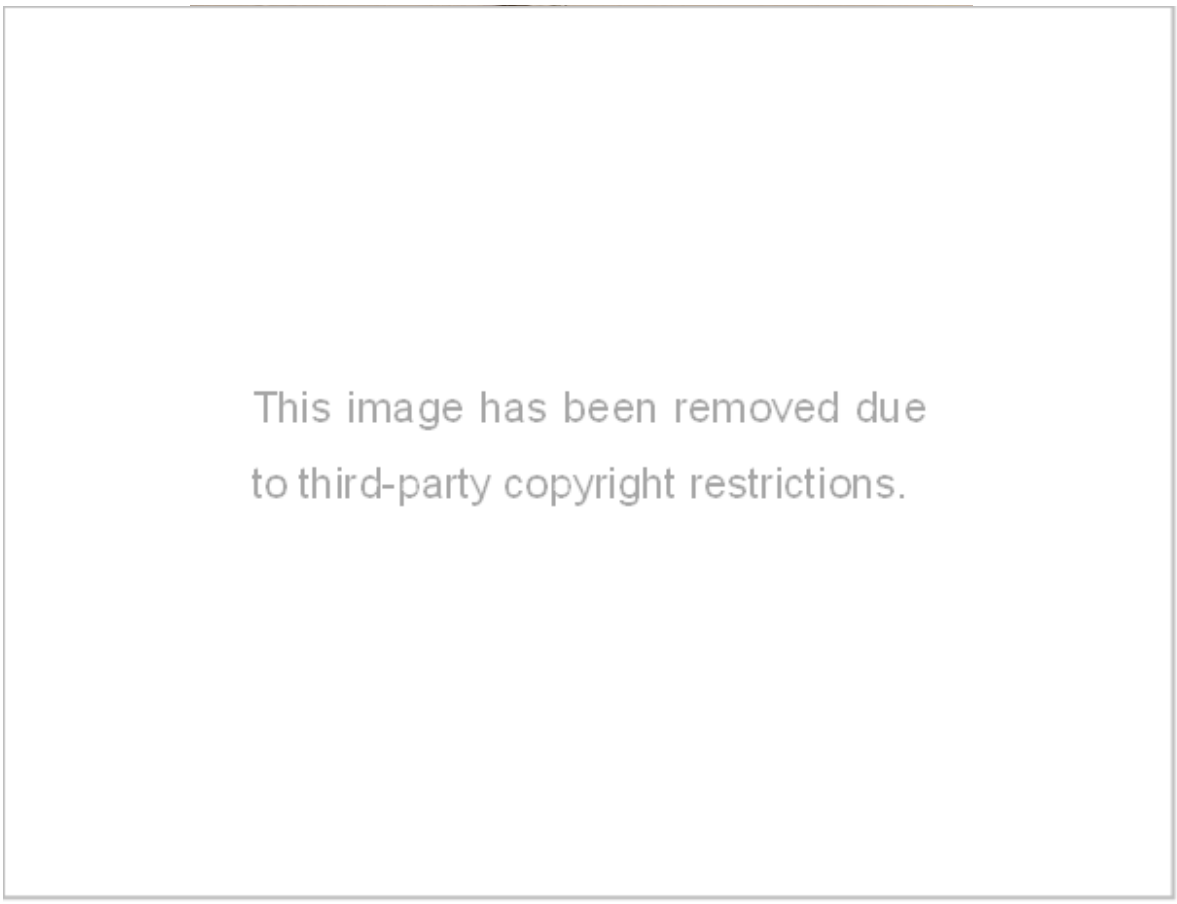

Figure 16: "A Tribal War and its Hero", p. 101.

Most pages in the folder follow the same schoolbook-like pattern: on the top of the page (alternatively its right upper corner, if it is another page on the same topic), a broad heading such as "Chronology" or "Immediate Causes of the War" marks its contents, followed by bullet points, lists, or, in the case of timelines, a content division by year. Particularly painstaking are a mechanically typed up summary of the first five books of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, divided by chapters, or parallel timelines of the main political and cultural events of the fifth century, juxtaposing seemingly unrelated events such as the revolt of Euboea against Athens in 446 and the beginning of the construction of the Acropolis in 447 (Fig. 16).[699] Some pages contain direct references to scholarship, such as the biographical notes on Alcibiades (the intended titular "Hero" of the war) drawn from Aleksander Krawczuk's *Sprawa Alkibiadesa* [*The Alcibiades Affair*]

[699] AZH, akc. 17874, k. 63-5, 101. Herbert could have copied out these historical timelines from reference works such as the *Cambridge Ancient History*, which use this very format to comprehensibly communicate chronology.

(1968), or Herbert's Polish-language summary of the main argument of Victor Davis Hanson's *The Western Way of War* (1989).[700]

Also interesting are pages which simultaneously testify to the distance between Herbert and his material and his attempts at bridging it through active familiarisation and the creation of understanding. Another page titled "Alcibiades", for instance, includes brief, comprehensible definitions of the terms "herms" and "metics", set apart from the summary of Thucydides' account of the affair of the herms through the use of asterixis.[701] Even more intimate feels "The Celts", a notebook on Celtic culture from 1963 and thus filled during one of Herbert's stays in Britain.[702] In addition to meticulous notes including historical chronologies as above, an archaeological classification of Celtic culture into distinct periods (Fig. 17), and descriptions of various tribes taken from ancient authors such as Diodorus Siculus or Caesar, the notebook also features numerous drawings presumably intended to help Herbert visualise the information he was taking in through his research.

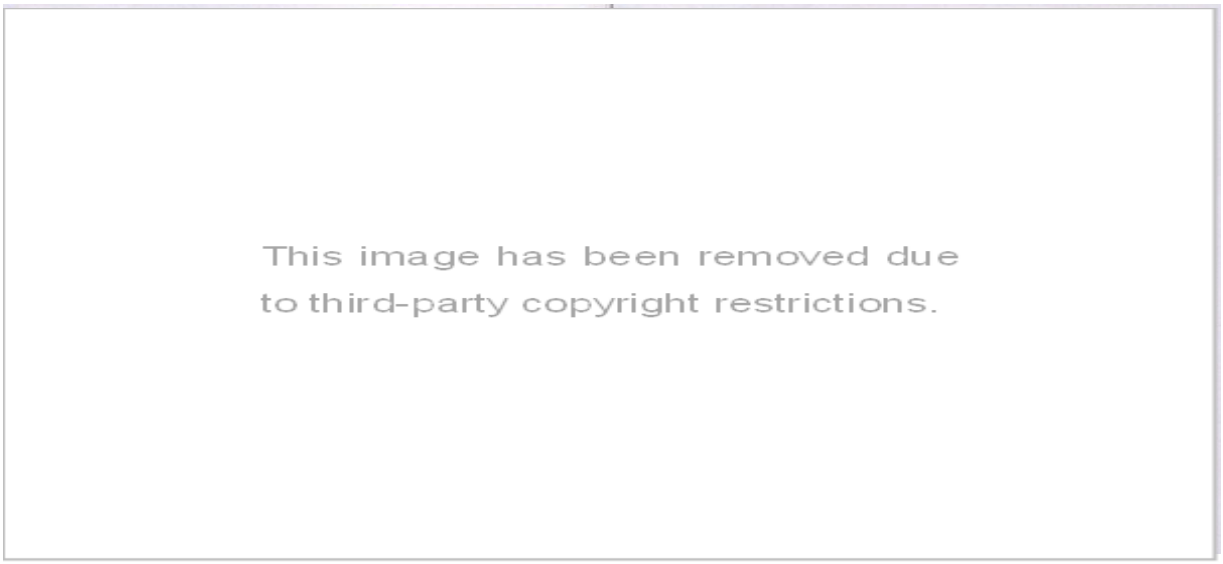

Figure 17: Notebook "The Celts", 1964.

[700] AZH, akc. 17874, k. 56. Krawczuk was Head of the Department of Ancient and Byzantine History at Jagiellonian University in 1980-86 and then Minister of Culture in 1986-89. He also ran the popular television documentary series *Antyczny świat profesora Krawczuka* [*Professor Krawczuk's Ancient World*], and thus represented Herbert's ideal of combining academic expertise with opening classics up to the public (see Chapter 1). A few pages later (ibid, 72), Herbert also refers to Jean Hatzfeld's *Alcibiade* (1940).
[701] AZH, akc. 17874, k. 108. Thuc. 6.27-28.
[702] July to December 1963, see Franaszek 2018b, 854.

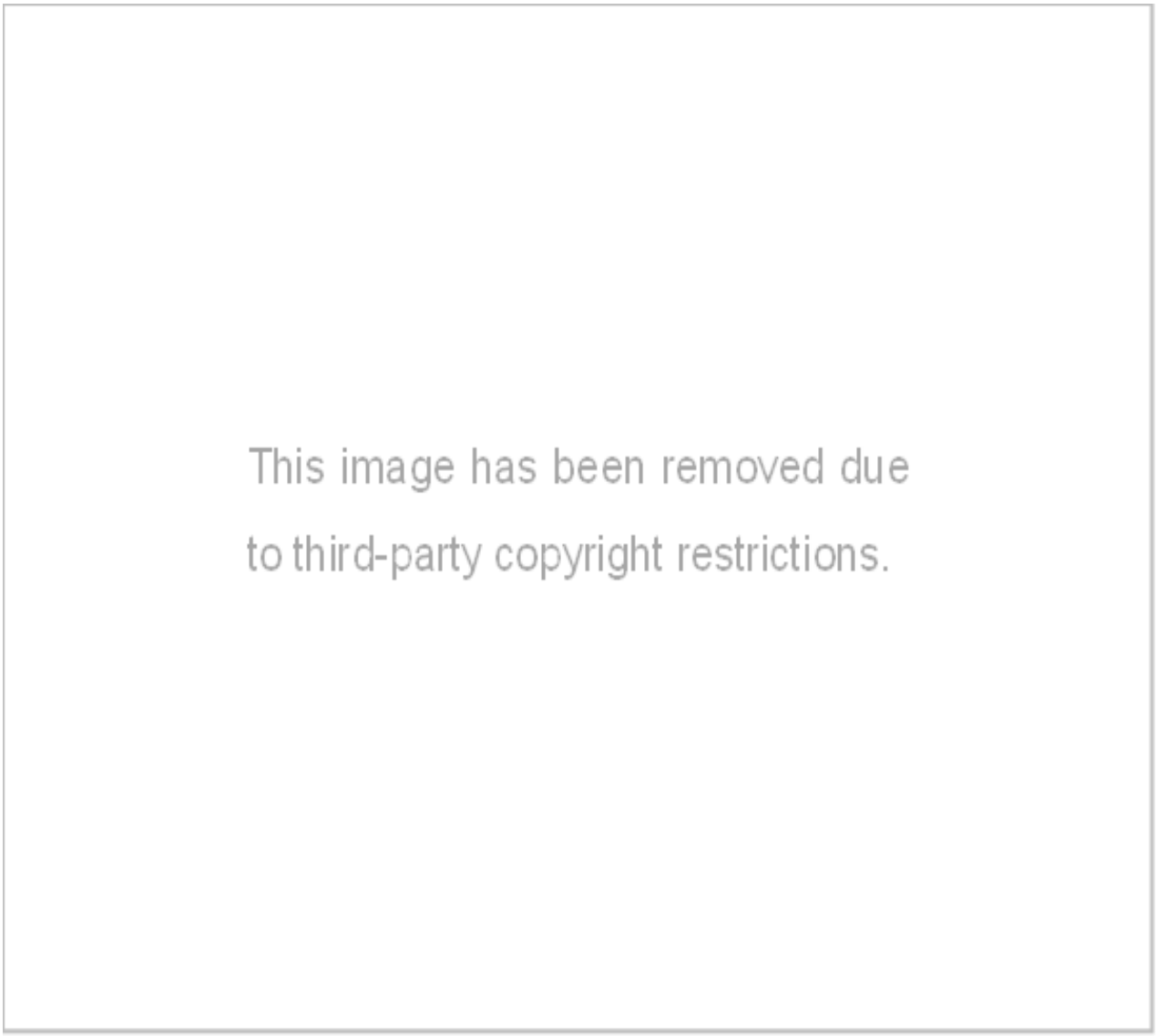

Figure 18: "The Celts", reproduction from Powell 1958.

This is especially interesting in the case of a geographical visualisation of the connection between "wine trade" routes between "Greeks" and "Celts" and the locations of "princely burials" and "strongholds" (Fig. 18), an image Herbert copied from T.G.E. Powell's *The Celts* (1958) together with its caption.[703] As Herbert was only just developing an advanced knowledge of English at the time, he evidently felt more comfortable reproducing the *visual* aspect of Powell's historical exposition and its straightforward definition while making sense of the preceding text (on the properties of Celtic houses and settlements) in Polish. The notebook's alternation between Polish and English as well as Herbert's efforts at visual understanding both point to a more *vulnerable* side of his rigorous effort to "labour out" the past – an effort which, as the

[703] *Cf.* Powell 1958, 97-98.

notebooks show, he took very literally, writing up countless pages of source summaries and fact sheets. Perhaps it was the lack of creativity in this approach, unworthy of a "great poet", that has caused the notebooks to be largely neglected by academic studies of the AZH.[704] In the context of Herbert's theory of reception as labour, however, they are most revealing not only in their testimony to the fact that Herbert practised the cultural labour he preached, but also in their display of the vulnerability of intellectual curiosity and the humility of learning that is brought to the process.

Yet, at this point it is important to emphasise that only very little of this vulnerability and humility makes its way into the travelogues where, as was already argued, hard-laboured learnedness is marked as spontaneous association, and in the "coquettish" play with the Polish reader the humility of the zealous student is replaced with the confidence of the cultural expert.[705] What is more, there is the perpetual problem of missing citations, which drew the attention even of Herbert's early recipients. Already in his 1971 interview, Andrzej Babuchowski thanks Herbert for revealing his composition method of "see[ing] certain things first" and then "read[ing] into various books on the topic" with the words: "[…] I was about to ask you about that, since you basically masked this writing method in *BO*."[706] Of course, Babuchowski could not have known that Herbert's "masking" went as far as "borrowing" "entire paragraphs" from the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga to create *MNW*, or compiling "A Stone from the Cathedral" (*BO*) from direct translations of Jean Gimpel's *Les bâtisseurs de cathedrals* (1958).[707] Even if Herbert does explain the lack of "a bibliography, footnotes, indexes" with his intention not to write "for academic study" already in the preface to *BO*, the direct plagiarism that comes with it demonstrates an astonishing lack of respect for intellectual genealogies, strongly opposing both Herbert's own rhetoric of "tradition" and his practice of frank, studious notetaking.[708]

[704] A noteworthy exception is the 2017 volume edited by Mateusz Antoniuk, whose contributors pay equal attention to Herbert's academic notes as they do to drafts of poems or essays.
[705] For Herbert's "seduction" of his reader see Oczko 2016, 114.
[706] HN, 28-9.
[707] On Huizinga see Oczko 2016, 93; on Gimpel see Bielawska 2004, highly controversial at the time of publication.
[708] BO, 8.

Again, much of this disrespect could be explained away by the travelogue genre and its stress on being the representation of one individual's quest for authentic experience, which necessarily involves the rejection of textbooks, guides, and "experts" in the face of empirical reality. Yet, Herbert's description of tradition as something to be "conquered for oneself" in "Conversation" suggests that in his case, questions of genre might not be the answer. As the reader might recall from the epigraph that opened the Introduction, in his last letter to the Czajkowskis the hospitalised Herbert expresses bitter annoyance that his "enemies" have always misinterpreted his journeys as leisure-packed "luxury trips" when they were intended as acts of "wrestling with the world" [*zapasy ze światem*].[709] This image of the *world* and the highly embodied situatedness of the traveller as a "wrestling" body within it points back to Herbert's insistence on the physicality of cultural labour: when he tells Monika Muskała in 1994 that "museums are truly exhausting", his travel writing shows that he does not exclusively mean intellectually.[710] In "Siena", the effect of a post-museum cappuccino is not just the "clarity" regained by Herbert's head, but also the extraction of fatigue "from his limbs".[711] Similarly, Herbert's disappointing first visits to the Acropolis Museum (*DG*) or the Archaeological Museum in Heraklion (*LNM*) result in embodied struggles with negative emotions, such as his "dragging himself" through space or attempting to disentangle the pangs of disappointment from the pangs of hunger.[712] In this, Herbert's texts show that the encounter with cultural and historical spaces is a trying endeavour, and the traveller often becomes a body *against* the world.

In a similar mood of adversity, Herbert's appropriation of written sources in his texts almost suggests an intention to present his journeys as acts of wrestling something from the world, rather than just with it. Something to capture (in that aggressive sense of *zdobywać*), to make his own, and to present to his readers in his envoy function – it is not without reason that in a now-famous metaphor Herbert called himself a "poacher" [*kłusownik*] of art.[713] While this language of

[709] Letter from Warsaw dated 24/10/1997 (ZHKZ, 225).
[710] HN, 218.
[711] BO, 65.
[712] MD, 22; LNM, 10. This relationship between hunger and cultural consumption will be explored in detail in Part Two.
[713] HN, 216.

the hunt will be explored further in Part Two, it is worth considering a text formulated not in the language of conquest and labour, but gratitude and vulnerability: "The Prayer of Mr Cogito – Traveller" (*Report from the Besieged City*, 1983). In the poem, the traveller's body is neither pushed to its limits in an overwhelming museum space or bent over a library desk in the zeal of notetaking. It is shown lying "by the well" in Tarquinia, fed sun-ripened fruit on Ithaca, driven to the Grand Canyon in an act of kindness between strangers. Travel is not an extension of hardship, but a respite from it, and it appears that only through watching the sun set "on the truly indescribable Ionian Sea" the lyrical subject is able to forget about his own "gray deluded persecutors" (presumably the Security Service) and begin to "understand other people other languages other sufferings". It appears that those most authentic moments of connection, whether with living humans or dead artists such as "Duccio Van Eyck and | Bellini" cannot be "laboured out", but only felt in one place at one moment in time, just as the poem is punctuated by place names and times of day (night, moon rise, sunset, etc.). Yet, despite its placing of spontaneous experience above the tiring continuity of labour, implied by the imperfective aspect of *zdobywanie tradycji*, the never-ending obtaining of tradition, "Prayer" reiterates the centrality of the physically and mentally tested self for Herbert's idea of cross-temporal and cross-cultural connection – a subject position that will now be shown to be at the heart of Herbert's turn to theory.

II. Reception as Compassion

As Polish society was moving from the growing disillusionment of the 1970s towards the *Solidarność* era of the 1980s, the younger generation of political activists and intellectuals born after the war turned to Herbert for moral guidance and a model of psychological resilience – something he was happy to provide in his new political poetry.[714] As a result, it was this picture of Herbert as "spiritual leader" of a generation, known for maintaining unbroken "dignity" in the

[714] Gierek's policy of borrowing large sums of money from Western banks to boost the economy failed dramatically, leaving Poland in debt and causing another revolt over food prices in 1976 (Fidelis 2022, 205). Franaszek 2018b, 399-400. Among Herbert's young followers was Barbara Toruńczyk (b. 1946), who would later become the editor of many of his posthumous publications.

face of adversity, that, as Andrzej Franaszek addresses in his 1998 study *Ciemne źródło* [*The Dark Source*], long obscured the fact that Herbert's poetry was equally a poetry of suffering, of broken bodies and broken things.[715] Given the omnipresence of violence in Herbert's oeuvre, it might seem surprising that his readers needed to be reminded of Herbert's ability to see suffering even in "seemingly sheltered and safe places" or spaces of beauty, such as the Greek landscape.[716] Yet, it was not a general ignorance of the presence of suffering that Franaszek felt compelled to intervene in, but a one-sided perception of the Herbertian subject's relation to it. In line with the common interpretation of Herbert as a poet-witness to history, combined with the moralist image above, this narrative reduced Herbert's role (both as an embodied writer and a textual narrator) to that of an observer, focused on the ethical dimension of testimony.

In addition to the abovementioned factors, such a narrative was also enabled by the then-prevalent binary between Herbert's earlier poetry, personified by the self-contained, upright body portrayed in political poems such as "Mr Cogito on Upright Attitudes" (1974), and his late poetry collections, whose featuring of an ageing, disintegrating body sat uncomfortably with interpreters and was explained away by Herbert's exacerbated mental and physical illness in the last decade of his life.[717] While this biographical reasoning is not misguided per se, in *Ciemne źródło* Franaszek successfully demonstrates that a preoccupation with the bodily fragility of the speaking subject appears already in *A Chord of Light* (1956), suggesting that Herbert always perceived himself and his textual subjects as enmeshed in the fabric of suffering he describes.[718] Interestingly, this is further evidenced even by some interpretations predating Herbert's thematisation of his own ailing body. Analysing the famous poem "Apollo and Marsyas" (1961) in 1978, for instance, Ryszard Przybylski draws a distinction between artists who choose to render suffering through their own formless "screams of terror" and those who, without "crossing the

[715] Anders 2009, 86, 96.
[716] Franaszek 1998a, 36, 42-43.
[717] The late collections are *Elegy for the Departure* (1990), *Rovigo* (1992), and *Epilogue to a Storm* (1998). Franaszek 1998b, 16-17, *cf.* Anders 2009, 85. On the motif of "upright posture" in Polish culture see Poloczek 2019.
[718] Franaszek 1998a, 17.

boundaries of their own experience", choose to speak about it with "calm and moderation".[719] As expected, Herbert is considered one of the latter, but it is striking that Przybylski holds on to the poet's lack of entanglement in his subject's suffering despite having started his text by arguing for Herbert's deconstruction of the Stoic idea of the mind's complete independence from the outside world in "To Marcus Aurelius" (1956).[720] How that poem's description of the universe's sensory assault on the philosopher's intellectualised mode of being deconstructs Przybylski's idea of a bounded, autonomous subject is easily discernible (even if not to the author himself) and points to Herbert's insistence on the necessity of partaking in the arbitrariness and fragility of the material world.

In the context of Herbert's engagement with the past, this idea of fragility is supported by my examination of his idea of cultural labour as something that involves and, importantly, wears out the subject's body. Herbert's movement through spaces of culture and historical resonance as a vulnerable body, testing his own limitations and constantly grating against the "warm, coarse skin of life", as he puts it in his travel notes from Crete, vividly contextualises one of his most important uses of the imagery of suffering: the conceptualisation of ancient objects or buildings damaged by time as wounded bodies.[721] Before considering the implications of this idea for Herbert's theory of reception, however, it must be established that despite the constant dialogue of violence and beauty that defines *BO*, *woundedness* does not come to characterise the materiality of the past until *LNM*. In "Among the Dorians", we are still told about the temple in Paestum:

> The word 'ruin' is alien to a Greek temple. Even those most damaged by time are not collections of crippled fragments, disorderly heaps of stones. A drum of a column half-dug into the sand or a torn-off capital have the completeness of a finished sculpture.[722]

In this passage, phrases such as "crippled fragments" or "a torn-off" capital serve to underscore the persistence of the past against all odds that Herbert is communicating so vigorously across the travelogue as a whole. There is, too, a reverent aestheticisation of the classical fragment that

[719] Przybylski 1978/1998, 99. The first type is represented by Tadeusz Różewicz, known for his avant-garde poetry and absurdist plays.
[720] Przybylski 1978/1998, 80-81, *cf.* Franaszek 1998b, 11.
[721] MD, 33.
[722] BO, 32 (edited translation).

could be said to contradict Herbert's condemnation of the classicising "wish to see the Greeks washed [out] by rains, white, devoid of passion and cruelty" later in the essay.[723] This rhetoric returns once more in Herbert's discussion of Piero della Francesca's *The Legend of the True Cross*, where he expresses the hopeful conviction that even if only one figure from the "severely damaged" fresco cycle remained, the whole could still be reconstructed, "just like from the fragments of a Greek temple".[724]

When Herbert returns to writing about Greek temples in *LNM*, however, this awe for the alleged completeness of the classical fragment appears to lie in the past. Telling are the following descriptions of the Acropolis in the eponymous essay:

> It is a wounded building, stripped of its sculptures, which were an essential, inextricable part of the architecture.[725]
>
> The ruined southern colonnade of the Parthenon, the stumps [*pnie*] of columns cut off low, made my heart contract. The stones fought against the encroaching void.[726]

Here, the ruined Greek temple no longer inspires reverence but makes Herbert's heart "contract", and the persistence of the past is not a temporal certitude but a *fight* that must be put up by its material remains. A fight that, as the first quotation shows in its portrayal of even the most "inextricable" parts of a building as torn off, they are often bound to lose, and that makes seemingly unimaginable losses reality. In addition to this mood of hopelessness, "Acropolis" is also the first travel essay to describe an encountered artefact as wounded (*zraniony*), rather than just "damaged".[727]

To delve deeper into this semantic shift, I would like to compare three uses of the language of organic physicality in relation to historical objects, in this case frescoes:

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[723] BO, 34.
[724] Ibid, 171.
[725] LNM, 104 (edited translation).
[726] Ibid, 130.
[727] In "Café" (*Hermes, Dog, and Star*, 1957), Herbert already speaks of a café at night as a "ghostly slaughterhouse of furniture", "bestially murdered chairs" and "tables […] on their backs", though the poem is naturally not related to historical objects.

> Bound to architecture, a fresco shares the fate of walls. It is organic like a house or tree. Subject to the law of living beings, it is consumed by old age.[728]
>
> The [Procession] fresco is mortally wounded; its color of clotted blood is peeling.[729]
>
> […] the Minoan frescoes are few and come to us in a crippled state, burnt by fire, mutilated by the dubious endeavours of conservators.[730]

The first quotation, drawn from "Orvieto's Duomo" (*BO*), refers to the frescoes by Fra Angelico and Luca Signorelli located in the cathedral of Orvieto, while the remaining two constitute Herbert's impressions from the Archaeological Museum in Heraklion ("Labyrinth on the Sea", *LNM*). In all cases, the frescoes are depicted as "living beings" subject to bodily processes, but the processes in question vary drastically. While the Orvieto frescoes follow the life cycle of organic matter to its natural conclusion of old age in the same way as brick walls or trees, the Minoan frescoes are dying a slow, externally inflicted death in the state of "crippling" and "mutilation", with the image of "peeling" layers of "clotted blood" most succinctly encapsulating a never-healing wound. The mention of trees as exemplary organic beings also links back to the image of the Parthenon's broken columns as "cut stumps", violently severed from the natural cycle of growth and decay.[731]

Visibly, a striking contrast emerges between the symbiotic world of *BO*, best represented by the previously discussed Presocratic imagery of constant flux and the Heraclitan river, and that of *LNM*, in which time wounds and fragmentation hurts. An explanation for this change may lie in the gradual worsening of Herbert's mental health in the years following his trip to Greece in 1964, which culminated in a serious nervous breakdown in April 1967 during one of his stays in France. Plagued by sleeplessness, intense paranoia, and suicidal thoughts, Herbert had to seek out the help of a neuropsychiatrist, who prescribed him a three-week long medical treatment for stress-induced depression.[732] This diagnosis would be soon proven incorrect by even worse depressive

[728] BO, 53 (edited translation). In Polish, *starość* is a more neutral word than Anders' original translation of "senility".
[729] LNM, 17.
[730] Ibid, 11.
[731] As opposed to the English, the Polish word *pień* can only mean a tree stump, not a human body part.
[732] Franaszek 2018b, 203-205.

lows, rapidly followed by maniacal highs, but in spring 1967, the severity and medical implications of the episode were still unique and, importantly, cut right through the composition process of "Acropolis", which Herbert had started in late 1966 after finishing "An Attempt at a Description of the Greek Landscape".[733] In a letter to his former philosophy professor and intellectual mentor Henryk Elzenberg from December 1966, Herbert speaks of writing about "how [the Acropolis] changed and crumbled over the course of two and a half thousand years", adding that "the most painful wounds were inflicted on it by Königsmark, Morosini's artillery general".[734] It is intriguing to note that while the description of the Acropolis as "wounded" did perhaps spring from such reflections on the military operations it was exposed to over the centuries, this woundedness acquired a much more abstract and affective dimension when Herbert resumed writing the essay after his breakdown – and, what is more, it became a crucial element of later essays, such as "Labyrinth" (1973).[735]

In his biography, Franaszek calls *LNM*, the essay collection Herbert was contractually bound to submit to *Czytelnik* in 1966 and finally managed to finish in 1973, only to never see it published during his lifetime, a "symbolic reflection" of the turbulent course Herbert's life took from the late 1960s onwards.[736] The sudden appearance of the conceptualisation of ancient objects as wounded bodies in "Acropolis" demonstrates that Herbert's mental illness influenced not just the composition history of the essay collection, but also its reception-theoretical content. This is further demonstrated by the following passage from "Acropolis" which, together with a brief architectural discussion, closes the antiquity-centred section of the essay:

> We learned to look at works of Greek art as fragments and scraps. We have believed too easily that they owe their perfection and beauty exactly to being fragments and scraps. […] We derive a strange aesthetic satisfaction (which has probably never been fully analysed) from the fact that the capital of a column holds up nothing, that the marble cheek of a goddess suddenly loses its fleshly smoothness and turns into raw uneven stone. […] The aesthetes of the nineteenth century (and these days this attitude to

[733] Franaszek 2018b, 860. The only other essay Herbert finished before the breakdown was "On the Etruscans" (1965).
[734] Letter from Antony, France, dated 20/12/1966 (ZHHE, 112).
[735] There is no mention of woundedness anywhere in the *DG*, the most immediate record of the Greece trip.
[736] Franaszek 2018b, 72.

> ancient works of art is almost universal) were glad in a certain way that Greek architecture had come to us stripped of color and sculpture.[737]

The first thing to note here is the rejection of the aestheticisation of fragmentation and of the "nineteenth-century aesthetes" who are to blame for its dominance among general attitudes towards ancient remains, as if they had exploited ("were glad") the fragmented state of antiquity to spread their own ideologies. There is a certain amount of self-reproach in the narrator's inclusion of himself in the "we" addressed in the passage, which could point back to Herbert's endorsement of the aesthetics of the classical ruin in the abovementioned passages from *BO*: here, he may still not deny ancient works of art their "perfection", but wishes to shake off any externally induced reasons for perceiving it as such.

In a broader sense, I believe that in its fascination with the workings of the reception of ancient art, the passage identifies the very gap in which the discipline of reception studies now sits, analysing what in Herbert's time (or at least to his knowledge) had "never fully been analysed". There is a desire to *see through* the mechanisms of the gaze, of "aesthetic satisfaction", and, most importantly, of seemingly "universal" and prescriptive models for both. Herbert's curiosity for analysis, it seems, is deeply grounded in *suspicion*, the suspicion that both he personally and the general modern recipient of antiquity are being led to believe something that goes against the "true" nature of the material.[738] That similar feelings of suspicion have already been identified in Herbert's formulation of his theory of cultural labour as an effort of opposition in "Animula" (1973) should immediately capture the attention of any reader familiar with the importance of the "hermeneutic of suspicion" for critical theory, or cultural studies more broadly. Even more intriguing, however, is the connection between theory and *paranoia*, first suggested by Freud in his comparison between himself and a paranoid patient (the "Schreber case") and brought back to academic consciousness by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her critique of paranoid reading.[739]

[737] LNM, 105-6 (edited translation, my emphasis).
[738] The influence of the affective state of suspicion might also explain Herbert's glossing over the substantial corpus of reflections on ruins, fragments, and their aesthetic qualities, even by authors he references in the very same essay, such as Chateaubriand (see LNM, 123-24). On Chateaubriand and the image of the ruin see Fritzsche 1998, for the *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* specifically see Fournet 2017.
[739] Sedgwick 2003, 123-51. *Cf.* Felski 2015, 34-5.

Particularly relevant here is Sedgwick's highlighting of the "extraordinary stress" this intellectual stance places on producing "*knowledge in the form of exposure*", an ambition arguably present in Herbert's desire for analysis above.[740]

Without falling into what John Farrell calls the "clinical nonchalance" of ascribing the terminology of legitimate mental disorders to modes of creative expression, it cannot go unnoticed that Herbert's turn to theory occurred at a point when not only had he just recovered from a paranoia-driven nervous breakdown, he was also growing increasingly more paranoid in his daily life, suspicious of both the intentions of his friends (as was addressed above) and, perhaps more understandably, the socialist state apparatus.[741] This paranoia reached its peak in February 1975 at the general meeting of the Polish Writers' Association (*Związek Literatów Polskich*) in Poznań, when Herbert suddenly felt unwell after drinking from a bottle of mineral water at the hotel and immediately jumped to the conclusion that the Secret Service had attempted to poison him to prevent his participation in the meeting as a "dangerously" political voice.[742] Perhaps unsurprisingly, no evidence for an attempted poisoning has ever been found, but the incident demonstrates how closely Herbert's paranoia was circling around the image of a body under assault – an image which equally defines his language of woundedness.[743] Much could be said about Herbert's rejection of the aesthetics of the fragment in the wake of his own experience of fragmentation of the self in mental illness, or about his description of the chain of classical receptions as a "*conspiracy* of delight" in one of the opening paragraphs of "Acropolis".[744] Yet, I would like to remain mindful of Sedgwick's reminder, itself based on the psychoanalytic work of Melanie Klein, that paranoia should always be considered a position, never a fixed diagnosis (even if in Herbert's case it eventually became part of one), and that "it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people" who are capable of "the richest reparative practices".[745] In

[740] Sedgwick 2003, 138-41 (my italics).
[741] Farrell 2007, 311.
[742] Franaszek 2018b, 448-51.
[743] As a real repercussion of Herbert's political activities in the early 1970s, his works were banned from circulation in 1976, see ibid, 456-57.
[744] LNM, 95.
[745] Sedgwick 2003, 150.

what follows, I will look at Herbert's enrichment of his conceptualisation of ancient objects as wounded bodies with the imperative for the modern subject to meet such woundedness with compassion as an example of such reparative practice.

In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick defines reparative reading as "a stance that looks to a work of art for solace and replenishment", rather than as an object to be "demystified".[746] Chapter 2 already shed light on the solace-bringing function the materiality of antiquity takes on for Herbert in the face of cultural and physical rupture, and his refusal to destroy the "mystery" of art through overly rational explanation has been a common conclusion in Herbert scholarship.[747] Although I generally disagree with this interpretation, as my stress on Herbert's interpretative mastery of his subject matter has shown, the level of care for the inviolability of the object it implies is most definitely borne out by the mode of reception Herbert suggests as a response to the woundedness of the past. This is most explicitly spelled out in the following passage from "Labyrinth", which closes an explanation of the style and history of Minoan painting:

> Not many works of art have reached us in their full glory and splendor. One should be surprised (and it is a joyful astonishment) that so many testimonies to human sensitivity and genius have survived at all. In the garden of art there is a big hospital of mutilated and dying forms. The powerful quern-stones of time work relentlessly. So, wandering through the rooms of the museum in Heraklion as if through hospital wards, I tried to discover in the old frescoes the beauty of youth. Like the sick, they expect our compassion and understanding [*współczucia i zrozumienia*]. If we deny it to them, they will depart, leaving us in loneliness.[748]

This passage is remarkably representative of Herbert's grounding of theoretical thought in immediate spatial presence and embodiment, a blend aided by the travelogue form. Herbert does not simply imagine the "hospital of mutilated and dying forms" (*szpital form okaleczonych i umierających*), he is moving through it – a movement his text replicates in the guidebook-like round of descriptions of various Minoan frescoes that follows the passage. This textual strategy,

[746] Felski 2015, 151.
[747] See for instance Dziadek 2006, 32-46; Shallcross 2002, 66-67; Słodczyk 2017, 29. For a dissenting voice see Oczko 2016, 100.
[748] LNM, 13 (edited translation). Misleadingly, Valles translates *żarna* as "mill wheels", replacing a deeply archaic image with a mechanical one. The image of the quern remains puzzling, however, perhaps linked to the "garden" through the element of grain and the cycle of life.

which the reader might recognise from Chapter 1's analysis of "proxy-experience", gains a completely new dimension in light of the preceding conceptualisation of the museum as a "hospital" (*szpital*): it is this space of sickness, mutilation, and death, not the exotic Cretan tourist destination, that Herbert's reader is provoked to share.[749]

This addition of a level of abstraction to the guidebook form, inviting the reader to consider the workings of the act of reception as it happens on the page, reflects the new reception-theoretical dimension of the post-1967 essays in *LNM*. Yet, just as Herbert's interest in the analysis *of* reception increased, his acceptance of analysis as one of its modes seems to have decreased at the same pace, replaced by a focus on the unquestioning healing of pain that the image of the hospital embodies.[750] This shift is equally palpable in the use of the noun *zrozumienie*, which, in contrast to the verb *zrozumieć*, is used more in the sense of *sympathetic awareness* than an intellectual grasp of something, especially when paired with *współczucie*, compassion.[751] Considered one of the central concepts in Herbert's oeuvre, in his definition compassion is less of a "feeling-into" (akin to the German *Einfühlung*) and more of a "feeling-with", an idea likely influenced by the philosophy of Henryk Elzenberg.[752] In his most important work *Kłopot z istnieniem [The Trouble with Being*], Herbert's former professor writes that "a human being experiencing genuine compassion does not comfort the one who is crying, but cries with him", and in the same way Herbert often uses *współczucie* interchangeably with *współodczuwanie*, literally "co-feeling".[753] Asked by Monika Muskała in 1994, for instance, where his "determination" for reaching the "human drama" in history comes from, Herbert replies:

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[749] Interestingly, a similar connection between museums and hospitals was established by Michel Foucault in his designation of museums and psychiatric hospitals as heterotopias ("of time" and "of deviation" respectively), see Foucault 1984 [1967].
[750] As Fornari 2022 demonstrated, after Herbert's extensive stays in *mental* hospitals between 1976 and 1978 the image of the hospital acquired a much more negative meaning not yet palpable here.
[751] This semantic range is well covered by the English "understanding". Another such pairing of concepts, discussed in Chapter 3, is *porozumienie i przymierze* ("comprehension and covenant"), Herbert's ideal connection with the past. Although *porozumienie* and *zrozumienie* are etymologically related, the former always describes an agreement between two parties, while the latter is extended from one party to another.
[752] On Herbert's poetry as "governed" by compassion see Stala 1991, 167. On *Einfühlung* and Vernon Lee's theory of empathy (that Herbert could not have been aware of), equally developed through her work with ancient objects, see Morgan 2012.
[753] Elzenberg 1963/1994, 69. Himself a rather minor figure in the history of Polish philosophical thought, Elzenberg is now mostly known through his influence on Herbert's oeuvre.

> It comes from the fundamental mental quality grandiloquently called empathy [*empatii*], so the art of compassion [*współczucia*], of co-feeling [*współodczuwania*] [...] The past is not a museum overgrown with mould, it's people with passions and miseries who once lived, were similar to us. We need to bring the past to life, bring to life shades, give them our blood like Odysseus, who descended to feed the souls... I also wanted to give them something of my blood to make them come alive, to extend their survival.[754]

While unknowingly reproducing a much used metaphor for the act of reception, Herbert's image of "blood for the ghosts" illustrates how deeply the woundedness of the past and its remedy, compassion streaming from the present, are linked by the receiver's status as that of a fragile, *hurting* body.[755]

Although undoubtedly intended as heroic, Herbert's self-presentation as the one giving his blood to keep the past alive is also an image of self-harm. It presents the modern body as a mutilated body, meeting the mutilated past in what is less co-feeling than *co-suffering*, a state that makes the abovementioned question of Herbert's projection of his pain onto the ancient world inevitable.[756] If the language of woundedness is indeed primarily a paranoid projection, however, it clearly comes with its own reparative practice. By extending compassion and understanding to the wounded material world of antiquity in a process of co-feeling, Herbert could also extend such understanding to his own wounded self, which strongly resonates with the large body of evidence for the psychological comfort travels to museums and historical sites provided him with. What is more, Franaszek makes a similar link between Herbert's bipolar disorder and his practice of meticulous notetaking and academic reading, seeing in the constancy of Herbert's learning efforts a way of resisting his illness and, we might add, its fragmented temporality.[757] Thus, while Herbert's concepts of reception as labour and as compassion are both clearly rooted in personal experience, their formulation *as theory* allows us to read them outside of it, and it is perhaps in this orientation towards others where theory ultimately differs from paranoia. Unconsciously, Herbert articulates an approach to antiquity that is nowadays still echoed in the

[754] HN, 215.
[755] On "blood for the ghosts" see Lloyd-Jones 1982.
[756] "Co-suffering" naturally suggests the German *Mitleid*, also brought up by Franaszek 1998a, 123 as an accurate term for Herbert's idea of compassion.
[757] Franaszek 2018, 207.

work of scholars such as Rita Felski, who has recently proposed the "care" for the "survival" of the "wounded and vulnerable artifacts of history" as a new way forward for the Humanities.[758] If we decide to take this road, it should not be without the knowledge that for one Polish man back in the 1970s, this theory was never just about the survival of antiquity, but also his own.

Part Two: The World in the Body

I. Reception as Surrogate Victimhood

If we were to begin formulating a body of theory from Herbert's reflections on reception, then, extending compassion to the "wounded" past would be one of its most crucial imperatives. To reiterate, this compassion asked of the modern receiver can be defined as displaying "understanding" for the damaged state of ancient artefacts and gratitude that they survived "at all", as well as applying one's imagination to rediscovering "the beauty of [their] youth".[759] In Polish scholarship, this concept of the imagination, already touched upon as a potential key to reading the fragmentation of Herbert's drawings, is often called crucial to Herbert's idea of connecting with the Other, be it a work of art, the past, or another human being.[760] In the context of antiquity, it has been presented as Herbert's alternative to the process of physical reconstruction by Jacek Kopciński in his analysis of Herbert's radio play *Reconstruction of the Poet* (1960).[761] As has already been touched upon in Chapter 1, Kopciński effectively argues for Herbert's awareness of the radio's ability to produce visceral emotional reactions through the listener's physical immersion in its soundscapes, established in Polish academia by pre-war media theorists such as Witold Hulewicz and Leopold Blaustein, and for his conscious use of this effect to engage his listeners in the same act of imagining the past that he would propagate in *LNM* years later.[762] What is more, Herbert's portrayal of Homer as your chatty neighbour down

[758] Felski 2016, 217.
[759] LNM, 13.
[760] Żuchowski 2006, 37; Gogler 2006, 102.
[761] Kopciński 2005, 139.
[762] Ibid, *cf.* Hulewicz 1936 and Blaunstein 1938.

the road shows that imaginatively bringing the past back to life does not just entail picturing objects in a state of physical wholeness, but also seeing humans "just like us" behind them.

Herbert spells out this notion of a universal human condition as the basis for cross-temporal connection in the already much-cited interview with Zbigniew Taranienko (1971):

> It seems to me that revising history [*repetycja z historii*] is active labour, a form of creation. And what's enthralling is the attempt to reconstruct the human being who lived before us. […] I'd like to write a history of life, not about kings or wars, not even about what people ate, but about what they dreamt of, what kind of fears they had. How it would be to find yourself in Rome or Athens, where sanitation was nightmarish […] By delving into bygone cultures one gains a feeling of closeness to people, empathy towards things we supposedly don't care about.[763]

Succinctly, Herbert here ties together his ideas of reception as "active labour" (its schoolish nature reinforced in the word *repetycja*, which means "repetition" rather than "revision" only in the terminology of music) and as an act centred around the sensation of compassion or empathy. In this passage, however, it is not broken objects that are the recipients of such compassion, but past generations of humans, imaginatively "reconstructed" by the modern subject in the process of learning about the intimate details of their lives.[764] That Herbert sees himself as the mediator of such knowledge, and thus the creator of such "closeness", is perfectly in line with his envoy mission and his stated aim to transmit not personal impressions but information.

This ambition to act as mediator between past and present seems to have only grown over the course of Herbert's life, and is formulated much more directly in his interview with Marek Sołtysik (1981), where Herbert distinguishes between history and his own past:

> I live intensely in the historical past – but not in my own. I strive to communicate, as much as I'm capable of, with other civilisations, other people – and the wonderful thing about culture is exactly that we can make contact with some writing by Homer.[765] And I

[763] HN, 38.
[764] The exclusion of food from this subject matter foreshadows the Herbertian link between culture and food discussed in the next section.
[765] The Polish phrasing here (*z jakimś napisem Homera*, with *napis* also translatable as "inscription") is colloquial and sloppy, emphasising Homer as an ancient individual over the texts attributed to him. On Herbert's unitarian position on the Homeric epics see his early article on "The Decipherment of the Cretan Script" ("*Odczytanie pisma kreteńskiego*", *Twórczość* 1956, reprinted in WG, 443-45).

> would like to conduct this dialogue [*ten dialog prowadzić*], in view of which I don't care about looking at my own limited, very slim past [*ograniczoną, bardzo nikłą przeszłość*].[766]

Herbert here addresses what has now come to be construed as one of the most persistent models of reception, namely that of a "dialogue" with the past.[767] Despite criticism of its construction of a simplistic "duality" of ancient and modern and the emergence of more pluralistic concepts such as "transmission" or the "chain of receptions", the "dialogue" continues to be a model in which, to use Michelakis' words, "classical studies is heavily invested".[768] One of the reasons for this continued investment is the sense of "moral superiority" that can be drawn from conceptualising one's contact with antiquity as a benign, reciprocal "dialogue" instead of the ethically complex, asymmetrical encounter it inevitably is – which Herbert is an almost excessive example of.[769] Describing his own "limited" past with the adjective *nikły*, translatable as both slim in size and spectrally *faint* in substance, Herbert even appears to be implying a kind of *reverse asymmetry*, in which it is not him, but *antiquity* that plays the dominant role while he disappears into the background.[770] Yet, Herbert's self-presentation also includes a paradox: if Homeric writing, for instance, is expressive enough to be made contact with, what would the modern reader need a mediator like Herbert for?

In order to answer this question, we must look at one of the earliest reception-theoretical passages in *LNM*, namely the opening paragraphs of "On the Etruscans". After situating his essay in "neither the first nor the last wave of Etruscomania" and citing Livy as a source for Etruria's power before the Roman conquest, Herbert quickly moves on to the relationship between Etruria's fall and the modern reader:[771]

> By the second century B.C. Etruria has been completely consumed and digested by the mighty Romans. The conquerors' historians labor [*pracują*] to efface the role of the conquered. We, the heirs of the crime and the silences [*przemilczeń*], endeavour to mete

[766] HN, 118.
[767] For reception as a "transhistorical" dialogue of "ancient and modern" see for instance Martindale 2013. On Herbert as responding to the "call" of the past *cf.* Konończuk 2013, 153.
[768] Hardwick 2020, 22; Michelakis 2020, 9-12.
[769] Michelakis 2020, 12.
[770] *Nikły* is etymologically related to the verb *niknąć*, "to disappear" or "to become invisible".
[771] Liv. I.2.5.

> out justice to the past; to give back a voice to history's great mutes, the peoples who didn't succeed in history.[772]

Although written in 1965, thus before Herbert's turn to paranoid reading, the passage already foreshadows the hermeneutics of suspicion that would come to define his theoretical reflections in *LNM*. In an interesting play with the tradition of describing the Graeco-Roman past as "heritage" handed down to its "rightful heirs", a language contested by classical scholars today, Herbert instead calls the modern subject ("we", discussed further below) heirs to the *crimes* of the Romans and to the silent passing-over of the suffering of their victims.[773] He underscores "our" complicity in the next paragraph, where he presumes that if "asked what events or developments in ancient history we consider most important, we would without hesitation name the war of the Greeks with the Persians and the Roman conquests".[774] The reason for this, Herbert states, are "undoubtedly" the "great authorities" Graeco-Roman historiographers (and, given the present tense of *pracują*, potentially also their later admirers) are considered – authorities that must now be questioned.[775]

Herbert's occupation with the power dynamics determining whose voices shape our image of the past resurfaces all throughout his literary oeuvre, including some of his best-known poems such as "The Elegy of Fortinbras" (*Study of an Object*, 1961). In this monologue addressed to Hamlet's body, which itself seems to mock the notion of a dialogue with the dead, the Norwegian prince Fortinbras overwrites the narrative the dying Hamlet wished Horatio to tell with his own interpretation of events ("The rest is not silence but belongs to me").[776] We can see that while Herbert here cloaks his disapproval of the stereotypical "winner writing history" in multiple layers of irony, creating an ambiguous figure which could both reflect the banality of evil and a

[772] LNM, 147 (edited translation). The verb *przemilczeć* means "to pass over in silence" rather than Valles' more active translation of "cover up". The language of incorporation into empire foreshadows my discussion of reception as incorporation below.
[773] Holmes 2017, 43.
[774] LNM, 147.
[775] Ibid. Valles' translation omits the adverb *niewątpliwie* ("undoubtedly"), toning down Herbert's assertion. Herbert's emphasis on the role of historians in determining "history" recalls E.H. Carr's *What is History?* (1961). Although Herbert did own a copy of the 1977 edition (Fortuna 2024), it is unclear whether he was familiar with the work in 1965.
[776] *Cf.* Tomasik 2013, 199.

neutral, realistic approach to governance (Fortinbras' "sewer project" and other administrative tasks), in "Etruscans" he takes a far more direct stance on speaking for the silent bodies of history instead.[777] This ambition arguably takes its final form in *MNW* (1993), which is entirely centred around "the margins of history", a subject area encompassing both "marginalised" stories of social outsiders and the forgotten ordinary life of ordinary people, perfectly encapsulated by the titular image of Dutch still life painting.[778] As Piotr Oczko has noticed, Herbert's fervour to present himself as the champion of the historically voiceless, including social groups that could be termed subaltern ("unlicensed traders, day labourers, peddlers"), often relies on hyperbolic and deceptive statements such as "we know nothing of the mass of ordinary people", made at a time when the Dutch lower classes had already been the object of major exhibitions and widely disseminated research.[779]

Despite this ethically doubtful aggrandisement of his own efforts to "speak back against history", there is doubtlessly something *contemporary* in Herbert's interest in "marginal" narratives and "epistemologies of power" – something reminiscent of the recent renegotiations of the "modes of knowledge-making" in the discipline of classics.[780] Yet, to speak of Herbert-the-theorist as a forerunner of critical ancient world studies, for instance, would be a stretch for two important reasons. To begin with, despite placing such stress on the language of marginality and "silences" in *LNM* and *MNW*, in his *Greek Diary* (*DG*) Herbert is directly dismissive of modern women's efforts to reinscribe two female figures, Eva Palmer Sikelianos and Sophia Schliemann, into the history of classical reception. Although one can hardly expect intersectionality from a heterosexual white man born in 1924, the way this dismissive attitude unconsciously parodies and even undermines Herbert's own model of engaging with the past is striking. To demonstrate

[777] The contrast between Hamlet, a "useless" dreamer, and Fortinbras, a capable ruler, occupied Herbert already back in 1952, when he sent Henryk Elzenberg an essay defending Hamlet as the archetypal artist (ZHHE, 34-37; 43). It was published only posthumously as "Hamlet na granicy milczenia" ["Hamlet on the Border of Silence"], *Zeszyty Literackie* 4/76 (2001): 55-63 (reprinted in MD, 7-18).
[778] Both the Dutch "tulip fever" ("The Bitter Smell of Tulips") and the story of the persecuted painter Torrentius ("Still Life with a Bridle") are explicitly described as episodes "on the margins of history", MNW, 59, 88.
[779] MNW, 16, 26. Oczko 2016, 113 n.77. Of course, Herbert remains right in that the *particularities* of subaltern lives can hardly be uncovered.
[780] Umachandran and Ward 2024, 3, 13.

this, I will first look at Herbert's encounter with two American women in Delphi, from whom he learns about Eva Palmer Sikelianos:

> It turns out that I haven't seen the most important thing – the grave of Eva Palmer, and what's worse, I don't know who this being was. So both ladies, bickering over the details, are doing their best to enlighten me. Eva was born in New York as the daughter of a millionaire, but already in her early youth she felt the call of Hellas and came to Greece to awaken the glorious past. Her epoch-making achievement is supposed to be staging *Prometheus Bound* at the theatre at Delphi. She reconstructed Greek music from Byzantine music (which seems suspicious) and designed the choreography based on her study of figures on Athenian vases. This might have been a person of contagious enthusiasm, but this false and sentimental dressing up as Greeks doesn't appeal to me.[781]

If there is one piece of objective criticism that could be salvaged from the swamp of misogyny the passage constitutes, it is Herbert's distaste for "dressing up as Greeks". The comment is consistent with similar remarks on the modern tendency to turn the authentic past into a "costume", made in the context of the Sienese horse race *Il Palio* ("Siena", *BO*) and of "comical" portrayals of ancient battles in sword-and-sandal movies ("Samos", *LNM*), which prevents receivers from taking history seriously.[782] Even so, the description of a woman's classical reception as "playing dress-up" has an unshakably patronising ring to it, as does the rest of Herbert's presentation as "contagious enthusiasm" what was in fact in-depth knowledge of ancient and modern Greek culture, whose traces cannot be completely erased even in his belittling of Palmer Sikelianos' methodology as "suspicious" practices.[783]

Naturally, Herbert does not notice how close his mocking description of Palmer Sikelianos as "awakening" (*budzić*) "Hellas" through physical presence lies to his own rhetoric of bringing the past alive, or that in focusing their Delphi visit on the artist's grave, the two "bickering old ladies" follow the same practice of cultural "pilgrimage" off the beaten track that he propagates in "Piero della Francesca" (*BO*).[784] This irony is even more biting in Herbert's account of his visit to the birth

[781] MD, 31.
[782] BO, 88; LNM, 140.
[783] On Palmer Sikelianos' education see Leontis 2019, particularly Chapter 3 on her expertise in Byzantine music.
[784] While LNM also contains instances of a neutral usage of "Hellas" to refer to ancient Greece (e.g., LNM, 30, 75, 113), many are either lightly or heavily ironic, such as Herbert's dismissal of Percy Shelley's search for a "Hellenic" physique (ibid, 7) or his pragmatic assessment that the "idea of an eternal Hellas" was hardly the "motor for action" behind the 1821 "rebellion against the Turks" (ibid, 123).

house of Sophia Engastromenou, later wife of Heinrich Schliemann, as part of his stay in Athens. Herbert is shown the house by an Egyptian Greek woman who, much to his irritation, calls herself Vivien ("she should be called Helena, Daphne, Chloe") and is presumably a sex worker based in Pireus.[785] Accurately sensing Herbert's desire for the authentic, Vivien takes him to see the house as "something no tourist has seen before". He, however, is not impressed:

> In Vivien's opinion [*zdaniem Vivien*], Sophia was the real discoverer of Troy and Mycenae. On which the sources are maliciously silent. Schliemann certainly did provide the money for it all, but the soul and brain behind the archaeological expeditions was his wife. I look at Vivien turned pink with emotion and at the ugly wall of the house, whose plaster is crumbling.[786]

This travel note almost directly mirrors the above passage from "Etruscans", with the important difference that its use of indirect speech ("in Vivien's opinion…") turns the "malicious silence" of historical sources into nothing but a joke at the expense of Vivien, while her attempt at "speaking back" to male-dominated history is reduced to a personal *opinion*. Her presumably genuine attachment to this piece of local history, evidenced by her physical reaction, equally becomes a target of Herbert's ridicule.[787] Not even the historical building itself is worthy of compassion: the crumbling wall of the house is not wounded, but ugly.

Although, again, it would be unfair to hold Herbert to today's standards of intersectional awareness, it must be emphasised that the potential of his misogyny to undermine his ideal of connecting with the Other was already put to him by Renata Gorczyńska in 1986.[788] Reminding Herbert that in the poem "Silk of a Soul" (*Hermes, Dog, and Star*, 1957) the lyrical subject's attempt at peeking into a sleeping woman's soul results only in the image of "a pair of silk stockings" on a "glass counter", Gorczyńska provocatively asks, "Is that empathy too?".[789] Herbert deflects the

[785] While their relationship remains ambiguous in the text, Herbert meets Vivien "at a streetcorner", after which she gives him her "business card" and is "called up" by him two more times (MD, 23-25). For confirmation of Herbert's use of the services of sex workers see ZHCM, 52 (letter to Miłosz, Vienna, 12/11/1965).
[786] MD, 24 (my emphasis).
[787] That misogyny lies at the source of Herbert's reaction here becomes evident when the scene is compared to his interaction with the old caretaker at the amphitheatre in Arles, a WWI veteran whose similarly "naïve" attachment to the Romans inspires not ridicule, but a sense of wonder in Herbert (BO, 40).
[788] "Sztuka empatii" ["The Art of Empathy"], first printed in Gorczyńska 1999, reprinted in HN, 165-80.
[789] HN, 169. On a similarly misogynistic tone in the few poems that hint at erotic encounters with women see Gutowski 1999, 126-28.

question by talking about the "need for the concrete" as opposed to the "murky psychology" often expected from poetry, but the arisen discomfort sticks to the page. Interrogating this discomfort through the now-established belief that knowledge-making cannot be truly interventional unless it acknowledges the interactions between different types of social marginality allows us to see that linking Herbert's interest in the "voiceless" to the wider cultural project of democratising history might be misleading. If we now return to "Etruscans" to see what follows Herbert's invitation to look past Graeco-Roman history, it quickly becomes clear that there are indeed other factors at play in his advocacy for the silenced. After characteristically describing the "colonization of the Mediterranean Sea basin" as a "fresco blurred in many places", Herbert draws our attention to the "painters" of this "many-layered palimpsest": "little-known peoples, who have left behind only their names and the memory of their defeat".[790] This emphasis on "defeat", the paragraph's heavy last word which stays with the reader while Herbert launches into an account of Etruscan history, must be seen in relation to the essay preceding "Etruscans" in *LNM*, but written seven years later, namely "Sprawa Samos" (1972).

Herbert's essay on Samos, the translation of whose title I will discuss soon, starts with an encyclopaedic overview of the island's geographical features and history, after which Herbert defiantly breaks the travelogue convention. Admitting that does not "know the island by autopsy", he declares that instead of "describing old stones", he will focus on an episode "specialists" have "squeezed into the margins of history": the Samian revolt (440/39 BC). Then, he announces:

> We will try to reconstruct this history from contradictory sources and accounts, without concealing our sympathy for the defeated.[791]

Multiple aspects of this passage should strike the reader as familiar: the "talking back" to experts, the language of margins, the use of compassion as methodology. Yet unexplored, however, is the

[790] LNM, 148.
[791] Ibid, 136. While the first-person plural is a narratorial convention in Polish academic writing, it is interesting that Herbert comes to it after having used the singular for the autopsy sentence ("I do not know the island…").

emphasis on victimhood, a stance in no way neutral in the Polish context. To begin to unravel why that is the case, let us look at the following exchange between Herbert and Taranienko:

> ZH: I'm interested in civilisations that died, which means nations that didn't succeed in history. After all, we haven't been doing particularly well ourselves. I'm interested in the Cretans, the Etruscans, for instance.
> ZT: Do you want to find analogies and the mechanism behind the workings of history?
> ZH: I would very much like to […], but I am not sure if I can succeed. When I take up such topics, what's important above all is my relationship to those who also lost.[792]

What clearly emerges here is the reasoning behind Herbert's "sympathy for the defeated", and the second reason why we should be careful with describing Herbert as "anticipating" current critical approaches in classics: his identification with the subject position of victimhood, an identification Miłosz called Poland's "collective psychosis".[793]

As Joanna Niżyńska explains, it was in the context of the partitions (1795-1918) that the now "characteristically Polish" notion of heroic victimhood, with its self-congratulatory martyrology and fetishisation of sacrificial suffering, first emerged. Unable to healthily mourn its losses (such as crushed uprisings against the partitioning powers, executions of political leaders, the suppression of Polish culture) through institutionalised practices, Polish society fell into what Niżyńska terms "affective compensation", defined as the generating of national pride and community through constant affective reiteration of traumatic historical experience, a "paralysing" circle of acting out trauma while supposedly "keeping its memory alive".[794] How strongly reinvigorated this mechanism was not just by the Nazi occupation, but also by Soviet-imposed state socialism and its drive to the ideological "sanitisation" of public memory is evidenced by Herbert's own poetry and its function as a repository of officially unacknowledged collective trauma (see Chapter 2). What is more, next to its role as a compensation mechanism, the Polish victim ethos is also a symptom of Poland's semi-peripheral status in the Western-

[792] HN, 35-6 (my emphasis). Herbert's first statement is repeated almost verbatim in his interview with Andrzej Babuchowski the same year (quoted in Chapter 2), where he specifies that "not doing well" in Poland's case meant being "on the brink of disappearing from the map".
[793] Miłosz 2001, 115. For a comparison with the self-victimisation narratives of other European nations such as Serbia see Schmid 2016.
[794] Niżyńska 2018, 222-25. Much of this mechanism also depended on the popular flattening of the message of Polish Romanticism, i.e., that sacrifice should be a means to social change, not an end in itself (ibid, 222).

centric world-system. Similarly to other countries within the global semi-periphery, which usually designates the previously thus termed "Second World", Poland has long preferred to present itself as a victim of its "powerful and aggressive neighbours" than as an oppressor in its own right, which would require acknowledging "its responsibility towards its own peripheries" (in Poland's case, its imperial aggression towards Ukraine or Lithuania, or its history of anti-Semitism).[795]

In this context, for a Polish writer to identify with the "victims of history" is not necessarily an expression of his investment in social justice (at least not in the way the term currently functions in the humanities), but rather of his entanglement in a complex framework Polish culture struggles to free itself from even today.[796] That "Sprawa Samos" is a thinly veiled critique of the Soviet Union is not difficult to spot, not least in Herbert's use of the term "Athenian League" (*Związek Ateński*, the direct equivalent of *Związek Radziecki*, the Polish term for the USSR) instead of the more ambiguous "Delian League", and in the League's ironic description as a "voluntary" union no one can actually leave.[797] On top of what could be called a necessary use of historical parallels to get regime-critical writing past the censors, however, Herbert directly identifies the Samians with the Poles through the essay's title, an action that arguably moves its message from political commentary into affective excess. Translated by Valles as "The Samos Affair", "Sprawa Samos" directly recalls the phrase *sprawa polska*, "the Polish question", which has functioned as the shorthand for the issue of Polish independence for centuries to the point of being parodied.[798] But there is no laughter in Herbert's use of it, and the establishment of such a tight relationship between the cruelty suffered by the Samians and Polish victimhood poses the question whether the "sympathy" felt by the narrator is in fact for the Samian revolt in its historical specificity, or

[795] Grzechnik 2019, 1005; Cobel-Tokarska 2021, 144, 152. The war in Ukraine and the mass presence of Ukrainian refugees in Poland have motivated fresh efforts to work through the difficult aspects of Polish-Ukrainian relations, see for instance Motyka 2023.
[796] Niżyńska 2018, 233. For "justice-orientation" in classics see Umachandran and Ward 2024, 22-25.
[797] LNM, 142. Towards the end of the essay, Herbert even boldly writes of growing "hatred" towards Athens in the "eastern part of the *empire*" (ibid, 141, my italics).
[798] The phrase "Słoń a sprawa polska" ("the elephant and the Polish question") was popularised by Stefan Żeromski in his novel *Przedwiośnie* (1924) and refers to the Polish tendency to shoehorn the "Polish question" into everything, even an essay about elephants.

whether it is yet another inward-looking reenactment of the Polish self-victimisation impulse. While, according to Niżyńska, the recognition of such historical specificity is the "one remedy" for the "automatic recourse" to the martyrological paradigm in the face of any potentially pattern-fitting event, in the essay's closing paragraphs Herbert goes in the very opposite direction by drawing a "moral" from this "distant affair", thus foreclosing an understanding of the specific in favour of, to use Herbert's own phrasing, the *false sentimentality* of the universal.[799]

A similar foreclosure of an encounter with the Other through too strong a focus on one's own victimhood has been identified by Paweł Gogler in the poem "Mona Lisa" (*Study of an Object*, 1961), already analysed in the context of Polish war trauma in Chapter 2. Gogler observes that in the course of the poem, the lyrical subject grows evermore impatient with the titular painting's "indifference" towards his presence, which is simultaneously the physical proof of his survival ("it's me here | pressed into the floor | with living heels"). Fixating on his own language of survival and suffering instead of "opening himself up" to that of the painting, the lyrical subject starts throwing "invectives" at the painted woman ("fat", "horrifying ears", "empty volumes of her flesh"), which can be read as both a polemic towards the painting's canonicity and a simple display of frustration.[800] Gogler's reading of the poem highlights what any reader familiar with contemporary studies of the representation of suffering, such Elaine Scarry's seminal *The Body in Pain,* might have already sensed throughout my discussion of Herbert's insistence on "co-suffering" as a source of interpersonal or even cross-temporal connection: pain alienates. Pain alienates, and imagining another person's pain without simply projecting one's own experiences onto them is almost impossible – the connection between Herbert's nervous breakdown and his sudden conceptualisation of ancient remains as "wounded" already demonstrated that.[801] In this sense, if a "dialogue" with the dead, absent past always runs the risk of tipping into a self-perpetuating monologue, such as the one spoken by Fortinbras over Hamlet's dead body, a "dialogue" based on the experience of suffering would seem even more bound to solipsism.

[799] Niżyńska 2018, 227. LNM, 144.
[800] Gogler 2006, 85-86.
[801] Scarry 1985, 3-11.

In a way, Herbert knows this. He knows it when he makes Fortinbras draw attention away from Hamlet's death by wallowing in his own grievances (that his practical efforts will never "be the subject of tragedy", for instance), and he knows it when he speaks to Adam Michnik (1981) of the motivation behind his writing about the "killed nation of the Etruscans and all those stories":

> There I find more material for study, which slightly reconciles me with further fate, the fate of my homeland. It's as if historical catastrophes helped me survive [*przeżyć*] my personal catastrophes. It's a dreadful consolation – the misfortunes of others.[802]

Paradoxically, Herbert here showcases both the solipsism of an excessive identification with the victim position and Niżyńska's suggestion that even a mechanism as obsessive as constant "affective returns to the traumatic" can serve as its own working-through.[803] In "Etruscans", this working-through manifests itself in Herbert's re-inscription of the "we" subject as the "heirs" of the perpetrators: it is his effort to position the Polish subject within the genealogy of classical heritage, a goal so central to his writing about antiquity, that makes him unintentionally challenge the Polish victim paradigm. Moreover, this reckoning with the "classical heir's" complicity in Roman violence motivates Herbert to negotiate the relationship between the positions of cross-temporal mediator and historical victim instead of conflating them in the way he does in "The Samos Question".[804]

Considering why the Etruscan strategy against the Romans looks so "desperate", Herbert muses:

> It may be that the image of the Etruscans' fate is a result of our seeing them exclusively in the light of foreign sources. It is as if they are the object of history, not a conscious subject, justifying themselves, explaining their defeats, appealing to their heirs to judge them kindly, to grant them the grace of understanding.[805]

Who is this other group of "heirs", if not the narrator and his readers? The essay does not clarify, and given its insistence on the importance of written subjecthood for the establishment of lines of inheritance and the participation in History, neither is it clear whether the "mute" Etruscans

[802] HN, 86. *Przeżyć* can also be translated as "to experience".
[803] Niżyńska 2018, 236.
[804] This disappearance of critical distance might have also been caused by the worsening of Herbert's mental health between the two essays.
[805] LNM, 151.

have any heirs at all. And, despite the narrator's interventionist ambitions, this lack of subjecthood appears unchanged by the end of the essay. In the closing image we have already encountered in Chapter 1, the reader is put face to face with the funerary sculpture of a "man leaning on his elbow", holding our gaze across the timeless expanse of eternity in a palpable *silence* Herbert's essay had changed nothing about.[806] As Michel Wieviorka puts it, victimhood is a negative identity – an identity of lack and loss, and for Herbert to present the Etruscans as anything but the unrightfully extinguished, tantalising mystery would have meant to threaten the victim position he constructed them through.[807] Ultimately, "On the Etruscans" capitalises on this negative space of loss. It fills it with physical sensuality (one so atypical for *LNM*), "tanned bodies", "feasts, hunts, dance", constructing a distinct aesthetic for itself that points to a site of compensation to which Herbert returns over and over: the living body.[808]

II. Reception as Incorporation

After having read *BO* for the first time, Czesław Miłosz chides his young friend Herbert:[809]

> You rascal, everything makes up the taste of the world to you: tavern, table, glasses, smells, lights, shadows, architecture, but all this is indicated in passing, a bit too much bowing to art for my taste.[810]

Amidst this affectionate teasing, Miłosz identifies one of the most characteristic elements of *BO*, which makes it stand out not only in relation to Herbert's "dry" poetry and the practically disembodied narration of *MNW*, but also to most essays in *LNM*: sensuous, ritualistic accounts of meals.[811] Despite Herbert's mocking of Michel de Montaigne's *Voyage en Italie* as a "restaurant guide" in his travel-theoretical article "Monsieur Montaigne's Voyage to Italy" (1966; see Chapter 1), he, too, "bends over his dinner plate with unfailing curiosity", carefully describing local dishes

[806] LNM, 163.
[807] Wieviorka 2009, 63.
[808] LNM, 152, 163. Although both this sensual aesthetic and Herbert's image of the Etruscans as silenced bodies are likely to have been inspired by D.H. Lawrence (as Chapter 1 already hinted at), its physicality and connection to historical violence is also distinctly Herbertian – as the section below will show.
[809] Much of this section has, in slightly altered form, since been published as Leszczyk 2024.
[810] Letter from Montgeron, dated 18/07/1963 (ZHCM, 24).
[811] For the "dryness" of Herbert's poetry see Coetzee 1993, 7.

such as truffles, Camargue rice, or pizza.[812] What is more, he equally draws the reader's attention to the sensations experienced by his own eating body, such as the "enchanting" effect a wine called "Orvieto" starts to have on him the moment it flows down his stomach, freezing the heart while setting the head ablaze.[813] Out of the ten essays constituting *BO*, food prominently co-creates Herbert's travel experience all throughout the first five ("Lascaux", "Dorians", "Arles", "Orvieto's Duomo", "Siena"), disappearing only in "A Stone from the Cathedral", which, as mentioned, Herbert plagiarised from the French medievalist Jean Gimpel.[814]

For Dorota Kozicka, the composition of so many essays from the same building blocks of "arrival – sightseeing – meal – departure" constitutes a direct resemblance to the format of tourist guidebooks, and thus a sign of Herbert's stylistic play with the body of texts he both sets himself apart from and continues to depend on.[815] Without dismissing this interpretation, I believe that the close proximity of meals and sightseeing points beyond it, opening Herbert's text up to the much-studied connection between food and culture. Importantly, Herbert's meals and his engagement with art or historical sights are never just presented as close in time, but as actively forming one holistic experience. This is exemplified by Herbert's tableau of the lunch preceding his visit to the Greek temples at Paestum:

> A meal on the veranda of a modest trattoria, face to face with the art of the Dorians. One must dine with moderation, unhomerically, not to embarrass them. No hunks of meat or craters of wine. A bowl of salad with garlic will suffice, accompanied by bread, cheese, and a quarter liter of wine. […] Instead of an *aoidos*, a Neapolitan tenor on the radio lures his beloved to Sorrento.[816]

Over a bowl of salad, Herbert juxtaposes three distinct temporalities, which will remain interwoven throughout "Among the Dorians": the "precolonial" era of the Homeric epics, the period of Greek colonisation, and modern-day Italy (the era of the radio and Kodak-clicking

[812] BO, 9-10, 38, 68.
[813] Ibid, 53.
[814] It is worth noting all essays are set around the Mediterranean basin, as opposed to the more geographically scattered "Piero della Francesca" or the northern French "Valois", thus feeding into the traditional conception of food as central to the southern European travel experience.
[815] Kozicka 2003, 129.
[816] BO, 26.

tourists).[817] By conjuring up the image of Homeric feasts, Herbert also opens a ring composition whose other end, a passage from the *Odyssey* narrating Nestor's sacrifice to Athena, later closes the essay in a similar contrast between Homeric exaltation at the sacrificial altar and the boredom of modern tourists sauntering around its Paestian counterpart.[818]

A similar enmeshment of eating and culture, in which both sides simultaneously frame each other, occurs in "Orvieto's Duomo", where Herbert again consumes a meal "face to face" with his main sightseeing destination, the Orvieto Cathedral, even at the cost of the high prices at the "only restaurant" with such a view. Having ordered the abovementioned local wine, he announces to the reader:

> Drinking "Orvieto" can be considered a cognitive act. It comes in a small fiasco with a cold haze, brought by a young girl with an Etruscan smile—a smile that resides in the eyes and the corners of the mouth, bypassing the rest of the face.[819]

While the presence of the Etruscan metaphor might be surprising in the context of an essay centred on a Gothic cathedral, it is likely to have been inspired by Orvieto's Etruscan origins and the frescoes found in the so-called Golini Tomb (fourth century BC). Next to reclining diners, the frescoes depict servants in the process of preparing the feast to be consumed – among them, aptly, a serving woman with a mostly unreadable, although gentle expression on her face.[820] Through this reference, Herbert situates his consumption of the wine within a depth of both time and culture: instead of a tourist in an overpriced restaurant on the main sightseeing route, he becomes an Etruscan diner, the corporeal presence of the town's Etruscan lineage in the young woman matched by his corporeal internalisation of Orvieto's namesake.

"It is more difficult to describe a wine than a cathedral", Herbert states at the beginning of the next paragraph.[821] At this point, he has neither drunk one nor seen the other, but the two objects

[817] Herbert's distinction between the Homeric period and the Dorians appears to be purely chronological, as he does not touch upon questions of their ethnicity throughout the essay.
[818] BO, 35. *Od.* 3.404-463.The centrality of the Homeric imaginary to Herbert's Paestum visit is slightly betrayed by the English title, which fails to communicate the implication of hospitality and guest-host relations inherent in the Polish "*U Dorów*", more suitably rendered by the French *chez*.
[819] BO, 53.
[820] Golini Tomb I, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Orvieto <https://library-artstor-org.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/#/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039779860> [accessed 08/04/2024].
[821] BO, 53.

are already linked in their eventual transformation into the written word. Between this transformation and their material existence lies Herbert's experience of them. "Drinking 'Orvieto' can be considered a cognitive act", Herbert proposes, as is his intellectual gazing at art – but does the parallelism end here? When Herbert eventually reaches the frescoes by Luca Signorelli he had come to Orvieto to see, he describes their impact on the viewer in an interestingly multisensory language: "*The Damned* burns our skin, makes us taste ashes on our tongue and fills our nostrils with the yellow odor of sulphur."[822] While Herbert here most definitely draws on Bernard Berenson's concept of "ideated sensations", i.e. an artwork's capacity to make the viewer feel "its own state" "all over our own bodies", which Berenson also applies to Signorelli's Orvieto frescoes, Herbert goes beyond Berenson's emphasis on "tactile values and movement".[823] Adding the elements of smell and taste to his dissection of the fresco into physical sensations, he constructs the same set of senses that he will use again in "Siena" to explain how to correctly taste wine in three simple steps (look, smell, taste).[824] If drinking wine can be a cognitive act, then cognitive engagement with art can, in its physical effects on the body and its internalisation of its object, be like drinking wine.

Discussing what she perceives as the elitism of Herbert's travelogues, Anna Nasiłowska reads his didactic ambitions as reaching beyond the mere transmission of historical knowledge to the creation of an "educated model of art consumption" as an exemplar to follow.[825] As Alexander Holt rightly points out with reference to the abovementioned wine-tasting lesson in "Siena", however, it is not just art on whose "sophisticated consumption" Herbert's reader is being educated: the meal scenes, too, serve to demonstrate what to eat and how to eat as a "refined" consumer.[826] This link between *BO* and consumption, which Herbert's delicately spun connection between food and culture effectively feeds into, is an undeniable aspect of the text due to its situatedness within the context of the post-Stalinist Thaw (1956 onwards), which came with the

[822] BO, 56.
[823] Berenson 1897, 80 (on Signorelli), 33-35 (on tactile values), 35-7 (on Duccio *not* provoking such sensations, opposed by Herbert at BO, 70), *Cf.* Montagu 1986, 247.
[824] BO, 89.
[825] Nasiłowska 2010, 121.
[826] Holt 2020, 204.

re-establishment of the private trade sector after a period of forced trade nationalisation and a more lenient Party attitude towards consumption.[827] Instead of the Stalinist "rhetoric of austerity", consumption of material and immaterial goods (such as art and literature) beyond the bare necessities was now embraced, provided that it stayed within the limits of the moderate, "rational" consumption which was supposed to distinguish the socialist consumer from the decadent, hedonistic Westerner.[828] In a way, when Herbert advises his reader to drink only "a little sip" of wine "without barbaric haste", or emphasises slow, educated engagement with culture over the purchasable pre-packaged experience of group-tourism, he perfectly reflects the values of "intelligence, moderation, politeness, [and] self-control" which both the socialist consumer and the post-Thaw traveller were advised to exhibit.[829]

Nonetheless, there is a certain irony to a text in which, amidst gruesome historical tales of war and plunder, it is too hasty a sip of wine that suddenly becomes *barbaric* – the same irony with which the title of the essay collection could be said to play with the Eastern European "inferiority complex of a provincial" in the face of the idealised West.[830] Whether Herbert's travelogues successfully challenge this inferiority complex through their erudite, sophisticated narrator, or whether they entrench it through their didactic nature, is a question that, just like many other Herbertian paradoxes, can hardly be resolved.[831] Yet, Chapter 2's look at *BO*'s importance for Polish culture has already shown that if the essay collection is indeed driven by the "myth of the West", it is in its sensual satiation of the Polish public's *hunger* for this "repository for unlimited fantasies", rather than in its rationalisation of their consumption, that the source of its impact should be sought.[832] This desire-focused reception of the text, well represented by Wiktor Woroszylski's ode to its "world of beautiful things", opens up a much more libidinal, visceral side to Herbert's internalisation of Western food and cultural heritage easily overlooked in its

[827] Mazurek 2013, 409.
[828] Crowley and Reid 2000, 12; Bren and Neuburger 2012, 9.
[829] BO, 89; Gorsuch and Koenker 2006, 5.
[830] Rajewska 2013, 59, *cf.* Nasiłowska 2010, 120.
[831] Interestingly, Western readers are quickest to jump to the conclusion that the titular "barbarian" is nothing but irony (see Heaney 1988, 55; Kadir 2011, 135).
[832] Nasiłowska 2010, 123; Bren and Neuburger 2012, 14.

proximity to discourses of regulated consumption. A side whose more discreet presence in *BO* will soon be unearthed, but which emerges in its most prominent form in "Labyrinth on the Sea" (*LNM*).

As an essay collection more concerned with theoretically navigating the distance between the modern present and the ancient past than between East and West (even if arguably, the West and the past are always synonymous in Herbert's texts), *LNM* does not return to *BO*'s pattern of food and culture consumption. The only exception is its opening essay "Labyrinth on the Sea", punctuated by multiple meals and overtly using the language of food consumption to represent Herbert's encounter with cultural artefacts. In the Heraklion Museum, Herbert is animalistically "sniffing" the Minoan frescoes "like a dry bone", and later sums up his feverish attempts to see as much of Crete as possible with the words:

> Never before have I raked the dust of history so patiently, never have I gulped down old stones so voraciously [*łapczywie*], and so the contours of time, of past and present, have begun to erode.[833]

Just like in Orvieto or Paestum, the internalisation of present manifestations of history transports the self into the past, but this time, refined sipping has been replaced by *gulping down* and cultured tasting by *voraciousness*. The adverb *łapczywie*, etymologically related to *łapa*, the paw of an animal, implies an insatiability far more physical than Valles' original translation of "greedily" might suggest – a rapacious, wolfish hunger. Originally published in 1973, when Poles were enjoying their newly gained freedom of travel to East Germany by bringing back consumer goods in such quantities that the GDR soon curbed their enthusiasm with strict duty restrictions, "Labyrinth" was free to represent such voraciousness.[834]

Importantly, its presence should alert us to the emotionally charged nexus of hunger, precarity, and violence through which Herbert's relationship to food and its consumption was long mediated. While his family appears to have led a relatively stable existence during the Soviet

[833] LNM 11, 53 (edited translation).
[834] See Mazurek 2013, 414-15 on the Gierek government's silent encouragement of such "shopping tourism" and its filling of market gaps back home.

and Nazi occupations of Lviv (1939-44), Herbert's letters to his childhood friend Zdzisław Ruziewicz show that immediately after the war, their good fortune turned.[835] Having fled Lviv in March 1944 before its annexation by the Soviet Union, the Herberts found accommodation in a townhouse in Proszkowice near Kraków, only to witness it burn down (together with all their possessions) in the Soviet Army's clash with the retreating Nazis in January 1945.[836] For the first time, they were out in the street, with Herbert describing their state to Ruziewicz as "a mess so hopeless I could have never imagined. No flat, nothing to eat (literally)".[837] Eventually, Herbert's parents relocated to Sopot in July 1945, while he and his sister Halina precariously remained in Kraków to pursue their studies at the city's reopening higher education institutions. As Halina Herbert-Żebrowska would later recount, their sustenance depended on aid packages from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, which they jokingly called "auntie Unra", and on the "informal economy" of black-market trade, street vendors, and petty profiteers.[838] There, Herbert in particular excelled in ever-new ideas on how to outsmart before being outsmarted, such as by buying half-rotten apples to "conscientiously" cut out the good bits instead of "paying triple" for fresh ones.[839]

Herbert-Żebrowska also fondly recalls her brother's creativity in attempting to psychologically lighten the burden of hunger:

> My brother would write menus. One day we ate *la soupe rouge à la Bolognese*, then *Bolognese à la rouge*. It was always the same borscht.[840]

While this sounds like a humorous anticipation of Herbert's "educational" comments on French cuisine, it must be emphasised that rather than being a realisation of this fantasy of elegant Western dining, his first long-awaited journey to France in 1958 constituted a return to the food insecurity this fantasy had served to alleviate. "I'll stay here for a few months if I can still go

[835] Franaszek 2018a, 185.
[836] Ibid, 213.
[837] Letter to Ruziewicz, dated 27/07/1945, cited in ibid, 214.
[838] Ibid, 220. On the centrality of UNRRA packages for Polish post-war life see Zborowska 2019, 205-36. On post-war profiteering see Mazurek 2013, 394-400.
[839] Ibid.
[840] See interview with Herbert-Żebrowska, "Brat" ["My Brother'", recorded for the AZH, cited in ibid, 220.

hungry the way I used to", the financially struggling Herbert writes to his then-lover Halina Misiołek from Paris, a comment that should make us reconsider dismissing declarations of meal-skipping or hunger in both *BO* and *LNM* as mere instances of authorial self-creation as the "average traveller from behind the Iron Curtain".[841] Herbert was deeply familiar with hunger not as an inconvenience, but as a legitimate existential threat, and what is more, he was equally familiar with the economy of violence (emotional, verbal, physical) in which food becomes entangled in times of crisis. No wonder, then, that especially in "Labyrinth", freed from the negotiation of consumption imposed by the Thaw period, all of Herbert's meals are intimately linked not only to the ancient past, but also to images of violence – violence seeping out of the past onto Herbert's dinner plate, or from his violent imaginary of food consumption into the past.

Thus, it is over his dinners at the Morosini fountain in Heraklion that Herbert-the-narrator contemplates "catastrophe", pondering over the "cataclysm" that wiped out Minoan civilisation, and it is over *ouzo* and *moussaka*, carefully familiarised as "anise vodka" and "Greek pizza", that he watches a butcher quarter an ox, which prompts a crucial reception-theoretical reflection on the butcher-like "hacking-apart" of texts by interpreters and the material object's supposed resistance to this process.[842] Fascinatingly, Herbert's original travel notes for the butcher scene include neither the parallel between the butcher and the violence of interpretation, evidently a mark of Herbert's post-1967 turn to theory, nor the "restaurant-guide"-like digression on Greek cuisine clearly intended for his Polish readers. Instead, they deepen the connection between food, violence, and poverty:

> Noise. Smells. Bouquets of smells. Bouquets of garlic, olive oil, and blood. I sit over an *ouzo* (with it goats' cheese, a pepper, black olives, dried little fish) and gawk at the spectacle. […] Right next to me crouched down an old woman with a black scarf on her head. At her side a basket of dried herbs, on her outstretched black palm a handful of seeds. The butcher opposite me is quartering an ox. He takes out the liver from its insides and throws it flatly onto the wooden board. A tall man with a rifle joins me at my table.

[841] Letter to Misiołek, dated 30/06/1958, cited in Franaszek 2018a, 641. BO, 65 (Herbert not being able to afford lunch); LNM, 10 (hunger impacting his experience of the Heraklion Museum).
[842] LNM, 47, 18-19. This claim was discussed in Chapter 3. The phrase "Greek pizza" might be referring to the cultural connotations of *moussaka* (a traditional "people's dish"), rather than its culinary make-up, which Herbert accurately describes as "eggplant, pureed potatoes and ground meat" (ibid).

> He leans the rifle against the tabletop, takes a killed rabbit from his shoulder, and lays it down right next to my hand.[843]

The passage finds Herbert fully immersed in Cretan life, almost claustrophobically so, co-existing with local individuals in a physical proximity that almost encroaches the boundaries of his own body. Figures so archetypal that they could be allegories of poverty and violence in a symbolist painting, the old, labour-hardened woman and the man with the rifle flank the "gawking" Herbert, who seems to devour Crete both with his eyes and his mouth. The killed rabbit and the seeds in the woman's hand, which she is likely about to chew, point to the underbelly of the food economy, the self-sourcing and the "making do", that Herbert publicly dissociates himself from by presenting his readers only with the restaurant meal, but that nonetheless accompanies him like a shadow.[844]

The figure of the rabbit poacher, whose imposing physical presence was transferred to the "athletic" butcher in the final version of "Labyrinth", leads us back to the opening essay of *BO*, "Lascaux", and Herbert's first establishment of a connection between art and the barehanded hunt for flesh.[845] Beginning with a most refined breakfast, an omelette with truffles, the text quickly loses this elegant air to explore how these expensive mushrooms are being sourced: sniffing pigs must be employed, soil "burrowed", woods "ravaged".[846] While the parallel between the truffle pigs and Herbert's own mission to "unearth […] underground networks" of cultural connection has already been identified by Holt, the voraciousness of the passage and the light it thus sheds on Herbert's contact with culture and history has gone unnoticed.[847] What Anders' English translation slightly distorts, too, is the kind of "fever" that the discovery of truffles first resulted in. In the Polish, it is not "truffle fever", but instead a *gorączka poszukiwań*, which can be translated as "searching fever", a term that might have reminded many readers of the post-war phenomenon of *poszukiwanie skarbów*, the "treasure hunt" that opened Chapter 1 – or, even more

[843] MD, 33.
[844] For "making do" as central to the consumption culture of the Eastern bloc see Crowley and Reid 2000, 14.
[845] LNM, 18.
[846] BO, 9.
[847] Holt 2020, 217.

violently, of *gorączka szabru*, the "looting fever" that swept across the country in 1945. Lured by the promise of "no man's" property left behind by the Germans driven out of the "Western territories" assigned to Poland at the Yalta Conference, as well as by the victims of the Holocaust, thousands of Poles engaged in both deprivation and profit-driven looting on a mass-scale.[848] Although it is highly unlikely that Herbert participated in *szaber* himself, he would have been surrounded by looters (*szabrownicy*) and their goods every time he went to one of Kraków's "informal" markets to bargain for half-rotten apples.[849] Crucial context, it seems, for someone who would go on to describe himself as a cultural "poacher" years later.

This self-designation from Herbert's 1994 interview with Monika Muskała is now worth citing in full:

> [The art historians] are the hunters, they have their pieces of forest [...] I, by contrast, am a poacher, I go where no one has asked me, where I have no permission to be, and I hunt for whatever animal catches my eye.[850]

This quotation should clearly demonstrate why the term "consumption", if viewed through the lens of Western consumerism with its capitalist teleology, is too narrow to encompass the parallelism that arises between Herbert's internalisation of Western food and cultural heritage.[851] Herbert does not just *consume* Western history and its material remains, he *incorporates* it in a way that follows the logic of hunger, of the hunt represented on the walls of the Lascaux caves, of *szaber*. Similarly to the *gorączka szabru*, which, as Marcin Zaremba argues, was driven by a sense of victimhood, a sense of "taking back" what one has been due all those years of deprivation, Herbert's practice of reception as incorporation paradoxically reflects both his anxiety of having been robbed of his claim to classical heritage and his conviction that this heritage must be

[848] Zaremba 2009; on the politics of German property specifically see Zborowska 2021. In Sopot, Herbert's parents, too, were (lawfully) given accommodation in a "post-German" house and witnessed the looting first-hand, see Franaszek 2018, 238-39. For recent Anglophone explorations of the concept of the "post-German" see Bedyński 2022, Kończal 2023, Kurpiel and Maniak 2024. In Polish importantly Kuszyk 2019 on the transgenerational memory of and guilt over the looting.

[849] As Zborowska (2017, 424) points out, "the majority of objects" in circulation at that time would have been "looted at some stage in their journey to the market". On looting and trade *cf.* Zaremba 2009, 210-13.

[850] HN, 216. For a recent use of the phrase see the edited volume *The Poacher and the Hunters. Zbigniew Herbert's Private History of Art* (2020).

[851] On consumerist associations of the term "consumption" see Bren and Neuburger 2012, 5.

reclaimed.[852] When Herbert thus drinks wine served with an Etruscan smile, eats (with) the Dorians, or unashamedly *gulps down* ancient ruins, this hunger equally reflects the desire to bridge the rupture that divided him from Mediterranean antiquity on the most intimate, most immediate level possible: that of the body. As Maggie Kilgour puts it, there is hardly any act which depends on the division between subject and object as strongly, and dissolves this division as convincingly, as incorporation.[853]

[852] Zaremba 2009, 218.
[853] Kilgour 1990, 4.

CONCLUSION, OR A POSTSCRIPT TO THE PAST

> *Recently an Israeli expedition working near the town of Malhalla had that sort of unglamorous task: to determine the reach and character of the cultures of Natuf (the middle Stone Age). What do we know about the people of those distant times, apart from the fact that they battled hunger and thirst, and subsisted on hunting, fishing, and gathering? We can't even guess what their gods were like, or their magicians and leaders, what their great terrors, their great joys were—their dreams, loves, despairs. To us they're like a long-extinct species of fungus.*[854]

The past is a foreign country. An overused metaphor, perhaps, and yet an apt way of conceptualising Zbigniew Herbert's relationship with antiquity. Unlike his contemporary and fellow "Galician" writer Jerzy Stempowski, who culturally connected his native region to the world of Mediterranean antiquity through the figure of the Scythians and saw Virgil's *Bucolics* as a suitable framework for representing the multicultural community of interwar Ukraine, for Herbert the ancient past was always *elsewhere*.[855] Elsewhere: beyond the Iron Curtain, in the Mediterranean, in Western museum collections, in the libraries of Vienna, Berlin, or Paris. Intentionally, Herbert draws his reader's gaze away from the *here* of the socialist bloc, implicitly too historically and culturally ruptured to hold potential points of connection with solace-bringing antiquity, to the *there* of the West – the sunny shores of Italy, France, or Greece, where architecture is lasting and people frequent the same trattoria for generations. Equally intentionally, however, I have drawn *my* reader's gaze to the very time-space the travelling Herbert looks away from, hoping to at least slightly lift the "aura of nightmare" that, to cite Czesław Miłosz, has long stuck to the "vagueness that has always characterized the presence of Central and Eastern European countries in the Western imagination".[856] Without denying the oppressive aspects of state-socialist Poland (such as censorship, the universally feared surveillance apparatus, or the lack of civic freedoms), I purposefully avoided the rhetoric of

[854] "Pact", trans. Valles, first printed as "Pakt", *Pismo* 7 (1981): 116-17, reprinted in WG, 80-81.
[855] Uliasz 2020, 483. I use "Galician" here to indicate geographical proximity: as the reader might recall, neither was Herbert *actually* from Galicia, nor did Stempowski (1893-1969) ever use the term to designate the land of his youth, instead preferring to (accurately) speak of "Ukraine". For Stempowski's fascination with the bucolic tradition and his pursuit of the form of the "Virgilian essay" see Zemła 2023. As an influential recipient of Graeco-Roman literature, especially Thucydides, Stempowski is another author deserving a place in Anglophone reception studies.
[856] Miłosz 1988.

"grayness" and "bleakness" into which the classical world would have then burst like a ray of Mediterranean sunshine.[857] Treating Herbert as a body in space, rather than a literary voice on the page, allowed me to present postwar Poland as a tangible lifeworld that actively shaped his perception of the materiality of the past: a world of bright neon signs, bombed buildings, pulse-quickening treasures, state-produced homewares, and modernist museum halls packed with Homer enthusiasts.

Nevertheless, as palpable as this world has hopefully felt, it does not take expertise in Polish history to know that this state-socialist world is now quickly becoming another "remote civilisation" (to once more play on the preface to *BO*). The part of the Polish population that lived through the PRL might have not yet become "a long-extinct species of fungus", as Herbert terms "people from distant times" in the article "Pact" (1981) that opened this conclusion, yet the Polish public's relationship with the socialist past is already governed by mechanisms not unlike those that this thesis delineated as influencing Herbert's relationship with antiquity. Similarly to the socialist regime after WWII, in 1991 Poland's first democratic government made it its "ambition" to leave behind the "inglorious past" in favour of a "brighter future".[858] Just like in the other countries of the former Eastern bloc, the socialist period was instantly branded as nothing but an exclusively negative detour on the "only existing path of historical progress" towards mankind's highest form of development – capitalism.[859] Even when the transformation period did not bring the paradise that was promised and many Poles grew disillusioned with this myth of progress, in a perhaps paradoxical instance of *self*-censorship public discourse still did not reflect the "positive attitudes" towards various aspects of life in the PRL that anonymous sociological surveys were starting to register.[860] As my study of Herbert's reception activity has shown, however, the past

[857] On the cliched nature of the opposition between socialist "grayness" and capitalist colour see Fehérváry 2009, 426-28.
[858] Crowley and Reid 2002, 8; Pobłocki 2008, 181. To many radical dissidents, this "politics of forgetting" was unsatisfactory and did not sufficiently "punish" former party-members. For a rather glorifying account of Herbert's contribution to this position see Szumiło 2016, for continued disagreement over the Roundtable of 1989 see Bernhard and Kubik 2014.
[859] Reifová 2018, 589-90.
[860] Todorova 2010, 5 refers to an early study among middle-ages Poles by Wieliczko and Zuk presented at the 2003 meeting of the American Sociological Association.

never stays hidden for long, especially if it is being purposefully repressed. Since the early 2000s, the phenomenon of "post-socialist nostalgia" has been occupying ever more space in the public spheres of post-socialist countries, finding expression in revivals of pre-1989 cultural products, positive reassessments of socialist fashion and design, as well as the creation of commercialised "places of longing", targeted at both Western tourists and locals alike, that allow visitors to sensuously (re-)immerse themselves in the socialist past, its lifescapes and food.[861]

Yet, exactly *because* the PRL still lies within living memory, this trend has met with significant pushback from those Poles (and Eastern Europeans more broadly) who weaponise their *authentic* experience of state socialism to condemn especially young people for whom a "trip to communist times" is supposedly just as "exotic […] as travelling to another continent".[862] The past has again become a foreign country, and those who treat enthusiastic engagement with the socialist past as a form of politically dangerous "collective amnesia" of its "horrors" fail to see what Irena Reifová sharply identifies as the root cause of post-socialist nostalgia: a wish for *cultural continuity* in the face of the very rupture that had made the past so *foreign*.[863] In the same way that Herbert eased the anxiety of having been torn out of the world in which he studied Latin and was read the *Odyssey* by his father by interacting with ancient sites and artefacts, middle-aged Eastern Europeans rewatch the movies of their childhood or visit the Neon Museum in Warsaw. In the same way that Herbert sought a sense of *belonging* to the classical tradition in a politically ruptured and unstable world, young Eastern Europeans might look to the history of socialism and its distinct material lifeworld to form a more locally rooted sense of historical self-positioning in the era of hypercapitalist globalisation.[864] What is more, critics of post-socialist nostalgia ask the very questions that classicists, too, have long been grappling with. How ethical are forms of

[861] Reifová 2018, 594; for a seminal study of "post-communist nostalgia" across the bloc see Todorova and Gille 2010; for the "post-socialist" tourist industry in Warsaw see Balcerzak 2021. As scholars of the phenomenon in the former bloc agree, this is not a nostalgia for an authoritarian one-party state, but rather for forms of sociability and materiality that were lost in the transformation period. The case of modern-day Russia is more complex, with a significant portion of the population having since felt nostalgic for the USSR per se, see Yurchak 2005 and Kirwiel 2013.
[862] Czepczyński 2008, 137.
[863] Reifová 2018, 588, 594-95.
[864] This point is acknowledged by Czepczyński (2008, 137) despite his condemnation of the phenomenon.

engagement with the past that appeal to bodily pleasure and emotions "rather than historical consciousness"?[865] Is there an "authentic" substance of the past beyond the "commodified authentic"?[866] Where does fascination end and fetishisation start?[867] Establishing greater dialogue between scholars of Central and Eastern Europe and classical reception studies could lead to richer explorations of interactions between times, allowing classicists to apply their insights on the workings of cultural tradition, rupture, and repression to the much *closer* historical context of post-socialism that continues to influence European cultural politics and identities to this day.[868] Slavonic scholars, in return, can significantly expand the subject matter of reception studies by identifying presences of Mediterranean antiquity in underrepresented contexts that our Western-centric discipline has only recently started to explore.[869]

The establishment of such a dialogue can be facilitated by interdisciplinary studies such as this thesis, and the reader might have already noticed that the issues above are all closely related to features of the modern classical reception landscape that the Introduction brought up as relevant to Herbert's own reception: the prevalence of "rhizomic" or "fuzzy" connections with the past, an emphasis on the "immersivity" of media and experiences claiming to bring us "closer" to it, and an opposition between private encounters with (ancient) history and regulated discourses of knowledge. In this sense, it is now suitable to briefly summarise where this thesis showed Herbert's contribution to the debate to lie. Chapter 1 explored the issues of distance and mediation, demonstrating Herbert's awareness of the triangulation of distance lying between himself, his ancient subject matter, and his readers. Herbert recognised that with the post-war disappearance of classics from the Polish education system, and thus collective consciousness, knowledge on antiquity was just as difficult to access for his readers as its material remains on the other side of the Iron Curtain. To mitigate this double-distance, in the 1950s he used his

[865] Reifová 2018, 597; on kinaesthetic reception importantly Slaney 2020.
[866] Balcerzak 2021; for the "commodified authentic" see Outka 2009.
[867] Pobłocki 2008; for fetishism in classics see for instance Humphreys 1997 and her much-cited observation that "fixation on material traces of the past, like fixation on fragments, is also a form of fetishism" (209). For an excellent discussion of the fetish in the context of nostalgia for the past see McClure 2003 on Athenaeus.
[868] See Ghodsee 2017 on how the roots of numerous contemporary issues can be located in the Cold War period and its aftermath.
[869] See Torlone et al. (eds.) 2017.

journalistic work to draw attention to public events organised by Polish classicists, all while gently suggesting ways of making these events even more *immersive* through accessible contextualisation, focused on the sensory world of antiquity and its *experience* rather than philological commentary. As soon as Herbert was able to travel West, he put his own advice into practice by constructing his travelogues as not just seemingly transparent "reports" of reality, but also textual spaces of "proxy-experience" allowing readers to insert themselves into his encounters with Greek temples, Etruscan tombs, or Roman amphitheatres – all while being provided with detailed information on their history and academic afterlives.

Chapter 2 complicated this relationship between reader and author by pointing to the various ways in which Herbert's literary engagement with the ancient world was (mis)interpreted, explained away, and criticised. To fully explore the political and cultural implications of Herbert's attachment to antiquity, I situated it within the discourse of socialist modernity that had a determining influence on all aspects of Polish life from the Thaw onwards, shaping architecture, design, and collective identity as a "modern" society. In this future-facing climate of the technological revolution, Herbert's decision to look to the past often had to be justified through the language of scientific discovery, or, to detract from accusations of "escapism", through his model of the "simultaneity of history", which insisted on the continued presence of the past in the time-space of modernity. In culturally and materially ruptured post-war Poland, this insistence on the possibility of "eternal things" had a particularly solace-bringing, if not *therapeutic* social function – yet, as I suggested, this therapeutic function could also be read as an outwards projection of Herbert's own way of coping with his bipolar disorder through contact with art and historical objects. To further problematise the collective significance Herbert ascribed to his reception practice, I pointed to the inseverable link between his attachment to the *distant* past and his self-positioning as the "guardian" of a one-sided, hyper-militarised version of Poland's *recent* past, which gives a problematic edge to Herbert's past-facing cultural position.

Chapter 3 returned to the relationship between Herbert's reflections on temporality and the material world by putting his concept of temporal simultaneity in relation to the much-discussed

"primacy of the object" in his oeuvre, which I connected to his real-life encounters with ancient artefacts. Examining Herbert's idea of the historical object or artwork as the locus of communion between the modern receiver and the object's point of origin, I demonstrated that despite voicing a dynamic, non-linear conceptualisation of time in his public appearances, in the direct encounter with ancient remains Herbert insists on an "abyss" between the past and the modern receiver which must remain untainted by anachronism or reconstruction. To challenge this fixation on *authentic* objecthood, I then turned to Herbert's drawings to suggest that their fragmented and elusive form offers a fascinating framework for reading his equally fragmentary ekphrases of art and ancient artefacts not as "reports" or ethically charged "testimonies", but instead as records of ephemeral (and always deeply subjective) sensory experience. While the travelogues present Herbert's private experience of seeing as authoritative or even universal, the private nature of the drawings allowed us to witness his connection with antiquity at its most tentative and doubtful of its own success.

This "aesthetic of the attempt" became especially important in Chapter 4, which built on Herbert's direct engagement with the questions of distance, historical self-positioning, embodiment, and temporality to present four models of reception with the potential to find application beyond the scope of this thesis. Moving from the arguably most derivative model, the Eliotic idea of "working" or even "sweating out" one's connection with the past (in Herbert's case through meticulous research and the hardships of travel to ancient sites), the chapter concluded with the most distinctively Herbertian model of reception as incorporation, grounded in his experience of postwar food insecurity and its intertwinement in economies of violence.[870] The two other models, reception as compassion and reception as victimhood, are deeply connected through the projection of pain: on the one hand, Herbert's own mental anguish projected onto ancient remains "wounded" by time, on the other, the Polish historical position of victimhood

[870] Without any relationship of influence, this model is (to my knowledge) only comparable to the "image of classical reception, or *imitatio,* as digestion" identified by Slaney (2015) in Renaissance theatre, as well as Oswald de Andrade's "Anthropophagic Manifesto" (1928), a Brazilian modernist work similarly thematising the question of "cannibalising" Western European canons through the indigenous ritual practice of anthropophagy (see Fradinger 2023).

projected onto "extinguished" ancient cultures. Remaining aware of the dangers of both projections, I also pointed to the *reparative* potential of Herbert's emphasis on compassion and its anticipation of the current humanities-wide turn away from critical practices of suspicion towards practices of care and preservation. That suspicion cannot be ignored as an equally crucial driver of Herbert's reception theory, however, was demonstrated with reference to the tight link between the paranoia of theory and paranoia as a symptom of Herbert's mental illness.

From the start, this thesis has sought to draw attention to Herbert's engagement with the reception process itself, using his theoretical leaning to position itself as an experiment in looking *beyond* the case study as an analytic category. In contrast to Herbert's often moralistic poetry, his corpus of essayistic reflections (as well as its archival extension) acts not as an answer, but a set of *questions* to be put to other authors, other times, other places – a thought made especially tempting by Herbert's close affinity with the recent turn to "affirmative" models of cultural engagement.[871] Not only do his model of reception as compassion, his presentation of ancient remains as bringers of hope, and his emphasis on personal connection fit right into "hopeful" and care-centred critical practices such as postcritique – Herbert's fragmentary, contradictory formulations of theoretical thought *require* postcritique's resistance to "static argument" and recognition of the "fitfulness" of theory to be put into motion at all.[872] Yet, before heralding Herbert as "ahead of his time", we must recall both his out-of-placeness in an academy committed to intersectional justice work and, importantly, that "suspicion, opposition, and hostility" – all the "negative affects" postcritical scholars now oppose – lie very much at the heart of Herbert's turn to theory.[873] They were discovered within Herbert's insistence on looking back when Polish society looked forward (Chapter 2), his deep-seated fear of inauthenticity, resulting in a distrustful attitude towards reconstruction or even restoration (Chapter 3), and finally in his imperative to remain suspicious of "what lies under the fresco" (to cite "Livy's Metamorphoses"

[871] On the current state of the field of postcritique see Felski 2023 and the special issue of *Media Theory* that Felski's afterword closes.
[872] Mitrano 2023, 15; Dabashi 2020, 950.
[873] Mitrano 2023, 13.

once more), even if it should mean exposing the classical tradition as a "conspiracy of delight" (Chapter 4).

While this affective disposition can be explained by the general climate of suspicion that permeated both sides of the Cold War (as outlined in Chapter 2), Herbert's mental illness and its manifestation as, among other symptoms, periods of intense paranoia complicate this picture.[874] Especially since in post-socialist Poland, the uncomfortable postscript to Herbert's status as the "Cold War writer" as which he was analysed in this thesis, his hostility towards the world only grew. As a result of Herbert's active involvement in the *Solidarność* movement from 1981 onwards, the slowly advancing politicisation of his public image reached its final stage in his new role as the moral guide of post-1991 Poland. Herbert gave interviews published under weighty titles such as "How should we live now?" (*"Jak tu teraz żyć?"*), wrote political pieces on the "correct" shape of democracy for outlets such as the newspaper *Tygodnik Solidarność* [*Solidarity Weekly*], and overtly played out his cultural authority by, for instance, publishing an open letter to president Lech Wałęsa.[875] What a long way from the young poet forced to justify himself for writing on antiquity, one might think, yet Herbert's public position in the 1990s was not necessarily the triumph it might initially appear to be. Already much tormented by physical illness and his barely treated, thus uncontrollable bipolar disorder, Herbert used the intensified attention granted to him by the Polish public to slander former friends and literary colleagues as "communist sympathisers" and "collaborators" – a public extension of the private fight-picking already addressed in Chapter 4. It was in these difficult final years of his life, too, that Herbert cemented his later reception as the "unbroken Polish patriot" that clouded his biography for years to come.

An especially important example here is the poem "Wilki" ("Wolves", *Rovigo*, 1992), originally published in the press together with the calumnious "Chodasiewicz" (already mentioned in

[874] In his advocating for hope as a "critical orientation", Castiglia (2017) connects the tradition of suspicious reading to the all-encompassing mood of suspicion in Cold War America, when citizens were encouraged to see veiled Soviet activity everywhere, and resistance to this imperative was expressed by directing such suspicion *back at the state* (215-16).

[875] "Jak tu teraz żyć?", *Tygodnik Solidarność* 13 (1991): 14; "W obronie demokracji" ["In Defense of Democracy"], *TS* 4 (1996): 5; "List do Lecha Wałęsy" ["Letter to Lech Wałęsa"], *Rzeczpospolita* 5 (1995): supplement "Plus-Minus", 3. Herbert was attempting to intervene in favour of Ryszard Kukliński, a former CIA spy sentenced to death in 1984 whom Wałęsa initially refused to pardon.

Chapter 3 in its proximity to "Black-Figure Work by Exekias") – a diptych designed to highlight Herbert's patriotism against the background of Czesław Miłosz's supposed lack of loyalty to his national community.[876] Highly atypically for Herbert, "Wilki" is a rhyming poem, written to commemorate resistance fighters hiding in the woods. Who these resistance fighters are supposed to represent, however, is an interesting question. In his thought-provoking article on the poem's reception in Polish right-wing circles, Mateusz Antoniuk traced the evolution of its dedication across multiple manuscripts stored in the AZH. What emerges is the wide range of military organisations Herbert considered commemorating with the same poem: naturally, there is the Polish Home Army (AK), but equally the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (pol. *Ukraińska Powstańcza Armia*), the Jewish Combat Organisation (*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*), or even the controversial Russian Liberation Army, also known as the "Vlasov army" (pol. *Własowcy,* a collaborationist unit of Russian prisoners of war who later turned against the Germans). The differences in aims and political orientations are already becoming untenable, and this is only a selection of the organisations on the list. As Antoniuk elegantly put it, "with the rhetorical structures of commemoration all set", Herbert seemingly could not decide "what and who" he actually "wanted to commemorate", which again brings us back to the question of the doubtful *historical specificity* of Herbert's calls to compassion with the "silenced".[877] In the case of "Wilki" and its popularity in the late 2010s, this "silence of history" (also prominently addressed in the poem) became particularly ironic: under the government of the right-wing *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* [*Law and Justice*] party, the narrative of the "cursed soldiers" (*żołnierze wyklęci*) refusing to lay down arms after 1945 was not "silenced", but one of the central elements of state-sponsored mnemo-politics.[878]

[876] *Czas Krakowski* 75 (29 March – 1 April 1991), see Antoniuk 240.
[877] Antoniuk 2020, 252. "Wilki" was ultimately published with the capacious dedication to "soldiers who died in the woods after 1945 without laying down their arms and who did not break their oath" (my transl.).
[878] For Anglophone analyses of the "cursed soldiers" narrative and its controversial place in Polish culture see Jaskułowski and Majewski 2024 and Kończal 2020, who also refers to the importance of "Wilki" within the discourse (erroneously describing Herbert as a "member of the Polish resistance movement during the war", ibid, 78).

Reproduced on murals *commemorating* individual partisans whose "fight for [Poland's] independence" encompassed massacres of Lithuanian, Belarusian, or Jewish civilians, as well as used as an "inspiration" for "patriotic" baby clothing, "Wilki" is also an example of Herbert's classical reception.[879] As could easily be linked to the connection between "proper" commemoration and eternity Chapter 2 identified in Herbert's contrast between the rubble of Warsaw and the catacombs and triumphal arches of Rome, the imagery of remembrance used in "Wilki" is deeply classical:

> they didn't leave an Electra sighing[880]
> nor were they buried by Antigone
> and now they will be forever dying
> deep in snow through all eternity

The point here is simple: because the partisans could not come out of hiding without surrendering to the Red Army, they died anonymously and were denied a proper burial, which in turn denied them safe passage to the afterlife. In censorship-free Poland, where the Catholic church was no longer persecuted by the state, Herbert could have equally expressed this point using the imagery of last rites and purgatory. He did not. Instead, he drew on Greek tragedy, its exploration of tensions between conflicting loyalties, its concern with pollution, and lastly, the figures of two of its most famous mourners, Antigone and Electra.[881] Importantly, however, Herbert's interest in these two female figures is *displaced*. The poem is not asking us to "think with" Antigone to consider the experience of a woman torn between the wish to retrieve the body of her partisan brother and concerns for her own safety in the face of the Red Army (notoriously feared for its sexual brutality), nor is it interested in Electra as a sufferer of trauma and its somatic manifestations.[882] Instead, it keeps its gaze fixed on the (almost exclusively male) partisans themselves, arguably elevating them to the ranks of heroes of the Trojan War through their identification with Agamemnon, and uses Antigone and Electra merely as *carriers of cultural*

[879] Kończal 2020, 76; Antoniuk 2020, 243, 246.
[880] Outside of the limitations imposed by the rhyme scheme, *nie opłakała ich Elektra* would be literally translated as "they were not cried over by Electra", i.e. not ritually mourned.
[881] On pollution in Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* see Meinel 2015.
[882] On Red Army rape see Chapter 7 in Mark 2011; on Electra and trauma see Griffiths 2011.

associations.[883] They represent the importance of mourning the dead, the conflict between individual and civic order, and, last but not least, the *gravity* associated with Greek tragedies as spaces of inescapable fate.

While "Wilki" thus confirms the argument that no classical presence in Herbert's work is ever simply a "coded message" designed to get "forbidden" content past the censors, it also makes it painfully clear how deeply implicated Herbert's engagement with Mediterranean antiquity is in the more controversial aspects of his oeuvre: its re-inscription of the Polish martyrological paradigm, its reproduction of the hegemonic, militaristic narrative of WWII, as well as its obsessively anti-communist rhetoric, which had been used for decades to *truly* silence those wishing to tell a more multi-layered, ethically complex, and pluralistic story about the "Polish experience" of the second half of the twentieth century. The last point in particular, Herbert's construction of an anti-communist discourse through engagement with and references to Mediterranean antiquity, might have been an unquestionable act of political resistance in the age of authoritarian state-socialism, but deserves another moment of our attention in 2024. As part of his wider work on symbolic violence in Polish literature, in 2015 the literary scholar Paweł Wiktor Ryś analysed one of Herbert's best-known poems, "The Power of Taste" ("Potęga smaku"), published in the underground press in 1981 and often considered the anti-communist manifesto "of an entire generation".[884] The poem's message is disarmingly apolitical: communism is aesthetically ugly, and its rejection is simply a "matter of taste". While everyone is entitled to their own opinion on brutalist architecture or socialist-realist art, it is Herbert's way of building this message that Ryś drew attention to for the first time in the poem's reception, and that makes the poem's status as a highly canonical "treatise on aesthetics" equally highly controversial.[885]

As Herbert blatantly states in the second stanza of the poem, it is not just communist cultural products, but *communists themselves* that are ugly, those "boys with potato-eaters' faces |

[883] The other, more cynical interpretation of the partisans as equivalents of Polyneices, and thus associated with morally ambivalent civil strife, could have hardly been on Herbert's mind, yet resonates with critical approaches to the "cursed soldiers".
[884] The poem was later incorporated in *Report from a Besieged City* (1983). On the cultural importance of the poem see Ryś 2015, 51 citing Andrzej Stoff.
[885] Ryś 2015, 56.

very ugly girls with red hands". These are not just lazy invectives flung at political opponents, Ryś insists, and – similarly to the methodology of this thesis – unpacks the *lived reality* behind the catchphrase of "Stalinism" usually named as the poem's context. What emerges is a distinct connection between the poem and the post-war land reform, which "subdivided landowners' estates exceeding fifty hectares among peasants, such as small farmers, landless people and *fornals*", significantly improving their hitherto dire living conditions and thus gaining their sympathy for the government and the socialist project.[886] These individuals were then encouraged to further advance in society by taking up higher education and administrative positions in Polish cities, where they were often confronted with social stigmatisation at the root of which lay the very thing mocked in Herbert's poem: their bodies. Writing on "the shame of the peasant body", Karolina Koprowska draws on testimonies of first-generation university students who lived with the constant fear that despite all cultural mimicry, their physical appearance would eventually betray them as *out of place*, biologically unsuited for their new place in society.[887] It is this very binary between the peasant body and "high culture" that "The Power of Taste" reflects in its last two stanzas, contrasting the aesthetic deficiencies of communism with the beauty of Graeco-Roman antiquity.

Having established the physical ugliness of communist supporters, in whom we can now recognise many individuals from the peasant class looking for a better life, Herbert writes:

> Truly their rhetoric was just too shoddy
> (Marcus Tullius turned in his grave)
> chains of tautologies a few flailing concepts
> torturers' dialectics reasoning without grace
> syntax devoid of the beauty of the subjunctive

In juxtaposition with Herbert's use of Mediterranean antiquity as a source of hope and collective comfort in his travelogues, this weaponisation of classical learning is almost saddening. Herbert's conjuring up of the "beauty" of the Latin language (implied by the grammatical terminology of the "subjunctive") and of Cicero, affectionately called by his praenomen and nomen to emphasise

[886] On the land reform see Błąd 2021; *cf.* Ryś 2015, 57. The land reform and its transformation of Polish society have been analysed in the groundbreaking work of Andrzej Leder (2014).
[887] Koprowska 2023.

the intimacy "between the speaking 'I' and the ancient tradition", as a rod (a literal *kanon*) against which to measure the "shoddy" rhetoric of Marxist thinkers reminds us of the exclusionary potential of classics and of its function as a disciplinary tool, working to curtail the "transgressive" potential of the peasant body – in the same way it was used to discipline colonial subjects or the British working classes.[888] When Herbert closes the poem encouraging the (impliedly equally anti-communist) reader "to spit out your scorn | even if for that the body's precious capital the head | would roll", the image of the addressee as a classical column losing its capital completes the poem's re-inscription of classics as "instrumental in the intellectual and cultural reproduction of class hierarchies".[889]

When Ryś's study of "The Power of Taste" as reproducing the centuries-old discourse of violence against the peasant class appeared in 2015, Poland was still around five years away from what has since been termed, using the language of the many "turns" in the humanities, the *zwrot ludowy* of 2020s – the "people's turn" or, in a different translation, the "turn towards the common people".[890] As a result of a true boom of both academic and popular works on the traumatic realities of serfdom, political and economic structures of exploitation, gender differences in experiences of systemic oppression, and forms of peasant resistance (which, in the case of women, often included the practice of witchcraft), identification with the peasant class and its history is not just available, but proudly embraced by the wider Polish public for the first time in history.[891] For many Poles, there is no going back to false identification with the upper classes, which poses the question what position Herbert occupies, or *can* occupy in this cultural reality. And this is where Herbert's internal contradictions and the open-endedness of much of his thought become his saving grace. Even in his highly critical article, Ryś admits that in "reading

[888] Ryś 2015, 62; Koprowska 2023, 232. On the classical education of colonial subjects see for instance Vasunia 2013, on ancient languages and (self-)discipline see Stray 2018. The classism implied in the adjective "shoddy" is even more striking in the Polish, where *parciany* literally means "made from sackcloth", the main fabric used in peasant clothing, see Ryś 2015, 54-55.
[889] Stead and Hall 2020, 10. The Polish is far more impersonal than Valles' use of second-person possessive adjectives implies: Herbert's language thus includes both the lyrical subject and the addressee (lit. "taste demands that one…"), creating a community of resistance.
[890] Zysiak 2023, 193. Two earlier works that are usually identified as having paved the way for the "people's turn" are Sowa 2011 (which shaped much of my own thinking on Poland as cultural periphery) and Leder 2014.
[891] On these selected topics see Janicki 2021, Leszczyński 2020, Kuciel-Frydryszak 2023, Pobłocki 2021.

Herbert against Herbert" he was merely following Herbert's own imperative to "read Livy against Livy", expressed in "Livy's Metamorphoses" with all its recognition of Graeco-Roman culture's role in legitimising imperialism and facilitating the interpellation of subjects by hegemonic discourses.[892] In the same way, this thesis can be seen as offering an alternative to Herbert's designation of the body as a locus of difference and stigmatisation: from my investigation of Herbert's thinking on cross-temporal connection, embodiment emerged as the most *timeless* aspect of human existence.

"What do we know about the people of those distant times, apart from the fact that they battled hunger and thirst, and subsisted on hunting, fishing, and gathering?", Herbert asks in the epigraph to this chapter, drawn from the article "Pact" which expresses wonder at the discovery of the remains of a puppy in one of the graves at the Natufian site of Ain Mallaha in Israel – evidence for a "pact" of love not even time was able to break. He seems to take it for granted that even if we know nothing else about the people of the past, about their "terrors" (*przerażenie*), or "joys" (*radość*), "dreams, loves, despairs" (*sny, miłość, rozpacz*), thus the matter of "language-inflected social life", we still retain some kind of extradiscursive "substratum of experience", as anthropologist Judith Farquhar puts it, to *recognise ourselves in* even across the greatest historical differences and gaps in knowledge.[893] While it would be unwise to attach oneself to the "naïve faith" in the possibility of an "uninscribed", ahistorical body, Farquhar convincingly argues that embodied, material life can act as the "imaginative common ground" through which otherwise easily exoticisable subject matter can be incorporated into each individual's imaginary of reality.[894] It is this approach – *pace* Farquhar, *pace* Herbert – that this thesis has followed in its presentation of post-war Poland and the Cold War divide through Herbert's embodied experience of the world, and whose relevance for reception studies it thus hopes to have demonstrated.[895] Hunger, food consumption, everyday interactions with architecture and household objects, as

[892] Ryś 2015, 65. Interestingly, "Livy" (1990) is a much later poem than "Taste" (1981), making it impossible to construct a linear narrative of Herbert's critical thinking on antiquity.
[893] Farquhar 2002, 5, 8.
[894] Ibid, 10, 22.
[895] The importance of making the body a central analytic category within the discipline of history has recently been argued by Jajszczok and Musiał 2019.

well as more complex affective states such as war trauma, anxiety, or longing can all act as frameworks connecting Herbert to other receptions, perhaps even offering new ways of mapping the field of classical reception that free individual case studies from being, to use Moira Fradinger's phrasing, "locked into locality" – locked into a specificity of time and place that prevents them from speaking to other receptions arisen in similar affective contexts.[896]

Finally, it is this search for cross-temporal communion through the shared physicality of bodies, a "relatability" of existence in different historical eras that shines through the specifics of accurate contextualisation, which I believe to lie at the heart of what Herbert can contribute to ongoing debates on classical reception, the new pluralised shape of Polish history, or questions of popular engagement with history more broadly. Herbert wants us to care about the past. Yes, because the cultural products of periods such as Mediterranean antiquity constitute the "roots of European civilisation", but also because the people of those periods battled hunger, experienced despair, and created art just like we do (even if not *in the same way* that we do). Ancient artefacts should be preserved not just because some of them are "masterpieces", but also because time has already wounded them enough, and "like the sick", they require our compassion. Projecting suffering onto "lost civilisations" reproduces politically dangerous martyrologies, but the imperative of care that comes with it can open up the self-victimising modern subject to the pain of others. For every reason to reject Herbert, there is an equally good reason to take him seriously, and to "think with" his theory of reception. It is his multivalence, too, that makes it important not to allow one of his faces to completely eclipse the others – especially not the nationalist, militarist Herbert, whose classical reception excludes rather than making time more expansive, and the past more palpable.[897]

For this reason, more work remains to be done on Herbert's classical plays, especially *The Philosophers' Cave* (1961), which only recently appeared in English translation.[898] There is

[896] Equally considering the issue of locality, Fradinger (2015, 15-23) refers to Emily Greenwood's (2013) concept of the "omni-local", which emphasises the ultimate locality of *all* receptions.
[897] The importance of resisting nationalist mnemonic hegemony and its politics of fear is also emphasised by Jaskułowski and Majewski 2024, 105-07.
[898] Valles (ed.) 2024.

immense potential in analysing the play through the methodology of performance studies, which possesses the tools to complement my study of the intersections of body and language in Herbert's travel writing through an examination of how that very intersection was brought about on stage, in a real, rather than textual, moment of antiquity *coming alive*. Our understanding of *Cave* can also be significantly enriched by the historical context of the late 1940s, when its first drafts were composed.[899] The play's almost nervous occupation with the topic of fear and how to overcome it has been approached through the lens of Platonic philosophy, but not yet connected to Marcin Zaremba's influential study of fear as a governing force in post-war society (especially until 1947).[900] Further, Herbert's posthumously published short-story collection *Król mrówek. Prywatna mitologia* (*The King of Ants. A Private Mythology*), composed of retellings of Graeco-Roman myth, remains to be linked to his theory of a "radically subjective history of art", as well as his plans for an essay collection entitled *Prywatna historia świata* [*A Private History of the World*], which could have included classical essays such as "Nos Kleopatry" ["Cleopatra's Nose"], or "Nero".[901] This repeated insistence on the "private" nature of history and mythology could be read in the context of Herbert's turn away from the socialist state, but equally resonates with consciously subjective critical practices such as affect studies or postcritique.

Mindful of Helen Slaney's warning that to seek the "relevance" of ancient receptions (or their source material) in the most frightening aspects of the current social and political climate would be "a rather ghoulish kind of wishful thinking", I am averse to closing this thesis by promoting Herbert as having been again made "relevant" by the looming onset of authoritarianism across the Atlantic, or the growing tensions within the European community Herbert himself only dreamt of.[902] Any aspect of the past is only as relevant as we make it, and if there is anything I would like to *make* relevant about Herbert, it is his firm belief in the power of art and historical

[899] Franaszek 2018a, 320.
[900] On Plato see Sienkiewicz 2000; Zaremba 2012 (an English translation appeared in 2022). Another play directly inspired by post-war brutality is *Lalek* (see Dedecius 1981, 233), which could offer clues for interpretation.
[901] AZH akc. 17 872 t. 1. Elsewhere, Herbert noted down the collection title as *Mała historia świata* [*A Little History of the World*], see AZH akc. 17 871.
[902] Slaney 2015, 279. For Herbert's hope for a united Europe see the short essay "Holy Iona", written for the Westdeutscher Rundfunk in 1966, reprinted in MD, 19-20.

artefacts, expressions of the humanity of all those who came before us, to bring about healing, hope, and community. Engagement with the humanities does not continue to be important *despite* occurring in politically troubled times, it continues to be important exactly *because* it occurs in politically troubled times. If we are to look to Herbert, let us look to him as an example of that.

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APPENDIX

"Willem Duyster (1599-1635) or The Discreet Charm of Soldiers": Programmatic passage on Herbert's concept of a "radically subjective history of art" (printed in MD, 54-56), my translation

Pursuing an art history reduced to taking notice of forms, styles, techniques, and conventions is an activity that is dignifiedly barren and solemnly boring. Fertile, however, seems to me the effort directed towards establishing a dialogue with the creator of a work, with his unique inner world, love, passion, dilemmas, and also with his unique path to perfection, laid out only for him, that he had walked and that he forgot about.

Amateurs, that is to say those who deal with works of art for their own pleasure and not out of lowly financial motives, meaning professionally, feel the overwhelming need for contact with the artist as a person, with, simply speaking, a long dead human being; contact through objects, which constitute the only material trace of his presence. I know that this is hardly possible, that it reeks of spiritism and table-turning, insults the discipline and sacred methods of knowledge; and so science, conscious of its dignity, ignores such longings and desires of simpletons. In return it gives what it can give – information, terminological spells and formulas; it aids the understanding of a work's composition with the help of axes, little squares and triangles, as well as – which is the latest fashion – offering up empty colourful shells of emblems, hidden meanings and symbols, allegories.

All the while the stubborn and naïve amateur contemplates the vices and the greatness of his favourite creator's soul. He asks about matters that seemingly go beyond the boundaries of aesthetics, namely the [p. 55] artist's moral nature: if he was brave, true to himself, if his arm and his eye were governed by the elementary principles of honesty.

Enthusiasts are attracted to what is singular, unique, slipping through the schemata of epochs and schools. They delight in details – the shape of eyelids in the paintings of the Sienese masters,

Crivelli's manneristic way of drawing lips reminiscent of a jeweller or goldsmith, Hals' lace [...] They are immune to the generally accepted hierarchy of judgement, the reputation of a firm, they can point out weak works by great artists, as well as sloppy parts of masterpieces. *Summa summarum* they are heretics, but without them this portion of human history called art history would resemble a massive factory, in which pale labourers, occasionally geniuses, work under the tyrannical orders of the Spirit of the Age [Zeitgeist].

I take the side of the dying breed of amateurs because I belong to them myself. Just like everyone else, I am simply defending my right to existence. I would like to live among dead artists similarly to how I live among the people I am surrounded with, governed by like, dislike, reverent adoration, consuming resentment, caring little for theoretical justifications of those arbitrary judgments, since deep emotions fortunately resist rationalisation. I am more attracted to character, less to mastery. I innocently believe that neither talent, nor the magic tricks of technique can obscure an artist's vulgar and shallow soul. [...on Herbert's personal dislike for Jan Steen...]

It is thus valuable to study living works of art, forgetting dates, metrics, schools, styles, themes (horses, ships, flowers), [p. 56] and instead applying criteria that are less pedantic and more meaningful: [an artist's] inner drive, relationship with the absolute, central vision, the gravity and force with which the artist collides with reality – loses, wins, doesn't settle for an easy compromise. One can thus only dream of a radically subjective history of art, freed from 'scholarly' terminology, based on a discerning eye, unswayed by the tyranny of place and time, for the rhythm of art can often be surprisingly different from the rhythm of history; it has its own battles, alliances, borders, kingdoms, and disasters. With such an art history, I believe, it would be much easier to change traditionally accepted hierarchies – to excavate creators who are forgotten because "unrepresentative" and to question greats who are persisting by sheer force of inertia and monotonous repetition.