

## Small Narration

by Wojtek Ziemilski

Translated by the author

*Words in brackets or underlined appear on screen.*

[Small Narration]

[#471. It is so difficult to find the beginning. Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back.]

You think: It started with the name.

[Wojciech]

You think: Wojciech is not a good name.

Michael is just Michael. Matthew is Matthew. Mark, Andrew, those are good names. Wojciech has no neutral form. He is either called Wojciech, and that sounds official and stiff, or Wojtek, and then you're a kid from the neighborhood. The name "Wojciech" is impossible to identify with.

You think: It began when you were 6 and you were sent to the US. For half a year you lived with a crazy aunt who decided that nobody would be able to pronounce the name Wojtek, so she switched it to your second name, Anthony. For six months you went to an American school, you spoke English, you thought in American, and your name was Tony.

[Tony]

When many years later you were living in Portugal and began doing theater, the problem with the name returned.

An artist called Wojciech would have a tough life in Portugal. They even pronounce Wojtek [Wojtek] like this [UOJ-TEK]

So you simplified.

Instead of this [Wojtek] the simplest spelling would be this [Voitek]. You allowed yourself one nostalgic addition. The result was this [Vvoitek].

This might look good in Portugal, but in Poland it's just a silly spelling. With a name spelled this way, it was clear you would not be in a rush to go back.

[#472. When a child learns language it learns at the same time what is to be investigated

and what not. When it learns that there is a cupboard in the room, it isn't taught to doubt whether what it sees later on is still a cupboard or only a kind of stage set.]

It began with the last name. At some point of your childhood, someone suggested you should have a double name, both from your father and your mother's side. Wojciech Dzieduszycki-Ziemilski, the aristocratic sound of it feels nice. You would like to believe it was the Tony in you that refused to be manipulated. But probably it began with Father saying no.

It began with the blood-ring. When you were 13, grandmother convinced you to wear a family ring. You were very proud. Breaking off a bit of the stone aptly called "blood-stone" in Polish took you about a week. You lost it after three months.

It began with running away.

It began when you left to follow a girl. And when you were abroad, for the hundredth time you explained the dramatic history of your family during the war, yes, *that* war, because we in Poland say "the war" in reference to WW2.

It began while telling the story, when you realized you don't want this history. You don't want World War 2, or WW1, or Communism, or the fall of Communism, you don't want September 1, September 17, May 8, July 11, May 3, April 19, August 1, December 13, June 4. You don't want the Holocaust, you don't want the Ribentropp-Molotov treaty, you don't want Solidarność, you don't.

Neither the November uprising, or the January one, or any such thing as an uprising. You want to know nothing about how someone was rising up, someone else who you are not. A history you are not.

It started just about when Tony spoke up (by then he was called Vvoitek).

It began with the question, isn't each of us a self-made man?

Isn't each of us above all his o w n body? Doesn't he begin with it and end with it?

[#189. At some point one has to pass from explanation to mere description.]

It began when Claudia Dias [Claudia Days] stuck everyday objects with some tape to her body and used them to make a map, a guided tour of her world.

The critic wrote:

"The body of Claudia Dias is a body-object which is used as a framework, or a setting, in which she draws disenchantment – and re-enchantment – with life. It is a body which frees itself of the litter of urban life, to create an intimate map of emotions."

[*in the video*: Claudia Dias "It was at the Caparica Coast that for the first time I went to a hotel room with a boy.

I was very young. So was he. And we had never been in such a situation.

We felt very insecure.

We went to a hotel called Sea and Sun.

The receptionist looked at us disapprovingly.

This made us laugh.

We entered the room.

I remember I felt very strange.  
Everything here was impersonal.  
The windows had heavy, green curtains.  
It was a bottle green.  
Everything smelled of dust.  
I remember my first gesture was opening the curtains,  
to open the space up a little.”]

It began, when French choreographer Jerome Bel [Jeremy Beautiful] decided he wanted to get down to his own self. That if dance is the body on stage, that is where one should start.

The critic wrote:

“The absence of utopia allows the dancers to discover their specific qualities. Their bodies are not shown to provoke repulsion or empathy, but are put on stage as an essential part of their ‘owners’ identities. It is all the more powerful since they avoid any superficial theatricality.”

[*video*]

It began when you were watching a performance by the French choreographer Xavier Le Roy [Xavier The King] called “Self Unfinished”. Le Roy considers that the thing we are is not a unity, although seemingly it is one body.

The critic wrote:

“... the loss of identity becomes the topic of discussion. Le Roy investigates the point where ‘Owning’ a body and ‘Being’ a body cross.

How can we show the loss of control? The body stops being the medium, to become a dismembered thing which keeps changing depending on the point of view. The body of Xavier Le Roy seems to have a middle, but no head. Which is of course an illusion: it is the head that moves that creature, on the stage or in the mind.”

[*video*]

It all began in Autumn of 2006.

[*scans of articles*:

The popular actor and singer collaborated with the communist Secret Police for 20 years.

I do not know today if I hurt someone, or whom to ask for forgiveness.

The letter is disproportionate in relation to the scale of the collaboration.  
Nearly everyone was shocked by the information.

In a special letter read during the closed session of the City Council, the popular Tunio asked for forgiveness for his contacts with the communist secret services.

The Count wrote: I was recently reminded of embarrassing and painful events from my past.

In 1949 I was made to sign a paper making me a collaborator of the secret police.

I would like to believe my deeds made no serious evil to anyone, but I may be wrong.

Coincidence is excluded from the case.]

[#504. Whether I know something depends on whether the evidence backs me up or contradicts me. For to say one knows one has a pain means nothing.]

It all began when the phone rang, and Mom said it seems it's true after all, at least that grandfather wrote things.

You were in Lisbon, sitting on the roof of a building with a friend, you were drinking, but not porto, or even normal wine, only the fairly bad Portuguese Sagres beer. It was the evening and very chilly, as winter was approaching, but the lights, there were so many tiny lights, and you were probably talking about life, or about how awful it is that the Portuguese only say bad things about themselves.

And that's when everything began.

Pedro asked what's happening, and you told him you had just learned that your grandfather was an agent of the communists. Although a week earlier Pedro had sung Happy Birthday to the melody of L'Internationale, he nodded his head.

And it all began by you saying, you know, when he signed the papers, it was the peak of Stalinism. And he was accused of sabotage. And many people were executed for sabotage then. And he was an enemy of the people because he was an aristocrat. And an engineer, and a mill director. And an opera singer. And a critic. And that's why. And because of the war, and the concentration camp. Three concentration camps. Because of being used to compromises. Because of his father who worked on the farm – although he was an aristocrat. Because of what it was like before. Because of the war. Because of Communism. Because of the stupidity of someone who left the concentration camp a few years before and believed he can get away with all this. Because of the stupidity of someone who left the concentration camp a few years before and believed he can't get away with all this. And it's impossible that he wanted evil things. It's impossible because he helped, even later, he hid illegal pamphlets, he protected dissidents, because there was opposition, illegal opposition, it wasn't always that bad, later it wasn't that bad, and later he didn't stop either, or maybe he did stop, hard to say, because what was a report, who has ever seen a report, was a report always a bad thing. Now we can say so if we are stubborn ambitious historians, but people back then, they were people living in this world, they were, I'm sorry to be boring you, but this is important, it wasn't like what you think, they were all, they all were part of the system, they made films and theater and music and they even got money for paintbrushes, it depends when, because it was the Poland they had, you know, it wasn't like Salazar who didn't allow anything, it was, it's difficult to explain, you know, history, man, history, man.

It began with the search for a title.

[Tunio: a reading about contemporary performance art. And history.]

[Tunio: a read attempt of coming to terms]

[On Certainty. An attempt at reading.]

[The Beginning. An attempt at reading about myself.]

[Tunio and Me]

[WOJTUNIO. Trying to read.]  
[Tunio. A small written narration about someone else.]  
[Tunio. A lecture about smaller narrations.]  
[Smaller than narration]  
[Smaller narrations]  
[Small narration]

It began with the article by the Institute of National Memory: “A Life in Hiding. The agent-collaboration of Wojciech Dziędużycki with the secret services of Communist Poland between 1949 and 1972.”

It began with an actual Institute which was in charge of the memory of a nation. With the affirmation that a nation has a memory, that it is this memory. With assuming that that memory is working inside of every memory.

[#589. For how does a man learn to recognize his own state of knowing something?]

It began with the cases.  
The cases from the Institute's article, the only available source of history.

#### Case No.1

Dziędużycki reported: “After the show by the Soviet Theater, journalist Tadeusz Lutogńiewski from the ‘Worker’s Gazette’, Mieczysława Urbańska from the District Culture Department and Mrs. Olszewska from the ZSCh were returning by tram to the Krzyki part of Wrocław. Lutogńiewski was criticizing the show severely, saying it was as naive as a children’s play, that it seems the Soviet artists have no idea of the high level of Polish theater art.”

#### Possible defense:

Tadeusz Lutogńiewski was a Communist. Tadeusz Lutogńiewski was someone who was commonly known to have been sent by the Communist Party executives to destroy the “Odra” magazine.

#### Case No.2

In his reports for the Secret Police, he did not even miss accidentally overheard conversations in the train. The precision of the informant is here astonishing. He wrote: “Going by sleeping couch from Warsaw to Wrocław on 03.18.53, at 10.37 PM I overheard a conversation between two passengers.” The conversation concerned management problems in a construction company in the town of Tychy. “Unfortunately I couldn’t get the passenger’s name. He got off in Opole.”

#### Possible line of defense:

Sense of humor. It’s about sense of humor. The meaningless precision of the report gives a completely abstract image of anonymous people talking in a train. It is rather the proof of trying to fill the ever-thirsty Secret Police with meaningless reports. It is possibly the most useless report in history.

#### Case No.3

In April 1963, the Secret Police received very extensive descriptions of people working in

the arts, including quantities of gossip concerning their intimate lives. The Secret Informant gave his own, often quite far-going, opinions: Radio and TV – “Dir. Aleksander Mokrzyzewski. I know him little. From what I hear, a reasonable man. Hanek – the director of the music department – a very small personality. Lesław Bajer – TV – He never had anything to do with theater, radio or cinema and, without a doubt, putting him in charge of the TV station was a very risky step, which was confirmed by the embarrassment of his first programs.”

Possible defense: You don't know

#### Case No.4

Possible defense: You don't know.

#### Case No.5

Possible defense: You didn't check.

It began with the possibility of defense.

It began with the lack of access to the archives. It began with the refusal of access, first to the family, then to journalists, and to historians. It began with the memory being national, and so not yours. It began with an impossible defense.

It began when you made a show called Small Narration. A show where, almost at the very beginning, you stopped reading, you got up, and, every single time, you pointed at spectators randomly, asking: What do you know? What did you learn? Where did you get to? Is it enough for you to know yourself?

It began with a show where you got mad, genuinely mad, at your own impotence. Where you told the gathered bunch of people that we are here together, we are a group, we can do something, since our views are not so different, we can go and force them to open up history. We can rewrite it, retrieve it, regain it. We can change history just as any reader does. We can learn who we are, who our grandfathers are.

But of course, not yours, you told them in this show, not yours, because it was my grandfather who wrote, and that is a lot, that is too much, that forces me to ask questions you do not need to ask. To get fucking furious, that's what you told them, to get fucking furious at being enclosed in non-history.

It began with you having a grandfather. And no history fitted him. But a lack of history did not fit him either.

While it fitted you just fine. You felt great watching spiderman 3 with a coke and popcorn. His simple fight with his own self, his jekyll and hyde, his portrait of dorian gray, all of this so spectacular.

But it all begins with the discovery that nothing is spectacular here. All that is important appears as non-cinematographic, it does not explode, it does not shine, but happens modestly, what a pity, the things that happen dissolve in triviality.

You are impressed with the young historians from the Institute of National Memory. How do they manage to make it all seem so colorful? Is it through misrepresentation or ignorance?

But isn't it true that all of us, starting with Tunio, don't stop until we see a colorful version of history crystallize in our minds?

[#126. My doubts form a system.]

[#127. For how do I know that someone is in doubt? How do I know that he uses the words "I doubt it" as I do?]

It all began when Beata wanted you to write a book. It began when you told her, I don't want to bring my private history out through the artistic guts, it began when Beata said it is not your private history. It began with your answer, so where is my private history? What happened to my private history? Is it that my private history becomes public because public history remains private?

It began when you did not want to go on stage, because you do not like being on stage, but there was no one else, except for the gentlemen from the Institute of National Memory, it began when the National Memory was not being written by the nation, but by a few individuals, it began when you realized that you could talk about it publicly, more than that, on stage you can go further, you can say that the Institute historians named Iwaneczko and Kaczmarek are unfair, more, on stage you could say that they are unfair stupid motherfucking cunts, who in the name of the public hide knowledge, manipulate, destroy a man, you could say that, or maybe it began with your grandfather, who if he really did so much evil, was an unfair stupid motherfucking cunt who in the name of the public hid knowledge, manipulated, destroyed people. It began with the discovery that one possibly awful deed does not exclude another. It began, it began it began with no one having access to history. It began with Tunio not leaving his house for the last two years of his life. Exactly from the publication of the article. It began with him shuffling his feet through the house. Not remembering. Being his own body. Starting in it and ending in it.

[#164. Doesn't testing come to an end?]

It began when you took memory for a given. When you decided it was nothing new, nothing special, just an institute, and an institute is the institutionalization of something already present. It began with a memory that makes up a nation, with a memory that is never plural, that says I am, I am a nation.

It began with memory.

With your memory to replace his memory. With a memory sprouting somewhere else than the source, a replacement memory.

With Tunio stating he does not remember.

It began with a smile,

[*smiles*]

with a smile that's seductive, you feel it, it is seductive against your own will. Can one take courses for not seducing? It began with a smile which is too much like this foreign smile, this stranger's smile from the past, it isn't, it is not your smile, it is someone else's smile, someone else's deceit.

How is one to account for someone else's memory? How to count someone else's cases? And unexpectedly, from case to case, someone else starts appearing, someone you are, or rather: who is also you.

It all began when, while preparing for the show, you were looking for materials about Tunio. You looked on the net – you wrote Dzieduszycki on YouTube, and instead of films with Tunio in them, this appeared:

*[film]*

It began with hesitation. With a body that hesitates. With the enclosure in a body that hesitates.

It began with a simple declaration: I don't remember. It began with being enclosed in a house. With walks from the bedroom to the office and back. To the bedroom with the TV turned off.

It began with the body forgetting.

With it remaining contained within itself, and opaque, with it waking up to another dream, with it moving obliviously, writing itself, devouring itself, discharging itself. It began when the body suffered, or was suffered as one suffers a cost or a sacrifice. It began when the body suffered itself.

It began when, while preparing this show, you had technical problems.

*[video]*

You were trying to find publicly available material, if possible, online. And you managed to download the films, but there was a problem with the format. And something completely different appeared. But it began with the .flv format, you thought you wouldn't have any problems converting it to .avi, but you discovered none of your programs wanted to convert it, finally you managed to convert it to .mp4, and that seemed like universal enough, but then something went wrong with the codecs.

It began with the note on 2009-01-19:

Yesterday Paweł called and said someone stole the tombstone. The entire tombstone. For the last few days your aunts have been saying someone had been to the graveyard and destroyed the grave, that it was probably some extreme right-wing group. But this is a real shocker.

You will have to inform the police, go and take pictures... It had to be an impressively organized action!

By coincidence Mom is on her way to Wrocław where the grave is, and she calls you. You hesitate, then you tell her. And she starts laughing. And while laughing, she repeats "No..." almost hysterically. You think, she broke down completely, but the reaction is strange, so film-like.

Through her laughter Mom tells you it's the tomb maker. He took the stone to change the letters.

Because the old letters aren't good. They keep disappearing. And one has to correct them all the time.

And one cannot spend his life constantly correcting golden letters.

It began on November 1, 2008. The day when the Poles go to the graves. When memory becomes vital.

You all go to the graves. You came to Wrocław just for that. You were going to stay longer – but that didn't work out. You managed not to come here once during the two months when you said you would "take care of everything".

You discover the tablet that had Tunio's name on it was taken off by the tomb maker, because when he arrived he saw that it had graffiti on it saying "SB" ("Communist agent").

So today there is no tablet. Tunio is buried here anonymously. The mother, the son, the wife are described... and Tunio is passed over in silence. Better not to have anything than to have a bad description. Thought the tomb maker. And threw it out. And none of you reacted. You didn't decide anything for now. Of course, in the future, you will change the tombstone, change the letters, the letters are impossible to see, the paint disappears, it was a bad idea, a new stone, a different color, a clearer one, but the costs, you know, let's think about it, let's talk about it, let's find the time, let's find the money find the focus find the courage let's decide, and meanwhile, and meanwhile you look at the crowds flowing through the cemetery like on a field trip. They stop, they watch, oh, the Dzeduszyckis, look, of course he died, don't you watch TV, right, that's why all the candles, and it's set. There are eight candles. Is it worth counting?

You all lost count. One report is minus 100 articles, give or take. More? Less? What about the candle? How many articles is each? People nod, they look curiously, they watch they watch, as if waiting for something special to happen. And nothing happens, so they nod, yes yes, and they leave, discretely, somewhat embarrassed (really!), and now you have no doubts that this lack of a tablet is crucial, that it participates in your dynamics of the lost sheep. Shepherd, shepherd... why, there is no story of the lost shepherd.

It began when on All Saints' Day your grandfather didn't even have a tablet, because someone sprayed something on the temporary one, and it had to be thrown out, and the people came by and they hesitated, for how were they to know, and even if they knew, how were you to be sure, that's right, how, how were you to be sure, a grave with no sign, now that's a sad affair, sometimes one of you would stop, and whispered to the others, you whispered quieter than you have ever whispered in a graveyard.

[#517. But might it not be possible for something to happen that threw me entirely off the rails? Evidence that made the most certain thing unacceptable to me? Or at any rate made me throw over my most fundamental judgements?]

[(Whether rightly or wrongly is beside the point.)]

It began on June 5, 1912.

It began on February 12, 1949.

It began with the pseudonym.

Tunio chose the pseudonym ONE.

You remember exactly when it began. You are four years old, you are in Tunio's office. You write. You invent your own alphabet, because you can't stand that the grown-ups have an alphabet you don't understand, that they write something unattainable for you. So you invent your own alphabet, unattainable to anyone but you. You write, lying on the ground, and behind you, behind a massive wooden desk with lion paws, sits Tunio,

typing something. The rhythm of typing is different from that of your journalist parents. Tunio first spends a long time looking through papers, magazines, programmes, then he sits staring in front of him, in silence – although he doesn't mind that his office is really just a passage from the corridor to the sleeping room, and all the time someone passes through here, and in the sleeping room the TV is always on. And then he leans over the typewriter and the letters spill out in a current, non stop, non stop, non stop. Today you would say there is something compulsive in it, but in your memory remains the pure, freely flowing sound of the fonts hitting paper. Tunio stops writing, looks at you and asks what you are doing. Writing. And wouldn't you like to learn to write? You would. You get up, go to Tunio and sit on his knees. He takes a sheet of yellowish paper and a crayon. Then some time passes, maybe a few weeks or days, you sit on Tunio's knees and write. One other thing you remember: you look at what you've been writing before, in your language, and you don't remember what you wrote, and you can't read it any more.

[#522. We say: if a child has mastered language – and hence its application – It must know the meaning of words.]

It began on some afternoon of 1981, when you were sitting in Tunio's lap. Tunio just taught you how to read. You remember the letters, you quite distinctly remember the letters, that's how it began.

[#523. And indeed no one misses doubt here; no one is surprised that we do not merely g u e s s the meaning of our words.]

Then as a reward, Tunio begins your favorite game. He throws you up in the air with his knees, reciting the poem: Riding goes the LORD, on the horse ALONE.

It began with text. With reading. With writing. With noting. With passing on. With losing grip of the language. With falling into narration. It began with the word, and then the word inscribed itself in body.

It began when Beata wanted to convince you to write a book. And you shrugged your shoulders. And said nothing, smiled enigmatically, and thought you want something exactly the opposite. You want erasing. Yet, nothing can be erased, the letters burn out slowly, and we don't know their butterfly effect, we can only hastily write over them, overwrite them with subsequent layers, while we could, we could wish to have it all be simpler. Enough already of the flesh of the forefathers in this face in this hand, why, it is its own flesh, this hand has much more of this hand than of other hands. And if so, if we can, for our own sake, accept this, than let's start with it being simpler.

It began with the show by Simon Bowes and his group Kings of England. It began with the group he created with his elderly father. It began with the show "Where We Live And What We Live For".

The critic wrote:

"In a touching meeting on stage, Bowes Junior guides his father, who is losing his

memory, around his own past. He tells him of the fall, the last one, when he lost his memory, and the previous one, kept in the family archives, which was to be a beautiful jump into the sea from a rock cliff, and ended up as a fall. The distinguished elderly gentleman represents his own life, with its simple and serious choices, and no less serious consequences. At the same time, the meeting is the acceptance of everything that constructs us, and that we have no influence on.”

*[picture of jump]*

It begins when Tunio teaches you to dive. You are 9 or 10 years old. Tunio teaches you to jump, first diving head first, then with a flip. A flip into the water. You don't know how to swim yet. You swim to the shore doggie-style, drinking some water. But you love it. For a long time you will only know how to swim doggie-style. But you can do some nice flips.

*[film]*

It begins when you wake up in the morning and, quite unexpectedly, nothing has changed. It begins when you can't distinguish his smile from yesterday's, how is it possible, so many things have happened, and here you have conversations by the table and I'm glad to see you, indeed, thank you, I will help, I'll see what I can do, can do, can do, and yet nothing has changed, you get up in the morning and he is sitting by the typewriter or in the armchair and looks into the same void as yesterday, no other end of the world will there be, the garden is still fading just as sadly.

It began with the article by the Institute of National Memory: “A Life in Hiding. The agent-collaboration of Wojciech Dziędużycki with the secret services of Communist Poland between 1949 and 1972.”

*[a scan of the article]*

It began with the subtitle:

[“truth and freedom either exist together, or together they miserably die”]

It's a quote from John Paul II.

But it's not complete.

[“When truth is taken away from a man, any attempts at freeing him are completely unreal, as truth and freedom either exist together, or together they miserably die.”]

It began when you came back to Poland. And Tunio died, and here it goes again, the history again, not yours again again, and you had to write a text, a text to the papers to say they couldn't write such things. A text for the funeral to remember. It began with the idea of remembering, and with the desperate search for appeasement. With visits, it began with visits to bookstores, because maybe someone somewhere knows something more, it began with the hopelessly similar, hopelessly dissimilar stories of other people, but really, really it began when you grabbed a small book by Ludwig Wittgenstein called “On Certainty”. Not knowing it was the last thing he wrote. And the last paragraph, that last

difficult paragraph he wrote two days before dying.

[#676. If something has taken away my consciousness, then I am not now really talking and thinking. I cannot seriously suppose that I am at this moment dreaming. Someone who, dreaming, says "I am dreaming", even if he speaks audibly in doing so, is no more right than if he said in his dream "it is raining", while it was in fact raining. Even if his dream were actually connected with the noise of the rain.]

It began when the Portuguese choreographer João Fiadeiro stood on the middle of the stage in his show "I Am Here".

[João Fiadeiro]

And in front of him he had a huge shadow of himself. And then the lights went out, and we heard him dance, or maybe just shake his body, and when the lights went on again, he was standing again, with his shadow. Only it was slightly blurred.

[*pictures*]

And when this situation returned several times, we realized it wasn't his shadow, but black pigment. And until the choreographer disappeared, we were wrong as to who was whose shadow.

The critic wrote:

We look at the body, and the body suddenly ends with feet, hands. It ends there. There is nothing more, it is like a rock cliff by the sea. Suddenly, it's gone.