Corporeal Matters

CLASSED BODIES

The Performance of Discrimination in the Arts

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(eds.)

[transcript]

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For the First Time ‘From the Working Class’

In 2021, for the first time in my life, I had the courage to introduce myself in an official setting as an artist coming from a working-class background. It was a project application for a grant. I have been working internationally in the field of performing arts for over ten years and have never seriously considered my class background as a factor that shapes the aesthetics of my work, its discursive levels and the artistic methodologies I choose. Nor have I ever directly addressed this issue in any of my performances.

My mother worked as a cleaning lady and as a saleswoman at a grocery store in Poland. For most of her life, she was serving customers, stacking and pricing merchandise, carrying crates of lemons, cutting meat, unpacking frozen foods and washing the store’s shelves. My father’s small business collapsed in the late 1990s, when liberal capitalism began to establish itself in our country. He could not find his way in the free market, and his one-man firm re-distributing electronic components was never competitive enough with larger companies. In my family, there are no stories of great explorers, esteemed professors, acclaimed scientists or controversial artists. There are no academic titles, distinctions, awards, great successes or scientific achievements. Instead, there are stories of work, unemployment, job searching, money saving, exhaustion and being exploited.

Fig. 1 — *“After leaving the cash register, complaints will not be accepted.” My mother at work in the 1980s in Poland, courtesy of Irena Krężel, approx. 1982.*