

EXHIBITING POLISH ART ABROAD: CURATORS, FESTIVALS, INSTITUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Edited by
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Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, numerous exhibitions contributed to the development of scholarship and the promotion of Polish art, increasing its presence in international art-related discourse. This special issue of *Art and Documentation*, explores the curatorial, institutional, artistic, and cultural contexts of international exhibitions of Polish art. It examines global and local impacts, trajectories of development across periods of political and social turmoil, as well as multiple narratives formulated by various actors, both individual as well as collective. It covers a long period – from the late forties up to the present, and therefore also examines times when creating international contacts was very difficult. Currently, the presence of Polish art in the international art circuit is mostly determined by finances, but some issues remain the same – the artists and curators try to define the position of Polish art in relation to the ‘centre’ as well as to other peripheral milieus.

The set of articles starts with the subsection entitled “How Is it Going? Or the Need to Build Relationships in the Field of Art.” The text by Bernadeta Stano, “The Thaw, or Warming in Kraków’s Artistic Community Relations with the

West, and Consequences to Art” focuses on the time after the 1956 Thaw and sheds light on state subsidised travel by artists born in the thirties who debuted during the Thaw and who were active in the Kraków community – the Nowohucka Group and the Second Kraków Group members. The following article by Kata Balázs, “Paraphrase as an Act of Art: Some Aspects in the Work of the Artist Collectives Łódź Kaliska and the Substitute Thirsters” analyses the connections between the Hungarian Substitute Thirsters (1984-1992) and the Polish Łódź Kaliska (founded in 1979) groups. The article underlines some aspects of the cooperation methods between the two groups and their activities in producing DIY samizdat publications and especially their relationship with paraphrase as a genre, aiming at re-creating and re-enacting paintings from the 19th century that serve as national symbols in both countries. These articles are followed by two texts (subsection “Branding Polish Graphic Arts”) that focus on the Polish Poster School: “An Escape From Socialist Realism. State-Organized Overseas Exhibitions as the Road to Fame of the Polish School of Posters” by Mateusz Bieczyński and the more specific “The International Poster Exhibition Vienna 1948” by Jeannine Harder. The

Polish poster artists in the worst time of Stalinism (1945-55) had relative freedom, in comparison to other art fields like painting or sculpture. The International Poster Exhibition in Vienna was the starting point for the worldwide popularity of Polish posters, especially in the fifties and sixties.

The next sub-section, “Polish Art in Scandinavia and Great Britain,” refers to Polish Art in Scandinavia and Great Britain and consists of three texts: “Władysław Hasiór in Sweden: Reassessing Peripheral Neo-Avant-Garde Networks Through Horizontal Art History” by Karolina Kolenda, “The Politics of Appearance: Tadeusz Kantor Exhibiting in Sweden 1958 - 2014” by Camilla Larsson, and “From a Demarcation Line to a Living Archive. Documentary Exhibitions of the Foksal Gallery on the British Isles” by Anna Dzierżyc-Horniak. The first two texts draw on Piotr Piotrowski’s concept of ‘horizontal art history.’ Karolina Kolenda examines the exhibitions of Władysław Hasiór’s work in Sweden to reconsider the mapping of Neo-Avant-Garde art in Europe. She also proposes a reading of Hasiór’s work through the lens of environmental art history. Camilla Larsson analyses the exhibitions by Tadeusz Kantor in Sweden and proves that he has mainly been perceived as a Polish artist, even though the ideas of Polishness have shifted over time, mainly shaped by a centre – periphery logic. Anna Dzierżyc-Horniak analyses the contacts between the Foksal Gallery run by Wiesław Borowski, Tadeusz Kantor, and Richard Demarco (Scottish art promoter who opened Great Britain to Polish art). She proves that the network of personal friendships built across the Iron Curtain developed into institutional cooperation and concrete artistic projects.

From the north of Europe we move “Overseas” – to the USA, to read two texts: “A Firecracker, a Light at the End of the Tunnel? The First Polish Programme of Residential Stays for Artists in the US” by Łukasz Białkowski and “Freedom Is Not Free. The Poland-USA Performance Art Project *Juliett 484* and Its Social-Political Background” by Małgorzata Kaźmierczak. The first text’s purpose is tracing the history of

Polish art residencies operated by the Kościuszko Foundation since the seventies, and focuses especially on the first decade of the programme to delineate its organization, as well as the artists’ motivations and attitudes. Małgorzata Kaźmierczak recalls a Polish-USA performance art project *Juliett 484* – which resulted in a co-operation between the Castle of Imagination Performance Art Meeting in Poland and the Mobius Group in Boston and took place in historically important spaces such as Modelarnia in Gdańsk or a demobilized submarine *Juliett 484* in Providence, RI. It is the only text in this set dedicated solely to performance art (the position of which is special, as performance artists need to be present in the space to practice their art).

The collection of articles is closed with three texts on “Polish Art in a Global Context,” arranged chronologically. The first text by Krzysztof Siatka “Hamdi el Attar and Kassel’s *Stoffwechsel* shows of the Eighties: Notes on the off-mainstream presence of Polish artists” again uses the horizontal methodology and examines the presence of certain Polish artists within three shows set up by Hamdi el Attar: *Stoffwechsel* (1982), *MuKu – Multimedia Kunst* (1985), and *Künstlergruppenzeigen Gruppenkunstwerke* (1987) in the contexts of the artistic, political, and existential reality of Poland after the introduction of Martial Law in the country. Maciej Gugala, in “Entangled in Contexts: Ten Years After the *Side by Side* Exhibition in Berlin’s Martin-Gropius-Bau” examines the largest Polish-German exhibition and the largest display of Polish art in Germany to date. The author analyses its meaning in the political, museological, artistic contexts as well as the exhibition’s possible aftermath. Finally, Jarosław Lubiak, in his article “Recognizing a Polish National Idiom in Global Art: Two Exhibitions of Polish Contemporary Art Abroad” writes about the most recent exhibitions: *State of Life: Polish Contemporary Art within a Global Circumstance* organised by the Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, Adam Mickiewicz Institute at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing in 2015, and *Waiting for Another Coming*, a joint presentation of Polish and Lithuanian artists, shown first at

the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius in 2018 and then at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw (October 25, 2018, to January 27, 2019). He uses the exhibitions as a case study to reflect on defining and locating Polish contemporary art in the context of global art. He refers to Jean-Jacques Lecercle's philosophy of language to create a theoretical framework based on three concepts: minor language, refraction and conjuncture.

This set of articles merely begins mapping the presence of Polish artists in the international circuits. As mentioned above, chronologically they cover a period since the post war Stalinism, until present. The conditions under which artists and art promoters created the international contacts are, of course, varied. The above texts also discuss all media, each of them having its own peculiarity. Nevertheless, this collection of articles underlines the fact that art cannot flourish in isolation and that the creating of international contacts is one of the most vital powers for art. This is something that in today's globalised world seems obvious, and is what artists have always practiced – on an institutional, as well as on a personal level.

1

**HOW IS IT
GOING?
OR, THE NEED
TO BUILD
RELATIONSHIPS
IN THE FIELD
OF ART**

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THE THAW, OR WARMING IN KRAKÓW'S ARTISTIC COMMUNITY RELATIONS WITH THE WEST, AND CONSEQUENCES TO ART

As asserted in the *Introduction* to the book *Podróże artystyczne. Artysta w podróży (Artistic Travel. The Travelling Artist)*, “The phenomenon of artistic travel and the travelling artist remains an essential artistic and historical fact in the history of art.” Nonetheless, progress in research regarding travelling artists in the period analysed here (i.e. the second half of the fifties) is far from impressive. The recent Association of Art Historians’ publication, *Wędrowanie sztuki (Art on Tour)* illustrates this point. Its authors explore journeying in terms of work-related migration, grassroots art community development, or predefined field work outside the studio rather than travel-related exploration. Accordingly, in 2013, the Zachęta National Gallery of Art raised the previously unexplored theme of artistic travel during the so-called cold war. Speakers at the conference accompanying the exhibition *Map: Artistic Migrations and the Cold War* (curator: Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska, November 30, 2013 – February 9, 2014), among other things, discussed the role of Paris and London, as well as the story of selected artists and art critics abroad. In this particular group of exhibition protagonists, only a few hailed from Kraków – those whose accomplishments had already become part of 20th-century art history, and thus described in biographies and/or monographs with a focus on their art

(consider Tadeusz Kantor, Andrzej Wróblewski, Maria Jarema) usually specifying dates, circumstances and artistic consequences of foreign travel. This is why I believe that it would be worthwhile for this paper to investigate the activity of lesser-known artists from the same circles, those who had been offered stipend opportunities to travel abroad shortly after graduating from Kraków's Academy of Fine Arts, for whom the aforementioned artists comprised commendable role models in terms of their aspirations. The young artists in question formed the so-called Nowohucka Group (also known as the Group of Five), and officially became Kraków Group members on March 8, 1961.¹ Notably, the works of artists from the Group of Five were shown at various exhibitions of the collective. They included the exhibition of the Group’s initiator Barbara Kwaśniewska (first collective exhibition), Danuta and Witold Urbanowicz, Julian Jończyk, Janusz Tarabula, Jerzy Wroński, Lucjan Mianowski (first and fourth exhibition) and Jerzy Kałucki (fourth collective exhibition and a show in London). While having never declared affiliation with the Group of Five, Mianowski’s name was featured in the document proclaiming its formation in 1956 – this was due to the fact that immediately after the Group had been established, he took part in their first exhibition at the Dom

Plastyków (Art and Design Centre). I am taking the liberty to include him in this paper: not only did he learn and practice at the same Academy studios; he also (ever since the first mentioned exhibition) remained close to the Group of Five, among other things, by showing his works with them at a collective exhibit in June 1961, at the Krzysztofory Palace.

Before I proceed to explore specific developments and their outcomes, I would like to identify my field of study which spans three disciplines: twentieth century history of art, the sociology and the geography of art. Clearly, a focus on the lives and works of artists is self-evident only for the first field listed. An art historian would primarily point to the period spanning all researched phenomena: in the case of artists described herein, the period of the so-called Thaw. Its presence in the article's title is dual in purpose, firstly referencing the process of easing the rules imposed through the socialist state's cultural policy, for purposes described herein in terms of issuing permits and funding travel for art community members; secondly, the label afforded to the period from 1956 until 1960 by reference sources over several decades.² The period has not been identified and recorded with any great precision – similarly, there was no single genre that would classify the work of all contemporaneous artists, albeit most painters mentioned herein would choose matter painting as their preferred technique.³

Nonetheless, the travel theme identified does give rise to an obligation to employ terms typical for fields represented by the two other identified sciences. A sociologist would most certainly be interested in aligning travel with how artists functioned with regard to their essential reference group: the art community. In the context of travel explored herein, however, there is another motive expressed by sociologists focusing on institutionalised education. "Travel complements and augments the process of teaching art."⁴ Marian Golka writes in *Socjologia sztuki (Sociology of Art)*, listing an entire array of quotes from artists across the ages as proof in another publication

(*Nauczanie sztuki. Cele-formy-metody; Teaching Art. Objectives-Forms-Methods*).⁵ Furthermore, the capacity of artists to travel and their ability to circulate their works was influenced by their public acceptance of state cultural policy, in other words, by expressing worldviews and political beliefs aligned to the expectations of the state. Their public attitude was thus of fundamental importance for their acceptance as recipients of state funding (scholarships). The phenomena at hand can also be considered in the context of a ritual, as it were, expanding the scale of art circulation, and developing a sense of habit in art recipients in terms of recurring exploits with regard to overall direction and purpose.⁶ I had hoped for descriptions of artists listed by Marian Golka and Andrzej Osęka to reveal a motif identifying an artist on the road, or travelling artist – yet this did not happen, as in all likelihood prior to the founding of the academy of arts, the phenomenon had been naturally associated with artistic professions and not seen as noteworthy.⁷ Once the education system changed and the need for education *on the road* (at private studios or royal courts) vanished, artistic travel lost its attribute of a necessary condition to making an artistic career.

Organisers of the artistic travel exhibition *Map: Artistic Migrations and the Cold War* (mentioned above) at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art suggested a clear take on travel from a geographical perspective. The phenomenon's spatial (or territorial) analysis was expressed in the visualisation of the titular map, and discussions employing the phrase 'migration,' however overstated.⁸ My paper will primarily focus on three locations: Kraków (and, indirectly, Nowa Huta⁹) as a permanent location; and Paris and London – metropolises visited by artists and hosting exhibitions of their works. I will also reference the artists' birthplaces.

The Thaw in Travelling

In the context of the 1996 exhibition *The 'Thaw.'* *Polish Art ca. 1956* at the National Museum in Poznań, Piotr Piotrowski somewhat critically declared, "After the socialist realism intermission, artists began travelling to Paris to visit *Art Informel* exhibitions, which had by that point lost their fresh touch."¹⁰ Tadeusz Kantor, whose works were obviously shown at the *The 'Thaw'* exhibition, had already 'organised' a passport for himself as early as 1947, arriving in Paris via Switzerland. Following in Kantor's footsteps and following his advice, Maria Jarema (known also as 'Jaremianka,' which is how fellow artists would call her – translator's comment) went travelling to Paris for three months, having previously tasted the climate of the 'Mecca of artists.'¹¹ Kantor had in a way blazed the trail for Jaremianka by having attended the 1955 Theatre Festival¹². Already under the new circumstances of the Thaw, in the autumn of 1956, she resubmitted scholarship applications. Her application was accepted after several months; she was given a scholarship, reimbursement of medical expenses, and permission to take twenty artworks with her; she would later offer them to friends or sell them to art galleries. When in Paris, Jarema visited exhibitions and permanent museum collections, maintained old and established new contacts, and – obviously – painted. Some Group members had already been abroad by then – others, like her, took advantage of scholarship-funded travel. Her stay in Paris coincided with an exhibition showing some of her works opening at the Musée National d'Art Moderne. This brief account of Jarema's journey is included as a symptomatic example for the older generation of artists (debuting before World War II) who were able to travel thanks to Ministry of Culture and Art officials' awareness of their accomplishments.¹³

While travel scholarships were most certainly a form of reward and recognition, they were not the only path to temporary stays abroad. Artists could also be part of foreign delegations, e.g. accompany Ministry of Culture

and Art officials, travel on invitation by foreign institutions, or take part in cultural exchanges – notably, however, prior to 1958 the latter were organised chiefly under agreements entered into by local art unions, and only involved opportunities to travel to such countries as the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Romania, Hungary, Korea and Mongolia. Exchanges requiring no foreign currency advances, all costs covered by participants themselves, were recorded separately. The names and destinations of artists travelling abroad were always recorded in *Biuletyn Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków* (*Newsletter of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers*).¹⁴ The contemporaneous realities of the socialist state's cultural policy merit a concise commentary at this juncture; whenever planning to travel, artists were confronted with a strict set of rules. This was a period of frequent structural changes within the Ministry of Culture and Art. In 1948, ministerial structures were expanded to include an Office for Foreign Cultural Relations; two years later, its activities were suspended, related competencies entrusted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office reinstated in 1957. Yet the gradual post-1956 unfreezing of international relations was key to the process of awarding foreign scholarships to creators and researchers of culture.

In the year 1957, the scholarship campaign was experimental in nature: in all probability driven by a wish to make up for all the 'lost' years, the Ministry awarded multiple foreign scholarships – yet thwarted by foreign currency restrictions, it found itself unable to deliver stipend contract obligations already by the fourth quarter of that year. Consequently, Minister Karol Kuryluk issued a relevant Ordinance of March 18, 1958, regulating the form and manner of scholarship approval and stipulating new criteria.¹⁵ He further explained in an accompanying memorandum that while the volume of scholarships would be reduced, time spent abroad by scholarship recipients would be extended.¹⁶ Applications could be submitted to the Minister by authors' unions, artistic associations, institutions of science and culture reporting to the

Ministry, and directors of relevant organisational units at the Ministry. The Office for Foreign Cultural Relations handled all organisational affairs for scholarship recipients. The aforementioned Ordinance stipulated that particularly talented individuals should be considered as candidates potentially valuable to Polish cultural involvement in view of their considerable artistic and academic achievements. No mention was made with regard to themes or chosen artistic style – consequently, persons whose travel plans had been previously obstructed because they did not engage in art conforming to state cultural policy could count on being included as well. Nonetheless, in this particular aspect the Thaw did not last long: the subsequent Ordinance of February 21, 1959 proclaimed by the new Minister Tadeusz Galiński made the scholarship application procedure much more complex, bureaucratising approval proceedings.¹⁷ It also mentions the selection procedure of candidates for scholarships awarded by foreign authorities and institutions. Twelve artists travelled under the new procedure in 1959 – very few, given the overall membership of the Association (over 4,000), and, as previously mentioned, considerably fewer than in 1957 or 1958 (103 and 26 visual artists with approved travel scholarships, respectively).

The French direction of foreign relations during the Thaw merits mentioning as well – so-called French Government stipends are most frequently mentioned as circumstances allowing young artists' foreign travel.¹⁸ While a pertinent agreement on scientific and cultural exchange had been entered into by and between Poland and France as early as 1947, it remained a 'dead letter' (theoretical) law throughout Stalinist times. Respective contacts were reinstated pursuant to a memorandum signed by both parties in February 1958.¹⁹ Issues of customs clearance for the carriage of artworks abroad were regulated in the year 1959 as well – single copies of artworks by members of individual Association of Polish Artists and Designers sections were customs-exempt. It was also agreed that each artist shall have the right to

take a set of his or her works when travelling abroad, provided that the Association was duly notified, and pursuant to a permit by the Ministry and art conservation authorities.

While not in any way associated with or required by scholarship award procedures, regular travel practices included writing letters to acquaintances back home, as well as delivering reports and talks on return, publishing articles, and showing works created abroad and/or inspired by foreign experiences. Art-related travel circumstances apart, non-professional private events equally well-known to the Kraków community were held as well, such as Tadeusz Kantor and Maria Stangret's wedding ceremony planned for Kantor's successive stay in Paris in the spring of 1961.

Every journey and subsequent account by a well-known artist encouraged and motivated others. Kantor, Jaremińska, Stern or Marczyński's travels were a guiding beacon for the younger generation, letting them know that it is worth their while to live abroad, however briefly, or even take a trip to see things only shown in poor-quality magazine reproductions. Regrettably, even after 1955 it was far from easy to secure permission for travel, passport or funding – the latter condition indispensable to young artists, unless they had their own money or had relatives abroad ready to take them in. The group of artists born in the early thirties included Kraków-born Marian Warzecha, a 1957 graduate of the Faculty of Stage Design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, who joined the aforementioned artists as co-founder of the Second Kraków Group. I am mentioning him herein as a representative of the Group of Five generation and contributor to foreign episodes, albeit in a different part of Europe: in Rome, where (in emulation of Kantor, as it were) he married Teresa Rudowicz.²⁰ Notably, this was a private trip rather than travel in the framework of a scholarship, which obviously does not mean that the artists did not engage in admiring, seeking inspiration in, or creating art in daily life. This, however, was an isolated case of a person so young, immediately embarking on a long journey.

The Twilight of the Thaw. Young Artists in Travel

Before exploring the history of other 1956–57 graduates of artistic faculties at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, I should offer a brief description of their pre-academic years: only Janusz Tarabula was born in Kraków, the others grew up elsewhere and chose Kraków as their place of residence. Danuta Urbanowicz arrived from the whereabouts of Radom; Witold Urbanowicz spent his childhood years in the so-called Eastern Borderland; Julian Jończyk was born in Szczekociny and went to school in Sosnowiec; Jerzy Wroński hailed from the village of Biskupice near Lublin; Lucjan Mianowski was originally from Strzemieszyce and went to school in Będzin; Jerzy Kałucki was born in Lviv, Barbara Kwaśniewska in Warsaw. To individuals not born in Kraków, their origins also meant that after the relative stability of university years, they had to face a difficult period of securing permanent residential quarters. Settling locally was both a challenge and artistic exploration theme for the young artists, all around 25 at the time. The motif was most intensely examined by Lucjan Mianowski (see e.g. *Przeprowadzka* (*Moving House*), lithograph, 1957; *Mieszkanie anioła* (*An Angel's Flat*), oil on canvas, 1959; *Czarne wnętrze* (*Black Interior*), collage, 1958). The artist's studio, back in "old" Kraków, in a tenement house at Kościuszki Street, was a theme also reflected in paintings by the Urbanowicz duo, who would soon thereafter marry (Witold Urbanowicz, *Srebrny* (*Silver*), 1959, Danuta Urbanowicz, *Murek* (*Wall*), 1959/60, both works: mixed technique). Young Academy of Fine Arts graduates would gradually become self-sufficient. Nowa Huta would become the place of residence – and, accordingly, artistic work – for five artists (Jończyk, the Urbanowicz duo, Wroński and Mianowski). While it would soon (in 1951) lose its independent municipal township status, it is noteworthy that when travelling abroad, all five would be leaving a young district, then in the throes of dynamic development and generally considered modern, though unfinished.

Group initiator Barbara Kwaśniewska was the first to leave and settle in Paris permanently in the autumn of 1958. While not having received an Academy Diploma, she began studying in Paris under Johnny Friedlaender at his studio. Julian Jończyk made tenacious efforts to stay in touch with her. In fact, it is his foreign travel that remains best-documented, thanks to his profuse correspondence with other members of the Group. We know that he completed his curriculum in June 1955, passing the final exam one year later before the State University Diploma Committee at the Faculty of Painting of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. In the spring of 1956, he was issued written permission to travel abroad and continue university studies, conferred upon him in recognition of his academic accomplishments at the Faculty of Painting by Professor Czesław Rzepiński, Rector of the Academy of Fine Arts at the time.²¹ The aforementioned favourable circumstances notwithstanding, Jończyk could travel to Paris on a French Government stipend only in November 1960, as the original permission did not include funding for the endeavour. The artist's letters penned over his four Parisian months allow certain conclusions regarding his pursuits. Financial matters remain at the forefront: the purchase of canvas panels took up a sixth of his entire scholarship. Jończyk's other activities included visiting exhibitions; already familiar with matter painting debuts – his own and his friends' – in Kraków (Krzysztofory Palace, February–March 1960, Second Group exhibition; and International Press and Book Club, Nowa Huta, September 1960, third exhibition), he followed local matter paintings with great interest as well. Having viewed an École de Paris exhibition, he reported on the works he had seen to Jerzy Wroński in great technical detail, attaching his own sketches to the description. He was equally enraptured by classics of modern painting at the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, a location he had, as mentioned above, known only from albums or magazines. Following in Jarembianka and Stern's footsteps, he was quietly planning to journey

to Italy as well.²² Several days later, he would summarise his opinions on current art in a letter to Janusz Tarabula: “These are, simply, symptoms of extraordinary vividness – ranging from terrible kitsch to good-quality art.”²³ He believed that the former included, among other things, collections and montages of ready-made objects; today, we would refer to them as assemblages and associate them with new realism. On the other hand, he considered experimenting with motion, a hugely interesting topic, given its potential suitability for theatre or architecture. He also focused on the genuine local art market, a phenomenon he could not have experienced in Poland, while declaring himself to be painting “for posterity (usually for pleasure).”²⁴ Yet Jończyk’s primary quests in Paris involved traditional art. He lavishly contemplated Jean Dubuffet’s retrospective in another letter he penned one month later. “Everything I had rather enjoyed at gallery exhibitions has now become ludicrous. [...]” He goes on to add, “I am completely broken.”²⁵ His correspondence included general observations as well: “All things considered, Paris is ugly – yet it does have a certain something that escapes definition, palpable only after one has spent some time here. A certain rhythm, things slight and elusive – living in Paris has its own special charm.”²⁶

Danuta Urbanowicz would follow in Jończyk’s footsteps – yet she left nearly two years later, in late 1962. Awarded a similar stipend for one month, she extended her stay to eight months thanks to Mateusz Grabowski, a gallery owner in London who purchased several of her paintings.²⁷ One year later, Witold Urbanowicz travelled to Paris as well, staying four months. Of the three artists, only Danuta was successful in organising a solo show of her works in the Chinese quarter, at La Galerie Mouffe. She was offered another show at the Galerie Lara Vincy but she would have to stay longer in Paris – or have her works brought over from Poland.

The intensity of her activities can be compared with Lucjan Mianowski’s travel in the framework of a scholarship. In all likelihood,

Mianowski had ‘earned’ his time in Paris by having graduated with honours from the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, his Diploma in lithography supervised by professor Konrad Srzednicki; and with a Sopot Biennial award he received in 1957. His stay, or rather two stays – in the years 1959–1960 and 1963–1964 – were distinctly educational in nature, the artist continuing his studies at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, in Professor Pierre Clairin’s lithography studio. The first French Government stipend brought him a show at the Parisian Librairie Celtique (1959), the second one – at the Galerie Lambert (1964). His continued studies offered him an opportunity to explore Europe further: already by the early 1960s, he had temporarily stayed and worked in Denmark, Sweden and France and elsewhere. One might ask why the others did not travel as well to perfect their skills and establish new contacts. The answer is rather simple: having married and raised families, Wroński and Tarabula had slightly different priorities at the time.

The Artistic Outcomes of Travel

Before I proceed to discuss the issue, let me quote Tadeusz Kantor; this particular utterance became legendary in the community. He was giving a talk at the Krzysztofory Palace immediately upon returning from Paris; Janusz Tarabula, attending the address (November 1958), heard him say, “Ladies and gentlemen, new lands have been discovered,” and shared the news at once with all colleagues.²⁸ One may justifiably assume that Kantor was referring to matter painting, one of the many varieties of *art informel*. Roughly one year later, Jonasz Stern returned from Rome; commentators on changes in Polish painting would also interpret his return as influential in terms of inspiring or enhancing the genre of painting in his home milieu.²⁹ One can therefore be assured that interest in new forms of creating art had preceded the time of the Group of Five travelling to Paris on stipends. Young artists did not have to be exposed to works by

Burri or Tàpies – reproductions easily available in art magazines – to introduce early technological novelties in 1959, especially as textured paintings (including those by Jadwiga Maziarska or Jan Lebenstein) had been shown at exhibitions in Poland already. The young were swift to assimilate such observations with their own explorations based on the memory of places they had encountered themselves. Many years later, Jerzy Wroński – having never left Kraków during the Thaw – would offer excellent and detailed explanations of these interdependencies: “My bas-reliefs have much in common with the nature of spaces I was brought up in – the gently undulating fields and sandy roads ...”³⁰ Yet this is not the crux of this paper in terms of the development of Matter painting in Poland. One should rather be asking whether visiting Paris might have affected the evolution of art created by young painters at the time.

I fail to observe any major watershed in Jończyk’s art, the artist mesmerised and intimidated by Dubuffet’s paintings. The collage cycle titled *Confetti* that he painted immediately upon returning, was but an extension of his intimate 1960 *Interiors (Wnętrza)*. Pondering the entire course of Jończyk’s career in retrospect, one might detect consequences of travel and a critical approach to multiple expressions of modern-day art in the fact that the artist began gradually abandoning painting in favour of experimenting with motion in space (performance) and light. A much better measure of ‘travel-related’ change is offered by contemporaneous studies and experimentation by Danuta Urbanowicz and Lucjan Mianowski – their stays in Paris were the longest. In Danuta’s case, post-university works include the cycle *Pleśnie (Moulds)*, and paintings *Wall*, 1960, and *Przejście (Gateway)*, 1959. The painter was seeking inspiration in the haptic cognisance of her immediate surroundings. In *Moulds*, fabrics and other glue-infused materials became a uniform plastic mass resembling the title-referenced deposits. They may well have brought *art informel* associations to mind, albeit with the riot of colours missing. She created her

next series in the attic-studio at Kościuszki No. 48, her workplace for around 10 years. One of the preserved works – *Wall* – is a chunk of wall plaster against a background of hardened lace, the latter pronounced in a subtle bas-relief effect. Introduced a year later, *Epitafia (Epitaphs)* greatly differed from the previous works. Logic and brightness took over in compositions of non-painting materials, their structure somewhat imprecise. Pieces of corroded or flaky enamel-covered steel were coupled with swathes of thick cloth and joint compounds, their sandy texture clearly visible. Composition divides would usually run along lines parallel to edges of paintings, a distinct centreline of symmetry mirroring the parallel projection. The artist gradually expanded her array of fabrics to include soft textiles, shreds and scraps of lace, knitted fabrics, tassels, and embroidery. This is the technique she employed, among others, in the cycle *Gry (Games)*, which includes the paintings *Zestawienia materii (Combinations of Matter)* and *Układy pionowe (Vertical Arrangements)*, both dated 1962. The purpose of individual pieces in her works is akin to that of materials used by Braque and Picasso in their collages: to construct the object-image, enhancing its texture and colour. On the other hand, the compositional discipline and eschatological titles suggest that this was no simple or intentional application of non-painting substance, with its *vanitas* symbolism concealed in the very essence of degraded matter. What, therefore, had Urbanowicz’s stay in Paris yielded? No spectacular change, that is unquestionable: while her Parisian compositions had also included similar ready-made materials, the possibility of picking up delicate lacework and ornamental steel pieces at local flea markets drove the artist to experiment. She began creating ‘soft’ fabric paintings; regrettably, they have never been returned to Poland, their titles suggesting no literary tropes (*Obrazy – Images*). Yet they are visibly larger in format, richer in shade, and inspired by geometry. Urbanowicz herself would write many years later that while her intent had been to abandon array centrelines, the materials

themselves forced her to adopt a specific discipline in composition. She also attempted to sneak in figurative motifs (torsos and heads) – yet that particular trope in her oeuvre would become more intense only post - 1967.³¹ Interestingly enough, the joints between individual materials – seams, welds, rivets, nails – are distinct in all her Parisian works. These elements may be associated with the experience the artist had developed in Professor Jacek Puget's sculpture teaching studio, and/or her brief stage design episode at the *Widzimię* puppet theatre in Nowa Huta – yet first and foremost, they may well be interpreted as a metaphor of manual labour well done. Consequently, were I to attempt a laconic description of the direction followed by Urbanowicz in her genre, I would be inclined to use phrases such as 'improvement' and 'perfection.'

Mianowski's case, given his successful debut, was rather similar. Prior to his graduation, during plein-air work, he had discovered provincial themes, he gradually began expanding to include landscapes and Nowa Huta *petit genre* scenes. His paintings and prints from the series *Małe miasteczka nie są nudne* (*Small Towns Are Not Boring*) comprise a mix of a dismal yet grotesque vision of socialist realism in an unfinished district, with a hint at positive emotions – artists were given an opportunity to settle down there, after all. His images include the simple places in which he and his colleagues were mentally rooted. It goes without saying that he was connected with the contemporaneous matter painters of Kraków through a sensitive perception of detail; yet Mianowski's frames usually encompass entire objects and silhouettes, including a repertoire of exaggerated gestures and facial expressions. He would only become more attentive to the matter of objects (buildings) when in Paris, translating them to the language of graphic art. Immediately upon graduation, Mianowski was discovered as a promising printmaker with a passion for lithography – offset printing in stone which he would soon replace with zinc sheet metal. This was the direction of artistic development he decided to focus on in Paris. His attempts would be duly

expressed in the cycle *Katedry* (*Cathedrals*) of the early sixties. His *Katedra Miasto* (*Cathedral – the City*, 1960) carries the visible mark of an individual's enchantment with a metropolis. The fine proportions of the Notre Dame cathedral, in the shadow of which Mianowski would explore the art of the West, would define the rhythm of divisions in his other works in the cycle – even once pinnacles were replaced with bulbous domes (*Katedra ikonograficzna*, *Iconographic Cathedral*, 1961, lithograph), naves and fissures of the transparent façade filled with figures from the crowd, living or dead (*Katedra wykopalisko*, *Cathedral – Excavation*, 1961, lithograph). The artist also created dwelling-related prints, on the margins, as it were, of the principal cycle: consider *Mieszkanie Anioła w Paryżu* (*The Flat of an Angel in Paris*, 1960), a formal and ideological extension of the earlier *Black Interior* (1958) and *An Angel's Flat* (1959).

To summarise this particular trope, one may definitely conclude that this generation, only able to travel once the Thaw had reached artistic circles, was already well prepared (in terms of content viewed, read and heard) for what they should pay attention to in Paris. With favourable conditions, they could all spread their wings and make Paris their own studio. Critically referred to as capitalist consumerism in the propaganda of poorer socialist states, the affluence of receiving countries (France, Italy) was conducive to experimentation and technique improvement. Other ancillary factors included the absence of censorship and the free market ambience, the latter a shred of hope for even the tiniest profit.

Young Painters' Works at Foreign Exhibitions

"An artist's position in the community is best captured through the geographical reach of his or her oeuvre," Aleksander Wallis pointed out in the 1964 sociological study of artistic life in the early days of socialist Poland.³² While he attributed clear symptoms of snobbery to such attitude, it did not prevent him from declaring that "the success of an artwork beyond its native territory is a litmus test of the scale and standing of its artistic value."³³ No wonder that all Polish painters, age notwithstanding, dreamed of their works being shown by a highly regarded gallery in a reputable foreign centre. Even participation in collective exhibitions, usually considered of lesser significance, could spike jealousy among colleagues in the art community. Individual artists' plans and aspirations notwithstanding, members of all sections were also supported by the Association of Polish Artists and Designers, abetted and supervised by the Foreign Exhibitions Committee of the Minister of Culture and Art.

Other advantages of such activity included the artists' physical presence when their works were shown, especially on opening nights, all providing ample opportunities for making new contacts. Maria Jarema's case of 1957 is sufficient proof of how important and rare it was to obtain ministerial permissions to take works abroad. Alternative solutions involved creating works locally with the use of whatever was available or affordable, with intent to show the finished pieces (and potentially sell them, allowing the artist to stay abroad for a longer time). Consider Danuta Urbanowicz. Her work was made easier by the fact that she frequently decided to reuse her materials.

There was one other option for artists to make a name for themselves in Western Europe, or even further afield: sending works to be shown on exclusive invitation by foreign institutions. In the case of the group of artists from Kraków, two such developments are noteworthy, both slightly outside the framework of the Thaw timewise (1962). One

involves their works having been shown as part of a travelling exhibition of the Kraków Group in the US (*The First American Exhibition of Polish Painting by the Kraków Group*), the other – a show in London in April. The latter proved to be much more significant to the Group's history. Invitations were most probably extended in view of the artists having joined the Kraków Group, and not least because West European art dealers and critics had had the opportunity of viewing young artists' works when visiting Poland in September 1960 for the Seventh Congress of the AICA, International Association of Art Critics, especially at the Group of Five exhibition at Nowa Huta's International Press and Book Club.

Titled *Artists from Poland*, the exhibition at the Grabowski Gallery was open to visitors from April 25 until May 19, and was warmly received by English and Polish critics, as evidenced by 11 reviews. Wroński, the Urbanowicz duo and Tarabula apart, other abstract artists – Tadeusz Dominik, Jan Lebenstein, Leon Śliwiński, Jerzy Kałucki and Henryk Stażewski – showed their works as well. The reviews were understandably interesting, offered outside Polish territory and thus unencumbered by ideological censorship. One review referred to these works with a phrase explicitly evoking past times: "socialist abstractionism,"³⁴ whereas Stanisław Frenkiel criticised socialist realism and post-impressionists in harsh terms in an article in the cultural weekly *Wiadomości*, describing the former as "slowly giving up the ghost since the October mutiny," and the latter as "having grabbed lead positions in artist unions, exhibition juries and art academies..."³⁵ Comments of the kind would have been out of the question in the Kraków press. It is also intriguing that despite the artists themselves not having been present at the exhibition, commentators were relatively well-informed of their achievements back home; they even quoted from the catalogue of the second collective Group exhibition at the Krzysztofory Palace, referencing artist's commentaries probably provided for purposes of the London show.³⁶ In emulation of

comments following the Group's show in Kraków, an anonymous London Chronicle reviewer of the *Gazeta Niedzielną* weekly, published for the local Polish community, wrote of the gravity of the young artists' proposals, contrasting their programmatic monochromatism and the process of shedding blackness with practices engaged in by older participants of the show.³⁷ In all of the lengthier interventions and similar to Polish critics, reviewers provided an abundance of detailed comments concerning the artwork's technique, seeking parallels to famous paintings from other parts of Europe, Spain in particular.³⁸ These comparisons were not the only courteous gesture extended to guests from Poland – further advantages began by inviting them to show their works at a Gallery established in 1958 in London's Chelsea district. Having been already accepted and recognised in Kraków, their accomplishments were revitalised in the context of Polish artists living and working in London, known to the Polish community in the United Kingdom, as well as other authors from around the world discovered by Mateusz Grabowski.

I believe that the young artists of Kraków would have subscribed to sociologist Marian Golka's statement that "artistic travel, spending time at a particular location is a blend of leisure, pilgrimage and academy,"³⁹ albeit they usually forfeited the first of the three for reasons of the limited time they were given in their metropolises of choice. They undertook a pilgrimage to places anointed by the permanent presence of artefacts known from stories and reproductions, to the cradles of modern art. As shown herein, they would have found it difficult to survive in the western world for any extended time, work with dignity or accept the art market rhythm as their own. By living alone – a significant circumstance, as they would usually stick together in Kraków – they surrendered any chance for creating even a sliver of a new community. Their scholarship travels took place several years after their momentous debuts in Kraków, bringing no change to the overall direction of their interests; Jończyk may be the sole

exception, given his substantial metamorphosis in later years. Working abroad in rented studios was conducive to experimentation, enriching their techniques and highlighting the quality and diversity of painting and printmaking – fields they had already selected for their work. They would revisit their scholarship travel destinations in later decades, having stabilised their position in Poland, found employment at universities, and/or established gallery contacts – yet they would return as inspiration-seeking tourists or guest artists at collective exhibitions.

Notes

¹ The Second Kraków Group was established after World War II. The consolidation of the group of the Moderns was finally resulted in the creation of the Second Kraków Group, which came to life as an association in May 1957. The new Kraków Group took as its headquarters the basement of the Krzysztofory palace, which housed a gallery and a coffee house. Members of the Group did go through various fascinations, including pop-art, the happening, or matter painting, the last one being associated with inclusion of the members of the Nowohucka Group, which was influenced by the informalism, in the Kraków Group.

² Piotr Piotrowski, "Odwiłz / The Thaw," in *Odwiłz. Sztuka ok. 1956 r. / The Thaw. Art ca. 1956*, edited by Piotr Piotrowski (Poznań: MNP, 1996), 9-35.

³ Matter painting (French: Haute Pâte, lit. 'thick paste') also known as Matterism refers to a style of painting that emphasizes the material qualities of paint through heavy impasto. The style marked a return to impulses characteristic of abstract expressionism. Matterism first emerged in Paris in the 1940s in the work of Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier. The style reached widespread popularity in the 1950s.

⁴ Marian Golka, *Socjologia sztuki* (Warszawa: Difin, 2008), 94.

⁵ Marian Golka, *Nauczanie sztuki. Cele - formy - metody* (Poznań: PWSSP, 1991), 52-53.

⁶ Ibidem, 136.

⁷ See: Marian Golka, *Socjologia artysty* (Poznań: Ars Nova, 1995), 57-89; Andrzej Osęka, *Mitologie artysty* (Warszawa: PIW, 1978).

⁸ "The titular 'migrations' pertain not only to the artists themselves and their official and semi-official foreign trips but also to the phenomenon of travelling works and wandering ideas. The time frame – arbitrarily adopted – begins in 1947 (the moment of intense cultural exchange, primarily with France, under an official scholarship programme) and ends in 1959 (the height of the 'expansion' of Thaw-era Polish modernism in the West)," accessed 19.01.2023, <https://zacheta.art.pl/en/wystawy/mapa-migracje-artystyczne-a-zimna-wojna>.

⁹ Nowa Huta was created in 1949 as a separate city near Kraków, on terrain repossessed by the Socialist government from the former villages of Mogiła, Pleszów and Krzesławice. It was planned as a colossal center of heavy industry. The city was intended to become an ideal city for Socialist propaganda, and populated primarily by industrial workers. In 1951, it became a part of the city of Kraków as its new district, and in the following year, construction of tramway connections was underway.

¹⁰ Piotr Piotrowski, "Odwiłz / The Thaw," in *Odwiłz. Sztuka ok. 1956 r. / The Thaw. Art ca. 1956*, edited by Piotr Piotrowski (Poznań: MNP, 1996), 9.

¹¹ She had previously visited Paris in the years 1937-38 accompanied by other Association of Polish Artists and Designers scholarship recipients and supported by funding from friends at the time. See: Agnieszka Dauksza, *Jaremińska. Biografia* (Kraków: Znak, 2019), 185-96, 330-31, 81-83, 500-41. In response to her first letter to the Ministry of Art requesting a foreign scholarship, Jaremińska received permission to travel to London, yet she did not find that satisfactory and ultimately did not go for reasons of currency shortages. One year later, she was promised funding for a scholarship in Paris, yet the proceedings were extremely lengthy and tedious. When she finally managed to travel, she also visited her brother in Rome.

¹² Piotr Juskiewicz, "Wyprawa po socmodernizm: Kantor w Paryżu w 1955 roku" / "The Quest for Socmodernism: Kantor in Paris in 1955" in *Artyści i Kraków. Studia ofiarowane Tomaszowi Gryglewiczowi / Artists and Krakow. Studies dedicated to Tomasz Gryglewicz*, ed. Jan K. Ostrowski, et al. (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 2022), 143-150.

¹³ Other noteworthy members of the Kraków Group officially formed in 1956 include Erna Rosenstein, whose stay in Paris coincided with Jaremińska's (1947) and Jonasz Stern's (1949-1950). Paris apart, other travel destinations had begun appearing on artists' schedules during the Thaw. In 1959, Stern visited Italy (on a Ministry of Culture and Art scholarship); Tadeusz Brzozowski travelled briefly to Berlin and Dresden in 1956, and one year later – to Italy. He travelled to Paris in 1960, taking the opportunity to visit Switzerland and Vienna as well. In 1956, Jerzy Nowosielski journeyed to Italy in 1956, and to France in late 1958 / early 1959.

¹⁴ See: *Biuletyn ZPAP*, no. 2 (1959): 27-30; *Biuletyn ZPAP*, no. 4 (1960): 12.

¹⁵ *Biuletyn Ministerstwa Kultury*, 19.04.1958, no. 5, item 47, 4.

¹⁶ Ibidem, item 58, 10-11.

¹⁷ Ibidem, no. 5, item 47, 3-4.

¹⁸ Patryk Pleskot, *Intelektualni sąsiedzi. Kontakty historyków polskich ze środowiskiem „Annales” 1945–1989* (Warszawa: IPN, 2010), 19.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 110.

²⁰ He stayed in Rome from December 31, 1958 until mid-1960. See: Anna Budzałek, "Marian Warzecha – Zbiór otwarty. Oczami kuratorki," in *Marian Warzecha*, ed. Robert Wolak (Kraków: MNK, 2020), 11.

²¹ Marek Czeremański found Julian Jończyk's documentation in the Archives of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków when working on his M.A. thesis (*Obrazy i pokłady malarstwa w dorobku Juliana Jończyka – Paintings and Visual Layers in Julian Jończyk's Oeuvre*), supervising professor: B. Stano. He defended the thesis at the Institute of Graphic Art and Design of the Pedagogical University of Kraków in 2020.

²² Julian Jończyk, "List do Jerzego Wrońskiego, 20 listopada 1960," in *Malarstwo materii 1958-1963. Grupa nowohucka*, ed.

Marta Tarabula (Kraków: Galeria Zderzak, 2000), 186-87.

²³ "List do Janusza Tarabuly, 28 listopada 1960," 187.

²⁴ "List do Jerzego Wrońskiego, 19 grudnia 1960," 190.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Ibidem, 189.

²⁷ See: *Danuta Urbanowicz. Obrazy*, (Kraków: Galeria Zderzak, 1993), Exhib. cat., 20-22.

²⁸ The event was referenced in numerous publications, i.e. Marta Tarabula, "Kalendarium Grupy Nowohuckiej," in *Malarstwo materii 1958-1963. Grupa nowohucka*, ed. Marta Tarabula (Kraków: Galeria Zderzak, 2000), 181.

²⁹ The issue of the ostensible sequence of these events was analysed by Marta Tarabula in *ibid.*, 182.

³⁰ Jerzy Wroński, "Biała deska," *ibidem*, 172.

³¹ See: *Danuta Urbanowicz. Obrazy*, 21.

³² Aleksander Wallis, *Artyści – plastycy. Zawód i środowisko* (Warszawa: PWN, 1964), 78.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ "Polskie życie kulturalne. Gwasze Bohusza Szyszki. Artyści z kraju w Galerii Grabowskiego," *Orzeł Biały*, 3.05.1962, 8.

³⁵ Stanisław Frenkiel, "Spacer po galeriach," *Wiadomości [London]*, 10.06.1962, 4.

³⁶ A., "Konstrukcje i abstrakty z Polski," *Dziennik Polski [London]*, 7.05.1962, 5.

³⁷ J. Ch., "Artyści z Polski w Galerii Grabowskiego," *Gazeta Niedzielną [London]*, 13.05.1962, 5. See also: Maciej Gutowski, "Wiadomości plastyczne. Wystawa w Krzysztoforach," *Dziennik Polski*, 6.03.1960, 4.

³⁸ Marjorie Bruce-Milne, *The Home Forum*, 2.06.1962, 6.

³⁹ Golka, *Nauczanie sztuki. Cele - formy - metody*, 53.

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PARAPHRASE AS AN ACT OF ART: SOME ASPECTS IN THE WORK OF THE ŁÓDŹ KALISKA AND THE SUBSTITUTE THIRSTERS ARTIST COLLECTIVES

The Substitute Thirsters (Hejettes Szomlyazók) were a group of artists active between 1984 and 1992, founded by István Elek (Kada), Balázs Fekete, Attila Nagy, Péter Kardos (who distanced himself from the group in 1985), and Tibor Várnagy, who knew each other from an art workshop.¹ Three more artists joined later on: Balázs Beöthy (1985), Attila Danka (1987) and Rolland Pereszlényi (1989). The name – with spelling mistakes referencing the cult of ‘genius dilettantes’ in the eighties – is of biblical origin: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:6), and may also be a reflection on the circumstantial bureaucracy of the socialist system, as well as on the traditions of inevitable ‘substitution’ dominant in the Eastern European Neo-avant-garde.²

In the summer of 2017, two complementary exhibitions opened, providing a comprehensive presentation of the activity of the group throughout the eight years of its existence. With a periodization based on these two exhibitions, the first, ‘underground’ period of their activity can be dated between 1984 and 1987 (presented at the exhibition *Rügyfakadás / Budburst* at the New Budapest Gallery, from 31 May until 3 September 2017), and their second period, showing signs of

gradual institutionalization between 1987 and 1992 (*A kopár szík sarja / Sparse Alkali Flats* at the Ludwig Museum between 14 July and 10 September 2017). Not only did these exhibitions feature some reconstructions, they also unearthed a number of works believed to be missing or forever lost, shedding new light on the ‘alternative’ art of the eighties.

The Substitute Thirsters deserve special attention owing not only to their uniqueness amongst the numerous groups active during the late Kádár-era,³ but also to the diversity of their artistic approaches (painting, graphic art, installation, living art, literature, self-published samizdat⁴ journals and artistic books, music, film), the collective nature of their practice, as well as their instinctive congruence with the idiosyncrasies of the period’s local and international art worlds and shifting status in sync with the change of regime (from underground to ‘overground’).

Their relationship with the Polish artist group Łódź Kaliska (founders: Marek Janiak, Adam Rzepecki, Andrzej Świetlik, Andrzej Wielogórski, and Andrzej Kwietniewski as a ‘resting member’ since 2007) is particularly worth highlighting from this network. This short paper underlines some aspects of the cooperation

methods between the two groups and their relationship with paraphrase as a genre. The Polish artist group's members⁵ are practically the only artists in the region whose activities – except for, perhaps, some of Milan Knížák's art show a number of similarities with the Substitute Thirsters.

Tibor Várnagy took a key role in establishing the connection. Várnagy who was the head of the Liget Gallery, one of the centres of experimental art of the eighties, between 1983 and 2022 met Józef Robakowski in Budapest in 1986, as a participant in the 2nd International Portfolio exhibition curated by John P. Jacob at Liget Gallery. Várnagy remembers the encounter:

I showed him our *Világnézettségi Magazin* (Worldviewership Magazine), which immediately brought a smile on his face, spurring him to tell us about a similar Polish samizdat published by the Łódź Kaliska group under the title *Tango*. He invited me to participate in the First International Videoclip Festival in Łódź, organized by him in January of 1987. I set off on a harsh winter day, arriving in Poland to find the country in a state of emergency, with a 10/11 pm curfew in place. Those were the days of the infamous Jaruzelski era. It was an adventurous trip, at times a bit frightening, but generally high-spirited, and peppered with house parties, giving me a chance to meet the members of Łódź Kaliska and many other Polish colleagues. We exchanged publications with Łódź Kaliska. The difference between their *Tango* and our magazine was that while ours was primarily based on graphic reproduction techniques, theirs – partly due to their involvement in film and photography – relied far more heavily on photographic means. Like us, they used a mimeograph for printing the text, and also made use of screen printing, stamp printing and sometimes lino printing as well. They had started publishing *Tango* a few years earlier than we launched our *Világnézettségi Magazin*,

but both periodicals had their last issues printed before 1987. Another similarity between the two groups was that like us, they were also keen on making parodies, paraphrases and persiflage. Moreover, both groups were eager to involve colleagues in producing their publications, performances and actions. Artists from outside their group (among others, Jolanta Ciesielska, Zbigniew Libera, Zofia Łuczko, Jacek Kryszkowski, Zygmunt Rytka) were featured in *Tango* and in their actions, just like in our *Világnézettségi Magazin*.⁶

The daredevils of the Jaruzelski-era named their group after the Łódź train station in 1979. The first time they visited Hungary was in 1989, two years after being invited by Tibor Várnagy.⁷ A few days before their opening (*Nie Pierdol* □ *Ten Years of Łódź Kaliska*, in the scope of which they made a paraphrase of Goya's *Third of May 1808* in collaboration with members of the Substitute Thirsters), they participated in one of the openings of the exhibition *Fractions* (at which, incidentally, the Beöthy-Várnagy duo exhibited the work *Polack Wenger*, made in 1987 for the *Węgierska Sztuka Młodych* exhibition in Warsaw, reminiscent of the works of Oldenburg or even Szajna) and a collective action painting event.⁸

In turn, the Substitute Thirsters were invited to Łódź in December and gave an impromptu concert at the legendary artist-run space, the Wschodnia Gallery.⁹ Wearing dressing gowns, the men played music on found, modified or recycled objects (a dustbin, lid, pot, plastic pipe): they interpreted banal pop hits and various songs, including a Mozart paraphrase rehearsed with composer Gábor Litván, pounding the ad-hoc instruments with beef shin bones, which seemed more like a musical piece of absurd theatre, diffusing the strict and serious boundaries of performance as a genre, and according to some recollections, thus ironically commenting on the untenable conditions that characterized Poland in the eighties. Łódź Kaliska visited Hungary on several other occasions,¹⁰ and in 1999 they even

made a paraphrase of Mihály Zichy's monumental romantic painting *The Triumph of the Genius of Destruction* in the artist's birth place at the Zala Museum.

Łódź Kaliska operated at Strych (Attic), one of the places that were established against the Avant-garde/Neo-avant-garde traditions that had often become dogmatic by the end of the seventies. These places, like Wschodnia Gallery, Józef Robakowski's Exchange Gallery, usually operated in the apartments of the artist-organizers. Strych was one of the centres of the Polish new wave Kultura Zrzuty (Pitch-In Culture), of which Łódź Kaliska was an active participant between 1982 and 1988, and the location where the *Tango* samizdat was published. In the nineties, the 'revitalization' of the street where Strych was located is also linked to the group, more specifically to the activities of Marek Janiak and Andrzej Kwietniewski. The most important 'art club' of Łódź was opened here. The Łódź Kaliska pub, one of the city's must-see attractions, has postmodern interior design solutions, and is decorated with the group's artwork. It essentially functions as the Łódź Kaliska Museum, and its realization, in sync with the group's activities, carries many contradictions bordering on self-irony and memorialization.

Their initial period of the Polish group was spent in the underground scene, similarly to the Substitute Thirsters. They were also an open community, and the kinship between their samizdat *Tango* and the *Világnézettségi Magazin* (in A4 and A3 format, mixed media, published monthly then irregularly in 100 copies) is as indubitable as the similarity in the subversive and insolent spirit of both communities, incessantly mocking the bureaucratic socialist institutions. Nevertheless, their use of media was different: from the beginning, Łódź Kaliska's primary interest lay in technical media, that is, photography and film. From 1980/81, it turned to Dada-based gestures, happenings, communicating through manifestos as the Substitute Thirsters did, through the two manifestos created during their existence. The film academy of Łódź certainly played a role in this, as this was where the revival of Polish cinema

began, not to mention the presence of video art (Józef Robakowski): these were the roots of the activity of Łódź Kaliska. The Substitute Thirsters as a community used photography less frequently, they tended to use graphic media and painting as their point of departure, and installation and action art as their means of expression. Their film made in 1990 (*The Private Life of the Substitute Thirsters*) has been lost, but many videos of the group's actions survived, including the reconstruction of the original action painting on the Eastern side of the former Berlin Wall (1990).

Łódź Kaliska's Dadaist, or more precisely, Duchampist basic stance is more consistent than in the case of the Substitute Thirsters, which was not dominated by a specific approach or artistic interest. Łódź Kaliska made direct references to Duchamp's works throughout their activity (such as *The Bride Stripped Bare* at Liget Gallery, a direct reference to *The Large Glass* in 1999). The two groups also had different ideas about collective work: for Łódź Kaliska it was important to name the originators and creators of each piece, documenting each work by Łódź Kaliska both as co-authored and individual creations. In terms of their interest in paraphrases, however, the two groups are similar. At the same time, from 1986, the Substitute Thirsters turned to historical painting and the national theme with more frequency, whereas Łódź Kaliska only began to study traditional Polish patriotism and Catholicism, Polish historicism, the cultural history of specific national events or figures after the regime change, around the time of its institutionalization, and still finds endless inspiration in these.

This was evidenced by their latest exhibition entitled *Prophets' Parade*, which was presented by the New Budapest Gallery in 2016. The pixelization of Jan Styka's allegorical-historical painting *Polonia*, commemorating the 'May Constitution' of 1791, and the presentation of a wall preventing viewership is part of their project dealing with the cult of Adam Mickiewicz, the author of *Pan Tadeusz*, one of the 'three bards' of Polish romantic literature (along with Krasiński and Słowacki). Mickiewicz was born and grew up





1. Substitute Thirsters and Łódź Kaliska together, *Fractions/Frakciók*, Stúdió Gallery, 1989. Photographer: István Halas

Courtesy of Tibor Várnagy

2. Substitute Thirsters and Łódź Kaliska together, *Fractions/Frakciók*, Stúdió Gallery, 1989. Photographer: István Halas

Courtesy of Tibor Várnagy

3. Łódź Kaliska re-creating Mihály Zichy's *The Triumph of the Genius of Destruction* at Zala Museum, 1999. Photographer: Marek Grygiel

Courtesy of Tibor Várnagy

4. Substitute Thirsters / Hejettes Szomlyazók, Galeria Wschodnia, Łódź, 1989. Photographer: Bolesław J. Kapuściński

Courtesy of Tibor Várnagy



5. Substitute Thirsters / Hejettes Szomlyazók and their work *The Condemned Cell*, Stúdió Gallery, 1986. Photographer: Tibor Várnagy
Courtesy of Tibor Várnagy

in the Lithuanian territory of the Polish-Lithuanian state under Russian rule. Thus the work, evoking the perception of history by the painting, also reflects on the aspects of national canons marked on the axes of language and geography and the culture connected to Poland, which actually did not exist on the map and was divided between Austria, Prussia and Russia. In 1999, the paraphrase of Jan Matejko's painting (1878) commemorating the victory over the Teutonic Knights of the united Polish-Lithuanian army, which also included various peoples, the *Battle of Grunwald* (1410), was created with the participation of the public, effectively drawing attention to the myths of the heroic battle/historical glory. *Polonia* was originally in Lwów (today Lviv, Ukraine), then, in accordance with the Potsdam Conference (1945),

which annexed Galicia to the Soviet Union in the east and 'enriched' Poland with parts of Germany in the west, it was taken to the 'reclaimed' Wrocław, to the basement of the museum. Thus, the fate of the picture also reflects on post-war Polish history.¹¹ The foreground of their interest is therefore the questioning of the canon of romantic-historical painting and literature, as well as the cult of genius that accompanies it, i.e. the objectified and symbolic forms of the transformation and interpretation of historical events into a heroic national past. In the eighties, Łódź Kaliska used photography as a tool, making classical genre pictures with the contribution of their friends, drawing on outstanding works from the world history of fine art. Such were the appropriation of Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* or Goya's

Third of May 1808, which put great European revolutions and paradigm shifts in art into quotation marks and reflected on the devolving of such 'iconic' sights.

The Substitute Thirsters' oil paintings (initially their collective work was dominated by this technique, until it was replaced by paper-based works and installation after 1986) and their collectively edited samizdat publication (1984-85) reflect this approach the best. Kada (István Elek) shared literary inclinations that had an important role in wording the slogans of the magazine, most of which he had previously realized in the form of posters, and he was also actively engaged in tasks around the 'production' of the publication. Evocative of the lyrics of some pop hit, the title of the painting *I Take Your Blackbirds into My Heart* (1984), for instance, is characterized by the mixing of different cultural contents or layers. In this case, the work of Gyula Konkoly from 1968, *A Rose Speaks More* can be considered an antecedent, also marking the place of Pop Art among the antecedents integrated into the program of the Substitute Thirsters, but we can mention the works produced during the collaboration of János Vető and Lóránt Méhes, i.e. Zuzu-Vető, in the early eighties. Substitute Thirsters' painting *The Summer Of My Youth* employs a wealth of artistic and cultural references constructed like a montage. Its axioms were based on powerful visual content with graffiti-like catchy and often lyrical linguistic solutions, which ignores orthography altogether (see for example the lack of punctuation in the text written for their exhibition *Second Wave* at the Bercsényi College in 1985). This includes the juxtaposition of (hoax) news inspired by the language of the period's press, art brut, figures resembling children's drawings. Such solutions appear on their co-authored paintings and the 'journal-paraphrase' pages of the *Világnezettségi Magazin*¹² (printed using a DIY silk screen made of a window frame and some fabric stretched across it) almost in the spirit of Cut'n'Mix, based on linguistic and cultural code-switching.¹³

The Substitute Thirsters' 'period of great installations' took place in this context, entailed

by a switch to paper-based pictures, forcing the artists to use recycled, easily accessible, 'poor' materials and a 'penniless aesthetic.'¹⁴ In 1987 they were invited to East Berlin for a group exhibition with East German artists. Their paraphrase of Grünewald's *Isenheim Altar*, or rather its sculptural 'analysis,' was made for this occasion. The contradictions of the last years of socialism are well illustrated by the fact that in 1986 their exhibition in Komárom was banned and in 1987 they were forced by a police intervention to shut down Plato's Cave operated together with the Swapseriesgroup, but in the same year they received a government invitation to participate in the exhibition in Germany.¹⁵ In 1988, they made their piece *Döbling* for the annual exhibition of the Studio of Young Artists, and ended up winning the Studio Award with this total environment, which emphasized the narrative quality of the group's works more than anything before.¹⁶ The found objects (lamps, temperature charts, signs) taken from the building of the Döbling asylum before its reconstruction, (the home of Count István Széchenyi in the last years of his life in the mid-nineteenth century) actually display the environment of the story being narrated (the last days of Széchenyi). Other paraphrases include a since destroyed textile object paraphrasing *Picnic in May* by Pál Szinyei-Merse, as well as a paraphrase of El Greco's *The Penitent Magdalene* (1991) made for an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, which was eventually left out of that selection by the curator. This work features the strongest fusion between the narrative intent, so typical of the Substitute Thirsters' practice, and the performative element, also present in all of their projects: the collage-like piece is transformed into a stage design or meditational tool once chairs are placed in front of it.

However, this was all preceded by the creation of *The Condemned Cell* in 1986. With this project, the paraphrases and quotations that had formerly used the media of painting and graphic art were transferred into three-dimensional space. Two members of the Substitute Thirsters (Balázs Fekete, Tibor Várnagy) were admitted to the Studio of Young Artists, and

under their authorship the group managed to exhibit at the yearly Studio exhibition that would pave the way for an institutional breakthrough. Their choice of **Munkácsy** was at once a critical gesture and homage. On the one hand, the officially promoted taste had set forth examples of Hungarian historical painting (and the events these artworks recalled) as ideals of good, honourable, socialist ethics to comply with, and Munkácsy was chosen by the very aesthetic of socialist realism as a standard for Hungarian artists. On the other hand, when the Substitute Thirsters made the paraphrase of *The Condemned Cell* out of ‘poor materials,’ they actually just acted on the inspiration they got out of the genius loci (the venue of the Studio’86 exhibition was the Historical Museum at the Buda Castle in the vicinity of the Hungarian National Gallery, where nineteenth century Hungarian historical paintings are kept among other things). The original painting also used the ‘privy’ device of doublespeak: it preserves the tragic memory of the fallen revolution and independence war of 1848/49, just like the award-winning painting by Viktor Madarász, *The Mourning of László Hunyadi* (also paraphrased by the group), or *Péter Zrínyi and Kristóf Frangepán in Prison at Wiener Neustadt* (also paraphrased by the group). *The Condemned Cell* – and the entire cycle *My homeland, My homeland...* – reminds the spectator of national tragedies, fallen and retroactively manipulated revolutions (1711 – Rákóczi War of Independence, 1848, 1918 – Aster Revolution, 1919 – Hungarian Soviet Republic, 1956...).

Through the various techniques applied and figures made of rusty scrap metal found at the waste disposal site just outside Kisörspuszta, the Substitute Thirsters also put historical tragedies within quotation marks, metaphorically referring to the shoddy, ‘ramshackle’ nature of Hungarian reality that had already emerged during that period as a result of the slackening of the economy; private repair services, dismantled components built into holiday homes, ramshackle insulations made of materials from who knows where, crop up among the associations raised by the installation. The use of materials in *The Condemned Cell* led Thomas Wulffen to the conclusion with regard to the installation made for Bethanien¹⁷ – which elevated the group’s activity into the forefront of

the international scene together with Wulffen’s article in *Kunstforum* – that it should be regarded as an example of the ‘penniless aesthetic’ characterizing Eastern European art, what is more, as an anarchistic, extravagant one at that.

In terms of the operation of the two artist collectives, many other aspects could be raised, like the formulation of gender issues (see Tibor Várnagy’s *Ass print*, which was first published in *Világnézetségi Magazin*, and Adam Rzepecki’s *Project Pole Father Memorial*, 1981), the defining context of the new wave in their operation, or about their conceptual art heritage. This short text attempted to raise some aspects regarding paraphrase as a metalanguage and its meaning in socialist Central Europe in the work of two groups that present clear similarities in their artistic approach.

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The article is a complemented and modified version of my two previously written texts, using the translations made by Dániel Sipos and Kata Balázs: Kata Balázs, “A valóság barátságos ellenfelei. Megjegyzések a Hejettes Szomlyazók történetéhez / Friendly Opponents of Reality. Notes to the History of the Substitute Thirsters,” in *Hejettes Szomlyazók: Borgyíngó*, ed. Hejettes Szomlyazók (Budapest: acbResearchLab, 2018), 14–105 and “Prófétaparádé. Łódź Kaliska térben és időben,” *Tranzitblog.hu* published electronically 13.11.2016, accessed 29.07.2022, <http://tranzitblog.hu/profetaparade/>. All translations by Kata Balázs.

Notes

¹ The establishment of the Lajos Vajda Studio and its heyday in the eighties also support the decisiveness of autodidacticism in the era.

² Substitution due to economic circumstances (e.g. using 'poor materials') is a phenomenon well-described in József Havasréti, *Alternatív regiszterek. A kulturális ellenállás formái a magyar neoavantgárdban* (Budapest: Typotex, 2006), 132–54.

³ The Kádár era or regime is the common name for the years between 1956 and 1988 in Hungary. It is named after János Kádár (1912–1989) who was the leader of the Hungarian People's Republic from his installment by the Soviet Union during the 1956 Revolution and Freedom Fight and his retirement in 1988, subsequently followed by the regime change. Kádár was responsible for the execution of the revolution's prime minister, Imre Nagy and his fellows as well as the merciless retaliation after the suppression of the revolution. From the early sixties, the Kádár system transformed into a 'soft dictatorship' under the motto 'who is not against us is with us' opposed to the motto of Mátyás Rákosi's fifties Stalinist dictatorship ('who is not with us is against us').

⁴ Samizdat is grassroots self-publishing that comprises secretly copied (often created, translated, edited) and distributed literature banned by the state. Samizdat is created in order to avoid censorship and provide access to information free from political propaganda. It is mostly used while referring to underground self-publishing activities in the former Eastern Bloc.

⁵ <http://www.c3.hu/~ligal/LodzKaliskaFO.htm>, accessed 25.07.2022.

⁶ Tibor Várnagy. "Part 1 (1968–1989)." Interviewed by Kata Balázs. *Review of Hungarian Photography*, no. 2 (2021): 29. Translated by Zsófia Gregor. Originally published as Kata Balázs, "Beszélgetés Várnagy Tibor képzőművésszel I. 1968–1989," *Balkon*, no. 3 (2019).

⁷ <http://www.c3.hu/~ligal/hszvsik.html>, accessed 25.07.2022.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ It happened during the martial law period that alternative art life flourished in Poland, confined into apartments, and at several artist-run spaces. In Łódź the avant-garde collection established by Władysław Strzemiński, Katarzyna Kobro and Henryk Stażewski became the foundation of this tradition.

¹⁰ *Lofasznamurze/Lófaszafalon*, Liget Gallery, 1999; *New pop*, Liget Gallery, 2004, *Vesszenek a férfiak* (Down with Men), King St. Stephen Museum, Székesfehérvár, 2010; *Profétaparádé/ Prophets' Parade*, New Budapest Gallery, 2016.

¹¹ The conditions of the *Prophets' Parade* exhibition include the fact that at the same time the *Wild West. The History of Avant-garde Wrocław* exhibition was on view at the Ludwig Museum. It outlined the local cultural structure operating during the harshest deficit economy. By explaining the history of the Wrocław collective Pomarańczowa Alternatywa (Orange Alternative), conceived as an 'extension' of LUXUS or Solidarity, the exhibition enriched political gestures with artistic elements, and presented the activities of various art punk and new wave groups that helped to clarify the historical and cultural background of the eighties.

¹² For the detailed chronology of Világnezettségi Magazin, see Andrea Tarczali, "Világnezettségi Magazin (Tanulmány és dokumentáció)," (2002), Manuscript.

¹³ Havasréti, *Alternatív regiszterek*, 170.

¹⁴ Thomas Wulffen, "Stellvertretende Dürstende. Künstlerhaus Bethanien 18.5–28.5.1989," *Kunstforum International*, no. 102 (1989): 323–24.

¹⁵ In the history of Łódź Kaliska, we find examples of clashes with the authorities after the regime change. In 1998, they were arrested in Florence, when they took illegal photographs for a paraphrase of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* in the Uffizi. In 2004, as part of their New Pop series, which uses magazine aesthetics, they replaced the Polish national heraldic symbol, the crowned eagle with a naked female figure, causing a media scandal.

¹⁶ My attention was recalled on this aspect by Balázs Beöthy. Public reading as a performative activity closely linked to storytelling spans across the activity of the Substitute Thirsters, from the texts read at their Kondor-evening at Plato's Cave through the *Women's Matinee* reading that accompanied the *Perpetual Calendar* (1987) to the readings at the series of openings that declared the dissension developing nationwide and within the group (*Fractions*, 1989; the exhibition was rearranged by teams of two formed within the group each week, with a new opening each time).

¹⁷ Wulffen, "Stellvertretende Dürstende."

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2

**BRANDING
POLISH
GRAPHIC
ARTS**

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AN ESCAPE FROM SOCIALIST REALISM. STATE-ORGANIZED OVERSEAS EXHIBITIONS AS THE ROAD TO FAME OF THE POLISH SCHOOL OF POSTERS

Introduction

The Polish School of Posters has been described in a number of academic publications. However, none of them seems to have exhausted this topic and none has even managed to provide a clear definition of this artistic phenomenon. Although the name 'Polish School of Posters' is constantly repeated in references to the experimental poster art of the Polish post-war period, it neither refers to a closed set of works nor is it represented by a clearly identifiable group of artists. There are several reasons why the term still escapes any scientific description. Firstly because, from the very beginning, the Polish School of Posters formed with no defined contours. Jan Lenica, who is credited to have invented this term, did not define it. What Lenica did was to narrow the Polish School of Posters to a certain group of artists who,

in some of their works, showed "a tendency to use visual metaphors and a reluctance to be purely decorative."¹ The second reason stems from the first and is related to the continuous circulation of this term in programmatic, critical, propagandistic and academic publications, none of which have clarified it as a concept with a clear definition.² Thirdly, it is because poster art was determined after the Second World War by many circumstances and historical events which have still not been fully investigated.

The fact is that the Polish post-war poster gained a worldwide reputation for its formal and stylistic diversity as well as for the development of a specific visual language and its use of a means of expression that derived from painting. The Polish School of Posters has become a globally recognised brand. It formed between 1947 and 1966, i.e. in the period immediately following the Second World War, which included the horrors

of Stalinism (1945-1953). The circumstances in which the Polish School of Posters emerged may seem surprising from today's perspective. After all, at that time Poland was one of the countries of the Eastern Bloc, where, following the example of the Soviet Union, the model of official art was centrally decreed in accordance with the guidelines of the doctrine of socialist realism. Still, Polish authorities - to a certain extent - allowed artistic experiments and graphic design not to have to conform to the assumptions of state propaganda. "Even in the worst period of Stalinism designers managed to use metaphors and allegories."³ The question that comes to mind is "how was this even possible?"⁴

The attempt to answer this question will be present throughout this article, however, more specific research questions will also be posed. The very fact that the Polish communist party allowed a certain amount of artistic freedom for poster artists does not explain the circumstances under which works they created had a chance to appear in a wider, international context. After all, if Polish posters had not been presented abroad, Polish poster art would not have gained international recognition. Therefore, it will be crucial for this paper to analyse why Polish post-war posters – particularly culture and film posters – gained worldwide attention. The support of the communist government was essential in this process. The state promoted Polish poster art in two ways: by organising a number of official exhibitions abroad, and by supporting the organisers of the 1st International Poster Biennale held in Warsaw in 1966. The relationship between cultural events at home and abroad is a fact that does not need to be proven, but its detailed characterisation still requires in-depth research. It seems obvious that without overseas exhibitions of Polish posters organized by the state, the International Poster Biennale would not have been established. On the other hand, without the Biennale, Polish poster art would, at best, remain a local phenomenon waiting for its future discoverer and would not have been appreciated by international audiences that quickly. However, the organisation of overseas poster exhibitions was not free from tensions and

the outcome of the "negotiations" between artists and the authorities could never be determined.

This paper consists of several parts. The first part is dedicated to the theoretical and practical sources of the term 'Polish School of Posters.' It presents the ways in which it has been understood so far. The second part is devoted to the role of overseas exhibitions in shaping the worldwide reputation of Polish posters. The third part describes the consequences of the worldwide recognition of the Polish School of Posters – the organisation of the First International Poster Biennale in Warsaw and the emigration of many poster artists. The fourth analyses the international reception of the Polish poster and presents the international relations of the community of Polish designers. The paper ends with a summary that attempts to indicate the connection between all previously described aspects which make up the characteristics of the reasons for the fame of the post-war Polish poster abroad.

The Polish School of Posters

– Theoretical and Practical Sources of the Notion

The history of the Polish post-war poster begins in 1944. Together with the arrival of the Red Army that accompanied the Polish Army, "the activity of the Propaganda Poster Workshop of the Propaganda Department at the Main Political and Educational Management Board of the Polish Army intensified."⁵ In the following year, with the re-establishment of institutions and political and social life, culture posters – mainly for film and theatre - began to appear alongside propaganda posters. At this early period, Film Polski (a state-run organization that produced and distributed films) played an important role in creating favourable conditions that led to designing 'artistic posters.' In 1945, graphic designers like Erik Lipiński and Henryk Tomaszewski managed to negotiate a wide margin of freedom for designing film posters.⁶ This created the basis for an area of

publicly subsidised poster production which was not subject to the strict cultural policy guidelines of the emerging socialist state. Even after the adoption of the doctrine of socialist realism in Poland, which “was proclaimed after 1949 (...) by the then Minister of Art and Culture Włodzimierz Sokorski”⁷ culture posters remained – at least to some extent – the last stand of artistic freedom. This freedom meant that artists could follow their own formal-stylistic aspect and could also select the means of expression, the content and the interpretation of a given cultural event.

This early period is considered to precede the formation of the Polish School of Posters. Several events from that time, however, are worth mentioning. Already in that period, Polish posters were recognised abroad, which drew the attention of the authorities to this particular field. The most notable event of that period is Henryk Tomaszewski's triumphant participation in the International Poster Exhibition in Vienna in 1948. The artist won five gold medals.⁸

A further periodisation of the so-called golden period of Polish post-war poster art is proposed by Andrzej Turowski:

The beginnings (...) of the Polish School of Posters can be traced to the years 1950-1952 and refer to classes taught by Mrończak and Tomaszewski at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and to works by Fangor. They all searched for a separate space for posters within the framework of the prevailing doctrine of socialist realism. The second wave began with the thaw of 1955-1956. Poster artists reached their peak period in the early 1960s. This period ended in 1964, when the Polish Communist Party curbed artistic freedom. That was the period of the greatest artistic achievements of Lenica and Młodożenec. Sometime later, Cieśliewicz, Starowieyski and Świerzy followed suit.⁹

Many researchers consider the poster for *The Walls of Malapaga* created by Wojciech Fangor as the first work of the Polish School

of Posters. The ‘School’ can be understood as a certain section of the Polish post-war poster art (mostly culture posters, particularly film posters) that to a huge extent differed from the dominant design trends in post-war Poland. However, an abbreviated and metaphorical way of thinking in poster creation manifested itself earlier than 1952. Tadeusz Trepcowski's poster for the film *Ostatni etap (The Last Stage)* from 1948 paved the way for future film posters. The author used a simple but very resonant metaphor of a broken poppy flower. The flower was presented against a striped background illustrating genocide in the concentration camps during World War II. The strategy of reductionism in conveying by means of a simple sign the essence of the work's content would be very characteristic for the Polish poster in the later stages of its evolution.

Both works – by Trepcowski and by Fangor – allow us to understand the importance of the style of creation that derived from painting in the characteristics of the Polish School of Posters. Principles of this style were formed in the post-war period between 1945 and 1948, so even before the official introduction of socialist realism in Poland. In other words, artists that created the Polish School of Posters usually had professional backgrounds in painting. They mixed the aesthetics of painting with the conciseness and simplicity of posters. It allowed the development of features like painting gesture, linearity and vivid colours as well as the sense of individual personality, humour and imagination. The Polish poster made the distinction between a designer and an artist less clear. The line between them became blurred. Despite the similarity of the artistic means used, each of the artists belonging to this group developed their own individual style.

Zdzisław Schubert, Andrzej Turowski and Mariusz Knorowski claim that the Polish School of Posters ended in the mid-1960s. Their theory has a purely symbolic dimension, as, paradoxically, it was around that time when the Polish poster art reached its peak, which was reflected in the organization of the First International Poster Biennale in Warsaw in 1966. Of course, painting-

like posters using metaphors did not cease to be created overnight. Schubert, Turowski and Knorowski refer rather to the advent of new, different tendencies in design connected with the introduction of montage and photography. Leading artists representing new trends were Marek Freudenreich, Leszek Hołdanowicz and Bronisław Zelek.

Overseas Exhibitions Organised by the State and the Recognition of the Polish School of Posters

The first overseas successes of post-war Polish poster art were not closely linked to the cultural policy of the state. Although the involvement of political structures in the selection of the national representation for the already mentioned International Poster Exhibition in Vienna in 1948 cannot be completely unnoticed, Tomaszewski's success was the result of his own talent and not of state patronage. For the Polish Communist Party it was a clear sign that Polish artists have significant, internationally recognized achievements in the field of poster design. Worldwide professional magazines like *Graphis*, *Art and Industry*¹⁰ and *Modern Publicity*¹¹ published favourable texts describing the phenomenon of Polish poster art. They juxtaposed Polish posters with posters created in the West that were confined by the restriction of 'commercial' regimes. As a result, Polish authorities expressed more interest in Polish poster art and began active promotional campaigns abroad. As early as 1949, Polish posters were exhibited in Prague (*Výstava polského plakátu*, Uměleckoprůmyslové Muzeum, 1949). It was merely a small taste of the promotional actions of 1950, however, when exhibitions of Polish posters were held in Berlin (*Ausstellung Polnische Plakate*, Kunstbibliothek Berlin, 1950), Brussels (*Affiches polonaises*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1950), Budapest (*Lengyel Plakátművészet*, Kiallítás, Iparművészeti Muzeumban, 1950), Bucharest (*Afişului Polonez*, Sala Ministerului Artelor, 1950),¹² Oslo (Polske

Plakater, place of the exhibition unknown, 1950),¹³ (Utställning av Polska Affischer i Stockholm, Kulturhuset, 1950) and Vienna (*Polnische Plakate*, Ausstellung in der Wiener Kunsthalle, 1950). Exhibitions were first held in the capital city and later in other parts of the country. For example, the exhibition held in Berlin in January was the inauguration of the German tournée. By late March, Polish posters were presented in other East German cities like Leipzig, Halle and Magdeburg. Between April 1950 and December 1951, posters were exhibited also in West Germany – in Baden-Baden, Konstanz, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, Nuremberg, Munich, Stuttgart, Mannheim and Wiesbaden.¹⁴

There was a steep decrease in the number of exhibitions in the years 1951–1953. This fact can be linked to the temporary tightening of the state's cultural policy aimed at strengthening the dogmas of socialist realism. However, through the exhibitions organised in 1950, Polish authorities managed to achieve some of the goals of their international policy. Above all, the communist party wanted to soften its image before the signing of the agreements approving Poland's western border on the Oder river.

However, the idea of exporting Polish poster art abroad was quickly revived. As early as 1954, the Polish authorities made active efforts in this regard. Polish posters were exhibited at official overseas exhibitions in Copenhagen (*Den Danske Plakatudstilling* Kobenhavn, place of the exhibition unknown, 1954), Moscow (*Wystawka polskich kinopłakatów*, place of the exhibition unknown, 1954), Pardubice (*Vystava soucasneho polskeho plakatu*, place of the exhibition unknown, 1954) and Prague (*Vystava polsky plakát*, Dom Uměleckeho Průmyslu, 1954). In 1955, exhibitions of Polish posters organised by the Central Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions (a national agency founded to organise artistic events under the state patronage) could be viewed by the public in Brussels (*L'Affiche polonaise*, *Polske Affiches*, Palais des Beaux-Arts), Bucharest (*Expositia Afişul in Republica Popolara Polona*), Kiev (*Wystawka polskiego obrazotwórczego mistjctwa*, place of the

exhibition unknown), Minsk (Wystawka polskiego wyjawlenczaga mastactwa, place of the exhibition unknown), Tournai (L'Affiche polonaise, place of the exhibition unknown) and Washington (An Exhibition of Polish Posters, Polish Embassy in Washington). The year 1956 brought exhibitions in Budapest (Lengyel Plakat-művészeti Kiállítás, Nemzeti Szalon), Buenos Aires (Affiches Polacos, Galeria de Arte Rose Marie), Göteborg (Polsk Affisch Konst, place of the exhibition unknown), Mexico City (100 Carteles de la Nueva Polonia en Mexico, Galería Pemex), New Delhi (Polish Art Exhibition, Lalit Kala Akademi), Nuremberg (Polnische Plakate, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg), Vienna (Das polnische Plakat, Museum für Angewandte Kunst) and a couple of Italian cities (Mostra Cartelloni Cinematografici Polacchi / L'affiche polonaise du cinéma). Between the years 1957-1970, another 45 exhibitions of Polish poster art were organized abroad under the auspices of the Polish government.¹⁵ Apart from Europe and the US, Polish posters were exhibited in New Delhi (*Exhibition of Polish Posters*, The Indian Academy of Fine Arts, 1959), Rio de Janeiro (*Cartazes poloneses*, Museu de Arte Moderna, 1959), Beirut (*L'Exposition d'affiches polonaises*, place of the exhibition unknown, 1961), Havana (*El Cartel Polaco*, Palacio de Bellas Artes, 1962), three cities in New Zealand: Wellington (National Art Gallery Wellington, 4-24 February 1963), Christchurch (Robert McDougall Art Gallery Christchurch, 18-31 March 1963) and Auckland (Dunedin Public Library, 22 April - 5 May 1963; Auckland City Art Gallery, 27 May-16 June 1963), Mexico City (*El Arte de Cartel Polaco*, Museo Nacional de Arte Moderna, 1964) and Veracruz (*El Arte del Cartel Polaco*, Galeria del Teatro del Estado, 1964), Tokyo (*Posters of Poland*, State Modern Art Museum, 1966) and Ankara (*Polonyagravürveafissergisi*, GüvenMatbaası, 1967).

The list only includes exhibitions that were accompanied by a printed catalogue. Actually, the number of such events was higher. However, trying to provide the exact number of exhibitions is less important than analysing their content, functions and trying to assess their contribution

to establishing the worldwide fame of post-war Polish poster art.

A closer look at these exhibitions and the works presented there leads to the conclusion that:

(...) in the international exhibition practice [Poland] pursued a strategy of differentiation. The catalogues of Hungarian and Romanian exhibitions contain almost no film posters by Eryk Lipiński and Henryk Tomaszewski of international renown, especially for French, English or American films. In contrast, these two graphic designers were represented at exhibitions in Brussels, Oslo and Stockholm with thirteen and fourteen works respectively. This means that the exhibitions in the socialist countries were more closely aligned with the unified artistic doctrine of their own country within the communist bloc, while the exhibitions in the non-socialist countries were more thematically and stylistically diverse.¹⁶

Regardless of the proportion of cultural and propaganda posters presented at each exhibition, however, all of these presentations combined have contributed to building a worldwide brand of Polish poster art. It should come as no surprise, then, that Polish poster artists very quickly began to be individually invited to participate in review exhibitions abroad, by the world's leading cultural institutions. One example is the presentation of works by Roman Cieśliewicz, Jan Lenica and Wojciech Zamecznik held in 1961 in the New York Museum of Modern Art at the exhibition entitled *Film Poster*.¹⁷ What contributed to the positive reception of their works, was the fact that posters were mostly previews of foreign films familiar to American audiences.

The Opposite Side of Cultural Policy – the Warsaw Poster Biennale and Emigration

The rising prominence of Polish posters, which was the 'flagship' of the state's cultural policy during the People's Republic of Poland, translated directly into the recognition of individual artists as well as into the establishment and development of contacts between artists in Poland and abroad. The rising demand led to two clear tendencies that somehow stood in opposition to the ideas behind organizing official exhibitions abroad. It is because they resulted in the integration and strengthening of the community of poster designers in Poland and in some members of the Polish School of Posters leaving the country.

Strengthening the Polish community of poster designers led to the idea of establishing in Poland an international event dedicated to artistic posters. Successful negotiations between artists and the authorities resulted in a compromise. It allowed for the launching in Warsaw, in 1966, of the 1st International Biennale of Poster. This event was a celebration of art but did not really suit the Communist Party, the organizers faced many obstacles:

Let us mention that perhaps even during the communist times there were thoughts of stopping the event. No wonder. Many of the things going on in the posters and displayed in Warsaw at the time might have annoyed the communists, especially as crowds flocked to this particular event every time. It was for these reasons that one of the posters about Amnesty International by Roman Cieślewicz was once not allowed to be exhibited.¹⁸

Marszałek's observations reveal a certain paradox. The establishment of the International Biennale broke the state's monopoly on organizing poster exhibitions. Contrary to state-managed exhibitions abroad, exhibitions of international

posters in Poland could not be fully controlled. The organization of the Biennale in Poland turned the tables. Artists co-decided on the selection of artists and guests. Suddenly, artists coming from the West were allowed to exhibit their works in Poland. Among them were some Polish artists that had emigrated, partly due to political reasons. Presenting works of foreign artists opened Poland to content that was not fully in line with the official political agenda of the socialist state. Such a situation posed a threat to the Polish Communist Party. There were numerous examples of censorship. A poster by Roman Cieślewicz for Amnesty International was not exhibited due to the ban on the establishment of NGOs in the Eastern Bloc. However, not all liberal influences could be stopped.

From the artists that formed the Polish School of Posters, the first ones to leave the country were Wojciech Fangor (1961), Roman Cieślewicz (1963) and Jan Lenica¹⁹ (1963). However, the real emigration wave of Polish poster artists began in the 1970s. Among the artists who decided to emigrate were: Waldemar Świerzy (1970), Wiktor Górka (1970) and Bronisław Zelek (1970). The younger generation of artists also made use of the reputation of Polish poster art. One of them was Krzysztof Lenk who emigrated in 1979. Although he gained recognition as a creator of diagrams, he also created some excellent film posters commissioned by state agencies.

In 1970, Waldemar Świerzy, Wiktor Górka and Bronisław Zelek left for Cuba on a contract between friendly socialist states. They were to teach design workshops for graphic artists working for the Cuban political bureau. However, they did not stay there long, as they found it difficult to adjust to the reality of Fidel Castro's revolutionary state. Instead, they relocated to Mexico where Górka decided to stay. Świerzy spent a few months there and went to live in Florida. Zelek returned to Europe and decided to settle in Vienna. What is interesting is the fact that most of the artists that emigrated taught, at least for some time, at art universities. For example, Jan Lenica was a lecturer at Harvard University, Cambridge (USA) in 1974. He later served as the

head of the Faculty of Animated Film at a university in Kassel (1979-85) and worked as a professor at the Higher School of the Arts in Berlin (1986-1994).²⁰ In the years 1973-75, Roman Cieślęwicz was the head of the Studio of Visual Forms at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, and in the years 1975-96 he served as the head of the diploma atelier of graphic arts at Ecole Supérieure des Arts Graphique.²¹ Wojciech Fangor was, in the years 1965-1966, a lecturer at Bath Academy of Art in Corsham (Wiltshire, UK). Between 1966 and 1999, Fangor lived in the US where he taught in leading universities: Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, N.J. (1966-1983) and the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (1967-1968).²²

For many years, Górka taught at Mexico's leading universities, for which he was later awarded a special prize by the Mexican Biennale of Poster for his contributions in the development of Mexican art of design.²³ Świerzy established commercial contacts that resulted in commissions for cartoon and poster presentations with gangster motifs in film genres.²⁴

Apart from the aforementioned poster artists, many others decided to leave Poland, e.g. Jan Sawka (he lived in France from 1976, and in 1985 relocated to the US), Andrzej Krajwski (left for the US in 1985) and Rosław Szaybo (in the years 1966-88 he resided and worked in London, and upon returning to Poland started working at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts).

In the context of these successes of Polish designers in exile, one could risk saying that official foreign exhibitions of posters were, for them, a ticket to freedom. However, it is worth mentioning that most of them maintained contact with the Polish design milieu. They continued to carry out domestic commissions for posters and other types of graphic design, including book and record covers. Some like Wiktor Górka would regularly visit Poland and engage in numerous initiatives. They can therefore be viewed as unofficial ambassadors of the Polish poster abroad. They played a key role in reaffirming the reputation of the Polish School of Posters.

The Polish School of Posters from the International Perspective

The diaspora of Polish poster artists tightened cooperation with foreign artistic circles, which facilitated contacts for the organizers of the next editions of the Warsaw Biennale. Poster artists that emigrated regularly participated in exhibitions held in Poland. Many of them won prizes and distinctions at the Biennale in the following years. For example, Roman Cieślęwicz was awarded a prize at the 5th International Biennale of Poster in Warsaw in 1974, even though he was a member of the jury at that event.²⁵ Jan Lenica, who also lived abroad, was on the jury of the Seventh Poster Biennale.

Poster artists that chose to stay in Poland constituted the backbone for a network of artistic and project relations. Emigres that taught abroad presented works of Polish poster artists to their students which developed interest in the Polish poster not only among poster artists but also among young creators who had not yet graduated. This interest was not purely theoretical; on the contrary, it resulted – perhaps surprisingly from today's perspective – in a search for opportunities to come to Poland to participate directly in the academic classes conducted by renowned Polish poster designers. One of the artists who achieved the status of a mythical teacher from behind the Iron Curtain was Henryk Tomaszewski. He drew foreign students like a magnet. Tomaszewski was the head of one of the two studios of posters established at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1952. He remained an active academic teacher until 1984. Throughout the thirty years of his teaching career, he cooperated with many generations of designers. His students were popular poster artists like Mieczysław Wasilewski, Jan Młodożeniec and Maciej Urbaniec. They continued to develop the tradition of Polish graphic design in the field of the poster.

“The fame of the Polish poster and the international recognition of poster artists started to draw foreign trainees to the Academy of Fine

Arts in Warsaw, just like before the war.”²⁶ The most numerous group were the French. The first one to arrive was Michel Quarez in 1961. “Upon returning to France he encouraged other talented graphic designers to come to Poland.”²⁷ Among other French artists that came to Warsaw were: Alain le Quernec, Bruno Koper, Thierry Surfis, Guy Mocquet and Vanessa Vermillon. In the 1960s, artists like Pierre Bernard and Gérard Paris-Clavel (founder of the group Grapus) and many others followed in their footsteps. Andrzej Klimowski deserves a special mention as he came to Warsaw from London twice: in the academic year 1973/74 and 1974/75. He was a son of Polish emigrants. He was considered to have continued the traditions of the Polish Poster school abroad although he did not grow up in the reality of communist Poland. Upon his return to the UK, Klimowski spent years teaching at the Royal College of Art in London. As Zdzisław Schubert observes:

Klimowski quickly adapted to Warsaw and began to design posters for films and theatre plays. Before he left Poland in 1980, Klimowski created dozens of works. Even after going back to London he never broke ties with Polish publishers and from time to time we can see his posters in the streets. His works do not clearly show traces of fascination with works by Tomaszewski or Lenica, however, they clearly strike a dialogue with the works of Cieśliewicz through the similarities between matter and the use of photomontage.²⁸

It was not only Klimowski that achieved significant success after returning to his country of residence. Most of the more than 60 trainees of Tomaszewski were listed among world's leading designers. Their success only drew more people to the Polish School of Posters.

Many of the trainees, after returning to their countries, quickly rose to the top of the designers in their circles. However, putting their posters together leads to a surprising

reflection: despite all the individual styles of each of them, the spirit or atmosphere of Tomaszewski's and Mroszczak's studio emanates from almost all of these works (except Klimowski, who has already been mentioned, but this is a special case). We are dealing here not only with the same kind of thinking – which is understandable – but also with a cheerful, sometimes even humorous or slightly ironic tone – a feature so characteristic of Polish poster art.²⁹

Former trainees of Tomaszewski maintained their ties to Poland. This is especially visible in the list of people who joined the jury of the subsequent editions of the International Biennale of Poster in Warsaw.³⁰ In 1988, Gerard Paris Clavel (France) became a member of this prestigious jury, in 1994 Pierre Bernard (France), in 1998 Alain Le Quernec (France), and in 2000 Andrzej Klimowski (Great Britain). However, the twentieth edition of the Warsaw event was particularly rich in former Tomaszewski trainees. The jury included: Thierry Sarfis (France), Marjatt Itkonen (Finland), Radovan Jenko (Slovenia) and Karel Mišek (Czech Republic). The only juror who did not have an internship at the famous poster studio of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts was Marcin Mroszczak, who represented Poland but defended his diploma at Tomaszewski's studio. These examples show how important the reputation of the Polish poster had become.

Meanwhile, the tendency for Polish graphic artists to leave the country continued into the 1970s. Interestingly, many of them found a common language with foreign artists who had completed an apprenticeship with Tomaszewski. One example is Ewa Maruszczyńska, who left for France immediately after her studies, where she later founded the graphic design studio Zanzibar't together with the previously mentioned Thierry Sarfis. We may risk a claim that the interest in Polish design among foreigners was reflected in the reputation of those who left Poland for other countries. It significantly facilitated their start in the new environment.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to present the role of official state-funded foreign exhibitions of post-war Polish posters organized in the years 1947-1970 in the development of the worldwide reputation of the so-called Polish School of Posters. Organizing exhibitions in cities around the world made the participating artists more popular. Those exhibitions also allowed the development of contacts with foreign artists, which contributed to the creation of the first worldwide event dedicated to poster art. The 1st International Biennale of Poster held in 1966 contributed to the wide scope of artistic freedom in poster creation in Poland. By treating posters as works of art, the awareness of design circles abroad was awoken. As a consequence, Polish creators achieved the possibility of emigrating on beneficial terms. When they arrived at their destinations, they did not share the fate of accidental travellers, but were able to continue their artistic work. What's more, they continued to work on the improving of the reputation of Polish poster art, inspiring the idea of 'artistic design' in masses of students, many of whom later came to Poland, one of the Eastern Bloc countries behind the proverbial Iron Curtain, for internships with the legendary masters led by Tomaszewski and Wasilewski. Such internships had many outcomes. Artists who participated in them transferred the 'Polish' way of thinking into their national artistic circles and maintained contact with the Polish artists, submitted entries for the following editions of the Biennale and accepted invitations to be members of the jury.

Polish graphic artists coined an attractive slogan that inspired artists around the world to create their identities. The slogan goes: 'posters are works of art.' It expressed the conviction about the value of individual style that could be seen even in works created on commission. What's more, commissioned works allowed the creators to interpret the topic in an individual way. From the national point of view, good reputation and fame earned abroad by the creators of the Polish School of Posters consolidated achievements in the field of

artistic freedom. As posters became an attractive tool of propaganda that could be exported by the People's Republic of Poland, Polish poster artists, unlike their peers from other fields of art, did not need to strictly follow the rules of state's cultural policy. They were able to escape socialist realism. Artists who decided to escape in a physical way (to emigrate), not only defected formally, but also ideologically and organizationally.

Both dimensions of the escape from socialist realism find a common denominator in the term 'Polish School of Posters' – a term that has no clear-cut framework, although it functions as an axiom in many studies. Official exhibitions abroad and the emigration of Polish poster artists seem to have had a direct impact on the international recognition of the Polish poster art, even though they remain in clear ideological opposition to each other. This opposition is probably the reason why these two elements of the history of the Polish poster art have been described separately. This paper, however, tries to demonstrate the existence of a strong direct relationship between them – a feedback loop.

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This text was prepared as part of the research project *Polish school of posters - origin, evolution, continuation, tradition* financed by the National Science Center (NCN) under the OPUS program, research project number: 2018/31/B/HS2/03805.

Notes

- ¹ Jan Lenica, "Polska szkoła plakatu," *Polska*, no. 1, 1955, 11. All the translations from Polish sources by Mateusz Bieczyński.
- ² Por. Mariusz Knorowski, "Polska szkoła plakatu – rzecz o wolności myślenia i szczególnym rodzaju synergii," *Teologia Polityczna* published electronically 11.06.2019 <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/polska-szkola-plakatu>, accessed 28.07.2022; Zdzisław Schubert, "Plakat," in *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 roku*, Edited by Piotr Piotrowski (Poznań: MNP, 1996), 121-28; Andrzej Turowski, "Polska szkoła plakatu' en question," (2004), Typescript.
- ³ Krzysztof Lenk, *Krótkie teksty o sztuce projektowania* (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz Terytoria, 2011), 23.
- ⁴ Katarzyna Matul posed this question in the title of her book on the organisation of the 1st International Poster Biennale in 1966 as she pondered the points of view of artists and authorities, see: Katarzyna Matul, *Jak to było możliwe? O powstawaniu Międzynarodowego Biennale Plakatu w Warszawie* (Kraków: Universitas, 2015).
- ⁵ Schubert, "Plakat," 121.
- ⁶ Krzysztof Dydo, *Polski plakat filmowy. 100 lecie kina w Polsce = Polish film poster: 100th anniversary of the cinema in Poland* (Kraków: Krzysztof Dydo-Galeria Plakatu, 1996), 37-38. Exhib. cat.
- ⁷ Schubert, "Plakat," 122.
- ⁸ Lidia Becela, ed., *Who's who in Poland: a biographical directory comprising about 4.000 entries on leading personalities in Poland and information on major state, political, diplomatic, scientific and artistic institutions, and organizations* (Warszawa: Interpress, 1992), 900.
- ⁹ Turowski, "Polska szkoła plakatu' en question," 2.
- ¹⁰ Charles Rosner, "Posters for Art Exhibitions and Films: A Lesson from Poland," *Art and Industry* 46, no. 278 (1949): 52.
- ¹¹ David Crowley, "An art of independence and wit: the reception of the Polish Poster School in Western Europe," in *100 lat polskiej sztuki plakatu / 100th Anniversary of Polish Poster Art* (Kraków: BWA, 1993), 25-29.
- ¹² *Catalogul expoziției afişului polonez*, Sala Ministerului Artelor, București, 1950, exhib. cat.
- ¹³ *Katalog den Polske Plakatutstilling*, Oslo, 1950, exhib. cat.
- ¹⁴ Jeannine Harder, "Polnische Plakatkunst als Medium transnationaler Kunstkontakte und Kulturpolitik im Ost-West-Konflikt," *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte*, published electronically, accessed 29.07.2022, <https://www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-28529>.
- ¹⁵ In 1957 exhibitions were held in Berlin, Helsinki, London, Stockholm, Zagreb; in 1958 in: Karlove Vary; in 1959: in New Delhi and Rio de Janeiro; in 1960 in: Amsterdam, Budapest and Ottawa; in 1961 in: Beirut, Mannheim and New Delhi; in 1962 in: Havana, Munich and Ostrava; in 1963 in: Copenhagen, Moscow, Hertogenbosch and Wellington; in 1964 in: Belgrade, Mexico City, Rome, Vera Cruz; in 1965 in: Frankfurt am Main, Köln, Oberhausen, Hertogenbosch; in 1966 in: Basel, West Berlin, Edinburgh, Stockholm, Tokyo and Washington; in 1967 in: Ankara, Hamburg, Innsbruck and La Chaux-de-Fonds; in 1968 in: Barcelona, London and Mexico City; in 1969 in Parma, in 1970: in Turin.
- ¹⁶ Harder, "Polnische Plakatkunst."
- ¹⁷ MoMA exhibition entitled *Film Poster* was on display from 14 December 1960 to 23 February 1961, see: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/5000?artist_id=5894&page=1&sov_referrer=artist, accessed: 12 may 2021.
- ¹⁸ Grzegorz Marszałek. "O plakacie, reklamie i wolności." Interviewed by Karol Szymoniak. *Nurt*, no. 8 (1995): 4.
- ¹⁹ Marcin Giżycki, "Jan Lenica," in *Piękni XX-wieczni. Polscy projektanci graficy*, ed. Jacek Mrowczyk (Kraków: 2+3D, 2017), 232.
- ²⁰ Ewa Czerniakowska and Tadeusz Kujawski, *Jan Lenica – Labirynt* (Poznań: MNP, 2002), 254. Exhib. cat.
- ²¹ Joseph S. Czestochowski and Janina Fijałkowska, *Contemporary Polish Poster in Full Color* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), iv.
- ²² Ewa Gorzadek, "Wojciech Fangor," *Culture.pl*, published electronically 12.2004, accessed 29.07.2022, <https://culture.pl/en/artist/wojciech-fangor>.
- ²³ Ian Haydn Smith, *Selling the movie: the Art of the Film Poster* (London: White Lion Publishing, 2018), 173.
- ²⁴ Ewa Gorzadek, "Waldemar Świerzy," *Culture.pl*, published electronically 04.2006, accessed 29.07.2022, <https://culture.pl/en/artist/waldemar-swierzy>.
- ²⁵ "Jurorzy Międzynarodowego Biennale Plakatu w Warszawie w latach 1966-2012," accessed 29.07.2022, <http://www.postermuseum.pl/biennale/jurorzy/>.
- ²⁶ Zdzisław Schubert, *Mistrzowie i uczniowie plakatu* (Warszawa: Przedsiębiorstwo Wydawnicze Rzeczpospolita, 2008), 139.
- ²⁷ Anna Grabowska-Konwent, "Henryk Tomaszewski," in *Piękni XX-wieczni. Polscy projektanci graficy*, ed. Jacek Mrowczyk (Kraków: 2+3D, 2017), 169.
- ²⁸ Schubert, *Mistrzowie i uczniowie plakatu*, 145.
- ²⁹ Ibidem, 146.
- ³⁰ "Jurorzy Międzynarodowego Biennale Plakatu w Warszawie w latach 1966-2012."

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POLISH POSTERS AT THE 1948 INTERNATIONAL POSTER EXHIBITION IN VIENNA

Introduction

Of course, one could leave it at consecrating the phenomenon of the Polish School of Posters. But perhaps it should be subjected at some intervals to critical analysis or even vivisection, or at least, undergo an endurance test periodically to ward off the reckless temptation of exhumation, which seems to be our national ailment.¹

Thus Mariusz Knorowski, art historian and chief curator of the Poster Museum in Wilanów, advocated for a close re-evaluation of the *Polish School of Posters* from time to time. In recent years, Katarzyna Matul has been able to present fundamental research regarding the integration of poster art into cultural policy strategies in the Polish People's Republic.² Concerning the presentation of Polish posters abroad, little research has been carried out so far.³ This article attempts to shed light on the International Poster Exhibition held in Vienna in 1948, the first presentation of Polish posters abroad after the

Second World War. As it pioneered the success of Polish poster art around the world, this exhibition has been a crucial moment of foundation of the so-called Polish School of Posters.

Poster exhibitions with international participation have taken place in Europe since the end of the 19th century in various cities.⁴ After the Second World War, exhibitions of commercial art brought international developments in contemporary art to the attention of a large audience. This was especially true in countries where the art of the avant-gardes and abstract modernism had long been ostracised by the Nazi regime.⁵ The Vienna International Poster Exhibition in 1948 was the first of its kind in the world after the Second World War. Partially parallel to the 24th Venice Biennale, the exhibition took place from August 21 to September 19. Around 2000 posters from nineteen countries were on display at the Künstlerhaus in Vienna.⁶ The exhibition aroused great interest among the Viennese population; 24,500 visitors attended the show.⁷ Ample information about the exhibition can be found in the exhibition catalogue,⁸ and the United States Information Service (USIS) documented the event photographically.⁹ Due

to its status as a four-sector city under the Allied occupation, Vienna was a nerve point where East and West met.

Exhibition Organisation

Viktor Matejka, the communist City Councillor for Culture and Popular Education, was the spin doctor of the exhibition. The well-known Austrian commercial graphic designer Viktor Theodor Slama became its curator, supported by the Graphics Section of the Professional Association of Austrian Visual Artists (Berufsvereinigung der bildenden Künstler Österreichs).¹⁰ The organizers were keen to show posters that were as up to date as possible, which meant posters created after 1945. The nineteen participating countries were China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, Soviet Union, Turkey, United States of America, and Yugoslavia. With China and Japan, East Asian countries participated, and the Soviet Union and Turkey represented the border regions of Eurasia. The USA were the only representative of the American continent; no countries from South America, Australia, and Africa, took part in the exhibition. A clearly Eurocentric focus thus prevailed.

According to the catalogue, the works were brought together mainly through personal relationships. In addition to items on loan from various private collections, most of the posters were kept at a municipal documentation centre, initiated by City Councillor Matejka himself. Most of the foreign exhibits came directly on loan from the different countries. Professor Slama and the Graphics Section of the Professional Association of Visual Artists ultimately put together the chosen works during a few months.¹¹

In the Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych = AAN), in the files of the Polish Ministry of Culture (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki = MKiS), the request of the Professional Association of Austrian Visual Artists for this exhibition was handed down. In a letter

dated December 1, 1947 and addressed to the Polish Mission (Polnische Gesandtschaft) in Vienna, posters for the planned International Poster Exhibition were requested. This letter was signed by Heinrich Sussmann for the Graphics Section.¹² Noting that Sussmann was a former prisoner of the Auschwitz concentration camp, the letter was forwarded to the press department (Departament Prasy i Informacji = DPII) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych = MSZ), as well as to Juliusz Starzyński, Director of the Department for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries (Biuro Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą = BWKZ), part of the Ministry of Culture.¹³ As an art historian Starzyński maintained many contacts with artists and humanists. Unfortunately, the archive does not reveal who Starzyński contacted, nor do the documents indicate the selection criteria for the works sent to Austria. The private contacts of Stanisław Jerzy Lec, the new press attaché of the Polish Mission in Vienna, may also have been important for the compilation of the posters. Through his involvement in the re-establishment of the satirical magazine *Szpilki*, Lec was certainly acquainted with the cartoonists Henryk Tomaszewski and Eryk Lipiński, who at that time also created posters for Film Polski, the state-owned film distributor.

Polish Poster Section

The selection presented in the catalogue and through photographic documentation reveals a plethora of posters from the cultural sector. On the other hand, surprisingly few political propaganda posters were shown. The curators arranged a presentation divided according to nations. According to the catalogue, the Polish posters were on display together in a room alongside Soviet, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Turkish ones. The only photo from the exhibition, which probably depicts about half of the Polish works, shows the posters hung in the form of a triptych (ill. 1).¹⁴ The selected works covered different topics: mainly culture and



Polish posters shown in the exhibition catalogue

film, some political posters for state holidays or against fascism, and one poster each on tourism and public health. Four examples are reproduced in the catalogue (ill. 2): two film posters, one by Henryk Tomaszewski for the French movie *Symfonia pastoralna* (orig. title: *La Symphonie Pastorale*), one by Eryk Lipiński for the Soviet movie *Ostatnia noc* (orig. title: *Poslednia noč*); furthermore, two exhibition posters, the one *Zbrodnie niemieckie w Polsce* (German Crimes in Poland) by an unknown artist from 1946, and one by Jerzy Karolak on *Polska sztuka ludowa* (Polish Folk Art) from 1948. The poster images show clear differences in terms of their composition and artistic style. With its surrounding frame displaying the title, the 1946 exhibition poster

is reminiscent of a conventional book cover and, though not separated by a frame, the title field in the film poster for *Ostatnia noc* looks similarly separated from the pictorial section. These two posters with their militant motifs are in line with the tradition of Włodzimierz Zakrzewski's war-propaganda posters,¹⁵ which they also conceptually resemble in the way the viewer's gaze is directed and in their intended psychological influence. The poster of Jerzy Karolak is composed of very few design elements. Two aspects determine the field of view. The central figure is a Madonna with expressive, woodcut features, a child on her arm, and a small angel to her right. A monochrome colour field functions as the background, tracing the outlines of the group of figures. The lettering

to the right of the group stands out against the neutral background, showing the same contrasting dichromatism. The large letters, with their broad lines and their compact and angular typeface, take on the characteristics of the woodcut. Image and font are also linked by the overlapping background colour field. In the choice of font size and type, as well as the monochrome colour field as background and the picture's composition, Karolak's poster formally resembles Edward Manteuffel's exhibition poster *Polska sztuka gotycka* from 1935. This observation offers visual evidence that some young artists working in poster graphics after the Second World War stood in a direct artistic continuation of the Polish commercial graphic design of the interwar period, even though there was little personnel continuity. Regarding contents, Karolak combined his expressionist graphic manner with folk art elements, which are based on stylized and abstracted forms. Through the indicated cuts on one face side of the Madonna figure, Karolak identifies the depicted sculpture with the Black Madonna in Częstochowa,¹⁶ thereby imparting a national Polish message into his poster. The artist thus placed the modern art movement of Expressionism in line with folk art and religion as national points of identification, while the other two posters presented before each show supranational images of enemies and friends symbolized by the swastika and the red star.

The film-poster for *Symfonia pastoralna* shows none of those political or national symbols. This work, which was reproduced in many later monographs on Polish poster art, is an early example of Henryk Tomaszewski's film posters, with a surrealist interpretation of the film story. In its formal structure, the separation between the text and the image field is completely abolished. The inserted text provides only necessary information, while the main emphasis of the poster lies in the visual elements. Against a plain, bright background in the centre, only the head of the leading actress Michèle Morgan is shown from a frontal view with an emotionless facial expression. In contrast to the calm, smooth facial features and the pale skin colour, her dark hair twirls restless in all

directions and dominates the entire upper half of the work. A darker colour field in the foreground takes up most of the lower half of the picture. Its contours resemble an outstretched hand with fingers spread; like a shadow it obscures parts of Morgan's portrait. The shadow hand, stretched out as if to warn, but equally threateningly desirous, seems to reach for the woman. The lettering is integrated in several places into the picture; the title of the film was inserted by the artist into the contour of the thumb and the shape of the palm, the information about the film distributor appears in an extension of the wrist and, in the upper part of the picture, the inscription was partly designed in a similar curve to the strands of hair. To merge image and text seamlessly, the poster artist used strongly varying fonts, which through their diversity contribute to the tension in the poster, paralleling the contrast of light and dark colours. This poster is an early example of how Polish film posters differed significantly in their formal design from the Hollywood-style film poster, which was prevalent in both the USA and Europe at the time.¹⁷

Exhibition Texts and Press

Commentaries

In the following, the exhibition selection of Polish posters is compared with contemporary written sources. The exhibition catalogue offers some texts on the exhibition background as well as on theories of poster design in general. One of the organizers' concerns was to "(...) collect posters from countries whose development we had been cut off from for years."¹⁸ In addition to the years of the Second World War, this statement also refers to the previous Nazi rule. Hence the exhibition gained the rank of a political statement against violence, National Socialism, and dictatorship; the posters were styled as a medium for democracy and freedom. Two quotations from the catalogue reflect the two poles of discussion between which the poster graphics are placed: one with a stronger emphasis on artistic-aesthetic principles, and the

other with an emphasis on the task of contributing to economic profit.

The interaction of artistic design with an impressive text does not only influence the formation of opinion, but it also shapes the viewer's taste from day to day and in many places.¹⁹

The artistic function of the poster must therefore always be supplemented by the promotional function, and thus we see the need for one to be fully realized in practice without the other.²⁰

These excerpts show that a synthesis should be achieved of 'those almost romantic outlooks' with a social impetus in the sense of an *art démocratisé*²¹ and the economic-psychological aspects of advertising psychology and marketing studies, mainly defined by theorists from the USA.²² The positioning of the poster in social life after the Second World War was thus linked to theories that had been described since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Viktor Theodor Slama named several major trends of contemporary international poster art. His division of the European states is interesting; he saw Western countries such as Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, and England as having been under the influence of French art for a long time, although these impulses had long been integrated into their own works. Slama confirmed the Central European countries, which included Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, now had an even stronger orientation towards the new French models, after they " (...) had been cut off from contact with the West" due to the incisive years under the Nazi dictatorship.²³ Slama thus placed the four countries mentioned above in a middle position between West and East, and clearly set them apart from the Soviet Union by mentioning French art as the sole source of inspiration.²⁴ The author of an exhibition review in the Austrian newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung* also emphasised a demarcation of Polish posters from Soviet poster

art. Polish exhibits were described in contrast to the stereotyped and conventionally perceived Soviet ones: "The reverse is true of Holland or Poland, for example, which offer mainly modern, even some ultra-modern solutions."²⁵ Both texts coincide in their division of European art into a Western European Modernism and the art of the Soviet Union, dominated by Socialist Realism. Modernist Russian art movements such as Constructivism, which was particularly present in poster art after the October Revolution, were not addressed, not even in the text on the history of poster art in the exhibition catalogue. In this historical overview, France was referred to as the single point of departure for new artistic impulses since the late nineteenth century, and no Russian names were listed among the mentioned outstanding artists.²⁶ Above all, the connection with Western European Modernism defined the extent of recognition of Polish poster design.

The assessment of the Polish posters in the *Österreichische Zeitung*, the publication organ of the Soviet Army in Austria, was quite different: "In the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, etc., a generally understandable realism is prevalent, which clearly reveals the meaning and purpose of advertising, while representatives of many other countries use symbolic means of expression and depict the issues dealt with in a surrealist manner."²⁷ These arbitrary descriptions of the means of artistic expression in the Polish poster designs show that the exhibition mainly had to fulfil a cultural-political purpose in public debate, completely detached from the varying design vocabulary of the presented posters.

Thus, even if various cultural reporters, politicians, and a circle of graphic artists assessed the strengths and weaknesses in contemporary poster art sometimes diametrically opposed to each other, their statements nevertheless are similar to one another because all of them are exclusively artistic generalizations, without considering individual design solutions.

Despite the emphasis on national differences, City Councillor Matejka expressed his hope for further international cooperation,



United States Information Service
(photo agency), Polish posters at the
International Poster Exhibition in the
Künstlerhaus, 24.08.1948, US 5543/34, ©
Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

for example supported by UNESCO.²⁸ The International Poster Exhibition could serve as a starting point for these plans. In terms of poster graphics, this could be read as the desire to bring together and perhaps to unify advertising art from different countries. Due to the prior artistic attribution of the exhibited posters, mostly with France as a point of reference, as many countries as possible were implicitly drawn to the “Western” side of this international cooperation. Thus, the International Poster Exhibition in Vienna, without many explicitly political posters on display, became a reflection of the global political situation in those days. The political positioning of Central European countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Austria itself was at issue

at that time. To set apart those countries and thereby themselves from the Soviet Union, the organizers and involved urban politicians used a simplified and even largely constructed cultural transfer with France as the only source, with no reference to political reality. Astonishingly, the exhibition was not examined by the international graphic design press. No exhibition reviews can be found in the internationally distributed journals *Graphis* or *Art and Industry*. Art journals, such as *Przegląd Artystyczny* in Poland, did not report on the exhibition either. A Polish perspective on the exhibition is only apparent through one article published in the Polish weekly magazine *Odrodzenie*.²⁹ Its author was Józef Mroszczak, himself a graphic artist and a former student at

the Vienna School of Applied Arts in the interwar period. After mentioning the key data for the exhibition, Mroszczak then, like the catalogue entries or other articles from the daily press, allocated the different participating nations to larger, transnational design lines. For works from Denmark, Belgium, Holland, and England, he considered French influences to be predominant. In an additional comment, he highlighted the artist duo Lewitt-Him, who emigrated from Poland in the thirties, and stressed that they were able to set new tones in commercial graphics in Great Britain. Next, Mroszczak presented the Czech, Hungarian and Polish posters. Also influenced by France, for him they differed from those mentioned above by their 'folkloristic qualities.' By the genre of folk art, Mroszczak endeavoured to ascribe an independent standpoint in international poster graphics towards Polish works. In the Soviet section, Mroszczak referred exclusively to posters with caricaturist depictions, which he described as very apt and successful, avoiding a clear stance towards Stalinist Socialist Realism. As a political and creative counterpoint, Mroszczak referred to the American posters, which he divided into 'sweet, kitschy, naturalistic' ones with the main theme of 'smiling girls' on the one hand and 'good' examples on the other. In his opinion, the latter were created almost exclusively by emigrated German and Austrian commercial graphic artists, meaning that only European contacts could positively influence US poster graphics.³⁰

After considering Austrian and Polish statements on the development of international poster graphics and Poland's position within these developments, it can be stated that all authors, despite their differing evaluations of the indicated artistic influences, always attributed Polish poster graphics as a unit to a particular design tradition. As the visual comparison with the multifaceted examples of the Polish section revealed various references e.g., to German Expressionism and Russian Constructivism, those creations of poster art traditions are oversimplified. In addition to the historical friendly relations between the French and Polish nation and the former French dominance in

poster art, the global post-war political situation may have been a reason why both domestic and foreign critics often brought Polish poster graphics close to French ones. At that time Poland and France, as well as the other European states, had to reposition themselves and be repositioned in the new power structure between the United States and the Soviet Union as the two great hegemonies. The emphasis on Poland's artistic connection with France as the cultural centre of Europe can be understood as an attempt to show an ideal way out of the incipient power play between the USA and the USSR, whose reference point should be Europe.

Awards for Polish Posters

Publications on Polish poster art regularly mention the five first prizes for Henryk Tomaszewski and the seven first prizes for Eryk Lipiński awarded at the Vienna Exhibition. As the mentions are consistently without any footnotes, those authors seem to suggest that the awards were an elementary part of the early stage of the Polish School of Posters, so that no further explanation of the exhibition and the awards is required. The knowledge of these awards was apparently conveyed by the Polish press: in two short press releases, dated September 12 and 13, 1948, the twenty-five prizes won (twenty-two first and three second prizes) are mentioned and the honoured Polish artists are named.³¹ That the artists were not generally anchored in cultural life is evidenced by the fact that many of the names given in the two articles differed from each other significantly. Tadeusz Trepcowski is completely ignored in one of the notices, as are Kreczkowski and Pawlak. Deviations can be found orthographically in Kaczmarczyk / Karczmarczyk, Grochowski / Grabowski (actually Gronowski), Stawiński / Stanisłowski. Even in the Ministry of Culture, where there was a special note on the awards, there were apparently problems in assigning the names to Polish artists.³² There was no mention of the titles of the award-winning works either in the articles or in the documents of the Ministry.³³ The unexpected international success should have been published

afterwards at least. Jozef Mroszczak's exhibition review appeared as the main article in the first issue of the newly established column *Grafika*³⁴ in the weekly *Odrodzenie*. Mroszczak seems to have been assigned to write this article only after the news of the successful Polish participation reached the Ministry of Culture. His text dates from October and was published not before early November 1948,³⁵ although the exhibition had already ended in mid-September.

According to a report from the newspaper *Österreichische Volksstimme*, the organizers awarded a total of 700 awards for 300 posters.³⁶ These figures provide a frame of reference for the large number of individual awards. However, precisely because the five and seven first prizes for Henryk Tomaszewski and Eryk Lipiński are no longer contextualized with the overall large number of awards, since this information did not remain in the historical discourse, the success out of the blue of the two Polish artists seems even more astonishing and suitable as part of a founding myth of the *Polish School of Posters*. Nevertheless, it is true that the International Poster Exhibition was a structurally important event for the development of poster art in the socialist Republic of Poland because since this presentation there was an ongoing strong and active interest of foreign graphic design associations and publishers in Polish posters.

As early as September 23, 1948, only about a week after the end of the Vienna exhibition, the Polish representation in Paris received a request concerning the depiction of Polish posters. The yearbook *International Poster Annual*, a new publication from the Swiss publishing house of the renowned graphic design journal *Graphis*, asked for the possibility of reproducing some of the Polish posters presented in Vienna.³⁷ Stanisław Jerzy Lec, then press attaché of the Polish Mission in Vienna, was directed by the BWKZ in November to take the corresponding photographs.³⁸ Further illustrated articles about recent Polish posters followed in 1948 and 1949 in two volumes of *Graphis*.³⁹ As poster graphics did not occupy a prominent place in the cultural life of the People's Republic of

Poland in 1948, the Austrian exhibition was the starting signal for their worldwide distribution. The International Poster Exhibition in Vienna opened the doors to an international perception of contemporary Polish posters. Thus, even before a discussion on the socialist realist poster initiated in the Soviet Union, which reached Poland in the early fifties,⁴⁰ there was already an appreciation among foreign experts, especially from non-socialist countries, for Polish cultural and film posters from the young socialist republic. In collaboration with renowned representatives of commercial art, special exhibitions of Polish posters, organised by the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art, were held in almost all European countries between 1949 and 1951.⁴¹ Thanks to the support of foreign commercial artists, these exhibitions also found their way into renowned cultural institutions in non-socialist countries. The artistic freedom often noted for Polish film and cultural posters, even during the first half of the fifties under the doctrine of Socialist Realism, can thus be understood as a niche deliberately permitted by cultural policy in order to be able to visually mediate Poland's own foreign cultural policy interests, particularly outside the socialist bloc.⁴² The International Poster Exhibition in Vienna of 1948 gave the decisive impulse for the future inclusion of Polish poster graphics in the international cultural relations of the People's Republic of Poland.

Notes

¹ Mariusz Knorowski, "Polska szkoła plakatu – rzecz o wolności myślenia i szczególnym rodzaju synergii", *Teologia Polityczna*, published electronically 11.06.2019, accessed 28.07.2022, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/polska-szkola-plakatu>. Knorowski's text was first published (without the introductory summary) in "Polska szkoła plakatu - rzecz o wolności myślenia i szczególnym rodzaju synergii", *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Zabytkoznawstwo i konserwatorstwo* 37: Krzyk ulicy – krzyk pokoleń. Mistrzowie i adepci polskiego plakatu (2009). All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

² Katarzyna Matul, "La légitimation artistique de l'affiche en République populaire de Pologne (1944-1968): pratiques, discours et institutions," (Faculté des lettres, Université de Lausanne, 2018), Ph.D. Dissertation; "La notion d'espace dans l'analyse de la légitimation culturelle de l'affiche : l'exemple de la fondation des Musées de l'Affiche de Paris et de Varsovie," *Études de lettres*, no. 1-2 (2013): 91-108. <https://doi.org/10.4000/edl.488>; "Une chemise neuve chaque jour...": La 'posture d'auteur' des créateurs d'affiches en Pologne après 1945," *Fabula / Les colloques*, published electronically 1.07.2014, accessed 29.07.2022, <http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document2404.php>; *Jak to było możliwe? O powstawaniu Międzynarodowego Biennale Plakatu w Warszawie* (Kraków: Universitas, 2015); "The Transition to Art: Poster Exhibitions at the Outset of the Poster's Institutionalisation," *Ikonotheka* 26 (2016): 239-51. <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0010.1680>; "Polska szkoła plakatu – od sztuki masowej do dzieła sztuki," *Teologia Polityczna*, published electronically 11.06.2019, accessed 29.07.2022, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/katarzyna-matul-polska-szkola-plakatu-od-sztuki-masowej-do-dzieła-sztuki>.

³ Regina Wenninger, "Polnische Plakatkunst in der Bundesrepublik der Nachkriegszeit," *Porta Polonica*, accessed 29.07.2022, <https://www.porta-polonica.de/de/atlas-der-erinnerungsorte/polnische-plakatkunst-der-bundesrepublik-der-nachkriegszeit>.

⁴ In Vienna, for example, an international poster exhibition with well over 1,000 posters from many different countries took place in the so-called flower halls of the buildings of the *Gartenbau-Gesellschaft* from 14 to 25 April, 1888, at that time one of the first of its kind. "Eine der originellsten Expositionen." *Die Wiener Plakatausstellung 1888*, accessed 29.07.2022, <https://www.austrianposters.at/2018/08/25/eine-der-originellsten-expositionen-die-wiener-plakatausstellung-1888/>. In 1898 the *Muzeum Techniczno-Przemysłowe* in Krakow hosted the first international poster exhibition, which was largely organized by Polish artists. See: "Historia polskiego plakatu," <https://arteriaposterehibition.tumblr.com/historia-plakatu>, accessed 29.07.2022.

⁵ See the comments by Behrens on the *Internationale Ausstellung Gebrauchsgraphik* (International Exhibition of Commercial Art) in Düsseldorf, October 22 to November 19, 1948. However, this exhibition was exclusively Western-oriented and had no exhibits from socialist states. Mentioned in Karl Christian Behrens, *Handbuch der Werbung: Mit programmierten Fragen und praktischen Beispielen von Werbefeldzügen*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: Gabler Verlag, 1975), 383.

⁶ Mayor Körner wrote in his preface of twenty states. See in *Internationale Plakatausstellung 1948* (Wien: Künstlerhaus, 1948), 11. Exhibition curator Victor Slama noted twenty-two countries – see: Victor Slama, "Internationale Plakatkunst," *ibidem* (1948), 49. However, only nineteen countries can be found in the listings of the catalogue. The mentioned number of posters also varies. While the number of about 1,000 works is given in the catalogue, several newspaper reports indicate about 2,000 posters. See: h. a., "Surrealismus der Straße: Die Internationale Plakatausstellung Wien 1948 im Künstlerhaus," *Neues Österreich*, 22.08.1948. "300 Diplome für die Plakatausstellung," *Wiener Kurier*, 10.09.1948. In addition to the poster exhibition with its exhibits from different countries, the so-called *Galerie der Straße* (Gallery of the Streets) as a presentation of Austrian posters took place around the *Künstlerhaus* building.

⁷ "Rührige Volksbildung mit wenig Geld: Allgemeine Anerkennung der Tätigkeit Stadtrat Matejkas," *Österreichische Volksstimme*, 21.12.1948, 298.

⁸ *Internationale Plakatausstellung Wien 1948* (Wien: Künstlerhaus, 1948), exhib. cat.

⁹ The photographs from the USIS archive are now part of the collection of the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* [Austrian National Library].

¹⁰ Among the 22 employees of Slama were renowned Viennese graphic artists such as Paul Aigner, Hans Fabigan, Walter Hofmann or the exhibition architect and visual artist Heinrich Sussmann, see the list in *Internationale Plakatausstellung Wien 1948* (Wien: Künstlerhaus, 1948), 8. Exhib. cat.

¹¹ Viktor Matejka, "Kultur des Plakats," in *Internationale Plakatausstellung Wien 1948* (Wien: Künstlerhaus, 1948), 14.

¹² Request for the International Poster Exhibition in Vienna. Heinrich Sussmann and Sektion Graphik der Berufsvereinigung der Bildenden Künstler Österreichs to Polnische Gesandtschaft in Wien, 1.12.1947, MKiS BWKZ 366/12, 54, Archiwum Akt Nowych.

¹³ Request for the International Poster Exhibition Vienna, forwarded. Aleksander Jackowski and Departament Propagandy i Informacji to Juliusz Starzyński and Biuro Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą, 13.01.1948, MKiS BWKZ 366/12, 54, Archiwum Akt Nowych.

¹⁴ Polish posters can be seen on only one of the 99 recorded photographs by the *United States Information Service*, USIS Photo documentation of the International Poster Exhibition 1948 at the Vienna Künstlerhaus. The picture can be found online in the database of the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*: United States Information Service, 24.08.1948, US 5543/34, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, <https://onb.wg.picturemaxx.com/id/00061879>, accessed 10.08.2022.

¹⁵ Since mid-1944 Włodzimierz Zakrzewski directed the design and printing processes of Polish propaganda posters in the front poster workshop (*Pracownia plakatu frontowego*) in Lublin. Zakrzewski had previously been responsible for the graphics of the TASS propaganda windows at the Moscow-based Soviet Telegraph Agency (TASS). After the war he designed many political posters in the People's Republic of Poland.

¹⁶ The Black Madonna of Częstochowa is the destination of millions of pilgrims and the national shrine of Poland. A force protecting the Polish people is attributed to the image. The modern poster version adopted the characteristic cuts on the icon's right cheek. See: emblematic poster images with a Polish national meaning in the early post-war period Mariusz Knorowski, "Plakat polski," in *Muzeum ulicy: Plakat polski w kolekcji Muzeum Plakatu w Wilanowie*, ed. Krystyna Spiegel (Warszawa: Krupski i S-ka, 1996), 38.

¹⁷ In general, the title of the film was used like a heading, underneath it the painted, almost photo-realistic portraits of the leading actors and an atmospheric film scenery as background were shown. Emily King describes this type of movie poster as common and successful until the mid-1950s. Emily King, "Taking Credit: Film Title Sequences 1955-1965" (Royal College of Art, 2004), MA Thesis, https://www.typosetheque.com/articles/taking_credit_film_title_sequences_1955-1965_2_introduction, accessed 16.12.2021.

¹⁸ Matejka, "Kultur des Plakats," 14.

¹⁹ Körner, *Internationale Plakatausstellung 1948*, 10.

²⁰ Karl Skowronnek, "Die werbliche Funktion des Plakates," in *Internationale Plakatausstellung Wien 1948* (Wien: Künstlerhaus, 1948), 30.

²¹ Bernhard Denscher, "Bilder und Worte: Wissenschaftliche Forschung und Literatur zur Geschichte der Plakatkunst," in *Kunst! Kommerz! Visionen!: Deutsche Plakate 1888-1933*, eds. Hellmut Rademacher and René Grohnert (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 1992), 31. Denscher explains how in France, at the same time as the first poster exhibitions at the end of the 19th century took place, poster graphics were understood as an art *democratisé* with the streets becoming a *galerie en plein*. In the debate about the poster, its positive effects in educating the public in an aesthetic way was constantly acknowledged, i.e. purely artistic qualities pushing the economic function of the poster into the background. This changed around 1910, when advertising psychology and marketing studies which emerged as a sub-division of economics. As a result, the posters were confronted with a conflict of art or commerce. The two world wars and the founding of the socialist Soviet Union brought propaganda as a new field of application for posters to the fore.

²² See, e.g., Walter Dill Scott, *The Psychology of Advertising: A Simple Exposition of the Principles of Psychology in Their Relation to Successful Advertising* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1908).

²³ Slama, "Internationale Plakatkunst," 53.

²⁴ Ibidem, 54.

²⁵ O. P., "Plakate sprechen zu uns," *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 24.08.1948.

²⁶ Slama, "Internationale Plakatkunst," 49-56.

²⁷ Fall, "Bürgermeister Körner eröffnete die Plakatausstellung," *Österreichische Zeitung*, 21.08.1948.

²⁸ Matejka, "Kultur des Plakats," 16.

²⁹ Józef Mroszczak, "Wiedeńska wystawa plakatów," *Odrodzenie*, 7.11.1948.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ "Rekord Polski na wystawie wiedeńskiej," *Wieczór*, 12.09.1948; "Sukces grafików polskich na wystawie w Wiedniu," *Kurier codzienny*, 13.09.1948. One article lists Tomaszewski (five prizes), Lipiński (seven prizes), Trepkowski (two prizes), Chomicz, Karczmarczyk, Janko, Karolak, Jakubowski, Grabowski, Białostocki, Śliwińska, Bocianowski, Stanisłki, Swoboda (one prize each), in the other article Tomaszewski, Lipiński, Kreczkowski, Chomicz, Śliwińska, Jakubowski, Stawiński, Bocianowski, Białostocki, Karolak, Grochowski, Kaczmarczyk, Janko, Pawlak and Swoboda are mentioned.

³² Listing of the Polish prize winners at the International Poster Exhibition in Vienna. Aleksander Jackowski and Departament Propagandy i Informacji to Biuro Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą, 14.10.1948, MKiS BWKZ 366/12,54, Archiwum Akt Nowych. For example, Jerzy Karolak's first name was not written in the list, Otto Swoboda (actually an Austrian graphic artist) was left with question marks and Janko turned out to be the first name for Janko Kozierowski. The only woman mentioned was Ewa Śliwińska.

³³ The fact that the award ceremony and the criteria of the jury were untransparent and confusing is also confirmed by an Austrian newspaper article "Preisverteilung - wenig gepriesen," *Weltpresse*, 24.09.1948.

³⁴ See Katarzyna Matul, "La légitimation artistique de l'affiche en République populaire de Pologne (1944-1968): pratiques, discours et institutions," 168-72 on the unfortunately short-lived development of the column *Grafika* as the first attempt after the Second World War to publish specialist texts on applied graphics in Poland.

³⁵ Mroszczak, "Wiedeńska wystawa plakatów."

³⁶ "Preisverteilung in der internationalen Plakatausstellung," *Neues Österreich*, 11.09.1948; "300 Diplome für die Plakatausstellung" *Wiener Kurier*; "Diplomierte Platkünstler," *Österreichische Volksstimme*, 11.09.1948. The *Wiener Kurier* reported 300 diplomas, *Österreichische Volksstimme* counted 700, while the newspaper *Neues Österreich* mentioned 900 awards.

³⁷ Request from the International Poster Annual for reproductions of current Polish posters, forwarded. Aleksander Jackowski and Departament Propagandy i Informacji to Biuro Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą, 20.09.1948, MKiS BWKZ 366/12,54, Archiwum Akt Nowych.

³⁸ Request from the International Poster Annual for reproductions of current Polish posters, forwarded. Aleksander Jackiewicz and Biuro Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą to Stanisław J. Lec and Polnische Gesandtschaft in Wien, 11.11.1948, MKiS; BWKZ 366/12,54, Archiwum Akt Nowych.

³⁹ Jan Lenica, "Polnische Nachkriegsplakate," *Graphis* 4, no. 24 (1948): 358-62; "Polnische Plakate und Kinderbücher," *Graphis* 5, no. 27 (1949): 248-55, 99-301; Charles Rosner, "Posters for art exhibitions and films: A lesson from Poland," *Art and Industry* 46, no. 278 (1949).

⁴⁰ "Dyskusja w sprawie plakatu politycznego," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 7, no. 3 (1952); Jan Lenica, "Plakat – Sztuka dzisiejsich czasów," *Przegląd Artystyczny* 7, no. 5 (1952); *O plakacie: Zbiór materiałów z narad i dyskusji oraz artykułów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Artystyczno-Graficzne RSW Prasa, [1954]); *Plakat polski (1944-1953)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Artystyczno-Graficzne RSW Prasa, 1953).

⁴¹ Jeannine Harder, "Polnische Plakatkunst als Medium transnationaler Kunstkontakte und Kulturpolitik im Ost-West-Konflikt," in *Kunst, Politik und Gesellschaft in Europa seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Thomas Höpel and Hannes Siegrist, Europäische Geschichte in Quellen und Essays 3 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017), 191-98.

⁴² See, e.g. for Germany, Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Polen und die deutsche Ostpolitik: 1945-1990* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

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3

**POLISH ART
IN SCANDINAVIA
AND GREAT
BRITAIN**

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WŁADYSŁAW HASIOR IN SWEDEN: REASSESSING PERIPHERAL NEO-AVANT- GARDE NETWORKS THROUGH HORIZONTAL ART HISTORY

Introduction

In recent years, a growing number of publications, research projects, academic conferences, and exhibitions have emerged with the objective of scrutinising our knowledge and understanding of the spatial, political, and economic factors that have shaped the power relations in the international post-war art world. The first decades of the twenty-first century witnessed growing scholarship within global art studies, but also, more recently, urgent calls for decolonisation – both stemming from the observed need to account for the past and present bias, marginalisation, and injustice. In the Polish context, particularly significant was the project of the late Piotr Piotrowski, who proposed a ‘horizontal art history’ as a practice aimed at redrawing existing maps of artistic relations to challenge the established

art history and its dominant narrative of centre and periphery. Piotrowski’s idea found a fertile ground in other European ‘peripheries’ and beyond, resonating with increasingly common calls for revising the geography of post-war art. Understandably, this task has been particularly pressing for countries that have been cut off from the West for political reasons, such as the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. But it is also important for national art histories that found themselves marginalised (misinterpreted, overlooked, or purposefully dismissed) for other reasons. In this essay, I would like to examine two episodes from the history of post-war encounters between peripheral and semi-peripheral art milieus, that is, Poland and Sweden respectively – episodes involving the exhibition of works of Władysław Hasior in the Swedish capital and its vicinity. I am interested in understanding how the categories of

centre-periphery underpinned the context for the reception of Hasior's work in Sweden, but also in how this story can be reread today. I will look at the exhibition of Hasior's work at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1968 and the subsequent exhibition at the Södertälje Konsthall, followed by the commission for an open-air sculpture in Södertälje, which ultimately took shape as the *Sun Chariot* (*Rydwán słoneczny*) installed in the city space by the canal between 1972 and 1976.

Re-writing Polish Art History Through or For the Western Canon?

In East-Central Europe, one of the strategies of art marketing after 1989 was to seek (at least partial) revision of Western art histories and canons or to supplement their narratives with selected episodes from the local art history. These 'episodes' were chosen not so much for their significance for local art history, or not only for that reason, but often for their potential ability to transform or update existing chronologies or positions within the canon, particularly in terms of influence and/or precedence. To identify an artist as an important but hitherto unrecognised pioneer is one strategy;¹ to spot parallels indicating possible dialogues between artists representing diverse milieus, cultural traditions, or political contexts is another.² What is at stake here is not just raising the interest of the international art world, leading to an increased scholarly attention and growing market valuation. Equally important are the terms on which this happens. Will the entry of a Polish artist into the Western (and global) canon challenge or rather confirm the position of Polish art as peripheral? Can an art exhibition question the very foundations of the canon as geographically biased or does it simply 'fill the gaps,' i.e. supplement the canon?

An apt illustration of this dilemma comes with the twenty-first-century retrospective exhibitions of Władysław Hasior's work, where the curators sought for a variety of strategies to find and present new readings of his work in

order to restore his much-deteriorated position in the Polish canon, but also to revive his *oeuvre* for an international audience. A retrospective exhibition of Hasior's work, organised in 2011 at the "Sokół" Małopolska Cultural Centre in Nowy Sącz as the show inaugurating the opening of this new institution, sought to both celebrate the artist born in this city, as well as revive a popular and professional interest in his work. Both the exhibition catalogue, as well as an accompanying publication of conference proceedings, contain multiple texts that both reiterate as well as challenge the myths that arose around Hasior. It seems that, at least for some historians and critics, the temptation to position Hasior as a pioneer or predecessor of Pop Art was too strong to resist and, in fact, determined the way they attempted to rehabilitate his work after the artist's death. This often came together with a repetition of the most powerful myth about the artist – that he was a singular and isolated phenomenon. For instance, Bożena Kowalska insisted that "during his short artistic journey to the West, Hasior had most probably little chance to encounter Pop Art and New Realism, which had just begun to emerge from the tradition of Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism." Moreover, he did not "require any inspiration or role models. He made his assemblages from his own initiative and fantasy."³ With his unique vision of art he preceded "Pop Art and New Realism by at least five years."⁴ Similar claims were recurrent in older critical receptions of Hasior's work and are often still accepted; even though it has been established that the artist was familiar with contemporary art and culture, while his art seems to share a lot with that of his peers both in Poland as well as beyond. Recent scholarship clearly shows that Hasior was neither a pioneer of Pop Art, nor a completely singular and idiosyncratic artist.⁵

A retrospective exhibition organised by the MOCAR Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow (February 14 to April 27, 2014), under the telling title *Władysław Hasior. A European Rauschenberg?*, apparently sought to revamp the artist's image and refashion him as an international

pioneer as a way to challenge the Polish audience's traditional perception of Hasiór as a 'local' (and perhaps slightly provincial) artist, whose work was inspired by vernacular popular culture and fully comprehensible only within the local context of the highland folklore and Catholic religiosity. A potent source for this refashioning was found in the titular reference to Robert Rauschenberg, who famously won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1964, the same year that Hasiór was not allowed to represent Poland at this event.⁶ Certainly, the reference to Rauschenberg in the title lends our all too familiar and perhaps for some also parochial Hasiór a more international, 'cooler' air. Yet, it also positions the entire exhibition as an attempt to provide a straightforward answer to the titular question. Understandably, the viewer is prone to expect only one answer: "yes, Hasiór was indeed a lot like Rauschenberg, because...." It is difficult to imagine a show organised under such title with the sole purpose of saying: "No, as a matter of fact, Hasiór was nothing like Rauschenberg – the comparison would be groundless."

An introductory text in the exhibition catalogue, by Maria Anna Potocka, is titled *The European Rauschenberg*, but without the question mark. Potocka, however, does not focus on proving a point that there was, indeed, something like Pop Art in Poland and that Hasiór was its champion and pioneer, or that the influence of American art reached deep within the countries behind the Iron Curtain. "Hasiór and Rauschenberg did not know each other. Any similarities in the idiom and (...) aesthetic (...) noticeable in their work is quite incidental" – she writes.⁷ This statement is followed by a list of differences and similarities, which could perhaps suffice as a background for a joint exhibition of Rauschenberg and Hasiór, but does little to explain the narrative structure and objectives of Hasiór's retrospective in a newly opened museum of contemporary art. In many ways, the curatorial decision to cast Rauschenberg in an ambiguous role of a simultaneous present and absent reference point epitomises the dilemma faced by art critics and historians when they wish to secure the position of a Polish artist within the

Western canon, but at the same time they seek to emphasise the originality of his or her local vision, that is, to both update the canon, but also challenge it. To Hanna Kirchner, Hasiór's life-long friend and one of the most significant critics of his work, comparisons between Hasiór and Rauschenberg seemed as unwelcome as they were recurrent. In her essay, included in the MOCAR exhibition catalogue, she comments angrily: "And (...) why should Rauschenberg constitute a canon (...) for a Polish artist? Hasiór was taken aback by knee-jerk comparisons with the American artist during his first individual exhibition abroad, at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm."⁸

Although, as Kirchner's comment suggests, the perception of Hasiór's work through the lens of his American peer has been to some extent imposed by international audiences, it has ultimately been 'internalised' by the Polish critics, even if Rauschenberg is mentioned only as a negative reference point. Nonetheless, to use the American Pop Art pioneer as a means to better explain what Hasiór's art was or was not clearly positions American art as a model – a model of art but also a model of a strong artistic identity and authority. Curiously, when, in some critical readings, Rauschenberg and American Pop Art are dismissed as 'sources' of Hasiór's art (understandably so, since the chronology would not validate any direct influence), it is done so often to replace one Western reference point with another – the assemblages of Pablo Picasso, for instance.⁹ Even if precedence, in terms of the key influences on Hasiór's art, is given to the local vernacular art and the material culture of communist Poland, there are recurrent attempts to examine Hasiór's exposure to Western art during his motorcycle journey to France, Italy, Germany and other countries that he undertook in 1959–1960. How much did he gain from his studies at the studio of Ossip Zadkine? Did he witness the emergence of Nouveau Réalisme? Did he appreciate Surrealism? Or did he dismiss contemporary art in favour of the prehistoric and tribal art he saw at the Musée d'Homme in Paris?¹⁰ Can his art be seen as a part of the global shift towards assemblage if his first

works of this type date back to his childhood creations in the provincial town of Nowy Sącz?¹¹

Whatever the answer to these questions, there is a tendency to perceive this short excursion as a significant episode in Hasior's career as an artist and an enduring impact on his art works, only to reiterate an ongoing narrative about modern Polish art – a narrative where the story begins when a young artist goes to Paris and comes back transformed by what he or she witnessed. In this story, the West always plays the same role of an older, much richer and much more experienced, cousin. This peculiar status of East-Central Europe's self-imposed inferiority has been analysed in terms of 'self-colonising,' a concept formulated by Alexander Kiossev to describe the cultures that have "succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the West without having been invaded and turned into colonies in actual fact."¹² Consequently, their 'peripheral' position stems not so much from the West's imposed hegemony, but from their readiness to "absorb the basic values and categories of colonial Europe." In this process, where "all took place beyond colonial realities (...) social imagination had a key role to play."¹³ Self-colonising cultures internalise Western categories of centre and periphery, but at the same time reject their peripheral position or seek to struggle their way to the centre: they demand recognition. Yet, as Kiossev writes, "in this desire they had already interiorised the concepts, values, and symbolic hierarchies of the colonisers."¹⁴ Rather than be forced into the peripheral position by the colonial centre, they internalise the centre's norms and values and self-value through a comparison, consequently constituting this identity as always and already 'lacking,' inferior, not-quite and not-fully developed.¹⁵ Even if rejected, these patterns of self-perception hinder the ability to formulate independent value judgements and autonomous hierarchies. As Jan Sowa writes, the ideal self of such countries is located in the West/embodyed by the West. Self-colonisation is typical for countries which are too proximate to the centre to remain culturally independent, yet too remote or weak to become fully participant in the centre's culture on equal terms.¹⁶

Escaping the Self-colonising Condition Through Horizontal Art History

The question of how to re-write the Western canon, yet also avoid the problematic situation of doing so from the self-colonising position, is formulated from various points of view, not only a post-Communist East-Central European perspective. On the one hand, 'updating' the canon offers an illusory sense of agency or inclusion, while, in fact, as Keith Moxey insists "the point is not necessarily to attempt to set the record straight by adding or inserting local events into the framework of the Western narrative, for there is no way in which one set of events can be conceived of as equivalent to the others."¹⁷ On the other hand, the application of Western frameworks for the discussion of art whose contexts stretch beyond its alleged relationship with Western predecessors would be pitifully reductionist.

In his final, posthumously published book, *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej* (The Global Perspective on Eastern European Art), the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski reiterates his postulates for a horizontal art history and proposes how artistic peripheries can be approached and researched through the lens of postcolonial theory.¹⁸ Horizontal art history is required, he argues, since the West-centric model of understanding the dynamics of modernism after WWII pervades art historical writing up to this day; perpetuating the myths of a one-directional movement of ideas and forms from the Western art centres, Paris and New York, to the rest of the art world. Their dominant position throughout the twentieth century offers also a convenient caesura, dividing the century in neat halves, as the year 1945 initiates a process whereby modern art is gradually 'stolen' by the New World capital and the position of Paris declines.¹⁹ In art historical categories, writes Piotrowski, the period between 1947 and 1948 "marks the beginning of the clash between two universalist artistic doctrines: socialist realism and abstract modernism, introduced (...) under two competing slogans – 'peace' and

‘freedom’ respectively.”²⁰ The problem with this narrative is that it automatically explains art made in peripheral locations, such as Eastern Europe, as already related to or under the influence of the centre. To demonstrate how this interpretive bias works, Piotrowski examines Eva Cockcroft’s assessment of Polish art of the post-Stalinist era as a successful transfer of Abstract Expressionism (via Tadeusz Kantor’s visit to Paris, where he had a chance to admire the work of Jackson Pollock), which completely ignores the Polish artist’s general admiration for French art and particularly for the French *informel*.²¹ Meanwhile, in the fifties, the same fascination with Paris can be observed in post-Peron Argentina.²²

The same dilemma – was it the American Pop Art or the French Nouveau Réalisme? – seems to haunt much of the discussion of the sources of the Neo-Avant-Garde and realist art produced in ‘peripheral’ European states, for example in East-Central Europe or the Nordic countries. The problem with the urge to apply Western-derived terms to the discussion of art made in a different cultural context and often with a different objective has been aptly summarised by Katalin Timár in her text, *Is Your Pop Our Pop?*, as well as by Piotrowski.²³ Piotrowski suggests that there is a distinct difference in the types of “peripheral conditions,” which translate into a variety of trajectories of movements originating in the West. “If Sweden tended to focus on the North American art scene, Eastern Europe was (...) more ‘traditional’ and viewed Paris as the eternal capital of culture with the capital ‘C’. Because it was cut off from its Western part, it petrified the old, continental, imagined cultural relations, which at the same time were symbolic, and compensated for the loss of the paradise that Europe without the Iron Curtain was thought to perhaps be.”²⁴ Timár and Piotrowski point out that the application of terms such as Pop Art to the discussion of art produced in Central Europe (e.g. Hungary) or the Baltic countries (such as Estonia or Sweden) does little to counter the centre-periphery binary optic. Yet, equally problematic might be the focus on local contexts that seek to highlight regional variants

of post-war art as ‘original’ and ‘of distinctly local air.’ As seen from a postcolonial perspective, such distinctions merely work to emphasise and, ultimately, reinforce the peripheral position. Equally challenging, as Anne Ring Petersen argues in relation to the Nordic countries, is the task “to carve out a critically reflexive position for oneself in the semi-periphery of a global art world dominated by discourses distinguishing only crudely between the binary opposites of ‘centres’ and ‘peripheries’.”²⁵ While the semi-peripheral condition of the Nordic countries is considerably different to that of the Eastern European states, cut off from the West by the Iron Curtain, the critical model used to describe their artistic production similarly vacillates between the urge to look for Western (predominantly American) influences and highlight local variations. In effect, as Ring Petersen argues in reference to the reception of Per Kirkeby’s landscape painting, “the ‘production of locality’ in semi-peripheral art often comprises an amalgam of ‘indigenous’ and ‘international’ elements.”²⁶

Hasior in Sweden

I would like to look now at two episodes from the history of the encounter between two European artistic peripheries: Poland and Sweden and consider the critical context around the staging of Władysław Hasior’s works in Sweden – his solo exhibition at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1968 and the site-specific sculptural group *The Sun Chariot* in Södertälje. The former will serve as an example of how the relationship between the two ‘peripheral’ art milieus comes as already mediated through the Western canon of contemporary art, where the West works as an intermediary or a lens for the assessment of the artist cast in the role of an Eastern European follower. The latter will work as an opportunity to propose a way out of the aporetic situation *via* the combined methods of horizontal and environmental art history.

I mentioned earlier that Hasior, confronted with the reception of his work in Sweden, on the occasion of his solo show at the Moderna Museet

in 1968, was rather shocked that his art was appreciated only inasmuch as it was seen to originate in the Polish artist's reception of Rauschenberg. According to Kirchner, "He said mockingly that he was considered a grandson of Rauschenberg, who was used as a measure of his success."²⁷ The fact that the two artists were born within three years of each other (Hasior in 1928, Rauschenberg in 1925) did not seem to matter. The dominant narrative of the Western canon exerts a considerable, if often self-imposed, pressure on peripheral art *milieus* to self-colonise their art history and institutions, a fact that still has multiple manifestations, despite the ongoing debate on this issue. It is thus understandable that a relatively young institution such as the Moderna Museet was, in the late sixties, prone to seek self-identification as the most avant-garde, i.e. the most West-centred of the Nordic art institutions. Interestingly, when the same museum launched its first ever show of a Swedish artist (Siri Derkert in 1960), the narrative highlighted her studies in Paris in the early twentieth century and cast her in the role of a "Swedish Picasso who had brought Cubism to Sweden" (even though she was not influenced by Picasso, nor was her art recognised in Sweden at the time).²⁸ Although the contacts between Sweden and the two artistic 'centres,' Paris and later New York, were complex and often involved more of a mutual exchange than a direct flow of influence on a centre-periphery axis, the choice of major partners for this exchange seems to confirm the Moderna Museet's West-centric orientation.²⁹

The museum, opened in 1958, had primarily focused on the early twentieth-century avant-garde, with particular attention to French art. Its director, Pontus Hultén, organised some of the most memorable exhibitions of kinetic art (*Art in Movement*, 1961), as well as Europe's first American Pop Art exhibition (1964). Under his directorship (1958–1973), the Swedish museum gradually changed orientation towards American art. Throughout the 1960s, as Annika Öhrner summarises, shows of early 20th-century art (many of them of French artists) were displayed alongside a more contemporary programme.³⁰ *Movement in Art* was the first show in Sweden to include American

Neo-Avant-Garde art, which was followed in 1962 by an exhibition of *4 Americans* (with Jasper Johns, Alfred Leslie, Robert Rauschenberg and Richard Stankiewicz) and a 1964 travelling show *Amerikans Popkonst*. The latter exhibition is considered very influential in terms of the subsequent development of the local Swedish variants of social realism, which had its roots in the French Nouveau Réalisme, yet veered more towards the Pop Art photorealist practice, albeit with a distinctly critical approach towards capitalist consumer culture.³¹

Did Hasior, in the late sixties, require an 'American context' for his art to be successful in Sweden? Certainly, despite his life-long interest in the specific socialist version of popular culture and in the folk traditions of the Podhale region, he was not a locally-bound artist whose art circulated exclusively within the countries of the Eastern Bloc. He was privileged in that he could travel abroad, representing Poland at international art festivals, as well as undertaking numerous commissions and participating in group and solo shows. In 1961, he became a member of the international art group Phases and exhibited with the group at their collective exhibition in Paris in 1963 (*Voues impreposables* at Galerie du Ranelagh).³² His first presence in Sweden dates back to 1966, when his works formed part of the exhibition *100 Malningar av polska konstnärer* at the Sveagalleriet in Stockholm, followed by a travelling exhibition of Polish art in Bergen, Helsinki, and Charlottenborg the following year. Irma Kozina argues that "his Golgothas on fire, fantastic vehicles, aphorisms made of found objects were exhibited enough to influence Western artists," offering as an example the work of the Swedish artist Jörgen Hammar (born in 1935).³³ Nevertheless, the association with Rauschenberg seems understandable, particularly considering the fact that American art worked as an important reference point for assemblages and found-object works by the Swedish artist Per Olov Ultvedt, who collaborated with Hultén on numerous art projects, as well as with artists such as Jean Tinguely, Niki de Saint-Phalle, and Rauschenberg.³⁴ In Sweden very few artists at the time engaged in this type of artistic practice, working mainly in the medium of

painting. This is perhaps a reason why they would associate themselves with their French or American counterparts and, as a result, be critically interpreted through the lens of this association.³⁵

Hasior's solo show at the Moderna Museet (9 Nov – 15 Dec, 1968), although later recalled by him with some bitterness, enjoyed a good reception and was said to have impressed the viewers with the *Burning Monument* located outside the gallery building.³⁶ Reviewers writing for the *Svenska Dagbladet* newspaper noticed the element of "Polishness" and "fresh folklore," and concluded that Hasior's art was strange but also very familiar, making him one of the "most interesting European artists today."³⁷ On display were Hasior's assemblages, sculptures, banners, and parts of monuments (a total of seventy-three exhibits are listed in the catalogue). If Hasior was unpleasantly surprised by the unwelcome 'American connection,' he must have also been very much aware of the recognition of and appreciation for the Polish folk element in his art and of the generally enthusiastic reception of his work. Since his *Burning Monument* was the most captivating for the audience and seems to have been the least 'Rauschenbergian' of his works in the exhibition, then perhaps this fact had some bearing on the artist's subsequent shows and commissions in the Nordic countries, and particularly on Hasior's choice of subject matter for the open-air sculptural group in Södertälje.

In Hasior's career, the late sixties and early seventies marked a period of intense development of large-scale sculptural projects, where the intended shape was dug in the ground and filled with concrete. The emerging forms were literally torn from the ground, hence the name Hasior gave to this technique – "rzeźby wyrwane z ziemi" (sculptures torn from the ground). He had experimented with this form since the early sixties. The source for this method came from the artist's visit to a cemetery in Aix-en-Provence, where he observed empty human-shaped forms carved in rocks. Wishing to recreate this process, in 1960, he carved a shape in the ground and filled it with concrete. Titled *St. Sebastian* (*Św. Sebastian*), the work surprised the artist with

its unexpected structure and the texture of the surface, uncovered rather than created.³⁸ In 1969, he represented Poland at the First Biennial of Open Air Sculpture in Montevideo, where he showed *Golgotha* (*Golgota*), while the following year he showed his *Pieta* at the 35th Biennale in Venice. In early 1972, he had a joint exhibition with Jerzy Bereś at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark, where he made a public sculpture titled *The Burning Pieta* (*Plonąca Pieta*). Later that year, at the Konsthall in Södertälje in Sweden he again exhibited together with Bereś. Hasior recalled that its director, Eje Höggestätt, originally asked him to make a group much like the one in Montevideo.³⁹ Hanna Kirchner claims that Hasior refused, proposing instead a group of horses or Pegasuses that would be shown as if running up a green hill amongst pine trees.⁴⁰ However, the preserved sketches for the work suggest that the final idea came only after the artist walked around the town and selected the site, while the horse figures came after several other ideas were considered (such as the cyclist group), as suggested by existing sketches.⁴¹ Hasior worked on *The Sun Chariot* (*Sloneczny rydwan*, *Solspann*) from 1972 to 1973, the official unveiling taking place in summer 1973, with the artist completing the work later in 1976.⁴²

The six horses that ultimately formed the group in Södertälje were not produced in the artist's studio in Zakopane, but on site, hence their direct relationship not just with the local culture and landscape that inspired them, but also with the soil, particularly so since the stones and the texture of the dirt in the ground, the leaves, and blades of grass left their imprint on the surface of the sculptures. The forms, whose shape was strengthened with reinforcing bars placed inside the holes in the ground before the concrete was poured, were then complemented with metal additions, such as ladders and metal pipes, which, when filled with petroleum, produced the effect of the titular flame-bearing chariot. The chariot itself was drawn with white cement on the hill, with its shape inspired by the Scandinavian Bronze Age rock painting, as was the shape of the horses.⁴³ This element, however, has not been preserved to this day.

I would like to suggest that this site-specificity and inspiration with local material and cultural history works to highlight the fundamental orientation of Hasior's sculptures torn from the ground, which mark his growing engagement with nature rather than culture, the primitive and primeval rather than the technologically elaborate and technology-mediated, the landscape rather than the city. While the assemblages at the Moderna Museet exhibition could be seen to balance between the material aspect of specific objects and the semantic capacity of the object as sign, much like the American Pop Art and the French New Realism, the concrete sculptures torn from the ground are most emphatically site-specific, earth-bound, and earth-dependent. In the Polish critical discourse and curatorial practice, Hasior's sculptures torn from the ground have recently been framed by another 'American connection,' namely Land Art.⁴⁴ Certainly, the practice of making new sculptural forms by subtracting rather than adding and using the earth as the main material is recurrent in numerous examples of Land Art, with Michael Heizer's classic *Double Negative* as the first association to come to mind. Yet, as with Pop Art, this comparison seems to occlude more about the specificity of Hasior's endeavour than it clarifies, which I have discussed at length elsewhere.⁴⁵ Moreover, it dangerously removes the possibility of a creative encounter between the Polish artist and the Swedish landscape and history through an interjection of an, in fact, non-existent intermediary. Is the focus on the local landscape and folk traditions a possible way out of this impasse? After all, the Swedish critics did appreciate Hasior's ability to invest his work with elements of 'fresh folklore.' Moreover, the artist designed *The Sun Chariot* as both rooted in the land's prehistory, as well as reviving the traditions of celebrating the sun. The local inhabitants engaged annually in re-lighting the fire on the horses' backs during the celebration of *Midsommar*, while Hasior organised processions and lit the fire personally during the unveiling, as well as on other occasions.⁴⁶ These activities seem to highlight the ritualistic, even ludic aspects of this work, producing a sense of joyful appreciation of the creative powers of nature. So, does the focus on the

local help to set up new horizontal art geographies? The answer to this question is not simple. In her discussion of the Neo-Avant-Garde landscape-oriented art in East-Central Europe, Maja Fowkes argues that some scholarship on this topic mistakenly highlights the combination of 'avant-garde elements' and 'the tradition of folklore' allegedly present in such works.⁴⁷ And this, ultimately, further perpetuates their perception as peripheral.

My tentative suggestion would be to read Hasior's work in Södertälje from a perspective that combines the tenets of horizontal art history with those of environmental art history, which can allow us to, on the one hand, recognise the networks of artists and institutions formed often away from and independently of the dominating centre-periphery axes, and, on the other hand, analyse the local models of engagement with landscape not as a token of their peripheral status, but as a way of uncovering the traditions that at present can and often are revisited. Construed in this fashion, a horizontal environmental art history would seek not so much to fill the gaps in the Western art history or "supplement" the canon, but rather to bring to light the art historical facts that broaden our understanding of the history of our relationship with the environment. In this history, as recent ecocritical research shows, tradition and local forms of engaging with nature often played a more important role than any influence of the international avant-garde.⁴⁸ While, as Piotrowski argued, the goal of horizontal art history is to write histories that are "polyphonic, multi-dimensional, devoid of geographical hierarchies,"⁴⁹ that of ecocritical or environmental art history is to give voice to one of the many Others marginalised by the Modernist West-centric canon, namely nature. From this perspective, the history of Hasior's work in Södertälje, together with that of his visits and participation in the *Midsommar* celebrations, becomes a chapter in a yet unwritten history of the Neo-Avant-Garde networks formed in European peripheries, but, perhaps even more so, a chapter in the history of how the environment is gradually recovered as an important reference point and source of identification in the modernised, urban societies in the late twentieth century.

Notes

¹ For instance, the work of Katarzyna Kobro has been exhibited outside Poland with the aim of securing her position as a significant pioneer of Constructivist sculpture.

² This strategy was clearly at work in the making of the exhibition where the work of the Polish sculptor Alina Szapocznikow was shown together with other women artists, including Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse. See: Agata Jakubowska, ed., *Alina Szapocznikow. Awkward Objects* (Warszawa: MSN, 2011).

³ Bożena Kowalska, "Hasiór jako prekursor i twórca własnej wersji pop-artu," in *Granice sztuki współczesnej – wokół twórczości Władysława Hasióra*, edited by Marzanna Raińska (Nowy Sącz: MCK Sokół, 2011), 10.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ See: Romuald K. Bochyński, "Wczesna twórczość Hasióra a nowe tendencje w rzeźbie lat 60. XX wieku," ibidem, 11–14; Magdalena Moskalewicz, "Twórczość Władysława Hasióra w latach 60. na tle artystycznych eksperymentów neoawangardy," in *Granice sztuki współczesnej – wokół twórczości Władysława Hasióra*, ed. Marzanna Raińska (Nowy Sącz: MCK Sokół, 2011), 15–19; Julita Dembowska et al., eds., *Konferencja tatrzańska. Wokół Zakopanego i sztuki Władysława Hasióra* (Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzańskie, 2015).

⁶ See: Anna Żakiewicz, *Władysław Hasiór* (Warszawa: MNW, 2005), 101.

⁷ Maria Anna Potocka, "Europejski Rauschenberg/ The European Rauschenberg," in *Władysław Hasiór. Europejski Rauschenberg? / The European Rauschenberg?* Edited by Józef Chrobak (Kraków: MOCAK, 2014), 9.

⁸ Hanna Kirchner, "O Hasiórze – po latach / About Hasiór – After Many Years," ibid. (Kraków: MOCAK), 23.

⁹ See for instance: Anna Żakiewicz, "Between Tradition and the Present: on the Art of Hasiór," in *Hasiór. Powrót* (Nowy Sącz: MCK Sokół, 2010/2011), 46–47; *Władysław Hasiór*, 19–27.

¹⁰ See: Bożena Kowalska, "An Artist Innovator – a Folk But Universal One," in *Hasiór. Powrót* (Nowy Sącz: MCK Sokół, 2010/2011), 23.

¹¹ Ibidem, 25.

¹² Alexander Kiossev, "The Self-Colonizing Metaphor," *Atlas of Transformation*, published electronically, accessed 28.07.2022, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html>.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ On the notion of lack as constitutive to the Eastern European identity formation see: Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 351–430.

¹⁶ Ibidem, 373.

¹⁷ After Edit Andráš, "Who's Afraid of a New Paradigm? The 'Old' Art Criticism of the East versus the 'New' Critical Theory of the West," *ArtMargins*, published electronically 20.04.2002, accessed 28.07.2022, <https://artmargins.com/whos-afraid-of-a-new-paradigm-the-old-art-criticism-of-the-east-versus-the-new-critical-theory-of-the-west/>.

¹⁸ Piotr Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej* (Poznań: Rebis, 2016).

¹⁹ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago-London: University of Chicago, 1983).

²⁰ Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej*, 15.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem, 18.

²³ Katalin Timár, "Is Your Pop Our Pop? The History of Art as Self-Colonizing Tool," *ArtMargins*, published electronically 16.03.2002, accessed 28.07.2022, <https://artmargins.com/is-your-pop-our-pop-the-history-of-art-as-a-self-colonizing-tool/>. See also: Piotr Piotrowski, "Why Were There No Great Pop Art Curatorial Projects in Eastern Europe in the 1960s?" *Baltic Worlds*, published electronically 19.11.2015, accessed 28.07.2022, <https://balticworlds.com/why-were-there-no-great-pop-art-curatorial-projects-in-eastern-europe-in-the-1960s/?s=moderna%20museet,.>

²⁴ "Why Were There No." For a discussion of the significance of Paris for Polish modern art see: Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "Paris from behind the Iron Curtain," in *Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900–1968*, edited by Sarah Wilson and Eric de Chassey (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), 250–59.

²⁵ Anne Ring Petersen, "Global art history: a view from the North," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 7, no. 1 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v7.28154>.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Kirchner, "O Hasiórze – po latach," 23.

²⁸ Annika Öhrner, "The Moderna Museet in Stockholm – The Institution and the Avant-Garde," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, edited by Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson (Leiden-Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 117.

²⁹ On the complex relationship between Sweden and France see: Marta Edling, "From Margin to Margin? The Stockholm Paris Axis 1944–1953," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 88, no. 1 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1080/00233609.2019.1576764>.

³⁰ Öhrner, "The Moderna Museet in Stockholm – The Institution and the Avant-Garde," 116.

³¹ Charlotte Bydler and Dan Karlholm, "Functions of Realist Art in Sweden, circa 1970. Lena Svedberg and Olle Kåks," *Baltic Worlds*, published electronically 30.01.2017, <https://balticworlds.com/functions-of-realist-art-in-sweden-circa-1970/?s=sweden>, accessed 28.07.2022.

³² Marzanna Raińska, "Kalendarium," in *Hasior. Powrót* (Nowy Sącz: MCK Sokół, 2010/2011), 97.

³³ Irma Kozina, "Contexts of Władysław Hasior's Artistic Actions," *ibidem*, 67.

³⁴ On Ultvedt's collaboration with Rauschenberg see: Annika Öhrner, "Recalling Pelican: On P.O. Ultvedt, Robert Rauschenberg and Two 'Ballets'," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 76 (2007): 27-39.

³⁵ See: Björn Fritz, "Art and Politics Since 1950," in *Swedish Art History: A Selection of Introductory Texts*, edited by Ludwig Qvarnström (Lund: Lunds Universitet, 2018), 344.

³⁶ Żakiewicz, *Władysław Hasior*, 115..

³⁷ After: *ibidem*, 117.

³⁸ Władysław Hasior, *Myśli o sztuce* (Nowy Sącz: Oficyna Wydawnicza Związku Podhalan, 1987), 42.

³⁹ Hasior enjoyed international acclaim at that time and the authorities of Södertälje were apparently excited to have his piece as a permanent attraction in the public space of the town. For the details of the commission see: Gunn-Britt Robertsson, "På språng mot solen," *Kulturdelen.nu*, published electronically 2.11.2010, accessed 28.07.2022, <https://kulturdelen.nu/2010/hasior-hastarna/>.

⁴⁰ Raińska, "Kalendarium," 97.

⁴¹ See: Robertsson, "På språng mot solen."

⁴² Józef Chrobak, "Władysław Hasior. Kalendarium / Timeline," in *Władysław Hasior. Europejski Rauschenberg? / The European Rauschenberg?* edited by Józef Chrobak (Kraków: MOCAK, 2014), 238. On the details of the stages of this commission see: "Solspann by Władysław Hasior," accessed 28.07.2022, <https://www.sodertaljekonsthall.se/en/>.

⁴³ Żakiewicz, *Władysław Hasior*, 163. More on Bronze Age rock carvings in: Björn Magnusson Staaf, "Prehistoric Art in Scandinavia," in *Swedish Art History: A Selection of Introductory Texts*, edited by Ludwig Qvarnström (Lund: Lunds Universitet, 2018), 24.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of Hasior's work in reference to the Land Art of Robert Smithson see: Ewa Tatar, "Lessons in Imagination and Sensitivity," *Not Fot / Władysław Hasior's Photo Notebook* Vol. 3: Ziemia. Materia. Rytm / Earth. Matter. Rhythm (2017): 73.

⁴⁵ I discuss the differences rather than similarities between Hasior and Smithson in:, "The Grass is Greener: Władysław Hasior in an Ecocritical Perspective," *Ikonothea* 30 (2020): 155-71.

⁴⁶ On the performative and community-forming aspects of *Solspann*, as well as on the history of the processions organised for the unveiling of the first three horses, the final six-horse group in 1976, as well as another procession during Hasior's 1989 exhibition at Södertälje Konsthall see: Magdalena Figzał-Janikowska, "Miejskie performanse Władysława Hasiora," *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 71, no. 1 (2022): 21-26.

⁴⁷ Maja Fowkes, *The Green Bloc: Neo-Avant-Garde Art and Ecology under Socialism* (Budapest-New York: CEU, 2015), 17.

⁴⁸ For recent discussions of what would be the possible objective of an ecocritical art history see: Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* (Manchester: Manchester University, 2019); Susan Boettger, "Within and Beyond the Art World: Environmentalist Criticism of Visual Art," in *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, ed. Hubert Zapf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 664-82; Alan C. Braddock, "From Nature to Ecology: The Emergence of Ecocritical Art History," in *A Companion to American Art*, ed. John Davis, Jennifer A Greenhill, and Jason D. LaFountain (Chichester: Wiley, 2015), 447-68; Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher, *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2009).

⁴⁹ Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, translated by Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 27.

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THE POLITICS OF APPEARANCE: TADEUSZ KANTOR EXHIBITING IN SWEDEN 1958–2014

Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990) was one of several Polish artists to arrive on the Swedish art scene in the post-war period. Sweden is the neighbouring country of Poland on the other side of the Baltic Sea. Even though national borders had opened up, art historian Catherine Dossin has pointed out that sometimes the infrastructure of transportation and custom regulations were slow which made it hard for cultural and artistic exchange to take place.¹ In addition, the Cold War divide raised other kinds of obstacles. Regardless of these, Kantor's art as well as artworks by artists such as Władysław Hasiór, Jerzy Krawczyk, Alina Szapocznikow, Sofia Kulik, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Katarzyna Kobro, Henryk Stażewski and Władysław Strzemiński were included in exhibitions in Sweden.

This article explores the trajectory of the exhibitions with Kantor's art in Sweden between 1958 – 2014, with two main questions to be answered. Firstly, how were exhibitions conceptualized by the host institutions and galleries? Secondly, how did the art critics receive

the public appearances? These exhibitions and their critical reception have been researched by neither Swedish nor Polish scholars.² The aim here is to analyse the history of Kantor's presence in Sweden from a critical historiographic perspective. My method would be an answer to art historian Piotr Piotrowski's theoretical proposition of a 'horizontal' art history. Piotrowski's horizontal art history is a relational geography of art and it has been described by art historian Charlotte Bydler as a "relentless critique of the universalist voice of Western-Eurocentric hegemonic art history with its conceptual and aesthetic canon of styles, artists, and models of influence."³ It means that Piotrowski rejected universalism and emphasized that art historians need to study art from where it is made in Europe, but also to, again with the words of Bydler, acknowledge that artists and art historians during the nineteenth- and twentieth century kept relating to the metropolitan art concepts and institutions rather than with each other.⁴

The article answers Piotrowski's proposition in two ways. First, I circumvent the hierarchical centre-periphery axis structured by a Western geography and look at a specific local context on the margin of Europe, and, secondly, I treat the Western narrative not as the universal model, but as one narrative among others. In this case, it is a very dominating one considering the specific time period and place on the globe, Sweden.⁵ I will not look at this history as a sort of deviation from what happened at a presumed centre, but as an ecology of actors with its own debates and value formations. In the mediated history of this time period, artistic excellency and artistic influences have usually been understood as stemming from art centres such as Paris and New York in a one-way direction to the so-called peripheries such as the Nordic countries.⁶ This means that the specific relation between Poland and Sweden, with Kantor as the example, will contribute to this picture by presenting an alternative view to that of existing research on transnational exchange.

One major finding is that the conceptualization of Kantor's presence in Sweden and its reception in the Swedish media were filled with ideas of what national belonging meant. Considering that the time period was fundamentally shaped by ideological and political turbulence, this is by no means unexpected. It is nevertheless a finding that I will discuss because what is understood as 'Polish' changes over time and is still under negotiation. I understand 'Polish' as a dynamic value formation that will, above all, tell us how Polishness is understood from a Swedish perspective through the lens of the art of Tadeusz Kantor.

The history of Kantor in Sweden and the fluctuating reception of Polishness will be discussed with the concept of the 'close Others,' also used by Piotrowski after art historian Bojana Pejić.⁷ With this term, Piotrowski discusses the dilemma of artists in Central and Eastern Europe after 1945, being dominated by the Soviet Union, but still remaining European in outlook. Art historians writing from a 'vertical' position, that is from the Western art centres of that time, Piotrowski argues, couldn't grasp what was happening on

the other side of the Iron Curtain, which led to a politically-framed understanding of the art. This resulted in misunderstandings and assumptions that there were two different voices of Europe, instead of acknowledging the complexity of the situation. Piotrowski catches this complexity by stating: "(...) although the meanings of art in East-Central Europe were different from those in the West, art in East-Central Europe kept developing within the orbit of Western culture."⁸ All in all, there were not two different voices, but rather an entangled situation. Additionally, following Piotrowski, the 'close Others' would relate to each other hierarchically and legitimize their self-understanding via the centre providing the canon.⁹ As art historian Annika Öhrner formulates it, from a Swedish point of view regarding art in the 1960s; Piotrowski's proposed horizontal methodology challenges the canonical position of "stylistic premises originating in North Atlantic Art History, in the general art historical discourse."¹⁰

As a nation, Sweden was politically neutral during World War II, but as Piotrowski puts it, the country was considered to belong to the Western part of the world.¹¹ Even though Sweden is located on the Northern margin of Europe, this ideological position would give Sweden symbolic power in relation to Poland, situated in the Central-East part of Europe. However, as Piotrowski also argues, the self-image of Poland was identified by a "superiority complex on behalf of their own culture" in relation to nations in their own region.¹² The relationship between those two countries on different fringes of Europe is thus inherently difficult to define in a coherent way.

In order to comprehend this relational and changing situation, as its title states, this article will look into the politics of the public appearances of Kantor's art in Sweden. And the 'politics,' just as Merriam Webster dictionary defines the word, is understood both as "political affairs or business, especially: competition between competing interest groups or individuals" and referring to "the total complex of relations between people living in society."¹³ The article will look into the people active on the art scene in

Sweden, particularly the relations between single individuals and Kantor. And as the art critique becomes more charged ideologically in the late 1960s, the use of the word politics will change in order to reflect this shift. On the whole, the meaning of the word will fluctuate as the article follows the public appearances of Kantor's art.¹⁴

Kantor as a Modern Abstract

Painter – Polishness Within

the Universal Model

Kantor's career as a visual artist outside Poland began in the late fifties. From the beginning his artistic practice was very much an international affair with exhibitions, invitations to theatre festivals and tours, teaching positions, and longer periods spent abroad; even though Kraków remained his hometown until his untimely death in 1990.¹⁵ In Sweden, Kantor made his international solo debut in 1958 at a Stockholm gallery called Konstsalongen Samlaren (The Art Saloon the Collector). This was one year before Kantor had his first solo exhibitions in Germany at Kusthalle Düsseldorf and soon after in France, at the Parisian Galerie H. LeGendre.¹⁶ The Swedish exhibition history is not only relatively extensive, but also, as we will see, heterogeneous.

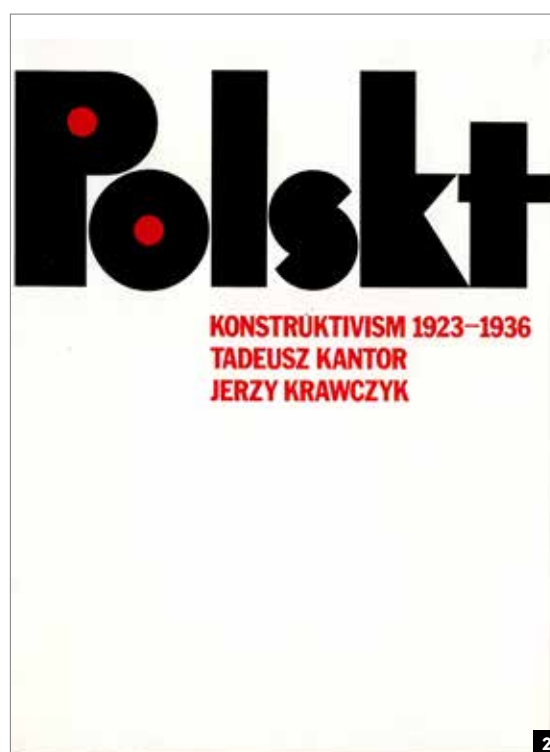
Between 1958 – 1960, Kantor's art was included in no less than five exhibitions in Sweden. After the show at Samlaren, the Art Academy in Stockholm was host for two group exhibitions in 1959. The artist-run space Galleri 54 in Gothenburg, the second largest city in the country, showed a solo presentation in 1960. The Lunds Konsthall, the public art gallery in the university city of Lund in south of Sweden, organized *Kylberg Chagall till Miro Hartung Matta* [*Kylberg Chagall to Miro Hartung Matta*], with art from the collection of businessman Theodor Ahrenberg (1912 – 1989) and his wife Ulla Ahrenberg (1931). The show included a mix of Swedish and international artists working with painting.¹⁷

Sammlaren's exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor. Polsk abstrakt expressionism* (*Tadeusz Kantor. Polish Abstract Expressionism*) consisted of twenty-seven paintings made between 1950 and 1958. The title referred to artistic style as well as national origin. This first event is of interest as Kantor met several individuals who already were or soon would be major actors on the Swedish art scene. The critic K.G. (Pontus) Hultén (1924–2006), who was to become the director of the Moderna Museet in the early 1960s, wrote an introduction. The text had a poetic tone and Hultén emphasized free form and anticipated that this new, 'modern' way to work had a future ahead of it.¹⁸ The gallerist Agnes Widlund (1911–2005) was originally from Hungary and educated at the Sorbonne in Paris. Widlund had started her gallery in 1943. She was well connected within the Swedish art scene as well as internationally, with personal contacts with galleries such as Denise René and artists such as Matisse and Picasso. She was among a small group of gallerists introducing modern art before the Moderna Museet was inaugurated.¹⁹ Her contacts, especially with Paris, made her a challenger to the more established galleries in the capital of Stockholm.²⁰

According to the memoirs of Theodor Ahrenberg, he was the initiator of the exhibition at Samlaren. Ahrenberg and Kantor became friends during the late forties when Ahrenberg travelled to Poland on business. He would later act as a patron, collecting Kantor's artworks as well as initiating exhibitions and organizing the artist's travel. Kantor and his wife, the artist Maria Stangret-Kantor, were also invited to Sweden as well as to Switzerland where the Ahrenberg couple had relocated in the beginning of the sixties.²¹ Just like Widlund, Ahrenberg was also challenging the Swedish art world establishment. He was not only a collector, but highly active as a free speaking debater, organizer of events, patronage, and well connected with museum directors, who he was not afraid of criticising publicly.²² As we will see, both in Sweden and internationally, Ahrenberg was to become a key person who acted in favour of Kantor until late in the eighties, when he passed away.



1. Photographic documentation from the inauguration of Tadeusz Kantor, *emballage*, Kulturhuset Stockholm, 1975. Photographer: Per Bergström



2. Cover of exhibition catalogue *Polskt* [Polish], Kulturhuset, Stockholm Oct 31, 1975 – Jan 6, 1976

The travelling exhibition *Kring spontanismen* (*Surrounding Action Painting*), made by the Riksförbundet för bildandekonst (The National Federation of Fine Arts Society), was presented at the Art Academy in Stockholm, and the art museums in Gothenburg and Malmö,²³ the second and third biggest cities in Sweden. The show was comprised of works by a broad spectrum of artists from various parts of the world, the oldest was Joan Miró and youngest was the Swede Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd. Swedish artists were in the majority, twelve out of forty-four artists, and the rest came from Europe with some exceptions from China, Japan, and Canada, with names such as Karel Appel, François Arnal, Alberto Burri, Jean Dubuffet, Hans Hartung, Asger Jorn, André Masson, Marcel Pouget, Sugi Kumi, and XiaoWou-Kai.²⁴ Kantor participated with *Peinture 1* (1957) and *Peinture 2* (1958) belonging to Ahrenberg.

The introductory catalogue text focused on individual artistic expressions instead of introducing stylistic schools or groups of artists. The commissioner, Lars Erik Åström, discussed the exhibited artworks in terms of *action painting* and *tachism*, and used the Swedish term 'spontanism' that can be derived from spontaneity. Åström highlighted the rhythm of the artists that was said to come alive through different application techniques.²⁵ Even if they were not in the show, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Sam Francis, and Wols were mentioned, because they were considered the ideal exemplars for the commissioner's discussion. Reading the text today, there is an interesting tension between the emphasis on individual artistic expressions and the way the artists were unified using a common language of abstraction. The different nationalities were apparently needed in order to make the

exhibition universal, which was understood as something more than the different nations together, but what the national variations signified was never explicitly discussed.²⁶

The second solo presentation took place in 1960 at the artist-run Galleri 54.²⁷ Ahrenberg was mentioned as a key person. The title of the show was simply *Kantor* and displayed thirteen canvases and an unspecified number of works in the techniques of gouache, drawing and etching, made between 1950 and 1959. In the exhibition leaflet, Kantor was presented as part of a larger tendency, wherein artists explored material aspects of painting by using unconventional substances such as varnish and resin.²⁸ Physical effects such as the tactility of the surface were also discussed. The perspective in the introduction stands in contrast to the emphasis on the spontaneity of the application technique that was the focal point in *Kring spontanismen*. In retrospect, the conceptualisation of Kantor at Galleri 54 resonates with how Piotrowski today has discussed not only Kantor's painting at the time, but also other Polish painters, positioning them somewhere between the expressiveness of French tachism and the material interest expressed by the artist group CoBrA, formed in 1948 by artists from Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam, but without their politically charged ethos.²⁹

There was almost no critical response to the two gallery shows, although in 1959, when Kantor was included in the travelling show *Femtio år polskt måleri (Fifty Years of Polish Painting)* that will be discussed below, art critics did mention the show at Samlaren. *Kring spontanismen*, on the contrary, created a debate between different artists in the art journals *Paletten* and *Konstrevy*, although Kantor was not specifically mentioned by name.³⁰ The debate circled around issues on spontaneity and abstraction, which undermined prevalent ideas about artistic craft and skills. The different parties in the debate were convinced that the radicality was within the medium of painting, but the main arguments circled around which kind of application technique was most radical.

Overall, the first three exhibitions that introduced Kantor to the Swedish audience did this by focusing on the new, modern expressions of formal and material experiments, while the reception by the art critics were more focused on the application techniques and the gestures of the artists. Kantor was seen as one of many international artists working with abstraction, independently and freely.

Kantor in Comparison – Polishness Within the East-West Divide

The second group show Kantor participated in was *Femtio år polskt måleri*, at the Art Academy in Stockholm in 1959.³¹ A honouring committee was mentioned in the catalogue leaflet, with the main text written by professor Zdzisław Kępiński, director of the painting department at the National Museum of Art in Poznań. He was also the commissioner of the exhibition. The majority of the exhibited artworks came from the collections of the National museums in Poznań and Warsaw. Among the Polish members of the honouring committee were the minister of foreign affairs, Adam Rapacki, the Polish Ambassador in Sweden, Antoni Szymanowski, and officials from the political and cultural fields, such as artist Jan Cybis and professor Stanisław Lorentz. The same kind of mix between representatives from the art scene as well as from politics and business made up the Swedish section of the committee.³² This type of counsellor exhibition, as art historians Anthony Gardner and Charles Green calls them, was frequent in Sweden during the post-war period.³³ Museums and kunsthalls were not always able to arrange temporary exhibitions with contemporary art from abroad and it created a way for organisations on a national level within culture and international affairs, to act as organizers.

Altogether works of thirty-nine artists from the generation of Młoda Polska (Young Poland) the Polish modernist generation, such as Stanisław Wyspiański, were exhibited together with those of younger artists such as Kantor, Maria

Socialism och antisemitism



Ovan till vänster är Karl Marx, till höger Vladimir Lenin
Vänster och i mitten Leonid Brezhnev

En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...

INGEMAR HEDENIUS
Tröstens villkor

Tröstens villkor • De...
Karlens villkor • De...
Karlens villkor • De...



"Han har följt sin egen väg"

En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...

SAM LIDMAN
Korta möten

Bonniers



En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...

En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...

En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...

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En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...

KONSTKRÖNIKA

KONSTKRÖNIKA
En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...



TADUEX KANTOR: Konstruktiv

En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...



Nu gör Morlett jobbet

En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...



En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...

JERNBOLAGET ESKILSTUNA



En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...

En bok som jag hoppas blir spridd bland många! Den heter...

42

Polski i Kulturhuset

Konstruktivister med uppgift att bygga en ny socialism

TEJTEKONSTNÄR Polska i Kulturhuset är en utställning av konstnärer som tillhört den konstruktivistiska riktningen i Polen. Den består av omkring 100 verk från 1920- och 1930-talet. Konstnärerna var ofta anknutna till den polska konstruktivistiska skolan, som var en av de viktigaste riktningarna i den polska konstlivet under 1920- och 1930-talet. De var ofta anknutna till den polska konstruktivistiska skolan, som var en av de viktigaste riktningarna i den polska konstlivet under 1920- och 1930-talet.

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Gustaf Aulén minnen

En yrkesman med självtillit



Gustaf Aulén var en av de mest betydande konstnärerna i den svenska konstruktivistiska skolan. Han var en yrkesman med självtillit, som var en av de mest betydande konstnärerna i den svenska konstruktivistiska skolan.

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Svenska berättare

A large grid of portraits of Swedish artists, each with a name and a brief description of their work. The grid includes names like Karl Ragnar Gierow, Maria Lund, and many others.

3. Review of *Femtio år polskt måleri* [Fifty Years Polish Painting], by Ulf Linde in *Dagens Nyheter* [Stockholm], May 8, 1959
4. Review of *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage*, by Olle Granath in *Dagens Nyheter* [Stockholm], Nov 29, 1975

Jarema, Jan Cybis and Jonasz Stern, working with modern means of expression such as surrealism, expressionism, and abstraction.³⁴ In the catalogue, Kępiński focused on long time spans with the aim of outlining the historical development of a national Polish art and highlighting key moments. He discussed how Polish painting had developed from a French tradition dating from the sixteenth century, the time of revolutions, and from the Impressionists. Kępiński also employed a system of competitive comparisons and claimed that Polish painters did well, “compared to other Western European countries.”³⁵ His statement can be seen in the light of Piotrowski’s discussion regarding how the hierarchy of art historical narratives was played out as a dilemma of ‘close Others.’ Particularly in this case where Polish art historians turned to the West and overlooked relations and transnational exchanges with nearby countries in order to construct a national art history.³⁶

Femtio år polskt måleri had several reviews in the main daily and evening papers and Kantor’s fleshy, expressive *Ramamaganga* (1957) was used as the illustration. This confirms the curiosity for Kantor’s abstract art in Sweden at that time.³⁷ Kępiński’s way of comparing the five last decades of painting in Poland with a French tradition became the central discussion point for the Swedish art critics. Parisian-oriented modernism was the uncontested standard against which the Polish national version was tested. In a review in *Svenska Dagbladet*, one of the main daily papers, Lars Erik Åström affirmed the Polish proximity to French art, especially as he knew that artists such as Kantor and Kujarski also exhibited in Paris.³⁸ Åström acknowledged their successful way of expressing themselves in a ‘modern’ way. One should note that it was Lars Erik Åström who was the commissioner of *Kring spontanismen*, which means he was already invested in the debate around informal, expressive styles at the time. On the contrary, Hans Eklund in a review in one of the major evening papers, *Aftonbladet*, found the Polish art to be inferior to what was already presented in Paris.³⁹ He also mentioned that he could see a strand of melancholy in the artworks. A third critic, Ulf Linde, in a review in the main daily paper *Dagens Nyheter*,

expressed his surprise that Kantor was so free and modern in relation to Pollock, Mathieu and Tapies.⁴⁰ What Kępiński tried to do with his catalogue essay was used against his intentions as the Swedish critics were biased. The Swedish critics, even though not speaking from the Parisian centre, seemed to perceive themselves as more Western and modern which allowed them to judge the Polish artists accordingly and they did not buy into Kępiński’s analysis.

Between 1966 and 1975, Kantor’s art was included in four exhibitions in Stockholm. Among them, *Fri polsk konst* (*Free Polish Art*) at Sveagalleriet (Svea Gallery) in 1968 (September 21 – October 13, 1968) was given much attention by the critics. The gallery was part of ABF, the educational department of the Swedish labour movements.⁴¹ In a similar way as in *Femtio år polskt måleri*, the text in the leaflet addressed the exhibited art within a national framework, although it focused on contemporary artists and not constructing a grand historical narrative on a national school. *Fri polsk konst* included artworks by fifteen artists such as Bogusław Balicki, Jerzy Krawczyk, Jerzy Federowicz, Maria Hiszpanska Neuman, to mention a few beside Kantor. The mission of the gallery was to present art from both Eastern and Western Europe, for which the organisers were also criticised because Swedish critics considered this a way to support authoritarian socialist regimes.⁴² The catalogue text focused mainly on the mission of the gallery; to “inform about art and the working conditions for artists in different countries” and to show the selected artists were united by the truly free and heterogeneous way of expressing themselves, which was also reflected in the title *Free Polish Art*.⁴³

The critical reception of this exhibition followed the same logic of competitive comparison as *Femtio år polskt måleri* (1959). Polish and Western artists were compared, including French, but now also American and British pop-artists were mentioned. The Polish artists were subordinated to their Western fellow artists, but what was most frequently expressed was a scepticism against how ‘free’ the artists really were, arguing against the title of the show by referring to the authoritarian grip the Soviet Union had on Poland.⁴⁴ Torsten Bergmark, in

Dagens Nyheter, went further saying that the artists might live under the illusion of being free, because as long as the Polish state wasn't explicitly criticized, the politicians understood the value, economical and ideological, of letting artists work as they were considered rather harmless. A tone of nostalgia, avoidance and an unarticulated stroke of sadness could also be discerned in Bergmark's critique because of the 'unfree' lives of the artists. Overall, the reviews, compared to the previous ones published a decade earlier, were much more politicised. Sweden, at the time, was facing a political radicalization. The socialist and more radical left was fragmented because of internal conflicts. During the 1970s, the left was also critiqued for becoming more dogmatic. This fragmentation also arose within the cultural field, creating different fractions among the critics.⁴⁵

By that time, Swedish critics assumed that Kantor and his fellow artists were not able to express themselves freely.⁴⁶ They took for granted that even if they were aware of modern trends in Paris or New York, they couldn't express these concerns accordingly. The artists were reduced to a kind of 'repressed essence' generated by the ideology of the Communist regime.⁴⁷ Kantor, on the contrary, was part of the circle around Galeria Foksal with other artists, art critics, and curators, highly engaged in artistic experimentation and advanced theoretical debate. Even if they can be criticised for not addressing what Piotrowski calls the "velvet prison" of the "pseudo-liberal policies of the Communist Party during the 1960-70s," they can't be criticised for not being conscious about the state of affairs.⁴⁸ Exhibiting in Sweden in the late 1960s, Kantor was nevertheless perceived as a secondary pop-artist manipulated by state ideology, to put it bluntly.

Between October 31, 1975 and January 6, 1976 the large solo exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage* was running at Kulturhuset in Stockholm. Kulturhuset was the host organization, and the show was made in collaboration with the Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, with their director Ryszard Stanisławski as the curator.⁴⁹ Altogether, seventy pieces of Kantor's wrapped art works were on display. The show was part of the umbrella project called *Polskt* (*Polish*) with two other exhibitions; the

group exhibition *Konstruktivismen i Polen 1923-36* (*Constructivism in Poland 1923-36*), with artworks by Henryk Berlewi, Karol Hiller, Katarzyna Kobro, Henryk Stażewski and Władysław Strzemiński, and a solo exhibition with Jerzy Krawczyk.

Polskt was inaugurated by the head of the cultural department of Stockholm city, Thorsten Sundström, Polish ambassador in Sweden, Stefan Staniszewski, and Stanisławski. The invited guests represented a mix of the cultural and political actors engaged in the project. The art historical ambition to represent a specific national art, expressed by the catalogue of *Femtio år polskt måleri* (1959), was absent in the catalogue essays of *Polsk*, even if Stanisławski used the national as a currency on an international scale when arguing for the relevance of the manifestation of Polish art in the capital of Sweden. What he emphasized was the ability of the exhibited artists to leave an imprint internationally and still keep their national specificity.⁵⁰ Writing about Kantor in particular, he pointed out that Kantor's artistic practice had to be seen as radical as he was the first in Poland to explore informal painting, an anti-naturalist absurd theatre, and he introduced objects in visual art.⁵¹ Kantor was presented in close proximity to a stylistic narrative based on Western art.

As I argue in my dissertation on Kantor's inherent width of artistic expression, this way to conceptualize Kantor can in hindsight be problematized according to Piotrowski's discussion on the relation between Eastern and Western Europe during the nineties.⁵² Piotrowski criticizes the way many Eastern European curators, critics, and art historians have internalized a Western canon without reflecting on how they reproduce a Western biased, so called universal artistic development.⁵³ In his critique he doesn't mention *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage*, but the large scale exhibition project *Europa, Europa* made by Stanisławski in Bonn in 1994.

Even if *Polskt* was grand in scale, the art critical attention was moderate. One fairly long review was published in *Dagens Nyheter* by art critic Olle Granath and it stands out compared to the previous ones published in relation to *Fri polsk konst* in 1968.⁵⁴ Granath did not connect

the exhibition to a Polish political context, but discussed Kantor's body of work in detail, visual art as well as his work in theatre.⁵⁵ Granath appears to be well informed about the *oeuvre* of Kantor and the artistic context of Poland at the time, which was confirmed in a conversation I had with Granath in 2015.⁵⁶ During the seventies, Granath got to know Stanisławski's work as a curator and museum director of the Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, he was acquainted with the art critic Wiesław Borowski and the activities at Galeria Foksal. Granath was to become the director of Moderna Museet 1980–1989, but he never exhibited Kantor at the museum. On the contrary, Maria Stangret-Kantor and the twin brothers Lesław and Waław Janicki, all part of Kantor's theatre group called Cricot 2, were included in the group show *Dialog (Dialogue)* made by Granath in 1985.⁵⁷

Polishness Reloaded – from Repressed to Political Radicality

After Kantor's death in 1990, artworks and objects from performances of his Cricot 2 theatre appeared in Sweden four times. Ahrenberg's collection was on display at Passagen, a municipal Kunsthalle in the university city Linköping, south of Stockholm, and at Gothenburg Art Museum, in 1993. In the reviews, Kantor's art was not mentioned. Marionettmuseet (The Museum of Marionette Dolls) showed set design with objects, costumes, and documentation, from Cricot 2's productions in the exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor. Ett livsverk (Tadeusz Kantor. Life's Work)*, in 1998.⁵⁸ The exhibition was as comprehensive as the title suggested and co-produced with Cricoteka – The Center of Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków. The exhibition was mentioned in the press, but in relation to the huge ambition the critical reception was small. In 2007 at WELD, a project space for contemporary dance, visual art and performances in Stockholm, a one evening event was held with a lecture by theatre scholar Tomas Håkanson and performance by the Polish

artists Aleksandra Kubiak and Karolina Wiktor's group *Sędzia Główny*.⁵⁹ Several of these events were organized by the Polish Institute but taken together they appear as rather disparate considering their different contexts and diffusion over time.

The last time that Kantor's artworks appeared in a temporary exhibition in Sweden was 2014, when Moderna Museet's local branch in Malmö organized the thematic group show *Society Acts* (September 20, 2014 – January 25, 2015).⁶⁰ As the title expressed, art and society was addressed, with a Baltic perspective, combining contemporary artists with works made by an older generation.⁶¹ Kantor, as one of the older artists, was represented with two artworks. The assemblage *Signez s'il vous plait* (1965) was included in the show and in the catalogue the paradigmatic photograph of the artist Władysław Strzemiński, conducting the waves of the Baltic sea, was published.⁶² Strzemiński's conducting performance was part of Kantor's *Panoramiczny Happening Morski* that took place one day in the summer of 1967 at the beach in Łazy.

In the thematic framework, that highlighted artists who intervene in the 'social fabric,' Kantor appeared as a socially engaged artist. Additionally, the time and place where Kantor was active, Poland during the Cold War period, was of interest. From the perspective of this last show, I interpret the geographical context as rather positive because Kantor's actions were understood as critical, politically and socially. As I argue elsewhere, this kind of reading can be nuanced by the writings of researchers Sebastian Stankiewicz and Klara Kemp-Welch, who independently of each other have written about Kantor's happenings. They have pointed out that Kantor's happenings first and foremost should be understood artistically in contrast to artists who, during the same time period, explored the media with explicit political and ideological intentions.⁶³ Kantor, as well as other Polish artists, strongly believed in modernist values such as the autonomy of the arts, which in turn can be read against the doctrine of social realism.

Society Acts was introduced by the director of Moderna Museet Malmö John Peter Nilsson, as being the first one to introduce Baltic artists

in the Swedish context in one hundred years.⁶⁴ The geographical focus referred to the hundredth anniversary of the *Baltic Exhibition*, an exhibition of industrial and crafted goods that took place in Malmö in 1914. Considering the current article, this statement can be discussed. And, even if the curatorial perspective of Andreas Nilsson and Maija Rudovska, expressed in the catalogue essays, is much more nuanced, the impulse of announcing oneself as the first institution in a long time to explore the Baltic region has to be understood as rhetorical. Regardless of the specific reasons for why the museum director didn't acknowledge previous exhibitions of Kantor or any other Polish artists in Sweden during the post-war period, the attitude can be understood as indicative of a larger symptom of the way this time period has been historicised in written art history.

Speaking in terms of discursive social formations, I would say that the particular venues and individuals connected to Kantor's exhibitions in Sweden, had important positions on the art scene at the time. Despite this they haven't been included in written art history, nor left any lasting impact on the contemporary historical imagination of that time. Galleries such as Samlaren, Galerie Pierre, Galleri 54, Sveagalleriet, and, Kulturhuset in Stockholm have no comprehensive archives. Compared to Moderna Museet, very little is written or discussed about their past activities, either from the institutions themselves (the ones that still exist) or within the academic field. This means that the history of Kantor in Sweden, to a certain degree, has been sealed up in a not-yet written history of these venues. Due to charges of economic crime, the collector Theodor Ahrenberg had to flee the country in the early sixties, setting up a home in Switzerland where Tadeusz Kantor and Maria Stangret-Kantor were frequent guests. Ahrenberg's legacy on the Swedish art scene is currently being considered, with a book initiative from his family. The story of gallerist Agnes Widlund, who together with a handful of other gallerists paved the way for modern art before Moderna Museet was inaugurated, is still to be written.

Even though Kantor had a long and heterogeneous history of exhibitions and theatre performances in Sweden, they were treated as peripheral by Moderna when not referring to, or building upon, them. The historical gap makes it possible for Moderna to proclaim themselves as the ones introducing Kantor and his legacy to a presumably unaware audience. My main argument, however, is that the presence of Tadeusz Kantor's art in Sweden both tells an untold part of Swedish exhibition history and gives a perspective on the Swedish art scene which was periodically marked by a Cold War rhetoric of an East-West divide and importantly, not fundamentally governed by it since artworks and theatre performances were still presented.

As art historian Katarina Wadstein MacLeod has pointed out, periphery is a "politically sensitive and contested concept in art history and portrays a disharmony between writing history and events as they were lived."⁶⁵ Following her line of arguing it is impossible to define Kantor's presence in Sweden between 1958 – 2014 in a unified way. Rather, his presence evokes questions such as, was he an artist from a peripheral country behind the Iron Curtain exhibiting at peripheral art venues in Sweden? Was he a rising star looking for opportunities in a semi-peripheral country with his eyes turned to the art centres of Paris and New York? Or, as I argue, Kantor's art was and still is present in Sweden and he visited the country many times. He had his personal connections with a smaller group of people, the critics and the audience met him with both admiration and scepticism. His art moved through the country, it appeared in several different artistic contexts in many different kinds of institutions, and the art was subjected to different kinds of debates. There is not one straight history to write, as his presence in Sweden both follows and opposes what we already know about art in post-war Europe. These new layers make the picture more complex. They have been added with the methodological approach that follows what art historian Agata Jakubowska urges art historians to do, to look from the perspective of the personal.⁶⁶

Notes

¹ Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s-1980s*. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 53-54.

² Compared to research made on Kantor's presence in Germany, Switzerland and the UK in the following two publications: Uta Schorlemmer, ed., *Kunst ist ein Verbrechen. Tadeusz Kantor, Deutschland und die Schweiz. Erinnerungen – Dokumente – Essays – Filme auf DVD* (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst-Cricoteka, 2007); Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka, eds., *Kantor was here. Tadeusz Kantor in Great Britain* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011).

³ Charlotte Bydler, "Piotr Piotrowski. In Memoriam," in *Baltic Worlds*, 3-4, 2015, 12.

⁴ Ibidem, 12-13.

⁵ Piotr Piotrowski, "Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde," in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, ed. Sascha Bru and Peter Nicholls (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 54.

⁶ Annika Öhrner, "Barbro Östlinn & New York: Konstens rum och möjligheter" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Uppsala Universitet, 2010), 189-90.

⁷ In a footnote Piotrowski mentions his reference to Bojana Pejić's essay "The Dialects of Normality," see: Piotrowski, 52-53.

⁸ Ibidem, 54.

⁹ Ibidem, 55. Art historian Marta Edling investigates the contacts between Stockholm and Paris during 1944 – 1953 and she concludes her findings by pointing out the mutual dependencies between what she prefers to call two local contexts and she stresses the importance of the translocal which rather diffuses the presumed one-way direction of centre – periphery. Marta Edling, "From Margin to Margin? The Stockholm Paris Axis 1944–1953," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 88, no. 1 (2019): 9-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00233609.2019.1576764>. And in the context of the Nordic region her research nuances how Piotrowski discusses regional contacts as governed by the relationship to centres such as Paris, when she points out that Paris, during the first decades of the twentieth century, served not as a given source of innovation, but as a key-junction where contacts to fellow Nordic artists were made, which provided peer support in future careers, "Building New Collaborations With Old Networks: The Early Years 1945-59," in *75 YEARS – The Nordic Art Association's Swedish Section*, edited by Björn Norberg, Camilla Larsson and Jonatan Habib Engqvist (Stockholm: Orfeus Publishing, 2020), 17-19.

¹⁰ Annika Öhrner, "Introduction," in *In Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop: Curatorial Practices and Transnational Strategies*, edited by Annika Öhrner, Södertörn Studies in Art History and Aesthetics (Huddinge: Södertörn Universitet, 2017), 17-19.

¹¹ Piotr Piotrowski, "Why Were There No Great Pop Art Curatorial Projects In Eastern Europe In The 1960s?" in *Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop: Curatorial Practices and Transnational Strategies*, edited by Annika Öhrner, Södertörn Studies in Art History and Aesthetics (Huddinge: Södertörn Universitet, 2017), 57.

¹² "Politics," in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*,

¹³ The philosophical meaning of the word, that can be related to the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, will be left aside, even if Kantor's art has been analysed in existential terms by dance - and art historian Martin Paul Leach, "Even the thing I am...": Tadeusz Kantor and the Poetics of Being" (Ph.D. Dissertation, De Montfort University, 2012).

¹⁴ According to Kantor himself his international theatre career occurred when Cricot 2 made *Kurka Wodna* (1967) and started to tour with this piece in the early seventies, Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine. Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Death*, translated by William Brand (Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004), 77.

¹⁵ Before 1957 Kantor's artworks had been included in group exhibitions internationally and the decisive moment for his international career as a visual artist was the solo exhibition at gallery H. Le Gendre in 1959, according to ibidem, 76-85.

¹⁶ *Kylberg Chagall till Miro Hartung Matta* (Lund: Lunds Konsthall, 1960), Exhib. cat.

¹⁷ *Tadeusz Kantor. Polsk abstrakt expressionism* (Stockholm: Konstsalongen Samlaren, 1958), Exhib. cat., n.p.

¹⁸ Rolf Söderberg, "Agnes Widlund legend inom svensk konsthandel," *Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm]*, 25.02.2005.

¹⁹ Three commercial galleries in Stockholm, Svensk-Franska galleriet, Blanche and Färg och Form, have been pointed out as the most important regarding international contacts during World War II, and Widlund's Samlaren was included in this troupe when it was opened in 1943, see: ibidem.

²⁰ Monte Packham, "Ett liv med Matisse, Picasso och Christo: Theodor Ahrenberg och hans samling," edited by Carrie Pilto (Stockholm: Arvinius-Orfeus Publishing, 2018), 285.

²¹ Ahrenberg openly challenged representatives from the larger art institutions, such as Carl Nordenfalk at Nationalmuseum and Pontus Hultén at Moderna Museet, and got himself into conflicts with several of them, trying as an outsider to steer what exhibitions the museum should put on and which art to collect. Per Borissö Bergström, Oggy Donatsch, and Jürg and Anna Strand, eds., *Ahrenberg Collection* (Göteborg-Linköping: Göteborgs konstmuseum-Östergötlands länsmuseum, 1993), 17.

²² The Federation started 1930 and aimed to introduce and spread the knowledge about art in Sweden with travelling exhibitions.

²³ *Kring spontanismen*, Vandringsutställning (Stockholm: Riksförbundet för bildande konst, 1959), Exhib. cat.

²⁴ Lars Erik Åström, "Trädet, muren och tecket," in *Kring spontanismen*, Vandringsutställning (Stockholm: Riksförbundet för bildande konst, 1959), n.p.

²⁵ Art historian Kristoffer Arvidsson researched abstract art exhibited in Gothenburg and Stockholm in the post-war period, and he also discusses the tension between abstraction considered as a universal language and the national variations, that was more of an issue if the artists were from countries further away from the presumed centres with their canonical artists, Kristoffer Arvidsson, "Den romantiska postmodernismen. Konstkritiken och det romantiska i 1980 – och 1990-talets svenska konst" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Göteborgs Universitet, 2008), 478-84.

²⁷ The gallery opened in 1959 by Group 54, with the mission to exhibit surrealism and abstract art as a way to oppose what many younger, locally based artists in Gothenburg had experienced as an unbalanced art scene. The Gothenburg art scene was dominated by the so called Göteborgskoloristerna (Gothenburg Colorism), which never acted as a formal artist group, but got a lot of attention for their particular treatment of colour and light. Group 54 was connected to the Valand Art Academy in Gothenburg and the Hungarian artist Endre Nemes (1909-1985), serving as professor at Valand between 1947-55, Håkan Wettre, "En brytningstid. Endre Nemes – en främling i provinsen," in *Valand från ritkola till konsthögskola*, ed. Irja Bergström (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, 1991), 114-19. The similarities between the local art scene in Gothenburg and Kraków with the Kapist-painters are to be explored.

²⁸ Kantor (Göteborg: Galleri 54, 1960), Exhib. cat., n.p.

²⁹ Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and The Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 75-83.

³⁰ The exhibition was discussed between the two artists Öyvind Fahlström and Rune Hagberg in several issues of *Paletten* and *Konstrevy* between 1958 – 1962.

³¹ Femtio år polskt måleri (Stockholm: Kungl. Konstakademien, 1959), Exhib. cat.

³² Minister of foreign affairs, Östen Undén, Swedish ambassador in Poland, Ragnvald Bagge, director of the National museum in Stockholm, Carl Nordenfalk, and representatives from the Art Academy, Hakon Ahlberg and Sten Karling, see: *ibidem*, 6-7.

³³ Doctoral candidate in art history Pella Myrstener points this out in her forthcoming dissertation on exhibitions in the post-war period in Sweden, and she highlights that art critics considered the exhibition format obsolete by the late 1960s and 1970s, Pella Myrstener, "Exhibiting art in a European Periphery? International Art in Sweden during the Cold War 1945-1969" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Södertörn University, 2023).

³⁴ Zdzisław Kepiński, "Inledning," in *Femtio år polskt måleri* (Stockholm: Kungliga konstakademien, 1959), 9-17.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 9-10.

³⁶ Piotrowski, "Towards a Horizontal," 56-57.

³⁷ Lars Erik Åström, "Polskt måleri under 50 år," *ibidem*, 3.05.1959.

³⁸ Hans Eklund, "Polska modernister," *Aftonbladet [Stockholm]*, 27.05.1959.

³⁹ Ulf Linde, "Konstkrönika," *Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm]*, 8.05.1959.

⁴⁰ ABF is part of the Swedish labour movements, but works independently of any party politics. The gallery existed between 1961 – 1992. *Fri polsk konst* (Stockholm: Sveagalleriet, 1968), Exhib. cat.

⁴¹ Other exhibitions in the gallery exhibition programme was *Estniska konstnärer i Sverige (Estonian artists in Sweden)*, 1963, *Jugoslaviska bykonstnärer (Yugoslav Village Artists)*, 1969, *Nutidskonst från Slovenien (Contemporary art from Slovenia)*, 1970, and *Från rumänska ateljéer (From Romanian Studios)*, 1975.

⁴² *Fri polsk konst*.

⁴³ Torsten Bergmark, "Hur fri är fri polsk konst?" *Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm]*, 2.10.1968.

⁴⁴ This development is also discussed in Arvidsson, 127-28.

⁴⁵ The exhibition had the following reviews: Bengt Olvång, "Öster- och västerut i konsten," *Aftonbladet [Stockholm]*, 26.09.1968; Stig Johansson, "Bra och prisbillig polsk konst," *Svenska Dagbladet [Stockholm]*, 1.10.1968; Bergmark.

⁴⁶ The same kind of pejorative statements was posed by French art critic Pierre Restany. Art historian Anna Markowska discusses Restany's critique in one issue of the art magazine *Cinaste*, published in 1962 (no. 57), where he meant that Kantor had lost himself in retouches influenced by the art he met while travelling abroad. Markowska also asks if Kantor's development by that time was a result of a real artistic change or "import" from a liberation journey from Stalin's Poland. See: Anna Markowska, "Rewizjonistyczny skok w Krzysztoforach," in *W cieniu krzesła: Malarstwo i sztuka przedmiotu Tadeusza Kantora*, edited by Tomasz Gryglewicz (Kraków: IHS UJ, 1997), 54.

⁴⁷ Piotr Piotrowski, "How to Write a History of Central-East European Art," *Third Text* 23, no. 1 (2009): 11-13.

⁴⁸ The exhibition in Stockholm was a version produced at Muzeum Sztuki Łódź in 1975, that was the first larger museum presentation of Kantor's art in Poland. *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage* (Stockholm: Kulturhuset Stadsteatern, 1975), Exhib. cat.

⁴⁹ This way of arguing taps into what art historian Robert Jensen says about the art canon. He discusses how a canon is constructed and reproduced by different actors on the art scene by them emphasising the historical significance of artists and artworks, how much value they had for their contemporary and future fellow artists, as a way to incorporate non-canonical artists in the canon, Robert Jensen, "Measuring Canons: Reflections on Innovation and the Nineteenth-century Canon of European Art," in *Partisan Canons*, edited by Anna Brzyski (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2007), 28-32.

⁵⁰ Ryszard Stanisławski, "Tadeusz Kantor," in *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage* (Stockholm: Kulturhuset, 1975-76), 1-2.

⁵¹ Camilla Larsson, "Framträdanden. Performativitetsteoretiska tolkningar av Tadeusz Kantors konstnärskap," (Ph. D. Dissertation, Södertörn University, 2021), 130.

⁵² Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 24-30.

⁵³ Olle Granath, "Polskt i Kulturhuset: Konstruktivist med uppgift att bygga en ny socialism," *Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm]*, 29.11.1975.

⁵⁴ Officially Sweden and Poland, with Olof Palme and Edward Gierek as head of states, had a good relationship, that got more tense with the advent of the *Solidarność* movement around 1980. During the mid-seventies cooperation existed between the Polish opposition and

Swedish organizations, which officially dealt with working related issues, but for the ones involved it also covered other political areas. The exhibition as such had no political agenda, except that Stanislawski in his introduction, expresses his hope to contribute with deepening the already established good contact between the two countries. Even if no political issues were brought up in the art critique, it does not imply that individual art critics did not know about the repressed situation of the Polish people or had sympathies for them, Fredrik Eriksson, ed., *Det började i Polen. Sverige och Solidaritet 1980-1981* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2013), 9-25.

⁵⁶ Olle Granath. Interviewed by Camilla Larsson (2015).

⁵⁷ The following artists participated in the show: Henryk Stażewski, Daniel Buren, Edward Krasinski, Lars Englund, Zbigniew Gostomski, Barry Flanagan, Maria Stangret-Kantor, Christian Boltanski, Tomasz Tatarczyk, Susan Rothenberg, Leon Tarasewicz, Ian McKeever, Lesław and Waclaw Janicki, Gilbert & George, Agneta Nordenankar, "Dialog med åtta polacker," *Dagens Nyheter* [Stockholm], 7.09.1985.

⁵⁸ The museum existed between 1973-2011 and the collection is now part of Statens musikverk (Swedish Performing Arts Agency).

⁵⁹ "Föreläsning och performance, 7 feb -07," *Weld*, accessed 29.07.2022, <https://www.weld.se/program/talk-and-performance-7-february-07/sv/>.

⁶⁰ *Society Acts. The Moderna Exhibition* (Malmö: Moderna Museet, 2014), Exhib. cat.

⁶¹ The exhibition is the third one in a series of exhibitions made every fourth year to survey the Swedish contemporary art scene. The current edition expanded those limitations geographically as timewise.

⁶² Two artworks by Kantor are in the collection of Moderna Museet; the painting *Tadana VI* (1957) donated by Theodor Ahrenberg in 1958 and *Signez s'il vous plait* (1965) bought from a private collector 1977, online search in the collection, "Tadeusz Kantor," Moderna Museet Malmö, accessed 27.07.2022, <https://sis.modernamuseet.se/search/Tadeusz%20Kantor>.

⁶³ Stankiewicz discusses differences of this kind between Kantor and Jean-Jacques Lebel and Volf Wostell, Sebastian Stankiewicz, "Akcyjizm Tadeusza Kantora w kontekście happeningu zachodniego. Kilka uwag na temat odrębności," in *W cieniu krzesła: Malarstwo i sztuka przedmiotu Tadeusza Kantora*, edited by Tomasz Gryglewicz (Kraków: IHS UJ, 1997), 61. Klara Kemp-Welch discusses Kantor's happenings in relation to dissident ideas of 'anti-politics' and 'politics outside politics,' Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central European Art. Reticence as Dissidence Under Post-Totalitarian Rule 1956-1989* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 4-9.

⁶⁴ John Peter Nilsson, "Introduction," in *Society Acts. The Moderna Exhibition* (Malmö: Moderna Museet, 2014), 9.

⁶⁵ Katarina Wadstein MacLeod, "Troubling Peripheries: Pierre Restany and Superlund," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift / Journal of Art History* 90, no. 1 (2021): 13.

⁶⁶ Agata Jakubowska, "Personalising the Global History of Pop Art. Alina Szapocznikow and Maria Pininska-Beres," in *Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop. Curatorial Practices and Transnational Strategies*, edited by Annika Öhrner (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2017), 257.

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FROM A DEMARCATION LINE TO A LIVING ARCHIVE. DOCUMENTARY EXHIBITIONS OF THE FOKSAL GALLERY IN THE BRITISH ISLES

The presence of the Warsaw-based Foksal Gallery in the British Isles through the so-called documentary exhibitions is undoubtedly a special case of artistic contacts across the Iron Curtain. On the one hand, we have a small gallery aiming at 'avoiding the state of certainty,' which has been operating since the mid-sixties, simply taking advantage of 'opportunities' and additionally a gallery operating in the systemic circumstances of the Polish People's Republic, effectively stifling any dreams of international power. "In this country and under these conditions? All you were thinking about was a minimum of normality in your environment," argued Wiesław Borowski, a long-

term gallery manager, one of the main characters in this text.¹ On the other hand, the Foksal Gallery was under the patronage of the Fine Arts Workshops State Enterprise, a state-owned monopolist responsible for the visual and artistic culture of the state. Paradoxically, however, the art critics running the institution placed it outside the official current of art supported by the cultural authorities of that time, presenting art that usually did not appear at the Zachęta Gallery or in the network of so called Bureaus of Artistic Exhibitions.² Yet, it was exactly the Foksal Gallery that was invited to the British 'classy establishments' in 1979 – to Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, and Dublin. I would

like to take a closer look at these events, which I see as the culmination of a longer process, as a result of which a network of personal friendships built across borders translated into institutional cooperation and specific artistic projects carried out by artists and institutions from opposing political blocs. The personages of Richard Demarco, Tadeusz Kantor, and Wiesław Borowski seem to be the key in the 'British case' discussed here and it is on them that I would like to focus my attention. Using the example of a series of exhibitions presenting the achievements of the Foksal Gallery, I will analyse the sequence of events that led to their presentation in the British Isles, and then I will consider the strategies that were employed in organising the exhibitions. This will shed light on a few questions relating to the reception of Polish contemporary art abroad, the opportunities for cooperation in the period of political divisions, and ways of building a position on the basis of documenting art and gallery archives.

Demarco and Polish Art

I will start my story with Richard Demarco (b. 1930), a Scottish artist, theorist and outstanding proponent of European culture. Undoubtedly, his person is absolutely crucial here. This was already emphasized by Nicholas Serota, an influential curator and one of the most eminent British gallery managers. He argued that Demarco – an Italian-descent Scotsman, founder of the Traverse Theatre (1963), co-founder of the Richard Demarco Gallery (1966-1992), co-creating the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh for many years – inspired them all by bringing visual arts from other parts of the world, and precisely from Eastern Europe, long before it became an element of curatorial practice.³ This attitude stems from a number of sources, but first of all, it should be noted that Demarco was involved – initially as a spectator, then as a curator and one of the directors – in the Edinburgh International Festival. This unique event was initiated in the second half of the forties by Rudolf Bing and Henry Harvey Wood. The idea of this enterprise

was international in its very foundations as it was supposed to build a platform of artistic agreement across political borders, because, as Demarco explained, what the world divided by the Cold War needed was the language of art. "the highest level of music, theater, and performing arts. It was a language of healing."⁴ It was a response to the trauma of World War II, to the divisions it had created, and a way to heal war wounds. The annually held festival gained increasing fame and recognition. Today this general name covers a whole series of independent events (festivals) including various forms of artistic activity.

In the context of Polish art, the 1972 edition was undoubtedly important. The exhibitions organized as a part of the so-called official festival by the Richard Demarco Gallery were already a very important part of this complex event at that time. The festival, in its musical and performative part, was truly international, but this did not apply to the visual program, which was largely limited to the territory of Scotland and, at best, to Great Britain. Taking the opportunity that the festival attracted audiences from outside the British Isles, Demarco tried to overcome these limitations and invited the European avant-garde to Edinburgh. It was thanks to him that a wide presentation of Polish contemporary avant-garde artists took place. Titled *Atelier'72* it overshadowed similar projects after 1945 with its scale.⁵ Of course, the context of this largest exhibition of Polish avant-garde in the West in the post-war history of Poland is somewhat broader, as it cannot be forgotten that two years earlier, the exhibition of German art *Strategy: Get Arts* (1970) had taken place. This exhibition referred to the art community from Düsseldorf (headed by Joseph Beuys), a city that challenged New York as the world's capital of visual arts. Demarco did not want to be considered a representation of the whole of Europe; hence the *Romanian Art Today* exhibition (with Paul Neagu) was held already in 1971. He realized, however, that the small size of this exhibition hampered a proper assessment of what was going on in the East and West.⁶ This is how *Atelier'72* came to pass, with the participation of over forty Polish artists, as well as

Eight Yugoslav Artists (with Marina Abramovic) in 1973. Demarco compared the importance of the Polish show to *Strategy: Get Arts*, which, as Cordelia Oliver (painter and art critic) argued, quickly became a legend, not only in Scotland or Edinburgh itself but it was widely echoed far beyond Great Britain.⁷

Atelier'72 was not only an exhibition-review of the Polish post-war avant-garde but also an attempt to present it in an international context⁸ – which was also credited to Ryszard Stanisławski, the director at the time of the Museum of Art in Łódź. The museum was officially a partner of this undertaking. Wiesław Borowski also participated in its organization, and among the artists there were creators associated with the Foksal Gallery, such as: Stanisław Dróżdż, Zbigniew Gostomski, Koji Kamoji, Tadeusz Kantor, Edward Krasiński, Maria Stangret, Henryk Stażewski and those who had their presentations in it, like Jerzy Bereś, Włodzimierz Borowski, Zbigniew Warpechowski. It was one of the significant advances in opening Great Britain to Polish art. Why did Demarco choose Poland? The organizer himself spoke of it: “for everyone has forgotten what the Poles have achieved. And they helped win the War. I have always believed that Poland and Poles represent the true culture of Europe.”⁹ Demarco had the opportunity to get to know the Polish diaspora in Scotland. Here it was a diaspora of immigrant former soldiers (Polish military units were based in Scotland, and a network of hostels for Poles was established there immediately after the War), Demarco saw soldiers pray in Polish uniforms, he taught their children at an Edinburgh school. As he recalled: “They were a new kind of Scotsmen. (...) I thought Poland was an important unexpected new dimension in Scottish history.”¹⁰ The Traverse Theatre (Gallery) established by him in the sixties, and later the Richard Demarco Gallery, gave him space to implement his plans to overcome the Cold War divisions in the sphere of culture.¹¹ He found a fairly good moment for his ideas. In the early seventies, Poland, under the rule of Edward Gierek, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, started a policy of

opening up to the world and developed extensive trade contacts, also with capitalist states, while still being deeply dependent on the Soviet Union. It was also a time when, in the pursuit of normalising international relations, a kind of second Thaw took place in culture and science. But like the former one, in 1956, it did not last long. Riding on this new wave, however, projects such as *Atelier 72*, officially supported by the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art, as well as the Polish Cultural Institute in London, the consulate in Glasgow, and on the British side - the British Council, became possible. Here, Demarco acted as the director of the Richard Demarco Gallery and director of exhibitions related to contemporary art at the Official Edinburgh Festival, which allowed him to gain access to the Ministry of Culture. During the meeting, he received from the communist authorities a list of artists whom they wished to promote in the West. Yet, he was interested in people who were not on that list.

Wiesław Borowski and *Studio*

International, Kantor with Successes in Great Britain

One of these unlisted people, and one of the most important ones in the narrative unfolding here, was Wiesław Borowski (b. 1931). A Polish art critic of similar vintage to Demarco, he had been co-managing the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw since 1966. At the beginning of the seventies, this gallery was not a completely unknown establishment. In 1970, it participated in the prestigious 3e Salon International de Galeries Pilotes in Lausanne (and Paris), as one of the four galleries from Eastern Europe, taking into account all editions of the event. It was undoubtedly a significant event for the Warsaw-based gallery. This review achieved an international status. Numerous critics arrived in Lausanne, then going straight to the parallel Biennale in Venice from there. They were attracted to the Swiss museum by “determined commitment to what is avant-garde in the contemporary art

and rejecting features of commercialism." The presentation of the Polish gallery did not go unnoticed, but the participation alone - taking into account the situational context of the institution locked on the 'wrong' side of the Iron Curtain - at an international meeting of sixteen galleries selected from around the world (in the third edition) was both unexpected and ennobling.¹² It should therefore not be surprising that Demarco, being in Warsaw in the summer of 1971, headed directly for Foksal.¹³ Borowski recalled it as follows:

then I met him with Kantor; we went to Kraków, he saw a piece of 'The Water Hen'. He was delighted and invited the Cricot 2 theatre to Edinburgh. Simultaneously, he invited a number of Polish artists to an exhibition in his gallery, because he accepted the mission and decided that he was most interested in the art of Eastern European countries. He invited our crew from the gallery, Koji Kamoji, Dróżdź, Narkiewicz, Jurkiewicz and many others.¹⁴

This is how the long-term cooperation began. Then, in Warsaw, but also in Łódź, Wrocław and Kraków, Demarco met artists who made a great impression on him and whom he wanted to present on the western side of the Iron Curtain. He spoke about it years later:

It was them who filled me with hope that despite the nightmare of the Cold War, Polish culture had a future ahead of it. They also reassured me that without Poland, Europe would not be able to compete in the field of art with the world centre, which was New York. These Polish artists of the Cold War period recalled still vivid memories of Polish uniformed soldiers I had seen in Edinburgh, who were a living testimony to Europe plunged into the chaos of war.¹⁵

Nicholas Serota, talking about those first Polish-British contacts, first of all emphasised the role played by Borowski: "We all knew that he

ran the [Foksal] Gallery in a very unusual way by the standards of those years. It was his sensitivity and awareness that brought these two related groups of artists in Britain and Poland closer."¹⁶ One of the platforms for this rapprochement turned out to be the prestigious magazine *Studio International*, edited by Peter Townsend (later a friend of Borowski's), which welcomed art from Central and Eastern Europe. Townsend (1919-2006), a publisher, writer and sinologist (with a colourful past in China during the Mao Tse-tung revolution), was at the helm of *Studio International* for a decade (1965-1975). It is the longest running British art magazine, with a tradition dating back to 1893, but had slumped into stagnation before Townsend took it over, lost its radical edge, and was 'international' in title only. The new editor, while preserving the legacy of the magazine, caused it to gain a truly 'overseas' reputation and perspective. Emphasising London's geographic location between Europe and the United States, he made available space on the magazine's pages for new experimental art practices challenging the status quo and hierarchy of power in the art world, including those extending beyond American cultural domination. He developed a network of collaborators; both young and leading critics from Western and Eastern Europe, the United States, as well as South America, Japan and Australia and posted their texts in *Studio International*. All this coincided with the British Council-led modernisation of British contemporary art, which was to become an international export commodity in the seventies. Thanks to Townsend, *Studio International* was at the centre of these changes, and Townsend himself was regarded by many as a key figure in the British art world from the late sixties to the early eighties.¹⁷

This British man turned his attention to what was happening behind the Iron Curtain, being aware of how poorly documented the art from this region is in Western mainstream art magazines. The person of Tadeusz Kantor was introduced to him by Richard Demarco, as both men regularly corresponded with each other.¹⁸ Wiesław Borowski turned out to be an indispensable 'liaison,' but his

appearance in the English magazine was connected with Czech art and the figure of Henryk Stażewski. Still in 1970, a historian and art critic Jindřich Chalupický was invited to collaborate with the magazine. He prepared occasional articles on contemporary art in Czechoslovakia. In one of them he referred to the Prague exhibition of Stażewski, a pre-war constructivist, known in Great Britain for his activities in the groups Blok, Abstraction-Création and Cercle et Carré, and his articles attracted the attention of the editor-in-chief of the *Studio International*. In Stażewski, he found a direct connection between the subject of interest to him, i.e., the constructivist understanding of painting and sculpture, and contemporary artistic activity in Poland, the most interesting manifestation of this for him were the happenings and theatrical performances by Kantor, as well as the artistic activities of Edward Krasiński, which he had seen at *Atelier'72* in Edinburgh.¹⁹ Borowski knew them all, befriended them and they established the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw together. It constituted a platform through which these contradictions could function in harmony. At Townsend's request, Borowski conducted an interview with Stażewski in 1974, which was published in *Studio International*. The same year, he presented an article about Kantor and his Cricot 2 theatre to the British audience in an earlier issue.²⁰ In this way, Townsend wanted to deepen the discussion on Kantor's work and show a wider perspective than the British newspapers had shown so far.

The magazine's editor had a good sense of the subject. Undoubtedly, both of the artists, Stażewski and Kantor, can be described as 'artistic guides' of the Foksal Gallery, representing various artistic traditions.²¹ For Townsend, the activity of Kantor in the theatre was a logical extension of the trajectory from constructivism to happening – the theatrical representation of temporality. The other side of this activity took the form of shows – revolutionary for the British – organised by Kantor at the Edinburgh festival. They caught Townsend's interest as practices combining painting, theatre and performance.²² It was similarly perceived

by Borowski, who explained in his text that Kantor's experimental practice had its roots in constructivism and dadaism; that it represents the totality of experiences in which the methods are part of creating the work and not a separate entity; that the Polish artist wanted to show reality in action.²³ Years later, Townsend himself considered Borowski's article about Cricot 2 to be one of the most important during his tenure at *Studio International* (along with such authors as Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Carl Andre and Roger Hilton).²⁴

Wiesław Borowski's activity in the British Isles was in large part due to Tadeusz Kantor and the consequences of his meeting with Richard Demarco. The Cricot 2 Theatre, until then completely unknown in Great Britain, achieved its first international success in Edinburgh in 1972. The cooperation between Demarco, Borowski and Kantor developed in the following years. A year later in 1973, Kantor appeared in Edinburgh with a new play: *Lovelies and Dowdies*. Borowski, who was accompanying him in the role of a 'curator' ('accompanying critic'), met Sandy Nairne, the future head of The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (ICA). He also met Joseph Beuys and Caroline Tisdall who was his partner and a critic from *The Guardian* during the rehearsals of a new play.²⁵ These were important acquaintances. Kantor came to Scotland for the third time in 1976 with his performance the *Dead Class*, which sealed his worldwide fame. The performance aroused wide-reaching interest. It was then that Kantor met David Gothard and Erica Bolton from Riverside Studio, who managed to turn the place into the centre of worldwide dramatic art in a short time. It was them who brought the Cricot 2 Theatre to London for the first time. Meanwhile, Nicolas Serota, in the wake of the audience's highly enthusiastic reaction to Kantor's theatrical experiments, organised a great exhibition of the Polish artist's wrapped-up objects (*French emballage*) with Borowski's assistance the same year. It was held at the prestigious Whitechapel Art Gallery in London. Borowski said:

It was a large gallery, then perhaps the most prestigious, next to ICA, in London. (...) I travelled with Kantor by taxi between Whitechapel and Riverside (two ends of London) every day because they were playing the *Dead Class*. (...) Carol Tisdall wrote a review, some few interviews were in the evening press... However, I would not say it was a success. Kantor outshined his paintings in London with his theatre. *The Dead Class* was the 'number one' event.²⁶

All these trips with Kantor's Cricot 2 brought Borowski new and valuable international contacts. He made the acquaintance of critics, gallery owners, collectors and, of course, artists. This made it possible to exchange letters, obtain materials and further addresses, as well as to invite people to hold an exhibition in Warsaw. Borowski found invaluable support from Milada Ślizińska and Andrzej Turowski. Together in the seventies they tried to find good foreign artists for the Foksal Gallery. In terms of exhibitions, they could also count on the British Council and the Museum of Art in Łódź - financially and institutionally. As a result, the gallery became ever more international, choosing the "British direction" increasingly often. At that time, Foksal was visited by, among others, Cambell (Tam) Mac Phail (1973), Art & Language (1975), Victor Burgin (1976), John Hilliard (1978, 1979), Ian McKeever (1979), Michael Craig-Martin (1979). All this happened between *Atelier '72* and Foksal's trip to the British Isles.

Documentation Boxes

The opening of the space in the Foksal Gallery to a strong British representation, introducing Kantor to British readers as well as the contacts and friendships with representatives of the local art world, caused the Warsaw gallery to be invited to a kind of 'Foksal tour' around the United Kingdom. Its main element was the retrospective exhibition *Foksal Gallery PSP*, presenting theoretical achievements and documentation of the gallery's

activities over the years 1966-1979. It was shown successively in: Richard Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh (August – September 1979), the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow (October – November 1979), the ICA Gallery in London (December 1979 – January 1980), and the Project Arts Centre in Dublin (June – July 1980). Borowski recalled:

We prepared fantastic documentation and enlargements on photographic canvas with Turowski. Jacek Stokłosa, following in Kantor's footsteps, designed beautiful boxes. However, Kantor's boxes were black and ours were immaculately white with black inscriptions. (...) We included all the entries about our texts on the living archive and the entire history of the gallery. Quotes and some enlarged photos. It was quite a load.²⁷

What did it look like in detail?

The exhibition consisted of 10 parts. Part I contained a text describing the contents of the exhibition, a reproduction of the *Documentation* (1971) leaflet, a photograph from *The Sinking* with a text about this action from the *Panoramic Sea Happening* (1967), a photo of the gallery archive (box) and a fragment of the text from the *Living Archive* manifesto (1971), fifteen exhibition posters and the famous photography from the action *We See You* (i.e., the faces of critics and artists at the gallery's window, 1969), texts about the history of the gallery and its basic tasks.²⁸ Part II discussed the stage of the gallery development, called 'gallery against exhibition.' It consisted of the manifesto text *Introduction to the General Theory of Place* (1966), a photo and text from Tadeusz Kantor's *Popular Exhibition* (1963), a photo from Włodzimierz Borowski's *The Sinking* with a description (1966), a photo from Zbigniew Gostomski's *Environment* with a description (1967). Part III presented the 'elimination of art in art,' which included a text by Wiesław Borowski of the same title (1967), photographs of Władysław Strzemiński's unistic painting with a fragment of

The *Unism*, from Kantor's *Multipart* action along with an agreement signed between the artist and the buyer of the work (1970), from Henryk Stażewski's exhibition and a photo of his white relief and linear sculpture by Edward Krasinski. The stage of the gallery's development referred to as 'the object beyond painting' defined the fourth part which consisted of four photographs from Kantor's happenings (*The Letter* - 1967, *Panoramic Seaside Happening* - 1968, *An Anatomy Lesson According to Rembrandt* - 1969) along with two scores and actions: Alain Jacquet's *Tricot* with description (1969), Druga Grupa [Second Group]'s *Iodine* (1968), *Four-Person Hat* by Kantor's Students (1969), Jerzy Bereś's manifestation. It was supplemented by subsequent texts: Kantor's definition of a happening and his text on the object, Anka Ptaszewska and Wiesław Borowski's comments on happenings, a table with a list of happenings implemented in Poland. Part V was filled with documents which fit in with the slogan 'gallery against the gallery,' i.e. the manifesto *What We Do Not Like About the Foksal Gallery PSP* (1968), a description of individual events (with numbering) and then photographs: of the gallery's participation in an exhibition in the Wrocław Town Hall (1967), Gostomski's *Windows Without a View* and Kantor's can with the inscription 'open in 1984' (1969) created as part of the Winter Assemblage. It was complemented by subsequent photographs on canvas: a drawing by Zbigniew Warpechowski (1971), a view of the *Collective Exhibition* (1971) and shots from the Golden Grape Symposium in Zielona Góra – an action of Kantor's students *We Are Not Asleep*, a stand and the action of copying Druga Grupa [Second Group] (1969). *Things and Thoughts* constituted part VI of the exhibition and included a photograph of the letters and typescript of László Lákner (1972), photographs with a description of the action *Remembering* by Druga Grupa (Second Group) (1972), a line in the Tam Mac Phail gallery (1973), a reading at the Bernar Venet gallery with text (1973), reproductions from a photocopy of Victor Burgin's photographs (1976), three photographs presenting a series of Jarosław Kozłowski's shows *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *ics* (1972,

1974), Gostomski's diagram *It begins in Wrocław* (1970), Kantor's conceptual emballage *Cleopatra's nose* together with text (1971), a photograph of the rainbow and a sketch from the exhibition *Braille* by Alain Jacquet (1970). This part ended with a photograph showing the installation *Between* by Stanisław Dróżdź (1977), accompanied by the lonely English word 'between' on the side. The next stage of the gallery's development was described by the authors of the exhibition as 'gallery against documentation.' This section, or Part VII, referred to the *Living Archive* exhibition (1972), which was presented by means of the photographs of the exhibition, reproductions of a flyer and a letter to artists, a description of the exhibition. They were accompanied by a reproduction of the *Documentation*. Part VIII covered what was hidden under the slogan 'gallery against pseudo-avant-garde:' the original poster for the exhibition *Documentation* (1971), a translation of the text from the poster, and an excerpt from Borowski's article *Pseudo-avant-garde* (1975). The next part, 'art and something else,' already IX, was represented in large numbers by photos and short descriptions accompanying them. It consisted of the following artists' works: Andrzej Szewczyk's *Paintings from Chłopy* (1978), Kantor's *Everything Is Hanging by a Thread* (1973), *Grey Rabbit... etc.* Art and Language (1975), wall paintings by Joel Fisher (1978), *Vehicle* (1973) and *Drawing of a Line* (1974) by Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Thinking out loud* by Tom Marioni (1975), *Particolare* by Giovanni Anselmo (1974), *Projection II* by Druga Grupa (Second Group) (1973), *It can be presented everywhere* by Robert Barry (1973), Gostomski's *Ulysses* (1970), Ben Vautier's banner with slogans (1974), one of Dróżdź's 'ideaforms,' Michael Craig-Martin's wall drawing (1979), *Photographs* by Zygmunt Targowski (1971), Christian Boltanski's *Les images stimuli* (1978), John Hilliard's photographs (1978). The last one, part X, referred to the 'collection outside the gallery' and was illustrated with a reproduction of the text *Collection* by Borowski and Turowski (1978).

The same set of documentation was presented successively in Scotland (Edinburgh,

Glasgow), England (London), Ireland (Dublin), but in each of these places, it was 'packaged' differently. The broadest perspective was proposed by Richard Demarco. He included photographs and texts from Foksal in his gallery (depicting 'its philosophy and approach to artists and art education'). At the Gladstone Court, he organized a presentation of *Ten Polish Contemporary Artists from the Collection of Muzeum Sztuki Lodz* (these were "selected sculptures and paintings from one of the most important collections in Poland"). At the Fruitmarket Gallery, he juxtaposed two veterans of the Polish avant-garde with exhibitions: *Stanisław Witkiewicz 1885-1939* (featuring him as "an artist and playwright who was one of the main inspirations for contemporary Polish theatre, especially Kantor and his Cricot 2") and *Henryk Stażewski – Recent Paintings* (these were "contemporary works by one of the founding members of Constructivist groups in Poland, collaborating with Malevich and Miro"). The whole thing was advertised by him as *Polish Avant-Garde 1910-1979*.²⁹ In the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, apart from the documentary exhibition, the above-mentioned shows of works by Witkiewicz and Stażewski were presented. Only the boxes with the documentation of the Warsaw gallery's activity appeared in Dublin. On the other hand, at the ICA in London, which – as Borowski recalled, gave them the best rooms on the floor – the artists from Druga Grupa (Second Group), i.e. Lesław and Waław Janicki and Jacek Stokłosa, appeared as a 'living element' in the creative output of Foksal presented in a documentary fashion.³⁰

They came to London thanks to the fact that Sandy Naire, the head of this prestigious institution, paid for their trip to England. Naire was fascinated by Kantor's work and had helped organise the performance *Lovelies and Dowdies* at Demarco's in Edinburgh a few years earlier (he even replaced Borowski in the role of a millionaire in this performance - it was his first stage appearance, after which he became Kantor's only British 'actor').³¹ Borowski recounted:

Druga Grupa (Second Group) did various shows with us in the gallery, excellently prepared, very witty actions. Our documentary exhibitions, shown in English, might have been a bit boring for the viewers, too sophisticated, conceptual and propagandistic. Turowski was very involved in them, the Janicki family and Stokłosa were there as a living example.³²

Druga Grupa (Second Group), associated with Kantor and his Cricot 2 theatre and with the milieu of the Kraków Krzysztofory Palace, also collaborated intensively with the Warsaw-based Foksal in the first half of the seventies.³³ The artists who formed the group recognized the necessity of 'intervention activities' - actions revising the rules of conventions, conventionalized objects and activities. Most often it was achieved by exaggerating one of the elements organizing a given situation – for example, a simple life activity – and reducing it to an absurdity.³⁴ Their activities included various artistic media: happening and a form similar to the performance in our present-day understanding thereof, as well as painting, graphic techniques, and processed photography. The activity of Druga Grupa (Second Group), as Łukasz Guzek wrote, can be situated at the turn of the artistic eras: the elements of the works created under Kantor's influence belong to the visual arts of the sixties, while their attempts to free themselves (and to deny this dependence) should be referred to the artistic issues of the seventies. In the artistic practice of the group's creators, paratheatrical and happening actions and Dadaist wit were combined with conceptual thinking, which dominated especially in their event-type actions. More than once, playing with such notions as 'art' or 'work,' they questioned the institutions of art, its functioning in the buy/sell system, and the sense of producing objects-artefacts.³⁵ In one of the performances, they referred to the idea of *The Living Archive*, which was directly referred to in the documentary presentation of the Foksal Gallery in the British Isles. It was a performance called: *Remembering* (1972) carried out in a Warsaw

gallery, in which the artists learnt by heart any text proposed by the audience, declaring a 'full commitment to remembering' and at the same time not using it for any purpose.³⁶ Luiza Nader saw it not only as an extreme test of the memorising capabilities of artists, but also as a contestation of the practice of abusing the "procedures of indexing reality and documenting one's own activity," present both among conceptualists and in the bureaucratic space of a gallery or archive.³⁷

The presence of Druga Grupa (Second Group) in London confirmed the self-critical approach represented by the Foksal Gallery, and at the same time brought 'some ease and distance to serious art' – especially that a seminar and a discussion about the gallery were organized before the presentation of Foksal's documentation. It was attended by Borowski and artists cooperating with the Warsaw facility: Michael Craig-Martin, Joel Fisher, and Ian McKeever. In his speech, the Polish critic emphasized that the Foksal Gallery functions on the outskirts ('off the main routes') of Western art, and at the same time its situation in Poland is similar, on the border of official and approved cultural life. In this context, he argued that, as an isolated gallery, it did not show art that was representative of Polish art in general.³⁸

Dividing Lines and Dialogue Between Traditions

The reactions of the British press referred largely to these ideas. At the beginning, one can recall the enthusiastic opinion of the *Daily Telegraph*, in which the author agreed with Demarco's words that the Warsaw gallery is among the most fascinating ones in the world. Terence Mullaly emphasized the gallery's international reputation and the fact that it had a guaranteed place in the history of the twentieth-century avant-garde. He also noticed that the gallery presented art completely different from the 'ruthless conservatism' of the socialist realism doctrine, with which modern art in the Soviet Union, and thus the entire 'artistic production' in

the countries of the Eastern Bloc, may be associated with it.³⁹ Felix McCullough from *Art Review* emphasized that it was Richard Demarco's direct contacts with Ryszard Stanisławski and Wiesław Borowski and the Ministry of Culture in Poland that led to the organization of this three-part exhibition in Edinburgh. Owing to this, what was official and acceptable was allowed to meet what was radical in Polish art on a neutral ground. According to the reviewer, this testified to a specific situation of the Polish art scene, the possibility of a certain tolerance and compromise. The festival featured the constructivist works of Henryk Stażewski, the 'restlessly romantic' works of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, and the documentation of the Foksal Gallery – which was supposed to speak of a real struggle of the avant-garde for existence and development in a culturally and politically conformist environment.⁴⁰ No wonder that Edward Gage wrote in *The Scotsman* that it was good that Polish art of the twentieth century was included in the official program of the Edinburgh festival – more so because that the same year Poland made newspaper headlines around the world thanks to the visit of the new Polish Pope in his own country. The author reminded his readers that this was the second presentation of contemporary Polish art in the British Isles. For him, it was of great value that, unlike *Atelier'72* (which, due to the enormity of the project, the variety and the different scale of the works, did not give him an appropriate perspective and possibility of evaluation), the 1979 exhibition which was limited to the presentation of twelve artists and documentation of one gallery showed what was crucial in the field of fine arts after 1900. On one hand, the author emphasized the centuries-old feature of Polish culture, visible in the artistic visions of Witkiewicz and Stażewski, i.e., international connections and openness to external stimuli, and on the other – he noted the presence and achievements of a small, independent gallery from Warsaw, which had always devoted itself to avant-garde issues. Gage recalled that it was established, inter alia, to 'bind broken trends of the Polish avant-garde' and at the same time to refer directly to new trends in world art. The critic

saw these connections in this exhibition, of course, in the person of Tadeusz Kantor, whose ‘surreal imagination is the link between Witkiewicz and the present day.’ After all, one could also connect Henryk Stażewski, one of the co-authors of the collection constituting the basis of the Museum of Art in Łódź, with contemporary artists whose works were also included in the collection of this institution. Stażewski then presented his reliefs from the sixties, which, in the eyes of the critic from *The Scotsman*, presented an interesting, but well-known range: from optical effects through randomness, the problem of order and disorder, white on white, to the sets of lines characteristic of minimal art ‘in search of order in chaos.’⁴¹

This theme – two coexisting traditions – was also strongly emphasized by Paul Overy in *Art Monthly*. He regretted that the subsequent editions of the documentary show of the Warsaw gallery in the British Isles lacked the exhibitions accompanying it at the Edinburgh festival. Only documentation consisting of photographs and texts was shown at ICA, and therefore, in his opinion, in isolation from the previous ones, it might “have given the impression of yet another conceptual spectacle, indigestible, devoid of self-criticism and incomprehensible.” “However, if someone wants to trouble themselves watching it, he explained, they will notice that it is a completely different exhibition, and it is worthy of attention. This is an exhibition of art documentation, not works of art.” The author, referring to the words of the organizers, referring to the text of the *Living Archive*, pointed out that it was another attempt at opposing “pretentious practices of manipulating the material documenting aesthetic activities” and efforts to identify them with art itself.⁴² Overy stressed that the documents from Foksal would have been easier to understand if they had been shown together with the works of Witkiewicz and Stażewski, because it was dramatic expressionism and cold constructivism that set the framework for post-war Polish art, in particular the art presented at Foksal. Contemporary sculptures and paintings from the collection of the Łódź Art Museum – whose authors were, among others, artists

associated with the Foksal Gallery - would have also emphasized this important, comprehensive perspective in his opinion.⁴³ The same author in the previous two issues of *Art Monthly* drew the general background for the exhibitions organized by Demarco, including the display of the Foksal Gallery documents. In the first of his texts,⁴⁴ he discussed the situation of art in Poland, starting from the time of the partitions, the constructivism of the twenties and German occupation, to transition smoothly to the subject of Museum of Art in Łódź, Ryszard Stanisławski and Henryk Stażewski, drawing attention to the artistic milieu of Wrocław represented by Zbigniew Makarewicz, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Barbara Kozłowska, Maria Michałowska and the Pawilon Gallery in Nowa Huta, discussing the importance of Tadeusz Kantor and Józef Szajna, highlighting Magdalena Abakanowicz and, of course, Foksal Gallery in Warsaw. Overy explained that the British art world was truly ‘insular’ and that it was only interested in whatever could be heard from its closest neighbour (France) and a distant ‘cousin’ (the United States). The art of Eastern Europe – apart from the period of fascination with Russian constructivism – is an unknown territory for the British. Richard Demarco tried to change this situation with the exhibition *Atelier '72* and the performances of Kantor and Nicolas Serota with the exhibition of Kantor's emballages at the Whitechapel Gallery. Hence, Demarco's latest initiative, organized under the slogan *Polish Avant-garde 1910-1979*, was so valuable to the author of the article. Its own important place therein was occupied by the Foksal Gallery, which Overy perceived as the most avant-garde gallery in Warsaw in terms of its program.⁴⁵ The British critic visited it a year earlier, in 1978, paying attention to several aspects of its operation and location: a quiet alley in the centre of Warsaw, the vicinity of the headquarters of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers (government control?), activities not aimed at a wider audience, fulfilling rather the function of an information centre for artists and insiders. It reminded him of the famous and influential Nigel Greenwood Gallery and Lisson Gallery in London

- except that the Warsaw gallery was supported by the state monopolist and did not conduct any commercial activities.

In the second text, Overy narrowed the perspective to Edinburgh itself.⁴⁶ He explained that the display of the documents of the Foksal Gallery was a series of events making up the Polish month of Polish art in Edinburgh. When Richard Demarco organized his four exhibitions (including Foksal) as part of the festival, the Polish Cultural Institute showed a 'different image' of Polish contemporary art, an alternative to the Polish avant-garde. It was an exhibition of Polish fabrics entitled *the Łódź School of Realism*, but according to the critics, 'it was not surprising and did not arouse much interest' (because the works of Magdalena Abakanowicz were missing there). In the text, he, again, drew attention to the polarization of attitudes between expressionism and constructivism among Polish artists, and, at the same time, emphasized the role of the Foksal Gallery presenting 'a clearly defined concept of its mission among various phenomena taking place on the stage of Polish art.'

There were also critical opinions in the press. The author of *Weekly Hibonnia* drew attention to the not-so-new jargon in the exhibition announcements (questioning the nature and function of the gallery as a physical space where work is presented, and as a commercial institution where works of art have commodity value and essays on the goals and activities of the gallery that are "long, written in a pompous style and difficult to understand in places."⁴⁷ On the other hand, Waldemar Januszczak in *The Guardian* wrote about problems with the translation of texts and about exotic phrases in the exhibition catalogue, about the show being "a tribute to bold typefaces," about the walls at ICA looking "as if they had been wallpapered with pages from an English-Polish dictionary, as if there had been an invasion of black and white, words and letters taken out of their proper context," about the fifteen-year history of the gallery reduced to "a group of travelling posters that felt comfortable on the ICA exhibition walls." It seems, however, that the

chief art critic of *The Guardian* lacked a deeper perspective. He focused rather on the controversy often resulting from the reception of conceptual art.⁴⁸ Paul Overy, in the aforementioned text *Polish Month in Edinburgh*, explained that the show in London (presenting, inter alia, famous Western conceptualists) could lead to the conclusion that Foksal is a gallery devoted to conceptual art when subjected to superficial assessment. In his opinion, this would be an incorrect assessment, as evidenced by Kantor and his influence on the functioning of the gallery.⁴⁹

The press overviews above show some recurring themes in the reception of the Foksal Gallery exhibition by British art critics. They saw it primarily as performing the role of a 'liaison' between various avant-garde traditions and between East and West. Their reviews, therefore, referred to what Demarco had already said on the occasion of *Atelier'72* and Kantor's *The Demarcation Line* watched by him.⁵⁰ Demarco was impressed not only by the *Water Hen*, staged by Kantor, but precisely by this installation shown as a part of the collective exhibition of Polish avant-garde. By drawing a line on the black, plastered surface of the wall and on the floor, and adding meaningful slogans to it, Kantor made it clear that the art world of the twentieth century, whether it was located east or west of the Iron Curtain, was really divided by a line that separates the real avant-garde from the false one. Consequently, as Demarco said: "The Demarcation Line was an affirmation that I accepted as a confirmation of Kantor's readiness to work under the aegis of Galeria Demarco in defence of the values and goals of Foksal Gallery." He also identified it as a work of art explaining the ethos of the Foksal Gallery, summarizing its history and *raison d'être*, and affirming it as a space for experiments.⁵¹

Undoubtedly, with his *Demarcation Line* Kantor pointed to the staid and re-forming divisions in art. The fact that it was 'adapted' in many fields by the organizers of the Foksal Gallery shows that this was partly due to its institutional position, torn between being subject to a state institution (PSP) and protective (and at the same

time critical) of activity in the field of art. The idealistic concept contained in this idea was never fully implemented.

The Problem of Documentation and the Strength of the Institution

However, in the analysis of the 'Foksal tour' around the British Isles, one cannot ignore the second key theme, which was the documentary nature of this exhibition. It showed the exhibition strategy applied at that time, which had been developed in the gallery environment since the beginning of the seventies and concerned the problem of documentation/archive. Considering the efforts the gallery organizers made over the decade in the field of theory and exhibition, it was the most important problem for them at that time. The *Foksal Gallery PSP* exhibition shown in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, and Dublin was preceded by several, it seems, similar 'documentary undertakings.' A closer look should be taken at them, and the sequence of these events is as follows.

The first one of them, unsurprisingly, was *Tadeusz Kantor. Happening and Happening-like Actions 1963-1970* (1970). It was implemented according to a script produced by Kantor, who wanted to develop the idea of an archive of his own work in this way. At the Foksal Gallery, they presented photograms from such events as *Cricotage* (1965), *The Dividing Line* (1966), *Die Grosse Emballages* (1966), *The Water Hen* (1967), *The Panoramic Sea Happening* (1967), *An Anatomy Lesson according to Rembrandt* (1968), *The Little Cosmetic Operations* (1969), *The Chair* (1970). They were accompanied by photographic montages depicting the idea of an exhibition at the post office (1965), photographs of drawings of emballaged figures related to the idea of a journey, and texts of musical scores and manifestos from happenings and performances.⁵² Kantor said: "We've been talking about the documentation of the creative output for a long time – a lot – I had a *fixation* on this point – it turned into something

autonomous."⁵³ It was, in a way, a continuation of the thinking initiated by him with *Popular Exhibition* (1963), when the artist gathered 937 objects in the basement of the Krzysztofor Palace: drawings, reviews, notes, and objects revealing, on one hand, the 'anatomy' and, on the other, the 'waste' of his creative process.

A year later, the art critics Wiesław Borowski and Andrzej Turowski, who ran the gallery, presented the texts of *The Living Archive and Documentation* (1971). As Turowski himself explained, they were the result of endless conversations aimed at determining the place and role of the gallery in the situation of groundbreaking changes in the artistic field (including the conceptualisation and dematerialisation of artistic activities), which they attentively observed. "We formulated them in two declarations: the first critical one, entitled *Documentation* and referring to the 'sinking' of the gallery's documents during *Panoramic Sea Happening*; the second one, called *The Living Archive* and attempting to delineate a new area of the gallery's activity, which was to be 'non-interference' in the sphere of creativity, its unfixed thoughts and elusive actions."⁵⁴

The action *The Sinking* (1967), with the participation of Wiesław Borowski, Zbigniew Gostomski and Mariusz Tchorek, consisted of the literal sinking of a large box marked with the address of Foksal Gallery PSP on the high seas. The public was told that "important documents" of the gallery were inside. These were to be: manuscripts, chronicles of pseudo-artistic events, applications and replies to applications, press clippings, recorded speeches, receipts, transcripts, minutes, photographs, exhibition offers, personal data.⁵⁵ *The Sinking*, carried out as an independent action by the 'Foksal Crew' community, independent of Kantor, although implemented at the same time and in the same place as the rest of the events that made up the *Panoramic Sea Happening*, took on a special character, as a specific form of dialogue between critics and Tadeusz Kantor. This was undoubtedly the time when a vigorous and emotional discussion began about how the gallery should operate. The next two years, when the

organizers of the gallery switched from criticism of the exhibition to the criticism of the gallery as an institution, were even more significant in this respect. Therefore, one can also see something else in this event – the question about its history posed for the first time by the founders of the gallery. In other words, *The Sinking* was in fact the proper beginning of a self-discursive practice, which would henceforth be one of the characteristic features of the Foksal Gallery. Considering the fact that the gallery had operated for a year and a half, such a clear manifestation of self-awareness distinguished it from similar domestic institutions.

It should come as no surprise, then, that it was the photo from *The Sinking* that appeared on the first page of the *Documentation* leaflet. This is related to the person of Turowski, who, when collaborating with the gallery from around 1970, proposed a new artistic strategy. It consisted of building a relation between artists and the gallery, understood no longer as a 'place' (as declared in the gallery's most famous program manifesto, *Theory of Place* 1966), but rather as an institutional structure with its own history.⁵⁶ It also corresponded with the views of Kantor, whose presence at Foksal led to the confrontation of the original ideas of the gallery's organizers with the practices of happenings. As Paweł Polit argued, "it is difficult to assess the impact of Tadeusz Kantor's intervention on the activities of the Foksal Gallery. One thing seems certain: his ideas and artistic propositions set a new direction for the Gallery's activity, which turned towards conceptual art around 1970."⁵⁷ At the same time, 'the world of art has entered the era of DOCUMENTATION.'

This situation required critical intervention. Borowski and Turowski suggested opposition to the rapidly growing tendency to document and archive, in particular, ephemeral works. They wrote: "we create the illusion of the survival of artistic ideas, and in fact we have a tangled magma of artistically useless and commercially useful 'traces'."⁵⁸ The concept of *The Living Archive* was supposed to be a remedy for this. The authors of the text postulated adopting a strategy of defining a work when it is 'neutrally valid.' This meant that the

only way to avoid the manipulation of an artistic fact – performed by 'the artists themselves,' 'show organizers,' 'greedy audiences' – is to capture it in the suspension between dispatch and receipt. This 'in-between' state was to be the target point of activities undertaken to create a 'framework for creative activity' within *The Living Archive*. Borowski and Turowski therefore proposed doing away with the superficial reception of art that would include artistic self-analysis and penetration of an artwork's structure with the purpose of sharing it – their suggestion was instead to isolate the surviving artistic fact in the documentation. The authors of the text called upon the artists to send materials to *The Living Archive* (this is the way *Living Archives* were supposed to be formed). Years later, Turowski recalled that:

(...) in 1971, as if in spite of the archive concept denoting all that is dead, we called the Foksal Gallery archive 'a living archive'. On the other hand, we took the life away from the documentation being extremely popular in that period. (...) As the documentation had been put to death, we had to revive the archive as the means of 'conveying' art, as a place which is 'neutral', non-interfering, and storing whatever returns and exists.⁵⁹

In this context, the uselessness of the collected material was intended to distinguish *The Living Archive* from other documentary artistic collections.

This is what *The Living Archive* – *Documentation* (1971) and *The Living Archive* (1972) exhibitions became like. Catalogues, photos and posters were displayed on the walls, tables and on the floor in the exhibition hall, but it was done in a specific way, because they were packed in plastic bags and therefore unavailable. The viewer could only listen to tape recordings. The critics' intentions were clear: the enormous number of documents made them impossible to read, denied their meaningfulness, and at the same time 'protected' artistic facts as an 'isolated

message.’ As a consequence, however, one could get the impression that the artists’ statements were treated as an object – the lack of access to them deprived them of the capability of exerting influence.

Another documentary exhibition, which showed photograms, publications and writings of the gallery’s artists, had a different character. While previously the aim was to ‘sink’ (protect) an artistic fact, this time it seems that it was already about its exposure. At the 1976 exhibition, *Documents of the Artists* (Stanisław Drożdż, Zbigniew Gostomski, Lesław and Wacław Janicki, Jarosław Kozłowski, Roman Siwulak, Maria Stangret, Jacek Stokłosa, Zygmunt Targowski, Andrzej Welmiński, Krzysztof Wodiczko), *Documents of the Gallery* (1966-1976) all documents were placed in frames and panels, putting selected names in order. A certain narrative of the show was forming around them. As Luiza Nader suggested, this visible change occurred after the publication of the article *Pseudoavant-garde* by Wiesław Borowski, as a result of which “the order of the exhibition clearly contrasted with the anarchic proposal of the *Living Archives*, somehow referring to Tadeusz Kantor’s *Archiving Machine*.”⁶⁰ In his intervention text, Borowski, on the one hand, defined the titular phenomenon and pointed to its manifestations, and on the other hand, declared that, in the name of defending the neutrality and disinterestedness of the work understood as an ‘isolated message,’ he distanced himself from the ‘levy *en masse*’ of the avant-garde and remains faithful to the ethos of the genuine one.⁶¹ This declaration became a source of conflict and a very clear community-internal division in Polish art.

This topic also appeared in Borowski’s speech at the ICA in London. The critic argued that “the field of artistic experience is limited not only to the processes of devaluation, degradation or rejection,” that it also includes “the accumulation and strengthening of values,” that gallery operators should ask themselves whether “the gallery provides the right context for artists” and whether its institutional activities ensure their independence.⁶² Interestingly, this

topic was addressed in the British press as well. In his review of the London edition of the exhibition of Foksal’s documentation, Paul Overy, being oriented in the matters of Polish art, elaborated quite extensively on the subject of the ‘pseudo-avant-garde’ phenomenon, against which Borowski and Turowski spoke sharply.⁶³ Aiden Dunne also referred to this when he wrote that the Warsaw Gallery, undermining its status, was situated in the position of the ‘fortified avant-garde.’ He noted the difference between the pure (‘blue-eyed’) avant-garde and the ‘pseudo-avant-garde’ only in the differently accepted value scales of both formations.⁶⁴

Self-analysis – Self-criticism – History of the Self

From this broader perspective, it is clear that, even more than in the case of the previous documentary exhibitions, the *Foksal Gallery PSP* exhibition established its own history. It became an illustration of the text on the history of the gallery shown at the exhibition (in part I). This proposal combined the development of the Warsaw institution with the development of art from that time, referring directly to the interaction of artists and critics. Subsequent and interleaving phases listed at the exhibition were defined as fragments of texts by the gallery organisers, to whom specific ‘artistic facts’ were assigned. Until 1979, nine such developmental periods had been defined: ‘gallery against exhibition’ (1966), ‘elimination of art in art’ (1966-1969), ‘object outside painting’ (1965-1969), ‘gallery against gallery’ (1967-1970, ‘things and thoughts’ (1970-1974), ‘gallery against documentation’ (1971-1972), ‘gallery against the pseudo-avant-garde’ (1974-1977), ‘art and something else’ (1974-1979), ‘collection outside the gallery’ (1975-1979).⁶⁵ One could find in them, among other things, the questioning of the exhibition as a form being secondary in relation to the work and artistically inactive; creating a site for conducting – on the basis of acts of

renunciation, negation, disapproval, elimination in art – a constant dialogue with the boundaries of art; transcending the painting and theatrical form, back to life, which was to be ensured by the formula of the happening; questioning the ‘regime’ of the gallery itself through the activities of artists. These stages were exemplified in specific productions that appeared at Foksal and which were shown during the ‘Foksal tour’ in The United Kingdom.

This is how the narrativisation of the gallery's history was carried out by the gallery itself. But it could not have been otherwise. Turowski already argued that the gallery is an institution in a state of permanent crisis and at the same time it possesses a nature revealing its repressive nature towards artistic facts. The critic wrote about the gallery that, “The practice did not consist in exhibiting works, but in exposing itself, revealing internal contradictions, constantly updating questions about the status and place in the context of the diagnosis of the contemporary condition of culture.”⁶⁶ As a result of these questions, answers had to emerge, one of which was the *Foksal Gallery PS* documentary exhibition.

In this context, this exhibition can actually be considered as an effect of the institution's strength in the face of previous theoretical research and exhibition practice. This is a trait that was not so clearly identified by Western commentators at the time but was nevertheless reflected in the interest that the Foksal Gallery aroused, and the importance attached to it later.⁶⁷ In the exhibition catalogue from 1979 at the Richard Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh, the organisers clearly indicated their view of the functioning of such an institution as a gallery. However, its text, *The inevitability and failure of the archive*, suggested that this exhibition as a visual discussion and presentation of the theoretical and historical position of the Foksal Gallery through the display of documents, became the criticism of the gallery and revealed its institutional weakness.⁶⁸ It was a permanent element of the gallery's narrative created for the Western audience, which constantly emphasised its functioning ‘in between.’

Undoubtedly, it was important for Richard Demarco, the main initiator of Polish art exhibitions in the British Isles. When he arrived in Poland as one of the first emissaries from the West, curious about what was happening in the countries cut off from Europe by the Iron Curtain, it was after only a few days' stay that he understood, as Borowski explained, the situation of artists and the Polish tradition of the mid-twentieth century. “This tradition has such features as indecision, uncertainty, and failure to fulfil; existence somewhere ‘in between’, ‘on the edge’, marginalised.”⁶⁹ Demarco, being an admirer of Joseph Beuys, considered art to be a universal tool of social change. Therefore, he consciously strove to create a platform of understanding between the East and West through art. Such a general dimension and message was imparted by him to the presentation of the achievements and ideas of the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, which he co-organised. As an organiser of artistic life, he focused on building bridges and not on defining boundaries. This is why he became one of the first to show artists from the other side of the Iron Curtain. He believed that art is derived from meeting friends and their readiness to work, based on shared values, ideals, hopes and willingness to take risks.⁷⁰ It seems that he found like-minded (and active) people of art in Wiesław Borowski, Tadeusz Kantor and even Peter Townsend. It resulted in many years of relationship, cultural dialogue and artistic projects, which were of particular value to the Warsaw Gallery. Borowski recalled: “Maybe we felt a foretaste of laurels, or even worse, a foretaste of importance. These were interesting adventures and they were, in a way, donated”. They were donated by “Demarco – a little bit – and a little bit by Kantor, without him knowing of it.”⁷¹

Looking from today's perspective, it is clearly visible that within the Foksal Gallery there were international contacts in addition to the current cultural policy, which allowed the milieu of its artists and art critics to enter the international art circulation on a scale comparable at that time only to the Museum of Art in Łódź. And the

institutional power of both institutions cannot be even compared. Unusual personalities turned out to be the basic capital that allowed for taking appropriate actions. This specific *networking* between artists and institutions from opposing political blocks translated into institutional and artistic cooperation. It seems it was the only road available for a small exhibition institution from Poland in the divided world of those times. In my opinion, this cooperation determined the international success of the Foksal Gallery. Klara Kemp-Welch was also convinced of this. Even though during late socialism, large institutions, such as the Central Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions (today's Zachęta) which organised official international exhibitions, in some of which the so-called artist galleries had contacts with foreign artists, the researcher stated: "Nevertheless, the international program of the Foksal Gallery in the seventies had no equal in terms of the calibre of the world of art celebrities, artistic ambition, and the coherence of conceptually oriented exhibitions."⁷² Thomas Skowronek commented on this in a similar way. He noticed that both the first foreign presentation of the Foksal Gallery at the 3e Salon International de Galeries Pilotes in Lausanne (1970) and subsequent British exhibitions (1979-1980) could serve as a framework for 'rhetorical appropriation of Polish art and its separation from the Eastern bloc.' He explained that in both cases there were similar methods of regulating the symbolic order: a scientific idea and a neutral representation of contemporary art. In a world divided into two opposing political blocs, this interpretation, according to him, allowed art to be seen as a 'means' for crossing borders.⁷³

What is important is that the cooperation with Demarco strengthened the position of the Foksal Gallery and its status vis-à-vis the Western art world, but at the same time the narrative construed by the gallery itself became the dominant narrative. Its key elements were documentary exhibitions presenting the gallery's constantly interleaving history and history of the self as well as its ongoing struggle with its own institutionality. In this way, a vision of the gallery was created,

sometimes tending towards a kind of mythology. This task was made easier by some highly vivid and imagination-stimulating facts, such as the dynamic beginnings of the gallery, the close and mutually stimulating cooperation of critics and artists (including artists of such calibre as Henryk Stażewski and Tadeusz Kantor - as shown by the texts in *Studio International*), the undertaking of an avant-garde discourse (including the search for continuity with the pre-war avant-garde), the theoretical activities that responded to the trends of world art. All of these points, marked on the axis of the Foksal Gallery's development and shown from Edinburgh to Dublin, created its authority and entitled it to become a subject in discussions with institutions and artists from the western side of the Iron Curtain. At the same time, there seems to have been a great awareness within the gallery circle of both the pitfalls and benefits thereof. After all, there were activities conducted by the critics that no longer signalled the existence of the institution (self-analysis), but rather questioned the principles of its functioning. The self-criticism of the gallery can therefore be treated as a kind of attempt to start everything anew. Nevertheless, the myth of the gallery continued to develop, and these paradoxical attempts became an integral part of it (a history of the self).

Notes

¹ Wiesław Borowski, *Zakrywam to, co niewidoczne. Wywiad-rzeka*. Interviewed by Adam Mazur and Ewa Toniai (Warszawa: 40000 MALARZY, 2014), 285

² In the years 1949-1994, Zachęta, as the Central Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions, together with branches in the largest Polish cities, formed a network of state institutions involved in the organization of contemporary art exhibitions, control of exhibition traffic, as well as popularizing activities in the field of fine arts.

³ After: Richard Demarco, *Richard Demarco and Joseph Beuys: A Unique Partnership* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2016), 12.

⁴ Richard Demarco, "Do You Have to be a Pole to be a Genius: An Interview with Richard Demarco." Interviewed by Filip Lech. *Culture.pl*, published electronically 10.12.2014, accessed 1.12.2022, <https://culture.pl/en/article/do-you-have-to-be-a-pole-to-be-a-genius-an-interview-with-richard-demarco>.

⁵ Artists who took part in the exhibition included, among others: Magdalena Abakanowicz, Jerzy Bereś, Maria Stangret, Wanda Czelkowska, Stanisław Dróżdż, Stanisław Fijałkowski, Zbigniew Gostomski, Władysław Hasior, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Tadeusz Kantor, Koji Komoji, Marek Koterski, Edward Krasinski, Natalia Lach-Lachowicz, Roman Opalka, Teresa Pagowska, Józef Robakowski, Jerzy Rosołowicz, Bogusław Schaeffer, Henryk Stażewski, Józef Szajna.

⁶ Richard Demarco, ed., *Atelier 72: an exhibition of contemporary Polish artists* (Edinburgh: Richard Demarco Gallery, 1972).

⁷ Ibidem, 2-3. Demarco considered these three exhibitions the most important among those he prepared as part of the Edinburgh Festival. See: Richard Demarco, "The art world, like the Edinburgh festival itself, is in danger of being identified with the world of entertainment and leisure." Interviewed by Janet McKenzie. *Studio International*, published electronically 10.10.2014, accessed 1.12.2022, <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/richard-demarco-edinburgh-international-festival-joseph-beuys>.

⁸ Dominik Kuryłek even suggested that "the size and diversity of the art shown at *Atelier'72* was a reaction to the glaring absence of artists from the East at the largest international event at that time," that is, *documenta 5*, which Demarco had visited two months earlier. It was then, for the first time in Kassel that the participation of artists exploring the formula of a happening and the Fluxus movement had become possible. That same year, a very important exhibition for the British art scene, *The New Art* was held too, at the Hayward Gallery in London, which was the first 'museum presentation' of conceptual art. The artists who showed their works then had their individual exhibitions at the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw (Art & Language, Victor Burgin, Michael Craig-Martin, John Hilliard). At the Edinburgh Festival, as Kuryłek argued, international audiences could see that Polish art from *Atelier'72* was on a par with art created on the western side of the Iron Curtain (including a slightly earlier presentation of German art from Düsseldorf as part of *Strategy: Get Arts*. See: Dominik Kuryłek, "Ujawnianie nieobecności. Zbigniew Warpechowski na wystawie polskiej sztuki współczesnej *Atelier'72* w Galerii Demarco w Edynburgu," *Pamiętnik Sztuk Pięknych*, no. 9 (2015): 197-201.

⁹ Demarco, "Do You Have to be a Pole to be a Genius: An Interview with Richard Demarco."

¹⁰ After Iga Bożyk, "Richard Demarco and Demarco Archives," published electronically, accessed 27.07.2022, https://polishscottishheritage.co.uk/?heritage_item=richard-demarco-demarco-archives.

¹¹ Demarco undertook many initiatives related to Polish art there. Until 1979, i.e. the time of the documentary exhibition of the Foksal Gallery, these were the following events: 1966 – exhibition of Polish film posters (Traverse Gallery, Edinburgh). 1967 – exhibition of 15 British painters from the Richard Demarco gallery (exceptionally at ZPAP, Warsaw) and an exhibition of 16 Polish Painters including Maria Anto, Tadeusz Eysymont, Ryszard Gieryszewski, Juliusz Narzyński, Roman Opalka, Anna Trojanowska-Kaczmarek (Traverse Gallery). 1971 – Józef Szajna (Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh). 1972 – *Atelier'72*, group show of 42 Polish artists, in collaboration with Lodz Museum of Art (Richard Demarco Gallery) and Kantor's Cricot 2 Theatre production of *The Water Hen* (Forrest Hill Poorhouse, Edinburgh). 1973 – Tadeusz Kantor's lecture in Edinburgh Arts 1973 (Richard Demarco Gallery), *Formula X* lecture and installation by Zbigniew Makarewicz (Edinburgh), Kantor's Cricot 2 Theatre production of *Lovelies and Dowdies* (Forrest Hill Poorhouse). 1974 – Magdalena Abakanowicz's lecture in Edinburgh Arts 1974. 1975 – Performance Events by Barbara Kosłowska and Makarewicz, and Edinburgh Arts '75 Festival Exhibition including Kosłowska and Makarewicz. 1976 – Kantor's Cricot 2 Theatre production of *The Dead Class* (Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh and Riverside Studios, London). See: *Chronology (selective record of exhibitions, performances and events)*, accessed 27.07.2022, https://www.demarco-archive.ac.uk/richard_demarco_chronology.pdf.

¹² See: Anna Dzierżyc-Horniak, *Początki są zawsze najważniejsze... Geneza i działalność Galerii Foksal: teksty programowe, wystawy, wydarzenia, artyści, 1955-1970* (Warszawa-Toruń: Polski Instytut Studiów nad Sztuką Świata-Wydawnictwo Tako, 2019), 469-82.

¹³ At that time, Demarco also visited the Museum of Art in Łódź and Krzysztofory in Krakow, met with Wanda Gólkowska, Jerzy Rosołowicz, Zbigniew Makarewicz and Józef Robakowski, and he watched a play by Józef Szajna and Magdalena Abakanowicz's studio in Warsaw. See: Kuryłek, "Ujawnianie nieobecności," 198.

¹⁴ Borowski, *Zakrywam to, co niewidoczne. Wywiad-rzeka*. 314-15.

¹⁵ Richard Demarco, "Sztuka jako lekarstwo," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, published electronically 18.11.2013, accessed 27.07.2022, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/sztuka-jako-lekarstwo-21138>.

¹⁶ Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "Emballages at The Whitechapel. Interview with Nicolas Serota," in *Kantor was here. Tadeusz Kantor in Great Britain*, edited by Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011), 65.

¹⁷ Andrew Brighton and Joanna Melvin, "Peter Townsend," *The Independent*, 01.04.2009. See: Joanna Melvin, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography 2005-2008*, edited by Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1124-25.

¹⁸ Joanna Melvin, "Studio International Magazine: Tales from Peter Townsend's editorial papers 1965-1975." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University College London, 2013).

¹⁹ Ibidem, 290.

²⁰ Wiesław Borowski, "A conversation with Henryk Stazewski," *Studio International* 188, no. 969 (1974): 72-73; "Tadeusz Kantor and his Cricot 2 theatre," *Studio International* 187, no. 962 (1974): 22-23. In the following years, other texts by the Polish critic appeared in the magazine: "The Paintings from *Chłopy* of Andrzej Szewczyk," *Studio International* 196, no. 999 (1983): 34-35.

²¹ I analyzed this thread extensively in the book dealing with the first, the so-called the 'heroic' period of the Foksal Gallery's activities. See: Anna Dzierżyc-Horniak, *Początki są zawsze najważniejsze...*, 62-100.

²² Joanna Melvin, "Studio International Magazine," 298.

²³ Borowski, "Tadeusz Kantor and his Cricot 2 theatre," 22.

²⁴ Joanna Melvin, "The Living Archive, the Death of Rubbish and the aesthetics of the Dustbin," in *Kantor was here. Tadeusz Kantor in Great Britain*, edited by Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011), 149.

²⁵ Wiesław Borowski, "Tadeusz Kantor and his friends in the UK," in *Kantor was here. Tadeusz Kantor in Great Britain*, edited by Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011), 25.

²⁶ *Zakrywam to, co niewidoczne. Wywiad-rzeka*. 63-67. The *Emballages 1960-1976* exhibition was held from September 22 to October 31, 1976. It is worth noting that for the curator Nicholas Serota, the newly appointed director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, this was the first presentation at this venue. The author of the original concept of the exhibition was Ryszard Stanisławski, and the decision to organize the exhibition in London was taken by Jasia Reichardt, then director of the ICA, of Polish descent, actively involved in promoting Polish art in the United Kingdom. The exhibition presented an aspect of Kantor's work other than the theatre, focusing on the theme of 'objects of the lowest order' – painting works and objects created by the artist in the sixties and the early 1970s. Years later, Serota admitted that the link to Kantor's happenings and theatre was missing; certain one-dimensionality of the exhibition prevented the depth and complexity of Kantor's artistic practice from being revealed.

²⁷ Ibidem, 394.

²⁸ I have prepared a description of the exhibition based on the drawings with the exhibition scheme of *Foksal Gallery PSP*, found in the Foksal Gallery Archives, Warsaw.

²⁹ Poster and press release from Richard Demarco Gallery, Foksal Gallery Archive, Warsaw. Interestingly, as Demarco informed in a letter to Janina Ładnowska from the Łódź Museum of Art, the exhibitions of Witkiewicz and Stażewski were an official part of the Edinburgh Festival, while the presentation of the Foksal Gallery and artists from the collection of the Łódź museum – as part of the Richard Demarco Gallery program. See: Richard Demarco, *A letter to Janina Ładnowska*, 16.04.1979.

³⁰ Borowski. *Zakrywam to, co niewidoczne. Wywiad-rzeka*. 362

³¹ "Tadeusz Kantor and his friends in the UK," 25.

³² *Zakrywam to, co niewidoczne. Wywiad-rzeka*. 395.

³³ They carried out the following actions in the Foksal Gallery: *Zapis bromowy* (1970), *Kolekcja* (1970), *Giewont* (1970), *Łóżko* (1971), *Zapamiętywanie* (1972), *Seans filmowy. Projekcja II* (1973), *Pierwsze Nienaturalne Złoże Kamieni Szlachetnych* (1973), *Kanon* (1979).

³⁴ "Druga Grupa: Lesław Janicki, Waław Janicki, Jacek Stokłosa," in Wiesław Borowski, Małgorzata Jurkiewicz, and Andrzej Przywara, eds., *Galeria Foksal 1966-1994* (Warszawa: Galeria Foksal SBWA, 1994), 129.

³⁵ Łukasz Guzek, *Rekonstrukcja sztuki akcji w Polsce* (Warszawa-Toruń: Polski Instytut Studiów nad Sztuką Świata; Wydawnictwo Tako, 2017), 100.

³⁶ Druga Grupa, *Zapamiętywanie*, (Warszawa: Galeria Foksal PSP, 1972). Leaflet.

³⁷ Luiza Nader, *Konceptualizm w PRL* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2009), 258, 60.

³⁸ The text of Borowski's statement in the ICA, Foksal Gallery Archives, Warszawa.

³⁹ Terence Mullaly, "Poland presents two faces," *Daily Telegraph*, 29.12.1979.

⁴⁰ Felix McCullough, "Edinburgh Festival 1979," *Arts Review*, no. 18 (1979).

⁴¹ Edward Gage, "Expressions of the Polish intellect," *The Scotsman*, 27.08.1979.

⁴² Here, Paweł Polit saw a similarity between the statements in *The Living Archive* (and also *Documentation*) by Wiesław Borowski and Andrzej Turowski and the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' artistic information in Seth Siegel's approach. This, according to him, concerned the status of the 'isolated message' held by the conceptual work versus the forms of its recording and distribution. An American gallerist spoke similarly, arguing that "art presentation and art are not the same thing." See: Paweł Polit, "Rozbijanie monolitów znaczeń. O sztuce konceptualnej w Galerii Foksal," in Michał Jachula and Justyna Wesolowska, eds., *Galeria Foksal 1966-2016* (Warszawa: Galeria Foksal-Mazowiecki Instytut Kultury, 2016), 61.

- ⁴³ Paul Overy, "Foksal at ICA," *Art Monthly*, no. 28 (1979): 21-22.
- ⁴⁴ "Polish Month in Edinburgh," *ibidem*, no. 30 (1979): 12-15.
- ⁴⁵ A critic from *The Sunday Telegraph* wrote about it in a similar way, arguing that Galeria Foksal from Warsaw is the intense focus of new thoughts and vision in Poland. See: Michael Sheperd, "Some of the greatest shows on earth," *The Sunday Telegraph*, 19.08.1979.
- ⁴⁶ Overy, "Polish Month in Edinburgh," 10-11.
- ⁴⁷ Anonymous, "Poles Apart," *Weekly Hibonnia*, 31.07.1980.
- ⁴⁸ Waldemar Januszczak, "Foksal," *The Guardian*, 12.01.1980.
- ⁴⁹ Overy, "Polish Month in Edinburgh," 10-11.
- ⁵⁰ This work related to Kantor's happening *The Dividing Line*, carried out on December 18, 1965 at the Krakow SHS (the Association of Art Historians, Kraków Division).
- ⁵¹ Richard Demarco, "Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot 2 Theatre at the Edinburgh Festival," in *Kantor was here. Tadeusz Kantor in Great Britain*, edited by Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011), 35.
- ⁵² Małgorzata Jurkiewicz, Joanna Mytkowska, and Andrzej Przywara, eds., *Tadeusz Kantor. Z Archiwum Galerii Foksal* (Warszawa: Fundacja Galerii Foksal, 1998), 43. Another exhibition of this type referring to Kantor's work took place seven years later: *22 lata działalności Teatru Cricot 2 i Teatr Podziemny 1942-1944 Tadeusza Kantora* (1977). It was prepared again according to the script of the artist from Krakow. It is worth adding that it was preceded by an exhibition at the Krzysztofory Gallery: *Żywa dokumentacja – 20 lat rozwoju Teatru Cricot 2*, presenting photographic documentation of the Cricot 2 Theater (1976). Caroline Rose's Cricot 2 photogram show was of a similar nature (Foksal Gallery, 1978). See: *Tadeusz Kantor. Z Archiwum Galerii Foksal*, 46.
- ⁵³ Tadeusz Kantor's notes on documentation after: *ibidem*, 47-48.
- ⁵⁴ Paweł Polit, "O sztuce koncepcyjnej. (Andrzej Turowski w rozmowie z Pawłem Politem)," in *Refleksja koncepcyjna w sztuce polskiej. Doświadczenia dyskursu: 1965-1975*, edited by Paweł Polit and Piotr Woźniakiewicz (Warszawa: CSW Zamek Ujazdowski, 2000), 52.
- ⁵⁵ Jurkiewicz, Mytkowska, and Przywara, *Tadeusz Kantor*, 160.
- ⁵⁶ See: Wiktoria Szczupacka, "Galeria przeciw galerii i Żywe Archiwum, czyli teoria i praktyka Galerii Foksal z perspektywy krytyki instytucjonalnej," *Sztuka i Dokumentacja / Art and Documentation*, no. 19 (2018): 172, 77.
- ⁵⁷ Paweł Polit, "Czy można spóźnić się na koniec historii Galerii Foksal?" in Karolina Łabowicz-Dymanus, ed., *We see you: The Foksal Gallery activities 1966-1989 / Me näeme teid: Foksal Galerii tegevus 1966-1989 / My was widzimy: działalność Galerii Foksal w latach 1966-1989* (Warszawa: Mazowieckie Centrum Kultury i Sztuki-Galeria Foksal, 2009), 106.
- ⁵⁸ Wiesław Borowski and Andrzej Turowski, *Dokumentacja* (Warszawa: Galeria Foksal, 1972). Leaflet.
- ⁵⁹ Zofia Kulik et al., "Na marginesie idei i praktyki archiwum," *Obieg*, no. 1-2 (75-76) (2007). Also see: Piotr Piotrowski, *Dekada. O syndromie lat siedemdziesiątych, kulturze artystycznej, krytyce, sztuce – wybiórczo i selektywnie* (Poznań: Obserwator, 1991), 32-33.
- ⁶⁰ The *Archiving Machine* is an object resembling a Torah or a hand-wound cinematograph, designed especially by Kantor for the *3e Salon International de Galeries Pilotes* exhibition in Lausanne in 1970. 'Machine' was used to review the documented activity of the Foksal Gallery in the years from 1966 to 1970. See: Nader, *Koncepcjonalizm w PRL*, 313.
- ⁶¹ Wiesław Borowski, "Pseudoawangarda," *Kultura*, no. 12 (1975): 11-12.
- ⁶² Wiesław Borowski, statement in the ICA, London, 20.12.1979, Foksal Gallery Archives, Warsaw.
- ⁶³ Overy, "Foksal at ICA," 21-22.
- ⁶⁴ Aidan Dunne, *In Dublin* 1980.
- ⁶⁵ "Rozwój sztuki – przemiany galerii," (Warszawa: Foksal Gallery Archives), Typescript. It can be assumed that the study was created in 1978, as the texts related to it and available in the gallery archives come from this year: *Historia i Status Galerii Foksal and Podstawowe zadania galerii*.
- ⁶⁶ After: Nader, *Koncepcjonalizm w PRL*, 269.
- ⁶⁷ Peter Townsend was certainly interested in this perception, but this fact was only revealed by Joanna Melvin's analysis of his archive. Shortly before the second performance of the Cricot 2 Theatre in Edinburgh (1973), Wiesław Borowski sent him the texts of *The Living Archive* and *Documentation* with an intriguing photograph and a description of the 'sinking' of the gallery's precious collection of documents. Although they were not published in the magazine, Townsend considered their significance in the context of his own practice and the functioning of *Studio International*. It was an appealing idea for him, and he pondered the strategies that would need to be employed in order to destabilize the ideal status of the archive, and why a 'sinking' process might be necessary. See: Melvin, "The Living Archive, the Death of Rubbish and the aesthetics of the Dustbin," 155.
- ⁶⁸ *Galeria Foksal PSP* (Edinburgh: Richard Demarco Gallery, 1979), Exhib. cat. See also: Melvin, "The Living Archive, the Death of Rubbish and the aesthetics of the Dustbin," 155.

⁶⁹ After: Janet McKenzie, "10 Dialogues: Richard Demarco, Scotland And The European Avant Garde," *Studio International*, published electronically 20.01.2011, accessed 27.07.2022, <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/10-dialogues-richard-demarco-scotland-and-the-european-avant-garde>.

⁷⁰ After Bożyk, "Richard Demarco and Demarco Archives."

⁷¹ Borowski. *Zakrywam to, co niewidoczne. Wywiad-rzeka*. 362. He continued: "it was fine, but we felt edgy.... you could sense that something was about to crop up." It was already the end of the 1970s, and soon the gallery – after its success, which undoubtedly the presentation in such a prestigious place as the London ICA proved – was to be closed down for the duration of martial law in Poland.

⁷² Klara Kemp-Welch, "Galeria Foksal i stosunki międzynarodowe," in *Galeria Foksal 1966-2016*, edited by Michał Jachula and Justyna Wesołowska (Warszawa: Galeria Foksal-Mazowiecki Instytut Kultury, 2016), 70.

⁷³ Jacqueline Niesser et al., "Cultural Opposition as Transnational practice," in *The Handbook of COURAGE: Cultural Opposition and Its Heritage in Eastern Europe*, edited by Apor Balázs, Apor Péter, and Horváth Sándor (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2018), 561. Also see: Thomas Skowronek, "Crossing the Border: The Foksal Gallery from Warsaw in Lausanne/Paris (1970) and Edinburgh (1972 and 1979)," in *Art beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945-1989)*, edited by Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, and Piotr Piotrowski (Budapest-New York: Central European University, 2016), 388.

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4

OVERSEAS

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A FIRECRACKER, A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL? THE FIRST POLISH PROGRAMME OF RESIDENTIAL STAYS FOR ARTISTS IN THE US

A Filmic 'Love Story'

The story of art residency described here begins like the screen-play of a melodrama. Let us imagine a Polish woman emigrant who, in the early nineteen-sixties, finds herself, slightly against her will, in the US. Her name is Ewa Janina Pelczar, she possesses an uncommon beauty and arrives there at behest of her brother. The latter had gone missing during the Second World War, but was found in Chicago, to which, immediately after re-establishing his connection with the family, he brought his parents.¹ In the sixties, they are already people of an advanced age, so help is required in his care of the parents. He, therefore, writes to his sister, who was born in Lvov in the thirties, and

is a student in Łódź at the time, has an interest in art and design, and is rather ill-disposed towards permanent settlement on the other side of the Atlantic. In Poland, she would have to abandon her budding career of an applied art designer, her carefully constructed network of contacts in elite Warsaw society, and a partner. Her sense of duty, nonetheless, wins.

Despite her poor command of English, Pelczar starts studying at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and strives to devote herself to design. She is hardly successful, so – like a majority of emigrants – she takes up an array of unrewarding jobs. Then, she becomes a secretary to two medical doctors. The wife of one of the doctors takes a liking to her, so, seeking company, takes her shopping, introduces Pelczar to her friends

and into the milieu of the American middle class. Here, the plot twists, since at a certain point – like the Cinderella story – Pelczar meets Walter Pape, a milk industry tycoon. Older than Pelczar, Pape falls in love with her and they are married in 1965. Pelczar takes her husband's last name and begins to appear in the arts (as well as in Polish diaspora) milieus as Eva Pape, or Ewa Pape. She moves to New York. Having substantial funds at her disposal and a network of connections, she decides to take up organising exhibitions, primarily of Polish artists. It would be difficult to overestimate her role in promoting Polish art in the US: she organised tens of exhibitions (from the Primitivists to the neo-avant-garde), initiated donations or sales of works by Polish artists to large art institutions (including MoMA and the Alcoa Collection of Contemporary Art).² In the seventies, she headed (and later co-headed) an art gallery in Los Angeles, and, most pertinent to the context of this text, she made a significant contribution to establishing the art residencies that are the subject of this text.

Specificity of the Kościuszko Foundation

In order to capture the specificity of this enterprise, it is worth noting that up to this point the Kościuszko Foundation had seldom financed the stays of visual artists in the US, and then only sporadically. The Foundation was officially established in 1925, on the initiative of Stephen Mizwa, who had emigrated from Poland as a child under the name of Szczepan Mierzwa. He later became a lecturer in economics at Drake University and a social activist interested in matters of the Polish diaspora. One of flagship ventures of the organisation was then and, to this day, remains the Kościuszko Foundation Chopin Piano Competition, organised since 1949. Another crucial project was the 1959 publication of their English-Polish dictionary. The institution also sponsored other publishing initiatives, e.g. bilingual comic books, published in Poland in the seventies, describing

the beginnings of the Polish state. A note-worthy element of the activities of the Foundation was their involvement in a campaign against jokes about Polish people, popular in the sixties and seventies in the US, the so-called 'Polack jokes,' as well as, similarly, but much later, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, their condemnation of the use of the phrase, 'Polish concentration camps,' in the American public debate.

These are only several instances of the institution's wide range of activities. Many more could be enumerated;³ however, the Foundation dealt chiefly in a broadly understood popularisation of Polish culture and science in the US as well as regularly sponsored exchanges of American youth and academics of Polish origin to Poland. It has also been organising reverse exchanges, dedicating a considerable portion of its funds to visits from Polish physicians, physicists, chemists, economists, philosophers, historians and, obviously, musicians, to support their stays in American research units, to engage in lectures and meetings in centres of Polish diaspora as well as concerts. Until the seventies, representatives of the visual arts had been missing from those circles; this was most probably related to the personal interest of Mr. Mizwa, the long-standing president of the Foundation, who seemed to have a profound fascination with classical music. Emphasis ought to be placed on the fact that activities of the institution were consistently apolitical in character. Amidst Poles invited to the US in various periods, people of disparate social, political and ideological provenance could be found, e.g.: Karol Wojtyła (a cardinal of Roman Catholic Church and the future pope), Jacek Kuroń (an activist and one of leaders of left-wing oriented anti-communist movement), Stanisław Mackiewicz (a conservatist and pro-monarchist dissident), or Władysław Bartoszewski (a dissident and journalist). Neither did the Foundation hesitate to collaborate in production of various cultural projects with the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland, which distinguished this milieu sharply from, e.g., the Polish diaspora that had settled in the UK. Nevertheless, the ideological pluralism or apolitical stance sometimes became a subject of allegations

made by representatives of different Polish émigré milieus, e.g. that of the Paris *Kultura*.⁴

A certain interest in the visual arts from the Kościuszko Foundation can be observed only in the mid-sixties, when Eugene Kusielewicz became assistant to its president. This coincides – probably not accidentally – with the development of Eva Pape’s curatorial activities. The Foundation archive contains a letter from Paul C. Denney, Jr., a lecturer at the Iowa Wesleyan College, dated to the October 7, 1965, addressed to Stephen Mizwa. It includes a request for information about English-language book-length publications on Polish art. Replying on behalf of Mizwa, in a letter of the October 11 of that year, Kusielewicz points out two (a book by Irena Lorentowicz that I am unfamiliar with and an equally mysterious UNESCO publication), while also emphasising a definitive dearth of other, similar items on the English-speaking book market. The situation – as well as, perhaps, many others – must have caught Kusielewicz’s interest, since, in March 1968, he sent a semi-official letter to Stanisław Lorenz, the director of the National Museum in Warsaw at the time, claiming that the Foundation has been ‘bombarded with demands for information about Polish painters and painting,’ as well as asking if he could receive copies of books concerned with Polish art, classical and contemporary, from the Museum. On the occasion, he added – which demonstrates the specificity of the period relations between the US Polish diaspora and the state authorities – that he would rather have avoided any intermediation from the Polish government in satisfying his demand, while the thought of the ministerial bureaucracy’s slow pace of work had previously deterred him entirely from any conceivable completion of the task. One point which demonstrates the poor relations at the time between the US Polish diaspora and the Polish state authorities is Kusielewicz’s statement, in his letter, that he would prefer to avoid any interaction with the Polish government in his request for these books. In addition he refers to the ministerial bureaucracy’s slow pace of work which had deterred him from expecting any outcome should he have approached them in this matter.

It seems, however (although these are merely my suppositions), that a key role in persuading Kusielewicz to broaden the scope of the Foundation activities to the visual arts was played by Eva Pape (and, perhaps, her husband’s money and connections). Letters preserved in the Foundation archive, exchanged between them in the seventies, testify to an intimate relationship between the Papes and the Kusielewiczs. While their subject matter – exhibitions, her collection and art events organised by Eva Pape with the Foundation – also points towards her firm determination in promoting Polish art in the US. Regardless of whichever motivations or whatever persons influenced Kusielewicz’s decision, his commitment in this respect was significant enough for him to explore the possibility of co-producing with the Polish National Television a series of documentaries dedicated to Polish artists in the United States. When Kusielewicz became the president of the Kościuszko Foundation in 1971, Polish visual artists started becoming regular recipients of the Foundation’s scholarships. It was precisely during his term of office, or almost throughout the decade of the seventies, that the institution was inviting Polish artists to the US with the highest frequency in its history. Since the eighties, the scholarships have been awarded to visual artists ever more rarely. I will, however, return to this point later.

Westbeth – Cheap, Unsafe and...

Prestigious

One of Kusielewicz’s first moves with the aim of organising arrivals of Polish artists, was to rent premises in a building called Westbeth. This place has achieved, a near-cultic status among Polish authors over the years. An interesting report was penned by Piotr Korduba, who describes the building in the following manner:

Westbeth is an artist house situated in the West Village neighbourhood on Lower Manhattan, a non-profit housing community

composed of five combined buildings. ... They were erected in the early 20th century as a location for laboratories concerned with image and sound transmission (Bell Telephone Laboratories). ... In the 1960s, a decision was made to transform the complex, with the support from private donations, into a set of apartments and studios for artists. It was a pioneering idea at the time and the first adaptive reuse of such large post-industrial spaces for residential purposes in the United States. Richard Meier was entrusted with the task ... the architect transformed its interiors into 383 studio-apartments, including also common spaces, a gallery and facilities to rent. ... According to a New York Times report from May 1970, 150 painters, 49 sculptors, 27 photographers, 29 writers, 26 musicians, 38 actors, 18 dancers, 14 film-makers, 11 playwrights, 7 poets, 9 composers, 7 architects, 7 scenographers, 7 engravers, 3 designers, 4 graphic artists, 5 artisans, 4 theatre directors, hundreds of children and a plethora of animals moved in.⁵

Admittedly, Kusielewicz could not have chosen a better location to accommodate Polish artists. Low rents (110-190\$) resulted in a situation in which “at the very moment the first lodgers moved in, the Westbeth apartment, the waiting list was as long as a thousand people,”⁶ which suggests that either the Kościuszko Foundation was extremely fortunate, or it had made use of its wide influence to secure an apartment. By 1972, therefore, the institution became a tenant of one of the premises at Westbeth.

Currently, the immediate vicinity of Westbeth – the windows of which overlook the Hudson River and New Jersey – is a home to people such as Calvin Klein, Julianne Moore or Annie Leibovitz, and the area is peaceful. In the seventies, however, this was not the case. West Broadway had not yet become an art district, there were butcher shops and meat wholesalers in the neighbourhood. Throughout the day, the place was noisy, and prostitutes, thieves and other criminals came out at

night. One protagonist of Korduba’s report recounts: “When we moved in, my musician husband handed his trumpet over to me from our window straight to our car, because he worried that if he were to walk down the small stretch of the street with it, it would have been stolen.”⁷ Nonetheless, cheap flats attracted artists and the building had such renowned residents as, for example, Diane Arbuse (who lived there until her death by suicide in 1971) and Merce Cunningham, who had a studio there. The list of residents was closed in 2007, and now their majority is composed of the children of those who had been the original occupants. Until this day, also, the Kościuszko Foundation has maintained their premises there. It provides a residence not only for artists but is also sublet to other scholarship holders or private individuals.

Which Polish art makers stayed there? No official register of artists who received scholarships from the Foundation was kept, with the exact same lack of record keeping that pertained in every other profession. A list of artists (and all the other individuals) arriving in the US on scholarships from the Foundation can be reconstructed on the basis of several types of sources. One may be correspondence with the Foundation authorities (however, very few letters of this sort have been preserved), bills, receipts and other accounting records (there are very few of those as well, records kept refer to no more than the last twenty years), or *The Kościuszko Foundation Newsletter*⁸ – which is the most valuable source, albeit also often imprecise – which, yearly, published lists of scholarship recipients, indicating the purpose for which the funding was granted. However, we are facing two fundamental issues here. First, until the late eighties, information about grant-recipients was published for an academic year. Hence, we are informed about arrivals in, for example, 1973/74, 1974/75 etc. Theoretically, this should cover a time period extending from autumn of one year, e.g. 1973, until the summer of the next, 1974. Nevertheless, in numerous instances, it is difficult to ascertain whether a given person arrived already in the autumn of 1973, or only in the winter of 1974 (or, in practical terms,

already during the following financial year). Such events did sometimes occur, since – and this is the second issue – scholarship holders did not arrive at a specified time, and their stays were sometimes rescheduled. The list of artists arriving for their scholarships ought to be corrected on the basis of other sources, which is not always feasible. Chances of a precise reconstruction of the list are also further reduced by the very financial structure of the Kościuszko Foundation, which operates a number of funds created by different donors and divided into various programmes. The two most significant programmes, which contributed to funding scholarships for artists, were those named after Sanislav Chylinski and Alfred Jurzykowski. Scholarships awarded as part of those programmes were recorded by the newsletter. Nonetheless, it sometimes happened that artists had their stays sponsored by other funds, so their names appear in the correspondence, for example, but they are absent from the newsletter records. And, to further complicate the question, the list of scholarship holders also includes artists whose names do not appear in the Foundation authorities' official correspondence. In such cases, when a particular artist is no longer living, it is difficult to verify if they turned up at the residency. Issues with establishing the list arise already with reference to the first scholarship recipients and continues as a model situation for the decade. Based on the newsletter, we know that the first scholarships in visual arts were awarded for the 1970/71 period; the decision must, therefore, have been made at least a year before Kusielewicz assumed the office of president. The scholarships were awarded to Krzysztof Bielec, Paweł Bielec, Wiesław Borowski, Tadeusz Łapiński, Bogdan Skupiński, and Marian Warzecha.⁹ Since Skupiński and Warzecha also appear among the recipients a year later,¹⁰ one can assume that their arrival was postponed by a dozen months. Also, Wiesław Borowski, who received the scholarship once again in 1989, disappears from the records for twenty years. In an official letter to Eva Pape of the November 4, 1975, Eugene Kusielewicz lists fourteen artists, who turned up in New York in the years 1971-75, and three who

were about to arrive (the complete list provided in Kusielewicz's letter of the November 4, 1975: 1971-1972: Zbigniew Dłubak, Jan Dobkowski, Zbigniew Gostomski, Teresa Rudowicz, Marian Warzecha, Stanisław Wiśniewski; 1972-1973: Roman Opalka, Ryszard Winiarski; 1973-1974: Witold Masznicz, Janusz Przybylski, Stefan Żechowski; 1974-1975: Franciszek Starowieyski, Feliks Szyszko; 1975-1976: Jan Berdyszak, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz (awaiting arrival), Marta Kramer (awaiting arrival), Henryk Ziembicki (awaiting arrival). But then, again, the newsletters of the period feature artists not listed by Kusielewicz. They are often figures who did not make a particular mark on the history of Polish art, their monographs are not in existence, they are sometimes dead, and any access to people capable of verifying the truth of the information is difficult, if not impossible. Neither later records, nor the aforementioned letter bear any mention of Krzysztof Bielec and Paweł Bielec, so they are likely not to have arrived. All in all, it is highly probable that none of the artists listed above arrived in 1970 and 1971. However, thanks to Kusielewicz's letter, we do know that, for the academic year 1971/72, Zbigniew Dłubak, Jan Dobkowski, Zbigniew Gostomski, Teresa Rudowicz, Marian Warzecha, and Stanisław Wiśniewski were invited, and certainly arrived in New York. Numerous other sources provide additional confirmation of the fact. It was these artists who were the first residents of the Kościuszko Foundation to stay at Westbeth.

The Moving Spirit and the Tacit Advisor

Eva Pape might not have become the purported moving spirit of art residencies in Westbeth if not for the person of Jagoda Przybylak. And it can certainly be claimed that without Przybylak's contribution, the residencies would have had an entirely different character. Both women had met in Poland in the late fifties. Jagoda Przybylak, an architect by education, was intensely invested in photography and maintained excellent social relations with numerous young artists from Warsaw. It was precisely due to these connections,

that Eva Pape gradually came to make the acquaintance of the Polish art milieu, particularly that of Warsaw, both before her emigration and later, when she visited Poland from the US. Thus, she became acquainted with the *crème de la crème* of the current local neo-avant-garde, including: Edward Krasiński, Ryszard Winiarski, Roman Opalka, and numerous other, equally significant artists. An essential factor in this exchange is that Jagoda Przybylak travelled regularly to New York, and based on her knowledge of trends in the art of the time, she could advise Eva Pape on matters of visual art. Most important for the topic of this paper is that her presence in New York in the period and her role as an unofficial advisor to Eva Pape, makes Jagoda Przybylak a valuable source of knowledge on the initial period of residencies at Westbeth and the outsets of the Kościuszko Foundation scholarships for visual artists.

If we take a closer look at the list of arrivals, Jagoda Przybylak's influence is plainly evident. Among the names listed by Kusielewicz, there is a predominance of representatives of the Warsaw milieu, with slight touches from Krakow. Moreover, many are connected to the Foksal Gallery, or the milieu in which Przybylak, too, was socially engaged. This leads to the question of the criteria adopted by the Kościuszko Foundation in awarding its grants. Przybylak's memoirs feature the motif of consultations both ladies undertook – noteworthy, at Przybylak's explicit request – with art critics and historians, among which she mentions: Bożena Kowalska, Maria Bogucka and Janusz Boguski, and Ryszard Stanisławski, the director of the Museum of Art in Łódź at the time. No documents have been preserved in the Foundation archive that could point to communications with the four individuals. The consultations, therefore, must have been held informally and taken place directly during Jagoda Przybylak's and Eva Pape's sojourns in Poland.

If we were to refer, on the other hand, to the list of artists mentioned by Kusielewicz, we observe a great variety, which becomes even more evident, when we scrutinise the list of artists invited until this day. This is reminiscent of the Foundation's previously discussed ideological pluralism,

transpiring in inviting such disparate figures as Stanisław Mackiewicz and Jacek Kuron. In the case of the visual arts, the pluralism is manifest on at least four levels. First, artists awarded the scholarship represented very different artistic strategies, from graphic arts (Jan Lenica), through textiles (Barbara Maryńska), to performance art (Krzysztof Zarębski) or multimedia art (Izabela Gustowska). Second, they presented the whole array of political attitudes, from indifference (Andrzej Pityński) to membership of the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) (Zbigniew Dłubak). The differentiation also concerns the position of invited artists in the art milieu: we encounter here consummate celebrities, artists recognised already in the seventies (Franciszek Starowieyski) and individuals barely known both then and now. Fourth, the artists selected by the Foundation included individuals producing extremely interesting, ambitious, experimental work as well as authors of pieces which were, so to speak, imitative or conservative. It is worth adding, in this context, that there are occurrences of artists who, today, are valued or even considered contemporary classics, but who did not receive a scholarship or a grant. This was the case with Tomasz Ciecierski who, in a letter to Kusielewicz of the September 3, 1974, incidentally, written in two versions – in perfect Polish and in broken English – asks for funds to cover travel costs to his exhibition in New York. If he received any money at all, it was certainly not part of the two leading programmes mentioned above: his name is not to be found in the newsletters.

Staying in New York

The Kościuszko Foundation gave the money without any restrictions on how recipients should spend their time.. It did not organise studio visits, meeting, consultations etc. The scholarship residencies were not formalised: it was up to those arriving how they organised their time. Certainly, in the seventies, a significant role was played by the above-mentioned Jagoda Przybylak, who, whenever she was around, performed the role of minder and guide. Interestingly, the first artists

to arrive in New York were disappointed that Eva Pape was not to be found there. The curator lived, then, in Los Angeles where she ran an art gallery. Young Warsaw artists felt let down by the fact, as they had been expecting that, thanks to Pape, they would get to know potential collectors or gallery owners. Pape, of course, assisted the artists, but not through facilitating their direct contacts with representatives of the local artistic milieu, but rather by organising exhibitions or lobbying buyers and institutions maintaining their own collections. In any case, due to such a free nature of the stay, it is difficult to give a precise description of the things particular art-makers did or focused on. Sometimes, the newsletters provide information that a given artist was awarded the scholarship for 'acquainting themselves with current trends in American art.' True as it certainly was, the justification is no more than a glib formula, typically included in grant applications, which, in fact, may mean anything whatsoever.

In the seventies, the residential stay lasted three or four months. If we calculate the amount received from the scholarship, it turns out that it equals 7\$ of spending money per day. Despite the sum being far from impressive in New York terms, artists residing in Westbeth tightened their belts as much as they could to bring some of their money back home. The fact is mentioned both by Jagoda Przybylak as well as by Krzysztof Zarębski, one of the scholarship recipients whom I managed to interview.¹¹ The purchasing power of the dollar in comparison to the Polish złoty must have, doubtlessly, been a powerful motivation; to the extent that (according to Jadwiga Przybylak) a number of artists in the seventies decided to take the sea passage. The journey lasted ten days, but it cost much less than a flight and helped to keep some of the money.

We can suppose that the principal purpose and the greatest desire cherished by those arriving in New York was to find a gallery, a collector or an institution that would agree to show their work, which might have allowed them to return or even settle there. Certainly, those desires were supported by Pape. We should add that, probably, the only

formal requirement from the artists on the part of the Foundation was the preparation of a report from their residency. If it happened that an artist had an exhibition, or their works were accepted or purchased by an institution, every such instance was scrupulously recorded by *The Kościuszko Foundation Newsletter*. There are, however, only a few of such published reports; they are also missing from the archive. One might, therefore, form the impression that either it was difficult to obtain such reports or rarely anything written there merited publication. A typical published report goes, more or less, as the following statement from Tomasz Tatarczyk:

Your grant let me become acquainted with the new trends of contemporary American and world art and gave me the opportunity to show my works in New York. (...) I could realize my plans in having an exhibition of my painting in New York. They were exhibited in two galleries: The Soho Center for Visual Artists, from January 14 to 20 February, 1988 (a two-man show) and in the Frank Bustamante Gallery, from January 19 to February 6, 1988 (a one man show). (...) I want to let you know that two of my works were chosen by curators of museum collections. One of them is at present in the Everson Museum of Art w Syracuse, NY, and the other in the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art w Ridgefield, CT. The period of my stay in the United States was a very important artistic and practical experience for me and I am sure it will have a great influence on my future painting creativity.¹²

When notes procured by editors appear, they sound, more or less, like the remarks concerning Roman Opalka's residency:

While here, the American art world was so impressed that he found a gallery which arranged to exhibit his works. Prior to having exhibited his works at the John

Weber Gallery, in Soho (N.Y.), he had already exhibited successfully in Poland, Italy and England. (...) His works have been acquired by many museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, in New York.¹³

Thus, we receive a formula which sketches an artist's profile and their successes, subsequently mentioning instances of recognition on the American market. A similar blueprint refers to many other artists presented in the newsletter. In Opalka's case, things might have not unfolded as fortunately if not for a certain accident. Jagoda Przybylak recounts that the period of Opalka's stay in New York coincided with his name day. The name's day party at Westbeth was supposed to have been attended by her female friends, who, however, did not turn up. On the following day, Przybylak phoned them to express her displeasure. One of the women, whose boyfriend was a New York sculptor, having a guilty conscience, decided to ask her partner to introduce Opalka to several gallery owners, as a recompense. As we have seen, quite effectively.

Eva Pape's assistance could be just as effective. We learn about it from a letter she sent to Janusz Przybylski.¹⁴ On the one hand, she sharply demands that Przybylski does not sell paintings to collectors behind her back and, on the other, she reminds him about sending two "recently promised" paintings she requires for an exhibition in an unspecified museum, a presentation for Polish National Television and for one channel of an American television. Przybylski would also have been happy to be included in an exhibition, about which we learn from a piece of correspondence between Pape and one of the Kościuszko Foundation board members, Walter Golaski, from July 1975. The curator writes there that 'before Kusielewicz became president, no visual artist had received a scholarship,' and since then, it was possible to invite and successfully exhibit such artists as: Warzecha, Dobkowski, Opalka, Masznisz, Winiarski, Gostomski, Przybylski, Starowieyski (sic!), Szyszko, adding that it was the *crème de la crème* of the Polish art world. It would be difficult

not to appreciate her efforts, exactly like the efforts of the Kościuszko Foundation, bearing in mind trends in the American art of the period. There is no concealing that despite the majority of artists invited in the 1970s having enjoyed the position of local stars of the neo-avant-garde in Poland, separated by the Iron Curtain, their output must already have seemed slightly outmoded on the American market. After all, they were not bringing novelties there like French artists several decades before them, but rather works which stylistically might have seemed somewhat derivative from the perspective of the Western world. Pape, organising exhibitions of Fangor or Stazewski, faced the task of competing with the rich output of American abstractionism and minimalism. Besides, it was not even a question of novelty of the medium or stylistics: art from Central Europe evoked no concrete associations, even when actions which could easily compete with the American avant-garde were proposed. Such was the case of Natalia LL, the Kościuszko Foundation scholarship holder for 1977. Despite her efforts, including meetings with Leo Castelli, among others, 'America was not ready for it,' to paraphrase the humorous title of Karol Radziszewski's film, dedicated precisely to her visit in the US.¹⁵

As could be expected, individual artists variously tackled their residential stays in the United States and made different uses of the opportunities that arose before them. There were those among them who decided to remain in the US or return there shortly after completing their scholarship period. Based on documents in the Kościuszko Foundation archive as well as interviews with Jagoda Przybylak and Mieczysław Rudak – a collector living in New York since the eighties and the owner of the Emart Gallery – it can be assumed that, from the Foundation scholarship recipients, three decided to permanently settle in the United States. These were (in temporal order of their residencies): Andrzej Pityński, Krzysztof Zarebski, and Barbara Maryańska. The former gained popularity, devoting himself to monumental sculpture in public space. His projects are often concerned with national subject matter, and

his hallmark work is, perhaps, the monument commemorating victims of the Katyń massacre, set in New Jersey. Krzysztof Zarębski settled in the US two years after his scholarship, in 1980, and took part in activities of the independent New York art scene, associating with the Rivington School Artists group as well as continuing his individual work, frequently showing his pieces in Poland. Barbara Maryańska, who arrived on her scholarship in 1987, in order to become acquainted with techniques of textiles production developed by Native Americans, also became integrated into the activities of the American art scene. She moved from textiles to painting and, currently, she also works as an exhibition curator and runs her own independent gallery in Beacon, a town north of New York, where she also lives.

Westbeth Once More?

If we take into account all the artists about whose scholarships we are informed through the contents of *The Kościuszko Foundation Newsletter* and we complement those with information from other documents, we can estimate that, since 1971, around seventy artists arrived in the US. In the space of nearly fifty years, two tendencies can be observed. Firstly, since the eighties, it is noticeable that, besides artists from Warsaw and Krakow, artists from other cities also appear, Poznań or Łódź, for example. Secondly, a decrease in the number of artists awarded scholarships is visible as well. While in the seventies about fifty artists arrived in the US, in the three following decades, there were merely twenty. For these reasons, this text resonates primarily with the first decade in which the Foundation started to finance residencies for visual artists.

Reasons for the decreasing number of scholarship recipients may vary; one of them is a change in the Foundation leadership: in the early eighties, Eugene Kusielewicz ceased to serve as the Foundation president, and his successors paid less attention to promoting this particular section of Polish culture. The niche character of

contemporary art determines the fact that it is more difficult to advertise Poland by visual art, without drawing on music, theatre or cinema. Another reason might lie in the fact that a decision was made by the next president of the Foundation to shift the emphasis: since the seventies, an informal association, the Pro Arte League, has been connected to the Kościuszko Foundation. Its members have been people, mostly women, who organised exhibitions, avocationally, and for charitable purposes, chiefly at the Foundation's seat on 65 East Street. As this was a fund raising exercise rather than a professional gallery event it was characterised by pieces whose quality left much to be desired, while one of the hallmark events of the associations became a fashion show, helping to raise funds for operations of the Foundation.¹⁶ This event might have stemmed from the institution's financial situation, the jumble, however, surely does little to support avant-garde art. The seventies were, therefore, a time when the Foundation opened up to actively supporting visual arts, which has become a permanent feature of its activities, but the number of art scholarship have been, subsequently, reduced, apparently shifting the emphasis to the activities of the Pro Arte League.

It is also worth noting that the premises in Westbeth – a place intended by Kusielewicz to serve artists – has stopped being used exclusively for this purpose. The place may operate sometimes as a residence for artists, these days, however, it is most often sublet for commercial purposes, in order to supplement the Foundation budget. Another reason might, arguably, be the fact that a large section of scholarship recipients – unlike in the seventies – does not stay in New York, but rather heads towards residencies in institutions in various corners of the US. The Foundation, in such cases, serves the sole role of residency sponsor, but is not obliged to secure an apartment. Hence, the artists turn up at Westbeth ever more rarely.

Numerous themes surface in this text which could be developed on a more general level and situated in a number of contexts: political, economic, migratory, or post-colonial. For many Poles, the perspective of spending several months

in the US still belongs to the fantasy of the quest for and conquest of Eldorado, despite the fact that economic disproportions between the two countries have, indeed, changed greatly in comparison to the potential of the People's Republic of Poland in the seventies. In a period when the Iron Curtain separated the two economic-ideological formations, leaving provincial Poland for an art residential stay in the capital of contemporary art, which New York was considered to be at the time, had a much larger weight than it has today. Staying at the 'capital' offered a glimmer of hope for an international career, but it was mostly related to opportunities of achieving or stabilising an artist's visibility of the art scene back in Poland. The times have changed and New York, the US or the West, in general, have ceased to play the role of the Promised Land in mass imagination. The living standards in Poland are gradually levelling with those in Western countries or, at least, the differences are not as vast as they were two decades ago. There is no censorship or information blockage to speak of any longer. Ever more often, Polish tourism loses its financial motivation and becomes a leisure or a cultural activity. The latter is especially true of artists, who go on art residencies globally.

Residential stays as a way to make art have become highly popular in the past ten or twenty years. If we were to approach the activities of the Kościuszko Foundation in this manner, its work in the field of visual art could be described as the first residential programme for Polish artists to be established in the United States, and, perhaps, the first in the world. Yet, the history of residencies organised by the Kościuszko Foundation is not unlike a firecracker. From its vehement illumination in the mid-seventies, when several tens of artists appeared in New York, to a gradual dying-out and its later, humble glowing up to this day; in the last decade, only a few artists came to New York at the invitation of the Kościuszko Foundation, and the very existence of the programme is a little known fact in the social history of Polish visual arts. Nevertheless, this text is a brief overview which aims, above all, to delineate a basic factual account related

to the functioning of artistic scholarships within the activities of the Kościuszko Foundation and is focused only on its early stages. Studies situating the phenomenon – of migration or, simply, artists' travels – in the context of relations between cultural centres and peripheries, economic inequalities, censorship, or cultural memory, in reference to the discussed Foundation, might still be undertaken in future.

Audio:

Interview conducted by Łukasz Białkowski with Jagoda Przybylak: <https://soundcloud.com/ukasz-bia-kowski-921729330/rozmowa-z-jagoda-przybylak-o-rezdydencjach-artystycznych-w-westbeht-w-nowym-jorku>

Interview conducted by Łukasz Białkowski with Krzysztof Zarębski: <https://soundcloud.com/ukasz-bia-kowski-921729330/krzysztof-zarebski-opowiada-o-westbeth-i-początkach-pobytu-w-nowym-jorku>

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all information about Eva Pape come from Jagoda Przybylak, with whom I conducted an interview on the August 16, 2017 at her apartment in the New York borough of Brooklyn, in the neighbourhood of Greenpoint. A recording of the conversation is available at: <https://soundcloud.com/ukasz-bia-kowski-921729330/rozmowa-z-jagoda-przybylak-o-rezydencjach-artystycznych-w-westbeht-w-nowym-jorku>.

² "The Remarkable Ewa Pape," *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 31, no. 9 (308) (1976): 6-7. Henceforth, *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* is abbreviated to *KFN*. All material taken from the source is anonymous.

³ For example, sponsoring, together with the Alfred Jurzykowski Foundation, the establishment of the Faculty of Geology, Geophysics and Environmental Protection at the AGH University of Science and Technology, Krakow, in the nineties, to the amount of 100,000\$.

⁴ A leading Polish-émigré literary-political magazine, published from 1947 to 2000 initially in Rome and then in Paris.

⁵ Piotr Korduba, "Dom starego hipstera (The House of the Old Hipster)," *Wysokie Obcasy*, 19.09.2015.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ The newsletter was not a typical one, publishing brief items of information about activities of the Foundation; numerous issues operated as a platform for public discussion, raising issues that were crucial to the US Polish diaspora, such as the aforementioned "Polack jokes" or polemical responses to allegations from the Paris *Kultura*.

⁹ *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 25, no. 10 (1971): 2-3. Wiesław Borowski, in a direct conversation with the author of this article, pointed out that he appeared in New York several years later. However, he could not remember the precise date, while the preserved records remain silent on the subject of his presence there.

¹⁰ *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 26, no. 10 (1972): 12.

¹¹ A recording of my interview with Krzysztof Zarębski is available here: <https://soundcloud.com/ukasz-bia-kowski-921729330/krzysztof-zarebski-opowiada-o-westbeth-i-początkach-pobytu-w-nowym-jorku>.

¹² Original spelling, *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 39, no. 4 (1988): 8.

¹³ *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 31, no. 9 (1976-77).

¹⁴ The letter is in the Kościuszko Foundation archive, its date remains unknown.

¹⁵ Karol Radziszewski, *America Is Not Ready For This*, 2012.

¹⁶ *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 43, no. 4 (1992-1993): 10.

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FREEDOM IS NOT FREE. THE POLAND-USA PERFORMANCE ART PROJECT *JULIETT 484* AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

In the following text I would like to consider the performances that took place during the exchange of artists from Poland and the USA in 2003 under the name *Juliett 484*. This project took place at a very specific moment in the history of both countries.¹ I would like to analyse it from the perspective of a contemporary participant of culture, after almost twenty years. This is difficult because no reliable factual description of it has survived. I am most interested in the political and social contexts, and within them especially the issue of personal freedom, which was severely restricted in both countries at the time. In the United States,² in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and, as Naomi Klein named it, under the 'shock doctrine,' where citizens surrendered their freedom to privacy and free movement in the name of so-called national

security. Poland, which joined NATO in 1999, also felt the effects of US foreign policy. The Second Gulf War began on March 20, 2003 and did not officially end until December 15, 2011. Anti-war protests in Poland were rare,³ although the majority of the Polish public did not support Poland's participation in the operation *Iraqi Freedom*.⁴ At the time, the CIA's secret prisons in Poland had not yet been discovered – the matter only came to light in 2005.⁵ The year 2003 in Poland was a year of pro-European euphoria – the signing of the treaty in Athens expanding the European Union by ten countries (April 16) and the European referendum (June 8).⁶ Acceptance of Poland's accession to the EU in the art community was unanimous.⁷ In 2003, the post-communist Leszek Miller government was still in power, but the so-

called 'Rywingate' – the biggest corruption scandal to date after 1989 – caused the eventual collapse of this political faction to the advantage of the right.⁸ In the parliamentary committee set up in January to explain it, Zbigniew Ziobro shone,⁹ which gained him immense popularity and contributed to the victory of the PiS party in the 2005 elections.¹⁰ How did artists react to these events and what threats did they see in the actions of those in power? What does it look like from today's perspective? The title of the text "Freedom Is Not Free" refers to a popular post-9/11 slogan used, among other things, on the Korean War veterans' memorial in Washington. In this context, it was a reminder that freedom is paid for by the sacrifices of soldiers, but it can be interpreted in different ways. Both countries have a deeply rooted myth of freedom which, in Poland, is reinforced by its periodic loss during the partitions, the German occupation and the communist regime. The myth of 'American Freedom' and the belief that the United States is the freest country in the world are among the basic myths underlying US identity.¹¹ What did this freedom really look like through the eyes of the performers taking part in *Juliett 484*?

The Submarine of Imagination

In March 2002, Władysław Kaźmierczak, curator of the *Castle of Imagination* performance art festival, was invited by artist and lecturer Marilyn Arsem along with Ewa Rybska to Boston to present a lecture and a performance at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts. In May 2002, artists from the Mobius group founded in 1975, Marilyn Arsem and Jed Speare, were invited to Poland for the *Castle of Imagination*.¹² This was when the idea of organizing an exchange of artists from Poland and the US was born. From the beginning, the idea of the Mobius Group was to share space with other artists and initiate exchanges, which made it unique at the time in the US.¹³ In the United States, in the wake of the systemic changes and the war in the former Yugoslavia, funding opportunities arose in the late nineties and early two-thousands for projects supporting contacts with artists from Central and

Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Supporting institutions here were mainly The Trust for Mutual Understanding, Artslink and Soros Centers for Contemporary Art.¹⁴ The *Castle of Imagination*, in turn, was the first annual international performance art festival organized in Poland after 1989. It was held between 1993 and 2006. The first edition of the *Castle of Imagination*, curated jointly by Władysław Kaźmierczak and Grzegorz Borkowski, took place in 1993 at the Teutonic Castle in Bytów, hence the name of the festival. Since 1996 Kaźmierczak was the sole curator. The last Bytów edition was held in 1999. Since 2000, the *Castle of Imagination* has been organized in various places in Poland. Crossing the country's borders was a natural consequence of the constant search for new contexts for art and new audiences. In 2003, 2005 and 2006, the *Castle of Imagination* was held successively in the USA, Great Britain and Germany.

The *Juliett 484* project, an exchange of artists from Poland and the US, took place in 2003, in several spaces. First in Poland, at the BGSW Gallery in Ustka and at the Modelarnia in Gdansk as part of the *Castle of Imagination* festival. The second of these spaces was on the grounds of the Gdansk Shipyard, where workers' strikes had taken place and where the so-called August Agreements were signed in 1980, resulting in the birth of Solidarity. In the States, the artists performed in Providence, RI (as part of the Convergence Festival), Boston (at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts) and New York (at the BPM Performance Space and the Chashama Theater¹⁵). The project was named *Juliett 484* after a former Russian submarine moored at Park Point Collier in Providence.¹⁶ Władysław Kaźmierczak, curator of the *Castle of Imagination*, did not hide his scepticism about making this the context for the event and imposing specific performance themes on artists:

(...) How artificial and grotesque the idea was, was transparent. Yet for the sake of performance art we have also invented this useful story on the significance of our artistic project. Another submarine sailed

in the water of the Baltic Sea in service of a totalitarian state. The actual presence of the Soviet submarine brings back memories on the cold war and the totalitarian system as well as the tragedy of the Kursk submarine vessel which came from the same production series. It could have been one of the war vessels patrolling the Gdansk Bay during Solidarity strikes in the 80s, it could have visited Ustka or another port on the Baltic Sea. Demobilised after its long service and not armoured anymore it was purchased by Mauno Koivisto – Finnish President's daughter's husband - and anchored in Helsinki to become a restaurant called *Juliett 484*. Since it caused false alarms in the NATO alarm system it had to be withdrawn from the port. It was chartered to Florida and then purchased by a Providence foundation – Collier Point Park, Providence, Rhode Island. Today it is a tourist attraction and a teaching aid but at the same time a silent and vulnerable monument of the cold war and the communist system. With the Polish part of the project located in Ustka (a port) and the Modelarnia building on the area of the Gdansk Shipyard right next to historical places where the peaceful fight with the totalitarian systems started, the *Juliett 484* has gained a distinctive political context.¹⁷

The context outlined by the event creators created for the grant application referred to the Cold War era. It supported the division between the 'good USA and the bad USSR.' Reference was also made to the sinking of the Kursk submarine (2000).¹⁸ Officially, the analogy between the Cold War and the just-launched War on Terror was overlooked. However, artists from the United States did not intend to uphold the myth of the US as a military power and guardian of democracy, on the contrary, they wanted to deconstruct this colonial power. This attitude was important for artists from Poland, because for them the trip to the 'cradle of performance art' was an important experience, and

what the US artists said about the reality of life in the States probably influenced the perception of this country by Poles. Polish artists, on the other hand, were critical of their contemporary history related to the Solidarity movement, Polishness as such, as well as Poland's progressive conservatism, which for US artists may also have been surprising and revealing.

The Power of Nightmares and Un-American Paranoia

Introduced after 9/11, back in 2001, the PATRIOT (Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) Act allowed for surveillance of ordinary citizens, tapping their phone calls, tracking their online activity, and even the books they borrowed from libraries.¹⁹ At the same time, George W. Bush Jr. in the founding manifesto of the Department of Homeland Security argued: "Liberty and freedom are fundamental to our way of life. Freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, property rights, freedom from unlawful discrimination - these are all rights we are guaranteed as Americans, and rights we will fight to protect."²⁰ The perpetuation of the myth of American freedom and exceptionalism was evident in public spaces in the US. After 9/11, US flags appeared everywhere (in the New York subways on every train car). At the same time, bags began to be checked before entering stores, malls and libraries. This atmosphere of danger and, at the same time, loss of privacy must have translated into the art that the US performers showed. "The mood of their performance was mostly reflectively sad, a little bitter, which reminded us of the state of the spirit of Poland in the eighties during martial law. Is this the spirit of America at war today?" – Łukasz Guzek asked rhetorically.²¹ I will therefore analyse some of the performances during the *Juliett 484* project that dealt with the themes of war and U.S. foreign policy, which artists created in the context of wars with notable names in Afghanistan (*Operation Enduring Freedom*, 2001) and Iraq (*Operation Iraqi Freedom*, 2003).

The submarine in which the festival was held a year earlier had starred in a film *K-19. The Widowmaker* about the tragic nuclear reactor leak in 1961. In fact, it was a similar nuclear launcher submarine called the K-77, and Juliett was the name of the submarine type given by the US military. Marilyn Arsem – founder of Mobius – performed during the festival in the cabin of a KGB officer where, in the performance *Watching; Waiting*, she read the Department of Homeland Security alerts in a whisper.²² These alerts were meant to justify its existence and maintain a sense of perpetual threat. The context of the site imposed an analogy to the Cold War and the constant exaggeration of the USSR's military power once made by Team-B, but not based on any evidence. This CIA-competing group began in 1976 by President Gerald Ford claimed, among other things, that the USSR possessed non-acoustic submarines, although it never provided proof of this.²³ The analogy with accusations that Iraq had possessed weapons of mass destruction comes to mind. At the time, it was not known that they were false, but the artist's intuition proved accurate. The famous sentence from the first page of the aforementioned 2002 founding manifesto of the Department of Homeland Security, which reads: "Today's terrorists can strike at any place, at any time, and with virtually any weapon,"²⁴ spoke of a constant danger that is so undefined that it is impossible to win or end the fight against it. It was a danger that resembled a submarine lurking in the depths of the collective subconscious.

The scenario of threat that informed global politics after 9/11 has made the absence of any guarantor of belief much more palpable, particularly as it operates under the sign of the precautionary principle. As Adam Curtis's *The Power of Nightmares* (2004) documents, actions are justified on the basis of an imagined future, and the threat of a force that hasn't yet acted or revealed itself; there can be no empirical basis for this argument, since it is hypothetical and the proposed action seeks to prevent the imagined dangers from ever being released.²⁵

The quote above was written by Jill Bennett, citing a documentary by Adam Curtis showing parallels between the emerging movement of Islamic fundamentalists and neoconservatives in the United States since the late fifties.

In Ustka, at the Modelarnia in Gdansk, in Boston and in New York in a performance titled *American Foreign Policy*, Marilyn Arsem dissected the myth of US exceptionalism and imperialism. She set a terracotta pot with a cyclamen plant on a table, watered it, tended it, removed dust and blooms from it. She then asked the audience to close their eyes, smashed the pot with a stone, and then bandaged the whole thing and reassembled it. She repeated these actions over and over again until the plant and pot were completely destroyed, while never asking the audience to open their eyes, so some people had their eyes closed the whole time. The performance at the Modelarnia ended with an excerpt from George Bush's speech to the troops in Iraq, bringing to mind the poem *White Man's Burden* by Rudyard Kipling: "As you accomplished your mission, you treated innocent civilians with kindness, began delivering urgently needed food and medicine, and acted with the highest traditions of the United States Military. Our whole nation is proud of you, and I am proud to be your Commander in Chief."²⁶ Vanessa Gilbert, on the other hand, took the audience on a walk in a performance titled *I Want to Live in America* in Ustka – to an Internet café, an ATM and a port. These were three points where one can encounter advanced technology that is largely exported by the US. In the suitcase she carried she had a tape recorder with a recorded child's voice repeating the question, "Are we there yet?" Gilbert laid flowers and placed candles at the sites, she also deposited a notebook with her thoughts written down at the café, and drowned a few dollars at the harbour wharf. The artist exposed the myth of U.S. exceptionalism and the longing for a better world represented by the country, and at the same time criticized military-corporate technology. On the other hand, at the Modelarnia (and later also in Providence), in a performance called *Memento Mori*, the artist climbed onto a chair wearing a top with the word FREE written on it in a Statue of



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1. Marilyn Arsem, performance *Watching; Waiting*, Juliett 484, Providence, RI. Photographer: Bob Raymond

Courtesy of Marilyn Arsem

2. Aleksandra Kubiak, performance *For them*, Juliett 484, Providence, RI. Photographer: Bob Raymond

Courtesy of Marilyn Arsem

3. Arti Grabowski, performance *Successor*, Juliett 484, Providence, RI. Photographer: Bob Raymond

Courtesy of Marilyn Arsem

4. Vanessa Gilbert, performance *Memento Mori*, Juliett 484, Providence, RI. Photographer: Bob Raymond

Courtesy of Marilyn Arsem

5. Grzegorz Klamon, performance *Maybe Later*, Juliett 484, Providence, RI. Photographer: Bob Raymond

Courtesy of Marilyn Arsem

6. Władysław Kaźmierczak & Ewa Rybska, performance *The Giants*, Juliett 484, Providence, RI. Photographer: Bob Raymond

Courtesy of Marilyn Arsem

7. Antoni Szoska & Yin Peet, performance *Cross to Lingam*, Juliett 484, Providence, RI. Photographer: Bob Raymond

Courtesy of Marilyn Arsem

Liberty gesture, muttered the US anthem, and then climbed a ladder to the ceiling and spilled dogtags on the floor (in Providence she spilled them directly from the ceiling onto herself). These are the tags that soldiers wear around their necks so they can be identified after death.²⁷ So US foreign policy not only generates destructive activities in other countries, but is also complicit in the death of its own citizens in the name of bringing freedom and democracy.²⁸ Freedom Is Not Free. Other artists: Arti Grabowski and Jed Speare addressed the submarine context more generally – ridiculing toxic machismo, militarism and imperialism. In the performance *Successor*, Arti Grabowski first hit the bread with a baton to the rhythm of the ‘enedue rabe, the stork has swallowed the frog’ nursery rhyme, then he made himself bread epaulets and a general’s cap. Next, he set up plastic soldiers – black and white, later knocked over by a live rat, to which the artist tried to give orders. At the end, he pinned a medal from a lollipop to his bare chest. Jed Speare, on the other hand, for the performance *Sub-mission Regarding Juliett 484*, shot a black-and-white film inside the submarine, styled after avant-garde films of the twentieth- thirtieth and inspired by its name – Juliett. The film thus featured *Juliett and Romeo*. During the performance, Jed made uncoordinated movements on a chair to the rhythm of military steps, and then performed a shadow theater with two boats – a Soviet and a US one – both going down. Through such actions, the artists tamed the fears and sense of danger that became the glue of the global narrative about the post-9/11 world.

In one pub in Providence, a framed slogan, “Paranoia is un-American,” was hung on the wall. It inspired Władysław Kaźmierczak and Ewa Rybska to create performances in Boston and New York’s Chashama Theatre under that very title. The original idea was to rent an avionette, fly over New York and drop leaflets with this slogan. The organizers reacted to the idea with one sentence: “don’t even think about it.” It is worth noting that at the time NATO coalition troops were spreading leaflets, ideological ‘manna from heaven’ in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the so-called PSYOP (Psychological Operations). Even before the start of the operations in Iraq, some

33 million of them were dropped.²⁹ The performers finely parodied the appearance at the border, always associated at that time with stress for U.S.-visa-holding tourists from Poland.³⁰ This border in performance was a stretched string and tiny American flags. A meticulous inspection, removing shoes, looking into every corner of the body. In the background a conversation was played about the performance title with festival participants. The term ‘Un-American’ itself had come into existence in a political context when the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUA) was founded in 1938 – a special investigative unit tracking the manifestations of fascism, but especially communism in the United States until 1975. With its activities, HCUA fuelled Cold War sentiment especially in the fifties. “[T]he curiously conspiratorial nature of claims levelled against putative Communist subversives, such as Alger Hiss, entrenched the hysteria and paranoia that would characterize full-blown McCarthyism in the early 1950s would culminate in the execution of the Rosenbergs in 1961” wrote Simon Van Schalkwyk.³¹ It soon became clear that paranoia in the post-9/11 era is not just peculiar to the US. For, as Wendy Hui Kyong Chun wrote, “Paranoia stems from the desire to compensate for a perceived weakness in symbolic authority.”³²

The humiliating procedures noted by artists traveling to the *Juliett 484* festival were only in their infancy. In addition to colour CCTV cameras, despite the controversy, full body scanners were later introduced at airports and other public places, among others, which violate the right to privacy. This particularly affects the rights of transgender people by exposing them to transphobic attacks. If we add to this the racist facial recognition system³³ and the Chinese social credit system based on it, we will get the fulfilment of the grim prophecy of the George Orwell’s *1984*. At the same time, artists who are sensitized to all manifestations of oppression, subvert any “rationalizing or false answers to contemporary questions” – as defined by Andrzej Turowski, who continues: “If democracy is a means of improving collective life (rather than a political utopia), and politics a means of achieving a socially

desired order (rather than political power), then the art of the *particular* sparks that unrest without which democracy as a form of critical participation in the collective project would be unthinkable.”³⁴

Free Catholic Poland

As mentioned above, 2003 was dominated by pro-European euphoria. At the time, Poland was negotiating the shape of the preamble to the European Constitution, insisting on a reference to ‘Christian values.’ The prospect of joining the European Union triggered reflections on one's own identity, the definition of Polishness, the place of Poles in Europe and the world, national vices and addictions. This was done, among other things, in his performance *Polish Menu* by Arti Grabowski who got drunk during the show, smashed bottles against a bucket placed on his head, nailed a large cross to his chest with a hammer, burned a bonfire ‘on his face’ – on the seat of the chair under which he was lying, all in the presence of the Polish flag.³⁵ Earlier, in Ustka, he performed a performance entitled *CV* during which he nailed to doors with nails various acronyms (PRL, MGR, SLD, ASP, ZUS, NIP³⁶ etc.) that accompany us during the bureaucratic life in Poland. The sharp ends of the nails went to the other side of the door. In the next step of the performance, the artist “placed the nail-strewn door in the middle of the room, supporting it lightly and with little security, he lay under it holding a string in his hand, the pulling of which was supposed to drop the door directly on him”³⁷ – recorded Łukasz Guzek. He then pulled the string, but luckily managed to dodge the falling door. In the last scene, he put it on his back and crawled with it to the set destination, then, lying all the time under the door, he lit a candle playing *Happy Birthday*. Also autobiographical, but more personal, was the performance of Aleksandra Kubiak, who in Ustka and then in a submarine performed a piece entitled *For them*. The ‘them’ were her alcohol-addicted parents. The artist hung from the ceiling of the gallery and then in the corridor of the submarine, face down, and drank vodka through a pipe.³⁸

At the time, part of the exhibition *Roads to Freedom*, about the bloodless seizure of power by Solidarity, was shown at the Modelarnia.³⁹ This process was addressed by Władysław Kaźmierczak and Ewa Rybska in a performance on a platform next to the *Juliett 484* submarine entitled *The Giants*. The performers hung up about hundred large photographs taken during the Gdansk Shipyard strike between August 15 and 30, 1980, and, moving slowly for several hours, collected and deposited field flowers and grasses in front of them. However, they wore muzzles on their faces, suggesting the lack of freedom of expression in ‘free Poland.’ The meaning of the performance was communicated by an inscription:

(...) The workers created the first independent union in the whole communist system. They developed a unique movement bringing back the human dignity and elementary human rights. Because of this strike, the consciousness of the Polish people was changed; they started to believe in the possibility of creating a free country with democratic rules. This strike also brought us to intensive thinking about the breakdown of the Yalta Agreement, which divided Europe into two parts and pushed Poland into a totalitarian ideology. During the strike the Soviet navy stood all the time in the Gdansk Bay in visible distance. The Navy wanted to give a signal and visible pressure that they would defend the communist ideology and Soviet empire. The peaceful revolution in Poland was very threatening to the totalitarian system. Today's context: demobilized Soviet submarine / photos of shipyard workers reminds us of a gloomy time, which we hope, will never come back.⁴⁰

Today – in retrospect – we know that the ideals of Solidarity as a labour movement have been betrayed. In 2003, the unemployment rate was around 20%.⁴¹ “The fact that it was ‘Solidarity’, the party built by Poland’s blue-collar workers, that

oversaw the creation of this permanent underclass represented a bitter betrayal, one that bred a deep cynicism and anger in the country that has never fully lifted” wrote Naomi Klein.⁴² Freedom Was Not Free. Poland’s Road to Freedom – along with Leszek Balcerowicz’s plan, and in fact – the plan of Jeffrey Sachs and David Lipton⁴³ – constituted ‘shock therapy’ for Polish society, whose impoverishment and disillusionment resulted in its subsequent susceptibility to the populist slogans of PiS. Paradoxically, by voting for the Right, Poles got rid of the personal freedom they had won for themselves, under the (never realized and purely demagogic) slogan of revindication of state property sold off after 1989. Another issue was the struggle between these ‘giants’ – the leaders of 1980 strikes over the legacy of Solidarity and their mutual accusations taking away from Poles the feeling that they had accomplished something great. Lech Wałęsa was accused of collaborating with the UB (Security Office). *Gazeta Wyborcza* furthermore explains that “Kazimierz Świtoń accused Walesa of handing Poland over to ‘Jewish racists’ at the Round Table.”⁴⁴

An artist who also referred to Solidarity was Grzegorz Kłaman, who rebranded the submarine Juliett as Solidarity in the performance *Maybe Later*. Let me remind the reader, that in the official conception of the festival, the submarine might have been one of the warships patrolling the Gdansk Bay during the Solidarity strikes of the eighties. In the aforementioned film *K-19: The Widowmaker*, during the christening of the boat, the champagne bottle did not break. The sailors pronounced, ‘it’s a curse.’ The story from the film repeated itself in Providence. Kłaman stuck a sign with the new name on the submarine and tried to break the bottle, which didn’t succeed right away because it was covered with rubber. Finally, after several attempts, he managed to smash it against a metal railing. Kłaman also hoisted a red, white and black flag that he had designed on the mast. Adding black to the colours of the Polish flag was meant to remind people of Poland’s infamous history. In the early two-thousands, this was vividly being discussed, thanks to Jan Tomasz Gross’s book *Neighbors*,

published in 2000, about the Polish nation’s crimes against the Jews of Jedwabne.⁴⁵ The book caused a shock in a Polish society convinced of its own impeccability in the context of World War II, and even of the heroic deeds of the “righteous among the nations of the world.”⁴⁶ The publication, which has been repeatedly criticized for its inaccurate assessment of the sources, sparked a discussion about Polish participation in Nazi crimes – now impossible to erase, as evidenced by the PiS government’s backtracking on its ban on accusing the Polish people of co-responsibility for these (and other) crimes.⁴⁷ Returning to the performance – the gesture of Poland’s acquisition of the submarine was dressed up in pathos, on the other hand, the flag itself – intended to refer to values that Poles are supposed to be proud of – was manipulated and contaminated by the artist without allowing us to forget the ‘black pages of history.’ It is unclear what exactly the christening of the boat and the hanging of the manipulated flag meant in this context. The gesture can also be read as a criticism of Solidarity for its conservatism and ties to the Catholic Church. The political freedom won in 1989 meant giving in to its pressure. Freedom Was Not Free. Milan Kohout, an artist of Czech origin and signatory of *Charter 77*, also referred to it⁴⁸ in a performance of the *Word of God*, when in Gdansk he locked himself in a cage with chickens, to whom he read the *Holy Scriptures* in Czech. He also used the soundtrack from the *Roads to Freedom* exhibition, which, as mentioned earlier, was shown at the Shipyard at the time – these were recordings of police conversations from the 1970 demonstrations. One oppression turned into another.

How severe this oppression was, the Polish art world found out in 2003. On July 18, 2003, Dorota Nieznalska was sentenced to six months of restriction of liberty (performing community service) for offending religious feelings with the installation *Passion*.⁴⁹ Nieznalska’s trial took place at an express pace, especially for the Polish justice system. The first hearing took place on September 16, 2002, the verdict came on July 18, 2003 and came as a shock to the art community. Władysław Kaźmierczak and Ewa Rybska commented on it in

their performance *Body & Sin*. First, they set in motion a magnetic man-acrobat – spinning around his axis and performing funny poses. The image was transmitted from the camera to the cinema screen and suggested a resemblance with another person who appeared on the screen – Judge Tomasz Zieliński – the protagonist of the documentary film *The sentence*, from the trial of Dorota Nieznalska. The performers acted separately – Rybska, holding a glowing pendant in her hand, showed various objects wrapped in transparent containers: peppers, pasta, two vibrators, a plastic fluorescent cross, handcuffs, a black whip, and condoms. At this time Kaźmierczak took off his jacket and began to put plastic garbage bags over his white shirt, making a kind of cape or jabot to suggest a judge's outfit. Then he very slowly smeared his face and his entire head with black mud. “This mud with which Dorota Nieznalska was pelted sticks to every artist, all art (...)”⁵⁰ – commented Łukasz Guzek. Kaźmierczak then dried his face and hair with a hair dryer, took off his garbage bags and put on a jacket. Rybska handcuffed him to a chair and then whipped him. When the projection ended, the performers slowly began to howl like wolves. One of the spectators at the Modelarnia was Dorota Nieznalska, who snatched the whip from Rybska's hands and began to beat the screen with an image of the judge speaking. Other artists who addressed the Nieznalska case were Antoni Szoska from Kraków and Yin Peet from Taiwan. Their performance was titled *Cross to Lingam* (‘Lingam’ is the Sanskrit name for phallus – a symbol of male power). They built something like a large phallus – a totem – in the Modelarnia. To this totem made of wire they horizontally attached two brooms with bread loaves impaled on the handles. In this way they built a form of a cross. “The artists crushed the bread into tiny crumbs, covering the floor of the gallery with them. Then, with brooms, they swept the bread as is done in stone meditative eastern gardens, where gravel is raked in a mandala pattern”⁵¹ – recalled Łukasz Guzek.

Aleksandra Kubiak was one of the artists who came up with the performance on the spot – in Providence – prompted by an accidental encounter

with a non-binary person. The artist, with her torso wrapped in foil, sewed boiled eggs to her thighs.⁵² In Poland of the early two-thousands, the subject of queer, non-binary and non-heteronormative rights was completely ignored. In art criticism, male writers reacted to the emerging feminist discourses with the notion of androgyne, understood, however, more as a universal ‘humanity’ meant to be an argument for the existence of ‘universal art’ and depreciating the existence of feminist art, identified with the art of women.⁵³ At the time of the *Juliett 484* festival, *Pride Parades* were a novelty (the first one passed through Warsaw only in 2001). In 2003 Karolina Breguła created the campaign *Let Them See Us* on billboards. It was the first Polish artistic social campaign on LGBT issues and stirred up a lot of emotions. The company AMS, which was originally supposed to show it, withdrew at the last minute. It was eventually handled by City Board Media, but the billboards were often destroyed. “The fate of the campaign has showed the scale of intolerance, fear and censorship in our country,” two dozen Polish intellectuals wrote in a letter to the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*.⁵⁴ One of the couples shown on Breguła's billboards were Tomasz Kitliński and Paweł Leszkowicz, who made a performance *To cut* in Ustka during the *Castle of Imagination* discussed in this text. The artists stood with their backs turned to the audience, at some distance from each other. From the tape flowed a parodied, long, vulgar and jazzy monologue by a woman who hates gays. After the tape was played, they turned to face the audience and grabbed their hands, exactly as on the Breguła poster. It was a very simple gesture, saying: ‘love is love.’ From today's perspective, one looks at this work as if not much has changed. In 2019, fifteen years after Poland's entry into the European Union, the right-wing *Gazeta Polska* launched its ‘LGBT-free zone’ campaign. According to a recent report by the Center for Research on Prejudice (2021), the situation of non-heteronormative people is as it was twenty-seven years ago. In some respects, it has even worsened – for example, the percentage of parents accepting their child's non-heteronormativity has dropped.⁵⁵ Tomasz Kitliński, on the other hand, became the victim of a homophobic campaign when,

as an employee of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, he protested the award of the Amici Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska medal to the Minister of Education and Science Przemysław Czarnek due to his statements expressing hatred toward the LGBT community, as well as his lack of merit justifying the award beyond the competence of the governor. Minister Czarnek reported Kitliński's words to the prosecutor's office, accusing him of insulting the state.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Performance is the kind of art that reacts very quickly to political and social events. More than other art genres, it functions as a 'sensitive seismograph' because it happens here and now. Some of the performances described above were prepared on the spot, inspired by the moment, by contact with the space, with another country. This is the artists' way of working that is characteristic of festival performances. The performances, which were prepared in advance, generally also referred to current reality. Today we can see that the artists' intuitions were going in the right direction, diagnosing problems that subsequently only compounded. No US administration has abolished the PATRIOT Act, and in Poland persecuting artists and accusing them of 'insulting religious feelings' has become one of the overarching goals of the Law and Justice government.⁵⁷ Ordo Iuris has even published a manual on how to do it effectively.⁵⁸ Isaiah Berlin would say that negative freedom – from state control – has become merely a slogan and an unfulfilled promise of so-called liberal democracies. It has been replaced by 'freedom to,' which citizens voluntarily give up in the name of 'higher goals,' such as 'public safety' or 'moral codes'.⁵⁹ Artists during *Julieta 484* took advantage of meeting in places of special historical significance that no longer exist⁶⁰ to construct statements about different types of enslavement and to deconstruct national myths. They also met at an important moment in the history of both countries. They spoke about the oppressiveness of the Catholic

Church, the state apparatus, the bureaucracy, or the capitalist system, as well as homophobia that excludes and takes away personal freedom. As in any such exchange, it is important how the citizens of the two countries viewed each other's socio-political reality. The attitude of Poles to U.S. politics is perhaps best reflected here by the closing of eyes in Marilyn Arsem's performance. US citizens, on the other hand, admired Poles for their bloodless revolution, but did not recognize the differences in Polish society's perception of the events that led to the systemic transformation. They may also have been unaware of the oppression resulting from the strengthening of the Catholic Church that manifest in the form of censorship, prosecutorial investigations against artists, or daily homophobia.

The performances mentioned above complement and complete the historiographic picture of the US and Poland in 2003 in a meaningful way.⁶¹ They complement it with a human agent, an individual perspective, taking advantage of the fact that in art they can operate both on an abstract level and create images deeply rooted in history and culture.⁶² Performance like no other art functions 'in the present,' influenced by current political events. At the same time, artists using their social position – often also acting as lecturers or art curators – disseminate their vision of the world, along with all their anxieties, intuitions and diagnoses.

Notes

¹ In the Castle of Imagination / Juliett 484 the following artists participated: Marilyn Arsem, John Boehme, Marek Choloniewski, Nicola Frangione, Vanessa Gilbert, Arti Grabowski, KKO Group (Marta Jurkowska, Małgorzata Migula, Emilia Musiał), Władysław Kaźmierczak and Ewa Rybska, Tomasz Kitliński and Paweł Leszkowicz, Grzegorz Kłaman, Milan Kohout, Aleksandra Kubiak, Paweł Kwaśniewski, Mari Novotny-Jones, Angel Pastor, Yin Peet, Christian Schmidt-Chemnitzer, Magda Sowierszenko & Eugen Proba, Jed Speare, Antoni Szoska and Dominik Złotkowski. The curators were: Władysław Kaźmierczak, Bob Rizzo and Jed Speare.

² In the text, I do not use the words 'America' and 'United States' interchangeably. If the word 'America' appears, it is only in quotations.

³ saba, "Protest antywojenny w Warszawie," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30.03.2003.

⁴ Anna Grudniewicz, "Wzrost nastrojów antywojennych. Komunikat z badań" (Warszawa: CBOS, 2003); "Polacy o misji stabilizacyjnej w Iraku. Komunikat z badań" (Warszawa: CBOS, 2003), Adam Leszczyński, "90 proc. przeciwko inwazji na Irak," *Oko.press*, published electronically 19.06.2016, accessed 15.05.2022, <https://oko.press/90-proc-polakow-przeciwko-inwazji-irak/>.

⁵ Dana Priest, "CIA Holds Terror Suspects in Secret Prisons," *Washington Post* published electronically 2.11.2005, accessed 10.06.2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/01/AR2005110101644.html>.

⁶ In the referendum, 77% of Poles voted in favour of joining the European Union, 23% against. The turnout was 59%. <https://referendum2003.pk.gov.pl/sww/kraj/indexA.html>.

⁷ The only manifestation of a discussion on the subject in the art press was a short text by Kazimierz Piotrowski, who commented on anti-European statements on Radio Maryja in the pages of *Exit* magazine, taking the side of integration. See: Kazimierz Piotrowski, "inteGracja / inteGration," *Exit*, no. 3 (55) (2003): 3096-99.

⁸ 'Rywingate' or 'Rywin affair' was a scandal, which started after a prominent film producer Lew Rywin offered Adam Michnik – the former dissident and Solidarity leader who is the Chief editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza* – amendments to the media ownership law in return for a payment of \$17.5m. He said he was operating on behalf of the cabinet. Adam Michnik recorded their conversation. See: Ian Traynor, "Bribery case threatens Polish government," *The Guardian*, 9.06.2003, accessed 19.01.2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jun/09/filmnews.poland>.

⁹ Zbigniew Ziobro, currently a Minister of Justice, known for his ultra-conservative views. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zbigniew_Ziobro.

¹⁰ PiS – Law and Justice Party is a right-wing populist and national-conservative political party in Poland. Its leader is Jarosław Kaczyński. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_and_Justice, accessed 19.01.2023.

¹¹ Por. John Wickey, *The Myth of American Freedom. Understanding How Democracy Stands in the Way of Restoring America* (Boise, ID: Delphic Press, 2010).

¹² The name "Möbius," in turn, began to be used from 1977. First it was Möbius Theater (1977-1985), then Möbius Performing Group (1985-1990), and finally Möbius Artists Group (1991 and continuing). The organization incorporated in 1980 as Möbius Theater, Inc., an artist-run 501(c)3 non-profit, tax-exempt organization for experimental work in all media, but dropped 'Theater' from the legal name in 1985 to become Möbius, Inc. See: <https://www.mobius.org/history>.

¹³ In 1996-1997 there was an exchange of female artists from North Macedonia, and in 1999-2002 there were several exchanges with male and female artists from Croatia. See: <https://www.mobius.org/history> See also Nina MacLaughlin, "Möbius moves. The artists' group goes global with 'Juliett 484'," *The Boston Phoenix*, published electronically 19-25.09.2003, accessed 15.05.2022, <https://bostonphoenix.com/boston/events/perform/documents/03162630.asp>.

¹⁴ Private correspondence with Marilyn Arsem. 13.03.2022.

¹⁵ Brooklyn-based performer Dan McKereghan was the first to collaborate with the Chashama Theatre. In 2002, he organized the Currency festival there. This theatre is run by Anita Durst, an actress and niece of the famous Robert Durst, a multiple murderer. See Dani Anguiano, "Robert Durst, convicted murderer and disgraced real estate heir, dies at 78," *The Guardian*, published electronically 10.01.2022, accessed 2.05.2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/10/robert-durst-convicted-murderer-disgraced-heir-dies-78>. The Theatre has changed location several times, always being near Times Square – the area once known for its peep shows. Before another skyscraper was built here, Anita Durst was allowed to adapt the space into an independent arts venue. See: Cait Munro, "HBO True-Crime Expose of Robert Durst Reveals Family's Art World Connections," *Artnet*, published electronically 20.03.2015, accessed 2.05.2022, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/robert-durst-family-art-world-278871>.

¹⁶ The submarine sank in 2007. Associated Press, "Providence submarine museum sinks," *Boston.com*, published electronically 19.04.2007, accessed 15.05.2022, http://archive.boston.com/news/local/articles/2007/04/19/providence_submarine_museum_sinks/.

¹⁷ <https://www.performance.com.pl/en/en.html>.

¹⁸ Today it is openly written that the lies of the then newly elected President Vladimir Putin on this issue were the beginning of the end of democracy in Russia. The submarine Kursk sank in August 2000, with 118 crew members killed and 23 managing to save themselves. See: Inna Denisova and Robert Coalson, "Kursk Anniversary: Submarine Disaster Was Putin's 'First Lie'," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, published electronically 12.08.2015, accessed 15.05.2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kursk-disaster-putin-turning-point-russia/27184505.html>.

- ¹⁹ Public Law 107–56 - Oct. 26 2001, “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT ACT) Act of 2001,” edited by 107th Congress.
- ²⁰ “National Strategy for Homeland Security,” edited by Office of Homeland Security (2002), 20.
- ²¹ Łukasz Guzek, ed., *Performatyzacja sztuki. Sztuka performance i czynnik sztuki akcji w polskiej krytyce sztuki* (Gdańsk: ASP, 2013), 58.
- ²² <http://marilynarsem.net/projects/watching-waiting/>.
- ²³ Lawrence J. Korb, “It’s Time to Bench ‘Team B,’” CAP published electronically 18.08.2004, accessed 15.05.2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/its-time-to-bench-team-b/>.
- ²⁴ “National Strategy for Homeland Security,” 13.
- ²⁵ Jill Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics. Events, Affects and Art after 9/11* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 127.
- ²⁶ <http://marilynarsem.net/projects/american-foreign-policy-i/>.
- ²⁷ The dogtags were designed by sculptor Holly Laws, who in 2000 was preparing a set for an adaptation of Homer’s *Iliad* at a theater in Rochester. At the time, she invited poets to collaborate, who created six sentences: “THIS IS THE PERSON / WHO IS NOT A PERSON / THIS IS THE BODY / THAT IS NOT A BODY,” “COUNTLESS / WHISPERS / REPEAT / EACH LIFE,” “AND SO AS KINSMEN / WE WALKED BETWEEN THE ROOMS,” “ONCE WHEN I WAS LIVING / NEAR THE END OF THE WORLD,” “I COULD DO NOTHING / THIS IS TO SAY I WAS A CHILD,” and “ANYONE IS EVERYONE.” <http://curamag.com/events-archive/2012-events-benefiting-covenant-house.html>.
- ²⁸ 4,487 U.S. soldiers have died in the Iraq war. See “Iraq war in figures,” *BBC News*, published electronically 14.12.2011, accessed 29.06.2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11107739>.
- ²⁹ Jennifer Gabrys, “Leaflet Drop: The Paper Landscapes of War,” *Invisible Culture. An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, no. 7, published electronically 20.03.2004, accessed 15.05.2022, http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_7/Gabrys/gabrys.html; Daniel L. Haulman, “USAF Psychological Operations, 1990–2003,” (2003).
- ³⁰ Visas for Poles were waived in November 2019.
- ³¹ Simon Van Schalkwyk, “‘Un-American Confessions’: Translation as Subversion in Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies* (1959),” *European Journal of American Studies*, no. 12 (2) (2017): 13, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.12031>.
- ³² Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom. Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA-London: MIT, 2006), 267.
- ³³ See, e.g., Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology. Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Cambridge-Medford, MA: Polity, 2019). Or a film by Shalini Kantayya, “Coded Bias” (USA 2020).
- ³⁴ Andrzej Turowski, *Sztuka, która wzniesła niepokój. Manifest artystyczno-polityczny sztuki szczególnej (Art That Sparks Unrest. The Artistic-Political Manifesto of Particular Art)* (Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2012), 88.
- ³⁵ Private correspondence with Arti Grabowski, 15.05.2022.
- ³⁶ PRL – Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (People’s Republic of Poland), MGR – MA, SLD – Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance), ASP – Akademia Sztuk Pięknych (Academy of Fine Arts), ZUS – Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych (Social Insurance Institution), NIP – Numer Identyfikacji Podatkowej (Tax ID Number).
- ³⁷ Guzek, *Performatyzacja sztuki*, 60.
- ³⁸ Conversation with Aleksandra Kubiak, 17.03.2022.
- ³⁹ <http://fcs.org.pl/projekt/drogi-do-wolnosci-stala-ekspozycja/>.
- ⁴⁰ <http://www.performance.com.pl/en/en.html>.
- ⁴¹ Główny Urząd Statystyczny, “Stopa bezrobocia rejestrowanego w latach 1990–2022,” published electronically 26.04.2022, accessed 15.05.2022, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/bezrobocie-rejestrowane/stopa-bezrobocia-rejestrowanego-w-latach-1990-2022,4,1.html>.
- ⁴² Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine. The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books. Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 192.
- ⁴³ Leszek Balcerowicz was as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who in the summer of 1989 became the first elected non-communist Prime Minister in the whole Eastern Bloc. Assisted by Harvard Professors Jeffrey Sachs and David Lipton, Balcerowicz quickly implemented a process of economic transformation based on private market economy. See: Richard J. Hunter Jr., and Leo V. Ryan, “A Retrospective Analysis and Future Perspective: Why Was Poland’s Transition So Difficult?” *The Polish Review* 60, no. 2 (2006): 147–171.
- ⁴⁴ Maciej Sandecki, “Spowiedź Wałęsy,” *Gazeta Wyborcza Trójmiasto*, 10.10.2003.
- ⁴⁵ Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). The book was first published in Poland in 2000.
- ⁴⁶ Por. Barbara Józefik and Krzysztof Szwejca, “Polish myths and their deconstruction in the context of Polish-Jewish relations,” *Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, no. 1 (2011).

⁴⁷ In January 2018, an amendment to the IPN Law was introduced providing for a penalty of up to three years in prison for attributing co-responsibility for Nazi crimes to Poles. The amendment was criticized by many lawyers and historians. President Andrzej Duda referred it to the Constitutional Court. On July 17, 2018, another amendment repealing criminal sanctions went into effect. See: "Najnowsza nowelizacja ustawy o IPN – co się zmieniło?" *Infor*, published electronically 2.07.2018, accessed 15.05.2022, <https://www.infor.pl/prawo/kodeks-karny/kary-i-srodki-karne/2289628,Najnowsza-nowelizacja-ustawy-o-IPN-co-sie-zmienilo.html>.

⁴⁸ *Charter 77* was a declaration in defence of human rights signed by 242 signatories on Jan. 1, 1977. Milan Kohout in 1986 was expelled from Czechoslovakia and left for Boston. Por. Monika Hoření, "Každé umění by mělo být angažované," *Haló noviny. Český levicový deník*, published electronically 2.08.2013, accessed 29.06.2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150924024801/http://www.halonoviny.cz/articles/view/7911270>.

⁴⁹ See the photos and the description of the work: <https://nieznalska.com/en/passion-en/>, accessed 19.01.2023. Karol Sienkiewicz, "Dorota Nieznalska's *Passion* – A Decade of Judgment on Artistic Freedom in Poland," *Culture.pl*, published electronically 14.12.2011, accessed 29.06.2022, <https://culture.pl/en/article/dorota-nieznalskas-passion-a-decade-of-judgment-on-artistic-freedom-in-poland>.

⁵⁰ Guzek, *Performatyzacja sztuki*, 60.

⁵¹ Ibidem, 61.

⁵² This performance was performed twice: at the BPM Performance Space in Brooklyn and at the SMFA gallery in Boston, where it was marked with a 'for adult audiences' card. Conversation with Aleksandra Kubiak, 17.03.2022.

⁵³ See Grzegorz Dziamski, "Sztuka kobiet: od outsidera do Innego," *Format*, no. 8-9 (1992): 35. In 2003 Andrzej Karmasz took part in the Eugeniusz Geppert competition with his work *Androgynous Portraits*. See: Andrzej Jarosz, "Młodzi bez przyszłości?" *ibidem*, no. 43 (2003): 46. In Polish art, the topic of transgenderism was perhaps the first (in a series realized in 2004-2007 *malawida: moRgan&veriKami*) to be taken up by Barbara Konopka. See: Krzysztof Jurecki, "Barbara Konopka," *Culture.pl*, published electronically, accessed 15.05.2022, <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/barbara-konopka>. It wasn't until 2011 when Anna Grodzka won the parliamentary elections that the topic began to be more widely discussed. In the same year Michalina Manios - the first transgender celebrity – won third place in the TVN Top Model competition and told her life story as a gender-corrected person. Nonbinarity in the consciousness of Polish society appeared only through Margot (Małgorzata Szutowicz) in 2020. See: Renata Ziemińska, *Niebinarne i wielowarstwowe pojęcie płci* (Warszawa: PWN, 2018), 72. About the situation of intergender people in Poland read on pages 71-73 of the same book. See also: Mateusz Król, "(Nie)widzialność osób transpłciowych w Polsce," *Chorzowskie Studia Polityczne*, no. 14 (2017).

⁵⁴ https://web.archive.org/web/20120206011545/http://niechnaszobacza.queers.pl/index_en.htm.

⁵⁵ Ewa Siedlecka, "Dramaty osób LGBT w Polsce. Nienawiść, wyrzucanie z domu, depresje," *Polityka*, published electronically 12.12.2021, accessed 29.06.2022, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/2146550,1,dramaty-osob-lgbt-w-polsce-nienawisc-wyrzucanie-z-domu-depresje.read>.

⁵⁶ Angus Reid, "Poland: prominent academic targeted by far-right," published electronically 14.11.2019, accessed 3.05.2022, <https://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/poland-prominent-academic-targeted-by-far-right/>.

⁵⁷ Stian Gabrielsen, "Freedom of Expression Under Attack in Poland," *Kunstkrutikk* published electronically 7.02.2022, accessed 15.05.2022, <https://kunstkrutikk.com/freedom-of-expression-under-attack-in-poland/>.

⁵⁸ Filip Cieplý, ed., *Odpowiedzialność karna artysty za obrazę uczuć religijnych* (Fundacja na Rzecz Kultury Ordo Iuris, 2014).

⁵⁹ See: "Berlin: Aktion gegen Werbestrategie-Ausstellung," *Indymedia*, published electronically 25.03.2004, accessed 25.09.2019, <http://de.indymedia.org/2004/03/77993.shtml>; Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁶⁰ The Modelarnia was demolished in 2012, and the Juliett, as mentioned above, sank in 2007. See: Rafał Borowski, "Te budynki zniknęły ze stocznioowego krajobrazu," *Trojmiasto.pl*, published electronically 27.02.2019, accessed 29.06.2022, <https://historia.trojmiasto.pl/Te-budynki-zniknely-ze-stocznioowego-krajobrazu-n132156.html>.

⁶¹ Today, it has been joined by Internet giants, troll farms and a deluge of fake news, among others. See: Jakub Dąbrowski, "Wolność sztuki 2010-2020 albo o kulminacji wielkiej smuty," *Magazyn Szum*, no. 35 (2021/2022): 26.

⁶² Girma Negash, "Art Invoked: A Mode of Understanding and Shaping the Political," *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique* 25, no. 2 (2004): 188.

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5

POLISH ART IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Krzysztof SIATKA

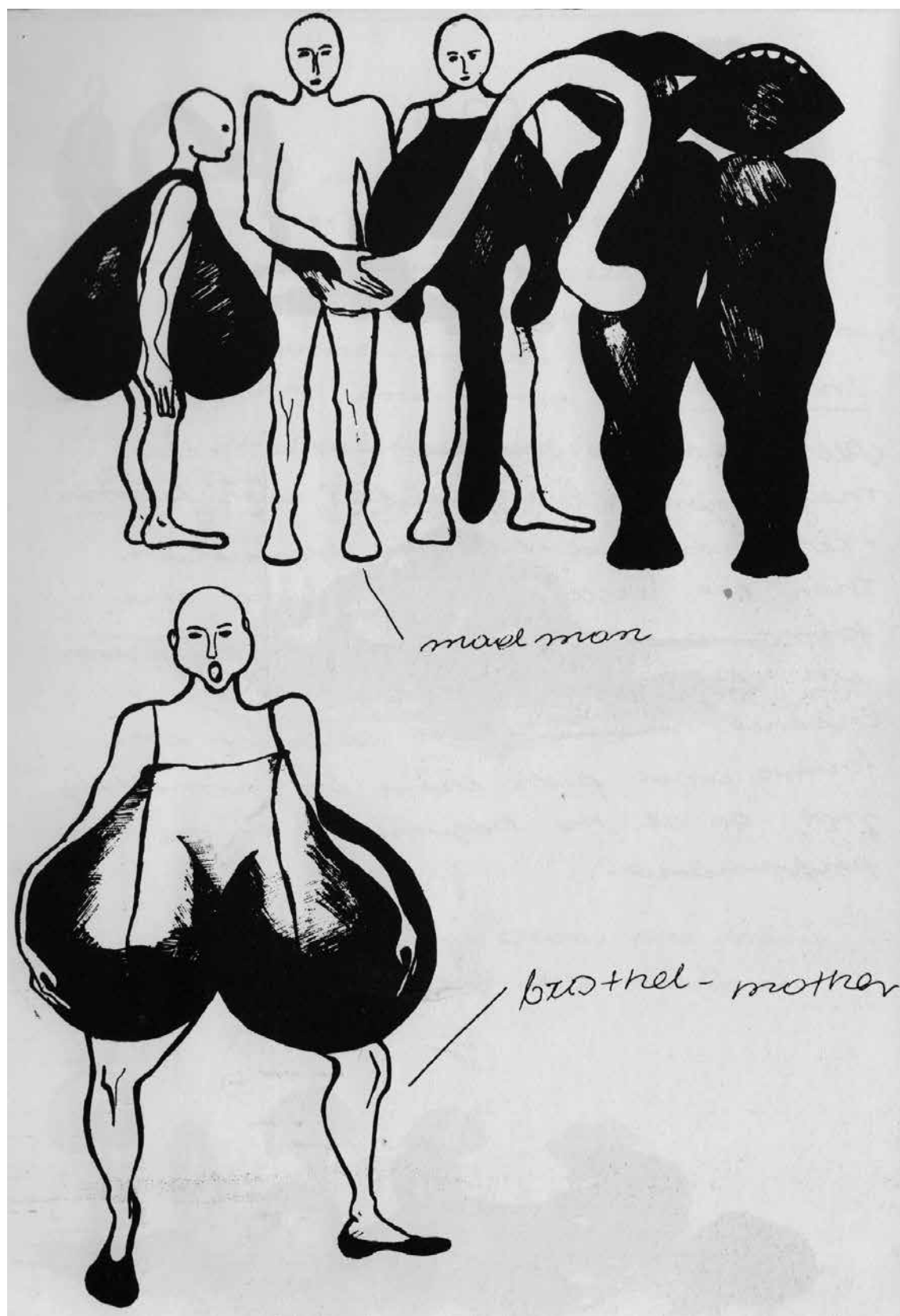
Pedagogical University of Kraków

HAMDI EL ATTAR AND KASSEL'S *STOFFWECHSEL* SHOWS OF THE EIGHTIES: NOTES ON THE OFF- MAINSTREAM PRESENCE OF POLISH ARTISTS

To explore in depth the contemporary art that has been presented in Kassel, one ought not to stop at the quinquennial *documenta*, a popular and influential festival of Western art which - obviously - has been promoting one unquiet narrative after another. There is a richer subtext available if one examines phenomena in general situated away from the central current of Western art; phenomena whose voices, although in fact carried by the latter tide, testified to the existence of alternative directions but were not widespread until many years later. What I have in mind here is art originating outside the cultural centre of the West: that of African countries and other former colonies, emancipated eventually at the *documenta 11* in 2002, on the initiative of Okwui

Enwezor, in addition to the neo-avant-garde of Central and Eastern Europe, recognised by Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buergel fifteen years ago. As I understand it, the example for the three of them was provided by shows curated by Hamdi el Attar, a lecturer at Kassel's Kunsthochschule and curator interested in non-Western pursuits, of Egyptian descent himself. His projects, spanning the period of 1982 to 1992, occupied the post-industrial K18 hall and included works from Polish artists too. These were exhibitions brought about by surveys of developments shared by territories deemed exotic by the contemporary art milieu at the time.

In this paper I reflect on how subversion against the widest publicised artistic events can complement the image of art in general and, in

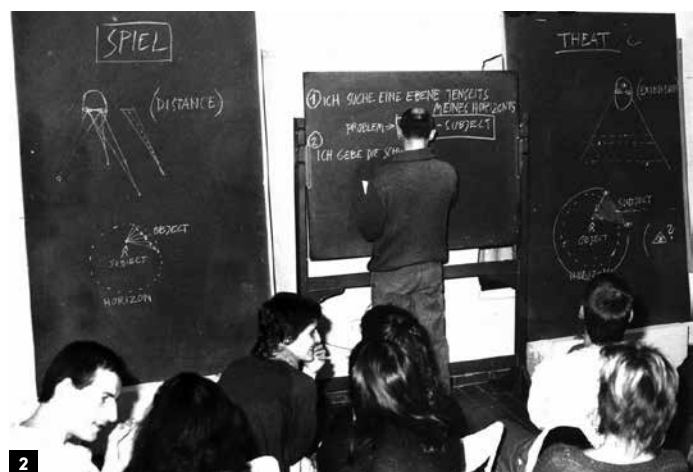
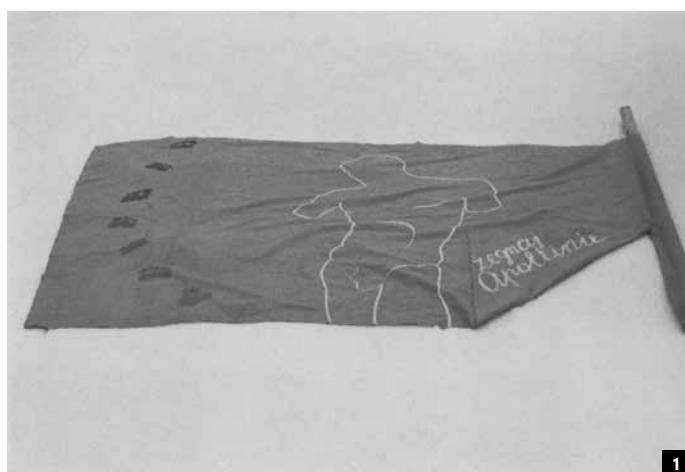


Aleksandra Holownia, sketch for performance *Ulysses*, 1986. Courtesy of the artist

particular, that of the history of contemporary art in the later phases of Iron-Curtained Central and Eastern Europe, namely in the eighties. The paradigm builds upon the horizontal approach to art history - a proposition challenging all hierarchical narratives - and places at its centre the relation between an artist and where he or she lives and works.¹ The paper aims at examining a certain part of the output of Polish artists (Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko, Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Anna Kutera, Maciej Toporowicz, Bogdan Korczowski, Alexandra Hołownia, Kooperatywa artystyczna THEAT (THEAT Artists' Cooperative), and the groups Koło Klipsa and Gruppa) and interpreting their presence within three shows curated by el Attar: *Stoffwechsel* (1982), *MuKu – Multimedia Kunst* (1985), and *Künstlergruppenzeigen Gruppenkunstwerke* (1987) - in the contexts of Poland's artistic, political, and existential reality after the introduction of Martial Law in the country in 1981. Remarks concerning the region's geographical factors, shaping the artistic map when barriers for Poland were reinforced, are made because of those artists' presence in the Western (although, let me stress: non-mainstream) circulation of art. Their experience of multifaceted separateness justifies speaking about them in the metaphorical terms of activity pursued 'on the boundaries'² and when the decade in question had only begun, political and artistic boundaries between the worlds were more evident than ever. Still, the period examined here includes great variation in terms of the levels of oppression exercised by the Communist regime in Poland: the fact of Polish works or artists being featured on the global scene at the *Stoffwechsel* show in 1982, while domestic social life faced the harshest suppression, is of different significance to the *MuKu – Multimedia Kunst* show in 1985, or the exhibition *Künstlergruppenzeigen Gruppenkunstwerke* of 1987, when the Polish authorities were becoming - rather unwillingly - less and less oppressive.

Metabolism - Theory as Defined Through the Practice of Exhibiting

The search for otherness and the penetration into peripheries is deeply rooted in the biography of Hamdi el Attar - both in his artistic practice and organisational activity, and in the theory emerging between these two fields. Born in 1938 in Egypt, he received his artistic education in Stuttgart, to hold the position of an academic professor at Kassel's Kunsthochschule from 1974 through to 1999. A cultural emancipator, backed by the West German elites, he inspired them to look at art differently and embrace what was not considered central. As an artist and a designer he worked with textiles, and as a curator he attracted artists by experimenting with materials, which often produced brilliant site-specific installations. Being employed at the university did not stop him from criticising art institutions or the curatorial elite.³ Rather, it is artists who were his kin, and it is their self-organised undertakings, modestly structured, that were his mode - one aiming to blur the polarising professional boundaries dividing the artist, the critic, and the curator. He travelled the world and mapped the art scenes in places whose atmosphere was set by the people and their work, and not by state institutions. That method would guide him both in the early eighties, when he looked for ways to introduce textiles into the field of the visual arts, and ten years later, when he took an interest in the art of Islamic, Caribbean, and African countries⁴ - issues demonstrated in the *K18 Stoffwechsel (K18 Textile Metabolism)* show of 1982 and in *Begegnung mit den Anderen (Encountering Others)* of 1992, respectively. He rejected the tendency to gravitate towards an emphasis on curatorial narratives and attempts to legitimise them by featuring the same artists over and over. This is a trend that was pointed out repeatedly to many independent and charismatic curators who presided over *documenta* or other major festivals. Charles Green and Anthony Gardner even dared to name a few giants, such as Harald Szeemann, Rudi Fuchs, Okwui Enwezor, or



1. Maria Pinińska-Bereś, *Standard: Farewell to Apollo*, 1976. Courtesy of Maria Pinińska-Bereś and Jerzy Bereś Foundation

2. *THEAT Lecture*, 1984. Courtesy of Zygmunt Piotrowski

3. Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko, *Ready for Use*, photo Horst Hoheisel. Courtesy of the artist

Massimiliano Gioni, and impute their complicity, claiming they helped certain individuals by creating a demand for the latter's products that would by far exceed their supply.⁵ In his practice and writings, el Attar openly objected to the commodification of art. Active as an artist, he developed an alternative model for the practical verification of theories - one produced in a position of academic authority but at the same time devised against everything we know from all sorts of rational or economic propositions. That model was to pursue artistic experimentation and demonstrate the result in the format of a problem-oriented exhibition. So, el Attar consolidated other artists around himself to engage them in his projects, also extending this circle to include students and correspondents from the entire world. As far as Poland's artistic context is concerned, he owed his grasp of it in the early eighties to the Kraków-based critic and curator Stanisław Urbański, while in the second half of that decade he had the performer Alexandra Hołownia working closely with him.

It had not taken el Attar very long to perceive the benefits of collective work: there were projects signed by the K18 Stoffwechsel Project Group (Projektgruppe K18 Stoffwechsel) in the

late seventies already, and their collective identity came to be confirmed by the *K18 Stoffwechsel* show in 1982.⁶ Preparations for the exhibition spanned a period of four years, during which the idea to transform the matter by employing alternative substances in the artistic process and in the field of visual arts, grew and matured.⁷ However, as the boundaries between art and design were still clearly defined at the time, the K18 Stoffwechsel Project Group appeared as intruders in a domain not entirely theirs - that is, outside the bounds imposed on them by the designers' competences. K18's work bore the experience of meanings which manifest themselves in the way a substance is employed when creating, and in trespassing into the field of design, where the rules of pragmatic use apply. The collection displayed in the K18 hall in 1982, being a survey of the applications of textiles in contemporary art, brought about reflection on what the significance of situations like that might be.⁸ The show enjoyed exposure and was commented on widely, being covered in more than a dozen reviews printed in dailies, in both local and nationwide German press. The artists mentioned most, the authors of pieces reproduced in the articles, included Ilona Ruegg, Akiko Hamatani,



Veerle Dupont, the group *En avant comme avant*, E.R. Nele, and Horst Hoheisel.⁹

Obviously, making form and substance change in an artistic process entails the creation of new meanings, and conceptual experiments of the previous decade had carefully deconstructed such phenomena. What the eighties saw, in turn, were the formulas of allusive expression—a language found in the productions of Polish artists featured in the *K18* exhibition in Kassel. The piece by Maria Pinińska-Bereś bearing a likeness of an ancient statue of Apollo (*Fahne. Abschied mit Apollo* (Standard: Farewell to Apollo), 1976) took the shape of an abandoned standard, with an inscription in Polish: *Żegnaj Apollinie* (Goodbye, Apollo), and was possibly a nostalgic reflection on the fading of classical ideals - that of beauty, among others - overwhelmed by the current brutal reality. Pinińska-Bereś didn't make it to the show: the closed border and lack of passport kept her from leaving the country; in addition, having the works shipped back to Poland caused a lot of problems and generated an exorbitant cost.¹⁰

It was a different case with regard to the situation of Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko: already a resident of West Germany, he was the only

featured Pole to attend the exhibition in person. His was a site-specific installation for the space of the former factory, titled *Ready for Use*. The artist used tree branches and trunks painted white, red, and black and similar glossy foil applications. The form of these objects conjures up an abandoned or stranded ark, or a forsaken warehouse full of dust-covered standards or banner poles, symbols of power, and life-saving appliances.

The piece by Anna Kutera, missing today, titled *Równoległa projekcja tautologiczna* (Parallel Tautological Projection), made an appearance at the show as records alone: photographs were displayed on slides. The great variety of media featured in the exhibition could be seen as untamed experimentation from the Western point of view - but to me, the organisational difficulties faced by the Poles only signified the existential disaster in the country. Fittingly, the *K18* hall, formerly a site of Henschel-Werke, repurposed in the thirties and forties to manufacture locomotives and APCs for the army. During World War II, forced labour from Eastern Europe was used there, and in 1982 the halls were dirty, damp, permeated with grease. The brick structures with complementary steel elements and ceiling-mounted lighting fixtures provided

some 21.5 thousand square feet of context which had nothing in common with the elegant interiors of the neoclassical edifice of the Fridericianum housing the concurrent *documenta* 7.

In that edition of the festival, designed content-wise by Rudi Fuchs, the reception has seen a reaction to the previous one (*documenta* 6), propounding an understanding of art as a tool for social change above all else. In the early eighties, Fuchs unhesitatingly drew on the traditions - the notions of beauty or artistic individualism - and some of the artworks on show were representational; the exhibition actually celebrated expressionist painting. Only one artist from Poland was featured: Edward Dwurnik, with his series of canvases titled *Sportowcy* (Sportsmen).¹¹ The rulers of the Polish People's Republic allowed him to travel to West Germany for the opening in exchange for his promise to refrain from boycotting the country's official art institutions as called for by the cultural circles after the introduction of martial law. The case of Dwurnik diverges from those of the Polish artists featured in the accompanying event: while the former's decisions were pragmatic and individualist, intended to make a name for himself in the world's professional circulation of art, the latter believed instead in the ideal of the artistic process and the benefits it brings to any alternative community.

Towards a Collective Effort

Another large project of the K18 Stoffwechsel Project Group to follow, assumed the form and formula of the *MuKu Multimedia – Kunst* show (1985). In it, the multimedia genre of art was defined as creation which combines various means and procedures of expression in order to free oneself from any conventional limitations. The practice of multimedia, where the work is given both spatial and temporal dimensions, was meant to turn the artist's and the viewer's attention away from the tangibility of an object, from the technical aspects of its execution - from anything, in general, that could engender commodified perceptions. The process

of commodification was viewed as something fatal to the institutions and the personnel of the art world. Similar claims were being set forth by the Group in their programme notes: worded in the first-person plural, these were indicative of a collective effort and so emancipated the formula of artistic organisation, theory, and practice pursued collaboratively. Looking at the Group's printed materials from the period in question, we can see how the visual identity of their activities developed, incorporating certain brand-building features, such as the logotype.¹²

Several Polish entries into the exhibition had been accepted too. For the opening on June 15, émigrés Maciej Toporowicz, living in Munich at the time, and Bogdan Korczowski, based in Paris, produced an installation-performance titled *Zwei Künstler fern von zu Hause* (Two Artists Far From Home). They erected a room made of black foil, with a fluorescent Greek cross as a dominant. On the floor, a negative of that shape was placed, to be filled by the two with freshly mixed concrete during the event. The whole set-up was bathed in ultraviolet light, Korczowski appeared in white scrubs, and Toporowicz, bandaged up from head to toe. The performance, stemming from Malevichian mysticism, seems to be lauding the creative ways of the avant-garde. On a flyer accompanying the action, the artists issued a reductionist declaration defining their action in negative terms: "it is not a demonstration ... nor contestation ... politics ... nor a rite, not a beginning nor an end. Still, it is art."¹³

The idea for the stage piece by Alexandra Holownia, titled *Ulysses* (Ulysses), was based on an imagined nocturnal city like those found in the literary experiments from James Joyce - a grotesque realm where procurers and prostitutes abound. The play had originally been produced in Warsaw's Buffo theatre in 1984, then rerun in Pracownia Dziekanka (Dean's Workshop), although in a smaller version, reduced for political reasons. The actors didn't make it to Kassel because they weren't granted passports - the artist arrived on her own, bringing colourful sculpture-costumes made of painted canvas. In the end she herself appeared before the audience, in the company of

unnaturally large mouths, arms, legs, breasts, a penis, and buttocks.

In 1985, Kassel's K18 also welcomed the THEAT Artists' Cooperative, led by Ukio (Zygmunt) Piotrowski and formed by a multinational array of individuals based in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland (Jürgen Fritz, Ulrike Hedwig, Andrzej Komorowski, Ina Pohorely, Hélène Prevost, Tomáš Ruller). The artists defined their practice as operating on the boundaries between extended theatre, philosophical activity, and alternative education. Their team effort was one of an open, improvised play or game manifesting the connections between people who engage in a creative process together.¹⁴ In roughly the same period, Piotrowski founded an international artists' group called Aufmerksamkeitschule (The School of Attentiveness). To them, being attentive constituted a means for the complete mental and physical understanding of any space where performance artists are to perform. In Kassel, Fritz presented records of what the Cooperative had done as well as their postulations.

The actions mentioned above shared the idea of a work of art determined by a communal effort - even if external factors sometimes prevented that from taking place. Over the second half of the decade, el Attar developed a theory for works to which multiple artists contribute, devoting one project of his after another to that matter. In 1986 he travelled to Poland: while in Warsaw, he spent time in Pracownia Dziekanka, a cult site of the movement who called themselves Kultura Zrzuty (Pitch-In Culture), and in Poznań he visited the city's Academy of Fine Arts and met the internationally recognised Polish conceptualist Jarosław Kozłowski. Going on a tour of Poland, arranged for him by his later long-term collaborator Alexandra Hołownia, el Attar joined Klaus Groch and Jorge Glusberg in the fellowship of organisers of the international art world who expressed an interest in the avant-garde of the Eastern Bloc. Unlike the other two, he witnessed a disastrous time, when Poland's artistic circles were polarised and the country's alt-culture, remote from the official circulation, instituted

affairs of great importance.¹⁵ The organisation of artistic life was then shifting towards collective formulas, justified by the political circumstances and serving as carriers for generational defiance and pronouncement.

El Attar's Polish journey was followed by the K18 show *Künstlergruppenzeigen Gruppenkunstwerke* of 1987,¹⁶ which can be examined as an exemplification of collaborative phenomena in the artistic domain. The exhibition displayed an adverse reaction to the individualistic treatment of artists and to the competitive disposition of the art world. Accordingly, el Attar's curatorial practice can be situated in the contexts of ever diminishing modernist attitudes (if these are understood as idiosyncratic expressions of particular subjects) and the increasingly familiar postmodernist approach, welcoming the not entirely predictable interplay of multiple actors and factors. After all, the latter mode had been guiding the K18 Stoffwechsel Project Group for several years. Critics in Germany recognised the significance of the show and appreciated its input into the development of notions about the installation genre as well as its take on the heterogeneous reality of art.¹⁷ Hołownia and Bożena Kowalska contributed to the exhibition content-wise, with the latter's text, dealing with modernist origins of Poland's contemporary artistic collectives, included in the catalogue for the event.¹⁸

Two Polish groups were included in the show. In arranging their *Wystawa 5* (Exhibition 5), the Poznań-based Koło Klipsa - Mariusz Kruk, Leszek Knaflewski, Krzysztof Markowski - employed fable-like scenographical objects, such as a dwarf and a serpent. Warsaw's Grupa - the painters Ryszard Grzyb, Ryszard Woźniak, Paweł Kowalewski, Jarosław Modzelewski, Marek Sobczyk, Włodzimierz Pawlak - spent a couple of days working together on an installation of monumental proportions. Titled *Kuda Gierman*, the piece had been supposed to feature representations of the vagina, personifications of the classical elements, as well as demons and gods, but in the course of the work the artists decided to efface each individual composition - a gesture of

erasing any individuality and giving in to the logic and rules of group work.

The two groups' inputs and outcomes have already been reconstructed, comprehended, and interpreted. Aleksandra Alisauskas discerned in the show an instance of Western perceptions of Communism, relating and comparing it to Poland's post-1981 models of collective work.¹⁹ In the country, efforts made collectively in the 1980s were significant in political terms, while the perspective assumed by any display in the West could treat those simply as propositions of alternative formulas for artistic production and participation. Either way, the interpretation is determined by the interpreter's position in relation to the boundary between the Western world and Central-Eastern Europe. The extended formula of an art group applies to both these views and allows for the subversion of fatal forces that act in various systems, be they those entrenched in art markets or sanctioned by totalitarian states.

Conclusion

The guiding idea of this paper has been an attempt to cover the relationships between what was receiving much exposure and what was considered off-mainstream - two realms which I, according to the applied horizontal methodology, do not see as entirely separate, although they are oriented towards separateness and function as such in the discourse. The *Künstlergruppenzeigen Gruppenkunstwerke* show ran concurrently with the celebrated *documenta 8*. That edition, conceived by Manfred Schneckenburger, seemed modelled after some handbook or manual of postmodernism: the end of grand narratives, on the one hand, and programmatic eclecticism, on the other, were manifested outright.²⁰ As concepts these are not far from the theses derived from the cooperative pursuits of the K18 Stoffwechsel Project Group. Also, the same festival featured several performance acts by Black Market, formed on the occasion by Boris Nieslony, Jürgen Fritz, Norbert

Klassen, Zygmunt Piotrowski, Jacques van Poppel, Tomáš Ruller, and Zbigniew Warpechowski. Their pieces, bearing the common title *Das Brakteatenstück* and presented at Neue Galerie, dealt with tensions between the personalities of individual members of the collective and of the combined artistic organism.²¹ What shape, then, does the introductory metaphor of 'the boundaries' take if the flows between the communicating vessels of the art system are so strong? Once established, the boundary - even if it is not airtight - becomes a constituent of the two fields delineated on its sides. The current, however anchored in the best-exposed circulations, secured by the market, and responsive to the demands of contemporarily operating theories, founds a hierarchy like those taught in textbooks. It is being defined in opposition to the less endowed off-mainstream distribution, which came to be expressed so bluntly in Kassel's K18 hall in the eighties. Alternative directions had been destined to find their definitions in practice, with successive exhibitions serving to advance the methods of collective work and ultimately arrive at a vast multifarious mosaic, effected through the use of montage and offering a genuine experience of multiplicity. The method introduced by el Attar is traceable in his own profession - his interest in textile arts. Knowing the socially engaged artistic practices of the sixties, one ought to understand any collective activity in the field of art as something more extensive than just redefining the work of an artist, his or her means and media, and the related practicalities and theoreticalities - that is, one often ought to include in this understanding the artists' aspirations of redefining the very public sphere.²² In academic research on the design of textiles and clothing, it is fairly consensual to relate the histories of those to - broadly speaking - formulas of cooperation and communal action, for their ability to bond people with each other and communicate a person's affiliation of any kind, be it culture, ethnicity, gender, or politics.²³ Textiles are emanations of one's life in society, demonstrating political and moral entanglements as well as wealth or poverty.²⁴ With the conceptions put forward by

el Attar, artistic pursuits were meant to dissolve the individuality of an artist, and in this respect their stance departed from the well-known past of other avant-garde formations, such as the Dadaists or the Surrealists, where ideologists and leaders had been named. Perhaps that - this dissolution-wise orientation on the part of el Attar - was the reason why his project never bloomed into full actuality in the art field. The artists themselves would accept the entry conditions to strive later for sheer self-promotion. The members of Koło Klipsa eventually claimed that their *Exhibition 5* had been shown at *documenta 8* - a platitude so sound it even found its way as fact into one recently published monograph on Poland's artistic output of the eighties.²⁵ Despite an utmost willingness to write the history of art democratically, artists seem to keep compromising plans like those discussed here. In line with the logic of a Pole's success in the West, they kept setting up their identities on the periphery, warmed by the blaze of someone else's glory.

Translated by Błażej Bauer



Notes

- ¹ Piotr Piotrowski, "O horyzontalnej historii sztuki," *Artium Quaestiones* 20 (2009): 66.
- ² Following the December 13, 1981, many artists left Poland and attempted, on unequal terms, to make names for themselves locally in the West; others succeeded in having their work featured abroad only to realise they were unable to attend the shows in person due to administrative or financial reasons.
- ³ Paolo Bianchi, "Vom Anderssein der Anderen" (On Being Other than Others)," *Kunstforum International* 119 (1992): 526–41; Alexandra Holownia, "Inne definicje sztuki," *Artluk*, published electronically, accessed 28.07.2022, <http://www.artluk.com/eart.php?id=89>.
- ⁴ Hamdi el Attar and Elisabeth Herr, *Al Fan-Die Kunst Zeitgenössische Kunst in den islamischen Ländern* (Kassel: Universität Gesamthochschule Kassel, 1995); Hamdi el Attar, *Türkische Kunst heute am Beispiel der Universität Mimar Sinan Istanbul* (Kassel: Universität Gesamthochschule Kassel, 1990); *Karibische Kunst heute* (Kassel: Projektgruppe Stoffwechsel-Universität Gesamthochschule Kassel, 1994), Exhib. cat.
- ⁵ Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta. The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 124.
- ⁶ The *K18 Stoffwechsel* show ran from June 20 to September 29, 1982; it is worth noting that the exhibition had been slightly desynchronised with *documenta 7* (June 19 through to September 28, 1982) – a shift attributable to the wish that the openings be kept from coinciding with each other.
- ⁷ It is no coincidence that the group as well as the show got their names from the process of metabolism—conversion of the energy (*Stoffwechsel* in German); cf. Hamdi el Attar, "Preface," in *Stoffwechsel K18, Internationale Kunstausstellung*, edited by Hamdi el Attar, Vera Kipp, and Karin Ohlenschläger (Kassel: Thiele und Schwarz, 1982), n.p.
- ⁸ "K 18 – Textile Metabolism," 37–40.
- ⁹ *K-18 Stoffwechsel Internationale Kunstausstellung Presseberichte 20.06–29.09.1982*, a file containing press materials collected by the Project Group Stoffwechsel is kept in the Archives of the Maria Pinińska-Bereś and Jerzy Bereś Foundation in Kraków, Poland.
- ¹⁰ In a letter to Andrzej Kostełowski, Maria Pinińska-Bereś spoke about herself being featured in the *K18 Stoffwechsel* show: "Also, I took part in a sideshow to Kassel's *documenta*, at their invitation. And what a terrible ordeal this business was – struggling with all sorts of impossibilities. All in all, it cost me my peace and a lot of money too. For instance, I was forced to pay for the return of my works, through foreign exchange dealings! I am beaten, completely." The correspondence is kept in the Archives of the Maria Pinińska-Bereś and Jerzy Bereś Foundation in Kraków, Poland.
- ¹¹ *documenta 7* (Kassel: D+V Paul Dierichs, 1982), Exhib. cat. See: Richard Flood et al., "Documenta 7: Continued," *Artforum* 21, no. 2 (1982): 81–86.
- ¹² Hamdi el Attar, "Multimedia Kunst," in *MuKu Multimedia – Kunst, June 15 to July 15, 1985, K18 hall* (Kassel: Universität GH Kassel, 1985), n.p.
- ¹³ "Unsere Aktivität ist: keine Manifestation, keine Kontestation (...) keine Politik (...) kein Ritual (...) es ist kein Anfang, kein Ende aber es ist Kunst."
- ¹⁴ Andrzej Komorowski and Ukio Piotrowski, *Kooperatywa artystyczna THEAT (The THEAT Artists' Cooperative)*, Brochure.
- ¹⁵ The so-called 'third-site / third-space chromatics' (chromatyka trzeciego miejsca) – the position of Poland's independent young artists within the country's circumstances of the eighties – was defined by Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945* (Poznań: Rebis, 1999), 220–35.
- ¹⁶ Hamdi el Attar, ed., *Künstlergruppen zeigen Gruppenkunstwerke* (Kassel: Universität GH Kassel, 1987).
- ¹⁷ Florian Rötzer, "Künstlergruppen zeigen Gruppenkunstwerke," *Kunstforum International* 91 (1987): 309–14.
- ¹⁸ Bożena Kowalska, "Künstlergruppierungen in Polen," in *Künstlergruppen zeigen Gruppenkunstwerke*, edited by Hamdi el Attar (Kassel: Universität GH Kassel, 1987), 38–48.
- ¹⁹ Aleksandra Alisauskas, "Communists like them. Polish Artist Groups at Künstlergruppen zeigen Gruppenkunstwerke," in *Rejected Heritage. Polish Art of the 1980s* (Warszawa: MSN, 2011), 130–41.
- ²⁰ *documenta 8* (Kassel: Weber & Weidemeyer GmBH & Co KG, 1987), Exhib. cat.
- ²¹ *Ibidem*, 302.
- ²² See, e.g. Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven: Yale University, 2012).
- ²³ Janis Jefferies, "Editorial Introduction," in *The Handbook Of Textile Culture*, ed. Janis Jefferies, Diana Wood Conroy, and Hazel Clark (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 7–8.
- ²⁴ See, e.g. Annette B. Weiner, ed., *Cloth and Human Experience* (Washington, DC: Jane Schneider Smithsonian Scholarly Institution, 1991).
- ²⁵ Jakub Banasiak, *Proteuszowe czasy. Rozpad państwowego systemu sztuki 1982–1993* (Warszawa: MSN, 2020), 254.

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ENTANGLED IN CONTEXTS: TEN YEARS AFTER THE *SIDE BY SIDE* EXHIBITION IN BERLIN'S MARTIN-GROPIUS- BAU

More than 700 objects from nearly 200 collections, 19 exhibition rooms, thousands of visitors – these numbers show the scale of the largest joint Polish – German temporary exhibition to date, titled *Side by Side. Poland – Germany. 1000 Years of Art and History*.¹ Displayed in the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin from September 23, 2011 to January 9, 2012, it comprised works of art dating from the Middle Ages to the early twenty-first century: paintings, graphics, sculptures, old prints, craft objects, installations, and video presentations. They were brought not only from Polish and German museums, but also from collections in France, Great Britain, the United States, Italy, Austria and the Vatican, among others.

The exhibition, coordinated by the Royal Castle in Warsaw and the Martin-Gropius-Bau, was

an event celebrating Poland's assumption of the Presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2011. It provided an opportunity, long planned by the Polish authorities,² to present Polish art in Germany where, surprisingly, it is little known, and set it in the context of the artistic ties between the two nations. High-profile cultural events in the EU member states, organized by the presiding country, are something of a standard. However, *Side by Side* carried an exceptional interpretative potential set in a unique context – that of Polish–German relations, which have undergone constant change, burdened with memories and consequences of conflicts as well as different perspectives on Polish–German and universal history.

The ten years which have passed since the opening of *Side by Side* seem like an entire era in

the relations between both countries – an era of closer and looser ties, of increased cooperation and tensions. The Polish–German political relationship has shifted from a close cooperation to a barely concealed (and sometimes not concealed at all) mutual distance. This has had an impact on official interstate cultural relations. There have been no similarly spectacular joint projects since *Side by Side*. This raises the following questions: Was *Side by Side* an ‘accident at work’? What were the contexts of the creation of the exhibition? Should it be viewed solely through the prism of politics? What artistic and art historical potential does this exhibition hold? Is there any kind of legacy of *Side by Side*?

The Political Context

“Taking up a historical subject is ... a good reason to revise the usual ideas about the history of the Polish–German relations.”³ With these words Anda Rottenberg, the curator of *Side by Side*, described her intentions in creating the exhibition. The division of the exhibition into twenty-two thematic modules located in nineteen rooms of the Martin-Gropius-Bau, however, corresponds to the classical chronological perspective, starting with *The cult of St. Adalbert and the beginnings of neighbourly relations* and ending with *Poland and Germany in a united Europe*. One might therefore get the impression that the exhibition, which was commissioned by politicians, had a cautious framework imposed from above and did not necessarily serve to revise ‘the usual ideas.’ The concept of the exhibition did not deviate from the traditional approach found in permanent exhibitions in art museums: the thematic modules were not broken, for example, by curatorial interventions with works from other periods and indicating the long duration of ideas or their reinterpretations. This was probably because, as Izabela Kowalczyk argues, “the implementation of art projects that are politically inspired and financed with government funds involves extreme caution, and thus the fear of violating taboos or conventions.”⁴

This was explicitly mirrored in an event that took place after the opening of the exhibition: as a result of critical opinion by a member of the German Jewish community, the director of the Martin-Gropius-Bau asked the Polish organizers of *Side by Side* to remove Artur Żmiejewski’s 2000 video *Berek* (The Game of Tag), which shows a contemporary staged game of tag among adult naked people in a room reminiscent of a gas chamber. The German side justified their request with their concern for respect for the victims of the Holocaust.⁵ The withdrawing of the video from the exhibition, interpreted by Kowalczyk as an act of limiting “opportunities for discussion offered by art,”⁶ and by Magdalena Lorenc as a violation of “good museum practices, which assume the protection of the artist and his work,”⁷ namely censorship, is set by Lorenc in yet another context. She describes it as an example of inequality in the Polish–German partnership⁸ and the evidence of the political nature of the compromises forced upon the Poles, who had to adjust their vision to German taboos, which in the case of the Holocaust were much stronger than Polish reactions to it.

Lorenc’s look at *Side by Side* deserves special attention in itself. Though insightful, it is an example of the strong temptation of interpretative reductionism, consisting of attributing the importance of a given phenomenon to only one narrow field – in the case of *Side by Side*, it would be all about the political dimension of the display. Taking a quotation from Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* as a motto for her reflections on *Side by Side*, Lorenc interprets the exhibition as a “banquet for the past”⁹ thrown when “at any given time, the living see themselves in the midday of history.”¹⁰ From this perspective, *Side by Side* becomes an expression of determinism, something unavoidable and imposed, to some extent artificial and crafted, because it is serving current political purposes. The quote from Benjamin ends, “The historian is the herald who invites the dead to the table,”¹¹ and in this sense, the herald is Anda Rottenberg, the curator of the exhibition.

Lorenc’s reflection on the political nature of *Side by Side* echoes a critical tone towards

the institutionalised control of the exhibition's narrative. As she notes somewhat rightly, the exhibition focused primarily on what unites Poland and Germany, effectively avoiding sensitive topics such as the restitution of Polish cultural assets seized by the Germans during the Second World War,¹² which in the case of an art exhibition takes on a particular dimension and refers to a real contemporary problem in relations between the two countries. Indeed, concentrating on the positive peak moments in Polish–German history is always fraught with the risk of distorting the proportions, not so much of the time, but of the consequences of these relations. Such a narrative serves to create an image of friendly cross-border relations. Culture in the service of international diplomacy therefore assumes that sensitive subjects are not touched upon and that the content and possibilities of discussion are thereby narrowed down.

The Museological and Exhibition

Contexts

Lorenc rightly points out that such a filtered narrative gains an ally in the authority of the museum institution, which legitimises the story in the form of the exhibition.¹³ According to Carol Duncan's diagnosis, the museum space as perceived by visitors can be compared to the space of a temple and a visit to a museum or a gallery is supposed to evoke an effect of humility similar to that experienced by a viewer in a ritualised sacred space.¹⁴ According to this interpretation, most visitors would therefore not question the content of the exhibition. Symptomatically, this view was reflected much more openly in the German reviews of *Side by Side* than in the Polish ones,¹⁵ which may confirm the argument about the persistence of different perspectives on the contemporary reference points in the relations between the two countries.

Lorenc's interpretation of *Side by Side*, reduced to a political dimension, has omitted important contexts and trivialised others. One of them is the museological context of the exhibition,

which cannot be treated solely as a manifestation of a politicised relational discourse in which objects engage in dialogue with one another only to confirm preconceived theses.¹⁶ Such a methodological approach in exhibiting has, after all, its roots in the beginnings of conscious collection-building back at least in the early modern period.¹⁷ The cultivation of discourse by exhibitions and museums has intensified with the entry of modernist art forms, commenting on current events, into exhibition spaces, especially after the Second World War. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, discursivity became the norm also in the case of exhibition phenomena based mainly on historical content.¹⁸ This is due to the popularity of narrative exhibitions (although not only), which use clear theses and a precise vision of the history they present. Although the creators of such exhibitions are seldom objective in their work, these displays are precisely part of a broader discourse – but this means that it is possible to argue with them, as Rottenberg herself suggests in her introduction to the catalogue of *Side by Side*: “Each of us remembers Polish–German history from history lessons and carries certain ideas about it in their hearts. For many, this [exhibition] will be a cause for criticism and dissatisfaction.”¹⁹ Today in Poland, exhibitions in museums and galleries, either permanent or temporary, narrative or traditional, are one of the most important axes of public debate on the politics of remembrance, as has been shown in recent years by the disputes over the ideological profiles of, among others, the Warsaw Rising Museum, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the European Solidarity Centre or the Museum of the Second World War.

Lorenc's critical remark about the heterogeneity of objects displayed in *Side by Side*, which she calls ‘art-not-art’ (Polish *sztuka-nie-sztuka*),²⁰ and the alleged interpretative problems resulting from this, seem similarly misguided; she claims that “other categories are adequate for the study of practices used in the presentation of art, and others for the construction of ethnographic exhibitions.”²¹ In the case of *Side by Side*, the trivializing term “art-not-art” applies to: 250

works of painting, 30 sculptures, 60 old prints, 80 manuscripts, 60 graphics, 60 documents, 100 craft objects, 150 photographs, films, modern books, and sound recordings.²² However, it should be taken into account that the idea of juxtaposing works of art with objects of everyday use within one exhibition is not new either. What is more, it is not reserved for the aforementioned narrative exhibitions, which willingly use such an approach, treating the exhibit as a source of narration or as an element supporting the narration. The non-heterogeneity of *Side by Side* would not therefore have been unprecedented and surprising at the time of its opening. Anyway, in Germany, where museums and exhibitions seem to be more conservative in terms of convention than in Poland, such displays had already existed – like the permanent exhibition *Deutsche Geschichte in Bildern und Zeugnissen* (German History in Images and Testimonies) at the German Historical Museum in Berlin, opened in 2006 and presenting an extremely eclectic set of objects almost exclusively in showcases and without additional scenography.

A separate issue is setting *Side by Side* in the context of the presence of Polish themes in exhibitions in German museums and galleries. This issue should be divided into two: permanent and temporary presentations, as they also function in partially different contexts. What might Germans learn about Poland and Poles in their museums? It seems that *Side by Side* actually gave German audiences the opportunity to learn about Polish material heritage on a large scale for the first time. As Tobias Weger notes “for decades, Poland was completely absent as a subject of exhibitions organised in West Germany, although also in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), despite official declarations of ‘friendship between nations’ and ‘international solidarity,’ the situation was not much better. The absence of one of the largest and most populous neighbouring countries in German museums and exhibitions can be seen as a symptom of a long tradition of marginalisation or even erasure of Poland and Poles from the German collective consciousness.”²³ These words, written by a German scholar, are particularly meaningful, as they confirm that Germans themselves notice the

problem of their minimal interest in their eastern neighbour.

Although the history of a permanent Polish presence on German soil dates back to the Middle Ages, and the Polish diaspora, estimated at as much as two million people, is the second largest one in Germany,²⁴ there is only one museum dedicated to the Polish diaspora in this country – the Kraszewski Museum in Dresden, located in the former residence once belonging to the Polish writer Józef Ignacy Kraszewski. References to Poland can be found in exhibitions mainly in local museums. Thus, in the castle of Rastatt in Baden-Württemberg, there is an exhibition commemorating the freedom movements in Germany from the Middle Ages to the present day, whose narrative also includes the thread of Polish immigrants participating in those movements. Bavaria’s Schleißheim Castle houses the Gertrud Weinhold Ecumenical Collection, a private collection of Christian art, including religious folk art from Poland. Similar works can be found, for example, in Berlin’s Museum of European Cultures, but, as Weger notes, they do not “add any political value to the complicated German–Polish relations.”²⁵ Similarly marginal are the mentions of Poland and Poles in historical museums – in the aforementioned German Historical Museum or in the new permanent exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Berlin (where Poland appears to a limited extent mainly in the context of the Holocaust).

The situation is somewhat different when it comes to temporary exhibitions. The first decade of the twenty-first century saw several presentations of Polish–German relations as part of major historical, and often international, exhibitions in Germany. One of them, *Europas Mitte um 1000* (The Centre of Europe around 1000), toured several Central European cities, including Kraków and Berlin, between 2000 and 2002. It was created under the auspices of the Council of Europe to mark the anniversary of the so-called Congress of Gniezno, a meeting in 1000 between Emperor Otto III and Polish Duke Bolesław I the Brave at the tomb of St. Adalbert. The exhibition’s aim was to draw parallels between the unifying trends in Europe 1000

years ago and the process of integration into the European Union on the eve of the accession of the Central and East European countries in 2004. A few years later, at the turn of 2005 and 2006, another exhibition created by the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin, *Polenbegeisterung. Deutsche und Polen nach dem Novemberaufstand 1830* (Polish Enthusiasm: Germans and Poles after the 1830 November Uprising), focused on Polish–German relations in the context of the November Uprising, a Polish rebellion against the Russians, and its aftermath. *Deutsche und Polen – 1.9.39 – Abgründe und Hoffnungen* (Germans and Poles 1.9.39: Abyss and Hope) of 2009 was in turn an exhibition presented at the Deutsches Historisches Museum in connection with the 70th anniversary of the German invasion of Poland. Another noteworthy exhibition was *My, Berlińczycy/Wir, Berliner* (We, the Berliners) in 2009, a presentation of the history of Polish presence in the German capital, organised by the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin in the local Fohreim Palaca and the Märkisches Museum. To this should be added the impressive but not faultless international exhibition *Europa Jagellonica. Art and Culture of Central Europe under the Jagiellonians 1386–1572*, presented in 2012 in Warsaw, Potsdam, and Kutná Hora in the Czech Republic; this project aimed to consolidate the positive narrative of the medieval roots of European integration on the example of the reign of the Central European Jagiellonian dynasty.

A somewhat different issue is the German exhibitions on the wartime and post-war displacement of German citizens from the Third Reich's eastern territories taken over by Poland and the Soviet Union in 1945. In the name of good relations with the communist-ruled Polish People's Republic and the USSR this topic was not officially raised in the GDR, but in West Germany such exhibitions began to appear as early as the beginning of the fifties, and at least ten of them were organised there by the end of the eighties.²⁶ At the time in Poland, due to the taboo surrounding the past of the formerly German territories, these exhibitions did not evoke a response, but those

created after the fall of communism in 1989 already created fertile ground for tension in this regard, especially in the context of the activities of the German revisionist Bund der Vertriebenen (Federation of the Expelled). The message of these exhibitions was not uniform; some focused on the injustice that met Germans in political and material terms, others concentrated rather on the loss of cultural assets. In response Poland has organised a number of exhibitions showing the losses of the Polish heritage as a result of the German invasion and occupation during the Second World War.²⁷

The Artistic Context

Among the multiplying contexts in which *Side by Side* is entangled, perhaps the least discussed is the one concerning the artistic value of the exhibition and the image of Polish art in relation to German art that would emerge from this presentation. It seems that the diagnosis is brutally honest for Polish art: from the Middle Ages until the late nineteenth century, it stood in relation to German art, and not the other way round. Wherever artistic circles from both countries came into contact, it was Polish artists who drew technical, formal, and often thematic, inspiration from their German counterparts. The predominance and attractiveness of German art resulted from a number of conditions that were not explicitly discussed at the exhibition and need to be expanded upon. Unlike the Polish lands, the wealthy German countries were located at the junction of the South and North European artistic tradition, which meant that German artists had much broader access to the rich cultural heritage dating back to antiquity. Thanks to generous patronage, not only by monarchs and aristocrats, but also by the bourgeoisie (which in Poland was practically meaningless until the nineteenth century), workshops and later institutionalised art education were of a high standard. Territorial proximity and close political and economic ties with Western, Northern and Southern Europe allowed Germany to quickly absorb and adapt trends that would only reach Poland after a lengthy delay. German

art produced artists appreciated in Europe, such as Albrecht Dürer, Lucas Cranach the Elder and the Younger, Hans Holbein, or Caspar David Friedrich, who were role models for local and foreign artists. The phenomenon of the predominance of German art over Polish art lasted practically uninterrupted until the second half of the nineteenth century; at *Side by Side*, it was visible mainly in the form of Polish works of craft, sculpture, and graphics, almost entirely influenced by German models or made by Germans on Polish soil.

On the other hand, in the history of art there are not many examples – and in fact there were none at the exhibition – of the opposite trend, and it was only during the late period of the Partitions (i.e. the period from 1795 to 1918 when the Polish state was dissolved and its territory annexed by Prussia, Austria and Russia) that some Polish painters who attended art schools in Munich and Vienna managed to spread new skills comparable to those of the West and put them at the service of patriotic art, more or less openly opposing the domination of the partitioning powers (*The Prussian Homage*, the 1882 large-scale painting by Jan Matejko, was an example of this approach at the exhibition.) At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some Polish artists were active in the circles of Berlin's international artistic bohemia, becoming part of an increasingly transnational artistic circuit, and in the interwar period Polish and German artists were similarly eager to become involved in new avant-garde movements spreading throughout Europe. The striking difference between Polish and German art at the time, shown at the exhibition, was the involvement of a number of Polish artists in the efforts promoted by the Polish authorities to develop a 'national style' for the newly reborn state, mixing patterns of traditional folk and modernist art and blurring the influence of the former partitioners.

When taking up the subject of Polish–German relations, post-war Polish art served primarily as a means of working through trauma: on the one hand as material for rebuilding Polish dignity after the wartime humiliations suffered from the Germans, on the other as a tool for vivisection of the damaged collective psyche and

an attempt to understand the essence of evil that cannot be understood. With the passing of time, as subsequent generations came to speak, another trend was added: the reinterpretation of the meaning of the Second World War and the image of Germans in the Polish culture. This was done especially through conceptual art. A lot of space was dedicated to it at *Side by Side*. A natural reaction is to ask about the originality of these activities in terms of form and content. It seems that during the communist period their 'exciting underground' status²⁸ required the artists to be more creative in smuggling critical, often anti-German content in defiance of the policy of the communist authorities, who tried to avoid explicitness towards the brotherly GDR. However, the form of those works of art itself did not differ significantly from what could be found in the Western art world at the time, which was also evident at *Side by Side*. Despite the Iron Curtain, Polish art, more than that of other Eastern Bloc countries, showed a surprising absorption of Western trends,²⁹ which gave the Western audience an easier insight into the messages of works created in communist Poland. A similar trend after the fall of communism has no longer had this quality of exoticism; it is not surprising that the art of the post-communist countries in the period of transformation, in the pursuit of adaptation to the West and in the globalizing world of art, became more visible and accessible,³⁰ but less specific.³¹ Post-1989 Polish artists have to a large extent either distanced themselves from the experiences that shaped them,³² or have continually reworked them.

The works of those who reworked those experiences, such as Krzysztof Wodiczko, Piotr Uklański, and Mirosław Bałka, whose aforementioned video was removed from *Side by Side*, are part of the recent Polish–German cultural relations in the field of exhibition. According to Izabela Kowalczyk, "before 1989, attempts at establishing mutual (Polish–German artistic) relations were mainly initiated by the artists themselves."³³ Today, they are predominantly official and institutionalised, embedded in the system of grants and artist residencies on both sides of the border. Polish art is promoted in Germany, e.g., by

the Polish Institutes in Berlin and Leipzig, but they were and still are:

mainly aimed at making up for the previous absence of the [Polish] art in [Germany] and at familiarising the German audience with the youngest generation of Polish artists. They have taken up subjects such as the fall of communism, the process of the European unification, the unabsorbed memory of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, the Polish perception of Germans as enemies, and have asked questions about the freedom and the inclusion of Polish art in the canon of European art.³⁴

An extensive list of these exhibitions is presented by Kowalczyk in her text about visual arts in the Polish–German iconosphere,³⁵ and there is no need to list them here. Suffice to say that from an artistic point of view, *Side by Side* definitely fits in with the phenomenon described by Kowalczyk.

The Context of the Present and the Future

Did *Side by Side* leave behind anything that could be called its legacy? Did it set a direction or a trend in artistic and cultural relations between Poland and Germany? Ten years after the exhibition, one cannot see any deliberate reference to it in the current cultural landscape. Polish cultural diplomacy has shifted its focus from emphasising what is common to both nations to promoting content that had hitherto been overlooked and to educating Germans about the damage they caused to Poland during the Second World War.³⁶ It thus reflects a progressive trend in Poland to develop historical rather than artistic or art-historical exhibitions, as represented in *Side by Side*.

In this respect, the dominant role has been taken over by the Pilecki Institute in Berlin, an educational and exhibition branch of the Warsaw institution of the same name, located in the very

heart of the German capital, right next to the Brandenburg Gate. The patron of the institution and the main character of the biographical exhibition it houses is Witold Pilecki, a Polish officer active during the Second World War in revealing the truth about the Holocaust, a voluntary prisoner of the German death camp in Auschwitz, and after the war a victim of communist persecution. For the current authorities in Poland, Pilecki is a symbol of the restoration of the memory of national heroes forgotten or marginalized for years. As a model of resistance against the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, the Institute aims to function as a warning to the Germans not to forget their criminal past. The exhibition in the Pilecki Institute in Berlin, which includes objects connected with the Holocaust, contains a strong emotional charge. It is also the basis of the educational programme of the Institute, which, by organising classes for German schools, takes it as a point of honour to fill the alleged gap in the Germans' knowledge of the Polish victims of the Second World War.

Such an approach, however, ignores something that, regardless of political overtones, resonated strongly in *Side by Side* – namely the broadly understood aspect of Polish culture and art, which goes beyond the disputes concerning the evaluation of the moral attitudes of Germans and Poles in the previous century. In this sense, Germany lacks if not a permanent, then at least an occasional counterbalance – a reminder of Polish culture on a larger scale. The small and not too active Polish Institutes in Berlin and Leipzig do not fulfil their role in this respect, and the memorials and research centres dedicated to the Polish victims of the Second World War, announced by the German authorities,³⁷ remain a part of the aforementioned discourse on the tragic twentieth-century history. The recent proposals to create a major museum of Polish–German relations, displaying the whole spectrum of bi-national history, are only an idea at the moment.³⁸ It is hard to imagine that such a museum could omit art and other aspects of culture. However, it seems that it will still be a long time before, or rather if, the legacy of *Side by Side* in Germany takes on a material shape.

Notes

¹ The exhibition had a Polish and a German title, each of a slightly different meaning. The Polish one was *Obok. Polska – Niemcy. 1000 lat historii w sztuce*, which translates: Nearby. Poland – Germany. 1000 Years of History in Art. The German title was: *Tür an Tür. Polen – Deutschland. 1000 Jahre in Kunst und Geschichte*, meaning: Door to Door. Poland – Germany. 1000 Years in Art and History. The English title used in this article comes from *Culture.pl*, the Polish online portal of the state-funded Adam Mickiewicz Institute; see: <https://culture.pl/en/event/side-by-side-poland-germany-1000-years-of-art-and-history>. Unless stated otherwise, other titles or quotations from non-English sources were translated by me into English.

² Magdalena Lorenc, “Obok. Polska – Niemcy. 1000 lat historii w sztuce jako przykład wystawy politycznej,” *Przegląd Politologiczny / Political Science Review*, no. 2 (2013): 168.

³ Anda Rottenberg, “Wprowadzenie,” in *Obok. Polska – Niemcy. 1000 lat historii w sztuce*, edited by Małgorzata Omilanowska (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 2011), 21.

⁴ Izabela Kowalczyk, “Sztuki wizualne w przestrzeni polsko-niemieckiej,” in *Interakcje. Leksykon komunikowania polsko-niemieckiego*, edited by Alfred Gall, et al. (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT – Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, 2015), 379.

⁵ Lorenc, *Obok. Polska – Niemcy*, 169.

⁶ Kowalczyk, “Sztuki wizualne w przestrzeni polsko-niemieckiej,” 379.

⁷ Lorenc, *Obok. Polska – Niemcy*, 169.

⁸ Ibidem, 170.

⁹ Ibidem, 163. The fragment of the motto quoted from the American edition: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 481.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 481.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Lorenc, *Obok. Polska – Niemcy*, 174.

¹³ Ibidem, 170.

¹⁴ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 7–20.

¹⁵ Two selected reviews of *Side by Side* may serve as a quintessence of the different attitudes: the German one by Burkhard Steppacher and the Polish one by Joanna Ruszczyk. See: Burkhard Steppacher, “Nachbarn in Europa – Tür an Tür. Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen kunstvoll vermittelt,” *Die Politische Meinung. Monatsschrift zu Fragen der Zeit*, no. 506/507 (2012): 125.: “Much has changed in German–Polish relations over the past 20 years. In a free, democratic Europe, Germans and Poles can now shape their future as partners together with other Europeans. The exhibition leaves the visitor with a critical, sharpened, but also optimistic outlook.” Joanna Ruszczyk, “Obok. Tysiąc lat polsko-niemieckiej historii,” *Newsweek Polska* published electronically 17.10.2011 <https://www.newsweek.pl/obok-polska-niemcy-recenzja-wystawy/9gftw58>, accessed 27.07.2022. “... the last stage of Polish–German history seems to be the most important – it is, after all, an exhibition of political significance, the most important cultural event of the Polish Presidency of the EU. That is why one can get the impression that those moments in history when there was a spark between neighbours are not emphasised particularly strongly.”

¹⁶ Lorenc, *Obok. Polska – Niemcy*, 171–72.

¹⁷ Dorota Folga-Januszewska, “Muzeum i narracja: długa historia opowieści,” in *Muzeum i zmiana. Losy muzeów narracyjnych*, ed. Paweł Kowal and Karolina Wolska-Pabian (Kraków-Warszawa: Universitas-Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego, 2019), 19–27.

¹⁸ Paweł Kowal, “Społeczny, cywilizacyjny i polityczny kontekst polskiego boomu muzealnego,” *ibidem* (2019), 46.

¹⁹ Rottenberg, “Wprowadzenie,” 21.

²⁰ Lorenc, *Obok. Polska – Niemcy*, 164.

²¹ Ibidem, 164–65.

²² “Obok. Polska – Niemcy. 1000 lat historii w sztuce,” accessed 27.07.2022, <http://mkidn.gov.pl/pages/posts/obok.-polska-ndash-niemcy.-1000-lat-historii-w-sztuce-2310.php>.

²³ Tobias Weger, “Muzea i wystawy,” in *Interakcje. Leksykon komunikowania polsko-niemieckiego*, edited by Alfred Gall, et al. (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT – Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, 2015), 628–29.

²⁴ “Polacy i Polonia w Niemczech,” accessed 27.07.2022, <https://www.gov.pl/web/niemcy/polacy-i-polonia-w-niemczech>.

²⁵ Weger, “Muzea i wystawy,” 621.

²⁶ Ibidem, 623.

²⁷ Recently, there have been many such presentations in Poland, just to mention a few: the series of exhibitions *Utracone/Odzyskane* (Lost/Recovered) in the Kordegarda Gallery of the National Cultural Centre in Warsaw (since 2015), *Dziela utracone* (Lost Masterpieces) in the Museum of Independence in Warsaw (2019), *Utracone oblicza* (Lost Faces) – an outdoor exhibition in Warsaw (2020), and *Cenne... Zagrabione... Utracone?* (Precious... Looted... Lost?) at the Museum of Landed Gentry in Dobrzyca (2020).

²⁸ Wojciech Włodarczyk, “Sztuka Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej i Polski,” in *Sztuka świata*, edited by Wojciech Włodarczyk (Warszawa: Arkady, 2006), 213–14.

²⁹ Anda Rottenberg, *Sztuka w Polsce 1945–2005* (Warszawa: Stentor, 2005), 103.

³⁰ David Hopkins, *After-Modern Art 1945–2017* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 217.

³¹ Rottenberg, *Sztuka w Polsce 1945-2005*, 322, 39.

³² Włodarczyk, "Sztuka Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej i Polski," 241.

³³ Kowalczyk, "Sztuki wizualne w przestrzeni polsko-niemieckiej," 375.

³⁴ Ibidem, 379.

³⁵ Ibidem, 379–86.

³⁶ This can be seen in the recent interviews with and articles by the managers of the Pilecki Institute in Berlin, Hanna Radziejowska and Mateusz Falkowski, published in the German press; see: Jan Puhl, "Die Deutschen wissen fast nichts," *Der Spiegel*, published electronically 30.04.2021, accessed 27.07.2022, <https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/pilecki-institut-zur-geschichte-polens-die-deutschen-wissen-fast-nichts-a-74ab712f-8177-4451-bba9-f85a5a046889>; Mateusz Falkowski, "Über polnisches Kulturgut, das die Nazis geraubt haben, wird kaum diskutiert," *Berliner Zeitung*, published electronically 9.05.2021, accessed 27.07.2022, <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/wochenende/ueber-polnisches-kulturgut-das-die-nazis-geraubt-haben-wird-kaum-diskutiert-li.157364?pid=true>.

³⁷ Anna Widzyk, "Bundestag za centrum upamiętnienia ofiar niemieckiej okupacji w Europie," *Deutsche Welle*, published electronically 9.11.2020, accessed 27.07.2022, <https://www.dw.com/pl/bundestag-za-centrum-upami%C4%99nienia-ofiar-niemieckiej-okupacji-w-europie/a-55219334>.

³⁸ Wolfram Meyer zu Utrup, "Hallo Nachbar, dzień dobry," *Der Tagesspiegel*, published electronically 7.04.2019, accessed 27.07.2022, <https://causa.tagesspiegel.de/politik/wie-gedenkt-man-der-deutsch-polnischen-geschichte/hallo-nachbar-dziennbspdobrynbsp.html>.

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RECOGNIZING A POLISH NATIONAL IDIOM IN GLOBAL ART: TWO EXHIBITIONS OF POLISH CONTEMPORARY ART ABROAD

‘Impossible translation’ and ‘clash of idioms’ are the issues in my reflection on the critical challenges for two presentations of Polish contemporary art abroad. The first of these was *State of Life: Polish Contemporary Art within a Global Circumstance* organised by the Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, Adam Mickiewicz Institute at National Art Museum of China in Beijing in 2015 and second was *Waiting for Another Coming*, a joint presentation of Polish and Lithuanian artists, showed first at Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius in 2018 and then as a different episode at Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw (October 25, 2018, to January 27, 2019). The Beijing show was curated by myself and the Vilnius one by Anna Czaban, Ūla Tornau, and myself. However, I am not going to focus on the curatorial practice of presenting Polish contemporary art. Instead, I will reflect on ways it

is interwoven with global art and the consequences of this intertwining for so-called ‘national’ shows.

In his seminal text, *Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate* (2009), Hans Belting argues that contemporary art became global after 1989 as the continuation, development, and domination of modern and world art.¹ He carefully juxtaposes the two pairs of terms, arguing that whereas the latter pair was strictly conditioned by the domination of the West, colonialism, and the idea of universalism, the former goes far beyond it. He focuses on the opportunities created by the global expansion of contemporary art, seeing it as liberating from cold war geopolitical constraints and hierarchies. He is utterly optimistic, arguing that inclusive policies of global art have replaced modern art's double exclusion (of non-Western modernist works and non-modern art). However, he notices one

discontent - the overwhelming pressure of the art market that subjugates artistic activity to the neoliberal model of creative production. Despite this, in his later text, *From World Art to Global Art: View on a New Panorama* (2013), he reiterates his belief in its liberating and emancipatory potential. "By its own definition global art is contemporary and in spirit postcolonial; thus it is guided by the intention to replace the centre and periphery scheme of a hegemonic modernity, and also claims freedom from the privilege of history."²

What is striking, he describes global art mostly negatively by showing how it differs from modern art, and when it comes to positive definitions, they are somewhat vague and metaphorical. He says:

Art on a global scale does not imply an inherent aesthetic quality which could be identified as such, nor a global concept of what has to be regarded as art. (...) It clearly differs from modernity, whose self-appointed universalism was based on a hegemonial notion of art. In short, new art today is global, much the same way the World Wide Web is also global. The Internet is global in the sense that it is used everywhere, but this does not mean that it is universal in content or message. It allows for free access and thus for a personal response to the world.³

So, in his argument, contemporary art is first of all anti-universalist or at least non-universal in its content, and secondly, it is worldwide in its reach. While discussing the function of the Museum of Contemporary Art as a symbolic site for global art, he states that they "are built like airports awaiting the arrival of international art."⁴ In this view, global art is not content and is not form; it is more like a format of appearing and protocol of acting.

Modern Art at the time was distinguished as 'modern form' in art, which could even

mean 'only form' without any subject matter when abstraction in the 1950s was recognised as a universal style, a 'world language' (...). The difference of global art, given this background, is all too obvious, for it lacks any common idiom in terms of 'style' and does not insist any longer on form as a primary or independent goal. Rather, art is distinguished by new proof of professionalism such as contemporary subject matter and a contemporary performance, usually a mixture of film, video and documentary materials.⁵

His argument may be reformulated. Although global art is not universalist, it should be understood as a kind of language because it uses formats and protocols to operate on meaning. Even if highly abstract, it is meaningful practice. It is like a language as it embraces a set of idioms and dialects and is based on specific pragmatics.

In her excellent book *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience*, Caroline Jones, proposes the notion of 'language' to analyse the historical dynamics of modern and contemporary art.⁶ Unlike Belting, she shows that despite all differences the global language of contemporary art is a straightforward continuation of the universal language of modern art. She uses a notion of international language to show the continuity in terms of structuring, functioning, and accessibility through both periods. In that sense, the global language is a contemporary mutation of the international language of art. Following these assumptions, she comes to say: "The historical artists tracked throughout this book will be seen to navigate the world picture with varying success, but always under a specific set of rules: the artist must speak the international language, but use it to speak of difference."⁷ And again: "the artist who would become international would need to speak a global language, but would just as often be understood to speak of her own representative difference."⁸ Her argument may be reformulated: if differences are to be articulated,

one needs a common medium to make it possible. The language of art, whether international or global, is such a medium.

Both authors' positions may be reconciled: while the language of modern art was universalist as it imposed one idiom fabricated in the West, the language of contemporary art is a set of idioms that are similar to an extent but varied. In the latter, the differences are not subsumed in the universal language (as in modernism), but they are revealed through a series of variations to create idioms translatable to each other. It does not mean, however, that hierarchy and inequalities are abolished. On the contrary, global art circulation is hierarchically layered and geographically unequal, and this structuring is based on the economic, social, and political order of the world. Nevertheless, through its language, contemporary art may express it and respond to it.

To illustrate this, let me discuss the practice of the *Slavs and Tatars* artistic group. The collective call themselves "a faction of polemics and intimacies devoted to an area east of the former Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China known as Eurasia." They explore marginalised cultures that persisted under the pressure of hegemonic imperial projects clashing in this vast area over history. They are primarily focused on minor languages and their struggles for survival. They developed a very idiosyncratic practice of translating, transcribing, transliterating, and transferring images that might be called *transpicturing*. Their work *Jęzzers język* (2015, vacuum-formed plastic, acrylic paint, 64 × 91 cm) from the cycle *Language arts* may be seen as a comprehensive example. As they explain: "*Jęzzers język* celebrates the nasal phonemes specific to the Polish language through a retro exclamation: Yowzers! Unlike most other Slavic languages, the Polish language has prominent nasal phonemes – 'ą' and 'ę'. These letters have provided an unlikely source of self-determination and resistance in the face of pan-Slavism, Russian imperialism, amid a panoply of perceived or real threats." Later they add: "JEZZERS A Polish phonetic

transliteration of 'yowzers,' an English slang word exclaiming excitement. (...) JEZYK Polish for 'language'." Words with precisely designed fonts are supplemented by a sketchy image of a nose. The relation between verbal and visual elements resembles that of a pun, and this kind of play is crucial for the collective's practice of transpicturing.

Let us return to Caroline Jones's book. While it contains powerful analyses, it does not provide us with a precise concept of language. It is instead based on what Althusser calls a 'spontaneous philosophy of scientist.' I believe this lack may be compensated by the philosophy of language of Jean-Jacques Lecercle. His point of departure is a ferocious critique of linguistics (from de Saussure to Chomsky) for insisting on the simplified and reductionist concept of language as an abstract system and instrument of transparent communication. Instead, he proposes a philosophy as social practice through which "language is imposed on its speaker in social interaction."¹⁰ Thus, language "produces effects of intersubjectivity by means of interlocution, creating subjects/speakers through interpellation."¹¹ As a result:

The subject becomes a speaker by appropriating a language that is always-already collective – which means that she is appropriated by it: she is captured by a language that is external and prior to her (...). Possession here is a transitive relationship, something clearly marked by the ambiguity of the word: I possess the language in as much as I am possessed by it, just as people were once possessed by the devil.¹²

Obviously, Lecercle writes about natural languages. However, we may extrapolate his analysis to the artificial language of art by replacing the speaker with an artist, curator, or viewer who, after acquiring the language, may possess it and be possessed by it. So, if they are successfully interpellated by it, they become its subject and

a subject of it. This subjectivisation by the global art language is strictly a social process that would not be possible without numerous institutions that create the art world. By acquiring its language, anyone may get access to it. However, it is not a situation free from structural inequalities and discrimination. Lecercle is well aware of this when he states that every language is determined by “a hierarchy of places and a power relation.”¹³ They also structure the language of global art and the functioning of its subjects.

Three concepts of Lecercle's philosophy of language are remarkably relevant. First is refraction, a term with which he replaces the classic notion of reflection. Implying distortion, *refraction* “is not a simple image, mere representation” to the contrary “the action of language is a mixture of representation and intervention: the image of the world conveyed by language is not only deformed, it is transformed and, in return, transformative.”¹⁴ The second is the *linguistic* conjuncture, which “is the context in which meanings are formed, within the social practices of speakers (...), and within which they are reified into formations of meaning (...), which form so many points or forces in a semantic field.”¹⁵ It is strictly connected to historical and political conjunctures that are refracted in language. Furthermore, the third is *minority* – borrowed from politics and strictly connected to the power relations that structure every language, especially standard language or major language. The concept is created to juxtapose “minor dialects, registers and language games” to “a language of power, major because dominant.”¹⁶ Juxtaposition opens a “dual process: the minor dialects subvert the major language, they disquiet it, destabilize it, put it in a state of continuous variation; correlatively, however, by subverting it they make it live, they cause the linguistic formation to continue to develop, to be the site of tensions and contradictions that render it active in the historical and linguistic conjuncture.”¹⁷

The three concepts enable us to translate Lecercle's philosophy of language into a theory of global art language. And this, in turn, allows

us to analyse globalised art world(s) in terms of a hierarchy of places and power relations. For instance, access to the top layer of global art circulation connected with participating in most significant big exhibitions or biennials and gaining high prices at the most prestigious art fairs is rigidly conditioned by getting mastery of the standard global language of art. It is strictly connected with the ability to properly refract current global conjuncture or at least selected regional or local conjunctures. The collective *Slavs and Tatars* are examples of such a mastery of the global standard language of art. Furthermore, the dialectics of major and minor idioms within the global art language allows us to grasp the tensions occurring in any national presentation of contemporary art and face the challenge of impossible translation.

The exhibition *State of life. Polish Contemporary Art in a Global Context* was shown at the National Art Museum of China (NAMOC) in Beijing as part of a comprehensive and varied presentation of Polish culture in China. It was a counterpart to the exhibition *Treasures from Chopin's Country: Polish art from the 15th-20th Centuries* curated by Maria Poprzęcka in the National Museum of China. Both exhibitions formed a sequence that presented a panorama of the history of Polish art from the fifteenth century until today. The NAMOC and the National Museum of China are the most important art museums in the country. In this context, all the artworks included in the *State of Life* exhibition became connected with the issue of national identification. The Polishness attributed to them was to be translated into a story readable to Chinese viewers. In 2013 at NAMOC, there was a discussion about the preliminary concept of the exhibition. Fan Di'an, director of the museum, strongly emphasised the issue of presenting artworks that would be meaningful and relevant for Chinese viewers. Fan Di'an's voice was the more interesting, as he participated in introducing contemporary art to China; he co-organised its first official manifestation, the exhibition *China/Avant-Garde* at NAMOC, in 1989. The tension between the local (national?) idiom

and global standard language may be analysed with the example of Agnieszka Kalinowska *No Man's Land* (2011, paper string). The work deconstructs the national emblem treating it as a visual cliché that requires confrontation. The visual pattern dissolves in the complex texture of the sculptural object, while the rhetoric of the title exposes the suspension of national identification. Most of the artists included in the show seemed to agree with Étienne Balibar when he claims that every national “community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary, that is, it is based on the projection of individual existence into the weft of a collective narrative” but at the same time “only imaginary communities are real.”¹⁸ As a result, the artists treat the manifestations of national identity as imaginative clichés or stereotypes that can be critically or ironically reworked. Such an approach poses a challenge to narrowly understood promotion tasks of any national show. Furthermore, this very approach provokes a political controversy around contemporary art in Poland. Contemporary artists avoid merely representing national identity; instead, they want to refract it to intervene in the nation's conjuncture and interpellate viewers with the minor language of art.

The show, however, was aiming neither at celebrating nor at destroying national identity. Instead, it was to give access to Polish conjuncture by translating it with the language of contemporary art into an experience that could be shared with the Beijing audience. Despite all the differences, some elements of Polish and Chinese conjunctures are comparable: communist past and rapid social and economic transformation. As the title *State of Life* suggests, the refraction was based on the category of the lived experience of Polish people and artists translated into exhibition form. The show was divided into five parts: *State, Environment of Life, Ecologies of the Self, The Shareable Part, The Globalised Enjoyment*. It presented 56 artists, primarily contemporary ones, and several classics of modernity strongly influencing current practice. According to the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, the

show was visited by 126 000 viewers. Nevertheless, I tend to believe that translation of the experience could not be entirely successful. As Lecercle emphasised, refraction should be a representation of the conjuncture and an intervention in it. While the exhibition inevitably reduced the meaning of all the works to representations of certain visual, symbolic, imaginary, conceptual, or affective aspects of Polish conjuncture. Although the translation appeared impossible, something was gained from it. The first was a vivid aesthetic experience. The second was the confrontation of the minor language of Polish contemporary art with a powerful language of Chinese contemporary art. The viewers could be interpellated by the works as representations of a Polish conjuncture (without comprehending it deeply) and, at the same time, urged to intervene in the conjuncture of their own. The other project I would like to discuss is *Waiting for Another Coming*, consisting of two exhibitions accompanied by performance and lecture programs; first at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Vilnius (2018), Lithuania, and then at Ujazdowski Castle Contemporary Art Centre in Warsaw (2019). Both episodes presented Polish and Lithuanian artists together, and the whole project was curated by Ūla Tornau from CAC, Vilnius and Anna Czaban and myself. To avoid inequalities, every curatorial decision was based on consensus which made the process slightly arduous. The first episode will be the focus here.

A pretext for the project was a centenary of independence celebrated in both countries, while the subtext was the complicated common history that provoked questions about the current situation and future prospects. During preliminary research, it became clear that there were no deeper connections between cultures and contemporary art scenes. In fact, Polish and Lithuanian contemporary art were appearing as if created on two separate planets. Given this, the project aimed to create the possibility of encounters for artists of both countries and follow the dynamics of mutual exchange.

Not based on any presumptions, curatorial research followed the proposals of selected artists. As a result, the only motive that seemed to permeate all artists' ideas was that of heterotopia. The term was coined by Michel Foucault:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.¹⁹

While "the former leads to the creation of a blueprint for an idealised reality, the latter results in the creation of an actual space, which is different from everyday reality."²⁰ When Foucault mentions representing, contesting, and inverting, it may exactly be seen as modes of refracting. By creating their heterotopias, artists refracted their conjunctures, intervened in them. They abandoned thinking about designing the future, focusing instead on activities in their life environment.

To give some examples. Stroboskop collective created an artist-run, independent exhibition space in a small garage. Moreover, they were most rigorous in defending their heterotopia. When invited to the show, they commissioned an oil painting depicting one of their exhibition's openings (*Night of the Exhibition at Stroboskop*, 2018, oil on canvas). The very space of the gallery was not, however, revealed.

The starting point for Ewa Axelrad's sculptural installation *Hang and Sway* (2018, steel, concrete, soil) is carpet-beating frames that are cleaning devices installed in communal spaces of

Polish cities. They are also popular in other Eastern Bloc countries; however, they differ in shape. The frames are sites where children and youngsters used to hang out in pre-internet times. The artist investigates habits and rituals connected with occupying territories and forming gangs. She treats the carpet beating frame as a social apparatus and a tool to analyse the distribution of violence and hierarchy. Axelrad visually refracts some element of a conjuncture to intervene symbolically in it. The intervention is supposed to interpellate the viewers as most of them know the original device from their experience.

Of all the works presented in the exhibition, those of Rafał Dominik were most popular. He created not even an idiosyncratic idiom; actually, he developed a visual style to refract reality. Fascinated by popular culture, he creates images that are affirmative and sarcastic at the same time and this mixture is very appealing to the viewers. Furthermore, it challenges their social and class stereotypes. Again, refraction is a tool of interpellating the subjects to intervene in their own conjuncture.

However, when we come to a more general analysis, there is something striking about how both Polish and Lithuanian artists created their heterotopias. The whole process turns out to be a literal illustration of Caroline Jones's thesis: most artists used the global art language to speak of differences; they did not want to mention anything in common. The exhibition appeared to be an assemblage of idiosyncratic idioms; however, in most cases, precisely articulated in the most proper global art language. It reveals a more general paradox, only differences should be spoken out, but this may happen only in standardised language. They are refracted through the process of translation to the extent that they are reduced to mere representations of actual differences. Reified in objects, they become signs ready to be included in global circulation.

On the other hand, the exhibition could have been an encounter of two minor languages of global art. To a moment and extent, it was

intended to be such an encounter of Polish and Lithuanian contemporary art. In the end, it turned out that all artists had missed the meeting as they were too busy constructing their own heterotopias. They used the global language of art to escape the cultural policies of both countries and the curatorial agenda. The exhibition appeared to be a clash of idioms, an assemblage of idiosyncratic enunciations and sometimes individual styles. Their aim was, thus, to create radical minor languages.

Interpreting art in terms of Lecercle's philosophy of language allows locating contemporary art from Poland within the global circulation. It also provides a theoretical framework to understand how as a minor language, it is created by refracting a particular national conjuncture. Idiomatic specificity of Polish contemporary art may be expressed only when translated into the standard language of global art through a process of differentiation. Both *State of life. Polish Contemporary Art in a Global Context* and *Waiting for Another Coming* in various ways aimed to elaborate these translations and differentiations.



Notes

- ¹ Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art A Critical Estimate," in *The global art world : audiences, markets, and museums*, edited by Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 38-73.
- ² "From World Art to Global Art: View on a New Panorama," in *The global contemporary and the rise of new art worlds*, edited by Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2013), 178.
- ³ "Contemporary Art as Global Art A Critical Estimate," 40.
- ⁴ Ibidem, 50.
- ⁵ Ibidem, 53.
- ⁶ Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago, 2016), 249.
- ⁷ Ibidem, 32.
- ⁸ Ibidem, 96.
- ⁹ *Slavs and Tatars: Wripped Scripped*, (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2018), 118.
- ¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*, trans. Gregory Elliott (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), 23.
- ¹¹ Ibidem, 34.
- ¹² Ibidem, 142-43.
- ¹³ Ibidem, 52, 102.
- ¹⁴ Ibidem, 110.
- ¹⁵ Ibidem, 161.
- ¹⁶ Ibidem, 135.
- ¹⁷ Ibidem, 212.
- ¹⁸ Étienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 13, no. 3 (1990): 346.
- ¹⁹ Michael Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Foucault.info*, accessed 27.07.2022, <https://foucault.info/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en/>.
- ²⁰ Anna Czaban, Jarosław Lubiak, and Źła Tornau, *Waiting for Another Coming: Exhibition Guidebook* (Warszawa: CSW Zamek Ujazdowski, 2018), 11.

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