

SECTION 2

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SOMETHING IN COMMON?

POLISH AND KOREAN PERFORMANCE ART IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUNG DEMOCRACY

Introduction

Edited by Anka LEŚNIAK

The collection of articles entitled *Something in Common. Polish and Korean performance art in the context of young democracy* consists of four articles by Korean and Polish authors, who introduce the history and development of action art in both countries. The articles are the result of the one-week event under the same title that took place in October 2019 at the Patio Art Space of the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk, organised by the Intermedia Department. It consisted of a show of performance art by Polish and Korean artists: Neung Kyung SUNG, Jaeseon MOON and Marek ROGULSKI, performance workshops with students of the Gdansk Academy and a conference on Korean and Polish performance art. The four articles written by Jin-Sup YOON, Ah-Young LEE, Łukasz GUZEK and myself are based on papers delivered on this conference. They concerned performance art in Poland and Korea, its history and social and political background. Also current performance art activities and history of development of performance art festivals

were discussed in the articles published in this collection. The role of women in the performance art field was also highlighted.

The first impulse for organising the event referring to the relationship between democracy and performance art in Poland and Korea was the already existing collaboration between artists and theoreticians from both countries, connected with the Art and Documentation Association in Poland and Soro Performance Art Centre in Seoul. This began in 2012, when I was invited to take part in the PAN Asia Festival organised by Jaeseon MOON. While listening to the artists' talks and speakers of the conference accompanying the performance shows, I realised that in such geographically and culturally distanced countries, surprisingly, we could find more similarities than one would expect. The two most important common points are performative art practices and pro-democracy policy activism. Poland was under totalitarian power based on the communist idea until 1989, when the first free election took place and the

country turned its course to democracy. South Koreans were also suppressed by a totalitarian military dictatorship. Both regimes, although different in their ideological assumptions, resulted in the same effects, a downtrodden nation seeking independence. In Korea this came two years earlier than in Poland, in 1987. These facts brought me to the idea of comparison of the character of Polish and Korean performance art and its political background. The possibility of organising an event devoted to these issues in Gdańsk, motivated me even more, because it was the workers of the Gdańsk Shipyard that played a significant role in the overthrowing of totalitarian power in Poland. Since then Gdańsk has been considered as the cradle of democracy in Poland. The artists from Gdansk also contributed to the legacy of performance art practices, among them Grzegorz KLAMAN, a co-founder of the Wyspa Institute and current head of the Intermedia Department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk.

For the purposes of the research presented in these articles, the most important one is the timeline of performance art and a search of its beginning in both countries. In both cases the first such artworks were realised in the 1960s. The articles by Ah-Young LEE and Łukasz GUZEK show that the interest of Korean and Polish artists in action art such happenings and events in that time had not simply been an 'imported inspiration' from Western art, where the first happenings took place. The form of Polish and Korean happenings had its root in the cultural and political conditions of both countries. It was the ephemeral and subversive and thus political nature of the live art that made it interesting and useful for artists that were willing to act in particular conditions with all its limitations imposed by the ruling authorities on culture. The distinction between the terms such as 'happening,' 'even' and 'performance' is noted in the presented articles, however it refers mainly to the history of action art, when the term performance art had not been yet come into use.

Performance art that, both in Poland and in Korea, had its root in happenings and events of the 1960s, was created in the time of authoritarian

power and under its constraints. The subsequent military regimes and suppression of individuality in Korean society resulted in various forms of action art, where the body of the artist was engaged. The relationship between the politics of the regime, and action art as the most powerful artistic form of resistance against it, is presented in the most detailed way in Ah-Young LEE's article: "The Korean avant-garde: performance art from the 1960s to the 1980s in the context of the democratization of South Korea." She is writing from the perspective of a researcher, curator and art historian, who also was in charge of the *Performance Art in Asia* archiving project, she also curated the *Performance Art in Asia* archive exhibition in Gwangju in South Korea in 2015 and co-curated the exhibition *Rehearsals from the Korean Avant-Garde Performance Archive* at the Korean Cultural Centre UK in London in 2017.

The perspective of a witness of history and as well participant and initiator of events presenting performance art is clearly indicated in the article by Jin-Sup YOON "Avant-garde-ness and experimentation: renegades as outliers." YOON is an artist, art critic and curator of performance art festivals, such as the Millennium Nanjang Performance Art Festival in Theater Zero (2000) or the Seoul International Performance Art Festival (2000, 2002).

The rebellious and revolutionary character of action art is also emphasized in the article by Łukasz GUZEK. He is both a researcher, witness of the evolution of Polish performance art for over 30 years and an author of the book *Rekonstrukcja sztuki akcji Polsce* (The Reconstruction of Action Art in Poland). GUZEK's article "Happenings-events-performances in Poland: intermingling histories of art and politics" gives the reader a substantive overview of artists, artist-run initiatives and festivals that contributed to the development of this field of art, both in the time of the totalitarian regime and in democracy. He also provided number of comparisons and juxtapositions that enable the reader to imagine the relations between such geographically distant countries and different culturally art milieus that work in the same medium of performance.

Finally, my article concerns the presence of women in Polish performance art. The article “Action art as a way of emancipation. Women's performance art practices in the context of the totalitarian regime based on communist ideology and the young democracy in Poland” is based both on my own artistic experience, observation of the performance art scene and interviews with women artists of older generations. It is based on the art and research methodology. I introduce only Polish women artists and the Polish political context.

However, in the matter of women's rights we can also see some similarities in the situation of Polish and Korean women. Both countries have a number of women performance artists who refer to the position of women in the society. The role of women shamans in Korean society could be also interesting to analyse from the perspective of performative practices in avant-garde art.

The period of rapid industrialisation of both countries resulted in the employment of women, which gave them a relevant independence. However, the traditional expectations towards them referring to the family life were still strong, and the violence against women is a problem that hasn't yet been solved both in Poland and in Korea. Also in both countries, the law on abortion is restricted, which is always a sign of patriarchal cultural rules. The Korean artist Bul LEE referred to this problem in 1988 by suspending her naked body tied to a rope hanging from the ceiling. Both in Poland and in Korea, women also face a gender pay gap and they are not as frequently employed as men in management positions. The first Korean feminist artists using action art as a form of their expression appeared in the late sixties. Among them were Kuk Jin KANG, and Chanseung CHUNG, Kangja JUNG who staged *The Transparent Balloon and a Nude* collaborative happening in 1968. The similarities and differences between the strategies of Polish and Korean performance artists and forms of the performance art works have not been fully covered in this collection of articles. However this appears to be a promising topic for further research for Polish and Korean artists and

scholars that opens up new perspectives and fields of study and thus it creates a fertile ground for future discussions.

Ah-Young LEE

THE KOREAN AVANT-GARDE: PERFORMANCE ART FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1980S IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF SOUTH KOREA

1. Introduction. Modern Asian Conditions which brought about Avant-garde Performance Art

Recently, there was an exhibition titled *Awakenings: Art in Society in Asia 1960s-1990s*.¹ After World War 2, throughout Asia, there was a transformation of the established social structure caused by drastic changes such as industrialization, urbanization and democratic movements. Coinciding with the *Zeitgeist* of this period, the form and function of art also changed. Having identified the resonances between the radical and experimental art practices of each Asian country, the curators of the exhibition presented the keyword 'awakening' which refers not to awareness through external (Western) intervention, but to the emergence of political awareness, new artistic attitudes, and a newfound sense of subjectivity as the driving force behind the change of the art practice paradigm. Under this premise, the exhibition dismantled the distinction between 'Social Realism/Activism' and 'Experimental Art/Conceptualism,' and incorporated these into the radical art practices triggered by the 'awakening.'²

As the exhibition revealed, radical art trends recognized as 'avant-garde' emerged in Asian countries after World War 2. 'Avant-garde' is a concept related to the attitude toward art rather than its form, and its essence is the deconstructive criticism of modernity and the re-connection between life and art. Therefore, 'avant-garde,' whose core is not an external form but a relationship to practical life, was the concept that enabled postwar artists, who had internalized Asian hybrid modernity, to bring criticism to the fullest extent, and to present more autonomous contemporary art.

At this point, I will briefly mention the ACC (Asia Culture Center) Archive and Research's *'Performance Art in Asia' Archive* to elaborate the modern conditions of the Asian avant-garde. This project highlighted performance art as the front line of avant-garde based on the similarity of sociocultural conditions as Asian avant-garde appeared when each country commonly experienced the instability of domestic politics, rapid economic growth, and the aspiration of democratization with the growth of cultural consciousness. Namely, Asian avant-garde art emerged based on new subjectivities that appeared in the transitional period and performance art, especially, is a significant index to understand it.

Based on these backgrounds, I will deal with Korean performance art from the 1960s to the 1980s as an example of Asian avant-garde performance art, specifically, seen in the context of the trajectory of the democratization of the country as a significant driving force of avant-garde (performance art).

2. Korean Modernity and South Korean Democratization in the Twentieth Century

2-1. Korean Modernity as a case of Asian Modernity

Okwui ENWEZOR claimed that it is necessary to approach *petit* modernities considering localities away from *grand* modernity which is Western-centered, and in order to practice it, new perspectives and methodologies are required to escape from the structure of the *grand narrative*.³ In this context, he suggested the concept of “the four domains of modernity” to examine how modernity has worked in the hierarchical layers of its construction, and how it has especially been revealed in the domains of cultural and artistic practices. Among the four categories of today’s modernity, the East Asian modernity is designated as ‘developing modernity/*andromodernity*’ which is a subordinate modernity derived from ‘supermodernity.’⁴ This form of modernity is “a hybrid form of modernity, achieved through a kind of accelerated type of development, while also devising alternative models of development” and an obsessive modernity in development pursuing “the accoutrements of a modern society.”⁵

These characteristics of the Asian modernity are linked with the discourses on Korean modernity. To explain the Korean modernity, the philosopher Eun-Joo CHANG presented the concept of a ‘Confucian modernity.’⁶ This is a hybrid modernity combined with the secular Confucian culture of the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910). It features ‘the absence of individuality’ (in that it puts priority on the values of groups) and ‘worldly materialism,’ which brings about fetishism. This distinctive modernity is the background of Korean capitalist development, which pursued

collective values and suppressed individuals in a period of the country’s development when the people were mobilized to achieve national goals and materialistic abundance. In addition, the sociologist Suk-Jung HAN suggested the concept of ‘Manchurian modernity,’⁷ which explained that the origin of Korean developmental regimes sustained for twenty years since the era of Chung-Hee PARK is related, specifically, to Japanese colonialism and Manchurian experiences. Behind the Korean military regime’s rapid industrial development and city construction which flaunted masculinity, there was a modern spirit which originated from Manchukuo.

These theories explained the fundamental characteristics of the Korean society in the era of the military dictatorship. In the political, social and cultural environment built on the peculiar Korean modernity, Korean avant-garde artists, specifically, performance artists tried to resist the oppressive systems with ‘their bodies’ in accordance with the aspiration of democratization.

2-2. A Brief History of South Korean Democratization in the Twentieth Century

As Korea’s political tradition lacked experience in liberal democracy, soon after the nation’s independence, it quickly degenerated into the authoritarianism of Syng-Man RHEE’s patrimonial rule (1948-1960).⁸ In 1960, there was widespread dissatisfaction with extensive election fraud and the poor state of the economy. In particular, most Koreans complained about the corrupt government practices. In that year, the April 19th Revolution broke out against President RHEE’s dictatorship. Eventually, RHEE resigned as he was “confronted both with intense domestic pressure to resign and with loss of support from the United States.”⁹

However, due to the succeeding government’s failure to control the political turbulence created by the Revolution, a coup took place in 1961. This coup was a historical turning point to end political struggles between diverse forces that sought to achieve different objectives of ‘nation building’ in the newly independent country. “In this struggle, the military’s alternative – capitalist industrialization combined with authoritarian control – gained supremacy and

dominated the Korean society for some time.”¹⁰ The leader of the military coup was Major General Chung-Hee PARK. While serving in the Japanese army during colonial period, he was affected by a doctrine of the Japanese military, which was “characterized by a belief in strong, centralised management of the economy and by a strong nationalism.”¹¹ In 1972, PARK’s regime declared the *Yushin* (Revitalizing Reform) Constitution. He employed “the ideology of security” based on the assumption of a threat from North Korea. In terms of the systematic use of security threats as a means of mobilizing and controlling civil society, the *Yushin* system had similar characteristics to the pre-war militarist system of Japan. The *Yushin* system eventually ended with the assassination of PARK in 1979.¹²

After the brutal struggles between military-authoritarian and civilian-democratic forces from 1979 to 1980, the New Military group centering around Doo-Hwan CHUN eventually took power.¹³ But his rule faced stronger opposition, which was better organized, greater in size, and ideologically radical, which was a consequence of social diversification and a long history of political resistance. CHUN dismissed President Kyu-Ha CHOI and expanded martial law across the country on 17th May 1980, igniting a confrontation with pro-democracy activists. Matters came to a head on May 18 when the city of Gwangju was taken over by the Gwangju Democratization Movement who held it by force of arms against the military for 10 days. During the battle to take the city back from the protesters, hundreds of civilians were brutally massacred, beaten and tortured by the military. The brutal suppression of the Gwangju Democratization Movement only strengthened the opposition to the regime.¹⁴ The nationwide uprising in June 1987 ended CHUN’s dictatorial rule. The June Democracy Movement was an entirely new achievement in that it initiated a democratization process that has continued until today without experiencing reversals such as any further military takeovers.¹⁵ As the ongoing struggle for democracy resulted in the victory of the pro-democracy movement, the year 1987 can be treated as a turning point in culture and society for Korea.

In the later 1980s, the meaning of avant-garde art as resistance to the system built on the Korean modernity shifted. Therefore, I will re-examine the avant-garde performance art from 1967 (when the first performance art was presented in Korea), to the turning point in 1987.

3. The History of Korean Performance Art in the Trajectory of Democratization

3-1. Korean Performance Art in the ‘4/19 Generation’ in the late 1960s and 1970s

At the time when the *informel* art of the Korean War Generation started to lose its vitality in the art world, three young artistic groups Mu(Zero) Coterie, Sinjeon(New Exhibition) Coterie, and Origin Coterie, collaborated to hold the *Union Exhibition of Young Artists* (1967). These groups presented objects, installations, and performance art as new attempts to escape from the two-dimensional nature of abstract art. Among these attempts, there was a performance art piece *Happening with a Vinyl Umbrella and Candlelight*,¹⁶ which has been considered as the first performance art in Korean art history.¹⁷

In 1967, President PARK began steps to strengthen national security by suppressing the activities of the democratic camp. At the same time, his regime started the second five-year economic plan. In conjunction with the rapid economic development, the mass media was developed, spreading Western popular culture and individualistic ideas. Performance art appeared in Korea when the society was being infused with Western economics and culture, but the thoughts and actions of Koreans were oppressed in the name of anti-communism and national security. When South Korea had just begun to embrace modernization and industrialization, Western society was already trying to overcome modernist ideology and had started the post-industrial era. In particular, youth groups challenged the “economic, cultural and epistemological systems of older generations.” In this same context, Western artists were producing avant-garde art challenging the

authority of abstract modernist art. Therefore, as Soo-Jin CHO pointed out, Korean performance art was born from the cultural exchange between the two different worlds – Korea which only then began modernization in earnest and the West which was already on its way to post-modernity.¹⁸

The initial period of Korean performance art can be divided into the era of ‘happenings’ led by radical performance art from the late Sixties to 1970, and the era of ‘events’ led by conceptual performance art from the mid-Seventies. Most heroes of Korean performance art history in this period belong to the ‘4/19 Generation’. These people had witnessed the April 19 Revolution and the May 16 Military Coup when they were in high school or college and experienced the *Yushin* dictatorship when they were in their 20s and 30s. Further, they were the first generation that had grown up under the influence of American pop culture. Their thirst for democracy, which developed while experiencing the Revolution, motivated their will to be the main agents of the new culture together with the individualistic attitude as a ‘way of living.’¹⁹

Until around 1970, these people presented radical ‘happenings’ to express their resistance to the ideals of the older generation. In 1967, some artists who participated in the *Union Exhibition of Young Artists* held a street protest in the downtown of Seoul. They picketed with signs criticizing artistic institutions and demanding new cultural policies. This can be regarded as the first political demonstration as activist art in the history of Korean art.²⁰ In 1968, Kuk Jin KANG, Chanseung CHUNG and Kangja JUNG presented a ‘happening’ titled *Murder at the Han Riverside* as a criticism against the established culture and art circles.

In June 1970, The 4th Group was formed centering on Kulim KIM and the young elites in their 20s and 30s. All cultural areas including art, theatre, fashion, music, film, and religion were gathered in this group.²¹ By the time when this group was active, most Koreans were suffering from “both the oppression of a military dictatorship and the alienation of the developing capitalist system.” The government controlled the citizens’ physical bodies through strict regulations, and their bodies were denigrated as machines for modernization.

Performance artists who presented the early ‘happenings’ revealed people’s inherent physical and sexual desires. For instance, *The Transparent Balloons and a Nude* (1968)²² attacked the patriarchal objectification of women by exhibiting a female artist’s body, and in *Condom & Carbamine* (1970), Ku-Lim KIM, Chan-Seung CHUNG and Tae-Su BANG handed out condoms to the students of Seoul National University. At the 1st Seoul International Contemporary Music Festival (1969) directed by Ku-Lim KIM, Chan-Seung CHUNG and Myung-Hee CHA simulated sexual intercourse. They addressed sex as the most basic desire to challenge the Confucian moral standards in Korean culture and the stoicism of the military regime as well as to criticize the commodification of the body.²³

The moment signalling the climax and end of the ‘happening’ era is *Funeral for the Established Art & Culture* by The 4th Group. This performance was staged on Korea’s Independence Day as a symbolic ritual to bury the established art and culture. They marched along the street carrying a coffin decorated with flowers and the Korean national flag but were arrested by the police in the Gwanghwamun area. At that time, the leader of the group Ku-Lim KIM was interrogated all night in a police station. Less than two months after forming the group, he had no choice but to disband it.²⁴ The dictatorial government oppressed avant-garde art such as ‘happenings’ because it was linked to the younger generation’s pop culture and subculture, which were regarded by the state as ‘decadence’ or ‘rebellious ideas,’²⁵ thereby suppressing its critical meaning to the society.

Around the beginning of the *Yushin* system, performance art began to disintegrate because it was considered ‘immoral’ and ‘riotous.’ The mainstream art circles became more conservative. Despite this atmosphere, performance art re-emerged as ‘events,’ a process that was led by the S.T. Group.²⁶ This group was active for more than a decade in the 1970s. This period was an ‘era of a vacuum’ because the late Sixties’ youth culture movement entered a lull and the avant-garde art movements that expressed social messages became extinct.²⁷ Against the backdrop of the time, the S.T. Group placed emphasis on theoretical activities

and logic. By publishing newsletters and holding seminars, the group introduced and studied contemporary art theories. They were particularly influenced by Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN's theory of the critical power of language, Joseph KOSUTH's linguistic examination of art. The theories of U-Fan LEE combined the phenomenology of Maurice MERLEAU-PONTY with the philosophy of Nishida KITARO.²⁸

Overall, the activities of the S.T. Group can be divided into two periods. From 1971 to 1974, its members mainly presented objects or installation art under the influence of U-Fan LEE's theories, and from 1975, they mainly presented 'events' that were explicit and concise performance art.²⁹ This changeover to performance art was the result of their acknowledgement of the 'body' as the most critical element in works after researching the contemporaneous philosophies and art theories.³⁰ More directly, in April 1975, when Kun-Yong LEE presented the first 'events' titled *Indoor Measurement* and *Equal Area*, he seemed to have begun performance art after getting some information about Japanese avant-garde art trends from Kulim KIM as well as experiencing performances when he participated in the '73 Paris Biennale.³¹ The first 'events' revealed U-Fan LEE's theory to transcend the objectively targeted view of the world and to encounter the world through 'events' based on phenomenological 'rhetoric,' which were related to the previous objects and installation works. However, in October that year, he presented several 'events'³² such as *Drawing Lines*, *Biscuit Eating*, *Ten Round-trips*, *Age Counting*, and *Round Trip of Two People* which were different from his first 'events' in that the logical inevitability of action and its consequences were emphasized in these works.³³

From around 1975, Yong-Min KIM, Neung-Kyung SUNG, Suk-Won CHANG, and Jin-Sup YOON along with Kun-Yong LEE presented numerous 'events.' LEE explored 'the logical event' as 'the artistic act as reasoning of the body instead of the mind' and coined the term 'logical event' to refer to the performance art of the S.T. Group.³⁴ These 'events' featured repetitive and controlled bodily acts which were common in the artist's daily life. LEE argued "the events of Event-Logical inspiration

could not escape the boundaries of the art system, which differentiated them from 'real' actions that were subject to coincidence and uncertainty." The concept of neutral logic in the 'Event-Logical' theory stemmed from the body's attempt to contemplate the world through a linguistic structure.³⁵

The artists of the S.T. Group revealed the analytical attitude of the artist as the subject of an action through their 'events,' which by itself had resistance-related meanings in the collective discourse of the Seventies.³⁶ In the exhibition *Event-Logical* (1976), three artists (Kun-Yong LEE, Neung-Kyung SUNG, and Yong-Min KIM) staged 'events'³⁷ in accordance with strict procedures and ruling out improvisation or accidental situations. Like the 'events,' from *The Fourth ST Exhibition* in 1975, the 'event' of the S.T. Group was refined by casting off dramatic elements, excluding symbols and allegories, and the repetitive acts that were the distinctive characteristics of their 'events.'³⁸ The 'events' of the S.T. Group were conducted based on logical processes by contemplating 'what art is' in the Cogito-style self-reflection. Particularly, Kun-Yong LEE's *Body Drawing(The Method of Drawing) series*³⁹ is a strong index of the subject. Only the changes of his body position or the level of body restraint, which he had planned, decided the lengths and curves of the drawings revealing the apparent existence of the body as a subject. In the Seventies, Korean society pursued collective ideals such as nationalism, suppressing individualism. However, the 'event' artists of the S.T. Group focused on their bodies and actions. All the actions they presented related to the sense, judgment and indicative decision of the 'I' that controls the body. In that sense, their 'events' caused ruptures in the collective ego of the authoritarian era as well as struck back at the utilitarian industrial system through meaningless acts.⁴⁰

In addition, according to Kun-Yong LEE, the 'event' was an avant-garde strategy "to subvert the mechanism of control" and by exhibiting the body's internalization of the pressure of a totalitarian system, the 'events' sought to "expose and resist the encroachment of political power onto the body of an individual." Many 'events' featured compulsive repetition or strictly regulated actions, which were reminiscent of factory labour or military drills.⁴¹

In the context of criticism of contemporary society, Neung-Kyung SUNG's *Newspapers: Newspapers: From June 1, 1974* (1974) was a relatively direct criticism of the dictatorship. He was interested in the informational quality of press media and the political nature of everyday life. For this work, he cut out the articles of a newspaper every day, put them in an acrylic container, and left the newspaper with images and advertisements. The work "mocked the violent political censorship of the military government by punning on the popular phrase, 'the truth can be read between the lines.'"⁴² Two years later, by further developing this work, he presented an event titled *Reading Newspapers* in which he cut out the articles after reading them out.

Furthermore, performance art as a social outcry kept being presented even in this rigorous period on a few occasions. Jum-Sun KIM's work *Mourner's House of Hongs*⁴³ (1975) is an example. This happening on the theme of a funeral was staged at a graduation ceremony at Hongik University. The artist perceived the graduation as a symbolic death when entering society that was full of anxiety under the martial law. Chanseung CHUNG *Hair Cutting Happening* (1978) also had a sense of criticism of the regime which even regulated the citizen's hair styles. In this happening, he gave out his hair strands to the audience, and recited 'Aesthetics of Long Hair' after shaving his head.⁴⁴

In 1976, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art sent an official letter to art organizations in accordance with the instructions of President PARK. The official letter prohibited 'artistic acts of violating public order and morals as in outdoor happenings' as well as 'pseudo-art disguised in avant-gardness.' As this letter implied, they lived in such illogical times, so they pursued 'the logic' in their 'events.'⁴⁵

3-2. Performance Art and Art Activism in the Democratization Movements of the 1980s

Although PARK's dictatorship ended with his death, the political repression of the dictatorship lasted until the late 1980s as a new military regime

emerged. However, the civil society's resistance also became more active and better organized. The issue of socially engaged art also emerged as a major agenda in the art circle. The dark era of the Seventies which was characterized by political oppression and labour struggles led to the development of political avant-garde art, Minjung Art (People's Art) in the early 1980s.⁴⁶ In art activism in which artists and citizens used art practices in real politics, there were some cases that can be dealt with in the context of performance art. The unique declarative aspects of performance art were incorporated into the collective and political festivals in minjung art. Before talking about these aspects, I will focus on the performance art of the Eighties that was developed based on the legacy of the avant-garde art of the Sixties and Seventies.

The dissolution of the S.T. Group' in 1980 led to the suspension of the presentation of 'events' and performance art developed without receiving significant attention until the mid-Eighties.⁴⁷ In this period, performance art was more active in other regions than in Seoul. In 1980, the artists of the 'Daejeon 78 Generation' presented 'field events' near Shintan riverside. In the same year, The 1st Geumgang Contemporary Art Festival was held at Gongju. This festival also had the characteristics of an outdoor art festival. In addition, the YATOO Outdoor Art Research Group was formed around Gongju in 1981. This group focused on creating art that sympathized with nature.⁴⁸ Their art practices in the natural environment were mainly installation and performance art. In 1981, The 1st Winter, Daeseongri 31 Artists Exhibition was also held on Bukhan riverside in Gapyeong, near Seoul. The young artists that participated in the art event were fed up with the oppressive society and the authoritarianism of the mainstream art circle. The artists of *Dansaekhwa* (monochrome abstraction), which was the mainstream art trend, insisted that their art practices were a process of self-discipline to reach absolute spiritual freedom by unifying the object and the self. They tried to reach a state of being consistent with the essence of the original nature. This ideal came from the traditional thoughts and they chose abstract 'nature' as an artistic ideal to establish Korean identity. Unlike this, the artists in The 1st Winter Daeseongri 31 Artists Exhibition

or YATOO Group chose real 'nature – outdoor' to challenge the mainstream art and to present a new place for performance and installation art. For them, 'nature' is not an ideal but a real place for art practices that served as an alternative to the existing art institutions and art markets centering around the city. Furthermore, comparing the Gukpung 81 cultural festival organised by CHUN's government with The 1st Winter Daeseongri 31 Artists Exhibition, the contrasting meanings of these events were revealed. The former was a political event⁴⁹ to distract college students in order to weaken the resistance to the military regime shortly before the first anniversary of the suppression of the Gwangju Democratization Movement. However, in the latter event, the avant-garde artists who wanted to create an open space for an audience to experience their art works were creating the democratic publicness through their art activities in 'outdoor-nature.'⁵⁰

Until the mid-Eighties, most performance artists did not have the chance to present their works in the downtown of Seoul. However, after CHUN's government won the bid to host the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Summer Olympics (Seoul was chosen in 1981), the government began to take a partial conciliatory stance to show stability and order to the international community as a response to the criticism of the dictatorship. For instance, they lifted the curfew, abolished school uniforms and loosened hair styles in 1983, and implemented the 'car-free street' policy on weekends in Daehangno of Seoul in 1985. This 'car-free street' was a complex cultural space for the public as the local government allowed people to hold cultural events there. Some artists held the '86 *Here is Korea* street exhibition there. These artists actively sought to communicate with the cultural public through installations and performance art in outdoor public spaces.⁵¹ In the Korean performance art history, this exhibition was a significant inflection point because performance art pieces were presented in the downtown of Seoul for the first time since the disbandment of The 4th Group.

In 1986, when performance art returned to the public space in the city, a large-scale exhibition of performance art, the '86 *Performance and Installation Art Festival*, was held at the Artcosmos

Museum in Seoul.⁵² In the exhibition, there were numerous performance art presentations by participants. Through this, performance artists across the country were able to meet each other, and this meeting became a catalyst to many forthcoming art events organized by artists themselves. At that time, the exhibitions of performance art increased drastically. In 1987, there were around 30 performance art exhibitions. Particularly, in the exhibition '87 *Batang, Flow – The Nine Day Funeral*, artists from various fields such as literature, fine art, theatre, films, dance, and Korean folk music participated in one theme.⁵³ As this implies, the performance art of the Eighties is characterized as a phenomenon of fusion. Artists with diverse backgrounds were involved in creating collaborative pieces, although most experiments were done by performance artists with backgrounds in fine art. In addition, some of these art practices also took their techniques of expression from memorials, funeral ceremonies, physical restraint, and so on to express the oppressive atmosphere of the time. For example, at this festival, Young-Seong SHIN's performance titled *Aqur's Prayer* dealt with the deaths of youths which occurred in the course of constitutional abolishment and hard-fought democratization. He was a member of Nanjido which was one of the small groups of the 1980s that were searching for a new language of expression between the two big discourses of formalistic modernism and social realism.⁵⁴ They newly developed the issues which had been previously addressed in the avant-garde art of the Sixties and Seventies by denying the abstract, uniform and material-centered aesthetics.⁵⁵ These young artists began presenting performance art as an alternative to contrast with the two big discourses after meeting the old generation through the performance art exhibitions in the late Eighties. Other artists from the small groups of the 1980s that presented performance art were Keun-Byung YOON in TARA, Yong-Sok HA in Nanjido, and Bul LEE in Museum and so on. This reveals the lasting continuity of Korean performance art until the late 1980s.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, after the *June 29th Declaration* in response to the people's calls for democratization and a direct presidential election system, the

Daehangno road became the space for 'street politics' because opposition social groups and citizens used the 'car-free street' as the venue for political rallies. In this atmosphere, performance artists also revealed social criticism in their works. For instance, in 1987, Jin-Sup YOON's Performance Group presented *The Big Eye* in the 'car-free street,' which indirectly hinted at the suffering of the citizens under the control of dictatorial power.⁵⁷

In the year 1986, from this turning point, the orientation of performance art drastically began changing. Performance art, which had emerged through the introduction of the temporal attributes of performing arts as an avant-garde strategy, re-emerged as a new 'total art' by actively adopting the attributes of other art genres.⁵⁸ In the late 1980s, tendencies in performance art became more varied, and performance art as an art genre was being established and revitalized within the cultural and artistic circles in a postmodern atmosphere. In 1988, the Korean Performance Artist Association was formed.⁵⁹

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, some art activities presented by minjung artists can also be highlighted in the context of avant-garde performance art. Many Asian political art organizations comprising social realists showed "activism as collective actions linked to the social and political contexts." The political art organizations of social realists actively participated in political protests or engaged in community activities, performances and rallies in association with workers, farmers and student groups.⁶⁰ As a case, minjung art flourished between the Eighties and the mid-Nineties in South Korea. It pursued social participation through art with critical perspectives on the reality of its surroundings. Minjung art can be understood within two discursive frameworks, which are 'critical modernism' and the 'minjung cultural movement.' While the first framework puts stress on "minjung art's self-reflexive inquiry into the South Korean modern art scene during the 1970s and 80s," the second one "reveals the ways in which minjung art sought to take part in the radical social revolution and serve its political agenda."⁶¹ Minjung artists adopted various activities and expressions to dismantle the boundary between art and daily life, attack artistic institutions, and reject

the union between art production and commodity production systems.⁶² With these avant-garde characteristics, some art practices can be treated as performance art. In this paper, I will present several minjung art practices that can be discussed in the context of performance art with the hope of future study on this issue.

According to Wan-Kyung SUNG, the minjung art movement can be divided into three periods, which are the beginning period (1980-1984), the middle period (1985-1989), and the final period (1990-1998). In 1979, the Gwangju Free Artists Council was formed in Gwangju and Reality and Utterance was formed in Seoul. During the first period, small-scale collective activities flourished, the artists of these groups pursued 'art as communication' paying attention to the visual culture of the industrial society.⁶³ Following these first generation groups, one of the second generation groups, Durung, which was led by Bong-Jun KIM, was formed in 1983. This group used the Aeogae little theatre as the main space for their activities. Since this theatre was also used by other groups of traditional performing arts, Durung was influenced by the traditional performing arts.⁶⁴ In particular, they adapted *sinmyung* (the vital energy and convivial spirit) which was originally developed in theatres and performances of the Sixties and Seventies minjung cultural movements.⁶⁵ Like Durung, some other artists in suburban and rural areas recreated the images and themes of folk traditions as an activist form of minjung. The artists collaborated with artisans and performers in mask-making, woodcut printing, and performances, so the traditional theatrical style called *madangguk* was improved. In particular, Bong-Jun KIM expanded the aesthetic qualities of *madangguk* theatre, emphasizing its unique relationship between artists and audiences as well as art and communal festivals.⁶⁶ These activities such as the *madangguk* of Durung can be interpreted as performance art led by visual artists who were influenced by traditional performing arts and its symbiotic productions.

From the year 1985, minjung artists began to methodically engage in social movements and work with the 'audience' that was discovered while addressing political issues through their art.⁶⁷ The minjung artists presented their art activities and

works in everyday spaces. Their main media were woodcut prints, *gulgaegrim* (enormous banner paintings), murals, cartoons, posters and flags as these could be produced quickly and copied in large quantities.⁶⁸ As the oppression of CHUN's regime became severe, the wave of radical social movement against the dictatorship quickly rose. The explosive social movement brought on "the massive emergence of socially engaged art productions at the protests" while encouraging the artists "to organize themselves as activists and subjugate art under the logic of social reform."⁶⁹ From 1987, the street became the main stage of art activism as the artists stepped out into the street where citizens called for democratization and used powerful images of citizens' requests while drawing with them. In this period, the art activism, which artists and citizens presented together in the public struggle site, was the core of minjung art.⁷⁰ Specifically, minjung artists contributed directly to resistance movements as the blueprints for massive rallies, marches, festivals, and public funerals. For example, Byung-Soo CHOI, who was famous for his *gulgaegrim*, planned, designed, and directed the visual and performative details of major political events such as the *June Resistance* and *July-August Labour Struggle* of 1987, and the funeral procession for Han-Yoel LEE. He also "mapped a march through the city, acutely sensitive to the visual dialectics of time and space" for the funeral of Kyung-Dai KANG.⁷¹ These activities can also be interpreted newly in the context of performance art, which were realized through the participation of the masses.

4. Conclusion. How Avant-garde Artists Resisted the Authoritarian Regimes with their Bodies in the Conditions of Korean Modernism

In the exhibition *Awakenings: Art in Society in Asia 1960s-1990s*, the curators believed that the driving force of Asian avant-garde art was rooted in three trajectories: democratization, decolonization, and anti-modernism.⁷² When the dictatorial

governments in Asian countries suppressed the people's political activities and freedom of expression, the pro-democracy movements were triggered and a new awareness of subjectivity began emerging among the citizens. They considered these changes as the trajectory of democratization. The democratic movements throughout Asia were an influential driving force to change the form and the function of art.

Focusing on South Korea, the past decades from the 1960s to the 1980s, when the avant-garde art trends emerged and developed, were a period of social absurdities and conflicts, interwoven with the industrialization led by the military regimes and desire of citizens for democratization. South Korea had a long and fervent history of democratic movements against the dictatorship. The struggle for democracy resulted in the victory of the pro-democracy movement around 1987.

The past 30-year authoritarian regimes built on the unique form taken under Korean modernity were indirectly and directly criticized by avant-garde artists. The Korean avant-garde performance art in this period was not performance art as a genre but an artistic experiment and a challenge to the existing artistic institutions, and the meaning of this challenge often extended to the social criticism.

Most artists, who led the initial period of Korean performance art, belonged to the '4/19 Generation.' Under PARK's military dictatorship, the young artists, who had already experienced the democratic spirit through the April 19th Revolution, used 'happening' "as a political weapon to restore the subjectivity of the individual and to reform society through self-expression of the desiring body."⁷³ The social order of the authoritarian regime based on the Korean hybrid modernity (Confucian modernity or Manchurian modernity), had the potential of being shaken by the subjectivity of the artistic 'happenings' being organised at this time, so the regime suppressed the avant-garde artists participating in them.

Under the government's censorship and the negative perception of avant-garde art in the *Yushin* period, performance art re-invented itself as 'events' mainly through the activities of the S.T. Group. They grasped that the body was the most essential element in the contemporaneous

discourses and presented 'events' insisting that their actions only referred to the internal issues of art without any sociopolitical meanings. Kun-Yong LEE insisted that the *Event-Logical events* could be validated within the art system. Nonetheless, their performance had several layers of meanings related to political resistance. Firstly, in the mid-Seventies, the 'events' featured repetitive and controlled bodily acts that were common in the artist's daily life. These compulsive repetition or strictly regulated actions of the 'events' exposed the body's internalization of the pressure of a totalitarian system by subverting the mechanism of control. In this context, Neung-Kyung SUNG's *Newspaper Events* are important works in that his repetitive actions of cutting out the articles of a newspaper every day not only imitated daily actions subversively but also contained relatively direct criticism to the violent political censorship of the regime. Secondly, the artists of the S.T. Group through their 'events' sought to reveal the analytical attitude of an artist as the subject of an action which by itself had meanings relating to resistance at the time when "increasing state surveillance and propaganda exhorting citizens to put the nation before the self fatally compromised the idea of personal space or sovereignty."⁷⁴ In the period when individualism was suppressed under collective ideals, the 'events' of the S.T. Group attributed to the sense, judgment and indicative decision of the 'I' that controlled the body. In that sense, their events caused ruptures in the collective ego of the authoritarian era as well as struck back at the utilitarian industrial system through meaningless acts.⁷⁵

Although the happenings of the 1960s and the events of the 1970s had different forms of action and concepts from each other, both trends were presented by the '4/19 Generation' who had experienced the democratic revolution and had the desire for individual freedom in the oppressive society. Centering around the body, their strategy to subvert the authoritarian society was different. The 'happening' directly interrupted daily life and dealt with more instinctive desires related with pop culture to attack the existing system. The 'event', however, sought to prove the 'I' which was the subject of an act within the art institutions through a logical reasoning of the body. In a certain

sense, both strategies can be considered as an act of presenting an alternative subjectivity to the oppressive society of their time.

In the 1980s, when the resistance to the military dictatorship of the Fifth Republic and the aspiration for democratization reached a boiling point, minjung art, which is a practical art movement, emerged to overcome social absurdities and stood against modernism⁷⁶ In this atmosphere, performance art based on the legacy of the avant-garde of the Sixties and Seventies was developed more actively in Daejeon and Choongnam province than Seoul in the early 1980s. In particular, the artists of the Daejeon 78 Generation and the YATOO Outdoor Art Research Group led the development of performance art in the regions. Their artistic activities were often presented in the natural environment. In 1981, there was another outdoor art event titled *The 1st Winter, Daeseongri 31 Artists Exhibition* in Gapyeong. The young participants in this event chose real 'nature – outdoor' to present a new place for performance and installation art seeking to create the democratic publicness near Seoul where the government-inspired arts events were held to weaken the people's resistance to the regime.

In the context of the democratic publicness, the sociocultural changes of the mid-1980s were important. Before the hosting of the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Summer Olympics, the regime implemented some policies to show stability and order to the international community. Specifically, it instigated a 'car-free street' policy in the Daehangno street of Seoul. This 'car-free street' became a public space where people could hold cultural events. In this venue, the exhibition *'86 Here is Korea* was held by some performance and installation artists who sought to communicate with the cultural public. From the year 1986, the number of exhibitions of performance art increased drastically. In the late Eighties, artists from various art fields were involved in collaborative performance art pieces. This boom of performance art reflected the sociocultural changes around 1987. In a way, performance artists of the Eighties took performance as an alternative art practice to overcome the two big discourses ('abstract modernism' and minjung art). From the turning point in year 1986, tendencies in performance art became more varied, and with its

diversity, performance art as an art genre was being established and revitalized within the cultural and artistic circles.

The performance art of the 1980s was based on the legacy of the avant-garde art of the previous two decades. The legacy was valid for the young artists of the Eighties because they needed to find alternatives to the two big art trends which were 'abstract modernism' isolated from the reality and minjung art embedded in political messages. They presented performance art as alternative answers to the questions on art. Their new art practices could be an alternative subjectivity to the South Korean society of the Eighties, where people were still isolated by both the authoritarian oppression and the contradictory structure of capitalism.

Meanwhile, in the same period, the minjung art movement was more actively involved in social reality. Although minjung art was hegemonic in nature, by serving a political purpose, it not only had political but also aesthetic avant-garde characteristics in that it adopted various activities and expressions trying to "transcending the existing binaries between art and life, art and history, and art and society."⁷⁷ Related to these aspects of minjung art, there were some activities of minjung artists that can be highlighted in the context of performance art. Minjung artists actively participated in political protests or engaged in community activities, performances and rallies. For instance, one of the minjung artist collectives, Durung was influenced by the practices of Korean traditional performing arts along with the Eighties' folk culture movements. Some minjung artists including the members of Durung worked with local community activists and performers of traditional arts. The place of *Madangguk* in the minjung art of the Eighties was the result of the collaboration with the artisans and performers of traditional folk arts. It can be interpreted as performance art led by visual artists who were influenced by traditional performing arts and its symbiotic productions. In the middle period (1985-1989) of minjung art, the art activism, which artists and citizens presented together in the sites of public struggle, was the core of minjung art. For instance, a minjung artist Byung-Soo CHOI contributed directly to resistance movements by providing the blueprints for massive

rallies, marches, festivals, and public funerals. These activities can also be considered as performance art which the participation of the mass realized.

At this point, we can reconsider the historical origin of minjung art. Minjung art, specifically the activism artists' combatant spirit and optimism have their origin in the minjung cultural movement of the Sixties and Seventies that began with the April 19th Revolution.⁷⁸ This revolution is historically significant in that a new historical subjectivity had emerged. The students or workers, who successfully forced President RHEE to resign as the result of it, became individuals undergoing a monumental event with "an eye-opening experience." The '4/19 Generation' that shared this experience was the main agent to prompt "a moment of awakening, especially about the question of freedom and liberty – and the possibility of achieving them."⁷⁹ Thus, at this point, when considering the minjung artists who did their art practices based on the legacy of the '4/19 Generation' along with the Sixties and Seventies performance artists who were of the '4/19 Generation,' we reach the point where the youths of the '4/19 Generation' shared the experience of 'awakening,' although their ways of resistance against the authoritarian regimes were different.

In the trajectory of democratization in South Korea, avant-garde performance artists resisted the authoritarian regimes with their bodies, and their art practices usually seemed to suggest another way of living against the dominant collective ego. I believe that the Korean performance art, developed around the 'body' that emerged as a powerful place of existence, was a practical presentation of alternative subjectivities challenging the existing systems – the military dictatorships - formed in the conditions of modern Korea.

Notes

¹ This exhibition was held at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo from 10 Oct. to 24 Dec. in 2018; at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea from 31 Jan. to 6 May; and at the National Gallery Singapore from 14 Jun. to 15 Sep. in 2019.

² In a forum of the exhibition titled *Contact Points of Contemporary Art in Asia* (MMCA Gwacheon, 31 Jan. 2018), Suzuki Katsuo's presentation topic was *Rehabilitation of the Narrative in Asian Art* and he explained this.

³ Okwui Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 109, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 600. Text originally published in the catalogue: *Altermodern* (London: Tate, 2009).

⁴ Supermodernity is based on "the general character and forms it has taken in European and Western culture," and is related to ideas on evolution, progress, development, and so on, and is essential for the development of the world system of capitalism. "It is foundational to all other subsequent claims and discourses of modernity." Okwui Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," 610-611.

⁵ Okwui Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," 611-612.

⁶ Chang Eun-Joo, *The Future of Confucian Modernity: The Legitimation Crisis of Korean Modernity and Democracy as Human Ideal* (Paju: Korean Studies Information, 2014).

⁷ Han Suk-Jung, *Manchurian Modern: The Origin of 1960s Korean Developmental Regime* (Seoul: Moonji Publishing Co., Ltd., 2016).

⁸ Kim Yung-Myung, "Patterns of Military Rule and Prospects for Democracy in South Korea," in *The Military and Democracy in Asia and the Pacific* ed. Ron May and Viberto Selochan (Canberra: ANU Press, 2004), 120.

⁹ Edward M. Graham, "The Miracle with a Dark Side: Korean Economic Development under Park Chung-Hee," in *Reforming Korea's industrial conglomerates* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 2003), 14.

¹⁰ Kim Yung-Myung, "Patterns of Military Rule and Prospects for Democracy in South Korea," 120-121.

¹¹ Edward M. Graham, "The Miracle with a Dark Side: Korean Economic Development under Park Chung-Hee," 14-15.

¹² Kim Yung-Myung, "Patterns of Military Rule and Prospects for Democracy in South Korea," 123.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 124-126.

¹⁴ Kim Yung-Myung, "Patterns of Military Rule and Prospects for Democracy in South Korea," 126.

¹⁵ Paik Nak-Chung, "Democracy and Peace in Korea Twenty Years After June 1987: Where Are We Now, and Where Do We Go from Here?" *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, vol.5, issue 6 (2007), accessed 9 Nov. 2019, <https://apjif.org/-Nak-chung-Paik/2440/article.html/>.

¹⁶ Oh Kwang-Soo wrote the script of this 'happening' and 'Mudongin' and 'Shinjundongin' participated in it. In this performance, Kim Young-Ja held a plastic umbrella and sat on a chair, surrounded by ten artists holding candles. The artists sang a song titled "Bird, Bird, Bluebird" while circling around Kim. They concluded the performance by breaking the umbrella.

¹⁷ In the exhibition *Renegades in resistance and challenge 50-year history of performance art of Korea: 1967-2017* (2018), an art historian Cho Soo-Jin, and a curator of the exhibition Yoon Jin-Sup suggested that the street protest by the participants in *Union Exhibition of Young Artists* can be considered as the first 'happening' in Korea.

¹⁸ Cho Soo-Jin, "Confronting an Era through the Body: Korean Performance Art of the 1960s and 70s," in the exhibition catalogue *Reenacting History: Collective Actions and Everyday Gestures* (Gwacheon: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 2017), 216.

¹⁹ Cho Soo-Jin, "The Whole Story of the 'Fourth Group': The Challenge and Frustration of 'Korean' Happening," Seoul: The Korean Society of Art History, *Reviews on the Art History* 40 (2013): 153.

²⁰ Yoon Jin-Sup, "Resistance & Challenge and Avant-gardeness & Experimentation: Renegades as Outliers Brief History of the 50-Year Performance Art of Korea," in *Renegades in resistance and challenge 50-year history of performance art of Korea: 1967-2017* (Daegu: Daegu Art Museum, 2018), 59. Exhib. cat.

²¹ Cho Soo-Jin, "The Whole Story of the 'Fourth Group,'" 145.

²² This work, which was the first nude performance in Korea, was presented by Kuk Jin KANG, Chanseung CHUNG, and Kangja JUNG.

²³ Cho Soo-Jin, "Confronting an Era through the Body: Korean Performance Art of the 1960s and 70s," 220.

²⁴ Yoon Jin-Sup, "The Study on the Korean early 'Happenings,'" in *The Theory and Field of Performance Art* (Seoul: Jinkyung Publisher, 2012), 81-83.

²⁵ Park Choon-Ho, "A Study on the 20th-century Korean Art History: Focusing on the 1960s-70s Art," Seoul: The Korean Society of Art Theory, *The Journal of Art Theory and Practice*, no.16 (2013): 28.

²⁶ S.T. Group was an acronym for 'Space and Time Sculptural Group.' It was formed in 1969 and was active until 1980.

²⁷ Kim Mi-Jung, "I, as a Logical Subject not Collective: The Meaning of ST Art Movement in 1970s Society," Gwacheon: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, *Journal of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art*, vol.8 (2016): 146.

²⁸ Cho Soo-Jin, "Confronting an Era through the Body: Korean Performance Art of the 1960s and 70s," 224.

- ²⁹ Kim Mi-Jung, "I, as a Logical Subject not Collective: The Meaning of ST Art Movement in 1970s Society," 154.
- ³⁰ Cho Soo-Jin, "Avant-garde Gestures Incorporated into the Korean Art History: Performance art of Korea in the 1960s and the 1970s," in *Renegades in resistance and challenge 50-year history of performance art of Korea: 1967-2017* (Daegu: Daegu Art Museum, 2018), 50. Exhib. cat.
- ³¹ Kang Tae-Hi, "1970's Performance Art Event: On ST Members' Works," Seoul: Association of Modern Art History *Journal of History of Modern Art*, vol. 13, no.1 (2001): 9.
- ³² In *The Fourth ST Exhibition* in October 1975, Lee Kun-Yong presented five events. One of his representative performance art works, *Biscuit Eating* was one of the five events. Lee attempted to eat hardtack using the right hand. His right arm was progressively restrained by the application of a splint to the wrist, elbow, upper arm, and back (respectively).
- ³³ Kim Mi-Jung, "I, as a Logical Subject not Collective: The Meaning of ST Art Movement in 1970s Society," 155.
- ³⁴ Cho Soo-Jin, "Avant-garde Gestures Incorporated into the Korean Art History: Performance art of Korea in the 1960s and the 1970s," 52.
- ³⁵ Cho Soo-Jin, "Confronting an Era through the Body: Korean Performance Art of the 1960s and 70s," 224. Referring to the article by Lee Kun-Yong, "Report on Three Dimension Art and Performance Art of Korea: 'Happenings' of the 1960s through 'Events' of the 1970s," *Space* (1980).
- ³⁶ Kim Mi-Jung, "I, as a Logical Subject not Collective: The Meaning of ST Art Movement in 1970s Society," 149.
- ³⁷ Lee Kun-Yong presented *Drawing Lines*, *Logic of Hands*, and *Logic of Place*. Kim Yong-Min staged *A Damp Cloth*, *Drawing and Erasing*, and *Two Stones*. For *A Damp Cloth*, he picked up a wet towel placed on the floor and slowly squeezed it out, shook off remaining water, folded it, then again squeezed it out so that no drops of water could come out, and finally left with a towel wiped off the floor. Sung Neung-Kyung presented *Reading Newspapers*, *15 seconds*, and *Contraction and Expansion*. For *Contraction and Expansion*, he contracted and extended his body as much as possible to do something with only the body.
- ³⁸ Kim Mi-Jung, "I, as a Logical Subject not Collective: The Meaning of ST Art Movement in 1970s Society," 157-158.
- ³⁹ For the *Body Drawing* series, Lee found different ways of restricting his body's movement, and then performed the drawing under those restrictions. The body's actions, which varied in position, posture, and degree of restraint, eventually remained the drawing of different variations on the plane.
- ⁴⁰ Kim Mi-Jung, "I, as a Logical Subject not Collective: The Meaning of ST Art Movement in 1970s Society," 160-164.
- ⁴¹ Cho Soo-Jin, "Confronting an Era through the Body: Korean Performance Art of the 1960s and 70s," 224. Referring to the notes dated from 10 to 16 June in Lee Kun-Yong's "Artist Note on Performances at Namgye Gallery in Daejeon in 1979."
- ⁴² Sung Wan-Kyung, "From the Local Context: Conceptual Art in South Korea," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York: The Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 120. Exhib. cat.
- ⁴³ In the script of the happening, Kim Yong-Ik would fall on the ground in the middle of the graduation ceremony, and his friends would place him in a coffin, and nail it down, and then Lee Il-Ho would hold the picture of the deceased and lead the funeral procession.
- ⁴⁴ Cho Soo-Jin, "Avant-garde Gestures Incorporated into the Korean Art History: Performance art of Korea in the 1960s and the 1970s," 53-54.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 54.
- ⁴⁶ Yoon Jin-Sup, "The Beginning and Development of Performance Art in Korea in the 1980's," in *Performance Art of Korea 1967-2007* (Gwacheon: National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea, 2007), 111. Exhib. cat.
- ⁴⁷ Cho Soo-Jin, "How did Korean performance art secure publicness?: Daehangno in 1986 as 'Nori Madang,' and the Korea Performance Art Association," Seoul: Korea Association for History of Modern Art, *Journal of History of Modern Art*, no. 44 (2018): 253.
- ⁴⁸ Yoon Jin-Sup, "The Beginning and Development of Performance Art in Korea in the 1980's," 112-113.
- ⁴⁹ About 6,000 students from 194 universities across the country, including traditional folklore artists and celebrities, staged a total of 659 performances, with a large number of people from the organizers totaling 10 million in the downtown of Seoul.
- ⁵⁰ Cho Soo-Jin, "How did Korean performance art secure publicness?: Daehangno in 1986 as 'Nori Madang,' and the Korea Performance Art Association," 260-262.
- ⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 262-266.
- ⁵² *Ibidem*, 267-268.
- ⁵³ Yoon Jin-Sup, "The Beginning and Development of Performance Art in Korea in the 1980's," 113-114.
- ⁵⁴ Kim Chang-Dong, "Korean Avant-Garde Movement: Rebellious Escape: Status from the late 1960s to late 1980s," in *Busan Biennale 2016 - Project 1 an/another avant-garde china-japan-korea* (Busan: Busan Biennale Organizing Committee, 2016), 212-213.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 215-216.
- ⁵⁶ Cho Soo-Jin, "How did Korean performance art secure publicness?: Daehangno in 1986 as 'Nori Madang,' and the Korea Performance Art Association," 269.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 275.

- ⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 270-271.
- ⁵⁹ Yoon Jin-Sup, "The Beginning and Development of Performance Art in Korea in the 1980's," 115-116.
- ⁶⁰ Bae Myung-Ji, Seng Yu Jin, Suzuki Katsuo, "Introduction – Awakenings: Art in Society in Asia 1960s-1990s," in *Awakenings: Art in Society in Asia 1960s-1990s* (Gwacheon: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 2019), 276.
- ⁶¹ Sung Wan-Kyung, "The Rise and Fall of Minjung Art," in *Being Political Popular: South Korean Art at the Intersection of Popular Culture and Democracy, 1980-2010*, ed. by Lee Sohl (Seoul: Hyunsil Publishing, 2013), 189.
- ⁶² Sung Wan-Kyung, "From the Local Context: Conceptual Art in South Korea," 124.
- ⁶³ Sung Wan-Kyung, "The Rise and Fall of Minjung Art," 192.
- ⁶⁴ Kang In-Hye, "The Meaning of Tale, Folklore, and Shamans Represented in Durung, 1980s' Minjung Art Movement Group," Seoul: The Korean Society of Art History, *Reviews on the Art History*, no. 52 (2019): 197.
- ⁶⁵ Sung Wan-Kyung, "The Rise and Fall of Minjung Art," 193.
- ⁶⁶ Sung Wan-Kyung, "From the Local Context: Conceptual Art in South Korea," 122-124.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 122.
- ⁶⁸ Choi Youl, "Korea's Minjung Art Movement: 1980s Art in Urban Streets and Plazas, Schools and Factories, and Rural Areas," in *Awakenings: Art in Society in Asia 1960s-1990s* (Gwacheon: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 2019), 308. Exhib. cat.
- ⁶⁹ Sung Wan-Kyung, "The Rise and Fall of Minjung Art," 190.
- ⁷⁰ Oh Mi-Jin, *The Activist Public Art in Korean Minjungmisul (People's Art)* (Seoul: M.A. Kookmin University, 2016), 30-31.
- ⁷¹ Sung Wan-Kyung, "From the Local Context: Conceptual Art in South Korea," 124.
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- ⁷⁴ Joan Kee, "Why Performance in Authoritarian Korea?" in *Performance Histories from East Asia 1960s-90s: an IAPA Reader, Curators' Series #11*. Institute of Asian Performance Art, ed. Victor Wang (London: DRAF, 2028), 108. Text originally published in *Tate Papers*, no.23 (2015).
- ⁷⁵ Kim Mi-Jung, "I, as a Logical Subject not Collective: The Meaning of ST Art Movement in 1970s Society," 163-164.
- ⁷⁶ Kim Chan-Dong, "Korean Avant-Garde Movement: Rebellious Escape: Status from the late 1960s to late 1980s," 203.
- ⁷⁷ Sung Wan-Kyung, "The Rise and Fall of Minjung Art," 190.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 190-191.
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Jin Sup YOON

AVANT-GARDE-NESS AND EXPERIMENTATION: RENEGADES AS OUTLIERS

I.

It was 1971 when I first came across information on Korean performances. I was mesmerized by an article on happenings covered in a combined edition of a weekly magazine called *Reading Newspaper* when I was a student at a vocational high school in the countryside. It was a happening titled *Funeral for the Established Art & Culture* conducted by the 4th Group. The happening was an avant-garde art of challenge and resistance by a group of young avant-garde artists gathered in Sajik Park in Seoul at midday on August 15, 1970.

I will talk about the happening in details later. In this article, I would like to narrate the history of Korean performances in a different manner from the past, which is to explain about the experiences I have had and things I have seen against the background of my times. To this end, I will make a brief explanation of my artistic preference or tendency.

When I was in middle school, I was vaguely exposed to avant-garde art after reading the literature of Yi Sang KIM Haegyeong (1910-1937). There was a book in the study in my house in the countryside, which was from the Korean Collection: *Compilations by Multiple Authors* bought by my

eldest sister-in-law when she was married to my eldest brother. The book covered the novels and poems of Yi Sang KIM Haegyeong who pursued dadaistic experimental and avant-garde literature during the twenties and thirties and is admired as a pioneer of avant-garde literature throughout the history of Korean literature. I encountered Yi Sang's poems and novels including *Ogamdo* (which means: Crow's eye view poem) and *The Wings* when I was an emotionally sensitive adolescent. Thus, I passionately read literature books and wrote on my own, and I started to study painting by joining an art club when I entered middle school thanks to my talents in fine art.

The period about 1967-68 is when we saw the full-fledged launch of avant-garde art in the contemporary art history of Korea. The year 1967, when Korea's first happening *Street Protest* was staged, was the year of inauguration of the 6th President of Korea, Chung-Hee PARK who took the helm as a former general through the May 16th coup d'état to gain political power in 1961.

The period prior to that in my memory is filled up with the anecdotes from my seniors along with the vaguely remembered currency reform administered by the militaristic PARK government in the early sixties. In other words,

for approximately a decade starting with my entry into the art college after I grew up and conducted events and performances myself, I would have to depend on information from books or anecdotes from my seniors. Yet, the history of Korean performances after the mid-seventies when I made a debut with an experimental photographic work titled *Mediating Term* can be recounted on the basis of my own experiences and information. Now, I would like to start discussing the history of Korean performances based on my curatorial experiences after the late eighties and my writing career as a critic after 1990.

II.

The film *Parasite* by director Joon-Ho BONG recently won four Oscars, which created a big stir throughout the world. When I visited Poland last October in Poznań, I did a drawing with a unique design for a poster of *Parasite*. In fact, parasites recall not such a pleasant memory from my childhood, when many Korean children suffered from gastric volvulus. In the road by my village there used to be the smell of the gasoline burnt in the cars driving along it, and children liked the savory odor, and many adults said roundworms in their stomach liked the smell.

I took a bus to visit a city like Cheonan and take part in art contests when I was in elementary school. In retrospect, various vehicles including taxis, trains and buses, high-rise buildings (although they were of four or five stories), and flashy window displays enabled me to experience the city's modernity. After the sixties, the shift to modernity was in full swing. The usage of the metric system was implemented in 1963, and the government conducted the population census each year. The implementation and acceptance of the metric system as part of the modernisation of Korea is significant because it meant a shift from an agrarian society to an industrial one. A shift from *sikgyeong* meaning 'for the period of having a single meal' to international standards of metre and kilometre meant establishing a modern institution. Doctorate degree holders made a great contribution for various institutions to be adopted and settled in many fields including politics,

economy, society, culture and education along with advanced Western administrative institutions. Major newspapers in Korea back then introduced Korean Ph.Ds from abroad (including the U.S.) in the society section with their small photos, which aroused an education zeal among Koreans.

Followed by the April 19th Revolution that overturned the corrupt Liberty Party-led administration, general Chung-Hee PARK launched a coup to dominate the regime on May 16th, 1961. In the next year, he established and implemented the Five-Year Economic Development Plan to revive the post-war impoverished economy. The national agenda, including achieving the export volume of 10 billion dollars led by the Saemaueul (New Village) movement was implemented. In 1967, when happenings were presented in the Union Exhibition of Young Artists by artists led by the Mu Coterie and Sinjeon Coterie, the grand plan to construct the Gyeongbu (Seoul-Busan) Express Highway was announced as a presidential election pledge.

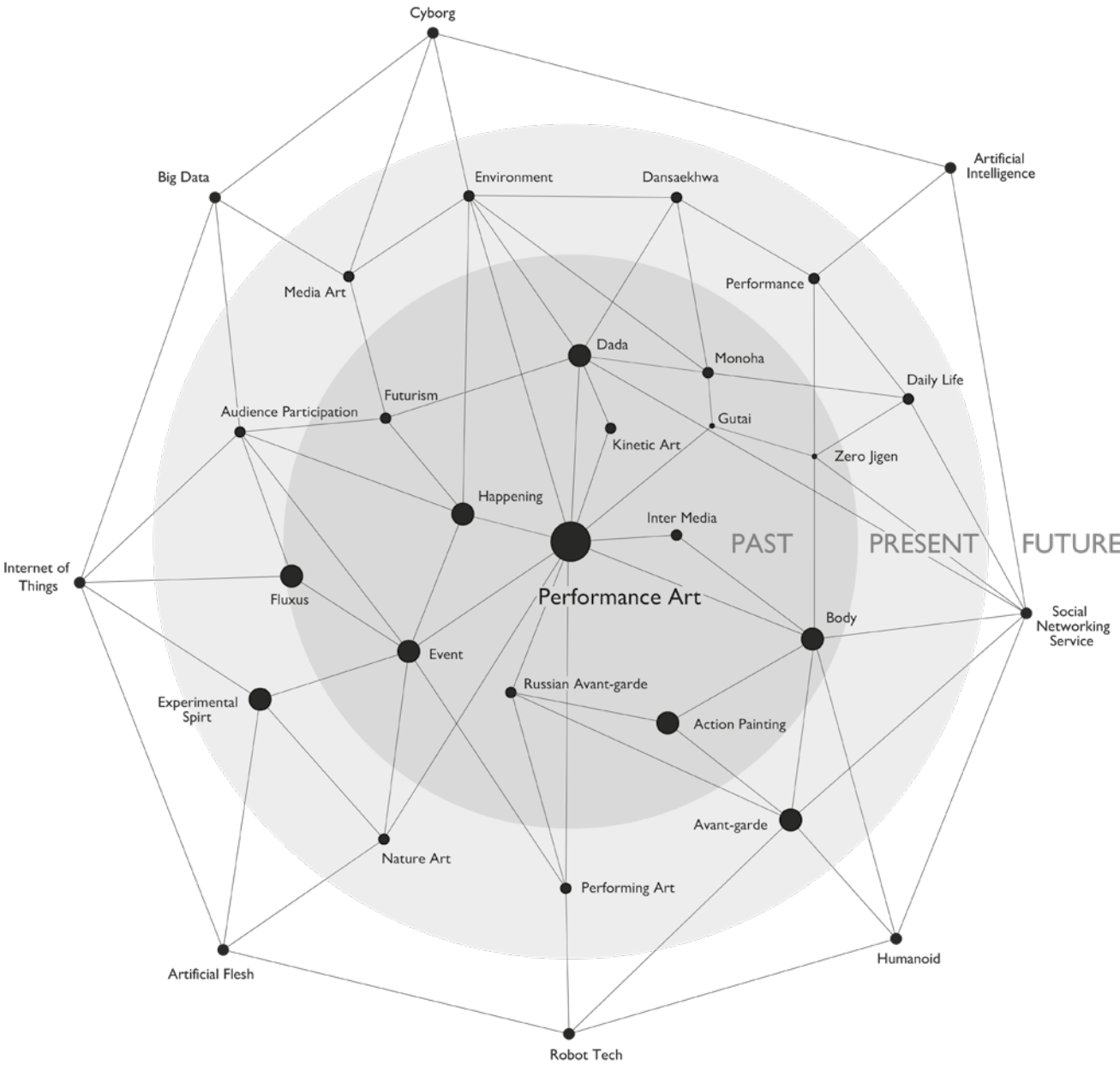
On December 11, 1967, the Union Exhibition of Young Artists¹ was held in the Exhibition Hall of the Central Intelligence Agency. The happening of *Street Protest* by the participating artists, and *Happening with a Vinyl Umbrella and Candlelight* staged on December 14 introduced a fresh and shocking avant-garde art to the then conservative society.

III.

When we are discussing Korean performances, controversies lie in whether or not they are homegrown or imported. True, they had been adopted from the West, but 'happenings' that were popular in Korea in the sixties have a strong autogenous tendency in their content. This is an unprecedented rarity in the world. I once half-jokingly said of this phenomenon, "A cow catches a rat while stepping back,"² emphasizing the positive side of this phenomenon.

According to the memoir of Chanseung CHUNG, a pioneer of happenings in Korea in the sixties, he said he did not even know the word 'happening'. Those that knew the word were

Rhizomatous Map of Performance Art





- 1 Neung Kyung SUNG, *Newspapers: From June 1, 1974*
- 2 Kuk Jin KANG, Kangja JUNG, Chanseung CHUNG, *Murder at the Han Riverside, 1968*
- 3 Mu Coterie & Shinjeon Coterie, *Street Protest, 1967*

correspondents of foreign news in newspaper companies. It is assumed that since they were knowledgeable about overseas novelties, they could have encountered happenings.

Kulim KIM, one of the pioneers of the Korean avant-garde art in Korea, said that it was through foreign magazines that he came to gain information on the Western avant-garde art including happenings. His testimonial was that he came to know of the foreign avant-garde art through such magazines as *Time* or *Life* from the American troops stationed in Korea.³

Chanseung CHUNG or Kulim KIM's testimonials reveal an important fact when discussing happenings in Korea. Back then, KIM became aware of a lot of information by purchasing many books from a foreign art bookstore in front of the Chinese Embassy to Korea in Myeongdong, Seoul. Yet, since he was not familiar with English, he mostly looked at the paintings, which brought about an extraordinary outcome with a unique form of happenings. In Korean happenings, there was nothing with a partitioned structure like Allen KAPROW's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, which is an example showing a unique style of Korean happenings.

Murder at the Han Riverside held by Han River in 1968 or *Funeral for the Established Art & Culture* of the 4th Group' held in Sajik Park in Seoul in 1970 as socially satirical happenings starkly criticized their contemporary social reality. *Murder at the Han Riverside* staged by three artists – Kuk Jin KANG, Kangja JUNG and Chanseung CHUNG – was an avant-garde happening to criticize the rampant scandals of the National Art Exhibition. It was a street happening performed by the 4th Group covering theatrical play, pantomime, fashion and film along with artists. Members that took part in the happening were arrested by the police in the middle of the street protest, imprisoned for a minor offense, and were released on warning.⁴

IV.

The seventies was a period of cruelty when oppression of the media and violation of human rights were conducted by the military regime of

PARK. As shown by *Five Bandits* by Jiha KIM, socially rampant corruption and irregularities caused anxiety about the government among ordinary citizens that led a diligent life. While the early sixties was the period that resulted in the tangible achievement of the Five-Year Economic Development Plan, its side effects were significant. The dark reality of the Korean society during the period, represented by the suicide of Tae-il JEON, a worker who set himself on fire in Pyeonghwa Market, continued until the end of this period with the murder of president PARK on October 26, 1979.

At this time, one had to be rather fortunate to see events in the advanced avant-garde form in the art community when there were less than 10 commercial galleries in Seoul. During the period, performances were dominant in international shows including Paris Biennale and Sao Paulo Biennial, so the avant-garde art gained popularity among Korean artists.

A performance first appeared (under the name of an 'event') in Baekrok Gallery in 1975. It was staged by Kun-Yong LEE who presented *Indoor Measurement and Equal Area*, which had a subtitle of *Event Logical*, which later became a hallmark of him. Yet, in the regular exhibition of the S.T. Group' in 1974, one year before then, Neung-Kyung SUNG performed the act of cutting out articles after attaching a copy of *Dong-A Daily* newspaper on the wall every day during the exhibition period. He dealt with social issues in the art community which back then was fully inclined to modernism. As such, many artists had a weak social awareness which fell way behind the happenings of the sixties.

The piece *We stroke* by the author of this article released in the S.T. exhibition held in Gyeonggi Gallery in 1977 was a playful nomadic event heralding performances of the eighties. The performance inducing the audience to engage in, as I suggested, everyday issues through performance by building a tiny log cabin or making a fence.

V.

The murder of president PARK in 1979 brought the 'spring of democratization' represented through the emergence of the three Kim's – Daejung KIM, Youngsam KIM and Jongpil KIM. And yet, it was short-lived. The new military government that emerged through the 'December 12 incident' in 1979 oppressed citizens of Gwangju and exerted its dominant power along with the inauguration of general Doo-Hwan CHUN as the 11th President of Korea. The eighties were seemingly a period of economic abundance as symbolized by the 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Olympic Games, and they served to disguise the harms of the then political oppression. People's yearning for democratization induced the 'June 29 Democratization Declaration' with the 1987 democratization movement. Performance in the eighties triggered a tendency for total art through cross-genre convergence to the point of forming such groups as the Korean Performance Artist Association.⁵

The early 1980s were a period of a conflict between modernism centered on the Dansaekhwa art dominating the seventies and Minjung (People's) art. The sentiment was officially triggered by the holding of the Contemporary Art Workshop organized by the Dong Duck Museum in 1981. Avant-garde groups, including S.T., Reality and Utterance and Seoul 80 were invited. The theme was 'Modalities of Presentations and their Ideologies in Avant-garde Groups,' which served as a catalyst to discuss the changes and development of the art community in the eighties.

In 1986, the '86 Performance & Installation Art Festival organized by the Artcosmos Museum triggered a gathering of loosely networked performance artists nationwide. After that, the event '86 Here is Korea was organized as a nationwide festival with outdoor installations and performance art.

Korea entered the era of globalization starting from the nineties. The international prestige of Korea after the 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Olympic Games was increased. Korean performance art in the 1980s and 1990s established the prestige that allowed Korea to be prepared for international exchanges in the new millennium of

the 2000s. While diversity thrived, which was not comparable with the sixties and the seventies, the number of practitioners skyrocketed. Active artists back then were: Yongdae KANG, Joonsoo KIM, Jaegwon KIM, Soonchoo NAM, Junggyu MOON, Hyosung BANG, Neung-Kyung SUNG, Youngsung SHIN, Hongjae SHIM, Chiin AHN, Kun-Yong LEE, Doohan LEE, Bul LEE, Ija LEE, Kyungsook LIM, Geunbyung YUK, Jin Sup YOON and Choongyun CHO.⁶ In the Daejeon Performance Art Festival held in Daejeon in 1987, the following artists were invited: Kun-Yong LEE, Neung-Kyung SUNG, Chiin AHN, Yongmoon KIM, Jungheun KANG, Jin Sup YOON, Hyosung BANG, Junggyu MOON, Chuljong SHIM, Changsoo PARK, Doohan LEE, Gunjoon HAN, Honghae SHIM, Taekjoon LIM, Sangjoon KO, Choongyun CHO, Ilgook CHUN, Jungmyung KIM and Myungsoon KIM.

The following quote presents the trend of Korean performance art back then:

The performance held at ['89 Young Artists] exhibition (the predecessor of [Young Search] exhibition) held at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art from March 26 to April 23, 1989 was the first case to have a marginalized performance to have entered into the mainstream. Therefore, this event was the first and the last exhibition to have invited performance artists since its formation in 1981. The then commissioner and art critic Woohak YOON invited Chiin AHN, Jin Sup YOON, Doohan LEE and Bul LEE. They turned the central exhibition hall at the solemn National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art into total chaos. LEE Doohan made a fuss where he baked sauries over a movable cooking stove, covered his body with plaster, and moved around while covering his penis with an alarm lamp. At a recent occasion where I met Doohan LEE, he said he felt a sheer fear threatening his life because of the plaster that so firmly tightened his body.⁷

During this performance I threw 180 eggs over large windows on the facade of the



Neung Kyung SUNG, *How is your business doing*, Namsan Traditional Village, 2015

central exhibition hall, and performed an action-driven drawing session. Bul LEE wore weird needlework clothing reminiscent of a monster, and went around the exhibition hall, and Chiin AHN distributed hundreds of cards to the accompaniment of loud music. This scene was aired on ‘Munhwaga Sancheok’ (A Walk Around the Cultural Circles) on KBS in Korea, and one lawmaker called the broadcasting network to complain by saying, “Is it art?” by calling the head of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (“Wrangling with an art museum on an egg throwing incident against a performance art,” *Segye Ilbo*, March 30, 1989).

VI.

During the period, performances varied from personal discourses – dominance of narratives – to social issues such as AIDS, body-oriented-ness, gender, feminism and homelessness. This can be seen as a transitional signal when social oppression and conflict penetrating into the dictatorship in the

seventies were deconstructed to induce a transition from collectivism to fragmented individualism.⁸

They had a strong tendency to internalize personal discourses including grotesqueness or narcissism in the nineties, unlike those in the eighties when auditory and visual experiences were focused on.

At 10:00pm on December 31st, 1999, performance artists gathered at Theater Zero before Hongik University. They were from all across the nation to attend Nanjang, Millennium Performance: 1999-2000 and present performances set according to a predetermined procedure. The event, which I curated, was voluntarily attended by participant artists, which was a ‘chaotic show’ as an amalgam of boogie, comedy, chaos, disorganization, improvisation and happenstance. The show started with a performance of Neung-Kyung SUNG. He read a statement for a ritual written on a burning paper fan, artists presented their performances. Seungtaek LEE poured *makgeolli* – the Korean traditional liquor – in green wine bottles into disposable paper cups the audience were holding,

and the mouth part of the bottles was exaggerated to resemble a penis, so the liquid being poured was reminiscent of semen. A woman in the audience received it and drank it, arousing booing, laughter and humorous exclamation from the audience. Gukhee LEE staged various performances by messing up the stage. The highlight was that LEE wanted to defecate on stage towards the end of the performance but could not because he was feeling excessively nervous and then a puppy toy stopped moving around. The gesture seemingly symbolized a moment when the century neared its end. Sukhwan KIM who moved around Suwon Fortress, exuding a white cloud by carrying a coffin with a disinfection sterilizer arrived at the site on a truck, and burnt the coffin on the road in front of the theatre. His performance implied disinfection of evil crowds while putting an end to the old generation at the closing of the twentieth century.

The 2000s can be summarized as the era of internationalization of Korean performances. Starting with Seoul International Performance Art Festival (SIPAF) in 2000, the KoPAS Group led by Baekgi KIM, the Bucheon International Performance Art Festival (BIPAF) founded by Obong HONG in Bucheon, 'SORO' led by Jaeseon MOON (and the Performance Art Network ASIA (PAN ASIA) founded in 2008 as an extension of that) are some of the most thriving international events and groups.

The KoPAS Group led by Baekgi KIM has held performances on the theme of 30 Years of Korean Performance Art since its first show in 2002 annually near Hongik University. It has renamed itself as the Jeju International Experimental Art Festival with its headquarters relocated to Jeju Island and held events every year. Jaeseon MOON's PAN ASIA held its 10th anniversary performance festival in the Asia Cultural Centre in Gwangju and Ilmin Museum of Art in Seoul in 2019.

VII.

In the catalogue for *Renegades in Resistance and Challenge* held in the Daegu Art Museum in 2018 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Korean

performance art, there is a conceptual map on the lineage of the performance art in Korea. The map is based on the diagram I came up to explain the concept of 'Dansaekhwa' at the exhibition of *Dansaekhwa of Korea* curated by myself at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea in 2012.

At the centre of the diagram lies the performance art, and two circles spread out outwardly. The central circle is the past, the circle outside it is the present, and what is outside of it is the future. While fine lines connecting big and small dots are interwoven, the lines protrude outwardly. It is the future and the point to which we need to pay attention. It is the area where the present and the future belong, which is called the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Let's take a look at the scattered dots and terms – cyborg, big data, IoT, artificial flesh, robotics, humanoid, social media and AI. They are concepts which the present and future performances would have to encounter explicitly or implicitly or converge together. Ushering in the epochal changes that are inevitably different from the past, a new concept for performance art must be devised. Through the diagram, readers would “fully expect that the performance art of today is not simply an artistic genre or a medium, but the one that bears seeds for ‘performology’ to unfold in the future.”⁹ To this end, we need global discussions and implementation beyond the nation, race and culture.

Notes

¹ Participating groups and members for the Union Exhibition of Young Artists are as follows:

Mu (Zero) Coterie: Bunghyun CHOI, Youngja KIM, Dan LIM, Taehyun LEE, Bokchul MOON, and Iksang JIN; Sinjeon (New Exhibition) Coterie: Kuk Jin KANG, Duksoo YANG, Kangja JUNG, Sunhee SHIM, Inhwan KIM, and Chanseung CHUNG; Origin Coterie: Myungyoung CHOI, Sungwon SUH, Seungjo LEE, Sooik KIM, and Kiok SHIN.

² A Korean expression to describe a situation where one achieves something by slim chance or pure luck as when a bull steps on and catches a rat while taking steps backward without even looking.

³“Kulim KIM, Pioneer of Avant-Garde Art of Korea. Happenings and Events: Korean Performance Art in the 1960s and 70s,” *ACC Asia Culture Archive Report*, no. 4, 2016 (Seoul: Asia Culture Center (ACC), 2016), 16-17.

⁴ The 4th Group was a group in pursuit of total art formed by Kulim KIM against the ideological background of Korea’s traditional ‘Intangible thought.’ Its members include Chanseung CHUNG (art), Taesu BANG (nicknamed ‘Beggar BANG’/ theater), Ilgwang SON (fashion), HoGO (pantomime) and Iktae LEE (movie), etc. They were oppressed for irritating the authorities by satirically entitling them “Tonryeong (Kulim KIM)” which takes the first consonant of the word ‘President’ or ‘Dae-tonryeong’ and vice leader (Chanseung CHUNG). They even formed local organizations, but they were disbanded in a few months.

⁵ It was formed in 1988. I was its founding chairman along with vice chairmen Sanggun HAN (dance) and Doohan LEE (art), etc. Advisory members were: Kuk Jin KANG, Kulim KIM, Sejung MOO, Neung-Kyung SUNG, Woosung SHIM, Kun-Yong LEE, and Manbang LEE.

⁶ They are participating artists for the exhibition of *Art & acts, and humans, and life, and thoughts, and communication* organized by Now Gallery (from July 7 to 17, 1989).

⁷ March 20, 2018. From a dialogue with Doohan LEE.

⁸ Yoon, Jin Sup “Resistance & Challenge and Avant-Gardness & Experimentation: Renegades as Outliers, a Brief History of the 50 -Year Performance Art of Korea,” in *Renegades in Resistance and Challenge. 50-year history of performance art of Korea: 1967-2017* (Daegu: Daegu Art Museum, 2018), 35. Exhib. cat.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 75.

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HAPPENINGS-EVENTS- PERFORMANCES IN POLAND: INTERMINGLING HISTORIES OF ART AND POLITICS

In 2018, the Art Museum in Daegu, South Korea, organized an exhibition entitled *Renegades in Resistance and Challenge; 50-year history of performance art of Korea, 1967-2017*, dedicated to the history of the development of contemporary art forms in Korea.¹ The exhibition consisted of two parts. The first was devoted to avant-garde art, which in the terminology of Korean art history means other forms than the two dominant forms at the time. The first was Dansaekhwa, that is abstract art of the seventies, more or less corresponding to the informel trend, but often using Asian ink or Korean paper from the bark of the dak tree. The second was Minjung Art, politically and socially engaged art of the eighties, mainly figurative, whose counterparts can be indicated in the political art of South America, but it would be interesting to compare it with socialist realism, as well as, going backwards to the expressionism of the twenties and thirties in Europe or more contemporary neo-expressionist graffiti art. The term avant-garde art is also distinguished from so-called Korean art, which means art with traditional forms, which in Poland we would classify as folk art or ethnography, but one should be aware that these are visual forms and iconography cultivated

since the Middle Ages, and refer to court art – as opposed to folklorism. The part of the exhibition dedicated to avant-garde art presented works that may be classified as installation art, art object, or generally conceptual and post-conceptual art forms. Hence, according to such a categorization, a lot of space was occupied by the media, film and photography.

The second part of this exhibition was devoted entirely to performance art. The documentation included works from 1967-2017. In this way, the continuity of the development of this art form for five decades was shown. Emphasizing historical continuity rather than change and the succession of various forms is the result of the specificity of historical thinking. Its main leading feature is the recognition and positive evaluation of immutability, an element of unification, and calm flux of things. And not change, or the element that reverses things, brings novelty, where the new replaces the old and invalidates it. This is considered the most important problem in Western art historiography, also in the relay-race of avant-gardes. At the same time, it is the methodological paradigm of the study of art history, including avant-garde art. In the description and interpretation

of both contemporary and early art history, these elements and aspects that change are important and are considered as the main factors of historicisation, not what is a continuation. Everything that is a continuation is considered a traditional factor hindering development. Tradition is ultimately a trampoline. In Western art, we neglect and reject history first, so that it can be carefully reconstructed with the help of scientific methods. However, as a result of such efforts, we create history anew, not recreate the old one. What matters is the difference, not the *status quo*. That is why in European museums, change is exhibited, not permanence. This is unlike this exhibition at the Daegu Art Museum, where performance art is a holistic artistic phenomenon. And this methodological premise must be the first and most important one that guides further considerations on the action art in this article.

The decision of the curators of the exhibition at the Daegu Art Museum to single out performance art from the set embraced by the notion 'avant-garde' is significant as such. And it indicates the importance that is assigned to this artistic practice in Korean contemporary art.

Therefore, a special methodology must be built for the purposes of this article. On the one hand, it must provide comparability. On the other it should demonstrate continuity. The third methodological aspect, interpretative methodology, concerns the socio-political context, the great world history that was the background for the art created during this period in Korea and Poland. The adopted methodology thus includes comparative studies, i.e. it singles out facts, works and events for comparison. In other words, it serves to enable such comparative and contextual research. At the same time, the research method is to allow the demonstration of the historical continuity of the subject of the study.

Catalogue was published along with the exhibition.² It contains the chronology of the development of Korean performance art in 1967-2017. It also encompasses documents, mainly photographs, action descriptions and statements regarding individual activities. Three essays open the catalogue. The first was written by an art

historian. So, according to the methodological assumptions of the discipline of art history, the author examines performance art from the perspective of a work of art, the visual forms and the artistic means used. And on the basis of formal and artistic analyses of works, the author outlines the history of performance art in Korea. The diachronic approach, covering the sixties and seventies, is balanced by synchronous divisions that correspond to several periods of development. Performance art appears as a whole, an artistic discipline whose specificity has been described through works of art, or in other words the features of the works constitute the features of the performance art discipline in Korea (Soojin CHO, "Avant-garde Gestures Incorporated into the Korean Art History: Performance Art of Korea in the 1960s and the 1970s"). The second essay deals with the context of the development of performance art in Korea during the last fifty years. The history of art forms is read here through the socio-political history of the country. In this perspective, the coherence of historical realities, which is the military dictatorship, determines the coherence of the actions by artists representing pro democratic social aspirations. Two words: 'resistance' and 'challenge' were chosen by the author of the essay as key words that explain the background of artistic activities and motivations of artists, and were decisive for taking up action as a form of creation. Importantly, this essay was written by one of the exhibition's curators, which indicates the direction of interpretation of historical documentation presented in the form of an exhibition installation (Jin Sup YOON, "Resistance & Challenge and Avant-Gardness & Experimentation: Renegades as Outliers, a Brief History of the 50-Year Performance Art of Korea"). The third essay is by the curator of the Daegu Art Museum and describes the assumptions of the organization of the exhibition, dividing the space into four parts corresponding to the history of performance art: Birth (1967-1970), Settlement (1971-1980), Spread (1981-1999) and Globalization (2000-on). This structure of the exhibition and the names of the titles of individual parts bring to mind the construction of a drama on stage. The history of performance

art is shown here and develops like an action in drama (the dramatic arc in a classical play), i.e. it is presented as a performance in itself. The title of the essay refers to the previous text of the curator, which additionally gives the exhibition concept coherence (Gyeyoung LEE, "Performance in Resistance, Archives in Challenge").

The presentation of archives plays an important role in this exhibition, especially the archives of Jaeseon MOON, who founded the Performance Art Network Asia (PAN Asia) in 2008, celebrating ten years of continuous activity. The inclusion of the archive in the exhibition demonstrates the role of the Korean art scene in performance art in the region. It is no accident that Korea plays this role. First, today's achievements are grounded in the long history of this art in the region. This is how history shapes the present. As a result, contemporary art festivals in Korea are booming today. These festivals are not just about performance art. They cover many phenomena of contemporary art, defined according to the terminology used in Korean art history as avant-garde art. It is interesting to compare this situation in Korea with the current situation in Poland, because performance art festivals in Poland are disappearing, unlike in the nineties, when there was a festival boom. All these art festivals in contemporary Korea are Pan-Asian, but also international. Hence the term 'globalization' is used here in a very justified manner.

The part of the catalogue containing the essays ends with a very interesting diagram depicting the dissemination of performance art, as well as the presence of the live art factor in other manifestations and phenomena of culture. This diagram was also presented at the exhibition, on the wall, as one of the exhibits, which further emphasizes its character of an artwork (and not only its informatory and education function). By placing the performance in the centre, the diagram shows its connections with other human activities in other fields not only of art, both in the past and present, as well as in the future. Performance is thus used as a natural component of life. Performance as a dynamic factor determines our perception of both artistic movements and everyday life. We understand

that it is a factor of change - political and artistic, in art. And at the same time it is what makes us more connected and united. The diagram (after Dick Higgins, it can be said to be a 'visual essay') bears the significant title of "Rhizomatous Map of Performance Art" and its author is Jin Sup YOON. A rhizome, like a network, describes the structure of non-binary development, and multidirectional (or non-directional) development. Therefore it represents unity despite its multiplicity. will begin the analysis of art in this article from an analysis of this diagram as a methodological indicator.

Although a rhizome migrates non-directionally, it also creates nodes during its development. These are significant points in the new incarnations of performance art. The first zone (past) are trends of the historical modernist avant-garde, but also post-war, up to the sixties, including action painting as well as happenings and events. The second (present) are the performance itself and genres related to performance art, as well as media art. This sphere includes social life and contact with nature as part of a wider area of human activity. The third sphere (future) is prospectively dominated by the digital media and social media. Digital life replaces natural life, and the place of man is replaced by a hybrid of man and technology (robots, humanoids, cyborgs, AI). In such a vision, performance art as an artistic practice based on the human condition does not save humans. Rather, it participates in human transformation into a technological entity. This rhizomatic history of performance, in the first part consistent with the findings of historians, and in the second corresponding to certain futuristic visions, is holistic and shows performance as a dominant development factor in contemporary art, and even more - in building a new civilization of the digital age. Otherwise, to bridge the edges of history, it can be said that without dadaist subversive criticism, it would be impossible to create today's technological tools of such criticism. Performance is therefore the main factor in the development of culture and in the same time the best tool for criticizing this culture. This discipline of art, often considered marginal due to its ephemeral character has therefore a very important role to play. This approach is the

basis of the interpretative methodology of artistic forms and practices of performance art in history and today.

Let's go back to Daegu. This is a special place for Korean history. It is in the vicinity of this metropolis that the largest base of the US Army is located. This is a trace of the political history, which is also present in the works of performance art. Daegu was also an important centre of contemporary art during the breakthrough period, the dominance of conceptual art and high days of performance art that was presented there (Daegu Contemporary Art Festival, from 1974). The museum itself is young, it was founded in 2011. So, history and contemporary meet in Daegu. The amalgamation of history and contemporary of performance art provides the framework for the comparative and contextual analyses carried out in this article. One other factor should be mentioned as forming the basis for laying the ground for comparative considerations. Although the performance art diagram discussed above includes avant-garde trends of the first half of the twentieth century, it should be remembered that modernist avant-garde art was not present in Korea at that time. Korean artists could not refer to artistic ancestors. This is in contrast to the situation in Poland, with artists like Tadeusz KANTOR or WITKACY for example, or the artists of the Workshop of the Film Form, experimenting with photography and film in the seventies, or to the constructivists (Katarzyna KOBRO, Władysław STRZEMIŃSKI). In Korea, in writing about history of contemporary art a trend called 'avant-garde' has been created, but it was the first Korean avant-garde. Hence 'avant-garde' is a descriptive term, and not evaluative one, just like in Poland, where it is a historical, but also critical, value-adding term.

The term 'performance art' has undergone a similar evolution in Korea and in Poland and now is similarly used as a general term for all types of live art. Life art is even a broader term than action art, which in visual arts seems to be the most general one. In Poland, the word 'performance art' began circulating more widely in artistic discourse after the I AM (International Artists' Meeting) festival, Warsaw, Remont

Gallery, 1978.³ The I AM festival was important because of the first presentation of punk rock music in Poland. Later this gallery was a place of concerts for alternative music bands and sound performances, e.g. works by Andrzej MITAN.⁴ Performance art is associated with conceptual art that dominated the art scene in the seventies. And the term itself was retrospectively referred to all action art works created throughout the decade. Today, expanded performance extends to related disciplines like postmodern dance, theatrical forms, contemporary music, net art as well as multiple performing arts practices (in the same way as in Korea, however it is global trend). During that time, the term 'parateatr' was used to describe phenomena that, on the one hand, reached beyond theatre or dance, and on the other they did not belong to the visual arts. This distinction is important here because, in Poland, performance art is closely related to the field of visual arts, historically it was created in this field and developed as a separate artistic discipline. The term 'parateatr' included such phenomena as Jerzy GROTOWSKI's theatre as well as the theatre of Tadeusz KANTOR or Józef SZAJNA. As part of the contemporary performance studies discipline, all performative artistic practices are studied as phenomena having common sources, a base in the dynamic approach to the art form, the artist's psychophysical condition, the inclusion of the beholder and context of everyday life. As was the case in Korea, the history of action art in Poland begins with happenings. These are the happenings by Tadeusz KANTOR, with his most widely known *Panoramic Sea Happening* (1967) and with a photo of Edward KRASIŃSKI conducting the sea waves. This action was a part of this happening. It had a compartmented structure, classic for Allan KAPROW's happenings, which in turn was related to the structure of a musical piece. The happening is composed of parts just like a piece of music, 4'33" of silence by John CAGE was composed of three parts. This structural aspect of happenings is not so strongly emphasized in the descriptions of the early Korean happenings. However, kinship with KAPROW and CAGE are pointed out (CAGE was a Buddhist, which proves that this influence was mutual). The elements of sound played an

important role in *Panoramic Sea Happening* and Kantor's other happenings. Like expanded music in happenings, so in the sixties and decades that followed, this form of action art was continued by Fluxus. In Poland, the Warsaw Autumn, an experimental music festival, was taking place at that time (since 1956).⁵ And music forms related to CAGE and Fluxus were known. Contacts with Fluxus artists is important because they were one of the first conceptual and performance artists from the West who began to maintain permanent contacts with artists in Poland, which is due to the open nature of Fluxus art and their use of mail art. The first such contacts were initiated by Jarosław KOZŁOWSKI,⁶ who ran the Akumulatory 2 gallery.⁷ The first Fluxus festival (concert) in Poland took place in this gallery in 1977. In Korea, thanks to Nam June PAIK, relations with Fluxus were more direct than in Poland. This is an important factor for the analysis of this art, because in many artistic milieus in the world it was Fluxus artists who heralded contemporary art. The tradition of expanded music or sound art is well grounded in Korea, because artists could refer to PAIK's experiments (Seoul International Contemporary Music Festival, since 1969). But in Poland, the appearance of musical experiments in art actions was understood as the incorporation of a factor coming from outside the field of art. This arises from a strict western division between artistic disciplines.

In Poland, Andrzej MATUSZEWSKI's happening *The Procedure* (1969, in the odNowa gallery, Poznań) had the most classical compartmented structure.⁸ At the same time, Włodzimierz BOROWSKI developed (since 1966) a very original form of happenings, which he called 'Syncretic Shows'. Based on his personal presence in spatial arrangements, he combined action with objects and installation art. He was an art historian by education and hence he consciously built the iconography of his works (not only in happenings), i.e. the relationship between image and meaning. His happenings were saturated with symbolic references.⁹

KANTOR's first happening, and the first one that took place in Poland, was titled *Dividing Line* (1965) and it had a classic structure composed

of a set of small nonsense actions or events. This structure directly referred to the avant-garde tradition of dada and surrealism and the ballet *Relache* by Francis PICABIA. The *Panoramic Sea Happening* was a complex structure, the largest of Kantor's happenings and the largest in Poland. It took place during an open-air meeting that was far from the big cities and art centres (where art was censored and more subjected to the control of political authorities). For this reason, plain-airs provided an opportunity for radical artistic activities throughout the rule of the totalitarian system in Poland. The same strategy was used by artists in other countries of the Soviet bloc behind the Iron Curtain, as well as in Russia. The *Panoramic Sea Happening* took place exactly in the year when *Happening with Vinyl Umbrella and Candlelight*, the first happening in Korea took place. Kantor's other happenings were *The Letter* (1968), a letter 14 metres long was carried by postmen from the post office to the Foksal gallery, Warsaw. This form of over-scale object referred to Claes OLDENBURG's works. *An Anatomy Lesson According to Rembrandt* (1968, first in the Kunsthalle Nuremberg, then the Foksal gallery) was a reference to the masterpieces of art history, but also in the *Panoramic Sea Happening* one of the parts was called *Medusa Raft*, which was referring in the composition of figures to the famous painting by Théodore GÉRICHAULT. References or quotes from the history of art often appear in his paintings, based on the postmodern principle of 'intertextuality.'

The year 1968 and time around this year, because we are dealing with processes, is special in Poland and Europe. Anti-government student unrest in Poland erupted in March 1968. Paris exploded in May that year. In August, the Prague Spring was bloodily suppressed by the invasion of the Warsaw Pact army, under the command of Soviet Russia.

In contrast to the previously presented artists, who in their happenings focused a lot of attention on formal solutions in accordance with the modernist principle of the art autonomy, Jerzy BEREŚ in his happenings always emphasized the symbolic meaning of the actions and props he used. For him, the art form primarily conveys meaning.

Happenings were invented as a discourse and a dissident discourse. This attitude brings his work closer to the Korean artforms, where the meaning and message of content are particularly important. Similarly, BEREŚ's happenings (called by him 'Manifestations') have always had a polemical sense directed towards the authorities, emphasizing the need for resisting but also for dialogue, entering into a dispute. And he organized such disputes during his happenings. The first of them took place in March 1968 and was called *Prophecy* (or *Oracle*, first at the Foksal gallery, then at the Krzysztofory gallery in Kraków). The happening and exhibition took place during the student protests in March that year, after the riots in Warsaw and a few days before the outbreak of the riots in Kraków. His happenings are related to his sculptures, in which he also takes care of their metaphors and symbols. For him, the artist is a prophet who can predict the course of events in reality. In 1988, the artist decided to repeat the happening *Prophecy* (*Oracle*) on its twentieth anniversary. He then wrote the phrase 'it will be fulfilled' on his body - a few months later talks between the government and the opposition began, which resulted in the first free elections in Poland and the Soviet bloc.¹⁰

When making comparisons between Polish and Korean art, I would like to draw attention to the direct presence of women in happenings. In Korea, Kangja JUNG, did the first ever happening in nudity in 1968 (*The Transparent Balloons and a Nude*). It is also worth emphasizing that, relative to the number of happenings created at that time, there were numerous other happenings with the participation of women (not necessarily nude). What is particularly important is that they were connected with feminist awareness. Interestingly, in both these early happenings in the history of Korean art, *Happening with Vinyl Umbrella and Candlelight* and *The Transparent Balloons and a Nude*, women have a special role: they are located in the centre of the action, but in the final scene male participants fall upon them, destroying an umbrella or balloons. So they play an element of symbolic violence.¹¹ It is probably a matter of Korean cultural tradition and the place of women in it. And the presence of women in the

contemporary performance art scene in Korea is still strong. The same elements of nudity and action with feminist awareness are not present in such a combination in Polish contemporary art before the mid-seventies (performance by Ewa PARTUM, *Change*, 1974).¹² In Polish art, due to the long-standing patriarchal culture, a woman was a theme for painting rather than as an artist. Conceptual art, dominant in the seventies, became a new medium for expressing female identity. Due to the importance of feminism as a breakthrough factor in contemporary culture, this topic is crucial and deserves a separate study. Here, I only signal cultural differences that result from the analysis of action art works.

The second phase of the development of action art after happenings was described using the word 'event,' as highlighted in Korean art history. Also in my research published in the book *Reconstruction of Action Art in Poland*, I specified events as a form of action art intermediate between happenings and performance. This difference is not only historical but also formal. Events and performances are based on an individual gesture and thus emphasize the importance of the artist's individual psychophysical condition as a material for art. The structure of the happening shows that it consists of small isolated actions – parts or compartments. That is, events. And events turn into performances when they become an independent form of action art works. In Korea, the importance of gesture is emphasized, which results from the rooting of these contemporary art practices in the vernacular tradition of calligraphy gesture, painting gesture as well as accumulation and discharge of emotions in the single gesture. So the tradition of gesture in Korea meant that the event was understood as an avant-garde art form, but belonging to and arising from culture and its profound tradition. In Poland and Western tradition, gesture of this kind of expression is associated with the theatre and actors' manner of playing its characters, or a stage persona. The gesture as it was used and incorporated into artworks by happening was more associated with daily activities. Hence, in the structure of happenings, also by KAPROW, everyday banal gestures take on the meaning

of art activities or an art form, since the main principle of happening was bringing art closer to life, everyday life. This gesture can be understood in the tradition of the western avant-garde and in the context of the conceptual art trend as 'ready made' by Marcel DUCHAMP, or 'empty gesture', as it was named by Jan ŚWIDZIŃSKI, i.e. gestures that we make subconsciously and routinely, paying little attention to them, not as the effect of deep internal concentration on a conscious act.¹³ ŚWIDZIŃSKI performed them to illustrate his theory of art as contextual art. The contextual definition of art reads as follows: Object 'O' assumes a meaning 'm' in time 't,' place 'p,' situation 's,' in relation to the person/persons 'x,' then and only then. This 'scientific' formula states that only in specific conditions something is art, because in others it may no longer be art (just like a ready made object).

At the beginning of the development of performance art in Poland, the main figure was Zbigniew WARPECHOWSKI. His early performances were based on simple actions. Of the over 300 performances he has made so far, the most important appear to be those of the seventies and eighties. From 1971, he performed a performance with fish (live). He also performed with birds. These performances are based on a dialectical principle: the fish removed from the aquarium suffers, the artist puts his head into the water and also suffers. Such a swap of places continues during the performance. During this time he criticized the Catholic religion as spiritual void, devoid of higher values, belonging to mass culture. He symbolically crucified himself during these performances, dressed in a baseball or soccer player outfit (*Champion of Golgotha* series). One highly political performance was entitled *Asia*. The artist played the role of a poor neglected man living in the hopeless realities of Poland under the domination of the political system imposed from Soviet Russia, which in Poland at that time was a symbol of 'Asian', like everything that was east of Poland. It is about a conflict of two worlds divided by the Iron Curtain and two political and value systems: eastern - totalitarian, and western - democratic. This performance took place in 1988, shortly before the changes in Europe, the agreement between government and opposition in Poland,

which resulted in the first free election in the Soviet block and then the fall of the Berlin Wall.¹⁴

WARPECHOWSKI also made a drawing in the corner, he drew on the gallery wall sitting in the corner, and the drawing marked the limit of the range of his hands, and therefore the possibilities of the body. This use of drawing in the performance can also be found in Korea (for example, in the seventies it was used by Kun-Yong LEE, and in the eighties it was employed by Won Gil JEON and Jeong-Kyoo MOON). The drawing located within the framework of performance art is tricky, because the drawing is the basis of traditional art practices, here devoid of its original sense, it only serves as a way of placing the body in art. An interesting comparison is provided by the use of the line drawn in the landscape (existing as photographic documentation) made in the seventies by Kook-Kwang CHUN and drawing of the 'endless line' by Edward KRASIŃSKI (the wave conductor from the *Panoramic Sea Happening*), a blue strip of scotch tape fixed indoors at a constant height of 1.3 m (numerous piece of art).¹⁵

Daily newspapers were a special ready made object in the art of that time. In conceptual art, they represented works belonging to information art, and at the same time referred to the phenomenon of mass communication. Thus, they had the ambivalent nature of media that combine information and political or commercial propaganda. Newspapers were used by KAPROW (*Apple Shrine*) in his environment, as well as by Joseph KOSUTH, in his case very often and in many forms of presentation. In Poland, newspapers were 'planted' in the sand on the beach during the *Panoramic Sea Happening*, the part entitled *Agrarian Culture on the Sand*. Nothing grows on the sand, so it was an allusion to the lies of the political propaganda in the censored press published in Poland at that time. However, press photographs and a newspaper as a prop appear in the works of Jan ŚWIDZIŃSKI. He began doing performance art quite late, in the eighties. However, he is an important figure in the history of Polish contemporary art, because he created one of the key theories of the conceptual period: art as contextual art (already mentioned

above). ŚWIDZIŃSKI was in close contact with KOSUTH. The theories of ŚWIDZIŃSKI on contextual art appears in a similar period to the theory of anthropologized art by KOSUTH in the mid-seventies, and similarly aims to criticize the autonomy of modernist art, thus introducing postmodernism in visual arts. Later, ŚWIDZIŃSKI adopted performance as his medium for his artistic message because, as he thought, it is better suited to expressing the anomy of the postmodern world (earlier in this text I mentioned his performance from the series 'empty gestures' as ready made gestures). In Korean art, Neung Kyung SUNG presented a very interesting way of using newspapers. He cut out all the articles in the daily newspapers (then collected in a semi-transparent box – ballot box), leaving the advertisements and photographs. In this way he 'censored' discursive content, criticizing their message. The process of cutting out was a durational, long-lasting performance. The work was simply titled *Newspapers*. Newspapers changed into conceptual objects were displayed on the gallery wall. This type of work has been created since 1974, and therefore during the rule of the Korean military regime and his work was a clear allusion to press control. However, at the same time, it was in the context of conceptual art treating information as art and dealing with words and multiplicity of meaning. SUNG's work was an example of information art and of blurring the boundaries of art and everyday life. A comparative analysis shows that the works by SUNG are among the most interesting and the most important contextual masterpiece of art, created with the use of public media and critically referring to these media.

In the seventies, SUNG also made several performances for photography. Their documentation is now exhibited as a separate work of art consisting of a set of photographs in which the continuity of action was presented as individual gestures, single images composed in a photographic frame. Each performance is a simple gesture. Their expression is natural. They are non-theatrical, and non-narrative, being important in themselves. It is pure presence in front of the medium. The title, *Locating*,

indicates their relationship with the here and now, a particular time and place. One of these performances for photography has a critical meaning. The performed gesture consisted of holding the art magazine *Space* in an unusual way, e.g. in the toes. The work therefore contains an element of art criticism addressed to the Korean art milieu. At this time, the artist did a lot of this type of performances. In Poland in this period, works of the performance for photography, or performance for camera (film), type were created from the beginning of the seventies. Interestingly, works of this kind were created mainly by artistic groups. Working in a group made it technically easier to carry out this type of work. And an artistic group has the spirit of the former avant-garde. The first such group in Poland was the Workshop of the Film Form founded in Łódź by artists associated with the Lodz Film School. Józef ROBAKOWSKI was the informal leader of this group.¹⁶ In Wrocław the Permafo group had a similar program and artistic goals.¹⁷ Andrzej LACHOWICZ was the leading character of this group. Later, in the second half of the seventies, also in this city, was founded the Recent Art Gallery led by a group of artists whose chief figure was Roman KUTERA.¹⁸ They were all groups of new media artists experimenting with photographic images, where performances for camera were one of the ways and fields of the experiment. The rule was to combine actual presence, a body inscribed in the space, situation or conditions of everyday life with the medium of registration, and recording of the performance (event) as a media image. Interestingly, ŚWIDZIŃSKI developed his theory of contextual art in cooperation with these artistic groups. His understanding of the context as 'here and now' was associated with the registration of a given situation in a given place with the participation of given persons. The last of the groups of media art artists to be formed was The Łódź Kaliska group from Łódź, which has been operating continuously from 1979 to today. The leading figure here was Marek JANIĄK.¹⁹

During the period of dominance of conceptual art, and by virtue of its basic theoretical assumptions, all kinds of symposia,

conferences, lectures, usually associated with academic practice, became artistic practice. In accordance with the methods of art history research they should be considered as a piece of art. Similarly, the founding and running of galleries during this period was often treated as an artistic practice. The galleries were artistic projects. Both artists and other active participants of the artworld created such institutions as artist-run galleries. They were often situated - nested - in existing institutions. The most important factor was the presence of a person who was aware of contemporary art. Such institutions in Poland created the movement of artist run initiatives (ARI), which was very strong, also in terms of numbers, and constituted a network of cooperation and exchange. Over the years, the ARI movement in Poland has become an art institution in itself, which formed an alternative to the institutions managed by the state. It played the same role in relation to art as institutions do: it evaluates works and artists, defines what is art and what is not, and has built its own hierarchies in the artworld. It all based on its own assumptions arising from conceptual art. Thus, it should be considered as part of the art history of that time. And its role and character should be taken into account when creating research methodologies for the art history of this period.

The same methodological premise applies to the study of Korean avant-garde art, because both outdoor activities, in the open-air and on city streets, as well as incorporated (nested) in existing institutions, was a common practice, although it occurred on a smaller scale in numbers. At the same time, creating alternative places for contemporary art, including performance art, influenced the formation of the value system in contemporary art in the same way as the ARI movement in Poland. The role of ARI stems from the nature of ephemeral art, and this should be reflected in research methodologies. Performative arts and performance art always form an alternative to the cultural policies of every authority. Therefore, they should be considered as a holistic phenomena. This in turn enables comparative studies on contemporary art in geographically distant and culturally different

countries, here Poland and Korea. In the research methodology constructed for this purpose, formal analyses precede contextual analyses.²⁰

Art of ephemeral forms, such as conceptual or live action, before 1989 gained its significance in the conditions of state control and censorship, because it was more difficult to grasp for the authorities. After 1989, in the 1990s and in the early 2000s, performance art became very popular because, as a radical art form, it was a manifestation of creative freedom in a new, democratic, political situation. From the beginning of the nineties, several large, regularly organized, performance art festivals were held in Poland. And several others took place once or twice. Performance art works were also often presented in galleries. They were all international events and built or contributed to the international performance art network. The first large-scale festival organized in the nineties was Real Time - Story Telling, held in the BWA gallery in Sopot in 1991 and its second edition in Lublin in 1993. It was organized by artists who practiced performance art themselves, Jan ŚWIDZIŃSKI and Witosław CZERWONKA. Then came the Castle of Imagination festival in Słupsk and Ustka, which was organized by the most eminent performance artist of that time, Władysław KAŻMIERCZAK.²¹ In Krakow, the Fort of Art festival was organized by Artur TAJBER, also an outstanding artist actively working in the field of performance art at that time.²² In Piotrków Trybunalski, the InterActions festival was created, organized by the city gallery, under the artistic patronage of Jan ŚWIDZIŃSKI and Ryszard PIEGZA, the latter lived and still lives in Paris, where he also organizes performance art shows in his gallery located in his private studio. During the WRO media art festival in Wrocław, performance art works were also regularly presented, in this particular context. The Audio Art Festival in Kraków demonstrated numerous relationships between contemporary music or sound art and performance art. I ran the QQ Gallery in Kraków, whose program was dedicated to performance art. Performance art works have been regularly shown in galleries located in all major cities in Poland, such as: the Labyrinth gallery in Lublin,

Galeria Działań (Gallery of Activities) in Warsaw, the BWA gallery in Zielona Góra, the ON gallery in Poznań, Galeria Wschodnia (East Gallery) in Łódź, and the Wyspa Gallery (Island Gallery) in Gdańsk. Among the large institutions, the Centre for Contemporary Art in the Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw has devoted a lot of attention to performance art in its program. An example of private activity was the Jan RYLKE art studio in Warsaw, where art actions of all types have regularly been held. Here I have named only those most actively involved in the global performance art movement. Occasionally, many such actions took place throughout Poland. The new political and social atmosphere in Poland was expressed in performance art. However, in the second decade of the 2000s, this activity associated with the performance art weakens. This was the time when Poland became a member of the United Europe community, which brought stability and funds for economic and cultural development. In 2020, the InterActions festival is still operating in Piotrków Trybunalski, and the PGS gallery (formerly, the BWA gallery) in Sopot has one event dedicated to performance per year. But instead in all large cities museums for contemporary art were built, which showcase in their collections documentation of performance art, and develop curatorial research on this art. At the academies of fine arts (there are eight of them in Poland), education in performance art is carried out everywhere. The first institution of education enabling study in the field of performance art was the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań (today The University of the Arts), where performance art is taught by Janusz BAŁDYGA, an artist important for the Polish action art scene, who began his artistic career in the eighties and was very active in the nineties, all the time developing the original form of performance linked to the sculptural object.

This brief overview outlines the path performance art has followed in Poland: from dissident art, through the art of the period when a new reality based on democratic, liberal foundations was created, to become an institutionalized discipline in academic didactics, musealisation, historical research and

curatorial studies. However, the stabilisation of the performance art discipline through institutionalisation, whose presence is confirmed by scholars, researchers, universities and academies, grounded in performance studies and art practices, can become a good starting point, or a trampoline for young generations of artists creating their own type of performance art, which responds to the realities of the contemporary world, United Europe and Poland.

Undoubtedly, more such parallels and similarities in specific pieces of performance art, kinships noticeable at the level of forms, can be pointed out in the comparative analysis of artworks. A deeper analysis interpreting works of art from the point of view of culture and tradition would also show some differences. An interesting conclusion is that it is on the common ground of contemporary art and forms, such as action art, that the combination of different cultures and traditions can be traced. Contemporary art turns out to be a platform connecting artists from various places on Earth, even as distant as Poland and Korea. Artists in Poland, creating happenings in the sixties and performance in the seventies, knew nothing about their colleagues from Korea. And vice versa. And yet, contemporary art joined them, forming a bridge between continents. That comparisons can be made over such a large geographical distance proves that the history of ephemeral art is 'horizontal' in contrast to the 'hierarchy' of centres and points of origin.²³ Trends in contemporary art, avant-garde ways of creation, are not fads coming from outside, as nationalist critics of modernity put it. On the contrary, comparisons between Polish and Korean art prove that contemporary art has built the most inclusive system. This is a global, worldwide art system based on the avant-garde, the conceptual and post-conceptual principles of which are universal.²⁴ It creates a framework within which individuals and nations find inspiration, guideline principles, and practical means for the pursuit of freedom. There is one other similar thing: in both Poland and Korea, contemporary (avant-garde) art was created in the socio-political context of functioning in the realities of a totalitarian regime using state

terror and censorship. In Poland, it was a civil dictatorship, but maintained and supported by the military force of the Soviet Union. And after the imposition of martial law in December 1981 by general Wojciech JARUZELSKI, the army ruled in Poland until 1989. In Korea, the military regime ruled from the beginning of the foundation of the South Korean state. In both Poland and Korea, repeated rebellions against totalitarian rule caused victims. This is the price that every dictatorship exacts to maintain its existence. Pro-democratic changes begin in Korea as well as in Poland at the end of the eighties and this process continues in the nineties. So the political history is therefore similar, just as the context of art is similar.²⁵ Art throughout this period was dissident. Thanks to its critical aspirations, all contemporary (avant-garde) art, by nature, was in opposition to political power. Art, even if it did not openly take up political themes, was subversive because of its experimental form and the quest to create something new, unknown or so far non-existent. And every dictatorship cares about maintaining the status quo. Hence the internal art criticism directed at art ultimately refers to the surrounding reality. This is why art is political par excellence. The art forms of performance art, ephemeral art, conceptual and post-conceptual art are political by nature. Live art reveals the political nature of art. Inevitably action art intermingles with life.²⁶

political confrontation, which is in line with the avant-garde model. This is a matter of research methodology: the 'horizontalism' proposed in this article above focuses on unique achievements within Korean art, in a Korean context, rather than comparisons with their counterparts in European or American art.²⁷

After writing this article, I came across an article by Sooran CHOI, "Manifestations of a Zombie Avant-garde: South Korean Performance and Conceptual Art in the 1970s." The author of this text criticizes the use of the term 'avant-garde' in relation to Korean art of the time. Her criticism is based on the analysis of texts that narrow down the concept of the avant-garde, consider it historical and / or outdated, if not simply 'dead.' Hence the metaphor for describing Korean art as 'Zombie Avant-garde.' The hypothesis that artists in Korea used the term of American origin to avoid being repressed by the pro-American regime must be confronted with the fact that many of them did not escape repression. They were also not very welcomed by the Korean art world. It was an artistic as well as a socio-

Notes

¹ *Renegades in Resistance and Challenge*, Gallery 1 & UMI Hall at Daegu Art Museum, Jan.16, 2018 – May 13, 2018, https://artmuseum.daegu.go.kr/eng/exhibition/pop_exhibition1.html?cid=0&sid=92&gubun1=2&gubun2=2&start=.

² *Renegades in Resistance and Challenge; 50-year history of performance art of Korea, 1967-2017*, ed. Gyeyoung LEE et al. (Daegu: Daegu Art Museum, 2018).

³ See more: <https://artmuseum.pl/en/performans/archiwum/2739?read=all>.

⁴ For more about the artist, see: <http://www.andrzejmitan.pl>.

⁵ See more: <https://culture.pl/en/article/warsaw-autumn-international-festival-of-contemporary-music>.

⁶ For more about the artist, see: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/jaroslawn-kozlowski>.

⁷ *Beyond Corrupted Eye. Akumulatory 2 Gallery, 1972–1990*, eds. Bożena Czubak, Jarosław Kozłowski (Warszawa: Zachęta National Gallery, 2012).

⁸ See detailed description: <https://artmuseum.pl/en/archiwum/archiwum-polskiego-performansu/2522?read=all>.

⁹ For more about the artist, see: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/wlodzimierz-borowski>.

¹⁰ For more about the artist, see: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/jerzy-beres>; <https://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/beres-jerzy-przepowiednia-ii>.

¹¹ See detailed description of these happenings: Kim Mi Kyung, "Expressions without Freedom: Korean Experimental Art in the 1960s and 1970s," *post. Notes on Modern & Contemporary Art Around the Globe*, https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/202-expressions-without-freedom-korean-experimental-art-in-the-1960s-and-1970s.

¹² For more about the artist, see: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/ewa-partum>.

¹³ For more about the artist, see: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/jan-swidzinski>.

¹⁴ For more about the artist, see: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/zbigniew-warpechowski>.

¹⁵ For more about the artist, see: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/edward-krasinski>.

¹⁶ For more about the artist, see and the Workshop of the Film Form group: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/jozef-robakowski>.

¹⁷ *Permafro 1970-1981*, ed. Anna Markowska (Wrocław: Wrocław Contemporary Museum and Motto Books, 2013).

¹⁸ *The Recent Art Gallery. The Avant-Garde Did Not Applaud*, Part 1, ed. Anna Markowska (Wrocław: Wrocław Contemporary Museum, 2014); *Romuald Kutera. The Avant-Garde Did Not Applaud*, Part 2, ed. Anna Markowska (Wrocław: Wrocław Contemporary Museum, 2014).

¹⁹ See more about the group: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/lodz-kaliska>.

²⁰ The role of performance art in creating dissident culture in the countries behind the Iron Curtain has been widely discussed. See: *Performance in the Second Public Sphere*, eds. Adam Czirak and Katalin Cseh-Varga (New York: Routledge, 2018). Further reading in the bibliography included.

The concept of "public sphere" or spheres assumes the equality of these spheres. And thus the dialectical relationship between official and dissident culture. However, art analysis should consider the ARI network as an autonomous value system, and precede contextual statements. This is especially needed in cases such as the ARI movement in Poland, which was extremely extensive and diverse. And this was the only place of contemporary art production.

²¹ See the artist's homepage: <http://www.kazmierczak.artist.pl/>.

²² See the artist's homepage: https://tajber.asp.krakow.pl/Artur_Tajber/A.R.T._trailer.html.

²³ Piotr Piotrowski, "Towards A Horizontal History of Modern Art," in *Writing Central European Art History: PATTERNS Travelling Lecture Set 2008/2009* (Vienna: Erste Foundation, 4, 2008).

²⁴ The term 'global conceptualism' was introduced by the curators of the exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950-1980s* (Queens Museum, New York, Apr 28-Aug 29 1999) and became widely distributed due to its comprehensive catalogue. The popularisation of the term 'global' in relation to this kind of art seems to be the most important here, because it links it to contemporary discourses and universalises it, thus making it 'horizontal.' However, the curators focused on the contextual narratives of art, i.e. political and sociological, rather than more formalistic and artistic analyses. Also, as the title indicates, they searched for the origin of this art beyond accepted dating, which always raises doubts rather than explaining something. Similarly, the distinction between 'conceptual art' and 'conceptualism' is questionable and cannot be justified in the art history research dealing with the examination of works. In Poland, both terms were used interchangeably, as they appeared in the art discourse as already existing descriptive terms for a given genre of art.

Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950-1980s, eds. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

²⁵ Piotr Piotrowski's research methods concerning art in Central Europe can be extended to other countries with totalitarian political systems. Piotrowski's research was based on interpretative methodology, and showed that works can be explained through context, because it shapes them. However, comparisons of historical contexts of countries of very different cultures as Poland and Korea prove the possibility of functioning of ephemeral art forms in such a different contexts, i.e. its universality as an artistic means.

Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945- 1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009); Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-communist Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

²⁶ The Polish-Korean relations studied here join the trend of globalizing studies. Art analyses present ephemeral art as universal, or in other words, as a global artistic means. From this perspective, artistic production regardless of the name: Central or Eastern Europe - contributing to global art. The above geographical identifications come from the period of the division of Europe by the Iron Curtain. They are irrelevant today. This region still occupies the belt from the Baltic to the Adriatic, but now this position in the middle of Europe has global coordinates, i.e. not West-East as it used to be, but Middle Europe - Global World. This requires a revision of the history of art and critical thinking about contemporary art that is 'cosmopolitan' in its core. New research methodologies must be created for this purpose.

See: *Globalizing East European Art Histories; Past and Present*, eds. Beáta Hock and Anu Allas (New York: Routledge, 2018). Especially the "Introduction" and the chapter "Managing Trans/Nationality: Cultural Actors within Imperial Structures" by Beáta Hock. The book is dedicated to the memory of Piotr Piotrowski.

²⁷ Sooran Choi, "Manifestations of a Zombie Avant-garde: South Korean Performance and Conceptual Art in the 1970s," *re•bus*, no. 9 (Spring 2020): 74-108.

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ACTION ART AS A WAY OF EMANCIPATION. WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE ART PRACTICES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TOTALITARIAN REGIME BASED ON COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY AND THE YOUNG DEMOCRACY IN POLAND

I am writing this article from the perspective of an artist involved in feminism and performance art. My research method connects my theoretical background on art history studies and my practical experience as a female artist in Polish social, political and artistic realities. I am going to focus on the position of women artists and their artistic activity in the contexts of the changing political situation. I intend to introduce Polish women artists who were active on the art scene from the seventies until today in the field of performance art and to answer the question what the women artists of my generation have in common with their 'artistic grandmothers.'

The last part of the text focuses on what has been already achieved and what still needs to be done for women's emancipation both in artistic as well socio-political life. The aim of this article is also to familiarize foreign readers with the specific status of women in the process of the

changing of the political situation in Poland that took place before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989.

I would like to begin from recollection of my video-installation *Fading Traces. Women in Polish Art of the Seventies* (2010). Its concept emerged when I realized that I could recall only a few avant-garde women artists, contrary to the many male artists' names, whose art had been introduced to me during the course of my studies in art history and fine arts. Since oral history and the personal testimony play an important role both in my artistic and theoretical activities, I realized that I knew only testimonies of my 'artistic grandfathers' like Zbigniew WARPECHOWSKI or Józef ROBAKOWSKI, but the 'grandmothers' remained silent. This fact bothered me even more, because the seventies was the decade of the second wave feminism and the time when women artists started to challenge the status of women

in patriarchal societies. Poland at this time was a country where the equality of men and women officially proclaimed by ruling regime had little to do with real life. It was sheer propaganda that aimed to show the advantages of this political regime over the West.

In my project I have interviewed seven women artists dealing with feminist topics. I was curious to know whether they remembered more women artists who had disappeared from the art scene and what their strategy had been to survive in the art world dominated by men. For all of them, the period of the 1970s was an early stage of their careers. It was also the decade when I was born, and this personal link that created a sort of time loop was significant for me. As it turned out, most of them created performance art pieces, so their testimonies are important for the topic of this article. In my project, the following female artists took part: Natalia LL, Ewa PARTUM, Anna KUTERA, Izabella GUSTOWSKA, Krystyna PIOTROWSKA, Teresa MURAK and Teresa TYSZKIEWICZ.

Natalia LL said that there was no feminist art in Poland in that time. There were single artists who were interested in these issues, but the feminist movement was impossible, because it was foremost a social movement, and that was possible only in the democratic states. "Here we were told that women already had equal rights, that women can drive a tractor, women can do everything, but in fact they were miserable women, who queued in the long lines in front of groceries and then were carrying heavy bags to their households to prepare the meal for the family."¹ The most difficult situation was faced by women who worked in factories, physical workers, such as textile workers. Women, of course, also got lower salaries for their work.² These double standards for men and women were also caused by the religious tradition of the country. The Catholic Church in Poland had always significant impact on people's mentality, and even the communist ideology of ruling regime that lasted 44 years was not able to change it. Anna KUTERA, asked by me why women artists were not significantly present in the avant-garde art of the seventies said: "The decision of doing

experimental art involved a sort of a risk. The broader audience did not understand this kind of art and rejected it. And the social position of such an artist was uncertain. When somebody studied the disciplines of fine arts such as painting or sculpture or craft arts: glass or textile design, it was clear what kind of skills the society would expect from such an artist."³ The experimental (avant-garde) artist was perceived as not particularly useful and perhaps also unpredictable. As Anna KUTERA said, for women it was a double challenge. Natalia LL confirms that many women graduates in the field of art chose a career in craft arts, fashion and design. According to her, only the most determined and ambitious women artists decided to experiment with new media and new forms of artistic expressions.⁴ Anna KUTERA added: "I was brought up to the role of a mother, a housewife. Women were brought up in this way in general. But I said to myself: OK, I am ready for this role. I know how to do it, I can do it any time, but why not try something else? But I was a self-confident person. I was also supported by my family and encouraged by my partner. Not everybody had such support. Not everybody felt strong enough to challenge the social expectations."⁵

The activity of women artists in the field of performance art had its background in conceptual art. The work *Consumer Art* by Natalia LL is also a significant example of Polish conceptual art, although through the sexual connotations it embodies, it also challenges the character of this movement. The feminist potential of this piece was noticed by Austrian curator and gallerist Ursula KRINZINGER, who invited Natalia LL to participate in the exhibition *Women's Art: New Tendencies* in Innsbruck in 1975. This was the venue where Natalia LL got to know the feminist movement and became its advocate in Poland. The first exhibition of women artists in Poland inspired by Natalia LL was made in Lublin under the title *Art & Feminism*. It took place in the Labirynt gallery in 1977 together with presentation of her and Valie EXPORT, who was a very influential women artist in Europe of that time. Natalia LL also organized a feminist exhibition in Wrocław in 1978. Carolee

SCHNEEMANN, Suzy LAKE and Noemi MAIDAN were also invited to participate, all of them were already well recognised women artists. As Natalia LL recalls, the reception of the exhibition was very negative, which, according to her, revealed only that Polish art critics were not familiar with this kind of art and its main representatives in the world.⁶ Another woman artist that took part in the conceptual art exhibition movement was Ewa PARTUM who ran the Address Gallery in her private apartment in Łódź (1972-77) that was mostly based on mail art exchange.⁷

I would like to begin the presentation of works by Polish women artists in the field of performance art with Maria PINIŃSKA-BEREŚ, whom I had no chance to interview because she died in 1999. Although she was a recognized artist on the Polish art scene, her significance seemed not to have been fully recognized and appreciated at that time. Maria PINIŃSKA-BEREŚ was the wife of the performance artist Jerzy BEREŚ. However, they worked separately and the form of their works were different. Maria PINIŃSKA-BEREŚ was mainly active in the field of sculpture, but in her soft forms made of textiles we can see an element of performativity and undoubtedly they are also an example of the use of female language in art. She consciously gave up sculpture in rigid materials such as concrete or metal, because she did not want to ask her male colleagues for help in carrying her heavy sculptures. But a more important reason seemed to be the search for art forms that could express her convictions about condition of women. She deliberately used the colour pink, which became her 'trademark.' Pink is considered as a female, or even girlish colour that is somehow improper for 'high art.' The artist decided to challenge this belief. At the first glance, her sculpture objects seem to be sweet and 'feminine'. She also placed 'naïve' words or phrases on her sculptures such as *My sweet little room* or *Whispers, Secret* and the like. However, these 'sweet,' pink and soft objects express the oppressive situation of the woman in society. The title of this series is *Psycho Furniture* and she began it in 1968. These pieces were all covered with pleasant colours and were of shapes that served at the same time to hide behind this

nice facade all disturbing and gloomy feelings.

Her performance activity began in the 1970s and at first her performances were made outside, without an audience. In 1980, she did a performance in the winter landscape in the outskirts of Krakow. She went out dressed in shades of pink and carrying a rolled up a banner with the inscription "pink." Maybe we can also interpret the work as a subversive provocation toward the communist regime that used the colour red as its symbol. In the other public performance, she drew attention to the 'common female household jobs' such as washing. During the performance *Washing (or Laundry)*, which she did for the first time at the exhibition *Women's art* in the ON Gallery in Poznań in 1980, she washed laundry in a metal wash-tub by hands and then hung it on the line bordering her action field.⁸ The letters on the cloth finally revealed the word "feminism."

In that time, the totalitarian government already allowed experimental art activities, however treated them as a sort of safety valve that guaranteed that artists would not protest. This was also the case of the ON Gallery that belonged to the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań and was run by two women graduates from the academy: Izabellina GUSTOWSKA and Krystyna PIOTROWSKA. The first was also an assistant professor at the Academy in that time, what was quite unusual, because it was mostly men who were appointed as professors.

Unfortunately this promising initiative, like many others, was interrupted by the martial law imposed in Poland in December 1981. It was the time of national grief and hopelessness. Asked about this time and its consequences for artists, Izabella GUSTOWSKA told me, "The martial law was such a rupture, such an abyss that it was impossible just to fill in it. When communism collapsed in 1989, we faced a new reality. New curators appeared, and they searched for new art and new artists. And if someone from the former time survived on the art scene, it was only because of their determination and huge effort. Because of many reasons, such as family life, it was much difficult for women to survive."⁹

“My problem is a problem of a woman:” this is the sentence by Ewa PARTUM, who openly declared herself a feminist. It was pretty brave declaration in the situation of Polish art of the seventies. It should be noticed that in this and next decades, although women artists told about the condition of women in their works, they did not declare it clearly. Firstly, because as Natalia LL said, they had no support of art critics, gallerists or curators, as did feminist artists in the West. We may assume that they were also afraid of not being treated seriously by their male artistic colleagues. This was the case of PINIŃSKA-BEREŚ, when the artists of the Łódź Kaliska group (all male) put their own clothes into the bath-tub during her performance *Washing II* in Osieki.¹⁰

The background for Ewa PARTUM's activity in art was the conceptual art movement. However Ewa PARTUM, like Natalia LL, expanded and exceeded the language of conceptual art. They shifted the hermetic para-scientific experiments focused on the given medium such as video or photography towards the areas of sexuality, femininity and eroticism that were rarely present in the art of male representatives of this movement. With the use of visual codes that show women as objects of desire designed for male pleasure, they challenged these clichés and stereotypes. In the series of works entitled *Poems by Ewa*, she composed the letters of alphabet in words such as “love.” She used her lips with lipstick, which she imprinted on the piece of paper. This is a very conceptual but in the same time a very performative form. As Ewa PARTUM recalls: “at that time, dark-red lipstick was very fashionable. But the lipstick was not of a good quality and left marks. When you drank a cup of coffee, you left a lipstick smudge on the cup. When you kissed somebody, you left a lipstick shadow on their cheek...”¹¹ Thus Ewa PARTUM decided to play with this 'embarrassing' experience, and used it as her art tool. Her gesture belongs to the process of women seeking for their language and ways of expression in art, which we clearly see in her series of mouth-print works *My touch is a touch of a woman* (1971).

Her sentence “My problem is a problem of a woman” quoted above, was a part of her

project entitled *The Change* (1974) where the young artist artificially aged half of her face with help of professional make-up artists. She printed this photographic portrait with the sentence as a poster and hung it in the streets of Warsaw. The title of this action was *Emphatic portrait* (1978, 1979).¹² The artist touched the problem of getting old and the fear of it, which especially affects women, judged by their looks. This problem was also raised by Maria PINIŃSKA-BEREŚ in her sculpture *Is a woman a human being?* from 1972 consisting of a swimsuit formed in the shape of a female body, tagged with the inscription “date of production/date of expiring.”

Ewa PARTUM made a second version of *The Change* in 1979 in the Art Forum Gallery in Łódź. During the action, film makeup artists aged the right part of her body in front of the audience. The action was accompanied by a closed-circuit installation. The event was broadcast live on a TV screen installed in the gallery. Ewa PARTUM is also the author of other radical performances. She took part in the already mentioned *Women's art* exhibition in Poznań, where she made a performance piece *Women, the marriage is against you*. She was dressed in a bridal dress that she finally cut into pieces, thus manifested the rejection of the traditional female role and expectations toward women. She also showed that a women's dream about the ideal man, everlasting love and happy marriage promoted by fairy tales and popular culture is just an illusion. Ewa PARTUM recalled her friend Ewa ZAJĄC, who helped her in realisation of some performances. “She took photos of my actions, because I even didn't have a camera [she meant she could not afford the camera, and it was also very difficult to buy one]. She also ran the Address Gallery with me. But when she got married and had a child, her husband, who was also an artist started to blame her that she devoted more time to art than her family. Finally, she gave up.”¹³

Ewa PARTUM also challenged the conviction that women are stupid. In her performance titled *Stupid Woman* (1981) she appeared naked in front of the public. Only Christmas tree lights decorated her body. In this performance she interacted with the viewers,

she sat on their knees, touched and kissed them, drank alcohol and asked them if they found her beautiful, attractive and if they love her.¹⁴ She mocked the patriarchal dream about a completely vulnerable and subdued woman seeking for love and attention of the man. She visualised that dream so literally that it rather caused confusion instead of pleasure and fun.

Ewa PARTUM was aware of the prejudices towards women and about the fact that they are considered rather as an object of art than its creator. Thus, she decided to appear naked in front of the public while taking part in exhibitions or panel discussions. A naked woman standing next to men dressed in suits caused uncomfortable feelings. And this naked woman was not silent, as it would be expected. She spoke on art and the condition of women. She challenged the boundaries between private and public life, between what is expected and what is inappropriate in a given situation. And the performance art, which is based on direct contact between the artist and the audience, allowed her to evoke the discomfort of the viewers.

One of her most radical gestures took place in the Mała [Little] Gallery in Warsaw during the opening of her individual show *Self-identification* (1980), when she decided to go out of the gallery to the street. The gallery was located next to the Registry Office, where the civil weddings took place. Ewa PARTUM suddenly appeared naked in front of participants of a wedding ceremony. This performance lasted only a while, but long enough to evoke an effect of surprise and confusion, and some of the witnesses were not even sure if they really saw her or it was just a hallucination.¹⁵

Paradoxically, the official attitude of state authorities to sex and sexual freedom had very much in common with the Catholic Church's point of view on this issue. Sex in that time was a taboo and there was a kind of consent between the Church and the Communist authorities in this matter.¹⁶ If any sexual discourse existed, it was only medical. Thus the naked female body used to express a feminist message became political. It not only challenged the constraint of female sexual freedom imposed on women by

both patriarchal religion, but also the authority of the totalitarian power.

The play with erotic codes is clearly visible in already mentioned series of work entitled *Consumer Art* by Natalia LL. It's an intermedia artwork which includes photographs and video based on gestures performed in front of the camera. The artist didn't pose herself for this series. She encouraged women models to play with bananas, sausages and jelly. They are putting them in their mouths, licking them and smiling, suggesting the good fun and sensuous pleasure caused by this action.¹⁷ This series of works undoubtedly belongs among the artworks that still trigger our imagination and inspire new interpretations given by changing socio-political and artistic contexts. The critics of the seventies interpreted this work in the framework of conceptualism. They referred to its formal composition and the idea of permanent registration developed by the group Permafo (abbreviation of 'permanent photography'), whose leader was Andrzej LACHOWICZ, Natalia LL's husband.

The *Consumer Art* evokes many other questions and among them is the doubt whether the artist hadn't repeated the patriarchal patterns of objectifying women. We are not sure of anything in this work and this uncertainty sparks our imagination. We easily associate the bananas and sausages in the context of gestures and mines performed by the models as substitutes of the phallus. The women who at first seem to perform in front of the camera to please sexually a male voyeur, in fact have good fun with playing with phallic attributes. The male attribute disconnected from the body becomes a toy in the hands of a woman. The woman controls it, plays with it, but can also devour it at any time.¹⁸ After all, bananas and sausages are edible. The explanation of this work given by the artist herself and directly connected with its title, open us to another problem of the social reality within which it was created. When the dominant consumerism was and still is the problem of the Western culture based on capitalism, in communist Poland people dreamt of store shelves full of goods. Thus, this ecstasy of women playing with the fetishized

sausage or banana could be interpreted as a subversive political critique.

Also, the art of Natalia LL changed just before the next decade, but the reason was rather more personal than political. The breakthrough in Natalia LL's art came after an illness that she barely survived. As she recalls, the sudden deterioration of her health completely surprised her when she was at the top of her career. She was happy in love and in a blink of the eye it turned out that she was about to die.¹⁹ Since that time, the themes of passing away and death appear in her artworks. Sometimes like in the *Panic Sphere*, the artist explores the problem of fear, in the other works, like in the video *Brunhild*, she tries to 'familiarize' death through the use of black humor and the grotesque. She brightly combines the elements of Eros and Thanatos, and these erotic images like a banana in the mouth of a skull amuse more than terrify us.

For the purposes of this article, I would like to recall Natalia LL's performance from the series of *Dreaming*, which she began in 1978. The artist explored a specific state of mind and body while sleeping. The theme of sleeping as a state between life and death is present in art from the time of Symbolism, however Natalia LL with her conceptual background performed a live experiment through which she proved that sleeping and dreaming are important for our intuitive cognition and the course of the creative process. She explored this question in her performances, when she fell asleep right in front of the audience after taking sleeping pills. The performance *Pyramid* was a dreaming in a very specific surrounding - in a model of an ancient Egyptian pyramid. According to the artist, her dream experience came as a result of the specific impact of the pyramid on the human body and mind. The pyramid functions as a "detector or generator of the energy of the unconscious, embedded in us as a result of the repressed experience of our species."²⁰

The artist in the *Dreaming* series balanced between para-scientific experiments where she was both a researcher and an object. An attempt to reach and explore the different states of mind or different psychological dimensions situates

her performances close to the shamanic rituals. Natalia LL either 'travels' to the areas of cognition that are not accessible in the state of consciousness or observes other people while dreaming. Also her attributes such as a wreath on her head or a white gown bring associations with a priestess, a female shaman or even a goddess. It seems to be also significant that intuitive cognition and intuition are considered feminine qualities, contrary to the reason and scientific cognition attributed to men. And science and reason are more appreciated than intuition and instinct. Natalia LL seems to appreciate this domain as equally important as rational cognition.²¹ Natalia LL used very frequently in her conceptual art works a kind of spirituality, like in performances for camera where she repeated with her body the constellations of stars on the sky. In the *Points of Support* series from the end of the seventies she looks like a shaman performing mysterious rituals. This performance is also an example of sensuality incorporated into conceptual art by women artists.

The other artist whose performance pieces we can interpret as expressing longing for the primordial order of mother nature, when the woman was a goddess, a birth giver or a person that connects us with the mystery of life is Teresa MURAK. She sows seeds or puts them either in the ground or on her own body, where she lets them grow, as in the performance when she was taking a bath in a bathtub filled with soaked seeds until they sprout.²² It is an interesting fusion of female power associated with fertility and agrarian rituals, especially performed during Easter, celebrated the rebirth of nature, however it refers to more ancient rites.

Teresa MURAK's *Easter Carpet* (1974) was made of cress that she brought to the church in the village Kielczewice. Preserved photographs from this action depict a kind of procession of people carrying the carpet and led by the artist herself. The same year, in the performance entitled *Procession*, she was walking dressed in a cress coat through the streets of Warsaw.²³ This woman 'priestess', all in green, must have looked really stunning in the heart of the city made of concrete and steel.

Regardless of whether Teresa MURAK wanted to be associated with priestesses or not, we can read such a message from her ritual performances. A performance piece also worth mentioning is *The Rags of the Visitation Nuns (The Cloths of the Visitandines)*, which took place in the Dziekanka Gallery (Warsaw 1988), Labirynt gallery (Lublin, 1988) and in the Moltkerei Gallery (Cologne, 1989). The artist performed with old rags full of holes, used for many years by the nuns to clean a church.²⁴ During her performance, after cleaning of the gallery, the artist sowed grain in the rags' holes. Thus, we can interpret this gesture as a homage to the nuns and their invisible 'female' work. These burlap rugs made by the nuns were also fully natural, bio products.

The collapse of the totalitarian regime in Poland in 1989 and the social and economic changes that were their aftermath affected also the Polish art scene.²⁵ Women as a social group were losers of this transformation. Also the Catholic Church began to be more and more influential in the social and political life. The first symptoms of this could be seen during the Roundtable Talks held in 1989 between the representatives of the Communist government and the Opposition. Among the participants of the plenary session were only two women (only one from the Opposition side, i.e. the Solidarity movement) and fifty-four men.²⁶ There were also three priests with the status of 'Church observers'. The contribution of women in the fight with the regime was not reflected in the mass media and school books. However, during more recent years we have observed that more and more women's organisations have been working to remind the public of more of the unfairly forgotten women names. Recently also new leftist parties have appeared on the Polish political scene, and these fight for the rights of women and LGBT people and spotlight ecological issues, social inequalities and injustice.

Among the women artists who began their career after 1989 was Julita WÓJCIK. One of her first performances was based on the act of peeling potatoes in front of an audience in the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in 2001 and raised such everyday women's work to the level

of art.²⁷ The performance of this emerging artist caused a discussion in which the voices of support met the critical opinions of those who considered such a performance as banal and of poor artistic quality. There were also those who used it as an excuse to attack the new policy of the gallery. The performance by Julita WÓJCIK also had something in common with the above-mentioned *Washing* series by Maria PINIŃSKA-BEREŚ. Julita WÓJCIK was referring to the same strategy about two decades later. What we may conclude from her action is that in the intervening period, the social expectations towards women had not changed, and there were still those that would aim accusations such as 'banality, dilettantism, lack of artistic quality' against women artists working with women's problems.

In 2003, the artist did a performance *To Sweep up after Women Textile Workers*. In it, she was sweeping an abandoned factory hall in Łódź.²⁸ This simple everyday gesture was raised to a symbolical meaning. Women textile workers had been the victims of the political changes in Poland. Unlike the miners from the closing mines, who got a high severance allowance, women textile workers simply lost their jobs and just disappeared. They did not receive any extra support from the state. The city of Łódź, the second largest city in Poland, faced impoverishment and outflow of people. Łódź, called also the 'city of women,' clearly illustrates the phenomenon of the feminisation of poverty.²⁹

One of the prominent artists of a new generation, who started their career in the early 1990s was Katarzyna KOZYRA. She debuted in 1993 with her diploma artwork consisted of a sculpture made of taxidermy animals and a video, in which we see the artist killing a horse with an injection. The artwork caused a scandal, and the artist was attacked by media and also animal rights activists. On the one hand, killing animals for art does not seem to be very ethical, on the other, as she declared, she used already dead animals except the horse and a rooster that were already intended for slaughter.³⁰ The everyday animal killing in the food industry happens legally, but the society using these animals as products does not want to watch their

death. The artist both made visible these deaths and revealed the hypocrisy of the public, because as an individual woman artist she was much more easily targeted than the meat industry.

Katarzyna KOZYRA worked with gender issues and its performativity. One of her performances addressing these questions was a video-installation entitled *The Men's Bathhouse* from 1995. The video documenting this action shows the artist in the Turkish bath in Budapest. The artist with a hidden video camcorder and in a male disguise visited the male bath. Through her artwork she showed that the gender attributes and roles are all performative ones.³¹ We can perform as a man or as a woman and the way in which we behave and how we dress, determines how we are perceived. Performance art plays an important role in the art of Katarzyna KOZYRA, however usually it is only a part of more complex projects, where the artist uses media such as installation and video.

One of the most interesting and radical performative projects in Polish art was *I have seen my death* by Zuzanna JANIN. In Western culture, focused mostly on material goods and promoting youth and an active way of life, the subject of death is a taboo. People die mostly out of sight of the others in hospitals and old people's homes. Their bodies wait for the funeral in freezers. We have removed the death ritual as much as possible from our direct experience. Zuzanna JANIN distributed the information about her own death and funeral. Only the nearest relatives knew that it was an artistic action. She appeared at her own funeral in a disguise. After others revealed that she did not die, the artist faced aggressive attacks, both from the mass media as well as her colleagues from the art scene.³²

It is meaningful that most of the cases when an artist was accused of causing a scandal in the 1990s and after 2000 concerned artworks made by women. And what we should not overlook is that the attacks were particularly fierce, hateful and contemptuous. The women artists were attacked personally as people and women, while in the case of 'scandalous' works made by men, mostly the quality of art was questioned, but the artists themselves were not insulted.

An artist who explores the intersection of the female body and its intimacy, everyday household works and politics is Ewa ŚWIDZIŃSKA. She began her artistic career in the beginning of the 1990s and took part in the cycle of exhibitions focused on women's art organised after the political breakthrough in 1989. As the artist says, the performance is an updating of herself. "I am a performance" she used to say.³³ Thus, according to her, there is no performance concerning some general issues. Performance art is always personal. The artist through this medium explores her personal condition as a woman. The costume, the clothes are important props in her pieces. During the performance in the Grodzka Gallery in Lublin in 2005, she took off the subsequent layers of clothes, starting from a thick coat tightly covering her body. Finally, she stood dressed only in a 'sexy' latex suit and with a woman's handbag, which had a mirror on one side. The mirror plays a symbolical role in our culture. It is inherent with femininity and the image of woman. It's a tool of gentle oppression that always reminds women that they are judged mostly through their physical attractiveness. During this performance, the artist looked at herself in the mirror, then turned it to the public. While she was taking off the latex suit, the audience could see the photos from porn magazines covering her body. She tried to remove them with the use of chemicals and with scratching. Then she tried to wash her body. Finally, she stood naked in front of the public. She had released her body from the patriarchal clichés and expectations. As the art critic Łukasz GUZEK wrote, her body is the source of her resistance and also a medium through which she expresses her protest. The way to freedom leads through the freedom of the body. Here we can see a reference to Foucault's thought: blocking, confining the body is a strategy of power. Thus, the strategy of rebellion against power is unblocking and liberating the body.³⁴ The woman's body experiences many more limitations than the man's body in a patriarchal culture. Ewa ŚWIDZIŃSKA also takes pictures, intimate photography sessions of the female part of her body, such as photos of her genitals that

she adorns with trinkets. But the photos are not in the aesthetics of glamour or pop art. They rather document her private worship of her vagina – the women's sexual organ, deprived of its sacred meaning and despised in patriarchal cultures and religions.³⁵

Ewa ŚWIDZIŃSKA was also one of the participants of the *Performance-esse* women's performance festival curated by Małgorzata JANKOWSKA. The event took place in 2005 in the Wozownia Gallery in Toruń. Except Ewa ŚWIDZIŃSKA, the participants were emerging artists of that time, born in the late seventies or early eighties. Among them were Angelika FOJTUCH, the Sędzia Główny (The Chief Judge) duo and the Dziewczęta Przeszanowne (The Most Honorable Girls) group. The festival took place on 13th of December. Regardless of whether that was accidental or intentional, the date was symbolical, as it was the anniversary of the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1981. The artist who referred to this date in her performance piece was Anna GRYCZKA. She involved a group of people wearing t-shirts with printed newspaper articles about the martial law on it. They stood in a queue, which referred to the economic crisis in Poland in the 1980s. All of them wore dark glasses, like general JARUZELSKI who had introduced the martial law. The articles printed on the t-shirts had been collected by the artist from different sources and periods, before and after the collapse of Communism system in Poland. The last person in the queue presented the most recent article on the martial law. The articles proved how the language of the public debate changed in the time when the country regained independence.³⁶ But the young Polish democracy faced another danger – the rising influence of conservative and traditional politics promoted by so called right-wing politicians, supported by the Catholic Church.

The other event dedicated only to women's art was *Święto Kobiet* (the Women's Day) curated by the Exgirls – a duo of feminist curators: Magdalena UJMA and Joanna ZIELIŃSKA. In the period of rule of the Communist regime, International Women's Day was officially celebrated, but it was rather a farce.

In the democratic Poland women tried to regain control of this holiday and find deeper ways of celebrating it, such as cultural events, where the issues of equality and empowering women were taken up. *The Women's Day* by Exgirls promoted such a point of view. And performances were important here, although not the only one type of art presented during the edition in 2003.

Angelika FOJTUCH made a radical performance in a much frequented area in the city centre of Krakow. She was standing in a walker and wore a big nappy. She also held a sheet of paper with the inscription “I am a woman. God bless you,” which created associations with beggars asking for money.³⁷ The artist, almost naked, stood in her pose for 3 hours. The cold weather made this challenge even more difficult. Performance artists quite often examine the limitations of their bodies, but the performance by Angelika FOJTUCH raises the question about female bodies, their strength, endurance, suffering and also their politicisation. The artist in a very direct and suggestive way showed the position of women in Poland based on 'Catholic values' and the neoliberal economy. The slogan from Barbara KRUGER's poster *Your body is a battleground* referring to the political fights for control of women's bodies and procreation in the United States of the seventies, became very up-to-date at the turn of the new millennium in Poland.³⁸ The sentence “God bless you” that could be literally read as “God will pay you” expresses gratitude for charity. It also refers to the role of the Catholic Church in maintaining the inferior position of women in the society. The poor and passive woman as was portrayed in a grotesque way by Angelika FOJTUCH in her performance can only count on people's and God's mercy.

Aleksandra KUBIAK and Karolina WIKTOR, who worked for several years as a duo, the Sędzia Główny (The Chief Judge) group, also dealt with the condition of the woman in society, by challenging the stereotypical women's role models. The use of similar costumes and wigs and also the same gestures and poses performed during their actions made their performance pieces very spectacular. They called the performances they made together *The Chapters*

and their common artistic output is about eighty performance pieces. They performed both in galleries and in public places. Their look in the different performances was changeable, but it was always an important part of the event. We could see a wide range of the images of women, from pin-up girls, a little black dress, through the vamp look, to the uni-sex creatures or a kind of clones like in the performance with a banana *Hommage a Natalia LL*.³⁹ These 'artistic twins' based their performance pieces on a contradiction, usually between their attractive, sexy look that was contrasted by their manner of behaviour. During their performance *Chapter LXI. Women's Day in Łódź* in the Manhattan Gallery, they wore short, red and white polka dot dresses and high-heeled shoes. In such costumes, on all fours, they were drinking vodka, spitting the alcohol on the floor and then licking it, thus doing the job of a cleaner.⁴⁰ In another performance that took place about Easter time, they pushed eggs out of their vaginas, while they were sitting on the counter in a pub. Then they served pieces of the eggs to the public (as it is in the Eastern European ritual that based on sharing a piece of egg as a good luck symbol).⁴¹ We can interpret such an action on many levels. They referred to the ritual of the consecration of food brought to the church in the baskets during Easter. In this, as symbol of fertility, eggs play an important role in it, and at this time, they are decorated in many colours and patterns. But both eggs themselves as a symbol of fertility and the custom of decorating them reaches back to the pre-Christian times. The act of pushing eggs out of the artists' vaginas seems to refer to the role of the woman as a birthgiver. These leads to their objectification and treating them as reproductive machines in the name of duty to the Church, state and particular male interests. The performance poses also questions about the sex industry. The performances by the Chief Judge group play with all these expectations and stereotypes, but instead of perpetuating them, they challenge them. It is also important that this performance took place in a pub, rather than in a gallery or go-go club. At least part of the audience was not prepared for such a show. Such 'pushy' interference in a public sphere may, of

course, cause hostility and rejection but may also provoke discussion.

One of the performances by the Chief Judge took place in the studios of a Polish TV station called TVP Kultura (TVP Culture). In 2005, the artists proposed a game for the viewers, who could call to the TV studio and give some orders to the artists. Although the premise is that the programs of the TVP Culture station are considered to appeal mainly to ambitious and sophisticated viewers, the Chief Judge's performance proved something opposite. Most of the orders were given by men, and they usually asked the artists to take off their clothes.⁴² As Yoko Ono and Marina ABRAMOVIC had once done, the Chief Judge duo created a performance piece, where they became passive objects of viewer's actions. Three decades later they confirmed the same mechanism: women are expected to be passive objects, but that passivity causes their objectification and aggression towards them. Here we can compare the traditional works of art, such as paintings, sculptures, etc. with action art that happens live. Regardless of the type of a performance piece, the immanent feature of performance art is its rebellious character. The performance happens live, thus is unpredictable, both for the artists and the viewers.

This unpredictability is highly visible in the performances by Anna KALWAJTYS. She also knows how to build up the tension. She starts from very calm, delicate and subtle gestures at the beginning and intensifies her expression until the climax. This is the point when nobody is sure what may happen next.⁴³ Her performance *The Flag* from 2017 started in the 'safe' space of the Zbrojownia [Armoury] Gallery at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk. The artist painted her body in black and also a half of her face. She painted the other half in white. She performed with two big flags. One of them with white and red stripes referred to the Polish flag, but the artist added also the black colour. The other flag was white as a flag of surrender. The artist was waving the flags, first more delicately then stronger and stronger, almost desperately. Then she unexpectedly left the gallery space and ran out into the town's street. While still waving the black-red-black flag she started to

scream very loudly, with a piercing voice as if she called someone from the distance. She also seemed to imitate the sounds of animals or maybe the cries of tribal people. Some passers-by started to interact with her. The flags got 'dirty' when they brushed up against the painted body of the artist. Thus, the colours and the borders between them were not so 'clear' anymore. In the last scene of the performance, the artist went back to the gallery. She took the white flag from its pole and wore as a skirt. Then she put a Phrygian bonnet on her head and holding the other flag took up a pose resembling the female allegory from the painting *Liberty Leading the People* by Delacroix. However Anna KALWAJTYS's postcolonial interpretation of the allegory of Liberty prompted the question what this notion means now.⁴⁴ The context of this performance was also the forthcoming one-hundredth anniversary of regaining the independence of Poland after one hundred and twenty years of partition between three European Empires (Russia, Prussia, Austria). It was also in 1918 that Polish women 'received' the rights to vote. But in fact, despite the great involvement of women in resistance against the invaders, the leader of the new country, Józef Piłsudski, was still rather reluctant to accept this liberal idea. Thus women gathered in front of his mansion in the cold November evening and knocked with umbrellas to his door and windows until he accepted their rights.

The umbrella as a symbol of women's rights was used again in October 2016, when women in Poland took the streets in protest against an attempt to pass a bill that restricts the already restrictive anti-abortion law. Polish women faced not only the danger of violation of their human rights but also the fear of death or disability if the new law had been introduced. Men also suddenly understood that the fight for women rights wasn't only a case for women but of freedom and democracy for all. Thus, they came to protest with women. On the 3rd of November – the day when the main protests took place – it was rainy. Thus, tens thousands of umbrellas covered the streets of big cities. Also women from smaller towns joined, which rather had not happened in the past, because the Church and conservative politicians are more influential there. The number of protesting women in small towns

was not so impressive, but those who decided to protest should be even more appreciated; to be one of five or ten protesters exposed to people's eyes required much more courage than protesting among thousands who think the same. Since then it was called a 'protest of umbrellas'. These demonstrations, called also the 'Black Protests', are worth mentioning in the context of women's art in Poland, because it sparked the collaboration of Polish women activists, artists and theoreticians, which had never happened before. Thus, it was the beginning of a real feminist movement in Poland.⁴⁵

I would like to describe briefly two examples of such collaborations. One of them took place in the Centre of Contemporary Art in Toruń in 2018, where its director Waclaw KUCZMA curated the exhibition *Why do we need freedom, anyway?*. Among forty invited artists, only one was a woman. When somebody tries to refer to the problem of freedom and ignores the voices of women, I can say without a doubt that such a person committed a kind of abuse. It caused a reaction in the form of action. The collaboration between artists and activists that had been strengthened in the time of protests against the anti-abortion law, now profited. Both women and men appeared at the opening of the exhibition. They were dressed in paper costumes with the names of about forty Polish women artists. The sentences on their costumes asked the question such as "Where is Natalia LL?," "Where is Maria PINIŃSKA-BEREŚ?" and many others.⁴⁶

The censorship and removal of the works by Natalia LL, Katarzyna KOZYRA and the Chief Judge group from the permanent exhibition of the National Museum in Warsaw by its newly appointed director, Jerzy Miziołek (now already dismissed), was covered not only by the Polish press. What is very meaningful, all the censored artists were women who referred to the question of femininity and gender issues in their art. All of them also created performance pieces or works based on performative practices. The removed work of Natalia LL was from the above-mentioned series with bananas entitled *Consumer Art*.⁴⁷ This act of censorship sparked protests of both the artistic community as well as

journalists, writers, art lovers etc. They gathered and performed with the eating of bananas in front of the National Museum. Some people also made such video-performances with bananas or performances for photography and published them in social media. The protesters were very creative and as in the case of the exhibition in Toruń, the distinction between social protest and action art became blurred.

As the last performance art piece to be described, I would like to mention my own action entitled *Women's Food Riots* from 2018. This event illustrates well how the collaboration of women activists and artists works and how ephemeral, time-based art can support promotion of women's achievements. I was asked by the group of activists from the Łódzki Szlak Kobiet (Lodz Women's Trail) to propose an artwork referring to the Women Hunger March from 1981, when women took to the streets because of shortages of food. As I have already mentioned, women's involvement in protests against the totalitarian power was frequently omitted in the official version of history taught in schools. Women's grass-root organisations have been working for a few years in order to change this picture. While doing research on this case, I realised that the Women's Hunger March in Łódź was a part of a series of similar protests that had taken place in the past and were still happening in different parts of the world (Latin America, Africa) and in different political and economic systems. Food Riots (riots caused by food shortages or hunger) have one thing in common. Very often, women are their instigators and constitute the majority of protesters. However, they have always happened in the regions under governments based on patriarchal values, corruption, military regime or war. Women's street protests are caused by a desperation, which has a revolutionary potential. In many cases women's protests became a harbinger of social change.

At the Freedom Square in Łódź, I set up 11 banners representing the dates and regions where women protests against food shortages had taken place. The installation consisting of banners was the background for my performance,

during which I walked with a megaphone around the Freedom Square reading fragments of articles about food riots in various parts of the world, including the Women's Hunger March in Łódź. I distributed small cards with information about the women's food riots to passers-by. I also invited other women artists from Łódź, especially from the Frakcja group (of which I am a member) to participate in the event. The artists one after another or sometimes simultaneously performed around the square.⁴⁸

To conclude, in this brief article it was not possible to introduce the works of numerous other women artists who have contributed to the performance art or performative art practices in Poland, thus I chose only a few examples to illustrate the relationship between changing political condition of the country and the evolvement of women's action art dealing with feminist issues. However, among women performance artists, we shouldn't omit such names as Ewa ZARZYCKA, Anna KUTERA, Malga KUBIAK, Aleka POLIS, Justyna GÓROWSKA, Karolina KUBIK, Justyna SCHEURING, Ola KOZIOŁ, Marta OSTAJEWSKA and many others.

Thus, women artists have been present in the Polish performance art scene from the beginning of introducing of this discipline in Poland. Frequently it was not the only part of their art, though nevertheless an important one. We can also observe that this kind of activity was very often a means of resistance against the dominant political power. Women's performance art pieces from the seventies or eighties were based on more private gestures, watched only by a limited audience or even without the viewer's presence. Nevertheless their gestures are preserved through photographs and sometimes film recordings. In the nineties and after 2000, artists of the generation born in the late seventies or early eighties started to criticise the stereotypes and prejudices against women in a more open way. They also do it with the use of subversive strategies, mockery and irony and perform in the public venues as well. They also challenge the system of art education, like the *Dziewczęta Przeszanowne* group. They teased their professors who believed that women art students,

even gifted one, would not be able to have an artistic career. The artists from the group, while still students, replied to them in subversive way. When they were given a task to make a sculpture, they carved the head from mashed potatoes from the canteen.⁴⁹ This apparent student's joke shows another feature of performance art. It can be created spontaneously and instantly. Thus, the performance artist can react immediately. Such features as immediacy and unpredictability determine the rebellious potential of this type of art. A good example of these features is Cecylia MALIK's action against the massive tree felling ordered by the rightist Catholic and anti-ecological government recently in the whole of Poland, even in protected areas.⁵⁰ This was a very simple but powerful gesture, Cecylia MALIK sat on one of the many trunks of the freshly cut down trees and started to breastfeed her little child. Then she published documentary photos in social media. This triggered the action *Polish Mothers at the Felling* that was joined by many other women doing the same in other places.

Before the political turnaround of 1989, women artists worked individually, although there were some in male-dominated or mixed artistic groups. Only in the new political reality did women's artistic groups such as The Chief Judge, Dziewczęta Przeszanowne or Łuhuu start to appear. None of them received a professional education in performance art, but they felt that painting or sculpture or any kind of object art was not sufficient to express their feelings and thoughts. I can also add that when a group of artists works together, regardless of whether its members are artists practicing performance art or not, it triggers an action. I can also observe it in the Frakcja, a group of women artists to which I belong. We create artworks for the exhibitions of our group individually, however if we decided to do something together, these were usually a performance art pieces.

In the period of the new democracy, especially during last two decades, performance art pieces by Polish women artists became more rebellious. Since 2016, the course of Polish politics has become more populist, conservative and democracy is in danger again, and this also badly

affects women's rights and their position in the society. But at the same time, thanks to democracy and the financial support of the European Union, the grass-root women's initiatives have appeared and are getting stronger. The collaboration of women from different branches of public life seems to be organised well enough to defend women's rights and make the country more friendly to women and all discriminated people in the future.

Notes

- ¹ Anka Leśniak, *Fading Traces*, video-installation, 2010. An interview with Natalia LL.
- ² Anuradha Kumar, *Human Rights. Global perspectives* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2002), 269.
- ³ Anka Leśniak, *Fading Traces*, video-installation, 2010. An interview with Anna Kutera. See also: <http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/tag/kutera-anna/>.
- ⁴ Anka Leśniak, *Fading Traces*, video-installation, 2010. An interview with Natalia LL.
- ⁵ Anka Leśniak, *Fading Traces*, video-installation, 2010. An interview with Anna Kutera.
- ⁶ Anka Leśniak, *Fading Traces*, video-installation, 2010. An interview with Natalia LL.
- ⁷ "Address Gallery Documentation," FilMOTEKA Muzeum, artmuseum.pl, <https://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/partum-ewa-dokumentacja-galerii-adres>.
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- ²² The performance took place in the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko in 1989.
- ²³ Ewa Małgorzata Tatar, "Procession – performance by Teresa Murak," *Parallel Chronologies: An Archive of East European Exhibitions*, <http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/procession-performance-by-teresa-murak/>.
- ²⁴ Izabela Kowalczyk, "Aleka Polis: Cleaning (for) Democracy," *Czas Kultury*, 3 (2016): 47-48.
- ²⁵ During the Communist regime, artists received well paid state commissions and had a privileged position in relation to amateurs. Although the commissions concerned design and decorative arts, they were still an opportunity to earn good money to live off. After the political transition of 1989, professional artists and designers lost their status in the neo-liberal economy and now compete in the market with dilettantes offering much lower price for their services.
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- ⁴⁰ Ibidem.
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- ⁴² “Sędzia Główny / Chief Judge,” *Culture.pl*, <https://culture.pl/en/artist/sedzia-glowny>.
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