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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 term 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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