

**Exhibition Scenario
in Thirty-Two Scenes
by Anka Ptaszkowska**

1.

Soirées Privées

Announcement: Privacy is coming. We vomit public space: Art (the public girl), the Market, and Politics.

Soirées Privées: a space for debates and discussions about art and politics, sometimes exhibitions too. In close association with an old brother in arms, François Guinochet, and the publishing house Éditions nous. The agenda of these evenings is determined as much by the current moment—our preoccupations at any given time—as by our former projects. Held in Paris, the evenings are not pre-planned, but rather organized spontaneously.

We stress their private nature, not worrying much about the ambiguous undertone of the French term *soirée privée*. As in the numbered gallery that we organized in the 1970s [Gallery 1–36], anything can be a subject: a debate, an exhibition, a single work or two, an excursion. The only fixture is an ample buffet (we like to use the opportunity to provide a reminder that regular galleries won't even serve peanuts, let alone that after openings the gallery owner, perhaps with a collector, usually sneaks out to a restaurant).

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Zamek Group and our beginnings

In Lublin, in the late 1950s, the Zamek Group is founded at the initiative of the art critic Jerzy Ludwiński, with

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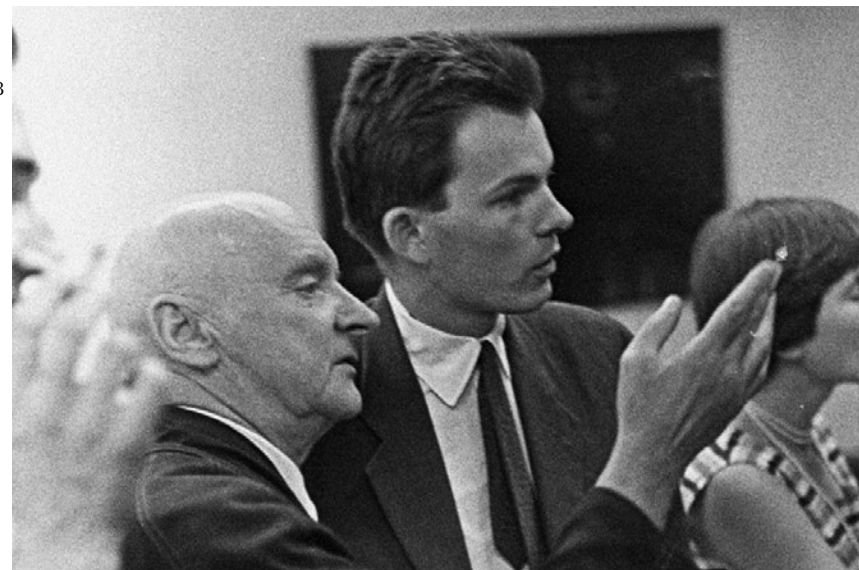
Wiesław Borowski and Anka Ptaszkowska, both art history graduates of the Catholic University of Lublin, and the independent thinker Mariusz Tchorek. They publish a periodical, edited by Ludwiński, called *Struktury*, a supplement of the monthly poetry magazine *Kamena*. The political context: the collapse of Stalinism, the Hungarian revolution, the rise to power in Poland of Władysław Gomułka, the cultural thaw, jazz, rock and roll, Young Intellectual Clubs.

The agenda of *Struktury*: the end stage of the struggle against illusion in painting. Naturally two-dimensional, the painting receives a third dimension. Concrete space. Our theoretician and spiritual leader is Ludwiński, a visionary, author of a sort of “theory of relativism” applied to art. He used to say that wherever he happened to live—in Lublin, Wrocław, Poznań, or Toruń—there the centre of the world was. We study Strzemiński’s Unism and cybernetics. Borowski’s *Artons* arise—the painting as a living cell.

I view the 2nd Exhibition of Modern Art at Zachęta [in Warsaw] with Tadeusz Kantor. His work and person are the subject of my master’s thesis in the Department of Art History at the Catholic University of Lublin, written under the supervision, or rather—given the sophisticated harassment I suffer from the university—under the heroic protection of Jacek Woźniakowski.

Kantor at the 2nd Exhibition of Modern Art, in front of Borowski’s *Artons*: “Is that this avant-garde of yours?” Me: “Yes.”

Our life: Tarczyńska Street Theatre, Henryk Stażewski and Mewa Łunkiewicz’s studio, Krzywe Koło [Crooked Circle] Gallery, night life at spots like Kameralna or the Bristol Hotel. Important figures: Boguś Choiński, poet,



radical artist, writer of songs performed phenomenally by Ludmiła Jakubczak, Adaś Pawlikowski, Sanktus, a great jazz dancer, and other heroic playboys.

My first direct experience of art being made. I watch for hours as Włodzimierz Borowski works on his early paintings. His 1966 show at Foksal Gallery: the viewer, rhythmically blinded, loses the status of an observer. The observer is the artist, hidden in the exhibition space. The viewer becomes the object of his cold and somehow malicious observation. I write about this anti-show by Borowski in the Foksal Gallery programme. Another experience of art being made: Kantor working on his Art Informel paintings. He lets me, a young student, watch this breath-taking spectacle in his theatre studio. “Attention, painting!”

“Classic or Avant-Garde?” on Henryk Stażewski is my first essay published in *Struktury*. I am introduced to him at SARP, the café of the association of Polish architects. He greets me with the words: “You’ve made a superhuman effort to make a modern painter out of me.”

3. Foksal Gallery

Foksal Gallery is founded in Warsaw in 1966 at the initiative of critics Wiesław Borowski, Anka Ptaszkowska, and Mariusz Tchorek, and artists Henryk Stażewski, Roman Owidzki, Edward Krasiński, and Zbigniew Gostomski. They are later joined by Tadeusz Kantor and Maria Stangret. Besides Prague’s Špálova, it is the only avant-garde gallery in the entire Soviet bloc. It is founded as a unit of the state enterprise known as the

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Fine Arts Workshops, to serve as an alibi for the rather obscure affairs of its director, a high-ranking Party apparatchik. But reality will far surpass these intentions.

The text of the inaugural exhibition declares: “First, not so much to exhibit ‘artworks’ in their ‘final’ form as to reveal the circumstances and situations bound up with their making. Second, to consider these circumstances and situations as organic elements of the art show.”

Artists respond to this challenge by producing Europe’s first examples of installation art, working *in situ*, to use Daniel Buren’s term, in the gallery space.

4. Theory of Place— Mariusz Tchorek

The Theory of Place, ironically/pompously titled “An Introduction to a General Theory of Place,” is born as the result of a night-long talk between Mariusz Tchorek and Anka Ptaszkowska on a porch in Zalesie in 1966. Tchorek reads it out with prophetic zeal during the Symposium of Artists and Scholars in Puławy in 1966. The Theory of Place immediately provokes a storm of protests, first of all from Kantor, who accuses us of plagiarism and declares that manifestos are to be written by artists, not critics. The text is then published in the Foksal Gallery programme.

The Theory of Place (excerpts):

“Rather than looking at the artworks themselves, let us stop in front of the terrain where they find themselves.

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Let us not enter the exhibition, but rather stop before it. This is what we assert: 'Here follows a critique of the phenomenon of the exhibition, particularly its secondary character relative to the creative act.'

The PLACE. So the PLACE. Certainly the PLACE. The PLACE is an area that comes into existence through a bracketing, a suspension of all of the rules that govern the world.

The PLACE is not a spatial category, it is not an arena, a stage, a screen, a plinth, a pedestal, and especially it is not an exhibition.

The PLACE is a sudden gap in the utilitarian notion of the world. In the PLACE all measures in force outside it cease to be in effect. Within the PLACE there are no vacillations, because there is no difference between good and bad, worthy and worthless—everything simply is.

The PLACE is neither strange nor common, refined nor vulgar, wise nor foolish.

The PLACE is one and one only.

The PLACE cannot be bought or collected. The PLACE cannot be arrested. The PLACE cannot be known.”

Mariusz Tchorek remains the only person so far who has achieved an understanding of the deeper meaning of the Theory of Place and the unexpected possibility that this theory offers. According to him, the Theory of Place is the proposal of a practice both artistic and existential. And the only path that gives access to it is personal and utter commitment. The Theory of Place is Mariusz Tchorek. Not only because he is its author. Mainly because he has situated it. Moreover, he has situated himself in it. And for the rest of his life.

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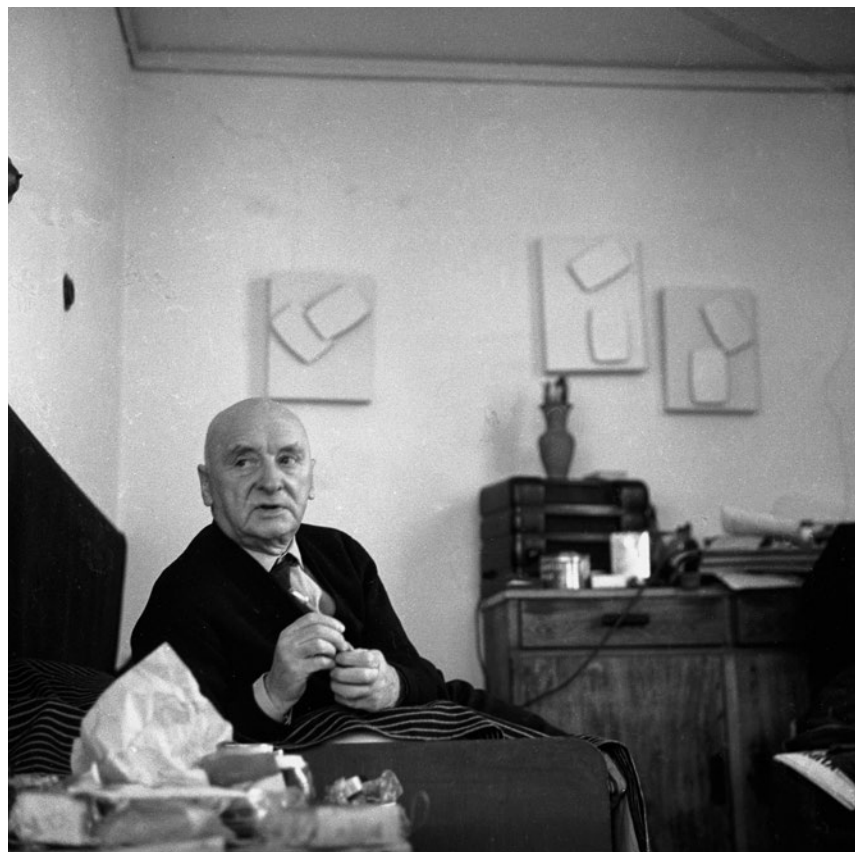
5. Henryk Stażewski— Mewa—Studio

Henryk Stażewski, known to all as “Henio”—doyen of the Polish avant-garde art movement, member of Constructionist collectives of the 1920s and 1930s: Blok, Praesens, “a.r.” Cofounder, with Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro, of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, the world’s first museum founded by artists. A painter. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s art world, he embodies the tradition of the Avant-Garde movement while remaining an active member of it until the end of his life. Totally committed. Open to everything.

Maria Ewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska, known to all as Mewa (“Seagull”)—a painter practising “Purism” in the 1930s, and later, in the 1950s and 1960s, working in the spirit of the School of Paris. Stażewski’s companion. Miron Białoszewski speaks beautifully about her as a dame of the avant-garde in his *Denunciations of Reality*, in a chapter titled “Gioconda.” They are the soul of the Polish avant-garde art community of the 1960s, its legitimation and its invigorating force.

Their studio is the birthplace of initiatives such as Foksal Gallery, an art exchange between Polish and us artists, and many others. It is also the only credible platform of contacts with the West at the time. In the 1960s, it has three residents: Henio, Mewa, and Mewa’s husband, Jan Rogoyski, who during the Stalin years provides for all three from his paycheck and tends plants on the terrace. After Rogoyski’s death, Mewa, on her own deathbed, decides: “Edzio will live in Jan’s room.” Stażewski’s cohabitation with Edward Krasiński will last for 20 years. After Stażewski’s death, Krasiński will be the sole master of the space. It has been preserved

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and opened to the public through the efforts of Foksal Gallery Foundation as the Avant-Garde Institute.

Following my relocation to France, where Stażewski ultimately and magnanimously talked me into going, we exchanged tons of letters and, Stażewski being Stażewski, projects. Once I came to Warsaw and saw a photograph of a woman on Stażewski's desk. "Who is she?" I asked. "She's similar to you," Henio replied.

Henryk Stażewski: nouns and adjectives read out horizontally by Anka Ptaszkowska at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź on the centenary of his birth:

authentic	layman
delicate	methodical
discreet	modern
elegant	naïve
erotic	natural
ethical	nervous
European	non-believer
farsighted	open-minded
frank	pacifist
frivolous	painter
good	playful
gourmet	realist
independent	shy
individualist	spot-on
ingenious	unbiased
innocent	unselfish
innovator	wise
intelligent	witty
internationalist	youthful
joker	

What do I owe to him?

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Knowing someone who, with his own life and example, challenged human inequality, power and possession. Being next to an artist for whom art and its wonderful inventions are shared property. Being part of the everyday life of a fantastic man. A great gift.

Mewa in the silence of her painting and the exuberance of her life—a person in the full sense of the word. She was a mother and guide for me. She loved us all.

Their studio—an unforgettable, priceless place of creativity, filled with life. Here and around. A place of constant meetings, discussions about art, ideas and initiatives, banquets and parties.

Someone dropping in every day: Miron Białoszewski next to Prof. Antoni Żabiński, Adam “Mauzio” Mauersberger, Erna Rosenstein with Artur Sandauer, Jerzy Tchorzewski, the Owidzkis, Boguś Choiński the poet, Kantor on his visits to Warsaw, Jerzy Ludwiński, Włodzimierz Borowski, Wiesław Borowski, Zbigniew Gostomski, to mention just a few.

6. Zalesie—my mother

Zalesie—my mother’s house, currently the house of my daughter Paulina, Antonina, and two Aleksanders.

In times when the word “us” still made unshakable sense and included Henio, Mewa, the entire Foksal team, and random friends, Zalesie is a home to us all. In summertime a place of vacationing, meetings, parties, banquets, and ceremonies, and in winter you have to wade two kilometres through snow to the train station.

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Through my mother's mad fancy, heroic persistence, and incredible spatial imagination, a house is built in Zalesie during the German occupation. After the death of my father, shot in the Battle of Wytyczno, my mother builds the house alone, without a budget, with the help of sympathetic people. She quickly gets rid of the architect, builds the house "by eye," giving it delightful proportions. The wartime history of the house and of my mother's extraordinary feats is yet to be written.

Let me just recall its beginnings. As soon as the house is "on its feet," without water or electricity, but equipped with ingenious hiding places for weapons and people, my mother arranges a café in the living room where beautiful old furniture (now nearly all sold off) and a majestic Blüthner grand piano stand on a floor on which you walk as on moving piano keys. Concerts and poetry readings take place there, but the main goal is to feed a bunch of people: family members, partisans, Varsovians driven out of the city following the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, hiding Jews. To provide for them all, my mother goes deeply into debt. Hence mine and my sister Teresa's childhood goes by "in the shadow of the debt collector." Among our childhood entertainments is watching surreptitiously how the partisans dance the Cossack dance while shooting at the ceiling. My mother's unique charm and goodness mean that people are willing to do anything for her.

7. Zalesie—Edzio Krasiński

In 1962, Edward Krasiński appears at Zalesie as my husband. He opens a new chapter in the history of the



house. He creates it anew—it is unfinished yet already on the brink of ruin. This ambiguous status and atmosphere are particularly to his liking. In ways known to him, he makes it great. Using jute and a few slats, he conjures up extraordinary spaces in the attic. He pads the door to my room with black velvet and hangs a squirrel's whitened skull on it. He takes a cow's skull brought from excavations, paints its horns gold, then hangs this African mask above the living room door. He turns rickety chairs into royal seats. He cuts small heads out of black boards and pastes our photographs on them so that we have something to lean our heads on. He covers me with a fishnet shawl, and paints a bow tie and a vest for himself.

Next to the house grows a fantastic 300-year-old oak tree. "Others have cars, I have the oak," Edzio says.

In Zalesie, Krasiński produces his first three-dimensional paintings, first spears and aerial sculptures. Here the blue tape begins its course, starting from the day when Edzio sticks it on trees in a nearby wood at the height of 130 cm, or, as he used to say, at heart height.

And if it happens that the blue tape runs across art, such as photographic reproductions of nineteenth-century paintings in ornate frames or the *Battle of Grunwald*, then it activates a deeply buried question: "Is this art?" And then, inevitably, "Art? What is that?" "Art, schmart," Edzio replies, yet pinned to his desk is a note with a faded motto: "Art is too serious a thing to be made by artists."

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8. Kantor—happenings

Tadeusz Kantor. Anyone who hasn't personally experienced the phenomenon of his presence, its paralysing and enlivening power, doesn't know the most important thing about the man. The rest is commentaries, more or less apt, more or less fair.

In the mid-1960s, Kantor organizes happenings, engaging the participation of a group of artists and critics associated with Foksal Gallery. The first *Cricotage* happening in the café at Chmielna Street in 1965; the *Letter* happening of 1967: eight postmen carry a 14-metre-long letter to Foksal Gallery; the *Panoramic Sea Happening* on the beach in Łazy in 1967 in four parts: *Sea Concert*, with Edward Krasiński as conductor; *Erotic Barbuyage*—girls as sardines suggestively wallow in tomato sauce on the beach; *Agrarian Culture on the Sand*—standing in a line formation, participants plant hated newspapers on the beach; *The Raft of the Medusa*—a reconstruction of Géricault's painting with the participation of members of the public. The latter consists of some 1,500 people convened unofficially, let us not forget, under the police regime of communist Poland.

Taking part in a happening is a unique experience of the autonomy of every action, object, and person. Often in spite of our Great Conductor. The autonomy of every thing means equality, and with it, freedom. Individual and, in the case of a happening, collective. It is a different version of the unforgettable lesson in equality given by Stażewski and perhaps an anticipation of the *Principe d'égalité* in the 1990s and later.

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I guess I should say out loud what many think but are afraid to utter. If I never dared to do that in Kantor's lifetime, it was not only out of fear of what his reaction might be, but also out of a sense of respect for how important painting was for him. But whereas Kantor's theatre was the most revolutionary theatre of his time, his painting is completely eclectic and conventional; to be honest, it's bad. Let's try to forget about his paintings. We will then grasp the essence of this difficult, even painful relationship. Paradoxically, Kantor's theatre owes its revolutionary quality to painting. Not to his actual painting practice, but to his thorough knowledge of the history of twentieth-century painting. Kantor elicits the essential, theoretical meaning of the revolutions that successively shook the art of painting, and subordinates theatrical action completely to Schwitters's method of collage and Duchamp's idea of the readymade. He injects this knowledge in the living matter of his successive productions: "informel theatre," "zero theatre," "happening theatre." To my eyes, the evolution of Kantor's Cricot 2 theatre is a great animated "replay" of the revolutions that shook twentieth-century painting. Thus Kantor manages to overcome representation, the holiest and indispensable foundation of traditional theatre.



9. The Zalesie Ball

The Zalesie Ball, titled "Farewell to Spring," takes place in Anka Ptaszkowska and Edward Krasiński's home and garden in June 1968, shortly after the brutal suppression of a student revolt. Many people have been thrown in prison, gatherings of more than three persons are



banned. The ball is attended by some eighty brave guests from all over the country, including Kantor and Maria Stangret straight from the May revolution in Paris.

Amazing scenery. Krasiński reconstructs Bruegel's *Land of Cockaigne* around the 300-year-old oak, a cart of vegetables as a tribute to Arcimboldo. Gostomski erects the "table for giants", Krzysztof Niemczyk, in a top hat wreathed with jasmine, plays a concerto by Tchaikovsky at 5 a.m. on the old Blüthner. Intense partying goes on for three days and three nights. Police cars, lights off, stand in the neighbouring streets. But they don't intervene.

In 2006, Paweł Althamer, in association with Paulina Ołowska and Joanna Zielińska, produces a re-enactment of the Zalesie Ball in the garden of Warsaw's Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, a project curated by Paweł Polit. After nearly 40 years, as the title of Althamer's project proclaims, the ball is revived.

10. Krzysztof Niemczyk

Niemczyk writes, passionately plays the piano as an autodidact, and paints. Besides several short stories, he is the author of the novel *The Courtesan and the Hatchlings*, which enjoyed cult status in the 1960s even though it was not published until much later, first in French by Éditions de la Différence in 2003, and in Polish in 2007 by Wydawnictwo Ha!art in one volume with *Krzysztof Niemczyk's Treatise on Life for the Young Reader*, written by Anka. In the 1960s, Henryk Szażewski writes a manifesto, *Scandal in Literature*, in defence of *The Courtesan and the Hatchlings*.

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Niemczyk works in the real-life world. He doesn't use the protection afforded by art. In the police regime of 1960s Poland, he stages scandalous performances on the streets of Kraków which, of course, are considered criminal. He bathes naked in the fountain in front of St. Mary's Basilica, walks around with poet wings attached to his back, publicly bares his buttocks, organizes spectacular thefts at grocery stores. His self-portraits—overdone makeup is a mask as much as a means of bodily regeneration. At age seven he goes naked to school, where the teachers wrap him up in a map of Poland. That is also the end of his school education.

His practices are a challenge to which police henchmen and ordinary defenders of morality react in unison. Niemczyk, meanwhile, pursues his own version of the revolution and his own method of political opposition. He pays a heavy price in prisons, in a psychiatric hospital, regularly beaten up at police stations. He dies in abject poverty in 1994.

What Kantor, himself remaining on stage, preached as the indispensable features of an artistic attitude—freedom, risk, nonconformism—Niemczyk embodied in his own life, without enjoying any protection and bearing fully the consequences of this attitude. Looking from this perspective, we dare to ask: what specifically can be done with the “reality of the lowest rank,” which was so dear to Kantor? It's not like there are a hundred solutions: either lift it up or sink to the bottom. And there you may encounter Niemczyk again.

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11. Dividing Line

Dividing Line, Kantor's 1965 happening, becomes a joint manifesto for the Foksal Group circle. It dictates the modus operandi, defining the avant-garde's attitude as one of permanent opposition to all authority. An uncrossable line between Us and Them. "They" are functionaries of the official institutions of the communist party and the government. "We" are some artists, some critics, hippies, riffraff. Kantor's *Dividing Line* separates and accuses. Translated faithfully into French, it becomes *Le partage de la ligne*, the line of sharing. It is under this title that the magazine *Ohm* publishes an extended interview with me.

Years later, Cezary Wodziński writes in a letter to me: "Dividing line. What a monstrous metaphor."

12. What Do We Not Like about the Foksal Gallery?

"To realize that we act within a HABIT!

To discover and reveal what in our behaviour is HABITUAL!

The rule of time

Creation is always PRESENT. We must finally challenge the calendar, with its divisions into years, months, days and nights. For artistic ends it is unnecessary and encumbering.

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We must not waste time!
Let's get rid of it!

Rule of place

To the question: when? We answer: NOW. To the question: where? We answer: EVERYWHERE. Let ACTION dislodge and defame performance.”

13. We Are Not Sleeping

The Foksal Group's harshest political presentation, curated by Anka Ptaszkowska in *Critics Present Artists*, a show held as part of the 1969 edition of the ultra-official Golden Grape Symposium. She shows Mieczysław Dymny, Stanisław Szczepański, and Tomasz Wawak—all three being students from Kantor's class at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts (which has just fired him)—and the Second Group, consisting of Lesław Janicki, Waław Janicki, and Jacek Stokłosa, actors of the Cricot 2 theatre.

In the exhibition, the Second Group run a stall where they accept commissions for “faithful copies” of paintings exhibited next to it, selling them for two zlotys to the accompaniment of exclamations: “Lowest price guaranteed,” “Trust us,” and “Down with plagiarism.”

In the adjacent exhibition room, three students recline on camp beds under a sign that says “WE ARE NOT SLEEPING.” Close by, a PERMANENT JURY appointed to oversee the performance of *WE ARE NOT SLEEPING*. At the table: Krzysztof Niemczyk, Wiesław Borowski, Zbigniew Gos-tomski, Anka Ptaszkowska. Upon entrance, all critics

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participating in the symposium receive an invitation to join the PERMANENT JURY at any time of day or night. Party authorities and the exhibition organizers are utterly surprised, stupefied. During the symposium, Ptaszkowska presents a scandalous picture of Polish art criticism and the condition of Polish art, and reads out telegrams sent in by foreign artists and critics in support of *WE ARE NOT SLEEPING*. Every now and then someone takes the floor to remind those present that three artists still aren't sleeping in the exhibition room. Finally, Niemczyk brings the three "non-sleepers" over to the door of the room where the jury is deliberating, where they lie in their beds under a sign that says "WE DEMAND A PRIZE."

As a result of this event, Foksal Gallery faces closure, Ptaszkowska receives a threat-ridden reprimand from party and ministry authorities, and a press scandal rages for months.

The idea of not sleeping comes from Kantor, but the actual leader and strategist of this mini-revolution is Niemczyk. He brilliantly seizes upon the moment of the authorities' confusion at the sight of the "non-sleepers." He bombards them with more slogans: "Only sleep ensures impunity," "We haven't told you good night," "We demand an inspection," and finally, "We'll be back." The official banquet is an opportunity for the apparatchiks to hurl all kinds of threats at me. And suddenly, in the terrible silence of concentrated fear, Jonasz Stern, a pre-war communist and a Holocaust survivor, untouchable even for the communists, crosses the banquet room and kisses me cordially. Fear dissipates, solidarity is born. And Niemczyk tells me: "Go to the ministry right away or they'll close the gallery." Come morning, I appear before Department Director Kuduk, who only yesterday fulminated at me. I demand funds

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for Cricot's trip to Rome and Foksal Gallery's participation in the Salon International de Galeries Pilotes in Paris. Received like a queen, I get the funds without any further discussion. I congratulate Niemczyk for his keen sense of the psychological meanders of corrupt power.

14. New Rules of Collaboration with Foksal Gallery

"We hereby announce a break in Foksal Gallery's activity as a site of exhibitions, happenings, and artistic manifestations of all kinds. The gallery has realized that it is a privileged place—a place where everything is possible. Possible and legitimate.

So act outside the gallery as you would act here! Everything is possible, everything is legitimate. Act in non-artistic places (that is a condition of our collaboration), in public or private (depending on your preferences).

The gallery undertakes to document your activities and publicize them.

We will hold an open, public, and permanent media briefing at the gallery.

Send us your materials (photographs, films, accounts, documents).

You don't need to trouble yourselves personally.

You don't have to cover the cost of shipping your works. Nor do we."

This open invitation to a revolution becomes one of the reasons for the breakup of the Foksal Group. Kantor vehemently protests against the idea of a Critics' Gallery, in the name of that of an Artists' Gallery of course.

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Niemczyk's reaction to the "New Rules" is immediate. His innocent action, *Waiter, Today You Will Tip Us*, has the Kraków police on their toes. After an "anonymous tip" offered by Niemczyk himself, the market square and the streets leading to the Grand Hotel restaurant are blocked, and the happening participants convened there are arrested and brought to the station. The police play their role, but according to a script written by Krzysztof Niemczyk.

15. *6 mètres avant Paris*

Our beginnings in Paris: jumping in without a parachute, cheerful poverty, anonymity, doing physical work and serving the bourgeois to earn a living, but hijinks in Montparnasse in bars open until morning, meeting strange people. Goodbye, art! Goodbye forever!

For days on end we wander around Paris with a baguette in hand. Eustachy Kossakowski, a Rolleiflex camera slung on his shoulder, notices a sign that says "PARIS." "That's worth photographing," he says. Thus begins our great adventure of discovery. Questions waiting to be answered: What is this sign for? Is there one of them, or many? How many? Installed where?

The result of our long-time explorations: there are 157 such signs. They stand on the administrative border of Paris, where the streets leading from the suburbs enter the city.

Kossakowski's decision: to photograph them all, from a distance of six metres, with the word "PARIS" in the

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centre. He chooses one and the same point of view for 157 compositions, while attesting paradoxically that their number is infinite. This strict rule opens the door to chance. The word “PARIS” means that all views are beyond any doubt views of Paris. Only no one has ever seen, or rather wanted to see, such a Paris. We are per-versely pleased by the amazed questions: “This ... this is Paris?” Kossakowski’s sister, Barbara, says: “No one has realized it’s a prank.”

16. Eustachy Kossakowski

I ask Eustachy: “What did being a photographer mean to you?” “A photographic artist? No, no ... I’m a photographer.”

It meant that your eyes were open—permanently, in 360-degree vision. You used to tell me: “But you don’t see half of the things.”

Your position in the art world is clearly defined: you are the one who sees—an observer. You’ve never claimed the status of an artist. Whereas the professional practitioners of artistic life claim boldly: “I create, I’m an artist.”

Your career as one of the best photographers in 1960s Poland is impeded by a sober reflection: Why is it that shifting the camera by a few millimetres makes all the difference between a masterful shot and a failure? To avoid this dilemma, you permanently challenge the established point of view. A sense of humour and a spirit of opposition help you in this. You photograph the Twelve Apostles on the façade of St. Peter’s Basilica in

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Rome from the back. You turn your back on the famous stained glass windows at Chartres Cathedral, the untiring subject of thousands of photos, and instead for seven years you capture the interplay of the lights and colours thrown by the windows on the walls of the cathedral. You regularly press the shutter release, recording the progress of light in the series *A Window on Rue Dareau* and *Light in the Corridors of Chambres de Bonnes*. In dark Pompeian villas, you capture rays of sunlight that, instead of illuminating interiors, slice through them and ruin them. You take a picture of the flag of the Doge's Palace in Venice straight against the sun. For why should you shoot with the sun and not against it? Why go with the grain rather than against the grain?

Defying the whole tradition of European painting, you don't treat light as a medium illuminating form, rendering it visible. Instead, you photograph it as an object—an autonomous object. This requires truly Promethean audacity.

17. Daniel Buren

Two meetings.

The first one in the mid-60s, the Foksal era. Thanks to the censorship office, which allows only materials from “proven” sources to be brought into the country, we regularly read *Les Lettres françaises*, the culture weekly published by the French Communist Party and edited by Louis Aragon. There we encounter texts by Daniel Buren, Michel Claura, and René Denizot. They resonate closely with our own reflection on the social

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functioning of art that we express in our manifestos. I translate them rather clumsily into Polish, and they circulate from person to person. Stażewski declares in his characteristic, half-joking, half-serious manner: “I announce to you the appearance of the most important artist of our era. His name is Daniel Buren.”

The second meeting: Paris, 1970. After the breakup of Foksal Gallery, I abandon art “forever.” But I want to meet Buren. I go with Stażewski to his exhibition opening at the Yvon Lambert Gallery. I expect to see “all of Paris” there, but it’s just five people. I feel very shy when Lambert introduces me to Buren: Anka from Warsaw. Buren has just returned from the Tokyo Biennale, where the critic Yusuke Nakahara, who had invited Krasinski to participate in the event, told Buren: “If there’s one place in the world where you are truly appreciated, it’s Warsaw.”

In Buren’s studio, we meet his closest circle: Michel Claura with Brigitte, Seth Siegelaub with Rosalind, Niele Toroni with Dalmas, Philippe Sers. All, except Sers, politically far on the left. From us they hopefully await news from a “better world.” Our vehement anti-communism, which we voice thunderously, shocks them. But the deep ideological divide doesn’t prevent us from becoming friends and working closely together.

18. Gallery 1–36

In 1972, together with Michel Claura and François Guinochet, and in close association with Daniel Buren, we launch a gallery with me as its curator. The gallery

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changes its name with each show: Gallery 1, Gallery 2, Gallery 3, all the way up to Gallery 36.

Funding comes initially from the collector Herman Daled and from Guinochet. A series of exhibitions and presentations takes place in a basement at 17 rue Campagne-Première in Montparnasse.

But this is a gallery without a name or a fixed abode. A numbered gallery that shows truly critical art. Critique is inherent to its very idea. Each successive incarnation is unique (the numbers never repeat), but it is also representative of a genre; more still, it is a genre itself. We show minimal art and conceptual art by international avant-garde artists. The gallery can be an exhibition, a concert, a performance piece, a film, a debate, a meeting—almost anything.

Gallery 5

Invitation to the presentation of Gallery 6

Gallery 6

Exhibition of ten young artists, each showing ten works. Participants: Goran Trbuljak, Jacques Charlier, Claude Rutault, Maurice Roquet, Robert De Boeck, Hiroshi Yokoyama, Laurent Sauerwein, Alain Clément, François Guinochet, André Cadere.

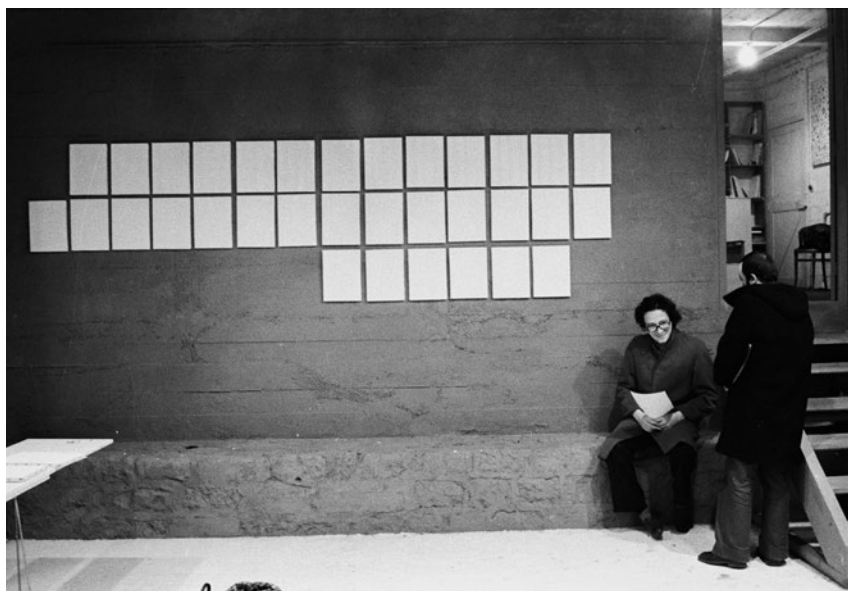
Gallery 7

In accordance with the proposed system of rotation, the show changes every day. We reveal the crucial role of context which every exhibition imposes on the artist. It is a mill for grinding artworks, annihilating them. We stress that ours is not different from other exhibitions,

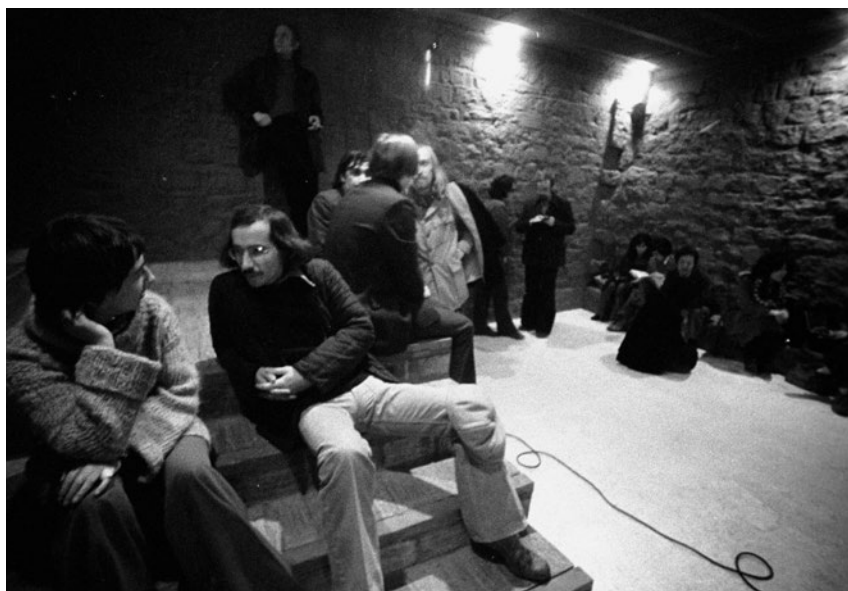
18.3



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but exactly the same. With the difference that the artists know beforehand.

Gallery 10

Vincent D'Arista, an artist from Naples brought to my attention by Lucio Amelio, uses donkey-driven carts to carry several tonnes of old rubber tyres to the top of Vesuvius. He sets the tyres on fire. Billows of smoke, a panic, hundreds flee, certain it's an explosion of the volcano.

In another project, he adds a fifth lion to the four marble lions on Piazza dei Martiri in Naples.

D'Arista plays a "shot in the dark" game with me. He has me order pneumatic hammers, hydraulic rams and the like from a tool rental store. It's clear that his "shot in the dark" means the physical destruction of my gallery. But I keep it cool and order everything he wants. He ultimately chickens out and shows my picture captioned: "Anka Ptaszkowska, director of Gallery 10."

Gallery 23

A Loop Seen as a Line, a film screening and exhibition by the Japanese artist Takahiko Iimura. For hours, sitting still, we watch tiny vibrations of stretched film stock. Cultivating boredom. Defying the "society of the spectacle."

Gallery 34

Exhibition by Carl Andre: *1 Segment Hexagon, 2 Segment Hexagon, 3 Segment Hexagon*. A beautiful installation on the gallery's white floor. Gifted by Andre to the ultra-left periodical *POUR écrire la liberté*, edited by Isi Fiszman. Acquired by Pontus Hultén for the



collection-in-the-making of the Centre Pompidou, despite a concentrated assault by international dealers who swarm to Paris to talk him out of the idea. Strong market pressure, but fortunately, in Hultén's case, ineffective.

Gallery 35 – Hiroshi Yokohama; Gallery 36 – Bertrand Wicquart

In 1976, my gallery goes bankrupt and we lose the basement at Rue Campagne-Première. A real estate agent, Claura's friend, lets us use for a month a several-story building at Boulevard Sébastopol. We stage exhibitions by Hiroshi Yokoyama and Bertrand Wicquart on the upper floors, linked by elevator. It's a big Paris event. In the footsteps of New York, the first "gallery-house" in Paris. A swansong in the grand style. The unexpected visit of Tamás Szentjóby, who in 1967 had illegally crossed the border to take part in Kantor's *Panoramic Sea Happening*. Upon his appearance, a fire breaks out in the borrowed building. Horror. But the firemen manage to put it out without any major damage. Years later, I learn about Szentjóby's mysterious ability to start fires at will.

19. Gallery fringe in the 1970s

I meet Gérard Lebovici, a major patron of Guy Debord and the Situationist International, owner of the publishing house Champ Libre. Because it's far too early for "my" artists, the sale of their works through my gallery is a rare occurrence. The gallery's existence is greatly supported by Stazewski, who, with his characteristic

19.1



magnanimity, gifts me his paintings and even exempts me from the resale tax. But still I'm constantly on a desperate hunt for funding. And then one day Gérard Lebovici himself walks in. He inquires with me to find out what we are about. I tell him about our debunking agenda, and I can feel that we're on the same wavelength. It's complete rapport until the last question, which he asks as a pure formality: What is my political involvement? I can still hear my answer that after the experience of real socialism I want nothing to do with politics, and I see disappointment in his eyes.

Even if in an erratic manner that is sometimes characteristic for me, I still involve myself, and the gallery too, in efforts to support the ultra-left *POUR écrire la liberté*, a periodical run by Isi Fizman. Isi is a well-known collector of avant-garde art, of Marcel Broodthaers, Hanne Darboven, Panamarenko, and Joseph Beuys, among others. He comes from an Antwerp family of diamond cutters, their roots in Łódź, Poland. Because of his pro-Palestinian sympathies, Isi is banned from visiting Israel. He appeals to artists to donate works to support *POUR*. Donations flood in, because artists at the time liked to consider themselves ordinary workers. Therefore, the growing prices of their works throw them into moral discomfort. With Isi, we begin a joint adventurous sale of the donated works. We slip through the Swiss border in a van full of undeclared "goods," with Isi's dog (who had access to all museums of the world) by the steering wheel. In Venice, we rather insolently propose to Peggy Guggenheim to stage a show at her foundation. Unbelievably, we get a free stall at the first FIAC in Paris and at Art Basel. We stand silently under Beuys's work *Dürer, ich führe persönlich Baader und Meinhof über die Documenta V*. Baader and Meinhof are, of course, terrorists sought by the police. The sale of Carl Andre's work for the Centre

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Pompidou collection (see Chapter 18 above) is one of our financial successes.

20. François Guinochet

Let me briefly reveal his extraordinary story. Due to Guinochet's incredible modesty and discretion, hardly anyone knows it.

In 1967, at age 18, he organizes at his home in Lyon the world's first exhibition of Daniel Buren and of the group Buren, Mosset, Parmetier and Toroni. He takes part, as an artist, in the first exhibitions of conceptual art staged by Michel Claura and Seth Siegelaub. He is politically deeply committed, close to the Situationist International. One day he resigns his status as an avant-garde artist and goes to Place du Tertre in Paris, where he paints for tourists, and paints well too. The purpose of this operation is a political one: to compare the avant-garde art market with that of kitschy painting. But Guinochet's views of Montmartre, in the "moderne" style, as he calls it, unexpectedly become a hit. He is able to co-finance our numbered gallery, builds up an excellent library, supports and collects selected artists. Raymond Hains is probably top of his list. Together we launch out into the work of André du Colombier and later Rachel Poignant. Guinochet has an infallible eye for art. If he had a commercial instinct, he would probably have been the greatest dealer of his time. But what he values above anything else is his freedom, in other words: unselfishness. These days, together again, we organize *soirées privées* in Paris.

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21. Michel Claura

Michel Claura, a renowned 1970s art critic, who organized the first exhibitions of conceptual art, including discussions with Ian Wilson. To this day we remain closely in touch and work together whenever Michel has time and feels like it. I could talk about him for a long time. But let me just quote one sentence by Anne Tronche: “Because of Michel Claura, we thought for a long time that Daniel Buren can’t write.”

22. Vitrine pour l’Art Actuel

Mid-1970s: the avant-garde in an artistic and intellectual crisis. The war declared by conceptual artists against the art market under the battle cry of “Art is not a product” ends in a fiasco, that is, a financial success. Ambitious galleries, like Wide White Space, shut down. In the sterile white of the other ones, equally sterile shows take place. New Figuration, Trans-Avant-Garde, Bad Painting march triumphantly onto the stage.

Our belief that galleries no longer matter leads to the idealistic conclusion that they will cease to exist. With Michel Claura and Brigitte Niegel, we open Vitrine pour l’Art Actuel next to the emerging Centre Pompidou. It is the first alternative space in Paris: a bookstore specializing in “artists’ books,” exhibition catalogues, independent international art periodicals. Irregular artistic events take place here, but not exhibitions. In

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the eponymous display window, photographs from exhibitions worldwide. An *à volonté* buffet. A memorable event: a concert by Jeffrey Lohn and Glenn Branca's New York rock band Theoretical Girls. With indescribable vehemence, the band shout out their hatred of the art world. A big event, a dense crowd, the street barred off. Order is kept by pimps from bars we are friends with, and they act with true seriousness and enthusiasm. We are in Rue Quincampoix, famed for prostitution. It remains so until the day when artists flocking in to be close to the Beaubourg museum write a petition to the mayor, complaining that the streetwalkers make it difficult for them to work.

23. Échange Entre Artistes 1931–1982, Pologne–USA

In 1981, working with Pontus Hultén, former director of the Musée national d'art moderne and a cofounder of the Centre Pompidou, later director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, I organize a direct exchange of artworks between Polish and American artists. Endorsed by Henryk Stażewski, a historical precedent for it was the "a.r." group's First International Collection of Modern Art, created with artists' donations for the museum founded in the 1930s in Łódź. Here, too, it is not institutions, not museums, but artists themselves who set the terms of the exchange. The Polish collection goes to MOCA, the US one to Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. Both "meet" in a joint show at the Paris



Museum of Modern Art in 1982. In Poland, it's martial law. The country sealed off from the world. The Polish artists' works arrive in Paris illegally with a shipment of medicines. Asked why an exchange, I reply: "To take money out of the game."

24. Stażewski—Buren— Krasiński

Their long-time association is an extremely rare example of community between artists resulting directly from their artistic attitudes and agendas. In spite of political and geographical distances, with no institutional support, beyond any self-interest.

1970: a meeting between Buren and Krasiński in Paris. In Buren's studio, Krasiński sticks a piece of blue tape on Buren's work *Bandes verticales blanches et noires de 8,7 cm de large*, horizontally, at the precise height of 130 centimetres. It's their joint work now. The following day, Krasiński sticks blue tape on the display windows of Rive Gauche Gallery and in the courtyard of the Paris Museum of Modern Art, accompanied by Buren, Erik Veaux, and myself.

1974: Stażewski invites Buren to stage an exhibition at his studio. Gallery 21 "sponsors" the event. Buren's work *in situ* on the windows of the studio and of Repassage Gallery during a Krasiński exhibition. Accompanied by his friends, critics Michel Claura and René Denizot, Buren's visit is ripe with events. Exhibition opening in Stażewski's studio. A debate with members

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of the Warsaw art scene at Repassage Gallery. The vivid memory of huge platters of crayfish and chilled vodka served at the Pod Samsonem restaurant in soda bottles before the magic hour of 1 p.m. when liquor could officially be sold in communist Poland.

1985: Stażewski invites Buren to participate in *Dialog*, an exhibition at Stockholm's Moderna Museet. Buren builds *Cabane éclatée n° 9*, on the walls of which he displays Stażewski's paintings. *Cabane n° 9* is then shown in Stażewski's exhibition at the Polish Institute in Paris in 1997. In a conversation with me published in the catalogue of that exhibition, Buren talks beautifully about his friendship with Stażewski, how in response to the invitation to Warsaw he built the hut to receive Stażewski's paintings. Today, *Cabane éclatée n° 9* is on permanent display at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź as a counterpart to Strzeński's Neoplastic Room.

1993: Buren comes to Warsaw and for the centenary of Stażewski's birth recreates the 1974 works on the studio's windows. He also takes part in a festival focused around the work of Edward Krasiński, organized by Biblioteka Gallery, run by Stefan Szydłowski.

25. Edzio Krasiński—Hommage à Henryk Stażewski

Edward Krasiński's exhibition *Hommage à Henryk Stażewski*, at Foksal Gallery in 1989, a few months after Stażewski's death.

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With this show, Krasieński provides answers to several questions. How to publicly exhibit a private place? Krasieński's answer: by taking from Stażewski's studio its photographic views and placing them next to real ones. How to replace Stażewski's paintings, of which only outlines in dust on the walls are left? Answer: with one's own work. How to make present a personally experienced absence? Answer: by concretizing the memory of someone powerfully enough to prevent it from becoming a reminiscence.

Krasieński proposes a precarious situation. He is fully aware of the risk he has taken. I've never seen such jitters as in Krasieński on our way to the opening. The situation arranged in the gallery borders on the miraculous, because the public accepts it as something natural. People intimate with Stażewski's studio have no doubt that here we find ourselves in it, or towards it.

26. Reconstructions

Reconstructions, or relocations. Relocations with the benefit of inventory. That's probably a better term than "exhibiting." Krasieński relocates the studio to his favourite café, Gruba Kaśka, to a butcher's shop, to the Zachęta National Gallery. At some point, the view of the studio from the door facing the corridor is cut into long strips. To make the relocation easier, we'd like to believe. But if we remember the re-enactment of Bruegel's *Land of Cockaigne* at the Zalesie Ball, we will discover here a genuine need to be in another time, another place. But probably not in the skin of another artist. But why not in his painting? Let's not forget that

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Krasiński in his youth drew and painted like the Old Masters. Perhaps in his courtly life he also took part in *tableaux vivants*.

Today, Krasiński's studio is the Avant-Garde Institute. A masterpiece of the art of conservation. And proof that for an institution—and an artistic institution at that—altruism can be a virtue. The Foksal Gallery Foundation carries out the complex, costly, and delicate work of preserving the space where Edward Krasiński lived and created on a daily basis. The place has been preserved so meticulously that dirt remains dirt, no longer being dirty. The terrace is being converted into an exhibition pavilion. Subtly dosed exhibitions and events are held here.

27. The principle of equality— *Principe d'égalité*

A phenomenon is based on an organic cooperation of contradictions: an aspiration to equality is dynamized by its opposite, and a constantly renewing hierarchy becomes a driving force of equality.

With Benoît Casas, the future founder of Éditions NOUS, I run a seminar under this title at the School of Fine Arts in Caen. We open the seminar with French students in 1993 at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź in a colloquium devoted to Władysław Strzemiński. The first sentence of the keynote speech is a quote from *Unism*: “Every square centimetre of the painting has the same value.” We trace and catalogue the egalitarian tendency

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in twentieth-century art history, without, of course, ignoring its social and political applications.

EQUAL ASCENT. A proposal by Mariusz Tchorek, whom I invited to participate in the seminar. Introducing the principle of equality into interpersonal relations. This collective experience of being in equality takes place at the most ceremonious place, the Lower Normandy Regional Council building. Over a dozen students take part. Tchorek organizes a space of encounter that precludes the creation of any hierarchy, and he is an attentive participant in the meeting. After eight hours, we leave the place with a feeling of unprecedented lightness.

28. André du Colombier

In *art press* in 1988, I called him provocatively (but was it only that?) a genius. He was certainly the only genuine Dadaist that I've met. Highly educated, from a family of philosophers versed in Deleuze's seminars, half-Romanian, born in Barcelona, secretive, living off nothing at the utter margins, uncompromising, surprising, haughty, arrogant towards people of social or artistic prestige, gentle towards all others. He made art everywhere and out of everything, as a gift or for stellar prices. Language is his privileged area: "*modéstie, compétence, efficacité*" (modesty, competency, efficacy). Words, sentences hastily written on coloured paper, arranging themselves into sequences of meanings overt and covert, surprisingly simple and so complex they are not always graspable. A demanding and exclusive art, but nonetheless an "art for all." Individual and shared by few—an attempt to transform the world.

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One day du Colombier went to a police station in Paris to lodge a complaint against the Museum of Modern Art. He was thrown out. He went to the next station, was thrown out again, and finally reached the Central Police Station, whence he was sent away to the madhouse. He managed to get out following the intervention of Pontus Hultén, director of the Musée national d'art moderne, which is not an innocent paradox. Du Colombier was never accepted by the Paris art world, which is a euphemism for the ostracism that he experienced and always responded to in his exclusive and aloof manner, with humour both sophisticated and offensive. To this day he has followers among those broadminded enough. Together with François Guinochet, we keep protecting his work from disregard and oblivion.

29. Raymond Hains

I never worked with Raymond Hains as I happened to work with Stazewski, Kantor, Krasiński, or du Colombier. Still, our relationship was more than just mutual sympathy and friendship. Hains was very fond of Kosakowski and greatly appreciated his work. During the launch of an exhibition of Kossakowski's photographs at Galéa Gallery in Caen, which belonged to Elvira Allerini, a taxi from Paris suddenly arrived, and to everyone's surprise, Hains stepped out of it. And one day he told me with his benevolently mocking smile: "*On va se marier, Eustache va être notre témoin*" (We are going to get married, Eustachy is going to be our witness).



30. Rachel Poignant

My personal and consistent commitment to the art of Rachel Poignant stems from the fact that she keeps returning to questions that we considered fundamental back in the 1960s and 1970s.

For example, the term “work.” In the contemporary art world, it means its result, that is the artwork. In her practice, Poignant restores to the word “work” its original meaning as a verb. The subject of her work is work itself. And this isn’t a petty tautological game. It means totally committing your whole life to the artistic process, not its result. This is work without prospects for a final product, selfless and demanding. The reward is quality. And the matter of price? It is not about the price paid to the artist, but the price that the artist pays. In Poignant’s case, it is very high; it contains the mystery of her sculptures’ quality.



31. NOUS

Run by Benoît Casas and Patrizia Atzei, the publishing house Éditions NOUS has already published over 100 volumes of philosophy and poetry. It publishes authors whom I appreciate and resonate closely with, although I don’t fully share the NOUS team’s radical political commitment. With Benoît Casas, I shared the same view of art and society in the seminar that we jointly taught, titled *Principe d’égalité*. Éditions NOUS has also



published Eustachy Kossakowski's photo book *6 mètres avant Paris* and a monograph of Rachel Poignant. Together we organize my Paris *soirées*. We really have a close relationship.

32. The place of the avant-garde

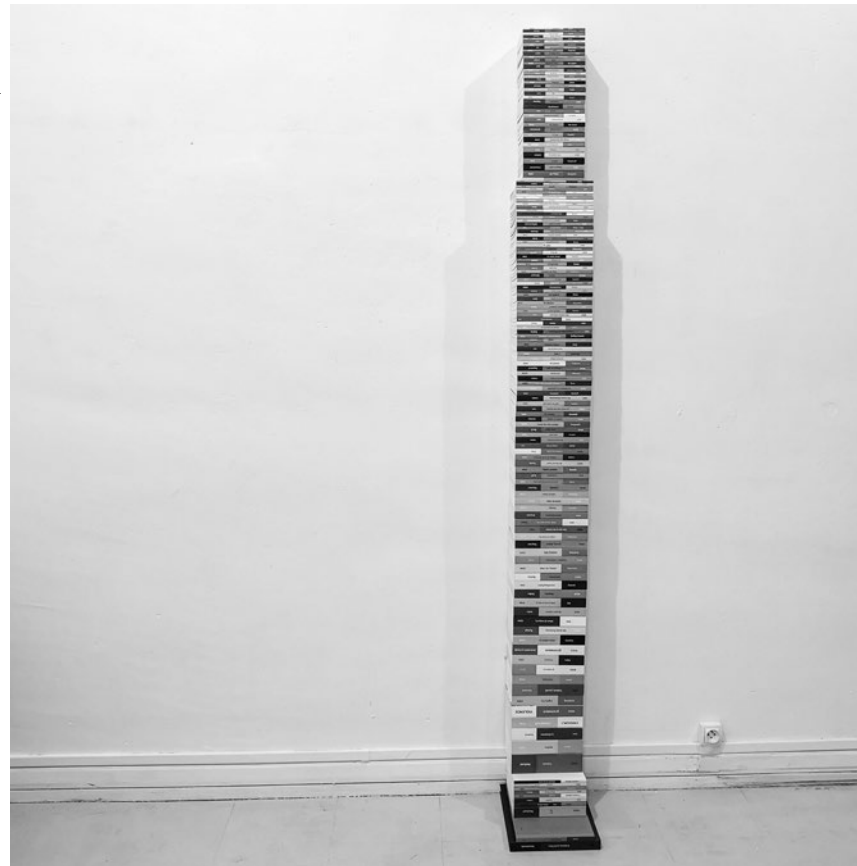
I don't think it would be bombastic to say that there is no place for the avant-garde in today's society. Its end was announced long ago. On that occasion, it was criticized for directivity, historical determinism, commitment to the idea of progress and so on. Let me start with a question: does the fact that we don't proclaim the avant-garde's manifestations in current life mean that it's dead? I'm in no hurry to come up with an answer.

But I will answer the question of what was the historical Avant-Garde's true enemy. It was the FALSEHOOD in the social, political, and religious realm and thus in the collective consciousness. Yet the place where the avant-garde of recent years has sought to make a presence is public space. A space filled with falsehood as tightly as never before. So is there a place for the avant-garde in the present-day world? I will leave aside the too-difficult question with a too-easy answer: "Can art still be a territory for the avant-garde?" The avant-garde's last manifestations that I know of were individual attempts to wrench moments of anti-falsehood out of public space (Krzysztof Niemczyk, André du Colombier). Those, I repeat, were individuals' attempts, paid for with their own life. They are closely connected with what I consider to be the last aspiration of avant-garde art: an individual refusal of power. In

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31.1



the personal realm and the public one. Thus is born the chance that the personal will feed through into the sphere of the collective. The condition of this transformation: ADEQUACY, an integral part of the principle of EQUALITY.

32.1



Photo captions

2.1

From left: Mirosław Derecki, Ewa Jaro-szyńska, Modest Misztal, Anka Ptaszkowska, Włodzimierz Borowski and Stanisław Bońkowski, Kazimierz Dolny, c. 1960, MSN Warsaw

2.2

Włodzimierz Borowski, c. 1960, MSN Warsaw

2.3

From left: Henryk Stażewski and Jerzy Ludwiński at the opening of a show by the Zamek Group at Krzywe Koło Gallery, 1958, photo Tadeusz Rolke, (c) Tadeusz Rolke, Agencja Gazeta

3.1

Włodzimierz Borowski (centre) during his *Second Syncretic Show* at Foksal Gallery, Warsaw, 1966, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

3.2

French critic Gérald Gassiot-Talabot and Anka Ptaszkowska at Foksal Gallery, 1969, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

3.3

Audiovisual show *5x* (composer Zygmunt Krauze and artists Grzegorz Kowalski, Henryk Morel and Cezary Szubartowski) at Foksal Gallery, 1966, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

4.1

Anka Ptaszkowska and Mariusz Tchorek during "scary expedition," 1966, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

4.2

Anka Ptaszkowska and Mariusz Tchorek during "scary expedition," 1966, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

4.3

Mariusz Tchorek during "scary expedition," 1966, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

5.1

Henryk Stażewski in his and Mewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska's studio, Warsaw, 1966, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

5.2

Maria Ewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska, 1950s, photo Irena Jarosińska, (c) Irena Jarosińska, Karta Centre Archive

5.3

Henryk Stażewski and Mewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska on the beach in Sopot, second half of the 1950s, courtesy of the artist's estate

5.4

Marek Piasecki, Miron Białoszewski's Theatre (Słowacki, *Kordian*), 1961, MSN Warsaw

6.1

Alina Oxińska, Anka Ptaszkowska's mother, in front of the house in Zalesie, undated photo, private archive of Anka Ptaszkowska

6.2

Left to right: Hala Ptaszkowska and Anka Ptaszkowska in the house in Zalesie, early 1960s, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

7.1

Edward Krasieński in the house in Zalesie, first half of the 1960s, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

7.2

Henryk Stażewski (left) and Edward Krasieński in front of the house in Zalesie, 1960s, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

7.3

Anka Ptaszkowska in the house in Zalesie, first half of the 1960s, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

8.1

Tadeusz Kantor, *The Letter*, Warsaw, 1967, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

8.2

Tadeusz Kantor, *Cricotage*, Warsaw, 1965, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

8.3

Tadeusz Kantor, *Panoramic Sea Happening*, 1967, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

9.1

Zalesie Ball "Farewell to Spring," 1968, photo by Jacek Maria Stokłosa

9.2

Zalesie Ball "Farewell to Spring," 1968, photo by Jacek Maria Stokłosa

9.3

Zalesie Ball "Farewell to Spring," 1968, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

10.1

Krzysztof Niemczyk, street action *Municipal Waste Bins*, undated photo, MSN Warsaw

10.2

Krzysztof Niemczyk, *Portrait in Makeup*, undated photo, MSN Warsaw

11.1

Anka Ptaszkowska reading Tadeusz Kantor's manifesto *Dividing Line* during the exhibition *Living Currency* (curator Pierre Bal-Blanc) at Dramatyczny Theatre, Warsaw, organized by the MSN Warsaw, 2010, photo Jan Smaga, (c) Jan Smaga

13.1

From left: Mieczysław Dymny, Stanisław Szczepański and Tomasz Wawak during the action *We Are Not Sleeping* at the Golden Grape Symposium in Zielona Góra, 1969, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

13.2

From left: Zbigniew Gostomski, Krzysztof Niemczyk and Anka Ptaszkowska as the "Permanent Jury" during the action *We Are Not Sleeping* at the Golden Grape Symposium in Zielona Góra, 1969, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

13.3

From left: unknown, Mieczysław Dymny, Krzysztof Niemczyk and Anka Ptaszkowska during the action *We Are Not Sleeping* at the Golden Grape Symposium in Zielona Góra, 1969, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

14.1

From left: Tadeusz Kantor, Anka Ptaszkowska, Wiesław Borowski, Edward Krasieński and Zbigniew Gostomski on the terrace of Henryk Stażewski's studio in Warsaw, 1970, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

15.1, 15.2, 15.3

Eustachy Kossakowski, *6 mètres avant Paris*, 1971, MSN Warsaw

16.1

Anka Ptaszkowska and Eustachy Kossakowski in Paris, 1971, MSN Warsaw

17.1, 17.2

Daniel Buren's exhibition *Invitation to Read as an Indication of What Is to Be Seen* at the Yvon Lambert Gallery in Paris, 1970, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

18.1

Anka Ptaszkowska and Daniel Buren during the opening of Dan Graham's exhibition at Gallery 17, 17 rue Campagne-Première, Paris, 1974, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

18.2

Anka Ptaszkowska installing Carl Andre's work *4 Segment Hexagon* at Gallery 34, 17 rue Campagne-Première, Paris, 1976, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

18.3

From left: Michel Claura, André Cadere, Pia Denizot and René Denizot during Jacques Charlier's opening at Galerie 18, 17 rue Campagne-Première, Paris, 1974, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

18.4

Michel Claura (first from left) at Bertrand Wicquart's exhibition at Gallery 25, 17 rue Campagne-Première, Paris, 1975, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

18.5

Opening of Takahiko Iimura's exhibition at Gallery 23, 17 rue Campagne-Première, Paris, 1974, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

18.6

Anka Ptaszkowska during the opening of Goran Trbuljak's exhibition at Gallery 28, 17 rue Campagne-Première, Paris, 1975, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

19.1

Shared booth of Gallery 1-36 and the journal *POUR écrire la liberté* at the FIAC art fair in Paris, 1976, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

19.2

Anka Ptaszkowska and Léo Bond at the gallery at 17 rue Campagne-Première with Joseph Beuys's work *Dürer, ich führe persönlich Baader und Meinhof über die Documenta V*, Paris, 1976, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

19.3

Anka Ptaszkowska and Isi Fizman with his dog Pauline in Venice, 1976, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

- 20.1
From left: François Guinochet and André du Colombier with du Colombier's work Untitled (*Bye, buy*) at a café in the Drouot district, Paris, 1988, courtesy of François Guinochet
- 21.1
Anka Ptaszkowska and Michel Claure during the opening of the exhibition *Actualité d'un bilan*, 1972, Paris, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw
- 22.1 Concert by the group Theoretical Girls with members (from left) Glenn Branca, Jeffrey Lohn and Margaret De Wys, at Vitrine pour l'Art Actuel, 51 rue Quincampoix, Paris, 1978, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw
- 22.2
Michel Claure and Philippe Sers at Vitrine pour l'Art Actuel, 51 rue Quincampoix, Paris, 1978, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw
- 23.1
During installation of the exhibition *Échange entre artistes 1931–1982, Pologne–USA. Une expérience muséographique* at l'ARC—Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1982, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw
- 23.2
View of the exhibition *Échange entre artistes 1931–1982, Pologne–USA. Une expérience muséographique* at l'ARC—Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris; from left, works by Stanisław Dróżdż, Włodzimierz Borowski and Zygmun Targowski, Paris, 1982, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw
- 24.1
Henryk Stażewski (left) and Daniel Buren in the house in Zalesie, 1974, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw
- 24.2
Daniel Buren's work *Cabane éclatée no 9* at the exhibition *Dialog* at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, 1985, MSN Warsaw
- 25.1
Edward Krasieński's exhibition *Hommage à Henryk Stażewski* at Foksal Gallery, Warsaw, 1989, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw

- 25.2
Edward Krasieński's exhibition *Hommage à Henryk Stażewski* at Foksal Gallery, Warsaw, 1989, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw
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Edward Krasieński in his studio, 1993, MSN Warsaw
- 26.2
Exhibition by Edward Krasieński at a butcher's shop, Warsaw, 1994, photo Tadeusz Rolke, (c) Tadeusz Rolke
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Anka Ptaszkowska with students during artistic action *Assiette commune* [Common plate] at the École régionale des Beaux-Arts de Caen la Mer, Caen, 1992, MSN Warsaw
- 28.1
André du Colombier in François Guinochet's apartment during du Colombier's exhibition *Modestie, compétence, efficacité*, Paris, 1987, MSN Warsaw
- 28.2
André du Colombier, Untitled (*Stravinsky's Piano*), 1990, photo Eustachy Kossakowski, MSN Warsaw
- 29.1
Raymond Hains, undated photo, MSN Warsaw
- 30.1
Rachel Poignant during the opening of the exhibition *Generations* at Królikarnia in Warsaw, 2017, photo François Guinochet
- 30.2
From left: Anka Ptaszkowska, Daniel Buren and Rachel Poignant during Poignant's exhibition in Ptaszkowska's apartment in Paris, 2015, courtesy of Rachel Poignant
- 31.1
Twentieth anniversary of NOUS publishing house at Anka Ptaszkowska's apartment in Paris, 2019, courtesy of Benoit Casas
- 32.1
Eustachy Kossakowski, Warsaw, 1960s, MSN Warsaw

Disclose the Conditions and Situations*

To capture the phenomenon of Anka Ptaszkowska in the format of an exhibition seems at first glance a daunting task. Her uncompromising defence of freedom, autonomy and uninhibitedness is manifest in her attachment to events that are accidentally beautiful rather than planned. Anka strongly advocates transgression, nonchalantly abandoning all confirmations of status. She pursues experimentation over dull rationality. She combines this attitude with her own definition of the avant-garde as uncompromising freedom of thought—against all limitations, including social and economic ones. This no doubt accounts for her fascination with individual artists who prize their own creative autonomy above all else: from the French conceptualist André du Colombier, who opens this exhibition, the outsider Edward Krasieński, the scandalmonger Krzysztof Niemczyk and the forgotten artist Mewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska, to the sculptor Rachel Poignant, whom she discovered, and radical artists such as Tadeusz Kantor, Henryk Stażewski and Daniel Buren. This impulse has also meant that in her activities she often tested the limits of institutional resilience, which sometimes caused conflicts and splits. But she also initiated rare events, such as the first radically conceptual gallery she founded in Paris in 1971, or the project *Exchange Between Artists 1931–1982, Poland/USA: Museographical Experience*, with an aim worthy of the founding collection of works for Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź.

Anka has left her own position in the art world understated. She has specialized in radicalizing attitudes, looking for a sharp retort and the most brilliant punchline. She has been “complicit” in numerous artistic undertakings and the co-author of manifestos. She's a gallery owner convinced that art is not a commodity, and prepared to actively defend this view. A mentor who hates imitators. An extreme individualist who finds fulfilment only in joint activities. An insightful art critic, looking for kinship of thought beyond borders and political divisions. For her, risk is an essential element of creation, and fun, mischief and riot are an indispensable part of life.

* Quote from the manifesto in the *Programmatic Text of the First Exhibition of the Foksal Gallery* (1966)

In Anka's belief in the possibility, or even the necessity, of putting individual freedom first, there is a liberating force that orders her world. It allows her to always set a course for selfless actions, to prefer process over result, meaning over object, and shared existence over dogma.

The clash of such an elemental force—the fluid definitions but also the surgical precision of Anka's views on art—with the need for enclosure within the format of an exhibition, could not occur without collision. The contemporary professionalization of artistic life, the reinforcement of the rituals of accessibility and literalness of message, the complete lack of expectations that an exhibition can change anything in life, are the polar opposite of the experiences Anka gained first in the late 1950s in the Zamek group, then in the 1960s at the Foksal Gallery, and in the 1970s running independent spaces in Paris. Her huge commitment and enthusiasm in working with or against artists were focused on shifting meanings, tearing out a piece of the impossible. That is why undermining the bureaucratic exhibition routine, stripping the exhibition of design, relying on documentary material deliberately mixing art and life, are the foundations of the exhibition *Anka Ptaszowska: Case by Case*. The show is grounded in a commingling of orders: recognized museum works and ordinary everyday events. It seeks to snap us out of our lethargy of reception and restore the vigour of the era of the living avant-garde, when each exhibition meant a twist in the action and each individual gesture conveyed meaning. The enormous intuition and care put in by curator Maria Matuszkiewicz and exhibition designer Agnieszka Tarasiuk in rendering this unique state of “life in art” cannot be overestimated. Both have worked closely with Anka for years.

I got to know Anka when working on the book *Tadeusz Kantor: From the Archive of the Foksal Gallery* (1998), which was an attempt to disclose the conditions and situations guiding the founders of the gallery, and particularly the history of their conflict and breakup. Anka's certainty that the impossible can be demanded quickly became infectious. When the Avant-Garde Institute was established in 2007 in the former studio of Henryk Stażewski and Edward Krasiński, it seemed like a nearly impossible undertaking. Building a pavilion and

museum on the terrace of the artists' apartment required the consent of all 120 tenants of the apartments in the building. Anka and I visited them all, not doubting for a moment that we would bring the residents around to the construction of an extravagant institution on the roof of their apartment building. If it weren't for that experience—getting up to mischief together for the sake of the avant-garde—I'm not sure whether I would ever have thrown myself with the same unflagging confidence into such life-altering ventures as building the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Thus I'm thrilled that visitors to the exhibition will be met by the voice of Anka, recorded and commenting “live” on the events presented at the show. In this way, we will all have the opportunity to make personal contact with Anka, and this can inspire us to do things of which we dare not dream.

Joanna Mytkowska

Anka Ptaszkowska: Case by Case

Of the nature of her engagement in art, Anka Ptaszkowska, the protagonist of the exhibition, says: “Everything I did was grounded in the present and was of a one-off character. My integral connection with art—although interrupted, as every now and then I rejected it ‘for good’—was not professional. Professionalism was and is my enemy.”

Anka Ptaszkowska was born in 1935 in Warsaw. She is a major figure on the Polish and French artistic scene, where she operates simultaneously as critic, gallerist, organizer of exhibitions and initiator of encounters, but first and foremost as the partner of numerous artists. She has always placed experimentation and adventure above pragmatic aims. Her distaste for rigid social roles and conventional methods of functioning accounts for the fleeting nature of the initiatives she undertakes. This discontinuity in her professional life contrasts with her long-term and total engagement in the creative work of the artists near to her. Art and the people who make it are in equal measure the subject of her engagement.

Among the artists she supports are those known in art history, as well as equally fascinating figures whose connections with art have been short-lived or “free.” There are also artists functioning on the margins of society and the art world, such as Krzysztof Niemczyk and André du Colombier. Their unconditional pursuit of freedom is close to Ptaszkowska’s anarchist attitude.

In 1966 she cofounded the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw along with a group of critics and artists, and jointly shaped the gallery’s programme until 1970. She drafted manifestos, and cooperated with and befriended artists Tadeusz Kantor, Edward Krasiński and Henryk Stażewski. This group of friends also pursued an intense social and artistic life in the studio of Henryk Stażewski and Mewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska, who served as links between the younger generation and the art of the pre-war avant-garde, and in the home of Anka Ptaszkowska and Edward Krasiński in Zalesie Górne. The contrast between the experimental agenda of the gallery,

which in manifestos and actions undermined the conventional frame of art, and the reality closely monitored by the communist regime, disclosed the boundaries of artistic freedom and led to conflict within the gallery and the break-up of the group.

In the early 1970s Ptaszkowska and photographer Eustachy Kossakowski moved to Paris, where they befriended artist Daniel Buren and critic Michel Claura, despite their political differences. Together with them, and thanks to her new contacts, she founded two experimental institutions: the conceptual Gallery 1–36 and the alternative site *Vitrine pour l’Art Actuel*, comprising a bar and a bookstore specializing in artists’ books. Ptaszkowska also launched the wide-ranging project *Exchange Between Artists 1931–1982, Poland/USA: Museographical Experience*, which resulted in the donation of works by American artists to Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź and works of Polish artists to the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. In her Paris apartment, she organizes meetings and exhibitions, assisting young artists—much as once upon a time Henryk Stażewski and Mewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska supported her and her friends.

Anka Ptaszkowska remains faithful to the ideal of human equality professed by Stażewski. As a warrior, and sometimes indeed a brawler, in line with the demands of Tadeusz Kantor, she often and nearly everywhere lays down a dividing line, and is “against something.” The list of enemies is long and open-ended, and includes such targets as professionalism, bureaucracy and design. The driving force for her activities, just as strong as her tendency to enter into conflict, is the huge enthusiasm with which she infects her environment. She can enlist people she encounters in the most surprising ventures, operating in line with the principle “If we reject the impossible, only the possible remains.”

The exhibition *Anka Ptaszkowska: Case by Case* comprises four layers: scenario, works, documents, and sound installation. The axis of the exhibition is the scenario for an autobiographical film in 32 chapters, written by Ptaszkowska in 2016 and now published in the catalogue. The selection of works and archival documents for each chapter of the scenario

discloses both the official and the private dimension of this history. The overall exhibition is supplemented by a sound installation by Michał Libera using passages from archival recordings and discussions with the protagonist of the exhibition. Executed with fidelity to Anka's principles, the show doesn't close off the story, but leaves room for contradictions integral to this figure. The mass of stories, characters, works, documents and sounds encountered in the exhibition convey the intensity of her activity.

Maria Matuszkiewicz

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Thanks to Dan Graham for the title “ANKA-WOMAN-BIRD.”

Never would I have given this title to an exhibition that might seem to be mine, for the following reasons:

- Its pretentious ring, on first but also second thought
- The inclusion of the word “WOMAN.” In the wake of that irritating fashion which all-too-facilely claims continuity with feminism, I would not permit myself to brandish this word in an attempt to elicit approval from the ladies in the audience.

But when it is you, Dan, who comes up with the title for my exhibition *Anka-Woman-Bird*, in memory of an ancient legend, I abandon all misgivings and find great beauty in your coinage. Even more so, when it fends off immediate graspability.

I thank you for this, just as I thanked you for the title of my only book: *I believe in freedom, but my name is not Beethoven*.

When I heard that Dan died, on 19 January 2022, it was some of the saddest news I have ever received.

THANKS TO:

HENRYK STAŻEWSKI, for my youth, which I was fortunate to spend in his studio. For his lesson in human equality, of which he set the best example. For the generosity that characterized the circle he formed with MEWA, which we experienced daily.

MEWA-MARIA EWA ŁUNKIEWICZ-ROGOYSKA, because she was a real lady, intelligent and loving. And for her love of France, which she instilled in me.

ALINA OXIŃSKA, my mother, for the wisdom in her madness

IRENA JURGIELEWICZOWA, for what she could prove to be and for the role she played in the early artistic, and non-artistic, endeavours of my youth

PROFESSOR JAN ŻABIŃSKI, DIRECTOR OF THE WARSAW ZOO, for mercilessly correcting my first articles

TADEUSZ KANTOR, for THE HELL OF THE AVANT-GARDE which he helped me cross, for the realms of the IMPOSSIBLE he allowed me to sense, and for the only live experience of my life in THEATRE

MARIA STANGRET-KANTOR, for the good and the bad

WŁODZIMIERZ BOROWSKI and JERZY LUDWIŃSKI, for the first steps we took together and their dire consequences

JACEK WOŹNIAKOWSKI, for imparting to me his faith in the validity of individual revolt, even a revolt as innocent as coloured stockings

MIRON BIAŁOSZEWSKI, for being

BOGUSŁAW CHOIŃSKI, ditto

EDWARD KRASIŃSKI, for wanting to be my husband and for what MARCEL ANDINO VELEZ had in mind when he said “Edzio was a saint”

EUSTACHY KOSSAKOWSKI, for everything

MARIUSZ TCHOREK, for his creative thinking and unique understanding of the most demanding artistic endeavours—like those of Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński

ERIK VEAUX, for the precision and lightness of touch (which rarely go together) of his translations into French, and for his unfailing generosity

CÉDRIC FAUQ, for his openness and assistance in acceptance by CAPC Bordeaux of the exhibition *Anka au cas par cas*

KRYSTYNA DAJBOR, for her gift of unconditional acceptance

ZOŚKA PASZKOWSKA, my friend since I was young

FRANÇOIS GUINOCHET, because he is unlike anyone else

MICHEL CLAURA, for what he taught me, behind his ironic smile

DANIEL BUREN, who at least for a while restored my faith that art can change the world

ANDRÉ DU COLOMBIER, a constant artist who never backed down from anything

BENOÎT CASAS, for the courage of the “endless painting” and for Éditions NOUS

ISI FISZMAN, for endowing with humour an Old Testament prophet, of which he was himself the incarnate image

RACHEL POIGNANT, also for restoring to the word WORK its true meaning as a verb

CHARLES DUPLAIN, for the commitment and work he devoted to Eustachy Kossakowski’s photo archives and my various actions and publications

KOJI KAMOJI, because he doesn’t back down from anything

LAURENT PREXL, for his prescient action *Free Transport* in the early 1970s and for the continuation

KRZYSZTOF NIEMCZYK, for the “individual revolution” he led alone, against all odds

CEZARY WODZIŃSKI—the man and the philosopher

CEZARY WOŹNIAK and ANTON MARCZYŃSKI for their *complicité...*

JOANNA MYTKOWSKA and ANDRZEJ PRZYWARA, for their understanding of art tied to its consciousness. For the difficult choice they made one day, and for their loyalty.

ADAM SZYMCZYK, for his talent for seduction or, depending on his mood, deception. For the accuracy and scope of his undertakings.

ARTUR ŻMIJEWSKI, for his intransigence

PAWEŁ ALTHAMER, for his “quasi-classical” statues, which amazed me, and for reviving the “Zalesie Ball”

WILHELM SASNAL, because after viewing his exhibition, I wanted to view it again

JEFFREY LOHN, for the music he generously shares and for his resemblance to Franz Kafka. And for the song I hope he will sing for me.

AGNIESZKA TARASIUK, who, at her own expense, set out to save the honour of the institution—in other words, for her involvement in the Impossible

TOMASZ ŁUBIEŃSKI, for his lucidity, courage and humour

MAGDA OCHAŁ, for the same things + her exceptional kindness

ROBERT JAROSZ, for what he himself does not know

MARCEL ANDINO VELEZ, for his care + exceptional courage
to find his own unique path

MARIA MATUSZKIEWICZ, for the subtlety of her understand-
ing, and tough commitment. And for what used to be called
high morality.

HER MOTHER, DR JOANNA ROWIŃSKA, DR PAWEŁ
KULICKI, as well as my grandnephew DR TOMASZ JAXA-
CHAMIEC, for treatment and healing

ANIA MOLSKA, for the film about me—accurate and sensitive

My daughter PAULINA and my grandchildren TOSIA and
ALIK, for their presence

All the people I may have met in my life who CARED

Thanks to the following for their assistance in putting on the exhibition:
Paweł Althamer, Emma Blanchard, Daniel Buren, Benoît Casas, Adam Chmielowski, Michel Claura, Cédric Fauq, Florian Fouché, Barbara Gołębiowska, François Guinochet, Izabella Jagiełło, Koji Kamoji, Paulina Krasińska, Babette Mangolte, Colombe Marcasiano, Anna Molska, Luiza Nader, Piotr Nowicki, Rachel Poignant, Paweł Polit, Andrzej Przywara, Maria Rubersz, Antonina Sawicka, Aleksandra Ściegienna, Violetta e a, Iwona Wojciechowska, Waldemar Wojciechowski, Piotr Woźniakiewicz

Thanks to the following institutions:
CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges-Pompidou, Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Foksal Gallery, Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Foksal Gallery Foundation, Signum Foundation, French Institute in Warsaw, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, National Museum in Poznań, National Museum in Warsaw, National Museum in Wrocław, Zachęta National Gallery of Art

The first edition of the exhibition, entitled *Anka au cas par cas*, was held at CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux on 23 June – 31 December 2022. The curators were Sara Martinetti and Maria Matuszkiewicz, architectural design by Olivier Goethals, sound installation by Cengiz Hartlap, and the graphic design of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition was by Lucile Billot.

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition *Anka Ptaszkowska: Case by Case* at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 17 February – 23 April 2023. The exhibition is also accompanied by a screening of Anna Molska's film *Imagine There Is Truth in Art* (2023).

Artists: Paweł Althamer, Carl Andre, Włodzimierz Borowski, Daniel Buren, Michel Claura, André du Colombier, Vincent D'Arista, Florian Fouché, Dan Graham, François Guinochet, Raymond Hains, Takahiko Iimura, Izabella Jagiełło, Koji Kamoji, Tadeusz Kantor, Eustachy Kossakowski, Edward Krasiński, Maria Ewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska, Babette Mangolte, Peter Marcasiano, Krzysztof Niemczyk, Rachel Poignant, Henryk Stażewski, Violetta e a, Bertrand Wicquart, Hiroshi Yokoyama

Curator: Maria Matuszkiewicz
Exhibition design: Agnieszka Tarasiuk, Violetta e a
Sound installation: Michał Libera
Visual identity, graphic design of exhibition and catalogue:
Studio Full Metal Jacket / rh.plus
Exhibition production: Paweł Wójcik, in cooperation with Maja Łagocka, Anka Kobierska, Dominika Szatkowska
Catalogue: Maciej Kropiwnicki, Aleksandra Urbańska
Catalogue editing: Katarzyna Szotkowska-Beylin
English proofreading: Christopher Smith
Photo editing: Tomasz Kubaczyk
Cover image: Vincent D'Arista, *Anka Ptaszkowska, directrice de la Galerie 10*, 1973, courtesy of Anka Ptaszkowska
Translation from French: Anna Leyk
English translation: Christopher Smith, Marcin Wawrzyńczak
Ukrainian translation: Maria Redkva

Printing and binding: KNOW-HOW Piotr Kaczmarczyk, Modlnica

ISBN: 978-83-67598-03-3



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