

PERMAFO 1970–1981: Zbigniew Dłubak, Antoni Dzieduszycki, Natalia LL, Andrzej Lachowicz

Introduction

Objectivised and mechanical means of expression, supported by the assumed isomorphism of visual and mental signification (i.e., the uniformity of these two significations), served as a theoretical basis for the initial conception of the PERMAFO Gallery, set up in 1970. The aim was to reflect on the new, post-manual consciousness – confronting the audience with reality, instead of the artist's genius – which required new ways of formalising artistic ideas. This programme, as Aleksander Wojciechowski described it soon after in his influential book *Young Polish Painting 1944–1974* [*Młode malarstwo polskie 1944–1974*], “contributed to the wide popularisation of photography in Poland as an autonomous means of painting expression.” In this phase the artists departed from the ‘artistry’ of art, which had in their opinion lost its vitality, and began to draw inspiration from reality and non-artistic mass communication systems. According to the postulations of Andrzej Lachowicz, who set up the gallery, the point was to reject old visual and mental clichés, and to alter stereotypical systems of visual signification in order to substitute them with new ones, which would subsequently emerge as a result of PERMAFO's art practice. These new system-clichés were as follows: permanent art, consumer art, penetrating photography, artificial photography, concrete photography, post-consumer art, and extreme art.² Suggesting a non-hierarchical, permanent registration of visual experience, the PERMAFO artists provoked reflection on the strategies of visual manipulation, persuasion, and a peculiar visual grammar. Ways of perceiving and the impossibility of the complete perception of a work of art were also problematised when the artists focused on the analysis of the capacity and morphological nature of signs, used in mutations, multiplications, and sequences. By emphasising the dynamics of what was going on, the artists thought about the processual and verbal character of their visual penetrations; the mutations of the registered world and the transformations of the registering subject. The programme evolved shortly after, supported by an idea of art perceived as being at the extremities of consciousness, an idea connected to the artists' movement towards a subjective attitude. Due to the influence of conceptualism, the emphasis

of the initial phase was put on the categorical rejection of metalinguistic reflection and traditional media (painting, graphic art, sculpture), and in subsequent developments the emphasis was laid not only on the inevitable conflict between individual and society, but more specifically on the need to demonstrate this polarisation. Thus, the programme evolved primarily to reject subjectivity (which was by then associated with anachronistic Modernist painters and empty stereotypes concerning humanistic values), to later rebuild it, by reconsidering the role of the artist in the People's Republic of Poland, on the basis of the burgeoning mass media. Contradictions between collective, social and individual consciousness were perceived in the second phase as the driving forces of art. This late-1970s tendency to create an individual and private myth was highlighted by Marcin Lachowski, a researcher from Lublin, who noted this change in emphasis even in relatively similar works. For instance, Lachowicz's sequence of photographs *Shadows* from the early 1970s could be seen as a series of analytical actions encouraging the viewer to reconstruct the sequence of atomised photos, while the same shadows registered with the video camera illustrated ‘the insularity of an artistic experience, which is available solely to the artist.’³ What is more, as Lachowski observed, photography later ceased to be treated as an objective instrument for registering reality, and began to fulfil its role rather as a subjective tool of the subject-artist's actions, ensuring the permanence of registration thanks to the artist's corporeality. In the new conception of the relations between the camera and the artist, photography and film became, in Lachowski's opinion, a fragment of reality associated with the artist's presence, focusing on ‘the natural order’. This in turn was “a truly romantic act of structuring the surroundings through the artist's figure”⁴ – an attempt to resurrect and reconstruct the author. This romanticism was, of course, autoironic. The multi-faceted activities of the PERMAFO Gallery (the name being an abbreviation of the term ‘permanent photography’ or ‘permanent formalisation’) included exhibitions, actions, lectures, publications, performances, and shows. It touched upon the issues of impossibility, paradox, challenge, and conflict, rather than positively understood expression. As Lachowicz wrote, “it is probable that art is an attempt to determine the indeterminable.”⁵ The key notion of permanent art for the first period was also explained by Jerzy Ludwiński as “an attempt (different with each artist⁶) to show how reality grows in time and space, and how its subsequent stages can be eradicated from the present.”⁷



A photograph taken from Natalia and Andrzej Lachowicz's studio/flat in ul. Młodych Techników in Wrocław; photo by A. Lachowicz



Antoni Dzieduszycki

Tactics: The everyday

From the very beginning PERMAFO focused on the indexation of the everyday and the passage of time, freeing its gallery and organisational activities of the need for discipline, control, and the pressure to make the right choices. Paradoxically, the unstable situation in terms of its seat favoured such an approach – the gallery was located inside the town hall at 24 Main Market Square [Rynek Główny] in a small room of the Creative Unions' Club [Klub Związków Twórczych] in Wrocław, which meant that meetings, lectures, and shows were actually integrated as part of the club's palimpsest of activities, including food and beverage catering. It was this perceptible difference in tone that set it apart from its noble predecessors, such as Krzysztofory Gallery, the seat of the Cracow Group, or the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw. The meeting place was supposed to be a true space for listening, whose intention would not come down to one dominant sense, glossolalia, or 'auditory space', as Michel de Certeau would call it.⁸ A space where, instead of proposing the rule of an elite – and consequently reproducing the ideas of the authorities of the communist state – a free exchange of thought was suggested, and a poaching of books and ideas previously taken for granted. Grzegorz Dziamski pointed out that while independent galleries of the 1960s opposed official salons and traditional art, newer art-making spaces were emerging in an atmosphere of rebelliousness and opposed art institutions as such.⁹ A new place, which would have become an independent sanctuary of high art due to its durability and prestige, was not created; instead, the rather ugly existing space (quasi-Modernist, but with beetroot-coloured armchairs of dubious attractiveness) was transformed by oral spells. And what ensued was in accordance with de Certeau's description of the difference between a place and a space: a place on a map separates, a tale transcends; it consists of actions which constitute a game, it guarantees a place for the stranger instead of pushing him outside its limits. Temporality was visible in the decor – works hung on movable partitions, walls built ad hoc – and made everybody aware that this place where thoughts could cumulate would not last long; nothing was deeply-rooted here, nothing would constitute a lasting order or hierarchy. The introduction of movability and impermanence was just as important as setting temporary boundaries. It is worth noting that during her trip to the 9th Paris Biennial in 1975, Natalia LL



Zbigniew Dłubak

performed as 'Natalia LL-PERMAFO' (with *Consumer Art*) – 'PERMAFO' becoming a kind of ironic trademark, just like the pseudonym Natalia LL itself.

PERMAFO's spatial practices gave rise to a peculiar theatre, which justified risky social practices. It was practices like these which first caused the idea of removing local 'gods' (as de Certeau would reference) in the form of academic art authorities from Cracow or Lvov, but also from pre-war Berlin or Breslau – as such there shall be no comparisons to the mighty names held in the tradition of the global avant-garde, or even to *genius loci*. Many artists, some of them with horrible war experiences (Dłubak, born in 1921, survived the Mauthausen concentration camp as a boy; Lachowicz, born in 1939, survived Auschwitz as a child¹⁰), arrived as youngsters in a city given to Poland by the allies, a destroyed and foreign city. And they lived in the present, listened carefully to each other's stories, discovered their dreams, and changed the atmosphere of this strange land through tales, dreams, and pranks – soft means which created an arena for micro-actions. While the Communist authorities spoke for the owners (having regained territories to which they were entitled, their writing of the map showing a will to legitimise what they had and to ensure stability), the young artists saw a window of opportunity, only just opened. They benefited from the temporarily favourable conditions and the authorities' lack of supervision and control using various tactics, defined such as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus."¹¹ When these windows of opportunity were opened, they were able to organise exhibitions that could not be later turned into museum fetishes. If we refer to Louis Althusser's belief that the institutions of art are part and parcel of the state's ideological apparatus, then we must admit that PERMAFO was not an institution as Althusser defined it. Events organised by PERMAFO frequently lasted just a few hours in order to avoid the control of the bureaucratic state. As Łukasz Ronduda pointed out, the exhibition itself (beginning with PERMAFO's first exhibition *Intimate Sphere*, and an even earlier collective exhibition of the Lachowicz, Dłubak and Dzieduszycki entitled *Mutants* at the Mona Lisa Gallery [Galeria pod Moną Lisą] in 1971) was treated as a medium and a means of expression, blurring the boundaries between the 'exhibited works of art' (i.e., the artists' photographs), the exhibition scaffolding, the title display, and the critical text.¹² It is worth adding to Ronduda's remarks that an exhibition as a work of art involved a peculiar approach not only to the



Andrzej Lachowicz



Natalia LL

'exhibits', creating an arbitrary and temporary space, but also to the visitors, who became an integral part of such exhibitions, having to squeeze through narrow makeshift corridors, and feel the physical violation of boundaries between the works and themselves. The 'stage' sometimes took a cubic form (which could be interpreted as a kind of expressive postmodern variation of Friedrich Kiesler's *Raumbühne* from 1924), but at other times its form was open, partitioned, or even more complicated. Each stage defined in disparate ways the mutual multidimensional relations between art, space, and the viewer. In these thus arranged ad hoc spaces, surprising and improvised events took place, as well as performances or even quasi-operas (*Natalia!*, Belgrade 1975). In these ways art lost the 'splendid isolation' of the Modernist gallery and its role as a guardian of proper standards, resulting in the makeshift whole becoming a reality – an exchange of energy here and now, which could not be documented and exhibited in a museum, a conversation, a discussion, or even an exchange of thoughts. The corporeality of mutual relations, apart from its analytical and serious definition of art, was in fact full of youthful carelessness and playfulness. We must not forget that art – in the predominantly male art field of the 1970s – was like a bauble which one produced to show off 'taming the shrew' (the long-legged, ambitious intellectual). As one of the artists remembered: 'She knows the game and she is waiting patiently for the first show. And here it is. The goldfish is approaching the hook. On the hook hangs an unpretentious inscription: *Art*.'¹³ It is worth reminding here that it was thanks to the Lachowicz that a sexual revolution took place in Poland – when Herbert Marcuse's theses

on the one-dimensional man in repressive societies (both West and East) and the idea of holistic development fell on fertile soil in Wrocław, it was so important and so frequently repeated in the artists' texts that everything seemed to be echoing *Eros and Civilisation*. Both Marcuse and Lachowicz wanted art to be real, to be a part of reality, so that it would not end up in 'mausoleums and museums', as Marcuse used to say. George Melly, a participant of the 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll revolution in the West (also an art critic and jazzman, slightly older than them) termed such action *Revolt into Style*, with the artists being 'taste-makers'.

Although they all knew that their political opponent was simply stronger, each of the founders of PERMAFO was a poacher, determined to outmanoeuvre the enemy in order to reach places they were least expected: Zbigniew Dłubak was the editor of the monthly magazine *Fotografia* from 1953 to 1972 (losing his position after publishing Jan Bułhak's photography showing the entry of Polish troops to Vilnius under General Lucjan Żeligowski's command during the Polish-Soviet war¹⁴); Antoni Dzieduszycki worked in the Cultural Section of Polish Public Television;¹⁵ Andrzej Lachowicz had co-organised the Wrocław Drawing Triennial since 1968, and was Chairman of the Art Board in the Lower Silesian Association of Polish Artist Photographers. The Lachowicz and Dłubak's position was strong enough for Aleksander Wojciechowski – who was the curator of the Polonia pavilion at the Venice Biennale for many years – to attempt to show the photographs of all three of them in 1974.¹⁶ The attempt was unsuccessful, but his book *Young Polish Painting 1944–1974* (previously cited) finishes with PERMAFO; and it was the Lachowicz and their experiments that made Wojciechowski feel helpless because, as he wrote, being an art historian he found himself in the position of his inability to conclude the book.¹⁷

In spite of this all, the PERMAFO Gallery did not intend to monopolise the artistic life in the city, for there was a surprisingly high number of such destabilising spaces in Wrocław, with participants flowing from one to another. Not much earlier (in December 1967) the Mona Lisa Gallery was established, which was run by Jerzy Ludwiński and was only open until 1971. The Studio of Emotional Composition [Studio Kompozycji Emocjonalnej] was set up at more or less the same time as PERMAFO in 1970 (by Wojciech Sztukowski, Jerzy Ryba, Zbigniew Jeż, Grzegorz Kolasiński, and Józef Malinowski), and a short while later in 1972 the Gallery of Current Art [Galeria Sztuki Aktualnej] (by Jolanta Marcolla, Janusz Haka, Dobrosław Bagiński, and the 'manager' of the group Zdzisław Sosnowski), Babel (Barbara Kozłowska's private gallery), and Creative Information Art Gallery [Galeria Sztuki Informacji Kreatywnej] (set up by Jan Chwałczyk and Wanda Gólkowska, also based on mail art).¹⁸ On Romuald Kutera's initiative, the mail art International Gallery of the Newest Art [Międzynarodowa Galeria Sztuki Najnowszej] was established in 1973. In 1974, the Gallery of the Newest Art [Galeria Sztuki Najnowszej] in the Pałac Studentów Culture Centre (with Stanisław Antoszek, Anna Kutera, Romuald Kutera, Lech Mrozek and Piotr Olszański), and later, also in Pałac, Art and Theory [Sztuka i Teoria] (Małgorzata Bodak, Bogusław Jasiński, Witold Liszkowski, Andrzej Sapija and Maria Zmarz). In 1978, the Foto-Medium-Art Seminary (Alek Figura, Ireneusz Kulik, Jerzy Olek, Leszek



Natalia LL's studio



Giancarlo Politi, Natalia LL, Piergiorgio Firinu



Piergiorgio Firinu, Giancarlo Politi, Andrzej Lachowicz



Piergiorgio Firinu, Giancarlo Politi



Giancarlo Politi, Piergiorgio Firinu



Giancarlo Politi, Natalia LL

Giancarlo Politi in Wrocław, 1975



Jorge Glusberg in Wrocław, 1975

Szurkowski and Ryszard Tabaka). And in the late 1970s, the X Gallery (under the auspices of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers, run by Zbigniew Makarewicz), Studio by the Moat [Zakład nad Fosą] (Michał Bieganowski), Wojciecha Stefanik's Plastic Arts Centre [Ośrodek Działań Plastycznych], and Light Centre [Centrum Światła] (Artur Babiarz, Leopold Duszka-Kołcz).

Most of these galleries were anti-institutional in nature; alternative spaces *par excellence*. In order to protect their efforts from the manipulations of the official systems of art, they created their own means of circulation and invented new ways to contact the audience, reflecting the changing forms of art.¹⁹ It was in Wrocław (since Jan Świdziński first cooperated with PERMAFO, then with the Gallery of the Newest Art) where the foundations of contextual art – one of the most widely discussed neo-avant-garde phenomena – were laid. The potential and opportunity for unexpected events in Wrocław suddenly appeared, the results of the crazy trajectories of wandering thoughts, with no respect for the systems organising artistic life in the People's Republic of Poland. All this stemmed from a change in the organisation of artistic life, which Urszula Czartoryska summarises as a 'successful joint effort', and associates with valuable international contacts established by various private galleries in the 1970s, when artistic geography shifted from centralisation to 'a network of vibrant young centres': "Polish artists informed their foreign partners that they had no wish to enter the system of commercial galleries and prestigious museum exhibitions. It gained them many true friends among rebellious or still independent artists in Amsterdam, Lyon, Antwerp or Lund."²⁰ Bożenna Stokłosa divided private galleries of the 1970s into three groups: mail (post) galleries, galleries of photomedia, and galleries of groups. Perceived as a gallery of photomedia, PERMAFO was categorised within the group of Warsaw-based galleries: the Contemporary Gallery [Galeria Współczesna] (1975–1977), the Remont Gallery, and (to some degree) the Studio of Action, Documentation, and Popularisation [Pracownia Działań, Dokumentacji i Upowszechniania] (established by Zofia Kulik, Przemysław Kwiek, and Jan S. Wojciechowski). When writing about PERMAFO, Stokłosa emphasised: "Being a gallery which presents both permanent exhibitions and ephemeral actions, PERMAFO existed also as a *theoretical-practical idea*, which grouped artists dealing with rationalised art."²¹ Art galleries and informal groups were so numerous in the

1970s that there was fierce competition between them – attempts were made at discrediting and even blocking the development of others. One of the most anarchic artists of that time, Bogdan Wiśniewski (pseudonym Anastazy), advised those who wanted to make art 'outside the system' to 'steer clear of existing Galleries, non-Existing, Foksal, Avant-garde, Pseudo-avant-garde, free Artists and others, (non-) leading Critics, ZPAP, BWA, CBWA, PSP, Institutes of Art, Workshops, Laboratories of Art, Academies, PWSSP, Departments of Culture, Studios, etc. [...] steer clear of all that which threatens you and take fitness trails!'²²

These artists did not succeed in transforming the system (which was the ambition of the previous generation, and also of Dlubak, who was member of the Polish United Workers' Party until a certain point), but they used it in ephemeral flashes, by finding joy in circumventing rules, in puckish pranks, and cunning and persistent manoeuvres; indexing the moment against art history, and even history itself. Art historians, who were used to permanent accomplishments, could not keep pace with these acrobats and their 'tents of art' (as Andrzej Kostolowski termed alternative private galleries). Art history, for them, was a history of places, not spaces. Therefore, it must be clearly said: unrecognised by the structures of power, they were literally swept away by history. The 1981 martial law brought back national rhetoric, the rhetoric of ownership and legitimacy, reintroducing the hierarchical order. To confront the authorities, the strategies of illustrious experts on socio-economic order were used, demonstrating their repertoire of indestructible, everlasting showpieces. Those who did not want to compete in either national or religious conceptions, or did not want to shout like the new wild ones (and butterflies can shout), perished in the winds of history. PERMAFO (established in December 1970) ceased to exist when martial law began in 1981, and when the old regime collapsed in 1989, there was no climate for restitution. A new generation appeared who, just like those some time ago, aspired to live without dwelling in the past, to live in the here and now without pondering the reasons why the political fight resulted in the use of hard means: ownership, prestige, and symbolic violence.

Andrzej Lachowicz on the set of Andrzej Sapija's film **Extreme Actions** [Działania ekstremalne], 1979



Andrzej Lachowicz
Archeology of Photography Foundation collection

Photography

Their emphasis on photography – the gallery having adopted as their ‘logo’ the lens of a camera as a witness to fleeting events – was explained in a perverse way by Wojciech Bruszewski, who was one of the participants of the PERMAFO movement (plus the owner, since 1977, of the first video cassette recorder in Poland):

If you want to remember something important, don’t go there with a camera. Take photos with your eyes that go directly to the brain, not onto some damn photosensitive film which you will lose when you get drunk. You won’t lose your brain. Unless it gets stolen by a nice smiling citizen, Dr Alois Alzheimer.²³

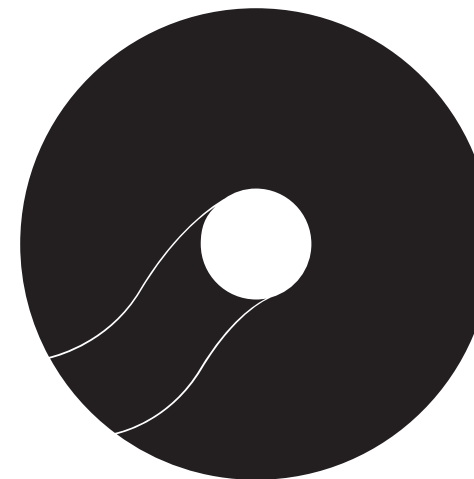
Polish conceptual photographers already knew what was discovered by Susan Sontag in her late book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, where she wrote that the primary aim of recent photography was to manipulate consumers. The young Poles, however, did not take photographs which would move brutally, deeply, and immediately, like those of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau which the young intellectual from New York saw in her youth, and called a ‘negative epiphany’ and ‘brutal initiation’.²⁴ What Sontag saw in the photograph was not registered on any ‘damn film’ by the young Polish artists, but was situated deep in their brains and bodies; because it was so obvious, it needed no elaboration. One might say that a desire to live in the present moment, plus the new medium of photography, made the artists commit themselves to a spectacle of creating reality, to the traps of its notation. Sensitive to form, they knew all too well that unbosoming

would show helplessness, a helplessness which they would not be able to bear. In the pliers of destiny, facing *fatum*, they took to self-help (do-it-yourself tampering) and ‘pure perception’, choosing the role of a witness and participant, rather than that of a hero. As Sławomir Mrozek said in the 1970s: “To think that it would be a good idea to deal in *bare attention*. Deal a little.”²⁵ We must not forget that PERMAFO’s manifesto emphasised that the artists were not interested in photography, but in reality, closer to what Mrozek termed *bare attention* – dissociating themselves from the so-called artistic photography, in particular from the anachronistic style of Pictorialism.

Moreover, only after we become aware that photography as a means of artistic expression was, for instance, more widely used in Ukraine after the fall of Communism, may we understand how strong the attachment to painting was in the Eastern Bloc countries (in the Soviet Union because of the socialist realist tradition, and in Poland due to the post-thaw tradition of Abstract painting as a compromised form of high art after Stalinism). In this context, rejecting the medium of painting in Poland at the end of the 1960s was not just an artistic issue, but concerned a broader social contract, the very definition of what art was and who an artist was. Painting as the embodiment of the authority, originality, subjectivity, exceptionality, and authenticity of Modernist art was becoming obsolete, deemed to be rather a camouflage for the official ideology, hidden under the ostensibly universal manifestation of the human body. Zdzisław Sosnowski, who was connected with PERMAFO, emphasised that “the 70s freed art from heroism, from mastery in creating art objects, supremacy, and perceiving an artist as a poet-prophet.”²⁶ What is more, a camera lens

not only changed the visual perception of the world, but it broadened the scope of the world’s visibility and of its understanding. Adam Sobota, an art critic who cooperated with PERMAFO, emphasised clearly that photography was treated as a danger, since using it ‘always posed the threat of an invasion of crude reality and non-artistic procedures. For this reason, both traditional and avant-garde art was suspicious of photography, which appeared in art whenever the goal was to blur the differences between artistic and inartistic situation in principle.’²⁷

Grzegorz Dziamski noted that the artists connected to PERMAFO used mechanical means of registration concentrating on the structure and perceptive-persuasive possibilities of the language of film and photography. He singled-out a current that reflected on the cultural character of technical means of registration, referring to Zbigniew Dłubak’s *Tautology* (1971) and photo-art connected with Zdzisław Sosnowski and Janusz Haka. Dłubak’s ambition was to free technical means from cultural superstitions – to recognise, show, and transcend the possibilities offered by new techniques and technology. Consequently, this current focused on transcending limitations in thinking about the world. Sosnowski and Haka, on the other hand, raised the issue of the cultural embedding of mechanical means of transmission, i.e., cultural content integrated into the medium of photography. Sosnowski and Haka’s works constituted, in Dziamski’s opinion, “an attempt to create a counter-environment of visual culture”, which was perverse in the sense of being based on “the completely faithful use of methods and techniques of persuasion, appearing in the iconic messages of mass culture.”²⁸ These artists’ works were symbolic representations (not iconic equivalents) of the contemporary visual consciousness – representations created with the use of means typical for the artists’ chosen medium.



PERMAFO logo created by Andrzej Lachowicz

Conceptualism and conceptual art

Łukasz Ronduda emphasises that permanent art was a type of conceptual art: “in conceptualism, the artistic realisation took shape through a process of sending constant communications back and forth between the material context of the work and the mind of the viewer in the act of perception.”²⁹ What is more, Dłubak approached photography as linguistic conceptualists approached language, “as a medium where a strong relationship exists between image and context.”³⁰ Dłubak never perceived himself as a conceptualist, thinking that much of what was going on in Poland was not exceeding a certain level of conceptual stylisation. He did admit, however, that conceptual reflection affected his views deeply and helped to crystallise them.³¹ Ronduda’s statement about the Lachowicz and Dłubak’s conceptual practice was justified inasmuch as it referred to Jan Świdziński’s conception, who used to cooperate with PERMAFO at its inception: he wrote, “photography is simultaneously a language and a picture”, adding that in the contemporary society of the time it was serving ever more frequently as a substitute for language. If we introduce changes in the morphology of this language, which would distort the simply coded photography-reality, we would eventually start to make changes in reality itself: “This process is similar to the mechanisms governing language, in that linguistic rules define speech which, in turn, allows changes to both linguistic rules and the broader social rules shaping the linguistic ones.”³² It is important to note that monographs of Polish conceptualism sometimes have the Lachowicz included in the categories of, for example, ‘photomedialism’ or – like Jerzy Olek – ‘photo-art’,³³ or they were not included at all. It is also known that American conceptualists had an ambivalent attitude towards the camera – as Dziamski recently reminded, Douglas Huebler called it a dumb copying device – and at the heart of the conceptual approach to photography lay its indexing, documenting character, in the meaning of documenting the artist’s conception.³⁴

Was PERMAFO, therefore, too photomedial, or not post-medial enough? Arguments about this issue have resulted in various exclusions. As early as the Osieki open-air festival, a disagreement between Dłubak and Ludwiński arose over conceptualism, Dłubak complaining that Polish critics ignored works and issues which had not been seen before in the US, stressing there were many interesting things going on in Poland, not necessarily influenced by the West. In this sense, including Dłubak under the term conceptualism means ignoring the fact that his analytical position stemmed from his own reflections and experiences, dating back to the famous first *Exhibition of Modern Art* in Cracow in 1948, where he participated as an activist, agitator, and revolutionary artist. The issue of both Dłubak’s and Lachowicz’s separateness was noted recently by Andrzej Saj in his article *Photography in Conceptual Art*, and before him by Alicja Kępińska and Adam Sobota.³⁵ Jan S. Wojciechowski, in the context of PERMAFO, wrote about the conceptual tendencies of photomedia stylistics,³⁶ proving that the philosophical discourse of artists such as Joseph Kosuth or Terry Atkinson had been substituted by a photo-film language in order to address similar issues concerning signification, and the relations between art



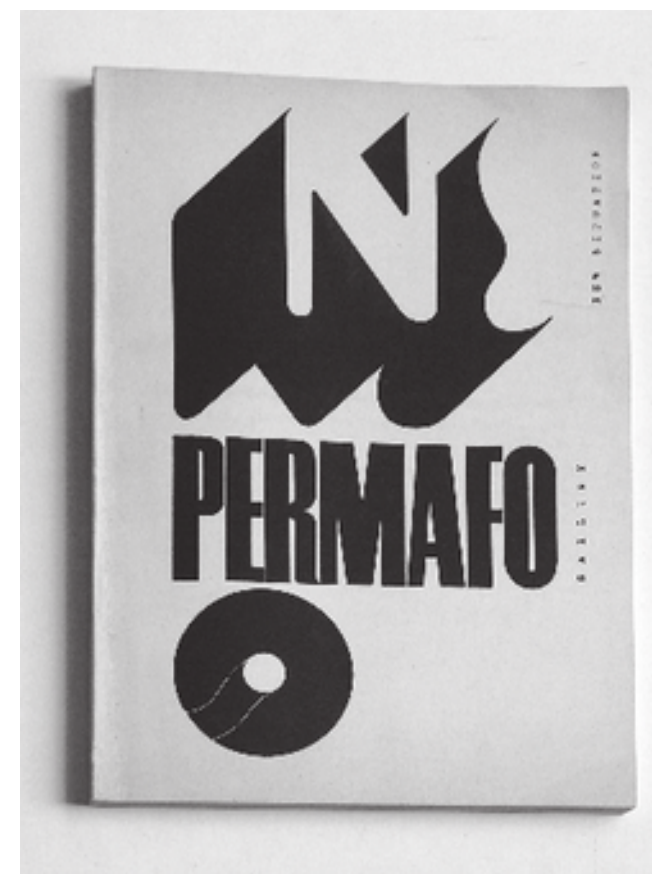
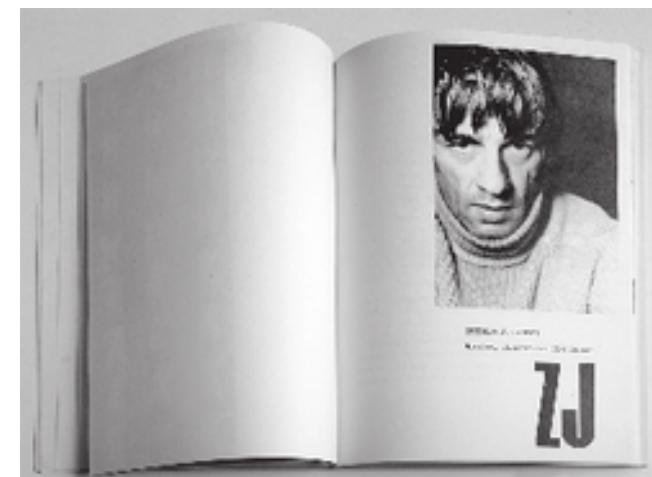
PERMAFO envelope

and reality.³⁷ However, let it be enough to remember the turmoil resulting from the exhibition *Conceptual Reflexion in Polish Art: Experiences of Discourse 1965–1975* at the Warsaw Centre for Contemporary Art in 2000 (and the catalogue accompanying it), which ignored not only the Lachowicz but also Zbigniew Dłubak, to understand that being labelled by 'the eye and the lens of learned man' may be considered dubious.³⁸ To protest against the distortion of history, a counter-exhibition was organised in Galeria Stara in Lublin in 2002, with an accompanying counter-catalogue, entitled *Autonomous Conceptual Movement in Poland*.³⁹ In his introduction to the catalogue, Zbigniew Warpechowski (an artist and a curator who also collaborated with PERMAFO) emphasised the ethical character of the Polish hybrid – i.e., conceptualism in the People's Republic of Poland – which did not necessarily correspond with the formalisations of Kosuth, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner, or the Art & Language group. In the Lublin catalogue, apart from Natalia LL, Andrzej Lachowicz, and Zbigniew Dłubak, there were other artists also excluded from the previous catalogue who cooperated with PERMAFO: Andrzej Partum, Jan Świdziński, Zbigniew Warpechowski, and Krzysztof Zarębski. On this occasion Warpechowski wrote his own definition of conceptualism which, although far from being academic, must not be overlooked when reflecting upon this period, not only because of it being deeply moving and subjectively true (due to its personal character), but because it emphasised the ethical and irrational dimension of giving names:

Whether it was right or wrong, the term 'conceptual art' was attributed to all artists who rejected conventional means of artistic expression, thus automatically locating them outside of the official artistic circles of Poland. In its early stage conceptual art created a terrible panic amongst the academic world and the members of artists' unions, established and operated under the supervision of the Communist Party, and which played a controlling role subjected to political indoctrination. Hence it was of a political character, in spite of verbal political declarations never being directly pronounced,

as was the case with the 'Wprost' group and other small groups of writers. Conceptual art was surrounded by an atmosphere of general disapproval, condemnation, and even the derision of the official structures of artistic life, as well as the crowd of 'visual artists' associated with the establishment. Starting with the very first confrontations within the framework of what I call the 'conceptual current', divisions emerged, mutual accusations were formulated, slanders and attempts undertaken directed at the monopolisation of avant-garde movements (one way or the other), and to discredit independent artists. [...] The name of 'conceptual artist' was given to all artists who wrenched themselves free from the patronage of the party and unions, and who broke with a ritual of making art, looking instead for possibilities in previously unknown artistic statements or means of expression. Such 'opening' was provided by the sole notion of conceptual art, and everybody acknowledged, conceived of, and realised it in an independent way that suited his own temperament, education, and intellectual potential. In spite of the accusations of 'intellectualism', intuition was its principal determinant. Only a few artists felt the need to broaden their knowledge with fashionable intellectual trends like structuralism or semiology. Artists of this orientation were bound together by a sense of common mission, breaking from the supervised rituals of shows and competitions, the functionaries of art distributing privileges and awards; there were various attempts undertaken to get away, to establish a creative dialogue beyond the official art circulation.⁴⁰

Divisions existed, naturally, among Western conceptualists too (let it be enough to mention Kosuth's exclusion of his colleagues from the circle of conceptualists, invectives including 'reactive art' and the like, or Kosuth's fight with "the junta, Greenberg's gang who ruled New York with absolute power",⁴¹ but artistic life in these countries was not monopolised by an ideological state. For Warpechowski (who, similarly to the other artists from PERMAFO, fought the Warsaw 'junta', set in Modernism) the meaning of conceptualism was fulfilled through fighting the



NS – New Situation, 1972

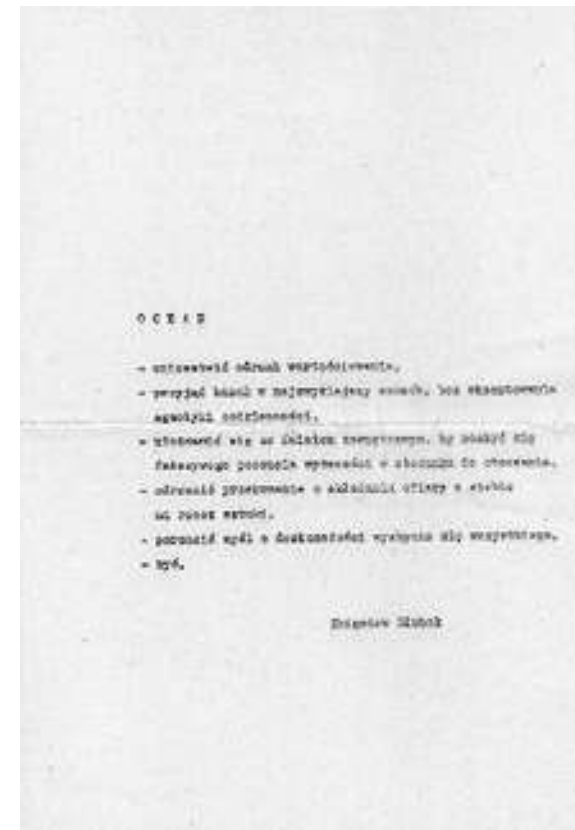


establishment, the tradition of which by then was quite common – like Ursula Meyer's monograph of conceptualism, which went as far as to equate conceptualism with a continuation of Dadaism and anti-art. For Jerzy Ludwiński (yet another artist close to PERMAFO) the definition of conceptual art was in turn quite narrow – he perceived it as an encompassing term which used tautologies, logic, and linguistics, its wider term being 'concept art' – "art in which the mental, conceptual moment predominates the material one"⁴² – which shifts the stress on the moment when the material side becomes less important, or the form loses its importance.

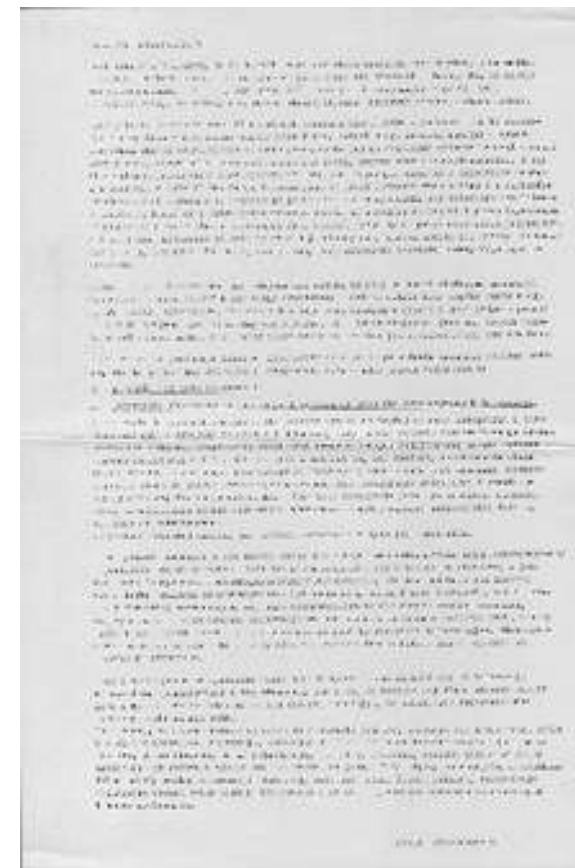
PERMAFO was thus a conceptual gallery (or a concept one), meaning that it was not the works exhibited in the cramped space of a TV room in the Creative Unions' Club that attracted all the attention, but instead, like in *boîte-en-valise*, the focus was put on maintaining intimate relations that were comfortable and free from the conventions of a vernissage. To a large extent PERMAFO held meetings, a place to exchange thoughts and texts; rectangular news-sheets, which would be folded and sent, existed as a kind of multiplied exhibition which was not based on viewers' concentration. Apart from the newspapers there were other forms of publications, such as grey envelopes with printed inscriptions, containing loose pieces of paper with reproduced works and texts. Just like the newsheets, these could not be considered as traditional catalogues, but as rather numerous (depending on their circulation) independent displays, often distributed by post. There were also the yellow books (in 1972 *New Situations* was published in English; in 1973 Natalia LL's *PERMAFO-Summary*; in 1976 *Permafo*, beginning with A. Lachowicz's text *Holism as Art*; in 1981 *Unidentified Energies* parts I and II, and *Interpretations*), and also two books of A. Lachowicz, *Visual and Mental Persuasion* and *Theory of the Equal Field* from 1973,⁴³ published by the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław, which were partly connected with PERMAFO. The situation in which a catalogue takes precedence over the exhibition – characterising Seth Siegelaub's 'canonic' conception – indeed took place in PERMAFO, and is exemplified by the case of the *NS PERMAFO – New Situation* exhibition and publication, shown in the Contemporary Gallery in Warsaw in February 1972, the following year in the Museum of Art in Łódź, and subsequently travelling to the USA with A. Lachowicz. Yet even in less radical situations, neither the newsheets



Photographs from Natalia LL and Andrzej Lachowicz's stay in the USA during their Kościuszko Foundation Stipend, New York 1977



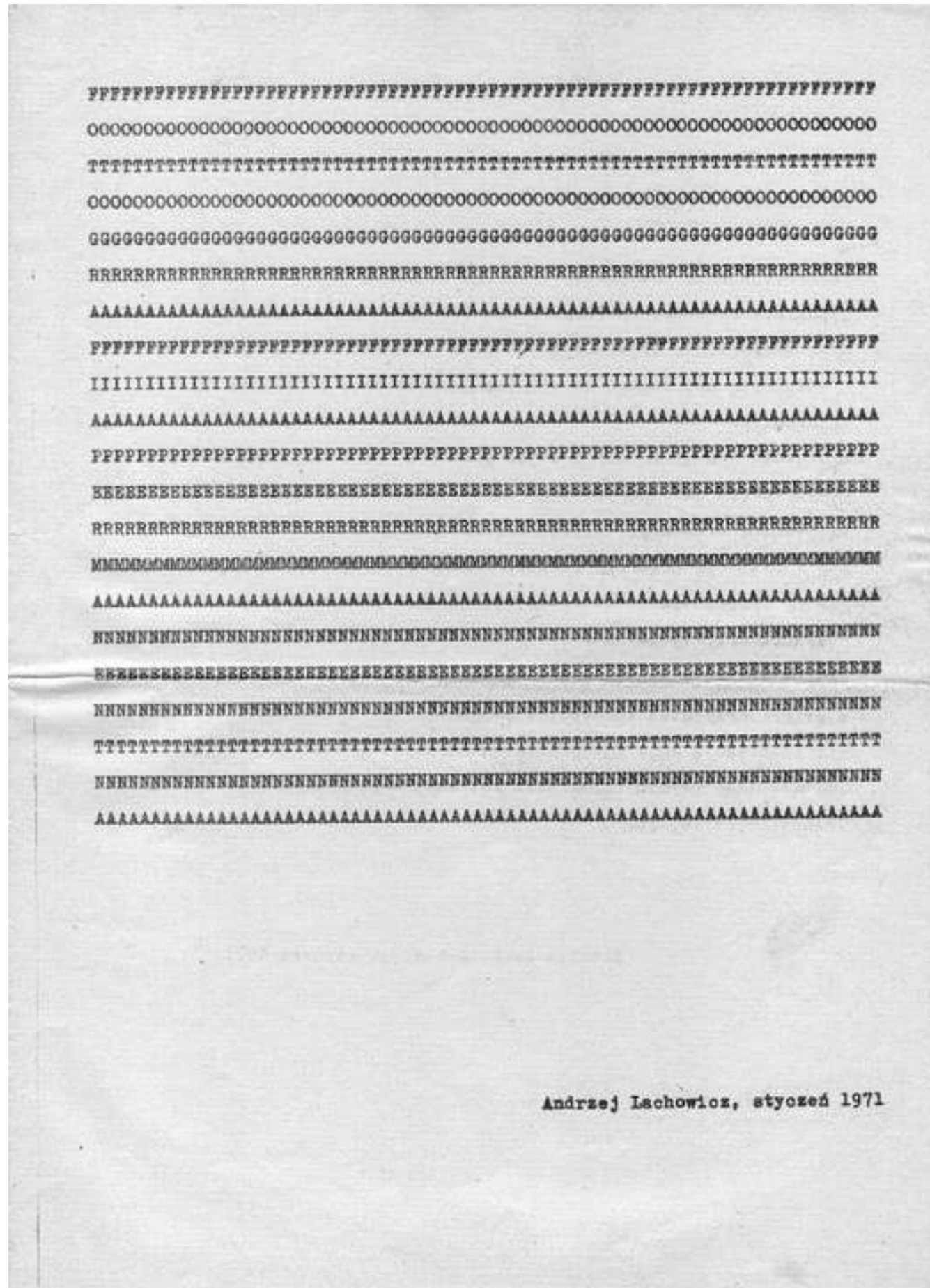
Zbigniew Dłubak, *Ocean*, contents of PERMAFO's catalogue-envelope, 1973



Antoni Dzieduszycki, *Why Photography?* [*Dlaczego fotografia?*], contents of PERMAFO's catalogue-envelope, 1972

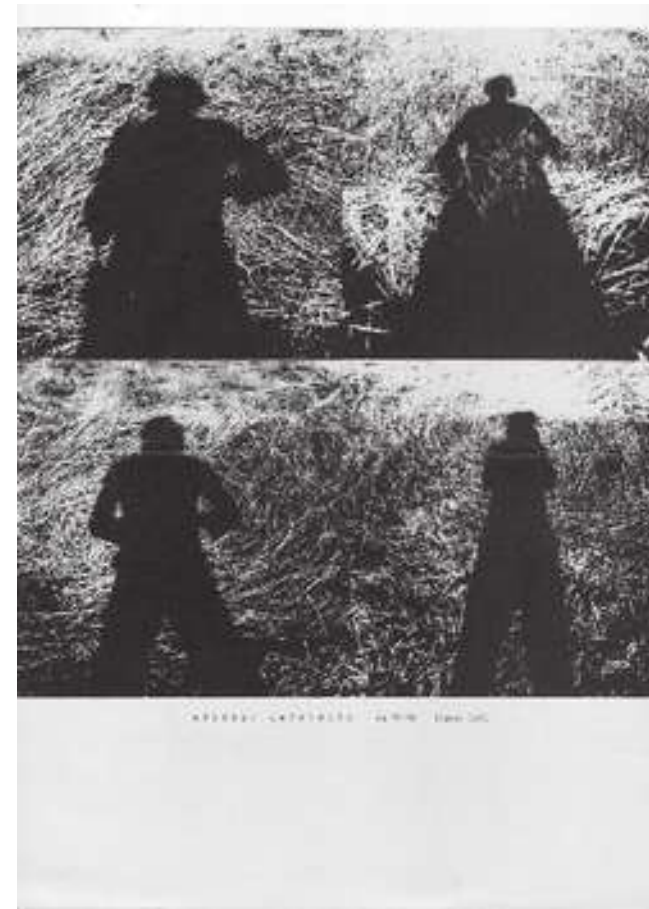
nor the grey envelopes with loose papers were 'proper catalogues' (the term being understood as a documentation of an exhibition) but were instead separate displays based on diffusing, decentralising and 'scattering' a multiplied work of art. These methods of display and distribution existed apart from more traditional exhibitions, which grouped viewers and artworks in one space, and under one roof (although in a formalisation different from the traditional one). The pieces of paper in the envelope were loose – not binding them being the classic assemblage method – and stressed the unwillingness to direct the viewer through an established hierarchy of watching and reading. We may therefore agree that PERMAFO had huge critical potential; it was anti-institutional, maybe not anti-commercial (it would be difficult to use this term when talking about socialism) but anti-commodity – against the commodification of art. There was a fundamental difference, however, between the situation in the USA and the one in Poland: when Seth Siegelau withdrew himself from curation, his artists were taken over by a brilliant art dealer from New York, Leo Castelli, but when Lachowicz stopped organising artistic actions in Poland, unfortunately nobody was interested in looking after the artists of PERMAFO. Even new commercial galleries, set up much later in free Poland, still sold traditional commodities like painting, sculpture, and graphic art. Polish millionaires, unlike the American ones, have never liked conceptual art.

It may be also assumed that PERMAFO was involved in conceptual art because the traditional relations between theory and practice had been categorically rejected. For instance, the art critic Antoni Dzieduszycki's instructions on art-making in the series *Films Anybody Can Make* (which could indeed be made, but did not have to be, the form of its reception being dependant on the viewer) were connected with the democratisation of both the production and reception of a work of art. What is more, many serial recordings of permanent art from the initial period were dispassionate registrations, devoid of any meaning or secret which might have been hidden in the metaphor, in accordance with Sol LeWitt's seventh sentence: "The artist's will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion. His wilfulness may only be ego."⁴ These works, devoid of subjectivity, became simple references to the original idea. PERMAFO, however, did not practice conceptualism understood as a pure continuation of 'canonic' American works.

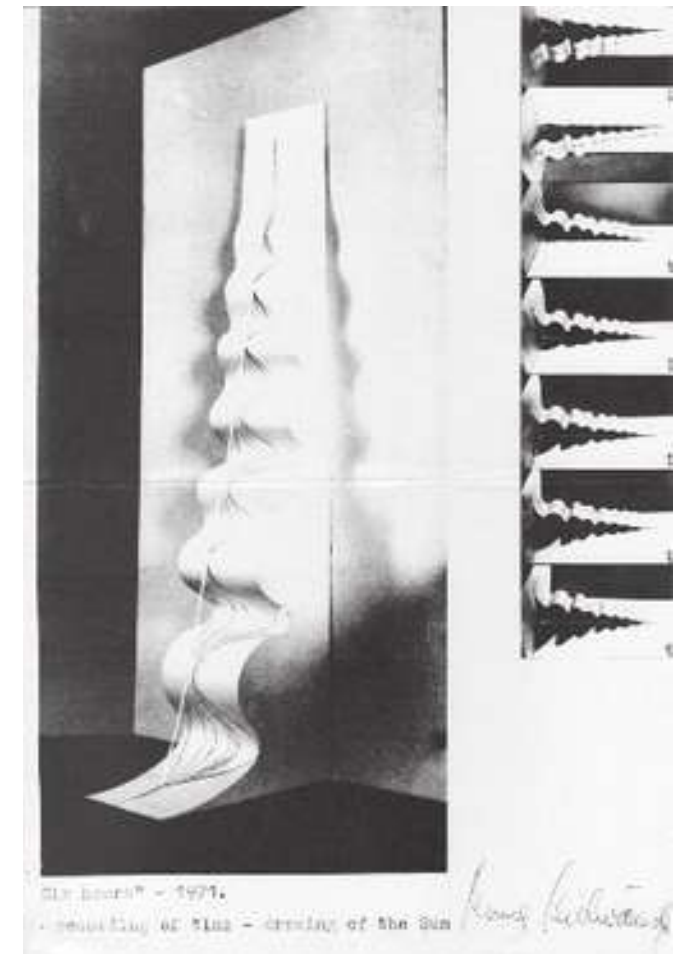


Andrzej Lachowicz, styczeń 1971

Contents of PERMAFO's catalogue-envelope, 1971



Andrzej Lachowicz, **ME YOU HIM** [JA TY ON], contents of PERMAFO's catalogue-envelope, 1971



Maria Michalowska, **Six Hours**, contents of PERMAFO's catalogue-envelope, 1971

Current state of research

One of the more important books published on PERMAFO's side of the Iron Curtain, in which its founders were described, was Klaus Groh's *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* from 1972, which was a kind of assembled self-presentation of artists from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, and the USSR.⁴⁵ Piotr Piotrowski admits that it did not make any significant contribution to the interpretation of their works, but he considers it pioneering in terms of looking at the territory of Eastern Europe as a whole, and describes it as "one of the first attempts to map the neo-avant-garde as a distinct trend in this region of Europe."⁴⁶ But when describing the book, he focuses on artists from Poznań and Jarosław Kozłowski's NET exchange (maybe because they both come from Poznań), and the Warsaw circle, mentioning Wrocław only briefly. It is a surprising omission, especially from such an outstanding scholar – the Wrocław milieu literally dominated the Polish representation of the neo-avant-garde map outlined by Klaus Groh (Jan Chwałczyk, Stanisław Dróżdź, Antoni Dzieduszycki, Wanda Gólkowska, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Barbara Kozłowska, Andrzej Lachowicz, Natalia Lach-Lachowicz, Maria Michałowska, Ludmiła Popiel and Jerzy Fedorowicz, Jerzy Rosołowicz, Krystyna Sokółowska, while Zbigniew Gostomski from Warsaw showed a work entitled *It Begins in Wrocław*). The map drawn arbitrarily by Piotrowski includes Warsaw, Poznań, and Łódź, with its Workshop of the Film Form. Groh's map (which Piotrowski does not refer to, although praising it), apart from a huge team from Wrocław, mentions individual people from other cities: Tomek Kawiak, Tadeusz Walter, and Anastazy Wiśniewski from Warsaw (but not from the Foksal Gallery, which is described so lengthily by Piotrowski), Jarosław Kozłowski and Andrzej Bereziański from Poznań, and Henryk Waniek from Katowice. This exclusion, carried out by an acknowledged expert on art in Central Europe, includes the fragment in which Piotrowski describes Miklós Erdély's theory of 'an empty sign', without any reference to Zbigniew Dłubak's (and Jan Świdziński's) similar conception, although Erdély visited Wrocław in the early 1970s.⁴⁷ The conception of the empty sign is deeply rooted in the tradition of the Polish neo-avant-garde – as Łukasz Ronduda analysed recently, it influenced Piotr Uklański's art, among others.⁴⁸ Groh published his book at a special time when a dynamic neo-avant-garde formation was taking shape, when artists were becoming more active on the European stage and were trying to avoid the state's monopolisation of their mutual contacts. He writes that Poland "was often visited by artists and intellectuals from the other East European states"⁴⁹ It was for this reason that Klaus Groh came to PERMAFO, amongst the other artists who cooperated with it: Imre Bak, Gabor Attalai, Dalibor Chatrny, Goran Djordjevič, Nuša Dragan and Srečo Dragan, Tibor Hajas, Milan Grygar, Janos Major, Dora Maurer, Peter Štembera, and Andre Tot. In this international exchange there was no hierarchy of geography, and there were also connections with West European artists, irrespective of their market and commercial position, including Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joseph Beuys, Dieter Helis, Hans Werner Kalkmann, Jürgen Klauke, Rune Mieldse and A.R. Penck from Germany; François Morellet, Herve Fischer, and Nicole Gravière from France; Vittore



Natalia LL and Klaus Groh, 1972



Klaus Groh, 1972

Baroni, Guglielmo Achille Cavellini, and Luigi Ontani i Mimmo Palladino from Italy; Urs Lüthi and Pierre Keller from Switzerland; Robin Crozier from Great Britain, Suzy Lake from Canada, and Les Levine, Bill Beckley, Joseph Kosuth, and Carolee Schneemann from the USA. In Groh's book (written in German) was printed Zbigniew Dłubak's text *Art For All [Kunst für Alle]*, as well as a sequence of his photographs. Also included were three film scripts by Antoni Dzieduszycki (which anybody could make using an amateur film camera), a photograph by Andrzej Lachowicz from the workshop in Osieki, and the text *Permanente Kunst* (dated 1971), an altered version of the 1970 manifesto *Permanent Art*. Natalia LL showed three permanent registration sequences, two of them in a nine-square grid picturing her face and an alarm clock, and the other divided into 15 squares with the face of an alarm clock photographed every hour from 9:00 am to 11:00 pm, entitled *17.11.70*. She called the first work 'a mobile model' because her face changed scale in relation to the square frame – from a small head at the bottom to an extreme close-up which cut off her forehead and chin. In this way the artist demonstrated an idea of documentation as a never-ending collection, with the same face being divided into a number of takes unable to be added up to make a whole, and none of them being the 'correct' representation.

PERMAFO's important role was described in major comprehensive publications that aimed to summarise the output of Polish post-war art, released in the 1970s and early 1980s. Aleksander Wojciechowski, a researcher connected with the Polish Academy of Sciences, acknowledged (in his aforementioned book *Young Polish Art 1944–1974*) the artist's role against the vast background of Wrocław in the 1970s as "a testing ground of conceptual art."⁵⁰ It was PERMAFO and the Mona Lisa Gallery that came up with a new formula for the gallery, having noticed "a limited usefulness of exhibitions as such", with a dynamic vision "combining features of a permanent gallery and a museum of imagination, working as a laboratory of new forms and creative ideas."⁵¹ The Lachowicz would also appear in another important book written by Wojciechowski after PERMAFO suspended its activity, entitled *Time of Sorrow, Time of Hope [Czas smutku, czas nadziei]*,⁵² which described independent art after the introduction of the martial law. But coming back to the reflection on art in the 1970s, in another important and influential book called *New Art 1945–1978 [Nowa sztuka w latach 1945–1978]* written by Alicja Kępińska (professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań), Dłubak and the Lachowicz's pioneering roles were discussed in regards to their investigation of the grammar of visual language and the roles of new media. Kępińska explained that the Lachowicz, in their use of permanent photography, displayed "a method of *information surge, hammering, visual slogan*",⁵³ where fragments of reality, perceived from different vantage points, were subject to changes of scale and multiplications, and resulted in a visualisation of the mutation of different states. In the case of A. Lachowicz, they were permanent registrations of his own shadow or a chosen fragment of a street, whilst Natalia LL's were of an alarm clock face or a part of a road. These processes made it possible to broaden the field of vision beyond the ordinary, although, paradoxically, it was the very fragmented everyday reality that the

artists registered. However, these processes of cropping, expanding, or even pushing at the viewer resulted in reinforcing and increasing the number of signals ordained by reality. Urszula Czartoryska's kind criticism also constituted important support for the PERMAFO artists. Amongst other topics, she wrote about the anti-psychological documentary character of Dłubak, Lachowicz, and Jan Dibbets' photography, which purposefully focused on the automatism of the registration process.⁵⁴ Bożenna Stokłosa called PERMAFO "a gallery which actually initiated the photomedia current in conceptualism", and emphasised that the photographic works, although they were a basic form of expression, were not the only medium used by the artists-founders, who presented "the newest experiments from the area of conceptual and visual action, created by means of all techniques available."⁵⁵

One of the most important books to arouse the interest of the younger generation in the accomplishments of the PERMAFO gallery was Marcin Lachowski's *The Avant-garde and Institutions. On Presenting Art in the People's Republic of Poland [Awangarda wobec instytucji. O sposobach prezentacji sztuki w PRL-u]*.⁵⁶ Lachowski saw in PERMAFO a feature that characterised the 1970s – the consistent and multidimensional penetration and analysis of new media using the principles of differentiation, i.e., the drawing of bipolar opposites such as art/reality, illusion/experience, corporeality/documentation. Well-known curator Anda Rottenberg's popular synthesis *Art in Poland 1945–2005 [Sztuka w Polsce 1945–2005]* mentions PERMAFO in the context of the numerous art galleries and conceptual experiments of the 1970s.⁵⁷ In turn Łukasz Ronduda, in his book *Polish Art of the '70s*, devoted separate chapters to Andrzej Lachowicz, Natalia LL, and Zbigniew Dłubak, showing what the artists had in common and what divided them. In the chapter *Reassembling the World. Andrzej Lachowicz's Permanent Art*, Ronduda shows a conviction that Lachowicz situated his art between Natalia LL's post-essentialism and Zbigniew Dłubak's pragmatism; in his analytical works he also demonstrates a rare coexistence of reflection and sense of humour. In the chapter *The Sensual Conceptualism of Natalia LL* he highlights that the sexual aspect of many of her works was an attempt to oppose the excessively narrow, ceremonial potential of many conceptual projects of that time. The work was also part of a struggle in the field of representation to liberate human sexuality from the sphere of pornography, in order to bring it back to everyday experience. To 'prove' it, Ronduda included on the centrefold (designed by Piotr Uklański) two beautiful works from the *Riddle* (1969) series, dazzling in their subtlety, delicate humour, and visual aspects; by describing them (the first shows a man's overexposed face, the other a semi-erect penis) one actually kills the mystical, transgressive, spiritual-corporeal character of this epiphany, whose masterly use of light is worthy of the greatest baroque masters. The unclear title refers to the ambiguity of the work, which is *exercisios spirituales* as much as documentation. Ronduda does not elaborate on these works, unlike Paweł Leszkowicz who compares them to the artist's other erotic works, and says without doubt that "she used neo-avant-garde art to affirm sexual freedom and eroticism as foundations of existence."⁵⁸ It is worth adding that the artist, aware of Kosuth's conception that material works of

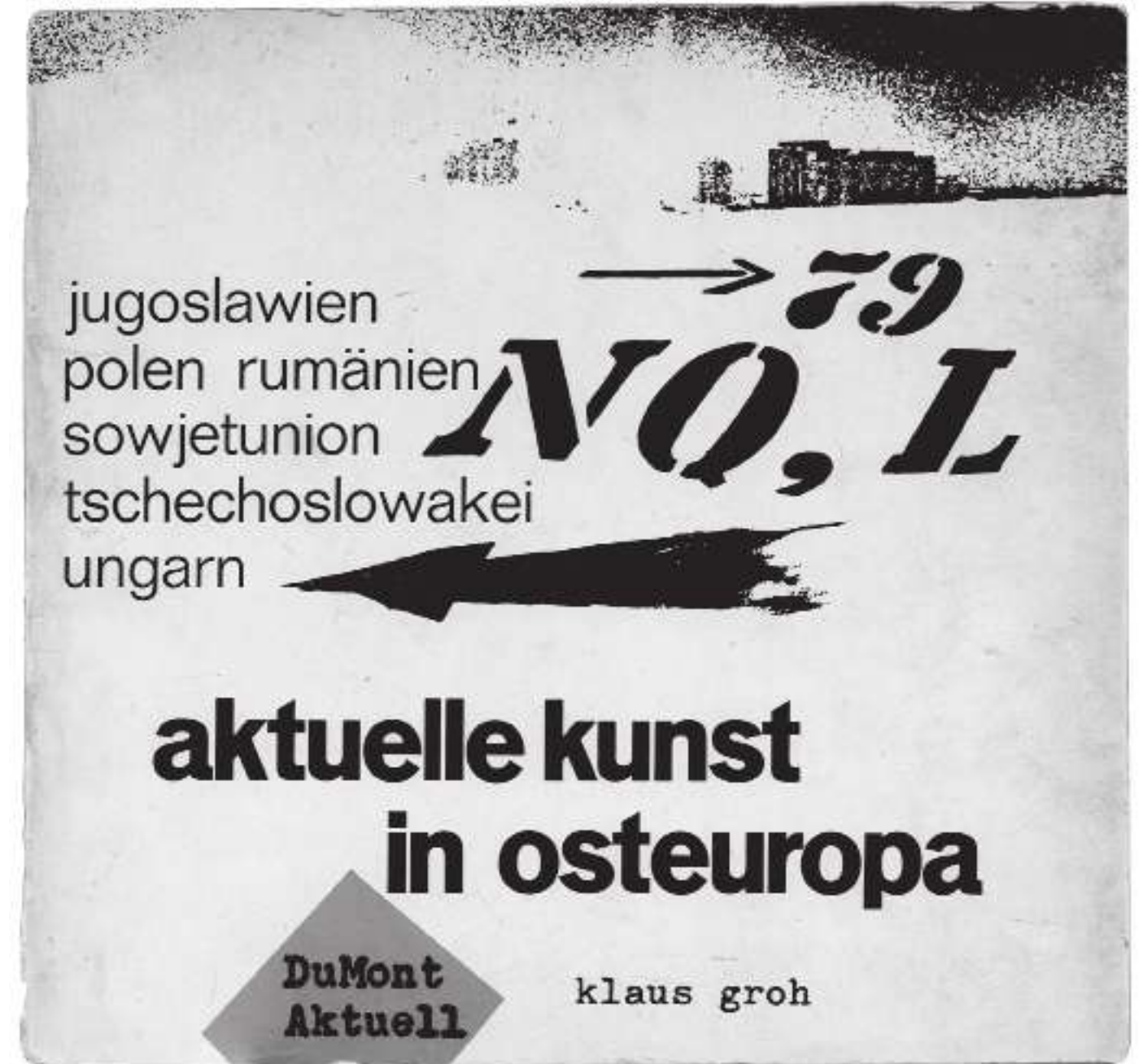
Photographs from Richarda Demarco's two visits to Wrocław in 1972



Natalia LL, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Antoni Dzieduszycki, Maria Michałowska, Richard Demarco, Jerzy Ludwiński, Wrocław, PERMAFO Gallery 1972



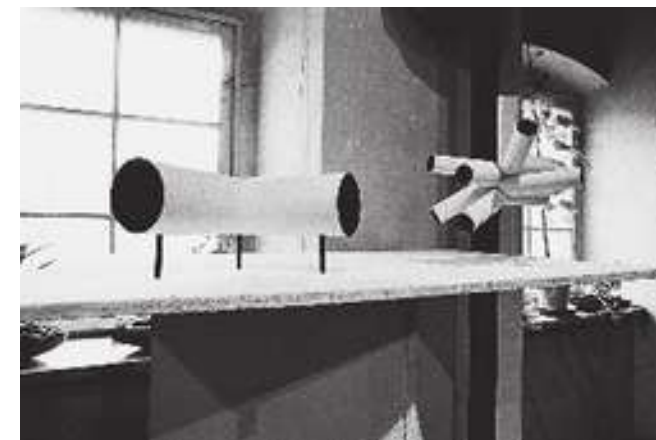
Richard Demarc0



The cover of Klaus Groh's book **Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa**, 1972



Zbigniew Dłubak, Natalia Lach-Lachowicz, Andrzej Lachowicz, **RELOP Optical Tools Set** [Zespół instrumentów optycznych RELOP], Wrocław '70 Symposium



art are only historical curiosities (and perhaps to avoid being accused of anachronism), rarely presented works of such strong aesthetic character. The 'embodying' conceptual practice of Natalia LL was slightly parodic and ambiguous in character, and bears similarities to, for example, John Baldessari singing Sol LeWitt's *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* (Baldessari Sings LeWitt, 1972). Returning to Ronduda's book, in the chapter 'Zbigniew Dłubak: the Myth of the New Avant-garde May Never Be Created,' it is emphasised that Dłubak was a leading character of the neo-avant-garde tendencies of the 1970s. Present in the most important links of Polish neo-avant-garde art, he co-founded PERMAFO in Wrocław, both the Remont Gallery and Galeria Mała in Warsaw, and also collaborated with the Workshop of the Film Form in Łódź. His pragmatic conceptions of art as the demystification of cognitive and perceptive habits, and his treatment of art as an empty sign to be filled with content (depending on social and historical context), were counterbalanced by his interest in Zen philosophy and the meditative aspects of perception. Although Dłubak was a generation older than Lachowicz, Ronduda highlights that their meeting was mutually inspiring. Apart from the 1971 exhibition *Mutants* (aforementioned), one of their more interesting works, together with Natalia LL, was *RELOP Optical Instruments Set*, a conceived but unrealised installation to be constructed in one of Wrocław's urban spaces. It would have been, if carried out, a democratic handbook of studies on perception and how to manipulate it. Mirrors installed in twisted pipes to create a periscope would make the images, seen through the Relop, differ significantly from the ones seen with a naked eye – the Relop would show mixed and simultaneously overlapping images, similar to those in a kaleidoscope, making it possible to see the everyday differently. This work appealed to Bożena Kowalska, who wrote that the sets of periscopes shattered "the monotony of reality by a fragment of it being transferred unexpectedly to somewhere else."⁵⁹

Wrocław's art critique did not favour conceptualists: Kazimierz Rainczak and Paweł Banaś "do not pass many opportunities to oppose Jurek Ludwiński, in a more or less open way."⁶⁰ The practices of the artists connected with PERMAFO, in particular those of Andrzej Lachowicz and Natalia LL, were frequently the subject of brutal attacks, mockery, and ridicule. These instances are worth remembering, for it is not just unconditional acceptance

that makes us acknowledge the importance of art. Strong opposition can shatter our most deeply held beliefs and destabilise our world view, but if presented, for example, in the form of a review, it can provoke the expression of our opinion, and perhaps even a modification of it, to let the loathsome stranger into our own territory. One might say that the Lachowiczes were lucky enough to have outstanding critic-opponents of their artistic practice since, undoubtedly, outstanding critics are not interested in unimportant art. The most important, almost legendary text – "a kind of paradigm of excluding artists who competed with the Foksal Gallery"⁶¹ as it was recently described by Piotr Piotrowski – is the article *Pseudo-avant-garde* written by Wiesław Borowski (director of the Foksal Gallery), which was published by the Warsaw-based weekly *Kultura* on 23 March 1975. The Lachowiczes were mentioned in exquisite company (from today's point of view), among members of the Workshop of Film Form and others, and were considered a threat to Polish culture and the 'real' avant-garde. Having already analysed Borowski's text many times (among others in my last book *Two Turning Points: Polish Art After 1955 and 1989*),⁶² I am not going to do it again here. But it is worth mentioning that Lachowicz took revenge in the same weekly magazine with his text *Retro-avant-garde*,⁶³ where he emphasised that changes in perception are brought about by changes in civilisation and by highly formalised intellectual systems in all spheres of human artistic activity, production, and artistic practice. Borowski's way of thinking was continued in Piotr Piotrowski's early book *Decade*, which was a kind of pamphlet against artists connected with PERMAFO and others.⁶⁴ Adam Sobota emphasises Joseph Kosuth's participation in an exhibition entitled

Protografia (shown as part of the VI Biennial of Graphic Art, organised by A. Lachowicz soon after Borowski's article) as symptomatic, in it being interpreted as lending support to the Polish 'pseudo avant-garde'.⁶⁵ What is interesting is that the Lachowicz were also attacked by their 'companions', the 'pseudo avant-garde artists': Józef Robakowski accused his Wrocław colleagues of, among other things, antedating works, that is the "casting [of] tendentious and perfidious light and the so-called adjusting of alleged artistic facts."⁶⁶ One of his accomplices was Marcin Giżycki who, as Robakowski was trying to prove, had no idea about film art yet "dares to write about current phenomena taking place in contemporary film."⁶⁷ This particular dispute was over pioneering analytical-investigative attitudes towards the camera's usage, in which favour was granted to the Lachowicz by both Giżycki and Kępińska.⁶⁸ Before these publications in 1973, the same Lachowicz were, in Robakowski's opinion, authors of original artistic solutions.⁶⁹ Since the very beginning the Lachowicz had not appealed to the taste of influential critic Bożena Kowalska, and in her hugely popular book *Polish Avant-garde Painting [Polska awangarda malarska]* the author barely commented on their work presented during the VIII Festival in Osieki, simply noting that "the artist exhibited white trays with distilled water, weighing in total 7 kg." But, having described in an equally dispassionate way the works of Natalia LL, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Jarosław Kozłowski, and Maria Michałowska, she wrote with irritation:

Many of these ideas, whose examples were quoted, especially by artists from the young generation, could be characterised by ease, naivety, or imitativeness, bringing to mind the exemplary (for them) works of Yves Klein and Vostell, with the other creators of happenings and precursors of conceptualism.⁷⁰

She repeated the accusations in her diary *Fragments of Life*: "The boys lost their minds. They don't know anymore how to surprise and with what. And they must be hugely unwilling to work. With their heads nor their hands."⁷¹ Luiza Nader, in turn, described the conception of permanent art as "sounding rather naive",⁷² which was all she had to say about this kind of art in her important and extensive publication *Conceptualism in the People's Republic [Konceptualizm w PRL-u]*. When examining local reviews from Wrocław, let us remember the text *Self-Reflexive Conceptualism [Autokonceptualizm]* written by Mirosław Ratajczak – a critic from *Odra* magazine who lent great support to, amongst other things, poster and graphic artists from Wrocław (Sawka, Aleksion, Get-Stankiewicz, and Czerniawski), as well as to Jerzy Olek, a photographer, theoretician, and gallery owner. The mocking character of Mirosław Ratajczak's *Self-Reflexive Conceptualism* would be best evidenced in noting that Lachowicz's works could easily be made following a DIY manual and, although the critic himself was attached to the noble traditional working style, he was very correct in detecting the democratic and participative factor of Lachowicz's art, who wanted to manage ideas rather than be a craftsman-artist. He was also correct in capturing Lachowicz's lack of attachment to the aesthetic role of the physical object eventually produced in defining art, his interest being more focused on the idea, intention,

and cognitive process. Ratajczak's mocking instruction, which may be construed as a DIY instruction in the spirit of Fluxus, was as follows:

Take a camera ('Druh' is best because it is very easy to use), ask a friend to put the film in it, take twelve snapshots, take it to the photographers. Don't forget to pay. While waiting for the prints, go to the library, borrow books written by: Eco, Lévi-Strauss, Piaget, Jakobson, Barthes, Althusser, Foucault, Poule, Marx, Bourbaki, and your favourite adventure book when you were a kid, tear out one page from each of them, or a fragment of a page (be discreet), rewrite it all at home, ask somebody a favour to photocopy it, and give it the title *Art as Prank Art*. Next organise a conference on the subject *Channels of Modern Art*, show anxiety about the current developments in art in your introductory essay, and finish it with presenting a constructive thesis called *Art is Worth Noting*. Prank art will be noted by those who should do it. You will go to Toronto, for example, for an international session. Take advantage, try to be photographed with a pope of local prank art.⁷³ Representatives of mass media will be awaiting you at the Okęcie airport. The tools brought from abroad (Canon with all the accessories, Parker fountain pen, Remington typewriter) will make it possible for you to achieve the highest level of art.⁷⁴

In January 1979, Natalia LL's action (or 'séance') entitled *Dreaming* took place in PERMAFO. Jerzy Olek titled his review of this event *...jiggery-pokery*, which succinctly encapsulates the charges he brought against the artist. In his opinion, the only basis for the show (which simultaneously accompanied a reading by Ryszard Przybylski and the concert *Dawn and Morning* by Ryszard Gwałbert Misiek) was "photographic documentation of the artist lying on the floor, surrounded by a cultured audience;"⁷⁵ to function as 'real art' only in foreign catalogues. Olek argued that because the photographers (who were taking pictures the whole time) absorbed and discomfited the listeners so much that nobody ended up listening to anything, despite the fact that the artists "talked sense" (even "very cleverly") and the music was actually incredibly good. Andrzej Lachowicz responded to the criticism by pointing out, first of all, that the artists were consistent in penetrating the everyday and the trivial, this ordinariness being her prime focus (at least since her *Transformative Attitude* essay, 1972); secondly, that the external form of dreaming – the only one available to the viewers – demonstrated the impossibility of translating and transferring personal experiences into visual form (hence Misiek's music being described as the "audio equivalent of the mental part of the show") always inside the individual's domain; and finally, that faced with the impossibility of transferring a message, we all must accept this challenge and make a recording, which will in fact be a fictitious document. In the context of the latter, it is important that *Dreaming* raised various problems, in particular the impossibility of transferring private ownership.⁷⁶ Jerzy Olek's writings were polemical, referring in his text *Superiority Complex* to, as he himself put it, "a sophisticated game of self-advertising which – as he sees it – is 'grand art' in and of itself; a game whose main principle is to be present, as often as possible, on posters and in newspapers."⁷⁷



Ryszard K. Przybylski's lecture, session of **Dreaming** [Śnienie], Wrocław 1979



Zbigniew Ruszkowski's lecture, session of **Dreaming** [Śnienie], Wrocław 1979

Insults were flying back and forth, seemingly no place for courtesousness in this exchange of opinions: Olek dismissed Natalia's work as "jiggery-pokery humbug" and a "complete farce", and characterised Lachowicz as a "Permafo-showman" suffering from a superiority complex, afflicted by a "compulsive fever of negating facts",⁷⁸ a megalomaniac swindler interested only in his own publicity. Lachowicz described Olek, partly in retaliation, as a prolific populariser of amateur photography who continued a vulgar version of the early ideas of PERMAFO.⁷⁹ Lachowicz polemicalised frequently and with great zeal, truculently and theatrically pointing out – mostly accurately – the adversary's shortcomings. From today's point of view we would argue that his aim was to create an agonistic space where differences were not camouflaged, and where overwhelming compromises were not made as long as there was still a disagreement. What is most important is that Andrzej Lachowicz's strategies (consciously being present in mass media, in order to gain opportunities to use them to his own purposes) consciously redefined the artist's role in the society. By signing his works as 'Andy' (after all, Warhol's name was *Andriej*, which is Andrzej) in a country which was as ambiguously open to the West as Poland was during Edward Gierek's time, he tried to make it clear that the artist's role had to be redefined. However, what is truly surprising and fascinating about the artist's attitude is his mastery of art, specifically in relation to provocation or even blasphemy (*A Successful Attempt to Stand on Water. 'Metaphysica'*, 1974) as well as his subtle lyricism.



Natalia LL, session of **Dreaming** [Śnienie], Wrocław 1979



Natalia LL

Intimate partnership

Emphasising everyday practices as the foundation for PERMAFO's conceptions, it is impossible to not stress that at the core of PERMAFO was a married couple – the Lachowicz, Natalia and Andrzej. Western historians of art (especially feminists) have for a long time been interested in the difference of receiving art from coupled individuals – much has been written about Lee Krasner's views on art in her relationship with Jackson Pollock, Jasper Johns with Robert Rauschenberg,⁸⁰ Valie Export and Peter Weibel, Niki de Saint Phalle with Jean Tinguely, or Anette Messager with Christian Boltanski, to name just a few well-known relationships.⁸¹ The role of silent witness has often been analysed, the artist's muse, who made sacrifices for the spouse. In Polish literature there are probably no such studies, even though the issue does in fact exist. A breakthrough has recently been made by Krystyna Czerni who, although she did not adopt the feminist position of emancipation, described with great emotion how Zofia Gutkowska, a gifted painter, sacrificed herself fully for her husband Jerzy Nowosielski's career, whom she perceived as more artistically gifted.⁸² The existential darkness and fiasco of having a relationship with a 'genius' – as if taken from the time of Young Poland, set in a traditional bourgeoisie entourage of Cracow – could be contrasted with our model from Wrocław, which was a light, crazy, optimistic love affair, free from the solemn tradition of what an intimate relationship ought to look like. Art as an idea for the every day, the incessant turning of life into art, if – as Natalia LL said – we record such ordinary and mundane routines as



Andrzej Lachowicz



Natalia LL and Andrzej Lachowicz, Cracow 1976

sleep, copulation, and rest.⁸³ A type of sexual revolution was taking place in Poland in the 1970s. Fortunately, artists did not assign the role of voyeur to the viewer (although the viewers envied them this passion, this spectacular game they played in front of their eyes, with extravagant clothes, nonchalant gestures, and fast motorcycles) since their role was to simply inspire and brighten up the everyday. Therefore it should come as no surprise that included in the catalogue published by the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle on the occasion of Andrzej Lachowicz's retrospective exhibition, apart from the artist's critical and programme texts, alongside the reproductions of many key works, were love poems to and about Natalia.⁸⁴

Paweł Leszkowicz correctly emphasised recently that "the example of the Lachowicz shows how intellectualisation as a method of desexualisation was moved entirely to the sphere of theoretical commentary, while the image remained *pure*, consciously showing its erotic and humorous intentions. Natalia LL was also able to engage in an ironic dialogue which unmasked the tendency in the photographic act in question – the so-called photomedia

actions; a conceptual *peep show* – to reveal the decorative and patriarchal character of eroticism, and the hypocrisy of artists who referred only to an 'academic study of art', ignoring completely the basic level of what was shown."⁸⁵ The research highlights that Natalia LL, thanks to her feminist position (among other aspects), managed to dissociate herself from the male-centric voyeurism typically characterising the Polish neo-avant-garde, and break free from the official establishment policies concerning gender and sexuality. Rightly calling her a "master of neo-avant-garde art", Leszkowicz concludes simultaneously that openly showing a sexual act was a manifestation of freedom, a natural threat to the authorities who always aimed to stifle the "anarchic pleasures and desires giving a foretaste of freedom."⁸⁶

Grzegorz Dziamski, in turn, posed the question of why were there so few female artists in conceptual art,⁸⁷ and tried to answer it in an oblique way by showing how important this conceptual breakthrough was for women. Dziamski proves that it was the language of conceptualism that made women's voices audible and that challenged the authority of the monosexual subject.

Carolee Schneemann, still from the film **Fuses**, 1967
DTZSP collection

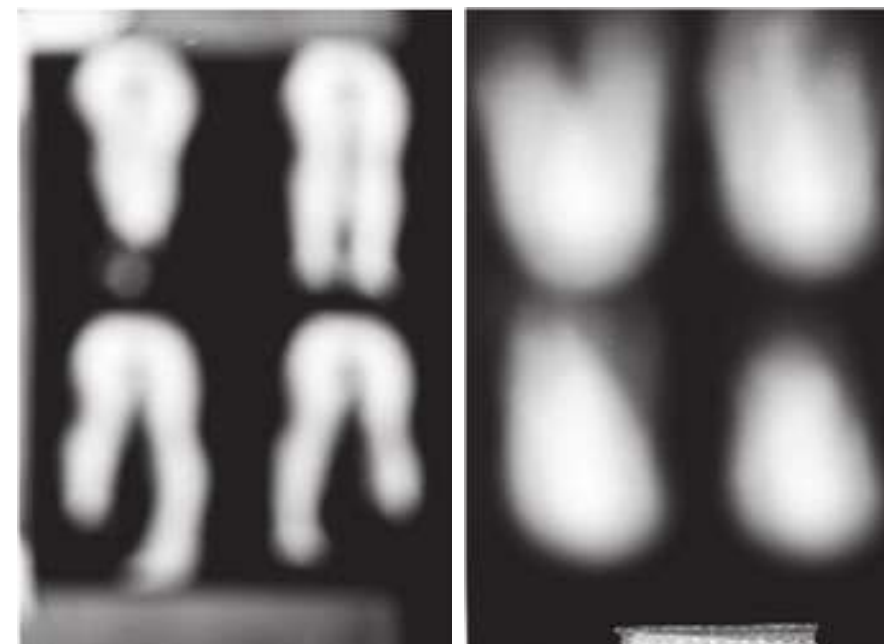
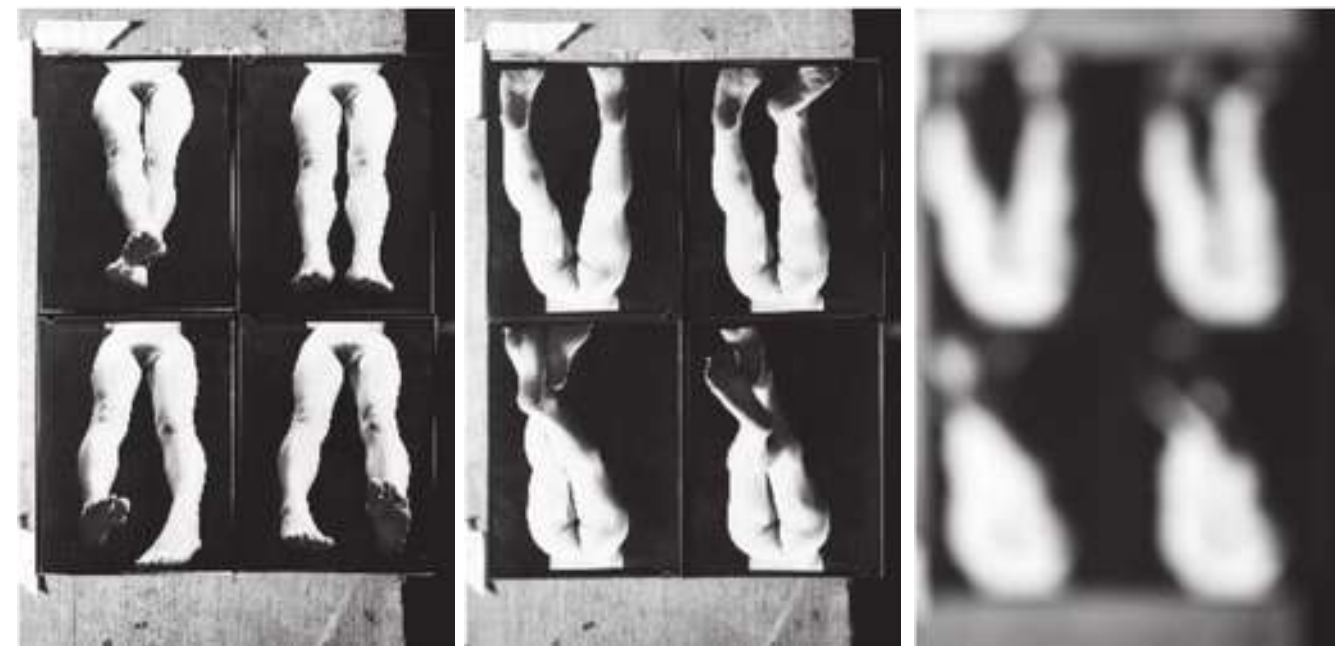


Zbigniew Dłubak

People

When PERMAFO was set up, its oldest, most well-known and active member (in the avant-garde movement in Poland) was Zbigniew Dłubak, who was 49 years old while the other founders were in their early thirties. As a boy, Dłubak was a prisoner of the Nazis and, together with Marian Bogusz, he organised clandestine art exhibitions in the Mauthausen concentration camp. After the war, and having reached the rank of colonel, he was in charge of the House of the Polish Armed Forces in Warsaw, where he was responsible for organising cultural life, and was cooperated with by luminaries of Polish culture such as Henryk Stażewski, Stanisław Fijałkowski, and Julian Tuwim.⁸⁸ One of his more important public appearances before Social Realism was officially decreed was at the first *Exhibition of Modern Art* in Cracow in 1948, at which he showed only photographs, mostly depicting clockwork, a section of a plant, the movement of stars, and a chest X-ray, amongst other subjects. They were not only his own photographs, but also scientific reproductions that he had appropriated: “The point was that the form of natural phenomena affects the depiction in modern art.”⁸⁹ He wrote to the organisers of the exhibition in September 1948 that he had encountered Marxism in 1935, and his world view had been under its influence ever since; that art had interested him only since 1937, and that he had been involved in photography since 1948, which, he announced, was “an art technique which I find most appealing.”⁹⁰ Dłubak’s photographs seemed almost surreal, but even at that time what mattered for the artist was that in spite of being completely realistic, they looked different, thanks to a convention of presentation which was devoid of artistry, breaking stereotypes concerning the depiction of both art and reality. For a long time Dłubak did not photograph landscapes – being stopped twice by the police in the process, he said, “I stopped feeling like making landscapes.”⁹¹ This remark reminds us of the kind of strict disciplines and prohibitions in place which one was confronted with in taking up photography in the People’s

Republic. During the thaw after Stalin’s death, Dłubak set up Group 55 with his old wartime friends Marian Bogusz and Kajetan Sosnowski, and their first exhibition was held in Barbara Zbrożyna’s sculpture studio. Their important joint manifesto was the so-called *anti-Arsenal* – an exhibition in Desa in the Old Town, which stood in opposition to the official *Arsenal*, considered by some researchers as the exhibition that ended Socialist Realism (although the dominant form of the ‘new opening’ – expression in painting – was relatively homogenous). Dłubak was of the opinion that *Arsenal* presented neo-socialist-realist art which was just a bit more open; the idea of art’s subordinate role not yet done away with, it was “just language, not an issue within whole culture.”⁹² He was equally negative about Kantor (with whom he cooperated in Cracow during the Modern Art exhibition) – he believed that one should not treat modernity as a catalogue of forms to be copied, but instead treat art as a whole. Dłubak also argued with Kantor about Socialist Realism, which was an interesting challenge for him; he was never ashamed of that position, and never attempted to leave it unsaid. In one of his most important articles titled *On Some Aspects of the Marxist Theory of Art* from 1950 (which was included in a collection of his texts on art published by the Remont Gallery in 1977), he wrote that socialist-realist art filled him with “a huge load of optimism.”⁹³ As an avant-garde artist, he referred to Colourism with reluctance, considering it a type of superficial and harmful aestheticism which impoverished art, dealing only with the surface of the image. He himself did not start dealing with the image through the medium of photography, but from peculiar paintings of fossils (*Amonity, Antropolity*). Even at the famous Osieki festival he provocatively produced a painting, leading him to fall out with young conceptualists who revoked painting as such, having also previously fallen out with the Foksal Gallery; in between, however, he also took photographs, including the still-famous *Iconosphere*. After the breakdown of Group 55 Dłubak learnt to work alone, but in spite of this, having received a personal invitation to the *Wrocław ’70 Symposium*, he invited the Lachowicz to collaborate, and soon after (partially by necessity because he still lived in Warsaw) his involvement with PERMAFO began. However, admitting he could not agree with many things that were happening at PERMAFO, his cooperation soon became looser, especially after the Warsaw Seminary was created (1976).⁹⁴ In his initial period of intense involvement with PERMAFO, Dłubak also met Jan Świdziński, whose meetings together were to become crucial in the second half of the 1970s, when both artists’ connections to PERMAFO had become more distant. When asked by Wiesława Wierzchowska to summarise his views on art, Dłubak explained that he was involved in making dynamic sets of objects whose main purpose was to last in time, that would eventually change their principle through this lasting, the principle being the thing that was changeable and fluid. At a certain point the objects, having become signs of art, would be incorporated into a set called art; being before that – as empty signs – excluded from that set. Dłubak stressed that he was “interested in exactly this process of the changing meanings of what we call ‘a work of art’,”⁹⁵ and that sooner or later some signs come to signify art itself.

Zbigniew Dłubak, *Mutants* [Mutanty], 1971
Museum of Art in Łódź collection



Zbigniew Dłubak, **Action – Gesture** [*Czynność – Gest*], fragment, 1980
National Museum in Wrocław collection



Zbigniew Dłubak, **Ocean**, PERMAFO Gallery, Wrocław 1976



Zbigniew Dłubak



DŁUBAK

OCEAN

- 2 Feb. 1973



Zbigniew Dlubak, **Ocean**, contents of PERMAFO's catalogue-envelope, 1973



Natalia LL, photograph reproduced in PERMAFO's catalogue-enveloppe, 1971

Natalia Lach-Lachowicz studied in Wrocław, becoming a citizen in 1957 after leaving her home town of Żywiec (where she had spent her childhood and early youth);⁹⁶ and almost immediately started to achieve artistic success. In 1961, when she was still a student, she received a Grand Prix for a series of photographs at the 1st Festival of Students' Artistic Photography, and again in 1967 in the National Photography Exhibition *One*. Meeting Andrzej Lachowicz in 1961, and marrying him in 1964, sealed her willingness to co-establish an avant-garde in Wrocław. Her involvement in PERMAFO marked an exceptionally intense period of her life – many famous works were created in this time that are nowadays considered Polish art classics, such as the *Consumer Art* series from 1972–1975. The artist travelled extensively, and her work was praised by the feminist movement in being, as Agata Jakubowska noted, “a statement on the relations of power between genders.”⁹⁷ Her cooperation with feminists resulted in many publications, and group exhibitions with, among others, Marina Abramović, Valie Export, Annette Messager, Gina Pane, and Carolee Scheemann. A work of hers was shown on the cover of *heute Kunst* (1975, no. 9) and on the poster and invitation to the large 1975 international exhibition *Women's Art – New Tendencies [Frauen Kunst –*

Neue Tendenzen] that took place in Innsbruck, Austria. A by-product of this event was the exhibition *Women's Art* at the Jatki Gallery in Wrocław (with Carolee Schneemann, Noemi Midan, and Suzy Lake), also in 1975, which was completely misunderstood and put Natalia LL off of any further curatorial work, resuming it only at the time of the Wrocław Drawing Triennial. Although Ronduda approved of her “suggestive, eccentric image”, I think Agata Jakubowska's summary of Natalia LL's self-creation was more accurate, in that “she paved the way to an impossible expression of different femininity”,⁹⁸ this difference partly referring to her anamnesis and her celebration of the Great Goddess.⁹⁹

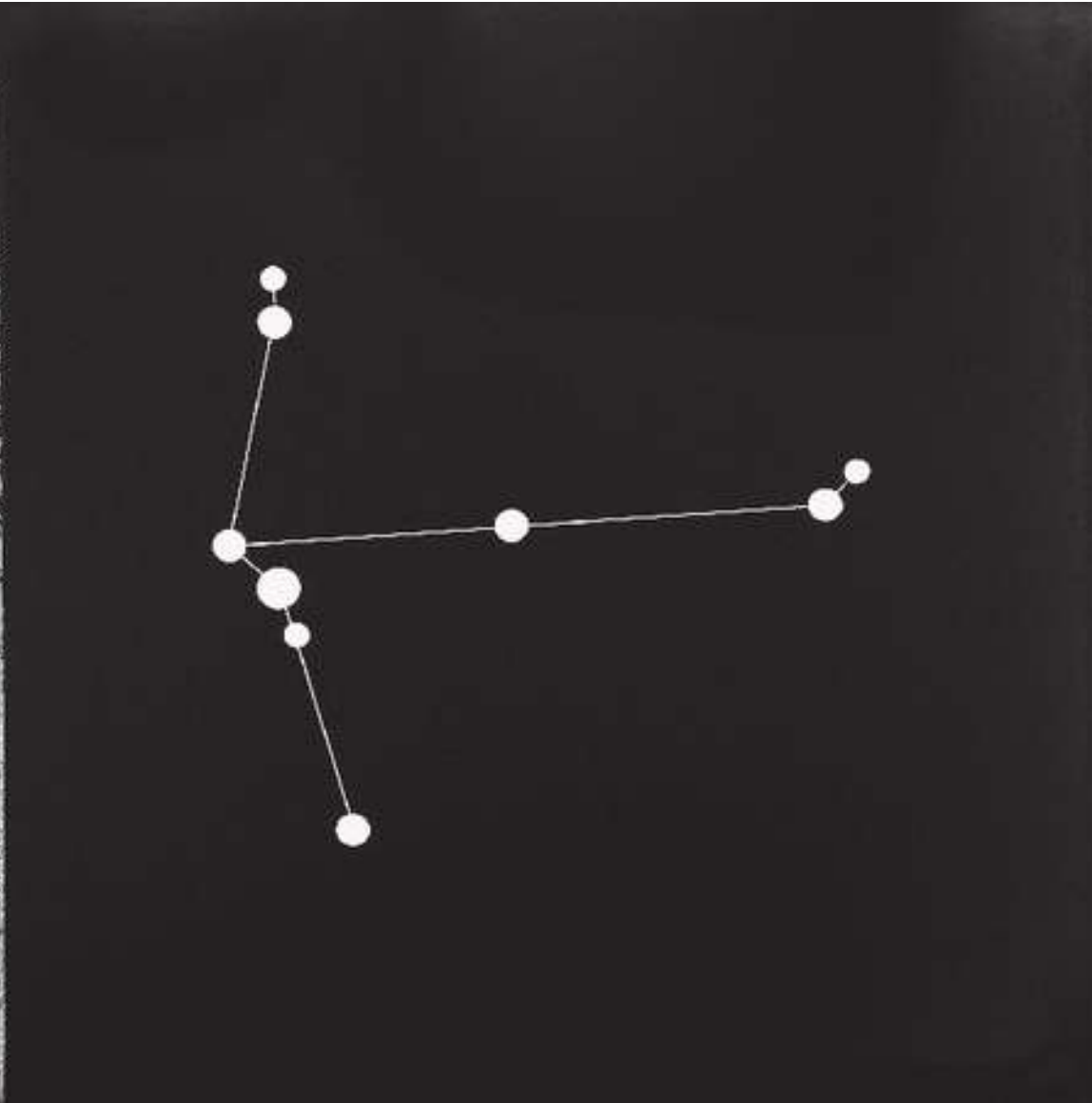
Since 2004, Natalia LL has been teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań (today called the University of Arts). Her connections with the younger generation, for whom she is a point of reference, have been emphasised by Adam Mazur, among others.¹⁰⁰ The critic observed that the artist not only succeeded in allowing photography (often perceived as a work of art to be hung on the wall) to become a spatial form and a documentation of a creative process, but that she also ‘deprives’ Diubak of the naive eroticism of his work, and scrutinises his outlook as being permeated by an almost sexual desire.¹⁰¹



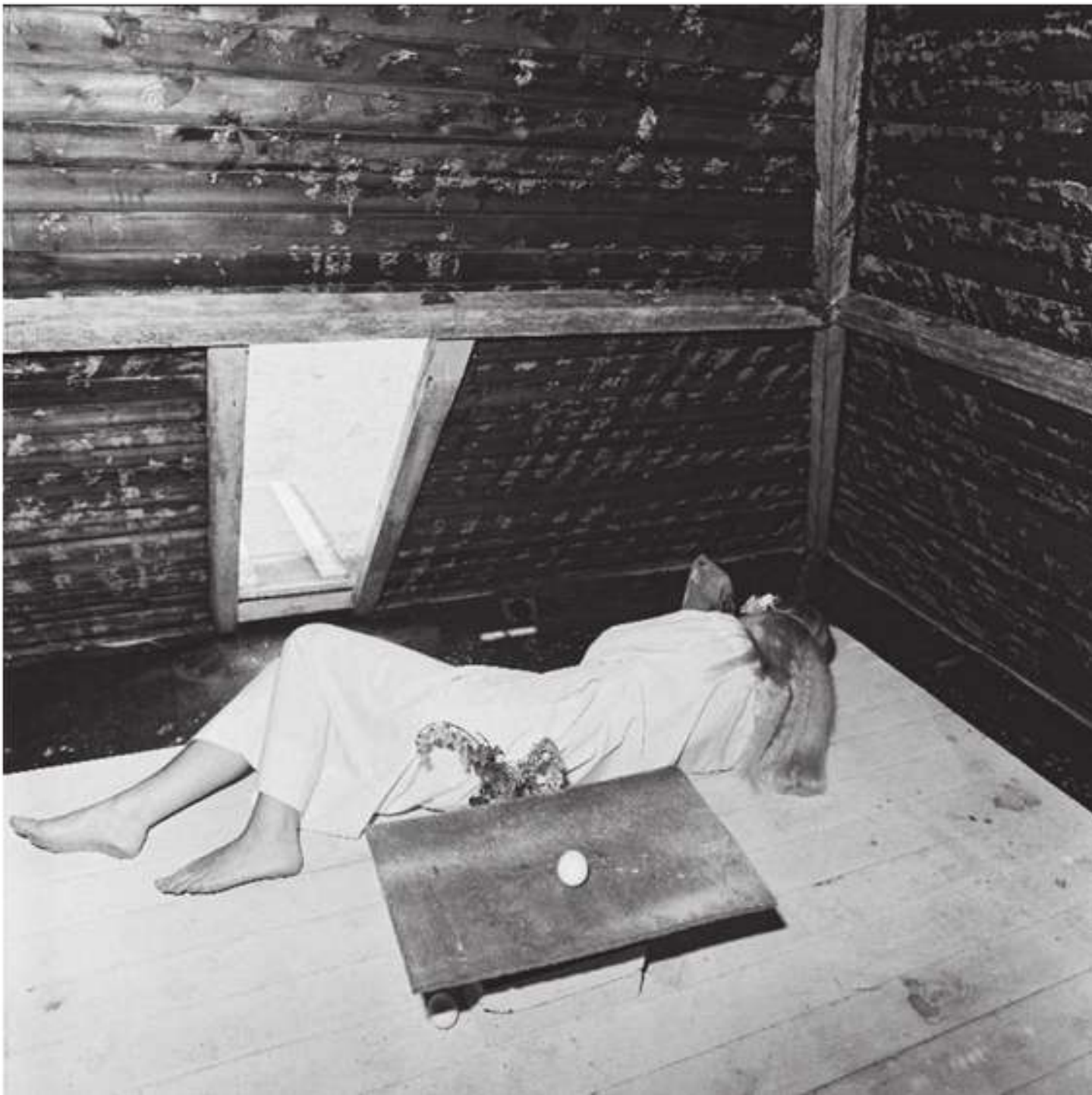
Natalia LL, session of **Dreaming** [Śnienie], Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, 1978



Natalia LL, **Points of Support, Aquila Constellation** [*Punkty podparcia, gwiazdozbiór Orzeł*], 1978
DTZSP collection



Natalia LL, **Points of Support, Aquila Constellation** [*Punkty podparcia, gwiazdozbiór Orzeł*], 1978
DTZSP collection



Natalia LL, **Pyramid** [*Piramida*], Wrocław-Stabłowice 1979



Natalia LL, **Pyramid** [*Piramida*], Wrocław-Stabłowice 1979



Andrzej Lachowicz

Andrzej Lachowicz, (Łódzia coat of arms) was born in Vilnius in 1939 (his parents lived on Subocz Street [ulica Subocz], not far from the Missionaries' church) into a repatriated family; he was later deported to the State of Poland from the territories (including Lithuania) that were annexed by the Soviet Union to the former German territories in Western Poland, as it was decided by the allies towards the end of the Second World War. His first stop was Cracow, where he studied at the Academy of Mining and Metallurgy, and made many friends in artistic circles. The next stage of his journey to the West was Wrocław, where he finished his art studies at the State Academy of Fine Arts in 1965. Marcin Giżycki considered him to be the first to use photography in the area of fine arts with such determination and belief;¹⁰² this statement was restrained, however, by his colleagues from Łódź, the members of the Workshop of the Film Form who incidentally saw themselves as the pioneers.¹⁰³ Although the point of arrival (the use of photography) was indeed common, the starting points of the artists from Wrocław and Łódź were undoubtedly different. The Workshop was clearly connected with the Łódź Film School, where taking photographs and making films (even experimental ones) was more scripted and accepted than at the fine art schools, where photography served only the purpose of documentation, or where using it as a reference for painting was thought to impoverish imagination, and was almost prohibited. In 1972 Lachowicz published his book *Visual and Mental Persuasion*, which was published as a continuous sequence of pages at the 10th International Graphic Art Biennial in Ljubljana, where the artist was awarded its first prize.¹⁰⁴ The artist distinguished his work between two attitudes – 'dynamic' and 'neutral'. The dynamic one – designed to provoke immediate reaction – actively influences the viewer through their preferences and habits, and is most efficient in agitating and advertising. In order for it to be efficient, it is necessary to use the method of forced mnemotechnics, i.e., repeating a sign, and developing it (so-called 'running-on'). The neutral persuasion, in turn, is a series of actions which make a sign transparent in relation to reality. A message is created, even though the emergence of a sign is almost unnoticeable. As Lachowicz wrote, a classic example of neutral persuasion is the use of the passage of time during a creative process. When registering a given situation at subsequent time intervals, what is happening in between can only be imagined, and this triggering of the use of imagination and consciousness is precisely the point of neutral persuasion.

Assuming the permanence of art, i.e., it not ending at the moment of finishing the first registration, implies a permanence of the sign which expresses this art. Therefore a sign is in a state of continuous, model-based dialogue with reality. It is interesting that putting emphasis on the relation between a sign and reality significantly changes previous creative practices. While an object of (intentional) contemplation was a registration of one's own impression, a permanent sign is rather a registration of a certain unique state of reality, or an artificial creation of a fact in reality. Thus, by making use of a seemingly visual message, we create meaning which is fulfilled in conceptual art.¹⁰⁵

Lachowicz went on to explain that the role of a sign in conceptual art is to make it possible for a message to exist, and that what follows happens in the receiver's consciousness, where "the whole of the meaning is fulfilled beyond the sign." In this way, one attempts to create a paravisual message – which, he added, seems to be the most interesting in art practice. This text could be considered a kind of manifesto, in which Lachowicz rejected signs which are "intuitively created, based on the experience of the tabular image", and put forward a separate category questioning the traditional understanding of composition, and the isomorphic sign which describes the uniformity of one shape and another:

the choice of a sign resulting from a rational choice of a shape which is best for a given message – this act of composition being the knowledge of proportions and the locations of shapes and colours with respect to one another – becomes a discipline that investigates superficial signs that have been separated from their meaning.¹⁰⁶

Bożenna Stokłosa emphasised that these conceptions constituted 'the key to read the output of PERMAFO's artists following the photomedia version of conceptualism, including Lachowicz's *permart*'.¹⁰⁷

However, there were interpretations existing without this key. For example, Kazimierz Piotrowski considered, metaphorically and intuitively, Lachowicz's *Energies of the Fall* (1980) in terms of a pre-cognition of the fall of the People's Republic.¹⁰⁸ This interpretation was in accordance with the artist's other conceptions that were connected, as noted by Wojciech Krukowski, with the "freedom in releasing elements of humour, paradox, and creative confabulation, as both part of transformation of reality by media and as a kind of game he played with his own milieu."¹⁰⁹



Andrzej Lachowicz, **A Successful Attempt to Stand on Water** [Udana próba stania na wodzie], 1974
National Museum in Wrocław collection



pp. 50-53: Andrzej Lachowicz, **PERMART**, artistic action during the Golden Grape Symposium, Zielona Góra 1971
 Among the participants were: Marcelli Bacciarelli, Andrzej Basaj, Jan Berdyszak, Szymon Bojko, Wiesław Borowski, Karol Broniatowski, Zbigniew Dłubak, Andrzej Dłużniewski, Jan Dobkowski, Stanisław Fijałkowski, Wanda Gołkowska, Konrad Jarodzki, J. Kaczmarski, Piotr Krakowski, Natalia LL, Ewa Ludwińska, Jerzy Ludwiński, Jolanta Marcolla, Elżbieta N., Adam Radajewski, Jerzy Rosołowicz, Zdzisław Sosnowski, Juliusz Starzyński, Z. Trojanowska, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Wiesława Wierzchowska, Krzysztof Zarębski, Eulalia Złotnicka





Andrzej Lachowicz, **Topologies** [*Topologie*], 1966–1987
DTZSP collection



Andrzej Lachowicz, **Topologies** [*Topologie*], 1966–1987
DTZSP collection



Antoni Dzieduszycki

Antoni Dzieduszycki (Sas coat of arms), two years Lachowicz's senior, was another settler from beyond the Bug River; his mother died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp when he was eight. Although he did not have a disposition for science or museology, after graduation from the Jagiellonian University (completing his master's thesis on the late-Baroque painter Alessandro Magnasco) Dzieduszycki became a custodian of the Pieskowa Skala Castle, noticed and recommended by professor Jerzy Szablewski, who was also the director of the Wawel National Art Collection. The castle then became the favourite meeting place of artists from Cracow, and the venue for the balls of the Piwnica pod Baranami, the most renowned political cabaret in the country. Soon he started working as a journalist, became involved in TV production, and began making films about art and specific artists such as Antoni Rząsa, Władysław Hasiór, and Tadeusz Brzozowski. In the 1960s Dzieduszycki returned to Wrocław (where he had attended and finished secondary school education) and got involved in the activities of avant-garde artists.

He published texts in the *Odra* magazine, wrote scripts, and organised performances – all the while crossing the boundaries between theory and practice, as recommended by conceptualism. His action entitled *I or When Attitude Becomes Pose* [*Ja lub kiedy postawa staje się pozą*] (1971) consisted of moving two cardboard life-size letters – 'J' and 'A' ('Ja' meaning 'I') – to various places and posing with them in different situations (even hanging the letters on a tall chimney), all registered by a camera. The game of exposing the artist's ego as a self-mocking promotion (plus the ridiculed Freudianism of the phallic chimney) was also a game shared – behind the camera was Natalia LL, with Lachowicz involved in production. Dzieduszycki later moved to Warsaw, where he was the editor of *Pegaz*, a popular TV programme focussing on art. His last episode as editor, which he made with his friend and professional partner Paweł Sosnowski, was the coverage of the Congress of Culture, which was interrupted by the introduction of the martial law. Dzieduszycki lost his job, and after a spell of unemployment he opened a small gallery with Paweł Sosnowski, which (in the depression of the 1980s!) was obviously unprofitable. Dzieduszycki lived – as Sosnowski put it – like a vagabond, moving from place to place countless times, always without money, without a flat, but also without acquiring personal possessions, taking up temporary jobs "with just the shirt on his back". Sosnowski remarked that "Antek [as Dzieduszycki was known to his friends] was a phantom; he appeared unexpectedly and vanished without notice; he had no schedules, and even if he made one at times, he didn't respect it."¹⁰ Caught in an absurd life, he was able to enthuse about art, enjoy life, and inspire. His script for *Film III Total Documentation* read:

Make 14,600 one-frame takes of all the facts we consider worthy of our attention, including accidental ones, which happen to be in front of the lens. The frames should be edited to make one whole. The documentation should never be stopped – new frames should be added to the already existing film. Frames from tapes shot by other people, found etc., can be added. Soundtrack to be made analogously.

In the context of Dzieduszycki's life, this script may be interpreted as an impossible project involving an infinite number of narratives that could result from being in a time. Are there really things of higher and lesser importance in it? Or maybe those of lesser importance can suddenly open surprising spaces to us? Dzieduszycki worked 'in-between', and it is this in-between that the new art of the 1970s set out to index.

Antoni Dzieduszycki, *I or When Attitude Becomes Pose* [*Ja lub kiedy postawa staje się pozą*], NS PERMAFO – New Situation catalogue, 1971

ANTONI DZIEDUSZYCKI, polen

filme, die jeder mit einer amateur-camera, 8 oder 16 mm, machen und mit hilfe eines einfachen projektors projizieren kann.

I. "Gleichzeitigkeit von Raum, Zeit und Handlung."

man filme 3 filmsequenzen mit fester kamera / A, B, C, *) und schneide den film nach folgendem schema zusammen:

die sequenz A fängt mit der höchstbildfolge /24 bilder in einer sekunde/ an bis zum stillstand. um ein gleichmäßiges ausblenden der A-sequenz zu erreichen, muß sie jeweils um ein bild pro sekunde vermindert werden / 24-1 , 23-1 , 22-1 , etc./.

statt nun bilder herauszuschneiden werden die einzelbilder der sequenz B eingefügt, was wiederum vom stillstand bis zur höchstbildfolge geschieht. alle 24 sekunden wird die situation umgekehrt. die sequenz C wird jetzt so in den ganzen film eingefügt, daß ein gleichmäßig wiederkehrender rhythmus entsteht, der auch akustisch dem elektrocardiogramm des autors übereinstimmt.

*) unser vorschlag sieht folgende aufteilung vor:

- A - dokumentation des ortes
- B - dokumentation der person
- C - dokumentation des ereignisses

II. " Vertraute Ereignisse "

variante a . ein vertrautes ereignis unseres privatlebens wird mit hilfe einer fest eingebauten kamera in einem stark abgedunkelten raum, der ab und zu durch blitze aufgeleuchtet wird, gefilmt.

bedenke! die filmspule wird nicht eingebaut, es wird nur so getan, als ob gefilmt wird.

variante b . der film wird wie an variante "a" belichtet, jedoch wird ein frei gewählter ausschnitt der wirklichkeit in voller länge einer filmspule gefilmt: eine straße, ein innenraum, ein bach, ein wald.

mit leerer filmspule !

III. " Total Dokumentation "

14.600 einzelaufnahmen von allen dingen, die uns wert sind gefilmt zu werden, werden mehr oder weniger zufällig gemacht. diese einzelaufnahmen werden als ganzes aufgezogen.

die dokumentation wird nicht unterbrochen, sei es, daß neue aufnahmen gemacht werden.

weitere ausschnitte können den film ergänzen.

die tonaufzeichnung geschieht analog.

wrocław, 1970

antoni dzieduszycki



Zdzisław Sosnowski, **Hat** [Czapka], 1971
collection the artist

also Professor Leszek Kaćma from the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław. His next challenge turned out to be the Studio Gallery, part of Józef Szajna's 'kingdom'. His cooperation with Szajna was also fruitful, showing several outstanding avant-garde artists, including Sol LeWitt and Mario Merz.

Zdzisław Sosnowski's impact on the art of the 1970s has only recently begun to be appreciated. An important role in re-discovering the output of the artist (who has been living in France since the 1980s) was played by Łukasz Ronduda, who considered him to be the first Polish artist who chose to play with the mass media and consumer culture, having rejected the autonomous language of art to investigate the relationships between the culture of celebrities and of contemporary artists who changed their status and social role.

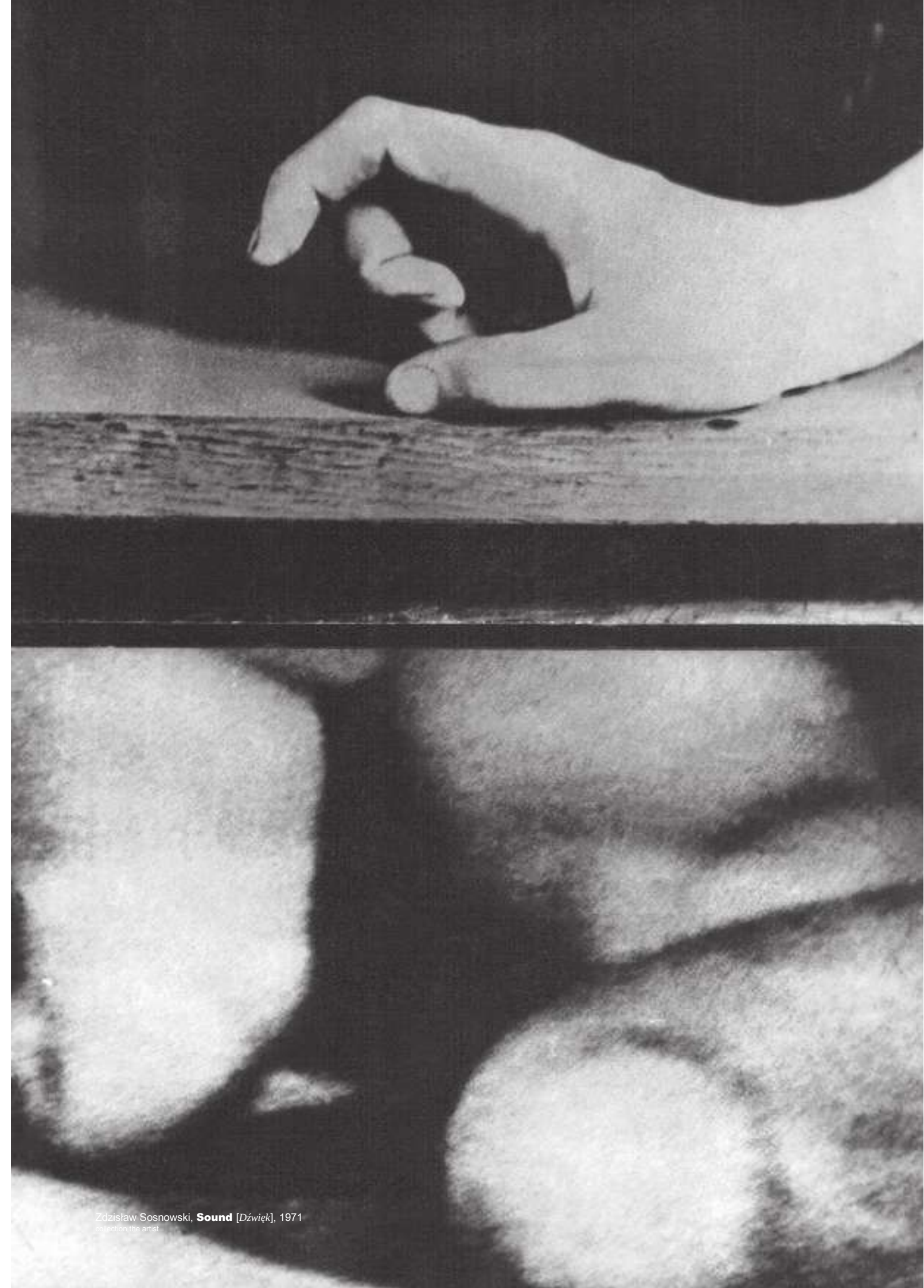


Zdzisław Sosnowski, **Bench** [Ławka], 1973
collection the artist

PERMAFO was readily involved with young artists. Zdzisław Sosnowski, 12 years Lachowicz's junior, was regularly present during meetings at the Mona Lisa Gallery, and the discussions with Jerzy Ludwiński; he was a student of Alfons Mazurkiewicz, who was extremely open to new trends and allowed him not to paint, letting him decide about his art himself through the choice of means of expression, which made it possible to develop his own experiences from the very beginning. Andrzej Lachowicz, who also taught in the Studio of Visual Actions and Structures (the director was Professor Leszek Kaćma) at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław, was equally relaxed. All this made Sosnowski find himself within PERMAFO's range of influence. But later he started to operate on a wider scale, making his own name as a curator (in 1972 he set up the Current Art Gallery – active until 1975 – together with Jolanta Marcolla, soon joined by Dobrosław Bagiński and Janusz Haka), and organising, among other shows, the famous 1972 exhibition *Current Art* (featuring Sławomir Bagiński, Anna Bolcewicz, Wojciech Bruszewski, Paweł Duda, Paweł Freisler, Zbigniew Jeż, Jerzy Kiernicki, Roman Kutera, Paweł Kwiek, Przemysław Kwiek, Jolanta Marcolla, Wiesław Smużny, Zdzisław Sosnowski, and Jan S. Wojciechowski). The exhibition existed as a quasi-manifesto of young art, the catalogue including Lachowicz's *ABC* and one of his own, in which he cockily wrote:

We situate ourselves and all others in a process of reflection on the seemingly trivial matters of reality, we do not imitate mentors of timeless truths who paint nondescript brown torsos in thick painting matter.

His contact with the Wrocław avant-garde did not drop, but loosened when he took over the Contemporary Gallery in Warsaw after Janusz Bogucki. But when he organised the national exhibition *Aspects of Modern Polish Art* at the gallery in 1975, together with Jacek Drabik and Janusz Haka, he invited not only his friends from PERMAFO, but



Zdzisław Sosnowski, **Sound** [Dźwięk], 1971
collection the artist



Zdzisław Sosnowski, still from the film **Goalkeeper**, 1975
collection the artist



Zdzisław Sosnowski, still from the film **Goalkeeper**, 1975
collection the artist



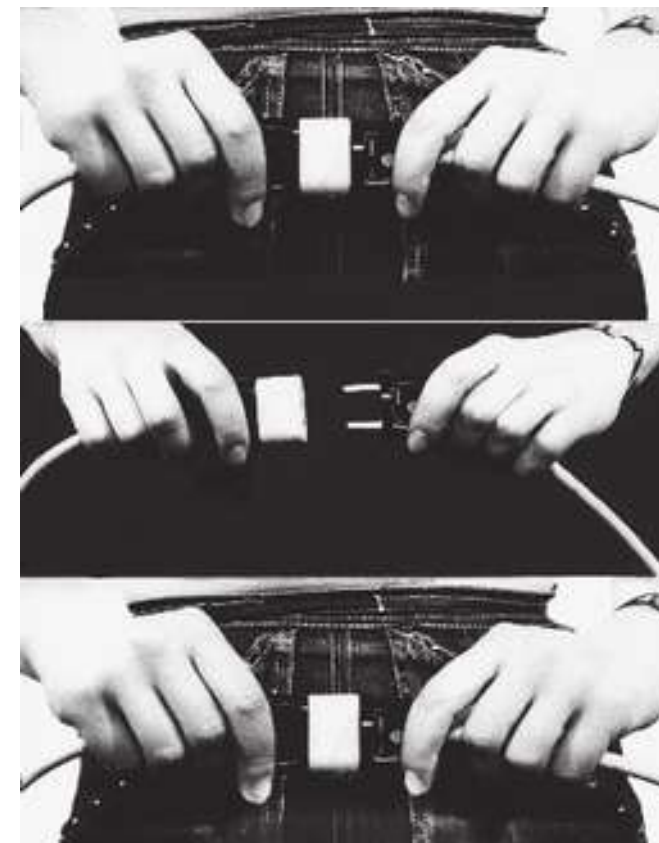
Jolanta Marcolla, **Dependence**, 1972
collection the artist

Another person connected with PERMAFO and the Current Art Gallery was Jolanta Marcolla, who situated her area of interest at the intersection of the mutually dependant realms of art and reality; of what we see and what we know.¹¹¹ Despite it seeming like she was only interested in documentation, it was important for her to be able to see multiple conceptions in ostensibly objective registrations, to reveal a hidden structure beneath that which is visible. Like Sosnowski, she was allowed to follow her individual programme of study at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław, quickly focussing on what really interested her: transferring a work of art into a mental sphere, the manners of its reception, and playing intellectual games with the audience. She was also quick to concentrate on new media, not only photography and video, but also television, in which she saw a possibility of manipulating reality; she was one of pioneers of using a TV studio for artistic instead of commercial and common means. Marcolla described her practice in terms of 'research work', 'revealing', 'using

a chosen language', and 'constructing the potential research apparatus'. She also reflected on more traditional media, one of her most interesting actions being the *Handwork* series of paintings, in which the painter's flourish repeated the linen structure of the canvas, remaining transparent with respect to the starting point; theoretically not changing anything, but in practice turning 'raw' material into a work of art. Commenting on this parody of the painter's alchemy, she said in 1974: "the questions about the boundaries of art are probably the driving force of my work."¹¹² She perceived her role as an artist not so much in terms of adding something to the world – not to mention personal expression – but rather in terms of giving up the numerous possibilities offered by art: "The hard-practiced ability to give up the many possibilities in art is my way of being independent from it."¹¹³ Marcolla participated in performances captured on camera, the camera being the only witness of the pre-programmed event. Some of them (e.g., *Contact*, 1972) were so trivial that photography became a medium which transformed a banal action, like putting a plug into a socket, into a multi-meaningful visual notation (this method was also used by Natalia LL). At other times, like in *Small Curls* (1975), the starting point was a bit of newspaper advice with the idea of femininity attached to it. Here, the artist used a multi-layered parody, mocking the instructed appearance of the petit-bourgeoisie and its resemblance to conceptual instructions. Her piece under the title *Four Photos* (1975) may be treated as the manifesto of Marcolla's attitude – it in fact shows *three* photographic self-portraits, with the middle one showing the artist with a camera aimed directly at the viewer. It is the taking of the 'fourth photo' that makes us aware that the artist does not accept a passive 'feminine' attitude towards the world.¹¹⁴ Similarly, she did not accept a contemplative attitude towards art, declaring that "art is always such as it is created by active attitudes."¹¹⁵ The artist's pretty, roguish face – willing not only to undertake 'research work', but also prone to irony and pranks – looks out at us from many photographs of the 1970s.



Jolanta Marcolla, **Four Photos**, 1975
collection the artist



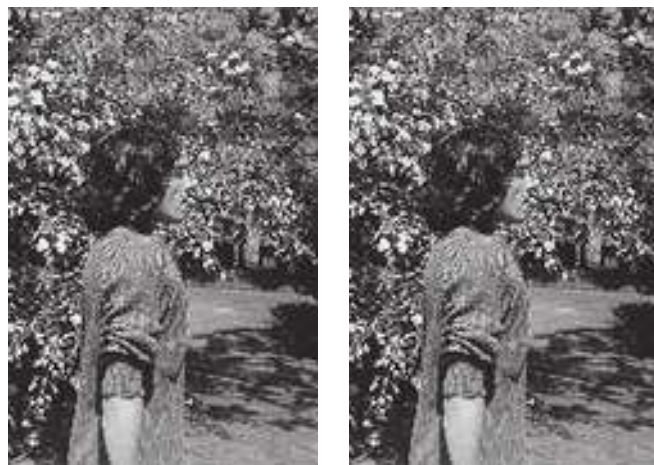
Jolanta Marcolla, **Contact 1**, 1972
collection the artist



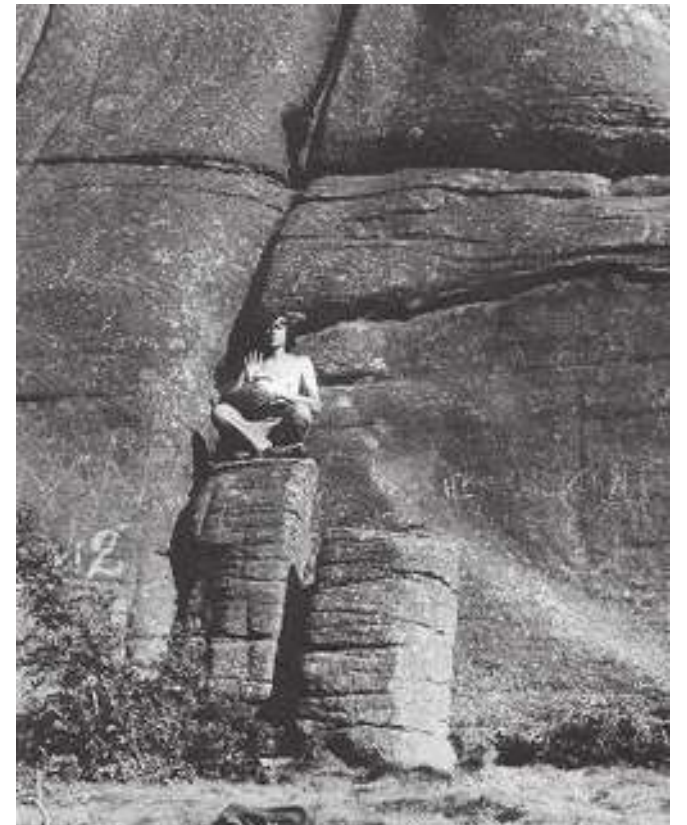
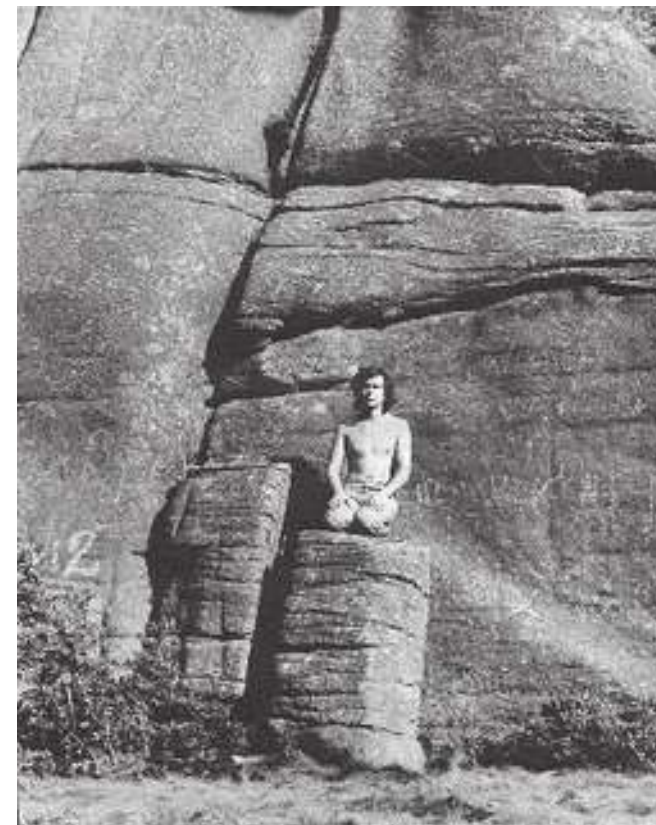
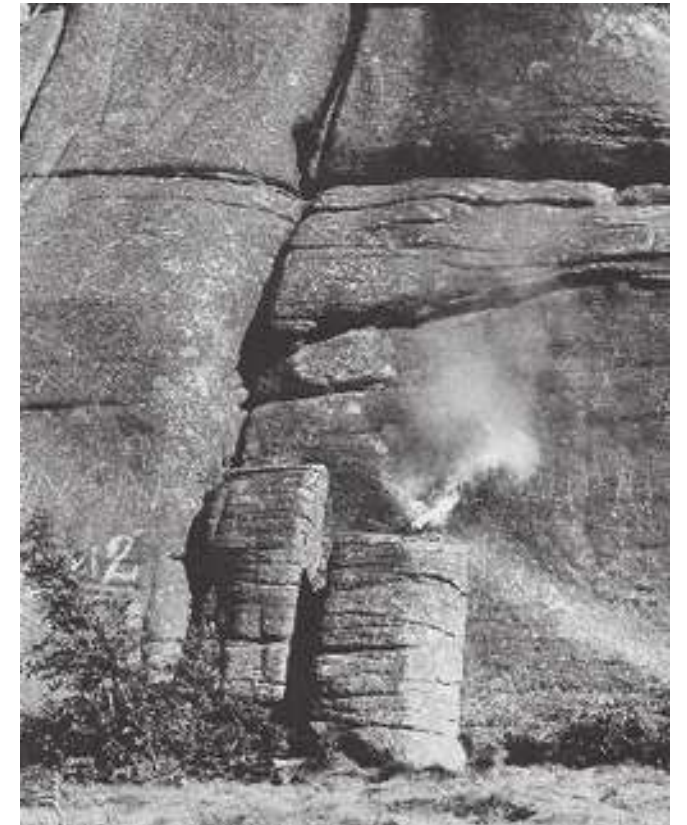
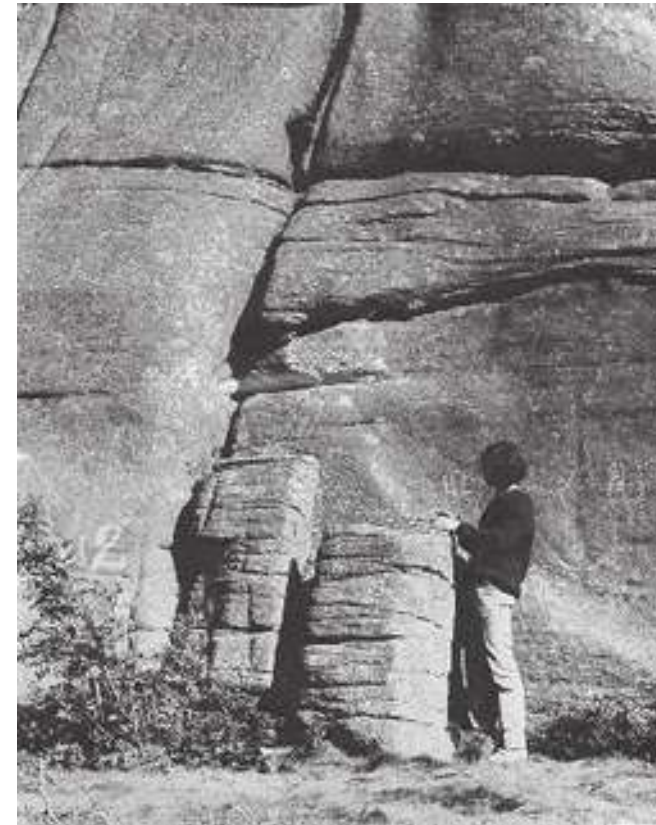
Romuald Kutera, **Mirror II** [Lusterko II], 1972
collection the artist

one, in which art could become truly social, the former ways of presenting it having been negated. In the early 1970s Kutera created many sets of photographs which, by 'telling' banal stories, de-mythologised the author's exceptional position (*Breathe In, Breathe Out* [Wdech-Wydech]; *Open Sign-Closed Sign* [Znak otwarty-Znak zamknięty]). The set *Stepping Down from the Pedestal I–III* [Zejście z cokołu I–III] from 1973, in which the artist literally steps down from a pedestal to the earth, constituted a kind of conclusion. The artist's favourite prop at that time was a mirror aimed at the camera's lens – the various angles of the mirror resulting in the alteration of the camera's way of 'seeing' and deconstructing forms revealed, through an incredibly simple technique, the manipulation of visibility. On the one hand, these mirror manipulations seemed to focus on the real world instead of producing separate artistic universes. But on the other, through working with a closed mirror-lens system in the place of a tautological aspect, they seemed to accentuate the paradoxical role of light that, instead of revealing sense, actually eliminated it. A flash of light in the mirror not only blurred the silhouette, somehow invalidating the role of the artist holding the mirror, but it also introduced cracks and refractions of space into the photographic image itself, peculiar cosmic holes filled with flash-voids. These flashes were nothing more than an image of light reflected from the shutter captured on film. The cycle followed an analytical approach to the device, i.e., the so-called 'media investigation' into the photo and video camera (*Transferring the Camera* [Przekazywanie Kamery], 16 mm black-and-white film, 1974), where seeing was perceived as an interaction of complex contexts which could only be revealed, without any hope of reaching the crux of its proper sense. In any case, knowledge gained through seeing is not accessible outside of the order in which it is created.

Another student of Alfons Mazurkiewicz was Romuald Kutera, who cooperated with PERMAFO (in particular with Jan Świdziński) before setting up his own gallery, the Newest Art Gallery [Galeria Sztuki Najnowszej]. The collaboration soon resulted in joint conceptual art undertakings outside of PERMAFO, such as a research project in the Kurpie region, where the artists confronted the local communities' ideas about art. Kutera attached key importance to the activities of the artistic collective, whose primary task was to create a unique system of cultural values through its members' direct contact, to then verify the resulting system in a wider social context.¹¹⁶ Here he was in agreement with Jan Świdziński, who was convinced that an artist's role was to mediate between various social groups in order to recognise and be able to understand a given reality of a certain group of people in their local context. What resulted would be a new institutional order, radically different from the previous



Romuald Kutera, **Breathe In – Breathe Out** [Wdech-Wydech], 1973
collection the artist



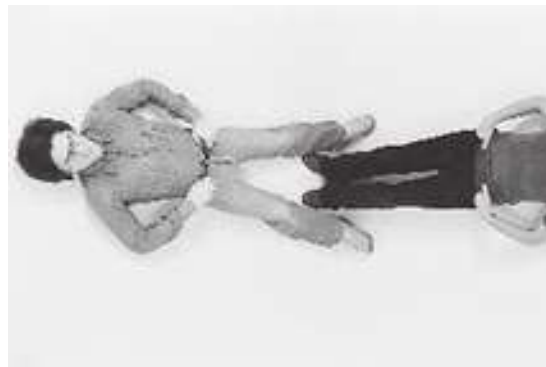
Romuald Kutera, **Sending Images – Contemplatorium** [Wysyłanie obrazów – kontemplatorium], 1973
collection the artist



Andrzej Sapija

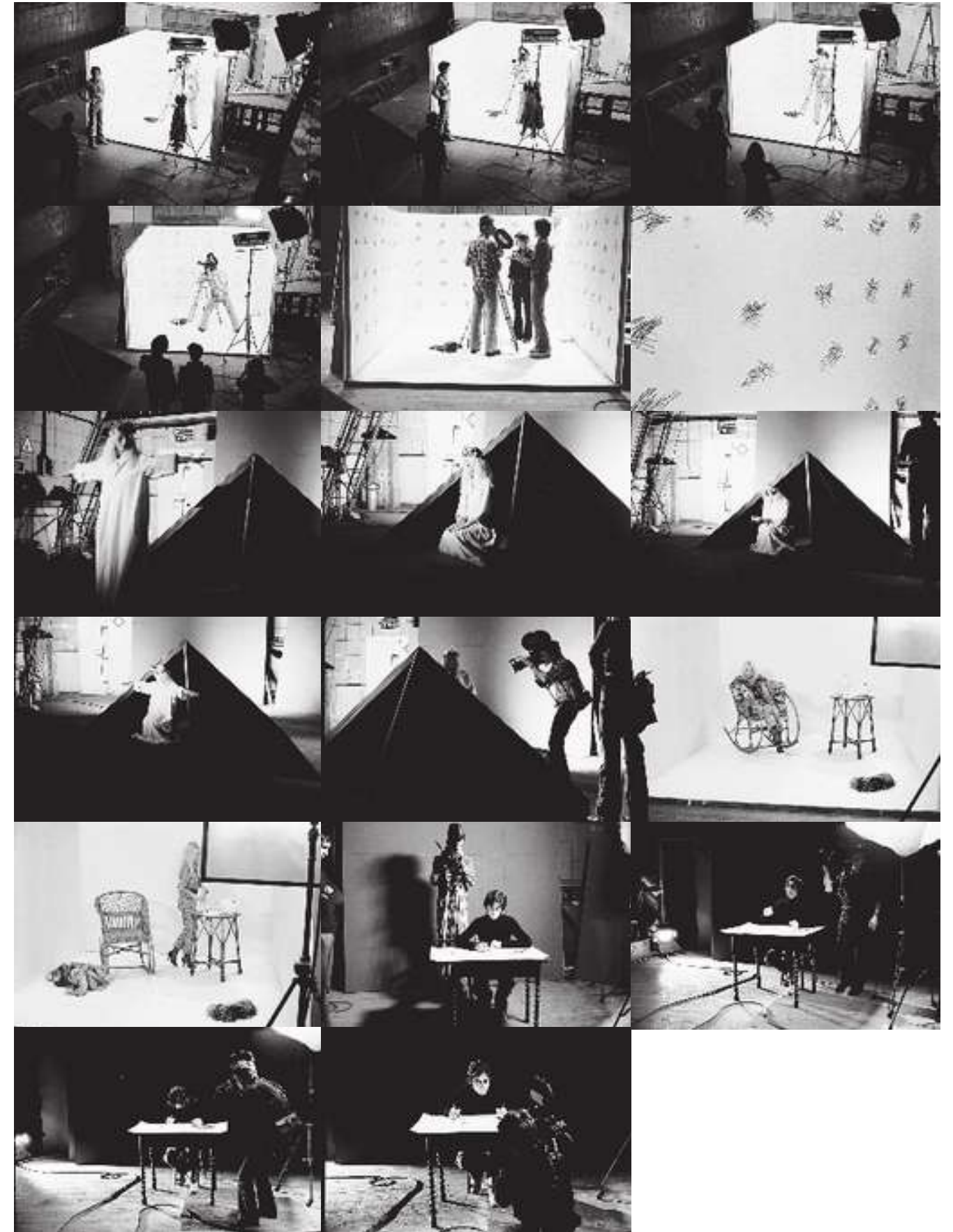
Andrzej Sapija encountered PERMAFO whilst attending the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław; he also studied philosophy (he read Gramsci during PERMAFO meetings), and soon after – because of his interest in photography and film – he took up further studies in the Department of Directing at the Łódź Film School. As a director he made films about the Wrocław avant-garde, including the work of Natalia LL and Andrzej Lachowicz, which are now considered as priceless registrations of the ephemeral actions. At PERMAFO he showed his drawing series, explaining his interest in the medium in the following way:

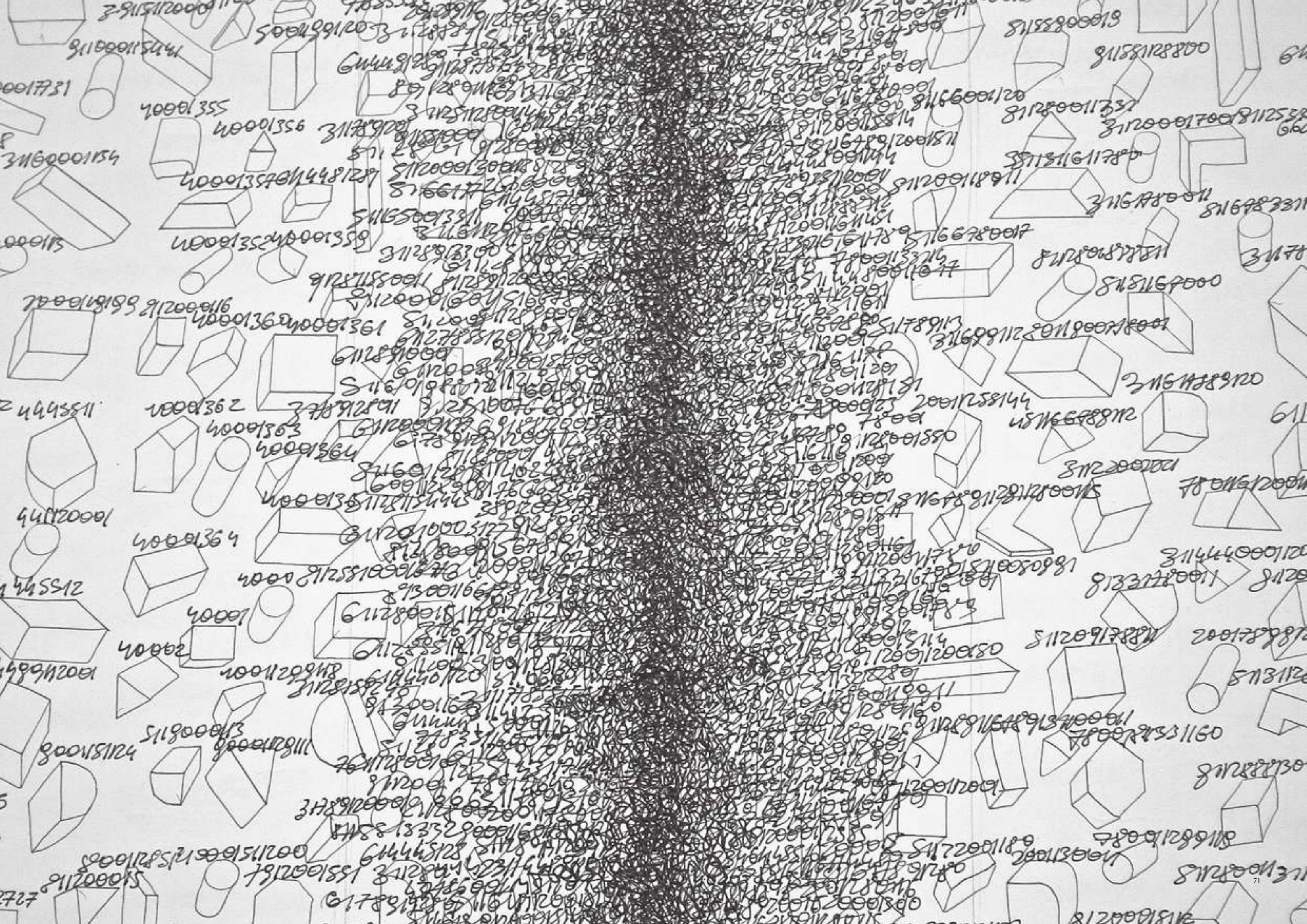
I think that nowadays drawing treats itself as its own subject of study, experimenting with itself and penetrating itself, trying to define its own limits of possibility. Perceived in this way, it is actually drawing of drawing, which investigates its boundaries of autonomy and the possibilities of playing with reality. At the same time it is a means of creating new ways to learn about art.

Andrzej Sapija on the set of his film **Extreme Actions** [Działania ekstremalne], 1979

The conceptual revolution in thinking about art was a turning point which changed the status of drawing. It became a medium for notation, documentation, and the registering of thoughts, but above all things it became a method for the intellectual penetration of art and reality. It became a method of raising new problems and posing questions which exceeded subsequent limitations on drawing; it broadened its definition, in order to reveal new possibilities lying within it.¹¹⁷

Sapija's drawings – decentralised clouds of numbers and geometric figures – enter through a crack of spectral space drawn between an architect and a meticulous string of digits which, in spite of their dryness and discipline, are prone to mathematical fever. Wiesława Wierchowska noticed in *Polish Contemporary Drawing* that the change in the status of drawing in the 1970s was connected with post-conceptual experiments and the sphere of experiences that Jerzy Ludwiński called 'art beyond convention'. Therefore it was not without reason, after having drawn conclusions from this change, that Wrocław became the venue for a national review of drawing, which was to later become an international triennial. It was here that various experiments and investigations were carried out, primarily connected with the self-analysis of drawing and its role in creative processes. Wierchowska also noticed that these experiences resulted in the emergence of a small group of artists in Poland that treated drawing as their main medium. Apart from Sapija, Wierchowska also references Marek Chlanda, Monika Małkowska and Zbigniew Kamieński.¹¹⁸ What is more, Sapija was appointed laureate of the first International Drawing Triennial in Wrocław in 1978.

**Extreme Actions** [Działania ekstremalne], on the set of Andrzej Sapija's film starring Natalia LL, Andrzej Lachowicz, Andrzej Sapija, 1979





Andrzej Sapija, still from his film **Extreme Actions** [Działania ekstremalne], 1979



Andrzej Sapija, from the **SETS** [ZBIORY] series, 1976–1979
collection the artist



Witold Liszkowski, **Personal Art** [Sztuka osobista], 1977
collection the artist

Jerzy Grotowski. It is worth mentioning here that Liszkowski studied under professor Alfons Mazurkiewicz, following in the footsteps of older students fascinated by conceptualism allowed by him to develop their art without being bound by formal requirements of the Academy; unfortunately, the professor's unexpected death made any further studies impossible.¹¹⁹ From 1977 onwards Liszkowski participated in many exhibitions, seminars, and art festivals, carrying out radical street actions (which involved interacting with passers-by, burning works or even himself), happenings, performances, para-theatrical actions, and his 'spectacles' during the Festival of Open Theatre and in Wrocław's Centre for Contemporary Art (such as the interdisciplinary spectacle *Bukowice* on 31 March 1981 with Wiesław Misiek, and *March '68* on 9 October 1981 with Wiesław Misiek, Lech Mrożek, and Marek Łopata). During the years that PERMAFO was active he was involved in the Art and Theory group, both as an artist and a theoretician. Much of the artist's early practice (including works such as *Personal Art*) was comprised of the registration of syntactic relations; isomorphic transformations where gentle, emotional gestures become aggressive and brutal; gender transformations where the artist's face changes gradually into a woman's face; where one meaning morphs into another. Liszkowski remembered self-mockingly that he was directed towards himself like Frida Kahlo – his performances for the camera in fact often appeared as slightly narcissist. The sequence of events needed to create a work started with the construction of a performance situation, which was followed by a series of photographs, and finally, the series of choices which disciplined and ordered them. Due to the choice of the sequence, a return to narration surprisingly occurred, on an existential, self-destructive, and sadomasochistic dimension. At this point there were discussions with Lachowicz, who called Liszkowski's expression an "excessive gutting out". Lachowicz demanded precise thinking – in one of his popular exercises, the morphology was to stay the same while the semantics was made to change. The conceptual form of the grid, which seemed to be created for dry and analytical linguistic operations, was blasted out from within by Liszkowski's corporeality.

The street actions engaging accidental passers-by in heated debates about art and society were stopped by the martial law (as was the case with the whole generation of artists' work), but Liszkowski was persuaded by Lachowicz, after their meeting in 1993, to resume his creative doings. He carried out large-scale projections of *Phenomenal Art* in public spaces, as well as the painting and installation series *Personal Structures*. Recently, together with Mariusz Mikołajek, he has been involved in a long-term and interdisciplinary project called *We Build a City of Art* in the streets of Wrocław (the Market Square, the square in front of the Wrocław Contemporary Museum, and Wrocław Nadodrze), which refers to his 1979–1981 actions.



Witold Liszkowski, **Questions** [Pytania], Centre for Contemporary Art, Wrocław 1979
collection the artist

Another gifted student of Lachowicz was Witold Liszkowski. Just like Zdzisław Sosnowski and Jolanta Marcolla, he also followed an individual programme of study at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław. He graduated in 1979, and presented his famous diploma thesis *Questions*, an installation resembling a library reading room and archive containing texts, catalogues, and books by writers such as Althusser and Benjamin (of whom Liszkowski was a passionate reader at the time; also attending Jan Kurowicz's classes, and debating fiercely with Grzegorz Dziamski), as well as Maciej Słomczyński's freshly translated edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Inside these books were highlighted fragments, crossed out sentences, and handwritten questions such as 'Is there progress in art?', 'Does the avant-garde still exist?', 'What is post-conceptual art?', and 'Is art headed toward self-destruction?'. These texts, arranged on tables with chairs prepared for visitors, were meant to serve as an introduction to the 'proper' work, a discussion initiated (but not produced) by the artist, who used his energy to inspire the prepared venue. Another action was *Confession* (1980), a peculiar auto-da-fé, where he publicly burnt his own works in Świdnicka Street [ulica Świdnicka], in front of random passers-by who listened to the artist's 'confessions' made through a microphone, his words encouraging them to be for or against the burnt works. Other actions from the multi-motive cycle *Modernity* took place in Świdnicka Street and at the Students' Centre of Culture Pałacyk at Kościuszki Street, and again engaged the participation of passers-by or random club members. He also organised para-spectacles in front of the National Museum using exhibitions of his own works, banners, and amplification equipment, which resembled Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London. During one of such actions, a camera recorded the presence of



Witold Liszkowski, **Confession** [Wyznanie], ul. Kościuszki, Wrocław 1981
collection the artist



Witold Liszkowski, **Confession** [Wyznanie], ul. Kościuszki, Wrocław 1981
collection the artist

Witold Liszkowski, **Contemporaneity** [Współczesność], in front
of the National Museum, Wrocław 1981
collection the artist





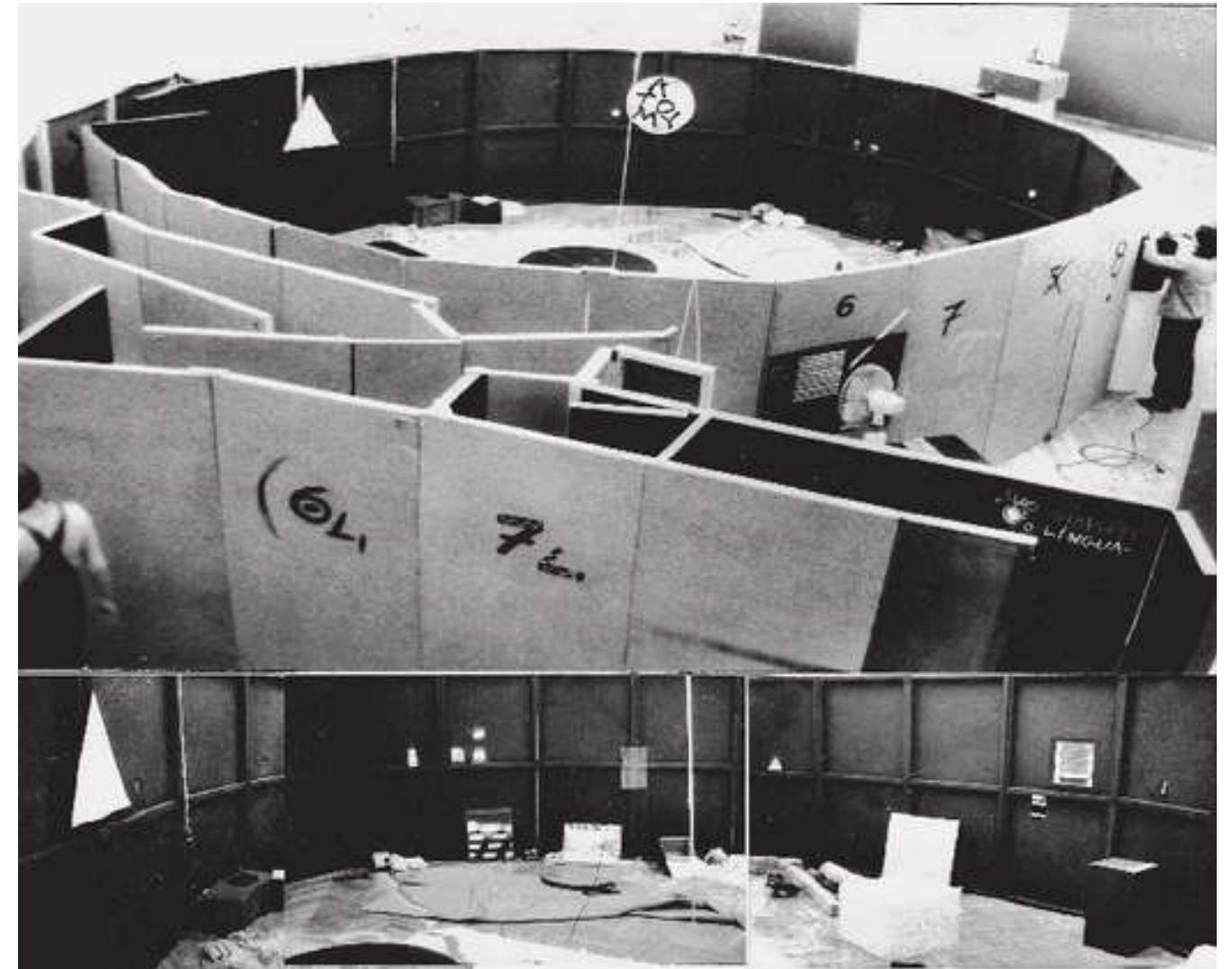
Ryszard Piegza
collection the artist

From 1979 to March 1981 the circle was named the Original Spectacle Art Stage [Plastyczna Scena Spektaklu Autorskiego] (or 'Ambalanguan Airlines'), and was co-created by Czesław Chwiszczuk, Andrzej Albin, Leszek Chalimoniuk, Jerzy Ropiecki (Wacław's brother), and Lech Twardowski, who organised three-day actions every month consisting of a series of individual actions in three formulas: film, music, and the plastic arts. Both Piegza and Liszkowski's quasi-theatrical actions must have been influenced by the artistic events happening in Wrocław at that time; not only the ones connected with Jerzy Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium, but also with the students' theatre Kalambur, whose director Bogusław Litwiniec organised the International Festival of Open Theatre in Wrocław, a large-scale event which brought to the city some of the world's leading avant-garde theatres. After all it was in Kalambur where the artists presented film and photo documentation of Ambalangua, during the *Paratheatre* exhibition in 1981. The idea of Ambalangua (its actions after 13 December 1981 being carried out illegally) was resumed by Ryszard Piegza with his *Flying Carpet* project after he emigrated to Paris, which was launched there in 1992 at the Wiza Video Art Action Centre with an action-homage to Józef Robakowski and his Exchange Gallery [Galeria Wymiany]. Andrzej Lachowicz was certain to also appear in this centre, as were Krzysztof Zarębski, Zbigniew Warpechowski, and Jan Świdziński, as well as many other outstanding artists from Poland and other countries.



Ryszard Piegza, **Circle** [Krag], 1978
collection the artist

Ryszard Piegza considers the 'filming' of Natalia LL's *Dreaming* as his first action at PERMAFO. Faced with the problem of the invisible, he carried out this near impossible action with bravado. A friend of Piegza's pulled him and his camera onto the floor alongside the sleeping artist, which resulted in a so-called travelling. Obviously, the camera needed no film in this case – the travelling itself served in its place. One of Piegza's most famous actions was the building of 'Ambalangua' (also known as the Coexistence Circle²⁰), an architectural space of common action. Although it was not carried out as part of PERMAFO, Andrzej Lachowicz recalls appearing during one of the actions of the circle as a bishop. And Piegza left no doubt: "After all, if it had not been for the influence of PERMAFO on me, the Circle would never have emerged."²¹ Inside the circle – a twelve-sided space which could be reached through a dark labyrinthine corridor – spontaneous actions took place with no script or director, in which viewers became the participant-passengers of 'flights'. Before each three-day session, airline tickets were distributed, and the 'travellers' not only had to check in, but they were also screened with an episcopo. Art served here as a vehicle which enabled movement, unlimited by any system. The principle of the circle was to not inform each other about particular actions; thus, each actor also became a viewer, surprised by the actions of others.



Ryszard Piegza, **Ambalangua**, BWA Gorzów Wielkopolski 1981
collection the artist



Wacław Ropiecki, **Autotherapeutical Session**
[Seans autoterapeutyczny], 1978
collection the artist

sessions that he had begun eight years earlier. The paradox of the researcher-archivist emerged here, as someone relying solely on intuition when creating classifications, photographic narrations, and selecting pictures. That which had passed was selected in two ways: the first when the artist decided to set the self-timer and photograph himself, and the second when he subsequently decided which of these earlier decisions had been more important than others. Impression was all that mattered, 'screening' a photograph in order to see the invisible.

Just as the question of choice emerged, so too did the conviction that an individual photograph could be a neutral carrier of information; it is only this latter view which breaks its purely factual character, but it is only between the former and the latter that the feeling of existence emerges. This is why Ropiecki chose to use a peculiar system of notation: he would choose two views in order to release that which happened between the two almost identical pictures.

The series *Greetings from Paris* contrasted such inter-picture impressions with banal views from postcards. Is it possible to see the Eiffel Tower differently even if it is still the same Eiffel Tower? Is it possible to be an 'everyday' creator? Their unpretentiousness and ability to enjoy the moment make Ropiecki's artistic notations seem like they postulate a careful and happy life.

By participating in the mail art movement, he consciously built his independent outsider position in order to create projects within his network of acquaintances, a casual exchanging which resulted in collections (*The Book of Souls*, *The Book of Silence*, *The Book of Life and Death*, *The Book of One Day of Your Life*, and *The Book of Friends*) and works (like *The Book on Life through Art* and *The Book of Autotherapeutical Sessions*) which he carried in a suitcase and presented as the MORE LIGHT! Travelling Gallery wherever he happened to be.

Ropiecki has always functioned outside the meanders of history, oblivious both to the changes within the generation of artists who were active in the 1980s, and to the subsequent turmoil in the art world. He is constantly moving from one place to another with his MORE LIGHT! Travelling Gallery, being kind to people, taking photographs, printing them out on paper, and including them in new books (such as in the draft collections *Morning Coffee* and *The Book of the Travelling Gallery*) which he carries in his suitcase or sends electronically. He is still trying to put his most famous mottos 'To Life through Art!' and 'Change the World!' into action.

In the late 1970s Ropiecki, alongside Liszkowski, Sapija, and the Lachowicz, created an informal PERMAFO group, meeting frequently and exhibiting together at the Creative Unions' Club in Wrocław in 1978 and 1980 (1980 being the tenth anniversary of PERMAFO), as well as presenting the exhibitions *Art as the Extreme of Consciousness* (1978) at the Ducal Castle in Szczecin and *Extreme Art – Limits of Consciousness* (1979) at the Arsenal BWA in Poznań; as well as participating in the *Book-Art-Documentation* symposium (1980) at Labyrinth Gallery in Lublin.

Wacław Ropiecki, unlike the Kuteras, Liszkowski, Marcolla, Sosnowski, and Piegza, did not become an artist as a result of attending art school – a strong impulse prompted him to give up his mathematics studies in order to start meditations on how the world is ordered. Ropiecki quickly became a member of the Association of Polish Artist Photographers, and perceived his practice as not only totally uncommercial, but also as extra-institutional.

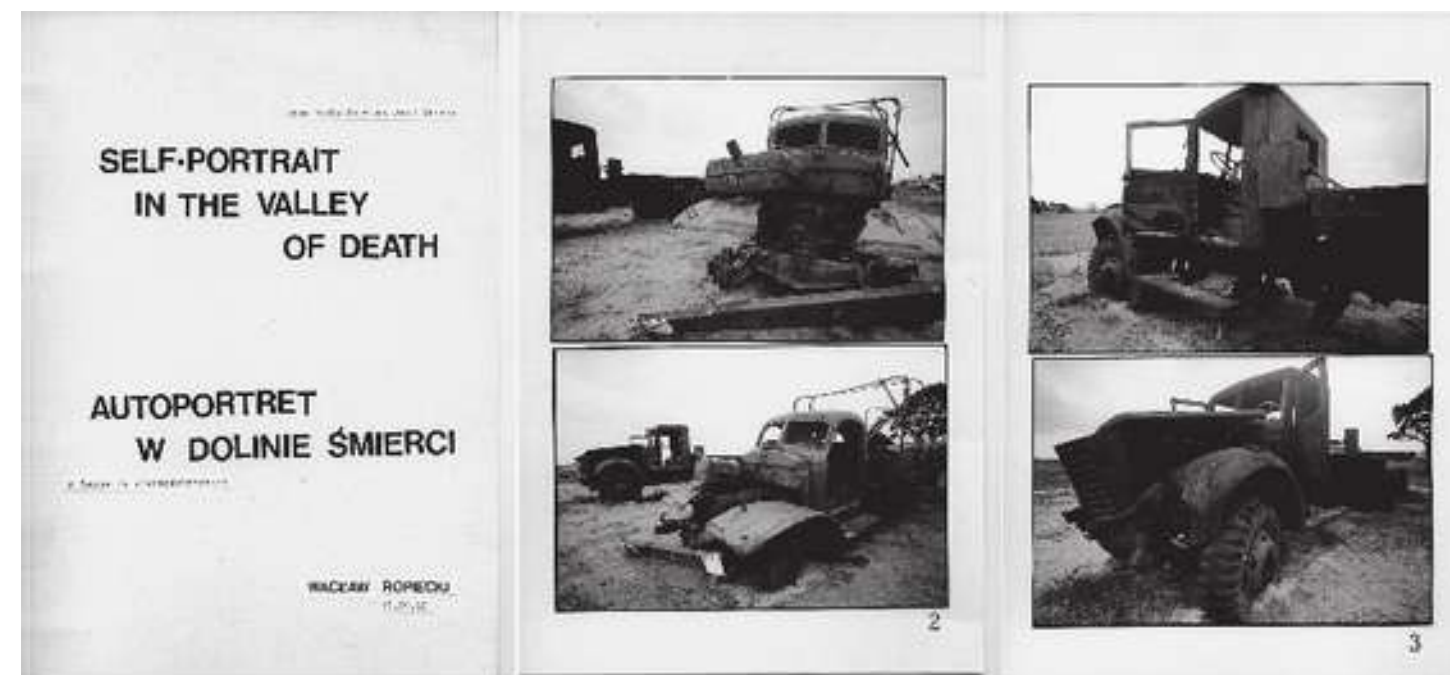
He produced his *Autotherapeutic Sessions* from 1971 to 1980, which eventually took on the form of an atlas of photography. Carried out in front of a camera, they were a kind of performance directed at investigating the difference in their existence and identity when registered, and when such a decision was not made, the slight difference between being recorded or not. They posed the questions: Can such subtleties be registered? Is the difference visible between when we are or are not inside the process of creating? Are we able to create without a clear aim, which turns creating into the illustration of pre-conceived ideas? Are we ready to follow whatever is expected from us by the scene or whatever may happen? The artist was driven by his desire to experiment with the camera as a tool enabling one to change his own state (or even aura) and begin the process of creation. He understood creation as a simple process involving a camera, not as something that could perform the extraordinary. Because the artist revealed himself in his everyday ordinariness, it could be interpreted as a helpless exposition, or even as a readiness to be humiliated; after all, nothing special or worth showing off was created.

What was important in an *Autotherapeutic Session* was both being in the process of creation and seeing it later in a photograph; seeing something which (one may shrug his shoulders) remained invisible, and unregistrable. Is a camera, in its tireless registration of the impossible, really needed in order to know that the most important things are engraved upon the heart and the invisible?

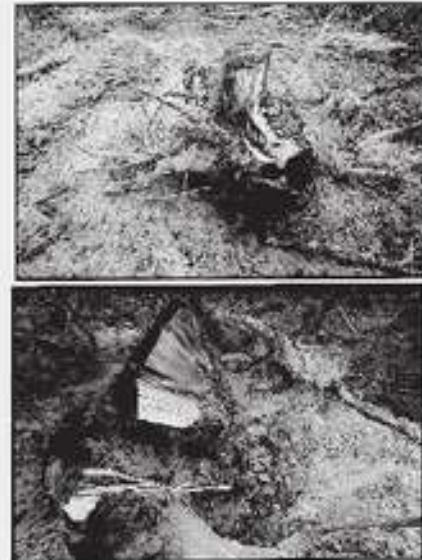
In 1979 Ropiecki decided to organise the *Catalogue* exhibition, which was his first attempt to summarise all the



Wacław Ropiecki, **Self-Portrait Against the Background of Burned Forest**
[Autoportret na tle spalonego lasu], 1976
collection the artist



Wacław Ropiecki, **Self-Portrait in the Valley of Death** [Autoportret w dolinie śmierci], 1976
collection the artist



Wacław Ropiecki, **Self-Portrait Against the Background of Burned Forest** [Autoportret na tle spalonego lasu], 1976
collection the artist



Wacław Ropiecki, **Self-Portrait in the Valley of Death** [Autoportret w dolinie śmierci], 1976
collection the artist



Wacław Ropiecki, **Greetings from Paris** [Pozdrowienia z Paryża], 1976
collection the artist



Jan S. Wojciechowski, from the **Means of Expression** [*Środki wyrazu*] series, 1972–1973
collection the artist

Jan S. Wojciechowski, along with the Lachowicz and Robakowski, was labelled as pseudo avant-gardist²² and remained a friend of PERMAFO while living in Warsaw. In the 1970s, Wojciechowski (together with KwieKulik) was one of the initiators and participants of the *Open Form*, a concept developed at Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts by Oskar Hansen, a famous Polish Modernist. What connected this to the Wrocław avant-garde was a kind of scientific approach, a desire to combine the roles of an artist and a scientist,

and the striving for objectivity; where they differed was in their disparate attitudes to the social and political sphere. When writing about Wojciechowski's scientism, it is worth noting that it was rather a justification of his postmodern and anti-institutional attitude, a hope that mathematics could de-ideologise art. He attended the university seminars of Stanisław Piekarczyk, a forgotten methodologist of history who tried to include the language of mathematics in historical thinking.¹²³ Wojciechowski combined the attitudes of artist and theoretician; a collection of his theoretical texts *Art Text* was published by the Remont Gallery in Warsaw in 1978.¹²⁴ He also gave lectures at PERMAFO, talking, amongst other topics, about the insufficiency of traditional descriptions of form, and the need to exceed the morphologic and semantic truisms of perception – since a sign precedes sense, its meaning is delayed or sometimes non-existent. This theory reflected Zbigniew Dłubak's conception of a sign, however Wojciechowski drew different conclusions from this oblique character of a sign. Unlike Dłubak, he perceived such semantic ambiguity as an attractive asset which could meet the needs of the art market. Having abandoned photography in the 1980s, his ambition was to produce an item that could be marketed, and could manipulate this market. One may say that the artist drew practical conclusions from his experiments in the 1970s, testing the marketing potential of different signs; through activities such as kicking, cutting, and shooting, he investigated not so much the form of the destruction, but the symbolic differences of various values after the clash. Moreover, as Ronduda observed, Wojciechowski was one of the first Polish artists that introduced archives to the gallery in the place of artworks. These archives had an open, interactive form because the viewer was encouraged to use the collected documentation to make his own lists.¹²⁵



Jan S. Wojciechowski, from the **Messages** [*Przekazy*] series, 1972
collection the artist



Jan S. Wojciechowski, from the **Messages** [*Przekazy*] series, 1972
collection the artist



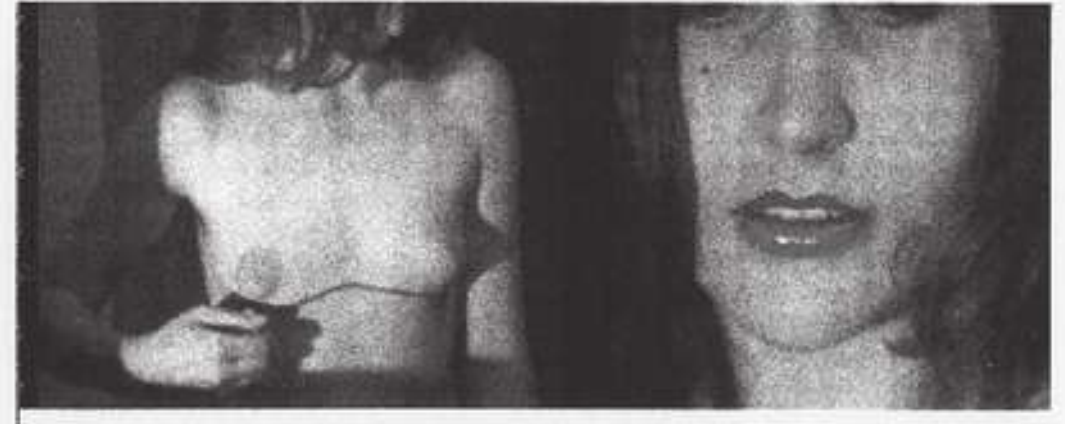
Krzysztof Zarębski
collection the artist

decoration for Tadeusz Różewicz's play *Birth Rate* [*Przyrost naturalny*], directed by Kazimierz Braun (which premiered in the Wrocław Contemporary Theatre, 30 December 1979).¹²⁶ Kazimierz Piotrowski described the artist's creative interpretation of the dramatist's text, and the idea he came up with of having a 'chastity belt fitting room' in the theatre, which the viewers were invited to use. After the spectacle he invited a model (Jolanta Romanow) to come and have her photograph taken, "thus producing documentation as an aesthetic work of art, to be shown and sold in galleries",¹²⁷ appearing at PERMAFO the following year with the same model. Piotrowski described Zarębski as the only one apart from Natalia LL and Bronisław Wojciech Linke who could present the truth about Eros. Kazimierz Braun, the director of the Wrocław Contemporary Theatre from 1975 until 1984, was later fascinated by Ryszard Piegza's *Ambalangua* circle and considered it a wonderful idea to construct the project during the entire theatre season; however, it was never carried out. Łukasz Guzek emphasised Zarębski's unique approach to using unconventional materials (such as ice, sugar, foam, erotic toys, and leeches), describing him as an artist of unusual sensitivity, delicacy, and attention to detail, who responded acutely to subtle impulses from the surrounding reality, triggering a multitude of associations and impressions. The critic praised the play, writing: "It is unusually pure, avoiding even the slightest belying and beautifying, the noise of bold declarations."¹²⁸

Another artist who came to PERMAFO from Warsaw was Krzysztof Zarębski. He crossed paths with the Lachowiczes (among others) during the *Offer 76* group exhibition at the Labyrinth Gallery in Lublin (whose curator was Andrzej Mroczek); another more interesting occasion was the presentation of his work in Wrocław alongside the set



Krzysztof Zarębski, **Autohemo**, Labyrinth Gallery, Lublin 1976, photo by Leszek Fidusiewicz
collection the artist



Krzysztof Zarębski, **untitled**, in the photograph Krystyna Jachniewicz
collection the artist



Krzysztof Zarebski, **untitled**, 1971
Galeria Bielska BWA in Bielsko-Biala collection



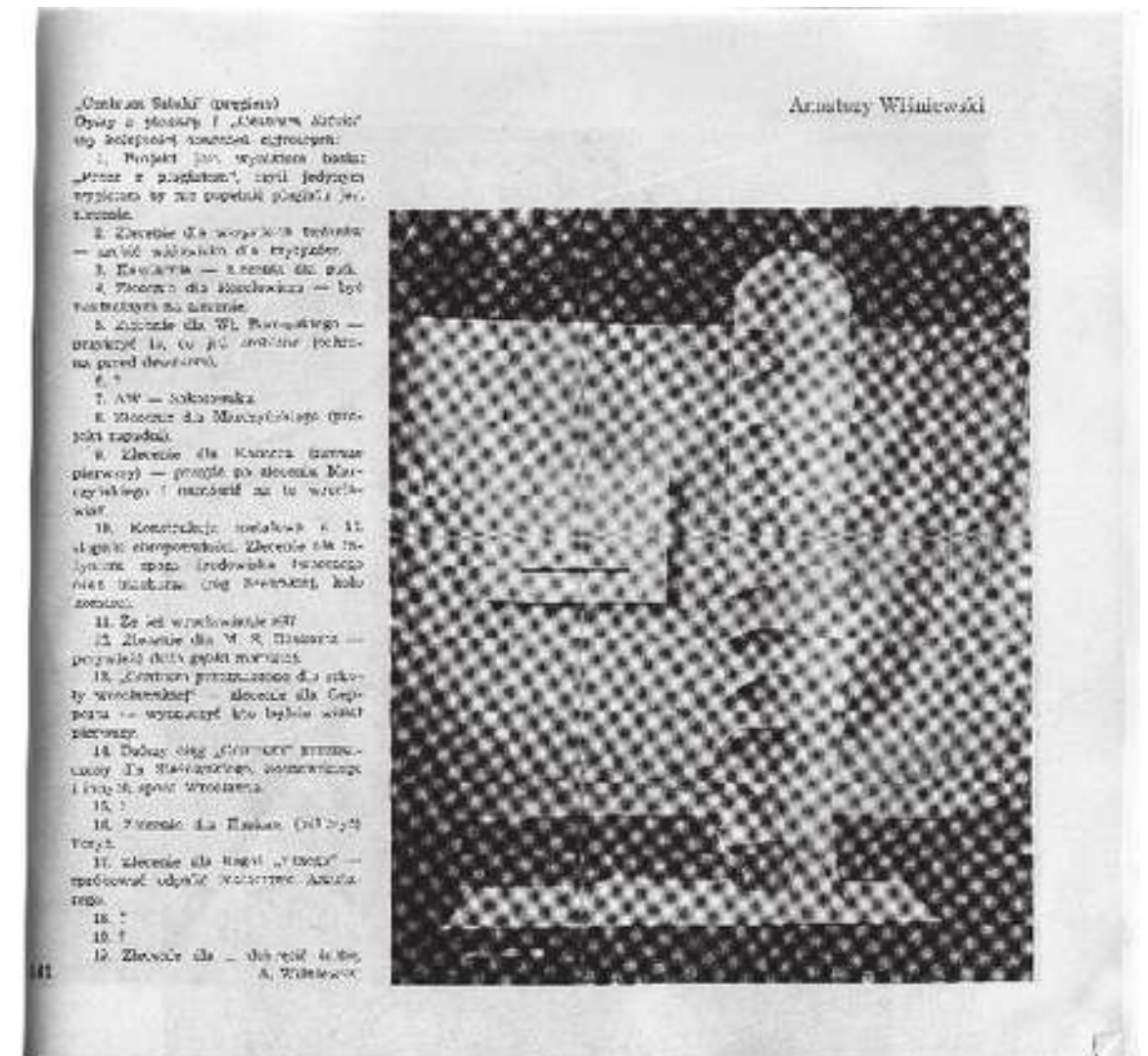
Krzysztof Zarebski, **untitled**, 1973, film still
collection the artist



Krzysztof Zarębski, **Hey, Boys** [Hej, chłopcy], 1973
collection the artist

It is also impossible to omit Anastazy (Bogdan Wiśniewski) since, as it was noted by Bożenna Stokłosa, it was mainly his doings – along with the Lachowicz and the Kwieks – that were connected to the creation of new terms to describe the new artistic phenomena of the 1970s. Anastazy is mostly remembered for his design of a gigantic pink phallus that he presented at the *Wrocław '70 Symposium*, which he also wanted to erect in the city to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the unification of Wrocław with its so-called motherland. Stokłosa reminds us that in Anastazy's *Selected Writings* there is a manifesto in which the artist describes his and his friends' activities as art 'in a way' and art 'between', and the manifesto itself as a 'denunciation'. In Anastazy's opinion, the schematic approach of professionals to art and their strategy of containment towards the most interesting phenomena resulted in the emergence of "art in a way, a kind of art which will probably survive officiality on the margins, yet still in a position of strength."¹²⁹ The Yes and

No Gallery set up by Anastazy (defined by Makarewicz as a gallery-process) resisted both the official system of art and – equally fiercely – the new forms of promoting art. Andrzej Lachowicz, who held outstanding oratorical skill and linguistic ingenuity, supplemented Anastazy's ideas through 'hammering' (i.e., crossing out people considered to be uninteresting or passé), a permanent motive to establish hierarchies during the discussions over magazines such as *Flash Art*, the targets being sometimes vividly described as 'expressive gut-emptors', 'the walking dead', or simply 'losers'. When Lachowicz took walks in the Market Square with Giancarlo Politi, he was obviously a 'winner'. Expressions such as 'structures of power' were also used, as well as a metaphorical awareness of art likened to oil (i.e., art connected to big money).



Page from the book **Wrocław '70 Symposium**



Zbigniew Warpechowski, **1/2** performance, PERMAFO Gallery, Wrocław 1981

Later in 1981, Warpechowski appeared at a symposium organised by Andrzej Lachowicz during the Drawing Triennial with the performance *Agreement*, using props such as a whip, a stone, and a semi-transparent cover held by the artist. He remembers "several people who started clapping spontaneously after the end of the performance (signing the "agreement") quickly stopped, suddenly scared of what they were doing."¹³³ Łukasz Guzek once emphasised that art was an anchor of morality for Warpechowski;¹³⁴ at that time (exalted though it may sound today) this was a way to avoid getting lost in an abyss of depression, which required agreeing to a certain authoritarian use of brute force.

Another friend of PERMAFO was Zbigniew Warpechowski. As a pioneer of performance, connected with the Cracow Group, he traces the sources of his works back to his public musical and poetic improvisations from the late 1960s.¹³⁰ Both him and Lachowicz spent their youth in Cracow and studied science (Warpechowski studied first at Cracow University of Technology), but unlike Lachowicz, Warpechowski went on to study plastic arts at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts. He had a high opinion of PERMAFO, but did not start performing there until as late as 1981, when he presented a two-part performance. The first part was a lecture based on the texts of Feliks Koneczny, a historian from Cracow who died in 1949 and specialised in the history of Central and Eastern Europe, and in the second part he transformed the lecture into an action, since the artist had always believed that "a work of art is made real through its contact with people."¹³¹ It was in the 'hot' years of the 1980s that one of these performances was carried out, which – literally – helped people to live because they turned the sphere of art into an area of fundamental judgements, in which it was impossible to tell apart the concerns of aesthetics and a world view. Warpechowski's description of $\frac{1}{2}$ (the piece's title) – although precise – cannot quite testify to the overwhelming emotions felt at that time:



Zbigniew Warpechowski, **1/2** performance, PERMAFO Gallery, Wrocław 1981

At PERMAFO I had a Bolshevik sabre of perfect shape and well-balanced hilt. Under the ceiling hung eggs and a chicken (to avoid suspicions of maltreatment, it must be said that the chicken had been frozen, plucked and disembowelled). On the wall, as always, the inscription '1/2' and a straight line on a piece of paper. I managed to cut the eggs (two or three, I don't remember exactly) in half with one stroke, and then I halved the chicken. The cuts were so precise that it almost contradicted the principle that a perfect half could only exist in mathematics or in the mind. Then, like in the previous performances of $\frac{1}{2}$, I attacked the line, but without touching it.¹³²



Zbigniew Warpechowski, **1/2** performance, PERMAFO Gallery, Wrocław 1981



Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, **White, Clean, Thin Linen**
[Białe, czyste, cienkie płótno], 1970
National Museum in Wrocław collection

It is impossible to list all of the people who appeared at PERMAFO during the decade of its existence. At its exhibitions and meetings there were present some of the most outstanding artists in Wrocław, including Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Maria Michałowska, and Jerzy Rosołowicz, as well as excellent artists from all over Poland who travelled here specially for these occasions, such as Łukasz Korolkiewicz, Paweł Kwiek, Józef Robakowski, Mikołaj Smoczyński, and Grzegorz Sztabiński. Sometimes photographs can help. One of them shows, for instance, the physicist Witold Ruszkowski reading a theoretical text inside a glass tube (aside from this Ruszkowski also specialised in delicious desserts, particularly jellies); in another one, Natalia is captured walking whilst wearing a uniform and the forage cap of a Serbian guerrilla, looking as if she were a member of the Laibach collective. There was Feliks Podsiadły, who later left for France; photographers Andrzej Albin and Zenon Harasym; Roman Płocki, a cameraman; Jan Kurowicki, a philosopher; Marcin Giżycki, Leszek Szurkowski, Łukasz Szajna, Tomek Sikorski, Andrzej Paruzel, Alek Figura, Zygmunt Rytko, Czesław Chwiszczuk (now professor of Wrocław Academy of Fine Arts), Maria Lubieniecka (philosopher and philologist), Barbara Baworowska, Jolanta and Piotr Dudziński, Jacek Lalak, Marek Łopata, Janusz Wróbel, Andrzej Cwiertnia (a photographer from the Museum of Architecture), Bonawentura Kochel (he made the pyramid in Złotniki for Natalia LL on Mariusza Krzyszta's plot of land), Jerzy Ropiecki, Ewa Zarzycka, Ewa Kowalska from Białystok, Urszula Benke, Kaman, the philosopher Bogusław Jasiński, Gwalbert Misiek, and Witold Chmielewski.

History

Although PERMAFO was active during the entire decade of the 1970s, we could single out – following Adam Sobota, a critic connected with PERMAFO – two periods of unusually high activity.¹³⁵ The first period comes to an end in 1973 with Dłubak, Natalia LL, and Lachowicz's exhibition at the Remont Gallery in Warsaw, and an exhibition held in Buenos Aires at Jorge Glusberg's invitation. The second period is connected with Lachowicz's manifesto *Extreme Art* and the travelling exhibition (under the same title) which showed, apart from the usual core members of the gallery, the works of Witold Liszkowski, Waclaw Ropiecki,



Józef Robakowski, **Study of the Shadow** [Studium cienia], 1972
National Museum in Wrocław collection

Andrzej Sapija, and Zdzisław Sosnowski. At the core of PERMAFO there were events that, due to their importance and intensiveness, united the group present as friends and triggered the need to establish a platform for meetings and exchanging thoughts. There were a number of exhibitions and events in 1970: the *Wrocław '70 Symposium* (which Antoni Dzieduszycki hoped would initiate a non-institutional Centre for Experiments and Art Studies in Wrocław¹³⁶); the eighth Meeting of Artists and Art Theoreticians in Osieki, an open-air festival considered to be one of the most interesting manifestations of Polish conceptualism (it was here that Jerzy Ludwiński read his famous text *Art in the Post-Artistic Age*, and Stefan Morawski *Crisis of the Notion of Art*¹³⁷); and the *SP* exhibition (*Sztuka Pojęciowa, Conceptual Art*), opening at the Mona Lisa Gallery in Wrocław, 4 December 1970. An exhibition of the photographic documentation of the Osieki festival, organised by Andrzej Lachowicz at the Creative Unions' Club in Wrocław, turned out to be hugely successful, both with his fellow artists and the directors of the Club; interestingly the festival itself ended with a scandal (aggressive attacks by the press, ending



Jorge Glusberg in Wrocław, 1975

in a refusal to finance future festivals in Osieki), clearly suggesting – as Luiza Nader observed – that it “let down the local establishment”.¹³⁸ There were also other important exhibitions at the Mona Lisa Gallery, especially the exhibition of the palimpsest installation *Mutants*, created together by all the original members and founders of PERMAFO (the exhibition also included Dzieduszycki's review published in *Odra* magazine), which opened in March 1971. It consisted of a large cube cut in half with inscriptions and photographs glued to its surface, and was situated almost blocking the way of the entrance to the Empik club. *Mutants* raised and blurred the problem of the individual's authorship of a work, as well as the ways of presenting it. The artists actually ignored the space of the Mona Lisa Gallery, bringing their own space (which was a kind of poster pillar) and distorting the previous methods of moving inside an institution.¹³⁹ These shows were attacked by traditional the artists mockingly called ‘plastics’ (from the Polish name of the powerful union which grouped them, ZPAP – the Association of Polish Artists and Designers). It is worth emphasising that belonging to an artists' union was obligatory if one wished to make art in the People's Republic of Poland (it was only possible to buy the materials necessary for creative work – paints, brushes, etc. – after showing a union membership card); graduates from the academies of fine arts usually joined the Association of Polish Artists and Designers. The members of PERMAFO, however, belonged also to the Association of Polish Artist Photographers (ZPAF), which was a kind of ideological demonstration – Natalia LL joined in 1964, Andrzej Lachowicz in 1968. Dłubak, who was a generation older, started to move from painting towards photography as early as the 1940s. Since there had been no schools of photography in Poland, the Association of Polish Artist Photographers admitted (after an exam) self-taught photographers who had various professions, naturally associating them with a different way of perceiving art distinct from the case of ‘professional’ graduates from the fine art academies.¹⁴⁰

At the Osieki festival (curator Ryszard Siennicki), Natalia LL showed *Warrant of Arrest*, a perverse homage to Jerzy Ludwiński, while Dłubak meditated, drilled holes in the ground with a stick, and committed his deliberations to paper. He also provocatively presented a painting to distance himself from the ‘young conceptualists’, since everybody agreed (which he found suspicious) that pictures should not be painted anymore. Lachowicz, in turn, made a series of paintings entitled *Ginza*,¹⁴¹ which, through the way they were painted, resembled information and propaganda boards, and openly mocked art professors' opinions about what the content of a canvas ought to be. Natalia's *Warrant of Arrest* consisted of nine cubes with photographs stuck to them depicting Jerzy Ludwiński (wearing a striped shirt resembling a prisoner's uniform, and photographed like a criminal with portrait views and both profiles), as well as the forest in Osieki and a Cuban cigar, which played the role of ‘material evidence’. The work constituted an ambitious attempt to transfer the experiences of Minimal art and Pop art to Poland (Warhol's screen print of criminals and Robert Morris's variable exhibitions had probably inspired the artist), which was connected to the taking of strong and audible positions on the cultural policy of the time, which paralysed the development of the most talented people. The work, apart from



Marcelli Bacciarelli and Natalia LL, with Natalia LL's work **Warrant of Arrest** [List gończy], homage to Jerzy Ludwiński, Osieki open-air festival 1970

its strongly political content, was also radical in terms of its form – by arranging the cubes in different ways, it was possible to create 270 variants of the same work, which existed as a formal potential dependent on the viewer's position.

The aforementioned *SP* exhibition, although many artists participated in it, was to in turn unite the future ‘permafoers’; the turbulent summer events in Osieki had been reflected upon and Ludwiński had re-edited his text *Art in the Post-Artistic Age* (one of the texts on which Polish conceptual discourse was established¹⁴²). Natalia LL presented *Warrant of Arrest* and her permanent registration of the Soviet alarm clock photographed every hour; Antoni Dzieduszycki his three film scripts; and Andrzej Lachowicz his manifesto of permanent art. Lachowicz also designed the characteristic exhibition catalogue-envelope with reproduced identical content (300 copies were printed), which turned out to be such a successful idea that he later repeated it for PERMAFO's catalogues.¹⁴³ Jarosław Kozłowski has highlighted that the most important aspect of presenting works at the *SP* exhibition was the catalogue, for it broke the conventions of the time, and as such invalidated the *sacrum* of an art gallery. He reminds us that the same pieces of paper from the catalogue were hung in the gallery, and recalls that the form of presentation corresponded with the practice of the Art&Project Gallery in Amsterdam.¹⁴⁴ Whilst analysing the exhibition, Luiza Nader stressed that “the exhibition was intended to be read rather than watched – it consisted of texts and it became text, thus degrading the visual and perceptive aspect of an artwork in favour of the

artwork's artistic content."¹⁴⁵ Emphasising the primacy of the catalogue over the exhibition, Nader took it for granted that the catalogue's designer and editor must have been Ludwiński: "Presenting the works in the most neutral and anti-aesthetic way possible (impersonal screen prints) de-personified the projects in order to stress the instructive character of a manual; to shift the emphasis from exhibits to ideas. A catalogue thus created, containing only conceptual *raw material* (with no introduction, critical analysis, or explanations), aimed to present artistic ideas as directly as possible. It followed the utopian motto *Live in Your Head* – the egalitarian premise of artistic ideas accessing the viewer's mind or consciousness without the mediation of an institution."¹⁴⁶ Moreover, Nader notes the similarity of Ludwiński's exhibition concept to Seth Siegelau's, and Dzieduszycki's instruction ('film recipe') to Sol LeWitt's and Douglas Huebler's. In describing Poland's relationship to the USA, Nader uses a 'vertical' description which emphasises a hierarchical centre-to-periphery relation, while Kozłowski thinks that there was no "alleged transfer of Western formulas to Poland", emphasising that Strzemiński and Malewicz's tradition was still alive, as was the romantic and anarchic attitude of Polish artists; that the two countries were at different stages of their development, which resulted in a correspondence rather than directed influence.¹⁴⁷

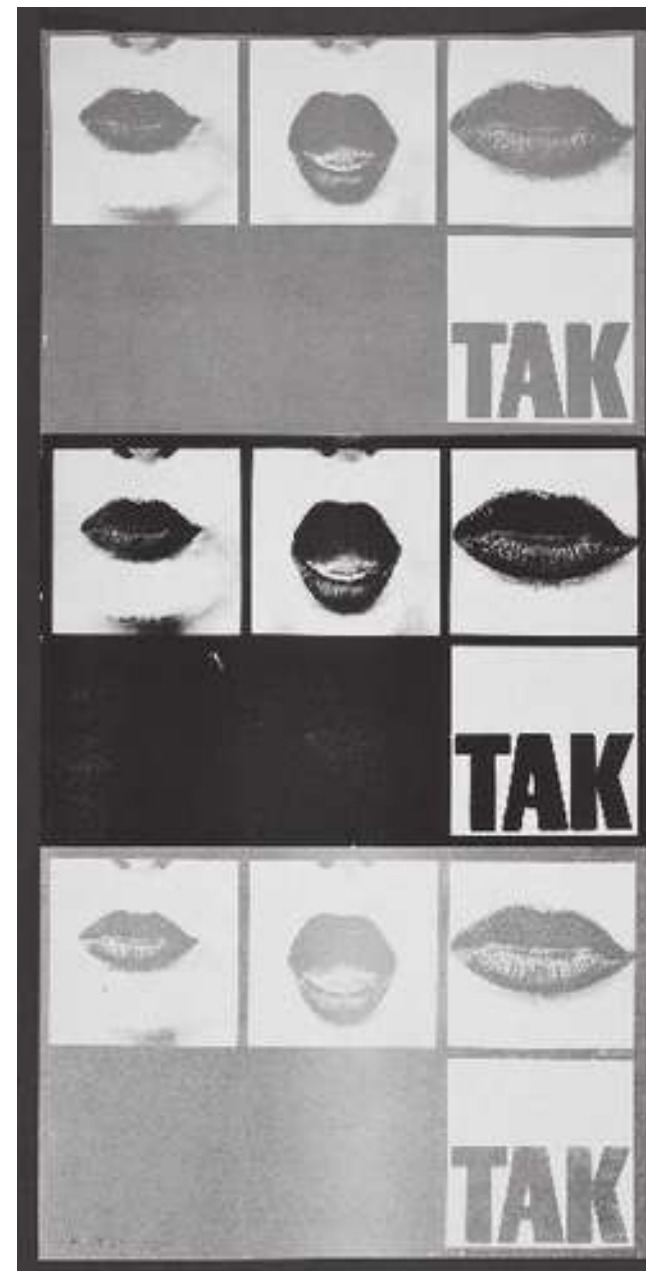
The first collective exhibition of the PERMAFO artists took place in 1971 in Warsaw as part of the *Experimenting Photographers* exhibition, but PERMAFO's very first exhibition was Natalia LL's *Intimate Photography*, which opened 24 February 1971 at the Creative Unions' Club in Wrocław. For this show the club housed purpose-built architectural constructions including a narrow and cramped room (2.2 × 2 × 2 m), the outside covered printed reproductions of the artist's portraits, and the inside filled with multiplied erotic photographs. The squeezed space made it difficult to watch the work 'in the perfect way' (standing up, keeping an appropriate distance to see the whole work), and forced the viewers to bend and push their way through the crowd. This method of presentation negated the previous ways of accessing artistic truth and 'the whole' through a metaphysical leap, by rejecting the epistemological privilege of seeing (ocularcentrism). Just like in *Warrant of Arrest*, the image was defined by division rather than unification; by elusive fluctuation and intangibility rather than 'the sender's message' which was supposed to be 'correctly' (according to authoritarian rules) deciphered. But it was clearly not the presentation but the content of the photographs – close-ups of sexual acts between a man and a woman – that resulted in the banning of the exhibition, as an act of censorship.¹⁴⁸ The artist showed the same work alternatively titled *Intimate Sphere* in the same year at the Golden Grape Symposium [Symposium Złotego Grona] in Zielona Góra. In this version the viewer could not enter the cube (the photographs inside could only be seen through a peephole), and the work ended up being destroyed during the night by the watchmen, wanting to see what was inside.

The next two important exhibitions which dealt with the premises of registration and the strengthening of "a group of signals too weak so far to be retrieved"¹⁴⁹ were Zbigniew Dłubak's *Tautologies* (April 1971) and Andrzej Lachowicz's *Permart* (November 1971). In the installation *Tautologies* the artist juxtaposed photographic images of banal items

(woodblocks, a fragment of a TV set, door and window handles) alongside the actual items themselves. The photographs displayed next to the items were produced at 1:1 scale (i.e., so that the depicted object was exactly the size of the physical object), resulting in the creation of two surprising realities: the 'real' one and the 'artistic' one. Dłubak explained in his commentary that his intention was not to compare items with their photographic views, but to question the identity and visuality of the item *through* the tautologically juxtaposed views of its two appearances. As a paradoxical result, Dłubak's confidence in the true existence of the item built. Turning to Lachowicz's *Permart*, the processual nature of the work seems far more intrinsic – the work was based on the continual consecutive photographing of people against the background of boards, and later the gluing of these photographs back onto the boards in the background, such that when the next photograph was taken, its information accumulated. This process was repeated until the personality of an individual (as Antoni Dzieduszycki described it) was blurred so much by the total sum of the subsequent personalities that the visual information reached the level of noise. On the one hand the people photographed had to be egocentric enough to participate in a work of art, but on the other – due to the very quantity of individuals – they ended up the actual material (or object) of the work, not its subject.¹⁵⁰ What is equally important was that the work could theoretically last forever (being no limitations in its 'composition'), and the roles of the artist and the viewer became blurred; even though the top of the board was dominated by Lachowicz's self-portrait in Windsor spectacles, with long hair and fingers forming the 'V' sign – or rather 'W' for 'Widerstand' [resistance].

These exhibitions were followed by *Group Exhibition 12* (January 1972), with 12 photographers including Bruszewski, Robakowski, and Lachowicz's student and 'discovery' Zdzisław Sosnowski; Natalia LL's *Word* (November 1972); Zbigniew Dłubak's *Ocean* (February 1973); and Natalia LL's *Consumer Art* (June 1973). Fortunately, both *Word* and *Ocean* – despite the artists' scientific and analytic postulates – were not devoid of the anachronous value of beauty, and it is thanks to this, in combination with their noble and reserved character, that the resulting works were moving and surprising, with a simple affirmation of life. In *Word*'s visual poetry, language ceased to function solely as Descartes's *cogito*, and tightened its relationship with the body's physical and biological activity – photographs of the mouth pronounced the individual sounds of the word 'TAK' [YES], juxtaposed with the same word written down. The poetic character of Dłubak's *Ocean* is also permeated with a definite 'yes' for life. The work consists of a combination of photographs which he took during his voyage to America, and a text of meditative beauty, reading: "to eradicate the impulse to judge, to accept banality in the simplest manner, without emphasising the exoticism of the everyday, to identify with the external world in order to divest oneself of the feeling of superiority in relation to one's surroundings, to reject the feeling of making an offering of oneself to art, to abandon thought on a perfect rejection of everything, to be."

Another one of PERMAFO's exhibitions in Warsaw (after *Experimenting Photographers* from 1971) was *NS*



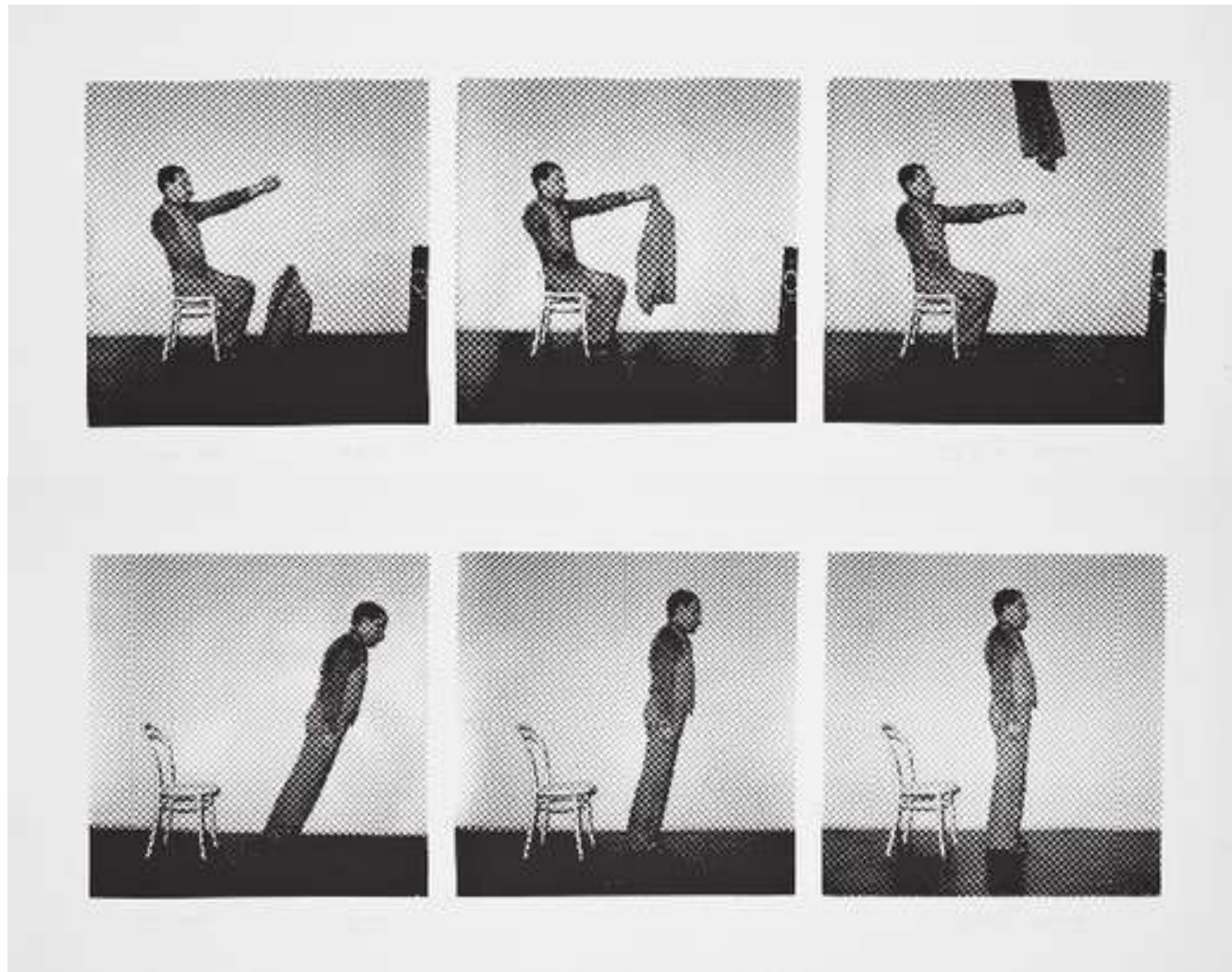
Natalia LL, *Yes [Tak]*, 1971
National Museum in Wrocław collection

(*Nowa Sytuacja*, *New Situation*) in February 1972 at the Contemporary Gallery [Galeria Współczesna] (run by Janusz Bogucki),¹⁵¹ and repeated the next month at the Museum of Art in Łódź, and later in Rochester, USA. Displayed on mobile walls were the individual pages of the publication *NS PERMAFO – New Situation* (printed in English, which included works by Zbigniew Dłubak, Maria Michałowska, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Natalia LL, Andrzej Lachowicz, Aleksandra Paderewska-Karst, and Jerzy Rosołowicz), enlarged to a size of 70 x 50 cm. In doing this the difference was blurred not only between a catalogue and an exhibition, but also between the status of the original work and the copy. The text was considered a work of art (if such non-dynamic definitions mean anything at all) equal to the artists' photographs reproduced on the boards. As the author Antoni Dzieduszycki explained, the form of an artwork is not its key aspect but a simple necessity whose function is to carry information; it should be capacious enough to include and send a thought. Dzieduszycki also added six stills from his film *When Attitude Becomes Pose*, whose title refers



NS – New Situation [NS – Nowa Sytuacja], 1972

to Harald Szeemann's famous exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Live in Your Head* (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969; the exhibition catalogue's motto was 'Art in Your Head'). Dłubak and Rosołowicz, when preparing notes on themselves, decided to use four different portrait photographs to accompany them, hinting that the representation of an artist's volatile personality needed more than just one photo. Part of the catalogue became a quasi-commercial *Polish Fair Magazine*, probing the boundary between the artist's presentation and putting himself up for sale. Lachowicz presented an interesting set of mental propositions – there was the cycle *My Own Identification* (1971) in which the artist took photographs of his clothes scattered as if they were relics and rubbish at the same time (including a pair of so-called bell-bottoms, fashionable trousers that became wider from the knees down); *Me You Him*, a permanent registration of Lachowicz's own shadow; documentation of *Permart*; and the humorous *Transformation of the Graphic Sign into Electric Energy*, created in Turów's brown coal mine on 12 July 1972. In this last piece Lachowicz painted flat signs representing a cube on a Bristol board, gluing them onto thick fibreboards, to then throw them onto a conveyor belt transporting brown coal to the furnace of the Turów power plant. After 25 minutes they had been converted into electric energy (the amount of electricity generated was measured by an engineer), which the artist used to shave himself with an electric shaver. He commented on this event years later with a certain melancholy: "Thus the artist's many hours of work spent on creating the graphic representations were turned into electric power, worth just a couple of minutes of shaving time."¹⁵² Perhaps the work was a paraphrase of the sequence of four photographs *The Energy of a Real British Breakfast Transformed into Breaking a Real Steel Bar by the Artists Dibbets and Ruthenbeck*, which – transferred into Polish conditions – showed the 'value' of artists' work in a country with no free market, where the protest against the commodification of art necessarily had to take on a different form than in the West. We could observe here a description of a defeat as something positive, which was typical of Lachowicz (according to some researchers, conceptualism is a tale of collapse). Understood in this way, *The Transformation of the Graphic Sign into Electric Energy* is a 'mockumentary' which parodies the real factory broadcasts often shown in the media at that time. Jerzy Rosołowicz's addition to the *NS* exhibition, among other things, was *Neutrikon*,



Andrzej Lachowicz, **Energy of the Fall** [Energia upadku], 1980
National Museum in Wrocław collection

a series of photographs taken by a neutronicon camera installed near a department store in the period of intense shopping before Christmas. The lens of the neutronicon registered the changing traffic of both cars and pedestrians. This permanent game of changing views was registered by Natalia LL, and her photographs were printed in the catalogue. She also showed photographs of her face and mouth in the works *Word* and *YES*, as well as documentation from *Intimate Photography* and *Permanent Registration – Upper Oder*, which consisted of announcements stating the Miedonia and Oder river's water levels.

These exhibitions took place in what has previously been named as PERMAFO's second period, which focused on the conception of *extreme art*, and which (apart from the aforementioned exhibition of the same title that later travelled to Poznań and Szczecin) is connected with such actions as Natalia LL's *Dreaming* and Zbigniew Dłubak's *Systems*.

Energy of the Fall

Western critics sometimes associate the emergence of conceptualism with the language of American propaganda during the war in Vietnam, which fully emphasised humanistic values (where an 'incident' means a shooting; 'air operations', a bombing; 'irregularities', black market sales of United States equipment¹⁵³). The peak of conceptualism

in Poland coincided with the period when Władysław Gomułka's rule came to an end and Edward Gierek took power, bringing with it a sense of optimism and the need to develop a strong propagandistic language. Although this fundamental change in the language of the authorities at the turn of the 1960s and through the 1970s was not directly referred to in Polish conceptual art at the time, the sense of it as a language that constructed reality was of course an important consideration. If the language of propaganda added 'proper meaning' to facts, making it impossible to interpret them freely, the language of art preferred to reduce language in order to investigate how it affected meaning. The proto-conceptual example of Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning* drawing changed the course of art; in this way an erasing became a dismantling, i.e., the revocation of a previously agreed definition of art. As it happened, the context and relationships created by an object were more important than making objects: Victor Burgin, Alan Charlton, or Mel Ramsden's monochromes were based on emptying a picture from a priori senses imposed by the author; the sponge used by Beuys to wipe the blackboard clean during his 1974 lecture in New York was soon signed by him, as were other, spare sponges that he managed to buy, creating 550 multiples in total – inexpensive souvenirs from his trip to America. "We had to destroy the town to save it", said an American officer after capturing Hue in Vietnam.¹⁵⁴

Zbigniew Dłubak's empty signs (and Jan Świdziński's empty gestures) – some of the most recognisable artistic conceptions of the 1970s, which can be perceived in relation to Lachowicz's equally important conception of neutral persuasion – may be understood in both a political context and an institutional one, as formulating certain expectations about art. In the West, museum trusts consisted of entrepreneurs, who became more affluent during the war. In Poland (as in other countries of the Eastern Bloc) the aesthetic expectations of what should be shown in museums might have been quite different, but the taste of the decision-makers was quite similar. However, the expectations of the political and cultural authorities on both sides of the Berlin Wall were met with insubordination. One of theoretical impulses in Zbigniew Dłubak's art – as he wrote in his text under the title *Ocean* – was "to eradicate the impulse to judge", as well as to accept banality and to divest oneself of the feeling of superiority toward one's surroundings.¹⁵⁵ Andrzej Lachowicz together with Leszek Kaćma specified that they were not interested in *post factum* judgements because "drawing conclusions from the creation-perception relation eventually leads to high cognitive stagnation."¹⁵⁶ The solution to stop this stagnation was grounded in the principle of continuity (permanence) and a structural notation based on the principle of having an equal field for investigating the current spatial situation. As Kaćma and Lachowicz assumed in their experiments, "the next stage of using the equal field will be a structural study of meaning",¹⁵⁷ referring later on to Jan Świdziński's reflection on the neutrality and arbitrariness of the sign, and on the disposal of the formal bond linking it with the concrete.

In his late text *Energy of the Fall* (dated 24 August 1980), Andrzej Lachowicz contrasts 'the fall' with nothingness – the latter for him being a state of homeostasis, "a state of suspension and energetic sucking-out"; but also with a point of destination, a "self-silencing and a self-fulfilment."¹⁵⁸ *Energy of the Fall* is undoubtedly a summary of his experiences connected with the conceptual revolution in which he actively participated; a summary – it must be added – truly ambiguous and paradoxical, as if he was sensing that the imminent political changes in Poland would bury analytical art for more than a decade, and the hot time of change would choose as its emblem a wild art, full of emotions. The fact that there could be some bridges, links, or common denominators between the conceptualism of the 1970s and the refreshing anarchy of the 1980s would not be realised until a bit later. Meanwhile, Communism was collapsing and everything was coming to an end, since those who refused on principle to create within any one given aesthetics were creating a recognisable language and aesthetics perceived by the younger generation as anachronistic and an inadequate portrayal of their reality. For many conceptualists, the expressive art of the 1980s must have seemed like a betrayal of their ideals, a complete pandemonium; while for the young artists who began their practice in the 1980s, the art of the 1970s was a formalised, hermetic code that had to be broken. It obviously soon turned out that there were more things connecting them than dividing them – both groups distanced themselves from the prestigious enclaves of Modernism, expressed through abstract art or other art preoccupied with 'humanistic values' in the aesthetic autonomy. Astute artists (Andrzej

Lachowicz undoubtedly being one of them) found that these shared values proved an unexpected opportunity to loosen the corset of the language of the 1970s. He displayed a negative attitude towards the seemingly unquestionable idioms of the 1970s, including "Medialism and Scientism as a pathological tendency of the human mind" (which, as I understand it, involved theories of communication applied to art similar to those of Jerzy Olek at the Foto-Medium-Art Gallery, and an awareness that the plethora of information ceaselessly registered by the PERMAFO artists would not eventually lead to an increase and summing up of knowledge, but would instead be transformed into a separate quality which could be developed *ad infinitum* due to its limitless potential¹⁵⁹), and "all pseudo-constructivist and activist-productivist convulsions"¹⁶⁰ (this may refer to currents in both conceptualism and abstract geometry). Lachowicz's *Art of the Fall* is therefore an outline of an artistic programme in which art is consistent with the previous period's connection to reality and the volatility that accompanies it (being, as he wrote, "part of the *real* reality and real art"), avoiding simple satisfactions and cathartic certainties, for it was fuelled – as he beautifully put it – by "temporary tinkering"; but also a programme which slides towards the unknown (which could have been risky or even embarrassing in the spirit of the 1980s) where both "extreme dynamics" and crossing the horizons of "sceptics, scientists, and defeatists"¹⁶¹ are equally important. For the ultimate aim was to reflect "a special form of the world's complication" through repeated contact with reality. It is this complication that prevented an artist from succumbing to ideologies and authorities ("placing yourself in the position of a priest",¹⁶² as a student of Lachowicz's from the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław put it) which years later turned out to be the foundation of conceptualism; but at the same time that stressed the necessity of making art that transgressed logical discourse, in order to be, as Lachowicz used to say, as "logically imperfect" as possible. One of his examples of this is Duchamp's gesture of bringing a snow shovel to a museum, which worked through the transgression and the realisation of a mental structure of similar operation; and what is more, the idea that the incompatibility of contradictory elements in a work of art may be used to judge it. An interesting experiment to exemplify would be the act of feeding different information to each of our eyes, so that – through appropriate visualisation – what is seen would not form a coherent, monocular image.¹⁶³ It is also important for art to include that which is 'unthoughtful' – because it creates "a potential possibility of a holistic 'nonverbal thinking', a Gnostic view of the world."¹⁶⁴

Tadeusz Złotorzycki, who participated for a short while in the circle of PERMAFO artists, wrote an article entitled *Ruined Thought, i.e., Energy of an Error* (included in the collection of theoretical texts *Unidentified Energies II* published by the gallery in November 1981), where he announced the opinion that one of the fundamental errors in thinking is hypostasis, in particular when it assumes the form of false, artificially created ideas to which one aspires.¹⁶⁵ He wrote, "we deal with ruins when a thought is substituted by a thought, a label",¹⁶⁶ and added that he knew of other ways to ruin thoughts: by naming, the aim of which is to take control of a situation (so-called 'wishful thinking'); or by limiting one's vocabulary because of an ideology (so-called

'newspeak'). For Złotorzycki, hypostasis is the most dangerous ruin because it is the most subtle one.

As Jan Świdziński insisted during his cooperation with PERMAFO at the beginning of its existence, in order to truly transform art it was necessary to perform three operations in subsequent, progressive stages: the first, dematerialisation; the second, analysis; and the third, grammaticalisation.¹⁶⁷ Coming back to the energy of the fall, it could therefore be noted that against the background of the Gdańsk Agreement of August 1980, as if predicting the collapse of the empire (Poland being an unwilling satellite), Lachowicz wrote without pathos but with optimism, that in thinking about art "nothing that falls down does so as completely as it could."¹⁶⁸ This could be perhaps read as the need for a new grammaticalisation. It should be noted that Lachowicz was faithful to his earlier postulate of applying 'many-valued logic', and also to his opinion concerning the inadequacy of formal logic, because of the necessity in using one's own experience, intuition, and reflection.¹⁶⁹

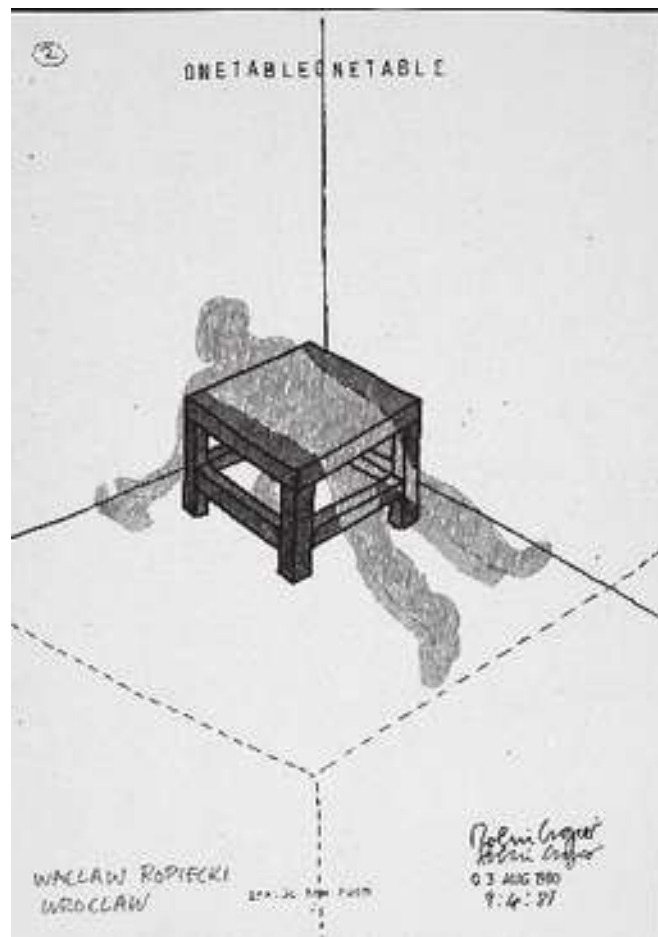
Summary

The PERMAFO Gallery was one of the most important independent galleries of the 1970s; at the heart of which were two outstanding artists, Natalia LL and Andrzej Lachowicz. Having participated since the very beginning in Jerzy Ludwiński's shows and performances, they managed to create a gallery-situation in Wrocław (even

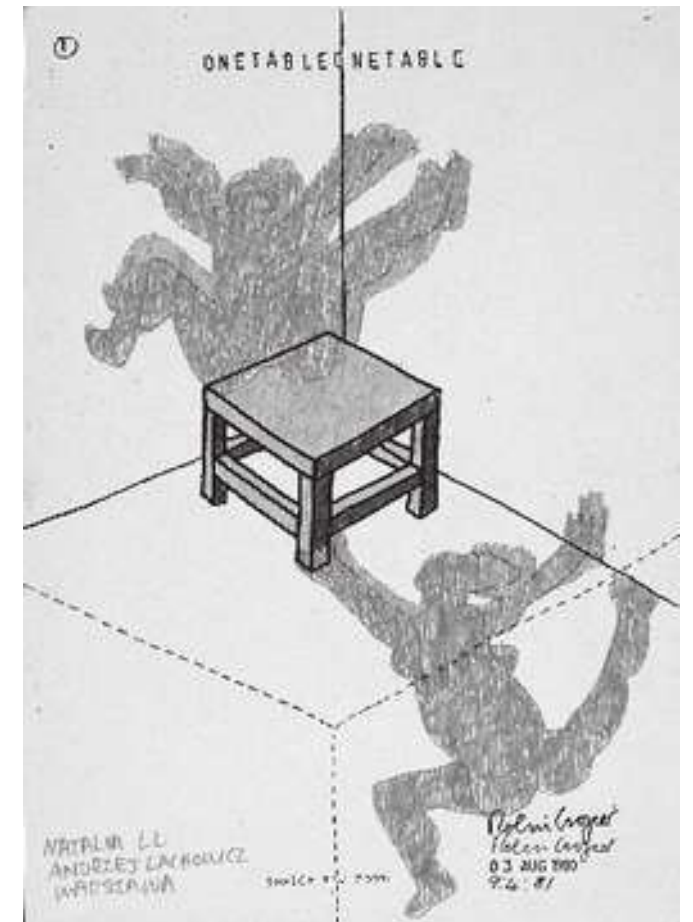
though the Mona Lisa Gallery was still open), a place for actions and meetings of some of the most outstanding neo-avant-garde artists from Poland and abroad, also welcoming scientists, philosophers, writers, and poets. They succeeded in basing their activity in the local community, without depending on the existing cultural institutions and their programmes. The PERMAFO artists' aim was not to paint pictures that would end up in museums, but to 'capture' unimportant, unprestigious space; to use the space to create a participatory gallery-model, in which both the work of art and the context in which it is presented are of equal significance, since PERMAFO emphasised the key role of the conditions (technical, institutional and political – if we take into consideration obstacles and the interference of censors) in which an artwork was created. To borrow from Marx's language, one could say that they operated in the 'superstructure'; that their aim was to change consciousness, experiment with the cultural aspects of life, introduce negotiation, and provoke discussion in the active social fabric. Their role should be evaluated not only through a number of outstanding works of art, but also – to quote Kosuth's famous opinion on Duchamp – through how they contributed to a questioning of the nature of art, and what they added to its conception. They achieved their credit in breaking with the closed, hermetic circulation of officially established Modernist art in Poland, as well as with the (at times) equally exclusive circulation of conceptual art in the West. In spite of the stark East-West division, the ongoing process of globalisation caused PERMAFO to seek a close to the period of Modernist optimism, its belief in artist's uniqueness, the ethos of novelty, the struggle for innovation, and its 'less means more' reductionism; its participants opened to the postmodern idea of subversively appropriating and sharing material from visual culture, and using elements of social play. Paradoxically, they positioned themselves between democratic design (the authorship of which is negotiated by both artist and viewer) and the elitist tradition of giving form. Due to the such liminal nature of their proposition, many of their works have a paradoxical character – on the one hand, the artists questioned the author's position by working together, which often resulted in the disappearance of an individual gesture or a unique originality; but on the other, they were concerned with creating their own mythology. *Mutants*, for example, clearly demonstrates this contradiction. Their attitude towards colour was also truly paradoxical – the artists used the conceptual and puritan monochromatic schemes associated with the cooling of emotions, yet yellow became the characteristic colour for all of their printouts, favouring the light, sunny yellow contrasted with black. The artists also often used colour photography.

One of Andrzej Lachowicz and Natalia LL's main accomplishments was the redefinition of the artist's role and the exhibition, as well as the context of their reception. The artist's role became interchangeable with the role of the curator, the researcher, the anthropologist, and even the celebrity. As artist-curators, they arranged exhibitions in order to activate the viewer. As artist-researchers, they produced knowledge about reality (permanent registrations were in fact reports of carefully devised actions), and continued a neo-avant-garde ethos devoid of the compromising factor of state propaganda. Moreover,

Lachowicz was the author of original conceptions, such as 'visual persuasion' or the 'equal field'. As artist-anthropologists (or artist-ethnographers) they were interested in individual and collective identity (*Intimate Art* was in fact a representation of marriage); they believed in the influence of cultural patterns on an individual, and in the possibility of modifying these patterns through art. It is actually quite difficult to say that the propositions of Lachowicz and Natalia LL were strictly 'photo-medial'; they were in fact post-medial – their artistic statements were not medium-specific, and they were aware that an exhibition, a performance, or an event was as rightful a medium as the narrowly-defined conception of photography. Their approach also reflected on the artist's profession – they often invited people from outside the 'certified' visual artist's environment to make statements and participate in discussions. The artists often opposed a technical understanding of art and new media, looking instead for holistic solutions; but Lachowicz still specifically felt that in the age of the development of mass media an artist had to be able to adapt to the new situation; one might say that it is not without reason that Zdzisław Sosnowski was Lachowicz's student, being also particularly aware of art's media dimension in which the roles of artist and celebrity are intertwined. In addition, Lachowicz's later conception of radical art – involving the 'excessive' elevation and radicalisation of his opposition to society – was a premonition of the scandals which would go on to provoke the next generation of artists. The changes in the martial law mark the turning point between Lachowicz's radical art and the provocations of artists from the late 1980s and early 1990s, the younger generation unaware of how much of their freedom they owed their predecessors. While artist Zofia Kulik (Warsaw) could follow the work of her 'student' Zbigniew Libera in Poland, Lachowicz's 'students' emigrated to France, like Zdzisław Sosnowski or Ryszard Piegza; or, like Witold Liszkowski, suspended their art practice for many years due to political or other artistic events. The continuity of Wrocław's innovative tradition was broken – the later generation of the Luxus group were unaware of how much they would have had in common with PERMAFO.¹⁷⁰ The Wrocław Contemporary Museum aims with this exhibition and catalogue to restore the memory of PERMAFO's activities, and to rebuild this inter-generational bond. The corporeal approach to conceptualism as was implemented by Natalia LL was both a negotiation of women's writing and an escape from cerebral ideology, the subject of this ideology being the patriarchal man. She has always preferred strategies of affirmation and subversion to those of negation and exposure, which has resulted in a reawakening of her work in recent years, and of the references to her involvement in gay and queer art. Natalia LL found her followers in the practices of artists such as Karol Radziszewski, or the Sędzia Główny group. Although there were significant differences between her and Andrzej Lachowicz in terms of practice, what they had in common were the 'unrighteous' metaphysical experiments within the neo-avant-garde, and heterogeneity of their entire oeuvres, which was never subordinate to any pre-disposed programme. It was this readiness to change and to keep changing that made – and still makes – their work remarkable, capable of surprising, and thus – still significant.



Robin Crozier, *Inside the Room*, 1980–1981
Museum of Art in Łódź collection



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