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Between the Stage and the Art Gallery: “Artistic Actions” at the Lublin Theatre Spring in 1973 and 1974

Abstract

In this article, I have undertaken an analysis of the visual arts section “curated” by Zbigniew Warpechowski at the student festival Lublin Theatre Spring in 1973 and 1974, where many artists, later known as precursors of performance art, performed. Experimental happenings within the field of student theatre, referred to as “artistic actions”, are mentioned by many sources as an event marking the start of performance art history in Lublin. The aim of this article is to reconstruct individual actions, collect scattered archival materials (brochures, descriptions of actions, memories, photographs, excerpts from press reviews), and analyse the reception of these actions among the audience and theatre critics based on press reviews. These events are placed in the context of the simultaneous emergence of avant-garde theatre represented by Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, and Józef Szajna, as well as student theatre. This contextualisation illustrates how this new art form, later defined as performance art, negotiated its position and sought its place between the theatrical stage and the art gallery in the mid-1970s. The article also demonstrates how these new theatre models converged with the reflection on action art. Moreover, the research highlights the local and transmedial specificity of the development of this artistic direction.

Keywords: performance art, transmediality, student theatre, Lublin Theatre Spring, reconstruction

“Artistic actions” presented at the two editions of the Lublin Theatre Spring in 1973 and 1974 are considered foundational events for performance art in Lublin. They preceded the pioneering actions of Piotr Bernacki, Krzysztof Zareński, Marek Konieczny, as well as the *International Meetings of Artists* “Performance

and Body" in 1978, which were one of the innovative festivals showcasing performance art in Poland. The commissioner of the "artistic actions", Zbigniew Warpechowski, described them as "the first avant-garde art presentation since the Group Zamek in Lublin".¹ They took place at a time when the emerging new form of action art was searching for its identity and place in the artistic landscape of that time. The precursors of action art from various artistic backgrounds (including poets, actors, sculptors, visual artists), presented their happenings in diverse locations that allowed for bold artistic experiments. They circulated between the gallery and the theatre stage. The aim of this article is to reconstruct the individual actions presented at the Lublin Theatre Spring, gather scattered archival materials (brochures, action descriptions, memories, photographs, press excerpts), analyse the reception of "artistic actions" among audiences and theatre critics, and demonstrate how in the mid-1970s, a new art form, later defined as performance art, negotiated its position and sought its place between the theatre stage and the art gallery. The article presents a transmedia perspective on the beginnings of performance art in Poland, highlighting the relationships between avant-garde artists and experimental theatre, as well as the presence of performers on the fringes of theatre in the student cultural field. It also argues that the presentations of "artistic actions" were an important reference point in shaping the program of the Labirynt Gallery in Lublin since 1974, directed by Andrzej Mroczek.

Many researchers believe that the concept of "performance", along with its practice, was "imported" from Western art criticism and emerged in 1978, together with the International Artists' Meetings at the Remont Gallery in Warsaw and *Performance and Body* at the Labirynt Gallery in Lublin.² However, Piotr Piotrowski's methodology of horizontal art history requires a focus on the local specifics of the emergence of this new art movement and its embedment in a particular institutional and ideological context, rather than adopting the paradigm of "importing" progressive art from the West. The article uses a framework of concepts developed by the artists themselves and the local community from which they originated to describe the phenomena presented. The artists later labelled as performers defined their procedural works in various ways. To describe them, I will mainly use the term "action" or "artistic action" as used by Warpechowski to describe various phenomena that defy genre categories.

1 Z. Warpechowski, *Podręcznik Bis*, Cracow, 2006, p. 54.

2 Ł. Guzek, *Rekonstrukcja sztuki akcji w Polsce*, Warsaw-Toruń 2018, pp. 533–534.

The relations between theatre and action art in the 1970s

New interpretations of performance under the sign of the “performative turn”, initiated in Poland by Agnieszka Sosnowska and the exhibition *Other Dances* at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, propose focusing on the transmedial origins of performance art, highlighting its intersections with various disciplines, including happenings, street and avant-garde theatre.³ They advocate for a rewriting of both art and theatre history, challenging essentialist approaches proposed by numerous scholars, such as Łukasz Guzek.⁴ In Poland, the topic of the connections between performance art and experimental theatre in the 1970s has not yet been extensively explored by researchers, as if these worlds existed in isolation. However, there is ample evidence to suggest that there were numerous collaborations between visual artists and theatre practitioners, as well as significant parallels in thinking about the actor’s and performer’s body, active presence, and the crossing of boundaries in traditional art forms. Researcher and artist Anka Herbut wrote on this topic as follows:

“In the mid-1960s, a performative revolution took place in art. The body of the actor–performer no longer represents or imitates reality. By freeing itself from the compulsion of representation, it turns towards its own materiality, experiences space, establishes a connection with the audience and the object. Both in theatre and gallery spaces, it achieves aesthetic and semantic autonomy. Embedded within dense structures of signs, it starts to exert influence and respond more than signify. The presence of the spectator’s body becomes equally important – their presence should involve active participation. Performance art and performativity establish a new grammar of artistic language. [...] The body becomes the fundamental mode of existence in the world and the only possible channel of communication”.⁵

The relationship between performance art and theatre remains complex due to the use of multiple terms and their different definitions by researchers. Marco de Marinis describes the osmotic interpenetration of basic performance indicators into the realm of new theatre.⁶ The researcher points out that there

3 The title of the exhibition *Other Dances* originates from the title of the performance by Akademia Ruchu (Academy of Movement), a theatre group operating at the intersection of several artistic disciplines. See A. Sosnowska, ed., *Inne tańce. Zwrot performatywny w polskiej sztuce XXI wieku*, Warsaw, 2019.

4 Guzek, op. cit.

5 A. Herbut, “Vita negative”, in: *Dzikie pola: historia awangardowego Wrocławia*, ed. D. Monkiewicz, Wrocław, 2016, p. 181.

6 M. De Marinis, “Performance and Theatre: From Actor to Performer and Back?”, text presented by Jerzy Grotowski at the conference *Performer – Old or New Paradigm of the Artist?* which took place on 19–21 April 2012 in Cracow. <https://grotowski.net/performer/performer-5/performans-i-teatr-od-aktora-do-performera-i-z-powrotem> [accessed 18 April 2023].

are many convergences between New Theatre Studies and performance studies. De Marinis notes that in the 1970s, two parallel phenomena emerged: the “theatricalisation of performance” and the “performatisation of theatre”. Happenings, the performances of the New York-based Living Theatre, and Jerzy Grotowski’s “poor theatre” are connected not only by the reduction of theatre to the spectator-actor relationship but also by a focus on real action, transformation, and a departure from the fiction of dramatic action towards “truth” and an interest in the reality of the actor’s body.⁷ The emphasis shifts to the action itself rather than the mimetic value of the performance. De Marinis identifies three main characteristics of the “theatricalization of performance”: the prevalence of self-referential presence and materiality over fictional plot and referential meaning, the deconstruction of staging structures, and a focus on the concepts of “event” and “relation”, primarily the corporeality of the actor.

In the field of Polish theatre, one can identify many phenomena within the realm of what Martines refers to as “theatrical performativity”. The most obvious link between the gallery and the theatre stage is the figure of Tadeusz Kantor, who not only directed but also designed set pieces, costumes, decorations, and painted or created installations. He played a significant role in the development of performance art by directing group happenings in urban or gallery spaces in the 1960s, as well as creating productions for the Cricot 2 Theatre, which included many Cracow-based visual artists. His happenings involved numerous young artists who, in subsequent decades, became pioneers of performance art, including Jerzy Bereś⁸ and Maria Pinińska-Bereś.⁹

The closest approach to theatrical performativity was the idea of “poor theatre” by Grotowski, which had already crystallised in his performances and paratheatrical actions of the Laboratory Theatre in the 1960s and was expressed by the director in his book *Towards a Poor Theatre*.¹⁰ It involved rejection of unnecessary elements of the spectacle – set design, props, makeup, music, the division between the audience and the stage – while focusing on the relationship between the spectator and the actor. These experiments led Grotowski to assign a special role to the actor, whom he called a “performer” endowed with exceptional physical and mental abilities developed through ascetic training. The actor was supposed to be a “dancer, priest, and warrior”,¹¹

7 Ibidem.

8 J. Bereś, “Moje kontakty z Tadeuszem Kantorem i Grupą Krakowską w latach sześćdziesiątych”, in: *Cricot 2, Grupa Krakowska i Galeria Krzysztofory w latach 1960–1970*, ed. J. Chrobak, Cracow, 1991.

9 J. Hanusek, “O pewnych aspektach Panoramicznego Happeningu Morskiego Tadeusza Kantora”, *Estetyka i Krytyka*, 2014, 35, no. 4, pp. 90–105.

10 For the first time published in 1968 by Odin Teatrets Forlag in Denmark, see <https://grotowski.net/encyklopedia/ku-teatrowi-ubogiemu-towards-poor-theatre> [accessed 19 April 2023].

11 J. Grotowski, “Performer”, in: idem, *Teksty z lat 1965–1969*, eds. J. Degler, Z. Osiński, 2nd edition, Wrocław, 1990, p. 214.

and, above all, himself rather than a played character in classical theatre. Additionally, the performative aspect of Grotowski's theatre involved interaction with the audience, involving them in the dramaturgy of the performances. Through the search for transcendence, the presentation resembled a ritual or ceremony. It aimed to initiate spiritual experiences both for the actors and the audience.

Grotowski's ideas did not arise in isolation from the thoughts of contemporary visual artists. When examining the history and map of avant-garde Wrocław, one can notice many common places for theatre and visual arts. One such location was the Club of Artistic Associations in Wrocław. Here, starting from 1966, the Galeria pod Moną Lisą was based, run by the theorist Jerzy Ludwiński; it also housed the rehearsal room of the Laboratory Theatre. As Anna Markowska writes: "the conceptual line of Wrocław's neo-avant-garde represented, among others, by Jerzy Ludwiński, intersected with the performative line represented by Ryszard Cieślak, Grotowski's brilliant actor".¹²

Ludwiński was a frequent visitor to avant-garde theatres in Wrocław, as evidenced by his interview with Marcello Bacciarelli, in which he compared the non-state theatre scene to a network of independent galleries.^{13, 14}

Józef Szajna, a theatrical artist, painter, sculptor, set designer, and director, was also the author of an experimental concept called "plastic theatre" in the 1960s and 1970s. He transcended the traditional boundaries of theatre and sought new means of artistic expression. His performances often incorporated elements of artistic installations and environments, utilising space and objects in unconventional ways to create holistic performative situations.¹⁵ On his initiative, the present-day Galeria Studio in Warsaw was established in 1972, which from the very beginning showcased performers such as Marek Konieczny, Krzysztof Zarębski, Stuart Brisley, and Akademia Ruchu.¹⁶

As a director and playwright, Helmut Kajzar created the *Manifesto of Meta-Daily Theatre*. He believed that the essence of theatre lies at the contact point between actor and audience, which should take the form of minimal mediation.¹⁷

12 A. Markowska, "Klub Związków Twórczych", in: *Dzikie pola: historia awangardowego Wrocławia: przewodnik*, ed. D. Monkiewicz, Wrocław, 2016, p. 196.

13 "Wrocławskie centrum sztuki aktualnej. Rozmawiali: Marcelli Bacciarelli i Jerzy Ludwiński", *Kierunki*, 12.04.1970, no. 15, p. 3

14 Moreover, Grotowski collaborated with many visual artists, among whom Krzysztof M. Bednarski should be mentioned. See "W mojej bliskości wyczuwałem śmierć, z rzeźbiarzem Krzysztofem M. Bednarskim o jego pracach dla Jerzego Grotowskiego rozmawia Waldemar Baraniewski", *Odra*, 2008, no. 11, pp. 77–81.

15 N. Andrzejewska, "Muzeum Józefa Szajny i synteza sztuk: dokumentacja kontekstu wielomedialnego dzieła sztuki – ochroną jego idei", *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, 2013, no. 8, p. 22.

16 A publication on the complex relationship between visual arts and theatre in Szajna's work was created: L. Dorak-Wojakowska, *Szajna Teatr/Te-art. W poszukiwaniu formuły teatru plastycznego*, Cracow, 2017.

17 Herbut, op. cit., p. 173.

Therefore, he eliminated elements borrowed from other disciplines, such as set design, sound, props, and decorations, which could disrupt communication. He focused primarily on working with the actor's body. The most important aspect was performativity, the act of happening, movement on stage. Similar to Grotowski, he defined the actor as a "man in action". He was interested in ritualism and personal transgression, akin to rites of passage, but presented within the framework of everyday practices. In 1974, he began collaborating with Krzysztof Zarębski, one of the pioneers of performance art at the Labirynt Gallery. They worked together on the play *Rycerz Andrzej* (Knight Andrew) at the Teatr Studio in Warsaw. Zarębski was responsible for "fetishes and artistic actions" that formally went beyond traditionally understood scenography. For Zarębski, the body was a living sculpture. In theatre, he involved actresses in its creation, while in films and performances, he involved women who were close to him,¹⁸ juxtaposing the intimate private sphere with the public one.¹⁹

The examples cited illustrate that theatre and the emerging performance art shared many common spaces. They were created by artists who mutually inspired each other, viewed each other's works, and met in the realms of independent art. Furthermore, they were closely aligned with the idea of an "expanded", transdisciplinary field of art. Experimental theatres were open to new forms of expression, distinct from traditional interpretations of classics and playwrights' works. The Lublin Theatre Spring is just one example of these numerous interdisciplinary encounters between visual arts and theatre in the 1970s. The above examples demonstrate the process of "theatrical performativity". Below, I shall focus on illustrating how the actions of performers operated within the field of student theatre, which was distinct from mainstream theatre and major experimenters but also open to new, unconventional forms.

The Lublin Theatre Spring as an example of student culture open to artistic experiments

The Lublin Theatre Spring was a recurring event that took place in Lublin from 1966 to 1974. It operated outside the mainstream of the theatrical world, on its periphery, and was a significant expression of student culture. Its main organiser was Andrzej Rozhin, initiator of the Academic theatre UMCS Gong 2. Most of the performances were shown at Chatka Żaka, a local student cultural centre. As part of the festival, theatres from all over the country were invited to present performances and participate in a competition. Regular participants included Teatr STU, Teatr 38, Teatr Miniatur, Teatr 77, Pleonazmus,

¹⁸ Among others Krystyna Jachniewicz, who as an artist and performer presented her works at BWA Lublin in the 1980s.

¹⁹ A. Herbut, "Strefa kontaktu", in: *Dzikię pola...*, p. 223.

and ST Gliwice. Alongside the later Young Theatre Confrontations, the Lublin Theatre Spring is one of the two most important theatre festivals in the contemporary history of Lublin. Both focused on alternative and student theatre and aimed to intervene in urban spaces.²⁰

In the last two editions of the Lublin Theatre Spring, the award for the best performance was discontinued and the event was renamed the “Workshops of Young Theatre”. The main programme included not only performances but also workshops delivered by the artists themselves, followed by presentations.²¹ There were also accompanying events, including exhibitions, lectures, and “artistic actions”, which encompassed experimental activities at the intersection of visual and performative arts, the subject of this article. In parallel with the festival, a brochure called “Teatralia” was published, featuring presentations of theatre groups, reviews, and a calendar of events, often containing witty and ironic comments. In 1973, four such brochures were published and two in 1974. They are an important source of information that captures the intellectual atmosphere of those events.

The authors of the anthology “Scena Lublin” emphasise that the city had a reputation as a centre for avant-garde and student theatre at the turn of the 1980s. The scene of non-institutional theatre, not only student or alternative, was very rich. At that time, several notable groups and venues were active, including Teatr Gong at Chatka Żaka, Grupa Chwilowa, Provisorium, Scena 6, and the Gardzienice Center for Theatrical Practices²² located near Lublin. The mid-1970s marked the peak for independent theatre in Lublin. In the second half of the 1970s, the wave of “theatre of contestation” began to lose momentum,²³ as can be clearly seen in critical texts related to the festival.

The Lublin Theatre Spring was part of the student theatre movement that had been developing since the 1950s. Its foundation lay in a network of clubs, festivals, publications, and local periodicals. According to Aldona Jawłowska, its manifestations were a conscious attempt to contest not only the social but also the political reality. It allowed the formation of an “alternative worldview” among the theatre-going audience.²⁴ Sławomir Malaga contextualised student theatre within the events post-1968, the global student countercultural rebellion, while avoiding specifying the local characteristics of these phenomena. He wrote about theatres such as Teatr 77, OTO Kalambur, Akademia Ruchu, Scena Plastyczna KUL, and Teatr Stu.²⁵ The author saw student theatre as a tool to measure the emotional dynamics and expression of different generations.

20 J. Cymerman, “Konfrontacje z miastem. Festiwale teatralne w Lublinie”, in: *Między świętem a przesytem. Festiwale teatralne i ich miejsce we współczesnym życiu kulturalnym Polski*, ed. D. Kosiński, Szczecin 2016, p. 117.

21 T. Nyczek, *Pełnym głosem. Teatr studencki w Polsce*, Cracow 1980, pp. 110–113.

22 J. Cymerman, D. Gac, G. Kondrasiuk, eds., *Scena Lublin*, Lublin, 2017, pp. 85–92.

23 Ibidem.

24 A. Jawłowska, *Więcej niż teatr*, Warsaw, 1988.

25 S. Magala, *Polski teatr studencki jako element kontrkultury*, Warsaw, 1988, p. 35.

The student scene was less constrained by material limitations and more direct than institutional theatre. It could serve as a space for experimentation and expression of progressive content. According to the author, it nurtured the tradition of critical theatre, which is confirmed by the words of Jerzy Stefan Osowski: "The fever of ideology went hand in hand with interference in the existing reality. This theatre was a movement closely linked to an authentic community of spectators, serving as a sensitive barometer [...] student theatre will remain faithful to its critical audience and to itself".²⁶

Konstanty Puzyna wrote about it as "alternative culture", alternatively referring to this phenomenon as the "new theatre" and, following Grotowski, as "active culture".²⁷ However, the issue of political entanglement remains complex, as it existed within the framework of official institutions.²⁸ Andrzej Rozhin's statement points to the intricate nature of this phenomenon:

"We had certain limitations; we had to take into account the requirements and demands of our sponsors – mainly the Union of Polish Youth [ZSP] and the Provincial Office [Urząd Wojewódzki]. We needed approval for everything; every performance and idea regarding the organisation of the event had to be approved by the censorship. The festival was, on the one hand, a source of pride for the community and the city, but on the other hand, a constant source of anxiety – what new ideas would these students come up with?"²⁹

The statement highlights the tension between state expectations, censorship requirements, and creative freedom, experimentation, or political and artistic rebellion, which lay at the core of such artistic initiatives in the 1970s.

The Lublin Theatre Spring was not the only student event in the 1970s where avant-garde artists and performers showcased their work. Other venues included the Studencki Teatr Satyry Pstrąg in Łódź, Klub Sigma at the University of Warsaw, Klub pod Jaszczurami in Cracow, Galeria Remont at the Riviera Student Club, and Galeria Dziekanka in Warsaw. Student initiatives were attractive to neo-avant-garde artists as they were seen as more open and spontaneous spaces. For the communist authorities, student culture had a non-professional status and was not always taken entirely seriously. It served as a "safety valve" where various tensions, including youthful rebellion, could be discharged.

Furthermore, the student theatre movement, in a formal sense, was open to avant-garde experiments inspired by figures like Grotowski, Kantor, Szajna,

26 J.S. Osowski, "Gombrowicz, ty byku", *Student*, 1979, 24, p. 10.

27 K. Puzyna, "Jak krety", in: idem, *Półmrok*, Warsaw, 1982, pp. 142–156.

28 It's worth noting that the statements and writings about student theatre mentioned above were produced in the 1980s. The assessments of the achievements of student theatre contained in them may have been influenced by an evaluation of their political involvement in the struggle against communist authorities.

29 Quoted after: M. Dejneka, *Lubelska Wiosna Teatralna w Lublinie (próba monografii)*, Zelwerowicz theatre Academy, Warsaw, 2000 [typescript], p. 102, http://biblioteka.teatrn.pl/Content/47984/Studenckie_Wiosny_Teatralne.pdf [accessed 2 May 2022].

and Kajzer, as demonstrated by the program of the recent editions of the Lublin Theatre Spring. Interest in the “theatrical performativity” and its expanded format can be seen in the accompanying texts of the Lublin Theatre Spring. Director Kazimierz Braun, in his article titled “The Viewer – Spectator or Participant”, outlines a new vision of theatre – one devoid of stages, baroque buildings, and focused on the act of gathering and community. In this theatre, the presence of the actor and the viewer is paramount, with the viewer becoming a co-participant in the events. The author also references the practices of the New York-based Living Theatre, which left traditional theatre buildings, emphasising egalitarianism and direct interaction with the live audience. He advocated for “an open structure of the performance and a theatre that defied definitions and rules but was felt with profound realism”.³⁰

The opening of student theatre to new, performative forms was not just a matter of declaration; it was also reflected in the performances showcased in the last editions of the festival. Among the highly praised productions in 1973 were “Collage” and “Lectures” by Akademia Ruchu, directed by Wojciech Kruckowski. The former received the main jury award for being “a mature and technically refined performance”. Akademia Ruchu was established in 1973, initially as a student group affiliated with the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw. They created actions at the intersection of theatre, visual arts, film, happenings, and performance. “Collage” was their first production, consisting of a dynamic montage of “visual signs” created by actors while constantly moving across the stage, creating a filmic composition. The overall effect was meant to resemble the one-directional movement of a film reel.³¹ “Lectures”, referred to as a “Fragment of a Larger Whole” in the brochure, consisted of seemingly abstract rhythmic behaviour of the actors who appeared within circles of light projected successively at various points on the stage. It was accompanied by the playback of the book *Do you Speak English?* from a tape recorder. In juxtaposition with it, the actors’ movements gradually took on meanings as an allusive commentary on individual socio-political entanglements. Both performances received glowing reviews from the critics. Tadeusz Kruczyński concluded his review with the statement: “We have finally met Godot”.³²

Evidence of the opening up of student theatre and the Lublin Theatre Spring itself to new forms of expression was the invitation extended by Rozhin to visual artists, whose “artistic actions” had little in common with traditional theatrical performances. The texts accompanying the festival attempted to argue for the presence of these new forms and highlighted the transmedial

30 Teatralia. 8th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young theatre, Lublin 1973, brochure, no page numbering.

31 Description of the performance available: <https://www.akademiaruchu.com/cont/story.htm> [accessed 21 September 2023].

32 T. Kruszyński, *Waiting for Godot*, Teatralia. 8th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young Theatre, Lublin 1973, brochure, no page numbering.

nature of the visual actions. In announcing the activities of the visual artists, the editorial committee wrote: “Undoubtedly, anyone who participated in the presentations and visual actions at last year’s ‘Spring’ was struck by the fact that the means that theatre had wielded so far had been taken over for beyond theatrical activities.”³³

Furthermore, Jan Świdziński, a contextual art theorist, in his article “Okolice sztuki” (The Vicinities of Art), anticipated what was to happen at the student festival, emphasising the artists’ bold move beyond media divisions such as theatre or art, outlining a perspective that today could be called transmedial: “I am interested in the area of the latest art – post-happening and post-avant-garde, a broader field than professional divisions and broader than what we traditionally considered art. [...] This year’s 8th Lublin Theatre Spring, through avoidance, expanded the scope of its activities to include accompanying events, which, at least in part, provoke reflection beyond just theatre.”³⁴

The reconstruction of artistic actions and an attempt at classification

Artistic actions were presented during two editions of the Lublin Theatre Spring. From the documents, it appears that in 1973 the festival took place between 30 April and 6 May. It ceased to be a competition of student performances and became a creative meeting under the theme *Workshop of Young Theatre: Goals, Tasks, Means*. The artistic actions did not take place in the standard festival location, which was Chatka Żaka, but in the exhibition salon of the Bureau of Art Exhibitions (“BWA”), a separate venue designated for visual arts presentations. During the first edition in 1973, Zbigniew Warpechowski, the commissioner, invited Włodzimierz Borowski, Jerzy Bereś, Andrzej Brzeziński, Andrzej Dłużniewski, and Giovanni Lucci³⁵ to create actions and workshops. The presentations were commented on by Jerzy Ludwiński and Jan Świdziński, who were present at the event.

The ninth edition of the Lublin Theatre Spring took place from 15–19 May 1974, with the participation of Ewa Partum, Andrzej Partum, Jerzy Bereś, Lech Dymarski,³⁶ and theorist Andrzej Kostołowski, who gave a lecture entitled *The Context of the Museum*. The film *Na wylot* directed by Grzegorz Królikiewicz

33 Teatralia. 9th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young Theatre, Lublin 1974, brochure, p. 19.

34 Teatralia. 8th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young Theatre, Lublin 1973, brochure, no page numbering.

35 Edward Krasieński, an artist associated with the Foksal Gallery, was also invited to the festival but did not appear in Lublin.

36 An artist and politician who later became estranged from the artistic community.

and Krzysztof Zarębski was also shown. The event also involved artists from the Workshop of Film Form, who presumably presented a film. Additionally, during the 9th Lublin Theatre Spring, a workshop was organised by the Poznań-based Grupa Od Nowa,³⁷ involving Izabela Gustowska, Bogumił Kaczmarek, Wiesław Krzyżaniak, and Wojciech Müller.³⁸ From archival materials, it can be read that the group proposed a visual arts workshop called *The Theatre Museum*, which thematized the role of visual arts in theatre and performances as a separate, autonomous field not solely subordinate to scenography.

Below, I present the course of events from both editions of the festival that have been reconstructed thanks to documents, materials from brochures, catalogues, and interviews with artists. They can be divided into two categories. The first category comprises actions focusing on the performer's body and their relationship with reality, akin to reflections in the field of body art but more grounded in spiritual and transcendental contemplation. The second category consists of conceptual actions that use the analytical language of conceptual art and engage in critical dialogue with it. It is worth emphasising, however, that unlike "Western" performance art, which is based on bodily aspects, the performer's identity (gender, race, or class), political gestures, and in contrast to superficial interpretations of action art in Eastern Europe as "political performance" or "anti-communist"; the actions of performers in Poland were more rooted in media experiments, formal experimentation, and engagement with traditional visual arts media (such as sculpture or painting) or conceptual thinking.

During the 8th edition of Lublin Theatre Spring Warpechowski performed one of his most iconic actions, *Dialogue with a Fish*. He used a live fish taken out of the water, which he embraced while partially naked and spoke tenderly to. Throughout the action, he became verbally more affectionate. The audience witnessed a cruel spectacle in which a live animal suffocated before their eyes.³⁹ Ultimately, the artist "surrendered" and returned the fish to the water. In the artist's interpretation, the literary and biblical symbolism of the fish was important, as well as its "pure and silent" disposition.⁴⁰ The artist asked

37 The Poznań group existed from 1970 to 1980 and its name referred to the Od Nowa Gallery, run by Andrzej Matuszewski from 1964 to 1969, which was an important place for the development of happening art in Poland. The artists were later associated with the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań. Unfortunately, it is not known exactly what their activities involved during the Lublin Theatre Spring.

38 Source: leaflet "Grupa Plastyczna Od Nowa Poznań" found in the archives of the NN Theatre, ref. no. oai:biblioteka.teatrnn.pl:46358, <https://biblioteka.teatrnn.pl/dlibra/publication/49338/edition/46358#description> [accessed 10 October 2022].

39 This was not the artist's only action involving animals. He had previously suffocated another fish during an action at Andrzej Partum's Poetry Office, and in the *March* action in 1984, he tied a small bird to his leg.

40 Z. Warpechowski, *Zasobnik: autorski opis trzydziestu lat drogi życia poprzez sztukę performance*, Gdańsk, 1998, p. 28.

what was more important to the audience: the suffering of the animal or the art/performance they were witnessing. He wrote, "I wondered what people considered more important, the suffocating fish or my acting performance".⁴¹ In the context of theatrical considerations, the actions can be seen as a reflection on the tension between the reality and fiction of theatrical performances or actions. The artist did not portray any character but physically inhabited the space of the room, close to the audience. The live fish and the act of suffocation were also real. However, the artist introduced an element of acting, which involved speaking to the animal. Verbally, he tried to placate it, but physically, the fish was dying. This placed the audience in a state of cognitive dissonance. The action itself could also be understood as a critique of theatrical activities based on fiction and plot. The art presented by Warpechowski focused on the "here and now", emphasising embodiment, the reality of physical experience, and a certain transgression associated with the use of a naked body or a live animal.

In the same year, during the festival, Jerzy Bereś performed an action titled *Transfiguration III: Author's Altar*. At the beginning of the performance, the artist arranged a square made of four concrete slabs in the centre of the room, around which the action unfolded, resembling a ritual. The rhythm of the action was marked by successive gestures repeated by the artist. Half-naked, Bereś entered with a belt made of two planks wrapped around his hips. Attached to the planks was a cord, one end of which the artist placed in the centre of one of the slabs. This cord determined the distance he could move away from the centre of the action. One by one, he painted his feet in blue, then green, yellow, and red, using them to trace a circle of colourful imprints on the ground. He alternated between signing pieces of paper and concrete slabs. He placed four pieces of paper on the four slabs. Then, he undressed completely and alternately painted his body with black, elongated lines and chopped a wooden block until only splinters remained. Using the wood and crumpled paper, he formed a bonfire, which he ignited. When the flames had grown into a fire, he left the room.⁴²

The action significantly differed from a classical theatrical performance that the audience might have been accustomed to. The artist did not portray a character or a literary scene, but rather existed in the space as a real person. His male nudity caused a stir, as it transgressed the taboo of the prudish culture of the People's Republic of Poland. The concerns about nudity and its appropriateness are reflected in Warpechowski's statement: "These were emotional moments for me because when I picked up Bereś in Lublin, he already warned me as he got off the train, 'Listen, I'll be undressing'. I, as the one

41 Description of the work from the collection of the Museum of Art in Łódź, <https://zapy.msl.org.pl/arts/view/5357> [accessed 10 October 2022].

42 A. Węcka, ed., *Zwidy, wyrocznie, ołtarze, wyzwania*, exhibition catalogue, Poznań, 1995, pp. 103–104.

responsible for him, felt that I had to make sure there was no scandal because our comrades would have exploited it right away.⁴³

Furthermore, the artist ignited a real fire in the gallery space, further surpassing the conventions typically associated with theatrical performances.

In the following year, Bereś performed an action titled *A Toast to Spring* with the musical group Osjan, which included Jacek Ostaszewski, Marek Jackowski, and Tomasz Hołuj. The band regularly performed at Piwnica pod Baranami and was associated with Cracow's progressive jazz and improvisational music scene. In the artist's archive, a score was found labelled "Transfiguracja – Bereś+Ossjan" for an action at the Galeria Współczesna in Warsaw in 1973. It can be suspected that the action in Lublin ran a similar course. The score for the action was unusual because it was detailed,⁴⁴ which may indicate that it served the group to keep track of the action's progress or served the director of Galeria Współczesna, Janusz Bogucki, to submit the action for censorship approval.

If we were to assume that the artist, along with the Osjan group, repeated the action in Lublin as they did in Warsaw, it might have looked as follows. As in other manifestations from the early 1970s belonging to the *Transfiguration* series, the artist invited the audience to join a quasi-ritual in which he outlined the sacred space, a circle marked by footprints in green paint around a slice of tree trunk. Kneeling next to the tree trunk, he alternately painted white divisions on his body from the waist up and cut a cheese into pieces. Then, he alternately painted red divisions from the waist down and poured wine into glasses. Next, he painted a vertical blue line on his torso and sliced a pear. Finally, he invited the audience to participate in the action by partaking of the refreshments, as indicated by the notation in the score, "Please eat and drink". During these moments, there was usually a relaxation of tension, and Bereś tried to establish contact with the audience. The props he used were simple and raw, with metaphors reminiscent of Christian liturgical symbolism.

The artist commented on the action as follows: "It wasn't a full-fledged manifestation. Firstly, it was repeated. Secondly, it had a decorative character. Thirdly, it wasn't fully authorised because it was performed during a concert by Osjan."⁴⁵

Bereś did not consider it his typical performance, or in his terminology, a "manifestation". The structure of the action was repeatable and structured with a clear beginning and end, and it was a collective work, which could fit into theatrical presentations. There are no notes on the reception by the audience regarding this performance. The musical performance and how it may

43 The conversation between Aniela Mroczek and Zbigniew Warpechowski took place on 11 June 2010, in Sandomierz [manuscript].

44 The uniqueness of this score was confirmed by Oskar Hanusek, who is responsible for the artist's archive.

45 Węcka, op. cit., pp. 103–104.

have influenced the dramaturgy of the action were also puzzling. However, this collaboration is significant in the context of transmedial considerations about the origins of performance art and is another example of various artistic collaborations between performance art, theatre, and music.

Another category of visual actions that can be distinguished during the Lublin Theatre Spring are “conceptual actions”, referring to considerations from the field of conceptual art, language, or structuralist philosophy. In 1974, Warpechowski invited Ewa Partum to participate in the festival. Partum, an artist who ran the conceptual Gallery Adres in Łódź from 1972 to 1977, focused on mail art, performative actions, and art documentation. Partum performed an action in Lublin titled *If you Want to say Something, Speak the Language of Language*. In an interview, she mentioned that she had attempted to perform the same action earlier at the *5th Biennial of Industrial Forms in Elbląg in 1973 – Kino Laboratorium*.⁴⁶ In Lublin, several individuals present in the room were invited to participate, which involved simultaneously uttering the titular sentence in multiple languages. Partum was clearly inspired by Marshall McLuhan’s famous statement, “The medium is the message”. She wanted her art not to be subject to interpretation but to be what it is – pure language. The form of art was intended to be its message. Partum was primarily interested in semantics and created tautological, conceptual, and “linguistic” works in the spirit of actual poetry. The presentations of “visual actions” were just a pretext to showcase her work, which also functioned in other media. The titular sentence appeared in *Book by Ewa*, the first grassroots-published book about the artist containing her conceptual poems.⁴⁷ It was also sent and presented as paper mail art at various exhibitions, including the anti-Documenta in Kassel in 1977.⁴⁸

A workshop with a similar topic was conducted by Włodzimierz Borowski, a precursor of the neo-avant-garde art in post-war Lublin and co-creator of the Zamek Group. He was invited to lead one of the workshops at Chatka Żaka. It was titled *Perception of Perception*, and its announcement in the accompanying brochure of LTW’73 directed attention to topics related to conceptual and perceptual art:

“WORKSHOP IV led by: Włodzimierz Borowski
PERCEPTION OF PERCEPTION
1. ACTION REACTION
2. ACTION ACTION

46 In Elbląg, she was said to have been silenced by male artists, primarily Józef Robakowski. Ewa Partum gave me a phone interview about the Lublin Theatre Spring in May 2022. She mentioned, among other things, how difficult it was for a woman to perform in an environment dominated by male performers and artists.

47 E. Partum, *book by ewa: jeżeli chcesz coś powiedzieć mów językiem języka*, published in collaboration with Klaus Groh’s International Artist Cooperation, Oldenburg, 1974.

48 D. Monkiewicz, U. Król, eds., *Ewa Partum 1965–2001*, Warsaw, 2006, p. 11.

3. REACTION ACTION

4. REACTION REACTION

Does a deciphered sign become a new sign, and if so, can this sign 'NEW SIGN' cause another one or restore its former value?

SIGN RECEPTION SIGN

SIGN RECEPTION SIGN

STAGE AUDIENCE

STAGE = AUDIENCE

LACK OF SIGN = SIGN

SIGN O

Workshop IV, titled 'Perception of Perception,' will be conducted by visual artist Włodzimierz Borowski. The author invites participants of the Young Theatre Workshop to take part. The production group should consist of sensitive participants with imagination and acting skills".⁴⁹

Unfortunately, apart from an enigmatic note, no information regarding the progress of the workshops or the final presentation has been preserved.⁵⁰ The quoted text includes wordplay with the words "action" and "reaction", as well as references to signs. There is also an equation that juxtaposes the audience and the theatrical stage, which may relate to the contemporary reflections that aimed to break down the clear divisions of classical theatre performances. Borowski, known for his trickster-like happenings in the spirit of Dada and art filled with ready-made elements, turned towards conceptual art in the early 1970s. Ludwiński wrote that during those years, the artist was mainly engaged in writing texts, giving lectures, and having conversations. "Concepts became art, and what used to be art before was reduced to the status of an addition to concepts".⁵¹ Right after these events, from 1974 to 1976, Borowski suspended his artistic activities due to criticism of what was happening in contemporary art.

In 1973, Warpechowski performed an action titled *Nic+Nic+Nic+Nic* (Nothing+Nothing+Nothing+Nothing), which, according to the artist's interpretation included in the catalogue, was meant to relate to the category of *Noumenon*, to "things in themselves", a concept introduced by Immanuel Kant.⁵² The action consisted of four parts that played with the titular concept. In the first "Nic" (Nothing), Małgorzata Dłużniewska, cut Warpechowski's hair into the shape of the word "Nic" (Nothing) using scissors. Then the artist stated that the cut locks of hair corresponded to the letters "N", "I", "C". Next,

49 Biuletyn 8. Studenckiej Wiosny Teatralnej, Lublin, 1973, p. 11.

50 The performance at Lublin Theatre Spring is not mentioned in the artist's catalogue published on the occasion of his retrospective at Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, J. Kozłowski, K. Barszowska, eds., *Ślady, 1956–1995. Włodzimierz Borowski*, Warsaw, 1996, or in the catalogue J. Kozłowski, C. Pieczyński, eds., *Włodzimierz Borowski: no to co? Nic: no właśnie*, Warsaw, 2018.

51 J. Ludwiński, "Włodzimierz Borowski – a journey to the world of infinite smallness", in: *Ślady...*, p. 21.

52 Warpechowski, *Zasobnik...*, pp. 27–28.

Warpechowski arranged the hair on a board to form the word “NIC” (NOTHING). In the final scene, the artist set fire to the hair, causing its dematerialisation. Analysing this action through semiotic theory, one could say that the signifier became the signified. The meaningful word “nothing” became “nothingness”. In the book *Zasobnik*, it can be read that the artist’s intention was to “realise” and “qualify” the concept of “Nothing”.⁵³ Warpechowski devoted many of his performances to this subject, starting from the Edinburgh festival to the iconic film rendition of *Prayer for Nothing* from 1974. Warpechowski engaged in a dialogue with conceptual art, which experienced its heyday in the early 1970s. However, Warpechowski added an emotional, philosophical, and existential element to the dry, dictionary-like, and mathematical concepts, which can be seen in the artist’s subsequent actions described below.

During the Lublin Theatre Spring, there were also works that engaged in a more explicit critical dialogue with the tradition of conceptualism. In 1974, during the last edition of the Spring, Warpechowski performed two actions: *Attempt to Represent the Colour of Reality – Nothing* and *Reading a Treatise on the Collection of Axioms for a Treatise on Art*. Warpechowski described the first one years later as follows: “It was such a conceptual action. I also had several boxes with holes constructed (...). At that time, I was dealing with the problem of ‘nothing.’ Is ‘nothing’ black, colourless, or not visible at all, and so a set of these objects was created”.⁵⁴

Sketches of the objects were included in the “Teatralia”. There were three boxes in total, with the first one being white and unlit inside, the second one black and illuminated, and the last one transparent with the inscription “lack of light”. Alongside stood a mirror with the word “black” written on it, and next to that was a plaque that said “nothing is the colour black”.⁵⁵ The drawing was accompanied by a quote from Lao Tse, a semi-legendary Taoist philosopher.

On the other hand, Warpechowski wrote the *Treatise* under the influence of his interest in semiotic and structuralist thought. However, the artist approached these tendencies with distance and humour. Among the axioms, there were playful and ironic fragments, such as “The artist’s action is conditioned by the field of play; it can dominate it, and in the event of the fact of art’s existence, it should destroy it”, or “Irritation with something that nests around art is a possibility of its condition”.⁵⁶ The language of these absurd statements resembled the language of structuralists who attempted to describe all cultural phenomena using equations, principles, and dependencies. The artist was particularly inspired by the texts of analytical philosopher

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ The conversation between Aniela Mroczek and Zbigniew Warpechowski took place on 11 June 2010, in Sandomierz [manuscript].

⁵⁵ Teatralia. 8th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young theatre, Lublin 1973, brochure, no page numbering.

⁵⁶ Warpechowski, *Podręcznik Bis...*, p. 403.

Bertrand Russell. Warpechowski's axioms were repeatedly publicly interpreted, and each time they underwent changes together.

In Lublin, the artist asked a dancer from Teatr Gong 2 to perform an improvised dance live during the reading. "She performed a series of movements, gestures, and exclamations that were an unselfish reaction defining the meanings or indefiniteness of art."⁵⁷ Unfortunately, there is no more detailed description of this event, and her name was not mentioned by the artist. However, this serves as another vivid example of the transmedial experiments of the early performers.

Warpechowski also invited Andrzej Partum to participate in Lublin Theatre Spring, a conceptual artist and creator of the Poetry Bureau independent gallery in Warsaw. As part of his performance, Partum presented a provocative action titled *You Are an Ignorant of Culture and Art*. It involved sending a letter with this title to representatives of institutions, authorities, critics, and journalists. The Biuro Poezji action was presented to a wider audience at the festival through distributed leaflets. Łukasz Ronduda wrote that "the purpose of the action was to indicate that the most valuable, living art is always outside the discourse, beyond the competence and knowledge of the institutional art world, and that true art always defies institutional requirements, and in reality, we know nothing about it".⁵⁸ Partum's activities differed from the conceptual artists focused on concepts, definitions, and language. The artist mocked it, playing with its conventions and strategies. He caricatured conceptual actions as well as the institutions themselves by using their language and tools such as telegrams, letters, leaflets, or applications. Partum's actions had a dadaist and performative character. He was a trickster, unwilling to conform to the realities of the institutional world of art, literature, and theatre, as demonstrated by the distribution of ironic leaflets to the audience of Lublin Theatre Spring.

Andrzej Bereziański, an artist from Poznań working in the spirit of abstract painting, conceptual art, and performance, who exhibited works in many conceptual galleries in the 1970s, executed an action in 1973 titled *Imagining Pure Necessity*. The course of the action remains unknown, but in the brochure, it can be read that it was an "example of the recently fashionable concept of creating without a work"⁵⁹ and part of the paravisual trend in conceptual art. The brochure also contains the artist's manifesto entitled "There Exist Objects", which dealt with phenomenology and the perception of time and object perception.

57 Teatralia. 9th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young theatre, Lublin 1974, brochure, p. 20.

58 Ł. Ronduda, "Lęk przed wpływem. Rzecz o sztuce Andrzeja Partuma w dekadzie lat 70", *Obieg*, 18 December 2007, <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/teksty/2093> [accessed 3 September 2022].

59 Teatralia. 8th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young theatre, Lublin 1973, brochure, no page numbering.

Andrzej Dłużniewski, a painter, performer, and conceptual artist, carried out an action during which he gave participants commands such as “Stand back-to-back” or “From now on, you will be surrounding”, suggesting that the human mind can shape the surrounding reality. This action reversed the assumptions of “environmental” art, in which the artist invited people to a space he created. In his action, everyone had to create it themselves. The brochure stated that “both actions by Dłużniewski and Bereziański were activities involving the manipulation of the viewer’s consciousness”.⁶⁰ They encouraged participants to use their imagination.

Reception of “artistic actions” on the theatrical stage

“There is no doubt that the artistic actions were the biggest event in the city of Lublin” – wrote one of the editors in “Teatralia”,⁶¹ appreciating the importance of the participation of visual artists in the event. Important sources regarding the atmosphere of the Lublin Theatre Spring and the reception of artistic actions are mentioned in the official press and texts from “Teatralia”.

From press reviews, it can be inferred that the artists’ actions were considered original, elicited emotions among the audience, and sometimes even proved controversial or provocative. Barbara Osterloff, the editor of the monthly magazine “Teatr”,⁶² wrote that the artistic actions were more interesting than the student performances presented at the festival.⁶³ However, this opinion was isolated because most of the reviews were negative. This may have been due to the fact that official media and critics were not favourable towards artistic experiments. The actions by Bereś and Warpechowski caused the most controversy. Janusz Płoński’s outraged piece in *itd* reads as follow:⁶⁴

“The presenter (or performer?) spoke tender words to a fish lying on the floor. The artist lay beside it, and the fish was alive, just taken out of a jar. The action was abruptly interrupted by one of the ladies present, who angrily crushed the fish, preventing the artistic endeavour from reaching its conclusion. This was not the only tragedy that occurred during the 8th Lublin Theatre Spring. (...) Perhaps my opinion will not be

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² The oldest magazine dedicated to theatrical topics in Poland. It has been published (with a break during the martial law period) since 1945.

⁶³ B. Osterloff, “Wiosna czy jesień w Lublinie?”, *Teatr*, 16–30 May 1973, 12, pp. 8–9.

⁶⁴ *itd* is a student magazine published by the Association of Polish Students between 1961 and 1990, and later re-established in 2005. Its history can be traced back to the magazine *Po prostu*, which ceased publication in 1957 and was transformed into the periodical *Odnova*. In 1960, *Odnova* changed its title to *itd*, which stands for “i tak dalej” (and so on).

very popular within the 'circle', but I believe that the audacity of some artists exceeds the boldest boundaries. They have led to a paradoxical situation in which the viewer or participant of their 'actions' is faced with an imperative to accept everything as a work of art. Because that is the will of the artist."⁶⁵

Wiera Korneluk, a long-time reviewer of theatrical events in Lublin, wrote mockingly about Beres' action: "The artist delivered his credo while another artist, completely naked except for a pimple on his buttock, wandered around the room with a tulip in his hand, not covering his somewhat battered genitalia. One outraged lady, while leaving the room, exclaimed on the stairs, 'We need to restore order here!'"⁶⁶

The reviewers and a portion of the gathered audience had doubts about the artistic status of the performers' acts. Their actions exceeded the boundaries of what was permissible, employing means such as nudity or the use of live animals. Through their form, they also transcended the understanding of theatrical performance and did not fit into the common understanding of the term "plastic art". Partum's actions from the field of conceptual art also encountered some misunderstanding. Maciej Parowski wrote:

"I have two small cards in my hand: 'If you want to say something, speak the language of language' was written on one, and 'I am ignorant in the field of art' on the other. The same is written underneath in French, German, English, and Hungarian. At the bottom, the signature – Ewa Partum (the whole thing was actually led by Andrzej Partum⁶⁷). Does collective chanting of such revelations truly open a person up to new matters, experiences, or bring them closer to anything? Let's just leave it at this kind of question".⁶⁸

The critic may have distorted the content of Andrzej Partum's work. They also did not find Ewa Partum's tautological reflections on the nature of language interesting or compelling. Perhaps they saw them as pure provocation without any meaningful content.

Bereś was also aware that the actions presented by him and other visual artists were met with incredulity from the audience. In a catalogue collecting descriptions and memories of the artist, he wrote about an action during the theatre Spring: "My manifestation had a strong impact because it was a time when the wave of happenings had long passed, and the term 'performance art' was not yet in use. (...) It was a time of conceptual and media ideas. Students called what was happening in BWA 'art without muse'".⁶⁹

The artist was aware that his artistic proposition defied categorisation, "had no muse of its own", was not yet named, and remained in the grey area

65 J. Płoński, "Wiosna ukrzyżowana", *itd*, 10.06.1973, 23, p. 7.

66 W. Korneluk, "Wiosna-Wiosna", *Sztandar Ludu*, 19–20.05.1973, 118, p. 6.

67 It is puzzling how Ewa Partum's action proceeded, since according to the critic it was led by her husband, and according to the author – by herself.

68 M. Parowski, "Posucha w Lublinie", *Politechnik*, 09.06.1974, 23, p. 18.

69 Węcka, op. cit., p. 104

“in between”. The statement also suggests that some of the audience were aware that they were encountering a new form of artistic expression.

The positive reception is evidenced by a statement from Janusz Bałdyga, a later member of the Akademia Ruchu and a performer:

“It was something so incredible in Bereś’ performance, in such concentration, that it made a gigantic impression on us. And actually – we were in the third or fourth grade at that time, I say ‘we’ in the plural because Onuch and I always went to various things together – Bereś started to be like a point of reference there. There was a conversation, and it was the first time we encountered such a strong emphasis on the ethical aspect. Someone told us that for the first time.”⁷⁰

The reception of Bereś’ action is also reflected in a comment in the brochure “Teatralia”:

“What we saw at BWA can formally be called an act of self-creation. A happening. The motif of the ritual is linked here with everything that constitutes the starting point of every creativity. An act of marking, an expression of human connections with what surrounds him, the transformation (transfiguration) of what he found into a new dimension, became present in Bereś’ action just as the traces of the ritual are present in the paintings of the Lascaux cave. We encountered something in the face of which words become rigid, and discussion falls silent. Kindling a fire, leaving a trace behind, chopping wood... The only thing that can be done now is the exhumation of human nature, of what lies dormant in all of us, penetrating without reference to time, space, race, cutting off at once from all possible classifications, typologies, distinctions, etc., in which man-cocoon is entangled.”⁷¹

The comment suggests that Bereś’ action made a significant impression on the audience. The physical presence of the performer, the genuine act of chopping wood and lighting a fire, evoked numerous associations with ritual, ceremony, and spirituality. Nudity did not provoke mockery, as seen with official theatre critics. Another humorous verse in a different issue of “Teatralia” entitled “Na konceptualistę” (To a Conceptualist) goes, “Even if you hang yourself / you won’t be Bereś”. This could be understood as criticism or satire of conceptual artists whose performances lacked the spiritual and ritualistic power found in Bereś’ actions.

In summary, when reading reviews from the official press, one might conclude that the visual actions were not favourably received by the student audience. Their form – conciseness, metaphorical nature, use of nudity, lack of plot, or linearity – remained incomprehensible to the viewers. Similarly, actions using the language of conceptual art were unclear and were interpreted as intellectual provocation. However, the texts from “Teatralia” specialists and

70 The interview conducted with Janusz Bałdyga by Jerzy Hanuszek on 5 July 2016, shared with the author by Jerzy Hanuszek.

71 Teatralia. 8th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young theatre, Lublin 1973, brochure, no page numbering.

the statements of other artists suggest that some of the audience appreciated and understood the complex meanings of “artistic actions”, praising Beres’ manifestations particularly highly. The audience was well-versed in contemporary art, familiar with the form of happenings, and aware of conceptual theories. They attentively observed the emergence of a new artistic form at the intersection of theatre and visual arts.

The new program of the Labirynt Gallery in Lublin

During the last edition of Lublin Theatre Spring, another action organised by artists took place at Galeria Labirynt, located at Rynek 8 in Lublin functioning under the Municipal House of Culture. It was described in the festival brochure as follows: “This year’s artistic activities began at Galeria Labirynt with a total manifestation of this direction in art, which could be called ‘Impossible Art.’ On the 15th of the previous month at 5 pm., as planned, a group of people gathered in the gallery and, after a long wait, declared the absolute absence of artists and art”.⁷²

The title of the action may have referred to Jerzy Ludwiński’s theory from a text *Art in the Post-Artistic Era* from 1970.⁷³ In his theoretical text, Ludwiński outlined the main stages of development in contemporary art. One of these stages was “impossible art”, which Ludwiński positioned on charts alongside “conceptual art”. These charts described artistic projects that were impossible to complete, unable to exist in material reality, but were presented through documented concepts.

The action in Lublin also resembled Yves Klein’s happening, which took place in 1958. Klein invited guests to the empty Iris Clert Gallery in Paris for an exhibition titled *The Void*. The exhibition was inaugurated with honours, and many guests attended the vernissage. However, when they entered the gallery, they found emptiness and freshly painted white walls.⁷⁴ The action at Galeria Labirynt also aligned with the tradition of Włodzimierz Borowski’s “shows” in which he always sought to surprise his audience with his exhibitions. In this context, it is worth mentioning *Fubka Tarb*, the “anti-happening” by the artist at Galeria Pod Moną Lisą in Wrocław in 1969, where the artist

72 Teatralia. 9th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young theatre, Lublin 1974, brochure, p. 20.

73 Its principles were first presented in the summer of 1970 during the 8th Meeting of Artists and Art Theorists in Osieki. P. Lisowski, “Archiwum Jerzego Ludwińskiego”, *Jednodniówka Muzeum Współczesnego Wrocław*, 26 July 2013, <https://muzeumwspolczesny.pl/mwww/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/jednodniowkaLudwinski-1.pdf> [accessed 5.06.2023].

74 Vide F. Lucarelli, “Two Exhibitions at Iris Clert Gallery, Paris: Yves Klein’s *Le Vide* (The Void, 1958) and Arman’s *Le Plein* (The Full-Up, 1960)”, *Socks*, 23 November 2019, 23, <https://socks-studio.com/2019/11/23/iris-clert-yves-klein-the-void-arman-the-full-up/> [accessed 24 October 2022].

did not appear at the vernissage. He treated the audience as the material of his art and presented them with photographs of themselves.

In "Teatralia", there is a text by Jan Hamilton that recalls this action: "Disheartened by the absence of a strong figure from the world of happenings, Zbigniew Warpechowski, in the 'Labyrinth,' we settle into the chairs (...) ⁷⁵ and he goes on to describe the impressions of another performance". No other materials from the action have survived, and it is not known who conceived it. It can only be speculated that it was meant to be a form of conceptual interaction with the audience and provocation. Leaving the empty gallery without artists and artworks at the Galeria Labirynt was a gesture that indicated the conceptual and performative interests of the artists.

Interestingly, this action was also likely the first "exhibition" in that gallery under the direction of Andrzej Mroczek, who became its director exactly halfway through 1974. Therefore, this action can be interpreted as foundational for the gallery and as a manifesto defining the curatorial interests and tendencies that the gallery's program would be devoted to from that moment on. After Mroczek took over the management, the gallery focused on presenting the latest artistic tendencies such as conceptual art, performance art, video art, and feminist art. From the very beginning, performance art played a significant role in Galeria Labirynt, presented during spontaneous one-day artistic actions as part of exhibition openings and later during dedicated meetings or festivals.

The article has successfully reconstructed most of the artistic actions presented to the Lublin audience in 1973 and 1974. It sheds light on the strategies employed by pioneers of performance art as they sought their place between the theatrical stage and the gallery. It highlights numerous intersections between the theory and practice of experimental theatre, searching for new forms within student theatre and performance art. The Lublin Theatre Spring is a clear example that supports the idea of the transmedial origins of performance art in Poland. The artistic actions presented at the festival not only included live music, dance, strategies from the field of "active poetry", but also engaged in a dialogue with classical theatre by focusing on the performer's reality and physicality.

Despite many shared thoughts between performers and experimental theatre in the 1970s, performance art at the Lublin Student Theatre Festival stirred controversy and sparked discussions, as evidenced by the quoted reviews. The Lublin Theatre Spring served as a platform for performance art to confront a new audience, marking a new direction in Lublin's art scene. This direction was continued by the Galeria Labirynt, which became one of the most important venues in Poland for presenting performance art, hosting numerous performance art festivals.

⁷⁵ Teatralia. 9th Lublin Theatre Spring. Workshop of Young theatre, Lublin 1974, brochure, p. 24.

The experiences of performers within the theatre and festival context may have influenced the need to establish an autonomous festival dedicated to performance art, which would emerge a few years later as the International Meetings of Artists "Performance and Body". This article does not exhaust the topic of transmedial encounters between theatre and performance art in the 1970s. It is hoped that it will serve as a starting point for further interdisciplinary research into the connections between artistic avant-garde and new theatre in Poland.

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