



Piotr Lisowski
**PERIPHERAL PLAYING FIELD.
 WHERE IT ALL ENDS OR
 BEGINS**

In the spring of 1975, Jerzy Ludwiński left Lower Silesia and Wrocław for good and moved to Toruń. At that time, no one in Wrocław was thinking about creating a Museum of Current Art, the Mona Lisa Gallery had been closed for four years, the echoes of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium had faded away, and the last chance for change, the Art Documentation Centre, was dissolved due to layoffs less than a year after it had been established by the Department of Culture. At the time, Ludwiński himself was living in Lubiąż, more than 50 kilometres away. Together with painter Małgorzata Iwanowska, they served as therapists at the Department for the Treatment of Addicts at the Provincial Hospital for the Nervous and Mentally Ill managed by Dr Zbigniew Thille. Then they move to Toruń together.

A SLIPPING PLAYING FIELD

Iwanowska recalled the moment of departure as follows: 'He did not want to leave this place. The situation was reminiscent [...] of Jurek's farewells to Lublin, after the symposium in Puławy: it was impossible to stay any longer, not even for one day. No chance of further work, no housing, no stability of any kind. So, we stood on the edge of the road. It was a dawn in May. [...] We stopped a van of some sort and set off, leaving the monumental Cistercian abbey in Lubiąż on the right, beyond the forest and the Oder. [...] Jurek looked off into the distance, sitting back-to-back [...] at the emerald Lower Silesia, disappearing in the grey mist [...].'¹ The comparison of his departure from Wrocław to the situation in 1966 and his farewell to Lublin immediately after the end of the Symposium of Artists and Scientists *Art in a Changing World* in Puławy seems significant. Both due to the exhaustion of professional opportunities and clerical resistance, as well as Ludwiński's own uncompromising approach to art and artistic choices.

The critic's actions were often in opposition to the official standards of Polish artistic culture at the time. They were oriented towards a model of action that was on the move, geared towards lively debate, active participation and constant change. Ludwiński, interested in artists who bring in new, original values, was at the same time fascinated by the disintegration of hierarchies, of canons of all structures in art. He was a participant in and to a large extent a creator of artistic life in the 1960s and 1970s. He was particularly involved in the construction of experimental institutional models, but also in the symposium and plenary movement, in which he saw the idea of a mobile artistic centre as a place for artistic manifestation as well as confrontation and dispute between artists and theorists. It was in these spaces of activity, based on ephemerality, aiming to decentralise the field of art and

1 M. Iwanowska-Ludwińska, *Jurek. Szkice do portretu*, Toruń, 2004, p. 34.

artistic confrontation, that Ludwiński emerged most fully with his theories, passions, preferences and artistic choices.

In an interesting way, this portrait is illustrated in Natalia LL's work, dedicated to Ludwiński, with the symptomatic title *Arrest Warrant*. The installation, realised in August 1970 during the 8th Meeting of Artists and Art Theorists in Osieki, consisted of nine cubes, each covered with photographs. Three of them showed the critic (photographed in the manner in which criminals are photographed: in two profiles and en face, additionally wearing a striped shirt similar to a prison outfit), while others showed a forest in Osieki, a Cuban cigar and a receipt for a contribution to the Polish Fishermen Association, issued for Andrzej Lachowicz. The cubes could be arranged in 720 variations.

At the time, the artist commented on this specific kind of *hommage* to one of the most important figures in the Polish art world at the time as follows: 'Ludwiński's contribution to the development of new art is not to be underestimated. However, his activities did not gain full acceptance and were often even fought against by those who advocated the coarseness and backwardness of art. *Arrest Warrant* is a kind of mobile model of the construction and disintegration of a work of art.'² Natalia LL's work, as Anna Markowska noted, is a gesture of support for a prominent critic and, above all, a manifesto for new art and a declaration of war on the art establishment. '*Arrest Warrant*, the art historian wrote, is an existential declaration: the progressive artist and the critic feel and are treated in the Polish People's Republic as defendants. That is why they gave the cubes to selected participants of the open-air workshop in Osieki, thus crossing the boundary between art and life and making them a gift that dislocates from the public space of the open-air workshop to the private sphere of the recipients. Faced with the impossibility of an extended existence in the public sphere, the artist therefore declares her readiness to create a grassroots system of art exchange. [...] At the same time, *Arrest Warrant* takes a form that is an overt resistance to the dominant art.'³

It is also difficult not to see in Natalia LL's object a reflection of the main theses contained in Ludwiński's speech entitled *The Post-Artistic Era*.⁴ The process he outlined showed the evolution of art, which, by

2 Natalia LL, *Arrest Warrant*, typescript, 1970. Quoted [in:] Natalia LL. *Opera omnia*, ed. A. Sobota, Wrocław 2009, p. 44.

3 A. Markowska, 'Amour fou w nieprzyjaznych dekoracjach', [in:] Natalia LL. *Secretum et tremor*, E. Toniak (ed.), Warszawa, 2015, p. 25.

4 The speech was given on 14 August 1970. The edited text, in the form of a typescript, was published under the title *Art in the post-artistic era* as part of the exhibition *Sztuka Pojęciowa* realised at the Mona Lisa Gallery in Wrocław (December 1970), and was subsequently reprinted in the monthly magazine *Odra* (no. 4, 1971).

seeking to break down the notion of the work of art and its dematerialisation, ceased to be visible, eventually blending in and blurring with reality. Ludwiński spoke about the blurring of various boundaries, including those between art and reality, but also art and theory. At the same time, he pointed to the further dispersion of art leading to a re-evaluation of artistic phenomena and the formulation of a new, constantly evolving definition of art that abolishes all divisions.

The meeting in Osieki is the culminating moment for Ludwiński's 'Wrocław period'. In principle, the open-air workshop can be seen as a continuation of the ideological themes of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium.⁵ This is evidenced both by the composition of the participants, which largely coincides with the list of artists previously invited to Wrocław,⁶ as well as by the topics discussed in the discussions, the nature of the works produced at the open-air workshop and the specificity of the entire event. According to Luiza Nader, the open-air meeting in Osieki continued and radicalised the activities that took place in Wrocław, and the meeting itself turned into a discussion on the need for a new definition of art.⁷ It is worth noting that at the time of the Osieki meeting, in Wrocław, there were still lively discussions and organisational work assuming the finalisation of selected symposium projects. One of the key issues remained the establishment of the Centre for Artistic Research that was to be one of the outcomes of the Symposium.

The Centre was a natural development of Ludwiński's concepts contained in the idea of the Museum of Current Art, developed in 1966. Starting from the earlier model of the museum, also in this proposal the critic highlighted the notion of the 'playing field' as a key one. Having analysed the two programmes, Magdalena Ziółkowska wrote: 'It was Ludwiński's intention [...] to make the Centre for Artistic Research a manifestation of the 'game museum', a new incarnation of the previously unrealised Museum of Current Art. The critic transformed the Museum of Current Art into a museum without a stable location, acting as a link between the fields of changing art and static institutions. The museum was to become a 'mobile centre'. In doing so, the Centre for Artistic Research would be neither a mediator nor a binder of the areas mentioned. [...] Thus, the Centre

5 Z. Makarewicz, 'Ostatni zjazd awangardy', [in:] *Symposium Plastyczne Wrocław'70*, eds. D. Dziedzic, Z. Makarewicz, Wrocław, 1983, p. 40. Cf. L. Nader, 'W stronę krytyki wizualności. VIII Spotkanie Artystów i Teoretyków Sztuki w Osiekach', [in:] *Awangarda w plenerze: Osieki i Łazy 1963–1981. Polska awangarda II połowy XX wieku w kolekcji Muzeum w Koszalinie*, ed. R. Ziarkiewicz, Koszalin, 2008, p. 66.

6 The task of constructing the list of participants was entrusted to two art historians and critics, Jerzy Ludwiński and Bożena Kowalska.

7 L. Nader, *Konceptualizm w PRL*, Warszawa, 2009, p. 393.

for Artistic Research rejected any mediation of experience, the secondary nature of established hierarchies and formalised relationships. It offered direct confrontation of diverse attitudes and participation of artists, critics, audiences.⁸ The Centre was to combine both research and stimulating artistic activities, it was to remain an institution in progress, reproducing the constant variability of current art. In Ludwiński's view, the Centre was meant to be an institution interested in artistic and theoretical activities through which the content of the concept of art is enriched and its previous boundaries become increasingly outdated. 'The idea,' the critic wrote, 'is to create a playing field, not restricted to one place or any one artistic tendency. Such a playing field, in which the Centre would act as a binding factor, could lead to an accelerated development of the arts. The Centre's activities would thus be directed not to the past but to the future of art, not to the accumulation of art departments but to their emergence, not to material objects but to the artistic movement.'⁹

The first stage of implementing the idea of the Centre was the Art Documentation Centre, established on 1 May 1972 at the Department of Culture of the Presidium of the National Council of the City of Wrocław. Jerzy Ludwiński and Zbigniew Makarewicz were hired to run it as instructors for visual arts documentation. There were serious prospects that this time it would work. The drive to create this type of facility was an expression of a real need in the nationwide art community, which manifested its support for Ludwiński's idea during the Symposium.

The Centre began working on documentation for the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium, and was also involved in talks with the Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) concerning the programme for the AICA Congress to be held in Warsaw in 1975. Above all, however, a network of contacts began to be created, laying the organisational and financial foundations that would enable the popularisation of contemporary art at home and abroad.¹⁰ The Centre for Art Documentation was also visited by Richard Demarco, who was on a curatorial tour of Polish art at the time, which resulted in a later exhibition at the gallery he ran in Edinburgh.¹¹

8 M. Ziółkowska, 'Symposium Plastyczne Wrocław '70 i koncepcja Muzeum Sztuki Aktualnej', [in:] *Symposium Plastyczne Wrocław '70*, ed. P. Lisowski, Wrocław, 2020, p. 361.

9 J. Ludwiński, 'Centrum Badań Artystycznych', [in:] *Symposium Plastyczne Wrocław '70*, op. cit., p. 154.

10 Z. Makarewicz, *ibidem*. Cf. кк., 'Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki', *Odra*, 1973, no. 6, pp. 110–111.

11 The *Atelier'72* exhibition took place at Richard Demarco Gallery as part of the Edinburgh International Festival (20 August – 9 September 1972). It was the first presentation of Polish contemporary art abroad of this importance and

After a year of operation, the Art Documentation Centre, a joint – as Janusz Bogucki noted – ephemeral work of the national avant-garde of visual artists and the Wrocław cultural administration,¹² was closed down. Taking advantage of administrative changes and the merger of the municipal and provincial departments of culture, Ludwiński's and Makarewicz's jobs were liquidated. The action taken was interrupted, and much material and many documents were dispersed and consequently lost.

Ludwiński's attempts to revise the institutional system, from the programme of the Museum of Current Art to the activities of the Mona Lisa Gallery to the Centre for Artistic Research, represent a certain train of thought. The critic's views have evolved towards seeing artistic action as something that does not really need an institution or a place, but is a kind of playing field.

Ludwiński was formulating the premise of the 'game museum' considered as an institution in motion already at the stage of designing the Museum of Current Art. This is what he tried to implement at the Mona Lisa Gallery, where he developed a scheme of activities based on the principle of creating a multifaceted situation in which there would be direct contact between the artist, the curator/theoretician and the viewer. The concept of the open playing field, a consequence of this stance, has taken art out of the gallery, making it easier for it to take on tasks of unprecedented magnitude.

This concept was implemented in the form of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium, which already encompassed the entire city space and even went beyond it. In the case of the Symposium, the social aspect was also important. What made this event unusual was that participants were expected to relate to the architectural and urban context of Wrocław. At the time, artists had limited access to public space, so many of them were quite sceptical about this assumption. In this situation, it was more important to present ideas and confront different concepts about public space than to wait for their practical implementation. It was more important to establish a playing field where different views and attitudes could clash. In a subversive way, this also included a critical aspect, which Ludwiński described as 'disloyalty to reality'. The artists used it to protest against the *status quo* that existed at the time, against the situation they found in almost all areas of life. In retrospect, he added

was co-organised by the Museum of Art in Łódź. The Wrocław art scene was presented by Jan Chwałczyk, Wanda Gołkowska, Stanisław Dróżdź, Barbara Kozłowska, Zbigniew Makarewicz, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Grzegorz Koterski, Natalia LL, Andrzej Lachowicz, Maria Michałowska, Leszek Mickoś, Wiesław Paczkowski, Jerzy Rosołowicz and Jerzy Ludwiński.

12 J. Bogucki, 'Od I-go pleneru koszalińskiego do spotkania "Wrocław '70', [in:] *Symposium Plastyczne Wrocław '70*, op. cit., p. 24.

that it was also a defiance of political reality: '[...] the aim of all power, especially totalitarian power, is to get the whole of society to speak with one voice, while the artists at that time wanted to speak with many voices that differed from one another. It was therefore not about anti-government yelling; it was not about reacting on the same level. This was not well received, which can be well seen if we study how the results of the symposia in Puławy and Wrocław were treated by the authorities. In both cases, efforts were made to immediately cover up the case as if it did not exist at all, to destroy documentation or not to allow anything to come to light. Therefore, if you wanted to do anything, you had to act quickly and by surprise.'¹³

The Centre was the logical consequence of this sequence of events and, at the same time, the beginning of a new phase in the art movement, for which, in the critic's opinion, Wrocław was the best prepared of all Polish centres. Ludwiński emphasised here the unprecedented dynamism of new and experimental phenomena, as well as the highest frequency of artistic facts of an unconventional nature. 'In this circle,' he wrote, 'for the first time in Poland we have observed the emergence of new trends in art that have arisen here in an independent way, independently of analogous trends in world art.'¹⁴ The Centre was to be an institution in motion, following this dynamic and fitting in with the idea of a mobile art centre associated with the open-air-symposium movement, which remained central to the formulation of the collective experience of the Polish neo-avant-garde of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the Centre's implementation plan for 1971, outdoor actions in Zgorzelec, Bolesławiec, Osieki, Elbląg and Łągow were listed among the tasks to be coordinated.¹⁵ In the case of the first two open-air events, Ludwiński was directly involved and influenced their nature.

The *Zgorzelec Land* open-air workshop was the last event initiated by the Mona Lisa Gallery. It took place in July 1971 in Opolno-Zdrój, a few kilometres from the Turów lignite opencast mines. The decision regarding the location was by no means a coincidence. The mine was an example of a space where nature in a near-pristine state meets the new nature created by industrial and technical human activity. At the same time, it illustrated quite aptly the problem of the exploitation of natural resources and the

13 'Nowość w sztuce jest miarą wyobraźni artysty. Jerzy Ludwiński w rozmowie z Pawłem Politem', [in:] *Refleksja konceptualna w sztuce polskiej. Doświadczenia dyskursu: 1965–1975*, ed. P. Polit, P. Woźniakiewicz, Warszawa, 2000, p. 64.

14 J. Ludwiński, 'Aneks do programu Centrum Badań Artystycznych', [in:] idem, *Sztuka w epoce postartystycznej i inne teksty*, selected and edited by J. Kozłowski, Poznań-Wrocław, 2009, p. 241.

15 *Plan realizacji Centrum Badań Artystycznych na rok 1971. Projekty*, [in:] ibidem, p. 239.

associated destruction of the original character of the landscape. The meeting, held under the motto 'Science and art in the process of protecting the natural human environment', was devoted entirely to environmental issues. It was intended as a confrontation between artistic and scientific attitudes, with the aim of reflecting on the possibility of planning the civilisational change in such a way so that it would be compatible with the natural processes of biological change. The art itself – as the authors of the open-air workshop wrote – 'fulfils a very important function in the process of changing stereotypical thinking'.¹⁶ Obviously, the organisers did not expect the participants to realise permanent objects, but rather broadly defined artistic proposals as a commentary on the perceived acceleration of civilisation, the overproduction of human products (including waste) or other negative factors associated with industrialisation.

In the case of the Lower Silesian Sculpture Open-air Workshop in Bolesławiec in 1971, an attempt was made to reform the event, which had been taking place since the mid-1960s, by transforming it into a meeting of visual artists, architects and critics, consisting of two sessions in Wrocław and Bolesławiec. A year later, as part of the next edition, Ludwiński, together with Makarewicz and Alojzy Gryt, tried to implement there the model of gallery called the 'Playing Field'. In October, an exhibition and theoretical session entitled *Art and Space* took place at the Bolesławiec Cultural Centre with the participation of, among others, Jan Berdyszak, Andrzej Dłużniewski, Włodzimierz Borowski and Antoni Dzieduszycki. This short-lived initiative involved the introduction of innovative concepts of spatial forms, ephemeral activities and, consequently, performative practices. The 'Playing Field' encompassed more than a specific physical space; it was intended to be an area of people's imagination, emotions and thoughts in a common pursuit.¹⁷ The measure was enthusiastically received by the local authorities, but the provincial authorities supported by some artists from the ZPAP community blocked the initiative.¹⁸ Soon, as we remember, the Art Documentation Centre was also dissolved.

16 J. Chwałczyk, A. Dzieduszycki, J. Ludwiński, 'Założenia programowe pleneru – spotkania artystów, naukowców i teoretyków sztuki Ziemia Zgorzelecka 71', [in:] *Plener Ziemia Zgorzelecka – 1971. Nauka i sztuka w procesie ochrony naturalnego środowiska człowieka*, after-workshop materials, Opolno-Zdrój 1971, n.p.

17 Z. Makarewicz, 'Pole gry', *Wiadomości. Tygodnik społeczno-polityczny* 16 November 1972, no. 46/816.

18 Idem, 'Polska sztuka na zachodzie. O Jerzym Ludwińskim we Wrocławiu', [in:] *Jerzy Ludwiński. Wypełniając puste pola*, eds. P. Lisowski, K. Radomska, Toruń, 2011, p. 65.

BETWEEN POINTS THAT DO NOT EXIST

After moving to Toruń, Ludwiński still tried to develop the idea of a mobile art venue by establishing the Punkt Gallery. It was active from 1977 to 1979, first in the ZMS 'Iskra' Municipal Youth Club and then in the 'Od Nowa' Student Club located in the Artus Court in Toruń's Old Town. As part of the gallery's initiation, the Flying Gallery, which had been defunct for five years and was run in 1972 in Toruń by Wiesław Smużny, was presented.

At the time, in a text accompanying the presentation, the critic described the three main groups of galleries that were on the art circuit at the time, showing the diversity and richness of the contemporary art world.¹⁹ The first group was made up of collection galleries that usually promote one chosen strand of artistic phenomena. The second group included the game galleries, where there is a constant confrontation between the most topical phenomena. Finally, the third group was the concept galleries, for which the flow of information is most important even at the expense of an exhibition or other events. Against this backdrop, the Punkt Gallery was to remain 'a white board on which to project everything from this unlimited diversity'.²⁰ In its conception, it was intended to be a place without a programme – a point in mathematical terms, and therefore a concept that does not exist in reality, from which something begins or on which something ends.

Ludwiński invited artists from a variety of creative fields, constantly searching for and emphasising border areas as the ones where the most interesting things happen. New trends and genres of art were created at junctures: where methods crossed and conventions lost their meaning. Nevertheless, the Punkt Gallery itself remained a rather ephemeral creation, with few realised activities.

One such event was *Action Point III*, held between 30 November and 3 December 1978.²¹ The event included performances by Barbara Kozłowska and Zbigniew Makarewicz, a show by Jerzy Kalina and a performance based on Rainer Maria Rilke's *Elegy* by Ewa Benesz. The whole event was accompanied by a theoretical session entitled *Art at the Borderline of Genres* with papers by, among others, Janusz Bogucki, Andrzej Kostołowski and literary scholar Janusz Skuczyński.

In a surviving manuscript entitled *Akcja 'Punkt'* [Action 'Point'], which can be considered the gallery's programme manifesto, Ludwiński wrote: 'One can imagine movement to such a point from all possible directions, and movement from that point in all possible directions. Realising

19 J. Ludwiński, *Galeria 'Punkt'*, [in:] idem, *Sztuka w epoce...*, op. cit., p. 249.

20 Ibidem.

21 *Akcja Punkt III*, leaflet, Punkt Gallery, Toruń, 1978.

such a point in art is a particularly important thing. It is then that the field is cleared and everything sort of starts again. One big pulsating process. We are proposing it instead of an exhibition understood in a traditional way. Action 'Point' will take place not only in space but also in time. It will also have a research character, the nature of a kind of test, spread among artists and all people interested in art. For during the action, such a point will exist in a quite realistic manner. It will be the task of all observers to find it.'²²

The proposed idea was derived from the concept of the playing field with a stronger emphasis on processuality and ephemerality. It seems that Ludwiński was no longer aiming for a compact structure or format of an informal gallery. The word 'gallery' itself became synonymous with and *de facto* replaced the word 'action'. 'Action', in turn, could be said to have become something that evolved from the notion of 'situation', which determined the programme of the Mona Lisa Gallery. There, Ludwiński had spoken of a 'situation' where there would be direct contact between the artist, the curator and the viewer. The exhibition was just a pretext for it. In the case of Action 'Point', it is similar, however the degree of unpredictability is even greater and the boundaries are set by points that do not exist.

THE PERIPHERIES OF ART

'Jurek was an idealist,' Wiesław Borowski recalled, 'so suggestive that he created a system of art around himself [...] he had no traditional approach to art: that art develops, transforms. Where he was, there was the centre. [...] He was passionate about the fact that Paris ceased to be an art centre in favour of New York. When he later moved to Wrocław, a certain centre was established there.'²³ Ludwiński's activity in the capital of Lower Silesia was a heroic period. It is during this time that he developed key concepts and programmes. The melting pot that formed a strong neo-avant-garde artistic milieu, defined and co-created by Jerzy Ludwiński, and which was cemented by the emergence of conceptual art. Although he himself defined conceptualism very broadly, describing it as a 'convention-free zone' that encompasses everything 'that can be thought and communicated'.²⁴ Ludwiński's later views were largely shaped around issues developed in Wrocław.

His critical views regarding art institutions, his efforts to decentralise the field of art, his insistence on creating dialogical situations between

22 J. Ludwiński, 'Akcja Punkt', [in:] idem, *Epoka błękitu*, ed. J. Hanusek, Kraków, 2009, p. 270.

23 Wiesław Borowski, *Zakrywam to, co niewidoczne. Wywiad-rzeka. Rozmawiają Adam Mazur i Ewa Toniał*, Warszawa 2014, p. 167.

24 J. Ludwiński, 'Strefa wolna od konwencji', *Projekt 1972*, no. 1, p. 2.

critics, artists and the public, his visionary reflection on the transformations of art, and his somewhat counter-cultural style of being made him a figure who definitely broke out of the conventions and norms prevailing in the cultural field at the time. One can say, following Małgorzata Iwanowska-Ludwińska, that he was in some way a man of the peripheries, with these peripheries becoming the centre thanks to his presence.²⁵ The peripheries should be seen in several ways.

In the first instance, it can be read in a literal way, as a province, a margin in relation to the centre. The first such place on Ludwiński's path was Lublin, obviously considered in the context of the relations prevailing in artistic life in Poland at the time, with the predominance of Warsaw and Kraków circles. Ludwiński studied art history at the Catholic University of Lublin between 1950 and 1955. The university in those years was a place that attracted a multitude of young people from all over the country, outcasts, beatniks, people fleeing military service or unable to get into university elsewhere. It was an asylum welcoming all students without restriction. At the same time, it had an interesting staff, composed in large part of lecturers coming from the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius and the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv. During and just after his studies, Ludwiński was actively involved in the development of the Lublin artistic milieu, e.g., participating in the activities of the Zamek Group (1956–1960) or editing, in the years 1959–1961, *Struktury*, a supplement to the Chełm-Lublin cultural magazine *Kamena*, dedicated to the visual arts. Both of these activities undoubtedly constituted an important testimony to Lublin's artistic life and its openness to the transformations of Polish art in the second half of the 1950s.

When Ludwiński moved to Wrocław in 1966, the art community there was well established, although Jan Chwałczyk, who proposed that the critic come to Wrocław during the Puławy Symposium, saw in his arrival an opportunity for the critical vibration that was lacking in the local environment. Chwałczyk recalled: 'In Wrocław, I worked at the BWA Gallery. Just before I left for Puławy, I had a conversation with Jerzy Nowak, the director of the Department of Culture, who asked me if I knew anyone who could stir things up a bit in that dull Wrocław art community. It was right after he brought in Jerzy Grotowski. So, in Puławy [...] Jurek came to me and said that he had talked to a friend from his studies, who at that time was some kind of activist in Lublin, and he told him that he had nothing to look for here, that he would be eaten up here, not only by his fellow artists, the union, but also the situation was such that probably nothing would be published, no catalogue from that exhibition. We are sitting on the sofa talking and then I ask Jurek: and would you come to Wrocław? He immediately replied: 'Yes'. After a few weeks or days, he was already in Wrocław.'²⁶ In a short period of time, a very strong community emerged centred around the Mona

25 'Człowiek-nikt'. Z Małgorzatą Iwanowską-Ludwińską rozmawia Piotr Lisowski', *Archiwum Jerzego Ludwińskiego. Jednodniówka Muzeum Współczesnego Wrocław* 26 July 2013, p. 12.

26 'Napięcia kontrolowane. Z Janem Chwałczykiem rozmawia Piotr Lisowski', *Jednodniówka Muzeum Współczesnego Wrocław* 2 September 2011, p. 9.

Lisa Gallery, run by Ludwiński, and Wrocław became the main centre of conceptual art in Poland.

In the area of the geographical periphery, we can also place the entire symposium and open-air workshop movement, which became very much a part of the landscape of artistic life in the 1960s and 1970s. The open-air workshops and symposia were important centres for shaping the self-awareness of Polish art, and were established as a result of the more general policy of the state aimed at the socio-economic and cultural activation of the territories recovered after World War II. Ludwiński regularly participated in the most important ones, such as the open-air workshop meetings in Osieki, the Biennale of Spatial Forms in Elbląg or the Golden Grape in Zielona Góra. He himself was a co-creator of such key events as the Symposium of Artists and Scientists in Puławy (1966), the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium (1970), the 8th Meeting of Artists and Art Theorists in Osieki (1970), and the open-air workshop The Zgorzelec Land (1971). There was also a whole group of smaller-scale events, attracting the artistic community in large numbers (including in Osetnica, Miastko, Trzebieszowice, Jagniątków). Ludwiński was keen to embark on an 'open-air workshop season' each time, although he was aware that at some point this formula ceased to stimulate the art movement.²⁷

The peripheries, understood in yet another way, can also refer to functioning outside the official interest of the art world. Ludwiński formulated his remarks in opposition to official exhibition sites, state institutions such as BWA or museums, and, in a broader context, to the cultural policy of communist Poland. In the 1960s, he assumed that only unofficial (authorial, independent) galleries were capable of shaping the image of contemporary art. Such places, also thanks to the charisma and commitment of the people who ran them, were directed towards presenting new artistic phenomena and remained open to experimentation and risk. It is in these types of venues that the most unconventional works could be encountered and new content that showcased the image of contemporary art could be sought. This is because these galleries are observing things that are out of the ordinary, it is not the rich artistic output that matters, but the new position that is yet to provide material for discussion.

Ludwiński's struggle with the establishment was already evident earlier, in the 1950s in Lublin, where, as co-founder and critic of the Zamek Group, he tried to situate his colleagues in opposition to the aestheticism and colourism dominating the academic circles at the time. Moreover, it is worth noting that the group also included amateur artists

27 J. Ludwiński, *Awangarda awangardy*, [in:] idem, *Sztuka w epoce...*, op. cit., pp. 74–75.

without visual arts studies, and that nationwide critics ignored Zamek, relegating the group 'to the margins, as an example of the excesses of provincial art'.²⁸

Even from the perspective of the late 1970s, Ludwiński wrote about an era of outsiders, i.e., artists who function somewhere completely on the margins, outside the mainstream, focused on the sources of art and a friendly attitude to the world.²⁹ The blurring of boundaries and divisions also ran the risk of blurring the boundaries between the avant-garde and official art. Observing the changes in the art field of the late 1980s and early 1990s, he pointed to 'third art' as an alternative to the official manifestations of artistic life. In his text *Pałka Bretona i trzecia sztuka* [*Breton's Baton And The Third Art*], depicting the situation of official art, he wrote: 'There is an ongoing bidding war for the massive blows with which the former avant-garde was associated. The visible presence of the artist is important, including at openings. The salons are dominated by important personalities. And beyond that, mass and strength. And money, which never before in the history of the art movement, was present in such quantity.'³⁰ Ludwiński contrasts this with the above-mentioned third art, which differs from official art in its choice of location and, above all, in its attitude.

At the time, Ludwiński was far less involved in artistic life, dividing his time between Toruń, where he lived, and Poznań, where he taught at the State School of Fine Arts, later the Academy of Fine Arts. He often thought back to the late 1960s and the revolution that took place then. He saw the shortcomings of artistic modernity, above all in the very rapid academisation and institutionalisation of phenomena and in fashion. 'In art it is the other way around,' he said a few months before his death, 'art is where there is one person who is a separate person and a separate artist. These are people who belong to a distinct minority who are important for the world of art.'³¹

28 Idem, *Największe pomyłki krytyki*, [in:] ibidem, p. 39.

29 Idem, *Epoka outsiderów*, [in:] ibidem, pp. 140–142.

30 Idem, *Pałka Bretona i trzecia sztuka*, [in:] ibidem, p. 184.

31 *Sztuka zmierza do maksymalnej różnorodności. Z Jerzym Ludwińskim rozmawia Rafał Jakubowicz*, [in:] ibidem, p. 330.

His critical views regarding art institutions, his efforts to decentralise the field of art, his insistence on creating dialogical situations between critics, artists and the public, his visionary reflection on the transformations of art, and his somewhat counter-cultural style of being made him a figure who definitely broke out of the conventions and norms prevailing in the cultural field at the time. One can say, following Małgorzata Iwanowska-Ludwińska, that he was in some way a man of the peripheries, with these peripheries becoming the centre thanks to his presence.

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Abstract

This article is a reflection on the critical and curatorial activities of Jerzy Ludwiński, one of the leading animators of artistic life in Poland in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. The reflections focus on the critic's activities, which were in opposition to the official standards of Polish artistic culture at the time: directed towards a model of action that was on the move, geared towards lively debate, active participation and constant change. Ludwiński, interested in artists who bring in new, original values, was at the same time fascinated by the disintegration of hierarchies, canons of all structures in art. He was particularly involved in the construction of experimental institutional models, but also in the symposium and plenary movement, in which he saw the idea of a mobile artistic centre as a place for artistic manifestation as well as confrontation and dispute between artists and theorists. It was in these spaces of activity, based on ephemerality, aiming to decentralise the field of art and artistic confrontation, that Ludwiński emerged most fully with his theories, passions, preferences or artistic choices.

Keywords:

Jerzy Ludwiński, playing field, point, critic, independent gallery, symposium, open-air workshop

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