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THE ASPECT OF "THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR" OF WANDA GOŁKOWSKA'S ART

Abstract. Wanda Gołkowska (1925–2013) was an outstanding artist associated with Wrocław's artistic milieu whose abundant oeuvre underwent many transformations. This article focuses on one stage of her artistic and creative endeavors, for which the 1968 exhibition at Mona Lisa Gallery was a turning point. The objects presented in the series "Open Compositions" became a sort of canvas for my deliberations on the reasons of transformations of artists' status in the face of social, political and cultural transformations in the reality of Polish People's Republic, referring to the avant-garde discourse rooted in the notion of modernity present in the "post-thaw" times. These micro- and macroprocesses were confronted with the main concept of the essay "The Death of the Author" written by Roland Barthes in 1967.

Keywords: Wanda Gołkowska; Polish art in the 1960s; Barthes' theory in contemporary art

ASPEKT „ŚMIERCI ARTYSTY" W TWÓRCZOŚCI WANDY GOŁKOWSKIEJ

Abstrakt. Wanda Gołkowska (1925–2013) była wybitną artystką związaną ze środowiskiem artystycznym Wrocławia, której bogata twórczość ulegała licznym przeobrażeniom. Artykuł koncentruje się na jednym etapie jej poszukiwań artystycznych i twórczych, dla którego punktem zwrotnym była wystawa w Galerii Pod Moną Lisą w 1968 roku. Obiekty prezentowane wówczas w cyklu *Kompozycje otwarte* posłużyły za swoiste płótno dla moich rozważań nad przyczynami przemian statusu artysty wobec przemian społecznych, politycznych i kulturowych w rzeczywistości PRL-u, nawiązując do dyskursu awangardowego zakorzenionego w pojęciu nowoczesności w czasach „poodwilżowych". Te mikro- i makroprocesy zostały skonfrontowane z główną koncepcją artykułu „Śmierć autora" napisanego przez Rolanda Barthesa w 1967 roku.

Słowa kluczowe: Wanda Gołkowska; sztuka polska lat 60. XX wieku; teoria Barthesa w sztuce współczesnej

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INTRODUCTION

The starting point for our deliberations will be the legendary words of the French thinker Roland Barthes about "the death of the author".[1] In what follows, we will look at the art works of the Polish artist Wanda Gołkowska (1925–2013). I hope to grasp the readers' interest by giving them an opportunity to confront the standpoints, because my reflections take place at the junction: avant-garde—modernism and modernism—postmodernism. The aim of this article is to find the reasons for the artist's decision to follow a new direction in her art, thus deciding to radically reject familiar ways and turning towards opposite principles. Many artists may have experienced that, and their biographies will no doubt present various reasons for their turning points. However, I focus on Wanda Gołkowska as a peculiar case study, and I wish to highlight this variety of reasons emerging from both her individual self-development and social-political conditions of a country under a communist regime.

Wanda Gołkowska underwent a metamorphosis. She abandoned realism for abstract and conceptual inquiries. Nonetheless, I will not limit my study exclusively to biographical elements but also address parallel philosophical and artistic transformations.

Barthes' position, grounded in reflections on postmodernism and literary studies, will be useful for our consideration of the issue of a role of an artist of visual arts. Therefore, I would like to paraphrase the famous words of the French thinker who stated this:

> We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture…. The writer can only imitate a gesture forever anterior, never original; his only power is to combine the different kinds of writing, to oppose some by others, so as never to sustain himself by just one of them.[2]

I will discuss this standpoint with reference to the artistic field via the transposition into visual arts, illustrating it with the example of Wanda Gołkowska's work. I will do that by referring directly to the central claim of

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[1] Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, trans. Richard Howard (n.p., 1967), 1–6.
[2] Barthes, 4.

"the death of the author" as the death of the artist's status—and more specifically, the artist-creator's status. For a better insight, I want to focus on the following aspects:

- Artistic choices: modernism or avant-garde?
- Redefinition of the artist's status in the twentieth century.
- Elimination of the interpreting category based on the author's/artist's intention, illustrated by Gołkowska's work.
- The idea of covering the author's/artist's tracks—the author's withdrawal from the position of a transmitting subject.

POLITICAL CONTEXT OF POLISH ART AND ARTISTIC CHOICES:
MODERNISM OR AVANT-GARDE?

Let me now outline the political context of Polish art, which overshadows its development, including Wanda Gołkowska's work, and influences artistic decisions. Complete avoidance of political entanglement in Poland after 1945 was virtually impossible: under Stalin art was absolutely subordinated to communist authorities and propaganda. After 1956, the so-called Polish Thaw started, when Władysław Gomułka became the First Secretary of Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (21 October 1956), announcing changes in internal politics of Polish People's Republic, which was caused by social grassroots movements (tension in the country after bloody repressions of worker protests in Poznań in June 1956) and inner-party movements leading to de-Stalinization. Until the demise of the Polish People's Republic in 1989, there had been some controlled and short-lived moments of let-up, which were merely a substitute of freedom.[3] Those historical processes influenced Polish artists' perception of art's interference with people's lives, and as a consequence the role of the artist in society, which was different from that

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[3] Cf. Piotr Piotrowski, "Modernismus und sozialistische Kultur im Polen der späten 50 Jahre," in *Die Depots der Kunst, Dokumentationszentrum Kunst der DDR* (Burg Beeskow: Dokumentationszentrum, 1997), 40–46; Piotrowski, "Totalitarianism and Modernism: The 'Thaw' and Informel Painting in Central Europe, 1955–1965," *Artium Quaestiones* 10 (2000): 119–74; Piotrowski, "Modernism and Socialist Culture: Polish Art in the Late 1950s," in *Style and Socialism. Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, 133–47 (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000); Piotrowski, "Modernism and Totalitarianism II. Myths of Geometry: NeoConstructivism in Central Europe, 1948–1970," *Artium Quaestiones* 11 (2000): 101–54; Piotr Juszkiewicz, "Farewell to a Myth. On Close Relationships between Modernism and Totalitarianism," *Kunsttexte.de, Journal für Kunst- und Bildgeschichte* 3 (2014): 7.

in the West. Piotr Piotrowski drew attention to this matter, saying that avant-garde aims at rooting art in reality and overcoming the ideological barriers of everyday life and art, and so should the post-war neo-avant-garde do. On the other hand, modernism reinforces an opposite tendency of eliminating art from social and political routines.[4] The view of contemporary scholars who analyse phenomena from the time perspective is, no doubt, different than of those artistic life participants immersed then in that reality. In the late 1950s, artists did not separate clearly the avant-garde from modernism. Avant-garde was associated with civilizational transformations of daily life and at the same time it was an expression of their aspirations connected with changes of the Polish Thaw.[5] However, in reality, artists showed a profound mistrust of strengthening their contact with the party apparatus, unlike their predecessors during the October Revolution. The artists of the October Revolution believed in the postulate of creating the new human—*homo sovieticus*. This status underwent consecutive changes in the theory of productivism art: from the artist-painter, who evolved into the artist-blue-collar-worker and later into the artist-engineer, to the artist-organiser of production and life.[6] The case of Gołkowska is widely different, as she was a person born when avant-garde ideas were drowned in the utopias framed into Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union. Gołkowska's creative position, her attitude formed thirty years later and not on the basis of some idea but a specific geopolitical situation, is expressed in the need to sever any relations with the state's authoritative apparatus in order to work out a margin of freedom for her creativity. That mistrust proved justified. With hindsight, post-1956 national politics is perceived as a subtler strategy of supervision, because it was by then common knowledge that the mechanism of punishment and repression from the Stalinist era was not effective. In the situation of one-party state there were tactics of "loosening the reins" and of "tightening the screw".[7] Piotrowski stressed that "the method was enriched by the local element of the situation where a jail guard didn't

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[4] Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu: W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* (Poznań: Rebis, 1999), 80–81; Marcin Lachowski, "Powojenna krytyka artystyczna wobec awangardy," *Studia i Materiały Lubelskie* 20 (2017): 56–63.

[5] Andrzej Osęka, "Los polskiej awangardy," *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 7 (1957, February): 3; Aleksander Wojciechowski, "Styl życia i plastyka," *Przegląd Kulturalny* 45 (1957): 8.

[6] Nikolai Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta k mashine* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo „Rabotnik prosveshcheniya", 1923), 5–24; Andrzej Turowski, "Konstruktywistyczna przemiana," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1 (1977): 98–99; János Brendel, "Rodczenko – Produktywizm – Proletkult. Uwagi na marginesie monografii artysty," *Artium Quaestiones* 8 (1971): 190.

[7] Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 78–79.

intend to melt into the structures of an ideal jail, quite the opposite—every now and then he had to remind about himself with various enunciations, party resolutions, guidelines, etc."[8] Piotr Juszkiewicz has proved close relationships between modernism and totalitarianism and shown "how a specific combination of modernism, alongside many aspects of the communist ideology (a kind of Socialist modernism) that influenced the culture of Central and Eastern Europe Countries after WWII, confronts this mythical modernism with its own historical and ideological foundations and political history of the region."[9]

Recognition and proper consideration of those non-artistic factors when researching Polish art is unusually difficult. Luiza Nader, an art historian and scholar engaged in the concept of affirmative humanities (disseminated in Polish academic circles by Ewa Domańska), tries to cast a new light on the situation in Polish art after WWII.

> The idea of modernity and, more extensively, post-war art in Poland, is based on absolutely negative categories. It is considered in a dialectical relation regarding the destructive socialistic-realism experience which in the history of art in Poland is perceived as establishing disgrace, fall, break, non-art…; boundaries between social realism and modernity are blurred—there has been a discourse about the long process of leaving socialist realism or dangerous proximity, negative similarity to socialistic realism and modernity. All in all, modernity, in its rejection of figurative art, realism and the concept of political art, is now perceived as the negative heritage of socialist realism and the negative tradition of the present.… Deliberations of this kind are accompanied by a kind of lamentation over what could have happened in the art history of Poland but did not.[10]

Despite the ambiguous evaluation and various methodological approaches used nowadays, it must be, however, conceded that one consequence of the "thaw" in Poland was a greater creative freedom which was not part of the experience of artists in other Soviet countries—although it was still merely a delusion of freedom in a kind of "velvet prison".[11]

Awareness of these limits begs a question about the existence of any spaces for freedom in the art of that period. In this political situation, Piotrowski noticed in artists some demonstration of disbelief in avant-garde postulates.

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[8] Piotrowski, 79. All translations from Polish are mine.

[9] Juszkiewicz, "Farewell to a Myth," 1–7.

[10] Luiza Nader, "Afektywna historia sztuki," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1 (2014): 17–18.

[11] Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison. Artists under State Socialism* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 79–80.

He claimed—and rightly so—that the Thaw and post-Thaw modernism in Poland grew out of fears of direct engagement of art in life which reinforced the strong attachment to work's autonomy as a guarantee of free art, hence freedom in general. Sadly, Piotrowski argued it was not genuine but false freedom. Undoubtedly, the authorities were interested in not spreading even sham freedom.[12]

Piotrowski's opinion is also shared by other Polish art historians. For example, Piotr Juszkiewicz writes about an escape forward of certain groups of those in power to manage the social ferment,[13] and Anna Markowska describes the adopted political strategy as a "Machiavellian step of the communist establishment".[14]

WANDA GOŁKOWSKA'S ARTISTIC PATH TO "THE DEATH OF THE ARTIST": A REDEFINITION OF THE ARTIST'S STATUS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Although this article is not monographic, it is necessary to outline the biography of Wanda Gołkowska.[15] She was born in Rzeszów and spent the war with her family in Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine). As a consequence of the Yalta Conference decisions (4–11 February 1945), an exodus of Polish people from areas annexed by the USSR began. As a result of expatriation, the artist together with her family ended up in Wrocław. She studied Polish philology for three years, which helped her increase her attention to language and its semantic and referential potentials. As soon as the National School of Visual Arts (today Academy of Fine Arts) was established in Wrocław in 1946, she signed up and was handed in a student ID no. 1. After that she studied painting

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[12] Piotrowski, 82.

[13] Piotr Juszkiewicz, *Od rozkoszy historiozofii do „gry w nic". Polska krytyka artystyczna czasu odwilży* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2005), 79.

[14] Anna Markowska, *Dwa przełomy. Sztuka polska po 1955 i 1989 roku* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2012), 61, 61–64.

[15] Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna, *Wanda Gołkowska: Wrocławskie Środowisko Artystyczne / Wanda Gołkowska: Artistic Milieu of Wrocław*, trans. Małgorzata Kaziów (Wrocław: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. Eugeniusza Gepperta we Wrocławiu), 2015; Aleksandra Zbroja, *W poszukiwaniu utraconych znaczeń. Międzyczas i Układy Otwarte w sztuce Wandy Gołkowskiej* (Wrocław: Fundacja dla Sztuki Niezidentyfikowanej, 2015); Jolanta Studzińska, ed., *List pisany przez całe życie – Układ otwarty – Wandy Gołkowskiej* (Wrocław: Fundacja dla Sztuki Niezidentyfikowanej, 2017); Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna, *Sztuka jest nieustającą polemiką. Wokół refleksji teoretycznej i praktyki artystycznej Wandy Gołkowskiej* (Wrocław: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. Eugeniusza Gepperta we Wrocławiu, 2018); Jolanta Studzińska, Marta Smolińska, and Wanda Gołkowska, *Wanda Gołkowska Zmienność w międzyczasie / Changeability in Meantime*, trans. Szymon Nowak and Magdalena Piłakowska (Poznań: Fundacja 9/11 Art Space, 2019), exhibition catalog.

and in 1952 graduated with a diploma in the workshop of professor Eugeniusz Geppert.

Like so many young Polish artists, she took part in the Polish National Exibition of Young Visual Arts "Against War—Againts Fascism" (a.k.a. Arsenał) (Warsaw, 1955). Together with the artists Jan Chwałczyk (Gołkowska's husband from 1950), Jerzy Boroń and Michał Zdanowicz, she created the group Poszukiwania Formy i Koloru [Quest for form and colour] (1956–1961). Their first exhibition took place in the Bureau for Artistic Exhibitions [Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, BWA] in Wrocław (1959), and the second one entitled Function of Form and Colour (1961). Moreover, she was part of such groups as the Wrocław School (later called the Wrocław Group) (1961–1976) and Kontynuacja i Sprzeciw [Continuation and opposition]. In the 1960s, she took part in artistic events crucial for Polish art, such as the 1st Biennale of Spatial Forms (Elbląg, 1965), Koszalin Plein-Air Workshops in Osieki (1964–1981), The International Symposium of Artists and Scientists "Art in a Changing World" (Puławy, 1966), Wrocław Symposium '70, Exibition of Polish Contemporary Art "Atelier'72", which was organized by the Richard Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh. She cooperated with important centers of experimental art, such as the gallery odNOWA (the name is a pun using complementary terms: *anew*, *renovation*, *once again, from the start*) in Poznań and with the Mona Lisa Gallery in Wrocław founded by Jerzy Ludwiński. She expressed herself in various forms of artistic creation: painting, drawing, graphics, mail art, conceptual art, op-art, spatial forms or art projects. This broad range of artistic interests was bound with the artist's main preference—geometric abstraction. She believed that her life-long work can be divided into three stages: spontaneous—structural images, matter painting (1954–1965); reflective—conceptualism (1968–1978); a period of creative discipline—related to limiting artistic means (1978–1999). She lived in Wrocław until her death.

As an artist, Wanda Gołkowska had to face structures of a communist regime. In her youth, she created political works during her artistic studies, because works of that kind were demanded in the curriculum. Fortunately, they were not a dominant number in this propaganda banality group. She oscillated between authentic portrait studies that stylistically followed an ostentatiously classical form (detached from the propaganda rhetoric promoted at that time)—coal miners' portrait series made with charcoal, 1954–1955—and painful and hard realism of Käthe Kollwitz's works when she presented the distressing subject of the past war. An example of such a work can be *Nigdy więcej Auschwitz* [Auschwitz never again] (1955) (see figure 1).

Gołkowska consciously limited the range of means here. She drew a woman's face expressing fear, in ink, using wide and confident strokes. The roughness of the line contrasts with the screaming background—the first page of main national newspaper *Trybuna Ludu*, where one can distinguish in between columns a highlighted headline of an article "Wola narodów zdolna jest przekreślić plany siewców wojny" [The will of nations can ruin the plans of war mongers], which refers to the Appeal of Vienna World Peace Council to the UN in 1951, concerning the global political situation and the arms race of that time. Thanks to this procedure, an intertextual context was created, open to individual reflection. Given the title, it may seem that another picture of Gołkowska called *Ręce precz od Korei* [Hands off Korea!] (1950s, figure 2) belongs to the group of works promoting politics of the USSR. However, in opposition to Wojciech Fangor's canonical work *Korean Mother* (1951), it is an abstract piece, whose melancholic mood is created by the colours (shades of azure, brown and black) reinforced by the expressive form of black trickles.

Around 1957, Gołkowska quit the figurative art, which was a very brave decision in a political system where abstractionists' participation in public exhibitions was at the level of 15% (as ordered by the Polish United Workers' Party in 1960).[16]

For many Polish artists this decision to abandon figurative art came about in response to its enforcement under socialist realism. Also, it was an attempt to find their space in art free from political indoctrination. Therefore, those social-political circumstances should be taken into consideration as a factor affecting the artistic choices of creators and their perception of their own place in a society, which influences the problem of transformations in an artist's status. Grzegorz Sztabiński, analyzing the history of comprehension of the idea of an artist in the European culture, claims that "the twentieth century is the time of harsh criticism of an artist-genius concept. Representatives of avant-garde kept distance from this romantic idea later transformed into a stereotype."[17] In the light of experience related to the First World War, artists lost their faith in the idea of artist-genius—what is more, also in art itself. Changing partly the character and meaning of art, they tried to defend it or criticized it by formulating concepts of anti-art or non-art.[18]

Peter Bürger believes that avant-garde, by definition, was poised to clash with society, but it was not moralistic art that became their target; rather, it

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[16] Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 72.
[17] Piotrowski, 163.
[18] Piotrowski, 166.

was the transformation of the art functioning within the society. One of the consequences was a demystification of the artist's genius.[19] After the 1950s, the auto-demystification of the Polish artist took place for a couple of reasons. The first of them was, as already mentioned, an attempt to recuperate after years of artists' subordination to political authorities in the period of Stalinism, which in consequence led to the rejection of artistic catchphrases that had been used perversely to serve the nation.

THE IDEA OF COVERING THE AUTHOR'S/ARTIST'S TRACKS

While looking for a way out of the impasse, artists found support in a still (barely) alive tradition of constructivism (thanks to the active artistic work of representatives of grupa a.r. [original spelling], formed before the war by Henryk Stażewski (1894–1988))[20] and the poet Julian Przyboś (1901–1970). At the attempt of reconstruction—or rather a revival—of independent art and with the continuous pressure of the authorities, the renegotiation of the status of an artist was necessary. As a result of insufficient exchange of ideas—both among Polish art circles and (especially) on international forums—artists drew from available native models (in reference to constructivism), indirectly and selectively from second-hand ideas of Western art, and also from their intuitive choices. For this reason, the post-Thaw attempts at redefinition occurring in the 1960s involve artists torn between two styles—neo-avant-garde and modernism. But why not post-modernism? First of all, because the source of information from the Western academic art world to the Polish one was still not strong enough. The first Polish translation of Barthes' essay was *Mitologie* in 1970. But then Polish readers had to wait for a second publication of Barthes in Polish until 1996. From that moment, Barthes' works became very well known in Poland thanks to numerous translations. The case of Jacques Derrida's works was similar—the first Polish translation was published in 1975,[21] and three years later *Différance*. The tremendous interest in him was shown in the number of translations, identically as with Barthes, in the mid-

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[19] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: Manchester University Press–University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 49, 53.

[20] Klara Kemp-Welch, "Articulating the *between*: Stażewski's critical spaces," in *Awangarda w bloku / Avant-garde in the bloc*, ed. Gabriela Świtek (Warszawa: Fundacja Galerii Foksal; Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2009), 306–17; Piotrowski, "Modernism and Totalitarianism II," 101–54.

[21] Jacques Derida, "Pismo i telekomunikacja," trans. Joanna Skoczylas and Stanisław Cichowicz, *Teksty* 3 (1975): 75–92.

1990s. Publications of Michel Foucault were much more difficult to publish, most probably due to censorship (the first translated text was *Nietzsche, Freud, Marks* in 1988). And just as with the previous authors this backlog was dealt with in mid 1990s. Just few followed the discourse and transformations taking place during Parisian May 1968, because at that time Polish society was involved in the wave of anti-Soviet protests across the country called March 68. On 25 November 1967, the premiere of the poetic drama *Dziady* by Adam Mickiewicz, a Polish poet of the Romanticism, was staged in modern form at the National Theatre in Warsaw. On 30 January 1968, the play was cancelled due to the presence of elements of national liberation movement, which the spectators reinterpreted as a call to anti-Soviet outbreaks. Such a decision of authorities provoked a surge of protests from students who demanded "independence with no censorship". Against the backdrop of those political events, "The Death of the Author", presented in the conference The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1966, was not likely to be adequately recognized by Polish intellectuals.

Regardless of the foregoing, if we analyze transformations in the twentieth-century art, it is hard to avoid connotations with the literary discourse about the status of the author. It seems to stand in opposition to Foucault, who introduced an academic limit to the label "author" in the widely perceived literature and theoretical written texts, giving it the name of "world of discourse". Agata Jakubowska notes: "In postmodern discourses, which are more frequently present in the history of art, the way of comprehending the oeuvre is changing, and so is the status of an artist and a recipient. The author is no longer merely a human, but a woman or a man, white or black, heterosexual or homosexual."[22]

Barthes had been earlier recognized as a committed structuralist. His abandonment of this theory became a fact in 1966 during the Baltimore conference. Opposing the schematism of the text research methodology and undermining the arbitrariness imposed by the interpretation of the author, Barthes underwent a metamorphosis which culminated in 1970 in his changing the research method: he discontinued his earlier practice ordering the meanings and stopped searching for structure rules, and the pursuit of neutral academic

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[22] Agata Jakubowska, "Kobieta wobec seksualności – podporządkowana, uwikłana czy wyzwolona? O kilku aspektach twórczości Natalii LL z perspektywy psychoanalizy Lacanowskiej," *Artium Quaestiones* 8 (1997): 114.

statement—where the structuralism flowed from—he substituted with "writing" and "pleasure".[23]

In the decade before the above-mentioned literary "revolutions" initiated in Baltimore, socialist realism dominated in Polish art (1949–1955), in which Bożena Kowalska's term rooted in "avant-garde's frozen time",[24] one of the first and most significant syntheses of post-war Polish art. In reference to the theme of this article, we could make use of the following metaphor: in a way, the symbolic "death of the author" took place, because he or she was overwhelmed by the propaganda of the authorities. Such a point of view is not of my interest, therefore I will omit this period because of strong political conditions influencing the limits of autonomous artistic deliberation. The beginning of the Polish Thaw (1953–1955)[25] gave Polish artistic circles hope for autonomy of art—we hindsight, we think they were vain hopes. Nowadays, there is a predominant view accurately described by Anna Markowska: "The socialist realism trauma caused the modern style in the times of the 'thaw' to become—probably contrary to artists' intentions—a camouflage of the regime handling matters with kid gloves."[26] Such an attitude was presented earlier by some researchers, among them Wojciech Włodarczyk, who pointed out the conciliatory approach of artists towards the political reality of their functioning.[27] To provide some balance, we shall also highlight, according to Kowalska, that post-arsenal painting was "in defiance of the realism which started to form into naturalistic illustrations,… a protest against narrowing and simplifying the subject matter in painting…, against academic canons of both schematically comprehended socialist realistic realism and to some degree, esthetics of postimpressionism." And later: "In the formal aspect … it is based on relics of Colourism esthetics, with the variants visible in borrowings from Picasso Braque, Léger, Chirico, Matisse, Chagall.[28] For this reason, an erup-

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[23] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hillard and Wang, 1975).

[24] Bożena Kowalska, *Polska awangarda malarska. Szanse i mity* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1975), 56.

[25] Piotr Piotrowski, ed., *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956* (Poznań: Muzeum Narodowe, 1996), exhibition catalog; Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 40–55; Łukasz Guzek, "Władza vs. sztuka w PRL-u i dziś," *DYSKURS: Pismo Naukowo-Artystyczne ASP we Wrocławiu* 21 (2016): 36–47.

[26] Anna Markowska, *Dwa przełomy. Sztuka polska po 1955 i 1989 roku* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2012), 10.

[27] Wojciech Włodarczyk, "Nowoczesność i jej granice," in *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku: Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Warszawa, listopad 1984*, ed. Teresa Hrankowska (Warszawa: PWN, 1987), 21.

[28] Kowalska, *Polska awangarda malarska*, 66–67.

tion of interest in *art informel* and matterism—so characteristic of the late 1950s—may be regarded as politically manipulated. Yet again factors from beyond art changed the course of art evolution in Poland. The dismantling of modernism occurring on both sides of the Atlantic due to body art and performance, did not really affect Polish art, because "authorities were interested in modernism, as according to its assumptions it was believed that a strict form would provide assigned meaning, and that with the means of external hierarchy values in art can be managed".[29]

THE IDEA OF COVERING THE ARTIST'S TRACKS
IN THE WORKS OF WANDA GOŁKOWSKA

The broken decade of 1950s—both in the chronological and symbolic sense—saw the debut of Wanda Gołkowska. It is worth noting that even though the artist lived most of her life in the period of political division of Europe, she presented unusual sensitivity to transformations of international art, and this despite the peripheral status of her native center (Wrocław was situated on the sidelines of the artistic map of Polish People's Republic, with the Warsaw and Kraków centers at the fore). Naturally, the term "peripheral" implies duality: the traditional, hierarchical center–periphery opposition, and one that abolishes the very hierarchy due to the prevention of "hegemonic strategy of universalistic, modernistic western art history",[30] so widespread in Polish publications on the subject, especially by Piotr Piotrowski.[31] It is not my aim to present commonly known historical facts and directions of development of postcolonial studies, but only to emphasize the term "peripheries", previously revalued in the academic environment. Despite the abundance of theoretical underpinnings, I would like to present a discourse about the meaning of "peripherality" and focus on indicating analogy, also coincidental, between Barthes's and Foucault's concepts on the subject of author's status and activity of most probably unknown to them Polish innovator.

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[29] Markowska, *Dwa przełomy*, 11.

[30] Piotr Piotrowski, "Od globalnej do alterglobalistycznej historii sztuki," *Teksty Drugie*, nos. 1–2 (2013): 271.

[31] Cf. Piotr Piotrowski, "Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde," in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, ed. Sascha Bru et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009): 49–58; Piotrowski, "Peripheries of the World, Unite!" in *Extending the Dialogue…*, ed. Urška Jurman, Christiane Erharter, and Rawley Grau (Ljubljana: Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory; Berlin: Archive Books; Vienna: ERSTE Foundation, 2016), 12–29.

Keeping in mind the above-presented political and sociophilosophical processes, I will now focus on some works of Wanda Gołkowska, in preparation for my discussion of the elimination of the interpreting category based on the author's/artist's intention. I want to start with Gołkowska's works exhibited in January 1968 in this artist's monographic exhibition at Mona Lisa Gallery, located in the hallway of the International Book and Press Club (Klub Międzynarodowej Książki i Prasy, at plac Kościuszki, Wrocław), run by a controversial critic of the Polish People's Republic's, Jerzy Ludwiński (figure 3).

The visitors could see the compositions *Bujak* [Rocking thing] (wood, acrylic, see figure 4), *Układy otwarte / Kompozycja zmienna* [Open compositions / variable composition] (an object with balls, see figure 5), *Układy otwarte* [Open compositions] (a plate with 13 cubes and 24 pins, see figure 6), *Układ otwarty – Szesnaście sześcianów* [Open composition—sixteen cubes] (a frame with strings with beaded cubes painted with vertical or horizontal stripes, figure 7), and a model of Spatial Form for the 1st Biennale in Elbląg (1965, figure 8).

At the exhibition, the artist's fascination with mathematical order was perceptible. Dorota Heck compared the central role of a square/cube in Wanda Gołkowska's works to its importance in modernistic architecture.[32] The source of the *Open Compositions* concept—which as a developed element appeared in Gołkowska's creations around 1965—was earlier noticed by Ludwiński at the 1957 exhibition of the group Poszukiwania Formy i Koloru. The reliefs, exhibited during the period of post-Thaw cult of modernity, were built from irregular cuboids arranged in the net of verticals and horizontals on flat surfaces.

Referring to the constructivist tradition, the artist at the same time broke with it by rejecting the geometrical dictate. "The artist's project was then rejected by Wrocław circles, because it was so unusual," noted Ludwiński.[33] Wincencjusz-Patyna wrote a detailed report on Gołkowska's series *Open Compositions* in a separate chapter.[34] She noted the influence of Henryk Stażewski's oeuvre on Gołkowska's artistic path (especially the series *Open Compositions* by Stażewski from 1957–1958, which made it possible to introduce an unlimited number of changes in the composition).[35]

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[32] Dorota Heck, "Abstrakcja daje do myślenia," in *Sztuka jest nieustającą polemiką. Wokół refleksji teoretycznej i praktyki artystycznej Wandy Gołkowskiej*, ed. Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna (Wrocław: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. Eugeniusza Gepperta we Wrocławiu, 2018), 23–37.

[33] Jerzy Ludwiński, "Proces twórczy czy produkcja przedmiotów," *Odra* 1 (1968): n.p.

[34] Wincencjusz-Patyna, *Wanda Gołkowska*, 51–56.

[35] Wincencjusz-Patyna, 33–34.

In 1968, at the Mona Lisa Gallery Gołkowska presented a very mature, individual theory of open compositions, where she explored pure relations between the variety of elements, each with their own autonomy and avoiding any subjection or mode. The idea of open compositions was best presented by the artist herself:

> An open composition is the opposite of the idealistic concept of art—a pursuit of one, absolute, perfect solution; it is the opposite of the traditional idea of the stability of a work of art—it presumes there is a mathematically specified/unlimited number of changes resulting from mechanical movements, the viewer's motion, introduction of physical motion, the movement of light. It gives the recipient an opportunity to interact.[36]

She defined her theoretical views of the time (although she denied it was a manifesto) in October 1967 and published them in an article with Jerzy Ludwiński several months later on the pages of the magazine *Odra*,[37] accompanying the exhibition at the Mona Lisa Gallery. The commentary on her own artistic work starts by mentioning changes that have occurred in the contemporary language of visual arts, provoked by the absorption of the way exact sciences formulate thoughts (terms, theories such as the probability theory, relative frequency, statistical theories, cognitive bias). Her open compositions are the reaction to current transformations. She states the impossibility of creating a stable work—absolute, ideal, finished—which until then used to be the main goal. In exchange, she offers a work in which the recipient interacts with the surroundings.[38] In her notes from October 16, 1967, she declares:

> At this moment I am for open compositions which have the potential of numerous changes achievable in a composition. A possibility of an active inclusion of the recipient. The number of transformations is determined by the probability theory. It enables forecasting or predicting. Modifications of compositions are created as a result of mechanical movements, maneuvers of the viewer, introducing physical motion, light shifting. The term "picture" is not valid anymore—I replace it with the term "object".[39]

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[36] Wanda Gołkowska, "Układy otwarte," *Odra* 1 (1968): n.p.
[37] Gołkowska, "Układy otwarte."
[38] Gołkowska, "Układy otwarte."
[39] Studzińska, "List pisany przez całe życie," 67.

One is tempted to analyze the interactivity suggested by Gołkowska using the theoretical solutions created much later and presented by Eric Zimmerman. By his definition, we could compare projects of the Wrocław artist to the model of functional interactivity—taking place at the level of mentality of the artistic work, manifesting itself through structural and functional operations which can be conducted on a piece of art.[40] Ryszard Kluszczyński wrote about this aspect that it refers to a certain type of kinetic art, which he calls participatory art.[41] They are physical (material) pieces of art created by the artist so that they may not be experienced from the distance of museum space but the observer is encouraged to physically interact—contact with a work of art causes it to transform and triggers an experience of metamorphosis.[42]

Gołkowska believed that the role of artists is to make choices and predict.[43] That is why a conscious selection and thought crystallization are perceived by her as the most creative stage in the process of art creation, and the production itself is "epigonic in relation to the thought-concept".[44] Such reasoning led to her departure from the forms manifested and consolidated the artist's gesture to elements that blurred the author's imprint. This transformation was noticed by Ludwiński:

> The difference between the first and the following blocks, the one most easily observed/seen/noticed, is more or less like between unequally hemmed carvings in stone and prefabricated elements in modern architecture. Blocks lost their unique character, they are typical artefacts of mass production. The hand of the artist does not leave any mark on their shape, nor surface. Whether they are hand made by an artist or by a carpenter's workshop does not matter at all.[45]

He attempted to place those experiments of Gołkowska in a particular artistic trend, specific phenomenon, whose origins he noticed in opposite tendencies: constructivism and Dada. While reflecting on that he decided that

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[40] Eric Zimmerman, "Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games: Four Naughty Concepts in Need of Discipline," in *First Person. New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 158.

[41] Elżbieta Błotnicka-Mazur, "The Taming of Space in Recovered Territories. The Participatory Aspects of Biennale of Spatial Forms in Elbląg and Visual Arts Symposium Wrocław '70," *Art Inquiry* 20 (2018): 133–57.

[42] Ryszard Kluszczyński, *Sztuka interaktywna: od dzieła-instrumentu do interaktywnego spektaklu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2010), 128.

[43] Gołkowska, "Układy otwarte."

[44] Gołkowska, "Układy otwarte."

[45] Ludwiński, "Proces twórczy."

> Gołkowska's works are currently on an evolutionary line drawn by the first tendency whose main creators were Vasarely with his art of repetitive elements, and Albers with the program of optical illusions, and other artists gathered around groups searching for visual art.[46]

Next, Ludwiński gives a broad definition of visualism which "encompasses all possible ways of analyzing forms in space via motion and light"[47] and he enumerates features of Gołkowska's art by placing her in this system/trend:

> (1) constructing a form out of possibly the simplest geometrical elements, (2) repeating identical forms in the number high enough to diminish their individual character, (3) introducing movement as a constituent element of pictures, (4) strict programming of forms' behaviour in the space, (5) planful rejection of all such visual signs that could bear any imprint of the artist's personality, (6) mechanical processing of elements used for the construction of the picture without the necessity of the artist's manual contribution.[48]

Particularly important are his remarks regarding the function of repetition of identical forms. It appears that removing the individual character of forms is coupled with masking the representation of the author (points 2, 5 and 6). The strategy is key to implementing the affirmation of an idea (concept) at the expense of materiality of the work of art. Gołkowska turned to conceptual art practices this way, and an observant critic noticed this move. Introducing geometrical forms free of individuality into her performance, she consciously withdrew from the circle of main interpretational matters as subjective artistic personality, trying to enable implementation of universal issues associated with mathematics, as exact science. A trace of creative gesture marked by an individual shaping of blocks in her works presented in 1957 was substituted with schematically and serially produced blocks. In this way, by hiding her mark, Gołkowska freed the work of art from the consequences of the author's stigma. This evolution of the creative path highlights the dimension of blurring him or her and withdrawing them from the position of the transmitting subject. In her notes from October 16, 1967 she writes:

> I allow an emotional factor to interact during the first creative stage—i.e. thought crystallization. The second stage **is realization—"realization" is a mechanical**

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[46] Ludwiński, "Proces twórczy."
[47] Ludwiński, "Proces twórczy."
[48] Ludwiński, "Proces twórczy."

artisanal translation of a thought into a language, artistic language. For this reason, more and more artists do not create their works on their own—they commission them to craftsmen, in the future it will be contracted to production plants or to machines. […] **The moment of signing yourself on the work is not while leaving a manual mark of a tool, of an artist's hand, but in a personal choice of an idea—concept—all the effort shifted to intellectual inquiry**.[49]

In this fragment one can notice, rather, other reasons for the artist's conscious withdrawal from the privilege of imprinting her mark on her work than Barthes' theory of "the death of the author". Gołkowska shifts her attention to the significance of the author's role in creating the concept, and the French thinker blurs the role of a creator in polyphony of inspiration. According to Roland Barthes, the mark carries in itself an assumption of fragmentariness and is released from the obligation of a complete and full presentation.[50] In the aspect of the relationship between the term "mark" and the author, it is somewhere in between "their death" and the testimony of their existence. Derrida believed that the mark is both the establishment and the cancellation of the subjective signature.[51] In the works exhibited at the Mona Lisa Gallery, Gołkowska intentionally covers her tracks. She seeks to sever the relationship between "the causative subject and the work" trying to leave to interpretation only the mark of absence. She does so, however, for different reasons than Barthes'.

Due to Barthes' contemplations running in parallel to the exhibitions of Gołkowska's oeuvre, we can assume she did not know the French thinker's theory, which was about to shake up the literary and philosophical world. In the very introduction to the significant text "The Death of the Author", Barthes announced: "Literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes."[52] In those deliberations the status of the author is enigmatic because it appears as disappearing "I". A gesture of the author is a testimony of their existence, but being an author is also a carefully

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[49] Studzińska, "List pisany przez całe życie," 69; emphasis in the original.

[50] Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 8.

[51] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 197.

[52] Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 1.

constructed social position.[53] The author imprinting their mark in the text be-
comes more physical and private as for Barthes. Foucault, Barthes and Derrida
stated the "death of the author" as "present/rational subject". Actually, Barthes
announced the author's return three years after the publication of "The Death
of the Author". Restored presence does not, however, create a complex image
of the author, yet it appears in the scattering of the traces and remnants.[54]
Michel Foucault asked then: *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?*[55] In his argumentation,
the philosopher hypothetically contemplated the possibility of depriving the
author of the right to impose the way of existing and functioning of the utter-
ance/work in the society, stating simultaneously that the "ownership right"
inhibits the freedom of interpretation.[56] He did not attempt, however—as fi-
nally Barthes did—to remove the "author" completely, but only to reduce their
influence. In the aforementioned argumentation, which aimed to answer the
question "Who is the author?", he analyzed the idea of a work of art and of
the author. The challenge taken on by the thinker develops complementary my
research question regarding Gołkowska, which was indicated by Ludwiński in
his statements I cited earlier: "the artist's hand does not imprint any mark on
their shape or surface." I find two crucial threads entangled in this one sen-
tence: the work and the author. We can observe that Gołkowska reached for
nonprogressive anymore modernistic solutions, because her *Układy otwarte*
presented at the Mona Lisa Gallery were constructed on wooden frames hold-
ing bars beaded with balls or cubes. On the other hand, however, the introduc-
tion of the possibility of movement is progressive (*Bujak* [1965] and *Bujak*
[1968], the latter in figure 4; *Szesnaście sześcianów* from the *Układy otwarte*
series [1967], figure 7). Works analyzed here are meant to exemplify the thesis
about the existence of mathematically determined, unlimited number of trans-
formations in the piece of art, which enables the recipient to be actively in-
volved in the action. It is an advanced declaration in which the author shifted
the responsibility for further life of the piece of art from the author to the
viewer.

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[53] Michael Foucault, "Self Writing," in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. Paul
Rabinow, vol. 1, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New
Press, 1997), 207–22.

[54] Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (Berkeley: University of Ca-
lifornia Press, 1989), 7–8.

[55] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed.
Paul Rabinow, vol. 2, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert
Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1998), 205.

[56] Foucault, 221–22.

The question is whether Gołkowska's attempts (to blur the trace of her gesture and shift the responsibility for the work to the viewer, as indicated by Ludwiński) are a sufficient implementation of the "the death of the author" postulate. Well, they are not. Foucault said that the proper name and author's name "are situated between the two poles of description and designation".[57] The author's name, Foucault admits, is not a typical proper name, when their relationship with the oeuvre is at stake.[58] Gołkowska left her inalienable signature on the works exhibited in Mona Lisa Gallery just through the exhibition itself. In regard to Ludwiński's commentary who wrote about blurring the mark of the artist in her works, it becomes clear that the removal of the artist's identity was not complete, because it was still revealed in the declaration of authorship of the exhibition. An interesting complementation of the presented conclusion are Foucault's words:

> The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse: the fact that the discourse has an author's name, that one can say "this was written by so-and-so" or "so-and-so is its author", shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status.[59]

Therefore, there is no possibility of announcing the complete "death" of the author (artist), but their "constant disappearing" takes place and the creative subject is both "outside [the work] and antecedes [it]".[60]

Removing the artist from the traditionally fixed position was continued by Gołkowska also in following years. During the Koszalin Plein-Air workshops in Osieki in 1970, she postulated via her project "Akcja bezinteresownego zwielokrotniania materialnych dzieł sztuki" [Action of disinterested multiplication of material works of art] the

> conscious creation of a situation of fear. Discrediting previous criteria of evaluation of works of art by committees, jury, evaluating or qualifying factors. Introduction of yet greater chaos into existing mess.[61]

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[57] Foucault, "What Is an Author?" 209.

[58] Foucault, 209.

[59] Foucault, 211.

[60] Foucault, 205.

[61] Studzińska, *List pisany przez całe życie*, 21.

The artist's concept was processual creation of a collection of works of art unlimited with space, time, and also classification. The idea is in opposition to views of the American conceptualist Douglas Huebler, who stated, "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more."[62]

I would place Gołkowska's manifesto in the orbit of wave interference of the famous work of Marcel Duchamp called *Boîte-en-valise / Box in a Suitcase*, 1936–1941 (Paris–New–York), because in both those works I notice original and subversive dialogue with the phenomenon called "Art World" by Arthur C. Danto and George Dickie. Although on both sides of the politically divided world mechanisms of artists' entanglement were various, they undeniably existed. The evolution of Gołkowska's thoughts on the subject was abandonment of the game of pretences and allusions with the means of a reformulated postulate expressed in *Dezaprobator* (1971, figures 9 and 10). The first of them referred to the infamous, though widespread, tradition of denunciation—letters cut out from a newspaper glued to a black background formed a word NADPRODUKCJA [Overproduction] (figure 9).[63]

This association with denunciation—often anonymous and by definition supposed to conceal the informer—is to be perceived as a peculiar exemplification of the "author's death". Certainly, this is a questionable misuse of Barthes' theory, yet the connotations emerging from this dissonant juxtaposition provoke a reflection on the direction of theories and artistic practice.

The second piece called *Dezaprobator potrójny* [Triple disapprover] (figure 10), presented in 1972 in Edinburgh on the exhibition of Polish contemporary art "Atelier'72" organized by Richard Demarco between August 20 and September 9, 1972, could be more closely connected with Barthes' theory of the "the death of the author".

This installation consisted of four paper reels of different width and length, one of them unrolled and showing the following text:

> Overproduction of works of art and excess of information make it harder to choose and blur the distinction between authenticity and imitativeness.… I suggest creating a worldwide repository of artistic information working as a Patent Office.… In order

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[62] Douglas Huebler et al., *January 5 – 31, 1969* (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969), n.p., exhibition catalog.

[63] Wincencjusz-Patyna, *Wanda Gołkowska*, 60.

to avoid any existing systems of evaluation used by committees and juries, comput-
ers and electronic brains would give opinions qualifying [works of art] for storing.[64]

This content suggests a shift in views presented in Osieki. The Polish author
drew closer to Huebler's views, but she reached certain conclusions. Sarcasm
displaying disappointment and a critical attitude to the reality of artistic life
and the way this artistic world functions is visible in the above-quoted words.
Moreover, I can sense here some doubt about the artist's role, which ultimately
debunks the modernistic myth of the creator-demiurge. This fresh approach to
the problem of the creator's and the work's roles is a signal that the ideas of
conceptualism attracted Gołkowska's interest at that time.

Shortly beforehand, *Kinestezjon* (1970, figure 11) was created. The term is
a portmanteau of two words: *kinesthesia* (awareness of a part of one's body)
and *cenesthesia* (awareness of oneself and the entirety of one's body). This
project should be perceived as a consecutive and parallel stage of the trans-
formation of the author–viewer relationship. The observer was supposed to
experience emotions triggered by the world of reversed order created by the
artist—the viewer locked in an ideally silent (hence isolated) capsule was sup-
posed to see underneath their feet clouds floating in the sky and above filmed
pictures of the ground. This visionary work—pertaining to science fiction—
disembedded the spectator from the reality and focused on creating new sen-
sations for and by the spectator, but (so characteristically of Gołkowska) it did
not say much about the author herself. She hid behind her concept, which did
not carry any marks of her activity, neither in the form of gesture nor any trace
of the creator. With the means of today's technology we can achieve easily the
effects close to the idea of the kinestezjon (e.g. VR gogles) and authors to the
wide audience seem to be anonymous corporation employees.

CONCLUSIONS

In Wanda Gołkowska's oeuvre we can see three kinds of exemplification
of "the author's death". The first occurred when the interpretative category
based on the author-artist's intention was abandoned. It was based on her
Układy otwarte series, and it came to light at the Mona Lisa Gallery in 1968.
It meant abandoning creators' individualism and their work. The second form

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[64] Wanda Gołkowska, *Układ otwarty jako proces twórczy* (Wrocław: BWA Catalogue, 2001), n.p.;
Grzegorz Sztabiński, "Tautologie konceptualistyczne," *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, no. 6 (2012): 92.

manifested a critical attitude to overproduction of works of art nowadays and subordinating creativity to the workings of art markets (*Dezaprobator*, 1972, figures 10, 11). The third form of considering the artist's status was parallel in time to the latter, but it highlighted the artist's transformation into a technician creating an unreal sphere for the viewer (*Kinestezjon*, 1971, figure 12). In both kinds of artistic endeavour Gołkowska used the idea of blurring the mark of the author-artist by removing them from the position of the transmitting subject.

These conclusions were presented against the broad background of artistic, cultural and political transformations in the times when the above-discussed works of Gołkowska were created. Eliciting relations between factors beyond art and particular works of art became the backdrop for my analysis of the change of the artist's status in regard to Barthes' death of the author. To accomplish that, I presented theoretical aspects of artistic choices between modernism and avant-garde in the Polish art of the 1950s to the 1970s which contributed to the redefinition of the artist's status in the twentieth century.

The artist's knowledge of the philosophical and literary developments occurring in parallel to her artistic explorations is a separate matter. I will leave unanswered the question if such an unusually brilliant person as Gołkowska— who functioned outside the main cultural centers (Paris, New York, London), living in a country with an inefficient economy and a dreadful political situation—was able to follow dynamic transformations in global culture and art. A witness of the times, Jacek Woźniakowski (a critic from Kraków), asked years later, "What didn't we actually know then?"[65] A bitter conclusion emerged from observations of Polish circles' only rudimentary knowledge about global art processes. Sources of information, says the author, "reached here in too basic of a form for us to satisfy the thirst or even to pick up their real taste."[66] Regardless of the extent of the consequences of the issue pointed here, which influenced the shape of Polish art, we shall be intrigued and inspired by the fact of coincidental points (e.g. "self-evading" of an artist attempted by Gołkowska) of junction with theories of great importance and impact which swept through the contemporary humanities.

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[65] Jacek Woźniakowski, "Nieznany czar Zachodu. Odszukiwanie kontaktu," in *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku: Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Warszawa, listopad 1984*, ed. Teresa Hrankowska (Warszawa: PWN, 1987), 117.

[66] Woźniakowski, 117.

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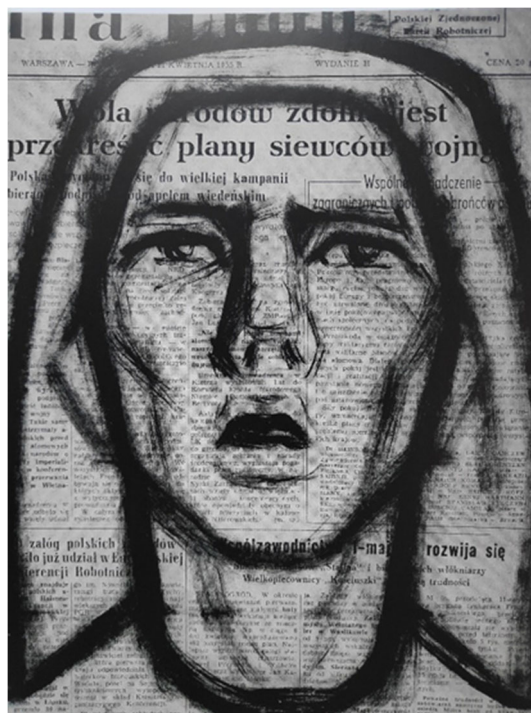
FIGURES

Figure 1. Wanda Gołkowska, *Nigdy więcej Auschwitz* [Auschwitz never again], 1955.
Ink, newspaper, ca. 33.4 × 23.5 cm (photo by Andrzej Moczydłowski,
used with permission of Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna)

Figure 2. Wanda Gołkowska, *Ręce precz od Korei* [Hands off Korea!], 1950s.
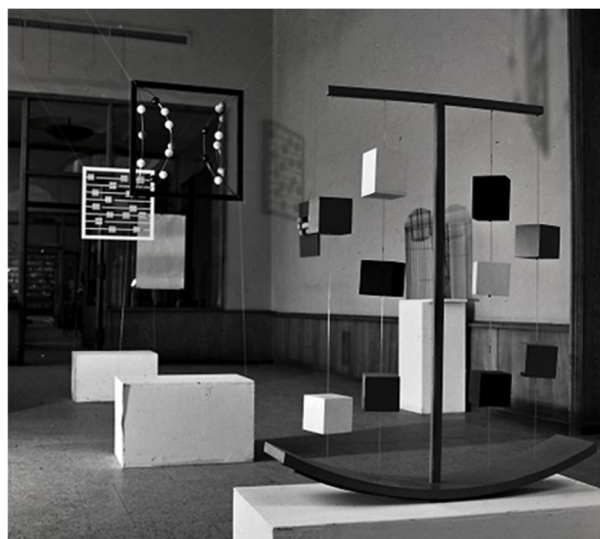Oil, canvas, 160 × 220 cm (private domain)

Figure 3. Exposition of Wanda Gołkowska's works at the Mona Lisa Gallery, January 1968.
Photography, 5.6 × 5.6 cm (photo by Zdzisław Holuka, courtesy of
Wrocław Contemporary Museum)

Figure 4. Wanda Gołkowska, *Bujak* [Rocking thing], 1968. Object, wood, acrylic, 84 × 70 × 15 cm. National Museum in Wrocław (public domain)
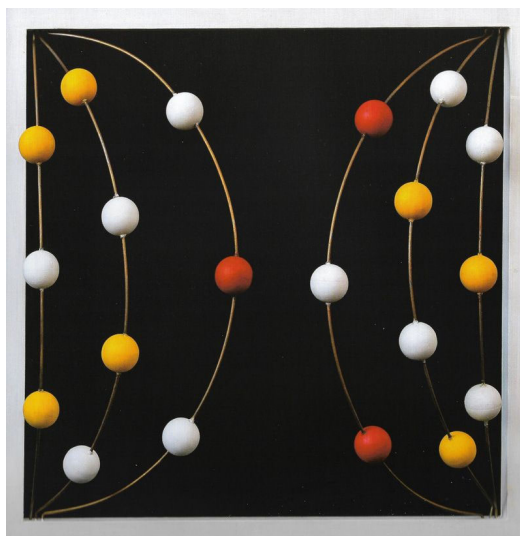
Figure 5. Wanda Gołkowska, *Układy otwarte* / *Kompozycja Zmienna* [Open compositions / variable composition], 1967. Object, wood, wire, plastics, 55 × 55 × 40 cm. National Museum in Wrocław (public domain)

Figure 6. Wanda Gołkowska, *Układy otwarte* [Open compositions], 1968. Object, wood, acrylic, 60 × 61 × 6 cm. National Museum in Wrocław (public domain)
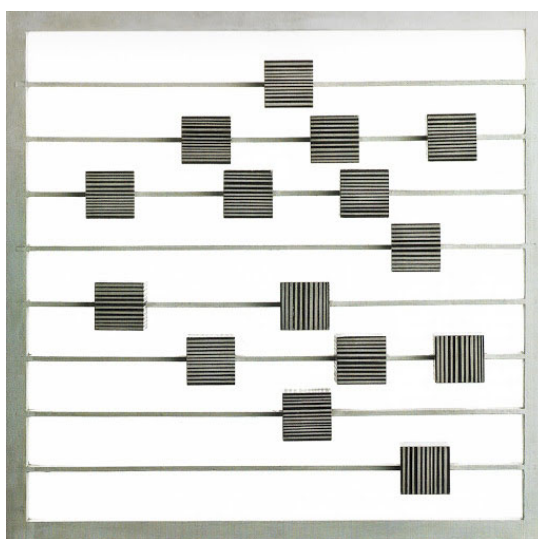
Figure 7. Wanda Gołkowska, *Układ otwarty – szesnaście sześcianów* [Open composition — sixteen cubes], 1967. Object, wood, acrylic, 55 × 55 cm. National Museum in Wrocław (public domain)

Figure 8. Wanda Gołkowska, The Model of Spatial Form for the 1st Biennale in Elbląg,
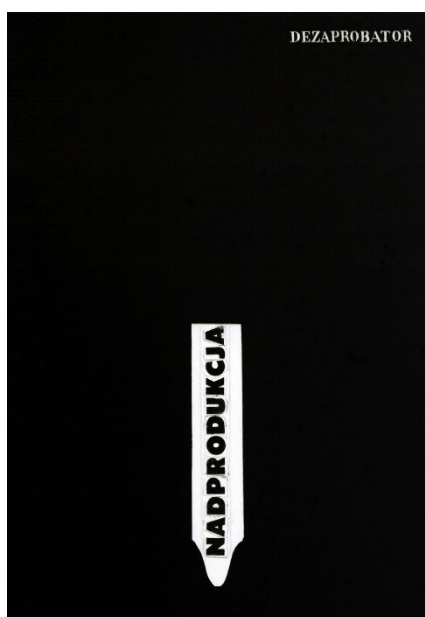1965. Sculpture, metal, height ca. 70 cm (courtesy of Museum of Architecture in Wrocław)

Figure 9. Wanda Gołkowska, *Dezaprobator I* [Disapprover I], 1971. Collage, acrylic, paper,
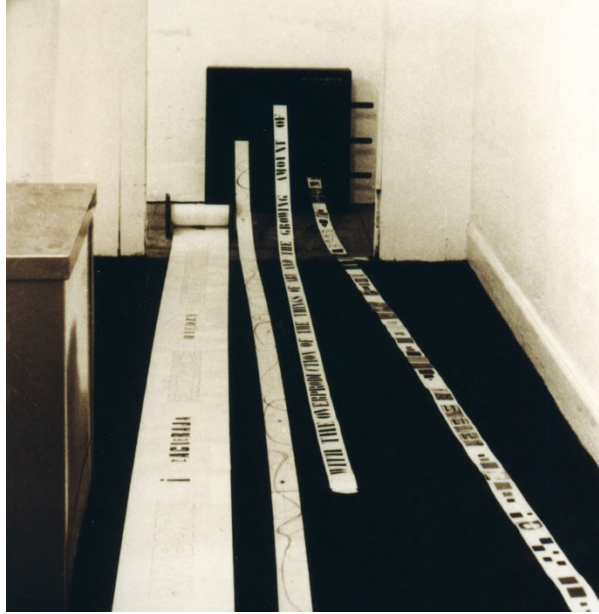$72 \times 51 \times 13$ cm (courtesy of Wrocław Contemporary Museum)

Figure 10. Wanda Gołkowska, *Dezaprobator potrójny* [Triple disapprover], 1971. Wood, acrylic, paper, ink, 60 × 70 × 12.5 cm (courtesy of Wrocław Contemporary Museum)
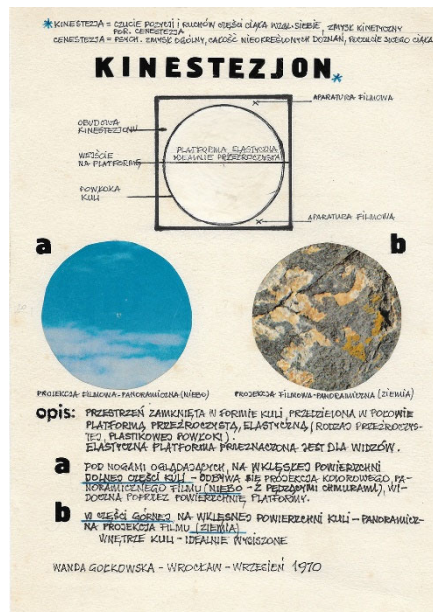

Figure 11. Wanda Gołkowska, *Kinestezjon*, 1970. Project, collage, cardboard, marker, ink, newspaper, adhesive foil lettering, 102 × 72.9 cm (courtesy of Wrocław Contemporary Museum)