NET, JAROSŁAW KOZŁOWSKI IN CONVERSATION WITH KLARA KEMP-WELCH

KLARA KEMP-WELCH: I'd like to begin by asking you about the unique network of author's galleries in the Polish People's Republic in the 1960s. Could you tell me something about these spaces, in particular about your involvement with Andrzej Matuszewski's Galeria odNowa?[1]

KOZŁOWSKI: There was a very particular situation in Poland, in comparison to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. A few galleries surfaced in the wake of the events of "October" 1956, such as Marian Bogusz's Krzywe Koło in Warsaw, and their values were shared by the galleries that appeared in the 1960s such as Galeria Foksal, Galeria Krzysztofory, Andrzej Matuszewski's Galeria odNowa, Jerzy Ludwiński's Galeria pod Moną Lizą, and Gerard Kwiatkowski's Galeria EL. There are different terms for these galleries—"authors' galleries" is one, or we can speak of independent, alternative, underground, or anti-institutional spaces—the point is that they functioned outside the official circuit. All the other exhibition spaces in Poland at that time were controlled by a

system appointed to do this, and realized programs that reflected cultural policy of that period, though this varied of course, and was different before October 1956 and different after October, changing with the flow of time, the arrival of Gierek, and so on. What mattered was the distinction between these entirely state-controlled networks with their official exhibition spaces, and those few (and there *were* still few in the 1960s) galleries that built their own program and identity and weren't in any way coordinated by the Ministry of Culture and Art or the Union of Artists, which was also under very strict control and realized the official program. Although the cultural program at that time was officially defined by Party institutions, and enforced through provincial and central committees, these galleries completely ignored this sort of obligation. They were led by either theorists, as in the case of the Foksal Gallery and Gallery Mona Lisa, or by artists realizing their own program, their own art utopia.

KKW: Did the people who ran these galleries belong to the Union of Polish Artists? I was under the impression that in the countries of the "bloc" it was impossible to function as an artist without being a member of this professional body?

JK: Membership in the Union wasn't the result of expressing a wish to join the Union; it was linked to completing one's studies at an art school. Anyone who completed an art degree at that time automatically became a member of the Union, but this had no bearing on the independent status of these galleries.

KKW: In practical terms, if the sole criterion was to have finished the academy, doesn't that mean that the Union was relatively open to different forms of art? Were there instances of people who were not accepted into the Union?

JK: Anyone who had a higher education art degree was accepted into the Union. This was the only key to membership. But membership in the Union had no bearing on anything. . . . Well, other than that, it did have a bearing on the possibility of exhibiting in official galleries or museums; it had a bearing on various existential aspects of an artist's life, such as the possibility of getting a studio, scholarships, undertaking commissioned work.

KKW: Were the authors' galleries *allowed* by the authorities, then? I ask because they did not exist in the same way in other countries in the Eastern bloc.

JK: They weren't prohibited. Above all, they functioned outside the frame of official art institutions. For example, Galeria Foksal's sponsor was the PSP, an institution concerned with commissioning and designing memorials, banners, and other official art forms.

KKW: And who sponsored Matuszewski's activities?

JK: The Union of Polish Students. Galeria odNowa was located beside the Student Club, and sponsored by the Union of Polish Students, who would also go on to sponsor Akumulatory 2 later in the 1970s. In Wrocław, it was the International Book and Press Club that sponsored the Mona Lisa Gallery. Galeria Krzysztofory in Cracow was sponsored by the Cracow Group of Artists.

KKW: At the time of your collaboration with Matuszewski in the second half of the 1960s, initially as an assistant in the gallery, your approach to art seems to have shifted dramatically. It was during that period that you first sent out anonymous instructions in the mail, among others an envelope containing grains of sand with instructions to the recipients to count them. Were you inspired by the structure of George Brecht's event scores? Could you tell me why the strategy of anonymity was important to you? Who did you send these instructions to?

JK: I still didn't know anything about Brecht at that time. There were five of these correspondence pieces that I mailed anonymously between 1968 and 1970. I was becoming more aware of what was happening in art—not just in Polish art—and I had had some important experiences at odNowa gallery, such as meeting Włodzimierz Borowski and Jerzy Ludwiński, and collaborating with Andrzej Matuszewski, which was important in different ways. The anonymity of the correspondence pieces came out of a desire to avoid authorship and not to construct an artistic identity or a name for myself—to escape attributing whatever exists in art to the signature. I sent around three hundred of each of these pieces. They were sent to people I knew and to people I didn't know, whose addresses I took from the phone book.

KKW: Not necessarily artists?

JK: Not necessarily artists. People selected completely by chance too, and of course there wasn't a return address. The postal service destroyed one of them because the name of some high-up politician happened to be among the addressees, which led them to be suspicious. To be on the

safe side, they destroyed the entire batch of correspondence, which I had carelessly sent from just one post office.

KKW: What were your five propositions?

JK: One of them involved counting grains of sand, the second was a piece of paper with instructions on how to fold the page into a paper airplane, and there was an instruction saying that after folding the piece of paper the receiver should sign their name and surname, open a window and fly it out. . . .

KKW: So the receiver is the one who realizes the proposition?

JK: The receiver becomes a participant, counting the grains and so on. . . .

KKW: Did the receiver also become an artist? Can everyone become an artist?

JK: Maybe it wasn't quite so conscious about turning everyone into an artist. But a participant, yes. Another proposition was a postcard with the name and surname of the person I was sending it to, with the caption "sphere of imagination."

KKW: Was this before your important "Imagination Zone" action in 1970?

JK: Yes, it was earlier. What else was there . . . there was half a photograph, each half sent to a different person, so if I sent it to Mr. X, there was information that the rest of the photograph, which wasn't there, was in the possession of Mr. Y, and Mr. Y's with Mr. Z, and in this way a huge circle was produced.

KKW: But you didn't include the address of where the other half was?

JK: No, no. Just the name.

KKW: Could you tell me more about odNowa Gallery?

JK: odNowa was far more important to me as an experience than the six years I spent at art school. Art schools were very conservative at that time—academic in the most repulsive sense of the word—following a compulsory program. They didn't provide any particular adventures intellectually. At odNowa though, thanks to Andrzej Matuszewski's program, I was able to get acquainted with other interesting artists who were rather marginal at that time. That is to say—they didn't take part in official trends, just in the network of alternative galleries that were functioning at the

time. I already mentioned Borowski, Ludwiński, but also Rosołowicz, Chwałczyk, Fijałkowski, and many others.

KKW: Was odNowa a discursive environment or mainly an exhibition space?

JK: Mainly an exhibition space, but also, from time to time there were lectures, discussions.

KKW: Were there also international artists?

JK: Not many, because of the political restrictions the movement of international artists was made very difficult. But there were a few artists from abroad.

KKW: odNowa was closed in 1969, is that right? Was this partly due to the changes in cultural politics after the events of March 1968?

JK: Yes. Its closure was connected to two events that took place there. The exhibition and performance by Włodzimierz Borowski, VIII Syncretic Show, which happened shortly before March 1968, was attacked by an art critic in a Poznań newspaper, the organ of the Party Regional Committee. The other was Andrzej Matuszewski's provocative happening titled Proceeding. The closure of odNowa Gallery had to do with the radical-ism of these two actions which decidedly went beyond what was con-sidered appropriate at the time.

KKW: What changes did the shift from the politics of Gomułka to the politics of Gierek bring, after 1970? Andrzej Turowski and Piotr Piotrowski have both argued, in different ways, that Gierek began to play a new game in the 1970s, outwardly allowing *more* freedom, but at the same time creating what Turowski, following Foucault, has called "ghettos" or "enclaves." To what degree do you think it's possible to characterize the change in this way? Would you agree that this was Gierek's cultural game? Did the situation improve for artists?

JK: It didn't for me, just the opposite. At the beginning of the Gierek period I had all the problems with NET. It began with a denunciation, and then the security services invaded my apartment and seized all the mate-rials and so on. But it is true that some time in the mid-1970s the activi-ties of unofficial galleries were neutralized by their rapid multiplication across the whole country. This meant that enclaves of official avant-garde art were created [by the authorities], or rather fabricated. These were

then sponsored—generously sponsored—and these sorts of initiatives were designed to neutralize and marginalize unofficial galleries and their activities.

KKW: It's interesting that there was a proliferation of new galleries and a shift in policy in the mid 1970s. 1975, after all, saw the setting in motion of the Helsinki process, according to which the communist authorities agreed in an international forum, in writing, to respect basic human rights, such as the right to freedom of intellectual exchange. It was on the back of these commitments that dissidents in Czechoslovakia were then able to demand that the authorities begin to respect the rights for which they had signed up.

Returning to 1968, though, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops in August: repression intensified across the board, particularly in Czechoslovakia, with the onset of so-called normalization. To what extent did artists in Poland feel a sense of duty toward their neighbors in the Eastern bloc? Was there a feeling that one should try to give them a hand to make some exhibitions possible, to try to help them make international contacts? There were a number of experimental Czechoslovak artists who visited Poland in the 1970s, for example, but as far as I'm aware, there wasn't any significant evidence of artistic solidarity in the short term, post-1968? The shock does not seem to have been registered in Polish unofficial art of the period, in contrast to a series of actions in the Hungarian art scene designed to show solidarity with Czechoslovakia. How was this invasion of Czechoslovakia processed in artistic circles in Poland?

JK: The invasion was certainly noted, but there wasn't any practical forum in which this kind of attitude could be manifested. Of course, there were discussions in people's homes, and in unofficial places. But there was no possibility, in the first two or three years after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, to invite anyone from there. In 1972 I invited Petr Štembera to exhibit at Akumulatory 2. He couldn't come, but he sent materials and I installed the exhibition in his name. Jiří Valoch visited, but this was two years later, in 1974. There were also some letters in circulation protesting against the imprisonment, in Czechoslovakia, of an artist connected to Fluxus, Milan Knížák. I signed perhaps three of these letters.

KKW: Was Knížák already in contact with Poland before?

JK: I don't think so. Klaus Groh's book *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* was one of the first sources of information on Eastern European nonofficial art in 1971 or 1972. But Groh's book was only distributed in a small number of copies because the book was withdrawn from circulation. I found out from Groh many years later that the DuMont publishing house was ordered to take it out of circulation in view of a political deal between East and West Germany because two or three East German unofficial artists were presented in the book. Quite a large part of the edition was destroyed, shredded, with the exception of those copies that had already been distributed. I had already received a copy.

KKW: I would like to turn now to the NET manifesto that you wrote in 1971 together with Andrzej Kostołowski.[2] The first point raised in NET is that "a NET is open and uncommercial. . . ."
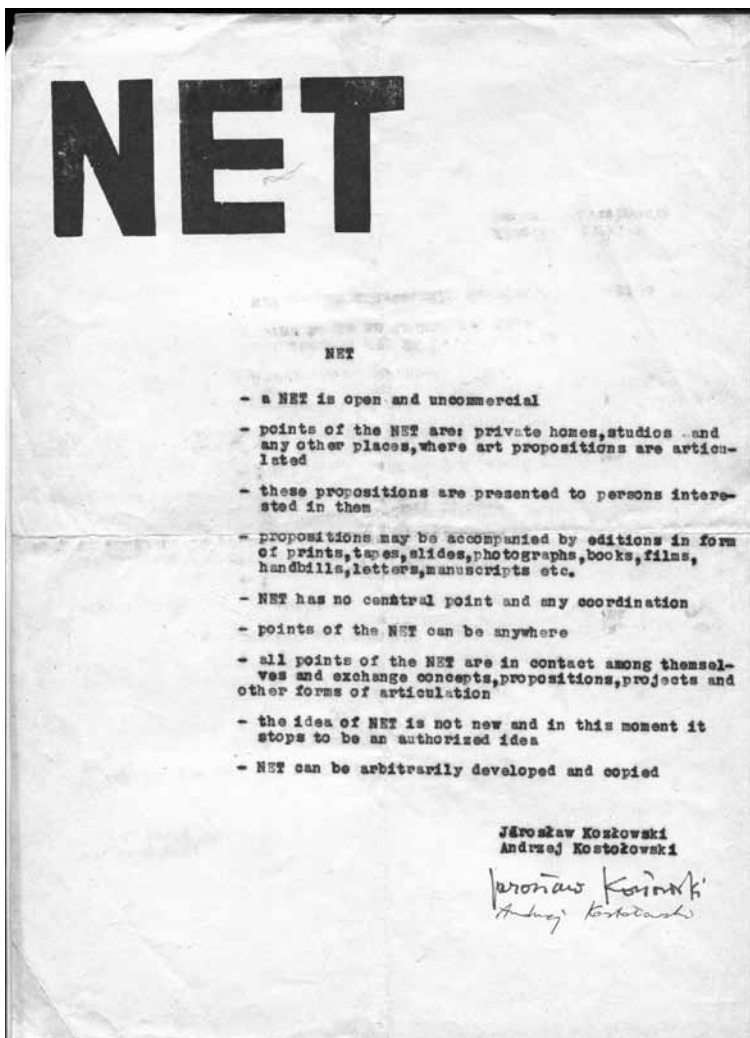
JK: We wrote it in 1971 and it was sent off at the beginning of 1972, or at the end 1971. Kostołowski and I met very frequently and talked about art, swapping books, and so on. The idea of ignoring all the physical barriers and borders which limited contacts was born in a very natural way, as was the idea of using the post to get in contact with various artists around the world—and finding among the artists on the other side of the iron curtain attitudes analogous to those we had here, except that they were contesting a slightly different ideology. Here, ideology was really related to the totalitarian system, while over there it was about commerce, institutions, the whole commercialization of art, and the institutionalization of art.

KKW: Other conceptual artists in Central Europe whom I've interviewed have mentioned that they felt betrayed by the West's swift institutionalization of conceptualist tendencies. Were you aware from the outset of the limitations experienced by artists operating within a market system? After all, many people in Poland in the 1960s and '70s held a somewhat idealistic view of the West. To what extent do you think artists here were envious of Western artists' commercial possibilities?

JK: The market didn't play any kind of role over here at all—it didn't exist. Andrzej [Kostołowski] and I were aware of how the art market func-

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2   Andrzej Kostołowski, coauthor of the NET manifesto, art critic, and curator of several major
     Polish art festivals, such as the Miastko meetings in Swieszyn (1971–81) and,
     with Maria Pinińska-Bereś, of the 10th International Cracow Meetings, BMA Galeria,
     Cracow 1981.

NET

- a NET is open and uncommercial

- points of the NET are: private homes, studios and any other places, where art propositions are articulated

- these propositions are presented to persons interested in them

- propositions may be accompanied by editions in form of prints, tapes, slides, photographs, books, films, handbills, letters, manuscripts etc.

- NET has no cenntral point and any coordination

- points of the NET can be anywhere

- all points of the NET are in contact among themselves and exchange concepts, propositions, projects and other forms of articulation

- the idea of NET is not new and in this moment it stops to be an authorized idea

- NET can be arbitrarily developed and copied

Jarosław Kozłowski
Andrzej Kostołowski

Andrzej Kostołowski and Jarosław Kozłowski. NET manifesto, 1970. Typescript with rubber stamp. Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

tioned—its corruption and the major role of gallery and museum dealers. The Western market didn't swallow up artists associated with conceptualism at first though—this happened significantly later, somewhere in the second half of the 1970s perhaps, or even later. To begin with, conceptual art was very much aimed against the idea of modernism with all its implications, most notably against Greenberg. It was concerned with analyzing the language and the function of art. Leftist tendencies, and

an interest in the interpretation of Marxism, were also a feature of Western conceptualism.

KKW: Emerging from Minimalism?

JK: Emerging from Minimalism through Kosuth. There was his famous text "1975" in *The Fox*, as well as writings by Art and Language in Britain.

KKW: So people on either side of the iron curtain were becoming aware of the parallel systems of control imposed by the Cold War framework.

JK: It's hard for me to say if this awareness was very widespread. To some, maybe, the West seemed to be a good thing, with the perverted pleasure it guaranteed. But there was also a degree of awareness that prompted cynicism.

KKW: In another interview, you even said that you felt the West's system of control was more sordid.

JK: It was cleverer, more intelligent. The authorities' pragmatism was rather primitive here; their activities more transparent. When I had to take every exhibition invitation card we proposed to print at Akumulatory 2 to the censors, it all seemed a bit puerile. They were ready to buy or accept anything provided it was presented in such a way that it didn't arouse suspicion; of course, it could have done, but it was a matter of interpretation. In a way it was a simpleminded system. But the perversity of ownership, and the standard concept of freedom that the West attached to the function of art, camouflaged very clever and insidious forms of pressure and control.

KKW: I'm very interested in the specific form that the NET manifesto took. It conveys an "aesthetic of its administration," to borrow art historian Benjamin Buchloh's term. It's somehow para-legal, with its logo, bullet points, and signatures.

JK: This is because bureaucratic stamps played a crucially important role in Poland at that time. In part, we stamped as a way of ridiculing this para-institutional activity. But we also wanted to make sure that the form wouldn't be clear to the censors and controllers at the postal service. It worked. The assumption was if something was stamped then it had important value. Of course the letters "NET" on the stamp were just cut from erasers.

KKW: It looks very official.

JK: It looks very official, and that kind of official emblem allowed it to pass through the postal service's control. In Poland at that time there was a peculiar institution that was rather humorously called the "postal exchange office." It was some sort of a contradiction in terms because the postal service by its very nature deals with exchange. So they checked all the mail but they didn't destroy the NET mailings.

KKW: The manifesto is in many ways an absurd document. You announced that "the idea of the NET is not new and in this moment it stops being an authorized idea," and then, finally, that "NET can be arbitrarily developed and copied." You invoke the issue of copyright in order to reject it.

JK: Yes. We said that there would be no copyright. That there would be no coordination of it, control over it, that it cannot be steered. There was this aspect of mockery, but NET was also strategically designed to look like an official document. An official document sent by something that isn't institutionally rooted anywhere and isn't an institution but uses the symbolism of the institution. That's why the beady eyes of the controllers passed it over.

KKW: You sent out more than 350 copies of the NET manifesto. Presumably it was an enormously laborious task to type all these letters by hand?

JK: I typed all these letters on an old typewriter using sheets of carbon paper. It was quite a job for some good weeks.

KKW: The NET manifesto was always accompanied by a list of those invited to participate, and their names and addresses. . . .

JK: Yes, of course. Or at least everyone got the list to begin with. Later it wasn't so coordinated any more. At some point I stopped sending the list. I sent out a few batches of the manifesto with the first list, and then there were two or three appendices. But later I stopped sending appendices because the whole thing became internally generative and there was no longer the need to inform people about it. I think this is still happening!

KKW: The manifesto states that "points of the NET are: private homes, studios and any other places, where art propositions are articulated," wherever "propositions are presented to persons interested in them," and that these "propositions may be accompanied by editions in the form of prints, tapes, slides, photographs, books, films, handbills, letters, manu-

Persons invited to be co-creators of NET

CECILE ABISH -89e9 Francois Place,North Bergen,New York,USA
KEITH ARNATT - Tintern Forest,Wales,G.Britain
CARL ANDRE - Box 540,Cooper Station,New York,USA
ANGELO DE AQUINO - Via Amedei 5,20123,Milano,Italy
GABOR ATTALAI - Budapest I,Groza rkp.11,Hungary
MARTIN BARRÉ - 52 rue de Montparnasse,ParisXIV,France
IAIN BAXTER - 1419 Riverside Drive,North Vancouver,British Col.,Canada
GEER VAN BEIJEREN - Richard Wagnerstr.8,Amsterdam 9,Holland
JERZY BEREŚ - Kraków,Siemaszki 22/24,Poland
LASZLO BEKE - BudapestbIX,Thaly Kalman U.56 I/3a,Hungary
ANDRZEJ BEREZIAŃSKI - Poznań,Dzierżyńskiego 119 m 25,Poland
JULIEN BLAINE - 20 rue d´Arcueil 75,Paris XIV,France
MARINUS BOEZEM - Gruttershof 59,Gorinchem,Holland
WŁODZIMIERZ BOROWSKI - Brwinów k.Warszawy,Kępińska 70,Poland
WIESLAW BOROWSKI - Warszawa,Rozbrat 32 m 21,Poland
GEORGE BRECHT - 83 Landbroke Grove,London W.11,G.Britain
DAVID BRIERS - 15 Park Mansions,Prince of Wales Drive,London S.W.11
                                                        G.Britain
JANOS BRENDEL - Poznań,Piękna 12,Poland
STANLEY BROUWN - Willem de Zwijgarlaan 60,Amsterdam,Holland
DANIEL BUREN - 21 rue de Navarin,Paris IX,France
BALTHASAR BURKHARD - Junkerngasse 25,Bern,Switzerland
GIANFREDO CAMESI - 29 rue de Genéve,1225,Chéne-bourg,Genéve,Switzerland
UGO CARREGA - Via Borgonuovo 20,20121 Milano,Italy
LUCIANO CASTELLI - Seefeldstr.5,Luzern,Switzerland
CHRISTO - 48 Howard St.,New York,USA
URSZULA CZARTORYSKA - Łódź,Wójtowska 24,Poland
ANTONIO DIAS - 5 Via Amedei,20123 Milano,Italy
JAN DIBBETS - Hasebroekstr.20,Amsterdam,Holland
CHRISTOS DIKEAKOS - 2676 West 13-th.Av.,Vancouver 8,British Col.,Canada
ERNER DOV - Kibeutz Hatzor-Achded 90-670,Israel

List of persons invited to be cocreators of NET, 1970. Typescript. Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

scripts etc." So the "points of the NET" connect places and objects rather than people. But then there is also the list of names and addresses.

JK: The points of the NET are people—that's to say—places connected to people.

KKW: And also objects? Aren't objects also granted a sort of new autonomy to circulate here? Are these points part of the NET, too?

JK: But they are ones that begin to move. . . .

KKW: I know you are interested in drawing. Did you ever think about drawing or diagramming NET? If the network existed in some sort of environment, what would it look like? Would it consist of points? Or of constellations?

JK: They would envelop the whole world. . . .

KKW: The manifesto states that "all points of the NET are in contact among themselves and exchange concepts, propositions, projects and other forms of articulation." How would you show that all points are in contact with all the other points?

JK: It would be very difficult to create such a map. I have never been tempted to try. As a matter of fact it would not be possible, because I was not able to control NET's development.

KKW: In a way, *East Art Map*'s big black poster is an attempt, isn't it? But I noticed that your network is misrepresented there. You appear to float about in isolation—without lines linking you to anyone else. Still, perhaps a more complete map like this could be made based on the NET documentation one day. Bruno Latour argues that in actor network theory every person is already a network—a star among other stars and constellations that link to one another in complex, but ultimately traceable ways. I like this idea because it seems to expand, just as the NET itself has done. And of course I think it is crucial to move away from the idea of the artist as just an isolated individual. Especially when talking about the former Eastern bloc. There is nothing to be gained from repeating the old stereotypes of total isolation now. Of course people felt isolated, but they also developed strong networks.

JK: Well, in a sense, yes. I met László Beke, much later, thirty years after NET. He said what a mistake it was that we didn't copyright the name NET—we would have been millionaires now!

KKW: Of course!

My current research is partially fueled by my dislike of the term Zeitgeist. It seems to me to be a mental shortcut. After all, people exchanged ideas in so many concrete ways.

JK: Yes, it is false. It wasn't Zeitgeist. The appearance of conceptual art in Poland was not a result of some kind of osmosis but was rather con-

nected, among other things, with the presence of the Polish Construc-
tivism tradition and the contacts of Strzemiński and Kobro with Russian
artists. This was also a network in a sense.

KKW: Yes—a network that went on to become the basis of a collection. It
seems that participants in the mail art network were to some extent also
building personal collections of the work received through the network.
But NET was not about collecting—you did not ask those you added to
your list to send you anything.

JK: No. It was about exchange and getting to know people.

KKW: You announced that the NET existed, and could be used.

JK: Of course, after a month or two all sorts of mail arrived. To begin with
I organized "receptions" where I displayed the materials received. Then
later these materials served as a basis for inviting artists to Akumulatory
2, which I founded in 1972 with the help of four art history students
from Poznań University. The gallery was located in the students' club, and
partially supported by the Students' Union. During the almost twenty
years of its activity, we organized 172 solo exhibitions, five group exhibi-
tions, and thirty lectures with Polish and international artists and theo-
reticians. Seventy to eighty percent of the gallery's exhibition program was
based on the contacts that developed through NET.

KKW: You referred to these early meetings as "receptions" rather than
"exhibitions?"

JK: Yes, receptions. The first such reception of NET materials was in my
apartment at 7 p.m., on Monday 22nd May 1972. The mailings were
very diverse. People sent works and letters and printed materials. I invited
ten close friends, artists, art historians, and writers. I included all the
pieces we had received by that time. Twenty-four artists from different
countries sent responses.

KKW: I see that the materials were also on the floor.

JK: Yes there was no more space. The photographs were developed by the
Security Services, by the way.

KKW: The secret police entered your apartment after just forty-five
minutes?

JK: Yes. They took it all down and took it away. After a year, they returned
most of the material, but not everything.
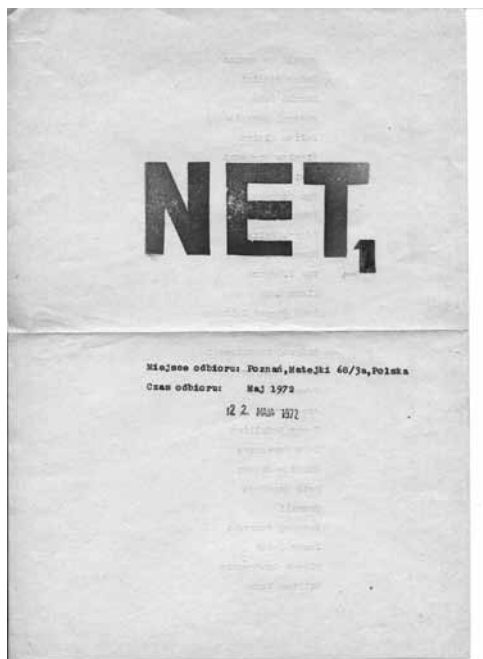
Invitation to NET₁ reception at Matejki 68/3z, Poznań, May 22, 1972.
Typescript with rubber stamp. Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

KKW: And I understand that you were summoned to be interrogated?

JK: Yes, it did drag on for some time. I don't know who out of these ten people I invited reported it to the security agents. I have my suspicions, but no certainty.

KKW: And the others were also interrogated?

JK: Yes.

KKW: What did the Security Services want to know? What questions did they ask?

JK: The leitmotiv was that we were in the process of founding an anarchist organization directed against the state [laughs]. Later, they calmed down and a day before the court hearing was due to take place I was informed that they had abandoned the idea.
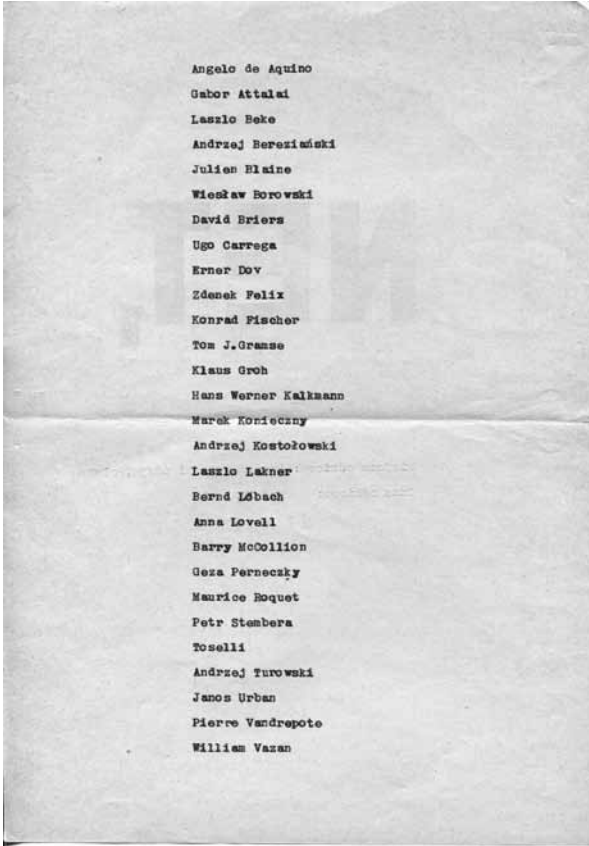
KKW: And how did you defend yourself against the accusation of anarchism?

Installation of materials received at the first NET$_1$ reception, Matejki 68/3z, Poznań, May 22, 1972. Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski. Photograph by Jarosław Kozłowski.

NET$_1$ reception Matejki 68/3z, Poznań, May 22, 1972 (Tadeusz Brzozowski, Jacek Zagajewski, Jerzy Ludwiński, and Andrzej Bereziański—from left to right). Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski. Photograph by Jarosław Kozłowski.

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Angelo de Aquino
Gabor Attalai
Laszlo Beke
Andrzej Bereziański
Julien Blaine
Wiesław Borowski
David Briers
Ugo Carrega
Erner Dov
Zdenek Felix
Konrad Fischer
Tom J.Gramse
Klaus Groh
Hans Werner Kalkmann
Marek Konieczny
Andrzej Kostołowski
Laszlo Lakner
Bernd Löbach
Anna Lovell
Barry McCollion
Geza Perneczky
Maurice Roquet
Petr Stembera
Toselli
Andrzej Turowski
Janos Urban
Pierre Vandrepote
William Vazan
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List of artists' propositions received at NET$_1$, Matejki 68/3z, Poznań, May 22, 1972.
Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

JK: Well, I tried to explain that it was all about art and had no connection with any political manifestation. It was quite tiresome. It went on for almost a year.

KKW: But in spite of all this you decided to organize a second reception, this time in the Club of the Union of Polish Artists. Was this change of context a critical game of sorts? The move from your apartment to the Union Club somehow resonates with the institutionalization of conceptual art in the West. . . . Isn't it significant that you decided to take advantage of the protection of an official institution?

JK: Well, it was only the club, a meeting place for local artists where they could talk and drink coffee or beer, not the Gallery of the Artists'
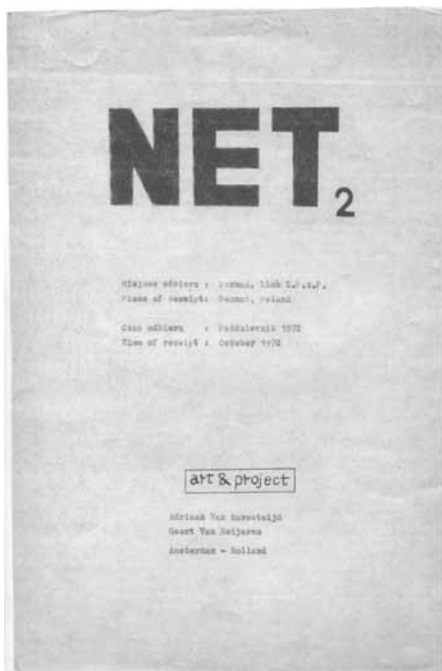
Invitation to NET$_2$ reception of materials from art & project, at Klub Z.P.A.P., Poznań, October 1972. Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski.

Union—this gave it a different meaning. The point was to do another show and not to give up. We couldn't use the apartment because of the way the previous "reception" there had encroached on my privacy. An alternative place had to be found. In this sense, yes, we were under the umbrella of an association. But the most important thing was not to give up after the first raid—to do something once again, even just for two hours.

KKW: What was included in the second reception?

JK: It consisted of printed materials sent by art & project, documenting a few years of the gallery's activity, presenting what was shown at more than sixty exhibitions.[3] They were also on the NET list. Hanging the pages from wires was the quickest and easiest way, and the least damaging to

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3   Art & project—the leading contemporary art gallery in Amsterdam of the 1970s and '80s and a key platform for conceptual art, founded in 1968 by Adriaan van Ravesteijn and Geert van Beijeren.

NET₂ reception of materials from art & project, at Klub Z.P.A.P., Poznań, October 1972 (Anna Kozłowska, Andrzej Jur, unknown). Image courtesy of Jarosław Kozłowski. Photograph by Jarosław Kozłowski.

the documents. It was a very quick and spontaneous action. The aim was to organize a second reception quickly.

KKW: Looking at the photographs of the event it is clear that this was all about reception and the recipients' experience. . . .

JK: Yes, they are very important.

KKW: Was there any trouble this time?

JK: Well, they [the Security Services] boasted they had seen the exhibition and that they had commented on it.

KKW: In some of her texts on your work, Luiza Nader has developed ideas around the utopia of privacy. I'm interested in the tension between individual, private attitudes and the desire to produce an expanded collective such as NET.

JK: It was never a group. NET was concerned with dialogues between individuals.

KKW: You have said that the NET worked according to a system of permanent recommendation and expansion. The manifesto sets the structure in motion. I find this interesting because it seems to me that it has to do with trust. The element of trust was also important at Akumulatory 2, which you set up in 1972. You invited artists to take over the space, without censoring them in any way.

JK: Yes. There was nothing formal or written, but artists still had a certain responsibility as a matter of principle. After all, they were all strangers to me and when they came to have their show, they would all live at my place. There was no state sponsorship.

KKW: So Akumulatory 2 was a democratic space, based on freedom and responsibility?

JK: Responsibility was enormously important. Also because the authorities (censorship, Security Service, administration of the building) played silly and provocative games against the Gallery. For instance, sometimes they didn't let us into the gallery space just before the announced date of the exhibition. In such cases we had to quickly look for an alternative space. It happened several times. Altogether, we organized exhibitions in seven different spaces.

KKW: In the manifesto, you write that "NET can be arbitrarily developed and copied." Is this not an abdication of responsibility for how the idea will continue?

JK: This was something that the Security Services found very provocative. During our "conversations" I was often accused of avoiding responsibility—they did not like the fact that it seemed blurry. But, in a way it was not contradictory.

KKW: The statement that "NET has no central point and no coordination" suggested to me the ideal of self-management. The creation of a new framework for relationships that can be replicated in any situation.

JK: Trust and responsibility are inscribed in the proposition, and this determines the lack of control.

KKW: Yes. It seems to me that some mail artists have tended to try to exert more control over their exchanges—for example the issue of whether anyone should be allowed to join the "network," or whether entry should be somehow vetted for quality. Others, of course, laughed at such attempts and found them to be in contradiction with the structure of an open system. There were a lot of people who were, and remain, absolutely ready to correspond with everyone. Géza Perneczky has argued that mail art is more a sociological than an artistic phenomenon. I think he meant that communication itself was what mattered, not so much what was being sent. What is the relationship between NET and mail art?

JK: I treated my first five correspondence pieces as a form of mail art, but I didn't think of NET as a mail art activity. It was just that the mail was the only possible way of distributing the idea. The rest developed in its own way.

KKW: In the manifesto you refer to "propositions" rather than art works.

JK: Yes, propositions. Ideas matter more than than the realizations of ideas.

KKW: And what did you have in mind when you wrote that "the idea of the NET is not new"?

JK: We wanted to be pragmatic. So we didn't want to emphasize that it was our idea as authors—authorship would have interfered.

KKW: So why did you both sign the manifesto?

JK: Because we wanted to act responsibly.

KKW: In the 1980s György Konrád wrote of the need to develop horizontal human relationships in opposition to the vertical relationships of military society. He argued that Eastern and Western Europe should unify, so as to offer an alternative to the superpowers and the Cold War division of the globe.

JK: We didn't want to limit NET to some European structure, because this would be a sort of declaration and a definition that would be contrary to the idea of universality.

KKW: Ultimately then, what was it that was shared by individuals through NET? Was it not this sense of responsibility and solidarity?

JK: Yes. We were sharing attitudes.

KKW: Géza Perneczky has recalled his concern at reading a mail art call saying: "Become a mail artist and every day will be like Christmas!" because the desire to possess works or objects is a form of primitive accumulation. Are you saying that NET was about ideas rather than objects?

JK: In a sense the objects and works are peripheral. But it is only natural that the registration of an idea—the proposition—becomes the language of exchange.

KKW: Looking at the list of names of the first NET mailing today, it is striking how many important artists were included in the circle from the start. Was it always so exclusive?

JK: Less important artists also appeared! As I mentioned, Akumulatory 2 came to be the continuation of the idea of NET, and we worked with established and also with very young, unknown artists. For example, we had an exhibition of work by Richard Long. Exhibitions always lasted for four days maximum, due to the fact that we shared the space with a student nightclub. The following week we had a show by a fourth-year art student. There was no hierarchy.

KKW: Which acquaintances made through the NET became the most important for you, as an artist and personally?

JK: To answer that would be to establish a hierarchy! I certainly developed excellent contacts with the Fluxus artists Emmett Williams, Eric Andersen, Geoffrey Hendricks, Ken Friedman. I was in touch with George Maciunas, although we never met—he was the one who proposed the Fluxus festival at Akumulatory 2. It was the last festival before his death. Also New York artist John Matthews whom I've never met, but we still correspond. . . . It would be a long list: Robin Klassnik and Richard Long from Great Britain, Peter Mandrup and Lone Arendal from Denmark, Carlfriedrich Claus from East Germany, Rene Bloch, Franz Erhard Walther, Hanne Darboven, Reiner Ruthenbeck from West Germany, On Kawara, Carl Andre, Lawrence Weiner, John Blake from the States, Bill Vazan from Canada, Mieko Shiomi from Japan, and many others. There was very good contact and exchange of ideas with South American artists, such as Angelo de Aquino and Clemente Padín, perhaps because we were sharing similar experiences and problems—facing politically different but quite similar totalitarian systems.

KKW: Does this alternative international network correspond to your idea of the "third ring," which Luiza Nader describes as "the realm of freedom" or "sovereignty"?[4]

JK: What I call the "third ring" is located between reality and art understood as a kind of mirror of reality.

KKW: A mirror of reality? Do you mean reflection theory?

JK: No, not only. The "third ring" concerns the whole art scene, both the functioning of art and the understanding of art as a kind of sovereign, parallel reality. The third circle is like a ball that bounces off the wall of reality and hits the wall of art and comes back to the wall of reality, and takes on elements from both these defined spheres.

Jarosław Kozłowski (b. Srem, Poland, 1945).

KKW: A form of dialogue then?

JK: It's rather a kind of permanent dialectics between reality and art, without entering categorically into the sphere of so-called reality or the sphere of so-called art!

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TRANSLATED BY HANNAH KEMP-WELCH

4   Luiza Nader, "Exercises in Sovereignty: On the Works of Jarosław Kozłowski from the Sixties and Seventies," in *Question Marks: Jarosław Kozłowski*, ed. Bożena Czubak (Warsaw: Profile Foundation, 2010), 68.