Giving Back the Gift: Predicaments of Patronage and an *Offering* from Włodzimierz Borowski

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In August of 1966, roughly sixty artists, critics, and academics convened for a Symposium at a newly opened nitrogen plant in socialist Poland. Late one evening, conceptualist artist Włodzimierz Borowski donned a tuxedo to deliver a speech to a crowd. Behind him towered urea furnaces. Entranced by the beauty of the industrial landscape, Borowski declared the furnaces to be works of art and returned them, as such, to the plant's management. The performance, titled *Ofiarowanie pieca* (Offering of the Furnace), was the fourth iteration in his cycle of happenings and installations called "Syncretic Shows." With his "gift," Borowski reversed the Symposium's patronage model, which had put the plant and its resources at the disposal of visiting artists. He gave back the gift of patronage.

This article uses the device of Borowski's *Offering*—the returning of a gift—to investigate ambivalent engagements with state sponsorship of culture in the socialist art system. Borowski's action reduces to formula a recurring tactic of critical art: acceptance of state support followed by its repudiation or return. The cases collected below, sharing this formula, challenge a consensus narrative that has long shaped discourses on politics of culture during socialism: that in the relationship between the ruling Party and cultural producers, power flowed one way (exerted by the oppressive state over subjugated individuals) and suppressed or distorted artists' motives—premises summarized here as the state repression thesis. While this narrative has myriad justifiable applications, its status as a default premise blocks access to nuance in ambivalent rapports between local actors and official institutions. This article aims not to deny the state's incursions into the cultural field but suggests that an *a priori* fixation on power (understood abstractly as domination and concretely as state-socialist institutions—both captured in the Polish *władza*, meaning "power" and "regime") has led to the passing-over of certain attitudes held by cultural producers: commitment to socialism, desire to make socially useful art, and willingness to agitate for a sustainable *modus vivendi* within a state-socialist system here to stay.

The state repression thesis rears its head, for instance, when Łukasz Guzek asserts the totalitarian dialectics of repression and thaw as an umbrella framework for all socialist-era art.[1] Magdalena Moskalewicz argues for instead viewing cultural production as "product of the delicate but stable, and

1. By characterizing repression and thaw as complementary strategies of domination, Guzek sweeps all socialist-era cultural production into his totalitarian framework. See: Łukasz Guzek, "Władza vs. sztuki w PRL-u i dziś," *DYSKURS Pismo Naukowo-Artystyczne ASP we Wrocławiu*, no. 21 (April 2017): 37.

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mutually beneficial, consensus between artists and the communist state."[2] While Guzek and Moskalewicz agree on continuities connecting cultural politics during and after Stalinism, they apply contrary value judgments to this thesis: Guzek sees post-Stalinist liberalization as the insidious extension of a totalitarian trap, while Moskalewicz recuperates the Stalinist art system as a consensual arrangement between artists and state actors. This article continues Moskalewicz's revisionist destranding of post-1989 discursive anticommunism from internal challenges of real socialism, allowing the latter's complexities to come into view.

While existing criticism frames Borowski's *Offering of the Furnace* as an "individual protest" in "unabashed opposition" to the Symposium during which it transpired, I will identify those of its aspects that aligned with the Symposium's goals.[3] The *Offering* is underserved by the consensus noted by anthropologist of Soviet culture Alexei Yurchak to sort socialist reality into binaries like "oppression and resistance, repression and freedom, the state and the people . . . official culture and counterculture, totalitarian reality and dissimulation, morality and corruption . . . ."[4] Yurchak casts these binaries as post-perestroika constructions motivated by fear that to concede common ground between official and inner languages draws into question the sincere self now that the state's authenticity has been discredited. To parse the implications of giving back the gift of state patronage, I suggest we read Borowski's *Offering* in the context of its time, when official and inner languages still overlapped.

As a public speech delivered to viewers inside and outside Borowski's social milieu, *Offering of the Furnace* interweaves speech registers, mimicking official culture's gravitas but containing moments of opacity for audience members to interpret according to their personal critical orientation or social proximity to Borowski. Following Klavdia Smola's exploration of "community as device," I read the *Offering* through the registers of its audience's social subgroups, whose varying degrees of common ground with Borowski shaped their reception of his speech.[5] In addressing friends, strangers, and adversaries together, Borowski's goal, I argue, was not to weave a common language for all but to make visible social barriers between them.

2. Magdalena Moskalewicz, "Who Doesn't like Aleksander Kobzdej?: A State Artist's Career in the People's Republic of Poland," in Aga Skrodzka, Xiaoning Lu, and Katarzyna Marciniak, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Communist Visual Cultures* (Oxford, 2019), 196–223.

3. Anna Maria Leśniewska uses the cited phrases to present the *Offering* in the sole book on the Symposium (Anna Maria Leśniewska, *Puławy 66: I Sympozjum Artystów Plastyków i Naukowców* [Puławy, 2006], 44, 46). Łukasz Guzek, presuming the *Offering* to be a straightforward critique of the regime, credits the action for deterring officials from supporting subsequent industrial Plein-Airs (Guzek, "Władza vs. sztuka," 43).

4. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2006), 5, 7.

5. Smola, writing about late Soviet nonconformity, applies the concept of "community as device" to scenes external to official culture. I believe her perspective also services the Plein-Air "contact zones" between critical and official milieus. See: Klavdia Smola, "Community as Device: Metonymic Art of the Late Soviet Underground," *Russian Literature* 96–98 (Spring 2018): 13–50.

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Following an analysis of Borowski's *Offering*, this article's latter half uses its formula to interpret two later re-giftings of patronage at public festivals: artist Zofia Kulik's participation at a sculpture festival in 1971 and (moving beyond the socialist context) Łukasz Surowiec's filmed action *Dar dla boga* (Gift for God, 2012). Both artists repeat the device of giving back (or away) resources allotted by public patrons. I order these cases chronologically, and if I foreground Borowski, it is not to frame Kulik or Surowiec's actions as derivative. By declaring his counter-gift as he performs it, Borowski distills this tactic to its rudimentary form, providing a lucid baseline that usefully illuminates other artists' critical maneuvers within and against state patronage. Borowski, Kulik, and Surowiec all contend with the peculiar guilt called complicity: accountability attending the receipt of a gift from a compromised source, and the endorsement of that source implied by the gift's acceptance. To withdraw this endorsement and undo one's complicity, simply giving back the gift is never enough. Cognizant of this, these artists perform their complicity to expose the conditions to which they are beholden as working artists.

If socialism postulated a universal class wherein all citizens are workers of commensurate value and skill, the scenarios below focalize how artists internalized their worker status. Their critical strategies can therefore be understood as labor organizing tactics (a perspective implemented throughout this article). Finally, my case studies issue different commentaries on art's social utility: by analyzing them together, we gain insight into changing attitudes (diminishing irony and sincerity's return) toward socially useful art as socialist realist doctrine receded into the past.

Plein-Air Playing Field

Borowski performed his *Offering* at the First Symposium of Artists and Scientists (subtitled "Art in a Changing World") at the Azoty Nitrogen Plant in Puławy in 1966. The festival belonged to a category of state-sponsored art festivals known as Plein-Airs organized throughout the 1960–70s. Several Plein-Airs were hosted by industrial facilities that supplied materials, studio space, and fabrication support. These events staged a vision of industrial-modernist synthesis, hailing back to the Russian Constructivist (and especially productivist) impetus to relocate art into the factory.[6]

Plein-Air festivals were contact zones for people of varied interests: Party functionaries, industrial managers, artists, and townspeople attended and utilized these events in different ways. The Puławy Symposium, for instance, opened with a wine reception where artists and state officials mingled.[7] Positioned at the official art system's fringe, Plein-Airs were outside the state museum network yet financed by state organs. Art historian Klara Kemp-Welch described one event cycle as "an annual carnival of sorts, at

6. On Russian Constructivism's post-1921 turn from aesthetic laboratory to industrial production, see Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley, 2005), especially Chapters 4–5. For a text theorizing this development as it occurred, see Nikolai Tarabukin, *Ot mol' berta k mashine* (Moscow, 1923).

7. See opening day program in Leśniewska, *Puławy 66,* 88.

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the expense of the socialist state."[8] Plein-Airs were "playing fields" (a phrase associated with Jerzy Ludwiński, Puławy Symposium organizer) in that they were fertile zones for collaboration nonetheless subject to implicit rules of the game.[9] While some emphasize their distance from cities where artists exerted more influence, I see the Plein-Airs as profoundly public events witnessed by diverse communities and opening channels between artists and authorities that resulted in agonistic communication more often than overt conflict.[10] As semi-official contact zones, Plein-Airs defy the consensus topography of socialist culture counterposing official institutions to "enclaves of freedom."[11]

Despite their polemical spirit, the Plein-Airs faced no overt reprisals. They were products of delicate negotiations between artists and state officials, offering both a shared forum until martial law's installment in 1981, at which point semi-official spaces could no longer be sustained in good faith. The Plein-Air era's effective conclusion was the final edition of a recurring Plein-Air in Osieki in August 1981. Participants sent a clear message that this event format had been compromised: organizer Jerzy Fedorowicz resigned with an open letter to authorities. Artist and poet Andrzej Partum used an odorous chemical to sabotage a lecture hall. Piotr Kmieć spent a day shackled into a pillory in self-imposed captivity. These tactics of refusal (Kmieć), sabotage (Partum), and withdrawal (Fedorowicz) functioned like work stoppages of aggrieved workers: as precursors of general strike. They presaged artists' boycott of official institutions following the imposition of martial law in December of that year.[12]

The Plein-Airs' story cannot, however, be reconstructed from this last episode. Before 1981, the critical mode prevailing at these events was one of cooperative contestation: critique whose conditions of expression are first negotiated with the opposing side. The Plein-Airs demonstrate artists' willingness to parlay with authorities to obtain leverage for their work. The art

8. Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central European Art: Reticence as Dissidence under Post-Totalitarian Rule 1956–1989* (London, 2017), 35.

9. The term "playing field" (*pole gry*) was also the title of Borowski's 1972 retrospective at Galeria Współczesna.

10. Guzek emphasizes the non-urban locations of the Puławy Symposium and other Plein-Airs in order to downplay their influence (Guzek, "Władza vs. sztuki," 40). I argue that if these settings were important, it is because they afforded flexibility to participants who pivoted between permanent urban institutions and durational festivals, testing the parameters of both and taking risks at Plein-Airs that might have lasting repercussions at their home institutions. I offer two examples: Marian Bogusz co-organized the initial Biennial of Spatial Forms while running the Warsaw gallery Krzywe Koło. The latter was shuttered in 1965, the same year the Biennial was launched. Ludwiński, likewise, ran the Mona Lisa Gallery (1967–71) in Wrocław while organizing and attending Plein-Airs.

11. Jacek Dobrowolski uses this phrase to describe artistic circles in the 1970s: "Counterculture, Hippies, and Alternative Social Movements in Poland in the 1970s," in Łukasz Ronduda and Georg Schöllhammer, eds., *KwieKulik: Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek* (Warsaw, 2012), 512.

12. On escalating conflict at the 1981 Osieki Plein-Air in its political contexts, see: Łukasz Mojsak, "Kontestacje osieckie w latach 1967–1981: Dwa przełomy," in Jerzy Buziałkowski, Piotr Pawłowski and Ryszard Ziarkiewicz, eds., *Kolekcja Osiecka Muzeum w Koszalinie: Katalog malarstwa, rzeźby, grafiki i fotografii uczestników plenerów w Osiekach w latach 1963—1981 ze zbiorów Muzeum w Koszalinie* (Koszalin, 2018).

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resulting from such arrangements often criticized the very institutions facilitating the work. Early Plein-Airs represent an alternate way forward for oppositionist culture: a readiness to engage in tempered conflict as a viable means to discourse between plural viewpoints. Securing this arrangement was what Piotr Piotrowksi and Luiza Nader have deemed a "tacit social contract"—a bilateral consensus in the broader political climate regarding acceptable thresholds of resistance and control.[13] The Party, however, violated this contract during the Plein-Air era by brutally suppressing civil expressions of dissent in 1968 and 1970.[14] In consequence, later Plein-Airs became stages for what Nader calls dissensus: a break from the agonistic paradigm that occurs when one side has violated the terms of arbitration. Dissensus can be understood as a labor organizing tactic: when the empowered party avoids good-faith bargaining, more conflictual tactics are needed.

Let us resist the temptation to retroactively apply the drama of dissensus to early Plein-Airs. When artists convened at the Azoty Plant in 1966, they likely expected the Symposium would be a viable "playing field" for their experiments. Rather than matching Yurchak's binaries (resistance versus compromise), the attitudes expressed at the Symposium occupied moving points along a spectrum of criticality and sincere engagement of socialist themes. The putative goals of state funders likely overlapped with those of participating artists, for whom localized grievances did not preclude identification with the socialist mission to democratize art.[15] This event's story is not reducible to the imposition of an agenda by state patrons and its rejection by artists.

The line dividing agonism from dissensus—likely ambiguous in the first place—grows difficult to pinpoint retroactively. Plein-Airs consequently pose a methodological challenge to scholars removed in place and time. Their residual artifacts emerged on socially specific "playing fields" defined positively—by shared codes and styles, but also negatively—by implicit understanding of the rules of the game. The east European intellectual tradition

13. Luiza Nader, "Wspólnota Wyobraźni Jako Dyssensus. VIII Spotkanie Artystów i Teoretyków Sztuki Świdzin/Osieki 1970," *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, no. 18 (2018): 52; Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* (Poznań, 1999), 125.

14. I am referring to the use of police and military violence to quell protests and strikes. In 1968, the state's repression of student demonstrations was compounded by its concurrent antisemitic campaign, which ultimately drove a "forced exodus" of Polish Jews. See: Dariusz Stola, "Anti-Zionism as a Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967–1968," *The Journal of Israeli History* 25, no. 1 (August 2006): 175–201. On the 1968 and 1970 conflicts as blows to the revisionist opposition's confidence in agonistic engagement with the state, see David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia, 1991), 49–53.

15. Piotr Piotrowski argued that artists embraced official socialist values at Plein-Airs with a mixture of "political naivety" and "pragmatic resourcefulness." Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 124–25. Qualifying this claim, Magdalena Moskalewicz writes: "Rather than a cunning trick played on the communist authorities . . . this performance of 'pragmatic opportunism' . . . should be seen as a reflection of the congruence between the artists' belief systems and the official ideology. Both parties shared interests and goals." "Formula and Factory: Jan Chwałczyk and Jerzy Ludwiński's Highly Material Conceptualism" in Christian Berger, ed., *Conceptualism and Materiality: Matters of Art and Politics* (Leiden, 2019), 111.

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supplies analytical categories capturing such settings: Smola writes of "communicative niches" generating and utilizing a shared communication structure that "*semantically and semiotically charges the lifeworld* of those involved even before the creation of texts and artworks."[16] Nader similarly writes of the Plein-Air as a "communicative community" possessing a shared domain of imagination.[17] What I find absent in scholarship on Plein-Airs is balanced appreciation of this paradox: if participants shared frustrations and restrictions, perhaps these negative forces benefited their solidarity. The need to navigate bureaucratic constraints was likely a source of common ground. Guzek writes that artists "tried to find a *modus vivendi* with the regime" and uses the Latin term pejoratively, hinting at the moral compromise of all who heeled to Party parameters.[18] *Modus vivendi*, however, is an ambivalent term of utopian and cynical valences. It means compromise and being-with; a present-tense gerund easily distorted in the past tense of academic discourse. With this in mind, I argue that scholarship on Plein-Airs is incomplete if it makes no attempt to restore its object to present tense. This means reading each event on its terms and not through the prism of subsequent historical downturns. To do so opens our analytical "playing field" for interpretations that the state repression thesis otherwise rules out.

Synthetic Synthesis in Puławy

The Azoty Nitrogen Plant in Puławy (host of the First Symposium of Artists and Scientists) features in Krzysztof Zanussi's film *Struktura kryształu* (The Structure of Crystal, 1969), which contains a tacit reference to the Symposium. The film follows entanglements between a schoolteacher, Anna, her husband Jan, and his estranged friend Marek. Jan and Marek, both scientists, have parted ways at the crossroads of their careers, growing apart socially and professionally. Jan chose a life of contemplation in the countryside while Marek climbs the ladder at an urban university. The film explores pressures placed on scientists to find pragmatic applications for their research, thus touching on a concern of this article: unstated terms of patronage that rush the extraction of use value from culture or knowledge. In the personae of Jan and Marek, the film counterposes theoretical to pragmatic knowledge and cooperation to abstention. When Jan, Marek, and Anna visit Puławy, they interact with public sculptures leftover from the First Symposium of Artists and Scientists. "It's a saber. Do you see?" muses Anna, pondering a sculpture's shape. "Or maybe a scythe," suggests Marek. "Yes, it's definitely a tool," he concludes, determined to wrest utilitarian value from the abstraction.[19]

Anna beckons her companions to a vertical steel sculpture featuring a circular cavity into which she nests her face (see Figure 1). The sculpture appears in Symposium documentation without attribution. Photographs reveal a

16. Smola, "Community as Device," 14, 20.
17. Nader, "Wspólnota Wyobraźni Jako Dyssensus," 49–51.
18. Guzek, "Władza vs. sztuki," 38–39.
19. *Struktura kryształu*. Directed by Krzysztof Zanussi. Warsaw: Studio Filmowe Tor, 1969.

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Figure 1. ***Structure of Crystal*** **(dir. Krzysztof Zanussi, 1969)**

cantilevered appendage resembling a chin rest on the sculpture's backside. The sculpture's interactive function was thus intended by the artist and factored into its design. For the viewer, she becomes the sculpture's center. The abstraction transforms into a classical portrait of woman in the modern world, with Azoty's smokestacks as backdrop. Yet for Anna, the sculpture is a window outward: a viewpoint activating her senses in new ways. The scene tests the Symposium's promise to bring art to a mass public, adapt it to the changing world, and make it an agent of said change.[20] It seems the Symposium succeeded in these aims: the sculpture resonates with Anna. There is literally room for her in the art. It transforms her perception of her environment. This process is participatory: it is through her intuitive interaction with the art as an accessible urban fixture that its effects are felt.

The First Symposium of Artists and Scientists was organized in 1966 by Jerzy Ludwiński (curator and critic), Ryszard Stanisławski (Director of the Museum of Art in Łódź), Mieczysław Porębski (Professor at Warsaw's Fine Arts Academy), and Jerzy Stajuda (artist and critic). The event secured patronage from multiple state organizations: the National Councils of Puławy and Lublin, the Warsaw and Lublin branches of the Polish Artists' Union, the Lublin Bureau of Art Exhibitions, and the Regional Trade Union Commission. The Symposium's three-week duration (August 2–23) offered sufficient time for a *modus vivendi* to emerge among attendees. On August 3, they elected a self-governance committee. Participants shared common meals and attended daily meetings and lectures.[21]

20. On discourses of "democratizing" [upowszechnianie] art (facilitating mass access to art) in state policies and as conceived by artists, see Bernadeta Stano, *Artysta w fabryce: Dwa oblicza mecenatu przemysłowego w PRL* (Krakow, 2019), 351–76.

21. A day-to-day event schedule can be found in Leśniewska, *Puławy 66*, 89–115.

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1966 marked ten years since the beginning of the Polish thaw together with the millennial anniversary of Poland's adoption of Catholicism—an occasion recast in socialist terms as 1,000 years of Polish statehood.[22] At this milestone, the Symposium demonstrated progress on two fronts: Azoty was a paragon of modernized industry, and art made there (as if organically emerging from this industrial base) was to prove the Party's promised receptivity to creative experimentation. An informational pamphlet states that organizers deliberately invited artists who eschewed popular conventions.[23] Coverage of the event in the official magazine *Polska* praised its "principled debates" and "controversial exhibitions."[24] Program premises envisioned the exhibitions as "confrontations" rather than placid displays of stylistically uniform art.

The Azoty Plant, as patron, supplied materials, studio space, and staff support. Artists received room and board and, in some cases, monetary awards. Invited scholars received honorariums. This industrial patronage arrangement was framed as a generative first step in the synthesis of art and industry: art made in Puławy would be "the first artistic propositions cast into the Azoty crucible."[25] Commissioner Mieczysław Porębski saw this synthesis in humanist terms: "Modern science and technology extend a hand to modern art to draw new strengths from the dynamic tensions it creates and to find in these its own humanist dimensions."[26]

Following a 1962 agreement between the Central Trade Unions Council and Polish Artists' Union, the state had recruited the industrial sector into its arts patronage system.[27] In the following years, several Plein-Airs were hosted by industrial firms that donated materials and employees' labor time. An exemplary initiative was the inaugural Biennial of Spatial Forms in 1965. Hosted in Elbląg at Zamech Mechanical Works, the event was conceived by

22. To enshrine 1966 as a milestone connecting Poland's origins to its bright future, state leader Władysław Gomułka launched a campaign to build one thousand new schools honoring the millennial anniversary. Using modular designs and prefabricated construction, this massive infrastructural project brought modernized schools to rural areas, making tangible progress toward socialism's promise to equalize living standards for all. See: Anna Cymer, "Tysiąclatki—szkoły na rocznicę," *Culture.pl*, at https://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/tysiaclatki-szkoly-na-rocznice (Accessed January 24, 2022). The Puławy Symposium transmitted the related promise that cultural amenities should be equally accessible to rural and urban populations.

23. "Pamphlet for Participants of the First Symposium of Visual Artists and Scientists in Puławy" cited in full in Leśniewska, *Puławy 66*, 12–13.

24. "Puławy 66," *Polska*, no. 11:42, introduction accompanying essays and photographs, author unattributed.

25. (*Pierwsze propozycje artystyczne, wrzucone do tygla "Azotów"*). "Pamphlet" cited in Leśniewska, *Puławy 66*, 12.

26. (*Nowoczesna nauka i technika podają dłoń nowoczesnej sztuce, żeby czerpać nowe siły z wytwarzanych przez nią ożywczych napięć i odnajdywać w nich własne humanistyczne oblicze*). Lecture by Symposium commissioner Mieczysław Porębski, cited in Leśniewska, *Puławy 66*, 30, amended translation.

27. *Porozumienie zawarte pomiędzy Centralną Radą Związków Zawodowych a Zarządem Głównym ZPAP w sprawie udostępniania i upowszechniania sztuk plastycznych*, AAN Warszawa zespół ZPAP, no. 1/104. See: Bernadeta Stano, "Plenery pod skrzydłami Wielkiego Przemysłu. Mity i próby ich wskrzeszenia" in Alicja Kisielewska, Monika Kostaszuk-Romanowska, Andrzej Kisielewski, eds., *PRL-owskie re-sentymenty* (Gdańsk, 2017), 217–18.

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self-described "art worker" *(robotnik sztuki)* Gerard Kwiatkowski (later known as Jürgen Blum), who had opened a gallery and studio (Galeria EL) on the Zamech grounds. Zamech laborers cooperated with artists to craft industrial metals into large-scale "spatial forms."[28] Unfamiliar with industrial materials and equipment, artists relied on Zamech workers' expertise to realize their ideas. Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz's design, for instance, would not stay balanced until engineers intervened. Zamech workers also rescued Edward Krasiński's sculpture when it broke during assembly.[29]

Kwiatkowski attended the Puławy Symposium (producing new spatial forms there), and overlap in the events' artist rosters suggests continuity between them.[30] Nevertheless, despite being lionized in patrons' speeches, Azoty workers are absent from festival documentation with few exceptions: Andrzej Matuszewski and Jo Oda collaborated with workers, as did, unsurprisingly, Kwiatkowski.[31] Manual workers otherwise had marginal presence, performing banal tasks unrelated to artmaking.

Contrary to intentions, the 1966 Symposium was the first and only edition. The catalog foreseen in the budget never appeared. The event's truncated afterlife indicates its patrons' disappointment. To reconstruct their expectations and deduce how they were violated, we can consult the event's bylaws, program premises, and speeches delivered at the opening ceremony. Bylaws identified Azoty as patron, placing artists on the receiving end of the exchange. This begged a question: how would artists pay back the plant? One

28. The term "spatial form" (*forma przestrzenna*) in the Biennial title elaborates on the spatial constructions (*prostranstvennye konstruktsii*) of Russian Constructivism (imported into Polish art by sculptor Katarzyna Kobro as "spatial compositions" [*kompozycje przestrzenne*]). Anecdotal accounts present Zamech's patronage as a casual, consensual arrangement between Kwiatkowski and Zamech workers. Janusz Hankowski, co-founder of Galeria EL, recalls how Zamech supplied electricity to the gallery thanks to a cooperative worker who quietly set up a link to Zamech's power grid. Kwiatkowski was employed at Zamech's Decoration Workshop and had participated in cultural initiatives with the Zamech workforce since the 1950s. When it came time to organize the inaugural biennial, support from Zamech was the natural extension of a cooperative relationship already in place. See: Karina Dzieweczyńska, ed., *Gerard Kwiatkowski/Jürgen Blum: Założyciel Galerii EL w Elblągu* (Elbląg, 2014), 50–51. This grassroots model was a singular case among factory-hosted Plein-Airs.

29. See: Jarosław Denisiuk, *Otwarta Galeria. Formy przestrzenne w Elblągu. Przewodnik* (Open Gallery: Spatial Forms in Elbląg. Guide, Elbląg, 2015), 22. The division of labor casting artists as creators and workers as builders was complicated by the fact that many artists were themselves accustomed to fabricating others' designs. Artists commonly earned income by taking commissions from the State Enterprise Fine Arts Studios (PP Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych), which often delegated design and execution phases to separate artists. On this practice, see Tomasz Załuski, "KwieKulik and the Political Economy of the Potboiler," *Third Text* 32, no. 4 (October 2018): 394–95.

30. In addition to Kwiatkowski, artists Henryk Stażewski, Jan Chwałczyk, Alfred Lenica, and Edward Krasiński attended both events.

31. Photographs of the Symposium made on commission by photojournalist Eustachy Kossakowski for the official magazine *Polska* offer a vital resource for taking up Klavdia Smola's call to reconstruct lifeworlds underlying cultural artifacts. Kossakowski's photographs provide a richer record of social interactions at the Symposium than textual chronicles of the event.

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answer can be found in the program premises, which envision artists as the industrial sector's Research and Development arm:

> Institutes and studies of visual experimentation are proliferating the world over, and their usefulness is becoming more and more of an everyday issue. Under certain circumstances, the activities of these institutions are profitable; they influence the form of industrial products and advertising, and they can even affect working efficiency through the organization of people's workspaces. In a socialist system, under conditions of new patronage there is the possibility of shaping man's products and his entire environment through art on a scale hereto unknown.[32]

Azoty's Director saw the Symposium as a chance to introduce artists to the synthetic materials produced in Poland's burgeoning chemical industry.[33] A preliminary exhibition titled *Synthetic Materials* showcased polymer-based art.[34] Artists were responsive to this prompt.[35] Teresa Rudowicz experimented with methacrylic acid. Jan Tarasin worked with melamine resin (consequently falling ill with fume poisoning). Many have noted this era's pervasive trend to fashion the work of art as a scientific experiment.[36] In Puławy, this tendency took literal form as ad-hoc chemistry experiments proliferated on site.

Despite its emphasis on chemical materials, at the Symposium's core was an abstracted if not absent substance: the nitrogen fertilizer produced at Azoty. Patrons had seized the plant's chemical production as emblematic of modernized industry—clean, efficient, and sophisticated compared to steelworks of the Stalinist past. Left unstated was the plant's emission of nitrogen-saturated pollutants into soil and air, posing risks to local residents and wildlife. Locals also feared industrial accidents. Contemporary artist Wilhelm Sasnal, who grew up near a nitrogen plant in Mościce, recalled his grandmother's repeated warnings to drape wet blankets over their windows in the event of catastrophe.[37] Eliding such aspects of Azoty's production allowed Symposium patrons to capitalize on its symbolic value.

In response, many artists reversed this abstraction procedure by engaging the materiality of chemical motifs. Liliana Lewicka's *Miejsce do rozmyślań*

32. "Program Premises" cited in full in Leśniewska, *Puławy 66*, 87–89.

33. See excerpts of Mieczysław Kołodziej's speech cited in Leśniewska, *Puławy 66*, 89.

34. This exhibition was curated by decorative artist Jan Bruzda, who researched artistic applications of polymers and spent his career promoting their usage, publishing books on the topic such as: Jan Bruzda, *Tworzywa sztuczne w plastyce* (Synthetic Products in Art, Warsaw, 1973).

35. Artists had incentives to embrace this prompt. It was compatible with the interest in scientific discourse pervading art at this time and, as Magdalena Moskalewicz notes, artists accustomed to conditions of scarcity welcomed free access to materials: Moskalewicz, "Formula and Factory," 111.

36. Luiza Nader traces Ludwiński's role in this tendency in the case of his lecture "The Post-Artistic Era" and its reception at a 1970 Plein-Air in Osieki. See: Nader, "Wspólnota Wyobraźni Jako Dyssensus," 49. This tendency is also signaled in the title of Kwiatkowski's gallery in Elbląg—Galeria EL: Laboratorium Sztuki (Gallery EL: Art Laboratory). The keyword "laboratory" was associated with pre-war constructivism.

37. See: Marcin Laberschek, "W cieniu fabryki. Wizja katastrofy Zakładów Azotowych w Mościcach w pomniku Wilhelma Sasnala," *Zarządzanie w Kulturze* 21, no. 4 (December 2020): 337.

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(Place to Think) was a sculptural arrangement of decomposing animal parts sourced from a slaughterhouse. Due to the putrefying contents, a "chemical patrol" of Azoty employees guarded the area. *Place to Think* laid bare the social distance between visiting artists and Azoty workers who, granted no creative power, were bargaining chips in a patronage contract.

By staging a chemical reaction (putrefaction) and foregrounding its harsh sensorial effects (the stench of rot), Lewicka tested the Symposium's theme of productive synthesis between industry and art. As socialist keyword, "synthesis" connotes cooperation and conflict: the generative convergence of elements in tension. The word's origins lie in Marxist-Leninist conceptions of the unity of opposites and union of analysis and synthesis. While these two terms are dialectical counterparts, Symposium patrons had bypassed analysis while brandishing the synthesis of industry and art in aphoristic form. They projected a "synthetic synthesis" between elements that in practice did not yet cohere. *Place to Think* performs synthesis *with* analysis, bringing together incongruent animal parts and breaking them down through decomposition accelerated by the intense August heat. The "thinking" prompted by Lewicka's title may be analysis of the Symposium's official script.

Włodzimierz Borowski, whose *Offering of the Furnace* I turn to below, also embraced the prompt to use synthetic materials in a manner that cut against this directive's celebratory symbolism. Synthetic synthesis is again thematized in his work *Formula*. In between wall-mounted addition and subtraction symbols, Borowski hung a disintegrating fragment of extruded polysterene foam (known as styrofoam). Here, thesis (+) and antithesis (-) culminate in a synthetic synthesis of flimsy, crumbling matter. Styrofoam also featured in Borowski's *Pakamera* (Packing Room), where it covered the floor of a room-scale installation. Viewers entering the room waded into styrofoam scraps piled one-foot deep and painted with neon lacquer. Ludwiński observed: "the Styrofoam floor screeched like a live organism and with every step, the environment's howl grew more unbearable."[38] Borowski's use of styrofoam activated its material properties, allowing the substance to speak for itself—a maneuver he repeats in *Offering of the Furnace* as detailed below.

Giving Back the Gift

It was in his action *Offering of the Furnace* that Borowski gave back the gift of patronage. While art historical narratives position Borowski as the Symposium's provocateur, he was also its key player: he was intensely productive (making multiple pieces during his stay) and was among thirteen artists to receive monetary awards. He even submitted a design for the Symposium logo, which indicates some level of support for its conceptual program.[39]

38. Jerzy Ludwiński, "Włodzimierza Borowskiego podróż do kresu sztuki," *Kresy*, no. 4, cited in the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw's online archive: https://artmuseum.pl/pl/archiwum/archiwum-wlodzimierza-borowskiego/1242 (accessed May 29, 2023).

39. Borowski's career-long friendship with Ludwiński likely explains his logo submission. On their rapport, see Borowski's commemorative texts "Jurek i Włodek w drodze" (Jurek and Włodek on the road, 2001) and "Metody Jurka" (Jurek's methods,

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In its monologic format, *Offering of the Furnace* restaged the speeches delivered by patrons at the opening ceremony and (as argued below) satisfied the expectations voiced therein in a manner so literal it was received as an affront. To reconstruct the event, I cite from Borowski's description (written afterward):

> Everyone gathers in front of the furnaces in an area designated with speakers. The scene is dark but for massive gas burners that roar loudly, illuminating the furnaces from below.
>
> After a moment, I climb metal steps to a platform. I am wearing a tuxedo. A uniformed worker with protective headgear leads the way. . . . I see vehicles pull up: the fire department, an ambulance, a police car.[40]

Borowski's tuxedo accentuates his social distance from the uniformed worker. Service vehicles register the presence of state authority.

> Spotlights illuminate the furnaces. They click on and off to the rhythm of a heartbeat. . . . I begin speaking into the microphone.
>
> I say that, entranced by the beauty of the industrial landscape, I feel I can do little but treat the object from which I am speaking as a work of art and return it, as such, to the Azoty management.

Borowski designates managers as his beneficiaries, signaling workplace hierarchies and manual workers' exclusion from the Symposium program. On the other hand, his "gift" presumes the Marxist principle of social ownership of the instruments of production: here, the power to determine the furnaces' ownership falls to whomever works on-site (Borowski as art worker; managers as representatives of Azoty personnel). State ownership is bypassed.

> I ask that the object be treated with care, for warning signs marking volatile materials hang nearby. To honor the moment, I begin to sing a song of my own composition with the lyrics 'Urea, urea,' pausing now and then to remind my audience of the warning signs. . . . [M]y enthusiasm peaks, and the melody segues into the national anthem.

In sheet music for Borowski's song (see Figure 2), measures where the tune shifts to the national anthem are crossed out but not erased, leaving this endorsement of the state visible but compromised.[41] Borowski did for urea what he had done for styrofoam in *Packing Room*: he gave it voice. He summoned the ignored substance by naming it (over and over again), prompting his audience to free-associate on the word as he sang. If his performance issued a critique, its articulation fell to audience members mentally deciphering his song.

2001). These and other texts by Borowski can be found in the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw's online archive, at https://artmuseum.pl/pl/archiwum/archiwum-wlodzimierza-borowskiego/1166 (accessed January 29, 2022).

40. All excerpts of Borowski's description are amended translations from where they appear in Leśniewska, *Puławy 66*, 45–46. The full description in Polish can be viewed online, at https://artmuseum.pl/pl/archiwum/archiwum-wlodzimierza-borowskiego/1219/79379 (accessed January 24, 2022).

41. I am grateful to Andrea F. Bohlman for her observations on the sheet music.

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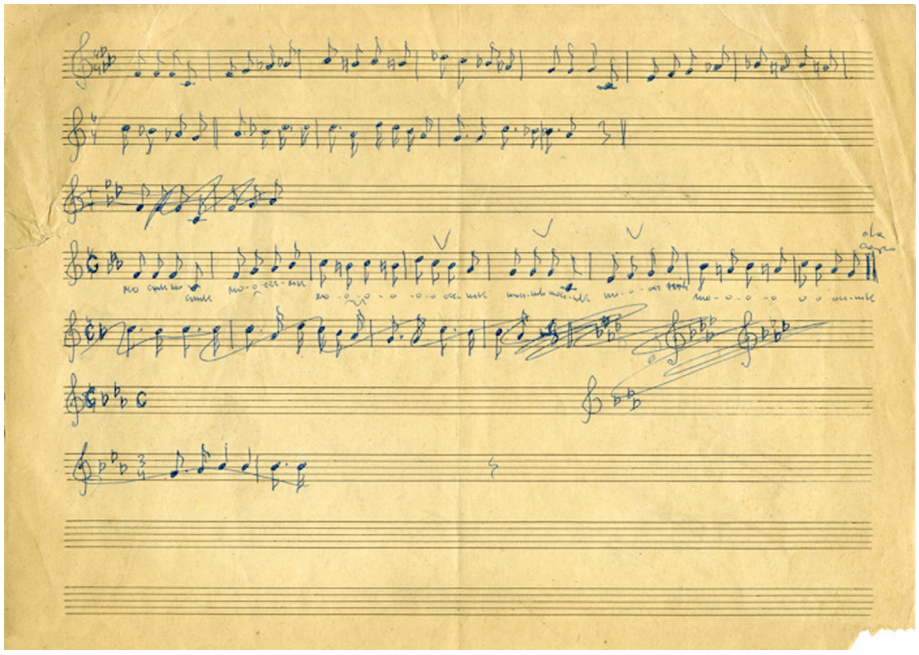

Figure 2. Włodzimierz Borowski, sheet music from *Offering of the Furnace: IV Syncretic Show* (1966), courtesy of Weronika Borowska.

One possible association summoned here is urea's role in biological waste metabolism.[42] Borowski had already established a parallel between machine and bodily functions by likening blinking spotlights to a heartbeat. The gifted furnaces mimic the metabolic process by which urea and ammonia are made in the liver when proteins are broken down into usable and unusable parts (in this sense, the *Offering* extends the analytical breaking-down of Lewicka's *Place to Think*). Alluding to the production of urea (to eventually be voided from the body as urine) was perhaps Borowski's way of "taking the piss" out of his patrons while formally matching their gravitas. This invocation of waste may have served to undermine the rhetoric of efficiency in the Symposium's technophilic messaging and to question the event's aspirations to social utility: despite its stated mission to democratize art, the Symposium did not measurably benefit the local workforce. Perhaps the whole enterprise was a misuse of resources. This reading of urea's significance is corroborated in Borowski's explanation (years later) of his activities at the Symposium: his goal, he claimed, was to undo objects' functionality by assigning them organic qualities.[43]

42. This theme guides art historian Rachel Haidu's interpretation of the performance. Rachel Haidu, "Humiliation and Resistance: Borowski's 4th Syncretic Show" (Works and Reconstructions, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, 2010).

43. This procedure inverted Borowski's earlier production of objects quasi-organic in appearance and titled Artons (*Artony*): "Just as I had formerly negated the 'Biological' by denying its logic, this time I negated the functionality of utilitarian objects by assigning

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This anti-utilitarianism is qualified, however, in notes written decades later, where Borowski muses: "[was the *Offering*] a provocation aimed at Art itself? Making some demand of it?"[44] In an official art system that showcased formal experimentation as proof that repressive cultural policies were in the past, artists who wanted to "demand something" of their work (to procure social use from it) faced an impasse. Should they retreat to socialist realist treatment of proletarian experience? If not, how to exit what Maciej Gdula calls the "ghetto of 'pure art,'" where formal provocations were applauded by officials provided they came without political commentary?[45] Borowski benefited from Azoty's patronage, even receiving financial compensation as an award laureate. It was reasonable to expect he might produce value in return: to *demand* something of his art need not be a compromise.

Borowski's description goes on to assess his (in)ability to reach his audience:

> I go into the crowd. . . . Some friends approach me to congratulate or console me. Most people try to avoid me.
>
> I feel their embarrassment and my own, their indignation and contempt for such a failed performance.
>
> The Director of the plant is outraged.
>
> An actor rushes up to me and shakes my hand, declaring this a perfect scene for reciting Norwid. He ascends to the platform, and poetic verse flows from the speakers.
>
> . . . I go off for a drink with friends, others stay to hear the Norwid recited in the hall.

Borowski choreographs his "failed performance" so that he is its waste product. What he *offers* is not the furnaces, which were never really his to give away, but his dignity. Expelled from the "playing field," he exits the plant grounds.

The performance ends with a register shift: a conceptualist experiment reverts to the cultural canon. An actor takes the podium to recite excerpts from romantic bard Cyprian Kamil Norwid's *Promethidion*—a poem in dialogue about art's position vis-à-vis its social system. Absorbed into Borowski's description, the recitation can be treated as the *Offering*'s final stage. Perhaps, then, something positive is achieved here: the power to speak passes to an audience member, who extends Borowski's reflections on art's social function in an entirely new way. Call begets response: Borowski cedes creative control over his work to its addressee. The monologic format of his speech phases into the dialogic format of poetry in dialogue. What begins as a conceptualist transmission for those within Borowski's "communicative community" opens to operate on plural registers.

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them organic qualities." Włodzimierz Borowski, *Pole gry* (exhibition catalog, Galeria Współczesna, Warsaw 1972).

44. (*prowokacja wobec Sztuki? Wymuszenie czegoś na niej?*) Włodzimierz Borowski, "Opis III i IV Pokazu Synkretycznego" in "Pokazy Synkretyczne. Po latach. Impresje" (handwritten manuscript, 1996): https://artmuseum.pl/pl/archiwum/archiwum-wlodzimierza-borowskiego/1703/79372 (accessed January 24, 2022).

45. Maciej Gdula, "KwieKulik: Defying Cynicism, Defying Anti-Politics," in Ronduda and Schöllhammer, eds., *KwieKulik*, 513.

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A 2013 reconstruction of the *Offering* by artist Oskar Dawicki leans into sarcasm as its salient affect. In *Offering of the Bunker*, Dawicki declared the site of a Wrocław museum to be a work of art and returned it to the museum director. Dawicki, overplaying his role in a glittering blue tuxedo, may have been apt to locate sarcasm in his source, but here, it becomes the *Offering*'s only note.[46] I suggest we instead contemplate Borowski's deadpan: an inscrutable affect that, according to Lauren Berlant, initiates a game of hidden meanings, engendering solidarity among all present by hinting at a "structure of feeling" (Raymond Williams' phrase) unstated but intuitively shared.[47]

Instead of achieving solidarity, Borowski's deadpan tests it. One possible interpretation of the *Offering* is that it elucidated social barriers dividing his audience. For this is what he documents upon his speech's conclusion: the audience separates from one unified mass into differentiated groups (Borowski's friends; the offended management; those staying to listen to Norwid). If the *Offering* was an experiment testing the Symposium premises, it did not verify the postulated synthesis between artists and industrial workers. Instead of unifying his audience, Borowski instigated a chemical reaction causing artists, managers, and workers to physically segregate like oil from water.

However, the closing lines of Borowski's description rehabilitate this undermined postulate:

> Preparations for this event were enormous: numerous meetings with Plant management, the Chief Engineer and Director of BHP. I am granted permission to use the machinery for artistic ends provided I abide by safety regulations.
>
> I learn about the technological procedures for producing urea. The engineer overseeing this process gives me a tour of the plant. I memorize all that I learn: chemical formulas, scientific nomenclature.
>
> Later, I spend hours with electrical engineers preparing the mechanism for the flashing light and making calculations for the strength of the lights and speakers. Tests; time spent walking around the furnaces whose sounds gave me my melody.

Borowski scrutinized the production processes his patrons had abstracted into symbols. To prepare his *Offering*, he spent substantial time with workers otherwise excluded from the festival. He learned from them, seeing the plant through their eyes and committing to memory their knowledge. In so doing, he performed a Marxist analysis of the instruments and technical relations of production by examining the material infrastructure determining labor processes at Azoty. He dialogued with workers of different rank, learning from those on the ground before addressing his *Offering* to their administrators. Relaying knowledge from managed to manager, he facilitated bottom-up communication that perhaps only "failed" due to the disingenuity of his addressees. Writing about the Symposium, Azoty's Director ("outraged" according to

46. A description and video recording of "Ofiarowanie bunkra" (Offering of the Bunker), found on the *Raster Gallery* website, at http://rastergallery.com/galeria/blog/ofiarowanie-bunkra/ (accessed January 24, 2022).

47. Lauren Berlant, "Structures of Unfeeling: *Mysterious Skin*," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28 (2015), 193–94.

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Borowski's notes) pledged his desire to overcome divisions between "producers of material and cultural goods." He saw integrating culture into the eight-hour workday as a "necessary countermeasure" against alienation.[48] Had these statements been sincere, he might have noticed that Borowski pursued these very goals.

These interpretations of the *Offering* (as bottom-up communication; as analysis of the means of production) will likely elude those privileging sarcasm as Borowski's sole affect.[49] This points to a methodological challenge attending the ephemeral Plein-Airs. The affects expressed when Borowski's friends "congratulated" and "consoled" him were transmitted through unrecorded vocal tone, facial expression, and body language. Klavdia Smola warns: "an inclusive perspective on the cultural history of late Socialism . . . requires an awareness of the whole laboratory in which it developed. Inside this laboratory, the aesthetics that we observe today is the trace of a lifeworld that is slowly disappearing into the past."[50] As the *Offering*'s diminished traces, sources like Borowski's description cannot divulge this event's full story. Scholars cement the work's passage from live enigma to inert artifact when they unquestioningly accept its status as sarcastic stunt.

By giving back the gift of patronage, Borowski rejected and obeyed the Symposium's premises. He obliged the stated wish to foster reciprocal benefit between art and industry by literally reciprocating the gift he had ostensibly received. In the same stroke, his re-gift repaid his debt, recusing him from an unstated relationship of mutual obligation. His over-obedience can be likened to the subversion of an aggrieved worker in that it resembles the tactic known as "work to rule": adherence to protocol so precise that it lowers productivity. Workers using this tactic undermine top-down directives while following them to the letter. To situate Borowski's *Offering* vis-à-vis its object of critique and gauge its correspondence to the state repression thesis, we must reckon with the peculiarity of giving back a gift: an ambivalent act that is both reciprocation and retribution. Counter-giving lays bare the economic logic that, according to Jacques Derrida, taints all gifts named as such, for with recognition come conditions (obligations to reciprocate) that annul the gift's alleged altruism.[51] Reciprocation is Borowski's way of naming patronage for what it is: a conditional investment expected to yield returns.

48. Azoty Director Mieczysław Kołodziej described worker-artist interactions at the Symposium as a reciprocal "shock method" stimulating a "beneficial reassessment of worldviews" (*pożyteczne przewartościowanie światopoglądowe*) in artists and "sensitizing the still-naïve [workers] assisting the creative process" (*Artyści . . . uczulili ludzi nierozbudzonych, asystujących i pomagających w procesie twórczym*). Mieczysław Kołodziej, "Piękne obowiązki," *Polska*, no. 11:42.

49. Among these multiple meanings, Borowski's intentions do not necessarily reign sovereign, for we can also privilege the performance's reception by his audience (or sectors thereof). This would be in keeping with Borowski's career-long tactic of self-effacement, which Piotr Piotrowski interprets in the context of the postmodernist death of the author (pronounced by Roland Barthes). See Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London, 2011), 192–95.

50. Smola, "Community as Device," 42.

51. See Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago, 1992), particularly pages 13–14, 26–27.

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Deft in his deadpan, Borowski made plain this logic without telegraphing its subversive implications. His audience was left to puzzle over whether the affront was obvious or not there at all. If the *Offering* was an insult, its target was contingent on complicity latent in its viewers. Patrons, managers, organizers, and artists could feel implicated, depending on their own (unconscious) scruples. This may explain the reflexive nature of Borowski's humiliation ("I feel their embarrassment and my own"): complicity, as Nader writes of the related affect shame, is powerfully contagious.[52]

Borowski is incriminated by his first deed: his agreement to attend the Symposium, which implied his consent to its premises. From this it does not follow that declining to participate would have been a stronger choice. Accepting and then returning the gift of patronage carries distinct critical power from rejecting it outright. Perhaps Borowski saw promise in an industrial arts patronage model that would, ideally, furnish occasion for artists to blend knowledge with other kinds of workers. Patronage systems compensated artists, assigning them roles within the class system as productive workers and removing obstacles for aspiring artists lacking access to inherited material or social capital.

Borowski's *Offering* calls for rethinking the moralized terms by which we evaluate individual choices in the socialist art system. Binaries opposing dogmatic and dissident art fail to capture this re-gift's ambivalences. Removing the state repression thesis from the premises of analysis clears space for a fuller story, even if Party power enters into the conclusions eventually drawn.

Giving Back the Gift, Again

Distilled to the formula of returning the gift of patronage, Borowski's *Offering* anticipates later critical interventions. In 1971, Zofia Kulik was invited to the Second Polish Plein-Air of New Sculpture (*II Ogólnopolski Plener Młodej Rzeźby*) in Legnica. The event showcased work by recent graduates of Poland's Fine Arts Academies. In the early 1970s, Kulik and her peers—representing a younger generation than Borowski's—turned away from conceptualism due to its erudite removal from social reality.[53] As the duo KwieKulik, Kulik and her collaborator Przemysław Kwiek identified as "art workers," a designation certain peers perceived as a threat to their creative autonomy.[54] Jacek

52. See Luiza Nader, "A Summons to See: *It Looks Pretty from a Distance*," trans. Eliza Rose, in Adam Szymczyk, ed. *Wilhelm Sasnal: Untitled (Reader)* (Cologne, 2022), 190.

53. Despite this generational difference, Kulik and Borowski's social and professional milieus overlapped: for example, Borowski participated in the 1971 Biennial of Spatial Forms (subtitled *Zjazd marzycieli* [Dreamers' Congress]) briefly attended by Kulik during the Legnica Plein-Air. When asked if she and Przemysław Kwiek were conceptualists, Kulik objected on the basis that conceptualism in Poland was "academic, turned away from the current conditions of reality, from concrete, contextualized existence." KwieKulik aimed instead to "expose the conditions" (*ukazywać uwarunkowania*) of the prevailing order. See: Tomasz Załuski, "KwieKulik i konceptualizm w uwarunkowaniach PRL-u. Przyczynek do analizy problemu," *Sztuka i Dokumentacja* 6 (2012), 79.

54. Wiktoria Szczupacka notes Dobrowolski's wariness toward this moniker in her lecture on KwieKulik's art worker positions. Szczupacka's approach aligns with my own in that she takes a revisionist stance against the state repression thesis (what she calls the

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Dobrowolski likened Kwiek to a "young Marx" when recalling his interactions with KwieKulik, writing: "... as 'art workers,' they were more ideologized than we were."[55] In what has been narrativized as a decade of cynicism, KwieKulik staked out space for politically committed art.[56] That Kulik and Kwiek's applications to join the Polish United Workers' Party were neither granted nor denied indicates that their Marxist rigor intimidated Party functionaries.

KwieKulik did not keep their distance from state patronage but used it, tested its limits, and resisted its terms. Tomasz Załuski has helpfully unpacked how KwieKulik pursued professional advancement within the system they critiqued to expose economic conditions of art work during socialism.[57] They produced a valuable record of the mechanisms of patronage (and its failure to adequately support working artists) by incorporating institutional correspondence into their art. This archiving work was hardly passive: by contesting unfair conditions through letters of complaint to funding institutions, they tested the state's receptivity to grievances from below. These letters were not protests but petitions: KwieKulik aspired to make their status official and negotiated for visibility and resources.[58] Nor were they naïve about the obstacles complicating this endeavor. In 1976, they addressed western artists operating on the free market: "Do you want to live off hairdressing or be a clerk? Or do you want full state support? This requires competent and risk-taking officials, that is, officials that keep up with artists. That is certainly utopian."[59]

Kulik's early-career participation in the Legnica Plein-Air previewed this tactical orientation. As the first major event she attended after graduating

"totalitarian approach"). See: Wiktoria Szczupacka, "Art Workers Between Avant-Garde Art Circles and the Cultural Policy of the Late Communist State—KwieKulik's Artistic Practice and the Issue of Work during the 1970s in the People's Republic of Poland" (paper presented at the conference "To the Left of Power? Radical Culture in Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s," Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, September 27, 2021). KwieKulik shared the term "art worker" with Gerard Kwiatkowski, who organized the above-mentioned Biennial of Spatial Forms. A rich record of activities related to this identification by Kwiatkowski, KwieKulik, and their peers is Kwiatkowski's five-volume zine *Notatnik Robotnika Sztuki* (Notebook of an Art Worker), (Elbląg, 1972–73).

55. Jacek Dobrowolski, "Counterculture, Hippies, and Alternative Social Movements," 512.

56. See Maciej Gdula, "Defying Cynicism, Defying Anti-Politics."

57. Their series *Earning Money and Making Art* is one example of how they absorbed commission work into their independent activities in order to expose their working conditions. See Załuski, "KwieKulik and the Political Economy of the Potboiler," 396.

58. For example, they continuously applied to obtain funds and official status for their initiative to document ephemeral art—Pracownia Działań, Dokumentacji, i Upowszechniania—PDDiU (the Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation). Their proposed budget included two full-time salaries for their labor. Their application for funds and related correspondence (drawn out 1974–80) is detailed in Klara Kemp-Welch, "Art Documentation and Bureaucratic Life: The 'Case' of the Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation," in Ronduda and Schöllhammer, eds., *KwieKulik*, 515–17. For an earlier letter of complaint addressed to the Minister of Culture and Art, see: Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, "Petition—Compliant" in Ronduda and Schöllhammer, eds., *KwieKulik*, 437–39. On their petitionary letters, see Załuski, "KwieKulik and the Political Economy of the Potboiler," 398–400.

59. Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, "Our Comments on the East and the West," in Ronduda and Schöllhammer, eds., *KwieKulik*, 446.

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from Warsaw's Fine Arts Academy, the Plein-Air was a career opportunity for Kulik. She agreed to attend but scrupulously documented her frustration with the event's hypocritical premises. The Second Plein-Air of New Sculpture was hosted by the metallurgical plant Legmet. Consistently with the industrial patronage model, Legmet donated steel from which artists would produce sculptures to be installed in the town as public art. While at Azoty, the emphasis on industrial materials had been mere prompt, in Legnica, it was a directive. In both cases, the transfer of resources from industry to art was to affirm the progressiveness of Polish industry and project an impression of abundance, for materials in deficit should not, presumably, be requisitioned for a cultural event.

Kulik, however, noticed that Legmet managers were reluctant to part with their metal and that city officials ignored their objections. She recalls the experience in an interview:

> The city was being underhanded. Abstract forms in this city were such an abhorrent prospect that I told myself, never in my life will I make such things. What a waste of material, first off. Economy of material is important to me. . . .So instead of using my apportioned products to design a spatial form, I went to the scrapyard.[60]

Kulik dissented to this seizure of industrial materials to yield art with no demonstrable public benefit. She objected to the festival's projection of harmonious cooperation between workers, statesmen, and artists, for in practice, its government patrons disregarded the concerns of Legmet staff.

Thus implicated in a festival with false premises, Kulik knew no single aesthetic strategy would negate her complicity. It was too late to extricate herself from the event. Seeking an ethical way forward, she performed a chain of actions contesting the event in different ways. Her first action was to give back the gift of patronage by returning her allotted metal to Legmet. Instead of producing a new object, she then photographed waste at Legmet's scrapyard to critique the festival's misuse of resources. Kulik had to negotiate the terms of this critique by filing for a permit (see Figure 3). She was granted entry to the scrapyard with a security escort. Kulik turned her camera on the guard to document this supervisory measure, but the resulting photographs do not villainize the guard as an avatar of authority. To the contrary, he poses cooperatively, as if flattered to be Kulik's subject (see Figure 4). He, too, was a Legmet employee who had been otherwise excluded from the Plein-Air program.

In a third gesture, Kulik moved metal from the scrapyard to a park where it was used in a temporary sculpture. Per Kulik's instructions, Legmet workers built an empty cube from iron rods and heaped scrap metal inside the frame. Photographs show workers poised over the skeletal structure, as if to evoke the Plein-Air's empty promise to include them in this cultural event. Kulik's scrap heap was the Kristevian abject twice expelled, discarded by the plant

60. Adam Szymczyk and Andrzej Przywara, "Niech archeolog nie odkłada łopaty. Wywiad z Zofią Kulik," *Materiał*, no. 1 (1998), accessible on Zofia Kulik's website: http://kulikzofia.pl/archiwum/niech-archeolog-nie-odklada-lopaty/ (accessed January 24, 2022).

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Figure 3. Temporary permit granted to Zofia Kulik, Legmet factory in Legnica, 1971, courtesy of the artist, Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation and Persons Projects.

and again displaced by Kulik. This negation of a negation produced no positive synthesis. One cannot un-ject the abject; the gesture is just as perplexing as giving back a gift.

Having performed these actions yet still dissatisfied with her part in the event, Kulik took aimless photographs without using the camera's viewfinder.[61] These four actions (returning the steel, photographing the scrapyard, moving scrap metal, taking unfocused photographs) did not cumulatively negate her complicity. The photographs' fuzziness conveys the lack of clarity in the Plein-Air's premises and the roles they assigned, where Kulik's role vis-à-vis the officials presiding over the event and workers conscripted into it was fuzziest of all.

61. Natalia Sielewicz and Łukasz Ronduda, eds., *Chleb i róże. Artyści wobec podziałów klasowych / Bread and Roses. Artists and the Class Divide* [exhibition catalog] (Warsaw, 2016), 50.

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Figure 4. Guard assigned to Zofia Kulik one day while she took photographs at the Legment factory in Legnica, 1971, courtesy of the artist, Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation and Persons Projects.

The Plein-Air coincided with a pivotal moment in Kulik's life and career. She left Legnica mid-festival to attend a summer retreat in Giżycko. It was here that she became involved with Przemysław Kwiek, with whom she would make work as KwieKulik until 1988. Together, they travelled to Elbląg for the Fourth Biennial of Spatial Forms, whose inaugural edition (as discussed above) had included industrial workers in artmaking.[62] Following the Biennial, Kulik returned to Legnica alone and resumed photographing industrial waste.[63] We can extend her sequence of actions in Legnica to include her departure and return (see Figure 5).

This chain of cumulating and self-canceling actions reflects the disorienting creative conditions facing left-oriented artists in late socialism: how does one protect and assert values that are declared but unsubstantiated by state institutions? How does one speak truth to power when sharing language with power?

These same questions weighed on artists attending the Puławy Symposium. Their interventions were not necessarily motivated by their

62. On the Biennial's diminished focus on Zamech workers after its first edition, see Eliza Rose, "Single-Minute Communities: Assembling Collective Agency with Paweł Kwiek," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 13, no. 1 (July 2022): 79–80.

63. She eventually sent one photograph to Kwiek. Luiza Nader cites this as an initial expression of Kulik's persistent affective intensity. See Luiza Nader, "Konceptualne afekty. Dyskurs miłosny 'listu z Mediolanu' (1972) Zofii Kulik," *Miejsce*, no. 3 (2017), http://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/konceptualne-afekty-3/ (accessed January 24, 2022).

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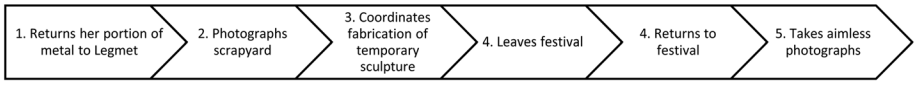

Figure 5. Zofia Kulik's actions at the Second Plein-Air of New Sculpture (1971)

rejection of the event's goals. To the contrary, many likely cared about broadening art's social relevance but doubted their patrons' genuine investment in this objective. To narrate such scenarios, the state repression thesis falls short. Kulik's negative and positive actions in Legnica express not her flat rejection of a corrupt system but her frustrated efforts to petition and improve that system. Załuski describes KwieKulik's activities as "ideological blackmail"—"a way of taking socialism at its word."[64] The potency of KwieKulik's art lay in its subversive adherence to socialist premises—a case of over-obedience much like Borowski's too-literal execution of the Symposium's goals. Kulik's actions in Legnica can be seen as attempts at arbitration that only "failed" because their addressees were not acting in good faith.

Surowiec's *Gift*

My last example of giving back the gift of patronage comes from 2012. I invoke it here as an action that builds on a legacy of responses to state support in the socialist past and reveals artists under capitalism to be no less dependent on fraught patronage systems. When artist Łukasz Surowiec was invited to participate in a festival in the resort town of Sopot, he proposed offering an all-inclusive holiday to several unhoused people from the Silesia region. If carried out, the project would have incriminated the festival sponsors by exposing social inequities glossed over and unmitigated by the event: like all vacations, this one would end, and the beneficiaries of Surowiec's "gift" would return home with no lasting compensation for their labor. The unhoused men would be put to work on Sopot's beaches, made subject to public gawking due to their assigned status as "art objects." The spectacle would have ridiculed all involved, artist notwithstanding. By proposing to relocate subjects from the poorer Silesian region to Poland's historically more affluent north, Surowiec also called attention to persisting socioeconomic disparities in post-socialist Poland.[65]

64. Załuski, "KwieKulik and the Political Economy of the Potboiler," 405. Załuski notes that their blackmail was ineffective only because by the 1970–80s, statesmen no longer cared about the socialist values KwieKulik petitioned to protect. Maciej Gdula relatedly argues that KwieKulik protected socialist values at a time when they had been abandoned by both the cynical regime and its newly anti-political opposition: see Gdula, "KwieKulik: Defying Cynicism, Defying Anti-Politics."

65. Using art to devise and test solutions that tangibly aid Poland's unhoused populations has been a recurring objective for Surowiec. One year after his proposal in Sopot was turned down, he carried out the work *Poczekalnia* (Waiting Room) at Bunkier Sztuki by converting the Krakow museum's basement into an all-access space open around the clock for people to use as they saw fit. The waiting room became, in Surowiec's words, a "prototype" for an "anarchic social space," serving as a self-organized shelter

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When the festival organizers rejected this proposal, Surowiec instead supplied the filmed action *Gift for God*. The festival's unstated function was to promote Sopot as a resort destination and accrue cultural capital for the city through association with the arts. *Gift for God* fulfilled these expectations: alluding to Sopot's marketing slogan "beach of golden sands," Surowiec used his artist's fee to purchase a bar of gold, which he melted down and reforged into rubble to scatter in the sand. By disposing of his fee, Surowiec gave away the gift of patronage. As an inversion of the stock phrase "gift from God," the work's title implies the return of a gift—this article's recurring formula. Giving back a gift sends conflicting messages: it is reciprocation, repayment, and insult. As Borowski did before him, Surowiec supplied these ambiguities but delegated the work of interpretation to his addressees.

Borowski's re-gifted furnaces, Kulik's slag heap, and Surowiec's scattered gold all summon the poetics of waste to reflect on art's utility. What differentiates these counter-gifts is an attitudinal shift. Borowski delivers his wasteful action in opaque deadpan. Kulik resents the wasted metal and regrets rendering no useful service to Legmet. Surowiec, likewise, wastes his gold to demonstrate that the festival budget could be put to better use. These changing attitudes may be explained thus: the desire to make socially useful art was gradually de-stranded from the mandate to do so (in a particular way) under socialist realist policies. Younger generations of Polish artists freely reflected on art's utility, whereas Borowski, wary of the still-recent past's doctrine, did so with ironic distance.[66] After socialist realism fell out of favor in 1955, certain artists and critics sought new bridges to social reality. Mieczysław Porębski (Puławy Symposium commissioner who participated in socialist realist and modernist programs) wanted the Symposium to furnish a "new basis in the world surrounding and co-creating art."[67] Magdalena Moskalewicz has shown how Jerzy Ludwiński and others retained the socialist realist principle of proximity to reality for post-Stalinist modernism, in part through industrial Plein-Airs.[68] As "playing fields" for state officials and artists, Plein-Airs furnished occasion for disparate groups to parse their competing understandings of their shared keywords and goals. They were venues for testing pressing questions: can the intent to make socially useful art survive the mandate to do so through codified style? To echo phrasing above, can one speak truth to power when sharing language with power?

That artists in socialist Poland were beholden to funders' interests is not unique: artists today remain dependent on patronage systems that elevate progressive ideas often to launder the reputations of corporate sponsors. In 2019, New York activists called on artists to boycott that year's Whitney Biennial.

for many unhoused Krakow residents. Documentation of *Waiting Room* can be found on the project's blog: http://dziadypoczekalnia.blogspot.com/ (accessed January 24, 2022).

66. For recent manifesto-like texts on art's social utility by Polish artists, see Artur Żmijewski, "Stosowane sztuki społeczne," *Krytyka Polityczna*, no. 11/12 (October 2007); Krzysztof Wodiczko, "The Transformative Avant-Garde: A Manifest of the Present," *Third Text* 28, no. 2 (March 2014): 111–22.

67. (*now[e] oparci[e] w świecie, który tę twórczość otacza i współkształtuje*), Mieczysław Porębski, "Udany debiut," *Polska*, no. 11: 42.

68. Moskalewicz, "Formula and Factory," 105–6.

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The demand followed the revelation that Warren Kanders, then Vice Chair of the Whitney Board, had amassed his wealth through Safariland—a company manufacturing tear gas and other munitions. Safariland products had been used against migrants at the US-Mexico border, against Indigenous water protectors in Standing Rock, North Dakota, and to suppress protests against the murder of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson, Missouri. Progressive values showcased in the Biennial were in flagrant conflict with the museum's funding source.

The artists, with one exception, chose to participate anyway.[69] Many argued that the onus should not fall on early-career artists to forfeit opportunities due to the Whitney's unscrupulous fundraising. Their predicament recalls that of Kulik who, as a recent art school graduate, had pragmatic incentive to accept a Plein-Air invitation. Two months after the Biennial opening, *Artforum* published a statement by Hannah Black, Ciarán Finlayson, and Tobi Haslett calling on artists to withdraw their work from what was now deemed "The Tear Gas Biennial."[70] Eight artists subsequently asked to withdraw art already on view. On July 25, Kanders resigned from the Whitney Board. The boycott, however delayed, worked: Kanders was pressured to resign.

This repudiation of institutional support was, I argue, as effective as the morally pure act of total boycott. The choice to withdraw from a compromising patronage arrangement exerts distinct critical effects from the absolute refusal of complicity. Consider the spectacle of the art's removal. One reporter mused: "We might just end up with a Biennial of empty rooms."[71] Nicole Eisenman requested to de-install her massive, crowd-drawing sculptural group *Procession* from the Whitney's sixth-floor terrace. This context transformed *Procession*'s meaning: it comprised multiple hulking figures moving as a group, some pulling others on systems of carts, pulleys, and cinch straps, as if the art itself, impatient for the Whitney's institutional cogs to turn, was carrying out Eisenman's request and slowly exiting the terrace. The cumbersome labor required to remove the sculptures and mitigate Eisenman's complicity reminds me of the scrap metal relocated by Legmet workers at Kulik's behest. *Procession* was not ultimately uninstalled, perhaps because the mere prospect of this spectacle expedited Kanders' resignation.

69. In dissent to "toxic philanthropy" and in solidarity with activists and concerned Whitney staff, Michael Rakowitz announced his decision not to participate in February 2019: Margaret Carrigan and Victoria Stapley-Brown, "'I stand in solidarity with the staff and say no': Michael Rakowitz on why he turned down the Whitney Biennial," *The Art Newspaper*, February 26, 2019, at https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2019/02/27/i-stand-in-solidarity-with-the-staff-and-say-no-michael-rakowitz-on-why-he-turned-down-the-whitney-biennial (accessed January 24, 2022).

70. Hannah Black, Ciarán Finlayson and Tobi Haslett, "The Tear Gas Biennial: A Statement from Hannah Black, Ciarán Finlayson, and Tobi Haslett Regarding Warren Kanders and the 2019 Whitney Biennial," *Artforum*, July 17, 2019, at https://www.artforum.com/slant/a-statement-from-hannah-black-ciaran-finlayson-and-tobi-haslett-on-warren-kanders-and-the-2019-whitney-biennial-80328 (accessed January 24, 2022).

71. Zachary Small in Neda Ulaby, "At Whitney Museum Biennial, 8 Artists Withdraw in Protest of Link to Tear Gas Sales," *Morning Edition*, July 21, 2019, at https://www.npr.org/2019/07/21/743993348/at-whitney-museum-biennial-8-artists-withdraw-in-protest-of-link-to-tear-gas-sal (accessed January 24, 2022).

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Artists and, moreover, scholars have historically operated within patronage systems and continue to do so today, for we rarely produce commodities we can take straight to market. Unable to sell our products ourselves, artists and scholars partake in a never-ending game of justifying our labor's value to patrons through grant writing, artist statements, and end-of-year reports. As one who writes about east European socialist culture, I approach artists' utilization of Party resources with the compassionate identification of one similarly reliant on compromised systems of support. To do so un-trains my eyes from the binary vision diagnosed by Yurchak—a post-socialist construction that, in the past three decades, has been used to sort complex dynamics of complicity and criticality into cleaner categories. By giving back the gift of patronage, Borowksi, Kulik, and Surowiec assert communication over conflict as an effective mode of critical engagement.

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