

Ingenious Dilettantes – Night Patrol – Punk in Poland.

Transgressions, subversions and détournements in experimental music and cinema in West Berlin, Warsaw and Łódź in the 1980s.

In the beginning of the 1980s, experimental filmmakers from underground scenes all over the world gathered in West Berlin, a dream city with a flourishing subculture. They invented a nihilistic cinema in the spirit of „no future“, „post-punk“ and „new wave“, using the super-8 film format, easily affordable and available at every flea market. They attacked both American capitalism and Soviet and East-European communism, using the city divided by the wall as a backdrop. This anarchic and undisciplined movement brought to life an unique style which was dreamlike, neurotic and electrifying, exploring the imagery of the city. Emerging from the West Berlin underground avant-gardes and from the feverish night life, this cinema combined a spirit of decadence and a visual aesthetics of decline with the radical post-punk music of bands and artists such as Die Tödliche Doris, DIN A Testbild, Einstürzende Neubauten, Notorsche Reflexe, Malaria!, Christiane F., Alex Hacke, Frieder Butzmann, Klaus Beyer, Sprung aus den Wolken, Kosmonautentraum, Mechanik Destruktiv Komandöh (MDK), Flucht nach vorn, Deutsch-Polnische Aggression, Mona Mur etc. Incorporating nascent synth music and free jazz, the cinema also invoked multiple collage techniques and experimental montage on the screen, incorporating unwittingly art movements that preceded it: the political photomontages of the 1930s, Dadaist cut-ups and Surrealist juxtaposition.

This movement of self-identifying Ingenious Dilettantes [sic!] arose from an encounter between filmmakers, artists and musicians. In the early 1980s, Berlin was home to Western artists such as Nick Cave, David Bowie, and Lou Reed, but also to Ewa Partum, Ryszard Waśko,

Wojciech Bruszewski and Luter from the Polish punk band Tilt. The intermingling of performers and artists proved a favorable environment for visual and musical experiments which crystallized in the first Super-8 video-clips and captured the energies of the moment. The cinematic style which emerged articulated a certain state of mind, reflecting a deep disillusion with political and social conditions.

A similar attitude reigned at the same time in Poland, which was placed under martial law,¹ always remaining connected with a belief in the possibility of creating another reality. Obviously Polish punk (just like the so-called Ost-Punk in East Germany) emerged under radically different political circumstances from those in the West, and the desire in the East to create another reality differed from the will to capture the immediacy of reality in West Berlin; in the East, what was at stake for participants in marginal cultures of performance and filmmaking was a search for fundamental freedoms, for self-determination, for a radical change.

In this essay, I trace how this cinematic underground, connecting West Berlin to Poland, on an imaginary level - through spectral resemblances and elusive connections, formulated its own particular aesthetics and the desire of transgression. Even a cursory study of its possible points of reference points the observer to the Futurism and Dada of the inter-War period; and such influences are named in the scene's founding texts and manifesti. A closer look also points to critical appropriations of the Situationist International, and to the ideals of the Solidarność Trade Union in Poland. And as important as these theoretical and formal predecessors may be, a no-future attitude on the one hand and an intransigent demand for freedom on the other were also important components of this cinematic, musical and performative aesthetic. Taking all these elements of the Ingenious Dilettantes' style into account, this essay reconstructs a moment in the early 80s when artists separated by the

¹ The martial law was a violent attempt of the communist government in Poland to crush political opposition in the country. Imposed on December 13th, 1981 by General Jaruzelski, it drastically restricted normal life: a curfew was imposed, the borders were closed, access to main cities was strictly controlled. Telephones were disconnected, mail was censored, all independent organizations and initiatives were persecuted, schools and universities suspended teaching. Thousands of intellectuals and opposition activists were interned. Although martial law in Poland was lifted on July 22nd, 1983, many of the political prisoners were not discharged and remained in prison until the general amnesty in 1986.

wall, in West Berlin, Warsaw or Łódź collaborated on a new transnational aesthetic, with one thing in common: a punk attitude.

In order to explore this commonality of purpose connecting people across hundreds of miles and spanning the Cold War's central dividing line, I would like to try to confuse this very precise moment in the early 80s in West Berlin and the ideological recuperation of punk by Solidarity as a major event in history. The aim would be to pose a simple question about coincidence. For instance: why do both Wolfgang Müller and Józef Robakowski, who have never met before and work in West Berlin and Łódź, respectively, begin working with amateurs, talking about the importance of dilettantism, and tracing the impact of immediate reality on individuals' subjectivity and creativity by practicing and theorizing a new kind of artistic practice and cinematic representation? In answering this question, I would like to try to anatomize this very moment in the early 1980s in West Berlin theorizing the explosive potential of apocalypse, dilettantism and changing reality.

1. Formulating an aesthetics of decline: *Die große Untergangsshow der Genialen Dilletanten*

On September 4th, 1981, „Die große Untergangsshow der Genialen Dilletanten“² took place in the walled-in city of West-Berlin and gave birth to the eponymous movement of Ingenious Dilletantes. „Die Große Untergangsshow“ or „Das Festival der Genialen Dilletanten“³ was the first of its kind, a huge spontaneous event gathering diverse artists searching for new modes of expression beyond any established categories. These performers, musicians, writers, and filmmakers distanced themselves from Critical Realism, Violent Painting, Neue Wilde, or even Post-Punk and New Wave. The festival took place at West Berlin's Tempodrom and featured artists and bands of the Ingenious Dilletantes' scene.⁴ As Wolfgang Müller, the festival's founder and theorist, as well as the leader of the experimental band Die Tödliche Doris,

described it, the festival sought to „both pinpoint and fight to the utmost the absurd division between high and subculture.“⁵ The movement of Ingenious Dilettantism – with its spelling error, the double-l, posed new questions concerning quality and judgment criteria, as well as transgression of limits in the arts.

With the book-length treatise *Geniale Dilletanten*⁶, Wolfgang Müller provided the festival with a philosophical and theoretical background. It was „a document of ephemeral artistic activities performed during the festival and a manifesto drafted by the protagonists themselves – and not by art theoreticians twenty years down the line“⁷. The book was published at Merve Verlag, which at the end of the 1970s was the smallest publishing company in Germany and principally known as the first domestic publisher of Foucault through his book *Mikrophysik der Macht*⁸ (1976); Merve would later publish other French post-modern philosophers, such as Jean Baudrillard, Félix Guattari and Jean-François Lyotard. These books circulated as bad quality copies and also, as Christoph Tannert recalls⁹, even reached East Berlin¹⁰. Some even made it as far as Poland – for example, Józef Robakowski had access to some of these publications already in the early 70s. Robakowski, probably the best informed and most subversive of all Polish artists at this time, often developed his artistic and theoretical activity with reference to the work of Christian Metz, Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, theoreticians following a structural or / and semiotic orientation.¹¹ These ideas circulated and reached artists, even if separated by the wall.

2. The invisible frame / The Wall

Jacek Lenartowicz (alias Luter) from the Polish punk band Tilt, who emigrated from Poland to West Berlin in 1981, remembered the city as an artificially sustained symbol of the so-called free West. You could survive with very little money, but in very poor conditions: with no shower or warm water, dependent upon a coal heater, confined

2 English: The Big Decline Show of Ingenious Dilletantes.

3 English: The Festival of Ingenious Dilletantes.

4 The above mentioned.

5 Ingenious Dilletantes?, Interview with Wolfgang Müller, in the booklet of the DVD box: *Berlin Super 80. Music & Film Underground West Berlin 1978–1984* (Berlin 2005).

6 English: Ingenious Dilletantes.

7 Idem.

8 English: Microphysics of Power.

9 Interview with Christoph Tannert, realized by Aneta Panek in Künstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin, 10.06.2013.

10 Christoph Tannert adds: „The study of texts by French structuralists took place not least within the underground review „Ariadnefabrik“. As we know today the publisher of this publication, Rainer Schedlinski, was a Stasi informer, which is revealing in every respect.“ Interview with Christoph Tannert, realized by Aneta Panek in Künstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin, 10.06.2013.

11 Łukasz Ronduda, *Pamięci Leonida Breżniewa oraz Sztuka to potęga Józefa Robakowskiego*, lecture at Audytorium / Kino LAB, 02.07.2003.

to dilapidated courtyards and squats. This environment did, however, offer great freedom to experiment with quirky and unconventional ideas in art and music.

From a geographical standpoint, West Berlin was situated right in the middle of the GDR and in close proximity to Poland. However, it remained mostly unreachable for most East-German and Polish artists. Nevertheless, some artists who had managed to emigrate from communist Poland lived in West Berlin beginning in the early 1980s.¹² The Wall turned West Berlin into an island, with its own cultural biotope. West Berlin was a radiant city with no closing times and an excessive nightlife. A very animate club and bar scene emerged, particularly in Schöneberg and in Kreuzberg. Key night-clubs and performance venues included Risiko, Mitropa, SO 36, Zest, Milchbar, and Swing.¹³ SO 36 was taken over by Martin Kippenberger and Andreas Rohe, and besides performances by local and international punk bands, it served as a meeting point for the Ingenious Dilletantes and the so-called New Savages (Die Neuen Wilden).

As Wolfgang Müller put it in his manifesto, mocking the slogans from the GDR:

Vielfalt statt Einfalt, Kleinheit statt Einheit. / Diversity instead of naivety, smallness instead of unity (...) The self-awareness of dilettantism and of the device: Everyone is a musician (Everyone is an artist! of Joseph Beuys) became an urgent reality.¹⁴

As Müller proposes here, the Ingenious Dilletantes' new attitude was based on stylistic variety and freedom, egalitarianism and do-it-yourself aesthetics. New bands appeared with their own style, rejecting the very idea of technical perfection and discovering new unbridled energy in their experimentation with rudimentary performance techniques and amateurish compositional methods. Imperfection and dilettantism, as Müller declares, could constitute a new stylistic norm. And thus in the early 80s emerged both the sound and the intermediality of the Ingenious Dilletantes, who expressed themselves in all available media, experimenting with

sound, film, live performance, painting, sculpture and drugs for a dreamed and expanded reality.

In the end of the 1970s, preceding and preparing the explosion of „Die große Untergangsshow“ in 1981, an experimental cinema scene emerges, producing distinctly unconventional and experimental movies. These films were made by artists looking for new, more immediate means of cinematic expression. It wasn't about perfection and eternity, but about the imperfect, the ephemeral, the here and now. It was about the importance of oneself and the immediate reality; about transporting a way of life: fast, spontaneous and free. This was not about universal truths, but about transmitting the essence of oneself into the world while remaining in one's own backyard with friends.¹⁵ Everybody began spontaneously to make their own films, sometimes awkward, sometimes brilliant – but some of them became true masterpieces of the cinema of the 1980s; art works and precious documents, a living archive of this time. Super 8 served as a tool to examine the immediate surroundings, the very reality. The motto was: Exploit situations!

3. 3302 – Nightpatrol – Punk in Poland : Encounters and coincidences / Bands and films

Christoph Döring's 3302, also known as *Taxi Film*, is an example of a film based on exploiting situations and on exploring reality. It is also an unacknowledged precursor of subsequent video clips, like for instance the music video segments *Night Patrol*, a dark, experimental song about the martial law from 1983, performed by Kora from the polish band MAANAM and responding in a strange echo to the angry and ironic *Jeszcze Polska*; a version of the Polish national anthem recorded by Mona Mur & die Mieter¹⁶ in 1982 in West Berlin. Especially the video clip for *Lucciola*, realized by Ryszard Lenczewski in 1984, a dark, intense song about love of a port prostitute, performed in deepest shades and with morbid intensity, visualized as a monotonous, neurotic tramway ride

¹² This was the case of artists such as Ewa Partum, Ryszard Waśko, Wojciech Bruszewski or Jarosław Kozłowski, who either emigrated or spent time in the city on DAAD artists-residencies.

¹³ A very precise mapping of these venues, was recently published as „Karte des MedienDenkens und -Handelns im West-Berlin der 60er bis 80er Jahre“, in: *Forum zur Genealogie des MedienDenkens* Bd. 1. Siegfried Zielinski im Gespräch mit Peter Weibel, Joachim Paech, Thomas Elsaesser, Florian Rötzer, Elisabeth von Samsonow, Hans Ulrich Reck und Boris Groys. Ed. by Daniel Irrgang and Clemens Jahn (Berlin 2013).

¹⁴ Die wahren Dilletanten, in: *Geniale Dilletanten*, ed. by Wolfgang Müller (Berlin 1981).

¹⁵ A phenomenon still existing in Berlin today for example in New West Berlin, Schokoladen, Zosch, or Club der Polnischen Versager.

¹⁶ Mona Mur with FM Einheit, Mark Chung, who was at that point the bassist of Abwärts, and Alex Hacke from Einstürzende Neubauten.

through the grey city of Warsaw, showing anonymous passers-by, streets and courtyards in a repetitive movement of the camera, creates a similar, surrealist, claustrophobic and ghostly atmosphere. 3302 also strongly reminds the exploration of reality performed by Robakowski in his movies from the series *My Own Cinema*, for example the movie *From My Window* (1978–99), showing simple observations recorded over the years from the window of the artist's apartment in a skyscraper-quarter of Łódź ironically called „Manhattan“, and showing the life of its residents, their every-day routine and the changes occurring in this grey and banal reality as time passes by. The film ends with images of a construction site of a hotel directly in front of Robakowski's house, to ultimately obscure the view from the artist's window. One could also recall Robakowski's video-clips from the 80s, for instance videos realized for the Polish underground punk rock band Moskwa.¹⁷ The group was founded in Łódź in 1983, during the period of martial law and symbolized the rebellion of the Polish youth against the regime, both with its provocative name and its song lyrics, which described the actual situation under socialism, without any self-censorship. Robakowski's videos juxtapose found-footage material filmed from the tv-screen, such as news-features showing Soviet military parades on the Red Square in Moscow, a fictitious cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin on the Moon, or the famous staircase scenes from Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*, with wild punk music of the band. Image and sound merge in a strange contrast to create a radical gesture of rebellion and liberation.

3302 was Döring's first short film, shot while driving in the streets of Berlin and featuring music by Mekanik Destruktiw Komandoh (*Berlin*), *Flucht Nach Vorn* (*Falle Tief*), and *Die Unbekannten* (*Perfect Love* and *Radio War*). For 14 minutes and 35 seconds of running time, the viewer follows the camera on a taxi ride through the city. The film was occasioned by Döring's actual part-time employment, (driving a taxi was a temporary job, as he



Die Tödliche Doris auf dem Carrot-Festival, Hala Gwardii, Warschau, 27.03.1987. Konzerttitel: *Noch 2 Vorstellungen*. Archiv Wolfgang Müller (Die Tödliche Doris), Fotograf: Zbigniew N. Laskowski.

17 Moscow.

had to finance his studies). He invited friends and strangers to step in and out of the camera shot, playing passengers. The repetitive monotony of the taxi ride through the city structures the film: the views of the empty AVUS, of the Straße des 17. Juni and the Messegelände against the light of the afternoon sun, a repetitive neurotic ride in which the taxi threatens to smash itself against the inside of the Wall encircling West Berlin, with GDR and nazi slogans sprayed on it, with music by Die Unbekannten and East-German radio announcements as a soundtrack. We also see Berlin at night with the inferno of lights and the speed of the taxi ride. The use of scratches on the film tape, as well as the prosaic and accidental quality of the framing, gives place to a fully new cinematic aesthetics; on view is the city's experience from the taxi as a self-repeating dreamscape. A particular fixation on repetitiveness and poetic of the city landscape, and on the other hand on decadent, vomiting, spitting and masturbating junkie guests;¹⁸ play with slogans and irony – all these give the movie a specific touch of punk aesthetics which would resonate in some of Döring's later collaborative work.¹⁹

Focussing on the same time and same place was *Passenger* – a movie made in 1985 by two befriended filmmakers: Henryk Gajewski, an artist and Remont Gallery manager from Warsaw, and Jacques de Koning, a Dutch filmmaker who spent time in Poland, then under martial law, because of his fascination with the Polish punk scene. The film, also known as *Punk in Poland*, documented the beginnings of the Polish punk band Tilt and was shot both in Poland and in West Berlin, recording the contrasting political situation and the similar punk attitude of the artists, expressing itself in alienation and anger, through their harsh music with deliberately offensive lyrics, going against any stereotypes, that would be the conventional society and popular culture and calling themselves „punk“. „Punk in Poland“ tells the story of two friends, co-founders of the band Tilt: Tomek Lipiński (Frantz) and Jacek Lenartowicz (Luter), who become

separated when one of them, Luter, decides to emigrate to West Berlin. The film contains beautiful, existential poetry by Luter, as well as a lot of gigs and live-performances featuring rebellious lyrics of the group and sounding like a sharp commentary of the actual reality. The viewer follows both protagonists: Luter in West-Berlin, as he tries to find a place for himself in the new reality and his attempts to found a new band together with his girlfriend Pola. And Frantz in Warsaw – in his everyday life, with no illusions about the future. We also watch a lot of archival material from 1979–1981, recorded in Poland. Historical concert recordings such as Tilt's performance of *Get Up, Stand Up* in Gdansk just a few days before the outbreak of the shipyard strikes that eventually led to the formation of the Solidarity Trade Union, are followed by scenes with Piotr Rypson, punk expert, art critique and curator (today the director of the National Museum in Warsaw) announcing bands at the legendary first Polish new-wave festival in Kołobrzeg. This footage intersects with the more personal and stylized, sometimes even naive staging of the interviews and the documentary part of the film. It begins with the statement of Luter saying: „You wanted to know why I left Poland... And I found that question very stupid, because for example if someone from Holland goes to Germany, no one asks him why did you leave Holland? I don't want to be treated like that – this is the man who left. I'm the man who is coming.“ We see him later in the streets of West-Berlin carrying an armband with an inscription „Ausländer“ on his jacket. Tomek (alias Frantz) is showed washing baby's nappies at home in Warsaw and saying: „Well musicians are like everybody else, you know they are just people. Maybe more sensitive but they are just people you know?“ And later: „The young ones, they have no illusions any more. People in my age, I'm now twenty eight, still may have some illusions, but the younger generations and those very young no more.“ The message is clear: „There is no future.“ But still the future, somehow, is already there: with a new life in Berlin

¹⁸ Ben Becker has one of his first appearances here, playing himself as a teenager and spitting directly into the camera.

¹⁹ During the production of this film project, Christoph Döring met Alexander von Oertzen, with whom he and Knut Hoffmeister founded the multimedia group Notorsche Reflexe (Notorious Reflexes) in 1982. They dedicated this project to seeking new ways to combine film with painting, performance and live music. In the following years, they performed as the Notorsche Reflexe in Paris, Amsterdam, Zurich, Oslo, and Bologna among other places. Döring made a lot of further experimental movies, such as: *Persona non grata* (1981), *Urlaubs-clip Afrika* („Holiday Clip Africa“, 1984)

or later *Krause oder ein beschriebener Film ist halt wie ein erzähltes Mittagessen* („Krause, or, a described film is like a narrated lunch“, 1988). During the 1990s, he made films for the German public TV station ZDF, as well as documentary features for the arte-series *Lost in Music*. He taught at the University of Fine Arts in Bremen, registered a patent for electroluminescent displays on flying objects, and now works as a programmer and web designer. (Cf. Ingenious Dilletantes?, in: *Berlin Super 80*)

for Luter and with a young family for Frantz. This film shows, how Polish punk developed in the context of a specific political moment stretching from before the birth of the Solidarity Trade Union to the declaration of martial law one year later, when the media were strictly controlled by the Communist Party, and any independent publishing or recording activity were subject to censorship and repressions. At this time, the Catholic Church had an important role as a space of freedom and commitment, as numerous art exhibitions, events and concerts took place in churches – even if obviously the content of the artworks presented or music performed had nothing to do with the Catholic Church.

4. Punk, Avant-garde and Solidarność

In 1980, the biggest Polish punk-rock festival in Jarocin emerges and is directly placed under the surveillance of the Polish Secret Service. The explosive potential of the Polish punk scene is immediately discerned by the official power. Polish punk was born as an act of rebellion against the oppression by the communist regime, and similarly to Western punk it represented an „alliance of attitudes“: of subculture and high culture, of the avant-garde art and the new energy of punk²⁰. As Łukasz Ronduda and Michał Woliński fairly describe it in their exhibition catalogue *Down with the Pimps of Art! Relationship between Art and Punk*,²¹ artists and punk bands worked together challenging even the most radical and progressive artistic groups, who declared their „engagement into the reality“ though, as an opposition to the „splendid-isolation-art“.²² In Warsaw, for instance, art institutions were used as venues for punk concerts, organized by among others the above-mentioned Henryk Gajewski, director of the Remont Gallery; as well as Tomasz Sikorski, the leader of Dziekanka Gallery; and Piotr Rypson, art critique and curator. They all had in mind a utopian model of an anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical culture.²³ The Polish punk scene's organizers worked together with the artistic avant-garde and

political opposition, and found shelter within Solidarność. In the beginning of the 80s, both Solidarność and Polish punk had one thing in common: an anti-totalitarian and social character. The Solidarity movement gained an important popularity in the Western world amongst artists and fans of punk rock. In 1983, for example, the British band Angelic Upstarts released a song dedicated to Solidarity; this was an homage for the workers protesting in the factories FSC Lublin and WSK Świdnik in July 1980 and in the shipyard in Gdańsk in August 1980, who for the first time openly stood up to the Communist regime.

Many artists and filmmakers in Poland saw in punk a welcome eruption of new vital energy, lacking in the art scene, a fresh and rebellious form of expression, much more appropriate to the social and political situation of the time. In Łódź, the filmmaker Józef Robakowski, became very interested with the punk phenomenon. In 1985 he realized *The Energetic Recording. Moscow and my Eye*, performing the Polish punk-group Moscow. His two most famous films, *Funeral of Leonid Breżniew* (1982) and *Art is Power!* (1985), were a subversive expression of a profound protest against and a negation of the political reality of the martial law, emphasized by the music of bands Laibach²⁴ and Moscow. Both are video art films based on material recorded by means of a video camera from the TV screen. These two films were a part of the series *My own cinema*, realized by the artist from the end of the 70s until the mid-80s. This series was, as Robakowski put it, „a way to remember myself, to hold on to my own mentality, my gestures [...] my psychic intensities, which appeared along with the reality“²⁵. And further: „My own cinema is a cinema realized when nothing else works [...] it is the direct projection of the filmmaker's thoughts. It's free from trends and aesthetical rules and from established codes. It becomes very close to the filmmaker's life.“²⁶ The same description might be used for the West Berlin films made in the 1980s by the Ingenious Dilettantes.

²⁰ From the very beginning, in Western countries, punk worked hand in glove with high art – the Sex Pistols were named after Malcolm McLaren's shop in the King's Road which was a scouting site for haute-couture concept artists, Patti Smith saw herself as a spiritual descendent of Rimbaud etc. This tension was present in the Western countries, as well as in West Germany, where figures from a variety of high art or avantgarde scenes seized on punk as a new expressive form (as Jürgen Teipel documents it in *Verschwenne deine Jugend. Ein Doku-Roman über den deutschen Punk und New Wave* (Frankfurt am Main 2001)). This was also the case in Poland, even if the political context was different.

²¹ Łukasz Ronduda, Michał Woliński (ed.), *Precz z alfonsami sztuki / Down with the Pimps of Art! Relationship between Art and Punk*, exhibition catalogue (Warsaw 2006). The exhibition took place at the Willa Warszawa, ul. Barska 29, from 26.08 to 01.09.2006 and was curated by Łukasz Ronduda and Michał Woliński, and organized by Piktogram and Archfilm.

²² Reference taken from the exhibition catalogue *Precz z alfonsami sztuki / Down with the Pimps of Art! Relationships between Art and Punk*.

²³ Idem.

²⁴ Józef Robakowski often commented himself on the choice of the music by the Slovenian (back then Jugoslavian) punk band Laibach: „Only a Polish artist could have had the mad idea of using a song by a Slovenian punk band performed in German for pictures shot on the Red Square in Moscow, filmed at home from the TV screen in the context of Poland under martial law.“ The pseudo-fascist/pseudo-futurist aesthetics of Laibach had a strong subversive character in connection with the pictures used for the film along with the political context of the martial law and a very difficult personal situation of Robakowski, who at the time was victim of severe repressions. From an interview with J. Robakowski, realized by Aneta Panek in Łódź 05.06.2012.

²⁵ After Łukasz Ronduda, *Pamięci Leonida Breżniewa oraz Sztuka to potęga Józefa Robakowskiego*.

²⁶ Józef Robakowski, *Kino własne*, in: *PST* (1989), p. 113.



Punks vor einem Lenin-Denkmal, Ost-Berlin, 1982. Fotografin: Ilse Ruppert.

It's the same research to capture reality with the simplest, the most immediate means. But surely we must concede that filming reality is mediating it. The adding of industrial and punk music and the repetitive editing techniques of the found-TV-footage material had a very strong subversive function. These realizations become what Marek Goździewski calls Video Art Clips,²⁷ referring to a title of a festival, that Robakowski organized in Łódź in the 80s.²⁸

Also other artists integrated punk attitude: Zbigniew Libera founded bands named Sternenhoch and NAO, together with Jerzy Truszkowski and Barbara Konopka. Filmmakers from the Film School in Łódź documented the scene, professional artists as well as amateurs: Michał Tarkowski, Andrzej Titkow, Mariusz Treliński, Piotr Łazarkiewicz, Andrzej Kostenko.

Akademia Ruchu, an interdisciplinary collective organizing live-performances linking visual arts, theatre and radical form of social communication, was also inspired by punk music – they were using it for their spectacles. *English Lesson* and *Other Dances* are two films produced by the AR in 1982, where music by bands Białe Wulkany and Brygada Kryzys structures their performative public protest actions. The street action of the AR at the documenta 8 in Kassel in 1987 was accompanied by a performance of Paweł Kelner Rozwadowski, active within punk bands Fornit and Deuter.

Art and punk were united in Poland by a strong ambition and the belief in a possibility of creating another reality, by a protest against power, dominating aesthetic, political and moral standards. No future in Poland in the time of the martial law had a different meaning than in the West; it was much more urging, hopeless and apocalyptic.

5. West Berlin/Warsaw, Łódź – Transgression and Subversion.

All these films had one thing in common besides the gesture of denial: the analytical interest with surrounding

²⁷ After Łukasz Ronduda quoting Marek Goździewski's, biographic note about Józef Robakowski accompanying the exhibition Międzynarodowa Kolekcja Sztuki Współczesnej CSW, in: Łukasz Ronduda, *Pamięci Leonida Breżniewa oraz Sztuka to potęga Józefa Robakowskiego*.

²⁸ Another possible parallel to Berlin with its festival of the Ingenious Dilettantes and to the experimental Film Festival Interfilm.

reality, but also with the structure of the medium itself. Throughout the 80s this interest was expanded in films, which engaged audiences through a semiotic analysis, by a critical activity of uncovering ideological elements of any message.²⁹ Artists were interested with an analytical investigation into the very nature of the medium – the Super 8, Video, and TV, unveiling its technique and rhetorical instruments. These films evinced a tendency toward demystification, often offering a deconstruction or a critique of a transported message, a need to uncover its contradictions and hypocrisies from within. For instance, the films might work at uncovering their objects' totalitarian origins, the pseudo-sacral celebrations of power, and mechanics of mass-culture. This kind of sabotage / subversion is constantly present in these works, and there are neo-dadaistic tendencies manifesting themselves in different acts of transgression aiming to trespass, disobey or criticize established rules. Often, a situationist *détournement* appears, meaning the reappropriation of signs of the mass media in order to uncover them and create radically opposed messages. There is definitely a legacy of Guy Debord and the Situationist International in this technique of subversively transgressing the meaning of a sign taken out of its context. Punk deliberately manipulated its own image, its cinema of transgression and its music in relation to media images (similarly to the films of Debord himself) handling them within the media stereotype in order to, as remarks Leire Vergara, criticize it from within the system, a strategy defined by Žižek as over-identification.³⁰

These characteristics inherent to the experimental cinema generated by post-punk subculture seem to be similar in West Berlin and in the Polish punk scene, which allows to situate these tendencies in the context of critical art of the 80s and, following the reading of Łukasz Ronduda,³¹ connects it with terms such as „postmodernism of resistance“ or „post-structural postmodernism“³². These terms, according to him, describe tendencies in the art, which developed in the opposition

to dominating at this time „neo-expressionistic“ and „trans-avant-garde trends“ which basically were a reactionary attempt of returning to traditional artistic values and forms. The same opposition was to be found in the West Berlin underground scene and in the Polish punk.

6. Conclusion: On Nihilism and Apocalypse

Let me end with a quotation from the last chapter of *Simulacra and Simulation*, by Jean Baudrillard, 1980, „On Nihilism“.

We are in a new, and without a doubt insoluble, position in relation to prior form of nihilism:

Romanticism is its first great manifestation: it, along with the Enlightenment's Revolution, corresponds to the destruction of the order of appearances.

Surrealism, dada, the absurd, and political nihilism are the second great manifestation, which corresponds to the destruction of the order of meaning.

The first is still aesthetic form of nihilism (dandyism), the second, a political, historical, and metaphysical form (terrorism).

These two forms no longer concern us except in part, or not at all. The nihilism of transparency is no longer either aesthetic or political, no longer borrows from either the extermination of appearances, nor from extinguishing embers of meaning, nor from the last nuances of an apocalypse. There is no longer an apocalypse [...].³³

Post-punk, new wave and subversion of the 80s appeared in a context of an impossible apocalypse as a voice that denied the very reality of the moment. The connection of this denial with an aesthetic of decline created an irresistible temptation to transform reality; and to claim that since nothing was possible, everything would be possible. The historical coincidence with the Solidarity Trade Union in Poland gave it a new moral sense. There was a legacy of commitment and a necessity of change. As Marcus Greil famously stated it in *Lipstick Traces*, punk reformulated a critique of post-modern society once proclaimed by the Futurists, then

29 Łukasz Ronduda, *Pamięci Leonida Breżniewa oraz Sztuka to potęga Józefa Robakowskiego*.

30 Leire Vergara, Big Place is No Place, Big Cry is No Cry, in: *1,2,3... Avant-Gardes. Film / Art between Experiment and Archive*, ed. by Łukasz Ronduda and Florian Zeyfang. Centre of Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle (Berlin 2007).

31 Łukasz Ronduda, *Pamięci Leonida Breżniewa oraz Sztuka to potęga Józefa Robakowskiego*.

32 Remark made by Łukasz Ronduda in the exhibition catalogue *Down with the Pimps of Art! Relationships between Art and Punk*.

33 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris 1981); engl.: *Simulacra & Simulation* (Michigan 1994).

the Dadaists and Surrealists, continued by the Lettrist International, refounded as the Situationist International – as an avant-garde political movement, seeking to recapture the ideals of surrealist art, which wanted a revolution by transforming the reality through the language, and using them to construct new and radical social situations. The Situationists achieved their greatest effects shortly before and during the student revolt of May 1968, when their critique was sprayed across the walls of Paris. In 1980, the Independent Self-governing Trade Union Solidarity was born in Poland, as a broad social movement, using the methods of civil resistance to advance the causes of workers' rights and social change. These kinds of ideological connections and circumstances are well known and were often declared in the history of punk. In the UK of the 1970s it was a widespread comment on punk subculture, Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols introduced situationist ideas, along with Vivienne Westwood's fashion and Jamie Reid's album covers, which intended to provoke a specific social response. In the Polish punk-artist's fanzine *Post* from 1981 Piotr Rypson compares punk to the activity of the Futurists and the Dadaists from the beginning of the 20th century. He is connecting punk with two decisive moments in the art history: the publication of the Futurist Manifesto by the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1909 in the Italian newspaper *Gazzetta dell'Emilia* in Bologna, and to the birth of DADA in Zurich in 1916, spreading to Berlin shortly thereafter and celebrating anti-art to be later embraced by Surrealism. He describes punk as a new tendency of an arrogant, non-conformist attitude of anti-art, a lap in the necessary and dramatic process of renewing culture. In *Lipstick Traces. A Secret Story of the Twentieth Century* published in 1989 – the year of all changes in the world order, Greil Marcus summarizes these affinities on one page, quoting no-future slogans of Sex Pistols, Henri Lefèbvre and Guy Debord: „Punk carries within itself a radical negation-dada, this event which took place in

a Zurich café“ (Henri Lefèbvre in 1975), and: „The art of the future will be the overthrow of situations, or nothing.“ (Guy Debord, 1952).³⁴

34 Quoted from: Marcus Greil, Preface from *Lipstick Traces – A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA 1989), S. 14.

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Toni Hildebrandt, Clemens Jahn,
Linnéa Meiners, Sandra Moskova,
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