

The Common Gestures

(cinema screening curated by Zofia Cielatkowska)

1 Natalia LL <i>Consumer Art</i> , 1975 original 16'01" (fragment 5'56")	5 Joanna Rajkowska <i>Oxygenator. Grzybowski Square in Warsaw</i> , 2007 18'05"
2 Ewa Partum <i>Active Poetry. Poem by Ewa</i> , 1971 5'53"	6 Agnieszka Polska <i>Correction Exercises</i> , 2008 8'02"
3 KwieKulik <i>Open Form – Game on an Actress's Face</i> , 1971 2'29"	7 Aneta Grzeszykowska <i>Polymorphia</i> , 2008 7'21"
4 Ewa Zarzycka <i>Standing Dialogue</i> , 2011 1'04"	8 Zorka Wollny <i>Unhum for 23 Musicians and 52 Passers-by</i> , 2011 3'49"
	9 Honorata Martin <i>Setting forth into Poland</i> , 2013 original 17'25" (fragment 5'56")

time: about 1 hour

Gestures are a form of communication relying on the body. They can have various meanings: from a simple 'yes' made with the nod of the head to a more complex sense in the art or life (for instance, in political protest). They can accompany speech or be a sign of disappointment with the language. Gestures, if made consciously, rely on a silent 'agreement' that there is a common space of understanding in which they are readable and accepted. However, this agreement is usually written into power relations – visible, as well as invisible rules.

Sometimes the silence breaks and it often happens through an *uncommon gesture* – a disagreement with the structures existing on various levels. Paradoxically, the uncommon gesture very often allows one to discover what is really common, and what the true rules and patterns are. The artists selected for this short screening make such uncommon gestures. They are either connected with disagreement with the existing artistic rules (Ewa Zarzycka) or patriarchal relations (Natalia LL, Ewa Partum). They may question the concept of the body norms (Agnieszka Polska, Aneta Grzeszykowska), or the emotional and physical borders between individual and the "others" (KwieKulik, Honorata Martin). They may also bring out the hidden structure of collective behaviours in the site-specific space marked by memory and history (Zorka Wollny, Joanna Rajkowska). The question of what constitutes the common gestures remains open.

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Source / Further info:

The movies and most of the (partially abbreviated) descriptions are from Filmoteka Museum // Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw: <https://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka>

All movies in the screening are shown with the consent and courtesy of the artists

Artists and Movies

Natalia LL (born 1937, real name Natalia Lach-Lachowicz)

Natalia LL's works are classified as conceptual art, photo art or body art. She works with painting, sculpture, installation, photography, video, performance and drawing. She lives and works in Wrocław.

Consumer Art, 1975

Probably the most notorious work by Natalia LL, *Consumer Art* presents models delighting in bananas, frankfurters or ice cream. Obviously, this seemingly innocent activity acquires a strongly erotic edge. The combination of a 'cold' film recording with a 'hot' sensual motif stands for a rejection of the purely analytical character of conceptual art. In the 1960s and 1970s, Natalia LL was one of the first artists to step forward and criticise conceptual art for its excessive rationalisation and avoidance of physical sensuality. In *Consumer Art*, she also refers to the imagery of popular culture, where consumption and erotic motifs are often paired. However, in the 1970s, Polish communist mass culture was highly puritan and the products consumed by the model difficult to reach, paradoxically, the film might have had the adverse effect of actually promoting consumption. On the other hand, the active role of the model in the film is in sharp contrast with the mass culture's fixed image of women as passive 'objects of erotic contemplation'. In *Consumer Art*, the classic paradigm of domination of one sex over another is reversed: it is the woman who takes an active role, while masculinity is reduced to mere products of phallic shape.

Ewa Partum (born 1945)

Ewa Partum is one of Poland's most prominent conceptual artists from the turn of the 1970s, who was a forerunner of feminist art in Poland. She is the author of performances, activities in public space, experimental films, and visual poetry.

Active Poetry. Poem by Ewa, 1971

The poetic work of Ewa Partum consisted in scattering single letters of the alphabet in non-artistic spaces: be it the open air, the sea, or an underpass. This gesture led to the deconstruction of language, whereupon grammatical, syntactic and semantic structures were used to determine certain patterns of an artistic statement. Her poems were shaped by coincidence, which made their language more open and process-oriented. The confrontation with the elements associated with femininity (water, wind) made it possible to face the patriarchal patterns rooted in the language.

KwieKulik (1971–1987)

KwieKulik is an artistic duo formed in 1971–1987 by Zofia Kulik (born 1947, Wrocław) and Przemysław Kwiek (born 1945, Warsaw). The artists started out as Oskar Hansen's students at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. From the early 1970s, they tried to give a radical political twist to Hansen's Open Form theory and practice, and their strategy combined artistic activity with everyday life. At the turn of the 1970s, they belonged to the first generation of Polish artists who rejected traditional means of expression in order to focus on media and the mechanical recording and reproduction of images.

Open Form – Game on an Actress's Face, 1971

Is one of nine sequences of a film realised by a group of students between 8 and 14 February 1971. This scene from Open Form, entitled *Game on an Actress's Face*, presents a multi-layered reflection on processuality, participation, media and mediatisation. Using the 'public face' of an actress as if it was a neutral surface for a collective and collaborative artistic act, this first example of a processual Visual Game instructed participants to perform successive moves on this premise. Given that each move, each 'utterance' influenced the next one and modified the original situation, the rule was to react to others' moves, opening new possibilities for others to express themselves or narrowing their scope. The collective

Activity established a form of visual language. The camera shows a close-up of the actress's face, the 'players' remain outside the frame.

Ewa Zarzycka (born 1953)

Ewa Zarzycka is mainly known for her spoken or narrated performances which might also be treated as an artistic process, self-analysis and confession. Apart from that, she works with film, sound recordings, drawings, and installations.

Standing Dialogue, 2011

During the 1990s and in the first decade of the 2000s, instead of continuing to make films, Zarzycka focused on her performative activity. Her performances were documented on videotape by the hosting institutions or by friends, mainly Józef Robakowski. Many of these recordings are in his archives. Around 2010 Zarzycka returned to filmmaking. In 2011 she made a series of short videos. In general, these films deal with the overproduction of art and its repetitiveness. *Standing Dialogue* is one of these examples.

Teresa Murak* (born 1949)

Teresa Murak was one of the first Polish artists to work with performance, land art, and activities in public space. Her performances evoke the notion of landscape, its relation with the human body, and emotional ties with the ecosystem. They are usually connected with earth and seeds (mostly cress) and seem to be a ritual of sorts.

*Her works are not in the screening programme, but she is an important artist in this context.

Joanna Rajkowska (born 1968)

Rajkowska creates public projects, objects, films and installations, as well as ephemeral actions and non-gallery situations. The artist's best-known works – *Greetings from Aleje Jerozolimskie* (the popular palm tree that has been standing in Warsaw's de Gaulle roundabout since 2002) and *Oxygenator* (2006–2007) took the form of social sculptures in public spaces of Warsaw. Rajkowska's projects often rely on work in a specific location which has a historical or ideological burden, or is scarred by a lack of identity, trauma, or suppression.

Oxygenator. Grzybowski Square in Warsaw, 2007

Joanna Rajkowska's *Oxygenator*, a public project in the centre of Warsaw, took place on a green square in Grzybowski Square in Warsaw from July through September 2007. In the middle of the lawn, a 140 square metre-large, 1 metre-deep pond was arranged, surrounded by greenery, shrubs and water lilies, and equipped with air-ozonating and fog-creating equipment.

Grzybowski Square is a place suspended between different temporal orders, architectural layers, and social groups. There is a synagogue nearby and a church, corporate offices, and small hardware stores. All these layers meet physically in the same space, but they are unconnected. Their residents pass each other every day, but they do not communicate – their common space is virtually non-existent. Joanna Rajkowska's *Oxygenator* was an attempt to create a place exempt, as it were, from the dominant conventions, a place that would be virtually ideal, an enclave of fresh air in the centre of the city. Its temporariness, unusualness, lack of a pre-adopted script create a space that only others can fill. In this project, the artist makes the initial gesture, which is then developed and interpreted outside of her control.

Agnieszka Polska (born 1985)

Agnieszka Polska creates videos, animations and photographs. In her works, she employs archival sources, fabricated visual materials and stylized paintings created a few decades ago. The subject of Polska's work is often the history of art – especially the 1960s and 70s. She is interested in its myths, legends that are difficult to verify, as well as the mechanisms of remembering and denial in the system of constructing artistic canons.

Correction Exercises, 2008

In *Correction Exercises*, the artist made use of photographs found in old books on medicine. The aesthetic appeal of these photographs – low resolution and slight blurriness – makes the film seem like an old

documentary. Agnieszka Polska's animated films rely on illustrations and photographs found in pre-war press and publications on the art of the 1960s. The artist sets the archival material in motion, performing subtle colour-related interventions, and presents them in an entirely new context, manifesting the 'afterlife' of the seemingly dated archives.

Aneta Grzeszykowska (born 1974)

Aneta Grzeszykowska works with photography, object art, and film. The artist has often teamed up with Jan Smaga, which resulted in the well-known architectural photography projects *Plan* (2003) and *YMCA* (2005).

Grzeszykowska's individual works mostly concentrate on defragmenting the body and memory.

Bolymorphia, 2008

In *Bolymorphia*, we witness a constant multiplication of Anetas, which create decorative choreographic arrangements, one after the other. All this happens to the rhythm of the *Bolero*, onto which the artist has superimposed the composition *Polymorphia* by Krzysztof Penderecki, perfectly disrupting and deconstructing the drive towards culmination in the classic Maurice Ravel piece. In this video, with every minute, the artist's body becomes more and more like a machine, an element of a perfectly working clock mechanism, or an ornament, to the extent that at some point a new 'organism' emerges, with the many Anetas playing the role of head, hands, torso, and legs. (Music: Krzysztof Penderecki, *Polymorphia*, 1961; Maurice Ravel, *Bolero*.)

Zorka Wollny (born 1980)

Zorka Wollny creates acoustic compositions for institutions, factories and empty buildings. Her works inhabit a space between art, theatre and contemporary music, and are always closely connected to the historic and functional context of specific architectural sites.

Unhum for 23 Musicians and 52 Passers-by, 2011

The performance's aim was to spread a symphonic piece throughout the space of the main street in Lodz - Piotrkowska, the city's most recognizable symbol. Artur Zagajewski's *Unhum*, originally meant to be performed in the city's philharmonic hall, was recomposed according to this specific situation and the site's acoustics. The location of individual instruments was dictated both by the acoustics, as well as by the availability of flats/offices from where the musicians played. Sounds coming from within the street: actions of performers and accidental passers-by functioned as a counterpoint to the defined structure of the symphonic piece.

Honorata Martin (born 1984)

Honorata Martin is a painter, performer, and multimedia artist. She employs different forms of art. The starting point of her work is observation. She is interested in the strong emotions that accompany fighting our own limitations and fears, searching for the limits of psychological, physical and emotional strength, which she tries to present through both brutal and humorous forms.

Setting forth into Poland, 2013

Setting forth into Poland is a two-part project that comprises the artist's personal experience and a video documentation. Martin began her journey across Poland having left everything that defined her social status. All she took was a change of clothing, a sleeping bag and her dog. The artist started her march in Gdańsk and covered 30 kilometres per day, visiting small towns and asking local residents for shelter and assistance. Part two involves a documentary made by the artist – a unique atlas of second-class Poland, and a record of a radical existential experience, depersonalisation and fear.