

## THE ART OF EFFICIENCY: KWIEKULIK'S REFLECTIONS ON THE ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF THEIR WORK

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That KwieKulik (1971–1988), the artist duo formed by Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, were also a couple in their private life and lived and worked in a joint household throughout the duration of their collaboration is crucial to the form and mode of production of their work. It is because of this fact that KwieKulik were able to intertwine their everyday and artistic activities in their performances, photos, and installations, as well as in the archive of ephemeral Polish art of the 1970s and '80s that they maintained in their Warsaw apartment (Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation / Pracownia Działań, Dokumentacji i Upowszechniania – PDDiU). The duo's artistic work had a semi-public existence in state-socialist Poland. Even if it was not exhibited in prestigious state-run museums, the cultural situation in Poland in the 1970s was quite liberal, and there were some possibilities for innovative artists such as they were to exhibit work. On the one hand, KwieKulik were able to show it in avant-garde institutions such as the Galeria Repassage or the Galeria Remont (both in Warsaw), often financed by student organisations and tolerated or even sometimes supported by the state. On the other hand, KwieKulik used their apartment as a locus for artistic interventions and for encounters with invited guests. In the following, I will show how various dimensions of the concept of 'economy' in the life and work of the couple are addressed in their art: On the one hand, commissioned so-called "potboiler" work and domestic household activities are shown as economic conditions underlying artistic work. On the other hand, their artistic work itself is deliberately governed by an economic ideal of efficiency.

**THE ECONOMICS OF COMMISSIONED WORK** — Worth recalling first of all is KwieKulik's engagement—unique in the Polish art of the 1970s—with the "political economy of the potboiler," as Tomasz Załuski puts it. The latter is referring to the artists' activities thematizing the harsh economic conditions of their precarious existence (Załuski 2018b). Under state socialism, no free art market existed in Poland, making it almost impossible for artists to make a living by selling their work. Instead, they were dependent on state commissions, an arena in which young and politically disfavored artists such as Kwiek and Kulik were discriminated against, e.g. in being refused commissions or in being assigned

the execution of third-rate propaganda works such as decorations for socialist festivities or commemoration plaques (pol. *Chaltura*, eng. Potboiler work or hackwork). Załuski describes KwieKulik's artistic approach to this situation as follows: "While executing such potboiler commissions, KwieKulik also created their ephemeral and documented 'activities.' They combined potboiler works with their experimental artistic practice in order to show that they were able to 'act efficiently' within given conditions of life and artistic production and, at the same time, critically expose those very conditions. This was a way to combine 'art and life' under socialism. Such joint works were called [by KwieKulik] Earning and Creating" (Ibid.: 396).

— An example from the category of *Earning and Creating* is the extensive series of black-and-white photographs and color slides from 1974 entitled *Activities with AK Kinga Plaque* [figs. 1 & 2].<sup>1)</sup> In this work, a memorial plaque produced by the duo to honor AK Kinga [fig. 3] – the resistance group murdered by the Nazis during World War II – serves as the literal basis for various ephemeral activities (pol. *działania*), which were carried out during the production of the plaque in the state studio the artists were allowed to use for their potboiler work, with the aid of diverse materials and objects such as paper, plaster masks, and fruit. The arrangements were made without an audience, for the camera only; they were recorded on photographs and slides, preserved in the artist's archive, and shown in changing combinations in slide presentations and exhibitions. Some of the arrangements articulate a humorous but trenchant critique of the Polish art institutions of the time and of their representatives, while others exhibit a similarly playful but more enigmatic character.

An example of the more critical work is the slide with the casually inscribed strips of paper laid on a slab in such a way that they complete words already chiseled into the sandstone [fig. 1]. In the works involving writing, KwieKulik play with the semantics of words, altering the plaque's intended message through their own interpolations. In this 'reworked' version, the solemn memorial plaque bears an ironic inscription: "Here ZK [Zofia Kulik] and PK [Przemysław Kwiek] died a heroic death at the hands of middlemen, art critics, cultural activists, MKiS [Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki / Ministry of Culture and Art] officials Czartoryska, Skrocki, director Ubranowicz, Oseka, Stanisławski." As Załuski aptly observes,

1) In the publication containing the most comprehensive catalogue to date of the duo's works, the series is listed as number 068 and illustrated with more than fifty photographs and slides of various activities; see Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 170–177.



// Figure 1 & 2  
KwieKulik, *Działanie with AK Kinga Plaque* – Earning and Creating, 1974

“[f]or a short—but well-documented—moment, the potboiler work became a critique and an indictment of the Polish institutional ‘artworld’ [sic] of the 1970s, represented there by the names of its leading protagonists” (Ibid.: 397–8).<sup>2)</sup> Less clear in its meaning is the slide with fragments of plaster masks and pieces of orange and grapefruit distributed relatively evenly across the plaque [fig. 2]. Cut up in various ways and hence fragmented, the masks look as if they are partially submerged in the plaque, while the pieces of fruit suggest little boats “floating” on its surface. Here, too, the semantic meaning—of things rather than words, in this case—is presented as context-dependent: In the neighborhood of “sunken” masks the pieces of orange turn into boats. Works such as this one do not employ strategies of institutional critique or directly refer to political conditions. Rather, they deal with self-reflexive artistic questions, at least on the level of the pictorial motif. Their critical significance thus lies at the superordinate level of production. By contrasting the playful, ephemeral interventions with the conventionality of the memorial plaque, the works show how formulaic the forms of official commemoration have become. And last but not least, through their juxtaposition of the commissioned work with their own artistic activity, KwieKulik draw attention to the impossibility of artists’ making a living from their art proper.

— Furthermore, the couple’s engagement with the economic conditions of artistic work under state socialism led them to adopt a specific perspective on the situation of artists under the capitalist economic system, a view they expressed in the text “Our Comments on the East and West” (“Nasze uwagi o Wschodzie i Zachodzie,” 1976) addressed to their Western colleagues (Kwiek / Kulik 2012c). After first depicting the unappealing economic constraints at play in their own lives as artists under Polish state socialism, they write:

“One feels like saying: Why complain about business in art? Be happy that you have the hope that your art will be bought one day and that will enable you to keep on living

2)

The text of the manipulated plaque reads: “In this very place ZK and PK died a hero’s death at the hands of mediators, art critics, cultural activists, Ministry of Art and Culture officials, Czartoryska, Skrodzki, Oseka, director Urbanowicz, and Stanislawski”; *ibid.* Załuski’s text also contains a detailed account and excellent analysis of KwieKulik’s engagement with the political and economic conditions of artistic work in socialist Poland.



// Figure 3

KwieKulik, *The unveiling ceremony of the AK Kinga Plaque with the participation of scouts and war veterans, 103 Solec Street in Warsaw, April 4, 1974*

and making art. [...] Is business in art not better than a constant division between a) making art and b) earning one's living + earning to finance one's art + earning to finance its distribution? 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 utopia. We find this strange: the constant opposition to business, commercialization, but these 'oppositions' keep becoming marketable commodities. If you eliminate business from art and eliminate the necessity of earning one's living outside art, the result will be to reject money as an equivalent of work and potential possibilities" (Ibid.).<sup>3)</sup>

3)

KwieKulik's relationship to the West, or to the geopolitical division into East and West, is explored in detail in Załuski 2014: 19–41.

4)

"Activitation" is the translation used in the abstract for Jakubowska 2018. "Actioning" is employed in Szczupacka 2019: 99–115.

Even if KwieKulik lacked detailed knowledge of the economic constraints that existed beyond the "Iron Curtain" and thus ran the risk of idealizing the Western system, their position outside the capitalist market economy enabled them to discern the contradictions of the attitude toward "business" in which their Western colleagues were (and still are) entangled. For KwieKulik, who otherwise sympathized with communism, participating in the market meant potentially being freed from the need to carry out state commissions and hence from dependence on state institutions.

**THE ECONOMICS OF DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES** — In addition to their examination of the economics of commissioned work, the theme of seemingly banal, repetitive, everyday activities as a condition of creative labor is central to KwieKulik's engagement with art's economic dimension. After the separation of the duo in 1988, Zofia Kulik continued to address this constant bustle of everyday life and work in her art, and in the 1990s coined the term "czynnośćowanie" (translatable into English as "activitation" or "actioning")<sup>4)</sup> to designate this ongoing busy-ness that conditions our lives. In this neologism she turns the noun "czynność" (activity) into a term for a monotonous, repetitive behavior. For Kulik, "activitation" denotes "an inner urge to constantly 'do something' and the resulting ongoing performance of a range of activities that are [...] necessary for the maintenance of the collection and the surrounding environment" (Jakubowska 2018). In a discussion of two films produced in 2016 and 2017 that associate Kulik's on-going maintenance of the archive with the domestic activities of her mother, Agata Jakubowska points out that "activitation" has an economic dimension, in addition to an existential one (Ibid.). The films show how



Kulik's mother, who was living with her daughter at the time, takes care of the household while the artist herself organises her archive. According to Jakubowska, they present the division of labor as the basis of art's symbolic and financial capital. Additionally, they also exhibit another economic aspect of "activation": that it resists the neoliberal imperative of productivity characteristic of the post-socialist, newly capitalist societies among which Poland has belonged since 1989 (Ibid.).

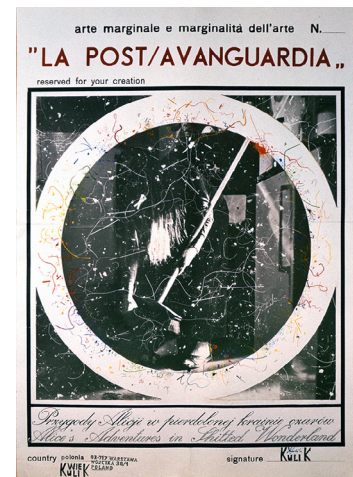
— Indeed, Kulik addressed the division of labor and "activation" as conditions of life and work long before she coined the latter term and before the end of state socialism. As early as 1977, she created the mail art collage *Alice's Adventures in Fucked Wonderland* [fig. 4], the center of which is occupied by a photograph of a woman deeply bent-over, sweeping the floor. As Wiktoria Szczupacka and Agata Jakubowska observe, in this essentially unrecognizable self-portrait—as in a number of works created together with Kwiek during the same period—Kulik is referring to the practical and domestic aspects of her everyday life and work (Jakubowska 2018; Szczupacka 2019). Tidying and cleaning but also the laborious task of shopping for groceries<sup>5)</sup> were among the latter's indispensable components.<sup>6)</sup> Interestingly, Szczupacka interprets the attitude toward housework expressed by Kulik in this collage as eminently positive. In her view, the artist's frustration, reflected in the expletive of the title, with the workings of "wonderland" (which Szczupacka interprets as the milieu of the Warsaw neo-avant-garde) is aimed at the "inability [of the neo-avant-garde] to acknowledge the 'menial' work necessary for its own survival" (Szczupacka 2019: 114). According to Szczupacka, the artist here expresses her frustration with the absurd rules that prevailed in the circles of the neo-avant-garde, where material labor (here: cleaning the room), which was mostly done by women like Kulik herself and which underlay the production and presentation of art, was negated and went unnoticed while male artists led public discourses. Szczupacka places the collage in the context of statements made later by Kulik, in which the latter expresses her appreciation of housework as a form of anxiety management or meditation, and describes the supporting role she played in her artistic milieu, which was dominated by men and their abstract discourse. In this context, Szczupacka reads Kulik's *Alice* as a "call for recognizing [cleaning] as an important form of contributing to collective well-being—as commitment expressed in a different language [...] other than by excelling in public debates" (Szczupacka 2019: 114–15).

5)

One aspect of the economics of KwieKulik's artistic work was the fact that their groceries were provided by Kulik's mother, which enabled them to use their extremely limited financial resources for artistic materials. See Jakubowska 2018.

6)

This is also emphasized by the artist in a number of interviews; for example, in Kwiek / Kulik 2012a, as she describes cleaning the apartment after potboiler works as an onerous task.



// Figure 4

Zofia Kulik, *Alice's Adventures in Fucked Wonderland*, 1977

—— Jakubowska and Szczupacka emphasize Zofia Kulik’s positive attitude toward household tasks in the 1977 collage as well as in the films made forty years later. In contrast to their interpretations, however, I seek in what follows to differentiate more strongly between the early work and the late. I will focus on the negative side of the deeply ambivalent meaning that daily house-keeping had for Kulik and KwieKulik in the 1970s. For instance, it can hardly be denied that, with its crude choice of words, the title itself—*Alice’s Adventures in Fucked Wonderland*—casts the cleaning displayed in the photograph in a negative light. Even if it is not the act of sweeping itself that is referred to as “fucked” but rather its setting, the image unquestionably links this description to the action displayed. Why else should viewers perceive the wonderland as “fucked” if not because of the activity imposed on the photograph’s heroine, particularly since she is carrying it out in a borderline-uncomfortable position and with no sign of pleasure? In later recollections, Kulik describes the constant tidying and cleaning as something she would not wish on anyone (Kwiek / Kulik 2012a: 538). Her late films, by contrast, tend to valorize seemingly unproductive activity. Here again, this is apparent from their titles alone, despite their ironic undertone. Thus, underneath the series title *Cultivating the Archive*, we find the titles *How the Sum Total of Small Actions Builds the Archive* (2016) as well as *A Sum of Rugs and an Archive Next Door, the Kingdom of Helena Kulik, Zofia’s Mother, in which the Archivist Grew Up* (2017). Moreover, beyond the fundamentally positive connotations of their titles, Jakubowska is certainly correct in suggesting that the films themselves pay tribute to “activation” as an aspect of life in general and archival work in particular to be welcomed for its resistance to the productivity-imperative of the post-socialist turbo-capitalism.

**THE ECONOMICS OF ARTISTIC LABOR** —— In what follows, I would like to discuss a third level at which KwieKulik negotiate the economic dimension of their artistic and domestic working partnership. Doing so may help to accentuate the gradual difference between KwieKulik’s earlier and Kulik’s later works. This level has already been hinted at by Załuski; to repeat his comment from above: “They combined potboiler works with their experimental artistic practice in order to show that they were able to ‘act efficiently’ within the given conditions of life and artistic production” (Załuski 2016: 396). I have in mind the economic ideal of efficiency in artistic production, which the duo strove to realize in their work

of the 1970s. This ideal of the rationalization of work processes stands in tension with the repetitive, monotonous housework shown by Kulik in her version of “Alice in Wonderland,” a kind of work that was necessary for but also delayed the achievement of artistic goals. In my view, in the 1970s KwieKulik largely sought to minimize, in their production, the everyday labor that Kulik later referred to and valorized as “activation.” It is important to remark that the daily difficulties in the lives of KwieKulik and other avant-garde artists without a fixed income were many, and the living conditions were hard. Circumstances KwieKulik address repeatedly in their work include the lack of space for their artistic labor, resulting in a continuous re-arranging of their apartment; the lack of money; the ongoing ‘organizing’ of food and everyday goods; the difficulty of living in a small apartment in a loud and dirty house, and so on.<sup>7)</sup>

— In order to understand KwieKulik’s attitude toward repetitive housework and what an economy of artistic labor meant for them, it is of great importance to look at the origin of their ideal of efficiency. The duo borrowed the concept of efficiency (*sprawność*) as an ideal for “good work” from the philosophy of Tadeusz Kotarbiński, whose lectures they attended in 1971 and whose “praxeology,” the research field for which he was most famous, deeply occupied them at the time (Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 148). Thus, in a wide-ranging interview with Maryla Sitkowska, Kulik remarks: “There was a time in our lives when Kotarbiński was more inspiring for us than any artist” (Sitkowska 1986–1995).<sup>8)</sup> Załuski rightly interprets KwieKulik as having aspired to become artists-as-scientists, stressing Kotarbiński’s centrality for their conception of art (Załuski 2016: 392; Załuski 2012: 532–533).<sup>9)</sup> Praxeology in particular, as a science of efficient action, is very important for their conception of efficient artistic work. In his many texts—particularly his major work, *Traktat o dobrej robocie* (A treatise on good work, 1955, translated into English in 1965 as *Praxiology: An Introduction to the Science of Efficient Action*)—Kotarbiński develops and systematizes a set of general rules or principles of efficient action that apply universally and to all forms of human activity (Porębski 2019: 30–40; Skurjat 2018): 119–128). Praxeology, for him, is bound up with the goal of improving the quality of human life by optimizing work processes; in this sense, he views praxeology as a component of general ethics (Pszczółowski 1971: 227–31). In this, too, KwieKulik followed him in connecting artistic goals with ethical ones, as will be shown further on.

7)

A prominent example of a work that deals with their living conditions, and which comes from the joint oeuvre of Kulik and Kwiek, is the collage *KwieKulik Circle* from 1976: Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 234–235.

8)

I am grateful to Wiktoria Szczupacka and the KwieKulik Archive for making this text available. Under Kotarbiński’s leadership, praxeology attained a prominent position in the Polish academic world. This is reflected, for example, in the establishment of a Center for Praxeology (Zakład Prakseologiczny) as part of the Polish Academy of Sciences with its own journal, *Praxeological Papers (Materiały Prakseologiczne)*, later *Prakseologia*. KwieKulik attended events at the Center for Praxeology beginning in 1974, forged connections with the scientists who worked or spent time there, e.g. Maria Nowakowska, and subscribed to the journal *Prakseologia*. Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 148–149, Kwiek / Kulik 2012a: 538.

9)

KwieKulik were also interested in Marxism, logic, and cybernetics, among other things, and beginning in 1970 audited other lectures and seminars at Warsaw University as well; see the remarks in Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 148–49.

— Just how important praxeology was to KwieKulik is made clear not only by the retrospective reflections in the interview with Sitkowska mentioned above, but already by the terms coined by the duo to refer to their art at the time of its making. Thus, departing from the terminology commonly used in art criticism, they do not describe their performances as actions or activities but instead employ the Polish term *działania*, which they deliberately choose not to translate into English. In their programmatic text “Our Activity: Aims, Principles, Practice, Benefits” (“Nasza działalność, cele, zasady, praktyka i korzyści,” 1978), they describe their artistic ideals under point eight, “*Działania* and the Activities,” as follows:

“When we started translating our texts into English it turned out that the Polish ‘Działanie’ literally means ‘Activity.’ Information about activities started to flow from the West. In spite of the fact that certain elements or aspects or fragments of these activities resemble our *Działania*, we have not come across any Western artistic activities which would qualify as *Działania* in our understanding. The reason for that is that the whole complex of operations [...] which comprise *Działania* is not taken into account in the activities. The same goes for the aspect of efficiency” (Kwiek / Kulik 2012b: 449).

— Under point nine, “Efficiency and *Działanie*,” they add:

“Of the many elements which make a *Działanie* [...] we intentionally choose to write about efficiency as a criterion characterizing and separating our *Działania* from other activities. The idea of efficiency, which has been treated instrumentally in the past, is carried over by us into the realm of aesthetics by saying ‘Efficient equals beautiful.’ If efficiency will radiate from a *Działanie* it may become useful to other people in their activities. It will make them realize what efficiency ‘looks like,’ and that is a lot in the social realization of the axiom: to work more efficiently means to live better. A man may also act when he is not working; if he acts correctly then he will live more beautifully for himself, for others and together with others” (Ibid.).

— The combination of *działanie* and *sprawność* (efficiency) makes the origins of KwieKulik’s conception of the artwork unmistakably clear, since both of these notions play a central role in



texts by Kotarbiński, who defines his praxeology as the theory or science of efficient activities (*sprawne działania*).

— But how do KwieKulik attempt to realize the ideal of efficiency in their *Działania*? In what sense, that is, do they design and produce their works efficiently and hence economically? The examples from the *Działania* series *AK Kinga Plaque—Earning and Creating* already display a number of attributes that can be connected with efficiency even without any knowledge of Kotarbiński's detailed lists of efficiency measures [figs. 1 & 2]. KwieKulik's arrangements are produced using objects that were probably already available in their workshop (masks) or could be brought there with little effort (orange and grapefruit): their production did not require any more time and energy than was absolutely necessary. The added text is done on cheap brown paper in casual handwriting—producing it requires no more material, time, or attention than is needed to communicate the “message” (the aforementioned semantic displacement). Moreover, if it took little time to spread out the objects across the plaque—they were not affixed to it—it took just as little to remove them, and some of them did not even need to be returned to their original locations (the fruit could surely be eaten as a snack once the work was completed).

— The series *Działania with Dobromierz*, produced between 1972 and 1974 and consisting of some nine hundred black-and-white photographs and color slides, shares some of these attributes, but it also exhibits additional economical design measures (Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 130–141).<sup>10</sup> Even a cursory glance at the roughly 120 documentary images included in the KwieKulik catalogue reveals the simple patterns that regularly recur there [figs. 5 & 6]. The household items, books, and foodstuffs employed—again, all things that were immediately available—are often laid in circles around the couple's young son Dobromierz—who was also always immediately available. When they do not form a circle, the objects tend to be evenly distributed across the floor without any visual centers of gravity (like the masks and fruit on the AK Kinga plaque). Moreover, the structure of many of these assemblages is static and symmetrical, oriented around a central axis, even though the artists are not especially concerned with precision of execution. By repeatedly returning to the pattern of the circle and the principle of dispersion, KwieKulik avoid a more time-consuming composition of their arrangements. The

10)

Some 120 examples from the series are reproduced there. For a detailed discussion of the genesis and structure of the series, see Załuski 2008, who considers the work's mathematical, logical, and linguistic aspects. The emotional dimension of *Działania with Dobromierz* is treated in Dauksza 2015: 65–74.



// Figure 5 & 6

KwieKulik, *Działanie with Dobromierz*, 1972–74

circle may be seen here as a self-referential figure for forgoing a more complex type of organization in which multiple formal focal points would be brought into creative equilibrium; after all, with its unparalleled centrality and symmetry, the circle is one of the simplest of all geometric figures.

— *Działania with Dobromierz* and *Działania with the AK Kinga Plaque* also reveal another economical aspect of KwieKulik's artistic work—the methodical approach and meticulous preparation that were necessary in order to execute the *Działania* efficiently and later to systematize their results. For evidence that the individual actions were conceived in advance and that their execution was planned, we may turn to the published notes on the *Działania with Dobromierz* and the handwritten catalogue of the *Działania with the AK Kinga Plaque*. The notes, which were written partly before and partly after the fact, capture the preconditions of the individual actions, the objects involved, and the resulting situations. Some of them also depict unrealized plans in a similar fashion (Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 131–134). The catalogue contains a description of the process of conceiving and preparing to realize *Działania with the AK Kinga Plaque*, making clear not only the level of planning and organization that went into them but also the extent to which everyday chores and “primitive” physical activities were regarded as aspects of the artistic work and hence worth communicating:

“5) 27 March 1974, Wednesday [...] On a crowded bus 106 we got the idea to perform ‘Activities’ with the plate while carving the inscription, referencing primarily the sets with our son, and to add to the carved words some new ones that didn’t belong to the project. [...] 6) 28, 29, 30 March 1974—Przemek [Przemysław] burnishes the stone. 7) 28 March 1974—Zosia ventures to the cemetery in Bródno to order 10 chisels. 30 March 1974—Z. picks up the chisels. 8) [...] Somewhere around midnight we go together to PSP [PP PSP: Państwowe Przedsiębiorstwo Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych / State Enterprise of Visual Arts Workshops] and move the plate to a lower sculpting table. 9) 30 March 1974—at about 3 p.m. the two of us gather together for a brainstorm—what to do with the plate. Time for thinking—2 hours. Thinking at the paper [...] Ideas for activities 3 p.m.–5 p.m. [...] At about 6 p.m. we resolve to bring Maksio [Dobromierz] to the workshop. We ask Paweł [Przemysław Kwiek’s brother] for help. At 7 p.m. the following left home: Zosia [Zofia], Przemek, Paweł, Maksio in a pram. We took: 2 photo cameras, lamps, color

cellophane, grapefruit, orange, red sash, black paper, estrop-hole, dinner, and Maksio's stuff. Paweł took a small ivory dog and a color folder [...]. At 8 p.m. we begin work [...]" (Ronduda / Schöllhammer 2012: 171).

— It should come as no surprise at this point that the planning of the artistic work described here is compatible with a number of rules and principles for the economization of activities defined by Kotarbiński in his major work, the *Treatise on Good Work*, and other texts (Kotarbiński 1965).<sup>11)</sup> Consider, for example, his measure of "minimizing interventions": this includes, among other things, "refraining from actions until the right moment"—easily recognizable in KwieKulik's connection of potboiler works with actions of their own—and the "replacement of materials by less work-intensive alternatives"—visible in their substitution of paper for stone as a writing surface. The rule of "anticipation" includes, among other things, "resorting to already accomplished and irreversible deeds," as in the duo's use of potboiler works as the basis for additional actions and pictorial documents. Furthermore, the constant incorporation of existing images and concepts into new combinations, the persistent use and reuse of old works for new ones, a "recycling" principle present in KwieKulik's whole oeuvre, can be interpreted as a measure to produce art efficiently.<sup>12)</sup> "Automation," another of Kotarbiński's rules of efficient action, hardly requires further explanation in connection to KwieKulik's work: this measure involves facilitating the execution of actions by resorting to repetition, standardization, and imitation—for example, the recurring circular shapes in *Działania with Dobromierz*. Last but not least, the "immanentisation or internalisation of actions" also plays a fundamental role in KwieKulik's work, since it involves "using reflection instead of physical efforts, analysis and conceptualisation instead of trial-and-error."<sup>13)</sup>

— KwieKulik were thus committed, in their art which was produced under the conditions of state socialism, to the ideal of the rationalization of work processes, something that is by no means universally embraced today in a world marked by an unfettered, neoliberal, capitalist economy and the associated acceleration even of ordinary life processes and sequences of events.<sup>14)</sup> If we are to empathize with this commitment, we must historically embed KwieKulik's position in a material and intellectual context in which the word "optimization" had not yet lost its positive connotation. For KwieKulik, the efficiency of their *Działania* was not an end in itself but a part of their work toward improving the reality of

11)

See also Klinecicz 2017: 76–88.

12)

Tomasz Załuski aptly describes the persistent reuse of already existing images for new works as reflecting the logic of the database; see Załuski 2008. The highly intricate structure of KwieKulik's archive, in which individual objects exhibit multiple layers of reference to others, is demonstrated by Załuski 2018a. In his text, he considers KwieKulik's "economy of the archive": the relationship between the financial economy (of its commercial exploitation) and its *oikonomy*, that is, its location in the household, which is overseen by Zofia Kulik.

13)

The descriptions of Kotarbiński's economization measures are taken from Klinecicz.

14)

See for example the critique of modern acceleration processes in Rosa 2005.

ordinary life. Here, too, their ethos is aligned with the attitude of Kotarbiński, for whom praxeology, as mentioned above, formed a subcategory of general ethics and was related to ethics in the narrower sense as well. He gave his concept of an ethics independent of religion and other framework conditions the title of an “ethics of the reliable caregiver” (“etyka spolegliwego opiekuna,” often translated as “ethics of the reliable protector”). Czesław Porębski defines Kotarbiński’s ethical ideal in this way: “Briefly, a reliable protector is a person who, possessing the proper qualities of character, attitudes and conduct, succeeds in ‘efficiently’ combating suffering and other evils that endanger the life and well-being of people he is obliged to safeguard” (Porębski 2019: 40). Efficiency and social welfare come together in the “reliable caregiver,” whom KwieKulik strove to emulate through their posture of consistent engagement, economy, and ethics.

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**Fig. 1 & 2:** KwieKulik, *Działanie with AK Kinga Plaque – Earning and Creating*, 1974, color slide, Courtesy of Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation  
**Fig. 3:** KwieKulik, *The unveiling ceremony of the AK Kinga Plaque with the participation of scouts and war veterans*, 103 Solec Street in Warsaw, 06.04.1974, color slide, Courtesy of Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation  
**Fig. 4:** Zofia Kulik, *Alice's Adventures in Fucked Wonderland*, 1977, pencil, ink, paint, photograph on paper, own technique, 56x40 cm, Courtesy of Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation  
**Fig. 5 & 6:** KwieKulik, *Działanie with Dobromierz*, 1972–74, color slide, Courtesy of Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation

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