

PIOTR DMOCHOWSKI

STRUGGLE FOR BEKSIŃSKI

Translation from Polish into English by Iwona Sikorska

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INTRODUCTION

These notes were written down in French, in the years 1986-87, that is nearly ten years before their first publication, which I want to emphasise as I talk about the reality at that time and a contemporary reader might get an impression that some periods have been confused.

I am publishing this book myself, just like I published all my monographs about Beksiński.

The English version of the notes has been translated from the Polish version, which I translated from French on my own. All the described events are authentic. I only changed or passed over three or four names. All the others have been retained.

BARRET, 10TH DECEMBER 1985

Today I invited to dinner Robert Barret, an art critic and journalist writing for the small economic weekly “Prévisions”. He is an extremely nice and witty man, though already advanced in years. He’s willing to write an article about my future exhibition. His magazine, however, requires an interested person to first place an advert in it. In other words, if Mr Barret is to say something nice about me, I’ll have to pay for it.

I don’t know what it’s going to be like, because I haven’t got the money to buy the advert in question. But it doesn’t change the fact that it’s really heartening to finally meet a smiling guy amid all those grim mugs I have to talk to on an everyday basis. For since the time I started to promote Beks, I’ve had an impression of moving in a milieu of greedy notaries, and not among people inspired by passion for beauty and art.

KOŁODZIEJCZYK, 11TH DECEMBER 1985

Today I invited to dinner Leszek Kołodziejczyk, a retired Polish journalist. He has written a short article about my exhibition in “Przekrój”, which in some respects is a counterpart of “Paris Match”.

Kołodziejczyk is going to Poland and coming back to Paris in May. Perhaps our interests will converge, because upon return he’s going to look for an odd job for three thousand francs monthly, and I must find a public relations specialist for my next exhibition. He seems to have extensive connections in Paris. At least this is what you might judge by the numerous interviews he had with different French celebrities when working as a foreign correspondent for “Życie Warszawy” (“Warsaw Life”) and “Polityka” (“Politics”) weekly. What’s most important, he will get me some journalists, who wouldn’t bother to come without a “recommendation of Mr X...”.

EXHIBITION, 16TH DECEMBER 1985

After the exhibition of 22 paintings by Zdzisław Beksiński, which I'd organised in Valmay's Gallery on the Seine Street in Paris in October 1985, I found myself in a disastrous financial condition.

The exhibition itself was a success. Lots of people came to see it. I officially say there were fifteen thousand, but in reality I guess there could have been about ten thousand, as more than seven thousand leaflets were taken by visitors. Actually, many guests didn't take them. At peak times, on Saturday afternoons, the number reached one hundred and thirty persons per hour, while at "slump" moments, which usually occurred on weekday mornings, there were about fifty per hour. Such a calculation was from time to time done by Tommy, a young Pole who took care of the room upstairs and, upon my request, made a list of incomers.

I'd been preparing the exhibition for many months. I will try to list, not necessarily in the chronological order, my major endeavours to bring it about. Please, forgive me for sort of highlighting my own merits in this way, but I'm doing so not only to defend myself against the charges made by lots of people, with Beksiński at the head, but also to preserve a written trace of all that, before the memory of it fades away and everything sinks into oblivion.

First of all, I managed to rent Valmay's Gallery after endless bargaining with its owner. Since he is a mean man, who would never spend a penny on keeping it clean, he handed it over to me in a really poor condition. The room itself was nice, spacious and well located on the Seine Street. The whole place, however, was dirty, and I had to repair the wiring (it conked out on the vernissage day) as well as refurbish three rooms the dwelling consisted of. The façade was also repainted and a new signboard installed.

The old furniture, which had cluttered up the gallery, was removed and replaced by my own. I even had to change the terribly destroyed doormat. In the room on the first floor I installed some framing halogens, which in the dark, against the background of black velvet covering the walls, highlighted the mysterious atmosphere of the paintings and brought out their colours.

I exhibited the best twenty two paintings by Beks from among the ones I possessed. Previously I'd had them framed by two Parisian picture framers, whom we'd chosen with Ania after a few weeks of searching and comparing.

The exhibition was accompanied by a number of publications: a brochure with twelve colourful illustrations, containing about thirty pages of interviews with Beks, which I'd translated on my own, his biography, which I'd written, and the bibliography, which I'd collected and put in order.

By the entrance to the gallery, leaflets in four languages (French, English, German and Japanese) were given out. They contained my short article "Painting without Meanings", devoted to Beks's works. Thanks to this leaflet, I estimated the number of visitors to have reached about ten thousand.

I had 12 postcards printed on laminated cardboard of various dimensions, in three thousand copies each.

The first form of invitation to the exhibition involved sending the above brochure to two thousand and seven hundred addressees. Two weeks later I sent the same people laminated 21 x 27.9 cm cardboard, which contained two big colourful reproductions and invitations to the vernissage.

I spent many days in the library, leafing through French "Who is who", so as to find the addresses of all sorts of celebrities whom I wanted to send invitations. One day the librarian asked me ironically: "You're paging through this thick volume every day. Do you want to learn it by heart?"

At twelve stations of the Parisian underground were pasted up one hundred and fifty posters, which had the dimensions of 2 x 1.50 m, each series containing thirteen pieces. Apart from, three thousand 70 x 60 cm

posters were printed, two thousand of which were put up in shop and café windows in Paris.

I bought half a page in “Beaux Arts” and “Connaissance des Arts” monthlies as well as in “Officiel des Spéctacles”, where I announced the exhibition. The announcements were accompanied by the reproduction of the most important painting (the one which I call “A couple of mummies”). Pierre Brisset, owing to the backing of Valmay’s Gallery owner, wrote an article in “L’Oeil” about the forthcoming exhibition.

During the exhibition, the audience could view press cuttings about Beks and put their names down in the golden book. Both volumes were leather-bound. Their production took me six months and more than ten meetings with the bookbinder, Ardouin, not to mention the weeks needed for meetings, photocopying and classification of press clippings about Beks, and then, putting them in a chronological order.

For the needs of the exhibition I also made a short 23-minute film, which was shot by Bogdan Dziworski. The whole organisation of the production in France (a number of scenes were shot in Poland, where the film was also edited and provided with sound) was my responsibility. I had to buy the tape, hire lamps, stands, supervise the staff, feed them, rent rooms for them, transport them etc.

In order to screen this short movie – which was a mistake, partly responsible for my current financial situation – I first of all made a video version from the original recorded on a film tape. Next I hired two television sets, which I installed in the gallery so as to show it non-stop throughout the exhibition. At the same time I rented the cinema room next to the gallery (“Christine Studio”), where the film was screened for a number of weeks.

During the vernissage, another film team, managed by my friend Janusz Porebski, shot a report about the exhibition. At the same time, Michal Glinicki, a Polish photographer, came from Warsaw to make a photo report. Let me add that for a number of months Glinicki photographed in ektachromes all Beksiński’s paintings which were available from museums

and collectors scattered throughout Poland. They were supposed to be used in the album which I am still designing.

I hired six people (five too many) who supervised the exhibition during the day and at night. Two persons gave out invitations before the entrance to FIAC, which at the same time was taking place in “Grand Palais”.

The exhibition was insured with Lloyds for five million francs.

Oh, God, it's hard to imagine to what lengths I went so as to make the exhibition worthy of Beks's genius! Can't remember precisely, but there must have been ten other things. Actually, I wonder if there's anything I didn't do.

The press cuttings and the golden book were bound in the most exquisite Marroquin leather, the publications were issued on laminated chalk paper, the reproductions were always coloured, there was Cordon Rouge champagne, the movie was recorded on a 35-mm tape by Eastman Kodak, that is the highest quality professional film, the texts were translated and proofread by professional translators, whom I'd carefully selected for this purpose.

Should I also mention hundreds of hours devoted to the conclusion of contracts, various endeavours, supervising the teams, transportation, text translating, writing letters and phoning? the interviews with Beks alone took more than fifty hours of recording, followed by typewriting and – at least partial - editing.

All that was happening in the atmosphere of tension due to badly performed work by people who didn't care much for the whole thing, absent in the office, “terribly busy, you understand”, which meant they kept coming to work late and constantly made mistakes. I might sound conceited and preposterous, but at the end of my enterprise I came to realize that my passion for Beks's painting combined with a sort of obsessed desire to succeed in putting up the exhibition and making it dazzle Paris, gave better results than all the work of clerks, journalists, printers, translators and

the others who do it professionally, on an everyday basis. Although I wasn't a specialist and I'd had the first exhibition in my life, just to make Parisians believe that Beks was a great painter, my work was better completed, better thought-out, more punctual and more precise than that carried out by the so-called professionals with whom I happened to cooperate.

Over the past two decades I've done the work of a whole team.

Before I started any kind of enterprise, I would give much thought to its details, observed how the work was performed by museums and galleries, specialist magazines and, in general, professionals, whom I actually often asked for advice and opinion.

No, two months after the exhibition, when a time of bitter settlement has come, I am still far from accusing myself of megalomania which might have trapped me in my convictions and delusions. On the contrary, I have never despised the experience or skills of other people. As a matter of fact, I did follow their advice as long as it seemed reasonable.

I could make the list longer and keep weaving wreaths for myself, mentioning numerous merits and victories of mine.

If you are an amateur, though, it will come to light in the most important thing. It's true that the specialists I met when working on the exhibition did drag along, falling behind me by a mile in terms of details, precision or punctuality. Unlike me, however, they would have never made a cardinal mistake. That mistake led me to the bottom of a financial precipice, with no ladder to help me scramble out onto the surface. There is no point then in further listing my merits, as all that didn't come to much use.

Yes, I did make only one, but unpardonable mistake.

I knew next to nothing how a painter's reputation was supposed to be built. Of course, I had some "literary" idea of the machinations, plots, the meaning of money, and in particular, the power of the milieu which could block the way to any outsider wishing to sneak into the closed circle of famous artists without obtaining their consent and paying the toll.

Yet I didn't really believe it, as I don't tend to trust any systematically pessimistic or systematically angelic visions conjured by novel authors or journalists. The funny thing is that the same literature and press, in order to adulate the democratic-liberal regime, being their support, simultaneously presented me with enthusiast pictures of great artistic fame that people achieved in a honest way, owing to their talent, work and love for the profession. Why should I then believe the black visions of grim pessimists, and not the bright look of the liberal world eulogists? There was no reason why I, having no personal experience in the matter and forced to envision the environment of art propaganda on the basis of literature, should concur with the systematic scepticism, which made my ambitions doomed to failure?

Why shouldn't I believe the ones who kept assuring me that it is hardworking, talented and persistent people who are on their way up in a free world?

In a word, after a failed attempt of making the Parisian galleries and Beaubourg Centre interested in organizing an exhibition of Beks's paintings, I thought that I was able to force him upon the world solely thanks to the quality of his painting and the brilliance of the exhibition under my own direction. It seemed to me that I would be able to get my own way with the audience being my only ally and judge. I didn't realize at that time how unimportant was the opinion of spectators in the process of an artist's promotion and how much the aesthetic tastes of the audience depended on the opinion voiced by decision-makers.

My primary hope was to establish Beks's renown without the necessary support of buyers and collectors.

Whoever has a lot of money may cherish a well-founded hope that, in the long term, after a long positional war, the decision-makers' resistance will be broken. By paying for articles in the press, publishing books at their own expense, flooding the media with paid reproductions, such a person may impose their artist upon them. (In the end might suffer a defeat as well ...)

If I'd had the money and could have survived for many years, then I might have done without decision-makers. But there were no buyers, and in my situation of an ordinary everyman on a very scarce budget, I was not able to do without the help of both. Well, French decision-makers flatly refused to grant me any help. This made my task even more difficult, as at the end of the day purchasers depend on decision-makers in the same way as the audience does. Collectors will not buy, just like the audience will not like a thing which has not been previously shown to them by critics, galleries and the clerks of the culture department. These guidelines may be different and even indirect, but they have to be coincident and lasting.

Having no support from decision-makers, you should at least win favour with collectors, and I was so enchanted with Beks's paintings that I didn't even see the need to solicit for their support, as it seemed to me I could do without them as well.

The contempt for buyers took its revenge. At that time I was, and I am still bound by an agreement with Beks, in which I obliged myself to sell his paintings and share the half of the profits. Since I could satisfy him by buying twelve paintings a year, there was nothing to make me put them up for sale. As I wanted my exhibition to be wonderful, brilliant and prestigious, that is – different from the ones organized by traders, motivated solely by the lust for profit, I decided to show my best paintings, i.e. The ones I wanted to keep for myself. Therefore, irrespective of my calculations, irrespective of my knowledge, or rather ignorance of the principles governing the environment and the tithe you must pay to have your own way, I'd already bolted the door and excluded any kind of sale. For whatever calculations I would do, getting rid of the most beautiful paintings by Beksiński was simply out of the question. During the next exhibition – I kept telling myself – I will show less interesting items and put them up for sale. I was convinced that it would be easy to do and there would be enough buyers.

OK. Let there be a prestigious exhibition.

At this point, I'd like to make a little digression. You must know, my Friend, that the usual mechanism of a painter's promotion known to me involves getting a circle of fans around the artist in the first place, selling his/her works at relatively low prices to favourably inclined people, who will surely buy more so as to complete their collections and will keep talking about the painter everywhere they stay, will help to organise next exhibitions, bring journalist etc..

Well, instead of relying on that stereotypical mechanism, which involves slow and patient building of the whole enterprise based on people's real motivations, I chose a spectacular strategy (alone against everyone). It is this way that the media and poets later talk about, telling stories to idiots like me about the staggering success of "great loners".

But let's come back to the issue of sale. The most aberrational thing about it was not so much the actual exclusion of any sale during the first exhibition, but the fact that I failed to explicitly explain the clear-cut rules of the game that I invited people to join.

And it would have been such an easy thing to do: I merely should have announced that the exhibition had a purely prestigious character.

But instead of excluding all the paintings from sale in a clear way, I did it only in the case of fourteen. As for the rest, the gigantic prices in the order of 350 000 francs for an item were supposed to render any sale impossible.

It seemed to me I was smart doing it this way.

Horrendous prices – I kept repeating myself – will protect me from all kinds of temptations and bargains. And at the same time, they will ennoble Beks's painting.

For I knew, how sensitive people are in this respect and how excited they may get about the prices. I therefore expected they would talk about it, which was actually my aim.

They will be convinced that the painter is great just because of the high prices – I thought. Though such a strategy seemed logical, in reality it turned out naïve and dangerous.

Naïve, because while it might be good when people are talking about us, it is good indeed when they are saying nice things about us, and not when they are calling us names. Well, owing to my price policy I was described as: a sly one, petty con artist, second-class swindler, who wants to go high in a disloyal way, without overexerting himself.

As for the renown which the artist was supposed to gain thanks to high prices, my reasoning was even more naïve, because what ennobles a painter is the actual prices at which the paintings are sold, and not the ones that his promoter has put on a poster.

Besides, the entire strategy was dangerous and short-sighted, because if I really was to put up for sale any paintings at the next exhibition, the prices would have to be affordable. Having once put them up for sale for 350 000 francs, I would find it hard to back off and establish the prices at a realistic level, ranging from 40 to 80 thousand (as this is what I consider affordable even now). The audience will think that Beksiński is becoming devalued and I am organizing the sales of the works of a “collapsing” painter, which should be sold rather than purchased, as the artist’s ratings keep falling ...

At that time, I didn’t know that beyond a certain price people buy art objects neither for love nor because they are driven by their hearts. Some do it to be praised by guests, while the others treat such items as a good investment. For the former, the high price of a painting by an unknown artist exceeds the pleasure they might derive from hanging his painting in the living room and hearing potential praises from friends. For the latter, a painter whose ratings are falling can’t be a good investment.

Today I know all that and everything is clear to me. It’s so damn obvious. Then I was driven by pipe dreams rather than reality and facts, though. It seemed to me that I was clever, rendering the sale impossible in an ambiguous and, at the same time, suicidal way: by excluding fourteen

paintings from sale on the one hand, and establishing exorbitant prices for the remaining eight ones on the other hand.

At the same time, however, I cudgelled my brains, trying to leave my options open and provide myself with a gate of retreat: just in case ... so I placed the following explanation on the price list:

“The aim of the exhibition organisers is not only to sell the exhibited paintings, but also to offer a few of them to museums and great collectors, so that the works could exert an influence commensurate with their quality. Considering the above goal and the small number of paintings they possess, the organisers reserve a right to choose from among potential purchasers. In order to avoid a mercantile atmosphere, the transactions will not be announced during the exhibition”.

I told myself that if a museum really wanted to buy a painting, I would sell it at a price even ten times lower than the offered one. But at the same time, thanks to the above explanation, I wouldn't have to disclose it. For other “ordinary” buyers I felt contempt, so if a Smith or Brown suddenly fell in love with Beks and wanted to buy a painting, I would either not sell it, or he would have to pay a high price.

All that was neither clear nor precise and coherent. Rather vague and uncertain. From time to time I was carried away by passion, on some occasions I dreamt of dazzling Paris, while at other times I caught myself hoping for a big profit, which was a sign of the most common greed. Today I am almost certain of this.

As for the crucial issue, whether I wanted or not to sell paintings by Beks and at what price, I found myself torn between various incentives, some of which were noble, while other funny or shameful.

Anyway, I deluded myself that there would be enough purchasers willing to buy a few paintings put up for sale and I would decide what to do about the whole thing at the last moment. Assuming any general theories in advance was therefore neither necessary nor worthwhile.

This didn't however prevent me from taking temporary, partially irreversible decisions, which *ipso facto* rendered any future change of the strategy impossible.

But did I really think about all those low financial motives and lofty spiritual reasons? When I recall that period, I'm not sure of it. I was in a state of frenzy. Ok, I might not sell the paintings, so what? – I kept telling myself. I will earn money selling the film.

Also in this case, I thought that the quality of a short-length film would be the only criterion to be taken into consideration by purchasers. Since a film is good – I thought – it won't be difficult to sell it to televisions all over the world. Film distributors will also accept it without greater problems.

But did I really have all those thoughts? Again, I seem to ascribe such reasoning to myself *a posteriori*, as at that time, full of exaltation, these things were sort of distant, smothered and of minor importance.

Anyway, I didn't know at that time that a short-length film was a trap from which you don't get out alive. I didn't realise that television stations had their warehouses packed with such films and didn't know what to do with them. Finally, I didn't realize in due time that cinema owners preferred to fill the breaks between performances with adverts, and not short-length films, because adverts were paid, while short films didn't bring any profits. Besides, my film was three times too long to be accepted by a commercial distribution network. Finally (and particularly!), Dziworski, who wasn't properly supervised when shooting and editing the film, based it almost solely on the macabre, gruesome - easy and superficial - aspect of Beks's painting. Thus the unique beauty of these paintings and the profound emotions they aroused had completely disappeared from the film. While Beks's painting itself repels some people with its deathlike atmosphere, the film was even more difficult to sell in this respect.

Today, two months after the exhibition, all the admirers are gone, and I've been left alone in a disastrous financial situation.

The cost of the exhibition was enormous. The advertising itself devoured 180 000 francs, the film – 350 000, the painting frames – 30 0000, the renting of the gallery – 20 000. I should also add the cost of the exhibition insurance, payment for a number of teams made up of several persons, which dealt with reports, supervision, the gallery renovation, worked during the vernissage, translated texts, gave out leaflets etc.

The bill was steep: nearly one million francs.

For comparison, I will add that my remuneration of a research worker at university amounts to 8 000 francs monthly, so the exhibition cost was slightly more than my ten-year university salary. I'd drowned all our savings. All.

And now the debts. I'm up to my ears in debts, the most dangerous of which is the bank loan of 430 000.

When the bank director realized that it had been stupid of him to lend me money without thinking at the last moment he demanded our flat mortgage and a security of 163 golden louis, which we kept in the safe.

Luckily, in the atmosphere of enthusiasm surrounding the exhibition, Annie agreed to sign the mortgage. However, when the notary was reading the document, she nearly passed out. Had she refused to sign it, I would have been auctioned off straight away. At that moment, a number of my cheques were still in many hands and hadn't been cashed yet. If, in the absence of my wife's consent to mortgage, the bank hadn't paid them, I would've had five or six suits filed by my creditors breathing down my neck.

Today the debt of 430 000 francs hangs over me. It hasn't budged an inch since the time the mortgage was signed two months ago. It's only swollen with the interests payable to the bank, which inexorably keep growing every day. I have to settle everything by 9th May, which means there are five months ahead of me. If by 9th May 1986 I don't return the bank what I owe to it, it will sell my flat and I won't have a roof over my head.

But I repeat – this sum of 430 000 is a drop in the ocean.

I must add 40 000 francs resulting from the interests on the borrowed capital for the next five months, i.e. until 9th May.

14 000 francs has to be paid to the company that dealt with the shipment of invitations.

19 000 francs I must give back to Brynski, who has lent it to me.

70 000 francs I need for the production of internegative, interpositive and 4 copies of the film demanded from me by Film Service.

100 000 francs I owe to Beks. I must have it before the end of 1986 for the obligatory purchase of 12 paintings which I am supposed to buy from him every year, according to our agreement.

Also to Beks I owe 16 000 francs for the drawings. He's not going to wait.

50 000 francs for Szydlo for three paintings and a relief, which I carelessly bought from him on credit before the exhibition.

70 000 francs I need to pay the tax for the current year and, what's even worse, the tax imposed by the Revenue Office due to my excessively big operating costs, which I deducted in the years 1981 and 1986.

If my flat was to be sold, I'd have to find another dwelling and furnish it somehow. The removal itself would cost me about 70 000 francs. Then you should add 8 000 francs of a monthly rent.

I'd also have to find money for financing the only enterprise that would let me regain a financial balance. I mean organizing a new exhibition, this time sale-oriented. Well, the cheapest exhibition like that wouldn't cost less than 100 000 francs.

In total? Altogether I have to find a million francs. A precisely calculated million. No overstatement.

That's not the end, though. There is also everyday life, different bills to pay, telephones, car, the purchase of new clothes and cosmetics for my wife. And I'm not allowed to touch them under the pain of aggression on her part, which would paralyze all my efforts to get out of the precipice. I've never

done any calculations of our monthly costs of living, but I guess it's much more than 30 000 francs. Then the list would have to be longer by another 360 000, which gives a total of circa one million three hundred thousand.

Where shall I find such a sum? How? I'm not able to raise it by any means.

Now, let's move on to the income.

I keep counting hundreds of times:

The sale of the flat will bring me 550 000 francs. The sale of golden coins – 80 000.

My legal practice has come to a deadlock. At the moment I've got two or three cases (chiefly the case of Karys and Spararzynska), which should end this year and give me 30 000 francs. A few divorces will surely come in on the way. Let's say, another 30 000. Of course, in good periods Ania used to earn 380 000 francs annually. We might assume that the year '86 will be excellent in terms of money. How can you be so sure, though? If anything, we should actually be less certain, because she's going to retire from being a model, and in any case, wants to break up with the main employer – Perris. In other words, what she will bring home might be much more modest than 380 000 I am counting on. And even if it was 380 000, it's ONLY 380 000.

Finally, there is my salary at university – 100 000 francs.

And that's all.

In the best case scenario, I can count on an income of more or less 900 000. Where shall I find the missing 400 000?

There is no way out

As for the prompt cash from the promotion of Beks, I don't even take it into account.

For I proposed the sale of five paintings to museums in the provinces: in Grenoble, Lyon, Strasburg, Nicea and Marseille. I also offered to sell paintings to three museums in Paris (the Centre Pompidou, the Museum of

Modern Art of the City of Paris and the Museum of Decorative Arts). The prices were reasonable – 40 000 francs. In the majority of cases I didn't get any replies. Once or twice I received the stereotypical “no, thank you”.

I have proposed to sell the film to three channels of the French television. I've also sent cassettes to all TV channels in Europe and Israel. Till today I haven't got any answer. Actually, there is hardly any hope. If any reply does come, it's going to be “no, thank you”.

I offered to organize an exhibition of Beks's works to many institutions, museums and galleries in France and abroad. A few museums in the provinces replied that “this kind of painting does not suit our aesthetics”. The others didn't bother to give any answer whatsoever.

I proposed the issue of Beks's album to many publishing houses: Flammarion, Cercle D'Art, Hazan and others. So far I have received five refusals. The others haven't even acknowledged the receipt of my letter.

Finally, in the absence of new ideas, I proposed four gramophone record publishing companies to place reproductions of Beks's paintings on record covers. No reply.

To sum up, I see no way out. No way out No way out

I keep telling that myself all days and during sleepless nights: no way out.

For there isn't a single minute during the day when I don't think about it. There is no single night for me to sleep it through, from the beginning to the end, without suffering from stomach cramps the moment I wake up.

This has become an obsession: to promote Beks. And this obsession immediately breaks against the same wall: there is no money and no allies. There are debts.

So I write to kill my own fear. Every night I walk the length and breadth of my room, then sit down and start filling the pages.

What kind of atmosphere am I living in? How is my environment reacting to it?

I am trying to show no signs of panic that has gripped me. Pretend to be a self-pleased man who has succeeded.

Are your paintings selling well? – people keep asking me.

- They are, but too slowly – I reply casually.

All the people around me get an impression that I've managed to promote Beks and done a deal. Nobody's got a vague idea of the precipice I have fallen into. Even Ania doesn't realize it and thinks that the sale of the flat and gold is going to cover our debts.

Her being unaware, and something else, her solidarity cause that I'm not flooded with remorse. Except one or two scenes she made after the exhibition had ended, she's still in a good mood and doesn't come back to the object of my torment in everyday chats. Paradoxically then, my daily life is surrounded by my wife's feelings, which, if nothing changes, will make her even closer to me.

It's much worse with Beks, though. He's a painting genius, but also a difficult man. Thinking soberly and knowing a lot, he once warned me that I was taking risks. At the same time, however, using a hundred signs, words, interjections, allusions and memories, he showed a profound conviction that my strategy was right. His approving smiles, the ease with which he let me take his best paintings for the exhibition - all that was supposed to mean that, deep inside, he believed that what I was doing would be a great leap. In ten different ways he showed me that he believed in an instant success every Pole dreams about. For in Poland only a "leap" can get you out of a complete deadlock. There are no prospects for success based on solid work and patience.

Now, when everything has collapsed, Beks reminds me of his warning, giving it some monstrous dimensions. All I did he has suddenly seen as ridiculous and inept: the exhibition was organized at the last moment, the frames I'd chosen for the paintings were "petty bourgeois and pretentious", the lettering in the brochures was "preposterous" ("even

Polański has noticed it ...”), and because of Dziworski’s film, I got a few letters from Beks (actually funny) filled with such a dose of fury that we read them with Ania a few times, just to make sure it was real.

And this is what it’s like, my friend. This is how things are when I’ve failed.

If only I could have another chance – I keep repeating myself like a cripple who for years has been chewing over the moment when he made a wrong move with the steering wheel, which left him chairbound for life. Oh, God, how I wish I could start everything anew ...

DINNER, 17TH DECEMBER 1985

A dinner in Maison du Danemark at Champs-Élysées. We've invited a couple of people whose support we need in our Beks-related endeavours.

I'll start with Mr and Mrs Zarzecki. He's a rich Belgian businessman of Polish origin, whereas she is a woman in her mid-forties, a bit obese, though still pretty, with an ample bust. They have one painting by Beksiński and both came to my exhibition.

Then there is Mrs Marszalek-Mlynczyk, the director of the Polish Institute in Paris. She is a keen admirer of Beks and a nice person, though should be classified as a typical representative of the Polish Communist Party circles.

Beside them a French journalist, in charge of the morning news on the French television first channel TF1. An overwhelming feeling of disgust comes over me as I observe this intellectual whore. He knows perfectly well why this dinner has been bought for him. And he guzzles, stuffing himself with food as though he hasn't eaten for two days. Orders champagne, then cigars (four!), the most expensive dishes (as if that meant they must be the best), three coffees and three desserts. He speaks loudly, banging on the table with his fist and showing his importance to me. To Zarzecki, however, he is simply bowing and scraping. Oh dear, how he enjoys patting Zarzecki on the back, laughing his head off at his jokes... Hardly bothers to answer my questions, though. Just mumbles something.

He's like a character taken straight from the grotesque stories by Gogol: a caricature, once servile, another time arrogant. How many louses like that have I met in the journalist world! These people earn little, but are powerful. They are therefore torn between the hope to be invited to a few meals and the intoxicating sense of power.

The remaining four persons watch the journalist's behaviour with embarrassment, resorting to courtesy so as to conceal the humiliation that all

of us have been exposed to. They are nice to us, including Zarzecki, who might be lacking good looks, but is undeniably a classy man.

What's the purpose of this dinner? Easy to guess.

To obtain the consent of Mrs Marszałek-Młyńczyk to the organization of an exhibition of Beks's drawings in the Polish Institute next spring. But it's also meant to strike up closer bonds with this energetic woman, who is my great ally, and in Poland will probably make a career.

As for Zarzecki ... Who knows? Perhaps this wealthy industrialist will agree to sponsor my future exhibition? Now that I've come to understand that it's necessary to sell Beks's paintings, I might be able to sell him something, at least a single picture.

Unfortunately, throughout the dinner he doesn't react to my allusions. He doesn't stop, however, enthusing over the way I organized the exhibition. We'll meet after Christmas. Great. Let's come back to the point then. OK.

As regards the French journalist, I'll have to patiently buy him with dinners and suppers, just like the rest of that journalist scum. I will have to buy him so that he will kindly do his duty and come wherever something connected with Poland (which is a frequently mentioned item in his TV bulletins) takes place.

Will he take the hook? We'll see. Right now he keeps devouring the scraps I throw him under the table. I don't ask him for anything special. I just invite him to an exhibition of drawings in the Institute. Oh, and one more thing: I promise to send him a cassette with the film and the whole documentation.

If I succeed in bribing him with meals (which is not impossible, as similarly to most of his colleagues, he clearly implies that "in their profession it's just like that"), he might buy the film for TF1, where he's one of the important figures.

The cost of the dinner – 2030 francs. Almost everything I still had in my drawer. I would have swallowed the bill stoically, though, if it hadn't been for that crippling impression that I'd rubbed shoulders with a vile rat.

TABASTE, 20TH DECEMBER 1985

I call Mrs Tabaste from Jacques Lonore, Henri Laurens publishing house. The idea of releasing an album about an unknown painter doesn't interest her.

- The position of our publishing house on the contemporary art market is not strong enough to take such serious financial risks – she replies me. She sends me back to other, vaguely specified publishers.

NEWSAGENT'S, 20TH DECEMBER 1985

This morning I met with a boy from the newsagent on Saint Michel Boulevard. The newsagent is situated just next to the Luxembourg Garden, in the very heart of the Latin Quarter, full of intellectuals and students. I counted on a specific clientele, which at first glance should share my tastes. That's why I'd left the boy some postcards from the exhibition so that he could see whether they might sell. Since the beginning of the experience he'd sold ... 10 (3 of which over the last two weeks).

Admittedly, he placed the shelf I'd made on my own somewhere at the back, but the whole thing was still visible, especially that my cards are big and conspicuous.

What do I do in view of such a failure?

Firstly, I give up repeating the same attempt with Irena Jordan's cousins. They have two small shops specialized in the sale of postcards on Tertre Square in Montmartre. Wanting to please Irena, they proposed to put up for sale mine.

The foreign department of Hachette publishing house also agreed, though without much enthusiasm, to send the postcards with a sale proposal to their clients outside France. But I'll give it up too, because neither the former nor the latter cherish the slightest hope to sell my postcards and don't hide the reason why: "The postcards breathe an air of death!".

For the time being, the failure on Saint Michel Boulevard seems to suggest they are right.

HAZAN, 23RD DECEMBER 1985

Today I'm calling a Mr Baillu (43-54-68-72) from Hazan publishing house.

He hasn't read my letter or looked through my documents yet.

- Please, don't expect an answer before 3-4 months – he warns me. – People keep sending us so many letters...

Surely you're not Stakhanovites – I'd like to reply him, but I don't. Instead, I present him with all the details of the idea with the album. He tells me to call him at the beginning of January, as right now he's going on holiday.

- We could have dinner and talk about it one day, after you come back – I suggest.

He is mistrustful and tries to weasel out of it. Since a lot of things in this regime depend on personal relations with decision-makers, he doesn't want to establish any relationship with me, probably fearing that this would doom him to accept my project.

MISCELLANEOUS, 24TH DECEMBER 1985

I call “Penthouse” magazine (42-56—72-72). They inform me that the “Art” column is run by someone called Nicolas Hugnet. He’s not in. Must try to catch him in the afternoon.

*

I call Lechêne (Hachette group). Its director, Claude Chevalier (43-29-12-24) is absent. They tell me to call back in the afternoon.

*

I call Flammarion publishing house. Talk to Adam Biro’s secretary, who in the morning asked me to call again, as the boss was not in. Now she informs me that she can’t find my documents.

- Must have got mislaid – she says. – Could you send them again? Let me remind you the address: 26, rue Racine, Paris 6. No, no, do not come! We’ll write to you ...

*

I call “Penthouse” again. At last, Nicolas Hugnet is in.

- Oh, yes, I remember something ... It was such a thick envelope, wasn’t it? He obviously doesn’t recall my dispatch.

- I quite liked it, but would be pleased to see something more – he adds cautiously. – Could you send the documents again, please?

He hasn’t seen anything. I’m sure of it, so I offer to come to the editorial office and invite him to dinner. He’s leaving Paris now and coming back on 7th January. I should call then and make an appointment.

*

I call Lechêne publishing house for the third time. Speak to Mr Claude Chevalier. He assures me that he hasn't received my documents. – Do you want me to send them again? – I ask, being perfectly aware that if I don't see him in person, he will not open another envelope, just like he hasn't opened the previous one. It will simply land in the dustbin.

I invite him to dinner then, “so as to personally present him the design of an album about the Polish painter Beksiński”.

It seems to be my lucky day, because he accepts the invitation. He will let me know in January so that we can arrange to meet.

CHRISTMAS, 24TH DECEMBER 1985

1. A ray of hope: a few journalists, an editor (from Lechêne publishing house) as well as the head of the art magazine “Penthouse” have accepted my invitation to dinner. I’ll have an opportunity to directly talk to them about the album design and exhibitions. They ask me, sometimes twice, to provide them with documents about Beks. I’d like to remind you, my Friend, that these documents consist of two posters (small and big), a two-part brochure (one of which contains the reproductions of paintings, while the other one – fragments of interviews with Beks arranged in three parts), a leaflet in four languages with the text *Beksiński – Painting without Meanings*, a video cassette with a film and postcards.

2. A little consolation: today, with the morning post I got Ms Dzikowska’s article about me, entitled *Passion*. It appeared in “Radar” magazine, read chiefly by youth in the countryside. I’m surprised how that woman, after a conversation lasting merely a quarter, was able to perform a thorough (and full of anxiety ...) radiology of my effusive nature.

3. The sum of my financial commitments for the year 1986 practically hasn’t changed. It’s still astronomical: 800 thousand instead of 850 000 francs. When calling Eclair laboratory today, I found a solution which should satisfy Film Service and spare me the expense of 50 000 francs for the production of materials they demand from me. Instead of the sum of 70 000, which I was afraid of, 20 000 will be enough if I send Film Service only the film “master”, that is the interpositive instead of the internegative, whose production would cost more.

4. I also registered the film with Centre National du Cinéma. Since its producer is a private person, and not a company, the department of registration hesitated whether the formalities could be completed. For a moment, I thought that a new problem would join the old ones. Luckily, a smile to the secretary solved the matter.

5. Ania has decided that we shouldn't put up our flat for sale until her mother goes away. She's lived with us for four months and is coming back to Poland in two days. In the meantime the situation should have become clear. In particular, Ania will already know how much money we may count on for the spring fashion season.

6. I still don't have any new clients.

7. It's Christmas today. Already six o'clock, so we'll be sitting down at the table.

FLAMMARION, 24TH DECEMBER 1985

I call Flammarion publishing house (45-49-12-20).

The consent to new designs depends on the director, Adam Biro. The secretary I talked to on the phone hasn't got his answer yet. I must call in the afternoon. In the meantime she'll remind him of my calls and the documents concerning Beks's album.

- He's very busy at the moment – she warns me.

1200 FRANCS, 26TH DECEMBER 1985

1. Yesterday was Christmas. I've got 1200 francs in my desk drawer and a multi-thousand hole in the bank. I don't expect any cash before the end of the month. I might sell a big icon, or Ania could have a few fashion shows ... In two or three days the 1200 francs from the drawer will inevitably run out. Ania will ask me to give her money for a living and I'll answer her that there's nothing left.

2. I still haven't got any new clients in my office. It's like nobody in Paris knew of the existence of a barrister having my name.

3. A few journalists and a representative of a gramophone record publishing company have accepted my invitation to dinner. I already mentioned it in my yesterday's notes. But how shall I pay for these meals?

SKORECKI, 31ST DECEMBER 1985

The journalist from “Liberation” and the film critic having a Polish name, Skorecki, whom I called yesterday, having previously sent him the film and documents about Beks, replied me in a way which had already become classic for me:

- Yes, yes, I remember. You wrote to me a couple of weeks ago. No, I haven't had time to see your cassette. Do you want me to send it back?

- No, I'd rather wait until you wa.....

- Well, it's up to you – he interrupts me. - As you wish.

I call Roger Gicquel from TF1:

- He's not in. Please, call back in a week.

I call Henri Chapier, a film critic from the French channel FR3.

- He's out. Call back in the afternoon, please.

The same story with Chazal, a film critic from “Franc Soir” daily. I call CNAP (National Centre for Fine Arts). Several days ago I asked them to send me documentation on various painting events in Paris itself and in the Parisian district. The person I turned to at that time is absent today.

- Please, call back later.

I call back later. Nobody answers. I wait two hours and call again. A trainee tells me she doesn't know about anything. She suggests I should call another number and ask for the documentation in question. I call the number she's given me. Somebody asks me to wait for a “competent” person, who right now is not in the office. After three minutes of waiting I hang up.

In principle, I don't include reports on the talks and endeavours in these general notes¹. However, all of them put together make it possible to realise

how difficult it is in this country to move somebody from their place or simply force them to do their duty.

Some of my interlocutors are absent from the office, and their inferiors don't know the matter and cannot take any decisions. The others didn't read my letters, or, even if they did, they "haven't had time" to watch the cassette. Some people promise to reply in 3-4 months (Hazan publishing house) or don't answer at all, while other return my documents without having bothered to open the envelope I sent them (a museum in Lyon).

The most frequent reply is:

- No, don't send anything. I won't have the time to look at it, anyway. We are terribly busy at the moment. Please, call in 3-4 weeks.

Two people fixed the date of an appointment with me for September 1986, that is, in nine months.

- Then I'm going to be a bit less busy – said one of them.

The incompetence and lack of professional responsibility of many people kept pestering me throughout the period of preparations for the exhibition. But these people were ordinary contractors, because at that time it seemed to me that I had money and didn't need to ask decision-makers for anything. Today, without an imagined, or at least borrowed franc in my pocket, I have come to understand that I can't do anything alone. So I turn to people holding senior positions, to the cultural establishment of this country, to editors, critics, museum curators, journalists. Logically speaking and considering the professional position they hold, I should deal with a completely different class of people and completely different work quality. By and large, managerial positions in this system are held by those who work better and are more professional than others.

However, objective criteria only partially determine a professional career in this country, so I often come across incompetent persons, barely interested in their job, unpunctual and bashing out their work, which they obviously detest.

A large part of this society works badly. Well, in Poland the level of performed work is even worse, but it's no consolation to me.

¹. This book has been written in French and in the French version its title is "Notes sur la situation générale", which means „Notes on the General Situation“, hence the expression “general notes”.

THE NEED TO WRITE,

7TH JANUARY 1986, 2 A.M.

I am finding the old need to write so as to relieve fear. Now I understand what Beks once said to me:

- Paint death to forget about it, at least for a while.

But the new year began with a few heartening signs.

A contract for Ania from Féraud arrived at last. Without it, my hope for another 60 000 francs would have certainly evaporated. But it did come.

The Finish television bought the film for 600 dollars. Just as much as it costs to produce a one-inch cassette they had demanded. But at least this purchase broke a cascade of refusals from Belgians, the Swiss and Japanese.

It wasn't long, however, before the black serious came back.

I wonder if the cassettes I'm sending to different televisions actually reach their addresses.

For example, the person who lives in New York and deals with the selection of short-length films for Oscar awards, a Mr Rappaport, told me on the phone that he hadn't received anything. Just like Ms Georgiades, whom I sent a cassette a month ago.

Other televisions don't acknowledge the receipt.

I therefore start to react like an animal pressed against a wall that it's not able to jump over; I suspect that someone at the post office in Marly has discovered the contents of my parcels and keeps stealing them.

In any case, I'm sure that the cassette for Israeli television has vanished. A journalist from Tel Aviv has written that she hasn't got anything, although the cassette was sent two months ago.

The documents which I sent a month ago to Flammarion and Hazan publishing houses with a proposal of releasing an album about Beks have evoked no response.

The most distressing, however, was my recent telephone conversation with Ms Georgiades. She gave me to understand that her enthusiasm for having an exhibition in Houston had greatly lessened. Anyway, she hadn't dealt with it for a month, as she was busy "hunting deer in Texas".

My account has become heavier with new debts reaching 20 000. I've got a 40-thousand hole in the bank and 600 000 of various financial commitments for the year 1986 alone. And that's without the costs of the new exhibition in Valmay, which is necessary to maintain and deepen the impression made by the first one.

Without selling the paintings and the film, I cannot count on more than 200 000.

My bad financial situation is also morally depressing. The relations with the environment are deteriorating. I'm becoming nervous and aggressive towards my only ally – Ania. And without her I will not be able to get myself out of it. Especially that her liking and a good mood have so far provided me with a kind of mental comfort. If I were to lose this atmosphere of love and calmness in the event Ania started reproaching me – it would be even harder to withstand.

Night fears have come back. I keep waking at about two in the morning, after two hours' sleep, with a painfully clear awareness that there's no way out. It inexorably carries me off into the depths. In the best case scenario, the nervous, chaotic movements I make to clamber out of an avalanche exhaust me before time.

There are a few vultures around me, sharpening their beaks in anticipation. My friends hate me and are patiently waiting for a moment when they can stigmatize my "light heartedness" and the lack of "caution", finally "sympathising" with my wife due to the financial disaster I have led

her to. The acquaintances will attack me to give back all the blows I struck them for years, which they furiously had to pass over in silence.

It will be like the last elections for the position of maître de conférences at university¹ – a collective revenge, short, immediate and deadly.

Beks, unfair and exaggerating in his letter as of 1st December, apologized to me in the next one, which arrived three weeks later. For some time, I was cross with him and didn't call. On second thoughts, however, I resumed contact. But there was no heart in it. I can't muster the warm feelings that I still had for him not long ago. He must be feeling the same. During our yesterday's phone chat he just made a casual mention of some rumours circulating in Warsaw that my exhibition was "brilliant". He himself hasn't got the slightest intention to congratulate me on the exhibition, or to apologise for the accusations of "hasty preparations at five to twelve", "pretentious, petty bourgeois frames" and "the ridiculous lettering, irritating like a pimple".

This man can neither be grateful nor can he correct his mistakes, which certainly doesn't prevent me from being deeply influenced by his painting. During the day I repeatedly fix my gaze on "Katyń", "Don Quixote", "Bath", "Legs on the Chair" or "A couple of Mummies", which are hung around me in the study. Each time I get an impression that I've had them for merely two days and I experience the first moments of joy known to a collector who has just managed to buy the items he's been dreaming of for years.

The thought that all that might end up in failure and the paintings would remain unknown to the local audience for ever is even more cruel than the fear that, due to my passion, I will end up stuck in abject poverty.

¹ Maître de conférences – the French counterpart of Polish associate professor

CONSOLATION, 12TH JANUARY 1986

A few rays of comfort have lit my dull everyday existence:

Next week I'm meeting with two journalists working for second-class magazines, who will write something about my next exhibition (if I manage to arrange one at all ...). I am also going to see a member of the editorial staff for the erotic magazine "Penthouse – France", a Nicolas Hugnet, who seems interested in the publishing of several paintings by Beksinski in one of the subsequent issues.

The art director of the gramophone record publishing house Polydor (I think his name is Ducros) is the first decision-maker who, having seen Beks's documents, was very enthusiastic over the phone and told me:

- We liked it very much!

There is a chance then to have the reproduction on a record cover. Why not? It is something, after all. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

Apart from that, at the end of April a TV programme fair will be held in Cannes (don't confuse it with the festival, which is organised in May). Also next week I've got an appointment with one of the fair organisers, as I'm thinking of buying the right to participate in it. If the transaction takes place, I will have an opportunity to personally present the film to foreign and French televisions. This way I will be able to talk to the purchasers directly and have a chance to defend the film, if necessary.

The ambassador of Poland, Mr. Stefanowicz, promised me to talk with the French authorities and insist that they organize an exhibition of Beks's paintings in one of the Parisian museums.

That's all.

KEEP SILENT, 12TH JANUARY 1986

The hardest to stand is the fact that all my fears I must keep to myself. For if a mere shadow of fear appeared in my eyes, most of my friends would leave me. All those who today are congratulating me on the successful exhibition, would turn their backs on me angrily. Beks, Szydło, Nyczek or Louse, who in a way admire my “success”, would change their minds immediately if they found out about my real situation.

- It was easy to organize a prestigious exhibition with borrowed money – they would chorus.

I can almost hear them. I can see them as they turn on me to settle a few scores. Beks would immediately terminate the contract, which is beginning to disturb him (unless some big money appeared very quickly). Or Szydło – would accuse me of fraud, if I returned him the three paintings and the relief by Beks, having nothing to pay within the agreed time limit. Or finally Nyczek – maliciously, with his ever reflective face, would announce ex cathedra: “Didn’t I tell you at the beginning that he’s a pilferer?”.

Not to mention the whole rest, just waiting for a moment of my weakness to sink their claws in my carcass.

So I will be silent and keep striking triumphant poses, just to prevent them from getting this pleasure.

SOMEWHERE ELSE, 12TH JANUARY 1986

French decision-makers do not want Beks. Shouldn't I look for luck somewhere else then? I'm thinking of other countries, where some people have been advising me to go since the very beginning: for example Germany, the aesthetic tradition of which better suits this form of tragic expressiveness, Nordic countries or the USA, where new things can get through with less difficulty?

Easy to say.

My brother Johnny left me a message on the answerphone yesterday. The proposal of having an exhibition in Boston doesn't make him happy. He's talked to some traders and painters, none of whom gave him any hope of selling Beks in the States. And who's going to organize an exhibition without at least the slightest chance to earn on it?

Ms Georgiades, who showed interest in the exhibition in Houston when staying in Paris, has kept her mouth shut since that time. I suppose that, just like Johnny, she showed the brochure everywhere and soon figured out that nobody wanted it.

In Germany I don't know anybody who could walk around galleries and find out. Who I should turn to then, and upon whose recommendation? Obviously, I've sent all the documents to a number of galleries there. It's equally obvious, however, that I haven't received any reply. I tried to meet the cultural attaché of the Embassy of the Federal Republic in Paris. Didn't manage to catch him. Although he's German, he might have picked up the French disease: whenever I call him, he's not there, he always has "a meeting downtown". Even if I did contact him, though, the answer would be negative, as usual. For why should he care for making a Pole popular in Germany? Besides, how is he supposed to do that? the Lands in Germany are not dependent on Bonn with regard to cultural policy. He would certainly

send me back to the ministers of culture in each Land. I'd better do it on my own, without waiting for his proposal. Just in case, I asked for their list in the Goethe Institute in Paris. Of course, I will write to each of them, but the result is a foregone conclusion.

In Norway Jasia Januszezewska-Skreiberg is talking about Beks's exhibition in Unique Antique gallery in Dal near Oslo. It's a thin thread, and though I try not to paint a gloomy picture of things, I think it's going to break soon. For if the owner really wanted to show Beks, he would have contacted me directly to present a coherent and clear project.

No, no matter how much I want it, I see no chance of seeking my fortune anywhere else.

Besides, I'm aware that important things are happening right here. If I intend to show Beks to the whole world, I must start with Paris.

WONDERS, 12TH JANUARY 1986

Incredible but true ... As I look at the wonders that surround me: “Katyń”, “Don Quixote”, “Bath” or “A Couple of Mummies”, hung on the walls of my study, I can’t understand, don’t grasp it. How could anyone be indifferent to so much beauty, so much strength and emotion emanating from Beks’s paintings?

How come that the members of the French cultural circles shrug their shoulders at this most beautiful and powerful kind of painting I have ever seen?

Could I really be so different from them?

There is also the second question: even if they finally recognized Beks as a genius, how could I possibly live next to them for the rest of my life, greet them with a shake of hands, talk to them as if nothing had happened? ...

THREE MONTHS, 12TH JANUARY 1986

Well, the conclusion that I came to three months after the exhibition: France, and at least its decision-makers (as for the audience, it was large and enthusiastic) do not care for Beks at all.

I walked around nearly all the museums, publishers, or film and painting purchasers, ministerial officials and gallery owners. In a word, all those who are important in Paris. Nobody in the world of art can still claim that they don't know anything about Beks's painting. As a matter of fact, having studied the exhibition golden book, I found in it the signatures (without any comment) of renowned Parisian reviewers. So they also were there. And they did see. The others know about Beks owing to the documents I sent them alongside the brochure and accompanying letters.

They didn't answer, though. The others said: no.

At the beginning, I thought it was some kind of temporary difficulty: I'd given them too little information. And anyway, too little time had passed and I'd put too little effort to expect a visible result – I kept telling myself.

Then, annoyed with their stubborn silence, I started to accuse my addressees of arrogance, laziness and incompetence.

It seems that both explanations are true to a large extent. However, the incessant, consistent refusal on the part of the people of art is acquiring a new significance. Its meaning is becoming painfully clear to me: the French cultural establishment just doesn't like Beks's painting.

Let me repeat: I still believe that I can't expect a spectacular success and I know I have to work really hard to achieve anything in this matter.

I still maintain that – not belonging to the local cultural elite – I'm treated bluntly, haughtily and with contempt by the people who perform their work badly.

But it's about something much deeper and more dangerous. Something that the energy of ten people like me is not able to fight. Something that neither painstaking work nor enormous patience can overcome throughout years of endless efforts. Something I will never be able to eradicate, even by sneaking into the local establishment, through contacts or (maybe in the future) money earned. This thing seems to be simply the profound aversion of the French world of culture to Beks's aesthetics.

But why?

I don't know and I'm bound to spend months, if not years, looking for the reason.

As an *advocatus diaboli*, I will try to find all the faults that the average man of art in France could find with this painting. Here are ten hypothetical features that he finds irritating about Beks's painting:

bleak
archaic
figurative
full of content
literary
Baroque
mystery-wrapped
sweaty
"sleek-licked"

Indeed, the whole local aesthetics that seems to prevail here at the moment is based on completely opposite values. For those who persist in rejecting, or actually ignoring my proposals, painting should be:

serene
futurist or at least avant-garde
rational
poetic
simple
light, or even frivolous

decorative
ingenious
spontaneous
deliberately unfinished

1. Bleak

When saying that Beks's painting is bleak I think of five obsessively recurrent motives: cruelty, fear, suffering, despair and death.

Beks's paintings are full of corpses, figures turning their backs, walking away into a grim distance, stitched up scars, twisted bones, black clouds, gales, closed, misty or popping out eyes, drooped heads, leaves or pieces of paper blowing in the air, ravens flapping their wings, open graves, cracked tombstones, ominous crosses, gagged mouths, blood-stained bandages, burning towns, hands clenched like claws, dark gulfs, cobwebs, bats, blind men with leucoma covering their eyes, destroyed houses, skulls, temples with holes made by bullets, figures tied up to stakes, Jewish cemeteries, tied up hands etc., etc.

The French buyer is put off by the bleakness. The French have absolutely no wish to discover every morning the *memento mori* hung on the walls of their flats, or to clench their fists with fear when looking at them in the evening.

- Beautiful, but I couldn't live with it – my guests kept repeating during the exhibition.

The average French spectator immediately associates this painting with Aushwitz, the ruins of burnt Warsaw, ghetto etc. I've been asked hundreds of times, whether Beks is Jewish, has he been to a concentration camp or does he paint Polish martyrdom, the Jewish holocaust or the atom mass destruction of humanity etc. A certain idiot, French critic, even wrote that Beks's painting was about the suffering of Poland under the yoke of communism and marshal law of general Jaruzelski.

The whole culture of rich France bursts with optimism, serenity and *joie de vivre*. Here the German occupation did not wreak havoc in the minds or predilections, or material goods. Earlier, except for losses sustained in the First World War, France had never been murdered or plundered. But it did ruthlessly murder and plunder the others in Africa and Asia.

That's why a wealthy French buyer of works of art has such a reluctant attitude to all kinds of death and destruction pictures, while being tremendously influenced by the colourful, pleasing to the eye impressionism, which allows you to accept life, as well as unaggressive, decorative abstraction, emanating joy and hope. Local galleries are packed with it. Whole walls in the flats of French bourgeois are wallpapered with this kind of stuff.

Though hesitantly, a French decision-maker, who unlike a French collector, does not have to buy, spend money and then live with these pictures on an everyday basis, would agree à la rigueur to Beksiński's bleakness. After all, Pina Bausch, Bacon, Kantor, Velickovic, though equally gloomy as Beks, are extremely popular in France. The bleakness of Beks however, according to a French critic or an official from the Ministry of Culture, is built of excessively clear, or even intrusive, elements. To a French cultural decision-maker Beksiński's dread is grotesque. "Empty threats", "the theatre of horror" ... How many times have I had to listen to that.

And that brings us to the next charge.

2. Figurative

To a French buyer, it doesn't seem a sin. As long as they are serene, jolly and optimistic, figurative paintings sell here quite well, so galleries in the provinces, in all resorts, but also big cities, like Lyon or Marseille, sell practically only figurative paintings (by the way, hideous!).

On the other hand, the French cultural establishment views this kind of painting as an outright crime. The art shown by serious Parisian galleries,

museums, public collections gathered by FNAC, FRAC and others, among people who have a say in the so-called society and during exhibitions organized by the ministry is almost solely abstract. Even if a human figure, animal or plant does appear in such works, it's merely a pretext, usually so deformed that it becomes unreal.

Some part of the cultural establishment in France perceives any return to the figurative past as an offence. And unforgivable one. For the formal revolution, of which the French were the precursors, does not settle for supporting the avant-garde, modernity or artistic experiments. Like all revolutions, it goes much further: with all its strength it condemns the past. With no mercy and no exception. It demands radical and absolute breaking up with the 19th century and bans any return to traditions from the past epochs. Whoever refuses to yield to it, will not get any support and, to make the matters worse, will be ignored.

Like in every dictatorship, even if it's a democratic dictatorship of the majority, the official French art must find an enemy, which will motivate it to fight. Like every culture, it has its "degenerated art". Only except that Hitler's realism agreed to exhibit Chagall, just to spit at it. Since Picasso was a sympathizer of Communism, he was often exhibited by socialist realism dictatorships, whereas in this country of "freedom" and "pluralism", the "degenerated art" is simply ignored. That's much more effective than any kind of witch-hunt.

The formal revolution gave birth to a generation (generation? generations!) of headstrong, sectarian, or even blind fighters. The fear that "pompiers", taking advantage of the inattention and inexcusable tolerance of the modernity upholders, could rise from the ashes, gives sleepless nights to some of the local decision-makers. All of them feel burdened with a holy mission to relentlessly defend the benefits of the "revolution".

For those people Beks's painting is not just outdated relic of the past. It's simply rotten. Like a corpse. A stinky, but dangerous corpse, as it might resurrect.

Since for the fanatics of novelties, modernity or progress in art, anything that does not discover new horizons, does not blaze a trail or serve the avant-garde, is like carrion . Just makes them sick. Especially figuration.

It's also an element of contemporary French culture and one of the reasons responsible for my failures. To a much larger extent than the arrogance and incompetence of the local decision-makers.

3. Full of content

But the sin of Beks's painting is far more serious than the figuration itself: it is full of associations, symbols, contents.

Well, in France, some people of culture are incomprehensibly reluctant to compare painting with prose. They do, however, search for similarities with poetry.

I use the term "incomprehensible reluctance", because when defining a thing with the features of another thing, you usually choose the one which adds splendour. Well, the French poetry has always been poor, whereas the French prose is appreciated all over the world. Why is then painting so eagerly praised for its bonds with poetry, and criticized for the links to prose?

I don't know. But it's true. You can often hear a Frenchman going into raptures over a painting: "it's full of poetry", while another picture will be reluctantly, if not contemptuously, labelled by the same Frenchman with a short: "literary, narrative".

If therefore some painting is vague, misty and poetic, it stands a chance. It will be called "lyric abstract" or something like that, and the French will adore it. It just must be obscure, implied, inexplicit, discreet, bashful, that is, similar to what poetry should be like in their opinion.

Anyway, mind you, my Friend, that some of the local art critics also try (usually in an embarrassingly inept way) to be poetic, light and vigorous, when writing about painting.

On the other hand, all that's painted or said in a clear way, explicitly, unambiguously, with the i's dotted and t's crossed, is considered over-talked, anecdotal, literary, self-evident, and essentially, boring like the 19th-century realist literature. So these are the epithets that are hurled at Beks's painting by some of his enemies here.

And again, the difficulty I come across at this point is something more than insufficient amount of information or an unfortunate coincidence. Here the obstacle lies deep in the very culture of this country and is impossible to skip over.

4. "Sleek-licked"

The others are put off by the ultraclassic technique of a "sleek-licked" painting ("so sleek that it makes you sick" – they add so as to leave no doubts how utterly disgusting it is to them).

The careful painting of details, perspective, a human body, a plant, a table or a face seems to them extremely irritating. These people associate a well and meticulously painted picture with a daub committed by a labouring pictorial wannabe by the sweat of his brow. Anything that doesn't spurt from the brush, that is not born within a fraction of a second or does not pop out onto the canvas like Athena leaped from Zeus's head, is considered blunt, down-to-earth scribbling of a mediocre craftsman. In the best case scenario, it's regarded as a school exercise, which shouldn't be required from students anyway, so as not to suppress the free pulsating of their inspiration.

Such understanding of painting is also part of today's culture, hard-rock, hard to break. Harder and more persistent than the arrogance and incompetence of gentlemen from the cultural French establishment.

5. Mystery-wrapped

While some of the local people are obsessed with modernity, poetry or spontaneity, other decision-makers are paralysed with admiration for knowledge, science and technological progress. After all, Cartesianism, the Enlightenment, rationalism were French inventions, weren't they?

Therefore, any art referring to mystery, esotericism, symbolism or romanticism seems to them a naïve babble of ignoramuses. Science has already explained everything, or, if not, it will explain it tomorrow. Hence we've got constructivism, geometrical abstraction, conceptualism and other intellectual trends in art. All of them are supported by an endless stream of hermetic, incomprehensible explanations, a complicated exegesis pushed into the framework of strict syllogisms of contemporary logic, semantics or ethnological analysis.

It's enough to read the local reviewers. Just like avant-garde painters try to create intellectual masterpieces, the critics go to great lengths to present philosophical arguments, strewn with technical vocabulary, which they have drawn from the scientific nomenclature. With every step you make in the local art literature, you can come across "investigations", "laboratories", "search", "discoveries", "experiments" and so on. When reading those guys' master theses in the history of art, you get an impression that you've come across a dissertation in hermeneutics. Yes, the naïve scientism might have died in science long time ago, but in the art of this country it's still flourishing.

Therefore, despite the vague, nearly shameful memory of Moreau, Delville, Redon, Lévy-Dhurmer or Drops, today's symbolic, visionary and phantasy painting is viewed as ridiculous by a part of the French cultural world. Blatantly contrary to today's achievements of the reason, technology and science, it presents merely a historical value. It might be still interesting to poorly educated bumpkins. According to some "cultural" French people, such art may be liked by lower classes, but not by the educated, enlightened elite. Hence the painting by Beks (or Giger, or Hernandez for example)

comes across too easy and popular (in the bad sense). The average French decision-maker in the field of art associates it with cartoons for children, phantasy, oriental tattoos covering the shoulders of people living on the fringe of society, with decorations for the films intended for the youth and cheap science fiction illustrations.

6. Sweaty

On top of that, all the French are in a way incapable of experiencing deep emotions. This superficial, tepid, shallow sensitivity is the first thing noticed by a newcomer.

Indeed, in public life the French seem moderate, which is undoubtedly a valuable merit in politics. In art, however, they are cold. They hate painting which speaks in a lofty tone, makes a grimace or calls for help. They detest strong, expressive, tragic works.

To many local people of culture, Beks's painting seems "garish", "hysterical", "exaggerated", "exhibitionistic".

- You, Poles, do not know moderation. A diapason at the very start, exaltation. As if you were murdered every moment – such annoyed comments I heard during the exhibition.

And that's also about the deeply rooted way of perceiving the art of painting in the culture of this country. It's typical of a part of the French artistic world and so much harder to fight than the ordinary incompetence and arrogance of my everyday interlocutors!

- Wishing to sell my paintings to Frogs is like trying to live off pork trade in Israel – Beks predicted ironically, though soberly on the very beginning of our acquaintance.

Today I've come to the conclusion that I was wrong neglecting his warnings. Being a loner who'd never spent a day in France, Beks could better see through the artistic sensitivity of this country than I, who had lived in Paris for twenty one years.

All in all then, should I manage to impose my idol upon this country one day, it will be more significant than a usual success in the promotion of a new painter. If I did it, I would achieve a much more difficult thing: I'd instil in the French culture the interest for aesthetics completely different from its old and new traditions. A piece of cake!

But I keep coming back to the beginning, as if I haven't understood anything, haven't made any observations or learnt anything. For even though my mind is more and more clearly grasping the enormous work ahead of me and can see a slight chance for success, the heart will not accept a failure. Not only because I love this painting more than I can express it, but also because my nature rebels against final judgements leading to resignation.

While my reason can see things clearly, the soul persists in believing that there's no flat refusal from the French decision-makers, no contradiction with the local culture or the prevailing spirit of the age. Naively, but stubbornly, I claim that it's just usual, temporary difficulty and the French must be given some time to better get to know Beks. That is has nothing to do with violating the local aesthetic sensitivity, but merely trivial problems with promoting a new talent. That it always costs some time and effort, as there are many artists who would like to get a place in this culture etc.

And whoever says: difficulties, they assume there is a potential, hope, persistence, effort.

No, even if I was to move a mountain from one place to another, I will not give up and stop halfway.

- Don't worry – says Ania jokingly. – You will teach the Jewish to eat pork, and then we'll open a slaughterhouse in Tel Aviv. You'll see.

CHEVALIER, 13TH JANUARY 1986

I call Chevalier from Lechêne publishing house (46-34-68-00). He's out. His secretary tells me he's handed over the materials to Hervé de la Martinière.

I call Hervé de la Martinière (46-34-85-82). He's not in. I must call back at about eleven. A woman takes my details.

I call at five to eleven. He hasn't looked at the materials yet. Busy. I should call at the end of the week.

RIDDLE, 16TH JANUARY 1986

1. Here's a riddle that I can't solve however much I try: the chasm the one side of which is the enthusiastic welcome of Beks by the Parisian audience, and the other – icy, adamant silence of galleries, museums, ministries, televisions and other decision-makers.

This contradiction is so Manichaeian that almost unreal. It resembles a second-rate movie with the main character fighting with the world in the style of Kafka, the absurdity of which eats everything away, including the film, and is so exaggerated that the world loses all its credibility.

For there isn't a single day that somebody wouldn't express their admiration for Beks. But there is also no single day that I wouldn't receive four, five "no" answers from all those whom I address by phone or to whom I send reproductions and cassettes with a request for support.

This play of simultaneous utter contrasts, this daily combination of extremes which alternate with each other is in a way psychedelic. I would like to believe that my paranoid mind suggests premature conclusions, but such a lot of people are involved on both sides that any illusion is out of question.

2. Whenever I call, it's usually the secretary who picks up the phone and gives me a ritual answer: "Mr X is not in the office now". Or: "He's in a meeting."

The second or third time I call, when I finally come across the decision-maker himself, I hear a reply in a slightly aggressive tone (as if my interlocutor wanted to defend himself anticipating an attack on my part) that he hasn't had time to look at the documentation or see the film. If I make a nice face, I will invariably hear the same explanation: "You understand, at the moment we've got loads of work."

If, after many telephone reminders, at last I succeed in forcing him to see the documents, the answer is through the secretary again: "Mr X has seen

your documents (or your film). Unfortunately, he can't give you the answer you counted on".

If the decision-maker answers me personally, he serves the refusal in a tone which cuts any kind of discussion, so as to avoid what he fears most: polemics that might ensue from my question: "but why?"

In the event the decision is taken collectively, the refusal itself is formulated in the same way, except that it's hidden behind the vague word "commission". "The commission has seen your documents (or: your film), but cannot accept the proposal." Or: "Your candidacy has not been accepted by the commission".

3. If the refusal comes in a letter, the formula is always the same. I might have already mentioned it in my notes, so forgive me, my Friend, if I'm repeating myself. It has two variants, a and B.

Variant a consists of three sentences, while variant B – four. The first two sentences and the last one are the same for both versions.

One of the sentences plays the role of an introduction and refers to the facts: "We received your And contained in them for which we thank you".

The second sentence is the most important and contains the decision. It starts with the word "unfortunately" and announces the refusal. It's usually short, kind of embarrassed.

Only variant B, relatively rare, contains the third sentence, namely the motivation: "Our schedule for the years to come is already full". Or: "This kind of aesthetics doesn't fall within the scope of our museum's interests" (or a similar formula).

After the disappointment which follows the refusal contained in the second sentence, I most intently focus on the third one. If they have already rejected me, at least I'd like to know why! – I think intensely and carefully read the explanation a few times.

But it's always formulated evasively and doesn't give a real answer. Having received dozens such letters, I already know that I'll never discover the real reasons of refusal.

Now follows the last, fourth sentence, shared by both versions. In this very French sentence, my correspondent, who not only has never seen me in his life, but has caused me distress, ensures me of his "cordial", "respectful", "sincere", "friendly" or "best" feelings. "Please accept my best regards.." – he writes.

So I do. Of course, I accept ...

CRITERIA, 16TH JANUARY 1986

As for many years I've been moving in the milieu of research workers, I'm used to objective criteria that every enterprise should be guided by.

My intellectual world is inhabited by definitions, clear-cut orders and prohibitions, regulations and the codes in force. I was taught them at university, and now pass them to my students.

The fact that I'm a barrister hasn't changed anything. On the contrary, my interlocutors have included tribunals and civil service representatives with their numerous vices, but also an undeniable, fundamental virtue, namely rational behaviour. For the administration bodies and courts respond to letters which are sent to them, observe the deadlines imposed by regulations, draw up lists of bans and orders based on strict rules, issue permits having previously examined the matter etc.. If civil servants do not observe these requirements, they are punished by special courts after a prior lawsuit according to a strictly defined procedure.

Living in such a world for more than twenty years must have left a permanent impression on my psyche, so when I entered the world of art, at the beginning I couldn't understand any of its mechanisms.

The French culture administration, contrary to other governmental agencies, is not bound by any regulations or any forms of dialogue between the decision-maker and the applicant. In its everyday activity, it's not subjected to any hierarchal or court control.

At the same time, I realize that also the private sector dealing with art is not governed by any rational criteria, which are usually ascribed to it.

As regards the culture administration, the criteria of the quality of a work of art, the quality of accompanying information, the benefit that it might bring to the audience, its purchase or exposition, have very little influence on decisions taken by officials.

As far as the private sector is concerned, it turns out that, surprising as it might seem, the basic, objective criterion of profit is not always decisive.

1. You will tell me that the quality of a work of art is relative. All right. It's not an answer, though, but merely an excuse, because if artistic quality is a social value, its confirmation should be sought in the opinion of the society. In such a case, the crowds that came to see the exhibition, all those admiration-filled entries in the golden book, the interjections which I heard from all sides are a social, therefore, objective confirmation of the quality of Beks's painting.

- Oh, God, how beautiful it is, wonderful! – I heard from far and near.

Hiding behind the statement that “beauty is a purely personal matter”, which is the typical behaviour of the officials from Beaubourg Centre, is an example of exceptional hypocrisy.

No, quality criteria do exist, even in art. An aesthetic impression is not as subjective as different Pontiuses Pilates claim, just because they want to weasel out of giving their own opinion.

Well, in everyday activity of the French culture administration, the criteria of quality and beauty of a specific art work are of very little importance. They account for merely a fraction of decisions taken by the officials who buy and exhibit works of art for the audience.

2. The same applies to the quality of information which accompanies a given work of art.

After all, – I kept asking myself – isn't it my fault? Did I go about it properly? Perhaps I am to blame for my own failures just because I advertised Beks's painting in the wrong way and didn't give enough information to French instances?

Actually, it would be a sort of consolation for me, as it would mean that when others take over my mission of making Beks's works popular, they will do it better than me and the culture administration in France will finally accept his painting.

But this explanation does not satisfy me, either. Accepting it, I would be unfair to myself, as each of you, Readers, will have an opportunity to leaf through the documents which contain the copies of letters about Beks, reports on telephone calls, detailed reports on the efforts I made so that information about Beks could get everywhere. No, laziness wasn't my sin. There were hundreds of letters, reminders, phone calls.

Also, nothing in the documents implies that my endeavours, though numerous, might have been awkward. It seems to me that they were neither expressed in an inappropriate tone (for example, aggressive or effusive) nor chaotic or incoherent, and the proposals I made were neither exaggerated nor devoid of realism. To my mind, there was nothing in my doings that would suggest I was a flippant and hence unreliable informant.

Finally, the choice of the doors I knocked at wasn't either modest or accidental. All of them were the doors of people in power, culture branch decision makers holding their posts in ministries, governmental offices and management bodies, that is, the doors of all those who, sooner or later, must deal with an enterprise like mine in this country.

3. Then, there is the private sector and its driving force: profit.

The administration works according to the rules of public service, that is, the duty of unpaid or low-paid service for the whole society. It is therefore slow by principle, deprived of any individual motivation or enthusiasm. Actually, this might have been the reason for my failures in talks with ministers and different officials.

On the other hand, wherever the principle of profit applies, there should be enormous energy, enthusiasm and efforts. At least, this is the motto of

each liberal society: by seeking an individual profit, satisfy (sort of unwittingly, but efficiently) the needs of all. And where profit is the king, the realm should be governed by rationality, efficiency, selection and promotion.

Nothing of the kind.

The world of art trade, the world of galleries, art merchants and collectors, as I see it after two years' observations, is deeply irrational, just like the world of culture branch offices and institutions. Its decisions are frequently influenced by obscure reasons, connections, influences, string-pulling snobberies, phobias, antipathies and fears instead of profit and rationality.

What is the conclusion then?

I'm going round in circles and still don't know what to stick to. The more I try to let in some light, the deeper and darker the mystery of my failures becomes.

KEY, 16TH JANUARY 1986

When talking to someone yesterday, I found a new key to solving my problems. Admittedly, it was a bit large, but at first glance seemed to open all bolted doors.

- For a very long time I worked alone – I talked. – First, being a student, then a university research worker, and finally, a barrister, I had neither colleagues at work nor superiors, so I coped and struggled solely with my own skills, own motivations and own competence. Little did I know about the world and its governing forces.

As an able adherent of Marxist theories, the huge doses of which I'd been injected in my youth, I thought at the beginning that the history is ruled by the efforts of masses, their work and struggle.

Only now, when I come in contact with many people while promoting Beks, do I realize the passive idleness of idolised Demos. The public and its admiration do not mean or contribute anything. The public will not lift its finger. And if it does, it will be pointless.

I therefore changed my mind for a time and, banging the table with my fist, began to claim enthusiastically that the world is pulled forward by a handful of resourceful, talented and courageous people. In a word, the history is driven by the minority and, owing to its gifts, persistence and imagination, the world is able to stand on its feet.

And again, I had to come down a peg and open my eyes to reality: the elites of a demo-liberal system (at least in this country) are affected by sclerosis, nervously and greedily clinging to their privileges, inaccessible and static.

I came to the conclusion that I couldn't expect help either from one side or the other, and had to become reconciled with the fact that I would have to wade through the sea of mediocrity alone and nothing but alone.

Telling my interlocutor all those things, I suddenly realised that I was blathering like nutcases and impotent men. For I've heard on many occasions loonies and wimps accusing the world of stupidity ("all of them are idiots") or dishonesty, corruptibility and partiality ("all of them are thieves"). But I recall that at the time when I was still in my right mind, I used to smile at such accusations, as they seemed at least exaggerated.

- Which – I talked to myself while sermonising before my interlocutor, doesn't change the fact that it's impossible to close eyes to the obvious thing: I can use the fingers of just one hand to count the people who, after a two-year period of our cooperation for the needs of Beks's promotion, deserve to be called professionals, enterprising or open-minded.

An hour after I'd finished enchanting my interlocutor with these witty arguments and had given a few intelligent replies to myself, I came to simpler conclusions, much closer to the common sense. Whenever something is connected with Beks's painting, I tend to set very high standards and require people to make efforts which would match my passion. But when fulfilling my other duties – especially in court – which I don't particularly love, I'm as mediocre as everybody else, equally deprived of any enthusiasm whatsoever.

What is then the "fin mot" of this philosophy dissertation?

An enthusiastic amateur works better than a professional. However, convinced of his own superiority, he feels contempt for others. As a result, nobody wants to help him. All in all, he loses battles in the fields where others achieve the set goal more slowly and without any drama.

To last

MARTINIÈRE, 17TH JANUARY 1986

I call Hervé de la Martinière (Lechêne publishing house). His secretary, Ms Bragua, tells me that one of the programme commission members has seen my documents.

- It's about a Polish painter. The audience is scarce. I'm sorry, but despite the quality of this painting, we have to refuse.

I ask:

- But is it only mercantile considerations that don't allow you to issue this album?

She answers:

- Yes ... Yes ... I think so

And I've been sent back to the secretary again. So I'd already knocked the doors of all publishing houses in Paris. All of them unanimously refused to release an album about Beks's works.

What shall I do then?

What?

Just do it yourself.

CARPENTIER, 22ND JANUARY 1986

Today I met with the owner of a major gallery, located on Bac Street (number 46), a Carpentier. In all that confusion, I wanted to seek some advice from him. The meeting had been proposed and then arranged by doctor Cohen. Before I recount the conversation with my main interlocutor, I'd like to say a few words about our middleman.

Cohen used to be a doctor and next converted to a businessman. Today he's the owner of a chain of shops with imported English furniture. I met him when buying a sofa. As every good tradesman, he can easily strike up an acquaintance. One thing led to another and I told him that I was interested in the painting of "a guy who lives in Poland and whose several paintings I've already bought". It was at the time when I purchased the first items of my collection from Ściegienny, Beks himself and from Wahl. I had a few slides with me, so I showed them to Cohen. Like hundreds of people after him, he was surprised by the paintings. But his reaction was of particular importance to me: it was one of the first reactions I'd experienced, so it made a powerful impression on me. Additionally, it was accompanied by a piece of advice, which later turned out to be decisive. Not realizing the significance of what he was saying, doctor Cohen made a casual remark when walking to the door with me: - When you've met such a painter, it's worthwhile having exclusive rights to him.

At that time I didn't know anything about exclusivity agreements, just like I didn't know anything about art trade. But the idea started germinating in my mind, and a month later, when going to Poland, I already had a ready project. The project inspired by the talk with doctor Cohen. As you see, my Friend, everything began quite by chance.

Upon return from Poland, I visited him and gave him a bottle of Polish vodka as a present. He was surprised when he discovered the reason for

the gift, as he hadn't realised the importance of his advice and most probably had simply forgotten about it.

Besides, since he long enthused over the painting "heads in blood", I decided to buy it from Baele's son, though I actually didn't like it much.

Later on, doctor Cohen often told me about a serious art tradesman he would like me to meet. At the beginning, I wasn't very keen on the meeting, because its faint mercantile smell hurt my pride. However, the necessity of selling at least a few paintings by Beks had become a matter of the utmost urgency. I therefore contacted doctor Cohen and asked him to put me in touch with his friend.

Well, this is what I wanted to say about doctor Cohen. I must admit that if I have ever met anyone friendly, kind and really unselfish on my "Beks way", it surely was him.

Today I met with him in the quarter of St. Germain des Près. Having no money, I couldn't invite him to a posh restaurant. Tough luck. But I'd noticed that he wasn't the extravagant type, either: just in case he had to pay the bill, Cohen readily accepted my proposal to go to the Plate of Beef, which is a restaurant with flat-rate menu pricing. Our conversation very quickly moved to the problems which result from working with the French. My bitterness soon found an attentive listener in him.

- Oh, dear, how well I understand you – he told me, while confiding his own problems to me, the problems of a Jewish emigrant from North Africa, who had to pave his way in this sclerotic, hostile and sluggish society.

- Have you ever been to the States? – I asked him. – I heard people work really hard there and you can achieve things.

No, he'd never been to the States.

After dinner, at the arranged time, doctor Cohen takes me to that Carpentier, for whom we have to wait twenty minutes. Right now we are chatting about one or two things with his wife. First a bit tense, Mrs Carpentier soon relaxes and tells us interesting things about life in Israel,

the inflation in this country, problems with finding a flat, earnings etc. She goes there to see her daughter five or six times a year.

Her husband, who turns up a bit later, right away makes an impression of an open, bright and cordial man. His handshake is firm and short.

He tells me that he's already seen the brochure and the film, which doctor Cohen gave him through an acquaintance of theirs. Now he's looking at three paintings by Beks, which I've brought along. These are: "Town in Ruins", which I bought from Seniuch, "Icon", which Ania also calls "Makowski", and "Face with Inscription, Hanging over the Sea".

When we start talking about Beks, I take out a piece of paper and, as the conversation moves on, I put down all the impressions of my interlocutor. I can therefore certify that what I write is true.

Carpentier admits straight away that it's "very good painting" and "Beks is a real painter". But the sale of his works is out of question, because they are simply "scary". He's absolutely sure of that and will not change his mind throughout the conversation.

"He's never going to become a great painter. Too scary".

"You're going to have endless problems with this painting. Give it up".

"Stop! You're coming into a hole without a way-out".

"Just try to recover the money you've put in it and forget it".

At a certain point, doctor Cohen shows him the slide of Madonna and Child.

- The moment you see it, you start thinking about death – says Carpentier. – You'll never sell this painting. Closed eyes are associated with death. Misty eyes also bring death to mind.

In reply, I tell him about Beks's success in Poland.

- He might be liked in Poland – Carpentier answers. – Poles are peculiar kind of people. They've had too many brushes with death.

I listen to him attentively, but say to myself: Talk all you want, “specialist”. This painter is going to be more fast-selling than Picasso. Neither you nor I will live to see it, but a time will come when each painting by Beks can be sold at a price determined by the seller.

And I’m not shaken in my belief even when Carpentier’s son (a 24 or 25-year-old youth) enters the gallery and, asked by his father: “What do you think of it?”, answers in an absolutely identical way: “Macabre. It won’t sell.”

Actually, I don’t know the Old Testament at all, but I’ve heard it contains a parable which goes more or less like that: “If one person tells you that you are wrong, it might be true. If three people say you are wrong, it is almost certain to be true. And if all people claim that you are wrong, you needn’t worry: surely, you are right”.

Of course, this doesn’t prevent me from memorising a large number of Carpentier’s strategic tips. It’s not even worth trying to show Beks in Japan.

- It’s like committing suicide. A gallery daring to exhibit such a painter would be smashed up. To the Japanese, this painting would simply be shameful. (See the endnote).

- The Australians buy only big names, but chiefly third-rate pictures. Just out of snobbery, they want to have a great painter. For example, a mediocre painting by Renoir.

- And what do you think of the States? – I ask.

- Perhaps in the west states? But that might come off only after prior 4-5 exhibitions around the world.

As regards Italy, he hesitates. When I tell him about Margonari and the large-scale success of his exhibitions organised in Mantua and Florence, he doubts:

- Well, maybe, maybe ...

But he does advise me to try in Germany and German Switzerland. Proposes to look for the address of Bronstaad gallery (in Hamburg?) and give

it to me on the phone. Before that, he will call the gallery and tell them about me.

Among other strategic tips, I have noted also this one:

- To become famous, a painter must sell well. In many galleries, not just one. This arouses confidence and people begin to appreciate him. If not selling well, even a gigantic painter will never be famous. And vice versa.

Besides, he gives me a lot of practical advice, which I scrupulously write down:

- If a gallery wants to have a decent exhibition of a painter, it must invest at least 200 000 francs. So it must have 30-40 paintings to be put up for sale. In such a case, the division of profits between the gallery and the painter must be 50/50. If, however, the painter participates in the costs, he's got a right to demand more.

Small pictures by Beks (15 figures) might be put up for sale for about 10 000 marks (30 000 francs), "because he's an unknown painter". Big pictures (100 figures) might be sold at about 65 000 francs. But he advises me against conditioning the price on the size and suggests that it should depend on the painting's quality. It's sort of comforting to hear it from a representative of the profession in which art is usually sold by metres and kilograms.

- Why don't you make lithographs? – he asks at a certain point. He then moves on to explain that if someone doesn't know how to do it on their own, it's possible to "cheat a little bit". The painter must just prepare the patterns. Then specialists in France use these patterns to make copies, and the audience will not even see the difference.

- The cost of it would be 100-150 francs per a lithograph. And you can sell it for 800 francs. This will let you recover the costs put in it, because altogether the investment will not exceed 25 000 francs, and it will sell very well.

- Don't bind yourself with any gallery for more than one exhibition. Anyway, no gallery would agree to that – he adds a moment later.

- If you send your paintings abroad, send them only on the condition they are bought.

Then he adds:

- Insure the paintings with Lloyds according to a fixed value. You must make it clear that in the event the paintings don't come back on the agreed day, they will have to pay you the insurance. This will protect you against dishonest and insolvent galleries.

I have now reached the crucial point, which requires the opinion of a specialist: don't I risk sort of downgrading Beks by proposing lower prices at the next exhibition? I tell Carpentier about my previous strategy of excluding 16 paintings from sale and establishing so high prices for the remaining 6 pictures that nobody could buy them.

He assures me that I shouldn't worry.

- If people really remember your prices, which I personally doubt, they will just think that you didn't want to sell the paintings and now you've changed your mind. That will neither harm the painter nor belittle him in the eyes of the audience.

I'm relieved. There's no better thing to listen to than the one you want to hear.

At one point doctor Cohen asks Carpentier if he is willing to exhibit Beks in his gallery, to which he responds that "the matter is open". Then, I add in turn that I could take part in advertising costs, that "Penthouse" is going to devote a couple of pages to Beks, which would undoubtedly help the exhibition, and finally, that success with the audience is guaranteed, as during the exhibition at Valmay's the number of visitors ranged from 50 to 130 persons per hour.

- Just like at the exhibition of Lebenstein, that Pole we showed not long ago – Carpentier's son interrupts me. – Lots of people will come, and nobody will buy anything. It's true, however, that there is a difference of the whole

quality class between them. When leaving, Carpentier asks me to call him in two months.

-The schedule for this year is full. But next year... A prestigious exhibition without any hope for sale ... Why not?

What is the general conclusion then?

This man made a powerful, good impression on me. He gave open, honest and clear answers, quite different from the caution remarks I can hear from everywhere. Which doesn't change the fact that his advice to sell the paintings and run away from the sinking ship let me down.

What delighted me, though, was that a specialist admitted I was right in the fundamental question, namely, that I wouldn't downgrade Beks by lowering the prices at the next exhibition.

In the end, I meticulously wrote down his explanations about the necessity to sell paintings if you want to promote their author and make him a great artist. For, without the sale, he will remain unknown even if he were Rembrandt.

POST SCRIPTUM

To what extent you shouldn't believe specialists but yourself could be proved by the fact that it was the Japanese who, in 1990, bought 59 paintings by Beks in one transaction for a million dollars, paying for the last of them (Sea with the Sun) 100 000 dollars. They were so excited that they'd have bought for 100 000 dollars a piece all the remaining paintings by Beks from my collection (apart from the ones I'd already sold them, I still had 80 at the time) if I'd only agreed. For Katyń they were ready to pay any price, I mean the one that I'd have demanded. They came to Poland five times to buy all Beks's paintings circulating on the market.

Can you then treat seriously the words of an experienced specialist who claims that showing Beks to the Japanese would be tantamount to suicide, that they consider this kind of painting shameful and would smash up the gallery which dared to exhibit him?

MINIÈRE, 28TH JANUARY 1986

A moment ago I had a meeting with the regional fine arts adviser, Claude Minière. His office is in Grand Palais, on the ground floor, entrance D.

In the previous note, I already described the surprising talks I'd had for many weeks with his secretary, who persistently refused to organise an appointment with her superior. Yesterday she unexpectedly called to inform me that Mr Minière had changed his mind and was going to talk to me.

The meeting started at 6 o'clock sharp, that is, at the agreed time. The conversation lasted forty three minutes.

Claude Minière is a high-ranking official in the department of culture. He must be about fifty. Medium height, slim, with an earring in his left ear. His voice and behaviour, however, do not show any signs of homosexuality.

On his desk lies the cassette with my film and the documents I sent him, asking for an appointment: a two-part brochure on the exhibition, a four-language leaflet, a small poster and 12 postcards.

Our conversation soon turns out to be important to me, because, at last, it is clear. It's clear, as I get open and direct answers, which seems quite unusual for this milieu. But it is also clear because I finally have the courage to ask clear-cut questions.

Since I'm up against the wall and have practically nothing to lose, this time I don't limit myself to asking for help in my enterprise – which I did with his predecessors. Now, I decide to openly ask my interlocutor what he thinks of the difficulties I constantly come across. In the future it's going to spare me time which I would otherwise waste racking my brains over the possible reasons for refusal and making wild conjectures about it.

After exchanging a few hackneyed remarks on the impossibility of seeing the movie (“we had our video cassette recorder stolen”), we move on to the purpose of my visit.

I introduce myself as Beksiński’s friend and briefly tell him about the exhibition in Valmay’s Gallery.

The experience has taught me one thing: this kind of introduction might be deemed as bragging, so I’m brief and proceed to the heart of the matter:

- Since the time of that exhibition – I finish my story – I’ve tried to open many doors. Everywhere I’ve heard a refusal.

- What doors did you knock at?

- I started with Beaubourg Centre. I’d done that before I exhibited Beksiński in Valmay’s Gallery. At that time, I hoped the Centre would help me ...

- And what did they tell you?

I give him a rough account of my conversation with Brunet and Zadora.

- Their invariable argument – I say briefly – was that they couldn’t evaluate the quality of this painting, because such an assessment would be thoroughly subjective. The Centre adopted a policy – I was told. This policy is to support a certain kind of art. Well, Beksiński’s art is not the kind that the Centre decided to propagate.

I tell him about the difficulties I encountered at museums in Paris, in the suburbs of Paris and in the provinces, which also refused to give any assessment of Beksiński’s painting. The only opinion I heard was that this art did not conform to the criteria and policy they had adopted.

I don’t want to provoke a hostile reaction, which appears when the office is attacked before the official. Polemics on this subject would blur the real cause of refusal, which I will hear in a moment. Therefore, throughout my story, I avoid any critical remarks about my previous interlocutors. At

the same time, as I am dealing with an official, I try to use an ordinary, matter-of-fact language, with as few adjectives as possible.

My tactics turns out right, because Minière soon discloses his real beliefs on the issues that keep bothering me. He doesn't hide behind the high-officials' jargon, packed with cautious expressions, the jargon I know well, which lets you talk a lot and say nothing.

The opinions I hear from my interlocutor are clear. I soon find out what I wanted to know.

As I expected, Minière – due to his position and milieu – doesn't like this painting. He won't help me. The argument he uses I've already heard in an indirect form from other culture department officials. All of them were not particularly sensitive to aesthetic experiences, but extremely attached to the criteria and rules of the policy allowing them to immediately separate the art which is not worth any support from the one that deserves it. So, having heard the usual speech on the great importance of novelties in art, I already know that I'll hear a refusal in a moment. But I also realize that I don't risk anything if I get involved in polemics, and that I can freely speak my mind.

Since it's not going to cost me anything, I would like to take this opportunity and find out something more about the causes responsible for such a severe narrowing of the mind in a seemingly normal man. Especially that this man holds a high position in the state culture administration.

- Is novelty the only value of a work of art? It is only novelty that can encourage state authorities to help artists? – I ask.

Such a Manichaeian question, though expressed in a polite tone, usually provokes irritation.

- Yes, definitely yes – answers Minière, to my amazement. – If a given painter doesn't inspire the contemporary artists, doesn't provoke questions, why should we help him? In France, there are thirty five thousand artists

belonging to the National Insurance System. Why should we support those whose art is already a relic?

Then he shows me a leaflet about Adami, who at the moment has an exhibition in Beaubourg Centre.

- Look, this is an artist who has something to say, and Centre Pompidou was right when taking the decision to exhibit him – he adds.

I awkwardly try to protest:

- But there are other criteria of art quality apart from its innovation and inspiration for the youth. Also, museums are not the only arbiters of the greatness of artists. The innovation criterion is quite fresh and might be temporary. It didn't start until the time of impressionists and the abstract art revolution. Nobody in their right mind would think of measuring Dürer's genius by the degree to which he influenced the art of other artists of his time. He's brilliant and immortal, as he appeals to the whole mankind, in every epoch. As regards the arbiter – it seems to me that apart from the museums which show artists' works and critics who participate in their promotion, there is also space for the audience. It also has something to say. Well, there were crowds at Beksiński's exhibition

Minière interrupts me:

- It's not a criterion. And the audience, as you say, buy daubs in Montmartre. They will adore whatever they are told to adore.

For two seconds I keep silent, so as to emphasise the overtone of this opinion.

- The officials responsible for culture in France – I say – seem to share your opinion on this only criterion of the quality of art, namely innovation, at least with regard to contemporary art. I was told exactly the same in Beaubourg Centre. But if this is the case, why shouldn't you help me simply because it's one of national painters in the country considered friendly by France. For in Poland Beksiński is one of the major painters.

- Is he a dissident?

- No – I reply, being more and more amazed by the sincerity of this man. It's true that I've been asked this question before, but always in a veiled way, sort of casually, as if my interlocutors didn't attach much importance to it. Finally, however, I started asking myself this question: "if there was a positive answer, would there appear any proposals? Art, as every other domain, is a field of ideological struggle. The democratic-liberal system is as cynical in its artistic ecstasies as the communist system. Claude Minière is evidently disappointed with my answer and with his both hands makes a gesture which seems to be saying: "You must understand that in such a case I can't help you".

But after a few moments he comes back to the issue of Polish identity and encourages me to highlight this aspect in the future:

- Has your painter established a school in Poland? Please, write – he adds with a sudden surge of energy, as if he finally found a key to the puzzle – something which would explain that he has inspired the young, that he has formed a school. Are there any painters who admit to be influenced by him? – he comes back to his leitmotif and finishes: - If yes, there might be a chance. And if no, let me repeat: this art is obsolete. Renoir can still be exhibited, because he still exerts an influence on the young. But this art does no longer inspire anybody.

I understood: Beksiński, a curiosity of the countries from the world's end.

- This doesn't change the fact that there is something tragic about it – I start the conversation again, in an almost irritated tone. – Well, if it was true that the quality of contemporary art is determined only by its novelty, this would mean that we are coming back to official art. The art which is recognizable on the basis of one criterion, like in the case of the art of salons in the 19th century and Soviet socialist realism. This is the only art deserving the support of state authorities, as it conforms to the official measure of value. In this case, the measure of this value is supposed to be innovation.

Minière does not react to my increasing aggressiveness. Just like his colleagues from Beaubourg Centre, he will repeatedly come back to the decisive, in his opinion, criterion of novelty and inspiration for the youth, the only true values of contemporary art. The stuff I hear from those people is so similar that, in the end, I've got an impression that all the officials, those Grympases, Zadoras, Brunets and others had ganged up before they met with me. Except that the previous ones drowned the gist of the matter in a stream of more or less incoherent words, while this man seems to be extremely precise and surprisingly consistent in what he's saying.

Should I continue the polemics with him then? As for Beks, everything is lost, anyway. Should I try to explain to this high-ranking official that art is something far more complex? After the impressionists and cubism were ignored, which was a humiliating experience for France, all of them were made to believe that, since now on, art would be measured and weighted according to one, but infallible criterion. That art is the ability of renewing itself on an everyday basis, constant searching for new ways, in keeping with the spirit of the age.

Shall I try to convince this man, within a few moments which he allotted me, that looking for novelties in art might be a transitory, or at least a fresh phenomenon? That it might be merely a reflection of technological and scientific progress observed in the world for about a century. That the art which expresses this progress and serves the insatiable desire for novelty could be a fleeting trend? That in each of us there is something constant, eternal, unshakable and universal, and there is always space for art which refers to mysticism, death, infinity?

These people were taught from the same textbooks, at the same university, by the same professors, for years, slowly, every day – that everything is replaceable, that art, just like science and technology, must push its way forward to deserve to be called art; that any artist's reflection on what is universal and permanent, is bad, because it is static, passé and outdated.

They wrote master theses, then press articles and books about it. They invested thousands of hours of individual and collective work to instil in the people the vision of art as a promoter of progress. They are so convinced of it that they can't understand to what extent their outlook is historically temporary. They cannot feel how much Beks's painting is timeless, because it is close to what is constant and immutable in human existence as long as a human being is (still) a human being.

Should I hope that, within a quarter, I will convince the official who has devoted all his life to propagate a certain vision of art that all his truth is merely a tiny crumb of Truth, small and fossilized. That art is a giant phenomenon, complex and mysterious, which cannot be reduced to one or two criteria?

How shall I convince a civil servant who disposes of public money that his clear and simple criteria – which let him cut any discussion and spare him any hesitation – are merely an illusion? That you can't avoid uncertainty, mental effort, risk and “unnecessary” polemics if you want to make a good choice and spend public money in the right way. That to promote art, you need passion, impulses, love at first sight and a “nose”. That relying on two criteria and one “policy” might be justified in the case of road construction, but not when you propagate art.

Should I try to convince him of all that? Convince him and similar officials whom I've met on my “Beks way”?

Now we are talking about the purchase of paintings by CNAP (National Centre of Fine Arts). I ask him about the obscure and tortuous principles governing the selection of candidates for the purchase of paintings. And above all, I ask him about the presentation and patronage of some painters, which is exercised by mysterious inspectors.

In his opinion, there is nothing shocking or disloyal about these rules, even if most candidates cannot take advantage of them.

- What should I do then to make an inspector agree to see the paintings by Beksiński, so that they can be recommended to the jury which takes a decision on the purchase? I tried to arrange an appointment with Mr Gassiot-Talabot. No way.

- These people don't have a habit of seeing anybody. They search on their own and contact the artists they've selected. They choose artists whom they visit so as to see their works, and later provide them with patronage before CNAP commission – answers Minière.

- I understand that such behaviour is typical of art critics – I answer naively. – Critics are free people (as long as they aren't paid by a gallery ...). They can choose to meet a painter or not. They may visit his studio or not. Inspectors are civil servants, and state offices are governed by the principle of applicants' equality and there should be objective control over the administrators' decisions. Besides, some minimum openness and transparency must be ensured in the regulations of a contest whose winners will obtain a benefit from the administration. In this case, I mean the purchase of their paintings by the state.

Although my interlocutor is an official himself, and most probably remains sensitive to this argument, he doesn't respond.

At the end of the meeting, Minière suggests that I should turn to the Centre of Culture in Creteil (the suburbs of Paris) to have Beks's exhibition organised, because a Pole has recently exhibited his works there". Or I should propose Beks's retrospective to a salon ("although at the moment salons are not worth much"). He gives me a whole list, which he must have specially prepared for the meeting with me. He's underlined four salons on the list, the ones that he considers "a bit better than other" (May Salon, Autumn Salon, Critical Figuration, Comparisons). And what shall I do if no salon agrees to the retrospective of Beks? "Then exhibit him, like the others, and wait until something happens".

Our conversation has come to an end. We've had it in a nice atmosphere, despite a few bitter tones on my part. His tone was calm and polite.

POST SCRIPTUM, 29TH OCTOBER 1987

Since that time I have been asking myself:

Can you die of a heart attack if, instead of a heart, you've got a beating criterion in your chest?

DAILY LIFE, 5TH FEBRUARY 1986

1. It's three in the morning. I get up so as not to wake up Ania with my incessant fidgeting in bed. The feeling of fear becomes unbearable. I must write a few pages to find some peace and quiet.

2. The series of failures goes on.

Well then, another German gallery refused to exhibit Beks's paintings. The whole explanation was contained in one short sentence: "We are not interested". And they sent the documentation back. In other words, they weren't even bothered to leave any trace. That's strange, because both Neuman and Carpentier recommended this gallery as the one specialized in this type of painting.

Germany doesn't look like an area easier than France. After German and American failures, I will have to moderate my anger with the official art in France and the sectarianism of the local culture branch establishment, which rejects any other aesthetics than its own. The difficulties I come across must have some deeper reasons than the mere arrogance of French decision-makers. These causes are probably deeper than the very fact of existence of official art in the West, which refuses to let any other art into its museums and exhibition rooms. But what are these reasons?

3. I haven't heard from Hugnet from "Penthouse" for a long time. I'm worried: will his publication really come out? Or is it another chimera I'll be chasing like my own shadow?

4. Ms Chanlaire from Unifrance Film keeps silent. She's in charge of short-length films in this institution. And Unifrance Film is the lock which

you must open if you want to make your way to grand international festivals. What is she pondering over? How can I sleep well if somebody, somewhere, at the same moment is taking decisions on my film, and I'm not present in the room and can't defend it?

5. I'm thinking of organising a private one- or two-day exhibition in a big Parisian flat (if I find one). I would also like to invite my acquaintances, Levêque or Brisset, that is, the only (paid) critics I know. Of course, if they agree to come, which I doubt judging by the silence they respond with to all my letters.

6. Yesterday I met Louse (see the memo on this meeting). As if nothing had happened, I began to unfold before him splendid prospects of the exhibition which I proposed to organise in his gallery in September – October.

- It will have to last two months – I told him. – And then, you can exhibit Tadeusz Mroz.

Louse demands lots of money, and in no case does he want to take financial risk (in return for participation in potential income), as he doesn't believe that I will succeed in selling anything. I therefore need 200 000 francs to organise this exhibition. Where shall I find it? How? My debts have already reached hundreds of thousands!

7. Grazyna Globus, a friend of my wife, working as a booth chief in Lanvin fashion house, has brought her husband's cousin, Jacques Fliderbaum, to us. The cousin is interested in Don Quixote. I don't feel like selling this painting. No way. The cousin's going skiing to Switzerland and will be coming back with his wife in a month, so we put off the talks till his arrival. Maybe he will be willing to buy another painting? I nervously cling to this prospect as my last resort.

8. Another friend of my wife, Kasia Mlodzikowska, a model with Dior, has raised my vague hope that her acquaintance Prince Albert of Monaco is reportedly ready to accept a painting as a gift. But will the Prince authorise me to disclose this fact? And even if he does, where and how should I publish such information? What's the use of the gift then if I have no money to publish Beks's album or to organise another exhibition during which I could publicly announce that one painting belongs to the private collection of the Prince of Monaco? It would be useless from the point of view of Beks's promotion. If, however, this was to come about, I guess, I'd give him "Head with Ruff and Earring".

9. Bogdan Michalski has come from Poland and brought me Beks's photographs to be published in "Penthouse" in case the said publication really comes out.

He has proposed his flat in Warsaw as a place where the exhibition could be organised and combined with the screening of my film. He could invite hundreds of diplomatic staff members and foreign correspondents in Warsaw. It's true that Michalski is a wordly-wise man and knows everybody. But there is an obstacle: he wants me to finance the cocktail party which would accompany the vernissage. It seems to me that the idea is good, but I've got no money for it. I will therefore give Michalski the cassette of my film and tell him that Tomek Beksinski (who confirmed it by phone yesterday) is ready to lend his paintings for the exhibition. But I must find a way to get out of its financing.

The grudge I hold against Michalski is not receding. That's a pity. He himself is trying to get in touch with me and would like me to forget about everything that happened and drove a wedge between us. I'm feeling bad about my grudge, too, because he's a nice friend and could become one again. But if I were to hold out my hand to him, I would have to not know that his friendship is based only on his admiration for me and his fear of me.

Unfortunately, I know it perfectly well. And I know that this friendship would vanish the moment Michalski discovered how weak I am and how little I've really achieved. He's already let me feel it two times over the phone. Therefore, what for some time seemed to be an emotional block, which I couldn't cope with, has now become a well-thought-out attitude. Friendship between two men which is not built of thousands of small facts, memories, talks, events; friendship that is based only on admiration and fear is not lasting. How many various kinds of political, intellectual or artistic dictators made a mistake trusting the friendship of those who merely admired and feared them. As soon as the admiration was gone and the fear disappeared, all those admirers betrayed them. *Et tu, Brute, contra me?*

Any friendship based on solely two elements will not only collapse when these elements are gone, but will cover with debris the one who was still dominating yesterday.

On top of that, I can't forget Michalski's incompetence and poor work during the exhibition. I paid him lavishly. He was supposed to be my spokesman and create a screen between me and the people I didn't want to see, because I didn't like them or they aroused my aggression. Well, Michalski limited himself to selling postcards. Even the mere 5 or 6 addresses of people interested in Beks's painting, which he took during the exhibition, were given to me only yesterday, three months after the exhibition ended.

PARANOIAC, 22ND FEBRUARY 1986

Today, in the toilet, where we keep “Paris Match” and other tabloid rags browsed by my wife (which I also secretly look through), I came across an excerpt of an article about mental diseases, placed in the women’s magazine “Cosmopolitan”.

I cut it out and stuck to this note, because it’s all me, like in a photo. However, just in case the article got somehow mislaid, let me quote the most “flattering” fragments about me:

“Un-bear-able ... little commander. In a state of permanent war with the whole world, to which he must constantly prove that he’s not anybody ... Collects evidence ... Builds quite a convincing delirium around his grudges ... convinced that humanity doesn’t want to acknowledge his rights. Such a person is a brilliant inventor or somebody who considers himself brilliant, and yet the contest jury refuses to give him the award he deserves. One day he will show them all ... Stiff ... Dominant megalomaniac ... Speaks clearly and logically. Knows perfectly well what he wants ... Doesn’t have even a grain of humour ... Everybody hates him”.

Oh, yes, the bit “everybody hates him” is true.

POST SCRIPTUM, 28TH JUNE 1986

I read this note to Ania.

- You are not like that – she said. Everything goes in your direction, but it’s not you. It’s exaggerated. All is true, but raised to power. You have some sense of humour, though, and you’re not so stupid. The fact that “I’m not SO stupid” has a particularly strong appeal and flatters my ego.

FLU, 23RD FEBRUARY 1986

Something's wrong with my head.

1. I'm so irritated that in my heart of hearts I'm fighting with the whole world. At such moments, I imagine to be staying on a podium on TV or in Supreme Court and giving a speech for the prosecution against all incompetent, arrogant people and cowards. I don't let anybody get away. All of them ask for forgiveness, and I remain merciless and punish them severely.

I'm blathering – I say to myself and keep on announcing sentences.

2. The prospect of a usual day, just an ordinary Monday, like all other Mondays in a year, makes me anxious. I will have to do so many things, which in the end will turn out useless ... It's so hard to struggle through a weekday.

3. I'm getting over an acute flu. That's the cause of my nervous exhaustion. It's because of the flu that I'm constantly coming back to my grudges, taking spiritual revenge. But I'm tired irrespective of the illness. If no reason for a smile, at least a tiny ray of hope, appears on the horizon, I'll plunge even deeper in my phantoms.

How many failures are there still ahead of me? How many?

4. My balance is so upset that I'm starting to worry about myself. I went through a similar beginning of grim depression at the age of 22. But at that time, there was the promise of the future. Today I'm approaching 44 and the experience has taught me that you can have the black colour in roulette 20 or even more times in a row. In such a case, only beginners could be naïve enough to put a bet on the red against the table, hoping they win thanks to patience.

5. Ania is in Germany. I'm lying in bed alone and systematically spoil the life of my mother-in-law, who has come from Poland to stay with us for a couple of months. Every now and again I attack her, and later apologise. Then I start anew.

RESENTMENT, 24TH FEBRUARY 1986

I often reproach myself for not being able to forget the harms suffered from people. When a friend I took offence at tries to bury the hatchet, I usually don't respond. Having once turned my back on him, I rarely decide to get closer again and hold out my hand to him. Usually, ten or fifteen years must pass by before I forget the grudges.

And doing so, I think I'm right.

Firstly, if I wanted to make it up with somebody who has hurt me, I would have to be able to find the motives for him causing me the pain. Can I do that?

Usually, he doesn't realize himself why he acted this way or another. In any case, he doesn't realize that he has done something wrong. At the same time, he doesn't realize how deeply he hurt me with his behaviour. He doesn't understand the motives or the effects of his deed. And if he himself, who's inside, is not able to find them, how I, the one who's outside, could possibly do that?

The reasons? the simplest hand gesture contains hundreds of them. Numerous, tangled, changeable reasons; how could I find them, if he himself claims that he didn't realize the effects would be bad and cause me pain.

I really envy those happy ones who always know perfectly well why they were harmed...

And suppose I could find the reasons, would I be able to explain them to him?

It's still a piece of cake – to single-handedly discover your neighbour's reasons for the gesture that insulted you. But you must justify them, as, by definition, he doesn't understand them. Should I then have an honest chat with him? God forbid!

Words are a thin footbridge. When you enter it to get to your enemy, it breaks. A tiny sand grain, a wrong track, an awkward gesture are enough to block the way to him. Anyway, there are ten other paths, and only one is good. How to find it?

And even If I discovered it, could I convince my friend of his guilt so that he would admit I was right?

Finding the motives on your own, then explaining them to him are just two (and already exhausting) steps on the way which requires a hundred. To convince him – that’s the real difficulty. How to omit it? That’s what I don’t know. For how can you convince another person of the evil you’ve found in them? For him, it’s only empty words to which he will respond with words, too. The words which will be right and sufficient in his opinion. “It’s because ...” – he will answer me, firmly believing in what he’s saying. A talk of the deaf.

And finally, could I change him even if I managed to convince him and he admitted I was right?

The most difficult part of work is still to be done: what to do to make him improve his behaviour?

“I’ve understood – he will say in the best case scenario. – I will never do it again”.

But despite the remorseful face and pricks of conscience, despite the firm will to change himself, he won’t change a jot. He will remain what he was in the past. Because in a fight with oneself, one always loses. Once David succeeded in beating Goliath. That’s why the Bible mentions it. Apart from that, however, it’s Goliath who crushes David. This is what the Bible doesn’t say, because there isn’t much sense in talking about obvious things, is it?

What can the contrition of my culprit do against his own ego? What's the point of attempts made by a man who wants to soar in the air if his own weight gets him down, to the ground?

That is why, in general, I don't hold out my hand to anybody who asks forgiveness. And I guess I'm right.

TEXT, 3RD MARCH 1986

Death here, death everywhere ...

At the beginning, like every proselyte, I observed the Master's teachings to the letter: there is no content in this painting.

I even wrote a short text "Beksiński – Painting without Meanings". He'd repeated it so many times that I believed in what I was saying like in the Bible. Besides, I had to put an end to the crude, annoying and ridiculous deliberations on "the end of the world", "we and infinity" or "ecce homo", which accidental members of the audience embarked upon during their visits, because if I'd allowed the literary interpretation of Beks's painting to become widespread in France, the opinion on him as a narrative illustrator would soon have been established. And due to the reasons I've never been able to grasp, painting which illustrates poetry (especially optimistic) is by no means threatened in France, while the one inspired by prose (especially tragic) is doomed to ridicule.

Therefore, to remain faithful to Beks's teachings on the purely formal character of his painting, and to avert explanations that might harm him, I started talking about the lines and colours, as if they were the only elements explaining this painting. There is "neither any philosophical wisdom to be instilled nor deadly stories to be told" – I wrote in the text accompanying my exhibition.

Today, I view it in a completely different way!

I've seen too many paintings to stick to that fallacy. It's nothing but death. Beautiful, solemn and painful – Death. And, if I'm so fascinated by these paintings, it's because Death fascinates me in them.

I therefore wrote a new short text entitled Beksiński – "Soul-to-Soul Talk". I wrote it spurred by my feelings, which, as usual, were exaggerated.

Although that text expressed exactly what I was feeling, it might have seemed equally ridiculous, because of my grandiloquence.

When I read it to Ania, she shrugged her shoulders. Beks, on the other hand, gave me to understand that the text had irritated him with its ecstatic tone.

Above all, however, the text was a failure because, contrary to the previous one, it ascribed to Beks the intention that didn't exist. But only now do I know about it.

For, unlikely as it might sound to any reasonable person, Beks paints without understanding, without even wishing to understand where the impression of content emanating from his paintings comes from. He is like a tool himself, unaware tool in the hands of a higher being that inhabits his sub consciousness and uses his brush to express itself. An incredible thing to a spectator, who can't understand how the author of a painting so packed with content is not able to formulate any "message" while creating it.

So, even though I know that my text is poor for at least two reasons, I can't resist the temptation to quote its very conclusion. Although it's ecstatic and has nothing to do with what Beks really thinks while painting, the text still proves the existence of this Being in the depths of his sub consciousness. Beks renounces and is ashamed of this Being, but at the same time he can't help being a medium through which it constantly expresses itself. Anyway, it's this Being that attracts me and with which I identify. The aware, sober Beks is not interesting at all.

I therefore wrote:

"This painting is mystic. And although the life of its author could be closed in ten lines, the whole world of creatures and things inhabits his soul. There is a deep mystery in him, though he denies it. The mystery, however, shouldn't be sought in his life. It is hidden in the fearful, dark world, in which he has a constant dialogue with nothingness. The dialogue without words, without meanings, without content.

And when he paints a cross on a dumping ground full of rubbish, it's not because he wants to provoke viewers and force them to pity for a while. In this painting, there is no pain screaming for people's attention, because this painting does not ask for anything. It is a desperate dialogue with Death, a dialogue beyond any meanings, a soul-to-soul dialogue”.

ZARZECKI, 20TH MARCH 1986

An apartment on two levels in a wealthy house in Neuilly, “family” dinner, she, he, Ania and me. A conversation about everything and nothing. In front of me, there is hung on the wall a painting by Beks which I haven’t known before.

Mr and Mrs Zarzecki came to the vernissage. They seemed to like the exhibition, as they repeatedly emphasised their admiration for its organisation. I then concluded they might want to join another one. Why not? After all, they treated their own painting like a treasure.

- The most beautiful painting belongs to us – they kept repeating.

In the middle of September 1985, as far as I remember well, we invited them to dinner to Maison du Danemark, in the company of Mrs Marszalek-Mlynczyk and a journalist from TF1 news, Jean Offredo. After the said dinner, I wrote to them, attaching a cassette with my film. Later on, I heard from somebody that they’d been to Poland and tried to contact Beks.

- Aha – I thought – they want to buy another painting, but cheaper than from me.

So, when upon return they called me, inviting to dinner, I thought I’d already understood what the whole thing was about: they didn’t manage to buy from Beks and now, are coming back to me. Great!

I need to sell something badly. It’s absolutely necessary. Nobody wants my paintings here, and the only thing I’ve achieved after a five-month tussling is that article in “Penthouse”, which cost me 170 ektachromes lost by Hugnet.

It’s not long before I figure out that there’s nothing to hope for. Just at the beginning, Zarzecki, like all the others, assures me:

- This painting is of extraordinary beauty, but it puts me in a depressing mood. I couldn't live with skeletons on a daily basis.

Well, as a matter of fact, the painting they have is "mild": a board standing on the seashore. The frequent motif in Beks's painting; in this one, however, there's no aggression.

I hint to them that I also have many "mild" paintings. No reaction. A nice chat.

When Mrs Zarzecka goes out of the living room, her husband can't hold on any longer and quietly confides in me:

- Two months ago, we bought one more from a collector in Warsaw. We'll have it in Paris soon.

Now I understand everything. The depressing character of Beks's paintings is merely an official version, which was supposed to explain the refusal to buy a painting from me.

We promise each other to meet again. In our place. In theirs. They are going to invite Offredo so that he will show a report on my autumn exhibition on television. Then I kiss the hostess's hand and that's the end. One of my last hopes floats away

I keep a cheerful face and, in the car, try to gossip with Ania about the Zarzecki in a carefree tone. She can't be fooled, though. She's worried, as she knows how important this meeting was to me. Luckily, she only partly knows about it. Finally, I change the topic, because I'm afraid of betraying myself and changing her fear into panic.

Later come four hours of deep sleep, after which I suddenly wake up in the middle of the night. Breaking out in a sweat, with a twinge of anxiety in my stomach, I get up. In the bathroom, I look at myself in the mirror: my eyes are popping out.

There's the last hope left: a brother-in-law of Grażyna Globus. When staying here last time, he clearly gave me to understand that he would like to

buy the painting which I call Don Quixote. It's a bit as if he wanted to buy one of my hands, so I first said: no. Having my back to the wall, however, today I would probably say: yes. Anyway, he's already left for London. If he gives me the slip, I can't count on any other help. None!

And yet ... After finishing this note, as if nothing has happened, for the rest of the night I will be correcting my talks with Beks and the article for the next brochure: Beksiński – Soul-to-Soul Dialogue.

FELIKS, 20TH MARCH 1986

There is grand History, and little histories beside it.

Last Sunday, Ida Smith with her husband Stan and son Feliks came to us.

Having seen the paintings, about which they already knew a lot, as I'd shown them the ektachromes, the film and "Penthouse", they stopped in front of Rectangular Sea, hanging in the hall.

- Do you like it? – Stan asked Feliks with emphasis.

The child answered:

- No.

A meaningless "no", which means so much. A little "no", which this little boy could have easily said as a little "yes". A little "yes", to which this megarich man could have replied:

- I will buy it for you then.

For I know that Stan doesn't like this painting and wouldn't have bought it for himself. But for his son ... And I would have been saved. Cleopatra's birthmark...

HUGNET, 20TH MARCH 1986

It seems that Nicolas Hugnet has lost my 170 ektachromes.

At eleven o'clock this morning, I went to "Penthouse" to persuade him to place some adverts about the autumn exhibition in different publications of Filipacchi group, which the monthly belongs to, and to get the cassette with my film back, but chiefly because I wanted to recover the ektachromes.

He hadn't brought the cassette to the editorial office, as he'd been "up to his ears at work". He didn't have time to talk with me about advertising, because "the phone kept ringing all that time". At the end, he told the secretary to fetch the envelope with the ektachromes from the cupboard.

His office is a mess like an attic. How can one work in a room where everything is scattered around, papers, photographs, envelopes, different weeklies, all that on the floor in an absolute mess?

After long minutes of patient searching, the secretary stands up and says:

- They are gone.

- Look for them.

The secretary plunges her head in the cupboard, rummages through the stuff, takes it out and puts back again. Then Hugnet does the same. He finds 16 ektachromes, the ones which appeared in "Penthouse". They are in an envelope with the name of a man unknown to me. Apart from my ektachromes, there are two other pieces belonging to another painter. The remaining 170 are gone.

I don't say anything, but my breath is clearly giving away the condition of my nerves. 170 ektachromes lost! I hate to think about it. If they have really disappeared, the fortune and many-month work of Glinicki, who travelled throughout Poland to photograph the paintings in museums and collectors' houses, are lost ...

Hugnet mutters something under his breath:

- I'll find them in a moment. I'll call you in the evening.

If he finds them, all right. I've already got a pretty shitty day ahead of me, but that's another story. When such a day is finally over, you say to yourself: much fear about nothing. But this day has just begun.

I hope I can breathe a sigh of relief in the evening. Even if it happens, though, who's going to pay me for 9 hours of fear? Assuming, of course, that he finds them , which I really doubt. I have no receipt. Nothing. Only his word ...

When will the black colour finally stop coming on my table?

It's ten past four in the afternoon. I call Hugnet, as I'm so panic-stricken that I won't hold on till the evening. He hasn't found them yet. Still searching...

DELAGE, 27TH MARCH 1986

It doesn't look good.

At about four in the afternoon I went to the Winter Salon on Taine Street, to pick up two paintings by Beks (the ones which I call Trumpeter and Precipice with Gravestones) and two paintings by Mróz.

- Too early – tells me Ms Dubreuil, whose job is to receive guests here – please, come at five.

Waiting for the fixed time, I talk for a longer while with the Salon organiser, a Mr Delage. He's an old man with a clever and spiteful look.

- It's well-painted – he says looking at Beks's paintings. – But you'll never succeed in selling it. Such painting won't get through in France. Too macabre. Ms Dubreuil, who spent a month receiving guests here, will probably confirm it. All those who'd seen the paintings got the same impression. Your Mróz is much better in this respect. Actually, I was surprised by the number of people interested in this painting. But Beksiński doesn't arouse much interest. Besides, you know, everything is determined by the traders. They won't let you sell it. Americans? No, they don't buy much. Apart from that, they are interested only in big names.

I show him the brochure and "Penthouse".

- It's not worth anything. Every day I get a packet of such catalogues from Lausanne, Munich, Washington. I throw everything away. Sometimes I will have glance at a photo. "Penthouse"? Everybody knows that critics write because they are paid. Nobody believes in what they say. Besides, everybody knows that magazines sometimes publish articles which are, in fact, hidden advertisements paid by galleries that promote painters. You can only count on an amateur who will like it. Don't even think about anything else – he adds after a while.

- And if I exhibited this painter in the provinces? – I ask.

- Where? In a museum? Mayor's offices? Galleries? Actually, any good painter tries to exhibit his works here, in Paris. It's not worthwhile going to the provinces. There, you'd find it even more difficult to sell. People in the provinces buy only to invest. If you want to promote him, you'd better exhibit. This is the only thing that makes any sense.

It's not very heartening, is it? And not very logical.

By the way, I don't really understand why this guy organises painting salons, if he throws away all art publications he receives.

With the loss of the ektachromes, this day is written off.

I'm sleep-deprived. Drink too much coffee and sleep only half a night. At two in the morning, I still pace back and forth in the study, or get up at dawn, because Ania is just coming back from Germany to leave for Kuwait tomorrow, and I have to drive her to the airport. Staying with her for a while is my only joy.

EXPERIENCE, 30TH MARCH 1986

If I'd spared myself this experience, I would have surely been good for me.

Saying that, I think about all the disappointments, hatred, grudges that have built up in me towards people and myself since the time when, trying to promote Beks, I met head-on with the reality.

Complaining about painful blows from the real world at the age of 44 might come across as a literary pose. After all, I haven't lived with angels since the time I appeared on Earth. That's true. I'm not making up stories, though, because it's at the time when I was trying to make Beks popular in the West that I discovered (or rather re-discovered) the world as I remember it from childhood: atrocious.

I've already explained it at length, so I know that I'm a tiring bore to come back to the topic for the hundredth time. Yet ...

If you have a bad character, you'd better live in an out-of-the-way place. From such a position you find it somewhat easier to put up with life. Otherwise, it's unbearable. Well, it happens that I've got an awful character. Therefore, my only defence has always been staying away from the others. Now, the promoting of Beks forces me to constantly contact my neighbours.

Fine. This is what I wanted to say in a few words when starting this sour note. Now, I'd like to tell about it in more detail.

1. My whole life has been based on building an independent position for myself. I've usually been able to achieve it. Thanks to that, I existed away from the others, even when I was staying right beside them. This way I could put up with people, and even, in exceptional cases, grow fond of them:

- a. My memories of childhood are dreadful. The situation of a little, several-year-old creature completely dependent on others forced me to

incessantly mix with mates, siblings and teachers. I had to stand them on a daily basis, and there was nowhere to escape from them. Willy-nilly, every day, I had to go to school with a feeling of hatred and misery deep in my heart. I had to share a half of each day with them, like a prisoner has to share the cell with a co-prisoner. Every day, I had to bear attacks of their aggression, to which I replied with similar aggression, being unable to break free from the chain which, against my will, bound me to them. Any moment, any teacher could humiliate me in public, shouting at me or giving me some corporal punishment, although I was one of the best pupils in the class and, thanks to that, sort of favoured. What about the others then? Comparing this world to a small concentration camp doesn't seem to be hugely exaggerated.

b. Since that time, for about thirty years, I have lived in a sort of cocoon. First as a student, then as a research worker and barrister, I had neither God nor ruler. The relations at university, scientific articles as well as relations with students and clients depended only on me. And even if I had to cooperate with anybody, my position was usually dominant.

After I'd left high school, with the exception of Parisian beginnings, I didn't have an employer, colleagues or co-workers who could influence my enterprises in any way. I was neither dependant on people nor cared for them. And even if I did develop any bonds with the others, it was for some minor purposes or in the interest of third parties. I didn't feel committed either here or there. In a word, though I physically lived next to my neighbours, our relations were based on a casual acquaintance. Meetings with friends, to whom I wasn't bound with any chains, interest, duty or common enterprise, were the most typical form of my contacts with the outer world. And it didn't matter how many people I met on the underground, at university or in the street every day.

c. I've been obviously influenced by this very independent lifestyle: as I stayed with people only when I wanted it, I sort of developed a liking for them. At least, I didn't have any reasons to detest them, because even if someone was temporarily nasty to me, there were no grounds for

complaining of the whole humanity, or to draw negative conclusions about the whole universe.

Yes, after leaving high school, when I was no longer pestered by life, that is, the omnipresence of the others, when I didn't have to defend myself against their aggression or attack them myself any more, I found peace.

And I lived this way for a good bit of time, in accord with the others and myself. Constant conflicts with people no longer fuelled my passion, my anger, my exaltation and my hunger for exaggeration. These conflicts – at least it seemed so to me – had died out once and for all. I'd changed.

I kept repeating it to myself, not realising that I owed this wonderful mutation to myself as much as to life conditions. And that it would vanish the moment these conditions returned to the zero point, namely, when I started to be dependent on others again.

Actually, I was quite liked ... And, what's most important – I stopped hating other people. Anyway, one thing resulted in the other, in a chain of actions and reactions. The less I had to put up with the unbearable presence of the others, the easier it was. People felt I wished them well, and they paid me back with the same, which made it even easier for me to tolerate them. And so on.

I've finally managed to decipher this mechanism, and now I know exactly how it works: following the miserable school experiences, all my life I've looked for solutions which would free me from any kind of dependence, or even, from just sharing an area of two square metres with other people.

To put it simply: my efforts to prolong the period of studies; the selection of an academic, and next, barrister's career; the searches for a sphere where the pressure of the environment would be as little as possible, all that resulted from a constant, though not necessarily conscious, pursuit of freedom. To not depend on others! To not have to put up with the attacks of the employer, colleagues, audience!

With time, without the pestering presence of *homo sapiens* by my side, whose stinky odour I would have otherwise been forced to inhale, I found peace, and even – let me repeat – some vague friendly feelings for people.

d. Though it might seem paradoxical, my four-year work in Lido was an evident proof of all that. The world of thirty young people, workers, engine drivers working at night, mostly illiterates from North Africa, or French criminals, mercenaries from Kathanga, ex-soldiers from the Foreign Legion – I really liked it. A small colony of Poles, almost all from the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw (which I didn't attend) looked like an intellectual institution. The accounts were squared with the necks of broken bottles or chair legs. I repeat: all that suited me. Being physically strong, I was not afraid of any assault.

Besides, I didn't think that this environment reflected the world in any way. There was no reason to generalise on human meanness after a young criminal or Berber peasant (though Amar, Berber, was a real model of nobleness and honesty) screamed or banged his fist. Despite the brutality and incessant scuffles, the life in Lido was pleasant. The principles were simple, clear, and the relations with people almost accidental (although every night we spent four hours together). Our boss, Pappini, a nice and liberal man, usually didn't pick on us.

The most important thing, however, was that none of my personal projects depended on those people, which let me feel quite comfortable among them and be tolerated, if not liked. I had good relations with them, just like with criminals I dealt with when working as a barrister for many years.

2. The meeting with Beks changed everything.

Firstly, I started to care about something more than about getting an a in an exam. Especially that the said a stopped depending on me. To achieve my aim, again, I had to get in relations with people. And again, these relations became a permanent source of conflicts and suffering for me, frustration which makes me hate people and which causes people to hate me even more.

This series of mutual attacks began this way:

a. The certainty that I'd come into possession of a treasure, something unique in the world; the belief that I'd become the promoter of a genius, made me self-confident.

Yes, the conviction that I had something which would be craved by generations brought the old devil: excessive pride.

My real nature, covered with thirty years of a modest, mediocre and pleasant life, scrambled onto the surface again. Like at the time when I was ten years old, I became a boss again. Oh, yes, it certainly was me who set the first step in mutual fights with the surrounding world.

b. Besides, I soon realized that – due to my passion for Beks's painting, or because of my character of a perfectionist – I worked better than the people whom I now had to contact. I collected a whole pile of documents about it, describing precisely my doings and stages of the exhibition preparations. They are filled to the brim with examples of inaptitude, incompetence, irresponsibility and disrespect on the part of people I happened to work with, who contrary to me, however, were professionals.

Had it concerned another task, the clash with the real world of mediocrity and amateurishness might have been like water off a duck's back to me. Or the other way round, I'd have given up the whole thing. But it was about something I couldn't give up, or ignore and watch passively as it wasted away. It was something I cared about too much. I had to push Beks's wheelbarrows on my own and rush others to properly do their part of the work. It sickened me when somebody made a blunder or did something stupid.

This way the second stone was placed: pride resulting from the conviction that I was better was joined by anger at poor work performed by other people.

c. Apart from excessive pride and fury, the third stage in this devilish whirl, which was pulling me down, was contempt for others. How come these

people work so badly although they are professionals? – I asked myself, believing that the whole mankind was a bunch of mediocrities.

d. When added, pride, fury and contempt equal arrogance.

In other words, the hit dog yelps. I was like that as a child and came back to it at the age of forty. The sense of superiority and grudge, hatred and contempt soon reached pathological dimensions.

Botchers and amateurs.

Supported by fury, my arrogance came across a half-closed door. It was enough to push it a little. I will show you, the bunch of morons, that I'll manage without you and better than with you. Trash!

I was in a state of delirium. During the exhibition I could hardly recognize myself. I tried to shit higher than my ass could reach. Most of the time, I didn't even bother to speak to anybody.

Finally, I went as far as to separate myself from the visitors with my assistant (Bogdan Michalski), whom I entrusted with the task of talking to them. It was disastrous from the commercial point of view. But I don't feel like talking about money now. The account that I want to settle is with my own conscience.

e. No sooner had I started to show others that I hated them than they started showing how much they hated me. Oh yes, the financial demands of Dziworski, the greediness of Louse, the double-dealing and itchy fingers of Ściegienny, all that was enough to drive a wedge between me and life. I firmly defended myself from the hungry rats (which, by the way, would have certainly been charming companions during dinners and night outings if I hadn't been in business with them, that is, in a situation of mutual dependence). At the same time, I became terribly nasty to the people closest to me: Ania and my best friends.

“The chosen nation, self-confident and arrogant” – I remember these characteristics of Israeli Jews, given by general de Gaulle.

During and after the exhibition, my behaviour was obviously much more irritating than theirs. I was proud to have organised an unusual exhibition myself, against (because not: with) dozens of wasters, who could only fool around. I was so proud that I didn't recognise myself in the mirror. For what I saw was terrifying. Unfortunately, it was terrifying only for a moment, when I saw things in their right proportions. Then, I became myself again.

The whole shell which I'd slowly formed over my adult years melted like wax, and a little 10-year old Peter came out: physically the strongest in the class, one of the best pupils, violent, a brawler, a bigot, sickeningly big-headed, hated by all mates, who shouted him nicknames from a safe distance: - Hey, spastic, spastic ...

Oh, yes! Had I spared myself that return to childhood, to the real world and to myself, I wouldn't have lost anything.

But there's no crying over the spilt milk. The sorrow will not disappear as if by magic. So much bitterness towards people and resentment against myself had built up that even if I managed to achieve the goal in the future, it wouldn't change anything – I won't forget.

Yes, Beks ... meeting you on my way didn't bring me much pleasure.

DEATH PENALTY, 31ST MARCH 1986

A few days ago I saw a TV report on the corridors of death in American prisons. The report was accompanied by the reminiscences of the trial and execution of Chesman.

It was a good report: simple, direct and unpretentious. No high-flown words, just everyday life in the slammer. There was neither emphasis nor aggression or tears. Meals, searches, handcuffs, talks about everything and nothing. Poor colours highlighted the impression of the authenticity of the report, shot with an amateur camera, without any special lights or a huge team of assistants. The noise and voices were a bit amplified, so as to stress the impression of the truth and strength. A matter-of-fact, simple report. Just in the American way, previously plaintiff, now in the style of sparing authenticity.

The report didn't convince me at all. Manicheism doesn't pay.

Just like it didn't do any good to that French report on life sentence, which was shot in the prison in Clairvaux, as far as I remember well. The report was made so well that I even recorded it on the VCR and stored it for a long time. It must have been a few years ago. They showed it at the end of the programme, at about midnight. Contrary to the previous one, that report was made in an intellectual style: a prisoner in a mask, next to him a priest and one or two leftish journalists, who asked questions. The conversation was strewn with quotations from Kafka, Dostojewski and Platon. A good quality film, muffled sound, no dirt, no body search, or poking between prisoners' legs. No fake indifference. A solemn tone and deep reflection, instead. Confessions of a prisoner sentenced for life – moving, because everything was expressed in simple words and a proper tone. I've never read Goldman or Knobelspeiss, so supported by the Parisian literary world. But it must have been something similar in style: talent, authenticity and loftiness. I'll never forget that report, and I regret to have

finally cancelled it so as to make some space for a new movie. I should have kept it, just to have evidence proving how hypocritical and biased it was.

Because this report did not convince me, either.

I'm not for the death penalty. But neither am I against it

To be honest, this problem doesn't exist in my consciousness, as it hid somewhere in the shadow long ago. There was a time when it preoccupied my thoughts and I would have spat in the face of Georges Pompidou for not pardoning Bontemps, who was sentenced to death together with Buffet. Georges Pompidou, the one who, "in philosophical terms", was against the death penalty ... Today my outbursts of outrage have eased off. Meanwhile, I became a barrister, which has given me an opportunity to have a closer look at things. So close that I can even smell them. This lets me see and smell what the others try not to see and not to smell, the ones who talk about criminals with compassion, because they look at them from a distance.

Enriched with this experience, in which I don't take pride at all, I don't claim that both reports were made badly, because they defended the thesis of abolitionists. I don't even claim that fighting the fear of death by fighting the death penalty is a utopia, which defeats the purpose. I also do not condemn Roger Badinter, the current minister of justice, who cleverly bound the hands of France by ratifying the European Convention of Human Rights. This way he settled the matter for good, in case a new majority in the Parliament wanted to restore capital punishment in the future. No. But my legal profession doesn't let me agree to the outright cheating and tricks that abolitionists use to feed us, which are epitomised by the two above mentioned reports.

Before those TV reports began their story about convicts, in the first part they should have shown the eyes of a victim at the moment of dying, in a precise, detailed and scientific way. They should also have shown the eyes of the person sentenced to death, when he was torturing or raping the victim, or smashing the skull. The problem is that you who object to capital punishment skip this stage and start with the second act. You start from

the moment when, many months or years later, the perpetrator appears in court, humble and downhearted, or when he struggles with prison watchmen, who are taking him to scaffold. To defend your thesis, you hire the best pens, like Sartre or Camus, and describe the fear of a convict, which in fact is our fear, and his death, which is actually our death.

Why don't you write something about the victim in the first part? In the same words: dry, cold, precise and impartial. And devote the same space to the first part as to the second one. Do something more: place a camera in a good point, and show the crime live. Just like you broadcast live executions. Take a good microphone, which records all sounds: bone breaking, the panting of the perpetrator and the victim, the roar of pain and lethal hiccups. Then, play the sound tape at full volume. And do not interrupt the spectacle after ten seconds, as usual. Set the camera on the victim's eyes to show how they were popping out of the head, how saliva was dripping from their mouth, how the victim was farting and breaking out in sweat. Show all that on television, from the beginning to the end, and do not stop in the mid-way for the sake of shame or sensitivity. You should also show this report to children, at primetime, between eight and nine in the evening, when everybody is sitting in front of their TVs.

And then, if you wish, go ahead with your second part.

If you want to exhaust the topic, however, add the third part.

I know this third part of the drama perfectly well, though you never show it. I mean the part in which the victim's family or the victim himself/herself struggles with the judiciary to get any help, compensation, and frequently, even a rescue.

Do you want me to tell you this third part of the drama, which you tend to discreetly pass over? I know it by heart, because doing my job, I watch it every day. Well, listen. I will tell you. It won't take long.

It begins with attorney, bailiff and expert fees. Then, you often have to pay a deposit to file a lawsuit. Later come trials, many of which are postponed for

x months. First adjournment, second, third. Then you have to face the fury of the presiding judge shouting at the victim:

- You are a cheat! You haven't told the tribunal that you've been divorced for five years!

- Yes, Your Honour, but I don't demand compensation for the loss of my wife. It was my child who was killed, and it has nothing to do with my divorce.

- Counsellor, please, explain to your client that cheating costs. Please, tell him, because he doesn't seem to understand it himself. Let him remember it in the future.

- Yes, Your Honour, but my client doesn't have any other children. There will be no future. It was the only child that he had, and this child was killed.

- The decision will be announced on the 5th May.

What decision? Five thousand francs for the moral loss sustained by the father due to the killing of his twelve-year-old son. Five thousand francs of moral compensation for the death of the child killed by a drunk driver. And the victim's grandmother? Well, she hasn't divorced anyone. She is entitled to ... two thousand francs. The same sum as for the killing of a dog. The attorney's fee (that is, mine): ten thousand francs. The appeal is going on and has already been adjourned four times, because the court has a lot of work. It is then postponed for another six months.

You should also show the drunk driver.

He spent fifteen days in custody. Then he was released pending trial. He was tried by another presiding judge, quickly, without any anger, within eight minutes:

- Do you live alone?

- Yes, Your Honour.

- And you drink alcohol to kill your loneliness?

- Yes, I do.

The presiding judge – who is humane, and, like most people in this country, has probably drunk-driven after a good dinner in a restaurant about a hundred times, sighs. He understands the defendant, so he knowingly looks at the members of the jury:

- Four-month imprisonment, suspended for three years. A fine of three thousand francs. Driving licence withheld for three years, except driving for job-related purposes from nine a.m. to six p.m. Counsellor, please, explain it to your client that for three years he will be banned from driving a car after six in the evening, and after three years he will have to take an examination to regain his driving licence.

- Yes, Your Honour.

This should also be shown.

Then, if you want to make an exhaustive report, show what happened to the two presiding judges and the drunk driver. I know what happened to them. I met dozens of criminal judges and dozens of criminals throughout the years that I devoted solely to criminal cases. The years during which I spent mornings in the jail in Fresnes, Sante or Fleury, and afternoons in criminal courts.

After the convict had left the room, both presiding judges proceeded to deal with other cases. In the evening, they could hardly remember anything. One of them had forgotten about his furious attack on the victim's father, and the other about his understanding for the drunk driver.

As for the latter, he had "serious problems": for three years he couldn't drive a car after six p.m., because if he had done so, he would have been sentenced to a month in jail suspended. A week later, he also forgot about the whole thing.

And the victim must make endless visits to courts for five years, ask, write and pay, only to finally hear from the judge that he demands too much and, on the whole, behaves in a despicable manner.

Show it, too. Especially in France.

I always tell my students:

- You can never be victims in this country. If you hurt or kill somebody on the road, you will get away with it, because freedom is perceived here as the highest good, and all courts will do their best to avoid taking it away from you. Being victims, however, you will ask for compensation or punishment for the perpetrator. Well, in this society, demanding money in return for the harm is considered mean and vile. And demanding the culprit to be punished is immediately associated with revenge, and as such, morally discredited. All courts will go to great lengths so as not to grant you any compensation whatsoever or to give you an absolute minimum you are entitled to, as it is shameful and despicable, because it's about money. All judges will tell you to keep silent, if you demand that the perpetrator should be punished. "It's not your role – they will say briefly. – Such matters are dealt with by the prosecutor".

And what about compassion? Of course, compassion for perpetrators, as for victims I haven't seen much sympathy in France.

Among my criminal clients, there was not a single one, I say it cautiously, who was undeservedly accused and undeservedly punished. Saying that, I'm not driven by any animosity. To the contrary, indeed! I have many friends among them, and they like and value me:

Blanki, an international fraudster, every week received Russian press, for which I paid with my own money, as he no longer had his. I defended him free of charge.

For Tajeb, a drug dealer, I brought clothes, because his cell was freezing.

I spent long hours in the prison director's office to obtain the right for receiving letters for Roby, a double murderer.

To Philibert, a professional criminal, whom I defended for free, I gave four thousand francs from my own pocket, so that he could have his teeth treated. Admittedly, at that time he advertised me in the jail and brought new clients every week.

All of them liked me, and I liked them. You see, I find it easier to understand and communicate with criminals than with “decent” people, which doesn’t change the fact that I doubted their guilt only on one or two occasions.

One time the case concerned Simenon. Did he really kill his wife by kicking her stomach, or was he only accused by his son, who sought for revenge? I will never find out. Anyway, I was able to defend him and he was released.

The second case concerned a black man from Cameroon. Was he really stealing on the underground when he was caught this time? He swore he wasn’t, and I think that he was frank, because to previous thefts he owned up easily.

I had some doubts two times. And two times I hoped they would never do it again. As for the others, I had absolutely no doubts, and I was seldom mistaken. Broken personalities, no morals and one fear: being put in the slammer.

What happened to my lofty ideals from the youth, which fed on the texts by Camus or “Le Monde” daily for long years? And compassion for criminals, which my saint Mother instilled in me for years? Where had it gone?

You will answer me: so what?

And you’re right. It has nothing to do with the subject. I admit. All this drama is our drama, not theirs. I know that inflicting death on them will not free us from our own death. And that giving them a death sentence, we first of all sentence ourselves to death. That’s why we are so afraid and would like to free of it.

No, I’m not for capital punishment and life sentence. I’m not against, either.

The only thing I want to obtain by writing this note is to force you to have a decent trial and to make you speak honestly about the death penalty and life sentence, while letting each side to fully express its feelings. I want you to first show the victim and the crime, as I believe that only then can you talk

about the vice of the judiciary. *Audi alteram partem*. Then you may file an honest and exhaustive bill of indictment against the death penalty and life sentence. After that, when the passion and hatred on the one hand, and elevated feelings and compassion on the other hand are over, all of us together can pronounce judgment, which we will not have to be ashamed of.

The judgment of honest people.

PLAN, 1ST APRIL 1986

Today I invited Nicolas Hugnet and his wife to dinner in the Polish restaurant Ravailac.

I would have got over his incompetence and written off the loss of 170 ektachromes – after all, I’ve experienced worse things in my life. What really drives me mad is his aggression. I swallow his loutish words, though, because I need badly journalists and free advertisements for my future exhibition. I can’t afford to pay for announcements, so in return, I treat people of his ilk to dinners.

Today I’m showing a relaxed face and we are chatting about this and that.

Finally, at the end of the dinner comes a moment when we have to get to the point and raise the main issue, which is not in a hurry to do that itself and, just like others, would like to eat my pork chop for free.

So here are his promises.

1. He will try to feel out Ross Melcher, the representative of American “Penthouse” in France, if it is possible to devote the “Art” column in the American issue of the magazine to Beks. He therefore wants me to:

Send him a cassette with a shortened version of the film, because the scene in the dive made a bad impression on him.

Send him a photocopy of the letter which Polański wrote to me, thanking me for the publication of his paintings in the French version of “Penthouse”, just to flash some hope at the American “Penthouse” that Polański might also write a few words if they publish Beks. The name of this man means a lot in the States, despite the fact that he can’t return there, after his rape of a minor girl.

Contact Wajda, so as to check if he’s staying in Paris, and sound him out whether he would be ready to write a short text about Beks.

2. In about a year the French “Penthouse” will issue a special number, devoted solely to art. It will be called “The Art of Love”. Beks will be placed there among other painters.

3. If my film is selected for Cannes, “Penthouse” will publish its review among other reviews dedicated to author’s films. I have to send him a film photo (preferably, the burning hearse), so that he could publish it in the May number of the magazine.

4. He dictates me the address and telephone number of one of his co-workers, a Sureaut, a printer, who’s reportedly very cheap (800 francs for a 21x29.7cm piece). The guy is also a distributor of postcards. He’s seen Beks’s reproductions and liked them. He’s willing to distribute them if I have them printed by him in the format of postcards. Their sale won’t bring me much profit (20 centimes per card), but it’s going to be good advertisement for Beks.

5. I suggest that his Fillipacchi Publishing House (which “Penthouse” belongs to) should from time to time use the reproductions of Beks’s paintings on book covers. Hugnet keeps silent on the subject. I feel that his influence in the hierarchical pyramid of this publishing house is very little, and apart from “Penthouse” he cannot do much.

6. Nonetheless, he promises that during the exhibition they will print free-of-charge announcements in a number of Fillipacchi magazines: “Elle”, “You and Your Future”, “Periscope” (in this magazine he even promises me a whole page), “The Echo of Savannah”, “Penthouse”, “Woman”, “Look” and “Decoration Internationale”. I don’t really believe him and think he’s just putting on airs, because, let me repeat, he’s merely a pawn in the mechanism of Fillipacchi Publishing House. But I pretend to be smiling and thanking him. Only in the case of “Paris Match” does Hugnet admit that he can’t help me. I’m grateful to him for being so modest ... In July, I must provide him a note for the press (1 page) and the slides. – I only have 24 x 36mm slides – I say sort of casually. – You understand that I no longer have 6 x 6cm ektachromes ... He pretends to have not heard it, and changes the topic.

7. If I return him the costs, he will sell me duplicates of “Art” column excerpts devoted to Beks, as he doesn’t need them. I can use them in my own publications, but I won’t be allowed to lend them to other publishing houses.

8. He will give me the details of the photographer Hubert Fenthomme. He’s reportedly very cheap, charging only 180 francs for one ektachrome shot in two copies.

- Yes – I think, smiling wryly – thanks for advice. When multiplied by 170, gives the sum of 30 thousand francs, anyway. Will you pay for them?

9. Fillipacchi publishing house will not issue an album about Beks, because he’s not known in France. Neither will it go into partnership with me in this enterprise. But it can deal with distribution for 55% of the price if I issue the album at my own cost. 55% is too much, but still less than other distributors demand.

10. Hugnet can’t help me with Artcurial Gallery (with which they are issuing together the album of Matta at the moment) and won’t try to convince them to exhibit Beks.

- Anyway, - he adds – the exhibition during which all the paintings aren’t put up for sale is out of question. No gallery will accept that. And you want to put up for sale only a few paintings ...

NOLAN, 1ST APRIL 1986

I call Caty Nolan from the American magazine "People". She's had an interview with Ania about her impressions on the trip to Haiti with the Duvalier family, for which my wife recently showed the fashion of Sherrer, if I remember well.

I propose an article about Beks. We agree that I will send her "Penthouse" and the whole documentation. She'll let me know if "People" can do anything for me. In principle, the topics for publication are selected by their New York head office. Anyway, articles about painters appear very seldom. And even if they were to publish one, it would be about the man himself rather than his works. Well, Beks not only lives somewhere far away in Poland, but also there's nothing unusual about his life, nothing that young girls dream about during sleepless nights.

QUARREL, 6TH APRIL 1986

When at two in the morning the guests are finally leaving, I feel that I'll be given a dressing-down.

Throughout the evening, Ania laughed and was very talkative. I'd even say, too talkative, if you ask me. She kept interrupting her interlocutors, who I, personally, wanted to listen to.

For we talked about things important to me: the chances for success of my future exhibition. Ania took every opportunity to interrupt us. I therefore gave her to understand in a quite nasty way that she annoyed me. I could see that it hurt her. She looked at me for a longer while, as if she wanted to say: Just wait till we are alone. Just wait.

And now the guests are leaving. I'm going to get a scolding.

I try to forestall the inevitable reproaches. Pretending to sound relaxed, I make a remark to her mother, but loud enough for Ania to hear it:

- Did mum see it? Did mum see how unbearable Ania was all the evening? All the time she talked and talked, fast and endlessly. Oh, God, she's such a parrot ...

It doesn't seem to be working. There is some anxiety in my voice, and the joke doesn't relieve the tension at all.

Instead, an avalanche falls on my head in a moment.

- Because you are not listening! – growls my wife. – When are you going to learn to listen to people at last! Did you hear what they were saying?

- Sure, I pricked up my ears whenever I could. If only you'd let me focus on listening for a while ... - I reply in a semi-joking and semi-hostile tone. Which means: Stop! Or I'll give back!

-What? Listened! Pricked his ears whenever he could! You kept interrupting me all the time! You skipped from one subject to another. You talked about everything except what they wanted to talk about.

That beats everything! This is what I reproach her, and she serves me the same thing ...

- And tell me, darling, what was that thing they wanted to talk about so much? What?

- The stupid things you did during the exhibition. When I said at the table that you'd made a mistake choosing "Legs on the Chair" for the cover of the brochure, choosing such an idiotic lettering or fixing such preposterous prices, you assumed that tone of yours, the tone of an infallible fanatic. "Come on, what mistakes are you talking about? – you answered haughtily.

- Let's say that it was you rather than them who wanted to talk about my "mistakes". And that it was you, not them, who I interrupted in an inappropriate way, as you claim. Just be more modest and express yourself in the singular.

That's it! She wanted to turn the dinner into a small tribunal, so as to file a suit more easily.

- Do you want us to have an argument?! – I answer back, leaving the room.

I'm saying it still in a quiet voice, but fury begins to bubble in my throat. Fury and fear. I'm exhausted and feel that my ego is going to fail me. I'm afraid of my own violence.

Ania leaves the dining room and goes to the bathroom. A nervous thought flashes through my mind: start thinking about something else! I must immediately start thinking about something else! Change the topic. Breathe deeply so as to relax the knot in my stomach. By the way, who did I plan to write to tomorrow?

It's a waste of time. I can't stop thinking about the things that are really happening, and anxiously wait for Ania to come to the bedroom. I know the argument will go on. It will go on just because I will start it anew as soon as my wife gets out of the bath, since I hate uncertainty.

Will she attack me again? – I ask myself. – I must know if this is the end of the argument or not. Shall I go to sleep? How can I defend myself?

I'd like to make it up with her, but to do so, I'd have to fawn, because she won't give in. And the word "sorry" sticks in my throat. My ego will not open the mouth.

And if I don't say anything? – I ask myself. – Then she won't say anything, either. But in such a case, I won't be able to sleep for hours and will be completely worn-out tomorrow. This argument must finish today.

At last, it's Ania, not me, who comes back. Having got into bed, she turns her back at me and mumbles, as if she talked to herself:

- Since the time you found someone who's going to pay for your next exhibition you've become confident and arrogant, again. Just like a year ago: the one who knows everything. Don't forget that I'm financing it, too.

That's her favourite trick when she wants to cut me to the quick. She knows that this charge will hurt me most painfully.

I see that my spouse is not going to make things easier for me. And to fall asleep, I definitely need to make it up with her, so I suddenly assume a meek tone:

- Unfortunately, I know about it too well, honey – I say.

My fury turns into bitterness, and bitterness into quiet whimpering.

- And as for sponsors, I haven't found one yet – I add. – Because even if Wojciechowski issues the catalogue, it will be a drop in the ocean of my needs. I've got a hundred problems and I'm far from being arrogant. Believe me.

When a defeated dog gives in to the one who won the battle, it lies on its back and shows testicles, which means that it accepts the defeat and lets the winner bite its most sensitive place. I also prefer to show that I believe in the magnanimity of my tamer and accept my fate.

It seems Ania is finally pleased. While she hates my supercilious face, there's nothing she enjoys more than my weak little voice, which I sometimes use to complain. She's blatantly triumphant when I openly show my weakness, usually hidden under the mask of arrogance and self-confidence. She would hate me if I really were a nice man. But she does like when, from time to time, I turn out to be little and fragile, asking for forgiveness.

The argument comes to an end. I have admitted my failure, so Ania can drop off. Thirty minutes later I also calm down and fall into a deep sleep.

This morning, when I've been already working in my study for three hours, as usual, at about ten, Ania wakes up and, through the half-open door, asks me in a jolly tone:

- Is everything ok, my little frog?

And everything is OK again.

WORDS, 7TH APRIL 1986

1. I'm myself only when I doubt.

2. To be free is to do what you want.

But how can I break free of my own will? Especially when it wants me to do what I myself don't want to do, as I don't understand what it wants, or when the thing my will wants causes me pain?

3. Painting without meanings – I wrote.

- But it's bursting with meanings! – somebody answered me, writing his name in the golden book at the exhibition.

Could I doubt it?

4. Death, loneliness, madness, sorrow, depression, fall, leaving, breaking up, suffering, melancholy, despair, anxiety, suicide – do these words mean? Yes! I'm fascinated with pictures by madmen and paintings by Munch, my recent discovery of Alfred Kubin, and my today's encounter with the photographs by Don McCullin "Images des ténèbres".

5. I don't like the following words: aggression, exaggeration, quarrel, arrogance, hatred, I.

UNIFRANCE, 10TH APRIL 1986

A moment ago I picked up my movie from Unifrance Film.

Certainly, it wasn't endangered there. I know and don't deny it. Still, I prefer to keep it in my place. This is the only copy I have, and after the unforgettable adventure with Hugnet losing my ektachromes, I'm afraid of my own shadow, let alone the shadow of somebody else ...

Carriau, who together with Poitroneaut is the main organiser of the Perspectives of French Cinema (one of the four parts of the festival in Cannes, the one in which I hope to place my movie), has left. But his team are in: two assistants and a boy, whom I don't know. All of them are young and nice.

- Thanks to you we've discovered Bek – he hesitates for a moment - ...siński. Unpronounceable name.

They saw the film, which they liked, and they adore the paintings.

I show them "Penthouse" and the brochure, which I then decide to leave them. I know, however, that their smiles and the warm welcome do not mean anything. In due time I might hear them say the ritual "we are sorry", which I already know in a full range of tones, or the extremely rare "we've got some good news for you", of which I actually haven't got the faintest idea yet.

Anyway, one of the girls stresses:

- No, believe me, I'm not kidding: we really don't know yet which films will be chosen. We choose as we watch them. Well, certainly, everybody's got their preferences. But it's nothing final, and anything may happen.

Indeed, it must be really hard to select nine movies in a mass of 240 ...

My tension increases by two degrees.

HAS IT STARTED? 10TH APRIL 1986

Is it possible that Ania is starting to show the first signs of exhaustion? She's making me an endless scene, methodically and with an emphasis on the subject:

You must find somebody to finance your exhibition. I won't give a penny.

She pretends to sound calm and moderate. The dangerous tone, which I fear most.

Raising the argument by three octaves, thus discrediting myself at the very beginning, I start yelling:

- When will stop attacking me at last? What? What else have I been doing for months? Only this one thing: looking for a sponsor! Even if I wanted to chip in with our money, I couldn't do it, anyway. We haven't got a single franc.

- Yes – she answers imperturbably. – But you must find somebody to finance the next exhibition. I'm not going to give anything.

And it starts again.

I'm red with anger, and she walks away with an offended look. Normally, she isn't stubborn, except when panic-stricken, so I ask myself whether it's not the first symptoms of panic.

SURREAUT, 10TH APRIL 1986

I'm writing this note in Publicis drugstore at Etoile Square, by the exit of Champs-Élysées. For an hour I've been waiting for the printer recommended by Hugnet, a Sureaut. He was supposed to call me yesterday, after the failed meeting in "Penthouse". He didn't. This morning I called his workplace three times.

- He's out – I was served this phrase three times.

Finally, he called and we arranged to meet at two thirty p.m. To make sure he was not going to stand me up, I asked him with emphasis:

- Are you sure this time we will be able to talk about my project?

- But of course!

And yet, the clock struck a quarter to four, and he hasn't turned up. Another wasted afternoon.

France, France, how is it possible that you still stand on your feet, having such workers to support you?

But why? the cars are going on the road, the shops are full of goods, the pavement in front of me is clean and the waiter brings the coffee I ordered. I can't get over my amazement: all that exists and functions normally despite the fact that every day, invariably, on my "Beks way" I meet so many people working like that printer, or like Hugnet, or that Eclair laboratory. How can this country possibly move forward if it's set in motion by such a lot of incompetent and irresponsible people?

My mind goes round in circles, biting its own tail: how come there is such a huge gulf between two real worlds, both of them tangible and evident?

The first of them is visible with a naked eye: this country is strong and thriving.

But also the reality of the other one is as plain as day: the people I work with in connection with my Beks promotion enterprise are rotten professionals, and any enthusiastic amateur is head and shoulders above them.

AMPUTATION, 10TH APRIL 1986

I'm sitting on an underground platform and feel like puking between two trains. I must finally spit out the vomit that I'm choking on.

When at last will it be possible to have one's character amputated? When can I finally have the warts breeding on my soul removed and my hideous ego castrated?

I've never loved my internal face, but meanwhile it has become simply disgusting. I can twist my nose in all directions, looking at myself in the mirror of these notes – I still have it in the middle my face, with a huge, suppurating carbuncle on top of it.

EFFORT, 13TH APRIL 1986

“Doing nothing useful is a great virtue. But it mustn’t be abused”.

Have I abused my natural tendency to be lazy? the golden thoughts of famous people appeal strongly to imagination. I claim, however, that this one, though produced by Talleyrand, does not fit the reality. I therefore told Ania yesterday:

- If, one day, I get my own way, it’s not going to come about by pure chance. And also if I fail, nobody can accuse me of not working hard enough. There isn’t a single day without ten calls, five letters and three meetings about Beks, which I have in the city. And it’s been like that for three years.

- You’re getting nowhere – answered Ania.

That’s true. I’m getting nowhere.

The day before 9th May, that is, the day before repaying my whole debt to the bank according to the fixed term, or having to pack up and wind up my business, the balance of the past ten days is as monotonous and banal as before: a few slips and loads of failures.

Neither Dymitrievic (who refuses because this is “decadent” painting) nor Wojciechowski (who might want to do it, but has no money) will issue the album. And I don’t have the means to match the calibre of my ambitions.

Fliderbaum keeps silent, and Kasia hasn’t been able to get in touch with Prince Albert, whom I was going to present with one painting and then boast about it.

Polański replied with a nice letter, thanking me for sending him “Penthouse”, in which two of his paintings were spanned across two whole columns. But between the lines his letter clearly said: “For God’s sake, do stop pestering me, please”.

Andrzej Wajda promised to visit us next Tuesday, to see the film. Even if he likes the movie, it will be too late to recommend it to the director Bernard Tavernier (who seems to be the one who has the final word in the matter of selection of films for Cannes) and obtain his patronage.

Veronèze, who was so enthusiastic about the prospect of having an exhibition in Cannes, during the festival, delays his arrival in Paris to establish the conditions.

Next Wednesday I'm meeting Miss Breutaut, who is responsible for the purchase of films about art for Beaubourg Centre. I'll show her mine. But the Centre has already said "no" to Beks, and it's bound to do the same, just to avoid contradicting itself, if not for any other reason.

Out of fifteen foreign galleries to which I've recently written, none (except for Bronstaad – check if the spelling is right? – from Frankfurt) has replied to my proposal of having an exhibition. Neither in Germany nor in Switzerland, nor even in the States. And the one which answered did it only to say the trivial "sorry".

I've written to the minister of culture, Francois Léotard, to Suzanne Pajet from the Museum of Modern Art for the city of Paris and to the critics of twelve major Parisian magazines, sending them the whole documentation (including the one from "Penthouse"). Not a single reply.

I've sent another 30 copies of "Penthouse" to different celebrities who came to the exhibition and whose names were written in the golden book. They haven't even acknowledged the receipt of my parcel.

Ms Stratton, a young American fan of Beks, who'd seen the paintings at the exhibition, contacted me to tell me that she was going to write a master's thesis in the field of psychoanalysis. Now she reports that the topic has not been approved by her professor. And even if it was finally accepted, there's no chance for her to receive a master's degree before the (uncertain) exhibition in October. In other words, it's sure that I can't boast her work and use it as a sort of showpiece.

Hugnet lost my 170 ektachromes and, after the publication of six pages devoted to Beks in the “Art” column of “Penthouse”, none of the magazine readers has written to the editorial office to find out something more about the artist.

Exhausted with all those futile efforts, who wouldn't scream:

- Stop it! Can't you see that you're getting nowhere!

So, I understand Ania perfectly well and don't condemn her.

Is doing nothing useful such a great virtue then? Perhaps. In any case, I don't abuse it.

PATRONAGE, 11TH APRIL 1986

Let's not exaggerate things. After all, this country is not ruled only by double-dealing, patronage or a system of contacts with strings pulled by friends in high places. This society is not made up solely of cliques formed by cronies and clever dodgers.

All right.

The truth is, however, that if I've made any career in France, it's not because I'm better. If I've achieved anything, it's because I was recommended by an influential person at the right moment or because I was rendered a service which I needed at the moment. There are many talented people in this country, but since they are not anybody's protégés, they will never make names for themselves.

I graduated from university with loads of diplomas. I'd left behind four years at Łódź University and Warsaw University, where I received top grades in exams. I'd been granted a master's degree at the Faculty of Law in Paris. I'd graduated from the Parisian Institute of Political Sciences (International Relations Department) having the tenth place in general classification. I had a diploma in one-year PhD studies in public law at Paris II University and a diploma in one-year studies in political sciences, which I'd defended with a good result at Paris I University. Sometimes I would get 10/10 mark in an examination.

Having obtained all those diplomas, I started to look for a job.

- We're sorry – I heard everywhere. – You are a specialist in public law. It's not what we need.

After six months of writing to all possible places, I didn't find anything.

My dream since childhood was to be a professor, just like my Father and my brother Johnny. I applied for the position of an assistant at Paris II

University. When I did it for the first time, anonymously, without any contacts, I wasn't even taken into consideration.

But one day, in the hall of Panthéon Centre, I met André Mathiot, a constitutional law professor, an outstanding mind, erudite, a character in the style of old France. He lectured on the political system of the United States at the one-year PhD course I mentioned before.

- What are you doing? – he asked me.

- No change – I answered. – I'm studying during the day, and at night I'm pushing decorations in Lido.

- What? In Lido cabaret? Really? You are working at night? So how did you manage to come to my seminar at eight o'clock last year?

- I didn't go to sleep – I replied. – I finished work at two in the morning and read. Then I came to your seminar at university at a quarter to eight.

It's enough when somebody smiles to me or shows me some interest, and I'm instantly willing to open up. Besides, I greatly admired the professor, whose erudition and intelligence impressed me a lot.

- Do you like Lido? – I asked him spontaneously.

- I've never been there. I heard you're required to wear an evening dress there, and I don't have one.

- A dark suit is usually enough – I assured him. – And if you do me an honour and accept the invitation, I will be very pleased to have an opportunity of taking you to a show.

He agreed.

Once a month, on Sunday, I had a right to bring my friends to Lido for half the price. I then invited the professor with his wife, paying for their entrance, because, I repeat, he was a unique person, though extremely right-wing, at the time when I was still ultra-leftist.

Who could predict that next year Mathiot would be chosen dean of the Faculty of Law at Paris II University? Certainly not me, and you may

believe, my Friend, that I wasn't trying to finagle anything when I invited him to Lido. At that time, I didn't know anything about the structure of university authorities, research employees and work in higher education. I was far more interested in organizing another strike in Lido than in the clever moving of pawns on the chessboard of my university career.

That spontaneous gesture paid, as Mathiot presided over the meeting of the Council, which considered my application for the position of an assistant. And there were several candidates per one post.

Andone of them fell to me.

Every year I send Mathiot Christmas greetings, thanking him for that gesture, though he's been retired for a long time. And I'm going to thank him till the end of my life, because I know that hadn't it been for his help, I would have never got a job at university, even if I'd had five more diplomas with best grades. Without this backing given to me at the right moment, my life would have taken a different course.

Later on, I used to be supported each time there was some promotion at our university, until the time Mathiot retired.

Well, promotion came to an end with the end of patronage. Since that time, I haven't made any progress. Despite the fact that I've published many articles in public law, defended my habilitation thesis with flying colours and received further honourable mentions in the form of being proposed for the award and ministerial subsidy – I'm not moving forward.

During the penultimate recruitment for the post of associate professor (in France having habilitation is not tantamount to becoming an associate professor) I thought that there would finally be fair play, because I found that the commission (CSU), having examined my application, my habilitation thesis and my articles, had given me the first place among all the candidates. Four of us had been selected, with me at the head.

I heard that after reading my works, the professor in charge had written a favourable report.

But there were only two places in that alleged contest. Two places and four candidates, including the one supported by the new dean, so he was sure to get it. The other one was the protégé of his professor, Gaudemet, who was doing his best to pull strings for him. And if Gaudemet decided to back somebody, he went the whole way. He would resort to any means to secure the post of associate professor for his candidate.

So, according to the witness who later told me about the whole incident, Daniel Amson, the one who you know, my Friend, from his columns in “Le Monde” - during the meeting the said professor Gaudemet stood up and said:

- Dmochowski? Oh, no! No way! I’m not going to work with him and I’d rather he left my team.

I had never, but never spoken to that professor. Quite by chance, I’d found myself in his administration law team a year before. We’d had no argument whatsoever. Once or twice I’d shaken hands with him during the few meetings of our teaching staff. But if I’d been nominated, his protégé wouldn’t have got the job. That’s because in this pseudo contest there was actually only one place, as the candidate backed by the dean, without any discussion, had to get the other one. Therefore, the hostile declaration of the Gaudemet was his way to make his candidate win that pseudo contest rather than a sign of his real reluctance towards me (because practically hardly anybody knew one another in that huge factory with 13 thousand people - the Faculty of Law).

Certainly, all the predictions materialised. The Council Members played under the baton of the professor Gaudemet who was prejudiced against me. Seeing such a great deal of aversion towards me, nobody wanted to argue about a Dmochowski, who was disliked for his stiff and pompous face, anyway.

After eliminating Dmochowski, his opponent, who’d been given the last place by the All-France Commission, now held the first position.

Then I submitted my application at another university. The All-France Commission selected five of us and we were going to be interviewed by the Faculty Council at this university. I realized that the candidates were leaving the room with an alarming speed. I looked at the watch when they asked me in. I only had time to come in, sit down, introduce myself and say three sentences, after which they told me: “thank you:”. Having left, I looked at the watch again. The interview had lasted exactly 6 minutes. Within 6 minutes a decision was taken on the university career of someone who’d spent 25 years studying and writing. But also, within 6 minutes, a decision was taken on the career of someone who for the next 25 years would have a right to speak from the lectern to generations of students, in the atmosphere of prestige around the title of associate professor.

In the evening I had a call from a professor of that university, Troper:

- I didn’t know that you’d applied at our university. Why didn’t you tell me?

- I was surprised how fast the Council interviewed us – I replied, shunning the question, as I would never want to become his debtor and would never ask him for any support.

- Well, you know that such decisions are taken neither in this place nor at this moment. Everything had been decided before you appeared in front of the Council.

- And I wasn’t accepted, was I?

- And had you hoped? None of you stood a chance, because there was a candidate from our university, supported by three members of the Council.

OK.

Another recruitment at my university was coming near. I didn’t hide before anybody that I was going to put forward my candidacy again. This time also without any backing. Not because I was particularly honest, but simply because I had no friend to ask for help since the time Mathiot retired.

Again, there was a candidate supported by the commission chairman. To avoid having to resort to the forcing means used by the Gaudemet during the previous recruitment, the commission head, professor Benoît-Janneau in a confidential conversation, demanded (of course, orally) that I withdraw from the contest. I refused and submitted my candidacy application. And what did I see? My surname was on the list of candidates at a provincial university. It didn't appear on the list of candidates for our university at all. Professor Benot-Janneau had arranged it with the National Commission that my surname would be "forgotten", so finally his protégé was admitted.

But I didn't get a post in the provinces, either. It's because there the game was played according to the same scenario. The dean of the local Faculty of Law, Professor Philippe Breton personally contacted the candidates to tell them with emphasis that they shouldn't come to the contest, as "there was a local candidate who would be selected". So on the day when the Faculty Council had a meeting at the said university, the three outside candidates didn't turn up at all. Only I spoiled the whole game, because I arrived. What for? I don't know myself, since the result was exactly the same as the local dean had foretold – the candidate he'd supported was admitted.

I wouldn't like you to think, my Friend, that the local milieu of lawyers is particularly rotten. It isn't; at least compared to the medical environment, where posts are systematically handed out to members of professors' families or among professors' friends. Actually, this phenomenon had reached such immense proportions that a certain doctor, doctor Levy, three weeks before one of the pseudo contests secured with a bailiff the exact results of his competitors who, being in cahoots with the jury members, were supposed to get the posts. The list didn't differ by even one third of point from what doctor Levy had foreseen.

The poor wretch dared to file a complaint with court. This way he broke his career once and for all.

The second thing I'd like you to understand, my Friend, is the mechanism which enables a whole system of connections to exist in this country, without

provoking any objection from the society, which after all is governed by the rule of efficiency.

This society is based on two fundamental principles.

Firstly, despite daily recited slogans in praise of democracy, it is governed by small elites. Therefore, the system of patronage functions in tightly closed and small milieus, the members of which can be easily forced to be silent, keep secrets and remain submissive, as they are threatened with the sanction of being removed from the environment, just like doctor Levy has been excluded for ever.

Secondly, this system of backing may last endlessly, without causing any objection. Elites in France are usually made up of quite well-educated people, since the level of higher education is good here.

As a result, the local system of recruitment might seem outright corrupt and biased from an individual perspective, yet from the social point of view it doesn't have much influence on the efficiency of a given elite. The candidates have graduated from the same university, so quality differences between most of them are not big. Thus, the elite's social efficiency is not really affected just because X has been employed thanks to somebody's backing, whereas Y, displaying more virtues, has been removed for ever, as he isn't anybody's protégé.

The only harmful result of this general system of patronage is the fact that this way the most outstanding personalities often stay in the shadow, and that in France there have been merely a few Noble prizes, while in the States they come in dozens.

First of all, however, I wouldn't like you to think, my Friend, that I consider myself honest and virtuous. Facing the gigantic system of backing and the absolute impossibility of omitting it, I am by no means going to play the role of doctor Levy. Quite the opposite, if only I had an opportunity, I'd eagerly and unscrupulously take advantage of this system.

Just look, I'll give you another example: when my wife was to settle permanently in France, I had to ...

Wait, I haven't finished. Listen to the rest. Why are you leaving before I've finished my story? ...

Douce France, le pays de ma démente ...¹

¹"Douce France, le pays de ma démente" – reference to the famous song by Charles Trénet "Sweet France cou, the ntry of my childhood" has been rewritten to "Sweet France, the country of my madness" – (*translator's note*)

THAT'S TRUE, 13TH APRIL 1986

I often realize that my passion makes me blind: that, being filled with bitterness towards those who don't share it, I behave as if I held a grudge against the whole world. On such occasions my sense of justice protests and demands impartiality towards all those whom I would otherwise most readily send to the stake. Besides, my realistic mind reminds me that, without an ounce of sober judgement, all that fulminating of mine will go unnoticed. At the stage of promoting Beks which I'm going through at the moment, I will then try to objectively judge the matters and differentiate between the charges that I sustain and the ones which I levelled too hastily.

Well then, the most painful have certainly been completely unjustified abuses directed at this painting (1). Also, I've been acutely hurt by the lack of connections, without which it's virtually impossible to make your way in this fossilized society (2). Apart from that, on many occasions I've had a justified reason for complaining of the French people's negligence in doing their job. In fact, it has cut me to the quick over the last two years (3). However, I have neither had to resort to bribing the ones whom I asked for something (4) nor suffered because of my Polish origin (5).

1. It is true that I've had to listen to unprovoked insults hurled at Beks's painting.

- He's a weak pupil – told me Séran, the owner of Râ Gallery, when I brought him two paintings (the one which I call Madonna with Child, and Don Quixote).

Then he added haughtily:

- I could give him a few lessons. But you say he's fifty six years old. It's too late.

Or let's take what I was told by that culture official Grympas, whom our neighbours, the Hoangs, brought one day to us:

- Yeees, indeed – she drawled her words – it’s very narrative painting ... And that technical precision ... Some time ago, in the Soviet Union, we were shown a painter who’s famous there. We were told that he went to a forest and looked at the leaves so as to paint them better afterwards. And such people think that this way you can become a great painter. Can you imagine that?

Or another clerk, a district counsellor Claude Minière, who hosted me in Grand Palais:

- The very fact that the audience liked this painting during your exhibition does not prove anything. Sir, the audience buys daubs in Montmartre.

Dymitrievic, the owner of the publishing house called the Age of Man, was even more brutal:

- I’ll put it bluntly: I will never issue an album of this painter. I hate this painting. It’s decadent.

Like many other people to whom I proposed this edition, a person from Hazan publishing house on Seine Street, opposite Valmay’s Gallery, simply choked with fury on the phone:

- That’s all we need, indeed! Issue an album of Beksiński?! It was enough that for a month we had to put up with having him as a neighbour. This painting makes one sick.

“Horror”, “sick”, “macabre” - these are just a few most frequently repeated epithets. Yes, I’ve heard loads of insults from the mouths of all those “defenders of happiness”, “joy of life” and “optimism in art”, for whom painting something else than the faith in existence is a sign of decadence.

2. It is true that I’ve suffered a lot due to the silence or indifference of nearly all decision-makers, just because I couldn’t get to them without a recommendation, a letter of recommendation or a friendly phone call of an influential celebrity.

All museums in the provinces, in Grenoble, Marseille, Aix en Provence, Strasbourg and elsewhere gave a negative reply to my proposal of them purchasing or exhibiting the paintings by Beks. Or they just didn't answer at all.

Pierre Brisset from "L'Oeil" magazine and Jean-Jacques Levêque from "Quotidien de Paris", the only critics who wrote something about Beks, didn't hide from me that museums would still reject or ignore my proposals. And when I asked them what to do to make the curators change their minds, Pierre Brisset replied as if it was an obvious thing:

- Well, such things are always arranged through contacts, connections and friends in high places.

Actually, they also stuck to the rules of this game. Brisset, who from the very beginning didn't hide his hatred for Beks's painting, wouldn't have written a word without the recommendation of Louse. Other critics, whom I didn't know or to whom I wasn't recommended, didn't even bother to see the exhibition or reply to my many letters and phone calls.

3. It is true that I've suffered a great deal because of the negligence and don't-care attitude of paid French co-workers. Some of them admitted they'd "forgotten" to reply to my proposal. The others were absent from the office whenever I called them, didn't react to the messages I left, didn't come to meetings or came very late. Still others did their job inexcusably badly, like that painting restorer from Faubourg Saint-Honore Street whom I entrusted with the task of varnishing two paintings. Having finished work, he secured the paintings in the frames with thirty nails, puncturing the hardboard on which they were painted. Or the printer preparing reproductions for the brochure who, without any particular reason, cut out 25 centimetres of the wave and the same amount of folds on the dress in the paintings which I call "Bath" and "Lady squeezing her Breasts". Or yet another one who selected and printed the idiotic lettering in the first brochure, without consulting me whatsoever. Or, last but not least, the one who printed

the brochure with texts about Beks, having forgotten to remove the handwritten notes from the finally accepted film.

How many people “really forgot” or “frankly speaking, had no time to think about my matters”, for which I paid them after all, or “have been recently very busy, you understand”? How many? Fifteen, twenty? the notes on phone calls and letters in my archives (which I don’t publish in these notes) are filled to the brim with complaints of mistakes and a fundamental lack of professionalism on the part of the people I had to cooperate with.

Only Beks, though you know, my Friend, how I detest him, didn’t deserve the gnashing of my teeth. He’s always been well organized, professional and efficient.

Anyway, what are the things I’ve never had to complain about?

Two important things that other people sometimes complain about, which however have not been obstacles on my way (perhaps only temporarily) are: bribery and xenophobia.

4. It is true that in Poland you often can’t do much without a bribe. For example, this year, getting a place at university costs as much as a good job, and you have to grease someone’s palm to get a passport. In my homeland, bribery is a common thing.

Well, my endeavours to promote Beks in Paris have never (so far?) been accompanied by any corrupted proposals (let alone demands). Sometimes I heard of people who wanted a bribe. For example, I’ve been told about a TV journalist who openly demanded one painting he’d chosen in return for him inviting a painter to the programme. I’ve also heard of a French specialist press journalist who, before writing an article about a tailor, in a very meaningful way expressed his admiration for one of the dresses, which “would perfectly suit his wife”. I, personally, have never come across such explicit “suggestions”. Neither Levéque (except official fees that he received) nor Brisset, or Hugnet demanded any presents or money from me.

But I had to invite journalists to endless dinners. Not being able to stand a journalist a meal, even in a second-rate restaurant, is a great obstacle in France. Sometimes it drives me to despair. Today I already know that many companies earmark special sums for meetings with the press. It's also widely known that on the market has appeared a new group of professionals whose task is to discreetly convince the press to write about something – press attachés.

Journalists don't earn much, so they consider an invitation to dinner as a natural thing. They don't even realise that they are commonly held in contempt for this unbearable form of begging. That's disgusting, especially that some of them are so gluttonous that one might get an impression they haven't eaten for two days. For example, that journalist from the first channel, Jean Offredo: in Maison du Danemark he was so carefree when ordering cigars, champagne and the most expensive dishes at my cost that, at the end, the waiter brought the bill for him, not me, thinking we were all his guests.

5. It is true that my Polish origin and the fact that Beks lives in Warsaw have never provoked any aggressive attacks against us.

On the contrary, our Polish identity usually aroused sympathy. What created a certain psychological barrier was the difficulty in pronouncing our surnames, as a Frenchman finds it easier to recall names like Durant or Dupont than ours. But that was compensated by the fact that I practically speak this language without any foreign influences and, at the beginning of any conversation, I'm mistaken for a Frenchman.

No, never have I heard any affronting remarks on our origin. I did, however, hear a lot of ridiculous speculations. In particular, I mean all that naïve searching for Beks's inspiration. The average Frenchman almost automatically seeks its sources in the hard experiences of Poland.

- Are these the ruins of Warsaw? – I was asked by the owner of Berneheim le Jeune Gallery.

- Yes, but they went through that nightmare in Auschwitz, you understand ... Having suffered all that – it's been dozens, but dozens of times I've heard such simplified deliberations of people visiting my exhibition.

In this country, racism is almost exclusively anti-Arabic and chiefly cultural, as (contrary to the attitude of Americans towards black people) Arabs are not considered naturally inferior beings. The French detest them only for what (in their opinion) is brought by their culture: aggression, hypocrisy, noise, dirt ...

All in all, the balance is not completely negative and I can say that, choosing in 1964 a country which I would later make my second homeland, I might have chosen worse.

WAJDA, 15TH APRIL 1986

A moment ago I met with Andrzej Wajda, a Polish director, the author of many films known all over the world. If I somehow managed to associate his name with Beks's promotion in the West, it would help a lot.

I'd been writing to him and sending him invitations for a long time so as to arouse his interest in my doings. Two times he replied me that he was willing to see me during one of his stays in France, and in the last letter he informed me that he would be free in these days in Paris.

For a start, let me say a few words about the impression I got after the meeting. Well, not only did I meet a great artist, but I also spent four interesting hours in the company of an intelligent man.

As agreed in our yesterday's telephone conversation, at ten o'clock I went to Grenelle Street, No. 15, where he usually stays when visiting Paris. It's a small palace with a nice façade, but modest interiors. As he told me, in the past, surrealists used to have their meetings here.

When I came in, Wajda was practically ready – he was just tidying up some things. Waiting for him to finish, I asked if I could have a look through the window. It had a view of an internal park, typical of this wealthy bourgeois part of the town. This is what we started talking about: about Paris, and then its hidden treasures. Although we said trivial things, I immediately felt comfortable with him. At first glance, I discovered an open, unpretentious man, ready to talk about anything in a direct way, as if he'd already known me. He's a type of interlocutor who keeps the conversation going.

Skipping from one subject to another, from Paris we moved on to the political situation in Poland. When going down the stairs and proceeding towards my car, which was parked several metres away, we exchanged pessimistic remarks on what was happening "there".

With the first words I felt I was dealing with an anti-communist and anti-Russian patriot. Not blind or blathering, however, like many of our older generation countrymen and Solidarity activists. At the same time, I knew that he also didn't bear the slightest resemblance to those French blockheads, ENA graduates and other Parisian "intellectuals", who, in one sentence out of every three, servilely recite clichés read two hours before in the last issue of "Express", "Paris Match" or, at best, "Le Monde".

In an uncoordinated way we started talking about the hope which Rakowski – the former editor of "Polityka" weekly, and then deputy prime minister at the beginning of martial law – gave us, Poles, when he was in power.

- He was removed from power, because he'd never won the support of middle level staff of the party machine. Although he's a son of a peasant and has gone through all stages of a party career ... - says Wajda.

First of all, I didn't know that Rakowski was a peasant's son. And what I find particularly surprising is the fact that the artist sitting next to me reasons like a political scientist.

In the opinion of Wajda, Poland is in a disastrous situation, especially that the nation is morally callous.

- ... and nobody wants to do anything to get out of it. It feels even in your job. Whatever good is done, it's appropriated by the communists straight away. If, for example, someone has made a good movie, "they" immediately show it as a proof of alleged freedom, so people prefer to do nothing. And this way, all of us are digging ourselves even deeper into trouble.

I absolutely agree with it, because Poles are really like that. To spite mum I'll have my ears frostbitten – they say, mocking at themselves, but unfortunately there isn't a grain of exaggeration.

- Since the time we had to sell them everything – adds Wajda – symbiosis with the Russians has become so close that they are ubiquitous in the life of

our country. Again, there's a threat we'll be living on the margins of Europe, while in the time of Gierek we hoped to get closer to it.

Let's say A lot could be said about Europe, which I myself have been observing for twenty years and where I've met an impressive number of impeccably dressed idiots in ties. A lot could also be said about the annoying Polish complex of Europe. Especially that there is nothing this particular man could envy European intellectual and artistic elites, as he is head and shoulders above them.

However, I do agree with what he says about Polish communists, and reply:

- If I'd heard you ten years ago, I would have probably thought that it's thinly-disguised anti-Communist propaganda. Even five years ago, like most people, I hoped that the army would restore some order in Poland; that, after a threat of disaster which Solidarity extremists were leading to, Jaruzelski would start a quick and controlled march towards liberalization. Today I no longer hope for that. All my life I've been a communist and even in the penultimate elections I voted for French communists. Today, however, I see that Polish communists only deepened our national vices and, instead of helping us spread our wings, they are pushing us into a blind alley.

He answers me, complaining of the corruption of Polish communist bureaucracy, and adds:

- The country in which the administration sector employs a whole army of people doesn't even have an administration school.

And again, I've got an impression to be listening to a political science professor, and not a film-maker, as all the ones I know have never talked about administration schools, of which they usually had a vague idea.

I listen more and more closely to what he's saying, partly because I don't believe in logic, logicians and logical reasoning. I do, however, believe in what I don't have myself - intuition. And next to me in the car is sitting a man who has proved with his films that he can better predict the direction

of History than all sorts of observers, politicians and political scientists. The fact that he's moderate in the use of adjectives also reduces my instinctive mistrust, which is aroused whenever someone gives opinions brooking no argument, or, what's worse, tries to convince me of anything. Wajda, however, doesn't use any kind of exaggerated terms which usually put me on my guard.

- Why didn't you try to settle down in the West? You'd obviously have an honourable position here.

Having asked him this question, I'm prepared for a possible high-flown oration on "the demands of History", "fight" and "Homeland". But no, nothing of the kind. Again, he answers in a matter-of-fact way, raising arguments that I'd have least expected.

- Firstly, I'd have had to do that much earlier. For example, just after I'd made "Ashes and Diamonds". In my age, you think about a place to die rather than live. Besides, if I'd settled here, I'd have to make the films in the style of the local directors. I'd have to tell beautiful stories. Roman Polański is brilliant doing that. He makes the films like all those directors, only better. It's not my goal ...

- ... and apart from that – I interrupt him – you might lose a part of your audience, just like Solženicyn has lost his – since the time he moved to the States, living behind a barbed wire fence, in a luxurious villa ...

- Yes ... - now he interrupts me. – My films have become successful in a way, because they were made "there". Finally, if I'd always worked "here", the things might not have been so easy. I'm not sure at all that in the West I'd have been given the resources for doing what I wanted to do and what I could do "over there".

Among the whole lot of topics we are raising, I ask him how he leads actors, and especially, why in "Man of Marble" he let Janda act in this pseudo American style, laidback, verging on hysterics. It's always intrigued me why the director of so meticulously made films would allow such a thing. I hate

Janda for this exhibitionistic, nervous and noisy acting without any restraints. This kind of acting, which is like scraping iron on glass, simply clashes with the acute judgement, wisdom and seriousness of Wajda's films.

- I wanted to emphasise the breaking up of the new generation with the standardized youth from the times of Stalin in the years 1945-55. A more free youth, relaxed – he answered me. I remained unconvinced, though.

And we change the topic again.

Using his last book "Cinema, my Love" as a pretext for further discussion, I ask him a series of questions on what he's writing.

He answers me that he's reached a stage in his life when he feels an urge to hand over to the young all the things he wanted to know when starting to work in this profession, and which he had to learn himself, as there was nobody who would tell him about it.

- Apart from classic interviews, which you often gave and which I've read, has anybody recorded the talks with you, like the one we're having now? I'm asking you because I did it myself with Beksiński. I've got over fifty hours of recorded talks with him. They will let future generations get some idea of him. Has anyone done something like that with you?

He produces a quiet, jealous oh!, but denies. Which of the great people wouldn't like to have a faithful chronicler by his side, who would give History an account of every little gesture and word ...

When we get to our house, I forget to warn Wajda that I live on the fourth floor in a building without a lift. He bravely begins to skip over two steps, like a trained sportsman. On the second floor, however, he starts panting heavily, and on the fourth one he turns pale. Having come into my flat, he collapses on the sofa and for five minutes tries to catch his breath.

When he's finally recovered, I steer the conversation to what is most important to me: I show him paintings by Beks, the documentation which accompanied the exhibition, the brochure, the golden book and press cuttings. He doesn't say anything. Nothing specific, in any case. Nothing

I could remember. Oh yes indeed: he says he appreciates my project of creating a museum of Beksiński. But he actually mentions it so as to take an opportunity of saying that he himself was going to do the same for his friend from the Academy of Fine Arts, the painter Wróblewski:

- I was told: no, because in 1956 Wróblewski returned his party card – he finishes bitterly.

- And do you still paint? – I ask.

- No. I stopped after I'd finished the Academy. But for 30 years I've been making sketches and drawings in my diary. Now I'm having them exhibited in Wrocław. In the summer they will be shown in Warsaw.

He still doesn't say anything about Beks.

When we are coming back, I openly ask him if he's ready to write something about these paintings. He replies:

- No. I can't find the key to this painting. It's not that I deny its greatness. It is great. But I would have to name what I feel towards it myself, and I don't find the right words. Besides, I'm not fluent at writing. I can't write well.

When I propose to record him on my equipment, he answers:

- When you put yourself on a recorder and then hear through it, everything is all right. But later, when you want to write it down, you find that there's nothing you thought about. And then you must write everything anew. This way you get into the same trap as at the beginning.

We are still in my flat, but I can already see that I won't get anything out of him. So I drop this subject.

- I understand and don't insist – I finish. – If, one day, you feel like writing something about Beksiński, I'll take it with pleasure. I could publish it in the album I mentioned a moment ago, or in another publication about him.

He replies me:

- All right. Let's do so.

At the end I show him the film.

He looks focused, without saying anything. When it's finished, he says spontaneously:

- I liked it!

Then:

- It's good this way. I know how difficult it is to do: a director usually either imposes himself too much, thus harming the painting, or does something opposite, in which case the viewer may ask what the film is for. Since I made a film about Dunikowski, I've known something about it. And Dziworski has kept the balance.

I don't share this opinion, but don't show it. Instead, I ask him what he thinks of the scene in a dive, which many people criticized and which I'm going to cut out.

- I don't think love between old people will shock the audience. If anything, it's rather the fact that it's the only scene with some plot. It promises something that finally doesn't come. Makes the viewer expect something, which then doesn't come true.

He also likes the manner of leading the camera:

- When filming the paintings, the camera isn't nervous, like in other scenes in which it moves too much. It moves slowly and you can first see the upper, and then the lower part of each painting. I was also afraid that he would cut the paintings into pieces. But he shows them well. One can see them as a whole, even if not at once, they emerge gradually.

Again, I've got an impression that he's wrong and judges Dziworski in a too friendly way.

But I keep this opinion for myself.

As for the chances for this film to be chosen for the festival in Cannes, he's very sceptical.

- An unknown painter, who would be promoted this way; an unknown promoter; the director less French than the other two ... Paraphrasing Hamlet, you are between the swords of dangerous swordsmen – he says.

But after a while he adds:

- The festival in Cannes is very independent. It's capable of granting an award to a really unknown film and without support.

For a long time he talks about various festivals, especially about the festival in Moscow. It stuck in his craw, because when his film (doesn't specify which) was close to getting the first award, the Russians, in order to lessen his success, at the last moment invented a super-award, which they gave to the updated version of "Long Live Mexico" by Eisenstein.

We come back to Dziworski, about whom Wajda talks in nice words. I feel, however, that something disturbs him.

- Why has Dziworski never made a full-length movie? – I ask.

- Exactly – picks up Wajda. – He has problems leading his team and can't agree with actors. Actually, many young directors have this problem. They are so worried that their film might flop and so carefully supervise everybody's work that in the end they don't know themselves what they wanted to say. They boss around too much and don't understand the team.

- Apropos – I interrupt him. – In a French TV report on the set of "Man of Iron" I got an impression that what was happening there was improvised and uncoordinated. You seemed to be hardly present. It looked as if everybody was doing what they wanted. I thought it didn't bode well for the film and that's why I was prejudiced against it. Especially that the local propaganda, equally mendacious as "there", distorted the message of the film. When I finally went to see it, I not only liked it, but greatly appreciated the precision of construction and acting coherence. Well, the actors are coherent if the director is the same. How do you manage to convey to actors what they are supposed to do, while you make an impression of not having said anything?

- A good dialogue with an actor is short – he answers me – because unnecessary words were said long ago. You must work for a long time with a given actor to create a bond which later lets you do without words. Something like that exists between Fellini and Mastroianni. Fellini didn't give Mastroianni the role of Casanova and made a mistake. "Ginger and Fred" is Mastroianni's revenge on Fellini. With the mastery of his acting he showed Fellini to what extent he can understand him without words. Fellini made a mistake in Casanova, taking Sutherland instead of him.

As I said a moment ago, when driving back to Paris, in spite of everything, I make one more attempt to bring up my issues. I then ask him if he could arrange it with his French distributor to show my film as an addition to one of his movies. He doesn't reject this idea, but says that now his films are seldom shown in the West and his relations with the distributor (I think his name is Miller) have loosened. But he will ask him. I feel that he's not very keen on getting involved in the whole thing. Neither is he reluctant, however. He comes back to the topic on his own, resumes it and wonders aloud.

He definitely gives up on the promotion of my projects. Just like Polański (though with a less dose of contempt), Wajda refuses to give me any help.

- What are you preparing at the moment? – I then ask him. – You've come to Paris to shoot something, haven't you?

- Yes, "Demons". But how can you translate "Demons" into the language of reason? My screenwriter is trying to do that. I'm afraid, however, that he might fail, because French Cartesian minds won't find it easy to understand what is so important in Dostojewski's literature: a whim, chance, exaggeration. Not long ago he made a film based on "A Chronicle of Amorous Incidents" by Konwicki.

- It is set in Vilnius – he comes back to his obsession. – "They" banned me from even mentioning the name of this town, because the Russians might understand it as some territorial claims. In the paralyzing atmosphere of the preparations for the party rally, everybody is afraid of taking any initiative, because it might be pointed out during the rally. Just in case then,

my film went to the shelf. Fortunately, this is not going to harm it – he remarks realistically. – Because, contrary to “Man of Marble and Man of Iron”, where the moment of showing the film was very important, in this case nothing will happen to the film if it lies on the shelf for some time. It’s not going to be dramatic.

I drive him to Grenelle Street at 2 p.m. He asks for my details, which I write down myself in his notebook on the last page. He would like to meet with me, this time in the company of his wife, who is ill. He’s staying in Paris until the end of April.

Let me finish this note by writing a few comments and adding some more details.

1. Ania took part in the whole meeting, except for the part in the car.

2. What surprised me during the meeting with Wajda was that his behaviour greatly differed from the one I’d expected. Because one day the wife of Piotr Fronczewski, a Polish actor of the young generation, showed me Wajda’s letter to her husband concerning the interpretation of the role of Hamlet, played by Fronczewski in the theatre. The letter in which Wajda gave him advice how to play was vague, incoherent and strewn with most vulgar curses. Could he have written it when drunk? Given the problem of alcoholism in Poland, it’s most likely. Anyway, it’s not this person I met.

3. As regards the heart of the matter, I didn’t achieve anything - neither text for the album nor promotion of my film. Wajda didn’t even blink when I answered the phone from Unifrance Film in his presence and told Ania that nothing was certain yet, and it was too early to be happy of being selected for Cannes. I won’t hide from you, my Friend, that I talked loudly in his presence hoping he would ask me a question on the subject and propose help.

4. I’d like to add that all the talks quoted in this note are real, though I might have forgotten one thing or another. I’m writing it in a drugstore

in Champs-Élysées, an hour after saying goodbye to Wajda and following the emotional visit in Unifrance Film (see the note on this visit).

What this note lacks, however, are Wajda's expressions, his manner of speaking, the words he used and the way he built sentences. I can't fully picture this nice personality, simple and, at the same time, intelligent, sober, neither cynical nor impulsive, never conceited or falsely modest. While during the first meeting with Beks I got an impression that he was a quiet but cold person, Wajda strikes with his cordiality.

Maybe too much?

BREUTAUT, 16TH APRIL 1986

If you want to rule by means of obedient inferiors and make them follow only one policy – yours, spare your efforts to bribe them with career prospects or to threaten them with dismissal. It's pointless. Such methods are stressful and do not give any results. If somebody else offers them more than you do, or threatens them in a better way than yours, they will betray you.

The proper method is to put right people in managerial positions; people who come from your environment, who have read the same books as you and who were taught by the same professors; people who, similarly to you, have put much effort in the propagation of your common ideals and who would lose a lot if you failed together. What binds you to them will be the best guarantee of their allegiance. Spontaneous and voluntary, as it were natural allegiance, hence all the more merciless towards your common enemies. Allegiance which – without a continual effort of introspection, being rare in second-rate contractors – will never realize what its sources are.

This method is as old as the world and invariably effective. Today, once more I tested it myself. Without any prior communicating with each other, with no imposed orders to follow the established policy – the people who didn't know each other reacted identically to the same stimuli.

Well then, I went to Beaubourg Centre. Once again (but surely the last time) I put my pride in my pocket and headed for the temple in order to preach the word of Beks.

I'd made an appointment with Miss Gisèle Breutaut. She's in charge of the film archives and takes decisions on the purchase of films about art for the Centre. I must admit that I'd secretly hoped to sell her my movie.

For many weeks I'd tried to get her on the phone. She'd always been absent, downtown or busy. Finally I succeeded in catching her.

A high and thin voice, quite young (might be 35 years old) and unshapely. Throughout our meeting she was accompanied by an assistant (whose name I will never know), older than her, withered and ugly. Both of them in the style of provincial pen-pushers, dressed differently, indeed, but in equally bad taste.

Breutant laughs. Her laughter is nervous and uncertain, as if constantly asking for approval. However, I quickly find that she's not a submissive person, ready to agree with anybody who speaks in a self-confident tone.

After short presentations we head towards the projection room.

And guess who I see in the passage, photocopying some documents? the clerk who even before Zadora refused to exhibit Beks in the Centre. (damn it, what was his name ..? Oh, yes, Bordaz! Jean-Pierre Bordaz.)

He looks at me, so I greet him with a nod. I can see an expression of uncertainty on his face, followed by a sudden glint in his eyes. I realize he has finally recalled who I am.

- Oh – I say to myself – after I leave, he'll surely ask Breutaut what I wanted from her. I can already imagine him speak: "Beksiński? He bored you with Beksiński, too? Do I know him? This guy was here two years ago ..."

If their opinions differ – I figure out in my thoughts – and if Breutaut likes my film, she will feel uncertain. No good. If, however, their opinions are similar, that is, Breutaut feels the same disgust as Bordaz, when I showed him publications about Beks – I can give up on my plans once and for all. He will confirm her in their common belief and vice versa. If I ever want to launch another attack, I will bump against the solidarity of the Centre clerks, who from now will be taking a monolithic stand. Then it won't be easy to dissuade them from changing the once adopted shared judgment. Willy-nilly, even those who might think in a different way than the rest will have to follow the same policy, which has been established by all of them. All in all, I'll hit an insurmountable barrier. It is therefore absolutely necessary that

Breutaut immediately takes a final decision on the purchase of the film. Otherwise, neither Beks nor the film will ever get to the Centre.

All that disorganised reasoning gallops through my mind. It lasts only a moment, just as long as our eyes meet.

As we walk towards the projection room, pretending to sound naturally casual, I warn Breutaut and her assistant that Beks's painting, and especially the film, may provoke a strong reaction.

- People are either enthusiastic, or they simply hate it.

I have this stupid habit of thinking that if I speak my mind, I can get the favour of the enemy, and at the end of the game, I will be sort of rewarded.

I try to sound natural. The ladies don't make it easier at all. Straight away they inform me in a tone of hurt sincerity that they've never even heard of Beks. Two years ago, I was surprised by the same reply from Zadora (who speaks fluent Polish and organized, I think in 1982, the exhibition "Polish Presence" in the Centre). All these clerks work in one of the biggest museums of modern art in the world. They are seemingly acquainted with big art events and big names in different countries, not only in Paris, New York and on their suburbs. Admittedly, Paris is huge and many different things are happening here. However, this doesn't change the fact that ... For God's sake, how is it possible that someone who is paid to know about the art of our times doesn't have the faintest idea of Beks? Especially that Parisian streets were plastered with posters during my exhibition.

How can you possibly admit, with a naïve face and a surprised look in your eyes, that you don't go to Seine Street to have a glance at what's going on in the art galleries district – on the pretext that you can't find there things of any worth?

It has to be said that the local culture branch officials do not display any particular interest in new art trends, no matter if the latter take place here or abroad.

The working conditions in Beaubourg Centre are appalling. All the employees are crowded together in one big room on the second floor. It's divided into pens, four square metres each. The people working here are separated with 1.2m-high thin walls. Nobody can yawn or scratch without other workers hearing or seeing it.

At last, we've reached the projection room. What a mess, what shambles. The room is small and everything is scattered around. The recorder is set in the wrong way and the atmosphere turns sour at the very beginning. The picture is black-and-white. The atmosphere becomes even tenser when I start to insist on strengthening the voice a little bit and restoring the colour. Breutaut's assistant tries to set the machine, using a lighter to illuminate the equipment in the semi-dark room. Apparently she's too lazy to make a few steps to turn on the main light, whose switch is located by the entrance. The whole operation lasts full two minutes. Meanwhile Breutaut asks me:

- Are you sure we can't play the film as it is now?

How can you watch Beks's painting in black-and-white and without the sound? This stupid idea comes so easy to her that it puts me in an even worse mood. I can see that she doesn't give a damn about it and wishes it would finish as soon as possible. I still insist that the equipment should be set in the right way. Finally, the colour appears on the screen. No trace of a good atmosphere, though.

This time the picture is dark and the voice too loud. Neither of them tries to correct it. Breutaut is not focused on the film for a single moment. She asks me questions, which she could have left for the end of the projection. She wants to know how Beks's surname is spelled, how old he is, what I think of the general situation in Poland and of Wałęsa. In the twilight, she smiles, stops smiling and then smiles again. And it's like that all the time.

From the very beginning I feel that both my film and Beks's painting annoy her.

- Pure horror – she says in a semi-whisper.

The moment the cradle begins to sway with creak, she says as if she wasn't addressing anybody specific:

- He hasn't spared us even this. – Then she looks at me and smiles.

- Has he?

And she stops smiling, again. I feel she becomes increasingly aggressive. Well, no luck with culture officials: Grympas, Zadora, Bordaz, Brunet, Breutaut – there is a whole circle. All of them react with disgust and categorically. They are more or less the same age and inspired by the same missionary spirit of fighters for “avant-garde” art presented by the Centre. Each of them is equally sectarian and hateful to all forms of beauty other than the one they've been taught about, in the name of which they've been fighting over many years. Each of them firmly believes that whatever doesn't conform to the criteria of beauty hammered into their heads is simply shit. When the film is over, silence hangs in the air.

- We should see this painting – says the assistant. – It seems to me that the film does more harm than good to it.

I open the brochure then, but she has no intention of coming closer to see what's in it. I therefore encourage her to come up:

- You wanted to see this painting ...

She won't move. Each of them behaves as if she waited for the other one to say clearly what she thinks. I feel they both hate this movie and Beks's painting as well, but each of them is afraid that the other one might have a different opinion.

From the jumbled up stall, that is the projection room, we walk towards the pen, which is their office. In the meantime the assistant disappears, without having said goodbye to me. She comes back after a few whiles, though, only to vanish without saying a word again. Breutaut looks through the brochure and the publications I brought along. She comments on them with the words which I used to find amazing. Today they no longer surprise me. Now I know perfectly well that people fall and will fall in the future into

two categories: staunch enthusiasts of this painting, like me, and its obdurate opponents. I stoically accept what Breutaut says. At least I try to react this way, but I can't hide the tone of irritation in my replies.

- Talkative painting – says Breutaut.

As if she'd ganged up with Grympas. Oh, God, where on earth is the pluralist society I was promised? Where? All of them finished the same schools, read the same books, worked in the same environment, speak the same language and are like robots: the spitting image of one another. And yet, they didn't agree on anything in advance. Simply, they are faithful to their common roots: education of culture officials reared on Picasso and Matiss. Culture officials who have no personal passion for art and for whom nothing can be beautiful except Klein or Dufy, as this is what they've been told.

- Horror – says Breutaut. – Everything in this painting is literary, isn't it?

And that obsessive smirk, which seems to be asking for approval ...

- You see, it's better in the painting by Goya – she adds. – At least he doesn't say everything; he leaves some doubts, which makes him stronger.

That exceeds the limits of my patience and I jump with annoyance.

Take a ride to Prado – I say to myself. – And have a close look at Goya. Not only does he dot the i's and crosses the t's, showing maimed corpses of convicts, but he adds their horrified eyes and fearful howling.

I feel that Breutaut fears that I might use the argument of Goya and that's why she serves it first, so as to take the wind out of my sails. Having realized, however, that her assistant (who has turned up again) doesn't share her opinion, she adds out of the blue:

- I don't know what to say. No, I guess the film is like that.

I open the brochure. Breutaut covers the chair in the painting "Legs on the Chair". Then she does the same to "Cradle", which is at the end of the brochure:

- Without it the painting would be much better. This wall, even with the cross, is beautiful. What is this figure for? And the cradle?

Of course, the wall behind the cradle reminds her of the paintings by Tapies and the tendency to paint shabby-looking walls, covered with writings from under which one can see the bricks. The familiar, close world of “poor art”, which is known to her and therefore “beautiful”.

Her aesthetic mind is so schoolish that I don't know whether I should laugh at it or cry.

I answer spitefully:

- One could go further and simply paint a monochrome, without any details. Why not? Anyway, it's in the style of your museum.

- What do you mean?

- You've got here a great deal of Klein's monochromes, haven't you?

- Well, yes, but it's not the point – she assures me.

Again, I let her speak without interrupting, so as not to distort her reaction with my remarks. At least I will know what culture officials really think. But the longer I keep silent, the less confident she becomes. However, neither this uncertainty nor that smirk playing on her face can hide her disgust for Beks's painting and my film.

The assistant comes back and leaves again.

The atmosphere is utterly unbearable. I feel like telling her that my passion for Beks doesn't lessen my admiration for Hartung, Bacon or Kandinsky. I can't say that about her, though.

Now I already know that Beauborg Centre is lost for me forever. All these people have identical tastes, the same fighting spirit in their hearts, and in their heads the same lack of curiosity and understanding for what doesn't meet the criteria of “avant-garde art”.

Having nothing to lose, I want to irritate her even more. I tell her that Wajda, whom I showed the film yesterday (which is true), liked the film very much.

Breutaut, who cannot dare to openly deny such an authority, as befits a clerk accustomed to yielding to the hierarchy, desperately tries to find a way out:

- Yes, the film, not the painting.

Saying this, she obviously forgets that a moment ago she gave a completely opposite opinion.

- Besides, Wajda is a film-maker – she adds.

- He's also a painter – I answer her.

- No, he's not a painter.

- Yes, he is. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in the same year as Wróblewski. Besides, in his films he always gives priority to the pictorial side. Have you seen "The Wedding" by him?

- No, he's not a painter. Whatever... yes, yes.

She's on the verge of crying. To hurt her even harder with a provocation that doesn't cost me anything, I add:

- Beksiński is a painting genius.

- No, he isn't a genius, he isn't a genius!

Her voice, like in a little girl, turns squeaky.

Wishing to tease her even more, I say that last night my film was chosen for the festival in Cannes for the Perspectives of French Cinema. She has no idea what to answer me. Her assistant disappeared long time ago and Breutaut is completely lost.

- Can you leave me your details? – she asks me. – I don't know what to think about it.

She doesn't make any proposal regarding the film. Neither do I. No way. I won't give her an opportunity to take revenge by refusing to purchase my film.

- Please, let us know how it was received in Cannes.

-Yes, beauty – I think – if you show the same interest in films as in painting novelties, certainly you won't find out about it on your own. Aloud, however, I say in a dull tone:

- I hope you will hear about it soon.

She smiles to me, and I leave. And guess who, my Friend, I pass in the hall when leaving? Bordaz, of course.

Once more the old method has been confirmed that it's enough to staff managerial positions with the same people and they will follow the same policy. There is no need for circular letters specifying the rules, or punishment in case any departures from the rules come about: surely, there will be no such cases.

PRICES OF PAINTINGS, 17TH APRIL 1986

Having a new exhibition in prospect, I'm beginning to contact the journalists I met during the previous one.

I therefore invited Robert Barret to dinner in a Polish restaurant Ravailac, opposite Saint Paul underground, on Roi de Sicile Street. He's an art critic in the small economic magazine "Prévisions", which has its regular column "Culture". He's that nice, smiling old man I met in December last year, about whom I've already written a short note.

I've invited him, because I need an answer to the question which has been pestering me for a couple of days: is it really sure that I'm not heading for disaster if, during the next exhibition, I establish a reasonable price, namely, ten times lower than before?

1. I started sounding out the art milieu with Barret, so as to find out what he thinks of it and avoid hitting a reef.

Well, this is what he told me:

- People don't remember your horrendous prices during the previous exhibition at all. You can easily lower them. Only little sly ones will remember, and you shouldn't pay any attention to them.

2. I also asked him:

- Have people understood that the reason for horrendous prices at the previous exhibition was to make the sale of paintings impossible?

He answered:

- If the prices are too high, people like me (critics) think: he doesn't want to sell the paintings.

3. Except for a few renowned artists, such as for example Carzou, who's always in demand, the director of each gallery exhibiting another painter

takes risks in 95%. It's impossible to predict things. Everything might be sold easily, but equally well nothing might sell at all.

This point is particularly comforting to me, as I've reached such a degree of despair that I don't know what to cling to. It's therefore sort of consolation that professional art traders are as uncertain as I am. Moreover, it proves that they shoot blindly when they claim, putting on a haughty face and an arrogant tone, that Beks "will never sell".

4. Barret knows many paid critics.

- Half a dozen of them will write something about your autumn exhibition if I ask them to do so – he assures me.

Let's hope so! – I feel like shouting. – Maybe at last I will also take advantage of patronage and friendly recommendations, which the local system is based on!

5. Barret will visit me to see the paintings and advise me how to fix the prices. I'm going to listen to him carefully, because, unlike my usual interlocutors, he won't put on a sulky face, and this face will be smiling.

MEMORY, 18TH APRIL 1986

It's raining every day. May's drawing on, but it looks like December: drizzly, dark and cold. A proper decoration for my slow fall, with my last breath drawn at the end of the chapter.

For many weeks I've been sleeping less than six hours a day. Since I can't recover in sleep, memory begins to fail me.

1. For example, yesterday:

I went to the shop to pick up the typewriter, which I'd bought there a few months ago and left for repair last week. The shop assistant gives me a silver typewriter.

- But ...- I say cautiously – mine was brown.

He insists it was silver.

- Just look at the number!

And he gives me the receipt.

- You can see that it's the same one. Please, read the digits here.

He seems to be sure he's right, so I give up.

- Yes, indeed – where's my brain? Mine was silver. Well, I have so little sleep that I'm going round the bend.

The moment I come back home, Ania says:

- It's not yours!

- Isn't it? – I pretend to be surprised.

- Yours was brown.

- Are you sure?
- Of course. When we were buying the typewriter six months ago, we wanted it to suit your English desk and the lamp. Mum! I'll come for a moment. Have you heard?
- No. What's the matter?
- What colour was Peter's typewriter?
- I think it was brown.

2. Just like yesterday:

Before going to bed, I went to the park with our dog Makaszka. As usual, I walked round the avenues and returned to the flat. I open the door and what do I see? Makaszka is sitting in the middle of the room, waiting for me to take her for an evening walk ...

POST SCRIPTUM, 20TH APRIL 1986

The whole thing is becoming highly mysterious.

I went back to the shop to return the silver typewriter and collect mine, brown. The shop assistant compares the numbers on the typewriter, on the order and in his accounts book, so I can see in black and white that I brought him the silver one for repair. The one that was returned to me on the 17th .

Therefore:

- not only didn't I notice the colour of the typewriter that I'd been using on a daily basis for six months,
- not only did I remember that it was brown, while in fact it was silver,

- but also my wife and mother-in-law, without communicating with me, much less with each other, spontaneously and separately, also had an impression (and Ania was certain) that it was brown. And not any other colour, or two different colours, one for each of them. No, they unanimously agreed that it was: brown.

REACTION, 18TH APRIL 1986

I liked Ania's reaction, because whenever I hesitate myself, I prefer somebody to tell me in a firm tone of voice what I should do.

- Although Veronèze is fibbing, you must organise this exhibition in Cannes – she says in a voice that brooks no argument.

Bravo!

Because when he called me late evening yesterday, to change something again and find new problems, I started doubting everything.

- Finally – he says – having consulted the counsellor of Tapie, we decided that investing 100 000 francs in the exhibition is too much for us.

All right about the money, but what does Bernard Tapie have to do with all that? If I'd heard such an idiotic reference to a business-show star in the past, I would have answered coldly: tough luck, cutting any discussion whatsoever. This kind of citing renowned names as authority usually gives away weak and unstable people. Just the sort of people that get on my nerves. And when somebody annoys me, I move away from them.

But now, under the influence of Ania, I become normal, realistic and understanding again, going as far as cheering him up, which I usually do when negotiating agreements for my clients. I even try to help Veronèze and raise his hopes, assuring him that “we'll cope with that”.

So, first of all, I will bring the paintings myself. It's going to spare us the costs of transport. I'll only burden him with insurance and leaflets, which will be given out before the exhibition.

As usual, he begins by admitting that I'm right.

- Exactly – he says. – For example. Well, of course!

Then he starts hesitating again. He must consult somebody. Who?
Anyway, today we are going to meet in La Palette café and think again if the project can be saved.

DISCUSSION, 18TH APRIL 1986

A discussion with students on international debts, a nuclear strategy or the influence of technological advances on the deepening of crises between countries has an anaesthetic effect.

Whenever I can talk about other people's miseries, my own tensions seem to ease off. University polemics is like a flash of light against the background of dark sky: to a sore mind, having a possibility of moving neutral concepts of system analysis around the intellectual chess-board instead of actually dealing with starving people or legs torn away by mines is like a dive into a bucket with chloroform.

This year, my two seminars in political sciences are good quality.

TAKING ACTION, 19TH APRIL 1986

Yesterday (or maybe this morning) I wrote in my notes that I draw pleasure from my university polemics with students, especially the ones in the fourth year of their studies at the faculty of political sciences who begin to understand the heart of the matter.

University disputes, however, end with a dog chasing its own tail. After an outburst of euphoria, theoretical thinking almost always begins to fill an intellectual with the irritating sense of impotence: the impossibility of influencing the course of events, the impossibility of checking the formulated conclusions *in concreto*, being unable to forge them into real actions. This is what seems unbearable about university work.

If therefore, apart from passing theoretical knowledge about the surrounding world to young people, I couldn't meet with people in person, risk, attack them, take action – my thinking would soon become what it is for thousands of university research workers like me: empty babbling in search of witty clichés, the aim of which is to arouse admiration of readers or students for a “profound thought”.

Whatever I say, or however often I curse the fact that I'd got into the trouble of promoting Beks, believe me, my Friend, I don't regret anything. At least here I meet with the reality, I see things in their real proportions and understand how they relate to one another. I nearly forget about the fear, which is always by my side, about the fury and hatred filling my gorge.

Just like I don't regret other periods of my life, filled with all kinds of activities.

I mean the years of intensive sports training, after which I ended up having problems with my spine, the torn tendon of my left biceps, stretch

marks on the shoulders due to fast growing muscles, two broken and badly knit fingers and a good deal of scars all over my body.

Neither do I regret my early days in Paris, though I had to change the country and nationality, start my studies almost from the very beginning and build a new environment for myself, so as to settle in my new homeland, which observed my nervous efforts with cold reluctance.

What's more: I don't even regret that I became a barrister. And you know, my Friend, how stinky this legal cesspit is, filled to the brim with injustice and suffering.

Taking action, doing something real, directing all the efforts towards one goal – this cannot be replaced by any speculative reasoning.

FREE WILL, 19TH APRIL 1986

I don't think that the area of my free will is very extensive.

Those who disagree with the above statement mistake the freedom of choice for what is merely obedience to inner imperatives. The less they know about the origins and the mechanism of these imperatives, the more they believe they are free.

However, not only the lack of knowledge of oneself gives birth to illusion. Its source is also one's ego.

Even if he thoroughly explored himself, a man who loves himself would like to be obedient only to himself.

Only the one who has penetrated the dark recesses of his soul and who doesn't take pleasure in looking at himself in the mirror will neither find pleasure in listening to his inner imperatives. Yielding to them, he will realise to what extent he is his own slave.

Who can better than a hideous woman understand the prison which is her own face?

LIBERATION, 19TH APRIL 1986

Live at last. Be free. Find happiness.

Just the opposite, I think that man craves death.

Every activity, the slightest gesture he makes are the stages of his endless escape from suffering inflicted to him by his own body, the surrounding things and other people.

And it is in this escape, not in a happy and free life, but in death that he will find peace. Only death can free him from suffering.

For as long as he lives, man is the victim of endless dilemma, which takes its origin in the fact that he is alone in the world, being the whole world for himself. He is a universe imprisoned in another universe. He believes that he can break free from it by dominating it. In reality, however, he tries to identify with this universe and plunge into it at the price of his own existence.

Human life is a streak of endeavours aimed at overcoming one's own alienation: endless searching for reconciliation with the world by escaping from fear, unbearable waiting, pain and hunger into death.

Find peace. The peace which we knew when we were nothing and which we will only find if we come back to what we were: non-existence.

What else do we do, anyway?

When we are changing ourselves and the world, isn't it because we want to be closer to it and reach the end of this incessant argument in death?

For if we invent cars, clothes and drugs, if we try to get to know ourselves better and discover the laws that the universe is governed by, isn't it because we want to finally reconcile with this universe by identifying with it?

This is the history of our whole History: seeking after peace. Not the peace achieved by conquering and subduing the world that surrounds us, but the peace which would come with the annihilation of our own existence; the peace which may only be non-existence.

Happiness, freedom and death are synonyms.

INSURANCE, 19TH APRIL 1986

1. A moment ago I was at Visconti Gallery on Seine Street, No. 37, where I brought three paintings by Beks: “Huge Chair”, “Rectangular See” and “Bath”.

Ballester’s carrier should come on Tuesday and take them to Cannes. This time I succeeded in obtaining the acknowledgement of receipt (though the gallery owner defended himself as if I’d personally insulted him with this request). Well, I may take some time to forget about the lesson Hugnet taught me. However, I still don’t have an official letter from Ballester asking me to hire the paintings. I then run risks of having no proof in the event the paintings get lost.

2. What I fear most, though, is the thought that he hasn’t insured them. I even wonder if it isn’t the real reason why he hasn’t sent me that official letter.

Well, I know that even if Ballester, according to our agreement, insured the paintings, it would be just a cover for the eyes.

Chiefly because none compensation would repair the sustained loss if anything happened to the paintings. And I’m entrusting Ballester with three of the best ones.

Besides, I know French assurance companies well (Lloyds is said to be a bit more honest in this respect), since I stay in regular contact with them as a barrister: in the best case scenario, I would be able to get some ridiculous sum after three years’ lawsuit, stress and costs.

Each French assurance company will take a premium without asking any questions, especially regarding the object to be insured. Then it will defend itself like mad to evade paying the compensation. It’s a no holds barred contest. Whenever I demand compensation for car accident victims, I hear

most incredible arguments quoted by my colleagues who defend assurance companies.

Besides, how could I prove the value of each of my paintings, which I established as 95 000? Lloyds reportedly agrees to the proposed value and later sticks to it loyally. French companies, however, despite having accepted the value declared by the client and established the premium dependant on so declared value, when the time comes and an accident happens, will suddenly start questioning the said value, resorting to all possible means.

If Ballester didn't insure my paintings "according to the declared value" (and this costs more), in the event of a dispute an expert would be appointed. The expert would ask me if Beks has an established price at West European auctions. Since there is no such price, the said expert would quite logically demand customs declarations from me. In such a case I would fall into a trap, because – when bringing the paintings to France – I declared their value as the price which I paid for them myself, namely, one thousand dollars per a piece. Then the expert would ask me about the prices of Beks's paintings in Polish galleries and would convert them into French francs, which would equal about five thousand francs per one painting, due to the ridiculous value of the Polish currency.

In the end, I should be happy if after three years of an exhausting lawsuit the insurance company paid me 5-6 thousand per a painting, not to mention the most important thing, namely, that the painting would be lost or damaged.

FRANCE, 19TH APRIL 1986

A moment ago I wrote that my second homeland, France, had never lifted a finger to help me in my numerous endeavours. That's true. I'm not taking back anything I said. On the other hand, it hasn't disturbed me in anything. I've never suffered hostility or rejection due to my Polish origin, or because of the slightly foreign accent that I've retained. That's a lot.

What prevents me from getting through to the local establishment results from a completely different thing: the lack of connections and roots.

In France, a career within the ranks of ruling elites, working one's way up the ladder or personal success only partially depend on one's virtues and talents. The rationality of objective criteria is not common in the motherland of Descartes.

Whether you are let into the circles of elites and make your way to the top depends on different kinds of backing, support, snobberies, acquaintances and contacts. They determine the career of most, if not all people. In this "democratic" country, personal relations with influential people and origin have a decisive influence, even if this influence is intangible and hard to prove in black and white.

The fact that I wasn't born in France, that I couldn't take advantage of the support of a big and influential family, distant relatives and their numerous friends, that I couldn't show off a well-known surname, the renown of my environment and many other "little things" – all that put an obstacle on my way, making it impossible for me to get to the establishment.

It's also for these reasons, and not because I can't write, that I could never publish my articles in the press or issue my scientific works in a proper way.

The same causes are partly responsible for the fact that despite my persistent applying for the position of assistant professor at our university

for many years, I can't become one, contrary to my colleagues of French origin. Although I don't have an exaggerated faith in my abilities, it seems to me that sometimes my lucky competitors had less talent than me.

But is there a place in the world where it's better to live?

Of course, it turned out that France, a country of "equalities", is a faint shadow of my youthful dreams. Just the opposite, I bumped against the rock-hard "brotherhood" of inaccessible elites.

On the other hand, where else could I live today, if not here? Romania? Haiti? South Africa? Israel? To watch the police shoot people like rabbits on a daily basis? I hate to think about it. No, no way, even if I belonged to elites feeding on the oppression of co-citizens.

And even in Japan or Germany, where people are said to work honestly, or in the United States, where you can reportedly succeed without having any roots and climb up your career ladder as high as you wish, being restrained only by your own ambition and talent, is there any guarantee that I would receive a warmer welcome than in this miserable, mediocre country, where I found myself by pure chance and where for twenty years I've been wasting time going round in circles?

No, it might have been worse. Besides, how could I possibly renounce the daily compensation I receive in the form of the most beautiful and charming city in the world, where I luckily live: Paris.

Not everybody is given such a fortunate opportunity.

DAY AFTER DAY, 20TH APRIL 1986

Yesterday there was some sunshine. Today it's raining again.

For some time it's been hard for me to organise my daily matters. The days are becoming too short. Actually, I don't complain, because it's a sign that my slowly dying barrister's office has come back to life. It nearly flopped when I started devoting almost all my time to the next exhibition of Beks. So yesterday I triumphantly announced to Ania:

- Look, what a nice sum I've earned today - 2000 francs. I know that you earn such money in two hours, but ...

I find it really difficult to squeeze all bothering Beks's matters in the tight schedule of my 18-hour daily activity. Apart from that, there are letters, pleadings in court, phoning the tardy folk and pushing them to do things, which I'm supposed to deal with as a lawyer, as well as six types of classes at university in three different subjects (constitutional law, administrative law and main political issues). Like every research worker who's been awarded habilitation, I'm in a very comfortable situation and work only 10-12 hours a week. Nonetheless, I must have at least a cursory glance at my notes before each meeting with students. I also have to read 100 – 150 works from the last weeks of the academic year, attend a few meetings of the teaching staff and put documents in order before the meeting at the end of June. All that is happening at the time when I have a 10-day stay in Cannes in perspective and it's necessary to settle a lot of things in advance, so they don't have to be dealt with when I'm away from Paris.

Starting a new week, I already think about the next weekend, during which I will be able to edit a few notes, play chess with Ania or go with her to an exhibition or to the cinema.

My free time has always taken priority over money, and I've always preferred freedom to career prospects. That's why I decided to work at

university, where you don't earn much, but you enjoy freedom which is hard to find anywhere else. And yet, I got myself entangled in unceasing duties, which until recently I'd so persistently and successfully avoided.

- Why did you get in all the trouble with that Beks of yours? – ironically asks me Wojtek, who, just like me, has always valued freedom more than wealth. – Did you really need it? You were your own master. You managed your time as you wished. This is what you always wanted, didn't you? And now, you're beavering away, pulling the whole thing like a little steam engine.

Sometimes I suffer from exhaustion: my right hand goes numb a little and I've got a heart-ache. It must be too much coffee that I've been drinking recently.

To prevent the collapse of my health, yesterday I decided to drastically cut down on it: one cup a day, not more. Also, for eleven months I haven't been eating sweets, except for a handful of raisins in the morning, and six months ago I stopped eating meat and animal fats. I depart from this rule only two or three times a month, when we are visiting somebody. I do that so as not to complicate the life of a hostess who invites us and to avoid drawing the attention of other guests. To this list of limitations I should also add cigarettes, given up nine years ago, and alcohol, which I quit two and a half years ago. Everything that I used and abused in the past has been blacklisted. Every year I cut out some pleasure. When nothing that I could deny myself is left, I decide to have seven-, nine- or eleven-day strict fasts. On such occasions I don't eat anything at all; I only drink water; or for twenty one days I live on bread only.

(However, there is one feat I haven't tried, but it seems to me so difficult that, to avoid a certain failure, I will never attempt it – to not open my mouth to anybody one day a week, which was a habit of Ghandi).

Why do I do all that?

Presumably, to please my childish nature of a little scout. Besides, it's so nice to be admired for something that doesn't cost me much, anyway. The main reason, however, is probably to suppress the memory of the burning shame which I felt when, at the age of several years, despite the vows and pledges which I'd made to myself, I couldn't resist the temptation and masturbated a few times a day. Influenced by the teachings of my saint Mother, I subconsciously view it as a sin until today.

Now, a brighter side of my life: in recent months an osteopath has improved the condition of my spine. After weight lifting excesses in my young years, the lordosis which I'd developed as a result didn't let me walk or stand for a long time.

However, if I don't change my lifestyle and if anxiety still wakes me up after six hours of shallow sleep, I won't hold on for too long. For I get up tired, with my mind filled with apocalyptic visions of the future. During the day I don't rest, and in the evening go to bed with my eyes popping out.

ENCOURAGEMENT, 20TH APRIL 1986

Ania says I shouldn't agree to whatever Veronèze will propose during a phone call that I'm going to have with him in a moment. I thought that, fearing a disaster we are heading for, she would try to make me accept all his conditions, in particular, to sell the paintings at any price, which Carpentier from the gallery on Bac Street and a few other "realists" had already advised me.

This encouragement on her part is in a way invaluable, especially at this critical moment of our life together, when Ania might continually reproach me and force me to give up the whole thing so that we could just keep our heads above water.

And at the same time, although she still doesn't share my passion, she is at least equally surprised by the reactions of French decision-makers. To both me and her, they seem worlds apart from what is fundamental. Recently she's often been repeating:

- Where can they see horror in these paintings? I don't understand anything. I live with these paintings every day and I've never had an impression of macabre. Certainly, my attitude to them is not religious, like yours, but horror and macabre surely are not the right words. In these paintings I just see what is important in life and in death, and immense, boundless beauty.

Thank you with all my heart.

EGO, 20TH APRIL 1986

A Sunday at home. It's raining. It also rained yesterday. Actually, it's been raining for two months.

For a long time I wondered, hesitated and delayed things. In the end, I surrendered to an attack of my ego. Since the time I discovered that these notes are easy to read, my desire for a word of encouragement from Ania has become an obsession. Today I therefore decided to read her a few least disturbing pages, because fishing for her possible praise, I still didn't want to provoke what I feared most: panic that would certainly grip her if she discovered the dimensions of the financial disaster I'd got her into.

So, I read her a few notes during today's breakfast.

- Simple, spontaneous, not licked. And well written. Vivid – she commented briefly.

Even if it wasn't a series of compliments that I'd craved most, they certainly tickled my vanity. Because if the first reader had got bored with my chronicle, even the soothing effect that writing has on my nerves wouldn't have been enough for me to find the energy necessary to continue it.

Fine then.

Having once put my fingers in the gears, though, I will have to go on, because if I don't read new notes to Ania, she will get an impression that I'm hiding something from her.

Actually, all that talk is pointless. The truth is that, like every vain man, I love praises and Ania is willing to give me a few more before my notes bore her stiff.

I will keep reading these notes to her then.

But taking this commitment, did I calculate the risk involved? It might turn out that, not realizing the consequences, in exchange for a few caresses

for my vanity I gave myself into the hands of a censor whose opinion will deprive me of my freedom, because:

- Ania is the first commentator of my notes. This fact alone lets her impose her preferences more easily than anybody else who will come after her.

- Besides, she's going to be the most frequent commentator. Most days we stay at home together. Just for the very reason of spending so much time with each other, we talk a lot and this subject will surely come back. She may endlessly pick up different threads until her opinions settle in my head.

- Apart from that, she's going to be a merciless commentator. I harbour no illusions about it. Ania knows all the dark corners of my thoughts and all kinds of little dirt that I'd like to hide. She knows my phobias and dreams better than anybody else. With one harsh word, one pregnant silence, one straight look she will easily hit my most vulnerable spot, which is going to hurt most and which I want to try to hide most. She won't deny herself this pleasure.

- Finally, she's going to be a dangerous commentator, as she has an effective sanction in support of the expressed opinions. If I didn't want to comply with her instructions, she could punish me easily and severely, without any consequences to herself. I say "without any consequences to herself" because, contrary to third persons who dare to criticize me, in which case I can always put on a mask of coldness meaning: "You know where you can stick your opinions. From now on, you will have no opportunity to express them, as I'm not going to give you any", Ania doesn't have to fear that. Not only can she hurt me more painfully, but even if I am hurt with one of her remarks, in the evening I will still go to sleep with her in the same bed.

Altogether, there are four serious reasons why I should start worrying about my freedom, which I'm putting in danger because of my conceitedness.

PARADOX, 20TH APRIL 1986

A life paradox: I've been expecting my wife to break down, and here Beks appears on the horizon ...

1. He's constantly pressed by the slow and difficult agony of his mother and incessant conflicts with Tom. Having no possibility to vent his anger on them, he transfers all that onto me and imagines I'm to blame for all his miseries.

I have therefore become his major obsession, and in his mind it's me who provokes the problems he has to tackle every day. To my letters he answers churlishly: "You've got a unique talent for pissing me off!" – he writes.

I don't reply then.

I'm convinced he would split up with me if only I gave him an alibi. This way he could free himself of me without giving me any compensation. For example, if I delayed the payment I owe him, he would immediately inform me that from now on, he's not going to abide by our agreement.

2. Additionally, the whole enterprise related to his promotion, to which he carelessly (as he believes) agreed, prevents him from focusing on work. At the same time, he's convinced that should my endeavours in Francs fail, everybody will find out about it and his renown in Poland will be over once and for all, because people in Warsaw will say: "Beksiński didn't manage to go over the European crossbar. He's just a little local hack painter".

This fear is becoming his *idée fixe*.

To tell you the truth, he doesn't have the faintest idea of the difficulties I must struggle with. If he knew about half of them, not only would he break all our bonds, but he would simply panic and take to his heels.

God save me from my friends. With my enemies I can cope on my own.

VERONÈZE, 21ST APRIL 1986

Yesterday we talked about it in bed for a long time. Ania is standing firm behind me. Of us two, she's the one who's more inflexible.

- You're really unlucky! There's Louse, constantly trying to cheat behind your back; then, there's that Veronèze, who's making his debut as a gallery owner and doesn't have the faintest idea how to go about it. Is he going to reduce the prices if he doesn't manage to sell all the paintings? Is this what he's told you? Is he out of his mind? Should he call tomorrow again, just chase him away.

Actually, it's only now that I discover real Ania. The more we plunge in the blowhole, the more loyal she is. I worried that she might panic and try to make me sell everything for some rotten money, only to regain the financial balance. And, surprise, surprise, she's most strongly objecting to the prospect of a third-rate exhibition.

As for the heart of the matter, I also agree with her.

Veronèze is a neophyte. I can understand that he wants to earn as much as possible, but at the same time I hoped that his aim was to open the gallery with an exhibition which wouldn't make him blush with shame afterwards. However, now I see that I'm dealing not only with a dilettante, but also a penny-pincher who wants to earn little, but without any effort; the guy who doesn't want to invest anything in the enterprise about which he is just lukewarm. Yesterday he informed me that he had no intention whatsoever to participate in the cost of the paintings insurance. His only aim is to obtain a small, but certain benefit from the exhibition without any advertising, a catalogue, a poster, and at ridiculous prices. What beats everything, however, is that he threatens to lower the prices if nothing has been sold by the end of the exhibition. Beks offered at reduced prices

Faced with such an alternative, I still prefer to be dead-scared. Let the “realists” laugh at me. Let them mock that only idiots die of hunger, because they don’t want to sell mummy’s ring. OK, I’m an idiot, but I will not sell the paintings by Beks at the farmer’s market, at reduced prices.

WORK CULTURE, 21ST APRIL 1986

1. I've just called Ballester's secretary in Cannes. Since she'd delayed with it for a long time, I dictated her every word to put in the letter, asking her to send it to me with an official request to hire three of the paintings. At the end of our conversation, I also demanded a certificate of insurance drawn up to my name. With a note of anger in her voice, she promised to send me both documents in the evening.

2. After I'd left the post-office on the other side of Champs-Élysées, in Unifrance Film I left a copy of the movie before the screening for the press. There was nobody from Perspectives yet, so I entrusted the tape with a boy who seemed to know something about it. But I demanded a receipt from him.

As usual in such cases (yesterday I had a similar incident with the owner of Visconti Gallery, and today, with Ballester's secretary over the phone) there was a moment of tension. The boy growled aggressively:

- What do you mean? What receipt? Don't you believe me? Are you preparing for a trial or something? Maybe I should send it to you by registered mail?

3. Lack of work culture in this country is appalling. (Let me mention that in Poland it's ten times worse). What in a normally organised society, German or Japanese, would be considered obvious and natural is viewed as a personal attack here and in Poland. And that's because doing any work comes across as rendering a service, so in return for it you can only expect gratitude and trust.

Having learnt my lesson with Hugnet, I decided that even if I lost an opportunity, I would never again settle for verbal assurances and I would always demand a receipt or another proof in writing.

And the longer I live, the more clearly I realize the importance of trust, even in work relationships.

If, however, my Friend, you are ready to listen to my advice, you must know that you can rely on trust only when:

- you know the level of work culture of a given person;
- you know the level of the environment in which this person works, because a high class milieu sooner or later will get rid of poor elements;
- finally, it's about a matter which is of minor importance to you.

Well, in my whole enterprise related to Beks's promotion, none of these three conditions was fulfilled.

In France, apart from Delpoïo, who has nothing to do with my endeavours as he's a barrister, I can't see anybody I could trust on the basis of their professional culture. In Poland, only Beks is really professional, and even though he let me down on many occasions, at least at work he behaves blamelessly. Both in France and in Poland, even most honest people – and there are a lot of them – seldom realize the importance of a detail, accuracy, punctuality, preparation of their work and leaving the trace of what has been done. The professional culture of people I happen to cooperate is usually low, while the object I'm dealing in – the paintings by Beks – are invaluable, at least for me.

Therefore, even if people look at me with anger, gnash their teeth, or even refuse to do what I'm asking them for, I won't give in ever again: no more trust and that's final.

SEARCHING, 21ST APRIL 1986

In my endless pursuit of a hint, a principle, a rule, a bit of certainty, even something that would remotely resemble the truth – I have already tried everything.

Wishing to discover what to stick to, who to trust, where not to put my fingers so that they aren't trapped, I first relied on "mummy and daddy", on my professors and university textbooks. Afterwards, however, I decided to count solely on my experience, intelligence and my own wits.

In both cases it was a complete flop.

Let me quote the latest example of my failures. Recently, it seemed to me that I'd made an important discovery. Human aggressiveness? It's a good symptom in those who are going to work for us!

Why? Because each correctly constructed reasoning proves – I continued, probably thinking about myself – that aggressiveness is the best guarantee of effectiveness. Somebody who can refuse, require things from other people, or make them serve his own interests in a way that brooks no argument, even at the price of hatred they will feel towards him, will do the same with my interests, if only they match his.

To prove my point, I recalled all aggressive people and their remarkable achievements.

A bad character is a harbinger of good work – I concluded.

Now, let's take Nicolas Hugnet, an aggressive lout and egoist. These qualities, however, don't prevent him from being a complete nonentity at work. Not only is he irresponsible, as – let me remind you – he lost my 170 ektachromes, but at the same time, he doesn't seem to show the slightest sign of embarrassment about it.

Therefore, no sooner had I discovered a rule than I had to part with it.

Again, I find a new key to knowledge. I must go about it in a different way. From now on, I will trust only my own nose.

“Be careful with the first impression, as it is often accurate” – said Talleyrand.

So, I start building a new theory on the basis of this brilliant discovery. Throughout my whole life – I think – I’ve met hundreds of people. My subconsciousness has recorded thousands of facts related to them and gestures they made. In our first contact with any new person, we listen to what we call intuition and what in fact is merely a memory deeply hidden in our subconsciousness, and we compare, within a blink of an eye, all the features displayed by the new acquaintance with the features of people we’ve met before. The tone of voice, the choice of words, the way this person builds sentences, shakes hands, smiles or looks in the eyes are instantly compared with the files stored in my subconsciousness. This comparison provides a reliable working portrayal of the newly met person. Long live the nose!

Armed with this modern reasoning, in which psychoanalysis aspires to marry the computer, I set out to conquer.

And what’s the result? After the first meeting with Veronèze, I described him as a moderate, trustworthy and serious man. To make things funnier, in one of my notes I dwelled upon this trust at great length. Two weeks later, Veronèze turned out to be like everybody else: irresponsible, greedy and, in negotiations – hypocritical.

Who shall I trust then? How do I know? How can I find a key-not, a rule, at least one undisputed principle?

The cliché forged by Socrates which has been handed down from generation to generation as the most valuable legacy: “The only thing I know is that I don’t know anything” doesn’t soar very high.

Does one have to be Socrates to make such a “discovery”? Does one have to be a philosopher to begin with?

The impossibility of understanding the world, of seeing anything incontrovertible is visible everywhere and seems obvious to anybody who has turned the age of ten. And there is nothing metaphysical, noble or profound about this lack of knowledge. It is common, ubiquitous and as clear as daylight. It's present at every moment because, in a trivial way, it makes it impossible to foresee usual events of everyday life, to predict what is going to happen this afternoon, this evening. You don't have to graduate from university, read books or think a lot to experience it five times an hour ...

However, what seems most irritating about it is the fact that when confronted with this obviousness, which common sense can spot at every turn, the real world proves something to the contrary: because if there are houses, in the past there must have existed their building designs. If the factories are working, it's because their production has been planned before. If schools are being built, it's because there are plans to educate children. There are even governments the task of which is to forecast (always badly) and organise the life of the nation.

In a word, there is a material and social reality which proves, in black and white, that organisation, planning and knowledge do exist in this world. You can even touch them, just like you can touch your own head or a chair on which you are sitting.

And yet, the impossibility of cognition is equally obvious.

I envy smart alecks who can explain all that, building coherent philosophical systems governed by dynamic rules, which, if you already know them, let you be ahead of time.

“If I had the parameters of every atom, I could predict the future of each thing”.

And surely the guy understood ...

Oh, I know, a real philosopher will smile reading these deliberations. And having done so, he will be wrong, because in this narrow area in which I am a specialist, my ability to genuinely understand the world is as faint as when

it was when I was beginning to learn the trade, that is, before I gained the skill to use a few handy tools, a few witty formulas and a few “learned” expressions. I therefore think that a philosopher worth his salt is in no better position than I am, even if he can hide behind more precisely formulated notions or behind a more precise language than mine. Just like me, he must be pestered by incessant uncertainty and exhausted by the pursuit of his own shadow.

At the most, he will be able to shut me with a few profound thoughts like: “Nothing exists, everything becomes”; “You can never step into the same river twice”; “*Cogito, ergo sum*” and similar rubbish.

Finally, however, travelling the length and breadth of the things, he will start chasing his own tail like a dog. Admittedly, he will be able to chase it longer than me, because the systems he builds in the privacy of his comfortable study are like *perpetuum mobile*: their functioning doesn’t require any contact with reality. My whole current life, on the other hand, is filled with hectic activities, in which every morning I discover the ineffectiveness of the endeavours to understand the surrounding world which I made the day before.

COURTS, 21ST APRIL 1986

This morning, after two defence summations, in the corridor of the court palace called Harlay, I was accosted by a young woman, who reminded me that she'd been my student many years before. She'd become a colleague in the same line of work and asked me how I was doing.

- I will never forget your seminars and the hours we spent with you – she said.

The liking that students have for me has a soothing effect on life disappointments. However, this doesn't change the fact that I'm always surprised to discover it, as I usually have a poor opinion of the human kind, which I don't bother to hide.

APOLOGISING, 21ST APRIL 1986

Fortunately, I'm a man who keeps his mouth shut. I seldom tell people what I think of them.

Fortunately – I repeat – fortunately.

For I change my mind every now and then. In my thoughts, I accuse people of all kinds of evil, and then back out. In the morning I'm filled with enthusiasm for a new acquaintance, while in the evening I find that I've been disappointed again. In a word, every moment I think something else. Luckily, people don't know about it.

Because, if they found out, I would have to start every day by walking round the town. Every morning I would have to knock twenty doors and, standing on the doorstep, apologise for what I said, claimed and maintained the day before, which I don't believe at all the next day.

Finally, they would start running away. And if they honoured my person by murdering me, they would only do it to write: "Stupid prick" on my gravestone.

PERTINACITY, 21ST APRIL 1986

1. I'm more and more surprised: why isn't Ania breaking down? Faced with the prospect of losing our flat and everything we've managed to buy (chiefly thanks to her, as it's Ania who finances most of our family budget), she could do what many other people would do if only they had an opportunity, that is, give me a simple alternative:

“Either you sell everything at any price, or I quit”.

2. The worst thing about it is that in such a case I would really sell everything. Which wouldn't stop her from leaving me, anyway.

Because, before letting the paintings go, I would resist it with all my strength, which would make her demand it even more eagerly. Our relations would become unbearable. And if I finally gave in, it would be too late: so much resentment would have built on both sides that it would be impossible for us to stay together any longer.

3. That's why I just can't believe my eyes: not only isn't Ania breaking down, but she's more and more inclined to support my inflexible attitude towards Veronèze, Ballester, and in particular Louse and Hugnet.

4. The only person she still likes is Beks.

- You can quote me all his letters – she tells me – and flood me with proofs of his egoism. I like this guy, anyway, because he can be funny. And, actually, I don't want to read your notes about him, because I don't want to lose this feeling.

FEAR, 21ST APRIL 1986

For the hundredth time I find that the deepest cause of my fears is the threat that I might lose Ania as a result of the whole enterprise.

Thinking about the day when there will be no single franc left in our family budget has become a real obsession. Should it happen, will she forgive me for drowning all the savings and getting us into enormous debts? Or will she still accept the fact that I bought all the paintings, produced the film and organised an expensive exhibition, namely, I've done three things that have pushed us into an abyss from which we are not able to get out; the abyss that in near future will most probably engulf our flat, and, in general, our comfortable and cheerful life?

Yes, I am afraid of the day when Ania will begin to ruin our relations with reproaches, which will turn our life together into a nightmare, finally making us split up.

For the time being, she's loyal and supports me where everybody else would persistently argue that I'm wrong: I'm talking about my definite "no" to the sale of Beks's paintings for half the price only to keep our heads above water at any cost.

Besides, surprisingly, she likes this painting more and more, although at the beginning she had a sober look, deprived of any enthusiasm whatsoever. Well, a drowning person wouldn't like the things that are pulling them to the bottom, would they?

I will never forget her solidarity, on which I didn't count at the moment when nobody wanted to give me a hand, and the main interested person couldn't do anything except demand the money I owed him.

DAY, 21ST APRIL 1986

How many kilometres do I cover every day?

I wake up at six o'clock. I wash myself, deal with my current affairs and make notes on the conversations I had the day before.

At eight o'clock I call my client Ms Nage to tell her that I'm going to be 20 minutes late for our appointment in the court building, but, as agreed, I'll come on time to the trial in the afternoon.

Ania wakes up at about 9.30. We eat breakfast together, talk about what each of us is going to do during the day and arrange to meet by the entrance to the university to go to the cinema.

I take a copy of the movie to Unifrance Film. I need it for the screening for the press and the jury, because it is here, in France, where my fate will be decided. The jury have their sessions here, not in Cannes, and in a few days will choose a film to be awarded. It's only the announcement of results that takes place in Cannes. Until this time the list of awarded films will be kept secret. Besides, they need this copy to send it to Cannes, where the film will be shown three times.

From the post-office opposite Lido in Champs-Élysées I call Ballestar's secretary, asking her to send an official request to hire the three paintings by Beks. I dictate her what to write. I do the same with the receipt which she's supposed to send to the assurance company.

After the visit in Unifrance Film I proceed to the meeting with Ms Nage, and then to the trial in the appeal court.

I leave the court angry, because the opponent played an absolutely unnecessary, heart-rending and virulent comedy, though there were no witnesses. The trial took place behind closed doors and he might have given it a miss. Anyway, the judge was not in the least bit impressed by his

interjections; such things are usually designed for the public and do not make much sense during a meeting between specialists.

Having left the courtroom, I go to the library of Legal Council and make a note on the trial. At two p.m. I speak before the tribunal in another lawsuit, and then go to the library to make a note again.

Later, I run to Cite underground and go to Boulogne, to pick up the prints of “Two Mummies” ektachrome from Duplicolore laboratory. I must bring them today to Unifrance Film, because I’ve been told that journalists might ask for them. I know it’s pointless, as no journalist will write a single line about my film, but since they ask me, I do it.

In the meantime, I call from a street telephone box to make sure that the film has been handed to Carriau, because it’s the only copy I have, and if it got lost, I would have to say goodbye to Cannes.

From the post office in Champs-Élysées I send a number of letters, having first photocopied them for my archives in the specialist shop on Marbeuf Street.

And the underground again.

I stand in a queue to the travel agency near Châtelet, to book a room in a hotel in Nices, because Cannes is going to be crowded from 9th to 20th May. Finally, I get the reservation, but only from 15th to 19th, while I have to be there already on 13th. I must prepare the ground, try to make journalists interested in the film, tell the people about the screening dates and try to sell the film. When I arrive there at last, I’ll have to find a room for the first two days. Well, if the weather is nice, I could get some sleep in the car. No, actually not, because I’ve just recalled that I decided not to go by car. I won’t be taking the paintings with me, anyway. Besides, if I go by train, I’ll spare myself two tiring days behind the wheel. I will therefore leave on 12th May. But I will have to reserve a couchette, so from Unifrance Film I will go back to the travel agency near Châtelet.

It’s raining. It’s raining incessantly. When is it going to stop?

My wet hair doesn't want to dry in the foul-smelling warmth of the underground, so I've got a weird mop on my head, at which people are looking with a sneer.

Having returned from Boulogne, where I collected the ektachrome duplicates, I once more pop into Unifrance Film, to leave them there. I take an opportunity to tell two young missies, press attachés, how surprised, pleased and optimistic I am because of being chosen for the festival after "impartial selection".

They are glad to hear that.

- You know – says one of them – many of the 240 films submitted for the contest were supported, but finally none of them appeared on the list of nine selected movies. Patronage didn't help.

All the better. At least once.

Next, I go to visit Hugnet, almost opposite, in the editorial office of "Penthouse", number 65 on Champs-Élysées. I want to give him the slide of "Two Mummies", so that he can use it in the report on the festival in Cannes, which will appear in the June issue. Hugnet demands a film photo (preferably the hearse), and not the painting by Beks. He insists. It's inconvenient for me, because the movie is already in Unifrance Film and I can't get it back to have the slides made. I don't have any film snips, either, because Dziworski appropriated the exposed ones to use them in his future film.

To my own surprise, I sort of like Hugnet's demand, and his usually unpleasant tone somehow doesn't annoy me. I think that he knows what he wants and he's right not to give in. Although his request is a bit awkward for me at the moment, I'm glad to finally see his serious attitude to work.

Taking the opportunity, he quotes me the price of duplicates of the photographs that came out in "Penthouse" in March: 6 888 francs. Far too much for my possibilities. He must have made a mistake and didn't check with the printer. A duplicate can't cost that much. But I know that he won't

do anything, especially he won't call the producer to make sure. The moments of responsible work are extremely rare in his case. I'd better give up the whole project. It would be yet another opportunity to complain of people's poor work.

It's half past four p.m.. I hurry to the university. There are two seminars in constitutional law ahead of me. It's going to be the only nice and tension-free moment of the day. I'll spend three hours talking to people who like me, and our conversation will not revolve solely around money and the refusal to all my proposals.

In the evening, at 8 o'clock, by the university entrance I meet with Ania. We're going to the "cinema of great emotions". This is what we call Cosmos on Rennes Street, where they show Soviet films, which we both like so much.

Well, this is how I've spent the day.

SOMETHING NEW?, 21ST APRIL 1986

Nihil novi: a few refusals here, a few concealments there.

1. None of the twelve journalists-art critics from the most widely-read French magazines has replied to my letters. About twenty days ago I sent them materials about Beks, asking for an appointment. Of course, I wanted to talk with them about next exhibitions. Receiving no answer, I called each of them. Didn't catch anyone. Two of them were "sick", the others were "downtown". In the end, I got a simple answer that ... There was no point in calling.

Actually, Otton Hahn's assistant from "Express" even repeated it twice, in case I wouldn't understand:

- If Mr Hahn is willing to write an article, Mr Hahn will write. Please, do not disturb him all the time. It will be enough if you send us relevant materials.

- I did so.

- Oh, yes, indeed. Actually, we had a closer look at them. But .. which painter is it about?

I think that if she looked in her dustbin or her superior's dustbin, she would soon find the answer to her question.

2. Also, there is no echo from the Independent Salon. Well, actually, no ... I met there somebody (I guess it was the wife of painter Pierre Henry) and I made an enthusiastic note on the conversation with her, beginning with a youthful shout: "What joy ..." Well, since that time it's rather been: what bleakness.

At the same time, I got a letter from a doctor Miltz. “I have seen the paintings by Beksiński in the Salon. Please, contact me as soon as possible”.

I called him, having my heart filled with some frantic hopes. Guess what? He just wanted to satisfy his curiosity about Beks’s age.

3. What else?

At last, Julka has replied to my letter, in which I asked her husband, the secretary of Jaruzelski (previously of Kania, and before him – Gierek; interesting how often first secretaries change, and the secretaries of secretaries won’t budge), to turn to his friend, the culture deputy minister Janas, with a request to include Beks’s exhibitions in the new culture agreements between Poland and other countries. Unfortunately, her husband “has a lot of work” and hasn’t had time to deal with my matters. But she thinks

4. There will be no album, because Wojciechowski doesn’t have enough money, and I don’t have it at all. Sureaut and Mathan have prepared tempting estimates of a 112-page book; everything according to my requirements (laminated wrapper with a colour reproduction, hardback covered with canvas, glossy 150-gram paper, 60 reproductions, including 50 colour ones). The only thing I can do with these estimates is to add them to my archives.

5. I sold our 20-franc golden coins to satisfy, at least partially, the bank. The moment seemed to be right. A return to anonymity in gold transactions might have caused a jump of prices. Indeed, one day they were close to the level of 610 francs, which I established as a minimum. The next day, however, they plunged to 554 francs.

6. But damn it, there are some brighter points, aren’t there? the film has been sent to Cannes. I’ve dreamed about it for too long to not include it on the list of achievements. Besides, there’s going to be Ballester’s collective

exhibition on Croisette, where three paintings by Beks will be shown (“Sea behind the Sun”, “Chair” and “Bath”). It has to count for something.

As a matter of fact, the April balance is not completely negative.

COMPLAINING, 23RD APRIL 1986

Having vented all my grudges on these pages, I feel relieved. It's like all my problems vanished for a while. It's the same kind of relief I sought for when I cried in the pillow as a child, or when, being a young boy, badly ill, I writhed and gritted my teeth in pain. Today I resort to similar self-defence against miseries: I pour them out onto paper.

My situation doesn't let me complain aloud. If only they felt that I'd flagged, many of my friends, acquaintances and co-workers would immediately come for me with their fists. They've received too many blows from me to let me get away without giving me back when the first opportunity arises.

Also my excessive pride doesn't let me betray my other fears. I would be ridiculed, like every tough guy who suddenly asks for a tissue to wipe his tears. I therefore keep silent and put on a brave face. With great care, I cultivate the opinion about myself as a "man with balls" – as I was once described by my own spouse, observing me with admiration at the time when one success was followed by another. And I do it so well that even the closest do not suspect to what extent I am weak.

On these pages, however, just like in my thoughts, having only myself as a confidant, I can get my complaints off my chest and satisfy the need for groaning.

CERTAINTIES, 23RD APRIL 1986

1. “There are two kinds of introductions to speeches and articles: the first have the form of a funnel, while the other – a pistol shot. The first approach the topic from a distance and slowly encourage the audience to ask themselves a question that you want to speak or write about. The second type of introduction asks this question in a direct way, by means of a witty quotation, a reference to a recent incident known to everybody, or an interjection”.

How enjoyable it is to sermonize this way in front of an audience that respects me and agrees a priori with whatever I say. The world which I like and which likes me: my students.

What a nice feeling it is to pass to them what I have been taught: axioms.

The world in three dimensions, in which I know the number of things, their relations and mutual proportions. The world in which you can move around without stumbling over the obstacles that you failed to notice.

2. A similar feeling gripped me during yesterday’s general assembly of the co-owners of the house where Ida Smith lives; I’m her lawyer and representative. This is also the world which I understand and which doesn’t give me the slip. They are talking about the door in the garage and a plastic magnetic card for 24 francs, about sockets in the hall and dustbins to be placed in the cellar.

No, I’m not talking about all that just to mock the rich bourgeois living under No. 16, who doesn’t want to pay for the card, because “it’s too expensive”. Neither do I want to jibe at the madam spangled with genuine diamonds, as if she was at Sherrer’s fashion show, who keeps complaining that the caretaker earns as much as 980 francs “for doing nothing”.

No, the only reason I talk about it is to emphasise the soothing effect of certainties that prevail in this world: a discussion of petty shopkeepers, clear

views, problems of my calibre, and finally, clear-cut conclusions. There are no hesitations, no pursuit of the fleeing truth. It's the world of a small stall, three apples and a brush for sweeping the hall; the world without questions that have no answers, the world in which I don't have to rack my brains about the causes of the cold arrogance and fighting sectarianism of the French culture branch establishment.

BUSINESS, 23RD APRIL 1986

What a lark! Louse calls me to tell me that “he’s felt a prick of conscience”.

- Because when I had a closer look – he says – I found that the letter from “Le Monde”, which you got two weeks ago, contained something more than just an advert. There are a few words from Michel Tatu, a journalist. He invites you to a performance in which his wife plays the main part.

You son of a bitch! He thinks I haven’t seen through him. It’s as plain as a pikestaff. Our agreement obliges him to send me any Beks-related correspondence that comes to the address of his gallery.

Two weeks ago I found out, quite by chance, that a letter from “Le Monde” had arrived and Louse had taken it home. You know, my Friend, how important it is to me that the press has finally reacted to my endeavours, and how I look forward to receiving its slightest signal.

Louse hadn’t opened the letter yet and was surprised by my call. And if it contained something important? Something entitling him to demand money from me? Just in case then he assured me there was only an advert.

Now, two weeks later, having found that the letter didn’t concern Beks or the paintings, he realized that it was of little worth to him. In any case, it didn’t contain anything entitling him to wheedle any benefit out of me. So now, he pretends to be repentant, because he “forgot” to give me the letter at once.

After this friendly (Louse uses this word with emphasis) gesture, he moves on to the main point of his call: he proposes to contact me with an acquaintance of his (he calls her “Madame”, but cautiously doesn’t mention the surname) who “owns 50 cinema rooms in Paris and could be interested in the film”.

- But it’s a difficult matter – he adds. – You understand ...

At this point I should confirm that I understand and ask:

“How much do you want for it?”

He’s disappointed, as I don’t say anything.

From the next part of the conversation I conclude that he’s not going to buy any Beks’s paintings for himself. Perhaps except the “tree”, but he must “give some thought to it”.

I suspect (but maybe it’s about another machination) that Louse has a purchaser for this painting, somebody who has seen the exhibition, who doesn’t know me personally and who turned to the gallery to buy the “tree”.

Louse is obliged to inform me, without any remuneration, of any proposals and questions about the exhibition.

This man, however, doesn’t have the slightest intention to give me the name of the interested person, as there might be a chance for him to make a deal. Who knows?

TELLING THE TRUTH, 23RD APRIL 1986

Moralists claim that in politics you should tell the truth. They accuse governments of Machiavelism, when they twist or hide the truth from people. “Only truth is revolutionary” – Lenin reputedly said. In keeping with the tradition of Erasmus of Rotterdam, students wrote it on Sorbona façade in May 1968.

Yet politicians frequently depart from the truth. Why?

Because the history is full of examples of statesmen who expressed it too clearly or too early, which resulted in them being mercilessly removed from power.

Should you then tell citizens the truth? Or should you hide it from them?

As usual, a question asked this way suggests a clear answer, filled with lofty feelings and simply brimming with honesty. As far as I am concerned, I prefer to give a less unequivocal answer, since, like most things in this world, also telling the truth is the question of degree, moment and manner. In a word, as everywhere and as always, an answer to the question whether citizens should be told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth depends on the intelligence, luck and the “nose” of the one who stands at the helm of the state. No universal principle that he was taught in his young years will spare him risk and effort, because when you have to tell the truth, you must know how to do it.

This reminds me of the tactics adopted long ago by that bastion of democracy, that is, “Le Monde”. Oh, yes, it can tell the truth! Hats off! For many years it’s been successfully following the principle: do not hide unpleasant stuff from the readers, but put it on the fourth page, in a form of a small digression, in small font and in trivial words.

And this is exactly what educated people reading this daily expect. They don’t want any threats hovering over the society to be hidden, but they also

don't want to be frightened by being presented with the matter in a complete and exhaustive manner. So much for the question of truth in case of the educated, let alone masses.

A citizen who is threatened with a danger wants to be informed of it in advance. However, he doesn't want to know the whole size of the danger. Only a politician in power should measure its whole weight. Anyway, isn't it the reason why the former (citizen) entrusted the latter (politician) the task of managing the vast majority of his issues? He has done so not only because he doesn't have time to do it himself, but also because he lacks the courage.

This is the hypocrisy which both sides crave for and accept, as it is the essence of democracy. It's about finding a fleeting, uncertain and constantly escaping balance between the desire of Demos to know the truth and its wish to live without fear. It is only this fundamental condition that enables a politician to get people's approval for the solutions which he's going to adopt, without provoking their reaction of panic (in the event he disclosed them the whole truth) or a rebellion (if he kept them in complete ignorance).

GENIUS, 24TH APRIL 1986

Yesterday I told Ania:

- I've always gone through hundreds of doubts and anxieties. Actually, I'm still experiencing them – you know about it. But what amazes me is that I've never doubted the genius of Beks, while in my situation it would seem a normal thing to shift the blame on others, or at least wonder if you've really made a good choice. Especially that thirty five people keep telling you that it was wrong.

It's true that I usually doubt everything; I even wonder if I'm really walking on the earth. I've always found it easier to ask questions than find answers. Yet in this matter I don't have the slightest doubt that I'm right.

Ania didn't reply anything.

I know that she likes this painting, but she can't understand my fascination for it.

CLERKS, 24TH APRIL 1986

Governments come and go away, but the administration won't budge.

There was therefore no reason for it to change only because on 18th March this year Mr Chirac gave up his post to socialists.

And this administration belongs to the best in the world. It's a known thing.

No matter if he serves the right wing or the left one, it will never occur to a French clerk to do anything against the directives of his superior. Neither will he keep the documents that have been entrusted to him.

In this respect, people dealing with culture don't differ from those who work in the department of transportation. Painter Schmeltz once told me, quite rightly:

- Why are you cross with them? a clerk is only a clerk; whether he deals with mail and telegraph or culture, he is only what he is and nothing more. He will act according to the same principles, no matter if he supervises the construction of a motorway or manages a museum.

That's why no clerk, either under the rule of the Right or the Left, has taken liberty of expressing his own opinion on Beks's painting. It could be contrary to the opinion of his government! God knows what might happen in such a case. Also, none of them kept the brochures I'd sent.

“In the event a request is rejected – the Supreme Court judicature states – the administration is obliged to return the entrusted documents to the applicant”.

That's why none of the clerks has had an idea to “lose the documents” so as to later show them to an acquaintance, or just add them to their own collection.

Also, none of them has taken the risk of expressing an opinion on this painting which would be different from the opinion of his superior.

And of course, none of them has committed an offence of writing to me a letter like that:

“Dear Sir,

Following the policy delineated by our ministry, I regret to reject your proposal of our exhibiting the paintings by Beksiński.

His works do not conform to the line adopted by our department of culture, since the latter is solely aimed at supporting the avant-garde as well as propagating optimism and gratitude for the benefits brought by the democratic-liberal system. Quite apart from the said line, however, I take the liberty of keeping the brochures you sent us, as I personally think this painting is fascinating”.

No, no. The letter I received a moment ago from Fine Arts Office is impeccable with this respect:

“Unfortunately, we cannot accept your proposal” – it announces at the beginning. Then it adds: “We hereby return you the documents which you sent us”.

No personal note, no departure from the ministry policy, and first of all, no mention of appropriating the entrusted case files.

Actually, the truth is that if, instead of the letter I got, the said clerk had dared to send my invented letter, he would have committed a triple crime; a triple crime for which he would have had to be brought to trial:

- firstly, by using the exaggerated term “fascinating painting”, he would have breached the duty of moderation imposed upon him;
- secondly, by using the term: “quite apart from the line of our department ...” he would have infringed the duty of obedience towards his

superior, who is the only person having the right to establish the policy of the office;

- at last, thirdly, he would have committed a real offence by appropriating the dossier of proceedings.

There is therefore a reason why the French administration is regarded one of the best in the world. Anyway, isn't it what I keep telling my students every day?

HIDEOUS PRICK, 24TH APRIL 1986

Whenever I'm talking to a greedy, arrogant or vicious person, I feel an irresistible urge for giving them a smack across the face.

However, in the evening usually comes a moment of reflection. Then, I try to understand how it's possible that saying what he said that person didn't realize he is a hideous prick? Strictly speaking, I ask myself the question what he felt when he was talking to me and how come he didn't notice something that I saw easily, because it was as plain as the nose on your face?

To answer this question, I try to completely forget about my anger, go out of myself, go into that person, install myself, sit back, make myself comfortable and then repeat aloud what made me so angry. Now, being in his shoes, will I get the impression that I'm a hideous prick?

If it doesn't lead anywhere and I still feel in him perfectly well, I add a bit of honesty and sober assessment, which my interlocutor was obviously deprived of before I incarnated in him. Will I now feel that he was a hideous prick? Or irrevocably, having once put myself in his position, I will always have to like myself?

This game can also be played with oneself.

Therefore, I would like to be signalled aloud about the moments when my interlocutors, looking into my face, quietly say to themselves "you hideous prick!", because if I knew which moments are these, I could immediately realise what I was feeling when they hurled insults at me.

In other words, there is a question:

How can one be a hideous prick and fail to notice that? And, if other people make us aware of it, why is it so nice to remain a hideous prick?

CONSENSUS 1, 25TH APRIL 1986

“There is nothing worse for an intellectual or an artist than clashing with fifty people who feel and think the same. What is the strength of democracy – consensus – for an artist or thinker is a wall against which his originality in search of emotions or truth will be smashed”.

This morning I voiced this opinion sort of unknowingly in front of my students. On second thoughts, however, I think it is justified.

Actually, this is the lesson I learn every day in my fight for imposing Beks on the French. In the past I learned it when facing difficulties to smuggle a few statements in my habilitation dissertation.

REPLY, 25TH APRIL 1986

I wanted to know, so now I know. The pestering, philosophical, profound question which I asked myself yesterday's evening: "When do I behave like a prick without realizing it at all?" – found an irrefutable answer this morning. Nyczek replied to my proposal of adapting his text, which I want to publish in the album, if I ever issue one, of course.

"My good-natured simpleton – he writes something like that – together we can write a cookery book, but not a literary work".

Let me open small brackets: he's sung a different tune before. At the time when the publication of his text in the album which I was supposed to edit depended only on me, my proposal seemed quite natural to Nyczek, and he agreed to my signature appearing next to his. Therefore, the charge that I'm an idiot to propose such things is fresh, and Nyczek's irony - very occasional. It is true that for the time being Beks's album with Nyczek's introductory text will be issued by Arkady, and in such circumstances Nyczek doesn't need me anymore. Here I close brackets.

Let's come back to his letter, though. A valuable thing about it was the answer to the question: "When do I behave like a dick without realizing it".

Now I understand that I must have been a fool to propose him the adaptation of the text as if nothing had happened, because my gesture, though deprived of any malice, contempt or arrogance (well, maybe a little bit ...), was utterly stupid. I hadn't noticed the red line marked by the ego of each author, behind which one mustn't walk in their boots. If I'd realized what I was doing, if a warning light had gone on, I'd have withdrawn for sure. Sure? Well, let's say ...

But there's no crying over the spilt milk. What I should do now is decide how to behave in the future: stick to my guns or apologise?

If I apologise, he will say: “Dmochowski first puts his foot in it, and then yelps. Idiot”.

Stick to my guns then? In such a case, I’ll turn from an “idiot” into a “prick” .

On second thoughts, I conclude that I like “cheeky prick” very much. If I am to be a jerk, I’ll go the whole way, so I won’t back out of anything and will still demand that Nyczek authorize me to rewrite his text, which is incoherent and absolutely unacceptable on the French Cartesian ground.

I deserve a slap in the face, because I am an idiot, indeed. If, however, somebody spits in my face, I need higher reasons to calmly wipe myself and claim that it’s raining.

CONSENSUS 2, 26TH APRIL 1986

I ask myself the question: which of the two is worse: the tyranny of Gulag or the tyranny of general agreement?

To somebody whose opinion differs from that shared by the majority there isn't much difference between the two kinds. His mouth will be locked equally well by an opposite view shared by fifty people as by the prison gate. To the one who falls victim to tyranny it doesn't matter whether it is spontaneous or built, unconscious or planned – tyranny always resembles itself.

Should I take comfort in the fact that it's not a police cordon but curators of French museums, unanimously considering Beks's painting "decadent", that block him the way?

He is gagged in liberal France as effectively as he would have been in totalitarian Soviet Union if he'd been an abstractionist at the time of social realism.

"Let a hundred flowers bloom" – Mao used to say.

Where? Here? Surely not. Maybe in Beijing, during the cultural revolution, but certainly not in "sweet France". Here, consensus in art, aesthetic unanimity, spontaneous refusal on the part of decision-makers are more effective in eliminating the differences between artists than a prison wall.

"This art lies beyond the aesthetics of our museum".

How many times have I heard this answer from all sorts of culture functionaries? Five? Eight? Twenty?

It is true that optimism, the joy of life or gratitude for the benefits of the "free" society do not emanate from Beks's paintings. It's the art of despair

and nothingness; the art of impossible happiness on earth, at least for us, that is, one of the last generations pestered by death, illness, hatred and fear.

But is there really no space whatsoever for another art than official in at least one French museum? Isn't there a single curator who would dare to admit that Beks is a great painter, worth being shown to people equally with Picasso?

Oh, God, how could one deny that terrorists are right? First, they bump their heads against the wall of consensus and liberal unanimity. Later the only thing they can do is smash its face with a bomb. The tyranny of majority is terrible.

MADMEN, 26TH APRIL 1986

While visiting Valmay yesterday, I met a man who six months after the exhibition came to buy a big poster.

- Do I like this painting? Sir! Do I like it? I've gone crazy about it.

He said that throughout the six months which he'd spent in hospital he dreamed about the poster.

On the day he left hospital, he immediately ran to the gallery.

But there are no madmen among culture department officials, among collectors who invest, among paid critics or gallery owners. If they were mad, they would have never achieved what they achieved. Madmen are not successful in life.

“We haven't gone out of our minds yet, dear sir”.

Yet I recall that when Solon wanted Athenians to listen to him, he pretended he'd lost his mind: he went to the agora and started fidgeting, gesticulating and dancing. Everybody pricked up their ears to hear what he wanted to say, because at those times madmen were considered to be haunted by gods.

But these times are gone and we don't live in the same democracy. Because in our democracy, madmen have been replaced by graduates with diplomas in the history of art.

SUNDAY, 27TH APRIL 1986

“It’s Sunday today. Come, my pretty mummy(C’est aujourd’hui dimanche. Viens, ma jolie maman ...)”.

An oasis of peace on that day of rest. At night Ania returned from Belgium. She’d been there at fashion shows. We woke up early and now we’re spending the morning together, as in the evening I’m seeing her off to the Opera, where she’ll be taking part in a fashion gala.

Today it’s raining a bit less than in recent days. But although it’s already the end of April, only a few leaves have appeared on trees and it’s cold. The apple tree near our house, which is usually covered in flowers at this time, has merely a few hundred, small, puny and half-frozen leaves.

From the box I take out the painting “cyclist”, which is to be exhibited in May Salon since next Tuesday. As the whole operation requires other paintings to be moved, we can once more have a closer look at all of them. When I take them out, one by one, Ania repeats many times:

- It’s absolutely extraordinary. Oh, God, how beautiful they are!

A quiet day spent at home with my beloved wife.

Fortunately, “the period of Sundays on a bench in the park” is left far behind.

It was a grim stage of my life. The stage when my only entertainment on Sunday was sitting on a bench in a small square near number 32 at Marbeau boulevard, opposite Bois de Boulogne, where I lived in a small room for servants. At that time I didn’t know anyone. I could say only several words in French and didn’t have a penny in my pocket. I didn’t have any papers or a permanent job, either.

The only way to forget about the existence, probably more painful than all the hardships of the past week, was to sit on Sunday “on one of the famous

public benches, public benches, public benches” – like in the song sung by Brassens, and weep in my lonely heart. Then, I returned to my hovel, cried, masturbated and fell into deep sleep.

It was half a year after one beautiful afternoon in October 1964, when I got off at Invalides Airport with a suitcase and 22 francs. I stood over the bank of the Seine and looked at water flowing under Alexander III Bridge.

Where shall I sleep today? – I asked myself this obsessive question.

At that time a baguette cost 46 centimes. Two months later I found a temporary job as a draughtsman and cleaner in the architect’s office of Pierre Chateau, located on Perreire Boulevard, in Paris 17th District. I received for it 200 francs monthly. I worked 12 hours a day, happy that I had something to do and that, owing to it, I would get an employment agreement on the basis of which I could finally obtain legal residence papers.

In the evenings, Chateau would treat his clients to champagne and give peanuts to everybody. I used to stuff myself with them, as I was never sure if I would have anything to eat the next day. I still didn’t understand anything I was told in French, except the ritual answer (like today’s: no, thank you) that my employer gave me whenever I asked him for a pay rise:

- I have no cash, boy. No cash.

On Saturdays, father Placyd, a Polish monk, received poor people like me at his place on Master Albert Street and gave us dry cookies. When going to him, I would stop in a nearby small grocery to buy a baguette and a litre of milk. I ate all that in a nearby gateway so as not to fall on the cookies and swallow all of them at once.

It was a gloomy period also due to the memory of unhappy love, which had made me leave Poland. One of these adolescent, sudden loves that hurt one’s body and mind and leave scars for the rest of one’s life: insomnia, which pesters me until today, ten years of aural hallucinations and nervous depression, which changed the colour of my reality into leaden grey.

“I hate Sundays ...” – sang Juliette Gréco.

I hated those Sundays spent on a bench in the park, lonely, strangely sunny in the spring of 1965, empty and desperate.

BANK, 28TH APRIL 1986

- Bad news, my little frog. The bank refused to prolong the term of loan repayment. You've got a letter from them at home. They will send it again by registered mail with acknowledgment of receipt.

We meet with Ania at the projection in National Cinema Centre, where our film and other short-length movies chosen for Cannes are being shown for the press. Today I don't like it at all. The tango scene goes on endlessly, and I've got an impression that everything is different as chalk from cheese, as the clerk from Pompidou Centre, Miss Breutaut, put it. Four people are leaving the room. Somebody closes their eyes and repeats in a hushed voice:

- Next! Next!

After the projection, already on the street, I take Ania's hand:

- What's the matter? Are you all right? What?

It is at this moment when she tells me:

- Bad news, my little frog.

I keep silent, but four words are spinning obsessively in my head: "That's the end. That's the end. That's the end". In the car, Ania has a moment of weakness, and a long litany of reproaches strikes my face:

- What did you need this stupid film for? the two girls who were sitting next to me behaved exactly like that jade from Pompidou Centre. One hid her face in her hands, and the other kept repeating: "Oh, you see, and now Berlioz, give it to me now, and some rubbish, and tra-la-la". Then both of them left before the end. Besides, I discovered that you'd paid Porębski 8 000 francs for the report which he'd never made. An hour ago I was at home and looked carefully through your bills. And that mortgage on our flat ... Why? If I hadn't felt so bad that day, everything would have taken a different

course. I wouldn't have signed it. When the bank was lending us money, it didn't demand any guarantee. And now, out of the blue, this mortgage ...

We both keep silent.

- It's not the past that counts, sweetie – I break the silence. – It's not the past. Only future counts. The only important thing is to find a solution. That's the whole problem.

But I know that in Ania's eyes everything looks different. Just like nine tenths of people, she needs a culprit in the first place. She has a far greater need to vent all her grudges than to find a real solution.

For the hundredth time I go through my bills: at the moment we've got a bank debt of 272 000 francs. If I sell our gold now (which has just reached the lowest price since the time when we bought it), the debt will be reduced to 200 000 francs.

- Could any of your friends lend us 50 000? For instance Perris?

She shakes her head, which means no.

- You've talked to mum about it – I ask after a long pause in the car. – You've told her everything, haven't you?

- Yes.

- I'd like to remind you that we agreed not to tell anyone. Are you sure that this letter is the reply to my request for prolonging the repayment term? You know, I've also sent them a letter with a proposal to sponsor our next exhibition.

- But, of course – Ania is sure. – I've read it. You don't reject a sponsoring proposal in a registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt, do you?

- Well, indeed.

Having got home, I hasten to ask her:

- Where's the letter?

- On your desk.

I read it and immediately find that Ania got it all wrong. The letter refers to the one I wrote myself on 19th April. In reply, the bank management write: "We cannot take a positive stance on your request".

I check the dates once more: on 19th April I wrote to them to propose sponsoring. It was only the next day, on 20th April, that I sent a request to prolong the debt repayment term. Besides, their letter doesn't mention the acknowledgement of receipt. It simply starts with the words: "We acknowledge the receipt of our letter as of ..."

In the kitchen I give Ania a long kiss and confess to the only thing I really feared – that one day she would ditch me. We both laugh and kiss. Then Ania tells me that a Michel de la Borde (or Borgne?) called me, asking to send him a videocassette with the film. I haven't got the faintest idea who he is and what the whole thing is about.

- Did you put down his telephone number?

- No.

I kneel down in the middle of the living room and, raising my hand as if wanted to swear an oath, I ask her most solemnly:

- I beg you, in the future, please, read the letters carefully and note the phone numbers of people who call me.

Yes ... And we laugh again ...

NUANCES OF PRIDE, 29TH APRIL 1986

One is always a riddle to oneself.

A tramp in the street smiles and greets me. I smile back and give him a coin.

A drunkard throws insults at me. I don't pay attention to him and keep walking.

A clerk at the post office shows impatience when I ask him for information, so I immediately start arguing with him.

My superior reproaches me in a raised tone. My face freezes with anger, my eyebrows frown and I look at him in silence, with emphasis. And if I answer him, I will do it slowly, drawling my words, the last syllables of which I pronounce with exaggerated precision.

A thug threatens me with a pistol. I am calm and business-like. I take out my wallet and scrupulously give him everything it contains.

My Father gives me an order in a tone that brooks no argument. I bow my head and immediately do his will without a murmur.

How is this game of likes and indifference, oversensitivity and pride, submissiveness and spontaneous obedience played in me?

I know the gears of my character and I know how it functions, but the whole mechanism and its dynamics escape my understanding.

I therefore know that these six attitudes are based on a specific relation of forces between me and my interlocutor, and on my pathological need for dominance.

1. If the configuration of forces is to my advantage, two variants are possible:

a. In the first one, my interlocutor accepts and respects my superiority. My excessive pride is not threatened at all, so I am filled with good feelings towards him. I don't show any haughtiness or contempt for him. Just the opposite, I am very friendly towards him, which makes me different from my neighbours. So, in such a case, people like me and I tolerate myself. It's a pity the old times are gone. If I'd been born two hundred years ago, as a son of rich countess Chołoniowska, I would have been a good master, kind and liked by his serfs.

So, when my students address me with respect, I am nice and adopt a paternalistic tone. This is one of the reasons why I like, protect and occasionally even fight for them. For the same reason I live in a mental difference between us, though sometimes somebody interrupts me laughingly:

- What are you telling me? It's rubbish.

b. If, however, my interlocutor offends me, and the relation of forces is obviously to my advantage, my pride, though attacked, remains untouched. A street drunkard may then hurl countless insults at me, and I will be imperturbable and cheerful. The dog barks but the caravan moves on.

2. More complex is the intermediate space, the space in which the forces between me and my interlocutor are equal within a certain range, but in another range they are unbalanced, and the issue who actually has the right to be in command remains disputable.

Actually, in the system of our Judaeo-Christian democracies it is the most frequent situation, because in certain areas we are all equal to each other (as people and citizens), though in other fields we have most different social positions. One of us in relation to the other is in certain aspects in a dominant position, while in other situations he is dominated.

Not knowing each other well, everybody hopes to take a position in command despite the seeming equality, and just in case growls: "You don't know who I am!". And when he finds that the other person's position is

higher in rank than his own, he apologises, saying: “Oh, if I had known who you are, I would never have taken liberties ...”

As far as I am concerned, there are two hypotheses:

a. If, for some reason, it seems to me that my position is higher-rank than my interlocutor's, and he expects equality, I feel piqued. In such a case, my ego makes itself felt very soon and the other side's demand for respect triggers my aggression. If, therefore, a student starts talking to me in a self-confident tone, or a shop assistant makes me wait, because he's just gossiping with somebody on the phone, I become unpleasant, sometimes even very unpleasant.

b. If it is the other way round, and for various reasons I feel equal to my interlocutor, and he requires respect from me as if he was holding a dominant position, I look at him icily and start drawling my words.

So, when the dean of our faculty oversteps the mark, starting to instruct me in a haughty tone, I will pretend to be looking at the ceiling to give him to understand that he's annoying me. My position of a research worker at university gives me disciplinary guarantees which, apart from us, are available only to judges. Therefore, the dean knows that he can't do anything serious to me, and if he assumes a haughty tone, I will put him down immediately in an indirect, but clear way. All he can do is hate me quietly and try to block my university carrier behind the scenes.

Then I will feel that the relation of forces is balanced: my pride fights fiercely against the requirement of superiority from the other side.

3. Finally, there are two situations in which the relation of forces to my disadvantage is so evident that my interlocutor may openly show his superiority, not only provoking no protest whatsoever on my part, but making me immediately yield to him and do what he tells me to do.

That's because in these two cases I am fully aware that I don't mean anything before a man who's much stronger than me.

In the first case, the conciliatory tone I adopt results from my fear of violence. In the second, its source is in the authentic respect for authority, whose orders I wouldn't dare to object.

a. I therefore don't defy a law representative, who has prisons and tribunals at his disposal. I have been stopped by a policeman for this or another reason on many occasions. Wherever others would have started to argue or protest, I've always maintained a serene, matter-of-fact tone of voice and an open, sincere facial expression. I had no chance to defy him, so I gave in voluntarily.

I would behave in the same way if I was attacked by an armed thug. I would scrupulously obey his orders without murmur and give him the contents of my wallet without any anger.

b. The second case when I don't put up any resistance is when the authority has an overwhelming moral advantage. Therefore, being already an adult man, I never defied or talked back to my Father. Even when he told me "to close the door on the other side". He simply embodied authority to me.

The choice between these six attitudes does not result from calculated reasoning. It's spontaneous, natural and its source is in myself – I'm just like that.

I behave like a Doberman, which without any calculations adopts a condescending, but friendly manner in relation to a small puppy; which doesn't pay attention to the yapping of a miniature pinscher; which will bite badly a mongrel that's trying to catch its tail; which will bark its fangs to another Doberman trying to dominate it; which without a murmur will give in to a trainer, as the latter threatens it with a whip; and which will listen to its master politely, because it respects and loves him.

But to be honest, these six attitudes do not follow one another in a fixed sequence. They usually appear together, in a talk, one thing leading to another, word after word, sentence after sentence, in a mixture of kindness,

indifference, aggression, oversensitivity, cowardice and respect, which is concocted in my subconsciousness.

I mention it because despite knowing the gears of my character, I can't grasp its functioning, which remains a riddle to me. I can never foresee the sequence of these attitudes, or predict which one I will adopt at a given moment and what will be the overall outcome resulting from their mutual connections.

But why am I saying all these things? Let me explain.

For some time, Ania has been insisting that I shouldn't stand up to Beks and childishly expect his recognition and gratitude, and since today I'm going to talk on the phone with a lot of people from Poland, she asks me:

- Are you going to call Beks?

- What for? We've said too many things to each other. What we need now is some silence – I answer aphoristically.

She doesn't say anything and walks away. When leaving, however, she makes a remark:

- The longer you keep silent, the harder it will be to start talking again.

After two minutes she comes back to the topic:

- It's like in a marriage: give and take; one time it's you, and another time your partner who gives in. Anyway, your oversensitivity is ridiculous. It's he who is a genius, not you, and it's you who should show respect to him, not vice versa.

Although I'd locked myself in my grudges, I discovered that actually this was what I'd been waiting for: a pretext to come back to common sense and natural behaviour, in conformity with the hierarchy between me and Beks.

For common sense demands me to act in a different way: in this game I can spoil everything. I will either sterilise Beks with my aggression, thus deepening his tension, or push him to the limits of patience and he'll break off our agreement.

In the first case I will have paintings, but they will be worse. In the other one, I won't have paintings at all. In any case, Beks is a hundred times stronger than me, and if there's anybody who has a tool to take revenge on the other one, it is Beks, not me. I am helpless because of my idolatrous attitude to his paintings. Anyway, Ania was right saying that he is a genius, not me. On what grounds should I expect equality then?

Common sense prompts me to yield to him. In such a situation it's enough if somebody quotes an argument and puts it in a good formula. And Ania's formula suits me.

So I call Beks.

Doing so, I promise myself that I will stifle my pride and hush my troublesome oversensitivity. But I know they will come back with great force the moment Beks attacks me with his first words. I will therefore have to speak in a way which will make it impossible for him. Or I will have to firmly stick to my promise.

Even if he hurts me with his first words, I will withstand it. In the worst case scenario, I will stay neutral and restrict myself to avoiding polemics.

Having dialled the number, I repeat it three times to myself as I wait for him to pick up the receiver. That's because on many occasions I got carried away by the conversation instead of taking control over it.

Admittedly, an oral exchange of words with Beks seldom takes a turn for the worse. He is even a greater coward than me and seldom dares to show the feeling of fury that he's bursting with, despite the fact that he's a hot-head by nature and sometimes simply chokes with anger.

He will do it after a few hours, though, when he starts typewriting his letter to me. In this letter he will come back to all disputable topics that we raised when talking. And now he won't be embarrassed at all, hurling fucks and shits.

He treats paper like a mask behind which he doesn't feel any fear or shame. Hidden behind a sheet of paper, he's not afraid of my attacks and

doesn't have to hide the feelings I arouse in him. Separated from me with a letter, he won't have to face up to my short temper or speak to me with due respect, so as to save the face.

Just in case, though, to avoid the risk of a delayed reaction, I promise myself that from the very beginning I'll set a relaxed tone of our conversation. At the same time, however, I'm going to let him speak first as I want to sound out about his real feelings.

It's true that if I leave an initiative to him, I will find out what his current attitude to me is. But if he tells me something unpleasant, my oversensitive ego will immediately seek revenge. I won't be able to pretend that I haven't noticed anything and steer the conversation in another direction. I will surely stiffen if he hurts me. So should I let him speak first or straight away impose a friendly tone in our conversation, as Ania told me, thus taking the initiative?

Torn between different sides by my reason and the desire to keep good relations, the fear of his means of pressure, excessive pride and admiration for his genius, I begin the talk in a tone which leaves an open door to any eventuality:

- How are things?

- Glinicki told me that you're coming in July, and now it turns out you're not coming at all – he replies, as cautious as me.

This meaningless sentence can lead to an attack. I know it: "Again, you're changing your mind, and again, I'm disorganized because of you" – he will tell me in a moment.

Should I let him continue then? No, I won't test his internal tensions any longer. The game might get out of control. I interrupt him in mid-sentence and adopt the tone which I'd promised myself:

- The film has been chosen for Cannes. I have to go there to promote it – I answer seductively.

Ania is listening, afraid that I'll begin to go into raptures over the success of the film. She gesticulates to tell me that I shouldn't talk about it. Instead of setting a relaxed tone, this mention of the film success may hurt the ego of Beks, who hated it and expected it would be a complete flop.

Anyway, I'd promised myself to no longer inform him of the successes and failures of my enterprise. This way I will avoid his accusations if something goes wrong, and his cold, ostentatious indifference, if things take a turn for the better.

I therefore back out and change the subject.

Seeing that we're on the right path now, Ania walks away.

As usual, we skip from one subject to another, each of us being on his guard so as not to provoke the other. I feel he's curious about "Penthouse".

- Somebody in Warsaw has one copy – he says as if he recalled a completely unimportant detail.

I see what he's driving at and, breaking off with my good intentions, I provoke him by answering casually, as if it was about a trifle, indeed.

- Yes, it has come out.

- Why didn't you send it to me then? – he is no longer in control of himself.

Annoyed, I forget about the pledges I'd given to myself.

- You asked me to bring it when I come to Warsaw. You claimed that censorship forbids the sending of pornographic magazines. You were even sure of that.

- Yes – he says, backing out, because my argument is irrefutable. – But now they allow "Playboy" and "Penthouse".

- You have to make up your mind – I answer coldly.

Well, well! I feel that he's burning with impatience to see these publications and he's even ready to get rid of the tone of fake indifference,

the only aim of which is to not recognize my merits, so as he won't have to reward them in any way. To find out about "Penthouse", he's even willing to show some interest. He would do it even at the price of having to say "thank you" and risking that I might ask for something in return.

- Do you want my mother-in-law to bring it for you?

- Yes, yes, very well! – he accepts the idea eagerly.

- Don't you need money? – I add after a while.

Yesterday's false alarm raised by Ania, who said that the bank hadn't agreed to prolong our term of debt repayment, caused so much panic that, just in case, I want to pay Beks his 2000 dollars, although the sum is due only in July. I fear that if a disaster actually happened, Ania would first of all try to make me pay, at least partially, the bank debt. And at the same time, I probably want to prove to Beks that I'm still solvent, as if he knew about the size of my financial problems and started to doubt the possibility of my fulfilling the undertaken commitments. But I might also want to make a gesture which will force a nice response of Beks. Well, it's pleasant, my Friend, when somebody asks you to accept money, isn't it? I also suspect that my intention is to examine the condition of his internal tensions and anxieties about the financial future and the whole enterprise. If he says: yes, yes!, it will mean that he's guessed it is in his best interest to save what can be saved as soon as possible, before I get completely drowned. "Rip him off before he goes bankrupt" – he's been advised by family and friends.

The last suspicion turns out vain.

- No – he answers. – There's no hurry.

- Are you sure? My mother-in-law is leaving for Warsaw on 8th May. She might take the money with her – I insist even more. – You know, now after all these political changes in France, there is hardly any control over money taken abroad and Ania's mother could take it absolutely legally.

- Ok, agreed. Money always comes in use – he answers and stops pretending to trust me.

- Write it down then: she's coming on 8th May. You'll have to meet her at the airport.

And to take revenge, I feel like adding: "But behave yourself this time".

Because my mother-in-law has held a mortal grudge since she brought him several compact discs I'd bought him. The parcel was heavy, but all the time she was holding it in her hand so as not to lose it. Beks welcomed her at the airport with a vague "thank you", told her grandson to carry the parcel to his car and immediately took off, leaving her alone with grandson on the snow, although he knew that it's impossible to get a taxi at Okęcie Airport.

- He didn't even offer to pick me up. Nothing. "Thank you, it looks heavy. Goodbye". That's all he said – she complained.

Beks is curious what I'm planning in the future, but he doesn't want to add too much weight to his questions. He's played the role of a man who doesn't give a monkey about my endeavours too often to admit that he does attach importance to them.

- And in general, what's up? Is everything all right? How are things?

- What things? – I ask naively to humiliate him, forcing him to ask further questions, which will put him in a position of an applicant.

- Let's say, general prospects. What about the future?

I promised myself to keep this conversation in a friendly tone. I'm tempted to play the fool, just to force him to show the interest he has for "general prospects", but finally, I stop pretending to not understand.

- Well, Paris is a huge city. Like a whale. It swallows cultural events like little fish, without even realizing it, and immediately forgets about everything. It's an enterprise for long years. But I'm slowly pushing my wheelbarrows. Pushing.

I like myself with that sudden patience, reason and modesty.

And now it's Beks who would like to sound me out, as he's not sure whether, by any chance, I'm not going to give up the whole thing. Because he gets contradictory information: on the one hand, after the financial disaster I suffered due to the exhibition, in one of our phone calls I let it slip that "The noose is tightening around my neck", which made him panic.

On the other hand, however, he can see that things are moving forward, that the publication in "Penthouse" really came out, that his paintings are still exhibited in Paris and the film has been chosen for Cannes.

But he doesn't dare to make his questions more clear, as this would betray his interest in my endeavours, and this way I would gain advantage. So he smiles and tries to start the conversation from the other end:

- Sisyph was chained to the rock. You aren't chained.

How shall I answer?

- I'm chained, too ... - I finally say and suddenly realize that he might construe it as a reproach. I therefore add: - ... voluntarily. Yes, I'm going to push this rock till the end of my life and I don't complain about it.

I'm feeling more confident.

Since we've hit a carefree tone, he tells me that all our problems will soon be solved, anyway, because the radioactive cloud is "hanging over all of us". He alludes to the accident in the nuclear power station in Chernobyl in Ukraine. Indeed, according to press reports, it's moving towards the west. Reportedly, it's not very radioactive and at the moment it's moving over the eastern part of Poland.

So I correct him:

- It's over you, not us.

- Yes, but if I die, it will be the end of you and all your efforts will be wasted.

- Let's say that if you die, the price of your paintings will rise by 300 per cent – I add laughingly.

He's got a lot of trouble at home. His wife is suffering from kidney problems, varicose veins and hypertension. She's physically and mentally exhausted with the endless agony of mother.

- Mother's just calling, I must go – Beks says suddenly.

These people could afford to eat in the best restaurants in Warsaw on a daily basis and hire a full-time working nurse. Yet his wife prefers to cook on her own and stand in queues every day. He washes mother of her excrements on his own, bathes her wounds and serves the food, because hiring somebody to do all that job would cost so much money ... And this way, one can save.

Similarly, they both tolerate the incessant presence of Tom, who comes to them to eat and use the phone for hours, while he could have both things paid and provided to him outside their home.

Apart from the miserliness characteristic of mean-minded provincial people living in the sticks, somewhere at the back of Rzeszów Region, the reason for their behaviour in both cases is the fact that this is what others do in the Polish countryside. This is how their parents behaved, their neighbours, the protagonists of the books they read and the people they talk about every day.

They would think that they are not doing their task well if they didn't patiently carry the burden of family duties; the duties which in France are shifted to a Portuguese woman or a nurse.

Besides, there is the pressure of public opinion, that terrible "what will people say". In parochial Poland, public opinion meddles in everything, even the most hidden corners of one's private life, and everybody is damn afraid of it. Friends, neighbours, aunts and uncles, who are as provincial as Beks, wouldn't feel embarrassed to tell him that this is not the right way to look after one's own mother and own son. Beks knows about it perfectly well and, like every parochial Pole, gives in to social discipline without a murmur.

- Yes – I tell him. – I recall that an actor from Łódź, whom I knew, couldn't put up with his mother's illness any longer. He placed her in hospital, and there they turned her into a wreck within three weeks.

- Exactly. I can't do that – Beks answers me.

Then he adds:

- Now it's routine and I hope to pull myself together and start working again.

I conclude from what he says that recently he hasn't been doing anything. Right now it doesn't matter for me. Neither museums nor collectors are fighting to snatch the paintings from each other's hands.

Afterwards we say goodbye to each other. I'd like to add that I'm calling on 23rd May, at 9.00 p.m. But to avoid his usual reproach in case I don't manage to get through ("Again, I was waiting in vain and I couldn't work"), I add:

- If I get a connection.

- Yes, sure.

I stand up from the armchair with an impression that neither of us had his ego hurt, neither of us belittled the other one nor tried to impose his superiority. But what is the reality?

I'll find out after I get the next letter.

SELTZ, 30TH APRIL 1986

Today I visited May Salon in Grand Palais (first floor, gallery), where I brought the painting which shows a “Building with flying Stones and Fish”. It’s marked at the back with AZ monogram, which means that it was painted around 1985. It’s a so-called big format. This is what I and Beks call 98.5x132cm paintings. Since he paints in his own flat, and not a spacious atelier, he can’t make bigger ones.

It all started when, after a hundred disputes and hesitations, Ania chose the “motorcyclist”. All right, let her have her way. Frankly speaking, this painting has a lot of good sides: there’s no horror (as the enemies say). The colours, however, are almost monochromatic; and it’s big size.

On the other hand, the quite modern topic makes me feel anxious:

- They’re going to say it’s a comic illustration – I take the liberty of making a personal remark.

But this is the way it is ... the painting is to be presented in the Salon with a proposal of sale. And actually, I wouldn’t suffer a lot, if this particular one left my collection.

So this morning, having screwed to the frame a brass plate with Beks’s surname engraved in it, I took the painting to Grand Palais.

Taking these big formats out of the box in our bedroom and carrying them down from the fourth floor is no mean feat. What about the rest of the way? But I’m repeating myself.

No sooner had I lugged the painting up the first floor of Grand Palais than an old little, grey-haired woman, with a big neckline on her saggy breasts and a fanciful huge ring on her thumb jumped to me:

- What have you brought here? Haven't you read the instruction? Pictures must be framed with an ordinary wooden slat. Your frame is hideous. With such a frame you can go Independent Salon (Salon des Indépendants).

She's looking at me with disgust. I try to discover if she's had at least a quick glance at the picture itself. No ... How could she do that when I'm holding it in front of me, blocking half of the view. No, she isn't looking at the painting at all. However, she's carefully gazing at the lower part of the frame and notices a small brass rectangle with the inscription "Beksiński".

- And what's that? Man, if his name was Titian, we could talk about it, but...

I guess immediately that she's Ms Seltz, the secretary of May Salon. I've already talked to her on the phone and I know there are no chances with such an enemy. If I start polemicizing with her, she'll kick me out of the Salon straight away. Therefore, as usual in such cases, when I feel that things are taking a turn for the worse and I'm no match for my interlocutor, both my arrogance and ego disappear in the blink of an eye. And as usual, when I'm endangered, I find my calm, pleasant and even nice tone. I start with admitting that Ms Seltz is right. But no humility, God forbid – I say to myself. – No false smiles or feet licking. Such a policy with strong personalities almost certainly results in the same defeat as trying to clash with them. People like that can only be calmed with a dull tone and winning sincerity.

It's a foolproof method, which also this time brings the desired effect.

Ms Saltz, as it's really her, who's been mocking me for a long while, expects an answer in her style. She's simply taken aback when instead of that she hears:

- I admit you're right, I'm sorry. I have no intention of breaking the rules.

Ms Seltz reads aloud the instruction, which all of us were sent by mail. She probably hopes to cover up the unpleasant impression she made with

her completely unfounded assault a moment ago. Or perhaps she wants to provoke me to finally object? No way, because I persist in admitting she's right.

I find it quite easy because the frame is hideous, indeed. White, with a golden border around, just like the one in those village pictures of Mother of God at an intersection of dirt roads. It's Beks who ordered it. Ordered and told me to pay for it. Because – he claims – he paints big formats at my prompting. In return he demands that I pay for the frames. It's true that he couldn't find an ordinary wooden slat for this picture and was forced to take this one from the only framer in Warsaw who hadn't kicked the bucket yet. I believe him, especially that I've travelled the length and breadth of Warsaw myself and couldn't find an ordinary strip instead of a frame, either.

For a moment Ms Seltz seems sort of relaxed. But she's keeping a close watch on me. If only I blink, she'll jump on me again. I'm more and more convinced that there's something more important hidden behind the frame story. First, I think she hates this painting, just like so many French officials before her, and she would be glad if we had a kind of a row. In such a case, *in extremis*, she would find a pretext to kick Beks out of the Salon.

- Madam – I say in a conciliatory tone – I'm taking the picture and will be back before six thirty. Or maybe I could remove this frame here ... Well, I can't - I think aloud. – There must be a frame. The picture hardboard must have some kind of protection, and by this evening I won't be able to find anybody who would make a real frame. What shall I do then? Shall I bring another picture? I could bring another picture. What do you think?

- And do you have other paintings? – she asks me. – Are you an acquaintance of him? Oh, it's you. We've already talked on the phone. Your name is D ski?

She pronounces D and ski very clearly, growling the whole rest. Those all Polish surnames, damn them ...

- Yes, it's me.

- I have to give back your brochure about B...ski.

And again, she pronounces B and ski clearly and discreetly swallows the rest.

I feel disappointed, because she also doesn't want to keep this document for herself.

- When reading I underlined one sentence. I'll give it back to you. At the moment I have no time. But this brochure, I'll give it back ...

- I'm very pleased to hear that you have also read the text – I say, hoping to find out something more.

- What? Have I read? O, yes! It's outrageous!

- Where? – I ask with a new cramp in my stomach.

- Where he writes that he hates salons, because they always destroy his paintings.

Now I understand everything. Oh, my God! the most painful blow that could have been given to Ms Seltz, who devotes all her life to May Salon, just like Mirabelle Dors dedicates herself to Critical Figuration. I hastily offer an explanation to save the situation:

- But he talked about salons in Poland, where sometimes people handle paintings without any care. It wasn't about France.

- Aha, aha ... It might have been said. Why didn't you tell me? You should have told me.

- But wait a minute, so he doesn't live in France?

A! – I think, as I don't know May Salon regulations very well; in particular, I don't know whether foreigners living abroad are allowed. If I reveal that Beks lives in Warsaw, she might easily forget that she's forgiven me, resorting to this last pretext to not allow the painting to be exhibited in her salon.

Finally, however, I come to the conclusion that her bad mood is over and that's not the reason why she's asked me this question. Anyway, I can't lie to her, because when she starts interrogating me, sooner or later it will come to light. Besides, I'm afraid that my ambiguous answer would only inflame the wound that I inflicted to her ego.

- Yes, yes. He lives in Warsaw and has never left Poland in his life.

- Well, you could have started with that. You should have told me. I was so outraged that I even decided to quote this excerpt to the Commission ... But they shouted me down, saying that it's not important; that he's just eccentric, that it doesn't matter ...

So now I find that Beks's participation in the Salon was hanging by a thread and, in any case, Ms Seltz tried to block his way ...

- You, Poles ... We, the French, in 1848 were very close to help you – she adds filled with kind superiority.

When I hear a historical analysis on this level, I feel like taking out a gun. I have the same wish when people play the wise guys while talking about Beks's paintings and drivel like: "There's hope here. And here – a human dilemma".

However, the difference of forces is so huge that I give in and, like a defeated dog, lie on my back.

Ms Seltz appreciates my smile. We promise each other to meet during the Salon exhibition.

- May I write to you? – I ask when leaving. – I will explain everything to you in a letter.

- God save! No, no! God forbid! But, please, come during the exhibition. We'll talk.

A tough one, a strong woman whose authority I will never try to undermine. I take "Motorcyclist" with me and, having called a client of mine to tell him I won't meet him in the office before 2 p.m., I drive back to Marly.

When I've come back home, I hesitate which painting I should substitute for "Motorcyclist". Among small-size ones there is a whole series of excellent items, framed in an ordinary strip. But this is where the difficulty lies: I have absolutely no wish to part with any of them in the event I find a buyer. It seems preposterous on the part of a person who is absolutely forced to sell something, but this is the way it is and I can't help it. Besides, the format of a painting plays an important role in Salons. Ania thinks like me, or even more like me. After pondering for a few whiles I propose "Building with Flying Stones and Fish". Then I take it out of the box. But I need certainty. And since I'm not certain myself, I seek it outside me.

- No doubts? Are you sure you want this one? – I ask Ania.

- Yes – she answers.

- No, no, I want you to be sure – I insist.

I don't want to be responsible for any selection mistake. I'm aware that I made a good choice about the poster (Two Mummies) and not the best one about the brochure (Legs on Chair). It is then even harder for me to decide. Besides, this painting doesn't tell me much. So, on the one hand, there would be no tragedy if it got sold. I'm "for" then. But on the other hand, it's too dull to get sold. So, I'm "against".

I'd rather Ania took the decision.

- Yes, I am sure, arch-sure, extremely sure. Do you want me to repeat it once more?

She says it strongly enough for me to wash my hands of any responsibility in the future.

Well, this is how choices are made, which are later subject of other people's discussions. Why did he choose this particular painting? It's preposterous (or: it's brilliant). How did he figure it out?

Because such a choice is sometimes the result of endless talks, insisting, advice from many sides, uncertainty, debates and new doubts.

Yet on another occasion, it is pure chance, a quickly made decision at the last moment, upon the advice of somebody who gave it casually and without even realizing its importance.

An hour later I bring the painting to Ms Seltz. I kiss her hand like a gentleman and we both smile to each other:

- See you soon.

But I already know that I'll never come to talk to her, and she will forever slam the door of May Salon in front of me.

1ST MAY, 1ST MAY 1986

It's Labour Day today. The hundredth celebrations since the time of pogrom in Chicago.

When I finally obtained French citizenship, the first thing we did with Ania was go to Republic Square to take part in a May Day march. I didn't use to do it before, as I'd been afraid it might reach the ears of Renseignements Généraux (that is, the ears of French political police). At that time, even casual participation in May Day was considered here as a subversive deed. Actually, foreigners until today are banned from any "political" activity in this country.

I admit that although I didn't go to May Day marches, I ostentatiously flaunted my extreme leftish views and organized strikes in Lido.

Which didn't prevent me, though, from humbly asking "papa" Guerin, the co-owner of Lido, an influential man from Parisian high society, to support me in the matter of naturalization.

Then he told me that he'd obtained the information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs that I had a good place on their list of dangerous lefties. It might be true. In May 1968 the minister of internal affairs was a Marcellin, an obviously mentally ill man, suffering from conspiracy obsession, typically found in paranoiacs. Well then, at the very beginning of May events I delivered a small speech in Sorbona, occupied by the rebels at that time, and it seemed to me that I was secretly being filmed by someone in the lecture hall.

Today I absolutely don't believe that anybody paid the slightest attention to me, and with a fake smirk I cover the embarrassment due to my cautiousness at the time. As for "dad" Guerin, I think he was just lying so as to get rid of me and weasel out of patronage I asked him for.

This morning we've got beautiful weather for the first time over a long period recently. And I am watching TV.

Almost ironically I ask Ania:

- Well, shall we go to the march?

She gazes at me for a moment to check if I'm not joking:

- No way! I guess we've changed, haven't we?

Well, yes. We have changed, indeed. A lot ...

BOOTLICKERS, 2ND MAY 1986

At the back you must lash with a whip, while at the front - entice with a carrot.

The omnipresent, spontaneous censorship of this system, the censorship of consensus, of the usual “no, thank you”, of concealment or oblivion, the censorship which has lackeys in all of us has forced to bow more than one. Many a man has had to shut up and join the ranks.

Repression towards unruly ones is not enough, though. Good pupils deserve a reward. “A free citizen of a free country” behaves like a whipped donkey. But, being a donkey, he must have a carrot dangling in front of him.

To the point now. This is what I’ve discovered in recent days: bootlickers who hope to gatecrash life like stowaways by reciting the democratic-liberal refrain about human rights and totalitarian system dangers.

To illustrate what I mean, let me tell you something that happened to me: I was to correct 51 examination works concerning “big contemporary political problems”, written by students in the fourth year. According to university regulations, students have two topics to choose from. The first one was quite technical: *Disappearing differences between the notion of foreign policy and internal policy in Easton’s concept of a system*. To deal with this topic you need to know something, so only few best students chose it. Their works are usually good.

The second topic was political: *Europe and its defence*. This one was very popular with all bootlickers and dunces, all those who were convinced that it was impossible to fail here. Why? Because no matter if a student knows anything or not, each examiner checking the works will settle for the words recited en mass in the press and at political rallies, the refrains about “threat from the East”, “Soviet expansion”, “defence of the free world”, “independence of democratic Europe” and yada yada.

Indeed, it usually goes like clockwork. What professor will not be moved hearing our youth chant an anthem in praise of freedom and democracy and, at the same time, shout “off with you” to those on the other side? Could they be denied a diploma?

It was the same “there”. Except that it was more thinly disguised.

From my childhood years I recall communist leaders in parade stands during a May Day march, who had tears in their eyes when nice children with red scarves over their necks walked leg by leg, chanting: “Long live comrade Stalin”. They stroked their heads and said:” It’s worth more than school-leaving examinations”.

Twenty two years went by. Now I’m in Paris and I’m supposed to take my seat in the local parade stand, have tears in my eyes and give good marks to all those who are singing verses in praise of the demo-liberal system.

Unfamiliarity with the subject? Lack of knowledge? It’s a trifle; we won’t formalize things.

Conclusion? Look around carefully, and you will see how many politicians have become ministers, getting into a bragging contest about who is a greater lover of “democracy and human rights”. Over electoral stands proudly soar noble slogans about the benefits of freedom, produced by the kilogram and by the metre in a peculiar kind of competition, in which the contestants shout each other, trying to utter within a minute as many sentences as possible.

How many journalists such as Anne Sainclair, Claude Julien and many others, like Emanuel Khan, unimaginative hack writers, but outstanding bootlickers have made careers in the media owing to “liberal” outrage, which they’d learned by heart.

How many artists have gone down in history, how many writers got a Noble prize just because they could sing loudly in honour of “freedom and democracy”. No talent? So what?

POST SCRIPTUM

- Is Beksiński a dissident? Do the horrors he paints illustrate the atrocities of life in the totalitarian system? Was he a member of Solidarity? You should present him as an enemy of communism, and we'll make another Sołżenicyn of him – I've heard remarks like that here and there.

- Unfortunately, he's not interested in politics. But he's a brilliant painter – I answer naively.

- You've already told us that five times. We are sorry, but we can't help you.

PLURALIST SOCIETY, 3RD MAY 1986

What does the popularization of a painter have in common with bitter reflecting on the mechanism of a pluralist society? Why do I constantly compare and mix these two motifs, which apparently are not related at all.

Firstly, this is illogical.

Secondly, enthusiasts of Beks's talent may get bored with my notes. After all, they don't open this book to listen to lectures on political sciences.

Also political scientists do not fully understand what the whole thing is about, because they are not in the habit of considering social systems from the point of view of the passion that somebody may have for the works of art of a painter.

"Boring stiff" – will say the former, tired of searching for the motives of Beks's history among the author's philosophical remarks, for which they are neither prepared nor show any interest in them.

"Quirky" – will say the latter, for whom the world of art has a priori nothing to do with their field.

For me, however, comparisons between these two things are neither accidental nor indifferent.

Because after long years of university teaching about the theory of mechanisms governing a democratic-liberal society, I can take this opportunity of making Beks popular in France to practically verify the scale of rubbish I talked to my students.

And there is nobody against whom you hold a greater grudge than somebody who deceived you.

Because it is blind faith in the pluralist virtues of this society that I see as the earliest beginnings of my current miseries.

I retained this faith for a very long time, even in my forties, as I'd never before had a chance to confront it with the facts.

I was so filled with this faith that I gave voice to it spontaneously, without thinking, even during a conversation which I had three years ago with two clerks of Pompidou Centre – Bordaz and Brunet, whom I tried to convince to exhibit Beks.

Throughout the conversation Bordaz wriggled like an eel, repeating obsessively:

- We've got a policy, you must understand. We can't do that, we've adopted a policy, you need to understand ...

Which was supposed to mean: "We've defined the criteria of what we will consider art. The works of art which do not meet these criteria will not be allowed in our museum".

To which I proudly replied, as if I were giving a lecture from behind a university podium:

- Fortunately, we live in a liberal and pluralist society. To your policy I will reply with the policy of others. You can't ban other people from helping me. Even if twenty decision-makers like you refuse to help me, I'll always find the twenty first who will like this art and will agree to show it to the public. Sooner or later, I'll find someone who will help me make Beksinski popular in France.

I should have bitten my tongue, but at the moment of expressing this "profound" and "definitely optimistic" thought, in my boundless stupidity I unshakably believed that it would come true. And Bordaz's ironic smile, which accompanied my touching credo, I mistook for sheer posturing.

What a jerk ...

Later, with the first disappointments, I thought that I'd gone about things in the wrong way.

I don't work hard enough – I told myself, as this is how I'd been taught to explain any failures of the members of this society. It didn't even occur to me to shift blame onto other people. It's my fault, and besides, everything will change soon and come back to normal – I kept repeating myself. I must double my efforts.

But three years of hard work didn't make me move forward by even an inch. The immovable wall of a kind, cold and definite “no, thank you” stands like in the past. The monolithic and cohesive wall of decision-makers, all of whom react in the same way: no.

The wall made of one block, completely insensitive to the swaggering postulates of pluralism. The wall that no dictatorship would have built higher by hitting people's heads with truncheons or hurling grenades with tear gas at demonstrators.

So, for three years I have been seeking an explanation, as I no longer believe that the reason for my problems lies in Beks's paintings or in the ineptitude of my endeavours to make him popular.

Today I certainly know that the “other” side is responsible in great measure.

But acquiring this certainty didn't bring me any intellectual satisfaction. Just the opposite. Instead of blaming myself, which I've been monotonously doing for three years, now I'm going round in circles, chasing my own tail, which I can't catch: because if the responsibility for my problems lies with this system, what are its mechanisms that I couldn't decipher before?

For the longer I observe it, the less I understand its dynamics and structure.

How is it possible that in the society which seems to have so many centres of power, so many political parties, decentralized television units or radio stations, there is so little space for a “different” vision of reality and “different” enterprises?

How come that having such a big number of museums and galleries, critics, painting salons, artists and aesthetic trends that prevail here, at the same time it offers so little space for a “different” art? In a word, how can this apparent diversity be reconciled with omnipresent identicalness, which is close to the resemblance of sand grains? I close my amazement in a form of two questions:

1. Perhaps this society is governed by real pluralism, but I’m too stupid to find a key to it?

2. Maybe it’s about a gigantic pack of lies?

These two proposals contain the crux of the matter that I’ve been revolving around for months. And I’m more and more inclined to agree with the second version.

As a result, I verbally attack the democratic-liberal propaganda, which reduces all human minds to the lowest common denominator, and the search for profit, which reduces all local people’s behaviours to the same lowest common denominator. This is the source of my curses, which I mumble after each new failure.

Above all, however, I’d like to understand how this huge impression of variety and freedom in the local system is born, lives and functions; the impression that nobody can resist, including me.

I’d like to understand how this machine is pushing forward, the machine which eliminates differences between people and their individualities in a painless way, without resorting to the slightest violence; what’s more, the machine which is enthusiastically applauded by the crowd and sometimes even by its own victims?

And yet, it’s enough to scrape off its varnish to find, under a shell of variety, a smooth, monolithic granite block which makes the fingers of all rebels slide down.

When I'm carried away by fury, because yet again somebody rejected my proposals, I accuse this system of lying and cheating. However, the truth is that I'm fascinated; fascinated by the devious tricks that even most critical minds fall for.

CHARGES, 4TH MAY 1986

Yesterday I spent all day fulminating. First of all, against the society, especially the liberal one. Next, I directed my imprecations at France and my accidental countrymen. But the ones I was shooting at were still too anonymous to be really insulted by my curses. Therefore, to aim better, I gave a few kicks to the local world of culture. As I didn't want to deprive them of the pleasure of being outraged, with particular intensity I spat at the people of art, the audience and collectors.

Like every educated person who screamed "guilty!" too early, today I feel sort of embarrassed, slightly remorseful and a bit ashamed. Wishing the whole thing to be quickly forgotten, I suddenly become conciliatory. I know, however, that a moment will come when I'll have to make a step further and openly apologise.

What's the point of waiting then? I'll do it straight away.

1. At the beginning, I have to admit that the very fact of drawing up the bill of indictment against the local world doesn't stand up to criticism:

a. Complaining about our neighbours and hurling insults at them makes us relaxed and relieves stress. It doesn't solve our problems, though. I do the same – crying up my sleeve and levelling charges against people, I calm down my nerves. It's a usual animal reflex.

It seemed to me, however, that having grown up, I'd begun to measure the intelligence of my neighbours who had difficult lives by the yardstick of their irresistible need to blame the others. I even took pride in having long ago surpassed the crowd that yells: "Death!". I thought that my little daily miseries stopped being a pretext for me to curse the environment. And now I see that I resort to the same common substitutes. Instead of asking: "what's the matter?", I immediately switch over to: "it's their fault", and instead of "I must manage somehow", I become intoxicated with making scenes to people.

b. The moment when I drew up the bill of indictment wasn't the best choice, either: much too early.

Those lessons of morality, good and bad grades I gave to various persons, assuming that I'd achieved a final victory and that "the guilty" had showed remorse. As a matter of fact, such things would only be acceptable if done by someone who was right against everybody when those who only yesterday opposed, now begged forgiveness.

Where is my triumph here? Who actually started: "*mea culpa*"?

As long as the configuration of forces is definitely to my disadvantage, it's better to keep silent, because my fulminating could only make its addressees have a good laugh.

In a word, it's still a long way to make a speech for the prosecution, because the trial has just started and right now witnesses are being examined. Proving the "guilt" of the others and my own "truth" is still far off.

2. As regards the heart of the matter:

a. Why not look at the people of art in a way prompted by common sense? What's the point in complaining about their incompetence and arrogance if they might genuinely not like this art? When galleries, museums, ministerial clerks or critics, in a word, those who live off art do not respond to my letters, do not have time to listen to me or serve me the ritual: "no, thank you", is this an irrefutable proof that all of them are lazybones and sectarians, incapable of loving art?

Perhaps their truth is really where they claim it is. Who knows? Maybe Beks's aesthetics seems really "decadent", "overtalkative", "anecdotal", "literary", "obsolete" or deadly grim to them? Perhaps in reality they are not a bunch of stuck-up turkeycocks and they really speak their minds?

I accuse them of talking rubbish. But if they are sincere and they really believe that Beks's paintings are "nightmarish"? Who knows, who knows? Perhaps they don't lie, and even are not mistaken? Maybe the reflex of disgust triggered by Beks's painting does not result from "I don't care about

anything” attitude, or from insensitivity to beauty? It might be simply a symptom of their faithfulness to the local aesthetics? Perhaps, all these French people of art, as they claim, are actually capable of experiencing emotions, and they don't lie saying that they detest Beks, and love for example Chagalle?

b. And the audience?

I accused it mainly of cheating, and then betraying me. It cheated me by flocking into Valmay's Gallery, by oohing and ahing, by writing laudatory hymns in the golden book and by congratulating me for many days.

And it betrayed me, because today all these people are keeping their mouths shut. There is not a single phone call, no letter, no request for the slightest information. As if all of them disappeared. Why would one become so euphoric to next vanish into thin air?

But didn't the audience behave just like it might have been expected to behave? And did it really dump me?

Of course, hadn't it been for the concert of raptures before and during the exhibition, I wouldn't have got trapped. I would have certainly adopted a different policy: cautious and long-term.

On the other hand, was the admiration of the audience really fake, and its betrayal evident? Do I have a right to blame ordinary lovers of art for first admiring, and then forgetting?

The audience might really be made up of people who admire what they are told to admire, while in actual fact they don't feel anything. Perhaps indeed, the audience is like a child who can't be reproached for first enthusing over a toy and later starting to play with another one? Maybe the audience only strolls around, here and there, just to pass the time? Should it be blamed because it looks for some entertainment? Because it talks rubbish and because no reasonable person attaches any importance to its admiration or fussy complaints? ...

As Pierre Brisset, an art critic, explained it to me, the audience came to the exhibition, because it was attracted by the publicity I'd given to it. In Brisset's opinion, nobody left me; simply the circus show is over, so the amusement is gone. It's my duty to organize it again. And then, like every child, the audience will come back to have a look again.

Yes, this is Pierre Brisset's explanation.

c. How about collectors?

I'm angry with them. I admit. All right, ministerial officials don't give a hoot about it and twiddle their thumbs, galleries only think how to make money, and the audience, like a donkey, comes, goes away, claps hands, forgets. But collectors? They should combine love for art with the passion for possessing it. You know the result, my Friend: I haven't managed to sell a single painting. Some of them even refused to accept paintings as a present.

But why should I blame them? Just because collectors in Poland are fighting over Beks's paintings irrespective of the price?

Firstly, at the beginning of Beks's career, his paintings were bought almost solely by the intelligentsia.

Neither private business nor the communist nomenclature sought after him at that time. Therefore, in the 1970s, almost exclusive buyers of the paintings by Beks were journalists, writers or film-makers. Actually, I know nearly all of them. And if at the beginnings of promoting Beks in France the intelligentsia representatives were not buying him, whose fault was it? Well, surely mine, because it was me who established the price of 340 000 francs for a painting! Has this group of people ever had the money to treat themselves to such a masterpiece?

And bourgeois? Both there and here, in Poland and in France, richies buy works of art to invest their capital. Let's take a Sinczak, for that matter, a market gardening businessman living near Warsaw. Did he buy four paintings by Beks to have a "soul-to-soul" dialogue with them? Even if he has an occasional look at them on Saturday evening, it's because he sees a pile of

gold dollars in it. He had no idea of the paintings. He even asked a painter to tell him which ones he should buy.

Why should I therefore blame French collectors for not hurrying to the cashier's window? They don't ask for anything else: they only need to be certain that a painter is famous. And if he is, they buy immediately, convinced that it's a good investment. It's my role to show them that buying the paintings is a good business for them.

What is then the preliminary conclusion of all that? As a matter of fact, the only person that I can bring charges against is myself: I hoped to achieve a quick, dazzling and spectacular success. I failed. Now, there's a long, patient and unrewarding work ahead of me, so I furiously attack the others. Actually, what's the point in taking people for what they really aren't.

3. But still, there is something sick about it, a faint smell of cheating.

And it wafts from the gulf dividing the local official propaganda from the real truth.

a. For the period of twenty two years that I've been living in the West, I've been instilled a conviction, which I faithfully passed on to my students without having thoroughly checked whether it is really right, that in "the system of democracy and pluralism" there is always space for the bloom of "one hundred flowers", because if one person refuses to help a new-born talent, the other one will help it. I even expressed it in these words in a conversation with Bordaz, that clerk from Pompidou Centre who had once foretold that I wouldn't find anybody who would agree to exhibit Beks:

- Fortunately – I ranted on with touching self-confidence – we live in a free, pluralist world. You can't ban other people from helping me. And even if twenty decision-makers such as you refuse me, I'll always find the twenty first one who will like this art and will agree to show it to the public.

I said all that with fervour, as it seemed so logical and rational.

Today I know it was rubbish, because this pluralism is a façade, and freedom – a deception. I’ve checked it on my own back. If you wish, my Friend, I’ll take off the shirt and you can count all scars on my back.

b. Secondly, this world doesn’t keep the promise that the fight for the first place will be based on strictly defined rules. Where is the respect for talent and work, for passion and dedication that I heard about hundreds of times? the omnipresent propaganda of this system extols the virtue of effort and promises a reward, enthuses over abilities and swears honesty. These are the principles it is allegedly based on.

Lie! Nobody here rewards the best ones and everybody cheats in the game. It’s enough to soar a little over this society to see how standardized and helpless it is at the bottom, and how exclusive and repressive it is at the top.

4. But if this is the reality, haven’t I had an opportunity to see it before? Didn’t I have enough time to find out that it is just a fable – a tale about fair-play competition, and that this reality actually resembles a scuffle with crowbars and hobnailed boots which inflict blows?

a. To justify my behaviour, I can say that at the beginning of my stay here I was a meaningless emigrant, who wasn’t allowed to take part in the game at all.

Later, being a student-worker-leftie, I rejected its rules in advance. I condemned this whole society from the only point of view I was interested in at that time: the point of view of a proletarian.

When life circumstances finally let me get into the “system”, I soon smelled a whiff of deception. However, I didn’t realize its dimensions at once. I continued my lonely life, which still depended only on myself. I admit, it doesn’t happen very often to live up to the age of forty in a protective shell without realizing the dimensions of everyday reality at all.

b. I admit that if I’d sooner plunged in that world of freedom and pluralism instead of teaching my students about it from the books written by

loners such as me, I would have recognized the shapes of things which surrounded me. And then I would have gone about my enterprise in a completely different way.

Yes, had I not lived, on my own will, through the first part of my life as a marginal individualist, I would have spared myself painful disappointments. Or their smaller doses would have sooner seeped in, like poison, to which I'd have finally become immune. At least, I wouldn't have naively drunk the content of the whole pot in one gulp, and today I wouldn't be writhing in pain.

What is the final conclusion then?

If we're talking about "guilt", it lies on both sides: this world doesn't observe the rules of the game, even towards those who accept it. But I was an utter fool that I didn't wise up to it.

COMMON SENSE, 5TH MAY 1986

- What? He doesn't like it? Get out of here then! He's come from Poland, yes? So let him come back to Jaruzelski, if he doesn't like living here in France. In Warsaw he will be fed up to the back teeth with pluralism he's so fiercely fighting for.

- But ...

- There's no "but". He should shut his gob and be happy that we've let him stay here. Other people aren't that lucky.

Well, of course. When this is said by real French democrats

WHAT WILL TIME CHANGE, 5TH MAY

If, instead of drowning my sorrows in ink, I started to complain aloud, I would seem ridiculously naïve to some people, because understanding the rules that a society is governed by when you are in your forties is rather embarrassing.

The others would say that the vices I attribute to this society are not typical of it. Simply “life’s like that”. It’s not the fault of either this country or its system that people are what they are – they have always behaved and they will behave like that.

Finally, there are all those people whom I personally offended. If they knew what insults I hurl at them on the numerous pages of these notes, they would simply smash me in the face.

To sum up, if I carelessly published this manuscript when I’m still alive, then out of 1000 readers:

- 950, after reading the last page, would mutter under their breath: “It serves you right, you stupid dick”.
- 30 would sigh absent-mindedly: “Well, it was an interesting enterprise. But that’s how it is”.
- 15 would sympathise with me: “It’s a pity. Poor guy But one thing must be said, he was extremely careless”.
- 5 would say: “If I’d been able to help, I would have helped him”.
- Nobody would lift a finger.

In one hundred years, however, when nobody will have an impression of being personally attacked by me any longer, because the time that will have passed will protect my readers from any responsibility whatsoever, these proportions are going to reverse.

Even the most hateful ones, all those Zadoras, Grympases, Mnières and other clerk scum that will be inhabiting the world of art in the 21st century will have a bragging contest who's better:

- That's unbelievable. Is it really true that Dmochowski failed because of such a stupid little thing? It's really unfair. If I'd lived at that time, I wouldn't have hesitated for a moment to give him our ministry's support in the promotion of this great painting.

It looks like those who inhabited this planet before us were blind.

Would I have bought all these paintings for our museum? All, all that I could buy! It's as if you asked me whether I would have bought paintings by Van Gogh when he was alive!

COMPLAINTS, 5TH MAY 1986

A grim, drizzly day.

1. Today it's Monday. Not Friday! I'm expecting a reply from the bank about my request to prolong the term of debt repayment and I ask myself the question: How long can one live in fear?

2. We've decided with Ania that there would be no exhibition in autumn. I have no money for it. Anyway, if it was to take place, the preparations should begin now.

3. In a week I'm going to Cannes, though I'm not sure what for. Who shall I meet, who should I invite to a screening and to a restaurant? I won't wriggle out of this form of humiliating corruption of the journalist rabble, although there's no guarantee it will come in useful. These people are so sought-after that even if one of them finally bothers to come and eat the dinner I've bought for him, he doesn't feel obliged to pass the information I'd like him to pass to the public, and just stuffs himself for free.

4. My complaints remind me of the incessant moaning of Mrs Malinowska, the mother of a friend from my young years, Marek Nowakowski, who has been paralysed for 25 years. Her each letter starts and finishes with a litany of miseries that have recently befallen her. At last, I stopped opening them, and now I read only five or six words which Mark is able to scribble and which are always optimistic and serene.

Who will find enough patience to listen to my endless groans?

ZERO AND NO, 6TH MAY1986

1. It seems to me that negation, that is “no” is an invention of man, just like zero is an invention of man, because neither “no” nor “zero” exist in nature. Nature can only exist, while “no” and zero are non-existence, that is, something beyond comprehension where only existence is possible. “No” is a part of every alternative (yes or no), and a choice is an attribute of consciousness and an element of human goals. Consciousness and goal, just like choice, do not exist in nature. Beyond man and social life “no” is nonsense. So is zero.

2. Man can only grasp something the principle and elements of which already exist in nature. Man comes from nature and belongs to nature, so he can't separate from it and create other principles, unknown to it; his only power is to get to know and reconstruct them. Everything he can do comes down to becoming an independent source of nature elements' movement and changing their moments, proportions and relations through his own choices. But apart from that, he cannot invent or create anything the principle and elements of which don't already exist in nature.

LETTER TO COMPATRIOTS, 7TH MAY 1986

In this morning's note devoted to the freedom of speech I announced that I would quote articles concerning the situation in Poland at that time, which I wrote in 1981 and 1982 and sent to the French press with a proposal of their publication. I'll quote them to show, in black and white, the huge gulf between the theoretical freedom of expressing oneself in this regime of liberal democracy and its practice, and to explain where this chasm originates.

Well then, first no newspaper wanted to publish my articles. My fight for their publication went on for months. In the end, after an endless war that I waged with "Le Monde" to morally force it to do that, it placed my articles on the page devoted to "Thoughts".

I claim that these articles were properly written and that the persistent refusal to publish them on the part of the press didn't result from the fact that "they were not good quality".

I even claim that anybody taking similar steps would have encountered similar difficulties.

I claim that these difficulties result from the fact that the demo-liberal press has robbed citizens of the freedom of speech, which it has misappropriated.

I claim that under the pretext that it would do it better, faster and more properly, the press turned the freedom of speech into a paid profession of journalists.

I claim that this way it deftly changed the issue of people's freedom of speech into the issue of gainful employment of journalists.

I claim that for the sake of its own pork chop defence (so much easier to understand and forgive than if it was about the confiscation of freedom ...) it doesn't let any competitor enter its own fenced off area.

Here is the first article published by “Le Monde” on 20th October 1981 (page 2), that is, just before general Jaruzelski introduced a martial law in Poland, on 13th December that year:

“Letter to Compatriots

Another pupil has joined the two hundred “Solidarity” members who handed in their resignation in protest against the extreme political line adopted by the first rally of the new trade union. Although this gesture doesn’t have any practical meaning, I also resign. Not my membership in “Solidarity” or the Party, to which I’ve never belonged. But I back out of the enthusiasm that overwhelmed me in the year of Polish renewal, the enthusiasm which carried away all Poles and all free people alike.

The maximalist tendency that imposed its political line on “Solidarity” during the debates of the first part of its rally in Gdańsk is now heading, probably without realizing it, for the confrontation with our eternal enemies: Prussians and Russians. This way not only all the benefits obtained in the fight of the whole nation for regime liberalization can be lost, but also the fate of the Polish state is endangered.

You must be outraged hearing such accusations from a countryman who doesn’t belong to the Party. But before you shout “treason”, let me tell you my four truths¹.

My first truth is that the pipe-dreams of a team of megalomaniacs who wanted to turn Poland into an economic power within ten years have now been followed by the pipe-dreams of a fraction of liberals who maintain that within a year they will make our country a model of democracy. The former led it to ruin, while the latter are leading it to a collapse.

Perhaps I’m a lousy countryman, but I know that if a nation for many years was anaesthetized, politically stupefied, cheated and deprived of any participation in power, which was the case of our country after 1945 and before, promising people that democracy will be tantamount to the freedom

to demand anything that comes to their heads and threatening with general strike over any little thing is simply a delusion.

My second truth is that everybody knows that the invariable aim of the Soviet policy in relation to the Polish state until 1943 was its destruction. First through the war, which took place in the years 1919-1921, then through partitions, like in 1939, by virtue of the Ribbentrop-Mołotow pact. But another commonly known thing is that in 1943 Stalin changed his mind. The twenty million killed Russians taught him that if he didn't want to fall victim to new aggression of the West, he would need a steel bolt: a strong Polish state ruled by ideological allies.

Therefore, it was him who, quite logically, in Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam demanded Silesia, East Prussia and boundary on the Odra and Nysa Rivers for Poland. With equal determination, Stalin allowed the withdrawing German troops to crush the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944, so that in Poland liberated by his army, after the Nazis were pushed back to the west, he could give back power to his political friends.

Well, the current policy imposed by the maximalists from Gdańsk, combined with economic bankruptcy caused by Gierek, plunges Poland into the state of permanent instability, which in the event of a confrontation with the West would allow the Polish bolt to be easily broken down. This way the existence of the Polish state would once more become politically and strategically useless for Moscow.

Apart from that, hostility towards Russians, incited by heated minds, is taking on the proportions which they can hardly tolerate. The profanation of monuments in honour of killed Russian soldiers, the threat of a general strike if the Russian tank from Westerplatte² monument is not removed are a moral slap in the face of the Soviet Union. The slap which has its well-founded justification in history, but – putting it mildly – is ill-timed.

In such a case, what political calculation will stop the Kremlin from returning to the old policy of the Polish state destruction once and for all, if

the state itself is falling apart, and at the same time has become openly hostile towards Russians?

My third truth – if you are already preparing for a war, you do so to win it, and not to die. Certainly, this won't be confirmed by the ones who in September 1939 had to attack German tanks with merely sabres in their hands – and on horseback, because they were all killed.

Well, now Poland is in a situation of not being able to put up the slightest resistance to a Soviet intervention even more than in 1939.

Ruined by the rule of Gierek, crushed under the weight of 145 billion francs debt, the return of which will surely be demanded by the West despite the words of encouragement and food support, Poland is just dying of starvation.

Its weaponry of Soviet origin relies completely on Soviet ammunition and Soviet spare parts.

As regards the military support from the West, it is known that there won't be any. In 1956 and 1968 the West proved that it observed the division of Europe established in Yalta to the letter. Just like the first time, when it didn't want to die for Gdańsk in 1939, it is not going to die for Gdańsk in 1981³.

Besides, Russians do not have to use heavy guns to crush us. They can simply pretend to be repairing the Friendship pipeline (sic!). Just like in the years 1948-1949, when they blocked West Berlin under the pretext of repair works on motorways leading from western occupation zones, tomorrow they may establish a power blockade of Poland. If this happens, our country, which depends on Soviet oil in 70%, will not have a drop of it. And there are winters when the temperature in Warsaw falls below 20 degrees. In such a situation bringing Poland to its knees is as easy as pie.

Finally, I have the fourth truth to tell you, even if you consider it not important. *Pacta sunt servanda*⁴.

The agreement dated 31st August 1980, freely negotiated by the strike committee of the Lenin Shipyard and Governmental Commission clearly states (part one, paragraph 2): “New trade unions (...) are not going to play a role of a political party. They accept (...) that PUWP (Polish United Workers’ Party) has a leading role in the state, and they are not opposed to the system of concluded international alliances”.

Well, although the government evidently is not going to keep the promise, according to which (part two, paragraph 2) “the activity of the radio, television, press and publishing houses will serve the pluralism of thoughts, opinions and judgments. It will be subject to social control”, this doesn’t justify the fact that the movement which was born in reaction to lie and contempt for the law is now showing contempt for its own solemnly given word. Isn’t it what the maximalist fraction of “Solidarity” is doing by striving to remove the statement on the leading role of the party from the trade union statute? the same fraction announces that since now on “Solidarity” will not settle for the role of a trade union, but it will demand the status of a “social movement”, which will allow it to become a competitor in relation to the authorities and the state.

In the end, the same fraction appeals to establish free trade unions in other socialist countries, which is a great thing in itself, but may be treated as a hostile act against Polish allies. At least you might suppose so when you recall how western countries accused Russia of breaking the alliance when, in the aftermath of the First World War, in which they were fighting by the side of Russia, they heard Bolsheviks appealing to workers in the West to propagate the revolution in their countries.

Let it be then; you may call me a fake Pole, serving Moscow, or even a traitor of the great cause. But from now on, gentlemen, we drift apart. I give up the role of a fervent adherent, whom I enthusiastically played for a year. I renounce Polish revival if you give it such a form.

¹“To tell somebody one’s four truths” (dire a quelqu’un ses quatre vérités) is a common French expressions, which means “give somebody a piece of one’s mind”

² Westerplatte was a military Polish post in the Free City of Gdańsk (Danzig). The Nazis’ attack on this post marked the beginning of the Second World War. A cross in honour of Poles’ heroic defence was erected in this place. Following a preposterous decision of the communist authorities, the cross was replaced with a Soviet tank.

³ There is an ironic saying in French “mourir pour Danzig?” (die for Gdańsk?), which means that just like in 1939 it was not worthwhile declaring war to Germany for their attack of Poland (hence, the “silly war” – drôle de guerre – from 1939 to May 1940), for France it is better not to meddle in foreign, distant and minor wars at all.

⁴ Pacta sunt servanda – agreements should be observed.

ARTICLE 28, 7TH MAY 1986

Below I quote the second text about the situation in Poland, which I wrote after the introduction of “stan wojenny” (“state of war”). It appeared in “Le Monde” on 2nd March 1982 in the “Thoughts” column. I had to call and write to the editorial office at least twenty times to have the article published.

Unfortunately, they took the opportunity to cut the text into pieces and change its message completely. The text which most eagerly welcomed the introduction of “state of war” by general Jaruzelski (who in the future will hopefully be paid due tribute for that) and thanked him for sparing Poland the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops, was turned into a neutral, dull text with no conclusions whatsoever, with which I don’t want to have anything to do either intellectually or morally.

Finally, I’d like to add that the Polish reader most probably will not understand much of this article, because it contains references to many facts within the scope of French constitutional law and the local political history, which are not known to the Polish public. Therefore, to simplify the task, let me tell you in advance that the aim of the article was to show that, contrary to the accusations of the local propaganda, general Jaruzelski didn’t commit a coup d’état and that, declaring “state of war”, the State Council made a legal use of a relevant regulation of the Polish Constitution as of 22nd July 1952. French “democrats” who claim that this regulation is anti-democratic should first recall that a very similar one is contained in their very “liberal” constitution as of 1958. In a word, “start cleaning in front of your own door”, as the local saying has it. That was the intentional message of my article.

And here it is:

From article 28 to article 16

Irrespective of the political aspects of the Polish crisis, there are a number of legal aspects which should be important to the French reader.

These aspects cast a new light on the dispute over the danger brought about by article 16 of the Fifth Republic's constitution. It has to be reminded that the article allows "stan wojenny" to be declared completely legally. This law is in every detail similar to the one introduced in Poland on the night of 12th/13th December 1981. Surprising as it might sound to anybody who doesn't know the constitution of both countries, general Jaruzelski made use of extraordinary measures in a completely legal way. And it is this legality that should be hereby proved.

The fact that Jaruzelski seized power in full compliance with the law can be proved as follows:

I. Did general Jaruzelski commit a coup d'état?

"Whoever misappropriates the sovereignty of the people shall be immediately deprived of life by free citizens".¹ You can hear French commentators claiming that by seizing extraordinary power general Jaruzelski committed a coup d'état, "coup de force" or staged a military putsch.

However, according to the definition quoted by M. Prélôt and J. Boulouis², "a coup d'état is an act of violence committed by one of the state governmental bodies against another one".³

This definition is best illustrated by the coup d'état staged by Louis Napoleon on 2nd December 1851. Then one governmental body, the Republic President, took over the whole power. He dissolved National Assembly, and a few months later received a hereditary emperor's title from the enslaved Senate. Admittedly, he apologised saying: "I went out of legality to come into the law", but nobody was taken in. It was a coup d'état.

In the case of Poland it's also about taking over the whole power by one of its bodies – the prime minister. We can hardly talk about a coup d'état, though, as there is no evidence showing that the investiture of general Jaruzelski at the head of WRON (the Military Council of National Salvation) was forced upon the State Council.

Also the term “coup de force” doesn’t seem to be fortunately matched. “Coup de force”, nowadays frequently referred to as a putsch so as to differentiate it from an anonymous rebellion, like the latter, is of private origin.⁴ It’s about an action such as the one launched by Babeuf or Blanqui some time ago. An example closer to us could be the putsch of Mussolini, who leading paramilitary units took over power in Italy after the march on Rome on 28th October 1922. This was a real case of “coup de force”.

To take over the state authority, general Jaruzelski didn’t have to rely on paramilitary private forces. Behind him he had the whole Polish army of which he was the head.

Briefly speaking, from the legal point of view, general Jaruzelski did not need to resort either to a coup d’état, “coup de force” or to a putsch. It was sufficient to comply with the Polish constitution. And this is what he actually did.

II. Did the State Council violate the constitution?

If there was no coup d’état or constitution breach on the part of general Jaruzelski, a question might be asked if the Polish constitution was not violated by the State Council itself, which allowed the general to seize power?

To this end, it’s necessary to quote *in extenso* article 28, which provides for such an eventuality.

„1. A decision on the state of war may only be taken in the event of an armed invasion of the Polish People’s Republic, or if international treaties require forces of particular countries to be joined in their common defence against aggressors.

2. The State Council can introduce “stan wojenny” in a part or all over the territory of the Polish People’s Republic if this is required by the country’s defence or safety. For the same reasons the State Council can proclaim partial or general mobilization”.

Having read this article, you may first of all figure out that the name which the French media hastily gave to the steps taken by general Jaruzelski

is wrong⁴. It's not about "état de guerre" (in the Polish text "the state of war"), but "stan wojenny". The expression "état de guerre" is reserved for the hypothesis referred to in paragraph 1 of article 28, that is, for the classic hypothesis of war declaration in relation to third states in the event of their invasion of Poland.

The reader's attention should be focused on paragraph 2 of article 28, referring to "stan wojenny", which was quoted by the State Council when it authorised general Jaruzelski to seize power.

That "stan wojenny" has little to do with the martial law, which is specified in the law dated 9th August 1849. On the other hand, "stan wojenny" from the point of view of article 28 of the Polish constitution should be compared with article 16 of the Fifth Republic's constitution.⁵

Just like in French article 16, a decision on the taking of extraordinary measures is entrusted only to the state head (the State Council is a collegial head of the Polish state). Such a decision can be taken at its sole discretion, even to a greater extent than in French article 16. It doesn't require a prior opinion of any organ, as is the case with the French constitution, demanding a preliminary opinion of the Constitutional Council. It doesn't impose the parliament's control on the executive power, as is required by art. 16 of the French constitution, which says that the parliament has to be automatically and immediately convened (though, frankly speaking, that control by the French parliament isn't worth much, since it cannot give a non-confidence vote to the government).

As regards the conditions which allow martial law to be proclaimed, in the Polish Constitution they are defined in an even more liberal way than in article 16 of the French Constitution. In particular, "the continuity of constitutional state authorities" does not have to be necessarily broken.

"The state defence and safety considerations" are sufficient for the State Council to proclaim martial law. Therefore, the Polish Constitution doesn't require an objective condition to arise so that the introduction of martial law could be justified. No menace, no situation, no damage threatening

the country's defences or safety specified by art. 16 of the French Constitution are required by art. 28 of the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic. The mere conviction of the State Council that – for the sake of the safety or defence of the country – it is necessary to resort to martial law is sufficient for such a decision to be deemed legal and compliant with the Constitution. It is therefore evident that the State Council cannot be accused of failure to observe the Constitution due to the introduction of “state of war” on 12th December 1981.

Just like the fact that on 23rd April 1961 general de Gaulle decided to resort to art. 16 couldn't be seriously called a state crime. The only charge that might be levelled is against the constitution itself, namely that the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic as of 1952 is too liberal in relation to the executive power. But the French Constitution as of 1958 could be accused of the same. Why don't we start with that?

1 Art. 27 of the French constitution as of 1789.

2 Institutions politiques et droit constitutionnel, Dalloz, 1978, p. 187

3 See also Curzio Malaparte, Coup D'état Technique, Grasset 1931.

4 M. Prélôt and J. Boulouis, op. cit., p. 186

5 In order to understand my references to the constitution of the Fifth Republic and comparisons to art. 28 of the constitution of the Polish People's Republic, it is necessary to quote in extenso art. 16 of the French constitution as of 1958:

“Lorsque les institutions de la République, l'indépendance de la Nation, l'intégrité de son territoire ou l'exécution de ses engagements internationaux sont menacés d'une manière grave et immédiate et que le fonctionnement régulier des pouvoirs publics constitutionnels est interrompu, le Président de la République prend les mesures exigées par les circonstances après consultation officielle du Premier Ministre, des Présidents des Assemblées ainsi du Conseil constitutionnel.

Il en informe la Nation par un message.

INHERITANCE, 7TH MAY 1986

For two and a half years I've been preoccupied with the following inheritance case: a Mr Karyś passed himself off as the sole beneficiary of his deceased brother. Basing on his untrue declaration and two false witnesses, he came into the inheritance. Having found out about that, the testator's two daughters, living in Poland, disclosed their identity and, through my agency, are demanding the legacy, to which they have full rights. My opponent's barrister fibs, gains time, requests the adjournment of trials and delays the screening of petitions. Finally, he loses in the first instance court. Promising not to file an appeal, he asks me not to notify the judgment so as to avoid running of a period. In return, he gives me to understand that we can reach an agreement if I help Karyś get the refund of the inheritance tax which he had to pay so as to come into the inheritance.

I agree.

For a year I fight with the revenue office to recover the said sum. They demand a number of documents from me, and some of them are in Poland. At last I have everything. I communicate this to the opponent party's lawyer, who informs me with calm cynicism:

- On second thoughts, we don't agree. Notify the judgment, please. We will appeal.

I notify the judgment then, and he appeals. This way I lose a year of my work and it's only because I trusted him and didn't demand the acknowledgement of the pledged agreement in writing. And now that he has appealed, I've got work for another two years.

Considering the new circumstances, this time it's me who proposes an agreement.

The new lawyer of Karyś, a woman for a change, finally convinces her client that concluding an agreement is the best solution for all of us.

Agreed. Agreement.

Coming back to the starting point, now I must recover the inheritance tax. The revenue office requests new documents from me, because a clerk has made a mistake, and actually the documents they need are quite different from the ones I delivered last time. To this end, I take a number of steps, chiefly in Poland. When I finally get them, the whole case has been going on for two years and a half.

Everything seems to be coming to an end; somebody from the tax office informs me by phone that the money Karyś paid for the inheritance will be transferred into his account in the bank of the Bar - CARPA, No. 2 Harley Street in Paris.

During the same conversation I give my interlocutor the details of my bank account and the bank's address. Apparently he gets it wrong, because Ten days later I get a letter in which I'm notified that "The applicant's request has been rejected. Reason: CARPA bank doesn't exist at 7 Harley Street".

Harley Street has three numbers. It's a small street at the back of the court building. As I said, CARPA is located at number 2. But the clerk doesn't call to check how the mistake occurred. He just rejects the whole request for money return.

Now I have to specify the address of CARPA and file a new request fulfilling all the formal requirements. It will be recorded in the district tax department, handed over to General Tax Management Office, sent to the State Treasury agent, and next submitted to National French Bank, which will issue a permit for transferring the money to the quoted address. All that will take at least another two months.

In the meantime, however, the opponent's party lawyer calls me in a hurry, saying:

- My client is dying. He's 85 years old. You understand. If the money doesn't arrive before his death, we'll have work not for two months, but for

two years, because the whole recovered sum will be included in the assets of inheritance and will be divided between three children of Mr Karyś and his brother's two daughters on the basis of an agreement. Provided that they come to an agreement. If not, we'll have to go to court again.

And indeed, two weeks later Karyś dies.

Just a phone call would have been enough. One phone call ... I'd have given the right number of CARPA bank and three days later everything would have been settled. No, the tax office clerk preferred to reject my whole request, thereby wasting two and a half years of my work.

France, France, how is it possible that you still stand on your feet, having such workers to support you?

FRIENDS, 7TH MAY 1986

- The girl is fifteen years old and doesn't care at all. She accepts life as it is. The boy, however, constantly hopes his father will call him on his birthday or will send him a postcard from holiday.

Ms Koucem is Algerian. She works as a waitress and cleaner in a primary school. I made her divorced a year ago. Today I accompany her in the notary's office, where we are settling some formalities related to the sale of her flat. Having left the office, for a moment we sit down in a café.

She's a calm person with a sharpened sense of justice. Throughout the divorce suit and now, when their meagre belongings are being divided, she thinks about her own and her children's interests as well as the interests of her husband. Seems strange given the fact that he made her life a misery, regularly beating her with a black cudgel, which made a strong impression on the judge when shown during the trial.

- No, the 60/40 division to my advantage, which you advise me, would be too much. He also had expenses. Let's divide it 50/50.

In a more melancholic and gloomy version, she's got the same generous soul as Bryński, a worker – jack of all trades in an advertising and photographic company in the 14th district of Paris. He's one of the few friends I have. Anyway, the only one who would rush to help if he saw me sliding down under ice. The only problem is that instead of a pole he could lend me a helping hand with the lowest possible salary.

I've often wished all people would die.

Oh, if only I had a way to annihilate the human kind, the earth would be cleaned of the most disgusting vermin walking on it – I often said to myself, gnashing my teeth when for the hundredth time during the day I found that my fellow-creatures were hideous larvae.

And the ones like Bryński too? – I then asked myself this question.

As long as he remains a model of fairness and generosity, like priest Peter (of course, with proportions kept between them), he interrupts my calm hating of the human nation.

At the same time he is funny, hilarious and always ready to mock himself; rather plain, almost bald, with a wrinkled face and bags under his eyes, he always smiles and wishes everybody well. Whenever I come to him, he's got some homeless Poles in his place. Sometimes he even sleeps on the floor, because he gives up his bed to a guest. He's a man of great heart, indeed.

When an angry waiter attacks him:

- Hey, grandpa, move!

He jumps:

- Grandpa? Me? Grandpa? Try to do that!

And in the middle of the café he shows off his favourite trick: doing knee bends on one leg. When he reaches the fifteenth, he bursts out laughing and asks:

- Do you want more?

Then the waiter tries to do at least four knee bends to save his face, but just after the third one he can't stand up from the ground. And the clash is over. They both laugh and drink beer together.

He's clownish and verging on quirkiness, but at the same time so funny, jolly and helpful that it's virtually impossible not to like him. So everybody likes him.

His French is terrible. One day, jibing at himself, he told a story how he'd walked down the ladder in an elderly lady's flat, which he was painting, and how he'd told her in a serious tone:

- Madam, now we must make l'amour.

- What are you talking about, Mr Bryński? Are you crazy? Mur, not l'amour!¹— responded the lady, who fortunately had some linguistic intuition.

The good old sole is not stupid at all. He passed secondary school final examinations and can organise his matters. He was 49 when he came to France. Over the next four years he found a flat for himself and a steady job, he obtained a stay permit and started living with a Polish woman, Ania, with whom he's deeply in love.

His only vice is: jealousy and national pride.

He turns into a biting scorpion whenever he discovers that Ania (55 years old) betrayed him with a young man from the street, whom he took in the day before.

He also forgets about his kindness completely if somebody hurts his fanatical patriotism or speaks well of communists.

In such cases Mr Bryński loses all of his sense of humour.

1 the dialogue is based on a play of words – in French „l'amour” means „love”, whereas „le mur” means „wall” – translator's note.

MORBIDE, 9TH MAY 1986

The most frequent word that the French use to describe Beks's painting when they don't like it is "morbide". It's untranslatable into the Polish language, but means something like "obsessive thoughts revolving around death" or "pathological love for death".

So, the charge levelled against Beks's painting by his French opponents is the fact that he constantly relishes death.

Maybe. But few artists can achieve such truth, such drama and such authenticity when describing the atrocities of life.

For the human work will not be authentic unless it is bathed in the tears of its author.

Well, it's obvious to me: a real masterpiece will never be created by someone who doesn't tell the truth. And the truth is tragic. Tragic because of the fatalism of life; the fatalism of human existence; the fatalism of our presence here and the presence of our fellow-creatures' hideous faces around us. The truth is tragic because of our overwhelming desire for death which we fear at the same time. Tragic because of the rare happy moments, which soon turn into sobbing.

A great human masterpiece can only be created by someone who desires to clear his heart of despair that he can no longer bear: someone who sets out to explore the recesses of death so as to tear out the pain strangling his chest.

In this search he will discover the labyrinth of his own soul, its hideouts, places of torture, locked cells, huge and small, dark, bricked up, where next to each other lurk the fear of fellow-creatures and a deep craving for their presence.

Oh, how I wish I could unlock those cells for a while and let out the torrents of my hatred for the human race ... Fill them with a short

moment of hope ... For an instant dream about the unattainable love of thy neighbour. And thus find out the truth: this underground tortured world, marshy, filled with the apprehension of the human face and the hope for its smile.

Few people have the guts to say aloud that it's impossible to live a life. Even fewer dare to describe the abomination and beauty of death.

UNDERGROUND, 11TH MAY 1986

The crisis is pushing the youth to the underground. In the past young people used to hurry through corridors. Today they come here to kill the time. Hale Station is a meeting point for dozens of young immigrants, boys and girls, frequently dressed in the style of Afro-Americans. From morning till evening they hang around platforms with radios or musical instruments. At RER station in Saint Germain en Laye, in the corner, next to the photocopier, camps a small group of drug addicts.

The musicians who come to breathe in the rotten air pumped by fans from the streets at the height of pavements and car exhaust pipes are also different than in the past. There used to be teenagers singing songs and accompanying themselves on guitars. They usually played badly, collected a few coins and went on somewhere else. Today these are elderly people, in suits and ties, who properly play various instruments, performing classical music. Probably they are unemployed professional musicians forced to earn their living this way.

Also beggars populating the corridors of Parisian undergrounds are different than usual. Although they stretch out their hands in the same way, they stand out against ordinary tramps, as they are shaved and dressed in clean clothes.

On the line Saint Germain en Laye-Etoile a well-built man sometimes comes into a wagon. He quickly recites a text that he's learned by heart:

- Ladies and gentlemen, please forgive me for frightening you. But I'm neither a thief nor a rapist, and surely I'm not a burglar ... etc.

Then he stretches out his hand. People know him and don't give him anything, which invariably makes him furious. He then uses a thick stick, resembling an axe handle, and with all his might bashes the seats and metal

parts of the wagon. He forgets his worn-out speech, the words of which are now hard to understand, and starts yelling very clearly:

- That's you the French! No solidarity! a poor unemployed man may die of hunger and drown in shit etc.

People lower their eyes and pretend not to see anything. Everybody is terrified at the thought that their eyes might meet with his and the man could concentrate his anger on them. But he usually leaves at the next station, not having got a single franc, and with his stick keeps beating everything he finds on the platform.

Long time ago, in the wagons appeared little Yugoslavian gypsies, whom parents sell to slave owners. It's impossible to assess their age, because they could equally well be children or midgets. Incredibly ugly, somewhat aggressively they shove a creased piece of dirty paper right in front of people's faces. It says: "I'm hungry and want to come back to my country".

If somebody gives them a coin, they don't thank or smile, because they know perfectly well they will have to give it back to their owner on the same evening. They usually walk in a group. Some of them hold a newspaper. On such occasions, people who know the underground prefer to change the wagon, as the said newspaper is used by the children to cover their hand when they are putting it into a victim's pocket. Every careful traveller can easily recognise them. Little gypsies, however, don't rob the ones for whom their procedures are clear. They almost always clean out tourists' pockets. Caught in the act, they get a few strong blows in the head and next are handed over to the police. But they are usually released after a few hours. The official reason is that it's impossible to state their age and they seem too young to be taken to court. In fact, however, it's because the police and courts know that they are slaves and there's no point chasing them. Their owners aren't chased, either, as the slaves will not give them away, just like prostitutes will not betray their pimp, and beaten children will not betray their parents-torturers. These little gypsies don't speak French or pretend to not understand the questions they are asked.

GREAT FILMS, 9TH MAY 1986

1. Yesterday was the beginning of the festival in Cannes, which started with *Pirates* by Polański, the film not included in the contest.

Just after it hit the screens in Paris, like everybody else, we went with Ania to see it. Well, a nice and quite funny movie, with a few rare scenes of typical “Polański’s humour”, like the dinner with a rat and the conversation on a raft. However, I don’t understand why 200 million francs was spent on it. And I’m convinced that the film surely wasn’t worth the fame of its author. There’s nothing devilish about it, no anxiety or mystery. Just an average film in the Hollywood style for wide audiences. It is such films that are granted popular awards like Oscars or Césars.

Each time I come across something like that, I understand a little bit better what Wajda wanted to say when I asked him why he hadn’t emigrated to the West:

- Why? – he answered. – Firstly, in my age you think of a place to die rather than to live. Secondly, what for? To make movies in the style of Polański? Admittedly, he makes them better than Western directors, but this kind of films doesn’t satisfy me.

2. However, the most important things, as usual, come from the Soviet Union. Supposedly a state of people’s democracy, to its very core, this country is in fact ruled by elites. Therefore, money and the opinion of a crowd constrain an artist to a lesser extent (provided that an artist doesn’t threaten the nomenclature or the system). Fortunately, some of these films sneak through the censorship of their police and through the censorship of demo-liberal propaganda and money in France.

In particular, I have in mind the film by German “Twenty Days without War”. We went to see it in “Cosmos” cinema, the day before “Pirates” hit the screens. Despite making efforts to calm down, at a certain moment I had

to hide at the back of the room (which was almost empty, anyway) so that nobody would see I was crying. It had already happened to me when I was 15 years old. Just like this one, it was a war movie. And it was also Soviet, “Fate of a Man” by Bondarchuk, based on Sholokov’s short story.

Showing tears in public has always seemed preposterous to me, as I’ve got an impression that only the innocent have a right to cry. Anyway, I heard that Franco snivelled too when he signed the death sentence for Basque terrorists. Which didn’t prevent him from asking why there were so few of them on the list.

MEMORIES, 9TH MAY 1986

I'm going to Cannes.

What for?

I don't know.

This is the last chance journey for the film. Nobody wants it. So, if I don't manage to set it in motion using the dynamics of the festival in Cannes (although it will be screened in the most modest and least known competition: the "Perspectives of French Cinema"), it will die a natural death.

I would like to protract the waiting, wait a little bit longer, prolong the hope.

What shall I do in Cannes?

Again, I ask myself a question without an answer.

I don't have a hotel room for the first two nights or money. What shall I do then? Sleep on the beach? For months it hasn't stopped raining, except 1st May. Nights must be cold, even in Cannes. Sleeping on sand with my kidneys is out of the question. Especially that young people who do it in July or in August bring sleeping bags and blankets with them. And I don't have anything like that.

Therefore, *toute proportion gardée*, I'm again in a situation resembling that twenty three years ago.

Because I first arrived in Cannes in 1963. At that time I was a 21-year old student who came for holiday straight from Poland (after a month spent in Paris). Princess Czetwertyńska-Grocholska, the owner of "Caldana" villa on the "California Hill", for whom I was a poor, distant relative, showed me a shed by the entrance to the park where I was supposed to sleep on a carpet folded in four. Once I was even invited to table.

For some time I lived off the money I'd saved up in Paris, where I worked black painting flats.

Three weeks later I had no more money. Since I was physically strong, I decided to look for a job at a vegetable market. After I fruitlessly proposed help to different truck drivers for a few hours, I finally found a chauffeur who told me to unload his lorry. The job was easy, but what I could hardly swallow was the fact that for all-night work I earned ... one franc. One single French franc. A baguette cost 46 centimes at the time. In the morning I sat on the kerb behind a storage yard and burst out crying.

So now, twenty three years later, I will have to come back to that place and – I repeat – *toute proportions gardée* – find myself in the same situation.

However, a time will come when I triumph over you, paid journalist trash and always busy sectarian culture clerks. A time of my triumph will come, even if I'm dead by then.

Like the protagonist of "Papillon" by Henry Charrière, from the depths of the grave I will shout to my torturers:

- Yet I'm still alive, to your confusion, scumbags!

CLERKS AND AUDIENCE, 10TH MAY 1986

1. I would like to find out what a clerk, for example a museum curator, the head of a department in the Ministry of Culture, or an employee of another office dealing with art propaganda, is doing when he receives my documentation about Beks.

What does he think? What does he say to himself while opening the morning mail? Does he read my letter and leafs through the pages of the brochure? What does he feel looking at the reproductions? Does he pick up the receiver to phone anybody? Or does he call his friend from the neighbouring desk to tell him: Come here to have a look. It's interesting.

Or perhaps he puts the documents aside into a pile, which has already built up for a week, telling himself: I have no time now. We'll see later.

Maybe he has a quick glance, finds that it's yet another applicant asking for support and mechanically throws the documents into the dustbin?

Or perhaps he mumbles:

- That's not bad, but not our style.

Does he like it? Doesn't he? And if he does, where does he find an intellectual alibi to reject my request, anyway?

His world is a mystery to me, like the world of Mars, inscrutable. There is a huge chasm between us: a sheet of paper. A white rectangle containing three ritual sentences:

“We hereby acknowledge the receipt ...

We regret to inform you that ...

With best regards ...”

A non-transparent sheet of paper through which it's impossible to see what happened on the other side before the secretary typed the letter, before

the clerk signed it and before the correspondence department put the letter in an envelope, addressed and sent it.

2. But these people don't have a trunk instead of a nose, or one eye in the middle of their foreheads. In the street they don't stand out from other representatives of our kind. They seem to be similar to the audience, which is fascinated by this painting.

For example, the two men I met during yesterday's dinner at Amrams. One of them was an elderly, witty, intelligent and educated man. The other one – a young, smiling, nice lover of music. Two people straight out of the public, but also resembling hundreds of clerks to whom I wrote, asking them to exhibit Beks, to buy a painting by Beks or just see me about Beks's matters.

But these two kept flooding me with questions for long forty minutes. They watched documentation, "Penthouse" and the brochure, returned to the initial questions and leafed over the documents again.

Ania often accuses me of taking the floor away from people and forcing them to listen to my monologue about Beks. So, when talking yesterday, I deliberately interrupted myself every three or four seconds to let my interlocutors slip another topic when I kept silent, thus allowing them to change the topic of conversation. They persisted in resuming it at the same point where I stopped it and asked me questions again.

The truth is that before I showed them the documentation, Roby spoiled it a bit, because he revealed his own impressions on the paintings he'd seen in my place. The reception was multi-national: French, Jewish, Greek, Romanian, English and Polish. At a certain moment he started in Greek and after a while switched over to French, to finish in English:

- ... and when I saw these paintings at Ania and Peter's flat for the first time ... I tell you that in English: it was horrible, fascinating, tremendous talent, grotesque.

At the end of the dinner, the mystery of “clerks and audience” was even more mysterious to me than at the beginning.

3. During the breakfast I come back to the comments. Ania takes the opportunity to reproach me:

- It seems to me that quite a lot of people don't like this painting, but only clerks are in a situation that lets them say it openly. The others might also show you what they feel if, before showing them the paintings, you'd spare them that empty introduction of yours. Art critics and clerks don't give you any opportunity, because they simply don't want to see you. But if you stopped terrorizing the audience with your passion, people might react in the same way as clerks and journalists.

I deny with energy:

- Firstly, when I write to ministries and museums to promote Beks, I also give them that empty introduction, as you put it. Besides, you ascribe more strength to me than I really have. If you think that people would be afraid of telling me what they think of Beks's paintings just because I look at them menacingly, you are wrong. Anyway, did I terrorize our yesterday's interlocutors with anything? It's a fib.

But Ania, having already forgotten about the pretext of clerks, keeps attacking me:

- You must call Aneta and Roby to thank them for yesterday's evening.

And when I pick up the receiver, she adds:

- Taking the opportunity, ask them if you didn't bore them with Beks yesterday. And then we'll see.

This is exactly what I was going to do. I therefore turn on the telephone loudspeaker so that she can hear what Aneta and Roby will answer me. When I utter the most important sentence: - I hope I didn't bore you with my Beksiński – without any communicating with each other whatsoever, they both say almost the same:

- Just the opposite. You added flavour to the conversation. What you said was very interesting. Very. The other guests left just after you and we didn't have an opportunity to hear their comments. But you really made us interested.

Then Roby comes back to the impression that Beks's painting made on him when he saw it for the first time in our place, three years ago:

- I'm not a specialist, but I was simply fascinated. Some paintings I would like to have. Others – not. But everything was unusual.

I hang up and ask Ania:

- And what will you say now?

- What do you mean? – she asks defending herself. – What they talked about doesn't refer to Beks's painting. Yesterday they were interested in what you were telling them and in your idol. But they didn't say anything about the painting. That young guy only asked you a couple of times whether Beks had been in Auschwitz. But he didn't say even once that his painting was remarkable.

- OK, let it be. But I don't say it, either. I only claim that the audience is fascinated by this painting. I don't insist that people adore it. But the clerks turn me out as if they didn't have any feelings about it.

4. I have one more, perhaps the hundredth proof of the audience's fascination, quite fresh: about four days ago I witnessed an even exaggerated reaction from the owner of a photographic studio, which I visited to have prints of some film shots made, so that I can take them to Cannes.

He was a little old man, with a body twisted by rheumatism, in dusty glasses, but intelligent and astute. He didn't see the film when I brought and handed it to his employees a few days ago. But while checking the prints, he got intrigued by the tango and hearse scene. Little by little, as befits a good travelling salesman, I led him to the topic of Beks and found an opportunity to show him what I had with me. Seeing the reproductions, the old man reacted like in a grotesque, moving from one corner to another to find better

lighting and to have a closer look. He watched them for at least half an hour (maybe more). What he said was all the more pleasant for me because it revolved around painting, the construction and the quality of painted matter etc. As for the contents, he absent-mindedly mumbled something only once, when his daughter, having had a glance, said: "it's full of death".

- Yes, it's quite deadly.

Then he immediately came back to the technical side, telling me about a sculptor who in granite obtained the softness and lightness of folds similar to that in the painting which I call "Veiled Madonna" or "Madonna with Child".

5. Now, after all these reactions of the audience, so similar, if not identical with one another, which I observed during and after the exhibition, can you explain the functioning of a clerk's brain to me, my Friend? What paths does he roam before he finishes each conversation with the ritual "no, thank you"? Why on earth isn't he fascinated by this painting like the audience is? How come that he has no need to show it to others as soon as possible?

Well, let's assume that the audience "buys daubs in Montmartre and loves the painting which it is told to love" and one shouldn't attach much importance to its opinion, as Claude Minière, a high-rank official in the Ministry of Culture, put it. Parisian decision-makers, however, must be Martians who have a Martian idea of art.

BROERS, 11TH MAY 1986

When I'd already drawn up a bill of indictment against somebody, the slightest sign of his remorse or the faintest doubt about his guilt was enough for me to back out. Then, on second thoughts or at the prompting of a third person, I gave up lofty feelings and came back to the initial conviction that I was dealing with a scoundrel.

1. I receive a quite long letter, in which Maf Broers apologises to me for not being able to exhibit Beks. In a seemingly sincere tone, tinged with bitterness, he tells me about the difficulties that forced him to take such a decision. For the first time a decision-maker apologises to me for the reasons of his refusal.

Maf Broers is the owner of "Antique Unique" gallery in Dal, near Oslo in Norway.

A long time ago, in reply to his request (addressed to Beks, who sent it to me), I agreed to organise an exhibition in his gallery. Jasia Januszewska, who lives in Oslo and is an ardent fan of Beks, went to see Broers to tell me what impression he'd made on her. The test result seemed positive. She reported that he was "a young, enterprising and positive guy". And most importantly, a lover of this painting.

Which doesn't change the fact that his drawn-out silence after my letter first surprised, and then annoyed me.

At a certain moment, angry at not having heard a single word from him, I told Jasia on the phone that even if Maf Broers finally replied me, I wouldn't agree to cooperate with him, anyway.

- A serious man doesn't leave you without an answer for six months – I told her.

Actually, it's the same charge that I levelled against Ms Georgiades, who was recommended by Krzysztof Krzyżynski, despite the fact that both

Krzyżyński and Jasia assured me their friends were rushing off their feet to find some patronage and organise exhibitions of Beks's paintings in the States and in Norway.

- If they don't write, it's because some people like epistolary art, while others don't.

- Besides – added Krzyżyński – I must confess that one doesn't feel like writing to you. I understand the silence of my friend, Ms Georgiades. Sometimes you assume an official pose even in relation to people favourably inclined towards you. Promotion of painting may become a question of big money, but at the beginning it's always the matter of good relationships and liking. And people don't have much liking for you, sir.

Let's come back to the most important thing: for a long time I've wanted to discover the way of thinking of the gallery owner who, after a many-month delay in replying to my proposal to exhibit Beks, when asked once more, answered: "no, thank you".

After I'd read Maf Broers's letter, the first thing that crossed my mind was that I'd finally found out: this refusal is neither as simple nor as fast, or as thoughtless as I usually viewed it; before he gave a negative answer, he'd thought three times about it.

Well, while reading his letter I find (and at the beginning don't believe it) that before Broers wrote me the ritual "no, thank you", he'd made the same attempts as I did, though on a smaller scale, and he'd gone through the same disappointments. According to what he says in his letter, it was only at the end that he gave up his efforts and, just like me, became pessimistic about the whole thing.

Moved by this letter, I think – let me repeat – that from now on I'll have to add much water to the vinegar which I usually pour over traders, culture officials and art critics for their canonic "no, thank you".

But these sincere feelings don't last long. Only after an hour, Ania's little intrigue makes me change my mind again and come back to the starting point.

2. Because having read Broers's letter, Ania smiles and doesn't hide her doubts about the nobility of the author's intentions.

- He weaselled out of it – she says, having finished reading the letter.

And when playing the role of *advocatus diaboli*, I start to defend Broers, she reminds me that although he knew about my living in Paris, he first turned to Beks, hoping to omit me and get the paintings cheaper this way, because he would buy them first-hand and in Polish currency. Actually he was completely wrong about it, because wily Beks had already demanded his pay in bucks for quite a long time.

- Besides, the whole story reminds me of Veronèz – adds Ania. – Just like him, this one hoped to have a little but sure profit without investing. Your conditions would force him to take risks and incur expenses. And he doesn't want it. What a hypocrite! With that pseudo-sincere letter of his. As a matter of fact, he only wants to leave his options open in the future, just in case

Listening to her with a growing interest, I want to find out why Ania assumed that prosecutor's tone. Ania, who usually goes to extremes trying to acquit people and making me responsible for my own problems ...

Yes, being increasingly prone to agree with her, I'm at the same time curious what provoked such a bad temper and dogged determination of hers. The trick that Broers wanted to play on me can't have been the only reason. I'm sure of that. Ania seldom becomes aggressive, even if she discovers that somebody had bad intentions.

I soon find the key to the riddle: in his letter, probably without realizing it, Broers carelessly labels Beks's painting as "morbide". Well, it's like a red rag to a bull for both Ania and me.

- "Morbide"? – she asks, moving on to the heart of the matter. – He writes that it's "morbide". And their Munch? Isn't he "morbide"? We could argue

about “*morbidité*” in Beks, but in Munch’s painting it’s blatantly obvious. A girl lying on her deathbed, or a woman in the last stage of tuberculosis – isn’t that “morbid”? Why does he talk such rubbish that “*morbidité*” is a problem for Norwegians. Actually, I repeat, he hoped to have a small exhibition, just like Veronèze, without any expenses. He wanted to experiment a little bit, because he’s a beginner, even if he claims that he’s already exhibited famous names. You are forcing him to have an exhibition in your way, and that’s too risky for him. Lower the prices, don’t make him advertise the exhibition or produce an expensive catalogue and you’ll see how fast he’ll come back to you, no matter if this painting is “morbid” or not.

- You can’t imagine how pleased I am with what you’ve told me – I answer Ania. – You’re right about Maf Broers, just like you were right about Veronèze. That confirms me in my belief that all people are scoundrels. Like every certainty which has been confirmed, also this one cheers me up. Thanks.

Giving up my temporary surges of lofty humane feelings, I come back to the comfortable, warm feeling of hatred.

FREEDOM 1, 12TH MAY 1986

When you look at things from a certain point of view, everything comes down to this short sentence: “To be able to do what man wants”.

It’s a banal sentence which we unknowingly repeat many times during the day. But just like other daily sentences, it contains the whole mystery of the universe.

Because:

“to be able to” – meaning what?

“to do” – meaning what?

“what” – meaning what?

“man” – meaning what?

“wants” – meaning what?

To be able to – and not have to. To be able to and have necessary means. To be able to dream. Legal possibility and material possibility. To be able now, immediately or in many years’ time. To be able to do everything or to be able to do something a little bit. Acquired “being able” or achieved “being able”. To not be able. An illusion of being able. Possibility and a ban. Power...

To do – or only to talk, write or think? To be compelled to do versus desire to do. To do in order to achieve a result or to do on principle. To do versus prevent other people from doing. To do noble work and to do lousy work. To refuse to do. To ban doing. To suffer for what one has done ...

What – everything and nothing. Can I do this? What is legally banned and what is demanded by morality? What is unacceptable? What is “constitutionally guaranteed freedom”? It’s like an ordinary lack of contraindications. What is organised and what is undetermined? What is impossible and what is not wanted ...?

Man – I, you, he, we, you, they. A particular man in a particular situation versus abstract Man. A man – a human like “human rights” and a man in a striped uniform. “Man – how proudly it sounds!” a collective man versus an individual man. A man equal to another man or a man not equal to another man. A man that I would like to become and a man that I have nothing to do with. A man lying on the ground. A man who has been deprived of his freedom, property and life. Humanity ...

To want – and to be aware of wanting. To want unknowingly. To want and to need. To want theoretically and to want in reality. To not want. To want but not be able. To want everything. To want nothing. To want too much. Free will ...

Each of these words contains a tangled, mysterious world of nameless things, each of which has a different world in itself. And yet, the moment the lips say this sentence, our mind picks up its all potential meanings, which the hand and tongue have not been able to express for ages.

FREEDOM 2, 12TH MAY 1986

“Oh, beloved freedom!”

How ironic!

For to be free means just the opposite - to constantly receive orders. Orders from oneself.

And the more I crave for freedom, the more the obedience of my own will turns it into slavery. Then my only wish is to become my own lackey. How is being your own lackey superior to being a lackey of somebody else? My freedom would be noble if the master I want to serve was a remarkable ruler. Is he? Can I be proud of myself, at least a little bit? Because when I say “me”, I mean my passions, my weaknesses and my desires. Is there anything I could boast about?

People usually think highly of themselves. Choosing their own will to be their boss seems very precious to them. Only the one who has discovered his loves and his bad habits; only the one who doesn't have recognition or understanding for himself knows that freedom in fact resembles prison.

I love my freedom not because I want to be happy, but because I want to escape suffering. My passions keep pestering me, so in order to run away from them, I try to satisfy them. Is there anything divine in escaping from torture?

For this is what searching for freedom really is.

We love freedom because we love ourselves. But we love ourselves because we don't know what we are made from.

“To be oneself!”

“To do what one wants!”

“To be free!”

Only unfamiliarity with your own self justifies these interjections. When you don't know yourself, you love yourself. And when you love yourself, you want to be obedient to yourself.

But freedom is not a creation of love. It doesn't choose a god to be its master. It's only a fruit of fear. And the one who gives it orders is a hideous creature: myself.

Real freedom would be to not love oneself and to stop being obedient to oneself, because one has stopped being afraid of oneself.

But could I avoid pursuing freedom if I realised the existence of its hidden coil springs? My internal imperatives? My desires and my fear? Myself?

Yes, if, having explored my own self, I could refuse to obey myself.

Unfortunately, I don't believe it. Because freedom doesn't owe much to getting to know oneself. Knowing who I am influences my desires only to a little extent. As I've already said, my will has only one goal: to liberate me from suffering caused by my passions. Knowing what hurts me does not free me from pain. I can't dodge myself or avoid the reason for my eternal escape: the fear of suffering. Just because I know why I run doesn't mean that I will refuse to obey myself or that I will stop running. Misery will not leave me just because I have discovered its reasons. They will chase me, not until I get to know them, but until I satisfy them. Discovering them will not help me to not want, to suppress wanting or to want something else than what I want.

Oh, no, I know the pursuit of freedom too well to not know that it will finish only when I find peace of mind, that state of non-suffering, non-desire, non-me. In other words, the state of non-wanting. The state which will make all my passions finally disappear: the state of death.

Only then will I achieve freedom.

COMPENSATION, 14TH MAY 1986

What I see in front of me compensates for all my hardships and anxieties.

A person who came from Poland a few days ago brought me the ektachromes of new Beks's works. The works themselves are waiting for me in Warsaw.

What wonderful paintings! Wonderful! How could Earth be still revolving around the Sun if the audience couldn't admire them?!

This figure in a purple gown, with a bonnet on the head, these two busts with popping out eyes, that strange umbrella with many hands, that scarecrow walking away amid leaves blowing in the wind, that terrible car swaying on a bush and that woman, Nike of Samothrace, a frequent theme in Beks's painting; I've already got two variants of this theme, this time with a midget's head on the right side ... Altogether fourteen paintings, seven of which are wonders of the world!

I'm on a train going to Cannes. Excited by a small parcel in my hand, which I incessantly observe against the light, move, put away, put elsewhere and once more view against the light from the window, almost forgetting why I'm going there. But if this journey is not successful, I won't be able to organise another exhibition.

I must, I absolutely must sell the film so that people can see these treasures in the autumn!

TERRORISTS, 14TH MAY 1986

Terrorists, just like hijackers, seem to have no imagination. Or they are slow in getting ideas.

I often observed that on television, especially hijackings. A crowd is moved back to a safe distance, and sharpshooters take their comfortable positions on the roofs. Then hijackers turn into rabbits. It's enough if one of them sticks his head out of the plane and he immediately becomes a shooting target. For a lurking hunter it's an exciting moment. The head of a pirate is moving in the viewfinder and bang, the bullet is in this head. I've often seen it.

And yet the principle which I frequently follow: "when falling down, pull your enemy into the precipice with you" should have put them on the right track: to chain to the victim with handcuffs and in the other hand hold a grenade with its pin pulled: you shoot, I fall, he blows up.

No, I exaggerate, hijackers and pirates are not stupid. It would be unfair to say that. But they think slowly.

So at last they also discovered what I'd already invented many years ago. Have you seen, my Friend, those two criminals who took the presiding judge hostage? I guess it was in Toulouse. It looked exactly as I'd thought: one hand attached to the judge by means of handcuffs, and a grenade in the other hand. Undefeated. Unless you write off the judge.

However, there are better and more effective ideas. They will get them one day, you'll see.

So, picture yourself, my Friend, a hostile country. A country to which you want to do as much harm as possible. Why not France? It's not about a little harm that will soon be forgotten, but slow and, preferably, most painful agony.

In what way?

“Drop a thermonuclear bomb” – you will answer me, pleased with yourself because you guessed it so quickly.

Nothing of the kind, you are wrong. Right now only a few countries have it. It would be immediately known where it came from and where the same one should be sent in reply. The account would be squared very soon.

Terrorism is something more: it's not known who blew up a police station or who was trying to shoot the archduke in a carriage, and who should be punished.

At the same time, however, terrorism is not very effective. You can kill several hundred travellers by planting a bomb at the railway station, but how can you wipe out a whole nation, if there are only fifty assassins?

Fifty? Why so many? Twenty are enough. Twenty determined people against fifty five million Frenchmen would be more than enough. Twenty sons of Allah or of Revolution, twenty kamikazes. That's all. They don't need machine guns or trucks loaded with dynamite. Twenty flame-throwers are enough.

I must first make a few introductory remarks. Forgive me, I'll be quick:

A “country”, you know it better than me, my Friend, a “nation” is first of all a collective soul and a shared language, a shared past and future, a memory of glorious feats of our ancestors and joint plans for our children. The term “nation” includes objects of worship that we are proud of and famous names, which are close to us, in our shared language. This is what you call a “nation”. There is no nation if there are no great moments of glory, no common cultural heritage and no artistic riches, which belong “to us”.

Just think, what do you have in common with that bloke walking down the street? the one in a navy-blue Basque cap, with a baguette under his arm ... You've never talked to him and you will never have an opportunity to do so. You don't even know his name. And yet, who knows, maybe one day you will fight, or even die for him? So what is this strong and mysterious link between you? What's this thing that makes both of you feel French?

I've already said and I will repeat it: this thing is delicate, nice pinching in your hearts that you both feel when somebody utters name Victor Hugo. And if I show you "Mona Lisa", you will both say: "it's ours". When passing Notre Dame, you will think at the same moment: "It's a French monument. Our ancestors built it".

The Louvre, National Library, the memory of Napoleon or Joan of Arc, the French language – this is what you share with that bloke in a navy-blue Basque cap, holding a baguette under his arm, and provides you with the only reason why you might wish him well. A shared sense of pride in the glorious past and joint plans for the future.

In a word, "your" ancestors and "your" children.

Now you've understood me. Don't tell me that you haven't, because I'll be disappointed. In any case, terrorists understood me at once. Oh, they are even winking at me.

Why should they leave suitcases with dynamite at railway stations so that poor travellers will fly in the air with their bellies ripped open and their legs torn away? Why plant bombs in Boenings or drive a truck loaded with explosives into a squad of soldiers?

In a word, why should they shoot at something that occurs on earth in excess and will always suffice: people?

One should aim at something exceptional. Something that is unique in the world and irreplaceable: one should inflict a blow to the soul of a nation, its museums, its archives, its language and its religion. In a word, the heart and memory should be killed.

So now you understand why twenty people are enough!

I can already see four of them, sneaking with flame-throwers into the Louvre from all sides. The alarm immediately goes off and the police come. But it's too late, because "Mona Lisa" is burning, just like the whole collection of Rembrandt, Philippe de Champaigne and the whole French school from Grand Gallery.

Get this fire under control, put it out? It won't quench itself. Neither will fire-fighters extinguish it. Because four sons of Revolution with gas masks on their faces, dressed in flame-proof asbestos clothes, are feeding the flames with flame-throwers. Wall by wall, painting by painting, display cases, everything, systematically. Just like Germans in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943.

Four hours later the Louvre is pulverised; there's nothing left, absolutely nothing. Like in Chartres, where one explosion destroyed all stained-glass windows that night. Like National Library, the 19th Century Museum, National Archives and Beaubourg Centre, of which only the roof has remained.

In the morning France wakes up and finds out about everything. Its population is still 55 million, not a single person was killed, and the French army still belongs to the most powerful armies in the world, intact. But France is gone ...

Fury and despair give way to slow agony. Shall we fight? For whom? Be proud? Of what? What relics should we defend, what impulses shall we succumb to? And how can you find something French in that bloke in a navy-blue cap, with a baguette, something that brought you together in the past, my Friend?

BROCHURE, 19TH MAY 1986, CANNES

Today I put up dozens of my brochures along Croisette. Tomorrow I will stick up the next ones. Throughout the festival, this kind of unpaid, wild advertising of usually minor films like mine is tolerated and nobody bridles at it. Apart from that, I personally gave out about a hundred brochures to people in various places, chiefly in the street and before Croisette Palace. Some brochures I left in journalist's postboxes in New Palace. Another two hundreds will be handed out by the cinema exit, after three projections of my film. It is widely believed that the feature film "Black and White" by Claire Devers, which is shown together with my short film, stands a good chance to be granted a "Perspectives" award. I therefore hope that a vast part of the 1500-seat hall will be filled and important people will come to it.

FESTIVAL, 17TH MAY 1986, CANNES

It's a pity I'm so busy looking after my little things. It would be worthwhile telling something about the festival in Cannes. It's a kind of myth I dreamed about in the past. Oh, these starlets ... - I discreetly said to myself as I plunged into enchanting dreams.

Well, a clash with reality usually strips us of a few illusions. Because even if any beautiful women happen to be in Cannes, there are not many of them. When I compare the festival to the abundance of wonderful faces and bodies at Ania's fashion shows, I find that its fame is wildly exaggerated.

Certainly, it's partly due to the weather, because although it's quite warm, the sky is overcast with fog. No starlets are parading naked on Croisette, and there are few people on the beach. Have a bath? No way: the temperature of water reaches merely 16 degrees! You would have to be a fanatic to wet merely the tips of your toes. That's why pretty girls aren't taking off their bras.

The huge machine of the festival is said to be the second event in the realm of media worldwide, closely following the Olympic Games. This opinion is also exaggerated. It is true, however, that crowds of film-makers flock to Cannes.

Outsiders such as me have nothing to do here, though. However big, this community remains hermetically locked. In the past, my marginality would have bothered me. At the age of 44 it leaves me cold. I look at the "high society" moving before my eyes without any envy whatsoever and obsessively think about my matters: how can I stop the diving flight I'm currently doing and muster up energy for a new start? How shall I sell the film, show it to people, where can I find support?

The festival? I feel as if I wasn't here. Although the identity badge gives me admission to nearly all projections, I've seen only two, while the others treat themselves to five performances a day.

For me the only worry are my posters, my meetings and the fate of my film this evening in the palace. Like a travelling salesman, I run Croisette back and forth and put up the posters. I hardly notice that crowd of Rolls-Royces, dinner jackets and low-cut dresses. I stopped only once to have a look for a few seconds at the stars walking up the main stairs of the New Palace to the rhythm of some idiotic music, between two rows of policemen standing to attention.

-They aren't a patch on the elegance of the republican guard – I thought. And it was the only thought that crossed my mind.

Oh, my God, why do our wishes always come true when we no longer care about them?

SPEECH, 17TH MAY 1986, NICES

It's already one a.m.. I'm so tense that I can't sleep a wink. Tomorrow at 6 p.m. it's the first projection of my film. Before, at 2 p.m., a Polish film-maker, a semi-amateur, wants to interview me about Beks, my exhibition and the film. After returning to Warsaw, he's going to propose it to Polish television. I've prepared a small speech, which I'm going to deliver before the screening. It's very important to me, because in this absurd world, where success is determined by some incomprehensible rules, the fact that I've found myself at the festival is a kind of miracle. I must therefore thank all those who helped me to get here.

And here's my draft speech. I'm not going to learn it by heart, but I will say more or less something like that:

“This film is entitled a *Tribute to Beksiński*. However, the first words of the tribute I would like to address to the organisers of Perspectives and the festival. This film has been produced by an outsider, a barrister and researcher, not a film-maker. Since I don't know the film milieu, I didn't take advantage of any backing, patronage or a “friendly favour”. My film was chosen for the festival by a jury in which I didn't have any acquaintances and I found out about its composition only after the film was selected. I met Mr Poitroneaut, the organiser of “Perspectives”, just three days ago. The festival, which is governed by equally fair rules, is not only praiseworthy, but it deserves its renown.

Of course, I pay tribute to Beksiński, a tragic painter who like no other can express the Polish soul. This film is the fruit of my passion.

Some of you will like it. I will be pleased to answer their questions. However, experience has taught me that many of you will hate it. To these ones I would like to apologise in advance and beg their forgiveness for the nasty 20 minutes they will have to spend in a dark room through my

fault. Especially that they can't leave the room, as a good feature film will be shown afterwards. All these people I just ask to understand that this art comes from another world and is geared towards a kind of sensitivity different than theirs. Thank you for your attention. Enjoy the performance.

LUCKY DAY, 18TH MAY 1986, CANNES

Today I was lucky. Only a little bit, but ...

1. First of all, that film-maker from Łódź I was talking about had a 15-minute interview with me. If Polish television buys it, the report will most probably be shown in the national programme in June. I'm really flattered.

However, from the fundamental point of view, it may only complicate my matters, because the more I will show off, the more easily I will provoke Polish authorities (or simply an anonymous clerk) to ban me from taking Beks's paintings out of the country. Admittedly, our national legislation allows it, even without any excise duty. Permission of the restorer of the National Museum in Warsaw is enough. Such a permit is issued automatically if a painter is alive and a work of art was created after 1945. However, I'm good enough as a barrister to not trust the laws. I'm therefore afraid that the more I'm heard of in Poland, the more easily somebody will get an idea to block my way and prevent me from taking the paintings out to France. Yet I couldn't deny myself the pleasure of giving that interview. Probably to make up for the indifference of the French media, for which neither Beks nor his painting exists ...

The interview was held partly on the beach of the Carlton Hotel, and partly in the very building of the hotel (as if I stayed there ...). The three paintings by Beks, exhibited in "La Malmaison", were also filmed and included in the report. Its director warned me what questions he would ask me. So I was surprised with the last one, for which I wasn't prepared as it hadn't been agreed. "And how is Beksiński selling?"

How could I fail to predict that this very point would be the most interesting for the compatriots ...

What was I supposed to say? the truth? That I hadn't sold anything? That nobody here wants Beks? It would have been the final nail in the coffin.

Should I have confessed all the mistakes I'd made? Too ambitious exhibition? the prices that were simply ridiculous? I then pretended that I didn't care much about the question at the moment and that in the future even Beks himself or the national antique shop (Desa) might deal with the sale. Of course, I tried to give an answer as ambiguous and non-committal as possible. At the end, however, I thought that I'd come onto a marshy area and I'd better withdraw. Having heard the tape in a nearby café, I asked the interview author to cut out the whole fragment about the price and sale. I'll have to repeat it to him, because from experience I know that all journalists easily forget their promises.

2. The second event today was the screening of my film.

The room in Croisette Palace was only partly filled: perhaps one thousand and two hundred people (out of one thousand and five hundred seats). It's a pity, but no reason to complain. Twelve hundred people to see my film was not bad, after all. Maybe more will come to the next projection? – I consoled myself in my heart of hearts.

Because this evening, at six p.m., my film will be shown in New Palace, and at eight p.m. – in the House of Culture in Cannes (the cinema room of which is called Studio 13).

At the beginning I gave the speech which I'd previously prepared. But as often happens, it was impossible to predict the most important things: the organiser of Perspectives, Jacques Poitroneaut, introduced me to the audience as Bogdan Dziworski, the director of the film. Having met me only three days before, he confused me with him. It's true that, as every outsider who doesn't know the new milieu, I'm constantly embarrassed among all of them. Since I came to Cannes, the people from Perspectives have been treating me with condescending superiority. So, when I was introduced to Poitroneaut a few days ago, I was able to utter merely three sentences. No wonder he didn't know who he was talking to and now confused everything. If I hadn't put it right, the whole introduction to my speech would have become incomprehensible. Therefore, at the last moment

I had to make a quite different start than I'd prepared. Fortunately, I never learn things by heart, so as not to be the slave of a text, as you can get lost if something unpredictable crops up or if you have a hole in your memory. It's a reasonable precaution, which also this time turned out salutary.

- I'm not the director of the film, only its modest producer – I started, correcting Poitroneaut' mistake. – My name is not Dziworski, but Dmochowski. Which doesn't change much, because both surnames are unpronounceable.

I admit that saying it I wanted to force a slight smile. The reaction, however, exceeded my expectations: the room burst out laughing, which I didn't want, because in a moment I was going to assume my favourite tone: exalted and solemn. So, when I moved on to praise the organisers of "Perspectives", I started speaking very seriously. But the audience kept laughing their heads off, as they thought I was still joking. This reminded me of a Soviet film from my childhood, "Dignitary on a Raft". I had no idea how to cope with that merriment. There was nothing clashing about it, but it nearly made me funny at the loftiest moment for me, that is, when I naively assured my audience: - Some of you will like this film.

Uttering this sentence, I didn't realize how pretentious it was. Because the environment I was addressing is neither lenient nor it likes when its reactions are foretold. It is even more irritated if somebody forces it to behave in a specific way. But God looked after me: the room treated what I said as a nice provocation, similar to my previous unintentional joke.

The impression of merriment, discreet but nonetheless humiliating, deepened when I added:

- However, I am sorry for all those who will detest the film. How can you possibly leave the room knowing that a good movie will be shown in a moment – I alluded to the long-length feature film "Black and White", for which my short film was an addition.

But all in all, my speech made the atmosphere relaxed, and this is what I wanted. The film might well have provoked booing and offensive insults.

Actually, it nearly happened during the screening for the press in the National Cinema Centre in Paris. Here, however, after the end of the projection, the audience applauded for ten seconds, although it's a fussy milieu, made up solely of film-makers, who usually have no qualms about showing their disapproval in a brutal way.

After the performance, by the entrance of the room, I gave out about a hundred brochures. By the other entrance was supposed to be standing a boy whom I'd accosted in the street, giving him a whole packet of brochures and advance payment of 150 francs. He didn't come and out of 1200 viewers I was able to catch only a few.

But the good news is that nobody refused to accept a brochure. Many people even came up to me to take it. Some of them congratulated me. Somebody who'd seen the Valmay exhibition asked me if I was planning to organise another one this year. A producer gave me his visiting card, asking me to contact him in Paris. So it seems I achieved a sort of success.

Ms Richard, a press attaché of Perspectives, caught me at Croisette:

- You'll see the reactions tomorrow! You'll see! – she said.

See?

See!

Well, so far I haven't seen anything. And I long ago stopped believing in something that I hadn't carefully examined on my own. Especially if this thing is supposed to be optimistic, positive and heartening. I'm waiting till tomorrow then.

To see.

NARRATION, 18TH MAY 1986

What's narrative about this painting? Where is literature in it?

It's as anecdotal as Renoire's painting that shows two girls playing a ball or Degas's picture with a naked woman going out of bath.

Any figurative painting is inevitably narrative, as it borrows accessories from things, events and people. It shows itself through objects and figures; it cannot manifest itself in any other way. The difference is that the girls playing a ball and the bathing woman are so frequently painted themes, and thus told so many times, that their story has become banal and vanished from our consciousness. Since we no longer notice it, it seems to be absent. But in does still exist in itself.

The reason for the charge lies somewhere else: it's because tragic art is rare. The accessories of death, destruction and despair do not often appear in painting, at least contemporary one. Hence, the impression of an illustrated tale which strikes people watching Beks's works. The objects and figures in these paintings are unusual. That's why viewers notice them.

Hence, Beks's desire that he's often told me about: by showing his painting to people many times and for many years make the audience so accustomed to what they find in the paintings that it will forget about the impression of a "story" or "parable" and will get carried away with pure admiration for the painting.

END OF FESTIVAL, 18TH MAY 1986, CANNES

Once more I pop into Ballester's exhibition in Malmaison. There is not a soul, which is a pity, because the exhibition is good: excellent painters and a carefully prepared, original presentation. All the three paintings by Beks are displayed impeccably. And all the time they are watched only by two ladies who are looking after them.

It couldn't be the other way when everybody is thinking and talking only about the festival. Having no experience, I didn't realize that genres shouldn't be mixed. Speaking clearly, there's no hope that Beks achieves any success when whole Cannes is fascinated by a quite different thing. It's like expecting this painting to be popular with football fans, just because they've come in great numbers to the stadium. A crowd is not enough. It must be interested in what you want to show it, or at least it cannot be absorbed by other matters. The festival is a kind of madness, and I guess that throughout this period people have even stopped making love.

Apart from that, in front of Malmaison there is a stall with whisky at half the price, pop music is being played at full volume, and a well-endowed blonde with huge, heavy and protruding breasts (which I ogle with sorrow and envy, thinking about the one who uses them every night) is doing a striptease on the bonnet of a car.

I walk away. At six p.m. There will be a projection of my film in New Palace. Yesterday I almost succeeded in Croisette Palace. But even if one day follows another, they are not alike. What's going to happen in the evening then?

Besides, should I invent anything new? – I wonder clearing a path for myself among pedestrians on Croisette. Shall I say the same as yesterday?

I can't, because Poitroneaut and the people from Perspectives will be present at the projection again. I then decide to give up the speech and settle

for three or four sentences which I'll invent on the spot. Anyway, I'm usually best when improvising.

I get to the end of Croisette and head towards the main stairs of New Palace, because I naively think it's my film that's going to be shown. From a distance I can see a massive crowd, separated from the entrance by a row of policemen: all of them are waiting to the sounds of solemn music. What for? the stairs are still empty. Could this pomp be for my film? I'm moving forward. Squashed in like sardines, the people timidly protest, but seeing my confident face, they make way for me. Finally, I get to the barrier separating the crowd from the stairs. Bent in half, I walk under it and climb upstairs. A minute star, observed by the gathered people, who are admiring my back, I hear from the guard (the clever beast hardly bothers to speak to me, though I'm dressed in a very chic white dinner jacket) that the grand room is out of my modest person's league. The main room is intended for serious film-makers and real stars.

I therefore turn back and walk up others stairs to the third floor. The room is medium size, probably 400 seats. I stand by the entrance and give out brochures to the comers. How polite I am! I give them my papers and kindly say "thank you". I thank them because they are taking the brochures while they could equally well say "Could you get lost and leave us alone, please?".

That's another kind of audience: elegant people, well-dressed, though in the "laidback afternoon" style. I feel that even if all of them are film-makers, they belong to a quite different category than the ones yesterday. In Croisette Palace gathered spontaneous youth that could be easily seduced. Now there are journalists, producers or directors. It will be harder to win their favour. A neat, well-rounded speech is not enough.

Jacques Poitroneaut introduces me to the audience, this time emphasising: "I'd like to introduce the film producer to you. Let me repeat, the producer".

Saying that, he pronounces my surname almost correctly. I have to quickly invent and say something that won't sound very stupid. Three or four sentences that I allotted to myself multiply into twenty. Unlike yesterday, this time I don't arouse merriment and don't achieve any particular success. But I do reach my goal: I erect a barrier defending the film from the signs of hostility, which otherwise would have surely followed.

I look tensely at the screen and find that the audience is reacting in a right, though discreet way. Luckily, nobody is booing ... No, I was wrong. For a couple of seconds somebody boos somewhere at the back. The applause is not as thunderous as yesterday. It's neither faint nor scanty, though. Just after the end I go out, so as not to watch "Black and White" once more.

-That's interesting – I think. – One corner of the room was particularly lively. The applause was stronger there. But the most important thing is that this time nobody turned their back so as to avoid looking at the picture.

But that's going to come. The same evening ...

On the same evening the third screening takes place. This time in the House of Culture in Cannes. Studio 13.

I don't know where it is. Two days ago, on Croisette I noticed a small plate with an arrow and an inscription saying "House of Culture". It must be very near – I thought, not even trying to check it.

Having left New Palace, feeling quite relaxed, I walk to Croisette Palace to see short-length films. It seems to me that I've got at least an hour ahead of me. Two of the films are excellent: "Alger la blanche" and "Mortal Wings". As these are only short-length movies, the room is empty. That's a shame, because the films are really great! What class! I can't move from my seat, especially that I'm convinced that 30 minutes is too much to get to the House of Culture. I even hope to be there 15 minutes before the performance and give out brochures to people walking into the room.

Well, I soon find out that the House of Culture is many kilometres away from Croisette Palace. And I have to cover this distance on foot. Every three hundred metres I stop to ask passers-by:

- Is the House of Culture far away?

They answer invariably:

- Oh, yes. There's a long way ahead of you. You'd better take a taxi.

But there's no trace of a taxi or a bus. I have to walk or almost run for 45 minutes. When at last I reach the place, sweating all over, the already delayed performance is beginning. The room is filled to the brim. I have hardly any time to give out a few brochures among the seated audience when the lights go out.

And here I feel from the very start that the film is not accepted. I use the behaviour of a couple in front of me as a barometer. That's my usual method whenever I speak in public or observe a crowd for some other reasons: I pretend to be moving my eyes from one face to another so as to establish contact with the audience, while in fact I pay close attention to just one person and observe only him/her throughout the event, in which I am an actor or an observer.

The man looks muddle-headed and is watching his nails. At a certain moment his companion hides her face, puts her head on his knees, and he covers her eyes with his hands. The atmosphere is stifling, the small room – about 300 seats is crammed, the air's hot, one can hardly breathe, and the seats are uncomfortable.

At the end there's nothing. Silence. When I'm just about to leave, one of the organisers accosts me:

- Do you have anything to do with this film?

- Yes – I answer. – the one that was shown a moment ago. Short-length.

The feature film, "Black and White", doesn't have its representatives here. A few hours ago they got the first award of "Perspectives" and now, giving

interviews at every turn, they have something better to do than participate in the projection of their film in the House of Culture, which, as I will soon find out, has nothing to do with the festival.

- Would you mind saying a few words?

This morning Carriau assured me that there are heated discussions in the House of Culture. I've been waiting for such a discussion for a long time, because apart from applause and booing, I'd finally want to hear what film-makers themselves think of my film. Now there seems to be an opportunity, so again, I serve a short speech.

- Would you like to ask me any questions? – I'm looking for something new, something else than the old refrain praising the festival organisers.

Silence. Not a single word. Just like in film clubs in Poland, nobody opens their mouth. "There are heated discussions in the House of Culture". A few words that I use as a filler don't help much. The silence goes on. I reach the cliché: "like no other he can express the Polish soul". Laughing. I give up further efforts.

Two organisers invite me for Perrier in the bar. They sympathise with me and want to sort of apologise for the whole thing. They admit that the audience gave us an icy welcome.

- What kind of people are they? – I ask, sensing that this is where the problem lies.

- The local people – says one of them. – Local people in 60%. And some holiday makers.

- Oh, really? – I sound surprised. – It doesn't have much to do with the festival, does it?

- No. We rent a few films from the festival to show them to the residents of Cannes, who are not allowed to official projections.

So I bumped against a "usual" audience, not professionals. Only now do I understand the lack of enthusiasm on the part of distributors. If the film is

going to provoke the same reaction in paid cinema rooms, there's no wonder they absolutely don't want it even if they like it.

I leave the House of Culture and return to the hotel to pack my things. The end of the festival. I didn't get anywhere at all. I've worked like a jerk for five days and blown 7 thousand francs, the price of one painting by Beks. But maybe ... I gave out a few hundreds brochures to film-makers. And there are my details. Might come in useful. For example a short article or a phone call? If not, the whole journey was for nothing.

And in Paris I left all my nightmares and fears. Throughout my absence they've been waiting nicely, stored in a cold place so that, well preserved, they wouldn't lose an ounce of their venom.

AWARD, 19TH MAY 1986, CANNES

1. Bugger! I didn't get anything. Happy days last only twenty four hours.

Frankly speaking, I'd never believed in this award. I must admit, however, that my heart was thumping like mad when I came to the cocktail party at the terrace of Croisette Palace at one o'clock. I arrived just when Guy Darbois was reading out the list of the awarded in the category of short-length films shown within the framework of the "Perspectives of French Cinema", and the chairman of the whole festival – in the category of feature films. Three times I sighed deeply to avoid choking.

And if a miracle happened? – I thought obsessively during the short, endless speech of Guy Darbois. If it happened?

Well, it didn't. The check for 10 thousand, and in particular the promise of Antenne 2 to buy the film went to "Paulette Epaulette". Nothing came of the prospect of showing my film to millions of viewers and the money, which I need so badly to push my Beks's wheelbarrows.

2. Many people at the cocktail party congratulated me on my little speech, which I'd given before the film screening.

- We listened with our mouths open – told me Poitroneaut's secretary. –

- Fantastic, brilliant – Ms Richard assured me even more enthusiastically.

Quite a pretty girl, the director of "High Speed", who in a moment was going to thank for the award, confided in me:

- We, film makers, can just mumble three words, while you ... Amazing!

- You've got such an incredible sense of humour. What a talent for provoking the audience! – assured me Carriau.

And so on and so forth. One might say that the real hero of yesterday was neither Beks nor Dziworski, but ... I. And on top of that, what a sense of

humour! It's a bit stupid to have made people laugh when one wanted to jerk tears. Damn my one-day fame. It might have been a pleasure if I'd also received what I craved for. But this one thing I didn't get.

3. During the cocktail party I come up to Guy Darbois. Short, self-confident, looks down on the others. Wasn't it for the difference in height, I would mistake him for my own mirror reflection. I awkwardly accost him:

- Good afternoon, sir ...

Jean Yves Carré rushes to help and introduces me. My meek face of a self-conscious schoolboy puts Mr Darbois in a good mood. He almost forgives me that I interrupted his slurping of champagne.

- I'm the producer of the film "Tribute to Beksiński".

- What kind of film is it? – he asks me.

- About a painter. The film took part in the festival – Carré butts in, offering an explanation.

- We buy only feature films – interrupts Darbois, who immediately understands why I'm turning to him.

- But it is a kind of feature – I assure him nervously.

- Oh, really? To be honest, I haven't seen it – says Darbois.

Well, nice things to hear about the chairman of "Perspectives" jury and a person responsible for the purchase of films for Antenne 2. But this guy reminds me of Nicolas Hugnet too much to be different from him. The same old story: arrogance – incompetence. It was also he who refused to buy the film when I presented it to his television channel a couple of months ago. So he didn't see it either then or now!

France, France, how can you still stand on your feet if you have such workers to support you! – I've already had fifteen opportunities to say it in my notes and I will certainly say it again on another occasion.

I'm sure that if I'd pressed, he would have answered me in a classic way: "You know, we're so busy that I've had no time..."

But fortunately, Mr Darbois is in a good mood today and agrees that I'll give him the cassette to see.

- Here, now, in Cannes? I've got it with me – I ask like an idiot.

He's simply scared.

- We've got too many other things on our minds here, you understand. No, in Paris. Send it to me by mail, please.

Of course. "We're so busy".

4. The interview I gave yesterday to a film maker from Polish television took place in an equally absurd way. I pretended to be laidback and confidently settled myself in the armchair. I put on a haughty face and made broad gestures with my hand, while in fact I had the barrel of a gun put to my head. In a white dinner jacket, on the beach of the Carlton Hotel and on one of the hotel terraces I was talking about the success of the film and the exhibition, as if it was the truth. At the same time I asked myself the question: How long can I put on this show?

Because the more I strain, the louder noise will be heard when I finally burst. And then, I can imagine the glee on the faces of some people: "At last he kicked the bucket, stinky dick. At last he croaked. I told you, everything was bluff".

POLISH IDENTITY, 19TH MAY 1986, CANNES

I think that Minière („fine arts counsellor”, God!), that scumbag, quite unknowingly, in his own way gave me a good piece of advice: to emphasise Beks’s Polish identity, at least for the time being.

Because when talking to people I tend to simply call him “a great painter”. Only sometimes do I add “Polish”. However, as I claim myself, it’s the proportions of things that are more important than their bare existence. Well, I don’t stress his Polish identity at all. Just the opposite, I place emphasis on the universal character of this art. Firstly, because I believe that it can’t be closed in any time span. Secondly, I do it to sort of get it out of the Polish ghetto and remove the label of the third world, which belittles it.

That’s why, at least at the beginning of Beks’s promotion in the West, I will have to turn down my interjections about universality. I make people freeze. Some of them (perhaps only at the moment) are insensitive to this painting and quite sincerely can’t see anything universal about it. Other people feel that it might become a competitor for their favourite old or contemporary artist. Still others prefer to wait with their judgments.

Therefore from now on, waiting for some people to understand, for the others to get to know, and yet for others to shut up, I’m going to stress the Polish identity of Beks. It’s only a temporary concession. But thanks to that, here in Cannes, I was able to calm the aggression which my film would have surely aroused. I’m almost certain of this: it got a warm welcome in Croisette Palace, was received with a dose of friendliness in New Palace and with hardly suppressed hostility in the House of Culture (Studio 13) just because I’d served a reassuring speech about Beks’s Polish identity before the first projection, quite successful one before the second screening and in the case of the third projection – a delayed speech after the film had been already shown. That short introductory speech created a kind of invisible protection, something like a transparent screen. When it was no longer

there, the audience reacted disapprovingly. So, I believe that such protection will be still necessary for some time.

Another observation I made is that this invisible screen must be something written or said *ex cathedra*. Because when I'm simply talking to someone, my prejudices and precautions do not bring any effects. As usual, nobody listens to me, even when I explain the specific character of Beks with his Polish identity. What I want to say gets blurred and lost in the polemics that I unwittingly provoke. The things I say annoy people even more than this painting shown without any introductions.

I guess it's easier to convince people if a piece of paper or a gathered crowd prevent a reader or listener from interrupting me in mid-flow.

Actually, the same happens at university: as long as I speak from the height of my desk, students believe me blindly. However, as soon as I walk down the pedestal and get involved in a discussion in the hall, I stop being "the one who knows". Again, I become the one who knows as much as the others, or even less.

Conclusion?

Avoiding aggressive reactions is one thing, but there is something far more important: to make people act according to my wish, to make them help and support me.

The fact that French decision makers no longer spit at this painting owing to my little speech and a letter explaining the Polish identity of Beks is surely a good thing. But it would be better if they agreed with me and supported my efforts.

And here, unfortunately, I haven't achieved anything.

NICES, 19TH MAY 1986

1. The weather on the Riviera is excellent; it's warm, but not muggy. A pleasant breeze is blowing and there's a lot of sunshine. In the morning I usually wake up with nightmares in my head, but during the day the bright air brings back some of my good mood.

I stopped in Nices (as Cannes is filled to the brim) in the Frantotel Hotel. It's a modern four-star hotel on Notre Dame Street, right next to the railway station. I hired a room for 400 francs a night through an agency in Paris. At the last moment a woman from the agency asked me:

- If you wish, I can book you a room for 900 francs. Do you want?

Of course, I didn't. And now I'm trembling at the thought that, despite my refusal, she booked such a room and I'll discover the truth when paying the bill. If I were a serious man, I'd clearly ask about it at the reception right now. But I have no courage, because I don't want to hear too early that my room is too nice to be cheap.

2. As I go to Cannes every day, at about ten in the morning, I see lots of utter paupers, far more than in Paris. They look like characters from a horror movie – faces furrowed with wrinkles, pale, with ulcers and decayed teeth. They can hardly move; they aren't usually drunk like Parisian tramps, though most of the time they lie motionless on the ground.

3. Somebody has told me that Saint Paul de Vence is a small town worth visiting. And today it's a holiday. Anyway, the festival is over for me. So, I am free and in the evening I could pop into the town before I go to Paris. I've got a bus at twelve thirty. Shall I go? I will.

CENSORSHIP, 19TH MAY 1986

How very true!

In his last book, which I paged through a moment ago in the bookshop located in the festival building, here in Cannes (“Cinéma nommé désir”), Andrzej Wajda reminds that there is not only police censorship. More effective and worrying is the self-censorship of a creator - the censorship that he imposes upon himself, fearing to overstep the boundary which the audience, “epoch” or “milieu” might not accept.

This brings a few reflections to my mind:

Eulogists of the democratic system tirelessly unmask the censorship of KGB. By way of contrast, or at least for the sake of politeness, it would be nice to add how good it is for an artist to create “here”, in “our free world”.

I know this world too well and I’m too aware of the clay it has been made of to believe it: every day, with a clear conscience, it exercises inexorable censorship in relation to those who oppose it, who fill it with fear, or who surpass it either spiritually or mentally.

There is nothing spectacular about this censorship, as it is common, monolithic, spontaneous and it never resorts to violence. It is therefore almost intangible and rarely spoken of, although one has to bear it on a daily basis.

This is where it nests and how it works:

1. Where?

On three levels:

a. Firstly, on the level of a creator himself. That’s the self-censorship Wajda talks about. Any moment, every artist, thinker or politician imposes limitations upon himself and erects obstacles, fearing social repression he

would surely be exposed to if he freely followed his intuition, conviction or the sense of truth.

- Can I say that? – he wonders. Can I do that? No, it won't work. They are going to destroy me. It's still too early ... It's already too late ... Nobody will come. Nobody will buy. Nobody's going to cast their vote on me.

He crosses and cuts things out. Adds a bit of red – now it sounds optimistic. Removes some grey colour – that's going to improve the mood. Self-censorship.

b. Secondly, on the level of the distributors of thoughts, works of art or political “message”, that is, on the level of producers, critics, gallery directors, ministerial clerks, editors or political party heads. I know that censorship of theirs. Whenever they apply it, they quote most reasonable arguments of profitability, consistence or morality. People want to have some laugh, relax. They want a gulp of hope and optimism, while you scare them with the truth and repel with the visions of suffering. If I publish you, if I put you on the air, if I announce your candidacy for elections, if I exhibit your paintings – they will not read, will not vote, will not buy.

Or another one – I've heard it myself many times: “We have adopted a certain policy, a strategy. I personally like what you propose, say, do, but if I exhibit your paintings, issue your album or submit your candidacy, my audience, my clients, my voters will not understand what it is about. No, I can't be distracted. Please, turn to X or Y. Maybe he will be interested. Yes, it's more his scope”.

Or yet another way: “There are people among my readers, collectors, voters who, you understand, would be shocked. We live in such prudish times ... Personally I like what you do very much, but please, understand me.... These are delicate issues”. Etc.

All those who propagate a philosophical thought, a political plan or a work of art fight, restrict and stifle any manifestations of originality in a thinker, truth in a politician and freedom in an artist. All Cerberuses of morality,

culture or ideology have the task of blocking the way, censoring, amputating and forcing corrections. What an artist hasn't forbidden himself will be banned by his distributors. What a politician hasn't crossed out from his speech will be crossed out by them. What a philosopher hasn't passed over in silence, they will.

c. Finally, it's the time for the supreme judge: people, the king of democracy, Demos. Voters for a politician, collectors for an artist, pupils for a philosopher. Masses.

They are present on all levels of censorship. They may intrude on the moments of loneliness of an artist, a philosopher or a politician as he creates in the privacy of his atelier or study, pestering and forcing him to censor himself. They seem even more omnipresent later on, when they are supposed to buy a painting, come to a lecture or cast a vote into the urn.

Listen to that statesman: have you ever heard equally empty promises, hackneyed platitudes or a speech as wooden as this one? Don't be surprised. It's not due to the lack of intelligence or ideas that he blathers like that. Not because he promised himself to lie to you or to pretend that he can't see what is as plain as day. He's simply afraid of you, demos. He's scared of stepping out of line, of betraying himself and divulging that he doesn't know or that he doubts, or that he sees the future in black.

- What does he mean? – you'd ask if he took the liberty of telling the truth. Does he want to frighten us? Discourage? We need a decided man, the one who knows where he's going and where he wants to lead us. We need an optimist, having faith in the future. A real leader. For such a man shall we vote, not for the one who wants to give us a scare.

It's the same with an artist, because if he fails to cheer up your leisure time – you won't come to his performance, won't buy his paintings. He will die.

The fate of a philosopher isn't much different.

He has to face a three-storeyed democratic censorship - germinating already in the mind of a creator, systematically applied by distributors and omnipresent in the reactions of masses. Its effectiveness, however, doesn't result only from the fact that it's like poisoned air, that is, everywhere. Its advantage over KGB repression lies mainly in the working methods.

After "where it nests" it's time to deal with the "how it works" issue.

2. How?

Well, this way:

Our native censorship works in one direction, spontaneously and with no violence.

a. In one direction, because under a thin layer of apparent individualism of particular people with their ideological, moral or aesthetic preferences, in a democratic society reigns a deep consensus of the overwhelming majority, which dictates the fundamental values, principles and goals to be pursued by all.

Admittedly, the consensus allows states to be governed without using violence to force obedience. Yet the price of it is the disappearance of real individualism and diversity of individuals' thinking, creativity and acting. Reduced to the level of replaceable ants, the overwhelming majority of the society feels more or less the same, thinks the same and likes the same. In consequence, more or less the same things fill it with aversion and disgust.

Thus, the resulting censorship works like laser light. It is applied by almost everybody in the same direction, aimed at strengthening the fundamental bonds of a democratic society at the price of the tastes, beliefs or preferences of individuals that this society is made of.

b. Spontaneously, because the agreement of the overwhelming majority of a democratic society members about the rules by which it is governed and which make it coherent, is deep and subconscious. Censorship is therefore applied by nearly everybody not only with no orders or means of coercion whatsoever, but also without people being aware of it.

In our democratic society there is no space for the conspiracy of villains gathering in secret in a huge, gloomy castle to plot against freedom.

So there is no need to provide paid or intimidated censors with textbooks specifying the culture that should be defended, politics that should be supported or morality that should be propagated.

Also, it's not necessary to blacklist dangerous authors who should be kept under surveillance.

Here each censor does his task automatically, with no need to be reminded of the principles which he should defend, and with no need to identify the guilty ones. These principles have been stuck in his subconsciousness since he was a child: he's got them between lines in school textbooks, in every book, newspaper, all kinds of performances that the eulogists of democracy have been feeding him with since his earliest years.

And owing to that daily, deep, subconscious osmosis of democratic principles, nobody has to point to the ones who don't conform, as the latter are fully exposed.

This way, democratic censorship based on general consensus is more uncompromising than police censorship. Its representatives don't have a nasty feeling of acting under constraint or out of fear. Neither do they feel to be doing harm to anybody. Quite to the contrary: they apply censorship even more severely, believing that it is a usual, spontaneous symptom of a healthy concern for quality, efficiency, beauty, profitability, that is, the principles to be followed by each civilized society.

c. Finally, since it is applied by nearly everybody, spontaneously, without people being aware of censoring anything or anybody, democratic censorship doesn't have to resort to any violence.

There is no beating or torturing. No Gestapo. No forced labour camps, no whipping, no books burned at the stake or destroyed works of art. Nothing of the kind.

A little gesture, usual refusal, concealment, absence are enough to achieve what in totalitarian systems cannot be attained even with a whip: the obedience of a creator, the conformism of a philosopher, the demagogy of a politician.

Do you throw a minister into prison because he told the truth in public? Democratic societies long time ago replaced the guillotine with dismissal, and a gun with a ballot paper.

Do we force an artist to paint in a different way? To what purpose? It's enough if we refuse to exhibit him, if we don't place his works in any museum, or if we just don't buy them.

Do we burn a philosopher at the stake because he said that it is the Earth that revolves round the Sun? Not at all. Simply he is not given a post at any university, his books are not published and no article in the press is devoted to his theories.

It's enough to not mention them, to forget about them, to pass them over. Usual indifference, usual "no, thank you" is enough. Above all, no violence: "You are allowed to do what you want. But I'm also allowed to not accept your proposal and to kindly say: no, thank you".

What makes this mild censorship even more effective is the fact that, like ether, it dulls the vigilance of its victims. "I must have done something wrong. Why don't they want me?". Pestered by general refusal, an artist, a thinker or a politician begins to ascribe the guilt to himself. "They reject me, so perhaps it's because I think badly, write badly, paint badly?". This way the vicious circle is closed: social censorship imperceptibly changes into self-censorship. And there is even less violence in it.

And an even greater sense of impotence and resignation. Because if the censor was a dictator, called by a name, somebody you can point your finger at, an artist, a politician or a philosopher might at least hope for freedom when the said dictator finally died or got killed. But if he is a censor for himself? Who should he plan to assassinate? Himself? And if my censor

outside is the whole society, unanimously telling me “no, thank you”? Who should I plot against? Against all the people?

And above all, how can I keep hope and against whom should I rebel?

The general, spontaneous, mild censorship of the democratic consensus.

Oh, I know well: everyday life censors, those people saying “no, thank you” will not understand what I’m talking about. “What on earth does he want to prove? Let him go to Gorbatshev to taste the bliss of real censorship. This might clear his mind”.

The others, thinking they are subtle, will say: “Why does he hold a grudge against us? What harm has our democratic reality done to him? He should turn his grudges to life. Life is like that, not our system. This system just lets you survive, go through the hardships of earthly existence without too much suffering and drama”.

Some people, however, will understand me, though their self-censorship may forbid them to admit it: all those who have fallen prey to general, automatic and mild repression against a philosophical thought, a political deed or a work of art. All those who have personally gone through what I describe in these notes. All those who have experienced first-hand the rule of masses and who therefore know the price of democracy.

Is everything lost then? Is there no room for real pluralism in the currently prevailing culture, politics and ideology? Will the censorship of crowds always reduce everything to a level of mediocrity? It’s hard to say. From time to time I can see somebody who manages to overcome the barrier of his own fear, the refusal of distributors and the repression of masses, somebody who is able to scramble out onto the roof of the three-storeyed building of democratic censorship and from there shout his truth to the world. I then stick firmly to my belief that I will also succeed one day: “As long as there is life, there is hope”. After all, some people survived even in Auschwitz ...

POST SCRIPTUM

“I will publish your statement with pleasure. It contains a lot of truth. However ... your conclusion ... Don't you think you are going too far? Suggesting any similarity between the democratic consensus, even if it means uniformity, and the barbed wire of Auschwitz ... Some people will be shocked. Couldn't you use another comparison? Please, think it over and call me tomorrow”.

IS IT WORTHWHILE, 19TH MAY 1986

I call Ania from a telephone box at the railway station in Nices. From the very beginning I feel that for some reason she's angry and ready to attack me any moment.

- What's the matter? a row again?! – I say angrily to immediately break her resistance.

- I thought you'd have called yesterday. Why didn't you call?

Aha, so it's about that. I calm down, because for a moment I expected one of those dreadful jealousy scenes that I hate so much. Now relieved, I tell her about my little miseries. But when I start reporting things in detail, she interrupts me:

- Be brief: was it worthwhile going there or not? It wasn't, was it? Admit it!

My attempts to thoroughly describe the whole situation, objectively and with finesse, soon bore her. She needs a clear, simple and undisputable answer: yes or no. She doesn't care much whether what I say will be a serious reply or just empty words. She needs certainty or something equally anaesthetic.

Ania knows perfectly well all my contradictions: I don't hesitate when doing things. I simply move forward. However, when it comes to reflection, everything goes to pieces before my eyes. Why did I succeed with this one? And that? Why was it a flop? How can I urge people to act according to my plans? How should I convince them?

As soon as I reach a truth, the very next day it diminishes in my eyes, becoming merely a piece of a large jigsaw puzzle. And then again comes darkness. I begin another pursuit of a shadow, which is constantly giving me the slip.

Ania usually likes my meticulous way of presenting facts. This time, however, it only puts her in a bad mood. She then insists that I say it clearly:

- Yes or no? Was it worth going there?

- Not directly, because I didn't pull things off. I neither sold the film nor got the award – I pluck up the courage to finally call a spade a spade.

- Who got it?

- “Paulette Epaulette”.

- What?

- You saw it at the screening for the press. But coming here I made a step towards the future – I pick up the previous thread – I just laid one more small brick of that building of ours. So after all, it's good I came here.

Am I really as certain of that as I pretend before her? I've splurged seven thousand francs, which is the price of one painting by Beks, though we don't have a single penny. Only the debt of hundreds of thousands ...

And what did I get in return?

ADVICE, 19TH MAY 1986

My Friend, if you ever read these notes (and after all, I address them to you, not being able to come back to the time when I was 15 years old), listen to my good advice:

Don't believe in the praises of courage, work, effort and optimism sung by the currently ruling system.

Don't give anything to it. Don't give it the slightest bit of your life.

And when you've finally achieved everything on your own, destroy what you have done.

Don't allow anything that cost you so much to be used by those who kindly answered: "no, thank you" when you were starving.

PRESS 1, 20TH MAY 1986

Let me pretend to be naïve: how can you turn freedom of speech into a paid profession?

You will ask: “What’s your profession, sir?”.

To which he will reply proudly: “To speak the truth freely”.

However, if one day he had a bit to drink and was in a divulging mood, he would confess something like that:

“I’m a journalist. In principle, I can say what I want. I can speak so loudly that the others must hear me. In fact, however, I live off this freedom. I earn my living by giving vent to my freedom of speech. That’s the main reason I defend it with my teeth and claws. Because if a competitor of mine started using the freedom of speech, how could I earn my dinner? Therefore, my first commandment is: don’t allow outsiders to speak. Do you want to write? Do you want to speak? All right, go ahead, but in secret. Then put everything into a drawer and lock it. Hands off my area of freedom; I won’t let you in here. There is hardly any space for my own texts, let alone competitor’s ones; nobody will barge in my beat ... No way!”.

Besides, working in a profession is not the same as being the one chosen by the nation. The truth is that those in power are in a worse situation, because they are chosen by voters. And if they let their voters down, it’s the end. Doomed to failure in next elections. Actually, ministers must sometimes pack up even before elections. And I? Am I chosen by my readers? Fortunately, it hasn’t happened yet. That would be a serious threat to freedom.

I was chosen by the head of our paper. He took me on for the reasons known only to him. He doesn’t have to report to anybody. Neither to you nor anybody else. And certainly, he’s not going to seek your opinion whether or not I should stay in the editorial staff.

A profession, however, is a synonym of morality. Let me stress it! Because when you're practicing a profession, you must observe the rules. In my profession the first rule says that my freedom ends where my neighbour's freedom begins. That is to say, the freedom of ... my boss. Yes, I owe him my loyalty. I have to be faithful to the policy of my newspaper. How can I defy him if he trusts me? What are you saying? That this obedience is in contradiction with my own freedom? I don't understand. And why is that exactly?

I don't get it. Why is there so much fuss about the nobility and mission of the journalist profession? After all, it's only work. I'm happy to leave the editorial office at six p.m., have a good dinner at the cost of somebody who will ask me to write a few favourable words, then put on my slippers and forget about everything. Why should I overwork? And why should I refuse an invitation to a posh dinner, if somebody wants to buy it for me? Isn't it quite a usual thing to write enthusiastically about the products of someone who invited me to such a nice dinner? And write about others? What for?

When I say: profession, I don't necessarily mean the creating of masterpieces. The fact that I'm a journalist doesn't oblige me to be brilliant. OK, I sometimes write any old thing, because, as you put it, I don't feel the need to "shout out the truth". So what? Why launch into a pompous speech? a full-time employee has a duty to produce. Who cares whether you have something to shout out or not, whether you bottle up a truth or have nothing to say whatsoever? I know that every morning I must bring an article to the editorial office. So I do. The article is stupid, mundane and doesn't contribute anything at all. Well, you don't get brilliant ideas on a daily basis. And you have to write, because you have to eat.

What are you saying? That it's negation of freedom if you have nothing important to say, if you don't weigh each word carefully, don't respect your opponent and don't search for truth, settling for scandals instead? That's all empty talk of an inexperienced whelp.

Being a journalist is not joining an order. Well, this profession is not a fine art. I have a right to rest on Sunday, and on Monday write a new portion of rubbish.

Am I exaggerating, caricaturing things? Of course. But for me freedom of speech is shouting when something hurts and keeping silent when you have nothing significant to say.

So down with paid freedom of speech, irresponsible freedom, corruptible freedom, obedient freedom, freedom without a feeling, freedom without dignity! Down with the profession of journalist!

BARRISTERS AND JUDGES, 24TH MAY 1986

A few days ago I hurled insults at journalists. Today it's time to deal with barristers and judges.

I don't like them. That's true. Just like I don't like priests. Actually, I don't like any professions in which you have to love your fellowmen against remuneration, use your own freedom in return for a salary, believe in God for cash and sympathise with the others if you're paid.

The legal profession, which I practice, is one of them.

Many times a month, in court I have to pretend outrage, passion and compassion for my client. When you enter into this profession, you promise chastity to yourself. However, you soon forget about your pledges. The sale of conscience is in a way a part of my role. It's the essence of my relations with clients. Every novice in this profession vows himself purity. Soon he becomes a whore.

1. Because how can you possibly defend a man whose misdeed you condemn yourself?

And at the same time forget the one who a year ago cried, wailed, tussled, begged for mercy, and who was beaten, raped, cheated and robbed by my client?

How can I maintain with full conviction, only because he pays me for it, that he had a difficult childhood, but today he's a completely different man? a different man ... the man who just after leaving the slammer will stumble again, coming back to jail sooner than he thinks.

How can I sleep calmly if I know that at the moment when I'm trying to get him out of jail, someone who doesn't yet know about it is already doomed to suffering and despair: his next victim whom my client is going to hurt, because thanks to me he's been released from prison?

If you'd seen someone like Blażejewski on the civil party's bench, and Lessieure, who had injured him and got away with it; if you'd seen Djaknoun leaving the tribunal slowly when Ms Szepko for the third time attempted to commit suicide after the loss of the only child he'd killed while driving with blood alcohol level of 3; if you'd seen someone like Philibert, who owing to my endeavours was released from prison on parole only to immediately rob somebody and come back to the slammer after six months; if you'd seen all those people and others of their ilk, could you still think you're honest practicing this profession of paid compassion?

Can you, wishing to play your role properly, attack a victim and claim that he's cheating or at least exaggerating, because he demands too much and in no case deserves trust? Just to play your role properly, is it decent to show sympathy for a criminal who knocked out his victim's five teeth and plucked out his right eye?

For above all, it's about the advantage of the social role that I'm supposed to play over the requirements of my own conscience. So can you trade in the feelings of compassion, outrage or friendship only to play your role properly?

Well, at the beginning of my barrister's career, during one of the trials it happened that I couldn't control myself. That day I described the prosecutor's speech as surprisingly gentle, and my whole defence came down to reminding the young age of the defendant. Ms Peti, the presiding judge, immediately ordered a break. She called me to her office and asked me outraged:

- For God's sake, you're supposed to play your role!

Her first reaction was surprise. She was slowly recovering. But she didn't make out much of my explanations. At about 9 o'clock in the evening the trial was still going on. And when we'd already got very tired, I openly asked her a question in public:

- Can you forbid a barrister to be honest? Does he have to pretend compassion that he doesn't feel, find excuses where there aren't any and promise that his client will mend his ways, which he doesn't believe? What should he serve: his social role or his conscience?

Ms Peti ordered another break, and having come back to the courtroom, she gave me the only answer that she could:

- Court cannot answer such a question in public.

But the young colleagues present in the room replied me quickly:

- Well, that's what you call rendering a service to the client! Do you think you deserved his trust?

They were choking with outrage.

- If you have moral dilemma, you'd better quit this profession.

But will they become irreproachable even if I walk away so as not to remind them that you can have moral dilemma?

Our older colleagues, with old scars, will remind me of Nazi or Stalin barristers, who were insistently asked to play a "positive" role, to give up the defence of "harmful elements of the society" and to "cooperate" with the judiciary. "Would you like all of us to play this role?" – they will ask me.

Surely not! Whenever the trial is falsified, and the defendant already convicted, the barrister should defend him at all costs. This is what courage and dignity is about. If, however, the trial is honest (and it should be honest in this democratic-liberal system, shouldn't it?), the first duty of a righteous person is to give priority to his conscience over the social role that he's supposed to play at the moment. Starting with barristers.

Because if you, gentlemen judges, have a right to pass verdicts "to the best of your knowledge", without having to stick to only one criterion when trying criminals; if for you, gentlemen prosecutors, "a pen is a servant, but a word is free" and you can accuse as well as defend a defendant, let's be equal. Give

me a right to condemn a criminal, and not only find extenuating circumstances for him.

Well, that's the most ambiguous thing about this profession: being forced to pretend feelings which I don't have, and hide the ones I actually cherish, only because this is required by the social role that has been assigned to me.

2. There is one more hideous aspect of this profession: even if I am in peace with my conscience and defend only those who deserve it, that is, victims, I still have to demand money from them. It's a job and I must live off it. Well, in my case it's living off somebody's misery. If a client is wealthy, dealing with one's remorse is easy. But if he isn't rich? My clientele consists mainly of poor people, accident victims, women left by their husbands, the unemployed dismissed from work. If I don't take money from them, how shall I earn my living? Legal Assistance? It pays next to nothing, is awarded to absolutely poor people (one must earn less than the lowest admissible remuneration), and for both a barrister and a client it's a synonym of a bungled trial.

But apart from what is necessary and what has to be demanded, even if a client is poor, this profession warps your character very soon. You demand more and more, for example under the pretext of losses suffered elsewhere. Because if one of the clients hasn't paid, you must make up for it somehow.

I observed colleagues in the same line of work, brand new trainees enthusiastically entering into this profession. They felt burdened with a noble mission. Two years later I found vultures. Their only obsession was to take away a client from their colleague, and having him in their claws, squeeze like a lemon. At the beginning, they suffered qualms of conscience about it. Later, however, they joined the ranks. Finally they forgot about everything and stopped paying attention. Just like me. When I became a barrister, my first patron, Jean Jacques Delpoïo, used to say:

- The only nice moment during a week is when I get a cheque.

He's an exceptionally good specialist, probably the only one whom I've never caught committing any gross professional negligence. But his confession simply outraged me. Today I share his opinion: I don't get any pleasure until somebody pays me. Can the others behave in a different way? Can they resist the alluring charm of money and the temptation to demand more and more as the client breaks down physically and mentally? There's nothing to stop them. No bans. Just the opposite; everything seems to entice. With utter impunity, completely legally, or even with a blessing of the Bar Council (which seldom intervenes) and the understanding on the part of society, which accepts the requirements of my profession, I have a right to demand whatever I want from a man who depends entirely on me.

And again, I can hear my colleagues gnash their teeth. "If you don't like it, sod off out of it!".

Okay, let it be this way. One day I will quit my profession, and it's going to be a very festive moment. However, the barrister's occupation will remain what it is. It won't change only because I've filed a lawsuit against it.

3. The third side of my rotting profession is the awareness of help I gave in the process of systematic victim crushing. Wherever freedom is involved, the judiciary is very careful. Freedom is a noble value in a liberal society, even the freedom of a criminal. However, the same democratic judiciary will, like a tank, run over anyone asking for compensation. For money is in France a shameful, despicable and dirty thing. Whoever asks for it is despicable and dirty himself.

I therefore often tell my students: "If you have a choice between hurting somebody and being hurt, between causing distress and being a victim to distress, never hesitate for a single moment. Do not ever be victims! the steamroller of the judiciary will run over you, without even noticing it".

Due to my profession, I am a small cog in a huge machine, where every wheel, judge, barrister, bailiff and even an usher will find an opportunity to oppress a little bit somebody who expects help and redress for harm. Each of them will do it with no malice or qualms whatsoever: the judiciary entitles

and entices him to do so. He will hardly realize that with his feet he's crushed a little bug – a victim.

None of the judiciary fellow workers will see any moral contraindications that might prevent him from doing what he views as natural and right.

On the other hand, to a victim any encounter with the judiciary is tantamount to:

nights of waiting: “shall I get compensation?”;

barrister's fees: “how shall I pay?”;

the trial adjourned again, because “the court is terribly busy”, “when is my anguish going to end?”;

evidence: “how could I predict that everything should have been written on paper?”.

And so on, and so forth.

Now last but not least, the indifference, if not hostility of court: “The damage was not as serious as it was depicted; it was merely potential and not sufficiently justified. There will be no reimbursement of barrister's fees. The civil action is dismissed”.

I recall that, when I was a student at the University of Łódź in Poland, a professor told us about a typical example of injustice dating back to the Stalin epoch: in 1951 the Supreme Court refused to award compensation to the family of a farm worker killed in an accident at work on the grounds that “human life is priceless”. To that professor it was a proof of hypocrisy in the period of “mistakes and perversions” and contempt for the law, hidden under a cover of lofty slogans. And what do I find in this system of democratic and liberal justice? a general, spontaneous and deep conviction that it is a contemptible thing to demand money for the loss of a close person or one's own health. The local courts will give you a compensation of 3-50 thousand francs for your child's death and 3-5 thousand for a percent of health loss. And the students at my Faculty not only aren't outraged, but they are surprised by my surprise: “How can you demand compensation for your

mother's death? Human life and health is priceless. Actually, he should be glad that he received any compensation”.

So, there is no need to look for Stalin judges among commandants in Siberian gulags. Prestigious schools for judges will deliver their sufficient number.

Being an accomplice of the machine which resorts to all kinds of means to protect the freedom of someone deserving its loss and shows contempt to the one asking for financial compensation ... Being a servant of the system which gives a defendant the right to have pre-defined terms of trials, a panel of many judges, the principle of presumption of innocence, numerous ways of appealing at every stage of a lawsuit ... the system which at the same time shows indifference, or even irritation towards the suffering of a victim, who feels like the fifth wheel and whose mundane financial demands deserve contempt ... This is also unbearable.

4. There is still the fourth act of this gloomy play: latitude in interpreting.

From court to court, from tribunal to tribunal, verdicts range from 3 to 1. One judge will give a sentence of one-year imprisonment, whereas the other one - three years for the same offence. Here you will receive a compensation of 30 thousand, while there – only 4 thousand. One judge will read your letters carefully, and the other one will be reading a newspaper during your defence (“Judicial Journal” in this particular case). “Nimirf, the court sentences you to 3 years of imprisonment, whereas your accomplice gets 2 years, because he was the first one to plead guilty”.

A trifle, a smile, a word, a delay in pleading guilty is enough to spend 365 days more in a prison cell.

It's absolutely impossible to predict a sentence, as there is no control over courts.

Starting with the “Spirit of Laws”, the question of the independence of judges from political power is the axis of a liberal system. It's a great achievement of freedom. At least for those who are in political conflict with

authorities. During a trial the government, which by its very nature is prone to vindictive and merciless repression, cannot exert any pressure.

Unfortunately, the said independence of courts has become its own caricature, for which thousands of apolitical defendants pay a high price on a daily basis. Because as long as a judge has not been bribed and nobody has filed a special lawsuit against him, during which he's incidentally hedged with a hundred of privileges, he can do whatever he likes if he doesn't care much about making a career. Just like a barrister soon yields to the temptation of money, it won't be long before a judge gives in to the temptation of latitude.

Except for famous trials publicized by media, a French judge is free of any moral or professional control over his verdicts. In the first instance one can still resort to appeal. That's the only existing possibility, because the annulment of a sentence is the eye of a needle through which it's impossible to pass. In such a case, a barrister has to be paid again, and the case will be prolonged by another three years. However, as long as there's appeal, there's hope. But what can be done if latitude is rife in appeal courts or among the jury, whose verdicts cannot be appealed?

The decisions I heard in both civil and penal cases, passed by all sorts of courts of all instances, were frequently ludicrous and the reasons behind them were often different than searching for justice, reason, moderation and responsibility. Ill-considered verdicts passed in a hurry, under the influence of annoyance or amusement. In many cases I took advantage of them. In many other cases I was their victim. In both cases, however, these verdicts made the hair of each clear-headed and impartial observer stand on end. And all that happens in the name of a concern for the independence of judges, which reaches some absurd levels that simply encourage latitude of interpretation. All that takes place because of an obsessive fear that courts might become vassals of political power. All that is done for the sake of a few political lawsuits which draw the attention of intellectuals defending freedom, of deputies passing laws and of the media that manipulate

the public opinion and have it in their clutches. The dark side of the coin, however, is the distress of dozens of thousands of citizens, who don't care about politics, but who would like to have a decent and seriously conducted trial, where latitude would be limited to minimum.

Finally then I ask: how can you practice a profession:

in which every day you have to put your conscience on one scale pan, and your duty to play the role imposed you by the society on the other scale pan,

in which nothing (except competition) protects a person asking you for help against your greed;

in which everything is constructed in a way protecting the freedom of someone who should lose it, but making it impossible to fulfil the demands of a victim;

which is frequently governed by the latitude of judges, who are protected against social criticism by a soaring wall of independence.

FIBAK, 25TH MAY 1986

A moment ago Wojciech Fibak called me. He's one of few countrymen whose names mean something to the western audience, apart from Polanski, Skolimowski, Wajda, Milosz, Zanussi, Kantor, Grotowski, of course Wojtyla, Walesa, Penderecki and a few others, although to a lesser degree. I don't know him personally, but through his agent in Washington I sent him materials about Beks, as I'd learnt that he collects Polish paintings. Who knows, I said to myself (and Glinicki confirmed me in this hope, sending a big article in "Polityka" about Fibak's collection), perhaps he will buy a painting from me?

I've been warned about him. Wojtek (who doesn't know him personally, but knows everything about tennis and tennis players) claims that "in the milieu he comes across as the most intelligent man and the biggest hypocrite". I prefer not to attach importance to these warnings, but I remain cautious.

I'm glad when he calls, though. Actually, I no longer counted on that, because I'd got to know (saying to myself: "That's hard luck!"), that he wasn't on the list of participants of the Roland Garros tournament and wouldn't be staying in Paris in the nearest time.

During the conversation his tone is indifferent, but not arrogant. The talk is neutral, despite my attempts to add a friendly note to it. He thanks me for the letter. Yes, indeed, he collects Polish paintings, but not contemporary ones. He's more interested in the representatives of Parisian School (chiefly Jewish: Gotlib, Kisling, Eibisch, Menekes etc.). No, not paintings by Beks. Do I have a gallery? I explain my arrangement with Beks to him. He's playing doubles at the end of the tournament and would like to call me next weekend. I ask him for a phone number so that I could catch him. He tells me that he's renovating a villa in Port d'Auteuil, where he's going to stay when coming to Paris. Obviously, he doesn't want to give me any details.

When I press him a little, he finally gives me the number of Jacek Kseń (42-61-56-07, extension 291), telling me that this guy deals with his matters in Europe.

I'd be pleased to sell a painting to Fibak, even at a low price. His surname is known in certain circles, and just like Polański's name might open a few doors for me.

I am waiting for his call then.

UNIVERSITY, 26TH MAY 1986

In front of me there is a huge amphitheatre of the Law Faculty. “Grand Amphi”.

It’s eight thirty five. More than a thousand students of the first year have started their written exam in constitutional law. It’s a sunny morning outside. At last, at the end of May the weather is nice, and I’m sitting in front a colourful crowd, listening to the rustle of turned leaves, the stifled cough of students sitting the examination and the steps of supervisors on the marble floor.

For students it’s a disagreeable moment, because if they fail two times in a row during the first two years of studies, they will be expelled from the faculty and banned from studying at any other university. I can easily imagine the anxiety that’s eating them up. The epoch when I was sitting in their place, in the same amphitheatre, is slowly receding. Sixteen years have passed. The memory, however, is still vivid, like the memory of all unpleasant moments in my life. And if I don’t pass? – I asked myself fearfully, just like they must be asking themselves now. – What will happen if I don’t pass?

That’s one of the reasons why I find it hard to flunk a student who’s looking into my face. Out of 25 examination sessions in which I’ve participated for 13 years since I started working at university there have been two sessions during which I was able to force myself to give honest grades in oral exams. I gave a certain number of bad marks. Even one or two zeros. But as I feel bad about it afterwards, I no longer do that. I’ve come back to my usual method: the “satisfactory” grade is the starting point, from which I sometimes go up.

When I correct written works, there are only pieces of paper in front of me, so I find it easy to objectively assess students’ works and apply a wide range of marks: from zero to twenty. However, it’s a different story when in

front of my I see a face which in ten minutes is going to shrink having heard my judgment. I can't do that. I guess I would be a rotten judge, as I'm submissive. Hiding behind paper, I have the guts to be firm or aggressive. But how could I take away a year of life from somebody who's looking into my eyes? I simply can't be strict, knowing how many things in his existence will fall through because of a little gesture of my hand writing the unsatisfactory grade into his files.

Besides – I say to myself and to Ania, who accuses me of taking the easy way out – there are so many bastards who aren't honest, but in the opposite direction: by principle, out of irritation or indifference, they flunk almost everyone. I believe there must be a balance in a student's life, so if there are examiners who always flunk a student, there must a counterpoise – the ones who will always push him through.

- I'm here to teach you, not to screen you – I frequently tell my students at the beginning of a new academic year, when we meet for the first time. – Let the others do it for me. And they will do it with pleasure, because most people are policemen who have missed their vocation ... So, I'm not going to call the roll and I give you my word of honour that each of you will get at least a satisfactory grade, even if he or she hasn't lifted a finger throughout the year. I believe that if you come to our meetings and listen to what I say, it's because you want to do that, not because you are afraid of me.

However, there is also another reason behind my leniency, a less noble one: somewhere in my subconsciousness lurks a need to win human friendliness, to buy a smile of gratitude, for which I pay with the only coin that doesn't cost me anything: good grades.

In the end, throughout the years spent at university I discovered that students who are free of fear and learn for pleasure work equally well as students acting under compulsion and out of fear. It's not students that are a problem, though. The problem lies in lecturers. My colleagues are often so boring that they have to use a whip to be listened to. I've also found that most of my students are promoted to the next year, whereas in groups run by

teachers who follow strict rules of the game and don't use the incentive of good marks, the failure rate is much higher.

But as usual, I'm lost in digressions and endlessly prolong the introduction. Actually, what I'm going to say today has little to do with my system of giving grades. The reason why I'm talking about my university life is that I want to say that because of Beks I swapped my previous quite existence for an incessant calvary.

I've drifted apart from books and from my research work. I no longer go to the library on Cujas, where the air is heavy with the smell of sweat and dusty books, the lights are dazzlingly bright, and the basement is made up of kilometres of winding corridors with shelves, often covered in cobweb, which I used to explore for many years in search of necessary documents. I stopped taking part in university life and seldom go with my students to dinner to "Assiette au Boeuf" on Saint Germain des Près.

My book "Conditions for the Efficiency of International Obligations" dropped dead before it was born. The fruit of eight years of contemplations and four years of daily, detailed, endless searches; searches which made me look through 50 thousand of documents and collect many thousand pages of notes; the fruit of enormous work, painstaking work of a Benedictine monk, which was already ripening. I dumped it, too. I needed one more year to classify everything, to complete the gaps and edit the whole thing. It would have surely been useful work.

Also my university career has come to a standstill. Being a habilitated doctor, I can't get the post of an associate professor, which corresponds to my academic degree, because under the pretext of a contest, this post is awarded by co-option. And the latter is governed by dark and devious rules. I've tried this way a few times and I've always failed. Sometimes because there were better candidates than me, but most frequently because the tacit conspiracy of the Specialists Commission members at our university blocked my way. I am simply detested by professors at our university. Almost all of them have right-wing or ultra-right-wing views. Some of them can't forgive

me my articles published in “Le Monde”, which were hostile to “Solidarity”, and favourably inclined towards the martial law introduced by general Jaruzelski. During the last recruitment 3 persons voted for me, while more than 30 Commission members voted against me. What unanimity ... I hate them as much as they hate me and I never deny myself the pleasure of showing it whenever I go past them without even saying a casual “good morning”.

Only a professor’s contest gives some guarantee of impartiality and honesty. I entered such a competition in 1982 and didn’t get through. After this defeat I was going to thoroughly prepare for the next one, two years later. On that second attempt I would’ve had all the chance to finally become a professor, without having to go through the intermediate post of associate professor. Almost all my colleagues became professors in the last three contests: Baco, Le Mir, Chevalier, Rials and many others.

One day Jacques Parisot reproached me:

- Why didn’t you devote yourself only to law? You should have won the professor’s contest like everybody else instead of wasting time for the promotion of a painter.

My university career was put aside, almost forgotten. Over the last three years a hurricane has gone through my life. My whole serene and contemplative existence has been shaken to the foundations.

But “*rien de rien, je ne regrette rien*”¹. The joys and passions I’ve experienced, the moments of utter exaltation and successes that I’ve achieved are more than compensating me for the loss of peace in my life. Financial disasters that have been pestering me for six months, hatred, contempt and the consuming resentment I feel towards the world of art in which I’ve immersed myself - none of these things will make me turn back and change the way I’ve chosen. Sometimes I feel like humming with Brassens “*J’aurai jamais dû m’éligner de mon arbre*”². However, the truth is that I do it to snivel in a corner and to appear more interesting rather than anything else.

But who knows? If I managed to promote Beks, maybe I would come back to meditation in the future? ...

No, quite unlikely. A researcher who's been once sucked in the whirl of events seldom comes back to university lecture rooms. Neither Woodrow Wilson nor Henry Kissinger, or Raymon Barre, to quote the most famous ones, ever returned to purely intellectual life after they'd become fascinated by activity and the stinky stench given off by human cloaca after it's been moved.

Besides, I will tell you that I wouldn't actually enjoy it any longer.

¹ „rien de rien, je ne regrette rien” – the chorus of a popular song by Edith Piaff „nothing, absolutely nothing, I regret nothing”

² “J’aurai jamais dû m’elogner de mon arbre” – I should never go away from my tree.

CONSPIRACY, 28TH MAY 1986

1. – Hold on, do you want to say they everybody has ganged up, or something?

I can hear a note of irritation in my interlocutor's voice.

A plot? No, that smells of paranoia, I admit.

Incompetence is rife everywhere – I repeat and for the hundredth time curse it, as I've been plagued by it for too long.

Excessive caution and a fear of taking risks? Certainly. How many times did I have to put up with it whenever I turned to anybody?

Indifference? a hundred times when I talked about Beks I could see cold looks, indifferent faces and a bored smile stuck to the lips.

But of course, any kind of plot is out of the question, just because all these people don't know each other, if not for any other reason.

2. Today I met with Ms Marszalek-Mlynczyk the director of the Polish Institute. She holds the post of a cultural attaché in the Polish embassy, and in a few days she's leaving Paris to take the post of the deputy minister of culture in Warsaw. That's a pity because I had a friend in her.

- Did Zadora from Pompidou Centre reply you? – I ask her.

- Zadora is in Poland preparing "Paris Four Times" exhibition. I've tried to talk to him about Beksiński on many occasions. He's never answered me. Whenever I call him he's not in the office. Gone out.

- I expected that – I reply. – Pompidou Centre already refused to exhibit Beksiński when I proposed it myself some time ago.

- Yes – she says. – I asked many important people from Poland who stayed in Paris for some time to turn to the French and propose that the Ministry of Culture in France organize an exhibition of Beksiński in

return for the “Four Times Paris” exhibition. They insisted. Begged. Nobody has ever replied them, and if they have, the answers were non-committal. Nothing can be done.

Ms Marszałek-Młyńczyk is as embittered as me, but she puts down this silence to the classic behaviour of French clerks after the elections on 16th March. She thinks that after the Parliament majority and the government changed, each clerk is quiet and doesn't want to stick his neck out so as not to lose the job.

Is it really about that?

I think that the line of thought of Ms Marszałek-Młyńczyk, who is a clerk herself, is too focused on this aspect, and finally, is wrong. Personally I believe that the reason for these excuses, direct and indirect refusals and absences is both broader and narrower. Narrower because it's only about Beks; and broader because it stretches beyond the milieu and the reasoning of clerks.

Today all Parisian decision makers know about the existence of Beks. I've knocked at the doors of all institutions, museums, ministries, directors, organs, centres and institutes. Everywhere I was met with a refusal or silence. I was sent to the others, who answered me: “no, thank you” and, again, sent me to somebody else. It doesn't refer only to a small circle of culture branch clerks. And it started much earlier that at the time of elections on 16th March.

Unanimity that makes all local decision makers tell me “no” combined with the admiration of the guests at my exhibition is like a psychedelic mystery.

I wish I could, like my interlocutor, say to myself:

- They must have ganged up.

What a relief. Then, at last I wouldn't have to bother with speculations.

SELF-CENSORSHIP, 29TH MAY 1986

When I was in Cannes a few days ago, I wrote a few bitter pages on self-censorship. Today I'm coming back to this topic, because it wasn't long before I had an opportunity to test in practice how it functions:

Well then, without thinking, or at least not thinking enough, yesterday I proposed Delpeo that I give him a few notes to read. No sooner had I done it than a self-censorship reflex was heard: "If I show him this page, first I will have to cut out a certain fragment. If I don't do it, what will he think of me? This one I can't give to him, either. Or at least not whole. And if I let him read the note where I talk about him, he's ready to take offence and I'll lose a friend. I'll have to remove or change it then".

Finally, I backed out of the whole thing. I won't give him anything to read, full stop. Because when I once put my fingers in the gears of self-censorship, there won't be much left to be published or everything will have to be reworded. In the meantime, the truth will have vanished into thin air. It's enough that I've made a big concession for my only reader, Ania. Because of her I don't talk in the notes about something that is very important to me: sex. I won't make any other concessions, though.

Another opportunity to discover what injuries may be caused by self-censorship came my way yesterday when for the second time I read the text I'd once written about terrorists and the fire of Louvre. I discovered that when writing this text I used the form "we" instead of "you", as if I was of French origin myself, as if my ancestors had built Notre Dame and Joanne d'Arc had belonged to my History.

I know why I did it: because when writing this text I secretly wanted to publish it, so to avoid being perceived as a foreigner who provides the enemies of France with criminal ideas, by saying "we" instead of "you" I wanted to show that I'd also be worried about it, that I would be as

devastated as the French, and for this reason, just in case, I claimed to have blood ties with this country.

So, this is how using self-censorship to win the favour of readers or the publisher can lead you into being servile and talking rubbish.

PORTRAIT OF BEKS 1, 31ST MAY 1986

I know it's unfair of me: Beks has no possibility to defend himself against my charges. Although he knows about these notes, as I've told him, he doesn't know exactly what they contain. In particular, he doesn't know that dozens of pages are devoted to his endless lawsuit. Also in the future he won't be able to say anything in his defence, because when my notes have been finally published, we'll both be pushing up the daisies two metres deep in the ground.

I wonder if I didn't make a mistake smearing him like that. Many people automatically link the author to his works. Only few people, like me, can separate one thing from another. To love the paintings, average enthusiasts of art must admire the painter. How many blockheads admire the work of van Gogh only because they are moved by the legend surrounding his miseries and failures. If I incessantly tell you about the vices of my idol, how can I count on creating a myth without which the majority of art lovers are not able to feel any aesthetic emotions at the sight of a painting shown to them? It's as if I was putting stumbling blocks in my own way. Because the more I will belittle his person in the eyes of my readers, the harder it will be to convince them of the greatness of his work.

But ... But, contrary to the principle "*audi alteram partem*", which I'm so lavish with, I can't keep silent like a gentleman and forgive like a Christian.

First of all, his endless financial demands are leading me to despair.

1. It's mainly about my duty to ensure him 12 thousand dollars annually, which I call a flat rate.

(By the way, what is he doing with such loads of money? In France 12 000 dollars is a modest sum, an equivalent of a yearly income of a clerk, but in Poland just one single thousand dollars is enough to provide for a five-person family during one year. Which leads to the conclusion that what Beks

needs for 365 days is an equivalent of money a Polish clerk will get throughout his life. Given the fact that he doesn't drink, doesn't visit people, doesn't gamble, doesn't collect anything except gramophone records, and in his flat there isn't a single, even the most modest decoration or an ornamental object, you might wonder what the hell he's doing with all that money. For the last two years I've been paying him not 12, but even 20 thousand dollars, as I've bought from him all the paintings that he had in stock, so he received 40 thousand dollars from me, to say nothing of the cash he got from the sale of paintings, which for a long time had been in the hands of Wahl and to which I had no access whatsoever. Believe me, neither I nor many other people who know Polish conditions and who know about our connections understands what he's doing with all that money).

This obligation to provide him with a steady income (flat rate) by buying at least 12 paintings a year is supposed to guarantee his financial security until the time the paintings start selling in France. And then we are going to share the income fifty-fifty. If this happens, his situation will be more than enviable. It's a dream of every Pole: to earn in the West and spend in Poland, where everything is about ten times cheaper.

But the very fact that I have to regularly and scrupulously pay the lump sum doesn't stir up my protests. What really hurts me is that Beks keeps reminding me, whenever an opportunity arises, that he'll demand this money even if I find myself in a most critical situation. Therefore, he's clearly said that he's not going to share any financial problems of mine. Even if spend everything I've got on the promotion of his art and go bust as a result, he will ruthlessly demand his lump sum.

2. All that would be acceptable if it weren't for the fact that he made me oblige myself that in the event I go bankrupt, apart from the lump sum due for that year, I will have to pay him a compensation of 24 000 dollars for breaking the contract.

So, if such a situation really occurred, that is, if I had no more money and badly needed his solidarity and support at this very moment, not only wouldn't I get one, but I would have to pay him 36 thousand instead of 12.

He reminds me of it whenever an opportunity occurs:

- I've got an impression you're heading for bankruptcy. Have you prepared 36 000 dollars for my flat rate and compensation? And will you have enough money to send me back the paintings you're storing?

- Drown, Peter. Drown. It's your business. It was not me who asked you to promote my art among the frogs. But before you drown, pay everything you owe me and give back the paintings for which you haven't paid yet.

It sounds more or less like that.

Not only am I hurt by this open demonstration of greed, but I'm simply outraged by injustice. Why compensation? Actually, according to our agreement, Beks doesn't have any obligations. All but all obligations lie solely with me. I have to buy the paintings. I have to exhibit them in France and in other countries of Western Europe. I have to try to make an album. I had to produce the film. I have to pay the costs of transport as well as any duties and taxes. So, if I break the agreement, because I'll have lost all financial resources for his promotion, what will actually be his damage that I'm supposed to "pay damages" for?

- After a period of absence I could have problems coming back to the Polish market – Beks explains to me. – Your compensation would help me to wait for the end of this time.

I don't understand it, because if anything, his fame has increased since the time the news spread that, like no other Polish artist, he is exhibited in Paris and is becoming known there. Nyczek, Wahl and many other gallery owners keep insisting that I sell again through their agency in Poland. There were no big problems with selling Beks's paintings in the past, but they know that now there would be even less trouble to sell, and at much better prices.

In other words, his budget wouldn't sustain any loss if I went bankrupt. Just the opposite.

Any other artist in his shoes not only wouldn't demand any compensation, but would rather try to help me wait till the losing streak is over (for the sake of his own well-understood interest). But certainly not Beks.

3. Our agreement provides for a fixed price to pay for the paintings: 1000 dollars for a piece, irrespective of the quality and size. For such a price he sold them to Wahl, when we met and I bound myself to him.

But he reserved the right to annually increase the price by the percentage of dollar inflation. That's why he carefully leafs through the pages of "Herald Tribune", where relevant indexes are quoted at the end of year.

- Don't forget that this year I will charge you 5% more due to inflation – he reminds me in each phone call.

4. When we were concluding the agreement, the dollar reached a very high value in relation to all western currencies, especially in relation to the franc. I was afraid that it would continue to rise and that paying Beks in dollars (as he didn't want to agree to any other currency, especially the French one) I would run out of francs. I therefore insisted that the price of paintings should be lower in the event the dollar became increasingly expensive for me. He flatly refused, arguing that he was not interested in how much I paid for a dollar, but how many zlotys he would receive for a dollar. Well, the relation of the dollar to the zloty didn't change much, although in the West the dollar was simply going mad.

The only thing I managed to get from him was to include a clause in our agreement by virtue of which in the event the value of the dollar increased (or dropped) by 20 percent in relation to the initial value in francs (which at the moment of concluding our agreement amounted to 1\$ = 8.40 francs), the party that lost because of the parity change could ask the other one to try to solve the problem together. The clause finished with some nebulous assurances like "the parties shall settle the disputes amicably". It was

supposed to mean that I wouldn't insist on an automatic reduction of the prices of paintings if the dollar continued to rise, but I would settle for the hope that "we would come to some agreement". In other words, I relied on Beks making a gesture, but this gesture was in no way imposed on him, and it was not even vaguely specified.

Just like I'd predicted, the dollar soon reached probably the highest, historical value of 10.2 francs.

At that moment I owed Beks several thousand dollars. I therefore asked him to negotiate and, as promised, try to find "an amicable solution" together.

- No way – he answered. – I demand the sum of dollars promised to me, no matter how many francs you will have to pay for it. Here in Poland the dollar is steady. I don't care for its rise in France.

- All right – I said.

And I paid what I owed him. However, I said to myself: Just wait.

Fortune is fickle. Some time later the dollar plunged. Not only was it far from its 10-franc peaks, but it decreased 10 percent below the value it had reached when we were concluding our agreement. Two months later the dollar dropped from 10.20 to 6.90 francs.

At that moment there was no term of payment for me. The nearest one fell in August. But Beks had already started to worry. The fact that the dollar still hadn't changed its value in relation to the zloty (which was his argument to previously refuse a price reduction) didn't calm him at all. Seeing that the dollar was getting cheaper in relation to Western currencies, he hastily informed me: "I am warning you that next time I will definitely demand a rise of the price. The dollar has dropped ..."

Seeking any "agreement" or "amicable solution" was out of the question. Indeed, he raised the prices without asking me for my opinion and shrugged his shoulders at my complaints.

5. This man is pathologically economical.

Whatever the issue, he will never call. He thinks that a telephone connection with Paris is too expensive, so he will patiently wait till I call one day to tell me what the matter is.

During the long recovery of his son after an attempted suicide I called him 45 times. I called in the morning and in the evening for 3 weeks. I didn't count quarters of the conversation, no matter how long he wanted to talk to me on a given day. Especially, I didn't count the time I spent dialling to get through, as getting a connection from Paris to Warsaw is not an easy thing.

When, upon my request, he records our conversations, he always tells me to pay for the cassettes. "Don't forget that you still owe me money for the plaster I lent you to pack the paintings. Do you remember? During the last shipment ..."

6. Beks is extremely cautious before he takes a decision to lend anything.

As you know, my Friend, I still believe that I'll be able to release an album of his works. So, in advance I asked him for the negatives of his old paintings that Glinicki wasn't able to photograph. As usual, the first answer was: "No, I won't lend".

I had to long assure him that I would return them and wouldn't damage anything. After eight months of my insisting he eventually gave in. "But if Glinicki does something stupid, you will pay. I warn you". I agreed.

He reacted in the same way when I asked him to lend me the press cuttings about his Polish exhibitions. I wanted to copy them and include the photocopies in the materials accompanying the exhibition.

"No, I won't lend".

For many weeks I had to ask him as if he was a stranger who could only lose and not gain anything.

7. If Beks is afraid of anything, it's surely not censorship, as it seems to some local naïve admirers fed with anti-communist propaganda. He is

terribly afraid of the tax office. It simply gives him nightmares. He wakes up in a cold sweat, fearing that he's been called on the carpet and must confess all his income sins, which are not only big for Polish conditions and always concealed, but to make matters worse, received in dollars, therefore illegal. He talks about it a lot in his letters. Sometimes he writes with a wit, which he doesn't lack. Sometimes very seriously and with deep anxiety.

To be able to deny that he's selling me his current paintings, which is a source of his silent, serious income in foreign currency, he got an idea to stop dating the new paintings, and instead mark them at the back with signs made up of letters. Should he be plied with questions by the Tax Office, he can claim that he has nothing to do with me, that currently he isn't selling me anything and that the paintings I take abroad have for many years belonged to my family collection, which my father bought in the Polish currency fifteen years ago.

Apart from that he's stipulated in the agreement that in the event any tax is due to be paid on the lump sum he's received, I will have to pay it.

In our talks, however, he clearly warned me that also in the case of another income, that is the income beyond the lump sum, if I buy more paintings than the obligatory twelve pieces a year, I will have to pay the taxes, irrespective of our agreement provisions. When I tried to protest, he threatened to raise the prices so that the taxes would still be paid from my pocket, but in an indirect way.

8. He is hardly worried that he might not go down in history. That doesn't bother him at all. However, he's eaten up by money issues, wondering whether the bank will not reduce the interest rate on his deposit by any chance and whether he will get his 10 percent at the end of the year.

Instead of a conclusion for the above act of indictment, let me give those two comments:

a. The most disarming thing about all that is the fact that Beks confesses to all his vices without a blush. He's sober and, in a way, void of ego, so he frequently tells me, not feeling embarrassed:

- You've got a nature of a poker player. You like betting big money and taking risks. I, on the other hand, have a character of a rentier. I want to have my coupon every month. Not a big income, but sure.

b. Instead of decreasing, Beks's financial requirements grow as he observes my endeavours. And that's for the following reason, which he confessed to me: when we met and negotiated the agreement, he was convinced that he was dealing with a rich French collector who didn't want to disclose his identity and had entrusted his barrister speaking Polish (that is me) to draw up an agreement on his behalf. This is what Beks pictured himself. No wonder he thought that his financial future was forever secured, as "the partner was solvent" (these are his words).

After a time he realized that I was his contractor (which I said at the very beginning), with little experience and even a smaller budget. Then he was seized with fury and fear. Fury because he, a cold calculating person, a sober realist, naively built a number of sand castles; because he made a fool of himself telling his family and friends about them and because the dreams about "glorious future" came to nothing. And fear because when I drown, I can pull him into the whirl.

While at the beginning he had too much faith in our financial success, now he exaggerates with expecting my failure. He would most like me to go bankrupt as soon as possible so that the situation clears up and I leave him alone once and for all. That's why, paradoxically, his financial requirements grow instead of dwindling.

Besides, he also confessed to me that one of his family members, whose opinion he values, advised him: "Rip him off before he goes bust".

So Beks is trying to rip me off as soon as possible.

But that's how it is with geniuses.

CHEESED OFF, 4TH JUNE 1986

- I've got enough of it! – Ania is annoyed. – I'm cheesed off! Fed up to the back teeth with your never ending story of Beks! Can't you change the topic for once? Invent something funny or malicious? It's an obsession!

She's right: I must either start writing something else or simply shut up.

Write something else? That means writing tales. Writing for others. To do that, I would have to fulfil two conditions: first of all, I'd have to make something up. Well, it seems I'm not capable of doing that. Next, the censorship of readers and distributors would have to be abolished. In the meantime, to anaesthetize it a little bit I would have to impose some restraints on myself: cut something out in one place, colour things in another place, round off the edges. Primo, this would be idiotic. Secundo: pointless. Unnecessary effort and unnecessary concessions, because right now I'm already certain that my literature is digestible only when I dwell on the numerous pimples on my face and the poisons that make me choke. As soon as I start pretending to be optimistic and friendly towards people, I fall into a stodgy style.

Should I go quiet then?

That would be most reasonable. Because the only reason why I started writing these notes was to break free of the unbearable fear. Pouring one's grudges onto paper is like taking an aspirin. Anxiety left me and I could go to sleep.

But the therapy has served its purpose. Again, I'm free of fear. Despite debts reaching 260 thousand and the prospect of other miseries – I somehow calmed down. The pressure sort of eased off and I'm almost numb, insensitive to my falling down. Frankly speaking, there is no longer any point in filling these pages. The end of pressure, the end of passion. The end of passion, the end of confessions.

So, Ania is right: no more Beks stories! And since I can't invent any other one, I'd better shut up and look at the park behind the window.

From now on I will try to do only this.

Let's say for some time ...

PLURALISM, 4TH JUNE 1986

Why are people so obedient and stand in an orderly line? Why does everybody march, leg by leg, with the same rhythmic step? Why in the system of democratic pluralism everybody verbally stresses what makes him different from the others, and when it comes to actions all people are alike?

There are a few reasons, which actually everybody knows. They are hard to confess, though.

1. Number one among all those reasons is searching for profit.

Five potential buyers of a painting by Beks will have five different, if not completely contradictory opinions of him. Which doesn't change the fact that in action all of them will be reduced to the lowest common denominator. A hundred of different cries of delight at the exhibition came down to unanimity when the question of money appeared on the horizon. Potential purchasers turned into potential traders, like Carpentier for that matter. He in turn behaved like Seran, whose behaviour in turn was exactly the same as that of Ms Passover. Like two peas in a pod.

All of them gave all sorts of various opinions on Beks's painting. It seemed they differed greatly from one another, but all of them lost their individuality as soon as the question of profit appeared. Suddenly they became as stereotypical as soldiers. The moment they moved from the opinion to action, their manners became similar to one another, if not completely identical.

- No, thank you. I won't earn on it – told me Carpentier, the owner of the gallery on Bac Street.

- Dear sir, it's nonsense to invest in it. He's not a known painter. I exhibit only the ones who sell well – I was told frankly by the owner of "Galerie de la Présidence".

- To sell well, a painter must be on the spot. If he isn't, it's impossible to earn on him. And you say that he lives in Warsaw. No, thank you – Blondel, the owner of the gallery near Beaubourg Centre told me.

A funny thing is that each of them had an impression he followed his own taste, without communicating with the others.

Seeking a profit simplifies one's personality and brings down people's internal variety in action to a few simple behaviours.

What hasn't been standardized by censorship and liberal-democratic propaganda will be standardized by the search of profit. Painlessly, without violence, unconsciously. All of them march with an even step, in a line, towards the same goal: profit. And all of them are deeply convinced of their individuality.

There might be a hundred galleries, many sponsors and collectors, each of them having their own taste. If all of them are operated by the same spring, which is looking for profit, their diversity is purely intellectual.

2. Wherever the spring of profit hasn't levelled personal tastes, the policy will.

By policy I understand a set of principles imposed upon themselves by people whose obligation is to promote art irrespective of the profit criterion, namely, culture clerks. Such as Grympas, Zadora, Minière, Bozo, museum curators, counsellors, commission members, in a word all those from whom I received a nearly identical answer:

- We have adopted a policy that we must follow. Your painter does not meet the criteria that we have determined.

- This painting goes beyond the aesthetics of our museum. Your painter is not modern. The task we have assigned to ourselves is to support artists who live and create in the spirit of our epoch.

Et cetera.

In the system of public, non-profit promotion of art the right to take basic decisions lies with a few centres which determine top-down criteria of the cultural policy. Such a concentration of decisions corresponds to the principle of lower-rank clerks' obedience to any signals from the top. Both factors (top-down criteria and obedience to hierarchy) cause that the diversity of clerks' personal tastes is crushed by the aesthetic uniformity of institutions in which they work. In a private conversation, French culture branch clerks show occasional interest in Beks's painting. However, when they speak officially, that is, according to the top-down criteria of the office, the final result is invariably "no, thank you". While at home they may say what they want, in the office they observe with unrelenting consistency the requirements of the cultural policy, which is based on the principles and criteria established by the management.

3. I'm not going to come back to other reducers of diversity in this system of apparent pluralism. I've already written about that at length.

I would just like to remind of this factor, which painlessly, by merely repeating over and over again, imposes aesthetic models to be followed by masses, audience, the public. This is called the propaganda of culture.

Also, I'm not coming back to the mechanism which forces artists to respect these patterns and these criteria under the threat of repressions on the part of decision makers and the said audience, which has been previously trained. This is called self-censorship.

Essentially, everything is pushing for unanimity: traders and collectors are identical, because they search for profit, culture clerks are the same, as they observe the policy of their superiors, the audience is standardized due to the cultural propaganda and artists because of self-censorship.

Then, thousands of idiots, such as Dmochowski, tell thousands of university students, who listen to them, about freedom and variety in a pluralist society. These in turn become teachers and repeat the same to millions of children at schools. The children grow up and pass it on to their children.

RATS AND ANGELS, 5TH JUNE 1986

The only thing that I'm still slightly interested in is my inner world. The world swarming with rats that produce piercing squeaks and angels that are humming out of tune.

As for the surrounding reality, I would like to forget about it at last.

DARBOIS, 6TH JUNE 1986

Georges Pompidou claimed that from the philosophical point of view he was against the death penalty.

It's well-known what he thought of it from the "practical" point of view. Because from the political point of view, seeing that the next elections might be lost by the Gaullists, he signed a death sentence for Bontemps.

From the "personal" point of view, Guy Darbois liked my film. However, from the "professional" point of view, he refused to allow Antenne 2 to buy it, thus depriving me of an award in Cannes.

In his defence let me remind you that the situation resembles the freedom of thought, which, great as it might be, shrinks immeasurably the moment it turns into the freedom of speech, and when you want to convert it into the freedom of action, it simply becomes as small as a handkerchief. From infinity to a nutshell.

Today I called him from the university, where at the moment I'm taking part in the meetings of the examination board for the fourth year students. And this is what he said exactly. Just after I'd hung up the receiver I wrote down his every word, so I think I didn't forget or twist any of them.

- I've seen your cassette. Your film (obviously he mistakes me for the director) doesn't fit our programmes at all. But I will tell you that personally I liked it. Oh, yes! It has ideas that you don't usually find in other films. Yes, yes, I liked it very much. But you know, despite the distance that you kept from the outdated form of a documentary, it still remains a documentary. And frankly speaking, I'm not sure where I could put it.

I interrupt him asking:

- Don't you see any possibility of squeezing it somewhere ... free of charge .. At least partially?

- Actually, I don't know who might take it. Everybody's got such stocks of this kind of films that I really don't know who might be interested in it. But if you make a full-length movie in the future, I'll buy it straight away. In any case, your film couldn't get the first award in Cannes, because we'd already known that we wouldn't take it.

Let me remind you, my Friend, that the award for a short film shown within the framework of the "Perspectives of the French Cinema" in Cannes was supposed to be the purchase of the film by Antenne 2 and a sum of 10 000 francs granted to the director.

Why did they put on this show then? What was the whole farce for if they'd known already in Paris that my film wouldn't be awarded, because it was a documentary? Why would one organize a competition which is supposed to be governed by quality criteria if the win is from the very beginning determined by commercial criteria?

From the conversation it is clear for me that the dice had already been cast before the festival began.

However, the most important thing is that Guy Darbois liked my film ... from the "personal" point of view.

POLAŃSKI, 5TH JUNE 1986

When I was going to the meeting with Mrs Afkhami this afternoon, for a moment I popped into the house where Polański lives, on Montaigne Avenue, so as to leave an additional invitation for the tomorrow's vernissage with the janitor of the building (which is guarded by two armed guys, just like buildings in New York).

This morning his secretary called me about it, because Polański had received his invitation, but Krystyna Morgenstern, who came from Poland and was staying in his place, would like to get hers. As for Krystyna Morgenstern, the wife of Polański's friend, Ida Smith told me about her one day:

- When she talked about you she choked with fury, as if she was going to suffocate in a moment. She called you a thief, a cheat. That's all because of your exhibition.

Because of that, however, I don't feel a stronger aversion to Ms Morgenstern than to majority of other people.

When leaving the house where Polański lives I meet him before the entrance. I greet him, but obviously he doesn't recognize me.

- You've had your hair cut – he says after a while, to excuse himself in a way.

I ask him if he's going to come to the vernissage to Grand Palais and tell him that his friend César called me to announce his visit. Polański replies that he doesn't know if he will come, as he must mix "Pirates" for the opening night in the USA.

- You've made a great movie – I flatter him.

He blushes slightly.

- Oh, really? – he clearly wants me to continue.

For the nth time I discover how lonely stars are, separated from the audience with a wall. This need to cling to just any remark of anybody in the street, so as to find in it an answer to the pestering questions that he asks himself; this need, let me repeat, I've already found in Beks, but it was only after a time that I understood its dimensions.

- The scene with a rat is going to go down in history – I bid up the price. – Just like the one with Dracula's son with the Bible in his teeth in "Vampire's Ball".

- It was a small booklet – he corrects me and adds after a moment: - I must tell an acquaintance of mine who's got two paintings by Beksiński about tomorrow's vernissage.

- I've heard that you bought one recently – I egg him on, because indeed, I've heard that Wahl sold him something.

- No, that was one of my friends.

- Anyway, we'll be pleased to see you at tomorrow's vernissage.

- Thank you.

And we say goodbye to each other.

One gesture of this man, whose popularity opens all doors here and lures the journalist rabble, his presence at a single vernissage, carefully announced to the public in advance, and how much easier my task would be ...

CÉSAR, 6TH JUNE 1986

- It's César speaking.

- César An artist?

The first thought that comes to my head is that one of my acquaintances is trying to take me in.

- Yes.

- Oh, good morning! I'm really pleased and honoured by your call. So, you have received an invitation to the vernissage? – I try to gain time, while pretending to be relaxed.

- Yes, what this painter is doing is very beautiful. Who's that? I don't know him. Is he alive?

- Yes, of course – I can't think of anything original or witty.

- Where? Here, in France?

- No, in Warsaw. He's Polish.

- How old is he?

- 57.

- Oh, so he's still young.

Why do all of them ask the same question and give the same idiotic commentary to my reply? And to make matters worse, they say it with a note of leniency, as if it was about a debutant who needs paternal words of encouragement, as he still has time to show what he can do.

- And where is the vernissage?

- In Grand Palais.

- Where is it?

I'm surprised that he doesn't know, because in front of Grand Palais, just next to Champs-Élysées, stands a huge sculpture presenting Centaur with his head, which he dedicated to Pablo Picasso.

- Grand Palais ... you know ... currently there is a sculpture of yours ...

- Is this his individual exhibition?

- No, it's a salon, there are five his paintings. – I add hurriedly: - This salon is called Critical Figuration.

- Is it a new salon?

What world do these people live in? – I ask myself.

- Oh, it's been in existence for at least 6-7 years. It's an excellent salon – I say aloud.

- Anyway, it's very beautiful what you sent me, this veiled head and even if Roman Polański ...

Now I'm sure that I'm really talking to César, and not somebody who's mocking me. Well, indeed, the letter accompanying the invitation which I sent started with the words: "Upon the advice of Mr Roman Polański, I take the liberty of informing you that"

The telephone ringing in the adjacent room interrupts our conversation. But before he hangs up the receiver, he adds:

- That's beautiful. I can't come to the vernissage tomorrow, because I won't be in Paris. But I will come on Monday or Tuesday.

Immediately, I try to get as much benefit as possible out of this new acquaintance.

- I'll be very pleased. It would also be a pleasure and honour for the painter if you would be so kind and write him a few words expressing your satisfaction ...

- With pleasure. See you.

A word from César ... For thousands of idiots who don't have their own opinion on art and just follow the renown of an artist; that's a guarantee that would free them of tiring hesitations and doubts about Beks's painting. Hesitations and doubts which so far have always ended with a careful refusal.

But most importantly, such a little word would shut the stinky gobs of morons like Minières, Grympases or other Zadoras. In a word, the gobs of all those hideous pen-pushers from Pompidou Centre and other artistic institutions who instead of aesthetic emotions have a "certain policy" to follow and hard slog, which they have to bash out every day from nine a.m. to six p.m. Because whatever is said by one of the masters of this sectarian and belligerent rabble immediately becomes gospel truth. They would even be ready to fall in love with "pompiers" if only the higher authority gave them an example.

Culture pen-pushers ...

FORGIVENESS, 6TH JUNE 1986

Something has got jammed – I sometimes say to myself – I can no longer forgive. What’s the source of this consuming grudge? For more than two years I’ve made the space around me deserted. I’ve rejected many friends and have been left almost alone. And if my wife quit me tomorrow, I would have nobody to open my mouth to.

Is there anybody in my little world I could still maintain relations with? I guess it’s only Jacques, with whom we have endless phone conversations so as to vent our common hatred for the gloomy play entitled “Judiciary”, in which we both play the roles of second-rate extras.

What’s the reason for these partings? What’s the source of this tenacity? Actually, none of my friends has hurt or betrayed me.

So why? And why this way?

Why? Probably because two and a half years ago I decided to stop drinking alcohol. And some of my friends were on the list of carousing companions. The French saying “as drunk as a Pole” is right. Our compatriots might drink a bit less than the French, but they drink until the end. Drunkenness is a national drama, but also one of the major components of the Slav soul, sincere friendships, strong memories and deep feelings. Nights of fascinating conversations in the fumes of vodka sometimes become a foundation of lasting relationships.

I broke up with them, because I broke up with alcohol.

Before we’d also stopped lifting tons of iron together and inflicting fist blows to each other on a boxing ring.

So, when I gave up weight lifting, boxing, and then vodka, many of these friendships waned and faded. First they loosened, and later simply died of

natural causes, as they were based, at least partially, on sports feats or memories of these feats and alcohol nights. They went away the moment I radically turned over a new leaf.

This seems to be the answer to the question: why.

What remains to be answered is: how.

Well, some of these friendships I broke off simply ostentatiously. Then, despite the fact that the other side was holding out their hand to me, I refused to give mine. As I observed my behaviour for some time, I understood its mechanism: it was about settling the score from my childhood. This must be the right answer to the question: why this way.

I was an awful child who aroused both hatred and fear of colleagues. Being scared during the day, they flattered me. At night, however, driven by a thirst for revenge, they cut my clothes with scissors. In the morning, they hurled abuse at me, walking in a tight group, in a safe distance behind me so that I couldn't punch them. I was usually alone and I felt terrible. It was a nightmare of my childhood, although I never complained about it, as I was stiff and proud, with a sulky face and contemptuous smile on my lips. However, deep in my heart I suffered, because like every child I had a great need for friendship. So one day I made concessions and promises to my classmates, but the very next day I shot with an air gun at them.

In my late thirties the situation changed: I'd achieved a certain financial and professional success. Besides, I've got a wife who is the whole world for me. The world in which there are also a lot of paintings by Beks. My mind is preoccupied only with them, and if it suffers from anxiety, it is only because of them and only for them.

So, I no longer need you, my old friends. New bonds are much more precious to me!

At the same time, however, I rejected you painfully and ostentatiously. Just like your predecessors in my childhood did it to me. That's why I turned

my back at you on the first available pretext and categorically refused to forgive.

Although the people are not the same, I tasted sweet revenge. And that's what I meant! Now I don't have any doubts about it. This is the deepest reason why I radically and voluntarily plunged into loneliness.

SECT, 6TH JUNE 1986

And this way I joined the sect.

Ms Afkhami has tears in her eyes when I tell her that the aim of my life is to create a museum for Beks. I also have tears in my eyes. We vibrate to the same rhythm and float at a stratospheric altitude. That's moving, that's preposterous, but it's true.

Returning a confession, she tells me that when she saw Beks's paintings in the "Valmay's Gallery", she had to leave the room so as not to suffocate. She recovered her breath in the street. Next day she came back with her mother and children.

It's like with Ściegienny:

- When I saw paintings by Beksinski at the exhibition at Theatrical Square in Warsaw in 1972, I had to go out straight away. I drank three vodkas in the nearby European Hotel and came back after an hour. First of all, I came back to myself, and then to that unusual exhibition.

- He not painter – says Mrs Afkhami in broken French. – He greater than painter.

Of course! We are talking like some fanatic followers about their guru, their Master. If we put all our sober common sense together, it wouldn't be enough to stop us.

- It beyond beautiful – adds Mrs Akfhami.

- It's beyond the notion of beauty – my university obsession makes me correct her scrupulously. – Yes, absolutely.

Again, I agree with her and again, I have a lump in my throat. The fact that I'm becoming comical doesn't prevent me from getting carried away by enthusiasm: I've found a kindred spirit. We begin to make plans like kids who believe that all dreams come true:

- Three million, you buy place for museum.

- Yes – I answer and add realistically: - But you must also take into account the costs of staff, works to be done and operating costs.

- Well, ten million. Easy?

- Oh, yes, it would be easier – I correct her again. – Oh, yes.

One zero more? My God! We're not going to fight over such trifles. I laugh at her and my own enthusiasm. But I still push forward. Every now and then we raise the bidding stakes: suppose we had thirty million, fifteen would be spent on the museum, and the other fifteen on publishing houses, on the purchase of paintings, and of course, we would bring Beks to the West and fund him a genuine atelier.

- But would he paint like that if he happened to be living in luxury? – I ask Mrs Afkhami with a serious face.

Kidding aside: I wonder if my interlocutor will also become my first purchaser of the painting. I'd bless her, because then the autumn exhibition could take place in proper conditions.

But I must tell you how I came across her.

Having come back home the day before yesterday, I found a message on the answerphone from a Ms Hekmanne from the managing board of Comparisons salon. She asked me to immediately contact her.

After hearing the message, Ania says:

- Perhaps somebody wants to buy a painting?

Oh, those pipe dreams of hers ...

Looking at things soberly, I reply:

- You're dreaming! I haven't paid for the reproductions from their catalogue yet. She must have recalled it and that's why she's calling.

Next morning (that is yesterday) I called Ms Hekmanne. I find that somebody speaking broken French, most probably from Iran, would like to

buy the painting exhibited in the salon which I call “Christmas Eve Night”. It’s one of the most moving items in our collection. So now it turns out that Ania-optimist was right. Ms Hekmanne only says that the price is too high for the Iranian woman.

- Do you still demand 120 thousand? – she asks.

I suddenly recall that I forgot to reduce the price, which I did in the case of paintings exhibited in the Independent Salon and Critical Figuration.

Sometimes inaccuracy does one good! I answer, as if it was as plain as day:

- Let’s say, 100 thousand. And how much does she propose?

Ms Hekmanne doesn’t know. I tell her to ask the Iranian woman and, at the same time, advise her to sound her out before she puts our cards on the table. She understands me at once.

I’ve spent an exciting evening. Before falling asleep, Ania has already built the third castle on sand. In the morning I’m going to Grand Palais to meet with Ms Hekmanne.

She is sitting in her room and talking to a friend. She’s so engrossed in a discussion on a hat and a scarf that she doesn’t remember anything. After a while, however, I see a flash in her eyes:

- Aha, you deal with Beksiński, don’t you? – Then she adds in a friendly, nice tone: - Sir, that woman ... I told her that the painter is ready for sacrifice. But only a little bit. And that in general, it would be better if she told me what she expects. She wants 80 thousand. What do you say to that?

As I talk to her, I look at a piece of paper that she took out and laid in front of her. There is a telephone number. I try hard to memorize it. Then I attempt to decipher the surname which is written next to it. The surname is of foreign origin and I have no head for it. I take out a scrap of paper from my bag, put on a careless face and while still looking into Ms Hekmanne’s

eyes and talking to her, I put down the details of the Iranian woman, digit by digit, letter by letter.

Ms Hekmanne doesn't suspect anything. Filled with trust, she keeps explaining things to me:

- Such people often change their minds. But this one lives on an elegant boulevard, in a rich district ... Who knows?

Not being certain whether the surname I noted down is the one I need, I hypocritically ask her in an innocent tone:

- And what boulevard does she live exactly?

- Henri Martin Boulevard, in the 16th district.

Now I'm sure that I've caught the right end, because next to the surname that I wrote down a moment ago it's written: "68, Henri Martin Boulevard".

So, I can negotiate with the Iranian woman herself, without the agency of the Salon, which charges a 20% commission.

Pleased with the fraud I committed, after coming back home I call the Iranian woman. Her name is Afkhami. We arrange to meet in a drugstore on Rond-Point, at Champs Elysees, at 2 p.m.

The rest of the conversation is that crazy talk about a museum for Beks and our common visit in the Critical Figuration salon. On the way I show Mrs Afkhami my brochure and "Penthouse". I also entrust the cassette of my film to her. When we get to the point of the purchase, she promises me that she won't resell the painting to anybody. It's important to me. We both like it with Ania. Even when pressed against the wall we wouldn't like to lose sight of it.

Despite all these touching precautions, I clearly realize that I'm trading in the skin of a bear that I haven't hunted yet. Because, for the time being, I can't be sure that Mrs Afkhami will really buy "Christmas Eve". First she must get the permission of her husband, who is a banker. Well, bankers are not very fond of expensive rapture. I know something about it thanks to Mr

Jalabert, who is the director of my bank. I owe him 250 thousand, and he's not able to comprehend how I could use his money to treat myself to such an expensive object of my mystical elations.

MOTIVE, 7TH JUNE 1986

1. In many paintings by Beks one can find the motive of a hole. The hole is dark or glowing with light. It's usually wide open, but may also be bricked-in. There is something on the other side, or at least, you can presume there is something. The hole is a sort of opening, an entrance or a corridor to another world on the other side. In the symbolism of Beks, who at the time painted such pictures, belonged to esoteric associations and most frequently created symbolic works, it's a requisite for initiation, for entering this real world of mystery, the view of which is unnecessarily obscured by our ordinary world.

A whole series of paintings from the 1970s contains this motive, which at the beginning I named *On the Other Side*. The painting that belongs to Waniek, the one with hanging hands, which is currently kept by Tomek, the painting of Bael, which was used as a cover for "Przekrój" weekly, the one that is housed in the museum in Sanok, with a bricked-in hole, and many others have the same motive. Not long ago Beks put it in a painting showing a rock with a cross and in the one which I call "Katyń", in the foreground, at the bottom. I guess the hole in the crotch in "Legs on Chair" plays the same role.

Beks attaches enormous importance to these holes. He simply hissed with anger discovering that in my film *Dziworski* had stopped right before the hole when travelling with the camera from the top to the bottom of "Katyń" and "Cross on Rock". I don't remember exactly what expression he used, but seething inside, he gave out a muffled growl, as if he wanted to say: "An idiot, didn't film the most important thing". As if the necessity to film this motive was an obvious, simply crucial thing.

I think that – apart from the conscious symbolic interpretation – only psychoanalysis could explain this Beks's need for painting holes at his age, as he broke up with esotericism and black magic long ago.

2. Another frequent motive requiring a psychoanalyst's explanation is the spastic hug. Many paintings by Beks contain a motive of two beings, or of a being and an object, the former of which hugs the other one, as if it wanted to merge with it; as if it was afraid that the other one might vanish, disappear, perish. Or as if it wanted to be blended into the other one.

To find the motive of a desperate hug, which is supposed to stop something or somebody, it's enough to look at the anxiety that "Lady with Breasts" is gripped with when squeezing her breasts. As if they were to blow up in a moment. In "A Couple of Mummies" the woman is digging her fingers in the man's arm, as if he was to leave in a moment and it was their last hug. In "Don Quixote" a little midget is nestling up to the rider, as the gale might separate them. (Beks claims that both figures "are doing shameful things" and that he meant a farce when painting this picture. In an answer I quoted the example of "Christmas Eve Night", where the main figure tenderly embraces a red doll with its hands. In this case, he also suggested with a smile that "grandpa Freud would've told you what he's really holding".)

In "Makowski" (that's the painting which Ania also calls "Icon") a child's clinging to a man with its many hands, just like it is digging and biting into the neck of mother in "Veiled Madonna".

And where the main figure is not clinging to the other one, it is clinging on to an object, merging with it. Like for example in the painting which is right now hanging in front of me – "Trumpeter", whose fingers merge with the instrument.

3. The paintings from the beginning of the 1970s also contain the motive of a crescent. Beks confessed to me that in a certain period of his life he couldn't resist the temptation of placing at least one crescent in each painting. When you listen to him, you get an impression that it's only thanks to the enormous effort of his will that he avoided placing them in absolutely all his paintings.

CATHALA 1, 9TH JUNE 1986

To give? Or not to give?

Now I can at least check whether my current problems have taught me anything.

Since the time when I bumped against a wall of hostility and silence I've been able to feel what must be felt by millions of people who really have no chance to get themselves out of problems: despair. I felt it so painfully and cruelly that I don't need any touching books or noisy advertising campaigns in mass media to experience, and thus understand what the expression "to have no way out" means to the others.

But let's check. A moment ago I read in "Le Monde" an article written in my style by a Michael Cathala, who is ill with leukemia. He turns to potential donors of bone marrow, because "only the cream of society donates a gift (of organs), whereas the others don't give a hoot about it ... I wish they'd find themselves in my situation one day."

Cathala won't pull through, so for him everything is over anyway. But there are other ill people ...

Frankly speaking, it's not remorse that suddenly made me feel guilty. It was because of a breath of fresh air, as I'd finally encountered someone who openly wished ill on millions of people in this country: those who "don't give a hoot".

Those rows of politicians, journalists or film stars trying to outdo one another in uttering "humanitarian" clichés, competing who's more outraged with the government because the latter doesn't give enough thought to the poor, or outshouting each other who rebels more against racism, "which is raising its head" and who declares more loudly that it's a scandal that so little is done for starving children in Africa – all these people make me sick. In this country there are a few million hypocrites who "don't give a hoot", but

howl like hyenas about their generous hearts. In Auschwitz there should still be a unit where all that trash would be sent up with smoke. So, if somebody has courage to say in public that he wishes they would suffer just like him, he becomes my brother at once.

Shall I give then? Or shall I not?

I've often donated blood. I stopped only when AIDS tests were imposed on donors. If it turned out I have it? That's why I no longer donate blood.

It was a simple thing. There was no big merit of mine: just a needle prick. Well, bone marrow is another story. You must undergo a real operation, and Cathala himself warns that this requires full anaesthetic.

Give it anyway? Or not give it?

Will I pluck up my courage or will my understanding for absolute human misery remain the same as it was before I went through the nightmare of the last six months: "literary"?

Will I be like that contemptible swine Georges Pompidou, who assured that from a "philosophical point of view" he was against the death penalty, and at the same time signed a death warrant for Bontemps?

In any case, I wrote down the ill man's address so as not to free myself too easily from this question with a clever "oblivion". Well, it lies in front of me and if I don't destroy it deliberately, I won't be able to claim that I no longer remember who was the person to donate: "any information is available from PIERRE CATHALA, Carrière BT 2 La Maladière, 74300 Cluses".

CATHALA 2, 10TH JUNE 1986

Bone marrow: continuation and the end of hesitations.

Yesterday I wrote a note about a public appeal to bone marrow donors, which appeared in “Le Monde”. In this note I expressed a lot of nice thoughts in the style of those who you can hear in the media day in day out. I even blocked my way back, to show how engaged I was.

Well, to deftly “avoid forgetting” the whole thing, I read the note to Ania, who thus became a (vigilant) guardian of my promise. Then I put down the data of the person who issued the appeal, Mr Cathala, and I immediately wrote a letter to him asking him for more details. Finally, I called my brother Johnny in Boston, a surgeon, to ask him whether the operation involved any risk. He assured me that it didn’t. It’s only painful and must be performed in full anaesthesia.

In essence, I won’t be able to either back out or keep silent about my excellent intentions.

At the same time, it gave me an opportunity to dismantle my egoism into pieces. I put aside these screws and cogs into small piles.

The first pile (I):

Spontaneous enthusiasm of a little scout: it’s going to be a good deed! By donating my marrow I will accomplish a feat which may save a human life!

Then comes fully justified embarrassment. Is it really a generous gesture? Isn’t there something ambiguous about it? What’s my real intention? Well, as a matter of fact, I got provoked. I can’t deny it. Obviously, I’m not driven by understanding or a sense of brotherhood. In the best case scenario I’m buying a plot in heaven on hire purchase. Just like for some time I’ve been keeping a few one-franc coins in my pocket to stick them in the hands of beggars and have a clean conscience this way. Can I be sure that I do care

about Mr Cathala? Isn't it just a new chance to prove myself that I have a good heart?

My soul is filled with grudge and bitterness. Since the time I started to fight with the reptiles and wish them death, I've wanted to find an alibi which would change my vulgar hatred into a noble sword of justice. This is what I really mean: I want to add solemnity to my grudges and obtain the title of a professor who has a right to give lessons, and an arbiter who has a right to count score for and against.

In similar circumstances in 1968, I contacted a delegation from North Vietnam in Paris to join the army as a volunteer in the war with the United States. I was driven not only by compassion for children burned with napalm. As a hero of a just war (which I was to survive, of course ...) I wanted to secure for myself a future right to decide what is good and what is bad, and to name the guilty. Fortunately, North Vietnam didn't look for volunteers (which, deep inside, I actually counted on ...).

It's a serious operation! I must think three times before I do something irreversible. It's not a usual procedure like blood donation. It might turn out that I will have to pay for my good heart much more than I'm ready for. Have I actually thought about my health? It's not the best. Not only will I not help Cathala, but I will also expose myself to unnecessary risk.

First of all, I must think about Ania. Because if I fall ill after such an operation, what will happen to her? After all, I have obligations towards her, and not towards persons unknown to me. A responsible man above all thinks about his family and the dear ones.

The second small pile (he):

One should have a closer look at that Cathala. For him it's too late, anyway.

Can I be certain that my marrow is compatible with his? What's the point of giving something only for the sake of giving? I've heard that if the donor's marrow is not compatible with that of the recipient, there is an immediate

rejection and the patient dies even sooner than without a graft. All in all then, it may turn out that not only will my gift be useless, but it will harm him.

And maybe it's Cathala's own fault? Do I know how he conducted himself and what kind of life he led? No. And if it was him who got himself into trouble? Or for example he didn't do anything in time to get out of it?

In any case, if I give him one time, he'll ask for more. I'm putting my fingers in dangerous cogs. Give him an inch, and he will take a mile.

The third pile (others):

Anyway, there will be others who will die too. What I will do for Cathala is merely a drop in the ocean of needs.

There are people simply obliged to sacrifice themselves in such situations. Mainly the family. It's their matter, after all. In any case, I've heard a transplant can only be done among relatives. I even recall a story of a man who on TV asked for marrow from his brother with whom he'd lost touch 22 years before, because nobody else was able to effectively help him.

For God's sake, there are special institutions. And what's the state doing? Is the state doing anything? They should assign credits for it. That's all because the institutions which should deal with such issues don't do anything. It's as simple as that!

All that is the fault of the rotten system. I've already repeated it a hundred times: here "everybody is for himself, and God is for all". Life is like that. What can I do about it? I can't change the world myself, can I? And if I did so, I would only encourage other people to stretch out their hands, as they would count on idiots like me.

It might be painful, but true: life is governed by natural selection. The weak drop out. And that's how it is. As a matter of fact, the ill even shouldn't survive.

Altogether there are ten reasons why I shouldn't give anything. All of them I feel deeply.

Opposite them, however, there is just one reason which weighs more than all of them together.

For six months I've been living in such fear, I've reached such a level of despair that I can no longer go past a young beggar, mumbling: "go to work, lazybones". I give. And I started to hate people who "don't give a hoot about it" or "have a hundred important issues on their heads, you understand"; I hate them so much that I feel a deep bond with all the others. The ones who are in deep shit.

That's why, *summa summarum*, I will give marrow to that Cathala or to those who will find themselves in his situation.

Firstly, to give them a sign. Secondly, to piss in the gobs of all those who have a clear conscience.

IDENTITY, 12TH JUNE 1986

Actually, it's usurpation of identity on my part.

I've got into a habit and say it as if it was the truth: "my" film. I never mention Dziworski and everybody accepts it. For example they ask me:

- This film of yours is good. Where did you shoot it?

Hardly ever anybody dares to ask:

- Who made it for you?

- A Pole – I then answer evasively, as if I've already said too much.

And I remember very well, because it was yesterday or nearly yesterday, how outraged I was because of the fate of an artist forced to sell his work to somebody who, just because he has money, appropriates the work and goes as far as calling it his.

- How come!! – I said gesticulating. – It's like having to sell your own child!

A despicable system and the beautiful Marxist theory.

And now I'm playing the role of a slave trader. Not only did I buy a part of Dziworski, but I also adapted it so that I can talk about it in the first singular person: my film.

What are the causes of that?

The first reason is noble: a known intellectual song about "me" and my reflection. Perpetual justifying myself, never exhausted alibi. Because "I" might be noble, but the reflection is hideous. Just like all those who have pestered me so many times. The same bastard, arrogant and indifferent.

Of course my "I" is outraged at what "the other one" is doing. It repents, refers to Christian principles and gives lessons of morality. Sometimes, just like with Cathala, it makes high-flown decisions about a "good deed".

Most frequently, however, it settles for complaining about being the prisoner of its own reflection.

It's – I say – a song of educated circles. But clear minds don't waste time considering nuances.

And here comes the second reason: whoever pays has a right. Even a right to be a father.

TWO DREAMS, 13TH JUNE 1986, FRIDAY

I have two dreams.

Always the same, but they never bore me. I can dream them five times a day, and each time I do it with the same enthusiasm. They may intrude on me any moment, for example in the street. Then I begin to gesticulate and talk to myself. Both dreams are simple, and I can tell them easily:

1. The first one is optimistic, but unimaginative: I've won the lottery.

Yes, 32 million francs. Why should one believe in work, effort or a talent? I've already said it a hundred times: I believe in the lottery. That's the only real chance: the only one that's really waiting for me.

And well, the biggest win has fallen to me. Suddenly I'm rich. Excellent. I know about it, because I've lived with money for many years, though I've never been well off. I therefore had an opportunity to test it: you can get drunk with money. And you never have a hangover. I'm aiming these words at poor people who don't have a penny and who are told a comforting tale that: "money doesn't make you happy". Oh, yes, it does make you happy. Not money alone, but lots of it.

So, I won 32 million. Why 32? Because it's the biggest win that has happened in France. I then want it, too. Why should I stint when dreaming? If you are dreaming, go the whole way.

Then I cash this dream: first a superalbum of Beks. Not a usual little album, but a genuine summa. It must be huge: minimum 50x70 cm, and extremely luxurious. I give it away for free right and left and centre.

Then twenty elegant exhibitions all over the world.

Next I built a museum for Beks. Not just any museum. In my imagination I can already see where I will locate it: in the most frequented place. Obviously, that's because nothing made me more enthusiastic than

the crowd which came to my exhibition, focused, with mouths agape. So I need a constant, multiple and immediate proof of victory: a crowd of visitors. I must be served this proof continuously, every day.

No, not any remote place, quiet, in a mysterious monastery, in a dark forest – that doesn't suit me. Everybody must admire the object of my adoration. The museum must therefore be located near Notre Dame Cathedral. Right there. There is already a gloomy, half-derelict building, which I will rebuild into a palace full of corners and dark chambers, mysterious stairs, corridors and balconies. And there will be paintings everywhere. Paintings that will emerge from the dark, as they will be lit just like during my exhibition, or even more theatrically. God forbid white walls or bright lights! No, I don't want it! the paintings are exhibited behind bullet-proof glass, as there is nothing more worrying for me than a child who might write "shit" on one of them.

The entrance to the museum is free of charge. What's more, by the doors I give out gifts. There is blissful silence ... No, there must be music or the blowing wind. Oh, yes, the wind, that's it. And in the wind you can hear a beautiful voice coming from the universe. I've always combined images with sounds. So there must be music, too. Not just any music, but music specially composed for my museum. Just like Prokofiev composed a symphony for "Alexander Nevski". Yes, I particularly like the swoosh of the wind and sea, so the place must be filled with it to the brim.

There is a lot of hype about my museum in all magazines. It's simply a Mecca. Whoever comes to Paris runs there as soon as they hear about it.

Awards await researchers who write habilitation works about Beks. Giant awards, real events!

And over the entrance to the museum there is an inscription in capital letters: "I don't give a shit about culture branch clerks and journalists."

So this is my optimistic dream. It's like a colourful movie: I dream it standing. It comes to me when everything around me is falling apart. When

I creep at the bottom of a nightmare, I hide in a palace full of Bek's paintings. You can then easily imagine that I know its every nook and cranny, because I've been staying in it all the time since I went under the ice.

2. And now my pessimistic dream. A biblical dream, straight from the Old Testament. It's a more modest version of the story of the king who asked guests to come to his son's wedding, but none of them arrived to rejoice with him.

This one I also dream with my eyes open. I even pop them out so as to better see the suffering of my enemies. Because, just like the king, at last I have something to torture them with.

Well then, I spit in the faces of those least guilty, who committed a misdeed of criticism. You will tell me that dreams are naïve. I can spit endlessly then. Nothing stops me: neither the police nor codes or tribunals. I gloat over the screaming of my victims who, defenceless, helplessly howl with fury. This is what awaits the least guilty, those who didn't believe.

In the case of the others spitting is not enough. The ones who humiliated me are punished with a substantial imprisonment sentence. I don't give less than ten years. They stay in empty cells, which they can leave only for a moment, and they are supervised by a hundred truncheon-equipped Le Pens¹, who play the role of guards.

But my full delight begins when I start hearing the groans of pain. Then I'm all focused, exclusively at the disposal of the most guilty, the ones who harmed me.

I've never understood the satisfaction of people dreaming about the death of their enemies. Freeing them of existence is simply doing them a merciful favour. My real satisfaction wakes up only where their suffering begins. And suffering needs living.

Here I recall the book that I read as a youngster: "The Man with White Eyes" (Polish title "Zły", meaning "Bad") by Tyrmand.

“Bad” caught a man who’d murdered a cripple. A western with an avenger after the Polish fashion. He dragged him to a shed and with an axe cut his arms and legs on a chopping block. I’ve always regretted that he didn’t cut his other protruding parts – the tongue, nose and the dick, of course.

Apart from amputation, I make holes in my enemies. I pierce them from each side: first of all the eyes, then eardrums.

I do all that very slowly, for weeks, so that they won’t go crazy or faint. I even turn out merciful, because actually I don’t like screams. Whenever I hear someone screaming with pain, I become gentle and start crying. I’m therefore ready to mutilate them under anaesthetic. But then I make them live. For about 30-40 years on average. I observe them attentively and imagine their suffering, as they cannot express it. They have no tools to do that. So I imagine their dark world, closed, bricked-in from all sides; the world in which they have to grope their way and keep stumbling, as they have no legs. A dreadful, fathomless world, a universe in which they fall down a chasm, like you fall when being completely drunk. A nightmarish fall, after which one howls with terror. But they fall silently, as I cut their vocal chords long time ago.

“Johnny gets his gun” – that’s it. Except that he still had sex and a merciful nurse who every day jerked him off² under the duvet. My victims don’t have such pleasures. Oh, no! Nothing, emptiness. Absolute loneliness, from which they can’t jump to finally smash. They are doomed to live, though every second they crave for death.

This is my pessimistic dream.

It comes to me whenever something’s getting better. Like that biblical king, I find in it all the pleasures of revenge on those who have humiliated me, me and the object of my admiration.

Un lit pour deux rêves³.

Deux rêves pour une vie⁴.

¹ Le Pen – the leader of the French right wing with fascist tendencies

² Jerked off – masturbated

³ Un lit pour deux rêves – one bed for two dreams

⁴ Deux rêves pour une vie – two dreams for one whole life

ULCER, 16TH JUNE 1986

In the small portrait of Louse, which I sketched a few weeks ago, a certain detail was missing: an ulcer. Now it is there, on the very top of his nose. Only yesterday did I notice it start growing before my eyes, when this rat was sitting in front of me, on my balcony, smoking cigarettes. I've recounted this conversation and I'm not coming back to it. All the time there was a smell of rotten carcass, but that huge red sphere, having a yellow-green shade, tapered with a giant black blackhead appeared before my eyes only when I asked:

- But you wanted to buy a painting by Beksiński, didn't you? No? You often came back to this subject. You've told me many times that you'd come to me to see all these paintings. Don't you recall? I even proposed you to do it in the early afternoon so that we could make use of the strongest daylight when watching the paintings. I thought this is what you meant, that you wanted to choose a painting.

- Yees, of course – he hesitates. – But at that time there was still some hope that Mr Dymitrievic would issue Beksiński's album, and that the painting I would buy from you would be listed there. I would be pleased if my surname was quoted among the names of Polański and Skolimowski. "From the collections of ... (Louse)". Yes, that would sound good. But if this is not the case, I'm not interested in paintings by Beksiński.

- How could you still talk to him politely when he told you that? – Ania asked me just after he'd left.

- I couldn't tear my eyes away from his ulcer – I answered.

Indeed ... Until now I thought that Louse was as mean as Harpagon, but that he was also an admirer of Beks. It's just that the price is too high and doesn't let him make a decision – I tried to find an excuse. But he likes it. It's not fair to accuse him. He's an honest man.

And now the cat's out of the bag! an ulcer in the middle of the gob instead love for Beks's paintings. I heartily hope it will infect you to death. With all my heart.

ALMS 1, 18TH JUNE 1986

At last, I've concluded an agreement with beggars. Phew, what a relief!

Am I ridiculous? Of course. So what? Since the time compassion gripped my heart, I've discovered generosity in myself: again, I began to notice human misery. Like in childhood. Because I have to say in the defence of little 10-year Peter, for whom I have no affection whatsoever, that he suffered due to the suffering of the others. All evenings he debated with his Mum how to help fellowmen in a Christian way ... But that's only a note in brackets.

And then the misery of the poor (as this one seemed to me the most dangerous, before I discovered a few other, equally painful ones ...) went from my heart to my head: I started "thinking" it. And no speculating is better than borrowing notions from the others. In a word, I became a Marxist leftie. Still at the age of 38 I propagated revolutionary slogans. It was like that for at least fifteen years in a row. Human misery was then the fault of the system and score with it had to be settled by shooting a few bastards during the angels' revolution.

When success, money, easy life and a hope of fame in the promotion of Beks came when I was about forty, I forgot about the forgotten.

- It's a plague of humanity – I told myself, reading an article in "Le Monde", written by an intellectual like me. A positive intellectual, an intellectual propagating progressive ideas.

At the beginning of my marriage it happened that for three days I lived under one roof with a tramp and a little girl, whom I'd picked up from Champs Elysées, but now I've stopped sending money to charity institutions. However, I declared a few donations to the revenue office, so that I could deduct them from tax.

Today the clock hand has led me to point zero.

And here comes compassion for others. It's catching up with me. I'm sensitive again and begin to notice outstretched hands.

First, passively and with embarrassment. Because it's embarrassing to have a bad conscience.

What can I possibly do about their poverty? Nothing – I began telling myself whenever I walked past them. So I didn't do anything. I kept walking. To avoid looking into their eyes, I usually gazed in the sky or carefully read "Le Monde". Deep inside, however, I started gnashing my teeth. Why the hell is he spoiling my afternoon? I was quietly reading a newspaper filled with compassion for the poor, and that beggar reminds me of unpleasant things ... What? I could probably help him? How? By giving a franc? It's a drop in the ocean.

Every time a poor person walked by, I heard the same chorus in my head.

Finally, it became an obsession: I'm an egoistic dickhead.

And here I found a way out: I concluded an agreement with my conscience. Leave me alone in return for a one-franc coin, which I will give to every beggar.

You will say there is nothing spontaneous in it. All right, let it be. It's a fruit of my mercantile mind of the "contracting party". All right, think it your own way. But every morning, at the first newsagent on my way I change fifteen francs, and next stick one franc into each outstretched hand. It's about 10-15 a day. Let's say 12. The price of one coffee with cream, and as I have to cut down on its consumption for the sake of health, my budget is still balanced.

Since that time I've been tasting the pleasure of clear conscience, which I rent for 360 francs a month.

READING, 18TH JUNE 1986

- Stop it! Let's stop talking about it. Go on reading!
- No, first you must tell me what he told you.
- If we start talking about it again, I won't fall asleep. Read!

For three minutes Ania comes back to reading "The Great Purge" by Alexander Weissberg-Cybulski, which she's been reading in bed for me for a week.

It's been like that for many years: before we fall asleep, my wife reads me a few pages. I then lie down on my left side and cuddle up to her. Lying on her back, she pulls up her legs, I lay my legs under hers and pull them up, too. While she's reading for about a quarter, I kiss her arm and shoulder, like an infant sucking at its mother's breast. After a while comes sleep. She turns off the light, and I turn on my right side. She, in turn, hugs my back and embraces my Achilles tendon with her left foot toes. I need it; otherwise I won't fall asleep. Her right hand must rest on my hip. But why am I talking about all those petty manias?

I insist that she reads longer. I would like to fall asleep as soon as possible and forget about everything. To no longer think about it. To stop pondering over and over about the harbingers of the end.

Indeed, fearing that I won't sell anything at the next exhibition, Louse doesn't agree to rent out the gallery, get the payment after the end of the exhibition and have it secured against the paintings. He wants me to pay for everything in advance.

Ms Afkhami, who only a week ago was so enthusiastic and willing to buy "Christmas Eve Night", keeps silent.

Five paintings are exhibited in Critical Figuration salon, but not a single person ever pops in.

I haven't got any new clients in my office. It's already 17th June and the month is finishing without any influx of money.

Contact with Ms Angelis, for which I counted a little bit, hoping to put down roots in the States, didn't come off.

And this afternoon I talked to a Piliszek, the director of the Polish publishing house Arkady, which is going to issue Beks's album in Warsaw. I've been proposing him cooperation for a long time, as taking the opportunity we could issue the additional French version, because with my own means I won't be able to do much.

- Why don't you want to tell me about it? – asks Ania. – What did he propose you?

- OK. So let's talk about it. But again, I'll get upset and won't sleep a wink. Piliszek is ready to make this French issue by June 1987. In a year. That would be good for my exhibition in 1987. But I've made a condition that if the introductory text will be the one written by Nyczek, in the French version I will adapt it.

- And what difference does it make? Why can't the text be the same, as it is now? Are you looking for more work for yourself?

- I've already done it. Actually, I adapted it a few months ago. From the factual point of view Nyczek's text is good, but it's poorly written. The adaptation is ready. It just has to be typed. But Nyczek will feel hurt, so he will object. I told Piliszek that I could take a thousand copies, 80 francs per a piece. On second thoughts, however, I realized it was too expensive. I then called and told him that I'd able to pay more than 60 francs. But I will take 2 thousand copies from him. Where shall I find the cash, though?

- And if you gave up the exhibition in the autumn? You could explain it to Louse ...

- You're talking rubbish. There is no point explaining anything to that rat. He's as he is not because he doesn't understand. Explaining wouldn't help much. Since he felt that I'm flagging, have no money and no certainty about

the sale, he's been behaving like all rats: running away from the ship. He won't give in this time. Dmochowski is no longer pompous, self-confident and certain of his victory, and Louse wants to have a guarantee. He wouldn't accept a commission on the sale as a form of payment even if I proposed him 50%. He doesn't believe in the sale. Neither does he want paintings in pawn. Now, when he sees me uncertain, he doesn't want to take the slightest risk.

- You shouldn't open up either to him or anybody else.

- Easy to say. A moment has come when I have no more means to beguile people about my financial situation. That's a deadline to start preparations for the autumn exhibition, and I'm not doing anything, because I don't have a single penny. Picture yourself that it's becoming visible. It was lucky enough that I was able to conceal my insolvency for the last six months.

- Give up this autumn exhibition then.

- Stop it. Let's not talk about it. This exhibition is absolutely necessary. Only the exhibition can get us out of it.

Ania reads for a minute and stops again.

- Why didn't you focus on the album this year? Why? And on the office? You'll have the exhibition next year.

- Where? That scumbag Louse won't let the gallery to me. He will tell me "no" out of sheer revenge, if not for any other reason. And where shall I have the exhibition then?

- In other galleries.

- What other galleries? Have you forgotten about all my fruitless searches for galleries that would like to exhibit Beks? Have you forgotten how many times I've been refused?

- Yes, but then you didn't have anything that would arouse a bit of trust. You only had a book of press cuttings with a few reproductions, which you collected here and there. You didn't have either the film, or "Penthouse", the fame about your exhibition or the salons where Beks was exhibited last

year. Now it's different. Then you didn't have anything in hand. Try asking around the galleries again. Besides, a hundred things may happen. Perhaps the exhibition that Jasia is mounting in Oslo .. Who knows? It might come off.

- That's true, yes, that's true ... What can I tell you? Everything may change. I'm not giving up anything yet. That's true. But how shall I push these wheelbarrows now? How shall I pay Beks? He won't agree to the slightest delay. I'm leaving for Poland soon – I add after a longer pause. – What for? To bring the paintings which I'll put in our storage. We don't have a single centimetre left. If I'm not supposed to have the exhibition, why should I bring them here? What shall I tell Beks? How to explain? As far as I know him, he will start suspecting that I want to cheat him.

- Tell him the truth. Tell him that you want to concentrate on the album, because right now it's the most important thing, and that you'll mount a big exhibition next year. Then it will be accompanied by the album.

- Next year most probably I won't have a penny. Well, now I don't have it, either. But if I manage to satisfy our creditors, in a year we might get out of debt. Perhaps we'll pay off the bank, too? But in such a case nothing will be left for the exhibition. Go on reading. Read, maybe I'll finally fall asleep. Or the night will be over for me.

She starts reading again. Twenty minutes later I stop kissing her arm. I turn on my right side, she turns off the light, cuddles up to my back, hugs my Achilles tendon with her left foot toes and puts her hand on my hip. I fall asleep.

Not for long, though. Two hours later I wake up with a dry throat. I feel like crying. But I can't cry, so I get up, go to the study and write this note.

Slowly I calm down. An hour passes by. The knot in my stomach loosens and again I can go back to bed, to fall asleep.

HOPE FOR SALE, 19TH JUNE 1986

Falling headlong into the precipice, I stopped for a while: I'm about to meet with Mrs Afkhami in a moment.

Waiting for her, I have a look through the window. Oh, something new! I find that I no longer ask fearfully: will it come off or not? God, how I wish it came off! And if it doesn't? ...

I've reached such a degree of doubt that I've already stopped believing in anything. It's not because I'm striking a fatalistic, grim and romantic pose. Oh, no! Neither because I don't want to jinx it, telling myself: it's going to end badly, and at the same time hoping it will be the other way round. Finally, not because I'd like to get prepared for the worst and avoid suffering when it happens. No, I just find that I have no more hope.

So, in fifteen minutes I will see Mrs Afkhami. I'm waiting for her in a café opposite the Opera. She's supposed to give me a final answer whether she'll buy "Christmas Eve Night". In principle, anything is still possible. She told me "yes" two times and then kept silent. On the other hand, she didn't reject my invitation to dinner, telling me at the same time that her husband was against the purchase, as he believed the price was too high.

I can already picture myself all the doors that would open if she bought ...

It would be my first sale of a painting by Beks. I'm far from claiming that it would solve all my problems. It wouldn't, but it would let me tackle the most urgent expenses: I would have some money to partially pay off the bank loan, go to Poland to pick up another 21 paintings, which are already waiting for me, and perhaps I could also give back what I owe to Szydło?...

In any case, I won't be able to have the exhibition this year. I'm already getting used to this thought, so this is not what I need money for. However,

other Beks-related expenses are coming soon, and Mrs Afkhami's money would be a blessing.

It would be a blessing also because it would let me wait, at least for a while, before another act of my gloomy moral decay is played. And perhaps a miracle happens in the meantime? the name of this hypothetical miracle is first of all Fliderbaum, who visited me in February and was interested in "Don Quichote". Afterwards he kept silent, and then suddenly appeared again:

- Please, forgive me I haven't got in touch for so long. I'll contact you during my next stay in Paris.

Ms Afkhami's money would also allow me to seriously engage in the issue of Beks's album by Arkady. I talked about it with director Piliszek two days ago, during his stay in Paris.

Thanks to this money my talks with Arkady would gain some reliability. Maybe not in the eyes of Piliszek himself, who doesn't know my financial situation and thinks I'm a serious and solvent partner, but in my own eyes. Because I talked to him, haggled and required things, knowing that it was leading nowhere; being aware that when it comes to sign the agreement, at the last moment I will have to get out of it under some pretext.

MRS AFKHAMI, 19TH JUNE 1986

Mrs Afkhami will go down in history. Let's say ... Beks's history, which in fact is the only history I'm interested in.

Today we met in Odeon district and drank coffee on the terrace of La Palette, chatting about my plans connected with Beks. Then, when I was walking her off to her car, she finally took out that longed-for envelope ...

Throughout the conversation my mind was pestered by one obsessive thought: will she really buy? Or will she say at the end of our conversation: "I'm not ready yet. This painting is so hard ..." or: "My husband decided that ...", or for example: "On second thoughts I came to the conclusion that it's too expensive".

In a word, she paid me the first instalment (20 thousand francs) for the painting which I'd bought from Szydło and named (or perhaps he named it this way?) "Christmas Eve Night". I hope I won't have any trouble obtaining the rest that she owes me, namely, another 60 thousand francs. Well, I sold her the painting for 80 thousand. When compared to my debts, this money is a drop in the ocean, but on its own it seems a substantial sum, an equivalent of my nine university salaries.

But whether or not she will pay me the rest, I'm grateful to her, anyway. At least, for three reasons.

1. Because she's inaugurated a new era in my life: she's the first person to buy a Beks's painting from me!

2. Because the financial straits I'm suffering from would force me to sell the painting far more cheaply, and yet she didn't try to haggle with me too much.

3. Because the awareness that "Christmas Eve Night" is now in her hands reconciles me with the thought that I've lost it for ever.

As for the last reason, it made me happy because when on Tuesday 25th May, just after taking it from Comparisons Salon, I wanted to bring it to her home, Mrs Afkhami asked me to wait with it until her return from Cannes.

- But it could hang in your house in the meantime – I tried to convince her.

- And if flat burglary? – she replied me in her bad French. Other things unimportant, but if stole painting? ...

It was exactly the reaction I'd counted on. Because at the beginning of my Beks's collection, whenever I went to the cinema or to a restaurant, I couldn't focus on the plot or a conversation. If somebody broke into my flat? – I thought. – And if they stole the paintings? It went on for many months, becoming an obsession.

So, when Mrs Afkhami told me that she had similar fears, I spontaneously kissed her hand.

ROCQUES, 19TH JUNE 1986

I don't agree with what you are saying. But I will fight to the last so that you can always say it.

Two affairs have fallen straight into their face. Bravo!

The first one is the choice of Kurt Waldheim for the president of Austria.

The second is Henri Rocques' habilitation work on Gerstein's report.

Two affairs at twelve o'clock sharp.

Well, first there was a lot of uproar of the local propaganda against Waldheim: "Nazi, murderer, butcher ... We'll deal with his past". It looked like he was up the creek. Who would dare to discuss the nuances of Shoah, knowing that in a moment he might be accused of being a supporter? However, we will pass over the fact that he's actually hated for following a pro-Palestine policy when Waldheim was the general secretary of the United Nations. Terrorized intellectuals will not demand an honest trial when the victim wants revenge, and the topic is a taboo. The public opinion will also rise to the bait and won't smell anything out. We'll instantly count up score for Mr Waldheim.

But something's creaking and getting jammed. The Austrians are saying: "Sod off. Mind your own business. The demo-liberal propaganda will not dictate us who's going to be our president".

A few honest Jewish intellectuals also demand evidence. The first of them is Wiesenthal, who advises in secret: "Leave it alone, you're just going to make fools of yourselves". Today my acquaintance from university, Daniel Amson, also objects in "Le Monde": the fact that Waldheim didn't do anything to prevent Nazi crimes is certain. However, there is no proof that he participated in them personally. In the light of the evidence, he seems to

have behaved like millions of Germans and Austrians: he enthusiastically loved Hitler. Neither more nor less.

It serves you right, propaganda. You hoped to shut everybody up. Under the pretence of respect for the memory of the millions of people murdered by the Nazi, you thought you would secretly settle a score with your present political enemy.

Henri Rocques' habilitation work is the same kind of comedy. "How can this scumbag doubt the existence of gas chambers! How is it possible that a university commission made up of professors gave him a very good grade? They must be neo-Nazi".

Then onto the scene comes the rector of the university of Nantes, where the said habilitation work was defended, and tells us how his whole family was murdered in Auschwitz. He's then very glad that his colleagues dared to undertake a serious discussion about the existing evidence on gas chambers.

And today in "Le Monde" the interested person himself publishes a letter in which he says more or less something like that:

"You have read my work carefully. Stop yelling for a moment and read what I have written. I have limited myself to analysing a report on gas chambers by Gerstein, a German officer, and I have pointed out that in many issues it is contradictory, and in others doesn't answer my questions. About gas chambers themselves I didn't say anything. I only polemicized with the documents (chiefly the ones concerning Gerstein's report), upon which historians base their claim on the existence of chambers, and I revealed the weak sides of these documents".

It serves you right, demo-liberal propaganda. You thought you would be able to ban any discussion on Horror, just like in the past it was forbidden to discuss about Devil. You flood people with half-truths, which are supposed to be blindly believed and kept in secret under the pain of cutting the tongue; half-truths which are recited daily by thousands of politicians and millions of ordinary people, as they all tremble, terrified by the wild Beast that

the public opinion is ready to set loose on them: the public opinion intoxicated with the slogans, the Demos, which will instantly throw itself to bite the place that you point to.

Let's say it clearly: I haven't got the slightest intention to defend Waldheim and thirty or forty million Germans and Austrians who loved Hitler madly.

Neither do I have a liking for Henri Rocques.

I find it easy to imagine what reverence Kurt Waldheim most probably had for Hitler during the war and I guess I know what Henri Rocques is actually driving at when he claims, seemingly innocently, that Gerstein's report is not worth much. But officially I don't know anything and demand evidence; evidence proving that Waldheim murdered Jews with his own hands and that gas chambers for killing people in Majdanek, Treblinka or Auschwitz really existed.

If an honest trial proves they are guilty (that one of them killed, and the other lies), they should be both hanged by their balls and dangle until life leaks out of them drop by drop. I won't let you go without this honest trial, gentlemen demo-liberals. And these proofs must be provided to me. Until that time I will pretend to be naïve and I won't believe anything you force me to believe on command.

Oh, I have no doubts, as I've heard too many testimonies that gas chambers existed and that millions of people were suffocated in them by the Nazi in the most dreadful torture machine known in History. How many relatives of mine went up in smoke there? But let me repeat: shouting will not replace a cold proof of the truth.

For what I can't swallow is the torrents of propaganda that keep flooding us every day; torrents of ready-made, prepared thoughts, the veracity of which mustn't be measured or weighed; torrents of pap which is supposed to replace the intelligence and evidence of guilt; the propaganda which bans

the opponent from speaking, even if he's a hangman, and accuses enemies without evidence.

Finally, I puke at those who take advantage of the intellectual climate of terror around sacred topics and try to settle a score with contemporary political opponents, setting against them the stupefied public opinion, which, like a rabid dog, attacks whoever it is told to attack.

And here I'm simply patting my thighs with delight. At least once they've smashed their own phiz. However, it's a pity that in the two issues the truth is on their side (I believe in it deeply, but still demand evidence).

So, I jump up and down for joy, because there are a few professors willing to participate in the commission that will evaluate the habilitation work of Henri Rocques and there are people like Wiesenthal and Amson, who demand a serious lawsuit with evidence to be launched against Kurt Waldheim.

But what makes me happiest is the fact that "Le Monde", which also accused without evidence, has become entangled in this rotten machination and humiliated itself again. That stronghold of correct thoughts, that excellent whore for 4 francs and 50 centimes, which I fuck every day for pennies (and what orgasm do I have!), then throw away with the rubbish and forget. The next day at two p.m., meek and mild, not offended by my yesterday's treatment, it comes back to me to copulate for the only 4 francs and 50 centimes.

What is he driving at? – nine out of ten people will ask. – He reads "Le Monde" every day and then calls it a whore. He doesn't doubt the Nazi crimes, but demands proofs and enemies' right of defence before a serious court. No, he must have a screw loose. Why don't we secretly lock him up? Nobody will even notice. And if it's revealed, "Le Monde" will cleverly explain everything, hushing up the whole matter.

Fortunately, I don't care whether nine tenths of people will understand me or not, and I don't give a damn if they will be my enemies. I'm interested

only in the remaining ones: the last one tenth. All those who, just like me, feel gagged, terrified, shut by the demo-liberal propaganda and by the crowd which it keeps on a lead: the public opinion, readers, voters, clients, employees and soldiers – Demos.

I hate propaganda, no matter if it is Goebbels' or "humanist", democratic and liberal one.

ALMS 2, 20TH JUNE 1986

Another story about beggars.

Well, this is what happened to me a moment ago. You could split your sides laughing.

Smartly dressed (Ania dresses me as if I were a model at Sherrer's fashion house) I walk down Champs-Élysées. At the height of George V Avenue I can see a gypsy woman with a child in her arms. She's sitting on the ground and working: a twisted face, an imploring voice. Nobody pays attention to her.

I stop for a while and start searching my pockets for a franc which I owe her. What has been promised must be done. As every bourgeois who has concluded an agreement, even if it's an agreement only with his own conscience, I scrupulously fulfil the obligations. But I discover that I have no coins in my pockets. Perhaps I'll find a franc in the bag? Well, I put my hand in the bag and grope for a coin.

At the same moment a distinguished man is walking past. He must be at least a director in his late fifties, with a Rolex watch on his hand. He looks and sees that I'm well dressed ... So he feels safe. When approaching me, he says:

- These are ... - However, seeing me close the bag, he walks away embarrassed and explains on parting: - I thought you wanted...

I can smell what's going to happen in a moment and I absolutely don't want to miss it. In a hurry, I start searching through the bag again. Not finding a franc, I take out the first coin I come across: 10 francs. Hard luck. My elderly gentleman would walk off if I kept searching. Besides, I don't want to make a fool of myself. When being watched, one should be generous. But if the 10 francs will make him even more angry? - I say to myself, because I guess I know what he means.

I casually throw the coin to the gypsy woman. My gentleman swallows the bait, just like I expected, because this way he can get out of the embarrassing situation and sort of excuse his meddling into my private affairs a moment ago. Apart from that I'll be able to give him a lesson of morality, which he nearly missed.

- They are play-actors – he tells me smiling nicely.

- Why? – I ask hypocritically, pretending that I still don't understand what he's driving at.

- Don't you know? They are play-actors. Do you think this one is really poor?

The tone of his voice is still friendly, and the question has been asked in literary French.

- Everyone must live off something – I answer aphoristically, keeping a face which doesn't express anything.

My answer confuses him. How to classify it? What should he expect? the only thing he can do is to keep bogging down.

- Oh, really? Live off something? You must be kidding – he is still smiling, but a little bit less. - Every morning two men drive them here in a Mercedes and pick them up in the evening. All of them sit on gold. Have you read this article in "Figaro" ... - he adds.

- I don't read "Figaro" – I interrupt him in an icy tone.

I've got what I wanted and I see no point in continuing the game. I then conclude by stinging him where it's going to hurt most: I ostentatiously show contempt for this narrow-minded, Manichaeian journal read by high-rank officials and wealthy intelligentsia.

Now he already knows that everything's been soured.

He has three options:

ridicule me,

make a joke of the whole incident,
insult me.

He's tried the first two solutions. It hasn't worked out for him: he's not witty enough to manage on his own, and I don't want to help him, so he says:

- You encourage people to beg. Idiot – and he walks away with a red face.

He makes a few steps, then stops for a fraction of a moment, hoping to hear from me:

- If anyone is an idiot here, it's you!

Seeing however that I'm looking at a shop window with a facial expression of a man who's already forgotten about everything, he finally walks away without my revenge.

I'm glad. I haven't wasted those 10 francs. But ...Actually, I was too generous ... I'll have to deduct the 9 francs that I paid in excess from the sum allotted to other beggars whom I'll meet today.

LAW, 23RD JUNE 1986

OK. I'll stop mocking. But I can't agree.

The local society has added “the rule of law” to the noble values of democracy and freedom. Down with privileges and elites. From now on, nobody will be cursed, and we will put an end to nepotism. Law. Identical rules, general and impersonal, the same for everybody. Egalitarian democracy owing to which all those who find themselves in a similar situation will be treated in the same way. Equality in the eyes of the law. And it's no wishful thinking. No, no, it's serious – obligation under compulsion. Which means that the state and its police, judges and prison guards immediately will rush to make the insubordinate obedient. A horde of submissive and disciplined clerks will also watch for their chance to ensure an egalitarian dealing with applicants. In a word, a LAW-ABIDING STATE; in capital letters.

OK, it's easy to stand by and sneer. I'm not sneering, though, but gnashing my teeth.

Because this law is only an intellectual chimera. I don't claim it's like in Gulags or Auschwitz. But I've experienced for myself how favouring, elitism and nepotism govern people's everyday lives in the local system, which brags about the values of its law and order.

But to make matters worse, this law gave birth to little offspring. Little “laws”. Perverse midgets called “personal rights”. “My right”. “I have a right”. Or: “Hands off my right”. To put it in a learned way, these are “legally protected areas of individual interest”.

In other words, I have an area in which I can harm others, thumb my nose at morality and be free from any lessons of justice, an area where I can walk around showing off my fully exposed egoism. Because I have such a “right”.

In this anarchy area allotted to me I have a “right” to be mean, stupid or harmful. The state and its officials, policemen, judges and guards, all of them will rush to defend me if anybody dares to give me lessons on what I should do. “Why are you poking your nose, man? I have a right!”.

Only occasionally someone will squeal timidly: “That’s an abuse of the right!”.

Is that abstraction? Am I exaggerating?

So look closely, my friend, at this law and those “rights”. I will count them for you with an abacus in my hand.

There are about 3 million unemployed people in this country. The legal regulations apply to them in the same way, so all those who have worked 1000 hours over the last 6 months have “rights”. This means that they receive a compensation reaching 60% of the earnings they had at the time when they still worked.

Now, this is what results from this equality before law and the “rights”:

An unemployed “smicard” (a person receiving the lowest statutory salary) has the “rights” reaching 60% of their income. Today this amounts to circa 4000 francs. But a managing director also has “rights” to 60% of his salary, which means 60% of 100 000 francs that he earned every month.

Mirelle Mathieu also has “rights”. If you think she doesn’t, call the nearest Unemployment Agency and check. Yes, she does have her “rights”. Johnny Halliday too.

A few years ago one of my acquaintances bought a house using his “rights”. He was an engineer and made quick calculations: 6-month work and 6 months of “rights”. Apart from that, he worked black doing some odd jobs. After a few years it gave 440 000 francs. In other words, his “rights” gave him just enough to make a good investment in the walls.

There are also others: hundred thousands of the unemployed who have a right to the last payment of their “rights”. And then there’s only the “right” to sleep rough.

DIVE, 26TH JUNE 1986

As a matter of fact, I search for strong impressions rather than usual happiness. Actually, it looks I feel really good only when I'm at the bottom of a hole. How else could I explain the fact that I'm diving into trouble the moment I've got out of it?

With a debt reaching 210 000 (currently my university salary amounts to 9 000 monthly) with overdue taxes, which I have to pay by the end of the year, and with Beks, who's holding out his hand to get his share, I would still have a little chance for a miraculous recovery (financial) provided that I don't worsen my situation looking for new adventures. Because if I am "a good boy" and don't do anything stupid, at the end of the year I will have "only" 300 000 francs to pay off. Given that Mrs Afkami owes me 60 000 and that I'll sell my gold, I'll go below 200 000 of debt. It's still loads of money. OK. Which doesn't change the fact that at the end of 1986 I might be miraculously healed. Well, didn't I find nearly 400 000 to pay my creditors over the past months? My wife, who so patiently allows me to do all kinds of crazy things, has again given me an idea of the last resort. On condition that On condition that I don't set the whole devilish machine in motion.

- Focus on the album. Don't have the exhibition this year – she ordered me.

But ... I'm having it. I'll borrow another 180 000 and again, I'm going to have nightmares. But that's how it is, I can't help it.

And this is how I took the decision to put my sore fingers in the cogwheels again.

A moment ago Louse called me.

- Good morning, sir. No, I don't want Beksiński's paintings in pledge. No, no, I don't want that. But I'll give you an interest-free credit for a year.

No sooner had the trap opened than I fell into it: I said “OK” straight away. And only yesterday Yesterday? Only today, an hour ago I didn’t even think about it.

I’ve given up on the exhibition – I wrote – and I’m already getting used to it”.

And now let me explain why I’m diving into trouble again. There are a few reasons. All of them have been lurking in me for a long time, and with Louse’s proposal, like a sprung devil they immediately popped out of the box, happy that they no longer had to sit still.

So, what I need in the first place is a dose of success. I must have it. See those dumbstruck people, those silent pilgrimages, those mouths gaped wide as if they were to receive Communion. After the last year’s success I need this drug. I must have it.

There is also another reason: without the exhibition I have no prospects. Emptiness and idleness. What shall I do to let off steam, to vent the excess of energy that I’m bursting with? I need plans, movement, meetings with people, tension and satisfaction. Having nothing to do, I will come back to my old grudges and boast about the old successes. I’m already embarrassed repeating the endless chorus about “my exhibition *Hommage à Beksiński*”. How long can you plait wreaths of the already withered leaves? I’ll be burning myself out doing nothing or doing in my thoughts the things that I’ve already done. If somebody prone to meditation suddenly gets a taste of action, he will experience fascination that will be pestering him for the rest of his life. How much more exciting it is to build enterprises than write down things on sheets of paper!

Besides, I need money to continue my project. Participation in the publication issued by Arkady requires 120 000 francs. Where shall I find it? And the album must be released and I have to be its co-editor. I can’t bolt at the last moment on the slightest pretext. If I were able to sell 3-4 paintings during the future exhibition, I could fulfil my obligations towards “Arkady”. And I can sell the paintings at “affordable” prices. At least I think so.

In a way, Louse is also important in these calculations. I've slung so much mud on him in these notes that now I can't reject a nearly friendly proposal. When he's not being a pig for once, how could I refuse to shake the hand he's holding out to me? Then I would have to admit before myself that I actually look for ostensible reasons to hate him rather than want to get out of the hole with his help.

Especially that he has means to take revenge on me, whereas I don't have anything like that at my disposal. If I don't agree to his proposal, I'll complicate his exhibition schedule. He's booked two months for me in the autumn, and I'm sure he must have refused somebody because of this reservation. If I leave him in the lurch, he's going to hold a grudge against me and he'll be right. He'll never again let me have an exhibition in his place. And now I know that Seine Street is an ideal place, the best one in Paris. Every art lover goes there at least once a quarter to have a look at what's going on in galleries. Even without advertising, I'm certain I'll have loads of visitors. I also know that no other gallery in this district will take Beks. "Too difficult. Impossible to sell". And even if by any chance a gallery owner took it, he would take with it all the profits, glory and pleasure. No, pushing for a definite break-up with Louse is not my interest.

But there's something deeper about it, and my masochism is not only literary prose: I'm obviously searching for a sense of misery. It sort of gives me an incentive to take action. For many days I haven't been able to write anything. Since the time I found my haven of peace and quiet, since I saw the end of the tunnel on the horizon, I haven't had much to say. Oh, yes, that "today it's Friday again". It's an expression I use in my talks with Ania when everything is all right, to complain about the passage of time, that it flies too quickly, that life slips through my fingers; that today it's Friday again and another week of happiness is gone without a trace. It's a bit too little. I once wrote that real art begins with immersion in the tears of its author. And I was right, because since the time I stopped suffering I haven't had anything important to say. And when I finally start writing, it bores me like a school composition.

In the end – and this is where I stop quoting the reasons why I’m having the exhibition – I have no pleasure being with myself when I’m not worried about anything. Actually, I crave for those nights filled with despair, when I wasn’t disgusted with myself. Since the time I started sleeping soundly, I’ve become down-to-earth and quick-tempered, like in the past. I fume at a driver who’s broken the rules, I’m red with anger because of a professor at university who didn’t reply to my greeting, and I promise revenge to any old passer-by who’s jostled me in the street.

I could even accept those fits of my fury, which come back like a boomerang whenever the knot of a gripping fear in my stomach gets loosened, but what most humiliates me is that they don’t have enemies of their calibre. I become mean, shallow, ridiculous and mundane. Like a rabid mongrel, I howl at mosquitoes. Oh, no, I need something stronger. I need real scoundrels that I will chase until I get them and bite them to death, arousing no laughter on the part of the audience.

Well, these are the seven reasons why I said “yes” to Louse. If I dug more carefully, I would probably find further seven causes which together with the above listed ones pull the strings of my “free” will.

And now dangers. Two of them are particularly worrying:

Firstly, there is no guarantee that during the next exhibition I will sell at least one painting. A dramatic reduction in prices that I’m planning might scare customers off instead of attracting them. Reduce the price from 360 00 to 60 or 80 thousand?! It’s a giant leap. Ania, Wojtek and Louse foretell me a disaster. The others claim that it’s just the opposite:

- Nobody remembers your prices. And those who remember have understood that paintings for 360 000 couldn’t be really put up for sale, and now they are. That’s all.

How can I possibly predict it? If I come a cropper, they’ll tell me:

- It was to be expected. Didn’t I tell you?

If I succeed, they’ll shout out with equal enthusiasm:

- He was right that he stuck to his decision. Persistence really pays off!

As usual, there is no clear future ahead of me. I take a plunge when some people assure me that the pool is full of water, and the others claim the water has been pumped out and I'm going to hit the concrete bottom.

The second serious danger is that due to the modest means the exhibition will also have to be modest.

- Oh, it's not the same as last year – the audience will say.

That's certain. As clear as daytime. I can't afford to have big posters in the underground. Also, there will be no advertisement in "Connaissance des Arts" and in "Beaux Arts". But I'll have a small brochure and poster made. That's minimum I can do. Without that the exhibition wouldn't make much sense. The cocktail party is going to be less grand and invitations less luxurious. But I already have a full lighting system with halogens, which I can use again. I also have a golden book and press dossier enriched with cuttings from the last 8 months. I have a hundred copies of "Penthouse" with an article about Beks to support my brochure if it was too thin, and to supplement the old one (a few copies of which I still have). I'll buy ten new frames from Delf. I can also use the old five ones.

First of all, however, the autumn exhibition will have a solid basis: it will take place after the exhibition of 1985, after salons in Grand Palais, after the festival in Cannes, after hundreds of letters I've sent and after the projection of my film for several weeks at Studio Christine cinema and (perhaps) in Studio Mac Mahoń. Rodon, the owner, has taken the film and will be showing it until next Wednesday.

Next, I've made a number of journalists acquaintance and maybe I'll manage to get something out of them: Reinette on 3 TV channel, Offredo on channel 1, Gicquel, Neuman and Brisset. Robert Barret has promised to write an article in his small weekly and, what's most important, find "half a dozen" friends who will write in their magazines. After the article that he wrote for "Penthouse", Levêque might publish something again. Claude Dorval will

write in the medical press, and perhaps Hugnet, apart from his “Penthouse”, will be able to do something in other publications by Filipacchi group. Maybe Boucher will convince one of his colleagues in “Le Monde” to place at least a short note. Raymond, a friend of the Amrams, promised that he would recommend me to the editor-in-chief of “Beaux Arts”. Patrick Beehr from “Newsweek” has never wanted to do anything to help the promotion of Beks, although he’s got one of his paintings, which he bought on Polański’s advice. He didn’t even answer my phone call. But who knows? Maybe he’ll lift his finger this time? It will be necessary to shake Maciej Morawski from Free Europe and Ms Lamotte, who wrote that she’d prepared an article about the previous exhibition, but she couldn’t have it published, as it was too late. And Ms Frossard, a sister of the famous columnist from “Figaro”? I’m sure she’ll be able to write something in that narrow-minded, Manichean journal. In any case, I must send her a photo from the previous vernissage that she asked me for, because she’s there in the central place.

As a matter of fact, I think that even without huge advertisements on the underground, in specialist monthlies and in “Officiel des Spéctacles”, the exhibition stands a chance of success.

So I take a plunge. However, I do know one thing: that it’s “sink or swim”. If I miss this time, there will be no next time. Life’s not going to give me a play-off opportunity and if I fall, I won’t get up again.

Just like in roulette, I bet everything on the colour of hope: red.

SCUFFLE, 28TH JUNE 1986

At last I've smashed somebody's phiz.

It's terribly hot and muggy today: 32 degrees in a shadow. With Ania beside me and *Christmas Eve Night* painting in the boot, I'm driving to Mrs Afkhami to give it back to her. Then we are going to an Iranian restaurant, to which she's invited us.

Near the 16th district of Paris from the side of Bois de Boulogne I drive into Henri Martin Avenue. There I notice a group of young boys on skateboards, who are clinging to a motorbike.

- Look what those idiots are doing – says Ania.

- Dangerous snots – I answer and try to be careful.

I'm already at their height and now I can see well: there are three or four of them and they are about 17-18 years old. Hideous gobs.

Suddenly one of them lets the motorbike go and rides fast into my side of the road. I brake easily, as for some time I've been on my guard, keeping my leg on the pedal. Anyway, we're just in front of the traffic lights.

I scrupulously hurl insults at them.

In response, the boy runs to me with the skateboard in his hand and wants to hit my head through the open window. I start the car. The boy gives a mighty kick to the car bonnet and hurls his string of insults at me. I stop, put the handbrake on, fling the door open and jump out of the car. He dodges, but the other two boys attack me with their skateboards. The one who first dodged the blow now turns back and, taking a swing, wants to hit me with his machine. Finally he decides to kick my testicles. He's too slow, though, because I manage to catch his leg and draw him to myself. He wants to make me lose my balance and, doing so, carelessly lifts his head. At this moment I give him an uppercut in the face from below. He lets me go and

catches his head with both hands. I let him go, too, and come back to the car. His two mates hesitate over whether or not they should attack me from the side.

In the meantime Ania gets out of the car and yells:

- Stop fighting! Can't you see that ...

A number of cars stop on the road, and people on the pavement stand still to have a closer look at me.

I get into the car. The one whom I knocked out has recovered a little bit and stands in front of me. For a moment he doesn't know what to do, next he bangs on the bonnet with his fist. I jump out of the car again and run towards him. He runs away with all his might.

And that's the end of everything. I return to my car and start the motor.

In the evening Ania claimed that they were just snots wanted to show off in front of the girls. That's not true. These thugs were adult, had hideous gobs and they were not kids from the rich 16th district.

- You stupid dick! - she yells. – Can't you see what's going on? They might have killed you! Serves you right. This is how people are murdered! I could have become a widow! What did you want to prove? That you're a guy with balls? If I'd had a tear bomb, I'd have thrown it at you. Then they could kick you black and blue. They might have killed you! Look what they've done to the car!

I don't answer anything, driving with an inscrutable face expression. I don't let myself be nervous so as not to fuel the argument. Several hundred meters away I stop. Ania wants to check what happened to the car. The incident with that scum was nothing dangerous. But if they'd damaged the car ... I hate to think what's going to start at home in such a case ... So, with my heart beating hard I come up to see the damage. Fortunately, banging my fist against the underneath of the bonnet, I manage to smooth out the dent. There's hardly any trace. The danger on the part of Ania has therefore been obviated.

I begin to muse: I'm a barrister, a research worker, an adult forty-year-old man (yesterday was my birthday), the bones in my right hand were badly knitted after a scuffle in my youth and may crack when hit, I had my nose operated on, so a casual flick could make it fall apart; finally, I've got glasses on my nose, which might stick in my eyes and poke them if I received a well-aimed blow; what on earth possessed me? Why did I spring out of the car as if I couldn't wait to rush to fight?

I need badly my daily analysis, in ten well-ordered points. My analysis of the ten reasons which, pent-up for years, sprang out from the car with me; my intellectual food. After a few moments of pondering I've already got a few causes. To tell about all of them, however, I would need to write a novel. I'll then limit myself to the first one, the one which is the biggest burden:

I'm a coward who eventually rebelled against his own cowardice. And at the same time, I make much ado, like every wimp who tries to save his face in front of an audience.

Here's my story:

Since childhood I've been torn between contradictory feelings which didn't have to lend anything from cowardice and violence, because they were cowardice and violence in themselves. It's like that even today.

I've always tried to frighten the others by yelling terribly. But since my inconspicuous looks didn't fill anybody with particular fear, it wasn't enough and sometimes I had to take action. Each time, however, I tried to make an impression on the opponent rather than gain real physical advantage over him.

Later, when I was already twenty years old, it was the same story at the boxing ring. Seeing me train on the equipment one might say: a good technician, but face to face with a real sparing partner it was less funny. Or maybe more?

In any case, despite my impressive biceps, I've never raised my head over the level of mediocrity. My cowardice was visible to the naked eye, as

I attacked my opponent incessantly, like a cock. At the same time, however, when I inflicted a blow, I always held the hand in a way enabling me to protect myself from a potential counter-punch. This way not only didn't I reach the target, but I didn't even manage to defend myself effectively. I had speed in my muscles, which was proved by all tests, but what I lacked was the speed in courage. In a word, fearing that I might be punched in the nose, I withheld my own blows, which made me a Sunday boxer.

Oh, yes, I did try hard to gain control over my fear. I walked outside buildings, from one window to another on the sixth floor, or I stood on the edge of the roof. One day I asked a boy whom I hardly knew to shoot with an air gun to the cigarette I was keeping in my mouth from a distance of six metres. Nothing helped: I was constantly lily-livered.

In 1968 I got in a company of tough guys. I'd found a job with Lido as an engine driver and for three years I worked among men who used bottle necks or pieces of an iron bar in scuffles. This way Kader maimed Jo for the rest of his life, and Muni had his arm cut in many places. I've already talked about it.

In Lido nobody picked on me, because I was often seen in a shower: I weighed 67 kilos, but I had an about forty-centimetre biceps and a bull's neck. At the same time, however, I had a sensitive nose and a badly knitted right hand – only I knew about it. So, I didn't provoke anyone and nobody provoked me.

All those Arabs, illiterate, former soldiers of the Foreign Legion, mercenaries from Katanga or ordinary criminals fought with each other quite often.

One day a Mego, an Algerian weighing ninety five kilograms, a gloomy figure, staying on the sidelines, a loner giving occasional instant blows that knocked down the other one to the ground, hardly able to distinguish the letters, silent, brutal and introverted, began to feel dislike for me. I couldn't help it: he simply stopped liking my head.

- I'll smash your gob – he told me at the table one day.

It was the only sentence he said that evening. And here is the reason: just like big dogs love their masters, that beast was in love with Colline, the star of the show, a 180-cm Rhodesian woman. Well, the said Colline, probably to pass the time, showed me some favour and let me take her to my little room and kiss her once or twice.

Mego couldn't forgive me her smiles.

- You'll get one across the chops.

I was even more scared, because he'd promised that solemnly and in public.

It went on like that for about three or four days. Very soon my fear turned into panic. One evening I put on a thin undershirt, which could be easily torn if Mego caught it, jeans and heavy boots, the tips of which I'd studded with metal. I'd devised a plan: I would trip him up at the very beginning of the scuffle, knock him over and then give him a few mighty kicks in the head.

Playing it safe, I asked Wojtek to be present during the fight in case it was necessary to separate us if one of us was about to kill the other.

Wojtek is a weightlifter, who even today has a forty-six-centimetre biceps, an acrobat, basketball player and tennis player, a graduate of the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw. At that time he was my best friend. Who could I rely on if not him?

Well, having heard me, Wojtek paled. Let me repeat it, he paled, and I'm not exaggerating, because strong and dexterous as he was, he feared Mego just like I did, if not more. The latter called him sometimes:

- Hey! Adamo, come here!

And Wojtek came running with a smile and asked:

- Yes, you called me!

And this is where Wojtek made a mistake.

- You're my mate, of course, but Mego too. I don't want to meddle in it.

OK. Let it be. Sixteen years have passed since that moment and I still haven't forgotten his answer. Another sixteen years will pass and I will still remember it.

Distressed, I took a decision: it will be today. In the hall, between the decorations piled up at the back of the cellar, near the cage with panthers, I lay in wait for Mego. But my cowardice didn't leave me for a moment. Perhaps it would be enough if I challenged him to fight? Perhaps? Maybe he'll crack?

So, just in case, I didn't attack him from the ambush, but when we were pushing a decoration, I said in a voice which stuck in my throat:

- You wanted to smash my face, I'm waiting.

A strange smile, half-hesitant, half-friendly, appeared on his face. I looked at his round little eyes, his low, fat forehead cut by a deep groove, and he ... walked away.

Five minutes later, when we were moving another decoration, I stopped in front of him and said distinctly:

- I repeat that if you're looking for me, you've got me. You wanted to square up with me. Go ahead.

Again, he walked by without saying anything.

When our ways crossed the third time while we were putting up the decorations, I quietly whispered through my teeth so that nobody could hear us:

- After work I'll smash your shitty phiz.

Ten minutes later another surprise: our boss, Pappini, comes running to me, furious:

- Mego says that you're threatening him. If you fight, I'll fire both of you!

Phew, it went well. This way I come across as a dangerous wolf. At least once I didn't crack and it paid. In military science it's called "dissuasion par représailles massives"¹. So, I could take off the heavy boots with thick metal tips and put on everyday working trainers. The matter was settled once and for all. Mego never again looked for a fight with me.

Years passed. I defended my habilitation work and started preparing the new book about "Premises for International Obligations Efficiency". I no longer had strong muscles. They melted since the time I'd stopped doing sport. I carried bulky tomes instead. At the beginning of each week I would go to the library in Cujas Street and take six books at a time to read them at home and give back the next Saturday.

One day, when coming back from the library with a bag full of books, I get on the underground train and sit down. I put the bag next to me, as the seat is free. A man comes in and sits on it. At the last moment I jerk the bag out from beneath him.

- You don't like me sitting here? No? Don't like it?

He's a drunk, strong, stocky worker in working clothes, with square muscular hands.

- So, the gentleman doesn't like me sitting here?

He catches my ear and tries to pull it. I'm paralysed with fear.

- You've lost your mind?! – I squeak tearfully.

- Go ahead, say that you don't like it! Just say!

He gets onto contemptuous first-name terms and wants to catch hold of my other ear. Then he adds:

- I'm going to indulge my whims. I'll treat myself to a nice weekend in a moment.

I look at the crowd that surrounds us and turn to two men who are sitting opposite us:

- Of course, you don't see anything. Do you? Aren't you going to react?!

One is looking at the ceiling. The other one is gazing at me reluctantly and doesn't say anything. A woman at the back waves to me:

- Please, come here. There's a seat.

I stand up. So does he. I walk away. He follows me. If I get off at the next station, he'll leave too. I pull the brake then.

The train stops. My opponent doesn't say anything. Neither do I. The crowd is looking at us, hostile and silent. Three minutes later the engine driver comes running. He's got bloodshed eyes and ... simply stinks of vodka. He furiously attacks me:

- I don't give a sheet about your arguments! – He feels like hitting me. – Last week I killed a man! He threw himself under my train. And I fuck you, sir. Jerk off with that guy on your own. I don't care a fart!

He walks away and a few moments later the train pulls out. At the next stop I get off. The man hesitates for a while, but finally he gives up and stays. He only tries to trip me up. If I fall, he'll give me a few kicks in the face, then will come back to the train and go away. I omit his leg and go out. The door automatically closes behind me and I'm left alone on the platform. Alone, trembling with fear and shame.

And now for five years I've been chewing over the fury and resentment, because I let myself be humiliated. I go through the same scene a hundred times and in my thoughts I punch the guy's hideous gob, which I should have done at the very beginning. I was sitting next to him. It was enough to rise and, having turned around my own axis to the right or to the left, stick my elbow in his eye with all my might ... Why didn't I do that? Why?!

Do you understand now, my Friend? Oh, certainly you do!

So, this is the first reason why I jumped out of the car and gave an uppercut to that boy. There's no point listing other causes. This one is enough.

¹ Dissuasion par représailles massives – an American military theory at the time of Cold War according to which Soviet aggression should be deterred by threatening it with massive nuclear revenge

SALE, 18TH JUNE 1986

Today I brought Mrs Afkhami (68, Henri Martin Avenue, Paris 16, telephone number 45-03-37-96) the painting which I call “Christmas Eve Night”.

That’s the first painting I’ve been able to sell.

I bought it from Szydło. To tell the truth, I shouldn’t have let it go because, just like “*Don Quixote*” and “A Couple of Mummies”, I love it for the tender movement of hands. Beks claims that in this movement one shouldn’t search for anything else than a joke, as the figure who’s holding a doll “does shameful things, you can see for yourself”. For me, however, there is only a bit of love, which moves me.

During our previous meetings Mrs Afkhami made an advance payment of 20 000. Today she gave me another 15 000 (still in cash).

This is also an opportunity for me to discover the importance of an alliance with collectors. For, before you call me an ordinary trader, believe me, my Friend, that irrespective of my financial problems and an absolute necessity for recovering my losses, I’ve eventually understood that the sale of paintings is an indispensable element of promoting any painter. Without it there is no chance of building up his renown. His paintings must circulate, must be sought-after and must have a financial value. Without all that nobody is going to know or try to find out about them.

So, Mrs Afkhami talks about Beks right, left and centre, as she’s now personally interested. And since she seems to have rich and influential friends, anything becomes possible, including a good exhibition in New York or the sale of another painting. That would allow me to prepare the autumn exhibition at Valmay’s Gallery in proper conditions, because 80 000 which I’ll get from the sale of “Christmas Eve Night” is not going to cover all the costs. Well, now I want this exhibition to take place at any price.

DREAM, 3RD JULY 1986

How can I take a liking to people? What can I do to finally wake up a warm feeling in myself and make the grudge for all the harm they've done to me disappear? How should I get rid of that dry tone, a cold facial expression and a glint of aggression in my look?

How can I hold back that pathological need for respect, which I hate so much and which has won me so many enemies?

How to learn to forgive?

When somebody smiled to me in the past, I wanted to embrace the whole world and each hobo became my friend. For a long time nobody has smiled to me.

So, how can I crush the demons that are hiding in me and how shall I hold out my hand to people? For I feel that I hate them, and they pay me back in their own coin.

For the time being, only a sunbeam emerging from behind the clouds lets me bear the presence of my neighbour for a short moment.

FOUR TRUTHS, 4TH JULY 1986

You're a real pig, Beks. A real pig.

I'd give a lot to satisfy your greed once and for all, so as not to be forced to look at you, read or hear about you any longer.

Your letter as of 22nd June 1986 – whole eight pages. A masterpiece of lie for the audience. Who are these elaborate manoeuvres to paint your black soul white for? For me? We're like an old marriage, in which one person knows perfectly well the tricks played by the other, being fully aware that the other side knows them too. There's no point in deluding yourself that you can fool your partner with a torn dress or grandiloquent assurances. Long ago we already discovered all the corners where our lies had skulked. So, when you're making up stories, it's not supposed to lead me up the garden path. You know it just as I do. If you're twisting the truth, it's supposed to beguile History; to fool those who don't know your devious tricks and will be taken in. But do you need it in the first place? After all, you are a genius. And it is your word that people will trust, even if it's a crude word.

So, why are you putting on a show of sincerity, real details accompanied by loud repenting, while at the same time you lie through your teeth about important matters?

A great art of a venal hack barrister: to plead guilty and offer profuse confessions about small things. Just after that, using the same sincere tone, you can deny serious crimes. And everybody will believe it. I know this method perfectly well, as I use it in my profession every day. My skills, however, are not a patch on the talent your present in your letter as of 26th June. I've attached it to this note. Let the others judge.

In the meantime, however, I'll tell you all my four truths straight from the shoulder. It's my turn. Certainly, I won't send it to you, because I attach too much importance to our enterprise, of which you would weasel out if

only I gave you the slightest pretext. I will therefore make a scene in writing and close the files on it. And I'll prepare it as perversely as you: I'll start with agreeing and making concessions. I'll even do it three times, each time with interjections. I'll do it wherever it doesn't matter at all. Yes, yes, three times, constantly assuring you of my remorse. Then I'll move on to the gist, to what may really hurt you. It's going to be my fourth truth. But these truths I'll tell in my own way:

1. You're right, no, no, don't deny, let's tell the truth to each other. So, you're right that I carelessly threw myself into a precipice and I put you at risk of plunging with me. Oh, I've known about it for a long time. Believe me. If you read these notes, you would have no doubts. But you don't have to flood me with a string of reproaches, because whether you fulminate or not, I'm going to push our cart like an ox, so as to get out of the quagmire.

2. You're right, I know: you must listen to music to paint. That's your drug. Perhaps that's why your paintings are so beautiful. So, you need records and you will have them. I'll bring them to you in my teeth. If I'm not able to find them, I won't object to a "certain German man" looking for them more effectively than me. Also, I won't protest if you present him with the best painting in the current series. Of course, you could as well give him one of the paintings I don't care about so much. But you won't do that, because it's the best way to sting me. You'll give him just the one I care about, and not any other. OK, give the best painting to the "German". Go ahead, give him.

3. You're right, Beks: the dollar has dropped. Then you should demand that I raise the price of your paintings by 15%. Add 3.8% for the "inflationary overhang", as you call it. I'll even pretend to have forgotten about the opposite situation - when the dollar surged every day and I asked you to "find an amicable solution" (as provided in our agreement), you answered dryly: "No way. I want a thousand dollars for the painting. Do whatever you want, it's your business".

You see, I've pleaded guilty three times, and three times I've tried to reach an agreement. Am I not a man of dialogue, ready to make concessions? Well, I'm just like that. An honest guy. I'm just like you, aren't I?

And now let's move on to the crucial thing: you are an exceptional swine. I thought I had a friend, and I discover a penny-pincher. A little accountant of his dollars, a mean usurer. And here is my fourth truth, the one without a comedy about false remorse:

4. You've never showed me any gratitude for my efforts, any recognition for the results or encouragement to motivate my further endeavours. No reaction. Nothing. Neither a friendly gesture when I got into trouble.

Let's talk about details, shall we? Tiny details.

Have you ever showed the slightest amount of appreciation for the exhibition I organized? the exhibition worthy of your genius? Let me repeat, the slightest amount of appreciation!

Three times you've brought yourself to give a short comment. Each time it was meant to ridicule me or to belittle my merits.

The first comment concerned the topography of the brochure: "Preposterous, even Polański confirmed it".

The second one mocked the "petit bourgeois and pretentious frames. So irritating, like a pimple. Ms Dzikowska didn't even notice them. Why did you have them made?"

According to the third comment, the exhibition was "organized in a hurry, at five to twelve. It was to be expected that everything would finish like that".

Have you ever showed any gratitude for the love that I have for your art? When I went into raptures about it, you interrupted me briefly: "Well, I remind you that you still owe me 18 000 dollars ..."

Have you ever uttered a single sincere "thank you" for the proofs of friendship I've given you for two years? For all the medicines, equipment and tools that I sent or brought from Paris, because they were missing in

Warsaw, and which I'd sometimes searched for long weeks, so that they would meet all your requirements? Have you ever shaken my hand warmly? Only once, using all your will power, you took out a painting from behind the wardrobe, where it had been lying for fifteen years. As you explained to me, it was the only painting among thirty which hadn't found a buyer despite being exhibited in Germany for many months. Being obsessed with sincerity when it comes to details, you admitted that it had serious technical defects, as it was painted at the very beginning, when you didn't know the oil technique yet, owing to which the picture hasn't dried till today. I also discovered that it had numerous deep scratches. Then you gave it to me as a present. Were you able to fall asleep that night?

Have you ever called me to ask if everything was all right? That would cost you one thousand zł. I pay you 12, if not 20 million. And when your son was unconscious, I called twice a day for two weeks to ask how he was feeling. And I didn't look at the meter.

You know about my financial problems at the moment, but your only worry, about which you keep harping on in your letters, is whether I'll pay you more and whether I've prepared cash for your "compensation" in case I go bankrupt.

But you aren't poor, for God's sake. Oh, no. For Polish conditions you are even a multimillionaire. In Warsaw an engineer can hardly earn 300 000 zł a year, including overtime hours and commissioned works, whereas I pay you minimum 12 million. Last year I must have given you 20 million. Due to the aberrations of the Polish exchange rate for the dollar, what is a small sum in the West turns into a fortune in Poland. You're one of the richest people in Poland.

- What are they doing with such cash? – people ask me. – Put it in the fridge? It's impossible to spend such money in Poland.

Well, you live modestly and constantly complain of the lack of money.

Why don't you spare me this comedy about your poverty? Couldn't you wait for once with your endless demands for a rise? Not for long, just give me enough time to earn some money, to breathe in a gulp of air, because I'm drowning.

You're hideous, and your mercantile mind makes me sick.

Even if, contrary to me, you don't have a religious attitude to your own works, at least you could treat your most fervent servant a bit better than a cook treats his butcher. And the object of our partnership you could approach in a bit different way than a potato merchant handles the goods that he sells to passers-by.

In seven days I'm coming to Poland, where I'll meet with you. How can I stop myself from telling my four truths to your face?

FRIENDSHIP, 6TH JULY 1986

If I hadn't craved for your friendship so much, Beks, everything would have taken a different course. Had you given me a bit of it, we wouldn't have got trapped.

Yesterday, having read your letter dated 26th June, I got mad. I answered you with a letter full of insults, which I will certainly never send. But you know that hurling insults makes me relieved for a while. Then, as usual, I need arguments and explanations. I must understand what happened that today we hate and wish each other all the worst.

You can't forgive me that I've blown it financially. You can't forgive me that for a moment I lured you by the prospect of going abroad, escaping from Tom, who terrorizes all of you, and saying goodbye to Poland, which is in its death throes, burdened with debts. Last but not least, you can't forgive me that finally it's not Paris waiting for you, but Revenue Office and being ridiculed in the eyes of your environment.

For all that you blame the grand scale of the exhibition that I organized, especially the horrendously high prices I fixed for your paintings.

That was caused by about a hundred reasons. At least fifty I've already explained in these notes. Today I'll quote the fifty first reason, the one which I hid from the others and myself, as there's nothing glorious about it for someone who wanted to come across as a businessman. Anyway, it was only recently that I really understood it, as your last letters, breathing fire, let me find the key to it.

Never in my life had I met a genius. Not everybody is that lucky. You should then understand my excitement when I finally found an authentic one, with stamps. You can also imagine that I instantly wanted to adulate him, make his acquaintance, gain his recognition, and hopefully even friendship.

Now, add the score I had to settle with my childhood, when my little mates hardly ever offered friendship to me. Instead, I was given hatred, which surrounded me from all sides. Then you will have a full picture.

Yes, I desperately needed your friendship, at any cost. To be able to casually say to my acquaintances: “My friend genius told me yesterday ...” That sounds terrific ... Friend genius ...” Ha!

I remember very well that already at the beginning of our acquaintance, in the letter to Margonari, I complained about your coldness and keeping me at a distance. He grumbled about the lack of any gratitude on your part for the exhibitions he’d organized in Italy, for which you didn’t thank him with a single word.

Since that time everything I’ve done, at least partially, has been fuelled by a subconscious hope for gaining your friendship.

Right now I’m not going to talk about our mutual relations at that time, how I called you twice after the failed attempt of Tom’s suicide, how often I went to Warsaw to meet with you, how I brought loads of presents and sent numerous letters. All that doesn’t matter today.

What am I driving at? I just want to say that the pursuit of your friendship became a reason for my financial disaster. Just like it put a brutal end to your plans of running away from all those you’re fed up with.

Yes, the reason why I’m going through a financial ordeal and you still look at gloomy Służew nad Dolinką through your window is the same: my dream to call myself your mate.

And here’s an explanation:

The construction of my enterprise was gaining momentum, as every new element, the purpose of which was to arouse rapture and admiration, met with your indifference. How could I possibly make you shout out: “What you have done is absolutely remarkable!”.

That was a hidden, subconscious driving force behind my actions.

For at the very beginning, when we'd just signed the agreement, your painting didn't take even a fraction of the space in my heart that it has today. At the very beginning, let me repeat, I was going to sell your paintings at a fair, but moderate price, three or four times higher than the one I was supposed to pay for them. The idea of having a huge collection of your best works or the dream about a museum dedicated to your works hadn't even crossed my mind. What's most important, though, I didn't have dozens of your paintings around me, which with time became my family, friends and children. The paintings that surround me and which I couldn't live without, because I'd feel as if I'd had my fingers amputated.

The escalation started this way: just like I'd obliged myself, I prepared the first brochure for the exhibition which I was to organize in Paris. The brochure contained eight reproductions on chalk paper, but it didn't have a cover. Just an ordinary leaflet. This is where my efforts finished. So did all my ambitions at the time. I brought the leaflet to Warsaw. I guess it was in January 1985. You glanced at it and said "yes". That's all. No, sorry, you added: "The lettering is idiotic".

Neither a smile nor thanks.

Now I know that at that moment you were very pleased, because everything promised to go as you'd expected: slowly, at the pace of a cruise ship, entirely adventureless, with a little impresario at the helm, who would sell your paintings abroad without investing much, but also without taking any risk.

At the time you didn't hope yet that owing to a relationship with me you would leave Poland. And the small scale of the enterprise suited you very well. Unfortunately, then I didn't know you as well as I do today. I mistook your indifference for disappointment. And after all, let me repeat, I did hope that you would praise me aloud. I didn't know yet that you're physically incapable of feeling gratitude and your silence was a sign of satisfaction. I didn't know how pointless it is to force you to be effusive; that I should have stopped there.

And this is how bidding started. To the lack of reaction on your part I answered a week later, adding to the leaflet a laminated cover with reproductions. Then I sent it to Warsaw.

You didn't reply at all.

I started to add things to my project every week, or even every day, and I told you about it or sent the samples. Each time I hoped to make you utter what I wanted to hear so much and to deserve your pat on my back, which would mean you'd taken to me.

All that resulted in exaggerated advertising, the film and decorations for the whole exhibition. Finally, the crazy pursuit of a shadow led to horrendous prices of the exhibited pictures.

I remember as if it happened yesterday: I was in Warsaw on that day, preparing boxes to carry the paintings to Paris. I was working at my place, in the staircase entrance hall, in the middle of June, as far as I remember well.

Not lifting a finger to help me, as indifferent as usual, you stood in the doorway and looked at me as I worked. We started talking about the forthcoming exhibition. You steered the conversation so as to find out what price I was going to fix for your paintings. At a certain moment, seemingly unwittingly, you mumbled something about 50 000 francs.

In the last act I had to play my role with pathos and finally, break your resistance. I had to dazzle you with the prices. It was supposed to be a final gong, a foolproof way to manifest how much I loved your paintings and how fascinating was the battle ahead of me. Pretending to sound ironic, I replied:

- 50 000?! You mean 350 000! Sell such paintings for 50 000? You must be kidding!

And this way I signed my own death warrant.

Since now on, the whole scenery of the forthcoming disaster was already in place: apart from the enormous financial obligations that I'd already undertaken because of the exhibition, at that moment I excluded a chance for

the sale of at least one painting. But you will like me so much! You're going to admire me! Such prices! Well, well ...

In a word, I struck an accurate knock-out blow in my own stomach.

Of course, I wasn't able to sell anything during the exhibition. However, I hoped to recover the losses by selling the film. If I'd really sold it and earned money again, the pursuit of your friendship would have started anew. This idiotic desire would have lasted infinitely if two things hadn't put an ultimate end to it.

Firstly, the reality itself: the exhibition ruined me financially. Since I couldn't sell the film, the reality promptly reminded me that even if I finally won the longed-for friendship of yours, it wouldn't help me get out of trouble, anyway.

Secondly, you: not only didn't you make the slightest step to get me out of trouble, but you became evidently irritated, and even furious.

Willy-nilly then, I had to discover what every realist would have seen at first sight:

that you are incapable of feeling friendship, gratitude or comradeship,

that if I so desperately wanted to win your recognition, I should have behaved in a way completely opposite to how I'd behaved so far: at the very beginning, before I came up with the prospects for your leaving Poland, I should have provided you, without any exaggeration or superiority complex, slowly but regularly, with an income, while supporting it with modest promotion that matched the calibre of your mundane ambitions. Surely, you wouldn't love me for that, either. But at least you wouldn't have held the grudge. And all in all, in your own lame way, you would secretly value me.

Today I don't give a hoot about your friendship. And I don't care about your recognition. Instead, I have your paintings, which became my treasures. Among them your little person is no longer important. Neither are your reproaches and financial requirements. Thanks to the paintings, I will

promote you with as much energy as at the beginning, when I hoped for your friendship.

Anyway, I'm in such dire straits myself that whether I want it or not, I have to be rushed off my feet to get out of it. That's another driving force, which doesn't need any friendship of yours. Besides, I've got two years of hard work behind me and a number of things that I've already done, which I can't leave unfinished. Finally, I have the most beautiful paintings in the world. They can certainly show me gratitude.

So, this is why, without a moment of hesitation, I will carry on pulling my little cart up the hill, even if the carrot of your friendship, which I used to follow at a trot, has been long decayed.

This way you understood everything. So did I.

DANGER, 7TH JULY 1986

I'm usually quite pleased with my cowardice.

When I'm threatened with a little danger, I go red with indignation, I even turn pale and stagger to show how upset I am and what's going to happen in a moment. Frequently I even succeed in frightening my environment a little bit.

However, when a serious threat hangs over me, I become as meek as a lamb. What's more, I may even become: nice, simple, direct and sober. I hold out my hand and smile frankly. I've experienced that on many occasions. This way I sometimes change difficult situations to my advantage: when somebody shakes his fist at me, my cowardice makes me extremely reasonable.

Joking and exaggerating a little bit, I recently mentioned an example of that. I mean my adventure with Ms Seltz. Actually, it was quite innocent, but I found a grain of that salutary cowardice in it: not only didn't I answer arrogantly to the aggression of a person I had no chance to win with, but I turned out to be flexible and – to call a spade a spade – I bowed and scraped to her.

Well, now a much greater danger looms over me. And it is in my best interest to be very nice: the threat is that Beks may split up with me.

Indeed, in five days I'm going to meet with him and discuss numerous new financial requirements. And the very thought that I will see him fills me with aversion.

This man has dumped so much suspicion on me, so many complaints in letters and telephone conversations, he's showed so much indifference for my nightmares and so much contempt for my efforts that I started to hate him.

Now, the threat is that when I see him, I'll call him a pig. He will surely answer me in the same way. We'll start to put forward mutual grudges, which is bound to end in an argument, and with the argument the dreams will be over. We'll break up.

A gloomy prospect like that would alarm people more courageous than me, putting them in a conciliatory mood.

Yet ... Yet it's beyond my power to stop myself from showing him my hatred. Let alone any hope for a moderate tone and promises which I make to myself that I'll have a responsible and matter-of-fact conversation ...

I feel I'll instantly blow up and act like a lout. Despite all the appeals of my heart and warnings sent by the reason, my pseudo "free" and "strong" will cannot do much against anger.

God, I wish the rage I'm seething with would evaporate! If only I could forget about it for a short period of two weeks that I'm going to spend in Poland! If only I could become what I've always been when threatened with a real danger: a coward.

ALMS 3, 8TH JULY 1986

Alms – the third part of the feature article.

This morning, on the fast underground RER, when I was going to Paris in the company of Ania:

- Ladies and gentlemen ...
- The same one again ...
- ... and children ...
- I was sure he'd say "and children".
- Why, do you know him?
- ... And workers. Yes, workers.

The beggar is standing far away, at the back of the carriage. His voice is muffled by the noise, though he's speaking loudly. I can hear only some snatches:

- ...neither a rapist nor a burglar ...
- I'm telling you, it's the same one.
- ...only a nice tramp who asks you for a little franc so that he could eat and drink some wine ...
- Ah, that's something new. It must be another one.

He's already close to us and I can see that, indeed, it's not the same guy we met on this underground line a few days ago, about whom I've already written in my notes. Anyway, everybody gives him a coin, while the other one didn't get even a centime.

When a young man smiles and refuses, the beggar asks him:

- Don't you have a franc?

Usually people don't take up such discussions and simply turn their eyes away. This hobo, however, won the hearts of the audience straight away and everybody gives him something, so the man feels obliged to explain:

- No, I have no coins.

- You have no coins? I accept banknotes. Including five hundred francs, because higher notes are only fakes. And you? – he turns to another traveller. – No dough? I wish you nice holidays, anyway. Don't worry. Those who are not giving today, will give tomorrow or in a month. I'm here every day at the same time ... the day started well. I can afford to eat dinner at Maxim's. You know, one day I went to Tour d'Argent, but they kicked me out ...

Ania is laughing. People keep giving the man money – one franc each, as this is the modest level established by the hobo. I think he's too moderate. I've prepared my coin and keep it in my hand, waiting for him to come up. Then I take another franc out of my pocket:

- This one because he's funny – I explain to Ania, though she doesn't ask me.

Although he got two francs from me, the tramp turns to my wife and stretches out his hand, in which he's holding a mug:

- I've already paid the contribution for the lady – I assure him.

He pats my neck kindly:

- OK, friend.

With his dirty hand he takes Ania's hand and kisses it:

- Dear madam ...

- Well, quite a sum has piled up – he states aloud a few moments later. – Quite a sum! I'll be back tomorrow at the same time. Hope everybody will be here. Good bye.

I guess he raised about forty francs.

- He's learned his speech by heart. He must have learned it by heart – I say enviously, when he's left the carriage.

- I've already met him once. Previously he said more or less the same – Ania comforts me.

- More or less, or exactly the same? Because it makes a difference – I want to be sure.

Ania hesitates.

- That's true – I add. – I've always hoped to meet a tramp writer who could make a funny conversation. To have a clear conscience. To be able to say, like other people: "He's only chosen real freedom. It's his free choice. Diogenes. Contempt for possessions. It's not because of poverty".

I tell Ania how I invited a hobo to dinner one day.

- When I threw him a coin, he answered jokingly. Anyway, I felt like talking to someone that evening. Heavily drunk, I was in an optimistic mood. Besides, the legend had to be satisfied for once: an intellectual and a hobo, wisdom and abnegation. In a word, I decided to invite him to a refined restaurant. In the past I caught Bertrand de Jouvenel in the act, when he was putting on a similar show: "Let's go and drink something" – he insisted, buying "Le Monde" from a poor man. Mine led me to a second-rate bar, which must have seemed posh to him. Throughout the dinner he hardly said anything, treating me indifferently.

- What did you want to prove this way?

- I repeat you: brotherhood. A dream of every intellectual, because the myth of a witty hobo, jolly and happy, who voluntarily chose "freedom" and gave up material possessions is hard to knock out of one's head ... Even my head. Oh, of course, I know very well they are human wrecks, poor and ill ... Do you remember the one who on the same underground fast train yelled furiously and banged the seats with a thick stick when everybody refused to give alms to him?

- Certainly. This one I won't forget for sure.

I take the opportunity to draw up a little balance sheet: I still give one franc to tramps. What has been promised must be fulfilled. With no difference in the race, sex or age. I don't even wait for a little "thank you" or a smile, which would spur compassion and make the gesture easier. This usually costs me about twelve francs a day.

There is also that Cathala, whom I promised to give bone marrow. He wrote in "Le Monde": "I wish all those who don't give a hoot about my illness would suffer just like me".

I liked it. Just like I took to that tramp who yelled and banged the seats with a stick. I was the only passenger who gave him a coin. I have more compassion for poverty which hates than for poverty that bows and scrapes.

Which doesn't change the fact that I happily tick off months without a message from that Cathala. Has he died yet? Probably. I'm secretly glad of it, as I know that I wouldn't give him marrow if he really asked me for it. Not because my egoism has taken this little area in my heart which I heroically rented out to my neighbour. No. But I'm scared of AIDS. I'm afraid of discovering that, well, who knows, I might be seropositive. After all, I've had my nice share of copulation ... Before giving bone marrow, I would be first subjected to tests. When I was undertaking this commitment I didn't give any thought to this necessity. AIDS was still little known to a wider public. Nobody told me about analyses at that time.

And if I'm seropositive? – I ask myself. I say "yes" to death - I've repeated it many times and I still find no reason why I should think another way. But knowing that I'm doomed is another story. Am I to die over low heat? ...

Since I haven't undertaken any other obligations, I don't give anything to anybody.

CHILDREN, 11TH JULY 1986, MARBELLA

“And children? Aren’t you going to have children? Well, it’s high time. A woman should have the first baby early, before the age of thirty five”.

Of course ... I smile, but we don’t feel like having children.

Why?

After thirteen years of marriage, with Ania approaching the age when she won’t be able to have children without exposing them and herself to danger, an opportunity arises to establish a list of reasons why from the very beginning we’ve been trying to avoid children.

Anyway, I like it: drawing up balance sheets. A few days ago I examined my conscience. In other words, I made an account of profits and losses I’ve had for the last twenty years of my generosity, which didn’t cost me very much, and slightly ashamed egoism. So, today I’ll make an analysis of my reproductive function.

It’s not easy to ponder over conflictual topics in the paradise of the Smiths’ villa, with its quiet, luxury and a view of the sea, which spreads behind a beautiful garden. But I told myself that this profit and loss account must be done. I will therefore do it, because of the sense of duty rather than enthusiasm. I’ll also do it to be able to ruminate about the pretexts and reasons for my lonely old age. Because it’s bound to finish this way. When it’s already too late, I will unavoidably ask myself: Why didn’t I have children when I could still have them?

Then I’ll open my notes, finding there everything in black and white. Like in the confessional.

1. Firstly, because I don’t feel like doing it at all.

I don’t feel like having children. Biologically, instinctively, genetically I have no natural need. No internal desire. Actually, this explanation should

be sufficient, because the first condition for having children is to follow “the call of the wild”. You have to be moved at the sight of a passing child and come to realize that you’re saying spontaneously:

- Oh, what a cute kiddie! Have you seen? Lovely!

You must unwittingly say something like that, and I don’t say anything like that.

Let me think, have I ever heard myself say such things? No, never. I’ve never felt touched when seeing a baby and I’ve never felt like hugging it. This is the way it is and any other explanations should finish here. In a way, it resembles the anecdote about the mayor of Strasburg (as far as I remember well), who was asked by Napoleon arriving with his army why no salute had been fired from the cannons. The mayor answered that there were eighty reasons.

- Give me the first one – said the Caesar.

- We don’t have any cannons – replied the mayor.

- That’s enough for me.

Because to be honest, except an evident lack of desire, the whole rest is only “fiction”, which I invent to explain things to myself and others.

“But have you thought of all the benefits which result from having children?”.

So, after the lack of desire, let’s discuss the interests.

2. What benefits could I get if I bred? None.

a. A small child wouldn’t give me other joys than the ones I already know.

b. Perhaps the latter would be provided by my adolescent son.

c. But surely not by an adult son!

Re a. A little child may bring a lot of emotional satisfaction. I don’t deny. Provided that you’re looking for it and won’t lose because of the exchange rate.

Since we got married with Ania, I've been absolutely happy in this respect: I have a friend, I have a wife and I also have a big child. When I've finally stopped arguing with my wife, when I've already confided in my confidant, I move on to caresses with the child. At the moment she's in the swimming pool, opposite me and asks me in a tone of a little girl:

- My little frog, do I make this movement well? Tell me, please, tell me I'm doing it well, will you?

Ania can play a child really well, she finds it so easy to be ingratiating that I simply melt with tenderness.

- Of course, my little woman, you do it perfectly, you're going to swim like Weissmüller.

If I didn't have a chameleon wife, who can instantly turn into a little eight-year-old Ania, funny and jolly, perhaps I would ask myself this question: Should I become a father? Why not?

But even if the child gave me the same joy, why should I change what I have in my grasp right now for something that tomorrow might fly away from me? For the presence of the child would certainly deprive me of the only feeling I'm surrounded by: the love of my wife, which would surely be transferred onto the child. Would I gain the child's love instead?

Re b. And when it grows up?

My memories of a teenager are very nasty for me.

Which doesn't change the fact that a growing up child may be an excellent companion. Especially for a natural born teacher that I am. A little child doesn't understand the whole knowledge acquired by his father. On the other hand, an adult one doesn't care about it. But just imagine the pleasure of ranting on about life in front of a young thirteen-year-old boy, curious, trustful and intelligent, the one who still believes in what his father tells him and doesn't accuse him of hypocrisy.

All these notes are directed to an ideal thirteen- or fifteen-year-old interlocutor, intelligent, bright and inquisitive. My warnings are also

intended for him. When starting a note, I sometimes say “Friend”. He’s my only confidant. The one who always listens to me without talking back: “I don’t give a hoot about your lectures!”.

Yes, a teenager could bring me a lot of satisfaction provided he turned out well. Beks thought the same way. He told me: “I begat Tommy to have a mate with whom I could have nice chats”. It was a bad deal for him. But let’s not get ahead of the story. The time of horrors hasn’t come yet.

Re c. So, an adult child.

“Will understand, help, support you in your old years and will continue your enterprise of Beksiński’s promotion”.

Rubbish. I don’t believe a single word. He’ll sell the paintings at the first auction and will entrust daddy to the care of two nurses in the nearest old people’s home.

But I’ve been carried away again. I’m going forward to the topic which makes me feel comfortable and give up meditations on potential benefits that result from having children.

No, there’s no point pretending to be an objective man, who reasonably weighs pluses and minuses, all “pros”, in which he doesn’t believe at all, and all “cons”, which give him nightmares.

So, after “pros”, which were very weak, let’s move on to “cons”, which are succinct and clear. Let’s talk about aversions.

3. I hate children.

I’ve always detested them. What can I do about it? That’s outrageous, but true. Even if some people nurse a grudge against me because of that, the truth is that children have always annoyed me.

a. When such a thing is still little, it constantly kicks your legs, keeps fidgeting, in the best case scenario doesn’t let you sleep a wink.

“When you have your own child, you won’t mind it at all. You’ll see”. I prefer not. I hate all kinds of nervous tension, unnecessary fidgeting and

unjustified noises. I can't stand them. And having a child is condemning yourself to all that.

b. But wouldn't it be just a bad while that might soon be over? a while followed by the time of friendship, liking and intimacy of two mates?

No, absolutely not. It wouldn't be better. Saying that, I base my opinion on concrete facts. Firstly, it's enough for me to recall what I was like as a child myself.

A little man is getting shape. You can no longer shrug your shoulders to its screaming and fuming. Of course, you can dream that it will be mild, nice, intelligent, helpful, affectionate, generous, obedient, hardworking, talented, scrupulous, etc... .. in a word, already canonized.

And this is what my boy would most probably be like.

Jacques has two daughters. As for wives, he's had three.

- In a marriage the only joy, if any, is the children – he told me one day.

For he has never really loved any of his wives. He adored his daughters, though. When he told me that, the older one was ten years old. However, when she was fifteen, one day she turned to her grandmother:

- Gran, there's something in the cellar. Could you go downstairs with me and see?

And when grandmother was already in the cell, Jacques' daughter padlocked the door, ran to the flat, took everything she could lay her hands on, especially money and jewellery, and escaped.

For a month her father didn't get any message from her. Then the prodigal daughter came back home with a boy. A boy? That's putting it mildly. Let's say: a tattooed rascal from the suburbs of Clignancourt. She lay with him in her father's bed and openly copulated for a month, without any fuss. Next she got pregnant and had an abortion. Jacques still paid for the school, the private school, where he'd enrolled her before so that she could receive proper education. Later the place had to be kept just in case

the child recovered her reason and wanted to return to school. But the daughter didn't come back to school. She didn't like studying.

Another two months passed. Jacques' daughter takes her father's cheque book and visits the shops around the house:

- My daddy is ill. He gave me a signed cheque to buy it – she points to the most expensive things which are easiest to resell.

The bill is longer and longer, because Jacques pays all the forged cheques.

Well, this is a short story of Jacques' daughter.

And now another story:

My sister Mika got pregnant with Ignacy Grocholski, who didn't like making love with a condom. She ended up having an abortion, as the said Grocholski didn't have the slightest intention to marry her. When my Mother, who was an epitome of faith, religiousness and morality, found out about it ... I thought she was going to die.

Being eighteen years old, my brother Johnny went to prison. During the period of the greatest Stalinist terror, he had an idea to secretly cross the Czech border with his mate, so as to go to the cinema in the nearest town. As he told me, he did it forty years later, simply to prove himself that "he was a man". He got caught by Secret Police. He risked his head, as at that time nobody made fuss over AK (the Home Army) soldiers, for whom the government declared an amnesty, but at the same time tried to physically eliminate them on the slightest pretext. And it happened that Johnny was in AK during the war. How did Mum get him out of jail? I don't know. But I wouldn't have liked to be in her shoes and go through the nights of fear, which must have been her experience.

My other brother, Teddy, used to get drunk on a regular basis, fight with waiters in restaurants and run away without paying the bill. Then our Father had to go to great lengths to get him out of custody.

One day Teddy insulted his university professor in public: “You lousy Yevrey” – he yelled on the excavation site, where he was having his archaeological apprenticeship, headed by the said professor.

And again, Father had to go to the Supreme Court in Warsaw to spare him a stay in prison, because in communist Poland, contrary to what the World Jewish Congress is trying to propagate, there is no kidding with anti-Semitism.

As for myself, among dozens of petty crimes I’ve committed in my life and which I’m going to tell about one day, a real feat was shooting to my mates from an air-rifle and stuffing them with lead. Yes, yes, I’m not making it up.

In a word, I could tell ten such stories.

For example the story of Beks’s son, Tom! I guess I’ve already told it, but nobody will be harmed if I tell it once more. For his eighteenth birthday Tommy prepared an obituary informing about his tragic death. At night he put up obituaries on the walls of Sanok. In the morning he locked his grandmother in the attic so that she couldn’t go to friends and tell them that it was a joke. Then he looked through the keyhole, waiting for people to visit his parents (absent at the time) to offer them condolences.

c. Then comes the age of reason.

My child is twenty years old. Begins to be nice.

That’s why he closes in his room, like my nephew Maciek, the son of Johnny. For nearly ten years he doesn’t leave the room, doesn’t study, lies on the floor and looks at the ceiling. Or like Tommy Beksiński: turns on the gas and waits. A spark blows up the whole floor, and he, all in blood, comes to his parent’s flat at three in the morning to announce that another suicide attempt of his failed. For the rest of his life he lives off them like a crab louse and talks to them like an SS man in a concentration camp to the newly arrived prisoners.

Or Didier, for that matter, the son of Remie and Irena. He’s a nice and unaggressive boy, whom I quite like. He doesn’t do anything except some

odd works in summer holiday clubs. He's already twenty five years old and has no prospects ahead of him.

- Oh, God, what boredom – the young acquaintance told me one day. – It's Saturday tomorrow and I must visit my old folks again.

d. Finally come mature years.

It's the time of alleged help of the son for his old father (that is me).

Firstly, I don't feel like thinking about my old age and preparing a program of my moral decay in advance. Besides, as regards help for old parents, I have a bunch of not very inspiring examples, which I haven't forgotten. This time I'll start with myself.

Where was I when my Father was dying? In Paris. And he was in Łódź. Six months before his death I'd come to Poland to pay Him a visit. But later I reproached myself even for this visit. I shouldn't have come. It would have been better if I hadn't seen him senile and half-conscious.

Well, this is the only reflection on the last months of my Father's life. As for the rest, I limited myself to giving money to my brother Teddy, so that he could take care of our Father and thus free me from the pricks of conscience.

To justify my behaviour I can say that two years before my Father's death I had Him staying for six months in our small flat in Marly, because the fuel situation in Poland was so bad that He was afraid he might die of cold if frost came. But I wouldn't like to be in his shoes. God forbid. God save me from what he suffered because of me. I was awful to him.

An actor from our town didn't even have such scruples. He simply placed his mother, a friend of my Mother, in an old people's home. And when she was in good shape for too long, he moved her to hospital. There, in the conditions of Polish hygiene and care, she was bound to die after fifteen days. And he wasn't disappointed.

Well, this is how it is.

e. What do you want to tell me? That I'm exaggerating? That it's not true and not so terrible? That I see only the bad side of things? That Ania is an exemplary daughter, just like her sister Krysia? That their mother has no livelihood, but she has everything she needs owing to the care of two daughters? It's true.

That Wojtek's son Igor, a thirteen-year old boy, is well-behaved, warm-hearted, an excellent sportsman and a good pupil? That's also true.

I'll say more: if I tried harder, I'd find another three or four similar cases or at least the ones which don't fill you with disgust.

So what? Firstly, such cases are rare. Secondly, what guarantee do I have that Fortune would smile up to me? Why should you take risks if you don't feel like doing something and nobody forces you to do anything? Having said that, I've said the most important thing.

4. The most important? Let's say, almost the most important.

Because there are two more reasons, which I've hidden well... They are, however, too big not to come to light sooner or later. Two reasons which drive all the other ones.

a. The first one is fear that grips me at the prospect of becoming a father. I'll say more: I'm certain I would be a bad father. Despotic, brutal, yelling and always furious. A father that I'd be ashamed of.

For I've never had a natural authority that would make other people obey me spontaneously. I'd therefore use force and a raised tone to be obeyed. I'd be the exact opposite of my own Father. Had he not been a strong, mild and wise Father, I might not be so demanding towards myself in case I had to play this role myself. Well, who knows ...

b. The second reason, apart from aversion that I'd feel for myself, is that I'd raise my own enemy, who would hate me. Just one more enemy. A little creature who, crying into his pillow, would whisper to himself:

- I hate dad.

At the age of eleven he would run away from home, vowing to himself that when he grows up, he'll take revenge on that "son of the bitch". And being eighteen years old, he would tell me straight out:

- You know where you can stick all your lessons. I don't give a shit about it. I'm off.

And that creature would go out into the world to our mutual relief and Ania's despair.

No, no and one more no!

I'm fed up with conflicts in my environment, at work and in life. The people who wish me ill are in sufficient quantity. Why should I then create one more enemy of my own free will and have to put up with him for twenty years? No, thank you.

What's the conclusion: there will be no children?

Let's say, there will be no children as long as the current situation persists.

For what do all these "reasons", obsessions and fears mean in the face of one twitch of the heart, in the face of one pulsation of a feeling and urge? Of course, mine, but chiefly Ania's. Because I don't decide about everything on my own, and if one night she woke me up with a huge desire.

- Draw me a lamb – she would say.

What else could I do than immediately draw her a huge, huge lamb, so that she had beautiful dreams?

POST SCRIPTUM, 25TH OCTOBER 1987

My malice bursts with glee, and my poisoned conscience is rejoicing and rubbing its hands. It's been one year and four months since the time I wrote the above note.

This afternoon Wojtek with his wife Grazyna visited us. We hadn't seen them together for nearly a year. Before coming, Grazyna warned Ania on the phone:

- Please, don't start talking about Igor's school.

You remember, my Friend, that I quoted an example of Igor, the son of Wojtek, as one of a few "positive" boys. At the time he didn't fit my gloomy puzzle composed of terrible children. Today he fits.

- Igor flunked the year and is in the same class again – says Wojtek during the meal.

- So what? – I ask, because I hoped it would be something more serious?

- Wait, it's not everything – Grazyna butts in and starts snivelling. – His teachers often called us to complain that he didn't do any work. Each time when he was supposed to show his pupil's record book with a summons to appear at school, he forged father's signature so as not to inform us about anything.

- So what? – I repeat once more, disappointed that it's such a little thing. - I played better tricks at this age.

- He forges father's handwriting so well – Grazyna goes on – that today it's impossible to tell one from the other ... Then he forged the certificate and joyfully announced that he'd been promoted, while in fact he'd flunked the year. He did it so that he would have no problems going skiing with his father. He even wrote letters to the headmistress, who thought they'd been written by me, and asked for understanding for himself due to the atmosphere at home. All days he spends in the Halls with three shady-looking individuals. The question is when he will start taking drugs?

Grazyna has a face full of pimples, she looks tired and aged. Her front teeth are in a deplorable condition.

After a walk in the park they leave. Then Ania tells me that when they were walking ahead of us, Grazyna confided in her:

- Igor hates his father and when Wojtek leaves home, he yells: “I don’t want to see him again! Fuck him! I hate this egoist”.

- God, we’re so lucky to have no children! – Ania whispers in my ear, flinging her arms around my neck.

NYCZEK, 17TH JULY 1986, WARSAW

When he found out I was staying in Warsaw, Nyczek came from Cracow to see me.

He's so nice and friendly that it makes me sick. He can wield perfectly well the weapon which I also use whenever I feel somebody's stronger than me: a sincere, open smile, a quiet voice and nice facial expression.

Using the same tone, I expressed my admiration for his books and kindly refused to fulfil any of his requests, which he'd presented to me.

First of all, however, I returned him his own text prepared by me. I say: prepared, though I'd changed the title, the introduction and the conclusions, let alone the whole rest, which I'd rearranged completely, as it was all tangled, and to make matters worse, badly translated into French by his translator.

The first reaction of hurt Nyczek was to refuse to publish my work in the French version of the album. When I proposed him to co-write it, he made a remark which struck me with its common sense: "Only cookery books can be co-written".

Now we'll see if it is his deep belief, because having my ektachromes I keep in my hand the key to the album about Beks, which Arkady wants to issue and in which Nyczek's text is to be published. And being angry at his remark (as if he himself couldn't be angrier than me at the way I treated his text ...) I hedged their lending with the condition that Nyczek must agree to my text.

At the end of our meeting (a working breakfast in the Forum Hotel) Nyczek showed a desire to see me off to the station, as he wanted to disclose a certain "personal" request to me, namely he wanted me to authorize Beks, via his gallery of course, to sell one painting to an English woman, "very nice, I can assure you".

Giving him a warm hug, I advised him in whisper:

- Tell her to come to me. My current prices are really affordable.

Then I smiled to thank him that he'd kept me such nice company.

PILISZEK, 18TH JULY 1986, WARSAW

In the American style, with a relaxed facial expression, director Piliszek from the Polish publishing house Arkady struts like a peacock and “plays the role”.

- Can you put me through with Mr Nyczek in the Bieszczady Mountains, please. And order three place settings in “Pod Retmanem” restaurant. I’ve invited Mr Dmochowski and the editor-in-chief to lunch. Let the chauffer wait for us at two o’clock sharp.

I’m gonna die laughing.

Firstly, because he makes a fuss over me as if I were a rich businessman, and I don’t have a penny. If the autumn exhibition flops, I’ll become definitely and irrevocably insolvent. Poor Piliszek, if he knew ...

Secondly, because it’s about a little, modest enterprise connected with my participation in the issue of Beks’s album by Arkady.

And thirdly, because I feel that there’s nothing reliable behind the confident face that my interlocutor puts on. Nothing except the Polish complex of “being a manager” in the American style and poverty, even more deplorable than mine.

Ostentatious swank: Nyczek is in the part of Poland which has no electricity, let alone telephones, the number of which is next to nothing even in Warsaw. The car that’s waiting for us is a Polish Fiat, mangled and rusty on each side. The restaurant is pretty shitty and I feel like crying, because the meat is so hard that’s impossible to cut it.

This reminds me of the situation a year ago, when I was negating the participation of a Polish film company in the production of my film.

Their director – Ryszka, as far as I can remember – invited me to the best restaurant in Warsaw – Victoria. But because he had no money, we stayed in

the waiting room. He was surrounded by a “staff” made up of two secretaries and two deputy directors, who had worn-out shoe soles and ink-stained fingers. Mr Ryszka kept proposing things to me in a self-confident and nonchalant tone of voice:

- We can also produce three thousand video cassettes for you. Is that of any interest to you? And would you be interested in fifty copies of your film? We can also take on the printing of postcards and posters, as it’s important for us to enter the western markets.

- But gentlemen – I answered shyly – I’m an ordinary private person. You won’t enter the “western markets” with me. I just want to produce a small film and three copies are absolutely sufficient for me.

- It doesn’t matter – he replied me undeterred and went on with his list of impressive plans.

Plans which three months later were followed by third-world quality execution: a scratched tape, a rusty film camera, missed deadlines, and at the end a discreet “private” request of one of the deputy directors – to find a post of a servant for his daughter in a “good home” in Paris.

The ridiculousness of those men can only be compared to the embarrassment that accompanies my participation in the show about beggars who think they are kings. The American dream. That is, the Polish dream.

As for the agreement itself, Piliszek is still unable to establish the sum that will allow me to participate in the issue of the album. He’ll ask the Yugoslavians. Because you should know, my Friend, that in Poland it’s impossible to issue an album of high quality that would be good enough to enable the sale of at least one copy in the West. They are therefore forced to have everything printed by the Yugoslavians. The latter, however, have the same sense of punctuality as my compatriots: for weeks I’ve been waiting for a precise estimate with no effect.

Oh, God, I'm getting myself into trouble, again. All that's because I have no money to make the album myself.

Well, this is how poverty teams up with misery, so that together they can conquer Eldorado!

PORTRAIT OF BEKS 2, 20TH JULY 1986, WARSAW

And again, we are giving tender hugs to each other.

He's sitting on a stool, in front of the easel or on a chair, on the other side of the desk. I'm seated in my usual place and look at two paintings behind him ("Car on a Bush" and "Figure Walking Away Amid Autumn Leaves"), slurping tea for hours no end. We take turns to make touching confessions and wistful reproaches to each other.

Everything's recorded on a cassette. This time I asked for it myself, so there's no point quoting our conversation in detail. Now that I've got the recording nobody will accuse me of making up stories.

Hope has once more come back to our relations and the attempts of explaining things to each other might not be completely pointless. For our mutual aggression, at least partially, seems to result from concealments and misunderstandings, which have built up between us. Well, in a tiny part. But still ...

I'm then very glad that some prospects have come out again, I'm not ashamed that from one day to the next I have to contradict myself. Because after yesterday's definite statement: "this man isn't going to change", today I admit that "not everything's lost yet". My conviction that he is what he is will not disappear just because for a few hours we'll be serving endearments to each other, but the fact is the explanatory conversation turned out useful.

Everything is in all. OK. What matters, however, are mutual proportions of things, their relations and moments when they appear. So I abide by what I've said about him so far and claim that Beks who I describe in my notes is really like that. However, this doesn't change the fact that today the dimensions of his vices seem less annoying to me. The moments when they become apparent leave some space for intimacy. Finally, the former in relation to the latter seem to create an acceptable whole.

What are they like?

I've never tried to put all my observations and judgments on him together. Today I feel like doing it.

I). What is he driven by?

a. Certainly, not by search for fame. At least not fame in the standard sense of this word. He doesn't care about being a star, an idol or "the one who's talked about". The "greatness" he thinks about is sort of totemic.

- Only Picasso succeeded with this fame trick – he once told me. Which helps to understand what calibre of fame he has in mind.

Also, he doesn't care about an ordinary audience. The one whose recognition he craves for is made up of "priests" and "temple guards", as he calls them. These are "major" (that's his favourite term) art critics, curators of great museums, world collectors, owners of recognized galleries. In a word, a group of the most influential cultural decision-makers.

His "priests" and "temple guards" are indeterminate, abstract, sort of "literary", no flesh and blood, ideal. They live far away, are mysterious, write unintelligible books about art, manage great museums of modern art in Paris, Londons and New Yorks and buy things at Christie's and Sotheby's for millions of dollars. As he's never talked to them in person, they seem powerful and lordly to him. He won't admit it, but the way he talks about them gives away his desire to be liked by them.

When I reply him that I've met such people on many occasions and can guarantee they are equally venal and servile towards "recognized" artists and arrogant, haughty towards those who are still anonymous as the ones he's met in Poland, he gives a seemingly sober answer:

- I know you're right. All over the world those who choose the history of art and then become critics or museum curators are people who failed to

study any serious things, because they were too stupid. But they decide what's going to be sacred in the future. It's them who canonize artists.

The hope to be liked by “temple guards” is for him like impossible love. He's convinced they have and will always have an unfriendly attitude to him. He tends to idealize them until he physically meets them, at which point he begins to demonise them with equal intensity.

b. The deepest reason for his painting is not so much the wish to achieve “fame” and even not giving a deeper meaning to his life as simply pleasing himself.

No, painting isn't for him any “mission” to fulfil. Beks is an egoist here (and in a hundred other areas!). His egoism is a guarantee of incorruptibility in relation to the “art world”. I'll come back to it in a moment.

c. It's not always been like that, though. Being young, when he didn't know the audience and cultural decision-makers at all, when all of them were distant and inaccessible, Beks did care about their opinion. But he was afraid of their reprimand rather than looked for praise. So, in the old times he was worried that somebody might accuse him of not developing.

That's why he believed he must “come up with something new”, “surprise” at each exhibition. Such was (and still is) the fashion among avant-gardists. And in his young years he was an avant-gardist. To “amaze” the critics, he created works (most frequently drawings, as at that time he almost exclusively drew) in various techniques and styles. Oh, these were not clumsy “searches” of a clumsy debutant. Each of these styles was perfect. But even though throughout the time it was the same “Beksiński” and his entire world, the works varied enormously from one another. The only purpose was always to surprise and amaze with something new.

Today some of these fears have remained. He reproaches himself that he can't “come up with anything new” before the Polish audience. Because, as he claims, I force him to continue the oneiric, fantasy (the malicious will say “anecdotal”) line. There is a lot of truth to this. As for the rest, Beks believes

that since Paris, for which he's currently painting, doesn't know him yet, either in the "old" or the "new" version, and won't reproach him for repeating himself, he can "serve the same old stuff".

Well, finishing the topic of fame: Beks doesn't have the faintest idea how many conversations he's the subject of. He has no idea, because he doesn't go anywhere (I'll come back to it).

When I asked him how he felt about this popularity, he answered:

- Who cares ... It doesn't solve my personal problems, anyway.

d. Don't understand it as a complete lack of interest in what people are saying about him, my Friend. Firstly, Beks is ashamed of many things, which I'll talk about below. And that's enough to assume that he is afraid of people's opinion.

He attaches great importance to what people say, but in a different way than others. What's original about him is that he would like to come across as a modest, normal man. The prospect of being perceived as a big-headed braggart fills him with fear. Hence, his anxiety about the things I write about him, as he knows that I keep these notes. And if I present him as a pompous buffoon? I can often see that he's worried about that.

He knows that he'll go down in history. But he would like to do it his way. The others dream of being remembered as wise, great and talented people, whereas he wants to go down in history as a "natural and modest guy".

e. If there's any pomposity about his painting, it doesn't show in his everyday behaviour or life calculations. And it's missing completely from his talks about his work. That's why he doesn't consider his work as "output" and his paintings as "masterpieces". They are just a way to freely express the ideas brought by his unrestrained imagination and to give himself a spiritual pleasure.

When he refers to what he does as "production" and calls its results "works", it's neither striking a pose nor false modesty. Conversing paintings into money, he chiefly counts the hours of work, as if it was done by

a craftsman or a worker. “It cost me loads of work” – he says when we argue about the price.

Still a year ago I thought he was a buffoon and played a role. Today I know that even if some dose of acting appeared over time, it was meant to not disappoint the interlocutors, who like modest people so much ...

No, Beks doesn't have any messianic tendency to give lectures to the whole humanity.

f. He treats his paintings as natural elements of his own environment, which he likes and would find hard to part with. And this is where it finishes. If he wants to paint beautiful paintings, it's not so much to change the direction of Earth revolutions as to surround himself with objects close to him, for which he would be a father. Proud to have begotten them, he would like to keep them at home. But he knows well that one day they will go out into the world and live their own lives.

g. He believes that enjoyment from working and begetting the said “pets”, as he calls them, at least the ones which he leaves for himself, can't turn into hard slog.

He hates everything that might change his free creating into some commissioned work, carrying out an order or a task given to him. (I'll go back to commissions and orders later on).

II). Now about money, because money is his biggest driving force.

a. I've often written: “God, if Beks knew what financial precipice I've led him to ...”

Today I discover he realized all that and even panicked at the thought that I could pull him down with me.

He claims that he doesn't need any money, but he'd like to be sure he'll never run short of cash. He belongs to people who are simply obsessed with

it. He even confessed that he'd started worrying I would go bust already a year ago.

- I lied to you – he told me yesterday. – Last year I proposed “en masse” purchase – he speaks this in French – of many paintings at half the price, because I thought you'd fall head-first on sand. I wanted to collect a small capital in advance, in case you lost everything and jacked it in.

What fills him with such fear is the memory of hard times at the beginning of his career in Sanok. That's why the main driving force behind all his doings is to find himself in a position where he can live at ease (that's another favourite expression of his). At ease – meaning without any financial needs or worries about the future. He claims that without this certainty he's simply unable to paint, that the fear of the lack of money paralyzes him.

b. In any case, I can see that objectively he doesn't need big money for everyday life. His flat is modestly furnished, without any knick-knacks or valuable objects. He doesn't go on holiday, play cards or drink (except beer). He eats normally.

On the other hand, he spends a fortune on mechanical gadgets and gramophone records. Yes, this is what Beks spends a lot of money on. Or let's say, he used to spend, as since the time he started to worry that I'd go bankrupt, he's been saving and doesn't let himself buy any unnecessary things. Which, by the way, makes him aggressive towards me. Having loads of money (for Polish conditions), he won't dare to touch it, because in a month it might turn out I'm insolvent and I'll stop buying his paintings. A lot of time will pass before people in Poland start to buy them again. How is he going to earn his living? So, he's mad with me, because he likes spending money, and my uncertain financial situation forces him to save all the time.

c. Before I finish this thread, let me say a few words on a similar subject: his helpfulness.

He claims that he lends money to people. I don't know if it's really like that. Once, in my presence, a close acquaintance of his – Schlabs, a painter, asked him for a loan. Beks weaselled out of it, mumbling something about expenses, that the dollar had dropped etc.

Perhaps he really lends money, but most probably only to his family. Because, in a way, it's revenge on relatives. When in his young years he started painting and didn't earn anything on it, his distant and closer relatives pointed fingers at him as a sponger living off his parents. Being able to lend them some money today, Beks has an opportunity to emphasise how the roles have changed and who really has an upper hand.

Sometimes he gives a painting to somebody. He keeps stressing it as an argument that I must leave him the best five items from the annual production “for gifts”.

I know for sure he's given a few paintings to professor Noszczyk. But does Beks really give paintings to the others? I don't know and can't check it. The only thing I can say is that I was given one, the absolutely worst painting, with a serious technical defect (the paint hasn't dried for years) and a few scratches.

d. To finish with the money: his biggest fear is taxes. He won't find peace if there's a suspicion a tax collector might become interested in him. In our talks he's many times returned to the possibility of being summoned to the Tax Office to give an account of his incomes.

I prefer to no longer talk about money then. Beks's attitude to it is one of the things that irritate me most, so if I started to elaborate on this topic, I'd certainly go too far and stop being objective. And while I take the liberty of assaulting, attacking and hurling insults at him in my usual notes, I would like this one to be impartial. For I know that it's going to be a source of information about Beks for people who've never met him and who would like to know something about him.

III). About feelings towards the surrounding people and himself.

a. Let's say I'm conceited; let's start with me. I don't know whether Beks has formed any clear-cut opinion about me or not. He still considers me a "partner", but not a "friend". This way he refers to me in his talks with people. When I ask him if right now he would conclude with me an agreement which we signed at the beginning of our acquaintance, he answers: "Yes, because in essence, the acquaintance with you is beneficial for me".

In the same way, it wouldn't cross his mind to ask me about my life, health or work.

Anyway, it's the same story with the others, even the ones he labels as people close to him. For example he doesn't know that Nyczek is married, although he's known him for twenty years. He's simply never asked him about it.

He claims that he's carried out a psychoanalysis of me (I wonder how?), but evades answering questions on the conclusions that he's drawn. Probably they are not favourable for me. But at least he trusts my honesty. That's not bad, given his mistrustful character. Because in the name of "realism" Beks suspects everybody of every possible kind of meanness. So, for example (as he confided in me in a surge of sincerity) he imagined that on the day I mentioned future "payments in dollars" in our telephone conversation, I'd done it because I wanted to secretly record his conversation and then blackmail him. For I have to explain it to you, my Friend, that transactions in foreign currency between private persons in Poland are forbidden. Therefore, all our financial deals are illegal.

On the other hand, he values me for accuracy and organized work. "An obsessively precise guy" – I heard him describe me in a phone conversation one day. I'll come back to that obsession of accuracy and precision in a moment, because it's one of his main features.

He doesn't show the slightest gratitude for my efforts. Firstly, because they are not focused on what he'd like them to be focused. Secondly, because he believes that what I'm doing I do for money and my own pleasure. In his opinion it's my own business then, so he has no reason whatsoever to thank me or show any feelings of gratitude.

b. There is, however, one more reason why Beks is afraid of displaying even casual gratitude.

He won't show it to me, Margonari or anybody else, as he would thus authorize us to ask him for a gesture in return. And that's what he wants to avoid at any cost. Any cost.

There are areas in which that fear of the gratitude duty is Beks's virtue. In other fields it's a nasty vice. In both cases the fear results from his thoroughly egocentric personality, reaching the size of neurosis.

i) So, Beks has never let the regime supporters buy him. While other Polish artists made their piles buying flats and studios, he's never asked for anything. And even if the communists suggest they'll give him whatever he wants, he weasels out of it. He does so not because he detests them, as his attitude to them is almost neutral. He refuses, as he doesn't want to provide them with an opportunity to demand a gesture from him. The fear that he would have to show gratitude or do something at somebody's bidding is an unbearable prospect for him. And Polish advocates of the regime have different ideas. For example they invited Beks to witness military manoeuvres, during which he was supposed to play the role of an observer giving a moral guarantee of their compliance with the principles established in the final document from Helsinki. Well, that's one of the things that Beks wouldn't bear. So he refused.

ii) Equally positive is his egotism, egocentrism or egoism (never mind the word, because everything revolves around his main principle "I") when it guarantees Beks's independence from the Polish cultural establishment.

I mentioned it a moment ago. I'll only add that to avoid having to be grateful and in consequence, having to paint at their bidding, Beks has never asked any critic to write an article about him. He's never suggested that a woman from TV should make a report about him. That's because in either case he would have to be grateful, which would mean giving them something for a start. In the end, he would have to paint according to their wishes. And both giving anything and working under commands is out of the question.

iii) However, there are areas in which his aversion to saying "thank you" is less commendable.

And here is an example: when coming back from Paris to Poland, my mother-in-law, a woman in her seventies, brought him about a hundred compact discs from me. On the journey she had them with her so that they wouldn't get lost and all the time she kept them in her hand. Everything might have weighed about eight kilos. When she'd gone through the customs control at the airport in Okęcie and wanted to give the CDs to Beks, he pointed his car to her. Then he tossed the parcel into the boot, said casual "goodbye" to her and drove away.

You might think he behaved like a lout. Certainly not. I know him too well to suspect him of bad manners. He was simply afraid he would have to say "thank you" to her. In return for the favour, the old woman might have asked him to give her a lift to the railway station, because there were few taxis at the airport. And if a conversation had started? Then he would have had to ask about me, about the journey, and finally, he would've been forced to ask if she had any place to stay in Warsaw or whether she had any possibility to get to the train to Tomaszów. Here he might have got trapped if she'd agreed to the proposed help. That's why he walked beside her in tension, not uttering a single word.

I've already mentioned a few times that one of the main reasons for his neurosis is the fear of any duty. In this case it was the duty of showing gratitude. The duty of saying "thank you" to somebody and making a gesture

in return for a favour. He often talks about it, usually with a smile so that it will seem a joke.

iv) In the same way, not embarrassed whatsoever, with the same smile on his face, he admits that the only person he's interested in is himself. Both statements (that he's afraid of saying "thank you" and that he's an egoist) match each other and one is a consequence of the other. The only "must" that Beks is ready to fulfil is the "must" having a source in himself, as this is the only important person whom he loves and respects.

People demanding absolute freedom are usually egoists. They listen intently only to their own internal imperatives, the only ones that they follow and are ready to succumb to.

c. Anyway, irrespective of gratitude, Beks doesn't have a sufficient amplitude of sensitivity at his disposal to be able to experience a deep positive feeling for people and matters in his immediate vicinity. So, his feeling of comradeship towards me is shallow, just as shallow as it is towards the others, even if he once called Nyczek a "friend" in my presence.

But neither have I ever heard him talk about anyone with hatred. He's just lukewarm.

Which doesn't prevent him from going into an occasional frenzy. He destroyed many of his paintings by breaking them into small pieces when they hadn't come out well. Sometimes this happened after a mere week's work on a painting.

Once he told Ania, laughing at himself as usual, that one day he'd nearly strangled his wife, as she didn't want to agree to buy a radio set.

While in a conversation he remains calm, in letters he is sometimes a madman, frothing with rage and hurling insults.

d. There is a paradox, to which I'll come back below.

I mean the contradiction between this lukewarm, moderate and reserved Beks, without any great feelings, who actually can't love or hate anybody

except his wife, and his emotional painting, full of sensitivity and sublime feelings. How come this cool, dispassionate man, insensitive to human misery, has so much compassion and love for it in his paintings?

If somebody knew only Beks and never saw his paintings, he would think that he paints small, nice landscapes in the style of impressionists. And the other way round, someone who knew only his tragic painting would never suspect that their author might be so indifferent to everything and everybody.

IV). About family and family feelings.

a. Beks is aware that Tom's emotional problems result partly from his own inability to love him. Or rather the inability to treat him in a different way than he treats an accidental acquaintance, with whom you can chat for an hour or two without probing into his intimate life. He told me about it many months ago, but only now do I understand what he meant by saying that he begat Tommy with the intention to make a friend for himself. For he didn't have many friends in his childhood and was sneered at by his mates.

- I knew – he said – that making Tommy I first condemn myself to a few unpleasant years, but then he'd be my mate.

He wanted to have an adult son and intellectual relations with him straight away. Tom's childhood, affection that should have been given to him, physical contact, all that was a "bad moment that had to be waited out". Then Tommy became a creature worthy of his interest. Today Tommy takes his revenge, behaving in a brutal, contemptuous and loutish way towards father.

If anybody ever attempts to carry out a psychoanalysis of Beks's paintings, he will find a partial explanation of their atmosphere in the tensions between Beks and his son. Many gestures of Beks are marked by a fear of Tom. The moment "Tommy" comes into the flat, Beks's voice turns into whisper, and his eyes freeze like in a dog scared of blows. Screams, door slamming,

threatening with a suicide, sadism that Tommy applies to terrorize his father day after day, year after year, seem to partially explain the atmosphere of fear in Beks's paintings. Although actually Beks is a fertile ground for this kind of threatening himself. Otherwise, Tommy wouldn't have been able to torment his father and his rage attacks wouldn't have brought any effects.

It's also true that Tom's mother loves him, and Beks in turn loves his wife. That's one of the reasons he doesn't kick Tommy out.

All that doesn't change the fact that I can often see the father and son chatting normally. Somebody who doesn't come to their place would never conclude from their conversations that there are conflicts in their home.

b. Beks hasn't told me much about his own father. He only gave me to understand that he 'would give a lot' to bring him back to life.

- My father was 67 years old when he died, while my mother is 87 today and she's bound to outlive all of us – he added ironically.

c. Beks is tender towards his wife.

- She didn't get exactly what she'd expected from me, and I didn't get what I'd expected from her. But it's very good.

Obviously, there's real love between them. Towards his wife Beks behaves in the opposite way than towards the others: his feeling is visible. Given his self-restraint, it's a fact that deserves being recorded.

One day his wife told me and Ania:

- You can't realize what an ideal husband he is.

On his part, Beks confided in me yesterday:

- What shall we do when the other one dies? This question makes each of us panic stricken.

It's a typical example of a marriage which makes the partners closer to each other as the years go by. In this respect, they both remind me of my own Parents and professor Wiśniewski with his wife. When professor Wiśniewski died, being a very old man, his wife got poisoned herself with iodine. They

lived in the same house as we did at the time of my childhood, in Łódź, Kościuszki Avenue.

d. He's never liked his mother, though. Today he's looking after her with utmost care, as she's completely paralysed, lifeless and suffering from bedsores. But he's doing that as he feels obliged and wants to repay.

- When we didn't have a penny with my wife – he told me when I asked him why he didn't want to place his mother in hospital – my parents maintained and fed us for a longer time. Now I have to repay my mother for it.

In a way, it's also an attempt to justify the reproaches he made against his father. Because being a young man, he held a grudge against him for not wanting to hide Jews during the war.

- How could I condemn him for that if I didn't take in my own mother when she needed it.

His mother touching him has always filled him with disgust. Even, or especially, when he was a child.

V). Beks is a man filled with obsessions, phobias, manias and neuroses.

a. He says that decay, ruins, bones, which he so often paints, don't make any impression on him. Yet they obviously pester him, as there isn't a single painting without a small skull or a shinbone looming in the background.

He maintains that he paints them only because in painting terms the decomposition of matter is more interesting to paint than colourful flowers or children playing a ball.

Anyway, he claims that he sees death not in these classic requisites, but in living creatures. Whenever he touches them, he's got an impression that he comes in contact with potential corpses. He sees death in abundant life, especially in lush vegetation at cemeteries. That's why he paints cemeteries. Not because there are a lot of dead bodies, but because the plants draw saps

from them and are suspended death themselves. For Beks death at cemeteries lurks on the ground, not under it.

He's developed a psychedelic fear of spiders. Hence, objects in many of his paintings are covered with a thick layer of cobweb.

b. He's packed with neuroses, which manifest themselves in everything he's doing. Whenever he obsessively thinks about something, waits for something or feels responsible before people, he immediately stops functioning.

i) When he recalls that he's breathing, he starts suffocating.

ii) As soon as he finds out I'm going to come, he immediately demands information on the precise time of my arrival. Because if he doesn't know what time he should expect me, or if I'm late, he immediately gets an upset stomach or intestine.

When I appear in Warsaw, even for two weeks, he puts aside his work throughout my stay, as he's unable to concentrate when he knows that tomorrow or in five days he'll have to stop working even for two hours to see me.

It's the same when the others are waiting for him or when he's responsible before people: he immediately gets diarrhoea. He couldn't work as a professor at university as he would know that fifty students wait for him three times a week and he mustn't be late. He can work and function only when he's laidback.

iii) the fact that he'll never show an unfinished painting to anyone except his wife and Tommy can be included into the same category of neurotic inhibitions. He's afraid that someone might make a remark, a positive or negative one. He's an independent person and won't give way to any "priests", his admirers or critics. A casual remark, however, will get stuck in his head, recurring obsessively throughout the painting process. Fighting it, he'll bungle the picture. My promise that I won't breathe a word, that I won't even praise is of no use. Each time I come into the studio, the painting on

the easel is covered with a mobile, specially constructed screen. And if I happen to come unannounced, he'll hastily greet me in the hall and rush immediately to his room to cover the painting.

c. When chatting to me, he also confessed to other aversions, phobias and disgusts.

i) For example he hates kissing and cuddling. That's why I started this note ironically with the words": "And again, we hug each other affectionately". Because something like that would be simply repulsive to him. Even shaking somebody's hand fills him with disgust.

ii) He doesn't like children, who fill him with sort of fear. Whenever a snot disturbs his work by shining a mirror in his eyes, he doesn't dare to come out onto the balcony to shout at him. He stops painting, sits half-paralysed and bears the dazzling until the kid gets bored and gives it up.

iii) People usually make him anxious and he doesn't want to be recognized in the street. He's confided in me that since the time he became famous in Sanok and people started to whisper when he walked down a street, his life in this little time has become even more unbearable than before. That was one of the reasons why he moved to Warsaw.

Now he's complaining again about the neighbours from the house in Sonata Street, who've begun to recognize him and he feels bad about it.

d. Beks claims it isn't true, but to my mind he's got masochist tendencies.

It's enough to look at the drawings from the time of his youth. I'll come back to it in a moment. There are lots of naked women beating with a riding whip a tied-up boy with an erect huge penis.

But even today his behaviour shows that he must relish suffering. Well, judge it for yourself, my Friend:

If there's someone ill who needs to call a person working in the adjacent room, the latter will normally install in his desk a lamp or a small bell, which the other one can activate in emergency by means of a string or a button.

Well, Beks installed a 200-Watt bulb over the door of his studio. When turned on, it dazzles you like a razor blade. Apart from that, next to the easel he's put in an additional bell, which is so noisy that it might wake up a dead person. As his mother calls him a few times a day, each time Beks jumps on his stool as if he got an electric shock.

e. When talking about his neuroses, manias and obsessions, I certainly can't pass over the topic of sex, which is the root of everything.

i) He's confided in me that at the beginning he was attracted by masochist intercourses, accompanied by the acts of physical violence, where he would be a bound submissive victim, moaning in pain. Then he asked himself why he should be the only victim. The others might be tortured as well. And he would be their tormentor.

And again, the fear of being ridiculous didn't let him put it in action. According to what he told me, his sado-masochism remained in the imaginary realm. It manifests itself only in an artistic form. First in drawings, in which sado-masochist narration is direct, violent, open and even aggressive. I've already said that. Then, later on, in a more indirect, sublime way, in painting. For all these wounds, blood, stitched bodies, twisted bones, figures tied-up and chained to pillars, all that stuff, which is so abundant in his paintings, has the same background: sexual sado-masochism, the excitement of tormenting, tortures.

ii) Today his sexual life seems to be in a deadlock or "pushed away". The truth is that he's approaching the age of sixty. The main reason, however, seems to be the fact that he likes only young bodies and older women fill him with repulsion. Well, again, his fear of being ridiculed doesn't allow Beks to pick up a young girl. Although I know from experience that some of them would let themselves be seduced by an elderly man who's surrounded by an aura of success.

iii) I suppose (let me repeat: suppose) that his sexual life is also "pushed away", because he's a neurotic, obsessive nature and the daily sight combined with the sickening odour of puss, urine and faeces, which he has to

constantly remove from between the legs of his dying mother, must obsessively appear before his eyes during intimate moments.

- For some time I've become almost impotent. I don't have a hard-on – he confided in me already in the first words of our phone call, just after I'd come to Warsaw a few days ago.

VI). A few other characteristics verging on obsession.

a. He's meticulous and precise, as in general he tends to be a perfectionist.

i) That perfectionism of his shows especially in do-it-yourself jobs, which he performs but has no liking for.

In recent weeks he's widened his complex easel by 5 centimetres (that's all he can afford with the size of the room he works in). Well, he's found a little one-millimetre gap in the said structure and told me that after my departure he can't get down to painting straight away, as he must first dismantle the whole thing, because whenever he comes into the studio he gets terribly annoyed by that little gap.

ii) When doing DIY, he must, he absolutely must screw bolts. He screws three times more bolts than required by solid work. It seems to him that an object is never strong enough to withstand strikes. If he could, he'd construct the whole world of steel and concrete.

iii) Beks may be chaotic in a conversation, but he keeps his workroom tidy. Everything is in perfect order. The brushes are clean and orderly, nothing lies around on the floor, there seems to be only a little mess on the desk, because the glasses, blank sheets of paper and pencils are scattered here and there. On the surrounding shelves, which he's built himself, are stacked thousands of records, loudspeakers, record-players, tapes etc. Beks takes them out easily, without having to search long, because everything is put in order, which he knows by heart.

Comparing his workroom with the shambles that can usually be seen in other artists' studios, you've got an impression of staying in a laboratory or a space cabin rather than in a place of a painter's work.

But I've heard his documents are scattered chaotically in the drawers. At least this is what he claims and promises to put everything in order when he's retired. I guess, however, that he's just being coy and in reality he keeps his documentation in order. To prove it, let me say that whenever we argue about the interpretation of our agreement, he can easily find my letters and additions to the agreement, so as to support his arguments in the discussion.

Although ... the press cuttings that he'd lent me so that I could copy them and prepare documentation for my exhibition were really piled up and I had to spend two days to put them in a chronological order.

iv) His meticulous and precise mentality, typical of perfectionists, also exerts an influence on the way he paints.

He's always tried to paint his visions with "trompe l'oeil"¹ precision. So, when I mentioned Jerka, a not very well-known Polish painter, he jumped in his seat at the sound of his name. Really impressed, he said admiringly:

- That's the guy who's so precise each stalk of grass, each straw painted with impeccable accuracy. Is that him?

He reacted in the same way when I mentioned Hausner:

- He's been exhibited in an Austrian centre. An incredibly meticulous bloke! Everything's brought to perfection!

That's why he tortures his own paintings, constantly reproaching himself that he's lazy and doesn't achieve sufficient accuracy.

b. However, having reached the current stage of his work, he's thinking of changing the style. He feels an increasing need to paint blurred, vague characters and objects, so that there's no real boundary between a figure and the background. He claims that the acquaintance with me and my raptures over his phantasy, oneiric landscapes have made him delay that change of

style. I claim that it's because in Paris they don't know "old" Beksiński, so he can "serve the old stuff". Anyway, this is how he calls it himself.

Because Beks is fed up with his precision in painting. That's why he'd like to paint like Turner rather than American hyperrealists.

c. Do I have to add that he's got a nature of a calculator? Since he's afraid of being surprised and making a false step in reply to something unexpected, he demands being warned about everything in advance.

In particular, he's afraid of his ill-considered concessions, gestures of good will or words of contentment. He then requires me to present him in advance all the elements of the discussion, so that he can think them over before giving an answer. And he immediately starts calculating. Throughout the night he tries to predict all the traps, all the dangers and figure out all the profits and potential losses. Then he edits his reply in writing, once, twice, three times, until he makes sure he hasn't made any mistake and has secured himself a maximum income with minimum costs. As a result, his written proposals in our endless negotiations are so complicated that I have to read them a few times before I understand all the clauses, conditions and precautions which have been contained in them.

In a word, he's obsessively afraid of spontaneity. Exactly opposite to his painting, which results from natural and free movements of his hand. Movements which he doesn't try to control, or even understand.

VII). What does he like about art?

a. Judging by his references to Dostojewski and Kafka, they are his favourite writers. Sometimes he mentions Bruno Schulz. Today he doesn't read anything except an occasional newspaper. At a certain moment of his life he was influenced by French anti-novels by Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet. He valued them for the lack of plot, the lack of protagonists, the lack of the notion of passing time and no causation. He'd like to write this way, too; actually, he even attempted in the sixties. I asked him to read me a few

pages. He doesn't know Celine and it's a pity that he doesn't read in French. I doubt if there's anybody who could translate Celine not only into Polish, but into any other language, because it's an untranslatable form, almost no content.

b. He doesn't show much interest for other artists' painting and claims he's never been to the National Museum in Warsaw. As for museums in the West, he doesn't know any, simply because he's never left Poland, if not for any other reason. He doesn't go to exhibitions unless I drag him there during my stays in Warsaw.

Searching for any influences in his painting is an absurd idea. He isn't inspired by anybody and his genius has no other source in the history of art. Anyway, he doesn't know much about the world painting, and if he does, it's only from postcards and gramophone record covers. He only had an opportunity to see something in his young years, when reproductions of Bacon's paintings or Moore's sculptures were circulating around Poland. He's never heard of Altdorfer and his "Battle of Ipsos".

But his lack of interest in the painting of other artists is not only due to his indifference to everything and everybody. He's afraid of seeing and knowing too much. His neurotic nature makes him paralysed and incapable of painting whenever he discovers somebody who's more fluent than himself and who does things better (and "better" in his opinion means "more precisely").

Some day one of his admirers brought him an album by a Swiss artist who in the opinion of Beks better than him painted gloomy landscapes with a hole, where one could see another bright world. Some time ago Beks painted many such landscapes, which are of extraordinary beauty in my opinion. I've tried to convince him on many occasions that he should come back to them. He's always replied me that whenever he saw another person do something better than him, he didn't feel like doing it any longer. What's more – it paralysed him and since that time he wasn't able to paint such a landscape. Well, that's because he's a perfectionist and the awareness that

there's someone better in his area hinders his main driving force: to be perfect.

Since Beks is neurotic, he's afraid that somebody might humiliate him by showing him a person better than him, or, to make matters worse, might suspect him that he's copying the other one. That fear deprives him of any wish to continue.

As for other arts, he's interested only in the film and of course music, about which he knows a lot and without which he can't paint.

c. I pass over the music, because I don't know anything about it myself and can't say anything interesting about Beks in this area. Anyway, many people have already talked and written about Beks's love for music, so I'm not going to invent anything new.

d. As for the film, I know that in his youth he wanted to become a director. However, his father, who wanted him to learn a "serious" trade, forced him to study architecture, for which Beks didn't have a vocation.

In films, just like in novels, he values the form. Preferably, a film should have no contents. Contents simply disturbs. Most frequently he comes back to Fellini, especially the scene in the film "Rome", where in an apocalyptic atmosphere, on a highway, in a many-kilometre traffic jam, the film staff are coming back in huge trucks from the set, during a storm, among the noise of cars and the calling of prostitutes, who are warming themselves by bonfires on the hard shoulder. Beks doesn't know "Last Year at Marienbad", though. I think he would like this beautiful film because of its searching for a form and unusual atmosphere.

I asked him whether he would like to make a film himself if I managed to collect the needed money. I stressed that he'd have an absolutely free rein with the script, direction, actors, scenery etc. His reply was what I'd expected, knowing the driving force behind his actions and his restraints. I mean perfectionism and neuroses.

As for perfectionism, he wouldn't undertake to make a film without first thoroughly getting to grips with the job of a director. Just like he wouldn't take up the challenge of writing anything about music (I also tried to convince him to do that) until he perfectly mastered the profession of a music critic.

As far as the neurosis is concerned, being aware that each minute of shooting the film costs x thousand francs, he would be paralysed at the thought he might run out of invention and squander somebody's money. All in all then, he wouldn't be able to shoot anything.

He claims that he's too old for that, anyway.

VIII). His knowledge and education.

a. He doesn't speak any foreign language, just jabbars a little bit in German, but chiefly when he wants to buy music equipment and other electronic toys.

He's ashamed and suffers because of that. The shame and fear of finding himself on a foreign territory, whose language he can't speak, is the reason (among others) why he's never been abroad. I've invited him to France on many occasions, assuring that I'd cover all the costs of the trip for both of them. His fear of being ridiculed because he doesn't speak any foreign language is stronger than the wish to go round the shops (certainly not museums, which don't interest him at all) to buy some gadgets that you can't get in Poland. So he's always refused.

The shame that he doesn't know languages also manifests itself in Latin, German, French and English expressions that he intersperses in chats and letters. It's just like he wanted to prevent any suspicion about his linguistic fault.

The evident fear of ridicule, which is stuck deep inside him, makes Beks try to ridicule himself in front of a person who already knows that he doesn't know languages. So, when it's necessary to use a foreign expression

the pronunciation of which is easy and known in Poland, with emphasis he will deliberately pronounce it phonetically or in a wrong way. This way nobody's going to correct him, as everybody will think he's kidding and purposefully pretends to be undereducated.

b. In a small talk he can't formulate thoughts clearly. Every now and then he's lost in digressions, frequently he doesn't come back to the main topic and in general doesn't construct full, clear sentences.

i) Which doesn't change the fact that he's an interesting, nice and funny person to talk to. Chattering with him for ten hours is pure pleasure, which doesn't make you tired. Anyway, as he told me, he was surprised himself to discover that whenever he opened his mouth, people fell silent, listening to him attentively.

He uses colloquial, unpretentious and direct language. Sometimes he'll curse, saying an occasional "shit" or "fuck". Those who've met him rightly consider him a natural, simple, nice, normal guy, who doesn't play any role.

ii) While in a conversation he's always smiling, non-conflicting and cheerful, in letters he can be like a viper, vulgar, shouting and shaking his fist. I've already talked about it.

That's certainly because he's afraid of a row (unless he's started one himself, though). As long as his partner stays within the reach of his sight and hearing, he'll avoid anything that might cause a clash. In letters, however, when the reader is far away, invisible, Beks, hidden behind a sheet of paper, is no longer afraid and can bawl him out. Those who know him personally will be surprised in the future when they read his correspondence with me. There're lots of arguments, vulgarity, aggressiveness and bile, which they've never experienced in a direct talk with that seemingly calm man.

c. He's got a great ability for memorizing details. He remembers expressions, names and digits from various areas and can easily use them like an expert. Is he one indeed? I can't assess. To do that, I'd have to know

the disciplines, almost solely technical, which he wants to talk about, and music. Or I'd have to arrange for an expert in these areas to check him.

On the other hand, he knows next to nothing within the scope of social, political or economic sciences. He's justified by the fact that he spends twelve hours a day in front of the easel. When can he read and broaden his horizons then?

At the time when he was a student, Poland was being rebuilt and the walls of towns were covered with a poster: "It's not school but true zest that will make you do your best". There was a demand for all kinds of half-specialists who would be able to build a house so it didn't collapse. Nothing more was expected from the youth just after the war. That's why Beks graduated from university within three years or even shorter and had few opportunities to learn who Durkheim or Max Weber was.

One should also make an allowance for the lack of a national institution for continual staff training, which in France is "Le Monde" daily. I don't like it for being a propaganda mouthpiece of the French authorities elites, just like "Prawda" ("Truth"), "Trybuna Ludu" ("People's Platform") or "Rude Pravo" are mouthpieces for the local communist elites. That's why both kinds of dailies spread propaganda which is supposed to justify the privileges and power of the groups for which they are press bodies. I turn my back whenever somebody insistently tries to impose upon me the way I should think, the system I should love, the elite I should support and the values I should respect. However, without this newspaper the French intelligentsia would be less educated than it is. The general level of a French student, scientist, entrepreneur, politician, in a word, the elite of the country, would be lower. There is so much information from various areas that the paper is a real textbook for continual training.

Well, in Poland, either because of the communists relying solely on the working class and peasantry, or for other reasons, there is no press for intelligentsia. That's why the level of the latter is frequently very low. And, as I've already mentioned before, Beks doesn't read anything except the press,

in which he doesn't find anything; anything sensible. That's why he doesn't know much about political events, sociological phenomena, economic indicators etc. As a result, not only don't we ever talk about it, but I don't feel like staying in his place any longer. Which doesn't change the fact that he's certainly one of the brightest minds among outstanding Polish artists.

But how can you talk in the long run with a man who - not knowing the majority of general topics - avoids talking about them (just like I avoid technical subjects and talks about music, which are fascinating for him, but completely unknown to me)?

d. What most impresses me about his mind are certainly the virtues I'd like to have myself: a sober look at himself, clear-headedness, a business-like approach, realism and attention to detail.

i) He views himself soberly, without a trace of indulgence, and doesn't escape from his own remorse. When I tell him I resent something he's done, not only does he listen to me attentively, but he answers to the reproaches, and sometimes even admits I'm right.

As for the importance of detail, we perfectly understand each other: we both believe this is where the gist of most things lies.

ii) He has a well-developed analytical ability (just because he appreciates what others treat as unimportant details). He can dismantle and put in drawers the smallest elements of a construction. On the other hand, I don't think his sense of synthesis is equally good. Big and small theories which generalise things don't really attract him and he doesn't try to build them himself. It's true that yesterday he started talking about his reflections on the structure of time, but it was short, vague and tangled.

iii) He shares with me a certain vice, namely he tends to search for discrepancies and restraints in things rather than cohesion and energy. Therefore, reasoning usually leads him to doubts. That's one of the causes

why he doesn't pass on his knowledge, for example within the scope of painting or music, to others.

- What shall I pass on if I'm not certain myself? – he says. He's filled with so much scepticism about things, matters and solutions that he remains intellectually paralysed throughout the time. He refers to it as a stalemate in check.

iv) However, his virtue lies in the fact that the said intellectual scepticism doesn't prevent him from taking definite decisions, making clear choices and continuing strenuous effort in one direction.

In this respect we perfectly understand each other.

IX). What's his everyday life like?

a. As I've already said, he's never been abroad. But in Poland he's also been only to four big cities: Cracow, where he studied, Rzeszów, where he worked as an architect after graduation, Szczecin, where he completed an apprenticeship, as far as I know, and finally Warsaw, which he hardly knows although he's been living there for about ten years.

Sometimes he goes out in the evening. Then he has a little ride around the city. But it's his wife who drives, because Beks can't drive despite having a licence which he bought illegally in the old times.

His hermit's life has a lot of reasons.

First of all, people bore him. Even when they listen to him attentively, as he can be an interesting interlocutor, he's got an impression he's wasting time on meaningless chit-chat while he could be painting. I've talked about it many times: he's indifferent to everything and everybody except painting, music and mechanical gadgets.

But the main reason for that life in seclusion is even more prosaic, and I've also mentioned it before: whenever there's a plan to visit people, he immediately gets diarrhoea. On the slightest occasion his neurotic, obsessive

temperament causes stomach-intestine problems. Even the prospect of paying a visit to his and his wife's aunts and uncles in Sanok, which after all remains his family town, is enough to make him "toilet-bound". Two days before he hardly eats anything so as not to have to run to the restroom throughout the journey. In particular, he doesn't go to any cocktail parties, as his liver doesn't let him eat what is served there.

Finally, he doesn't like being in the centre of attention. He's ashamed when people are looking at him and talking about him. Besides, he's afraid that during such a cocktail party a circle of crazy female admirers might start asking him stupid questions, and he would have to smile nicely and give polite idiotic answers. This duty of having an empty small talk makes his liver and stomach upset just like any other obligation, any other "must".

b. Stories about his legendary sausage, reportedly served to him for breakfast every day, are not true. On many occasions I've seen him eat also other things.

c. It is true, however, that for two and a half years I've always seen him dressed in the same way: the same shoes, the same shirt, the same trousers, everything resembling a military style, clean but bland.

d. He doesn't have a need for luxury in his everyday life. He doesn't even need ordinary decorations on the walls except his own paintings. In this respect, he lives like a monk. There isn't a bit of phantasy, a whim or embellishment in his flat, clothes or food. Just the opposite to his baroque paintings.

e. He dreams about cars, though. But not comfortable and quiet Rolls-Royces or Mercedeses. Just the opposite, he's keen on race Porsches, Ferraris or Lamborghinis. Cars must be fast, efficient and make a lot of noise. Just let me remind you that he can't drive even a small Fiat.

Also, whenever he buys some technical equipment (video cameras, record-players etc...), this equipment must have as many functions as possible, even the ones that Beks will never have an opportunity to use.

As far as I know, he can't swim, but when buying himself a watch he'll choose only a model used by divers or astronauts, resistant to highest pressures. If you can't go 30 metres under water with the watch, it's not worth anything in his opinion.

e. That's it: his dream world is mechanized, noisy and concrete modernity. Exactly opposite to his nineteenth-century painting. His desire is to live in a big city, full of sky-scrapers, the smell of fumes and rushing cars, preferably in New York. He wouldn't like to live in the country for anything, as he hates (it's his own term) birds and flowers.

Leaving for holiday, one of his neighbours left a big plant on the landing, hoping that one of the residents would water it. Beks didn't even give it a mug of water. He patiently waits till the plant dies, because he won't dare to throw away a living one, either.

- It makes it difficult to move the paintings when Glinicki is taking photos of them – he answered me when I asked him about it.

X). He's got poor health.

a. As a matter of fact, he's constantly ill. I ask myself how his art could be influenced by the suffering due to headaches persisting since his young years or gall bladder and liver disorders? Sometimes I see him pale with pain, though he seldom complains and talks about it, as if the suffering concerned another person.

b. He claims himself there is no link whatsoever between the physical pain and the torture-filled atmosphere of his paintings. It's certainly true from the point of view of an "intended plan". As regards "subconscious causes", however, I've learned not to believe his analyses. Just the opposite, as for years I've been suffering myself due to the upset nervous system, I know how my own vision of the world has been affected as a result. So, I'm still convinced that in the long run, acute physical pain must have had influenced

Beks, just like any other person. His temperament, worldview, but also his sense of aesthetics must have undergone some change.

Apart from that, pain must provoke his need to complain. An ordinary mortal would express this need in words. He, at least partially, expresses it with a brush.

XI). How does he solve contradictions?

a. I've already said it many times in my notes, but I have to stress it once more, with a thick line: Beks is bashful. Bashful in everything, not only in intimate matters. He's ashamed of what people might think or talk about him. He's ashamed that somebody could laugh at one of his weaknesses. He's ashamed at the thought that I might disclose his private life, publishing our correspondence and our talks etc.

Bashful people cope with bashfulness in different ways. Some of them keep silent. The others lie so as to show themselves in a favourable light. Beks started by taking the bull by the horns: he simply tried to openly and loudly talk about the things he was ashamed of.

i) So, in his young years he had a need to talk about sex. Talk in his own way, of course, by means of drawings. He soon got a rap over the knuckles, because Poland at that time was ultra-communist and Catholic, in a word – prudish. This caused him so much trouble among people that he changed the method. He began to cover sexual topics with a layer of irony and persiflage. He still drew them, but this time with a pretended smile, so that it looked he was joking. Because the truth is that all over the world you can talk about sex only in a medical, vulgar or funny way. You mustn't talk about sex seriously. Since that time he's stuck to this method.

ii) He's doing the same with the subject of death. He's ashamed of his fear of death, and at the same time, just like about sex in the past, today he must talk about death so as to forget about it for a moment. Which lets him

maintain before others (and chiefly before himself) that he was just kidding, as he knows there's no serious discussion about death among discreet and well-mannered people.

iii) Finally, there is the third area (after sex and death) in which the said shame of being ridiculed is combined with obsessions that he must talk about so as to be relieved. Also here the solution is an escape into persiflage, baroque and humorous embellishment. I mean his penchant for doom and gloom.

Beks has an impression that he's sitting on an ice floe, which is rushing headlong. Over him stands the motionless eye of the cyclone. In a moment the entire surrounding world's going to collapse and drown everything. I don't exaggerate at all, I simply use his words. The slightest suspicion about the behaviour of some person, for example silence or delay in the payment of money due to him he treats as a tangible proof of the forthcoming end. Hours of work, often mechanical, devoted to filling a rectangular hardboard are accompanied by a search of explanations for someone's behaviour towards him. That's why somebody who doesn't know him can't even imagine what hurricanes of anxiety and suspicion wail under the mask of a smile.

And here he's ashamed again, because at the same time he's got a sober look at himself and the world. It's as though there was another Beks outside himself, laughing at him because of these fears.

That other Beks, intellectual and conscious, craves for moderation, reason, a business-like approach and realism. He's then ashamed of the need felt by the first Beks: to sob loudly, shout at the top of his voice or unfold apocalyptic visions of the end of the world.

These contradictions between the tendency for paranoid catastrophism and the sense of ridiculousness are solved by Beks in his painting in the same way as the topic of sex and death. He talks about his fears aloud, but simultaneously covers everything with persiflage and irony. Persiflage and irony, which – I repeat it for the fourth time – is noticed only by him. For it's

a game with himself. An observer most frequently doesn't see any irony or persiflage, taking everything seriously. Irritated at not being understood, Beks considers the observer an idiot. He claims that he was clear enough. That, for example, the ruins of a town in his painting are surrounded by balloons in the shape of condoms. If one looks carefully, one can see that the tragic female figure on a horse and the terrified midget held and pressed by her are copulating. That the figure with a big head on a boundless desert with a cross in the background, tenderly holding a small red doll in both hands to protect it from cold, in reality has a penis in his hand and "grandpa Freud will tell you what he's doing with it".

This way an alibi has been found. If anybody had an idea to burst out laughing at his pathos and catastrophism, Beks can always reply:

- But you can see that I was kidding.

b. This contradiction between an intellectual penchant for simplicity, for quiet, for discretion, for moderation and the emotional tendency for catastrophism, for pathos, for exaggeration, for Baroque appears everywhere. Even in details. For example, my Friend, look how his paintings clash with the frames, which he makes himself. The hardboard is full of flourishes, swirls, curlicues. At the same time, however, the frames are primitive. Just ordinary black slats. There's some rationality behind it: these slats provide good protection for paintings during a journey, and, as I said a moment ago, Beks is obsessed with the solidity and resistance of objects to strikes. In this case, however, it's only a minor reason.

The most important one lies in the contradiction between his excessive, paranoid emotional sphere and the shame felt by his cool mind and common sense. I didn't understand it at once. That's why, wishing to match the content with the form, I removed his frames and ordered pompous, rich, sophisticated ones for my exhibition. As pompous and rich as his own paintings. Not realizing that this way he contradicted himself, Beks sneered the frames as "ridiculous, petty bourgeois, irritating like a pimple". That is to

say, just like his own paintings in the opinion of people who don't like pathos and pomposity ...

c. Besides, you will never understand this bizarre painting if you don't know about another contradiction of Beks, which he also solves with a trick. A trick that consists in escaping to persiflage and irony (which, let me repeat for the fifth time, only he can see in his paintings!).

I've already said it and I'll keep emphasizing that he's a rational, sober and business-like mind. He dreams of Cartesianism and he even dabbles in writing, in the style of scientists, with an introduction, two parts and a conclusion, in paragraphs and subparagraphs.

Well, that very same man is superstitious. He believes in black magic, the signs of zodiac, tarot, chiromancy etc. In his young years he studied esoteric literature, got to grips with the teachings of sages from the East, took part in initiation sessions ... He belonged to the sect whose guru was Andrzej Urbanowicz, also a mystical painter. There is a correspondence between Beks and that Urbanowicz and Henryk Waniek, containing their discussions and disputes on such issues as telepathy, sticking pins into dolls, looking into a sphere, Haitian religion voodoo etc.

Beks claims (with a smile, pretending to be just kidding) that the said Urbanowicz once wrote or told him to think about a part of his body. But he was supposed to do it carefully and cautiously, because this part was to be affected by bad luck. So, Beks thought about one of his fingers and immediately forgot about everything (though I don't believe it). Well, the next day he woke up with his finger twisted, like in arthritis.

In a certain period, Beks was also interested in psychoanalysis, but only for magic rather than worldview-related or therapeutic purposes.

He's got everything far more organized and systematized that I'm describing. Numerous books, studies, discussions with people like him – “the initiated” - led Beks to real knowledge, based on quotations from “writings” and “books” and on the exact interpretation of the canons of the faith etc.

There was a time when his faith was so strong that he couldn't stop talking about it (just like about sex and tortures, and today about death and a forthcoming disaster that looms over the world, and certainly over him). His main tool is the brush, hence that unusual atmosphere of mystery and dread in his paintings from this period. Hence the strange letters, as if from the Hebrew or Hindu alphabet, written in the sky, those closed eyes over a boundless sea, heads hanging in the space or blind men with their eyes fixed in emptiness, closed or open doors, which seem to lead to another reality, hidden to mortals etc, etc. Some paintings by Beks from that period contain a key to the symbols and allusions to that or another "sacred book", which they used to study and in which he once believed.

Yet Beks is a rationalist. And there's another contradiction. How to combine water and fire? How to avoid being ridiculous because of the mediaeval belief in witchcraft in our rationalized world, ruled by logic, common sense and experiment?

The solution is invariably the same: persiflage, being half-joking and half-serious, irony, baroque, exaggeration. And all that is done in case somebody (but mainly the other Beks, rationalist) ridicules him - then he'll be able to deny it by claiming that "he was only joking".

d. After bashfulness – consistency.

Consistency and compliance with the once adopted stance and the resulting contradictions are an essential issue in Beks.

In the area of consistency he'd like to achieve perfection. Just like in precision and accuracy. However, his sober mind defends itself against suicide, which is a natural consequence of such a pursuit of the absolute in the case of every truly ill paranoiac.

Therefore, the conflict lies in the fact that also here Beks doesn't know how to find a compromise. Where to set a boundary between the wish for consistency and what is imposed by the instinct of self-preservation?

There's one more reason why I stress it so much: because I claim that nobody will understand Beks's painting if they don't take into consideration this need for consistency. I already talked about it a moment ago: Beks won't yield to critics or to "priests" in general, though he dreams about being recognized and praised by them. He'll paint in the way he thinks he should paint, no matter if the world will laugh, cry, or shrug its shoulders at it. In the name of consistency he won't yield to them an inch. In the same way he likes money, but for no sum will he paint in a manner different than determined by himself, or actually by his nature, his talent, his sub-consciousness or his inspiration, however we call it. That's why he will never accept an order, as this would force him to be inconsistent with himself and would make him paint something against his internal imperative.

For a moment I'll open brackets: I don't claim that this need for consistency and listening only to "internal voices" exhausts all the reasons why Beks doesn't accept orders and doesn't crawl to "priests" by painting as they would wish it. Because this intransigence is also built on numerous neurosis, which I've mentioned before. They hinder his invention whenever he "must" do anything, when he's got a duty, because he promised it to people or because people expect it from him. Then his mind goes blank and the brush withers in his fingers. For the same reason he won't even accept an advance payment for his paintings, which he's supposed to paint in the future, because then he will "have to" paint them.

And if he fell ill or another obstacle appeared? the very possibility wouldn't let him work. Brackets closed.

But I also repeat that if someone doesn't take this feature of Beks into account, he won't be able to understand why he paints as he paints. In particular, he won't be able to understand why Beks doesn't paint in a different way, easier, merrier, "trendy" style for sale, a way which would make the audience and critics like him, bring him fame and easy money at the same time.

e. The crave for consistency manifests itself also on other occasions. It traps Beks in other contradictions, which he tries to solve in his own way. So, he's pestered by a fear that in a conversation he might contradict himself or that the interlocutor could contradict himself and deny it. And here he would like to be able to prove black and white that he's consistent, that he didn't lie or didn't deviate from the once adopted course; that it is the opponent who lied, contradicted himself or turned aside.

As a result, he needs to record all telephone conversations. But he records not only his telephone interlocutors. His whole workroom is strewn with hidden microphones, which record every or almost every chat he has with his guests. Of course, the guests don't know that they are being recorded.

Beks knows all the regulations banning such recordings. When I jokingly told him that I'd install a microphone behind his paintings at the exhibition to record comments made by visitors, he simply froze:

- Don't do that, sir! – At that time we were not on first-name terms with each other. – You might have serious trouble. It's legally forbidden! – he said.

He knows equally well that such a recording is not considered a proof in court. However, it's not about a lawsuit, but a usual dispute over who said what. The very prospect of such polemics is enough. And even if it's missing, Beks's thought go ahead and he's already scared. Just in case then, a hypothetical case if someone accused him of being inconsistent or lying, he'd like to be able to press a button and instantly prove that it was the other way round. He'd like to irrefutably show to the interlocutor, witnesses (but also to himself!) that he hasn't changed his mind, hasn't lied and hasn't contradicted himself.

f. In the chapter devoted to his contradictions born as a result of consistency on the one hand and everyday life requirements on the other hand, there's something that has a special meaning to me. This regards our cooperation and our mutual relations.

We've signed an agreement. You know about it, my Friend. Well, you should also know that without a guarantee such an agreement is merely a piece of paper, nothing more.

A few words on the theory of law: it's generally believed there are seven possible types of guarantees which, in changeable proportions, can support a concluded agreement:

- ◆ legal – that is, courts and punishments,
- ◆ rational – that is, the interests of each party and the benefits provided by the agreement,
- ◆ parallel – that is, the pressure that one of the parties may exert on the other one in other areas than those covered by the agreement,
- ◆ liability secured on property – that is, pawn, mortgage etc., in a word, property which one of the parties loses in the event it doesn't keep the promise,
- ◆ personal – that is, guarantee given by a third party, which will carry out the procedure that one of the parties failed to carry out,
- ◆ social – that is, pressure which might be exerted by third parties on the parties of the agreement so as to force the same to keep the word,
- ◆ finally, moral – that is, a word given to each other, a sense of honour, credibility, trust, consistency, honesty of each of the partners coming in agreement.

Our contract may not be the subject of litigation, as it concerns a transaction in foreign currency. It is therefore illegal, because as I said before, private persons in Poland mustn't pay each other in dollars. So, Beks can't be forced to keep his promise by a court.

As for the interests and benefits our agreement was supposed to bring him, Beks no longer believes in them. He's convinced that I'll never make his dreams about money come true and the whole thing is just a chimera. Even worse, now he's afraid that I'll pull him with me into the whirl of my own

trouble and financial problems. At the same time, he's afraid that he'll ridicule himself in Poland, because if the enterprise of promoting him in the West doesn't come off, it will look he's merely a local hack painter. However, he believes the said failure will result from the fact that he's led by an incompetent man. And his biggest worry is that he'll have to come back to the Polish market, where he's going to lose the whole capital of fame collected for twenty years, and that he won't be able to sell his paintings even for half the price he used to sell them before we met. In the long run Beks thinks that his interest lies in breaking off the agreement and getting rid of me.

When I'm talking about parallel guarantees, I think about a possibility of annoying Beks in a field other than our contract, so as to force him to observe it. But there are no such fields between us. We neither cooperate nor have common interests in any other area than paintings. The only possibility would be to publish our talks and our correspondence. That's because Beks is bashful. I've already said it once. The possibility of stripping him naked in front of thousands of readers is a serious threat. But who would issue such a publication? And more importantly, when? Maybe in ten years? In the meantime our agreement would have been broken off long ago and impossible to be resurrected.

As for the property guarantee, we provided for one in a form of my thirty-year right to purchase 5 paintings at the price of 8400 francs for a piece (without allowing for the monetary overhang) and to keep for myself 25 paintings in the event Beks breaks off the agreement. However, to pawn the said paintings, I would have to possess them. And I don't have them. The ones which I have belong to me, because I've already paid for them. But even if I had 25 Beks's paintings in pawn now and confiscated them in the event he broke off the agreement, it wouldn't give me any satisfaction. I don't give a hoot about 25 paintings and the prospect of enriching my collection this way. They would pay neither for my effort nor for my hopes, neither for the plans nor the already accomplished achievements.

A personal guarantee is excluded by definition. It assumes that in the event Beks breaks off the contract, a third party that guaranteed for him will do what Beks obliged himself to do, but doesn't want to do. That is to say, he said party will paint the paintings which Beks doesn't want to sell me. Even if Rembrandt undertook such a guarantee, I'd have to refuse. Thanks a lot, but I want to have paintings by Beks.

Also, I don't get my hopes up for a social guarantee, because if I turned to Polish public opinion, if I complained to his friends, if I called his family as witnesses, asking all of them to press Beks and make him keep his word, nobody would even lift a finger. I'm still much too little compared to Beks and I've done much too little to be considered important in the eyes of third parties that are observing us. I even doubt if any newspaper published my complaints, while all of them would welcome Beks to present his version and pulverize me. Perhaps in ten years' time I will have enough weight to be able to urge the public opinion to defend our agreement. Today this guarantee is not worth anything to me.

Therefore, a legal guarantee (that is, courts and punishments) as well as a rational one (the interests and benefits resulting from our cooperation for Beks), a property guarantee (a thirty-year right to purchase 5 paintings at a fixed price of 8400 francs and the pawn of his 25 paintings), a personal guarantee (guarantee of a third party), a social guarantee (public opinion pressure) wouldn't be of much use. They wouldn't secure the continuation of our agreement or the observance of its provisions by Beks.

Only a moral guarantee is left – his word. And actually this is what I count on, as Beks has a well-developed sense of keeping promises.

This feature of Beks, however, leads to the contradiction that keeps pestering him – he would like to get more than our agreement provides for or break it off. But in either case he'd have to break the word he's given.

As a result, Beks faces truly Shakespearean dilemmas. How to weasel more money from me, more than established in the agreement, or how to

break it off without paying me anything? How to avoid the loss of prestige, credibility, and especially, the pricks of conscience in either case?

How is he going to solve these contradictions?

As usual, in his own way, by manoeuvring between the poles, fifty-fifty.

Wherever the committing of a crime couldn't be hidden and where inconsistency would be overt, that is to say, if he wanted to break off the agreement without compensating me, he would stop. Even if one day his paintings were expensive and he was offered money to break off our contract, he wouldn't do that, because in such a case he would have to openly break the given word or grant me the right to purchase 5 paintings at a fixed price for thirty years and give me 25 other paintings for free. And he'll never have the guts to do the one thing or another. He's too mean to establish once and for all a fixed price even for 5 paintings and give me another 25 paintings free of charge, and too consistent to break off without compensation.

On the other hand, wherever the provisions of our agreement may be "interpreted", the wish to obtain the biggest possible profits, combined with a fear of sharing my problems will win, so I'm certain that in the future Beks won't observe either the prices we've established for the paintings or other finance-related provisions of our agreement. Because the truth is they have been formulated in a complicated way, so various interpretations are possible. And since in this case failure to keep the word and inconsistency will be the least evident, the least clear, Beks is going to deceive me and his own conscience.

As far as the observance of our agreement is concerned, I can sleep easy². However, the observance of particular provisions is going to be more troublesome – there's a lot of arguing and shoving ahead of me to snatch additional concessions.

g. Another side of this need for consistency is strong will and character. This influences his daily life, but also affected the way he painted in a certain period of time.

i) His everyday life is influenced in such a way that Beks has a cautious nature and if he sniffs out danger, he's determined to omit it, even if he had to give up a pleasure.

For example he loves sweets. Sweets and beer. Some time ago, when our mutual relations were still good and I found pleasure in buying him a present, I used to bring him various kinds of beer from all over the world, to hear what he thinks of them. He can put on weight easily on both things, as he drinks beer in big quantities and eats sweets in handfuls.

But the moment a danger appears on the horizon (for example health), he will immediately cut out everything that might cause or increase this danger. For example, he'll consistently lose ten kilograms of weight, as for three months he won't drink a can of beer and won't eat a single sweet.

ii) That strong will had an influence on his painting, at least for some time.

Belonging in his young years to all kinds of circles, esoteric sects and similar black magic associations, which I mentioned a moment ago, he was surrounded by people shooting up with drugs. As far as I know, chiefly LSD. It gave them unusual colourful visions the intensity of which, as they claimed, is beyond comprehension of an ordinary person. Well, Beks, with his cautiousness, a fear of becoming addicted and the awareness of his own tendency for addictions, didn't take part in taking drugs.

The main argument his friends-painters used when they tried to talk him into trying LSD was that, just like them, he would have fantastic colourful visions. It sounded like a challenge and encouragement: "Take it and you'll paint even more unusual things".

Beks flatly refused. Wishing to prove that the colours he saw in his natural visions were equally intense as the ones his friend had after taking drugs, in the seventies Beks painted a whole series of paintings with psychedelic sceneries in pure, furious colours. Tommy has a few paintings of this series, and whenever I'm in Warsaw I go to him to have a look at them.

XII). What does he think of “serious matters”, freedom, politics, God and death?

a. Above all, I wonder if his notion of freedom is the same as mine. I must ask him about it.

Because what I said a moment ago about Beks’s consistency immediately sends you back to the question about his sense of freedom. The question is as follows: while succumbing to his internal imperatives which make him paint as he paints does he consider himself a free man or his own slave?

The answer to this question depends on the answer to the other one: which is greater – the pleasure of being consistent with his internal imperatives or his suffering when he refuses to obey the imperatives of the community (which deprives him of rewards usually paid by the world in a form of fame or money to artists who can be obedient and paint as they are told to paint).

If he loves himself (and I’m not quite sure of that despite his egocentrism, egoism and egotism) and if he loves his internal motivations, he must feel free. If he has conflicts with himself and suffers because of his internal imperatives, he feels his “freedom” as a burden.

b. A few words on Beks’s political views.

i) I’ve never talked to him about it seriously. This doesn’t result from pure chance, though. Also, it’s not because we are afraid such a discussion might lead to an argument. Definitely not. I’ve already left my youthful lefty fervour far behind and I wouldn’t lift a finger in defence of liberal democracy either. Beks is also moderate in this respect. The few political views that I’ve heard from him were filled with scepticism rather than any ideology or a wish to change the world. So, if we avoid political topics, it’s chiefly because communist Poland, communist propaganda and communist press have calmed any need for talking politics. They have simply bereft people of any political knowledge, to such an extent that Beks, like most Poles, is not able

to talk about politics. He has no idea of the social structures, constitutional principles, political events, names, dates or statistics. He doesn't know the notions and methods used by a political scientist. In a word, he doesn't know anything what is taught to young people at Sciences Po or at the faculty of law in Paris, Geneva or London.

That's why a talk about politics in the Polish People's Republic is virtually impossible. Since the people haven't been taught to use intellectual tools which are normally used in a political discussion, they don't talk about it all.

I don't urge Beks to have such discussions then. Anyway, he feels embarrassed before me, as the lack of education in this area gets him down. At the same time, he's too proud to accept the role of a humble student, who will listen to the master's lecture. Such a division of roles is only possible when I start a talk about international monetary problems. Then he listens with attention and no embarrassment whatsoever.

So I can tell only about a few details which somehow sneaked into our talks, unveiling Beks's political views a little bit.

ii) He's cowardly. I've already mentioned it many times. At Stalinist times he carried out self-criticisms in front of a ZMP (Polish Youth Association) team and stigmatized class enemies, especially that he came from rich provincial bourgeois. He did all that without any belief in communism. However, he has never condemned communism itself in my presence. Quoting Ilia Erenburg, as far as I remember well, he once told me:

- The revolution eliminated exploiters, but it didn't eliminate idiots.

Which meant there were as many idiots in communism as in any other system. Therefore, one shouldn't worry that in Poland reigns communism, and not, for example, liberal democracy. Practically this wouldn't change anything, as people's happiness is governed by wisdom, not by an ideology. And both here and there wisdom is scarce.

Since Beks is not very interested in people and their fates, he neither sympathises with them nor is ready to fight for them. Whether they will live

this way or another leaves him cold. “Let there be a war all over the world if only the Polish countryside was peaceful”³.

Beks despises the communist nomenclature as well as the Church and Solidarity. He considers them Erenburg’s “idiots” and is only afraid that one of these fractions might achieve an overwhelming victory and introduce a Stalinist, syndicalist or theocratic terror.

iii) In particular, he despises Wałęsa. Once, half-jokingly, I mentioned that somebody had proposed to contact me with Wałęsa, so that the latter wrote something about Beks’s painting. Beks was speechless. Then he said that if I did such a thing, he’d give me 25 paintings as compensation and immediately break off the agreement. Beks can’t understand that in democracy the type of Wałęsa’s personality is a model of a demagogue that all the people will follow. He hates Wałęsa just like an intellectual can hate a peasant, and would burn of shame if the latter was to say a single word about his talent.

iv) There’s only one category of people for whom Beks has a certain liking: the Jewish. Firstly, quite rationally, he’s irritated by anti-Semitism in the country where there are almost no Jews. But he’s a philo-Semite (also in a very lukewarm way, though, like in everything) chiefly because, as I’ve already said, his father didn’t want to hide Jews during the war. In general, in their home prevailed – as he put it himself – “a mild, moderate, parochial anti-Semitism”.

Influenced by their parents, some people become sworn anti-Semites, although they’ve never seen a Jew with their own eyes. Others (like him) all their lives will feel a kind of remorse for what they saw at home in their childhood.

c. As for other “serious matters”, he’s an atheist, as far as I know, and we never talk about God.

d. However, I know well, and have already said it, why there’s such a frequent motive of death in his paintings. Because contrary to God, in

death Beks strongly believes. So strongly that he thinks only about it. He fears death so much that he's got no rest whatsoever. He thinks about death like neurotic natures with obsessive tendencies.

He's confided in me (but secretly, because his fear of being ridiculed doesn't let him talk about it aloud and in public) that he's going to have one of his fingers preserved after his death. He hopes to be restored to life from this finger in three hundred years' time, when the mechanism of life formation has been explained, resurrections have become possible and death has ceased to exist.

XIII). Where do his painting visions come from?

His inquisitive, business-like approach and an intelligent, introspective mind don't change the fact that Beks himself isn't able to answer this question. That's paradoxical, but true. He claims that he can simply see them. That they appear for a fraction of a second under his closed eyelids, and then he just tries to paint them, without analysing or pondering where they came from.

In the first period of our acquaintance this explanation didn't satisfy me. When I tried to pump him about it, he put emphasis on the formal side of his paintings (as he'd previously done in press interviews). He stressed the composition and technical problems which preoccupied him while he was creating. He emphasized the role played by the line in relation to colours and the shape of the hardboard on which he painted.

Listening to him, I was seized by contradictory feelings. Sometimes I believed him. At such moments I felt stupid and crude, because I hadn't immediately grasped that this was what the whole thing was about. It even seemed to me that my duty was to attack the audience myself for "not understanding anything". I then wrote a short text, which accompanied the exhibition: Beksinski – "Painting Without Meaning". In the article I gave the audience to understand in an oblique, but clear way that they were

imbeciles who couldn't see that it was about almost-abstraction, about "lines and colours", in a word, about purely formal searches.

Sometimes, quite to contrary, just like many people before me, I would give in to the reality: this painting contained an emotional, intellectual and aesthetic charge, which went far beyond poor searches of abstractionists.

On such occasions my annoyance turned against Beks. I called him a buffoon. I thought that he was playing a certain role and that behind the empty talk about allegedly purely painting solutions there was a wound, a call, a mystery, which altogether would explain the "content" of his paintings. Giving vent to this suspicion in my talks with Beks I tried to reveal the truth, to find that mysterious call and describe in words that tragic message. Asking him countless questions, I hoped to make him voluntarily unveil the mystery or solve it by being careless.

Today I understand it was a waste of time.

For the problem doesn't lie in Beks's sincerity or his hypocrisy. Neither does it lie in the mistake allegedly committed by the audience that excessively "interprets" this painting. Because the audience is right. It's not mistaken discovering Beks's feelings, meanings and references in the paintings. Which doesn't change the fact that Beks also tells the truth. No, he doesn't put on a show when he claims that the only thing he's preoccupied with while painting is the colours and their location on a flat surface, limited by the shape of the hardboard and the size of the frames.

But how come that both sides say opposite things, and at the same time they are both right?

There are two characters in Beks.

The first, the conscious one sees the surrounding reality as it is. He's a fluent painting technician, a very talented professional. That's the one who comments and gives interviews. In his paintings, this Beks sees purely painting problems to be overcome, forms, colours and lines to be arranged in a most harmonious way. This Beks simply wants to paint a picture without

a painting mistake. He doesn't store any mystery in himself, any personal or collective tragedy that he would like to transfer onto the painting. He doesn't know and doesn't want to know about the mysterious world, filled with anxiety and drama, which these forms, lines and colours form in his paintings. There's no point asking him about it. His only problem is how to make a good painting.

The other Beks, the subconscious one, is a visionary made up of neuroses, obsessions, fears, but also of the whole history and culture of the country in which he lives; of the Polish martyrological tradition, apocalyptic premonitions and art filled with symbols; of all those Witkacy, Grotowski, Abakanowicz or Kantor; of Auschwitz, Treblinka and other Polish horrors. This Beks is almost completely ignored by the first one, who only lets him use his hands to, sort of unknowingly, sneak into a painting.

That's why only the observation of these paintings, the knowledge of Polish culture and history these paintings are imbued with and the psychoanalysis of Beks himself could tell us something about his internal, subconscious world.

The observation of Beks's paintings is a simple matter. Everybody can check what I'm saying by simply looking at and comparing the paintings. As for Polish culture and history, the question is disputable. Disputable, because if you asked Beks about their influence on his painting, he would answer there's none, quoting his irrefutable argument that he poorly knows the history of Poland, that he's never seen Kantor or Grotowski, and for example that he hates Szajna and Abakanowicz. If he didn't put it this way, he would put it another way, but the result would be exactly the same.

Such an argument doesn't seem to be decisive, though. I know the ways Polish culture and history imperceptibly permeate into people's consciousness, and especially their sub consciousness. These are often casual, roundabout and twisting paths. The very fact that Beks can't specify the moment, the date, the event, the circumstance in which one or another element of Polish culture and history entered his mind doesn't mean

anything. If somebody, even a recluse, has lived in a given country for fifty seven years, he's at every turn inevitably exposed to its culture and history, through the radio, television, press, books ..., without even realizing it.

Besides, my own previous experience seems to suggest that Beks is a thoroughly Polish painter. As a proof it's enough to quote the success that he achieved in Poland and enormous difficulties I encounter when trying to make him popular in the West (not only in France). It's as if he immediately, spontaneously fit into Polish mentality, which has been shaped by the culture and history. Beks's mentality has been formed in the same way. That's why in Poland Beks has had a well-established position for years, while in the West it's no way forward, although from the professional, painting and technical point of view Beks knocks spots off ninety nine out of one hundred western painters.

Yes, but I defend myself against such a claim (and this is the second reason why the overwhelming influence of Polish culture and history on Beks's painting is a disputable issue). Because if this painting was influenced solely by Polish culture and history and didn't have any links to the worldwide culture, my efforts to promote Beks in the West would be *ipso facto* doomed to failure. Actually, I claim that Beks can be understood by every person around the world and recognized by an Eskimo as well as a Canadian or an Arab, as he's universal. And I don't have the slightest intention to give up my efforts to show him to the whole world.

Finally, as for the psychoanalysis of Beks, I know that nobody would undertake one. In this note, I myself - an amateur-dilettante, have tried to suggest its few elements. However, I can't go any further, as this would require the skills which I don't have. Anyway, Beks refuses to carry out any kind of self-analysis or to cooperate in the analysis of his sub consciousness carried out by someone who could do that. I've frequently talked about his neuroses. Well, he's afraid that he would become blocked if he solved the mystery of his painting or if somebody solved and revealed it to him. He fears that the spring which gives him momentum would break.

Coming back to the main topic, that is, my theory of “two Beks”: essentially, nobody makes a mistake and nobody lies. But everybody talks about somebody else:

Beks talks about his conscious “I”, about what this conscious “I” feels when he’s painting and what it aims at, whereas the audience thinks about subconscious Beks, with his profound feelings, messages, references and tendencies for universal, and especially Polish meanings. Beks is wrong to sneer at the audience, maintaining that it doesn’t understand his solely formal and painting approach to work. The audience is mistaken in its belief that Beks is a hypocrite, who deliberately hides his tragic soul and a deep, humanistic thought behind the alleged formalism.

The misunderstanding results from the fact that for an ordinary mortal it’s hard to believe that the author of such powerful paintings may not know what the source of their strength is. Just like it’s hard to imagine (which I mentioned above) that the same man, indifferent to nearly everything, can create paintings with such a gamut of feelings that they simply howl. Because it’s impossible to imagine such a split of two characters in one person. How come this conscious, emotionally cool and aesthetically formalistic nature doesn’t know the unconscious, frisky, powerful and emotional one, and even forbids itself to explore its mechanisms and springs?

Yet I repeat and have no doubts about it: Beks doesn’t lie. Pestering him with questions is pointless. I didn’t manage to find out anything by asking him endless questions for weeks and recording everything on a record-player. The journalists having interviews with him didn’t achieve much, either. Dziworski also didn’t go any further, although he was going to give Beks all his remunerations “for ten minutes of a sincere talk” (preferably in hypnosis ...). The conscious Beks talks about his profession and carries it out like every other professional: he’s interested solely in practical, technical and formal issues. As for the rest, the human side, the general contents, the atmosphere or visions, he’s only a tool in the hands of a higher being, that is to say, the other Beks, deeply hidden in his sub consciousness.

Anyway, isn't it the same case with other great artists?

XIV). What does he look like?

Since, quite unintentionally, I'm making a portrait of Beks, I guess I must finish with something I should have started with according to the principles of logic: his physical appearance.

He's probably 187 or 188 cm tall, he's got narrow shoulders, but a wide face and a big head. His one leg is shorter than the other one by a few centimetres, so after standing up, he walks with a limp for a moment.

When, as a child, he was messing about with a bullet, he got a piece of his thumb and index finger ripped off ... just a moment ... Was it the right or left hand? I can't say. I must check it when I see him today's evening⁴.

His eyes are dark brown, almost black. I prefer him in glasses; he's got about four or five pairs, which he keeps changing all the time. Whenever he takes them off, his look makes me feel uneasy: there's some severity in it, while in glasses he seems to smile constantly. Anyway, when he's speaking, he smiles very often. Nearly all the time.

XV). The most important thing I've forgotten about: he shares with my wife the awful mania of interrupting me in a mid-word, and then doesn't allow me to speak.

Summing up:

Have I said everything? And are the things I've said a faithful reflection of reality? – I ask myself. For what is important in a portrait are the lighting and tones, and not wrinkles and warts. Well, I've often given priority to what is spectacular and protruding, and passed over in silence what might be shallow, but thick and broad. To justify myself I can say that sketching this portrait of Beks, I improvised with one word leading to another, without

weighing their mutual proportions and relations; I just wrote what crossed my mind. One day I'll have to come back to this note, this time measuring the light, the distinctiveness of features and their shadows more precisely.⁵

For the truth is that everything I said is pure truth, but the final result of my account may not necessarily be the truth.

¹ Trompe l'oeil – a kind of painting the accuracy of which imitates photography

² I'm writing this postscript in 1995, that is, nearly ten years later. Beks broke off our contract. Since at that moment I possessed nearly 50 paintings which hadn't been paid yet, he agreed to give them to me as compensation (because in the meantime the said compensation had increased from 25 to 50 paintings). However, he flatly refused to respect the second part of my compensation, namely my permanent right to purchase 5 paintings a year at an unchanged price of 8400 francs for thirty years. So, all my faint deliberations on the contradictions, the need for consistency and internal conflicts of Beks didn't stand the test of time. The solution he adopted was much more simple and trivial.

³ "Let there be a war all over the world if only the Polish countryside was peaceful" – an excerpt from the famous Polish drama by Stanisław Wyspiański "Wedding" – *translator's note*.

⁴ I've checked: it's his left hand.

⁵ Done.

REALITY, 19TH JULY 1986, WARSAW

After tender hugs the grey reality reminds of its existence again. And I've told myself so many times: if not particular gestures, then general attitudes are never a result of a chance or misunderstanding. It's not enough to explain things to each other to make the other one change for the better. The real character, inborn aggressiveness, deep egoism and invariable business soon come out to surface. My raptures over the improved relations with Beks and the joy of the newly found liking lasted a mere three days. Yesterday I came to him to wait for the arrival of boxes in which the paintings would be transported to Paris.

In the morning I paid for them and gave a generous bribe to Ms Kania, a clerk from Hartwig company, which had nailed the said boxes together.

Waiting for the boxes, quite by chance I come across a small piece of paper, which lies on Beks's desk. It contains measurements given to a carpenter from Hartwig. I recognize the handwriting of Rymsza, who was told by Beks to make this note. I compare it with the note that I made myself after measuring all the paintings. And what do I find? an aberration. The boxes were supposed to be wider by 2.5 cm than the paintings, so as to avoid any risk in case it turned out they were not exactly rectangular. Well, reading the sheet of paper that Rymsza gave to the carpenter, I discover that he forgot to mention the safety margin. Beks, in turn, forgot to check what Rymsza had written. In the best case scenario the boxes will be fitted to the millimetre, while in the worst case, that is to say if the carpenter makes a mistake even by a mere 2 millimetres, it will be impossible to squeeze the paintings in. And if it's impossible to put the paintings into the boxes, the question is why I came from Paris, because my goal was nothing else but to take these paintings with me.

Attitudes are attitudes. As I said, contrary to particular gestures, they don't result from a chance, a mistake, a misunderstanding or

unconsciousness. This truth applies both to me and Beks. Because, like a trained dog reacting to the sound of a bell, with my obsession of a well-done job, I angrily hiss through my teeth, hardly realizing it:

- Other people's hands are light, but not sure.

Saying that I mean that I've done a stupid thing relying on both of them. Because now I'm facing a risk of an irreparable mistake. And since we are what we are, Beks on his part reacts as automatically as me, only in his own way: he immediately wants to shift the blame on his interlocutor or on third persons. In this case, on me and Rymsza. It begins to annoy me and I raise the tone. Succumbing to my provocative nature, with an increasing strength I emphasise their joint responsibility.

Seeing that he won't go very far here, Beks moves to another area, changing the role of a defendant for that of a prosecutor. Without rhyme or reason, he starts alluding to our telephone conversation as of 29th January 1986, during which I proposed to temporarily suspend our agreement. This happened in the period when the noose was tightening around my neck, so I thought it was an honourable solution, which at the same time let me care about his interests.

- You wanted to break off then? – he remarks.

- No, I didn't want to break off, only suspend our agreement, so that you could sell a few paintings in Poland. I didn't want you to suffer because of my disastrous financial situation. But I don't see any connection with what we were talking about a moment ago: about Rymsza and the boxes.

- No, you didn't want to break off? I don't understand why we wrote down our obligations in black and white only to withdraw from them the next day.

- I repeat that I see no connection between what you're reproaching me and the question of Rymsza and badly measured boxes. Besides, how many times shall I tell you that I've never wanted to break off, only suspend our agreement for some time till I catch my breath, without exposing you to losses at the same time. I proposed to return you a few paintings, six, as far

as I remember well, so you could sell them through Nyczek or through Wahl, and didn't have to share my financial problems. Actually, I tripped up myself because I wanted to provide my competitors with paintings. And I was ready to do all that because I didn't want to break off.

The atmosphere went to hell long time ago. The end of hugs and the end of assurances of mutual liking.

An hour later they bring the boxes. Not saying a word to each other, we immediately check them. Indeed, the carpenter made them to the millimetre. The boxes have no safety margin, but the paintings fit in. We barely managed to squeeze them in, but it's OK. Tension recedes.

The bile, even slightly dried, still stings, and the question still awaits an answer: where's the space for hope? How can I believe that a "sincere" talk will come of any use? How to believe that contradictions will disappear thanks to a dialogue?

We are what we are and even the best will is merely a thin layer, which cracks with the first pulsation of our inborn aggressiveness.

POLAND, 20TH JULY 1986, WARSAW

I don't feel like writing. If I continue these notes during my stay in Warsaw, I do it under compulsion, like one writes a composition set for homework during holiday.

That's because before I left for Poland, Ania asked me:

- Are you going to write there?

There was some encouragement in this question, but the main idea behind it was a manoeuvre, the meaning of which only I could guess: my writing would allow her to check what I was doing there. For example, to find out if by any chance a love affair didn't sneak into my schedule ... Well, I would certainly fail to mention it, but a detailed report on my activities in Warsaw might accidentally leave a trace ... the very fact of not writing would be meaningful in itself: it would mean that I might have spent nice moments in the arms of a young lady and had absolutely no need to drown my melancholy on the manuscript pages. In a word, it would mean that I had better things to do than smearing paper so as to forget a little bit about disappointments brought by existence.

So, I'm writing, writing. Trying to write. So that Ania can't say after my return:

- Sure. I should have expected that.

But what shall I write and how? What I can see here is sad and gloomy. All that fills me with apathy rather than an urge to write. I found Poland impoverished, shabby and covered with dust. The only mystery is: how come it hasn't collapsed yet?

A symbolic scene of road works in a street, with workers sitting on their tools, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes throughout the day is played non-stop. It's like a film stopped on a motionless set.

Minimum three times a day I travel across the city by taxi and each time we drive past a place where road works are being performed, probably started by MPK (Town Transport Service). It seems something is being built there, but I invariably see the workers drinking and smoking. When I happened to pass the place for the fourth time, the picture hadn't changed a jot. Except that at about three p.m. The workers' faces become radiant: they've already drunk seven bottles and smoked twenty cigarettes. Coming to Poland this time, I saw the same reality which prevailed at the time of Gierek, many years ago, in the period of an economic boom. It drove me to desperation whenever I came to visit my Parents.

- How do you work in this country? – I said irritated to my Father. – How do you work? At the building site of the hotel on the corner of Kościuszki Avenue, a skeleton of the building has stood for four years. I've never seen a single worker there. Everything's rusting and rotting. You're throwing money away through the window. And you're getting bogged down in debts.

My Father took these reproaches as a personal insult. This saint man, calm in every situation and kind towards everybody, was indignant when I criticized "our people".

- You don't understand anything! – he answered outraged.

Which was supposed to mean: "You've lost Polish identity. You no longer understand this country and its efforts. We're building great Poland, modern and strong".

- You're throwing away money through the window – I insisted. – a profit on work is usually 10-15 per cent. Certainly on condition that it's excellent quality. And the quality of yours is such that not only you are drowning the 15%, which you could earn, but you're also wasting the capital you borrowed from the Germans and Americans, which one day you'll have to pay back. You're throwing money down the drain.

- Yes, yes! – my Father cut the discussion, shivering with irritation. – We're throwing money down the drain and building great Poland! That's enough!

My brother Anthony, an opportunist, as usual, nodded ascent:

- Peter no longer understand anything ...

But Peter wasn't mistaken at all. While there's no certainty that an investment will bring any profit on even best work, it is sure that a constant production of trash leads straight to bankruptcy. Both gentlemen had to repent at the beginning of the eighties. My brother Anthony was the first to do it, with an embarrassed smirk. It didn't cost him much, it was enough to look around: the shops were so empty that no one even made any effort to cover their absolute poverty with tomato sauce tins. There was virtually nothing on the shelves. So, admitting I was right was an easy thing. Very easy.

After my brother it was my Father's turn:

- I admit, we've made a mistake.

It was one of his last confessions before death. This remarkable man ... Today I'd admit he was right a hundred times, even if I know he wasn't. I'd do that just for the sake of his dreams about great Poland. If only his dreams could come true. If only I could bring him back to life... Unfortunately, thrice unfortunately: it was me who was right. And I'm still right.

Poland has a debt of thirty billion dollars not only towards western banks. And how much does it owe to the Soviet Union? Nobody knows. Only a gigantic, collective effort for dozens of years, joint work of the whole society, highest quality work might perhaps get Poland out of this mess. And what actually happens is that some people are arguing about "free trade unions", and the others are drinking beer.

Why should I write then? What should I say?

That the demo-liberal propaganda lies, reducing this Polish deep, complicated helplessness solely to the absurd of the communist system? That I feel like screaming with fury, as all the blame is shifted to “the lack of freedom”? Shall I write that his country is heading for disaster, because it’s paralysed by alcohol, by absence at work after drink-sodden nights, by the “I couldn’t care less” attitude, “if I worked or if I lay, I must get my weekly pay”, by the lack of professional skills or an elementary ability to organize one’s work? That the lack of free trade unions has nothing to do with this nightmare?

Shall I write it? Say it? To whom? Both the patriots and the demo-liberal propaganda have their ears plugged.

- It’s a simple matter – once told me Jean Offredo, a journalist. - It would be enough to let the private initiative develop a little bit, and Poland would soon solve its problems.

This man is the editor-in-chief of the morning bulletin on the first TV channel and a specialist in the field of Eastern European countries. Given the popularity of this channel, its influence is enormous. Well, such people shape the public opinion in the West. Such simplified, Manichean axioms are used to wash the brains of masses in the West. When I quoted to him the number of hours which haven’t been worked due to the general hangover, the number of products with such serious defects that nobody wants to buy them, the number of delays in all kinds of deliveries; when I reminded him of the inability to observe the basic European standards in industrial production, of the impossibility of selling any machines to countries like for example France or Germany, because they said machines are good for nothing, which forces Poland to barter with Bangladesh or Nigeria, that bastard listened to me in silence, absent-minded, with an expression of deep boredom on his face. He was slurping champagne that I’d bought him, and must have thought, just like my Father and brother before: -

-What an idiot! He doesn't understand that it would be enough ... -
Besides, I wouldn't be surprised if it turned out that he's their man.

So, this is my holiday composition, dear wife. As you can see, there's no mention of sexual feats. This story doesn't make your heart beat with excitement, like in a beautiful story of bedroom adventures. If anything, it can only make one impotent.

BOGDAN, 22ND JULY 1986

A small sketch in vitriol, to enrich my collection of portraits: Bogdan Michalski. A strapping fellow, a handsome mug, holding his head high. A refined intellectual, who knows Witkacy inside out – he's written a lot of philosophical works on him. A lady killer; one day in Zurich he tried to seduce Ania. She was there at a Sherrer's show. She couldn't forgive him for that:

- That's a bit too far! Try to sleep with a friend's wife ... What a pig!

A judgment without appeal, despite the interested party's wooing efforts to apologise somehow. During the exhibition I engaged him as an assistant. He was supposed to deal with public relations, because I shrugged at the thought that I'd have to face the audience and, surrounding myself with a defence wall, I wanted to avoid it at any cost.

Bogdan disappointed me in his role. All days he spent picking up girls who visited the exhibition, and in the evenings he secretly emptied bottles of my champagne in their company. Actually, he didn't do anything.

- Bogdan! – I told him irritated. – I beg you, talk to that guy over there, at the back of the room. He's an important critic.

He answered hesitatingly:

- In a moment, first I'll buy some flowers, because the ones in the vase have already withered.

Then he was gone for a couple of hours. On coming back he smiled tentatively and apologized:

- I had a crisis. Women have a period, after all, don't they?

On the day before the end of the exhibition I was absolutely fed up with him.

I thanked him then and, having paid everything to the last penny, I felt relieved. And it didn't matter that the very next day I and Wojtek had to transport the paintings only by ourselves.

After a while of suffering from nothing more than injured pride, he came back a week later to find out why he'd got kicked out:

- Well, go ahead! Come on, I'm listening! What are your accusations? Go ahead.

His aggressive tone was filled with hope, which made me finally break off with him. Although until then I'd had sincere friendship for him, his humiliation forced me to finally say goodbye.

For if I'd held out my hand to him at that moment, the rest of the time he would have spent searching for an opportunity to humiliate me even more painfully. But how could I explain it to him? And what for, anyway? When he'd stopped being one of my close friends, I had no reason to put forward my grudges. I didn't answer anything then. And, as it turned out, I was right.

Because behind my back, Bogdan prepares a whole "operation".

First, he meets with Beks in Warsaw. Indeed, I introduced them to each other a few months before and Beks took to him. Why wouldn't he like an educated, intelligent man with good manners? So Bogdan begins to vigorously emphasise the passion he has for Beks's talent. Beks rises to the bait and sells him one painting at half the price.

- I wanted to have it so much – Bogdan assures him – so much!

He thanks effusively, nearly kissing his hands.

- I've bought a new flat in Warsaw – he explains. – Your painting will be its first and most important decoration.

A week later he takes the painting out of Poland to Switzerland and frantically looks for a buyer. He hopes to find one easily thanks to the addresses he collected during my exhibition. And this is where he's

wrong. For you can be an expert in Witkacy's art and a philosopher, but in the trade of art something else matters. Unfortunately, I know it too well ... In a word, nobody wants to buy the painting from him, so Bogdan comes to Paris, assures me of his friendship and ... proposes me the sale of the painting.

Aha!- I think. – Ah!

In the evening I call Beks.

- Is it you who's sold your painting to Michalski?

- What? – he wants me to repeat.

The connection is poor, so we can hardly hear each other.

- Is it you who's sold your painting to Michalski? – I repeat.

- Yeee.. s- he answers anxiously.

- He's brought it to Switzerland and wants to palm it off.

- Let him go to hell! – Beks says angrily.

So I turn the knife in the wound with delight.

- But you know that there's nothing I fear more than competition and secondary market.

- I thought it was for this collection. He assured me of that.

Beks wriggles like an eel with embarrassment. For even if he had a right to sell this painting (which I didn't want), he knows that putting it into circulation without my agency, he sort of puts a stick in the spokes.

Discovering this transaction and revealing it to him (in moderate words so that they will be more painful), I take my revenge on both of them at the same time. Beks is ashamed before me and finds himself in a false situation, because he might have at least asked about my opinion, whereas Bogdan is in deep trouble, as Beks for the rest of his life is going to be offended with him. Most probably because Michalski gave the game away to

me rather than because he lied to him, claiming that the painting was to decorate his own flat.

And I'm right, as Beks will never again see Bogdan in his place. Especially that Bogdan is gone and for a long time doesn't pay Beks what he owes to him. However, before he vanishes into thin air somewhere in Europe, he takes Glinicki with him and goes to Alicja Wahl, who's got a gallery in Warsaw and still has some old paintings by Beks for sale. Glinicki is a photographer; among others, he made me ektachromes for all Beks's paintings owned by Polish collectors and museums.

On the way to Wahl, Bogdan carelessly gives his plan away to Glinicki:

- You'll make for me ektachromes of Beks's paintings which Wahl has in her gallery. I'll send them to many people I know in Switzerland, France and the States. They are excellent and I'm sure it'll be easy to find buyers. Having shown the ektachromes, I'll ask for advance payment. For this money I'll buy the paintings from Wahl, then I'll send them abroad and we'll get four times as much. I'll show you how to carry out a slick financial operation without even taking out the wallet.

- Bravo! – says Glinicki, who's an intriguer and looks forward to telling Beks about everything, just to make him mad.

At the very beginning, however, Glinicki communicates the plan to Wahl, who immediately gives the information to Beks, who finally informs me. Each of them acts hoping to make the other one more irritated than he or she was himself. At last, the soup is spilled and Wahl kicks Bogdan out. There will be no ektachromes, no advance money or brilliant financial operations.

But before Beks began to see Bogdan in his place and before I broke off any relations with the latter, Bogdan advised Beks: - Peter doesn't agree to your selling the painting through Nyczek to the museum in Cracow, does he? Sell it in secret then. Peter won't find out about anything. In any case, surely not from me.

Because at that time Bogdan still called himself my friend.

Now, on top of everything: while putting my papers in order (an exceptionally literary moment, which is a starting point for many novels and stories), I come across Bogdan's letter written during the exhibition to one of the friends in the States – Hoffman, a philosopher. He forgot to send it and left it on my desk. He writes in it (I quote it word for word): “Hello Old Buddy, I'm very busy. I'm organizing a big exhibition of Beksiński's paintings in Paris. I've already made loads of money ...”. Indeed, he's earned cash. Loads – oh, yes! If Ania found out how much I paid him, she'd kill me. But what made me most furious was the word “I'm organizing”.

Well, I've lost a friend. A refined intellectual, a charming companion, just like Ściegienny (also a philosopher, what a coincidence!) and Louse (a son of a professor in philosophy). All of them felt like doing business. Philosopher Bacon is also said to have had a hand in business, which didn't do him much good. So tell me, my Friend, doesn't money spoil man? Starting with philosophers.

TREASURE, 27TH JULY 1986

Who am I toiling so hard for? Who's going to get the treasure, which I collected with so much effort, passion and tears?

I have no children, so my collection will enrich one of the museums which today don't even bother to answer my letters.

It's going to be proud and blow its own trumpet ... Its director, putting the blame on his predecessors, with a clear conscience will ramble on the merits of the donator, "an unattainable example of love for art". I can already hear him with my ears of my future corpse.

Collectors in search of a good investment, museums affected by sclerosis because of their strict obedience to only one policy, servile and arrogant critics, sectarian and always "up to their ears with work" culture branch clerks, and all of you who run after the already recognized big names and who are blind to real beauty and insensitive to great art: I hate you. And yet it's you who will reap the rewards of my efforts

My only comfort is the thought that life in itself is a misunderstanding.

STRATEGY, 27TH JULY 1986

A word to the wise is enough.

I. Beks suggests I should have a few teeth removed.

A. – One day you'll have to decide: to have them extracted or not.

If you have the exhibition this autumn, even if it's going to be painful, fix the prices on a level that everybody can reach: from five to seven thousand dollars maximum. This way you'll check whether it sells or not. Apart from that, put all the paintings for sale, even if it's hard to part with some of them.

- Frankly speaking – I reply laughing – you advise me to have not one, but two teeth pulled out: the first one is the best paintings. The second one – the prices. One tooth extracted from my “I – collector”, and the other one – from my “I – trader”. Let it be then. They will be equal to each other: they will both have aching jaws. OK.

I say OK, although what Beks says isn't any more logical than the opposite claim, the one which I obeyed so far. For I know that, as a matter of fact, nobody knows. And every reasonable man knows that nobody knows. Neither they nor me, nor even any specialist or clairvoyant. I've checked it and had proofs of it ten times. Even those who speak with a confident face (especially these ones) do not know. Buyers' reactions at this stage of promoting Beks's painting, that is to say, at the very beginning, are unpredictable. It may turn out that accepting Beks's logic, exactly opposite to the one I've followed so far, I'll trip myself up. Perhaps I'll be biting my nails in my financial coffin, meditating: if I'd continued prestige exhibitions, today I might not lie here.

Because Beks isn't in a hurry. He doesn't mind a cautious policy of little steps. But I have to cover in a short time the whole distance which he's been doing in Poland for the last twenty years ... the shortest way is always the one leading through the peaks. Of course, if I miss only once, I'll find myself five

thousand metres below with my neck broken. However, if I start to omit them, I'll have another twenty years of running ahead of me. Well, in the best case scenario and provided that I sort out my current financial problems, the money which Ania brings home and which enables the promotion of Beks will finish in two, three years. And later? Looking at things from this perspective, it's not so sure that my hastened strategy of prestigious exhibitions is a mistake and that the policy of little steps guarantees a success.

But if you once got your head beaten with a truncheon and somebody had anticipated it, next time you're dying for a piece of his advice. The advice which, I know it perfectly well, has all chances to turn out wrong this time. However, the need for "the daddy who knows", "an expert", "a guide" is greater than common sense.

I'll follow Beks's advice then, so that nobody will ironically tell me in the future: "A word to the wise is enough". I'll put up all the paintings for sale. OK. Although ... How shall I do it in practice? This means taking the risk of losing "Chernobyl", "Umbrella" or "Figure Walking Away Amid Leaves". That's preposterous. It's better to give up the whole enterprise. Shall I become a trader ready to sell everything he has? Why not cut off the index finger in my left hand and sell it too, if they pay well?

I'll fix the prices which are affordable to everyone. OK. But this means that "Sun with the Sea" might be sold at 40 000 francs ... That's even more ridiculous than the idea of putting up the best paintings for sale. Establishing such low prices is tantamount to lowering the rank of these paintings, which right now are worth ten times more. No way, I can follow Beks's hints only up to a point. I'll fix the prices within the range of 7 – 12 thousand dollars. Anyway, that's the advice of Carpentier, the owner of the gallery in Bac Street. I've learnt his lesson by heart: "If these paintings are to be sold, they will sell at such prices".

Although ... I also remember that among different, frequently contradictory opinions which that art dealer didn't spare me there was

the one saying that “a great painter is the one who sells well”; that “the greatness of an artist is determined by both his talent and the crave of the audience for his paintings”; that “people will crave for a painting if its purchase is within their financial possibilities”. Yes, I know all that by heart, just like I know many other things. But all that is only logic and intelligence. That is to say, empty talk, which weights the least, and in any case not more than its opposite. Those who make use of such tools are as dim-witted as an uneducated peasant.

- Suppose I accept your view and fix the prices at a reasonable level, how shall I explain their drastic reduction at the very next exhibition? – I ask Beks, withdrawing from my previous stance when I too hastily admitted he was right.

- Announce in public that last year you put up for sale the best paintings, belonging to collectors and the painter himself; that you excluded them from sale at the exhibition which had a purely prestigious character; that now you’re putting up the usual production and, therefore, establish the prices at their real level. Put up for sale two old, not necessarily best paintings at prohibitive prices, to make people associate the age of my paintings with their price.

- Talk, prophesy – I say half-ironically, half-seriously. – So you’re saying that ...

- I’m saying what I’ve already told you three times: if it sells, you’ll know what to stick to. And if it doesn’t, you’ll have time to adopt another method. Because if doesn’t come off, I’m still ready to sell you six best paintings a year for your private collection. However, I’ll come back to Nyczek’s gallery and to Wahl, and again, I’ll be living off what they have sold here, in Poland. And you’ll stop getting into a hole without a bottom.

You might say: what reasonable words! And saying that, talk rubbish. Because in order to stand upright, that logic immediately needs to be supported by another, stronger one. And the said specialist, in order to remain a specialist, needs another specialist, greater than himself. I soon get

a tangible proof of that. – Don't you think that the reduction of prices may scare people away? – I insist. – That they will say: "He's selling off everything for pennies. It's not the right moment to buy, because the price is dropping".

- Yees, yees ... Indeed. Frankly speaking, you've blocked your way with those horrendous prices. That's true. Maybe you should write some kind of an introduction to explain ... You'd have to edit it well ... Why don't you ask somebody for advice? ... Yes, you need to ask for advice ...

Sure, "you need to ask somebody for advice" ... Who? "The daddy who knows", "a specialist", "an expert"? Certainly.

In its essence, his logic is worth mine. His reasoning is well constructed, because we are both able to build iron justifications. Deep down inside, however, we both know perfectly well that while reason is a brilliant invention, experience has never harmed anybody and reasoning has the advantage of appealing to the lowly, the truth remains that an answer to the basic, strategic question (what policy should be adopted?) depends solely on the temperament, risk, chance and luck.

But as usual, I stray away from the subject and make digressions.

Coming back then to the strategy for the autumn exhibition, *summa summarum* I'll adopt the one proposed by Beks.

a). I'll adopt it for other reasons, though.

I accept it, because I've got no money to insist on having my own way (which, paradoxically, is more effective to my mind, as it allows reaching the goal sooner).

I also accept it because it's established by Beks himself. This way I've got a burden off my chest: I won't bear responsibility for the failure of my whole enterprise. Certainly, it's not him but me who'll lose anyway. He'll always fall on all fours, as his renown in Poland is established and he'll always find purchasers for his paintings. But at least nobody will accuse me when we all lie in graves: "Beksiński failed to reach the world level, remaining a local,

solely Polish painter, because he was badly promoted. It's the fault of that idiot Dmochowski. He's the one who spoiled everything owing to his excessive pride, his stupidity and his lack of experience".

b). Secondly, I'm not going to follow all of Beks's advice. I'll exclude three paintings from sale: "Umbrella", "Figure Walking Away Amid Leaves" ... No, I'll exclude five: "Umbrella", "Figure Walking Away Amid Leaves", "Car", "Chernobyl", and "Going to the Polls".

As for the prices, I'll also fix the level higher than he proposes, from 7 to 12 000 dollars. I am what I am, and that's it.

B. – Let's talk about frames – I ask Beks. – What do you think of it?

- Don't have rich frames made - he hated the ones I'd ordered for the previous exhibition.

- Once and for all accept standard frames for standard production, which will be put up for sale at standard prices.

- In a word, your frames?

- No, I don't think so. I was in a hurry and made any old thing. My frames take away rather than add anything to my paintings.

At this point I also nod assent, but I feel like I will only partially follow his advice. Baroque painting needs baroque frames – I say to myself. I'll order a few pompous ones, after all.

- And what about advertising? – I ask Beks. – What does the Master think? Well, you've already been right once, so I guess the second time we must assume you're right again. I'm listening. I'm going to make postcards, slides and the poster myself, but I can't afford a brochure.

For the first time, Beks urges me to make expenses:

- I think a catalogue is necessary. Modest, with one reproduction. But it must also contain explanations and data on the exhibited paintings: dimensions, technique etc. A three-fold sheet of paper will be enough.

II. Well then. As I've finally established the strategy, now it's enough to "roar into the battle". It isn't a simple thing, though.

A. Because where shall I find money for all that?

If I'm supposed to make something that resembles a brochure (and if I make one, it must be serious, and not a three-fold piece of paper), if I'm to make postcards, slides and the poster, print the pricelist, order a few pompous custom-made frames, if I have to renew and repaint the gallery and repair the bars (this repair is the *sine qua non* condition for the conclusion of an agreement between me and Louse), where shall I find the money for all that? Where? For the nth time I recapitulate the cost estimate:

1) Publications:

- a) postcards (12 x 1000) 2 000 francs
- b) poster (2 000) 1000 francs
- c) brochure (the real one) (1 000) 40 000 francs
- d) slides (12 x 100) 6000 francs
- e) invitations (1 000) 8 000 francs
- f) putting up the posters 3 000 francs
- g) sending the invitations 3 000 francs
- h) leaflet with Beks's CV 5 000 francs
- i) pricelist 3 000 francs

2) Materials

- a) frames (5) 10 000 francs
- b) repairs of bars 3 000 francs
- c) gallery repainting 3 000 francs
- d) transport of paintings 3 000 francs

- 3) Cocktail party
 - a) alcohols 5 000 francs
 - b) staff 1 000 francs
- 4) Exhibition insurance 6 000 francs
- 5) Rental of gallery 40 000 francs

In total: circa 170 000 francs

Four times less than the exhibition in 1985. There's been some progress made, hasn't it?

However, it doesn't change the fact that I don't know how to leap over such a high obstacle.

B. But money is only one difficulty. The time is running out. I've got just a month ahead of me to prepare everything, as August is excluded. Firstly, because everybody leaves Paris at this time, and secondly, because we are also going to Spain, to Ida Smith. Ania wouldn't agree to sacrifice holiday for preparing the exhibition, which she doesn't support herself. So there's only a month left and nothing more. And the last year's experience taught me that if you want to do something carefully, you need at least three months.

I have no other way out, though: it must come off.

OPTIMISM, 28TH JULY 1986

I'm leaving Warsaw this afternoon at 14.30, having an impression that the stay was successful. And here's the report:

1. First and foremost, my relations with Beks have relaxed. A few purifying talks (one of which is recorded on the tape) did us good. Although there was no frontal clash, each of us managed to vent the excess of the grudges that had built up in him. What was better and more difficult: at last, we understood the proportions, relations and crisis moments when our obsessions come to the surface. Our trip to the National Museum in Warsaw, during which we shared our impressions on the paintings, let me understand better some of Beks's claims, which had previously seemed to me muddled or groundless. As usual, throughout my stay Beks wasn't working and at the end he needed my presence to fill the emptiness as much as I needed his so as to satisfy my fascination with this intriguing and irritating man. I spent the time in their home as if they were my own family, sharing with them almost all meals.

- Don't you argue anymore? – his wife asked when she came into the room to invite us to the table.

- Come on, come to the table. Everything's ready.

2. Out of 20 paintings which I'm taking with me 12 are of extraordinary beauty. Especially the ones that I call "Umbrella", "Figure Walking Away Amid Leaves" I sent them to Paris without difficulties. I only had to wait four hours at the customs, because the computer had crashed and then the American Embassy demanded priority for its diplomatic baggage.

3. "Other people's hands are light, but uncertain" – I told Beks with a note of deliberate provocation when I'd discovered that the boxes for paintings which Rymsza had ordered at Hartwig, quoting them the dimensions

specified by Beks, had been made without any safety margin. I achieved the intended effect:

- I'm not to blame for it – Beks started to defend himself fiercely. – It's Rymsza who ordered them.

It's partly true. Although I hoped he'd explain everything to Rymsza and look after him. Besides, it's such a great pleasure to hit Beks where it's going to hurt the most. That is to say, where he's the most demanding for himself: in the field of a craftsman's reliability in workmanship. For he's one of the few people I know, apart from Delpoio, who can organize and do his work like a real professional. Fortunately, despite no safety margin we had no problems squeezing the paintings into the boxes. To the millimetre, that's true, but they fitted. Actually, the mistake of Rymsza (for which Beks is partly responsible, as he didn't look after Rymsza) saved me two days, which I'd otherwise have had to spend matching the boxes to the dimensions of paintings.

For you must know, my Friend, that in Poland you can't have boxes custom-made according to specified dimensions. If you don't demand that the box should be 2 or 3 centimetres bigger than the object which is supposed to be contained in it, you're heading for trouble. They will make it for you in a form of a trapezium, with nails protruding on each side. Without a safety margin the object won't be squeezed inside. However, if they make an allowance for a safety margin, you'll have to fill it to the right dimensions yourself, so that the paintings won't fly in all directions. And this takes two days of hard, physical work. This time, despite the mistake Rymsza and Beks had made, the boxes didn't complicate my life.

4. I wheedled 110 drawings out of Beks – they go back to the years 1965-67. In a tense atmosphere, after a row, he felt almost compelled to succumb to my requests so as to avoid another clash. He then sold me 58 drawings at a ridiculous price of 50 dollars per a piece with payment due "in better times". Another 25 drawings he simply gave to me "cost and lost", as he put it. His miserliness and generosity are irrational and change like hatred and

love in my case: excessively and without any logic whatsoever. My collection of his drawings is now really big, because including the ones I managed to buy from him during my previous stay in Warsaw in 1985, it consists of about 150 pieces.

His wife grumbled:

- You've taken all our stuff away.

Luckily, she found out too late. Probably, Beks would have also withdrawn if the atmosphere of tender hugs hadn't followed previous tensions, thus making a return to point zero impossible. Because if Beks had withdrawn, he'd have lost his face and there would've been another friction, which I'd certainly publicize .

So I'm the owner of a huge collection, in which only some drawings from the years 1972-74 are missing, that is, the last ones he made. Because he hasn't drawn anything since 1974.

5. We've concluded a number of agreements and additional arrangements for our contract. As a collector I've lost a lot, because from now on Beks is going to take 25% of the annual production for himself. Speaking more clearly: he'll take the best paintings. This results from the provision in our contract which guarantees him this privilege, although until today I somehow managed to snatch everything he'd painted away from him.

I've benefited as a trader, though, because I've maintained the financial *status quo* from the end of 1991. So if I'm lucky and I find buyers for the paintings consigned for sale, it will be enough to pay Beks the wholesale price, without having to share the potential profit with him. This way I've got some chance to recover a financial balance without destroying my own collection, as I can limit myself only to the sale of paintings belonging to Beks.

6. Finishing the question of agreements:

I've been able to negotiate good conditions for the issue of the album with Arkady. What's more important though, I've managed to avoid making

myself definitely obliged before the end of October. That is to say, before I know the first results of my autumn exhibition.

Apart from that, I have Arkady in my grasp. My ektachromes are sort of a key to their success. If they want to make a serious album, they can't do without me. Out of 70 paintings which are to be reproduced, I'm the owner of 36. Beks pointed to them as the ones which must necessarily be included in the album.

7. I've recovered a bigger part of the cassettes with recordings of our conversations dating from 1984 and the beginning of 1985. Together with the cassettes I recovered their transcripts on paper, prepared by a Polish typist. Now I need months of work to edit everything and make it comprehensible. As for his utterances, Beks refused to help me. He's 57 and says he prefers to devote himself solely to painting. Nothing doing. But I've got the documents. Even not edited, not fully legible, they're going to be a source of valuable information for my followers. Especially that I find in the long run Beks was sincere in these talks, with just a few exceptions. The best proof of it is the fact that after two years, when he's unavoidably repeating himself, he doesn't contradict his own words. The recordings are therefore reliable and seem to reflect what Beks really is.

8. From Waniek, who's also a painter (last year I bought one of his paintings) and a friend of Beks, I've borrowed some of his correspondence with Beks dating from the years 1970-71. I'm going to start studying it in a moment, on the plane. I wonder if in these letters I'll find the same Beks that I know from our own correspondence: aggressive, suspicious, witty and insanely afraid of the Tax Office.

9. Glinicki gave me a bigger part of the black-and-white photographs of Beks's old works.

He made them to my order, partly in the museum in Wrocław, which houses the sculptures from Beks's youth, and partly from the negatives belonging to Beks himself, who for many years, on a regular basis photographed his works on a black-and-white film.

Handing me over the last photos, Glinicki announced triumphantly:

- Now you've got all Master's works in ektachromes and black-and-white pictures.

Yeah, sure! After we checked them with Beks, it turned out that 160 paintings (sic! 160) hadn't been reproduced at all by my photographer.

- Your passport to Bangladesh is still valid – I then told Glinicki.

Bangladesh is an expression I use (and unfortunately, I have frequent occasions to use it) to complain about the organization and the third-world quality of work done by various co-operators.

I then sent him back to work. He swore that during my next stay in Poland he'd provide me with the rest of black-and-white pictures. These photographs will let me have a look at Beks's works as a whole and find out how many paintings there are altogether. My documentation will be really complete, as on the reverse of each photo we put with Beks the date, technique, dimensions, purchaser's surname (if it was known) and any other commentaries Beks wanted to include. As an interesting side note, I can add that seeing the black-and-white photos, Beks quite vaguely recalled the date and colours of a particular painting. He hardly ever hesitated about its size, though.

10. I met with Dziworski and Dąbal (the cameraman for my film). The meeting took place "at the request of the interested parties" at Ela Nalewajek's party, during which I showed Janusz Porębski's video film and report about the exhibition vernissage. I didn't want to worsen our relations, which were bad enough, but I told Dziworski straight out that I no longer harboured any hope to have 3500 metres of the tape for my film back. I didn't believe him when he swore to return it. Like every meeting, also this one gave him an opportunity (actually that's why he asked me for it) to weasel some financial benefit out of me. This time he wanted me to send him the second part of the airline ticket, which I (let me repeat: I!) had bought for

him a year before, so that Lot would return him 2000 francs for excess luggage.

Also Dąbal didn't come to assure me of his friendship, but to put forward a business proposal. Polite, very "British" and nice, as usual, he proposed to sell me two Dutch paintings from the 17th century, which he had in Warsaw.

- So you want me to secretly take them out of Poland, yes? – I asked him.

I can swallow the fact that somebody naively mistakes me for an art expert and an experienced trader. That's preposterous, but at least flattering for me. However, the thought that anybody can suspect I would take the least risk of squandering all my endeavours by smuggling works of art drives me to despair.

11. Ania Szczypińska, my great friend, was away from Warsaw, so I spent evenings at Rymsza's place, listening to records and talking to him. I like him, because he can sometimes be funny, even if he's not very efficient in doing any kind of work entrusted to him and has numerous obsessions of a confirmed bachelor.

Anyway, in Warsaw I had an impression that from all sides I was surrounded with friendship, without which I find it hard to function when my wife is absent.

12. The weather was lousy, but it didn't matter, as most of the time I spent in taxis or at Rymsza's, Beks's or other people's places.

What's the conclusion of all that?

All in all, the stay in Poland was successful, because apart from what I described above, which was positive in itself, I leave knowing what I really want and have Beks's blessing to organise an exhibition geared chiefly towards sale. So, filled with optimism, I get on the plane at 14.30. There is only one reservation: I don't have a penny to make my plans come true.

COGNITION, 8TH AUGUST 1986, MADRID

It's simply an obsession that keeps pestering me: to thoroughly get to know a thing I'm talking about. Like every race with my own shadow, it's my private speciality. How to capture the truth, how to catch it if it's gone the moment it has appeared?

The simplest, but also the most stupid thing I can do on such an occasion is to tell myself that the truth is hidden in a thing which I haven't noticed yet; in a detail that escaped my attention; in a fact I still don't know. So I have to memorize one thing, learn the other thing, read a few more pages, get a few further dates, figures, names into my head ...

The truth must be here, I say to myself, nowhere else. When I finally find it, I'll pin it down and it will come to light in its entirety.

A lover of the encyclopaedia.

One usually admires what he is incapable of doing himself: like nine tenths of people, I have little ability to store knowledge. Although I sneer at it aloud, as a matter of fact I succumb to the same principle which rules the masses and allows the intellectual elite to dominate them: like any old caretaker, I consider someone intelligent if he remembers the distance between Moscow and Tokyo by heart and remembers when Bismarck died. I ridicule in vain this feature of my character: like a reader of "Paris Match", I judge the degree of knowing the truth by the number of memorized pieces of information.

And yet I'm sharp-witted enough to know that the truth is seldom contained in a fact or the accumulation of facts and that it seldom lasts long enough to be shown with a finger. The truth is not contained in things, but their mutual relations, their mutual proportions and their mutual movement versus time. Most frequently it's also temporary and lasts a fraction of a second, day or epoch. It comes into being only to decompose immediately

or in three hundred years' time. Just like those oily liquids shown to us at farmer's markets: for a second they form some figures and melt immediately, forming the other ones. So how can you find "the only", "unshakeable", "eternal" truth?

I'm saying all that to wheeze out the irritation that got stuck in my throat due to my own obsession. I collect facts as if it determined the truth which I could then pass on to the others as "incontrovertible"...

When I was working on the book *Premises for the Efficiency of International Agreements*, I had to read about ten thousand pages of various documents. And before I made 3 000 notes on them, I'd thought I couldn't say anything serious on the topic. When I started interviewing Beks, I also needed about a hundred hours of conversations recorded on the tape to get the impression that I knew something about him. That's why I recorded absolutely everything he was saying, even trivial remarks on the noise outside the window.

Well, who knows – my nature of an archivist told me – who knows, maybe this is where the truth is hidden and might escape me without leaving a trace if I don't record it?

The mind of a clerk, obsession with details, attention to precision; to thoroughly get to know the topic. And yet ... a line on paper, one sentence, a well chosen word, an ordinary gesture made within a fraction of a while, sentence or History, in a certain context, while following some goal may be a three times more obvious truth than bulky academic books.

For the truth is a human creation. Therefore, it depends on human plans. No matter if these are the plans of an individual or a group, one-day, epoch or eternal plans. In all these cases the truth is the function of a goal. This is the way it exists, gets formed and decomposes. Searching for it in the accumulation of objective facts resembles a squirrel picking acorns – what a waste of time!

The word truth is far closer to the expressions “convince of something”, “serve a purpose”, “be useful to somebody” than to the expressions “exist undeniably” or “exist objectively”. And sometimes one look can express it better than a treatise in folio.

TO WRITE, 15TH AUGUST 1986, MARBELLA

To write?

Yes, but: why?

for whom?

what?

and how?

1. Why do I write?

I guess the wisest answer would be: I have no idea. Simply I've got such a need. Do I really know why? Every activity - let alone an activity like writing, which involves many other activities - hides from its author a part of the mystery that no introspection will explore. As a matter of fact, the reasons why I write are probably the conjectures resulting from the later reasoning and might be arbitral. But what can I do? My first motive was, let's say, of therapeutic nature. I remember it perfectly well, as I started to write just a few months ago: in December 1985, to be precise. Then, I woke up at night in such despair that I felt like hitting my head against a wall. I therefore went to my office and paced it up and down.

Since I couldn't share my fear with Ania without passing it on to her, an idea crossed my mind to confide in paper. I sat down to write and told about my problems. Having written two or three pages I calmed down, went back to bed and fell asleep.

Later, I returned to this sleeping pill a few times. One time, however, when I was rearranging the documents, I read one of the pages written this way. "That's not bad" - I thought.

I was surprised because what I used to write in my youth was poor, and I hadn't expected to be able to write properly anything else than legal articles, barrister's conclusions or official letters. But my handwriting is hard to read, even for me. I soon got bored with deciphering what I might have written. I then kept writing the pages to break free of the visions, without pondering whether it was worth anything or not.

When reading on the second occasion, which happened one early morning and was as accidental as the first one, the feeling "it's not bad" returned.

And now, beside the therapeutic one, new reasons started to pour in, each of them aspiring to be the father of what was born.

First, the most modest reason: a story about promoting Beks in the West. To be a faithful chronicler of the related events, to contribute to the birth of a myth, to add my own testimony. Taking the opportunity, to unveil – with my obsessive attention to transparency and logic – what is usually hidden from laymen: the inside story of the enterprise which one day will become a legend.

So I wanted to show how much humiliation, calculations, money, greed, stupidity, arguments and randomness is contained in great and lofty human successes. Because I still have no doubts that despite obstacles appearing on my way, the work of Beks will be accepted in the West.

There are also other beautiful and noble ideas that demand credit for writing these notes. But why should I talk about them? Let the others make them up in the future. They'll do it better than me. Especially if the ideas are theirs. I'd rather deal with shameful motives. Among such reasons, which screamed the loudest in me, demanding priority, the most important were hatred and anger: to settle the score with enemies. To pour the bile on those whom I wish ill. Since the fate unexpectedly provided me with weapons – use it to give back some slaps in the face, which were first inflicted to me. Spit in the face of Louse or Grympas-Nguyen, Serane, journalists and many others – clerks of Beaubourg Centre, curators of a few museums, art critics or directors of some galleries, all those who hurt me when I turned to them. If

one day these notes can damage their reputation or the memory of them, the effort I made to write them will not be wasted.

Never in my life will I gain the power allowing me to take revenge on people who've humiliated me. From the height of the posts they hold they can silently – if not at the top of their voices – laugh at my curses. However, if the enterprise came off and I managed to impose Beks upon the West, these notes might become a kind of a poison with a delayed effect. Yes, when all these people are gone and can't force me to keep silent with their polite “no, thank you”, these pages filled with venom and mud will hopefully ruin their memory. In any case, this is what I wish them.

Indeed, fury and hatred push the strongest to be shouted out. It had to be said clearly.

Take revenge on those who've hurt me. Yes, of course. But I also wanted to prove to four people, including two very close ones, who didn't believe in me that I could juggle with words quite well.

I tell you, there are four of them, two of whom are already dead. The ones I loved. The first of them was my Mother. A saint person, let me repeat, a saint person, indeed. She didn't think highly of my writing, though. For you must know, my Friend, that I started writing (in Polish) already at the age of 22 years, being exactly in the same mental and financial condition as now. The reasons were also the same - to cry without telling anyone. It was in Paris in the autumn of 1964, when having arrived from Poland, I didn't do anything, roaming around in the underground tunnels. Although ... But it's not what I wanted to write about today.

In short, at that time I scribbled my complaints in notebooks. Firstly, to comfort myself. Secondly, to stigmatize the surrounding world. Finally thirdly, to free myself from my phantasms. It was exactly the same process of growing needs that have been building up in me for nine months. One day I sent my Mother six letters containing twenty pages each.

Then there was long silence.

After a month I got a reply, in which she told me about Dad, aunt Halina and everything else except what was the most interesting to me at that moment: was my writing worth anything or not? Well, not really! At the end of the letter Mother thanked me “for the trust you showed us sending your prose”. That’s all. My Mother was a translator who also wrote on her own. Apart from that, she was the first reader of my notes. Her opinion was therefore twice as important to me. That’s why she remained the only reader. I stopped writing. Filled with shame, I understood that in no case should I start writing again.

However, there was an inevitable second attempt, this time related to epistolary art. I mean my correspondence with Jul Godlewski, also a saint man. I always repeat it. A saint man. Just like my Mother.

To all the letters he received from people he always answered in person. How did he manage to do that? – there were dozens of people he helped. I have no idea, but he never had it done by his secretary. Our correspondence started with a long letter in which methodically, with a false smile on my lips, point by point and with a lot of commitment I explained to “dear Mr Godlewski” (whom I didn’t know yet) that it would be good if he granted me a scholarship for my studies in Paris. One day I’ll tell the story of this man, who similarly to Beks influenced my life, but in a good way.

That attempt of epistolary wit didn’t bring anything good. A week later Jul answered me briefly:

“Dear Sir, your letter did not contain any reasonable information. However, before I give you a final negative reply (yes, he did use this expression “final negative reply”), please, write me something about your plans”.

It was then that I edited the most successful letter in my life. It consisted of two lines, so I remember it very well: “Dear Sir – I wrote. – I will finish studies without anybody’s help and will be happy to send you a copy of my diploma, which I will owe only to myself”. I also greeted him in a cordial, but

laidback way. Since I'd lost hope for any help from him, I didn't have to humbly lick his feet.

Two days later he sent me an express letter, in which he wrote: "I liked your letter very much. I grant you a scholarship. Right now for a year".

Throughout the next years of our friendship he, who corresponded with celebrities from all over the world, stored my letters. At least this is what I was told by Małgosia Balasińska, whom he'd confessed that. Until the day when ... I guess the devil possessed me to write the words in that letter ... Because when I found out Jul was coming to Poland, where he was going to meet with cardinal Wyszyński, I wrote him that "the cardinal is a fool and reactionary". This cost me a month of silence on his part. In reply, which finally arrived, Jul informed me ("after Christmas so as not to spoil this time for you") about breaking off our friendship and revoking the scholarship. It must have been then that my letters landed in a dustbin, because many years later, when I was talking to him in Warsaw, where he was staying in the European Hotel awaiting his death – I concluded from what he said that he hadn't left a trace of the letters and didn't even remember them.

So I wasn't successful in epistolary art, either.

Then I turned to scientific writing.

The editing of my habilitation work was endless. It dragged on and I couldn't finish it. For five years I pondered over every word, every comma and I cut out, changed and rearranged things a hundred times before I considered them perfect. When I presented the whole thing to my thesis supervisor, Paul Reuter, there was a long moment of silence. That prophetic month the meaning of which I'd already got to know. Then a letter arrived, the same "blow in the plexus", which similarly to the previous one attacked me like a small vampire, painfully bit my face and hid behind a white sheet of paper.

“The style of a habilitation work should be simple and clear. It’s not a rebus which has to be guessed” – wrote me that wonderful professor, who just like Beks hid a catty and cold soul under a mask of kind-heartedness.

For the next two years I was writing a new work: I vulgarized, simplified and trivialized all my ideas that I was so proud of before. And I immediately got a reward: “I assess it – wrote Paul Reuter – as a clear, well edited, interesting work, free of the features I noticed in your first version, due to which I was afraid of unfavourable judgments that might distress you”.

At least this one was well written.

Finally, in my life appeared an Andre Fontaine of gloomy memory, the editor-in-chief of “Le Monde” daily. For at that time I was pestered by a journalist inspiration. I’d discovered a talent of a polemicist in myself. I’ve already talked about it many times, so I won’t discuss it at length. And here again, I got a painful slap in the face. Also this time I went quiet to avoid further ones. So this is why I’m writing now: to prove to these four people – two of whom, my Mother and Jul, have a right to my eternal gratitude – that I don’t wield a word as badly as they thought.

Two other reasons, quite funny but absolutely real, also come to claim their paternal rights.

To be able to finish what I started talking about ...

- Ah, I wish somebody would at last listen till I finish talking ... - I once told one of my friends, suspending my voice so as to emphasize the strength of my desire.

Ah, I wish somebody would at last listen till I finish talking ... For hardly anybody lets me finish a thought I’ve started. As soon as I open my mouth, my interlocutor interrupts me and moves on to another topic. Or people keep talking with each other as if I haven’t said anything.

Probably there’s something irritating about my voice. Yes, it must be that.

There's also something about my facial expression, perhaps in the rhythm of expressing myself, in the nervousness of my look. Something that makes them interrupt me and start talking about other things before I have time to finish the second sentence. To draw their attention at least for a moment, I excessively slow down the pace of speaking. On such occasions I adopt the tone and facial expression of my brother Johnny. Because he's listened to by everybody. People adore his sermonizing. And to be honest, ... I envy him, so sometimes I copy him, speaking very slowly. My interlocutors, however, aren't stupid and can't be fooled for a long time. They can feel I'm pretending. They show first signs of impatience. Fearing they might interrupt me, I return to my fast rhythm, in which one word chases another with an increasing speed, as I notice my interlocutor's growing need to move on to something else. In the end, the speed becomes unbearable for all of us and they stop my speech even sooner, to be able to finally talk about their matters.

I hate it but I can't help it. Certainly, it's one of the basic reasons why I became a lecturer, and later a barrister. At least this way I can fully express myself, knowing that neither the court nor the students will interrupt me, as this is the rule of the game.

This is also the reason why I write: to finally be able to say everything I've got to say without exposing myself to the risk that some stupid fool will start talking about the latest Stock Exchange quotations while I'm discussing my spiritual dilemmas.

Besides, I can shine. I can show off my intelligence. Oh, God, how I adore it! Already at the age of eight years I trembled with desire for being admired for my wit. I'm not kidding.

The fact that the hatred which flows in torrents through these notes may disgust many people; that people will call me a virulent scorpion and flush my literature down the toilet leaves me cold. But what glee it would be to hear from the mouths of those whose opinion I value: "A! That's not bad".

Shine ... At least only before myself, but shine. Since I can't do it in the real world, I'd like to accomplish it at least in the world I've created myself.

It seems to me that "philosophical" or "sociological" fragments of these pages, devoted chiefly to Beks's matters, have their deep source in this childish crave for making myself more important: "Just look! He's even capable of such reasoning. What a profound mind!" This thought is surely inside me, though being aware of its own ridiculous nature, it hides and would like to become as little as possible. But beside these neutral and comic reasons there's still something honest about my need to write. At least one thing I'm not ashamed of: this activity very quickly became a game for me. Saying that, I don't contradict myself: you can't write anything strong if you haven't suffered. Writing itself, however, can't be an onerous slog, full of hesitations and compromises with the reader. It should become liberation. No blood sweated over words. No self-censorship. Even if it's full of crossing-outs and searches for an adequate expression. It's a game in which I got easily involved, usually not caring about "benefits" and "reasons". At last, there's something that doesn't make me blush.

2. But if I'm to write, who is it for?

But of course, for myself! I started writing for myself and this is how I'm going to finish it: it's not my intention to publish these notes while I'm still alive. The very prospect of fighting a battle with publishers to make them publish the notes would be enough to put me off making any attempts about it. I shudder at the very thought. Never!

My experience with Andre Fontaine, whom I've already mentioned a few times, is enough for me:

- Good morning, my name is Dmochowski. A month ago I sent you a text ... Yes, that's it ... So shall I call again in two months?

Yes. Of course. Thank you.

Sweating, gnashing teeth and licking feet. No, never again!

Editors and editors-in-chief in 80 per cent publish famous names, as this guarantees them an easy sale of books or magazines. In 15 per cent they publish those who were lucky to win the acceptance of professional readers, and the latter can be urged to look at a text only by a letter of recommendation or a “friendly” phone call from an influential person. Five per cent are independent and talented people who’ve managed to jump over all the obstacles. For years they will provide an alibi for the editor, editor-in-chief or the whole rabble of critics, who will talk about them at length so as to show the receptivity of the literary elite as well as the openness and vigour of the local culture.

No, I’m not going to fight with magazine editors or chiefs. Let the ones who will come after me and want to publish my notes do this dirty work. Like I’m doing it now for Beks.

Besides, I must admit that I’m a bit afraid of my “protagonists”, whom I smear on each page; the ones I refer to as “scumbags”, “louses” and “trash” . If they read what I write, they’d take me for a fifteen-minute “talk”. Two, three lawsuits for libel would soon put me off publishing my opinions about the world in my and their lifetime.

For some time, however, there has been one more reader of my notes – Ania.

Initially I was afraid of her more than of anybody else, as I’m related to her more than with anybody else. I was on my guard then, trying to prevent my notes from falling into her hands, as she would realize what abyss I was pulling her into.

Also, I didn’t want her to find out about the doubts I had about her endurance in the event she discovered our real situation.

But I soon couldn’t resist the temptation. After the first test reading session I risked another one. Seeing no negative reaction which I’d feared so much, I finally decided to read her the whole text. I’ll say more: it has become the highlight of our current holidays. I get up early in the morning

and type what I wrote manually the evening before. Then I read it out during dinner.

Her comments are balanced and short:

- Yes, OK.

Or:

- We need to see what it's like when we read it as a whole. Because bit by bit it sounds good.

At the beginning she paid me one or two compliments:

- It's clearly written.

Or:

- Vivid, not boring.

Nothing more. Two or three times she didn't like a note, as it seemed to her monotonous or exaggerated. Especially the first, introductory one, in which I describe the exhibition details. I suppose it irritated her, because I'd tried to evaluate my doings.

Once it was just the opposite, she seemed confused:

- My little frog, I didn't know that you have your feet so firmly fixed on the ground. Had no idea you're capable of being so self-critical.

She said it because of the note about my aggressiveness during the exhibition. When I finally read her about the reasons why despite our problems I was organizing another exhibition, she gave me a searching look:

- You're a sick guy – she said quietly. – These are the words of a man who's confessing his sins before committing a suicide.

That's all. That's the best way. Any evident praises on her part would give me sleepless nights and wake up a companion of all my successes: arrogance.

Any severe criticism or even the usual lack of interest would have provoked the opposite, though equally radical reaction: I'd have gone quiet.

Just like it was when my Mother gave me to understand that she didn't like my stories: I'd have stopped writing.

I need encouragement to know that what I write has some value. But it must be non-spoken, not definite ... , so I should just be happy with the moderation of my only reader.

Finally, there's the one to whom I turn: the imaginary addressee of these notes. He'll never read them, as he exists only in my mind. I imagine him as an intelligent young thirteen-, fifteen-year-old, whom I sometimes call "Friend", but whom I also address in the first person plural: for example I say "You realize ...".

These notes are written for him. But you probably know this joke: "What's the difference between an electric train set and woman's breasts? None. Both are designed for children, and it's daddies who play with them". In other words, my notes are like comic strips: they are mainly geared towards youth, but their authors secretly hope to attract the attention of intellectuals.

Why teenagers?

Because due to my professor's obsession, I think it's my duty to protect young people from shit, which I've had in big quantities in my life. Of course, they will do the opposite of what I advise them, putting their heads straight into the cesspit so as to taste it for themselves. But I must still hope to be listened by someone who, at least because of his age, is able to draw inspiration from my advice. Little children wouldn't understand all that, as it goes beyond their experience. Adults would only laugh, because things like that are obvious to them. But a teenager is like a son, so I may have an impression of passing on my practical wisdom to him and draw energy for writing from this conviction.

But why intellectuals?

Actually, I've talked about it: it's my childish wish to dazzle the environment to which I don't actually belong, and even if I do, I'm in its lowest ranks. I'm not an exception. People usually don't care what the others

“on the side” or “downstairs” think of them, but they attach enormous importance to the recognition and position among “their folks” or the ones holding “higher” posts. Well, each environment naturally, instinctively rejects the candidacies of outsiders, and blocks their own candidates the way to the local Olymp.

Yes, among his own people a man is never strong enough and will always find more valuable persons around himself. I think that even kings are doomed to displeasure: they are bothered about the opinion of other kings. But among kings they always take a position in the middle or at the end, and behind Emperors, in any case. To cut a long story short, without any digressions, my reader-intellectual is important to me. And the more refined he will be, the better.

If one day a crowd gets at my notes to make them a new *Passion for Life* in the style of Irving Stone; if the journalist trash or corruptible critics utter at least one word of praise on these notes – I will turn in my grave. But if a handful of most subtle intellectuals find merely a few whiles to read me with interest, I’ll say to myself in the other world that “it was worth writing”.

Why a “handful”?

Answering the charge that he formulated his thoughts in a hermetic way, Bertrand de Jouvenel once said that he was fully aware of it, but if “three thousand people in France appreciate what I write, this will be enough for me”.

My way of expressing myself is not hermetic, but three thousand readers would be a lot for me. Even too many. Actually, I’d be anxious if there were more than five hundred, because in no case do I want to become a folk martyr.

But the five hundred I have in mind stand high. I’m waiting in tension for the judgment from their lips; one understanding word on their part would relieve the pain of tortures which are surely awaiting me in the other world.

After the reader – another topic.

3. What shall I write?

And here another question arises: shall I limit myself to the story of Beks or go beyond it?

Writing about Beks and his promotion in the West was – as I’ve already said – my first intention, which is still the essence of my topic. It’s true that I can have endless monologues about Beks and his paintings: twenty four hours a day. And in the twenty fifth hour I would still find something new to write. I’m tireless. While I often talk about Beks aloud, I never talk about my problems connected with Beks’s matters. This topic evidently bores some of my interlocutors and their boredom humiliates me. That’s why I keep silent. On paper however, having no fear of the reader and his sarcasm, I can endlessly talk about my grudges: “This man – I write for example – told me that he didn’t like his paintings; the other one didn’t look at them carefully enough or frowned at them. Yet another one laughed at the wrong moment”. It’s an inexhaustible topic for me. But would the most fervent fans of Beks endure this story focused on one subject? Certainly not. The best proof of this is the reaction of Ania, who soon started to show the first signs of boredom. Having listened to the first twenty notes, she attacked me:

- I’m cheesed off with that Beks of yours. Couldn’t you change the topic for a while?

Then I had an idea to add variety to all that by including my deliberations, portraits and memories not related with Beks. But only when I realized that these notes might become a posthumous means of revenge on the people I hate did I decide to broaden the subject so as to face up to new ambitions. Then “philosophical” and “sociological” reflections or childhood memories began to appear in my notes. I call them monotony breakers.

Now that the subject matter has been extended, where shall I set the boundaries?

Shall I talk about anything that crosses my mind? As I’m to be read in twenty or thirty years (this is how much I’ve granted myself to live) – there’s

no point in writing about current events. For my readers they will have only a historical meaning. That's why I don't repeat the speeches which my students hear from me every day. The news and political commentaries, current social problems – no, I haven't got the slightest intention to raise them in this diary. Apart from a description of adventures and mishaps connected with Beks's matter, I then limit myself to personal topics or subjects which in a way are timeless.

But shall I talk about everything that's related to them? Or shall I impose some limits of morality, decency or simply common sense? Because common sense advises me not to attack the reader under the pain of turning him into an enemy, who will try to prevent me from achieving my main goal. Shall I then say everything I think about the journalist scum, stupid clerks of the culture branch machine or ruthless art traders? a fear of social repression is like a pair of scissors. I know how those who wish to avoid it mutilate themselves. I know how nearly every artist at every moment wonders what "they" would say if And here he crosses out a thing and adds another one. He wants to be on the safe side. Shall I tell everything to my readers then? For example that I despise some of them? I had to answer myself very quickly. In other words, I had to make a choice: either my goal is to achieve a tangible profit – then I have to limit myself to "non-conflicting" topics – or I curse at everybody whom I wish ill, throw the corked bottle into the sea and *que sera sera*, whatever will be will be. Without hesitation I chose the second solution: there won't be any taboo issues or sparing potential allies.

Also, there will be no powder and make-up in the picturing of my self-portrait. If quoting events from my life stands a chance of arousing anybody's interest, it's not owing to the extraordinary nature of these events or my extraordinary personality. Everything about my life is banal and ordinary, and I myself don't have any extraordinary features.

Any caution towards potential supporters or sparing myself would take away the charm from my breakers. That's why when I sometimes come back

to my own person, I'll treat it in the same way as my enemies: no anaesthesia.

4. After the topics – it's time for the manner. How shall I write?

Up to the standards of my ambition: rationally, realistically, amusingly, briefly and emotionally.

Let's start from the beginning, because there are as many as five goals.

My nature and my legal education make me prone towards rationality. Firstly, I was ridiculed a few times when I tried to be a "poet", and secondly, a business-like attitude, clarity and logic are a kind of my professional bias. Every morning I feel a pressing need for my daily dose of rationality. It's the same when I take a piece of paper and a pen; I need logic, a construction, three or four keynotes and a series of arguments to prove the former. In reality, I don't believe in rational disquisitions or logical constructions. I cope with this sort of exercise too well to not know how artificial they are and how seldom they lead to real knowledge. Yet I yield to temptation and wherever I can, I build my university arguments. But how can I express intuition and spontaneity if I'm completely deprived of them, while reasoning – one after another comes to me without any effort whatsoever? Besides, how shall I escape from rationality when the world pays a good price for it and doesn't worry that it actually buys wind? People are not able to formulate their thoughts clearly and imagine that the one who can do that has reached the truth. They admire and listen to him. How can I then avoid taking the easy way out?

Nothing doing – I said to myself and without scruple organized these notes on the pattern of scientific papers.

For me the synonym of realism is not making up stories. Oh, I don't mean not inventing any storyline! I'm completely void of imagination and I couldn't even make up any plot. It's this inability that made me choose the literary genre of my writing. Something between a personal diary and an official report.

Being a realist means two things to me: telling the truth and sticking to facts. As for the truth, believe me, my Friend, that while in everyday life I often depart from it, I never lie in my notes. You will never catch me adjusting the reality to my goals: taking revenge on others and excusing myself. You can trust me then and be sure that what I write is as close to the truth as possible.

But the search for realism also makes me strictly adhere to facts and avoid my natural tendency for emphasis and euphoria. For you must know, my Friend, that I love to sob vehemently, fly high and get drunk with lofty words. That's why in these notes, by way of contrast, I force myself to crawl on the ground and inhale all possible odours exuded by human cloaca.

Just like other features of my character, also these ones were acquired as a result of hundreds of kicks I'd received from life. I therefore remain a mundane realist, even when my heart is raring to soar towards the sublime.

To be funny! Oh, yes! It's not so simple, though. I'd give ten years of my life in return for two things: to be one metre and ninety centimetres tall and to be irresistibly witty. Ridiculous as it might seem, it's true. In reality I've got a height of merely one hundred and seventy five centimetres and no sense of humour whatsoever. In these notes I substitute for it with a half-ironic, half-derisive tone. Firstly, because this way I'd like to make the reader laugh. If one day someone smiles sincerely while reading my text, it will be like kissing my cheek. But I have no guts to admit it. I know, however, that I stand a much greater chance to seem ridiculous.

That's why – and this is the second reason why I adopt this tone, especially when talking about myself – I use irony as a shield in case I'm threatened with being ridiculed. This way I don't allow others to do it instead of me and better than me. Scoffing at my own stupidity is less painful than hearing it from somebody else. Anyway, mocking one's own vices sometimes takes the wind out of other people's sails: when they feel like sneering us, it turns out that the area is already occupied by ourselves, which deprives them of the surprise advantage. The Jewish can excellently put it in practice. Their

jokes about themselves flourish most vigorously at the time of ghettos and persecutions.

The best speeches are short ones. It's a known thing. I'd like to continue conciseness then. What's more, in a way I'm obliged to do so, because I don't let my students read out a paper for more than ten minutes and I don't allow them to exceed the limit of six pages when they write an exam work. At the eleventh minute and on the seventh page I use a guillotine – I take the floor away from them.

I don't do it without a reason: readers, and in particular unprepared listeners are not able to focus on an unknown topic for more than ten minutes. They switch off and at a certain moment no longer know what the whole thing is about.

My particular predilection for conciseness has also another, more personal reason, the sources of which I seek in my complexes: similarly to being ridiculed, I'm afraid of coming across as a bore. I anxiously examine my interlocutor's look to check for the first signs of boredom. Then I know he's going to interrupt me in a moment and I'll feel humiliated. It's the opposite of my childish wish to shine, and my desperate attempts to show off. This small amount of attention people have ever devoted to what I said taught me to be concise: I must exhaust the topic before they stop listening to me. It's not simple, as the nature of an archivist tells me to be exhausting – to say everything without omitting any details for the fear of twisting the truth by leaving something unsaid or providing incomplete data. This is proved by this note, which is growing bigger and bigger, while it should be finished as quickly as possible.

But as for the feelings ... My God, I'm teeming with so many extreme and contradictory emotions that these pages are filled with them to the brim despite the apparent indifference I frequently show. But what's the nature of these feelings and what writing method should I adopt to heal them and bring back their right proportions?

A desire for killing and a desire for love – this is what I feel most. Probably like everybody else. Like every animal, the only goal of which is to exist and reproduce; to exist you need to kill and to reproduce you need to love. That's why love confessions and literary murders fill these pages. The latter are particularly abundant – I've already committed several dozen of them and I'm not going to content myself with that. And yet killing a cockroach makes me feel down. I throw it out through the window, because crushing it makes me even more disgusted than watching it. If I heard the first screams of my victims, I'd probably stop the execution to apologize to them and bring them hot buns. However, as I do everything on paper and don't have to directly face their real suffering – I don't restrain myself and push forward. Without scruples and without hesitation. Just like you scream under a bridge when a train is going over it – to vent emotions. Just like Beks paints death, despite the fact that it terrifies him on the screen or in a photograph. My hatred and the penalties I use towards all those who caused me pain are a method for throwing up the accumulated poison.

So much has been said and the mystery remains impenetrable. I then have to finish by stating that I still don't know why, for whom, what or how to write.

I think it resembles the howling of a dog: like every beaten animal, I've got a mysterious need to produce articulated and non-articulated sounds.

MAN OF BUSINESS, 17TH AUGUST 1986, MARBELLA

The end of holiday.

Stan and Ida have gone to Zurich today. We've been left alone in their villa and we're not flying to Paris till tomorrow at 2 p.m.

If there's anything to dream about in life it's such a holiday: beautiful, sunny, clear weather. The sea is just fifty metres away from the table I'm writing at. The villa has got eleven rooms and 9 bathrooms in wedding white. 33 000 metres of a park strewn with flowers, cactuses and palms. Tennis courts, a swimming pool and the company of a couple of millionaires and their eight-year-old son. In addition, a pile of paper sheets on which you can write whatever you want. Idleness, strolls, evening jaunts and the presence of friends.

An idyllic picture from American propaganda movies about the advantages of the liberal system with Beverly Hills luxury in the background.

1. First a few words about the hostess, Ida. She's a living proof of the helplessness of common sense when we appeal to it to predict the future.

Ida was certainly the most unusual girl I'd met in my young years. A bit too short to be a sought-after model, but nicely built, even today, at the age of 48 years, she has a pleasant face with sensual lips à la Monica Vitti. Being merely 22, she told us the details of her 220 (until that time) adventures with railway men, ambassadors, butchers and professors. She was a clever girl, speaking loudly, self-confident, witty and spiteful; men used to be afraid of her biting sense of humour, but pretended to not notice it, because each of them hoped to be let into Ida's bed. According to her own calculations, for 16 years of her "spree" she must have drunk a hectolitre of vodka. In a conversation she used to eff and blind and was friends with all people having important positions in the Polish film, journalist or political

community. A strong personality, able to impose herself upon others, followed by men everywhere she wanted to lead them. Despite the fact that I worked in Lido with hundreds of beautiful girls from all over the world and for 12 years have been observing the fashion circles, in which Ania moves, I've never met such a combination of beauty, vulgarity, sex appeal, humour, garrulousness and dissolute life.

A high class courtesan.

Common sense told you there was the worst kind of future ahead of her.

Well, the truth is that she's never been ill because of the excess of alcohol she drank or the excess of sex in the arms of hundreds and hundreds of men.

At the age of 30 she left Poland, where I observed her as an adolescent boy, having my eyes wide open with excitement. She had a relationship with a rich film producer, a German Jew from Munich. Then she dumped him and, being 40 years old, she entered into a respectable matrimony with an American multimillionaire, also a Jew, Stan Smith, a ship owner cooperating with Onassis. She bore him a son and turned into a hausfrau, hatching her child and looking after husband. In relation to her son, who's eight years old today, she's a mate type of mother, careful, but not soft. She's also a good wife, submissive, but without any exaggeration. She has no complexes about her past, still a bit vulgar, sober and balanced, doesn't drink, but smokes. I've never seen them cuddling up together, only once Stan kissed the back of her head in passing, when we were playing boule. But it looks like they love each other, and even if they don't, they are relaxed and don't attack each other. Especially I admire her confidence when she calms him down, because Stan suffers from glaucoma and he's threatened with the loss of sight. He's waiting for the results of tests he's supposed to have on 2nd September.

- They will be very good – says Ida in a calm, self-confident tone, and in a moment Stan seems to have forgotten about the pestering fear.

For ten days I've been observing their gestures, like from a box seat. Because there are only five of us here and we're staying with each other all the time.

What's the conclusion?

That the only rule in life worth anything is "qui vivra verra¹". Small pretentious minds which tell the future, "because experience and reason teach us that ..." can recite their moral lessons, and beautiful Ida doesn't give a shit about them. As long as she was young, she drank and was an easy lay.

Today she's become a mother, a wife and a refined rich lady.

2. Which allows me to move on to the next topic.

Because actually it's not the charms of a holiday or the recovered chastity of an ex-courtesan that I'm going to talk about today, but about the conversation I had a moment ago with Stan about the financial forecasts for my forthcoming exhibition.

A few more words by way of introduction, this time to describe the circumstances in which the conversation took place.

As I've already said, Stan is a multimillionaire and all his life he's turned over big sums of money. Every evening we watch on TV the quotations for gold on London stock exchange and discuss what each of us has sold or is thinking of selling: I talk about my 96 20-franc lousies left, and he ... about a ton of gold he's sold. When he told me about that, I didn't want to believe my own ears. In a word, he's a man of business, who knows a lot about finances.

Having asked many gallery owners, painters and art critics, I wanted to take the opportunity and feel out a businessman. For if I were to fail, little brains would immediately give me a lesson with a dash of reason for three pennies:

- You should have asked specialists. Did you ask any man of business?

Such twaddle drives me up the wall, because every reasonable person knows that nobody can forecast the future. But if you say something like that in public, everybody will attack you, because there's a widely held conviction that somewhere there's someone "who knows", and that before you undertake anything serious, you should ask for the opinion of this "someone".

Anyway, due to the very fact that I'm a social creature, I also have an instinctive, natural, subconscious tendency to trust an authority, a master, a guide, an expert or an initiated advisor.

In a nutshell, coming back to the subject, we are on a beach on the Atlantic Ocean, near Gibraltar, where we've come to pass the time and sunbathe. Out of a sudden, Stan himself starts talking about my problems and asks me a number of questions on new Beks's paintings. I never bring up the subject myself so as not to bore the hosts, because they know I'm tireless then. This time he comes back to the topic himself. He's obviously intrigued by a meeting with a maniac who, after all, looks normal. At the end I ask him:

- So, doesn't this painting appeal to you?

- No – he says. – I prefer abstraction and jolly colours.

- And what do you think of the chances to sell anything at the exhibition?

- I've never understood anything about the sale of paintings. One day I bought Soutine. I paid 50 000 dollars. A few years later I sold it. I lost because the sale price was only 40 000. The same thing happened with Kisling, for which I paid 30 000 sterling pounds, and later got only 25 000 for it. And when I decided to sell Bernard, for which I'd paid 7 000 pounds, at Christi's they told me I'd get maximum 8 000. I thought I'd win anyway, and I was actually glad. But the painting got sold for 40 000 sterling pounds. So what? Can you make anything out of it? It's just the same with your Beksiński. Anything, absolutely anything is possible.

A word to the wise is enough, small brains – I told myself, addressing the words to all those who, with serious and sympathetic faces, would give a lesson of reason to “an enthusiastic, but careless risk taker” if my exhibition failed: “You should have asked a man of business for advice”.

No matter whether it’s the owner of a big gallery like Carpentier, Barret - an art critic, Stan Smith - a businessman and collector-investor, nobody can predict what’s going to happen. The future is like a black hole, which clears up only when it’s already become the past. And even then ... the whole idiotic legend about “eternal laws of success”, which you must get to know to ... All this gibberish about “a nose for business”, claiming that “it’s a dead cert for you” provided you have a good command of business principles. All that is just stupid talk, taken from “Paris Match”.

The future is unpredictable and every reasonable man who’s got an ounce of common sense and realistic judgment will tell you the same. So, you can sneer, small brains: “This is the result when a scientist tries to be a businessman”.

You can drivel as much as you want. The only thing I’m sure of is the fact that you won’t find “the one who knows” either among intellectuals, mums and dads, masters, millionaires, experts or parish priests. “The one who knows” simply doesn’t exist.

A black hole. To mine I’m coming closer every day, because if the exhibition starts as I predicted, the exam will take place on 8th October. I will either break even and the whole enterprise will go ahead again or I’ll rot in a dungeon forever, together with Ania and Beks. Ania’s going to lose her comfortable life, I’m going to lose her, and Beks’s going to be ridiculed and lose his renown in Poland. It will be even worse, we’ll begin to pour streams of hatred on each other: “All that was to be expected. Because if you’d ask a businessman for advice, you wouldn’t have done all those stupid things ... “

¹ Qui vivra verra – whoever lives will see

CHERNOBYL, 22ND AUGUST 1986

A memorable day: yesterday I felt a slight thrill of joy.

Sureaut brought me samples of the postcards and the poster for the exhibition. Technically all of them are good quality. Of course, there are errors to be corrected, but that's why he came, after all.

And now the first reason for satisfaction: the work is done properly from the very beginning. Besides, Sureaut is cheaper than Mathan and gives me a credit. I must withdraw the unpleasant remarks I made about him when he didn't come to the meeting we'd arranged.

But I'm mainly glad of the choice of 16 paintings (for the time being, because the target number is 22, like last year) for the exhibition. This choice seems to portend well for the future. I've put the reproductions brought by Sureaut beside me, because I can't do that with real paintings, as there isn't enough space. All that looks good. I didn't choose the paintings with an evident motive of death or disease. I also avoided gravestones and bone elements. If the exhibition is focused on sale (and it's supposed to be), I can't provoke the audience.

To make sure that I'd made a good choice, I asked Sureaut, who is a simple man:

- Have a look at these reproductions: don't they make you scared?

- Absolutely not – he answered.

I started insisting:

- Which one makes you scared? Do tell me, please, it's important to me.

He pointed to two paintings: *Chernobyl* ("because if you have a closer look, you can see bones") and *Horse* ("because it's made from people, and the audience will certainly not like it"). What word did he use to describe the rest? I can't remember. I think he said "poetic", but Ania claims it was

something else. In any case, it wasn't any word from the classic glossary ("morbid", "awful", "terrifying").

The truth is that I don't trust opinions expressed by my co-workers. I remember the raptures of all those who saw the reproductions and original paintings before the previous exhibition. It's because I'd trusted their opinions that I got trapped into the prestigious exhibition. This time I'm glad, because the choice I've made seems to suit the goal I've set myself, that is to say, the sale. As for the prices, I'm not going to get carried away: they will be "reasonable", starting with 25 000 (three paintings), through 40 000 (four paintings), then 60 000 and 70 000, and finishing with 80 000 (three paintings). In other words, the prices will be affordable.

When I tell people about them, they seem to admit I'm right.

Two paintings will be put up for sale for 120 000, and one – for 310 000. These will be old paintings, including the first painting Beks has ever made ("Gagged Face").

This is supposed, as Beks himself advised me, to justify the exorbitant prices during the previous exhibition and to show that there's a logical continuity between the last and this year's exhibition.

- People should think that today's prohibitive prices result, just like a year ago, from the age of paintings and their quality – he said.

Finally, four paintings will be excluded from sale. And that's for two reasons. Firstly, because two of them I love so much that I simply couldn't part with them ("Umbrella" and "Chernobyl"). Secondly, because aside from these two paintings I want to put up for sale another two, which are particularly "quiet" and suit the general atmosphere of the exhibition. I mean "Group of People" and "Building with Fish". Actually, I could put them up for sale at reasonable prices, as they aren't my favourite ones. But I've already shown them in May Salon and in Critical Figuration, where I proposed the price of 90 000 for each. If I put them up for sale again, this would mean I wasn't able to sell them before.

And now the poster. In Poland I had a little test among my acquaintances. Most of them chose the painting with figures kneeling by the posts to be placed in the poster. I also liked it. It's striking, visible from a distance and in the typical style of Beks.

Okay – I said to myself. – Let it be.

Not at all, because after coming back to Paris, actually quite by chance, I told Hugnet about the choice and he immediately bridled:

- People can't be scared! Why do you want to put this painting in the poster?!

I asked:

- And which one do you have in mind?

- For example this one – he pointed to “Chernobyl”.

So this way “Chernobyl” will be printed on the poster.

There was a hidden doubt behind my docility: I thought the painting with posts was too strong for the French sensitivity. If I'm to have a sale-focused exhibition, this painting may putt off people from coming – I told myself. That's why I immediately agreed to Hugnet's proposal. Besides, whenever I hesitate and somebody convincingly tells me what to do, I yield to him. It's true that I believe nobody knows what to do, but if I'm persuaded by someone having authority, I agree with what he says. Perhaps he knows? – I ask myself.

Of course, Hugnet doesn't know and pretty soon I get a proof of it.

Well, Sureaut brings me the samples. I look at them, then at Ann and I can see she's got the same impression as me: it's not good. The painting is extremely beautiful, but it reads badly. From a distance it's hard to see what's going on in it. If I revealed my doubts to Ania, though, I'd give her a reason to further hesitate, and finally, to block any decision whatsoever. Anyway, when a few minutes later I put the reproduction against a black background (this is what's going to be like in the poster), the whole thing looks better.

Then Ania adds:

- After all ... legible or illegible, you should take the best painting for the poster. And this one is the best.

That's true and puts an end to my doubts.

In the afternoon Ania gives me a few good ideas about the text to be printed in the brochure. I've been thinking about it for a few days and couldn't find any solution. And this is what I'm going to do now. I'll place a short *curriculum vitae* of Beks, his exhibitions (with a mention of Independent Salon, May Salon, Critical Figuration, Cannes, Antwerp and two exhibitions in the autumn: Autumn Salon and a phantasy painting exhibition, for which that man wants two paintings ... What's his name? Galais, now I remember). Then museums. Finally, films (with a mention that my film was shown in Cannes and now it's being screened at Parisian cinemas).

The same elements are contained in leaflets, which will be given out by the entrance, because I have no inspiration to write a new text in the style of *Beksiński – Painting without Meaning*. That's why to cover up the poverty of the new leaflet, I'm going to give out both leaflets at the same time. Especially that I still have big supplies of the old one. I'll also put my data in the new leaflet. This way Louse won't be able to intercept letters addressed to me or filter potential buyers.

Everything promises to go well.

If only I had the money to pay for it ...

LOUSE, 28TH AUGUST 1986

A nasty moment to go through: an argument with Louse about the terms of our agreement.

This morning I came to the gallery for another reason: I had to solve the problem with the grating, which was a periodically recurring chorus of Louse.

Because one day, during my exhibition in 1985, Louse caught Bogdan Michalski in the act, when he was pulling the bars with all his strength to hastily lock it, and the grating got unhinged as a result. The grating was old, nobody had ever oiled it and it needed to be patched up. Actually, that was the reason why it wouldn't lock and that's why Michalski broke it. Louse decided that I was to be blame for that and I should pay him for the repair. Being aware of my lies, I denied everything and for a year refused to discuss the issue. At the beginning of the year I even kicked up a row when talking to Louse on the phone. Well, I'm actually glad of it. But I'm sure, my Friend, you've had a pimple on your nose, haven't you? And you know that such a little stupid thing can disturb an important meeting. The one I'm going to have is a last chance meeting. I must give up then, as Louse has made the question of the grating repair a *sine qua non* condition for any other talks. OK. I'll have the bars fixed, because that scum is ready to spoil my encounter with destiny.

So we meet in the gallery and I call for a locksmith, who straight away hits my head:

- It will cost 2400 francs.

That's all the more painful because the day before yesterday the tax devoured 10 000 and tomorrow I'll have to spend another 3 000 for an advance payment for Sureaut, who's preparing the brochure for my exhibition.

And when the locksmith leaves, we have to get down to the discussion on the conditions of our agreement. Until I get it in writing, I'm at Louse's mercy. And the more expenditure I incur before we sign the agreement, the more dependent I am on Louse, who's got me in his grasp. So there's an unpleasant moment ahead of me, which I can't avoid. It's particularly nasty since I have to overcome my own pride and yield in many "honourable" points.

I feel like I've been given an electric shock when, at the very beginning, Louse demands that the invitation should contain a sentence: "Valmay's Gallery has been made available to A. And P. Dmochowski by the courtesy of (Louse) ..."

That "courtesy" irritates me. For 40 000 francs which he demands for the rental ... Already a year ago, when we were preparing all the documents to accompany the exhibition, Louse demanded that this sentence was placed in each of them. Having heard it, my banker smiled maliciously, though he's French and has been taught since childhood that if money is demanded from you in this country, you're told it's because a service should be rendered to it.

- I see you want to take credit for somebody's idea – I hiss through clenched teeth.

But Louse is ready to swallow every kind of insult. He wants to go down the History: he, a patron of the arts, who lent his gallery so that the world would get to know Beksiński. Because what is mercantile, fishy and mean, that is to say our agreement and the rent I'm supposed to pay, will be hidden according to Louse's wish. This is provided for in the last paragraph of our agreement. Louse figures out this way nobody's going to find out that his "courtesy" cost me 40 000 francs. My five salaries at university.

Well, you'll see, Louse, everybody will know! I'll make sure they will, believe me! – I say to myself. Our conversation is becoming louder and louder, and my fury grows with the raised tone.

- That's a bit too far. Of the "courtesy" – no way - I tell Louse.

At the same moment, however, I recover my senses. A bit of reason enlightens my mind.

You'll focus on a minor, small thing, the issue related to your ego, and you'll lose everything.

It's high time I changed the tactics.

- OK. Let it be – “of the courtesy”. Have your own way. Let your name be printed on the invitation!

Have your own way! – I say it in a most offensive tone, but his face brightens up with contentment.

Then we have a discussion on other provisions of the agreement. Paragraph after paragraph. Louse reminds me:

- But at the end of this sentence, please, write that I won't bear any responsibility in case of theft, even if I don't repair the alarm system in the gallery. Please, highlight it. It must be clearly emphasized. At the end, I slowly read out the agreement three times. It's been edited with the exactitude of a notary. After reading each paragraph, I raise my eyes and, for a longer moment, carefully look into his face:

- Do you agree in this point? Don't you regret anything? Don't you want to add anything? – I ask, as I know that Louse's tactics is first saying yes, only to “recall” at the end that as a matter of fact it will be “no”.

- No, no. That suits me. Oh, yes, but just one more thing: if the electricity conks out, I'm not responsible even if I haven't repaired the damaged wiring.

- It's already been established – I say. – You are not responsible for failures.

- But I'd like it to be emphasized in the case of electricity.

- OK.

- Also for gas and water.

And so on, and so forth.

When everything has been established, that is to say, after I gave in to him in everything, Louse invites me to lunch ... I'm surprised. I'd rather eat a spider that share a meal with him. But if I weasel out of it, Louse will find an opportunity to trip me up: until the agreement is typed and signed, any "last minute obstacle" he'll find may annihilate everything. I accept the invitation to dinner then. After all, whores get laid not only with pimps, but also with men wearing ties.

Louse invites me to a drugstore on Saint Germain des Près.

- There are inexpensive, but tasty dishes – he explains.

That they are inexpensive I know. As for the rest, I claim they aren't. When instead of dinner I order lettuce and a glass of water, Louse gives me a grateful look. He relaxes and, what's strangest, I relax too. Although I've been cooperating with Louse for a year, I practically don't know him. We start a talk with some platitudes. I soon realize that I'm dealing with mediocre intelligence and an outlook borrowed from "Paris Match".

- Why don't you have children? – he asks me.

- And you? – I answer with a question. – You only have a son from the first marriage. And the second?

- I wouldn't like my children to live in a world worse than ours. Because I've got an impression that our world is worse than the previous one and it's going to be like that in the future. The world's going crazy.

Louse is certainly lying and trying to ennoble his reasons. He simply doesn't have children, because after the divorce in Poland he got married for money with a rich woman in France, 26 years older than him, who couldn't have children long before.

- Going crazy? – I ask as if I believed in what he said. – What do you mean by that?

And here Louse refers to great adages. The ones that litter articles written by "new philosophers". The adages a big dose of each you have to swallow

when reading “Express” or “Le Point”; the adages which are so stupid, bombastic and empty that you don’t know whether to laugh or to cry.

- Today an individual is crushed by masses.

- Ah! – I reply and meditate over this “profound thought”, slurping my glass of water. – an individual ... man ... Well, well!

Then I feel like chatting, even if it’s going to be a talk on his level. It’s something so preposterous and naïve, so many times harped upon by Glucksmans, Levis, Halters and other television “philosophers” that I’m seized with anger:

- During my recent journey to Spain I saw hundreds of paintings in Prado and in other Spanish museums – I say. – Thousands of such paintings I’d already seen in all great museums of all big world metropolises. In the end, I’ve got an impression I constantly watch the same stuff. A tedious impression of monotony. All that revolves around twenty or thirty themes, always painted in the same, neat, sleek way. And it’s like that till our contemporary times. That is to say, the times you seem to not like. Do you think that in the past there were no strong individualities who wanted to paint in a different way? Surely there were. So how come we’ve got such uniformity and only details change like in Japanese rituals? Simply because the social pressure, the pressure of art patrons, the church, dukes or the surrounding morality immediately squashed even the most tentative attempt of painting in a different way, sharply, violently, with hatred or despair, fast, thickly, non-figuratively. Those who dared to step out of line were immediately pushed to a shadow and disappeared, sinking into oblivion in the best case scenario, and blacklisted – in the worst. First you had to build a position of a court painter for yourself so that you dared to paint awful mugs, executions or maimed bodies, like Goya. First you had to achieve absolute independence, like Turner, to stop “licking” the paintings, perfect in every detail. If not, social pressure soon forced an artist to stand in a line. It’s rather the contemporary epoch, our times that have given a more free rein and allow strong personalities to follow a flamboyant style in art.

Although there are five billion people, it's today rather than in the past that an individual can breathe more or less easily, at least in the western world. It's only today that individuals can defend themselves against the tyranny of the society, cite citizen's liberties and their subjective rights, attack the state, government or the president before court. In a word, one can defend himself and even attack masses and their representatives.

- And terrorists? Can you accept that?

Louse believes he moves with the times, because he "doesn't accept".

- There were no terrorists in the old times – he adds.

- Oh, really? – I answer. – How many kings died a natural death, in peace and quiet, in their own beds? How many tsars were poisoned, how many dukes were knifed, how many popes were invited to die suddenly? Are today's terrorists worse than the thugs headed by the Old Man of the Mountain? It's President Mitterand rather than Henry IV who stands a better chance to survive throughout his term of office.

- Yes, but how about the innocent? Terrorists shoot at the innocent, whereas thugs ... - answers Louse. – And that cruelty ...

- It seems to me that a peasant having nothing to do with the Thirty Years War shares the fate of a tourist killed by a bomb at a railway station. When an army was marching through his village, it also left the people without arms and eyes. Additionally, the soldiers raped his wife and daughters. Just look at the chapels built of the skulls of killed enemies or ordinary subjects of the enemy. There are a few in the world.

And so on.

We are chatting carelessly, but at a certain moment I realize I'm beginning to speak frankly what I really think. I strike that honest tone, which I usually adopt when after a longer tension my interlocutor seems to hold out his hand to me. I always do that and later hold a grudge against myself. Louse seems delighted:

- All that you're saying is tragic. But also fascinating – he whispers.

That's why I immediately become cautious. It looks like I'm beginning to confide in him – I say to myself. Firstly, I've got an enemy in front of me. And when you're talking to an enemy, "anything you say can be used against you" – as the British police say. Therefore, a good tip is: don't trust a man who you know wishes you ill. Besides, experience has taught me that an enemy will always remain an enemy. If I hold out my hand to him, I'll be stabbed in my back. The one who I have in front of me hates me so much that a few-hour small talk's not going to change his bad opinion about me. There are too many differences between us, too many bad memories, sustained and inflicted blows to not remember them a few hours after a "conciliatory" talk. There's no reconciliation with an enemy. Which shouldn't prevent you from finding common grounds if a joint business appears on the horizon. And in such a case a return to less hateful relations is possible in the long run.

After 44 years of experience I know all that by heart. But the impression that I'm talking to someone who's listening to me, who perhaps admires me is so intoxicating! I therefore scoff at myself when talking. And while scoffing, I find excuses for myself. Well, if I've already promised myself to put my arrogance aside ... If I've already understood how important it is to have allies ... , I must make the first step.

Then: that's going to be "a prudent policy". Louse seems to be sensitive to good social relations. And I might need him in case ... If I become insolvent after the exhibition and have no money to pay him the rent, maybe he'll go easy on me and will wait for a while?

I know how groundless all these machinations are. Louse is and will remain a louse. However, I need comforting illusions, which I multiply for the needs of the moment. And so the lunch goes on. I listen to and admire myself. What accuracy of judgment, what clear-headedness!

Finally, having confided in Louse how the obsession of freedom in the French style makes me mad, how the judiciary in this country drives me

up the wall and what a few other sources of my fierce fury are, we say goodbye to each other.

“Dear friend” – I feel like telling him on parting. And he would certainly want to hug me. I’m almost sure of that.

COMPLAINTS, 29TH AUGUST 1986

- Cashiers were fed up with continual complaints of the audience, so we took your film off the screen after four days. Sir, there were so many complaints ...

My film was shown at Mac Mahon Cinema, just by Etoile, as an addition for resumed *East of Eden* by Elia Kazan. And now it turns out they stopped screening it two weeks ago.

I found out about it after coming back from Spain.

TALENTS, 29TH AUGUST 1986

In the end talents always triumph, don't they?

Oh, look. This one, here. Look how he's twisted. Yes, yes, just this one! Only he? But no, there are hundreds of them! Look how they catch air with their mouths so as not to suffocate. Like carps taken out of water. But, please, don't tell me that you didn't see them, that you were somewhere else at this very moment or you looked in the opposite direction. Because this or the other way, all of them came to you some time ago. You answered them just like your grandparents replied van Gogh: "no, thank you". Or you didn't say anything. Yes, before some important people assured you that it was "an exceptional talent", just in case you'd preferred to keep quiet and not say anything. Before fame came and the prices reached millions, you'd been waiting cautiously, because "one can never tell". And no sooner had the apparatchiks from Pompidou Centre given their positive opinion than you immediately shouted out: What a great artist he was! Van Goghs will exist in your 21st century, just like they existed in my 20th century, in the 19th century and five ages ago. Since the time man became man, and art became art. You'll be deaf to the scream of despair of a contemporary artist in the same way as at other times "art lovers" were deaf to his suicide.

As for me, just pretend that you haven't heard of me at all. Especially when I die, don't shout about your admiration for the passion and the love for art of an "anonymous propagator". Be so kind. Thank you.

BEKS IS ILL, 30TH AUGUST 1986

Beks is ill again.

I called him yesterday and we talked for a while. The connection was so bad that we couldn't continue the conversation for more than five minutes. He just managed to tell me:

- Everything's all right with us. I've been sick all month, practically since the time you left Poland. First ischias, and then acute cholangitis.

I know what it is and how he must have suffered. A year ago, when I came to Warsaw to take the paintings, he had a similar attack. I saw him virtually writhing in pain.

- It's going to be like that for ever – he added before hanging up. – It will never change.

HONOUR, 4TH SEPTEMBER 1986

Today I had an honour which I'm proud of. The minister of culture Francois Leotard ... no, sorry, it was only on his behalf that a clerk, Dominique Bozo, wrote a letter to me.

But was it him for sure? Just a moment, I guess his signature is a kind of a stamp ... Anyway, what difference does it make? He simply didn't have time to sign it himself, that's all. This letter, however, must have been written by him, Mr Bozo. I'm deeply convinced of that. Anyway, I recognize his style. Besides, why am I trying to find faults? the fact is a fact: a moment ago I received a letter from the Ministry of Culture. A long letter, at the beginning of which Bozo asks my forgiveness for his replying with such a delay. Five months. I tell you, my Friend, it's a lucky day for me and I'm not going to formalize because of such a trifle. After all, five months isn't five years, is it?

"You are going to acquaint France with the works of Beksiński and for this purpose you are requesting the support of the Ministry of Culture". And ... you won't believe me, this precious support has been finally granted to me by Mr Bozo! Yes, yes! At last, after so many endeavours and so much suffering I get the long awaited, substantial support of the Ministry. Because Mr Bozo discloses to me the things I had no idea about: namely that there is an Inspectorate for Artistic Work, which deals with all that. He gives me the address and telephone number.

"You can communicate with the Inspectorate for Artistic Work, which has its headquarters in the Branch Office for Fine Arts (27, avenue de l'Opera, 75001 Paris, tel. 42-61-56-16)". That's not all, though. He also reveals that: "In the said Branch Office for Fine Arts there is Artist Work Support Fund ..." It's on the third floor, in the corridor to the left, then there are little stairs ...ah! He forgot to tell me which door. Oh, my God, oh my God! And it's only now that I find out about it! Why have I wasted the last three years! I've been running nervously everywhere like an idiot, writing to museums, ministries,

art galleries while the entrance was right here, as big as a gate, right in front of me!

Replying to my request for support, the Ministry of Culture finally solved all my problems.

Mr Dominique Bozo will go down in History. Long live France!

MEA CULPA, 7TH SEPTEMBER 1986

Sunday morning.

In the past, on the Creator's Day I used to attend a mass and stand in front of the confessional, waiting for my turn. And when I finally got inside, I kneeled down and repented. The truth is that I haven't been to a mass for more than 30 years. Today, however, I feel a need to confess my sins, as I don't have a clear conscience.

I smeared Louse: "A mean, greedy mountebank. A hypocrite and cheat". Each day brought me new proofs of his baseness. I had no doubts: a scumbag. To my surprise, however, he granted me an interest-free credit for a year to pay for the rental of the gallery for the next exhibition. This concession sort of spoiled the proportions in the portrayal of him that I'd prepared in my heart of hearts. But I said to myself: he must have some business in it. After all, he gave me the credit only when I informed him that despite our agreement I wouldn't have resources to have the exhibition in the autumn. Had I really resigned, he would've had a hole in the gallery programme and wouldn't have had enough time to fill it. He's making concessions, because he has no way out.

Let it be then.

Then there is Gryska's exhibition, which puts another spoke in my wheel.

Gryska is a Polish painter. Nice, simple and, incidentally, lives in poverty, because his paintings don't sell well.

And what do I see in July this year? Gryska in Valmay's Gallery with a monthly exhibition of forty paintings.

Intrigued, I say to myself: but he won't sell anything. How's he going to pay Louse?

A month is over and, indeed, Gryska hasn't sold anything.

I then find out that Louse didn't let the gallery to him, but they had an agreement to divide the potential profits fifty-fifty. With jealousy I ask Louse:

- With me you're very cautious. When I proposed you a 50% division of what would be sold, you refused me, which I don't understand because with me you stand a chance to earn something, while with Gryska you can only be sure you'll lose.

- Gryska is my friend and I choose myself who I want to lose with.

That's right.

Oh, actually he still counted on some sale and was mistaken. And that's all there is to it – I explain things to myself. After all, it's quite possible, because every gallery owner makes mistakes, especially Louse, who doesn't have a nose for painters.

No, it's impossible for Louse to have made such a gesture towards poor Gryska. He just miscalculated the possibilities and lost. That's all. And now he's trying to save his face. "Gryska, my friend ..." Yeah, sure! I don't find it easy to give up a truth once I've already captured it.

And this one is convenient and suits me very well.

Unfortunately, an even bigger flaw appears in it.

Ania has left for Germany, so to pass the time I've invited Leszek Kołodziejczyk to dinner at Ravillac restaurant. He's a Polish journalist who last year wrote a small article about my exhibition in "Przekrój". I've already mentioned him in these notes. Although a bit of a mythomaniac and a snob, he's a real friend, a very well educated and righteous man. Anyway, I've got a good reason to maintain positive relations with him, because he's going to replace me when I'm busy during the next exhibition. Kołodziejczyk has got a lot of free time, he's writing some book and, like many of my compatriots in Paris, he's suffering from poverty. Well, he tells me that substituting for me will be even easier for him, as in the nearest time he's going to move into a little studio, which belongs to Louse's gallery; it's situated over it, on

the first floor. But what I find the most surprising is the fact that he won't pay the rent, and even the telephone and other bills will be paid by Louse.

- Aaa? - Now I'm really confused. Don't know what to think of it.

It's obvious to me that Louse is mean and I'm not going to change my mind about it. However Perhaps ... In a selective way?

Is this the time I started to secretly repent and say *mea culpa*?

PINCER MOVEMENT, 10TH SEPTEMBER 1986

I must admit making a pincer movement, which misfired.

A week ago I went with Ania to dinner at the Smiths, so as to talk about their matters. As I've already explained in these notes, I'm a barrister for Stan, who asked me to represent him in all legal and administrative procedures related to his new apartment in Paris. A beautiful apartment, 320 square metres in the very heart of the sixteenth district. Huge and all painted white, which is what we both like with Ania.

- It's a sin that there are no two beautiful paintings by Beksiński in your living room, for example here and there – I spontaneously blurted out when talking to Stan. Well, it's true. If I had such an apartment, I would simply wallpaper it with Beks's paintings. Stan smiled, and I added:

- Look. I'll lend you two paintings so that you can hang them on both sides of the fireplace.

- OK, but I won't buy them.

Ida butted in the conversation:

- Why not? You can always hammer two nails. It's not a difficult thing.

After this spontaneous gesture, an idea of a pincer movement started to slowly develop in my mind: if I leave them the paintings, they will get used to them and eventually they'll buy them. I immediately thought about the two least gloomy (will I ever understand this word?) ones, that is to say, "Sea with the Sun" and "Glomp Going to Rome". "Glomp" on the left, and "Sea" on the right side. Well, that's it.

Having come home, I took them out of the box. At the same time, slowly and carefully, I took "Bath" and "Lady with Guts" out of their pompous frames. Then I put the two paintings "to be lent" into these frames.

I placed them right in the middle of the living room, resting against the chairs so that they would attract more attention. Anyway, I couldn't put them anywhere else, because together with the frames they occupied nearly half of the room.

This morning Stan and Ida are coming to me to play tennis. Ania is at fashion shows in Dusseldorf, so I invited them to my place to kill the time.

So they've come and sat down on the sofa. I go to my study, pretending to look for something, but in fact I just want to eavesdrop on their conversation at the door.

They don't say anything. Are they admiring them? – I think tentatively, but don't let myself believe in it. I'm right that I don't dare to believe, because in the end I hear Ida say to Stan:

- You must ask him where he found them.

- What? – I ask as I come in.

- The glasses on the shelf. They are absolutely extraordinary!

Three poor quality glasses we bought in Turkey, which should arouse pity rather than anything else, because I'd put them into silver stands from the 19th century and one thing doesn't match the other.

I see that Stan and Ida aren't going to say anything about the paintings. As if "Glomp" and "Sea" didn't stand in front of them, huge, right in the middle of the living room. I then ask openly:

- Do you like them?

Stan talks about "Glomp":

- I don't like this one.

Ida the same.

- There's always something morbid about Beksiński's paintings – he says. – Look at the hands which are coming off. And the face ... I don't know what it is, but there's always something grim about these paintings.

And I thought they were the mildest ... I will never ever guess what kind of things people may find fault with.

In any case, the pincer movement went to hell. With a long face I give everything up. The paintings will stay in my place until the exhibition. And frankly speaking ... I'm glad of it.

SENTENCE, 25TH SEPTEMBER 1986

Browsing through my notes today, I came across the one written on 6th April 1986.

It contains a report on the dinner in our flat in the company of painter Durand, his wife Caty and Irena and Remy Jordan. Before I type this note, I'd like to update and extend it. And theorize a little bit. In this note I wrote about my problems with hearing the opinion of different people on the chances of the autumn exhibition success. Since the exhibition starts in twelve days, I've already found a pretext for updating and extending the note as of 6th April.

At that particularly gloomy period of this year (although the previous one wasn't pink, either) Ania accused me of being a victim of my own self-confidence.

- If you'd asked some people's opinions, you wouldn't be neck-deep in trouble today – she aphoristically finished our talks. – Start listening to what other people say at last. Don't plug your ears. Did you hear what X said? And did you listen till Y finished talking?

In a nutshell, according to her, I consider myself a man of a higher race, self-confident and blind to obvious truths. Well, also the one who sneers at the reality, which is however as plain as day to the others. His excessive pride doesn't let him ask questions to which – that's obvious – everybody knows the answer.

But it was chiefly Beks, pathologically believing in “specialists” who constantly reproached me for not asking their opinions before I got about the whole thing. The accusations of them both were unjust. And they are unjust till today, because firstly, even when I'm disappointed with the results of such searches, I do them every day. Throughout the year, day in day out, I carefully listen to what people have to say. Even if they talk rubbish.

And secondly, I've already written in that note as of 6th April how pointless it is to prick up my ears to what the others are saying if I'm sure I'm right myself. For such a conviction tells you much more about the chances of fulfilling a plan than all "advisors" put together.

Today, five months later, I type this note and, enriched with a few new experiences, I absolutely agree with these statements.

Now, let me say what it was about. Like every man pressed against the wall, I started to doubt in myself. I began to suspect that despite being absolutely sure I was right, I'd made a mistake resulting from ignorance. A mistake which other people, owing to their experience, studies or intelligence, could do something about. Had I asked their opinion, I would have avoided a disaster. After the note written on 6th April I claim this isn't the case, and I advise you, my Friend, against attaching too much weight to people's tips. Well, who in fact are "the others"? What people shall I ask? Who should I ask to utter this famous "sentence" (1).

Besides, how shall I go about it? It's not so obvious. How can I dig up their real thoughts? How shall I ask a question to find what's hidden below a thick layer of words having lots of meanings, courtesies and clichés which people usually use to veil the answers we expect from them (2).

1. Whose opinion should I ask then?

That is the question!

a. Naturally, like everybody, I started with the closest environment. It's always like that and the others do the same. Beks doesn't even go beyond it and doesn't ask anybody except his closest family and friends. He does, however, dismantle every sentence uttered by Tom, his wife or Waniek, to next chew it over for weeks, as this is his only contact with reality.

I also began this way: what's the opinion of the people I contact every day?

i) Ania likes this painting very much. She's always actively supported me and still gives me all her money for the purchase of paintings and paying

the costs of promotion. We've never talked specifically about the chances of success for the whole enterprise or about the genius of Beks, but the opinion she's got is clearly reflected in her behaviour. So much for the principle itself.

As for the details, it was in the same way: I always asked her opinion before I made another step.

- What do you think of it? – I asked, showing her for example a draft poster or text I'd written about Beks. Such questions became simply ritual for us.

In reply she nodded her head, saying: "yes, that's good" or: "no, I don't like this one".

Nothing more. Seldom did she add a word of commentary. But she usually admitted I was right about the most important thing, that is to say, about the unusual quality of this painting and about the main elements of the exhibition in 1985.

ii) Then friends.

When I brought Rymsza "King's Snigger" so that he would store it at his place in Warsaw, he started snickering, turning the painting face to the wall and shouting: "what horror!".

I remembered the laughter and forgot the rest. Because Rymsza is a joker and I treated his term "horror" as a joke.

It was the same with Boguś Poniowski. May Lord look after his soul. When I brought the first paintings to France, with a face of an expert which suited him so well when he gave lessons on "how to live" to young people, he finished his sermon: "dreadful and badly painted". Although he was a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and a sculptor, his opinion was such an obvious absurd that I shrugged my shoulders and didn't attach the slightest importance to it.

Then it was the others' turn: Irena Jordan, my brother Johnny, who came from the States, or Stanley, my brother-in-law, whom I invited to Paris

specially for this purpose. When showing them the paintings, I observed their faces, listened to what they were saying and even followed the timbre of their voice to discover what was really hidden behind it.

All of them were excited, fascinated and filled with admiration.

iii) After family and friends it was the turn of other people. There were such a lot of people that I can't even count them: lorry drivers, printers, ambassadors and future ministers. They were also intrigued, sometimes simply fascinated, amazed. For example I remember the reaction of Delpoio, a barrister, one of the first people I invited home to sound them out:

- Strange – he repeated, looking closely at “Lady with Guts” for a longer while. – Extraordinary.

Durand with his wife, the ones we had for dinner on 6th April, seemed confused.

- What do you think? – I asked them.

- He's one of the great – said Durand. – It's a pity you didn't show him earlier. This way artists painted ten years ago.

My neighbours the Houangs, ultra-leftish intellectuals, whom I brought round so as to see their reaction, produced a few rapturous “a!”, and then confessed with relief:

- When you invited us, we were afraid you'd show us some daubs, which we would have to praise out of courtesy. But this is amazing! You must go with it to Pompidou Centre. They must show it. It's going to be a real scoop!

It's going to be a real scoop ... To Pompidou Centre ... God!

As more and more contradictory interjections followed one another, I felt as if a whirl was sucking me in. Especially that the new paintings bought from Ściegienny and Szydło were extremely beautiful. With time they become closer and closer to me and I got increasingly attached to them. When I started preparing the exhibition in 1985, I had to come into contact

with a whole series of collaborators who didn't belong to the world of art, but gravitated around it. Particularly Mathan, a printer:

- That's something! – he repeated many times, looking at the ektachromes and then at the original paintings when I invited him to my place.

Apart from him there was Mari – a photographer, Guinot – a typographer, a framer from Delf or Ardouin- a bookbinder. All of them expressed the utmost admiration. Besides, I met their customers and co-workers, who also looked at the reproductions and said without any encouragement on my part:

- Awesome!

From time to time a woman turned her head, pulling her face:

- I don't like it! It's full of death.

Such voices were relatively rare, though. I therefore kept repeating myself like at the time Rymsza described "King's Snigger" as horror: It's a whim. It doesn't mean anything.

b. People ... What people? Why should you ask a flock of "people" who matter only during elections, while you don't know anything about the opinions of several hundred ones who decide about everything? What can Robinson, who's a tram driver, know about the choices of Johnson, who drives a Rolls-Royce and rolls in gold?

For the success of my enterprise doesn't depend on the "wide audience", but on the "milieu".

If I wanted to sell a certain number of paintings just to be able to go on pushing my Beks wheelbarrows up the hill, I shouldn't have asked the opinion of architects, printers or barristers, but first of all gallery owners, art critics and collectors, who canonize or excommunicate painters. It's they who have the knowledge of things and necessary experience. It's they, not anybody else, who know the tastes, market trends and the meanders of sale.

In a word, being seemingly right, you will tell me that I should have asked “specialists”.

Oh, no, I didn't ignore their opinion! You can believe me, my Friend. I didn't ignore. Pricking up my ears to what is said by my nearest milieu, by people from the suburbs and the “audience”, at the same time I carefully examined the pulse of “specialists”.

But only the one who has listened to them carefully will recognize the incoherence of their reasoning and the contradictions in which they get trapped with every move they make.

To some people this painting is “amazing”. So the owner of L'Oeil de Boeuf gallery on Quincampoix Street, Cérès Franco, whom I met at the very beginning of my pilgrimage, when I was still looking for a gallery to exhibit Beks, for a long moment looked at the reproductions in the dossier I'd brought.

- What a painter! – she said with admiration. – What a painter!

A nice woman from Bernheim le Jeune Gallery on Faubourg Saint Honore Street, who was just retiring when I contacted her to rent the room, couldn't contain her excitement:

- I haven't seen such quality painting for a long time. But I doubt you'll find buyers for these paintings at 300 000. Especially that even great artists have serious problems to sell now. But he's one of them. That's certain!

Or Blondel, the owner of the gallery having the same name, near Beaubourg Centre:

- You've made an excellent choice. Oh, yes, you've got a sharp eye. Is he like that? Or does he vent all his emotions in paintings? – he asked me, looking at the ektachromes and refusing, like two other people before him, to exhibit Beks.

The same chorus in the gallery of Isa Brachot:

- Oh, you can see at once that it's an artist whose work has ripened. No, we've got our own painters. No, thank you – Ms Passover, the gallery director, finished the conversation after seeing two paintings I'd brought, and then the ektachromes (which she hastily looked at against light, while talking to someone on the phone).

Then Serane, the owner of Râ Gallery, whom I'd also brought two paintings so that he would see Beks's works in the original. What he told me stuck in my craw and just won't go down. I've already quoted his opinion at least five times in these notes, because it's a perfect example of how seriously one should treat whatever "specialist" say and how useful it is to ask their opinion:

- Ah, that's dangerous, here! Here, in the right top corner – he said about "Veiled Madonna". – oh, yes, he's a pupil. I could give him a few tips, but you say he's 54 years old. That's too late.

Later, when I came to him with the ektachromes on the next day, he looked through them so quickly that he couldn't even identify the forms.

In the end he said angrily:

- That's very uneven. No, thank you.

Which doesn't change the fact that he came to my exhibition. I wasn't in the gallery at that moment, but Wojtek, who substituted for me, informed me that Serane had looked at the paintings for a long while. Then he left only to come back after five minutes, and in the end he said:

- Extraordinary beauty. Awesome! – and he left the visiting card, asking me to contact him.

Or Grympas, a clerk from the Ministry of Culture and from Pompidou Centre, whom the Hoangs brought to me. I've already told three times how being extremely angry, she nearly hurled abuses at Beks's painting and couldn't restrain herself from saying:

- Yees, it's very talkative ... And that precision in details .. Just think these people imagine they can paint ...

- A brilliant artist – said Hugnet, the manager of the art department in “Penthouse”.

And Jean-Jacques Leveque, an art critic, bid up the price:

- Oh, dear, that painter of yours is the whole continent!

What a concert!

Ask the opinion of “specialists”... Experts not only contradict one another, but to make matters worse, they have big difficulties not contradicting themselves an hour later. So, for example Carpentier, the owner of a major gallery on Bac Street, whom I'd brought three paintings by Beks, started our conversation with a prophetic cliché:

- You'll never be able to sell it. Just give up on it and withdraw the stakes when there's still time to do that.

An hour later he adopted a more optimistic tone:

- Set the prices that are neither high nor low. Something between 35 000 and 65 000 francs.

And at the end of our long conversation he nearly intoned *Te Deum*:

- But of course, yes, why not? a prestigious exhibition of this painter in my gallery. Next year? Please, come back, we'll talk!

Who to believe? Actually, I should ask: “At what moment should I believe?”, because “specialists” keep changing their minds like chameleons. “Specialists” ...

Isn't Galais, whom I met this morning, a painter and organizer of exhibitions, a “specialist”? Yet for him Beks is the greatest painter in the world.

No, my Friend, when it comes to basic choices, you'll never find out anything from “specialists”. In the case of basic choices you always hold

a coin which you'll toss to decide: heads or tails. For experts grope their way just like other people, and similarly to them, are inspired by minor circumstances to finally miss. Their only advantage is that they speak in a confident tone, after much consideration, they quote precedents, carry out reasoning and strew their answers with numbers and names. That's all. And everybody knows that the most exact mind will gape its mouth in front of a jerk who can cite some dates. Which doesn't change the fact that when it comes to basic choices, "specialists" are as confused as any other mortal.

Anyway, I know something about it: at the age of 44, after 26 years devoted to studying the regulations and codes, I became a "specialist" myself. Yet I don't hide from myself, my Friend, and you've got a proof of it in these notes, how helpless I am about answering the basic questions, even the professional ones. Taking part in trials I never know whether I'll win or lose. Why should one be a "specialist" then? I just have an ability to build a clear line of reasoning and weaving in names, syllogisms and examples. With such weapons I can easily shut the mouth of an opponent who doesn't know my tricks. The audience will be taken in, too. I can't fool myself, though; neither can the reality, which tomorrow will prove I was wrong despite the fact that I'm such a "law specialist".

c. And suppose I made a few steps further – you'll tell me – and asked the opinion of those who buy the paintings? Perhaps I'd be very close to the right answer? Just half a metre away? This is what I thought. Not only was it completely useless, but got me a few painful disappointments.

Firstly, there's no access to wealthy people, who are potential buyers of expensive paintings. I rowed like a gallery slave to get to them. The ones who have money in a "democratic" system are a narrow "elite", locked, bolted and surrounded by an invisible wall. You can read about them in "Paris Match" and this is what makes the current regime in France different from the "ancien regime"¹. You won't jump over the wall or open the locks, though. If you're going to ask them a question according to the established rules, that is to say, by letter or phone, it's like you stuck a knife into water. They'll be

“absent”, won’t write back or will give you a non-committal reply, which doesn’t mean anything. I’ve collected quite a lot of letters from them, I’ve called many of them and I know what I’m talking about.

To be able to get any information out of them, to force them to answer my questions, I would have to be already a member of their milieu. However, to belong to their milieu I would first have to succeed. But if I succeeded, I wouldn’t care much for their opinion. A vicious circle.

Which didn’t prevent me from approaching two people like that. Two potential buyers, collectors-investors: Zarzecki and Smith. There are thousands like them. The crushing majority of those who collect pieces of art are like them: they don’t even recognize the style of a possessed painting, but they know perfectly well how much it’s worth. They are both very nice and ready to give me advice of experienced businessmen.

However, I soon understood that I wouldn’t learn anything from their answers. Firstly, neither of them could tell me how a real “collector” would behave in front of these paintings, as neither of them was one. As for the behaviour of a collector-investor like them, I know it from my own experiences: like all business people turning over big sums of money (Kołodziejczyk claims that Zarzecki has recently bought some areas in Spain worth 100 million dollars), they refused to invest a single penny in the promotion of Beks, because “the profit is uncertain”. So their verbal gymnastics accompanying the refusal opened the already wide open door before me: people like them will only buy a painting when the painter is renowned, expensive and easy to resell, which at least will allow them to recover the invested money, if not earn on it. In a word, they won’t buy until it’s a good capital investment. However, if these conditions were fulfilled, I wouldn’t need their advice, as life itself would give me answers to my questions.

And this is the difference (artificial) between “the opinion” about something of someone who’s got power or money and “the decision he takes”. If he is a ne’er-do-well, today he’ll present his opinion only to take

a completely contradictory decision the very next day. A good example are voters: a few months before the last presidential elections they gave 16% to Coluche in opinion polls. It was their opinion. When it came to the actual decision, though, that is to say, at the time of elections, it turned out that according to the polls, they wouldn't have given a single per cent to Coluche if he'd still stuck to his candidacy. It's no cost for a careless man to give his opinion about anything. It doesn't make him obliged whatsoever. He can say anything then, so it's not worth asking him. Although they are cautious and uncertain today, people like Zarzecki and Smith would rush to buy Beks's paintings tomorrow if only the news spread around that the paintings were selling well and at good prices.

Or, and this is the second hypothesis, your interlocutor is a person who, due to the post held, is forced to act according to what he said. If you ask his opinion, from the very beginning it will be distorted by the prospect of a decision such a man might have to take in the end. Similarly, the said decision will be distorted by the opinion that he might have impulsively expressed before.

What I'm saying seems abstract and complicated, but it's actually a simple and plain truth. I've personally found out about it, which has left a few scars on my back.

So when I sought the opinion of the officials from Beaubourg Centre about the possibilities of exhibiting Beks in Paris, none of them was taken in by my naïve face, as they instantly understood what I meant: using a pretext of asking their opinion, I wanted to imperceptibly make them fall into my trap: their future decision that would be favourable for me. Knowing that one day I'd quote their positive opinion on this painting and ask them to exhibit Beks, they preferred to give an "a priori" negative opinion. As far as their decision is concerned, it was taken according to the same pattern, only in the opposite direction. So when I turned to them again, this time with a concrete proposal to exhibit Beks in the Centre, they were already bound by their own previously expressed opinion. That's why Bozo, their director,

without even having a look at the documents sent to him, answered me: “no, thank you”, just to conform with the opinion of his institution expressed two years before by the two clerks I’d talked to. The worst thing, however, is the fact that since that time the Centre has been systematically refusing to exhibit Beks, the only reason of which is not to contradict itself even if Beks suddenly became famous.

- It’s not that you shouldn’t have asked people’s opinions. The point is you asked the wrong questions. You were not able to ask a right question – “deep” minds will say.

Perhaps ... Maybe it’s true that I couldn’t approach people in a right way so they would reveal the lining of their thoughts to me.

Let’s talk about it, because it’s a certain thing, my Friend, that if you ask a wrong question, you’ll get a senseless answer.

2. How should I ask the opinion?

That’s the question, how?

a. Here? Just like that? In a café, at the table? Or in the evening, during dinner? Many people do that, and I myself, in the note as of 6th April, which gave rise to the one I’m writing now, described the mess this method leads to. Because acquaintances sitting at the table will start polemicizing and interrupting each other; they will move on to the main topic, laughing and telling jokes. The whole series of temporary, minor circumstances, not related with the case, will influence the opinion they’ll express on the topic you are interested in and about which you’d like to get a clear answer from them.

Anyway, they will most frequently react to what their predecessor talked about a moment ago rather than give an answer to your question. To make matters worse, they will adjust to his tone rather than his words. How many times have I heard people talking in an uncertain, broken voice, who triggered an avalanche of negative reactions? And vice versa, during this

kind of meetings a person who's speaking confidently, fluently and with a focused face often makes an irresistible impression of telling the truth.

- Quite rightly! He's absolutely right! – can be heard from all sides. After two hours the majority of them would like to withdraw the enthusiastic interjections, but having thought for a while they understand that they got carried away by the atmosphere created by that person. It's too late, though, because the meeting is over and everybody's lying in their own beds.

A relaxed, spontaneous conversation when having dinner or a drink with acquaintances gives preposterous results. I've lost ten times on such occasions. For either I'm this insecure person that nobody's listening to, as he hesitates and has problems choosing words, or it's exactly to the contrary: in the case of Beks's painting my look turns into the scissors of a censor. People feel bad and start saying anything for the fear of hurting me or making fools of themselves in front of me. This was the case during that famous dinner on 6th April 1986.

- Do you think the prices should be lower than at the previous exhibition?
– I asked.

And it began. Outshouting each other, they started to jabber about anything that crossed their minds.

- God forbid! – started Durand, a painter by profession, which instantly made him a “specialist”. – the prices that you offered during the previous exhibition?...

- Why not? – Remy interrupted him immediately. – Nobody remembers the prices from the previous year.

Durand's wife moves on to something else:

- But not for the same paintings, I guess?

So Durand changes his mind as if nothing happened:

- Well, actually if these were the same paintings offered at lower prices, they might sell. I'm sure they would sell.

- Have you seen the prices at Isa Brachot's exhibition? – says Irena Jordan.

I'm trying to introduce some order into the conversation, but eventually I give up.

No, there's no point asking fundamental questions during a get-together with acquaintances.

b. What to do then? Should I do something opposite?

Should I take only one interlocutor, place him in an armchair opposite me, fix my serious eyes on him and clearly ask him a carefully formulated question?

If you go about it this way, you stand every chance of getting an idiotic answer, quite contrary to what that person really thinks. Because acting this way, you've set the scene for an abortive discussion.

Firstly, your interlocutor will be surprised. If he's honest and intelligent, he'll stop you straight away saying:

- I can't say anything about it.

Or:

- If I were you, I'd ask X. He knows more about it than me.

Most frequently, however, your interlocutor is big-headed and wants to show he can rise to the occasion and have such a serious conversation. He will then successfully weigh his words, succumbing to the focused atmosphere and his own temporary significance. He will desperately start looking for an idea in his head which five minutes ago was a complete blank. First of all, however, he'll formulate his answer in a way reflecting his attitude to you, and not your question. His reply will be completely different depending on whether he likes you or is afraid of you, whether he's got any score to settle with you or is bound by a joint interest. He'll hastily cobble his answer together depending on your relations or, what's worse, on the accidental circumstances at a given moment.

- Lower the prices? – shouted out Louse. – If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't give in.

Louse hates me. He'd be delighted if I got drowned, or at least he'd enjoy the prospect of my failure. Besides, maintaining the horrendous prices for Beks's paintings would add renown to his gallery. At the same time it wouldn't put him at any risk, as he lets the gallery to me at a flat-rate sum and will get it no matter if I sell anything or not.

- It doesn't matter at all, dear sir – said Carpentier. – If you lower the prices, it will only mean that last year you didn't want to sell, and this year you've changed your mind. You needn't worry.

This was also the opinion of an art critic, charming Mr Barret, who likes me and, understanding the absolute necessity of the exhibition, encourages me to organize it. But does he really believe in what he's saying?

Hugnet, while gorging on the soup I'd bought him in Maison du Danemark, hesitated:

- If you didn't want to sell, you shouldn't have put up any prices at all. Now their reduction may harm the painter.

- I can't remember the prices at all – I was strongly assured by Levêque, who's an art critic and wanted to give an impression he was above such mercantile issues etc. And I'm at a deadlock again.

c. Of course, there are more certain methods of finding out what people really think. It's enough to turn for example to a court expert, who in reply to my question will draw up an evaluation after a thorough analysis of the matter. This way I'd surely get to know his opinion. Just like I could seat twenty people at a round table, having first informed them ten days before what fundamental question I was going to ask and what auxiliary questions would accompany the main one, provide them with all the data about the bothering problem and ask one of the persons to write an introductory report ...

In a word, I could act like courts, councils, conferences and other “deliberating bodies”.

In the end – ah, that would be funny! – I could take all my friends and enemies to a closed room, one after the other, put them on a sofa and tell them to say whatever comes to their heads about the chances of the future exhibition. The more incoherent it would be, the better. No preparation, no introduction, no logic and no duty of consistency. “Contradict yourself as much as you wish and talk whatever rubbish you want”.

Yes, of course. I could do all that, just like I could do many other things.

But can you imagine a sworn expert bothering to find an answer to the question whether I’ll sell Beks’s paintings at the next exhibition. Can you imagine my friends and those who wish me all the worst after two weeks of staying together in one place and debating with the doors closed whether collectors-investors will decide to buy the paintings and, if they do, at what price? That’s comical.

And who would agree to undergo a session of psychoanalysis on a couch so as to disclose to me what his most secret opinion on my chances is?

And what’s the conclusion of all that?

Pessimistic.

When it comes to the most important, fundamental issues, you won’t get anything out of people, let alone specialists. Even if it was possible to get something out of them, the machinery to be set in motion is so heavy that any questioning becomes materially impossible.

But I’ll say more: even if I found out what the people’s opinion is, I’d be an idiot if I attached any importance to it. Whenever I did so, I always regretted. Passion, hatred, resentment, the wish for revenge or craving for a win, love, experience, “a nose”, and especially luck are far better advisors than people. Immeasurably better. Well, this is what I can advise you, my Friend. It’s the only lesson I’ve learnt in the forty four years of my life, in

particular the last three years, which I devoted to the fulfilment of my major project.

¹ Ancien regime – a synonym of pre-revolutionary French government

CRAVING FOR DEATH, 3RD OCTOBER 1986

When my Father was approaching death, he woke up at night and screamed:

- I don't want to die!!

I didn't see him at that time, as I was in Paris. But my brother Anthony told me that Father struggled as if he wanted to free himself from the hands of people leading him to the execution. Then he calmed down, looked with his absent eyes into the ceiling again or cried.

He was eighty six years old.

How can one reconcile with death?

Out of faith?

Out of habit?

Out of despair?

Believe and crave for death ...

This is how my Mother reconciled with it. This saint person craved death to finally become reunited with God.

- Mum – I kept telling her. – Mum's going to live a hundred years.

- God forbid - she would answer anxiously.

Despite the hard life she had, she didn't want to escape from it. She simply loved God so much that she perceived death as the most desired moment. A moment worth waiting for seventy five years.

Ah! I wish I could have such faith! And I wish I had a clear conscience, like her, and I wasn't afraid of being punished in the next world ...

Die out of habit then?

Some people claim it's possible. The contemporary man – they say – is scared of death, because throughout his childhood he's hermetically separated from it. That's why, having become an adult, he fears it like every single thing he didn't discover and get to know when being a child.

I don't believe. Because both today and in the past, yesterday as well as in a thousand years' time our death will always be like pain and hunger: terrifying. We won't reconcile with it just because every day we've stayed in its vicinity since the dawn of our lives. We'll get used to death inflicted to others by ourselves or by somebody else.

Our own death, however, will remain what it's always been: the most black, the most murky, the darkest of abysses.

What remains is despair.

Die because you're fed up. Die by poisoning yourself, by cutting your wrists, by hanging yourself. Any way is good to die. So that you won't have to go through what is impossible to go through: life. So that you won't have to bear yourself and face up to others. Reach such a level of weariness that the last gesture will be released by itself.

Looking at Beks's paintings I think about it a hundred times. The times when I talked about them as "abstract visions, constructed on the pattern of a symphony" are long gone. There's death in them. Death, breaking up and leaving. And this is what attracts me.

For this painting lets you feel despair of the highest degree. When looking at these paintings hundreds of times, I search for a pretext, alibi, incentive to finally make the suicide gesture. At the thought of my life filled with suffering, at the sight of the surrounding pain much more terrifying than mine, Beks's paintings are like a quiet, mild invitation to enter the world of icy and silent beauty.

Discovering them every morning on the walls of my room, I get such an obvious impression of truth that one tear would be enough to change everything into peace and silence...

FOSTIER, 15TH OCTOBER 1986

Today I come to court to pick up the correspondence and file a petition.

In my cupboard there's a letter from a Fostier.

Fostier, Fostier, Fostier? What was it? It might be a criminal case – I say to myself, opening the envelope.

I have a vague memory of someone I met at the time when I still defended criminals.

The letter contains thanks. Many years after he'd met me, some man found my address and now writes to ask about my health and say a few words about himself. Now I recall, yes, it was a thief who'd stolen a Mercedes, claiming he'd only wanted to impress his girlfriend and take her for a ride around the town. Which I strongly doubt, though. He was sentenced to one year in prison. When I compare his punishment with the one given to Djaknoun ... Three months of suspended imprisonment for driving when drunk and killing a child on a pedestrian crossing ... It stuck in my craw and I still can't get over it despite all the indifference to injustice that one develops as a result of permanent co-operation with the judiciary.

But let's come back to Fostier. Actually, it was not me who defended him on the day when he was convicted. At that time I acted on behalf of some little scumbag with a stinky mouth odour. While waiting my turn, I began to talk with that Fostier, who was waiting his turn on the dock. He then asked me to do him a favour, which his public defence solicitor "had no time" to do: make them give him back his wallet, which was seized and sealed upon arrest. I was so annoyed by the disproportion between the punishment he'd been given and the calibre of the offence he'd committed that I carelessly promised to do that. And then it was too late to withdraw. I had to carry out a hundred procedures to recover the wallet, because once something falls into the clutches of the judiciary, it's really hard to snatch it away. Only

a lawyer knows how much trouble it costs, how many floors have to be climbed and how many forms must be filled in for such a little thing.

When after many days I finally managed to recover the wallet, I opened it and found a photo of an old woman and three underground tickets. I sent everything back to Fostier, to prison.

For many months I waited for some thanks, as I'd rendered this favour free of charge. That's why the letter I got today is a real pleasure for me.

So after all, there's some space for "thanks" in this awful cesspit – I say to myself, walking along the magnificent corridors of the most rotten institution in France.

SUICIDE 1, 26TH OCTOBER 1986

In every mystical enterprise there's some master, guide, prophet. And apostles around him. Among them there will always be someone more tenacious about the doctrine than the helmsman himself, someone who in the end will begin to accuse him of being opportunist.

Well, that's me.

Today I wrote an almost indignant letter to Beks, because he'd confided in me that under no circumstances would he commit suicide. Without much hope that something interesting might still happen in his existence, he wants to live like that day after day until a natural solution.

SCREAMS, 26TH OCTOBER 1986

Who at last will compose a symphony about life? a symphony woven of the screams of tortured people, the howling of terrified madmen, the hiccups of the dying and the panting of tormented victims? a symphony which I'd like to be able to write so much, as I know its every note by heart ...

Who incessantly comes back to death? Who must listen intently to the others so as to suffer less himself? Or to finally find strength to break up with life?

VISIT, 28TH OCTOBER 1986

A week ago or so a young man came to the gallery. For a long time he looked at the paintings, one by one. Then we started talking, which I usually do with guests who seem to be interested in this painting more than other people. One thing leading to another, the boy confided in me:

- I'm visiting your exhibition for the third time. When I discovered Beksiński, I got shocked, like in the past, when for the first time I went to a concert of industrial music.

I was intrigued by this music, which I'd never heard of. So we made promises to each other – he promised to send me a cassette of the concert he'd mentioned, and I – the cassette with my film. Last Saturday I got a parcel and, with much interest, devoted all Sunday afternoon to listening to it. I felt that in good acoustic conditions (which unfortunately I don't have) this music could be intoxicating like a hallucinogenic drug. This is how I got an idea of a piece of music made up of authentic recordings of the howling of convicts, fear-stricken madmen, the begging of victims killed and the sweat dripping down tortured people's bodies.

When the boy came back to the gallery yesterday, I told him about it. He said that the presentations of industrial music and some concerts of punk music are accompanied by the sessions of tortures inflicted to volunteers in the hall. Their facial expression is shown on the screen together with the concert so the audience can observe.

- It's absolutely illegal! – I said. – Even if the victims agree.

The boy was a lawyer, a student in his fourth year at "Pantheon". By using the strongest word from our common glossary, I wanted to most clearly express the extent of my annoyance.

For I felt that my idea of a symphony and perhaps even Beks's painting might one day be associated with cheap sado-masochism that young punks

get intoxicated with during concerts. A humiliating prospect, to say the least. Writing music based on the screams of suffering people might be a worthwhile idea provided, however, that the goal behind it is more humanistic than arousing erotic excitement with the screams of snots subjected to burning.

- It's absolutely illegal – I repeated, adding: - It's like porno movies made up of scenes of really raped women, who are at the same time tortured and killed.

The boy sort of shuddered.

- Does something like that exist?

- Of course. In America it's quite common. And if you look around yourself, you'll surely find this kind of screenings also in Paris.

He seemed intrigued. Five minutes later he walked away. Will he start wandering about Pigalle in search of a secret show?

THE BLIND, 29TH OCTOBER 1986

Somewhere near Saint Germain en Laye or in the town itself there must be a home for the blind. I think so, because in the streets I often observe how people who can see teach the blind to use white sticks and to grope their way. Whenever they appear in front of me, I try to look in another direction.

And yet I know their world a little bit. When I was a little boy, my Mum, related to the nuns who look after blind children in Laski, took me with her so as to escape from everyday problems and be able to work in peace and quiet. I spent long weeks with her and while she was writing, I observed children with leucoma-covered eyes or empty eye sockets. Actually I got used to it. Here I can see adults who are learning to walk, which means they lost their sight just a few months ago. So not long ago they were like me. They looked at the sun, watched films, gazed at the naked body of the person they loved. Today, much better than children, they realize what they've lost forever. And yet from the very beginning they put on an inscrutable mask of people living in the dark. Their faces don't express anything, though the unbearable suffering must make their hearts constantly bleed.

STRONG EMOTIONS, 7TH DECEMBER 1986

What a day! I'm not exaggerating with the exclamation mark I've added. It is said: "He swam, swam and got drowned at the shore". This is how I nearly got drowned, too.

1. Yesterday was Saturday and the exhibition came to an end.

Emotions started in the morning: the Kirsts didn't come to the meeting. For a number of days I'd tried to catch them so as to establish when and how I should deliver them the painting they'd chosen and to decide about the manner of payment. Because as long as I didn't have a cheque in my hand, everything might change. Each time I called them it was Mrs Kirst who answered me. I wonder if she was drunk or doped all the time.

Anyway, she could never build one coherent sentence to confirm or cancel our appointment. She laughed, stammered and laughed again. At last she managed to give me to understand that her husband was in Germany on business, but they would both come to the gallery at noon on Saturday to pay and take the painting.

Well, I simply ran to that meeting at noon so as not to be late a single minute. All that hurry for nothing, because there was nobody at the agreed time. I tried to get in touch with them on the phone as soon as possible, but nobody answered. And I'd already included the 50 000 they owed me in my accounts.

Was my joy premature?

Finally, I came across Kirst himself, who confirmed they would come to the gallery, but no sooner than at seven p.m. Not bothering to show any remorse or to apologize, he only explained that he hadn't come to the appointment, because he was "busy". At the end of the conversation he added:

- I have problems with this painting.

Problems ... - I said to myself. So it's begun ...

At six p.m. Kołodziejczyk told me that while I was absent, a Swiss man insisted on buying the painting chosen by Kirst. Kołodziejczyk advised him to come back at seven p.m. But since he's sort of a mythomaniac, I thought the Swiss man just wanted to know the price of the painting without really wanting to buy it. I then waited for Kirst in tension, feeling pressed against the wall. He arrived a bit late, surrounded by a group of friends, Germans, smiling, talkative, slightly nervous. He started by repeating that he had "serious problems with this painting". I then thought that in the end he would carelessly tell me with a smile on his lips that having considered all pros and cons, he wouldn't take the painting.

- Sir – I said - only an hour ago a certain Swiss wanted to take it. If you don't take it now, I've lost an opportunity ...

- No, no – he assured me – it's not the point. I decided to take it, so I will. This painting is very, very charming and so on. It's just that I'll have to live with it ...

To block his escape route, I immediately packed the painting onto the lorry and delivered it to his place, on Bourdonnais Street, near Samaritaine. I was received by his wife, with a crumpled face, blurred vision, completely absent. Now she was speaking quite correct French and told me she'd been ill with flu ...

A few moments later arrived Kirst with his friends.

- So I owe you 52 000? – he asked.

On the table lay a blank cheque torn out of the cheque book.

- That's right – I answered in a relaxed tone, though I remembered perfectly well that we'd agreed on just 50 000, as I'd given him a little discount, which he apparently forgot at the moment.

And a moment later I had the cheque in my hand.

When I returned, Kołodziejczyk told me that the Swiss man came back and was furious that “Building with Fish” had been sold in the meantime. It was not the end of emotions on that day, though.

2. To be sure I’m getting out of my financial nightmare, I’d have to know that Mrs Afkhami with her daughter will certainly pay me 10 000 dollars for the painting “Turquoise Tower”. Recently they haven’t been coming to the gallery and I wasn’t sure what to do to get out the cash they owed me from them. They are sensitive persons and an unguarded gesture on my part might hurt them. I didn’t want Mrs Afkhami to get an impression that I suspected her of unpunctuality in payment. For I must remind you that she paid me very regular instalments for “Christmas Eve Night”.

I’ll call her to ask about her health – I said to myself. The term has expired, but if she doesn’t mention the due sum on her own, I won’t do it, either. If she passes over the question of payment, it will mean she’s got financial problems.

Serious? No, I’ve never doubted for a moment that one day she’ll pay everything to the last penny. But when?

Because in the meantime I don’t know what to do with Beks, who’s breathing down my neck and won’t give me even a day of delay. Apart from that I’m bothered by Sureaut, the printer, as I owe him 10 000, which I promised to give back by the end of the exhibition. And finally there are others: Szydło, Louse, the typist in Poland and a few other people. All of them demand their share and there’s absolutely no chance they’ll be fooled by my excuses.

I then call Mrs Afkhami to tell her about the end of the exhibition and ask about her health. She immediately assures me that tomorrow she’ll come with her daughter to the gallery to settle the debt. The day begins to gain some symbolic dimensions: all signs seem to suggest there’s been a turnabout in my struggle of a strangled man.

3. In the meantime Zarzecki comes and flatters me. He goes into raptures over my abilities of an organizer.

- That's remarkable – he says – what you have done! What patience, what persistence, what enthusiasm!

At the end he adds:

- I'd never dare to do what you've done. I must admit I didn't believe you could succeed. Now I have no doubts you'll achieve a great success.

My God!

Just like Smith, who persists in praising me and telling everybody around:

“Having seen how Peter went about the whole thing, I had no doubts he was bound to succeed”.

And who's saying that? a multimillionaire in dollars, who saw me drowning and never wanted to lift a finger to rescue me ...

Many people whom I asked for something, whose support I sought, whom I tried to convince have suddenly started to assure me of their deep faith in my success. Hearing them, one might think it's going to happen tomorrow. But if the sale of paintings stopped, they would again have doubts, “which as a matter of fact have never left them”.

4. But such a special day can't have finished in a banal way, successfully. The last chord had to be grandiloquent. “He kept swimming and got drowned at the shore”.

Well, this is how I nearly buried all my dreams on the last day of the exhibition.

At about ten in the evening, with Piotr Mazur we started to load the paintings onto a lorry, which I'd rented in the morning in Avis. Nothing special happened at that time. We carefully attached the paintings with wire, protecting the frames with sponge and blankets. The furniture (the armchair, the desk, the chair from my study etc.), which I'd used during the exhibition,

I placed at the back of the lorry so that they couldn't move forward and crush the paintings in case the truck braked suddenly. And I drove off.

Late at night, so as to avoid traffic on the roads. Gently, with a hundred precautions. No acceleration or sharp bends. Fifty kilometres per hour. Nobody could accuse me of anything

Except that I'm a complete idiot. And here I'm also far from exaggerating.

Because when I was getting to Marly, I instinctively headed for the tunnel in the middle of the road. Practically, I do it every day coming back from Paris and also this time I went on auto-pilot. Now I remember that at least five signals turned on in my head to not do that, but none of them set off the alarm. Frankly speaking, when analysing the moments that precede a disaster, one realizes many indicators of danger noticed by the senses and recorded by the brain. They even provoked the beginning of a formulated thought, failing however to arouse a reaction of the will. It's as though consciousness, which usually functions in a proper way, got disconnected with the mind and wasn't able to pass on a stimulus leading to a decision.

In a word, when slowly approaching the tunnel at 50 kilometres per hours, I mechanically glanced at the sign that showed the maximum permitted height: 2.60 m. At the same moment Peter asked me:

- Uncle, aren't we too high?

- We'll see – I answered automatically, thinking about something else.

Of course, I'm not used to paying attention to signals showing maximum height, as I don't normally drive trucks. Therefore, I don't have the reflexes which Peter has. Because at this very moment I didn't know yet that he'd driven big lorries in the army and that his reflexes were very quick. I'd also forgotten that Peter was shy and wouldn't dare to abruptly reprimand me for committing a cardinal mistake.

Also, I didn't remember that from time to time it's good to listen carefully to what he's got to say.

- We'll see ...

For that “we'll see” I should have my balls cut off. The nonchalant “we'll see”, which I so many times cursed in dozens of various jokers, incompetent jesters; there are such a lot of them in this country, and I've continually met them during my Beks pilgrimage. All those who “are always up to their ears in work”, so “you have to wait, sir”. The “we'll see” for which a court-martial would sentence me to execution by firing squad during a war.

Now I recall that a number of thoughts crossed my mind during those several seconds preceding the accident: 2.60? Brumel used to jump 2.20, but he surely wouldn't have jumped over our lorry.

That thought was almost the same as I formulate it now, only very distant, flat, deaf. I still didn't react and carried on driving. The last thought, deeply hidden, nearly subconscious was: so what? We've driven through the tunnel. I was right.

First I heard a terrible bang, then the lorry stopped dead. Neither Peter nor I fell forward, because we'd been driving slowly, about 50 kilometres per hour.

The bang came from behind.

- That's the end – I whispered through my teeth, but I still didn't think about anything.

It was only after three or four seconds that I got out of the cab and went to the back to see what had happened. The lorry had stuck in the tunnel and couldn't move forward. Only in the morning did we figure out with Peter what mechanism had worked: we'd run short of about 20 centimetres to squeeze in. But as the lorry was driving out of the tunnel, which was lower in relation to the further part of the road, it sank under its own weight and its front somehow got under the vault. Two metres further its coil springs pushed it out onto the real height and then the lorry stopped dead, completely blocked.

Behind us was a passenger Citroen car, stuck to our bumpers, with a totally crushed bonnet.

- Quelle merde, quelle merde, quelle merde¹ ... - I kept repeating in French, still not thinking about anything.

My mind was blank.

Behind the steering wheel of the Citroen car was sitting an elderly man and a woman beside him. He got out of the car with a certain difficulty and started viewing the damage. I was sort of surprised that he didn't attack me shouting and cursing. In the meantime a traffic jam had formed behind us. The cars at the back couldn't move either way, because the tunnel has only one lane. It was two in the morning. It might seem that a nip in the air and a breeze should clean the road at this time. Just the opposite, loads of cars immediately appeared from all sides. Simply, it was Saturday and people were leaving the nearby disco. We were soon surrounded by a group of young people hoping that some event would break the monotony and add sense to their night jaunt. I looked at one of them in a short-sleeved shirt and asked myself: how can he bear this cold?

The man from the Citroen car was already filling in the damage report form. My mind was still blank and I still couldn't understand why he wasn't hurling abuse or shouting at me. Like a broken record, I kept repeating:

- Quelle merde, quelle merde ...

Afterwards the man reversed his car by about two metres and only then did I understand his amazing calmness: it was him, not me who caused the accident. I just stopped in the tunnel for the reasons which he didn't bother about.

It was him who drove into me with his Citroen car. Driving too fast and too close to me, he didn't manage to brake in time. The bang we heard with Peter was simply his crashing into our bumpers.

At last, I opened the door to the trailer to see what had happened to the paintings.

I looked ...

Then I grabbed my head with both hands and started to nervously tear my hair, this time repeating in Polish:

- Jesus, Jesus, Jesus ...

The paintings, one on another, were dumped in a pile. The wire by means of which they were attached had broken and everything had fallen to the front part. If the furniture had been put at the back, it would also have fallen forward and crushed the paintings with its weight. I was the first to scramble onto the trailer, Peter scrambled just after me. I started taking out the paintings from the messy pile. The first one was “Umbrella”. I glanced at it quickly, but carefully enough to realize that it hadn’t been damaged. Then there was “Chernobyl”. Then “Sea”, “Figure Walking Away Amid Leaves” and others – none of them had a single scratch.

Three frames had been damaged, two of which only a little bit.

- So miracles happen not only to others – I said to myself.

What a day! And adding the exclamation mark I didn’t exaggerate at all.

¹ Quelle merde, quelle merde, quelle merde – what a shit, what a shit, what a shit

ACCIDENT, 22ND DECEMBER 1986, SZCZECIN

When the car skidded I had an impression of watching a slow-motion movie. I was waiting for a bang, but nothing happened. I remembered the previous one, in the tunnel, several days before, when I was transporting the paintings. I almost felt like comparing the two accidents to find if they were identical. At the same time I took my foot off the brake pedal, as I'd had enough time to recall that good reflexes are about slight pressing the gas pedal. No, I wasn't frightened.

The car gives you a sense of safety. It's as if you were sitting in a cinema room, just watching an accident that happened to somebody else. Anyway, I felt that our speed was moderate, about 50 kilometres per hour, and that nothing dangerous was going to happen. While skidding, the car made a full turn on its axis to next hit a metal barrier which separated the motorway. It rebound and made a full turn again. Then it stopped in the middle of the road.

- If the truck that overtook us a moment ago had been still behind us, we'd be on the other side now. It would've run over us – said Ania an hour later, feeling that my rage had relieved a bit and we could talk again.

For going by car to Poland, where we were supposed to spend Christmas, was something I'd wanted to avoid at all costs.

- Do you realize it's like to drive one thousand and six hundred kilometres in a blizzard, on black ice, on minor roads, in fog? - Do you realize? – I'd been shouting for as long as three weeks, taking every single opportunity, during breakfast as well as in the evening, in bed. – I'm not a champion. I've never driven in such conditions. We'll hit the first post on our way.

- Sure, you're always having those black thoughts of yours: blizzards, icy roads, accidents ... What else are you going to invent?

- Because life's like that and you'll see I'm not wrong a jot.

- But you don't want us – Ania added, considering it the most decisive argument – to pay 30 000 zł for the flight from Warsaw to Gdynia, do you? And we'll be doomed to that if we don't take the car.

- I'd like to remind you – I said with my fists clenched with anger – that 30 000 zł equals to 300 francs, which is the price of a dinner in a small bistro in Paris.

No effect. After all we're driving. The day before Fliderbaum paid me 128 000 francs for three paintings. It would be enough for travelling around the world by Concord. Anyway, in Paris Ania spends large sums of money on clothes and shoes from the best fashion houses, much higher than the price of a ticket from Paris to Gdynia. But the reflexes of my spouse, the reflexes of a little girl from Tomaszów telling her that it's necessary to save, that one should walk rather than go by tram or go by tram rather than by a taxi were immediately triggered the moment the word "Poland" evoked her long calmed memories.

So we found ourselves in a blizzard, somewhere in West Germany, with a crashed bonnet of the car, broken lamps on the right side, among thousands of cars, which were slowly moving forward with their lights on. We were driving 50 kilometres per hour. Some of the cars in front of us skidded on the snowy road like we did. You'll get the full picture of things if you add fatigue, because to make things worse, I'd slept badly that night, had a headache and nightmares in the morning.

Today we've been driving since morning at a speed of 50 kilometres per hour, we're going through East Germany. No houses, no lights, no cars. Instead, there is an endless plain, a forest, dazzlingly white snow and an icy wind blowing across the desert-like space. If we'd had a crash here, it would have been over for us.

We make a stop at last: there's a half-brick and half-wooden hut by the road. Inside it the empty shelves are decorated with about fifteen bottles of tomato juice and the shop windows are filled with ten packets of cookies. A bunch of badly shaven faces, some warm working clothes, a few unfriendly

askance glances from behind the table. Five men are eating sausages directly from the plastic cloth, dipping them in mustard smeared all over the plate. If somebody told me about it, I'd say it was anti-communist propaganda.

- A shitty system – I say to myself, forgetting how many times I voted for them in Poland and in France. Then we move on.

On the Polish-German border wait for us endless patrols of East German guards. Our money is counted three times, our bags and our pockets are thoroughly searched and even the ashtray in our car is emptied so as to check if some state secret isn't hidden there. Finally we reach the Polish countryside: no hotel, no petrol station. By the time we get to Szczecin, the night has already fallen. Fortunately, there's a free room in the local "international" hotel. The "international" hotels are strange places I dreamed about when I was a little boy, as at that time they looked like the ones in coloured brochures of the rich men's world, the pleasures of which I could only dream about.

And now I'm in one of them, twenty five years later. It's painted dirty black, a few "de lux" whores are walking along the corridors and two or three black-market money changers accost me with a servile smile.

During dinner Ania asks forgiveness:

- After we come back to Paris – she says – I'll tell all my friends that I've got an important declaration to make at Concorde Square. And there I'll declare in public that I'm the most stupid woman. But will you forgive me, my little frog?

I'm still sulky and give her to understand that I demand clearer signs of remorse.

- OK, I admit – Ania continues – that you've succeeded this year. I mean you got us out of debt and today, during the journey, all the nightmares you'd warned me about came true ... I admit ... I admit ... that I'm really stupid.

We burst out laughing, because Ania is in an excellent mood and would like to forget about everything. Contrary to me, she recovers pretty soon. And tomorrow we've got further adventures ahead of us on the Szczecin-Gdynia route ...

WISHES, 31ST DECEMBER 1986

A moment ago I said goodbye to Beks. We wished Happy New Year to each other.

When I was already at the staircase, he told me:

- I didn't usually believe that you'd succeed, and I still don't believe in it.

I replied with an automatic "thank you", like you thank for further New Year wishes, and I got into the lift, holding the drawings for the February exhibition under my arm. Beks's prophesy seemed so cordial to me that I called him from home to hear it again. Besides, I wanted to make sure that I hadn't misheard, as I'm a meticulous chronicler and don't want to contort his words ... He got scared a little bit:

- You're not going to write all that, are you? I know a guy who cited his idol so well that he made a monster out of him.

- If you think – I answered – that I paint you in pastel colours in my notes, with cornflower-blue eyes and fluttering eye-lashes, you're wrong. By the way: it's going to be very instructive for the posterity to find out that even the main interested party didn't give me any chance. Strictly speaking, that he didn't believe in the success of my enterprise and never passed up an opportunity to repeat it to me, even on New Year, when there's no difference between wishes and predictions.

- Yes, that's true. In 80 per cent I still don't believe you'll succeed. In 20 per cent I believe. Otherwise I wouldn't have bound with you, anyway. But you trip me up on every word I say, though you know I usually talk rubbish. For me jabbering is a way of killing the silence and I'm ready to say any old thing to avoid an embarrassing silence.

He laughs. So do I, though a bit wryly. Anyway ... I'm actually glad that one day I'll be right against everybody. Even against Beks. Especially that

the circumstances in which he foretold me (or wished me ...) a failure will make my victory even greater. For his defeatism is explicit, recurrent, and what's most important, expressed at the wrong time: just when I'm beginning to break even. People like Zarzecki, Smith or Jordan will always be able to deny my right to call them by their common name. They were more shrewd and cautious than Beks, because throughout this year none of them stuck his neck out by telling me straight out that he didn't give me (or didn't wish me ...) any chance. They simply didn't reply to my calls. And when the fortune seemed to take the turn for the better for me, they immediately started slobbering over my success and congratulating me. Beks showed his scepticism (or wishes ...) too openly and five minutes too late. Which didn't prevent me from spending three nice days with him, though. When his aggressive letters don't fill me with hatred, my resentment melts away under the influence of his tone, jokes and smile. Although I usually have a bitter attitude towards Beks, this time I'm leaving with an impression that I've said goodbye to a friend.

PHONE TAPPING, 31ST DECEMBER 1986

The last day of this damned year.

What shall I do then? a balance sheet? Some wise adage at the end?
a toast?

Frankly speaking, I'd rather, settle the score with a few enemies, oh yes!, this would be a great pleasure for me. No, not with that cur who wrote a biting article in the last issue of "Politics" and who's being talked about a lot in the Warsaw "milieu". No, I aim higher. Of course, I'd like to punch them in their kissers, which I'm going to do with the cur, but I'd also like to prepare a sophisticated revenge, highly elaborate and learned. A revenge that will hurt them to the core and won't stop after the first screams. The ones on whom I want to take my revenge are in France: in Beaubourg Centre, in the French press, in Parisian art galleries and in modern art museums of this country. It's a pity, however, that when I can finally harm them, it won't interest me more than a few kicks that I'm soon going to give to that Polish cur who wrote the said short article in "Politics".

And this is what the whole thing is about:

Having finally arrived in Warsaw after all the trouble I talked about, I call Glinicki.

Glinicki is a malicious gossip, who doesn't like me. I know he can't wait to tell me about anything that might upset me, which the others won't tell or tell too late.

Just like I expected, at the very beginning of our conversation Glinicki tells me that a very nasty article about me was published in the last issue of "Politics". It's a reply to the report by Leszek Kołodziejczyk on the autumn exhibition in Valmay's Gallery. An hour later Glinicki, with an artificially worried face, comes to me and hands me the article in. (I keep it in my

archives). The author of the article, a Bonarski, says more or less the following:

Poor Polish public opinion. Nobody tells it the truth, but a criminal robbery is being prepared: in the capital of the world, Paris, some dodger (Dmochowski) is promoting a mediocre hack painter (Beksiński). He exhibits his paintings at horrendous prices, hoping that a Texan or naïve Japanese man will be taken in and buy them. A corruptible journalist (Kołodziejczyk) writes a favourable article at the bidding, so as to beguile the Polish public opinion, whereas Bonarski himself, who is acquainted with everybody in Paris and, owing to that, knows the truth, wishes to disclose it to honest Poles.

What's this truth?

Well, here it is: none of the major galleries wanted to exhibit Beksiński in France. Even the third-rate Valmay's Gallery only agreed to let out its premises to Dmochowski, as it was afraid of discrediting itself by borrowing its aegis to promote a painter with no talent. A real artistic quality can be found in quite different areas. Kobro and Strzemiński – that's the future of Polish art. Recently Beaubourg Centre has exhibited one work by Kobro as part of the exhibition *What is contemporary sculpture*. And the greatness of an artist, as we all know, is judged by priests from the art temple, and not some Kołodziejczyks or Dmochowskis.

This is the conclusion drawn by that cur.

My first reaction after reading the article was anger. Then my mind, as usual, begins to search: how to turn the failure into energy for a new start? I know what I'll do: I'll include that malicious article in my Beks chronicle and this way I'll spice up its monotonous pages. At least it will come to some use.

Meeting with Beks on the same day, I ostentatiously show how glad I am of the whole incident. He doesn't know how to react.

- If we end up in a ditch one day, will you also claim it's been your plan? – he asks me irritated.

However, in his heart of hearts he's relieved that I approach the issue philosophically. Especially when I explain to him that the worst for us would be silence:

- Let them say whatever they want – I assure him – as long as they talk a lot and mention the name, it's OK.

Beks is even more pleased with my reaction, because Kołodziejczyk's report with its panegyric tone made his hair stand on end. He even thought it was me who'd ordered a malicious reply of that cur so as to restore the balance of things in a way.

Here the first part of the story comes to an end.

It's closely followed by another one.

Two days later I'm at Beks's home again. We are drinking tea and chatting. At a certain moment Beks's wife – Madame Sophie comes into the study and says:

- Zdzisiu, somebody calls about the article. Some woman.

To which "Zdzisiu", before picking up the receiver, whispers to me in hushed tones:

- I prefer to have it on a tape. You never know with these ladies.

Like most people having strong paranoid tendencies, he's obsessed with secret recording of phone conversations with people who don't know they're being recorded. He does so, because he's constantly preparing for a lawsuit that somebody might file against him in the future. Thanks to the recording of the conversation, within five minutes I know not only what Beks told his interlocutor, but also what she said to him.

To my amazement, the interlocutor is the daughter of Kobro and Strzemiński. Instead of enjoying the favourable opinion that the cur's article expressed about the works of her parents, she foams at the mouth with rage.

What's more: she's ready to "woof herself" (it's her own expression) and asks Beks if he doesn't mind it.

Beks vaguely understands what role he should play in the whole thing. He shrinks and wriggles like an eel. He'd like everything to calm down, as he's afraid the noise will bring the Tax Office on him. Besides, he isn't so naïve to believe in the explanations of Kobro's daughter. Obviously, she's been trying to beat the cur's mug in public for a long time. She'd like to use the article about my exhibition as a pretext. She claims that Bonarski is a "thief" (in the literal meaning of the word), who "stole" (it's her own expression) the works of her mother and now wants to bid up their value on the world market to sell them well. In her opinion, this is the real reason for mentioning the exhibition of Kobro's work in Beaubourg Centre.

Her daughter wants to unmask the cur as a liar before Polish public opinion and expose him as a "thief" and "smuggler" before the Tax Office and militia. To this end, she's going to write an article for "Politics". By doing that she hopes to gain some neutrality, if not support from Beks, as she thinks he's irritated by the cur's article and thus has become her objective ally. Not so much because he wishes to have a row but because he just wants to be left alone, Beks assures her that he sees no obstacles for her to get even with the "thief" making use of the article he wrote about my exhibition. Another thing is that seeing the cur kicked on the butt by a third person, who can't be suspected of bias, isn't going to be a nasty experience for Beks ... When I leave his flat, Beks walks me to the landing and wants to make sure:

- You aren't going to tell people about it, are you?

- Am I not going to tell? – I ask rhetorically. – Just the opposite, I'll tell everything in detail as soon as I come back home so as not to miss a word.

- Yes – he says embarrassed – of course, yes ... I just ... wouldn't like people to know I record their conversations in secret. Couldn't you pass over this detail? ...

Just in case, I don't answer.

ABOUT LOVE 1, 24TH JANUARY 1987

When reading my notes here or there, I realize they are carefully selected; almost always horrible and most frequently burning with hatred. It looks like I take pleasure in telling a story of what's most bitter and dirty about me and the others. I must admit that my interludes in Beks narration are a collection of repulsive tales.

That's because my world is like that. Anyway, the world of the others is the same. No? I'm sure of that. Except that other people don't have an obsession of looking at themselves in a mirror every day and counting the pimples. But they're covered in spots just like me. You may be certain of that. Just like me, in their hearts they have scars left by the blows they received and cover their heads to protect themselves against the next ones. Many of their gestures are an instinctive reply to the memory of the pain they've suffered. It's not enough to cover the inflicted bruises to heal them. They still exist, under a thick layer of powder. All our "experience" is nothing else than this: the accumulated knowledge of dodges. How to avoid further suffering, how to cut off from the past pain which, though bricked in oblivion, still persists, discreet and omnipresent?

Yes – you will answer me – of course, but life isn't made up only of that. Because apart from a stick, there is a carrot that a donkey runs after. It's a craving for love, human gratitude and freedom. So why shouldn't we mention them as a driving force behind human activities? Why should I talk only about disgusting things in my life and the reasons for my fierceness?

Love, freedom and human gratitude ...

For many weeks I've felt like talking about them. In my own way: clearly. Describe them as I experienced them and in a form they appear in my memories. Certainly, it's a huge enterprise and I'll never be able to finish it. How shall I tell about all my loves? How to shout out the need for freedom?

And describe the immense craving for human gratitude that I've begged for?
I'd need all life to do that.

OK, let's say – half of my life. Because only half of my doings take their source in these feelings. The other half originate from hatred, fear and suffering. But I'm not writing a doctoral thesis and there's nothing to force me to finish what I've undertaken. Why shouldn't I try then?

I'll start with love. Even if I give it up after ten pages.

About love then, about love ...

for God,

for my dear Parents and

for women who made me howl with pain.

ABOUT LOVE FOR GOD, 26TH JANUARY 1987

I will start with love for God then.

It has some advantages: by starting the story with veneration for the Creator, I add nobility to my confessions. But above all it allows me to better cope with the first chapter of this trilogy.

For my love for God, though it dragged for long years, can be summarized in merely a few words. Or even in one word: none. I've never felt it and, saying that, I'm precise. Throughout my pietism-filled childhood and the period of my pilgrimages around monasteries when I was about twenty years old, I never but never felt I was approaching "The Source of Life", the "Saviour" or the "Mystery". Anyway, never mind pompous terms, selected from some folk litanies to describe Him, and never mind capital letters. Yet the atmosphere in our home was filled with faith. I'll have many opportunities to talk about in the next chapter where I'll move on to love, this time real love, the love for my saint Mother.

I had my first holy communion when I was ... six, yes, I guess I was six years old. In any case, much earlier than my little mates. It took place during a special feast, which my Mother had organized specially for me. First, for many weeks I had to learn from her lips the prayers to be recited during the ceremony and then the exact meaning of the words which I was supposed to pronounce and hear. At those lousy times, just after the war, we didn't have anything. So Mum sewed me a dark suit for this solemn occasion on her own. I immediately stained it with a candle: staring at the altar, all alone among I don't-know-how-many priests, I didn't notice that the candle I held in my hand was dripping on my jacket ...

Throughout my childhood I went to church. I should have said "ran" rather than "went", because many times a week I was in front of the altar to receive the holy communion as early as at seven o'clock and at five I would kneel in the confessional to confess my sins. I collected May masses in praise

of Holy Virgin and September masses in praise of ... I don't remember who. I said a prayer in the morning, just after I'd woken up, and in the evening, before going to sleep. Then I slipped into Mother's bed and endlessly asked Her about God, paradise and saints.

It's the latter I was most worried about.

- We must pray for them – the other day I stated with a pensive expression on my face.

- Why? – asked Mum.

- Because having everything, they have the most to lose – I answered philosophically, as I was pestered by the story of fallen angels.

It was more or less at the same age that I said the only sensible thing I'd ever said about my love for God: as I listened to my Mother telling me about Him, I looked at her intently, then hugged her convulsively and said:

- I love You!

This way throughout my childhood I identified love for my saint Mother with the love for the Creator.

My Father was an atheist. He lived in a calm, unaggressive but incorruptible conviction that God didn't exist. Mum suffered because of that, but didn't lose hope that one day Papa would convert. While the atheism of my Father was not corruptible, the apostle's enthusiasm of mine was:

- Wouldn't you go to mass with me today, Papa? – I asked him one Sunday.

Of course, I did it to deserve the approving look of Mum. Father wasn't sure what to answer me, but pressed by the silence we kept with Mum, he gave in. He went to mass with me and bore the pain without a word.

- You see, I'm trying hard, but it won't work – his eyes seemed to tell Mum after we returned from the church.

Next week, however, he didn't agree to go to church with me again. Contrary to my little mates from school, who could be easily dragged there:

- I wonder where you're going in such cold weather? – asked us the mother of my mate, Tadek Barański. - It's minimum minus thirty degrees.

- To the Holy Cross – we answered invariably.

In the church I was bored. I went to the organ gallery and looked at the playing organist. It was my only attraction during a mass. At the same time, from upstairs I saw Mum, who was kneeling deep in prayer.

I didn't like her receive the communion. Her face seemed to be closed and assumed an almost menacing expression. Having returned home, she sometimes cried. She was exhausted after the whole morning spent on an empty stomach and couldn't control her nervousness. On such occasions it was mainly Papa who fell victim, then it was our turn to get a scolding.

All my childhood was marked by visits paid to priests, monasteries and monks. Sometimes these visits gained a comical dimension. For example, once I tried to get into *Tatry* cinema without a ticket, got caught, broke free, ran away amid the shouts of the person chasing me and ... fifteen minutes later I gave a message from my Mum to bishop Tomczak, who lived nearby.

Mum often took me to Laski, a small village near Warsaw, where Franciscan nuns managed a home for blind children. I spent there long weeks, listening to sermons by priest Tadeusz, floating about the forest or sitting opposite sister Catherine, who read me, translating from French, the *Rapickers of Emmaus* by priest Peter.

- Is this a school for bishops? – I once asked her, interrupting the reading.

- A school for bishops? No, of course not. Why?

- Because I'd like to be a bishop straight away – I answered modestly.

I started to lose faith in the same period when I began to build my independence, that is to say, at the age of about fifteen years. Also at that time I started masturbating. I guess the two things coincided. Masturbation (I'll talk about it in more detail in the chapter *About Love for Women*) filled

me with such remorse and terror that it seemed to me I should go out of sight of God who was surely outraged with that. I couldn't stand the contradiction between a sin and a prayer, shame pestered me at every turn. Today it seems to me it was one of the reasons for breaking up with God. Or perhaps it was an ordinary coincidence and my onanism had nothing to do with it, or the connection was very loose? In a nutshell, being more or less fifteen years old, I started losing faith. Or, to be precise, I began to gain courage and give my feelings (or actually the lack of them) their real names.

However, my rational and consistent mind ordered me to settle accounts with my own conscience. Perhaps an argument with God was only a temporary misunderstanding? Because in Poland you must believe in God if you don't want to stand out.

Fearing social disapproval, those who lose faith in my native country try to do it in secret, in a more or less indefinite way. That's why my willingness to move on to the state of "abnormality" in a clear and sharp way must have resulted from a permanent tendency towards painful and dramatic partings. Therefore, to avoid any hesitations and remorse for disrespect in the future, the first thing I did was to share all that with my saint Mother (surely not about the need for daily masturbation). Her mistake (but on the other hand what else could she advise me?) was encouraging me to start intellectual searches.

- How can you still believe in God without knowing anything about Him? Faith based on feelings is enough for a nine-year-old child. Not a fifteen-year-old, like you. Start reading something at last. Read!

So I started reading. Carefully and conscientiously I began to study the New Testament, page by page, pondering over every sentence. At least this is what seemed to me at the time. It lasted many months. Then further books followed. All that work for nothing. In the end I asked my mate at the time, Mark Burakowski:

- Wouldn't you like to go with me? We could arrange to meet with a priest and talk about our problems.

He didn't move an inch. He'd already reached the stage when he didn't care about anything. I guess I didn't care either, because when the priest fixed an appointment with me, I didn't come.

The matters with God were then finished.

But not with the Church. Or with monasteries, to be precise. I could never understand how one can become a lay priest, but the atmosphere of concentration, silence and asceticism that the monks imposed on themselves had intrigued me for a long time. No, I won't say: "fascinated". "Intrigued" is a sufficient word. This way I found out (and I was eighteen years old at the time) that one of my elder brother's friends, Andrew Polkowski, spent three weeks in a monastery in Tyniec, where he amazed the fathers with his silence and concentration.

Ah! – I said to myself. – This is something I would like. To be considered "silent and concentrated" ... Oh! That would flatter me.

I then took my mate Andrew Urbaniak with me and we went to Tyniec. It was done precisely in my style: concentration and silence, yes, but at the lowest price. Preferably with friends so as not to be very bored.

Tyniec is one of the oldest monasteries in Poland. Partly devastated, situated on the rocky shore of the Vistula River, this mediaeval stronghold is heartbreakingly beautiful, austere and romantic. There waited for me a cold cell, a mass at five in the morning and meals in a huge refectory, among silent monks with inscrutable faces. Exactly what I'd wanted, so as to be able to boast in front of girls later on.

During dinner one of the monks read aloud some religious or secular literature. His voice was monotonous and melodious, as required by the immemorial rule of Benedictine monks. It was so comical that sometimes we could hardly stop ourselves from breaking out into Homeric laughter. If I was late for a meal, I kneeled down in front of Father Superior, just like it

was required from fathers and brethren to obtain permission for taking a seat. The invited guests didn't have to do that at all, but as usual, I wanted to make a name for myself and have greater merits than the others. Finally, it began to embarrass the people and I was discreetly reprimanded. It's a pity, because it would've been nice if they'd considered me to be as absorbed in faith as Andrew Polkowski ...

About Tyniec I could talk for hours no end. There's no other place in Poland that attracts me more with its atmosphere of concentration, prayer and memories of the unusual days spent there. Just like the people I met there.

First of all, I have father Benedict Szczaniecki in mind. He was a mystical intellectual, who joined the order at the age of twenty two years; he looked after the monastery library. We spent whole nights having discussions about God and listening to records with Gregorian chants. At the beginning I was accompanied by Andrew Urbaniak. During my third stay it was another mate, Andrew Ozimek. And during the fourth stay – third Andrew, this time Roguski. Sometimes I would visit nearby Cracow to spend nights with a girl having beautiful breasts, Lidia. In the morning I came back to the cold monastery walls and tried to listen to the mass. That late search for God, taking place in the austere atmosphere of monastery life, but interlarded with various conveniences, which were supposed to help me bear the hardships, was both funny and embarrassing. I never understood what I'd really looked for in the monastery apart from aesthetic impressions.

I think Father Benedict also didn't understand what he was looking for, because closing his eyes whenever he talked about God, at last he opened them and from the pulpit saw a bigot, who convinced him to throw away the habit and make her two children.

The second figure was father Placid. A nice man and a personal friend of the pope John Paul II. I met him once in Tyniec, a few days before he left for France. He was sent to Paris to deal with young criminals and homeless Poles. I found him in this role when I arrived here in 1964. Rich Jul

Godlewski, who spent a fortune on support for people, gave him money for the rental of a large apartment in Maubert Mutualité district, at Maître Albert Street. The task of father Placid was to receive young compatriots who were looking for some port. In the company of his servant, a young Italian homosexual, every Thursday father Placid treated me to cookies. What was the name of that young servant? I can't remember. Actually, it doesn't matter. In any case, he felt the desire to make friends with me, which father Placid didn't like at all. Ah, now I remember, the boy's name was simply Mariano. A quite banal Italian name. But father Placid stopped being nice to me when he began to suspect his lover might be unfaithful. And if I wanted to take him away from him? My unambiguous, though indirect assurances that I wasn't interested in queers and my undisguised, simply animal predilection for women didn't convince him. In a word, I stopped staying at father Placid's place, where they no longer smiled at me.

This way I broke up with God and his servants.

Once more I came back to Tynieć, but I wasn't welcome there anymore. Father Placid had returned to Poland and, supported by the pope, had been appointed the abbot of the whole order. His reluctance had slammed the doors of the monastery in Tynieć in front of me forever afterwards. To be honest, it's not the point. The marriage of father Benedict and the homosexual cohabitation of father Placid didn't make me excessively outraged. My admiration for Church people was still unshaken. Firstly, because I was already too adult to be indignant about their behaviour when I discovered it. But mainly because I'd met too many men and women with great virtues who served the Church to misjudge them only because of two persons, who as a matter of fact seem quite nice to me until today.

However, my indifference towards God is equally unshaken as my attitude to Church people. Wherever I search, I don't find him. Neither in my own world nor in the world of my fellowmen. The period of intensive religious practice didn't give me any joy, and breaking up with God – any emotion. Even today, for the sake of intellectual honesty, I sometimes try to imagine

“the other” world, “Perfection”, “Love” etc. But neither my tendencies for speculative thinking nor the magnetic fascination with death, nor even my sensitivity to human suffering help me. Even Beks’s painting doesn’t arouse a need for God in me.

Like in the past in the sphere of emotions, today in the sphere of thoughts, God is an empty word to me. Because with or without Him I’m doomed to life, to suffering, to hatred for people and to death, after which any trace of me will disappear.

ABOUT LOVE FOR MY MOTHER,

1ST FEBRUARY 1987

“You shall respect and love your parents ...”

Did I love my Parents properly, as required by the Bible? Did I have for Them the veneration They deserved?

My Mother once told me:

- You'll see that heaven will reward your care for us.

Unfortunately, in reality my attitude to both of these remarkable people was not worthy their saint lives. In any case, heavens haven't paid me for the humble reverence I'd showed Them all my life.

After love for God it's time for filial love. I'm going to talk about it now. Doing so, I will use both the past and present tense, because there's hardly any day that I don't think about Them or don't turn to Them in the heart of my hearts. They are present in every corner of my internal life.

How many nights have I spent with my eyes fixed in the ceiling, trying to repair in my thoughts the harm I did to Them ... How many times a day do I look into emptiness and chew over the grudge that I'll never again be able to kiss Their hands and promise to mend my ways ... And how many talks I have with Them, the talks all of which finish with the same sigh: it's already too late ...

My Mother wasn't beautiful. From childhood I remember that She was an older woman with a destroyed skin and withered cheeks. I was born when She was already forty years old, during the war. So when I started paying attention to her appearance, she must have been about forty six. To make matters worse, life hadn't spared Her and all hardships She'd gone through were easily visible. She was rather obese, with saggy body on the arms. Today I know it's called cellulitis and women are ashamed of this fault. But it seems

to me that Mum didn't attach importance to her appearance. Probably because my Father didn't mind it at all. He even claimed that Mother was "very beautiful" in her young years. He said so because He was eternally in love with Her. I've seen many photos of Mum from the time when She was twenty five years old: Her face was nice, but no extraordinary beauty. However, Her body had always been obese.

Digging in my oldest memories from childhood, I discover the picture of my Parents lying together on one narrow Swedish bed from UNRA. But it's an old and vague memory, because they usually slept separately, though in the same room. Forgive me, my Friend, for talking about my Parents' sex, even in a form of an allusion, though I've only started sketching their portraits. That's because I understood very late that sex combined with love is a mystical thing. Throughout my youth I associated it solely with women's appearance. Each girl having attractive looks aroused my interest. So when I describe the appearance of my Mother, the old reflexes immediately wake up in me and that's why I started this story with sex. Frankly speaking, I don't know and wouldn't like to know anything about my Mother's sexual life. For me She was saint, and saints are free from sin. Therefore, I would never ever want to catch Her in the act, copulating or talking about sex. When one time I accidentally saw my Father's penis, I felt embarrassed. I immediately turned my eyes away, but it was already too late. I can't erase this picture from my memory.

Luckily, I never saw my Mother naked. At this point I'm thinking about Beks, who has to insert a probe in his mother's rectum a few times a day and take out her faeces with a teaspoon. My Mother never mentioned her sexual life, either. Although ... Yes, after all yes ... Now I remember.

The first time was when I asked Her why She'd revealed to me when I was merely six years old that children are the effect of insemination by a man and come out of the mother's belly instead of being brought by a stork. She replied that in Her times young people weren't told anything about it and She discovered everything only after She'd got married. It outraged Her so

much that She promised herself that Her own children would find out about everything very early. Being a consistent person, She kept Her promise to the letter. She did it with embarrassment and anxiety, fearing we might start asking difficult questions. Actually it came true immediately. I don't know what my brothers and sisters were doing, but I flooded Mother with numerous questions, asking for precise explanations. My practical nature was a source of her incessant torment:

- Mother – I asked for example – And if I need to pee when I'm between the legs of my wife?

The second time She alluded to Her sexual life during a conversation about some alcoholic girl. On that occasion Mum unguardedly uttered a sentence, which stuck in my memory forever:

- I don't understand her – she said. – Instead of drinking she might do something else. It's more pleasant and doesn't do any harm.

I resent Mother for that. Firstly, because this way I discovered She must have taken pleasure in having sex with Father in the old days. Secondly, because the whole idea of my immaculate conception fell through. Like the mother of each of us, also my Mother couldn't be less impeccable than Mary Immaculate. And since man was created in the likeness of God, as everybody knows, the virginity of our mothers is a conception of an ideal, which each of us ascribes to himself. But that was all, because carnal love, the fruit of which I was, never again became the subject of any conversations. My Mother's sexual life was a forbidden zone for me. I really don't know why I'm saying all that ... Although I've shagged a lot of women in my life, sexuality combined with procreation, and not only physical pleasure is a serious thing for me. I therefore feel embarrassed pretending to be talking easily about something which actually was the beginning of my own life.

In addition, it has nothing to do with the topic. Because when I quite frequently use the expression "my saint Mother" in these notes, I don't have this kind of holiness in mind. It was long time ago when I stopped considering marital infidelity, masturbation or watching porno movies as

a sin. In such a case why should I care whether my Mother had pleasure during an intercourse or not?

So to close this chapter, I'll make a statement that brooks no argument: Mother never betrayed Father, which I can't say about Him. Long stories could be told about this professor limping since the time an Ukrainian bullet went through his leg, who always went on holiday alone and came back content with life and a new conquest that had made his one-month stay pleasant.

No, it's not for sexual chastity that I canonize Mother. Nor even for Her lenient smile at my Father's love affairs. If I say She was "saint", I mean above all that She loved God unconditionally. There was nothing trivial about Her faith. I've seen and known a number of deeply believing people in my life. Anyway, there are lots of them in Poland. But the faith of my Mother is certainly the most admirable. It was mystical, fathomless, hot faith. Unshaken faith, omnipresent in every gesture of Her life. One didn't have to observe Her in church to realize that She loved God. As She was a translator and author of religious books, She was every day immersed in the Christian philosophy, which She knew perfectly well. She translated into Polish many books on the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas and the spirit of mediaeval philosophy written by Gilson. On Her own She wrote a few biographies of Church people and saints. In a word, Her faith was neither intuitive nor partial. I regret I wasn't really interested in God. She would have introduced me into areas as wide as the ocean, where She was acquainted with the winds and knew how to steer. Her faith in God wasn't either tiring or irritating for the environment. She didn't impose it on others and didn't torture us by constantly reminding us of morality requirements. We, children, were not forced to do ritual duties or sacrifice. When my eldest siblings, Johnny and Marguerite, who were coming of age, firmly declared they no longer believed in God, She suffered in silence, but didn't try to convert or blame them.

Just before She died, She thought She would become reunited with God. Not only didn't She fear a leap in a precipice, but She even bridled when I assured Her one day that She would live a hundred years:

- Oh, no, never! God forbid! – She answered.

If She wished to die, it was because She wanted to break up with life, like me, but to be reunited with God.

Actually it's not about it, either. After all, I don't call my Mother "saint", because She was faithful to Her husband or because She kneeled and prayed eagerly in the church. As a matter of fact, this leaves me cold, as I don't care much about the Creator or virtue.

Her love, however, was unrivalled in everyday life: in Her attitude to Father, to us – children and to the environment. For Her mysticism bore no resemblance to the asceticism of a hermit. She was immersed neck deep in the realities of life and tussled with them like every other mortal. In this struggle I observed Her like an inquisitor and counted score. If She'd sinned only once, I wouldn't have forgiven Her. For thirty seven years when I observed Her, including twenty two years spent under one roof, I never caught Her committing any negligence. Above all, I repeat that She never made a mistake in relation to my Father, whom she called a "saint atheist". And yet She did know that He wouldn't give a penny to a beggar and that He betrayed Her. She even let him talk about His love adventures in an oblique way and just smiled indulgently. She always defended and protected Him. If He was endangered in any way, or when there was only one piece of meat at home, Papa always had a priority.

One day during the occupation, an assassin shot at a German officer walking down the street. He was wearing a white shirt, and having shot, he hid in our house. The Germans immediately closed the district and started searching the flats. They found my Father in bed, also wearing a white shirt. He was ill as the wound in his leg had got opened, had a fever of forty one degrees and was raving in delirium. They dragged Him outside to shoot Him in the backyard. Mother, who spoke perfect German, started talking to them.

While in everyday life Her nervousness might throw you off balance, at really decisive moments like this one She kept absolute calm and a business-like tone. The intelligence and sober look let Her find a way out of many difficult situations. This time, however, the minutes of my Father's life were numbered. He was to die in a few seconds.

And at this point, my Mother, exhausted by utmost tension, demonstrated salutary quick reflexes:

- Do you a cigarette by any chance" – She asked the officer.

He automatically gave Her one and lit it. After a few moments of silence, he found out that he could no longer withdraw:

- This war has changed us into wild beasts – he told Mum. – Are you of German origin? No? I'm from Munich ...

This way my Father lived to the age of eighty six years, carried by my unwearied Mother in Her arms.

- This is for Papa – She would tell us when there was some ham or one egg at home.

When he was ill, which happened quite often because the wound in His leg kept opening, Mother put all her Masses and translations aside and looked after him for long weeks.

- The leg must be amputated – doctors gave their opinions. – There's a risk of the whole body infection and this may end up with death.

- No way! – She replied.

This way, both legs of my Father were saved. Fortunately, a few years later the invention of sulphonamides, and next penicillin put an end to His chronic inflammation of bone marrow.

It was also Mum who suggested, when I was still a little child, that I should kiss Father's hand. I maintained this custom forever and at the age of thirty five years I still greeted Him this way, whether in public or in private.

According to Mum, Papa was “a saint atheist”. She said it with a note of humour, but she wasn’t kidding. However, this didn’t prevent Her from teasing Father occasionally. Sometimes it was annoying. For example, She interrupted Him when He was relating an episode from this life, and She usurped the right to finish the story. No sooner had Father begun to talk and we started laughing, because He was often witty, than Mother butted in, as if She was jealous of His success and said:

- Will you let me correct it? It wasn’t like that at all.

And here we had to listen to Her version, which was often exaggerated or boring. As a matter of fact, it was at night that Mum led Father’s a dog’s life. About three in the morning I went to the toilet and passed the hall of our huge flat. Then I could hear Them very well, because there was glass in their room door. Most frequently Mum cried and reproached Father. He didn’t say anything. It lasted endlessly. What did She accuse him of? I don’t know. I guess it was about some little things. Just like every morning She used to nit-pick us, children. Sometimes She would cry and reproach for no reason whatsoever. This usually happened when She was hungry, on an empty stomach before receiving the communion.

This nervousness never left Her. Father bore it quietly, because whenever we were seriously endangered, Mum became icily calm. On such occasions her mind worked at an enormous speed and almost immediately She was able to find a solution which let us get out of trouble. This virtue of Hers made a strong impression on Father. That’s why he accepted Mum’s nervousness, just like you accept a pimple: with no enthusiasm, but also without getting dramatic.

I didn’t accept it, though. My temperament of Torquemada didn’t let Her get away with anything.

“Whoever preaches love must be impeccable himself” – I used to say.

And I supervised, supervised ...

- Do you love me? – I asked, sitting on Her lap when I was three years old.

- Yes.

- Do you love me very much?

- Yes.

- I love you, too.

I showered Her with these assurances for many years. I remember when I was shouting through the bars of Saint Family Hospital, where I stayed for ten days after the appendix operation.

- Mum, don't go! Don't go!

Then I cried on the stairs and in my heart of hearts hurled insults at Her. Hideous whore! She's gone! Gone! I pressed my head into the pillow and sobbed, as I was convinced that a car would hit her in the street on the same day and I would never see Her again.

However, when I was fourteen years old, everything looked different. I coldly looked straight into Her eyes and spoke slowly, with all the spite I could muster:

- Let Mum not complain about me to Papa in French, because I could understand and burst out laughing.

Then, when I was already a student in Warsaw and every weekend I came to Łódź to seem Them, on the train I would devise a plan how to make up to her for my impudence a week before. Which didn't change the fact that it always ended badly: no sooner had I come into our flat than both of us got irritated. I then started a conversation with a few well-selected words which were meant to hurt Her. Her nervousness annoyed me. Right, left and centre, just like I'm doing it now, I told everyone that my Mother was saint. But the promise I gave to myself to be cordial to her this time disappeared the moment I crossed the threshold. Mum unknowingly triggered my cruelty.

A few years later, when I was already in France and had some money, I ordered from Her a saga of our family and Her ancestors. It could be made into a long novel. Mum was one of the two daughters of count Chołoniewski,

who had latifundia on the Eastern borderlands of Poland. Until the age of sixteen She lived like kings. Then, in a nightdress, She had to run away with Her parents from Bolsheviki, who burned their palace. She was left without a penny and for many years had to wander Europe.

But just after She'd read me the first part of this saga, I said with contempt:

- Third-rate Sienkiewicz.

After that Mum didn't write a single word, though I repeatedly complained She didn't stick to our agreement ...

When I decided to leave Poland, She firmly supported me with absolute certainty, whereas my Father thought I should leave after obtaining a diploma which I was supposed to take in a year. One day, when I was lying on my bed and looking at the ceiling for hours no end, She came and sat beside. She looked at me for a long time and then made a sign of cross on my forehead.

- Go – she said. – Go. Maybe there you'll forget ...

She didn't know anything about the things that happened to me, but she guessed everything. She didn't take pity on me. These were my matters and I had to face my own problems. As long as I didn't ask Her for anything, she wouldn't give me any advice, which is what other mothers sometimes do in return for confessions. This was her immutable attitude, combining respect for my freedom with reluctance for meddling into irrelevant matters.

Even at the time of primary school she didn't intervene, though she suspected the terrible conflicts I had with the environment. The principal often called Her to complain about my violent character. She never went to any parents' meetings and didn't respond to calls. Only once did She send Father to school, who did it with an even greater reluctance. I remember when He returned home after He'd been called by the board of teachers who were terrified by the fights I started, and said:

- As punishment you're not allowed to go to the cinema for a week.

I was one of the best pupils in my class. Just like later on I was the best student at the faculty of law in Łódź. This was a pretext for my Parents to not meddle into my school career and my arguments with the milieu. I wonder whether they would have intervened if They'd found out I shot with an air gun at my school mates, studding them with lead ...

I still claim that my Mother's neutrality resulted from respect for my sense of responsibility. Until I asked Her for help ... And I didn't ask either Her or anybody else for it.

She knew my aggressiveness and violent tendencies. She had no difficulty detecting them, as She had to bear them on a daily basis. At the same time, however, She believed in me. She believed in my sense of justice and my craving for being honest. That's why She didn't meddle wherever She decided I was able to redress the wrongs I'd done.

Throughout my childhood Mum led me by the hand. The kisses I gave her and our mutual assurances of love were countless. I constantly sat on Her lap or held the hem of Her dress. In the evening I would slip in Her bed and listen to the fascinating story of *Pete and Maggie*, which She invented as it developed.

When I was asleep, She came to my room to tuck the duvet around me ... Until the time when She caught me in the act with some girl. – Go out of the room! – She ordered in a hushed voice. And when I came into the hall, She whispered to me with fury:

- Let this woman get out of here right now!

I didn't understand why I did it, but we obediently disappeared with the girl at five in the morning.

After leaving for France I wrote to Mum every day or even twice a day. I needed Her letters. It happened that She didn't write back for long weeks. I then spent evenings at the main post office on Place de la Bourse to get a telephone connection and complain that She didn't write.

Sometimes Her reactions were a source of bitterness for me. As for example about thirteen years ago, yes, exactly thirteen years ago, during Christmas Eve for which I'd specially come to Poland. I wanted to solemnly announce my engagement with Ania. Mum had another piece of news to communicate to the family: the baptism of my brother-in-law Stanley, a converted Jew.

So my toast was listened to in silence, politely, without any comment. Then we moved on to eating the soup, followed by a long speech of Mum about the miracle of conversion and Her friendship with that, you must admit, exceptionally nice man. No, Mother didn't have the virtue of humbleness. She never wanted to admit this ineptitude and used to find different kinds of excuses. Sometimes the reason She gave for ignoring my engagement was the lack of trust in the stability of our relationship, while at some other time She told me She was simply sorry for Ania because of the life with me to which she was condemning herself ... I'm still "surprised".

Just like I'm "surprised" by two slaps across the face that I got from Her in childhood. The first slap was for losing my cap. The second – for making noise one morning and waking up some uncle, who was staying with us. Anyway, I guess the second time She slapped me with deliberation ... Mum wanted to hit me and any pretext would've been equally good. In my life I've deserved a few good years in prison, and not two slaps in the face. Which doesn't change the fact that the ones I got made no sense. No sense whatsoever. So I've never understood or forgotten them, especially that they were the only ones. It's a shame, because on the spotless shroud of my Mother these two slaps across the cheek have remained like two stains, which despite trying hard I can't remove during sleepless nights.

My Father coped with that better. Being the Dean of the Faculty of Biology and Earth Sciences at the University of Łódź, he emanated authority on his cheerful and calm face. That's why He never had to raise his voice or resort to threats. Not only did I kiss His hand being already an adult man, but it also never occurred to me to deny Him or talk back in an unruly fashion.

Sometimes He said shortly:

- Close the door on the other side!

Only once did He “hit” me, when despite His ban, I scrambled onto the roof of a shed for the third time, though a year before I’d had both my arms broken after falling off a tree. With an embarrassed smile, Papa touched my buttocks, saying:

- You’ve been hit.

For He had to tell me about it so that I would know. Well, this is how I was once punished by my Father.

Anyway, it was exactly in His style. Twenty years earlier, when my seven-year-old brother John cut the dressing gown of his governess, Mum, furious in the extreme, turned to Father in an uncompromising tone:

- Papa, this time you must intervene!

During supper Father, still reading a newspaper and not even looking up, said to my brother:

- I’ve heard you cut Miss Helena’s dressing gown into pieces. Please, don’t do it again.

And He kept reading the paper.

Other grudges against Mum?

My vindictive mind remembers one more. I have to utter it so as to forget it. It was at the times when I had verbal hiccups, actually for the same reasons as today. I was overwhelmed by an irresistible desire to pour the excess of choking tears onto paper. Having written everything down, I sent it to Mum. Today I’m more clever – I don’t send or show anything to anybody. But at these days it seemed to me I could forge my miseries into literary consistency. Why did I do that? I don’t understand it, because until that time I’d always suffered in silence and hadn’t complained to anybody. Why did I open my heart then? It must have ended up with humiliation.

And of course it finished this way. My letter was followed by embarrassed silence.

When a letter from Mum finally arrived, it contained a lot of detailed information and finished with the sentence: “Papa liked your novel on the *Strange Death of Victor H*. And I would like to thank you for the trust you showed me”. This cured me of any need for confessions once and for all.

It’s been ten years ...

How many sleepless nights have I spent chewing over all the wrongs I’ve done to Her, helplessly biting my fists, as I will never again be able to ask Her forgiveness ... Because if paradise doesn’t exist, where shall I meet Her to tell Her about my pricks of conscience that give me sleepless nights?

Ten years ...

When I saw Her in hospital, she looked at me for a longer while, and then Her mouth twisted:

- I’ll never see you again, son.

A few months later I came back to Her funeral. She lay in a cold annexe of the hospital, which was used as a morgue, with Her head wrapped in a rag. Her body had been thrown onto a metal trolley with paint coming off it.

- Do you want to see her face? – asked a passing male nurse, ready to take the cover off Her head.

- No – I replied.

My Father burst into short sobs and then immediately controlled himself...

SILENCE, 3RD FEBRUARY 1987

I've already talked about it a little bit ...

Yes, but I'll know no peace until I say everything. This topic recurs like an obsession and I must exhaust it to free myself of it. I'm going through a bad period right now. Since I'm talkative, I'll surely tell about the reasons one day. But never mind the causes of suffering. Today I'd like to talk about its expression: about the facial expression of a man who's got a lump in his throat and stomach tied in a knot.

I look into shop windows and see my own face in them. A face which doesn't express either curiosity or passion. Just a face that doesn't say anything. From time to time the face bends when I'm sitting on a bench, or looks at the ground. This is the only thing it allows itself to do. I then start observing other people's faces. But what I can see in them is the same indifference.

And yet how many people whom I observe on the underground or in the street have just left hospital, where they found out they've got cancer or will forever be disabled?

How many of them were insulting or beating someone half an hour ago? Or were sacked five minutes ago ... Or are waiting for a sentence which is going to determine all their lives ...

How many of them are there?

Who are they?

I'll never find out, because their eyes are invariably calm, like the eyes of a man who's afraid of showing his wounds to a fellowman so as not to be humiliated by him.

I remember the face of an Afghan guerrilla who was sentenced to death by his companions. He was to be shot in a few moments. Western journalists

stood in front of him like a pack of hounds, taking photos of him every few seconds. They watched for their chance to catch the expression of his eyes, which they photographed in large close-ups. Also the guerrillas carefully observed every movement of his mouth, looking out for its slightest shiver. The man's eyes lacked expression till the very end. His jaws didn't clench for a single moment. The fear of imminent death was nothing compared to the fear of humiliation, which he would've experienced if he'd betrayed his despair and panic. Two minutes later his dead body slumped to the ground, flabby like a bag of potatoes.

However, sometimes I met people who behaved naughty. One day, during rush hour on the underground, in the silence drowned out only by the noise of the train, I sat opposite some man. The carriage was filled to the brim with people looking into the void or at their newspapers.

Also this guy had a calm face. He must have been a decent man. Actually, like all of us who sat on the benches or stood looking through the window or at the ceiling. And suddenly, without any warning whatsoever, the man bit his hand deeply and started bleeding. Luckily, he didn't produce any sound. Then again, he descended into the state of indifference. A nutcase – all of us probably thought. At least this is what I thought. Just in case, at the next station some man and I changed the carriage.

On another occasion, my own Father embarrassed us. That's true that he was already very old ... It happened when the body of my saint Mother lay on some shabby metal trolley in the morgue. I already talked about it a few days ago, so I apologise for coming back to this topic. My Father gave out a short sob and immediately controlled himself. For the first time since I'd known him he let himself do such an undisciplined thing. Everybody around was embarrassed.

The third time, I must admit, it was me who disturbed people's peace. I usually observe social rules. When I cry, I do it into my own pillow or into the drawer, in these notes. And when it happened to me two times at the cinema, I hid at the back of the room so as not to disturb the others.

One day, however, I behaved incomprehensibly. It was twenty years ago. About twenty years ago. Or perhaps twenty one? I was young at the time. Maybe that's the reason? ... Never mind the reasons, though. – In any case, I shouldn't have behaved like I did. Oh, I'm not apologizing, because if I started to explain why, I'd be answered: "He's looking for excuses". And to avoid feeling uneasy, people would find a few mitigating circumstances.

In a word, it happened one sunny afternoon in the summer of 1965. I left the dinner which our employer, an architect, bought for us when the building had finished. I'd drunk a little bit, that's it ... Having left the restaurant, I walked several hundred steps, next leaned against a tree and, on a street, in broad daylight, I burst out crying. With no shame or restraints. I shook for five minutes. I cried aloud, because I couldn't stand it anymore. People were passing by and felt embarrassed. They wanted to forgive me. I heard a woman, who asked:

- What happened to you?

It was not far away from Italia Square, somewhere near Tolbiac. I behaved in an inexplicable way ... So an ambulance arrived and took me to hospital. In the hospital room, next to my bed stood a group of doctors, who didn't know how to behave. An older nurse shouted at me:

- Cut the rubbish! That's enough. Stop crying right now. Just have some dignity!

I became silent at once.

The next day I left hospital with an indifferent face.

- Do you feel better? – asked me a doctor on duty.

- Excellent – I answered.

And I signed the pass.

But please, give me a lenient judgment, as I usually know how to behave and don't make a fool of myself. At that time I was very young and had just started learning about the rules of living in a society. I'll tell about this

incident, as it was engraved in my memory. In 1952, I guess ... yes, it was at the end of the Stalinist period. I was ten years old at the time. My Parents sent me to a preventive sanatorium for frail children. It was situated in Lower Silesia, in a beautiful small palace, which some rich Germans had to hastily leave a few years before, running away from the communists, Poles and the Red Army. The people's government earmarked the palace for undernourished children.

There were about two hundred of us, more or less the same age. The mountain landscape was very beautiful that early spring and the first crocuses were coming into bud on meadows. Meals in the huge refectory were silent. We weren't allowed to talk, so we didn't. After meals, during the afternoon rest period, when we were lying in our beds in dormitories, we didn't talk, either. The one who was caught talking was called during the evening assembly, stepped out of line and was publicly warned that his parents would "suffer the consequences". We counted days that separated us from the end of the camp. One day, two days, three days ... less. We ticked them in the calendar, which we hid under the mattress. To avoid breaking the social rules that we were taught, I got an idea to cut my hand with a razor blade and spill some salt over the wound. The pain would constantly remind me how to behave so as not to break the rules. It was simply an obsession for me. In the end, however, I lacked courage and didn't do anything like that.

And that was a bad thing, because one evening I broke the ban out of forgetfulness, stupid forgetfulness.

Well, this is what happened: I had a mate. He had a short haircut, but I can't remember today what his name was. He was ten years old, like me. We felt like talking, because we had a hundred stories to tell each other. One night he came to my bed and we started talking about all the secret matters we'd heard about during the ten years of our lives. A few minutes later some boy snitched on us and we were caught. We weren't punished because what we had done exceeded the limits of a misdeed. Instead, we were taken to the cellar with showers. And there we were poured with icy cold water for ten

minutes. Then a lovely young tutor took us, blue and naked, to the nurse's room. We were put on metal beds and the nurse made us an injection with tranquilizers.

The pain was unbearable, and the injection for each of us lasted about a minute. I looked at my mate's face, pale, blue with cold and covered in sweat drops. He was breathing deeply, but didn't produce a single sound. Then it was my turn. I didn't scream either and held the breath with all my might. If somebody had looked into my eyes, they would've thought I was reading a book. My eyes were not even goggled. Afterwards we were taken back to the dormitory.

The next day our tutor, Mr Paluch, came up to us during breakfast. He was a man who had a gift for telling various unusual stories. Every evening, in the palace living room we would listen in suspense to his stories about heroic soldiers of Monte Cassino.

We immediately stood to attention.

- Well, have you finished with that?

- Yes, we've finished with that completely! – we shouted in unison.

“L'enfant est le père de l'homme”¹.

If I'm still a man...

¹ L'enfant est le pere de l'homme – a child is the ancestor of man

SOS: OLD AGE, 18TH FEBRUARY 1987

1. It's four in the morning. I wake up with an immediate, irresistible desire for committing suicide. For weeks, for months I've been pestered by a suicidal obsession. The reasons keep changing, but the craving for death remains the same. Maybe that's better, but if the wish for immersion passes after two days, its place is immediately taken by aggression. It's just like in a swing: either I plunge into the dark or I'm seized with hatred. Both are equally unbearable.

2. Yesterday, in the Polish Institute there was a vernissage of young Beks's drawings. Beautiful, a bit-out-of-the-way place, in the eighth district of Paris, near Alma Marceau Square, on Jean Goujon Street. Few guests arrived, about a hundred people. It's Sureaut who's partially responsible for that, because he delivered invitations with an eight-day delay, so people were informed *in extremis*. The room was filled with a few of my ex-students and some regular visitors of Beks's exhibitions. As usual, among the guests there were a few elderly women looking for warmth and human presence. They come to every vernissage in Paris, which doesn't change the fact that they remain invariably lonely before, during and after it. Ania was beautiful and had a lot of make-up, as she'd just left the show of Feraud collection at George V Hotel. She was accompanied by a group of her friends, models.

So much for that.

It's nice to stay among people who've come because they value me, because they feel they're my friends or simply because they have a liking for me. I find it so hard to put up with myself and to bear my consuming resentment against people, my rage at them bites me so painfully that I get an impression they must hate me, too. That's why the sight, among a hundred people, of a few persons who came just to meet with me brings back some hope that what's happening in me is only a bad nightmare. The presence of acquaintances isn't a good sign, though, because this way

I discover that the circle of Beks's fans isn't getting any larger. Apart from my friends I constantly see the same faces at vernissages, which is strange given the fact that I sent more than 800 invitations, about 400 of which were accompanied by a brochure, and frequently also my personal letter.

As usual, no journalist turned up (except Yak Rivet from "Vie Française"). Neither did any apparatchik¹ from the culture department. Brochures and invitations were given to all members of AICA (and there are about 300 of them in Paris) as well as to all galleries on the Left Bank. I know that for sure because I delivered them myself. There wasn't anybody. Also in vain I searched for Stern among the guests. He has wanted to buy a painting for months, but he keeps delaying, lingering and pondering. Yesterday, after seeing the ektachromes and talking to his wife in Marseille, he was supposed to give me the final answer. His absence bodes ill.

3. Beks fills me with Biblical rage. He's feeling bad. For two months he hasn't painted anything and suffers from a number of ailments: he's got a headache, backache and a pain in his knees. However, all my compassion vanishes when he informs me with sadist pleasure that the best painting in the series has been chosen by some distant relative from Hamburg in return for sixty compact discs. Then he reminds me (as if it was a thing I keep forgetting about) that our agreement entitles him to keep four further paintings, and only then can I get the rest.

Even such a gigantic artist like him creates 5-6 good works annually. The rest is inevitably worse. In other words, I'll get second-rate paintings. Few people have an equally deep knowledge of the best ways to drive me mad. And he never denies himself the pleasure of doing so. Whenever his letter arrives, I say to Ania:

- What the heck has he invented this time? How's he going to piss me off ?

So I always decide to put off the reading till next morning so as to sleep through the night in peace and quiet. Then, equally invariably wakes up a hope that, after all, it's going to be a nice, warm and funny letter, like the ones he wrote to me two years ago, when the financial future promised to

be bright. I therefore open the envelope and at the very beginning start to gnash my teeth. God, how I hate this man! I no longer reply to his letters and I've stopped calling. I'd like to forget him once and for all and stay only with his paintings.

4. Yesterday I got a letter from the Association for Old People Aid "SOS 3-eme age". Many such organisations regularly ask me for support. Sometimes I open a letter. Sometimes, or to be precise, in most cases I don't open. I don't open, as I'm too mean to give alms, but also because I don't want to have an opportunity for telling myself: "dick, egoist". Just in case then, I prefer to throw a letter away at once. This way I'm calm and can pretend before my own conscience that I didn't know what was inside. Luckily, this time I opened the envelope. Among a few documents there was a letter written by an old woman to her son, who'd deceased long time ago. On a scrap of paper she told him her life. Just after reading the first sentences I was overcome by emotion. Finally, I had to stop reading. The truth is that my nerves are in a deplorable condition and I'm easily touched. But I must also admit that I've seldom read anything as simple and real as this letter. Whole life on one piece of paper. Nothing more and nothing less. I hope to forget about this letter soon, as it contains too many things which I don't want to know yet and which I already want to forget ...

I attach it with these notes.

5. The worse I feel, the more cordial Ania is to me. Of course, one thing is related to the other. Because whenever I'm beset with problems or plunge in my daily depression, I become helpless and meek. Ania wouldn't like my aggressiveness to disappear completely. She often repeats she'd leave a man who would let her "walk all over him". Which doesn't change the fact that she's a bit glad to see how I take some hard knocks in life for my arrogance and screams. This way justice is done. So Ania relishes the moments of revenge.

One year ago we were punching your fist against the table. But now you're as meek as a lamb. Serves you right! – she must be thinking. Nevertheless, she's filled with sincere sympathy and becomes nicer and nicer to me. There's something unreal about her good mood and optimism.

¹ Apparatchik - a colloquial term for a full-time, professional functionary of the Communist Party or government; i.e., an agent of the governmental or party "apparat" (apparatus) that held any position of bureaucratic or political responsibility – translator's note.

DETACHED REFLECTIONS, 1ST MARCH 1987

1. I give my students ten minutes to present a paper. After the eleventh minute I interrupt them. They complain, saying:

- There were still so many things to be told, which we didn't even mention. I then reply them that within ten minutes you can summarise the history of mankind. And to prove the same, I quote an anecdote that my Father told me when I was eight years old.

“A young king, who had just ascended to the throne, wanted to get to know the history of his nation. He thought he would rule better if he knew it. He therefore called all the wise men in the kingdom and ordered them to tell him how people had lived throughout ages.

- King – answered him the greatest sage – to describe it, all of us would have to work for thirty years.

- Write then – said the monarch.

Thirty years later the king was delivered one hundred books, which had been transported in ten carts. The king clutched his head in disbelief:

- But I'll never have time to read all that. Summarise it!

Ten years later only one cart filled with volumes in folio arrived at the royal palace.

- It's still one hundred times too much for me to be able to read it in the short time that has been left. Summarise!

Five years later the king was already lying on a deathbed. He ordered to call the greatest sage and told him with melancholy in his voice:

- I'm dying not knowing the history of my nation.

To which the greatest of the wise men gave him the following answer:

- Ruler, here it is: people came to this world without asking for it, they suffered throughout their lives and then died, fearing death.

- Thanks – said the king. – Now I can depart from this world in peace, as I already know everything”.

I often come back in my thoughts to this story. Without excessively prolonging it, I supplement it as follows:

A grudge against the past: that you can't repair the harm you've done; or find the happiness which is gone for ever.

Now: only torture and an excruciating question about the meaning of life. What's all this for? Why do I suffer?

For the future: fear and hope. And if everything collapses tomorrow? No, it's bound to be better!

And finally: death, which you craved so much and which man is so terribly afraid of ...

Well, this is my version of the shortest history of mankind, which I tell my students to convince them that all that's important can be squeezed in ten minutes.

2. To bring about a revolution, it's necessary to have “them” - those who make use of our work, and “us” - who work hard and can't make both ends meet.

At the age of 24, I asked Marie-Claude Bastide, my “fiancée” at the time, who studied economics while I was studying to become a lawyer:

- What's the cost of capitalism? How much do “they” load in their pockets and waste? What would happen if this money was taken away from them and put into circulation with the benefit to all of us?

She answered me:

- Not much. Capitalists reinvest a large part of what has been produced to experience again the pleasure of risk, game and power. What they squander

and what's wasted without any benefit to the society is only a fraction of the produced quantity.

But my "fiancée" was only twenty two years old at that time, and I myself was twenty four. Besides, she wasn't able to give me the exact figures. In a word, her opinions didn't weigh much in my eyes of a staunch reader of Marx and a born repairer of human harms. I therefore didn't believe her and for the next fifteen years remained a hardcore leftie.

Today I know that the communist revolution draws on envy and egoism much more than on the economic account.

It draws on envy (regarding the question of goods irrevocably squandered by the rich), because people think they are cheated by "those". But if they take the palaces, carpets, silverware and jewellery away from them to next divide everything among themselves, it will be enough for everybody and all the people will have better lives. Well, actually the point is that what can be taken away from capitalists (without harming investments) is so little that it's not worth murdering people. All the diamonds and rings, Dior dresses and private planes are merely a drop in the ocean of annual human production. The split goods wouldn't suffice for the first ten million poor men.

It draws on egoism (regarding the question of reinvestment in production), because we want to immediately benefit from our work before we die instead of just building a bright future for future generations and other nations, at the cost of our own sacrifices. Well, by not allowing us to fritter away all that's been made and "reinvesting" almost everything, "those" deprive "us" of things to ... give them back to us, our children and the rest of the world in a quarter of a century.

The real bloodsucker is our future, future generations and all fellowmen. Capitalists are merely an illusory enemy. It's not them who exploit us. We are exploited by other people, by our own wish to have better lives in ten or twenty years, and finally by the biological desire to ensure a better existence for our descendants.

Yes, but only now do I know all that, and this knowledge is intuitive, because so far nobody has carried out a thorough analysis of the costs: what is the real price of capitalism?

3. Innocent victims: women, old people and children, civilians, ordinary passers-by...

Whenever a bomb explodes in a street, killing and maiming people - the victims and their families whine: what have we done wrong? Why are “they” shooting at “us”? We were responsible only for one thing: that we found ourselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Why do terrorists and military men shoot at innocent civilians? For God’s sake, ordinary people are not to blame for anything.

Well, here’s my answer: both conquests and massacres have always been carried out in the name of children, women and old people, in the name of the nation and future generations. It’s for their sake that Red Indians were wiped out in America, colonial wars were waged and 100 million black people have been murdered over the centuries. It’s in their name that SS murdered Jews in Auschwitz, and today Israeli soldiers are killing Palestinians in Lebanon and Gaza. If both sides succeeded in carrying out genocide, pogroms and pacifications, it’s children, women, old men, civilians and “ordinary people” who would benefit – in a word, the whole nation. Therefore, it’s highly justified that it also pays for the crimes committed in its name when the time of revenge has come. There are no “innocent victims”. That’s why the Bible rightly puts a curse on a murderer and his children “until the fourth generation”.

4. The vast majority of our philosophical judgments are based not on the observation of the outside world, but on introspection.

What we claim to have discovered in the world we’ve actually discovered in our own lives, in our feelings or experiences. Our main source of information about the world is what we have experienced ourselves, what we have said and what we have hated or loved. Having formulated

the conclusions on the basis of this internal search, we generalize and next ascribe them to other people.

There's something highly positive about it, which is hard to avoid anyway and which allows us to make progress with our knowledge of the world; something completely rational and logical: being a part of the whole, by getting to know ourselves we inevitably discover the others in what they are similar to us.

The drawback of this way of getting to know other people and the world is that if they don't fit in with our internal picture, with our introspective conclusions on ourselves, we don't understand them, accusing them of lying or making a mistake. Then we hit their heads with truncheons, drop bombs on them and burn them with napalm.

5. Each work deserves pay. Both the work of professors and pupils. I know that the state doesn't have enough money to pay for their effort. But if the society exploits young people for free, at least it shouldn't claim that "they work for themselves and for their own future" and therefore, they aren't entitled to anything.

It's not only about justice: a child that would receive payment for full eight hours of work a day would feel much more engaged in it and would do it far better than if he or she wasn't paid. And the child should be paid like its parents: in money. Just like adults, who can see the result of their effort or idleness in the level of their salary, children would also be punished or rewarded in the most stimulating form: pay, remuneration, earnings. I'm sure the number of repeated classes, failed exams and unsatisfactory grades would drop five times.

The family of such a child would also be interested in its studying if the child participated not only in the expenses, but also in the family income. Even a distant aunt would press the child to be promoted to the next class every year.

6. Despite the defeat suffered in the 20th century by the 19th-century scientism and the shame it brought to itself, the only hope I harbour for the future results from my belief in the advances of science. Admittedly, technological inventions didn't stop massacres, wars and gulags of the 20th century, as the progress of human knowledge is also the atomic bomb and fast proceeding pollution of the planet.

Yet I persist in my opinion and keep repeating to my students: "No revolution, no religion, no ideology liberated women so much as the invention of a washing powder". However, the progress of science brings to mind the following question: what will happen to man if he becomes god: when he explores everything; when he no longer suffers and lives forever? I asked my philosophy professor this question twenty five years ago (just like twenty five years ago I wrote a short article about the necessity of paying salaries to students, which was never published), when I was studying at the University of Łódź. He replied me that he didn't deal with utopias, but concrete terms. He was a Marxist.

Which doesn't prevent me from persisting in my opinion: what will the world become in three or four centuries, when the progress of science deprives man of his normal driving force; when a fear of illness, pain and hunger disappears; when ignorance, chance and curiosity have been eliminated; when suffering, misery and the fear of death have become merely a bad memory? Will man still take action, move on, climb up? Or will he simply reproduce in most prosaic way?

Three or four centuries are merely a moment in the history of the world...

Deep down, despite incessant complaints that I pour into these notes, I'm an optimist. Only one little detail changes everything: I will no longer exist at this time to enjoy all that.

PATRONAGE 2, 13TH MARCH 1987

Will I eventually benefit from the system of patronage of this demo-liberal regime?

I've just left Antenne 2, the state channel of French television, where I met with a Bernard Gouley. I don't know exactly what his position in this institution hierarchy is or how important he is. However, judging by the quite advanced age of this man, his luxurious office, his secretary and the humble way I was led into his office, he seems to be one of the major figures. The note I will make on this meeting will therefore be more detailed, as it may turn out it will move me forward. Equally well it might turn out it won't move me an inch.

I'm so devastated by the wall of silence I've come across that it reminds me of a scene in *Eight and a Half* by Fellini, where Mastroianni, closed in the car, among hundreds of other cars stuck in a traffic jam, bangs his fists against the window and shouts until he's ready to drop, but nobody notices or hears him. Indifferent, silent, petrified faces in a bizarre scenery don't produce any sounds. I do the same, in a feverish nightmare I'm banging against the wall of the "temple" and shouting to convince the "priests" that my passion is justified. Their indifference remains unshaken, like marble.

So none of those who decide about the official culture of this country came to the drawings exhibition preview in the Polish Institute. Just like nobody came to the previous vernissages on the Seine Street. And yet all of them received an invitation and a brochure that I'd sent by mail. With the passage of time I realize more and more clearly that the forthcoming end of my financial problems (I'm finishing to pay back my debts) will not get me out of the vicious circle around which I've been running from the very beginning of my enterprise. I haven't moved an inch in the most important issues and none of the important people wants to accept Beks.

I then decided to turn to few personages that I knew in the old times. My contact with them had loosened, but having remembered me, they might clear the horizons for me. In a word, I decided to use the connections. Rare and poor connections, I should add, because if they were solid and numerous, I'd have made use of them long time ago instead of wasting my time fulminating against that batty regime. In other words, I'd have done what all the others do, and just like them, I'd have moved forward by a kilometre.

With Gerard Unger, my ex-mate from university, who in the meantime had become the deputy director of Monte Carlo Radio and the managing director of SOFIRAD, the whole plan misfired at the very beginning. This man had gained too much importance and after many calls from me he merely agreed to have a brief word with me.

As for the relations with Olivier Germain-Thomson, a close and dear friend in the past, who's now a journalist for ORTF radio, both his and my ego had been hurt too many times for us to be able to quickly forget about it after twelve years of separation. After the pitiful meeting we parted with a mutual impression of defeat. He hasn't called me ever again.

Then I remembered Claude Contamine. He's a leading personage, always at the head of the state media, and recently he's been appointed the head of the second television channel, Antenne 2. When I saw on the screen the celebrations of his enthronement, I got an idea to turn to him. I'd met him eighteen or nineteen years ago at Sciences Po (Parisian Institute of Political Sciences) on Saint Guillaume Street. He was then my professor in the field of international relations, in my last, diploma year. He headed the seminar which I attended.

I often wrangled with him during our weekly classes, because he'd come unprepared and in our debates he sometimes made mistakes about one or another detail. Of course, this way I could have made him my enemy, but I was clever enough to check various data about which we had different opinions in embassies, reports or statistics. I would do that between

seminars, so during the next meeting I came back to these details, signalling the mistakes which he, but also I had made the previous time. He didn't take offence and at the end of the year gave me an excellent grade with 18 points out of maximum 20, which put me into the first place among the seminar participants. I had the foresight to ask him for a written certificate on my work during the year, which I'd also done with Chaumont, Castellan and other professors who gave me good or very good grades in exams, seminars or for various diploma works. This prudence paid, because the said certificates next allowed professor Mathiot to find an argument to pull strings for me when I applied for the post of assistant at the faculty of law.

Three years later, after completing my studies at the Institute, I found out that Contamine, who in the meantime had become the head of ORTF radio, still remembered me; one of my female colleagues from the faculty of law (or perhaps from Sciences Po?), who'd become his co-worker, told me that he still spoke highly of me. Today I decided to try to get his attention. So I wrote to him, attaching with the letter the opinion he'd given about me in writing several years ago.

It was both ridiculous and humiliating, but what else could I think up except old certificates and connections?

Fifteen days later I received a letter from Bernard Gouley, the one with whom I parted a moment ago. He wrote that Contamine had asked him to see me.

The first words of his letter were: "Director Contamine gave me your letter as of 10th February and told me to contact you". So formulated sentence could have had some meaning, but equally well it might have not meant anything. Contamine might have easily suggested something like that: "See him to find out what he wants from us". Just like he might have given him a clear order: "See him to help him".

A few words instead of a few other words might have changed a lot of things in my life ...

I went to the meeting fixed by Gouley's secretary. I was void of any strong emotions, but also didn't harbour much hope. I'd put my hopes in the attic long time ago.

- Are you nervous? – Ania asked me before I went to A2.

- Unfortunately not.

Gouley sees me precisely at the agreed time, but the way he does it immediately confirms my fears:

- Dear sir, forgive me for having so little time for you, but please, speak briefly. You must have heard what happened today to our journalist Normandin?

Indeed, after watching TV afternoon news I knew that Libyan Hezbollah, which held him hostage, threatened to execute him if the prime minister, Jacques Chirac within 48 hours didn't declare the stance of France on the sale of weapons to Iraq, which was at war with Iran. So I immediately assume a business-like tone and move on to crucial matters, that is to say, the three exhibitions in Paris and the film. I add that the film was chosen for the festival in Cannes within the framework of French Cinema Perspectives. Gouley writes it down on a piece of paper and raises his eyebrows in respect. He also notes that A2 refused to buy the film and that Guy Darbois, who purchases the programmes for this channel, saw it but decided the film was too long, too documental and, probably, too dreadful to be shown on television.

Saying that, I give Gouley a cassette with the shortened version of the film, without the scene in a dive. This version lasts 17 minutes.

First of all, I must see the film and talk with Darbois about it – says Gouley, and adds after a while: - 17 minutes. Where shall I squeeze it in?

- You can cut something out and show only fragments.

- Yes, so much for the film. But what else can we do?

- Each format is good – I answer. – a report about the painter or about an exhibition of his paintings ...

- Yes, we could do something with a man standing beside the paintings.

- For example.

- Jacques Martin has his weekly programme. He's a difficult man, though – Gouley says, thinking aloud. – We had a broadcast about art, which was cancelled last year ...

- ... and which was very good. It's a pity that ...

- Yes, since that time art has only been mentioned by ... - Here he quotes three or four names of producers whom I don't know and who, concluding from what I hear, might show Beks's paintings in their programmes.

- Each format is good – I repeat. – a month ago I watched a sociological broadcast on your channel (or on TF1, I can't remember ...). In this programme, which – let me stress it – was of a sociological character, the journalist found a way to present some painter. To do that, he made a report about painting trade. Taking the opportunity, he let the painter show himself beside his paintings for full three minutes under the pretext of talking about the prices on the art market.

- Of course – says Gouley. – You can always handle it somehow. But it's important to go about it in a clever and gentle way, because if the director imposes it on some journalist, telling him: “You must do it”, that's simply inviting him to duck out of the whole thing. You have to go about it carefully.

- Anyway – I assent – this painting may arouse admiration and equally well it might cause extreme annoyance. The producer who would be entrusted with this task may hate this kind of painting and weasel out of the report.

- Yes. First I must see the film. When is the next exhibition of your painter?

- In the summer, at Orly airport.

Gouley shows disappointment:

- Nobody will want to go there.

- Sir – I say – if A2 guarantees that it will shoot a serious report about Beksiński's exhibition, I'll have one in a gallery on Seine Street very shortly, in the autumn. Then there will be an exhibition in the Parisian seat of UNESCO.

But not until next year, in February.

- That's a distant date ...

- Yes, there's no hurry, though – I answered with an insincerely carefree face. – In any case, we need years for France to accept Beksiński. It's on the other side of contemporary French aesthetic sensitivity, shaped by impressionism and abstraction. I'm not an art dealer ...

- I know. You've explained it to me in the letter ...- he says, pointing to my letter to Contamine, which lies on the desk.

-... so I'm not in a hurry, because I'm not pressed by money or time.

- You must let me know about any events related to your painter. But we could equally well make a report with your participation against the background of two or three paintings .. First I must see the film.

- So shall I wait for a signal from you? – I finish the conversation.

- Yes, yes. See you then. Goodbye.

The meeting was short, it lasted exactly 19 minutes. It wasn't possible to conclude either from the duration or from the course of the conversation whether the whole enterprise had interested the interlocutor or not. As I said at the beginning, the meeting with Gouley may be fruitful or, equally well, bring no benefit whatsoever. However, since I don't rule out such a possibility, just after I leave A2, I drink coffee in Theatrical Bar five metres away, so as to materialize our conversation when everything we told each other is still fresh in my memory. For I'm still convinced that one day there will be a shock and an avalanche will move. I wouldn't like then a trace of

this event to be missing from these notes and I wouldn't like to have to tell myself in the future: I wish I'd made a note immediately after the meeting which proved to be an about-turn in my endeavours.

But to be honest, with or without a report on French television, the walls of the "temple" will be as solid as before, and the sectarian faith of the "priests" will remain equally unshaken. The people who decide what the official culture in this country should be like need much more than a mere report on TV to betray their gods and bow to Satan.

KEPLER, 17TH APRIL 1987, WARSAW

1. Actually, it's an appropriate formula. I used it spontaneously in the conversation with Kepler, with whom I met today in the Victoria Hotel. It describes in two words my relations with Beks in their entirety.

Surprised by our sour feelings, Kepler commented:

- He might be a bit grateful to you for all the things you're doing for him. During the last television report he didn't find a single opportunity to merely mention you, though the programme was about his Parisian exhibitions.

- We're like an old marriage – I answered him – we'd have already parted long time ago, but ... there are children. I mean the paintings.

So much for the formula.

Those who in Poland observe and comment my doings do not understand Beks's attitude to me. I understand it, because my attitude to him is symmetrically identical: both sober and irrational.

They say: "Get to know yourself".

Among the rubbish we've inherited from Socrates, this one is particularly stupid. For there are few people as introspective as Beks. He's constantly turned towards himself searching for the reasons for his behaviour. He knows himself inside out. Why should he get to know himself then? Surely not to tease me less. I'm the same, anyway.

So, like many times in the past, we confessed to each other the curiosity we feel discovering in ourselves the whole meticulously arranged strategy to better inflict a blow to the other one. And this is the point at which an idiot would say to himself in relief: They've got to know each other. They will repent, so they'll surely change in the future. This is what an idiot would say, because what right does a moralist have to claim that the knowledge of oneself is combined with remorse, and remorse with a change in conduct?

Between the act of cognition, the act of conscience and the act of will there's no natural connection.

And this is what I'm driving at: Kepler asks me for two Beks's paintings for an exhibition of world surrealism in Helsinki. The same evening I communicate the request to Beks, because the paintings which I'm sending to Paris and which I can freely dispose of are already registered in the customs documents and I can't touch them. Anyway, they are poor in my opinion.

Beks agrees to lend his two paintings.

- Because it's for Kepler – he stresses. – He's a nice guy.

I share his opinion and incautiously show my contentment. This way Beks knows I'm anxious that Kepler should get what he's asking for. So on the next day, just after greeting me, he looks into my eyes and says:

- On second thoughts ...well, picture yourself I was thinking about it all night. No, I won't give Kepler two paintings. I'd be left with two empty spaces on the wall.

If I were naïve, I'd remind him that he kept for himself five best new paintings and they've never been hung on his walls. The absence of two wouldn't change the appearance of his flat at all. But I'm not naïve and won't waste time convincing him, as I know what it's all about. I'm looking forward to our next meeting in six months or in a year, during which Beks will tell me about his irresistible desire to hurt me. So irresistible that he didn't resist it. In a nutshell, I can't wait to hear him tell me how he found a good way of hurting me by withdrawing from his promise to give Kepler two paintings.

“Get to know yourself”.

2. I've sent to Paris 17 paintings which Beks has made recently. Previously, after a violent row on the second day of my stay in Warsaw, Beks took 5 best paintings for himself. The shipment was uneventful: both the making and fitting of boxes didn't cause any trouble. (Because what Hartwig company is able to throw together is of such poor quality that

usually you have to fit it to the precise dimensions of paintings for a day or two). This time I had my work done by a young boy I'd met last year at the airport, when he was preparing a similar shipment for some company. He acquitted himself well and I'm pleased with him. But I'll be 100% calm when I pick everything up in Paris.

3. There's a prospect of organising an exhibition in Moscow. I talked about it with Ms Marszałek-Młyńczyk, the deputy minister of culture. We made friends when she was the director of the Polish Institute in Paris and I know she'll help me wherever she can. The same evening I'm accosted by Beks:

- Do you know where you should have an exhibition of my paintings?

- Where?

- You won't guess.

- In Moscow?

- How did you guess?

- This morning I talked to Ms Marszałek-Młyńska about it, because now the whole world is looking at Moscow. It's easy to guess.

- You must hurry up, though, because if Gorbachev's attempts continue and real liberalisation takes place, tomorrow there'll be twenty brilliant painters and no effect whatsoever. Right now they are suppressed, forced to keep silent, but there've always been lots of extremely talented people in that country. It's enough to let them come out. Besides, Europe has a complex of Russia, so it will adopt them immediately. This and next year it's the last moment when a guy like me can show himself in Moscow and be noticed.

I shared this idea with Kepler. We decided that as the director of Art Exhibitions Office he would present an official proposal to the Polish and Russian authorities. It will be even less suspicious, because three Polish artists are to be exhibited in Moscow in 1987: Szajna, Brzozowski (who died three days ago in Rome) and Hasior. Besides, the fact that the exhibition will

be organised in cooperation with the Association, which I set up before my departure from Paris, will sort of disperse the faint smell of promotion steered by an unknown man. On the other hand, the fact that it's me who will cover the costs of transport and insurance and that I'll lend my own paintings might make it easier for the ministry to accept the project. For the Polish state is on the verge of bankruptcy and would give up such an exhibition rather than spend a single penny on it.

STUNT, 18TH APRIL 1987, WARSAW

1. – We could pull such a stunt if you agree: if you pay me in advance, I stress: if you pay me, otherwise it's out of the question, we could collectively burn all my bad paintings. If you agree that I will choose the ones I don't like and if you pay me for them, I agree to burn them. Actually, on these two conditions we could burn all my "bad" paintings in the future.

- And? – I answer. – If Vermeer had done the same, the "View of Delft" might no longer exist. Are you kidding?

- Actually, what else did I do when leaving Sanok? I burnt dozens of my paintings which I didn't like. You've got the photos of all that stuff burning.

- As a matter of fact – I say to myself – why am I surprised? I'm going to order my corpse to be burnt together with the best painting by Beks, "Katyń".

2. Everything's already posted. Yesterday I sent 17 paintings and then we made a list of the works possessed by Beks. I've decided to shorten my stay in Warsaw due to personal reasons, but also because I have nothing to do here anymore. As usual, I begin to feel sort of liking for Beks between the two moments when I hate him. But all three of us must take some rest from one another, because Madame Sophie starts showing the first symptoms of allergy to me. I've lost an ally.

- Why do you constantly make him sign these papers saying about "the death of Z.B." and about his heirs? You know perfectly well how he fears death! – she tells me.

I think she's also beginning to be worried about the interests of Tommy, who'll have his hands tied after father's death if Beks signs the documents for me. Besides, she thinks I impose myself too much and I'm too greedy for the paintings, which she would like to keep for her son after Beks's death. It's true that Beks is afraid of death. And it was only a year ago that I thought his paintings were a cry for liberation brought by death ...

- If it was possible – he told me two hours ago – I’d have myself filled with helium so that my body would be preserved for three hundred years until the time death no longer exists. Even if there wasn’t a single element of my today’s environment, even if all my friends, wife and acquaintances were moss-covered gravestones, I would do that.

3. Although our meetings are adorned with mutual confessions and friends’ reproaches (the thing we repeat almost like robots each time I turn up in Warsaw) and although they’ve been marked by the violent argument we had on the second day of my stay, they seem to be friendly and pleasant. But while I’m becoming increasingly appreciative of the complexity of his mind, I harbour less and less hope that he’ll ever change.

- If I’d known – he tells me – that our relations were supposed to be based on friendship, gratitude and solidarity, I’d never have concluded an agreement with you. I mistook you for a “cold businessman”, with whom I concluded a contract based solely on interest. That suited me. And now you take offence that I call you a partner and introduce you as an art dealer.

- Don’t worry – I reply. – That’s over. You’ve been able to cleanse me of any desire for friendship and cordiality. We’ve come back to point zero and we’re “cold businessmen” again. But be careful, because from now on I won’t make any concessions, especially I won’t understand why I should agree to increase the price of paintings only because the dollar has dropped. My “cold” interest doesn’t advise me to do that at all.

- Yes, but neither you have an interest to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs – he answers.

- But where are the golden eggs? – I ask laughingly and we cautiously come back to safer topics.

THREATS, 21ST APRIL 1987, WARSAW

This morning I came to Beks to take him to a temporary exhibition of contemporary Polish painting at the National Museum. There are four paintings of his. A year ago, this way I dragged him to this most prestigious temple of art in Poland so that he would see a permanent museum collection. For Beks claimed he'd never seen it before. The current exhibition is excellent. Recently I've been there twice to have a closer look. I didn't realize there had been so many great artists in Poland over the past thirty years. Artists who are sometimes greater and technically better than a large number of French or American big names filling the museums all over the world. What a pity our artists originate from a nation that has had no political or military significance in contemporary history.

However, the failed visit to the Museum made me realize one thing about my compatriots, namely their enormous appetite for holidays and days off. Although Easter finished on Monday, the museum was closed on Tuesday to compensate for an ordinary Monday, on which it would have normally been closed. We came by taxi in vain.

After returning to Sonaty Street we had our last talk before my departure to Paris. Everything happened according to the already established rules for farewell talks: cordial and filled with anxiety, smiling and even funny, but at the same time strewn with mutual, hardly veiled threats.

- If I don't answer you, it's not because I have no arguments – Beks assures me.– I just think: it's going to infuriate him, it may cause a clash. But if I don't contradict you, it's not because I lack means of pressure.

- Do what I do: write letters denouncing me to History or to a particular person. If I don't send the letters I've written, it's because I pour hydrochloric acid over you in them. I keep them for myself, like any other denouncing letters. No, not because you might destroy them if I sent them ...

No. I do it so that you know that after your death the others may find out what I thought of you.

- Sometimes I also feel like doing that ... But who could I write such letters to? Nyczek and Waniek are at hand and it's enough to pick up the receiver to talk to them. Shall I write to them under any pretext? Or write to my own wife? That would be even more preposterous.

- You do enough in the letters you write to me. Well, I don't destroy them.

He ponders for a while:

- Nobody's going to believe you ... No, nobody's going to believe you ...

I understand at once what he's alluding to and what he means: as time goes by, he's increasingly worried about my notes, which he's never read, but which he's sure one day will become the main source of information about him.

- You've got a paranoid mind – he adds.

- I'd rather call it a tendency for schizophrenia. I suffer from an evident, though probably not pathological split personality. Between what I write and what I do there's enough space for minimum two people – I express his thought more precisely.

- No, paranoid. You're exaggerating with your accusations. Besides, you're so systematic in reproaching those who've cut you to the quick ...

- ... for example reproaching you ...

- ... that your readers will be bored after the first pages. If something's exaggerated and systematic, you don't feel like reading it.

- Oh, be careful – I advise him. – What I write is not as systematic as you might think. Firstly, I complain not only about you, but also myself. I'm as critical in relation to myself as towards you or Louse. Besides, having once pointed out the disgusting things about you, I often defend you. I've even produced a note entitled the *Defence of Beks*, in which I imagine I'm you and try to find some arguments to justify your behaviour. And finally, I'm not as

systematic in shedding my grief as you think, because I frequently interweave the story about us with memories, contemplation on my own life, descriptions of various events or speculations about freedom and death. All that diminishes the systematicity you're counting on. Just the opposite, this way I become reliable. Anyway, I never lie in my notes. Neither do I add anything. The only fraud I commit, I admit it, is that I present only one aspect of things: the dirtiest. For example, writing about you, I seldom describe our nice talks, your sense of humour or your eloquence. That's true. But except that, I describe all of you as you really are, or at least as I perceive you: a rather disgusting picture. Anyway, I've got a nature of a prosecutor. I've missed my vocation.

Just in case, we both smile.

- I've got enough means to use against you – Beks starts again.

- You mean breaking off our agreement?

- Not, actually not that. It would be enough if I stopped painting. That's it. It would be enough if one day I told myself: I quit painting. Or if I started to paint pictures that I knew you wouldn't like for sure. And in such a case our agreement doesn't oblige me to pay you any compensation.

- I know it's your *idée fixe*: how to break off the contract without paying. Isn't it? I'll suggest a better way to you – I raise the bid. – You've got the means which are easier to use and bring more dangerous effects. Sometimes the people whom I told about your tricks ask me: "Why don't you take all his paintings without paying in revenge for all the dirty he's done on you?" To which I reply that in such a case you'd complain in public and the game would be over for me. Nobody would talk to me anymore. I wouldn't be able to sell or exhibit your single painting. Nobody would come.

- Of course.

- It would be the same if I had mass sales of all your paintings I possess at a second-rate auction, somewhere in a provincial French town, and then

announced in Poland that “Beksiński had no chances on the European market”. Then you’d become a second-rate, local hack painter of uncertain reputation.

- I must admit I’ve been thinking about it for a long time. Actually, this is what I’m afraid of.

We both burst out laughing excessively.

- If I have no luck in Paris, for some time you won’t be able to sell a single painting in Poland or you’ll have problems selling – I add details to the prospects for the future.

- That’s why we should make concessions to each other – concludes Beks, coming back to his obsessions. – Since the time we signed the agreement the dollar has dropped by 40 per cent ...

- We’ve already talked about it – I answer him with a thoughtful face. – And I answered you that it had dropped in relation to western currencies and the yen; it didn’t drop in relation to the zloty, though. Quite the opposite, in Poland it keeps rising.

- You forget about inflation in this country. The fact that the dollar has jumped here to 950 zł doesn’t prove anything. After the last price rise in Poland its real value has greatly decreased. Besides, I buy everything for dollars in Pewex. I’ve never exchanged a single buck for zlotys on the black market. I couldn’t do that. I live off Pewex, and there the prices in dollars are going up all the time. Have you seen the price of a Ford, the same one as I have?

- Come on, hold on a moment ... - I calm him down.

- You must revalue what you pay me. Our agreement obliges you to do so – he says tearfully.

- It also obliges you. Which doesn’t change the fact that when the dollar surged dramatically and I asked you to reduce the flat rate, you didn’t even

want to listen to me. “You owe me 12 000 dollars, no matter how much the dollar costs you. Full stop” – you replied.

- Yes, but I paid for my mistake. I paid a high price, I atoned for my sin. The dollar has been dropping for a year, and I don't say anything, although I can't sleep through a single night from the beginning to the end. I keep telling myself: he's right. When he asked me, I refused. But it's getting tragic...

- Three days ago you were pleased that we'd come back to the starting point, that is to say, to relations between “cold businessmen”. Yes or no? You were happy that there would be no more talk about friendship, gratitude or solidarity between us, that is, the things beyond your capabilities. That we would talk only about business ...

- Yes – he interrupts me. – If I'd known it was about something else, I'd have never entered into a contract with you...

- So I repeat what I told you two days ago: there's no reason for me to be guided by anything else than my interest from now on. Well, it's not my interest to discuss a possible rise of prices for your paintings.

- You'll be the first to lose on it. They're going to be worse, because I'll be stressed when painting.

- Are you sure? I'm not. Perhaps you paint better under stress? ... Why don't we check it?

I wait till he stops laughing and add:

- We'll see.

- When? – he asks.

- When it's the term of this year's payment. By the way, I'm ready to pay a double price for the landscapes ...

- Oh, no! No, not that! – he yells. – It would be like I became a prostitute.

- Explain it to me, please – I adopt a benign facial expression. – Recently you've made such a concession for your family from Germany, haven't you?

These ruins over rust-coloured flowers, which we both consider ornamental and easy, you painted this picture specially for them, didn't you? You owed them something and had to pay with a painting. You knew that if there was a landscape among the paintings you proposed, they would surely choose it for the debt. So?

- I can make one concession. I can make two. But if I were to make more, I'd better stop painting. Landscapes don't inspire me any longer. It's as if I bore dead children. I could paint them professionally, as many as I wished, but they'd lack something: the soul. One day I might even get an idea and, to realize it, I'll paint a landscape. But paint only professionally? ... Could you satisfy sexual needs of a 70-year-old lady just because she offers a double price?

- Seemingly you couldn't. If you couldn't (you couldn't, could you?), tell me why? Because you'd be morally disgusted or you wouldn't get a hard-on?

- I wouldn't get a hard-on. I absolutely can't paint to order.

- You did it at the request of Banach, though. You painted the face of his deceased wife on the basis of the photo he'd sent.

- That was awful. The final effect was the face of a corpse. Banach himself threw it away ...

Sophie, Beks'wife, brings me tea.

- If our relations are to be based on a pure game of interests again – I start after a short break – I'd like to remind you that being an art dealer I will act like other art dealers. Well, art dealers don't care much about spiritual dilemmas of poor artists. I know a painter who doesn't even know when his art dealer is going to see him to talk. And the said art dealer doesn't feel uncomfortable dictating the artist what and how he's supposed to paint.

- Mercy – Beks breaks out. – I won't do that! It's better to die straight away.

Laughing our heads off, we go to the kitchen to have dinner. An hour later I say goodbye to them and leave. And then all of us breathe a sigh of relief.

WAY, 24TH APRIL 1987, DEAUVILLE

The shortest route to Warsaw leads via Concorde Square, and the shortest way to my personal success - through the fame of Beks.

There are two simple truths behind these vague suggestions.

I find that the more institutions, magazines and galleries in Paris I besiege, the more famous Beks becomes ...in Poland. I could see it during my stay in Warsaw. While in France nothing important is happening and the milieu of the local decision-makers continues to ignore Beks, the Warsaw milieu seems to be brimming with enthusiasm. The echo from the capital of the world soon reaches the Palace of Culture and, accompanied by the Polish inferiority complex, makes my smallest step in Paris gain the dimensions of a victory in Warsaw. There's a lot of talk about it and everybody is trying to outdo others in giving exaggerated judgments.

Of course, the comments refer chiefly to money: "That thief Dmochowski - they say to each other - it's sheer robbery! He earned millions on Beksiński's paintings".

This way a myth is being born in Poland.

Then, as I said, the success of my own writing production depends on the success of Beks's painting. Whatever I produce is not going to cross the threshold of any publishing house as long as my signature is associated solely with a second-rate hack barrister; whereas a story about the road to fame of a genius will add grandeur of a masterpiece to confessions written down by a chronicler. Even his life might become interesting, because having explored it, the fans of Beks will sort of come closer to their idol.

If only I persevered...

RATS, 31ST MAY 1987

Young creatures and naïve minds admire great people. They would like to be as beautiful, generous and mighty as them, so folk legends and fairy-tales for children are full of lions, eagles and swans. Then experience reveals the deception: approaching the sirens, we discover rats. Some people are disenchanted and complain of disappointments brought by life. As for me, I feel an intense pleasure observing these little animals with a complicated psyche, aggressive and cautious. When left alone in peace and quiet, rats sleep. However, being scared, hungry or feeling hatred, they demonstrate mysterious and perverse intelligence. Put into a labyrinth and pricked with a needle, they look for an exit in panic. The ideas they have when trying to get out provide me with an inexhaustible source of reflection. They have a great ability to keep hope: they get drowned after nine minutes after being thrown into an aquarium. But if you take them out for 30 seconds while they are drowning, put them on a board and throw them back into water, the hope to stand on a firm ground again will let them swim ceaselessly for another 16 hours before they go down.

I don't like dogs and dolphins. They are servile and trustful. I can endlessly observe Beks's devious excuses, though. His fathomless internal life, clear-headedness, greed and fears are a fascinating world for me.

LITTLE PETE, 30TH MAY 1987

When putting papers in order, I came across the letter I'd written to my Father at the age of eight or nine years. It's written in Polish and impossible to translate into French, which is a pity, because the reader of these notes, weary of their ceaseless pessimism, could get a gulp of fresh air : this letter is hysterically funny.

I quote it without any changes. Those of the readers who know my native tongue will be able to relish little Pete's greed, which at least this time is hilarious and unthreatening.

I didn't correct a single spelling or punctuation mistake that I'd committed in this letter:

25th May 1951

To Daddy from little Pete

Dear Daddy, I'm very curios if you sunbathe and I'm very curios if you have nice wether or bad wether. Because we have bad wether all the time. Only today it was tolerable, because all the time since you left it was foul wether and was hail too and it was quit big but one happy thing is that it was very short. And you know we were in Helenówek, we chose the best day. And we were at auntie stasia but Teddy and Mika cheated me because listen to me. Auntie gave us cookies. And Teddy and Mika say me Pete we took two cookies each and of corse they ate three cookies so I ate these two cookies and Ifancy that cookie of mine because it was left because everybody was to eat three cookies, and Teddy tell me don't eat this cookie because when you eat it auntie will think that mummy don't give us food. And if you won't eat auntie won't think so and I stupid listened to them and just when I left the room they attacked the cookie like savage and ate it but not all because I heard it and snached a bit. But it's almost nothing, for one tooth.

Come as soon as you can kisses Pete

AGREEMENT, 16TH JUNE 1987

In these notes I often quote the agreement between me and Beks, which we concluded at the beginning of our cooperation. I think that Beks, despite the word he gave, is trying to weasel out of its particular provisions. Also, I cherish little hope that he'll observe the whole agreement. Sooner or later he's going to break it off. He'll do it when it becomes evident that I haven't been able to promote him in the West. But he will also do that when his fame in Poland increases owing to my endeavours in France. Then he will be able to sell his paintings in Warsaw for prices higher than he's selling them to me today.

The question I ask myself is whether he'll keep his word after breaking off the agreement and pay me compensation, that is to say, whether he'll give me 50 paintings and, if so, what paintings these are going to be? Probably the worst ones, namely the ones he won't be able to sell in Poland, even for measly money. The agreement entitles me to choose paintings from among "absolutely all" that he or I have, but knowing him, he won't give me any choice.

The third question I ask myself is whether he'll make it possible for me to purchase any five paintings annually at a fixed price of 8400 francs (an equivalent of one thousand dollars at the moment when we were signing the agreement)?

If he doesn't keep his word, how will he go about it? What explanations will he resort to? What is he going to use as an excuse? Will he tell me, looking into my eyes calmly: "I won't give anything and that's the end"? Or, having spent a whole night scheming how to choose the most profitable solution for himself, will he write me, as usual, a lengthy letter with brackets, interjections and digressions, in which he'll arduously try to prove that he doesn't owe me anything? He's a cowardly man and will surely try to give his refusal the appearance of rationality. But who knows? Having no hope for

further profits, he might boldly answer me in one sentence: “I won’t give anything and that’s the end”. Or: “OK, I’ll give you 50 paintings, but you can’t choose anything. I will choose the paintings myself”. Or finally: “No way, I won’t let you buy 5 paintings a year at a fixed price of 8400 francs after the agreement’s been broken off. Full stop”.

I decided to quote our agreement *in extenso* so that you could, my Friend, form an opinion on our arguments, during which I try to force Beks to observe the provisions of the agreement and he tries to shirk them; I also do it so that you can decide who’s to blame for breaking off the agreement when it eventually happens; and finally, so that you can realize how I will most probably be duped.

The agreement was negotiated for nearly a week, a few hours a day; then Beks typed what I dictated to him. We signed it solemnly and shook hands. A few amendments were then added to it, but they were later removed. The only significant one that has been left is the one which says that in the event Beks breaks off the agreement, he’ll owe me 50 paintings instead of 25, as provided for at the beginning, and that he can keep for himself 25 per cent of the annual production, no more however than 5 paintings.

Agreement

First part: Mutual obligations

A. Subject of agreement

1. Between Zdzisław Beksiński and Piotr Dmochowski (hereinafter referred to as ZB and PD respectively) has been concluded this agreement of exclusive sale by PD of all paintings to be painted in the future by ZB (with exceptions specified in paragraph 37). The agreement shall also apply *mutatis mutandis* to all works made in other techniques (drawing, graphics, film etc.) if ZB decides to create the same.

2. This agreement also provides for the exclusive right of PD to conclude absolutely all agreements and transactions concerning any kind of publications which are connected with ZB's works and his person outside the territory of Poland and the countries of people's democracy (TV, films, books, exhibitions etc.) subject to terms established by PD. This right may not be granted to any other person and may not be exercised by ZB himself. This right is granted to PD for a period of thirty years and may not be revoked by ZB without PD's permission, in which event a relevant authorisation shall be destroyed. The revocation of this right without PD's permission or exercising the same by ZB himself shall result in ZB's obligation to provide compensation in the form of 25 paintings chosen by PD from among absolutely all paintings created by ZB and possessed by him or by PD. Thus, the limitations specified in paragraph 37 shall not apply.

B. Duration of agreement

3. The agreement comes into effect after it has been signed, on the stipulation that:

a. Until 1st January, in a preliminary period, neither of the parties can withdraw from the agreement, but their mutual obligations shall not be full yet.

b. In the preliminary period ZB can fulfil his obligations towards third parties (presents in the form of paintings, the sale of paintings already placed in galleries etc.).

c. In the preliminary period PD shall not be obliged to guarantee an annual income higher than the paid sum of 4000 dollars for the four paintings purchased in February 1984.

d. The duration of the agreement has been established as thirty years. Before this term expires, the agreement may only be terminated due to force majeure, i.e. An unpredictable event which is beyond the control and will of

the parties and makes it absolutely impossible to fulfil the obligations of the agreement.

C. Solving of difficulties

5. In the event of other difficulties the parties must reach an amicable agreement. In the event of difficulties that the parties are not able to solve amicably, they shall be resolved by three arbiters; either party shall appoint one arbiter, and the so selected two arbiters shall appoint the third one.

D. Breaking off the agreement

7. In the event PD unilaterally breaks off the agreement before the end of the 30-year period, he shall lose all the undertaken investments and shall return all the paintings deposited with him to ZB. In the event ZB unilaterally breaks off the agreement, paragraph 2 shall apply.

E. Profits, risk and payments

8 a. Profits higher than the flat rate of 12 000 dollars shall be divided in the proportion of 50 per cent for each of the parties. In the same way shall be divided revenues from TV, books, exhibitions and absolutely all other publications devoted to ZB and his works outside the territory of Poland and the countries of people's democracy.

b. In the event PD decides to become an editor, a distributor or an organiser of publications or exhibitions about ZB and his works, the profits shall be divided according to general principles applicable in France between an editor, a distributor or an organiser and an artist – painter.

9. The flat rate of 12 000 dollars shall be paid personally to ZB once a year. Further incomes of ZB shall be paid in a convertible currency to be established by the parties each time, on condition that the said currency does

not entail any additional costs for PD or shall not make him breach the law. Payment of the guaranteed flat rate of 12 000 dollars shall be paid in dollars.

10. The exchange rate of the dollar is established as 8.40 French francs per 1 dollar (the average exchange rate for sale by banks in February 1984). If the value of the dollar in relation to the franc changes by more than 10 per cent in one or the other direction, the parties must find an amicable solution upon the request of either party. In the case of other monetary disturbances, the parties shall find an amicable solution before PD takes a decision to sell the remaining paintings stored in his place. Irrespective of the dollar fluctuations in relation to the franc, PD, as part of his obligation to pay the flat rate of 12 000 dollars guaranteed for ZB, shall annually revalue the sum of 1000 dollars per a painting by the official inflation rate of the dollar.

11. ZB's lowest income from the sale of one painting is established as 1000 dollars as part of the flat rate sum, and beyond the flat-rate sum – an equivalent sum in francs or another convertible currency established by the parties.

F. Taxes

12. Taxes on the sale of paintings belonging to PD shall be paid by PD. Taxes on the guaranteed minimum income of ZB's 12 000 dollars shall be paid by PD. Taxes on the joint income exceeding the obtained sum of 12 000 dollars shall be divided by the parties in half.

13. PD shall ensure ZB's anonymity in relation to Polish authorities.

14. The tax declaration regarding the income from the sale of paintings shall be separated by PD from the declaration regarding his income from other sources.

15. In the event tax burdens are impossible to accept by either party, the parties shall find an amicable solution.

16. The duty on export from Poland and the duty on import to France of paintings which belong to PD shall be paid by PD. PD shall also pay the said export and import duty on paintings the sale of which is supposed to guarantee ZB's flat rate of 12 000 dollars.

The duty on export from Poland and the duty on import to France or to other countries of paintings earmarked for sale beyond the flat rate shall be divided by the parties in half; subject to the provision that the net sum due to ZB for the sale of one painting may not be lower than an equivalent of 1000 dollars in francs or another convertible currency. The above principles shall also apply to the costs of the transported paintings insurance. In the event the customs or insurance charges are impossible to bear by either party, the parties shall find an amicable solution.

G. Delivery of paintings

17. Paintings shall be delivered to France several times a year after the term has been established by the parties.

18. In the event customs, insurance or tax regulations in Poland or in France change, and the said change creates a situation which is impossible to bear by either party, the parties shall find an amicable solution. If an amicable solution has not been reached, the provision contained in paragraph 5 may be applied upon the request of either party. As an absolute last resort, upon the request of the arbiters, the agreement may be suspended until the cessation of legal reasons; next, it shall be resumed as quickly as possible subject to the previous terms. In the period of the agreement suspension, both parties shall be free from mutual obligations.

However, the suspension of the agreement shall not affect the remaining permanent right of PD to purchase paintings for himself in line with the provisions contained in paragraph 30.

I. Unsold paintings

19. Paintings earmarked for sale which are possessed by PD may not be stored by him for longer than three years from the date of their delivery to France or another target country. When this term expires, both parties shall consult each other in order to decide whether the paintings should be withdrawn from sale or sold at reduced prices.

J. Emigration of ZB or PD

20. In the event ZB leaves Poland, the provisions of this agreement shall not change. Similarly, the moving of PD to a western country other than France shall not cause any changes to the agreement.

Part two: Obligations and rights of PD

A. Obligations of PD

21. PD obliges himself to systematically prepare slides of the paintings painted by ZB as well as ZB's paintings possessed by third parties and museums.

22. PD shall export new paintings two or three times a year. He is also obliged to: provide boxes for paintings and obtain permission for export, import and insurance of paintings. The costs of insurance are specified in paragraph 16.

23. PD shall advertise ZB outside Poland, in particular PD obliges himself to:

a. Exhibit paintings in a gallery in Paris or in other centres in or outside Paris.

b. Prepare brochures, posters or postcards etc. with ZB's paintings.

c. Propagate the name and works of ZB in mass media.

d. PD shall endeavour to have the works of ZB issued in an album.

e. All the above duties of PD shall be carried out at his cost or in cooperation with persons or institutions he selects.

24. If a transaction may provide both parties with evident profits, PD obliges himself to exhibit certain paintings at auctions and to cover the costs (5 per cent) in the event the unsold paintings are returned.

25. Starting with 1st January 1985, PD shall ensure ZB an annual income (referred to as the flat rate) in a minimum amount of 12 000 dollars net. This obligation shall be subject to the delivery by ZB of minimum 12 paintings specified by PD in a given year. Delivering a smaller number shall reduce ZB's income in a given year by 1000 dollars for each undelivered painting.

26. If PD is not able to sell at least 12 paintings annually and in consequence fails to obtain the sum of 12 000 dollars guaranteeing the minimum annual income for ZB, PD shall purchase for himself an appropriate number of paintings at the price of 1000 dollars each in order to ensure ZB's minimum income of 12 000 dollars. The paintings purchased by PD shall be precisely specified by him at the moment of purchase. Then PD will be able to dispose of them at his discretion. PD shall have a right to urge ZB to grant the paintings selected by ZB in compliance with paragraph 37 to PD, pursuant to his right provided for in paragraph 30. In such an event ZB shall have a right to demand that these paintings cannot be sold in the future by PD without ZB's permission.

27. PD shall keep a detailed list of paintings which he has obtained and sold as well as the paintings stored in his or in ZB's place or transferred to third parties.

28. PD remains responsible for any serious damage to the transported paintings and shall return ZB a sum equivalent to the price of paintings having a similar size at a given time (based on the price of the last sold painting) or shall lose the right to a corresponding number of paintings

which he may purchase on the basis of paragraph 30 and, at the same time, shall pay ZB the sum of 1000 dollars for a damaged painting.

29. After each new delivery of paintings, PD shall declare that in the event of his death these paintings should be sold by his wife, and after deducting the paintings due to PD pursuant to paragraph 30, the profits shall be divided according to general principles. In the event the paintings are not sold by PD's wife or his other heirs during a period of three years (except the ones kept pursuant to paragraph 30), they shall also be returned to ZB. The above mentioned statements shall be filed with barrister Jean Jacques Delpoio, 253.av.Daumesnil Paris XII, whom PD has entrusted with all his testamentary dispositions.

B. Rights of PD

30. After ZB has made his choice pursuant to paragraph 37, PD shall have a permanent right to purchase at his discretion no fewer than three paintings annually at a fixed price being an equivalent of 1000 dollars in francs for a painting, no more however than 25% of the annual production. Apart from that, PD shall have the right to pre-empt paintings other than the ones referred to in paragraph 37 for the current price, specified on the basis of the last sold painting of the same size. The rights provided for in this paragraph are permanent and do not depend on any of the provisions contained in this agreement, on its termination or suspension.

31. Every year, after receiving the slides of new paintings, PD shall have the right to refuse to accept some paintings. In such a case ZB can dispose of the said paintings at his discretion.

32. PD has an exclusive right to conclude absolutely all contracts concerning ZB and his works (TV, films, books, exhibitions etc.) outside the territory of Poland and European countries of people's democracy, according to the terms specified by PD. Any related costs shall be borne by PD unless these contracts have been broken off through the fault of ZB, in

which case only ZB shall be held responsible. Profits shall be divided in half. In the event PD decides to become an editor, a distributor or an organizer of publications or events and exhibitions related to ZB and his works, the division of profits shall be based on general principles applied in France between an editor, a distributor or an organizer and an artist-painter. Profits obtained this way shall proportionally reduce the flat-rate sum of 12 000 dollars, which PD owes to ZB.

Third part. Obligations and rights of ZB

A. Obligations of ZB

33. ZB shall ensure necessary painting materials for himself at his own cost.

34. ZB shall put new paintings in ordinary frames, having previously made them available to PD's photographer so that the latter could take photographs.

35. ZB shall reserve in a written document, a copy of which will be given to PD, that in the event of his death the paintings which have not been sold and which are stored by PD as well as the ones which have been painted since the last shipment to PD and are possessed by ZB's heirs shall be sold by PD and the income shall be divided between PD and the heirs according to general principles. PD's rights specified in point 30 shall be observed. This paragraph does not apply to paintings to which ZB is entitled pursuant to paragraph 37.

36. ZB shall systematically provide PD with all new paintings except the ones specified in paragraph 37.

B. Rights of ZB

37. ZB has a right to keep for himself and dispose at his discretion of paintings accounting for 25% of the annual production. In the event ZB or his heirs decide to sell these paintings, PD shall have a pre-emptive right.

38. Apart from the paintings retained by ZB pursuant to paragraph 37, in the first years of the agreement ZB shall have a right to store seven further paintings at his place for decorative purposes. These paintings shall be handed over to PD as new paintings are created.

The agreement has been drawn up in Warsaw in two copies, each being equally valid, on 23rd February 1984, subject to the jurisdiction of French law.

The document has been read out and confirmed in person: Zdzisław Beksiński (legible signature and illegible signature).

The document has been read out and confirmed in person: Piotr Dmochowski (legible signature and illegible signature)".

Then a few amendments were made, some of which were later withdrawn. The ones that were left provided that in the event the agreement was breached by Beksiński I would have the right to 50 paintings instead of 25 and Beks might retain 25% of the annual production, "no more however than 5 paintings".

POST SCRIPTUM, DECEMBER 1994

After Beks broke off our agreement on 16th November, I wrote to him on 24th November:

“Today a few material issues remain to be settled (...)

2. How do you propose to ensure the fulfilment of paragraph 30 of our agreement, which remains valid despite the expiry of the agreement itself? Because (...) every year I want to buy from you a few paintings for my permanent collection at 8400 francs ...”

Beks wrote me back on 30th November 1994:

“Re point 2. The formulation of paragraph 30 contains a contradiction, as there can't be a paragraph being a part of the agreement if the latter no longer exists. This is my final stance and further correspondence about it is pointless. If you want to take the matter to court, act according to the dictates of your conscience ...”

Then I wrote to remind him that we'd negotiated paragraph 30 long and carefully and that during ten years he'd never complained about its alleged “contradiction” with the rest of the agreement and that the content of paragraph 30 was unambiguous and didn't allow any “interpretation”. Namely, it stipulates that my right to buy five paintings at the price of 8400 francs (without “the inflation delay”) “is permanent and does not depend on any other provisions of this agreement, its termination or suspension”.

To which I got a short reply on 14th December 1994: “Re 2. I will never change my stance expressed in the letter dated 30th November 1994”.

PRESS 2, 23RD JULY 1987

Today I came across my note devoted to journalists dated 20th May 1986. A small note which was supposed to be sarcastic and biting when I wrote it.

When I'm reading it now, it seems simply lenient and doesn't satisfy me at all. I have such an aversion to the democratic-liberal press that I must file my indictment against it. I won't settle for anything less. And here are the bad things I can say about those who I envy and detest.

When I came to France I was twenty two years old. I'd brought with me the unshaken faith in socialism and every now and then I assured my French interlocutors of its superiority over the "bourgeois, decadent" system. Simple people I met here in that miserable period often admitted I was right: "It's a beautiful ideal of justice and community" – they said. Only to add a moment later: "But here at least you can speak freely".

The communist propaganda, the creation of which I was, hadn't taught me how to fight "the class enemy" in this field, although I reminded people that also here it would be risky to shout in the street: "Down with de Gaulle". I explained that "it's a transition state and when communism finally wins, freedom will come back to the USSR".

It sounded very weak, though. I couldn't cope with the argument the obviousness of which was blatant: "Here at least you can speak freely".

Twenty years have passed. First of all, I gave up the ideals of Marxism. Next I became a staunch adherent of "freedom and democracy". It sounded so good In the end, I forgot about all that and today I don't believe in anything. I understood, however, some mechanisms of that freedom of speech in the West, with which I couldn't cope intellectually in the past, its tricks, frauds and those who really benefit from it. In other words, life has taught me what I was not able to learn from numerous books by Marx.

It's dangerous to radically contradict obvious things. Sooner or later every kind of doggedness will take its revenge. I won't say then: "There has never been any freedom of speech". Instead, I will dismantle this freedom into my four usual pieces, so as to have a closer look at each of them. One after another.

1. Is everything that the West boasts about the freedom of speech a lie? Surely not.

Because private conversations are not eavesdropped here (a), the state doesn't monopolize the right to public appearances (b). Those who want to make use of this right are hardly ever censored (c) and they seldom meet with punishment, which is mild, anyway (d).

a. Firstly, in your private life you can talk through your hat. Who can seriously claim that he'll be eavesdropped when during a dinner with friends he'll tear the current government to pieces? We can be sure that if he lowers his voice, nobody will resent him if he says:

"I hate Jews, and in general I'm a fascist".

Contrary to dictatorships, there are no big ears listening carefully to personal confessions of citizens. The police don't stuff flats of ordinary people with microphones and there's no threat for anyone to be sent to Siberia because he said among his friends: "May you die, scoundrels". Here the authorities don't control private prattle.

This alone would be enough to decide that life is better "here" than "there". You are not afraid. You are able to think, but also say anything that comes to your head in a usual chat, without fearing prison. I remember nervous looks of my Soviet acquaintances when in 1962 I asked them indiscreet questions about state matters while we were sitting at a table in a Moscow restaurant and drinking Georgian brandy. They fell silent or lowered their voices: "Please, be careful – they said paralysed with fear – somebody might hear us". Why should I complain then? Don't we have the freedom of speech in this liberal democracy system, which I keep spitting

at? It looks like I contradict myself. Actually, I can be accused of inconsistency even more easily if I add that:

b. The authorities here don't ban anyone who wants to be heard by crowds from speaking in public, and they don't appropriate this privilege for themselves. First of all, they allow building a proper rostrum for this purpose, which is confirmed by the fact that every morning you can get at least twenty different newspapers at every newsagent's. There are reportedly ten radio stations and a few television channels which are not always favourably inclined towards ministers. If a political, cultural or social movement has adequate means adjusted to the calibre of its ambitions, it can afford some (because ether waves allow only several stations), if not all forms of mass media. Of course, at its own risk and without any support from the state. However, it doesn't have to distribute underground pamphlets, risking a deportation to a labour camp. Generally speaking, the prevailing motto is: "If you are lonely and poor, man, shut your trap. But if there are many of you, gentlemen, and above all, if you have money, lots of money, you can build a luxurious platform for yourselves, from which you can say whatever you want to the masses". Here, the state doesn't monopolize the right to speak. Let me repeat that again, it's a lot. It's something that's present "here" and missing "there".

So? Do I still claim there's no freedom of speech in the democratic-liberal system?

To make an even greater fool of myself persisting in his negation, I stress that:

c. The authorities here are not very severe when punishing vicious public speeches of their opponents. In general, there's no secret, preventive, administrative censorship. And if by any chance it does exist, because in the opinion of a mayor, a prefect or the internal affairs minister, someone's utterance might disturb the public order, it is controlled by administrative courts, before which you can always complain of abuse.

Most frequently, instead of censorship there's only criminal liability, which is exercised after the fact. But if you are held responsible for what you said or wrote, it's on the basis of precisely formulated regulations of the penal code, which was previously written and confirmed by the members of parliament chosen in free elections, and not on the basis of an accidental whim of a dictator or a secret administrative procedure. Therefore, the principle of responsibility is a posteriori and exclusively criminal. Finally, it is hedged with numerous procedural guarantees related to the openness of a trial to public, the adversarial approach, a two-stage system and collegiality of courts. In the end, let me add that it applies only to grievous offences. People are not punished for every stupid thing they've said or written.

Any third-year law student will easily reel off all these details, as the lecture in civil liberties taught him to appreciate all the benefits of this system. If I hadn't got an excellent grade 10/10 in the exam in 1967, twenty years ago, I might have not resented so much professor Rivero, who headed that department at the time.

One must admit, however, that it's a basic thing, which deserves being repeated: there's usually no place for preventive, secret administrative censorship, which is replaced by rare, mild and open a *posteriori* criminal liability, hedged with additional guarantees. I remember well Polish press, especially in the period before martial law, when whole articles were cut by the paranoid preventive administrative censorship. This memory is still too fresh in my mind to prevent me from appreciating an article the half of which was not previously removed with a furious slash of scissors and whose author was not secretly made silent on the very next day.

This is what all those who sing the praises of the freedom of speech in the West have in mind. Those who in 1964 answered me: "But here at least you can speak freely". Having said that, I finally stop playing a ridiculous role of *advocatus diaboli*, which I played for a moment so as to be "objective". Because there's the darker side of the coin, far less shiny, the one which is

hardly ever mentioned, as its victims are not many and nobody wants to listen to them. Unfortunately, I happen to be one of them.

So now I will tell you why I personally feel simply gagged here:

2. I invite you to have a little experiment so that you can understand me well: write an article. Write it putting all your passion and all your abilities in it. Let it be short, clear and well-structured. It's important, because otherwise there will be an excellent pretext to reject it.

Then send it to all newspapers you know. Wait.

Three weeks later the article will come back to you like a boomerang. It will be returned politely. If the person who sends it back is polite. Or it won't be returned at all. Actually, this is what usually happens.

Repeat the experiment with another topic. Send. Wait. Catch the article quickly, because it's going to fly through your mailbox. Repeat it four times. Then use your head and stop making a fool of yourself.

At least this is what I had to do. In these notes I've already written at length about that manhandling experience. I went through a whole range of humiliations, which left me scarred for life.

I wanted to tell, describe, shout out what at that time I thought of the country I come from at the dramatic moments of its history. It was in the period when the French press in many different ways, though unanimously, lied about what was happening in Warsaw during the martial law. Faced with the common front of biased information of the local propaganda (including communists, who lied in their own way), I wrote two short, matter-of-fact articles in a moderate tone. Similar to what I'm trying to do in these notes.

No daily newspaper or periodical bothered to acknowledge their receipt. A Ms Boussoglou from "Le Monde", who dealt with Eastern Europe at the time and to whom I turned as my last resort, dryly answered me on the phone: "Sir, in our newspaper there's hardly any space for all my articles, let alone other people's ..."

Finally, Andre Fontaine, who ran the “Thoughts” column in the said “Le Monde”, accepted and published one of my articles.

And what?

To have the other article published next year, I had to make thirty phone calls to him, because each time he was “in a meeting”.

When three years later I sent the third one – I received a short, but meaningful reply from Andre Fontaine: “You’ve already published enough of your stuff”.

That was the end of my freedom of speech. It was just gone. Except that ... I could read Andre Fontaine’s articles every day.

That’s it precisely! Saying that, I reach the most important issue: in this liberal democracy system the freedom of public utterance by means of mass media has been appropriated by a caste of people who made it their profession and thus slammed the door in front of all those whose minds would cross an idea to make even a partial use of it.

3. Why is it like that?

Firstly, because the contemporary Western society prefers competence in the expression of thoughts to the freedom of expression (a). A passive role to which it condemns itself this way suits it very well (b). Especially that from time to time also the society itself is allowed to enter the rostrum (c).

a. The truth is that while the folk can read, they don’t write very well. They understand when being talked to, but are awkward when expressing themselves. They prefer to keep silent and read the others. Formulating a clear, transparent utterance is beyond their capabilities. They feel unable to do that and the very thought of such a task paralyses them.

And when I say “folk”, I don’t mean only simple people. The vast majority of intelligentsia have the same feeling of panic when faced with a prospect of speaking in public or writing a polemical article, so they rely on those who have specially learnt how to master the word and can use it on a daily basis – competent, professional journalists.

Just like it wants to read and listen to its own opinions, which are formulated by journalists better than it could express on its own, demos in democracy wishes to be informed of events happening around it every day. And that requires searching for facts and their daily observation. In other words, it must be dealt with in a professional way, in a full-time job.

That's another thing that the folk can't do and another reason why they rely on competent, professional journalists. This way, the exercising of one of the most precious public liberties has been entrusted to a narrow group of professionals, who live off and feed on it. There's no wonder then that they defend their livelihood with all their might. Why should I complain when they tell me "there's hardly any space for my own articles, let alone other people's .." or "we've already published enough of your stuff". This ban on entering their workplace has no ideological, religious or racial reasons whatsoever, so it doesn't provoke any outrage on the part of the public. There's nothing that might make the crowd mad and shout: "Off with you". No. These people simply defend their dinner. The society understands them. Their argument seems so rational ... "What would happen to journalists if all people every day demanded to have their things printed in all newspapers?" I most like the words "every day", "all people" and "in all".

Anyway, the argument is irrefutable, isn't it?

Even if the folk wanted to take away the active freedom of speech from journalists and use it on their own, they can no longer do that. The thing has been monopolized, has become a profession, a way of making a living. Journalists won't let it out of their hands. Not realizing it, the folk, only to avoid having to speak in public and keeping themselves au courant, for the sake of competence and efficiency, once and for all have deprived themselves of the basic liberty they struggled for so vehemently in the past: the right to have a voice.

b. Secondly, it's like that because as a matter of fact ordinary people don't crave for speaking in public at all. The passive freedom of speech is more than enough for them. Because, let me repeat what I said a moment ago: if

they find their own thoughts in journalist's utterances, but formulated better than they would've been able to formulate, people have an impression they've expressed themselves. It's enough to watch television "which suits them", in newspapers find similar opinions to their own and on the radio hear the echo of their own predilections. The rest is done by the psychological mechanism of a listener's identification with a speaker or a reader's identification with a columnist: hearing what the speaker is saying or reading what the columnist has written and what the reader or the listener has in his own mind, the latter gets an impression that it's him who has said or written what he heard or read a moment ago and fully identifies with it. Hence, he's got an impression of fully enjoying the freedom of speech, while in reality he's completely stripped of its active part.

c. Finally, it's like that because from time to time, here and there, usually in the column entitled "Opinions" or "Letters from Readers", journalists allow ordinary people to voice their opinions in mass media. They do it to a minimum extent, but sufficient to refute any charges of usurpation. Actually, most often they "edit" on their own or cut that correspondence or readers' opinions, but thus created alibi is irrefutable. "What do you mean? You say that an ordinary man in the street has no right to speak in public? And what about X? What about Y? Weren't they printed in our newspaper or by our colleagues in the same line of work?"

Haven't I been allowed to the "rostrum" on two occasions? It's not the fault of "Le Monde" that I'm garrulous and insist on speaking to crowds "every day", "in all newspapers". An irrefutable argument. Who's going to prepare statistics to check the number of people who've had a real possibility of speaking at least once and those who must keep silent, because even if they are capable of expressing themselves, the journalist caste doesn't allow them to speak?

This freedom of speech is like political power. Seemingly, it belongs to people. In reality, however, in the name of competence, it has been captured by a narrow caste of professional politicians, which doesn't allow anybody

into its own circle. Participation of ordinary people in the exercising of political power becomes purely passive and comes down to throwing a white sheet of paper into a metal box once in five years. That's all.

4. But when I accuse journalists of usurping the right to speak in public, I do it not only because under the pretext of defending their own livelihood they deny this right to any other citizen.

I hold a grudge against them for another reason: if they've been entrusted with a monopoly on public speaking, it's because they are supposed to express themselves correctly and be knowledgeable about the things they write about, which is expected from all professionals. Well, I claim that in most cases it's just the opposite.

In other words, I accuse journalists of having enormous power over the society (a) while having no political (b) and moral liability (c), while displaying professional mediocrity (d), in pursuit of money (e) and using despicable methods at the service of sectarianism (f).

a. There's a lot of talk about "mass media power" and there's no exaggeration in it. Politicians fear and flatter them. I watch with pleasure how they bow and scrape to for example Anne Sinclair during the Sunday TV programme *Seven Out of Seven*. I take delight in observing the President of the Republic lap up the loutish behaviour of Yves Mouroisi during an interview with him. Philippe Boucher, whose venomous tongue is relished by "Le Monde" readers, told me exactly how Laurent Fabius, the prime minister of the time, fawned him to gain his favour. Journalists caused the collapse of Richard Nixon, and the power of the morning news bulletin journalist in the first programme of French television TFI is in some respects greater than that of a minister. In the USA it is said that mass media are the fourth power, after the power of the President, Congress and Supreme Court. Or that it is a counterbalance for the institutional power.

These terms are not exaggerated. Don't mass media aspire to play the role of an authentic representative of the social opinion, the king of democracy, the folk? Don't they claim their mission is to stop the dictatorial inclinations

of ministers and members of parliament, as the latter forget they are supposed to serve the masses?

b. Having enormous power, mass media are not subject to any political responsibility, opposite to members of parliament and (only indirectly, that's true) ministers, who are chosen in democratic elections and sometimes may be dismissed. In any case, they risk losing their posts during next elections. In short, they are controlled by and remain responsible towards those who have granted them mandates.

Of course, I'm not so naïve to not know about the machinations allowing politicians to shirk this responsibility and weasel out of this control. But at least there's a principle that they may (most frequently with no result ...) be controlled and punished politically.

However, have you ever elected a journalist? Do you think he can be dismissed when you're cheesed off with his lies and concealments? Are you able to not choose him in next elections? Every day at the same time he imposes himself on you and keeps pumping his views into your heads. He attacks some people and amazingly "forgets" about the others. Can you do anything about it? Change the newspaper? Yes, this is the only solution left. Then you'll become the subject of another brainwashing, other lies and other concealments. Anyway, the circle will soon be closed, as the number of really different newspapers in this country is limited to three or four.

It's impossible to bring a journalist against whom you've got serious charges to justice. Employed, and not elected, he's dependent solely on his boss. Despite having a real political power over his readers, he doesn't depend on them in any way. He must report his doings solely to his superior, who's only worried about the profitability of the newspaper, and not about the lies or sectarianism of the employees.

That's an enviable position that each MP and each minister would eagerly swap: a huge influence on the public opinion and no responsibility before it.

c. Just like they aren't politically responsible, journalists also bear no moral responsibility before society. If they haven't committed a crime by seriously slandering somebody, and even if they've done so, the unshaken, adamant and knowing-no-exceptions internal solidarity of the press milieu effectively protects them from any moral responsibility. No mafia, no ethnic group, no corporation is as loyal as journalists. If a man who's been dragged through the mud by a journalist protests against the mean methods used by the tabloid or extreme press, both the editors of "serious" newspapers and those who are normally political enemies of the incident perpetrator will stand by him as one man. No minister, no film star, no financial tycoon have a chance in a fight with any old journalist, who can tease them as much as he wants. That's because of the *nec Hercules contra plures* principle: as soon as a victim protests, the attacker's colleagues, who only yesterday wouldn't have shaken hands with him, will yell in unison: "Democracy is in danger! They're gagging freedom!".

But wherever responsibility disappears, its bad sister immediately turns up: professional mediocrity.

d. If in democracy the folk have given up their active freedom of speech in favour of journalists, it's because, as I said before, they believe journalists will do it in a competent way, will express the opinions of readers and will be knowledgeable about the discussed things. Well, in actual fact, it's the other way round and professional mediocrity prevails in the journalist milieu. Reading "Le Monde" daily is considered an intellectual pastime. Isn't it interesting when in the evening, while having an exquisite dinner you repeat what you read in it in the afternoon, in the office ...

Generally speaking, it's a good newspaper. Without it the elite guiding this state would be deprived of a kind of continuing education textbook. My own horizons would have been greatly narrowed if I hadn't devoured its several thousand pages in my adult life.

However, the moment my knowledge in many areas became more complete, I realized the lacks, weaknesses or simply the mediocrity of some articles I'd found in "Le Monde".

I don't even mention other newspapers, especially "Figaro" or periodicals such as "Express" or "Nouvel Observateur", the level of which is simply embarrassing; which use awkward methods of reasoning and a hideous language; which are full of jargon expressions, in which neologisms replace proper French language and English abbreviations give you a foretaste of the New York slang; in which the quality of articles frequently reaches the level of a first-year student at Political Sciences School on the day before the exam: incoherent, chaotic opinions, void of any deeper knowledge or profound thought.

For some time, when I was still a student, I used to collect articles on different subjects from "Le Monde", being convinced that this way I created a capital of knowledge for the future, to which I could refer when I had to prepare exams myself or write a dissertation. Because when you're reading this newspaper, you have an impression it contains a lot of facts and precise knowledge.

Unfortunately, when you read these cuttings for the second time, the impression is quite opposite. Wishing to get some minimum essence of thus collected texts, I systematically found they were simply empty talk. Basing on two or three hastily gathered dates, names and facts, copiously poured with literary "water" full of countless adjectives floating on its surface, a journalist creates a lengthy article, which doesn't contain anything except "nuances" and flourishes. I require my students to read the morning press, especially "Le Monde", the news bulletin of which is still the best of all French media. However, I always warn them against "journalism", against hasty and ill-considered way of analyzing, interpreting and presenting things. For I repeat that on many occasions I've caught journalists of this newspaper being almost completely ignorant of the issue they tried to write about; that I heard many times how they casually quoted a few names, dates

or facts, which they'd previously managed to collect, and then contented themselves with "meaningful" allusions, wishing this way to come across as "the initiated" journalists, who in a dialogue with "initiated" readers didn't see the necessity of "entering into details".

For a researcher accustomed to solid work, to long-term and meticulous gathering of knowledge, to cautious concluding – journalism is a synonym of mediocrity. That's why a large part of students' rejected works are labelled with that contemptuous comment "journalistic".

Oh, there's also a small group of people who write excellently, have witty minds and solid knowledge! Thank God. I'm far from fulminating at all journalists. My charges are directed at the profession itself rather than one or another person, because just like the barrister's profession brings out greed, the profession of judge – arbitrariness, the profession of journalism simply encourages mediocrity.

The duty of writing a lengthy article on a daily basis, sometimes within an hour, the necessity to adjust the writing to "the reader's level" and to "the spirit of time" (so that the newspaper can sell) from the very beginning thwart the plans of an enthusiastic person entering this profession with an intention to work solidly. The endeavours of a budding journalist are then doomed to failure.

Taken to task by his boss, who requires fast and popular "production" from him, a beginner in journalism will soon abandon illusions and will join in the general gibberish. Bad journalism in a natural way chases away the good one. But if that lack of responsibility before readers caused only professional mediocrity, I wouldn't rebel so violently against the journalists' milieu. The point is that mediocrity is always accompanied by the pursuit of money.

e. You must admit, gentlemen journalists, that your freedom of speech sounds better if the rhythm is beaten by cash: cash from adverts (i) that the newspaper lives off, cash from your boss (ii), who pays your remuneration, and cash from your "friends", who invite you to dinners (iii).

i) What do newspapers in the liberal democracy system live off? They live off the society. It's the society that feeds the press – by buying daily papers and periodicals.

The democratic society likes freedom, but ... not too much. Let's say, it loves it enormously when it doesn't cost a lot. Otherwise the society likes freedom much less or can simply do without it, which leads to the conclusion that the price of the newspaper must be low or nobody will buy it. Therefore, to make a living you must, gentlemen journalists, open an advert column on the pages of your newspaper. And this marks the end of freedom.

Jacques Fauvet, the head of "Le Monde", admitted in an interview some time ago that his newspaper "couldn't afford to disclose more than two scandals in the real estate trade annually". Because what would clients of the advert column say? Freedom – yes, but only to a degree which can be tolerated by advertisers. You must be excellently selling, satirical "Canard Enchaîné" to function without an advert column, and in consequence be able to afford full freedom. And then it turns out that the number of affairs revealed by this periodical exceeds everything that is published within this scope by the rest of the French press living off adverts.

ii) Being "free", you can say whatever you want, gentlemen journalists. That is to say ... let's make it more specific ... you can say what the owner of your newspaper thinks. Nothing more, because what's the value of your freedom against his freedom? None. It's not worth anything. "Le Figaro" had a glorious past during the German occupation. Then it was bought by a Robert Hersant, a fascist who in the war years had collaborated with Hitlerjugend. What happened to your freedom then, gentlemen journalists from anti-Hitler "Figaro"? Raymond Aron could afford the luxury of leaving, because he knew he would easily find a job elsewhere.

And what were the rest doing? Well, ... they changed their views. The threat of finding themselves out on the street, strangely enough, made them like Mr Hersant's ideas.

iii) Finally, there's the most humiliating form of buying your "freedom", gentlemen journalists – "culinary" bribery. At this point I'm talking about the so-called "specialist" press and I mean the liking its journalists have, especially art critics, for "nice friends" who buy them dinners.

This liking has no limits. Editors earn poorly: trainees in "Le Monde" get about 10 500 francs – merely twice as much as SMIC (the lowest statutory remuneration). That's why when they have to write an article about a gallery, an exhibition, a concert or another artistic event, which is supposed to bring fame to somebody and money to clients, why not accept a modest present or a tasty meal in return for the said article? After all, it's such a little thing ... There is a special profession, "attaché de presse". In other words, bribery as a social institution. This profession consists in dealing with journalists kindly, taking them to the best restaurants and letting them eat, eat, eat until they bloat. Sometimes a short trip, a painting or a dress "for your charming wife" complete the meal in such a nice way ... It's so obvious – you write best with a full stomach.

Yes, gentlemen journalists, you earn your daily bread on your "freedom", but that's humiliating bread and dwarfish "freedom".

f. However, if only it finished with professional mediocrity and the pursuit of money ... the lack of responsibility before their own readers systematically makes journalists sectarian. And at this point I'm reaching something that outrages me most. The truth is that the role of the press is to inform of concrete events, but also to express the society's opinions. In other words, to reflect the thoughts of readers. That's why it is said: the pressure of the opinion.

Having said that, let me remind you there's no one truth. There are ten of them. Ten truths may co-exist; all of them are equally intellectually coherent and all result from the observation of reality, experience and a logical mental construction. The acceptance of this statement, and in consequence permitting those who follow another truth than ours to express their

opinions, hearing them, an honest presentation of our arguments to them – isn't it the motto of liberal countries?

“I don't like what you're saying, but I will fight till the end so that you can say it”. Excellent. I've already cited it somewhere.

Yes, what most irritates me about the world of Western mass media is not so much the low professional level of journalists, but their bowing and scraping to money. That's normal. That's human. The world is not perfect. You can then understand a search of easy, spectacular or sensational effects. You can understand the frequently incoherent form, the careless language and the lack of reflection. It's almost natural when you are free of any political and moral responsibility, and at the same time you have to write a large article on a daily basis. I can also understand how easy it is to concede to the requirements of someone who's got money, whether it's an advertiser, an employer or a “friend”, when it's so hard to earn a living.

What drives me mad, though, is sectarianism, which is not forced upon anybody, and hypocrite tricks used by the local newspapers so as to come across as objective and impartial. Something better in this genre could only be found in Soviet “Truth”.

Journalists forget about the fact that their role in democracy is to express the opinions of readers, and not imposing their own opinions on them. A professional journalist is a humble servant of the folk. He's neither a guide nor a teacher and it's not what he's paid for. Breaching this basic commandment, the press gets involved in personal political fights, arguments, personal remarks, with a whole arsenal of resulting hatred. The conviction of possessing the truth, the only truth and nothing but the truth prevails in the journalists' milieu. A journalist goes beyond his role of a mirror of the readers' or listeners' opinions. He gets trapped in the defence of his own, frequently superficial views. That's why in the opinion of a journalist, a man who doesn't share his truth and persists in having his own one is either a fool (and in such a case his mistake should be forcibly pointed out to him) or he's a fraud who knows the right truth, but

pretends he believes in another one. The intentions of the latter have to be unmasked. It's almost a permanent element of the articles I read every day. Saying that, again I don't mean the tabloid or extreme press. In "Minute" or "L'Humanité" the principles of the game are clear: no holds barred. "Catch wherever you can and bite the most fleshy parts". No, no, I'm talking about the "pluralist" and "serious" press, about the "democratic" press, of which "Le Monde" considers itself a representative example. That is to say, the press which takes pride in its "objectivity" and which almost all the time discharges a daily torrent of its irrefutable convictions and contempt for the opponent. Actually, I would forgive it if it didn't take on the appearance of innocence.

When I'm reading "Truth", I know I have a dangerous opponent in front of me. If I attacked it, it might cost me freedom or even life. I'm afraid of wild beasts and run away from them. But whenever I read the liberal press, I know that I deal with a louse, which will smile to me, trying at the same time to secretly bite me in the crotch. Actually, I don't feel like running away, but crushing it with my nails.

Instead of simply denouncing an opponent to KGB, the so-called liberal press will try to isolate him, refusing to present his point of view (i), discredit him in the eyes of the public opinion by presenting his rights in a biased way (ii) or, if it doesn't work, simply slander him (iii).

i) the most important thing is to isolate an opponent. Have you ever seen a "pluralist" newspaper give access to its pages to someone from "an enemy's camp", for example communists or extreme right-wing? I haven't.

Of course, all-important figures, such as Jaruzelski, Pinochet, Le Pen or Marchais will sooner or later have their interviews in "Le Monde". But firstly, the aim of such an interview will surely be to discredit them, and secondly, it's not this kind of pluralism alibi that I have in mind.

What I'm talking about is the actual opening of a newspaper to all people who don't share its views. For any endeavours to isolate an opponent from the newspaper's own readers take it to absurd levels.

Therefore, allegedly liberal newspapers apologise to the public opinion if they inadvertently forgot about the prevailing sectarianism and opened its pages to those “bad” on the other side. That’s exactly what “Liberation” has done recently, when one of its journalists published the correspondence of a neo-nazi questioning the existence of gas chambers in German concentration camps. The journalist was immediately dismissed for allowing this enemy of democracy to speak in front of the newspaper’s own readers, and the editorial staff of “Liberation” withdrew this issue from sale and on the very same evening apologised to its readers in a television bulletin.

This is what the freedom of speech means here: the Western media feel obliged to apologise for accidentally respecting the principle of pluralism and allowing an ideological enemy to say his credo before another audience than his own. He might have had that rubbish of his published by the fascists from “Minute” – the secret explanation says.

“*Audi alteram partem*”, which is interpreted here as: “Let him express himself somewhere else”. There’s then no wonder that terrorists, forced to keep silent, drop a bomb in the face of this system so as to shout out their truth this way?

ii) Moving on to a higher level of subtlety, the “pluralist” press sometimes publishes on its pages the utterances of enemies or at least quotes their arguments, motivations and ideals. It’s extremely rare, but sometimes happens. However, its only purpose is to discredit the enemy by tendentiously presenting his point of view.

To this end, the press will “select” appropriate facts, belittling some of them and highlighting the other ones, will put them in an “appropriate” place, will insert “meaningful” quotation marks, will add illustrations, will “signal” these facts strongly, will repeat them in various ways, will flood them with “convincing” adjectives, will properly “comment” or replace them with “evocative” allusions ... a complex and vicious method. It’s difficult to show its hidden mechanisms, as no tribunal has ever been able to make head or tail of it ...

It's not easy to catch a high-level newspaper telling a naïve lie about dates, names or places. Just the opposite. All of them will be extremely precise. If today a mistake crept into an article, on the very next day the newspaper would publish a disclaimer and apologise to the readers, emphasizing it with a loud "*mea culpa*". Trying to catch this kind of press telling a vulgar lie would be a waste of time. What's the point of lying? Isn't it enough to "select" dates, figures or evidence, all of them identically precise, but leading to the same thesis? In a mass of information that reaches us every day, selection is unavoidable. How can you prove, though, that what has been selected by a journalist to prove his own claims is obviously tendentious? "But I couldn't say everything!" – he will answer you. And seemingly he'll be right.

Everything is in all. I repeat it myself on many occasions. But let's admit that the proportions of things are not always the same. Let's assume then that elements contained in a feature article are complete and no argument of the opposite thesis has been passed over. You can always highlight the "good" arguments and belittle the remaining ones – it's as easy as pie. There are a hundred methods to do that. You can observe how they're used on a daily basis in the "objective liberal" press. All of them are effective and considered "honest".

I'll start with the most preposterous ones.

One day in 1953 the headlines in "New York Times" said something like that:

US President in the pay of communists. The headline was huge, spreading over the whole top part of the page, which was visible from a distance when newspapers folded in half lay in newsagents' windows. Under the headline, in the lower part of the page, which was visible only after the paper was unfolded, you could read a text in small print: *stated senator Joseph McCarthy.* It was the time of "witch-hunting", when "liberal" media tried to outdo one another in officiousness.

Equally preposterous is the use of quotation marks. There's nothing better than quotations marks if you want a piece of information to seem reliable, taken directly from the source, not contorted, but given to the reader in its original form. Journalists from "Le Monde" take every opportunity to use quotation marks. How can one prove that the only thing they care about is to make an illusory impression of objectivity and reliability of information sources?

Or how can one prove that after cutting a politician's statement into several small pieces, putting each of them in quotation marks and next scattering everything in the whole text, the journalist composes a completely new truth in relation to the initial one, about which everybody will think that it was "copiously cited"?

Or the place where a given item of news has been printed. A newspaper is read quickly. The way of reading it, the psychology of this reading, the time, the place etc. Are fundamentally different than in the case of reading books. A newspaper is read at different times of the day and even in different places than a book. Similarly, you don't read all its content or every page with the same concentration. A reader's concentration is the greatest at the beginning of reading and then gradually drops. As a result, the place where the news is put in a newspaper is of utmost importance, just like in advertising. There's no easier thing than putting the key terms and "favourable" information on the front and last page, that is, the ones which are read first, without resorting to the slightest lie and exposing oneself to a charge of distorting the truth. On the other hand, an "inconvenient" piece of information will be placed on the fifteenth page, in a mass of other stuff, with titles in small print and without a word of commentary.

I remember how little space was devoted to the killing of a pedestrian by Yves Saint Martin (which had no continuation whatsoever), the most famous French jokey, who was completely drunk when driving. I congratulate all those who discovered this piece of information, so unfortunate for the national idol, among the flood of other information, as it wasn't an easy

task. And yet this man killed and in every law-abiding country the press should report this event in an appropriate way, proportional to the significance and rank of the culprit. Anyway, “Le Monde” merely mentioned the whole thing.

To highlight a piece of information which is supposed to “be pumped in the heads”, the title is put in bold and a photo or testimonies of different people are added. The one that is meant to pass unnoticed or be quickly forgotten will be printed in ordinary font, without the smallest illustration or any explanations. Another method leading to the same results consists in making a 2-second pause in a stream of words uttered by a radio or television newsreader. The attention of the audience, lulled by the preceding stuff, is immediately woken. And at this point the journalist reads a piece of information or a commentary which is supposed to be remembered by listeners. And vice versa: there’s no better way than a monotonous, dull voice, fast and uninterrupted rhythm of sentences if you don’t want a particular item of information to “worry” the listeners or to stay too long in their memory. Yet nobody can accuse you of not providing the information. It was communicated.

Now let’s move on to repeating: “*repetitio est mater studiorum*”. It was another open method used by Goebells propaganda. Communists naively took it over, not understanding that it’s effective only if used in an intelligent way. Repeating the same thing all the time, in the same form, as it is done by the Soviet propaganda, is wearing and simply puts the audience off. The press in France, however, does it in a masterly fashion. If it repeats a piece of information which suits it and is supposed to be remembered, the local press will do it in various contexts, in different ways and places. Then, even pincers won’t help to remove such a piece of news from the reader’s or listener’s head.

Just note an avalanche of adjectives used by the local press for propaganda purposes. As I said before, the role of mass media is triple:

to inform of facts

to reflect readers' opinions,
to do it in an interesting way.

Personally, I prefer if they limit themselves to dry information, as it is done by "Herald Tribune". I then like when newspapers stick to facts, without trying to convince me of anything or seduce me with "beautiful prose". But let me repeat: I know and fully accept the fact that most readers or listeners want to find their own opinions apart from information and, at the same time, have an impression they are reading or listening to good prose.

OK, let it be.

What drives me mad, though, is the press which on a pretext of providing me with an aesthetic pleasure simply floods me with a torrent of adjectives. They are supposed to show me black and white, hammer into my head and once and for all prove that the truth is on their side and if I think in a different way, I must be an idiot or a criminal. I hate propaganda, especially when it assumes the appearances of "nuanced" expressing of the opinions or creating of "artistic" literature by gentlemen journalists.

In order to lie in a more subtle way, the local "serious" press readily confuses presentation with interpretation. Coming across an event which can't be passed over, it will quote it. But only to immediately "explain". It isn't known, however, if this "explanation" is a shortened piece of information from a specialist who, not being able to describe the event in detail, has objectively summarized it, or whether the explanation is his subjective and biased interpretation. An ordinary reader, having superficial knowledge of the event, can't make a head or tail of it and most frequently is taken in. There is a whole school of commenting things: a commentary should be poured onto a reader so that he won't realize it. In other words, on a pretext of adding variety to the style and creating good literature, a commentary should be cemented with the information in such a way that the latter will become its natural continuation. Then it's hardly possible to discover if in a given fragment of the article you're still reading a description

of what “exists” objectively, or you’ve already moved on to something that “should (or shouldn’t) exist” in the journalist’s opinion.

On the other hand, if a piece of news is inconvenient, or just the opposite, very desirable, the local journalists resort to allusion. In the first case the allusion will be quick, discreet and just sufficient to ensure defence for the journalist in case he’s accused of concealment: “How can you say that I didn’t mention it? Maybe not directly, but I did, of course I said about it! Here, can you see?!”), whereas in the second case it’s going to be the other way round – the allusion will be “meaningful” and highlighted. The reader who’s knowledgeable about the subject won’t be taken in. If, however, he has only a fragmentary knowledge of it, like the vast majority of the public, he won’t know whether behind the allusion there’s a fact he just doesn’t know, or the intention is to make him believe this fact really exists. How many times I was fooled in the first years of my reading “Le Monde”. Having a poor knowledge of political news, I thought the allusions I found referred to the facts known to everybody except me and the journalist didn’t consider it necessary to talk about them in a direct way, as he wanted to avoid repeating himself. Today I know that frequently there were no facts behind certain allusions.

Thin threads of the democratic-liberal propaganda spun by the local journalists are just one more subtle procedure used “in the defence of the freedom of speech”. These are ordinary, common and widespread methods.

iii). When this is not enough, the “liberal” press resorts to heavy calibre: defamation.

Oh, it seldom initiates a defaming campaign on its own. What for, anyway? To maintain the reputation, it’s more convenient for “high-level” media to repeat the information provided by the tabloids, for example “Paris Match”. Then “Le Monde” only “quotes” it for the sake of “clarity and transparency”. This results from its “informative” role, doesn’t it? ... Journalists are most absorbed by the financial matters and sexual life of

statesmen. It is true that bribery among politicians happens everywhere, and in the time of III Republic in France or currently in Italy it has become a principle of political life.

Let me remind, however, the campaign of the “liberal”, “serious” press, which made minister Boulin commit suicide. Or the one that “Le Monde” had against prime minister Chaban-Delmas due to his tax return. Or yet another one – the campaign which my university colleague Philippe Boucher and his friend Jacques Sauvageot, the head or the editor-in-chief of “Le Monde” at the time, waged against President Giscard d’Estaing in connection with Bokassa’s diamonds affair. I’m wondering what will be the result of the current campaign of this newspaper, as usual made up only of “quotations” from the tabloids, which it is running against Jean-Marie Le Pen about his divorce and the photos of his naked wife that appeared in the French issue of “Playboy”.

In all these “affairs”, even if limited only to France and only to recent years (I’m passing over in silence Jeffrey Archer or Gary Hart, who were “messed up” by American media), “Le Monde” will shed some crocodile tears over the “excesses” committed by “some” daily papers and, at the same time, it will copiously quote their commentaries on the private lives of its own political enemies.

Conclusion:

What should be done then? Nothing. Dream. Dream that in the future you’ll be strong enough to build your own honest platform. Or that the government will donate it to rebellious minds which want to tell their truth in public and which the “liberal” press keeps gagging with its mild: “no, thank you”. Or that journalists will become honest people, who respect their opponents and the truth.

The Western press is a power which has ideally merged into the morals of the contemporary society in the West. It perfectly plays the role imposed on it by the democratic society. With its half-truths, its propaganda, its sectarianism, its hypocrisy and its mediocrity, it satisfies all of us. To face it, you would have to be a multi-billionaire suffering from the illness called “the freedom of speech” and ready to sacrifice all your fortune in its defence ... only to be thoroughly beaten by “gentlemen journalists” in the end.

GOOD LUCK, 7TH AUGUST 1987

I'm so lucky to have these paintings! And I'm so unlucky that I'm not Luis XIV who could donate them the most beautiful palace from a thousand and one nights. They would hang on all walls, in halls, on huge stairs, in splendid rooms, in the twilight of candles. Owing to these paintings, my trivial life without adventures has become extraordinary. How I wish I could endlessly look at them and whisper to myself: - That's all mine ... every day, at every time, in the evening, at night, in the morning. Who's got so much luck without having a fortune of Midas? And even he, was he ever equally enchanted by the view of his riches and equally miserable because he couldn't share with them the ecstasy which overwhelmed him at the sight of his treasures?

I've gone through terrible moments and my enemies will never experience the fear, fury and despair which pushed me to death for long months.

But I've also been carried away by euphoria which I'd like to share only with the closest friends.

Since the time I became the owner of these paintings, I've been feeling like in a trance, which many people have experienced only in a dream.

MISDEEDS, 5TH SEPTEMBER 1987

My Friend,

Several days ago I pledged myself before you to list all punishable offences that I've committed in my life, and I'm still delaying it. No, I haven't changed my mind, but there's a whole list of things and I had to work on it a little bit to recall everything.

All people of my age, both men in the street and those who hold responsible positions and are respected by the society, should spend two or three years in prison for all the thefts, forgery of documents, frauds and other offences they must have committed. Man – how proud does it sound! – said Gorki. Gorki was an artist and dreamed.

A man, an average man is a bastard.

And if the society seems to be made up in its vast part of quiet townies, that's only because the police apparatus is not effective enough to catch them in the act and take them where they should spend a few years of their lives: to the slammer.

I'll tell you a story of my crimes just to show you how many dishonourable criminals have been more guilty than your father and your mother only because they got caught. And since that moment they began to slide down. And if after many years there's a gulf between them and all professors, lawyers and other models of social behaviour, this gulf appeared precisely at the moment when they were unlucky and got caught.

Where would I be today if I'd been caught red-handed when committing my numerous crimes?

1. One day, when I was nine years old, a teacher wrote in my pupil's record book a note on my bad behaviour. My Parents were supposed to read and sign it. Fearing they would reproach me, I started forging my Father's

signature. Each time I tried, the result seemed bad and each time I erased it. In the end, seeing I wouldn't be able to do it, I gave the pupil's record book to my Father so that he would sign it. He pretended he hadn't noticed anything. Also the teacher didn't question the signature's authenticity, although my attempts were still visible and one might think the final signature wasn't authentic, either. They both had such a good opinion of me ...

2. When I was eleven years old, Teddy, Paul and I invented a game: we entered staircases with a screwdriver and pliers, cut bell wires and ran away. This way I had a collection of various bells.

3. At the same time, a bit earlier or later – never mind, anyway we'd already become a bit more reasonable – we led our caretaker, a Francis Wild, a dog's life. He was a good-natured man, very attached to our house, which belonged to the nicest buildings in Łódź. It was inhabited only by families of university professors. To tease the caretaker, I and Johnny, a son of the professor living over us, wrote insults like: "Very wild Francis pisses on civilized rose" (because his wife's name was Rose). We wrote these insults wherever we could, in the lift, in the cellars and in the attic, and we engraved them with a burin on the doors and walls so that the caretaker couldn't wipe them off.

4. In the hall of our flat, which connected the kitchen with the kitchen stairs, there was a window overlooking the backyard. Through this window we observed wild cats, which perched on the wall and warmed themselves in the sun. The game consisted in throwing empty bottles at the cats. One of the bottles I threw hit the cat's head. For twenty minutes it howled with pain. Then it fortunately came to its senses and ran away.

5. With my classmates I didn't have good relations. I've talked about it many times. Stronger and more aggressive than them, I terrorized the whole little world which surrounded me. That's why they hurled abuse at me when walking in a group, within a safe distance, because this way they were less scared of me.

One day one of them dared to provoke me, as there was a big distance between us and a wire net.

- Spastic! – he shouted, knowing that no other invective made me more furious. – Spastic!

I was fourteen years old at that time and often had an air-gun with me. I aimed at him and shot. Instead of getting frightened, the boy started running towards me to hit me. I reloaded the air-gun and shot again. Then I shot the third time as he climbed over the wire fence. When he was running up to me, I wanted to hit his side with the butt. At this moment the air-gun broke, though, and I wasn't able to do him any harm. I vaguely remember the fight which ensued as a result, but I think that although I was physically stronger than him, finally it was me who escaped, not him.

On the next day one of my mates told me at school that the boy had been hit and went to a surgeon to have pellets removed from under the skin. I don't know if it was true. Anyway, he wasn't able to snitch on me to the school authorities, as the headmaster refused to see him on two occasions because of lack of time, and finally the boy gave it up.

I was growing up.

6. At the end of primary school, at the age of fourteen, we had to take an exam. The mother of my friend Teddy worked in the local branch of the Ministry of Education. She was able to get the topics in mathematics many days before the exam.

I was one of the best pupils in the class. I had no head for maths, though. Before, both in the fifth and sixth class, I cheated in the exam. This time it came out. I and Teddy were so stupid that we went to our former teacher, who had already retired, to ask her to solve the tasks for us. Of course, we didn't tell her these were the examination tasks. On the day of the written exam the said teacher came to school to cheer up the students who'd had private lessons with her. She found out that the tasks she'd had in her hands a few days before were the examination topics. She got angry, because she

might have given them to her pupils and she didn't, so she told everything to the parents waiting in front of school. The latter complained to the headmaster.

I was called to the principal's room and asked where the leaks came from. He was a little man with a big, red nose, covered in violet veinlets and a big wart. He played the violin and remained coldly calm when punishing us.

- Who gave you these topics? – he asked me in a tone telling me it wasn't worth cheating him, as he knew perfectly well.

Without hesitation I gave away my mate and his mother.

- For a start you'll repeat the class – he said.

To my amazement, three days later, when the results were announced, I found that not only hadn't I flunked the year, but I'd been exempted from taking the oral exam, like all the pupils who'd got an a in the written part.

Later I discovered why I hadn't been punished: all the teachers from our school were convinced and also made the headmaster believe that it was my Father, a university professor, who'd obtained the topics for us. Therefore, the school's council decided to keep silent. To avoid a scandal? Fearing the sanctions that might affect my Father? Fearing my Father, who was a personage in Łódź? I never found out.

7. I nearly cheated in the same way during my university studies. Frankly speaking, I shouldn't mention it, as there was no crime, because the deed didn't begin. However, there was an intention and some preparations, during which I might have got caught.

It was in 1967, at the Faculty of Law in Paris. Thanks to the very good results that I had at the University of Łódź and at the University of Warsaw, in France I was admitted straight away in the third year of law. These studies were much more difficult than in Poland and despite my enormous effort I was afraid I might not be promoted to the fourth year. That's why I decided to cheat. This time my accomplice was Odette. Sitting in the toilet in the basement of the Faculty building, she was supposed to dictate me

fragments of notes by walkie-talkie. Fortunately, the device was very primitive at the time and human voice couldn't get through the thick walls of the Law Faculty building, so after a failed attempt we gave up. Of course, let me repeat, the criminal act was not initiated, so there could be no punishment. Besides, to reduce my moral responsibility, again I can quote my very good preparation for that session and the fact that I finished the third year in the forty ninth place out of one thousand and nine hundred French students, although it was my first year of studies in France and I couldn't speak this language properly yet.

Fifteen years later I wrote a 90-page legal article devoted to the legal status of a university examination, in particular to the penal and disciplinary sanctions imposed on cheats...

This lets me imagine what would have happened if Thank God I didn't commit this crime, which – if I'd been caught – would have changed the course of my life completely.

8. Luckily, I also wasn't able to commit a theft, which I'd prepared with my colleagues at the very beginning of our stay in Paris.

At that time I had a scooter with very worn-out tyres. We found an identical one, parked in a quiet corner of the street. That night we were going to change the wheels of the scooters. At the last moment a police patrol surprised us, checking our papers. If the policemen had come three minutes later, we would have already completed the exchange of wheels and would've been surely arrested.

Currently, as a barrister, I'm dealing with a similar case: two young Poles, a secondary school teacher and his brother – an engineer, when spending their holidays in France, made such an exchange of wheels with a car wreck abandoned near the Republic Square. They were caught in the act. When running away, one of them had the bad luck to bump into a policeman and break his leg so unfortunately that the latter was unable to work for a hundred days. Both brothers were remanded in custody for a month and released only owing to an exceptional favour of the examining magistrate

who was in charge of their case. Anyway, they lost their jobs in Poland, because without any justification (they couldn't reveal the reason for their delay) they didn't resume their work in due term. They were devastated and cried when I visited them in prison.

9. "Travel broadens the mind" - young people are told and encouraged to broaden their horizons. In Poland every citizen must go on a trip abroad. Not so much to visit other countries but to trade by smuggling illegal goods both ways. This isn't morally condemned, but punishable. So my first "tourist" trip led me in 1962 to Moscow. At that time I was a weightlifter and trained in the gym visited by the members of the Polish Olympic team in weightlifting.

- What's selling in the Soviet Union now? - I asked them before the departure.

They travelled abroad on a regular basis and knew what you could trade in.

- Bedspreads - told me one of them, the vice-champion of the world. - Take bedspreads with you. They must be colourful, heavy and richly embroidered.

- And on the way back?

- When coming back, take false teeth and plugs for *Pobieda* (a Russian car). In Poland you can sell teeth for 50 zł. You'll earn ten times more. The same with plugs. You'll sell them with a ten-fold profit, because they fit the *Warszawa* (Polish car named after the capital city of Poland, the construction of which was identical to *Pobieda*).

So I go on a "tourist" trip with bedspreads one way, and return with false teeth and plugs for *Pobieda* on the way back.

The journey to Moscow went smoothly, without any problems. But when I was coming back, I nearly got caught. I had a suitcase full of false teeth and a bag filled to the brim with spark plugs. Of course, I realized the risk I was

running, so I gave out a part of my stuff to other participants of the trip (each of whom smuggled the same quantities of some other goods than me).

The Soviet customs officers caught us in a crossfire. They came in from both sides of the carriage and systematically searched our luggage. Very soon they started to confiscate the plugs and teeth, which they found in the baggage of nearly all “tourists” of our trip.

In the end, they realized that someone was carrying a bigger quantity of this stuff. To spare the time, one of them walked along the carriage corridor with a plug in one hand and false teeth in the other, shouting:

- Whoever has false teeth and plugs, give them back.

Some people gave the things back. I didn't.

I was exactly in the middle of the carriage, so the customs officers coming from both sides met in my compartment.

- Take the cases off the shelves, put them on the seats and open – ordered one of them.

We did so. Although I opened the lid of my case, the boxes with false teeth were not visible yet, as I'd bashfully covered everything with a small towel. I was waiting my turn.

The customs officers, however, turned their attention to something else. A fellow traveller from the same compartment had bought two golden rings in Moscow, while only one could be taken out of the country. When the customs officers wanted to confiscate the ring, he assured them that he'd put the ring under the train wheels rather than give it back.

In the meantime I closed my case and bag, discreetly putting them back on the shelf.

- Has everything been checked? – asked one of the customs officers after he'd snatched the ring from my neighbour.

- Everything – I answered.

They had one more glance at the compartment and seeing that our cases had been already closed and put away, they left.

So I was the only person in the whole compartment who hadn't been searched, although it was me who was carrying the things they'd been seeking for half an hour.

Through the window I heard a Russian border guard, who assured one of the travellers:

- If you were the sixteenth Soviet republic, you could carry as many teeth as you wished.

10. A similar crime I committed one year later, when I was going to "visit" the international fair in Leipzig, in GDR. I was carrying American cigarettes with me.

I stuffed everything in the pockets, which I'd previously widened. I sold these cigarettes to local dealers, and on the way back I brought washing powder for whitening linen ("blinka-blank" or "blanke-blink" – I don't remember). I sold it with a 1000% profit.

11. The third and last crime related to illegal smuggling that I committed was far more serious than the previous two.

I'd already been living in France and working in Lido. At that time, on three occasions I brought to Poland synthetic semi-precious stones, which I'd bought from a wholesaler on Reaumur Street. For the money earned this way I purchased a 17th-century Dutch picture. I bought it from a "collector" in Łódź, who was probably a common thief. I also took out of Poland a few items made of silver, including two candlesticks from the 17th century, entrusted me by an acquaintance, which I'm sure had been stolen. When carrying these things, I hid them in various caches on the train so that the customs officers couldn't identify their owner. I lost the whole stuff as the border guards found the caches and confiscated everything, including a thousand dollars, which I'd hastily put in some propaganda leaflet lying in the corridor. It was a gigantic sum for me at that time.

On the third occasion I was carrying a ring with a 4-carat diamond from Poland. We'd bought it with my mate in Łódź and hoped to sell it well in Paris. The ring wasn't worth anything, because the diamond was yellow, and we lost the whole stake.

12. In those lean years I committed a number of other petty offences, chiefly thefts.

Let me then come back to the time when I was still a student in Łódź. I worked a lot in the student's work cooperative "Puchatek". It sent us to various state-owned companies which needed unqualified labour force. So I dug ditches, pulled out cables from under the ground or unloaded carriages with coal, which I then transported by a truck to different state-owned shops. It was the time when coal heating was the most common system in Poland. This work I did twice. Each time I stole a part of the cargo and sold it to people in the evening.

13. When I was already living in France, I secretly changed (five or six times) the labels on wine bottles in shops so as to pay less.

14. For some time I bought whisky for myself for half the price from a rascal who I knew stole it from shop shelves.

15. Also at the same time I used to travel by underground without a ticket. Admittedly, it was a petty offence, but still ... Once I was caught. I was then in the company of a girl and we started running away. In the end, the ticket inspectors got us. It was so funny that I burst out laughing. The inspectors liked it (or maybe they liked the girl ...) and gave us the smallest possible fine. I paid it scrupulously.

16. I guess only one of my youthful crimes was punished. The one I committed on the person of a Ponté. He's the only man on whom I'd wish to take my revenge now, twenty years later, if only I could get away with the punishment.

In 1968 students staged a revolution, whereas I was looking for a job. I then got an idea to set up a small flat painting business. Of course, it was

supposed to be black work. For a number of nights I put up adverts on walls and trees: “Students paint rooms”. At that time I didn’t know that it sounded awkward in French and I should have written “paint flats”. I also didn’t know that if such work was to be done by students instead of specialists, hardly anybody would take the risk to entrust it to them. Dziworski’s brother, Stephen, even a worse scum than Dziworski himself, was doing the job. I put up the posters and walked from door to door to haggle with clients.

Well, some of them got convinced by the low prices we proposed. Including the said Ponté. Dziworski’s brother painted his flat, but when it came to payment, Ponté looked into my eyes and said calmly:

- I won’t pay.
- Why?
- Because I don’t feel like paying.

First I wanted to force his superior in the Ministry of Navy on Montparnasse Boulevard, where Ponté worked, to intervene. I naively thought that a civil servant who cheated someone would be called to order by his superior.

After my explanations Ponté’s chief told me:

- What do I care about it? Settle it with him on your own. It’s not my business.

At the same time Dziworski’s brother pressed me:

- Pay me my part!

So I went with two mates, graduates of the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, and we messed up his face.

Unfortunately, although he didn’t have my address, that scum – Dziworski’s brother gave it to him and betrayed me for half the price which Ponté had paid him. So very soon I received summons from the police stations and was questioned by a commissioner, who also summoned

Dziworski's brother. During this interrogation I found that I'd been duped by both of them.

Next I got summons from the court in which I'm currently working, defending criminals, and I was questioned by an examining magistrate. After these interrogations there was a break of more than three years. The truth is that the offence wasn't dangerous and there was no hurry. I was convicted as late as in 1972, when I'd already become a junior lecturer at university. I was punished with a fine of one thousand francs. The incident took place before Pompidou was chosen President, so it was subject to retroactive amnesty, which is traditionally announced for petty criminals by the newly elected president. Therefore, my Friend, you won't find the slightest trace in the register of convicted persons. But the offence did take place. This is the only crime I don't regret and today I'd be ready to commit it again, for the second time, even if I was faced with a prospect of paying another fine of one thousand francs. Never in my life have I met such sons of bitches like Ponté and Dziworski's brother and if only I could crush them with my shoe, I would do so.

17. When coin-operated public telephones appeared in Paris (previously there were token-operated ones), sometimes you could see a group of young people besieging a booth. It was a certain sign that they'd managed to upset the telephone and, one after another, called abroad free of charge.

I also tried to call Poland without paying. An acquaintance of mine, who specialized in this kind of scams and thefts, assured me that one can block the counter with a magnet.

I was never able to do that. Fine. But I could've been caught with a magnet in my hand. And then ...

18. Also this one was just a little scam: I repeatedly called my Parents and acquaintances in Poland from the telephone at the Faculty of Law. Anyway, all the professors did so, endlessly calling their friends in New York or Easter Island. This lasted as long as the rector decided to turn off the numbers

which allowed obtaining an automatic international and intercity connection in the whole building.

You'll tell me, my Friend: it's a trifle, everybody does it. These or similar misdeeds were and are committed by all the people you love, you admire, who are a model to follow for you. The only thing that makes us different at this point is that I'm talking about my misdeeds without any embarrassment whatsoever, because when you read these notes, I'll have already been buried, and the fact that the memory of me will be covered with shame doesn't bother me in the least.

However, others don't dare to admit to their crimes.

Let me then strongly repeat: all these petty offences are committed every day by your parents and your acquaintances, by the ruling politicians and company directors, by writers and inventors. By all the people. That's why I say that everybody who' reached the age of forty must have deserved a few years in prison, which he would have served if only he'd been caught in the act. Therefore, if people defend private life secrets, protest against strengthening the police apparatus or stigmatise totalitarian societies, everything in the name of freedom, the real reason is prosaic: all of them simply want to hide their criminal past and be able to safely commit new offences in the future.

Freedom is a chance given to citizens to commit petty offences with impunity.

POST SCRIPTUM

That's not the end, because having become adult, I started committing other misdeeds, for bigger sums and punishable by articles of higher gravity.

I would need a few days to recall all tax frauds, forged documents and similar offences that I've committed over twenty years. In some time I'll come back to this topic so as to complete my confession.

DOCTOR SARDEL, 16TH SEPTEMBER 1987

“He comes dressed like a clown, a paranoid or a hysteric? He says that when he wakes up in the morning, he has an irresistible desire to commit suicide”.

The nurse comes into the room and warns doctor Sardel that his car is badly parked and blocks the way. Doctor Sardel gets up with a sigh and makes a few steps towards the door. Then he changes his mind, turns back, closes his files and slips them into a big envelope, the one used by radiologists for X-rays. Before leaving, he puts the envelope on the desk.

Not taking it with him, the doctor makes a mistake, because just a minute after he's gone out I take the files out of the envelope and have a quick glance at the last page. My psychiatrist's handwriting is legible, so I can easily decipher two short sentences he's been able to write since the beginning of the visit. It's even easier because I don't need to hurry, as I know it's gonna be long before he comes back. Discovering what the others think about us is a really salutary experience. To have it, some people hide a microphone under a table, invite people to start a conversation and next leave on any old pretext. The conversation unavoidably moves to them, so in the evening they can relish the things that were said about them when they were absent. Well, doctor Sardel asked himself the question: “Is it a clown, a paranoid or a hysteric that's coming to me?”

I'm wearing an Yves Saint-Laurent jacket with turned-up sleeves, wide in the shoulders, with inserted pads. The cuffs of my black trousers are also rolled-up. Apart from that, I've got a white polo shirt and almost new classic shoes.

This style has been imposed on me by Ania, but eventually I accepted it myself. It's an “in” style, followed by the world of fashion. Of course, I agreed to it also because it somehow suits me: I wouldn't have yielded to my wife to “finally start dressing in the right way” if I'd felt bad in these clothes. And

I feel even more comfortable wearing them because I hate suits and white shirts with stiff collars. Just like I detest ties. The truth is that I've got one tie, but actually I've put it on only twice over the last three years. I don't protest against the way Ania dresses me also because my milieu praises and showers me with compliments: "Ania dresses you very neatly".

Until the age of thirty five I used to wear jeans and sweaters. That was my style. This way I avoided dull suits and gained a bit of youthfulness. Since the time money appeared at home, I haven't worn suits, either. However, jeans gave way to Gerbault trousers, "all the rage".

Indeed, I must have a screw loose if at the age of forty five I don't dress like clerks. I admit. Can't help it, though ... Just like I used to hate scout's uniforms and then soldier's greatcoats, today I have an aversion to suits worn by high-rank clerks and businessmen. It's hard to deny that there's something clownish about it.

REQUIEM, 1ST OCTOBER 1987

Today I went with Ania to Cosmos cinema on Rennes Street to see *Requiem pour un massacre* (literal translation from the Russian language: *Come and See*), a Soviet film directed by Klimov. This film received a Great Award during the last festival in Moscow, and two French critics, who were paid to enthuse about it by the Soviet embassy, stated in “Elle” and “Le Monde”, as ordered by their employer, that it’s a real masterpiece.

The screening of the film was preceded by adverts and posters on the underground, also financed by the Soviet embassy, for which Cosmos cinema is a kind of a display case. The poster presented a scene in which four SS men take photos of each other while one of them is aiming a gun barrel at the temple of a boy kneeling in front of him. This didn’t change the fact that there were merely 18 people in the cinema room, including us. I know because I counted.

1. I don’t have much to say about the film itself. Could I say it was beautiful? I think it was just real. The man who made it or someone very close to him must have gone through what he was talking about, because the story was too authentic for merely literary fiction.

Two scenes dominate the movie.

The first one is the gathering of a Belorussian village inhabitants in an Orthodox church, where they are to be burned alive.

The second one is the poster scene, where during the massacre four SS men take pictures of each other while one of the, as I’ve already said, is aiming a gun barrel at the temple of a boy (the protagonist) kneeling at his feet.

Despite the atmosphere of authenticity, both these scenes seem dull compared to what the reality must have been like.

Starting with the second scene, I wonder why the boy isn't finally killed by the SS man taking photos of him, because in reality it must have ended this way. After taking a picture the soldier would have pulled the trigger, which he'd obviously intended to do, and next, on leaving, he would have kicked the body to make sure he had a corpse in front of him. He'd have killed the boy quickly, almost unknowingly, just like you kill a mosquito, and would have hastily walked away. Well, in the movie the SS man in an unexplained and miraculous way spares the boy and goes away. To adulate the Western audience, the director has introduced hope into the movie, the leading value of the Western society, for which everything must end with a paean to optimism. And there has never been any hope in such massacres. Everybody was liquidated, at least to get rid of witnesses, if not for another reason.

The second thing I didn't like about the movie was the fact that the Nazis sparkled with joy, were in excellent moods and laughed when burning the peasants alive, as if all that was new and funny for them. The human rabble, free of any restraints and allowed to slaughter, must be very happy to massacre fellow creatures, but I suppose it doesn't last longer than three times. The fourth time - when the killing turns into a duty, it becomes work, which is no longer fun. I then guess that if those soldiers had been in the fifth or tenth village where they murdered people (and there were six hundred and eighty Belarussian villages in which the inhabitants were put to the sword during the second world war), they didn't kill bursting their sides with laughter, but irritated and tired, they wanted to bash out their job as quickly as possible and come back to the barracks. For it must have been slog to wipe out a crowd of people who were howling, lingering, resisting, who needed to be beaten so that they would speed up, yelled at and frightened to be made obedient. I'll say more: after the first ten massacres, after the initially good mood, after the fatigue and irritation which followed the fun, at the end must have appeared a method, organization and calm so that the victims wouldn't resist and could be led like a lamb to the slaughter. Not only can't I imagine these soldiers laughing when any opportunity arose, or even when it didn't, but I simply see them as rational men, devoid of any

passion. On the tenth slaughter the torturers become professionals. People no longer resist them, because the former have mastered the tricks which allow them to lead a crowd wherever they want, without any screams or unnecessary panic. Finally, referring strictly to what I've said so far, I'd prefer German soldiers to have usual talks before, during and after the massacre. The talks resembling the chats clerks have in an office or workers have at a building site: about families, about the backache somebody has had since yesterday, or about an incident that happened in the latrine to one or another guy this morning. In a word, I'd have directed this scene in the German style: methodical work, without any joy or sadism, except on the part of some debutants who'd have been intoxicated with it. The rest would have done it in an atmosphere of weariness and professional responsibility. Klimov presented them as a wild horde, drunk with happiness and alcohol, which deprived this army of what was unique about it throughout History. Because in reality the Nazi soldiers were different from all previous barbarians. They were workers and clerks of a gigantic factory for killing people, organized on the pattern of a company taking care of its profitability.

2. As I said, there were 18 people watching the projection of the film in the huge room of Cosmos cinema. Well, a few days before, in a television-radio programme devoted to concentration camps Le Pen said that it was "a detail of the second world war".

That's why my second reflection concerns the country in which I happen to live.

I envy it, because the nation living here wasn't slaughtered during the war. The Germans treated it like a defeated enemy with whom they had to live from now on; like a state which had to be spared. Therefore, the French suffered due to humiliation and the lack of food. That's all. Few of them (compared to Jews and Slavs) were taken away to concentration camps. They cooperated with the occupying forces on a large scale and had little remorse because of that. Marshal Petain, the winner of Verdun,

cordially shaking hands with Hitler in Montoire, served them as an alibi. The French informed on Jews in an organized and systematic way. The French state police organized a gigantic round-up, gathering the Jewish at Velodrome d'Hiver (Winter Stadium), from where several thousand were deported to Auschwitz.

Let it be then. I guess the French are right saying that anybody would've done the same in their shoes. What makes me laugh, though, is a victorious smile of a veteran they put on their faces today. You might think each of them hid a British pilot in the attic and was under direct command of Jean Moulin. I then watch with sad merriment a few poor documentary scenes shot during the last hours of the Nazi occupation in Paris, in which the brave Parisian folk suddenly start chasing the invaders away. Let's add, several hundred invaders, who accidentally stayed in the capital city surrounded by Leclerc's division, which, being only a few kilometres away from Paris, rushed head over heels to lend its hand to the heroic Parisian resistance movement, in case the Germans really wanted to defend themselves. Well, that's the jolly folk whose only war drama was the shortage of butter. That's why it's so discreet when recounting this period of its own history. This is the reason why Le Pen can take the liberty (and young people believe him) of claiming that the Nazi atrocities were merely "a detail of the second world war". Yes, no wonder these people want to forget about everything and don't hurry to cinema rooms to see movies about the Russian, Polish, Yugoslavian or Jewish resistance movement in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943.

3. My third remark, very similar to the previous one, refers to the democratic-liberal system in this country, which has been created specially for lice that's swarming in here. Since the time we started living in France, this vermin has been biting all that time so I must constantly scratch my balls. At the moment an election campaign for the president of the republic is starting, in which the same Le Pen (if he gets five hundred signatures of democratic notables) wants to be a candidate. That's why, despite the French amnesia, 18 spectators (including us) did come to

the cinema! That's why the French press has finally become outraged by the famous "detail".

But that's only transitory. For long years pluralist journalists and politicians have believed that it's better to forget about the whole thing. Therefore, discussing or denying the existence of Nazi crimes, but also reminding about them was forbidden, as this kind of oblivion was both the least expensive and the least painful.

It came to the point where a journalist from "Liberation" was fired because he'd allowed a neo-fascist who (just like my only French friend Jacques) denied the existence of gas chambers to publish a letter on the pages of his newspaper. This period of history and these crimes were usually covered with a thick layer of silence, and indignation appeared only during elections. For the rest of the time business was done.

Instead of suddenly showing boundless "outrage", the henchmen of this shitty system had better see that dreadful movie, shown free of charge in all cinema rooms of the "free world" big metropolises, so that everyone can, or even has to see the truth. This way they would much better and more sincerely contribute to the propagation of truth than by shouting out their courageous feelings during election campaigns. In the same way, they would do more and better (finally taking out a few francs out of their pockets) if they systematically and free of charge took young people of "liberal democracies" to Auschwitz and Treblinka so that the latter could see the atrocities with their own eyes. Instead, in the name of "the unity of the nation", "reconciliation" and covering up the shame, Pompidou has pardoned a fascist militiaman Touvier, and Mitterrand is currently hushing up the trials of Pappon or Bousque, fascist Vichy officials.

4. But for me this film is also an opportunity to precisely describe what for many months has been building up chaotically in my mind: hatred for the human race. For some time I've repeatedly caught myself dreaming (usually when I'm driving, because then I'm the subject of aggression of

other drivers) that I'm shooting at every man walking on the pavement. No, I'm not going out of my mind. Surely not. But this dream keeps pestering me.

On such occasions I obsessively analyse the sentence said by Gorki: "Man – how proud does it sound!".

"Proud" ... wow!

I don't have the slightest doubt: without chains, without a whip, without prisons and without fear each of us would be able to do what the Americans did in Kojedo and then in My Lai, what the French did in Algeria and what German fascists did in the east of Europe. I needed forty five years to reach this truth. I admit I've always been retarded. But this certainty of mine is now clear and unshaken.

Who will then dare to say "man – how proud does it sound"? Does "a rabid dog on a thick chain" sound proud?

Just like another film, admittedly mediocre and second-rate but that's irrelevant, which I saw on television three or four months ago (*Avenger*, as far as I remember well), made me realize that after twenty years of fighting (although only verbally) the death penalty, now "I was for it", also this film helped me understand that if the fate of humanity was in my hands and I could send all of them, including children (in the film the protagonist stops shooting at the portrait of Hitler when moving back he sees him in a photo as a child in his mother's arms) to meet the Maker with one nuclear explosion, I would do that.

"Man" doesn't sound proud. I'd rather say that's a harsh sound, like iron scratching against glass.

NOVELTIES, 6TH OCTOBER 1987

1. At last Stern has written, asking me to contact him.

Could he really have decided to finally buy a painting after a year of silence? I need his money for the exhibition at UNESCO.

2. The public relations department of this organisation agreed not only to make a room available to me, but also to play the role of the exhibition co-organiser. I had to strongly press Mr Zabłocki, a representative of Poland (holding the rank of ambassador and having all the vices of a communist apparatchik, dull and mundane), to make him go with me to Mr Hatori, the head of the said department, and ask UNESCO to take official patronage over my exhibition in February. However, if you are a clerk by profession, you're also a clerk in behaviour: Mr Zabłocki was simply scared, as I'd asked him to go a little bit further and urge the editor-in-chief of "Courrier de l'UNESCO" (which is issued in 34 languages and read by decision-makers responsible for culture all over the world) to place an article about the exhibition and one of the reproductions. And the editorial office staff had assured me (during the dinner to which I'd invited a Mr Aiss, the deputy editor-in-chief) that the article would be published if only Poles officially expressed such a wish.

- What's that hype for? – Mr Zabłocki bridled, being obviously irritated. - There're lots of such exhibitions. Why's all that hype?

And he refused to go with me to the editor-in-chief, Mr Glissan, although their offices are on the same floor, in the same building.

Clerks! For I'd like to remind you, my Friend, that in France, just like in Poland, art in the eight tenths depends on clerks. It's them who on behalf of the state or local authorities buy, grant subventions, organize exhibitions ... No wonder then that I'm not able to make the Ministry of Culture or the local museums interested in Beks's exhibitions.

What awful vermin is crawling through European countries in this second half of the 20th century: culture branch clerks.

3. Claude Tournay, a journalist cooperating with “The News of Versailles”, who’d written a few words about a small exhibition of ten paintings by Beks in Evasion Gallery, contacted me saying that this time she wanted to prepare an “in-depth” article. She’s enthusiastic:

- A habilitation thesis should be written about this painting.

The problem lies in the fact that neither she nor I have a place to publish merely three lines of this “habilitation thesis”.

4. A small gallery from Marais called me, proposing the rental of their premises next year for little money. They came across one of my brochures and would be “honoured” to be able to exhibit Beks. Usually, when I hear such assurances, I know there’s a sharp operator on the other side of the phone, who’s going to do some business by flattering me. After all, I decided to go there. The gallery belongs to a young sculptor of Hungarian origin, Miss Faykod. She makes expressive marble sculptures of disputable quality. She makes an impression of being a bit fanatical, but I took to her and, practically, agreed. Her motives are simple and clear: together with Beks’s paintings she wants to show her own sculptures. Since it’s me who pays for the rental of the premises, her exhibition won’t cost her anything. We’ll probably have it for ten days in April next year. Before that I’ll invite her to our place and show her the originals.

5. I also agreed to hang three paintings in the mayor’s office of the 6th district of Paris as part of an exhibition organized by a fantasy painting lover, a Mr Veilly. He doesn’t limit himself to collecting paintings, but is also interested in and tries to propagate the marginal world of oneiric paintings. It’s a pity, though, that he’s an ordinary director of a company, just like I’m an ordinary barrister, and neither of us has any money. He attended all my exhibitions and called me about ten days ago to make a proposal. He invited me to dinner. I liked his moderate tone and practical mind.

6. In any case, I liked him much more than Eve Pape, recommended by Beks (who at the same time warned me against her, thus putting himself in a position of being always right, irrespective of the turn the things might take). That woman claims she can organize an exhibition in New York. Her letters and telephone calls are an essence of naïve slyness, which counts on stupid painters and their inexperienced promoters.

“I’ll find you an unusual gallery on Fifth Avenue. It won’t cost you anything. It’s enough if you sign an obligation for 20 000 dollars, which you will pay to the gallery in the event none of the paintings has been sold – she writes. – But of course, that’s only a formality, because you are going to sell absolutely everything. You’ve got my guarantee. I know everybody here and the press is in my pocket. There’s no time to waste. Hurry up, hurry up! I must have the paintings in two months. Otherwise it will be too late! Please, send me also my “fees”.

Yeah, sure!

7. On 20th September the interview I gave during the festival in Cannes in 1986 was shown in *Pegasus* – a programme on Polish television. After a year. Well, half a loaf is better than no bread.

8. I’m using underhand tactics against Beks about an important point of our agreement: prices. He wants to force me to considerably raise them or to make a commitment that I’ll take 17 paintings from him instead of 12 ... “Because what you pay me – he writes – leads me to poverty. The dollar has dropped dramatically in Poland ...” He gets 20 000 dollars annually and ... he’s starving, being one of the richest people who live off a salary in Poland.

In principle, I wouldn’t object to purchasing even all of his paintings, not only 17, but I have no resources to satisfy my appetite. Today I paid the last debt (to Szydło) and I’ve got only 7 000 dollars in the safe to pay Beks at the end of the year. With the “inflation delay” (of which he reminds me during every telephone conversation) I must pay him 13 500 dollars by 31st December. To this sum I have to add different expenses (first of all the transport of paintings from Warsaw to Paris). In total 15 000 ... Where

shall I find it? Anyway, I'm not going to confess to having new financial problems before him, as I remember his reaction last year, when I mentioned my dire straits in an oblique way. He then told me something like that:

- Drown, Peter, drown. But first send me back the paintings that you haven't yet paid for and the compensation you're supposed to pay me for breaking off the agreement. Have you put money aside for my compensation in case you go bust?

I wrote him back that we would talk about it when we opened the bag and saw what was inside. That is to say, when I see what he's painted since my last stay in Poland in the spring and when he tells me what he's going to take for himself and what he wants to sell me.

To humiliate him even more, I wrote coldly: "People always come to some kind of agreement when one of them offers a good merchandise, and the other pays a good price". Writing this, I used the only language he understands: the language of shopkeepers. At the same time, however, I gave voice to my disappointment with the previous series, which was mediocre. I'm worried about the things he's painting now. I think he's trying to paint in an even more "Turner's" style, which he's not able to cope with.

Although I know they aren't true, I maliciously spread stories that since the time Beks became sort of my salary employee, he's been fooling around, playing with a video camera and laser discs, and his duty of providing 12 paintings a year he bashes out in three months. But whenever work on some painting begins to interest him, he applies himself and does it carefully, as he knows that he can keep it for himself.

Surely there's some truth in it, and in a surge of sincerity Beks confesses to it himself. However, I deliberately exaggerate and simplify things. I do it to get anger off my chest, because he's taking the best paintings for himself, and all the rest he's painting in a slapdash way (judging by the last series). So I warned him that I would still press him to let me choose the paintings I want and leave the rest for himself.

9. The princes of Monaco refused to accept one painting as a gift, just like Wajda, Cesar and the Pope.

Fools, you'll regret it one day! And if you die before Beks becomes famous, your successors will regret it: "What a pity our ancestors were idiots – they will say. – What a pity".

10. For the second time during the last three days I've gone to see Bacon's exhibition in Lelong gallery. A great painter. His paintings sell at 8 million francs a piece and need no advertising. And yet they are not as strong and beautiful as Beks's.

EXPERIENCE, 7TH OCTOBER 1987

My Friend, I keep showering you with advice. That's tiring. I know. But if in my childhood I'd had a master who would have bothered to warn me against obvious things, I'd have avoided many mistakes and disappointments. If he'd told me all the things that each adult knows and sees no need to merely mention it to the youth, today I'd have fewer bruises and I'd be filled with less grudge and reluctance for people.

You should carefully read the story of my failures. Then you'll avoid other failures, which are lurking to take advantage of your inexperience.

You might think that what I tell you about my endeavours aimed at showing Beks's painting to the world and gaining general recognition for him is too special, too exceptional for you to be used in your own life. There will be no other Beks and you won't be another Dmochowski, who has harnessed himself to do a task which requires three times more strength than he has.

That's true. Nonetheless, ruminate about what I write in these notes, because *mutatis mutandis* you'll find here an answer to many questions which you can't ask yet and which nobody's going to answer you in advance, because some people prefer to forget the experience they've gained with so much difficulty, while for the others these are truisms not worth talking about.

SCUM, 14TH OCTOBER 1987

Yesterday I was in the Polish Institute to see the vernissage of Szajna's works exhibition, and today I saw the film about his theatre. He's present at the screening and, of course, I take the opportunity to give him Beks's documentation. My major goal, however, is to sound him out whether he'd be willing to take part in a collective exhibition of Polish painters in Paris (if I manage to organize such an exhibition). I keep thinking about this project, because wherever I propose Beks alone, the answer is "no, thank you". Szajna doesn't refuse, but he's got better proposals than mine, as Zadora wants to organize an individual exhibition for him in Beaubourg Centre. Szajna himself seems to be a nice, intelligent and outgoing person. When he noticed Ania (who was late) entering the room, he left a few people surrounding him and came up to her to make an acquaintance. It's true that whenever Ania comes in, the looks of all gathered people go to her and a number of men slightly rise to see her better.

Szajna is clearly sensitive to the charms of pretty women, but when Ania says her surname, he seems somewhat disappointed:

- Oh yes, a moment ago I met your husband – he says and walks away.

Now a TV journalist comes up to Ania:

- We have met before, haven't we? – and he introduces himself.

However, when Ania tells him her name, he takes to his heels and scrams. I can see that scum Zadora sneaks a greedy glance at Ania.

- If only I wanted, my dear, - Ania will tell me later – you'd surely have your exhibition of Beksiński in Pompidou Centre. That guy looked at me in such a way that if only I'd let him touch my arm, he would have done anything I wanted. But I shudder at the very thought I'd have to shake his hand. He's simply disgusting. Indeed, he's a little man in thick glasses, with a face furrowed with wrinkles, really ugly.

A few days ago I received an invitation to the celebration of awarding him with a distinction by the minister of culture for merits in the French-Polish cultural cooperation. Fortunately, the invitation arrived after the celebration. It's better that I didn't go, because probably I wouldn't have refrained from causing a scandal by ostentatiously leaving the room, while publicly asking the ambassador to forgive me and explaining my gesture: to show *Four Times Paris* exhibition in Warsaw, that scum rushed off his feet. However, when it came to exhibiting Poles in Paris, especially Beks, he was always absent from the office whenever Ms Marszałek-Młynarczyk, the Institute director, called him.

DISMAY, REMORSE, FEAR, 14TH OCTOBER 1987

Hitlerism, ghetto, Auschwitz and gas chambers, French police and Velodrome d'Hiver, the genocide of the Armenian, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, gulags in Siberia and Stalinist terror, Koje-Do in Korea, My Lai in Vietnam, apartheid, the children of Biafra, persecution of the Palestinian in Gaza, Poi Pot, AIDS, Chernobyl ...

And among all that there's abstract, official, disinfected, sterile art, harmonious lines and serene patches in the world marked by hallucinogenic cheerfulness ...

On the first page of Szajna's brochure there's a photo of him with rolled-up sleeves. And a tattooed number on the forearm.

MONSTERS, 14TH OCTOBER 1987

- In any case, Beksiński is a better investment than children.

Hearing Ania preach this surprising dictum, I burst out laughing:

- When people read it, they'll say: what monsters!

This time both of us laugh.

Ania's conclusion finishes the conversation about a strange phenomenon an example of which is Beks: how can such greed and a lack of fundamental human feelings coexist with such a remarkable artistic genius in one person? For Beks again is attacking me with his demands for extra money and furiously waves his fist in his last letter: "I have no money left to subsidize this business!".

This scream returns like hiccups. Whenever I recall it, I'm seized with an irresistible desire to strangle him. For three years he's been living peacefully and wealthily. He doesn't have to put up with fussy clients, doesn't have to share the profits with Wahl or Nyczek, doesn't have to make an all-out effort to hide his income before the tax office. At the same time he receives remuneration unavailable to anybody living off a salary in Poland. I pay him about 20 000 dollars annually, while the director of a huge company earns an average of 500 to 600 a year. And he has the cheek to tell me: "I have no money left to subsidize this business! ..." When I think about my debts, my completely unpaid three-year work to promote him, my expenses to make him popular ... Which doesn't change the fact that Ania is right: it's a far better investment than children. Such an enterprise, even having Beks as a partner, probably brings more joy and less trouble than the most charming kiddies.

ESPACE CARDIN, 14TH OCTOBER 1987

For a few days I've been besieging the entrance to the auction of contemporary paintings in Espace Cardin, to give out to people two coloured brochures of both exhibitions in Valmay, a brochure of drawings from the exhibition in the Institute and two postcards: "Veiled Madonna" and "Cradle". I also enclosed an announcement of the future exhibition in Unesco, printed on headed paper. Everything in a white Bristol envelope. The preparation of three hundred copies, putting all the documents in envelopes, giving them out to three hundred people entering the room cost me a lot of physical effort and more than three days of work. I'm worn to a frazzle.

I hope it will pay, though. Anyway, after the gallery audience, which already knows Beks and is enthusiastic (until they have to buy something ...), after a complete failure to make the local critics interested, the only thing that's been left for me to do is to acquaint the milieu of collectors with this painting. For these people seldom go to galleries and buy paintings almost exclusively at auctions. I need them even more urgently, because in near future I'll be broke again and won't be able to organize another exhibition so as to sell a few paintings this way. I'll then have to put them up for sale at an auction, which is an advisable and unavoidable thing anyway, because sooner or later every painter must face an auction audience and get a current price. And I have to prepare the ground in advance so as not to fall head-first. I'm afraid of this trial, but remain optimistic.

My attitude is even more positive because at yesterday's auction in Drouot I saw two paintings by Giger, quite mediocre actually, which were sold at 40 000 francs each. Well, Giger is as "morbid" as Beks, although since the time he made a stage scenery for the film by Ridley Scott *Allien* and received an Oscar he's been much better known in the world than Beks.

If in two or three years Beks reached at auctions a similar level to that of Giger, I'd get the money to issue an album and continue my enterprise. Also, I wouldn't have to cooperate with Louse or run around the town in search of a gallery.

Finally, I'm all the more optimistic because while I was giving out envelopes at Espace Cardin, I heard a snatch of a conversation, which I believe is characteristic. Turning pages in one of the brochures, a man explained to two women who Beks was. When one of them said:

- You'd need a special room to hang these paintings – which was supposed to mean they are so “nightmarish” that you can't possibly live with them on a daily basis, the man, who must have encountered Beks's painting during my previous exhibitions, said:

- Beksiński is something absolutely extraordinary.

It would be childish to draw general conclusions from such a sentence, but it cheered me up and provided new arguments to stick to my guns.

CRASH, 27TH OCTOBER 1987

The wheel of fortune turns incessantly ...

In conventional terms, the mechanism of a crash is simple. Every reader of economic pages of “Le Monde” might have predicted it as early as three years ago. Although I’m not a specialist and economics is only my third-rate hobby, like many other ones, I’ve been forecasting a stock market crash for a long time. The debt of the USA to its own population, the debt of the Third World to Western banks, the purely speculative rise in the prices of shares at the stock market, which had nothing to do with their real value, couldn’t last endlessly. For three years I’ve been describing to Ania the reasons and dynamics of the crash ahead of us. When Wall Street collapsed on 19th October, Ania, who at that time was showing fashion at George V Hotel, reportedly shouted out the moment the news spread around the room:

- My husband has been foretelling it for three years!

After a continuing drop of the CAC.40 stock market index for many days, with slight rises here and there, the things are irreversible, whatever happens in the weeks to come. The patient is not dead yet, but one of his arms has already been amputated. There’s also the prospect of an international debt crisis, which will only deepen the crash.

That’s why, when we were coming back home this evening, I started to tell

Ania what’s probably going to happen very soon and what’s also easy to predict:

- In the nearest time those who deal in money - financial circles will get whipped across the back. There are people who enjoy it: “It serves you right, profiteers!” Their joy is premature, though, because if financial circles really collapse, it will be the turn of those who produce: entrepreneurs. They’ll run short of credits, because those who deal in money, having been knocked into a cocked hat, will no longer be able to lend anything. Entrepreneurs, in turn,

will have problems with customers, because people, being unable to obtain credits, will have no money to buy goods. Therefore, after the financial circles and entrepreneurs it will be the turn of employees: unemployment. Because companies, having lost purchasers and credits, will have to close or, in the best case scenario, make a part of its staff redundant. You'll have no clients and my lawyer's office will be empty: recession.

- And what's the conclusion? – asks Ania.

- That we'll have to think twice before we buy twelve new paintings from Beks. In other words, I don't know if I'll be able to settle our accounts with him in December or, at least, if I'll be able to settle everything. The money we have in the safe, which was supposed to be for him, may be absolutely necessary in the nearest months – I answer.

- You're right! You won't pay him, no way! – Ania is delighted and raises the bidding stakes. – If what you're saying comes true and if in a few months we have no clients, I will have no shows and you – no divorces and inheritance cases, if additionally people stop buying Beks's paintings (and I'd like to remind you that this year only Mrs Afkhami bought one painting and still hasn't paid for it), we are done for.

I don't answer anything, as I see that I've gone too far and exaggerated the situation. Unwittingly, I fuelled her suppressed reluctance for Beks. Unknowingly, I added fuel to the fire and provided her with arguments to break up with him. Until now her attempts in this field have been quite shy, but her attacks on me to make me break up might intensify.

Will I really be forced to do that? I don't want to believe it. For if the parting happened in an atmosphere of general horror (“everybody is collapsing, so there's no disgrace that I can't meet my obligations”), this would be the end of my dreams and the collapse of one of the major goals in my life.

I then stop prophesying, because wishing to boast before Ania that I'm one of those “who predicted” what's going to happen, I limit the margin of

my manoeuvring in the future. Wishing to show my wit to Ania in one field, I give her weapons to attack me in another area. As a matter of fact, I can't imagine that I could quit what I've started. I love these paintings too much to give up the whole thing because of some stock market crisis. However, revealing to Ania the arguments that weight against paying Beks, I run the risk that she'll remind me of them in a month, when we are in Poland.

Which doesn't change the fact that in the evening I indirectly come back to the subject:

- Look how the fortune turned – I say. – For some time, that is to say, since I began to have problems, Beks hasn't answered to my appeals to his friendship, solidarity and gratitude. He told me that our relations were the relations of “cold businessmen” and that he didn't care about my problems. If in two months I have to break off our agreement, because this will be required by my interests, you'll see how he'll start emphasizing our “friendship”, trying to play on the emotional note. Do you recall how he refused to reduce the price of paintings when the dollar shot up like a rocket? Well, now he's yelping mournfully, begging to increase the flat rate, because the dollar is plunging. Do you recall what happened one and a half years ago, when I got bogged down in slime? “Drown, Peter, drown, but pay me back for the paintings, pay the compensation, and then die if you wish”. And in the end it's him who's drowning, because even if he regains freedom after the contract has been broken off, he won't find a single client in Poland. Following the world crisis and economic reforms of Jaruzelski, in short time also in Poland there won't be anybody who can afford to buy a painting for 2 million zł. For a longer time everybody will be absolutely penniless. I'm his last resort. Even if I don't fulfil my duties, I won't deny myself the pleasure of reminding him the sentence: “Drown, Peter, drown, but before you drown ...”

- You see, the wheel has turned – I add after a while to finish the conversation while we are coming into the flat.

READERS, 30TH OCTOBER 1987

Every literary work is a request for love.

Surely, but whose?

Someone who sells his works and must live off this sale tries to endear the masses. And to make them love him, he must feed them with what they want and what sets them in motion: a model to follow, some hope or a promise; a noble feeling which will add meaning to their lives and lofty values that will let them carry the burden of existence. This is what bestsellers, political speeches and priests' sermons are filled with to the brim.

I, on the other hand, hurl abuse at people, I address the closest people like vultures, and everywhere I exude the odour of cloaca ...

And this is why: because it's not love of masses that I try to win. Neither will I try to live off the sale of literature in my lifetime. These notes will be published after my death. And if at that time my spirit endeavours to win anybody's favour, it will be only a bunch of people who value sober judgment, which draws on the inexhaustible reservoir of truth. The masses are afraid of it, as the truth deprives them of the will to live.

The people whose recognition I seek are a narrow elite, insensitive to liberal or Christian morality, but sensitive to the complexity and despair of life. These are the ones whose love I beg. And that's why I don't hesitate to show myself naked before them, with pimples and eczema, and the world I describe is in dirty and repulsive colours.

If one day the masses wanted to take the pleasure in reading my prose, if critics were to say at least a word of praise for it, this would mean that I've confused the ways completely and wasted time looking for love of those whom I hate and despise.

WHAT TO DO?, 31ST OCTOBER 1987

What shall I do?

The previous series of paintings which I took with me to Paris in the spring this year was poor. After Beks kept the best five pieces for himself, only one of the remaining 18 paintings (“Green Tree”) deserved attention. I thought it was transitory.

However, since that time three people have visited him and told me that the current series is even worse. It’s true that none of them is a “specialist”, but what do I care about “specialists”, all of whom are against the very principle of this painting? In such a situation I’m more interested in the opinion of the “audience”.

And my three emissaries come from the audience.

One of them was an official working in the Polish consulate in Paris, Pawel Bietka, who is usually Beks’s enthusiast and, just like him, comes from Sanok. Taking the opportunity of travelling to Warsaw, he went to Sonata Street under a pretext of showing Beks a sample of the poster for the exhibition at Orly. When after his return to Paris I asked him if he’d seen what Beks was currently painting, he answered me:

- Disgusting.

I hoped that before I went to Warsaw on my own in December to see the current series, Beks would make some effort and paint at least a few works of good quality. Glinicki warned me on the phone not to be too optimistic about it.

In the end, Kołodziejczyk came back from Poland and confirmed:

- Nothing interesting.

Why is Beks acting like that?

Probably he doesn't know, just like I don't know. Of course, on a few occasions he confessed that he'd caught himself painting something that would hopefully hurt me. What's more: at least twice he's told me that he wants to drive me to break off the agreement, thanks to which he'll avoid the duty of paying me the compensation.

- Give 50 paintings as compensation for breaking off the contract ?- he said. No, I don't feel like doing that. That would be a big loss. But nothing bans me from stopping painting, from painting in such a way that you won't be able to sell anything, or finally from painting poorly so you won't like it. And in such a case you will have to break up.

Apart from contrariness and joking, there was some suicidal malice about it, which is sometimes stronger than common sense in him. But he's also driven by something else. For a long time he's felt like painting without self-censorship. Firstly, to give vent to his tiring obsessions, and next, to be able to concentrate only on a few paintings, while treating the rest as samples, searches and sketches. He couldn't afford either of them as long as he had to sell paintings on his own to have some livelihood. At that time he had to paint different topics, at least partially sellable, always good quality, finished and carefully painted. His current situation, lasting for four years, which ensures him a salary at the end of each year, has freed him of any care about the client. That's why he can do whatever he wants: focus merely on a few paintings, which he's bringing to perfection. These ones he'll keep for himself. As for the rest, he wants to blow off steam, treating them as relief from his pathological need to constantly paint a skull and crossbones (like a penis and a riding whip in the past). These ones will be given to me.

Of course, he knows that this way both of us will reach a bottom. But although he views the world in realistic terms, from time to time he's influenced by irrational and suicidal urges. Even though he's happy with our cooperation, thanks to which he can buy all the things he used to dream about, at the same time he hates it, as it turns him into "a salary employee". The money he gets from me satisfies his greed and allows him to take things

easy, which he's never experienced before. At the same time, however, he's got an impression to have lost freedom, which is very important to him and without which he finds it difficult to paint.

What to do then?

The economic crisis, which will follow the current stock market crash, most probably will prevent him from selling even a single painting. And it may be long and painful. Therefore, not only won't people be able to afford to buy works of art, but some of them will simply have no livelihood to survive.

My own financial problems may get even worse, making it simply impossible for me to exhibit any paintings. Ania sooner or later will have to retire from her profession, unless the forthcoming crisis deprives her of her job sooner. Finally, there's little chance that during one of the new exhibitions I'll be able to sell the current paintings by Beks. Their persistently repulsive side and sometimes simply mediocrity (judging by the last series) make any attempts of selling them doomed to failure. Where shall I then find the funds for the further campaign? Additionally, the reluctance of the Parisian milieu would probably increase if I exhibited what Beks is painting at the moment. And most importantly, how shall I find the passion in myself, the passion without which I wouldn't have done one tenth of what I've already done? Because if Beks continues to masturbate solely (and with no imagination whatsoever) his obsessions, keeping for himself a few good quality paintings, how shall I still lie to myself that my endeavours make any sense? How shall I take pleasure in continuing what I started? How in the future shall I bear nightmares that I experienced in the past? a frank talk with him wouldn't change anything. If, however, he admitted I'm right (and probably he would do so, because in breaks between his fits of fury he can see things as they really are), two days after my leaving his anger with me and the perverse desire to move the risk of our common disaster even further would again take the place of reason.

Only a direct encounter with the painful reality of the economic crisis and experiencing the impossibility to sell paintings on his own might act like

a cold shower on him and bring back his rational attitude to my endeavours and all our relations.

However, even if that happened, it would be too late for another cooperation, anyway. If we break up once, it won't be possible to start everything anew, as if nothing happened, because such cooperation would surely go wrong, filled with rows and hatred.

What shall I do then?

SHORTLY, 3RD NOVEMBER 1987

1. - I just call to confirm what, judging by your silence, is bad news: Mr Daulte didn't agree ...

- Yes, yes, unfortunately, that's the point. Mr Daulte looked through the documentation and said that in France it wouldn't sell. It's a difficult painter.

- That's a pity. Thank you. Goodbye.

This conversation I had a moment ago with Ms Carlier from Art Library publishing house. I'd been contacted with her by Mr Zatoń, a former Polish cultural attaché. Mr Daulte is the director there, but lives in Switzerland. These days he was to come to Paris and, taking the opportunity, Ms Carlier was supposed to show him Beks's dossier and propose the issue of an album.

2. Yesterday Ms Ginoux-Bessec from the Salon in Montrouge rejected Beks's candidacy for her exhibition of contemporary art in 1988.

3. The county museum in Saint Paul de Vence agreed to exhibit Beks for three months, but in the winter, that is to say, when there isn't a living soul in this tiny village on Azure Coast.

4. In the current Autumn Salon, where I exhibited "Bath", the painting was hung by the Salon organizer, painter Alaux, at the very end of the corridor, in a corner where it can't be seen at all. Despite that, however, somebody attached a small piece of paper next to the painting with a note: "sublime".

5. Tomorrow I'm seeing Stern to show him a few paintings. If he buys, I'll be saved for a year and will have money to pay Beks.

HATRED, 13TH NOVEMBER 1987

I hate you. You know about it perfectly well. I've repeated it many times. I imagine a sneer appearing on your lips. In a jolly mood, between two bites of pork chop you're tucking in, with your mouth full, you ask your neighbour:

- Have you seen how that snot's strutting his stuff?

I hate you without any hope or mercy, I hate you with the hatred one has for a deadly enemy, whom he will never forgive.

Without this hatred I couldn't live. For should it abandon me, I would have to accept what I mustn't accept:

that there will be no compensation in revenge,

that your death will not relieve me, as you'll be considered innocent, although you're skinning me alive, because there will be no boundary between virtue and misdeed.

I deeply believe my hatred doesn't blind me.

I need it to go through my life without looking for a final hideout anywhere else ...

Only hope that he suffers like I do lets me bear the presence of my fellow man.

PATRONAGE 3, 26TH NOVEMBER 1987

One day, strictly speaking, on 13th March this year, I gave an account of my meeting with Bernard Gouley, one of the chiefs of Antenne 2.TV, the right hand of this channel managing director, Claude Contamine. I started my note with a sarcastic question: “Will I eventually benefit from the system of patronage of this demo-liberal regime?”. Today I can say: “Probably yes”. Let me remind the facts:

1. I wrote to Claude Contamine, my ex-professor at Science Po, who in the meantime had become the managing director of Antenne 2. It's on his order that I was seen by that Bernard Gouley, who in turn handed over the matter to the manager of television news, a Raymond Tortora. Although he'd never heard about Beks and didn't show the slightest interest in his painting, the latter, just because he was told to do so, informed me on the phone that he'd send a team to the exhibition in UNESCO and show the report on the evening news. It was then confirmed by Gouley himself in a short letter he sent me two days later, in which he stressed that if there was any breaking news or important political information on that day, the report wouldn't be shown. Hence my “probably”. In the aftermath of this piece of good news, which is still up in the air, let me share a few general remarks connected with the promise given to me:

2. The question I asked during my meeting with Bernard Gouley might have come across as provocation.

Unjustly. Unjustly, because I'm becoming increasingly confirmed in my conviction that the quality of an individual and his/her endeavours in this democratic-liberal system, though not meaningless, do not weigh much. Ten other, much more important factors influence the final result of somebody's activity. These factors can make an object of worship out of shit and turn van Gogh into a poor, desperate and lonely suicide. The system of patronage and

mutual services belongs to such factors and is of great importance within the ranks of the ruling elites in this country.

3. For the nth time this remark, which I keep chewing over on each page of these notes, fills me with resentment that I haven't made use of fifteen years of my work at the most elite law university in France, where students are children of ministers, secretaries of state, bank directors and senators. For fifteen years, with belief and enthusiasm, I taught the constitutional and political principles of liberalism and democracy to them. I even won the recognition of a few of them and sometimes, many years after I'd left university, they would visit me to say how much my views had influenced them. And that's why I'm angry with myself.

Firstly, because I contributed to educate supporters of the system which I've been condemning since the time I discovered how it worked in practice.

Secondly, because I missed many opportunities to use the system of machinations and patronage, which were given to me thanks to the position I held. During classes I met with those young people anonymously and without any favouring whatsoever (except two or three pretty girls and from time to time a black or Arabic student, who deserved some indulgence). Today I realize the dimension of the mistake I made. I keep thinking about the powerful parents of some of my students and imagine how easy it might have been to use them to get inside their closed circle and take advantage of their support. For example, one of my seminars was attended by a daughter (intelligent and talented, by the way) of the former French ambassador in Moscow and in Bonn. Another one was participated by a son, exceptionally stupid, of Ms de Hauteclocque, a deputy and cousin of general Leclerc. In the third seminar I had a nice and discreet daughter of admiral Audrant. Not only during classes at university, but also when meeting with my students at dinners or having coffee with them after school, I was never interested in where they came from and who they were. What a mistake! Over the past fifteen years, when I was having lectures in this stronghold of the establishment and money of the local "egalitarian" society, I might have

made powerful friends. And I, idiot, don't even remember their surnames and haven't kept their addresses ...

INFORMATION, 26TH NOVEMBER 1987

Here's a bunch of information that has made the black series which seemed to have no end a little bit colourful:

1. Barm's, a small gallery, modest and of little importance, but quite well situated – opposite Notre Dame, on Quai Montebello, wants to exhibit Beks in the autumn of 1988. In a week I'm meeting its owner, Mr Bost, to talk about the conditions he proposes. In any case, it's me who will have to cover all the costs. Additionally, the gallery will take 30 per cent of the sale.

Ania claims it's a disaster:

- The end ... - she says. – Sales ... All that money you've drowned, all your work, your efforts ... Only to sink so low ...

- Well, what else can I do? – I answer. – Louse wants the price (“this time I want to earn a maximum” – do you remember what he told me?) that I can't pay. Nobody except Guity has bought a painting by Beks this year. I must accept every proposal of an exhibition, even a humiliating one, because I've got no resources to satisfy our ambitions.

2. My printer, Jacques Surreaut, has gone bust. That's bad news. He was cheap and worked properly. After his bankruptcy all the publications will cost me 25 per cent more. Besides, I'll have to cooperate with people like Mathan or Churaqui, who are nice but left behind an impression of poor, sloppy work, the lack of precision or punctuality. I had to supervise them wasting my time, because otherwise they wouldn't have worked at all or they'd have worked badly. As soon as I met Sureaut, I showered him with a torrent of abuse for not coming to the first meeting. Later, however, it turned out that he was a good professional (I almost feel like saying that's the reason he went bankrupt ...). It's a pity.

3. I met painter Seradour at his own exhibition, in Minet Gallery, on Beauvau Square. He's a member of the jury in the contest in Monte Carlo

and it's owing to him that Beks got an award of UNESCO Commission in 1987. This time Seradour has selected two ektachromes from among the ones I showed him and he wants me to enter them for the next year's competition. He'll do his best to make Beks receive an award of the Ecumenical Council (which means there would finally be some little money out of it) and, who knows, perhaps he'll arrange the whole room for Beks in the Autumn Exhibition. At least once somebody has done something for me without patronage, without "friend's recommendations" or "rendering mutual services". Because I didn't know Seradour and nobody "recommended" me to him. Having seen my exhibition, he spontaneously proposed to exhibit Beks in Monte Carlo.

4. The mayor's office of Paris, just like the mayor's office of 9th District before (where a small exhibition of symbolic painting took place in the past), turned down my proposal to show Beks in their salon.

GUIFY, 6TH DECEMBER 1987

How can I thank you, Ms Guity? How can I express all my gratitude for saving me from my financial problems, for your heart and moral encouragement? You don't even know what a big role you played in my whole enterprise ...

- Because I love his painting – the woman replied.

Oh, it's about something more. For if I complain about Beks before you, you admit it's me, not him, who's right.

- He must come to Paris, at least for two days. He must realize that there are great artists here. That he's not the only one. He must leave this prison in which he closed himself of his own free will and which harms his painting. Every artist should contact other artists.

What would happen to me and where would all my efforts lead if it wasn't for you? Because irrespective of your friendship, you helped me financially when I needed it. It was you who bought three Beks's paintings from me when I was suffocating financially and when nobody wanted them. And despite difficulties you are suffering at the moment, when I ask with embarrassment if you hope to pay me the last instalment for "Blue Head with Veinlets", so that I could settle my accounts with Beks before Christmas, you simply answer me:

- We'll manage somehow.

And I know that in five days the money will be handed in to me; that you'll deliver it with a smile, that we will then go with Ania to a vernissage and you will tell us that you like us very much. I know that when Ania has her show on television on 23rd December, you'll be sitting in front of the TV-set with all your family, keeping your fingers crossed for her.

God! This world is inhabited by angels and hyenas.

ALL RIGHT, 12TH DECEMBER 1987

Yes. Just for once I won't complain.

1. Yesterday Louse called me to say:

- It seems to me that actually both of us have an interest in continuing our cooperation.

- I'm delighted – I replied him.

Louse is and will remain a louse. He's constantly cheating and thinking how to dupe me. But Louse is also seriously ill. After he's had all tests done, now he knows for sure that he suffers from multiple sclerosis and his days are numbered. He's then afraid and confides his fears to me. During my studies in Warsaw, I visited young people affected by this disease to read for them, as they could no longer hold a book in their hands, or to render them other small services. I saw how they were dying slowly. So Louse asks me how much time has been left for him and what the last moments look like.

Which doesn't change the fact that even being condemned to death, like all people who are greedy to the bone, he keeps thinking how to earn money.

Let me tell you, my Friend, a short anecdote on this subject:

Both very old and terminally ill people sometimes surprise me with their lust for money, which they will have no time to spend anyway.

For example, now I've got a couple of clients in the evening of their lives, a Mr and Mrs Sala, the owners of a little detached house. The man is eighty years old and the woman seventy nine. They made a bad deal selling the building for life tenancy rights at a price which already today turns out to be four times lower than the one offered by somebody else. Since that time they've been fighting to cancel the life tenancy and sell the house to a new buyer. They have no heirs and if I win, they won't have anybody to leave thus obtained money. The lawsuit's going to last two good years.

- We'll have been long dead – the woman says soberly when I warn them about it.

To which the man interrupts her:

- That's not the reason to lose the lawsuit. Counsellor, you must win. If you win, you'll get your promised fee plus 10% of the building value extra.

Coming back to Louse: he finally agreed to the exhibition next autumn and the terms are less draconian than the ones he proposed in the summer. Let me explain: in June this year, when talking to me about this plan, he looked straight into my eyes and said literally:

- I wish I'd agreed on a percentage sum with you during the last exhibition. I didn't believe you could sell anything. I was wrong. But now I want to earn well, so you will pay me 60 000 francs for renting the gallery for one month and a half. If you don't, there will be no deal.

My moaning that it was a colossal sum, twice higher than the one I'd paid him for the previous exhibition, and that it absolutely exceeded my financial possibilities didn't help. Because also this time I'm not sure whether I'll sell a single painting and whether I'll be able to cover at least a part of the costs. I can't pay 60 000 francs for merely renting the gallery, as there are also the costs of advertising, catalogue, insurance etc. Or I'll have to run up a debt, and that's out of the question. Under no circumstances will I go through these nightmares again.

- If you say "no", the project is over – Louse repeated calmly. – Last year you sold well. I also want to earn a lot of money.

I hardly refrained from adding: For a lavish funeral.

- Tough luck, I'll sign – I said aloud.

Which doesn't change the fact that a few days later Louse started to put new obstacles in my way.

I'm convinced he did it to keep me in suspense.

Just like I am torturing Beks at the moment, keeping him on tenterhooks whether I'll give him a rise because of the dollar drop or not, Louse was secretly pleased pretending there were "difficulties". Well, he first announced that he could let only the ground floor to me, because – as he put it – the first floor was to be given to Zarzecki for his "Polish community club". Then he said that "a very rich gentleman proposed him very interesting things".

At a certain moment, when he put off the signing of the agreement for the fourth time ("because I'm not sure of the future"), I thought the autumn exhibition wouldn't take place at all. The problems I had with Beks (see the text below) filled my cup of bitterness to the brim and it seemed the whole year 1988 was a write-off.

So when Barm's and Faykod galleries offered small exhibitions for little money, I clutched at this proposal as the last resort. Before I gave him the final reply, though, I called Louse to try to come to an agreement *in extremis*. Anyway, Ania insisted that the next exhibition must at any cost be held in the same place as before.

- It's a decline – she shouted seeing the very modest rooms of Barm's and Faykod galleries. – Try to come to an agreement with Louse once more.

I didn't get my hopes up, because I was unjustly convinced Louse simply didn't want a new exhibition in his gallery anymore. And as usual, when I no longer hope for anything, it turns out I'm most effective in negotiations: my dull tone and resigned smile following previous fits of aggression and arrogance towards my contractors produce the desired effect. So, in a sincere and friendly tone, I assured Louse that I'd have the exhibition in his place rather than anywhere else, because the audience started associating Beks with his gallery; additionally, its location on the Seine Street was incomparable with any other place. Let me repeat, my voice was quiet and relaxed. I cherished no more hope to convince Louse and perhaps that's why I finally convinced him. Or maybe he was really afraid that I might go somewhere else to seek my fortune ...

As for specific solutions, I proposed him 30 000 francs for 6-week rental or 30 per cent of the sale. The only thing I categorically demanded was to sign the agreement before Christmas, so that I could give an answer to the remaining two galleries as soon as possible.

- I'll think about it – said Louse.

And yesterday he called to give me the famous assurance about brotherhood in “cooperation”, which I started this note with. This dodger is leaving for Poland in two days. So he called me at the last moment, just before the departure, to have a pretext for postponing the signing of the agreement until his return. This way he made it impossible for me to do anything about Faykod and Barm's.

He walks with difficulty, stumbles and frequently falls down, because his legs are affected by the disease. This doesn't prevent him from going to Cracow, though. I know that after return he'll do his best to delay the signing of the agreement and thus he will have me in his grasp and keep me in suspense. His manoeuvre is as plain as day. However, I believe the solution I proposed satisfies his greed in the optimal way, so I have an impression he'll eventually sign the agreement. He's just hesitating which of the two proposals to accept, because as usual, he's torn between his pathological caution and rapacious greed for money. Just like Beks, on the one hand he'd like something pre-defined and certain, but on the other hand he keeps telling himself: “And if that scum Dmochowski sells? Then I might miss an opportunity of earning a nice sum”.

He then wants to combine the guaranteed minimum, which he'll get in any case, with participation in potential profits. In the end, I agreed to his counterproposals, but with one reservation: if, by some miracle, there's a really big sale, since he requires a minimum sum, I'll demand a maximum one. In other words, Louse will get his 30 000 francs in each case. If the sale is big, he'll additionally get 30 per cent of the profits, but only to the level of 50 000. This means he'll receive between 30 000 (if nothing is sold) and 50 000 (if there's some sale).

2. If I say that “everything’s all right”, it also means that I’ve found a will and strength in myself to finally put an end to the argument with Beks. For I often repeat myself: “God, save me before myself. With the others I’ll cope without your help”.

Well, in his last letter Beks vehemently and fiercely demands that I raise the prices of paintings because of the dollar drop. The letter is written in an aggressive tone, which made me furious. I wrote two versions of reply. The first variant was as brutal as his letter. It was funny, though, because I don’t have resources proportional to my anger: I attach too much importance to the paintings to betray my fervent wish to their author – his painful death.

Sending this version was out of the question, as it was impossible to make him break up only to satisfy my little revenge and because of some stupid “rise” of several thousand francs that he demands from me. When I was writing this first version I knew perfectly well that I wouldn’t send it, so after putting on a show for my own benefit, in which I categorically refused any discussion on the rise, of course I must agree to some kind of compromise.

Everything is all right, because now I have resources for this compromise. Louse’s reply, which I mentioned above, lets me harbour hope that at the end of 1988 I’ll have enough money to actually pay Beks more than I’m obliged to pay on the basis of our agreement.

So having committed all my grudges to paper, I nicely wrote a neat second version of the reply, which I’ll take to Poland with me, so that he will read it before we start talking. It’s quiet, reflective, conciliatory and contains proposals interesting for him.

TO BE A GOOD SS MAN, 12TH DECEMBER 1987

I've never explored the mystery of Auschwitz. Especially that one of my few friends I have in this country, Jacques, persistently denies the existence of gas chambers, if not the camp itself, and tries to convince me of that.

But never mind Jacques and his negation.

What makes me wonder, though, is how SS men themselves could bear it.

For how can you beat people until your hands begin to hurt?

How can you stand in mud, in the rain, with a whip in your hand for long hours during an assembly of prisoners?

How can you wake up at four in the morning to drag them out of the barracks for an immediate execution?

How can you shout yourself hoarse?

How can you brutally push them if by merely staying one metre away from them you run the risk of contracting typhus? And how can you constantly torture them, torture even more, torture until they die?

How did those guards find energy necessary for the endless persecution of people? the very nature of ours makes us prone to rest, idleness and the lying position, doesn't it? Why should you strain yourself so much? How much easier it would have been to kill all them on the spot, without taking pains, immediately.

No, I don't grasp it. Auschwitz will forever remain a real mystery to me ...

There's something inexplicable about the victims' stories. Something's missing from them.

The books I've read on this subject, the reports I've seen don't satisfy me. Let somebody explain it to me: what was the point of torturing people and at the same time torturing oneself to the extreme?

What was the point in wasting time by telling them to move heavy objects from one place to another, then back and over and over until they fell of exhaustion, as I've seen in the film by Jakubowska *Last Stage*? What was the point in carrying them in cattle wagons from the other end of Europe, tattoo, dress in striped uniforms, build barracks and set in motion the whole powerful machine for supervising them, and all that to make them idly lie on plank beds, covered in lice, dirty, hungry and ill, awaiting death of typhus or exhaustion, as we are shown in reports from those times? the Germans usually have a greater need for efficiency and demonstrate a better organizational sense. After all, the idea behind "The final solution" was not to "look after" selected victims until their death of exhaustion or due to received blows, but simply to get rid of them as soon as possible.

If it was necessary to kill all Slavs, all gypsies, all Jews, all homos and mentally ill so as to purge the area for Aryan colonies in Eastern Europe, why did they complicate the whole task for themselves?

For pleasure? Of course, a multitude of wars have proved that every man loves killing his neighbour whenever he's allowed to do so. However, even during wars only a bunch of sadists prolonged the pleasure by torturing instead of killing. Is it possible then that all SS men in Auschwitz were sent there due to their penchant for torturing people?

Only once did I see a film answering the questions I asked myself. Actually, it was about Dachau (I think so), and not Auschwitz. It was an East German movie, the title of which I can't remember. I saw it in my young years. The camp shown in the film had a brothel and whores. The prisoners worked, ate and slept. When a trusty killed a prisoner without a reason, the SS man who noticed it asked calmly: "Why did you kill him? He did his work properly, didn't he?". Then he wrote down the trusty's number and on the very same day sent him to gallows for sabotage.

It's also in this film that I found a scene which struck me with its realism: through the megaphone the camp administration called the numbers of

people who were to be killed on that day for some kind of offence. They were supposed to immediately leave work and by truck go to the place of execution. While clambering onto the truck, a man automatically told the woman standing behind him “ladies first” and let her go first.

You’ll ask me, my Friend, what I’m driving at.

Well, this is what I’m driving at: I ask myself the following question: if I’d been born German in Berlin in 1915, would I have been a good SS man?

I’m educated, just like SS officers, who usually came from among young doctors, young architects, young scientists or young German engineers.

Also, I don’t lack hatred. It’s the main driving force behind my doings.

What’s more: it’s thanks to it that I still keep hope. The length and width of these notes I told you how it built up in me, brick after brick. I am (or it would be more appropriate to say: I was in my young years) an enthusiast of a totalitarian system of power, though it was Marxist, and not Nazi. I don’t like democracy, I despise elections and hate the so-called freedom of press. I’ve explained why on many occasions.

I’m violent. I’ve never hidden my violent tendencies. Not only do I now reject any dialogue with people, but I believe that a hit with a whip is a much better way to achieve the goal than explanations and negotiations.

Just like SS men, I love nature and animals. It’s far easier for me to watch the killing of people than the killing of a dog or slitting the throats of pigs.

Just like SS men (at least the ones they tell us about in films and in books), I’m far more sensitive to art, beauty and aesthetics than to the suffering of people and the death of my co-citizens.

So, having reached my age, I’ve acquired all the features of a good SS man. Except one: I wouldn’t have understood what my mission in Auschwitz was about if I’d been sent there.

Because either my slaves were supposed to work for me (or for those I'd serve) and then, without mercy, I'd force them to do so, but they would be nourished, treated and lodged so that they would remain useful for as long as possible.

Or my enemies (or enemies of my commanders) were to die and then, without much emotion, I'd murder them methodically, cleanly, fast and without delay. All of them, with no exception, would go to gas chambers immediately upon arrival.

So I do understand the principle of Treblinka and Majdanek, because there the victims were killed at once. I also understand the principle of Dachau, because it was chiefly about the use of slave work.

However, I can't understand the logic of Auschwitz, which was a gigantic machine for torturing people.

If I'd been sent there as an SS man, I'd have been bored and I'd have soon asked to be moved to the front, even the eastern one.

EXPRESSIVE ART, 13TH DECEMBER 1987

“... and since you’re going to issue this book on your own and you don’t want to ask anybody for anything, at least say it clearly”.

So I say: I hate Western culture à la Molier, Renoir or Charles Trenet.

Oh!

Because I hate decorative and formal art, which are both void of soul, the power of emotions and truth. And the Western art is just like that: charming films à la René Clair, colourful repulsive paintings à la Chagall and a play of flat, cold forms à la Pompidou Centre. That decorative and formal art would deserve only a passing attention and would gain a fraction of influence it has if it wasn’t supported by the economic and military power of the West, the ideological advantage of liberal democracies and their dominance over the rest of the world in all other fields.

The art of winners is always great art.

But I’m saying it chiefly because I love expressive art, that is, the art which is still cultivated only by Eastern European and Third World countries. I love the art of human soul, its fathomless chasms and its corners, where you find the lurking fear and the craving for death, compassion for human suffering and dismay at the vileness of life: Great Art. I like Kantor and Szajna, Brecht and Kubin, I like Bacon and great Soviet movies, German, Bondarczuk or Łapuszyński. I like art which once seen cannot be forgotten two minutes later.

Especially that in near future it’s going to disappear from the museums, galleries, exhibition rooms, theatres and cinemas of Central and Eastern Europe, as the latter becomes similar to the West. And eventually, just like here, it will end up in a poorhouse.

Western Europe isn’t short of great artists, because nothing in the world is distributed as evenly as talent and common sense. But expressive art lives

here a peripheral life, hidden and paid with daily sacrifices of its creators. It spreads through underground channels and only sometimes gets onto surface somewhere in the suburbs. Thousands of decision-makers, culture branch clerks, art critics, owners of galleries, cinema and theatre rooms, auction houses and book editors pass over or even discredit it. Oh, fortunately there are exceptions and sometimes somebody manages to hide from the levelling steamroller of the Western culture. Luckily, there are expressive artists who've succeeded in making their way in this cultural Sahara of Western Europe. There's Beckett, Ionesco and Bergmann. There's Appelt, Pina Bausch, Velickovic and Cioran. But how many people like that do we have? a handful. A small handful of expressive artists, surrounded by an ocean of decorative art as well as cold and neutral formal art.

When I left Poland, where I'd spent my young years, surrounded by great expressive works of art, and set my foot on this lunar cultural desert, at the beginning I thought it was some kind of misunderstanding and "competent authorities" should be informed. In a word, as I've already told a hundred times, I started walking along the halls of different offices, galleries, ministries and centres to convince them it was necessary to show, exhibit, invite great artists that had never been heard of here. Everywhere I came across silence, unconcern, and in the end irritation. I needed time to understand why it was like that, but eventually it dawned on me. I understood, because the truth was obvious and it was enough to open the eyes.

Art in the West is poor, because under the cover of pluralism, dozens of museums, hundreds of cultural magazines, thousands of cinemas and theatres, except for schools, movements and styles which are practiced here, it is reduced to merely two kinds: decorative and formal art. The third one – expressive art – is almost completely absent.

I'm not going to define these three notions, but their meaning will clearly result from what I'll say in a moment.

There are many reasons why the local culture comes down to a simple, only one alternative between decorative and formal art. A wider range, including expressive art, is chiefly opposed by the pursuit of profit by the local mercantile society (1). But also the Western man's withdrawal into himself doesn't let him see human suffering (2). He doesn't care much even about his own suffering from the last war (3). The galloping secularization of the West, where there's less and less space for God, pushes any interest in the soul, feeling, mysticism and suffering into the background (4). There's plenty of pietism, though. Loads of worship of idols and golden calves (5). But there's also optimism and belief in the future thanks to the progress of science and technology. Why should we then talk about tears and suffering, poverty and death? Why refer to expressive art? (6). Also the power and structure of the local cultural establishment block the way to aesthetic expression (7).

1. So the first of the reasons why the local culture is reduced to the choice between decorative and formal art is the pursuit of profit. Culture in the West is the subject of trade. The bourgeoisie buys it for itself, and the intelligentsia buys it for the state and local government centres. They both have dominated this culture, both in an indirect way let the artists live. Well, despite an ostensible differentiation, the bourgeoisie on the one hand (a), and the intelligentsia on the other hand (b) are almost monolithic and buy only two types of art.

a. What the bourgeoisie seems to be interested in is how to decorate their flats with pleasant to the eye works of art or how to get some amusement watching a nice show. In a word (although not to the same extent in all areas of art), the bourgeoisie looks for nice, cheerful and optimistic, that is to say, decorative works.

Not to the same extent in all areas of art – I say – because, luckily, different artistic forms do not share the same fate.

Film, ballet or theatrical shows are still the most susceptible to Great Art. Even in the West one may find very expressive and great quality

performances. These include films by Kurosawa, plays by Beckett or ballet by Pina Bausch. That's because a viewer's encounter with the gloomy world of human horror is short-lived and not very expensive. It lasts only an hour or two and costs merely the price of an entrance ticket. It can then be accepted by the bourgeoisie, whose patience and sense of economy is not excessively jeopardized. Therefore, artists have a material incentive to create such spectacles and distributors – to show them, as there's hope the rooms will not be completely empty. It's much worse in the case of fine arts (with the exception of photography and graphics, the cost of which is not high and which are within the reach of youth and real art lovers). A painting or sculpture are hung or put permanently in a flat, and their price is frequently high. "I couldn't live with such paintings on the walls on a daily basis!"; "Pay thousands of francs only to live with this horror?!"; "You must agree with the painting for which you've paid so much and with which you must live from morning to evening"; "I couldn't stand the sight of death or suffering in my living room" – say potential buyers, looking at expressive works of art.

That's why an artist isn't materially motivated to propose them this kind of art. A distributor feels even less engaged in it. He won't exhibit, issue or produce it, as he stands little chances of recovering the incurred costs, let alone profits, which are none.

Essentially, if we assume that the main movements in art are an expression of classes which promote them, especially by purchasing works of art, the dominance of the bourgeoisie is expressed in this decorative, empty, easy art, which has flooded us in the West; in this nice, optimistic and cheerful art you can see in the galleries of Western capitals, in Western cinemas and theatres; in these cute landscapes, which are here, there and everywhere; in these films and plays with a happy end; in these concerts filled with warm feelings.

b. Apart from the bourgeoisie having its own money, today's world is dominated by the working intelligentsia. It's thanks to this group that technology, science and economics are moving forward in the West. It's

the most powerful promoter of the Western society progress. Not very rich, the intelligentsia can't influence culture through its own purchases, because it only buys small and cheap works. However, it plays a major role buying art on behalf of the state and local government centres (communes, departments, regions, museums, centres, foundations etc.). It is like that especially in France, where the state itself as well as various FRACs, FNACs and other public culture centres are the biggest purchasers of art. Given the strategic position held in this circulation by the intelligentsia and a huge number of works bought by public centres, it can direct the dominant movements in art even more effectively than the bourgeoisie. The intelligentsia shows contempt for decorative art, so, given its education, it could become an ally of expressive art.

It's not like that, though.

Firstly, because its preferences turn towards art that doesn't express any emotions, neither optimistic and cheerful, which are typical of decorative art, nor emotions conveyed by expressive art – pessimistic and tragic. The art that the intelligentsia adheres to is purely formal, void of any anecdote, any literature, which should be understood as art: deprived of any feelings, whether positive, optimistic or negative, tragic. Its symbol is Malewich's black square against a white background or Klein's blue monochromes. Its ideal is not beauty, but an idea, discovery and endless explanations, verifications and generalizations. The engagement of the intelligentsia in formal art results from the fact that this art reflects the modern world, in which this intelligentsia moves around: the world of science, technology, urban planning, digits, books, microscopes and chemical formulas, the world which, contrary to religion and ideology, is void of any emotions. It's a world based on an idea, on a discovery, on an association of something that hasn't been yet associated, on proposing a concept nobody has developed so far, on originality, on surprising the viewer with a new invention or a new method.

Formal art, let me repeat, is a reflection of the environment in which the intelligentsia lives and works. The intelligentsia discovers the laws and

structures of reality and takes its mechanism to pieces. Hence its interest in formal art.

To see that it's true it's enough to take any book on information technology, molecular biology or urban planning and open it during a visit in a modern art museum or in a concert hall during a concert of contemporary music. You can immediately realize similarities shared by these two worlds, which are seemingly so far apart and so different from each other.

The dynamics of formal art isn't inspired by emotions, but by the vectors of science, technology or city life, that is to say, the vectors of progress, searches and constructions. In the opinion of the intelligentsia, an artist should "make discoveries", "blaze a trail", "find new solutions", "build a new reality", "experiment". In a nutshell, he should listen to slogans that apply to science and technology. Formal artists' ateliers and exhibition rooms with their works on displays are like chemical laboratories. They serve the purpose of "discovering new forms" or "building a new vision of reality". Everything is based not on beauty, but on an idea equipped with a bulky exegesis and theory.

So any theoretical reflection on formal art carried out by critics, any occasional articles and more thorough monographs devoted to it are dominated by three key words: "search", "discovery", "novelty". Three terms which are void of hatred, despair, death. Neither there is any joy, happiness or optimism, though. Just three neutral notions. From this point of view, the intelligentsia detests both "small" and "great" art, both decorative and expressive art.

There's then no hope that the intelligentsia, playing its role of an art purchaser on behalf of the state and public cultural institutions, will show interest in expressive art. That's why expressive works of art are so scarce in museums and places showing films, choreographic or poetic performances, which are financed by public funds.

The conclusion is simple: since buyers have particular tastes, sellers, that is to say, artists and distributors – adjust to them. For this reason they

propose for sale only what they hope to sell. And that's why the pursuit of profit is the first reducer of the ostensible aesthetic diversity in the West, which boils down to only one simple alternative: either decorative art or formal art.

2. The second reducer is the withdrawal of the Western society, the features of which are commonly known: egoism (a), individualism (b) and fear (c).

a. The Western egoism has been already stripped naked by writers and intellectuals a hundred times. We know it well. Nobody wants to admit to it, though.

There are nearly five billion of us on the Earth. A billion people live quite comfortably in the West, while the remaining four billion are starving in the Third World. Sometimes they are shown to us on television. However, we don't know anything about their culture born of poverty, despair and death, the culture dominated by expressive art. If artists from the Third World don't come to Western Europe or to the USA to create decorative or formal works, nobody will agree to exhibit or publish them, because nobody is interested in it. The West is lavish with great humanitarian principles. Representatives of the local establishment try to outdo one another in preaching profound dictums on "the duty which rests on liberal democracies in relation to the rest of the world". But the same West turns its back on the culture of countries marked by tragic expression, resulting from the tragic life and tragic death taking its toll there. The West slams the door before cultural manifestations of the Third World, because they don't concern it and it doesn't care about them.

"I can't publish a book by this writer"; "I can't put this film on screens"; "I can't exhibit plays written by this playwright"; "I can't exhibit this painter's works"; "Nobody's going to buy, nobody will come, nobody will watch. Simply nobody cares about it here" – you will hear when asking why there's so little art created by the four fifths of humanity. This is how the prevailing

egoism passes over expressive art, because this is not its art and doesn't tell about its existence.

b. Western individualism has many positive features, but it has also repulsive vices.

It's another manifestation of the local man's withdrawal in himself and his reluctance for expressive art. Just like he doesn't want to see the suffering of the four fifths of humanity standing at his door, he doesn't like watching his fellowmen whom he passes on the street every day. That's why the degree of culture of a man in the West is measured by his capability of suffering in silence, without asking anybody for help. According to the local standards, a civilized man is the one who keeps his dramas for himself and doesn't disturb other people's order with noisy symptoms of his suffering. If he's howling with pain, he's soon labelled "shameless". His duty is to talk about the weather. To the question: "how are you?" he's obliged to answer: "great", and, in particular, he must avoid "personal" topics. Even when he's threatened with death, he should keep a poker face. "Please, don't torture me with your problems. I'd be grateful".

The task of the Western art is to reflect this "discretion", this "bashfulness", this "self-restraint". It's supposed to show nice landscapes and quiet geometrical compositions against a neutral background. At the same time, expressive art is deemed "exhibitionist", "waffly" and "noisy". It disturbs like a pimple. In a way, it's considered to be a feature of a lower rank society, society from the old times, when hired mourners marched behind the hearse and wailed.

c. And finally, fear.

That's the third reason why the West closes its eyes to expressive art. Although it makes a big show of its open, pluralist and susceptible to influences attitude, the West has hermetically bolted itself against the influence of the culture of its enemies from the East. It fears that this way it might become ideologically weakened in the fight against communism. Throughout the time of cold war the West literally barricaded itself against

any influence of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Unless an artist has “fought for freedom” there. Such a dissident, protester gets money, rooms, projections, distributors, galleries, Noble prizes. For the others there’s nothing.

Well, the “others” are often great expressive artists. The communist authorities grant them support, because paradoxically in this art they find justification for their dominance. Exhibiting, buying, supporting the art that describes barbarity, heroic fight, poverty of the oppressed man, as it is done by expressive art of Eastern countries, ennoble communism, because its official task is to free the man from degradation. That’s why communists don’t spare resources for expressive art.

And that’s yet another reason why the West neither wishes to listen to these artists nor wants to let them express themselves here. For allowing them to speak would mean exposing oneself to the influence of the enemy’s culture and thus weakening oneself in the political fight with communism.

3. The West also has a short memory.

Not only does it see the suffering of other nations as if through a haze, but it’s not even pestered by the memory of its own suffering.

“Did these artists go through Auschwitz? – ask the local interlocutors in an almost reproaching tone. – That’s the past. One shouldn’t come back to old resentments. Life goes on”.

Of course, England was not occupied. Neither was the USA, and in occupied France the biggest misery during the war was the shortage of butter. So there’s no point in remembering bad things, is it? Only Jews, gypsies and Slavs inhabiting future Lebensraum, in a word, all those whose fate was to be “finally resolved” know what man is capable of. That’s why forty years later their art is still soaked with expression.

Well, the same forty years lived in prosperity and in progress made the Western society forget about its transient suffering. And together with memory, it’s lost any wish for art that would remind it of this suffering.

4. The fourth reason is the death of God.

Despite the atheistic façade imposed on it by communism, the whole culture of Eastern and Central Europe is soaked with the presence of the Creator. So is expressive art, which assumes there's something unknown, something that deserves constant searching: the human soul, the fate of man and the meaning of life. On the other hand, the West, especially European, has been secularized for a long time, and the interest in mysticism, suffering, despair inherent in life as well as the promise of redemption brought by death vanished with the disappearance of God. Suffering on earth ceased to be the way leading to paradise. Just the opposite, it's a discredit, fault, disability. Why should we then valorise suffering by giving it an artistic expression?

5. While God and religion have disappeared, the mythology and pietism continue to flourish here.

The rational and developed West worships its idols like ancient folks worshipped Olympus gods. All that is naïve and superficial in primitive religions has been taken over by the Western model of culture. That's why it's permeated with homage to idols (a), the myth of rebellious angels (b) and the triumph of martyrs (c).

a. Like in all societies based on pietism, the measure of sanctity is a blessing granted to the chosen ones by priests. For this reason the value of an artist in the Western world is not measured by his talent, but by his renown, and the class of a work of art is weighed by the name of its creator instead of its quality. In other words, the fame of an artist depends on the renown granted to him by museums, art critics and collectors, and not on his genius.

A great artist has no chance to be accepted by the Western society, if he hasn't been first sanctified by the canonizing bodies of the official art.

Like theologians about saints, critics must first write exegeses about artists. Like temples put calves on the altar, museums must hang artists' works on their walls. Like the faithful pay homage to gods, the collectors

must make obeisance to artists by buying their works. And the task of ordinary art enthusiasts is to worship them and have no other sanctities before them.

What I'm saying is only partially ironic, as it's a common attitude here. Actually, it's a source of paradoxical situations: the three hundred fortieth book about X (for example Picasso) will be written here and a symphonic orchestra will play a thousandth concert by Y (for instance Mozart) just because they are both deeply rooted in Western art Olympus. At the same time, however, nobody will lift a finger to show and see what's going on near or in front of Olympus, even if great things are happening there.

In Western museums, Western theatres, Western concert halls you constantly meet the same hundred standard names belonging to cultural Walhalla of the official art. All the time the same people. Every museum, every concert hall, every opera erects monuments for them, even if there are more talented artists around. In every theatre and every concert hall you can hear the same stars so often that it makes you sick. On the posters you find the same names and you constantly hear raptures over the same masterpieces, even if they have worn out completely. There prevails a stifling atmosphere of a ritual, which is supposed to instil in the society the conviction that there are only a hundred and several talented artists in the West.

b. Every pietism needs a myth on a rebellion of angels. That's why in the cultural religion of the West you can always find a group (it's an absolute must!) headed by a saint prophet. The said prophet must write an iconoclastic manifesto (necessarily!) and all of them have to "rebel".

"Do these artists form a group? – ask cultural officials and local art critics when they see something new. – Have they published a manifesto?"

Since impressionists formed a group, since surrealists wrote a manifesto, since both of them "rebelled", the same stereotype must be repeated in the mind of an average cultural decision-maker in the West. Without it he

won't put his stamp on an artist's passport and won't promote him to another circle of sanctity.

c. Every pietism and every mythology needs martyrs. For martyrs give us a guarantee that we deserve salvation. Since our ancestors sent a God-fearing hermit to death, they are of course condemned. But we already have one foot in paradise, as we have redeemed their faults by canonizing the victim.

This naïve and plaintive pattern, which was used for the benefit of van Gogh and impressionists after their death, is persistently suggested by official bodies of the Western culture: "You'll see, these artists will surely be recognized in the future".

Thank you for this assurance, but it's a cold comfort for me. I'd prefer to see rationality replace mythomania and the Western intelligentsia recognise talents for the sake of their greatness, and not because the artists suffered a lot and nobody valued them when they were still alive.

As for the humble, that is to say, ordinary art lovers, they should finally rebel against the myths of artists' redemption after death, which are propagated by the local establishment. I'd rather they appreciated really great artists when they are still alive instead of noticing only the ones posthumously canonized by official bodies.

6. The sixth reason for the monolithic nature of the Western culture, which holds expressive art in contempt, allowing only decorative or formal one, is the enormous progress of science in technology observed over several dozen years.

Why should we cry over the human soul and its wounds if, as I've already said in these notes, the invention of a washing powder liberated the woman far better than all revolutions and religions?

There isn't a single day that a discovery in medicine hasn't shifted the boundaries of human suffering and human death.

"Expressive art belongs to the past – say the local interlocutors. – It's a decadent art, which sends us back to the tragic past of man and his animal

nature. The Western man, the man of the future will be soon cured of bestiality, fear and hatred. In five generations he will forget suffering and maybe even death? What do we need expressive art for?"

7. In the end, the reason for the impoverishment of the Western culture, which reduces art to a decoration or a play of cold forms, is the local cultural establishment made up of big decision-makers (a), culture branch clerks (b) and art critics (c). Seemingly diverse, it's actually as monolithic as a granite block (d). Especially that it teems with opportunists, who don't have their own opinion at all (e).

a. The cultural establishment is first of all made up of big decision-makers.

You might think that where so many cultural, technical and economic factors impose only these two kinds of art on the society, there's always hope for some outstanding individuals. The hope that a few big decision-makers on the top rung of the social or political ladder will oppose this levelling tendency; that they will introduce real pluralism or at least a timid attempt of pluralism.

In a nutshell, there's always hope that outstanding individuals also have something to say in History and may participate in the creation of culture, opposing the forces that mould the society.

Nothing of the kind.

Let me limit myself only to the French example from the last twenty years: three consecutive politicians, each of whom might at least have attempted to blast the monolithic block of the French culture, Malraux, Pompidou and Lang, instead of opposing the levelling, only escalated it. By undertaking certain material enterprises (the Museum of Picasso, Beaubourg Centre, renovation of Jeu de Paume etc.) by granting funds exclusively to the official art, they only deepened the tendency which reduces the same to a choice between decorative and formal art.

In other words, instead of enlivening pluralism, they did everything to eliminate and standardize differences, to impoverish and simplify the French culture over the last several dozen years. And yet their example will long be a lodestar for a whole army of medium and lower level decision-makers, and in consequence for artists themselves.

So the hope that outstanding individuals will resist the tendencies of masses and will introduce a grain of rebellion into the uniformity and levelling turned out vain.

The explanation of it is clear: big decision-makers in the West are politicians chosen in elections. This way they become hostages of the demos, that is, voters. And voters are the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia.

If the elected politicians demonstrate preferences for tragic art, in the eyes of the voters they'll come across as pessimists, badly prepared for a fight for the wealth of a modern society.

Can you imagine the bourgeoisie voting for a man who shows a penchant for tragedy? Can you imagine the intelligentsia voting for a leader who doesn't believe in art progress and gives himself over to pointless searches for the human soul? Democracy is an optimistic, fighting ideology and practice, dominated by hope. It doesn't accept leaders who won't lead it to victory. And since it has an effective weapon – elections - no wonder big cultural decision-makers in the West bow and scrape before its tastes or even anticipate its aesthetic preferences.

Finally, I'll add that the underlying cause of the simplification of culture to the “decorative art – formal art” alternative is the very assumption of a democratic society. That's because such a society is based on consensus, that is to say, on an agreement of all citizens on a few fundamental values. For this reason the task of every politician is to build and strengthen this consensus so as to ensure the society's coherence. The introduction of real pluralism might pose a threat to the nation's cohesion and general consensus. It's impossible to rule a really pluralist society. That's why in

democracy the duty of leaders is to strengthen what is common for the members of the society, and not to fuel differences which divide it.

b. The cultural establishment is also made up of state officials and decentralized art centres.

Well, officials are subject to hierarchical obedience. They must observe the cultural policy defined by their superiors, defined by the management of the institution they work for, and on top of the cultural policy hierarchy - by the minister of culture and the government.

Irrespective of their aesthetic sensitivity and their interest in expressive art, they mustn't cross the line marked by their own authorities. All conversations in museums or cultural centres aimed at convincing the officials of the necessity to grant some place to expressive art always end with the same refrain: "We have a policy to follow. You must understand us ... This doesn't mean that expressive art is void of any values, but we've already defined the aesthetics that we will defend and we have to stick to it ...".

But if you assume sticking to a policy, you also assume support, money, publicity for some artists, and silence, oblivion and refusal for the others.

c. Finally, the cultural establishment is made up of art critics.

Having no support of big decision-makers and clerks, you might think that in this system of freedom at least those who don't have to fear elections or the duty of hierarchical obedience remain independent and will grant support to expressive art.

Well, first of all, journalists don't earn much. Apart from a few powerful figures who are really free, the whole rest are to a greater or lesser degree bound to newspapers, radios and television channels. They are also obliged to observe the profile of the media they work for. They may occasionally depart from the rule, but if they stick to their guns, they'll be soon taken to task. For a newspaper, a television channel or a magazine live off the sale of programs and articles as well as adverts. And if the critics deviate from

the bourgeoisie preferences for decorative art or from the intelligentsia preferences for formal art, these media will also be taken to task by the readers or viewers, who will stop buying or watching them.

d. The cultural establishment in the West, all those decision-makers, officials and critics form a solid block of granite, without any scratches or cracks.

Despite their number, despite the appearances of individualism and diversity, it's a sectarian, monolithic caste, tightly bound by common views on art; the caste that doesn't know hesitation, the cast that shares similar or even identical interests, a whole system of acquaintances, recognition, recommendations and services. All these people leave the same schools and have heard the same lectures by the same professors, who instilled in them the same artistic preferences.

They've read the same books on art and have written the same doctoral theses on the same artists. All of them are cast from the same mould and share the same aversion to art other than the one they've been taught: decorative or formal.

They behave like a communist nomenclature of apparatchiks, whose fathers won "their" revolution, the revolution of impressionists and abstraction, and who are now cashing in on dividends due to them. They might lose everything if the trend changed its direction. They've also made their own intellectual and formal investments in the promotion of decorative and formal art, that is to say, the promotion of the official art. Their careers, their renown, their position within the ranks of the ruling elites find a guarantee and explanation in this art.

Therefore, the first imperative, which they don't even analyse as it's imposed by their instinct, is to forget, pass over, push on to the sidelines any tendency that would like to find its place in the Western culture.

Behind a screen of artistic tastes diversity hides a deep sense of community uniting the Western establishment, which is felt spontaneously,

like friendship bonds, like brotherhood of arms, like the spoils won in a victorious aesthetic battle. Each of its members separately has an impression that he's free in his opinions, that his tastes and choices are independent. In a mass, however, they're dressed in the same uniform, like soldiers, enlivened by the same will, managed by the same leaders in the same battlefields. They don't need orders, circular letters or directives showing the way to be followed. It's not worth threatening to dismiss them or impose disciplinary penalties on them for departing from the established rules. There will be no departures whatsoever. Under a thin layer of feigned polemics they have with each other, under a veil of little squabbles that set them apart and personal preferences they demonstrate, underside they are like a solid block of granite: homogenous and with no flaws.

The social consensus in the area of fundamental values is a blessing for politicians. It allows them to manage the society without resorting to force. Thanks to it, they don't have to put a policeman behind every citizen, because all of them spontaneously, leg by leg, voluntarily and with full conviction head for the same goals.

The cultural consensus, however, is a curse that any great talent, any great individuality, any great objection will smash against.

e. Finally (and this time I no longer express general opinions about the whole cultural establishment in the West), let me share the last reflection with you, the most bitter one. It concerns the minority of decision-makers, critics and culture branch clerks. Apart from that, let me strongly stress it, there's nothing special about it, as it applies to every social group in every political system.

Some of these people are as changeable as a weathercock, having no aesthetic philosophy whatsoever. They will go wherever they're offered most profits, where compensation in the form of popularity, respect or money awaits them. So a part of the cultural establishment in the West consists of opportunists, for whom the kind of art followed by a given artist doesn't matter if only it sells well and is "recognized". If an artist's work has been

sanctified by important people, it's become "exceptional". They will go in raptures over it even if deep inside they don't feel anything or loathe it. There are so many art critics, culture branch clerks and big decision-makers who are ordinary lackeys, obsequious to the "recognized" art and arrogant towards the one that has not been "recognized". For example all those who hate expressive art, but still enthuse about Goya, Munch or Bacon, just because the latter have been sanctified by museums and auction houses, therefore are "great".

The difficulty in promoting expressive art in the West lies also in the fact that snobbism and mimetism, which are powerful driving forces behind the promotion of unknown artists, have very little effect in the case of expressive creators. Except a few celebrities practicing this art who've been able to reach the Olympus of the local culture, few artists have been canonized by the Western establishment. That's why not many can be used as a locomotive which will pull other, less known or beginning artists, thus adding dynamics to the whole mechanism of promotion. Since there are no great references, a part of the cultural establishment in the West – the part which accepts only the art awarded with medals, raptures and praises – despises unknown expressive artists, whom they would otherwise "adore" out of snobbism and mimetism.

What's the conclusion of all that?

If nobody wants to lend me a microphone so that I speak in defence of expressive art, the only thing I can do is to build my own rostrum for expressing my own opinions.

Anyway, this corresponds to the logic of the local system: "Do it yourself". In the freedom alphabet in the Western style this formula is written in golden letters on all facades of local buildings: "Do it yourself".

To do that, it's necessary to have resources, which I don't have for the time being. However, one day I will have them. And then I will be able to speak to crowds as much as I want.

So instead of counting on the interest of some people and the support of other, instead of listening raptly to the waffle about "Western pluralism" and "freedom in the West", I must write and publish my own monographs. Then I'll have to open my own gallery, to which I'll invite expressive artists from all over the world.

It seems to me that this way I've said things clearly.

POST SCRIPTUM, 15TH AUGUST 1995

At the end of 1987 I stopped making notes about the enterprise of Beks' popularization in the West. Further writing didn't make much sense, because as the years went by, there was no significant change in my relations with Beks, just like there was no big change in the attitude of the Western establishment to this painting. So if I'd continued writing, I'd have had to repeat myself.

But at the end let me add a few details, which may interest the enthusiasts of Beks's painting and which happened after 1987. In 1988 I was able to collect enough money to publish at my own expense a 300-page monograph devoted to his photographs, sculptures, drawings and painting since the time he started till 1987. In the same year I organized another exhibition in Valmay's Gallery, which as usual was a great success with the audience and a flop among French decision-makers. During this exhibition I sold a number of paintings and again I recovered financially.

In 1989 I decided to move further and no longer depend on others, open my own gallery, where Beks's paintings would be exhibited on a permanent basis and where Ania and I could also exhibit other expressive artists we liked and admired. I found premises on Quincampoix Street, in a good location, just next to Pompidou Centre. It was a ruin uninhabited for dozens of years. I performed all necessary works and opened the gallery in the autumn of 1989 with Beks's exhibition on two floors (in the basement and on the ground floor). Then the basement was forever reserved for his paintings, and on the ground floor took place exhibitions of expressive painters, sculptors and fine art photographers.

In 1990 a group of Japanese people, who'd discovered Beks's painting through my monograph, bought his 59 paintings in most unusual circumstances. They organized an ephemeral museum of his paintings in Osaka, then vanished without a trace and were never heard of.

At that time, finally having money, I started buying absolutely all Beks's paintings. I bought them wholesale, paying three to five thousand dollars per a painting, as that was the price he demanded.

Using the same "Japanese" money, I published another monograph, devoted to Beks's works from the period 1987-1991. Just like before, I printed it in Korea. At the same time, paying half the costs, I partially financed the issue of another monograph by French publishing house Ramsay.

In the meantime I organized an exhibition of Beks's works in Germany and Belgium.

Being still the owner (despite the transaction with the Japanese) of the most characteristic works from the last decade, in the years 1995-96 I decided to organize in Poland a retrospective made up of 92 oil and acrylic paintings as well as 50 drawings. It was held first in the Archdiocesan Museum in Warsaw, then in Łódź, Cracow, Katowice, and in the end, in the National Museum in Gdańsk.

My relations with Beks considerably improved with the appearance of money from the Japanese. When after four years the money finished, there was a crisis as I could no longer pay 5 000 dollars for a painting. So using the pretext I'd given him by not paying the due sum for a couple of weeks, at the end of 1994 Beks broke off our arrangement for the reasons known only to him, immediately placing his paintings in Polish galleries at the price of 8000 dollars.

After the exclusivity agreement was terminated, the first rationale for having our gallery in Paris ceased to exist, because its main goal was to show Beks's works. Having no access to his new output, we would've had to settle for his old paintings. That would have been boring.

The second goal of our gallery was to propagate expressive art. Well, this art is not popular in France at all and wouldn't have let us maintain the gallery from the sale of artists following this tendency. For I must confess

to you, my Friend, that throughout more than six years of its existence we were able to sell only one small engraving by Podolczak, three small paintings by Starowieyski, two small formats by Stasys, one painting by Walczak, three small formats by Henricot, two tiny pictures by Guenier and one sculpture by Brenen, whereas we didn't manage to sell any works by Szajna, any paintings by Russev (whom we exhibited four times), any paintings by Rambier, any photographs by Prouvos, any photographs by Brackman, any graphics by Rozga etc. There was no sale despite the fact that these are great artists and each of the individual exhibitions devoted to them lasted for more than a month, costing minimum 12 000 dollars (the rent, invitations, posters, staff, taxes etc.).

Only the money from the Japanese allowed us to maintain a 100% loss-making gallery for such a long period of time.

To maintain it in the future we would have had to exhibit decorative or formal painters instead of great, though badly selling, expressive artists. Well, that didn't interest us at all, as we weren't interested in having a gallery for the sake of having a gallery.

For these two reasons I and Ania decided to close it at the end of 1995. The breaking up with Beks enabled us to issue these notes, which would otherwise have been published after the death of us all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Piotr Dmochowski, born on 27th June 1942 in Warsaw. After the fourth year of his law studies in Warsaw, in 1964 he emigrated to France, where he's staying until today. A barrister at the Appeal Court in Paris.

Mâitre de Conférences at the Faculty of Law at Paris X University. Since 1983 he has been dealing with the promotion of Beksinski's art in the West.

Together with his wife Anna, the author and publisher of two monographs about this artist as well as the co-publisher of a monograph published by French publishing house Ramsay.

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