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by Joanna Mytkowska and Andrzej Przywara

During the dozen or so years he spent in his studio/flat, Edward Krasiński created a changing yet precisely thought-out collection of works from various periods and objects he made specifically for the place. A version of this collection has been preserved in the studio. We found out about Edward Krasiński's death on April 5, 2004 while away in the Netherlands doing research for our participation in *Who if not we...?*. All new contacts and developments suddenly lost their allure. Krasiński had been seriously ill for many months, his flat had been vacant for more than two years, and we were taking care of the space. The flat was not a typical artist's studio, and we were always reluctant to call it a 'studio'. Krasiński never let anybody see him 'working' and was indignant whenever someone called what he was doing 'work'. If he invited anyone to the studio, it was to show the final effect rather than the process itself. The studio seemed a perfect setting for celebrating solitude and friends' visits. We knew that it would be up to us and the artist's daughter, Paulina Krasińska, to decide what to do with the place. We rejected outright the idea of turning the place into a museum, firstly because of the nature of Krasiński's 'oeuvre,' and secondly because of the deadness into which artists' studios fall if turned into memorial rooms. We were tempted to leave everything as it was, slightly coated with dust, and to show it rarely, to keep this unusual place semi-concealed, without subjecting it to any of the known procedures of memory recording. We realised, however, that if we did this, the fragile objects and subtle meanings would soon fade and vanish irretrievably. Besides, because of its location on the eleventh floor of an ordinary apartment block in downtown Warsaw, the place would soon gain the status of an oddity. Instead, we have decided to settle for a different solution: to leave the main part of the studio unchanged and undisturbed, but to surround it with a framework of modern architecture that would help extend its function and create various contemporary references to the historic studio.

We have decided to rebuild the corridor leading to the studio's two main rooms – Krasiński's private room and a 70 square-metre terrace – into a multifunctional space, suitable for organising meetings or exhibitions, and serving as a studio for visiting artists. A small office space and a guest room would also be squeezed in. We have decided to commission this project to Rotterdam's BAR architecture studio, whose work we know from Utrecht, where they converted a historic tenement house into the contemporary art centre, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst.

Edward Krasiński's studio has a lengthy history, and has in fact become a legendary place in the history of Polish art. In 1962 (when the building

was erected), the government offered the studio to Henryk Stażewski who moved in with painter Mewa Łunkiewicz and her husband Jan Rogoyski. Stażewski was one of the founders of the avant-garde movement, a member of international art groups of the 1920s and 1930s such as Cercle et Carré, or Abstraction Création. In 1927, he was one of the organisers of Kasimir Malevich's first exhibition outside of Russia, which took place at the Institute for the Promotion of Art at Warsaw's Polonia Hotel. In 1931, he established (along with Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro) and helped organise Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi in Łódź, the world's first museum of modern art. The works donated to him by foreign artists, including Piet Mondrian and Claes van Doesburg, now form the core of its collection. Stażewski founded and wrote theoretical texts for the periodicals Blok and Praesens. He was particularly interested in the concept of neoplasticism, which he popularised in Poland and used to creatively define his own artistic position. In the 1960s, Stażewski returned to painting with his critically-acclaimed series of white reliefs (1961). Stażewski's artistic attitude and vitality gained him the respect of many young artists, and in 1966 he co-founded Galeria Foksal in Warsaw. From the 1960s onwards Stażewski spent his mornings painting in an armchair that has been preserved to this day (and exhibited regularly), and entertained guests in the afternoons. His flat was a place of meetings and discussions, an enclave of freedom in communist Poland, and Stażewski himself was a link to the avant-garde tradition whose continuity had been broken after the war. Krasiński started visiting Stażewski and Mewa in the mid-1960s, staying on an off in the small room adjacent to the studio after Mewa's death in 1967, and moved in for good around 1970. After Stażewski died in 1988, the studio, once full of abstract paintings, gradually emptied, leaving Krasiński alone in an empty apartment.

The studio began taking its present shape in 1988 as Krasiński filled the place with works he had shown at exhibitions, and objects created specifically for the studio. The new objects always turned up as if en passant; slight readjustments gradually changed the mood of the apartment making it a true expression of Krasiński's personality. Living alone in the studio inspired him to produce a number of important works, which transformed the nature of his art. In 1989, Krasiński organised the Hommage à Henryk Stażewski exhibition at Galeria Foksal. The exhibition included black and white photographs of the studio's furniture: bookshelves, cupboards, windows, and doors, as well as several real objects, including a table topped by a shark's fin (as if a shark were swimming under the table), designed in collaboration with Stażewski. The illusion in the photographs is almost perfect, with only small details revealing which photo was made in the gallery and which in the studio. Life-sized black and white photographs of the studio transposed into exhibition spaces would become a natural background for the blue strip, Krasiński's means of communication. On at least two occasions the studio was the protagonist of exhibitions: in Münster (1993), where two

photographed views of the studio were cut into strips and stuck to two sides of columns; and at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw (1998), where Krasiński showed a labyrinth ending in a wardrobe. As the studio gradually filled with these objects duplicating its features, it became a play of reflections and repetitions.

The objects now in the studio refer to Krasiński's earliest artistic activities. His early objects, made since the beginning of the 1960s, were gravity-defying sculptures that try to hang in space or imitate movement: wooden spikes suspended on thin wires, falling drops arrested a moment before falling, bent and twisted cables and wires. The studio contains either the original objects or copies Krasiński made in the 1980s. The logic of their functioning hints at a predilection for theatricality governing the structure of the studio, an almost childish delight in imitation, subtly subverting the laws of nature and transforming the studio into a visual trap set for the viewers. Numerous objects suspended in space, improbable combinations of objects, omnipresent puns and situational jokes give the place an air of the absurd. However, contrary to what has often been said, they have little to do with surrealism. Suspending things on threads, leaning the heavy on the fragile, and a general inclination towards the peripheries, are more in keeping with Alfred Jarry's pataphysics.<sup>1</sup> Things halted in mid-drop, frozen movement, repetitions and tricks all testify to the artist's search for the impossible. The logic of absurdity reigns supreme in Krasiński's studio, though it avoids being pushy. An egg in an open bird cage, a tree branch growing out of the floor. A clasp fastened to the light switch, suggesting it has been hung on the wall like a painting; swelled floorboards rising several inches above the floor. A faucet in the middle of the living room wall. A stick growing out of the floor throwing a painted shadow. Photographs of friends stuck to wooden cubes suspended in the centre of the room. Furry mice fastened to various objects are embodiments of hallucination. All these imperfect instruments of illusion have something childish about them, and childishness is something Krasiński embraced, as when he insisted that others call him by the diminutive name of Edzio.

Running around the whole studio is a strip of the blue scotch tape Krasiński would become perhaps most famous for, stuck at a height of 130 cm. Its first appearance in his work dates back to 1968, when he stuck it to tree trunks in Zalesie near Warsaw. In 1970, Daniel Buren helped Krasiński stick the tape onto the front wall of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. From that moment on, the blue tape became his trademark. Buren visited the studio in 1974 and stuck his own tape on the windows of Stazewski's room. During his next visit, in 1993, to attend a seminar organised in the studio, Buren glued strips of tape on the windows of the apartment's central room. The blue strip can be perceived as a continuation of Krasiński's earlier sculptures, a natural consequence of their gravitation towards the linear, but also as a manifestation of the quest for dematerialisation, the desire to replace the theatre of cheap

illusion with a total figurative gesture. The strip could potentially appear everywhere, run without end: its possibilities were inexhaustible. It was by accident that Krasiński came across a 19mm wide strip of blue scotch tape, but it was an accident that Krasiński had been waiting for. Towards the end of the 1960s, the magical causative power of linear objects, in spite of their illusionistic nature, was starting to become exhausted. Krasiński was searching for a way out of the dilemma, as reflected in photographic records of his performances showing him entangled in the line (*J'ai perdu la fin*, 1969), standing next to coils of wire, photographed with moving objects: a folding and unfolding wooden zigzag. Photographs from the late 1960s show Krasiński at work; by the early 1990s, they would celebrate only his presence. One such portrait hung on the apartment's front door. Another, fixed to the frame of the bed in which Henryk Stazewski died, traced the course of spiritual heritage. Yet another shows Krasiński playing table tennis with a gallery owner, a red ball hangs in the air between them. Krasiński's most radical conceptual gesture preceding the blue ribbon was to send a telefacsimile message with the word 'blue' repeated 5,000 times as his contribution to the Tokyo Biennale (1970). When the ship carrying the works was stopped in transit, Krasiński, knowing the works would not get there in time, sent a telegram. The telegram and the exhibition plans have been preserved at the studio.

The strip was a means of self-definition often applied in external, urban space, and above all inside, in enclosed spaces. The ribbon could cut through everything in its way. It was particularly good for defining all kinds of back rooms, recesses, and other margins of official spaces. In museums, it was a useful device to determine scale. In the early 1970s, Krasiński introduced objects that were something of an obstacle for the strip. At first, these would resemble fragments of rooms: a section of wall with piping and a toilet chain (now in the studio), part of a door, or a wallpapered surface. Then, around 1975, the objects gave way to abstract diagrams of spaces, their axonometric projections. This gave birth to a series Krasiński would work on and modify for the rest of his life.

Other objects returning from exhibitions to the studio include the black and white reproductions of historical paintings Krasiński hung in the place of the originals at various museums (Łódź, Münster, and Göteborg). Another object reflecting his struggle with the act of painting is a black ladder used when mounting exhibitions, to which a slaughterhouse hook, complete with a blood-red point, has been fastened. The only thing hanging from the sturdy hook, however, is a thin string. The frailty of painting is also implied by several randomly arranged shot-glasses, each containing a drop of dried red paint and signed with a printed 'E.' Krasiński gave these small tributes to the death of painting to guests attending his seventy-fifth birthday party.

Krasiński described his situation as follows: 'I inherited a large, empty studio from Henio [Henryk Stazewski]. I had put up at other people's

places for all my life, and here I was with this studio all of a sudden: 120 square metres, and to top it all off, a terrace. Traces of his paintings were on the walls, the ghosts of Henio's paintings, these whitish rectangles on the walls. And wires. And now the place is too full again. But I haven't been arranging anything, it has been mounting, accruing by itself. Is accruing by itself. Building up, like dust on the floor. From time to time I made some decision, hang something, Henio's shelves were photographed for an exhibition and got back here; paintings, still packed, stand in the corridor because there is no place for them anywhere else. But I have the situation in hand, and I'm very careful for the place not to get cluttered. At the same time, it's neither an exhibition nor a collection. I only live here, though I'm still staying in the small room, just as it was when Mewa and Henio were here. The studio is to there to sit in, have a drink; sometimes someone will show up. I rarely go to the other room. There are only all kinds of remnants here. There is a large painting by Henio, which is a remnant. Hang something on the wall today, a painting for instance, and the next day it will have become a remnant, that why there are only remnants here.' 2

Edward Krasiński was an important figure in the art world when we met him in the late 1980s, and for us he became a friend and a reference point in art. His strategy of abstaining from action and distancing himself jocularly from the paradigms of modernism enabled us to understand the changing principles of art. Krasiński was always in tune with the times, liking to show his work with that of young artists, as he did with Paweł Althamer at Manifesta 3 in Ljubljana (2000), an exhibition that was very important for us. The gesture of sticking on the tape, marking one's territory, belongs to the unsurpassed romantic utopias of the past. Transforming one's life into a work of art is one of the few forms of asceticism available today. His studio was a microcosm, a world he arranged his own way. We would like this world to survive.

Translated from Polish by Marcin Wawrzyńczak