

REVOLUTION NOW!

THE CENTENARY OF THE REVOLUTION. THE TRADITION OF THE AVANT-GARDE AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF MODERNITY

INTRODUCTON or EPILOGUE

In the early 1820s, or nearly a hundred years before the October Revolution, Comte Henri de Saint-Simon first described the creator's position as a social visionary and leader of the then scientists and industrialists. At the same time, his pupil and close friend, Olinde Rodriques, developed this idea in an essay "L'artiste, le savant et l'industriel: Dialogue," (1825) defining the role of the artist as a strategist of the first frontline with a word taken from military terminology - avant-garde. This term later became the main linguistic determinant of any creative attitude identified with the imperative of social activism, wishing to reformulate the world and to set new, previously inaccessible horizons. This attitude - taken in the perspective of the Marxist class struggle - resulted from discord on existential stagnation and economic exploitation as well as social injustice and political hypocrisy. The year 1917 became a key caesura in which the artist - who turns and attempts to put an end to history - treats art not only as an instrument of his activity but as a building material that forms the world "from scratch". This utopian (historical and social) vision, intertwined integrally with

the messianic hope of eternal redemption, was accompanied by the conviction - for the first time in history - of the full and definitive identification of art with reality, where there was no room for illusion or imitation. Such an "avant-garde" attitude of total commitment created a "human-artist permanently rebellious" whose revolutionary sacrifice today gives us not only awareness of participation in history, but also a sense of participation in art as a cathartic act. The revolution in 1917 is one of the most controversial, most often discussed and aroused emotions, events in the history of the twentieth century, and the art born from it (avant-garde) has become - a critical and committed - mechanism that penetrates all areas of life today. The centenary of the Revolution is therefore an ideal contribution to reflection on contemporary culture and the human condition, and the point of departure and the common theoretical clamp for the texts collected in this volume is a reflection on a series of questions emerging from this anniversary perspective: Is there any new discursive approach to the old avant-garde tradition and the release of new wordings, assumptions, criteria or theses? Is it possible to accept, reformulate or reject the conviction that the Revolution has an undeniable

influence on the shape and development of contemporary culture, including (interlocking) art, film, architecture, media, etc. - as an interpretation and tools of new life, a new and constantly updated reality? Or, to what extent does the postulate of the "death of art" announced by the First Workers' Group of Constructivists in 1920 still be valid? And further, whether the Revolution (already today) can be mythologized or vice versa, is it still a nostalgic and utopian faith in the causative forces of art that repairs and builds the world? Is it possible to draw out a new common matrix of post-revolutionary reality, or if we can dare to formulate some new definitions - or vice versa - ask questions: are any attempts to define post-revolution still valid at all? Our positioning after one hundred years, like in the "new point o", gives us the opportunity not only to look back, evaluate the entire artistic tradition so far, but also stimulate the critical verification of modernity. The aim of the publication is to try to outline the image of contemporary culture and art within the postulate of social activism and the tradition of contestation inherited from the October Revolution: "we rebel, so we are." The avant-garde of today - when we consider it a revolutionary legacy - appears as a permanently rebellious, self-reflective, critical and everything examining state of mind typical to a creative attitude, both shaping cultural and political awareness and constantly stimulating social and individual vigilance.

Artur KAMCZYCKI

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The problematic and thematic spectrum that we want to propose in this collection of texts includes both the analysis of examples from the theoretical basis of revolutionary culture, and the broad context of art research (especially critical and engaged art), art history, art criticism and various research areas showing an interdisciplinary approach to the topic of the revolution today.

This collection opens with Andrzej Turowski's text "Revolution, Revolution, Revolution, ...", in which the author describes the historical heritage of avant-garde art as revolutionary art, but at the same time presents

the revolution as a permanent and necessary element of contemporary art, one that contains the critical potentiality. On the background thus outlined, the remaining articles take on the contributory character. They present the results of detailed research on issues with critical potential, that is three times, as in Turowski's call - revolutionary.

The article by Artur Kamczycki "*Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge. Revolutionary and Messianic Meanings of El Lissitzky's Work*" presents the results of interpretive research on one of the most important revolutionary works in the history of art. The author of the article presented the connections of this work with kabbalistic and mystical content in the Jewish tradition, and the revolution itself as an attempt to realize the utopia of creating the ideal world.

Iwona Demko in the article "*Zofia Baltarowicz-Dzielińska - the First Female Student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow*" brought this forgotten figure closer. However, she presents her not only as an artist with achievements. At the same time, she also performs the procedure of rewriting and reinterpreting history from a feminist perspective.

Anka Leśniak made the subject of her presentation the figure of Stanisława Przybyszewska, who was fascinated by Robespierre and the French Revolution ("*Revolutionary Woman in Gdansk. The Potential of the Radical Attitude of Stanisława Przybyszewska for Contemporary Artistic Activities in Political and Social Contexts*"). For the author, Przybyszewska is the model of a woman "disconnected" in history, and this very place is restored by her works of art. The *InVisible inVisible* installation cycle, dedicated to various women, is carried out by means of the art and research method.

Mariola Balińska, writing about Jacqueline Livingstone ("*Jacqueline Livingston. Photography as a Tool of Socio-Political Change*"), is making a similar challenge to the view on the history of art, one now written by a woman. In this case, the theme is about American art, but the critical idea contained in it is a similar one.

Małgorzata Jankowska ("*Algorithmic*

Revolution. Art, Gender and Machine") subjected to critical analysis the media art exhibition in terms of the presence of female artists participating in them. The author argues that new media art is an area of exclusion, just like old media. All four of the last mentioned articles presented above are the fulfillment of Linda Nochlin's legacy contained in her article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" that calls for a change in the patriarchal view of the history of art.

In turn, Magdalena Maciudzińska-Kamczycka in the article "The Golem. Posthumanistic, Rebellious and Revolutionary Subjectivity" analyzes the occurrence of this character from Jewish culture in contemporary artworks. The Golem appears in her interpretation as a model example of the existence of a post-humanist era.

Ewa Sobczyk took up the subject of the presentation of animals in works of art, animals that accompanied people in various historic moments, often treated with cruelty. Her text entitled "Animals as Victims of Cruelty, War and Revolution" is a critique of the anthropocentric perspective, and thus, although in a different field of research (posthumanistic), it also proposes a comprehensive review of the current point of view.

Anna Dzierżyc-Horniak ("»Time For Revolution / Revollusion«, Avant-Garde Between the Past and the Present, Between the Archive and the Performance") based her text on a comparison of two projects using archives: a joint project by Anna Baumgart and Andrzej Turowski *The Sun Conquerors / The Locomotive of History* [*Zdobywcy Słońca / Parowóz dziejów*] (2012) and the work by Nasan Tur *Time for Revollusion* (2008). The title is a play with the words "revolution" - "illusion", which allows it to capture the dynamics, in other words - the performativity of revolutionary ideas contained in the art of the avant-garde and its functioning in contemporary art.

Małgorzata Graś-Godzwon analyzed the attitude of Witkacy ("The Heretic Witkacy – Destruction in the Era of Constructionism") who, being a witness of the Bolshevik revolution in

Russia, was also a revolutionary in art. However, the author, continuing the thought of Piotr Piotrowski, presents Witkacy as an anti-utopian and catastrophist, and thus someone who was against the main current of the avant-garde, who assumed optimistic ideas of constructivism and progress in art.

Rafał Michalski and Katarzyna Lewandowska presented the figure, activity and thought of Olympe de Gouges, who during the French Revolution took up the fight for women's rights. In the article "Olympe de Gouges – Forgotten Female Hero of the French Revolution" they outlined the diversity of its achievements in the field of political writing, showed the insight of its view of social reality and the contemporary nature of the legal solutions proposed by her. In her view, the revolution carried a comprehensive, real social change, which was reflected by a change in the social role of women. These views cost her life - she was the only woman guillotined in the period of "grand revolutionary terror". The presentation of de Gouges's thoughts also includes publications of translations of her texts, including the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, 1791 (translated by Rafał Michalski).

A set of texts devoted to revolution and revolutionary art in contemporary art closes the presentation of documentation of two projects of works of art using its critical potential: Grzegorz Kłaman *Kapitalizm 2*, and Black Venus Protest.

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