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# PARTICIPATORY ART AND DESIGN – A RESEARCH CHALLENGE

## INTRODUCTION

Edited by Agnieszka WOŁODŹKO

Participatory art and design are slogans which occur often and in many contexts: from official documents, to descriptions of social activists' initiatives and workshops delivered by nongovernmental organizations, to project schemes of cultural institutions. These terms' current popularity raises questions concerning meanings that they actually convey or those assigned by artists who employ them.

According to Arthur C. Danto, the act of exhibiting the famous *Brillo Box* by Andy Warhol at the New York Stable Gallery marked the end of modernism. Then art entered a post-historical phase, and artistic practices turned to achieving other aims than finding an answer to the question "what is art?" At this stage of 'over-functioning' there appeared a new perspective – seeing art as a form of social consciousness. And so artistic activity entered public spaces in order to animate them.

It was also the time when people involved in the counterculture revolt started urging the public to revive social life and regain the subjective, individual role of people. In that context the changed pattern of the artist-audience relationship was received favorably; as well as was the idea to negate the division

between the addresser and the addressee of an artistic message. This is how participatory art works, since viewers here become participants and a co-creators of a given event. At the same time similar practices occurred in the field of design. Potential users were often included in the decision-making process regarding future shapes of spaces, objects, even services.

The hybrid character of such practices - located somewhat near social activism - caused many theorists and viewers harbor doubts whether those had not already stepped out of the field of art having moved closer to politics, and thus, completed one of the postulates brought forward by the historical avant-garde. Having looked through numerous publications regarding participatory art and design one may arrive at a conclusion that they have not been tackled much by art historians, rather by scholars in the fields of cultural, anthropological and social studies. The perspective characteristic for their fields of research allows one to perceive the abovementioned practices within the context of the new social reality and the social imagination that comes with it. And so, the group of culture oriented scholars at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań are focused on analyzing

values, norms and cultural practices of modern cities.<sup>1</sup> Whereas sociologists from the same university observe and document vernacular activity performed in urban spaces.<sup>2</sup> At the University of Warsaw anthropologists reflect upon inclusive artistic practices as the scholars research activities which locate themselves in-between the notion of local culture and the practice of artists-animators.<sup>3</sup> A sociologist - Monika Rosińska - affiliated with the School of Form in Poznań includes problems connected with design based on collaboration in her research concerning new aspects of contemporary design.

Among scholars involved in analyzing participatory art and design there is a certain tendency to search for some new, experimental forms of generating knowledge. The attempts they undertake are based on their own creative input and involvement which makes them both researchers as well as artists. Para-ethnographic artistic practices of an interdisciplinary group performing the *Wyzwania etnografii twórczej* [Creative Ethnography Challenges] research (2012), led by Tomasz Rakowski, can serve here as an example. Similar research practices are performed by the Studio of Social Art at the University of Białystok, Institute of Sociology - research here is led by practicing design and activating, animating, or intervening into the local environment. Finally, one should mention research initiatives located outside academic circles; for instance, the Szkoła Nauk Praktycznych [School of Practical Sciences] (2016-2017) in Warsaw, Praga district, organized in the form of a flying university.<sup>4</sup>

Articles published in this issue of *Art and Documentation* were prepared by such an interdisciplinary team of authors. They involve not only analyses of the abovementioned issues, but they also provide a broad socio-political

background. A sociologist, anthropologist and historian Cezary Obracht-Prondzyński reflects upon the contradiction observed between social passiveness and a strong belief that the crucial goal for our nation as a whole is creating a strong civil society. An artist, curator and culture scholar Agnieszka Wołodźko focuses on the roots of participatory art and design as well as their values; moreover, she introduces and classifies their already existent definitions. Finally, we issue a review of a publication *Animowanie Miasta. Gdańsk przestrzeń artystów* [Animating Cities. Gdańsk, the Artists' Space], where Maksymilian Woroniszewski - a Polish philologist - talks about texts which present a multi-faceted perspective on creative and animation activities within municipal public space.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Kulturowe studia miejskie. Wprowadzenie*, ed. Ewa Rewers (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The *Niewidzialne miasto* [Invisible Cities] project, realized in years 2007–2011 by the researchers of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Institute of Sociology, Department of Visual and Material Culture Research, in collaboration with the Metropolis company.

<sup>3</sup> Dorota Ogrodzka, Tomasz Rakowski, Ewa Rossal, „Odsłonić nowe pola kultury: projekt etnografii twórczej i otwierającej.” [Unearthing New Fields of Culture: a project for creative and opening ethnography], *Kultura i Rozwój* 3(4) (2017): 89–112.

<sup>4</sup> Szkoła Nauk Praktycznych [School of Practical Sciences] was led by a philosopher and urbanist Piotr Jaworski together with an artist Iza Rutkowska.

## Cezary OBRACHT-PRONDZYŃSKI

SOCIALLY USEFUL ACTIVITY  
– CREATIVITY, ATTITUDES  
AND RISK

This paper aims to present tensions between social passivity and a strong belief that the key issue for our national community and the state is to create a strong civil society. Within such a context, the question most usually asked concerns the character of the barriers blocking the development of civil society. They can be of formal, financial, structural, political, mental nature, but also relating to personality. Another important reason was the lack of a civic education system after 1989.

The basic mechanism for creating civil society was the non-governmental sector. The main aim of its work has led to the activation of citizens, which was - although often insufficient - the only way to overcome passivity or even civic laziness. The process was problematic especially for those, both individuals and groups, that had the capacity and competences to become engaged in public affairs, but for some reason they never did. On the other hand, one should take into account the fact that passivity is caused by the circumstances and conditions in which a society has been living (transformation trauma, economic division, distrust, increasing state oppression, etc.).

Nevertheless, it can be stated that the Polish nation has a great potential for social mobilization, empathy, willingness to help and commit. This can be observed both in microscale and with significant social campaigns. However, there are problems and risks that should not be forgotten. They concern for example new communication techniques and the so-called 'slactivism,' with ideological pluralisation deepened by political divisions, which further leads to changes in the sphere of language and the radicalisation of moods. This, in turn, requires a well-considered institutional response, which in the Polish situation can be difficult to achieve due to low trust towards institutions. In this context,

the importance of creativity and art is growing, as such factors could be an important area for strengthening civil society.

## Agnieszka WOŁODŹKO

PARTICIPATORY ART AND PARTICIPATORY  
DESIGN: SOURCES, DEFINITIONS AND  
VALUES

Over the past two decades, a demand for audience participation in creative and design processes has been increasingly felt. A profound transformation of the field of art is a consequence of its timeliness. The desideratum of participation of recipients and users as creators is not limited to the sphere of art, but also applies to city development processes, common spaces or digital culture. This is a result of the observed transformation of attitudes of both artists and designers who now want to expand the spectrum of their social presence to act as responsible citizens. However, today's proliferation of projects incorporating unprofessional and vernacular activities has not resulted in a broader analysis of this phenomenon in the field of art history. In this situation, a theoretical reflection that will follow the changes taking place seems to be an important need. The deficit of the correct understanding of the concepts of participatory art and participatory design translates into practical consequences in a situation where the slogan of participation is readily picked up by local authorities, referring to it during processes of urban tissue transformation and revitalization of neglected quarters. Therefore, the role of the following text is first of all – an indication of the sources of art and participatory design and the values associated with them, and secondly – a review and ordering of existing definitions. In this way, it has a chance to become an opportunity for rethinking what the phenomena actually are.

## Maksymilian WRONISZEWSKI

### ART IN URBAN SPACE: STUDENT RESEARCH REPORT

The text provides a review of the book *Animowanie Miasta – Gdańsk przestrzeni artystów*. The author highlights the notions of the Gdańsk's street art and artistic activity carried out at the Gdansk shipyard. He takes a polemic stand especially in relation to the questions of the origins of the Gdańsk-located artistic milieu of the 1990s as well as economic and market-related conditioning of street-art as presented in the book.

