

DZIENNIK OPINII

— krytyka polityczna

Żmijewski: Applied Social Arts

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Artur Żmijewski, 03.11.2007

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Yearning to be done with all this consequence

Art had long struggled to gain autonomy, to free itself from politics, religion, authority, and everything else that sought to use art for its own ends. Independence was to have made art more important: every avant-garde movement saw art as being equal in stature with such reality-shapers as science, knowledge, politics, or religion. Aleksander Lipski wrote: Non-figurative art has struck at the inviolable core of the traditional artistic paradigm requiring the depiction of figures. The global artistic revolution is therefore the culmination of the emancipation of art. The process whereby art severed all ties and allegiance to externalities such as politics, religion, philosophy, technology and the mores of the day was complete with the abandonment of one last

principle – that of signification.”¹

The desire to be an active agent creating the social and political environment came up against a hidden enemy, however. That enemy was – and still is – shame. Politically committed art has often come to a tragic end. Artists supporting totalitarian regimes, like the Nazi sculptors Josef Thorak and Arno Breker, or filmmaker Leni Reifenstahl, compromised the very possibility of art becoming an instrument of politics. Polish art owes its sense of shame to its fling with socialist realism.

Guilt and shame associated with the past alongside the desire for art to be an active, contributing presence in public life has produced a paradoxical effect. All consequences attributable to art are now suspect; every visible change occasioned by its commitments has come under fire. Even the unseen authority that comes from the co-creation of symbolic realities that lend structure to our shared world, whether we like it or not, is being challenged. That tangle of shame, fear of appropriation, and the desire for influence has led to alienation. Shame has set in motion the mechanisms of repression and denial. Instead of drawing enjoyment from the outcome of their actions, the visual and performing arts are content merely to dream of such outcomes: fantasy has supplanted reality.

The autonomy of art has therefore made it "inconsequential." The actions of art no longer have any visible or verifiable impact. The deficit that Peter Bürger once discerned in bourgeois art has made its way into high culture: "the exaltation of art above day-to-day experience [is] typical for the status of a work of art in a bourgeois society... Aestheticism is also a manifestation of art's failure to produce social consequences."² Naturally, social consequences have occurred, but not necessarily the ones that were most desired. Over the last fifteen years or so, these consequences have included:

1. scandals breaking out over the topics art proposed to introduce into public debate;
2. the continuing brutalisation of public debate has been attributed by *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalist Anna Zawadzka to the violent language used by art in the 1990s and the resulting media backlash;
3. players from the realm of politics "learning" how to use subversive strategies that had once been proper to art. Subversive strategies "are the best example of Benjamin's proposed shift of emphasis from 'content' to 'apparatuses of production' that enable one to use 'foreign' representations in making one's own work."³ One instance of such subversive action was when right-wing deputies to the Polish parliament Witold Tomczak and Halina Nowina-Konopczyna removed the stone (meteor) from the prone figure of pope John Paul II (Maurizio Catellan's *La Nona Ora*) during an exhibition in Warsaw's *Zachęta* gallery in December 2000. Tomczak and Konopczyna demonstrated they could "read and understand" the strategies of art, and were capable of using them. Once Tomczak and Konopczyna learned how to perpetrate a transgression, and violate the taboo associated with gallery spaces, they simply responded "in kind," using the language of gestures and visual action, the language of performance. In 1997, Katarzyna Kozyra used a hidden camera to film women in a Budapest bathhouse, and did the same in a men's establishment two years later. The resulting film was shown at the Venice biennale, causing the inevitable uproar in the Polish press. Repetition and media coverage helped bring this "denunciatory" strategy into the mainstream. In 2002, newspaper editor Adam Michnik secretly recorded film producer Lew Rywin when the latter came asking for a bribe, while in 2006 member of parliament Renata Beger filmed her privately conducted negotiations with other politicians and released the recordings to the media. Kozyra, Michnik and Beger all engaged in similarly questionable behaviour while emphasising the ends justifying their choice of means. Transgression has thus become a valid political strategy. Since then, a whole series of "negative" transgressions or violations of democratic taboos, have been perpetrated by education minister Roman Giertych.

4. violating one set of taboos leads to the emergence of other taboos (Joanna Tokarska-Bakir); perhaps art contributed to redrawing the map with its focus on some parts of the body politic, as a result of which others became taboo.

Art has therefore struggled to retain its power to act, but it should have remained as perpetually neutral as Switzerland in its exercise. And what would constitute fair use of that power? Let me quote an exhibition invitation sent out over the Web: "A profound interest in the physical and mental limitations of human beings has become the wellspring of Żmijewski's artistic inquiries, leading to questions his bewildered viewers ineffectually seek to answer." The foregoing provides a simple definition of what artists should make viewers: bewildered recipients ineffectually looking for answers. Evidently, art produces states of helplessness and generates questions to which there are no answers. The word "ineffectually" bespeaks the alienation art has unknowingly lapsed into. Asked what made him become an actor, Jeremy Irons, known for his portrayal of tragic lovers (*Swann's Way*, *Lolita*) answered that he wanted to be "outside of society."

Duty and Rebellion

The consequence of the trauma of "being used" is refusal. Guilt and shame have been encoded in art as a "flight from" – an ongoing process of inner negotiation well-expressed in the title of an exhibition Grzegorz Kowalski and Maryla Sitkowska mounted on the centenary of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw: *Duty and Rebellion*.⁴ Even though the exhibition concerned the academy as an institution, its title was indicative of a split present within art. A split that allows art to "work for" the state and the national economy, to serve society as a shaper of environments, producer of visual information systems, designer of interiors and industrial goods, in short – to do its duty. On the other hand, art is kept from lapsing into dependence on the authorities by its rebelliousness, because it insistently challenges the taboo, nurtures dreams, proliferates freedom, and produces social knowledge, (art can be said to be an open university of knowledge). Art constantly offers and denies its services to the powers that be. In doing its duty it usually does not cross a certain line marked out by shame. The deadlock between duty and rebellion does not permit identification or affinity with other discourses that are somehow associated with authority. At most art can impersonate or lampoon them: imitate the language of politics and religion, lampoon the language of the media, go for the grotesque. A sense of duty attenuates all attempts at rebellion, while outward rebellion compromises duty. This sets the frame for art, confined within the bounds of duty and subject to an ethics of, necessarily noble, rebellion delimited by shame. Thus does art erect a cognitive barrier for itself. Shame acts as an inner "parole officer" making sure rebellion is not taken too far. Art may be political as long as it stays away from politics – it can act politically in galleries but not in real-life debates unfolding in a different communal space, such as the media. It may be social as long as it does not produce social consequences. In the Nieznalska affair, for instance,⁵ the accusations in the media, the indictment, the hearings in court, were treated by Dorota Nieznalska and her circle as a calamity rather than an opportunity to practice art "by other means." They balked at the prospect of exerting social impact.

Having an effect implies some kind of power, and having power is what art is most afraid of. The problem being that it already has power. Art has the power to name and define, to intervene in the workings of culture, exert pressure on elements of the social structure by turning them into artefacts (art works). And every artefact is after all an apparatus for actively modelling fragments of reality. If politics is the power to name things, art has that power – perhaps even in spite of itself. Even a love story is an agent of cultural power because it can induce or channel emotional needs.

Let's get back to the freedom associated with rebellion. Is rebellion in art a manifestation of freedom? No, because it is limited by duty. Rebellion has its limits, and these are reached much earlier than the ones laid down by civil and criminal law. Rebellion has been harnessed to achieve a dialectical rupture. Where there is no rebellion, duty reigns, and art is reduced to the ancillary function of satisfying social needs and supporting the authorities. Rebellion must be present to offset the performance of shameful duties. That is why it is part of the package with its illusion of autonomy. Rebellion is, so to speak, "a duty."

Since the 1990s, art has been growing increasingly institutionalised. Institutional critics, now in charge of defining the remit of art, have been moving to mitigate art's "ideological turpitude." Fantasies about the alleged "needs" of the market-place are also discouraging more radical forms of expression. Defiance can only be taken so far nowadays, and besides: the art market will also commodify rebellion. Art is becoming more and more anodyne.

The Idiot Savant

Shame constitutes a deep emotional substratum of art. Shame at having been implicated in power relations and endorsing totalitarian regimes prevents it from engaging in politics or explicitly creating discourses of knowledge. Anything political and scientific can only be a by-product of art. Owing to this reluctance to "take ownership of knowledge," attempts to call attention to social problems or discuss areas society would otherwise be indifferent to are accompanied by opposition and even hostility towards discourses appointed to handle these problems and issues, i.e. science and politics. Autonomy in art has gone so far as to become a measure of ideological purity, an acid test of "artistic integrity." Symbolic power, strength through knowledge, openly political attitudes are simply rejected.

On top of it all, one has to contend with the ignorance of artists. As Marcin Czerwiński wrote back in the 1970s, artists do not have "the ability to translate intuition into discursive language" and thus

rely on "the germs of truth scattered across reality that have the potential to develop into either ideas or images."⁶ That is one of the reasons why art has been called a social symptom. The euphemism refers to the unwitting, intuitive way it performs an assigned task. Artists as creative individuals are, according to this view, unwitting mediums of social processes. Willingly or not they visualise its crucial junctures in a perfectly mindless way. That makes the artist an idiot savant of sorts: someone with interesting and important things to say but no idea how these things came to them or what use to put them to. Czerwiński calls such a state "ideological abstinence," while Joanna Tokarska-Bakir has this to say on the subject:

the artists of today might in a somewhat 19th century way be perceived as secularised high priests who, acting 'through the symbolic medium that is the physical human body,' try to act out ritually a certain form of unexplored social relations that has come to dominate the world. The problem being that the relations they want to express through art are understood neither by themselves nor by the societies they want to reveal them to.⁷

It might, in fact, be in the interest of society to keep artists ignorant to some extent. The cognitive procedures of art based on risk and intuition seem threatening. The lameness of theoretical education in art schools might be a symptom of unconscious reluctance on the part of the community to enhance the intuitive tools of art.

Overcoming alienation

Is there a way out of this trap? Is it possible to stop defining what does and does not befit a client of the authorities, of business, and even a rebel? Art has already made a step towards doing away with this dialectics. It has assumed the position of a judge, an evaluator – the paradoxical position of an "involved observer." It has elaborated strategies of social critique – a hermeneutics of the "socially evident." With her action where she peeled potatoes in Warsaw's Zachęta gallery Julita Wójcik encouraged us to read that commonplace activity as a statement about the shifting battlefield, a nod at things that are really hidden and outside the pale of high culture. Wójcik contributed to changing the protagonist: the nature of reality is determined by an "invisible majority," not by exotic exceptions. Critique along these lines can involve either artistic identification with "the causes of evil" or interventionist and remedial action in so far as that is possible. These are the constituents of a paradigm shift involving explicit support for processes of modernisation or discourses of knowledge, sometimes even agreeing to undertake topical intervention and negotiate on behalf of vulnerable groups. One can say that this has partly helped overcome the alienation of art, its shying away from consequence, its refusal to exert any real and verifiable influence. But there is more at stake: regaining control over the ideology that leads to the unthinking generation of autonomy and is the cause of continual regress, and limiting the audacity and scope of artistic action.

The Ignorant and the Illiterate

One of the reasons for the alienation of art is that it relies on the language of images. Despite their immediacy, images remain unclear to representatives of other disciplines. Pictures are not texts, they are read "all at once," all their meanings are taken in with a single glance. Such a suspension of linear reading, and the fact that meaning reveals itself in a flash and opens up a whole range of associations is tantamount to "cognitive violence." There is less scope for "proprietary images" than reading a text provides. Texts stimulate the imagination: when we read we see images – a mosaic of visualisations emerging from the memory and "superimposed onto" the text. Therein lies the blankness of words: a word is not the things it names. Images are bolder in the way they refer to the object depicted. "In a picture the object surrenders itself entirely and its image is sure – as opposed to text and other perceptions that render the object blurred and debatable, and as such cause me to mistrust what I seem to be seeing."⁸ Confronted with a picture, the imagination works not to fill in the blankness of words, but to determine "what is it that I see?" Yet what else can the thing I see be, since it is already "everything there is?" The inability to read images is surely a form of illiteracy, and experts from other fields could do with a few remedial classes. The ignorance here is twofold: artists are seen as ignorant by experts in other fields and vice versa: experts in the field of, say, science or politics are as helpless as children when it comes to "reading" images. Anthropology, for one, holds the view that art's involvement in various kinds of social criticism brings unclear effects:

Documentary practice has come to resemble fine arts photography – by drawing on the more subtle and abstract forms of photographic expression – at a time when photography as an art form is

evolving into some kind of fuzzy social criticism, ambiguous rather than straightforward and literal: a function of how photographers perceive society than of systematic analysis.⁹

The findings that artists put forward are seen as too ambiguous and not verifiable in any scientific way. But this only shows how bungling science is when faced with an intuitive medium, how prone to "cognitive fundamentalism." The result is another ideological debate in which opposing arguments are derided as being unclear, vague, ambiguous, etc. The passage quoted above also tells us that science has learned "more subtle and abstract forms of photographic expression" from art. Now that it has "become aware" of the cultural ubiquity of images, does science not want to dominate over the ways they are read? Just as it has dominated our thinking about knowledge, by peremptorily persuading us it is the only credible source of that knowledge?

Furthermore, the knowledge that emerges as the product of artistic activity is obstinately reduced to the status of a merely aesthetic proposition by experts from other fields. Even though art literally "shows" what it has come to know, and its knowledge is discursive and lends itself to reasoning, the cliché that art is merely a producer of aesthetics is so ingrained that it produces an "indifference effect" among experts from other fields. The knowledge art has generated remains inaccessible to them – they are unable to read it. Meanwhile it was none other than an anthropologist who wrote the following passage:

In this language [of film] individual images/frames are words, shots and camera angles are the inflectional elements, while editing provides the syntax. [...] A series of images, arranged – organised – according to a certain convention (the grammar of cinema) into a collection of takes directly linked to one another in terms of meaning, makes up a phrase of editing. [...] Depending on the way images and shots are spliced together, on the phrases used in editing, the idiom of film may be used to construct 'epic phrases' declarative sentences of sorts, depicting a slice of life, an action sequence, fragments of an event. One can also compose (edit) so-called 'reasoned phrases' – through the skilful arrangement of semantically unrelated visual and/or sonic (verbal, musical) fragments – thus evoking associations, bringing out analogies, and even constructing metaphorical sentences. In effect, a cinematic text may assume forms resembling discourse, and thus satisfy the basic requirement made of a scientific language."¹⁰

Virus or Algorithm?

As I have indicated, art has, of its own accord, rejected consequences, and turned its back on effects. Nonetheless, it still manages to come up with useful cognitive procedures. Existential algorithms, the use of which makes it possible to "keep your eyes open" when exploring social structures, to enter into hidden places and true relations. In the cognitive equation we construct out of known and unknown qualities so that we may, in solving it, make the world a more transparent place, art has replaced speculation with existence. Existence speculates, thinks, and comes to know itself. Rather than drawing graphs, art becomes involved in real situations. Its cognitive strategies do not place reality in brackets like science does. It goes beyond the bracket – knowledge emerges within life, it springs out of emotion, visions, and sensations, out of real experience. It is all these things at once. It is suffused with contradictions and anxiety, mistakes and hopes, good and ethical deficiency, authoritarianism and timidity. In order to know reality art does not patronise but becomes one with it. "Impossible," science would protest, "the observer must be external with respect to the object under observation. S/he is placed outside by the very act of observation." Art, meanwhile, claims that this need not be the case. The bracket and its observer intermesh in a total cognitive experience. The observer emerges out of it through the image which becomes both the gateway to knowledge and its source – a referent, an address, a hotlink. Images as an extremely capacious form of writing in which contradiction and incoherence may be inscribed without detriment to the discourse, convey total knowledge – everything there is to know. But there are, in that simultaneity, orders of reading, layered like a theatre stage: upstage, centre-stage, downstage, wings...

The problem has to do with the language of critical practice whose associations make it possible for art to be defined as inimical to society. One example is the language used to define the concept of an "artistic virus." Art, it claims, produces artefacts: social and cultural events that "infect" various parts of the social system just like viruses infect an organism. They "damage" or "alter" it. The infected system must change: heal or be cured. The problem is that the associations produced by the word "virus" are all negative: poison, disease, parasite, enemy. The concept of art as a virus infecting and operating in various parts of the social system leaves no room for verification – what is the impact of the infection? Does it ever occur at all? How do we check what an "artistic virus" has done? Can the impact be anything other than just infection? Infection which is in itself an

achievement because it sets in motion fantasies of change and influence.

Why must we talk about viruses, and not algorithms for instance? In mathematics, computing, linguistics, and related disciplines, an algorithm is a procedure (a finite set of well-defined instructions) for accomplishing some task which, given an initial state, will terminate in a defined end-state. "In mathematics and computer science algorithms are finite, orderly sets of clearly defined actions necessary to perform a task in a limited number of steps... Algorithms are to guide a system from a certain initial state to a desired final state."¹¹ Such rigorous procedures would, of course be dysfunctional when applied to art. But if a virus can be a metaphor for action, so can an algorithm. Algorithms imply something operational and positive, a mode of purposeful action, I am not proposing that we artificially replace one term with another, but that we change the meanings of language. One that would allow us to consider the possibility of impact, to see art as a "device that produces impact." As guiding the system from a certain initial state to a desired final state.

Restore Effectiveness

Neither the immunity of art nor its stature have any effect on science, and neither science nor politics are afraid of art. What ought to be done, now that too much autonomy has led to the alienation of art, so that it is "not heard" and most of the knowledge it generates is being squandered?

1. The first way could be for art to instrumentalise its own autonomy and thus regain control over it. Instrumentalisation would mean reducing the role of autonomy to that of a tool like other tools. Autonomy would then once more become useful for the carrying out of plans and would no longer be a means of controlling our (the artists') "ideological purity." Instrumentalisation is a "choice of dependency." Art could once again serve as an instrument of knowledge, science, politics.

2. The second way would be to encroach upon other fields, such as science or politics, as a way of proving oneself. The point is to work with people who are not in awe of art. Stature is what protects artists and critics from being "called." There is the famous story about Duchamp submitting a urinal he signed R. Mutt for an exhibition. The qualifying committee rejected the work, with only Duchamp himself voting in favour. The piece could only be shown once Duchamp admitted it was his work. What made the difference was the stature of the author.

The stature and immunity that protect art are unknown in sciences such as, say, anthropology or sociology. There, an artist's statement is a verifiable hypothesis that can be refuted with the aid of other, more convincing arguments. Experts from other fields are substantively better prepared to debate the claims art makes. Since art is interested in social issues, what better interlocutor for it than a sociologist or social psychologist? I do not want to overestimate specialists in other disciplines - they too are limited by the invisible assumptions of their fields. Nonetheless art reviewers lack competence. They need sociological, philosophical and psychological expertise. Karol Sienkiewicz in *Sekcja*, an Internet magazine run by art history students at Warsaw University, sums up the discussion around Repetition as follows:

less relevant are the artistic merits of the project - "project" because it cannot be brought down to a forty-odd minute long film. I am not referring to the editing, the aesthetic categories or whether this or that critic was bored during the screening - such categories are irrelevant when trying to judge or interpret Repetition. Perhaps art history and criticism with all their tools are still helpless in the face of [the work]. An art historian wanting to take part in a discussion among sociologists and psychologists can only assume the role of a homespun connoisseur."¹²

Critics often do not know enough, and this lack of knowledge can lead art back to aestheticising. In the archaic, circular mode of communication where critics mediate between the artist and the viewer, lack of knowledge on the part of critics "forces" artists to simplify their message. It forces them to return to a reduced art - one that is restricted to the bounds critics have set for it, an art their competence is able to "handle." For what the critic cannot understand cannot be expressed and never makes it into the circuit of knowledge, is not revealed within the work. That, too, is one of the effects - and causes - of alienation.

It would be interesting if a work of art were "defeated" in the course of a genuine discussion, a clash of arguments. At the moment, a discussion with such an ending is not possible: art overwhelms its opponents. You could say that the ability to defeat opponents is embedded in a work of art.

Embedded in the tangle of its ambiguity, stature, and immunity. Opponents find this knot nearly impossible to disentangle; and it perpetuates the symbolic violence encoded in art. Usually there is no dialogue in the first place, only a monologue where the artist provides a single canonical interpretation, and if there are any battles at all, they are waged to maintain the supremacy of that

interpretation.

3. It is also worth trying to keep statements by reviewers from being treated as decrees. Since the turn of the century we have been witnessing a clear ideological asymmetry – the voice of artists is growing fainter. It is being drowned by successive teams of reviewers proclaiming the emergence or obsolescence of certain subjects in art. Such was the case with the new banalists; with art meant to be helpful; with art addressing issues of globalisation. The most notorious statement to that effect was made by Magdalena Ujma on the website of the Bunkier Sztuki gallery, when she said that taking an interest in power has become "passé." The following year sociologist Jadwiga Staniszkis published *O władzy i bezsilności*¹³ ["On Power and Powerlessness"], a book taking up the issue of new forms of power, its changing image and means of control, and last but not least its networked nature. Would Staniszkis also regard an [academic] interest in power as being "passé?" In a world where the authorities fall back on "the terrorist threat" in order to reassert their prerogatives, where the government eavesdrops on law-abiding citizens, and changes the meaning of language, can power be so naively dismissed? Magdalena Ujma's comment brought out a crucial problem, that of the loss of an acquired competence. Encroaching upon the study of power relations gave art valuable competence in that field. But such competence has no chance of holding its own against the asymmetry of strength and frequency that obtains between statements by critics and artists. Artists "keep quiet" – they are reluctant to defend and explain their actions, and leave that task up to reviewers. What art will and will not be interested in can be determined by the skillful management of fads, by terming this or that "passé," and by alternately praising and wounding the narcissist within every artist. This is where something I would call ideological amnesia and the amnesia of competence come in. Art becomes skilled in carrying out certain cognitive procedures; when these become useful and universally applied, they are compromised. This is what leads to ideological amnesia, or the loss of an acquired competence. Just as art accumulates knowledge about modes of visual action: composition, colour, spatial relations, so could it, in theory, verbalise and accumulate knowledge about the cognitive and critical procedures it applies.

Does that mean that extending the scope of freedom in art is not merely an illusion? "The decrees of reviewers" have left us with an internal hegemonic discourse where pluralism should have been. A true area of freedom could be obtained by simply using the plural: if we had areas, fields of freedom. A variety of fields of interest and, above all, if we kept and developed the competencies we had once acquired.

The Applied Social Arts

Instrumentalisation of autonomy makes it possible to use art for all sorts of things: as a tool for obtaining and disseminating knowledge, as a producer of cognitive procedures relying on intuition and the imagination and serving the cause of knowledge and political action. Naturally, art may still perform its classical function and express "the most poignant moments of the human condition." Control over autonomy is not the only kind of control that should be achieved. There is still the problem of originality and opaqueness. These too should be tools that can be used freely when the need arises. One would have to strip originality of its judgmental function, that is its propensity for control and exclusion.

I think that art could try and restore the original meanings of words. The term autonomy would then mean the right to choose a sphere of freedom instead of being an extreme personality trait. Originality would be a sign of creativity and not novelty at all costs. And, finally, opaqueness would be indicative of the difficulty of a message, not its illegibility and inability to communicate.

Will dependence on other discourses: politics and science not lead to an ideological reduction of content to what is useful from the standpoint of a group's political interests, for instance? Such a risk does exist but there are at least two reasons why it should be taken up:

1. Art manages very well in risky areas, while the "uselessness" artists feel can encourage risky behaviour. Wilhelm Sasnal said he sometimes feels like a "gallery louse" in collaborating with an art world that produces tautological references. Dependence on clearly "utilitarian discourses" is in all likelihood a subconscious desire on the part of artists expressed in fantasies of change that could occur through the agency of art.

2. Politics, science, and religion can do what art no longer can: achieve a connection with reality by producing useful tools: tools for the implementation of power and of knowledge. By becoming once again dependent art may learn how to be socially useful, even at an operational level (it already knows how to challenge reality and can count on support for its proliferation of rebellion).

A good example of an artistic activity not afraid of entering into various forms of dependence is film.

Film is literally "used" by various discourses. Film is a way to intervene, fight for something, inform, educate, update knowledge, tell fairy tales, persuade, call attention to problems, critical junctures, etc. And film is very close to the realm of art. Today, the camera is the artist's best friend.

In a text about Elżbieta Jabłońska critic Dorota Jarecka asked: "Whom should art serve today, and for what purpose?"... [Should it] engage in political discussion that will always be inadequate when placed against the discourse of philosophers and sociologists?"¹⁴ Yes, it should engage in such discussion. Art will enhance that discussion with its ability to use different strategies, its familiarity with intuition, imagination, and premonition. Unfortunately, art also has severe weaknesses and tends to dismiss its own importance. It has infused its discourse with self-compromising, amnesia, and recurring ignorance. Theoretical subjects in art school are taught as if they were merely a device for expanding the memory rather than exercises in thinking and discovering the world. There is doubtless some political interest in keeping art weak by forcing it to flounder between ignorance and knowledge. By having it perpetuate seemingly useful clichés regarding beauty and the artsy types who produce it. In the collective circuit of power, art is never "charged" as its "inventions" are not accepted. Arrested on the verge of the rational, it makes its actions out to be nothing more than vivid yet irrational fantasies. In the 1990s it played the rube, paying its share of the bill for the changes happening in the country (that would partly account for the scandals around art in recent years) - knocking on a weak discourse pays off in the economics of national frustration. In any struggle for power somebody has to play the useful idiot - and art with its naivete and lack of defensive strategies was often used for such a purpose, notably by the LPR¹⁵. We all lost out on our the failure to use the cognitive procedures developed by art to any greater extent. Procedures based on intuition and imagination, procedures based on denying one's righteousness and giving up judgementalism.

Intuition and the imagination embrace repressed and denied fantasies, desires and needs, and help search for ways to satisfy them. Renouncing the role of judge will reveal our collective and individual complicity in the injustices of the system. Then it will no longer be "them" but us who will share responsibility for the way our shared reality looks.

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1. A. Lipski, *Elementy socjologii sztuki. Problem awangardy artystycznej XX wieku* {"Elements of the Sociology of Art. Issues of the Artistic Avant-garde of the 20th Century"}, (Wrocław: Atla 2, 2001).
2. P. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*.
3. Ł. Ronduda, *Strategie subwersywne w sztukach medialnych* ["Subversive Strategies in the Media-based Arts"] http://www.exchangegallery.cosmosnet.pl/subwersywne_text.html
4. *Powinność i Bunt. Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie 1944-2004* ["Duty and Rebellion. The Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw"], Galeria Zachęta, 2004. Ł. Ronduda, *Strategie subwersywne w sztukach medialnych* ["Subversive Strategies in the Media-based Arts"] http://www.exchangegallery.cosmosnet.pl/subwersywne_text.html
5. In 2001, Dorota Nieznalska showed a cruciform lightbox at the Wyspa gallery in Gdańsk. In the centre of the cross was placed a photo depicting male genitalia. The object was accused of offending religious sentiments, and a lengthy court case ensued.
6. M. Czerwiński, *Samotność sztuki* ["The Solitude of Art"], (Warszawa: PIW, 1978).
7. J. Tokarska-Bakir, "Energia odpadków" ["The Energy of Waste"], *Res Publica Nowa*, No. 3/2006.
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