



This book offers a critical approach to the legacy of Piotr Piotrowski (1952–2015), who has become one of the major figures in the discourse of both East-Central European art history and global art history. It focuses on an aspect of his writing that is less well-known to the international audience: his interest in the political engagement of art, artists and art historians and his devotion to issues of democracy. These qualities were always at the core of both his art-historical writings and his activities as a critic, curator, museum director and citizen. The book also emphasises the importance of friendship and the role it plays in the practice of art history. Piotrowski's winning personality attracted a substantial number of people, enabling him to build long-standing relationships that offered mutual professional and personal influence.

Compiled after Piotrowski's untimely death, the book includes contributions by Polish and international scholars who had an impact on Piotrowski's intellectual development, identify themselves as belonging to his school of thought, or acknowledge his influence on their critical and historical writing: his teachers, students and colleagues, with whom he collaborated throughout his life. They offer an insight into different periods in Piotrowski's academic work, presenting not only the development of his intellectual biography, but also of East-Central European art history. The included essays benefit from their authors' close collaborations with Piotrowski, or at least from numerous discussions with him, which makes this volume unique in its combination of scholarly discourse and subtle personal overtones.

**Piotr Piotrowski**  
Center for Research  
On East-Central  
European Art

ISBN 978-83-232-3577-4  
ISSN 0556-1019



**After Piotr Piotrowski: Art, Democracy and Friendship**

## **After Piotr Piotrowski: Art, Democracy and Friendship**



After Piotr  
Piotrowski:  
Art,  
Democracy  
and  
Friendship





ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAŃ

SERIES: HISTORIA SZTUKI NO. 44

# **After Piotr Piotrowski: Art, Democracy and Friendship**

Edited by  
Agata Jakubowska  
and Magdalena Radomska



POZNAŃ 2019

Reviewer: Professor Anna Markowska (Wrocław University)

Publication of this book has been financed by  
the Institute of Art History and the Erste Foundation



**ERSTE**  
Stiftung

© Adam Mickiewicz University Press, Poznań 2019

Translations: Wojciech Szatkowski (texts by Andrzej Turowski, Magdalena Radomska),  
Ewa Kanigowska-Gedroyć (texts by Izabela Kowalczyk, Jakub Dąbrowski,  
interview with Jarosław Kozłowski), Marcin Wawrzyńczak (text by Piotr Piotrowski)

Cover design: K. & S. Szurpit

Cover photo: Piotr Piotrowski, *Self-portrait*, 1972, from the Piotr Piotrowski Archive

Layout: Elżbieta Rygielska

DTP: Reginaldo Cammarano

Copyediting and proofreading: Darren Durham

ISBN 978-83-232-3577-4

ISSN 0556-1019

ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY PRESS

61-701 POZNAŃ, A. FREDRY STREET 10

e-bookshop: <http://press.amu.edu.pl>

Sales Department: tel. 61 829 46 40, e-mail: [press@amu.edu.pl](mailto:press@amu.edu.pl)

PRINT AND BINDING: VOLUMINA.PL DANIEL KRZANOWSKI,  
SZCZECIN, KS. WITOLDA STREET 7-9

# Table of contents

Introduction – AGATA JAKUBOWSKA, MAGDALENA RADOMSKA 7

## Part One

### Practicing Art History and Friendship

The Criterion of Attitude: A Conversation with JAROSŁAW KOZŁOWSKI 21

ANDRZEJ TUROWSKI, An Interrupted Dialogue 35

Writing a History of East-Central European Modern and Contemporary Art  
in the (Former) West and (Former) East: A Conversation with STEVEN MANS-  
BACH 61

BOJANA PEJIĆ, A Politics of Friendship (Remembered) 75

## Part Two

### Meanings of Democracy

IZABELA KOWALCZYK, Politics, Emancipation and Democracy – According to  
Piotr Piotrowski 93

TAMÁS SZENTJÓBY, Protest pro Piotr Piotrowski, Budapest, 2010 117

JAKUB DĄBROWSKI, In the Shadow of Power: Piotr Piotrowski on the Freedom  
of Art and on Censorship 119

PAWEŁ LESZKOWICZ, Piotr Piotrowski and the Queer Revision of East-Central  
European Art and Museology 143

MAGDALENA RADOMSKA, Dangerous Consensus: Piotrowski's Remarks about  
Democracy, Framed with(in) Marxism 169

## Part Three

### Global Politeia

BOŻENA CZUBAK, On the Margins of the “Global Politeia” **195**

PIOTR PIOTROWSKI, Krzysztof Wodiczko and the Global Politeia **201**

Authors’ Biographical Notes **219**

Index **227**

## Introduction

Piotr Piotrowski (1952–2015) has become one of the major figures in the discourse of East-Central European art history and also global art history, being among those who understood that the world's new geopolitical situation requires a revision of the ways that art-historical discourse is formulated. His concept of “horizontal art history”, developed during the process of writing the history of post-war art created in East-Central Europe, proved to be of worldwide importance.<sup>1</sup> Yet the significance of Piotrowski's writings and activities goes beyond that, and in this book we concentrate on a different aspect, lesser-known to the international audience – namely his interest in the political engagement of art, artists and art historians.

Born in Stalinist Poland, educated in a post-totalitarian society, and developing his academic career in post-communist Europe, Piotrowski always put the issue of democracy at the core of his art-historical writings and his activities as a critic, curator, museum director and citizen. His politically engaged writings bear witness to Poland's turbulent transformation from a post-totalitarian socialist country to a post-communist democracy, and of the role art played in that transformation. All the forms of Piotrowski's activities – his research, university teaching and political activism – were distinguishable as being imbued with his appealing personality, and this – one may say – was structured by a dialectical relationship of openness and radicalism. The first feature allowed him to create a substantial network of people working on the subjects that interested him most; the second contributed to the fact that he often had great impact on their theoretical approach. He bluntly and bravely addressed controversial problems, and remained open to similar responses. His affection for people, and his strong commitment to the practices of “radical democracy” – as introduced by Chantal Mouffe – and Rancièrian “dissensus” resulted in many long-standing friendships enlivened by fervent disputes.

---

<sup>1</sup> A book on horizontal art history is being prepared by the Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central European Art (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, [www.piotrpiotrowski-center.amu.edu.pl](http://www.piotrpiotrowski-center.amu.edu.pl)).



\* \* \*

Piotrowski studied at the Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań from 1971–1976; the institution remained his “home” for his entire life. During his studies he met two important teachers with whom he developed lifelong friendships: Andrzej Turowski – a scholar with a strong Marxist background, working on Russian and Polish constructivism, who, as Piotrowski said, “with his leftist inclinations opened up the possibility of exercising a subversive art history”<sup>2</sup>; and Jarosław Kozłowski – a conceptual artist – who at the time was developing his mail art initiative, “NET”, which would put Piotrowski into contact with a whole network of artists around the globe and equip him with direct knowledge of art in East-Central Europe.

The time of the Solidarity upheaval brought Piotrowski to politics – he was a member and co-founder of the Solidarity Trade Union at the university, and after the imposition of martial law by state authorities in December 1981 he became involved in the underground opposition movement. This had a strong influence on both his practice of friendship, rooted in collectivity, and on his notion of democracy, later framed by him with post-Marxist thought rather than a neoliberal context. He perceived Solidarity as a labour union of civil resistance, and strongly criticised its later role in rightist politics.

The first half of the 1990s was the period of Piotrowski’s intense scholarly and professional development. Owing to several research grants he had received, he spent a fairly long time in the USA, where he “discovered” texts and publications by authors affiliated with *October* magazine, and in which he saw connections to his own ideas on art and power, thereby allowing him a different perspective on his Marxist background.<sup>3</sup> Hal Foster’s concept of critical art, and Michel Foucault’s concept of

<sup>2</sup> “Miłość do emancypacji. O warsztacie i zaangażowaniu badacza humanisty rozmawiają Luiza Nader, Katarzyna Bojarska i Adam Mazur” [Love for Emancipation: On the Know-How and Engagement of a Researcher-Humanist. In Conversation with Luiza Nader, Katarzyna Bojarska and Adam Mazur], *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* no. 3 (2013), <http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/87/115> (accessed 06 August 2018).

<sup>3</sup> One of the crucial texts written by Piotr Piotrowski – on horizontal art history – begins with an expression of his disappointment with the authors of *Art since 1900*, American art historians associated with *October* magazine, belonging to a group of art historians that has done much to revise the paradigm of art-historical studies, but have proved to support rather than

power (not read directly but mediated by “French Theory”) proved to be especially influential. Combined with his experience in the opposition movement, they became his tools for the criticism of post-transitional mechanisms of power that silenced the collective spirit of revolution and strengthened dependence on centralised and Church-related authority. Freedom of artistic expression and the issue of censorship were present in Piotrowski’s writing since the 1990s; engagement with both feminist and sexual minorities’ issues were to become extremely important in his historical writing and civic participation.

In the 1990s Piotrowski concentrated on rewriting post-war Polish art history, and simultaneously developed his interest in East-Central Europe. In *Znaczenia modernizmu: w stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* [*Meanings of Modernism: Towards a History of Polish Art after 1945*] (1999) he tried to outline the most important processes taking place in Polish art history after World War II. He invalidated seemingly antithetical notions established in Polish art history, such as official and unofficial art, and replaced them with a different distinction between “autonomous” and politically engaged approaches.

In 1994 in Poznań, the international congress *Culture of the Time of Transformation* was organised, where Piotrowski was responsible for the part dedicated to the visual arts.<sup>4</sup> At the time Piotrowski became a member of an international community of scholars dealing with East-Central European art, gradually playing an increasingly important role in it.<sup>5</sup> His engaged and innovative writing, along with his winning personality, resulted in a central position in the field.

---

challenge its Western-centrism; see: Piotr Piotrowski, “Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde”, in: *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, eds. Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tania Orum and Hubert van den Berg (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 49.

<sup>4</sup> Two editions of the international congress *Culture of the Time of Transformation* were organised in Poznań in the 1990s, dedicated to the culture of Central and Eastern Europe. The first took place from 02–05 February 1994, the second from 11–14 March 1998. Both were organised by the Poznań Society of Friends of Arts and Sciences.

<sup>5</sup> In 2010 he was honoured with the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory. The jury emphasised that he was an outstanding art historian of the East-Central European region, “active in setting up a network, as well as disseminating the specific art practices and ideas that originate in the region, outside of the centres. By doing so, Piotr Piotrowski acts as a sort of cultural ambassador.” <http://www.igorzabel.org/en/award/award-2010> (accessed 25 August 2018).



The Igor Zabel award ceremony, 10 December 2010 at MACBA, Barcelona. Photo: David Campos. Courtesy of the Erste Foundation and the Igor Zabel Association.

Piotr Piotrowski was the recipient of the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory 2010. Three working grants were awarded by the jury: Maja and Reuben Fowkes, the Romanian curator Raluca Voinea, and the interdisciplinary Peace Institute from Ljubljana, Slovenia. The fourth was appointed by Piotrowski himself, as laureate, and went to the Bratislava-based art historian Daniel Grúň. The jury in 2010 consisted of the following members: Edit András, Chus Martínez and Tadej Pogačar.

Piotrowski was convinced that it is essential to rethink how to write the history of the region in such a way that it will challenge the Western paradigm of art-historical discourse. He often emphasised the necessity of the re-evaluation of the seemingly neutral, omnipotent discourse of Western art history and its canon. He emphasised the need for a paradigm change, whereas in East-Central Europe many scholars relished the Western canon, trying to read East-Central European works in its context and fit them into it. Piotrowski's objective was not to extend the canon, but to differentiate it by introducing the perspective of critical geography, which challenges the relationship

between the centre and the margins. The critical geography of art (created initially in a dialogue with Irit Rogoff's critical cartography) was understood by him primarily as "a discourse on the relationship between different places". This relationship interested him as it revealed power relations, and because its analysis always aimed at questioning the centre's power. As Piotrowski claimed, the question of the relationship between different European places, particularly between West and East or Central Europe, is first of all the question of the centre, where power resides, and the margins, which are the object of power strategies.<sup>6</sup>

The existing discourse of art history was recognised and described by Piotrowski as "the hierarchical, vertical discourse ordering the artistic geography in terms of centres and peripheries".<sup>7</sup> He was not convinced by Hans Belting's "two voices of the history of European art" – the first, Western art history, and the second, Eastern European, as an alternative: "the task is not to provide the 'other voice of art history'" – he claimed – "but to establish another paradigm of writing art history".<sup>8</sup> That paradigm was named "horizontal art history". It is very likely that Piotrowski perceived this as parallel to the concept of "radical democracy" introduced by Chantal Mouffe – namely, he coined a notion that made possible the inner polemics he believed were inherent to both art history and democracy (and that he kept under peculiar protection), and maintained it as a critical battlefield. His role in discussions problematising the relationship of the centre vs the periphery/ies mirrors his resistance towards the socio-political (but also the discursive and visual) exclusion of various minorities.

In his book *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, which can be considered one of the most influential books on East-Central European art history, extensively quoted and translated into a number of languages, Piotrowski actively practiced the notion of horizontal art history. He introduced a critical, geopolitical, comparative narrative, which, rooted in the complexity of modernism, challenged the established discourse on East-Central European art by describing the conflictual contexts of particular regional narratives. He argued that, "depending on

<sup>6</sup> See: Piotr Piotrowski, "Between Place and Time: A Critical Geography of 'New' Central Europe", in: *Time and Place: The Geohistory of Art*, eds. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Elizabeth Pilliod (Hants: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Piotrowski, "Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde", 51.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

the location and political context, the same type of art could have radically different meaning and significance in different countries of the region”.<sup>9</sup> His intention was to create the critical “map of the region and [the outline] of its historic and geographic dynamics”.<sup>10</sup> He strongly objected to what he considered to be an effect of the oppressiveness of the Western, hegemony-unified vision of East-Central European art, and elaborated on the nuanced differences between countries based on differing historico-political contexts.

Piotrowski recognised democracy as one of the crucial determinants of context; even prior to publishing his book *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* it silently framed his arguments. *Art and Democracy* brought the essential shift in Piotrowski’s methodological approach. He problematised the notion of post-communist Europe, recalling the theories introduced by Susan Buck-Morss and Boris Groys, and included in his research countries of the former Soviet Union. He elaborated on the juxtaposition of post-communist and postcolonial studies, perceiving it as *problematic from a historical point of view*. Instead, ascribing the notion of “agoraphobia”, borrowed from Rosalyn Deutsche, to the communist period, Piotrowski employed the term “agoraphilia”, which according to him, in its political nature, “signifies the drive to enter the public space, the desire to participate in that space, to shape public life, to perform critical and design functions for the sake of and within the social space”, and “provides the key to the description” of the art of the region after 1989.<sup>11</sup> It is clearly visible how discussions led by Piotrowski with friends such as Bojana Pejić, Edit András, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Jarosław Kozłowski and Tamás Szentjóby influenced his writings – their concepts appear in his argument as a result of conference and private debates, and even conflicts, which – similar to how Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau defined democracy – were perceived by Piotrowski as being essential to friendship.

From 2009 to 2010 Piotrowski worked as the director of the National Museum in Warsaw. His radical position led to his resignation from the position, caused by the

<sup>9</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 10. First published in Polish as *Awangarda w cieniu Jalty. Awangarda w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1945–1989* (Poznań: REBIS, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 7. First published in Polish as *Agorafilia. Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* (Poznań: REBIS, 2010).

rejection of his programme by the museum's Board of Trustees. The gesture, however, appears as a consequence of, and not a resignation from, the concept of the "critical museum", as conceptualised in his book *Muzeum krytyczne* [*The Critical Museum*] (2011).<sup>12</sup> The critical museum appears as a concept parallel in structure to both "radical democracy" and "horizontal art history" – demonstrating that inner criticism conditions the maintenance of those notions. The book reflects Piotrowski's dialectical (both theoretical and practical) stance as applied to the critical museum. Describing the general assumptions of the new museology, Piotrowski deliberated on the possibility of introducing such a critical approach to East-Central Europe, and simultaneously presented examples of exhibitions that were a realisation of the idea, among them *Ars Homo Erotica* curated by Paweł Leszkowicz.

Piotrowski's answer to the question that became clearly heard in the new millennium – of how to write global art history – came from the consistent development of his horizontal approach. While many claimed that the globalised condition of today's art production challenges art history, Piotrowski saw that the need to rethink art history comes from a different direction – namely politics. In his last, unfinished project – *The Global Viewpoint of Eastern European Art* – he proposed a horizontal comparison of art created at particular historical moments, such as 1947, 1956, 1968 and 1989, in parts of the world where major changes occurred at those times ("the horizontal historical plane").<sup>13</sup> As regards 1989, his crucial observation was that the fall of communism in Europe coincided with the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and also with earlier events that culminated in the rejection of totalitarian regimes by various South American countries; he emphasised the return of democracy in those parts of the world. Although the relationship between the centre and the peripheries was always important for him, an equally crucial position was occupied by the problem of the relationship between art and politics in particular countries. Thus, when he compared East-Central Europe, South Africa and South America, he preferred to talk about similar situations in regions designated as post-communist, post-apartheid and post-authoritarian, but not postcolonial. He argued that there is a crucial discrepancy between the global character of the economy and local models of democracy, established and dictated by individual countries, which contributes to the

<sup>12</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne* (Poznań: REBIS, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> The unfinished book was published in Polish after Piotrowski's death as *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej* [*The Global Viewpoint of Eastern European Art*] (Poznań: REBIS, 2018), 39.

crisis of democracy.<sup>14</sup> Therefore he stated the need for what he called “global politeia” and “global agoraphilia”. He defined democracy as an “agonistic agora, rather than [a] shopping mall or perfectly organised factory”,<sup>15</sup> emphasising the crucial role of global art in building global democratic foundations.<sup>16</sup> Piotrowski gave up on the postmodern paradigm, which he identified with deconstruction, and claimed that the globally engaged artist must work towards democracy. He argued for transnational democratic structures, claiming that “local political structures are not able to protect citizens from being exploited by global corporations”.<sup>17</sup>

Piotr Piotrowski is one of few researchers in East-Central Europe who created their own research school. Firstly, in the strict sense of the word, with his graduate students, such as – to name but a few – Agata Jakubowska, Izabela Kowalczyk and Paweł Leszkowicz, who specialise in variously embedded discourses related to feminism and LGBTQ rights; Jakub Dąbrowski, focused on the legal aspects of censorship in art; and Magdalena Radomska, developing research on the art of communist and post-communist Europe from a Marxist perspective. Secondly, in a broader sense, the concept of a school refers to a wide group of international researchers engaged in research on the art of East-Central Europe and in practices that challenge the hegemonic discourse of Western art history, and who identified themselves with the methodological position Piotrowski developed.

Compiled after Piotrowski’s untimely death, this book includes contributions by Polish and international scholars who either had an impact on Piotrowski’s intellectual development, identify themselves as belonging to his school of thought, or acknowledge his influence on their critical and historical writing – his teachers, students and colleagues, with whom he collaborated throughout his life. They offer an insight into different periods in Piotrowski’s academic work, presenting not only the development of his intellectual biography, but also of art history written in East-Central Europe about the region’s art. In addition to discussing his work, a number of contributors, having deep knowledge of Piotrowski’s Polish background, offer an overview of Polish culture before and after 1989. The included texts benefit from the close collaboration of their authors with Piotrowski, or at least from numerous discussions with him, which is

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 149.



what makes this volume unique in its combination of rigorous scholarly discourse and subtle private overtones. Some authors decided to refer to Piotr Piotrowski by his first name, others by his family name. As editors, we decided to leave the choice to them. Similarly, although we agreed upon the use of the notion of East-Central Europe (from among many possibilities) as most suitable for Piotrowski's legacy, we decided not to interfere with the choices of our authors, in order to accentuate differences rather than trying to establish a unified system.

The book is divided into three parts that concentrate on crucial notions – friendship and democracy – through which we propose to look at Piotr Piotrowski's legacy. The first part – *Practicing Art History and Friendship* – begins with an interview with Jarosław Kozłowski conducted by Adam Mazur, which is devoted to the lifelong cooperation and discussion between this prominent Polish conceptual artist and Piotrowski. The conversation touches on issues such as the activities of the Akumulatory Gallery – a seminal alternative gallery space operating during the 1970s in communist Poland, created by Kozłowski and his students, including Piotrowski; the NET project, based on the mutual relationships between artists from Central Europe and the peripheral areas, such as South America, that Piotrowski later investigated; and Piotrowski and Kozłowski's discussions concerning the autonomy of art and art's role in political resistance.

The subsequent text, by Andrzej Turowski – Piotrowski's senior colleague at the Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, a practitioner of Marxist discourse and a prominent scholar of the Russian avant-garde, who inspired Piotrowski's early work – offers an image of their deep scholarly friendship. Turowski reconstructs their regular discussions – in person and above all in their writings – on themes such as the role of socio-artistic utopias, or the relationship between political power and revolutionary art. We also gain an insight into the specificity of the Poznań art history that strongly influenced Piotrowski's intellectual interests.

The next two contributions present Piotrowski as a member of an international milieu of artists and scholars, among whom common interests intersected with mutual affection. An interview with Steven Mansbach, author of *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939* (1999), conducted by Agata Jakubowska, concentrates on the advancement of research on East-Central European avant-gardes (historical and contemporary) during the 1990s, which is examined here both in political, personal and social contexts. Mansbach pays attention to Piotrowski's friendly



relationships and winning personality as factors that were important in developing research and the distribution of its results. The text by Bojana Pejić, who curated crucial exhibitions connected to the identity of the art of East-Central Europe, such as *After the Wall* (1999) and *Gender Check* (2009/2010), reflects on friendship and communality as crucial elements of East-Central European art history creation in the 1990s, as well as on how discussions with Piotrowski played an important role in Pejić's theoretical approach to curatorial practice and its conceptualisation.

The second part of the book – *Meanings of Democracy* – consists of texts written by a younger generation of scholars, Piotrowski's former students, who shared his interest in the relationship between art and politics, and his devotion to issues of freedom of expression and women's and sexual minorities' rights. The author of this section's first text, Izabela Kowalczyk, analyses the political involvement of Piotrowski's writing on art and culture, presenting it against the changing political situation in Poland and East-Central Europe. She begins with his engagement in the underground Solidarity movement of the 1980s, and concludes with Piotrowski's participation in the initiative for democracy called the "Open Academy". The text by Jakub Dąbrowski concentrates on the notion of freedom, an essential issue in the East-Central European art made both during communism and after its fall, and one that is constantly present in Piotrowski's writings. Dąbrowski analyses Piotrowski's texts and activities related to freedom of expression and its suppression by censorship, demonstrating how discussions about censorship in Poland and East-Central Europe have changed over time. He outlines the tension between democracy and censorship, inscribing the writings of Piotrowski into pre-existing methodological frameworks on the subject. The essay by Paweł Leszkowicz analyses aspects of Piotrowski's writings and museological practice that dealt with the artistic and political expression of the sexual revolution in East-Central European art, presenting Piotrowski's ground-breaking critical studies of body art and masculinity in the art of the region, as well as his understanding of the subversive and democratic potential of LGBTQ visual culture. The last text in this section, written by Magdalena Radomska, elaborates the notion of democracy in Piotrowski's texts from two conflicting methodological approaches he practiced – his inclination towards post-modernism and his Marxist background. It serves as a reconstruction of Piotrowski's methodological approach, demonstrating its inconsistencies and their consequences.

The book concludes with one of the last texts written by Piotr Piotrowski, *Krzysztof Wodiczko and the Global Politeia* – originally published for a monographic Wodiczko



Piotr Piotrowski's studio, June 2015. Photo: Ryszard Rau. The Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań Archive.

exhibition organised at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź in 2015. The exhibition's curator, Bożena Czubak, offers a short introduction to the essay, in which Piotrowski emphasises the crucial role of art in building global democratic foundations, and presents Wodiczko as a globally engaged artist who contributes to the development of global agoraphilia. Piotrowski died without seeing either the catalogue or the exhibition. The inclusion of the text in this volume is an indication of our will to continue a discussion *with* Piotrowski, and not to replace it with a discussion *about* him.

AGATA JAKUBOWSKA, MAGDALENA RADOMSKA





Part  
One

**Practicing  
Art  
History  
and  
Friendship**

Photo: Ryszard Rau



# The Criterion of Attitude: A Conversation with JAROSŁAW KOZŁOWSKI<sup>1</sup>

**ADAM MAZUR: Do you remember when you first met Piotr Piotrowski?**

JAROSŁAW KOZŁOWSKI: It was in 1971. Andrzej Turowski offered me a series of lectures on painterly technologies for first-year students at the Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. I went for it as I had problems at my own school due to my NET activity and was banned from running classes.<sup>2</sup> Piotr was one of those undergraduates. I spoke about technologies, though we had the subject over with rather fast – it was textbook knowledge and plain boring. So most of the time I generally spent on current art. The students liked that very much and were eager to actively participate in the meetings. Soon a group of students was formed who were particularly interested in these issues, among them – Piotr. I talked about independent galleries, about odNOWA, Foksal, Mona Lisa, and about all that was happening in Poland, about the nature of those places that were alternatives to the official art circuit. It all ended with them asking me to set up such an independent gallery together.

**A students' gallery?**

One that would, in a sense, draw on the experience of odNOWA, which had been closed in 1969 as a result of a political decision after Andrzej Matuszewski's

---

<sup>1</sup> This interview was first published in Polish, shortly after Piotrowski's death, as *Kryterium postawy. Rozmowa z Jarosławem Kozłowskim*, in *Szum* magazine, <http://magazynszum.pl/rozmowy/kryterium-postawy-rozmowa-z-jaroslawem-kozlowskim/> (accessed 09 July 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Jarosław Kozłowski worked at the State Higher School of Visual Arts in Poznań [editors' note].

*Postępowanie* [Proceeding].<sup>3</sup> We struck a deal and approached the Association of Polish Students with a proposal to consider the idea and perhaps find us some space in which we could organise exhibitions and public readings. The association reacted positively as it fulfilled their statutory obligation of “cultural activities”. The venue they offered was at the Akumulatory students’ dormitory at Adam Mickiewicz University. And that is how it all began.

**Do you remember who else was in this group of students, apart from Piotr Piotrowski?**

There was Andrzej Jur, who later emigrated to the United States, Tadeusz Matuszczak and Andrzej Wyrębski. Initially, they were all engaged in the activities of the gallery; however, with time it turned out to be rather time-consuming due to the fact that the premises were shared with a disco, which meant that before every exhibition we had to clean everything up, wash the floors, often paint the stained walls. Piotr, and especially Andrzej Jur, supported me the longest. They took part in most of the events at Akumulatory, actively participated in the discussions. We started off in a rather unique way – not with an exhibition, but with a series of readings by Jerzy Ludwiński, Andrzej Turowski and Andrzej Kostołowski. Only later did the exhibitions come – of Andrzej Bereziański, Angelo de Aquino from Brazil, Petr Štembera from Czechoslovakia, etc. Theoretical presentations, however, played a very important role in the entire nineteen-year history of Akumulatory. They were treated equally importantly as the exhibitions and artistic endeavours.

**Did you set up the programme? Did the students have a say as to how it looked?**

The gallery’s programme was very much based on my contacts from the NET,<sup>4</sup> hence its very international character. Considering the times – the 1970s, when contact with the world was limited – the audience found it interesting, not just the students. Particularly that the invited artists came to Poznań and made their works on the site – they were personally present at the gallery.

<sup>3</sup> The odNOWA Gallery functioned in Poznań from 1964–1969, Akumulatory 2 from 1972–1989 [editors’ note].

<sup>4</sup> In 1971, together with Andrzej Kostołowski, Kozłowski initiated the NET project – an international artistic exchange [editors’ note].



Piotr Piotrowski at the opening of the exhibition *Kanal 2*, Akumulatory 2 Gallery, Poznań, December 1979. From the Jarosław Kozłowski Archive.

### **What were the first meetings in the gallery like?**

Initially, the turn-out was huge – we often ran out of space during the public readings. With time, a set group of 50–60 people developed, who stayed with the gallery pretty much until its closing. We talked a lot. The discussions and the unpretentious manner of the encounters with art attracted people, artists included. News spread that in this strange place, in this strange city and country, there was a lot of talk about art, and that this talk about art wasn't limited to discussing ranking lists or commercial aspects, but artistic attitudes, the essence of art and its meaningfulness, and that these discussions were very serious – albeit informal and avoiding academism. It was like a magnet that attracted both the public and artists. It was, in effect, a practice in thinking and speaking about art. I suppose that for many students it was a much more meaningful experience of art than what they got at the art school or at the university.



**What were those students like? We are talking about a period immediately after the student revolts of the late 1960s. Were they more the hippie type or straight-A art history students?**

No, none of them were hippies, but neither were they straight-A types. They were very interested in art as a tool for rebellion and revaluation.

**Andrzej Turowski was a young scholar with strong ties to the revolt of 1968...**

Andrzej, who lectured in contemporary art then, was extremely popular among students. He had contacts in France, was engaged in the ideas of 1969, the Parisian revolts, etc.

**And you?**

I always liked to rebel, and NET and Akumulatory were the expression of my contesting the standards of the time. The rejection of the status quo was the field in which Piotr and I had very good communication, both then and later, when we wrote and signed all sorts of different petitions and letters of protest. Unfortunately, most often in vain.

**Did you, at the time, follow Piotrowski's academic endeavours, for example when he was working on his MA thesis, or later, in the late 1970s?**

We met on the occasions of different exhibitions at the gallery, we talked about what he did, but these were rather loose conversations. However, in 1975, when Piotr was still a student, he wrote an extensive and enthusiastic review of the exhibition and performative actions by Henri Chopin at Akumulatory, which he was able to publish in *Nurt* – a Poznań-based monthly focused on social and cultural issues.<sup>5</sup> The thing that Piotr liked the most in Chopin's art was his non-conformist attitude, expressed in his subversive works that touched on current politics, culture and education. It may have been the first published text on art written by Piotr, and the first manifestation of his interests. Piotr would somewhat systematically browse through the materials I received in connection with NET. There were many texts and works by artists from Central and Eastern Europe. Some of them, such as Endre Tót, László Lakner, Carlfriedrich Claus, Jiří Valoch and Imre Bak, had their exhibitions at Akumulatory, so he met them at the gallery. He remembered it some years later, when he focused his whole attention on this geographical region.

<sup>5</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "Henri Chopin w Galerii Akumulatory 2" [Henri Chopin in the Akumulatory 2 Gallery], *Nurt* no. 8 (1975), 34–35.



Meeting in Jarosław Kozłowski's apartment after the opening of the Henri Chopin exhibition, 1975, Poznań. From the Jarosław Kozłowski Archive.

**As far as the 1970s are concerned, the beginning of Andrzej Turowski's work at the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw was an important moment. It also had an impact on the situation of the Poznań milieu and on Piotrowski's thinking about the art scene in Poland. It was also reflected later, in his highly controversial book *Dekada* [*Decade*].<sup>6</sup> Do you remember the time when Andrzej Turowski joined Foksal and what influence he had on Piotr? Did you ever discuss it? What is your assessment of *Dekada*?**

It is difficult for me now to reconstruct the content of our discussions. Andrzej Turowski engaged himself in Foksal profoundly – he was fascinated with Tadeusz Kantor, who played first fiddle there. He soon succumbed to a mood of almost sacral adoration of Kantor, the main celebrant being Wiesław Borowski. Piotr didn't partici-

<sup>6</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Dekada. O syndromie lat siedemdziesiątych, kulturze artystycznej, krytyce, sztuce – wybiórczo i subiektywnie* [*Decade: About the Syndrome of the Seventies, Artistic Culture, Criticism, Art – Selectively and Subjectively*] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1991).

pate in that. As for *Dekada*, I don't interpret the fact that he had assessed the attitudes of some of the artists in a manner close to that contained in Wiesław Borowski's text on the pseudo-avant-garde as being shaped by Borowski's influence.<sup>7</sup> I actually shared many of these opinions. *Pseudoawangarda* [*Pseudo-Avant-Garde*] was published in 1975, *Decade* sixteen years later. Thus the latter was written from a completely different perspective, and with the use of a totally different vocabulary. The first half of the 1970s was a time when different attitudes and views polarised, which also included attempts to opportunistically adapt forms of articulation borrowed from current art for practical and political purposes. Some of these attempts were effective, to give the example of Zdzisław Sosnowski, Janusz Haka and Jacek Drabik taking over Galeria Współczesna in Warsaw in the 1970s – an institution that was very important to the independent circuit at the time. Piotr was a man of principle – he didn't play any diplomatic games, he wrote (and said) what he thought. In the subtitle to *Dekada*, he expressly stated that his comments were "selective and subjective". And these comments were his own – he took responsibility for them. It was no projection of the position of Foksal.

**He withdrew from some of those judgments later.**

We all change our minds when there are prerequisites to do so. That was the case with a number of artists about whom he had a critical opinion before.

**You also exhibited at the Foksal Gallery.**

Yes, I was affiliated with Foksal from 1971–76, where I had five exhibitions. My collaboration continued until, at one of the inner gallery discussions, "I behaved insolently towards Kantor". I said something about his megalomania, to which we shouldn't succumb. It turned out that it was unacceptable heresy, enough to exclude me from Foksal and then erase my entire past there. It was all a bit grotesque.

**I think that Piotrowski was somewhere between your influence and the influence of Andrzej Turowski. True enough, he developed his own vision of the 1970s, but these were also your 1970s.**

I wouldn't overestimate my influence on Piotr's views. Though he did have to free himself somewhat from Andrzej Turowski, who was a man of importance at the Institute of Art History. Turowski was very much liked by the students, and revered by

<sup>7</sup> Wiesław Borowski, "Pseudoawangarda", *Kultura* no. 12 (1975), 11–12.

many (Piotr probably included), who saw him as an authority – an author of splendid scholarly essays and an outstanding expert on constructivism.

**Did the fact that Piotrowski freed himself mean that his relationship with Turowski had been of a master-student type? Their positions at the university seemed to indicate that.**

That was undoubtedly the case at a certain time.

**It should also be added here that the institute, and generally the whole Poznań school, was very much tilting to the left, if not towards Marxism. From the texts and statements made by Andrzej Turowski we can gather that he was very much left-inclined at the time, while Piotr Piotrowski never really as much...**

...he never made any declarations about his political orientation. Instead, he tried to build his own point of view, his own concept of art and his own criteria.

**How would you define his attitude in the late 1970s? The end of the decade also meant the beginning of democratic opposition in Poland, and later Solidarity – a time when one clearly declared which side one was on.**

He was obviously engaged in Solidarity, and during martial law he was active in the underground structures – he was the co-editor of the local Solidarity paper, *Obserwator Wielkopolski*.

**We began with your initially being on the margins of the State Higher School of Visual Arts, while in the early 1980s you were at the centre of things.**

The first democratic elections for the rector were organised in 1981. This was the time of the so-called “carnival of Solidarity”, and the rector was chosen by a group of electors. For the first (and last) time, one third of the electors were students. And it just so happened that, by the vote of the students, I was elected rector. We immediately began radical changes in the school’s structure, the curricula and the school rules – on all levels. Students became empowered: they could choose the studios and the teachers, and change studios every year. A similar rule applied to most of the theoretical subjects. We opened up the academy to visiting professors. Many of the seminars were run by artists from the outside, and we also took advantage of artists who came from other places in Poland and abroad on the occasion of exhibitions at Akumulatory or other galleries. Their meetings with students opened up new horizons, introducing a creative buzz. It was

actually all illegal at the beginning, because the Act on Higher Education didn't allow for such far-reaching changes. Despite the fact that I submitted all the required documents to the ministry so as to receive formal approval, the ministry took so long responding to it that the legally stipulated deadline passed. And then martial law was introduced, and a decree was issued, by which all schools of higher education were to maintain their status quo as of 13 December 1981. We had already been functioning in the new order for some months. As ridiculous as it may sound, it was thanks to martial law that our reform received formal endorsement. The structure is still pretty much in force to this day.

**Did you keep in touch with Piotr Piotrowski and the milieu of art historians at the time?**

Not so much then, as I was completely absorbed with all of those changes – so much that there was no time for anything else, really. I did meet up with Piotr, of course. He was very much interested in what we did at the school.

**Were you active together in the opposition in the 1980s? Did you keep in touch outside of artistic activities?**

Piotr was engaged in Solidarity and the university; I was involved in my school, which was very absorbing. Martial law had a huge impact on the everyday functioning of the school. Different provocations took place – we were infiltrated by the Security Service, who found endless reasons to come over, interrogate us, or plant different things. On the other hand, I was very much against strikes in schools, as I believed they were generally helpful for the authorities, who kept seeking pretexts for ever-more-severe repressions, including the possible closing of the school. Neither did I support the strikes of artists and galleries, as I saw these as a means of self-gagging, which was very much in line with the totalitarian system. I believed then that it was a time to speak and to teach, so as not to abandon our role of shaping public awareness and debate. This attitude wasn't very popular – slogans appeared about collaboration and such on the walls of the school. Piotr was in support of the strikes. If I remember well, he actively participated in them. Still, the difference in opinions didn't have a negative impact on our friendship. We also argued about other things, but these were never actual quarrels.

**Did these discussions and differences originate in the 1980s?**

No, they were about the issues that Piotr touched on in his texts in the 1990s, such as the distinction between autonomous and political art. He believed that the striving for

autonomy in art – abstraction from the political or social context – and the lack of a clear ideological declaration, meant legitimising the system. Whereas for me, the experience of the autonomy of art was a necessary condition for all forms of criticism, including political and social criticism, as it implied a conscious distance that made it possible to overcome the division between art and propaganda. I liked those discussions of ours – they engaged us both very much. Even if we were unable to reach whatever clear consensus, they were always very useful. Piotr wrote a lot at the time. I read his successive books with great interest. He was also the author of a number of inspiring texts for my catalogues...

**In the late 1990s, Piotrowski began to concentrate more intensely on what the essence of the NET that you had organised was. He started to investigate its activity and the mutual relations between artists from Central Europe and other peripheral areas such as South America. It seems obvious today that these places are significant for art, but that wasn't the case back then.**

Nobody had really noticed it before. He was the first to be fascinated by the fact that the NET was a meeting ground for such extremely diverse views and ideas, which couldn't come to the same playing field in a natural way. Here we had communism on a daily basis, and we were really sick of it, while in South America communism was the hope. Artists from South America were Marxists, while we were repulsed with so-called Socialist Realism and had put Marx back on the shelf, not even trying to understand what he had actually written. But what we had in common was the need for freedom and sovereignty, as well as a mutual curiosity. Thus we communicated with each other – for example with Angelo de Aquino from Brazil, Clemente Padín from Uruguay, Horacio Zabala from Argentina and Guillermo Deisler from Chile. I have already mentioned contact with artists from Eastern Europe. The neo-Dadaist attitudes in American, Canadian and Australian art relating to the campus revolutions of 1967 were also interesting – still not sufficiently investigated by contemporary art history.

**Yes – however, these were your encounters with artists as an artist and, at the same time, a person engaged in the organisation of the NET. What I find more interesting in the context of our conversation about Piotrowski is the addition of theory and the historical context created by a person who had left it behind and then decided to write books such as *In the Shadow of Yalta*.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, what is of**

<sup>8</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

**key importance in terms of Piotrowski's attitude was his contact with artists, with yourself, with the people you had recommended. I understand that the source research Piotrowski conducted in the 1990s brought the two of you closer together.**

Piotr travelled the world quite extensively and met many artists. He had the ability to talk and make people trust him. Once he got involved in something of interest to him, he plunged in with all the engagement and enthusiasm he could muster. It opened up doors and facilitated contacts. Obviously, he often made use of my materials, which he found an important source of information, particularly if they were about the early 1970s. These were letters, catalogues, the works of artists, including their addresses. Just half a year ago he leased a few works by artists from South America to include their reproductions in a publication that was in the making. A few days after his death I received a book from London, *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, published by Ashgate Publishing. It contained a great piece by Piotr titled "The Global NETwork: An Approach to Comparative Art History", about the role of the NET in building informal relations between artists from different corners of the world.<sup>9</sup> It was for this publication that he needed the reproductions.

**In the early 1990s you were the chief curator at the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, where, together with Wojciech Krukowski and Piotr Rypson, you worked on creating the art collection and the programme of the new institution. The art that appeared in the castle's programme was very important to Piotrowski – I'm talking about the activities of Zbigniew Libera, Zofia Kulik, Krzysztof Wodiczko, and students from the circle of Grzegorz Kowalski's studio. Did you discuss the status quo and the direction in which Polish art was heading after 1989?**

I have already mentioned that art is important to me in its diversity and not in programme-contained formations. I tried to follow this idea at the Centre for Contemporary Art, where different attitudes and different artistic preferences were treated on an equal footing. Hence the presence of works by Zbyszek Libera, Zofia Kulik and Krzysztof Wodiczko in the collection was beyond discussion – after all, these were artists of great importance to Polish art. However, my contribution in shaping the collection and the

---

<sup>9</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "The Global NETwork: An Approach to Comparative Art History", in: *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 149–165.



programme of the centre lasted only two years. I gave up when I saw that I was unable to enforce what I had planned. As far as my discussions with Piotr – they were more about the need for a general revision and revaluation of the dogmas of contemporary Polish art. In that, we were on the same page.

**In the 1990s Piotr Piotrowski worked at the National Museum in Poznań. Did you stay in touch at the time?**

Yes – Piotr organised a number of important exhibitions at the museum. One of them was *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r.* [*The Thaw: Art ca. 1956*] – a panoramic view of Polish art during the short-lived political thaw of the 1950s. There was also an exhibition recalling the Poznań odNOWA Gallery from 1964–1969. Apart from that, two big solo exhibitions of Jerzy Bereś and Zofia Kulik (the latter was censored by the director of the museum at the time, Konstanty Kalinowski, who ordered that the genitalia of the classical sculptures used by the artist should be covered – which made Piotr furious). There was also my exhibition – *Przestrzenie czasu* [*Spaces of Time*].<sup>10</sup>

**At the end of the 1990s a very interesting moment took place in the history of Polish art, for which you were present. I am talking about the exhibition *Refleksja koncepcyjna w sztuce polskiej* [*The Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art*], organised at the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle by Paweł Polit with your significant support. The show met with very fierce reaction from the milieu. Discussions about *Pseudoawangarda* and *Dekada* came back, and disputes from the 1970s were revived, impacting the situation of the late 1990s. An incredible debate was opened, with your participation. How would you recapitulate it today?**

*Refleksja koncepcyjna* was my idea, which I wanted to bring to life back in 1992 when I worked at the Centre for Contemporary Art, but Wojtek Krukowski wasn't interested in it then. He changed his mind over the years, and Paweł Polit took on the task of organising the show. He invited Andrzej Kosiński, Jurek Ludwiński, Andrzej Dłużniewski, Zbyszek Makarewicz and myself to talk about the possibilities of its construction. We met maybe two or three times; however, it was Paweł who gave it its final

<sup>10</sup> *Galeria odNOWA*, 1964–1969 in 1993; *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956* in 1996; Jarosław Kozłowski: *Przestrzenie czasu* / *Spaces of Time* in 1997; Zofia Kulik: *Od Syberii do Cyberii* / *From Siberia to Cyberia* in 1999. Bereś' exhibition's (1995) curator was Aleksandra Węcka, not Piotrowski – he contributed a text to the exhibition catalogue [editors' note].



shape. He made a truly cohesive and well thought-out exhibition that evoked extreme reactions. Calling somebody a “conceptualist” in the 1970s was treated like an offence – I have experienced it myself many times. And all of a sudden, it was enough just not to paint pictures to be a “conceptualist”. These new “conceptualists” felt very offended by their absence from the show. Articles appeared in the press questioning the curator’s competence; there were personal attacks, libels. Zbigniew Warpechowski and Józef Robakowski were especially strong at expressing their wounded egos – they actually analysed the exhibition from the perspective of a conspiracy theory. I felt embarrassed reading their texts. The exhibition at the centre, authorised by Paweł Polit, was a presentation of a certain point of view on conceptualism, and didn’t aspire to canonical status. After all, every curator makes a certain selection when putting together an exhibition. The accusations voiced against the show could thus be made against any problem-focused presentation.

**You have mentioned how important the attitudes were, not just the works of art. In this sense, the selection of artists at the exhibition was also based on the evaluation of their behaviour and artistic activities in the past...**

Every choice is subjective, no matter whether we take the quality of the artworks or the artistic attitudes as the decisive criterion. I shared most of the choices that Paweł made, based on the criterion of attitude. It was important in the 1970s, and it is still important to me now.

**But perhaps not to Piotrowski any more. He then wrote *Znaczenia modernizmu* [Meanings of Modernism] and came to terms with some of the artists he had been in conflict with.<sup>11</sup>**

Piotr wrote *Znaczenia modernizmu* from the position of an art historian, while I am an artist and thus can let myself be more arbitrary.

**Today you are in the same gallery as Józef Robakowski, who was one of your main antagonists back in the day.**

I don’t maintain any relations with Józef Robakowski, ever since that time. For purely ambitious reasons he behaved unfairly towards me and never thought about apologising. The fact that we both exhibit at the Profile Foundation doesn’t mean anything.

<sup>11</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* [Meanings of Modernism: Towards a History of Polish Art after 1945] (Poznań: REBIS, 1999).

### **What was your relationship with Włodzimierz Borowski?**

I met Włodek Borowski in 1968 when he was working at odNOWA Gallery on his installation for the *VIII Pokaz Synkretyczny* [*VIII Syncretic Show*] titled *Uczulanie na kolor ho* [*Sensitisation to Colour*]. He later participated in the NET, and showed his works four times at the Akumulatory 2 Gallery. He also had seminars with my students at the State Higher School of Visual Arts. We would get together in Poznań, or at his house in Brwinów, and on the occasions of the symposia that Andrzej Matuszewski organised. In 1992 I invited him to the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, where he had his retrospective exhibition, of which I was the curator, and for which a rather voluminous catalogue with a text by Jerzy Ludwiński was published. The exhibition made a huge impression on Piotr – he wrote an enthusiastic article about it, in *Odra*, I think.<sup>12</sup>

### **You were one of the few people who persevered...**

Włodek could be difficult with people. He broke off relations with anybody who got into his bad books. He was demanding and categorical as far as artistic issues were concerned. I respected him greatly, including for that intransigence. He was a great artist – completely absent today. There isn't a single solid elaboration about his oeuvre apart from what we published at the centre back in 1992!

**Agnieszka Szewczyk, Paweł Polit and Luiza Nader also made an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, which was a re-edition of the show at the Centre for Contemporary Art, though with no catalogue, I believe...**

Yes, a very interesting international conference was organised on the occasion of the exhibition. There was also due to be a book with the conference materials, but nothing has come of it thus far.

**We are slowly approaching the end of the story about Piotrowski and his achievements. How would you describe his last years and your mutual relations?**

Our views continued to gradually come closer; we would argue ever less. In any case, whatever arguments we had, they were intentionally provoked by either Piotr or myself so as to trigger an exchange of opinions. For example, whenever we participated

<sup>12</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "Włodzimierz Borowski; rewizja historii sztuki" [Włodzimierz Borowski: A Revision of Art History], *Odra* no.12 (1992), 93–94.

in a conference in the early 2000s, be it in Prague, Vienna or Warsaw, we often presented opposite opinions in order to discuss them, and – by means of confrontation – arrive at quite similar conclusions.

**What would be the difference between his concept of seeing Central Europe, or recently South America, and yours?**

For me, art has never had any geographical definitions. On the other hand, I very well understood the reasons why Piotr focused on those regions, studied their specificities, differences and similarities. After all, there are certain determining factors stemming from language, history, cultural affiliations. Piotr knew how to describe and justify these aspects precisely.

**Do you see the concept promoted by Piotr Piotrowski – that there is something linking the art of the post-Soviet countries – as being unimportant?**

No, it's not as easy as that; at one point I actually counter-argued what I have just said. In the latter part of the 1970s, and then in the 1980s, I was invited to dozens of symposia and exhibitions on Eastern Europe. I consistently declined to participate, in the belief that such events only confirmed geographical and political definitions of art that, in the times when the world was divided into the East and the West, were nothing but stereotypes. I hated being the “exotic” artist from behind the Iron Curtain, or the “heroic dissident”. When the Iron Curtain disappeared after the transformation of 1989, we became part of Europe and the West, with all the due consequences of that change, in terms of art too. The values that had been important before were now of secondary significance, and were pushed out by other, much more measurable ones. In 1990 I was invited to participate in yet another symposium on Eastern European art, held in The Hague. This time, I accepted the invitation. One of the speakers, a Hungarian theoretician, László Beke, expressed his hope that this was the last conference dedicated to the differences between the art of the East and of the West. I, on the other hand, stated in the conclusion to my speech that the time had finally arrived when we could actually speak about these differences and varieties. I don't know how much of what I said was formulated under the influence of Piotr, but he definitely had his share in these words.

ANDRZEJ TUROWSKI

## An Interrupted Dialogue

In 1976 Piotrowski wrote his first substantive academic paper, devoted to the “social functionality of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz’s Portrait Firm”.<sup>1</sup> The topics it dealt with formed part of the academic debates being conducted at the Poznań Institute of Art History on the theme of the social involvement of contemporary art. I had been teaching at Poznań University for more than ten years by then, and was working on my post-doctoral thesis. In autumn 1980 Piotrowski was appointed assistant lecturer at the institute, while preparing his doctorate.<sup>2</sup> His growing ties with the milieu of Poznań University’s art history department led to his participation in the first international conference devoted to the avant-garde in Central Europe.<sup>3</sup> This initiation played a central role in the whole of his subsequent academic career. It was the momentous period of the inception and rise of Solidarity; the institute was caught up in the political ferment of the time, with the strikes of 1981 and the imposition of martial law hardening the

---

<sup>1</sup> Part of his MA thesis was published as “Portrety i społeczeństwo. O Firmie Portretowej ‘S.I. Witkiewicz’” [Portraits and Society: The “S.I. Witkiewicz” Portrait Firm], in: *Problemy interpretacji dzieła sztuki i jego funkcji społecznych* [Problems of the Interpretation of the Work of Art and its Social Functions], ed. Konstanty Kalinowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1980), 155–168.

<sup>2</sup> Piotrowski wrote about the period of his studies in Poznań and his interest in my lectures in his article “‘Francuskie teorie’, amerykańska mediacja. Pro domo sua i/lub humanistyka po dekonstrukcji” [“French Theories”, American Mediation: *Pro domo sua* and/or the Humanities after Deconstruction], in: *French Theory w Polsce* [French Theory in Poland], eds. Ewa Domańska and Mirosław Loba (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), 105–116.

<sup>3</sup> The conference was held in Gołuchów in December 1980 at the initiative of the Institute of Art History of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Its title was *Relations between Eastern and Central European Constructivism and the Avant-Garde of the First Two Decades of the 20th Century* [Les relations du constructivisme d’Europe de l’Est et d’Europe Centrale avec l’avant-garde des deux premières décennies du XX siècle]

opposition movement's stance towards the repressive regime. I was taking part in the Cultural Congress in Warsaw when, on 13 December, it was suspended without my having a chance to read out the words that I had already delivered in Poznań at the inauguration of the academic year: "The start of the academic year," I had said, "coinciding as it does with a new situation in society, so tense but also full of hope, places us, the teaching staff, in a particular position. We are resuming our teaching duties, lecturing about important fields of knowledge that we hold dear, at a moment when the reality that surrounds us is constantly overstepping the limits of theory [...] at this moment, with an intensity unprecedented in recent times, we can sense that the notion of responsibility is not confined to our conscious selves and our individual reflections, but quite evidently extends to all our actions."<sup>4</sup>

From this moment on Piotrowski was to collaborate with Solidarity, the movement having been forced to go underground and operate illegally. The overlap between politics and academic theory found its earliest expression in his work of the period. Analysing the crisis of the avant-garde – then a frequent topic of discussion – he saw it as deriving from mythologised notions of avant-garde art's independence and the purity of its accompanying theoretical framework. In Poznań we had discussed this previously at the so-called "Warnke Symposium".<sup>5</sup> My paper devoted to the concept of the autonomisation of the abstract image in Kandinsky called on art history as an academic discipline to critique its own isolated field of study, and for the demythologisation of art. Almost ten years later, Piotrowski saw the problem from the broader perspective of a crisis of humanist culture, as well as the hope unleashed by Solidarity. "At the heart of the debate", Piotrowski wrote at the time, "is a tradition whose most far-reaching consequence has been conceptual art, a tradition of extreme autonomy and self-reflection in art. In rejecting it, one is acting in the name of humanistic values, in the name of engagement, and in the quest for a true image of contemporary man

<sup>4</sup> Text from my archive. The Congress of Polish Culture, an initiative of intellectuals and cultural figures, was convened by the Solidarity opposition movement, and opened in Warsaw on 11 December 1981. After two days, proceedings were halted when martial law was declared.

<sup>5</sup> Adam S. Labuda, "Polska i niemiecka historia sztuki – sympozjum w Rogalinie w 1973" [Polish and German Art History – Symposium at Rogalin in 1973], *Artium Quaestiones* vol. XXVIII (2017), 227; Andrzej Turowski, "Ideologia i interpretacja sztuki abstrakcyjnej" [Ideology and Interpretation of Abstract Art], in: *Interpretacja dzieła sztuki. Studia i dyskusje* [Interpretation of the Work of Art: Studies and Debates], ed. Janusz Kęłowski (Warsaw-Poznań: PTPN, 1976), 168.

at a time when the use of force, intolerance and alienation are becoming universal, and when an increasingly mythologised academic discourse is incapable of charting the right path for humanity.”<sup>6</sup> Piotr wrote these words when, with the experience of conceptual art behind us – his at the Akumulatory Gallery and mine at the Foksal Gallery<sup>7</sup> – we had both started turning to an art of “practical application” to provide the critical values that we sought.

Between 1982 and 1993 Piotrowski wrote two studies<sup>8</sup> focusing on issues relating to “autonomous art and ethical history”. The first, which harked back to his earlier work on Witkiewicz, confronted the artist’s metaphysical worldview with the idea of the abstract image, pointing to the dangers of the formal absolutisation of art inherent in Witkiewicz’s notion of the “pure work of art”. Piotrowski wrote that, unlike Kandinsky, Mondrian and Malevich – with their optimistic, progressive and, in effect, alienating artistic utopias – the Polish artist was saved by his anti-utopianism. This gave rise to a form of conservatism that defended “enduring values”, the most important of which, according to Witkiewicz, were a spiritual sensibility reflecting life’s tragic dimension and the belief in the eclipse of humanist civilisation.

Piotrowski placed Witkacy’s art and artistic philosophy at the opposite end of the spectrum from the concept of the image and the Unist theory propounded by Władysław Strzemiński, whose work I had long been studying.<sup>9</sup> He was thus drawing attention to a wing of the Polish avant-garde (or *arrière-garde*) that was difficult to

<sup>6</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Dialektyka kryzysu” [The Dialectics of Crisis], *Miesięcznik Literacki* no. 1 (1981), 70.

<sup>7</sup> The Foksal Gallery opened in Warsaw in 1966. From 1970 onwards I worked closely with the gallery, developing its programme alongside Wiesław Borowski. The Akumulatory Gallery, founded by Jarosław Kozłowski, existed in Poznań from 1972. Piotrowski collaborated with Akumulatory in the mid-1970s while still a student. Both galleries were interested in conceptual art at the time and exhibited works by conceptual artists.

<sup>8</sup> The books were published more than a decade after they were written: *Metafizyka obrazu* [Metaphysics of the Image] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1985), and *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją. Studium z zakresu etycznej historii sztuki awangardy rosyjskiej* [The Artist between Revolution and Reaction: A Study in the Ethical History of Russian Avant-Garde Art] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> My studies and publications about Strzemiński dated back to the mid-1960s. They were summarised in my book *Konstruktywizm Polski. Próba rekonstrukcji nurtu* [Polish Constructivism: An Attempt to Reconstruct a Movement], published in 1981, many years after the date of writing (1969).

define in terms of the predominant formula of revolutionary constructivism. In effect, he was also embarking on a dialogue with the idea of the desymbolisation of the formal language of the image and its simultaneous reification – in other words, ideas characteristic of the founder of Unism. Unist homogeneousness, as I said in my studies about constructivism in the early 1970s, was aimed at nullifying the work of art's areas of expression or illusion that were extraneous to form. Stripping the image of all anecdotal and symbolic values was additionally designed to deprive it, in terms of conception and expression, of the ability to reproduce space – something alien to the flat surface – or movement, which transfers the action beyond the image's confines. "An idea alien to painting", I wrote, quoting Strzemiński, "stands in the way, preventing us from realising that the image is not the transposition of a phenomenon seen or indeed worked out somewhere else, that the image is in itself and for itself", or, as the artist wrote elsewhere – and this is a reistic consequence of the first statement – "the image just is, it exists". In striving to discover the "essences" of art in the theory of Unism, Strzemiński, I concluded, stripped painting of all its expressive and symbolic values, proclaimed the neutrality of the Unist image, and simultaneously gave the painting concrete form as an object like all other surrounding objects.<sup>10</sup> Reconstructing Witkacy's theory by reference to the same categories of autonomy and expression, Piotrowski asserted that, unlike Unism, the concept of "Pure Form" is possessed of two mutually conditional dimensions: it has autonomy (from the surface chaos of form), but, at the same time, because of this it can get to what constitutes the core of reality. It is the objectification of the essence of the cosmos, of the mystery of existence; it is autonomous, but in its autonomy it fulfils a symbolic function.<sup>11</sup> Witkacy's programme, particularly when it came to the theory of the structure of the image, Piotrowski was to add, was not an autotelic programme as in constructivism. The work of art could not, in the end, be reduced to itself; it did not exclusively evoke its own autonomous elements. Nor was it an expressionist programme, since the person of the artist was not the fundamental "subject" of the image. At the same time, Piotrowski emphasised that Witkacy's declarations contained a constant tension between the autotelic significance of the image and its expressive function. While the work could not be created without the participation of the self of the artist, in its finished result it could not be dependent

<sup>10</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *W kręgu konstrukttywizmu [In the Circle of Constructivism]* (Warsaw: WAiF, 1979), 88.

<sup>11</sup> Piotrowski, *Metafizyka obrazu*, 36.



Conference, *Władysław Strzemiński 1893–1952, on the 100th Anniversary of his Birth*, organised at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 1993. From the left: Piotr Piotrowski, Andrzej Turowski and Jaromir Jedliński (director of the Museum). © Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź.

on it. Witkacy actually writes about the “error of the theory of expressionism”, which “treats form merely as a means of expression and not an end in itself”.<sup>12</sup> This evidently related expressionism to symbolism and distanced it from constructivism.

In my book on the constructivist avant-garde cited by Piotrowski, I wrote that in Witkacy’s work, as in that of the symbolists, conceptions given concrete shape in painterly matter were open to a variety of meanings, “expressing ideas through decorative forms” with their elusive configuration, amorphous aspect and fugitive significations. The heirs to the symbolists sought the infinitude of being in the synaesthesia of the “music of form and colour” (Kandinsky) and in the transcendence of the energetic cosmos (Malevich). In Witkacy’s work, Piotrowski wrote, developing this idea,

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 56.



the structure of the work was a direct reflection of the structure of being, a reflection of the universe. The theory of Pure Form equated the language of artistic form with the language of metaphysics. Constructivism came to question this. The constructivist revolution – one of the “upheavals” of twentieth-century art – started at the point where a “formalist” consciousness of language came to the fore alongside the emergence of a crisis of metaphysics. It was here that I saw the essential tension between Strzemiński and Witkacy. Piotrowski basically agreed with this viewpoint.

The theme of artistic structure in the context of the artist’s societal engagement, the role of socio-artistic utopias in the formation of avant-garde visions of the world, and the ideological context of the relationship between political power and revolutionary art were the fundamental themes that I came to discuss regularly with students and colleagues while teaching modern art history at Poznań University during the 1970s. Piotrowski participated in these discussions. My views at the time were underpinned by a set of critical beliefs that did not so much absolutise or institutionalise events and our knowledge of them, as ideologise history and sociologise the work of art. We proposed the idea of a social history of art, linking visual culture in its broadest sense to artistic life; we drew on semiology and mythology; we discussed issues related to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the cultural field and the notion of communication competence propounded by the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School.<sup>13</sup> We succeeded in collating a broad range of historical documents and hitherto inaccessible texts relating to the Russian avant-garde of the first three decades of the twentieth century, which I later published in an anthology titled *Between Art and Communism*.<sup>14</sup> This material formed the basis for discussions at seminars and for two studies: mine, written in 1979 and subsequently published in the book *Wielka utopia awangardy Artystyczne i społeczne utopie w sztuce rosyjskiej 1910–1930* [Great Utopia of the Avant-Garde: Artistic and Social Utopias in Russian Art, 1910–30]<sup>15</sup> and Piotrowski’s abovementioned post-doctoral thesis and 1993 book *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją. Studium z zakresu etycznej historii sztuki*

<sup>13</sup> Piotrowski, “Francuskie teorie, amerykańska mediacja”, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *Między sztuką a komuną: teksty awangardy rosyjskiej 1910–1932* [Between Art. and Communism: Texts of the Russian Avant-Garde, 1910–1932] (Kraków: Universitas, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *Wielka utopia awangardy Artystyczne i społeczne utopie w sztuce rosyjskiej 1910–1930* [Great Utopia of the Avant-Garde: Artistic and Social Utopias in Russian Art, 1910–1930] (Warsaw: PWN, 1990).

*awangardy rosyjskiej [The Artist between Revolution and Reaction: A Study in the Ethical History of Russian Avant-Garde Art].*<sup>16</sup>

Although drawing on the same material, taking a critical view of the collected sources and employing similar methodologies, the two books went in divergent directions – in the first case focusing on artistic utopias and a critique of meanings, and, in the second, on a critique of false ideas and on the ethical standpoints of the relevant artists. My reflections – in the spirit of the quotation from Barthes cited in the Introduction – were intended as an analysis of the “play of signs” conducted by avant-garde artists, and the involvement of linguistic systems in artistic mythologies and political ideologies. The organisation of the internal elements of an avant-garde work – drawing attention primarily to itself, to its own form and to its own sign structure – is aimed at overcoming symbolic systems in order to, as I wrote, “unite with the world”, and at losing itself as a language in a world of unmediated understanding, a world of ontological unity between the thing and the thought. The Russian avant-garde enacted this perpetually unassuaged hunger for reality in their formal practices. On the basis of these assumptions, my intention was to identify what configuration in the structure of the avant-garde work of art had opened it up to manipulation and led to the artistic downfall of the then-avant-garde in the specific historical context of the totalitarian state and the doctrine of Socialist Realism. My book was primarily concerned with the work of art, and therefore owed much to the structuralist tradition, while Piotrowski’s dealt with attitudes and beliefs, and was thus closely related to the history of ideas on which we had both had reason previously to draw.

Piotrowski’s argument centred on the political and ethical responsibility of the Russian avant-garde in the context of the Leninist Revolution. It probed the reasons why artists of the time had been drawn to the ideology of Bolshevik power, and pointed to the historical co-responsibility of artists for the creation of a false image of reality. By deliberately choosing to dwell on the “tragic” history of the Russian avant-garde, Piotrowski seemed to be sending a message and a warning to his own times. In seeking to reconstruct the process of the ideologisation of pure form, he wanted to understand what it meant to be an artist living “in a time of need”, so as to be able to shed light on their moral complicity. The mistake that the Russian avant-garde had made, according to Piotrowski, was to lose touch with reality and then intentionally mystify the revo-

---

<sup>16</sup> Piotrowski, *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją*.

lutionary world. He believed that the fundamental ethical problem of the avant-garde was not that it had sought to subjugate the image in favour of reality, but that some of the avant-garde artists had accepted a false reality as if it was genuine. This did not of course exonerate the Russian artists, Piotrowski suggested, but it explained at least why an art that had been revolutionary in its ideas and accomplished in its forms found itself at the beck and call of a reactionary politics and at the service of the “big lie”. Living in a world he had himself falsified, the artist condemned himself to false moral choices. In conclusion, the author described as a tragedy the “fatal imperative” of the avant-garde artist, whose rightful rebellion was hijacked by an insidious revolution.

The consequence of discarding the pure image and choosing an ideologised reality, according to Piotrowski, was the acceptance that artistic activity was to be regarded in terms of the aestheticisation of the totalitarian regime and even as propaganda on its behalf – in other words, as the “production” of a false image of reality. The problem did not, however, reside in the actual decision to reject the pure image or to negate the image as a formula for the end of art. The very gesture of rejecting the “thing” (reism) and the potential appeal to reality had the makings of a genuine revolution, according to Piotrowski. That is beyond question. It was supposed to be – and he wrote that I had rightly pointed this out – a case of choosing a “true language”. But the decision never went beyond the stage of stated intentions. The problem was that the choice being made was not between the image (work of art) and reality, but between the image and a falsified reality, or, in other words, “myth”. Piotrowski said he agreed with me when I had concluded: “The maker of the new myth was not productivism but political power.” The authorities countered artistic utopia with ideology and politics – that is true as well. But here, in the tension between utopia and ideology, lies the problem and not its solution – it is the question and not the answer. Let us ask, therefore, why it was that, in opting for utopia, the artist of utopia, the rebel artist, ended up choosing ideology and subsequently came to serve a totalitarian regime.<sup>17</sup> The question was a fundamental one, and we returned to it on various occasions in the course of numerous joint debates; we also discussed it in our articles. Our proposed solutions, coloured by the respective contexts in which they were formulated, energised our research and intellectual judgements. The period coincided for me with the start of university lectures and seminars in France, while Piotrowski went on to

---

<sup>17</sup> Piotrowski, *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją*, 130.

carve out a place for himself in Polish academic life. So it comes as no surprise that the image of the Russian avant-garde and, above all, the intellectual capital Piotrowski invested in an understanding of its political role, were to be of prime importance in his life's work. The quest for the truth about reality under a layer of mythologised or ideologised meanings and his advocacy of such a truth was a lesson from history that weighed significantly on his subsequent choices. Piotrowski was not in this sense an essentialist, but a historian who saw the past as an arena of intellectual experience, and this went on to play a not insignificant role throughout his life.

It must also be remembered that the crystallisation of Piotrowski's social stance took place in the context of his engagement with the clandestine opposition and independence movement in Poland during the declining stages of communism.<sup>18</sup> The idea of democracy according to the ethos of the Solidarity movement – a civic order based on social justice, combined with a surge of pro-independence sentiment – came to dominate his activity in the public sphere during this period. In an ever-changing reality, however, the situation was exceptionally complex, and one would be hard-pressed to find consistency in his artistic choices or strategies as a critic then. Piotrowski subjected his own views to a process of observation and experimentation in reflections he made at the time on the topic of the 1970s and the phenomenon of the transition at the start of the 1980s, as he put it, “from the ethos of the involved artist to that of the opposition in the sense of a moral, rather than a political opposition”.<sup>19</sup> The institutional foundation of this ethos was the Catholic Church, which played a double-edged role in the process of instrumentalising culture and also devaluing it. Piotrowski came to repeat, with a certain irony, following the example of Leszek Kołakowski, “I am a conservative-liberal socialist”, which I naturally, from my own left-wing viewpoint, had to reject as a post-Solidarity stance. Yet Piotrowski's views fairly rapidly underwent a fundamental shift, and his political outlook hardened as a result of his disagreements with the neoliberal policies that prevailed in Poland after the fall of communism and with the increasingly conspicuous presence of the Church hierarchy (as well as censorship) in the country's political life. Various visits to the USA, where he mixed in intellectual circles and met university academics, confirmed

---

<sup>18</sup> From 1984 Piotrowski was associated with *Obserwator Wielkopolski*, the newspaper of the Poznań regional branch of Solidarity. It had been founded and was edited by Grzegorz Gauden, and during this period circulated unofficially.

<sup>19</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “On the Ethos of the Polish Artist”, *Art Monthly* no. 103 (1987), 13.

him in his left-wing choices.<sup>20</sup> We discussed this a lot at our meetings in New York, in which Krzysztof Wodiczko also took part. Subsequently rejecting liberal democracy as an essentially conservative system founded on a questionable notion of consensus, Piotrowski came out in favour of radical democracy, just as I then backed radical art. By temperament, so to speak, Piotrowski treated art, an enterprise conducted in the public realm, as a political activity; he also regarded politics as an arena of dispute between different social groups.<sup>21</sup> He was above all a supporter of the complete freedom of artistic expression. The basis of democracy, he wrote, “must be respect for human rights, including the right to freedom of expression”.<sup>22</sup>

In the framework of post-communist democracy, and given Piotrowski's socially engaged outlook, the concept of “critical judgement” acquired particular significance for him in relation to galleries and museums as institutions. This was a problem that we were perfectly familiar with quite independently of the new political circumstances. In 1972 I had published a programme statement for the Foksal Gallery titled “Gallery against Gallery”, which Piotrowski regularly cited. In it I formulated the idea of the gallery as a critical institution and another stage in the de-institutionalisation of the “space”, along the lines described in the celebrated manifesto “What do we not like about the Foksal PSP Gallery?” Analysing the role of avant-garde museums in revolutionary Russia, I wrote that “they took on the functions of critical institutions. In Strzemiński's eyes, the purpose of a museum was to provide a critique of contemporary art.”<sup>23</sup> Piotrowski's thinking years later, and above all his work in the museum sector, involved a similar transition from a protest-driven “critique of institutions” to an “institution of critique” as one of the fundamental elements of a democratic society. With great courage, personal risk and commitment, Piotrowski based his blueprint for the institutional structure of the National Museum in Warsaw on this kind of “critical thinking”. He briefly became its

<sup>20</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “W kręgu dyskusji postmodernistycznych” [In the Circle of Postmodernist Debates], *Artium Quaestiones* vol. V (1991), 156–165; *W cieniu Duchampa. Notatki nowojorskie* [In the Shadow of Duchamp: New York Notes] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od Melancholii do Pasji* [Art after Politics: From Melancholy to Passion] (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem w obronie demokracji” [Tooth and Nail in Defence of Democracy], *Obieg* (online edition) 20 March 2007, updated 12 November 2008, <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/artmix/1729> (accessed 10 May 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *Awangardowe marginesy* [Avant-Garde Margins] (Warsaw: Instytut kultury, 1998), 160.

director, but resigned from the post when its conservative Board of Trustees prevented him from implementing such a project.<sup>24</sup> “The critical museum”, he said in an interview, “pertains to the contemporary nation, seen not as a monoethnic construct, but as a collection of diverse social and ethnic groups and varied public and political interests. Today’s ‘nation’ is – as it were – cosmopolitical. So if we define it as a heterogeneous structure, the concept of a critical museum becomes entirely appropriate.” On this basis he emphasised that the museum “should undertake a debate with itself as an impersonal authority, and develop a system for involving the spectator that strips the museum of its authority, while at the same time constructing a more elaborate system of experiencing the museum, not only perceptual”.<sup>25</sup> Piotrowski was of course concerned here with “critical perception”, the capacity for “critical judgement” as the basic means of defining the essence of relations in the life of society, particularly in contemporary democracy.

Piotrowski owed this widening of the scope of “critical judgement” to the evolution of his own thought and the gradual overcoming of his own conceptual categories. In his early books, dating from the 1990s, the period of Poland’s emerging democracy (*Dekada* [*Decade*] and *Znaczenia modernizmu* [*Meanings of Modernism*]), Piotrowski wrote of Polish artists’ “modernist” embroilment with the problems of the autonomy of the work of art and of the artistic process, and described this as being in a dialectical game with the political engagement of the artist challenging artistic institutions and ideologies of power. It was a game in which modernist autonomy could equally be an instrument of resistance or a convenient flight from responsibility. Pointing to the fallacy of the belief in the existence of academic and artistic practice outside any authority, Piotrowski henceforth examined all sorts of institutional and psychological restrictions on expression. In *Decade*, his book dealing with the 1970s, he exposed with polemical single-mindedness both the opportunism of the pseudo-avant-garde and the institutionalisation of the neo-avant-garde. He found young artists to be lacking in critical viewpoints, and drew attention to the debasement of artistic values in art that abrogated the notion of responsibility.<sup>26</sup> Piotrowski later came to soften this stance

<sup>24</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne* [*The Critical Museum*] (Poznań: REBIS, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> “Chcieliśmy otworzyć muzeum. Z Piotrem Piotrowskim rozmawia Magdalena Radomska” [*We Wanted to Open a Museum: Piotr Piotrowski Interviewed by Magdalena Radomska*], *Czas Kultury* no. 5 (2010).

<sup>26</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Dekada. O syndromie lat siedemdziesiątych, kulturze artystycznej, krytyce, sztuce – wybiórczo i subiektywnie* [*Decade: About the Syndrome of the Seventies, Artistic Culture, Criticism, Art – Selectively and Subjectively*] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1991).

somewhat; nevertheless, the tension he described in relation to the 1970s between the ideological “apparatuses of the state” and socio-artistic strategies was to play a crucial role in his subsequent work. It was from this standpoint that, a few years later, he launched a harsh critique of my work at the Foksal Gallery, which I was to argue with Piotr about on numerous occasions.<sup>27</sup> Citing an article of mine about “Polish ideosis” with polemical gusto, he wrote: “Turowski writes: ‘demanding autonomous values in the sphere of culture to make them serve as a social weapon of art was a warning signal, since the authorities of the time were interested precisely in taking away these values’. My own point of view,” Piotrowski asserted, “which I have no hesitation in describing as materialist, particularly now, in a situation of right-wing hysteria, political hostility and ambient animosity to dialectical materialism, is exactly the reverse. The ‘authorities of the time’, and hence the Ideological Apparatus of the State, were interested precisely in the autonomy of art – they were interested in removing the values of political critique from the legacy of the avant-garde.”<sup>28</sup> This shift of viewpoint, the result of new influences, was noteworthy. My reference points were Adorno and Benjamin, while Piotrowski’s was Althusser. We wrote in different times, and had come out of different experiences – in my case, 1968, and in Piotrowski’s, 1989. That was the framework within which we sought common ground.

In *Meanings of Modernism*, to which we need to return, Piotrowski was interested in an even wider perspective, posing the question of the “endurance and dynamism of modernist concepts and values present in post-war Polish art”<sup>29</sup> – in a sense, an issue that concerned us both. This broadening of his field of research and change of emphasis was emblematic of Piotrowski’s evolving interests, allowing him to view the Polish art of the second half of the twentieth century as a dynamic process of mythologising and demythologising reality, or, as he put it, a clash between “Polish myths” and “critical strategies”. Viewing Polish artists in the context of historical ideologies, and adopting

<sup>27</sup> “Śladami Louisa Althussera. O polityce autonomii i autonomii polityki w sztuce Europy Wschodniej” [In the Footsteps of Louis Althusser: About the Politics of Autonomy and the Autonomy of Politics in Eastern European Art], *Obieg* (online edition) 23 December 2006, updated 26 July 2009, <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/artmix/4157> (accessed 10 May 2019).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* [*Meanings of Modernism: Towards a History of Polish Art after 1945*] (Poznań: REBIS, 1999), 6.

an analytical approach to the complexity and distinctiveness of Polish political culture – both stemming from this re-evaluation – immediately gave Piotrowski's research new intellectual "verve". Piotrowski henceforth regarded the issue of universalism – related to the autonomy of art and viewed in terms of freedom – as one of the most mythologised problems of Central and Eastern European culture. It was from this viewpoint that he critiqued my own reflections on the modernist idea of universalism, which I had formulated on the sidelines of *Europa, Europa*, an exhibition co-curated by Ryszard Stanisławski, held in Bonn in 1994. A rejoinder of sorts to the Bonn exhibition was Piotrowski's involvement in the major exhibition of European avant-gardes organised by Timothy O. Benson in Los Angeles in 2002,<sup>30</sup> which broke up the rigid model of modernism as a single movement and defined it in terms of a number of diverse urban centres developing in parallel. I was more sympathetic to such an approach, as I had long been inclined to draw a distinction between modernist utopias of universalism and a model of development in which avant-garde art was subordinated to a plethora of specificities. I now formulated this in the text "The Phenomenon of Blurring", published in the catalogue to Benson's American exhibition.<sup>31</sup>

The research Piotrowski undertook in the 1990s was directed at deconstructing modernist myths and finding points in history where they revealed themselves for what they were. Whereas in *Decade* Piotrowski adopted a polemical stance regarding the autonomous art of the 1970s, in *Meanings of Modernism* he discerned the existence of a "critical tradition" in post-war Polish art, desiring to make it the basis of the "critical art history" that he was working on. In line with the beliefs of members of the former Frankfurt School, criticism was understood by him as a method of apprehending social reality. Citing my observations and switching perspective somewhat, Piotrowski

<sup>30</sup> *Europa, Europa. Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel – und Osteuropa: Bonn, 27. Mai–16. Oktober 1994, Kunst – und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [Europa, Europa: The Century of the Avant-Garde in Central and Eastern Europe: Bonn, 27 May – 16 October 1994, Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany]*, eds. Ryszard Stanisławski and Christoph Brockhaus, ex. cat. (Bonn: Stiftung Kunst und Kultur des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1994); *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, ed. Timothy O. Benson (Los Angeles and Cambridge, MA: LACMA and The MIT Press, 2002). See also my reflections: "Dyskurs o uniwersalizmie" [Discourse on Universalism], in: Turowski, *Awangardowe marginesy*, 169.

<sup>31</sup> Andrzej Turowski, "The Phenomenon of Blurring", trans. Wanda Kemp-Welch, in: *Central European Avant-Gardes*, 362–373.



wrote that “the confrontation between the avant-garde and the protest movement (counter-culture) – in other words, between modernism and critical practice – was among the fundamental dilemmas of Polish artistic culture in the 1970s. These related to the exploration of the theoretical grounds for the legitimization or defence of the autonomy of art in the context of the total (totalitarian) appropriation of reality by the language of (communist) ideology. The defence of the autonomy of the work of art, or more precisely of artistic language, was a form of protecting it from reality.”<sup>32</sup> In my case, the instrument for defining the distinctive features of those years was the concept of marginality, while in Piotrowski’s work it was the idea of framing. It can be assumed – as I wrote in *Avant-Garde Margins* in 1998, this time attempting to mount a critique of avant-garde autonomy on my own account – that art history will now be shaken up by the margins, just as at one time it was shaken up by the avant-garde. “The margins are an overstepping of autonomy. If we are raising this as an issue, we are already going beyond the theory of the autonomous work of art.”<sup>33</sup> From a broader perspective, my aim was to challenge the notion that modern art history could be identified in terms of an artistic, political, biographical, ideological, cartographic and historical integrality. I was less interested in the structuralist whole, and more in the transgression of limits and in fragmentation. The margins were not subordinated to the hierarchy and domination of the text (style). I cited as an example Alfred H. Barr Jr.’s interpretation of the stylistic development of modern art. Piotrowski at the time was placing emphasis somewhat differently, but we were both making the same point. The concept of framing that he proposed in *Meanings of Modernism* was intended, as he wrote, to break the paradigm of a universalist art history based on dominant templates, including the concept of the autonomous avant-garde formulated by Western art history. MoMA in New York had of course played a notable part in this. The study of contemporary art, Piotrowski was thenceforth to say in numerous texts, must recognise that “the experiences of different countries were by no means shared, nor were their cultural meanings similar”. Here our views intersected.

The problem was not new, but it was now couched in radical terms. Its origins lay in the early 1980s when, amid political tensions and euphorias, a new political history was emerging, its attention focused on Central Europe. The debate sparked by

<sup>32</sup> Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 133–134.

<sup>33</sup> Turowski, *Awangardowe marginesy*, 13.

Milan Kundera's famous 1983 essay "The Kidnapped West or the Tragedy of Central Europe" centred on geographical and historical identity seen primarily from the point of view of the collective plight of the Central European countries experiencing "colonial" subjection to Soviet Russia and abandonment by the West. Against this background, the question arose of creating a new art history that, in breaking with the notion of provincialism, would usher in an art history of Central Europe that was an equal field of universal art research. These issues, as I have mentioned, were formulated for the first time at Poznań University in the autumn of 1980, at the international conference devoted to relations between the Central European avant-gardes and Western art. The lead paper at the conference, by Antoine Baudin, a Swiss researcher into the Polish avant-garde whom Piotrowski would later cite frequently, was called "Who's Afraid of the Peripheries?"<sup>34</sup> Posing the old questions of how to demarcate Central Europe's cultural borders, and within those to mark out the edges and limits of avant-garde art, the debate centred on three fundamental problems. The first was the lives of artists and their artistic biographies as the basic element shaping ideas about cultural identity. The second was geography, a kind of spatial and synchronic diversity within the overall shifting complexity of historico-cultural, economic-political and philosophical-ideological links. The third problem concerned historico-artistic processes – primarily ideas to do with the formation of stylistic trends, intellectual viewpoints, conceptions of history and visions of the future. I gave lectures on these themes both in Poland and France, and, along with the issues raised by the conference, they were reflected in my book published in France in 1986 under the title *Is There an Art of Eastern Europe? [Existe-t-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est?]*.<sup>35</sup> In it I wrote about the universalism and particularism of the Central and Eastern European experience, and the emergence in this region – alongside utopian visions of the future – of dystopias and retrospective utopias freighted not so much with ideas of progress as with lived history and geography. A little later,

<sup>34</sup> See footnote 3. The conference was discussed in *Artium Quaestiones* vol. II (1983), 188–190. The conference material was published, in French only, many years later in a special issue of the Paris journal *Ligeia* (nos. 5–6 [1989], 31–131). Along with an introduction by Andrzej Turowski, "L'avant-garde en Europe de l'Est: problèmes et orientations de la recherche" [The Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe: Problems and Avenues of Research] (31–34), the journal also published Antoine Baudin's key text "Qui a peur de la périphérie?" [Who's Afraid of the Peripheries?], *Ligeia*, op. cit., 124–131.

<sup>35</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *Existe-t-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est? [Is There an Art of Eastern Europe?]* (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 1986).

and all the while conscious of the reflections prompted by the previous discussions, I called for a “new artistic geography of the avant-garde margins. It would be”, I wrote, “an examination of the distribution of peripheral places and spaces. Of blank areas on a map of otherwise clearly marked centres. A labyrinth of routes and locales.”<sup>36</sup>

As we have seen, these were the issues that Piotrowski took up in his work of the 1990s, proposing fundamental analytical concepts regarding the artistic geography of Central and Eastern Europe and outlining broad lines of enquiry. The idea, he wrote, was to discern, within a universal or global idiom, that which was specific and local. The objective was to open up new interpretative possibilities and bring about a flexible contextualisation of art history, revealing the complexity of the art of a given micro-region from the perspective of global phenomena and processes. This approach would disclose, under the surface layer of shared form, the deeper context (super-text) of culture – one primarily linked to a particular time and place. It would be a way of bringing the “supporting bracket” of the text into play amid the uniqueness of experience and the diversity and richness of local meanings. It would thus disrupt the paradigm of a universalist art history. “The art of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Hungary”, Piotrowski wrote about the new geography, “developed in different semiotic and ideological spaces than the art of France or Italy. The universal perspective, understood as a methodological tool, prevents one from reaching particular meanings of culture, and from describing its regional, national and local identities. One can easily understand the psychological reasons behind the frustration of the art historians working on Eastern Europe, caused by the almost complete absence of the art dear to them from the cultural canon of the continent, due to its peripheral location. The solution to this problem cannot be reached, however, by perpetuating imperial and hierarchical models. It rests with a revision of the current paradigms, and in finding replacements for the present analytic tools that will reveal to us the meanings of the cultures of ‘other’ geographic territories.”<sup>37</sup> As far as the chances of effecting this kind of

<sup>36</sup> Turowski, *Awangardowe marginesy*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 24. First published in Polish as *Awangarda w cieniu Jalty. Awangarda w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1945–1989* (Poznań: REBIS, 2005). The passage originally appeared in Piotrowski’s key text “W stronę nowej geografii artystycznej” [Towards a New Artistic Geography], *Magazyn Sztuki* no. 19 (1998), [http://magazynsztuki.eu/old/archiwum/nr\\_19/archiwum\\_nr19\\_tekst\\_4.htm](http://magazynsztuki.eu/old/archiwum/nr_19/archiwum_nr19_tekst_4.htm) (accessed

intrinsic transformation of the “ontological foundation” of art history were concerned, I was much more sceptical. I agreed that “the questions arising from these explorations are of a paradigmatic nature, and relate to the totality of the fundamental assumptions and problems of our field of study. Let us not, however, expect to get identical answers,” I wrote, “and let us not nurture any hope of effecting a total rethink or finding a way out of the places where we have reached an impasse. And above all let us not succumb to the latest delusion by submitting to the temptation of trying to replace a questionable and worn-out system with a new and better one. If such an art history – one that embraces the margins – ever manages to forge an identity for itself, it won’t involve the whole system, but it will be a case of critical research practices penetrating a heterogeneous network of intertwined discourses.”<sup>38</sup>

In the 1990s, as can be seen, we had these concerns in common and found such lines of enquiry promising. When I wrote on these matters at the time, I did so with a slightly different emphasis than Piotrowski, talking of artistic cartography rather than geography. I linked the idea of otherness more and more frequently to the postcolonial legacy rather than regional factors, and I introduced the notion of marginality into considerations of localism. Of course we weren’t always talking about the same things, and there were differences of detail. My focus then, stemming from an overriding interest in the avant-gardes of the first decades of the twentieth century, was the concept of crisis sparked by the Great War, while Piotrowski’s research, geared to post-1945 art, was centred on issues raised by the breakthrough moment of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the search for a methodological framework within which I could examine aspects of crisis, I turned to two researchers, Aby Warburg and Max Dvořák, who saw WWI and the crisis associated with it in terms of psychological experience, and for whom it represented a change of cognitive orientation, rooted in the anthropology and historiosophy they were constructing. Piotrowski was interested in the contemporary work being done by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann on artistic geography, and by Denis Wood and Irit Rogoff on maps and the signifying practices of cartography, which he used as a basis for exposing nationalist ideologies and historical myths. While from the political point of view we had a joint interest in Foucault’s concept of biopower,

---

10 July 2015). The latter was reprinted with small changes both in *Znaczenia modernizmu and Awangarda w cieniu Jalty*.

<sup>38</sup> Turowski, *Awangardowe marginesy*, 21–22.

Piotr's attention was soon deflected in the direction of Althusser's "apparatuses", and then on to the "agonism" of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, while I gravitated towards Freud's "fetishisms"; and then Georges Bataille and Georges Didi-Huberman and the idea of "*l'informe*". He was looking for processes and points of reference, while I sought lacunae, ruptures and fractures. In all of this we were interested in a common understanding of change, rejecting in this regard, as I have already mentioned, a diachronic history that focused on historical centres to which milieux and styles were subordinated, and eyeing with interest a "synchronic history that," as I emphasised, "in its focus on geography, made history and innovation dependent on places on a map".<sup>39</sup>

At the time I was attached to the idea of heterotopia, which I was henceforth to link to modernist cartography. At the same time I questioned the model of art history based on oppositions, having become interested in differences rather than opposites. It was not a form of dialectic, because the latter is always binary, but a sort of interweaving of elements. In my introduction to *Budowniczość świata* [*Builders of the World*] of 2000, I adopted the model of a discursive intertwining as the underlying premise of research into contemporary art.<sup>40</sup> This had a multi-layered construction (but was not structured according to a single principle), comprised numerous fragments of the artistic life of a given time and place, and was subject to incessant pressure from social and psychological forces. Piotrowski attached similar significance to framing, which in his work increasingly came to signify difference. At this point the issue that interested him came fully to the fore – that of the political and cultural differentiation of social groups in a democratic collectivity, alongside a concomitant "negotiation of political identities". In Piotr's writings, the "frame", seen as difference, became a manifestation of democratic multiculturalism and a locus of agonistic debate. In my own articles I described this sort of interlaced weaving of a political nature in terms of the concepts of either ideosis or politosis. I related these to an ideologically saturated field tied together by a network of miscellaneous systems of cultural circulation. They did not structure the field, but allowed it to be viewed as a conflictual and politically unstable heterotopia. What integrated artistic and social phenomena were interactions and not genetic ties. In this interlacement, individual artistic statements (works, movements, utopias,

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>40</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *Budowniczość świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu w sztuce polskiej* [*Builders of the World: From the History of Radical Modernism in Polish Art*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2000).

programmes, styles, ideologies, critiques, etc.) formed gently interlocking and always intricately connected circles with a variable and fluid degree of internal organisation. On the fringes, these circles lost their precise borders, their bonds loosened, and the transgressive and critical discourses of the margins began to proliferate chaotically, deconstructing everything in their path. For Piotrowski this was the postmodernist problem of identity politics: “a more differentiated, anarchistic or liberal stance is required to customise the arena for negotiating one’s own position with the world around one”, he wrote in 2000.<sup>41</sup>

I did not need to be concerned, at least from the mid-1980s onwards, with negotiating my own place in a world on the margins since, from the moment I found myself in France, my situation underwent a fundamental change, bringing with it a completely different view of identity and an equally different academic perspective.<sup>42</sup> The methodological anarchism that I had recourse to more and more frequently was my critical contribution to positive scholarship, and at the same time it went to the very core of alternative modes of cognition. Here methodological meta-reflection, eschewing system-building, “roamed hither and thither”, filling in the blank spaces of nescience and querying the factuality of what we know and learn through cognition (narrative/ideology). It did not allow for a once-and-for-all determination of the field of research or object of observation; it imposed switches of points of view, invited a sharpening of critical observation and scrutiny, and challenged the historical and disciplinary integrality of scholarship. A method of this sort that questions methodological borders was disruptive of the system of knowledge, opening up cognition to the imagination. It was in such a spirit of inconsequence that many years later I was to write *The Locomotive of History*<sup>43</sup> (2012).

All the issues of a more or less theoretical or methodological nature that I have been talking about were pursued by us in the context of our historical studies, archival research and ongoing reading. Here we always complemented each other, enthu-

<sup>41</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Sztuka według polityki” [Art after Politics], in: *Negocjatorzy sztuki Negocjatorzy sztuki wobec rzeczywistości* [Negotiators of Art in the Face of Democracy], ed. Bożena Czubak, ex. cat. (Gdańsk: CSW Łaźnia, 2000), later reprinted in *Sztuka według polityki*, op. cit., 190.

<sup>42</sup> Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: New Left Books, 1975).

<sup>43</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *Parowóz dziejów – The Locomotive of History* (in Polish and English) (Warsaw: Instytut Książki i Prasa [Le Monde Diplomatique series], 2012).

siastically seeking comparisons between our essentially differently focused interests. While I was interested in the beginnings of twentieth-century modernism, Piotr was oriented towards late modernity, including the pivot to postmodernism. Piotrowski worked on post-1945 Central European art and its political involvements, whereas I was concerned with the artistic and political history of the Polish avant-garde, from its inception until the end of WWII. In the book *Builders of the World* I discarded the structuralist interpretation of constructivism that had characterised my earlier work, breaking up the integrated chronological-stylistic-ideological foundation of the interpretative art-historical narrative.<sup>44</sup> I now discerned fractures in constructivist structures that had escaped my attention previously, and was conscious that in the 1930s the spectre of war had loomed out of the lost utopias. In another work of mine, a case study titled *Malewicz w Warszawie* [*Malevich in Warsaw*], published in 2002, I was interested in this artist's multicultural identity, coming as he did from the margins of Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>45</sup>

Piotrowski's research of the same period came to fruition in 2005 with his substantive book *In the Shadow of Yalta*, which had the explanatory subtitle *Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*. It was an exceptional contribution not just to the Polish, but also to the global literature on the subject. It was the first comprehensive work on innovative artistic phenomena in a hitherto “unknown” part of the European continent, from the years directly following World War II to the period of the great changes wrought by the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War division of Europe. “The new geography of Eastern Europe”, Piotrowski wrote, “must, therefore, encompass not only the metaphysics of place, but also the entire range of historic factors appearing at the juncture between traditions, definitions of the place situated within local tensions, mythologies, inferiority complexes, political and social structures and, on the other side, cultural trajectories, reception of cultural models, and the export and import of artistic and other processes.”<sup>46</sup> The assertions made in the book, and the resultant questioning of the universal, namely Western, point of view led Piotrowski to seek a substitute for hierarchical art history and to construct a new horizontal model.

<sup>44</sup> Turowski, *Budowniczość świata*.

<sup>45</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *Malewicz w Warszawie. Rekonstrukcje i symulacje* [*Malevich in Warsaw: Reconstructions and Simulations*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 29.

It must be emphasised that in Piotrowski's research the return to a comparative (formerly structural) model – filtered through the new geohistory as outlined here – bore fruit in the proposition of a horizontally differentiated art history. World art history, he asserted subsequently, “if it is to be written in accordance with the demands of ‘geohistory’ – in other words, giving due consideration to the specificity of meanings of the art of marginal regions – must be critical towards hierarchical historico-artistic narratives, namely vertical art history, and in consequence should be written from the perspective of a different, horizontal paradigm”.<sup>47</sup> It entailed a fundamental change of reasoning and the importation of new categories and concepts. Behind it lay a desire to invert the question, to alter the standpoint, to take a sidelong view, to establish a distance – all in order to relativise the viewpoint from which art history is written. To replace a vertical history deconstructed through critical processes, Piotrowski proposed a substantive “spatial turn”, permitting a new art history to be constructed, taking account above all of the diversity of the expressive subject (otherness) and its localisation (localness). The idea was to build a horizontal cultural arena, in the framework of which far-flung and separate phenomena would not be seen in terms of the hegemonic vision of Western culture, but would exist in a spatial polysemy of mutually co-forming cultures. “Just as the horizontal history of modern art, or even the horizontal histories of modern art, are called upon to act as a critique of a vertical and centralised art history,” he wrote, “so too should world art history act as a critique of universal art history, of an imperial art history – in the literal sense of the term – which imposes hierarchies, epistemological categories and a metropolitan value system on its colonies.”<sup>48</sup> The horizontal artistic culture that Piotrowski was describing corresponded well with the political theory of radical democracy that we both espoused.

The historical books that we published in the early twenty-first century gave us an opportunity to return to methodological problems, which became the subject of an almost symbolic encounter in the 30th-anniversary issue of *Artium Quaestiones* (volume XX) of 2009, which published our two sets of arguments. These were invested, this time, with the weight of academic theories, and summed up our respective positions, while at the same time outlining avenues of further enquiry. Piotrowski

<sup>47</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “O horyzontalnej historii sztuki” [Concerning a Horizontal Art History], *Artium Quaestiones* vol. XX (2009), 66.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.



contributed the critique titled “Concerning a Horizontal Art History”, which indicated with post-positivist precision a direction of travel for studies aimed at a postmodernist consideration of global modernity, while my contribution to the issues raised by the detailed study of Central European modernist art was the essay “The Phenomenon of Blurring”, in which I charted my already adumbrated anarchistic direction of research centred on disintegration, dispersion and indeterminacy. “The model of the history of contemporary art that emerges from the study of the peripheries”, I wrote in my concluding remarks, “tends naturally to turn to contexts and margins, to go beyond the canonical text of modernist or avant-garde geography and history, into side-spaces abandoned, shamefully concealed or treated as reservations for ‘otherness’. Of course what I have in mind is not the prudishness of those formations, but their ideology, within which, as Pierre Bourdieu has pointed out, the issue is always one of legitimising one’s own conception of art as a generally binding norm. But the norm is not binding on the margins, the system falls apart, the whole is lost in digressions, and ideology is reflected in a crooked mirror. The minority becomes the critical discourse of the text. The resulting studies of the margins of the avant-garde (the margins of the margin) in Central Europe are critical only so long as they succeed in clearly defining their position.”<sup>49</sup>

“Of course”, Piotrowski wrote in the conclusion to his text, “the situation of mutual relations between the centre and nationally defined localities is changing. Modernist culture was defined in terms of the tension between the national and international; contemporary culture – postmodernist and globalised, and functioning within a framework of doctrines of multiculturalism – reaches for a different vocabulary. In line with the above, issues of identity are gaining in importance on the global arena [...] This does not have to, indeed cannot, lead (again) to the writing of a single world history of art, only this time a horizontal one; it should instead lead to a pluralism of transregional narratives that would evidently be a critique of the Western-centric historico-artistic narrative. That is the great challenge facing our academic discipline – at least the part of it concerned with the study of modern art [...] In other words: world art history, the object of our consideration, should be horizontal and not vertical.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Turowski, “The Phenomenon of Blurring”, 373. Polish text originally published as “Fenomen nieostrości”, *Artium Quaestiones* vol. XX (2009), 75–101.

<sup>50</sup> Piotrowski, *O horyzontalnej historii sztuki*, 73.

Global art history was to be the subject of a new book by Piotrowski.<sup>51</sup> He left it unfinished, with only a detailed outline and several chapters completed. It was published three years after his death, in late 2018. Piotrowski spoke about the book during a conference in Lublin in 2014,<sup>52</sup> which I did not attend personally. The new art history, he said, signifies a certain type of analysis of the art history of the whole of modernism in global terms. In a global world, an artistic geography that links art to nations should be replaced with a topography that emphasises contemporary culture's ties to the city as the global environment of human life (transcosmopolitanism). An art history derived from this belief, based on an absence of centres and using the methods of comparative research, would allow an extensive map of intersecting connections to be drawn, on which we would be able to observe the horizontal functioning of contemporary transcosmopolitan culture.<sup>53</sup> With his critical attitude towards market-based globalisation, Piotrowski also reflected on the degree to which cultural globalisation and a global art history could serve as the foundation for alter-globalist activism – for a “global undertaking which would involve exposing repressive practices directed towards margins, peripheries both geographically and topographically”.<sup>54</sup>

This last sentence, which is a summation of Piotrowski's interrupted work and once again relates art to politics, was a restatement of his belief in the ethical framework of art history in a changing world. Rejecting a hierarchical universalism rooted in a belief in Western moral superiority and rational thought, Piotrowski sought a pluralist and horizontal model of life. Piotrowski's project as a researcher was concerned not with defined moral norms but historically perceived ethical behaviours. For him it was about a new humanism. This was the reason for his belief not so much in the primacy of social choices over aesthetic ones, as in the necessity of an awareness, in the life of

<sup>51</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej* [*The Global Viewpoint of Eastern European Art*] (Poznań: REBIS, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> *East European Art Seen from Global Perspectives*, at the Labirynt Gallery in Lublin, 24–27 October 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Paraphrasing of an interview with Piotrowski conducted during the conference. See: “Droga, którą warto podążać. Rozmowa z Piotrem Piotrowskim” [A Road Worth Taking: An Interview with Piotr Piotrowski], conducted by Richard Kosinsky, Jan Elantkowski and Barbara Dudás, *Obieg* (online edition), 30 March 2015, <https://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/teksty/35105> (accessed 11 May 2019).

<sup>54</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “From Global to Alter-Globalist Art History”, trans. Marta Skotnicka, *Teksty Drugie* vol. 1 (Special Issue – English Edition) (2015), 129, <http://rcin.org.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=59977> (accessed 11 May 2019).

every artist, of the ethical dimension of history – a dialectical and materialist history, a pluralist and causative history, in which art and man have their place, their rights and their power. These – determined by their histories – are characterised by mutability, temporality and impermanence. Of course the version of art history developed by Piotrowski on this foundation was a political history containing a vision of global and agonistic democracy (following Chantal Mouffe). The critical relations of radical politics characteristic of this sort of democracy would, according to Piotrowski, call into question each and every dominance, and, in its witnessing and negotiating role, art would contest and resist every fanaticism and populism, every threat to freedom and equality, every attempt to exclude others from participation or strip them of the right to joint decision-making. Abandoning the cultural contestation and its utopia of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Piotrowski belonged to the Solidarity generation, while at the same time seeing a horizontal continuity of “cuts” connecting 1968 and 1989. Was this not a return to avant-garde utopias, he asked in hope, utopias “which never broke away from anarchy and critique and instead used them, embracing the principles of discord, analysis and destruction of the old to create the new? If that is the case, then we are witnessing the awakening of a new artistic sensibility that is charting new paths for art. Perhaps this is also the birth of new art, art that is making a historic turn not so much in the direction of the classic avant-garde, since the classic avant-garde had no interest in democratising democracy (on the contrary), but rather towards its sources that envisioned utopian social and political projects.”<sup>55</sup>

This time, too, our concerns intersected. The utopia of the avant-garde, banished as an unseemly reverie by the instrumentalism of political propaganda, and yet at one time representing the combative worldview of excluded artists – as I wrote in my book *The Radical Eye*<sup>56</sup> – remains to this day one of the discourses of resistance to the optimism of the political and economic ideologies of power; it ought not to be a fantasy of a better world, but a way of experiencing the crisis of the world in which we live, and, at the same time, an alternative project of change – namely of real transformation.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Anarchy, Critique, Utopia”, in: *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 151.

<sup>56</sup> My book *Radykalne oko* [*The Radical Eye*], written during 2012–2015, is awaiting publication by the Gdańsk publishing house Słowo/obraz terytoria.

<sup>57</sup> Krzysztof Wodiczko, “The Transformative Avant-Garde: A Manifest of the Present”, *Third Text* vol. 28, no. 2 (2014), 111–122. A longer, amended version was published in Polish as



Meeting after the conference *Der öffentliche Raum als neue Bühne der Kultur: Zeitgenössische Kunst und Theorie* Polens, Kunsthalle Wien, 2002. From the left: Piotr Piotrowski, Jarosław Kozłowski, Piotr Rypson, Andrzej Turowski, Krzysztof Wodiczko. Photo: Maria Anna Potocka, from the Piotr Piotrowski Archive.

Citing Immanuel Wallerstein, I wrote that utopistics was a serious assessment of historical alternatives and an evaluation of the zones open to human creativity. “Not the face of the perfect (and inevitable) future, but the face of an alternative [...] future.”<sup>58</sup>

Le Four à la Pérelle, 09 October 2018

---

“Awangarda transformatywna. Manifest teraźniejszości”, in: *Szum* no. 6 (supplement) (2014), 1–28. In it, Wodiczko cited my *Sztuka, która wzniera niepokój. Manifest artystyczno-polityczny sztuki szczególnej / Art That Sparks Unrest: The Artistic-Political Manifesto of Particular Art* (in Polish and English) (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2012). Piotrowski showed great interest in the book, and initiated a debate about it: “Manifest Turowskiego” [Turowski’s *Manifesto*], published in the journal *Czas Kultury* no. 6 (2013).

<sup>58</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *Utopistics: Or, Historical Choices of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 1–2.



# **Writing a History of East-Central European Modern and Contemporary Art in the (Former) West and (Former) East: A Conversation with STEVEN MANSBACH**

**AGATA JAKUBOWSKA:** I would like to start our conversation by asking you about your interest in Eastern Europe. When and how did it start?

**STEVEN MANSBACH:** It started when I was a graduate student at Princeton, and later at Cornell. I was very much interested in the Bauhaus and the utopian nature of the avant-garde. What I realised through examining the historiography is that almost everything celebrated then was supposedly created in Holland, Germany or Russia. The more I immersed myself in literature, however, the more I realised that almost all the theory, and much of the visual expression, had roots far to the east of Germany or Holland. In the early and mid-1970s this cultural geography had not been well investigated – at least by scholars of the time. So what prompted me was an absence. The challenge was of course twofold. First of all, access. During the mid-1970s, when I was writing my doctoral dissertation, and then subsequently when I was publishing on related subjects, I found it far from easy to get to those places. For instance, I was denied a visa to the Soviet Union for twelve years in a row. Hungary, by contrast, was one of few places that were relatively open to Western scholars. And of course in Yugoslavia there was very little difficulty. So I began my post-doctoral studies there mostly out of convenience, and not for any theoretical or even historical justification. And in Hungary and Yugoslavia I was indeed given access to research resources, archives, storage rooms and even libraries that locally trained, outstanding domestic scholars were too often denied.

The initial challenge of physical access was reinforced by the second challenge: namely my own pedagogical limitations – linguistic as much as experiential. Although I could read a number of languages, my speaking command was less broad, and there

were numerous occasions when German, French or English proved inadequate to communicate freely with colleagues about shared interests. Working in the entire geographical region from the Baltic north to the Balkan south required, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s, a better command of local languages than I readily possessed. Moreover, I wanted to explain to local colleagues why I, as a foreigner, was provided the kind of academic access to research resources that so many of them were denied, and trying to do so in a foreign (to them) language would necessarily undercut my endeavour.

**What was the reason for this one-sided access to research resources?**

I think that many of these scholars were considered suspect by their respective governments. They were likely perceived as potentially (or perhaps actually) untrustworthy, a case quite different from a single American with no identifiable local audience. As an American, and one without any direct family connection to the region, I may have been seen merely as a person who would come on occasion and then depart. Thus, I presented no political threat or danger in any form.

There was a type of irony at play – at least for me. When I organised one of the first exhibitions of the East-Central European avant-garde, *Standing in the Tempest: Painters of the Hungarian Avant-Garde, 1908–1930* (organised for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, then published as a book by the MIT Press in 1991), where I focused on Hungarian avant-garde art, I had to be interviewed by the Prime Minister of Hungary, the Minister of Culture, and several party bureaucrats before everything was approved for a Western venue and the desired loans were agreed to. The exhibition was to open at the end of 1989/beginning of 1990, but with the political change in 1989, all the permits were cancelled. We had to renegotiate everything with the new government, one quite suspicious of agreements made by the previous regime. Everything worked out nicely, but it was yet another awakening to the political dimension of working on modern (and contemporary) art from East-Central Europe, where culture itself is so frequently a field of contention and counter-claims.

**In the introduction to your book *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939* you mention the Soros Centers as being very useful for scholars from the West.**

Originally, there were two types of centre. First, there were Open Society Centers, which often operated in the various nations under differing names, and

promoted the liberal democratic aims for which George Soros has long articulated. Slightly later, and partly as a result of a discussion I had with him, the founder recognised that art was a vital vehicle to advance an open society, especially as so many liberal thinkers and emerging political figures were also deeply engaged with the arts. So Soros agreed to experiment by enriching the Open Society Centers with art centres. The latter had two dimensions: they were to be both history-oriented as well as contemporary-focused. Soros explained, and I share this belief, that the contemporary art (of the 1990s) had to reconnect with the past, with the period that was interrupted first by the consolidation of right-wing regimes in the 1930s and then by the establishment of left-wing governments in the post-World War II era. As a result, one of the objectives of the art centres was to document art that had been suppressed by these authoritarian regimes; there was also the recognition that even earlier, indeed in the 1920s, the avant-garde was embattled when it was at its most radical politically and culturally.

#### **Did you work with Soros Centers?**

I worked with many of them. I was one of few people from the West who was keenly interested at the time. I would travel from one Soros Center to another, basically from 1992 to 1997, a time when I was conducting research for *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*. The people who staffed the centres were among the most open-minded, responsive figures I have ever encountered. They were an ideal environment to research in, and I profited enormously from the courtesies and collaboration I received.

#### **The documentation system at the Soros Centers was based on the system developed at the National Gallery in Washington. You worked there – did you play any role in the transfer of this system?**

Yes, we started at the National Gallery. We hoped to help scholars with their documentation in each of the participating nations, and then have a duplicate at the National Gallery, so that one place would have everything and prove to be a centre for research on the entire region. This was a model that we tried to introduce in East-Central Europe, country by country. It was remarkably ambitious. One of the first places was Tallinn. One persuasive reason was because it was small and had a potent classical avant-garde from the 1910s and 1920s. With that strong historical basis, the Estonian centre could then embrace, promote and document the vital contemporary art being



produced. In my view, the Estonian centre was notably effective, but this model didn't work everywhere as successfully.

### **What was the problem?**

In some countries, such as Poland, the historical avant-garde was so enormous in scope and scale and achievement that you couldn't just have a few people working on both historical documentation and the promotion of contemporary art. Poland, and other nations with a comparable avant-garde record – both historical and contemporary – would have required multiple centres and additional personnel to realise the ambitious objectives originally established for the Soros Centers. As far as I know, each of the centres I visited during the 1990s proved successful to varying degrees. After 2000, I increasingly lost touch with the centres, although I maintained contact with several of the scholars who had been their directors.

### **At what moment did you meet Piotr?**

I met Piotr when he came to the National Gallery in 1989/90.<sup>1</sup> I was already in Berlin then,<sup>2</sup> but as the former Associate Dean of the Center for Advanced Study at the National Gallery, I would come back to supervise some of the documentation enterprises mentioned above, as well as other activities, several sponsored by George Soros. Among the latter I was working with Henry Millon, the Dean of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA), to persuade George Soros, whom I had known for several years before, to fund a multi-year Soros Fellowship at CASVA. This prestigious award had two aspects: a residency at CASVA for two months and then travel, wherever the fellow wanted, anywhere in North America, for two subsequent months. The purpose was, in part, to provide the one thing that scholars from Eastern Europe had been denied: complete freedom to travel, to meet fellow scholars and colleagues, and to gather research materials. Piotr came the first year of CASVA's Soros Fellowship programme, but not under these auspices, as he had applied to CASVA for a full year's award rather than the shorter term afforded to Soros fellows. However, Ma-

<sup>1</sup> Piotrowski was an Ailsa Mellon Bruce Senior Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> From 1988 to 1991, Steven Mansbach was an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the Freie Universität in Berlin, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) senior Rousseau Scholar. Following this, he was a senior Fulbright Scholar for Germany. He was also the founder (1987) and dean (until 1997) of the American Academy in Berlin.

ria Poprzęcka (University of Warsaw) and Olga Pujmanová (National Gallery, Prague) were there during Piotr's tenure, as inaugural Soros fellows.

In those days Piotr was working primarily on the classical avant-garde and especially on Russian topics. Both of us had published on Russian themes, and we had instant common ground for discussion. And we just hit it off tremendously as people. We became friends; each time I came back to Washington, we went for dinner. We talked mostly about the 1910s and 1920s in Eastern Europe, as well as about American art of the 1960s and 1970s, in addition to contemporary art. After that year Piotr returned to Poznań, but because I was living in Berlin we were able to see one another frequently: he would come to visit us in Berlin and we would go to Poznań. And we also became friendly with Adam Labuda,<sup>3</sup> both in Poland and especially once he assumed his professorship at Humboldt University in Berlin. At the end of the 1990s Piotr invited me to teach in Poznań, at the Institute of Art History, which I was finally able to do in 1999. I loved teaching there, where I saw Piotr almost daily. Of course we met one another frequently outside of Poznań, Berlin and Washington – we attended the same conferences, and often consulted the same research facilities in Bucharest, Budapest and California, among other points on the globe.

**In the 1990s you were interested in similar subjects, such as modern art, modernism and nationalism. Do you remember any discussions regarding the latter between the two of you? When one reads your texts, for example the book *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, it's clear that what you perceive as typical for Eastern European countries and the modern art created there is that they concentrated on national identity. In the 1990s Piotr was convinced that you cannot be national and modern and the same time. Was it discussed between you?**

Most of our discussions, especially from the mid-1990s, dealt with that very topic. He was very helpful with my writing on Poland, and he was supportive of my emphasis on the role of nationalism, but he wasn't convinced of the emphasis I put on it. He thought that it was only one of the important aspects to be considered, but in no way the major one. My attitude was that, for the larger audience that doesn't have a historical command of the region and still prefers to see this part of the world in Cold War terms, it's important to stress that each area was extraordinarily individual

<sup>3</sup> Professor from Adam Mickiewicz University, Piotr Piotrowski's home institution. From 1995 to 2009 a professor at Humboldt University in Berlin.

and had a type of self-awareness that was different from the others, even despite many shared characteristics and a powerful transnational worldview. I argued, and he would only agree in small measure, that one could be national and transnational at the same time – indeed the historical circumstances almost forced one to be so. Piotr, by contrast, was much more convinced that it was essential to emphasise the transnational at the expense of the national. I was even more persuaded of the decisive role played by the national, insomuch as contemporary art was in some important respect reviving – or at least coming to terms with – earlier national movements. Russia's Blue Noses Group might be cited as an example, as I think I brought up in a discussion with Piotr. What these Russian artists were doing, at least initially, was coming to terms with Malevich and the classical avant-garde in a national way. Such engagement with the past, much of it disparaged, discouraged and de-emphasised by former regimes, was happening in East-Central Europe to varying degrees among contemporary artists in the 1990s (when Piotr and I discussed the topic). I argued that contemporary art's excavation of the past required some form of reckoning with nationalism – not necessarily to celebrate it, but to come to terms with it.

**You both wrote books that are the only comprehensive surveys of art from East-Central Europe, but covering different periods. In your case it's ca. 1890 to 1939 [*Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939*, Cambridge University Press, 1999] and in Piotr's case first 1945–1989 and then post-1989 [*In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, Reaktion Books, 2009; *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, Reaktion Books, 2012]. These books are differently organised, and this is one of the subjects that art historians address when they compare them. Could you comment on this? Why did you decide to use the present-day nation-states as an organisational principle? And what do you think about Piotr's idea to abandon it?**

One of the major differences between our books – as you rightly indicated – is the time period on which each of us focuses. What interested me was what happens when new nation-states are coming into being and what role culture plays in their identity formation. Culture seems to be the defining aspect. For Piotr, dealing in the main with more contemporary things, a nation-state had a different set of meanings and an extremely unhappy contemporary history. This isn't to say that earlier in the twentieth century it didn't have an unhappy history, but the nation-state mostly lost

its fundamental (and original) optimism. Piotr's motivations were very different from mine; I don't think he would have written the same book(s) about the beginning of the twentieth century. In some respects the historical context shaped the organisation as well as the method of what each of us did. There is a third person who played a role in this general discussion, a friend of both of us – Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, who took yet another perspective in his 1995 book *Court, Cloister, and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450–1800*. What we share, at least in these texts, are overarching, synoptic themes, but in very differently inspired and motivated ways, and with a different set of audiences in mind. In some respects our books – the three of them – make for a rich anthology. They are certainly not uniform; in fact they are constantly in contestation with each other, but I think this is healthy and shows the diversity of different historical moments and the role of culture in those moments.

**I agree that both motivation and audience are very important for understanding the similarities and differences of your proposals. For example, Piotr's art-historical writing was always very much indebted to the current political situation. It was very political in the sense that it was driven by political issues; in your case it doesn't seem that important.**

You're right. One of the many wonderful things about Piotr was that he was a great host. I had an apartment for about a year in Poznań, and we would take trips, as I wanted to see places in Poland that I hadn't visited before. For example we went to Wrocław, where I wanted to see the sculpture that might have been saved from the fire that devastated St Elizabeth's in 1976. I admitted to Piotr that the rococo, indeed the entire eighteenth century in Central Europe and especially in Poland, was one of my secret passions. And on these long drives on terrible roads to out-of-the-way destinations, he would explain to me what it was like to be a young aspiring scholar during martial law. And he would tell me how afraid he was during that period of political oppression, and what role fear can play in forming one's scholarly self-awareness. As an American, I never had to deal with this. The only challenge I ever faced was the Vietnam War, specifically how to prevent being sent there. In contrast to my mild challenge, Piotr and his generation endured events in Poland that had a profound and lasting effect. In some respects it surfaces and informs almost everything on which Piotr later wrote. Thus, from these discussions held in his car, I realised that the political dimension of

his scholarship was a serious one. In my case I am reassured by a profound historical distance; I didn't live in the 1910s and 1920s, and later I didn't experience anything like Piotr or Adam [Labuda] or many others did in terms of opposing a regime. When I read their scholarship, in the back of my mind are those long drives we used to take, and I think – and this is only my conjecture, as Piotr never said anything explicitly – that one of the reasons he shifted from his initial focus on historical periods to more contemporary issues was his personal effort to come to grips with the political situation he faced during the early 1980s. This personal engagement differs fundamentally from the disinterested historical work on Russia under productivism that had first preoccupied Piotr. I'll venture a step further: one of the reasons that he may have been so keen not to limit himself geographically was his attempt to see to what extent these political experiences were universal, at least universal to the region. People like me lack the personal history to have this motivation.

**As we have already said, you wrote for different audiences. In the introduction to *Modern Art in Eastern Europe* you admit that you write for people from Western countries, to help them acquire knowledge about Eastern Europe and understand the art created there. It seems to me that for Piotr it was equally important to address people from Eastern Europe and the West.**

I did want people in Eastern Europe to read the book to the extent they could, in part because for so long people were in a kind of silo, e.g. Hungarians were interested in the Hungarian history of art and not in other countries. And here was a book that treated many, but not all, of the region's countries. There was a reception when the book came out, and the Bulgarian ambassador stood up and said, I trust in a jokey manner, that I would be *persona non grata* in Bulgaria because the chapter about Bulgaria had been removed. I tried to respond politely that Bulgaria, among other countries, was omitted only for reasons of economy; the publishers felt that if the manuscript I originally submitted – inclusive of Bulgaria – was published “as is”, it would require two volumes – the death knell for sales. Thus, Bulgaria appeared separately.

Both of us, Piotr and I, shared a firm belief that one has to overcome a type of inbred prejudice that there is dominant and derivative art. One of the greatest virtues of Piotr's later books is that he demonstrates the global importance of the subjects he is engaging. For example, if one is interested in the body, one sees how instrumental body art is to our understanding of what took place in Yugoslavia. His audience is

worldwide, and he compels us to take art much more seriously than before, because he makes us recognise that art's meanings shift. They can never be constrained by one predominant point of view or place.

**It's a good moment to ask you about differences in the conditions of knowledge production and distribution in the USA and Poland, for example. In your opinion, how did this affect Piotr's work?**

You raise a very important issue here. There are two advantages about US production and distribution: one is that the seeming universality of the English language and the economic system fosters the global distribution of scholarship published in English; the other is access to major publishers. Although Piotr didn't write his books in English (he made an exception for several of his shorter scholarly articles), he had a brilliant translator in Anna Brzyski, who is a wonderful scholar herself. One of the challenges he faced was how to find a publisher with an extensive distribution system. It's much more difficult if you publish in Poznań, even if your work is beautifully produced and translated. Piotr, among all contemporary scholars from the region, is perhaps the most widely read; his books have had the most profound worldwide effect. This isn't to suggest that other scholars haven't written equally important things, but I would say that the ramifications of their publications haven't been as dramatic, as the distribution of their work hasn't been as extensive. Piotr benefited from access to scholars, institutions and funders – he knew everyone.

**I just wanted to ask whether that might be related to his personality.**

He was awarded fellowships everywhere. When I spoke with Michael Ann Holly, the (now-former) director of the Clark Research Center, whom I have known for 50 years, we would talk about Piotr. Name any person in the Getty, and she or he knew Piotr. Everyone adored him – rightfully so, and it was of benefit to his scholarship. People promoted his scholarship because they promoted him, and it wasn't true to the same degree for many other people. We all remember Piotr's laugh. That laugh converted scholars maybe more immediately and deeply than his scholarship itself, and this isn't to diminish the eminence of his research. His winning personality recruited so many people to his fields of interest. He was also a brilliant lecturer; when he lectured, people listened, and therefore they wanted to learn more, so they started reading his books.



Visit of Michael Ann Holly (University of Rochester at the time) and Keith Moxey (Columbia University) to the Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, 1995. Above: Keith Moxey, Piotr Piotrowski; below: Mariusz Bryl (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), Michael Ann Holly, Piotr Piotrowski. From the Piotr Piotrowski Archive.



**It's clear from what you say that the 1990s were very important for studies on Eastern Europe. That period was very intensive. How do you perceive the development of research on the art of the region in subsequent decades? Did it become less important or less interesting?**

I would say just the opposite. I teach a series of courses on modern art, and integrate Central and Eastern Europe into all of them; I also lecture on the contemporary art of Eastern Europe. The enthusiasm and the number of students are enormous. It used to be people interested in nineteenth-century French art who filled art history lecture courses or graduate seminars; now there are literally hundreds of graduate students who study the modern and contemporary art, from the 1970s to today, of Central and Eastern Europe. I am teaching a graduate seminar this semester, and almost everyone is working on this area right now. They come from all over the world and are enthusiastic to study the subject. The lecture course for undergraduates is over-subscribed. I think that one of the reasons for this popularity is that it's still new to the students – one has to think in different methodological ways than in the past. It's exciting for students to realise that there are so many profound discoveries to be made – not just new art to learn, but novel ways to think about it. It's absolutely a booming “industry”. Everyone who has worked with me on the doctoral level has secured a job. Universities are now populated with Eastern European modernism specialists, and a whole generation of new scholars is emerging. When I was a graduate student – and we began our conversation today with it – I was the only one interested in the twentieth-century art produced in (and often for) Central and Eastern Europe; I was alone.

Piotr has consolidated the importance of studying the modern and contemporary art of “Eastern” Europe, both for and in Poland. You yourself, Agata, are one of the beneficiaries; and you continue to develop Piotr's legacy while enriching it with your own. One of the things that a professor does is to educate a new generation who might become professors and curators, who will surpass us with their own achievements. Piotr executed this responsibility brilliantly, and you and your colleagues are testimony to that.

**Now we have to educate people who are younger than us. And we obviously wonder what the future of studies on Eastern European art holds. What do you think: is the tendency to globalise Eastern European art a step in the development of this research area? The last project that Piotr was working on fostered the idea**





Doctoral graduation of Agata Jakubowska; Piotr Piotrowski as supervisor. Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, 2000. From the Piotr Piotrowski Archive.

**of globalising Eastern Europe by comparative studies, where you compare Eastern Europe with other parts of the world. You have written for example about architects both from Riga and Catalonia – still Europe, but a different region.**

On the one hand, one recognises that globalisation is something that is absolutely essential to encompass, and yet no one is doing it, in my opinion, convincingly. To a very large degree, one sees the advocacy of globalisation as merely adding more – more and more chapters. I am also guilty of this, adding Catalonia, or Slovenia, or

wherever it is, without coming up with a helpful new method by which globalisation becomes meaningful. I have a graduate student, Bart Pushaw, who just defended his dissertation, who wrote absolutely brilliantly and precisely on how to effectively employ a truly global perspective for a period and place. He brought together the Baltic, Japan and Latin America, proposed a carefully thought-through, compellingly argued new method that serves as a model that merits serious reflection by many of us who advocate the importance and relevance of globalisation. I can only hope that Pushaw's dissertation (University of Maryland, 2019) will be an incentive, if not the ideal model, to prompt further efforts to refine this perspective. The noble objective that Piotr had, that I and almost everyone interested in the modern and contemporary shares, is to perceive and promote the global dimension of art and culture. But this becomes meaningful only if it's reconfigured – not to make bigger books, but different books. We are still struggling with that defining challenge. In some respects it would be the perfect task and ideal role for Piotr to assume. He was among the most imaginative and versatile thinkers I have ever known, and his insightfulness is needed especially now.

19 April 2019



BOJANA PEJIĆ

## A Politics of Friendship (Remembered)

*Friendship, this relation without dependence, without episode yet into which all of the simplicity of life enters, passes by way of the recognition of the common strangeness that does not allow us to speak of our friends, but only to speak to them, not to make of them a topic of conversations (or articles), but the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even on the most familiar terms, and infinite distance, the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation.*

Maurice Blanchot quoted in Jacques Derrida, "The Politics of Friendship" (1993)<sup>1</sup>

"After", the ambiguous preposition in this publication's title – *After Piotr Piotrowski* – may be understood in two ways. It may be taken to mean that many writers who deal with art and culture in post-communist Europe, myself included, perform their art-historical tasks *following* the key concept Piotrowski introduced to the studies of art history, and which he named "horizontal art histories", or *according to* the method with which he demonstrated the limits of a "universalist" – or rather modernist – reading of (Eastern European) art. At the present moment, however, all of us who contribute to this volume are aware that the preposition "after" conveys a very specific meaning: we are framed here by the actuality of loss.

Elaborating on the notion of loss, which inevitably conditions an "after" – namely a work of mourning – a number of questions arise: "We might say that as soon as the question 'What is lost?' is posed, it invariably slips into the question 'What remains?' That is, loss is inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what

---

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Blanchot, cited in: Jacques Derrida, "The Politics of Friendship", *The Journal of Philosophy* vol. 85, no. 11 (November 1988), 644. French original: Maurice Blanchot, *L'amitié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). Online: Derrida, "The Politics of Friendship", [www.istud.it/newsletter/san/derrida.pdf](http://www.istud.it/newsletter/san/derrida.pdf) (accessed 20 November 2017).

remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained.”<sup>2</sup> Certainly, Piotrowski’s scholarly essays and books are those material “remains”, which will continue to be used, read and re-read, referred to, and sometimes questioned. Instead of proffering here an essay that would better fit the discourses elaborated by authors who constituted Piotrowski’s academic community, I’ve decided to write about him, my favourite art historian, using a less scholarly tone, risking a violation of the boundary of convention. I was, am and always will be a faithful fan of Piotr Piotrowski, one of the “groupies” (perhaps the oldest one) that his writings, his lectures, and above all, his energetic presence induced. My response to Piotrowski as an art historian has always been affective – as soon as I started reading his texts in the mid-1990s, I came to understand that art history could initiate the true joy of learning, *un gai savoir*. One should note that in the early 1990s, catalogues and texts dealing with art in post-communist Europe, even those translated into English, were not available in the Western bookshops or even libraries. We usually exchanged our writings when we met. Each time I read his sensible, analytical and well-argued articles for the first time, my reaction to his “art of the mind” was a rather irrational experience: it always ended with EUREKA! – a flash of joy, a WOW!, a moment of affectual sensation in which ratio, so it seemed, did not play any role. The first time it happened was after reading his amazing article on Jerzy Bereś, one of the first pieces I got from him, where he examined the artist’s performances as male sacrifice, unveiling in them connotations of Polishness as well as Christianity.<sup>3</sup> This text bypassed the usual – that is, “universalist” – interpretation of performance art, offering instead a contextual approach to the actions carried out by Bereś. When I try today to “rethink” Piotrowski as a colleague who was also a friend, I am not able to be less affective. Thus, I follow here Svetlana Boym (1966–2015), who, reflecting on the friendship between Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy stated: “Unlike recent philosophical reflections of friendship, what is offered here is not a theory but a theoretical fable that requires rigorous storytelling.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, “Introduction: Mourning Remains”, in: *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, eds. Eng and Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 2.

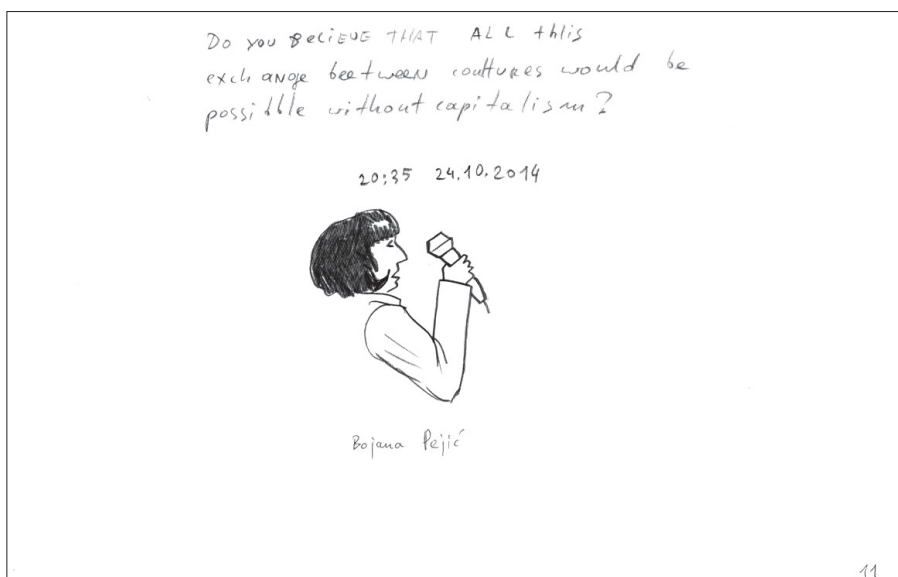
<sup>3</sup> See: Piotr Piotrowski, “The Artist’s Body”, in: *Jerzy Bereś – zwidły wyrocznie ołtarze wyzwania* [Jerzy Bereś – Hallucinations, Oracles, Altars, Challenges], ex. cat. (Poznań: Muzeum Narodowe, and Kraków: Muzeum Narodowe, 1995), 40–46.

<sup>4</sup> Svetlana Boym, “Scenography of Friendship”, *Cabinet Magazine* no. 36 (Winter 2009/10), <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/36/boym.php> (accessed 15 November 2017).

I first met Piotr Piotrowski in 1995, during an international conference that accompanied the exhibition *Where Is Abel, Thy Brother?*, curated by Anda Rottenberg, which was presented at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw. Months later, sometime in late spring 1995, during one of his frequent stays in Berlin, Piotrowski and I spent hours in my neighbourhood, at the Italian restaurant “*I due Emigranti*”, which was to become his favourite eatery in Berlin. This would remain our ritual meeting place, where we enjoyed an “incestuous” relationship – the kind of liaison cherished by intellectuals of the same profession and wavelength. Our restaurant became a place for conversation and for meetings with other art historians – for instance with two of Piotrowski’s friends, the diasporic Poles Ewa Franus and Andrzej Turowski, and once with his wife Maria. Back in the 1990s we all enjoyed the food prepared *dalla mamma* by the chef, a short punk girl who resembled a teenager from Manga comics more than an Italian mother, a contrast we simply adored. Between the meetings and conferences we both attended we would read each other’s articles, quoting each other and following closely what the other was doing. When I had the occasion to curate the exhibitions I called “East-centric”, such as *After the Wall* and *Gender Check*, where it was necessary to establish a certain balance between the number of artists from different countries, I always complained to him that the most difficult assignment for me was not selecting Russian artists, but choosing between Polish artists of great quality. He always replied with the phrase that became our in-joke: “Well, Poland is a big country.” Slowly, I came to understand the essence of our relation: “Friendship is never a given in the present; it belongs to the experience of waiting, of promise, or of commitment.”<sup>5</sup> The last time I met Piotrowski was again at an international conference he had initiated, *East European Art Seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present*, organised by the Labirynt Gallery in Lublin (24–27 October 2014). Our friendship, spanning almost twenty years, from 1995 till 2014, was an affiliation affected by mutual respect and responsibility, a shared sense of humour and joy, which has never been worded, let alone theorised. If I am to define it now, I would say that we have been practicing a *politics of friendship*.

The influential treatise “The Politics of Friendship” by Jacques Derrida appeared in English for the first time in 1988, and then again in 1993, and each time I read it I remember when I first came across it. During a short stay in Belgrade in April 1992 I attended Derrida’s lecture “Politiques de l’amitié”, held at the Student Cultural Center,

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, “The Politics of Friendship” (1988), 636.



Conference, *East European Art Seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present*, Labirynt Gallery in Lublin, 2014. Drawings by Mariusz Tarkawian. Courtesy of the Labirynt Gallery.

where I had worked from 1971 till 1990. The lecture was delivered on 07 April, and for the audience it had symbolic implications: although planned for earlier, it occurred the morning after Sarajevo was bombarded by the Serbian armies, which prevented Derrida from travelling to Sarajevo. The ensuing Bosnian war was to last until 1995, destroying cities and people's lives, as well as damaging many friendships between Yugoslav intellectuals. In his essay, Derrida explores the great philosophical and canonical discourses on friendship, from Plato to Montaigne, from Aristotle to Kant, from Cicero to Hegel, and from Nietzsche to Blanchot, and writes: "Before even having taken up responsibility for any given action, we are already caught up in a kind of asymmetrical and heteronomical curvature of the social space, more precisely, in relation to the Other prior to any organised *socius*, to any determined *government*, to any *law*."<sup>6</sup>

At the heart of each of these "minimal communities" is love, but friendship, as Aristotle said, consists "rather of loving than in being loved". Loving the Other, Derrida maintains, is habitually carried out within the "horizon of the same language". Let us now consider two of Piotrowski's friendships that I believe had vital importance for him, and which I was able to witness on several occasions: one was the long-lasting alliance with Andrzej Turowski; the other, his relationship with Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius: these implicated two diasporic Poles, and a Pole who stayed "back home", but who naturally kept communicating within the horizon of their mother tongue. If we are to inspect the politics of friendship between two (Polish) men, then the Western "homological" heritage, as Derrida demonstrated, has a lot to offer. In contrast, our Judeo-Christian tradition has little to propose if we intend to theorise the politics engaging two Polish art historians of different genders. Murawska-Muthesius returned to Warsaw from London and became Piotrowski's closest associate and his comrade-in-arms in the year-long battle that attempted to transform the National Museum in Warsaw into a "Critical Museum".<sup>7</sup> This was a project based on the pair's desire to challenge Polish *Realpolitik* democracy with a museum envisioned as a truly democratic institution; regretfully, the project failed.<sup>8</sup> Touching upon gender issues, Derrida cannot but diagnose that our grand philosophical paradigm had furnished us with a concept of friendship, along with the

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 633–634.

<sup>7</sup> Piotrowski worked as the director of the National Museum in Warsaw during 2009–2010. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius was a deputy director [editors' note].

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Piotr Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne* [*The Critical Museum*] (Poznań: REBIS, 2011). Serbian translation: Pjotr Pjotrovski, *Kritički muzej* (Beograd: Evropa Nostra Srbija et al., 2013).



theorisation thereof, privileging male bonds, which as often as not implied masculine supremacy: “What relation does this domination maintain with the *double exclusion* that can be seen at work in all the great ethico-politico-philosophical discourses on friendship, namely, on the one hand, the exclusion of friendship between women, and on the other hand, the exclusion of friendship between a man and a woman?”<sup>9</sup> In telling this truth, Derrida cites, among others, Nietzsche’s view that a woman is not capable of friendship as she “only knows love”. Derrida – intentionally or not – bypasses the feminist body of knowledge that dealt and still deals with these exclusions.

Svetlana Boym, although without explicitly taking a feminist position, explores the unlikely relationship between Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, “who theorized and practiced friendship in a passionately non-euphemistic manner”. Their friendship relied on an “asymmetrical reciprocity” engaging an immigrant and an expatriate, producing insights and intimation that, in Arendt’s description, are not “intended to communicate conclusions, but to stimulate others to independent thought, and this for no other purpose than to bring about a discourse between thinkers”.<sup>10</sup> Boym points out that this “cross-cultural story of friendship” was never burdened by the “agonistic competitiveness” that often arose among intellectuals of their epoch (and not only then). Keeping with Boym’s lexis, I would say that the “transnational” politics of friendship involving Piotr Piotrowski and myself excluded competitive spirit, but was nevertheless based on an “asymmetry” conditioned by the positions we had in our respective professional lives. He was fully settled in the academia (in Poland as well as abroad) whose early scholarly articles about Polish<sup>11</sup> and Eastern European post-World War II modernist art<sup>12</sup> (incorporated later into his book *In the Shadow of Yalta*<sup>13</sup>) helped me

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, “The Politics of Friendship” (1988), 642. Italics in original.

<sup>10</sup> Arendt cited in Boym, “Scenography of Friendship”. Original: Hannah Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts on Lessing”, in: *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968), 10. See also: *Between Friends – The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy 1949–1975*, ed. Carol Brightman (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Piotr Piotrowski, “The ‘Thaw’”, in: *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r. [The Thaw: Art ca. 1956]*, ex. cat. (Poznań: National Museum, 1996), 243–259.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example: Piotr Piotrowski, “Totalitarianism and Modernism: The ‘Thaw’ and *Informel* Painting in Central Europe, 1955–1965”, *Artium Quaestiones* X (2000), 119–174; Piotrowski, “Totalitarianism and Modernism II – Myth of Geometry: Neo-Constructivism in Central Europe 1948–1970”, *Artium Quaestiones* XI (2000), 101–154.

<sup>13</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

better understand Yugoslav (socialist) modernism. Given that my country had left the Bloc in 1948, in the early 1950s modernist art and theory were promoted in Yugoslavia as official art ideology. Thus Yugoslav abstract art was shown at home and abroad as “proof” that a “progressive” socialist country could practice the “progressive”, or rather “universal” art known in the 1960s as “universal language” (*Weltsprache*). However, as Piotrowski demonstrated, modernist art could be embraced in the socialist context only because it was apolitical art, an art that did not ask unpleasant questions about given reality. After I left Belgrade and moved to Berlin in January 1991, I dealt with my diasporic freelancer’s existence, wrote about contemporary art, continued to write for *Artforum* (which had begun in the 1980s), reviewed Berlin exhibitions, lectured occasionally and later curated.

Although we both dealt intensively with contemporary art in Eastern Europe, produced under restored democratic conditions, which we followed with enthusiasm in the early 1990s, we opted for different approaches to it. Piotrowski’s writing in general, and on the art of the 1990s in particular, never resorted to “cynical reason” or conveyed a coquettish post-communist malaise, a stance otherwise common to authors and artists who articulated their disillusionment with the “freedoms” that our post-communist democracies promised but failed to deliver. My response to the Eastern European “age of transition” and the quest for “normality” was (and still is) tinted with if not cynicism, then irony.<sup>14</sup> This is perhaps the reason why I am committed to artists with a similar disposition. A great number of these artists were represented in the international exhibition *Artist-Citizen*, which I curated in 2008 in Belgrade, as the 49th October Salon. For 44 years the Salon was an annual exhibition presenting Serbian (or rather Belgrade) artists, as boring as any such attempt at showing recent productions (mainly oil on canvas) would be. In the early 2000s – finally – the Belgrade authorities decided to restructure it, and transform it into an international survey of contemporary art. In 2004, the 45th Salon became the first international show, with Anda Rottenberg as its artistic director. Each year another international or local curator took charge. In the Salon I curated there were 75 artists, half of them active in Eastern Europe, and my focus was on contemporary contextual art practices, and thus I also included a number of artists who worked in

---

<sup>14</sup> See: Bojana Pejić, “The Dialectics of Normality”, in: *After the Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe*, eds. Bojana Pejić and David Elliott, ex.cat. (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999), 16–28.

“my” Yugoslavia of the 1970s and were engaged in institutional critique.<sup>15</sup> Piotrowski was able to attend this show, mentioning that he was doing research for a new book. When it appeared in 2012, under the title *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, I was more than pleased, as he referred there to many artworks displayed at my Belgrade show.<sup>16</sup> Here, Piotrowski escaped any ironic detachment – even in the last chapter of the book, entitled “Unfulfilled Democracy”,<sup>17</sup> he treats the “democratic” apparatus of censorship without deserved cynicism (whereas I would not have been able to resist).

Without any intention of romanticising the 1990s, I need to mention that the early stage of the post-communist condition was an age of *groupness* and a newly found *esprit de corps* connecting Eastern European actors, in which competitive spirit initially played a small role, if any. This was experienced by all the participants who contributed to the international conference *Body in Communism*, which I organised in 1995 in Berlin. This three-day symposium was an occasion for all of us – artists, art and literary historians, sociologists, theorists – to originate a discourse on “our” communist bodies, to exchange information (and new jokes!) and to take enormous pleasure in being together.<sup>18</sup> The lecture presented by Ewa Franus, in which she offered a feminist evaluation of Polish Socialist Realism centred on Wojciech Fangor’s painting *Postaci* [*Figures*, 1950], was absolutely brilliant. Her talk became decisive for a project that would occur much later, namely the exhibition *Gender Check*, which indeed opened

<sup>15</sup> See: *Artist-Citizen, 49th October Salon*, ed. Bojana Pejić, ex. cat. (Belgrade: Belgrade Cultural Center, 2008). Serbian and English edition.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaction Books, 2012). I find that the Polish original has a better title: *Agorafilia – Sztuka i demokracja w post-komunistycznej Europie* (Poznań: REBIS, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 262–288.

<sup>18</sup> The symposium was held on 30 March, 31 March and 1 April 1995 in the Literaturhaus Berlin, with the grant of the Senatsverwaltung für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten ~ Künstlerinnenprogramm in Berlin. Participating performance artists: Marina Abramović (Amsterdam), Else Gabriel (ex-East Berlin), Sanja Iveković (Zagreb), the group subREAL (Bucharest); art historians: Jan Bakoš (Bratislava), László Beke (Budapest), Kathrin Becker (Berlin), Marina Gržinić (Ljubljana), Sabine Hänsen (Bochum), Ewa Franus (Warsaw/Amsterdam), Andrej Kovalev (Moscow), Bojana Pejić; literary historians: Gisela Ecker (Paderborn), Georg Witte (Berlin); theorists: Jovan Čekić (Belgrade), Borislav Mikulić (Zagreb), Ivaylo Ditchchev (Sofia), Slobodan Blagojević (Amsterdam); and sociologist Žarana Papić (Belgrade). The delivered papers were, regrettably, never published.

with the Fangor painting.<sup>19</sup> The fact that during those days in Berlin there were no more than five or six regular German nationals representing the “West” in the audience did not matter at all – the conference created a strong sense of togetherness and belonging. But belonging to what? To the same past? Well, no. Even though we all grew up in countries practicing state socialism, each of us had experienced a different reality. My own need for “belonging” was certainly influenced by the fact that “my” Yugoslavia was in the process of disintegrating via brutal wars (which would ultimately end in 1999). During the Cold War, as a Yugoslav national I could freely travel to both Western and Eastern European countries, as well to the USA and Australia, either visa-free or on a tourist visa. In contrast, in the USSR, where Khrushchev’s thaw brought about (and occasionally even fulfilled) a fantasy about conquering the Cosmos, the situation looked rather different. Svetlana Boym remembers: “As we were growing up it seemed that we would travel to the moon much sooner than we would go abroad.”<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s I never failed to see an important exhibition in Paris or Cologne, or the *Documenta* in Kassel. The very first time I went “behind” the Iron Curtain was in 1988, when I went to Budapest to see the exhibition *Art in Revolution: Russian Soviet Art 1910–1932* shown at Műscarnok. Following the exhibition *Paris-Moscou 1900–1930*, held in 1979 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, where Soviet avant-garde art was prominently displayed (and which I couldn’t fail to attend), this was the first time that the Soviet authorities had agreed to present avant-garde works in a communist country. It occurred partly due the early changes implemented by perestroika, but mainly because Katalin Néray (1941–2007), the then-director of Műscarnok, invested her energy and diplomatic skills in the event. As Néray later became the director of the Budapest Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art, she also hosted *After the Wall* in Budapest in 2000. Back in the 1970s, international exhibitions and the presence of foreign (mainly Western) artists in Belgrade or other Yugoslav cities like Zagreb and Ljubljana often gave you the impression that you did not need to travel

<sup>19</sup> See: Ewa Franus, “Frankenstein’s Bride: The Contradictions of Gender and a Particular Polish Socialist-Realist Painting” (1996). English translation in: *Gender Check: A Reader – Art and Theory in Eastern Europe*, eds. Bojana Pejić et al. (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig [MUMOK], and Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2010), 71–78. Originally published as “Narzeczone Frankenstein: Sprzeczności płci i pewien polski socrealistyczny obraz”, *Magazyn Sztuki* no. 2 (1996), 232–240.

<sup>20</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 60.

abroad at all. In the Student Cultural Center, which was part of Belgrade University and performed the function of an institute of contemporary art, we regularly exhibited the works of foreign artists, but the activity became intensified each April, when we organised the international gathering *April Meetings – Festival of Expanded Media* (1972–1977), where we hosted post-object art practices, video screenings, body-based pieces and experimental theatre, and held discussions with the artists who constituted the Yugoslav New Art Practice or those of the international neo-avant-garde (such as Joseph Beuys in 1974). In 1975, Natalia LL personally presented videos from her series *Consumer Art* (1972–1974) to an audience consisting of Yugoslav and foreign art critics and artists. We all admired her work, identifying in it a playful deconstruction of both sexism and consumerism, topics central to Western feminism in the 1970s. It is worth mentioning that Natalia LL was the very first artist from a communist country to appear on the cover of the international art journal *Flash Art*, which featured stills from her *Consumer Art* pieces (though not with the bananas).<sup>21</sup> Only much latter, when I read Piotrowski's article in which he asked for a "change of paradigm", did I grasp that this work, which appears subversive in Yugoslav and/or Western circumstances, disseminated rather different meanings in her native Poland.<sup>22</sup> Writing about Yugoslav socialism, which I once defined via three notions – "Plavi radion" (the most popular washing powder in the country), "abstract art" (which was the official art ideology accepted in Yugoslavia for both national and international exhibitions), and "bananas" (the exotic fruit that we, in contrast to other socialist countries, were able to consume on a regular basis), Piotrowski's reading of Natalia LL's piece was rather inspiring.<sup>23</sup>

A politics of friendship engaging two art historians, which commenced in the mid-1990s, could be paralleled with those emerging among the artists; both are post-communist phenomena. Viktor Misiano, in his wonderfully argued essay "The Institutionalization of Friendship" of 1999, remains, alas, within the time-honoured frame of male bonding; this was the *camaraderie* consolidated between the post-conceptualist artists of Moscow and Ljubljana (the IRWIN group). Given that Misiano

<sup>21</sup> *Flash Art* nos. 40/41 (December/February 1975/76).

<sup>22</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "Post-modernism and Post-totalitarianism: The Poland Case of the 1970s", *Ars – Journal of the Institute of Art History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences* nos. 2–3 (1993), 231–242.

<sup>23</sup> See: Bojana Pejić, "The Morning After: *Plavi radion*, Abstract Art, and Bananas", *n.paradoxa* vol. 10 (July 2002), 75–84. Reprinted in *Gender Check: A Reader*, op. cit., 97–110.

situated their relationship in the larger context of the 1990s, his text needs to be cited at length. He writes: “This relationship has become so close that a kind of community has formed. The nature of the community is hard to define, because the relationships cannot be explained by any of the following: pragmatic expediency (the post-communist countries were seeking consolidation with the West rather than with the East in that period); regional proximity (geographically, culturally and historically, Ljubljana and Moscow are the most distant points of Eastern Europe); creative similarity (these artists, who belong to some general post-conceptual mainstream of the nineties, demonstrate its hetero- rather than homogeneity); and finally, by some ideological solidarity (the *Transnacionala* discussions showed that the project participants are rather antipodes than like-minded people). As one of the *Transnacionala* discussions’ participants said: ‘Recent art history is the history of friendships’ (Goran Djordjević).”<sup>24</sup> Further on, Misiano offers this statement: “When one speaks about the history of friendship, one speaks about the history of one’s own life.”<sup>25</sup>

During preparations for the project and exposition *After the Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe*, inaugurated in 1999, I met hundreds of artists and dozens of colleagues based in post-1989 Eastern Europe, with all of whom I shared a strong feeling of collegiality and a sense of togetherness, without which the project could not have materialised. Since 1997, when David Elliott, the then-director of Moderna Museet in Stockholm, initiated *After the Wall* and invited me to become its chief curator, we have also been engaged in a “West-East” friendship, laughing together about a number of stereotypes that such a liaison implies. Elliott, a former director of the Modern Art Oxford museum (UK), is an art historian and curator who wrote extensively about and staged exhibitions of the Soviet avant-garde, and, in addition, even organised an exhibition about Socialist Realism in the GDR, taboo during the Cold War. As curious as he is, Elliott was attentive to the changes in the region, and interested to discover if and how the Eastern European artists, a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, dealt with or related to those changes. Entering such a huge project, I was well equipped with Piotr Piotrowski’s writings. In his critical evaluation of the

<sup>24</sup> Victor Misiano, “The Institutionalization of Friendship”, in: *Transnacionala – A project by IRWIN*, ed. Eda Čufer (Ljubljana: Študentska organizacija Universe v Ljubljani et al., 1999), 182. Online: [www.irwin.si/texts/institualisation](http://www.irwin.si/texts/institualisation) (accessed 10 November 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 183.

exhibition *Europa, Europa*,<sup>26</sup> which I had the chance to visit, he questioned the “universalist” – and modernist – premise of the exhibition’s concept, and argued: “Yet the point is not to reproduce the imperialist and hierarchical interpretative models, but to revise the paradigm. To change the analytical tools so that they would allow us to discover the meanings of cultures of ‘other’ geographical regions.”<sup>27</sup>

Rather than falling into the trap of “strategic universalism”, *After the Wall* mapped contemporary art produced in 22 post-communist countries, focusing on individual artistic practices instead of national representations. It dealt only implicitly with the national and cultural contexts in which the artists lived and worked, as discussed by the catalogue’s contributors, who were all embedded in the Eastern part of Europe. The exhibition featured some 120 works made by 145 artists, and was structured in four major thematic units: *Social Sculpture*, *Re-inventing the Past*, *Questioning Subjectivity* and *Genderscapes*. These themes were not chosen a priori or before our visits to the Eastern European countries; when we made our final selection of the works and printed the images, the exhibition “made itself”, so to speak. It became clear that some artists proposed a critique of the post-communist present, and others were more concerned with the socialist past; still others questioned the (modernist) myth of artistic subjectivity and the role of the (male) genius; finally, the unit entitled *Genderscapes* comprised artworks exploring the power and gender relations introduced by the democratic setting. When the selection was complete, I was surprised that a great number of the works were produced by women artists, although most of them refused to be recognised as feminists! The main source for our research was provided by the documentation existing in the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art launched in the mid-1990s in twenty Eastern European capitals. But these centres, which local critics often viewed as “Western colonisation” of the East, were not the sole source of information. At that time, I experienced true solidarity among the artists I met, as they often suggested other artists who either worked in their country or whom they had met during the euphoric *Sturm und Drang* of the early 1990s; this gave birth to a number of shows in which the “East” was represented in or to the “West”. Seeing the

<sup>26</sup> *Europa, Europa – Das Jahrhundert der Avangarde in Mittel – und Osteuropa*, Kunst-und Ausstellungshalle der BRD, Bonn, 28 May – 16 October 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “The Geography of Central/East European Art”, in: *Borders in Art – Revisiting Kunstgeographie*, ed. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (Warsaw: Institute of Art, and Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1998), 45.

preliminary list of artists, Iara Bubnova commented that *After the Wall* was going to be “a kind of family show”. Another statement, later quoted hundreds of times, was issued by Deimantas Narkevičius on 07 November 1998 while we were walking “downtown” in his native Vilnius: “I am a bit tired of being a ‘Lithuanian artist’. I would like to be just an artist.” When *After the Wall* was staged in Berlin (2000–2001), i.e. in the West, it generally received negative reviews from German (art) critics. They came from two sides: the right-wing critics insisted on their steady conviction according to which the “East” is simply “catching-up” with the “West”, echoing Jürgen Habermas’s thesis explicated in his book *Die nachholende Revolution* (1990); the left-wingers, or rather those working out the *linke Melancholie*, also had negative views of the exhibition, stating that “the East” was now being offered on sale to the Western market. In many ways, the reviews of the exhibition simply mirrored the disagreements occurring among German intellectuals after reunification in 1990.

Piotr Piotrowski, of course, was the first colleague with whom I discussed the project in its early stages, and was the author whose presence in our catalogue was, for me, *a must*.<sup>28</sup> As we all know, writing about contemporary art and curating an exhibition are two different but parallel tasks. As per the curatorial proverb, “now that the exhibition is closed, I know what kind of exhibition I wanted to make”, it is only after a show is installed that a curator can see the mistakes as well as the possibility of different dialogues between works. Exhibitions are spatial narratives: they work (or not) in space, and you need to live with them, eavesdropping, as I often did, on visitors’ whispers and comments. The main question for a curator is how to use the given exhibition space in order to suggest the meaning that he or she intends to communicate in the exhibition. What Piotrowski and I share is that a reading of (contemporary) art should be contextualised; however, in an exhibition it is not possible to exhibit the “context” unless you rely on a documentary approach (historical photographs, maps and the like). I believe that an exhibition is in itself a way of producing a novel context, recognising the thematic links between works originating in different social conditions.

Indeed, Piotrowski later referred to *After the Wall*, asking relevant questions: “The year 1999 was the last moment when it was still possible to realize such a project. Soon thereafter the post-Communist world would disappear from the map of Europe as a historically determined territory. The curators of the exhibition were fully aware

<sup>28</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “The Grey Zones of Europe”, in: *After the Wall*, 35–41.



of this. Will we be able, in the near future, to find similarities between the former East Germany and Armenia, Slovenia, Poland or Belarus?”<sup>29</sup> These questions were answered ten years later: oh, yes, we were able to “reinvent” Eastern Europe one more time – with the *Gender Check* project.

This was launched by the ERSTE Foundation in Vienna, which in 2007 decided to mark the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain with a special event. Among the seven proposals they received, the board, of which Piotr Piotrowski was then a member, selected mine. My proposal was based on these facts: in the 1990s, Eastern European scholars, such as sociologists and philosophers, observed the socialist past and what followed it, taking feminist positions, but were generally blind when it came to the visual arts; in contrast, the art historians active in “our” geography – with the exception of Edit András – rarely, if ever, approached artistic practices existing during the socialist era or the post-socialist present informed by gender theories. However, when you look at curatorial practices in Poland, Macedonia, the Czech Republic and Hungary during the 1990s, a number of young women curators, who staged exhibitions of women’s and feminist art in their respective countries, relied on gender methodology. I even claimed that as late as the early 2000s, the history of art in Eastern Europe was not rewritten in scholarly publications, but rather in the catalogues accompanying exhibitions of contemporary art. After 1989 many Eastern European artists, curators and critics took a feminist stance, while most male and female art historians remained distant (if not hostile to) feminist interventions. The purpose of *Gender Check* was to fill this gap and generate a platform on which we could inspect and actually define the masculinity and femininity produced during the high socialist period, i.e. from the early 1960s until the early 1990s, and then extend our investigations to the post-socialist era, up to 2009. The research had been performed by 24 female and male art historians, curators and artists, who inquired into their cultural (i.e. national) milieux, trying to identify gender identities and relations as they were constructed and visualised by the artists and/or Eastern European art historians and critics. This resulted in an exhibition consisting of about 400 artworks realised in a variety of media. In my essay for the catalogue I was primarily concerned with inspecting gender relations as staged by the artworks created in the period of “genderless” state socialism, promoting the “progressive” ideology of gender egalitar-

---

<sup>29</sup> Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 21.

ianism in which it is easy – for a feminist scholar at least – to unravel the patriarchal models of femininity and masculinity.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly, having the opportunity to realise and coordinate such a gigantic project brings with it great responsibility, occasioning complaints about the “power of the curator”. I belong to the generation of the 1970s, when we did not have curatorial studies. Back then, curating was learning-by-doing. Let’s say that I have come to identify with a “position of authority in a way that exposes the illusions of that position without renouncing it”, as Jane Gallop once put it.<sup>31</sup> It’s easier to undermine such illusions with self-irony and humour. Even though *Gender Check* was based on serious “democratic” research performed by many colleagues, as a curator you must make many “undemocratic” but professional inclusions and exclusions, because your job is to offer a “frame” made up of many fragments. For me, each exhibition project requires a level of openness, and is a process of learning and unlearning.

In his contribution to the *Gender Check* catalogue, Piotrowski observed the then-present, the early 2000s, when the “transition” and “transformation” were over and Eastern European democracies were lost in “normalisation”. He contended: “It is quite obvious that the world in which we live is dominated by masculine culture, no matter how successful feminism has been in many fields. The post-communist societies of Eastern Europe seem much more phallocentric than the developed societies in the West. One reason for this can be identified in the tradition of anti-communist opposition from before 1989, which not only ignored feminism, but was thoroughly male.”<sup>32</sup> This was written in 2009, twenty years after the introduction of “male democracies”, which from the very beginning were haunted by the “spectre” of nationalism, and in due course manifested their inclinations towards “ethnically clean” democratic projects. In 2017, as I am writing this text, the “spectre” has ceased to haunt; it became materialised, and instead of bygone state socialism, Eastern Europe generally manifests its gargantuan *jouissance* in state nationalism. In the current European constellation,

<sup>30</sup> See: Bojana Pejić, “Proletarians of All Countries, Who Washes Your Socks?”, in: *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, eds. Bojana Pejić et al. (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig [MUMOK], and Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2009), 19–29. The exhibition (in a reduced form) was presented at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw from 20 March – 13 June 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 22.

<sup>32</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Gender after the Wall”, in: *Gender Check* (2009), 236–240: 236.

following Piotrowski's quest for a "transnational" approach to art histories has, at least for me, not only art-historical but also political implications.

In concluding this writing, in which I have been resisting acceptance of the fact that friendships – sooner or later – end in oblivion, I turn to Judith Butler and her question: "After Loss, What Then?" It would not be wrong to say that the authors whose writings are gathered in this publication constitute a community – the community Piotr Piotrowski himself created. Visiting Walter Benjamin, Butler reflected further on loss: "Loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community. And if we say this second truth about the place where belonging is possible, then pathos is not negated, but it turns out to be oddly fecund, paradoxically productive."<sup>33</sup> Performing this writing, I have tried to be productive; however, consulting once again Piotrowski's articles and books cited here, I have often thought that I've forgotten to ask him something, to tell him something... Honouring his deceased friend, the French art historian Louis Marin, Jacques Derrida described such a situation with these simple words: "We will never have the time."<sup>34</sup>

Berlin, 29 December 2017

<sup>33</sup> Judith Butler, "Afterword – After Loss, What Then?", in: *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, 468.

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Derrida, "By Force of Mourning", *Critical Enquiry* vol. 22, no. 2 (Winter 1996), 171–192: 191. A talk given by Derrida on 28 January 1993 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris during a conference dedicated to the work of Louis Marin (1931–1992).

# Part Two

## **Meanings of Democracy**

Photo: Ryszard Rau



IZABELA KOWALCZYK

## **Politics, Emancipation and Democracy – According to Piotr Piotrowski**

Piotr Piotrowski termed his intellectual stance “love for emancipation”. It was with these words that he ended an interview given to Katarzyna Bojarska, Luiza Nader and Adam Mazur in 2013. The issues touched on in the conversation included, among other things, Piotrowski’s theoretical background – what it was that had shaped him – as well as his interest in the questions of power and politics.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that most of Piotrowski’s writing was politically engaged in the “here and now”, in current social and political problems; at the same time it was full of praise for rebellion and disagreement with power. The present text is an attempt to trace this political engagement, which revealed itself both in his texts on art history as well as in his activities. I intend to present his thoughts on the mutual relations between art and politics, as well as to indicate the socio-political context that set the tone for his writing. Piotrowski combined theory with practice, criticism with social action, academic research with museum practice – thus when defining his political stance, it is impossible to treat these areas in separation. The period covered in this paper stretches from the 1970s/1980s, i.e. when Piotrowski’s intellectual position was being shaped and he was engaged in political opposition, up until the establishment of an initiative for democracy and freedom of speech, namely the “Open Academy”, which occurred at the beginning of the 2010s, shortly before his death.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Miłość do emancypacji. O warsztacie i zaangażowaniu badacza humanisty rozmawiają Luiza Nader, Katarzyna Bojarska i Adam Mazur” [Love for Emancipation: On the Know-How and Engagement of a Researcher-Humanist. In Conversation with Luiza Nader, Katarzyna Bojarska and Adam Mazur], *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* no. 3 (2013), <http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/87/115> (accessed 20 September 2017).

Piotr Piotrowski studied art history from 1971–1986 at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; this was where his interest in contemporary art appeared. He was close friends with Jarosław Kozłowski, one of the most important Polish conceptualists and founder of the Poznań-based Akumulatory 2 Gallery, the activities of which Piotrowski was strongly engaged in. Poland at the time was partly open to the West – it was a period of apparent modernisation, as Piotrowski termed it in later texts.<sup>2</sup> He also indicated that the fine arts could enjoy relative freedom then, as long as they did not relate to political issues. International exchange was already taking place, including at Akumulatory 2.<sup>3</sup> It was actually at the gallery that Piotrowski first came into contact with foreign artists, including Hungarians and Czechs (such as Endre Tót, László Lakner, Carlfriedrich Claus, Jiří Valoch and Imre Bak). Kozłowski recalls one of Piotrowski's first reviews, of Henri Chopin, published in *Nurt* magazine: "The thing that Piotr liked the most in Chopin's art was his non-conformist attitude, expressed in his subversive works that touched on current politics, culture and education. It may have been the first published text on art written by Piotr, and the first manifestation of his interests."<sup>4</sup>

In terms of his studying years, Piotrowski always stressed the significant presence of Andrzej Turowski, who helped him define his intellectual stance. In the aforementioned interview, this is what he had to say about his teacher and friend: "I never got the chance to attend his famous classes on the introduction to art history. While we studied vaultings and the like, his students read Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser – all that the Americans called 'French Theory'. With his leftist inclinations, Turowski opened up the possibility of exercising a subversive art history. It was a very important contribution to my way of thinking."<sup>5</sup> This was the time when Piotrowski had

<sup>2</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Dekada. O syndromie lat siedemdziesiątych, kulturze artystycznej, krytyce, sztuce – wybiórczo i subiektywnie* [Decade: About the Syndrome of the Seventies, Artistic Culture, Criticism, Art – Selectively and Subjectively] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1991), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jalty. Sztuka w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1945–1989* [In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989] (Poznań: REBIS, 2005), 261, 268.

<sup>4</sup> Adam Mazur, "Kryterium postawy. Rozmowa z Jarosławem Kozłowskim" [The Criterion of Attitude: A Conversation with Jarosław Kozłowski], *Szum* 29 August 2015, <http://magazynszum.pl/rozmowy/kryterium-postawy-rozmowa-z-jaroslawem-kozlowskim/> (accessed 16 July 2019). (See the English translation in this volume.)

<sup>5</sup> "Miłość do emancypacji".

already become absorbed by left-wing theories; coupled with anarchism,<sup>6</sup> they would set a very strong tone for his later texts. His MA thesis was on the functioning of the Portrait Firm run by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy) – an artist with affiliations to Polish Formism, among other currents. Witkacy was also a writer, a philosopher, and a lover of scandals and experiments with drugs and other substances; he committed suicide on 18 September 1939, the day after the Soviet invasion of Poland. Witkiewicz, or more precisely his theory of Pure Form, was also the subject of Piotrowski's doctoral thesis in 1982. He was not only interested in how Witkacy combined art and theory, but also believed that the artist's thoughts on art were close to the metaphysical role of the avant-garde, and thus to the concepts of painting formulated by Malevich, Mondrian and Kandinsky. All of these artists, to Piotrowski's mind, shared a transcendence of form, and identified pure artistic forms with the language of metaphysics.<sup>7</sup> Piotrowski also wondered whether the role that Witkacy played in Polish art was similar to that of Marcel Duchamp's in the Western avant-garde. However, by turning his back on the future, in which he saw no place either for art or metaphysics, Witkacy was more the creator of an *arrière-garde*.<sup>8</sup> At the time, probably owing to his friendship and discussions with Jarosław Kozłowski, it seems that Piotrowski was still attached to the notion of artistic autonomy – a protective shield against the political influences of the communist regime. He soon abandoned such thinking, however – Kozłowski noted that “He believed that the striving for autonomy in art – abstraction from the political or social context – and the lack of a clear ideological declaration, meant legitimising the system.”<sup>9</sup>

From 1976–1978, Piotrowski held the position of assistant lecturer at the Institute of Cultural Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He began his work at the university's Institute of Art History in 1980; this was a very important year for Poland – the time of the Solidarity movement and burning hope for a free nation. The enthusiasm evoked by the peaceful establishment of Solidarity came to an abrupt end on 13 December 1981 with the imposition of martial law by the state authorities. As was the case with many intellectuals, Piotrowski, a member and co-founder of the

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Piotr Piotrowski, “Anarchy, Critique, Utopia”, in: *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 125–151.

<sup>7</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz* (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1989), 114.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>9</sup> Mazur, “Kryterium postawy”.



Solidarity Trade Union at the University, became involved in the underground opposition movement. He explained his motives somewhat explicitly in an unpublished interview with Joanna Janiak: “When I got involved in the underground, I didn’t even have any expectations for a reform of communism. I simply wanted to maintain some kind of fairness, [...] so as to do something against those who were kicking our asses, [...] so as to be able to look at myself in the mirror.”<sup>10</sup> He was associated with the samizdat Poznań magazine *Obserwator Wielkopolski*,<sup>11</sup> of which he was a member of the editorial team from 1982<sup>12</sup> until January 1989, when he left for the USA on a fellowship. He initially published under the pseudonyms of A., Agata, Arkadiusz and Marcin K. – a practice he later abandoned. For some time, one of the illegal printing presses was even located in the house he shared with his wife, Maria Żuk-Piotrowska.<sup>13</sup> In the magazine he discussed unofficially organised exhibitions, of which he was often critical. He was particularly concerned about the idea of free art being practiced under the shelter of the Catholic Church, as was the case in the martial law years, when artists who refused to participate in official artistic life would frequently protest against official rule by organising exhibitions in facilities belonging to the Church. The quality of these presentations, however, was usually very poor, and they would often bolster the authority of the Church, which at the time was seen as the stronghold of freedom. Though Piotrowski was already anti-clerical, years later he concluded that his criticism of the Church had not been sufficient: “Perhaps we, as ‘observers’, hadn’t done a good enough critical job with what seemed to have been taking shape then – this clearly rightist and clerical ideology. This, I believe, was the mistake of the underground – that it hadn’t sufficiently unmasked the clearly ideological conflicts, and that it hadn’t explicitly enough built the ideological alternative to the right-wing Catholic-Christian

<sup>10</sup> Joanna Janiak, “Artyści ponoszą odpowiedzialność” [Artists Have a Responsibility], interview with Piotr Piotrowski, Poznań, February 2007, unpublished typescript made available by the author.

<sup>11</sup> Przemysław Zwiernik, “*Obserwator Wielkopolski*. Osiem lat w podziemiu” [*Obserwator Wielkopolski*: Eight Years in the Underground], *Kronika Miasta Poznania* Yearbook 62, nos. 1/2 (1994), <https://wbc.macbre.net/document/5683/obserwator-wielkopolski-osiem-lat-w-podziemiu.html> (accessed 16 July 2019).

<sup>12</sup> A certain discrepancy appears here, as this is the date that Piotrowski gave in an interview with Joanna Janiak. Zwiernik, on the other hand, says that 1984 was the first year of Piotrowski’s collaboration with *Obserwator Wielkopolski*.

<sup>13</sup> Zwiernik, “*Obserwator Wielkopolski*”.

discourse of Solidarity.”<sup>14</sup> He bluntly said of those times that “the terror of the Church and the God-Honour-Fatherland rightist ideology had already pushed me to resist”.<sup>15</sup> In his samizdat texts Piotrowski also revealed his interest in issues of political strategy in which opposition activists should have been engaged; he believed that to “be against” was not enough.<sup>16</sup> In 1986 he proposed the “interception” of official institutions, including trade unions, which should be infiltrated with trusted people so as to create “a new tension between the authorities and society, a tension of a type different from a military confrontation”.<sup>17</sup> He did not spare the Poznań university authorities from criticism either, particularly for abstaining from employing former political prisoners, including the art historian Janusz Pałubicki. He accused the school management of politicking, and expressed his surprise at the fact that “educated professors do not understand the simple fact that communists are difficult to outwit when one does not have the argument of force in one’s hand”.<sup>18</sup> In the samizdat newspaper Piotrowski strongly proposed the need to rebel against the authorities, but also shared his highly critical reflections about actions to be undertaken in order to regain independence.

Despite his involvement in the underground opposition, in 2007 Piotrowski refused to present a lustration declaration – a duty imposed on members of the academic staff pursuant to the vetting law of 2006. Such declarations would confirm that a given person had not collaborated with the secret services of the communist regime. Piotrowski, who then held the position of director of the Institute of Art History, wrote in an open letter addressed to the rector of Adam Mickiewicz University: “I reject the present ‘Lustration Law’ – because I and hundreds of thousands of citizens are treated upfront as collaborators of the communist regime, enforcing the need to negate a presumed culpability; it violates my dignity by forcing me, under the threat of losing my job for ten years (practically until my retirement or, perhaps, until the end of my life), to present the negative declaration that I have not been a covert or overt associate of the services of the communist regime, which I indeed have not been.”<sup>19</sup> The arguments

<sup>14</sup> Janiak, “Artyści ponoszą odpowiedzialność”.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Zwiernik, “*Obserwator Wielkopolski*”.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, open letter to HM Rector of Adam Mickiewicz University, Prof. Stanisław Lorenc, 26 March 2007, from the Archives of Piotr Piotrowski at the Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University.

he gave for this refusal included the violation of citizens' freedoms by the law, injustice, violation of the rules of the work guarantee, and finally, abandonment of the ideals of Solidarity such as: "human dignity, the right to guaranteed work, justice, freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, independence of academic life, taming of the ideological and political totalisation of the state, and many others".<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, Piotrowski's letter reveals his deep attachment to the initial ideals of Solidarity, and, on the other hand, his great sensitivity to human rights. His was one of the strongest voices in the debate of the time about the abovementioned law. On 11 May 2007, the Constitutional Court of Poland issued a judgement in which it stipulated the unconstitutionality of some of the provisions (including the inclusion of academics and researchers within the scope of the law).

Returning to Piotrowski's biography, the first half of the 1990s was the period of his intense scholarly and professional development. Owing to a research grant he had received from the Kosciuszko Foundation, he spent time in New York (1989) as an Ailsa Mellon Bruce Senior Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts in Washington, D.C. (1989–1990), and on a Getty Foundation Fellowship at Columbia University in New York (1994). In 1993 he received his habilitation based on the dissertation *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją. Studium z zakresu etycznej historii sztuki awangardy rosyjskiej* [*The Artist between Revolution and Reaction: A Study in the Ethical History of Russian Avant-Garde Art*].<sup>21</sup> These events all occurred after the breakthrough year of 1989, when Poland embarked on a path of accelerated capitalist development, and it seemed that we had regained our freedom. Although many of the former oppositionists abandoned the freedom issue in the conviction that the matter had been resolved once and for all, Piotrowski thought otherwise. He believed that in the new political situation the question was still crucially pertinent, both in the political and artistic contexts. He expressed this in a text published in *Obieg* in 1992 under the title "W poszukiwaniu alternatywy – odpowiadając Beuysowi" [In Search of an Alternative – Responding to Beuys].<sup>22</sup> Dorota Monkiewicz, one of the most important

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją. Studium z zakresu etycznej historii sztuki awangardy rosyjskiej* [*The Artist between Revolution and Reaction: A Study in the Ethical History of Russian Avant-Garde Art*] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "W poszukiwaniu alternatywy – odpowiadając Beuysowi" [In Search of an Alternative – Responding to Beuys], *Obieg* nos. 04/05 (1992), 9–14.

Polish curators, who created the first exhibitions of artists involved in critical art, and, from 2011–2016, was the director of the Wrocław Contemporary Museum, recently said that Piotrowski's text helped her find her path in contemporary art research after 1989. It was, therefore, a breakthrough text, blazing the trail for thinking about contemporary art in the context of the new liberal reality.

In the article, Piotrowski asked the crucial question about the situation in which we in Eastern Europe had found ourselves after 1989. It can also be seen as the settling of accounts with his oppositionist past, as in it he recalls the hopes stirred by the Solidarity eruption of 1980 – “the hope for the victory of human solidarity over class-related, national and political particularisms”, as well as anticipation of a “third way” (neither communism nor capitalism), and the construction of an “integral society” according to the concept formulated by Joseph Beuys.<sup>23</sup> Piotrowski wrote with disappointment: “However, an attentive observer of those days noticed traits of the later nationalist rhetoric and particular ideology. [...] The galleries and magazines (*samizdat*) were filled with martyrdom and nationalist-Christian journalism.”<sup>24</sup> He also noted that Polish messianism had once again been reborn, and that the religious-national symbolic sphere was seen by some as the deep identity of Polish art, not to mention that, after martial law, Christian rhetoric had moved into the Polish Parliament.<sup>25</sup> Thus Piotrowski was already indicating the threats stemming from the dominant position of the Catholic Church in Polish public life. Due to the fact that the institution contributed, to a degree, to the breaking away from communist oppression (the pilgrimages of Pope John Paul II to his homeland were perceived as having played a particularly special role), it found itself in a privileged position after 1989. One of the first moves made by Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government (Mazowiecki was the first democratically elected prime minister) was to introduce religion in schools in 1990, and in 1993 Poland adopted a legal ban on abortion. All subsequent government administrations in Poland (no matter whether left- or right-wing) have generally made concessions to the Catholic Church, and in their decision-making processes always taken the opinions of Church hierarchs into consideration.

The seminal “In Search of an Alternative”, which set a new tone in thinking about contemporary art in the context of freedom after 1989, should be read in a broader context, reaching beyond Poland and encompassing the whole of Eastern Europe after

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

the fall of the Berlin Wall. Piotrowski claimed that “it would be naive to say that the societies of Eastern Europe are free after the demolition of the Wall. If they are, then it’s only from Soviet domination. The disappearance of the Leninist-Stalinist state, [...] is coupled with the resurrection of old demons: nationalism, xenophobia, intolerance, in a way that is perhaps much more threatening to our freedom than the presence of soldiers with red five-pointed stars on their military caps.”<sup>26</sup> Thus in the early 1990s Piotrowski noticed that the greatest threats to the young democracy were the lack of tolerance, the nationalism and the xenophobia, i.e. attitudes that would gradually gain in strength across the whole of Eastern Europe in subsequent years. In Piotrowski’s eyes the problem also lay with the fact that the anti-communist opposition did not see as an objective the freedom of the individual, but rather the freedom of a nation (its independence); hence it was impossible to go beyond national particularisms and universalise one’s own experience.<sup>27</sup> It could be said that Piotrowski’s words, written shortly after the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, sound as a warning against all that occurred (and is presently occurring) in Eastern Europe – in particular in Hungary and Poland; years later, he was to term this situation “unfulfilled democracy”.<sup>28</sup> In the early 1990s Piotrowski believed that only utopia and rebellion can protect against enslavement. He referred to Albert Camus’s famous dictum from *The Rebel* [*L’Homme révolté*, 1951]: “I rebel – therefore we are.” He pointed to the grammatical aspect of the sentence, i.e. the singular subject, and the plural in the predicate. “Camus’s rebellion was an expression of solidarity with people [...] – a *sine qua non* prerequisite for the process of liberating humanity, a path from enslavement to freedom; it is – therefore – the constitution of humanism.”<sup>29</sup> Rebellious values, as Piotrowski predicted, would in time gain even more presence in artistic strategies; utopia, on the other hand, was to set the new vision of the future – the third way, as he postulated in “In Search of an Alternative”, quoting Beuys. The reason was that utopia “stimulates the imagination and forces [one] to take the effort and reconstruct the paradigm. We all need it so as to be able to ‘go beyond oneself’ in order to create a new reality.”<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 262.

<sup>29</sup> Albert Camus, *Człowiek zbuntowany* [*The Rebel*] (Kraków: Oficyna Literacka 1984); Piotrowski, “W poszukiwaniu alternatywy”, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. (Piotrowski), 14.

It was also in this text that Piotrowski explicitly specified the priorities of the stance that should be presented by both the researcher and the artist. He wanted to create attitudes such as rebellion and disagreement; he was convinced that the duty of the historian of contemporary art, as well as that of the contemporary artist, is engagement in the “here and now”, in issues of the surrounding reality. He wrote that “Art is born in contact with reality, including the concrete one (though, obviously, not predominately with it). It is more than just a reaction to reality. It is, broadly speaking, a reformulation of the contextual, local aspect – understood in many different ways (politically, socially, but also formally or psychologically) – into the universal.”<sup>31</sup> He continued, claiming that “the artist, speaking on behalf of ‘we are’, is doomed to solitude, and only in this way, it seems, can he/she build this ‘we are’. An ‘engaged artist’ – Albert Camus writes – ‘is one who does not reject struggle but does not consent to service in a regular army either; he/she is a freelancer.’”<sup>32</sup>

As a result of his time spent in the United States, Piotrowski became fascinated with American art, and discovered texts and publications by authors affiliated with *October* magazine. In them he saw connections with his own ideas, in reference to his leftist orientation and departure from the formalist kind of art history. In the interview quoted above, he indicated that American art history, to which he was introduced by Keith Moxey, “is to a great extent a reflection of ‘French Theory’”.<sup>33</sup> His interests in semiotics and structuralism were already present thanks to his friendship with Andrzej Turowski; it was texts by Hal Foster, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and T.J. Clark<sup>34</sup> that would become a point of reference for Piotrowski in the 1990s. He revealed this in his book *W cieniu Duchampa. Notatki nowojorskie* [*In the Shadow of Duchamp: New York Notes*] published in 1996. In the chapter titled “The Postmodernism of Resistance”, in which he gave an account of the views of Foster, Piotrowski defined postmodern thought as that which “no longer refers to aesthetics but to Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis and semiotics”.<sup>35</sup> This could be understood as Piotrowski specifying his own area of inspiration. In a manner more powerful than was the case with “In Search of an Alter-

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> “Miłość do emancypacji”, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *W cieniu Duchampa. Notatki nowojorskie* [*In the Shadow of Duchamp: New York Notes*] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1996), 74.

native”, Piotrowski emphasised the connections between art and the reality around him: “Art is not an area separated from other areas of human life but one which is deeply anchored in it; hence the non-artistic methods of its analysis.”<sup>36</sup> For that reason, from the perspective borrowed by Piotrowski from Foster, art is considered in a network of relations between power, production and communication. This is how Piotrowski described American art in the book, focusing on artists such as Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano and Hans Haacke – but also Marcel Duchamp – revealing its critical dimension, which is often subversive both with regard to the current art system, as well as with regard to power. In time, such a stance would become typical of his approach to the objects of his research, and would be included in his later publications; it would be one of the most characteristic traits of his engaged writing, and it determined his attitude as a researcher. In a later book, *Znaczenia modernizmu* [*Meanings of Modernism*], he tried to outline the most important processes taking place in Polish art history after 1945. He wrote: “An artwork is not [...] treated as an autonomous construction of an art form, but as a dynamic structure entangled in all sorts of mechanisms of power, social processes and political tensions of many post-war breakthroughs.”<sup>37</sup>

As far as the understanding of power goes, Piotrowski quoted the term in his book on American art following Foucault. It seems that the question of the interiorisation of power was not what caught his attention so much as the system of institutional power or political structures did,<sup>38</sup> which used censorship and introduced prohibitions and repressions such as the removal of art subsidies. This is clearly evident in *In the Shadow of Duchamp*, in reference to the work *Helmsboro Country* by Hans Haacke (1990), set in the context of the American cultural wars.<sup>39</sup> Piotrowski of course also became interested in the power hidden in social systems, stereotypes and means of mass communication. He defined it as political system-generated relations of domination and mechanisms of subordinating citizens – strategies of appropriating different spheres of public and private life.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* [*Meanings of Modernism: Towards a History of Polish Art after 1945*] (Poznań: REBIS, 1999), 6.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>39</sup> Piotrowski, “Moralność Inc.” [Morality, Inc.], *W cieniu Duchampa*, 96–111.

<sup>40</sup> Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 226.

Piotr Piotrowski began to follow these political entanglements of art in reference to the Polish art of the 1990s, which used the human body as its main medium. In later years this art would be termed “critical”.<sup>41</sup> In his text “Beyond the Old and New Faith”, published in *Magazyn sztuki* in 1996, Piotrowski analysed the works of artists such as Robert Rumas, Grzegorz Klaman and Zofia Kulik, inscribing them into the critical stance described by Hal Foster.<sup>42</sup> Again, the notion of power emerges as the key term. He wrote: “The stance that enables the artist-subject to become fulfilled ‘in the mirror of history’ [...] is a critical one; to be critical of history is to repeal the artist’s dilemma, to build a bridge between alienations and identification. The task of critical art, as Hal Foster notes, is to name political operations, stripping them of any charm by means of ‘terrorist provocation’. More precisely, it is to publicise methods of power such as the supervision and control of information.”<sup>43</sup> Of particular interest in the article is what Piotrowski wrote about the works of Zofia Kulik. He believed that in her art she combined political criticism with a feminist perspective, representing, among other things, the problem of women in Polish society.<sup>44</sup> Piotrowski directly addressed the repressive attitude of the authorities of the time towards women’s issues, in connection with an eruption of rightist rhetoric that emerged in reaction to the apparent emancipation of the previous communist era. He pointed to the rise in unemployment which, in the 1990s, hit women the hardest, and to the salaries that were 30% lower in the case of women in the same job positions as men. He also noted that the majority of women performed work that required no qualifications, and that they were predominantly absent from managerial positions. Therefore, in line with the feminist claims that began to be published in Poland at the time, including in the feminist magazine *Pełnym głosem* [*With a Full Voice*], Piotrowski said: “the ‘male’ political establishment (the rightist, actually) defends work for men, legitimising, at the same time, unemployment of women by means of ideology”.<sup>45</sup> The social aspects connected to the lack of equal opportunities for women, and engagement in both feminist and sexual minorities’ is-

<sup>41</sup> Izabela Kowalczyk, *Ciało i władza. Polska sztuka krytyczna lat 90.* [*The Body and Authority: Polish Critical Art of the 1990s*] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Hal Foster, “For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art”, in: Foster, *Recordings: art, spectacle, cultural politics* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1985), 139–156.

<sup>43</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Beyond the Old and New Faith”, *Magazyn sztuki* no. 10 (2) (1996), 154.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.



sues would become extremely important for Piotrowski's research on contemporary art and for his museum practice (among others in the 2010 exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica* at the National Museum in Warsaw, of which he was then the director; the show was curated by one of his former students – Paweł Leszkowicz). Piotrowski associated the unwillingness to accept otherness, women's rights and the rights of sexual minorities with the strong position of the Catholic Church and the Catholic fundamentalism manifested not only by the hierarchs, but also by political parties who sought their support and who hid behind the Church's protective authority.<sup>46</sup>

In an interview Piotr Piotrowski gave to *Znak* magazine,<sup>47</sup> in which he defined the framework of the Polish art of the 1990s, he pointed to its direct context, i.e. the mythologised art of the 1980s which, according to some critics, was a manifestation of "spirituality" drawing on the "great national narratives" – spirituality that was to remedy the misery of martial law and provide safety and shelter. It built a huge mythology over reality, and Piotrowski believed that the attachment to this mythology explained why the new art of the 1990s was so admonished. The main reason given for this admonishment was that it had abandoned spirituality, but Piotrowski claimed that it served a purely politically instrumental function, utilised by those who did not feel comfortable in the new liberal reality. He believed that the main issue for the artist should be to determine one's stance vis-à-vis reality – not myth – and that the identity of the artist is measured by the power of his/her confrontation with reality, i.e. globalised media culture today. In the *Znak* interview, Piotrowski mentioned Zbigniew Libera as an artist who made an analysis of the culture of violence created by the media and popular culture; Katarzyna Kozyra, who revealed the problem of physicality as appropriated by the media and popular culture; Robert Rumas, who deconstructed the national-Christian tradition; and Artur Żmijewski, who showed the marginalisation of people with disabilities. Piotrowski claimed that this was art that brings us out of the automatism of seeing and thinking.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, Piotrowski's analyses, though insightful and pointing out the flaws of late capitalism, are not so far away in terms of their basic message from the

<sup>46</sup> Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 238.

<sup>47</sup> "Wytrącić z automatyzmu myślenia. Piotr Piotrowski w rozmowie z Maciejem Mazurkiem" [Getting Out of the Automatism of Thinking: Piotr Piotrowski in Conversation with Maciej Mazurek], *Znak* December (12) (1998), 60–68.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

neoliberal thinking that dominated Polish politics in the 1990s. No questions were asked about who was not feeling well in the new liberal reality, and why that was the case. Piotrowski was mainly focused on ideological issues, and not as much on questions of the economy, which was then leading to even greater social stratification. He spoke about his viewpoint in 2007: “I see the shortcomings of neoliberalism and I regret that the national income is growing while there is so much poverty around. However, this is not my main idea – my criticism is of an ideological and not an economic nature, as I don’t really know much about it.”<sup>49</sup> This is where his thinking is at fault – it was, after all, those who lost as a result of the transformation and could not find their way in the new reality, along with those who were excluded from culture and language, who would begin – both in Poland and other post-communist countries – to demand that their rights should be respected. They did so by voting for anti-democratic or even pro-nationalist parties. The problem of those doomed to fecklessness is highlighted by David Ost, who indicated the class divisions in contemporary Poland: “It was they who the right-wing party have intercepted. The right became the voice of the excluded after 1992. At the same time, it would offer absurd solutions, as it was said that the reason for the situation being bad in Poland was that it was in foreign hands: post-communists, liberals, atheists. And that we have to unite around the nation.”<sup>50</sup> Contrary to Piotrowski, it is in this mechanism that Ost saw the reason for the expansion of rightist ideologies and the spread of political populism. In reference to these deliberations, Jan Sowa has argued that “populism could be eliminated if the wrath of the aggrieved could be directed not at the artificially constructed Evil Other (a former member of the communist secret services, a commie, a Jew, or a gay) but at the actual source of these problems, i.e. the economy.”<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, in his analyses Piotrowski did not want to combine these issues, predominantly seeing the ideological aspect of the conflict.

At the turn of the millennium, the economic and ideological conflicts gradually became exacerbated, particularly in the context of Poland’s accession to the

<sup>49</sup> Janiak, “Artyści ponoszą odpowiedzialność”.

<sup>50</sup> Adam Leszczyński, “David Ost o ćwierćwieczu wolnej Polski: Nie byliście głupi” [David Ost on the Quarter Century of Free Poland: You Were Not Foolish], interview, *Gazeta Wyborcza Magazyn Świąteczny*, 27 April 2014, [http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,139186,16233248,David\\_Ost\\_o\\_cwiercwieczu\\_wolnej\\_Polski\\_\\_Nie\\_byliscie.html](http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,139186,16233248,David_Ost_o_cwiercwieczu_wolnej_Polski__Nie_byliscie.html) (accessed 16 July 2019).

<sup>51</sup> Jan Sowa, *Ciesz się, późny wnuku! Kolonializm, globalizacja, demokracja radykalna* [Enjoy, Late Grandson! Colonialism, Globalisation, Radical Democracy] (Kraków: Korporacja ha!art, 2008), 444.

European Union (in 2004). The split between the advocates of democracy, openness, European community and liberal values, and the defenders of national tradition, the Polish identity and Catholicism, who believe that Poland should remain a stronghold of Christian values, became ever more apparent. The latter began to attack critical art, demanding the cancellation of exhibitions or filing suits against artists who, in their opinion, offended their religious feelings. Few people at the time actually noticed the economic reasons for the conflict, which presented itself as a fight between the advocates of freedom and those still living in the Dark Ages. However, because the promoters of freedom, democracy, civil rights and free art remained in the minority, and even constitutionally guaranteed rights were violated (e.g. freedom of assembly, by banning the Equality Parades in Warsaw and Poznań in 2006), the only thing that remained to be done was to sound the alarm in defence of democracy. Piotrowski, who at the time began to criticise liberal democracy as a system based on a consensus and a conviction about a common good which, in practice, meant the exclusion of minority groups,<sup>52</sup> still claimed that “While it is difficult to critique liberal democracy in Poland, since even the country’s constitution does not fully commit to it [the issue of the separation of church and state], its proponents must defend themselves and its principles against the ideological force of the consensus.”<sup>53</sup> Therefore he pondered how to discuss radical democracy in Poland if its opposite model, i.e. liberal democracy, was not only not exercised in full, but had come under attack from rightist conservative circles.<sup>54</sup>

As a result of these increasingly ferocious attacks against contemporary art, Piotrowski began to accentuate art’s entanglement in political interdependencies with new strength. The title of an article published in 2000 for the catalogue of the exhibition *Negocjatorzy sztuki* [*Negotiators of Art*], curated by Bożena Czubał, is very telling in this regard: “Art after Politics”.<sup>55</sup> This would also be the title of Piotrowski’s book published in 2007, with a subtitle indicating the artworks discussed there: *Od Melancholii do Pasji*

<sup>52</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem w obronie demokracji” [Tooth and Nail in Defence of Democracy], *Obieg* (online edition) 20 March 2007, updated 12 November 2008, <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/artmix/1729>.

<sup>53</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 264.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Sztuka według polityki” [Art after Politics], in: *Negocjatorzy sztuki wobec rzeczywistości* [*Negotiators of Art in the Face of Reality*], ed. Bożena Czubał, ex. cat. (Gdańsk: CSW Łaźnia, 2000), 20–34.

[*From Melancholy to Passion*].<sup>56</sup> In a text from 2000 Piotrowski pointed to two artistic traditions relating to politics, both present in Eastern Bloc countries. One assumes the concept of the autonomy of art, which can thus protect itself against appropriation by the totalitarian regime, and the other is an alternative culture in opposition to official institutions. This simple arrangement changed once democracy was instilled in the region's countries, thus enforcing a revision of the modernist mythology of universalism. For that reason, the politicality of art would be understood differently. As Piotrowski said: "Modernism did not differentiate art according to sex, race or origin. There was just one art, thus there was no necessity for individual negotiations or the individual establishment of one's own position because of one's sex, race or origin. Practically no negotiations with the surrounding reality were necessary; a declaration was enough. Now [in the 1990s] this is not possible any more. The fall of the totalitarian point of reference begat pluralisation of the subject and the awareness of its individualism."<sup>57</sup> According to this we should be aware of social diversity on the grounds of one's ideology, economic position, gender, sexual orientation, education or origin. This new situation was also connected with the unveiling of the specific political interests of different social groups. Still, the Polish authorities, as Piotrowski wrote in reference to the 1990s, regardless of whether they declared themselves left- or right-wing, tried to cover up such diversity. This was particularly true for those on the right, who aimed at restricting the open or liberal society (which was just at the stage of inception) by introducing all sorts of peculiar prohibitions and limiting freedom of speech and of art. A very important conclusion can be drawn from the Piotrowski's words above – namely that the post-communist societies were not eager to accept their own diversities. Polish society in particular was created as a kind of monolith by the ruling authorities after 1989. This lack of respect for diversity has become a serious danger for democracy – it was the main warning of this and other of Piotrowski's texts. "Soon any 'Other' and his language will become 'alien'"<sup>58</sup> – as he wrote prophetically, pointing to the danger of a new authoritarianism – the domination of one group over others.

<sup>56</sup> These are the two artworks that serve as the frame for the material discussed by Piotrowski: Jacek Malczewski's *Melancholy* (1894) and *Passion* by Dorota Nieznalska (2001). Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od Melancholii do Pasji* [*Art after Politics: From Melancholy to Passion*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Piotrowski, "Sztuka według polityki", 141.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

Piotrowski later proceeded to discussing the cases of artworks that caused controversy in Poland: Katarzyna Kozyra's *Więzy krwi* [*Blood Ties*] (1999); *Anatroph* (1999) by Grzegorz Kłaman; and the art of Robert Rumaś, Zbigniew Libera and Alicja Żebrowska. He pointed to concrete political events, which he connected with specific examples of artistic freedom being blocked, art institutions applying censorship, and critical art being attacked by right-wingers. He also highlighted certain threads in the art of the 1990s that attacked or criticised the system of power, thus unmasking the double morality of Polish society and the complexes of Poles. Piotrowski pointed to artists being interested in the political discourse of the body, its aestheticisation in mass culture, the power of corporations and repressive models of upbringing. He noted that in the 1990s Polish artists concentrated on the issue of the body by focusing on the repressive measures undertaken against physicality by power mechanisms. In "Art after Politics" and other texts, Piotrowski concentrated particularly on the issue of the restrictions imposed on women's rights to decide about their own bodies. For example, in reference to Alicja Żebrowska's *Grzech pierworodny* [*Original Sin*] (1993), in which the artist showed her own vagina, Piotrowski wrote: "The carnality of women, transvestites, sexual minorities and all those who break with the patriarchal order or the positioning imposed by this order, are exceptionally vulnerable to oppression. It does not require much effort to find such systems functioning in the so-called 'new Poland', after 1989. In the most general terms, the reactionary anti-feminine policy, including not only the current, strongly restrictive law banning abortion, and a specific discourse condemning contraceptives, but also the almost sick obsession of some conservative politicians, who want to ban prenatal tests and introduce the so-called 'family model of the functioning of the sexes', resulting in the discrimination of women on the labour market, makes Żebrowska's art political par excellence."<sup>59</sup>

From today's perspective it is frightening to realise that since this text was written, the situation in Poland hasn't changed for the better; as a matter of fact, present developments testify to the contrary. The current policy of the ruling Law and Justice Party<sup>60</sup> has introduced restrictions regarding women's issues, including withdrawal from subsidising prenatal physical examinations, battling for limiting access to con-

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 143–144.

<sup>60</sup> The Law and Justice Party (Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, abbreviated to PiS), is a right-wing, national-conservative, Christian, populist political party founded in 2001 by the Kaczyński brothers (Lech and Jarosław). The party won the parliamentary elections in 2015 with an

traceptives, renouncing the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention), and even attempting to further tighten the already restrictive anti-abortion law,<sup>61</sup> which has caused an unprecedented wave of women's protests (In Our Cause [09 April 2016], Black Protest and the Nationwide Women's Strike [03 October 2016]). Piotrowski's words from the aforementioned article, which indicate the disrespect shown to the rules of an open society in which gender equality, respect for minorities, freedom of expression of differing opinions, respect for "others", and the religious neutrality of the state are of utmost importance, more than adequately suit the present situation in Poland. "It seems that the style of a modern, or rather a postmodern democracy, based on the majority respecting the rights of the minorities, is alien to the style of governing represented by the successive governments; what is preferred is a peculiar type of the classical principle of the 'rule of the people': a domination of the majority."<sup>62</sup>

Although in the abovementioned texts from the 1990s Piotrowski clearly pointed to the need for analysing art in a political context, he did not yet directly term it a political action. However in 2007 he wrote: "Art as a public activity is by its nature a political activity in the broad sense of the word, as this space is defined by politics – politics understood as a conflict between the authority and the citizen, between the different camps of widely understood power, between the varied groups of citizens who differ in terms of gender, social background and economic interest, and between the ideological systems followed – a conflict between the emancipatory tendencies and those who preserve the social, moral and political order."<sup>63</sup> He notes that art, in these processes, does not function as their expression or illustration, but as an active actor.

At the time Piotrowski began to use the term "agonism" in his texts – a notion he borrowed from Chantal Mouffe.<sup>64</sup> He also referred to the analyses of public space offered by Rosalyn Deutsche in her essay on agoraphobia.<sup>65</sup> In relation to this concept, which means imposing fear of the public sphere onto minority groups, Piotrowski cre-

---

outright majority. It is currently the largest party in the Polish Parliament. The next parliamentary election is planned for October 2019.

<sup>61</sup> A draft law submitted to the Polish Sejm by the Ordo Iuris organisation in 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Piotrowski, "Sztuka według polityki", 31.

<sup>63</sup> Piotrowski, "Sztuka według polityki", 8.

<sup>64</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>65</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 290–373.

ated his concept of “agoraphilia” as the need to act in the public domain: “agoraphilia signifies the drive to enter the public space, the desire to participate in that space, to shape public life, to perform critical and design functions for the sake of and within the social space”.<sup>66</sup> He would use this notion in the Polish title of his book – the English translation is limited to the original’s subtitle: *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*. In light of the increasing political tensions in Poland, Piotrowski decided to primarily stress the conflicting nature of public space and the role of art in revealing it, including in the context of the debate on democracy. He therefore decided to support the model of “radical democracy”, based on the concept developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.<sup>67</sup> It was in the late 2000s that Piotrowski’s writing became more politically engaged. One of the reasons this occurred was his outrage – together with other left-wing contemporary art scholars – at the incomprehension of the essence of art in a democracy, in reference to the trial of Dorota Nieznalska, which dragged on for years. Nieznalska was an artist accused of insulting religious feelings; the trial was one of a series of attacks against critical art in Poland. The constitutional right to freedom of speech and freedom of creation was not respected by conservative-rightist groups, who believed that the Christian tradition should be supreme above all, and that religious symbols were untouchable. Extreme right-wing parties began to gain political support by intimidating the public with terms such as “heathen”, “atheist”, or “perverse” artists. The adversaries of critical art most often resorted to the argument of insulted religious feelings; art that engaged in a discussion about Polish Catholicism and the influence of the Catholic Church on Polish reality – which did not shy away from sensitive issues, or which revealed intolerance and mechanisms of exclusion – was seen as dangerous.

Dorota Nieznalska was indicted on the grounds of her video-installation *Pasja* [*Passion*] (2001), presented at the Wyspa Gallery in Gdańsk (14 December 2001–20 January 2002), which at the time was owned by the Academy of Fine Arts. The work referred to the double meaning of the word “passion”, which can be understood as an ordeal – suffering – or as an activity performed with great commitment or devotion to something (as in the saying “to do something with passion”). The installation was comprised of a cross with a depiction of male genitalia, an accompanying video showing a man working out at a gym, and a photo of the same man. The meaning of the work

<sup>66</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

referred to the question of “manliness” (hence the image of male genitals), which must be trained and exercised in order to meet established patterns. The reference to Christ’s Passion upset Catholics, who – instead of asking about the meaning of her work – accused Nieznalska of offending their religious feelings. By the decision of the rector of the Academy of Fine Arts, the gallery was closed shortly after the opening of the exhibition, and the artist was put on trial in light of Art. 196 of the Criminal Code. The trial ended in July 2001 with a judgement convicting Nieznalska to six months’ community service, as well as the payment of court fees. As a result of an appeal on 22 April 2004, the case was referred back for reconsideration, and thus a second trial began on 26 November 2004, which lasted until 04 June 2009 and ended with the artist being acquitted.<sup>68</sup>

This is what Piotr Piotrowski wrote about the judgement: “Although the Polish artist was cleared of an ‘offence against religious feelings’ by the appeals court, the judge, in his summing up, stressed the priority of the right to religious freedom over the right to freedom of artistic expression. He suggested that, even though Nieznalska’s work could have offended religious feelings, this was not the artist’s intention.”<sup>69</sup> This was the main thesis of the artist’s acquittal which, in Piotrowski’s opinion, was convoluted and unsatisfying. According to him, the line of defence should have assumed the artist’s right to blasphemy and profanity as “it is in the citizens’ interest to acknowledge this right, the exercise of which may not always be elegant, but is much safer than any effort to limit the right to free expression”. Moreover, “Freedom of expression should not be instrumentalised; it should be absolute and not relative.”<sup>70</sup> He also emphasised that seeing Nieznalska’s work as blasphemous was basically the effect of bad will or political manipulation.

The trial, which lasted from 2002 to 2010 (with some breaks),<sup>71</sup> the campaign against Nieznalska, her exclusion from the artistic milieu (no public gallery dared

<sup>68</sup> Although it is coincidental, it should be emphasised that the acquittal was passed exactly on the twentieth anniversary of free elections in Poland. Some commentators have interpreted this as the victory of Polish democracy. For more, see: Jakub Dąbrowski, *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku. Artyści, sztuka i polityka* [*Censorship in Polish Art after 1989: Artists, Art and Politics*] (Warsaw: Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, 2014), 498–640.

<sup>69</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 272.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> The acquitting judgment of 04 June 2009 was appealed by the prosecutor and the auxiliary prosecutor; however, the district court maintained the initial judgment during a sitting on 11 March 2010.





Piotr Piotrowski's lecture "Art and Democracy", on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Poznań Society of Friends of Arts and Sciences, 31 January 2007. From the Piotr Piotrowski Archive.

show her works at the time), along with other examples of attacks against art, testified to the lack of respect for creative freedom and to serious problems with democracy. In the essay "Pazurami i dziobem w obronie demokracji" [Tooth and Nail in Defence of Democracy], Piotrowski formulated an outright appeal to stand up in defence of the freedom of art. The text was initially delivered on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Poznań Society of Friends of Arts and Sciences, on 31 January 2007, and later published in *Artmix* magazine.<sup>72</sup> During the lecture he gave, Piotrowski said: "We, the people of the corporation [the Poznań Society of Friends of Arts and Sciences – I.K.], should be particularly sensitive to social and political processes. We should analyse them and talk about them. We should stand in defence of such values as democracy and freedom, and fight tooth and nail for them,<sup>73</sup> just as our ancestors

<sup>72</sup> Piotrowski, "Pazurami i dziobem w obronie demokracji".

<sup>73</sup> "Tooth and nail" (in the original: "with claws and beak", *unguibus et rostro*) – a credo of the Poznań Society of Friends of Arts and Sciences, founded in 1857. It was linked to the defence of the Polish culture and science at risk in the times of the country's partitions.

fought tooth and nail for the nation and independence. I would wish for this lecture, delivered here today before this distinguished forum, to be perceived as a voice in support of a public debate on the issues of freedom and democracy, a debate that has recently ceased in Poland, giving ground to ever new affairs in Polish political life – the files, the agents, the tapes, the sex scandals, etc.”<sup>74</sup>

It seems that the lack of discussion about freedom and democracy that Piotrowski foregrounded has led Polish society to its present situation, in which the basis of democracy is in jeopardy, through the changing and devaluation of its foundations, such as the Constitutional Court, the Constitution itself, and an independent judiciary. The party in power – Law and Justice – is trying to take complete control of the media, academia, education and culture. Piotrowski tirelessly continued his warnings about the situation, but the debate he called for never began.

It was in “Tooth and Nail in Defence of Democracy”, as well as the later book *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, that Piotrowski referred to Chantal Mouffe and the model of “agonistic democracy”, based on the inalienable nature of conflict in a democratic society and on criticism of the consensus. It is a criticism of liberal democracy and, at the same time, a utopian project of equal rights and the coexistence of different ideals and political options. Following Mouffe, Piotrowski indicated that liberalism was not able to cope with antagonism generating tensions between “us” and “them”. And although the antagonism is hidden under an apparent consensus, it leads to the implosion of liberalism. For that reason, it is necessary to “maintain conflict or dispute – an ideological rivalry as a constitutive trait of democracy – and not stifle it in the name of *common good* but keep it afloat as something-which-cannot-be-overcome. Participants of the dispute should not treat each other as enemies to be destroyed, but as *opponents*, who should be competed against. Thus *antagonism* can be transferred into *agonism*, and the relations of hostility into rivalry.”<sup>75</sup> Such a stance could be seen as an attempt to defend the democracy that, despite having been adopted in all the countries of post-communist Europe, “fails to meet the expectations vested in it and realises only in part the dreams of freedom.”<sup>76</sup> For that reason “It is up to intellectuals and artists, who cherish freedom as an ideal, who feel the discomfort of unfulfilled ex-

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem w obronie demokracji”.

<sup>76</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 287.

pectations, the discomfort of unfulfilled democracy, to argue and agitate for democracy. Intellectuals and artists who see their place in the agora, in the midst of public debate, are guided in their behaviour by agoraphilia.”<sup>77</sup>

The above can be treated as the credo of Piotr Piotrowski’s scholarly and social activities. One example of the latter was the initiative he created in 2014 of the Open Academy (with other founders including Monika Bobako, Przemysław Czapliński, Andrzej W. Nowak, Roman Kubicki, Krzysztof Podemski, Błażej Warkocki, Marek Wasilewski and the author of this text; over 500 people from Poland further declared their wish to join). This was to be an informal structure, in favour of the freedom of education, culture, academic research and open debate. The idea stemmed from the need we felt for finding a response to the increasing pressure of the right-wing ideology imposed by circles aiming to restrict civil freedoms in Poland. The initiative was also born as a result of the events that took place in 2013 and 2014 in Piotrowski’s hometown, Poznań. It was created in the conviction that the city was becoming the site of ever more compromising events, such as “the cancellation of a university debate [*Wojna o gender. Uniwersytet. Demokracja* (*The War on Gender. University. Democracy*), which was to have taken place at Adam Mickiewicz University – I.K.] under the pressure of rightist groups, as well as the still-unclarified situation of the police using force against protesters rallying in response to an anti-gender speech by priest Paweł Bortkiewicz, which took place at Poznań University of Economics on 05 December 2013”.<sup>78</sup> In 2014, during the Malta International Theatre Festival, a play by Rodrigo Garcia, *Golgota Picnic*, was called off as a result of a campaign waged by right-wing forces, representatives of the Catholic Church (including the Bishop of Poznań) and Poznań-based academics from the President Lech Kaczyński Civic Academic Club. The initiative unveiled the presence of a conflict in the Poznań academic community that eventually became apparent in the rest of the country – a conflict between the supporters of democracy and those who believe that Catholic and national values should be promoted above all in public life.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>78</sup> “Przeciwko państwu wyznaniowemu” [Against a Non-Secular State] – statement by the founders of the Open Academy, authors: Prof. Przemysław Czapliński, Prof. Izabela Kowalczyk, Prof. Roman Kubicki, Prof. Piotr Piotrowski, Prof. Krzysztof Podemski, Dr Błażej Warkocki, Prof. Marek Wasilewski), 23 June 2014, *Czas Kultury* online, <http://e.czaskultury.pl/otwarta-akademia/oswiadczenia/1683-przeciwko-panstwu-wyznaniowemu> (accessed 01 March 2015).

In the founding text of the Open Academy, it was strongly stressed that “The cancellation of *Golgota Picnic* is a huge step towards building a non-secular state, the reactivation of censorship, and limitation of civil freedoms and human rights, as the freedom of expression is part of these rights.”<sup>79</sup> We also stated that “Tension is rising in our country, verbal and – in extreme cases – physical aggression is on the rise, which takes place not only on the streets but also in university halls. Ideological and populist attacks are not only directed against knowledge, but also values, such as openness, sensitivity and rational thinking. Offensive words are not infrequent in these campaigns, with no one being held liable for them. They are often expressed by representatives of public life, who are traditionally vested with significant social trust.”<sup>80</sup> Piotrowski felt deep concern at the time about the developments in the country. He believed that it was the duty of scholars to voice their care for society. This could further be linked with his belief that academia is not limited to conveying knowledge, but should also teach critical thinking, openness and responsibility for others. Freedom should also be placed in the centre, as “[t]here can be no democracy without freedom”, and “freedom as a human right is non-negotiable; one either has it or not”.<sup>81</sup> According to Piotrowski, a critical way of thinking is our obligation. In one of his last interviews he said: “If you live in a particular place, you have to think in a critical way in order to improve that place, and this is also how it is with democracy. Being critical is an obligation for every intellectual, not just for scholars, art historians, and artists. No, we all have to think critically. Democracy is not a gift, it is not a given, we have to fight for this every day because there are always enemies. Critical ways of thinking can be used to disarm those who are against democracy. It is the condition in which intellectuals exist.”<sup>82</sup>

The radicalisation of political conflict that appeared in Polish public life at the end of Piotrowski’s life (he passed away on 03 May 2015), coupled with the political domination of Law and Justice and their subsequent parliamentary victory (on 25 October 2015), entailed a wave of civil protests, revealing the biggest problems that

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 264, 265.

<sup>82</sup> “A Way to Follow: An interview with Piotr Piotrowski”, with Richard Kosinsky, Jan Elantkowski and Barbara Dudás, *ARTMargins* online 29 January 2015, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/interviews-sp-837925570/758-a-way-to-follow-interview-with-piotr-piotrowski> (accessed 16 July 2019).

Piotrowski had warned against: negligence in building an open society, resignation from debate about democracy and freedom, and lack of respect for difference, leading to an atrophy of democracy. This is the situation we, unfortunately, have to deal with now. All of this shows the extraordinarily consistent intellectual and political stance Piotr Piotrowski presented – from his engagement in the opposition movement in the 1980s, to the criticism of the xenophobic, right-wing political position. This stance of his was filled with a rebellious attitude towards authority, but also with a love for emancipation and democracy, an attachment to the ideals of human solidarity and equality.

September 2017

TAMÁS SZENTJÓBY

## Protest pro Piotr Piotrowski, Budapest, 2010



Photo: Tamás St. Auby. Courtesy of IPUTNPU-Archives.

Following the resignation of Professor Piotr Piotrowski from the post of Director of the National Museum after the museum's Board of Trustees rejected his programme, Hungarian artist and friend of Piotrowski – Tamás Szentjóbý – organised an artistic event to support him. This happening, which took place outside the Polish Embassy in Budapest on the 25 October 2010 involved a few volunteers, who – together with the artist – protested in front of the building, carrying banners reading “We await the return of Piotr Piotrowski”, “Shame on you Polish Institute”, “Down with red tape”, etc., in Hungarian, Polish and English. Tamás Szentjóbý has been one of the most radical artists since the 1960s, co-organiser of the first Hungarian happening *Lunch (In Memoriam Bathu Khan)* and one of the main Fluxus artists in East-Central Europe. He founded the International Parallel Union of Telecommunications (IPUT) in 1968.

His politically engaged art was present in most of Piotrowski's books, including his last, published after the author's death, in which Piotrowski considers Szentjóby to be an artist equipped with a global, critical perspective. Szentjóby has practised various forms of strike, considering himself a non-artist. His numerous campaigns, installations and texts are anti-capitalist, anti-establishment and radical in form. His friendship with Piotrowski lasted for about 40 years.

Tamás Szentjóby recalls his first meeting with Piotr Piotrowski: "Four young men visited me in the 2 x 3-metre maid's room where I lived, in a four-room apartment rented from the state by my nine-member 'class-enemy', a family of clerks. I didn't know any of the visitors; they got my address from a Polish acquaintance of mine. We had some wine and a joyful, elevated chat about freedom of speech/art/sex for a few hours. After they left, I found a 20-forint banknote in my room, and I thought one of them must have dropped it. 20 forints was worth about three times the average hourly wage at that time. The next day I went to the student hostel where they were staying to return the money, but they said they hadn't lost it, so I invited all of them for lunch at the hostel's canteen. I can still see their curved backs covered with threadbare, grey pullovers as they stuffed the spinach with egg into their hungry stomachs."<sup>83</sup>

EDITORS



Photo: Zsuzsanna Simon. Courtesy of Tamás Szentjóby.

<sup>83</sup> Excerpt from an interview with Tamás Szentjóby conducted by Magdalena Radomska on 14 July 2019.

JAKUB DĄBROWSKI

## **In the Shadow of Power: Piotr Piotrowski on the Freedom of Art and on Censorship**

Although the issues of the freedom of artistic expression and of censorship were never the focus of Piotr Piotrowski's research, these topics were somewhat systematically on the agenda of his deliberations since the 1990s. This was due firstly to the engaged stance he expressed both in his work and his daily life and, secondly, to the interests that, from the 1990s onwards, began to dominate both his writing and curatorial practice (he had a passion for the art of the former Eastern Bloc states – a corner of Europe where the question of freedom had specific significance). An attempt to separate the two tropes would be a purely academic exercise; they are organically intertwined and mutually conditioning, hence it would be much more interesting to look at Piotrowski's views on the freedom of artistic expression and on censorship from the point of their evolution, method and terminology, as well as the ideological background, topography and context of the social roles that Piotrowski played: of a scholar, teacher, publicist, curator and museum director. His views were clear-cut as far as the freedom of art went, or, more broadly, freedom of expression, yet he did not develop a concise theory of censorship. Based on his texts, however, one may try to reconstruct a certain concept – the way he approached the issue. In order to do so, however, certain caveats have to be applied.

Over the last 50 years, the notion of censorship in scholarly deliberations has undergone an evolution from preventive censorship managed by the state (let's call it *institutional censorship*), to critical theories that accentuate the permanent play of power relations across the whole of social life. The first of these notions is tainted with a tension: non-democratic systems vs. liberal democracy. Democratic power is based on the assumption of the equal right of individuals to participate in social life by exer-



cising their right to expression. Once this principle is rejected, there is no democracy in the modern sense of the word. That is why, in the European legal tradition, the constitutional legal acts that provide for guaranteed rights and freedoms, freedom of expression, and, in particular, the freedom of the press (sometimes also the freedom of art and academic research) are treated distinctly. This is not to say that the sphere of communication is completely free – it is commonly accepted that it can be curtailed by means of laws adopted by the authorities that bear democratic legitimacy. These restrictions, however, should, by principle, be of a consequent and not a preventive type, serve justified interests (e.g. the security of the state, protection of health, morals, religion, reputation or the rights of others), and be necessary in a democratic society.<sup>1</sup> We are thus dealing with a legally sanctioned consensus on the possible curtailing of the freedom of expression. Still, both in colloquial terms and even in scholarly reflections, such bans are associated with censorship.<sup>2</sup> We shall not polemise with this peculiar usage, but only emphasise that the concept of censorship thus implied (let's call it *liberal censorship*) assumes to have its substantial source in some centre of power, and that, by means of an exception to the rule, it strikes at a specific point in the continuum of the free public sphere. However, such understandings of power, the public sphere and censorship have been subject to criticism as being too narrow and, generally, overshadowing the essence of the problem. This criticism originated from the theories of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, which maintain power-censorship relations but which, by diametrically changing the understanding of power, also diametrically reformulate the notion of censorship.<sup>3</sup> It is, therefore, to be emphasised that censorship (let's call it *censorship in the broad sense of the word*) does not actually manifest itself in control or prohibition by this or that organ of the state, but that it is, firstly, the effect of dispersed

<sup>1</sup> See e.g.: Art. 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Arts. 11, 13 and 52 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, and in Poland Art. 31(3) and Arts. 54 and 73 of the Constitution of 1997.

<sup>2</sup> E.g.: Lawrence Soley, *Censorship Inc.: The Corporate Threat to Free Speech in the United States* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002); Jane Clapp, *Art Censorship: A Chronology of Proscribed and Prescribed Art* (Metuchen, New York: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.); *Censoring Culture: Contemporary Threats to Free Speech*, eds. Robert Atkins and Svetlana Mintcheva (New York – London: New Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g.: Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York: The New Press, 1998); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977); Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

relations of impersonal power in society, and, secondly, that as with power, it acts both overtly and covertly, but also permanently and ubiquitously. Finally, censorship not only prohibits, but also creates a reality – the Truth and the Subject.<sup>4</sup>

Piotrowski did not apply such distinctions, although they seem to be implicitly present in his texts. Moreover, in the description above, an apparent tension emerges between the advocates of classical democracy and its left-wing critics. This tension is fundamental to Piotrowski's deliberations because – as we shall soon find out – the question of freedom was for him a function of views on democracy, and freedom of art a function of the perception of the role of art in a democracy.

### Evolution – terminology – method

Censorship in art as an autonomous problem first emerged in Piotrowski's deliberations in an article on the case of Robert Mapplethorpe (1992), and later in his book from 1996, *W cieniu Duchampa. Notatki nowojorskie* [*In the Shadow of Duchamp: New York Notes*].<sup>5</sup> Both texts appeared as if they were footnotes to the scholarly projects Piotrowski conducted in the USA in the first half of the 1990s. This was a period of American cultural wars, when artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Karen Finley, David Wojnarowicz and Andres Serrano encountered problems with censorship, and when theoreticians attempted to redefine the liberal understating of censoring based on the jurisprudence of the First Amendment.<sup>6</sup> Despite Piotrowski's frequent refer-

<sup>4</sup> See e.g.: Richard Burt, "Introduction: The 'New' Censorship", in: *The Administration of Aesthetics*, ed. Burt (Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Robert C. Post, "Censorship and Silencing", in: *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. Post (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1998); Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York – London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "Moralność Inc.", *Czas Kultury* no. 3 (1992), 34–39, and Piotrowski, *W cieniu Duchampa. Notatki nowojorskie* [*In the Shadow of Duchamp: New York Notes*] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1996). This small elaboration also contains other tropes that would become the leitmotifs in Piotrowski's later works, such as the dialectics of modernism and the avant-garde; Foucault's notion of power; the postmodernism of resistance and its expression – i.e. critical art analysing contemporary culture; deep conviction (in the sense of engaged art); support for the emancipatory activities of victimised groups – in particular women and sexual minorities; and reluctance towards the totalising elements of social life (the Catholic Church, the political establishment, corporate capitalism).

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 2 and e.g.: Sue C. Jansen, *Censorship: The Knot that Binds Power and Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Steven C. Dubin, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and*

ences to Foucault from the latter half of the 1990s onwards, he refrained from using the notion of censorship *sensu largo*. On a terminological level, he basically differentiated the issue of power and subjectification proposed by the French thinker from the concept of censorship, which he used to refer either to institutional censorship or any other individual and intentional action aimed at excluding a given expression from the public sphere (*liberal censorship*) – and he always remained a cautious analyst of such exclusions. In the description of the famous case of Mapplethorpe and the trial of Dennis Barrie, director of the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, Piotrowski stressed that American puritanism was a cover-up for the covert dealings of the authority, in particular the ties between politics (conservative senator Jesse Helms) and corporations (Philip Morris Inc.), and the indirect dependence of government agencies (the National Endowment for the Arts) on “big money” capital.<sup>7</sup> What is interesting is that he made his analysis by referring to Hans Haacke’s *Helmsboro Country* (1990), confirming in practice the cognitive significance of the engaged, critical current of art. Piotrowski also rehabilitated Serrano’s work, *Piss Christ*, attacked by the conservative senator Alphonse d’Amato, which resulted in it being stuck in “the twine of the questions pertaining to the freedom of the artist, the censorship of art, moral rhetoric and the political tactics of power”.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that at the time the *New York Notes* were being written, the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw had organised a Serrano exhibition (1994). The director of the institution, Wojciech Krukowski, did not allow *Piss Christ* to be presented, on the grounds that it offended religious feelings. Piotrowski, however, felt that artistic controversies and censorial practices could, paradoxically, provide an opportunity for the rebirth of art, which from the 1960s had been engulfed in a crisis of freedom – a freedom devoid of moral prospects. He wrote: “when (again) the limits of the freedom of an artist’s expression are delineated, the creator regains the moral right to breach them. Art (again), just as

---

*Uncivil Actions* (London – New York: Routledge, 1992); Michael Holquist, “Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship”, *PMLA* vol. 109, no. 1 (1994); Stanley Fish, *There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech and It’s a Good Thing, Too* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> In the *New York Notes* Piotrowski also emphasised the power of capital in creating artistic trends, and, drawing on the example of Rauschenberg’s artistic career, the connection of the art market with American politics – aimed at “a secret building of [the] imperialism” of the USA (52). He did not, however, problematise these phenomena in the context of artistic freedom or censorship.

<sup>8</sup> Piotrowski, *W cieniu Duchampa*, 113.

in the time of the avant-garde, becomes a gesture in which the ethics and aesthetics seem to be the inextricable parts of the artistic universe, and the word ‘freedom’ is more than just a slogan of pluralist creation – it becomes a call for the right to the integrity of culture.”<sup>9</sup>

From the *New York Notes* onwards, the question of censorship and freedom of expression was present on the margins of Piotrowski’s most important works, and also in many of his shorter texts. However, an important caveat must be added, which results from a matter he described – namely that the culture of an Eastern Bloc country, which came into being before 1989, would always have to grapple with what we usually term institutional censorship (in Poland, this was conducted by the Main Office for the Control of Press, Publications and Spectacles [Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk – GUKPPiW]).<sup>10</sup> These issues seem less obvious in reference to the art of democratic states, and, if so, they also require a different methodological apparatus (censorship in the liberal sense, specifically a broad one). What made Piotrowski’s writing specific was that he included, to an extent, the methodological apparatus of his research on communist countries. Whenever he turned to the period before 1989, he would – especially when focusing on Poland – always recall the watchful eye of the censoring office, but also take note of the mechanisms of what we would now call censorship in the broad meaning; first and foremost, he emphasised the subtle fluctuations in the cultural policy of the party leadership, the “giving of free rein” and “tightening the screw”. He wrote, with reference to Foucault: “What gave colour to this method [panoptic surveillance by the communist party – J.D.] was that the prison guard had no intention of letting himself dissolve in the structures of the ideal prison, but, to the contrary, was to make his presence known from time to time [...]. And the censorship left at his disposal did not just forbid, but also ‘released’ the criticism of what the different advocates of the main guardian had to say, which paradoxically strengthened the position of the guardian, making him a more effective supervisor.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Piotrowski, *W cieniu Duchampa*, 111.

<sup>10</sup> GUKPPiW was a state institution established in 1946 to perform preventive control over all manner of media (radio, television, press, books and other printed materials, film, theatre, musical performances, cabaret, exhibitions and even circus shows), ensuring that the content was in line with the current political needs of the ruling communist party. The institution was closed in June 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* [*Meanings of Modernism: Towards a History of Polish Art after 1945*] (Poznań: REBIS, 1999), 79.

It should also be noted that “censorship” was used here in reference to the activities of the GUKPPiW, which automatically places it in opposition to the other activities and processes that formed the sphere of social communication Piotrowski writes about. The above excerpt is illustrative of how Piotrowski treated the issues under analysis.

The quote comes from *Znaczenia modernizmu* [*Meanings of Modernism*], published in 1999 – the first complex Polish art-historical elaboration on the period from World War II to the present published during the Third Polish Republic. Yet Piotrowski was always sensitive to the complicated power relations forming the discursive sphere of the communist Polish People’s Republic. Of particular importance is his observation about the symbiosis of artistic circles with the party, which had been visible since the 1960s. The party made sure that artists had money and technical facilities, not to mention events (symposia, open-air meetings, festivals, etc.) where they could do as they wished just as long as they did not touch on political issues, particularly those critical of the authorities. Such tendencies intensified in the period when Edward Gierek was the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (1970–1980). This was a time when the authorities required political neutrality, but simultaneously turned a blind eye to formal experiments and postmodernist stylistics, thus testifying to the “modernity” and “Occidentalism” of the post-totalitarian state. In complementing Piotrowski’s deliberations, it could be said that institutional censorship and repression were the final (as in a chain), though not the most important means that the authorities could exert on the discursive sphere. Equally effective was the cautious distribution of privileges among the milieu, or the benefits and guarantees of enjoying artistic freedom within the framework of the modernist autonomy of an artwork. As a result, a distinct majority of cultural producers, including the Polish art world, adapted to the communist-imposed rules of the game, so that direct interventions from the censors were infrequent.<sup>12</sup> Such a nuanced strategy was effective, less socially costly, and ensured a legitimisation of the authority, which was stronger than

<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that there were no interventions in the visual arts at all – they did happen, although they were more related to issues of morality (nudity, sexuality) than political questions as such. The fact that communist censorship was not – as we are used to it – the administrative, preventive control of thought exchange, concentrating on specific issues, but a complex and continuous system of relations forming the desired modes of acting, is a topic of my article “What did not change on 6 June 1990? A few remarks on the mechanism of censorship in the PRL and the Third Republic of Poland”, *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica* no. 39 (2018), 209–224.

if it had been based on fear or the constant preventive intervention of institutional censorship. Therefore Piotrowski implicitly pointed not to the ban-based aspects, but rather the positive, productive characteristics of censorship in the broad sense of the term.<sup>13</sup>

Piotrowski's shifting of the burden from institutional censorship to dispersed power relations (whose correlate is censorship *sensu largo*) bore two important cognitive consequences: it helped focus on the diversity of the factors and processes that shape the discursive field, and also on their durability and continuity, which is often independent of current events and political situations. Thus the Polish underground opposition of the 1980s, which cooperated with the Catholic Church, not only fought against the communist regime, but (according to Piotrowski's narrative) actually became part of the system of power – of the generated “relations of domination and mechanisms of subordinating the citizens, strategies of appropriating entire spheres of public life and instrumentalising it for the purpose of the objectives or anti-objectives of the martial law”.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the democratic opposition and the Catholic Church regulated the discursive field according to their needs, thus producing the type of Truth

<sup>13</sup> On the strategy of the communist party and the conformism of the milieu of Polish visual artists in communist times, see: Piotr Piotrowski, “Filozofia gestu” [The Philosophy of Gesture], in: *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku : Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Warszawa, listopad 1984* [Polish Art after 1945: Studies from a Session of the Association of Art Historians, November 1984], ed. Teresa Hrankowska (Warsaw: PWN, 1987), 243–253; Piotrowski, *Dekada. O syndromie lat siedemdziesiątych, kulturze artystycznej, krytyce, sztuce – wybiórczo i subiektywnie* [Decade: About the Syndrome of the Seventies, Artistic Culture, Criticism, Art – Selectively and Subjectively] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1991). A few years later, Piotrowski expanded his reflection on the situation of artists in communist Poland with reference to Michel Foucault's theory of power: Piotrowski, “Postmodernizm i posttotalitaryzm” [Postmodernism and Post-totalitarianism], *Magazyn Sztuki* no. 4 (1994), 56–73; Piotrowski, “Odwilż” [The Thaw], in: *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r.* [The Thaw: Art ca. 1956], ed. Piotrowski (Poznań: Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, 1996), 9–35; see also: Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty. Sztuka w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1945–1989* [In the Shadow of Yalta – Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989] (Poznań: REBIS, 2005), 309–315.

<sup>14</sup> Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 226. The Polish communist authorities introduced martial law on 13 December 1981 in order to stifle the democratic opposition growing under the flag of the Solidarity Trade Union. The authorities interned approximately 10,000 opposition activists, and another 4,000 – mainly leaders and participants of protests – were sentenced to prison; 50 people died as a result of beatings and gunshot wounds. Thousands of people engaged in the protests lost their jobs, and Solidarity was banned, as were many student, artist and intellectual organisations. Whatever was left of the opposition was forced to go underground.

and Subject they found fit. It was the coalition of the opposition and the Church that finally emerged victorious; it was their type of Truth and Subject that won; the power relations that were produced in this configuration were then smoothly adopted in the post-communist reality of Poland. Piotrowski strongly accentuated this process. As he wrote in *Meanings of Modernism*, the problems of Poland after 1989, and in particular in the early 1990s, lay “with the ideological horizons of the old, Solidarity-based opposition”, defined by the narrow understanding of the concept of the nation, its tight links with Catholicism, and also with aesthetic conservatism.<sup>15</sup> It was in this book that Piotrowski undertook his first analysis of the curtailing of freedom of expression in the Third Polish Republic, highlighting the fact that such cases were the result of the dominance of religious fundamentalism over open society.

After 2005, Piotrowski intensified his already substantial engagement in political and social issues.<sup>16</sup> On the scholarly level, this was manifested in the book *Sztuka według polityki. Od Melancholii do Pasji* [*Art after Politics: From Melancholy to Passion*] (2007), and particularly in his vital lecture “Pazurami i dziobem w obronie demokracji” [Tooth and Nail in Defence of Democracy], delivered in January 2007 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Poznań Society of Friends of Arts and Sciences.<sup>17</sup> It may be said that in this paper, Piotrowski detailed his credo of an

<sup>15</sup> Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 222. At the time, Piotrowski failed to appreciate the complexity and durability of conservative relations in Polish society. The roots of this phenomenon should be sought not in the 1980s but in the late eighteenth century, prior to the partitions. These relations remain unjeopardised until today (2017), and we can even talk about their current strengthening – hopefully short-lived.

<sup>16</sup> It may have been related to the right-wing political turn in Poland, as a result of which a party with a strong conservative, national and Catholic profile, Law and Justice, took power for the first time after 1989. They created a coalition not with centrists but with the extreme right-wing League of Polish Families and the populist, but also conservative, Samoobrona [Self-Defence]. The Third Republic of Poland would symbolically become The Fourth Republic, i.e. a “new” state, breaking away from the past of the “rotten” compromise with the communists (an effect of the Round Table Talks) and the legal relations derived from it, as well as informal social and economic relations. The confrontational rhetoric of the victorious party and the postulated change to the status quo in many fields, with simultaneous attempts at strengthening the conservative social model, caused an eruption of resistance from the left-wing and liberal parts of society.

<sup>17</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od Melancholii do Pasji* [*Art after Politics: From Melancholy to Passion*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2007); Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem. W obronie demokracji”, *Obieg* online, <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/artmix/1729> (accessed 19



engaged researcher, theoretician, teacher and curator. His deliberations on the freedom of expression gained a proper theoretical framework and achieved fullness.

Art for Piotrowski was, first and foremost, a “public activity”, and, by its nature, “a political activity in the broad sense of the word”. To him, the political was “a conflict between the authority and the citizen, between the different camps of widely understood power, between the varied groups of citizens who differ in terms of gender, social background and economic interest, and between the ideological systems followed – a conflict between the emancipatory tendencies and those that preserve the social, moral and political order”. Therefore, it was a space of *agon*, and art was not so much an expression of these processes as it was – due to its specific attractiveness – “an active actor working in the public space”.<sup>18</sup> As such, it was subject to a whole array of dangers: “The symbolism and violation of conventions are values of art but also sources of conflict [...]. On the other hand, art gives society the chance for a deeper view of the surroundings, a deeper insight in the essence of reality. Therefore, it often leads to (though by no means always) a reversal of the traditional power-art relationship. Contemporary art often refrains from supporting power; quite the contrary: it wants to unravel its oppressive techniques. For that reason, art frequently remains in conflict with power. The latter, however, has its hands tied, and the only weapon left at its disposal is ignorance. Alas, it also often resorts to more repressive methods, if not drastic at times.”<sup>19</sup>

For Piotrowski, *agon* is the basis of democracy, and his definition of democracy was radical, following the reflections of Ernesto Laclau, Claude Lefort and, in particular Chantal Mouffe. It is a utopian “conceptual horizon” to which contemporary liberal democratic systems should head. These are imperfect as they are always subject to the excluding imperative of the consensus (Habermas’s “deliberative democracy”). Therefore, *agon* is about “democratising democracy” – so that the conflict, and the voices of dissidents, which are pushed out of the public space in the name of the impersonal Enlightenment discourse of universal community, are brought to light and respected by the mechanism of the *agora*. Consensus must be substituted by a permanent dispute,

---

June 2017). The lecture was later published, in a slightly modified form, in: Piotrowski, *Agorafilia. Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* [Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe] (Poznań: REBIS, 2010), as the chapter “Niespełniona demokracja” [Unfulfilled Democracy], 263–288.

<sup>18</sup> Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem”, and *Agorafilia*, 266.



which would become the irreducible basis of political order. The participants of the dispute must not, however, aim for mutual destruction, but for mutual competition (the transformation of antagonism into agonism). As Piotrowski has emphasised – and what is of particular interest to us – “such a model must be founded on the respect for freedom and the right of everyone to the freedom of expression, however not in the name of – and let us repeat – an allegedly common good, but the expression of one’s own convictions, despite the fact – or maybe because of it – that they are in contradiction with the general opinion”.<sup>20</sup> In any case, as he observed, regardless of what kind of democracy we would advocate, it must be based on respect for human rights and freedoms, including the right to free expression. What is important (and what undoubtedly influenced my deliberations on censorship in art), is that Piotrowski did not assign a privileged status to artistic expression: “Art is a relatively specific type of expression. By that I do not wish to say that it should enjoy any special privileges at the cost of other means of expression. Quite the opposite. *Freedom as a human right is indivisible: it is either there, or it is not* [my emphasis – J.D.]. If it is there, then it is a right to be enjoyed by everybody, not just by artists, but also those whose expressions would be difficult to classify as cultural. Freedom of expression cannot be of an aesthetic character.”<sup>21</sup>

Piotrowski’s position was in opposition to the tradition deeply rooted in Western culture, in which art enjoys a special immunity. His idea was not so much to limit this immunity objectively, but to expand it subjectively, so that the whole of society – and not just artists – could benefit from it. As risky as the thesis may be, I believe that it was one of the most interesting proposed by him as far as the freedom of art and, generally, freedom of expression are concerned.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Mouffe’s theory of agonistic democracy was particularly strongly accentuated by Piotrowski in *Art and Democracy*, published three years later. It seems that Piotrowski’s criticism of liberal democracy is linked, to a certain degree, with the criticism of modernism (in Clement Greenberg’s approach), as something that is universalising, holistic and canonical – hence supplanting dispute and diversity.

<sup>21</sup> Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem”, and *Agorafilia*, 266.

<sup>22</sup> Piotrowski never went into the details of the thesis, but remained on the level of general reflection. I try to develop the concept in: “Sztuka ponad wszystko – przedzałożenia w polskim dyskursie artystycznym o wolności wypowiedzi w sztuce” [Art above All: Presuppositions in Polish Artistic Discourse on Freedom of Expression in Art], in: *Założenia przedwstępne w badaniu polskiej sztuki najnowszej, I Seminarium Dłużewskie* [Presuppositions in Research

Parallel to the concept of “agonistic democracy”, the metaphor of “agoraphobia” – borrowed from texts by Rosalyn Deutsche<sup>23</sup> – appears in Piotrowski’s description of censorship. He would later expand on the subject in his book *Agorafilia – Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* [*Agoraphilia – Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, published in English as *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*] (2010) – a work summarising his research on the art of post-communist Europe.<sup>24</sup> Piotrowski applied the term “agoraphobia” to the actions of communist systems that made individual or collective civic initiatives dependent on the monopoly of the political apparatus, subjecting the public space to an ideological doctrine.

After 1989, the agoraphobic tendencies became much more dispersed and subtle: “the term ‘censorship’ is usually avoided here, and replaced by talk of social interest, respect for religious feelings, moral customs, the good name of an institution and figures in public life, as well as the interests of taxpayers”.<sup>25</sup> The notion of agoraphobia thus presented was later problematised by Piotrowski in relation to Althusser’s division into Repressive State Apparatus (Government, Administration, Police, Courts, Prisons, etc.) and Ideological State Apparatus (religion, schools, family, information, culture, etc.). Although both apparatuses support and mutually permeate each other, it is important to draw a distinction between the institutions that create them and the activities of those institutions.<sup>26</sup> Piotrowski was primarily interested in the functioning of the Ideological Apparatus in a given place and time, and especially in its cultural dimension. On the one hand, Althusser’s historicised take on the notion of ideology made it easier for him to nuance the meanings of artistic production in post-communist states, particularly to question their claims of universalism and autonomy; on the other hand, by emphasising the tension between the Ideological and Repressive Apparatuses, threats to the freedom of artistic expression could be better brought to light; Piotrowski

---

on *Polish Contemporary Art: 1st Dłużew Seminar*], ed. Jakub Banasiak (Warsaw: Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, 2015), 140–168.

<sup>23</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> “Agoraphobia after Communism”, *Umění / Art – Journal of the Institute of Art History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic* no. 1 (2004), 52–60; Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki* (chapter “Agorafobia po komunizmie” [Agoraphobia after Communism]).

<sup>25</sup> Piotrowski, *Agorafilia*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Piotrowski, *Agorafilia*, 85–87. Louis Althusser, *Ideologie i aparaty ideologiczne państwa* [*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*], <http://www.filozofia.uw.edu.pl/skfm/publikacje/althusser05.pdf> (accessed 19 June 2017).

believed that when the Repressive Apparatus becomes activated in the context of art, it actually proves that the state is no longer democratic.

### Poland – other post-communist countries – the West

Piotrowski's horizon of democracy, freedom of expression and the role of art clashed with Polish reality after 1989, and inevitably resulted in his harsh criticism of the latter. As previously mentioned, criticism of the ideological foundations of Polish democracy had already appeared in *Meanings of Modernism*, and was further developed in later years.<sup>27</sup> Piotrowski believed that Polish society "could hardly be called a liberal one; also the authorities here do not care about such problems as gender equality, respect for minorities, freedom of expressing one's convictions (against the authorities, naturally), respect for 'others', the religious neutrality of the state, as well as many other principles of an open society. It seems that the style of a modern, or rather a postmodern democracy, based on the majority respecting the rights of the minorities, is alien to the style of governing represented by the successive governments; what is preferred is a peculiar type of the classical principle of the 'rule of the people': a domination of the majority."<sup>28</sup>

And so, Polish democracy is only declaratively a liberal one, and in essence is actually – as Rosalyn Deutsche would call it – authoritarian democracy,<sup>29</sup> because instead of the ideology of the Enlightenment, it is based, for historical reasons, on a specific "discourse of a shared, common, nationwide interest founded on Christian values".<sup>30</sup> Piotrowski noted that the specific Catholic-national authoritarianism generated power relations that strongly limit the freedom of expression and art not only at the level of liberal censorship (e.g. the adoption and application of laws limiting rights), but also in less obvious and perceptible censorship contexts *sensu largo*. This is manifested, for example, in the influence exerted on capital, as seen in the censoring of Katarzyna

<sup>27</sup> Piotrowski analysed Polish political reality and the historical conditions for the functioning of the visual arts (along with issues related to freedom and the critical artistic strategies of the 1990s) for the first time in an interview: "Wytrącić z automatyzmu myślenia" [Getting Out of the Automatism of Thinking], published in the Catholic monthly *Znak* 12/1998 (60–68). The diagnoses agreed with those published a few months later in *Meanings of Modernism*.

<sup>28</sup> Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki*, 204.

<sup>29</sup> Deutsche, *Evictions*, 274.

<sup>30</sup> Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki*, 150, 230, and "Pazurami i dziobem".

Kozyra's *Więzy krwi* [*Blood Ties*], exhibited by the Art Marketing Syndicate (AMS) in 1999.<sup>31</sup> The company owned thousands of outdoor billboards in different Polish towns. In 1998, it began to present the works of Polish contemporary artists as part of a project called the AMS Outdoor Gallery. "The self-censorship of the AMS Outdoor Gallery, or actually their desertion in light of the political reaction of the authorities, illustrates this process [the influence of the dominant ideology on capital – J.D.] and shows that, according to politics, art cannot seek a credible ally in this field." Financial pressure is what links the different censorial activities. Likewise, the pressure exerted by reactionary politics on cultural institutions is of an economic character: "Polish galleries and museums are far from autonomy, and from functioning in clearly defined fields of the financial game, from the procedures of assigning budgetary means that are transparent and – most importantly – separate from the area of ideological debates." Piotrowski then continues, going beyond capital entanglements and broadening the perspective: "The processes are facilitated by the theoretical and technical anachronism of art criticism. [...] the lack of appropriate professional preparation makes it impossible for criticism to understand many of the artistic activities, particularly those which break away from modernist assumptions."<sup>32</sup> Piotrowski thus sees here that the diverse power relations form not only the limits of what can be expressed and shown, but – more importantly – of what can be understood (the impotent criticism does not provide the public with the codes of contemporary art, and thus it is excluded from the area of communication, remaining outside the protocols of understanding). Unfortunately, Piotrowski never elaborated on these tropes; neither did he include them in a system of concepts that would make it possible to have a deeper insight into this arising problem.

The socio-political situation in Poland has an obvious impact on both the content and the application of law, which in turn directly conditions liberal censorship (as we would call it). Piotrowski believed that the Polish Constitution of 1997 had something of a liberal character; still, even if it has provisions stipulating respect for otherness, this is more in terms of tolerance (a hierarchical relationship) than of equal treatment. Further-

<sup>31</sup> *Blood Ties* showed a naked Kozyra with a red crescent and cauliflower heads in the background, as well as her disabled sister (her deformed left leg from the knee down) with a red cross and cabbages as the backdrop. The piece was a commentary on the situation of women in former Yugoslavia. As a result of protests by politicians, the work was censored (the naked women were covered).

<sup>32</sup> Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki*, 190–204.

more, the fact that Christian values have been explicitly inscribed in the document is in clear violation of the republican tradition at the basis of liberal democracy. This reveals the ideological foundations of the consensus, and facilitates the symbolic appropriations of public space that find support in the positive law.<sup>33</sup> One of the most important examples of such appropriations in Polish art history is the case of the young artist Dorota Nieznańska. In 2003 she was convicted by a court of first instance to six months of community service, twenty hours per month. The reason for the sentence was that her video installation *Pasja* [Passion], exhibited during winter 2001–2002 at the Wyspa Gallery in Gdańsk, offended the religious feelings of other persons (Art. 196 of the Polish Criminal Code).<sup>34</sup> Piotrowski referred to the case in many of his discussions and texts.<sup>35</sup> He believed that the prosecution should not have gone ahead, and those who had felt offended (particularly politicians from right-wing parties) should have been made to file civil suits instead. The conviction of the artist set a dangerous legal precedent and evoked “a question about the constitutional order of the state in which, pursuant to the Constitution, freedom of expression is guaranteed not only for the artist, but any citizen”. Furthermore, the legal acquittal of the artist was based on dubious grounds, and was convoluted as, instead of being founded on the inviolability of the artist’s right to blasphemy, it suggested that although the artist may have offended religious feelings with her work, that was not her intention. Piotrowski claimed that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had twice spoken on the need to guarantee the freedom of artistic expression, blasphemous expression included. Both the Church and politicians “should understand that repression and expropriations of the voice of minorities from the agora is in conflict with the

<sup>33</sup> Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem”, and *Agorafilia*, 264.

<sup>34</sup> *Passion* comprised a Greek cross with a photograph of male genitalia, and a looped film showing the twisted face of a man lifting weights at a gym. The case dragged on for years and finally ended with an acquittal in 2010. The accusation was preceded by a media scandal caused by the liberal media, hand in hand with the right-wing League of Polish Families. Pursuant to Art. 196 of the Criminal Code: “Whoever offends the religious feelings of other persons by outraging in public an object of religious worship or a place dedicated to the public celebration of religious rites, shall be subject to a fine, the penalty of restriction of liberty or the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to two years.”

<sup>35</sup> Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki*, 234, 244; *Agorafilia*, 271–273; “Pazurami i dziobem”; see also: “*Pasja i uczucia*” [*Passion and Feelings*], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 28 March 2002; “Apel profesorów w sprawie Doroty Nieznańskiej” [The Professors’ Appeal in the Case of Dorota Nieznańska], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 24 July 2003; “Policja moralności” [Moral Police], interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza* 18 November 2002.

essence of democracy”<sup>36</sup>: “[...] it is in the interest of citizens to recognise the right to blasphemy, which is not always elegant, but the presence of which is incomparably safer than any limitations in the matter; it is in the interest of citizens to recognise the right to profanity, both political and religious, because – as Giorgio Agamben teaches – profanity is the recovery of what has been appropriated; it is the recovery of what is due to us. Freedom of expression should not be instrumentalised – it should be primary, and not relative. It is simply worth it. The violation of freedom of expression in one case can become a dangerous precedent for the entire construction of civil freedoms.”<sup>37</sup>

From a legal point of view, Piotrowski’s arguments were not congruent with the essence of the problem. The controversies related to the Polish Constitution did not stem from the provisions that Piotrowski questioned, and the reasons for Nieznańska’s acquittal were obvious in the context of Polish criminal law traditions and the dynamics of the trial. The jurisprudence of the ECHR, at least since the ruling in the case of *Otto-Preminger-Institut v. Austria* (judgement of 20 September 1994), remains unquestioned – national courts have a considerable margin of appreciation in adjudicating cases related to religion and morality. Polish case law, on the other hand, questions the possibility of filing civil legal suits in such cases (it should also be remembered that, even if such suits were possible, their number and the sums of adjudicated compensation, not to mention the trial costs, could lead to consequences that would be much more painful to the artist than a conviction).

When analysing the degree of artistic freedoms in post-communist states, Piotrowski observed that although acts of censorship were not infrequent in many of them (Czech Republic, Hungary, the countries of former Yugoslavia, Ukraine), the Repressive State Apparatus was engaged in prosecuting artists only in Poland and Russia. It is only in these states that convicting sentences were passed with regard to representatives of the art world. In both, the convictions pertained to the violation of religious taboos: Catholic in Poland, and Russian Orthodox in Russia. Likewise, both countries saw other cases involving the destruction of artworks seen as offensive.<sup>38</sup> Piotrowski claimed,

<sup>36</sup> Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki*, 234, 244, and “Policja moralności”.

<sup>37</sup> Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem”, and *Agorafilia*, 272.

<sup>38</sup> In 2001, an icon by Oleg Yanushevski was destroyed at the Central Exhibition Hall in St Petersburg. In 2003, the exhibition *Caution, Religion!* was demolished at the Sakharov Center in Moscow. In 2006, art dealer Marat Guelman (organiser of the dissident biennale *Russia 2*) was almost fatally beaten up in his Moscow gallery, and the raiders also destroyed works by

however, that the reasons for the repressive reactions in the two countries were different: in Russia they were more related to the given situation, and were a result of the current needs of authoritarian rule, while in Poland they were more of a structurally systemic nature, and were a consequence of consensus being the basis of our “rickety” democracy. In terms of sensitivity to religious iconography (more on this later), Poland is unique in the group of both post-communist and democratic Western countries.<sup>39</sup>

There are two other issues that make Poles different. The first is the censorial hyperactivity towards art demonstrated by the representatives of authorities at different tiers. As they are unable to interfere directly, they seek the help of prosecutors. The second – especially dangerous – is the passivity of the Polish public, who (aside from a few art critics) do not protest against censorship, seeing it as something normal.<sup>40</sup>

Piotrowski proposed an interesting diagnosis of such a state. He mentioned the historically conditioned low status of the visual arts, which in Poland are still associated with eccentric individuals and scandal. Seen as such, the visual arts have not deserved protection (except for historical nineteenth-century painting). At the same time, the education of the Polish intelligentsia was very much literature-oriented. Literature has been considered the treasury of national thought, and attempts at censoring it have been associated with the worst times of the country’s partitions<sup>41</sup> or the Polish People’s Republic. Polish education and upbringing have also been dominated by collective rather than individual values, with the first additionally connected to Catholicism. In the times of the partitions and of communism, aspirations towards independence were often formulated with the use of religious symbols. There was never space for individual rebellion, atheism,

---

Alexander Djikia. In Poland, in November 2001, Daniel Olbrychski cut up Piotr Uklański’s work *Nazis* with a sabre he had smuggled into the gallery. The piece was composed of some 150 photographs of well-known actors in Nazi uniforms, including Olbrychski himself. In December of the same year, a sculpture by Maurizio Cattelan, *La nona ora*, depicting Pope John Paul II crushed by a meteorite, was destroyed by two right-wing members of parliament, Witold Tomczak and Halina Nowina-Konopczyna. It seems, however, that the deputies did not intend to destroy the artwork, as by removing the meteorite from the pope they were trying to save him. On the elision of image and prototype, see: David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem”.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Three partitions of Poland, conducted by Austria, the Kingdom of Prussia and the Russian Empire, took place at the end of the eighteenth century, resulting in the country’s loss of sovereignty for 123 years.

transgression or profanity (indeed, it is the intertwining of religious and national tropes that lies at the foundations of Poles' specific sensitivity to religious iconography). The nineteenth century was crucial in this respect, as national enslavement was compensated by a reactionary culture. The century was also marked by the weak development of the bourgeoisie, with its liberalism and individualist ideology. Such weakness also meant poor levels of anti-bourgeois discourse – beginning with the proletarian revolution and ending with the sexual one. This paresis of left-wing movements and leftist thought is something that still handicaps Polish political life.<sup>42</sup> What Piotrowski wrote about could still be problematised as a type of an “artistic” habitus and symbolic violence (Bourdieu) or an order of discourse (Foucault). These notions are immanently interconnected with the concept of power, which objectively influences social interactions, ways of thinking and communication. Thus they originally censor (in the broadest sense of the term) the subject. In this respect, Piotrowski never arrived at any final conclusions in his deliberations, remaining on the level of diagnosing facts; still, the reader was given an insight into the vast spectrum of conditions in which art has functioned in Poland.

There is no doubt Piotrowski saw that the “society of ‘supervision’ would go on regardless of our awareness” and regardless of the political system. He found both the societies of communist totalitarianism and of Western consumerist liberalism repressive; the latter, however, was seen as more “velvety”, with its refined mechanics of “micro-power”; in such cases there is no mention of censorship, and prohibition is covered by positive rationalisation, e.g. the interest of the taxpayer.<sup>43</sup> In all ethical systems, artists have a calling to continuously unmask the mechanics of power, whether they reside in capital, discriminatory practices (race-, class-, sexuality- or gender-related), and the pressure of mass culture (or the domination of a part of it – namely media image).

### Academician – journalist – curator

Piotrowski combined his engaged writing with an engaged lifestyle. As an academician he was very popular with students, renowned for his witty lectures. His self-confidence and uncompromising attitude – even his imperiousness at times – may have been intimidating for attendees, but he would always encourage discussion. He enjoyed dispute – he was in his element then. Some of the academic meetings at the

<sup>42</sup> Piotrowski, “Pazurami i dziobem”.

<sup>43</sup> See: Piotrowski, *Znaczenia*, 211, and *Agorafilia*, 8.



Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań – the institution he was affiliated with for his entire academic life – would end in heated arguments with conservative faculty members. After 2005, these tensions intensified, but Piotrowski never held a grudge. In addition, he was a media person, and as an academic would often voice his opinion on issues regarding culture and education, always standing up for democracy and freedom, particularly the freedom of art. One might say that the turning point in his direct journalistic engagement regarding freedom of expression was May 1999. This was the time when the director of the National Museum in Poznań, Konstanty Kalinowski, decided – for reasons of morality – to censor the Zofia Kulik exhibition *From Siberia to Cyberia*, curated by Piotrowski, and there was also the aforementioned nationwide campaign against Katarzyna Kozyra's *Blood Ties*. Piotrowski tried to convince the director to withdraw his decision: together with Kulik he sent a letter of protest, spoke about the censoring in the press, and also commented on the Kozyra case.<sup>44</sup> This was the beginning of the cultural wars that would rage through the visual arts for approximately five years; it was also the time when the number of Piotrowski's letters of intervention, texts and statements would grow proportionally to the number of controversies related to contemporary art.<sup>45</sup> To my mind, the cul-

<sup>44</sup> For a description of the works by Kulik and the controversies, see: Piotrowski, *Agorafilia*, 278–280, as well as Małgorzata Wyszynska, “Na łonie Kultury” [In the Bosom of Culture], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 25 May 1999; a photocopy of the letter by Zofia Kulik and Piotr Piotrowski to the director of the National Museum in Poznań, Konstanty Kalinowski, of 24 May 1999, is in my possession. In defence of *Blood Ties*, see: Piotrowski, “Dla Gazety”, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Trójmiasto) 17 May 1999.

<sup>45</sup> As far as the destruction of Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture *La non ora* is concerned, see the “List do ministra kultury w obronie autonomii kultury” [Letter to the Minister of Culture in Defence of the Autonomy of Culture], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 22 January 2001. (Description of the work and the controversies: *Agorafilia*, 268–269.) With regard to the appointment of museums and galleries programme councils by the Minister of Culture, see: “List otwarty Zarządu Sekcji Polskiej Międzynarodowego Stowarzyszenia Krytyków Sztuki (AICA)” [Open Letter of the Board of the Polish Section of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA)], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 23 February 2001. With regard to the censoring of the work by Rafał Jakubowicz, see: “To cenzura prewencyjna” [This is Preventive Censorship], *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Poznań) 03 September 2002. (Description of the work: *Agorafilia*, 9.) With regard to the case of Dorota Nieznalska, see: Piotrowski's statement for *Gazeta Wyborcza* 18 November 2002, as well as the “Apel profesorów w sprawie Doroty Nieznalskiej” [Appeal of Professors in the Case of Dorota Nieznalska], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 24 July 2003. With regard to the censoring of the work by Piotr Kurka in Białystok (as well as other manifestations of

minating point of this activity was the 2007 delivery of the aforementioned manifesto “Tooth and Nail in Defence of Democracy”, and the crowning of his endeavours was the Open Academy, which he established with a group of scholars in 2014. This initiative was a public one, addressed mainly to academic circles, with the aim to oppose “all manifestations of authoritarianism, acts of hatred against those who think differently, attempts at limiting fundamental civil rights, including the right to creative freedom”. The Open Academy would fight for a state “which could effectively protect its citizens against all forms of economic and ideological, religious, as well as age-, gender- or health-related exclusion”.<sup>46</sup> The initiative was forged in response to the President Lech Kaczyński Civic Academic Club (AKO), which mainly gathered academicians from Poznań (and, with time, other university centres) who supported the Law and Justice Party, then-dominating the right side of the political scene.<sup>47</sup>

During the conflict over the Kulik exhibition (1999), Piotrowski strongly emphasised the need for curators and exhibiting institutions to face critical challenges; he was against expositions that were conservative, imitative, mythologising or illustrative of canons. When, after a series of exhibition scandals and a negative media campaign,

---

censorship), see the letter “Koltuństwo atakuje” [Obscurantism Attacks], *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Poznań) 29 November 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Quote after information provided on the Facebook profile page of the Open Academy.

<sup>47</sup> Socio-political reality in Poland has for a number of years been dominated by the acute conflict between advocates of the conservative, national-Catholic option and supporters of the left-wing-liberal option. The political embodiment of the first is the Law and Justice Party (founded by brothers Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński). The conflict became exacerbated after the crash of the presidential plane near Smolensk, in April 2010. President Lech Kaczyński died in the crash. At the turn of 2012 and 2013, an “epistolary war” took place – an exchange of open letters between the left-wing-liberal milieu, mainly academics from different centres, and the AKO. The conflict, in which I partook together with Piotrowski, was mainly focused on the attitude towards sexual minorities and the gender issue. It was quite apparent that the right-wingers associated under the AKO umbrella were gaining advantage, both in terms of organisation and media coverage. In June 2014, Rodrigo Garcia’s play *Golgota Picnic* was to be staged in closed, ticketed shows as part of the Malta Festival in Poznań. The religiously controversial performance caused a nationwide wave of protests, and even threats from right-wing circles. The director of the festival, Michał Merczyński, could not withstand the pressure and finally cancelled the play. The Open Academy was established soon after this act of self-censorship. The fact that, after Piotrowski’s death in 2015, the Open Academy all but ceased its activities proves just how important Piotrowski was to the project.



Exhibition, Zofia Kulik: *From Siberia to Cyberia*, the National Museum in Poznań, 1999. The main hall before an act of censorship. Courtesy of Zofia Kulik.

Anda Rottenberg stepped down from the position of director of the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw,<sup>48</sup> a large discussion began in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the major Polish daily, about the role that the most important contemporary art salon in Poland should play. One of the voices heard was Piotrowski's: "As any significant institution of artistic life, Zachęta should first of all be an institution promoting intellectual culture – ambitious culture; it should generate discussion, be disobedient and subversive."<sup>49</sup> Piotrowski had the chance to put his confrontational vision of an institution into place at the National Museum in Warsaw, where he took over the position of director and proposed a bold programme adapting modern academic reflection on the so-called "new museology" to the local (Polish and Warsawian) conditions of the museum. This was not just an attempt to introduce a total reform of the museum in the spirit of critical self-reflection, but also to empower the institution to engage itself as an active actor in socio-political life, in

<sup>48</sup> Piotrowski was one of the signatories of a letter in her defence, see: "List do ministra kultury", op. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "Krzywe lustra" [Distorting Mirror], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 05 July 2001.

the spirit of radical democracy postulated by Chantal Mouffe.<sup>50</sup> It inevitably meant that Piotrowski exposed himself to resistance and the censorial aspirations of politicians.

The first manifestation of the programme of his critical museum was the exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica*, curated by Paweł Leszkowicz, who claimed that his plan was to place in the centre all that had been excluded from mainstream exhibitions, i.e. the naked male body in art. The show opened in June 2010 and inevitably provoked protests from conservative circles. A Law and Justice MP submitted a parliamentary question to the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Bogdan Zdrojewski, in which he stressed that, among other things “[...] the Museum is funded by society’s money and cannot be a socially demoralising tool in the hands of a marginal, isolated group”. He asked: “Will the Minister take steps to prevent the disgrace of one of the most important Polish cultural institutions?”<sup>51</sup> This homophobic attack by the deputy was not the only attempt at censoring *Ars Homo Erotica*. During the exhibition’s presentation, the Archbishop of Warsaw, Kazimierz Nycz, pressed the Minister of Culture to withdraw a sound installation by Aleksandra Polisiewicz from the show. The work, *Krzeseł konfesyjne + spowiedź* [*Confession Chair + Confession*], presented the recorded confession of the artist admitting to being homosexual. Uncompromising as he was, Piotrowski fended off all attempts at censorship.<sup>52</sup> As it later turned out, the museum programme that he had proposed was so radical and confrontational that it generated

<sup>50</sup> For details about the concept of the critical museum, see: Piotr Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne* (Poznań: REBIS, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> <http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/IZ6.nsf/main/161CCD77> (accessed 19 June 2017).

<sup>52</sup> In response to the Minister of Culture, Piotrowski emphasised, among other things, that the authority of bishops is limited to administering churches, and that “it is not in force in public space, or in public institutions, in this case – a museum; the secret of confession is a provision of canonical and not universally binding law, and it especially applies to the confessor and not to the one who is making the confession. However, if the latter felt aggrieved, he/she could go to court pursuant to the civil code. [...] The power of state administration does not have the entitlements to issue an order to remove (or install) whatever artworks in museum institutions. This right is exercised exclusively by directors of these institutions [...]. The order to remove an artwork from a public space (e.g. a museum gallery) can only be issued by the court.” Based on a memo made by Piotrowski (as the director of the National Museum in Warsaw) on 10 August 2010 (a copy of which is in my possession). It should be emphasised that the minister had no formal possibilities of intervening in the exhibition, but, should there have been specific conditions fulfilled, provided for in the Law on the Organisation and Conducting of Cultural Activities (JoL of 2012, No. 406), the minister had the power to remove the director from the post. He could also further threaten him with future financial

the gradual disapproval of the museum's Board of Trustees, which led to Piotrowski stepping down from the position in 2010 (the great tensions between the director and the museum employees were also significant).

### Point of reference

As a researcher of censorship in contemporary Poland, I can only express my sorrow that the term never found a more focal point in Piotrowski's writings.<sup>53</sup> His deliberations on the issue were never methodologically consistent, and seemed to come to an abrupt end in the middle of the road. I am convinced that, should he have developed and elaborated on the intuitions he expressed in his publications from the 1990s (particularly *Meanings of Modernism*), it would be possible to arrive at a quicker revaluation of the classical and uncritical perspectives of censorship in Polish literature, and gain a different view of the mechanisms of curtailing freedom of expression, both in the Polish People's Republic and the Third Polish Republic. Nevertheless, awareness of the complicated mechanisms forming the discursive sphere in totalitarian or democratic societies, as well as the critical ideas propagated by Piotrowski, which referred to Foucault, Mouffe, Deutsche and Hal Foster, have become important points of reference for researchers dealing with the freedom of art.<sup>54</sup>

Piotrowski consistently emphasised the significance of human rights and freedoms, freedom of expression in particular. He infected his readers, listeners and viewers (and disturbed his adversaries) with his engagement and uncompromising attitude.

---

sanctions, e.g. cutting the budget of the institution. Such censorial decisions could of course be differently justified in order to cover up the actual reasons for repercussions.

<sup>53</sup> I wrote my doctoral thesis under the supervision of Piotr Piotrowski, entitled *Swoboda wypowiedzi artystycznej w Polsce po 1989 roku* [*The Freedom of Artistic Expression in Poland after 1989*], later published in a modified version as *Censorship in Polish Art After 1989: Art, Law, Politics* (co-author Anna Demenko) (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 2019). In the books I try to expand on or revalue some of the tropes brought up by Piotrowski.

<sup>54</sup> Before Piotrowski, it was the milieu of *Magazyn Sztuki* that made reference to texts by Foucault and Foster. Although this arts magazine, established in 1993, played a key role in avant-garde art movements in Poland, it wasn't until Piotrowski and his students that critical discourse was introduced into the mainstream of Polish art history. The publication of *Meanings of Modernism* is seen as the turning point, as its popularity was incomparably greater than the niche *Magazyn Sztuki* – for example, the book was nominated for the Nike Literary Award in 1999, the most prestigious literary award in Poland.

One might wonder whether this polemical streak was always to the benefit of his texts. Piotrowski would sometimes combine his broad perspective and his phenomenal intuition of synthesis with the superficiality of quoting facts and theories, as if he had no patience with them, particularly when they came from outside the art world. No doubt this helped him deliver effective speeches and intensified the persuasive character of his texts, but, at the same time, it gave ammunition to his opponents. This was, for example, true in the abovementioned deliberations on the legal aspects of the freedom of art, particularly the Dorota Nieznańska case. Furthermore, his equation of the freedom of art situation in Poland and Russia undoubtedly provoked in his readers deeper reflection on democracy in Poland, yet, at the same time, it somewhat invalidated the actual state of affairs in Russia: the political killings (Sergei Yushenkov, Stanislav Markelov, Alexander Litvinenko, Anna Politkovskaya, Nikolai Girenko and dozens of others), the persecutions and convictions of curators and artists (e.g. Oleg Yanushevski, Ludmila Vasilovskaya, Anna Michalchuk, Marat Guelman, Yuri Samodurov, Oleg Mavromati and Pussy Riot), the omnipotence of the secret services, and Putin's incapacitation of the courts and media.

As a curator, Piotrowski could be censored, but it was impossible to silence him as a polemist. If there was a defeat, such as with Zofia Kulik's exhibition in Poznań, he always tried to make the case public, so as to unmask the mechanisms of power and demonstrate the obscurantism of politicians and the conformism of the administration or the milieu. Therefore he always left a mark on the conflict, exerted pressure on decision-makers, and defeats would thereby gain a new dimension, triggering reflection and discussion. Aside from his impressive scholarly oeuvre, perhaps the most important thing that Piotr left behind is the awareness that one should always, consistently and boldly, fight for what one believes in.



PAWEŁ LESZKOWICZ

## Piotr Piotrowski and the Queer Revision of East-Central European Art and Museology

In my essay I focus on the exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica* (2010), which Piotr Piotrowski commissioned me to curate for the National Museum in Warsaw when he was director of the institution from 2009–2010. I will also analyse how Piotrowski's involvement in LGBTQ culture and rights resulted from his approach to art history, museological revision and research into art and sexuality.

Piotr Piotrowski held a complicated position in Poland as an eminent international academic, a professor of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and a fearless leftist dissident both under communism, as a member of the political opposition, and then in the newly democratic Poland as a vocal activist and critic of the new conservative state.<sup>1</sup> He always thought and acted in the tradition of Eastern European dissidents, in opposition to the many dimensions of power. In this text I will concentrate on two of them: museology and sexual politics. His involvement in feminist and queer rights through art, academia and curation distinguished him among Eastern European male dissidents, who often neglected issues of justice related to sexuality and gender.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s Piotr Piotrowski edited and published in the samizdat newspaper *Obserwator Wielkopolski*. In 2014 he was one of the founders of the Open Academy – an academic initiative to defend the freedom of education, culture, research and open debate in a country increasingly moving to the far right. See for details: Izabela Kowalczyk's text in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> On the exclusion of women from the Solidarity movement in post-communist politics, see: Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006). The main left-wing Polish newspaper with an anti-communist, dissident leaning, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, only began to support LGBTQ rights systematically in 2005, under the first government of the ultra-conservative and programmatically homophobic Law and Justice Party. In the 1990s, the first crucial decade of political transition, it had remained almost silent on the LGBTQ issue that became topical and visible in the early



Piotr Piotrowski believed that not only art, but also art history, are socially engaged practices of participation in public life, and can therefore be tools for the understanding and transforming of new societies grappling with democracy in East-Central Europe.<sup>3</sup> Hence he titled the final book published during his lifetime *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, in which he sees art and art debate as a positive force for civic society in the region.<sup>4</sup> Therefore in his revision of contemporary museology he proposed and practiced his own model of a museum that would enable art and exhibitions to play this polemical and participatory role.

In 2011 Piotr Piotrowski published the Polish-language book *Muzeum krytyczne* [*The Critical Museum*], in which he explains his concept of the museum and its genesis in critical museum studies, particularly in Carol Duncan's and Hans Belting's writing.<sup>5</sup> Piotrowski wrote the book after his resignation from the National Museum, as a reflection on his period of directorship, on the model of a critical museum and on his attempt to introduce it in Warsaw. He resigned on 28 October 2010 after a conflict with the curatorial staff and the Board of Trustees, who refused to support his radical revision and reform of the museum, even though the board had initially accepted it when offering him the position. According to Piotrowski, a more commercially driven and conservative model of the National Museum triumphed over the critical vision.<sup>6</sup>

I would like to emphasise the components of Piotrowski's critical museum that corresponded to my curatorial approach in *Ars Homo Erotica* (2010), an exhibition that was the main realisation of his idea of a critical national museum. According to his book, a critical museum should be involved in the key cultural and political debates of the moment; its mission is to participate in the democratisation of society, in

---

part of the decade. See: Tomasz Kitliński and Paweł Leszkowicz, *Miłość i demokracja. Rozważania o kwestii homoseksualnej w Polsce* (Kraków: Aureus UJ, 2005), 38–40.

<sup>3</sup> Elżbieta Matynia edited a book on the idea of grappling with democracy in the region after the transition. See: *Grappling with Democracy: Deliberations on Post-Communist Societies (1990–1995)*, ed. Elżbieta Matynia (Prague: SLON, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012). The book was first published in Polish in 2010 as *Agorafilia – Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* (Poznań: REBIS, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> The concept was fully elaborated in: Piotr Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne* [*The Critical Museum*], (Warsaw: REBIS, 2011). In 2015 Piotrowski co-edited a volume entitled *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum* with Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne*, 132–133.

European integration and in the cosmopolitanisation of culture. A critical museum ought to be self-reflective, especially in relation to the artistic canon – which is on display – and works considered less important – which are hidden. Moreover, a critical museum redefines the established artistic geography centred on the West; therefore such an institution in Poland should focus on East-Central European art and culture, and place it in a more global context.<sup>7</sup>

Piotrowski stressed that his vision is pertinent for a universal survey museum that covers the entire history of art. Additionally, in many countries such museums are significant national museums of art.<sup>8</sup> Thus the critical agency of contemporary art and art history should also be applied to the art of the past. Furthermore, the open-forum-like character of a national museum as a critical museum questions the homogeneous concept of the nation, and acts against nationalisms in the name of increased flux and cosmopolitan culture and society, promoting a contemporary, porous definition of the notion.<sup>9</sup> On a more scholarly level Piotrowski proposes to closely integrate new art history with museum practice, especially in relation to historical art, which needs constant revision through the prism of contemporary knowledge. The art of the past has often been left within the framework of traditional museology, while experimentation is conducted mainly with the modes of contemporary art display. But it is historical art that might benefit from new ways of thinking introduced by new methods of academic art history and the humanities in general. A universal survey museum offers the perfect space and collection for such revisions of art history, particularly in relation to the questioning of the canon and the rediscovery of forgotten materials and histories.<sup>10</sup>

Following these remarks, the text is divided into three parts. In the first, written from a curatorial perspective, I reconstruct the exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica*, enabled by Piotr Piotrowski, emphasising the relevant elements of his methodology of museological revision. In the second part I present my research on queer curation, particularly queer exhibitions in national/universal survey museums and queer curation in East-Central Europe, as they relate to Piotrowski's idea of the revision of encyclopaedic national museums and his interests in identity politics in the region. In the third part I trace the history of Piotrowski's interest in art and homosexuality in his books, to

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 72–73.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 58–59, 74–75.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 28–31, 152.

recreate the intellectual journey that led him to the unprecedented commissioning and defending of an LGBTQ exhibition in the national museum of a homophobic and fundamentalist country like Poland.

But first, in order to understand the courageous character of Piotrowski's directorial activism, one needs to recognise the turbulent context of Polish sexual politics in the first decade of the twenty-first century. During this period hostility towards people in the LGBTQ<sup>11</sup> community often made the news.<sup>12</sup> At the turn of the millennium, under the government of the Kaczyński brothers' far-right Law and Justice Party (2005–2007), Poland became the European capital of homophobia. This was due to the process of Poland joining the EU in 2004, which unleashed a huge conservative backlash to shield the country from “un-Polish” Western influences, especially queer and reproductive rights. These results set up a dramatic shift to the far right, as the brothers announced the beginning of a moral revolution. As a consequence, and up until 2007, when the Law and Justice coalition lost power, gay pride marches, known as Equality Parades, which had begun in 2001, were banned or attacked by far-right extremists and football hooligans in Warsaw, Poznań, Kraków and Gdańsk.<sup>13</sup>

On 07 May 2004, one week after Poland joined the European Union, members of the nation's leadership, the ultra-conservative League of Polish Families and its youth militia, the All-Polish Youth, brutally attacked participants in Kraków's feminist and gay Equality Parade with caustic acid. Anti-gay arguments were broadcast by the state

<sup>11</sup> In this text I will use equivalent terms such as “sexual minorities”, “LGBTQ” (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) and “queer”. By “queer” I mean non-heterosexual identities.

<sup>12</sup> Journalists warned against Poland's homophobia, particularly during 2005–2007, e.g., Jerome Taylor of the *Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/poles-apart-how-gay-people-suffer-under-the-new-regime-426564.html> (accessed 2 August 2013). This perception of the country has penetrated scholarship: the political philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum writes that Poland “still has a great deal of intense antigay feeling”; Martha C. Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law*, *Inalienable Rights* series (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30. In 2007 the European Parliament called on Polish politicians to stop inciting violence against gay people, see: “European Parliament resolution of 26 April 2007 on homophobia in Europe”, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0167+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (accessed 05 September 2013).

<sup>13</sup> On the detailed political analysis of the bashed and banned Equality Parades in Poland, see: Barbara Tornquist-Plewa and Agnes Malmgren, “Homophobia and Nationalism in Poland. The Reactions to the March against Homophobia in Kraków 2004”, *Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures & Societies* no. 23 (December 2007).

media, relating to religious prohibition, sin, medical pathology, unnatural behaviour and the equation of gay men with paedophiles. These ultra-nationalist fundamentalists were resisting the anti-discriminatory attitude that is part of the EU's legal system. Populist homophobia and anti-feminist attitudes played a major part here. At the time, thousands of LGBTQ citizens escaped the country in a massive queer migration.

All of this created a social climate that was hostile to LGBTQ citizens, but also inspired a very visible movement of queer activism and culture, of which *Ars Homo Erotica* is an example. The exhibition was politically possible because it was commissioned and prepared in 2009 and 2010 when the country was being run by the Civic Platform government, a conservative party but without a dominant homophobic agenda. Therefore it was a relatively liberal gap in Poland's twenty-first-century history, which has been dominated by the far-right Law and Justice Party that took power in 2005, and again in 2015, enforcing its nationalistic, natalist sexual politics. Yet even under the Civic Platform government, which was more open to liberal and queer culture, the precarious legal and everyday situation of LGBTQ citizens did not change much, as the parliament repeatedly rejected any attempt to legalise same-sex unions and to introduce protection from hate speech and hate crimes based on sexual orientation.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the number of cases of homophobic discrimination and abuse has not decreased significantly; thus the LGBTQ movement has continued to function in the same hostile political framework.<sup>15</sup>

### Ars Homo Erotica

Considering the political and media debates, controversies and occasional social violence around LGBTQ rights in Poland and many other East-Central European countries struggling with the acceptance of gender and sexual diversity, the subject has been an obvious problem within post-communist democracies.<sup>16</sup> As an art historian

<sup>14</sup> For the political analysis of the situation of LGBTQ culture and rights in Poland under Law and Justice and Civic Platform, see: Tomasz Kitlinski, *Dream? Democracy! A Philosophy of Horror, Hope & Hospitality in Art & Action* (Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press, 2014), 211–213.

<sup>15</sup> See a report prepared by Amnesty International: *Targeted by Hate, Forgotten by Law: Lack of a Coherent Response to Hate Crimes in Poland* (London: Peter Benson House, 2015), 31–35.

<sup>16</sup> On queer rights, lives and visibility in East-Central Europe, see: *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, eds. Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska (London:



Exhibition, *Ars Homo Erotica*, National Museum in Warsaw, 2010. Courtesy of Paweł Leszkowicz.



Piotr Piotrowski and Paweł Leszkowicz during a press conference for the *Ars Homo Erotica* exhibition, National Museum in Warsaw, 9 June 2010. Photo: Wojciech Olkusnik / Agencja Gazeta.

and social thinker Piotr Piotrowski profoundly understood the transformative role of queer culture and rights, as I will demonstrate in the last part of this essay. Moreover, when he assumed the role of museum director, his praxis followed his theory. Therefore in 2009, to realise his concept of a socially involved critical museum, he commissioned a pioneering international exhibition on queer art in East-Central Europe, aware that such a controversial project would quickly place the museum in the centre of the Polish agora. The exhibition, which I had the privilege to curate, was entitled *Ars Homo Erotica* (11 June – 05 September 2010), and was strongly supported not only by the director, but also by his deputy, Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, with whom he worked on the reinvention of the institution.

In my curatorial practice I have always explored the erotics and politics of queer art. Both factors are equally important – never one without the other. The expression of queer desire and love runs parallel to the acknowledgment of queer rights and participation, in accord with the idea of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the decade's sexual revolution and feminist movement – that the personal is political.<sup>17</sup> A project worth mentioning, which led to *Ars Homo Erotica*, is the exhibition *Love and Democracy*, which I organised at Gdańsk's public Bathhouse Center for Contemporary Art in 2006, as an oppositional art curation against the far-right government. This show of feminist and gay art was concerned with amorous pluralism and freedom, investigating queerness in Polish contemporary art. Selected artists visualised a diversity of love stories, relationships and identities, in opposition to the exclusively heteronormative construction of gender/sexuality and love found in the public sphere.<sup>18</sup> A conference and a press conference were organised before the opening of the exhibition, and Piotr Piotrowski participated in both. This is how our common history of queer exhibitions started, and why I was invited to curate the show at the National Museum – as an art historian and a curator who had specialised in the issue of art and queerness/homosexuality since the 1990s.

---

Ashgate, 2011); *Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe*, eds. Roman Kuhar and Judit Takacs (Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2007); *Queer Visibility in Post-socialist Cultures*, eds. Narcisz Fejes and Andrea Balogh (Bristol, Chicago: Intellect, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> See: David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History* (Boston, New York, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 3–10.

<sup>18</sup> See the catalogue: Paweł Leszkowicz, *Love and Democracy* (Gdańsk: Bathhouse Center for Contemporary Art, 2006). I organised two editions of *Love and Democracy*: first in Poznań's private Old Brewery Art Center (2005), and then at Gdańsk's public Bathhouse Center for Contemporary Art (2006).

When Piotrowski asked me to organise a queer exhibition for the National Museum, he only mentioned a project on LGBTQ art and questions in East-Central Europe, without any specification regarding the themes, historical frameworks or title. He mainly had contemporary art in mind – thus to extend the research into historical material and the collection of this particular museum was my own curatorial idea, enthusiastically embraced by the director and Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, as it corresponded with their thinking on a museological revision that should embrace the museum's holding in its entirety.

As a result, the international and transhistorical exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica* presented over 200 artworks from antiquity to the twenty-first century: a Greek vase with a depiction of Sappho and a Hellenistic sculpture of Ganymede; male nudes by the “old masters and mistresses” of early modern and nineteenth-century sculpture and painting; lesbian and transgender images from across the centuries; and current queer art from the region. The exhibition proposed a homoerotic perspective on the entire collection of the National Museum in Warsaw, and the art of East-Central Europe more broadly. Works from the National Museum's collection, along with the works of specially invited contemporary artists, surveyed cultural history and political contemporaneity from homoerotic and queer male and female points of view. The invited artists came from such Eastern European countries as Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine, Poland, Belarus and Russia, where amorous and sexual diversity sparks cultural tensions, political conflicts and acts of censorship. In order to systematise the multitude of images, metaphors and references, the exhibition was divided into thematic sections juxtaposing historical and contemporary works of art: “The Time of Struggle”, “Male Nude”, “Male Couples”, “Film Archive”, “Transgender”, “Lesbian Imagination”, “Homoerotic Classicism” and “Saint Sebastian”. This created a narrative with categorised politics, erotics and aesthetics.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the exhibition took centre stage in the museum (almost half of its entire exhibition space), and the museum is located in the very centre of the capital, making it a perfect platform for visibility and debate.

My methodology for the exhibition strongly resonated with Piotrowski's ideas that critical museology should be applied not only to contemporary, but first and foremost to historical art, and that the methods of new art history should be embedded

<sup>19</sup> See the catalogue: Paweł Leszkowicz, *Ars Homo Erotica* (Warsaw: CePeD, 2010).



in curatorial practice. I realised immediately that the National Museum, with its extensive and universal survey collection, was the perfect place for an exhibition about historic continuity and the differences in homoerotic imagery, and for the application of queer art history as one of those new methods.<sup>20</sup> I argue that national museums generally have enormous – yet neglected and often forbidden – queer potential hidden in their vast archives. My exhibition exemplified the fact that a national museum is a storehouse of homoerotic heritage and visibility when the collection is displayed from a queer perspective.

I was inspired by *Closets in the Museum* (1979), a pioneering text on queer museology by American art historian James M. Saslow, in which he states that powerful universal survey art institutions, the custodians of artistic heritage, tend to suppress the queerness of gay artists, or certain themes, as they render them obscene and/or unrespectable. Thus he writes that museums are storehouses full of closets.<sup>21</sup> This was precisely my observation about the national museums in Poland, which before *Ars Homo Erotica* had hardly dared to acknowledge the LGBTQ dimension of their collections. Therefore in the construction of my exhibition I opposed the silencing of queer-themed art in the Warsaw museum's display, and reached into its unconscious. The process brought about the discovery of many forgotten objects considered only of minor importance and therefore kept hidden, for example the academic drawings of male nudes. It also enabled focus on major queer pieces that had been marginalised in the permanent display, such as the kalpis with an image of Sappho from 510 BC Athens, one of the oldest preserved representations of the poetess!

Queering historical art collections poses a series of complicated methodological questions. Therefore in my work I have been inspired by foundational studies on the history of art and homosexuality/queer sexuality: books by authors such as Dominique Fernandez (*A Hidden Love: Art and Homosexuality*, 2002), James Saslow (*Pictures and Passion: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts*, 1999) and Emmanuel Cooper

<sup>20</sup> The other European projects I am familiar with where curators had the chance to queer the entire historical collection of large museums are: artist/curator Matt Smith's *Queering the Museum* intervention into the whole collection of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2011, and curator Patrik Steorn's exhibition *Queer. Desire, Power and Identity* at the National Museum of Fine Art in Stockholm in 2008.

<sup>21</sup> James M. Saslow, "Closets in the Museum", in: *Lavender Culture*, eds. Karl Jay and Allen Young (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 215–227.



(*The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West*, 1986), and by many other international scholars who have written about the intersection of art history and homosexuality.<sup>22</sup> These studies all list and interpret major queer artists in Western art history, but first and foremost illuminate the complexity of a homoerotic iconography based on Greek mythology, certain Christian Renaissance and Baroque topics in art, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century concept of female and male friendship, or literary references. These iconographic compendia taught me how to decipher homoerotic symbolism in images from the National Museum's collection; they also helped to place the selected artworks in a broader framework of cultural history, which was an important aim of the exhibition as an educational project – to elevate and illuminate queer meanings in art.

In my selection of artworks, both historical and contemporary, I applied two curatorial strategies that are present in queer curation.<sup>23</sup> On the one hand I followed the acronym LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender), selecting visual materials by LGBT artist or reflecting on LGBT issues – hence those sections of the show such as: “Male Couples”, “Transgender” and “Lesbian Imagination”; on the other hand I applied contemporary definitions of the noun and verb “queer”, signifying everything that is beyond strict heteronormativity<sup>24</sup>; hence I was able to queer the academic tradition of the male nude, the rendering of female homoeroticism by male artists in the early modern period, religious iconography, and twentieth-century posters advertising films and plays by gay authors, in sections such as “Male Nude”, “Lesbian Imagination”, “Saint Sebastian” and “Film Archive”. To sum up, I decided to take a pluralistic, freestyle approach, combining both the open-ended, non-heteronormative “queer” approach and the “LGBT” perspective based on identity, in order to keep all options open, to

<sup>22</sup> Other sources that inspired my scholarly and curatorial work are: *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, eds. Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (London, New York: Routledge, 1996); *The Art of Queering in Art*, ed. Henry Rogers (Birmingham: Article Press, 2008); *The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts*, ed. Claude J. Summers (Berkeley: Cleis Press, 2004); Michael Petry, *Hidden Histories: 20th Century Male Same Sex Lovers in the Visual Arts* (London: Artmedia Press, 2004); *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*, ed. Whitney Davis (Philadelphia: Haworth Press, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> On different approaches to queer curation, see: *In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, eds. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder and Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Michael Warner, “Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet”, *Social Text* 9 (4/29) (1991), 3–17.

embrace a variety of representations and to illuminate the theme in art as broadly as possible. The purpose was to provoke viewers to see and feel differently and queerly on many levels of visual communication.

Moreover, the homoerotic aspect of art was understood as the aesthetic and erotic quality manifested mainly in figurative representations. The selection criteria consisted not only of the artists' sexual orientation (biography), but also the subject (iconography) or the relevant context of the work of art – its contextual meaning and queer potentiality. There was also another element of the project – not as important from Piotr Piotrowski's perspective – centred mainly on the social and political impact of art and art institutions, which was essential for me. My focus was on queer beauty and queer aesthetics understood on the one hand through the tradition of homoerotic classicism,<sup>25</sup> and on the other hand through the more contemporary style of camp.<sup>26</sup> From my perspective, aestheticisation was a strategy of revolt directed against the debased and abject status of homosexuality, particularly in Eastern Europe. Aestheticisation was an alternative path of subversion through the therapeutic power of sublimation and aesthetics, one which I tried to implement via this museological experiment.

For both of us, however, the international character of *Ars Homo Erotica* was fundamental, as a way to rethink the authoritarian and traditional conceptions of the National Museum and of the nation itself, in order to break the heteronormative and nationalistic filters imposed on major cultural institutions, as well as on the concepts of personal and national identity. As a transnational and queer project mounted by a national museum, the exhibition challenged a system strongly intertwined with national values. This queer curation, working against the dominant narratives of national museums in Poland, had a direct political impact<sup>27</sup>; by bringing together queer European artists, the show celebrated European and cosmopolitan/transnational qualities, and participated locally in the global issues of queer emancipation and expression being debated in many countries. Therefore, in the introduction to the catalogue, Piotr Piotrowski, drawing together the historical, political, contemporary and international threads of

<sup>25</sup> Whitney Davis, *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 24–50.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964), in: *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), 277–293.

<sup>27</sup> Jon Davies, "Towards an Intimate Democracy in Europe: Paweł Leszkowicz's Queer Curating", *Journal of Curatorial Studies* vol. 2, no. 1 (2013).

the project, wrote: “The homosexual imagination, iconosphere and artistic sensitivity are part of European cultural heritage, and visitors to the Museum, citizens of a democratic state, have the right to know it. They also have the right to know the modern art that complements this tradition. We have chosen a very special time for organising this exhibition – in summer 2010, EuroPride is to be held in Warsaw, for the first time in former Eastern Europe. By presenting the exhibition at this particular moment, we hope to demonstrate an essential problem of contemporary public life from a different point of view – from the perspective of artistic work and of lost European heritage.”<sup>28</sup>

In my selective description of the exhibition I will focus on works and thematic sections that demonstrate the methodology of the show, combining the historical, the contemporary and the political dimensions of art and queerness in the museum space – an intersection of qualities also emphasised by Piotr Piotrowski. In the programmatic text “Making the National Museum Critical”, published in a book he co-edited with Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum*, he shows how traditional museological objects could have critical and contemporary social impact.<sup>29</sup>

In this manner the “Lesbian Imagination” gallery underlined the continuum of female homoeroticism existing in the history of visual culture, from antique vases and nineteenth-century illustrations to the contemporary art of new media. There are some difficult questions surrounding the subject of curating historical material on female homoeroticism. Since women were mostly not allowed to study art until the nineteenth century it is impossible to find “lesbian” artists in the early modern period, and the homoerotic female images that have survived were created mainly by men. The big curatorial question is if one can use them or not – if they are valid in a lesbian context. I decided to include all the representations by male artists of Sappho, the goddess Diana, nymphs and historical figures like Queen Christina of Sweden, and to juxtapose them in a revisionist dialogue with contemporary feminist and lesbian artists.

One of the show’s heroines was Diana – the goddess of virginity, unmarried women, the moon, the woods and nocturnal female ceremonies. The early modern

<sup>28</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “*Ars Homo Erotica* in the National Museum in Warsaw”, in: Leszkowicz, *Ars Homo Erotica*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Making the National Museum Critical”, in: *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum*, eds. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Piotr Piotrowski (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 137–146. A photograph of a section of the show devoted to homoerotic classicism is shown on the cover of the book.

erotic iconography of Diana and nymphs was of course created by male artists, usually for the pleasure of other men. However, there are queer/feminist interpretations in new art history suggesting that these patriarchal (yet homoerotic) works could have been perceived in an alternative way – as a source of subversive pleasure in courtly women’s private circles, because these were the only available depictions of all-female rituals and courtship. There is some duality and contradiction in such ambiguous mythological iconography, as well as a certain receptiveness to many different sexual readings, including the one embracing lesbian eroticism.<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly I commissioned a Polish queer artist, Aleksandra Polisiewicz, to elaborate on Charles-André van Loo’s mid-eighteenth-century rococo painting *Jupiter Disguised as Diana Seducing the Nymph Callisto*. She created an audio-photo installation, which enshrouded the old work with lesbian references, confessions and love stories originating in contemporary Poland. Moreover, this meta-historical piece became one of the most contentious in the exhibition. Part of Polisiewicz’s intervention was the sound installation *Krzesło konfesyjne + spowiedź* [*Confession Chair + Confession*] (2010). This consisted of a structure resembling a confessional, in which visitors could sit and listen to the confession of a lesbian to a priest, who then tried to persuade her to change her sexual orientation. The Archbishop of Warsaw intervened via the Minister of Culture, aiming to remove the piece from the exhibition, on the basis that it breached the confessional seal, but Piotrowski refused to submit to the request. For a while, having access to real power, he used it to decisively support issues that really trouble many East-Central European democracies – freedom of speech and LGBTQ rights – so much so that he wrote many times against censorship enforced by religious ideologies.<sup>31</sup> Thus the interaction of historical art and contemporary visual and art-historical revisions in the “Lesbian Imagination” section exemplifies the intertextual yet socially engaged methodology of the project and its risky edge.

The second example concerns the contemporary part of *Ars Homo Erotica*. The exhibition began in the main hall of the museum with the section “The Time

<sup>30</sup> See: Patricia Simons, “Lesbian (In)Visibility in Italian Renaissance Culture: Diana and Other Cases of *donna con donna*”, in: *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*, ed. Whitney Davis (Philadelphia: Haworth Press, 1994), 81–123.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. see his analysis of the Dorota Nieznańska case in: Piotr Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od Melancholii do Pasji* [*Art after Politics: From Melancholy to Passion*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 234–235; Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 272–273.

of Struggle”, where the artworks and visual campaigns reflected the turbulent world of LGBTQ struggles. This was a section that very much reflected my research into LGBTQ art in the region, and Piotrowski’s interest in contemporary art as democratic participation in East-Central Europe. Therefore in the hall two visual campaigns organised for gay and lesbian rights in Poland and Croatia were shown comparatively. In 2003, artist Karolina Breguła and the Campaign Against Homophobia set up the artistic social project *Let Them See Us*. 30 Polish same-sex couples posed for the artist in an act of joint coming out. Their portraits – couples holding hands on the streets in winter – were presented and destroyed on billboards in major cities as public art. In 2002 a visual campaign was organised in Croatia by the lesbian organisation LORI from Rijeka. The advertisement-like image of the faces of two actual young women in a relationship was accompanied by the inscription “Love is Love”. This poster was not vandalised, and remained on display on Croatian streets for a year, functioning as a blackboard on which people wrote down various comments on same-sex relations. The selection of this type of direct, activist agitprop image, which in the museum exhibition verges on both art and visual culture, testifies to the idea of the museum as a forum, a public agora, able to be remade with new genre public art engaged in local societies and communities.<sup>32</sup> *Let Them See Us* and *Love is Love* are examples of public art/social advertisement created to foster debate on civil rights and inclusion in post-communist societies, one of the specific aims of a critical museum.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in this paradoxical concept, high academic art and scholarly new art history enter the streets and, as will be shown, the parliament.

When, in the autumn of 2009, the museum announced its plans to stage a show on art and homosexuality, far-right politicians and intellectuals protested ferociously. Members of the nationalistic Law and Justice Party attacked the exhibition in both parliament and the media. In a letter to the Minister of Culture they demanded that the show be cancelled. A discussion about the placement and subject of the exhibition swept through the parliament, but the Minister of Culture at the time – Bogdan Zdrojewski – decided that it was ultimately up to the museum director to choose the exhibition programme. Thus, political opposition slowly died out.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See: *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994). The term denotes activist art addressing social and political questions in the public sphere.

<sup>33</sup> Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne*, 72–73.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 85–87.

The parliamentary intervention by censors, and the ensuing media commentaries around the exhibition opened both high- and lowbrow debate on issues such as the place of queer expression in state-sponsored institutions, the role of national museums, the situation of LGBTQ rights in Poland, the limits of queer visibility, and even the presence of homosexuality in art history.<sup>35</sup> The public discussions proved to be an excellent form of public relations for the show – one positive effect of the controversy. A negative outcome of the early criticism was the reluctance of corporate sponsors to support the project. Piotr Piotrowski had meetings with the directors of some large international petrol companies that usually support other major national museum exhibitions or queer events in the West, but they refused to become involved as they were afraid that association with such a controversial project could hurt business and their image. This decision confirmed Piotrowski's long-lasting conviction that capitalist liberalism is not a progressive cultural force, and market liberalism is not translated easily into social liberalism.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore *Ars Homo Erotica* was financed mainly by the public money that the museum receives in its yearly budget, with some additional funds from the Green NGO Heinrich Böll Foundation, and diplomatic support from the Slovakian, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Romanian institutes of culture, as well as the Lithuanian, Croatian and American embassies. It came as a positive surprise that the diplomatic institutions of those countries, which are not always beacons of queer rights, financed their artists' participation in the exhibition. The American Embassy was particularly helpful in organising the transportation and insurance of valuable photographs by Catherine Opie from Los Angeles, as for them it was the first opportunity in years to support LGBTQ culture in Eastern Europe. This reflected the foreign policy of the new democratic government of Barack Obama, something that is impossible to imagine now [in 2017]. Thus many progressive powers, local and international, made *Ars Homo Erotica* possible at that very moment.

When the exhibition opened as planned on 11 June 2010 it was received peacefully, without protests or attacks; it was also very well attended and experienced no

<sup>35</sup> Dorota Jarecka wrote a series of articles for *Gazeta Wyborcza* about the conflicts and debates around Piotrowski's revision of the National Museum and *Ars Homo Erotica*. See: *Gazeta Wyborcza* 07 July 2010; 09–10 October 2010; 24 July 2009; 10 September 2009.

<sup>36</sup> He expressed it for the first time in: Piotr Piotrowski, *W cieniu Duchampa. Notatki nowojorskie [In the Shadow of Duchamp: New York Notes]* (Poznań: Obserwator, 1996), 108–110.

disruption during its three-month run. In its entire history the museum had never had such international attention, with hundreds of articles and mentions in the international media, as journalists were very surprised that such a radical show promoting LGBTQ rights and art was organised in a national museum in Poland, a country associated with homophobia and art censorship.<sup>37</sup> Marek Bartelik wrote in *Artforum* that the exhibition gave voice to a large group of relatively unknown contemporary artists, some of whom had been actively engaged in advocacy on behalf of LGBTQ communities in East-Central Europe.<sup>38</sup> In *The Art Newspaper* Julia Michalska wrote: “Poland’s National Museum champions gay rights”,<sup>39</sup> and the influential media outlet *Deutsche Welle* observed: “parts of the show are addressed to young gay visitors who are still grappling with their identity”.<sup>40</sup> These three examples, among many others, demonstrate that the exhibition was seen and described favourably and accurately in the international cultural press, and that it managed to have resonance beyond Poland, changing, to some extent, the image of the country into a more liberal and democratic one. Through the national and international reception, both positive and critical, *Ars Homo Erotica* placed the questions of queer art, the role of a museum, the sponsorship of challenging art, the function of culture in LGBTQ activism, and the condition of Polish tolerance into the mainstream. Thus the exhibition proved to be successful by highlighting the issue of art’s social impact. Piotrowski achieved his goal of turning the National Museum into a critical institution, at least for a year.

### Queer exhibitionism

In *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (2018), Maura Reilly places *Ars Homo Erotica* and my curatorial work among curators working within the framework of “curatorial activism”, which she defines as a counter-hegemonic practice

<sup>37</sup> Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne*, 85.

<sup>38</sup> Marek Bartelik, “*Ars Homo Erotica*”, *MutualArt*, <http://www.mutualart.com/OpenArticle/-Ars-Homo-Erotica-/A8DEFC3B60C33C5B> (accessed 25 November 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Julia Michalska, “Poland’s National Museum champions gay rights”, *The Art Newspaper* issue 214 (June 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Rafał Kiepuszewski, “Warsaw’s exhibition of homoerotic art stirs protest”, *Deutsche Welle*, <http://www.dw.de/warsaws-exhibition-of-homoerotic-art-stirs-protest/a-5716488-1> (accessed 26 November 2016). The exhibition had the most extensive and positive reception in the German press.

that gives voice to those who have been historically silenced or omitted – artists of colour, women artists, non-Euro-American and queer artists. This curatorial strategy of resistance questions the canon, works against discrimination and brings to light that which was overlooked or neglected, a practice grounded in the ethical responsibility of curatorial engagement against exclusion.<sup>41</sup> Reilly places *Ars Homo Erotica* among exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la terre*, *Documenta 11*, *The Decade Show*, *Global Feminisms*, *Sexual Politics* and *In a Different Light*. In this part I would like to contextualise it within a different framework of the queer shows in national museums and LGBTQ exhibitions in East-Central Europe.

Following Reilly's argument I would like to emphasise the role of "directorial activism" mentioned above. The main power of art institutions is in the hands of their directors; radical change can only happen when they are supporting it, in cooperation with curator-activists. Piotr Piotrowski's critical museum practice was one of the best examples of directorial activism in the contemporary art system – short-lived, but effective.

Among the museum elites in the region, Piotrowski alone had the social consciousness and, at the time, the decision-making power to organise a pioneering and impactful queer survey exhibition in a national museum – an endeavour that is very difficult globally, not only in Eastern Europe. Recently the international art scene has witnessed an increase in queer exhibitions, but they have been organised predominantly by a variety of art institutions specialising in contemporary art. The history of queer exhibitions of contemporary art in the West had already begun in the 1970s,<sup>42</sup> but organising a queer project in a national or monumental general survey museum began only recently. The task is so arduous because major national museums are strongly connected with a sense of national identity, which is heteronormative everywhere.

The resistance of the museum elite has been so strong because, through queer revision, museums might become not just institutions of national heritage, but also of

<sup>41</sup> Maura Reilly, "What Is Curatorial Activism?", *ARTnews* online, <http://www.artnews.com/2017/11/07/what-is-curatorial-activism/> (accessed 17 December 2017); Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> On the history of queer shows of contemporary art and social history in the West, see: Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 179–254; *In a Different Light*, eds. Blake et al., op. cit.; *Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Amy K. Levin (London, New York: Routledge), 138–172, 253–279; Jennifer Tyburczy, *Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 175–200.



national subversion, as queerness is historically considered as something off-scene and hidden. Hence it questions and transforms the modern heteronormative construction of the nation established in the nineteenth century, which was based on monolithic rules of national and sexual identity.<sup>43</sup> Many national museums actually originated at the time that this closed model of identity was established<sup>44</sup>; queerness is one of the factors that fundamentally undermine this construction, opening the traditional concept of the national to the contemporary diverse, pluralistic and hospitable values of democratic societies, which go beyond narrow national and sexual borders. Furthermore, a major museum has a powerful symbolism related to nationalism, tradition and the high culture of the so-called “highest values”. Queering national museums not only subverts this conservative canon of museology and opens up and diversifies museums and nations, but also places traditionally debased queerness on a symbolic pedestal of important values. It is a double endeavour of creatively subverting the museum, dealing with its repressions, socially uplifting queerness and freeing it from oppression. But to realise this powerful double project, one has to have access to national museums.

There are very few examples of queer survey exhibitions that illuminate and challenge the national collections of art in major museums. There is also no other exhibit that queered the entire collection of a national museum and juxtaposed it with international contemporary art. The other exhibitions organised in national museums usually had a national character or were based on the collections alone; hence they confirmed the national character of national museums and identities, and were easier to organise from a financial point of view. I will present a short chronological overview of queer-themed projects in national museums, to place the Warsaw show, and its unique transnational and transhistorical (yet contemporary and socially engaged) vision in a comparative framework. My pioneering research into queer curation in national museums globally and in art institutions in East-Central Europe was inspired by the commission that I received from Piotr Piotrowski to work on *Ars Homo Erotica*.

The first exhibition to be organised by a national museum that dealt with queer art and issues is probably *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS* (1994) at the

<sup>43</sup> See: George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985).

<sup>44</sup> See: Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995).

National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, curated by Ted Gott. This was an exhibition of international contemporary art that responded to the massive devastation brought on the Australian population by the AIDS crisis. The radical project, financed by the national AIDS campaign, focused on the significance of the artistic response to HIV/AIDS and its impact on consciousness-raising, social empowerment and education.<sup>45</sup> More than ten years later, the Scandinavian national museums in Stockholm and Copenhagen organised some small-scale queer shows based on their own collections, often in relation to local Pride events. In the changing permanent display, the National Museum in Denmark included a room devoted to queer interpretations of gender and sexuality. The National Museum of Fine Arts in Stockholm put on the exhibition *Queer: Desire, Power and Identity* (2008), curated by Patrik Steorn.<sup>46</sup>

In 2009 the National Portrait Gallery in London prepared the hit show *Gay Icons*, for which ten high-profile LGBTQ celebrities were asked to select their heroes – straight or gay – to be displayed in photographs. Thus it was a show of photographic portraits of people who influenced queer culture in the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup> A month after *Ars Homo Erotica* closed (summer 2010), *HIDE/SEEK: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (autumn 2010), curated by Jonathan D. Katz and David Ward, opened at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. Because of its scale and historical range it is the only project that can be related to the Warsaw exhibition, yet, unlike the international *Ars Homo Erotica*, the American show was national in its scope and proudly American, and hence traditionally nationalistic. It was a survey of American portraiture seen through the lenses of divergent sexuality.<sup>48</sup> Another large, strongly national and long-overdue project was the exhibition *Queer British Art 1861–1967*, curated by Clare Barlow at the Tate Britain, London in 2017. The show explored connections between art and the queer range of sexualities and genders, in the period from 1861 (when the death penalty for sodomy was abolished) to 1967 (when sex between men

<sup>45</sup> *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS*, ed. Ted Gott (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1994), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Patrik Steorn, "Curating Queer Heritage: Queer Knowledge and Museum Practice", *The Museum Journal* vol. 55, no. 3 (July 2012), 355–365.

<sup>47</sup> *Gay Icons*, eds. Richard Dyer and Sandi Toksvig (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward, *HIDE/SEEK: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery/Smithsonian Books, 2010), 14–17.

became decriminalised in the UK).<sup>49</sup> *Queer British Art* was the result of strong criticism directed at the Tate by the LGBTQ community for not having dealt with the subject much earlier. Yet, regrettably, in its nationalism the show even ignored the disastrous impact of British legal homophobia on its colonies around the world. Finally, in 2017 the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid opened the project *The Other's Gaze. Spaces of Difference* in conjunction with the celebration of World Pride Madrid 2017. This wasn't an exhibition, but rather a spectacular route around the galleries: historical artworks with queer meanings that proposed "the other's gaze" were singled out from the core of the collection to form a trail through the museum.<sup>50</sup> In this way, the Prado's project corresponded to the historical part of *Ars Homo Erotica* based on the museum's collection.

The list of queer exhibitions in national institutions is not extensive: there are no examples of exhibitions in major museums in capitals such as Berlin and Rome, or such rich queer artistic archives at the Louvre in Paris or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; it is only the beginning of such interventions. After discussions with many curators, my observation is that the arguments against LGBTQ revisions of national art collections can be divided into two categories: it is seen as either too late or too early for this type of project. The use of these arguments depends on the national context. In advanced democracies there are voices claiming that such projects are no longer needed anymore: LGBTQ rights have been achieved, and are no longer an issue; by contrast, in developing democracies, it is a struggle to organise queer exhibitions. One powerfully voiced argument is that it is too early, as it is still too dangerous or too embarrassing – that this is something for the future. These attitudes – "too late/too old hat" or "too early/too risky" – are a double bind. This functions as an equally repressive and censoring device of the heteronormative institutional system, which neglects the burning questions in sexual and visual politics that are topical everywhere, regardless of the current state of LGBTQ rights. It is also a smokescreen for the enormous political and financial difficulties involved in organising queer revisionist exhibitions and finding sponsors for them. Piotr Piotrowski also had to struggle with condescending "too early/too risky" arguments, especially in discussions with the museum board, in whose view Poland was not yet ready,<sup>51</sup> but according to his philosophy of art, this was

<sup>49</sup> *Queer British Art, 1861–1967*, ed. Clare Barlow (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), 11–17.

<sup>50</sup> *The Other's Gaze. Spaces of Difference*, eds. Carlos G. Navarro and Alvaro Perdices (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2017), 9–15.

<sup>51</sup> Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne*, 85.

exactly why the show was necessary and potentially very powerful. Piotrowski searched for the subversive and the revolutionary in art, not for confirmation of the status quo!

Moreover, in 2010 Poland was more than ready, considering twenty years of a flourishing LGBTQ movement and culture against right-wing and far-right governments; EuroPride was organised in Warsaw that summer, and another progressive show was on display in the capital; 2010 was a generous year for major gender- and sexuality-conscious exhibitions. The Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw hosted *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, curated by Bojana Pejić. This feminist exhibition, originally staged at MUMOK Vienna in 2009, travelled to Poland in spring 2010. Piotr Piotrowski often collaborated with this curator and art historian, and wrote for the catalogue and the reader of her ground-breaking project.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, the National Museum organised a conference around *Ars Homo Erotica* and *Gender Check*.

*Gender Check* was a research and exhibition project, supported by the Austrian ERSTE Foundation's Culture Programme, which focused on the life and culture of Central and Southeastern Europe; hence the subject here was gender in the art and social life of the region after World War II. It was predominantly a feminist exhibition, focused on the representation of femininity, and to a lesser extent masculinity, with many powerful images of male-female relationships, but also a few examples of queer art from 24 post-communist countries. To mount the show, Pejić worked with a group of regional curators and art historians. The main difference between *Ars Homo Erotica* and *Gender Check* was that the Polish show concentrated exclusively on queer art and rights; it was more centred on images of masculinity, and included historical ancient and early modern art. While *Gender Check* strongly put forward the contested issues of Eastern Europe, visual culture and gender under communism, these were not the main concerns of *Ars Homo Erotica*, with its preoccupation with sexuality, transhistorical homoeroticism and contemporary queer politics. *Gender Check* was a travelling exhibition, and thus the Zachęta National Gallery only hosted the show, which was

<sup>52</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "Gender after the Wall", in: *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, eds. Bojana Pejić et al. (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig [MUMOK], and Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2009); Piotrowski, "Male Artist's Body: National Identity vs. Identity Politics", in: *Gender Check: A Reader – Art and Theory in Eastern Europe*, eds. Bojana Pejić et al. (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig [MUMOK], and Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2010).

not organised in Poland and not for a national museum, while *Ars Homo Erotica* was commissioned and created by the National Museum in Warsaw. Yet both exhibitions played a major role in mainstreaming feminist and queer culture at the time, and can serve as successful examples of curatorial activism for social change.

After *Gender Check* and *Ars Homo Erotica*, queer exhibitions began to mushroom in East-Central Europe, organised in contemporary art centres. In 2011 the Romanian curator Georgiana But staged the show *Pulse, Within the Veil* at Tranzit House in Cluj-Napoca (Romania),<sup>53</sup> which was directly inspired by *Ars Homo Erotica* and shared with it some of the contemporary artists. *Untold Stories* (2011) at the Kunstihoone in Tallinn, curated by Rebeka Põldsam, Airi Triisberg and Anders Härm, presented international, mainly Eastern European contemporary art, and had a highly political and documentary approach towards representing LGBTQ lives and struggles in relation to the turbulent social discussions concerning the legalisation of same-sex unions and other gay rights related to family and workplace in the region.<sup>54</sup> The travelling exhibition *What a Material! Queer Art from Central Europe* (2012), prepared by Ladislav Zikmund-Lender for the Česká centra in Prague, highlighted contemporary East-Central European queer art, mainly from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia; the historical part of the project on homoerotic academic life studies was inspired by *Ars Homo Erotica*.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, in 2013 Laima Kreivytė, a prominent feminist Lithuanian curator and art historian, organised the archival *From Dusk to Dawn. 20 Years of LGBT Freedom in Lithuania* at the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius, presenting a comprehensive story of queer art and activism in post-communist Lithuania.<sup>56</sup> Though international comparative shows are important and informative, this type of project, which delineates national histories of queer visual expression and activism in the late twentieth century, is very much needed and still regrettably rare in the region.

The systemic transition since the 1990s has given rise to a new dissidence of love against the legacy of totalitarian systems, religious fundamentalism and right-

<sup>53</sup> <https://euroalter.com/past-events/pulse-within-the-veil> (accessed 10 January 2018).

<sup>54</sup> Rebeka Põldsam, Airi Triisberg and Anders Härm, *Untold Stories* (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> See: *Queer Art from Central Europe*, ed. Ladislav Zikmund-Lender (Prague: Ceske Centrum, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> *From Dusk to Dawn. 20 Years of LGBT Freedom in Lithuania*, at the Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, 2013.

wing governments; therefore the stories that all of these contemporary queer exhibitions tell through images are precious documents of post-communist transformation, and essential examples of artistic participation in it. All the authors who organised the LGBTQ exhibitions in East-Central Europe are also *curatorial activists* working on a challenging topic against the persistence of various forms of social discrimination.

As this overview regrettably demonstrates, no other national museum in the region has dared to stage a queer-themed exhibition until today [2017]. Thus Piotr Piotrowski's directorial activism is proving to be very difficult to follow, and the queer potential of national museums is not being continued at present. As Maura Reilly emphasises in the subtitle of her book: "Towards an Ethics of Curating",<sup>57</sup> this type of radical stance against exclusion in an elitist art world always requires an ethical perspective. It is therefore not surprising that Andrzej Turowski refers to Piotrowski's art history, which combines research, activism and ethics, as "ethical".<sup>58</sup> As an art scholar, Piotrowski was also a moral philosopher with a consistent set of principles about right and wrong, which he was never afraid to voice and defend. Piotrowski's art history is a form of applied ethics derived from modern civil rights movements, focusing on topics such as equality, civil rights, justice, the emancipation of women and minorities, and the inclusion of non-Western art/artists.<sup>59</sup>

### Piotrowski's queer art history

Piotr Piotrowski's engagement in LGBTQ culture had started long before *Ars Homo Erotica*, as it was a subject in his books and art-historical analyses. I will discuss in chronological order three publications in which he deals extensively with this matter, and point out those elements that prepared his thinking about queerness as an essential component of a critical museum for a democratic society. These examples also demonstrate his pioneering work in the queering of art history in Poland, and his ethical approach to art and art history. His interest in sexual politics and art began

<sup>57</sup> Reilly, *Curatorial Activism*.

<sup>58</sup> See: Andrzej Turowski, "Krytyczne instrumentarium etycznej historii sztuki Piotra Piotrowskiego" [Critical Instruments for the Ethical History of Art by Piotr Piotrowski], *Szum* 10 (2015), 27–37.

<sup>59</sup> Edit András, "Provincializing the West: Interview with Piotr Piotrowski", *ARTMargins* online, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/5-interviews/691-provincializing-the-west> (accessed 15 November 2016).

with American art, then moved towards the revision of art under communism and the appreciation of queer art in post-communism.

He focused on art and homosexuality for the first time in his Polish-language book *W cieniu Duchampa. Notatki nowojorskie* [*In the Shadow of Duchamp: New York Notes*] (1996), in which he analysed twentieth-century American art, especially since the 1960s.<sup>60</sup> This publication was the result of his periods of fellowships and research in the USA between 1989 and 1994. The book was prophetic in relation to his later publications on censorship in Poland and Russia, as it was devoted partially to the legal, sexual and political controversies in American postmodern culture around artists such as Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe. Regarding Mapplethorpe and LGBTQ rights, he wrote in detail about debates in the late 1980s on the suspension of the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Family Association's attacks on the progressive, and especially queer, art community. In the book, Piotrowski emphasised for the first time the need to defend homosexual cultural expression, as he saw this issue as part of the larger and essential question of respect for human freedoms and rights. Thus he used an ethical argument.<sup>61</sup> The mechanisms of oppression that were brought out of the closet by the prosecution and persecution of Mapplethorpe's art paradoxically recalled the fundamental ethical question of human freedom that "homosexual" art posed at the time in the commodified field of contemporary art. The study and understanding of the political and moral dimensions of the phenomenon known as "queer art" that Piotrowski worked through when writing about the American cultural debates enabled him to place such forms of expression at the centre of his own critical, socially engaged museology.

Piotr Piotrowski was not only one of the first art historians in Poland to introduce and promote critical American postmodernism connected with the politics of identity; by introducing this subject and its significance, he also intellectually prepared the Polish art scene to face the Eastern European culture wars that began in the 1990s. He described the American culture war of the 1980s in *In the Shadow of Duchamp*, then actively participated in a similar conflict in his own country a couple of years later, defending women artists such as Katarzyna Kozyra, Dorota Nieznalska and Zofia Kulik, hard hit by censorship in contemporaneous Poland.<sup>62</sup> Therefore the book is

<sup>60</sup> Piotrowski, *W cieniu Duchampa*.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 110–111.

<sup>62</sup> See: footnote 32 and on Kulik in: Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki*, 204–206, and Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 272–273, 281.

key to Piotrowski's critical art history and his passionate dissection of the demons of post-communist Eastern Europe, especially religious fundamentalism and patriarchal political nationalism, which negate human freedom and equality.

In his major study *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (2005) Piotrowski highlighted the importance and the failure of progressive gender politics in the systemic transition of East-Central Europe.<sup>63</sup> *In the Shadow of Duchamp* traces the connections and conflicts around art and sexual politics in the USA; *In the Shadow of Yalta* deconstructs gender normativity within the Eastern European neo-avant-garde. Although he wrote an extensive feminist critique of representations of female bodies, his most original contribution to gender studies in Eastern European art history deals with the subject of masculinity. Especially pertinent is his critical analysis of the male body in performance art by men, which is close to a queer perspective, queerly reading performance art from the region. He argued that, from the 1960s, performance art and happenings were very popular among artists in the Eastern Bloc, who worked with their naked or semi-naked male bodies as a medium of artistic expression with a very strong political message. According to Piotrowski's critical interpretation, male artists predominantly used their bodies to speak about a universal humanity, not about questions of personal identity.<sup>64</sup> Though naked and masculine, the body was seen by performers as being outside gendered and sexual ramifications and privileges.<sup>65</sup> Aside from the radical art of Ion Grigorescu, the artists' attitudes were similar to the traditional heterosexual and patriarchal model of masculinity, in accord with the conservatism of communist gender ideology. Controversially, Piotrowski writes that the art of the male body in the East somewhat confirmed traditionally assigned heteronormative functions, and was hardly ever used as an instrument of critique for gender/sexual politics. Thus he emphasised many times that the masculine character of democratic political transformation, including its persistent homophobia, was one of the main problematic features of post-communist societies.

Piotrowski stated that, after 1989, the most frequent targets of *agoraphobia* in the region were members of sexual minorities. "Agoraphobia" here means official

<sup>63</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 363–387.

<sup>65</sup> He wrote about performance artists such as the Autoperforationsartistik Group, Jan Mlčoch, Karel Miler, Petr Štembere, Tomislav Gotovac, Ion Grigorescu and Jerzy Beres.



exclusion from public space, and is connected with political and legal measures, as well as cases of vigilante violence or vandalism. He mentioned the bans and attacks on Pride parades, which I have summarised, but also the slow improvements in many countries, confirmed by the increased visibility of queer culture, of which *Ars Homo Erotica* is a key example. Writing about queerness, he was never particularly concerned with sexuality, humour or scandal, but only with ethics and the politics of justice. In this context he quoted Hannah Arendt's argument about the right to have rights for those excluded from civil rights.<sup>66</sup> This was the basis of his ethics.

The most interesting example of this broader contextual socio-sexual thinking is Piotrowski's interpretation of Polish artist Katarzyna Kozyra's series of performances and films *In Art Dreams Come True* (2003–2007). This is a complex, queer project of drag acts and embodiments by a woman artist inspired by rich cultural and erotic references from all over Europe, including her gender-bending burlesque in a gay club in Berlin. After describing these multifaceted sexual and intertextual spectacles, Piotrowski interprets them as a symbol of a definite break from the communist and modernist legacy in post-Wall art. Hence the series opens up completely new gendered, geographical and mental spaces, undermining the old binaries of male and female, Eastern and Western, historical and contemporary. Thus he clearly sees the act of dissolving all differences – an act of queering par excellence – as the emergence of a new European reality.<sup>67</sup> For him, the queer show at the National Museum in Warsaw signified the arrival of this new global, transnational, fluid European reality in Poland.

One might emphasise that *only* in art can dreams come true, as in the year of Piotrowski's death, 2015, new neo-fascist, homophobic regimes began to rise to power in Eastern Europe, including in his own homeland, where the Law and Justice Party regained power. The political situation in Poland has returned to the dramatic years of 2005–2007 with which I began this text. *Ars Homo Erotica* seems now to be a dream. Thus Piotrowski ends *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* prophetically, with a call to defend democracy and stand up to populism, which would bring new forms of authoritarianism and place limitations on freedom.<sup>68</sup> This is happening all over again in the present day, and his call is more topical than ever.

<sup>66</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 9.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

MAGDALENA RADOMSKA

## **Dangerous Consensus: Piotrowski's Remarks about Democracy, Framed with(in) Marxism**

Piotr Piotrowski's critical perspective is located at the interface of postmodernism and post-Marxism. There may be no theoretical overlap between these conceptual fields, and the co-existence of two different conceptual apparatuses may engender numerous points of (creative) friction in his texts, yet Piotrowski does not seek leave from theories, but simply goes ahead and applies them.

It needs to be emphasised that although Piotrowski's texts do not create common terrain for his chosen methodological apparatuses, they are still a common space for his students and readers. Piotrowski trained a cohort of key Polish art history researchers in the fields of feminist and gender studies; he was the author of substantive, internationally recognised works on the art of East-Central Europe; he was a professed proponent of the new museology, and an attentive reader of post-Marxist and postcolonial texts, with a marked predilection for postmodernism and post-structuralism. Piotrowski's flair lay in the pursuit of an art-historical discourse with all its inconsistencies, without the tendency to simplify for the sake of coherence or the primacy of theory.

And yet the crucial resistance point encountered in any attempt to reconstruct Piotr Piotrowski's methodological repertoire seems to be the notion of democracy, which, as proven by the texts in this book, stands out as a key concept in his thinking. It seems that what binds together Piotrowski's thinking as a researcher, or otherwise sends it off in different directions, is the concept of Derridean *différance* defined from a post-Marxist standpoint, manifested at the very least as the "radical democracy" of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, or else simply taking the form of "poking the hornets' nest" in a variety of different ways. This structural pattern can be traced in relation to the core issues of Piotrowski's texts.

Piotrowski's use of the very concept of "East-Central Europe" [Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia] seems characteristic in this regard. The hyphen sets the two elements in opposition, while at the same time suspending them in a state of mutual definition. His choice of term, rejecting "Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia" [Central and Eastern Europe] and "Europa Środkowowschodnia" [Centraleastern Europe], is a political statement, and at the same time an element of Piotrowski's distinctive practice of differentiation. Piotrowski was one of the first of a small number of researchers to have devoted so much attention to the differences – repeatedly defined – of art in communist and post-communist Europe (his theoretical procedures differ in this respect from the research practices of Steven Mansbach, to give one example). Not only differences detectable in language, but above all fundamental fractures in the conceptual structure, have caused the traditional language of art history, as shaped by Western discourse, to become an instrument of oppression. That is why Piotrowski's attention is focused on its deconstruction more than its construction. Piotrowski, however, adheres to a system of thought that significantly transcends simple differentiation and touches Derridean *différance* – the fundamental difference that emerges to replace structure and which, as Jacques Derrida writes, "is never presented as such".<sup>1</sup> The perspective of postmodernist "linguistic games", or of the Foucauldian *Panopticon*, whose consequence can only be the Huntingtonian "patchwork" model of a clash of civilisations, do not suffice for Piotrowski: he seems to adopt a narrower and more precisely focused post-Marxist perspective, which is not content with the universality of these "meta-differences" and draws attention to their economic and political determinants.

Whereas in *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Europe, 1945–1989* the concept of democracy features all-but-exclusively within quotation marks in the phrase "people's democracy", in *Agorafilia* [*Agoraphilia*], where it is promoted to the book's subtitle – *Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* [*Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*] – it returns in a variety of definitions. It is noteworthy that the problems surrounding the idea of democracy come to be discussed at some length only fairly late in *Art and Democracy*, roughly halfway through the book, when – in the chapter titled "Anarchy, Critique, Utopia" – Piotrowski's search for a binary opposite to totalitarianism leads him to examine in the first instance the linkage between freedom and anarchy rather than the binary opposition of the totalitarian system and democ-

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 6.

racy.<sup>2</sup> Referring – somewhat summarily – to the Bakunin-Marx conflict, Piotrowski applies the phrase “revolt [...] in the name of freedom” to denote the idea of revolt against the totalitarian autonomisation of power claimed to reside in the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>3</sup> In defence of Marx, one should point out that there are studies clearly linking his thinking to democracy in a direct sense,<sup>4</sup> and after all this was also an important point of departure for Laclau and Mouffe. It is noteworthy, however, that where Piotrowski turns against Marx, he does so using a framework of argumentation that displays a strong attachment to dialectics – demolishing the binary opposition of democracy and totalitarianism, and asking whether there could be kinship between democracy and anarchy.<sup>5</sup> “It is clear”, he writes, “that anarchy is fundamentally opposed to totalitarianism. If democracy is the opposite of a totalitarian system, could democracy be linked with anarchy? Moreover, could anarchy work on the behalf of democracy?”<sup>6</sup> Piotrowski rejects consensual Enlightenment democracy in the interpretation of Jürgen Habermas, and comes down on the side of Mouffe’s model of “agonistic democracy”, noting that anarchy’s key role is “to question social reality, create strategies of resistance against the status quo, and therefore against the order that takes the name of democracy while tolerating mechanisms of exclusion and subjugation”.<sup>7</sup> *In the Shadow of Yalta* contains a similar departure from binary opposites, in a passage where Piotrowski refers to a 1978 essay by Václav Havel dealing with the difference between a classic dictatorship and post-totalitarianism, which – framed by Piotrowski’s text – calls into question the binary nature of the East-West opposition, with the proviso that post-totalitarian societies rejected democracy.<sup>8</sup> Piotrowski points to a common mechanism of the exercise of power in both the East and West – based

<sup>2</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 125–127. First published in Polish as *Agoraphilia – Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* [Agoraphilia – Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe] (Poznań: REBIS, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 125.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Springborg, “Karl Marx on Democracy, Participation, Voting and Equality”, *Political Theory* vol. 12, no. 4 (November 1984), 537–556, et passim.

<sup>5</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 126.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 287–288.

on a modern panopticism.<sup>9</sup> It is only when viewed from such a perspective, while also taking account of his earlier thinking, that the concept of democracy in his writings can be read as a stance that he negotiates between his Marxist outlook and the meanings it generates because of its own history of geographical belonging to the hegemony of the West and its association with capitalism.

The idea of democracy (the relation between art and democracy) in Piotrowski's writings is accordingly linked in an essential way to the idea of geography (the meeting of geography and art). A key device for revealing the way in which art is conditioned by its geographical, political and economic context is his use of the notion of "critical geography" – Piotrowski's "horizontal art histories", which take account of the artistic map. This is a concept defined according to the cartography of Irit Rogoff – what she calls "relational geography" (which, according to Piotrowski, treats cultural difference as a fundamental category).<sup>10</sup> This pivot is by no means away from an art without geography, but from what Piotrowski, in "Concerning a Horizontal Art History", calls the "tacit assumptions of modernist artistic geography", which he contrasts with the perspective of critical geography and its capacity "to deconstruct the relations between the centre and the margins in the world history of modern art".<sup>11</sup> Another crucial concept for Piotrowski is that of "geohistory", a term coined by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann to denote a process designed to "reveal the historical significance of the space and place where specific art works were actually produced".<sup>12</sup> Piotrowski questioned art-historical narratives in which art was "described within [...] the Western paradigm", and which shaped an image of art "established in the West".<sup>13</sup> He described them as "vertical art histories", as they not only overlooked the horizontal surface of the map, but also constructed fundamental relations based on hierarchies.<sup>14</sup> Crucially,

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>10</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "O horyzontalnej historii sztuki" [Concerning a Horizontal Art History], *Artium Quaestiones* vol. XX (2009), 66. Reworked portions of the article appeared in English in: Piotrowski, "Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde", trans. Marek Wilczyński, in: *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, eds. Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tania Orum and Hubert van den Berg (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 49–58; and also in: "1989: The Spatial Turn", in: Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 15–52. (For the present citation see: *Europa! Europa?*, 56.)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 60. (*Europa! Europa?*, 50.)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. (*Europa! Europa?*, 50.)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. (*Europa! Europa?*, 50.)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. (*Europa! Europa?*, 50–51.)

the author emphasises the essential difference of perspective between, on the one hand, artists engaged in the creation of modernist art (and hence also of its geography), and, on the other hand, the art historians apparently reshaping it. The former, according to Piotrowski, adopted a horizontal perspective as something natural, while the latter imposed a vertical one.<sup>15</sup>

Thus horizontal art history seems anchored in Chantal Mouffe's theory of radical democracy, which Piotrowski follows Mouffe in describing as a project that challenges the conflict-neutralising principle of consensus and exposes liberalism's inability to cope with antagonism.<sup>16</sup> In his books dealing with the art of East-Central Europe, which the author also later described as "post-communist" or "Eastern", Piotrowski practices "the political" in the sense proposed by Mouffe – namely the "ontological dimension of antagonism" seen as the opposite of a politics based on "acting in concert".<sup>17</sup> Horizontal art history is nothing less than an art-historical practice based on such a paradigm of the political – a differentiating structure that Piotrowski anchors in the philosophy of Derrida, and which in the writings of Mouffe assumes the guise, in her words, of "irreducible heterogeneity".<sup>18</sup>

*Dekada* [*Decade*], which is a little less read today, is important from this point of view. In it the author passes judgement on the art and artists of the Polish neo-avant-garde from the perspective that they themselves formulated. Piotrowski employs the term "cultural history", pointing to its incompatibility with political history in Poland in the 1970s. I greatly admire this book for the merciless way in which he judges the Polish artistic discourse of the 1970s, attacking the rhetoric of resistance,<sup>19</sup> the spurious critical capacity,<sup>20</sup> the "extreme neutralisation of the work of art",<sup>21</sup> and the superficiality and naivety of the way art related to the paradigms of Western culture.<sup>22</sup> In *Znaczenia*

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 61. (*Europa! Europa?*, 51.)

<sup>16</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 239–240.

<sup>17</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London, New York: Verso, 2013), 79.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Dekada. O syndromie lat siedemdziesiątych, kulturze artystycznej, krytyce, sztuce – wybiórczo i subiektywnie* [*Decade: About the Syndrome of the Seventies, Artistic Culture, Criticism, Art – Selectively and Subjectively*] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1991), 17, et passim.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 22–30.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., passim.

*modernizmu* [*Meanings of Modernism*], Piotrowski fits the 1970s primarily into his critical perspective of artistic geography in Poland, revealing a centralised discourse,<sup>23</sup> whereas in *In the Shadow of Yalta* the weight of the argument from *Decade*, although not articulated, excellently illustrates the context of the art of Central and Eastern Europe. *In the Shadow of Yalta* is a culminating point of *Decade* – the same arguments are *de facto* aired, but set in a different context. *Decade* reveals the influence of the intellectual tradition of 1968 on Piotrowski's thought; the concept of “ostensibly critical” critique used by Piotrowski is really a recontextualisation of Roland Barthes's “neither-nor”.<sup>24</sup> So it may be considered that what lies at the heart of *Decade* is essentially Piotrowski's intellectual disillusionment with the thus-construed ahistoricism of the discourse of Polish “cultural history”. Indeed, the ideas of Barthes provide a constant backdrop to Piotrowski's books – the notion of horizontal art history and the highlighting of the peculiar silence of geography bring to mind *Mythologies* and the way that Barthes writes about history's role in myth: functioning as a “servant” who “prepares all things, brings them, lays them out” and then “silently disappears”.<sup>25</sup>

Although *Decade*'s subject, as in *Meanings of Modernism* and *In the Shadow of Yalta*, is not the relationship between art and democracy, but rather art's *modi operandi* in undemocratic conditions, Piotrowski argues in all three books against what, in the light of the much later debate between Mouffe and Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and Paolo Virno, could be termed the “practice of exodus”. “If our approach has been called ‘Post-Marxist’”, Mouffe argues, “it is precisely because we have challenged the type of ontology subjacent to such a conception.”<sup>26</sup> The targets of Piotrowski's and Mouffe's critiques are fundamentally different – Piotrowski criticises the universalisation of the object and subject of art, and the related oppressive universalisation of the art-historical discourse, while Mouffe is critical of the “immanentist ontology” of “absolute democracy” based on a “total rejection of representative democracy”, in which the “multitude”, organised outside power, law and the state, and, according to Mouffe, resembling the Marxist proletariat, becomes the “privileged political subject”.<sup>27</sup> This comparison, however, is crucial for an

<sup>23</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* [*Meanings of Modernism: Towards a History of Polish Art after 1945*] (Poznań: REBIS, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> cf. Piotrowski, *Dekada*, 22–31.

<sup>25</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1991), 152.

<sup>26</sup> Mouffe, *Agonistics*, 78.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–78.

understanding of the evolution of Piotrowski's thought, which shares a close kinship – as he attested – with Mouffe's philosophy, and which in some ways developed coherently right up to his last book, the posthumously published *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej* [*The Global Viewpoint of Eastern European Art*].<sup>28</sup> For both Piotrowski and Mouffe the decisive factor is the dynamic of differences, and the two do not essentialise class difference. For this reason, therefore, Piotrowski's book, its global dimension notwithstanding, is closer to upholding the idea of radical democracy, in Mouffe's sense of the term, than thinking about absolute democracy, and the global map ultimately proposed by him is based more on the solidarity of the peripheries than class solidarity.

And so, while emphasising the significance of geography, Piotrowski continues to think in terms of history and does not repudiate its importance, appearing to concur with Derrida that “only differences can be ‘historical’ from the outset and in each of their aspects.”<sup>29</sup> Piotrowski defines them repeatedly as political, historical and discursive differences of context and of discursive traditions. In places he writes in near-conversational language, maximally elastic towards the “concept of play”,<sup>30</sup> thus seeming to reflect Derrida's observations on the cultural primacy of rhetoric. He is a “speaking subject” (in Derrida's term), since he interacts with a system of linguistic differences.<sup>31</sup> He is no advocate of the “trace”, however, seeing this “play of differences” through a framework of Marxist dialectics – performative history. It is worth recalling the characteristic dialectic between the peripheries/margins and the centre that Piotrowski enacted in his texts. Insofar as Poland, belonging to East-Central Europe, appears here as part of an underrated but consequently privileged centre, Warsaw (at least in *Meanings of Modernism* and the catalogue to *Odwilż* [*The Thaw*])<sup>32</sup> is identified as a centre that falsifies the art-historical discourse.

The Marxist roots of Piotrowski's texts extend, naturally, to the book *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją. Studium z zakresu etycznej historii sztuki awangardy rosyjskiej* [*The Artist between Revolution and Reaction: A Study in the Ethical History of Russian Avant-Garde Art*], which he conceived as a polemical response to texts published by

<sup>28</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej* [*The Global Viewpoint of Eastern European Art*] (Poznań: REBIS, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–16.

<sup>32</sup> *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r.* [*The Thaw: Art ca. 1956*], ex. cat. (Poznań: National Museum, 1996).



his art history (and Marxism) teacher, Andrzej Turowski.<sup>33</sup> The debate that raged between Turowski's *Wielka utopia awangardy* [*Great Utopia of the Avant-Garde*]<sup>34</sup> and Piotrowski's book has been one of the most intellectually resonant in Polish art history, dealing as it does with the appropriate use of Marxism as an analytical tool.

From the outset, Piotrowski wheels out the canon of dialectics against the structure that his teacher has elaborately woven out of the Marxist tradition. Writing, in an echo of Camus, of the "tragic history of revolt",<sup>35</sup> he constructs an argument based on dialectical logic – present and future, absolute freedom and absolute justice, the individual and collective subject – in order to deploy, in the book's first and second chapters, the key Marxist dialectic of action/praxis and theory; Piotrowski describes these as the "presence of the artist" and the "presence of the image" respectively. Whereas for Turowski – who begins his disquisition from Barthes – the dialectic is evidenced in the concept of a utopia that mediates the work of art, for Piotrowski it is the relation between, on the one hand, a utopia thus construed and completely appropriated by the symbolic dimension of culture (in the Lacanian sense and – paradoxically for Turowski – within the meaning of Barthesian myth, although Piotrowski does not see it in these terms), and, on the other hand, that which eludes such symbolisation – the real as defined from a post-Marxist perspective: social and economic reality. Piotrowski describes this in terms of "great utopia" and "great tragedy".<sup>36</sup> He consigns to parentheses, as it were, the dialectical – in Turowski's understanding of the term – nature of utopia itself and of the work of art. For Piotrowski – and it was to remain this way – the work of art is a cultural text on an equal footing with artistic intention and the theoretical text. Such a construction has a flat sign structure, as it does not allow for a distinction between *signifiant* and *signifié* in the process of interpretation, but it was precisely this construct that enabled Piotrowski to capture in parentheses Turowski's elaborately woven dialectical structures, and to break them up in dialectical opposition to the political, practical and ethical impact of the activity of the Russian avant-garde artists.

<sup>33</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją. Studium z zakresu etycznej historii sztuki awangardy rosyjskiej* [*The Artist between Revolution and Reaction: A Study in the Ethical History of Russian Avant-Garde Art*] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Andrzej Turowski, *Wielka utopia awangardy Artystyczne i społeczne utopie w sztuce rosyjskiej 1910–1930* [*Great Utopia of the Avant-Garde: Artistic and Social Utopias in Russian Art, 1910–30*] (Warsaw: PWN, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> Piotrowski, *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.



A statue of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Shanghai, 2008 (research trip from the Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań). From the left: Piotr Bernatowicz, Piotr Korduba, Monika Szmyt, Magdalena Radomska, Piotr Piotrowski, Agata Federćzak.

*The Artist between Revolution and Reaction* is an important point of reference for its author's further reflections. In *Art and Democracy* it is put at their direct service when Piotrowski refers to its conclusions in an analysis of Krzysztof Wodiczko's artistic stance, where Wodiczko's democratic standpoint, set in the context of a criticism of biopolitics and the Levinasian ethics of encounter with the Other, is somewhat arbitrarily contrasted with the Russian avant-garde project, in which, he argues, the Other is "nobody" functioning as a *homo sacer*.<sup>37</sup> Piotrowski continues these themes in *The Global Viewpoint of Eastern European Art*, in which, at the culminating point of the unfinished book, he compares two unrealised projects of, respectively, global communist revolution and global democracy – Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the*

<sup>37</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 241.



Peking University, 2008 (research trip from the Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań). From the left: Piotr Piotrowski, Anna Brzyski (translator of Piotrowski's books into English), Piotr Bernatowicz, Magdalena Radomska.

*Third International* (aka *Tatlin's Tower*) and Wodiczko's *Arc de Triomphe*.<sup>38</sup> Piotrowski is similarly arbitrary in his approach to the subtly conceived projects by Ilya Kabakov that explore problems surrounding the notion of collective identity, describing them as a "a sadomasochistic mechanism, a prisoner's fascination with the system that imprisons him".<sup>39</sup> These evaluations clearly point to the ambivalent status of democracy in Piotrowski's writings. On the one hand, he plainly wants to rescue the notion from the trap of binary opposition and tension in relation to the totalitarian communist system, but, on the other hand, he falls into just such a trap when methodological thought is needed to pin down his own contradictory position towards the political reality both before and after 1989. Piotrowski's art historian's Marxist grounding is clearly in evidence, but he is not a post-Marxist art historian, and his fundamentally ambivalent

<sup>38</sup> Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie*, 191–192.

<sup>39</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 231.



Participants of the summer school *Writing Humanities after the Fall of Communism* at the Central European University, 2009. From the left: Luiza Nader, Biljana Puric, (unknown), (unknown), Svetlana Poleschuk, Irina Denischenko, Ana Kršinić-Lozica, Margaret Tali, Sokol Lleshi, Jurga Daubaraite, Arandel Bojanović, Piotr Piotrowski (course faculty member), Edit András (course co-director), Magdalena Radomska (course director), Maria Krupnova. Photo: Jurga Daubaraite Archive.

attitude to Marxism is reflected in the methodological framework of his reflections and evaluations devoted to democracy and art. We had the chance to discuss the matter on many occasions, including on a trip to China organised by Piotr as director of the Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University, and during a course created by me, *Writing Humanities after the Fall of Communism*, at the Central European University in Budapest in 2009.

### Framing

The actual notion of the frame – a key element of Piotrowski's conceptual thinking – also seems to have a Marxist underpinning, linked as it is more to the base than the superstructure. It is rooted in the concept of the margin that appeared in the books of Andrzej Turowski, who taught Marxism at the Poznań Institute of Art History to students including Piotrowski. Turowski and Piotrowski differ fundamentally in their definitions of the work of art; for Piotrowski, it is an exclusively material function of (a repeatedly defined) context. With Piotrowski the *parergon* is in no sense the text; nevertheless, he writes: "The concept of the 'frame', which in the Culler/Bryson inter-

pretation replaces that of the context, [...] is a structure inseparable from the text and [...] it is not externally imposed; rather, it takes shape as a result of the interpretive strategy. The invocation of the frame/context in reference to a work of art constitutes, therefore, according to Bryson, a step backwards, towards uncertainty of the text (the work), and towards its anchoring base. But once taken, a step cannot be retraced. The context is a text, or [...] 'it is just more text'. Context, [...] has an active quality. Through our interpretive strategies, we activate that text or context."<sup>40</sup> But Piotrowski appears to consent to this dialectic of text and context only in the sense that he understands that the standpoint of the researcher is also contingent on a certain context, and the fact that whatever text he writes will never be neutral. In this way, every text is regarded by the researcher as a potential, "target" context, and, construed as such, the text becomes definitively set in context, even if the latter evolves over time. With Turowski the opposite is true: fundamentally, he is interested in the margin as a text in unceasing relation to the basic text; this is also the sense in which Turowski is interested in the work of art. This shift of emphasis seems to have ensured that Piotrowski managed to achieve the framing of his teacher's text and his application of Marxism to the interpretation of the work of art. The difficulty in reconstructing Piotrowski's methodological stance stems from the fact that his writings become embroiled in a particular dialectic of frame and text – a narrative that itself requires framing.

### Democracy as frame

Two issues are paramount here. On the one hand, there is the problem of reconstructing the ways in which Piotrowski framed the concept of art by means of the concept of democracy, and, on the other hand, reconstructing the frame itself. It needs to be emphasised that Piotrowski's methodological sensitivity to context does not permit him to uncritically apply a methodological frame to the situation in this part of Europe: in *Art and Democracy* Piotrowski uses the Polish context to observe that "it is difficult to critique liberal democracy in Poland, since even the country's constitution does not fully commit to it, [...] At the same time, the defence of liberal democracy seems intellectually rather dubious, given the current state of historical knowledge and the level of theoretical discussions."<sup>41</sup> While expressing doubt about the validity

<sup>40</sup> Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 26.

<sup>41</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 264.



of criticism of liberal democracy – given its underdeveloped form and the fact that it has to negotiate space with conservative and right-wing visions, which essentially formulate their own critique of it – Piotrowski overlooked the fact that the theory of radical democracy, with its post-Marxist origins, is – just like other theories that he invokes – an instrument whose cutting edge can be applied to both of these worldview constructs. Piotrowski consequently succumbs excessively to the binariness of a situation that he describes as specific to post-communist democracy,<sup>42</sup> and distils from it a concept of freedom equated with human rights, without seeing radical democracy as an instrument of egalitarian politics. Looking comprehensively at the relationship between notions of democracy in Piotrowski and in Mouffe, one has to note that although Piotrowski – who deploys the constructs of Derridean *différance* and radical democracy in parallel – is not all that far from Mouffe, who also anchors her construct of the “adversary” in *différance* or in Henry Staten’s “constitutive outside”<sup>43</sup>, Piotrowski makes no use at all of the concept of adversary, and does not share with Mouffe what for her is the fundamental idea of the “constitutive outside” as a description of liberal democracy. This leads Piotrowski, in his last book, to reach completely different conclusions than Mouffe. Invoking the concept of “global agoraphilia” as an operational category of global art history that describes “the need to enter into the public space, the agora, the desire to participate in this space and to shape public life”<sup>44</sup>, Piotrowski envisions a horizon constituted by the “global politeia”, representing “the goal of artists of global agoraphilia”.<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, he postulates the building of a “global agonistic democracy”, and, on the other hand, invokes constructs founded on the philosophy of Hardt and Negri that result in the emergence of “absolute democracy”, completely ignoring Mouffe’s dispute with them.<sup>46</sup> Whereas Piotrowski comes down on the side of a cosmopolitan vision of building democracy “with a transnational not national perspective, given that local political structures are incapable of protecting citizens from exploitation by global corporations”, and emphasises the significance of global institutions of democracy, Mouffe presents a whole series of reservations regarding such a conception, asserting that “the cosmopolitan construction of the

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 263–264.

<sup>43</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2005), 15.

<sup>44</sup> Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie*, 171.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>46</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political*, 107–115.

global citizen is another attempt to privilege morality over politics”.<sup>47</sup> “The new rights of cosmopolitan citizens”, she writes, “are [...] a chimera: they are moral claims, not democratic rights that could be exercised.”<sup>48</sup> Mouffe consequently favours a “multipolar world order”,<sup>49</sup> something that the text of Piotrowski’s book is not actually at odds with. In it he emphasises the importance of the concept of the global, but sees it differently than Mouffe: as a sort of “International of the Peripheries”. Being less radical than the post-Marxist Mouffe, however, he is at the same time uninhibited in adducing Hardt and Negri’s concept of the “multitude”, but without mobilising the theoretical apparatus associated with it – “immaterial labour” and methods of production as key factors in the analysis of works of art.

A similar paradox arises in Piotrowski’s conclusion when it is set against the philosophy of Jacques Rancière, from which he distils the concept of “dissensus”, treating it as related to radical democracy in its essence – namely social conflict. As opposed to Piotrowski, however, Rancière emphatically privileges Marxism as a “metapolitics” – as “thinking which aims to overcome political dissensus [...] by passing from the appearances of democracy and of the forms of the State to the infra-scene of underground movements and the concrete energies that comprise them”.<sup>50</sup> Related to this are the numerous reservations the post-Marxist Rancière voices about democracy in his strikingly titled book *Hatred of Democracy*, a reading of which reveals that Piotrowski’s conception of democracy – despite the strictures he applies – is firmly enmeshed in the hegemony of neoliberalism. Of significance in this regard is the critique of the trope of the “Rights of Man” that the philosopher mounts in order to expose their entanglement in hegemony, which results, he says, in “the return of the disused rights sent to the rightless back to their senders” and essentially the legitimization of the latter’s “right to humanitarian interference”.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Rancière links such rights to the practices of consensus that reduce democracy to its *ethos*.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>50</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>51</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?,” in: *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. Steven Corcoran (London, New York: Continuum, 2010), 74.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 72.

Although the motifs of post-communism and post-communist identity are important in Piotrowski's writings, like Mouffe he does not think in terms of the rearticulation of the "communist hypothesis", always speaking up for a democratic model with a Marxist perspective. With *Art and Democracy* there is a substantial shift in Piotrowski's methodology. The concept of East-Central Europe appears here in the sense of a post-communist Europe (defined as such in the book's full title), which for the first time includes Russia. Piotrowski places himself within a framework of post-communist discourse, citing Susan Buck-Morss and, much more extensively, Boris Groys. These passages are of particular value to researchers of the art of East-Central Europe, given that *In the Shadow of Yalta* excludes the art of the Soviet Union and thus lacks the context that could have been supplied, for instance, by Sots Art and Moscow Conceptualism; it also fails to make reference to the theoretical apparatus of Groys, who – together with Piotrowski – exhausts the term East-Central Europe on the theoretical level. It needs to be remembered that there is also – and perhaps most relevantly – a significant lack of texts by Groys, who hardly refers to East-Central Europe. It is thus impossible to isolate these strands, particularly in contexts such as the Cold War, the criticism of neoliberalism and globalism.

The case of Russia is put to use by Piotrowski in *Art and Democracy* when he switches to the theme of "unfulfilled democracy" in the final stage of his reflections. The book's concluding chapter essentially amounts to a democratic exhortation, emphasising the need to speak up for democracy and the unfulfilled hopes vested in it, which Piotrowski ties closely to the concept of freedom. The latter concept is essentially the last chapter's theme, alongside its opposite in the form of a description of censorship practices. This absolutisation, so to speak, of the notion of freedom reveals a major inconsistency in Piotrowski's methodological apparatus. The problem of course concerns equality, a crucial concept for the authors of post-Marxist notions of democracy that Piotrowski draws on, because, among other things, it exposes the problems inherent in the concept of freedom. While Rancière abolishes the binary relation between the two concepts and introduces the category of emancipation – which allows for the establishment of a joint form of action by the individual and collective subject<sup>53</sup> – Mouffe

---

<sup>53</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Reflections on Equality and Emancipation", <https://autonomies.org/2017/08/jacques-ranciere-reflections-on-equality-and-emancipation/>.



structures the two concepts in a binary fashion, assigning equality to democracy, and describing freedom as a trope of liberalism.<sup>54</sup>

An important theme in *Art and Democracy* is the exploration of problems surrounding the application of the postcolonial discourse to the exceptional situation in post-communist Europe, and this was explored at length in Piotrowski's last book. Piotrowski abandoned the obvious methodological route charted by critics of hegemony such as Antonio Negri, Étienne Balibar and Antonio Gramsci, in favour of Dipesh Chakrabarty and Homi Bhabha, as well as Alexander Kiossev and Igor Zabel. It is not the first time in his theoretical reflections that Piotrowski defines the Other from this sort of perspective – a trope that in his texts stands in for Mouffe's concept of the "adversary" – yet it seems to have a somewhat different meaning: that of an excluded adversary in a binding hegemony. Piotrowski concurs with the categories in which the Other is viewed by art historian Bojana Pejić, who distinguishes between the distant, "real" Other, who belongs to a different civilisational frame of reference, and the "close Other" or "not-quite-Other", located in the same civilisational frame of reference but outside the centre, on the margins of European culture.<sup>55</sup>

The Other is an important trope of horizontal art history, and yet it is difficult to reconcile Piotrowski's attitude to the artistic map and the category constructed on its basis with the concept of democracy or *agon*. While he exposes the conflictuality of narratives constructed from diverse perspectives, at the same time he considers the map and the art-historical discourse that is a function of it more in terms of hegemony than of democratic space. The concept of the Other based on a pluralist worldview introduces a category – indeed, an essential one – which, while it does not exclude class analysis and the class subject, is nevertheless far from giving them primacy. Piotrowski's gestures towards the map have a deconstructive status, something that changes only in his last book when the postulate of horizontal cuts can be understood – in line with the intentions of the author – as a constructive approach in the process of globalising the art-historical narrative and, in association with it, the map.<sup>56</sup>

*The Global Viewpoint of Eastern European Art* is probably the book in which Piotrowski's Marxist intellectual baggage is most strongly in evidence, although, as previously indicated, its conclusions are problematic in relation to the theoretical

<sup>54</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London, New York: Verso, 2000), 2–3.

<sup>55</sup> Piotrowski, "O horyzontalnej historii", 64. (*Europa! Europa?*, 52.)

<sup>56</sup> Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie*, 12.

apparatus he deploys. The main point is that the method of horizontal cuts and the dates selected by the author – 1947, 1968, 1989 – open up the potential possibility of pursuing the postulates of horizontal art history in its class aspect, without which – as I have repeatedly argued – horizontal art history is insufficiently horizontal.<sup>57</sup> These cuts open up the art-historical narrative to the notion of revolution. In the book, the constructive role of artistic projects based on Immanuel Wallerstein’s “utopistics”<sup>58</sup> also comes prominently to the fore, and Piotrowski partly abandons the postmodernist paradigms that had provided the fundamental underpinning for his texts.

In the Polish original, the book is also the first example of the use of the notion of Eastern Europe that the author had previously dismissed as inappropriate. This shift is connected with the rise to prominence of the global South, and indeed the terms East and West by no means mark a return to thinking in terms of a binary structure of the world. Piotrowski approaches the relations between East and West after the fall of communism in Europe with reference to the texts of Igor Zabel and a singularly interesting critic of capitalism – the artist and theoretical writer Marina Gržinić.

The relation between Piotrowski’s thought and Zabel’s is one of the most broadly significant in Piotrowski’s texts as it concerns a definition of modernism crucial to his theoretical work. The theme is already present in *In the Shadow of Yalta*. Citing Zabel, Piotrowski refers to universalist illusions and claims of modernism,<sup>59</sup> as well as to a multiculturalism of postmodernist provenance that stands in a state of perhaps vital tension with such claims.<sup>60</sup> *Art and Democracy* marks a decisive pivot, since Piotrowski writes here of many different returns: a return to (a re-evaluated) utopia,<sup>61</sup> a potential Groys-like return to a state predating modernity, or pre-communism<sup>62</sup>; as well as – discernible in all of these – a return to modernism. Such a reading of *Art and Democracy* might come as a surprise, given that Piotrowski stands out as a resolute critic of modernist paradigms and as a postmodernist. One could venture to contend

<sup>57</sup> I stated this viewpoint in my paper “Dialectical Geography and Horizontal Art History”, delivered at the conference *Theorizing the Geography of East-Central European Art* in Poznań on 26 October 2018 at the inauguration of the Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central European Art, <http://piotrpiotrowskicenter.amu.edu.pl/forum/magdalena-radomska/>.

<sup>58</sup> Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie*, 27, 173.

<sup>59</sup> Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 26.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 418–419.

<sup>61</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 149.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 42.

that the book's first chapter, which employs the Lacan/Foster apparatus to diagnose the predicament of post-war Polish art, basically asserts the traumatic character of modernism itself. Piotrowski argues that, despite the attempt in Polish art circles to critique the image and re-evaluate modernist myths, Polish artists, in paying homage to the autonomy of art, did not conform unequivocally to Victor Burgin's definition of the critique of modernism.<sup>63</sup> *In the Shadow of Yalta* took up this theme in the chapter titled "The Critique of Painting: Towards the Neo-avant-garde", pointing to the political diversity of the "meanings of modernism" and possible means of utilising them.<sup>64</sup> In his last book Piotrowski continues to explore the topic of the colonial conditioning of modernism,<sup>65</sup> but there is no concomitant analysis of the involvement of democracy in these mechanisms, to which consideration is given by the writers he cites.

Of vital importance for an understanding of the interface between theory and practice in Piotrowski's thinking are issues to do with the role of museums and the new museology. These are broached in the chapter of *Art and Democracy* titled "New Museums in New Europe", in which he introduces the categories of *traumaphilia* and *traumaphobia*. Piotrowski uses them – by analogy with his own category of *agoraphilia*, which was designed to serve as the opposite of *agoraphobia* as coined by Rosalyn Deutsche – to denote attitudes to the traumatic past enshrined in the structure of museum collections. These can be affective and confrontational, or operate as mechanisms of evasion. The chapter not only established a perspective for Piotrowski's book *Muzeum krytyczne* [*The Critical Museum*], written in the wake of his experience as director of the National Museum in Warsaw, but is also admirable for the evident way that he distances himself from his own methodology and subordinates it to the disjointedness of reality, something that, after all, is a characteristic feature of his texts. Piotrowski has repeated doubts about how unambiguous his chosen key terms of *traumaphobia* and *traumaphilia* really are, and notes their inadequacy and problematic nature in actual application. The chapter corresponds to the period of his career in which he became a fully fledged Althusserian "theoretical practitioner" of the *critical museum* concept he championed, and was forced to resign from his post as director of the National Museum.

*Traumaphobia* and *traumaphilia*, remaining in a state of tension with *agoraphobia* and *agoraphilia*, should be read as instruments of the democratisation of the

<sup>63</sup> Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu*, 175. See also: Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 335.

<sup>64</sup> Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 178–237.

<sup>65</sup> Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie*, 57–83.

museum, elaborated by applying the tenets of the new museology to the context of post-communist Europe. They are of exceptional relevance, given that Piotrowski's attitude to the museums emerging in post-communist parts of Europe illustrates the important place allotted to the memory of the communist past in these democratic institutions, and – for that matter – within democracy itself. An analysis of the exhibition policy of the MNAC in Bucharest – set up in proximity to Romania's democratic parliament, in a private wing of the People's House, where the apartments of the presidential couple were to be located – is particularly characteristic in this regard. Piotrowski's reservations are sparked by what he calls a strategy that "denies one of the basic traits of a museum as an institution, namely its local character".<sup>66</sup> It is only the "dual identity" – global/local – of museums that enables them to "potentially function as political forums, places where the contemporary condition, whether defined as global, postcolonial or post-communist, could be debated".<sup>67</sup>

Piotr Piotrowski's resignation after the National Museum's Board of Trustees rejected the policy programme he had authored – as I wrote in an article for *Czas Kultury*<sup>68</sup> – was not, however, a retreat from the idea of the "critical museum", but a consequence of it. The point is that the critical museum is not some new structure in which the key is "access", but rather a gesture of opposition to the structure, which can be mounted either from within or without – an act of opposition to the structure as such, and thus the equivalent of computer hacking. Numerous companies employ hackers to expose vulnerabilities in their systems, but to be effective the hackers must not succumb to the spell of a system's integrity. It is hard to imagine such companies feeling offended by the hackers' critical mindset, or, equally, the hackers deciding to operate if they have full confidence in the system. Museum hacking is a process – an unceasing vigilance against a dangerous crystallisation of meanings, which the critical museum hands over to the *agora*, where they can emerge in the course of public debate.

This gesture of handing meanings over to society and putting them up for discussion acquires greater significance when it arises in the framework of a public institution funded by the taxpayer. When, additionally, the museum in question is the National Museum in Warsaw, the central meaning over whose decrystallisation battle rages is the

<sup>66</sup> Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy*, 211.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>68</sup> Passages in this text regarding *Muzeum krytyczne* are taken from the article: Magdalena Radomska, "Muzealny hacking, causa locuta", *Czas Kultury* no. 5 (2010), 100–107.

concept of the nation. This was the case with the exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica*, whose curator Paweł Leszkowicz not only brought homoerotic art into the museum, but also retrieved it from the museum's own collections, thus deautomatising the very concept of the nation and depriving it of its monodimensionality.

This gesture of including the homosexual minority in the idea of the nation comes across as an extraordinary act of defiance. In Poland, as in many European countries, it is difficult to define the nation separately from the notion of nationalism, as the latter, according to Žižek, is based on the necessary exclusion of minorities engaged in stealing *jouissance*.<sup>69</sup> The Leszkowicz exhibition was exceptional from this point of view. At first sight it was devoid of incisive critical potential in the form of an accusatory challenge thrown down to Polish society, but, quite the reverse, it was actually open to dialogue on an educational level. As accurately observed by Izabela Kowalczyk in a discussion accompanying its opening, it was far removed from left-wing discourse and, if anything, owed much to the aesthetics of neoliberalism. The key to the choice of works and displays was plainly aesthetic, and the tone extremely lyrical. But this gesture allowed the curator to mount an exceptional operation of “theft of the *theft of jouissance*”. Leszkowicz did not allow the exhibition to be appropriated by a nationalist discourse, and did so by avoiding the conceptual calques centred on pleasure and sexual licence in terms of which such a discourse traditionally regards homoerotic images. *Ars Homo Erotica* surrendered the space to an orgy of an aesthetic kind, defining eroticism, if at all, as closeness and emotional intimacy – in other words, in categories that cannot be gainsaid in the framework of a nationalist discourse. This explains the exceptional criticality of the exhibition, eluding as it did the analytical categories at the disposal of such a discourse, and it is also the reason for the relatively subdued outcry it provoked. Leszkowicz carried out analogous operations on both the collections of the National Museum and the language of the nation – he addressed himself to images and concepts that pre-existed there and could not be disavowed without having to redefine identities. The powerful criticality of Leszkowicz's offering derived from the fact that he did not submit to the language against which he had mounted the exhibition – even in the form of simple negation.

<sup>69</sup> Žižek discusses this issue in particular in the chapter “Love Thy Neighbour? No, Thanks!”, in: Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London, New York: Verso, 1997), 45–85.

Leszkowicz's gesture is symptomatic in this respect as it exposes the methodological inconsistencies of his teacher, while Kowalczyk's criticism shows that Piotrowski's thinking offers a common platform and point of departure for various different research standpoints. Piotrowski's attachment to concepts such as democracy and freedom – problematic though it is without the requisite strictures or cross-references to the texts of the philosophers whose methodologies he utilises (absent from the text of his books) – has been one of the key problems complicating the reception of the work of someone who – significantly – seems perhaps to be the most universal of art historians. This raises a valid question about the universalism of the narrative of democracy and its associated theoretical apparatus, which – posed by Piotrowski himself, albeit inconsistently – needs to be given constant rearticulation in texts devoted to the subject.

Piotrowski's "critical museum" was by definition political, since it defined democracy according to the model conceptualised by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau shortly before the collapse of communism in Europe,<sup>70</sup> and constituted a polemic against the post-political vision of social space and culture, which operates from a false sense of security that the meanings most vital for society are non-negotiable and – consequently – untouchable. The reality is, however, that they thus serve the power that preserves them, and are not subject to social negotiation. Such a negotiation – according to Mouffe and Laclau – needs, however, to proceed in conflict, as only then can we be certain of the diversity of the parties to the debate.<sup>71</sup> As such, the debate is by its nature political. In this sense, as Alain Badiou writes, politics is a "truth procedure".<sup>72</sup> And that is why – paradoxically, and in the face of resistance from circles perceiving universalism as an abreaction in the wake of the totalitarian politicisation of reality in our part of Europe – we are seeing "the return of the political"<sup>73</sup> (Mouffe), with the purpose of establishing the foundation of European democracy. This cannot, however, assume the guise of an ostensibly universal democratic dictate, because that, it seems, is not allowed for by the formula of radical democracy, which also requires a post-Marxist framework.

<sup>70</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), passim.

<sup>71</sup> Mouffe describes it as "various discursive formations" in: Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London, New York: Verso, 1993), 77.

<sup>72</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 141–152.

<sup>73</sup> Mouffe, *The Return*, passim.

In *The Critical Museum*, which sets out the fundamental tenets of the new museology and discusses the case of the National Museum in Warsaw, Piotrowski talks more *via* than *about* the critical museum. To fully appreciate the nature of this shift we need to define once again the critical museum as a “lost cause” (in Žižek’s phrase), which is defended by being persistently lost.<sup>74</sup> A theory thus constructed does not amount to a need to renounce the present, but is a gesture of historicising it. The critical museum was a project of praxis, and “the relationship between theory and practice”, according to Žižek “is properly dialectical, in other words, that of an irreducible tension: theory is not just the conceptual grounding of practice, it simultaneously accounts for why practice is ultimately doomed to failure”.<sup>75</sup>

The project thus emerges not as a “*causa finita*” but as a “*causa locuta*” – a cause that has spoken via the critical museum. “Our defense of lost Causes”, Žižek continues, “is [thus] not engaged in any kind of deconstructive game in the style of ‘every Cause first has to be lost in order to exert its efficiency as a Cause’ [...] after one fails, one can go on and fail better, while indifference drowns us deeper and deeper in the morass of imbecilic Being.”<sup>76</sup> This kind of theoretical framework – immersed in post-Marxism – requires us to raise the questions of the revolutionary nature of the critical museum, its relationship with horizontal art history, and the tension between democracy and revolution, including the common sphere of these two concepts. Perhaps a practical response here would be an exhibition devoted to revolutions, including that of 1989, which was part of the plan submitted by Piotrowski, rejected by the National Museum’s Board of Trustees, and which was to have been curated by Andrzej Turowski.

On more than one occasion Piotrowski pointed out the deficiencies in his own theories, precisely in the light of their dialectical and dynamic relations to reality. He noted, among other things, that criticism of the vertical paradigm and application of the non-vertical perspective come with numerous necessary strictures – art according to the Western formula is frequently adopted as an instrument of critique of the Western model and Western domination.<sup>77</sup> He took the view that perceptions of the centre are different from the viewpoint of the centre and of the privileged margins.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London and Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2009), *passim*.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>77</sup> Piotrowski, “O horyzontalnej”, 61–63, 68. (*Europa! Europa?*, 49–52.)

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. (*Europa! Europa?*, 54–55.)

The hegemony of the centre, according to Piotrowski, was essentially anchored in language – particularly regarding the categories of style and canon.<sup>79</sup> The discourse of the margins, he says, relativises and reprocesses the canon without respecting stylistic purity, but, paradoxically, it is not the canon and the category of style, but the credibility and originality of the margins that are prone to breaking down.<sup>80</sup> Piotrowski goes on to say that the meaning of form is dictated by the local context, and by the domination of formal analysis dictated by a false paradigm that goes to the very essence of the myth shaped by Western culture. “Globalization of the art institutions”, he argues “[...] on the one hand weakens artists’ links to particular locations, and on the other, paradoxically, often made them stronger by creating particular local identities for sale.”<sup>81</sup> Piotrowski links the model of horizontal art history more to the postcolonial model, which in a sense stabilises the subject, than to the postmodernist one, which destabilises it,<sup>82</sup> but at the same time he highlights a consequent obligation to reflect all the more critically on the subject’s essentialisation.<sup>83</sup> Horizontal art history thus, in his view, has a dual purpose – in the macro-perspective it must defend the relatively integrated subject and undertake a critique of the centre on its behalf, and in the micro-perspective must subject it to critique (national subjectivity) in order to defend others marginalised by it.<sup>84</sup>

The complex nature of such a theoretical construct built around horizontal art history is reflected in some measure in Piotrowski’s considerations on democracy – in particular, his sense of the local/global. But he falls for the illusion that the concept of radical democracy on its own – in isolation from Mouffe’s theoretical apparatus and the discussions she conducts with other post-Marxists, along with a whole string of provisos about liberalism – will guard him from the trap that it sets by being coupled with capitalism and the hegemony of the West; in other words, the very thing he has been condemning from a horizontal art history standpoint. The problematic nature of the concept of democracy in Piotrowski’s texts also reveals the problem with horizontal art history itself – namely the absence of class analysis, and therefore of substantive

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. (*Europa! Europa?*, *ibid.*)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 68–69. (*Europa! Europa?*, 55–56.)

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 70. (*Art and Democracy*, 36–37.)

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. (*Art and Democracy*, 37.)

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 71. (*Art and Democracy*, *ibid.*)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. (*Art and Democracy*, *ibid.*)



reference to Marxist fundamentals, which, however, appear to be the ultimate authority for many of the conceptual constructs Piotrowski uses, such as context or horizontal cuts. As an operation performed on world history, as it were, the latter relate to the map as a place that breaks down a multiplicity of historical and political narratives, while horizontal art history, predicated after all on a non-hierarchical narrative, does not directly address class conflict, and in that sense is not horizontal.

In conclusion it should be noted that Piotrowski's last book basically suggests a possible route out of this paradox – particularly in light of its author's methodological standpoint of horizontal art history. His chosen dates are ones when the class factor came to the fore, and systematic and detailed investigation along these lines, which Piotrowski partially ran out of time to carry out, would undoubtedly have led him to such conclusions. The book, however, muddles the democratic frame of his texts, which is so admired by followers and students of his thought. The thinking of post-Marxists is anchored firmly in the tradition of system-based philosophies, but without the context of a theoretical apparatus it gets enmeshed in a whole series of inconsistencies and paradoxes, the effect of which may not only be a hybrid consensual and radical model, but also a dangerous consensus regarding the manner in which a researcher's texts are to be read. The fact remains that these only become fully legible when treated not only as an active frame, but also as a construct woven out of a combination of numerous methodologies that itself requires framing.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> This text is an extended and partially modified version of my text *Piotr Piotrowski jako praktyk teoretyczny*. In *Memoriam*, published in *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* no. 79 (2017), 625–633



# Part Three

## **Global Politeia**

Photo: Ryszard Rau



BOŻENA CZUBAK

## On the Margins of the “Global Politeia”

“...there is absolutely no doubt that my thinking about culture is marked by a disillusionment stemming from unfulfilled expectations – primarily about liberty, artistic freedom, self-realisation, a particular emancipatory tendency [...] I grew up in the period after 1968, obtaining a number of academic degrees, teaching art history and cultural history at a time when it really seemed that everything that was built up before had been taken over by ‘con artists’ engaged in business and politics. The only option was to make a certain system of critique out of it, as the utopian one had failed. So you could analyse and show the mechanism, but not build utopias. It was a learning curve for me, but it brought no satisfaction. It seems to me that the atmosphere of critique against utopia constructed by the various luminaries of postmodernism – the people involved with *October* in its early days, to give an example – has a flawed element of defeatism. The new, critical art history failed to live up to expectations. At some point, a phrase of Huyssen’s – that ‘the notion of critique is unclear if it is not related to utopia’ – resonated with me. It is a moment when we need to go back, we need to appoint a new postmodernist panel, reshape the postmodernist discourse, and go back to thinking about wider projects, big projects of emancipation...”<sup>1</sup>

When I was planning a book to accompany a retrospective exhibition of the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko at the Łódź Museum of Art,<sup>2</sup> I asked Piotr Piotrowski to contribute an article. He agreed, even though he was already in poor health and had

---

<sup>1</sup> Grzegorz Borkowski and Adam Mazur, “Sztuka według polityki. Rozmowa z Piotrem Piotrowskim” [Art after Politics: In Conversation with Piotr Piotrowski]. An interview from the series “Conversations with *Obieg*”, 09 June 2008, <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/rozmowy/15576> (accessed 01 June 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Krzysztof Wodiczko: *On Behalf of the Public Domain*, ed. Bożena Czubak (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2015).

to finish the piece in hospital. He was undoubtedly persuaded to contribute because of the subject and the artist, who occupied a key place in his art-historical reflections. He had written about Wodiczko's art on many earlier occasions. In the 1990s he had regarded it in terms of a "postmodernism of resistance", describing Wodiczko as one of those artists who are "always critical towards the contemporary world", and characterising him as endowed with the "status of an intellectual partisan, a demystifier who knows the world cannot be changed and who can only incessantly deconstruct it".<sup>3</sup> In the following decade he significantly revisited his earlier interpretations, while continuing to highlight the critical potential of Wodiczko's art and linking its critical themes to those of utopia. He saw the artist's work as the "realisation of the unfulfilled dreams of the Russian avant-garde", while of course acknowledging the various differences – particularly solidarity with the victim rather than with authority, and the pursuit of ethics rather than ambitions to change history.<sup>4</sup>

In Piotrowski's remarks cited at the beginning – part of a transcript of a discussion about his book *Sztuka według polityki* [*Art after Politics*] – he talked about the need for new utopias, citing Wodiczko and his project *City of Refuge: A 9/11 Memorial* (2008).<sup>5</sup> In this critical proposal running parallel to the World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition, the artist had presented his utopian vision of a discursive space instead of a monument, and called for the creation of programmes of emancipation and new political, social and cultural visions and constructs. The idea of transcending the critical, deconstructive role of art has undergone further development in Wodiczko's more recent visionary projects – in activistic and agonistic programmes. One of the most spectacular – *Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War* (2012)<sup>6</sup> – was the subject of the text Piotr wrote for the catalogue of the Łódź Museum exhibition. In it, he elaborated on themes he had previously signalled when writing about Wodiczko in the book *Agorafilia – Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* [*Agoraphilia – Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*], where he had

<sup>3</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *W cieniu Duchampa. Notatki nowojorskie* [*In the Shadow of Duchamp: New York Notes*] (Poznań: Obserwator, 1996), 83–92.

<sup>4</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "Biopolityka i demokracja" [Biopolitics and Democracy], in: Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Doktor honoris causa Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Poznaniu* [*Doctor Honoris Causa of the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań*], Signum Foundation (Poznań: Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Krzysztof Wodiczko, *City of Refuge: A 9/11 Memorial* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Abolition of War* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012).

unveiled new prospects for a return to thinking in terms of utopia.<sup>7</sup> In resuming this theme four years later, he moved the discussion from post-communist agoraphilia to global agoraphilia and global politeia. Pursuing the artist's idea of a world without wars, he outlined a vision of transformative processes in the interests of global peace and global transnational democracy. While neither settling the question of their effectiveness nor renouncing their idealism, he ended the piece by citing the last scene of Miloš Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, in which a Native American chief succeeds in doing that which had previously seemed undoable.

I had been keen to get a contribution from Piotr for the catalogue of the exhibition I was preparing for the Łódź Museum, not only because he had previously written on the subject of the utopia visible on the horizon of expectation in Wodiczko's artistic practice, and not just because he was the author of insightful studies of his work. The exhibition and catalogue in large measure showcased the artist's work as it related to dismantling the culture of war and violence, and disarming a memory and culture engaged in the perpetuation and proliferation of the commemoration and cult of wars. It was a subject that encountered resistance in Poland, where thinking about war is centred on the cult of martyrdom, while in cultural narratives it is a topic reserved exclusively for the martyrology of World War II and earlier independence struggles. When, in 2010, we organised Wodiczko's *War Veteran Projection*, I heard professional colleagues say that it wasn't "our" subject. This was despite the fact that the projection was about the experience of Polish veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that military conflicts and tensions in different regions of the world were being reported in the media. Martyrological memory, or a straightforward disinclination to manipulated memory, cast their shadow over the subject of war.

It seemed evident to me that Piotr would be able to get to grips with the subject, given the range of issues mapped out in his books – particularly in *Art and Democracy* – and his interest in art that mounted challenges concerning threats to democracy. For a researcher and critic seeking historical reference points and proclaiming the taking of responsibility for what happens in the public sphere, war was becoming "the most serious challenge of the contemporary world". Moreover, from his perspective as

<sup>7</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, *Agorafilia – Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* [*Agoraphilia – Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*] (Poznań: REBIS, 2010), 152, published in English as *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 149–151.



Exhibition, *Art According to Politics: An Exhibition Devoted to the Memory of Piotr Piotrowski*, Profile Foundation, Warsaw, 2015. Courtesy of the Profile Foundation

a researcher of artistic topography with a global dimension, his analysis of Wodiczko's project entailed an aspiration to bring Eastern Europe into the global agenda.

Unfortunately, Piotr did not live to see the catalogue or the exhibition, which opened a few weeks after he died. The news of his death came as we were in Venice installing the work of Jarosław Kozłowski,<sup>8</sup> an artist who had been one of the most important reference points in his contemporary art-historical discourse. Jarek's reaction was instant: "We'll need to do something." That was when the idea of an exhibition dedicated to Piotr's memory was born. It was clear to us that Krzysztof Wodiczko, Zofia Kulik and Zbigniew Libera should also take part. They were artists whose work he counted among the artistic experiences that determined contemporary visual culture. The exhibition that opened three months later was an improvised event, but we still managed to bring together a provisional archive of Piotr's publications and to display

<sup>8</sup> The *Time Archive* installation, presented at the exhibition *Personal Structures – Crossing Borders*, Global Art Affairs Foundation, Palazzo Mora, Venice, 2015.

works that had been discussed in his texts and in relation to which he had formed his vision of art history.<sup>9</sup> The title of the show, *Sztuka według polityki* (which can be translated as *Art after Politics* or *Art According to Politics*), repeated the title of his book, which was in turn eponymous with the title of a text included in the book, written in 1999 for the catalogue of the exhibition *Negotiators of Art*.<sup>10</sup> I had staged the latter exhibition – about the art of the 90s and the artistic negotiations of identity of the time – with the participation, among others, of the artists who were later to take part in the exhibition devoted to the memory of Piotr Piotrowski.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Art According to Politics: An Exhibition Devoted to the Memory of Piotr Piotrowski*, Jarosław Kozłowski, Zofia Kulik, Zbigniew Libera and Krzysztof Wodiczko, Profile Foundation, Warsaw, 31 July – 19 September 2015.

<sup>10</sup> *Negotiators of Art: Facing Reality*, ed. Bożena Czubak, ex. cat. (Gdańsk: Łaźnia Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000).





PIOTR PIOTROWSKI

## Krzysztof Wodiczko and the Global Politeia

Krzysztof Wodiczko was born in 1943 in Warsaw, a city that until the outbreak of World War II didn't stand out in any particular way on the map of Europe, let alone the world. It was one of the larger, but not the largest, cities in the Old Continent, the capital of a mid-sized state, and – until 1795 – the capital of a great empire known as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which collapsed during the eighteenth century. 1939 and the German *Blitzkrieg* in Poland changed the situation of Warsaw. In 1940, the Nazis created Europe's largest Jewish ghetto there, locking up in it not only the Jews of Warsaw – home of the largest Jewish community in Europe and the second largest in the world after New York – but also thousands of Jews from elsewhere. At some point, the number of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto approached half a million. In 1943, when Krzysztof Wodiczko was being born on the “Aryan” side of the city, an uprising broke out in the Ghetto, crushed after a month of heavy and dramatic fighting. A year later, on 01 August 1944, when most of the Jews in Warsaw had been exterminated, the Poles started what came to be known as the Warsaw Uprising, an insurrection that was subdued by the Germans after two months of fierce fighting. Its consequences were tragic for the inhabitants, soldiers and civilians – the number of casualties is estimated at over 200,000 – as well as for the city itself, which the Germans virtually razed to the ground. The two uprisings resulted in the city's not only symbolic, but also physical annihilation, an unprecedented event in the modern history of Europe.

Krzysztof Wodiczko left Warsaw, or, more precisely, emigrated from Poland, in 1977. The city had been rebuilt after the war and made Poland's capital again, only this time the country was ruled by communists. The artist left at a time when, in Warsaw especially, political opposition had been consolidating, a dynamic that a few years later, in 1980, would result in the establishment of by far the largest anti-communist movement in the Eastern Bloc, the ten-million-strong independent trade union known as

Solidarity. He left at a time when political and social activists seem to have understood the dramatic significance of the Polish armed uprisings from the late-eighteenth through to the mid-twentieth centuries; those freedom struggles usually started in Warsaw, and their most tragic highlights had been the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. This time the political opposition opted for non-violent resistance, and, despite the introduction of martial law in December 1981, succeeded eight years later – in a favourable international situation brought about primarily by the disintegration of the Soviet Union – in dismantling communism in Poland, which was followed by its collapse elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Krzysztof Wodiczko didn't personally witness those events, which doesn't mean that he was out of touch with them. Having left Warsaw, he settled in New York City and, working in Cambridge, Massachusetts – first at MIT, then at Harvard University – became one of the best known and most influential critical artists in the world. He frequently referred to his Polish experiences, starting with a seminal 1986 interview<sup>1</sup> for the *October* quarterly, where he stated clearly that it was in Warsaw – namely in the Foksal Gallery milieu – that his artistic philosophy had effectively crystallised. These Warsaw references have been finalised today in the project of the *World Institute for the Abolition of War*,<sup>2</sup> which is the main subject of this essay. By and large, Wodiczko's earlier immigrant-related projects referred to an experience shared with those who, for whatever reasons, had left their countries of birth. Moreover, one of his first public projections in New York – on the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in 1984/1985 – related to the Cold War, an important twentieth-century experience of Eastern Europe, while also going beyond it. Most Poles considered the Soviet Union to be the sole source of their enslavement, expecting – in vain, as Budapest 1956 and Prague 1968 demonstrated – liberation to come from the United States. Wodiczko showed two missiles, US and Soviet, connected by a padlocked chain, conveying the notion of the two superpowers' shared responsibility for the Cold War and its consequences.

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Crimp, Rosalyn Deutsche and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "A Conversation with Krzysztof Wodiczko", *October* no. 38 (1986), 22–51.

<sup>2</sup> Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Abolition of War* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012). Cf. also Krzysztof Wodiczko, ed. Duncan McCorquodale (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011), 346–351; Wodiczko, *Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War*, Paris, Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie, 2011; Wodiczko, "Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War", *Harvard Design Magazine* no. 33 (2010–2011), 126–135. The Eastern European experience is not referenced in the earlier texts, and appears for the first time in the 2012 book. Interestingly, the Polish edition, *Obalenie wojen* (Kraków: MOCAR, 2013) has "wars" instead of "war".

The geopolitical divide meant that Krzysztof Wodiczko realised no artistic projects in Eastern Europe between his emigration and the fall of communism. The first one to occur afterwards, in 1990, was the *Leninplatz Projection* in the freshly reunited Berlin, staged as part of the city-wide international exhibition *Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit* [*The Finitude of Freedom*]. On the now non-existent Lenin monument, Wodiczko projected the image not of an Eastern European democratic activist, but of an alleged tourist from the East, who was in fact a small-time trader, moving Western consumer goods through the former Iron Curtain. The artist was thus suggesting that the revolutionary idea and its symbols (Lenin) had been defeated by consumerism, pointing out that the desire to be freed from communism and to live in a democracy could be replaced by capitalism. Contrary to what many people believed in 1989, capitalism and democracy are not the same thing; in fact, the former can function as well (if not better) without the latter, something that today, nearly 30 years later, we are all perfectly well aware of. Soon thereafter Wodiczko appeared in Poland, including in Warsaw, with major exhibitions and public art projects. Biographical notes in his numerous publications state that he “lives in New York, Boston and Warsaw”.

The listing of the above facts from Krzysztof Wodiczko's life is not meant as an introduction to writing his biography or to “Polonising” his in fact global art, even if the artist himself often stresses these regional references. In a way, I intend to do the opposite thing. By analysing Wodiczko's most recent project, *The Abolition of War*, I wish to pull Eastern Europe into a global context – to “globalise” it, as it were.

### Global agoraphilia

Agoraphilia means an inner need to enter public space, the agora, a desire to participate in it, to shape public life; it is the opposite of agoraphobia, which means escaping from public space, withdrawing from it, fearing it, resisting it, and also being banned from democratic participation. Agoraphilia is thus not only the opposite of agoraphobia, but also its transgression. Writing about artists working in, or hailing from, Eastern Europe, including Krzysztof Wodiczko – artists who responded to the historical challenge of 1989 – I once called their art “post-communist agoraphilia”,<sup>3</sup> that is, work on creating a new democracy in the region. I am convinced that those

<sup>3</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, “Introduction: Agoraphilia After Communism”, in: idem, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

artists, working in the Czech Republic, Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Hungary, as well as in Russia and Ukraine, did (and are doing) a great job. Although the quality of democracy in the region remains problematic – more so in some countries, less in others – thanks to those artists' agoraphilic stance we are demanding the fulfilment of human and political rights, especially where they are being violated. Artistic agoraphilia is bound up with critical art, but it also creates a perspective for going beyond it – transgressing its deconstructive role and opening up to the future, working for democracy. By exposing various forms of oppression and exclusion – xenophobia, nationalism, homophobia, exploitation, clericalism, etc., art stands a chance to build a new way of thinking, a paradigm free from the above ailments. Those artists aren't loved by the authorities, of course, the latter being interested in autocracy or even tyranny and imperialism. They encounter problems, like Dorota Nieznańska in Poland, accused of offending religious feelings (and ultimately acquitted), like the members of the performance collective Pussy Riot, sent to a post-Gulag camp, like marginalised Hungarian and Bulgarian artists, and many others. But precisely because of the fact that their art encounters the resistance of non- or pseudo-democratic authority, these artists play an extremely important role in creating a "horizon of expectations";<sup>4</sup> to use Reinhart Koselleck's term.

On the other hand, 1989 not only opened democratic prospects for Eastern Europe, but also, ending the Cold War, completely redefined its historical context. The economy, politics and culture of the binary ideological division of the world entered the global era, or, more precisely, reformulated globality. The Cold War was global too, and by no means confined to the two main blocs: besides the First World and the Second one there was also the Third, often finding itself the stage of US-Soviet wrestling, yet observing its own interpretative frameworks. Today's global South is its direct descendant. Naturally, the roots of European global thinking go deeper, at least to the beginnings of the era of geographic "discoveries" and colonisation. But what has been happening since 1989 is mainly globalisation with various forms of resistance. One of the most interesting phenomena is the alter-globalist attitude, which proposes a global – rather than local or isolated – resistance against economic and political globalisation, believing that only such a form makes sense. This is open resistance, solidarising itself

<sup>4</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255–275.

with social groups excluded and repressed by the “Empire”;<sup>5</sup> as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call it.

Globalisation and alter-globalist activism have gone hand in hand with revaluations in art and the rise of agoraphilic practices on a global scale. The main centres of these strategies have been large international exhibitions, including some (but not all) biennales, particularly those with smaller budgets; Ranjit Hoskote calls them “biennials of resistance”,<sup>6</sup> while Thomas Fillitz – referring the title of the 1st Biennale of Sydney to the Dakar Biennale – speaks of “zones of contacts”.<sup>7</sup> The group also includes the Istanbul Biennial. Okwui Enwezor, artistic director of *Documenta 11*, says that these global mega-exhibitions are meetings of diverse cultures and a stage of counter-hegemonic and counter-normative artistic manifestations.<sup>8</sup> Some, of course, disagree.<sup>9</sup> Discussing their argument is not the point here; it is rather that institutional frameworks lend much publicity to agoraphilic art practices, as well as investing them with certain performative functions, especially that they are often accompanied by intense intellectual activity in the form of conferences, symposia and media.

The events of and around 1989 generated positive energy for democracy, and not only in Eastern Europe, where communism was overthrown. In the Republic of South Africa, the rejection of apartheid marked a milestone in the fight against rac-

<sup>5</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Ranjit Hoskote, “Biennials of Resistance: Reflections on the Seventh Gwangju Biennial”, in: *The Biennale Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Ovstebo (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 306–321.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Fillitz, “Contemporary Art of Africa: Coevalness in the Global World”, in: *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, eds. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 116–134.

<sup>8</sup> Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form”, in: *The Biennale Reader*, op. cit., 426–445.

<sup>9</sup> George Baker, for example, believes that “mega-exhibitions” are too big to be effectively perceived by the public; as a result, they serve the “art world” rather than non-professional viewers. Moreover, Baker points to false premises in Enwezor’s argument, who notices in mega-exhibitions a subversive “spectacle” and a manifestation of a “global diaspora”. Cf. George Baker, “The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor”, in: *The Biennale Reader*, op. cit., 446–453. Another author, Joaquin Barriendos, without referring directly to Enwezor, frames global exhibitions, including biennales, as resulting from a strategy of maintaining Western domination of global artistic culture, which he calls “geoaesthetics”; cf. Joaquin Barriendos, “Geopolitics of Global Art: The Reinvention of Latin America as a Geoaesthetic Region”, in: *The Global Art World*, op. cit., 98–114.

ism. The Arab Spring of 2010–2012 can be seen in the same perspective, though it was ultimately a failure, as was the Chinese student revolt of 1989, which ended with the Tiananmen massacre. It is also worth noting that the late 1980s saw the demise of the Latin American military juntas. Alas, this positive energy was accompanied by wars. Of course, there had been many wars since 1945: wars in Korea, Africa and Vietnam, wars in the Middle East, Soviet interventions in Afghanistan and Chechnya, etc. But after 1989 wars marred the atmosphere of optimism.

Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Gulf War began, followed by the disintegration of Yugoslavia and war among its former republics, the first armed conflict in Europe since 1945. And not the last one: in 2014 Russia started a war in Ukraine, annexing Crimea and supporting rebels in the Donbass region. A major factor in the proliferation of wars was doubtless the US military reaction to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, fought by US-led coalitions of many countries, including Poland, led to a rise in international terrorism, massacres in Syria, and radical Islamist militancy in Iraq and Kurdistan. To put it shortly, the end of the Cold War also meant the beginning of a whole series of new bloody conflicts. I am not saying that the end of communism was responsible for those wars; I am only noting that the fall of the Iron Curtain and the post-Cold War euphoria didn't free the world from war; in fact, I think war has become the single most critical challenge that the world faces today. This makes the role of agoraphilic global artists all the more important.

## Un-war

Krzysztof Wodiczko writes:

*I prefer the terms “un-war” and “peace-making” to the word “peace”, because peace is not a simple matter. In making it, one must first confront the social and cultural phenomenon of war and recognise how war is entrenched in our singular and collective minds. Un-war is the new state of mind that enables the process of understanding, uncovering and undoing war. It implies that the war exists as something hidden within us that should be brought symbolically and culturally to our singular consciousness before it erupts outward as bloody conflict; the other implication of the*

*term “un-war” is that war is an old state of mind and a mental condition installed in us from without, through the Culture of War.<sup>10</sup>*

War is thus not – just – an outbreak of armed conflict, but a deeply ingrained cultural phenomenon: the collective cultural superego. The culture of war – present in education, school curricula, high- and lowbrow art, the visual and the discursive arts, philosophy, inherited behavioural patterns, nationalistic ideology, patriotism, tradition, national memory, etc. – constitutes the framework of wars, and in fact their cause. Without a culture of war there would be no wars, because people wouldn't have the concepts to make collective murder imaginable. Taking the lead from the artist, Rosalyn Deutsche expands upon the theme of the “culture of war”.<sup>11</sup> I will try to follow the trope of art.

The culture of war can't be simply revoked, forgotten and eliminated from our collective and individual consciousness. It is a deep, long-term process of educational work. The fundamental question that the artist is posing is therefore: “How can art contribute to undoing the Culture of War and transform it into a new un-war culture?”<sup>12</sup> Of course, Wodiczko has a lot of experience in this kind of work. He is a quintessentially agoraphilic artist with a global reach, working in many countries on different continents. One of his anti-war monuments – a projection on the statue of Abraham Lincoln in Union Square Park in 2012, where the historical memorial was “animated” with the voices and gestures of war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and their relatives, also affected by trauma – stemmed straight from the legacy of his earlier projections on public monuments and buildings, which involved various excluded social groups. Including their loved ones and friends, the growing number of veterans of ever new wars are yet another group of persons excluded and marginalised by the system, alongside homeless people, immigrants and victims of (family, police, criminal) violence, whom Wodiczko helps to become visible and audible in the public space. It wasn't the artist's first war-related project; in 1999 he staged a paradigmatic projection in Hiroshima that dealt with the victims of the US atomic bombing. In fact, many of those victims were Korean immigrants, a group that suffered from exclusion, lack of public rights and social ostracism. For Wodiczko, this “animation of monuments”

<sup>10</sup> Wodiczko, *The Abolition of War*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, “Un-War: An Aesthetic Sketch”, *October* no. 147 (2014), 3–19.

<sup>12</sup> Wodiczko, *The Abolition of War*, 16.



served to expose their ideological and symbolic contents and connotations, to interrupt their shaping of the collective and individual consciousness. From these experiences stems the work with veterans, work that hasn't been limited to memorials. Drawing on his experience of designing vehicles for homeless persons, Wodiczko started using converted military vehicles, mounting projection equipment on the former weapons platforms. Such vehicles "fired" sounds and images in Denver (2008), Liverpool (2009), Warsaw (2010), Eindhoven (2011) and Kraków (2013), projecting audio/video testimonies of war veterans suffering from traumatic memories, psychological and physical damage, the loss of family and friends, and so on. Condensations of those testimonies – not only by veterans, but also by their loved ones, most often women – were then projected onto a building's façade to the sound of machine gun fire.<sup>13</sup> Another war veteran projection was *The Veteran's Flame* (New York, 2009; Wrocław, 2010), where the image of a burning candle flame accompanied the recorded voices of soldiers sharing accounts of their traumatic experiences. A different poetic was employed in ...*Out of Here* (Boston, 2010; New York, 2011), where viewers gathered in a darkened gallery heard gunshots from behind windows projected high overhead. Devoted to veterans, those projects are like war from the other side of the mirror, the mirror here being the TV screen, where war is shown every day. Soldiers, their heroism, but also their death. What we aren't shown is what happens to them when they return home. To reach them one needs to get through to the other side of the mirror, where one finds not an unreal, topsy-turvy world, as in Lewis Carroll's novels, but the essentially real one, never shown on TV, never mentioned by journalists or politicians.

Those projections fit into the perspective of critical or deconstructive art, whereas the work I wish to discuss now, *Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War*, seems to transgress it. In fact, Wodiczko had already foretold such a transgression: in a text describing the idea of transforming New York into a "city of refuge", that is one accepting immigrants from all over the world and thus paying homage to the victims of the 11 September attacks, he wrote:

*After post-structuralism, it is now time for self-reconstruction, towards new visions and constructions, political, social and cultural. Envisaging*

<sup>13</sup> Transcripts of those testimonies were published in Krzysztof Wodiczko, ed. Bożena Czubak, ex. cat. (Lublin: Labirynt Gallery, 2013).



Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War*, 2010. Courtesy of the Profile Foundation

*and designing new, engaging, inclusive, agonistic, memorial projects must become part of this emancipatory agenda.*<sup>14</sup>

The project provided not just for the ideological and political “disarmament” of a war memorial – the Triumphal Arch in Paris, built between 1806 and 1836 to commemorate the Napoleonic Wars (with a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier added after WWI); nor is it simply one of the “counter-monuments” popularised by late-twentieth-century artists. Rather it is an “un-monument”, part of a wider concept of “un-war” and “global peace”.

The design itself is a monumental construction in the form of scaffolding, covering the entire Triumphal Arch, featuring platforms allowing the viewer to peruse the monument, its sculpted decorations, iconography, and its historical/ideological narrative, accompanied by comments on that narrative, electronic equipment for showing film materials – war-related and not – plasma screens, pixel boards, etc. Also envisaged are conference, lecture and seminar spaces, and a Great Discussion Forum for the Abolition of War. The WIAW agenda provides for diverse forms of educational, academic and artistic activities serving a culture of un-war. I will not discuss the details, which can be found in the artist’s book, but let me cite his conclusion: “Nietzsche said that one should have the kind of past that one deserves. We should act now to make ourselves deserving of a past without war.”<sup>15</sup>

A single institute will not overthrow the culture of war. Wodiczko is therefore pointing to another initiative: a Central European Institute for the Abolition of War.

### Global politeia

Krzysztof Wodiczko, as we said, was born in Warsaw, a Central- or Eastern-European (depending on your viewpoint) city, where the cult of child soldiers fallen in the Uprising of 1944 is particularly strong. Of course, children have been used – and have died – as soldiers all over the world. In Warsaw, though, their death – even if it wasn’t the first such case in history – has been surrounded since 1944 by a particular aura of heroism. At the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw, a structure much

<sup>14</sup> Krzysztof Wodiczko, *City of Refuge: A 9/11 Memorial* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008), 43.

<sup>15</sup> Wodiczko, *The Abolition of War*, 83.

more modest than the Paris Arch, being the only surviving fragment of the former Pałac Saski, where the Polish Army General Staff was located before 1939 (as was the Wehrmacht HQ during the 1939–1945 occupation), the remains of a 14-year-old boy fallen in the Battle of Lviv (also known as the Defence of Lwów) in 1918 were interred, naturally before World War Two. In *The Abolition of War*, Wodiczko cites the statute of the International Criminal Tribunal, which declares that the recruitment and use of under-15-year-olds as soldiers constitutes a war crime.<sup>16</sup> This should cause us to rethink the Polish cult of child soldiers and – especially – their leaders, as well as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier itself. Notwithstanding the mass sacrifice of 1944, the focus here is on children and young people raised in a cult of war participation, in a culture of war and national martyrdom. The purpose of the Warsaw-based Institute would be to transform this culture of war into a culture of un-war, not only in Poland, but also throughout the region.

For such a project of a global culture of un-war to succeed, two things are necessary. Firstly, the Paris – Warsaw, or Eastern Europe – Western Europe axis isn't and won't be sufficient to ensure global peace. Other regional institutes need to be established: in Belgrade, Moscow, Beijing, Damascus, Washington, and many other places. Only such a global network working for un-war will make sense. Secondly, only democracy lets people influence the political reality, and thus also whether the culture of war will be eliminated from public discourse, historical memory and political projects. In other words, working for real democracy – radical, agonistic, non-exclusive – can also be a work for peace. Global peace requires a global democracy, a kind of global democratic constitution – a world politeia, not necessarily in the Aristotelian meaning of the term, reserved for the Athenian democracy, but in an expanded, agonistic character, including all the citizens of the world – the entire, as Hardt and Negri would say, “multitude”.<sup>17</sup> The objective of the artists of global agoraphilia, therefore, should be to build a global politeia, a global agonistic democracy. Otherwise their efforts will be in vain. In today's world, where politics has become global – and where the economy, with its agents in the shape of multinational corporations and states is also global – only global resistance makes sense. We should be building democracy

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2004). Cf. also Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

in a transnational, rather than national perspective, because local political structures are too weak to protect citizens from exploitation by global corporations that exert considerable – if not decisive – influence on national governments; they are also unable to protect them from war, sometimes doing the opposite thing. Faced with such a global political/economic assault, only a global democracy and global institutions, e.g. transnational trade unions, human rights organisations or global parliaments, will offer the chance of successful resistance. The same applies to global peace. It can only be achieved through global democracy.

Building his Institutes for the Abolition of War – the World one in Paris and the Central European one in Warsaw – Krzysztof Wodiczko should be aware of three things. Firstly, two institutes are too few to prevent a global war. There have to be more of them, as has been said, in all parts of the world. Secondly, such institutes will only make sense if they operate in a favourable social environment. There is no education without democracy – only manipulation. So if the educational efforts of the war abolition institutes are to mark a step towards global peace, these institutes need to function within democratic societies, willing to draw conclusions from peaceful education and eliminate warmongering politicians by democratic means: through elections and referendums. And thirdly, in a situation of global wars (even if fought in local theatres), democracy in one country won't be an effective peace-defending instrument, because the dictators of non-democratic, semi-democratic or quasi-democratic countries will be outside the control of the global democratic community. The idea that the global economy can be used as a means of exerting pressure on the non-democratic part of the world is a naive illusion, if only because of the fact that multinational corporations are interested in profits, not in global peace (global war can be better business), and that it is actually China and Russia, both non-democratic countries, that are able to decide about the rest of the world using economic instruments. So the opposite is actually the case – it is the democratic world that is held hostage economically by non-democratic countries. That is why we need a global democracy instead of the democracy of nation states, which has proved ineffective and doesn't guarantee world peace.

### Krzysztof Wodiczko towards un-art

Let us finally stress: when Krzysztof Wodiczko speaks and acts for democracy and peace, for the excluded and repressed, he always speaks and acts in the name of art.

His activity has always been artistic. This seemingly banal observation has fundamental significance. Today we are confronting “un-art”, a phenomenon that doesn’t belong to the tradition of anti-art, initiated by the Dadaists in the early twentieth century and continued in the following decades. Anti-art created a reverse of art, turning around values previously regarded as artistic, which doesn’t mean that it wasn’t artistically – in the institutional sense this time – successful. But un-art is a phenomenon of a different kind. It is part of a much larger phenomenon known as global art, which also includes anti-art, art, and what Hans Belting calls “post-artistic” and “post-ethnic” practices: post-historical, for it transgresses the terms of art-historical analysis, and post-ethnic, because it is again about the expression of identity (ethnic identity in this case) rather than about performativity, about making art and enacting it.<sup>18</sup> Owing to the changing status of artists from the former Third World, known today as the global South, both of Belting’s terms are practically connected. Previously, these artists used to be the subject of ethnographic interest, as creators of the non-individualised production of folk artefacts of religious, cultural or ritualistic significance, and of those sold as “souvenirs” in Western markets. Today – following the milestone marked by the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre* at the Centre Pompidou in 1989 (which featured Krzysztof Wodiczko) – they are considered as contemporary artists; their work is no longer studied by anthropologists or ethnographers, and has become the domain of art-critical reflection. This is a significant shift on the artistic map of the world. It is these artists and their art, as well as the new media and “glocal” issues that have subverted the status of art history’s analytical terms. Un-art also includes practices that use artistic methods, strategies and institutions as much as they exploit their symbolic capital.

The nearest example of un-art so construed is the work of Artur Żmijewski: both his artistic projects and his curatorial work, the most spectacular result of which so far has been the 7th Berlin Biennale in 2012. There, Żmijewski invited both certified artists and those not “formally” or “officially” recognised as such, e.g. members of the Occupy Movement. The former used their own artistic status, and that of the Biennale as an artistic institution, to realise political projects. One such project was Jonas Staal’s *New World Summit*, popularly known as the “congress of terrorists”, where the artist

<sup>18</sup> Hans Belting, “Contemporary Art and the Museum in the Global Age”, in: *Contemporary Art and the Museum: A Global Perspective*, eds. Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 16–38; Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate”, in: *The Global Art World*, op. cit., 38–73.



had invited representatives (i.e. lawyers) of organisations classified as terrorist by the EU and the US in order to discuss their exclusion and highlight a number of issues and grievances thereby caused. It is obvious (and this was precisely Staal and Żmijewski's strategy) that such a "congress" could only take place within a society that understands artistic "convention" and recognises the Biennale's "protective umbrella". It was also courtesy of the artistic institution and its symbolic capital that the "congress" gained publicity. That this communication code is unique to Europe and is viewed differently in other parts of the world is demonstrated by the problems the project's realisation encountered in Kochi, India.<sup>19</sup> I don't even want to think what would happen in the United States...

Żmijewski developed the curatorial strategy on the basis of his famous manifesto *The Applied Social Arts*, where he argued that the artist should enter the field of knowledge and politics not as an "artist" – that is as a person of ambiguous position, not treated seriously in the context of the declared objectives – but as an equal partner of scholars and politicians. The condition of success is for his actions to be judged on their effectiveness, not poeticality. Not art history, but knowledge and political effectiveness are to be the evaluation criteria.<sup>20</sup> This is, of course, an agoraphilic agenda – an agenda, if we take into account Żmijewski's preoccupations as artist and curator, of global agoraphilia. But it is also a good example of un-art, since it formulates alternative, non-artistic points of reference, taps into socially recognised channels of artistic distribution, and exploits the symbolic capital of art and its institutions.

In Krzysztof Wodiczko's case the situation is, however, much more complex than that, if only because the artist uses the forms – not to say aesthetics – of traditional media, though in a wholly non-traditional setting and scale. Anyone who has seen Wodiczko's projects has no doubt about the importance he attaches to form. It is, of course, a special kind of form, correlated with the engineering of his tools: the projections, the vehicles, etc. We might jokingly say that Wodiczko is the best artist among engineers and the best engineer among artists. An artist, though, who attaches immense importance not only to the function, but also to the form of his projects. And, naturally, a global artist, an agoraphilic global artist, since he not only works all around the world, but also deals with issues that concern the whole world. Still, this "formal" element of

<sup>19</sup> <http://newworldsummit.eu/locations/kochi/> (accessed May 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Artur Żmijewski, *The Applied Social Arts* (Dublin: Fire Station Artists' Studios, 2010).

his practice means that inscribing him in the main narrative of un-art seems highly problematic. In his well-known essay,<sup>21</sup> Andrzej Turowski focuses on the avant-garde trope of Wodiczko's art, using the term "avant-garde" in its historical sense, meaning the revolutionary tradition of Russian (Vladimir Tatlin, Alexander Rodchenko) and Polish (Władysław Strzemiński, Mieczysław Szczuka) constructivism. I don't intend to polemicise. Turowski makes many pertinent observations, especially with regard to Wodiczko's early work, though he also discusses his later projects. What I wish to do, however, is to point out what makes Wodiczko's art different from this tradition, especially in ideological terms.

A lot can be said about early Soviet avant-garde artists, but not that they were democrats. Wodiczko is a democrat in the first place. It wouldn't be fair to blame Russian constructivists for the mass crimes committed by Lenin, Trotsky, Dzerzhinsky and many other Bolshevik functionaries. The Soviet avant-gardists had a rather complex relationship with the Soviet state, but they shared a similar totalitarian language with, and showed political sympathy towards that state, even if that sympathy wasn't always reciprocated. It is not in democracy that they located their hopes for social emancipation, but in dictatorship – the dictatorship of the party of the proletariat, defined by Lenin as the avant-garde of the working class. The point is not that Wodiczko grew up in a communist country, so he had no special reason to love the communists the way Soviet avant-garde artists did, but that he locates the chance for building a global politeia not in dictatorial methods, but in democracy – in a radical, agonistic democracy. His cult of form can probably be derived from the tradition mentioned by Turowski – but its functionalisation cannot.

In order to pinpoint those differences, I will compare Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* (1919/1920) with Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War* (2010/2011). Neither has been constructed, though Tatlin made a wooden model of his famous design, and both are engineering projects, even if the technology differs. What matters, however, is not that electronics replace steel, but the purpose of those projects. We know already that the Paris Arch is to house the World Institute for the Abolition of War. "Tatlin's Tower", in turn, was

<sup>21</sup> Andrzej Turowski, "Krzysztof Wodiczko and Polish Art of the 1970s", in: *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, eds. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl. (New York/Cambridge, MA: MoMA/The MIT Press, 2002), 154–161; Andrzej Turowski, "Wodiczko and Poland in the 1970s", in: *Krzysztof Wodiczko*, op. cit., 13–25.



meant to be not only a symbol of imperial policy, a place of communist propaganda on behalf of a global proletarian revolution, but also the headquarters of its bureaucracy. Both ideological projects – a world democracy or *politeia*, and an international communist revolution – share a global character, but differ fundamentally in terms of method; Wodiczko prefers education, which can only be effective in a democratic society. The Third International wasn't a peaceful organisation; the peace it said it was fighting for was to be achieved through a bloody and ruthless war. Its members may really have desired peace – though opinions are divided on this – but their preferred methods were bellicose: global peace was to ensue only after a global revolution. Wodiczko, in turn, is well aware that global peace is to be achieved not through war, but through democracy. So we have war culture on the one hand (Tatlin), and un-war culture on the other (Wodiczko).

Let me note one more key difference. The Comintern was conceived as a means of building an international world and international societies, or society. This new society was designed not only among nations, but also on their ruins. First destroy, then build – that is the Leninist strategy. Wodiczko's is exactly the opposite: to transform rather than destroy, and to reconstruct rather than construct. This not an internationalistic strategy, but a cosmopolitan one, and Wodiczko's cosmopolitanism is something that has been noted by many researchers, e.g. by Rosalyn Deutsche.<sup>22</sup> The word "cosmopolitanism" is a compound of the Greek *kosmos* (world) and *polītēs* (citizen). Cosmopolitanism differs fundamentally from internationalism in that it respects the place and builds its vision on these grounds. Critical cosmopolitanism and its utopia are a "no! place" rather than an "un-place", something that Wodiczko himself admits.<sup>23</sup> Cosmopolitanism is a topographical attitude, respecting the *lieu* and the *milieu*; most of all it is an ethical attitude. As Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, cosmopolitanism is an "ethics in the world of strangers".<sup>24</sup> Wodiczko feels closer to a world of strangers living in a city-cosmos rather than to international comrades.

Both designs, of course, were utopian. We all know how the global revolutionary project ended (or hasn't it ended yet?). How will the project of war-abolition institutes

<sup>22</sup> Deutsche, "Un-War", 15–18.

<sup>23</sup> "Proteza Proroków" i inne instrumenty demokracji. Z Krzysztofem Wodiczko rozmawia Jarosław Lubiak", *Kresy* nos. 3–4 (51–52) (2002), 186.

<sup>24</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

end? This is something we probably won't know. Let me conclude this essay by referring to a scene from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), a film by Miloš Forman, a filmmaker born in Prague but, like Wodiczko, based in the US. The main protagonist, McMurphy, challenges "Chief" Bromden, a silent Native American of imposing stature, to lift a heavy marble sink. The man refuses, implying the sink is too heavy to be lifted. McMurphy tries, to no avail, but is defiant for having at least tried. The message is obvious: you have to keep trying even if the results don't look optimistic. But there is one more scene in the movie, the final one. After McMurphy's death, which comes as a kind of liberation, "Chief" Bromden wants to free himself too. He easily lifts the seemingly too-heavy sink, smashes a barred window, and breaks out of the mental ward that has become his prison.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> This text was originally published as Piotr Piotrowski, „Krzysztof Wodiczko and the Global Politea”, trans. M. Wawrzyńczak, in: Krzysztof Wodiczko: On Behalf of the Public Domain, ed. Bożena Czubak (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2015), 49-60.



## Authors' Biographical Notes

**Bożena Czubak** – art historian and art critic, curator of numerous exhibition projects presented at Polish and international institutions, author and editor of many publications on contemporary visual culture. President of the Profile Foundation in Warsaw.

**Jakub Dąbrowski** graduated in both law and art history. In 2013 he completed his PhD thesis at the Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Visual Culture Management at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, where he lectures on the history of contemporary art and copyright law. His main field of research covers the relationship between art and the law, as well as the history of post-WWII Polish art. In 2010 he won a Polish Association of Art Historians award for the best scholarly work of young members of the association; in 2014 he won the Jerzy Stajuda Prize for Art Criticism for his book *Cenzura w sztuce polskiej po 1989 roku* [*Censorship in Polish Art after 1989*].

**Agata Jakubowska** is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She runs – together with Magdalena Radomska – The Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central European Art. She is the author of *On the Margins of the Mirror: The Female Body in Polish Women Artists' Works* (in Polish, 2004) and *Multiple Portrait of Alina Szapocznikow's Oeuvre* (in Polish, 2008); the editor of *Alina Szapocznikow. Awkward Objects* (2011) and *Zofia Kulik: Methodology, My Love* (2019); and the co-editor (with Katy Deepwell) of *All-Women Art Spaces in Europe in the Long 1970s* (2018). Over the last few years she has been working on a project devoted to the history of women-only exhibitions in Poland ([www.wystawykobiet.amu.edu.pl](http://www.wystawykobiet.amu.edu.pl)). She is currently concentrating on a book devoted to the Polish sculptor Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931–1999) and co-editing (together with Magdalena Radomska) a book on horizontal art history.

**Izabela Kowalczyk** – an art and cultural historian, art critic and curator. She holds a PhD degree in history (2001) and a habilitation degree in cultural studies (2012), and works as an Associate Professor at the University of Arts in Poznań, where she is also a dean of the Faculty of Artistic Education and Curatorial Studies. Her primary area of interest is contemporary art in Poland and Central Europe. Her research focuses on issues such as feminist art, critical art, art and democracy, collaborative art and artistic responses to recent history. She is the author of publications on critical art, feminist art, and interpretations of recent history, including the books *Ciało i władza. Polska sztuka krytyczna lat 90.* [*Body and Power: Polish Critical Art of the 90s*] (2002); *Niebezpieczne związki sztuki z ciałem* [*Dangerous Liaisons of Art and Body*] (2002); *Matki-Polki, Chłopcy i Cyborgi. Sztuka i feminizm w Polsce* [*Polish Mothers, Boys and Cyborgs: Art and Feminism in Poland*] (2010); and *Podróż do przeszłości. Interpretacje najnowszej historii w polskiej sztuce krytycznej* [*Journey to the Past: Interpretations of Recent History in Polish Critical Art*] (2010), as well as around 250 articles. She took part in the preparation and research for the exhibition *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Vienna, Warsaw, main curator Bojana Pejić) (2008, 2009), and was one of the advisors for the PATTERNS Lectures of the ERSTE Foundation and WUS Austria (2010/2011). She has curated exhibitions including *Dangerous Liaisons* (Arsenal City Gallery, Poznań, 2002) (with Zofia Kulik, Katarzyna Kozyra, Zbigniew Libera and Artur Żmijewski, among others); *The Allure of Power* (Arsenal City Gallery, Poznań, 2009) (with Izabella Gustowska, Elżbieta Jabłońska and Zbigniew Libera, among others); *Microutopias of the Everyday*, an exhibition of the collection of the Centre of Contemporary Art Znaki Czasu, Toruń, 2013–2014; *Ethnographers in the Region*, a presentation of ethnographic photography from the archive of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, 2014; and *Polish Women. Patriots, Rebels* (Arsenal City Gallery, Poznań, 2017).

**Jarosław Kozłowski** is a leading Polish conceptual artist. He initiated the international artistic network NET (1971) and participated in the Fluxus movement. During the 1960s and 1970s he was engaged in analytical reflection and linguistic studies, as well as performance art, and was considered to be one of the most significant conceptualists. In the 1980s he began to create large-scale installations that criticised how art functions in society, and series of works devoted to demythologising art. Since the

1990s Kozłowski has created a number of spectacular installations that deal with the problems of modernist traditions and the social and political context of art. Born in Srem in 1945, he studied painting at the State Graduate School of Visual Arts in Poznań (today the University of Arts) from 1963–1969, where he has also taught painting and drawing since 1967. From 1981–1987 he served as the academy's rector. He has also taught at the Statens kunstakademi in Oslo (1992–1997); the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunste in Amsterdam (1992–2004); the Art Academy Without Walls in Lusaka (1999, 2001); and at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (2005–2010). In 1971 he initiated the NET project – an international artistic exchange. From 1972–1990 he founded and then ran the Akumulatory Gallery in Poznań, which presented the works of Polish and international avant-garde artists. From 1991–1993 he was the programming curator of the gallery and collection of the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw. He has held fellowships with the British Council in London (1979) and DAAD Berlin (1984–1985). He lives and works in Poznań.

**Pawel Leszkowicz** is a Polish academic and art historian, and a freelance curator specialising in international contemporary art and visual culture, and LGBTQ art and studies. He created the *Ars Homo Erotica* (2010) exhibition for the National Museum in Warsaw, and has curated numerous queer exhibitions and symposia in Poland and the UK. Leszkowicz has published books on Helen Chadwick, the male nude, and LGBTQ rights and art in Poland and internationally. His essay contributions have been published by Routledge, Palgrave Macmillan, New York University Press, Ashgate, Manchester University Press and USC Libraries. He has been a Marie Curie Fellow at the University of Sussex, a Senior Fulbright Fellow at the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at USC in Los Angeles, and a EURIAS Fellow at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. He teaches at the Department of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

**Steven Mansbach**, Distinguished University Professor and Professor of the History of Twentieth-Century Art at the University of Maryland, focuses his research and teaching interests on the genesis and reception of “classical” modern art, roughly from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century. With interests that encompass the whole of Europe, his specific area of scholarly

publication is the art of Central and Eastern Europe, from the Baltic north to the Adriatic south. On this topic he has published numerous books, articles, exhibition catalogues and essays, including *Advancing a Different Modernism* (2018), *Riga's Capital Modernism* (2013), *Graphic Modernism* (2007), *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939* (1999), and *Standing in the Tempest: Painters of the Hungarian Avant-Garde* (1991). He has also taught this subject as a professor in Germany, Poland, Hungary and South Africa, and at several American universities. In addition to holding fellowships and university professorships in the United States, Europe and Africa, he served for almost a decade as associate dean of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at Washington's National Gallery of Art, and as the founding dean and director of the American Academy in Berlin.

**Adam Mazur** PhD – art historian, freelance curator, editor-in-chief of *Postmedium.org* magazine. Assistant Professor at the University of Arts in Poznań. In autumn 2019, Kraków-based Universitas will publish his book *Mutilated World: Histories of Photography in Central Europe 1839–2018*. The interview published in this book is part of his long-term research concerning the Foksal Gallery milieu.

**Bojana Pejić** is an art historian, born in 1948 in Belgrade. From 1977 to 1991 she was the curator at the Student Cultural Center of Belgrade University. Since 1991 she has lived in Berlin. She was a guest professor at Humboldt University in Berlin in 2003, and at the Institute for Cultural Studies at the University of Oldenburg from 2006–2007. She was also a guest professor (of gender studies) at the Central European University in Budapest (winter 2013). She was the chief curator of the exhibition *After the Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe*, organised by the Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1999), which was also presented at the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest (2000) and the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2000–2001). In 2008 she curated the international exhibition *Artist-Citizen, 49th October Salon* in Belgrade. She was the chief curator of the exhibition *Gender Check* (MUMOK Vienna, 2009–2010, and Warsaw, 2011), and an editor of *Gender Check: Art and Theory in Eastern Europe – A Reader* (2010). She recently curated the exhibition *Good Girls\_ Memory, Desire, Power* at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC) in Bucharest (2013), and co-curated the exhibition *HERO MOTHER – Contemporary Art by Post-Communist Women Rethinking Heroism* (Berlin, 2016).

Since 2014 she has been a guest lecturer at the Bauhaus University Weimar for the Public Art and New Strategies course. She is also a senior adviser at the New Europe Collage in Bucharest for the seminar Periodization in the History of Art and its Conundrums (2018–2020).

**Magdalena Radomska** is a post-Marxist art historian and historian of philosophy, and an Assistant Professor at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She holds a PhD in art history, and has received scholarships from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, and Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. She was a director and lecturer of the *Writing Humanities after the Fall of Communism* course at the Central European University in Budapest in 2009. In 2013 her book *The Politics of Movements of Hungarian Neoavantgarde (1966–80)* was published. She is currently engaged in research on post-communist art in post-communist Europe (grant received from the Polish National Science Centre) and on the criticism of capitalism in art (book: *The Plural Subject: Art and Crisis after 2008*), and – as her second PhD – is writing a monograph on post-Marxism. She is a member of both the Polish and Hungarian AICA, and editor of the magazine *Czas Kultury*. She is a founder of the Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central European Art.

**Andrzej Turowski** – critic and art historian, Professor Emeritus of modern art history at the Department of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Burgundy in Dijon. Prior to 1983 Turowski conducted research and lectured in modern art history at the Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. As an art critic he cooperated with the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw. His research is focused on the history and ideology of the avant-garde in Central Europe, Russia and France in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He is the author of several hundred academic dissertations and critical articles published in many languages, and twelve books, including *Polish Constructivism* (1981), *Existe-t-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est?* (1986), *Builders of the World* (2000), and *Malevich in Warsaw* (2002). He has curated numerous exhibitions, most notably *Fin des temps ! L'histoire n'est plus* in Toulon (2004), *Maranatha* in Poznań and Warsaw (2006), *Awake and Dream and Particolare* at the Palazzo Donà, Venice (2009, 2011), and *A Theory of Vision: A Review* in Warsaw (2010). Since 1984 he has lived and worked in Paris.





Opening of the 2nd Congress of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies, 9 September 2010, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. From the left: Jacek Gulczyński (pro-rector of the AMU), Agata Jakubowska (convenor of the congress), Tadeusz Żuchowski (director of the Institute of Art History, AMU), Piotr Piotrowski (EAM chair). Photo: Ryszard Rau. The Institute of Art History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań Archive.

# Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central European Art



Piotr Piotrowski  
Center for Research  
On East-Central  
European Art

The Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central European Art was created to continue the academic research conducted by Piotr Piotrowski (1952–2015) and to preserve his material and intellectual legacy.

In line with the scope of research undertaken by Piotr Piotrowski, the Center's activities cover modern and contemporary art – beginning with the avant-garde movement of the early 20th century and ending with contemporary phenomena. The geographic scope of research conducted and inspired by the Center covers the art and history of Central and Eastern Europe in the global perspective.

The basic aim of the Center is to popularise and continue Piotr Piotrowski's research, both through academic activity (conducting and supporting research both on Piotrowski's legacy and on the art of Central and Eastern Europe in the global context) and through education (the development of an international offer of lectures and seminars). Our long-term goal consists of creating a critical methodological apparatus concerning the art of Central and Eastern Europe in the global context.

The Center serves as a platform to support and enable contact between researchers who explore the art of Central and Eastern Europe by organising a biannual event: the East-Central European Art Forum; by preparing publications; and through a broad offer of lectures crucial both for experts and beginners alike.

The Center enjoys a material foundation consisting of the Piotr Piotrowski Archive (donated to Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań by Maria Żuk-Piotrowska) and Piotrowski's personal library (bought by UAM), which was planned as both an introductory and comprehensive collection related to this field of research globally, and is being systematically expanded and developed.

[www.piotrpiotrowskicenter.amu.edu.pl](http://www.piotrpiotrowskicenter.amu.edu.pl)



## Index

- Abramović Marina 82  
Agamben Giorgio 133  
Althusser Louis 46, 52, 94, 129, 186  
András Edit 10, 12, 88, 165, 179  
Appiah Kwame Anthony 216  
Aquino de Angelo 22, 29  
Arendt Hannah 76, 80, 168  
Aristotle 79  
Atkins Robert 120
- Badiou Alain 189  
Baetens Jan 9, 172  
Bak Imre 24, 94  
Baker George 205  
Bakoš Jan 82  
Bakunin Mikhail 171  
Balibar Étienne 184  
Balogh Andrea 149  
Banasiak Jakub 129  
Barlow Clare 161–162  
Barr Alfred H. 48  
Barrie Dennis 122  
Barriandos Joaquin 205  
Bartelik Marek 158  
Barthes Roland 41, 94, 174, 176  
Bass Alan 170
- Bataille Georges 52  
Baudin Antoine 49  
Becker Kathrin 82  
Beke László 34, 82  
Belting Hans 11, 144, 205, 213  
Benjamin Walter 90  
Benson Timothy O. 47  
Bereś Jerzy 31, 76, 167  
Bereziański Andrzej 22  
Berg Hubert van den 9, 172  
Bernatowicz Piotr 177–178  
Beuys Joseph 84, 98–100  
Bhabha Homi 184  
Blagojević Slobodan 82  
Blake Nayland 152  
Blanchot Maurice 75, 79  
Bobako Monika 114  
Bojanović Arandel 179  
Bojarska Katarzyna 8, 93  
Borkowski Grzegorz 195  
Borowski Wiesław 25–26, 37  
Borowski Włodzimierz 33  
Bortkiewicz Paweł 114  
Bourdieu Pierre 40, 56, 120, 135  
Boym Svetlana 76, 80, 83  
Breguła Karolina 156

- Brockhaus Christoph 47  
 Bru Sascha 9, 172  
 Bryl Mariusz 70  
 Bryson Bill 179–180  
 Brzyski Anna 12, 29, 50, 58, 69, 144, 167, 171, 178, 197, 203  
 Bubnova Iara 87  
 Buchloh Benjamin H.D. 101  
 Buck-Morss Susan 11, 183  
 Buddensieg Andrea 205, 213  
 Burgin Victor 186  
 Burt Richard 121  
 But Georgiana 164  
 Butler Judith 90, 121  
  
 Campos David 10  
 Camus Albert 100, 176  
 Cattelan Maurizio 134, 136  
 Ćekić Jovan 82  
 Chakrabarty Dipesh 184  
 Chopin Henri 24–25, 94  
 Christina, queen of Sweden 154  
 Cicero 79  
 Clapp Jane 120  
 Clark T.J. 101  
 Claus Carlfriedrich 24, 94  
 Cooper Emmanuel 151  
 Corcoran Steven 182  
 Crimp Douglas 202  
 Czapliński Przemysław 114  
 Czubak Bożena 17, 53, 106, 195, 199, 208, 217  
 Ćufer Eda 85  
  
 d'Amato Alphonse 122  
 DaCosta Kaufmann Thomas 11, 30, 51, 67, 172  
 Daubaraite Jurga 179  
 Davies Jon 153  
 Davis Withney 152–153, 155  
 Dąbrowski Jakub 14, 16, 119  
 Dąbrowski Jarosław 111  
 Deisler Guillermo 29  
 Demenko Anna 140  
 Denischenko Irina 179  
 Derrida Jacques 75, 77, 79–80, 90, 170, 173, 175  
 Deutsche Rosalyn 11, 109, 129–130, 186, 202, 207, 216  
 Didi-Huberman Georges 52  
 Ditcher Ivaylo 82  
 Djikia Alexander 134  
 Djordjević Goran 85  
 Dłużniewski Andrzej 31  
 Domańska Ewa 35  
 Dossin Catherine 30  
 Drabik Jacek 26  
 Dubin Steven C. 121  
 Duchamp Marcel 95, 102  
 Dudás Barbara 57, 115  
 Duncan Carol 144, 160  
 Dvořák Max 51  
 Dyer Richard 161  
 Dzerzhinsky Felix 215  
  
 Ecker Gisela 82  
 Elantkowski Jan 57, 115

- Elliott David 85  
Eng Advid L. 76  
Engels Friedrich 177  
Enwezor Okwui 205
- Fangor Wojciech 82  
Fedeńczak Agata 177  
Fejes Narcisz 149  
Fernandez Dominique 151  
Feyerabend Paul K. 53  
Filipovic Elena 205  
Fillitz Thomas 205  
Finley Karen 121  
Fish Stanley 122  
Forman Miloš 197, 217  
Foster Hal 101, 103, 140  
Foucault Michel 8, 51, 102, 120, 123, 125, 135, 140  
Fowkes Maja 10  
Fowkes Reuben 10  
Franus Ewa 77, 82–83  
Freedberg David 134  
Freud Sigmund 52
- Gabriel Else 82  
Gallop Jane 89  
Garcia Rodrigo 114, 137  
Gauden Grzegorz 43  
Gierek Edward 124  
Girenko Nikolai 141  
Gotovac Tomislav 167  
Gott Ted 161  
Gramsci Antonio 184
- Greenberg Clement 128  
Grigorescu Ion 167  
Groys Boris 11, 183, 185  
Grůň Daniel 10  
Gržinić Marina 82, 185  
Guelman Marat 133, 141
- Haacke Hans 102, 122  
Habermas Jürgen 87, 171  
Hak Janusz 26  
Hal Marieke van 205  
Hänsgen Sabine 82  
Hardt Michael 174, 181–182, 205, 211  
Härm Anders 164  
Havel Václav 171  
Hegel Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 79  
Hjartarson Benedikt 9, 172  
Holly Michael Ann 69–70  
Holquist Michael 122  
Holzer Jenny 102  
Hoptman Laura 215  
Horne Peter 152  
Hoskote Ranjit 205  
Hrankowska Teresa 125  
Hurley Robert 120
- Iveković Sanja 82
- Jakubowska Agata 14–15, 17, 61, 72  
Janiak Joanna 96–97, 105  
Jansen Sue C. 121  
Jarecka Dorota 157  
Jay Karl 151

- Jedliński Jaromir 39  
 John Paul II, pope 99, 134  
 Joyeux-Prunel Béatrice 30  
 Jur Andrzej 22
- Kabakov Ilya 178  
 Kaczyński Jarosław 108, 146  
 Kaczyński Lech 108, 114, 137, 146  
 Kalinowski Konstanty 31, 35, 136  
 Kandinsky Wassily 36–37, 39, 95  
 Kant Immanuel 79  
 Kantor Tadeusz 25–26  
 Katz Jonathan D. 161  
 Kazanjian David 76  
 Kemp-Welch Wanda 47  
 Kębłowski Janusz 36  
 Khrushchev Nikita 83  
 Kiepuszewski Rafał 158  
 Kiossev Alexander 184  
 Kitliński Tomasz 144, 147  
 Klamann Grzegorz 103, 108  
 Kołakowski Leszek 43  
 Korduba Piotr 177  
 Koselleck Reinhart 204  
 Kosinsky Ryszard 57, 115  
 Kostełowski Andrzej 22, 31  
 Kovalev Andrej 82  
 Kowalczyk Izabela 14, 16, 93, 103, 143, 188–189  
 Kowalski Grzegorz 30  
 Kozłowski Jarosław 8, 12, 15, 21–23, 25, 31, 37, 59, 94–95, 198–199  
 Kozyra Katarzyna 104, 108, 131, 136, 166, 168
- Kreivytė Laima 164  
 Kristeva Julia 94  
 Kršinić-Lozica Ana 179  
 Kruger Barbara 102  
 Krukowski Wojciech 30–31, 122  
 Krupnova Maria 179  
 Kubicki Roman 114  
 Kuhar Roman 149  
 Kulik Zofia 30–31, 103, 136–138, 141, 166, 198–199  
 Kulpa Robert 147  
 Kundera Milan 49  
 Kurka Piotr 137
- Labuda Adam 36, 65, 68  
 Lacan Jacques 186  
 Laclau Ernesto 12, 110, 127, 169, 171, 189  
 Lacy Suzanne 156  
 Lajer-Burchardth Ewa 202  
 Lakner László 24, 94  
 Lefort Claude 127  
 Lenin Vladimir 203, 215  
 Leszczyński Adam 105  
 Leszkowicz Paweł 13–14, 16, 104, 139, 143–144, 148–150, 154, 187–188  
 Levin Amy K. 159  
 Lewis Reina 152  
 Libera Zbigniew 30, 104, 108, 198–199  
 Lincoln Abraham 207  
 Litvinienko Alexander 141  
 LL Natalia 84  
 Lleshi Sokol 179  
 Loba Mirosław 35  
 Loo Charles-André van 155

- Lubiak Jarosław 216  
Ludwiński Jerzy 22, 31, 33
- Makarewicz Zbigniew 31  
Malczewski Jacek 107  
Malevich Kazimir 37, 39, 66, 95  
Malmgren Agnes 146  
Mansbach Steven 15, 61, 170  
Mapplethorpe Robert 102, 121–122, 166  
Marin Louis 90  
Markelov Stanislav 141  
Martínez Chus 10  
Marx Karl 171, 177  
Matuszczak Tadeusz 22  
Matuszewski Andrzej 21, 33  
Matynia Elżbieta 144  
Mavromati Oleg 141  
Mazowiecki Tadeusz 99  
Mazur Adam 8, 15, 21, 93–95, 195  
Mazurek Maciej 104  
McCarthy Mary 76, 80  
McCorquodale Duncan 202  
Merczyński Michał 137  
Michalchuk Anna 141  
Michalska Julia 158  
Mikulić Borislav 82  
Miler Karel 167  
Millon Henry 64  
Mintcheva Svetlana 120  
Misiano Viktor 84–85  
Mizielińska Joanna 147  
Mlčoch Jan 167  
Mondrian Piet 37, 95  
Montaigne Michel de 79
- Mosse George 160  
Mouffe Chantal 7, 11–12, 58, 109–110, 113, 127–128, 139–140, 169, 171, 173–175, 181–184, 189, 191  
Moxey Keith 70, 101  
Murawska-Muthesius 79, 86, 144, 149–150, 154
- Nader Luiza 8, 33, 93, 179  
Narkevičius Deimantas 87  
Navarro Carlos G. 162  
Negri Antonio 174, 181–182, 184, 205, 211  
Néray Katalin 83  
Nicholls Peter 9, 172  
Nietzsche Friedrich 79–80, 210  
Nieznalska Dorota 107, 110–111, 132–133, 136, 141, 155, 166, 204  
Nowak Andrzej W. 114  
Nowina-Konopczyzna Halina 134  
Nussbaum Martha C. 146  
Nycz Kazimierz 139
- Olbrychski Daniel 134  
Olkusnik Wojciech 148  
Opie Catherina 157  
Orum Tania 9, 172  
Ost David 105  
Ovstebo Solveig 205
- Padín Clemente 29  
Pałubicki Janusz 97  
Papić Žarana 82  
Pejić Bojana 12, 16, 75, 81–84, 89, 163, 184



- Penn Shana 143  
 Perdices Alvaro 162  
 Petry Michael 152  
 Pilliod Elizabeth 11  
 Plato 79  
 Pleschuk Svetlana 179  
 Podemski Krzysztof 114  
 Pogačar Tadej 10  
 Pöldsam Rebeka 164  
 Polisiewicz Aleksandra 139, 155  
 Polit Paweł 31–33  
 Politkovskaya Anna 141  
 Poprzęcka Maria 65  
 Post Robert C. 121  
 Potocka Maria Anna 59  
 Pujmanová Olga 65  
 Puric Biljana 179  
 Pushaw Bart 73  
  
 Radomska Magdalena 14, 17, 45, 169, 177–179  
 Rancière Jacques 182–183  
 Rau Ryszard 17  
 Reed Christopher 159  
 Reilly Maura 158–159, 165  
 Rinder Lawrence 152  
 Robakowski Józef 32  
 Rodchenko Alexander 215  
 Rogers Henry 152  
 Rogoff Irit 11, 172  
 Rottenberg Anda 77, 81, 138  
 Rumas Robert 103–104, 108  
 Rypson Piotr 30, 59  
  
 Samodurov Yuri 141  
 Saslow James M. 151  
 Scholder Amy 152  
 Serrano Andres 102, 121–122, 166  
 Sheridan Alan 120  
 Simon Zsuzsanna 118  
 Simons Patricia 155  
 Skotnicka Marta 57  
 Smith Matt 151  
 Soley Lawrence 120  
 Sontag Susan 153  
 Soros George 63–64  
 Sosnowski Zdzisław 26  
 Sowa Jan 105  
 Springborg Patricia 171  
 Staal Jonas 213–214  
 Stanisławski Ryszard 47  
 Staten Henry 181  
 Štembera Petr 22, 167  
 Steorn Patrik 151, 161  
 Strzemiński Władysław 37–40, 44, 215  
 Summers Claude J. 152  
 Szczuka Mieczysław 215  
 Szentjóby Tamás 12, 117–118  
 Szewczyk Agnieszka 33  
 Szmyt Monika 177  
  
 Takacs Judit 149  
 Tali Margaret 179  
 Tarkawian Mariusz 78  
 Tatlin Vladimir 177, 215–216  
 Taylor Jerome 146  
 Toksvig Sandi 161

- Tomczak Witold 134  
Tornquist-Plewa Barbara 146  
Tót Endre 24, 94  
Tribe Keith 204  
Triisberg Airi 164  
Trotsky Leon 215  
Turowska Maria 77  
Turowski Andrzej 8, 15, 21–22, 24–27,  
35–36, 38–40, 44, 46–49, 51–54,  
56, 59, 77, 94, 101, 165, 176, 179,  
190, 215  
Tyburczy Jennifer 159  
  
Ukłański Piotr 134  
  
Valoch Jiří 24, 94  
Vasilovskaya Ludmila 141  
Virno Paolo 174  
Voinea Raluca 10  
  
Wallerstein Immanuel 59, 185  
Warburg Aby 51  
Ward David C. 161  
Warkocki Błażej 114  
Warner Michael 152  
Warpechowski Zbigniew 32  
Wasilewski Marek 114  
Weibel Peter 213  
  
Węcka Aleksandra 31  
Wilczyński Marek 172  
Witkiewicz Stanisław Ignacy 35, 37–40, 95  
Witte Georg 82  
Wodiczko Krzysztof 12, 16–17, 30, 44, 58–  
59, 102, 177, 195–199, 201–203,  
207–210, 212, 214–217  
Wojnarowicz David 121  
Wood Denis 51  
Wyrębski Andrzej 22  
Wyszyńska Małgorzata 136  
  
Yanushevski Oleg 133, 141  
Young Allen 151  
Yushenkov Sergei 141  
  
Zabala Horacio 29  
Zabel Igor 184–185  
Zdrojewski Bogdan 139, 156  
Zikmund-Lender Ladislav 164  
Žižek Slavoj 188, 190  
Zwiernik Przemysław 96–97  
  
Żebrowska Alicja 108  
Żmijewski Artur 104, 213–214  
Żuk-Piotrowska Maria 96  
  
Index: Jakub Wojtczak

