Pologne (English translation) : To take position

Jan Swidzinski

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TO TAKE POSITION

Jan SWIDJINSKI

The world in which we live is becoming more and more a global village of mutual dependencies. It is a world of very rapid changes and growing entropy of information. The boundaries between what is natural and unnatural, real and artificial, what can be approved and what cannot, is correct or not, admissible or not, proper or improper are more and more difficult to establish.

This reality is too complicated to be understood; too changeable for us to be able to have an emotional relation to it; too entangled into interdependencies for us to be able to take a neutral position; to be able to isolate ourselves, to find a manhole that would constitute a safe shelter.

A paradox of our artistic and cultural situation seems to consist in the fact that on one hand, not being able to decipher a reality that is too complicated, we cannot assume an attitude towards it, and on the other hand we feel that we have to take a position, that our cultural nihilism does not defend us against the growing entropy, that being passive we create to be an active and self-determining subject. On the contrary, we change ourselves into objects of other people's activities, without a possibility to defend ourselves.

Theses or questions on culture and economy

Art today is caught between the influences of two needs: the needs of culture and the needs of the market. Complicating the possible between these two spheres: symbiosis is impossible. These are not two different domains in life, these are two ways of conceiving of the same reality.

Beaudrillard in his last book entitled Cool Memories, 1987, said: "The nineteenth century was a witness to the long-lasting work of destroying appearances in order to draw, out something. The twentieth century is a witness to the manless gigantic work of destroying meaning— we have ceased to use both!" The postmodernist image of our reality: the death of philosophy, science, politics, ideology. The culture of exhaustion: silence following the hysterical cry of a new expression.

The economic approach to reality forces out the approach in terms of culture that has become the culture of exhaustion. It is a consequence of the constantly increasing process of changes. It is a paradoxical stage of culture when it ceases to produce its own patterns, its own Weltanschauung.

Economy as ideology expresses an idea of changes. It simulates a change and it itself is simulated by a change. The principle on which economy is based: exchange is a symbolic representation of the idea of a change.

In order to develop, the economic system requires the subordination of everything else: production, information, work, free time, culture and politics. It requires the subordination of the rich as well as the poor. The world market instead of world history.

The economic system requires the relativization of values. You cannot exchange something that is of the same value for both partners.

In order to develop, the economic system requires the illusion of two value paradigms: a) the world valorization of values, which leads to its liquidation, b) keeping and using a system of values, in order to awaken our needs and desires, thus simulating a process of exchange. c) the destroyed values are replaced by their substitutes. However, these substitutes do not exist without those which they replaced. There are no quotations without originals.

While developing, the economic system needs new values ever new and again. However, it is not able to create them byestroying the system of values. Accelerating the process of constant changes, it destroys at the same time what it creates. It substitutes; in other words, the meaning of the substitute gradually pales as the distance between them and the originals grows. That is the situation of contemporary art.

In the field of the economic system art is not only a commodity but also a symbolic representation of this order the justification of its concept of reality—art together with its new values replacing those which have lost their meaning. Art in the seventies, facing the problem of a too rapid acceleration that destroys its values, attempts to find them outside. However, it is not aware of the fact that this change raises the same problem for art and for life. In the eighties this comeback of art to art becomes as trutless as the exodus of art towards life in the previous decade.

One cannot reconstruct obsolete values. This comeback to art becomes coming back to consciousness that was art once and is not art any longer. Art may only become a substitute. The same substitute that is employed by economy.

Art becoming a quotation of art ceases to create a sense of culture. It means losing the position it has occupied so far, losing the position of the artist as a member of an elite.

The space for art, for an artist as an acting subject, has moved from the field of the appearances of a pseudo-universal systems created by institutions of the commercialized Art World... outside to the field where the process of constant creation of values that are necessary for all of us and for the functioning of our world is going on.

The present time of distracted meanings is not a time of great program, total solutions. There is no social consensus. There does not exist any Integrity that can be accepted. Nothing is left but he constant process of small steps, the context in which we function, the place from which we contact others.

Three texts on art history

"From the moment the modern industrial society came into being, and as change was acknowledged as the fundamental value, change became a factor that creates and destroys art at the same time."

What is said today loses its meaning tomorrow. As the speed of changes in the surrounding reality grows (the gap between reality and its image grows wider), from romanticism to postmodernism we can observe over and over again the described process of the stratification of consciousness by contexts—the succeeding stages of a paradoxical culture that while creating its own originals grows. That is the situation of contemporary art.

The consecutive stages of this process can be followed by looking at the history of our art and culture from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the modern times. It is also possible to follow an analogy and also from the world of matter: from the economic system to the world of art. From the economic system to art. From the world of matter to artistic independence, from the world of identity to the world of art. From the world of matter to the world of art. From the world of matter to the world of art.

Is it possible to separate the world of spirit from the world of matter? Is it possible for the values of art to become permanent even as material reality is changing? The attempts to find answers to these questions are another leitmotiv of the history of art of the last two centuries. It is also possible to investigate here the same change of emotions, from the euphoria of the avant-garde through the criticism of postmodernism.

A change is a positive value. Our best example of that is the material world, which is achieving a higher and higher stage of development by changing itself. But culture, by isolating itself, loses all its most precious contents. Culture, should become a part of life; the material world should find itself in the world of art. Culture, and therefore art, following life's example cannot stand still, sticking to the once and forever established values. Culture, as well as art,
just like matter while changing in its development becomes more and more perfect. That was the solution of the problem put forward by the avant-garde idea of constant progress, being at the fore of historical events, in the avant-garde. Just as it is not possible to separate the media from the message, it is not possible to separate a language — this concerns also the language of art — from the material world without reaching the absurd: and it is not possible to constantly increase the speed of changes of the society that one can change the patterns of culture correspondingly. Because time is required not only for creating them, but also for inculcating them into social consciousness.

There is one kind of time required for carrying out changes in physical reality and there is another time required for changes in psychic reality. Therefore at the turn of the sixties and the seventies art faced two alternatives: 1) to give up the values specific to art and say that art can be constituted equally well by painting a picture and drinking a glass of water — fluxus — art is life, life is art or, 2) to try to analyse what is left from the truth of art in the rapidly changing world. That was the subject of the conceptual considerations. Conclusions that could be drawn is that what is good for one side is bad for the other side. Permanence of values for culture, impermanence and relativization for economy. Both sides have universal aspirations: the order of culture should supply with answers for all questions and it should be the order for all members of the society of a given culture; the economic order can be only developed if it restricts and it increases the number of participants of exchange to the highest degree and frequency of exchange. As long as there exists a natural or inherited inequality in ownership, needs and desires, there exists a possibility of co-existence for culture and economy, and the material world does not collide with the material world. When these inequalities are not equalized and when the market is supplied, then economy has to increase the domain of its functioning by subordinating phrasing which have not been seized so far. It has to attempt to make its rules a part of the consciousness of those who have not been conditioned so far. It has to replace the values of culture by the values of economy. At the same time a process of greater and greater relativization of values seems to be necessary, replacing the constant values by the constant ones which leads to gradual liquidation. The aim of economy is not to satisfy needs and desires — if that was so, the activity that arouses desires would be unnecessary — but to gain profit from an exchange. Therefore economy aims at constant growth of the quantity of exchange and in this way stimulates a constant growth of changes. About problems it raises for culture I have written above.

In order to develop freely, economy has to get rid of values but at the same time it must force them in order to stimulate our desires of exchange by means of them. The solution to these contradictions is replacing values with their substitutes. The advantage of a substitute in this case is the fact that it is not "real", it is artificial. It is an appearance, it is something temporary; it can be destroyed, it is subject to economic order. Post-modernist art says honestly about itself that in its state of exhaustion it is not able to put forward values. It can only be a description of a revolution, the world of exhausted values of culture. It can only be a quotation of a history, a substitute of something which used to be a synonym of a sing of a sing. One ceases to be a sing of something else than it itself to exist? Doesn't economy as a total system of thinking while developing and liquidating values liquidate its own meaning at the same time?

A place for art

Art is caught between the influences of culture and the needs of the market. There is no place for art. Art is caught between the influences of culture and the needs of the market. There is no place for art.
1. The drastic reduction of funds for the development of art in most countries: art as an article of trade should be self-financing.

2. The artist as producer loses his former privileges; he is subject to the same regulations and laws as all other producers are, disregarding what he produces.

3. The drastic decrease of the number of art galleries and artistic ventures financed by public funds.

4. In the cultural policy accepting free competition in art. The result was the constant process of closing down local and national art centres and replacing them with the financially strong centre of New York in the eighties.

5. Replacing various schools deriving expression from their own traditions, and their own context, by the international uniform style.

6. The constant lowering of the dignity of art criticism being replaced by the advertising of art, an article of trade.

7. Obliterating the differences between High Art and mass art.

8. The constant lowering of the social role of art and artists — art as entertainment.

9. Consequently, the lack of new artistic propositions, the lack of program which can be clearly seen during international art ventures (as for example at the last Documenta.)

Another Place for Art

In all investigated cultures the felt-motif is the need to create a world, where all members of a given culture would feel safe. This safe world of culture is like a memory of one’s childhood; we know what is good, what is white and what is black, we know that we can trust it. It protects us against a sudden menace. It can supply us with answers to all our problems. It is a stable world of culture we can rely on. Other cultures are like this. Our culture is not. Our world is neither safe nor stable. There are no clear rules and explicit values there. Living with others we depend on ourselves. The other means a competitor in the struggle for survival. The proposition of economy: profit in terms of money, does not solve all the problems that are being solved by cultures. The relativization of values, this motive power of the economic order, liquidates the constant points of references the social consensus can be built upon. We live in two worlds: the world of the common market and the world of one’s own problems.

The replacing of common culture with economy bears double consequences:

Changing the so far existing system of values and replacing it with a new system in which the main value is a notion of profit. Old values function as relics of the past, quotations of history. This is the sense of the nostalgia for the past of neo-conservatism. Otherwise the old values function as substitutes that simulate the pseudo-needs for the use of the exchange of goods. As a consequence there comes a lack of social trust in the social function of great ideas, visions of the past, ideas of humanity, the good, ... the whole repertoire of notions employed by culture so far which has lost its meaning in a new structure. Hence the obvious crisis of trust in the old public institutions serving the values of old culture. Therefore come non-political character, non-ideology, non-ethical character, non-aesthetic character as the dominant attitudes.

As a result of the impossibility to satisfy the essential social needs within the frames of economic order which have been served by the old culture so far the creation of local subcultures replaces the universal culture: various kinds of communities, ethical and religious ones, movements of minorities etc. The world within which modern art looks for support ceases to be “a world at all” and it changes into the world of our contest, the reality of the environment in which we live. The culture which has been economic order functions in this world alone. Within this sphere there is a place for art that co-creates the constantly modernizing new values.

What are the conditions required for art to function?

1. A network of non-commercial galleries functioning in various places and in various social backgrounds. Opposing the centralization connected with the international Art Business.

2. Galleries of a contextual profile connected with a definite place and community, with their problems — here and now, facing this situation — opposing the anonymous character of the international market of Art World.

3. Galleries that keep in touch with one another all over the world. Not to impose one’s attitudes upon others but in order to talk to others about oneself and to understand oneself and one’s own problems by realizing the differences. Opposing the trend of Art World towards the unification of art by advertising artistic trends in force. The common market will replace the common world.

4. Galleries open to reality, which do not camouflage through art what really goes on there.

5. Galleries where a problem is more essential than the way it became aesthetic by means of artistic media.

6. Galleries of artists, organizers-animators and communities that communicate with one another, opposing the division of works of art, a receiver — a customer and a mediator of a transaction.

7. Galleries where may be revealed problems, anxieties, hopes of “these people”, “this community”, and not theoretical problems of generalization of a man and his problem.

8. Galleries where an artist is conscious of his limitations as well as of his freedom. He is able to keep his status of acting subject, he is able to express his opinion.
who annexed the space of the gallery, the square with many ramifications. The serigraphs were far as the Kabacki Forest. The foremost impression was one of variety. The event was accompanied by critical statements and discussions.

A few very interesting installations were mounted inside the gallery where Janusz DUCKI showed his Bysy Room — two blocks reminiscent of silhouettee of buildings, made up of prints of a single serigraph of a roof of lightning with many ramifications. The serigraphs were arranged in rows of different colors: red, yellow, blue and black-and-white.

Cezary STANISZEWSKI and Andrzej MITAN made small hobby-horses of white paper, and stuck some pieces to the inside and outside walls and door of the gallery.

Jan BERDYSZAK's installation, A State of Imagination Test, consisted of a table placed on a glass slab, and a plank, with a big stone at one end and five leaves of bread at the other, at the edge of the table. The balance was very delicate so that it to a rope, hoisted it to a tree of Kabacki Forest, and contoured a tree reflected in it. All the sounds accompanying the action were recorded. As usual in his undertakings, OJDA moved on the border area of nature and civilization.

Fredo OJDA's action, called Track, consisted in guiding the public along a fairly varied route to show them first the life of the housing estate, then sand excavations where he unearthed a large semi-transparent foil sheets. Then he used three projectors to show slides of burning countryside, scenes of various cities, his own performances, and finally a portrait of Albrecht Dürer. The accomplishment was sitar music.

Another form of work of the Small Gallery are the Archives to which everyone has access, where people can acquaint themselves with the creative work of those artists who are in search of new artistic ideas. It is, of course, a risk, because some of the exhibitions presented will not find general recognition, but as is the case with any kind of search, such a risk is a necessity. It is not our intention that exhibitions should necessarily display completely finished works of art. On the contrary, the very assumption of the character of the Small Gallery is that its exhibits are of a working character, subject to discussion. This is closely connected with the rapidly changing situation in art and the awareness of the need to reveal this situation in an up-to-date way.

The above text was written at the beginning of the existence of the gallery. We now enter our eighth year of activity, during which period we have held over 100 exhibitions. It should be added that the activity of the gallery is connected more with a modern approach to the role of the media, than with the traditional division of art into various branches, such as: painting, graphic arts, photography, etc. That is why whenever the author's conception requires it different techniques have been used, such as: films, video, graphic pictures, xerographic prints, text. The one hundred or more exhibitions have also included other types of artistic activity which were not in display in the gallery, such as performances, film shows, discussion meetings with various authors. Another form of work of the Small Gallery are the Small Archives to which everyone has access, where people can acquaint themselves with the documentation of artists connected with the Small Gallery and also with material published in other galleries, museums and contemporary art centers. In addition to this we possess our own collection of catalogues, containing reproductions of works and theoretical statements in Polish and English. Some of these catalogues should be a personal, possibly most cohesive artistic statement, not necessarily in words, and not as it is read, a rule of works, awards, distinctions, etc.

After a short break in the activity of the gallery in 1982, caused by the proclamation of martial law, we have resumed work and want to continue with the line initiated in the 1970's. One should be aware of the fact that this is not so simple since the situation in art has also undergone substantial changes. It is our intention to register these changes through continuation of exhibitions, based on differentiated approaches to and understandings of art, exhibitions in which artists will more frequently, though certainly not always, make use of photography.

Recently we have broadened the formula of artistic searchings by exhibiting works which in some way verify and enrich the already accepted spheres of photography. This does not mean renunciation or giving up of the tasks we have set ourselves. It is an attempt to reach out for slightly different spheres, which are generally supposed to have become the subject of apparent revaluations. I have in mind here realistic photography, which refers more directly to the present day. But time will show whether our often solitary efforts will introduce anything essential into the panorama of the latest art.
The past has left us a troublesome legacy, a pastiche of art of the earliest ages is better off, for nobody in his right mind claims he understands even a bit of it. As we look in the later approaches, the situation becomes even graver. The category of understanding becomes another stumbling block to ourselves. We try to prompt them, artists practicing photography are all the more induced to carry on research based on system vision and analysis rather than on isolated images of the surrounding world.

Photographers who have given up realism have done so on the grounds that contemporary societies have been portrayed to such an excess that the photographer's task now is to investigate the chaotic multitude of meanings rather than presenting the external forms of daily life.

A search for values, an inseparable element of creativeness, has often led to aesthetically striking situations transforming the art of photography into an act of exploration. This is where contemporary photography — also in photography presented at the Mala Galeria — differs from classical photography, which draws on the aesthetics of painting, photography has led to knowledge from the visual and mental reality surrounding it. Hence its apparent non-homogeneity, its resistance to being forced back into classical forms of expression. Janusz BAKOWSKI, whose exhibition inaugurated the gallery's activity ten years ago, says: "With today's techniques, everyone can take a superb photograph. This is not possible in painting, sculpture and music". Aware of this fact, artists practicing photography are all the more induced to carry on research based on system vision and analysis rather than on isolated images of the surrounding world.

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The successive period of Gallery Kalypso activity (1983-1986) finished as I had been kicked out of my flat. The possibility of managing in an empty apartment was the necessary clause to continue ideas of Kalypso Gallery. After 1986, the lack of a permanent space turned out to be a wholesome medium for Gallery Kalypso ideas thrive on.

This short period enabled us to realize our understanding of art. An understanding which throws away all those things, which grow over a piece of art as an excrescence until it is dead. I mean: trade, advertisement, snobbism. It is a smoke, which has already asphyxiated a lot of similar initiatives. It is only a coincidence that we have avoided such a fate. Otherwise Kalypso Gallery could be acknowledged along with the rest of them; fortunately, everything has gone in a different way: Gallery Kalypso has nothing and especially, has no chance to become "le salon".

Eclecticism and decadence — not "le salon"!

Every next show made by or in Kalypso Gallery Is from another basket.

Another danger I can see: these are art groups — but in practice, destruction groups.

The group is guided by its own logic of decay. Artists are afraid of refusal. They start to fight against each other. Day by day they give up this, what is incomparable. You can make a herd, or its leader, guilty for your own unfullfillment. Fortunately, Kalypso Gallery did not become an art group. Such a possibility did not occur. Because of these facts:

Gallery Kalypso does not exist
Gallery Kalypso is indescribable
Gallery Kalypso is an unimportant phenomenon
Gallery Kalypso takes all possibilities into account.

As a matter of fact, Kalypso is about 30 000-40 000 years old, all the words written above are really uninteresting for Kalypso.

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That which exists and that which I am creating is an entirety. I don't presage the past, I don't take in the future. My Now is without beginning and without end. It's a part. The entirety is finite and simultaneously infinite. It's for all and for myself. The entirety is dynamic, it changes depending on my activities. I take in an infinite number of elements which may be substituted. Books, dregs, installations, performance art convertible parts. They are equivalent.

Books: They reflect my current interests, meditations, desires and dislikes as well as they are my note-books, a shorthand of my activity possibilities; they are simultaneously fun.

Dregs: They are like table and chair, they're real and useful objects. They too have become authentic although a palimpsest — because of economic zeascushistorical record with some layers — a record of my work at the table or on the floor. As these they could come into existence only on the plane and in my opinion, they bring back the possibility of coming into existence an artistic picture on it. Not necessarily must the plane be changed from a level to a vertical one.

All I do creates a net. Books and dregs are some of its threads.

I hope to close the net perhaps but perhaps to hang it up.
Alina Anita KOWALSKA

Studio Dzielenka, Warsaw, April 1985: Spatial arrangement entitled Mom is God's Lake. Created to
Infuriate Woman; I change a white area into a
crazy room. I hang a mass of red bows on the
walls, ceilings, the window, the floor and a free
standing chair. One can spend about 20 minutes
in this room; then one gets a headache.

Remont Workshop, Warsaw, June 1985:
Performances Alienation of frustration. Costume,
upper half, symbol of armour; lower half, typi-
cally female, narrow black skirts, black stockings,
high heels. I begin to build a tent from branches.
I reject any help. The woman-knight alone makes
a home. The home, symbol of intimacy, but also
of alienation, closure and, creation. Then I place
a home. The home, symbol of intimacy, but also
of alienation, closure and, creation. Then I place
marking off the boundaries for myself. I enter the
house. The position I find myself in becomes
tiring and inconvenient. I stay there as long as my
aching legs can stand it. I set up the tent.

Freedom. I collect the bows and pin them on the
red bows around the house in a circle. Marking
arrangement entitled Man is God's lake Created to
Infuriate Woman; I change a white area into a
crazy room. I hang a mass of red bows on the
walls, ceilings, the window, the floor and a free
standing chair. One can spend about 20 minutes
in this room; then one gets a headache.

Studio Dzielenka, Warsaw, April 1985: Spatial
arrangement entitled Mom is God's Lake. Created to
Infuriate Woman; I change a white area into a
crazy room. I hang a mass of red bows on the
walls, ceilings, the window, the floor and a free
standing chair. One can spend about 20 minutes
in this room; then one gets a headache.

Remont Workshop, Warsaw, June 1985:
Performances Alienation of frustration. Costume,
upper half, symbol of armour; lower half, typi-
cally female, narrow black skirts, black stockings,
high heels. I begin to build a tent from branches.
I reject any help. The woman-knight alone makes
a home. The home, symbol of intimacy, but also
of alienation, closure and, creation. Then I place
a home. The home, symbol of intimacy, but also
of alienation, closure and, creation. Then I place
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Time is one of the possible axes of culture/art
analysis. Time sets forth a framework for acts of
rejection or continuation. It gives a chance for
conscious choice. It gives way to proposal-pole-
mic relations. It sets up institutions. It organizes
awareness. It is essential to experience, and
continuously reminds us that art is a process
rather than a state. The two-year experience of
the Gallery of Actions makes it possible to initially
evaluate its place in the process.

There is a district in Warsaw which was built
rather promptly and much unreasonably. Over
100 000 people live there in ugly, standardized
houses. The district's architecture makes its inha-
bitants unable to integrate. And its insufficient
infrastructure effectively drowns the short
moments described by sociologists as "leisure
time". It is in this ugly, unreasonable, shattered
and exhausted area that the Gallery of Actions is
based.

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There are generations, trends, schools, local
milieux, groups; in other words there are teams
of authors. Thus, the presented authors
take the risk of being present in a "non-ascribed-
to" place while the risk for the Gallery stems from
the uncertainty regarding to what extent an-
other proposal will be an individual, personal,
different statement. Ideally, the Gallery seeks for
consistent attitudes. Practically, to err happens
to give satisfaction.

The Gallery's experience confirms that it is
worthwhile to search only between the ideal and
the uncertain.

Civilization brought fire, the wheel, semicon-
ductors, TV, ideology democracy and dreams. Uni-
cation, war, environmental problems, totalita-
rianism, stress, etc. come as its shadows. News
media, posters, reportages, street demonstra-
tions are a "direct" description-response to the
whole mess. Art has the wonderful right to
indirect, ambiguous references. The church of
experimental art excels in it. The two extremes of
responding to the world are obviously inappra-
ently bound together. This is only a matter of
accents and of a role played in a given time in the
social theatre.

The Gallery of Actions is naturally connected
with a private recognition of the world. How-
ever, at the same time it remembers the lever of
the street, the multiple, the supraindividual. It
only wants to present the typical through indivi-
dual, and perhaps most extremely personal, res-
penses, to give the unique evidence of the social
and general.

These few remarks may fail to present
properly and systematically the Gallery's pro-
gram. They are rather postcards from a peregri-
nation to which the Gallery invites all who de-
mand the improbable.