DIALOGICAL ART AS A CHALLENGE FOR COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

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Contemporary society is raising important questions related to issues such as social construction or interpretation of reality, the role of culture and the meaning of art. Modernity replaces the determination of social standing with a compulsive and obligatory self-determination which holds for all periods and all sectors of the modern era, as described by Baumann (2001). This paper focuses on the analysis of problems related to contemporary art and its social meaning. The main focus is on projects which encourage their participants to question fixed identities, stereotypical images through a cumulative process of exchange and dialogue. The use of the community concept revolves around the complex forms of identification that exist between individuals and larger collective entities which encourage people to break down their defensive isolation and fear of others (Kester, 2004). The link between the society, history and culture is analyzed in the context of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002). The theoretical concept of dialogical art is illustrated by dialogical art projects and activist or community-based art practice, namely *WochenKlausur* projects. As a response to sociological problems of postmodern society, this could be a challenge for competitive environment, which often tends to position marginalized groups into disadvantaged situations.

dialogical art, postmodern society, social problems, collective identities, relational aesthetics, competitive environment, marginalized groups

Art as a Social Work

This paper focuses on the analysis of problems related to the contemporary art and its social meaning. The main focus is on projects which encourage their participants to question fixed identities through a cumulative process of exchange and dialogue. The use of the community concept revolves around the complex forms of identification that exist between individuals and larger collective entities. The link between the society, history and culture is analyzed in the context of relational aesthetics. The theoretical concept of dialogical art (Bourriaud, 2002; Bürger, 1984; Kester, 2004) and sociological background (Bauman, 2001; Giddens, 2000; Gerzon, 2006) is illustrated by dialogical art projects and community-based art practice, namely *WochenKlausur* projects. This contribution shows some aspects of dialogical arts and suggests what could be inspiring for competitive environment, especially in the sphere of communicative soft skills.

Visual art, as almost all areas in society, is permanently a subject of changes. These are not only forms and contents which are subjected to processes of transformations but also functions, evaluations, statuses and roles changes, thus also the expectations related to the producers of objects or consumers. Fairly large attention attracts nowadays a form of contemporary art which is often called *dialogical* or *participatory art*[1]. Its intention is to expose, make visible, social and political problems in society and thus demonstrate socio-political relevance of art.

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[1] For some purposes we decided to use term *dialogical* art in this text; but there are many alternative terms such as: interventionist art, community based art, relational aesthetics (mentioned by French theoretician Nicolas Bourriaud), or littoral art (as mentioned by Hunter and Larner).

The present position of dialogical art was influenced by developments in past centuries, for example by socially engaged art of 19th century (e.g. H. Daumier, J. F. Millet in France). Nevertheless, the modern art has thrown narrative forms aside; therefore it can no longer be appellative illustration of social problems in traditional, realistic or more individual expressive form. Instead, art of this kind operates directly in social reality: it enters into real situations, addresses various social topics involving social actors touched by those particular problems. As a specific form of social activism, dialogical art could be connected with social work or social research.

In this regard other resources of new artistic forms are essential. Firstly, we should refer to avant-garde movement bound up with ideas of progressive, equitable, socially fair and open society. Avant-garde movement, as a distinct one from modernist art in general, has attached higher importance to life than any other art (i.e. socio-political conditions of life), and therefore has struggled to abolish autonomous art and integrate it into the praxis of life. This "precipitated a general move towards more social and situational forms of artistic practice" (Bürger, 1984: 52). This social turn in art was especially significant in avant-garde Debord's *Situationist's International* from middle of 20ᵗʰ century.[2]

Great relevance also belongs to a conceptual art with its accent on *process/ideas* against *object*, and also to art of happenings (A. Kaprow) with its emphasis on *immediately created situation* (including viewers as participants or co-creators). Conception of *site specific art* from 1980s has brought another crucial idea: to make art as a unique single installation for *particular occasion* and *particular space* (which means non-artist place). Its recognized institutional nature of art-production was one of the reasons which intensified an interest to transpose art from galleries into *public space,* so called escape from the white cube.

Modern art is no longer shaped solely by the artist: because he often deliberately gives an audience space for an active participation and at the same time a viewer is seen more and more as non-negligible co-author of work of art, especially in art theory from the 1960s. Viewer's interpretation represents at least an ultimate point of giving meaning of art-work. Further, the process of modernization, including changes aiming at dematerialization of the art product, resulted in a conclusion that almost everything can be medium of artistic production,

even social relations or by Kester's (2004) term: *communicative experiences.*

If producer of dialogical art takes a non-artist, even a viewer or a passerby in a neighbourhood for the co-author of an artwork, then a role of the artist significantly changes: his/her new task is to project, to arrange particular situation and to facilitate social processes which were initiated.

This artistic tendency introduces two crucial questions: The first one is: What actually is art? The second would be: What are then differences between the dialogical art and a social work? The first answer seems to be easier: Today, nobody can claim that visual art should look this or another way. There is no possibility to define what art is and what is not. We doubt that any expert would like to do this. If somebody would think to have this right and sufficient knowledge, still the answer could not be satisfying. George Dickie insists, in his institutional theory from 1970s that a work of art, or its institutions, considers to be a work of art through its recognition. An art product is not apriori art or not-art.[3] If world of art treats dialogical artworks or authors, as manifestation of genuine visual art than we should accept it.

The second answer is a bit more difficult. In response to those who would equate their practice with social work or activism, W. Zinggl insists that dialogical art have to be defined in terms of art: "Localized between social work and politics, between media work and management interventions are nonetheless based on ideas from the discourse of art" (Kester, 2004: 10). The distinctive traits of art, we can see in the capacity to think critically and creatively across disciplinary boundaries: "Arts… let us think in uncommon ways," according to one of the WochenKlausur's statements, "outside of the narrow thinking of the culture of specialization and outside of the hierarchies we are pressed into when we are employed in an institution, a social organization, or a political party."[4]

METHODS AND RESOURCES

This paper is based primarily on personal experience of both authors with dialogical art projects.[5] Secondly, it deals with the most recent publications on this issue. Very important part of the analytical resources is long-term observation of dialogical art projects, namely activities of Wochen Klausur group from 1993–2012.

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2   Without Debord's resolute resistance to "the conventional 'banking' style of art", to borrow a phrase from educational theorist Paolo Freire (Kester, 2004: 10), is not fully understandable an aversion against producing physical objects as an art. Debord was not the only one, but probably the most purposeful from the avant-garde in rejection to produce objects for investing money.

3   WOCHENKLAUSUR, 2013

4   WOCHENKLAUSUR, 2013

5   Eva Abramuszkinová Pavlíková is a founder of non-governmental organisation ART Mill (www.artmlyn.eu), Blahoslav Rozbořil is co-author of many artistic performances (most of them with Josef Daněk) and a former teacher of Social art and Sociology of art at the Faculty of Fine Arts VUT Brno.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Examples of dialogical art: communication and trust building

Why it would be useful to discuss art in relation with competitive environment?

As the title of our contribution suggests we believe it can be instructive or can serve as an inspiration especially for arising branch of *caring economy*[6]. We want to demonstrate by examples in this text the capability of *collaborative encounters and conversations* initiated by artists and carried out beyond the institutional frames of the gallery or museum. Dialogical exchange plays central role in the works of the Austrian artists' group WochenKlausur, thus it represents probably the best example for our purpose. But there are many others such as: Suzan Lacy (USA), Stephen Williat (GB), Peter Dunn, Helen and Newton Harrison (USA) and groups like Ala Plastica (Buenos Aires), Ne Pas Plier (Paris), Superfex (Denmark), Temporary Services (Chicago) and many others[7].

We would like to show some aspects of dialogical arts and to suggest what could be interesting for competitive environment, especially in the sphere of communicative soft skills.

Social and political problems of society: individualism, decline of public place and growth of mistrust

Zygmunt Bauman (2001: 24) in his *diagnosis of our times* highlights weakening of civic society's cohesion, solidarity, and decline of public space: "The present-day uncertainty is a powerful *individualizing* force. It divides instead of uniting, and since there is no telling who might wake up in what division, the idea of 'common interests' grows ever more nebulous and in the end becomes incomprehensible. Fears, anxieties and grievances are made in such a way as to be suffered alone. They do not add up, do not cumulate into 'common cause', have no 'natural address'. This deprives the stand of its past status as a rational tactic and suggests a life strategy quite different from the one which led to the establishment of the working class defensive and militant organizations".

Bauman is concerned with changes in nature and mutual relations between the spheres of human life and his attention pays especially to the third realm in which private meets public: "We've learned from Aristotle to tell the *oikos* (this familiar and cosy, though sometimes noisy and stormy private territory, where we meet some familiar others daily and face to face, talk and negotiate the ways of sharing our lives) from the ecclesia (that distant domain which we seldom visit in person but where

public issues, the matters which affect the lives of each of us, are settled). There is a third area, though stretching between the other two: the *agora*, a realm neither truly private nor fully public, a little bit of both.(…) By the frequency with which it is visited, by the number of people who visit it and the length of their stay, the puls of democracy is measured. Democracy is, indeed, the practice of continuous translation between the public and the private; of reforging private problems into public issues and recasting public well-being in private projects and tasks" Bauman (2001: 24).

Increasing level of individualism represents for Bauman a threat for the third sector called by him *agora* in which occurs an ominous mixing of elements of private and public. The last one means particularly a space dominated by commercial media resulting in further growth of individualism. "The *agora* has been deserted. It has not stayed empty for long though. It has been filled once more – this time by the sounds reverberating from the *oikos*. (…) The 'private' has invaded the meant-to-be-public scene, but not to interact with the 'public'. Even while it is being trashed out in public view, the 'private' does not acquire a new quality; if anything, the 'private' is reinforced in its privacy. The televised chats of 'ordinary people' (…), and the newspapers' 'exclusive' gossip about the private lives of show-business stars, politicians and other celebrities, are public lessons in the vacuity of public life…" Bauman (2001: 205).

To operate well in society one needs to preserve certain balance between political, economic and civic institutions and structures. Similarly to Bauman, another prominent observer of today's society, Anthony Giddens points out: "A well-functioning democracy has been aptly compared to a three legged stool. Government, the economy and civil society need to be in balance. If one dominates over the others, unfortunate consequences follow" Giddens (2000: 99).

Dialog is an important means of maintaining of the balance. It is much more than only communication or debate. If the former consist of an information change, the latter represents verbal battlefield. The power of debate is that two polarized voices are free to *speak*. But the power of dialogue is that these voices can actually be *heard* (Gerzon, 2006). Unlike debate, the genuine dialogue (which is rare) can raise the level of trust, vital condition or health of civic or corporate life. Dialog is useful for solving problems. It brings experts, representatives of political or corporate administration, and laymen, touched by administrative acts, together.

Bauman depicts mechanisms at work and concludes: "To sum up: the other side of individualization seems to be corrosion and slow

6 Gerry McGovern: The Caring Economy. Blackhall Publishing, 1999.
7 As the most remarkable dialogical artist in the Czech Republic we note Kateřina Šedá from Brno.

disintegration of citizenship. Joël Roman, co-editor of Esprit, points out in his recent book *La Démocratie des individus* that 'vigilance is degraded to the surveillance of goods, while general interest is no more than syndicate of egoism, engaging collective emotions and fear of the neighbour'- and urges people to seek the 'renewed capacity for deciding together'- now silent mostly for its absence. If the individual is the citizen's worst enemy, and if individualization spells trouble for citizenship and citizenship-based politics, it is because the concerns and preoccupations of individuals *qua* individuals fill the public space, claiming to be its only legitimate occupants – and elbow out everything else from public discourse. The 'public' is colonized by the 'private'; 'public interest' is reduced to curiosity about the private lives of public figures, tapering the art of public life down to a public display of private affairs and public confessions of private sentiments (the more intimate better). 'Public issues' which resist such a reduction become all but incomprehensible" Bauman (2001: 49).

Although the main Bauman's interest is democracy, he warns also against worsening in the private dimensions of individual life, including economic security: "This is Gordian knot which binds the future of democracy hand and foot: the growing practical impotence of public institutions strips interest in common issues and common stands of its attraction, whereas the fading ability and vanishing will to translate private suffering into public issues facilitates the job of global forces which prompt the impotence while feeding on its result" Bauman (2001: 201).

It is precisely perspective of individualism which simultaneously makes solutions of individuals' problems rather impossible. "It is then one of those cases when (to use Ulrich Beck's expression) institutions 'for *overcoming* problems' are transformed into institutions 'for *causing* problems'; you are, on the one hand, made responsible for yourself, but on the other hand are 'dependent on the conditions which completely elude your grasp' (and in most cases also your knowledge); under such conditions, 'how one lives becomes the *biographical solution of systemic contradictions*'.(…) In *Das Zeitalter der Nebenfolgen und die Politisierung der Industriegesellschaft*, Ulrich Beck suggests that nothing less than 'another Reformation' is needed, and that it calls for the 'radicalisation of modernity'. He proposes that 'this presumes social inventions and collective courage in political experiments' - only to add right away that what is presumed are 'inclinations and qualities that are not exactly frequently encountered, perhaps no longer even capable of garnering a majority' (Bauman, 2001: 51).

Trust and mistrust: its impacts on society and economy

Discourse and dialog

Dialog is the highest form of *social communication.*[8] Not surprisingly it is topic of many works from various branches (philosophy, psychology, sociology, therapy etc.). Dialog is a traditional principle used in ancient times, articulated already by Socrates and Plato and relatively influential in modern philosophy (especially phenomenological

I: *Debate versus dialogue*

● Assuming that there is a right answer and that you have it	● Assuming that many people have pieces of the answer
● Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong	● Collaborative: participants work together toward common understanding
● About winning	● About exploring common ground
● Listening to find flaws and make counter-arguments	● Listening to understand, find meaning and agreement
● Defending our own assumptions as truth	● Revealing our assumptions for re-evaluation
● Seeing two sides of an issue	● Seeing all sides of an issue
● Defending one's own views against those of others	● Admitting that others' thinking can improve one's own.
● Searching for flaws and weaknesses in others' positions	● Searching for strengths and value in others' positions
● By creating a winner and a loser, discouraging further discussion	● Keeping the topic even after the discussion formally ends
● Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position	● Discovering new options, not seeking closure

Source: Gerzon, 2006: 170

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8   Gerzon (2006: 145) presents eight forms of discourse (verbal bowling, debate, presentation, discussion, negotiation, council, dialogue and reflective silence).

and existentialist) by authors like: Rosenzweig, Buber, and Lewinas (however, most proponents of dialog in art's sphere see immediate resource in Bachtin's work *The Dialogical Imagination* from 1973 which is significant contribution to the realm of literary scholarship). Dialog differs from discussion (conversation or other forms of verbal communication) in the accent on hearing and sharing and by seeking a common aim). As Gerzon says: "Dialog can only happen to the degree that the participants are willing to engage in the process. Only then can mistrust evolve into trust" (Gerzon, 2006: 172).

The Italian philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara, in her book *The Other Side of Language*, notes the etymological origins of the Greek term *logos* in *legein*: to lie with, to gather in, or to receive. She juxtaposes this with what she calls "the assertive tradition of saying" that has dominated Western philosophy and art. "We have little familiarity with what it means to listen," Fiumara writes, because "we are … imbued with a logocentric culture in which the bearers of the word are predominately involved in speaking, molding, informing. (…) she argues that we must begin to acknowledge the long-suppressed role of listening as a creative practice" (Kester, 2004: 106).

As Kester describes: "This requires two important shifts. First, we need a more nuanced account of communicative experience: one capable of differentiating between an abstract, objectifying mode, or discourse that is insensitive to the specific identities of speaking subjects (…) and a dialogical exchange based on reciprocal openness. This distinction, between what Jürgen Habermas terms an *instrumental* and a *communicative* rationality, is typically collapsed in modern and post-modern art theory. The second important shift requires that we understand the work of art as a process of communicative exchange rather than a physical object" (Kester, 2004: 90).

Habermas's work on the relationship between human identity and communicative interaction is particularly significant. He differentiates *discursive* forms of communication, in which material and social differentials (of power, resources, and authority) are bracketed and speakers rely solely on the compelling force of superior argument, from more instrumental or hierarchical forms of communication (e.g., those found in advertising, business negotiations, religious sermons, and so on). These self-reflexive (albeit time-consuming) forms of interaction are intended, not to result in universally binding decisions, but simply to create a provisional understanding (the necessary precondition for decision making) among the members of a given community when normal social or political consensus breaks down. Thus their legitimacy is based not on the universality of the knowledge produced through discursive interaction, but on the perceived universality of the process of human communication itself. Habermas seeks to preserve the Kantian subjects'

ability to transcend self-interest while in the same time avoiding the tendency, also evident in Kant, of abstracting ethical judgment from the specific social and material context within which human interaction occurs. For Kant ethical judgment is legitimated by an ostensibly inherent sense of *duty* that is hard-wired into the human consciousness. In a discursive scenario, on the other hand, *maxims of conduct*, as Mark Warren writes *relate to individual needs, interests, and situational commitments.*

The encounters theorized by Habermas take place in the context of what he famously defined as a *public sphere*. Participants in a public sphere must adhere to certain performative rules that insulate this discursive space from the coercion and inequality that constrain human communication in normal daily life. Thus, according to Habermas, "every subject with the competence to speak is allowed to take part in discourse, everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatsoever and everyone is allowed to express his or her attitude, desires or needs" (Kester, 2004: 109). This egalitarian interaction cultivates a sense of solidarity among discursive co-participants, who are, as a result, intimately linked in an inter-subjectively shared form of life.

CONCLUSION

Potential to contribute to resolving of problems: making a community of trust and solidarity

Why should an art be more successful in solving social problems than social workers and institutions?

The answer gives us for example W. Zingell, founding member of WochenKlausur: "Through certain freedoms that art has been granted, an area is opening for art where deficiencies of codified politics can be pointed out and their resolutions can be paradigmatically demonstrated. Art's opportunity to approach a problem unconventionally, naively, and open-mindedly is in principle an opportunity open to anyone who approaches a problem from outside" (Kester, 2004: 68). The cited text suggests that outsiders or laymen (laywomen) can be (for some reasons) more successful in solving social tasks than any experts, being scholars, managers, politicians or decision makers.

Predominantly *anarchistic propensity*, common to most of the modern artists, can play a positive role, as demonstrated by activities of WochenKlausur team. Realization of the projects thus often requires cunning strategies and trickery. In Ottensheim, a small town in Upper Austria, WochenKlausur developed a model for involving residents in communal political decisions. One part of the strategy for realizing this concept was the construction of a skater ramp for the local youth. The group thought that a youth sport facility would not have any opponents at all. That was true, but agreement among political parties with regard

to the location of the skater ramp could not be reached. Without hesitation, WochenKlausur set up the wooden ramp in the town's historic centre so as to bring about a decision. Three days later, the mayor announced its permanent location on the banks of the Danube. Clever manoeuvring was used also for the first project in 1993 in Vienna, when it came to covering the running costs of paying a physician to staff the mobile clinic for the homeless. The intervention was already coming to an end, and the city councillor responsible for such expenditures had not yet approved the subsidy. The decisive turn of events came thanks to the support of a correspondent from the magazine Der Spiegel, who did not want to write a report but nonetheless agreed to approach the councillor as if he was researching. Believing that Der Spiegel would otherwise report unfavourably, the city councillor decided to cover the expenses for the doctor from her budget (WochenKlausur, 2013).

As Kester (2004: 68) writes in some ecological context: 'The artist's role is to resist to political and economic elites and to speak 'on behalf of' those subjects or those populations that do not yet to exist, whose future well being might be substantively damaged by the self-interested actions of economically powerful.'

Public space, the crucial site for dialog, has become deformed by an individualized society. Its media fails by the focusing on the private life of the celebrities. To build and preserve some space for open public dialog, it remains difficult, though the amount of social problems does not decrease. Welfare state has proven to be threat for both traditional solidarity between people and individual responsibility. In institutional frames, build by law and bureaucracy, the capability of solving problems declines even more rapidly than current dismantling of the welfare state (Bauman, 2001).

It could seem to be somewhat paradoxical that there are today considerable tendencies in the art, which is an *individualistic medium par excellence*, to engage in the social and political problems. Sometimes it is capable to *identify/articulate* neglected topics better/ more efficiently than institutions or

media do. However, projects are limited by time, but the art of "social turn" can be an inspiration for acting in other areas of social life and help by its specific way in a renewal of public space.

CONCLUSION

Almost each institutional network is in a sense "leaky". Subjected to certain conditions it does not operate in a proper direction providing no expected results or without supposed efficiency. It could come out impractical for some specific cases, situations or groups or (by Merton's term from 1937) because of "unanticipated consequences of purposive social action".

For that reason communicative rationality should always involve the participants of three types: 1) *experts*; 2) managers or *decision makers* in general; 3) and *laymen* touched by results of the decisions[9]. Any acting in public space and any effort solve problems firstly needs *open public dialogues* (i.e. simply open communication) in this triadic assemblage before the outset of acting - if wants to be successful (or to avoid failures, conflicts, tensions and so on). Thinking of artists expressing themselves in interventionist art we have to admit that "the artists (…) occupy problematic position as intellectual specialist within professional-managerial class" (Kester, 2004: 63). Anyhow, given examples shows that artists are not only able to co-act with representatives of all parts of triads, but also they can identify members of the triad and to bring them to the *negotiating table* which is usually newly invented setting "where individuals can break free from pre-existing roles and obligations reacting and interacting in new and unforeseeable ways" or situations in which they are *able to transcend stereotypical images* of (…) people; this ability to see reality otherwise "resonates with attempts by avant-garde artists earlier in the century to challenge deadening representational conventions of academic art and to reveal instead the experiential specificity of the world around them" (Kester 2004: 6). In the light of this notion we could use for dialogical artist Gerzon's name "mediator", as opposed to inferior prototype of manager.

SUMMARY

This paper focuses on the analysis of problems related to the contemporary art and its social meaning. The main focus is on projects which encourage their participants to question fixed identities, stereotypical images through a cumulative process of exchange and dialogue. The use of the community concept revolves around the complex forms of identification that exist between individuals and larger collective entities. The link between the society, history and culture is analyzed in the context of relational aesthetics. The theoretical concept of dialogical art (Bourriaud, 2002; Bürger, 1984; Kester, 2004) and sociological background (Bauman, 2001; Giddens, 2000; Gerzon,

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9   We have borrowed this triad from book *Absurd Decisions* by French sociologist Christian Morel (working in Crozier's tradition). On few examples he illustrates different types of errors in decision making caused by failures in communication between members of this triad (Morel, 2006).

2006) is illustrated by dialogical art projects and activist or community-based art practice, namely *WochenKlausur* projects.

There are today considerable tendencies in the art to engage in the social and political problems. Sometimes it is capable to *articulate* neglected topics more efficiently than institutions or media do. Any acting in public space or efforts to solve problems firstly needs *open public dialogues* followed by the communicative rationality involving 1) *experts*; 2) managers or *decision makers* in general; 3) and *laymen* touched by results of the decisions. Artists are able to co-act with representatives of all parts of triads, but they also can identify members of the triad and bring them to the *negotiating table.* As a response to sociological problems of contemporary society, this could be a challenge for competitive environment where artists could be part of the open dialogue.

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