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Karolina Kolenda

Department of Art Education and Art Theory

Pedagogical University in Cracow

The political (in) landscape and post-Occupy art practices

In January 2017, after decades of preparation, Christo announced his decision to withdraw his largest to-date project that was supposed to be set in Colorado (Jones, 2017), as a protest against the programme of the new US president, Donald Trump, while MoMA responded to the presidential ban on immigration from Muslim nations by installing works by such artists in its permanent galleries (Halperin, 2017). It seemed that what we are witnessing is a new era of politically engaged art practice, whose motivations arise not so much from a shared and concrete political agenda, but from a common opposition to what is regarded as oppression and discrimination. More than with any other movements, this widespread protest of professionals representing the art world, cultural practitioners, and other actors alike, shares a lot with the Occupy movement from six years before, in that its emergence was ignited by the sudden alteration of political climate, rather than by a gradual progression – a sudden break in what seemed to be a continuous but otherwise balanced process of negotiation between the forces of conservatism and change. This is perhaps a trivial observation, since most protest movements (to name but the most culturally generative effort of 1968) indeed had their roots in what is perceived as a sudden (but perhaps inevitable) moment of crisis.

Another feature that these movements share is their inherently urban provenance and largely metropolitan resonance, that is, very much like all their 20th-century predecessors, they relied on the network of city-based actors, played out their contestation in the urban public space, as well as engaged spatially with what is considered the point of encounter between citizen and power, such as squares in front of offices of public authorities and the like. In this context, Christo's decision to retract his project invites questions on the political relevance and scope of Land Art. Certainly, Land Art is a type of practice that is always political as it engages with landscape that has been recognized as a space whose physical and ideological formation, as well as aesthetic reception, is largely a matter of politics. Yet, Christo's decision to refrain from putting his project to life suggests that, on some level, he regarded his withdrawal from any engagement with official institutions as

the most effective way to voice his protest against particular political climate. There is no doubt that, historically speaking, the position of withdrawal from action has often brought tangible political results. However, what interests me here is whether Christo's decision was motivated by what seems to be a commonly shared belief that the present cultural milieu and its discourses favor urban-based art as the natural environment and context, as well as medium, for politically engaged practices. My objective here will be to investigate examples of landscape art whose resonance is at once political as well as reaches beyond the obvious debate on environmental issues and sustainable development, taking interest in and making impact on public space at large – both urban and rural. These examples will illustrate that the practice of withdrawal (from intervening with nature or from making art at all), recurrent in the early stages of Land Art, has been supplanted by and to some extent transformed into other forms of engagement that seek to embrace the specific artistic climate post-Occupy.

The question about the political aspect of Land Art does not really translate into simple terms such as: can landscape art be understood as an activity in public space? Can it be political? After all, it was already in the 1960s, when the social history of art, with its major figure in the person of John Berger, set grounds for future understanding that all art, including landscape, is inherently political. Equally, well recognised, as well as thoroughly scrutinised, are the more openly political artistic statements that contested the apparently neutral but, in fact, deeply exclusionary power of landscape, with its class- and race-related bias. Such statements, arising hand-in-hand with the widespread Postcolonial reflection on Imperial constructions of landscape and its inhabitants, emphasized that rural space – in contrast to the cosmopolitan, multicultural urban space – is still defined as white, middle class environment. Within the field of visual arts, one of such foregrounding projects was Ingrid Pollard's *Pastoral Interlude* (1988), which paved the way for other artistic and theoretical considerations of landscape. Yet, an acknowledgment that any representation of landscape is political, or an understanding that numerous late 20th-century practices formulated openly political critique of the established and maintained cultural image of rural space, does little to illuminate the issue of whether and how a contemporary landscape art can formulate political content that has possible implications for the debate that reaches beyond the strict context of natural environment and its cultural constructions.

In this essay, I shall first consider selected examples of Land Art, in an attempt to identify these works and initiatives that sought to make an impact not only on landscape understood as an extended field for art practice or as a medium for new avant-garde art, but also wished to influence public space at large. Next, I shall consider how the most recent phenomena in art that make a reflection on landscape their starting point circumnavigate within the theoretical definitions of public space that have emerged in the second decade of the 21st century. I will be analyzing them on the backdrop of the political climate that found its expression in the Occupy movement of 2011 and in its immediate aftermath, therefore the discussion will be limited to the American context.

Land Art and public space

One of the most important debates within Land Art was the one about how the artist's intervention with nature should respond to the complexities of global environmental problems and actively comment on what and how should be done about them. The positions became somewhat polarized throughout the 1970s, with American artists engaging in large-scale land projects (to name but the most spectacular example of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* from 1970), while European artists advocated a more restrained approach, where nature is left "untouched" by the artist's hand, an approach practiced, among others, by Richard Long and Hamish Fulton.

It is perhaps in Robert Smithson's writing and practice where we can find the most comprehensive response to the question of how artistic involvement with nature might actively circumscribe the issues relating to the decay and growth of the urban and natural environment¹. What Smithson suggests is that an artistic commentary on political issues, made with the use of and in reference to natural environment, commonly posits a tactic of withdrawal, as the most viable way of securing nature's impact on the urban fabric. By withdrawal I mean a tendency to refrain from intervention and allow nature to work its ways in the city, or, conversely, allow the city to undergo the natural and nature-imitating process of entropy.

Working in similar vein, in 1968, Alan Sonfist proposed "a revision of thinking about civic monuments" and suggested an approach that would allow for the uncultivated development of nature in particular locations of the city of New York (Tufnell, 2006, p. 101). His *Time Landscape* (1965–2005) involves a space of free growing forest, thus introducing a fragment of nature as it had been before the 17th century.

Similar stance on how natural landscape can transform the urban environment can be found in works by Herman de Vries. The artist realised two projects that involved nature left to its own devices, so to speak, and naturally altering the space it inhabits. These works were: *die wiese (the meadow)* from 1986 and *sanctuarium* from 1997. The former consisted in the artist's treatment of nature as a readymade – the work was a simple meadow, an outlined field, which de Vries allowed to grow naturally so that, at present, it is the home to a variety of fruit trees and wildlife. All that the artist has done was to "designate the space a work of art" (p. 91). His strategy might be defined as that of withdrawal from cultivating or intervening in landscape: "it will go completely back to nature. This not doing anything anymore will be the art" (Gooding, Furlong, 2002, p. 61). An urban version of this work is *sanctuarium* (1997), realized in Munster, Germany. The work involves an enclosed garden whose plants developed from wind-blown seeds instead of planned, human intervention. As Ben Tufnell commented, the artist has "established a 'natural' space within the constructed and artificial space of the city" (Tufnell, 2006, p. 92). His ambition is social and political, while the goals achieved by making visible what people fail to notice (*ibidem*).

¹ Robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm (accessed: 14.02.2017).

In the final decades of the 20th century, this form of prioritizing natural processes of nature in Land Art came to be read as an overt campaign on behalf of the environment. It was not uncommon for environmental activism to symbolically appropriate any form of artistic expression that gave even a semblance of interest in its cause. A symptom of this tendency was the way Andy Goldsworthy's installation of *Midsummer Snowball* in London in 2000 was endorsed by Greenpeace and presented as an explicit comment on global warming, which took place due to the work's proximity to the London office of the British Petroleum and without the artist's knowledge or consent (p. 93). This, of course, was a diversion from the initial interests of many Land artists, in particular, Robert Smithson, whose fascination with degraded sites led him to conceptualise Land Art practices not so much as strictly environmental, but as mediators between nature and human industrial endeavour. He famously said: "Art can become a resource that mediates between the ecologist and the industrialist. Ecology and industry are not one-way streets, rather they should be crossroads" (Smithson, 1996b, p. 376).

In his discussion of how Land Art has voiced its political stance throughout the final decades of the 20th century, Ben Tufnell suggests that there can be identified three dominating positions, which he describes as: 1) creating a commentary on environmental issues together with a proposition of a solution to the discussed problem; 2) offering a "symbolic warning" or "poetic meditation," which is "shamanistic" rather than practical in nature; 3) bearing witness (Tufnell, 2006, p. 94). Although I largely agree with Tufnell's distinction, I cannot fail to notice that it employs a form of classification that combines formal description with that of the type of the artist's involvement or ambition, ranging the works from purely interventionist through artistically concerned to apparently detached. In this paper, I am not so much interested in the type of approach to landscape that artists manifest, but rather in how their involvement in environmental issues – which for the purpose of this text will be assumed as a given in all Land Art pieces – is expanded in their particular projects to formulate a political commentary on issues reaching beyond the confines of environmentalist discourse and making a political impact that concerns both rural and urban space, or public space at large.

Making impact – politics, nature, and beyond

An obvious and most famous example of a practice that involved a Land Art intervention but made an impact on the whole of the contemporary political landscape was Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks* from 1982. What is perhaps most significant here is how this piece – a commentary on the degradation of the natural environment and on the absence of trees in urban landscape – made a deeply anthropological contribution to the understanding of how the historically urban invention of a nation-state drew its vital powers from the conceptualization of rural space. In this particular case, Beuys sought to reinstate the actual oak tree into the urban landscape, at the same time extracting it from the compromised space of the national (and nationalist) collective imagination. What is particularly remarkable about Beuys' work is that, as early as 1982, it offered an insightful yet isolated recognition

of the problematic position of nature and landscape for European identity. It had to be seen as problematic since in most European states (and in numerous non-European ones) its idealized image served to shape, if not entirely create, a national identity, this product of metropolitan urban centres that invented rural space and portrayed its (always abstract, never actual) inhabitants as its ancient sources. Beuys' work is also important for another reason: as a reflection on what I called the problematic status of landscape for contemporary identity, it predates the widespread interest in this topic, whose growth can be observed particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s, when Postcolonialism in the humanities, on the one hand, and cultural geography, on the other, rose to considerable prominence.

Another seminal work that formulated a response to the contemporary environmental issues and, at the same time, made a commentary on wider political problems, was Agnes Denes' *Wheatfield: A Confrontation* (1982), a plantation of wheat on a Battery Park landfill in New York. Asked by the city authorities to create a public sculpture, the artist decided to take a different course and throughout the following six months took up the challenge of fertilizing the degraded plot, manually planting wheat seeds, and then collecting the crops. The crux of her endeavor was that rather than make a straightforward observation that, in the realities of the early 1980s, the metropolitan urban culture was deeply at odds with the country's agricultural effort that made its very existence possible, treating it – perhaps then more than ever – as a marginalised Other (the Yuppie culture was, after all, vehemently urban), she unveiled larger political issues at stake. In particular, she emphasized the deeply-rooted schizophrenic attitude to land, which – in contrast to the popular cultural imagery and the state-advocated policies of creation of natural parks and reservations – posits rural land as “priceless” (in this case, quite literally so), at the same time bestowing enormous value on a degraded plot of land in the city centre. Significantly, the value of the wheat crop was estimated at 158 dollars, while the plot itself at 4.5 billion (Denes, 1982). In Denes' work, the commonly operational dialectic of pristine, “priceless” nature and “useless,” degraded post-industrial site was turned upside down, resonating with wider issues of the twisted logic of capitalist economy, the symbolic and material exploitation of land, and the way the urban and the rural are inextricably intertwined in the system whose ideals are in thorough discordance with its practices. The artist explained that her ambition was to provide a symbol that “represented food, energy, commerce, world trade, economics. It referred to mismanagement, waste, world hunger and ecological concerns,” and “forgotten values, simple pleasures” (Agnes Denes..., 1992, p. 118).

Significantly, the respective works of Beuys and Denes were made in what is referred to as the second stage in the development of Land Art, lasting from the late 1970s until the end of 1980s, when landscape art – after a period of intense formal and conceptual experimentation, which marked the movement since its rise in the late 1960s – took a more political and environment-oriented turn (Tufnell, 2006, p. 122). In the 1990s and the early 2000s, landscape art became important on many levels: as a point of reference for a younger generations of artists who, like Tacita Dean and others, rediscovered the Conceptual founding fathers of the 1970s (e.g. in 1997 Dean made a trip to the footsteps of Robert Smithson in her *Trying to Find*

the Spiral Jetty), as a means to explore further the intricate relationship between technology and nature (e.g. Dalziel + Scullion's *Modern Nature*, 2000), or as a new form of art in public space whose spectacular scale paralleled the equally unbridled growth of new spaces of contemporary art (both in size as well as in number), leading to gargantuan projects of Olafur Eliasson, Anish Kapoor, and others, which – while supposedly engaging with nature-related issues – are examples of forcefully urban art, both in their involvement with major metropolitan institutions and their funding programmes, and in their ultimate resonance.

Landscape post 9/11

The advent of the second decade of the 21st century brought a sudden, yet – with hindsight – understandable turn of events. The unabashed optimism of the museum boom that lasted until the economic crisis of 2007, which left its mark both on weaker economies (to mention just the multitude of new spaces for contemporary art built in Spain, now left desolate and underfinanced, like many other products of its uncontrolled real estate frenzy) and major players on the market, led (yet again!) to a widespread doubt in art's ability to ever exist independently of its capitalist determinants, as well as to reasonable questions about how it is able to justify the way it combines its actual reliance on capitalist system with the dominating theoretical and ethical programming that prioritizes participation, equality, and human interactions.

This apparent clash between how contemporary art operated as an accomplice to global market and how it attempted to fulfill its obligations to the public is most pronounced in the focus of the most important art institutions, throughout the early 2000s, on a wide range of projects and practices of activist nature. Notable in this respect was a series of exhibitions organized by Nato Thomas at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, Massachusetts, from 2004 onwards. The initial, groundbreaking show titled *Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*, showcased a number of activist artist groups and was powerfully informed by theories of authors such as Naomi Klein and Antonio Negri. However, more relevant in the context of this essay is the second show, *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism* (2008), which, organized through Independent Curators International, traveled across the US to be showcased at university galleries. As Yates McKee summarized, "*Experimental Geography* captured an important cross section of work developing throughout the 2000s at the intersection of art-historical legacies, such as Land Art and the Situationist concern with the politics of space, with activist-oriented academic research in the overlapping discourses of geography, urbanism, architecture, political ecology, and spatial information design" (McKee, 2016, p. 70). Thompson's idea of "experimental geography" was drawn from the research of his associate Trevor Paglen, artist and geographer, who attempted to translate his academic research in geography into visual art forms capable of reaching out to wider audiences than the usual academic and theoretical lingo.

Paglen's practice was concerned with the global network of what came to be known as "black sites" – classified locations supposedly used by the United States government to detain and interrogate suspects after 9/11. He employed an unconventional research methodology and collaborated, for instance, with a group of "plane spotters" to map unregistered plane traffic. Although his series of photographs of assumed "black sites" made a contribution to what is presently considered a new form of visual and literary culture post 9/11, through its engagement with landscape, it also offered a material for reflection on how non-urban space is re-construed in the 21st century as hostile, rather than pastoral space. While the surveillance mechanisms of the urban space render the experience of the city as increasingly in-the-open, the vast and largely un-policed rural space becomes a hide-out where the government is able to place its covert operations beyond the public's controlling sight. As McKee aptly noted on the work's contribution to addressing political concerns, "through these aesthetic means – recalling but also undermining the tradition of topographic landscape photography – Paglen thus highlighted the limits of documentation alone in confronting state secrecy, enabling us to sense the politics of visibility and invisibility itself as the core aesthetic dimension of both sovereignty and democratic activism" (p. 172).

Similar concerns were raised by Puerto Rico-based artists, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, who combined in their work an interest in the formal aspects of Post-Minimalism and Land Art and ambitions of political activism. They elaborated on those issues especially in their investigation of the island of Vieques, for decades utilized by the US navy as a weapons-testing ground. The result of their investigation is a video piece titled *Under Discussion* (2005), which documents the journey undertaken by air and water around and above the island, with shots recording the quick pace of the vehicle (paralleled by quickly changing frames), recording in passing both the hidden facilities and the pristine, succulent nature.

Landscape, waste, and the post-Occupy condition

The important questions about how art institutions respond to the growing economic and environmental problems vis-à-vis their direct involvement with the capitalist system, which in the period following the economic crisis of 2007–2008 was held accountable for the devastation of both social and natural landscape, gained new currency during the events of the 2011 Occupy initiative. Nevertheless, the fact that a great number of participants of the strike organized at the Zuccotti Park in New York were, in fact, artists, allowed the art world at large to take – at least to some extent – the position of the major accuser, rather than one of the accused. This dubious situation of major art institutions was later to be acknowledged and reproached through a number of anti-museum actions.²

As Barry Schwabsky noted in a text that was published in 2011, the nature of many of the Occupy slogans carried by people during the protest and then recorded and published online, displayed a particular resemblance to Conceptual practices

² See for example G.U.L.F. action at the Guggenheim Museum in 2014, and their occupation of the museum in 2015, and Liberate Tate's *The Gift* at the Tate Modern in 2012.

of the previous decades. Their message seemed at once committed and curiously general, critical of particular reality, yet intriguingly self-ironic. In general, most signs would express the will to dissent rather than verbalize concrete postulates: "I'M SO ANGRY I MADE A SIGN". Others expressed what Schwabsky interprets as nostalgia for real protests that could boast of tangible agendas: "YOU CAN NEVER FIND A GOOD LEFT-WING MILITARY COUP WHEN YOU NEED ONE" (Schwabsky, 2016, p. 269).

Evaluated from the standpoint of politics, the Occupy movement raised questions about effectiveness and agency. However, even though it started off with what seemed like an un-directed (or misplaced) criticism of everything and nothing in particular, its demands began to take more concrete shape in the course of the following several months. Seen from the present perspective, the Occupy movement – working without a strict agenda and, in practical terms, largely ineffective as a policy-changing forum – needs to be regarded as a form of activism that paved the way for many other protests to come, those whose claims and demands were much more direct in their appeal.

Moreover, from the standpoint of visual arts, it came to be regarded as a phenomenon that marked a closure, indeed, as an end to contemporary art as we know it. In 2012, Kulendran Thomas observed: "Contemporary Art faces a potentially terminal crisis. Contemporary Art has sold itself as a non-specific, expanding, universal non-genre, much as neo-liberalism passed itself off as the natural state of things. The realization that Contemporary Art is in fact a time-limited historical period, that can end, is a radical moment. But it's an idea that's gathering momentum... I can't see what will emerge afterwards... but Occupy art can be seen as foreshadowing what replaces Contemporary Art."³

As far as culture at large is concerned, Occupy set the grounds for a widespread discussion of the problem of the dispossessed and frustrated majority, the 99% whose materially unstable existence had been presented to them as a natural order of things in neo-liberal capitalism, indeed, as a result of their not working hard enough. Marked by their shared precarious condition, the members of the 99% were often metaphorically described as "waste", "refuse", a class of disposable people working in uncertain conditions and oftentimes employed on "rubbish" contracts. Historically speaking, this state of affairs, when the rich minority marginalises the poor masses, both economically and culturally, is, of course, nothing new. Yet, it is perhaps in this very decade, after the AIDS crisis and its visual representations, after much of the Abject Art of the 1990s, and other events that have paved the way for the visual presence of the rejected and the degraded, that the problem of financial and political marginalisation has reached the widest scope (and understanding) and can be now rightfully expressed in forms whose aesthetic potency has already been tested.

The powerful image of people as "waste," whose precarious condition forces them to exist from day to day in a life that is never fully actualized, always in the present, and in an inefaceable sense of repetitiveness that incapacitates any

³ Th. Kulendran, cit. by Mason, 2012, cit. in: McKee, 2016, p. 8.

anticipation of or vision for the future, gains particular relevance when it is confronted with two theoretical perspectives that seek to explain the contemporary human cultural and material condition in reference to historical consciousness and aesthetics respectively. The former draws from Jacques Derrida's reflections on the ghostly presence of Marxism in the late 20th-century culture and politics, included in his *Spectres of Marx* (1993), and develops a curious field in which Derrida-inspired philosophical reflection on how our present is utterly unable to construe its own existence as historical, and thus relies on the past, whose presence in as undeniable as it is ghastly, becomes combined with an interest in all things Gothic, ghostly, and spectral. Things that – much like the precarious “waste” class – will neither be acknowledged nor fully disposed of.

The latter, equally inspired by Derrida's notions, can be related to Nicolas Bourriaud's reflections on the “exform” – the realm of the insignificant and the excluded. In his analysis, which draws from psychoanalysis, Bourriaud theorises the “exformal” as “the site where border negotiations unfold between what is rejected and what is admitted, products and waste,” stating that “gestures of expulsion and the waste it entails, the point where the exform emerges, constitute an authentically organic link between the aesthetic and the political” (Bourriaud, 2016, p. X). Bourriaud's text identifies the major problem with contemporary waste, namely, the fact that it is both disposable and impossible to dispose of: “things and phenomena used to surround us. Today it seems they threaten us in ghostly form, as unruly scraps that refuse to go away or persist even after vanishing into the air. [...] ours is also an epoch of squandered energy: nuclear waste that won't go away, hulking stockpiles of unused goods” (p. VII). In art, this fear of waste, claims Bourriaud, has taken a peculiar form in the pervading belief that everything and anything the artist produces can somehow be useful and meaningful: “inasmuch as artists devote equal attention to preparing, making and exhibiting their works, one also senses the dream of activity without waste: a process brought out into the open, whereby everything is useful or significant” (p. 7).

The condition of arts and the art world after Occupy is, therefore, a deeply conflicted one, where the presence of the disposable (objects, people, communities, environments) is at once acknowledged as a theoretical possibility, in fact, as a popular theme for exhibitions, workshops, publications, etc., and decidedly rejected in the day to day practice and programming of the entire spectrum of art institutions: from the smallest project-based initiatives to the major players such as MoMA or the Tate. This problematic and deeply unsettling position came to be exposed in the course of several post-Occupy events, when art institutional response to the tangible problems shared by particular communities fell short of what is required of the major cultural actors. The above-cited comment by Thomas about the end of contemporary art was, most emphatically, sparked by the disappointment with the failings of the art world to fulfill the roles expected of it, rather than inspired by a widely theoretical-historical reflection. It is perhaps also a post-Occupy characteristic, that an identification of the supposed end of an era stems from a frustrated disavowal of authorities and leaders, rather than from a concrete philosophical conception of history.

Green is white – nature and the politics of dispossession

The issue of the “disposable” people came back with a vengeance in the crises following the Occupy movement, in particular, in the events and aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in New York (2012) and the Ferguson riots (2014). In this particular context, the previously class-based definition of the precariat was now reformulated to account for the actual state of affairs; hence the openly race-oriented slogan: “Black lives matter.” The question of how the issue of discrimination of black citizens in America is related to the environmental and aesthetic concerns with landscape was well explained by Naomi Klein: “What does Black Lives Matter, and the unshakable moral principle it represents, have to do with climate change? Everything” (Klein, 2014, p. 187). I will try to explain below that rather than simply with climate change, the issue has a lot to do with how landscape and the dialectic of city vs. nature determines the actual distribution of space.

The new slogan “decolonise,” voiced by groups such as Unsettling America and DecoloNYC, sought to provide an alternative to “occupy” in an attempt to shift the focus from class- to race-related issues and stress that Occupy movement “occluded a deeper historical analysis of white supremacy, resulting in the frequent reproduction thereof in both its outward-facing movement work and its internal organizing culture” (McKee, 2016, p. 187). This initiative was motivated by the results of Hurricane Sandy’s destruction of parts of New York, where particularly hard damage was suffered by Queens district and its Rockaway Boardwalk, among others.

The later treatment of the district by the authorities and by the art world, requests a comparison with how the citizens of New Orleans were provided for after Hurricane Katrina hit the city in 2006. Particularly helpless at the time were the poor black communities, former inhabitants of numerous public housing projects. Due to the natural disaster, many of their homes were pronounced unfit for habitation by the authorities and ultimately earmarked for demolition. Hundreds of people were evicted from their homes, with no alternative housing provided. The art world responded with what has to be seen as a preposterous idea: “Artforum” called for major architects to create “visionary designs” for the city, most of which did not solve the problem of relocating the dispossessed community (p. 194). The most outrageous project came from the celebrated architect Thom Mayne, who proposed to treat the disaster in terms of an opportunity to redevelop the city and introduce more green areas. As McKee notes, activists from groups Common Ground and Survivor’s Village declared that “greening was here synonymous with whitewashing and erasure” (p. 187).

After Hurricane Sandy, the Far Rockaway was also visited by the moguls of the art world, who professed their readiness to provide solutions. In the spring of 2013, MoMA selected the spot next to the now empty site of the Boardwalk to erect a temporary dome-shaped white pavilion, a part of its Expo 1 project that comprised of a series of events organized throughout the summer by MoMA PS1. Branding itself as committed to the task of commenting on the difficult times of “economic turmoil” and “ecological challenges”, and “political upheaval,” the project

was, in fact, founded by Volkswagen and showcased “visionary designs” for the redevelopment of the site. As McKee notes, “none of the designs were grounded in the concerns or projects of local survivors (p. 206)”.

This deeply irresponsible and shameless approach of the art world to land in the city may be perhaps explained as a remnant of a long tradition of thinking about this issue, whose postwar manifestations can be found in what has been the starting point for this essay, namely, the art of Robert Smithson. In his appreciation for the contemporary wastelands seen as human-made equivalents of the natural processes of erosion and entropy, Smithson singled out what he saw as the perfect realization of the dialectical landscape – the Central Park in New York. In his essay on its maker, Frederick Law Olmsted, he described the future site of the park as “wasteland,” ignoring the fact that it had been inhabited by the black and Irish community of Seneca Village, whose settlement rose from 1825 to 1857 and was destroyed to make way for the park (Ibidem: 191). What the initiatives instigated by “Arforum” and MoMA, in 2006 and 2013 respectively, indicate is that the major contemporary art platforms’ involvement with and dependence on the global commercial superpowers puts them in the position where they are institutionally and inherently unable to embrace the post-Occupy condition, by which I understand not so much the new distribution of power within the artworld, but the emergence of new conceptual, practical, and ethical tools and stances. One of the major outcomes of the events that followed the movement of 2011, either as direct results of this process or as nature-inflicted disasters, was that the status of nature, understood as a place of refuge or as a stage for playing out Romantic pastoral sentiments, is impossible to sustain in the new political, economic, and environmental reality. Equally unstable is its status as a “green spot” in the city, since the major events of that period questioned the racial and class neutrality of such constructions.

Among numerous issues that rendered the status of nature in the city problematic was the location of the Occupy movement in the privately-owned but publically accessible Zuccotti Park, whose proprietors, together with the police, evicted the protesters on the grounds of their “unsanitary” conduct. Another was the described aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, whereby the urban-based green area was exposed as serving the interests of particular class (thus being a white more than green space). Those events have emphatically proved that the postulated (and environmentally justified) need for more green areas in the urban centres in fact occludes the understanding of the deep-ridden class- and race-based definitions of landscape and nature. To go back to my initial question: what kind of landscape art is capable of formulating a commentary that avoids being either escapist and pastoral or interventionist and environmental, yet at the same time makes a political comment that resonates beyond the confines of cultural geography? Certainly, one of such forms is art that starts with the goals shared by all post-Occupy movements and actions: shows indignation rather than withdrawal, strikes art and landscape, posits the excluded and the rejected at the very centre, recognising the *exformal* as the locus of potentially new art forms.

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Polityczność krajobrazu i praktyki artystyczne po działaniach ruchu Occupy

Abstract

Artykuł dotyczy politycznych aspektów land artu oraz stara się odpowiedzieć na pytanie, na ile współczesny klimat artystyczny i polityczny wytworzył sytuację, w której naturalnym kontekstem dla tworzenia politycznych wypowiedzi artystycznych dotyczących całości sfery publicznej jest kontekst miejski. Na przykładzie wybranych, klasycznych realizacji sztuki ziemi, powstałych w środowisku miejskim (autorstwa Alana Sonfista, hermana de Vriesa, Andy'ego Goldsworthy'ego, Josepha Beuysa, Agnes Denes), rozpatrywana jest kwestia tego, na ile uniwersalny wymiar mogą mieć wypowiedzi polityczne land artu, a na ile ich zasięg ogranicza tradycyjne odniesienie wyłącznie do kwestii zagrożeń dla środowiska naturalnego. Kwestia ta pozwala następnie przyjrzeć się temu, jakiego rodzaju zmianę w postrzeganiu zarówno sztuki ziemi, jak i politycznych wypowiedzi artystów, przyniosły wydarzenia z 11 września 2001. Na przykładzie wybranych praktyk artystycznych (m.in. cyklu wystaw organizowanych przez Nato Thomasa w North Adams, badań Trevora Paglena, prac Jennifer Allory i Guillermo Calzadilli), analizowana jest to, jak obraz natury komplikuje jej związek

z konfliktem politycznym po wydarzeniach z 11 września. Przykład stanowią wybrane działania artystyczne i instytucjonalne po wydarzeniach związanych z protestami i innymi akcjami ruchu Occupy. Kontekst dla nich stanowią protesty społeczne w Nowym Jorku, a także wywołane w tym mieście przez huragan Sandy.

Słowa kluczowe: krajobraz, ruch Occupy, Land Art

Key words: landscape, Occupy movement, Land Art

Nota o autorce

dr Karolina Kolenda (ur. 1982) – adiunkt w Katedrze Teorii Sztuki i Edukacji Artystycznej na Wydziale Sztuki Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego w Krakowie. Absolwentka Instytutu Filologii Angielskiej oraz Instytutu Historii Sztuki UJ. Jej zainteresowania badawcze koncentrują się na współczesnej literaturze i sztuce brytyjskiej, geografii kulturowej oraz problematyce krajobrazu.

Karolina Kolenda, Ph.D. (b. 1982) – she is an assistant professor at the Chair of Art Education and Art Theory at the Faculty of Art, the Pedagogical University of Krakow. She graduated in Art History and English Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. In her research, she focuses on British contemporary literature and visual arts, cultural geography, and representations of landscape.