

Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia de Arte et Educatione X (2015)

ISSN 2081-3325

SPOŁECZEŃSTWO, SZTUKA I NAUCZANIE

Piotr Bujak

West Side Stories – the Informal School of Social Practice at the Department of Art & Art History of Leland Stanford Jr. University

Short study on the selected practices of socially engaged artists, graduates of the Stanford University, living/working in the greater Bay Area, California, USA

To begin with, it is necessary to state that the aim of this article is not to create a super-complex analysis, but rather to focus on the characteristics of a few most current and – hopefully – interesting for an Eastern European reader projects, all of which have been carried out by Stanford graduates, who live or work in San Francisco and surrounding locations. Furthermore, it is not my intention to provide critical reviews, as I believe that readers would be capable of their own judgment and I would prefer for my role to be limited only to a cohesive choice and description of sample models.

Since my goal has been rather to show how both the sensitivity and a way of thinking of chosen artists work in different environments, not all of the projects selected for the aforementioned purpose are Bay Area location-specific. These works will deal with notions of – amongst others – communal responsibility, social awareness, neoliberal capitalism or public/private commodities.

A discussion about present art practices – or the particular nature of the art-scene and an intellectual vibe – in the Bay Area, would not make sense without describing the context, so please allow me to at least outline the historical, cultural and political background.

San Francisco with its counter-cultural, liberal and very inclusive character, has been a haven for the various kinds of free thinkers, artists, rebels of diverse occupations, and other individuals. The city, founded as a classic port town in 1776, turned in the second half of the 20th century into one of the most vibrant and progressive centers of the American Avant-Garde. Since about the late 1960s and the *Summer of Love* Era, the Bay Area has also been recognized for its ecological awareness and fair trade. It has been obviously connected with the broader hippie movement that emerged from the Beatniks.

Presence of Hippies and Beatniks – that started moving to San Francisco round 1950s – had a huge influence on the whole landscape. Since that times the Bay Area has become a heart of liberal activism, as well as numerous environmental, peace

and equality, and civil rights movements¹. The long lasting inflow – and rotation – of *the Creative Class*², has made this region become a motherhood of beat poetry, experimental music, dance, theater, opera, independent filmmaking and art that breaks conventions.

The art scene of the said area has always been considered to be less commercial than the one from other major big urban settlements in the United States, like Los Angeles and New York City on the Coasts, or Chicago in the Midwest. Artists from the Bay have been interested – to certain extent by default – in commonwealth and socially oriented issues, mixing genres, postcolonial studies and the notion of “Other”. Also, because of the proximity of a few most established universities in the world (University of California Berkeley, Leland Stanford Junior University, etc.) as well as the high technologies Mecca – Silicon Valley, the art-based research has often taken advantage of this surplus of knowledge and access to new technologies and has been thoroughly discussed at the academic level.

This discussion at the art/education/technology border has been mutually beneficial to all interested parties, though the most recent rapid expansion of the IT sector has had its negative impact on the entire landscape of the Bay Area. I will briefly elaborate on that point after a short description of the academic culture.

As it was mentioned in the preceding paragraph, academia has always had a huge influence on the art-scene and culture in general. Student body has always been very active and shown a very strong sense of community, often getting seriously engaged in mass protests – from Berkeley Riots in the 1960s³ to anti-eviction movements nowadays⁴. Artists and scholars who have been affiliated with institutions of higher education include i.a.: Roy Ascott, Chris Burden, Christopher Copolla, Okwui Enwezor, Renee Green, Spike Jonze, George and Mike Kuchar, Annie Leibowitz, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Hanru Hou or Rebecca Solnit.

Universities have kept a very progressive approach and attracted world’s greatest experts with uncompromising ideas who became tenured in many fields – including art – and contributed to the fact that this land has maintained its status of a hub for multidisciplinary and very non-conservative research. Schools that offer BFA and MFA programs – and there is quite a few of those – often combine art with other domains like social sciences or technology, or come up with their own unique curriculum.

¹ Such as a first in US lesbian-right organization *Daughters of Bilitis*, one of the largest and oldest pride parades – San Francisco Pride, non-profit *Friends of Urban Forests* the Black Panthers Party or OccupySF – just to list a few.

² After R. Florida *Cities and the Creative Class*, Routledge, New York 2005.

³ Series of anti-war and against racial discrimination protests at the University of California, Berkeley in the 1960s, quashed by the police.

⁴ Such as San Francisco Tenants Union fighting with the Ellis Act (law that allows landlords to go around the rental control and evict tenants without almost any restrictions).

California College of the Arts, based in Oakland and San Francisco offers a renowned MFA degree with the social practice area of concentration, San Francisco Art Institute is famous for its experimental courses hosted by the Film and New Genres departments. Two of the most important institutions in the world⁵ – University of California at Berkeley in the North East Bay and Leland Stanford Junior University in Palo Alto, South West Bay run small studio art programs with a cross-field curriculum, encouraging students to take classes outside their mother departments. Both of these universities have always had an amazing student body, alumni and affiliated professionals in almost each discipline one can think of, with Nobel Prize winners like writer Czesław Miłosz, biochemist Thomas Christian Südhof, economist Peter Arthur Diamond; World Leaders – former US secretary of the state Condoleezza Rice, former prime mister of Israel Ehud Barak or Crown Prince of Norway Haakon Magnus; entrepreneurs such as a co-founder and CEO of Google Inc. Larry Page, co-founder of Apple Computers Steve Wozniak or Microsoft's former CEO Steven A. Ballmer, scientists such as a psychologist Philipp Zimbardo, philosopher Alfred Tarski or mathematician George Dantzig, and many, many others.

What is also really important with the latter two examples of schools, is the real cost of education. Most institutions in the United States offer various sorts of financial aid, however, one will not pay a penny for the graduate education at Stanford, since the studies are fully refunded. Moreover, successful applicants are guaranteed a decent stipend in return for help with teaching some classes⁶. Berkeley, since it is – unlike Stanford – a public funds run type of school, has a little different policy. For California residents studies at the both graduate and undergraduate programs are either free of charge, or significantly lower, making it affordable for most people interested in attending⁷.

It is noteworthy, that the average tuition costs per academic year usually circulate around \$40,000⁸, making it barely possible to do a degree without getting into very serious debt. The notion of the wealth inequality would be addressed further in this article.

Down south from Palo Alto, where the Leland Stanford Junior University is located, spreads the gigantic technology and software hub, with the world's largest, most established and most inventive corporations. Silicon Valley – as this is a more popular name of this region – is the home for business concerns like Apple Inc. and Hewlett-Packard in Cupertino, Google in Mountain View, Facebook in Menlo Park, Adobe Systems in San Jose, or Intel in Santa Clara among many others.

⁵ According to three world's most reliable rankings – Shanghai Ranking, Q's Ranking and Times Ranking.

⁶ <https://art.stanford.edu/academics/graduate-programs/mfa-design> (access: 07.09.2014).

⁷ <http://grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/costs-fees/> (access: 07.09.2014).

⁸ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/shawnoconnor/2012/04/05/grad-school-still-worth-the-money/> (access: 07.09.2014).

The presence of these companies that created thousands of diverse, new places to work in the fields electronic gear, medical equipment, hardware and software technologies, has had a significant impact on the shape of the Bay Area landscape on many levels and to much larger extends.

Since the expansion of the Silicon Valley, the nature of the job market has been gradually shifting from labor oriented/industrial towards more specific creative/high tech. Both the IT branch and the intensively developing financial sector have created huge need for the professionals at the administration and management level, offering insanely high salaries for the chosen ones and thus noticeably adding to the wealth inequality. Since 2000s this influx of huge capital from the high-tech industry, followed by the intense job-migration has brought this issue to a new level, slowly, but visibly, making this unique communal lifestyle disappear, giving place to more organized and hierarchical social structures.

The impact of the said new group of residents, together with the recent economic turmoil and a general progress in the field of new technologies, have been significantly altering the overall local color. Both the nature of the job market shift, discussed in the previous paragraph, and – most of all – the Great Recession from 2008 have forced many of blue-collars from various sectors, including those most creative ones, almost native for this county, to look for other occupation and – as a result – to leave, since the living costs have soared drastically. On the other frontier, white collars have proved to have a completely different idea for this region's future shape. The "upper creative class" – as I would prefer to call them – affiliated with big corporations, and employees of other businesses such as banking and diverse start-ups that have found home here, have created a large demand for more refined standards of living.

That situation has caused a very aggressive housing and real estate strategies which – supported to some extent by the cities – has led to the growth of evictions, as for the growing number of tenants, rental prices have become impossible to deal with. Landlords can increase the prices as much as they please as they know that new city dwellers would most probably be able to even cope with monthly rents in San Francisco being far above Manhattan, NY range.

Simultaneously, the real estate market – in contrast to the global collapse – has been developing extensively, almost without any restrictions, with new investments all over the Bay Area, designed mostly for the affluent or for the office spaces. Authorities who gave the green light for the real estate expansion thought that construction companies would improve the employment rate. Yet they were right only to some extent. Most of contract workers have been hired only on a temporal basis, very often for the minimal wage, thus making their existence turn from jobless struggle almost to the slave work.

The increasing number of people not covered with any kind of the health insurance and working underpaid jobs, homeless communities – and there is an extremely large one in San Francisco – as well as people living in fear of losing their

jobs, are causing – mild at this point, but noticeable – social unrest on many levels. Mr. Obama’s healthcare reform from 2010⁹ aimed to at least address the issue of the healthcare system, however it is too early to judge whether it has worked out or not. And, as the matter of fact almost everybody is endangered with eviction threat – even well-known institutions with strong public and youth programs – as it has happened most recently with the Meridian Gallery¹⁰. Artists, as well as other art professionals are forced to relocate their studios elsewhere – often to the East Bay, but sometimes they even have to leave the Bay Area – as the rents are getting just too high.

Lack of sufficient support for the unemployed and deficiency of social housing have chased away the old creative class, or/and the working class who simply can no longer afford to live within this new, socially-unfriendly habitat. Non-stable forms of employment, job security have contributed to the growth of the Precariat¹¹. The costs of living and the growing number of new mansions, condos, high-profile apartments, and – most of all – gated communities, have made a new incarnation of the class division problem vividly visible.

North Bay – Marin County in particular – has become the place with the world’s most expensive zip-codes, where a lot of US millionaires associated with the silicon valley, as well as other very affluent people like successful sportsmen, artists or professionals affiliated with the media have been moving for at least a couple of decades. This process has sped up after 2000s and taken a bit surprising angle, with a lot of new inhabitants settling there mainly for the sake of the show off. Marin nowadays, with this huge amount of wealth, is turning into its own caricature in a really strange way by trying to become US version of Monaco.

East Bay, with cities of Oakland, where the operating seaport is, and which is rather large urban settlement, remained a kind of a blue collar neighborhood, with more people relocating there, due to costs of living in the West Bay. Aside of Oakland, the East Bay has a rather suburban character, however it has been dealing with safety issues at a really large scale. Oakland has become known for its high rank in terms of crime rate, being consistently listed as one of the most dangerous cities in the whole United States. Other cities are maybe not that unsafe, however one can feel that it certainly does not have such a relaxed and friendly vibe as San Francisco used to have.

While the authorities are trying to address this problem by adopting various policies, and the number of accidents is gradually declining, the reverb of the economical turnover is taking its toll in the form of a growing number of racial incidents. It is usually each time covered by mass media and discussed all over, however it does not seem that this tension is getting reduced enough.

⁹ The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, signed March 23, 2010, and the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010.

¹⁰ <http://meridiangallery.org/> (access: 07.09.2014).

¹¹ After G. Standing, *The Precariat – The new dangerous class*, Bloomsbury, London–New York 2011.

It is frequently artists community that is most eager to work with this kind of issues. The Fruitvale Station Shooting where a black man – Oscar Grant – was killed by the Bay Area Rapid Transit Police¹² has been even portrayed in a full time feature long movie from 2013 (*Fruitvale Station*), by Ryan Coogler starring Michael B. Jordan, Melonie Diaz and Octavia Spencer. It won an award for The Best First Film in 2013 Cannes Film Festival section Un Certain Regard¹³. Although this particular example is in the domain of filmmaking, as far as I have noticed – and I lived in the Bay Area for about three years between 2010 to 2013 – practices of local artists from different art disciplines – but mostly experimental – show strong tendency to engage in this social context. Also, Stanford’s Art Department hosts a really good program in documentary filmmaking, which is also recognized as a very pro-social. However, I would prefer to focus in this paper on the projects that deal less with the issues of violence and frustration – as they have been researched and written about a significant number of times – but which instead utilize everyday activities and systems to talk about the value of labor, ecosystems, and economy.

The artists that I would like to focus on at this point – very often having experience of being underpaid, and forced to take lowest salary jobs in order to hustle a room for their art production – depict how this atmosphere – in a direct way or not – has influenced their art practices.

Stephanie Syjuco, an alumna of Stanford and San Francisco Art Institute, whose work focuses mainly on the intersection of sculpture and social practice, is interested in open-source systems, shareware logic, shadow economies, flows of capital, and critique of consumerism. Her career sped up after the 2008 when a great recession hit the markets, in total opposition to traditional-media-based artists, many of whom were left on the lurch. Currently employed at the tenure-track position at the Art Department of the University of California at Berkeley, she is one of the most recognized artists of her generation from the Bay Area. Stephanie Syjuco is a receiver of the Guggenheim Fellowship Award in 2014, amongst many others.

I had a chance to talk with Ms. Syjuco several times, and what I have learned from these conversations is that although it usually does take a decent budget and a very detailed plan to come up with a good piece, quite often the same result can be achieved with more guerrilla or do-it-yourself strategies.

¹² Shooting of Oscar Grant by BART Police officer Johannes Mehserle at January 1st 2009, labeled an involuntary manslaughter and a summary execution. Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) is a rapid transit system serving the San Francisco Bay Area. This heavy-rail public transit and subway system connects most of the cities in the area.

¹³ A section of the Cannes Film Festival’s official selection. It is run parallel to the competition for the main award – Palme d’Or.

Stephanie Syjuco's participatory installations often involve – as she has put it in her statement – “an active public component that invites viewers to directly participate as producers or distributors”¹⁴.

Two of her works that I would describe, primarily investigate the value of labor in regard to the pop-cultural market.

Copystand: An Autonomous Manufacturing Zone was a project commissioned for the Frieze Art Fair in London – one of the most established art fairs with galleries showing top of the shelf and most “expensive” artists worldwide – taking place October 15th – 19th 2009. *Copystand* was a “parasite piece” that almost literally bred on the body of this fair. It consisted of a regular booth, divided into two areas, one of them resembling a formal gallery area, characteristic to other cubicles around, with works on a display and a desk with chairs and a laptop for the person responsible for further transactions. The second one was serving as a temporal production space where participating artists, invited by Stephanie, were working on a DIY replicas of the art on display at other booths. During the operation of this 5-day long performative installation, it was possible to purchase each item that was created and manufactured with the use of cheap materials like: “cardboard, plastic, colored paper, paint, inkjet prints, modeling clay, and recycled materials scrounged from the construction of the Fair’s grounds itself”¹⁵.

All of these replicas visibly differed from the originals and each of them looked in a way that is the characteristic for handmade production. The entire stock got sold out, with the huge sale at the end of the Fair. All of the copied items were priced differently, although not a single price exceeded £500, which was nothing in comparison to default models, making it also affordable for most of the public. Moreover, each of participating artists, received 100% of the sale money, as well as the compensation in the form of a daily stipend. Participating artists also signed the pieces that they produced with their names, as well as were given a credit in the project.

Most of the feedback that Stephanie received after this Frieze Art project, was describing it as a very poignant bitter-sweet satire for the bourgeoisie model of the art market. Moreover, it brought to light also the value of the art/craft labor, strengthened by the arrangement of the booth, as the production area was visible to the public. It also stirred a broader discussion on the underpaid/overpriced opposition which happens so often in the “real” art world, and the mechanisms behind it.

The Counterfeit Crochet Project (Critique of a Political Economy) is another incarnation of Stephanie's participatory art practice. It has been an ongoing and traveling collaborative installation – operating on a little bit similar basis as the *Copystand* – that was launched in 2006. It has toured since then all over the world, to

¹⁴ <http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/statement.html> (access: 02.09.2014).

¹⁵ http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/p_copystand.html (access: 02.09.2014).

Beijing, Istanbul, Manila, Milan, Berlin, Karlsruhe, Goteborg, Los Angeles, New York, Milwaukee, Jonkoping, and San Francisco.

The Counterfeit Crochet piece consists of a website and a series of workshops, held in various locations, that in a way turn into collaborative performances. The website serves as the main platform for the project, its guide, growing archive, main display of all collaborative production put together, and a summary.

For this work Stephanie has asked, through the above mentioned website, crocheters from all over the world to join her in a process of hand-counterfeiting handbags, originally produced by the most luxurious brands like Fendi, Gucci, Chanel, Prada, Dolce & Gabbana etc.. Participants have been responsible for finding a design or a pattern of their choice online and then to knit it, working with the jpeg image – usually low quality – that they downloaded from the web. There have been no hard restrictions regarding the process or the final product. Participants have been free to alter the handbag – within a basic framework – changing it colors, adding/removing materials and so on.

The author also stated that: “Makers are encouraged to keep and wear their bags, in an attempt to insert strange variants into the stream of commerce and consumption. I ask for people to send me snapshots of their items to share with others”¹⁶.

Authors of the counterfeits have been – similarly to the *Copystand* – given a credit on the projects website.

The results show various degree of quality and resemblance to the genuine bags, which also has been a part of Stephanie’s input to the discussion about cultural and economic translations and adaptations, bringing a reference to the notion an anarchic and democratic creativity.

The counterfeited handbags were both “homages and lumpy mutations. Crochet is considered a lowly medium, and the limitations imposed by trying to create detail with yarn takes advantage of the individual maker’s ingenuity and problem-solving skill”¹⁷ as Stephanie says on the website of the project.

The major goal, however, I would specify as a commentary on the idea of “outsourcing” labor and the issue of copyright in the creative process, as well as – on the contemporary capitalist large scale – automated production and distribution channels.

Another artist I would like to refer to is a Stanford University’s Art Department graduate Amy Balkin and particularly her *PublicSmog* piece. Amy Balkin is a cross-disciplinary artist interested primarily in the environmental awareness issues and new concepts of public domain outside of regular structures (cultural or lawful). She focuses on the area of social and material habitat and how it is being altered on various grounds. In her practice she depends on a very specific research – often

¹⁶ <http://www.counterfeitcrochet.org/about.html> (access: 02.09.2014).

¹⁷ Ibidem.

scientific – and instruments characteristic for economy and legal reasoning, which she employs to her work for the purposes of a social critique.

PublicSmog – an ongoing project that was launched in 2004, is basically an alternative to a public park that is set up in the atmosphere, without any pre-defined location, duration, shape and size.

This piece tracks two major issues – economic and environmental ones. It addresses the responsibility for the careless fossil fuels consumption – both industrial and individual – and outlines the risk of the climate imbalance that may be the result of an approach focused mainly on the short term profits.

It came to life after many legal, financial and political steps that led to its opening for general use. Moves that were taken to create the park included “purchasing and retiring emission offsets in regulated emissions markets, making them inaccessible to polluting industries”¹⁸. The project takes the form of a hypothetical communal airspace above the area where offsets are bought and held back from use. *PublicSmog* consists of two parks, each responsible for a different challenge. Upper park, which was so far operating in the stratosphere over the European Union from the fall 2006 through 2007, was established with the acquisition of 51 tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission allowances (EUAs) in the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EU-ETS). Carbon dioxide affects the upper layers of the atmosphere. The park remained operating until the expiration date of the offsets. It was opened one more time, from April to August 2010 over the United States when authors bought the right to emit 500t/CO₂ (Chicago Climate Exchange Carbon Financial Instruments - CCX CFIs). As for now, the Upper Park is closed. Lower Park was running between June 16th and June 24th, 2004, over California’s South Coast Air Quality Management District’s Coastal Zone (SCAQMD). Lower Park came to life with an acquisition of small amounts of Nitrogen Oxide (NO_x) offsets in the SCAQMD Air District. NO_x affects the lower layers of the atmosphere. 24 lbs. of NO_x 2003 cycle 2, zone I NO_x retain trading credits (RTCs) (expiring 6/30/04) were bought from an anonymous offsets trading company, operating in a regional, non-Kyoto Protocol cap-and-trade scheme, and withdrawn from use. The offsets were purchased at a price of \$4.25 per lb, \$102 in total¹⁹. Some legal activities were required before the transaction took place, which involved getting a permit to register into SCAQMD.

The body of the park changes, following the volume of emissions allowances that were acquired throughout the process and how long the contract for the particular *PublicSmog* incarnation is. Public smog is also exposed to flow of aerosols and gases on the long range through the winds. Moreover – as the author says – the *PublicSmog* is a step in an ongoing attempt to submit Earth’s Atmosphere for inscription on UNESCO’s World Heritage List.

¹⁸ <http://www.publicsmog.org/> (access: 30.07.2014).

¹⁹ http://www.publicsmog.org/?page_id=18 (access: 03.07.2014).

Since it does not function in the “real” world – or at least it is not visible – the only track of its existence is a website and an archive. It is an example of a very ephemeral, yet dealing with an extremely crucial subject matter communal project.

The last to be written about is a collective Futurefarmers, which was found in 1995 by another female artist living in the Bay Area and a Stanford Graduate – Amy Franceschini. Amy Franceschini was awarded in recognition of her achievements with the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2010, SECA (Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art) award from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2006, Artadia Award from The Fund for Art and Dialog in 2005 and Golden Nica from Ars Electronica in 2001. She holds a position of an assistant professor of studio art at the Mills College in Oakland, and occasionally teaches courses at the San Francisco Art Institute and at the Stanford University. Together with Futurefarmers, she is interested in working with local communities through participatory projects like *Lunchbox Laboratory* from 2008 or *Victory Gardens* from 2007, on the public space, technology, education and social issues. Futurefarmers often employ a strategy of a play, making their art more convenient to approach. They work with clients like MTV or NASA to channel funds and technological resources for their more meaningful, often auto-generated artwork. The visual execution of their practice is usually not limited to a particular medium and it is frequently metaphorical in its form.

Victory Gardens was a piece that was developed in cooperation with, and funded by the City of San Francisco in order to makeover the old, unused, or abandoned venues of different origin – backyards, front yards, window boxes, rooftops and other – into small-scale, self-sufficient organic food farms. The project was an ongoing initiative in the form of public activities – planting, creating an ornamental landscape, workshops, lectures, meetings etc. that took place between 2007 and 2009. Its main aim was to establish a network community of local food producers in the broader context of urban sustainability, ecological awareness and communal responsibility. Amy Franceschini partnered with Garden for the Environment and San Francisco’s Department for the Environment to create an entire infrastructure and a framework for this project.

It was based on a very active public component and it was built around the idea of vegetable, fruits or herbs gardens, planted voluntarily at private and public location, that were very popular all over the United States, Canada, United Kingdom or Germany during World War I and World War II. These gardens – often called also “war gardens” or “food gardens for defense” – were initiated – together with food stamps – to reduce a dependence on the public food supplies, and also in a way to boost a morale amongst civilians. Futurefarmers addressed both of these notions in the modern context of deepening wealth inequality which corrodes communal bonds. When American economy was doing not well, a large number of

US citizens were living off the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program²⁰ and youth consumed countless amounts of junk food. The food in both cases was traded without any kind of financial transaction (exchanged for other items or simply given away).

So far, there were a few gardens that appeared in San Francisco, each one designed in a slightly different manner and aiming for a little bit different target and a number of workshops was held.

Lunchbox Laboratory was developed by Futurefarmers in cooperation with Biological Sciences Team at the National Renewable Energy Lab in 2008. This project integrated design, education, technology and ecology, and focused on renewable sources of energy. It was basically a prototype of the small, portable research lab in the form of a wooden suitcase, which contained a set of tools that enabled a basic scientific screening on the algae strains. Algae strains is a seaweed, that scientists are currently using to produce hydrogen, but most of all, algae is a great resource for a biodiesel fuel production. Since this seaweed is omnipresent all over the world, it is really challenging time-wise to find strains productive enough for a further usage. Hence, the idea for the *Lunchbox Laboratory* was to be distributed along various schools to engage students in a broader discussion about ecological issues and to identify and eliminate those strains that are not productive.

This project was aiming to create a network community of young students participating in a “big science” research, while still pertaining in the realm of the play.

Works described above depict what I find distinguishing for Stanford University’s Art Department graduates. All of these artists share in their practices a similar communal approach, often based on a regular, mundane activities. They mimic and often take advantage of already existing systems. These projects may resemble strategies characteristic for hacktivism, adapted for the realm of art and related disciplines, however the most important is how all these “performative collaborations” – as I like to name them – work without any particular and pre-determined hierarchical frameworks and how they appeal to the audience. It is this public access, public execution of the project, and above all – dispersed ownership and, as a matter of fact, authorship of the project as well that to me is crucial for the Stanford’s school. Artists mentioned in this paper usually play a role of an initiator and, to some extent, a director/navigator of a specific project, which eventually

²⁰ As it is stated online at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap> (access: 25.07.2014): “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) SNAP offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities. SNAP is the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net. The Food and Nutrition Service works with State agencies, nutrition educators, and neighborhood and faith-based organizations to ensure that those eligible for nutrition assistance can make informed decisions about applying for the program and can access benefits. FNS also works with State partners and the retail community to improve program administration and ensure program integrity”.

unfolds on its own. It is significant, as in the many other examples of the art of social change participants are quite frequently just a mere labor force, while here they are more of a precisely chosen contract workers/co-producers/co-authors. Projects that have been mentioned in this article take directly from post Marxist notions of “relational aesthetics”²¹ – as they aim to build or transform social bonds – and “aesthetics as politics”²², which are either planted in a very visible way into a public sphere, or employed into the art production and distribution process, making even high culture – usually reserved for the wealthy – accessible for vast audiences. Lastly, these works also to some extent warn before social and cultural consequences of an overall neoliberal policy²³ in a way that is the most sophisticated I have encountered so far.

References

- Bourriaud N., *Relational Aesthetics*, Presses du réel, Paris 2002.
 Florida R., *Cities and the Creative Class*, Routledge, New York 2005.
 Ranciere J., *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and transl. by G. Rockhill, Continuum, London–New York 2004.
 Standing G., *The Precariat – The new dangerous class*, Bloomsbury, London–New York 2011.

Online

- <http://www.stephaniesjuco.com/statement.html> (access: 02.09.2014).
<http://art.stanford.edu/academics/graduate-programs/mfa-design> (access: 07.09. 2014).
<http://www.counterfeitcrochet.org/about.html> (access: 02.09.2014).
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/shawnoconnor/2012/04/05/grad-school-still-worth-the-money/> (access: 07.09.2014).
<http://grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/costs-fees/> (access: 07.09.2014).
<http://meridiangallery.org/> (access: 07.09.2014).
<http://www.publicsmog.org/> (access: 30.07.2014).
http://www.stephaniesjuco.com/p_copystand.html (access: 02.09.2014).
<http://www.stephaniesjuco.com/statement.html> (access: 02.09. 2014).

²¹ N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Presses du réel, Paris 2002.

²² After J. Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and transl. by G. Rockhill, Continuum, London–New York 2004.

²³ Understood here mainly as a legacy of an idea of *Monetarism* and Chicago School of Economics thought (and its main advocates such as Milton Friedman, Margaret Thatcher, Leszek Balcerowicz and others), which generally rejected interventions in the market and strongly emphasized the need of a non-interventionist nature of the state, which directly contributed to enormous wealth and income inequalities and financial safety and as a matter of fact to the rise of precariat and new class division.

West Side Stories – Nieformalna Szkoła Sztuki Społecznej na Wydziale Sztuki i Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Lelanda Stanforda Juniora

Streszczenie

Artykuł syntetycznie przybliży sylwetki artystek z Zachodniego Wybrzeża USA, podejmujących w swojej twórczości problematykę społeczną. Kluczem przyjętym do wyboru omawianych projektów jest autorstwo należące każdorazowo do absolwentki tego samego programu studiów wyższych. Tekst koncentruje się na metodach pracy, na specyficznej wrażliwości oraz na rodzajach myślenia i wypowiedzania się na tematy zaangażowane przez osoby z tego konkretnego środowiska. Wprowadzony na początku kontekst historyczny, intelektualny, ekonomiczny i geopolityczny, mający fundamentalny wpływ na funkcjonowanie sceny artystycznej i życia akademicko-naukowego Zatoki San Francisco, przybliży charakterystykę tego regionu i pozwala bardziej wnikliwie przyjrzeć się sposobom pracowania wybranych kwestii. Autor na przykładzie działalności Stephanie Syjuco, Amy Balkin oraz Amy Franceschini portretuje szerokie spektrum aktywności twórczych, które arbitralnie określił terminem Nieformalnej Szkoły Sztuki Społecznej na Wydziale Sztuki i Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Lelanda Stanforda Juniora w Palo Alto w Kalifornii, USA.

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka społeczna, Stanford, Uniwersytet Stanforda, zachodnie wybrzeże USA, San Francisco, projekty partycypacyjne, sztuka zaangażowana, sztuka krytyczna, ekologia, prawa autorskie, znaki handlowe, Bay Area, Kalifornia, rynki

West Side Stories – the Informal School of Social Practice at the Department of Art & Art History of Leland Stanford Jr. University

Abstract

The article synthetically brings closer the silhouettes of artists from the West Coast, touching upon the issue of society in their works. The key chosen for the selection of the described projects is the authorship, each time belonging to the graduate of the same university programme of higher education. The text concentrates on methods of work, the specific sensitivity and kinds of thinking and expressing on topics of importance for the people in this particular environment. The firstly introduced historical, intellectual, economic and geopolitical context, having a fundamental influence on the functioning of the artistic scene and academic life of the San Francisco Bay, serves to familiarize with the characteristic of the region, and thus allows for a closer look at the ways of working on the selected issues. The author, on the examples of Stephanie Syjuco, Amy Balkin and Amy Franceschini, portrays the wide spectrum of creative activity, which he arbitrarily dubbed the Informal School of Social Practices of the Stanford University's Art Department in Palo Alto, California.

Key words: social practice, social practice art, Stanford University, West Coast, San Francisco, future farmers, public smog, crochet project, participatory projects, critical art, ecology, copyrights, trademarks, Bay Area, California, markets

Nota o autorze

Piotr Bujak, ur. 1982 r. w Będzinie – polski artysta wizualny posługujący się mieszanymi mediami. Absolwent ASP w Krakowie i San Francisco Art Institute. Wychowanek Lynn Hershman. Doktorant Wydziału Sztuki Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego w Krakowie. Stypendysta fundacji Fulbrighta. Długofalowo związany z Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej KRONIKA w Bytomiu. W swojej twórczości odwołuje się do sytuacjonizmu, łącząc minimalizm i postkonceptualizm ze strategiami low-budget, quick-and-dirty i do-it-yourself.

Piotr Bujak – interdisciplinary artist interested mostly in problems of wealth, manipulation, misrepresentation and fear in the context of consumerism, technological progress and globalisation. Graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, Poland (2009) and San Francisco Art Institute, USA (2012) where he studied with Renee Green, Hanru Hou, Lynn Hershman and Stephanie Syjuco. Grantee of the John William Fulbright Foundation Graduate Student Award in 2010, currently enrolled at the PhD program (under the supervision of dr hab. Adam Panasiewicz) at the Department of Art of the Pedagogical University in Krakow. Bujak uses mostly time-based and experimental media, although his art practice also involves working with objects, site-specific interventions and prints. It combines the Fluxus' approach, do-it-yourself and quick-and-dirty strategies with the possibilities of a reproduction, low budget/ open-source/ strategies, conceptual rigor and a very sublime and minimalistic aesthetics.