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*ONE WORLD, MANY PEOPLES*¹. TOWARDS ART FOR MULTICULTURALISM

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A number of contemporary artists focus their efforts on facilitation of dialog between diverse cultural groups or communities, aim at unfolding the social dynamics of otherness, or try to challenge stereotypes that many an intergroup relation is influenced with. Paweł Althamer and his neighbor collaborates – all dressed in golden jumpsuits, modeled as aliens – set out on a journey to visit the Dogon people in West Africa to experience an intercultural encounter in its most basic form². The well-known street artist Banksy painted cracking holes in the West Bank Barrier, the wall separating Israel and Palestinian territories, and filled those holes with images of blue skies, golden-sand beaches, and merry children³. Rafał Betlejewski in a public project “I Miss You, Jew!” mobilized citizens of towns and cities across Poland to take collective photographs in places where the pre-war Jewish communi-

¹ The part of the title in italics is a paraphrase of the „one world, one people” slogan, connected to the peace movement. Among other appearances, the slogan was imprinted on the vinyl edition of John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s single „(Just Like) Starting Over/ Kiss, Kiss, Kiss” (1980) – in the form of an inscription on the inner part of the record.

² For more information about the project see e.g.: http://www.openartprojects.org/Projects/view/1502/pl_pl/Wspolna-sprawa. All the reference websites were accessed on May 11, 2011.

³ Altogether Banksy created nine provocative pieces along the barrier, to be seen, among other websites, on: <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/pictures/0,,1543331,00.html>. The images are no longer available on <http://www.banksy.co.uk>, where they were initially presented.

ties used to live⁴. Shahram Entekhabi in his video pieces “starring” Mehmet, Migel, Mladen and other popular ethnic characters, deconstructs the many roles which immigrants are perceived through in Western societies [ed. Smolak, Ujma, 2007]⁵. Suzanne Lacy, a contemporary American performer and feminist, has been working on dialogic projects devoted to women, teenagers and minorities since the 1970s, including “Crystal Quilt”, “Code 33” and “Skin of Memory” [Fryd, 2007; Kester, 2004; Lippard, 1988; Roth, 1988]⁶. John Malpede, who has been engaged with the homeless of Los Angeles’s Skid Row within the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) since the mid 1980s, uses theatre as a means of empowerment and communication with the public and policy makers [Burnham, 1989]⁷. Photographer Oiko Petersen in his series titled “Guys. From Poland with Love” exposes the various masks and guises imposed on gay men, and in “Downtown Collection” reintroduces people with Down syndrome as beautiful, sensitive and in their own way – perfect [Petersen, 2010]⁸. Deitmar Schmale, a German actionist, for ten days cleaned private houses and office spaces for a minimum wage in Trójmiasto, Poland, to put to the question the stereotypical image of a “polnische Putzfrau” (a cleaning lady from Poland employed in Germany as a “Gastarbaiter”) [Jopkiewicz, Karaś, 2010]. And last but not least, Artur Żmijewski in a socio-artistic experiment documented in the “Them” video creates conditions for a face-to-face confrontation between radical activist groups (nationalist, Catholic, Jewish and leftist), and provokes an open and ultimately violent conflict between them to uncover the mechanisms of political divisions⁹.

From the artistic point of view, the examples listed above fall into many categories, from public art, to guerilla or street art, to community art. They also reflect a variety of media and techniques that can be used artistically, from painting, photography and video, to theatre and performance (including so-called life theatre or everyday performance). They may be participatory, provocative or subversive, conversational or interventionist, affirmative or dis-

⁴ As a part of the project the photographs are published on the website: <http://www.tesknie.com>.

⁵ <http://www.entekhabi.org>.

⁶ <http://www.suzannelacy.com>. The documentation of selected projects can be viewed on Lacy’s YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/suzannelacy>.

⁷ <http://lapovertydept.org/>.

⁸ <http://www.oikopetersen.com>.

⁹ I have watched the video during the 5th Symposium “Warto zapytać o kulturę”, which took place in Ciechanowiec on November 20-21, 2009.

ruptive. Yet, however varied in terms of aesthetics, artistic motivation or relation to the audience, they all represent a common belief that art can be a tool of social change. This belief can be traced back to Joseph Beuys's original concept of "social sculpture" ("soziale Skulptur") [Kaczmarek, 2001], or Allan Kaprow's theory of happening as connecting art to the real life¹⁰, or Oskar Hansen's "open form" philosophy [Hansen, 2005]. By interfering with human relations, world views and ways of thinking, art can be consciously used to bring a change, namely a change in the attitudes towards cultural differences (both between, and within societies). In other words, it can help to achieve the purpose of multiculturalism, not in art, but in the society. Hence, we may speak of a specific area of art under scrutiny here, which I propose to term "art for multiculturalism", as contrasted with "multiculturalism in art" (seen merely as a topic of art, like in the case of the iconic 16th-century painting "The Tower of Babel" by Pieter Bruegel the Elder). One of the clearest, though metaphorical, expressions of this view on the mission of art is the "window right" pronounced in 1990 by Hundertwasser in one of his socio-artistic manifestos: "A person in a rented apartment must be able to lean out of his window and scrape off the masonry within arm's reach. And he must be allowed to take a long brush and paint everything outside within arm's reach, so that it will be visible from afar to everyone in the street that someone lives there who is different from the imprisoned, enslaved, standardised man who lives next door" [Hundertwasser, 2007: 17]. For Hundertwasser and others difference is the artistic platform. Without being overtly political, "art for multiculturalism" fights against intolerance, narrow-mindedness, prejudice, ignorance, discrimination, dogmatism, and xenophobia. It refers to diversity as the primary and indispensable human condition, and it ventures further afield for the experience of cross-cultural contact and communication.

On the other hand, the institutionalized art world seems to be resistant to the practice of multiculturalism and still stuck to national identities, which is best evidenced by the Venice Biennale with its national pavilions and exhibitions¹¹. However, something is changing in this matter, too. This year Poland is being represented by Yael Bartana, a citizen of Israel, who is best recognized for her "delusional" (as she calls them) political videos: "Nightmares", "Wall and Tower" and "Assassination", utopian narratives, in which she explores

¹⁰ For Kaprow's writings see e.g. UbuWeb Historical: <http://www.ubu.com/historical/kaprow>

¹¹ Also most museums and galleries, the main institutions of the art world, are national, state-sponsored institutions, and their missions are strictly connected to national values and identity.

the notions of homeland, return, belonging, ritual, identity and collectiveness. Since 1895, when the biennale was established, it is said to be happening only for the fourth time that a country is being represented by a non-citizen, a foreigner [Tomczuk, 2011], including Nam June Paik, who shared with Hans Haacke the Golden Lion for the German Pavilion in 1993.

Marzanna Morozewicz [2010] argues that the idea of universality has been present in the biennale at least since 1980, when the curatorial presentations in Arsenal were initiated. These exhibitions have been systematically conceptualized around issues of general importance, as manifestations of human values and concerns, transcending state or national boundaries. The past exhibitions were given titles like “Plateau of Humankind” (2001) or “Making Worlds” (2009), and aspired to create interlinks between the arts of the world. In addition, for about a decade many a participating artist has been introduced by the names only, and not one’s national affiliation. Others, such as Roman Ondak (Slovakia), Santiago Sierra (Spain), or Steeve McQueen (the United States), while still representing their nation states, have consciously used their works as leverages for the critical discussion of the anachronic “national art” concept. “It also seems – writes Morozewicz [2010: 107] – that in the new millennium the subsequent editions of the biennale have been an attempt to discover or invent a universal visual language, which would finally allow communication between all the nations”.

Yet “art for multiculturalism” seemingly stands for challenging the utopia of “one world” and affirming differences rather than promoting the ideal of humanity seen as a universal human condition or culture (a false ideal, one might say). The concept of a universal artistic language, a code of international art, a visual Esperanto, appears to be just another anachronism (or false ideal). “‘Globalization’ is a term that is deprived of its own reality, of any truth about the world that would stand behind it. It originates in the exaltation of the media and in the illusion of similarity. ‘Globalization’ is a product of our megalomaniac social imagination” – says art critic, Maria Anna Potocka [2010: 327]¹². However controversial her thesis might seem at first sight, the observation that there is no “one world” (no one global culture) is much closer to the reality than the excessively cited and widely misunderstood Marshall McLuhan’s metaphor of “global village” [ed. McLuhan, Zingrone, 2001].

¹² This and the following citations from Polish literature or websites have been translated into English by the authoress.

In the 1990s, Roland Robertson [1992], one of the first theorists of globalization, defined the process as a dialectic one, combining both universalistic (global) and particularistic (local) tendencies, and introduced the term “glocalization” into sociological discourse. While describing globalization as “the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole” [Robertson, 1992: 8], Robertson has placed the main emphasis on the problem of identity and its relativization. Hence, he would probably agree with Potocka in that globalization should be looked at as a collective state of mind perpetuated by global communications rather than a unifying cultural force. In terms of culture, the results of globalization vary a lot. Cultures of the world and within societies co-exist and intermix, compete or hybridize, protect themselves, fear and fight each other, but – luckily – are not one.

What is so lucky about it? Imagine that Esperanto, which was first detailed as an artificial language by Ludwik Zamenhof in 1887 [Eco, 2002], has since become a world language. What effect would it have on world cultures? Would it wipe out wars, which Zamenhof, quite naively hoped for? Would it change our view of the world (after all, the way we see it depends on how we describe it)? Would it enrich or impoverish our cultural experience? A number of contemporary sociologists and other social scientists, claim that cultural differences are the very source of social development. Diversity within a society is considered a benefit and an advantage. Hence, multiculturalism, as one of the possible scenarios for globalization, and apparently one that is coming true, has become a phenomenon of growing interest to social scientists, both theorists and researchers.

The semi-political ideal of multiculturalism (or cultural pluralism), when translated into scientific language, first and foremost denotes diversity. Yet, to speak about multiculturalism, it is not enough to see that there are many different cultures. It is equally important to note how these cultures interact. There are at least several distinguishable and contrasting models of the interactions in question: American, Australian, British, Canadian, French, German, or Swedish, to mention but a few (all resulting from global migrations)¹³. In opposition to the assimilation model, embodied in the early immigration

¹³ The concept of the “models of integration” has been criticized by sociologists in its own right for its ideological rigidness, practical ineffectiveness, and theoretical inadequacy to describe the variety and complexity of situations related to migrations in the globalizing world. An alternative is seen in the paradigm of “transnationalism”, according to which migrants are not connected to any nation state, neither the one they come from, nor the one they arrive at [Wieviorka, 2008].

policies and studies, these distinct models, however specific and complex, may be embraced by the overall term “intercultural integration”. Instead of domination, subjection or inferiority, the term implies equality, exchange and mutual gain. It also goes beyond the popular notion of tolerance (understood as indifference), invites openness and understanding in intercultural contacts, and last but not least, involves some minimum and negotiable, presumably democratic, common standards. According to Andrzej Sadowski [1995: 222], from the normative point of view, “cultural (ethnic) pluralism” refers to a situation when “particular ethnic groups have a full possibility, based on the legally secured and publically guaranteed equal chances, of maintaining their identities, and of cultivating and developing their cultures. It is a situation, which is dominated by the view that nurturing cultures of diverse ethnic groups within a nation-state enriches the culture of the entire society, that is, constitutes a positive value”. Intercultural integration could be defined as a set of practical and institutional means to achieve this end. Hanna Bojar [2000: 40-41] enumerates the characteristics of the pluralist integration model: symmetry and balance in mutual relations, consensus and compromise, cooperation, equality, lack of prejudice and stereotypes. She finds the model of prime importance to the formation of a democratic society. Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman [2003] search for “multicultural integration”, as they call it, precisely in the creation of a new, transcendent identity founded solely on citizenship (or equal membership in the state). Such integration requires not only common social and political institutions, but also recognition of various ethnocultural groups. Multicultural integration, according to Kymlicka and Norman [2003: 14], “accepts that ethnocultural identities matter to citizens, will endure over time, and must be recognized and accommodated within these common institutions. The hope is that citizens from different backgrounds can all recognize themselves, and feel at home, within such institutions”.

“One world, one people” was an effective frame for the peace movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The framing process behind it, as theorized by David A. Snow and others [1997], allowed everyone to either join in, or support the cause, no matter race or occupation. A similar catch phrase for multiculturalism would be “all different, all equal”. Originally referring to racial, national and ethnic groups, multiculturalism has nowadays expanded to embrace other culturally distinct social entities, such as: social classes, gender categories, age groups, urban and rural communities, the sick and the disabled, or the homeless. They are either described as social minorities (with a stress on the lower status), or social enclaves (with emphasis on inclusion/exclusion processes).

They may also be referred to as post-national identities in order to signal the decline of nationality in favor of other cultural identifications (either subnational, or transnational). In consequence, the multicultural society is viewed as a society that accepts, appreciates and promotes cultural differences of any kind. Hence, interaction and communication between the different cultures, minorities, enclaves or identity groups is central to the social practice of such a society, be it on global, national or local level. And it is precisely the point where art comes to action. "Art is a potential link across differences. It can be constructed as a bridge among people, communities, even countries – writes performer, Suzanne Lacy [1991: 64]. The space of art is a neutral one in many people's experience, making it an unthreatening meeting ground". The artists mentioned in the first paragraph have all, though by different means, attempted to utilize this ground for the sake of multiculturalism, as described above. None of the projects, however, has been ever presented as social activism. They have been introduced and analyzed as works of art, although certain aspects of these projects cannot be grasped by the theory of art. It seems that the commonly underestimated aspect of art is its active relation to social change, and engagement in the "mundane" aspects of the reality, including "real" people with their "real" problems. On the other hand, when art is seen and used instrumentally, not only artists reach for artistic means in the pursue of dialogic openness between diverse groups of people. There is a wide array of artistic activities undertaken by local leaders, cultural animators, third-sector workers, educators, activists and amateurs, who share similar concerns, repertoire and purpose. None of them has been ever called an Artist, and none of such projects has been ever called Art.

In order to bridge this theoretical divide and introduce an alternative approach, at the 13th Polish Congress of Sociology in 2007, I suggested describing the activities that combine artistic expression with a social (public) aim as "social art". The term has been inspired by Joseph Beuys's concept of "social sculpture" and Suzanne Lacy's projects, which have been on several occasions referred to as "social art" [Rothenberg, 1988], however without any further explanation of the term. I have decided to incorporate the term into the sociological framework for two reasons. On the one hand, the adjective "social" suggests a parallel to social activity and social organizations (as social art takes place in the same sector of society); on the other, it highlights the distinction of social art from public art, community art, activist art, and other

similar phenomena, with which it should not be confused¹⁴. I propose to look at social art as a combination of five crucial elements:

1. The aim or result of an activity (social change or public benefit);
2. The addressees of the activity (broad social groups or categories);
3. The way the addressees are engaged in the activity (no barriers of participation or reception);
4. The place where the activity is carried out (public, institutional sphere);
5. The bottom-up quality of the activity (spontaneity, self-organization, responsiveness, etc.).

Social art may be created by individuals, groups or communities (of different kind, and varied closeness of inner bonds), who act in the mezzo-sphere (between the micro-private and macro-public), beyond “traditional” political institutions [Offe, 1995]. It is usually set in the context of an open public space, local community, or minority group (i.e., a group of a lower social status and limited possibilities of citizen or political action). In these contexts, it takes a number of varied and often innovative forms – of an artistic installation, street graffiti, mural, poster, billboard, theatre, happening, participatory photography, mental map, stilt training, etc. Dependent on the context and form, it may fulfil at least ten distinct citizen functions: articulation of social problems and needs, unmasking symbolic messages, space revalorization, communication with participants or addressees of an action, mobilization of participants, creating social bonds, identity construction, social protest, resource mobilization, and changing attitudes¹⁵.

To illustrate the concept of social art, the following sections of the article present and detail three projects, which not only combine art with social aim and result, but also support multiculturalism: (1) “Where the Hell Is Matt?”, a global action initiated by an individual named Matt, who for the last five years has mobilized hundreds of thousands of people around the world to dance with him the humorous Matt’s dance¹⁶; (2) “Bridging the Distance”, a Polish-Indian cooperation involving youngsters from Nowa Wola in Podlaski region, Poland, and young Oneidas from Ontario, Canada; and (3) “Our World in 36 Snapshots”, a local project aimed at integration of Polish and Chechen children in a Bialystok primary school.

¹⁴ For analysis of the distinction between social art and public art, community art, and activist art, see Niziołek, 2009.

¹⁵ For a fuller analysis of social art see: Niziołek, 2008.

¹⁶ To view Matt’s dancing videos go to: <http://www.wherethehellismatt.com/>.

Where the Hell Is Matt?

“Where the Hell Is Matt?” seems to be an essentially global phenomenon. Dancing Matt (actually Mathew Harding) is an individual at his mid thirties, located in Seattle, who, according to his own story, at one point quit his job and ventured for something new and exciting. For the money he had saved he went for a trip around Asia, meanwhile creating a website to keep his friends and relatives updated about his voyage. In Hanoi a friend taking a picture of Matt’s asked him to do “that dance”, the same funny dance that later has won Matt’s popularity. Matt did the dance, and the friend filmed his performance. It was uploaded to Matt’s website and as time passed turned out to be an Internet hit, or “a viral video”, to use the Internet jargon. The worldwide response brought Matt to the attention of a chewing-gum company, who offered him an unusual job. They wanted him to go for another trip and make another video for the sake of advertising. As a result, in 2006 he took a six-month trip through 39 countries and the 7 continents. Wherever he went, he danced in front of famous landmarks and street scenes. A year later Matt came up with a new idea, to invite other people to dance with him. The sponsor agreed and Matt set off for his third trip around the world, visiting 42 locations in 14 months (according to Wikipedia¹⁷). He has since continued his project, meanwhile announcing the videos a hoax, starring in the Visa “Travel Happy” campaign, and creating a special video to celebrate the 2010 FIFA World Cup. In his videos Matt dances to the sounds of “Sweet Lullaby” by Deep Forest, which is a mixture of ethnic and electronic music, or the song “Praan”, composed by Garry Schyman and performed by Palbasha Siddique, with lyrics by Rabindranath Tagore (taken from the poem “Stream of Life”, a part of “Gitanjali”). His videos are available on YouTube, Google Video and Vimeo. He also runs his own website and writes a blog (a travelogue) to keep people informed and entertained. With his fellow dancers and fans he communicates via e-mail. He occasionally gives speeches about his project at conferences and conventions of various kind (being represented by a prominent artist agency). He has also delivered an academic lecture to the students of Champlain College in Burlington. So far his 2008 video has been watched by almost 38 million people¹⁸. His project has also received an extensive coverage in the mainstream media, including The Guardian, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and New York

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matt_Harding.

¹⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlfKdbWwruY&NR=1>.

Times. On July 22, 2008 a video of Matt dancing was made the Astronomy Picture of the Day by NASA. The caption below the image said “Happy People Dancing on Planet Earth”, and in the accompanying explanation it was stated: “What are these humans doing? Dancing. Many humans on Earth exhibit periods of happiness, and one method of displaying happiness is dancing. Happiness and dancing transcend political boundaries and occur in practically every human society. Above, Matt Harding traveled through many nations on Earth, started dancing, and filmed the result. The video is perhaps a dramatic example that humans from all over planet Earth feel a common bond as part of a single species. Happiness is frequently contagious – few people are able to watch the above video without smiling”¹⁹.

The huge success of Matt’s dancing videos is a perfect example of the possibilities of the new, electronic media and the Internet. It reflects the democratic potential and mobilizing capability of the Web. The films fall into the new category of “viral videos”, mostly amateur and not-for-profit videos that are passed electronically, from person to person, friend to friend, through video sharing websites, social media, private e-mails and other new technological devices. Since filming, editing and publishing tools have become available to large numbers of people (still not everyone, as the global technological or digital divide remains the issue of the day), cultural production is no longer the privilege and advantage of certain social groups, the so-called cultural elite, or the owners and managers of cultural industries. At times the two “worlds” notably intersect, like in the case of musician Czesław Mozil and poet Michał Zabłocki’s collaboration with the Internet users, which resulted in the 2008 long play “Debiut” (by Czesław Śpiewa). Zabłocki has gained Internet recognition for running a chat room devoted to what he calls “multipoetry”. He regularly connects with other people on-line to collectively write poems. Each verse of a poem is signed by the author’s Internet nick, and each of the project participants agrees that his creative work will be used freely. According to Zabłocki, “The work of art is not the poem itself, but the SITUATION, in which it is created”²⁰. This global shift toward cultural democracy, as exemplified by the “Where the Hell Is Matt?” and Zabłocki’s multipoetry, has also resulted in a new cultural activism, known as the free culture movement. The movement promotes the freedom to distribute and modify creative works by using the

¹⁹ <http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap080722.html>.

²⁰ <http://multipoezja.onet.pl/projekt.html>.

Internet and other media beyond the copyright restrictions. It advocates free sharing of content, be it information, software, video, music, or poetry.

Matt's dancing videos can also be seen as an example of what Robertson termed glocalization, combining the universal with the particular, the global and the local. For one thing, dancing, as highlighted by NASA, is a universal cultural activity. All the peoples, from tribes to nations, from the global North to the global South, do dance. Matt's dance has no particular cultural reference or anchor. It is neither traditional, nor ethnic. It is not even classical, modern, or hip-hop. Neither is it representative of any particular group of people. Or, perhaps more accurately, it was not, as since Matt started his project, a growing community of dancers (and viewers) has been emerging. This community could be described as ephemeral, or a "new tribe", or a "quasi-community" based on "quasi-interactions". Most notably, the members or participants of this community are connected through the Internet, and have only met once face-to-face to do the Matt's dance together. They do know Matt but most of them do not know each other. The fact is that there is only one thing, one experience, they have in common – the dance. Otherwise, they are the most diverse community in the world, or not a community at all. In fact, every single Matt's video is not only a manifestation of the oneness of human species, but at the same time a celebration of its diversity, of differences among peoples, cultures and localities. It could be poetically summed up with the famous U2 line: "We're one, but we're not the same". Apart from advertising commercial products, such as a chewing gum or a credit card, Matt's videos work as a front-page advertisement of multiculturalism.

Bridging the Distance

"Bridging the Distance" was a Polish-Indian cooperation involving youngsters from Nowa Wola in Podlaski region, Poland, and young Oneidas from Ontario, Canada. On the one hand, the project was aimed at building social bonds within the local community, strengthening local identity, and providing the local people with a sense of value and exceptionality. On the other hand, it was designed to bridge cultural differences, and facilitate the development of intercultural competence among the participants. It was addressed to children and teenagers, as well as the whole local community, and the partner community in Canada. The young participants were engaged in the project mostly as photographers and story-gatherers. They were supported by the older mem-

bers of the community, parents and grandparents, who played the important role of informers. On this level the project bridged not only the intercultural, but also intergenerational distance. However, it was the children and their unspoiled insight into the reality of Nowa Wola that constituted the core of the project activities and results: "The youngest asked questions that frequently seem to pass unnoticed to the mature minds. They were keen on the sensual details such as smells in their great grandparents' houses (...), or how the sweets their grandparents had in their childhood tasted. Though seemingly trivial, the questions revealed a particular inquisitiveness of the young mind, uncorrupted by the obvious" [Froń, 2008: 180].

Projects such as "Bridging the Distance" are rooted in the local community context, as defined by the relation to the place (locality), quality of social bonds and common identity. Such art can physically change the space of living (like community murals do), or change the habits and attitudes of the engaged people. It may teach regard for the place, strengthen the sense of responsibility for it, or convey a powerful and positive message that the place is something valuable, or even unique. The latter is highlighted by Bartosz Hlebowicz [2008: 8], one of the project's coordinators: "Today we know that Nowa Wola is a unique point, as are its young inhabitants. And this is not because of an apparently interesting mixture of Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian influences on the "native" culture, but because of something more fundamental: the way the young people perceive the world and the kind of dreams they have".

In the light of transformative and urban-environmental education theories, the space and its exploration are an important aspect of the individual and social development of children and youths. Firstly, space discovery makes a source of knowledge for the young; secondly, it reduces fear and raises one's self-confidence and self-reliance in a peer group. Thus, it is essential that the educators create safe conditions for such exploration and discovery of the local environment by children. In line with this argumentation, children should also be encouraged to critically judge and creatively change their surroundings. In a longer perspective, such an approach is expected to bring stronger identification, deeper concern, and greater involvement with the local community [Breitbart, 1995].

Congruence with these theories is apparent in "Bridging the Distance". The intention behind the project was to use the art of photography in a participatory manner, in order to encourage the young participants to look at their surrounding through the eyes of an artist, that is from a different, unusual angle, so that they could discover and "tame" their relation to the place and its

inhabitants, and understand that it could be a relation of a creative kind. “We wanted the inhabitants themselves to make their photographic autoportrait and show it to others, first in the open air exhibits, and then in the book. It was also about memory: young people photographing their houses, listening to their parents and grandparents, and then exhibiting photos in their own village and in other places – it was to be a way to see in a new light the everydayness of one’s own place, sometimes perceived as boring or limiting” [Hlebowicz, 2008: 8]. It is evident from the pages of the book “Nowa Wola Simply” (comprising children’s photos and stories) that the project participants indeed looked at their surrounding from a more artistic perspective: showing sensitivity to details, catching the unobvious, and creating photographs of “an inimitable artistic value” [Froń, 2008: 183]. This “inimitable artistic value” is not connected to the professional quality of the photographs, though, but to the meaning they have for their authors and the local community.

Analyzing the project from the social art perspective, one should also consider the idea of gift exchange or reciprocity inherent in its framework. It was inspired by the Indian tradition of “wampum” – a belt of beads that can serve both as a gift, and as a social memory carrier. In the case of the project it was the photographs taken by the young community members (each picture like a colourful bead) that were used as symbolic “wampums”, in order to initiate dialogue and interaction on multiple levels. First, between the participants themselves; then between the participants and their immediate audiences (the tribe, or the village); and finally, between the two faraway communities of Oneida and Nowa Wola people. To each of these levels a different social function could be ascribed: of creating social bonds through doing something together; of strengthening local identity through sharing images and stories; of changing attitudes towards the Other through getting to better know one. The dissemination methods employed in the project (the exhibitions and book) opened one more possibility of exchange, which would be between a minority and majority group. For it is important to notice that, however geographically and culturally distant, the two local communities involved in the project shared the same experience of a culturally diverse, rural and marginalized group. This is not untypical of social art projects. On the contrary, social art, and participatory photography in particular, is frequently used for the sake of marginalized people’s empowerment. “Our World in 36 Snapshots” provides a more explicit example.

Our World in 36 Snapshots²¹

The project was carried out in a half-Polish, half-Chechen group of fourteen primary-school children (8-12 years old) by a group of student volunteers. The children were invited to participate in workshops (to get to better know each other), and to take photographs of their material and social surrounding, and their everyday experiences (to get the others to get to better know them). Their task was simply to photograph “their own world”, hence the name of the project. All the children were given free digital cameras and instructed by a professional photographer beforehand, so that they could all participate in the project and approach the task on equal basis, no matter their social background and prior knowledge of photography. This is not to be underestimated, as according to the contact hypothesis, only when ethnic groups cooperate as equals, the contact between them may result in the expected reduction of prejudice and stereotypes, which was of prime importance to the project initiators.

On the whole, “Our World in 36 Snapshots” was intended to build up ties between a domineering majority and a stigmatized minority group in the school context. The school selected for the project was one attended by both Polish and Chechen children, but neglecting the problem of contacts and integration between the two groups. The project initiators wanted to encourage intercultural communication, and raise a more cooperative attitude towards each other between the Polish and Chechen schoolchildren. It was also designed to empower the latter, who normally find themselves in a disadvantaged position both as refugees, and as Muslims.

Although the project primarily affected the schoolchildren, the idea behind it was to exert an impact, however indirect and far more difficult to measure, on a wider audience: the whole group of Chechen refugees in Bialystok, the school community, and the other city dwellers. This was achieved through a number of interrelated dissemination tactics, such as: exhibiting the photographs taken by the children in their school, organizing a school fest at the end of the project, printing a booklet with pictures taken by the children, running a website dedicated to the project, and attracting the local media attention.

²¹ The following description of the project is based on my own research including observation and five interviews with its animators, whom I cite below. For the project results see: <http://36-klatek.blogspot.com>, and Potoniec, Grzędzińska, Gaworek, 2008.

The effect of the project on the participating children was three-dimensional. Socially, it created supportive conditions for an intergroup contact between the Polish and Chechen children, including mutual recognition, cooperation, and deeper interpersonal relations. Educationally, it provided the children with an opportunity to learn the art of photography in an informal setting. They acquired knowledge and skills, which they could immediately use in practice, and further develop after the project had reached its end. They could keep the cameras they worked with during the project, which was necessary for the Chechen children, as otherwise they would not be able to experiment with photography later on. Psychologically, the newly acquired competences raised the children's self-esteem. It seems that for the Chechen children the mere fact of inviting them to do something together with the Polish children, as well as the time, attention and care showed to them by the project team, made them feel visible, worthy and important: "For those seven children it was a huge event in their lives: that they could take pictures, that somebody wanted to meet and play with them, that they could leave the refugee centre after school, that they could go for a trip, that there was an exhibition of their photographs, that the press wrote about them, that a man from the radio talked to them, that they were on TV...".

On the other hand, the integration of the Chechen children turned out to be important for their parents. They were glad to see that their children – through participation in the project – ceased to be labelled as those who do badly at school, and instead were treated as individuals who are capable of completing creative tasks, learning and cooperating with other children. They were also proud to see that their children's undertakings got the attention of the local community.

Undoubtedly, the use of participatory photography in the project was of key importance for its integrative and empowering effect on the children. The choice of this method was initially based on the animators' desire to get to know the world of the children as they know it, but it also had a pragmatic justification. Photography, especially digital, is an attractive and interesting activity for children. Although in the case of "Our World in 36 Snapshots" the children were prepared to work (or actually play) with a photo-camera, in general digital photography does not require any particular competences or talents. At the same time, it is a skill that can be further developed and perfected as a hobby to prolong the impact of the project. Using photography in a group helped to establish and foster mutual relations between its members. During the photographic workshops, the children photographed one another, helped

each other to solve technical problems, discussed the pictures that they had individually taken at home or outdoors. The activity of photographing was also used as a pretext to introduce other interesting pastimes, like sightseeing. Within the project framework, the children went together for a trip to get to know the history and cultural diversity of the Podlaski region. It is worth highlighting that in this way their own culture got symbolically connected to other distinct regional cultures as another unique contribution.

Back to the notion of “art for multiculturalism”, in my opinion, there are five specific functions that can be ascribed to such socio-artistic projects: (1) providing a neutral meeting ground, as Lacy suggested; (2) creating a kind of an auxiliary language, facilitating communication (which Zamenhof unsuccessfully tried to achieve by linguistic means); (3) encouraging creative thinking, (4) stimulating collective activity, and (5) providing public visibility. Below I discuss each of the functions separately, however it is important to notice that the five of them are in fact interconnected. On the other hand, they are fulfilled by different pieces of art in different combinations and to a different degree.

1. Providing a neutral meeting ground

This function of “art for multiculturalism” should be seen as preliminary. To make a successful attempt to understand the other, one needs to break free from multiple preexisting roles and assumptions. And, as social psychologists claim, it is definitely not enough to realize the power of stereotyping. On the contrary, the more we dig into a stereotype, the more disposed we get to use it [Bilewicz, 2009]. Grant Kester [2004: 5] claims that Lacy’s “Code 33” project “created a performative space in which the police and young people [whom the project involved – K.N.] were encouraged to speak and listen outside the tensions that surround their typical interactions on the street and to look beyond their respective assumptions about each other”. It is also evident from the “Bridging the Distance” and “Our World in 36 Snapshots” that within the project space (or the space of art) interactions and attitudes differ from those in the outside world. External backgrounds, affiliations and identities are, as if, taken in brackets. A chance arises to relate to another person on a different ground. Art creates a friendly environment for people to meet and speak to each other privately, beyond persistent stereotypes and prejudice. Most notably, multiple private conversations held simultaneously in a public space constitute the dialogic content of Lacy’s performances. The artist is con-

vinced that when personal experience is shared through art, it can influence cultural attitudes and transform stereotypes [Lacy, 1991]. Reporting her findings on participation in arts, Sherre Wesley [2007: 16] notes: “Without losing a sense of their multicultural background, participants appear to find in the arts a temporary opportunity to simultaneously feel their belonging to a cultural community and to an artistic community with people from other multicultural backgrounds”. For Matt the neutral meeting ground is dance. Wherever he goes, he invites people to participate in the same, uniting, but not unifying, dancing performance.

2. Creating an auxiliary language

To communicate with other people we need a common language. Art is a universal phenomenon, an integral component of cultures worldwide. So is creativity and imagination. Hence, the language of art is not something artificial. It is natural to our human condition, though often suppressed, either by the highly exclusive discourse and practices of the “high” or “fine” art world or, which Hundertwasser relentlessly warned us against, by the “standardizing dictates” of modernity. If art is used as a means of communication, it does not necessarily require words to be spoken or written. It can resort to symbols, metaphors, concepts, designs, visual images, and even the body (a primary site for art according to feminists). It can even use silence or presence as the means of expression. According to one of Wesley’s [2007: 15] interviewees, due to art “you don’t need language. Dancing, music, painting – people can see it and feel it, and understand it”. It seems that the symbolic language of art, not only visual art, but also of dance, music or theatre, is a universal language, allowing – as it is stressed by social activists who “speak” the language – communication between people, who think differently, live differently, have been through different experiences, or using Pierre Bourdieu’s terminology, have different cultural capital [Bourdieu, Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 2005]. One of the theatre animators working with kids from the neglected Warsaw district of Praga and teaching them stilt walking says: “The stilts have become our way to communicate with the children and teenagers; (...) they work as a translator – it is thanks to the stilts that the understanding between us and them takes place” [Białek et al., 2005: 24]. It is important to note that art can serve as such an alternative means of communication, which can be resorted to whenever a discursive, verbal communication is for various social and cultural reasons difficult to achieve, like in the case of the Praga street children, or the homeless from the LAPD, or the people with Down syndrome pho-

tographed by Petersen. Likewise, if it wasn't for photography, the children of Nowa Wola and young Oneidas, so as the Chechen and Polish participants of "Our World in 36 Snapshots", would have a slim chance to talk to each other, or overcome the major language barrier.

3. Encouraging creative thinking

Art creates a context where difference is praised. "The creativity of a human being – writes Anna Maria Potocka [2008: 320] – is a result of the extraordinary inability to be like others". Art can help to get rid of some fixed ideas and assumptions, and imagine what the world would be like, if it was not as it is or as we know it. It encourages people to see differently, as if with another pair of glasses. It serves as a metaphor of change. "Downtown is an unreal place, but the possibility to talk about it in a certain way was of great importance – explains Petersen [2010: 119]. Disability is too often associated with the daily troubles and sadness. The metaphor of a paradise city was intended to break the spell of this image and reveal the entirely different side of disability". Althamer and his collaborator, when dressed in their golden jumpsuits, become "visitors from space" in their own neighborhood. Their appearance brings a fantastic element to the daily experience of the borough (Bródno), and interferes with the common-sense reception of the surrounding reality. According to John Dewey [1975], who saw art as a learning experience, imagination is activated when one ascribes new meanings and values to the known aspects of the world, including interpersonal relations. In other words, imagination, and through it – art, prepares the ground for a better understanding of the reality and other people. Hence, it helps to explore cultural and individual diversity. "In arts – writes Wesley [2007: 17-18] – people appear to find a place where it is safe to experience and engage with difference" and consequently they "try on another person's point of view or culture".

4. Stimulating collective activity

Audience direct participation in art is a crucial element of "art for multiculturalism". The majority of art cited in this article can be called collective (Banksy and Entekhabi should be excluded here). Collectivity is present in the process of art making and in the way the finished artwork is presented to the public – as the expression of "we" and "our". A collective built on artistic collaboration is a source of what Robert Putnam [1995] has called "bridging social capital", one that operates beyond differences. Against the common assumption that only the educated and privileged are interested in art, art, as

abundantly exemplified in this article, appears to be attractive to people from multiple, often disadvantaged and marginalized, backgrounds. This is partly due to the fact that art is fun to many people (including children). Fun takes the burdens of the outside world away, provides with a sense of comfort and safety, and makes it easier to relate to other people, especially the unlike people. Fun also helps to sustain engagement, not so easy a task when collective action is considered [Olson, 2002]. No doubt, one of the reasons behind Matt's popularity is humor. Dancing is fun, and dancing collectively in a ridiculous style is even more fun. Petersen has adapted the title for his project from Petula Clark's song "Downtown". Sounding a bit like a commercial jingle, the song invites listeners to leave all the troubles behind, and go downtown to have some fun:

You can forget all your troubles, forget all your cares and go
Downtown, things'll be great when you're
Downtown, no finer place for sure
Downtown, everything's waiting for you.

And the spirit of downtown is definitely collective:

And you may find somebody kind to help and understand you,
Someone who is just like you and needs a gentle hand to
Guide them along.

John Malpede observed that the homeless from Skid Row were not only excluded from the society as a whole, but also experienced alienation among themselves (they were strangers to each other). They were not a community. With his LAPD theatre Malpede managed to create a space for communication and the construction of social bonds and identity [Burnham, 1989].

5. Providing public visibility

The more public viewing of an artwork, the wider scope of possible change to be brought about. Hence, the children of "Bridging the Distance" and "Our World in 36 Snapshots" were provided with a chance to show their works to the public as an integral part of the projects. For Lacy creating art has become close to a "public informational campaign" [Fryd, 2007] or a "mass media performance" [Lacy, 1982]. According to this ground-breaking performer, art is not just an artwork, or an event, or a show, but a process, a series of activities, which include educating community and attracting media attention, and

which, at first sight, do not seem art at all [Lacy, 1989]. Art itself is, by definition, created to be visible, to be presented to the public. As such, it can serve as a vehicle for various social and political causes. Hence, those who gain access to the creation of art get an opportunity to speak out, to make their voices heard. This is extremely important in the case of marginalized groups. “I wanted to invade the public space, and invite as many people as possible to visit Downtown” – writes Petersen on his “Downtown Collection” project [2010: 119]. Art introduces marginalized groups and their problems into the public discourse. It raises social issues that would otherwise remain silenced or excluded to the level of public debate and collective action. Contemporary playwright and director, Rene Pollesh [2007] highlights that art, fulfilling its social functions, shouldn’t speak in anybody’s name, especially not in the name of the marginalized and disadvantaged. On the contrary, it should allow them to speak for themselves and in their own words.

Why are art and social art useful tools of change towards multiculturalism? How do they contribute to the intercultural dialogue? How do they help to introduce difference as a positive value? Darlene E. Clover [2006] argues it is precisely the dialogic approach, as conceptualized by pedagogue, Paulo Freire [1970] – and practised through participatory photography, among other media and techniques – that makes certain art resonant in terms of multicultural integration. The approach “emphasizes the need for equal rights and equity, empowerment, highlighting cultural power, and working toward a more critically aware and self-reflective citizenry” [Clover, 2006: 47]. Certain art does not, however, mean every art. I believe that to open up intercultural dialog art needs to fulfill three requirements. For one thing, it has to operate within a real-life environment: in a public place (on the streets), in a community, or a minority group. It also has to involve some first-hand experience, allow people to talk about their needs and aspirations with their own voice, to go for self-representation, empower them. And finally, it has to engage people in a meaningful way, or (preferably) place them in the position of creators, artists. Seen as this, the purpose of art is in fact to showcase new, multicultural forms of civic engagement. Althamer mobilizing his neighbors for a collective quest – a “common task”, Banksy visually commenting on the East Bank apartheid, Betlejewski trying to heal the Polish historical trauma, Entekhabi questioning stereotypes through personal enactment, Lacy facilitating conversation between conflicted groups, Malpede giving voice to the homeless of L.A., Petersen playing with photographic conventions in order to reveal the

individual in a gay man or in a person with Down syndrome, Schmale doing the underpaid, woman's job of house cleaning, and Żmijewski forcing unaware people into political confrontation – they have all acted as artist-citizens. So have, at least to some extent, Althamer's companions, Banksy's audience, Betlejewski's collaborator, visitors to Entekhabi's multimedia shows, participants in Lacy's performances, actors in Malpede's theatre, men and women photographed by Petersen, clients of Schmale's business, and parties provoked by Żmijewski. Viewers transformed into participants and collaborator constitute a new category of citizenship, which has already been labeled "artistic" or "cultural".

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SUMMARY

**One world, many peoples.
Towards art for multiculturalism**

The article introduces the notion of “art for multiculturalism”, as a subdivision of artistic activity. Referring to the concept of social art, three projects are analyzed in detail to show the multicultural potential of art, and many more are cited as illustrative examples. Specific functions of “art for multiculturalism” are enumerated and described in the context of artistic or cultural citizenship.