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ECOLOGY AND ART – IN THE NETWORK OF DISCOURSES

Abstract: Art, just like our public life, is entangled in the network of discourses. In this article, using the example of ecology-related art, I present how this network develops and what could constitute an impulse to create new connections. I also indicate how the discursivization of art begins with nomenclature itself. I consider reflecting on the network of discourses and entering the level of metadiscourse as a way of freeing oneself from the limiting community of interpretation. Similarly, I see the type of art that creates spaces for joint activities as a way out of the dangerous rivalry of discourses.

Keywords: art discourses, ecological discourse, eco-art, land art.

The purpose of this short article is to show the network of discourses that art produces and can be subject to. It will be a journey through a maze of thoughts and statements that compete with one another over popularity, utility and being right or, alternatively, play a game without winners and the defeated, and without throwing the opponent out of the way. In order to narrow the subject matter down, I suggest looking at art that is concerned with ecology or the natural environment. I want to point out right away that I do not intend to explain or investigate this genre of artistic practice closer, but only wish to indicate the phenomenon of its entanglement within discourses.

On discourse

Any written work that seriously considers the subject of discourse must begin with an explanation of the term (or rather with an explanation of the en-

tire phenomenon). The term, although seemingly precise, is extensive enough to cover the context of a sentence and a short message, as well as contexts of large areas of culture, art, politics and worldviews. Hence, presumably, the popularity of the term and research interest that it generates in numerous disciplines, e.g. language studies, sociology, philosophy and anthropology. These have expanded towards various methodological schools: semiotics, hermeneutics and deconstructionism, also including local varieties of the French, German or English schools. Thus, each new attempt at approaching the study of discourse begins with a presentation of the entire methodological situation related to it. Therefore, while taking into account the richness of the literature, let me skip this introductory part and focus on a pictorial presentation of an exemplary network of discourses in which art may be entangled, rather than on theorising and reporting the ‘state of research’.¹ I will not go into details about specific methods, including Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Studying discourse means analysing and discussing all phenomena related to the linguistic message that is involved in various interpretation fields and is constantly reread, reshaped and talked over. Discourse is the encapsulation of words with words. And, while we could wonder to what extent art constitutes a message (great efforts have been made for a long time to prove that art is, in fact, a language)², there is no doubt that even art that utilises images and objects as opposed to words, already in the process of being created and certainly during its reception, becomes the subject of discourse that manifests itself in the verbal sphere. Discourse is composed of numerous elements, starting with those that make up a speech act: message form and content, setting, scenery, speaker (sender), addressor, hearer (receiver, audience), addresses, purposes (outcomes), purposes (goals), key, channels, forms of speech, norms of interaction, norms of interpretation, genres,³ as well as those attributed to discourse itself: cognitive (knowledge), cultural and worldview (beliefs) and inferential (inference) aspects.⁴ With such a large number of factors, we are unable to frame a given message into one specific discourse. Quite the opposite – we can keep finding (and initiating) new discourses around a given message, the more so when we are dealing not with a verbal message, but rather with an item: an

¹ Such state of research is described by, among others: Teun van Dijk (ed.) *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, second ed., Sage Publications Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington 2011; David Howarth, *Discourse*, Open University Press, Buckingham, Philadelphia 2000, pp. 6-14; Monika Grzelka, *Dyskurs intelektualny ponad i pomiędzy*. Wyd. UAM Poznań 2009, pp. 23-46.

² See: G. Sztabiński, *Język sztuki a marzenie o komunikacji bezpośredniej*, “Saeculum Christianum: pismo historyczno-społeczne” 2003, no.10/2, pp. 89-100.

³ Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*, Routledge, (reprint) London 2001, pp. 53-62.

image that is ready-made or an installation (an arrangement of items). A work of art, when presented to the public, gets entangled into a web of discourses that are oftentimes different than those intended by artwork creators themselves. The current extension of the study of the message to the entirety of discourse has a vast impact on the theory of art itself, as well as on its analysis. Instead of looking at an artwork as an autonomous object with a specific meaning and exploring its substance, which can be considered as an essentialist approach, one can focus on the whole range of discourses that surround a given work and according to which it can be interpreted, criticised, typologized, read, etc.

Art in the ecological discourse

So, at the very beginning, when choosing a specific term with which I want to refer to a given trend in art, I locate it (as well as myself) in a concrete discourse and relegate it to a particular realm of interpretation. When I pick the word *ecology*, I suggest a scientific discourse which is understood as political today; when I choose the word *nature*, I position it on a conservative or romantic⁵ stand; if I chose the word *green*, I would get closer to the design process and become “eco-friendly”; if I equipped the term art with the prefix *bio-*, I would be closer to live and organic art, and not in a metaphorical, but a rather real way. Interestingly, however, I would not be able to avoid issues involving technology – thus, I would be very modern.

In the ecological discourse there are keywords (or *flagship words* as Walery Pisarek calls them)⁶ which are associated with specific ideas and actions. The choice of one word does not, however, resolve the question of the discourse

⁴ M. Czerwiński, *Kultura, dyskurs, znak*, Wyd. UJ, Kraków 2015. There are many more factors considered in critical discourse analysis (CDA). See e.g. Dianna R. Mullet, *A General Critical Discourse Analysis Framework for Educational Research*, “Journal of Advanced Academics” 2018, vol. 29(2), pp. 116–142.

⁵ Many critical ecologists have advocated the rejection of the word “nature” as the name of an idea that stands in the way of ecology. See: Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 2017.

⁶ According to Pisarek, those are the “words and expressions which, due to their denotative and connotative, and especially emotive value, are suitable to be placed on banners to play the role of an x or y in structures such as *Long Live x, Get rid of y!* Flagship words [...], either positive or negative, express (or evoke in the consciousness of the discourse partner) either positive (*mirandas*) or negative concepts (*condemnandas*). Thus understood, *mirandas* (“what should be admired”) and *condemnandas* (“what should be condemned”) represent different values and anti-values” W. Pisarek, *Słowa ważne i ważniejsze*, “Przegląd Humanistyczny” 2006, no. 3, p. 15.

within which the given type of art should be positioned. Quite the contrary, it is rather where the real trouble, or the real adventure begins (this is to show how diversely one can approach the matter of discourse as a research field). This is because ecological thought can manifest itself in various forms, depending on the worldview, i.e. on what is placed at the very centre of the process of our looking at the world. We can then speak of ecocentrism when the environment is considered to be of superior value, biocentrism when it is life that is of utmost importance (not necessarily human life) and anthropocentrism when the human remains the most essential point of reference.⁷ These views may have further ramifications, e.g. conservative oikophilia which can be understood as a concern for the natural environment as our home,⁸ transhumanism that transcends the boundaries of all species, or "Traditional Ecological Knowledge" which incorporates indigenous knowledge into ecology.⁹ These are only some of the possible ecological discourses – different ones will appear later in the paper.

It is also impossible for a single message to be accompanied by a single discourse, even within a certain overarching discourse. For if we acknowledge that the ecological discourse is superior, then if I attempt to make it more concrete (for example, by stating that it touches upon the question of the natural environment, nature protection, man-nature relationship and their mutual influences), I enter more detailed discourses which may be subject to further divisions and categories such as, for example, public, political or media, academic, or art discourses. Of course, I am not interested in the latter category which has its own internal discourses, out of which a network emerges. In order to avoid making the above statements appear groundless, I present a few quotations that point to the complexity of the described situation. Timothy W. Luke, while describing his point of view as "ecological critique of art" written from the perspective of the "vantage of the radical ecologist concerned about art", admits:

"Telling this story is not easy. It weaves together insights about social ecology, late capitalism, transnational commerce, consumer ideology, contemporary art in language drawn from critical theory, radical ecology, art and interpretation".¹⁰

⁷ This division was suggested by Artur Starnawski during one of the meetings at the Department of Ethics of the University of Łódź.

⁸ Roger Scruton, *Green Philosophy: How to think seriously about the planet*, Atlantic Books, London 2012.

⁹ R. Pierotti, D. Wildcat, *Traditional Ecological Knowledge. The Third Alternative (Commentary)*, "Ecological Applications", 2000, vol. 10, no. 5, pp. 1333-1340.

¹⁰ Timothy W. Luke, *Art and the Environmental Crisis: From Commodity Aesthetics to Ecology Aesthetics*, "Art Journal" 1992, vol. 51, no. 2, Art and Ecology (Summer, 1992).

Other eco-discourses are mentioned by Suzi Gablik while quoting Charlene Spretnak, the author of “Reweaving the World, the Emergence of Ecofeminism”: “Today (...) we work for eopeace, ecojustice, ecoeconomics, eco-politics, ecoeducation, ecophilosophy, eco-theology, and for the evolution of ecofeminism.”¹¹

And, finally, a quote that captures art within discourses on the state and future of the Earth:

“A groundswell of art since the turn of the millennium has engaged the politics of land use, addressing topics from the widespread privatization of public spaces and resources to anthropogenic climate change, borderland conflicts, the Occupy movement, and the rhetoric of “sustainable development.” Some of the most compelling artists today are forging new representational and performative practices to reveal the social significance of hidden, or normalized, features inscribed in the land. Their work pivots around a set of evolving questions: In what ways is land, formed over the course of geological time, also contemporary, or formed by the conditions of the present? How do environmental and economic structures correlate? Can art spur more nuanced ways of thinking about and interacting with the land? How might art contribute to the expansion of spatial and environmental justice?”¹²

When creating a work that touches upon ecological issues, artists throw their art into one of these discourses – or rather into all of them at the same time and into many others. Even if artists do not feel like representatives of any of these points of view, their work can always be considered from the perspective of one of these discourses, as well as from the perspective of a lack of such a discourse.

Moreover, the ecological discourse can cover not only modern, but also ancient art. Namely, since the 1990s, the trend of *ecocriticism* has been developing in the field of art history. As Allan Braddock states,

“ecocriticism may bring attention to neglected evidence of past ecological and proto-ecological sensibility or it may cast canonical works and figures in a new light by revealing previously unnoticed complexity regarding environmental concerns”.¹³

¹¹ S. Gablik, *The ecological imperative*, “Art Journal”, 1992, vol. 51, no. 2, p. 51.

¹² Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson, *Introduction. Contemporary Art and the Politics of Land Use*, in: *Critical Landscapes*, ed. Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson, University of California Press, Oakland 2015, p. 1.

¹³ Alan C. Braddock, *Ecocritical Art History*, “American Art” 2009, vol. 23, no. 2, p. 26.

Seeing how the network of ecological discourses can be multiplied, let us complicate it even further by imposing art-related discourses on it.

Art discourses

The network of art discourses also has its own hierarchy, although it cannot be said that it constitutes an order, as it is changeable and subject to constant discussion. If we consider art discourse as precedent, it will be a network of various points of view expressed by different groups from the art world, on topics that are not necessarily related to the questions of art itself. In this precedent discourse of (modern) art, we can thus find avant-garde, neo-avant-garde or postmodern discourses with all their varieties – critical, theoretical, institutional or aesthetic.¹⁴

Sociologists from Ghent University examined articles in the art journal “Frieze” that had been published for 25 years and, while analysing the specialised language of art criticism, they identified the most essential and the most frequently discussed topics.

In the introduction, they note two opposing directions of art discourses:

“there is discourse stressing formal, aesthetic aspects – in the classic Greek sense of the word, i.e. perception through the senses – relating artefacts to the internal history of the field, using categories such as originality, authenticity, expressiveness, and beauty. On the other hand, there is a discourse that borrows its vocabulary from domains outside the arts – e.g. psychology, philosophy, or sociology – and, hence, uses categories external to the artistic field, stressing social relevance, political/societal engagement, and participation (...).”¹⁵

Their research indicates how the proportion between these two types of discourses changes over time. The first one – the aesthetic one, which I would prefer to call an internal discourse of the art world, predominated in modern art, while the second, an external one, is prevalent in contemporary art.¹⁶

¹⁴ Sławomir Marzec lists the most important contemporary art discourses: “The current meta-discourses are as follows: the market, mass media, expert system and politics. In fact, they all come together at the level of the >exhibitionary effect< which has replaced the aura, metaphysics, aesthetics, expression, etc.” It is, however, worth remembering that these are the dominant discourses. Metadiscourse, on the other hand, is a reflection on discourse, the explicated awareness of discourse and its analysis.” S. Marzec, *Krytyka jako (anty)istota dyskursu sztuki*, [in:] T. Pękala (ed.), *Dyskursy sztuki, dyskursy o sztuce*, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2018, p. 60.

¹⁵ Henk Roose et al., *Trends in Contemporary Art Discourse: Using Topic Models to Analyse 25 years of Professional Art Criticism*, “Cultural Sociology”, 2018, vol. 12(3), p. 304.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The components of these discourses may be related to individual elements of the so-called *aesthetic situation*: the artist, the creative process, the artwork, the recipient, the perceptual process and the aesthetic value¹⁷, which can further develop into new discourses. We can then start tracing this network from the author and his thoughts, even at the stage of preparing the artwork, for if the artist verbalises an idea, then a certain discourse emerges. Yet when the work has been accomplished and made public, the very discourse can no longer be controlled by the author. Moreover, artists themselves do not need to say anything, as they have already been included in some discourse, so one can expect that the creator's work (or their voice) will be representative of this discourse. Michael Foucault notes that

“what he writes and what he does not write, what he sketches out, even by way of provisional drafts, as an outline of the oeuvre, and what he lets fall by way of commonplace remarks – this whole play of differences is prescribed by author-function, as he receives it from his epoch, or as he modifies it in his turn”¹⁸

The creative process may also be subject to discourse – it can be, for example, “green” or not¹⁹ and the finished work, at the reception stage, is subject to subsequent discourses that are dependent on who the recipient is and under what circumstance the work has been created or made public. Discourses around the work may also change over time because as long as the artwork is available for direct reception or remains in the social memory preserved through some medium, it will be subject to these dominant discourses. It may even happen that the discourse on a given work will last longer than the work itself.²⁰

A work of art²¹ in the network of art and ecology discourses

It is time we visualised discourse networks by following specific examples. One of the most expressive ones may be land art – a neo-avant-garde trend that

¹⁷ It is a diagram of an aesthetic situation created by Maria Golaszewska. A full bibliography of the author's works related to this subject is provided by M. Ostrowicki, *M. Gołasewska's Theory of Aesthetic Situation as the Foundation of Aesthetics*, [http://www.sideymyoo.art.pl/old/Teoria_sytuacji_estetycznej.pdf](http://www.sideymyoo.art.pl.old/Teoria_sytuacji_estetycznej.pdf)

¹⁸ M. Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, [in:] *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader*, (ed.) Robert Young, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston, London, Henley, 1981, p. 59.

¹⁹ Particular attention to the process is paid in design, but, for example, the use of bulldozers by Robert Smithson has become an argument in ecological criticism of his art.

²⁰ “Plenty of major texts – Foucault writes – become blurred and disappear; and sometimes commentaries move into the primary position”, M. Foucault, op. cit., p. 57.

²¹ The use of the term *piece of art* situates this argument in some (traditional) discourse, or, to be more precise, beyond certain (modern, postmodern) discourses. It would probably be

is continually undergoing both internal and external changes, and is constantly subject to interpretations. In the neo-avant-garde discourse, land art was interpreted as a type of art that crossed subsequent artistic boundaries and emerged from the “white cube” into endless spaces of nature, using the Earth and its riches as a creative material, either shaping the landscape or inscribing itself into it. Again, nomenclature itself places such artistic activities in various discourses, as we can come across the following names: land art, art in the land, environmental art, ecology art, or earth art.²² The movement had its peak in the late 1960s and 1970s, yet it still has followers to this day, although their projects usually appear under different names (which are, again, dependent on discourses). The most frequently quoted Land Art artists are those whose activities and projects arouse controversy, or those whose artworks best fit into the discourses that are dominant today – such as, for example, Robert Smithson, Christo & Jeanne-Claude, Walter de Maria and Michael Heizer on the one hand, and Agnes Denes, Anna Mendieta and Alan Sonfist on the other hand. Neo-avant-garde discourses that focused on the momentum of this artistic idea (sometimes with a cosmological dimension), shunned aesthetic discourses in the search for new materials and crossing new boundaries. Today, both the defenders and ecological critics of land art pay attention to the aesthetic (and especially visual) attractiveness of these projects, such as Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* or Christo’s *Umbrellas*. Eco-centric artists and art researchers point out the anthropocentric nature of this art, accusing it of land exploitation, the use of heavy equipment, the enormous cost of these undertakings and the lack of ecological awareness of the artists.²³ In the feminist discourse, it is the patriarchal and authoritarian nature of Land Art that is emphasised. Nancy Thebaut and Elizabeth Upper juxtapose the feminine “empathetic connection between a person and the natural universe” of artists such as Agnes Denes or Nancy Holt with the lack of environmental sensitivity of male artists:

more appropriate to use the terms *artefact* or *artistic practice*, as, oftentimes, creators’ works can be characterised as actions, concepts or projects.

- 22 See: Sacha Kagan, *Art and Sustainability: Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity*, Transcript, 2013 ed. 2, pp. 271-274; Sam Bower, A Profusion of terms, https://www.lindagass.com/PDFs/Unity_June09.3.pdf
- 23 The authors representing eco-feminism state: “For Robert Smithson’s now-iconic Spiral Jetty (1970), 6,000 tons of land were shifted off the shore of Utah’s Great Salt Lake in a mere six days to create a 1,500-foot-long coil. That same year, Michael Heizer’s Double Negative (1970) was made by carving out more than 200,000 tons of rock mesas in the Nevada desert to create two trenches. (It’s probably worth noting that planning permissions worked differently at the time these works were created and that what were then considered wastelands are now understood to have fragile ecosystems.)” Nancy Thebaut, L. Elizabeth Upper, *Earth Movers: Quaking Up Land Art’s Forgotten Feminist History*, “Bitch: A Feminist Response to Pop Culture”, 2010, no. 48, p. 37.

"This art form – known for enormous pieces built in generally remote, environmentally sensitive areas – was notoriously macho from the start. It celebrated scale and heft, comprised materials that often were taken from or permanently altered its surroundings, and explored mankind's relationship to the land. That's "mankind," not "humankind," as this hard-hatted, bulldozer-powered genre has been an artistic boys' club since its heyday in the late 1960s and '70s."²⁴

The authors see the very beginnings of green art in women's activities. Interestingly, the term "green" which includes performance art, architecture, design, as well as graffiti or guerilla activities, is retrospectively matched with projects that had not been guided by ecological ideas and are now accounted for such tendencies in the name of ecological ethics. The question "How green is Earth Art" constitutes an accurate example of incorporating specific art into this network of contemporary discourses.²⁵ Of course, critical discourse on land art can be considered as an important attempt to demythologise and demystify neo-avant-garde art²⁶, but there is a possibility that if it becomes the dominant discourse, it will duplicate the power of the preceding discourses.

The successors of neo-avant-garde artists reduced the scale and spaces used for their projects, and often moved to cities – while creating environmental art, their interests surpassed the discourse of art itself with its means and boundaries, towards more social questions and problems. Many of them, following ecological activists, became artivists and, using their own art – particularly performance as a force of persuasion and pressure – got engaged primarily in political discourses. The patron and precursor of such political action was, of course, Joseph Beuys. Today, however, his actions are subject to criticism: both in the ecological discourse (even *7000 Oak Trees* are criticised for the lack of biodiversity²⁷) and in the art discourse, where, among others, his authoritarianism, self-creation and collaboration with the capitalistic art market are brought up.

In the 1990s, the term ecological art started being used more and more frequently, although many very diverse artistic approaches and practices that

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ This question has arisen in the series of articles by Robert Louis Chianese, published in the journal "American Scientist" in 2013.

²⁶ See, e.g. Jan Verwoert, *The Boss: On the Unresolved Question of Authority in Joseph Beuys' Oeuvre and Public Image*, "e-flux journal", December 2008, no. 1, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/01/68485/the-boss-on-the-unresolved-question-of-authority-in-joseph-beuys-oeuvre-and-public-image/>

²⁷ Agnieszka Jakimiak, *Interview with Alice Creischer, Susanne Kriemann, Antje Majewski*, [Nature Morte spectacle. Premiere: 7th November 2020, Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw], p. [4]; <https://artmuseum.pl/public/upload/files/Nature-Morte.pdf>

are supposed to be tied together by “ecological ethics” are concealed under this “flagship word”.

Collecting the most important features, Sacha Kagan first recalls those mentioned by Suzi Gablik in her 1991 book “The Reenchantment of Art”:

“connective” practices, cultivating empathy and responsible dealings with fellow humans and non-humans, rather than merely affirming an individual self in opposition to society (...) aim to be “reconstructive” of sustainable ways of living, and not only “deconstructive” of modern social systems, (...) subject themselves to ethical responsibilities toward communities (understood as both human and non-human communities of life).²⁸

Tim Collins adds:

“(...) shaping of shared spaces for people and other species and the advocacy for such shared spaces” and states that: “Different scales of ecological relations at the local (...) regional/national, bioregional balancing, at multiple scales, the ego-... & the eco-.... perspectives, (...) connecting the level of everyday activities (...); critical reflexivity and systemic questioning, (...) explicit references to (and thorough study of) scientific insights from systems theories, ecology and complexity research; imagining of heterotopia (rather than planned solutions and utopia); and in some cases, also a level that might be alternatively considered as shamanistic, animistic or spiritual”.²⁹

According to Kagan, eco-artists “do not draw neat and clear lines between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, overcoming simplifying dichotomies. But they also do not confuse living ecosystems with non-living cybernetics (as some other artists working on or with technology tend to do). They are inter- and transdisciplinary practitioners, both when working by themselves and when working (as is often the case) in teams with other professionals from a variety of backgrounds, as well as with local communities. Their practice includes necessary ‘embedded ecological critique’, elaborates complex critical relationships to technoscience”.³⁰

A simplified, yet equally useful typology of the attitudes of ecological artists and the dimensions of their projects is offered by Rosi Lister: 1. “Interactive

²⁸ Sacha Kagan, *La pratique de l'art écologique*, “Plasatik” 2014, no. 4, <https://plastik.univ-paris1.fr/la-pratique-de-lart-ecologique/> in English on-line: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274719395>

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ibidem.

Observers – Art which observes and interacts with the (usually natural) environment;” 2. “Implementers of Ecovention” – Art which reclaims or improves physical environments in the tangible sense”; 3. “Agents of Perceptual Change” – Art which engages with the social environment, with pedagogical and/or activist intent.³¹

Each of these ecologically-oriented art forms is subject to various evaluations and discussions – it gets thrown into diverse discourses. Both antagonistic artivism and participatory currents, as well as green metropolization understood as “greenwashing” may be subject to critique.³² Recently, however, the term sustainability is becoming a flagship word that has now started to define a new, dominant political and social discourse, and which is also beginning to encompass the field of art. The aesthetics of sustainability combines ecological discourse with social and economic discourses, which is vivid in the reflection of Ruth Wallen, among others:

“In practice, sustainability promulgates relational, systemic thinking, integrating not only the hard sciences but also political and economic realities, into ecological frameworks. (...) Most significantly, this understanding inexorably links sustainability to social justice, placing human suffering – poverty, malnutrition, disease and lack of education – in an ecological context”.³³

Advantages and disadvantages of the network of discourses

Entanglement in the network of discourses, not only of art but of our entire public life, has many advantages and disadvantages. Let’s begin with the former. In subsequent discourses, we can still understand art anew, generate new theories and the recipient becomes a co-creator of meanings. It is all mind work that becomes not only a rhetorical exercise, but a real voice that builds various environments. Contemporary art is no longer an unattainable land available only to specialists – anyone can join a discourse now. Discursivisation essentially constitutes a process of art socialisation. Also, within the art world’s boundaries, the existence of a whole network of discourses can make thinking more flexible. Moreover, it is very important in the academic field, where new ideas are created and existing ones are described. It is virtually impossible to

³¹ Rosi Lister, *What is Environmental Art? A strategy for re-cognition, orientation, and implementation*, “Co-Gen Magazine 2003”, <https://www.ecologicalart.org/cogmag20what.html>

³² Rob Krueger, *Art, Social Change, and the Green City: A Rebuke of Green Metropolitanization*, “RCC Perspectives” 2018, no. 1, GREEN CITY: Explorations and Visions of Urban Sustainability.

³³ Ruth Wallen *Ecological Art: A Call for Visionary Intervention in a Time of Crisis* “Leonardo”, 2012, vol. 45, No. 3, p. 238.

have one unified binding model of narration about art and its interpretation. The role of academics is rather to observe the networks, get involved in them and, above all, create a metadiscourse that will allow us to see the dangers of anchoring ourselves in a singular discourse.³⁴

The disadvantage of discursivizing art and life is the lack of metadiscursive awareness.

For there exist so-called discourse communities³⁵ that emerge around discourse, all utilise a similar language³⁶ and reaffirm their own beliefs.³⁷ Discourse communities can be compared to “media bubbles” – a given community may not accept and acknowledge other discourses at all.³⁸ It is, however, worth telling ourselves: “Let’s keep calm, it is just a discourse, let’s not confuse it with the truth”.

In these closed communities, discourse may become a tool of manipulation and control, as Foucault emphatically portrayed by pointing out the constraints of discourse: limitation (of) its power, mastering (of) its aleatory appearances and carrying out (of) the selection among speaking subjects.³⁹ Therefore, the struggle for power takes place primarily in the field of discourse. As Waldemar Czachur notes: “The main feature of discourse is its contradictory nature, being

³⁴ Foucault saw the educational system as a “political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses along with knowledge and powers which they carry”. Academics aware of this state of affairs should renounce it by educating others about the power of discourse, rather than using discursive violence themselves. Foucault, op. cit., p. 64, 67.

³⁵ They are also called “societies of discourse” (Foucault, op. cit., p. 63) “interpretive communities” (Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The authority of interpretive communities*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005; or “epistemic communities” as “collectivities of social actors sharing the same knowledge” (Van Dijk, *Discourse and Knowledge: A Socio-cognitive Approach*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, p. 147).

³⁶ It is also worth remembering the “flagship words” described by W. Pisarek. Although the author applies this term in his research to socio-political discourse, when we look into their essential functions, we can admit that even these singular words can create the community of discourse. Pisarek lists their: 1) nominating function, as they name what is most important; 2) recruiting function, as they help attract new proponents; 3) integrating function, as thanks to them collectivity solidifies; 4) differential function, as they discern between what is “theirs” from the “other”; 5) identifying function, as they constitute hallmarks. W. Pisarek, op. cit., p. 18.

³⁷ As Marcin Czerwiński notes: “All interlocutors belong to certain communities of discourse that could be referred to as collectivities of interpretation or knowledge (...). To belong to such a community is equal to interpreting reality and communicating similarly. Each interlocutor is thus entangled in the already fixed meanings and established interpretations”, M. Czerwiński, op. cit., 113.

³⁸ “The listed inveteracies create certain less or more stable value systems and impose specific language-based “obligations” on their proponents – canonised and often stiff rules for creating statements that are to guard the observed vision of the world.” Ibidem.

³⁹ M. Foucault, op. cit. p. 62.

prone to conflict and struggle, and thus its basic strategies are evaluating, polarisation, emotionalisation, scandalisation and simplification".⁴⁰ Analysing discourses, as well as sharing and mediating them may become much more socially and artistically valuable than agon. To achieve this, however, it is necessary to give up the militant and critical tone, as well as the specialist-scientific language and mental division into allies and enemies. "For contemporary activism must give up dictating a moral way of living for the sake of political ecology which is engaged in negotiating the world's constitution"⁴¹ – as Christel Stalpaert writes and demonstrates how some artists propose (and practice) affectivity, which means evoking the potential of various groups, instead of focusing on the effectiveness of imposed solutions.⁴² Creating virtual and physical spaces for meetings, exchanges and education, where participants themselves make decisions and take responsibility for their environment, without unnecessary words that trap us in the net and close us in a discourse, could become an effective form of artistic activity for the sake of the greater good.

Instead of a summary

At the very end, I want to take the risk of carrying out a thought experiment by inserting a specific work of art into the ecological discourse. The volume is dedicated to the memory of Grzegorz Sztabiński, so let me choose one of his paintings in which one can discern an outline of a tree. The artwork is called "The square logic" from the series "Logical Landscapes" which, of course, introduced us to certain discourses that I will discuss in a moment – firstly, let us focus on the artist himself. Sztabiński was included (and, therefore, placed in a certain environment-context) among conceptual artists and, subsequently, among post-conceptual artists – he was associated with geometric abstraction, but also demonstrated structuralist tendencies.⁴³ Therefore, we should not expect to find ecological, environmental or biocentric references in his work.

⁴⁰ Waldemar Czachur, *Dyskursywny obraz świata*, "Tekst i dyskurs – text und diskurs", 2011, no. 4, p. 87.

⁴¹ Christel Stalpaert, *This body is in danger! Ekologia, protesty i aktywizm w sztuce*, "Didaskalia" 2018, no. 143, p. 27.

⁴² The author lists Benjamin Verdonck and Maria Lucia Cruz Correia among such artists.

⁴³ See: Wioletta Kazimieska-Jerzyk, *Obraz a idea. Estetyczno-antropologiczne paradoksy sztuki koncepcjonalnej (implikacje ikonoklastyczne). / Image and Idea. Aesthetic and Anthropological Paradoxes of Conceptual Art (Iconoclastic Implications)*, "Sztuka i dokumentacja" 2012, no. 6, pp. 51-52; Ewa Wojtyniak-Dębińska, *Grzegorz Sztabiński* [in:] G. Sztabiński, P. Sztabińska, (eds.) *Proper names in the art of Łódź. Contemporary painting, graphic arts, sculpture and intermedia*, the Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, 2008, p. 167; Ł Guzek, *G. Sztabiński*, [in:] *Katalog Artystów*, <http://www.artysci-lodzkie.pl/pl/artysta/s/grzegorz-sztabinski/>

The conceptual-abstract discourse⁴⁴ directs us towards autotelicity – what is external for art (also a fragment of a landscape) will only constitute a pretext to reflect on art itself. And yet, I will attempt to follow the issue of the image of a tree reproduced from a photograph, the shape of which is simplified and geometrised according to the “Square Logic”. Why is it that the squares marked out with a white line and “distorted” in the same place with an outline of a tree, should be for me, the recipient, an indication of the overriding discourse? And what about the “starting” mimetic landscape in the lower left corner, where the tree remains the real hero? In his work “The Eighties” from 1991, the artist delineated the shape of a tree on a text under the same title and blurred larger parts with a crayon in further copies. Which parts? In one version, it is the repeated world *landscape* and in another one everything is blurred out, except for the words *landscape*, *scenery* and *roaming*. In the third version, the author leaves out only the following fragment of a sentence: “individual trees or larger fragments” or “illegible and invalidated”. Thus, not only the logic of geometric repetitions, but also landscape itself became an important element for Sztabiński, which may cause roaming and invalidation. I will not go further into listing the performances where the author used twigs, for example – I would not want to abuse the already fragile line of argumentation. What am I arguing for, then? Not for placing “Logical Landscape” in the ecological or bio-centric discourse, but rather for the philosophical discourse of art which asks about its own place in reality and, therefore, in Nature; for a reflection on the order of art and nature, and for a reflection on the issue of an image. Of course, I do realise that these very questions may be considered marginal in the ecological discourse, but the work in question exists in a network of discourses. We can entangle it even further if we imagine a possible discourse on the neo-avant-garde and its participation in (or indifference to) the ecological discourse. What did nature mean for the artist; what did its geometric transformation mean – can we not see “Square Logic” as a metaphor relating to the reign of reason over nature in the late 20th century? Will art not face similar questions posed by eco-humanists one day?

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⁴⁴ Although we could also find nature-related works among conceptual artists – I have already written about the case of land-art.

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EKOLOGIA I SZTUKA – W SIECI DYSKURSÓW (streszczenie)

Sztuka, podobnie jak całe nasze życie publiczne, uwikłane jest w sieć dyskursów. W artykule przedstawiam na przykładzie sztuki związanej z ekologią, jak rozwija się sieć dyskursów i co może być impusem do tworzenia nowych połączeń. Wskazuję jak dyskursywizacja sztuki rozpoznaje się już od samego nazewnictwa. Prowadzenie refleksji nad siecią dyskursów, wejście na poziom metadyskursu uważam za sposób uwolnienia się z ograniczającej wspólnoty interpretacji, podobnie jak sztukę tworzącą miejsca dla wspólnych działań za sposób wyjścia z niebezpiecznej rywalizacji dyskursów.

Slowa kluczowe: dyskurs sztuki, dyskurs ekologiczny, eko-sztuka, sztuka ziemi.

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