
Magdalena Ujma
CRITICISM AND EDUCATION

The latest issue of *Elementy* focuses on institutional criticism and education. These subjects are closely related.

Institutions are the nodes of the field of art. We will take a look at what they are like in the classical liberal sense. They help in the circulation of art, they support and are involved in art production. At the same time, however, while exercising control over the flow of ideas and works, they tend to ossify. A researcher of institutions, Marek Krajewski, says, “Human networks of cooperation [...] exist due to institutions, that is defined ways of doing things. They seem obvious to us, [...] existing since time immemorial – for this reason they have the potential to influence us, to limit our freedom of action”¹. However, one must be careful. “The basic role of institutions,” according to Krajewski, “that is, regulating human behaviour in such a way that trust, solidarity and cooperation become possible, obviously has its other side”. The price for enabling people to cooperate “is coercion, subjection to conventions, the need to meet other people’s expectations and to make compromises in order to be able to act”².

Since they are so important and dangerous at the same time as they pose the threat of monopoly, excessive control over the circulation of art, ossification, they ought to be subject to intense critical consideration today. And since they produce art, provide meaning, establish hierarchies, create a field of visibility, they obviously provoke opposition. And they have done so. Institutional criticism, voiced since the 1960s (although protests against institutions have marked the entire modern era) dealt with precisely these topics. But the field of art is made in such a way that it cannot function without institutions. Attempts to do without them, to boycott them, fail.

This has been demonstrated by the history of institutional criticism. Protests against institutions often terminate in attempts to take them over. The ones created bottom-up, by the interested parties themselves, usually do not have the same blast radius as public institutions or large, traditional private institutions, as they have no power, such as the power to give visibility. Decades of critical work have, however, brought some fruit.

Irit Rogoff, who observed the transformations of institutional critique and who practices it herself, wondered what remains after the times of critical analysis of culture, including institutions, “What goes beyond the endless cataloguing of the hidden structures, the invisible powers, and the numerous offenses we have been preoccupied with for so long? Beyond the processes of marking and making visible those who [,,] have been excluded? Beyond

1 M. Krajewski, *Po co nam instytucje kultury?*, Kraków 2019, p. 13

2 *Ibidem*, p. 14.

being able to point our finger at the master narratives and at the dominant cartographies of the inherited cultural order?”³

All actions of this type have been carried out since the 1960s. Artists such as Hans Haacke, Marcel Broodthaers, Guerrilla Girls, Fred Wilson, Andrea Fraser and Barbara Bloom have analysed museums (*pars pro toto* of all institutions), attacked them, penetrated their interiors. Today we are in a different place. Institutions have undergone a significant metamorphosis. It is difficult to precisely determine whether this has happened only thanks to artists or due to a combination of various circumstances, including the progressive emancipation of various social groups in modern times, but undoubtedly museums, galleries and other centres are much more open and inclusive today, they emphasise different types of accessibility, critically analyse their collections and ways of exhibiting.

And yet today we clearly see that being open to critical analysis is not enough. Institutions still introduce distinctions, divide the audiences into their regulars and strangers. The changes they introduce are superficial. For instance? Exemplary solutions in the field of accessibility in exhibition spaces and lack of such accessibility in parts for the staff. This is common practice. What are we to do about all this?

Education suggests some solutions. It perfectly interacts with the functions of institutions. And at the same time it prepares for critical thinking. Its importance cannot be overestimated. In this issue of *Elementy*, we take a broad look at education. We analyse art and cultural education, but we are most interested in cultural education, with aims that go beyond the field of art itself, although it is strongly connected to it and stems from it.

It should be understood as “education through culture for conscious living (the forging of interpersonal and cognitive bonds as well as personal competences by way of acting in the field of culture [...]), education for deliberate impact on cultural reality (pro-social and citizen-forming education, giving people tools and supporting attitudes of critical reflection on themselves and on the reality around them and strengthening the sense of self-agency), education firmly based on identity, but enabling choice (highlighting subjectivity and individualism, understanding and accepting oneself in a network of various dependencies and possibilities)”⁴.

Understood in such a broad and ambitious manner, it goes far beyond the simple ability of reception of contemporary art. In its inten-

3 I. Rogoff, “Looking away: Participations in visual culture”, in: *After criticism – new responses to art and performance*, ed. G. Butt, 2008, p. 118.

4 *Animacja/edukacja. Możliwości i ograniczenia edukacji i animacji kulturowej w Polsce. Raport końcowy*, Kraków 2014, https://mik.krakow.pl/wp-content/uploads/animacja-edukacja_raport-koncowy.pdf [accessed 24.02.2025].

tion, it is an introduction to civil society – in its liberal understanding. In institutions, classes are most often conducted with narrower aims. Education is then a kind of initiation into art. Of course, such classes also have the backdrop of educating full-fledged citizens.

The popularity of educational programmes in institutions is the consequence of decisions made by successive ministers of culture after 1989. As early as 1993, the “Principles of National Cultural Policy” included a mini-chapter devoted to cultural education, but it only took into account art schools, considering them to be often the only cultural institutions operating in a given area. However, the path of today’s education was paved by very important traditions of courses, workshops and classes from the time of the Polish People’s Republic which were later continued, for example, in the Museum of Art in Łódź or in Zachęta. It is also necessary to mention (above all) the innovative understanding of education popularised by Janusz Byszewski and Maja Parczewska in Laboratorium Edukacji Twórczej, cooperating with csw Zamek Ujazdowski from 1989 to 2018. It was this that gave rise to today’s art and cultural education in Polish institutions.

In this issue of *Elementy*, we bring together materials related to institutional critique and education. Based on case studies, we prove how closely both fields are related. Thus, Dorota Jędruch analyses the educational strategy and communication with the audience in for instance the National Museum in Krakow. Zofia Nierodzińska devotes her text to the experience of co-running a municipal art gallery, using the example of Galeria Arsenał in Poznań. Thanks to her work, this gallery has become a model institution in terms of accessibility policies. Agnieszka Niczyporuk, in turn, analyses traditional craft workshops at Cieszyn Castle. Katarina Rusnaková describes the fate of art institutions subjected to political pressure during the populist swing in Slovakia.

Aleksy Wójtowicz in his analysis of art competitions (and competitions are a type of institution!) indicates their dependence on current political constellations. Iwo Maciak describes a specific case of the establishment of a fictitious state by the Neue Slowenische Kunst group. It is also an attempt to create an institution.

Aleksandra Knychalska presents the assumptions of education capable of responding to the call of the contemporary world and the ongoing changes in the understanding of the place of us humans on earth. Alicja Głuszek, on the other hand, devotes her text to an analysis of changes in the spirit of decolonisation of selected institutions from South America. In his other text, Aleksy Wójtowicz looks at the history of Polish culture wars, in which contemporary art is perceived with ignorance resulting from lack of art education in schools. Dominik

Stanisławski considers the modern concept of art and impact of artificial intelligence on it. Pierre d'Alancaisez talks in an essay with autobiographical elements about the destruction of art education by neoliberal concepts. Jakub Wydra analyses the content of Polish art magazines to show the territorial scope of their interests (and prove that centralisation is still strong).

In the non-reviewed part, Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk writes about recently published guide books on modernist Kraków and Zakopane, considering their educational aspect. Marc Partouche reviews experimental educational models in France. Rafał Jakubowicz, Wojtek Duda, Klaudia Prabucka and Barbara Stańko-Jurczyńska discuss the educational models they have adopted in their own work at universities in Poznań and Szczecin. Aneta Szyłak, in an unfinished interview with Adam Mazur, talks about developing her curatorial method. Laurent Marissal, in an interview with Łukasz Białkowski, reports on his artistic and anarchist work. In an interview by Agnieszka Kilian, Margarete Kiss talks about projects related to cultural and social life in Berlin.

The whole is complemented by the visual side: a pictorial essay by Justyna Gryglewicz and drawings by Kaja Kusztra, Aleksandra Herzyk, Alicja Pakosz and Katarzyna Wyszowska.

Pleasant reading!