

“Land Art Festival” in the perspective of posthumanism

The roots of landart go back to the beginning of the 1950s. Works created at that time often strongly interfered in the nature and changed the natural environment. Heavy machinery was used in their making and the “creation space” resembled a construction site or an open pit mine. These works were made in a specific historical and cultural context, therefore they were a symbol of the times. Times of the Cold War and an aggressive arms race. They were a sign of domination of Man (White Male) over the nature and all Others: women, coloured and local people, animals.

Today, in the times of the economic crisis, global warming and extinction of subsequent species of plants, animals, and insects environmental protection has become one of the major global challenges. Emancipation movements which have been active for decades have made significant progress in the fight for the rights of women, ethnic minorities and animals. Rather than affirming domination over the nature, more and more often the issue is approached critically. It seems that in the new historical-cultural context there is no space for activities that destroy the environment “in the name of art.” We should support these forms of activities (including artistic ones) that promote more conscious and responsible approach towards the surrounding nature.

In the Western reflection, the terms “nature” and “culture” for a long time functioned as oppositions. “Culture” was ours, “nature” constituted the world of Others. Nature had to be tamed, modified, set to work in the service of man. The relation between “culture” and “nature” was hierarchical; “culture” strongly dominated over “nature.” Even if some philosophers (led by Jean-Jacques Rousseau) tried to boost the importance of “nature,” the relation between the terms was still based on opposition and exclusion. A notion of “deconstruction” developed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, which unmasked the oppositions underlying our thinking, was a breakthrough. Binary oppositions are pairs of terms with opposite meanings, such as: white-black, good-bad, light-darkness, man-woman, man-animal, culture-nature. According to Derrida, the Western philosophy is based on oppositions, on “brutal hierarchy” where the former term dominates the latter. Not only do philosophical hierarchies affect our perception of the world, but also they justify the existing social inequalities. Derrida's considerations contributed to the development of numerous critical concepts of culture.

The belief that man is the lord and master of all living beings/creatures? is expressed in critical theories of culture such as ecofeminism and posthumanism. These theories, just like Copernicus' discovery once, change the place on man in the universe. Man is no longer “over”, he is “one of.” Being a human being does not necessarily mean ontological solitude. Our life (both in its biological and cultural aspect) is inextricably connected to the non-human life forms. Animals, plants and insects have always accompanied the development of civilization, and even co-created it. Without them, our culture would never be the way it is now.

Posthumanism is rooted in humanism. It takes over the ideas of human dignity, responsibility for development and self-improvement and the fascination with the possibilities of science. At the same time, it includes critical tendencies associated with the rejection of anthropocentrism and the end of the subject, of man or author, and, with this, the privileged position of the (male) subject. Over the centuries various discourses separated the world of man from the world of animals and machines. Today, the borderline between nature, culture and technology erodes. It is necessary to create new concepts of human subjectivity, in the centre of which lies the intermingling of the worlds and strategic coalitions with non-human Others.

The concept of “naturecultures” created by an American scholar Donna Haraway moved away from the opposition “nature-culture.” Haraway, observing the reality dominated by technology, notes that “nature” no longer exists and therefore the opposite term also loses its *raison d'être*. In naturecultures the boundaries merge and are impossible to separate. To illustrate the close relationships in naturecultures, Haraway forms two metaphors: a cyborg and companion species. A cyborg is an organism combining nature, culture and technology. It does not need to look like Terminator from the movie, it can be a laboratory mouse used for scientific research. For instance, the genetic code of OncoMouse has been changed so that the mice developed a particular variety of cancer. Mice look natural and are born “naturally” yet a techno-cultural intervention in their bodies makes them ill. They look like normal mice, yet they are protected by patents and

copyrights. In turn, companion species are those species of animals, plants or insects which for centuries have been closely linked to man and without them the development of our species would look quite differently. Dogs are a prime example of companion species. It is one of the first species of domesticated animals. Our species, for sure, would not look the same without the coexistence with dogs guarding farms, flocks or helping with the hunt. These examples clearly show that the fate of the human race is inextricably linked with other species.

According to Cary Wolfe, posthumanism is connected with the rejection of anthropocentric perspective that places human at the top of beings, one that separates from co-existence with other species. Wolfe does not dissociate himself from humanism, but encourages critical reflection on its values such as equality, tolerance and justice, and their historical and social contexts. Posthumanism rejects hierarchical and binary divisions: nature/culture, human/machine and human/animal. It seeks ethical and practical perspectives of sustainable coexistence of humans and non-humans. It criticizes the exploitation of animals and nature within the anthropocentric paradigm which emphasizes the privileged place of man in the universe. Posthumanism poses questions about the possibility of shaping a new ethics and identity as well as establishing relationships with non-human Others. It is a critical perspective in thinking not only about "nature" and non-human Others, but above all, about ourselves. This way of thinking puts an end to the privileged position of the human subject and, instead, it places us among the other species.

A need for non-anthropocentric aesthetics arises in the context of the aforementioned phenomena. This need is expressed by, *inter alia*, Monika Bakke, similar topics can be found in text by Wolfgang Iser or Richard Shusterman. Bakke proposes the concept of "zoe-aesthetics" which is "a critical approach directed at what is most vital, which determines not only who we are now, but also what he can become," It is an attempt to include non-anthropocentric perspective into aesthetics, covering also the latest challenges of modern biotechnologies and their impact on the life of the species.

The fourth edition of Land Art Festival fits perfectly into the cultural changes described above. The main theme was a tree symbolizing return to the roots, wildness, nature. Several invited artists created works that related to this topic. The works were scattered around the area of the Roztocze National Park, along Florianka tourist route. Such a surrounding forced a reflection on our relationship with nature, it compelled to think about the way the natural environment is treated and on the impact of our actions on plants, animals, insects and even mushrooms. A question asked by Robert Kuśmirowski during the opening - "How many species of plants, animals or insects have the artists destroyed making their installations?" - is a further proof of the emergence of ecological sensitivity. The answer given sounded optimistic: none.

During the opening, a forest ranger, who was invited by the organizers, spoke at each location. His stories allowed the viewers to understand better the context and the complex issues of environmental protection, as well as to draw attention to the intermingling of "nature" and "culture." He told the story of Tarpan, a primary race of horses which are in the Roztocze National Park's logo. The species was reconstructed and saved from extinction through selective breeding run on the basis of the Konik (Polish pony). "Wild" animals are therefore an outcome of human intervention and breeding based on the knowledge of genetics. Another example which shows that man can both threaten "nature" and protect it. Communication routes that cross the park's area (railway, roads) are a threat to species that inhabit it. They die in large numbers under the wheels of cars and trains while they are moving into places, where they can reproduce. To help them overcome these obstacles, a system of safe passages for amphibians and insects was built. Thanks to it, mortality among some endangered species fell as much as tenfold.

Florianka tourist route opens with the work of Jarosław Lustych "Axis Mundi". A birch located in the centre of a pond and covered with flakes of silver symbolizes the symbiosis of the earthly and spiritual worlds, world of nature and world of culture. The work is extremely picturesque and perfectly blends with the surroundings. If it wasn't for the context of the opening, it would be difficult to determine which part of the work has been done by man, and which by "nature." Even more so since the Black Pond was created artificially, by placing a dam at the Świerszcz stream.

Mirosław Maszlancko created an installation entitled "Tomography of a tree." Circles girdling the tree trunks are made of willow branches. It is difficult to say precisely what they are. They remind of tree rings, umbrellas, whirling dervishes' dresses, circles of hell, spirals, hats, UFO, vinyls or sundials. They form is the result of an attempt to penetrate the structure and specific character of a tree. The layout of the work is inscribed into the space, it results from the area's

topography and the location of trees. The appearance of the work changes depending on weather conditions and light. The artist emphasizes the role that ants, mosquitoes and cyclists passing by had in the co-creation of the work. There is an anthill close to the work, so he has an opportunity to establish a close, intimate bodily contact with the ants. He entered a space covered with a network of their paths, a space which they fiercely defended. Work on the installation was at the same time an attempt at interspecies communication, "getting along", sharing the space and building paths which would not intrude. The installation is a work in progress. It will be changing its colour, maybe in the future it will be used by species of plants, animals or insects, and finally, it will be absorbed by nature. Because it was done with natural materials, they should not have a negative impact on the ecosystem.

Moving on, we see a work "Dependencies – objects" by Cezary Klimaszewski and Katarzyna Wójtowicz. The objects resemble road signs made of lace or spider webs. When we see them we are not sure whose work it is: of man or a monstrous (maybe genetically modified) spider. The objects compel a reflection on the division nature-culture. Does it really have a point? Are we going to judge them differently knowing that they are made by people / spiders?

The subsequent work entitled "Time surface" has been created by two young artists from Latvia: Laura Bistrakova and Iveta Heinacka. For their work they used materials available in the area, an ecological, water-based paint and hand tools. They looked for a suitable location to highlight the connection between the work of art and the place. The installation reminds of a space left after a cut down forest, yet the artists distance themselves from such unequivocal interpretation. They stress the abstract dimension of the work, the impossibility of picturing time, counting it, specifying the beginning and the end. Time is infinite, almost like the trees in the forest. Cutting down of a tree, its destruction is also a beginning of the creation process, opening of the space for a new work and a new tree. Nature and culture are complementary, one results from another, undergoes changes. The work will be changing in time as a result of weather condition and animal activity. Even now it attracted interest of a large number of snails. With time, the installation and nature will become one, inseparable whole.

"Playing tree" is a work created by two young artists: Aleksandra Szulimowska and Pawel Marcinek. A beautiful, branchy pear tree was decorated with glass bells. They are not visible, but in windy conditions they make a surprising sound, unusual for nature. Thanks to this the work can be perceived with many senses. Nature co-creates the work: it depends exclusively nature whether the bells will toll, and how will they sound. Man has no control over this effect, he does not have a button to switch the installation on and off. He can only stand at the pear tree hoping to hear something. The bells have been made from waste glass unused at glassworks; thanks to the installation it got the chance to be re-used.

Jarosław Koziara is the author of the next work entitled "Procession". The artist playfully interprets the work as "American cones which carry an ancient Polish pine on themselves". It was constructed from twisted black cherry branches. The tree is a foreign species, brought from other areas. Its appearance threatens the ecosystem's balance. Fast growing black cherry infests the lower parts of the tree stand and cuts off the native species from access to light. Young trees are not able to break through, consequently, the species cannot regenerate and is threatened with extinction. National Park is not a space for the existence of wild "nature", uncontrolled by man. On the contrary, it is a space where nature and culture meet. Man brings in his cultural concepts and divides the inhabiting species into "his own" and "foreign", into those that require protection and those that are destruction. Active nature protection carried out in the National Park's area aims at elimination of foreign species, including the black cherry mentioned before. In this case the branches were used to create the installation.

An object called "Listen", created by a Dutch artist Karin van der Molen, sits in an old orchard. The artist was fascinated by the local culture and the beauty of nature. By combining an old rack wagon, which she found in a nearby village, with a wicker sculpture depicting a head she has created an interesting installation. The head seems to be lying and listening (as the title of the work suggest) to the sounds of nature, staring into the endless sky. An open space, in which the work is situated, is also a place to observe animals. In autumn, deer come here for the rut.

Aleksander Nikitiuk of Ukraine has proposed an installation entitled "Form". In the middle of a meadow the artist dug into the ground a line of wooden posts. They cast a shadow but not only when the sun is shining. The effect of "shadow" was created by digging ditches in the ground. Freshly uncovered ground clearly stands out on the background of the tree. The work changes

dynamically, acting the same as a sundial. At a certain time of the day the shadow cast by the posts exactly matches the shape of the ditches. The work changes with time, depending on the weather and light, as a result of the activity of nature, plants, animals and insects.

Slightly off the track stands "St Christophe" by Sergiy Radkevich from Ukraine. To create his work which in its style refers to an icon, the artist used the door from an old barn from the Zwierzyniec area. Located at the crossroads, the work greets hikers and cyclists travelling across the trails of the Roztocze National Park.

Waldemar Rudyk's "Penetrating objects" is a work made of spruce wood and air. It pictures a tree, or rather wood, as a building material of specific beauty. The construction will be changing its colour over time, to finally fall apart and be absorbed by nature. Its shape refers to the surroundings and to the hill, atop of which it is situated.

Ked Olszewski proposed an installation entitled "Temptation". A tree standing in the middle of a meadow was decorated with white dresses, reminding of wedding dresses. Some of them were decorated with the sparkling "trinkets" which the artist likes so much, pieces of mirrors reflecting the light. Due to connecting the work to the electricity, dresses glow in the dark. The tempting title of the work is a reference to biblical symbolism. The author does not specify who is tempted and in what way. Will maids resting in the tree shadow be tempted by a promise of quick marriage? Or whether bachelors will be tempted by attractive female shapes clad in white dresses? The work is open to interpretations: there are as many temptations as there are people.

"Infinity" by Katarzyna Szczypior is a work of slices of a tree arranged in a circle. The work has neither a beginning nor an end. In its form it refers to changeability and persistence of nature.

"Conversation, or taming of a tree" by Bolesław Stelmach is a work strongly inscribed into the surrounding context. A wooden chair designed and made by the artist has been situated in front of a wide-stretching tree. A quote from "The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry constitutes an integral part of the work that defines the manner of its interpretation. In the excerpt where the fox teaches the Little Prince how to tame a friend: "First you will sit at a little distance from me-- like that-- in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstandings. But you will sit a little closer to me, every day." This time-consuming, patience-requiring process of "taming" of a friend is at the same time an ethical obligation: "You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed." This statement is maybe not only the motto of the Festival, but also of the contemporary humanism which repeatedly stresses the man's responsibility for the fate of non-human Others.

The opening of the Landart Festival featured a concert by Osjan. The valley of Roztocze National Park was filled with light and sound. Ethnic sounds were pleasant for humans. We don't know what the animals that inhabit the park thought about it.

For some artists only appearing at the Land Art Festival which took place in the Roztocze National Park was a kind of an ethic declaration, an expression of their system of values. The works presented speak of the relationship with nature, connections between nature and culture, responsibility for the Others. Many artists emphasized that for their works they used the local material found at the location, which are not a burden to the ecosystem. Others during their work had a chance to enter into closer, intimate relations with our companion species: mosquitoes and ants. People visiting the Park and taking Florianka tourist route have an opportunity to enter the space of naturecultures and reflect on their relationship with other species inhabiting the planet. When a viewer goes to a forest, they do not expect to find artwork there. Such unexpected encounter pulls them out of from the state of indifference, forces reflection and leaves along with art and nature. Stopping, the viewer pays attention to the surrounding smells, textures, sounds. Entering a forest they calm down, free their mind, forget about problems and the politics, break away from the virtual and TV reality. Thanks to this, they become happy. The return to nature becomes the return to the state of innocence, childhood, the mythical garden of Eden.