

Agnieszka Lasota
TIES/ *WIĘZI*
2011

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Text/ tekst
Dorota Gruszka

AGNIESZKA
LASOTA

The image is a graphic design. It features a dark grey silhouette of a hand holding a pen, positioned as if writing. Overlaid on this silhouette is a bright yellow scribble that forms a circular shape around the word 'WIĘZI'. The word 'WIĘZI' is written in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font. In the background, there is a photograph of a room with wooden beams and a window, partially obscured by the silhouette and the scribble. The overall composition is layered and abstract.

WIĘZI



photo/ foto Jacek Kukuczka MEK



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photo/ *foto* Jacek Kukuczka MEK



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photo/ foto Jacek Kukuczka MEK

Apart from two rooms presenting the interiors of homes from Podhale and Krakow regions which form part of the permanent exhibition, visitors to the Ethnographic Museum can now see another interior: a contemporary room from a detached house. It is a thought-provoking continuation of the Museum's tradition aimed at showing how people lived / live. The new interior is somewhat like the others, a testimony to the activities going on inside. Although the inhabitants are not to be seen, there are signs of their everyday life. It is worth recalling that already St. Augustine wrote that places are marked by the value of intimacy between people, and those deprived of human relationships mean little.

Yi-Fu Tuan points out an important paradox stating that: "*things and objects are stable and you can count on them more than on people with their instability, moodiness and biological weaknesses,*" but on the other hand, "*in the absence of the right people, the meaning of things and places is quickly lost.*" Attachment to a place is in fact attachment to people, and the more ties there are, the stronger the emotions which the place evokes. It was not without reason that in antiquity the most severe penalty was not death, but exile. Home is an intimate place which defines us and constitutes a universal value, regardless of whether it is a hermit's hut, a nomads' tent, a flat in a block of flats made of concrete slabs or a Tuscan palace. "*Home is the focus of a cosmic structure, the concept of mystical thought*" (Yi-Fu Tuan). Hence an apparent oxymoron such as "the world as home" indicates the basic human need to define the *axis mundi*. In this sense, the interior of a home is a metaphor through which people become aware of their own position with respect to the exterior and therefore with respect to the reality.

In her experiment described in a book entitled *The Winter of Our Disconnect*, Susan Maushart tried to cut off her home from the media network for six months - during that period her family lived without the phone, the Internet, television or the radio. She decided to disconnect her home from the constant pressure of the outside world which was turning her family life in a desert with a symphony of sounds notifying its members of incoming text messages, e-mails, messages on countless devices... After some time, the members of her family, until then almost permanently glued to their computers, began to meet regularly at the table in order to talk to one another. Cutting down on excessive interior - exterior connections was an attempt, a successful one, to rebuild family relationships which disappear when there is no discourse.

The Internet guru Jaron Lanier, in his book entitled *You Are Not A Gadget. A Manifesto* - writes: "Give yourself time to think and feel - it should be crucial for you. Humanity requires that you are alone with yourself. You have to know what it means to be yourself before you start to function in the world." Both of these contemporary opinions on everyday experience direct our attention inwards, indicating the need to define our own centre, the metaphorical home. In this context, a diagnosis proposed by Maria Rogaczewska in a text entitled "*The Individualization of the Polish society*", from a book called "*In Search of a portrait of the Poles*", published by the Institute for Market Economics, saying that: "*In a relatively short period of time, i.e. when one generation was growing up, millions of individuals [in Poland] learnt self-reliance, how to plan their life, how to invest in themselves and their children, they adopted new patterns of education, work, lifestyle, consumption, entertainment, the use of new digital media.*

However there has been no similar spectacular revolution in the sphere of human relationships: we do not trust one another, we are rude to one another, we do not care about the aesthetics of public spaces, we believe that we only have to be fair in relation to our close family, there is not much solidarity in what we do, we are not very concerned about common welfare, which is more than the welfare of the next of kin" fits into the context of the interior and the exterior.

Work and lifestyle in the modern world also constitute clear messages, so clear in fact that they apparently do not require discourse, a *sine qua non* condition for substantial changes in interpersonal relations. Revolution - and it could mean the emergence of a civil society - requires first of all the formation of extremely strong social ties.

The subject of ties is connected with a certain ambivalence - the very language is a semantic trap, and therefore when talking about them it is best to use metaphors which in contemporary art offer a great way to diagnose the rapidly changing reality. Metaphors hold a power, reveal innumerable meanings, provoke questions, initiate dialogue. Hence the decision to add a counterpoint to the "Polish folk culture" exhibition by giving voice to contemporary art and the artist who describes the everyday life which after all is what ethnography deals with. Thus, using completely new tools, we can ask about the meaning of basic concepts and show how they function in specific areas of everyday life - which ones are reused and which extended, which are subject to renegotiation and which have disappeared leaving behind only empty form.

The language of contemporary art acts here as a mediator scanning the surface to show the lining of reality, pooling the senses and depicting the subjects which are constantly present and alive. Hence the seemingly simple procedure of transferring another interior into a historical museum exhibition gives Agnieszka Lasota the ability to talk about ties on countless levels . The artist, who in her work looks for hidden meanings of objects, often giving them new, symbolic functions, starts a discourse with the reality, not by creating more things or new entities, but by highlighting and extracting the meanings of the ones which already exist.

This is where the game begins - in the latest installation by Agnieszka Lasota, a the interior becomes a text to be read by an outsider who tries to find signs - objects left there (by the inhabitants or / and by the artist) of which Octavio Paz said:

*They live next to us,
We do not know them, they do not know us,
But they sometimes talk to us.*

This discourse with objects - signs which become empty in illusory space because they are cut off from their context is the process of giving them meaning and filling them with content. In this sense, the text is both something to be read and to be written.

Agnieszka Lasota invites the visitors to an empty room leaving them alone with and in themselves. In this way, through such an unobvious diagnosis, she invites them above all to a profound reflection on the opposition between the real and the imaginary, she encourages them to pose challenging questions which may lead to a redefinition of basic terms, to ponder universal values and their place in modernity. The artist disputes whatever seems natural, obvious and established, she undermines the validity of seemingly unshakeable hierarchies and the subsequent choices, and thus provokes new answers to her questions and a new discourse with oneself.

Everything else is illusion.

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Arton Foundation. Wilcza street 12 c 00-532 Warsaw. Poland Phone:48 502 055 130 www.fundacjaarton.pl