

TRICKSTER STRATEGIES  
IN THE ARTISTS' AND CURATORIAL PRACTICE

In collaboration with  
INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF WROCŁAW

POLISH INSTITUTE OF WORLD ART STUDIES

# TRICKSTER STRATEGIES IN THE ARTISTS' AND CURATORIAL PRACTICE

Edited by

Anna Markowska

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**Kup książkę**

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# TRICKSTER STRATEGIES IN THE ARTISTS' AND CURATORIAL PRACTICE

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Anna Markowska

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From the editor:

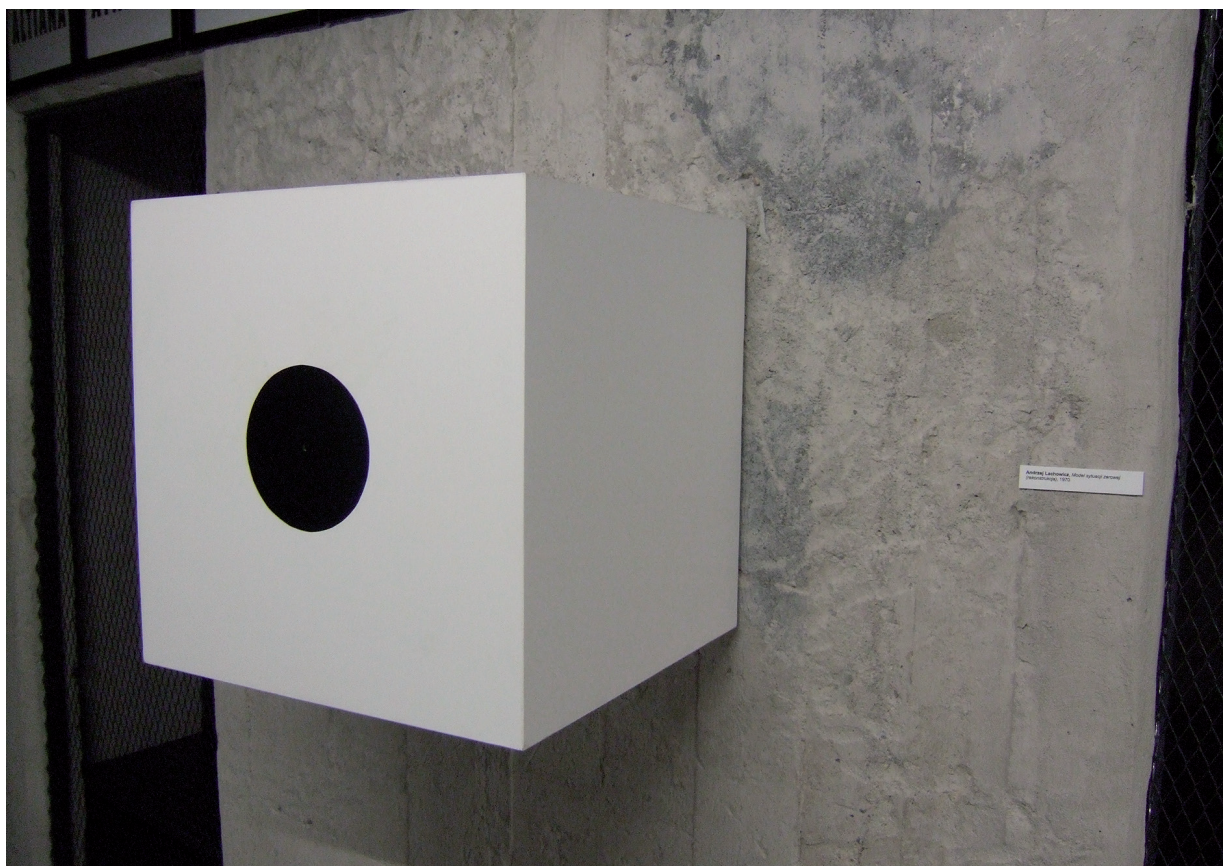
*Trickster in democratic and non-democratic systems*

A rascal, swindler, jockey, hooligan, or simply a trickster has immense merits in the field of art. In our times, trickster strategies are eagerly used in revealing power relations in post-communist and post-colonial countries. African history of art is abundant in tricksters. In Polish art history, however, they were discovered as recently as in the art of the 1970s. Undoubtedly, some of the books that contributed to the understanding of the role of a trickster were Piotr Piotrowski's *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe 1945–1989* (2005) and Łukasz Ronduda's *Polish Art of the 70s* (2009) peopled with intriguing cheats and rogues, though neither Piotrowski nor Ronduda use the term 'trickster'. They show, however, that artists using neo-avant-garde strategies turned out to be efficient in the disassembly of modernism and destabilization of unwritten consensus within communist authority. It is the so-called "artists of the neo-avant-garde pragmatism", as Ronduda calls them, such as KwieKulik duo, that within Sots Art criticised the socialist state for its authoritarianism,<sup>1</sup> breaking up the unwritten consensus of artists and communist authorities underlying the new status quo that, along with the regime of Władysław Gomułka (since 1956 he was the First Secretary

of the Polish United Workers' Party), followed the withdrawal from imposing social realism in Poland. Later, in the 1970s (during the so called "Gierek decade" – from 1970 to 1980 Edward Gierek superseded Gomułka on his position as the First Secretary) Paweł Freisler's actions showed some models, authorities and norms taken to the extreme, e.g. Freisler made a model of an egg in the Zamech factory in Elbląg and attempted to register it in The International Bureau of Weights and Measures in Sèvres. Normativity was taunted also by Andrzej Lachowicz. His *Model of Zero Situation* (1970, ill. 1) was a mere mockery of ideal mental constructions, in this particular case of an "ideal black standard". Moreover, a white cube with a black circular surface in the middle of one wall and a small hole inside it seemed to dialogue with the suprematist tradition, asking about the legacy of the avant-garde. Does its radicalism enable one to broaden the horizons or rather to always feel beneath adequate quality and requirement? Lachowicz's answer is trickstery intermediating. In turn, Leszek Maluga, an architect from the Wrocław University of Technology, ridiculing the classified nature of numerous military structures (the Russians prohibited printing detailed maps of some areas in Poland) designed a complete project of a UFO landing strip, naturally, not coordinating it with the authorities of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ronduda (2009: 14).



Ill. 1. Andrzej Lachowicz, *Model of zero situation*, (the so-called "ideal black standard"), 1970, reconstruction at the *Where is Permafo?* exhibition in Muzeum Współczesne Wrocław 2012

Warsaw Pact. His *UFO-Port 1* project was exhibited in 1980 in the X Gallery, Wrocław<sup>2</sup> (ills. 2–3). And Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, a visual artist and his pal, simultaneously wrote an ode to an alien expecting to land in the designed UFO-port.

New light on writing the history of countries from the Soviet Union influence zone is shed by the nowadays popular post-colonial methodologies, although Piotr Piotrowski, an outstanding historian of Central European art, warns against using a methodology designed on the basis of post-colonial countries to analyse what was happening in Central Europe.<sup>3</sup> Piotrowski writes that it was modernism that determined the identity of Central Europe in 1945–1989,<sup>4</sup> and although it should be understood as identifying modernism with the period of dependence on the Soviet Union, at the same time he stipulates that "it is difficult to treat modern art as a tool to colonise Eastern and Central Europe through Western Europe."<sup>5</sup> It cannot be

concealed, however, that the modern Polish were inspired by anachronistic and conservative mainstream Parisian modernism, enabling stabilised, essentialistic understanding of art as a jewel of culture, and the role of an artist as a depositary of the highest values, i.e. maintaining symbolic power.

After the Stalinist period, at the time of the so-called thaw, Polish artists – when they began to travel to the West and try to keep pace with contemporary art – completely did not notice the art of Jean Dubuffet or Asger Jorn or the *l'internationale situationniste* movement. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev notes that the art of postcolonial countries and those not belonging to the West was often limited to obligatory imitation of elegant Parisian formalism represented by Alfred Manessier, Jean Bazaine, Gustave Singier and Auguste Herbin.<sup>6</sup> Art began to be treated as a compensatory activity satisfying ambition and prestige, which became convenient for both artists and authorities. Of course, it can be explained by an insufficiency of culture in Poland and a willingness to cultivate traditions in a coun-

<sup>2</sup> Szkopek (2012:64).

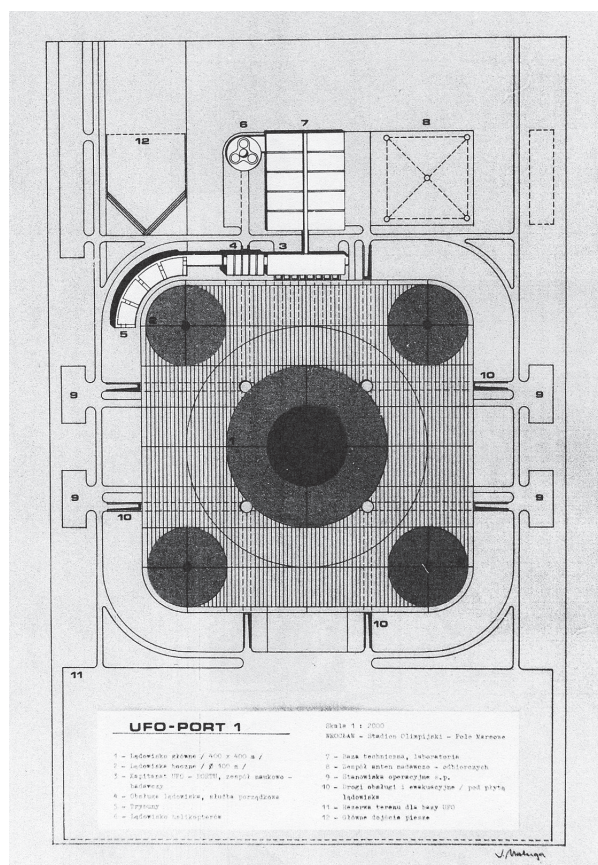
<sup>3</sup> Piotrowski (2010: 36–44).

<sup>4</sup> Piotrowski (2010: 45).

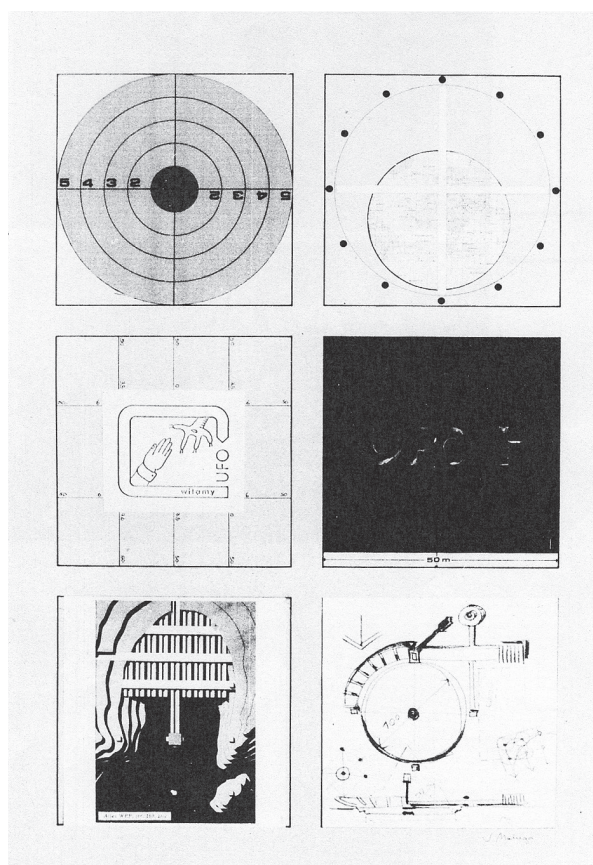
<sup>5</sup> Piotrowski (2010: 46).

<sup>6</sup> Christov-Bakargiev (1997: 82).





Ill. 2. Leszek Maluga, *UFO-Port 1*, project (1980), courtesy of The Ossolineum – National Ossoliński Institute, Wrocław



Ill. 3. Leszek Maluga, *UFO-Port*, details, courtesy of The Ossolineum – National Ossoliński Institute, Wrocław

try where radical socio-political changes were being performed. But this diagnosis, justifying cultural traditionalism, should be complemented with some questions – what caused post-war Polish art to be so closed to cultural dissimilarity, to joke and distrust of authority? Why was the authority of the centre and a preference for ready-made solutions so important? Even though defending the subject that is typical for modernism is also characteristic of post-colonialism, it is, of course, a completely different subject, which is proved by the post-colonial and postmodernist trickster – a subject that is distracted, devoid of consequences, not aspiring to become a titan-genius sure-footedly heading for the future fulfilment. In the context of Poland Piotr Piotrowski describes a different situation on the Czech neo-avant-garde stage of the 1970s, perversely quoting a joke of Hugo Demartini who believed that if the Russians had not entered Czechoslovakia, Czech artists would have ended up as professors and official creators.<sup>7</sup> As we know, a part of progressive Polish artists ended up just like that, even before

the fall of the Soviet regime. And, as Piotrowski noted, Polish neo-avant-garde stage, although very dynamic and rich in events, was at the same time very poor as far as direct political criticism was concerned.<sup>8</sup> The author also notes that although conformist tendencies manifesting in the uncriticalness of art were almost ubiquitous in the 1970s Poland, the situation in the field of literature was completely different.<sup>9</sup>

According to Hal Foster, in the USA the famous tricksters (Jimmie Durham or James Luna) draw our attention to the Indians' destiny without showing themselves as the victims and without calling for the return to old times where everything was better. Recently, in 2010, a Polish translation of *The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* by Hal Foster<sup>10</sup> was published. In the new Polish reading in the context of the current state of culture Foster's words about parodic "trickstering" of Jimmie Durham sounded very expressive: "All

<sup>7</sup> Piotrowski (2005: 268).

<sup>8</sup> Piotrowski (2005: 300–301).

<sup>9</sup> Piotrowski (2005: 314).

<sup>10</sup> Foster (1996).

such strategies – a parody of primitivism, a reversal of ethnographic roles, a preemptive playing-dead, a plurality of practices – disturb a dominant culture that depends on strict stereotypes, stable lines of authority, and human reanimations and museological resurrections of many sorts.”<sup>11</sup> Such tricksters as James Luna or Jimmie Durham tell very cheerless stories – about persecutions of Indians, demeaning treatment of Mexicans and unequal treatment of people of various racial backgrounds. It is then very easy to identify with the “foreign” and to usurp the right of speaking on behalf of everyone, to assume the role of the victim and to spin unending martyrological tales that become a sadomasochistic show and, as such, strengthen the stereotypes rather than combat them. Foster, however, believes that an artist cannot undermine the existing order without undermining and lessening the importance of his own role as an artist. Otherwise, he would change into another usurpatory authority, reanimating the supposedly “humanistic values”, while in fact being patronisingly condescending like someone who falsely puts themselves in an exceptional position. The significance of Foster’s words for the Polish situation results from the tendency of Poles to write their history in the heroic-martyrological-sacrificing version. The appearance of trickster artists in the 1970s in Poland played an important role in the dismantling of the consensual cultural order between the communist authorities and progressive avant-garde environment that had been achieved in the times of Władysław Gomułka. It is the trickster artist (i.a. the above-mentioned Lachowicz, Freisler, Jurkiewicz or the KwieKulik duo) that in the times of the subsequent communist state leader Edward Gierek broke the consensual order and introduced a possibility of a pluralistic agon in the situation of a non-democratic state with its culture controlled from the above. That is why a trickster artist enters the stage of communist Poland in the time of Edward Gierek’s new deal, a time when the state finally accepts progressive art on condition that it will be autonomous and will not disturb rigid power relations. Thus, we have a real paradox on our hands: at the moment of loosening the cultural policy and opening to the world, when Poland becomes – as a common joke said – the “merriest barrack in the Communist camp”, when authorities allowed numerous experiments in the area of visual

arts, young artists regard the majority of these experiments as facilitating the gloomy compromise with the authorities, legitimising them and improving their image. Another paradox is that the Polish trickster artist of the 1970s is not an apparent oppositionist: he actually often aspires to become a member of the Polish United Workers’ Party and goes to May Day demonstrations. However, he is rejected both by the most liberal activists of the party and by the unusually powerful underground opposition that was being born at the time. In the case of a trickster, the deep division on the Polish society into “us” and “them” (the establishment) is irrelevant. Łukasz Ronduda, describing the attitude of Zdzisław Sosnowski and Ewa Partum, wrote that they used artistic discourse to blur the borders between art and pop culture, between career and prestige mechanisms in both spheres.<sup>12</sup>

The archetype of a trickster is connected with fundamental cultural texts. Jerzy Prokopiuk, an anthroposophist, translator and essayist, in his essay *Jahwe: demiurg-tyran czy szalony trickster? Preludium 2006–2008* [Yahweh: A demiurge-tyrant or a crazy trickster? Prelude 2006–2008]<sup>13</sup> shows that God described in the Hebrew Bible plays an ingenious game with Adam and Eve – he had undoubtedly planned their fall, and the goal of the conspiracy was to banish them from the Garden of Eden and push them onto the course of progress on Earth. Yahweh in Prokopiuk’s interpretation is then someone who gave us a game called life in order to play it; God himself is actually having great fun pulling his trick, asking Adam a “pathetic” – for the Omniscient – question after Adam eats the forbidden fruit: “Where art thou?” (3,9) – and then a “naive” question “Who told thee that thou wast naked?” (3,11). If the fall had been pre-planned and the relation between God and man is described analogously to the relation between an adult and a child or a master-superior and a subject-subordinate, it is difficult to call the instance of temptation (interpreted by Prokopiuk as a relation between a paedophile and a child) a sin. It is rather the parent-God that is guilty of the sin of omission. That is why Prokopiuk views the story of Adam and Eve as an optimistic tragedy: thanks to a crazy trickster’s game mankind can finally be having fun.

<sup>11</sup> Foster (1996: 199).

<sup>12</sup> Ronduda (2009: 14).

<sup>13</sup> Prokopiuk (2009: 230–255).



The above-mentioned trickster explanation deprives a fundamental cultural text of a clear ethical interpretation. The demiurge becomes an ambiguous unprincipled person, a disruptor of the order that he had created himself. Let us also remember that Jerzy Prokopiuk is an outstanding translator of Carl Gustav Jung – and it was the Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist who had been writing about the trickster qualities of the Old Testament Yahweh. We get to know him as a creator of meaningless destructive orgies, as someone who makes himself suffer in order to later gradually humanise himself and change into a saviour. For Jung, this change shows the compensatory relation of a trickster with a “saint”, and its expression is e.g. the medieval carnival custom with the Feast of Fools or the Feast of the Ass that blew up the established social order.<sup>14</sup>

The purpose of this book is not to reconstruct full trickster discourse, from archetypal cultural texts and characters such as the above-mentioned Yahweh of the Old Testament, Egyptian Seth<sup>15</sup> or Greek Hermes<sup>16</sup> to interpretations of such outstanding 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars as Claude Lévi-Straus – connecting the trickster with disrupting the borders between Life and Death by the habit of eating carrion (something between the killing act of a carnivore and non-violent sustenance of a herbivore) or Sigmund Freud – connecting the figure with an unwillingness to delay immediate pleasure that leads to destroying the culture.<sup>17</sup> Even more so, there is no space here to analyse animal categories contained in myths, e.g. Indian myths (“raven,” “coyote,” “hare,” “rabbit”<sup>18</sup>) or in interpretations of modern cultural characters such as Charlie Chaplin (“*Charlie’s trickster helped bring the immigrant population into American culture*”<sup>19</sup>) or Borat played by Sacha Baron Cohen.<sup>20</sup> There have been numerous cheats then: Odysseus who wore woman’s clothes and pretended to be dead, Biblical Jacob who did not hesitate to cheat his father Isaac on his deathbed, etc. Contrary to the background of the ancient and the Jewish tradition, Christians, especially in Poland, seem very direct and deprived of the sense

of humour. Brought up mainly in the Christian tradition, we subconsciously prefer to emphasize our sacrificing or simply kind-hearted character. Even the word *szachraj* (cheat) as opposed to *ciapa* (wimp) is of foreign etymology (most likely German). Did tricksters Wile E. Coyote and Bugs Bunny push their way in between Polish children’s characters: Marysia the unhappy orphan and the loser Miś Uszatek? Thanks to the talent of Jan Brzechwa (1898–1966) – a Polish poet of Jewish origin – some trickster features appear in the unforgettable characters of children’s tales and poems: Pchła Szachrajka, Lis Witalis or knight Szalawiła.

The memorable exhibition *Shadows of Humor – Unpleasant Business. The Czech Exhibition* [Shadows of Humor – Przykra sprawa. Czeska wystawa] showed in the BWA Gallery in Wrocław in 2006 made us realize that after the fall of Communism the Czechs placed their bets on tricksters in their art: from David Černý, Martin Zet, Kamera Skura, Guma Guar to Jirí Surůvka. “Oh! If only the Poles had as much sense of humour when it comes to religion as the Czechs do!”, sighed Iza Kowalczyk on the occasion of exhibition<sup>21</sup> elsewhere describing a secretly threatening perfidious censorship strategy in Poland. The unsuccessful attempt to censor Czechs in Wrocław, Bytom and Bielsko-Biała was in fact “successful”. In Bielsko-Biała the problem concerned a pastiche of Damien Hirst’s work *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* by David Černý, simply called *Shark*, in which the shark immersed in formaldehyde was a sculpture of naked Saddam Hussein. In Bytom, on the other hand, a work by Guma Guar with the Pope Benedict XVI holding Elton John’s head was censored.

The purpose of this book is rather to check how a situation of continuous and deep historical changes affected both art and art narratives; why a trickster impersonates not only an artist (as the majority of authors prove here), a curator (according to i.e. Irina Hubbard, Ewelina Kwiatkowska or Filip Pręgowski and Wojciech Ciesielski describing his own curatorial practice in the National Museum in Szczecin), but even a narrator of a story as Ewelina Jarosz shows us in her paper “*Newman*”: *a trickster in every sense of the word!* creating Bernadette Newone as her *alter ego*. So we would like to ask here: what do we need such a protagonist for?

<sup>14</sup> Jung (2010: 222–224).

<sup>15</sup> Velde (1968).

<sup>16</sup> Kerenyi (2010).

<sup>17</sup> Carroll (1981).

<sup>18</sup> Radin (2010).

<sup>19</sup> Lieberman (1994: 26).

<sup>20</sup> Kononenko&Kukhareno (2008).

<sup>21</sup> Kowalczyk (2009).

What does he/she enable? What kind of forgotten, marginalized spaces does he/she bring with him/her? If we focus on emancipatory narratives, building pride and self-assurance, the answer is simple: a trickster does not wage war but, feeling uncomfortable within dominant norms, attempts to break free. Agnieszka Żechowska speaking about Aleka Polis and Małgorzata Jankowska reporting on Natalia LL reveal such an emancipatory potential in female artists' strategies of different generations. But Irina Gavrash recalling a yurodivy – a blessed fool – attracts our attention to an idiosyncratic relation with the world, a customary absence in prestigious councils and influential circles, in the academic or political world. A yurodivy has been withdrawn from any democracy – because he never is not only in the majority but not even in a “reasonable” minority. Goofy cheerfulness is allowed rather among comrades or friends, while hierarchical dependence exerts pressure to respect the status quo. Eastern artists in the West – although the Berlin Wall does not exist anymore – should rather make fun of the Eastern world, or at least give statements on their own skeletons in the cupboard. The chapter *The role of the trickster in post-communist and post-colonial countries* sheds some light on a new distribution of power which – as a patronizing one – is not quite new, in fact. The purpose of this book is, however, also a meta-theory – to reflect on art history and on the self-awareness of art historians: how to retell the images we know in a different way, and how new narratives enable us to notice something we have ignored before, e.g. the chapter *History of trickster. Urban myths and events* shows that some ancient stories can help to fulfill this aim. Classification, hierarchy, relation of power – this is for all of us who observed something extremely vivid and personal in the eye of the storm of the dismantling of the Soviet Union, and establishing a new political order in Europe. Nevertheless, also the doubts of curators (Patrycja Sikora and Piotr Stasiowski) who arranged a show on tricksters' strategies called *Swindlers, Rascals, Parasites* – described in the chapter *Curatorial performances* – cannot be omitted. Being afraid of a counterproductive and jejune effect, they disclose the frames of their activity: municipal patronage and its assumable expectations. A trickster does not offer us a universal remedy to a mere academism!

Not solving any problems, today, tricksters however add fuel to the flames when they participate in

various contemporary hot debates. Oskar Dawicki commented upon the commercialization of young art as well as humanistic, pompous predilection of the artists for splendid subjects. Dawicki's performance on the last European Culture Congress in 2011 (Wrocław) referred to the alienation of cultural policy from the needs of society and maintaining a peculiar caste of art officials who, financed by tax-payers' money, lead a pleasant, untroubled life of arbiters elegantiarum. During the deliberations of the Congress, Dawicki offered some refined refreshments that put the participants to the test of good taste – beautiful-looking biscuits tasted of burnt bread and the toast for the success of the Congress was raised with bacon-flavoured vodka. He ridiculed the attachment to the national alcohol tradition and created a two-in-one product, a vodka with a snack – a drink that simply stank. “For me, garlic with chocolate tastes subversively,” explained the artist with a smile, glad of the fact that the taste of garlic only appears after some time and the bon appétit toast seemed to have been much too early. If we combine the curatorial activities of the Culture Congress in Wrocław with the idea of relational aesthetics and a wish to differ from the “bureaucracy-encumbered collection-based museums”, we will certainly see a desire to create “a buzz of creativity and the aura of being at the vanguard of contemporary production” – as Claire Bishop wrote about curators promoting “laboratory” paradigm (Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Barbara van der Linden, Hou Hanru, Nicolas Bourriaud).<sup>22</sup> Bishop sarcastically notes that project-based works-in-progress and artists-in-residence begin to conform with an “experience economy”: “the marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experience,”<sup>23</sup> more than that – this experience is “essentially institutionalized.” Such in-depth analyses of Polish art do not as yet appear in Poland – that perhaps results from the fact that capitalism, since the fall of the old communist system in 1989, is still something new, the ethos of an “independent” artist following a strong modernist tradition is still something obvious and the joy that Polish artists achieve international successes measured by sales prices is still huge, also with the Polish left. In Krakow, after Oskar Dawicki moved to Warsaw, the main role of the trickster of

<sup>22</sup> Bishop (2004: 52).

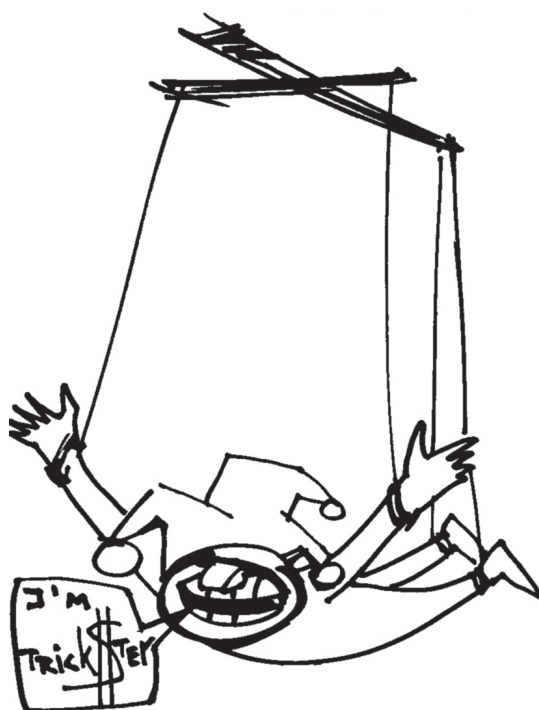
<sup>23</sup> Bishop (2004: 52).



Ill. 4. Logo of the conference *Trickster Strategies in the Artists' and Curatorial Practice*, organised in the Institute of Art History of the University of Wrocław in October 2011

the royal city was assumed by Janek Simon. Some time ago, in the Entropia gallery in Wrocław I saw his unforgettable film *Departure* [Odłot] about Krakow churches setting off into space – the film first showed a beautiful panorama of the city, a contemplation of which was interrupted by successive holy buildings unexpectedly launched into space. Whether they started out to get closer to the boss or left the sinful society that they did not want to harbour any longer – we will never know. The cityscape that was left was definitely different... However, Simon's trickster character is not only visible in his works but also in his lifestyle and the way of making a living, both of which mock the horizons of the Polish middle class. Such mockery was also known to a Swiss curator Harald Szeemann who died in 2005. When Szeemann created a mischievous exhibition for the Zachęta Gallery centenary (2001) in Warsaw, serious critics maintained that the artist did not want to invoke any provocation. Furthermore, there were also those who considered Maurizio Cattelan (author of the exhibited sculpture) as an artist concerned with humanistic and religious values. It was really difficult not to admit that the rightist critic Jan Michalski who ridiculed the hypocrisy of prominent art historians that in Cattelan's sculpture saw "a Pope suffering under a cross as Jesus did on His Way of the Cross. The meteorite crushing the figure of the Pope can be treated as a symbol of evil."<sup>24</sup> was right only so the discussion about the meanders of national Catholic tradition would not happen.

<sup>24</sup> Michalski (2001), see also Michalski, Jan: "Po aferach w Zachęcie" (After scandals in Zachęta gallery), *Znak*, 2001, kwiecień, [http://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/punkty\\_551.html](http://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/punkty_551.html), viewed on 2 March 2012



Ill. 5. The Krasnals, *Untitled*, the drawing sent to the organizers of the the international conference *Trickster Strategies in the Artists' and Curatorial Practice*

The figure of the trickster efficiently unveils hypocrisy. In Russia, they mock of the role of the artist from the East without being ashamed of attacking the public, as, for example, Oleg Kulik does. Fortunately, Kulik's exhibition in Warsaw in 2000 where the artist showed a *Family of the Future* did not occasion any indignant reactions. It was quite surprising because the list of censored works and exhibitions in Poland after the fall of communism is quite long (it can be viewed on the Indeks 73 website, [http://www.indeks73.pl/en\\_index.php](http://www.indeks73.pl/en_index.php)).

It is, undoubtedly, the legacy of the old system and a very bad practice in a country where nowadays one can be sentenced for the enigmatic “insult of religious feelings” (which used to be “undermining the leading role of the party”), often treated as a value superior to freedom of speech. That is why I raised the topic *Trickster Strategies in the Artists’ and Curatorial Practice* when organising the international conference in the Institute of Art History of the University of Wrocław (October 26–27, 2011, ill. 4). Above all I undertook an attempt to diagnose the context for using trickster strategies by artists from Central and Eastern Europe after over two decades after the fall of the old regime. On the occasion of the conference the following statement was sent to the organisers (I was supported by Ph.D. students: Ewelina Kwiatkowska and Magdalena Zięba) by the still anonymous The Krasnals group (ill. 5):

“Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the communist era ended and the times of politically correct literalness came a trickster – against what leading critics and curators claim – is NO LONGER a contesting artist, one who fights guerrilla warfare lined with humour that exposes the hypocrisy and shallowness of the governing elites. A trickster is a “creator” who, commissioned by a curator, carries out a public-funded project that is supposed to imitate the fascinating mythology of tricksters.

Instead of understanding it themselves and especially, in keeping with ethics, making the public understand – curators do something opposite. They do their best to sell this product that is spoiled by definition, with its faulty workmanship and erroneous construction in a packaging that is inadequate to its content.

The concept of a TRICKSTER introduced to the European Culture Congress in Wrocław is preposterous: at the very least because of the reference to the leading tricksters of Polish art – the Orange Alternative – while denying them participation in the Congress at the same time! Instead of that some commissioned junk by performers as distant from the idea of a trickster as Masłowska or Bałka was thrown into the ‘trickster’ pot.

The friendly media and art world will sing praises to this junk for some time, trying not to notice that parallelly, in true trickster spirit – as a sign of disagreement with what is happening in culture

and politics – the Orange Alternative and The Krasnals conducted COMMON TASK, an ironic happening within their alternative Frickster programme. But what can The Krasnals, a group that was the first in history to be awarded the Orange Dwarf by Major Fydrych, possibly have in common with tricksters? Actually, nothing – at least with the modern meaning of this phrase! Thank God! It is Frickster, not the Trickster that today effectively exposes hypocrisy, pricks the balloon of grandiosity and shouts loudly that the emperor is naked.

Currently The Krasnals are the most expressive group of artists working in the spirit of a frickster but at the same time, unfortunately, the only one actively contesting environment in the field of art in Poland. We do not know what that results from – perhaps from the prevailing spirit of conformism that modern artists so easily fall for. People who can do something on their own, not relying on external support can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The majority of grand or small personages will not lift a hand without the guarantee of financial support and an assurance of promotion. We, as The Krasnals, have got a different approach and proudly join the frickster tradition of the Orange Alternative. Their orange dwarves overturned the communism. But, as it turns out, the friendly arrangements of that time have not died out and art today once again is boiled down to a tool of political propaganda. The Krasnals group fights it now, a group that tries to break up the cartel that holds the power over the art market. We do it as our predecessors did – through absurd and joke. We are against fossilized arrangements shaping Polish art! We demand depoliticization of art! We demand that the political whore of Krytyka Polityczna deal with politics and not art! It is high time for the beast in the shape of the Wawel dragon calling for sacrifices and tributes to burst with a loud bang! We want politics to be on the agenda of the government, not in the museums, galleries or on the art market! We demand transferring the 1% of taxes to agriculture (at least we’ll have something to eat), not art! We want art to be free for Dwarves of all kinds!”

Unfortunately, the above manifesto of “freaksterism” has turned out to be only self-advertising activity because The Krasnals since recently have been vigorously adhering to right-wing politics betraying their previous in-between status. What is even more astounding, they seem to dream about



strong authority and prestige, unveiling jealousy and gall. And trickster is not a green-eyed monster!

The trickster, as an ambivalent persona, not locating itself beyond the analyzed system, makes us aware of its functioning, its spreading of prejudices and of its value systems. I previously thought that thanks to i.a. The Krasnals – as women also are members of the anonymous group – Ewa Toniak's thesis from her book *Olbrzymki* [She-Giants] (2008) that in the free post-1989 Poland women artists duplicate the worst stereotypes about female masochism and victimization is becoming out-of-date. But sado-masochism still seems to be the paramount tradition here, not so many years after our quasi-communism was dismantled. Unfortunately, a trickster in Poland is still above all a masculine figure; what is more, it is one accused of cynicism and immorality, while in fact, besides being a fascinating and elusive shape-shifter permanently on the road, thanks to his unsettledness it has a skill to wake the longing for freedom.

Wrocław, December 2012

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# History of Trickster. Urban Myths and Events

