

Ban Bang

ADA KOBUSIEWICZ

Lockdown ... it's good that it happened. I think it was or still is an exercise, a rehearsal, an opportunity, yes, definitely an opportunity to close the drastic gaps between people. I think that what is now important, and even fundamental, is transparency and action, and above all, radicalism and firmness in every area of our lives.

This is not about bringing individual closer to individual, but about changing the relationship that exists between them. It's about reducing the differences that build boundaries. It is about abolishing borders, the free circulation of information, experiences and emotions. And above all, solving fundamental problems, such as hunger and its effects in the form of nine million starving people. What the FUCK?! On the other hand, waste; 600,000,000 tons of food are thrown away every year.

Lockdown taught me how to count! Thank you, Corona! And so I count this hunger, this food waste, as a lack of respect for what we have and a lack of respect for other human beings, for other living beings, for our planet.

This system doesn't work properly. Democracy has lost its essential meaning. Citizens' participation in exercising power, and thus also in creating public space, is getting narrower. On the other hand, the prohibitions directed at citizens, which fill the public space and even sneak into the private space, such as the prohibition on hugging or kissing, or other prohibitions against fundamental human rights, are widening.

Does the government have the right to enter my apartment, my studio, my bed? How is it possible that there are homeless if we have so many empty, but closed houses and



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apartments? Why are there huge spaces almost in every country that stood empty for years while artists can't afford their own studios? Why do culture managers earn ten times more than the artists? Why is marijuana illegal yet you can get drunk like a pig? Why is the church allowed to interfere in the affairs of the state? Why are women discriminated against? Why is any person discriminated against at all? Why do we cut down trees and pack single strawberries in plastic? Why can't women who have been raped not have an abortion? Why don't 30 million Kurds have their own country? Etc... etc...

Now, as Zbigniew Preisner rightly said, one must act, *one must not remain silent!* Silence is tantamount to support. And here, the role of art that reacts to the current situation is crucial. Reaction – Action – Reaction and Do It Yourself but DO IT. There is nothing to wait for; there is no one to wait for; here it is necessary to act. Free people from information cycles that are increasingly fed to us by government-dependent media create our own media. Act,

create, react, confront society with the “invisible present”.

BAN BANG was my reaction to the abuse of power, the interference in private space, the corruption, humiliation and injustice. I think that the processes that accompany the everyday reading of the city and existence in public space influence the constitution of social behavior. Arranged in public space, prohibition and instruction signs are part of a local element but their pragmatic significance, appealing to the institutional order, often bring the freedom of society into question. The constitution of social behaviour is intertwined with the aesthetic, architectonic and social formation of public space. In this way, the focus is on the social dynamics of public space as well as inclusive social models: which visible and invisible aspects shape public space and our coexistence in it? And what role do the laws and prohibitions of common public life play?

In 1971, Ewa Partum, a Polish artist, created a work, *The Legality of Space*, in Freedom

Ewa Partum *The Legality of Space*

Square in Łódź, Poland. Within the square, a huge number of road signs and plaques with commonly encountered or invented content that banned various activities were placed: “No entry”, “Silence”, “It is forbidden to grow anything”, “Do not touch”, “Everything is forbidden” and “It is forbidden to prohibit” – a slogan known from the still fresh reminiscences of the Parisian Spring of ‘68.

At the time, the exhibition was interpreted as a criticism of Communism and its attempts to control all aspects of life. Today, almost 50 years later, Communism in Europe is a distant memory. Capitalism won the Cold War, and the “oppressed masses” were liberated. But the work of Ewa Partum has once again become a relevant critique in contemporary Western societies.

We should not forget that the processes of polarization and exclusion play a significant role in managing western societies, determining the social actions of most people. Due to globalization and the Internet, we are increasingly locked

into online “bubbles” generated by social media and search engine algorithms, where we are fed a diet of only the known and expected, constantly reinforcing our own world view and prejudices. Therefore, every example of prohibition or surveillance in public space needs to be questioned through art investigation; to ask; under what conditions do we accept the status quo; to ask what kind of social dynamics force us to get used to the new reality; to ask what kind of processes tame us to become accustomed to the prohibitions of common public life; to become indifferent and not ask about the freedom of society.

Our tolerance for the different, other or unknown has turned into a fear of everything that is not part of our reality. Here the role of public space is crucial, because only in public space can these “bubbles” be burst by coming into contact with and experiencing the unknown, the unexpected.

Yet opportunities for such encounters are constantly being curtailed. The ever-increasing



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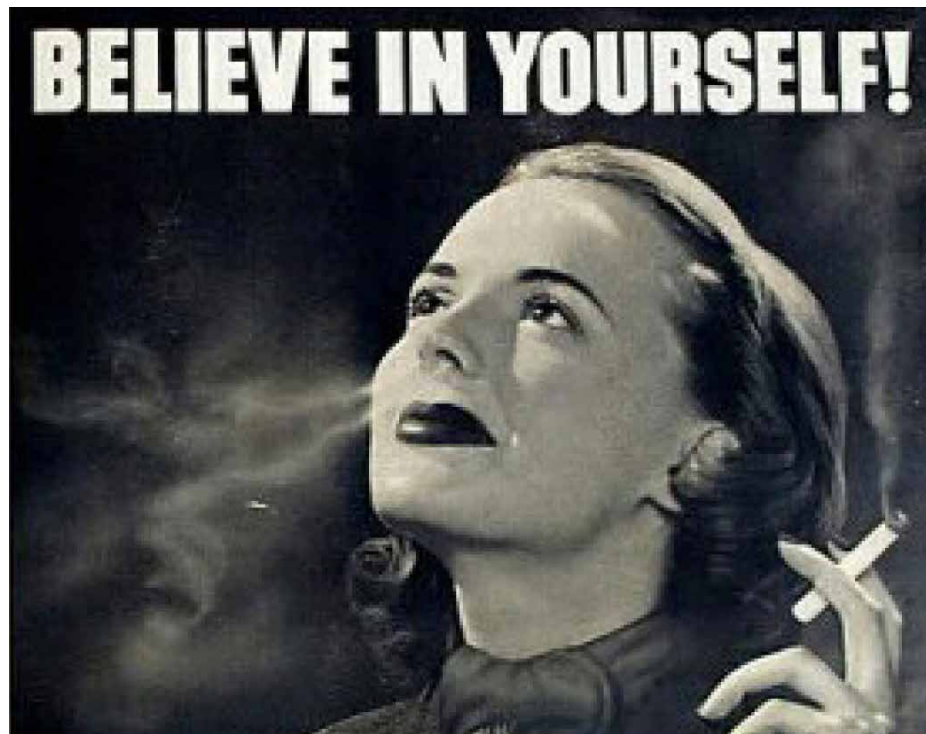
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1930, Phillip Morris campaign



number of prohibitions and bans in public space attempting to regulate our behaviour, our movements, and even our appearance are creating a homogeneous society which does not tolerate any deviation from the norm. There has been an explosion of bans all over the world, which have increased because of the Corona pandemic. In public parks, it is often forbidden to run, cycle, or walk your dog on the grass. Excessive hugs and even greeting kisses are forbidden in Poland; Homelessness is banned in Hungary; Children are banned from many pubs in England; Reusable cups are banned on Irish Rail; It is forbidden to die in the Houses of Parliament in the United Kingdom and the Norwegian town of Longyearbyen; Citizens of Denmark can only choose a name for their baby from a list of government-approved names; Winnie the Pooh is banned from playgrounds in Poland; eating and drinking near churches and public buildings is banned in Florence, Italy; In Seville, Spain it's illegal to hang your underwear

on a line; In Switzerland, it is illegal to flush the toilet after 10pm if you live in an apartment; In Portugal, urinating in the sea is forbidden. Surrounded by a set of instructions, I do not feel included but rather excluded from public space. Olafur Eliasson said: *How do we create a public space? What does it mean to make a space accessible for collectivity and individuals? How can we make people feel included in, rather than excluded from, the space?*

The point is that access to resources such as public spaces is fundamental to blurring the boundaries of inequality. In almost all EU countries, smoking in bars and restaurants has been banned. But in the 1930s, thanks to a cigarette PR campaign in New York, "Torch of Freedom", smoking became a symbol of the emancipation of women. How does this prohibition change our cooperation in public space? How can any kind of prohibition in public space be combined with the concepts of inclusive societies?

2017, Tokyo, Japan, smoking area



Those questions are important for me. I believe that access to resources such as public space is fundamental to blurring the boundaries of inequality and in my opinion, the growing number of prohibitions in public space can not be combined with the concepts of inclusive societies. How can society be free when the common person is controlled by commands and prohibitions, which, of course, do not apply to the elites, the politicians, businessmen and the mafia?

To face public bans and divisions that shape social dynamics, it is necessary to re-think the "invisible" components (social and individual experience) of the public text.

First of all, we think the world must be changed. We want the most liberating change of the society and life in which we find ourselves confined. We know that such a change is possible through appropriate actions.

Guy Debord 

Ada Kobusiewicz was born in Poland.

In 2004 she moved to Spain where she studied at the University of Granada, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts and at the Andalusian Institut of Arts where she completed different courses related with light design. In 2012 she finished MA Degree in Art, Research and Production at the Academy of Arts in Granada and in 2014 MA Degree in Light Design at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, Serbia. From April 2017 Kobusiewicz is researcher of PhD programme in Research in Arts at the University of Basque Country in Spain.

Ada Kobusiewicz lives and works as a freelance artist in Austria and Poland. She works as media and installation artist with analogue and digital media.

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