

MEGA



You never know.....

what's inside.

This publication was conducted within the framework of "NIE/PEŁNO/SPRAWNI: uprzedź uprzedzenia w wirtualu i realu" („DIS/ABLED in Poland. From Patients to Citizens: Looking for the Cure”).
<http://uprzedzuprzedzenia.blogspot.com>



Project partner:



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The present publication reflects the opinions of the authors of the respective articles

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Warsaw, 2012



ISBN: 978-83-934945-0-7

Publisher: Foundation Humanity in Action Poland

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Printing: Drukarnia Klimiuk, www.klimiuk.com.pl

First edition. Free of charge.

Dear Readers,

in 1948 Stanisław Lem completed his first book, "Szpital Przemienienia". In it he addressed the German "euthanasia" crimes committed against psychiatric patients in occupied Poland in 1940. Due to censorship, the text could first be published in 1955 as part of the trilogy "Czas nieutracony". Later, Lem's book was even made into the film "Szpital Przemienienia" in 1978.

Although the renowned Polish writer and philosopher made his literary debut as an advocate for Polish victims of German "euthanasia" killings, the issue did not remain in the Polish collective memory.

In fact, the murder of sick and disabled people was only one of the many systematic mass crimes committed by the German occupiers in Poland based on their ideology of "racial hygiene". The obliteration of the Polish intelligentsia, the murder of Jews and Roma, the depopulation of entire areas such as the Zamość region, the "Germanisation" of Polish children, and the persecution of homosexuals must also be mentioned in this context.

Greater knowledge of this history could increase people's mindfulness towards the disabled today. Irrespective of this, however, people with disabilities are citizens with equal rights. Government and society must ensure that people in need of support due to disabilities are guaranteed the same equality of opportunity.

The right to an independent and autonomous life is guaranteed in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention was signed by 154 states, and ratified by 123, including Poland. The ratification and implementation of the Convention could help to improve the status of people with disabilities in Poland. After all, most disabled people are without employment, and the percentage of people with low educational attainment is also particularly high among the disabled in Poland. Financial support for people with disabilities as well as structural improvements are important in order to improve their ability to participate in public life.

"The Right to Work - The Right to Participate" was the name of a German-Polish youth project funded last year by the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future". In the project, mentally disabled and non-disabled young people worked together in a carpentry workshop, a garage, a garden centre, a hotel kitchen, a hardware store and a computer company. The project director summarised the results as follows: "We definitely aroused interest among the employers, and the participants gained self-confidence and got to try out their dream jobs. Their young companions also had the opportunity to view society from a different perspective."

Perhaps such a change of perspectives could provide an important stimulus for the development of an inclusive society. This will require many more such meetings, not only in the context of projects, but also in everyday life - encounters that help us to recognize that disabilities are not the biggest differences between people, but rather that all people are different. And in our diversity, we are all entitled to the enjoyment of human rights.

This is the spirit in which this pamphlet was written. With it, Foundation Humanity in Action Poland seeks to publish the views and experiences of people with disabilities in order to share them with others. I hope that this publication is widely read by many people who understand that it is normal to be different, and that they model this normality in their own lives.

Dr. Martin Salm
Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Foundation EVZ

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From Patients to Citizens:

Looking for the Cure



Editorial

It is not the end of the road but a beginning –the President of Poland Bronisław Komorowski stressed when ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the 6th of September 2012 in Warsaw. Indeed, although the ratification of the Convention must be perceived as a milestone in the development of disability rights in a given country, it is not the end of the story. No way. It is a major step requiring a commitment which all the citizens of Poland should take care of and make sure that it is in force 24/7.

Having personally witnessed that historic moment of the ratification, we, the members of the „Pre-empting Prejudice” team, were very moved and empowered at the same time. It was almost like a dream-come-true moment for us. Finally, what we have been working on since 2010 was given this crucial green light by the authorities! Now, the process of turning the philosophy of the Convention into reality will actually be tangible. Of course, it will not happen overnight and be immediately complete. Rather, piece by piece, and bit by bit. And not on just one, but on many fronts. We, the “Pre-empting Prejudice” team have a desire to continue with our efforts and in consequence be a part of this process of change.

One of the tools which we created and are already using in our actions is this (MEGA)zin. The idea behind it is simple and complex at the same time. Our aim was to investigate what it means to be a person with disability rather than a disabled person. In other words, we wanted to show a perspective in which people with disabilities are perceived and understood as full human beings and fellow citizens as opposed to being treated as strange others, or solely as patients to be cured. The (MEGA)zin covers a wide array of areas such as: psychology, (pop)culture, design, sport, law, the media. The primary focus is on the contemporary Polish issues. However, we do also bring to the spotlight the forgotten history of the extermination of people with disabilities during the World War II as it exemplifies what horrors can result from depriving a person of her/his dignity. It is something we should keep in mind and if needed, be ready to be active.

The good news is that EVERYONE can pre-empt prejudice! How to do it? Take a look at the “Pre-empting Prejudice Manifesto”, which is the first in a Polish “translation” of the UN Convention into the language of young people. And feel invited to join us in trampling down hard on discrimination!

Enjoy your read!



**PRE-EMPTING
PREJUDICE**

Aleksandra
Gazda



And If the Distinguished Lady Should Break a Leg? Trampling Down on Discrimination!

Me moving around in a wheelchair and people pointing their fingers at me. No, not just pointing. I see telling looks in people's eyes, as if saying: „It's her own fault. You know what they say: better safe than sorry..." Staring at me with mouths wide open, not unlike an averagely intelligent monkey at the zoo. I wake up and sigh with relief. It was just a dream!

The phantasmagoric vision was as effective as a morning shot of espresso. But the dream got angry and ran off for the rest of the night, slamming the door shut and disappearing once and for all. As always, the TV came to the rescue: my remedy for insomnia. In an era of technological abundance, people are no longer surprised by computers, iPhones and other gadgets. Nobody is surprised by television and the trash it throws up in the form of rising and falling starlets of either sex acting as 'experts' and programmes representing a rock-bottom level of quality. But we are still most surprised by a man sitting in a wheelchair or holding a white cane in his hand. People with disabilities still evoke excessive interest – perhaps even

disbelief. These people still remain deprived of full and equal access to the basic spheres of social life. They continue to be socially excluded and treated as lesser humans. They are different; the 'handicapped' will never find their way among us 'normals' and 'perfects'.

People with disabilities constitute the largest and at the same time the most isolated minority. They account for about 10% of the global population; in the European Union Member States alone there are about 50 million citizens with disabilities. It is estimated that one in ten EU citizens has lower than average physical or mental capabilities. There are about 5,5 million disabled people in Poland; every seventh person in our country has some form of disability. Are you one of them? If your answer is yes, then I assume that you know what I mean. If you have full physical and mental capabilities, congratulations! Not everyone is as 'lucky' as you. And unfortunately not everyone appreciates it, because if they did, we would have less people showing off their below-par intelligence... The disabled are different, so we approach them

with reserve, disgust – sometimes even seeing them as freaks of nature. Some argue that there is no place for them in today's society. Then there are those who believe that people with disabilities do not exist (Martians, meanwhile, apparently do...).

During my trip to the seaside, I was staying in a newly built hotel. Everything was of sparkling quality and beautiful. The relevant EU standards were no doubt met. There were ramps and a lift, allowing people in wheelchairs to move freely in the corridors and rooms. Talking to the manager, I praised the innovative solutions, all the while noting that I hadn't seen people using these facilities. When I heard her answer – „Invalids are not welcome here" – all I could do was nod my head in pity, because unfortunately for that lady, she is unlikely to ever meet any standards. Not just the relevant EU ones.

A different situation occurred during a workshop devoted to access to higher education for people with disabilities, which was attended by both students and academic staff. The discussion



would have maybe remained relatively in-depth, if not for a certain 'intelligent' lady who suddenly let loose her 'voice of reason': „It is best not to do anything, because after all, such people are few and far between, and the university should be suited to those in the majority. And there are definitely more normal people. It's best not to adapt higher education to people with disabilities, because there are few such people attending university.” Yes, that's right: the disabled ARE ABNORMAL. Unfortunately, some people also seem to have problems with normality. Mainly when it comes to THINKING. Thinking is obviously a painful experience for some. And if the distinguished lady should break a leg? Well, a lift would come in handy, true... And maybe then

she would draw some conclusions... Provided that one knows how to draw conclusions, and not just draw a finger and point it at someone else.

Much has been said about integration. But the biggest barrier is not architectural, but mental. It stems from the belief that 'other' simply means 'worse'. And yet we are the ones who are most disabled. But disabled in a far inferior way – disabled in the head! Yes, that's right - US! Us with our eternal prejudices, parochial mentality and omnipresent stupidity. In a nutshell, we are simply moving back to the stage in which we 'belong in the trees' – except that perhaps not everyone has descended down from them. But that's an altogether different issue... Indeed,

that's also the view of one of Polish TV's biggest 'celebs', Kuba Wojewódzki, a man who is certainly full of wit and insight: „Disability is rather a question of mentality. I wonder if the real people with disabilities are those who happen to have some physical imperfections, or those who are incapable of interacting with the former”. Spot on. It's a pity that most of us still have problems with reading (and listening) comprehension. And with looking, too. We can't see anything beyond the ends of our noses. I turn off the TV. The dreams are coming back to me, but even they can't bring relief... For people with disabilities this is not a nightmare, but an everyday reality.

Good night! ■

Karolina
Muszyńska



Look, a Dwarf!

I pick up the phone and hear a very polite female voice.

„We’re shooting a new television show, would you be interested in taking part?”

„What is the remuneration?” I ask, spontaneously.

„600 zlotys for a day of filming”, responds my interlocutor.

Driven by the lure of a quick buck, I agreed to participate in the TV program. I make my way to the specified address at the specified time, where I am assigned the role of a little creature and dressed in a funny dwarf costume. I feel as if in another dimension. My interesting appearance, associated with my short stature, works great for this role. The director shouts out short commands: where to stand, which way to move and when to jump. After a day of jumping and tired, I get into a taxi and go home. Several weeks pass. My friends from university say that they saw me on TV and ask if it was me dressed as a dwarf, jumping next to the Great Ferdek. Embarrassed, I confirm.

Around me I hear whispering and derisive laughter. I begin to analyze my decision. How could I expect respect

from others, when I myself decide to become a laughing stock? It was just a single burst of money, but what about the future? Why have I been investing in myself my entire life? Does this represent any added value? The answer is simple! In the future my potential employers may remember me in this grotesque role, which certainly will not help me find employment. My friends may begin to treat me like a mascot, but after all I am a grown-up woman, and that’s how I want to be perceived. I quickly make my way home and open the box containing the 600 zlotys. I look at it with disgust, but I can’t turn back time. At this point, I realize that escaping into the world of fiction, which just replicates stereotypes, will not solve the problems of my everyday life. Unfortunately, walking down the street, I will continue to hear people turn and say: „Look, a dwarf?”. That is how a large part of society will perceive me. I shouldn’t regret it; after all, it was my own decision.

A few weeks later I get another call. It’s a woman from a magazine, asking whether I want to take part in a photo shoot showing people with disabilities in beautiful gowns inside a

stylish ballroom. At first, I have mixed feelings. Unfortunately, society has become accustomed to what it sees as a canon of beauty; that’s what sells quickly. Disability is perceived through the lens of compassion and fear.

I spontaneously ask my standard question: „What is the remuneration?” The person on the other end tells me that they are not providing any ‘payments’. After a moment of contemplation, I agree. Several days pass and the photo shoot begins. I get to know wonderful, interesting people who tell me all about the projects they are working on. A make-up artist takes care of me, a stylist selects beautiful clothes; for a moment I feel like a model. I am working with true professionals who manage to create a friendly atmosphere. After a while I forget my fatigue and have fun together with the other participants.

The next day, during the second part of the project, interviews are conducted with participants in which we talk about our passions, dreams, plans, and daily life. A few days later, friends from university come up to me with the magazine to talk about the idea behind



the project. On social networking sites, where I posted a link, I begin to see a lot of comments. The response is tremendous. People come up to me in the street and congratulate me. The aim of the session was to show that 'otherness' has always existed, exists, and probably will exist in the future. When you experience it, you don't need to shut yourself at home. I think such projects help to achieve this goal.

Several months further along, I get another proposal, this time from a web-based TV station. It's meant to be an interview in which I will talk about my everyday life. Of course, after the pleasant experience of the last photo shoot, I agree. Just in case, I make sure I can get the interview authorized. The day of the recording is fast approaching. I get on the bus and arrive at the specified address. Slightly stressed, I allow the make-up artist to do

her job. A moment later, I am wearing beautiful make-up. The journalist manages to create a very friendly atmosphere, sometimes asking a controversial question. I forget all the cameras surrounding me and I feel like I'm talking to a good friend. The recording lasts for an hour, which will be edited down to an 'essence' of 10 minutes and posted online. A few days later my friend calls and tells me I'm on the main page of the popular „Wirtualna Polska” portal. I turn on my computer and see lots of positive comments beneath the video. For a moment I wonder how come so much has changed in the mentality of our society. Am I still in Poland? Again, I'm very positively surprised. I paste the link to the Little People of Poland Association's Facebook page to re-examine Poles' reactions. I'm a normal, young girl. I have my dreams, plans, ambitions and interests. I want to live life to the ful-

lest, to have friends and meet people. I don't want the fact that I'm one meter tall to prevent me from living an active life and relishing in it. The sight of a person with disabilities arouses different emotions: from compassion to admiration. But, as always, the middle way is best. How we perceive disability depends on people with disabilities themselves. Maybe someday we will live in a time where I will draw others' attention not because of my height, but simply because of my competencies, which I undoubtedly possess. Let's not duplicate stereotypes! Let's fight them! This task could be made easier by the media, by presenting an image of people with disabilities which is closer to reality. ■

THE BLIND CAN'T SEE BARRIERS

Photos: Marta Komorowska, Aleksandra Bartnik



**Aleksandra
Bartnik**

Sailing Glossary

- Forecastle**
- a common room for the crew, used for sleeping, eating meals and spending free time
- Bollard**
- a steel pole used for mounting the mooring line
- Mooring line**
- the rope that attaches the ship to the dock
- Watch**
- a group of crew members at work on the boat at a given time, e.g. cooking meals or navigating
- Outer jib**
- one of the sails mounted on the first forestay
- Forestay**
- the metal line connecting the top of the mast to the bow of a sailing ship
- Staysail**
- a sail between the foremast and the mainmast
- Foremast**
- the first mast from the bow
- Mainmast**
- the tallest mast on a sailing ship

Factfile

- Organizer**
- Pirate's Nest Foundation
- Yacht**
- s/y Zawisza
- Sail plan**
- staysail schooner
- Sail area**
- 439 m²
- Total length**
- 42.7 m
- Crew**
- 46 people

Life on a sail ship is not a romantic or spectacular adventure, but a veritable challenge that everyone must face alone. Ships abide by their own rules – good and bad – which quickly make you forget the pop-cultural myths about brave sailors constantly experiencing great adventures.

Safety is the priority; this is the supreme law which supersedes all others. The sea, the ship, the rhythm of taking watch and resting – all of this operates in sync with the sound of the ship's bell. This is what governs your daily routine.

See the Sea with Different Senses

Every year, the „Zawisza Czarny” – a sail ship with a vibrant history – embarks on a socially integrative boat trip where half the crew are blind or visually impaired. The vessel is therefore equipped with modern navigation aids that make sailing safe. Thanks to the organizers of the „See the Sea” project, the ship has been equipped with a range of features meant to enable visually impaired people to take control of it. One of them is an auto-pilot which provides audio readings of the compass and rudder angle, which means that steering the ship is not a problem for the blind. Located near the helm is a large, Braille map



of the Baltic, and the ship is equipped with steel safety lines that lead the way and which can be clipped into when the weather becomes unstable. But technology alone is not enough. It is only thanks to cooperation and ingenuity that the blind crew was able to calculate the course of the ship on an ordinary map of the sea, even though they could well have resorted to the tactile Braille map. The only thing a sighted person had to do was to show the edges of the map and indicate due north. A blind person could easily do the rest, thanks to the right sense of proportion and using data defining the location of the ship, with a little assistance from a sighted person.

Race Towards Integration?

Our daily work was related to our watch, or the responsibilities assigned for the day to a particular group of crewmembers. We lived together, ate together, rested and worked together, shared stories and supported one another. All in one group... This is precisely the sort of thing that helps you to see the difference between autonomy and community. This is what makes it possible to adopt a personal, respectful approach towards others.

Our trip was meant to be about social integration. But what is social integration, really? Just being together? Doing the same thing? Obviously, differences appeared on the very first day. This was no surprise... A specific place like a ship, where people with different personalities and





habits must work together in unison over the course of many days, can be seen as a social laboratory of all sorts – with its full complexity of relationships and structures. The sailing tradition means that one must perform any command given by the commanding officer without even a murmur. Therefore, even the blind cheerfully and bravely painted the yacht's railings yellow when they were told to do so. The blind can't see barriers – this slogan accompanied our trip from start to finish.

The old „Zawisza” custom still applies – the officers are separated from the crew, which lives together in the fore-castle. They live, eat and stay apart. Their section of the ship is off limits to others. The question arises whe-

ther the physical, and thus the mental separation of the officers from the other participants, affects the idea of integration? Indeed, a wise captain once said that a good voyage can be recognized by the fact that during a manoeuvre, one may easily tell who the captain is, and who the crew are, but when there are no manoeuvres – i.e. during free time – it is impossible to tell the difference. Certainly an interesting topic for discussion.

On the first day of our voyage, in Stockholm, we became acquainted with the „Zawisza” and met the regular crewmembers. Participants of earlier editions of the project tended to stick together, with the new crewmembers slightly apart, but gradually they got to know the ‘insiders’ and to explore the ship. Some of them even gossiped the composition of the individual watches! The participants were divided so that a watch could not include people who knew each other – couples, siblings or close friends. For many participants, this was a problem, for example when one person needed another's assistance, or if two people shared their luggage. On the other hand, it was impossible to separate those who knew each other from the previous editions of the project. Greater flexibility here could have prevented the ‘condemning’ of participants to integrate. Forcing people to integrate does not automatically bring success, and may even hamper it. It must happen by itself: spontaneously blossom from genuine friendship, the joy of being together, and from the trust and respect for the autonomy of the other person. This is what happened on board the „Zawisza” once the crew got to know one another better, and friendly relations began to appear between people. It no longer mattered whether you are able to see, where you come from and how you look. Our integration manifested itself in a friendly, peaceful atmosphere and in quiet, mutual assistance. The sighted used words to paint images of what could be seen around us, while the blind talked about how they perceived the world. When someone needed



support, a person to talk to, a pat on the back, there was always someone you could count on. No matter how good your eyesight was. Our integration had no exceptions, because everyone was treated exceptionally.

A Sea of Surprises

We had to help each other, because the workload often exceeded the capabilities of a single person. On board of a ship, everything is huge. The bollard for fixing a rope looks like a massive, metal stool, and the rope itself may be as thick as a fist. There are miles of rope everywhere, and everyone must be able to tell them apart: this one holds up the

mast, this one is for hoisting the sail, that one is for lowering it, another one raises the flagstaff, yet another positions the sail in relation to the wind. This applies to each of the sails, of which there are no less than 10 on the „Zawisza”. You need to know which to pull and which to loosen, for example when you receive the order to hoist the outer jib or the staysail. The sighted try to remember their colours, but since the ship has served many years on the seas, they tend to be faded and difficult to distinguish visually. The blind sense their roughness, flexibility and precise location, thus becoming a guide for the sighted. The same applies at night: the sighted immediately become confused, while the blind are as quick and decisive as during the day.

Thanks to the sea voyage, the sighted learned a lot about living with disabilities and the challenges caused by ordinary living; they also learned how to really make life easier for those who cannot see, but without treating them like pupils. We discussed the stereotypes that affect us on all sides. It sometimes happened that the sighted were not aware of the scope and scale of these issues, or could not believe how demotivating and distressing harmful stereotypes about the blind can be. In other words, we learned from each other and increased our sensitivity to the needs of others. In each port of call, the ship and project caused a sensation. For many participants of „See the Sea”, meetings with blind people were the beginning of not just beautiful friendships, but also of a road to a better understanding of what integration should be like. ■



People for Things, or Things for People?

**Agata
Skiba**

THERE IS A CAR AD: TWO ENGINEERS ARE DRIVING ACROSS A NEW BRIDGE. ONE IS GERMAN AND OTHER IS FRENCH. THEY ARE ARGUING ABOUT THE RIGHT APPROACH TO DESIGN. IN LINE WITH THE PREVAILING STEREOTYPES, THE GERMAN TALKS ABOUT FUNCTIONALITY, AND THE FRENCHMAN FOCUSES ON BEAUTY. THE MESSAGE OF THE AD IS CLEAR: THE PERFECT COMBINATION OF BEAUTY AND FUNCTIONALITY TURNS OUT TO BE THE CAR THEY ARE DRIVING.

But we are not talking about cars. What is important is the idea that when designing, one does not have to choose between aesthetics and functionality. Objects designed with people in mind should provide efficient and smooth functioning on a daily basis. The goal is to be able to perform basic tasks effortlessly and without thinking. When you design your room, apartment, or house, first and foremost you think of comfort and safety. Of course, the aesthetics of our living space are just as important. It is much more relaxing to spend time in a bright, spacious room, surrounded by soft colours and contoured shapes.

Unfortunately, for many designers aesthetics are much more important than functionality. In a game of one-upmanship, interior architects try to create the most original and quirky shapes, manufacturing sharp-cornered furniture and objects which are almost impossible to use. It might seem that the newest designs are only good for admiring, or perhaps solely for wondering what exactly we are looking at and what its purpose is. It looks as if the modern world strives to create a separate reality, inaccessi-

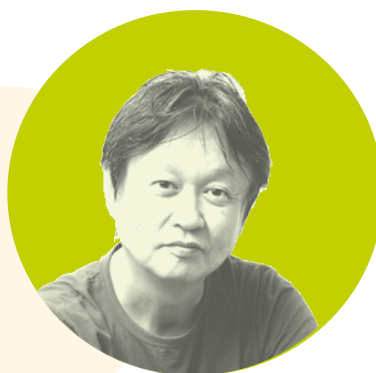


ble to ordinary people. The design space is becoming increasingly removed from its users; people are meant to serve as its backdrop. Fortunately, not all contemporary designers are heading in this direction. One such person is the Japanese designer Naoto Fukasawa.

Throughout the design process, Fukasawa asks himself a series of key questions. Who will end up using the object? What will he or she do with it? Where will the object be used? His most famous design piece is a fruit juice carton. The packaging smells, feels and looks like the fruit which the juice is made of. Amazing! Even with poor eyesight, we are able to tell the juice apart thanks to its shape or smell. We do not even need a label, since the carton tells us everything we need to know about its contents.

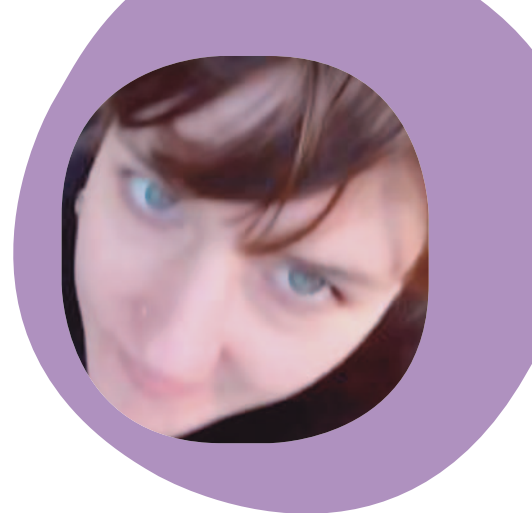
In the apartment designed by Fukasawa, many tasks can be performed with the simple flip of a switch: one click to brew coffee or tea, another click to cook the rice. The objects designed by him are very easy to operate. He makes use of state-of-the-art technology to make our lives as easy as possible. As for his furniture, the chairs and sofas have wide and sufficiently hard seats; they are stable and light. In the kitchen, there is a table with rounded edges (safety first), frying pans with long handles, and a hot water distributor to brew your favourite tea as quickly as possible. The phone matches the shape of our face; it is easy to handle, lightweight and wireless. If we like to watch TV, we can do so effortlessly in any of the rooms, thanks to a lightweight and portable receiver. Small details that, when put together, make life better. Everything is simple, easy to use, functional, customized, while at the same time having multiple purposes and being extremely aesthetic.

In his work, Naoto Fukasawa shows that art is not just about beauty. It may be something more. Thanks to its functionality, it can unite people instead of dividing them, making our surroundings a comfortable and predictable place to relax. Right now, universal design is very expensive – like every other niche product. However, we can all influence how quickly it will become mainstream. How? By remembering that things are for people, not the other way round! ■



Naoto Fukasawa

Japanese designer, professor of art at the University of Musashino, author of „An Outline of Design“. Creates everyday objects and implements the idea of universal design in his everyday work. Currently regarded as one of the most influential designers in the world.



Handy Handicapped

It would seem that disability - a difficult topic - would be one that pop culture should avoid at all costs. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. People who differ from the social norm are present in books and comics, and very often on the silver screen. My favourite 'different heroes' play crucial roles in literary and film fiction. Let us take a look at them in the functional sense, irrespective of the emotions they evoke as a result of their diseases or problems.

1.

Disability is a very convenient artistic figure that allows authors to focus on the nature of the outsider. Such features are not accepted by the fictional community, and, therefore, authors can use them to describe the community itself. This is a characterization 'by proxy': carried on the shoulders of 'the other' who is what the others are not, and is unwilling or unable to be thus. And so, for example, Lenny from John Steinbeck's „Of mice and men” (1937) is as calm and hungry for beauty, smoothness and softness, as the reality around is rough, brutal and dirty (California during the Great Depression). His true intentions are mistakenly interpreted. Fear and the unusual nature of the situation aggregate his strength, over which he loses

control. And so tragedy is born. Similarly, the electrifying sociopath Lisa (Angelina Jolie) from James Mangold's lesser known film „Girl, Interrupted” (1999) is the epitome of rebellion in the sense of its liberating power, lack of remorse as a means of rectifying first impressions, and finally of the vivacity of negative forces. This is also where Lisa's charm lies – honest to the point ruthlessness, sexy and full of ardor – since it certainly strays away from the reality of the early 1960s, which the film's young female psychiatric patients cannot cope with.

2.

'The other' is at times also a scapegoat, functioning in line with the mechanism described by historian

and philosopher René Girard as the 'sacrificial crisis'. In the event of a disruption of order within a given group – such as an epidemic, murder or harsh economic difficulties – there tends to be a strong need to find the culprit. Girard stated that the process of punishing this culprit is a symbolic way to restore order, a way of re-establishing it thanks to this functional death. In the age of AIDS – characterized by incomprehensible risks associated with intimacy – the independent woman becomes this involuntary symbolic scapegoat, since she openly expresses her desires. And although in Adrian Lyne's „Fatal Attraction” (1987), the quite obviously disturbed character played by Glenn Close triggers horror and aversion in the viewers, in the end they too must admit that blaming her entirely for the protagonist's



(Michael Douglas) extramarital affair is strongly related to this symbolic level. Very conservative societies are keen on stigmatising the scapegoat, who can thus be blamed for the collapse of traditional family values and, in turn, attributed the blame – in the form of AIDS – for the sin of promiscuity. And who better to carry this burden than the single – or, in today’s terms ‘independent’ – woman, who is not supported by a masculine force willing to defend her honour? In order to make her even more burdened and nastier to the viewer, just throw in a mental illness. Scapegoat ready.

3.

Finally, ‘the other’ is also used to amuse. Comic book superheroes who always manage to save the world are a veritable panopticon

of peculiarity and disability. After all, Spiderman is Peter Parker, who was bitten by a radioactive spider, leading to bizarre and disturbing bodily changes. The Fantastic Four – an unfortunate group which was exposed to cosmic rays during a space mission – suffer from such unpleasant ailments as invisibility, superhuman flexibility, self-combustion, and transforming into a super-strong humanoid piece of rock. Of all the American comic heroes, only Batman seems like a relatively (physically) integrated personae, unless of course you count the trauma of having silently witnessed his parents’ death at the hands of a criminal gang. ‘Others’ perceived as such constitute noble impulses abstracted from the paradoxically imperfect – indeed, incapable of sacrifice – human normality. These noble actions suit in particular those who, because

of their identity, must nonetheless live on the margins of society. And even though they can often turn into their very opposites – as in the case of the Joker (the victim of an accident involving chemical waste), the mutant Magneto (a survivor of a WWII ghetto, Auschwitz and a pogrom – sic!) and Sandman (yet another victim of an experiment with radioactivity) – if they come to learn that „with great power comes great responsibility”, they usually accept their difficult fate as the saviours of mankind.

Structurally speaking, ‘the other’ is the author’s gateway to the Obscure, the Mystical, the Symbolic. ‘The other’ has also been understood as the emanation of outstanding nobility, greatness of spirit, sensitivity. This has little to do with the everyday reality of people with living with flesh-and-blood disabilities. ☼

On Memory and Oblivion

Monika Mazur-Rafał, Magda Szarota

with contribution by Zofia Sliwowska

The nightmare ended on 27 January 1945. Auschwitz-Birkenau had been liberated. The prisoners who survived were released. Those who died became part of the collective catalogue of memory and are evoked, along with other victims, on 27 January every year – Holocaust Remembrance Day.¹ But not all. Some were re-buried. This time, in our oblivion. Why did this happen?

Humanity Test: People with Disabilities

What are the consequences of this collective amnesia? On the macro level, what seems most important is not drawing conclusions from the past. Violations of the most basic rights of people with intellectual disabilities – rights resulting from the fundamental dignity of every human being – are not positioned in the historical sequence of events, but instead treated marginally. As if these violations were merely insignificant events. At best, they are treated as a curious historical fact. Meanwhile, bigger and better insight into the history and treatment of people with neurological disorders leads us to conclude that it is a sort of litmus test in terms of respect for the rights of the individual in a given community. The right of each individual. Regardless of any additional traits.

When analyzing respect for the rights of persons with disabilities (or rather their mass violations), one should be aware of the role played by psychiatric patients in the Nazi German death factory. There is much to indicate that without the annihilation of hundreds of thousands of people with (mostly mental) disabilities in the Third Reich, and thousands of psychiatric patients in occupied Poland, the Holocaust would not have been implemented on such a huge scale, since it would have been impossible to plan and test the crime in such minute detail. Questions abound: how come so few stood up and defended the weakest citizens of the Third Reich, and why were so many people actively involved in ‘cleansing’ their race? Does this amount to genocide? Does the current, collective amnesia not rob victims of their dignity anew? Does this not fulfill the will of the perpetrators, who would prefer to hide the killings and their participation in them? Does this mean that all these people died in vain – the patients of Kocborowo (near Stargard Gdański), Świecie, Owińska (near Poznań), Fort VII in Poznań, Dziekanka (near Gniezno), Kościan, Chelm, Kochanówka (near Łódź), the Łódź Ghetto, Warta, Gostynin, Tworki, Choroszcz,

Zofiówka in Otwock, Kobierzyn (near Kraków), Lubliniec, Rybnik, Warsaw, Drewnica, Vilnius, Kulparkowo (near Lvov) and others?²

Skeletons in Elegant Closets

The ‘oblivion’ of subsequent generations once again strips these victims of their dignity; them who had earlier been repeatedly robbed of this dignity. Basing on the concept of Gregory H. Stanton³, who conducted a comparative study of various genocides to identify eight key phases leading inevitably to annihilation, it is hard not to notice these phases in the course of ‘Action T4’⁴. In the territory of the Third Reich, where it was initiated, the first step in ‘preparing the ground’ for the mass extermination of the mentally ill was to use propaganda to divide the population into not just those who were ‘racially pure’ Germans and ‘fully-fledged representatives’ of society, but also those who – despite being racially pure’ – were also so-called useless eaters and, in the terminology of the omnipresent propaganda, represented a ‘life unworthy of life’. Second, depriving them of their human traits (so-called dehumanization) was designed to not only strengthen social divisions and weaken the existing social bonds, but also to reduce the ‘psychological discomfort’ of the potential offenders. The third and final phase consisted in organizing criminal operations: under the guise of carefully devised bureaucratic procedures, decisions about life and death were taken at great discretion, e.g. by creating a system of incentives, including financial ones, for the perpetrators so as to entice them to murder in the name of racial purity. The erection of many psychiatric hospitals ‘off the beaten track’ only made it ‘easier’ to implement the ‘project’; symbolization within society itself was not necessary.

The Oiled Machine of Death Knows no Boundaries

In the territory of occupied Poland, there was no such ‘fussing about’: it was meant to be a testing ground to perfect the murderous machine.

This usually operated using the proven system – after replacing the hospital management and staff with complicit ones, the new managers then issued a directive banning the signing out of patients punishable by death; the patients were then categorized and, depending on the specific on-site conditions, the perpetrators selected the ‘most economical’ and



In Velvet Gloves

Covering up potential traces was part and parcel of this scheme. First, the terminology used was meant to lull people into a false sense of trust: the Nazis called the programme ‘euthanasia’, but instead of a ‘decent death’ it consisted of the annihilation of those designated as ‘unfit for social interaction and leading a life unworthy of life’. Secondly, the ‘project’ was shrouded in a veil of secrecy (secluded murder and burial sites, a closed group of insiders-perpetrators). Third, traces were regularly covered up, e.g. by deliberately deceiving family members, lower-level staff and the local community (allegedly transporting patients to other facilities in occupied Poland, destroying medical records and other evidence). Given these experiments and the extensive war crimes, it has become impossible to determine the basic facts: the identity of all of the victims, their burial sites, or even the scale of the phenomenon. This in turn means that it is impossible to prove that many of the perpetrators are guilty, leading to their de facto impunity.

Pre-empting Prejudice

When analyzing Action T4 one cannot help but notice that what Gregory H. Stanton identified as the phases leading to genocide really did take place, but were pushed into oblivion, among others due to the scale and horror of World War II and the Holocaust. Even so, they should provide an important reference point in education on the rights of people with disabilities, since future generations should be aware of the consequences of not learning from the past. Despite many slogans and wishful thinking calling for new genocides to be avoided, these unfortunately did occur. What failed was prevention. And though there is no single formula for success in this regard, it seems that effective prevention is not possible without informed and active citizens who are able to provide resistance in the face of alarming events. History teaches us that the ‘roller coaster’ of genocide can be stopped in its early phases, but not in the latter ones. Sometimes it is better to react immediately and even ‘overdo it’ than to ignore the facts and downplay worrying symptoms. We work towards ‘Never Again’ with small steps taken each and every day.

‘easiest’ method of industrial-scale murder of the patients⁷. And since every bullet was precious during the war, they sought cheaper methods of killing than shooting. For example, patients were starved to death, hygiene was ignored, thus contributing to the massive spreading of infectious diseases, scopolamine and phenobarbital injections were administered, and ‘experiments’ were conducted with the use of CO₂ emissions from car exhausts in specially ‘adapted’ vehicles. Over time, the high costs of this method led to the construction of the gas chambers. This drastic belittlement of human dignity concerned not only the conditions in psychiatric hospitals and the industrial-scale killing methods, but also the treatment of corpses, which were treated as reusable material. After all, it would be a shame to waste anything! Using corpses which also belonged to mentally ill patients, Rudolf Spanner – the director of the Anatomical Institute in Gdansk – developed a way of using human fat to produce soap⁸. This technology was later applied to the corpses of Jews. Human biomass. Obtained from people of all shapes and sizes.

NOTES:

1. International Holocaust Remembrance Day was established by the UN in 2005
2. A similar fate met the patients of the social care facilities in Bojanowo and Śrem.
3. Stanton singled out eight key stages in the development of genocide: classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, identification, extermination and denial, more at: <http://www.genocidewatch.org/genocide/8stagesofgenocide.html>
4. The name of the action comes from the address: Berlin, Tiergarten Street 4, which housed the headquarters of the operation.
5. In East Prussia, during the period of liquidation of small-scale institutions for the mentally ill (21.05-08.06.1940) the price of human life was set at 10 marks, regardless of the nationality of the victim. in: Nasierowski T., “Extermination of the mentally ill”, http://p-ntzp.com/dok/15Tadeusz_Nasierowski.pdf (17/02/2012).
6. Lists of patients were created, dividing them into three categories; the lists were handed over to the central authorities in Berlin. Depending on the category of illness, the relevant decisions were taken.
7. Nasierowski Tadeusz, “Extermination of people with mental disorders in occupied Poland”, Wydawnictwo Neriton, Warsaw 2008, pp. 59 et seq.
8. Jaroszewski Zdzisław (ed.), “Restoring memory. Would the holocaust have been possible without the extermination of the mentally ill?” in: “Extermination of the mentally ill in Poland 1939-1945”, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 1993, pp. 14-15.

Krzysztof
Kurowski



MY LIFE IN... SOMEONE ELSE'S HANDS?

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES OR MEDIA 'CHARITY'?

People with disabilities are full members of society. Full stop. This approach to people with disabilities is set out in the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons, adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly on 13 December 2006. It is not only a normative act, but also an educational one. The objective of the Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

The Convention is based on the following principles:

- Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;
- Non-discrimination;
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
- Equality of opportunity;

- Accessibility;
- Equality between men and women.

In his speech on the occasion of the adoption of the Convention, then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan wrote, „Throughout the ages, the treatment of people with disabilities has brought out some of the worst aspects of human nature. [...] Societies have even gone out of their way to ensure that persons with disabilities are neither seen nor heard. On paper, they have enjoyed the same rights as others; in real life, they have often been relegated to the margins and denied the opportunities that others take for granted. It was the community of the disabled themselves that worked tirelessly and insistently to promote this Convention, and the United Nations responded”.

But in our country, many people apparently working to benefit people with disabilities do not keep the spirit of the Convention in mind. They endeavour not to make the voice of disabled people heard, but rather the voice of ‘activists’ who ‘devote themselves’ and ‘spend their time’ helping people with disabilities.



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During the conference, „Independent living and full participation of disabled people in society: Are we on the right track?“ held on 4 March 2011 in Łódź, self-advocate Marcin Szarlat said, „Many people think that persons with disabilities should be given attractions, not jobs. Many people are surprised that I work... Ever since I've been working, I have become more independent and responsible for my life“.

But this has not convinced the so-called integration specialists, i.e. mainly with respect to organizing special festivals for disabled persons. Worse still, ‘not convinced’ is an euphemistic expression; they simply failed to notice the above statement, and perhaps did not even want to notice it. After all, they would have to change their entire way of thinking! And that is far

too difficult. So why bother? Moreover, ‘guardian of a disabled person’ sounds much more proud than ‘assistant’, so why would you rid yourself of this pleasure? The media are also much more eager to promote actions for those ‘poor disabled’ than modern ways of supporting people with disabilities. After all, the former sells better and on TV everyone will see how noble they are! Never mind that that the Convention talks about ‘living independently’? Who cares?!

Nonetheless, maybe it is worth analyzing the Convention and acting in such a way that people with disabilities have the opportunity of becoming increasingly independent and responsible for their own selves! So that they can take their lives into their OWN hands. ■

1 Text of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s message on the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sgsm10797.doc.htm>

2 Self-advocate – a person with intellectual disability who is capable of representing him/herself, taking care of their his/her own interests, taking care of official matters with the aid of a so-called supporter and, if necessary, helping other people with disabilities.

PRE-EMPTING PREJUDICE MANIFESTO

Young activists take on the meaning of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2011

For several months, we have been trampling down hard on discrimination! Why? Because, all across Poland, the topic itself has been laying in the streets: high curbs, endless flights of stairs, elevators out of order, invisible dis/abled people.... In order to change things, we have to use our heads. Our heads, meanwhile, are a mishmash of ideas: confusing aid with legal incapacitation, citizens treated like patients, tolerance in theory combined with a lack of integration in practice.

So where do things stand? Are we all equal and is everything cool? Or do we

condone the functioning of these colonies of everyday prisoners and everything is 'uncool'?

*Perhaps we should all
LIBERATE OURSELVES!:*

- From pretending that everything is OK, when it is not OK.
- From the excuses that nothing can be done, because right now a lot can be done in this domain.
- From the feeling that this does not concern me, because Earth is a planet of human beings and it would be good if disability did not prevent us from seeing 'the human being' in other hu-

man beings. Putting things off for 'tomorrow' is out of the question, because discrimination never sleeps. What is more, discrimination is cunning. It would be good to outwit it!

Therefore, we, the "Pre-empting Prejudice" team (uprzeczuprzeczenia.blogspot.com) – 20 young activists from across Poland – got down to work. Over the course of several months, we analyzed the topic and drafted a strategy. Conclusion? We must rearrange everything and redo all there is to redo. To make things easier, as young people we can start with ourselves. Here and now. So, off we go!

"Project Human" – Step by Step

Step 1:

When thinking of 'disabled people', think instead of 'persons with disabilities' (or PWD)! If you see diseases/defects/handicaps, look again: HUMANS! And to keep things fair, look at everyone as equally human. If you are or will be a teacher, educator or tutor, pass it on!

Step 2:

You can decide for yourself. Choose what is best for you. You have the right to dignity, autonomy, intimacy, and freedom. Are you feeling the power? And when you witness discrimination or incapacitation,

don't pretend that putting someone on a side-track life does not apply to you! Do the right thing and react! If you are or will be a lawyer or legislator, make sure the law is on the right side of the force.

Step 3:

What do you do if you want to continue your education but you can't because the premises/buildings are 'not adapted'? What do you do if because of this somebody suggests you take a different path and accept a less meaningful idea for your life? Do you want that proverbial 'one step' to decide about your future

profession? It sounds awful, but it is an everyday thing for many people with disabilities. School is meant to teach and educate! Every child, with no exceptions in the spirit of integration and tolerance. Taming 'otherness' and diversity from a young age will pay off in the latter stages of education. 'A world without barriers' is possible! But it will not come about on its own; it's our business to create it!

Step 4:

You don't see too many people with disabilities on a daily basis. Does this mean that they simply love play-



graphic design: David Sypniewski

ing hide-and-seek? Or that they are just stay-at-home types? Take a look around your neighbourhood, school, workplace, favourite pub, cinema, or theatre. For some, these are veritable obstacle courses. If you are or will be an architect, create projects with universal design in mind! Provide equal access for all! Help remove mental barriers by removing architectural ones, and vice versa!

Step 5:

Friday evening. Getting ready to go clubbing. You need to chill out after a hard week of work. To party with your friends and meet new people. It promises to be a great time :) But wait – what a failure! They don't want to let you in the club! You are not welcome there... You don't belong there! You need to change clothes. Well, that's not too pleasant, but it can be arranged. Now imagine that what's uncool is not your clothes, but your disability. You can't just take it off! Fun means fun! For everyone!

Step 6:

Do you really believe that there is no such thing as a bad job? Did you know that some people are left to stay at

home without a job, just because they have some form of disability? If you are or will be an employer, remember that a disability is not an item on a CV. What matters are competencies, experiences and passions! Take a chance. Don't hinder-hire!

Step 7:

Everyone knows what it's like. In the world depicted by the media, people with disabilities don't seem to exist. If they do exist, they are either victims or heroes. Don't 'buy' these messages: they contain viruses! The virus of distorted imagery mutates stereotypes into real life. If you are or will be a journalist, delete such reports as if they were from another planet. Present the world as multi-dimensional and human!

Step 8:

It's not so much fun to gossip about people's needs, problems and potential behind their backs. It is equally bad when citizens/persons with disabilities are discussed by everyone – except them. Important decisions relating to these citizens are commonly taken 'in their absence'. Do you want to feel like the proverbial child, who

should be seen and not heard? Would you want others to vote for you? Do you want to be treated frivolously and like an object? Or be moved around like a pawn on a chessboard full of traps and barriers? As a citizen, support the principle of 'fair play': 'Nothing about us without us!'

Step 9:

Do you hear those screeches? Do you see that this is the end of the line? Does this move you? Then trample down on discrimination! Push into that fifth gear and join us! Together let's pre-empt prejudice in Poland! Let's make sure that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is really put into practice.

Step 10:

Let's show everyone that young people want change. No more eyewash. It's time for "Project Human"! For everyone. Let's use the Convention to create a domino effect to „promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity“.

DIS/ABLED IN POLAND FROM PATIENTS TO CITIZENS: LOOKING FOR THE CURE

Photos:
Anna Rok

Project in a Nutshell

The "Pre-empting Prejudice" team consists of young activists and leaders from all over Poland. All of them are dedicated to fighting discrimination, strengthening human rights in general and focusing on promoting rights of people with disabilities in particular. They were invited to take part in this 1.5 year long project in order to look for innovative strategies and solutions for promoting the rights of people with disabilities, especially in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Additionally they developed ideas as to how to challenge creatively the existing stereotypical image of a disabled person: how to represent people with disabilities not solely as patients but most of all as full human beings and citizens with rights and obligations. The project received a lot of positive feedback from the community of people with disabilities, experts, government institutions as well as the media.





Gaining Knowledge & Sharing Opinions!

Throughout the whole project the “Pre-empting Prejudice” team had the opportunity to increase their knowledge by taking part in tailored-made panel discussions and seminars. They discussed pressing issues related to rights of people with disabilities and their situation with a variety of specialist such as lawyers, social psychologists, historians, social policy experts and educators. Some of those events were open to a general public which gave members of the “Pre-empting Prejudice” team a chance to present their views to a more diverse audience and learn about other points of view on the subject.

Enhancing Skills & Searching for Creative Expression!

Challenging the existing status quo by proposing a new civic paradigm of thinking and representing people with disabilities was one of the main aims of the project. But the idea was to go beyond discussions but actually making an effort to develop something new. That is why the "Pre-empting Prejudice" team was given an opportunity to work on a (MEGA)zin, in which they presented their experiences, ideas, strategies and best practices on the theme. They formed an editorial office, within which they have been

working for a couple of months with the help of the experts: editors and journalists. Thanks to this task project participants were learning and enhancing new skills such as creative and journalistic writing.

Their task was to create a magazine from scratch. So they had to come up with a new visions regarding people with disabilities, main themes to be covered, journalistic genres which would be used. They could work individually or in teams. It turned out that although each and every one of them wanted a new, better vision of person with disabilities they also differed as to what it meant exactly. The fervent discussions about those key issues turned out to be among most rewarding experiences in that creative process.



Experimenting & Making One's Voice Heard!

In order to break stereotypes and make one's voice heard sometimes it is good to do something 'crazy' which would, in a positive sense, put people off balance. That is why the "Pre-empting Prejudice" team created and carried out in the very heart of Warsaw a happening which also aimed at celebrating a European Day Against Discrimination of People with Disabilities. The artsy and edgy idea received a lot of attention from passers-by who at times joined the happening and contributed with their ideas/slogans related to eradicating discrimination of people with disabilities in all spheres of life. This initiative was also refreshing for the members of the "Pre-empting Prejudice" team as it enabled them to really think out of the box about those serious matters.

Presenting a New Vision!

Finally, the process of gathering experiences, knowledge and experimentation came to an end. The members of the "Pre-empting Prejudice" more than a 1.5 year of intensive work became even more confident and aware leaders and activists. The new vision and ideas for taking action which they jointly created were worth sharing with other leaders and experts in the field. That is why it was a great honor that the grand finale of the project took place with the Polish Human Rights Defender (Ombudsman). Additionally, a keynote speech was delivered by Mr. Marek Plura who is among a few MPs in the Polish Parliament who is committed to fighting against infringements of the rights of people with disabilities. There was an impressive turn-out at the event as well as media coverage. All in all, the final line was reached only to mark a new beginning!



This experience turned out to be also beneficial for participants' sense of belonging. It gave them the impetus for building a stronger network of like-minded activists and leaders. That is why, although the pilot program is over, the "Pre-empting Prejudice" team continues its cooperation under the label of "Pre-empting Prejudice" initiative.





photo: Anna Rok

Happening: "Pre-empting Prejudice: draw the chalk creed"

<http://uprzeczuprzedenia.blogspot.com/>