

## Artistic, social or political critique? The dilemmas of *Krytyka Polityczna*

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The paper introduces *Krytyka Polityczna*, the most important Polish New Left social movement. The author describes the movement's activities according to Boltanski and Chiapello's distinction of modes of critique and Eder's theory of middle-class radicalism. The descriptive and theoretical analysis is supported by the presentation of the initial findings of a quantitative study of *Krytyka Polityczna*'s policies.

Key words: Artistic critique, *Krytyka Polityczna*, New Left, *Political Critique*

### Introduction

The twenty years that have passed since the demise of real socialism in Poland seem to give enough distance to seriously question the convergence of Polish society with the capitalist world-system. Yet, while we can speak of a “modernization” of social structure and economy in Poland due to the pressure of neoliberal globalization and integration with the European Union, it is for sure a “conservative modernization”. The postmodern turn that occurred after the revolts of the Sixties in the West does not seem to resonate in Polish public discourse, which (in its most visible, hence most significant manifestations) is still attached to traditional values. Those post-materialist social movements that deal with the politics of sexual minorities, ecology or secularism, occupy a niche and their activities repeatedly meet with violent conservative backlash. Their attempts at institutionalization and inclusion into the political system, as in the case of the Greens Party, have not yielded the expected results. In this context, the appearance of *Krytyka Polityczna* – a movement which consciously refers to the ethos and legacy of 1968, tries to form “rainbow coalitions” as its predecessors did, and intends to create an alternative project of political organization – surely causes one to wonder whether this situation is soon to encounter change.

### What is *Krytyka Polityczna*?

According to Sławomir Sierakowski, the leader of *Krytyka Polityczna*, contemporary democracy resembles a cartel: the main parties in most developed countries have signed a shady deal against the people. There is no possibility, he argues, to bring back democracy (with emphasis on *demos*) without breaking the consensus that dominates institutional politics on both the local and global plane. In his *Open letter to political parties*<sup>1</sup>, Sierakowski (2011) states that differences between major parties are illusionary, as all debates, even those considered crucial, only reinforce the underlying agreement. False struggles spoil democracy, as both media and voters tend to follow them whole-heartedly, departing even further from the social problems that often demand immediate attention. What is even more dangerous, by ignoring such problems, society drifts towards populism. “Today, partisan systems stupefy people as much as television does”. The dumbing-down of politics affects society as a whole, turning it into a modern primordial horde ruled by hatred and greed, he argues.

We could be living in the end times, yet no one cares. The writings of Chantal Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek and Peter Sloterdijk seem crucial to understanding Sierakowski's thought. The Slovenian philosopher writes: "Although similar signs of 'great disorder under heaven' abound, the truth hurts, and we desperately try to avoid it" (Žižek 2010: ix). The public is aware of the rising problems of growing social inequalities, exclusion, soaring unemployment, depletion of natural resources and so on – yet due to the paralyzing power of the "cynical reason" of short-term profits (Sloterdijk 1988), no one is able to do anything about it. Despite intellectuals' and activists' calls for social agency, the masses remain immobilized by a lack of faith in the very possibility of having the ability to change anything. The populist parties that are gaining power across Europe are therefore indicators that the excluded see no other way to improve their situation than by dismantling partisan democracy. At the same time, the populist menace forces the establishment to close its ranks and restrict the field of debate even further in a desperate attempt to protect its power. Mouffe (2000) theorizes this problem via her critique of Habermas: of course, only rational individuals are permitted to take part in rational and institutional political discourse, yet it is the current hegemony that delineates boundaries of reason and legitimates institutions. The status quo is thus reaffirmed, as the populist barbarians are denounced by the mainstream media.

The problem lies, as Sierakowski states, in the neoliberal economic doctrine that exerts hegemony over the world. Indisputable (because "rational") rules of the free market reign over both left- and right-wing political programs, forcing them into submission to the market. In this perspective, Giddens' and Blair's "Third Way" or Clinton's "triangulation" are evidence that there is no political will to pursue truly leftist politics in our times. Even more: both examples illustrate, as Chantal Mouffe puts it, our inability to imagine a viable alternative to neoliberal capitalism. The post-political social contract could be summarized by the formula "ideologies are dead, the elites pursue their own agenda, and the masses follow the media". This is not only a sign of the "lack of spirit" of contemporary democracies, Sierakowski argues, but also an effect of power abandoning its representative form – the liberal democratic nation-state – and fleeing into the invisible hands of volatile financial markets. Yet hope remains, Sierakowski notes, as protests, like those seen in Madrid's Puerta del Sol, herald the dawn of modern partisan democracy. Political mobilization that bypasses parliamentary parties seems to be for him the key factor in the approaching revival of politics. Economic and political issues banned from public debate are returning due to the *indignados*.

One should not, however, mistake a diagnosis for a manifesto – and Sierakowski's *Open letter* should be read as the latter. Since 2002, when the *Krytyka Polityczna* magazine was launched, the ideals of the movement have been tied to a certain idea of what politics proper should look like. In the journal's founding essay, entitled *What is political critique?*, Sierakowski (2002) criticized the lack of politically engaged discussions among Polish intellectuals, activists and politicians. Themes informing his critique back then were the same as nowadays: depolitization of the public sphere and the shift of power from representatives to unaccountable institutions. He blamed cynical politicians for the crisis of society then as he blames them for the crisis of capitalism now. This designation of the guilty is an important issue, as it is not the bankers who are considered responsible for the crisis, but politicians.

Sierakowski's *Open letter* was published in the biggest Polish daily, the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza*, where open anti-capitalist sentiment seldom finds a place among its columns. The limits of its liberal, post-political discourse is one of several problems *Krytyka Polityczna* faces. Even if, as the anti-capitalist Left invariably insists, the system is in need of thinking outside the box, the public sphere remains locked into an old paradigm, one that is apparently already dead in academic critical theory, but still considered fit and healthy in political practice. Sierakowski's rhetoric remains constrained by the tension between the demands of the media he works with and those of anti-capitalist ideology. His language remains confined to the limits arbitrarily set by the very public opinion he is trying to change. I shall return to this issue later.

*Krytyka Polityczna* in Polish means “political critique” – critique that is not afraid to take an explicit political stand. The movement's activities are an attempt to initiate a certain return to the tradition of civic engagement by evoking the lives and stories of engaged intellectuals, and, at the same time, moving forward by refuting institutionalized and ritualized politics, while searching for new terms of debate. This noble aim is, I believe, impossible as long as the movement is attached to a certain regime of activism and critique. As we shall see in the last part of the essay, leftist politics in our times must become aware of growing material inequalities, as an inability to cope with them could undermine any efforts to alleviate the situation, or even make it worse.

### How does *Krytyka Polityczna* criticize?

So what is the *Krytyka Polityczna* movement in reality? How do members of the movement try to undermine the post-political consensus? Its organizational structure rests on five main pillars: the journal, a website, publishing house, cultural center and local affiliated clubs, all under the umbrella of the “Stanisław Brzozowski Association”, which provides the institutional basis for operations.

The activity of the *Krytyka Polityczna* movement started in 2002 with an irregularly published magazine also called *Krytyka Polityczna* and was supported by recognized left-wing intellectuals from the very beginning. Its aim was, and remains, to initiate debates concerning crucial political problems, as opposed to secondary or clearly populist issues. It is now considered to be the most important intellectual periodical in the country, publishing translations of influential academic articles, interviews and in-depth commentaries. The declared circulation of the magazine is around 6,500 copies, yet it is hard to estimate its true influence, especially given the highly sophisticated academic language it employs and special issues that are devoted to artistic projects. The internet portal supplements the magazine with the more current commentary, columns and other articles not appearing in the magazine. It is one of the most popular left-wing websites in Poland, yet again, its reach is hard to evaluate without statistics of the official number of visits.

The *Krytyka Polityczna* publishing house started its activity in 2006 with publication of Vladimir Lenin and Slavoj Žižek's *Revolution at the gates* (2006). The title sparked a debate on whether it is acceptable to spread communist ideology in a post-communist country, or even whether it is permissible to read Lenin as a serious political thinker and not only as a criminal. Thanks to a skillful application of controversy, the publishing launch was a success and allowed the movement's message to reach beyond the initial audience of a niche magazine. To date, *Krytyka Polityczna* has published over 100 books, e.g. writings of Badiou, Bauman, Blanchot and Brzozowski. Most are academic tomes concerned with the philosophy of politics or political-philosophical critiques of the current socio-economical order. The next largest group of publications consists of aesthetics, art and literature.

In 2009, *Krytyka Polityczna* won a contest announced by municipal authorities of Warsaw and was granted a venue directly in the city center on Nowy Świat street, said to be the most expensive street in Poland. The organization was expected to run a restaurant and a cultural center there with space for meetings, seminars and lectures, which had hitherto been held in a flat which also housed the editorial office of the magazine. Regional clubs situated in major Polish cities such as Krakow, Breslau, Danzig or Łódź are forced to pursue much less spectacular activities. The movement is strongly tied to the Warsaw hub because of its central organizational structure, being that there are no regional branches of the Stanisław Brzozowski Association. Local activists in these cities have had to act without legal personality, which often restricts available options, and rely on the headquarters' resources, which undeniably makes the whole effort more complicated and time-consuming, as well as less autonomous. Much of the regional clubs' activities depend therefore on locally available assets: social networks, clubs and cafés that provide space for meetings, and small grants awarded to them by universities or NGOs. Most of the time clubs just follow Warsaw's

projects, organizing discussions on newly published books and talks by guests already connected with the core of the organization. The most active local branches of *Krytyka Polityczna* are located in university towns, with the educational institutions providing members, audience and money. However, the activities of clubs cannot transcend local limits. Their independent activities, such as maintaining a day-care room for children in Cieszyn, do not interfere with the movement's main agenda and are treated as somewhat secondary to the movement's main interests. The lack of established horizontal connections between members of local clubs makes it difficult to organize grass-roots events capable of reaching an interregional or national audience.

Obtaining the venue in Warsaw is only one of numerous grants awarded *Krytyka Polityczna* by other NGOs, government agencies or transnational foundations such as George Soros' Stefan Batory Foundation. It is therefore crucial for the movement's leadership, as they have stated openly on several occasions, to maintain *respectability*, meaning the ability to act as a serious organization, avoiding failing to comply with its public obligations. In resource mobilization theory, the task of gathering resources for a social movement's activities evokes a tactical problem: trying to achieve one aim can conflict with behavior aimed at achieving another (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1217).

The organizational path *Krytyka Polityczna* has chosen prevents it from pursuing a politics of contention – which means direct, even violent, “collective interactions among makers of claims and their objects”, as McAdam *et al.* (2001: 5) define it. The tension between public and ideological credibility repeatedly becomes a problem. In a 2011 interview with activist and journalist Roman Kurkiewicz, published on *Krytyka Polityczna*'s website, Kurkiewicz compared a *Gazeta Wyborcza* columnist's writings, which were critical of pro-Palestinian activism, to anti-Semitic government propaganda of the Polish “1968” period. After an objection was raised by the Israeli Embassy, the editorial staff quickly removed the offensive part of the interview and issued an apology for resorting to such aggressive rhetoric. Afterwards an article written by the Israeli Embassy spokesman appeared on the *Krytyka Polityczna* website, in which the spokesman, not explicitly, of course, compared pro-Palestinian activism itself to an anti-Semitic witch-hunt. Publication of the material sparked discontent inside the movement. During its summer convention, several activists criticized movement leadership for undemocratic management and conformism to the post-political discourse it had sworn to overcome. They voiced their difficulties in preserving their credibility in their own communities, as their cooperation with other left-wing movements was suffering from such unpredictable decisions on the part of movement leaders. The activists claimed they were betrayed by the leadership and while other left-wing movements called them traitors to the cause of a free Palestine. It is clear that the publication of the spokesman's article was a means of avoiding accusations of anti-Semitism and an attempt to remain on good terms with the mainstream media criticized by Kurkiewicz. It is however unclear whether this kind of “political correctness” is already an indicator of *Krytyka Polityczna*'s submission to the hegemony of post-politics.

In the summer of 2011, an announcement appeared on a Polish Internet advertisement boards, stating that the *Krytyka Polityczna* cultural center in Warsaw was looking for staff, but offering only temporary job positions. It was easy to predict the lines of offense and defense in the debate that exploded afterwards. On the one side stood those who consider temporary jobs to be “junk jobs” that deprive workers of security and dignity: in other words, the “caviar left” was seeking to exploit workers. *Krytyka Polityczna* was accused of shamefully betraying the ideals it seemed to cherish. On the other side of the barricade, *Realpolitik* was invoked: it is impossible to maintain a non-profit culture center in times of austerity without some concessions to “the System” and, what is more, political gains from *Krytyka Polityczna*'s activities exceed their ethical costs. Again, the anti-capitalist leftist stance has clashed with the need to spread the movement's message more widely.

The same contradiction appears in the context of Sierakowski's essays I have analyzed earlier: they are critical of the Polish public sphere, yet they try to fit into it. As the range of the movements' activities continue to widen and it needs a constant supply of external

resources, *Krytyka Polityczna* becomes trapped between staying true to its proclaimed political ideals and acting as a rational actor interested in pursuing goals that fit into the formula of civil society. The so-called NGO-ization of the movement is occurring and this process is becoming increasingly visible the more *Krytyka Polityczna* tries to play the role of a politically oriented movement, not just a non-governmental organization.

## What is political critique?

Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 27-8) argue that critique is an inseparable part of capitalism. The very logic of the capitalist system permanently spawns sources of indignation for all involved in it, both on the part of those who benefit from it the most and those who occupy the lowest positions in the structure. The authors of *The New Spirit of Capitalism* identify four major sources of discontent: (i) inauthenticity and alienation, (ii) oppression and commodification of human relations, (iii) poverty and inequality, and (iv) the promotion of selfish behavior that erodes communities. These, primarily individual, phenomena and feelings offer a basis for the formulation of theoretical critiques that serve as programs for social mobilizations against the evils of capitalism. It is impossible however, as Boltanski and Chiapello seek to prove, to create one critique that could combine all four sources of indignation into a coherent political ideology. This is because of the essential differences between the underlying emotions and, one should add, differences between individuals and groups that are subdued by different forms of oppression. Unfortunately, Boltanski and Chiapello do not elaborate on the importance of class cleavages. Yet, it is class structure and class interests that should be considered crucial to the formation of critiques, as they account for both the sources of discontent and the language used to describe the feelings felt.

Anti-capitalist critique splits thus into two general trends: “social critique” that emphasizes immorality and egoism (sources [iii] and [iv]), as in the case of socialist movements, and “artistic critique” that draws upon feelings of alienation and inauthenticity ([i] and [ii]). Prime examples of this mode of critique are avant-garde cultural movements that, in the name of an individual's right to expression and self-realization, attack conservative norms of social life. Divergent views regarding which source of indignation is the crucial one lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between proponents of different forms of critique, as was the case in the heated debate between the old (social) and new (artistic) left during the 1968 revolts (see: Katsiaficas 1987; Wallerstein 1989). Again, it is important to note the class distinctions that underlie political misunderstandings. To use Pierre Bourdieu's expression, every interest, be it in economic or cultural issues, is usually “the choice of the necessary” (Bourdieu 1984: 372). This means that workers' movements' focus on social critique is not an accident or an arbitrary choice, quite the opposite: it is a fully reasonable choice to oppose oppression in its most acute aspect. Maslow's hierarchy of needs could serve then as a, albeit oversimplified, theoretical model of relations between social classes and sources of discontent. The lowest classes are usually concerned primarily with realizing their most immediate interests related to survival and safety. Self-realization and arbitrary limitations on spontaneity are problems that only better-situated members of society can afford. Social and artistic critique should therefore be seen as complementary forms of critique that are voiced by different factions of society, working class and middle class.<sup>2</sup>

Critique is also “a motor of changes in the spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005:27), one of the things that allows capitalism to thrive despite its crisis-prone nature. Through legitimate critiques that have called attention to errors and injustices, the free market economy has managed to gain a reflexivity that opposing economic systems lacked (the USSR model of state capitalism above all) and conquer the globe. This also means that critiques of capitalism entangle themselves in a very ambiguous relationship: on the one hand, they express feelings of discontent and indignation and form these into the theoretical practice of a social movement; on the other hand, they serve as a basis for re-formulations of the spirit of capitalism and adaptation of the economy to changing structures and needs of society. As

Harry Cleaver (2000) strongly emphasizes, it was workers' struggles and their successes that each time forced capitalists to adjust their strategies so as to comfort the revolting masses. In this dialectical relation between the forces of labour and capital, every critique that achieves its goal is a stone in the foundation of a new capitalist regime, a new spirit of capitalism.

Boltanski and Chiapello make an important point that every critique is *incomplete*. This means that the critique is always unable to truly reach beyond the system it criticizes. As famously expressed by Wittgenstein (2001: 68) in Thesis 5.6 of the *Tractatus* ("The limits of my language mean the limits of my world"), every utopia consists of elements of the existing world reshaped in such a way as to show how the world could look, and critique is no exception here. Every formulation of critique, even if it accurately describes oppressive structures at a given moment, also forgets the social conditions of its own existence. That was the case with the artistic critique of the Sixties: while properly analyzing mechanisms of inauthenticity, it could not properly apprehend the logic of growing inequalities. It could then serve as a basis for the new spirit of capitalism based on notions of individuality and creativity, treating material inequalities as a solution, not as a problem, as in the politics of austerity nowadays. This particular problem of the incompleteness of critique is also described by Pierre Bourdieu in *Practical Reason* (Bourdieu 1998), where he argues that every actor who has an *interest* in changing an institution is already *interested* in that institution by virtue of his or her class habitus. This works the other way around too: *being interested* in an institution means having an *interest* that is connected with that institution. This is another argument for the need to mind the relations between forms of critique and social classes. As every class lives in an institutional environment, its critiques are usually concerned with that set of institutions: it usually gives priority to certain problems while ignoring others. Different class interests, in both meanings of the word, form the basis of different critiques, as even the word "capitalism" has different meanings for blue-collar and white-collar workers.

How does *Krytyka Polityczna's* political critique fit into this schema? One amalgamation of social and artistic critique characterized by Boltanski and Chiapello is an intellectual critique as embodied in Jean-Paul Sartre's "Les Temps modernes":

*...an essentially economic critique condemning bourgeois exploitation of the working class went hand in hand with a critique of mores, denouncing the oppressive and hypocritical nature of bourgeois morality (especially in matters of sexuality), and an aesthetic critique discrediting the sybaritism of a bourgeoisie with academic tastes.* (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 39)

They argue that the idea of "transgression" is one that binds all three (economic, moral and aesthetic) dimensions of critique together into an intellectual project that attempts to provide a total, in the sense of Lukács' "totality", critique of capitalism. Bourdieu notes (and Boltanski and Chiapello would agree, I believe) that Sartre's program as a "total intellectual" was to give one orientation and form to all possible intellectual products (Bourdieu 1995: 209-13), and the concept of "transgression" was a way to unify essentially different phenomena:

*Workers sequestering their employer, homosexuals kissing in public, or artists displaying trivial objects transferred from their usual context into a gallery or museum – when it came down to it, were not all these forms of one and the same transgression of the bourgeois order?* (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 39)

In other words the idea of transgression was a metarule that went beyond the fundamental differences between the sources of critique and subsumed them all into a unified mode of intellectual critique.

The category of intellectual critique fits characteristics of *Krytyka Polityczna* in many aspects, but the movement does not really correspond to the Sartrean project. It could be interesting, of course, to analyze how Sierakowski, the leader of *Krytyka Polityczna*, tries to simultaneously present himself as a total intellectual, a participant in artistic projects, press discussions, academic polemics and political struggles. *Krytyka Polityczna* magazine might then be treated as an incarnation of "Les Temps modernes". However, this kind of simple

analogy is not my intention here. Yet, if in Sartre's project the transgression was a point of departure for the creation of a totalizing critique, in the case of *Krytyka Polityczna* the "politization" is the crucial notion. Both are forms of subversion of the social order, but they are different.

By the term "subversion" I understand creation of a metarule that serves as a reference for the critical appraisal of social institutions and the imposition of this metarule on distinct fields – art, literature, drug policy, even institutionalized politics itself. In Sierakowski's essays I have analyzed, this means that those fields of social activity are *not political enough* and that their rules have to be subdued to the metarule of politics (in Sartre's terms their rules should have been "transgressed"). In Bourdieu's (1995) analyses of the literary field, such tactics are employed mainly by individuals and groups occupying heterodox (i.e. dominated by and antagonistic towards the dominant orthodoxy) and relatively privileged (i.e. possessing enough capital to become part of orthodoxy, yet not being part of it) positions. This is a tactic of agents possessing enough capital to claim positions in the dominant faction of the society (or so they believe), yet are hindered in doing it because of certain maladjustments, institutional blockades on upward social mobility, consolidation of the dominant faction, their young age or other conditions that seem unjust.

Innovativeness of heterodoxy is based on redefining the rules and undermining the legitimacy of the existing structure of capital distribution. Its aim is to impose its own rules, instead of struggling for recognition with respect to the rules created by a dominant faction. Struggles for capital then become less quantitative, and more qualitative. The aim of subversion is to change the rules of the game: it should matter less how much capital a given actor has should matter less, whereas the type of capital an actor has should matter more.

This is the logic that underlies *Krytyka Polityczna's* activity. Instead of intellectual critique, I propose then to use the term "political critique", as in the movement's name, to describe the form of critique it proposes. Its critiques of the only left-wing parliamentary party (SLD) as not being leftist enough is a way to question this party's legitimacy as a left-wing party. Its critiques of Polish literature for not being politically conscious enough, and for forgetting certain traditions and authors, has a similar meaning: they are a means to subvert the rules of literary criticism and bend them to fit *Krytyka Polityczna's* program. Similar tactics are to be seen in the field of philosophy, where authors with left-wing inclinations are promoted and those considered not political enough are dismissed as followers of post-politics<sup>3</sup>. To return to Boltanski and Chiapello's distinction: the politics the movement is interested in are the politics of artistic critique, the politics of freedom of expression and of the realization of one's potential against the constraints of the conservative social system. These are the politics of the middle class.

For Klaus Eder (1993), the activism of the middle class is not only focused on issues deemed crucial because of habitus, but also performed in ways that the middle class finds suitable. In his inspiring development of Bourdieu's theory, Eder expands the notion of habitus to encompass social movements' activities as a whole. An attachment to the value of individualism implies in his theory certain methods of political engagement: for proponents of artistic critique, discussions, lectures or happenings may seem the most appropriate ways of voicing discontent, as they are based in certain experiences of body and society. Such acts could however be considered useless and unproductive for movements based in the working class that often employ more direct and physical methods of taking action. Thus, if we connect Eder's account with Boltanski and Chiapello's theory, we should see even greater differences among the modes of critique. Critiques are therefore not only certain visions of the world, but also specific ways of acting in it. These very practical disparities hamper even more the possibility of creating coherent social *and* artistic anti-capitalist critique. In real terms it means that a political alliance between old- and new-left movements is indeed rare, as it requires a pre-existing distance to embodied notions of political action.

## What is political critique? - An analysis

In my study I employed a method of social movement research called “political claims analysis”, (PCA) as developed by Koopmans and Statham (1999). In PCA, a political claim is defined as a purposeful and public articulation of political demands or critiques, a call to action, the expression of a proposal or refusal that concerns the interests and/or integrity of actors making the claim, and/or of other collective actors (Koopmans et al. 2005: 254). PCA shifts from analysis of direct and physical events of collective action, as in the previous version of the methodology called “protest event analysis”, to non-necessarily direct and discursive acts as a way to escape the image of “protesters standing at the door of the institution with their objections”, and in order to include in the research more subtle ways in which social movements influence the public sphere. Every “claim-making event” is coded in accordance with its organizers, place and time, participants, specific issues raised or ideological frames. A field test for PCA was the international research project MERCI on the discourse over citizenship and immigration in the European Union (see: Koopmans et al. 2005). The codebook from this research, which that also employed Franzosi's (2004) quantitative narrative analysis techniques, served as a point of reference for my research. I was able to avoid difficulties in the analysis of newspapers (see: Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz et al. 2005) which are common sources for social movements studies, as *Krytyka Polityczna* provides a list of almost all the events it has organized since 2004 on its web page. I thus coded almost 1,700 events organized by *Krytyka Polityczna*'s central location or local clubs, or with the movement's direct cooperation. By employing PCA, I could shift the focus from purely discursive forms of the movement's activity (books and the magazine), to both practical and discursive interventions in the public sphere, namely events, debates, conferences and lectures. In doing so, I tried not to follow the centralized organizational logic that *Krytyka Polityczna* employs<sup>4</sup>. By considering the headquarters' and local clubs' actions as equal, I meant to treat *Krytyka Polityczna* in terms of a social movement, not merely as a Warsaw-centered institution, and to emphasize its nationwide activity.

It is difficult to fit the data gathered into narrow categories of social and artistic critique, as a large number of issues could not easily fit either one or the other category. I therefore attempted to characterize *Krytyka Polityczna*'s mode of critique by referring to Eder's “middle-class radicalism” model, that takes the form of political critique in this case.

**Table 1: Ideological Frames/Issues Raised**

<u>Ideological Frame/Issue</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Art and Culture	418	24.80%
Left-Wing Politics and Activism	285	16.90%
Academic Left	207	12.27%
Feminism, Gender and Reproductive Rights	140	8.30%
Global Politics, Alterglobalism	111	6.59%
Urban Politics	93	5.51%
Economics and Work	87	5.16%
LGBT	87	5.16%
Drug Policy and Healthcare	77	4.57%
Ecology	70	4.16%
Ethnic Minorities	64	3.79%
Education and Children	47	2.79%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1686</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Almost 25% of claim-making events were concerned with art and culture. This category contains lectures or discussions on literature, theater, visual arts and others; meetings were also organized to discuss novels published by *Krytyka Polityczna*. We can treat this as an

indicator of the movement's "cultural bias", clearly explainable in terms of Klaus Eder's theory. The first three categories that fit the model of politization I have elaborated earlier, comprise more than half of all cases coded. They are too internally diverse to allow us to call them clear signs of the artistic mode of anti-capitalist critique. Concerns with Polish and global politics are not clear expressions of discontent caused by feelings of inauthenticity. This is why the notion of political critique, based on Sartre's intellectual critique, is useful. If we are to treat the events coded as global politics, including critiques of capitalism as a global system, economics and education as manifestations of social critique, this category would comprise less than 15% of all events organized by *Krytyka Polityczna*.

**Table 2: Forms of Claim-Making**

<u>Form of Claim-Making</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Discussions	886	52.55%
Movie Projections, Exhibitions	391	23.20%
Academic Conferences or Lectures	299	17.73%
Workshops or Public Consultations	110	6.52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1686</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

An analysis of its forms of claim-making clearly shows *Krytyka Polityczna's* attachment to the middle-class form of political participation. By treating discussions and movie screenings as political activities, the movement reveals its attachment to the idea of acting through words that is part of the habitus of educated persons. Academic conferences, which make up almost a quarter of all events coded, are usually closed events: this means both the language employed and issues raised are aimed at academic publics, mostly students and young doctors. They should also be treated as manifestations of a faith in the power of language. Few cases of direct collective actions traditionally associated with the old left, such as physical protests, were coded as workshops. Only this last category consists of events that are at the same time open to all and aimed at making direct changes in social praxis. This is particularly the case in public consultations or open meetings with local decision-makers that were held to allow the public to voice their concerns.

**Table 3: Where Claim-Making Takes Place (Warsaw Excluded)**

<u>Where Claim-Taking Takes Place</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Cafe or Pub	323	30.90%
Art Gallery, Theater	228	21.79%
Own Place	190	18.15%
University	121	11.54%
Book Store, Culture Center	111	10.57%
Public Institution or NGO	36	3.38%
Other	39	3.67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1042</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From this particular analysis I excluded 644 events that took place in Warsaw because almost every one of them took place in *Krytyka Polityczna's* headquarters, at first in the editorial office, then at the cultural center in Nowy Świat street. Again, this shows that the movement is attached to a certain category of places. Art galleries, universities and book stores, places of significance to middle-class representatives, make up 40% of all cases. Eighteen percent of the events held in local clubs' own meeting-places point to the relative strength of the clubs that have access to such facilities. We should also note the very small fraction of events held at public institutions or at other NGOs' premises. It could be an indicator of a certain negative

or critical attitude towards those institutions that prevents *Krytyka Polityczna* from cooperating regularly with them or the other way round: organizations that do not pursue political activities may find it difficult to cooperate with the movement or fear compromising their neutrality towards such issues.

### Conclusions: Political critique in times of austerity?

The New Left always had a problem with the class bias of its activities, and *Krytyka Polityczna* is no exception here. Even the small fragments of empirical analysis I have presented point to this problem. An attachment to certain values and ethos is strengthened by an attachment to certain ways of political participation, in effect consolidating its political critique as both an aim and a method of action. As an institutional analysis of path dependency would surely show, this process consistently diminishes *Krytyka Polityczna's* ability to pursue divergent policies with divergent allies. Sierakowski states that it “annoys” him when critics rebuke the movement for its disinterest in social and economic matters. This is, in fact, an inherent challenge for all movements composed of individuals of middle-class background educated in the social sciences or arts and humanities. However, and this is the crucial question here, is *Krytyka Polityczna's* political critique truly an innovative critique? Even if it lacks economists on board to deal with the hegemony of neoliberalism on its own grounds, the movement seldom cooperates with social forces that struggle for the expansion of redistribution networks and represent a social critique of capitalism.

It is certain that economic inequality may well prove to be lethal for liberal democracy. To rescue it, “the social” should dominate over “the economic” as Erik Olin Wright (2006) puts it, or, as stated in *Krytyka Polityczna's* program, “the political” should take command over “the economic”. David Harvey (2007) argues that the contemporary crisis is an outcome of class conflict, i.e. an attack of the ruling class on the middle classes. Questions regarding the relations of power in the nation-state and trans-national institutions, such as the European Union, should therefore be formulated in the language of redistribution, not only recognition, he argues. *Krytyka Polityczna*, however, is more concerned with artistic than social critique, but only the latter can provide the means for readjusting the relations of power in contemporary capitalism.

Tomasz Zarycki (2009) argues that, in the context of the semi-peripheral position of Poland in the world-system, critical analysis and activism in Poland should focus on struggles for redistribution of cultural rather than economic capital. Because of historical conditions, he argues, cultural capital is the most important factor in the stratification of Polish society, as it directly influences every other dimension of inequality. The activity of *Krytyka Polityczna* aimed at the education of enlightened and politically engaged elites who will in turn empower the larger society, seems to be a realistic and viable option in the light of Zarycki's argument, even though it reminds us of the Leninist project of an avant-garde party. It remains to be seen whether limiting the scope of critique to the sophisticated academic and artistic discourses will in fact lead to vital changes in society, in general. Clinging to those discourses could deepen the already existing class divisions and widen political differences between the proponents of artistic and social critiques. I therefore argue that the movement is simply an emanation from a certain liberal trend in society which is already liberalizing on its own. However, the movement certainly strengthens progressive ideas, makes them more coherent, visible and audible, even if the movement's political critique may seem anachronistic in times of increasing exclusion, defined in terms of redistribution rather than recognition. Its concern for the rights of excluded life-style minorities obscures its concern for the economically oppressed parts of the population. Słomczyński and Janicka (2005), in an important article entitled “Cracked structure of Polish society”, argue that the Polish population forms two blocks: those who won in the gamble of post-communist transformation (higher and middle classes, entrepreneurs) and those who lost (e.g. workers and farmers). Since 1989, the authors

argue, the material and cultural differences between these two factions have only widened. Is political critique enough to bridge this gap?

Despite Zarycki's thesis, *Krytyka Polityczna*'s activity can only help the new middle class accumulate cultural capital, and widen the gap between it and the rest of society. To prevent this process from happening, the movement should step beyond the limits of its class interest, in both meanings of the word, and turn to the wider public instead. Without this crucial shift, *Krytyka Polityczna* may itself become a part of establishment it attempts to criticize.

## Notes

1. The title is obviously inspired by Kuroń and Modzelewski's letter from 1964 that is considered to be the founding act of the Polish New Left: its authors claimed that socialism was indeed a cause worth fighting for, yet the ruling party's authoritarian stance blocked progress towards it.
2. This does not mean that different modes of critique are exclusive to different classes. Lazzarato (2011), who is critical of Boltanski and Chiapello's theory of critique, shows how members of the so-called creative class voice their discontent in terms of social critique. His arguments do not invalidate, however, the claim that the critique is in most cases concerned with the most immediate interests.
3. Most of the academic books *Krytyka Polityczna* has published are translations, as Polish authors are seldom published or promoted. This particular publishing strategy, which could in fact be called post-colonial, also serves to promote a certain vision of philosophy dismissive of that of the Polish academic establishment.
4. Even by beginning this paper with a summary of Sławomir Sierakowski's views, I follow the practice of mainstream journalists tending to identify a movement with its leadership.

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