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City Bombed with Yarn: Knitting Graffiti as an Ambivalent Practice of Resistance to Cultural Hegemony

Street lamp, bench, tree wrapped in a colourful knit, statue with a scarf or embroidered slogan hung on a gate, all constitute knitting graffiti, which is increasingly present in the cities around the world. It takes a lot of forms. It is not only a colourful aesthetic symptom, but also a manifestation and driving force of socio-cultural changes. Knitted and crocheted elements present in the urban landscape only seemingly tend to be frivolous and irrational. Creative actions made by these who 'knit the city' embody various meanings. In the presented article, the phenomenon of 'yarn bombing' is described primarily as a strategy of resistance, a form of street art, which makes the cultural practice of knitting stitch by stitch, traditionally associated with femininity, become a series of craftivist micro-political gestures.

Keywords: yarn bombing, craftivism, resistance, street art, creativity, cultural hegemony, new media

Miasto zbombardowane przędzą –
knitting graffiti jako ambiwalentna praktyka oporu wobec hegemonii kulturowej*

Otulone kolorową dzianiną uliczna lampa, ławka, drzewo czy też pomnik w szaliku i wyhaftowane hasło zawieszone na bramie to przykłady włóczkowego graffiti, które coraz częściej spotykamy w przestrzeni miast na całym świecie. Przybiera ono wiele form. Jest nie tylko wielobarwnym estetycznym akcentem, lecz także przejawem i motorem społeczno-kulturowych zmian. Wpisane w miejski krajobraz elementy wydziergane na drutach i szydełku jedynie z pozoru są niepoważne i nieracjonalne. Kreatywne działania podejmowane przez „dziergających miasto" ucieleśniają wiele znaczeń. W prezentowanym

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artykule zjawisko „bombardowania włóczką" (*yarn bombing*) interesuje mnie przede wszystkim jako strategia oporu, forma street artu, która z dziergania oczka za oczkiem, praktyki kulturowej tradycyjnie kojarzonej z kobiecością, czyni serię rękodzielniczych mikropolitycznych gestów.

Słowa kluczowe: „bombardowanie włóczką", rękodzielniczy aktywizm, opór, sztuka uliczna, kreatywność, hegemonia kulturowa, nowe media

Introduction

Knitting has remained an essential part of women's lives from years (Haveri 2013: 2). Over time, as second-wave feminists have repeatedly emphasised, it became part of a stereotyped femininity, according to which a woman fulfilling the social role assigned to her, 'confined' to a private space, selflessly served others, putting her own needs last. Engaging in knitting was one of the responsibilities of caring for home and family (Parker 2010: 6)[2].

Needlework was associated with submissiveness. This is mentioned by Rozsika Parker in her interpretation of Marcus Stone's painting *In Love* (1888), which depicts a man gazing lovingly at his chosen one sitting opposite him and occupied by embroidery. In Parker's view, the silent embroiderer personifies the stereotypical femininity. Indeed, her posture symbolises modesty, submissiveness and poise: the embroiderer has her eyes downcast and her head bowed (Parker 2010: 5).

Naomi Wolf points out that since the Industrial Revolution, embroidery and lace-making, as meticulous and time-consuming activities, were assigned to middle-class women in order to "consume the female energy and intelligence in a harmless way" (Wolf 2002: 15). However, she adds that at the same time reaching for needlepoint or lacemaking allowed women, as much as possible, to express their creativity and passion (Wolf 2002: 15). In the past, handicrafts repeatedly became for women a source of pleasure stemming from creation and a way of self-expression within the limited conditions (Parker 2010). This was due to women's ability to combine conflicting activities, referred to as the "creative tension between conformity and subversion" (Durham 1990: 342).

Contemporary forms of women's textile crafts have developed as an extension of women's daily work arising from their assigned duties. Today, there is no need to make garments or interior design elements by oneself. That is why today, in the field of knitting, tradition and utility are clearly giving way to artistic activity and unfettered creativity (Haveri 2013: 2).

[2] The perception of knitting as an activity that is a kind of exemplification of stereotypical femininity is not universal. I write more about this in: *Knitting – (wo)mens occupation* (Kępa 2019).

Textile handicrafts are becoming increasingly popular today. All over the world, groups of people united by knitting are emerging. Workshops on traditional handicrafts, including knitting and crocheting, are popular. There are also more and more knitting festivals[3]. In many cities around the world, there are even special 'knit cafés' popping up and gathering knitters. New media play a significant role in the development of interest in knitting. There are more and more places on the internet every day where knitters, crocheters and embroiderers discuss their passion. These include Facebook and Instagram profiles, as well as blogs and vlogs. Social networks that connect craft enthusiasts are also hugely popular, e.g. Ravelry which has over 9 million registered users.

The interest in knitting is, among other things, a response to the omnipresent consumerism. According to this idea, the haste that accompanies modern human leads to a situation where we increasingly feel the need to slow down, to stop. Handicrafts created from yarn offer exactly such an opportunity. It results from the fact that dealing with it takes time: completing a handicraft project often takes days or even weeks. This feature of knitting is highlighted by Wendy Parkins, who highlights the fact that it helps us to look at our lives at a pace that is unusual for us. In her view making stitch after stitch, which stems from the need to be creative, allows the weaving of rhythms and relationships that are a response to the disillusionment with the all-encompassing rush (Parkins 2004: 432).

In the present article, I look at knitting as a form of cultural resistance to dominant values, patterns of thought and behaviour. I refer here to the concept of cultural hegemony developed in the field of cultural studies by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. This hegemony is as the process of creating, maintaining and disseminating the concepts of meaning dominant in a given society (Gramsci 1951, 1961). In doing so, I point out that new media play a key role in the process of contesting the hegemony through knitting, as they enable the spread of the phenomenon known as knitting graffiti.

I also interpret the practice of making yarn graffiti by drawing on anthropology and the sociology of everyday life. In the article, I also take up the issues of activism in the context of popular culture, and refer to the relationship between the power and citizens' right 'to the city'. I thus present knitting as an ambivalent phenomenon, suspended in a dense web of meanings, impossible to be classified unambiguously and definitively.

[3] These include Edinburgh Yarn Festival (UK), Swiss Yarn Festival (Sweden), Barcelona Knits (Spain), Sheep & Wool Festival (USA), TWIST. Fibre Festival (Canada). In Poland, the Drutozlot convention of knitting enthusiasts has been held in Toruń since 2015.

City bombed with yarn

Knitting graffiti[4] also referred to as yarn graffiti or even as yarn storming and guerrilla knitting is a form of expression derived from traditional textile handicrafts. It brings together amateurs and professionals, and makes tradition and modernity intermingle. This 'soft' type of urban art is based on artisanal skills, but works through strategies typical for the field of fine arts and street art (Haveri 2013: 1).

Yarn bombing is a multisensory form of graffiti that, unlike 'traditional' graffiti, is easy to remove. Its creation involves leaving handmade elements of thread and fabric in the urban landscape. Yarn graffiti can be sophisticated – when it comes to dressing a statue in a jumper – or simple – when a street lamp is wrapped in a crocheted scarf. Some knit small works difficult to spot on an urban lawn, others create huge realisations capable of enveloping monuments. Yarn bombing can be made with a labour-intensive and intricate stitch or be composed of elements representing a uniform and simple pattern. It can be easily spotted or placed in some low-traffic areas where it can only be seen by careful observers (Moore, Prain 2009: 17–18).

Yarn bombing arose mainly from the need to make grey reality more colourful. It was initiated by Magda Sayeg, who in 2005, while running a boutique in Houston, one day, feeling bored, made a blue and pink doorknob wrapper, now called the "alpha piece". The resulting installation was well received and popular with customers. Having noticed this, Magda Sayeg and her friend (soon to be known as PolyCotN and AKrylik) knitted another colourful 'garment', this time for the road sign standing in front of the shop, which began to attract the attention of the townspeople. This is how the group known as Knitta Please, which created works all over the world, was born. The activities of the Knitta group started a so-called global revolution, changing the way knitting is perceived. This revolution saw embroidery, knitting or crocheting transcend the boundaries of private space to become a surprising and eye-catching element of public space (Moore, Prain 2009: 19–21). The change in question was brought about by new media offering new ways of creating, disseminating, processing, exchanging and storing information.

Yarn bombing is now an international phenomenon. Groups of stitch-by-stitch knitters in cities and towns all around the world are infiltrating the urban tissue through the emotional force of collective interventionism (Price 2015: 81). Colourful fluffy graffiti is appearing in Europe, America, Asia and Australia. In Italy, American artist London Kaye used the yarn to bomb a coastal cliff (Kaye 2019).

[4] The word 'knitting' is commonly used in the context of yarn graffiti. However, it should be noted that textile guerrillas also use other tools and methods to carry out their work. Many of them make stitches with the use of a crochet. In addition, it happens that the authors of the yarn graffiti make embroideries.

In London, the Knit the City group decorated the railings of London Bridge with little sheep to bring a "touch of humour" to the city, and 'enclosed' a telephone box at Parliament Square with yarn (*Knit the City Yarnstorm* 2009, 2010). Yarn bombing has reached China (Lyme 2015). It is also spreading in Russia, Morocco and Iran (Wollan 2011)[5].

One reason for the expansion of 'urban knitting' is the existence of social media. Authors of the yarn graffiti photograph and film their work and then post their accounts online. Information about their activities thus reaches distant places, inspiring more enthusiasts of unusual knitting to take up initiative.

'Yarn attack'[6] as a form of handicraft activism

As a practice of resistance, the phenomenon of yarn bombing intersects with craftivism. Knitting graffiti has become one of the most popular tactics undertaken by craft activists (Fitzpatrick 2018: 10). Craftivism is a term launched by Betsy Greer, who founded in 2003 the website craftivism.com. The term referred to is a combination of the words 'craft' and 'activism' (Paavolainen 2018: 223). Greer's work is guided by the idea that knitting skills can be used to change the world for the better. Within the handicraft activism, a type of creativity assigned to the private sphere, mainly performed by women as part of being a good housewife capable not only of mending socks but also of decorating the interior of the flat with an embroidered tablecloth, has transformed into an activity that enables them to creatively communicate their power and convictions to the world (Chansky 2010: 683).

Craftivism is based on the belief that even small acts of resistance can have a significant impact on socio-political reality, providing an invitation to debate

[5] It is worth mentioning that the knitted works in public spaces are not only realised and presented by amateurs. Handicraft activism is, for example, an integral part of the work of Agata Oleksiak, a crochet artist using the pseudonym 'Olek', who uses yarn to address personally relevant and socially relevant problems. Oleksiak is known for impressive productions created all over the world, from New York to India. She is the author of works such as *Our Pink House* (Avesta Museum, Avesta, Sweden 2016) and *Our Pink House* (Kerava Museum, Kerava, Finland), which she created with refugee women in need of a home and their own place on earth. Together with these women, she covered two houses with pink knitted fabric: one in the town of Avesta, Sweden, and the other in the town of Kerava, Finland. Agata Oleksiak emphasises that the actions she carries out prove that together people become stronger and can do a lot (Cooke 2016). According to her: "Crochet is just the way I illustrate my thoughts to the public. [...] I emploi my crochet hook as my language" ([olek olek] 2021). However, evoking the figure of Agata Oleksiak in the context of yarn bombing is not obvious, as the artist does not like to be identified with this phenomenon. As she once said: "I don't yarn bomb, I make art" (Wollan 2011).

[6] I borrowed the term 'yarn attack' (*włóczkonatarcie*) from the Saskie Trykoty group, about which I write below.

the issues raised through the creation of handicrafts placed in public space. One of the slogans embroidered by the handicraft activists refers to the words of Mahatma Gandhi captured in the wording: "In a gentle way, you can shake the world" (Morrison 2017). As declared by Greer, craftivism is an activity that grows out of a passion for creation undertaken to connect people (Greer 2019).

The idea of craftivism is subversive, it inverts meanings. Craftivism is a tactic of resistance that takes the form of interference in the way we see the world around us. It is a social process with the experience of collective empowerment, action, expression and dialogue at its core (Carpenter 2010). This is brilliantly captured in a photograph posted on one of the blogs, where the textiles scattered on the table are accompanied by the words: "connect", "challenge", "craft", "reflect" and "calm") (Craftivist Collective online).

I have taken the quoted phrases from the work of the Craftivist Collective, a global movement initiated by Sahra Corbett in 2009. Its motto encourages to seek answer for the following: "If we want our world to be more beautiful, kind and just, then our activism should be beautiful, kind and just?" (Corbett 2017). Corbett has delivered more than three hundred workshops and events to more than eleven thousand people worldwide as part of her work. She has collaborated for this purpose with art institutions such as the Southbank & National Portrait Gallery, as well as charities such as Save the Children and Unicef (Craftivist Collective online).

The handicraft activism initiatives can certainly also be described as subversive acts of questioning the meanings assigned to traditional handicrafts. Their power stems from the potential to bring about change inherent in performativity (Butler 1988: 27). Quoting handicraft gestures, performing stitch after stitch, in contexts that disrupt traditional notions of textile handicraft, is an activity that can be defined as part of the transformation of traditionally perceived femininity and the corresponding division between the private and the public.

Betsy Greer sees yarn bombing as a variation of craftivism, which is meant to beautify reality but at the same time make people look at their 'old surroundings' in a different way (Greer 2019). The power of the yarn bombing's impact comes from placing in unexpected places unexpected reveals of what belongs, in everyday life, to the private space. Moreover, yarn graffiti artists usually work in teams. Contemporary collective knitting practices, using this feature of yarn bombing, construct a new reality, as knitting in the city creates opportunities for creative recomposition of the urban environment. Yarn bombing is a type of political intervention in urban space that builds on positive emotions, leading to the renegotiation and reweaving of assumptions about urban spaces (Price 2015: 81–82). It is also a form of criticism aimed at the homogeneity of the dominant culture and the established power relations.

Gentle practices of resistance: 'softening' militarism, wrapping and warming the world

Yarn appears in the urban space for many reasons. Yarn activists, organising actions for world peace, proclaim: "Make craft, not war", thus referring to the anti-war slogan from the Vietnam War period: "Make love, not war" (*Craft Not War* 2012). In 2006, artist Marianne Jørgensen dressed an M.24 Chaffee tank in a 'pink jumper' as a protest against Denmark's involvement in the Gulf War. This combat vehicle, a symbol of military expansion, was thus transformed into an object evoking concepts such as care, concern and compassion. *Pink M.24 Chaffee* carries the potential to initiate critical discussion regarding 'global militarism' (Carpenter 2010).

Similar actions have been taken on a number of occasions. The London-based group Cast off Knitting Club for Boys and Girls has designed a yarn hand grenade in line with its proclaimed slogans: "Instead of dropping bombs, start stitching" and "Make jumpers not war" (Wilczak 2011). In October 2010, on the other hand, Magda Sayeg invited to Bali by the Insight 51 website as part of the 'Untitled' campaign, wrapped a giant gun and holster of a statue depicting an unnamed soldier in colourful knitwear. The propaganda power of the statue was thus weakened by the rainbow stitching. Four years later, Magda Sayeg also took part in the Swedish Artscape 2014 festival, where she dressed Carl Fredrik Reutersward's work *Non Violence*, depicting a gun with a barrel tied in a knot, in soft blankets (*Extreme Yarn Bombing* 2014).

Another spectacular action, called Wool Against Weapons (WAW) was initiated by Jaine Rose under the Action Atomic Weapons Eradication (AWE) programme. "Action AWE" is a campaign consisting of peaceful actions to stop the production of nuclear weapons at the UK factories in Aldermaston and Burghfield (Action AWE 2016). Realisation of the WAW project involved the creation of a seven-mile pink scarf that linked the two sites mentioned (Wool Against Weapons 2012). The scarf was knitted by hundreds of people united by a common idea, including knitters from outside the UK. Parts of the scarf were made in public places, in line with the idea "Ask me what I am knitting", according to which it is important above all to talk about what influence you want to make with your knitting.

The Viva Vittoria project, launched in 2015 in the Italian city of Brescia, which aims to combat gender violence and support the social reintegration of women who have experienced it, certainly stimulates the debate. Its guiding idea is encapsulated in the following words: "Awareness is the source of change: a woman must first develop an awareness of change in herself in order to be able to implement it" ("La presa di coscienza e lorigine del cambiamento: la donna deve prima sviluppare

dentro di se la consapevolezza del cambiamento per poterlo mettere in atto") (Viva Vittoria 2021). The project is constantly evolving. So far, several thousand volunteers knitted 5,000 squares measuring 50 by 50 centimetres. They were used to make 100 by 100-centimetre blankets which were laid out in the squares and streets of Italian cities and afterwards auctioned off for charity. The proceeds from their sale are donated for combating violence against women. In 2021, the Viva Vittoria project was hosted in Milan, Bologna and Rome, among others (*"Bombardowanie włóczką"* 2021; Viva Vittoria 2021).

Another knitting initiative carried out to support the fight with violence against women is the guerrilla crochet art project "Roses against violence" initiated in 2018 in the Austrian Tyrol. Its aim is to raise awareness of violence against women. Activists engaged in the project make crochet roses tagged with the slogan "Stop violence against women!". They then place the roses in public places and take photos of them, which, since the pandemic, they have published on Instagram and Facebook, among others (Roses against violence 2021).

Knitting graffiti, however, does not always take the form of a politically or socially engaged activity. A representative of the Stockholm-based formation Guerrilla Knitting said that projects performed by the group are often, but not always, accompanied by a political message. The founders of a Stockholm-based yarn-bombing group called Masquerade also claim that knitting graffiti is fun, eccentric and has only a subtle potential for global impact (Rothschild 2010: 6). This attitude is shared by Maja Brzozowska-Brywczyńska, sociologist and member of the now no-longer existing group Poznańska Partyzantka Włóczkowa (Poznań Yarn Guerrilla)[7], who, when asked why she was involved in knitting graffiti, replied that the group creates its works: "To beautify, tame, warm the urban space. To make 'something' that would break us out of our routine, wake us up. The colourful yarns contrast with the greyness of the city. Sometimes we just do it for fun. To have fun. The yarn can be wound on anything, it is patient, it can be arranged in all sorts of patterns and tangled in all sorts of ways" (Wilczak 2011).

Yarn graffiti also played quite a considerable role in dealing with the situation of lockdown associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Lockdown Letterboxes initiative was born in the UK. Eye-catching brightly coloured knitted and crocheted hats knitted by people aged between seven and eighty and bearing a QR code with information about the opportunity to donate to the charity began to appear on red mailboxes. The action was intended to bring joy to passers-by and to provide motivation to people involved in knitting. As part of this "British madness", a book and calendar for 2022 have been produced. Proceeds from their sale are to be

[7] By the way, it is worth noting that many of the yarn-bombing groups and the initiatives they undertake are ephemeral, temporary in nature.

donated to the YoungMinds organisation (‘*Yarnbombing*’ *Knitters* 2021; Lal 2021; Lockdown Letterboxes 2021).

When museums closed due to the lockdown, Nina Elliott, nicknamed The Rock Vandal, created an exhibition of colourful knitwear on a two-kilometre stretch of roadway in Twillingate, in Newfoundland, Canada, and called it Newfoundland’s First Outdoor Art Gallery. In doing so, she wanted to lift people’s spirits during the grim pandemic period (Elliott 2021; Hawthorn 2020; The Rock Vandal online). These are just some of the textile ventures that have emerged in urban spaces as a remedy for anxiety and the limitations that came with it.

Taming craft activism

Guerrilla knitting is sometimes removed from urban spaces. However, the authorities and cultural institutions of many cities increasingly become patrons of knitters colouring the streets. For it turns out that knitting graffiti is a kind of creativity that “serves the city”: on the one hand, by uniting residents in undertaking common activities, and on the other, by becoming a kind of tourist attraction. Among the activities organised on the initiative of municipal institutions, there are for example the Santa Cruz Urban Knitting festival organised in 2013 in Tenerife. The event gathered 55 women and men who, divided into neighbourhood groups linking generations, were given yarn to make colourful clothes for the trees. The plants decorated in this way became a tourist attraction admired also by the townspeople themselves. The City Council of Santa Cruz de Tenerife considered that this measure contributed to the revitalisation of the city’s commercial district (*Centro-Ifara* 2013).

Yarn graffiti proves to be an effective tool for promoting regions and cities. Representatives of the local authority are beginning to recognise this. Social media plays in this process quite an important role. On the one hand, they enable to reach, in a relatively easy way, a wide range of people who could be potentially interested in participating in the creation of yarn projects. On the other hand, social media makes it possible to effectively disseminate information about ready-made realisations in this field.

News about the knitting graffiti made on the initiative of the city and consisting of a 60-metre-long crochet awning, shading one of the streets of the historic centre, posted online had more than 427,000 views. Organisers and authors of the work, which is an ecological alternative to plastic roller shutters, received compliments and congratulations from many parts of the world. Municipal authorities expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of this form of promotion of local tourism and trade (*Las tejedoras del gran* 2021).

In 2021, the Finnish city of Turku hosted for the fifth time the Knit'n'Tag festival uniting city residents of all ages: from children to senior citizens, individuals and those belonging to associations, organisations or educational institutions. On the May 8, trees along the Aurajoki River were decorated with colourful knitting. The organisers of this edition of the festival referred to the aforementioned project "Roses against violence" (*Yarn Bombing Ideas* 2021; *Knit 'n Tag Turku* 2021). Another locally established group, Social Work Knit Berlin, meets to embellish its district, Friedenau, with knitwear (Social Work Knit Berlin 2021).

Knitting groups are often formed also within cultural institutions. The Material Girls Truro, a group from the UK town of Truro, was operating by the town's library and organised in 2018 an event called Yarn Bombing at Royal Cornwall Museum in collaboration with the Royal Cornwall Museum. During the event, citizens of the town had knitted together elements that were afterwards used to adorn the walls of the royal museum (*Spotlight On* 2018).

The Knit the Bridge group also carried out a huge-scale knitting campaign commissioned by the authorities of Pittsburgh. It gathered around 1,800 participants, who knitted and crocheted 580 colourful blankets that were later fixed on a bridge near The Andy Warhol Museum (Hamilton 2013).

Yarn graffiti is developing also in Poland with municipal cultural institutions willingly participating in its creation. In 2011, in Poznań, the SPOT. foundation, in cooperation with the Institute of Sociology of the Adam Mickiewicz University, organised the exhibition "Knitted City". The exhibition was accompanied by crochet and knitting workshops open to all generations (*Wystawa "Miasto Dziergane"* 2011). It featured lace graffiti made by the artist NeSpoon, city transport tickets 'dressed' in wool by Anna Maćkowiak, as well as sewage manholes, trees and Poznań Goats wrapped in yarn. The latter were decorated by the already mentioned Poznańska Partyzantka Włóczkowa (Zaczyński, Malesa 2011).

In Gdańsk, on the other hand, a workshop was held at the City Culture Institute in 2012 under the slogan: "Jewellery for the City". According to the announcements, the workshop was to consist of making a street-art embroidery to "decorate the gloomy parts of the city" (*Weekendowe warsztaty* 2012). The institute has been regularly organising knitting and crochet workshops aimed at city residents for several years (*Robienie na drutach* 2019).

In Lublin, urban knitting is developing through the Cultural Centre, where women of different generations and professions participate in open action meetings entitled "Bombing with yarn". Existing since March 2014, the group designed and created, among other things, a colourful installation on the Cultural Centre's cloister and coloured the railings in the square in front of the Centre's building (*Bombardowanie włóczką* 2019). As part of the Lublin yarn bombing, the windows and trees of the Paediatric Haematology, Oncology and Transplantology Ward

have already been decorated in the Christmas-winter theme six times. In turn, on 6 December 2021, Santa hats were deployed in a number of locations in the city. Knitted ornaments also appeared on one of the city's trolleybuses (*Bombardowanie włóczką* 2021).

As part of the Rękodzielnia (Handicraft) project, the Cultural Centre in Żyrardów, together with the group Żurek – Żyrardowskie Utalentowane Rękodzielniczki Kulturalne (Żyrardów Talented Cultural Female Crafters) realised the installations *Mandala Ceiling*, *Colourful Wings*, *Żyrardów Linen Flower* (Centrum Kultury w Żyrardowie, 2 October 2021; Rękodzielnia 2021; Żurek 2021).

Social media play a key role in promoting and carrying out the activities described by cultural institutions. In April 2021, the Ustka House of Culture encouraged people to take part in the making of a yarn "Cultural Patchwork" on Facebook. Organisers of the campaign wrote: "We have a quarantine mission for you! Please knit or crochet 20 cm x 20 cm squares. Do not limit yourself in colours and patterns" (Dom Kultury w Ustce, 20 April 2021). As early as on June 11, the finished patchwork was presented on the wall of the aforementioned institution (Dom Kultury w Ustce, 11 June 2021).

Cultural actors who, when organising yarn actions, use social media include also: Municipal Cultural Centre in Wągrowiec (*Światowy Dzień*, 5 June 2019), Local Activity Centre in Pionki (2019), Mościce Art Centre (2019), Cultural Centre and Public Library of the Suchy Las Municipality (2021) and many others.

At the same time, it is worth emphasising that grassroots actions by yarn guerrillas in our country are very rare. These include an event in Warsaw, where 'unknown perpetrators', as they have been described (or, in fact, creators gathered under the banner Mupka Designs), put a cover with the Superman sign on the shield of the Warsaw Mermaid (*International Yarn Bombing Day* 2011; *Nieznani sprawcy* 2011). Mupka Design, in collaboration with the "Ja Wisła" Foundation, also took part in the action to defend the trees in Port Czerniakowski (*Wełniana partyzantka* 2011). Similar events have taken place in Krosno, where, thanks to Maluca Yarnbombing, a cactus has 'grown' on the arm of the Ignacy Łukasiewicz statue, and in Poznań, where the Nicolaus Copernicus statue wears colourful clothes during the yearly student carnival and 'puts on' a red cap on the occasion of Christmas (Kwiatkowska 2014; *Pan Ignacy* 2011).

Poznań is also the area of the activity of the Pikotki Crew group, whose members write about themselves: "We are Pikotki Crew, or the Poznań Yarnbombing Collective: a group of girls who want to go beyond the comfort of home with their passion and popularise crochet and knitting, as well as yarn bombing as a form of artistic expression. On the one hand, it is great fun for us and an opportunity to put a smile on someone's face. On the other hand, it is a way to support

certain social initiatives, a form of drawing attention to issues or celebrating events" (Pikotki Crew online).

In Warsaw, a group called Saskie Trykoty has also been active for several years, regularly dressing up trees in the area of the Saska Kępa district and putting caps on street poles. The group is made up of three friends living in Warsaw at the Saska Street: Joanna, Kinga and Karol, who "have a great time, aware of the fact that the world cannot be changed, but that it is always worth trying" (Saskie Trykoty online). Yarn graffiti has also made its way to Warsaw's Bielany district. Residents of the blocks of flats at the Lipińska Street decided to enliven their shared space as part of the neighbourhood action "We wrap with yarn in our garden" (Woźnica 2021).

Years after the birth of yarn bombing, it is worth asking: to what extent has this originally grassroots handicraft practice resisted absorption into the cultural mainstream? Indeed, it sometimes happens that the authors of countercultural acts of resistance, often unaware of the mechanisms to which they are subject, reinforce capitalism (Heath, Potter 2004). The practice of yarn storming began with contesting the meanings, both attributed to knitting and to the art of graffiti. However, over time it has become a fashion trend that has been commoditised by large corporations. Today, yarn bombers are not only engaged in art projects by the city authorities. They also carry out commercial projects advertising well-known brands. The yarnbomber from USA, London Kaye, has collaborated with Starbucks, Adidas and Miller Beer, among others (Kaye 2019). Deadly Knitshade created works commissioned by companies such as Toyota, Nintendo and Saatchi & Saatchi (Kępa 2017).

People working to change the world for the better also often fail to recognise their entanglement in practices that exclude people who do not belong to the white race, who do not have the privilege of time, economic resources or cultural capital to engage in artisanal social activism. The creators of yarn graffiti are further accused that their actions not only reverse the meanings ascribed to textile handicrafts, but paradoxically also reinforce the traditional gender roles that second-wave feminism sought to eliminate (Paavolainen 2018: 224).

Conclusions

Yarn bombing is inextricably linked to the development of new media. Knitting activism repeatedly takes the form of a technologically mediated social and cultural movement. Using digital media, its participants balance the private and the public, the local and the global, being online and off-line. New opportunities for communicating, developing own skills, as well as archiving and publishing information

about one's activities provide a means of building creative identities for individuals, as well as a sense of community and engagement referred to as "DIY citizenship" (Orton-Johnson 2014: 141–148).

Knitting graffiti is a form of cultural resistance that takes many forms. Its subversive potential is ambivalent. Yarn guerrilla can have a dimension of spectacular undertakings that constitute a strong and visible act of defiance by organised groups of people formulated in the name of values such as peace, justice, equality, the right to agency and the expression of one's own subjectivity. Initiatives against consumerism, violence, indifference and inaction. Actions for the weak, the excluded and the needy. Creative endeavours that question the meanings ascribed to traditional handicraft undertaken to reclaim and beautify the urban space, taking the form of play, providing a cure for anxiety and insecurity. Knitting graffiti is also sometimes an expression of "a local, impermanent, individualistic, micrological resistance implementing Foucault's idea of 'personal insurrection'" (Brzozowska-Brywczyńska 2010: 116–117). An opposition that does not initiate a revolution but rather introduce minor transformations to the dominant model of cultural and social order.

Yarn bombing is an ambiguous form of cultural resistance also because of the 'intentions' and 'effects' of the actions taken. The subversive aspirations of its authors do not always lead to a violation of the existing social order. The ignorance of the mechanisms of cultural and social reproduction can even contribute to reinforcing existing hegemonies. The actions of the yarn bombers may then serve to reproduce what they appear to act against (Aggleton, Whitty 1985: 62–63, 66; Willis 2007: 40–41).

Referring to the words of Rafał Drozdowski, it can be agreed that yarn bombing, like most cultural practices that come into conflict with the dominant culture, repeatedly "conventionalises, fusing with the cultural mainstream" (Drozdowski 2010: 27). Although knitted graffiti creates 'fissures' in the existing reality, provoking the questioning of the obvious, it is often absorbed and turned into a tool for practices that have little to do with the ideas originally guiding its creators. Knits in public spaces not only breaks aesthetic conventions, communicate about social inequality, wars or the pitfalls of consumerism. They also become practices representing those who hold the power. Many authors of knitting graffiti accept invitations to carry out projects commissioned by cultural institutions, city authorities and even corporations. Recently, it has become increasingly difficult to find examples of grassroots craft knitted activism.

However, saying that yarn bombing, like many manifestations of cultures of resistance, reproduces the rules of the existing social order rather than transforming them, is certainly not true. Knitting graffiti as a handicraft practice of beautifying reality (Fitzpatrick 2018: 10) is above all a spectacular form of making one's

presence felt, a way of expressing oneself, a route to self-realisation: either individually or on the basis of relationships forged within the handicraft groups. Urban knitting 'softens' the harsh lines of urban landscapes and disrupts the conviction that textile handicrafts are meant to be useful and functional. Knitting objects placed in urban space are not created with their utility and practicality in mind; cultures centred around passions ('hobby cultures'), including communities of knitters, are capable of transforming the social and emotional geographies of the city. Indeed, knitting in the city reminds us of the richness of the rhythms in which urban life can be actively experienced and transformed, and points to the variety of social relations established in the urban environment (Price 2015: 85).

If we accept that subversion: "as a transformative action concerns interventions into culture and the pictorial, spatial or normative orders that dominate it, but at the same time it reconfigures the culturally shaped (and therefore also involving these orders) identity of the one who undertakes these interventions" (Skórzyńska 2010: 56), yarn bombing can certainly be considered a type of practice undertaken against social perceptions and expectations. It is an action that violates habitual ways of thinking and feeling imposed by culture and makes people capable of criticising, challenging and changing it.

The motivations for engaging in yarn graffiti are also varied. Some artists find the juxtaposition of yarn and graffiti amusing, others see it as a series of acts that, step by step, change the face of street art and of the cities themselves. Finally, some see it as an escape from everyday life. There are also those who declare that they want to liberate the art of knitting from the "long-standing obligation of making useful things".

Yarn bombing can therefore be political, heart-warming, funny, kitsch and even profitable. Whatever form it takes, however, it has a micropolitical impact, drawing our attention to what we repeatedly fail to see, as the non-obviousness of knitted items placed repeatedly in public places works more effectively than posters and demonstrations.

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