

ART INQUIRY

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Volume XI (XX)

Spaces of Freedom in Modern Art

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Volume XI (XX)
Spaces of Freedom in Modern Art

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CONTENTS

ROMAN KUBICKI – On the Aesthetic Sources and Boundaries of the Art of a Free Life	7
WALDEMAR HANASZ – Political non-domination and Artistic Freedom	33
IWONA LORENC – L’oeil emancipè (Emancipation of the Eye)	57
AGNIESZKA REJNIAK-MAJEWSKA – Aesthetic Illusions of Freedom? “Aesthetic Ideology” and a Praise of Aesthetic Appearance	71
GRZEGORZ SZTABIŃSKI – Spaces of Freedom in Modern Art	91
ROBERT C. MORGAN – The Free Space in Art	123
TERESA PEKALA – Philosophical Contexts of the Attitude of Contemporary Artists to Time, History and Tradition	131
RAFAŁ SOLEWSKI – Heritage and Identity in the Art at the Turn of the 21 st Century. An Introduction	143
MATEUSZ SALWA – The Space of Art History. Mieke Bal’s “preposterousness”	159
WIOLETTA KAZIMIERSKA-JERZYK – Camp and Glamour as Expressions of Aesthetic, Moral and Political Freedom	175
MARIA POPCZYK – The Art Museum: the Space of Freedom and Violence	199
ALEKSANDRA SUMOROK – Between Utopia and Realism. Socialist Realist Urban Space in Selected Examples	213
MAGDALENA SAMBORSKA – Freedom within the Boundaries of Feminism: Interpretations of Georgia O’Keeffe’s Art	231

PAULINA SZTABIŃSKA – Spaces of Freedom: the Role of Geometry in Land Art	243
AGNIESZKA GRALIŃSKA-TOBOREK – „They call it illegal, we call it free”– Street Art Images set Free	265
MICHAŁ BIEŻYŃSKI – Graffiti and Street Art. Incorporation of Urban Space as an Attempt to Establish the Artistic Freedom	281
BEATA ŚNIECIKOWSKA – The Space of a Socialist Housing District, the Space of a Modern Poem – the Sensual Art of Miron Białoszewski	299
GRZEGORZ DZIAMSKI – Expressive Painting of the 1980s as a Sign of Freedom	317
JUSTYNA RYCZEK – National Identity and Globalization – Examples of Polish Contemporary Art	329
GRZEGORZ SZTABIŃSKI – The art critic and globalization	339
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	343

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ON THE AESTHETIC SOURCES AND BOUNDARIES OF THE ART OF A FREE LIFE

Abstract: The article comprises four parts. In the first part, *Lusting for beauty, Odysseus on the track to disastrous freedom*, I present the story of Odysseus who uses his companions' help in order to experience the aesthetic beauty of the Sirens' voice. The adventure with the Sirens changes not only Odysseus (who "mellows"), but also his crewmen (for the first time, they recognize their own subjectivity as well as the right to decide about their own lives). In the second part, *A philosophical introduction to the problem of freedom*, I compare two modes of thinking about freedom – systems thinking (I refer to Leszek Nowak's conception) and non-systems (post-modern) thinking. Both of them meet in the final conclusion: it is only legitimate and true to state the lack of freedom, whereas a positive announcement of freedom carries a stigma of failure. In the third part, *Artistic landscapes*, I describe three experiences of art and I diversify them in reference to how they treat a necessity and coincidence. The fourth part, *In search of hope for safe freedom*, stands for a declaration that only art and love can be the source of existentially safe freedom.

Keywords: art – freedom – human being

1. LUSTING FOR BEAUTY, ODYSSEUS ON THE TRACK TO DISASTROUS FREEDOM

The legend of the Sirens' uniquely beautiful voices has been always popular in the mythical world of the Achaeans and thus Odysseus also desires to hear it. He knows the desire is not good as it can not be satisfied safely. No daredevils have managed so far to narrowly escape with their lives after meeting the beauty of the Sirens singing. People are divided into those who have never heard the Sirens and do not want to hear them, owing to which they live, and those who have once incautiously discovered their inner desire to aesthetically

experience their singing, which is why they are dead.¹ This time it is to be different, though. Odysseus informs his friends of the danger: “She told me first of all/ we should guard against the wondrous voices/ of the Sirens in their flowery meadows./ She said I alone should listen to them./ But you must tie me down with cruel bonds,/ so I stay where I am and cannot move,/ standing upright at the mast. You must fix/ the rope at both its ends onto the mast.”² And so it happens. When the ship approaches an island, Odysseus, beset with the beauty of the Sirens’ singing, thrashes around feverishly, trying to free himself. With gestures of despair, he wants to make his comrades unbind him. They, however, tie him down even tighter, “Then two of them got up, Perimedes and Eurylochus, bound me with more rope and lashed me even tighter.”³ They have their ears plugged with wax, which effectively protects them against the lethal poison of the Sirens’ song. “Some must watch, while some must sleep” – Hamlet would say many years later, probably not recognizing the original authors of the adage as Odysseus’s comrades. Nobody dies during this adventure. It is a seeming success for everyone: it has enriched Odysseus with the experience of beauty he cannot face up to. His comrades have been ennobled once again with the belief that true or cunning wisdom can get one out of the labyrinth of any trouble – unfortunately, they do not know they have been infected with a disastrous virus of excessive self-belief and irresponsible trust in their own innovations and ideas. Before this incident, they completely trusted Odysseus. He would give them orders and they would obey them. As the orders were simple, their simple minds felt secure and comfortable. When Odysseus said “row”, they rowed; when he asked them to stop, they stopped. Odysseus’s comrades knew they would reach Ithaca, provided that they were endlessly submissive. This time, however, Odysseus’s order sounds mysterious and not thoroughly understandable: “I order you not to listen to my orders.” Although Odysseus feels that hearing the beauty of the Sirens’ voice can ravage his mind, he does not retreat. Instead, he gives the uncommon order. The time which Odysseus fills with experiencing and contemplating beauty is treated by his comrades as the time of necessity, as for the first time they must take responsibility not only for their own lives, but also for the life of Odysseus. Once their leader is under the spell of beauty, they must pretend they are wiser than him. They know how to play this role – which is why the story has a happy ending. The boundary between being a wiser man and pretending to be a wiser man convincingly is not always clear

¹ Undoubtedly, there are always many people who are dead or will soon die for many other reasons; it is equally certain that there are numerous people (and actually they form the majority) who feel their life is free from this sort of dilemmas.

² Homer, *The Odyssey*, I. Johnston (trans.) Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, 2006, p. 229.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

and distinct. The not too sophisticated Odysseus's crewmen are rather unaware of that. They do not fully understand they are just playing the role of wiser men in the scene carefully and smartly directed by Odysseus. And thus, even when the scene already belongs to the past, they behave as if they still knew better than him what is really good and bad for all of them. They are going to feel so well forever. They sail past another island and want to rest there for a few days. Odysseus does not consent to that. He says they are already close to Ithaca and there is no point in tempting fate. This time, Odysseus's words, however, do not earn his comrades' respect. "Art soothes the savage breast"; this unserious truth would once be promoted by the slightly effusive art lovers. Odysseus is probably its first victim. Enriched with the experiences of beauty, he cannot comprehend those who have never been affected by it, "Then Eurylochus answered me. His words/ were full of spite:/ 'You're a hard man,/ Odysseus, with more strength than the other men./ Your limbs are never weary. One would think/ you were composed entirely of iron,/ if you refuse to let your shipmates land,/ when they're worn out with work and lack of sleep./ Here on this sea-girt island, we could make/ a tasty dinner. You tell us instead/ to wander on like this through the swift night. This time the whole crew supports Eurylochus rather than Odysseus."⁴

The action – with gods' intervention – quickens its pace. Due to bad weather, they stay on the island a couple of days longer. They run out of food and they start searching for it more and more nervously. When Odysseus falls into a deep sleep, Eurylochus starts thinking independently: he fairly quickly persuades his hungry comrades to kill a few bulls from Helios's herd. Within the boundaries of his free and independent reasoning, he hopes the temple his comrades are going to build in Ithaca will ease the god's rage. When Odysseus wakes up and sees his crew feasting, he quakes with fear and moans to the heavens, "Father Zeus and you other sacred gods,/ who live forever, you forced it on me,/ that cruel sleep, to bring about my doom."⁵

Odysseus's fear is legitimate. He knows very well that Helios undoubtedly believes that only gods can benefit from the so-called logic of accomplished facts, whereas people are supposed to pursue the logic of uncertainty. Thus, he does not have mercy on those who have raised their hands against Gods' sacrosanct property. When the ship sails offshore, Zeus strikes a thunder, causing serious damage. Eurylochus and his shipmates who yielded to his arguments pay with their lives for their premature emergence from their immaturity, for the decision and courage to use their own understanding without guidance from another man. Although they have never heard of the

⁴ Ibid., p. 234.

⁵ Ibid., p. 236.

motto “Sapere aude!”, they follow the track it has mapped out: they have the courage to use their understanding and step onto a difficult path to freedom.⁶ Thus, they have to die. If Odysseus did not lust for beauty, he would not have given this unfortunate order, “I order you not to listen to my orders”, whose irony they can neither face up to, nor recognize. Thus, they would not have experienced this premature ejaculation of the lust for freedom. Namely – as the history of thinking about freedom (or the mere history of freedom) would soon prove – freedom is either wise, or it does not exist at all.

2. A PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM

Postmodern thinking, whatever this phrase denotes, tries to avoid the use of such notions as system or society, since they at first suggest the existence, if only theoretical, of a sovereign whole and then they subordinate the existence of an individual to this whole. In other words, these concepts authorize the whole to specify the meaning of the actions undertaken by individuals. Postmodern thinking thus rejects the assumption that the human condition has a systems nature. Rather, it is constantly unbalanced; its elements are so autonomous that only the image of the whole perceived as a kaleidoscopic, momentary and casual result of interactions can theoretically rival it.⁷ The so-called systems thinking assumes a different interpretative approach. I will contrast these two cognitive approaches, relying on the ideas of the Polish philosopher Leszek Nowak.⁸ The author refers to his conception as Non-Marxian Historical Materialism. On the one hand, it is an attempt at presenting the social reality and history as systems. On the other hand, it constantly asks about individuals and the conditions and place of human freedom in particular. This place is neither safe, nor stable. The natural right of an individual to occupy it is not determined. The real aim of historical cognition is to unmask the flaws that form us. Theoretical thinking makes life “wiser” rather than easier. This is particularly clear in the reflection on the concept of freedom. “Freedom is not a natural condition of a human being. Just the opposite – it is artificial in the sense that maintaining it requires constant self-discipline and work on oneself”.⁹ “Man is not an autonomous creature, he can only become

⁶ Kant, *What is Enlightenment*, Königsberg in Prussia, 30 September 1784.

⁷ See: Z. Bauman, “A sociological Criticism of Modernity” in: *Modernity: Critical Concepts* (Malcolm Waters (ed.), London: Routledge, 1999, V. 4.

⁸ Here, I refer to my statements from the article *Zdziwienie a wolność*, “Kultura Współczesna” no 2(20) 1999.

⁹ L. Nowak, *U podstaw teorii socjalizmu*, V. II, p. 45, (my translation).

one”¹⁰. The same is true of human fullness, freedom and rationality. Man can be free, yet he is not born free, nor is he born as invoked to be free. Human vocation is to constantly shape one’s own vocation. As such, it is not given, but asked to be accomplished by the very fact that man is necessarily entangled in this world. “Only the one who acts on one’s own standards of rightness and knows the truth about the conditions of one’s action is free. The notion of freedom thus derives from both the concept of (subjective) rightness and (objective) truth” about the conditions of one’s action.¹¹ This laconic definition of freedom must be interpreted as an explicit warning against people’s ultimate belief in their autonomy. Otherwise, it can lead to unexpected consequences. As Helvétius says: “The free man is the man who is not in irons, not imprisoned in a gaol, nor terrorized like a slave by the fear of punishment”.¹²

The problem for the philosophy of freedom is not a human being who, being “in irons”, neither feels free, nor is perceived as such. The problem arises when man perceives himself and is perceived as autonomous. After all, what does the demand for following one’s own needs stand for and what are the consequences of relativizing freedom to the knowledge of the conditions in which it is fulfilled? Criticizing the libertarian concept of freedom according to which freedom is a state that allows only for the minimum of social constraints imposed by certain groups of people on others, i.e. it allows for just those constraints which are motivated by the will and necessity to avoid the so-called greater evil, Leszek Nowak writes, “To say that informing the secret service on his father, Pavlik Morozov was free, is to tell a flagrant lie. However, the libertarian concept of freedom imposes such a verdict – he did it of his own free will, nobody forced him to do it.”¹³ Moreover, “He did not do it to avoid some greater evil, informing on his father was not punishable. He probably neither reasoned, nor calculated it, yet the tendency to predict the authorities’ intentions and to be guided by their preferences was inscribed in his personality.”¹⁴ In other words, Pavlik Morozov was faithful to himself, the only problem is that the self he was faithful to was programmed by some authority (e.g. by the educational system etc.).

Is such an unambiguously negative image of Morozov legitimate? Actually, how can we be sure that Morozov neither “reasoned” nor “calculated” that his personality was programmed to be submissive to the authority’s claims? How

¹⁰ Ibid., V. III, p. 246.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 46.

¹² I. Berlin, (1958) “Two Concepts of Liberty” in: Isaiah Berlin *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 3.

¹³ Ibid., V. 3, p. 43.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

do we know he was captive and did not weigh up good and evil on his own? How can we believe that Morozov judged by “other people’s criteria which were inscribed in his subconsciousness”, that he saw the world with other people’s eyes rather than his own, which presented things in the same manner as the eyes of the contemporary authority?

The quoted argument of the criteria inscribed in one’s subconsciousness is a double-edged weapon. It also hits the one who puts it forward: when I agree – or not – with something or someone, how can I know that my intellectual stance is not ultimately guided by the criteria inscribed in my subconsciousness? If freedom is the ability to “treat oneself as the final decisive authority, which the subject should do in this situation”¹⁵, there is still the great unknown of this final decisive authority for which I look inside myself and which I find. “A person is free – as Leszek Nowak puts it – [...] if he is obedient to exclusively his own preferences. ‘His own’ means ‘accepted by him as right’, not necessarily ‘originating with him’”. The preferences which e.g. Christians have taken from the Gospels are thus their own preferences as long as they have accepted them voluntarily and consciously”¹⁶

However, how can we distinguish an individual’s voluntary and conscious acceptance of preferences from the equally inner fact of acceptance which has been gradually ‘inscribed’ in his consciousness along with the educational – both institutionalized and extrainstitutional – pressure exerted on him from the very first moments of his life? The question is whether our private goals and dreams, no matter how personal they seem to us, are almost always borrowed rather than invented. Even the most radically spontaneous action is not a lodestar to the Kingdom of Freedom unless the mind continually works on the conditions of this action – and the process of revealing the successive decisions determining the theoretical image of the situation in which the action has been undertaken is continually maintained. What facts should we know to definitely reject the assumption that Morozov voluntarily assumed the Stalinist ideology according to which denouncing one’s father was a meritorious deed as it served Communism and the Soviet Union? Naturally, we can claim that denouncing one’s father is always unquestionably a reprehensible deed and there is no situation which could, even slightly, justify it. However, we can think otherwise, drawing, for instance, on the not so fancy episodes from social life. European culture knows incidents in whose horizons denouncing a father is not evil “by definition”; just the opposite, it seems to be morally recommended. What shall a child do if he has accidentally (or not accidentally) learnt that his father is soon going to kill somebody?

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 44.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 44.

After all, the power of family values is not absolute. For instance, in the so-called modern society, blood ties usually involve the past. We meet our families for recollections. We do not form our social present and future with our relatives, but with those linked with us in other ways – e.g. by beliefs, skills, competences and interests. The motif of patricide seems to be present in every culture – including the Christian culture, where God the Father must accept the fact that people pray to Him if they believe in His Son.

Does this mean that to reject Morozov's stance, we must assume some objective system of axiological references which would define it as unambiguously reprehensible? Is it of any importance that my moral intuition tells me this system is not as arbitrary as the one in which Morozov's stance appears to be highly praiseworthy? I still do not know why I should appreciate my moral intuition more than Morozov's, or think that in his case, talking about any moral intuition is an evident misunderstanding.

The dilemma can be apparently resolved in two ways: Firstly, we can arbitrarily assume that the only undoubtedly true and ever right individual moral intuition is the one suggested by the negative diagnosis of one's freedom. Individuals are certainly right if they do not perceive themselves as free – then they are certainly not free. It is acceptable that a human being thinks or feels he is not free and yet everyone tries to prove to him he has made an incorrect diagnosis. However, if he is convinced he is free, he can be so, yet he is not necessarily right; he can be free, still he can never be sure of it. Thus, although people can perceive themselves as free, in fact, they are not.

Secondly, we can assume no less arbitrarily, that individuals are free only if they a) perceive and b) feel themselves and the world in a specific way. The latter refers to the suggestions of the ancient philosophers, for whom freedom depended not so much on being faithful to oneself, but just to some particular "aspect" of oneself. For some of them only Plato's slave of his own reason was free, whereas the one who would listen to one's own emotions and senses was not. "I dare to say", St. Augustine was convincing us, "that to the extent to which we serve God we are free, while to the extent that we follow the law of sin, we are still slaves".¹⁷ For others, on the contrary, "Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained".¹⁸

Individuals fulfill their freedom when they think about the world only in a particular way, somehow externally to this freedom. Leszek Nowak writes,

¹⁷ *John Paul II, Veritatis Splendor, 1993, also available on: http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_jp02vs.htm.*

¹⁸ W. Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 16.

“Fanatics are people spiritually captive by dominant denominations, either religious or secular”¹⁹ And one more quotation, “A human being who believes in a certain system of world-views – religious, secular or any other – is a person who has resigned from seeking independent solutions to problems of world-views, thus relying thoroughly and completely on a dogmatic message. It is a person who cannot judge his own or another man’s deed with his own moral intuition, and can only repeat a dogmatic judgment; it is a person who is not able, in any situation, to reject any dogma, trusting it completely, no matter what life experience and knowledge of the world he has gained”.²⁰ In this way, the non-Marxian historical materialism paints a picture of an individual who, being obliged to adopt a critical approach to the dominant popular thinking, unites both solutions.

According to postmodern thinking, all great theories (theories aspiring to the dignity of “the final language”) endanger an individual’s freedom. Thus, the diversity and dynamism of “little narratives” are emphasized. “Little narratives”, treated as their own justifications, no longer need a certificate issued by any Great Narrative; they thus guarantee an individual his non-alienable right to be different, to be himself and to express himself, as well as his right to be a human being who is always different, i.e. is not subject to any norms. “Little narratives” are not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition of freedom of an individual who identifies his place in the world through them. Naturally, this place is changeable, as the “little narrative” which defines it is open to the possibility of being rejected by an individual and replaced by another narrative. Postmodern thinking implies dispersion of objectivity, it creates the image of the world which, comprising an infinite number of factors creating meanings, trustfully submits itself only to a theoretical principle and social indeterminacy.²¹ Every great social theory hid an attempt at forming individual thinking about the world and, thus, its ambition to show people their ultimate place – objective from the perspective of the theory – in the order of existence: individuals were worth attention only in the light of this great theory. Thus, their quest for their actuality relied on fulfilling the postulates of this theory – in the paradoxical act of forming what had already existed. In fact, only postmodernism liberated an individual from the enslavement created by the Platonic paradigm of thinking about man and the world. It does not matter that they had already rejected the unchangeable, substantial idea of a human being, with us being just its miserable splinters, if the way of thinking about an individual (and thus – in compliance with the rule that if there is thinking, there must be also the one who thinks – and individual

¹⁹ Op. cit., p. 75

²⁰ Nowak, V. I, p. 290.

²¹ See: Z. Bauman, Sociology and Postmodernity, *The Sociological Review*, 36, 1988.

thought) was still subordinated to the dream of one theory of the world and the human beings. This subordination was binding not only – as it may seem – within the boundaries of speculative reason. It also had – and still has – its practical expression. On the one hand, it expressed the enslavement of the Western man (enslavement by the thinking that formed his image), while on the other hand, it substantiated their claims towards the people carrying out different paradigms of cultural intermediation in the world. The dominant position of the West (of Western systems) was accompanied by the conviction that the position of the Western construction of an individual is superior. The barbarians – or simply all other people – were human beings as long as they comprised some European elements. In this way, a slave of his own naivety believed to be the Master of the world.

Leszek Nowak's claim, "Truth is where nobody expects it to be", is not acceptable by postmodern thinking, as the truth whose perception suggests the demanding and repressive nature of the theory of cognition simply cannot be desired. According to this claim, an individual can find truth provided that he assumes a blasphemous and active stance towards the extant legacy of ideas which, suggesting to him the possible location of truth, however perceived, make him consequently look for it under the proverbial streetlight (to put it more precisely: in the theoretical light of the thinking established by this legacy). However, it comprises two elements: positive – "after all, truth exists" – and negative – "where nobody expects it to be". Leszek Nowak suggests we should search for truth in darkness rather than near the streetlight. Life teaches us that we find what we have lost only if we have lost it nearby the streetlight. All those who search for it in the eternal darkness should abandon their hopes. Yet, in the proverbial light, we can also recognize the beginning of the cognitive and moral destruction.

For example, describing the artistic output of the Japanese painter Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), Polyxeni Potter writes, "Perspective, a Western influence, graces many of Hiroshige's later works, which having excelled in capturing life as he saw it, now explored its depth. Master of illusion, he brought what he saw into focus, knowing full well that the scene was but a composition of life elements, not life itself. Hiroshige's dilemma with perspective is not unlike the scientist's, who also draws selected objects closer for a better look. But magnification and clarity are no guarantee of true perspective in the laboratory any more than in art. *Out in the open, under the proverbial lighthouse, lies always the risk of missing the obvious in close and plain view.* (my emphasis). And despite the science frame, zoonotic and vectorborne interactions and connections within the natural environment, like

the strolling visitors in the garden at Kameido, can easily be overlooked.”²² If Leszek Nowak is right that “truth is where nobody expects it to be”, then the cognitively lofty truth cannot be an obvious judgment. We all know what obvious judgments Copernicus debunked – nevertheless, lovers still meet at sunset, hoping to part only at sunrise. Before Newton’s physics, nobody had any doubt that the speed of a falling body depends mainly on its mass. Newton proved that when we analyze this phenomenon in unexpected conditions of an absolute vacuum, the mass of the body does not affect the speed of its falling and depends exclusively on the altitude where the nearest future of this body has been embraced by the absolute law of gravity. Nowak is afraid that most frequently, we can see the obvious, whereas the Japanese artist’s paintings crave for such obviousness. They warn us that in places where we can clearly see and recognize things, “lies always the risk of missing the obvious in close and plain view,” whereas it is all about building life in the obvious, close and plain view. Some people scare us with obviousness, others – tempt us with it. The former cannot get used to its mustiness, the latter – cannot restrain themselves from their allures. The former believe in the life-giving power of questions, the latter – look for an answer in whose horizon all uncertainty will die. “Security”, as Zygmunt Bauman writes, “is the value elbowing out that of freedom.”²³ We are either in favour of uncertainty flourishing in the light of every need for freedom, or we resign ourselves to stabilization blooming in the shade of every fulfilled – subjectively or even objectively – need for security.

Paradoxically and contrary to the biblical tradition, darkness derives from light: the current light intensity indicates the boundary of darkness (where the vital truth presumably resides) which Leszek Nowak asks us to cross. The criterion of division into those who search in the right manner and those who do it wrong is given rather than set to be developed, and thus, it is an attempt at smuggling one of the so-called Great Metanarratives into philosophy, namely the historiosophic vision of a subject’s emancipation, being fulfilled – according to the quoted message – in the ambitious process, among others, of reconstructing the path marked by truth which is capable of surprising us. Thus, it may seem that from the postmodern perspective, Leszek Nowak’s philosophical concept, so hankering for truth, could meet only the worst epithets. Exactly – it could! There is, however, another aspect of this interest-ing conflict between the systems thinking (represented by Leszek Nowak, among others) and non-systems thinking (endorsed for example by the post-modernists).

²² P. Potter, *The darkest place is under the light house* in: “*Emerging Infectious Diseases*” [online magazine]. V. 13, No. 4, April 2007. Available on: <http://www.cdc.gov/eid/content/13/4/676.htm>.

²³ Z. Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?*, quotation taken from the author’s manuscript.

However, what does postmodern thinking, represented by postmodernism, actually offer? The eminent Polish ethnologist, Ludwik Stomma, writes that it is the postulate of the constant bewilderment with the world. "Naturally, to be bewildered by ourselves, by our environment or society, we must somehow 'go out of ourselves' or achieve something like 'a state of defamiliarization'. It is about ... a research technique, a method rather than judgment, or even a moral postulate. Postmodernists have never claimed the marginal or eccentric to be more significant and more worth promoting than the canonic, orthodox and traditional. On the contrary, such a declaration denies their message which calls for not judging beforehand and thus, for being bewildered by the marginal and canonic with the same good will and understanding of arguments".²⁴ It must be admitted that the message of constant bewilderment attributed to the postmodern approach does not make it lighter or easier to comprehend. It is hard to see what it would be like to undermine the postmodern principle of rejecting all possible cognitive forejudgments (prejudices) referring to reality. After all, we are all surprised by what does not fall into a perspective established by our forejudgments. If we are bewildered by something, it is only because the thing seemed to be different – to behave in another way, to be subject to different processes. This is the simplest example: a stone thrown out of a window does not come as a surprise, yet St. Francis of Assisi would bewilder us – as much as a non-falling stone – by deliberately throwing a stone at some passer-by. The first case complies with the forejudgments imposed on us by the common knowledge, (and revealed by Hume, among others, who was surprised by our lack of bewilderment by the recurring sight of a falling stone and the rising sun), whereas the second instance infringes on the hagiographic image of the saint from Assisi. Stomma wants us to be bewildered by both "the canonic" and "the marginal". And so – let us be bewildered. However, if we want to achieve and then to maintain the desired state of "bewilderment", we must – unfortunately – at first assume some image of ourselves and the world. Being bewildered by the extant state of affairs shows that our conception of them is different. We are surprised by somebody's purple hair only when we expect the hair to be of some other colour. In this sense, every sense of bewilderment presumably includes a specific moment of peculiar conservatism, dogmatism and fundamentalism. Moreover, bewilderment assumes keeping some distance towards an object of our bewilderment. Those who are preoccupied with life constitute its integral part rather than being bewildered by it. If we are so willing to go out of ourselves when searching for some distance, it is only because we are certain that we can return to ourselves at any time. Without such a guarantee it is better not to go out at all... However, the above debate with Stomma would be

²⁴ L. Stomma, "Intelektualiści", *Polityka*, 1992, nr 46 (my translation).

dishonest if it did not consider the permanence of “bewilderment” so exposed by him: according to postmodernists, we should be surprised by everything, wherever we are. Thus, we should be surprised by a falling stone and by St. Francis of Assisi who does not throw it at a passer-by. Is such constant bewilderment possible? What picture of the world would be established by postmodernist forejudgments to make all these components of the world constantly surprise us – starting with a fly walking (or not) on a table (marginality (?)), to the tragedies (a canon (?)) we have witnessed (or not) at the close of the century? If everything means everything, always means always! Perhaps postmodernists have fallen into a pitfall of obsession? Not at all. There are forejudgments which make the postmodernist approach possible – e.g. the ones claiming the global non-existence of the world. Then, we are surprised by anything, provided it exists. It is existence itself that is bewildering. At first, we confirm ourselves in our belief that nothing exists – then, we live in constant “bewilderment” to find otherwise.

Does Leszek Nowak demand that we are constantly bewildered? It seems we should answer this question in the negative: Nowak’s works convey a different appeal. He rather wants us to think in the way that will surprise and thus astonish others. It is not important whether we are bewildered, it is important to bewilder others. What he continually stresses in his works is the remarkable and noteworthy truth. To make the quoted message more unambiguous, I will slightly rephrase it: The philosophically interesting truth is where nobody expects it to be. Let me quote some more from Nowak’s treatise: 1. “The greatness of an invention – may it be cognitive, moral or artistic – is measured by ... the extent to which it breaks our stereotypes and insults our trivializing ‘common sense’, showing us thoroughly new and unexpected perspectives”²⁵; 2. “A theoretician’s task is ... to deliver a real picture of the world rather than the one in which we feel safe and pleasant ... True theses usually contradict popular stereotypes”²⁶. On the basis of such statements we can suppose that the suggested supplement is not unsubstantiated. If we think about the world in the way that will surprise others, the rule will also apply to these “others”. They should also create their own images of the world which will be able to break our habits and infringe on our stereotypes on which we act; thus, they are also obliged to permanently bewilder us. In the world created by Leszek Nowak, bewilderment is a consequence of human activity rather than its aim. It is not the world, but its conceptualizations that can surprise us. The non-Marxian historical materialism guarantees the still unfulfilled postulate of postmodern thinking (or perhaps life?). In Nowak’s world, one *must* be (or at

²⁵ Nowak, V. III, p. 28.

²⁶ Nowak, V. III, p. 306-307.

least should be) a postmodernist, whereas in the world suggested by postmodern thinking, one only *can* be postmodern.

Still, even in the postmodern world nothing is for free. The postulate of living in the worlds of “little narratives” is both ambitious and groundless. “A little narrative” is – paradoxically – absolute within the boundaries of its existence: the existence of “a little narrative” has a function the right to which has been so far usurped by “the Great Narratives”. “A little narrative” has the right to exist as long as it exists. Granted, it can always be replaced with another narrative. It is not known, however, if making any “temporal conditions” in relation to it is legitimate, as they would assume the precedence of some external approach to “the little narrative”. In other words, “always” can as well mean “never”. Thus: even an individual who does (will) not use his freedom (to create new little narratives) is free. Or to put it differently: the freedom of an individual is fulfilled in his ideological and theoretical stillness and inertia. A free individual has also the right to resign from any attributes of his freedom and to “define” it, for example, in terms which are traditionally strange to the notion of freedom.

We should consider whether locating the main threats to individual autonomy in the theoretical and interpretative claims of “the great narratives” is fully legitimate and whether this localization reflects the uncompromising nature of the postmodern thinking. There is a serious fear that an individual deprived of the claims and statements put forward by the great theories, not bearing the burden of the elementary obligations resulting from their autonomy and completeness – can take an uncritical and fully affirmative stand on the world and himself. We know the evil of “the great narratives”, yet we can not deny them one thing – the critical approach towards all – as it seems – sorts of obviousness, especially to those established by alternative narratives. Does not the sense of obviousness of the experienced world frequently evoke a temptation to dogmatically confirm oneself in it? The principle of human independence as guaranteed by the right to the constant creation of “little narratives” allows individuals to incessantly choose their own network of references and meanings, to question all extraindividual structures. Perhaps the threat to an individual is not only the absoluteness of the great narratives, but also the absoluteness of an individual as such, who, having been critical of the world so far, now becomes uncritical of oneself, thus affirming his current perspective of the world. People who never like the world and those who are satisfied only with themselves are unbearable and dangerous to the world and to themselves.

The postmodern postulate of freedom is expressed with a multitude of “little narratives” (a multitude of mental images of the world) created by individuals. The German philosopher Odo Marquard opposes living in the shadows

(lights?) of many multiversal histories to living in the shadows (lights?) of one universal history; he is also in favour of living involved with many myths, and categorically warns us against the life which bases on just one myth.²⁷ However, when man can choose from many histories and myths, none of them is axiologically and ideologically more important than himself. Perhaps man should be condemned to freedom: not only to be able to, but even to have to constantly choose from numerous histories and myths. We are free only when we are doomed to freedom – when we have to live under the sky with many gods. However, does every “little narrative” – every myth and every history – deserve our perceiving it as a medium capable of introducing an individual into the world of freedom? We are all threatened mostly with the statements we are ready to accept as obvious and exclusive.

Naturally, all conceptions of social progress or social formation are an attempt at eradicating the uniqueness and actuality of an individual in the name of the truth which explains them. The issue, however, becomes more complicated if, from the perspective of this particular truth of an individual, it is important whether the individual confirms himself in his own belief, or, on the contrary – still asks himself why he is thinking in this, and not a different way. Leszek Nowak, and his non-Marxian historical materialism demands from an individual to constantly ask this question. Otherwise, one is doomed to unconditional self-trust. The non-Marxian historical materialism deprives one of this trust. In fact, pursuing this conception guarantees one the permanent sense of the lack of freedom. Leszek Nowak frequently points to this lack of freedom even where we were inclined to see its excess. Hence, the theory (i.e. the world raised to the power of a concept) makes it impossible for us to unconditionally trust ourselves as it constantly adjusts the question of the conditions of this trust to the standards of a system. It suffices for an individual under the arbitrary decision (to which especially a postmodern individual is entitled) to recognize himself as an important subject of this theory, and the theory will appear to be essentially a treatise on the lack of freedom of particular individuals. The lack which – contrary to what enthusiasts of freedom believe – does not diminish, but expands and deepens the illusion of independent existence. In short: the lack of freedom appears on the historical scene disguised as the degenerated form of freedom.

Both the systems and the non-systems way of thinking meet in the final conclusion: it is only legitimate and true to state the lack of freedom, whereas a positive announcement of freedom carries the stigma of failure. The bigger the failure, the more reluctant we are to painfully search for the deficiencies of

²⁷ See: O. Marquard, *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen*. Reclam, Stuttgart 1981; *Apologie des Zufälligen*. Reclam, Stuttgart 1986, (my translation).

the situation in which freedom is fulfilled. “Think less and live more”, said the philosopher from Königsberg, Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788), which did not discourage him from being a friend of Kant. This refers to the life which is not afraid of the constantly present multitude of theoretical comments, as only within their boundaries the blasphemous belief in boundless life is possible.

3. THE ARTISTIC LANDSCAPES OF FREEDOM

The flourishing spirit of modernity is still well off and it is apparently not going to surrender to the ephemeral spirit of postmodernity soon. We can even get the impression that they both fire blanks at one another and thus what we see are only pictures of imaginary wounds and artificial blood. The postmodern freedom is difficult and in fact, most frequently it is too difficult. The ideals of modern law and order attract us as long as they are dominated by the fear of this difficulty.

A. MODERN CONCEPTION OF NECESSITY

One of the patrons of modernity is undoubtedly Hegel. This great German philosopher frequently tended to interweave his abstract disquisitions with some linguistically well-turned thoughts which can be found in almost every anthology of aphorisms on almost every possible topic. A reader looking for the traces of understanding in the desert of philosophical abstractions can take a rest in the pleasant shade of Hegelian aphorisms. Here are some examples. We learn that “the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it”.²⁸ The thought can be dedicated to all the proponents of rapid and revolutionary changes. The wisdom of the next quotation is deeply sorrowful: “We might find it tolerable that individuals, their purposes and gratifications, are thus sacrificed, their happiness abandoned to the realm of natural forces and hence of chance to which it belongs; and that individuals in general are regarded under the category of means. Yet there is one aspect of human individuality that we must refuse to take exclusively in this light even in relation to the highest, an element which is absolutely not subordinate but exists in individuals as essentially eternal and divine. I mean morality, ethics, religion.”²⁹ Hegel does not spare us. Thrown into the world of coincidences, our life is fragile and uncertain. The only source of hope is an appropriately

²⁸ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller (trans.), Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1998, 1977, p. 19.

²⁹ Hegel, *Reason In History, a general introduction to the Philosophy of History*, R.S. Hartman (trans.), A Liberal Arts Press, 1953, p. 95.

big altar on which it will be sacrificed. These are particularly all the great values – truth, good, sanctity and eternity, among others – and their earthly representations, e.g. God, honour and homeland. This thought has been intriguingly deconstructed by the artist Marcin Berdyszak from Poznań in his work *Homo Creator*. As an art critic puts it, his work is “a life-size male figure, a dummy dressed in a uniform adorned with insignia, holding his own head in his hands. The uniform, seemingly a military one, bears the insignia of military and church hierarchy, and the dummy stands with his legs slightly apart on a fragment of the floor cut out in the form of a map and strewn with innumerable plastic toy soldiers.” After this adequate description, the art critic goes on to interpret the work, “Metaphors arise effortlessly, although this myth has no archetypal origins, but constitutes the terrifying present.”³⁰

The unquestionable motto of modernity is Hegel’s thought “The rational, like the substantial, is necessary. We are free when we recognize it as law and follow it as the substance of our own being.”³¹ This aphorism precisely expresses the essence of the Enlightenment’s hope, simultaneously heralding its constant pitfalls. In the world of science, the real equals the scientifically explicable. Science tries to familiarize itself with “the world of a coincidence” by means of equations in whose light the future is no longer an object of auguries, but it can be relatively precisely “calculated” and thus predicted. For example, if I attend a preliminary course of physics and know several adequate formulas, I can easily calculate when a stone thrown out of a window from the thirtieth floor will hit the ground. The rationality of a stone does not consist in our being able to talk with it, but in the fact that it acts according to specific laws of physics. Hence, it is the physical rationality of a stone and as such – also its physical reality. Thus, a stone which does not fall down is neither rational, nor real and predictable, so it is simply not a stone. As people are subject to specific laws of physics and biology, they are naturally rational, real and predictable in the world of physics and biology: they hit the ground or feel hungry. However, it is not where their reality and rationality ends. Human beings also want to be rational and real and thus spiritually predictable. To achieve that, they must abide by the law also in the world of spirit. A modern human being is rational and real as much as he is ethical and regarded as a citizen. Material bodies “always and everywhere” observe the laws of nature; a citizen also “always and everywhere” lives in accordance with the binding state law. Any real world is rational and thus it is dominated by the spirit of inevitability. Freedom consists in understanding necessities rather than in pathetic attempts at criticizing them. Understanding the necessities described

³⁰ E. Kościelak, *Marcin Berdyszak & Zafos Xagorari., Art. Identity*, Kościelak Gallery, The National Museum in Wrocław, Wrocław, 2009, Jacek Słupski (trans.), p.14-15.

³¹ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Reason In History*, p. 53.

by the laws of gravity does not make us give up planes and other flying machines, but, on the contrary, several dozen years ago it turned out to be a preliminary condition of their appearance in our world. Moreover, the increasingly more courageous understanding of the necessity of infections which torment us does not inspire more declarations of our humility. Perhaps we should look at the necessities which govern the social world in the same manner. Once a human being is born, the law – in whose light they can create their rationality and thus reality out of their own life – already awaits them, thus enabling the idea of humanity to realize itself once again in a particular human being. Only man decides whether he will ever recognize his own rationality, reality and freedom in this unemotional law. Hence, man – as a citizen – becomes predictable: he crosses the street exclusively at the green light and obediently pays taxes.

B. CREATING NECESSITY IN POSTMODERN TIMES

Friedrich Nietzsche is undoubtedly the main patron of postmodernity. He does not agree with the Hegelian programme of life according to which an individual, to live as a human being, must die as an individual. In his *Untimely Meditations* we can find the following quotation: “But even if the future were to give us no cause for hope – our curious existence in precisely this Now gives us the strongest encouragement to live according to our own standards and laws: the inexplicable fact that we live precisely today and yet had the infinity of time in which to come into being, that we possess nothing but this brief today in which to show why and to what purpose we have come into being precisely at this moment. We are accountable to ourselves for our own existence; consequently, we also want to be the real helmsmen of our existence and keep it from resembling a mindless coincidence. We have to approach existence with certain boldness and willingness to take risk: especially since in both the worst and the best instances we are bound to lose it. [...] No one can build for you the bridge upon which you alone must cross the stream of life, no one but you alone. To be sure, there are countless paths and bridges and demigods that want to carry you through this stream, but only at the price of your self; you would pawn and lose your self. There is only one single path in this world on which no one but you can travel”. Nietzsche quotes Cromwell’s words: “A man never rises higher than when he does not know where his path may lead him.”³²

A human being – a real human being – begins from zero and ends with it. Although he was born, he could as well not have been born. Although he was

³² F. Nietzsche, “Untimely Meditations”, in: *The Nietzsche Reader*; K. Ansell-Pearson, D. Large (eds.) D. Large (trans.), Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 143-144.

born for example in 1957, he could as well have been born two hundred years earlier or one hundred years later. Life consists in multiplying by zero. Here arises a fairly obvious question: how to multiply by zero so as not to get a zero. The world of arithmetic is ruthless – it does not allow for such a possibility. Similarly, life immersed in nothingness is doomed to inertia and dullness. A human being exists, yet he could as well not exist. There is no other necessity in man but death. Although life itself is not certain, the end of life is certain and necessary as a result of any correct mathematical calculation. Could Nietzsche have really been wrong? Let me quote this excerpt once again, “we also want to [...] keep (our existence) from resembling a mindless coincidence. We have to approach existence with certain boldness and willingness to take risk: especially since in both the worst and the best instances we are bound to lose it”. For Nietzsche, the loss of existence is an obvious necessity – it inevitably crowns both the best and the worst of lives. However, it is not death, but mindless coincidence that constitutes a threat to life. Death is a necessary part of life, its final gesture and manifestation. So far, every man who has died, had to live before. Does death need life more than life needs death? The answer is dead simple. As there is no death without life, there is no life without death. The first mythical and religious man who dared to face the burden of this existential truth is the biblical Eve. Eve wants to live, whereas to live means to give birth to life. The one who does not create life just pretends to live. Eve could give a new life only because Adam had seen her naked and his masculinity could bloom exceptionally in her life-oriented light: if there is no consent to images of female nudity, the acceptance of any male excesses dies out. Thus, the biblical Eve reaches for the fruit of knowledge of the male and female. She opens not only her own, but also Adam’s eyes. Since then, the consent to death has become the *sine qua non* of the act of any new life conception: on fertilizing the womb, the penis can go out. We know it is otherwise: on fertilizing the womb, the penis *must* go out.

Only when we understand this absurd necessity instead of hopelessly inefficiently suppressing it in our consciousness do we get a chance to open ourselves to freedom. Life should be protected against “the mindless coincidence”, rather than against the awareness of its inevitable end (most frequently referred to as death), as it is “the mindless coincidence” rather than death which – let us repeat it – is a necessary end of life and as such, deprives life of its dignity and meaning. But what is contradictory to the mindless coincidence? Perhaps some rational – or at least not mindless – coincidence? Or perhaps it is a necessity which always – as we have learnt from Hegel – hides some rationality? Life is not mindlessly coincidental when it is necessary: whereas it is necessary when it forms (not necessarily the only) basis of the world which provides this life with real existence. Life is

necessary as long as it cannot be replaced with some other life. In the language of logic, human life can be said to be absolutely necessary when it can be adequately described only in the absolutely intensional language³³ in which no expression can be replaced with another expression. During his existence, man creates numerous worlds (and then he is described in them in some intensional language) and at the same time, it is man who is created by numerous worlds (and then he is described in an extensional language which lets one expression be replaced with another one). The inhumanly lofty example of “an intensional life” can be the life of Napoleon, as there are no times of Napoleon without Napoleon; Napoleon’s life is necessary for Napoleonic times. On the other hand, the lives of many John Smiths (from the perspective of anonymous and mindlessly coincidental stories) can stand for numerous examples of the humanly warm “intensional existence,,. As there is no John Smith’s family without John Smith, John Smith’s life is necessary for John Smith’s family. Even if John Smith’s widow will get married again (as we wish her to do), she will not be able to create John Smith’s family. For the same reasons, my article does not exist without me, and in this sense, I am necessary in the world of my article. After all, if I do not write my article, it will not exist.³⁴ Nevertheless, when some disinterested or less ambitious reader does not read my article, it will still exist. The situation will be different, though, if none of my students comes to my lecture – it will then not take place.³⁵ Apparently, the world of intensional existences meet the world of extensional existences in numerous places and in different ways. Unconsciously, we suck its momentary necessity. Unconsciously coincidental in one context, we suck our momentary necessity from the milk of different contexts. The language of love is intensional, the language of stereotypical needs, expectations and offers – extentional. And what is the language of art?

Describing the postmodern artists’ situation, Jean-François Lyotard writes: “The postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes or the work he creates is not in principle governed by some pre-

³³ Logic does not know the notion of an absolutely intensional language. An intensional language is every language which is not extensional. In an extensional statement, substitution of co-extensive expressions always preserves logical value. For example, in arithmetic, each figure in the true statement $3 + 5 = 8$ can be replaced with an endless number of their equivalents and the statement remains true (e.g. 3 can be replaced with “8-5”, “12:4” or even “324 568 972 – 324 568 969”, etc.). Natural languages are not extensional and so they are intensional. Namely, if we replace some expression in a true statement with its equivalent, nevertheless, the statement can become false.

³⁴ Although we can not exclude the existence of students endowed with an extraordinary sense of irony who, ignoring my absence, will spend the time of lecture in the lecture theatre, behaving as if the lecture was taking place – such a possibility has been presented by Antonioni in his film “Blow-up” in the scene of the tennis match played without balls and rackets.

³⁵ Naturally, I can behave as heroes of the above scene.

established rules and cannot be judged according to a determinant judgment, by the application of given categories to this text or work. Such rules and categories are what the work or text is investigating. The artist and the writer therefore work without rules, and in order to establish the rules for what *will have been made*.³⁶ All the elements of this description are also included in the above-mentioned Nietzsche's diagnosis of life.

When Lyotard's artist approaches the canvas (or any other material), he can use it in any way. After all, he is free from the ascetic wisdom of style and the dissolute austerity of Greek, medieval, Renaissance and academic masters' artistry, which offered efficient resistance to their atavistic desire to last in the state of eternal anarchy. The modern artist is painfully alone. There is often no God in whom he believes – thus, there is neither truth, nor good. Although ethics is impossible, art (aesthetics) still remains feasible. Albeit the painter knows he can do anything with the canvas, he knows as well that not every fruit of his creative passion will ripen in the world of art as an artwork. Freedom does not rely on – as Hegel believed – understanding necessities, but on the artistic courage of their creation. Although principles of beauty no longer exist, there is still hope which sometimes derives from beauty. The artist can take the liberty of making an endless number of artistic gestures, yet not all of them will harden as another artistic and aesthetic necessity. Thus, Nietzsche brings us to the world where life alone, or even just life, lends the material for artwork creation to art. We put on the aesthetic mask at the expense of the ethical one. There is freedom, yet latitude is not allowed. Here returns the old hope referred to as an artwork (which is nothing more than truth) as well as the old fear referred to as kitsch (which stand for nothing else than falsehood).

Here, let me quote some excerpts from the poem “The Power of Taste”, written by the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert:

“It didn't require great character at all/our refusal disagreement and resistance / we had a shred of necessary courage/ but fundamentally it was a matter of taste / Yes taste in which there are fibers of soul and the cartilage of conscience.”

A few verses below, the poet concludes:

“So aesthetics can be helpful in life/ one should not neglect the study of beauty / Our eyes and ears refused obedience / the princes of our senses proudly chose exile”³⁷

³⁶ J.-F. Lyotard, “Answering the Question: what is the Postmodern” in: *The Postmodern Explained to Children*, Sydney: Power Publications, 1992, p. 9.

³⁷ Z. Herbert, “The Power of Taste” in: *Report from the besieged city and other poems*, John and Bogdana Carpenter (trans.), New York: The Ecco Press, 1985.

We can also approach the-art-of-life problem in a different way. In his book *The Art of Life*, Zygmunt Bauman writes, “Our lives, whether we know it or not and whether we relish the news or bewail it, are works of art. To live our lives as the art of life demands, we must, just like the artists of any art, set ourselves challenges which are (at the moment of their setting, at any rate) difficult to confront point-black; we must choose targets that are (at the moment of their choosing, at any rate) well beyond our reach, and standards of excellence that vexingly seem to stay stubbornly far above our ability (as already achieved, at any rate) to match whatever we do or may be doing. We need to *attempt the impossible*”.³⁸ Naturally, we can live differently: enjoying the possible and reaching only for these fruits that are within our human reach. We do not, however, pursue the life strategy of the Nietzschean Man, whom Bauman, incidentally, does not like. Once freedom is based on creating necessities, we should not ask about the sense of security so long as the process of their creation lasts. Only when life freezes in the concept which is the name for the necessities it has created, does there appear the possibility of understanding them and the freedom which derives from it. The interpretation of the most innovative artworks stabilizes and freezes in patterns as long as it is supposed to create dynamic artistic reality. The same is true of life. As Bauman sarcastically puts it, “Nietzsche’s ‘Higher Man’ seems to be doomed to end up as most of us, common people, do”.³⁹

C. COINCIDENCE AS THE SOURCE OF ARTISTIC FREEDOM

Modern artists often treat Nietzsche’s imperative of forming new necessities as another straitjacket imposed on them by artistic reality which limits their freedom since it forces them to create successive images of reality by designing new necessities. The necessities created within the boundaries of art also herald new forms of constraints and surveillance. As Marcin Berdyszak has aptly said, “Each of us is ignorant in our own way, but we know things in a similar way.”⁴⁰ Once we learn things, sooner or later our originality and uniqueness must smash against the looming reefs of mental patterns. We thus still hold the vision of the world saturated with all sorts of necessities. We replace old laws and relations with new ones. Although today we create new necessities, we will be able to attempt to understand them tomorrow. In this way we come back to the vision of freedom which relies either on the artistic perception of aesthetic necessities, or on the aesthetic perception of artistic necessities. Thus, artists try to go even further, searching for the world free

³⁸ Z. Bauman, *The Art of Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008, p. 20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, s. 19.

⁴⁰ M. Berdyszak, 1993-2001, Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warszawa, E. Przybył (trans.).

from necessities, where the eternal coincidence, constant surprise, absolute uncertainty as well as endless and undefined unpredictability would constitute the main materials. It is not an object, installation, situation, or even a process, but an eternal, permanent, absolute, boundless and undefined change which takes place in the subject, installation or process that makes for a work of art.

This conception is reflected in the artistic output of Marcin Berdyszak. His installation entitled *Baroque of Nature, Baroque of Culture*, is made of canvas, steel, wadding and natural bananas. The Baroque columns symbolize the fact that everything which exists, artworks included, must freeze in the particular gestures of the history of culture. The bananas, for many years Berdyszak's favourite material, impose on those gestures the awareness of constant change. Alicja Kępińska describes this fascination in the following way, "When I saw the bananas at your exhibition at AT Gallery, they activated my sense of touch because I wanted to check whether they were artificial or natural. Nevertheless I wasn't able to make up my mind whether I'd prefer them to be natural or artificial. I found myself in an indecisive situation – regarding my cognition and my intentions. [...] What you do escapes in different ways any divisions and measurements, formerly established by culture. It means raising many anchors that have been keeping us in definite safe positions. It is an impulse to say farewell to many habits, to former knowledge, to judgements which have already changed into prejudices. [...] The pieces make our perception equivocal to our cultural habit of making univocal judgements. [...] Such activity opens up other areas, other worlds to our cognition... The old world isn't a field for exploration any longer. It has lost its appeal. It doesn't guarantee the veracity of phenomena. [...] What we haven't looked forward to realizes itself for us."⁴¹

Marcin Berdyszak believes in the artistic wisdom of nature disgraced by numerous, fruitful romances with culture – thus, he hungrily reaches for the artistic potentiality of bananas. Piotr C. Kowalski – another Polish artist associated with Poznań – follows a different path as he believes in the artistic wisdom of culture entangled in the fertile romance with nature. A few years ago, I talked about his work with Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska. The following excerpt from this discussion has been edited for the purposes of this article: "The series shown by Piotr C. Kowalski at Ostrów Lednicki comprised paintings sunk deeply into the ground, in the place rich in history, exploiting at the same time the magic dimension of the four directions of the world, being affected by natural conditions, like rain, hail, wind and sun. The artist only assisted in their creation. He allowed natural coincidence to act on the surfaces of the paintings. They were soon covered by earth, which left its traces on

⁴¹ Ibid.

them too. For example, one of the excavated paintings was found covered with pieces of broken pots and bones which became part of the exhibition. Kowalski does not create to isolate himself from nature or people. His art involves great affirmation of life. The life of art lasts simultaneously outside and inside of it. The canvas still “work”: the sand, soil, leaves and pieces of bark that cling to them can come off the surfaces of the paintings. The artistic experiment at Ostrów Lednicki is an attempt at saving the artworks from passing, which is an inherent part of their life course. What is resurrected in the excavated painting with human and animal bones stuck to it is an artwork which was not created simply in 1990, but points to the prehistory dating back to 11th century or even earlier. The artwork is no longer protected against time. It is not isolated from the elements “of this world”, traditionally perceived as allies of the ultimate end. This time it is supposed to be different. It is impossible to destroy the artwork as each change it undergoes is a part of the process of its creation. How to destroy an artwork which consists of its own destruction? Piotr C. Kowalski wants to deceive time, trying to bribe it with the promise of art co-creation.”⁴²

As long as life lasts, everything can happen, especially the things which should never happen. The absolutely intensional existence is impossible to the extent the world is made of coincidences, amazement and bewilderment – deprived of the support of necessities and habits. It is only culture, not nature, which is helpless in the face of Berdyszak’s bananas. Piotr C. Kowalski also decided to finally excavate his paintings from the soil, though, as in the case of the mythological Antaeus, it was to be the source of their eternal vitality.

4. IN SEARCH OF THE HOPE FOR SAFE FREEDOM

Man is formed by the things that limit him; at the same time he is limited by the things that form him. Man is formed by his parents who also limit him. Man is also shaped by his language, origin, faith, education, sex, financial position, temperament, sexual and culinary tastes, interests, work, leisure, entertainment and the historical time and place on earth that he lives in. These things also limit him in the sense that they deprive his existence of the divine hallmarks of universality, localizing it in a specific particularism: what contributes to our identity is a particular language, origin, faith, education, sex, etc. Virtual reality also forms human beings and thus it also limits them. We should remember that people are particularly limited by the need for obvious-

⁴² R. Kubicki, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, *Poszerzanie granic. Sztuka współczesna w perspektywie estetyczno-filozoficzne*, Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1999, p.120-121 (my translation).

ness that they keep fulfilling through all their lives, and thus, consistent with what has been already said, it is also the need for obviousness that people keep fulfilling through all their lives that forms them. Owing to the obviousness we find in the world and impose on it, we do not have to stand to attention twenty-four hours a day, but we can let ourselves rest at ease. The obviousness chooses goals for us and indicates the easiest ways of their accomplishment. It is not bad when obviousness occasionally guides our steps, but it is disastrous when it is present in all our choices. The greatest and most effective ally of obviousness is the certainty that our critical reason will not allow us to fall into its trap. It also seems to us too frequently that the excess of the world multiplied by its numerous media and virtual images prevents the risk of our falling into the black hole of obviousness. Popular culture, filled to a considerable degree with the spirit of consumerism, deludes us with the images of the world in which we are active and omnipotent architects of our own fortunes; within the boundaries of this culture we believe ourselves to be the only people who responsibly choose our life goals, values and rules. Showered with thousands of complements by the mass media, we excitedly use them to construct our self-confidence: we provide ourselves with a little luxury we deserve always and everywhere. This does not mean that nothing is ever obvious in art; nothing has to be or can be obvious in art. In life, science, religion, law and morality, freedom consists in getting used to the necessities which form the reality of life, science, religion, law and morality. Freedom is possible exclusively in art and love, and it escapes the snares laid by the understood necessities as they – love and art – have the courage to realize themselves in the hopes of their constant self-creation out of everything and thus out of nothing.

Translation: Barbara Komorowska

O ESTETYCZNYCH ŹRÓDŁACH I GRANICACH SZTUKI WOLNEGO ŻYCIA (streszczenie)

Artykuł składa się z czterech części. W części pierwszej *Spragniony piękna Odyseusz na tropie zgubnej wolności* przypominam historię Odyseusza, który chcąc przeżyć estetycznie piękno syreniego śpiewu korzysta z pomocy swoich towarzyszy. Przygoda z Syrenami zmienia nie tylko Odyseusza (który „łagodnieje”), lecz także ich (po raz pierwszy rozpoznają w sobie własną podmiotowość, a wraz nią prawo do decydowaniu o swoim życiu). W części drugiej *Filozoficzny wstęp do problemu wolności* porównuję dwa typy myślenia o wolności – myślenie systemowe (nawiązując do koncepcji Leszka Nowaka) i niesystemowe (postmodernistyczne). Oba myślenia spotykają się na poziomie konkluzji: zawsze zasadne i prawdziwe jest tylko skonstatowanie braku wolności; natomiast pozytywne stwierdzenie wolności naznaczone już jest piętnem porażki. W części trzeciej *Artystyczne krajobrazy wolności* opisuję trzy doświadczenia sztuki, które różnicują ze względu na odmienne traktowanie konieczności i przypadku. Część czwartą *W poszukiwaniu nadziei na bezpieczną wolność* stanowi deklaracja, że jedynie sztuka i miłość mogą być źródłem egzystencjalnie bezpiecznej wolności.



1. Marcin Berdyszak, *Homo Creator*, Galeria Nowy Wiek, Zielona Góra 2008
photo Tomasz Daiksler; collection National Museum in Wrocław



2. Marcin Berdyszak, *Homo Creator*,
Galeria Nowy Wiek, Zielona Góra 2008
photo Tomasz Daiksler
collection National Museum in Wrocław



3. Marcin Berdyszak, *Homo Creator*, Galeria Nowy Wiek, Zielona Góra 2008
photo Tomasz Daikler; collection National Museum in Wrocław

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POLITICAL NON-DOMINATION AND ARTISTIC FREEDOM

Abstract: The interconnections between political and artistic freedom are complex and interesting but have never become a popular subject of deeper philosophical reflection. It is the main intention of this article to fill that gap and offer a conceptual framework for a more systematic exploration of the topic in the light of recent debates on liberty in political philosophy. For half of a century the discussions have been based on Isaiah Berlin's classic distinction between "negative" and "positive" liberty (known also as "non-interference" and "self-mastery") but recently a third alternative has appeared. The political philosophers of classical republicanism – including as well known thinkers as Quentin Skinner, Philip Pettit, and Maurizio Viroli – proposed the idea of liberty as "non-domination." The article will explore the theoretical and practical implication which those three interconnected concepts of liberty have for artistic visions and activities. The initial conclusions suggest that the new concept of liberty does not solve some problems associated with Berlin's distinction. In particular, the republican concept of non-domination seems to limit artistic freedom in ways very similar to the "positive" concept. The tentative observations sound inspiring enough for more exploration.

Keywords: Isaiah Berlin – artistic freedom – classical republicanism – non-domination

"Without freedom, no art: art lives only on the restraints it imposes on itself, and dies of all others," wrote Albert Camus (1960: 129). This claim may seem a bit overstated – one can argue, as we shall see, that not all restraints actually kill art – but the interconnections between art and freedom are, indeed, strong and rich: artists need spiritual freedom to be truly creative; they can express their love of freedom and inspire others to enjoy it; they can motivate people who have no freedom to seek it; free societies provide a friendly environment for artistic creation; societies which limit freedoms often view artists as potentially dangerous, and rightly so. In a word, everyone knows that art needs freedom and can be itself liberating. Surprisingly enough, the relationship between freedom and art has not been philosophically explored in a systematic way. It seems that both philosophers and artists consider the subject too simple or self-evident to be seriously discussed. It may have been so in the past but

recent lively discussions on the notion of freedom may require a fresh look at that relationship.

It is an intention of this article to overview a recent influential debate over the idea of political liberty and to reflect on how it can apply to artistic activities.¹ In particular, I am going to present the popular concept of liberty as non-domination proposed by political philosophers of classical republicanism and to confront it with the idea of artistic freedom. After introducing Isaiah Berlin's classic distinction between "negative" and "positive" liberty (known also as "non-interference" and "self-mastery") I shall present the idea of liberty as non-domination attempting to avoid the problems associated with Berlin's conceptualization. The article will explore the conceptual interconnections between these ideas as well as their practical implications. Although it is hard to predict whether republican political philosophy is going to acquire more tangible influence in contemporary politics, it makes sense to reflect on such future possibilities and their implications for artistic vision and action.

1. BERLIN'S TWO CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY

For over half of a century discussions on liberty have been predominantly streamlined by Isaiah Berlin's conceptualization of negative and positive liberty.²

Negative liberty, as Berlin presents it, is the absence of obstacles to one's possible choices and activities. Individual persons or groups of persons retain their freedom to the extent that they are not obstructed from doing what they want to do or coerced to do what they do not want to do.

I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others. If I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do, I am to that degree unfree (Berlin 1990: 122).

¹ As most writers I am going to use "liberty" and "freedom" as basically synonymous. English seems to be the only major language with such twofold terminology with roots from German (*Freiheit*) and Latin (*Libertas*); other Indo-European languages – be it French, German, Italian, Dutch, Polish, or Czech – have only one term. I accept this almost universal unity. However, I also follow the general convention that "liberty" usually abbreviates social or political liberty while "freedom" can be broader, including the metaphysical questions of free will. It should be clear where such distinction may take place.

² "Two Concepts of Liberty" was a lecture presented in Oxford in 1958 and published soon after. I am going to use the pagination from Berlin 1990.

Negative liberty outlines the domain within which a subject is left alone “to do or be what he is able to do or be,” without interference by others (Berlin 1990: 121). Negative liberty is thus *non-interference*.

Berlin hints that he merely articulates what many philosophers have systematically developed. According to him, Hobbes’s idea of “a free man” – as a person who “is not hindered to do what he hath a will to do” (*Leviathan*, chap. 21) – was the historical initiation of the usage of negative liberty. Most classical liberals – Locke and John Stuart Mill in England, Constant and de Tocqueville in France, and Paine in America – continued this model. Mill’s Harm Principle is a classic example of liberty as non-interference: “The only freedom that deserves the name is that of pursuing our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it” (*On Liberty*, Ch. I). The classical liberal tradition is based on the negative conception of liberty. A legitimately free person is a person who acts without an interference of other people; a free society is a society where people interfere with the actions of other people as little as possible. Such renowned phrases as “liberty, equality, and pursuit of happiness” declare that people should stay untouched when they want to. They should freely decide how to live and be treated equally in their pursuits. Contemporary language of individual rights in law and politics is the language of non-interference: the right to live is freedom from physical destruction; property rights exclude others from touching our possessions; privacy rights make sure that some affairs cannot be intruded on or controlled by anyone; free speech rights make us untouchable when we express our opinions; freedom of assembly allows us to organize our lives with other people without anyone’s intruding interference.

In particular, the idea of non-interference speaks against the interference of political institutions, especially the most powerful of them, the state. Political freedoms are enjoyed where citizens are able to participate in lawmaking and where governments are restrained by laws in their coercive actions. Citizens are free to vote and be informed about governmental decisions. The ideas of economic freedom and the free market are forms of negative liberty as well. Producers, sellers, buyers, and consumers should be free to decide how they want to manage their goods: what to produce, what price to demand, whether to buy anything and for what price, how to use their resources and why, what to consume now and what to invest for future benefits. No one – and the state in particular – should be able to control and dictate such decisions and choices. Free political and economic agents should be left alone.

Positive liberty, as Berlin defines it, concerns the source of control that determines the agent’s decisions and actions.

The 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer – deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them (Berlin 1990: 131).

Positive liberty requires the agent to actively control her decisions and actions. She is free when she consciously and independently realizes her life. Positive liberty is *self-mastery*. According to Berlin, thinkers from a variety of philosophical schools have adopted the positive conception of liberty. He mentions Spinoza, Rousseau, Burke, Hegel, and Marx as those who viewed freedom as the agent's capability to extend control over his existence.

One important aspect of the distinction between negative and positive liberty is the distinction between external pressures and internal abilities. While negative liberty emphasizes the troublesome effects of external interference, positive liberty concentrates on one's self-realization and internal capabilities to control one's life. One cannot fully control the outside world but one should be able to manage one's own self. People who are ignorant, mentally ill, emotionally disturbed or confused are not in control of their perception of the world and their actions. Their true freedom is limited or nonexistent. It may actually be no external interference on their actions but their self-realization is impossible because they are dependent on uncontrollable psychological or emotional forces. Such people are not masters of their own self, their internal disabilities enslave them. They lack autonomy and authenticity.

According to Berlin, rationality plays a crucial role in the notion of positive freedom. A person makes free choices when she can think about them and make choices deliberately; she acts freely when her actions are intended. A person is her own master when she is able to realize her life effectively according to her knowledge and reason. When she chooses and acts according to fears or obsessions she is not really free. When she fails to follow her reasons then she fails to act freely. Hence being well informed and educated importantly extends freedom. Ignorant people are like children or drug addicts; they may imagine they can do whatever they want but their abilities to achieve anything are miserable. One has to find one's authentic autonomous self – overcoming ignorance, obsessions, and addictions – to achieve real freedom.

2. ARTISTIC FREEDOM AS NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE LIBERTY

Berlin's focus is political but his concepts have far reaching implications for broader areas of knowledge. Should art be included? From Plato to Derrida, philosophers have often emphasized an intrinsic conflict between art and politics. "Art ideally requires absolute freedom of imagination, thought, and expression, while governments inevitably try to restrict the exercise of these faculties and their consequences; and the regimes like to define the restraints as freedom" (Edelman 1995: 146). In fact, most social institutions – political, moral, legal, religious, economic, customary, and others – can be seen as mainly limiting freedom in order to make cooperation and coexistence possible. From that perspective, artistic creation is indeed extraordinary; it is in its essence against limitations.³

However, arts and politics are also strongly interconnected in many ways (cf. Edelman 1995; Ankersmit 1996; Kemal and Gaskell 2000). It is not accidental that political transformations and artistic revolutions happen together. Ancient Greek art and theater grew under Athenian democracy; the Italian Renaissance was the growth of art and civic consciousness; the Elizabethan era was the Golden Age of fine arts and music. Denys Haynes quips that without freedom in ancient Greek art there would be no Western civilization as such and "we should all still be ancient Egyptians" (Haynes 1981: 100-1). Artists have sometimes tried to escape from political reality but they hardly ever could. The values and ideas artists express are placed in a broader picture of social life and its political order in particular. Artistic images present love, awe, passion, faith, devotion, courage, and other virtues which usually possess political meanings. Even when artists do not care about political importance, their works can produce unintended political consequences (cf. Edelman 1995: 24-26). Romantic poets, for instance, inspired the growth of national identity in Europe; Hollywood filmmakers produce images that influence the status of women in the whole world. For Camus artistic freedom was constantly fluctuating between "frivolity and propaganda": works of beauty are sometimes seen as obscene and images of social life can be politically shaped (cf. Camus 1960: 190-209). Works of art can be manipulated when they are publicly visible. George Orwell argues that "all art is propaganda" since such political consequences are absolutely inevitable (cf. Orwell 2008). Most artists are aware of these influences and some have tried to affect the public minds in their own ways. Richard Wagner, Bertold Brecht, Orson Welles, Pablo

³ I focus on artistic creation although freedom in aesthetical perception is also a fascinating yet neglected subject for philosophical reflection. For recent discussions on the subject see Neill and Ridley 2007.

Neruda, and Andy Warhol had some political agendas and were quite effective in their ideological efforts.

In a very natural sense, artistic freedom seems to be a form of negative liberty. Artists want to be free from external forces limiting their thought and work. They want to be free when they present their vision of the world, express their feelings, and do it in the forms they choose themselves. They want to choose whether to make their images realistic or pure fiction. Of course they need the external impressions to inspire them but such influences should never cross the line of forceful interference.

In particular, artists need to be free in their criticism of the existing social world, its moral and political content. Artistic images can articulate political ideas which can glorify existing political regimes as well as caricature them wickedly. Art can be an immense political force. Many artists consider their work a form of rebellion against social reality and life as it is, against traditions, stereotypes, habits, moral standards, and political ideologies. Artists challenge the dominant visions of society, especially the visions of people in power. Most masterpieces of prose, poetry, theater, and film have been passionately engaged in such critique. They are not political manifestos but their imagination generates alternative visions of reality. Artists create their own imaginary worlds which are in contradiction with the real worlds. Plato's *Republic*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Goethe's *Faust*, Welles's *Citizen Kane*, and Chaplin's *Modern Times* are all mixtures of reality and fantasy where the real world is criticized or rejected. The messages were not only original and inventive but often shocking.

Thus, those in power often try to limit the negative liberty of art. Various "fears of art" result in various forms of censorships and constraints (Edelman 1995: 42-44; Carmilly-Weinberger 1986). Some regimes just ban unwanted artistic projects; under Communism many Russian, Polish, and Czech writers had no chance to publish their works. Most of the time, however, political censorship aimed not at eliminating art entirely but rather to use it for the benefits of the regime. The standards of artistry were politically dictated, some artistic actions were officially accepted and celebrated, while other works were publicly criticized or considered hostile. Socialist realism and Nazi neo-classicism were the most extreme attempts to monopolize political power ruling arts. The artistic lives of such artists as for instance Shostakovich were the examples of fluctuating interferences. They had periods of relative freedom when they could create in their own styles, but soon the needs of political propaganda (or just the changing tastes of party leaders) destroyed any form of

freedom; they had to compose works celebrating the October Revolution, the Communist nation, and the Party.

However, the negative concept of liberty does not embrace artistic freedom in its entirety. Creativity, imagination, invention, originality, thoughtfulness, and beauty are not born just because artists are left alone. Negative non-interference seems not enough. An artist should be free to create not just anything but something meaningful and inspiring. If he romantically expresses his emotions, his expression should be refined in its form and beauty. If he is critical, his criticism of the real world should not be an ill spirited rejection, but a step towards a better vision. Most people believe that a brilliant artist can do much more than ordinary people. He can write poetry, design architecture, dance, and compose music like no one else. There are brilliant things that only he can create. As Horace Kallen poetically puts it, an artist is “a privileged soul endowed with a mysterious freedom” (Kallen 1942: 3). Art is a work of genius. In Berlin’s terms, since he can do more, his freedom is greater. Moreover, an artistic spirit should also affect those who enjoy his creativity. His freedom should contribute to mine; great art could be liberating.

Some of the best known declarations of artistic thought are therefore rooted in the positive notion of freedom, self-knowledge and inner self. To name just a few artists who have written on the subject: “It is Art, and Art only, that reveals us to ourselves” (Oscar Wilde); “Art attracts us only by what it reveals of our most secret self” (Jean-Luc Godard). “There is not a single true work of art that has not in the end added to the inner freedom of each person who has known and loved it” (Camus 1960: 184). Philosophers of art develop such powerful thoughts. E. E. Sleinis puts it is beautifully: “The three core features of the art enterprise are that it fosters freedom, it creates objects that command, sustain, and reward contemplation, and it fosters and enlarges the inner life of individuals” (Sleinis 2003: 4-5). It would be hard to find a more decisive description of artistic freedom as positive liberty. It seems almost evident that invention, creativity, originality, and imagination are clearly in sync with free agency and self-mastery. Imagination needs freedom; only self-confident artists can be original and inventive; only self-masterly agents can be truly creative and artistic.

As we shall see, however, the picture of unproblematic unity of positive liberty and artistic freedom is not so crystal clear.

3. WHAT IS WRONG WITH POSITIVE LIBERTY?

The distinction between negative and positive liberty is not merely conceptual. For Berlin it has strong normative implications. He argues that positive liberty easily gets misinterpreted and misunderstood. History is full of evidence how horrible can be the consequences of such misunderstandings. The following three arguments are crucial.

3.1. THE POVERTY OF NORMATIVE MONISM

Berlin's first objection to positive liberty is its intrinsically limited scope of human goals. He calls it monism: the conception of positive liberty seems to assume that there is a single universal pattern of values for all human beings, namely that of self-control or self-mastery. According to Berlin, such vision is faulty, because human beings have many legitimate goals and values. Self-control, autonomy, and independence are significant human values, but so are justice, equality, solidarity, safety, productivity, wisdom, happiness, spontaneity, social acceptance, and so on. For liberal political thinkers, including Berlin, the idea of liberty must be consistent with pluralism of human goals and values. Every individual ought to be at liberty to cherish her own ideals. As John Stuart Mill (1975: 18) puts it, "the only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way." Berlin identifies negative liberty with a pluralistic and tolerant view of human values and does it with passionate intensity. It is his important point that the differences of values and ideals are often uncompromising and permanent. Toleration, then, "is historically the product of the realization of the irreconcilability of equally dogmatic faiths, and the practical improbability of complete victory of one over another" (Berlin 1982: 78). History has taught us that it is prudent to tolerate opposing views even if we consider them mistaken. People can and always will err and we have to accept that possibility. In general, concludes Berlin, pluralism is "a truer and more humane ideal" than the monistic ideal of positive self-mastery (Berlin 1990: 171).

3.2. THE PARADOX OF LIBERATING COERCION

Berlin argues that the monistic approach to human values has extremely dangerous implications. If there is a single superior model of human goals, all human beings should – for their own good – pursue those best goals. People who pursue different goals act in wrong ways; there is something wrong with their perception of the best goals. They do not know what the right way to live is or they do not know how to take this way or they do not want to do this. In any case, it is bad for them to continue their ignorant or evil or twisted ways.

They do not self-realize themselves correctly and are not truly free. Such people should improve their behavior and they may need help in doing so. They are like children who have to be educated, disciplined, coached, and tutored. It is good for them to be taught or pressed or even forced to act properly. They are like drug addicts who desire things which are bad for them and ultimately are killing them. Sometimes they have to be coerced to save their lives. Such helpful coercion is fully legitimate: "it is possible, and at times justifiable, to coerce men in the name of some goal (let us say, justice or public health) which they would, if they were more enlightened, themselves pursue, but do not, because they are blind or ignorant or corrupt" (Berlin 1990: 132-33).

The defenders of positive liberty, Berlin argues, assume that some individuals are able to discern this pattern more clearly than others. Some of them know what the correct goals are while others need help to find these correct ways. "This renders it easy for me to conceive of myself as coercing others for their own sake, in their, not my, interest. I am then claiming that I know what they truly need better than they know it themselves. What, at most, this entails is that they would not resist me if they were rational and as wise as I and understood their interests as I do" (Berlin 1990: 133). The authority of such leaders grows dangerously high. They are the philosopher-kings, paternalistic dictators who have power to bend everyone to this universal pattern, because this is the "right" thing to do. Paradoxically as it may sound, then, it is possible that one is – as the notorious defender of the idea of positive freedom Rousseau put it – "forced to be free." Berlin strongly criticizes the conception of self-mastery for this implication. "What had begun as a doctrine of freedom, turned into a doctrine of authority and, at times, of oppression" (1990: xlv; cf. 148). In practice, the idea of positive freedom leads to the political systems of interventionist state that administers and guides its citizens' lives. The Jacobins, the Bolsheviks, and the Maoists followed that logic.

3.3. THE DILEMMA OF COLLECTIVE LIBERTY

Finally, self-realization of one's life cannot be done in a vacuum; we live in a society and we have to become our masters there. In fact, human self-realization seems impossible without other people. We need them – their cooperation and participation – to manage our lives and make them meaningful. We belong to families, circles of friends, neighborhoods, workplaces, cities, and nations; those groups are parts of our identity. Thus positive freedom must be seen as significantly collective concept. Such implications seriously worried Berlin:

The real self may be conceived as something wider than the individual (as the term is normally understood), as a social 'whole' of which the individual is an element or aspect: a tribe, a race, a church, a state, the great society of the living and the dead and the yet unborn. This entity is then identified as being the 'true' self which, by imposing its collective, or 'organic,' single will upon its recalcitrant 'members', achieves its own, and therefore their, 'higher' freedom (Berlin 1990: 132).

The defenders of positive freedom – Berlin returns to Spinoza, Montesquieu, Burke, and others – believe in that unity of individual and collective selves just like two sides of a coin. On the one hand, in order to be free people need to live in free commonwealths; on the other, the citizens of free commonwealths are also by definition free, because the common interests of their communities include the individual interests of each and every citizen. The problem of legitimate "liberating" coercion returns. Berlin cites Spinoza making an illuminative analogy comparing citizens to children. "Children, although they are coerced, are not slaves," writes Spinoza, because "they obey orders given in their own interests." In the same way, "the subject of a true commonwealth is no slave, because the common interests must include his own" (Berlin 1990: 147). It is again unacceptable for Berlin. He points out that the ideals of collective self-determination by communities, nations, and social classes are almost always in sharp conflict with individual liberties (Berlin 1990: 171). Freedom is an individual value, just like happiness or moral responsibility. A person feels only her own happiness and has her own feeling of duty. A "higher" level of collective freedom is for most individuals nothing else but what Friedrich Hayek called "the road to serfdom."

These troublesome implications of value monism, liberating coercion, and collective liberty lead Berlin to a passionate rejection of positive liberty as a potentially dangerous notion. To be sure, he does not claim that these implications are logically necessary or practically unavoidable.⁴ His main thesis is historical. He maintains that in political practice positive liberty has been often perverted into a justification for authority or oppression (cf., Berlin 1990, p. xliii-xlvii). Modern history has illustrated the dangers and contradictions of positive liberty. For him it is not a contingent fact that such corruption has often happened to one conception and seldom to the other (cf., Berlin 1990: xlv). He wrote his essay in the middle of the Cold War and was shaken by the fact that the liberating idea of self-mastery was distorted by

⁴ In fact, when he responds to some of his critics, he makes it clear that the conception of positive liberty is "essential to a decent existence" (Jahanbegloo 1993: 41). He also admits that the conception of negative liberty is not free from its own far from perfect implications (cf. Berlin 1990: xlv-xlv).

political ideologies, especially Communism. “The perversion of the notion of positive liberty into its opposite – the apotheosis of authority – did occur, and has for a long while been one of the most familiar and depressing phenomena of our time” (Berlin 1990: xlvii). The French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and the Cuban Revolution, to name just a few, started with liberty as their highest value and ended with state terror and ruthless oppression. In these historic acts of “liberation,” millions of human lives were destroyed.

4. POSITIVE LIBERTY AND ARTISTIC FREEDOM

Berlin views the implications of positive liberty as extremely dangerous for politics, but one can argue that these dangers are even more destructive for arts.

Any attempt to create a *monistic unity* of values must fail in art. Hilary Putnam observes that art – he mentions Greek tragedy and Russian literature – by its nature cannot be reduced to a singular kind. In particular, it is a kind of knowledge opposing science in order to “contest the claim of science to monopolize reliable knowledge” (Putnam 1979). Art is diverse in its forms, means, truths, and values. The diversity of forms is so great it makes art almost impossible to define. For ages philosophers have tried to point at the essential common factor making “artistic” as different phenomena as music, architecture, literature, dance, photography, and others.⁵ Definitions refer to perception of beauty, freedom of expression, emotional reaction, formal perfection, truthful representation, and other factors, but none is really able to grasp the very essence. Hence art remains an open concept; just as years ago there were disputes concerning an artistic status of photography, one can expect more future disputes about new technologies opening new forms of creative activities. Designers of computer animations and simulations already claim artistic status; soon more new technologies will open new forms of expression. It will be discussed again whether they belong to art or not. The list of artistic acts and forms will grow.

The diversity of artistic goals and means is even more complex. There are many philosophies of art – focusing on its aesthetical representation, artistic expression, and formal construction, to name just the leading ones (cf. Sleinis

⁵ And many things are described in artistic ways. Bismarck called politics an art; Hemingway – bullfighting (*Death in the Afternoon*); Trotsky – insurrection (*History of the Russian Revolution*); for Sylvia Plath, “dying is an art, like everything else” (*Lady Lazarus*).

2003) – assuming different goals of artistic activities. Different goals realize in multiple areas of activity and apply different criteria of judgment. It has been said that in fine arts an artist's hands, head, and heart must contribute. Great art includes technical skills, creative talents, vivid imagination, intellectual sophistication, emotional sensitivity, subtlety of taste, and other abilities. Each has its own principles of perfection. There are no artists who possess all those perfections; some create brilliant works in purely intuitive ways, without full self-consciousness of possible interpretations; others load their pieces with great intellectual content; some display extraordinary talents in their hands and eyes; others may be technically quite primitive yet emotionally refined. In *Critique of Judgment*, after attempts to find a transcendental unity of aesthetics, Kant concludes that for beautiful art "imagination, understanding, spirit, and taste are requisite." No philosophical unification seems possible.

As such, arts have always grown on curiosity and inspirations from different cultures, traditions, peoples, religions, languages, moral, political, and economic orders. Eastern cultures have fascinated the West and vice versa. Artists have traveled to other continents to experience different cultures and climates; some abandon their worlds and move to remote islands and deadly deserts; others decided to live poor and homeless to acquire artistic material. Joseph Conrad, Paul Gauguin, T. E. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, and many others could not live without such inspirations. All in all, lack of diversity seems unnatural and would be deadly for art.

Coercive interferences intending to produce valuable goods in arts seem even more confusing than in politics. One may believe that people can be forced to live more orderly and comfortable lives but to coerce in order to generate more artistic values seems absurd. Such attempts appear inconsistent for a couple of reasons. First, perception of art is not fully intentional, hence we cannot make ourselves enthusiastic or fascinated by it. Trying to choose to be enthusiastic is almost by definition not very enthusiastic. A pursuit of enjoyment or pleasure for its own sake will often fail because it is no fun to force oneself to have fun. There is an element of spontaneity in art which cannot be faked. Second, the important emotional element of art perception makes such inconsistencies even more striking. We do not choose our loves, sympathies, and fears, and we cannot fully control our artistic fascinations either. Sometimes we spontaneously and instantly love a piece of art we see for the first time, at another time we cannot force ourselves to love a piece even despite its overwhelming fame and celebration. Overall, artistic values and feelings are beyond our control. We cannot force anyone or anything to be artistic and ingenious.

It is, of course, a simple historical fact that such forceful interventions in artistic creations have been constantly made. From the beginnings of human civilization, the sponsors of arts were usually people of power. The greatest works of architecture were built to glorify pharaohs and emperors; the masterpiece portraits presented people who were rich, famous, and powerful; kings and popes employed artists to fascinate the minds of the masses. Henry VIII, Peter the Great, Napoleon, and Stalin demanded from artists to be presented as great leaders and human beings. Sponsors were censors who dictated what an artist was supposed to produce. In the Third Reich and the Soviet Union under Stalin artistic freedom was nonexistent. The artists were allowed merely to glorify a ruler, a revolution, a regime, a nation, an ideology (cf. Carmilly-Weinberger 1986: 100-38). But it was usually evident that the artists who followed such pressures were no longer creating their full potential. In the works of Michelangelo, Leonardo, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Kundera, and Hrabal we can usually easily see where they felt free to express their genius and where they were suppressed by censors.

Finally, the idea of *collective liberty* seems inconsistent in many ways with the very essence of art. Oscar Wilde proclaimed art “the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known” (*The Soul of Man under Socialism*). It would be very hard to find an artist who would disagree. This article is not a place to discuss the great variety of art theories, but a brief look at some of them illustrates their overwhelming individualism (cf. Kallen 1942; Kivi 1997).

First, the mainstream theories of art regard individual expression as the primary element of any artistic activity. Artists express their emotions such as love or anger or anxiety; they express fascination with the world or dissatisfaction with it; they express their imagination and fantasy. Romantic and expressionistic trends in art illustrate that understanding. According to Goethe, “individuality of expression is the beginning and end of all art” (*Proverbs in prose*; cf. Kallen 1942: 215-33).

Second, artistic expression can be also seen as an element of more complex theories of art, as a form of communication between an artist and a receiver. Sometimes the language of communication is intuitive or primitive; sometimes it is rich in symbolic meanings. For most writers, poets, musicians, and composers their work is a transmission of feelings between them and a reader or a listener. Again, it is an interaction between individual creators and individual art lovers. Creation and perception are emotional individual matters. Third, those who understand arts as special forms of imitation or representation of the world also recognize individualistic elements. The artists who paint

portraits or landscapes present their perception; the writers who tell a story put it in their own words and style; even photographers do not just copy a piece of reality but make pictures from their specific perspectives. Such concepts of art sometimes refer to the objective values of beauty, but still must rely on individual perception. Beauty may be an intrinsic feature of a piece of art or nature, but it has to be individually discovered and appreciated. An artist presents his vision of an object and intends to affect the feelings and imagination of a viewer.

There are multiple other ways to understand art, but all of them include individual involvement. Many ancient thinkers understood art as perception of proportion or harmony. It could be enjoyed by reason in music as well as mathematics (cf. Kivi 1997: 179-217; Kallen 1942: 754-88); it can be a domain of pure instinct in rhythm and dance. For centuries art was an experience of something mysterious, be it God's love, the beauty of nature, the infinity of the universe or the fear of death. It is impossible to imagine any world religion without its own aesthetic symbols and expressions. Today art has many more interpretations and functions. In the age of Hollywood, it has to be not only beautiful and imaginative, but also exciting and entertaining. The arts are used as means of education and psychological therapy. Art is politically expressive: anarchistic graffiti and punk rock music express criticism of society; stunning architecture and glorifying hymns can be the tools of powerful manipulation and intimidation. All those different forms of aesthetic experience have in common their appeal to individual feelings and impressions. Whatever is our interpretation of art, it remains a mode of individualism and any form of its collectivization contradicts its nature.⁶

5. LIBERTY AS NON-DOMINATION

There have been interesting attempts to provide new interpretations of the idea of liberty as alternatives to Berlin's dichotomy, but none of them has gained significant popularity among political philosophers.⁷ Only recently, after a long

⁶ There have been, of course, theories of art which interpret it as a mainly social product. Karl Marx dreamed that in a future communist society "the painter" as an individual artist would no longer exist, instead – in an ultimate collectivistic manner – "he would be one of those who are able to paint." But it seems that such understanding of art has rather been the product of philosophers than artists (cf. Eagleton 1990); there have been many Marxist theorists of art but hardly any Marxist artist. Anyway, such theories seem to be in rapid retreat today and usually sound quite anachronistic.

⁷ Cf. Putterman 2006; Miller 1991; Gerald MacCallum's "triadic" conception of freedom has to be noticed: "freedom is always *of* something (an agent or agents), *from* something, *to* do, not do, become, or not become something; it is a triadic relation. Taking the format 'x is (is not)

debate between liberalism (traditionally associated with negative liberty) and communitarianism (along with some forms of socialism usually coupled with positive liberty) as two leading trends of political philosophy, a dynamically developing alternative of classical republicanism has emerged. There are scholars considering the republican tradition seminal; they write about a historic “paradigm shift,” a “republican turn” or a “republican revival” in social thought.⁸ Republicans return to the ancient idea of the *res publica*, a unique Roman model of a commonwealth ruled by law and free from tyranny and corruption. Historically speaking, the republican tradition of thought includes Cicero, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Harrington, de Tocqueville, and the American Founding Fathers. Contemporary republicans consistently return to those predecessors.

A very specific idea of liberty is undeniably the central element of the republican tradition and contemporary republican authors leave no doubt that their understanding of liberty is a response to the difficulties noted by Isaiah Berlin. When Quentin Skinner, Philip Pettit, Charles Taylor, Iseult Honohan, John Maynor, and Maurizio Viroli introduce their ideas of republican liberty they invariably open their discussions with Berlin’s distinction.⁹ Philip Pettit in particular introduced the notion of “non-domination” as an explicit answer to Berlin’s conceptualization: “The dichotomy between the ideals of non-interference and self-mastery” – he writes – “leaves space, and indeed saliently leaves space, for a third possibility: the ideal of non-domination” (Pettit 1997: 25). This notion is currently universally accepted as the principal meaning of republican liberty.¹⁰

free from y to do (not do, become, not become) z ,’ x ranges over agents, y ranges over such ‘preventing conditions’ as constraint, restrictions, interferences, and barriers, and z ranges over actions or conditions of character or circumstance” (MacCallum 1991: 102). Interestingly, while for some philosophers it is an ultimate understanding of liberty, many others neglect it as practically marginal.

⁸ The bulk of republican literature is already impressive. The following outlooks are currently the most informative ones: White 1994; Pettit 1997, 2001; Skinner 1998; Onuf 1998; Honohan 2002; Viroli 2002; Maynor 2003.

⁹ Cf. Skinner 1986: 227; 1990: 293; 1991: 183-84; 1992: 214-15; Pettit 1993: 15-16; 1996: 577; 1997: 17-18; 2001: 128-29; Taylor 1979: 175-77; Honohan 2002: 135-37; Maynor 2003: 16-19; Viroli 2002: 38-41.

¹⁰ In a couple of earlier publications, Pettit introduces a couple of other conceptions of liberty, called “resilient non-interference” (Pettit 1993) and “antipower” (Pettit 1996). The idea of non-domination is a development of these earlier conceptions and includes some of their elements. Quentin Skinner’s conception of republican liberty was initially different from Pettit’s but in his later extensive essay, *Liberty before Liberalism*, accepts Pettit’s ideas although using different terminology. He calls it “neo-Roman” concept of liberty. Other writers simply follow Pettit’s vocabulary.

Pettit defines liberty as non-domination in three major points: an agent is free from someone else's domination when (1) no one has a capacity to interfere (2) on an arbitrary basis (3) in certain choices that the agent is in a position to make herself (Pettit 1997: 52). In its ordinary sense, interference is arbitrary, hence dominant, when its sole motivation is a self-interested liking of an interfering agent without respect to the dominated person.¹¹ An agent who is able to perform some actions and make decisions independently should not be interfered with in such coercive manner. However, these three conditions do not reveal the full meaning of non-domination. Non-domination is not just a lack of domination. In Pettit's words, "non-domination involves a sort of immunity or security against interference on an arbitrary basis, not the mere absence of such interference" (Pettit 1997: 69). Such immunity is an intrinsic aspect of non-domination, especially when compared to the negative conception of liberty as non-interference. Non-domination means more than non-interference; it is itself a form of capability or power. "It represents a control that a person enjoys in relation to their own destiny and such control constitutes one familiar type of power: the power of the agent who can prevent various ills happening to them" (Pettit 1997: 69).

Since modern republicans intend to demonstrate that their political philosophy is a strong alternative to contemporary liberalism,¹² the distinction between republican non-domination and liberal non-interference is vital. Skinner, Pettit, and their followers emphasize that their ideas of republican liberty are negative – they are still freedoms *from* some obstacles – yet radically different from liberal non-interference. Non-domination and non-interference conceptually overlap but differ in some significant respects. An agent may interfere in another agent's actions yet not dominate him. Since only arbitrary interference qualifies as domination, the agent who legitimately interferes due to fair principles or democratic laws is not dominating. In particular, when it is not an individual but a legal institution or a democratic political body that interferes, the intrusion is not considered dominant. At the same time, it is possible to be wholly dominated and yet free from interference. Pettit illustrates this point with an ancient allegory of a master-slave relationship¹³: "slavery is essentially characterized by domination, not by actual interference: even if the slave's

¹¹ Patchen Markell presents an interesting discussion over the concept of "arbitrariness" in Pettit as ambiguous and being a serious weakness of non-domination (Markell 2008: 13-16).

¹² Some authors make strong claims that republicanism is clearly superior to liberal philosophy. According to Viroli, for instance, "liberalism can be considered an impoverished or incoherent version of republicanism, but not an alternative to republicanism" (Viroli 2002: 61).

¹³ Cicero, Roman philosopher and statesman, defined liberty (*libertas*) as "life without a master" (*De re publica* II.xxiii) and his allegorical juxtaposition of *liber* and *servus*, free citizen and slave, is recalled very often in contemporary republican literature. Cf. Pettit 1993: 576; 1997: 31-35; Honohan 2002: 36-37; Maynor 2003: 36-37; Viroli 2001: 48-49.

master proves to be entirely benign and permissive, he or she continues to dominate the slave” (Pettit 1997: 32). The slave may be allowed to do practically anything, but behind his activity there is always the master’s capability to intrude without any respect to the slave’s interests and wants. That potential power of the master is arbitrary and hence dominating.

Republican sense of liberty as non-domination is to be institutionalized in the republic as a political regime based not only on the rule of law but also on civic participation and patriotic engagement. Citizens who want their goals to be realized must be actively involved in the political process. By participating in civic life they strengthen their motivation and admiration for common values. They realize their freedom from domination. Republicans follow the recent trends of democratic theory and propose various forms of public deliberation and contestation as ways to participate. Public deliberation is direct participation in decision-making procedures; political contestation is monitoring and challenging governmental decisions. Republicans argue that the ability to contest political decisions and policies is more fundamental than the possibility to vote and participate in decision-making.¹⁴

Civic participation strengthens the emotional and moral foundations of the republic. Republicans put great stress on strong interdependence between liberty and civic responsibility.¹⁵ Since only a free and strong republic can secure liberty, in order to be truly free we have to, in Skinner’s words, “devote ourselves wholeheartedly to a life of public service” (Skinner 1992: 217, 222). Viroli emphasizes that liberty needs passions (Viroli 2002: 12). Citizens should serve the common good with commitment and loyalty. The republic is founded on citizens’ emotional involvement, dedication, and public-spiritedness. It needs an intense sense of responsibility, self-constraint, patriotism, courage, and solidarity. Modern republicans enthusiastically recall the ancient ideas of civic virtue, civic duty, and civic education as tools of effective political organization. They leave no doubt that such intense civic engagement must sometimes override individual interests and freedoms.

¹⁴ Honohan extensively develops the former, Pettit and Maynor – the latter; cf. Honohan 2002: 221-38; Pettit 1997: 183-200; Maynor 2003: 155-73.

¹⁵ Cf. Honohan 2002: 158-66, 174-79; Pettit 1997: 241-70; Maynor 2003: 174-202; Viroli 2002: 69-103.

6. NON-DOMINATION AND SELF-MASTERY

While Pettit is quite specific in distinguishing his concept of non-domination from Berlin's non-interference, the difference between non-domination and self-mastery in his thought remains much more problematic. The readers of Berlin and Pettit must have a strong impression that the notions of self-mastery and non-domination are quite often identical. Similarly to Pettit's descriptions of domination – "an absolute power of arbitrary interference" that was available "to slave-holders over their slaves" (Pettit 1997: 57) – Berlin also returns to the master-slave allegories in his presentations of self-mastery: a free man is to be "self-directed" and not "acted upon" by other men, like "a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role" (Berlin 1990: 131; also 122). According to Berlin, "I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own" (Berlin 1990: 131); for Pettit, non-domination is being a subject of one's decisions, not an object of someone else's wish (Pettit 1997, p. 53-57). In Berlin's words, "I wish to be somebody, not nobody" (Berlin 1990: 131); in Pettit's, "You are a somebody ... not a nobody" (Pettit 1997: 71). Such examples abound.

The similarities are indeed striking. Berlin's self-mastery and Pettit's non-domination seem to be in concert in their terminology of dependence or independence, mastery or slavery, being a subject or an object, and being somebody or nobody. Contrary to Pettit's declarations that non-domination saliently differs from self-mastery (Pettit 1997: 25), his terminology is virtually identical with Berlin's language of positive liberty. And the conventional usage of both self-mastery and non-domination seems to confirm this resemblance. When no one dominates or subjugates my decisions and actions, I am my own boss. When no one enslaves me, I consider myself a master of my life. In Berlin, in common English, and in common sense perhaps, freedom as non-domination seems very close to self-mastery.

One might argue that a closer look can prove that the similarity of style and language is merely superficial. In order to avoid this difficulty, and to compare both conceptions on a deeper level, we have to comprehend their essential meaning, not just wording. Following this line of reasoning, we indeed discover some differences between Berlin's conception of self-mastery and Pettit's non-domination. While Berlin's definition of self-mastery emphasizes the agent's control over her own actions, Pettit, in his definitions of power and domination (Pettit 1996: 578; 1997: 52-58), focuses on the control other agents have over one's actions. For Berlin, an agent is a master of her decisions and actions when she – and she alone – is in control of them. Other agents have no control of her behavior. Pettit's domination seems to be an exactly opposite

situation: an agent is dominated when she does not control her actions, because other agents do.

Clearly, however, these two options do not exhaust all possibilities. The redefining of self-mastery and domination in terms of control adds another two options. My decisions and actions can be controlled in four ways:

- (A) My decisions and actions are under my exclusive control, no one else has any control (Berlin's *self-mastery* in its pure form).
- (B) My decisions and actions are under my control as well as someone else's.
- (C) My decisions and actions are under neither my control nor anyone else's.
- (D) My decisions and actions are under someone else's total control, not mine (Pettit's *domination* in its pure form).

If self-mastery and non-domination really differ, options B and C must constitute the difference. Literally speaking, one may claim that one's non-domination includes both options free from someone else's control, i.e. options A and C. In this sense, non-domination would indeed, as Pettit claims, differ from self-mastery. Option C constitutes the difference.

However, it would be rather odd to claim that the ideal of non-domination includes both options A and C. Option C cannot be a part of the value of non-domination, because it is not a valuable option. When no one – not even myself – controls my behavior, I cannot enjoy this situation as non-domination. It seems to be a state of total uncertainty and vulnerability. Hobbes's state of nature – when society is in a state of lawless chaos and everyone's life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (*Leviathan*, chap 13) – represents option C. If the chaotic option C is valueless, then in terms of external control the ideal of non-domination is identical with the ideal of self-mastery.

What about option B, when the agent shares some control of her actions with other agents? Perhaps this is the middle ground that distinguishes Pettit's non-domination from Berlin's self-mastery. It does not seem to be the case either. While Pettit might be able to accept option B as a form of non-domination (other agents' partial influence or control is not yet a state of domination), Berlin can also view this option as a form of self-mastery. Realistically speaking, it seems that both philosophers have to include option B in their conceptions, because pure self-mastery (option A) looks like a rare, if not completely abstract, possibility. Some agents, individuals and institutions, constantly influence our decisions and actions. Most of the time, we are not free from these partial forms of control. Even when we claim our (full) self-mastery, we tacitly assume these partial impacts. I can imagine, for instance, flying my private jet as an ultimate example of total freedom; the whole world is below and there is only sky above me. In fact, my apparently full freedom

depends on many people, including those operating navigation systems, those who oil my engines and tank fuels. When we claim our free non-domination, we tacitly assume such minor impacts as natural and self-evident.

7. REPUBLICAN NON-DOMINATION AND ARTISTIC FREEDOM

If neither option B nor C can be viewed as significantly differentiating non-domination and self-mastery then it remains an open question whether the idea of non-domination can overcome the difficulties associated with the concept of positive liberty. Interestingly, the relatively insignificant differences may have some appealing implications, especially for our subject of artistic freedoms.

Monopolizing elements of *value monism* which worried Berlin so much are clearly present in republican philosophy. Pettit, for instance, declares that the ideal of non-domination should be the “supreme political value,” a central goal “overarching other goals,” and “the one and only yardstick by which to judge the social and political constitution of a community” (Pettit 1997: 80-81 and *passim*).¹⁶ The republican constitution is called “the only type of regime” that guarantees liberty. Taylor argues that republicanism must concentrate on “a certain canonical form” of social order and no goals can be satisfied outside such a foundation (Taylor 1979: 181). Other republicans echo those monistic claims.

It seems, however, that such radical declarations are not quite consistent with the essence of non-domination since it partly maintains its association with negative liberty as freedom *from* something. Thus, different social activities and phenomena can peacefully coexist in societies which are politically organized in non-dominant ways. Such regimes – slightly against the monopolizing tendencies of republican philosophers – would not need claim a monopoly in legitimate values. Non-dominant political regimes could remain open societies where different cultures, various traditions, multiple values, and diverse views can interact and inspire artistic activities. Non-dominant social environment should not impose its ideas on arts and leave them independent. Under such conditions art can flourish.

The unruly paradox of *liberating coercion* also remains present in republican philosophy. Skinner, Pettit, Taylor, and other republican philosophers cannot avoid its worrisome implications. Skinner declares that in the republican order

¹⁶ The superiority of “non-domination as a political ideal” is developed in Pettit 1997: 80-97 and several following articles. In a recent article, Patchen Markell (2008) questions these ambitious claims as unjustified.

common interests prevail and an individual can be forced – in his own and everyone else’s best interest – to choose correctly: “the enjoyment of our personal liberty may often have to be a product of coercion and constraint” (Skinner 1991: 247). Pettit admits the ideal of non-domination is “a very dense and demanding goal” and contemporary states would need to make some “radical changes in traditional social life” to introduce it (Pettit 1997: 47-48). Taylor concludes then in a traditionally controversial manner of positive liberty: “men can, in short, be forced to be free” (Taylor 1979: 175; cf. Skinner 1986: 229, 235; 1990: 295). The notion of civic education is very strong in the republican tradition and most contemporary philosophers continue the idea that the republic should shape its citizens (cf. Maynor 2003: 174-92; Honohan 2002: 147-79). Such passages would be certainly very worrisome for Berlin.

However, the stress on the non-arbitrary character of republican liberty defines its partial difference from positive liberty and its dangers. In republican philosophy, not all constraints and interferences dominate, only arbitrary ones do. Some constraints are necessary but when they are democratically justified and institutionally controlled they are acceptable. That seems to be in sync with artistic philosophies and practical experience. Not all constraints are stealing artistic freedom. Contrary to Camus’s thought opening this article, not all constraints are necessarily killing the value of artistic creation. In his *Reflections on Literature and Morality* (1959) Andre Gide wrote: “The great artist is one whom constraint exalts, for whom the obstacle is a springboard.” Indeed, under all possible political regimes, many great artists have experienced more or less serious pressures and quite often such constraints made their work more refined and sophisticated. The hidden messages which Dante, Leonardo, Shakespeare, Hans Holbein, Nikolai Gogol, and Andrei Tarkovsky included in their artwork still fascinate us with their artistry. They were pressed, but used such pressures as elements of their work.

The republican political regime would be certainly very demanding for its citizens. Some argue that the idealistic models of devoted and diligent citizens can become oppressive. But such worries should not be exaggerated. The political foundations of republican regime – the rule of law, constitutional order, the system of checks and balances – should be able to eliminate arbitrary interventions which could become dangerous. The demanding republican regime may not be enthusiastic about artists who are not civic participants and patriotic servants but its dissatisfaction should not inhibit artistic ideas and activities. The republican regime constrains itself this much.

The problem of *collective liberty* remains the most troublesome aspect of republican political philosophy. In Taylor, Skinner, Pettit, Viroli, and other republicans the superiority of collective liberty over individual is undeniable.

For Taylor, “being free is governing ourselves collectively” (Taylor 1979: 181, 178). According to Skinner, collective freedom is a necessary condition of individual freedom (1992: 221) and “a self-governing republic” is the only community where the liberty of its citizens can be protected (1991: 197). Pettit presents the collective nature of republican non-domination in a broader context of the strife between liberalism and republicanism. Within the liberal tradition, according to him, “individuals are the primary subjects of freedom and societies the secondary,” “a society is free in virtue of the freedom of the individuals who live there, and not vice versa.” The republican tradition, on the other hand, views liberty as a mostly collective notion: “republicans speak of societies as the primary subjects of freedom, individuals as the secondary, so that individuals count as free in virtue of the freedom of their society, and not vice versa” (Pettit 1993: 32). It would be difficult to express collectivistic devotion more clearly.¹⁷ Republican liberty as non-domination is not possible without collective priorities.

As already indicated in section 4, there is immense historical evidence that it is difficult to find good space for artistic invention and originality under such collectively oriented political systems. Artists were forced to place their work into the service of a political regime and its propaganda. The interests of the state, the country, and the nation prevailed – often in brutal ways – over invention and originality. Republicanism is of course far from such oppressive regimes; it appeals to democratic values and institutions. But its collectivistic force remains strong. The dangers of positive liberty linger in republican political philosophy. The pressures of republicanism would be far from brutal coercion of totalitarianism, but its quite direct demands for civic engagements and patriotism may also be very suppressive. In particular, to cultivate civic engagement, the republican political regime claims right to control political education: “In order to instill these values in the citizenry, a modern republican state will directly interfere, but not in arbitrary manner, in the education of citizens” (Maynor 2003: 182; cf. Honohan 2002: 158-64). One may worry that a strong governmental pressure for civic involvement – even if based on democratic principles – may affect other areas of education as well. In particular, aesthetical education oriented toward civic engagement would be a great constraint of artistic freedom. Artists want to enjoy freedom in deciding whether to engage in political activities or not; most of them, in fact, prefer to remain disengaged. Any pressure limiting such freedom of choice might be disruptive. It is a very important question how disruptive such pressure would be but we have to leave it for another occasion. With some hope we can probably assume that such political forces could be obnoxious but not deadly.

¹⁷ Cf. also Pettit 1997: 144, 259 and passim; 2001: 104-24; Honohan 2002: 150-58 and passim; Viroli 2002: 79-103.

8. CONCLUSION

It is still hard to predict what the actual political influence of republican political philosophy and its concept of non-domination can be but the foregoing analysis points at some potential problems in both theory and practice. While its relative mildness and pressure for civic engagement can be seen as relatively mild and could be overcome to some degree (even against the very will of the republican founders), the collectivistic nature of republican liberty remains in sharp conflict with the individualistic nature of artistic freedom. If classical republicanism begins to acquire more real political power we have to pay more attention to that problematic factor in order to protect artistic freedoms.

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POLITYCZNA NIE-DOMINACJA I WOLNOŚĆ ARTYSTYCZNA (streszczenie)

Wzajemne powiązania pomiędzy wolnością polityczną i artystyczną są niewątpliwie złożone i interesujące, ale nie stały się popularnym obiektem głębszej refleksji filozoficznej. Główną intencją niniejszego artykułu jest wypełnienie tej luki i zaproponowanie pojęciowych ram do bardziej systematycznej analizy przedmiotu w kontekście najnowszych dyskusji nad rozumieniem wolności w filozofii politycznej. Przez półwiecze dyskusje nad wolnością opierały się na sformułowanym przez Isaiaha Berlina rozróżnieniu pomiędzy wolnością „negatywną” i „pozytywną”, lecz w ostatnich kilkunastu latach okazała się żywotna trzecia koncepcja. Filozofowie należący do nurtu „klasycznego republikanizmu” – do którego między innymi należą tak szeroko znani autorzy jak Quentin Skinner, Philip Pettit i Maurizio Viroli – zaproponowali swoje oryginalne rozumienie wolności jako „nie-dominacji (*non-domination*).” Artykuł analizuje teoretyczne i praktyczne konsekwencje, jakie te trzy ważne koncepcje wolności miały, mają i mogą mieć dla działalności artystycznej. Wstępne wnioski sugerują że nowe rozumienie wolności nie rozwiązuje niektórych problemów zawartych w klasycznej terminologii Berlina – mianowicie „republikańska” wizja polityki zdaje się ograniczać wolność artystyczną do pewnego stopnia podobnie do wizji „pozytywnej” – ale wnioski te zachęcają do dalszej obszerniejszej analizy.

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L'OEIL EMANCIPIÈA (EMANCIPATION OF THE EYE)

Abstract: The issue of the interaction of language and image in arts is often raised in philosophy. Contemporary philosophy – beginning with Nietzsche – recognizes the domination of language over image observed in the Western culture and highlights the fact that for quite a long time we have been witnessing the crisis of their interdependence. In the article I present the problem in the light of the writings of three authors: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, François Lyotard, and Louis Marin. I specify the remedies of anti-logocentric criticism represented by the aforementioned writers, as well as the cultural and artistic transformations which they discern, and which trigger the process of liberating the image from the logocentric supremacy.

Keywords: anti-logocentric critique – metaphysical theories of vision – connivance of vision and thinking – pure receptivity

Il s'agira dans cet article de montrer la coprésence du langage et de l'image dans le processus de constitution des sens artistiques, ainsi que le fait, que l'un aussi bien que l'autre sont des éléments de l'histoire de la conscience philosophique. Cette histoire, si l'on prend en compte l'un de ses aspects, est celle de la domination du langage conceptuel sur l'image, et celle de l'acceptation de cette domination par la philosophie.

Nous assistons aujourd'hui à une crise de cette hiérarchie des dépendances. Je vais montrer des exemples des approches mettant en question cette priorité de la conscience discursive sur les moyens représentatifs, ainsi que la priorité – qui en est la conséquence – du langage sur l'image. Je vais commencer par la façon dont voit ce problème Merleau-Ponty, surtout à cause des inspirations phénoménologiques de ses conceptions, qui servent de point de référence pour les opinions de Lyotard présentées ici-même.

Dans la deuxième partie j'irai au-delà de l'approche phénoménologique en présentant le point de vue de Louis Marin et montrant les convergences de sa pensée avec celle de la postphénoménologie, en ce qui concerne le sujet qui nous occupe.

Des chercheurs tels que Merleau-Ponty, Henry, Dufrenne, Marion, Maldiney et autres¹ accomplissent une sorte de "purification de la vision" (le mot est de Marion²), en lui prêtant la qualité phénoménologique de l'expérience originaire, d'une perception pure, antérieure à tout clivage sujet/objet et toutes les articulations linguistiques. Le retour à la chose-même, postulé par Husserl, est ici perçu comme le retour à une sensualité originellement vécue, et douée d'un certain ordre sensitif, bien que prélinguistique et dépourvu des références. Maldiney par exemple souligne, que ce qui "parle" dans l'art, ce ne sont pas les signes, mais les formes, et chez Dufrenne nous trouvons: "L'œuvre n'est pas un assemblage de signes, elle fait signe"³.

Sur cette voie de "la purification de la vision" les analyses des expériences de la vision pure jouent un rôle essentiel; mais il semble, que c'est le travail de critique et de démasquation qui est fondamental: la révélation, que toute l'histoire de la culture forme un champ de la réalisation d'une certaine "connivence" de la vision et de la pensée, dans le cadre de laquelle la vision est au service de la pensée. Cette dimension critique de la postphénoménologie harmonise aussi avec les tendances des philosophes aux orientations différentes. Aussi bien dans les travaux de Merleau-Ponty, d'un Lyotard, d'un Derrida que dans ceux d'un de Foucault⁴, ou de Marin, analysés ici-même, on assiste aux tentatives de décryptage des mécanismes et du sens philosophique et culturel de cette "collaboration" si particulière de la vision et du discours conceptuel. Dans le cadre de cette "connivence" la vision perd sa faculté de percevoir les choses telles qu'elles sont avant d'être prises dans un réseau des concepts. D'où aussi le postulat de Merleau-Ponty, de découvrir l'ordre perceptionnel de la vision dans sa particularité, dans sa différence de l'ordre conceptuel, de reconnaître son *logos* "tacite" (c'est-à-dire – non englobé dans le discours conceptuel). D'où aussi le double postulat de Lyotard: d'une part – arriver à la réceptivité pure de la vision, restituer à la vision son indépendance du mécanisme de "nommer", libérer l'image du pouvoir du langage; de l'autre – libérer le discours du diktat du signifié.

¹ M. Saison, *Le tournant esthétique de la phénoménologie*, Revue d'Esthétique, 1999, nr 36

² J.-L. Marion, *La croisée du visible*, PUF, Paris 1966, p. 77.

³ M. Dufrenne, "L'art est-il langage?", in: *Esthétique et philosophie*, Klincksieck, Paris 1967, v. 1, p. 111.

⁴ Voir p. ex. Derrida, *La vérité en peinture*, ou Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*.

En général ce vecteur antilogocentrique des analyses de Merleau-Ponty et de Lyotard s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une lutte postnietzschéenne et antimétaphysique contre la toute-puissance de la langue. C'est une lutte non seulement contre une certaine tradition d'origine cartésienne, mais aussi – et peut-être surtout – contre les interprétations contemporains et bien en vogue de la culture, plus ou moins proches du structuralisme. Ce serait aussi une protestation contre l'idée (utopique selon Lyotard) de la compréhension obtenue au moyen de la langue, contre l'idée du consensus.

Je vais m'appuyer sur les résultats des recherches de certains seulement des philosophes cités ci-dessus et je vais m'intéresser dans ces recherches à leur approche des problèmes de la "collaboration" de la langue et de l'image (ainsi que de la subordination de l'image à la langue, qui en est un moment) à travers les catégories du jeu de la signification et de l'indication.

C'est dans le cadre de ce jeu – et déjà au niveau de l'analyse critique – que se noue l'interdépendance ("le chiasme", aurait dit Merleau-Ponty) de ce qui est silence de la vision et ce qui est langage des sens. L'interdépendance qui d'une part fait du "dit" du discours une chose silencieuse à interpréter, et de l'autre – fait parler ce qui dans l'image est sensuel et silencieux.

1. LE CARACTERE ORIGINAL DE LOGOS DU VISIBLE

La structure de notre mode de penser la vision – dit Merleau-Ponty – est à deux étages: il y a la "vision" que je pense (l'objet de la pensée) et "la vision" („le vu") qui a la nature d'une expérience et que nous ne connaissons que grâce à l'expérience. Or la tradition métaphysique fusionne ces niveaux: elle fait de la vision un objet de la pensée. Pour Merleau-Ponty il s'agirait de penser l'expérience-même de la vision en évitant cette fusion conceptuelle. "Mais il ne suffit pas de penser pour voir: la vision est une pensée conditionnée, elle naît «à l'occasion» de ce qui arrive dans le corps, elle est «excitée» à penser par lui. Elle ne choisit ni d'être ou de n'être pas, ni de penser ceci ou cela."⁵ Cette "pensée de la vision" ne fonctionne pas d'après un plan préétabli, n'est pas subordonnée aux actes d'une conscience interprétée d'une façon volontariste. Cette "pensée de la vision" en tant qu'une expérience du sens donnée dans la vision (*logos* de la vision) n'est pas une forme de l'activité du sujet, mais plutôt une réceptivité, une ouverture vers le monde, selon le philosophe français – "un mystère de passivité". En effet, c'est le caractère inten-

⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *L'oeil et l'esprit*, Paris 1964, p. 71.

tionnel de la vision qui constitue son trait fondamental; elle désigne toujours la chose-même, sa transcendance. Elle est l'expérience de la faculté d'expression qui est propre aux choses, de leur état des choses visibles.

Comme chez Husserl, chez Merleau-Ponty le sens est quelque chose antérieur au *logos* conceptuel. Il existe un *logos* de ce qui est prédiscoursif; c'est – explique Merleau-Ponty – un système d'équivalence, un *Logos* des lignes, des lumières, des couleurs, des volumes, une présence nonconceptuelle de l'Être universel.

La révolution de la vision, qui s'était opérée grâce à la peinture contemporaine, consiste en la libération de la vision et du son *logos* propre du pouvoir de la pensée conceptuelle. Cette peinture a pour objet cet "ordre" d'apparition des choses-mêmes, propre à l'expérience de la vision, ce "système d'équivalence" dissimulé sous le réseau des schémas métaphysiques imposés à la vision, cette "présence nonconceptuelle de l'Être universel".

Pour Merleau-Ponty le "*logos* esthétique" précède l'ordre de la connaissance discursive. Une œuvre d'art, contrairement à un système de langage, n'est pas un instrument de la communication universelle. Par exemple dans une conversation, dans un discours scientifique ou philosophique, les sons du langage sont subordonnés à ce but principal, qu'est la transmission du sens, on peut donc les ignorer au profit du sens; en revanche l'idée d'une musique sans sons aurait été tout-à-fait absurde. L'art, indissolublement lié au moyens sensitifs de l'expression en tant qu'*aisthesis*, peut être interprété comme un univers clos, qui ne se réfère pas à la transcendance des sens, par exemple aux intentions des actes de langage. *Logos*, auquel se réfère l'art, est – comme je l'ai déjà souligné – une zone de l'ordre préexistant, précédant la coupure parole/chose, ou le sens est perçu dans sa indissolubilité avec son expression, avec sa dimension sensuelle et matérielle.

Cet ordre sensuel et tacite qui précède les articulations langagières n'est pas pourtant un ordre autonome, à cause – justement – de son caractère préexistant. Dans *Le visible et l'invisible* nous lisons: "Cependant il y a le monde du silence, le monde perçu, du moins, est un ordre ou il y a des significations non langagières, oui, des significations non langagières, mais elles ne sont pas pour autant *positives*"⁶. "Reste le problème du passage du sens perceptif au sens langagier, du comportement à la thématization (...) le langage réalise en brisant le silence ce que le silence voulait et n'obtenait pas. Le silence continue d'envelopper le langage"⁷. Le silence du monde perçu, et particulièrement le

⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, p. 225.

⁷ Ibid., p. 229-230.

silence de l'image pictural, son ordre caché, forment un ensemble des possibilités réalisées par le langage.

Il faut donc se rendre compte de cette vie silencieuse des concepts avant leur naissance. Il ne s'agit pas de rejeter le discours, mais de le placer dans un autre espace, où il aurait été la couronne du mystère originaire, que constitue notre contact sensuel avec le monde et son sens propre.

2. L'IMAGE COMME ARTICULATION NON-DISCOURSIVE DU SENS

Bien que Lyotard fait un grand effort pour garder et justifier la distance théorique entre lui et Merleau-Ponty, il est associé à lui par une tendance, d'origine phénoménologique commune, à élargir la catégorie de sens aux domaines qui échappent aux articulations conceptuelles (parmi lesquelles ils attachent une importance fondamentale à ce qui est vu), à la recherche de ce qui est avant le discours, ou ce qui dans le discours représente une articulation tacite du sens.

L'importance, que Lyotard accorde à la catégorie de silence est liée à l'aspect critique de son projet philosophique. Selon lui le but de la réflexion critique, contrairement aux constructions échafaudées par la philosophie moderne du sujet, est plutôt la découverte de ce qui dans les représentations de la culture garde le silence, que de ce qui y doit être dit. Ce but du criticisme philosophique, qui permet à Lyotard de nouer un discours avec Nietzsche, Freud et Heidegger, consiste à démasquer la violence du discours, contre laquelle on ne peut se défendre autrement qu'en appelant à ce qui est au-delà du discours. Lyotard se réfère à l'existence d'un sens tacite, qui se situe le long de la ligne séeparant les mots et les choses, dans un espace pas encore nommé, mais placé aux fondements de tout discours.

L'idée d'une présence du tacite dans la représentation, où le discours ne forme que la couche superficielle, est apparue déjà dans les premiers travaux de Lyotard. Dans son livre *La phénoménologie*, paru en 1954, il souligne le caractère paradoxal de la phénoménologie, qui en réalisant la tâche d'attendre l'originaire, se sert du langage malgré lui-même. Ce paradoxe marque la "ligne de résistance" de la philosophie lyotardienne face à la réduction du sens au domène du langage. Le philosophe français, en s'opposant à une telle réduction, tâche plutôt d'approcher le langage à ce qui est inommable, que de sortir de l'espace du langage. Il s'efforce à faire audible "la voix du silence" et "le

différend”. La recherche d’un idiome susceptible d’exprimer cet “inaudible”, est le but qu’il se propose dans son autre livre, *Discours, figure*.

Lyotard veut aller dans la voie antihegelienne plus loin que la phénoménologie. En s’opposant à la réduction du sens au domaine du langage, il va chercher dans la langue-même ce qui est impossible de nommer. Il verra dans la langue non seulement ce qu’elle signifie, mais aussi ce qu’elle indique. La radicalisation de la phénoménologie chez Lyotard, qui en apparence seulement semble proche à celle opérée par Merleau-Ponty, consisterait aussi d’un projet de dépassement philosophique du cercle tracé par la signification langagière, pour arriver à ce qui jusqu’alors appartenait dans la tradition européenne à un domaine hétérogène, radicalement différent de la langue, c’est à dire – au visible.

Selon Lyotard le visible ne diffère pas radicalement de l’exprimable. Bien au contraire, il est le mode d’existence de celui-ci, méconnu et jusqu’alors pas apprécié à sa juste valeur. Il est l’impulsion originaire du discours, sa distance constitutive, c’est-à-dire ce qui permet de parler et sans quoi on ne puisse pas parler.

Dans son travail *Discours, figure* Lyotard, en dépit du phonocentrisme occidental, défend l’œil et sa position dans le discours. Le visible c’est ce qui est radicalement et irréductiblement extérieur, qui ne se laisse pas interioriser en signification. Le symbole “donne à penser”, dit Ricœur. Pour Lyotard il est avant tout ce qui “donne à voir”. Dans sa fonction de figure (de forme, d’aspect, de ce qui est visible) la transcendance du symbole entame l’espace linguistique, en étant une exteriorité rebelle à la réduction au signification.

La représentation peut faire visible la vision elle-même et cette possibilité est comprise dans le jeu de la représentation, c’est-à-dire le jeu de la signification et de l’indication, propre à la représentation. Il faut respecter non seulement l’espace sémantique du langage et de l’image, mais aussi leur espace de l’indication, leur expression non-verbale. Cet espace, Lyotard la cherche aussi bien aux confins du discours en tant que son image, qu’à l’intérieur du discours, en tant que ce qui gouverne sa forme.

3. ANTI-LOGOCENTRISME PICTURAL

Lyotard remarque que la figure-image de la peinture classique, dont les règles étaient celles du discours métaphysique, diffère de la figure-image de la peinture contemporaine. Celle-ci est ouverte à “l’arrivée inopinée” de la vérité, parce que, contrairement à la peinture classique, elle est le lieu de l’exil des

règles de la signification (règles de la langue), le lieu de "l'erreur". Cézanne, selon Lyotard, ne peint pas pour parler, mais pour se taire.

Le tableau de Renaissance était construit selon les règles définies par le sujet, note Lyotard. (Soit dit en passant, les analyses de Damisch ou Foucault, beaucoup plus profondes à cet égard, soulignent le caractère réciproque de ce processus, c'est à dire le fait, que ces règles sont aussi le lieu de naissance du sujet lui-même). Les peintres de Renaissance délimitent un espace pictural, dont l'acteur principal est l'homme, et la signification à "lire" – la profondeur de l'univers représenté. Le point de rencontre des lignes de perspective réalise le projet de la "théatralisation généralisée", totalise ce qui est varié en une forme régulière et cohérente. Jeu des aspects qui caractérise la peinture de Renaissance, retrouve sa raison d'être par le renvoi à ce qui est au-delà du tableau, à un espace qui est "donné à lire" et cette tâche n'est pas la "vision" au sens dans lequel Lyotard voudrait employer cette notion.

Un tableau de Cézanne, qui se passe de focale, de pôle organisant son espace, n'est plus un communiqué "à lire". On regarde ces tableaux sans que l'œil soit employé à l'organisation d'un espace homogène. Bien au contraire: Cézanne obtient un effet de l'espace hétérogène, réalise l'égalité des droits pour ce qui dans les tableaux classiques ne formait que le contour d'une vision claire et précise. Il obtient un espace secondaire, périphérique, privé d'un principe constant. Il remplace les bonnes formes, conformes aux règles de la géométrie, par des formes irrégulières, inacceptables à l'œil éduqué, qui voudrait construire une image du monde reconnaissable. La représentation cesse d'être une synthèse basée sur les règles du sens et renvoyant aux mêmes règles dans le processus de la perception.

La peinture de Cézanne ôte à l'espace picturale sa subjectivité; elle n'est plus la vision d'un objet, mais une vision anonyme, qui ne fait que commencer le processus de l'organisation de l'espace, et se place donc au début du devenir du sujet. Cézanne ne peint pas le produit du travail de l'œil, mais ce qui se place à l'entrée de l'œil, il ne peint pas ce qui est donné, mais ce qui est la donation-même, quelque chose d'absolument passif et rebelle à toute tentative de récupération.

Il faut le souligner encore: l'ordre picturale cesse ici d'être un ordre des significations. Les formes et les couleurs ne sont plus des équivalents des paroles signifiants. La peinture de Cézanne rejette totalement ce que Derrida a nommé "le logocentrisme pictural", c'est-à-dire l'illusion, qu'est visible ce qui potentiellement est à exprimer en mots. Une peinture se situant à l'opposé de ce qui se laisse exprimer, accomplit un travail essentiel, en restituant le silence originaire de la peinture et en supprimant la violence, que lui fait subir le discours.

Être visible et tacite, cela fait aussi bien la faiblesse que la force de la peinture. La force dans ce sens, que ça situe l'expression picturale dans un espace extramimétique, un espace antérieur à la vérité de représentation comprise comme une fidélité au modèle. Cet espace est une zone de la réflexion tacite de la vision, préconceptuelle et mettant en retraite le discours conceptuel de la raison. Il s'agit donc moins de voir dans l'expérience picturale les limites de la possibilité de la réflexion philosophique sur cette expérience, que d'élargir concept-même de la réflexion. Cette réflexion tacite, contenue dans la vision, aurait correspondu au *logos* préconceptuel et tacite de Merleau-Ponty, présenté dans le chapitre précédent, si l'on fait la part de toutes les limites d'une telle analogie, découlant de la différence des perspectives philosophiques des deux penseurs.

4. LA VISIBILITE COMME LE JEU DE LA SIGNIFICATION ET L'INDICATION

La fondation réciproque, la complémentarité de l'image et du discours en tant que deux types de représentation, c'est le problème dominant des recherches de Louis Marin⁸. Pour employer la comparaison, forgée par Alberti, de la représentation picturale avec une fenêtre, selon Marin la représentation serait une fenêtre qui permet de voir le paysage extérieur, mais en même temps arrête la vision sur la surface-même du vitre. Marin se situe en opposition contre l'interprétation métaphysique de la structure des signes de la représentation, qui impose la nécessité du choix entre l'interprétation du signe comme une voie d'accès au contenu signifié, et l'interprétation du signe comme ce qui remplace le contenu signifié et où il serait toujours la question du choix de ce que nous cherchons: ou la "profondeur" de ce qui est représenté, ou la "surface" de ce qui représente.

L'auteur de *De la représentation* montre, que le langage et la peinture sont des domaines de soutien et de collaboration réciproques de deux attitudes perceptives et que leur interférence représente pour ces domaines une des leurs manières d'exister en tant que faits culturels des plus profonds. L'interrogation sur la "profondeur" de la peinture, c'est-à-dire – sur son contenu discursif, narratif, son sens anecdotique, descriptif, n'existe qu'en liaison avec les questions concernant sa "surface", c'est-à-dire son "corps empirique" sujet à l'analyse

⁸ Depuis les *Etudes sémiologiques. Ecritures, peintures* (1971), en passant par la *Sémiotique de la passion* (1972), *Détruire la peinture* (1977), jusqu'à *La parole mangée* (1986) et – analysées ici avant tout – *Des pouvoirs de l'image. Gloses* (1993) et *De la représentation*, Paris (1999).

symptomale. Ces questions, prises ensemble, mènent à analyser pas tellement ce qui est visible et la vision elle-même – prises dans leur disjonction – mais plutôt à un cercle problématique, qu'on pourrait définir comme le champ de la visibilité.

En choisissant cette 'optique, Marin trouve des points de rencontre avec la tradition phénoménologique, principalement Heideggerienne, transformée et avec l'analyse de la visibilité en tant que mécanisme de la constitution de l'espace symbolique de la culture (p.ex. de Damisch). Comme Merleau-Ponty et Lyotard il lie la problématique du langage et de la peinture. Son approche prend le contre-pied de la tradition occidentale dominante qui subordonne les moyens pictural au sens significatif langagière, le phénomène de la peinture, en gardant une relation avec la langue, se serait libéré du diktat de la discursivité. Le sens du tableau est ici interprété dans les termes de la tension entre son côté discursif d'une part et imagier-pictural de l'autre. Marin remarque, que la peinture prend pour son sujet la situation de voir elle-même, en englobant la vision du spectateur dans le champ de ce qui est représenté, qu'elle est – si l'on veut reprendre la comparaison d'Alberti – à la fois un paysage extérieur et un vitre couvert d'un relief.

La vision est un processus essentiellement asymétrique. En voyant je ne me vois pas moi-même, donc par l'acte de voir je mets en place des signes de ma propre absence pour moi-même, je remplace ma présence par la présence d'une chose vue. La métaphore de la vision, si souvent présente dans le langage de la philosophie occidentale, porte en soi quelque chose de cette 'asymétrie de la vision, qui accède ainsi au rang de la description d'une situation cognitive. Dans cette tradition notre contact cognitif avec la chose est marqué par l'asymétrie (qui s'exprime par l'asymétrie alternée du signifiant et du signifié dans la structure du signe). Celui qui voit ce qui est présent, est lui-même absent pour soi, il ne se voit pas. En revanche en se voyant nous-même, nous ne voyons pas la chose elle-même, mais telle qui est le résultat de l'opération de la construction de l'objet par le sujet. Ce problème, perçu déjà par Kant et la philosophie classique allemande (Schelling), était formulé dans les termes de l'incommensurabilité (c'est-à-dire de l'impossibilité de trouver une explication théorique commune) du sujet empirique et du sujet transcendantale.

La culture s'arrange avec cette asymétrie en constituant tout un système des médiations – des moyens, grâce auxquels le "je" voyant peut être présenté à la vision elle-même. Je peux me voir moi-même à travers ma représentation, si je la prends pour un signe ou une trace de ma présence. Le moyen de se voir à travers une représentation artistique, c'est de se faire un de ses éléments. La représentation artistique possède ses moyens propres pour faire entrer le

spectateur dans le jeu, en lui enlevant une partie du pouvoir, que lui donne sa position de l'observateur extérieur (elle découle de ce que l'observateur extérieur voit, n'étant pas vu, interprète, n'étant pas interprété, reconnaît, en n'étant pas reconnu). On l'arrache à sa position du contemplateur distant et théorique et on le place dans une position d'un objet du (auto)vision ou de l'interprétation symptomale.

Un de ces moyens est de placer à l'intérieur de la représentation un représentant du spectateur (*resp.* de l'auteur), ou de représenter la vision elle-même, de faire d'elle un sujet mystérieux, qui appelle une interprétation. Parmi les exemples bien connus du domaine de la peinture et de la littérature on peut citer comme des représentants du spectateur la personne mystérieuse d'un courtisan sur le seuil de la salle dans *Las Meninas* de Velazquez, Sganarel dans les comédies de Molière, Néron dans *Britannicus* de Racine ou enfin – pour appeler un exemple donné par Marin lui-même – l'homme dans la *Tempête* de Giorgione.

Cette stratégie fascinante conduit à l'autoconnaissance du sujet, qui pourtant dans l'acte même de reconnaissance perd son autonomie et se fait "un sujet à décrypter". La représentation absorbe et dissout l'autonomie du "je" voyant, qui – en tant que spectateur – est en même temps la condition et le résultat du processus de représenter. L'analyse sémantique du tableau (la reconnaissance de son contenu) et l'analyse symptomale (la reconnaissance du "je") se livrent ici une lutte sans merci, mais sans pouvoir se passer l'une de l'autre. Cette stratégie est un des aspects de la manière de fonctionner du discours littéraire (ce qu'essayait, par exemple, démontrer Roland Barthes), et aussi de la peinture (ce que démontre, par d'autres moyens que la textologie, Marin).

Le diagnostic de Marin concernant les mécanismes représentatifs de la culture occidentale suit les traces du criticisme de Nietzsche et de Foucault. Dans ses points principaux elle correspond aussi aux intentions de Derrida.

Le langage et l'image se soutiennent réciproquement dans la culture de représentation dominée par le discours cognitif – dit Marin, en appelant aux thèses de Hubert Damisch. Dans le jeu complexe de la culture ils conduisent, chacun par son chemin propre et se découvrant mutuellement, aux mêmes effets. Le paradigme de ce jeu c'est – comme dans le modèle «Platonicien» construit par la critique Nietzscheenne et Heideggerienne – un reflet en miroir, consistant aussi bien à la démonstration des images reflétées, qu'à l'effacement du médium de la surface en verre. Ce qui se laisse penser et ce qui se laisse voir, chacun à sa manière, supplantent le médium de la représentation.

L'image construite selon le principe de *mimesis* permet de voir la chose représentée, réalisant ainsi l'idée de la connaissance comme acte de regarder, la métaphore de "l'œil intérieur" de la conscience. Les signes du langage sont des substituts des concepts, tandis que ceux de la peinture remplacent les choses. Une convention culturelle, qui exige qu'un tableau soit pourvu d'un titre aussitôt peint, fait fonction de garde des règles de cette substitution. Le tableau représente donc une sorte de reproduction, conforme aux règles de la visibilité, d'une structure produisant un langage dans son ordre intelligible.

Ainsi la réalité de phénomènes, celle qui se présente à notre perception et qui elle-même est présentée par l'imagination de son époque, fait fonction de projection d'un modèle scientifique. Nous la retrouvons dans des tableaux, métaphores poétiques, comparaisons littéraires etc. En somme – ce monde serait un volume d'un grand texte écrit par Dieu et il suffit de le lire sagement. Il a un sens et il est doué d'un ordre avant qu'on ne commence à le représenter.

Ce n'est pas par hasard que les arts qui emploient le medium du langage ont trouvé pour elles un sol fertile à l'époque classique. C'est que l'art de la narration représente dans son essence une lecture discursive et raisonnable de l'ordre du monde: "La première opération fondamentale du discours narratif est la transformation, le transfert de l'expérience du monde déjà signifiant en significations discursives, en parole."⁷ – dit Marin.

5. LE CHAMP DE LA VISIBILITE

Selon l'auteur *De la représentation*, en dépit de cet ordre de dépendance, propre à la culture de l'Occident, il faut libérer l'espace du visible, émanciper l'image de la domination du concept tout, en ne perdant pas de vue leur collaboration culturelle réciproque. Le champ de la visibilité, ce champ où on devient visible, est le lieu de cette collaboration.

On peut observer ici une affinité d'intentions entre les recherches de Marin et la postphénoménologie. Dans les deux cas il s'agirait de montrer – à travers l'analyse de la peinture – le phénomène-même de la visibilité. Le tableau n'est pas plus une visualisation du sens, ni quelque chose de "donné" ou "donnant" à voir, mais plutôt le lieu de la réalisation de la visibilité. Le visible et l'invisible collaborent entre eux, en échangeant leurs places. La description d'un tableau, selon Marin, ne consiste pas nécessairement à l'immobiliser dans un

⁷ L. Marin, *De la représentation*, Gallimard, Le Seuil, Paris 1994.

resau des sens. Il s'agit en effet moins de la description que de la descriptibilité (autrement – de montrer la richesse et la pluralité des niveaux du processus de la description); moins de la vision, que de la visibilité, moins de la lecture que de la lisibilité comme des éléments d'une dynamique structurelle, qui n'a pas beaucoup à voir avec la statique de la description significative traditionnelle.

Dans son analyse de la *Tempête* de Giorgione, Marin montre comment la représentation elle-même (en tant qu'une représentation paradoxale de l'irreprésentable) résiste au mimétisme «platonicien» (inscrit en elle par la tradition) de la "spectacularité" (à vrai dire – "specularité") de la fenêtre Albertienne. Le spectateur occidental regardait d'habitude une scène d'un tableau à travers la fenêtre-écran de la représentation, de la même façon qu'il aurait regardé une scène se déroulant dans le monde réel, séparé par une "vitre-écran" de la surface du tableau ou de la conscience perceptante.

La visibilité de la peinture est pourtant possible à écrire, mais à condition que le spectateur y soit engagé, c'est-à-dire à condition de supprimer "l'écran", de rejeter le mythe d'une conscience contemplante, impartiale et désintéressée, conservé à travers toute l'histoire de l'esthétique, le mythe alimenté par le modèle « platonicien » de *bios theoretikos*. Le jeu pictural de la signification et l'indication produit une sorte de tension, capable de résister aux interprétations mimétiques de la représentation. Grâce à cette tension un tableau, irréductible à la description discursive, possède un certain surplus du sens, par comparaison aux interprétations sémantiques.

Le discours théorique traditionnel, lié à l'histoire de la philosophie occidentale, voit dans l'image "une existence de deuxième ordre", une copie, non-authentique et moins réelle que l'existence "vraie". D'autre part, il le prend pour un écran qui voile les choses elles-mêmes, pour leur reflet appauvri, illusoire, pour un rideau trompeur nous séparant de l'existence, dont il serait un substitut. En un mot – l'image comme représentation est ici comprise comme une présence secondaire. Se situer en dehors de cette perspective, signifie retourner à la question fondamentale du mode de l'existence de l'image ainsi que rechercher une autre réponse à la question sur le mode dont l'image existe.

EMANCYPACJA OKA (streszczenie)

W artykule podejmuję tematykę emancypacji widzialnego spod władzy tego, co pojęciowe. Nie jest to próba obrony tendencji wzrokocentrycznych, których przejawem jest – według wielu badaczy – współczesny awans problematyki wizualności. Będę odwoływała się do koncepcji, w których diagnozowanie współczesnej kultury jako zdominowanej przez obraz (przedstawie-

nie, jak woleliby powiedzieć niektórzy) towarzyszy krytyce mechanizmów stwarzania i funkcjonowania „światoobrazu” (mówiąc po heideggerowsku i zachowując właściwe temu pojęciu konotacje) i związany jest z szerszą krytyką jej tendencji logocentrycznych.

Ukazywanie się fenomenu, o jakim mówi współczesna fenomenologia (w artykule rozpatrywana na przykładach koncepcji Merleau-Ponty'ego), nie ogranicza się ani do empirycznego widzenia fizycznego oka, ani do mentalnej oczywistości oka wewnętrznego. Jest widzialnością samą, znacznie lepiej przystającą do interpretacji sztuk wizualnych, np. do malarstwa, niż metafizyczne teorie widzenia. Próbuję dowieść owej przydatności, np. nie tylko Merleau-Ponty, ale i analizowany tu Lyotard, dokonujący swoistego „oczyszczenia widzenia”, nadający mu charakter doświadczenia poprzedzającego wszelkie podmiotowo-przedmiotowe podziały i artykulacje językowe. Jest to zarazem doświadczenie źródłowo doświadczanej zmysłowości, której przysługuje pewien porządek sensu, choć jest to porządek przedjęzykowy, pozbawiony referencji. Tym, co w sztuce „mówi”, są nie tyle znaki, co formy lub – jak wolałby powiedzieć Lyotard – „figury”.

Na tej drodze istotne są nie tylko analizy doświadczeń czystego widzenia. Najważniejsza jest praca krytyczna, demaskatorska: ujawnienie, że dotychczasowa historia kultury jest obszarem realizowania się swoistej „zmowy” widzenia i myślenia, w ramach której widzenie pozostaje w służbie myślenia. Ten krytyczny wektor postfenomenologii współgra również z tendencjami filozofów o odmiennych orientacjach, np. u Foucaulta czy – omawianego w artykule – Louisa Marina odnajdujemy próby rozszyfrowania mechanizmów i filozoficzno-kulturowego znaczenia tej swoistej „współpracy” widzenia i dyskursu pojęciowego. W ramach tej „zmowy” widzenie traci swą autonomię postrzegania rzeczy, takich jakimi one są, zanim zostaną ujęte w siatkę pojęć. Stąd płynie postulat Merleau-Ponty'ego, aby odkryć swoisty, odrębny od pojęciowego, percepcyjny porządek widzenia, jego „milczący” (tj. nie ujęty w dyskurs pojęciowy) logos. Stąd także postulat Lyotarda, aby z jednej strony dotrzeć do czystej receptywności widzenia, przywrócić widzeniu jego niezależność od nazywania, z drugiej zaś – wyzwolić dyskurs z dyktatu znaczonego.

Generalnie rzecz biorąc, ten antylogocentryczny wektor wpisuje się w postnietzscheańską, antymetafizyczną walkę z wszechwładzą języka. Jest to walka nie tylko z pewnym typem tradycji wywodzącej się od Kartezjusza, ale również z pewnymi odmianami strukturalizmu. Jest to również protest przeciwko utopijnej, jak twierdzi Lyotard, idei porozumienia osiąganego za pomocą języka, przeciwko idei konsensusu.

Sięgnę do wyników badań niektórych tylko z wymienionych filozofów i będzie mnie w tych badaniach interesował sposób ujęcia „współpracy” języka i obrazu oraz – będącej momentem tej współpracy – gry znaczenia i oznaczania.

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AESTHETIC ILLUSIONS OF FREEDOM? “AESTHETIC IDEOLOGY” AND A PRAISE OF AESTHETIC APPEARANCE

Abstract: The article concerns two opposite modes of interpretation related to the question of aesthetic autonomy: in the first, art and aesthetic experience is recognized as a utopian realm of freedom; in the second this assumption is challenged by bringing to the fore the social and ideological premises in which such ideal of aesthetic freedom is grounded. My point of departure here is the original connection which was established between aesthetic experience and the idea of freedom in Kant's and Schiller's aesthetics, especially Schiller's conception of aesthetic state as the realization of human freedom. In analyzing Meyer Schapiro's interpretation of Abstract Expressionism, I present a more restricted modern version of this conception, pointing out the paradox which was implicit in considering art as a major area of human freedom and authenticity (which resulted in confining these values to the isolated domain of art). Such limitation implicit in the notion of freedom discussed in the tradition of aesthetic thought was also the object of Terry Eagleton's criticism: he found there a tangle of emancipatory impulses and restricted bourgeois notion of autonomy, which from his Marxist point of view seemed deeply problematic. In Eagleton's perspective, as well as in Pierre Bourdieu's sociological interpretation, freedom associated with aesthetic experience is a form of illusion, because it is already inscribed in the existing symbolical hierarchies and social relations of power. According to Bourdieu, one may take or invent a distinct position in the field of art, but freeing oneself from the socially and historically determined notions which structure our thinking and feeling is possible only on the higher level of theoretical reflection. A different view on this question is offered by the art critics Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh, who despite their earlier anti-aesthetic positions (countering the modernist notion of artistic autonomy), defend the specificity of the “aesthetic structure” of a work of art, by recognizing its emancipatory potential – a unique “suspension of power”, which offers a more effective form of resistance and critique than whatever may be proposed by critical theory. Such irreducible, utopian dimension of aesthetic experience is also defended by Jacques Rancière, in his reframing of aesthetics and politics, which is also a polemic with Bourdieu. At the same time, in his interpretation of Schiller's aesthetics, Rancière emphasizes the irrevocable linking of art and life practice: the crucial entanglement of aesthetic autonomy and heteronomy, which prevents art from taking a definite place, and saves its utopian promise.

Keywords: aesthetic appearance – autonomy - freedom, ideology – Friedrich Schiller – Jacques Rancière

By no mere coincidence, it was in the age of Revolution that aesthetics gained its name and was raised to the status of an autonomous philosophical discipline. At the origins of modern aesthetic thought, one may find a new connection which was established at the time between the notion of beauty and the newly “invented” idea of freedom.¹ This connection went further than in the traditional category of *artes liberales* which was opposed to mechanical arts, on the basis of the customary distinction between “free” intellectual practice and physical effort. Now the old terms appear in a new philosophical translation and the notion of freedom gains a broader significance. Art is called a “product of freedom” (Kant), or a “daughter of freedom”, ruled only by spiritual necessity (Schiller)². In Friedrich Schiller’s definition, aesthetic beauty consists in the visibly expressed “freedom in appearance” (*Freiheit im Erscheinung*)³, which pertains to a sensible entity which cannot be encompassed by a concept or reduced to some general, abstract rule. According to Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, a beautiful object implies a “free play” of our faculties of imagination and understanding, in such a way that the former does not dominate the latter; it means that in aesthetic experience imagination gains more freedom than it is usually accorded in other cognitive acts. Quite strikingly, all the definitions I have mentioned are constructed as political allegories, where sense particulars and concepts, or human faculties – imagination and intellect, sensuality and reason – come to represent the opposite parties, which should eventually coexist in some uncoercive unity, without suppressing each other. For Kant they still describe the common structure of human faculties, where reason should reign superior (Kant’s definition of art as a “product of freedom”, which I have quoted, means precisely that it is constituted through an “act of will that places reason at the basis of its action”⁴); and it only remains to prove that the unity of our higher and lower faculties is based on their original concordance.⁵ For Schiller, however, freedom also gains a specifically political meaning, as it is not only opposed to natural necessity, as assumed by Kant, but also to the social, “structural” restraint. Departing from Kant’s moral rigorism, Schiller tends to identify freedom with spontaneous activity, which comes from the harmonious interplay of opposite impulses (which he calls “material drive” and “formal drive”), and

¹ See: J. Starobinski, *L’Invention de la liberté. 1700-1789*, Genève 1964.

² F. Schiller, *Listy o estetycznym wychowaniu człowieka i inne rozprawy*, transl. I. Krońska, J. Prokopiuk, Warszawa 1972, p. 44.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴ I. Kant, *Krytyka władzy sądzienia*, transl. J. Gałęcki, Warszawa 1964, p. 224.

⁵ In the *Critique of Judgement*, as Gilles Deleuze noted, “beneath the determinate and conditioned relations of faculties”, Kant “discovers a free, indeterminate, and unconditioned accord”, which he regards also as a necessary condition of their other, practical and cognitive acts. G. Deleuze, The idea of genesis in Kant’s aesthetics, *Angelaki. Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 5, nr 3 (December 2000), p. 68.

finds its expression in “beautiful form” – a lawlike entity without any visible sign of constraint. In its specific relation of powers, the subjective aesthetic state becomes for him the embodiment of a new political ideal, opposed to the tyrannous rule. Aesthetic beauty – a subjective state it impels, and a mode of aesthetic creation by which it is brought to life, seems to offer a means for the full development of human powers. It also offers a model of human relations – a promise of ideal community, a utopian alternative to the existing social and political order.

A familiar notion of aesthetic freedom, which was associated with the spontaneous production of form – a self-determining order of its own, was a vision that strongly informed both the Romantic and modern conceptions of art. However, such notion of freedom – related to the possible suspension of any specific constraint, and usually confined to the particularly aesthetic realm – was also regarded as hopelessly limited, or as a kind of illusion, which masks actual interests and social antagonisms. According to Terry Eagleton’s Marxist interpretation, it was exactly the essence of “aesthetic ideology” – “a dream of absolute freedom which belongs to the bourgeois order itself”⁶. This qualification may refer to some modernist versions of aesthetic autonomy, in which the ideal of freedom was shifted to a separate, artistic domain, safely protected in its established institutional frames. On the other hand, in the Schillerian vision of the full realization and reintegration of human powers, which was to be attained in aesthetic creativity or in aesthetic transformation of life, one may find another politically ambivalent aspect, that is related with its totalizing and organicist vein. In what follows, I will refer to these questions in discussing the limitations of the concept of aesthetic freedom, the anti-aesthetic reaction to it, and the arguments of its social and ideological critique. Finally, I will refer to the work of Jacques Rancière, who still believes in the emancipating potential of aesthetic experience, and finds inspiration in Schiller’s ideas. But to prove their actuality, he reframes the customary understanding of aesthetics and politics, and consequently the meaning of their relation. Examining the causes and the nature of this change will be the main goal of this survey.

INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM IN A WORK OF ART

In its manifested “newness”, its bold independence from the past and from national cultural traditions, modern art often expressed an affirmative view of modernity and a wish to breathe the air of freedom that it offered. However, in

⁶ T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford, Cambridge, Mass., 1990, p. 109.

the 1940s and 1950s in America the situation was different: in the context of recent history on the one hand, and of contemporary mass culture on the other, freedom was presented as something endangered, which should be defended. In the large body of writings that accompanied Abstract Expressionism, there was an apparent fusion or even equation of artistic values with the value of individuality and freedom. It was evident in the existentialist overtones of Harold Rosenberg's writings, which presented the Expressionist painter as an existential hero. It could be even discerned in Clement Greenberg's formalist art criticism – in his metaphorical projection of existential values on the aesthetic qualities of abstract art: freedom and authenticity achieved in a specific treatment of the medium, or a free organization of pictorial space. From this point of view, Greenberg's conception of modern art does not appear simply as aestheticist withdrawal, but rather as a means to find a symbolic retreat for some crucial human values.⁷

A parallel position, and a summation of the typical characterizations of Abstract Expressionism may be found in Meyer Schapiro's article *The Liberating Quality of Modern Art* (1957). It is worth noting that this text was not written by a formalist critic who would like to stress the specificity of art as an aesthetic endeavour, but by a former Marxist, who used to be critical about the illusory notion of art's independence. Some years earlier, in *The Nature of Abstract Art* (1937) – a polemic with Alfred Barr's formalist interpretation of modern art – Schapiro cogently argued that even abstract painting, which seemed unconcerned with any social and political issues, was not independent from the reality in which it was produced. Even if it turned its back on it, it remained a part of the social fabric. This did not mean, however, that art should be politically engaged – unlike the Communist condemnations of abstract art as an ivory tower isolated from society, Schapiro presented it as a reaction to particular historical conditions. He offered a dialectical view, in which artistic practice was not only socially and historically determined, but also constituted an autonomous form of action – something that proved the essential freedom of the human mind and man's capacity to produce an order of its own. In *The Liberating Quality of Modern Art* Schapiro went further to emphasize the tension between the values of contemporary art and the general spirit of the times. Writing about the artistic practice of Abstract Expressionism (though without mentioning the term and the artists' names), Schapiro tried to demonstrate its importance and "humanity" by opposing it to the "general trend" of modern life that appeared to be "increasingly organized

⁷ For a parallel interpretation see for example: N. Jachec, *Modernism, Enlightenment Values, and Clement Greenberg*, *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 21, nr 2, 1998, p. 124.

through industry, economy and the state”⁸. Against the dominant instrumental rationality and impersonality of industrial production – he argued – modern art was a unique mode of activity, which allowed spontaneity and personal identification. Paintings and sculptures, he claimed, are “the last hand-made, personal objects within our culture. Almost everything else is produced industrially, in mass, and through a high division of labor. Few people are fortunate enough to make something that represents themselves, that issues entirely from their hands and mind”⁹. As something “freely made” a work of art “affirms” and “symbolizes” the individual.¹⁰ The process of its creation is not determined by any external rule or prior design – it is a free interplay of matter and action, and the final unity of a painting corresponds to the integrity of the artist’s self. In the technique of automatism adopted by American painters, according to Schapiro, “the random or accidental is the beginning of an order”. The final result (at least “in the best works”) is a harmonious whole, even if it remains unpredictable and preserves “the aspect of the original disorder as a manifestation of freedom”.¹¹

In Schapiro’s statements one may recognize some familiar motifs of philosophical aesthetics, in which art and aesthetic experience was regarded as a special realm in which the universal and the particular, necessity and freedom, reason and feeling could come to their harmonious reconciliation. One can find here a reflection of Friedrich Schiller’s idea – as it was inscribed and transmitted in the Marxist tradition – of the aesthetic order as a product of freedom, a harmonious whole which is born without external constraint. The creative process exemplifies a purposive action exempt from a definite purpose, a work free from external determinations, in which the individual may confirm and reestablish one’s psychic integrity. Of course, in Schapiro’s publication, the emphasis he put on pictorial unity, even “harmony” of the final effects was also a way to persuade his readers of the aesthetic value of the new painting that was frequently accused of subjectivity and irrelevance. Thus, expressing the hope for the universal value of those paintings (his belief that they could “reach out into common life” and “become a possession of everyone”), Schapiro diminished the anarchic spirit of the artistic movement he wanted to support. Instead of viewing action painting as an *acte gratuit*, a free gesture of excess, Schapiro wanted to place there all the important values that contemporary society in his view increasingly lacked. As an

⁸ M. Schapiro, The Liberating Quality of Modern Art, [first printed in *Art News*, Summer 1957], in: *Reading Abstract Expressionism. Context and Critique*, ed. by Ellen G. Landau, Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 2005, p. 219.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

“impressive example of inner freedom” – he argued – “by its fidelity to artistic goals, which include the mastery of the formless and accidental”, painting “helps to maintain the critical spirit and the ideals of creativeness, sincerity and self-reliance, which are indispensable to the life of our culture”.¹² Abstract Expressionism became here the visible symbol of American democratic ideals and of individual creative powers that were customarily regarded to be its basis. As we realize today, it was precisely this symbolism that was to become the object of political instrumentalization in the era of the Cold War, in a process that was given a close critical revision by Eve Cockcroft, Serge Guilbaut and others.¹³ According to Guilbaut, the paradox consisted in the fact that “in a society as fixed in a right-of-center position as the United States (...) Abstract Expressionism was for many people an expression of freedom: freedom to create controversial works, freedom symbolized by action and gesture, by the expression of the artist apparently freed from all restraints. It was an essential existential liberty that was defended by the moderns (...), serving to present the internal struggle to those outside as proof of the inherent liberty of the American system, as opposed to the restrictions imposed on the artist by the Soviet system. Freedom was the symbol most enthusiastically promoted by the new liberalism during the Cold War.”¹⁴ It was somehow ironic that Schapiro’s article was written at the time of the coming success of Abstract Expressionism: he presented it as a critical negation of the existing social order, but in a year it was to gain broad international recognition and become a positive symbol of American liberalism. Although this political instrumentalization was something Schapiro would not approve, it was facilitated in a way by the mode of interpretation that he offered, in which artistic activity was somehow limited to the economy of individual psychic forces, and political questions were reduced to the problem of inner freedom. Such interpretation offered an artist a full justification to focus solely on his work as an “ordered world of its own”. “In the absence of ideal values stimulating to his imagination – Schapiro maintained – the artist must cultivate his own garden as the only secure field in the violence and uncertainties of our time.”¹⁵

In this description one may note a striking break between the beautiful promise offered by art and the ugly reality in which it is enclosed. The rhetoric of Schapiro’s text is based on a dramatic opposition between the free, self-

¹² Ibid., p. 220.

¹³ See especially: S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, Chicago University Press, 1983.

¹⁴ S. Guilbaut, *The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America: Greenberg, Pollock, or from Trotskyism to the New Liberalism of the “Vital Center”*, in: *Reading Abstract Expressionism...*, op. cit., p. 395.

¹⁵ Schapiro, op. cit., pp. 219-220.

regulating work of an artist, whom he calls “the most idealist creature in the world”, and the external world, lacking freedom and blindly pragmatic, which he explicitly condemns. In this game of negations one is the mirror of the other, individual expression must remain resistant towards the totality of the social system. While the latter is recognized as an embodiment of instrumental reason, the artist becomes an anonymous romantic figure (it is significant that Schapiro did not mention any name), someone who exists only in full identification with his work. The modernist ontology of the subject remains closely related here with a particular vision of a work of art, regarded as a self-regulating, autonomous entity. There is only one point in the text when Schapiro goes beyond this schema, to suggest that modern art could be “liberating” not only for the artist, but also for the viewer. Eventually, paintings are offered to the public, and so they may appeal to everybody, reminding them of a possibility of free, spontaneous action.

THE SOCIAL CRITIQUE OF AESTHETIC AUTONOMY

Schapiro’s text implied an ambivalent or even contradictory relation of the assumed freedom of artistic production, which turns its back on the values of contemporary society, and the autonomous position it nevertheless takes within this society. This situation corresponds with the central thesis of Terry Eagleton’s book, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, which concerns the double role the category of the aesthetic could play in simultaneously offering a critical perspective of modern bourgeois society and supporting some of its ideological premises. According to Eagleton, modern concepts of the aesthetic provided a substantial critique of the existing social order and a utopian image of the full development of human subjective powers, which countered the dominating utilitarian values. At the same time, however, they were grounded in the modern concept of autonomy, which he calls “the central constituent of bourgeois ideology” – the concept that could function as a revolutionary force, but was also generally compliant with the capitalist ethos and the specific “division of labor” it imposed. The other side of autonomy – as Eagleton notes – is alienation, into which it can always imperceptibly turn.¹⁶ Thus, the aesthetic autonomy of art, which meant liberating it from the various social functions which it traditionally served, could turn it into an “isolated enclave within which the dominant social order can find an idealized refuge from its own actual values of competitiveness, exploitation and material possessiveness”¹⁷. In such case autonomy proved the most disabling. But aesthetic auto-

¹⁶ Eagleton, op. cit., p. 74.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

nomization of art was not the crucial premise of modern philosophical aesthetics – in many cases such premise was even alien to it (for example, it could be derived from Kant's aesthetics, but in his *Critique of Judgement* art was not conceived in such terms¹⁸). According to Eagleton, the central question of modern aesthetic thought was human subjectivity¹⁹, and the model it provided was characteristically double-edged. As he claims, in aesthetics one may find

„the very secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable enemy of all dominative and instrumentalist thought. It signifies a creative turn to the sensuous body, as well as an inscribing of that body with a subtly oppressive law; it represents on the one hand a liberatory concern with concrete particularity, and on the other hand a specious form of universalism”²⁰.

For example, Schiller's ideal of aesthetic subjectivity – of a self-regulating and self-determining mode of being – meant the valorization of human bodily, sensuous nature, but it was also conceived as a product of “aesthetic education”: of a progressive refinement of sensation and desire, which allowed man to liberate himself from the crude, lawless instincts of “animal state”, in which he remained “nature's slave”²¹. Even if this process, according to Schiller, was initiated by nature itself, it also implied – through some mysterious “leap”²² – that the higher rule of freedom should be established in nature's primary terrain: “Through the aesthetic modulation of the psyche the autonomy of reason is already opened up within the domain of sense itself, the dominion of sensation already broken within its own frontiers, and physical man refined to the point where spiritual man only needs to start developing out of the physical according to the laws of freedom.”²³ For Schiller the aesthetic mode of being meant reconciling higher and lower impulses (“sense drive” and “formal

¹⁸ Although Kant is customarily regarded as the founder of aesthetic autonomy – one who confirmed the modern separation of cognitive, moral and aesthetic realms, a closer reading of his *Critique of Judgement* may cast doubt on such interpretation. The questionable meaning of aesthetic autonomy is already apparent in his claim that the faculty of judgement does not possess a sovereign domain of its own (p. 19). For Kant the autonomy of the aesthetic does not refer to some distinct class of aesthetic objects, but to a mode of judgement, which he distinguishes from moral and cognitive judgements. Individual aesthetic judgement, which pretends to be “pure”, presents for Kant just one of the ways in which the autonomy of human subject may be performed.

¹⁹ A similar claim is also the basis of another historical account of philosophical aesthetics: A. Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche*, Manchester University Press, 2003 (II edition).

²⁰ Eagleton, op. cit., p. 9.

²¹ Schiller, op. cit., p.148

²² Ibid., p. 164.

²³ Ibid., p. 135.

drive”), in a way that unites natural spontaneity and rational control. His ideal of beautiful form was closely related to the classical notion of artistic mastery, which implies that an artist should work up his material in such a way that it no longer appears to be a constraint. Similarly, Schiller’s concept of moral grace indicated a kind of behavior untouched by any hint of repression, because ethical duty was already transformed in it into instinctual habit. For Eagleton it bears a quite repelling suggestion that the whole subject should “operate like an aesthetic artefact”²⁴.

In Eagleton’s Marxist terms, such inner discipline and mastery is generally the effect of social inscription – a matter of internal appropriation of the law. It is based on affections and sentiments that subjects adopt as their own by incorporating some particular social habits and beliefs. Thus, bringing our sensual being to the higher level of aesthetic feeling is precisely the way that “social harmony registers itself upon our senses, imprints itself upon our sensibilities.”²⁵ According to Eagleton, the aesthetic disposition, which inscribes our body with a “subtly oppressive law”, is also the function of social status, and expresses a common ethos of a particular class; for example, Schiller’s conception may be regarded as inherited from some pre-bourgeois ideals of humanism and aristocratic attitudes. Bringing aesthetics back to its social genesis could consequently reveal some actual social distinctions it silently implied, despite its universalist assumptions.

Such unmasking of the social nature of aesthetic judgement was the important topic in the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu. Against the abstract generality and assumed universality of the concepts of aesthetic autonomy, he proposed to analyse them as historical inventions, related to the social interests of particular groups. For instance, nineteenth-century conceptions of “pure art” (*l’art pour l’art*) could be interpreted not as a kind of aestheticist withdrawal, focusing on the inner qualities of form, but as a means to take a new, distinct position on the art scene of the time.²⁶ The autonomous artistic field is seen by Bourdieu as a social construct, a field of forces and struggles which tend to transform or conserve it. Its organization reflects and defines social hierarchies, which means it may be determined by social relations, but can also shape them as a particular source of recognition and legitimization. The historical autonomization of the field is related to a set of distinctions and exclusions, of which the most fundamental one concerns the “coarse” pleasures, identified with the lowly tastes of the uneducated masses:

²⁴ Eagleton, op. cit., p. 114.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁶ P. Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. S. Emanuel, Stanford University Press, 1996.

“Pure” taste and the aesthetics which provides its theory are founded on a refusal of “impure” taste and of *aisthesis* (sensation), the simple, primitive form of pleasure reduced to a pleasure of the senses, as in what Kant calls “the taste of the tongue, the palate, and the throat”, a surrender to immediate sensation.²⁷

According to Bourdieu, Kant’s distinction between “pure” aesthetic delight – a disinterested enjoyment of formal structure – and the “impure” pleasures of the agreeable and the charming, was implicitly a mode of social distinction. His conception of aesthetic autonomy amounted therefore to an “affirmation of a particular social ethos, one that singularizes, in other words, a certain social class”²⁸. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu demonstrated that “popular aesthetics” – the valuations implicit in everyday practices of lower classes, are mostly the opposite of the “pure” aesthetic judgment as defined by Kant: based on immediate enjoyment, related to some established notions of perfection and practical interests – they are apparently non-autonomous and impure. For Kant they could be “barbarian” or “primitive”, although they are by no means accidental, but grounded instead in a different ontological perspective, and a different set of values. According to Bourdieu the Kantian distinction, and the sacralization of culture and art it used to support, is a powerful symbolic mechanism which “enables educated people to believe in barbarism and persuade the barbarians (...) of their own barbarity.”²⁹

It could probably be questioned whether in contemporary culture – with its ubiquitous crossing of the borders between “high” and “low” – the same hierarchical distinctions still play a decisive role, and whether such aesthetic foundations are today of any importance for the autonomy of the artistic field. But this is a broader question which would deserve another discussion, and here I will focus solely on Bourdieu’s method in relation to aesthetics. In his perspective, our aesthetic attitudes (*habitus*) and shared aesthetic notions are a social and historical product, comparable to other “reproducible” forms of thought. And the general objective of his genetic sociology is, as he says,

... to bring representations and instruments of thought – all of which lay claim to universality, with unequal chances of success – back to the social conditions of their production and their use, in other words, back to the historical structure of the field in which they are engendered and within which they operate.³⁰

²⁷ P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge, Mass., 1984, p. 486.

²⁸ K. Geldof, Authority, Reading, Reflexivity. Pierre Bourdieu and the Aesthetic Judgement of Kant, *Diacritics*, vol. 27, no. 1, Spring 1997, p. 27.

²⁹ P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 236.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

This attempt means ridding these attitudes of their illusive “naturalness”, by grasping their social and historical “conditions of possibility”. Or, in other words: “restoring to them necessity by removing them from indeterminacy, which stems from a false eternalization.”³¹ For Bourdieu, a scientific concern with their particular genesis and function may liberate us from the blind pressure they impose on our minds. Sociological reflection offers an effective way of countering such social and structural determinations, together with the “symbolical domination” they support.

Consequently, in Bourdieu’s perspective there may be no real freedom in the aesthetic realm. The “autonomy” of aesthetic experience – the assumption that both the observer and the aesthetic object might be free from social, economic, religious, and political compulsion, is merely an illusion, an ideological artifice which helps to conserve the existing social order. In his polemical account of Bourdieu’s work, Paul Crowther argues that his way of bringing aesthetic practices back to their structural determinations is a kind of “sociological imperialism”, more sophisticated than deriving them from the socio-economic conditions, but nevertheless reductive. He accuses Bourdieu of presenting the producers and consumers of art – “like the ‘self’ of post-structuralist thought – as disembodied transmission points, through which the field of forces passes.”³² Moreover, as a distinguished interpreter of Kant’s aesthetics, Crowther points out some simplifications and inconsistencies in Bourdieu’s reading of the *Critique of Judgement*. It is a serious misunderstanding – he claims – to view Kant’s distinction as a simple reflection and legitimization of the existing social distinction.³³ For in the whole discourse of the *Critique of Judgment* it is evident that “for Kant taste is not the province of the sensitive and cultivated elite – it is a necessary expression of our shared humanity”³⁴. Kant’s definition of the disinterested aesthetic judgment was related to the more general imperative to go beyond one’s particular predilections and to put oneself in everyone else’s place – to judge individually, but from the universal position. The postulated autonomy of aesthetic judgment was not simply a question of its sufficient cultivation. Moreover, Kant realized that we have no objective basis to know whether a judgment we actually propose is really pure and autonomous – knowing this remains the matter of our subjective feeling. Thus, the possible autonomy of aesthetic judgment would rather be an expression of the more fundamental freedom Kant assumed to be our property as moral beings and the essence of our noumenal self. In his

³¹ Ibid., pp. 263-264.

³² P. Crowther, *Sociological Imperialism and the Field of Cultural Production: The Case of Bourdieu, Theory, Culture, Society*, vol. 11, 1994, p. 164.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 165.

transcendental philosophy it is clear that from the point of view of natural causality the possibility of such freedom cannot be demonstrated and explained. For Kant “freedom cannot be directly captured in a concept or image, and must be known practically rather than theoretically”.³⁵ Aesthetic feeling, which is the basis of the judgment of beauty is one of the occasions to know it. Bourdieu rejects this assumption, together with the whole transcendental framework of Kant’s philosophy. Consequently, in his investigation of the structural determinations which are implicit in our social habitus, “the category of the possible, whenever articulated, is immediately enlisted and subjugated by a perspective that articulates its ‘objective’ limits”.³⁶ According to Crowther, “the trajectory of his analysis is one which substantially reduces subjective dispositions to an effect of the social conditions under which they are generated”.³⁷ In result, what is lost in this perspective, are the possibilities which are latent in particular aesthetic experiences.

FAREWELL TO THE ANTI-AESTHETIC?

Parallel to this social critique was the anti-aesthetic discourse, which accompanied the avant-garde and neo-avantgarde practices in Europe and in America. Especially in Marxist interpretations, the concept of aesthetic autonomy, which found its embodiment in modern art institutions, was accused of false universalization, voiding art of any epistemic value and placing it at an illusory distance from practical interests and political demands. The aesthetic discourse that legitimized the autonomous production and reception of art was regarded as leading away from history and conflating social antinomies in its own totalizing systems. It was attacked for reducing art to the status of commodity, and equating its reception with passive consumption, assigned to a privileged few. Aesthetics – associated mainly with the attitude of “aesthetic disinterestness” – was consequently presented as a means of art’s neutralization, or identified with some form of aestheticist withdrawal. The logical counterpart to this theoretical position was the postulated overcoming of art’s aesthetic autonomy to make it an active force, participating in the transformation of life. One of the late manifestations of this Marxist idea – to break the magic circle of art’s autonomy, and to bring about its true “overcoming” in the life practice – was Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974). However, confronting these ideas with contemporary artistic reality became for its author a source of disappointment and of a pessimistic diagnosis.

³⁵ Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, op. cit., p. 79.

³⁶ Geldof, *Authority, Reading...*, op. cit., p. 40.

³⁷ Crowther, *Sociological Imperialism...*, op. cit., p. 163.

According to Bürger's thesis, the utopian hopes of the historical avant-garde that were the true content of its anti-aesthetic practices, in neo-avantgarde have been ultimately lost, as it was immediately accepted and easily consumed by art institutions. Instead of suffusing life with its critical and creative energies, artistic rebellion became a kind of spectacle: the anti-aesthetic turned into the artistic, the transgressive was cancelled by institutional adaptation. Bürger's disillusion accorded at this point with the sceptical view of Pierre Bourdieu, who also realized that the avant-garde subversions were fated to become consecrated as new art:

Nothing more clearly reveals the logic of the functioning of the artistic field than the fate of these apparently radical attempts at sub-version. Because they expose the act of artistic creation to a mockery already annexed to the artistic tradition by Duchamp, they are immediately converted into artistic 'acts', recorded as such and thus consecrated and celebrated by the makers of taste. Art cannot reveal the truth about art without snatching it away by turning the revelation into an artistic event.³⁸

In Bürger's and Bourdieu's reading, what is left is only a sad or ironic paradox of art's inescapable institutionalization, its inclusion in the autonomous artistic field. However, such formulations may seem one-sided, in their impassable dualism, when compared with the contemporary work of such artists as Daniel Buren, Marcel Broodthaers, or Michael Asher, who also tackled this paradoxical or contradictory situation. What these artists accomplished went apparently beyond the simple dialectics of recuperation and disabling transfiguration into "art" that was the object of Bürger's complaint – rather they showed that art institutions may be subverted or deconstructed from the inside. According to Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh, ignoring such contemporary examples was one of the mistakes of Bürger's *Theory*, which brought him to his too univocal and totalizing conclusions. In Foster's opinion, the historical narrative he offered was too much under the spell of a heroic and tragic vision of the historical avant-garde. This could explain why his review of contemporary practices, which he generally presented as a farcical or cynical "repetition" of the original gestures or the first avant-garde, was so visibly narrowed. Foster argues that Bürger took the romantic rhetoric of the avant-garde – its figures of rupture and revolution – too much at its own word. Consequently, it prevented him to appreciate the *contextual* and *performative* aspects of avant-garde practices, their "epistemological provocations" and their utopian dimension,

³⁸ P. Bourdieu, *The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods*, in: *Media, Culture and Society. A Critical Reader*, eds. Collins, et. al., London, 1986, p. 136. Quotation after P. Mattick, *Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics in the Visual Arts*, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1993, p. 256.

which made them irreducible to any practical effects.³⁹ According to Foster, it is precisely in these dimensions that one should recognize a special mode of criticality, one that may be the avant-garde's legacy still operative in contemporary art, more effective and open-ended than any attempts to literally overthrow the existing artistic rule.

Similar observations may also be found in Benjamin Buchloh's introduction to his *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, a collection of essays he dedicated to the work of several contemporary artists, from Richard Serra to Andy Warhol. What is interesting in this text, is the visible change in the author's position, compared with his earlier work concerning Conceptual art. Those early writings concerned contemporary art practices in which he recognized a critical analysis of the modernist institutions of art, a cool practical demonstration of the rules of their functioning. What counted then was a mode of critical reflexivity, close to the objectivity of a scientific work, similar to Bourdieu. But now he withdraws from such ascetic or anti-aesthetic positions, to explicitly identify the critical and political potential of a work with the particularity of its "aesthetic structure". Buchloh distances himself from "the delusion shared by Bürger" and at the time also by himself, "that the criteria for aesthetic judgement would have to be linked at all times, if not to models of an outright instrumentalized political efficacy, then at least to a compulsory mode of critical negativity."⁴⁰ Such point of view – he argues – was a "leftist prejudice" against aesthetic forms, whose transgressions might not always comply with the already prescribed patterns of political theory. But this priority of theoretical discourse (or "reductionist criticality") is something to be questioned, because due to their particular structures, artistic practices offer "a more subtle and complex range of oppositions and resistances, of forms of subjective self-constitution and public critiques of reification, that the political theories of the left could ever have allowed."⁴¹ The "aesthetic structure",

...dissolves all forms of domination, beginning with the dissolution of repression in whatever form it might have inscribed itself in codes and conventions: be they linguistic, specular, representational, or behavioral structures of social interaction.⁴²

³⁹ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., London 1996, p. 15-16.

⁴⁰ B. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry. Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., London 2000, p. xxiv.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. xxiv-xxv.

...one among the infinite multiplicity of functions intrinsic to aesthetic structures is in fact to provide at least an immediate and concrete illusion, if not an actual instantiation, of a universally accessible suspension of power.⁴³

These passages present a rather unexpected claim in favor of the aesthetic effectiveness of a work of art. They also suggest that art's political significance should not be separated from its aesthetic dimension or taken as its opposite. The notion of aesthetic structure as something that "dissolves all forms of domination", or brings about a "universally accessible suspension of power", recalls the familiar motif of philosophical aesthetics – the association of aesthetic experience and freedom. Of course, Buchloh's statement has a different theoretical basis: it is grounded in semiology and Lacanian psychoanalysis, based on the idea of a momentary suspension of the symbolic order, parallel to what happens in a joke or a dream. Moreover, Buchloh's notion of "aesthetic structure" differs clearly from the classical aesthetic conceptions of artistic work – it refers to some aesthetically experienced set of operations and tensions, rather than a self-contained, harmonious whole. Nevertheless, it is the "liberating quality" of aesthetic experience, not only an art work's critical reflexivity, that is brought to the fore again.

AESTHETICS AND POLITICS IN THE POST-POLITICAL AGE

A similar perspective on the relation of aesthetics and politics may be found in the contemporary writings of Jacques Rancière, whose political philosophy and especially aesthetic thought has recently aroused interest among the politically engaged artists and intellectuals in Poland.⁴⁴ Rancière also defends the utopian dimension of aesthetic experience, against such sociological interpretations – *vide* Bourdieu – that tend to reduce aesthetic activity to its social ramifications and social relations of power. For him – as for Benjamin Buchloh in the citation above – aesthetic freedom may even be an "illusion", but this does not mean that it is without significance. Rancière wants to take appearances seriously, whereas in the Marxist critique of ideology he recognizes an old iconoclastic urge – to abolish all false images, to dissolve all misleading appearances, which could mask the true structure of reality.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., p. Xxiv.

⁴⁴ This interest resulted already in two publications of Rancière's essays in Polish: *Estetyka jako polityka*, trans. by J. Kutyla and P. Mościcki, with a foreword by A. Żmijewski, Warszawa 2007; *Dzielenie postrzegalnego. Estetyka i polityka*, (trans.) by Kropiwnicki, J. Sowa, Kraków .

⁴⁵ J. Rancière, Los obrazów, in: *Estetyka jako polityka*, op. cit., p. 58. A parallel reading was proposed by W.J.T. Mitchell, *The Rhetoric of Iconoclasm. Marxism, Ideology, and Fetishism*, in: *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1986.

Against this rhetoric of suspicion, Rancière posits a new validation of the aesthetic – of the visible surface of things and individual aesthetic experience. In his turn to aesthetics he is not interested in the questions of aesthetic value, the objective system of arts, or the subjective basis of aesthetic experience. Talking about aesthetics, Rancière chooses the broader understanding of the term which reaches back to the original meaning of the Greek word *aisthesis* as sense perception, and also to Kant's transcendental aesthetics, concerning the a priori forms of perception: space and time. What he is interested in, is a specific configuration of the perceptible world, which is both aesthetic and social/political. Rancière questions the "conditions of possibility" of experience, but on the social, not purely transcendental grounds. He is concerned with the existing limits and potential shifts in relation to what (and for whom) may be seen, heard, uttered and thought, to become part of everyday reality. In relation to the way things are made visible or audible in society, Rancière proposes the term "partition of the sensible" (*partage du sensible*) – a multi-layered concept which is hard to translate adequately without losing some of its semantic complexity. The French word *partager* means simultaneously "to divide" and "to share" – so the whole phrase suggests at once the limitations and borders which structure our realms of the sensible and the intelligible (French *sensible* refers both to what can be sensed and what "makes sense"), and also the community which is established in this perceptual, aesthetic realm – the community of those who may share a common experience. According to Rancière this partition is both political and aesthetic, which means that aesthetics and politics no longer are regarded by him as separate realms.

This conception is also, as he admits, inspired by the genealogical thought of Michel Foucault, who sought to systematize how things can be visible, utterable, and capable of being thought at various moments in social history.⁴⁶ However, while Foucault put emphasis in his explorations on the conditions of possibility that amounted to what he called historical episteme, or the ways individual subjectivity was shaped within the established cultural patterns, Rancière seems more attentive to individual acts of transgression and deviation, which can disturb the existing order of visibility and thought. The word "politics" is restricted by him to denote those actions that disrupt the actual "partition of the sensible" and the social distribution of roles; whereas the powers which determine them and guard their stability (like the mechanism of education, state economy, or division of labor) contribute to what he calls a "police". In this context, it is clear that for Rancière the political does not reduce itself to the winning or exercise of power, or to the realization of some

⁴⁶ J. Rancière: Literature, Politics, Aesthetics: Approaches to Democratic Disagreement – Interview with S. Guénoun and J. Kavanagh, *SubStance*, no. 92, 2000, p. 13.

determined political goal. In his view, the core question of democratic politics, as for Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, is the possibility of voicing in public other, dissensual positions, of hearing even those who according to the given rules, have no legitimacy for speaking. Thus, the primary political act is to impose a reconfiguration of the sensible by making visible/audible what was not visible/audible, beginning with the public appearance of particular groups and individuals as subjects capable of talking about some common ground. Politics begins with this act of political subjectification, which may also take the form of ephemeral occurrences in public realm, offering temporary, but no less significant reconfiguration in the field of communal experience.⁴⁷

The latter possibility may correspond (as Rancière himself points out)⁴⁸ with the contemporary artistic practices of public interventions, subversions and appropriations, which clearly undermine the notion of art's aesthetic autonomy, in relating to everyday practices and systems of communication. Such practices are often regarded as "political" art, in a way which complies with the term Hal Foster suggested in the 1980s.⁴⁹ One could even say that they represent a particular mode of politics in our "post-political" age, which lacks comprehensive political projects and turns politics into a more or less effective form of management.

However, what is distinct in the conception of Jacques Rancière is that the political significance is something he also ascribes to the seemingly "autonomous" forms of art, tracing it to the level of their poetics and representations. A new reconfiguration of the sensible – as he claims – may come to life with the questioning of the older compositional norms and hierarchies of

⁴⁷ Rancière's conception suggests that in political action and political experience the aesthetic and performative aspects have a primary role. There is some similarity between this conception and the political thought of Hannah Arendt, who also, in her ideal model based on Greek democracy, offered a definition of political activity as a goal in itself, not a way to attain some determined practical aim. According to Arendt, the Greek conception of politics as a self-contained activity was the condition that enabled to create a free space of public discussion, which means it was a primary foundation of democracy. See: H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago University Press, 1958. There is not enough place here to discuss this question more broadly, but one may note that such "aestheticization of politics" was often received with reservation by those authors who identify their political mission with more practical tasks or the real transformation of the existing social order. Thus, for example, Slavoi Žižek rejects Rancière's version of the political as 'a game of hysterical provocation', which resigns of a true revolutionary task to establish a new positive symbolic order. S. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: the absent centre of political ontology*, London, 2000, p. 238; I quote after J. Valentine, Rancière and Contemporary Political Problems, *Pararaph*, vol. 28, no. 1, March 2005, p. 49.

⁴⁸ J. Rancière, *Estetyka jako polityka*, op. cit, p. 22.

⁴⁹ Hal Foster, For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art, in: *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, Washington, 1985.

themes, as in the “celebration of the ordinary” in nineteenth-century realist novel, and its “democratic” equation of subjects. As a property of aesthetic experience such new configuration may be projected again into everyday life. And also beyond this “representational regime of art”, as he names it, in its purely aesthetic dimension, Rancière recognizes a specific political purpose of art – one that consists in suspending the usual hierarchies and meanings which define our experience. At this point he refers to the classical philosophical aesthetics, and especially to Schiller, whose conception he presents as the theoretical ground for the modern, autonomous aesthetic regime of art. In Schiller’s notion of aesthetic semblance (which he also called “freedom in appearance”), Rancière finds a fundamental duality, which he regards as crucial for its utopian meaning. This semblance, as Schiller describes it in *Letter 15*, presents itself as completely self-sufficient and self-contained: a work of art establishes its own ideal space, which bears the promise of some future community, of a free and complete humanity. At the same time, however, it remains a contingent material object, a historical product, and part to our actual, common space. As a semblance, by opening its “other”, autonomous space, a work of art offers “a sacrament of community”⁵⁰, in both the ideal and the material sense. In a way, Rancière defends here the modernist notion of aesthetic autonomy; however, he points out that it should not be interpreted as a self-regulating logic that rules some isolated domain. Aesthetic autonomy should not be identified with the specificity of the artistic medium, or the self-referential character of a work of art. Only when it is not completely isolated from life, nor totally dissolved in it, may a work of art hold its utopian promise. So, autonomy must be always related to heteronomy: “The life of art in the aesthetic regime of art consists precisely of a shutting between these scenarios – playing an autonomy against a heteronomy, and a heteronomy against an autonomy”⁵¹. It is also the lesson that Rancière takes from Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*.

One may note here one more specific feature in his reading of Schiller’s aesthetics, in which it differs from other, quite common interpretations. In his emphasis on the employment of aesthetic autonomy and heteronomy, Rancière refrains from the more “political” interpretations of Schiller’s *Letters*, which find in this work a vision of social harmony that would come to fulfilment in some future “aesthetic state”. Such interpretations may be grounded in other passages in Schiller’s often ambiguous work, as in his saying that the “most perfect of all artworks” would be the “construction of genuine political

⁵⁰ Rancière, *Form Politics to Aesthetics?*, *Paragraph*, March 2005, vol. 28, no. 1, p. 20.

⁵¹ Rancière, *Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy*, *New Left Review*, no.14, April 2002, p. 150.

freedom”⁵². But Rancière prefers a less literal reading, for reducing Schiller’s propositions to some practical directives would impose a political and aesthetic finality, which could cancel his utopian idea.

Therefore, taking inspiration from Shiller’s idea of the aesthetic state, Rancière exempts it from the anthropological ideal that accompanied it, and makes it free from any aspirations to fulness and totality. For him the aesthetic does not present a model of life, whether individual or social. In this way, his conception differs from those interpretations of the aesthetic which presented it as a privileged ground for man’s full self-realization, or a chance to regain the lost totality of experience. He does not ascribe to it any definite area or positive content. This is a double move which helps him to avoid the problematic consequences of those utopian aesthetic visions that turned into their opposites (as in the case of the totalitarian state or the contemporary aesthetization of life), as well as relegating all hope to an isolated area of autonomous art.

ESTETYCZNE ILUZJE WOLNOŚCI?

„IDEOLOGIA ESTETYCZNA” I POCHWAŁA ESTETYCZNEGO POZORU

(streszczenie)

Artykuł dotyczy dwóch przeciwstawnych typów interpretacji autonomii estetycznej – tych, które w doświadczeniu estetycznym i w sztuce upatrują utopijnego obszaru wolności, oraz tych, które kwestionują to założenie, wskazując na społeczne i ideologiczne przesłanki, jakie stoją za takim idealnym obrazem estetycznej wolności. Punkt wyjścia dla moich rozważań stanowi źródłowe powiązanie doświadczenia estetycznego i idei wolności w estetyce Kanta i Schillera, w szczególności schillerowska koncepcja stanu („państwa”) estetycznego jako formy urzeczywistnienia ludzkiej wolności. Pewną zawężoną wersję tej koncepcji analizuję na przykładzie Meyera Schapiro i jego wykładni abstrakcyjnego ekspresjonizmu, zwracając uwagę na paradoksy, jakie wynikały z potraktowania sztuki jako wyróżnionej sfery wolności i autentyczności (a w rezultacie ograniczenia tych ostatnich do jej wydzielonego obszaru). Na podobne ograniczenie pojęcia wolności w tradycji myśli estetycznej zwracał uwagę Terry Eagleton, dostrzegając w niej – kłopotliwy z punktu widzenia marksisty – splot emancypacyjnych impulsów i ograniczającego je mieszczańskiego pojęcia autonomii. Eagleton, a w jeszcze większym stopniu Pierre Bourdieu, wskazują, że kojarzona ze sferą estetyczną wolność i zawieszenie uwarunkowań mają charakter pozorny, wpisane są bowiem w ustalone społeczne hierarchie i instytucjonalne podziały. W praktyce artystycznej według Bourdieu możliwe jest „emancypacyjne” zdobywanie lub wypracowywanie w polu symbolicznym określonych pozycji, ale „uwolnienia się” od społecznie uwarunkowanych form myślenia i odczuwania można szukać tylko na wyższym poziomie teoretycznej refleksji. Inaczej widzą tę kwestię krytycy sztuki, jak Hal Foster i Benjamin Buchloh, którzy mimo że wyszli z pozycji anty-estetycznych (krytycznych wobec modernistycznej koncepcji autonomii sztuki), to właśnie w doświadczeniu swoistej dla dzieła sztuki „struktury este-

⁵² Schiller, op. cit., p. 43.

tycznej” upatrują szczególnego, emancypacyjnego i krytycznego potencjału – i choćby chwilowego wyzwolenia, jakie daje rozbicie czy zawieszenie istniejących kodów symbolicznych. Tego utopijnego wymiaru doświadczenia estetycznego i jego względnej autonomii broni też Jacques Rancière, polemizując z Bourdieu. Sięgając z powrotem do Schillera, zwraca on jednocześnie uwagę na nieodzowny związek sztuki z praktyką życiową – splot estetycznej autonomii i heteronomii, który decyduje o jej niedookreślonym, pogranicznym, instytucjonalnie niedomkniętym statusie.

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SPACES OF FREEDOM IN MODERN ART

Abstract: Whenever the expression ‘spaces of freedom’ appears in a text about art, it is usually intended as a metaphor. In this article, the phrase is treated literally. To the avant-garde artists the search for new types of space was one of the most important goals. At the same time, they declared to aspire to freedom, albeit perceived in various ways. Could these goals be considered convergent or even connected?

The text showcases three methods of approaching the discussed subject which occurred in the art of the 20th century. In the case of the first of these, the space of freedom is the function of human desires. The emergence of such an approach to the problem can be traced back to the Romantic subjectivisation of the manner in which space was presented; it was further developed by the avant-garde concepts, the discussion of which has been illustrated with examples of Futurism (the merging of the world and man), Surrealism (going beyond the ‘old oppositions’ in surreality) and Constructivism (freedom within an unlimited, homogeneous and uniform space). The second approach consists in treating human desires as the function of space. It appeared in art of the 1960s and 1970s, in two diverse forms. One of these varieties has been associated with accepting the urban space shaped by the consumer civilization (pop art), the other involved an exit to natural, secluded areas in order to search for freedom there (Land art). The final part of the article is entitled *A Labyrinth as the space of freedom*. A labyrinth contains an infinite number of equally ranked paths which one can follow, which evokes a sense of unrestricted liberty of choice but at the same time creates a prison. This situation has been discussed in reference to the postmodern concepts of creativity and perception, based on the examples of hyperspace in architecture and hypertext in media arts.

Keywords: avant-garde – postmodernism – concepts of space – concepts of freedom

In art criticism, the term “spaces of freedom” is most frequently used as a metaphor. The phrase usually appears in the context of the political or moral issues addressed by the works, or else in connection with ensuring the artist’s individual freedom to act. Nevertheless, in the following essay I would like to approach the term more literally. Such an approach is validated by the fact that a range of endeavors in the visual arts of various periods – and particularly in the twentieth century – have centered upon the notion of space. Indeed, one might write a history of the art of the last century, focusing on that very issue.

Among the numerous reasons for seeking new types of space represented in painting or the graphic arts, or else incorporated into sculpture, performance art and installations, was the wish to discover the areas suggesting a sense of freedom. Therefore, it is worthwhile to reflect on the features which were seen as appropriate for such 'spaces of freedom'. Obviously, I do not intend to discuss all the examples of avant-garde achievements which illustrate this issue. Rather, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the problem and to emphasize what I see as the crucial connections between artistic treatment of space and the sense of liberty.

Yi-Fu Tuan wrote: "Spaciousness is closely associated with a sense of being free. Freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough room to act. Being free has several levels of meaning. Fundamental is the ability to transcend the present condition, and this transcendence is most simply manifest as the elementary power to move. In the act of moving, space and its attributes are directly experienced"¹. To the above argument the famous representative of human geography appends a series of explanations. He emphasizes that in the Western world space is a commonly acknowledged symbol of freedom because it is open, suggests a future and encourages one to act. The dangers which await a human being may also be analogous: both when we find ourselves in an unknown territory and when we abandon established patterns of behavior, we are exposed to risk. In both cases, when we wish to act or move, we are unable to fall back on preexisting rules, trodden paths or road signs. Both the state of being free and uncharted space are "like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed"². Such a conviction appeared as a symptom of modernity.

1. THE SPACE OF FREEDOM AS A FUNCTION OF HUMAN DESIRES

In the Romantic era, the image of the world was subordinated to man's subjective perspective. The reflection of this phenomenon in art was the transformed iconography. As Jan Białostocki wrote, "the new issues of the individual's relation to the world of nature and history, to society and fate, to time and death – the consequences of the directive to pursue freedom, the new and conceivably principal directive in all areas of action – found their

¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 52.

² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

expression in new thematic scopes and specific subjects”³. Rather than using their works to depict the spaces of freedom and enslavement as constant ingredients of the order appropriate for the ontological and social structure of reality, the artists, taking freedom as their primary directive, struggled to discover its areas. As a consequence, conflict and tension dominated their vision of the world: “harmonious coexistence was supplanted by opposition”⁴. The repertoire of new themes was based on oppositions: man and nature, man and society, man and fate, death, destiny, man and time (which also included the theme of man versus history), man and space, and finally man and the cosmos. The basis for each of these oppositions was the human being, although no longer understood as an element of a system, subjected to the existing order, but rather constituting a significant reference point for the presented sphere of reality. According to Białostocki, “Nature ceased to be a monumental frame for heroic deeds or an intimate scenery of pastoral lyric: it became a power with which man was beginning to struggle”⁵. In this struggle, nature sometimes surrendered to man, or their conflict was presented as a duel of equals (e.g. in Turner’s painting entitled *Rain, Steam and Speed*). However, more frequently man lost the fight and his ship yielded to the power of the elements (e.g. in Friedrich’s *Wreck of the Hope*). Active freedom, typical of Romantic art, also manifested itself in the search for the motifs which confronted man with the infinite and impenetrable reaches of the sky, sea or mountains. Sometimes, man would show his greatness in withstanding the confrontation. At other times, however, the work’s dominant mood was that of a threat, and “man sought escape: where circumstances precluded an active, heroic stance which would fulfill his wish to be free, he escaped in space and time”⁶. His spatial escapes led him into the world of the exotic, the Oriental and the fantastic; his temporal escapes were usually into the past: towards heroes, paragons of political action or lessons in calamity.

The distinctive Romantic penchant for the spaces that threatened freedom enabled its confirmation or at least allowed one to seek it; the emphasis was put on the activity of the protagonist. Whereas earlier man was shown as cast into the space, subjected to the situations which occur in it, here it was he who delineated the perspective. It is from his vantage point that we observe the various locales, it is he who determines the criteria for their evaluation and who struggles with unfavorable circumstances or seeks a possibility of escape. Thus, focusing on the ‘human theme’ led Romantic art towards the subject-

³ J. Białostocki, “Ikonomia romantyczna. Przegląd problemów badawczych. *Romantyzm. Studia nad sztuką drugiej połowy wieku XVIII i wieku XIX*, Warszawa 1967, p. 86.

⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

ivization of the representation of space. Selecting its fragment as a motif in his painting, the artist did not rely on its appropriateness for the work's religious or moralizing content, but on his personal intuition about where the will to act may be fulfilled, where the desire for freedom may be realized, where one may flee when the circumstances prove unpropitious.

The search for the connections between human desires and the character of space, which was highlighted in Romantic art, was characterized by a relative independence of the two elements of the equation. The represented space was correlated with emotional states, but it was not subjugated to them. In his selection of particular motifs, the painter was governed by ideas; while certain features were emphasized, the autonomous qualities of the phenomenon were also acknowledged⁷. In twentieth century art the situation changed. For the avant-garde artists of the first half of the century, space became a function of the human desires in a broader sense. In their manifestoes, these artists most frequently used the term 'freedom' to signify independence from external limitations. Thus, the space of freedom was intended perceived as an area of social and cultural liberty which enabled the artists to pursue innovative endeavors. The art critics and theoreticians who tackled this issue rarely went beyond such an interpretation, and even if they did, they only outlined the stages of the historical process of the emancipation of artistic activity. An original work of art was perceived as reflecting the fact that an artist mentally moves within the spaces which are free from limitations. The attributes of the works of art themselves, on the other hand, were interpreted in different terms. The issue of space, which had been one of the principal problems addressed by painters and sculptors since the Cubist period, was regarded in terms of the truthfulness or authenticity of depiction rather than in terms of freedom. Nevertheless, let us consider the problem in question from the perspective of striving for liberty. The question is thus as follows: did the new possibilities of treating space, which emerged in the avant-garde art of the first half of the twentieth century, address the necessity of freedom, and, if so, in what way? Could they be perceived as a means of expressing freedom or a method of seeking it?

⁷ A fitting example of the above tendency is Friedrich's painting entitled *Monk by the Sea*, in which one may notice the artist's endeavor to emphasize the convergence of sky, sea and earth. These elements seem to 'tend towards one another'. Simultaneously, however, the horizon triggers the mechanism of divergence, i.e. the disunity of various grounds and their escape beyond the space of the painting. The elements appear both to approach and depart from one another. Therefore, the figure of the monk, placed in the framework of this 'cosmological movement' becomes 'a personification of seeing and simultaneously of the tension between proximity and distance' (I. Lorenc, "Czas przestrzeni pejzażu romantycznego Caspara Davida Friedricha". K. Wilkoszewska (ed.), *Czas przestrzeni*, Kraków 2008, p. 159).

One of the fundamental themes of Futurist art is simultaneity, which is usually understood as a means to combine spatial and temporal factors within a painting. Traditionally, this principle is exemplified by the works of Giacomo Balla or Gino Severini, who incorporated elements from various stages of the depicted figure's movement into a simultaneous arrangement of forms painted on the canvas. However, looking at Futurist paintings, as well as reading the theoretical texts, we come to realize that the issue of simultaneity is more complex. The Futurists were primarily concerned not with conveying the images appearing in the act of perceiving an object, but rather the sensations (*sensazione*) which such images evoke in the artist, before they are concretized within the scope of a specific intention. Such a proto-sensation (proto-impression) merges current sensory perceptions with the images recorded in memory (*quello che si vede e quello che si ricorda*)⁸. Such synthesis results in the simultaneity of that which is normally kept separate. The Futurist concept, which Umberto Boccioni labeled "physical transcendentalism", aims at annulling both the passage of time and spatial distances. Thus, the *Technical Manifesto* states: "Space no longer exists"⁹. It does not exist in the sense of traditional perception, which assumes that people and objects are arranged as if in a large container. The dismissal of this supposition renders the rules of painterly perspective no longer applicable. Boccioni wrote that "the whole visible world must fall in upon us, merging with us and creating a harmony measurable only by the creative imagination"¹⁰. This process could be regarded solely as a singular creative effect, aimed at providing the artist and the recipients with unusual experiences. Nevertheless, Boccioni stated that the ultimate desire of the Futurists was to "achieve REALITY. There is no fear more stupid than that which makes us afraid to go beyond the bounds of the art we are practicing"¹¹. This transgressive stance subsequently led to the transferring of the intensified dynamism onto the surrounding space. This was to be achieved by architecture, which was being reinterpreted. Antonio Sant'Elia wrote that it should be perceived as "the endeavor to harmonize the environment with Man with freedom and great audacity, that is to transform the world of things into a direct projection of the world of the spirit"¹².

Space should therefore become a projection of human aspirations. This statement should not, however, be taken in the traditional sense, i.e. to mean that, basing on the knowledge pertaining to the existing environment, an attempt is

⁸ Cf. Ch. Baumgarth, *Geschichte des Futurismus*, Hamburg 1966, p. 255.

⁹ "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto, 11 April 1910", in: H. B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art. A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, Berkeley 1968, p. 290.

¹⁰ U. Boccioni, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture", in: *ibid.*, p. 302.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

¹² A. Sant'Elia, "Manifesto of Futurist Architecture", in: Ch. Baumgarth, p. 311.

to be made to harmonize the objectively existing world of things with the needs springing from human aspirations. The Futurist space of freedom is delineated by will. This was emphasized by Baumgarth, who described it as the highest human value according to Futurists, as “only thanks to his will can man rise above himself, ‘multiply’ himself; only through his own will may he achieve mastery over matter”¹³. Thus, will allows him to overcome his limitations. The issue of being free to act, so crucial in the first manifesto penned by Marinetti, was therefore reduced to the search for the possibilities of shaping the image of reality and, subsequently, reality itself, according to the principle of freedom. First, poetry and painting managed to overcome the oppositional treatment of place and time, movement and stability, being here and elsewhere, earlier and later. Thus, a vision of multidirectional and multitemporal space emerged, where both categories merged. As a result, the question of freedom acquired a new dimension. It no longer consisted in searching for places within a pre-existing field where freedom could be realized; instead the entire space was to be treated as the scope of its projection¹⁴.

Unlike the Romantics, whose vision was based on oppositions (often dramatically emphasized and evoking varied emotions), the Futurists chose to search for the possibilities of simultaneous realization of both opposing sides. Thus, the elements of the opposition are no longer absolute in character. Here, the space of freedom appears to be an area of limitless possibilities which remain in the state of dynamic tension.

Voluntarism was also characteristic of the Surrealists’ attitude. However, their primary intention was not to emphasize tensions, but rather to overcome them by revealing the artificial character of the ‘old oppositions’, as André Breton put it.

The Surrealists’ interest in the problem of freedom went through several stages¹⁵. In the first stage, influenced by the ideology of the Communist left, freedom was seen first and foremost in the context of political, social and moral liberties. The emphasis, however, was placed on the moral meaning rather than on the role of the economic factors. Also important was the problem of the freedom of the mind and it was this aspect that gradually began to dominate. Freedom became predominantly a criterion of evaluating attitudes and behaviors, including artistic ones. It was perceived as an absolute

¹³ Ch. Baumgarth, p. 240.

¹⁴ Futurism, in its early stage, emphasized the opposition between machine and nature or between city and country, where, respectively, the former elements of these pairs were associated with freedom. Later, the vision of liberty became cosmic and all-encompassing.

¹⁵ The issue is discussed more broadly by Krystyna Janicka in her excellent book entitled *Światopogląd surrealizmu* (Warszawa 1969, pp. 84-89).

independence of thought and the liberty of action. Emphasis was placed on its dynamic character. According to Breton, it was a vital force which led to continuous ascent. This trend seems to be of fundamental importance to the Surrealists. It stresses the timeless nature of freedom – unique, genuine and total – whose various historical manifestations were only partial realizations. Ever since the emergence of the movement, this understanding of freedom was associated with the force of desire, the power of the imagination, and the consequences of fulfilling the claims of these powers.

The scope of the objectives focused on by the Surrealists underwent partial changes throughout the movement's successive stages. Thus, the relation between freedom and space was realized in various ways. From the perspective of the issues under scrutiny, it is the final stage which is of particular importance. It can, after all, be regarded as fundamental for the movement, as it was already presaged in the very first manifesto. Being free was associated there with altering the hierarchy of the mental faculties, resulting in the possibility of broadening the concept of reality. Surreality (*surréalité*) was initially meant to include only that which is revealed in the human mind when it is liberated from the principles of logic or morality. Soon, however, Breton extended the concept, claiming that "surreality would be embodied in reality itself"¹⁶. This opened the possibility of searching for freedom in all available spaces.

Initially, the Surrealists associated the possibility of capturing surreality with their invented techniques. Of these, automatic writing was the most important, as was emphasized in the movement's first manifesto in 1924. This provoked a debate on the potential of the visual arts. As part of this discussion, in 1928, Breton formulated the concept of the eye "in its savage state". Freed from the habits and schemata of perception, it was meant to enable the capturing of previously unnoticed states of things, thus engendering "spiritual realizations sufficiently precise and distinct"¹⁷. These were to be translated into visual realizations, revealing thus far unacknowledged spaces.

The experiments conducted by the Surrealists by means of art were methodical in character. They systematically looked for methods enabling the penetration of the areas of surreality, associated with the spaces of freedom. Thus, the liberation was to begin with the cognitive sphere. Initially, one could surmise that the Surrealists negated the role of rational thought, aiming to replace it with imagination, desires, dreams and daydreams. Later, however, in

¹⁶ A. Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, transl. from French by S. W. Taylor, New York 1972, p. 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

his text *The Crisis of the Object*, Breton explained that “reason goes so far as to propose the continuous assimilation of the irrational”, and thus “it becomes necessary for *surrealism* to be accompanied by a *surrationalism*, which will act simultaneously as a stimulant and a restraining influence”¹⁸. This allowed for the concept of “generalized geometry”, including Euclidean geometry as part of the system, to be considered in relation to other varieties of the spaces of freedom.

The Surrealist approach was characterized by a syncretic attitude, as is evidenced in the above example. They focused on individual phenomena (fragments of space or objects), in an attempt to demonstrate that the existing differences or oppositions, emphasized in daily life as well as in the tradition of European science and philosophy, are in fact illusory. Placing emphasis on the oppositions restrains us, erecting seemingly insurmountable barriers and forcing us to make constant choices. However, from a supernal point of view proposed by Surrealism, they may be abolished altogether. Thus, a space of freedom is opened, “in which the attained and the desired no longer exclude one another” and “our eyes, our *precious* eyes, have to reflect that which, while not existing, is yet as intense as that which does exist, and which has once more to consist of real visual images, fully compensating us for what we have left behind”¹⁹.

The visual art of the Surrealists consisted in searching for thus understood spaces of freedom. In some cases, the starting point were faithfully reproduced quotidian places or objects, between which a fluctuation of mutual relations occurred. Examples of such situations can be found in the works of such artists as Salvador Dalí or René Magritte. In the case of the latter, Breton noticed a tendency towards a ‘secondary figuration’, which consisted in transcending the primary one by employing some rhetorical figures normally used in verbal communication, which can be seen as general ‘figures of thought’. This results in overcoming the relation between human deeds and circumstances, earlier acknowledged by rhetoric and dictated by the principles of common sense. What is established instead is “a great *semantic bridge* which allows us to pass from the proper meaning to the *figurative* meaning and to conjugate these two meanings with a single glance, with the aim of achieving ‘perfect thought’, that is to say, thought that has achieved complete emancipation”²⁰. Another possibility consisted in subjecting real, concrete objects or fragments of interiors to the process of reshaping by means of imagination or desires. Objects and places would be creatively juxtaposed in various situations, thus

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 276.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 270.

revealing their “latent possibilities”, or “fields of tension“. Because of such experiments, as Breton argued in *The Crisis of the Object*, “we are witnessing the same vigorous stirrings of the thought process rebelling against the thinking habits of the past millennium, heralding a way of thought which is no longer a reducing agent but has become infinitely inductive and extensible”²¹.

The Futurists and the Surrealists employed different methods in order to achieve the same goal, namely an infinite opening of space. Their starting point, however, was a specific place or object from our everyday experience. In this regard, the Constructivist conception was considerably more radical. It was based on the assumption that, beginning with what is limited, one could never fully attain infinity. For this reason, the starting point should be the concept of space which is empty, uniform and boundless; these are the features attributed to space in mathematics. Thus, the fundamental problem was the question of combining these attributes with real domains in which human activity occurs²².

In his text “Experience of the New Perception of Space”, Mikhail Matyushin describes particularly interesting experiments aimed at achieving such a goal.²³ He begins his reflections with stating that all of us, willingly or not, participate in the forming of a new awareness of space. This is manifested in art, science, construction, and social life. The author presented his vision of history in which the artistic output of the successive eras was related to the specific approaches to the perception of space. The evolution was leading towards combining visible objects into larger wholes and simultaneously separating this experience from personal factors. The author found the art of Cézanne to be of crucial importance, because in his works sight ceases to register individual objects and, “broadly taking in the visible reality, runs from the center in all directions, openly taking that which constitutes the very core of perceptible solids”²⁴. Matyushin decided to continue these experiments by ‘broadening the sight’ or opening the angle of view at the moment of perception. He began with the attempts reminiscent of Futurist practices, involving a simultaneous view of all mobile objects. Later, he moved towards experiments which involved both objects in front of us and those behind us. His intention was to overcome the opposition of the front and back, assuming that

²¹ Ibid., p. 277.

²² An in-depth analysis of this issue can be found in my book entitled *Dlaczego geometria? Problemy współczesnej sztuki geometrycznej*, Łódź 2004, p. 105-107.

²³ The 1920 work was read publicly twice in 1921 and 1924 but was never published. It was only made available in print in 1976 on the basis of the manuscript by Nikolai Chardziev (N. Chardziev, *The Russian Avant-Garde*, Stockholm 1976).

²⁴ M. Matiuszyn, “Próba nowego odczucia przestrzeni”, in: A. Turowski (ed.), *Między sztuką a komuną. Teksty awangardy rosyjskiej 1910-1932*, Kraków 1998, p. 131.

the human body is in this case a limit which precludes another direction of viewing. He argued that appropriate exercises would enable us to experience both what was in front of us and what was behind, at the same time. Finally, he arrived at the perception of depth – the abyss. We are prevented from experiencing it by the awareness of the ground on which we stand. On the one hand, it gives us a sense of security, but on the other – as Matyushin puts it – while facing an abyss, “we experience an overwhelming desire to defy everything and throw ourselves forward, regardless of our own safety”²⁵. This wish, the author writes, can be safely fulfilled with the aid of the eye: “[a] painter’s eye searches for a new space and senses its future ... To this eye, distance is not a joyous sphere of peace and full satisfaction but a flight hindered only by the universal law of gravitation”²⁶. The purpose of human activity is to overcome limitations and, gaining the awareness of a limitless space, learn to live within it. Concluding his text, Matyushin writes: “From all directions we shall be awash in a new perception of space which surrounds everything with its infinity and shall show us new paths leading to yet more effective collective creativity”²⁷.

The creativity of the future must be collective, because in the course of the experiences described above the sense of individual identity is eradicated. In Matyushin’s vision, the qualitative diversity of the world disappears. Thus, self-definition by relating to diverse external phenomena is impossible. The disappearance of such diversity is so advanced that even the fixed orientation of the directions in space ceases to be of any significance. There no longer exists a point focusing its radii (as is the case in geometrical diagrams) and the directions may lead everywhere at any given moment. Such space does not pose any limitations. What disappears therein is not only the culturally constructed qualitative diversity but also the traditional, purely mathematical or physical divisions. One has a sense of being in an area where the terminology applied to the description of immanent reality fails²⁸. For Matyushin, this is the ground of true freedom from which authentic creativity may emerge. Nevertheless, it cannot be an individualistic action, since there is no place nor basis for it in the infinite, uniform space. The activity must assume the qualities of the new space as the principle of its practice. Such a universalistic

²⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 140.

²⁸ The experience described by Matyushin is in some ways reminiscent of the path of the mystics aspiring to liberation from the diverse qualities of reality and a sense of individual identity in order to merge with the Absolute. Usually, however, they assumed that such a state was meant to last. Achieving it was an outcome of a certain path and all activity ceases with its attainment. In Matyushin’s case, on the other hand, an analogous experience is meant to lead to new creativity realized on a different basis.

postulate in its broadest sense was put forward by both Suprematism and Constructivism.

Kazimir Malevich was Matyushin's friend. His statements from the Suprematist manifestoes, in which he used the metaphor of a desert, could be seen as revealing the conception of space similar to that characterized above. This, however, posed a new problem: how to express such spatial experience? In his opinion, the painterly realization which came closest to the condition described as a sense of subjectlessness was the white background and the black square. The whiteness, stretching in all directions, was to express the sense of detachment from three-dimensionality, a possibility of an infinite number of dimensions. The black square was an entity which appeared in this space. In the later phases of Suprematism such entities proliferated, undergoing differentiation by modifying shapes and colors. However, the vision of reality derived from the sense of infinite space did not allow for subordination or enslavement. Malevich wrote: "Each form is free and individual. Each form is a world".²⁹

Katarzyna Kobro proposed a solution which, from the point of view of this discussion, was even more radical. She did not refer to Matyushin's reflections. Describing space in a text co-written with Władysław Strzemiński, she discussed its 'homogeneity', 'limitlessness', 'continuity and inseparability' as well as 'uniformity' not in the form of a postulate, of what can be considered by means of particular cognitive acts, but as a description of the normal state of things. She focused on the problem which the Russian artist only mentioned in the final sentence: what should be the character of the resulting art practice? She was interested in the methods of incorporating the aforementioned qualities of free and infinite space in works of art. In their search for answers, Kobro and Strzemiński concentrated on the problem of negating boundaries. On the basis of selected examples from art history, they argued that since the Baroque, various methods had been employed in order to reduce their importance, while in the 20th century avant-garde art an attempt was made to eradicate them entirely by opening the sculptural solid. In this way, by eliminating the opposition between form and space, it would be possible to achieve their true and full unification.³⁰ Forms existed, but they also acquired

²⁹ K. Malevich, "Du cubisme et du futurisme au suprématisme. Le nouveau réalisme pictural". *Écrits*, ed. A. Nakov, Paris 1975, p. 201.

³⁰ It is worth noticing that the Polish artists engaged in a polemic with Suprematism. Invoking Malevich's notion of forms moving freely in an infinite, dimensionless space, they wrote: "The Suprematist solution of this problem is very courageous and consistent: the shape, thrown off balance, does not return to it, but remains forever in the state of dislocation and movement, to employ the dynamic forces of its flight for merging with space, so that by swallowing space in the direction of its flight to fuse with it and become a homogeneous and inseparable whole. However, movement in space does not necessarily entail merging with it. A shape may traverse space in the

such qualities as continuity and limitlessness. Liberated from closed boundaries characteristic of a solid, they merged with space, becoming analogously free and open to the infinite possibilities of movement which permeated them.

According to Kobro and Strzemiński, the traditionally understood concept of freedom as complete lack of restraint and total independence can only be realized when individuality vanishes within a dimensionless space. Abolishing the boundaries of solids, opening them to the space which is “in all its parts uniform and identical” and where “each part is the same as others”³¹, we ensure their liberty. As the Polish artists are very consistent in their principles, they caution against the ‘centralizing’ character of constructing a work of art. An infinite and homogeneous space has no center. Any attempt to establish it, to define the *axis mundi*, must lead to hierarchization, inequality and the limiting of freedom. Only if the “continuity and uniformity” of space in actions and works is maintained is there a chance of true freedom.

This, however, poses a problem concerning the means of creating constructions which would meet the criteria of such principles. The Polish artists found an important inspiration in the sculptures by Boccioni, where a transition from shaping the solid to creating a ‘sculptural zone’ occurred. However, invoking Kobro’s own sculptural concepts, they suggested that the division of space be performed by introducing interpenetrating planes. These were to be arranged so as not to create constructions which would close up fragments of space (thus establishing solids) and which would in turn become prisons. They wrote: “The construction should be even and centerless”³² They also emphasized that the construction of planes should not suggest any action of forces nor should they provoke any tensions, as “the balance of space is *non-dynamic*, that is, achieved without any forces (such as weight, movement, etc.)”³³. An ideal observer of such Unistic constructions would be an incorporeal being possessed only of the ability to see. Strzemiński and Kobro realized that the involvement of a corporeal observer results in the space’s acquiring ‘orientation directions’ related to his actions: “the vertical statics of people and objects, the horizontal level of the surroundings which we encounter on both sides of ourselves and the direction inwards, forwards, onwards”³⁴. They

most dynamic manner, but does not in the process lose its qualitative difference from the space which is static and balanced, does not cease to be a shape which is separate and individualized from this space” (K. Kobro, W. Strzemiński, “Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczenia rytmu czasoprzestrzennego”, in: W. Strzemiński, *Pisma*, ed. Z. Baranowicz, Wrocław 1975, p. 83).

³¹ Ibid., p. 88.

³² Ibid., p. 91.

³³ Ibid., p. 92. This suggests that the idea of freedom associated with adjusting to what is necessary and including the existing conditions becomes obsolete.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

believed, however, that, unless they are diversified due to their cultural hierarchizations, these three directions make it possible to maintain the evenness of space. Thus, they suggest that sculptural constructions should be referred to the mathematical “three-axis system”. This is explained in the following way: “By arranging all shapes in these three principal directions we avoid their collisions and clashes, we avoid dynamisms, we arrange the axes of shapes so that they lengthen into infinity and thus merge with space expressed in the three-axis system”³⁵. Thus, the principle of liberty is maintained. While it is no longer an absolute freedom of movement within a uniform, indefinite space, it allows the avoidance of collisions and an endless development of creative endeavors.

In the second part of their text, Kbro and Strzemiński considered the principles which should be applied to the placement of elements in the spatial-temporal arrangement. Consequently, they suggested rules for calculating their rhythm. Is this rationalization in accordance with the presented concept of freedom, based on infinite space? Andrzej Turowski invoked the interest of the Polish artists in the ideas of Taylor and Ford concerning the principles of work organization in a modern factory, claiming that the construction principles which they propose could be seen as “Taylorism on a cosmic scale”³⁶. In my opinion, the association is not entirely correct. Indeed, both Strzemiński and – later – Kbro expressed their appreciation of Taylor’s ideas. The founder of Unism noticed the relation between dividing factory work into its simplest elements and the idea of functionalism in architectural design³⁷. A person’s life in an apartment was to be reduced to a set of basic functions, serving as guidelines for the arrangement of rooms and the design of the home appliances. However, was this organizing principle meant to turn a human being into a mechanical robot which would perform precisely defined activities both at the workplace and at home? I believe that the “cosmic” dimension of the concept, as Turowski calls it, changes the character of the performed actions. After all, the point is not to fill the universe with standard elements and imprison man in it. Kbro and Strzemiński emphasized that the principles of construction are to be founded on the nature of the limitless space, rather than the rules of functionalism being applied to its efficient arrangement. Thus, if any connection can be found between Taylor’s ideas and the calculations of spatial-temporal rhythm, it is only possible in terms of a radical change of goals. Taylorism was criticized because, in order to intensify production, it overlooked such concerns as the importance of working conditions or the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 93-94.

³⁶ A. Turowski, *Budowniczości Świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu w sztuce polskiej*, Kraków 2000, p. 280.

³⁷ Cf. W. Strzemiński, “Sztuka nowoczesna a szkoły artystyczne”, *Pisma*, p. 157.

laborers' psychological capabilities, thus leading to the enslavement of man in certain respects. It would be difficult to level similar accusations at the idea of spatial-temporal rhythm calculation. These develop rationally, but in a manner which is not dictated by narrow, practical goals, in a limitless space, while preserving its qualities. It is as if Ford's assembly lines were running in various directions and the worker could choose the one on which to work and could decide when to cease his labors and proceed to another one.

3. HUMAN DESIRES AS THE FUNCTIONS OF SPACE

Rosalind E. Krauss notes that the 1960s generation of artists turned the human theme in art into "a function of free space, environment, position and stigma of everything that is external³⁸." She was alluding to the liberation of works of art from the artistic space. She understood this as transcending the 'interior' of painterly space or the 'internal essence' of sculptural space. In this period, artistic issues relating to man began to be interpreted as a consequence of specific external spaces, such as the large modern city with its social diversity, in whose architecture and iconosphere kitsch is mixed with outstanding innovatory achievements, where an excess of objects attracts the eye in shops or irritates us when worn-out and littering the streets. Another type of external space considered by the artist of this period were natural areas, such as deserts, meadows, frozen or temporally dry lakes, and so forth. Such specific areas provided an important point of reference, dictating the character of the artists' reflection on the 'human themes', including freedom. Thus, beginning with the 1960s, the approach to the problem discussed here gained a new character. Instead of the voluntaristic attitude typical of the avant-garde in the first half of the 20th century – which saw the emergence of the visions of space and futurological conceptions predicting their materialization which were to change man's life – in the latter half of the century it was rather the 'cooperation' with real, existing areas as well as the question of its potential human meaning which were taken into consideration. Do they become areas of liberty or, rather, do they limit human possibilities?

Krauss links the beginnings of the change which she is describing with the artistic movement initiated by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. In all probability, she is referring to the art of assemblage, in which the dialogue of the artist with found objects has its roots. Calvin Tomkins emphasized, on numerous occasions, the fact that Rauschenberg tended towards the art in

³⁸ R. E. Krauss, "Richard Serra – Rzeźba", in: *Richard Serra*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Contemporary Art "Zachęta", Warszawa 1994, p. 16 (reprinted from: *Richard Serra/ Sculpture*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1986).

which the artists, their personalities, emotions, concepts and tastes would not be the principal element. In this respect, he was decidedly different from, among others, the representatives of action painting, who found their space of freedom in the process of painting. Rauschenberg also questioned the relation between 'concept' and 'execution', stating that it implies the precedence of an idea and the secondary nature of realization. In his view, it was the 'cooperation' with the material which was the most valuable and which he considered to be the opposite of manipulation or subjection. Thus, as Tomkins put it, "his attitude has always been one of cheerful and nearly total acceptance"³⁹. He was surprised when someone assessed an object used in his work as utterly ugly. This applied to stuffed animals as well as car tires, mirrors and Coca Cola bottles. By juxtaposing such objects in his 'combine paintings', Rauschenberg "always respects their integrity, never altering appearance to the point where they function merely as formal shapes in the composition and never allowing them to serve merely symbolic ends"⁴⁰. He claimed that "a picture is more like the real world when it's made out of the real world"⁴¹.

The described situation of complete acceptance of objects and of the close link between creative activity and their qualities seems to portend the artist's alienation and a reinforcement of a similar alienation in the viewers. Such a threat becomes all the more probable when one considers the fact that the objects arousing the interest of the representatives of Pop Art were industrial products or components of popular culture, which (as was strongly emphasized) were mass-produced at that time⁴². Thus, it could be surmised that this type of artistic activity is a transference of objectified human relations typical of modern civilization onto the field of art. The artists who exploited mass culture seemed to abandon spiritual independence which could be opposed to the world dominated by economic processes. They did not see the space of freedom which could be created by the field of art. Thus, with their activity, they deprived the viewers of the opportunity to enter it. This is why the emergence of Pop Art provoked debates among art critics as well as vehement protests from painters, especially those connected with Abstract Expressionism.

Were these accusations justified? They were based on the conviction that the source of human freedom was the autonomy of the subject. This is why any attempt to limit it must lead to alienation. Man acts freely when he is in charge

³⁹ C. Tomkins, *The Bride & the Bachelors. Five masters of the Avant Garde*, New York, 1965, p. 194.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 193-194.

⁴² Cf. texts in the anthology *Mass Culture. The Popular Arts in America*, eds. B. Rosenberg and D. Manning White, New York-London 1957.

of produced objects, controlling both their production and their purpose. Conversely, the alienation of work involves the loss of such possibilities. A laborer who works at an assembly line repeats the same action over and over again, neither knowing its place in the process of manufacturing the product nor controlling the final outcome. As a result, such an activity does not belong to him and thus turns against him, limiting and enslaving him. Objects and the processes of their industrial production control human life and impoverish it. Mass culture has been interpreted in a similar fashion. It has been emphasized that it fills a person's free time with aggressive, banal content conveyed in a superficially attractive form, thus blocking the possibility of its recipients' individualized spiritual development. For this reason, the products of mass culture have been seen as simplified substitutes for artworks, contributing to the recipients' voluntary alienation. Pop Art also seemed to reinforce this status. After all, its representatives refused to distance themselves from the contemporary consumer reality.

On the basis of the arguments presented above, attempts were made to contrast Pop Art with the endeavors of the avant-garde. Overcoming alienation was seen as one of the main goals of the Futurists, Expressionists, Surrealists and Abstractionists. The emancipation was primarily meant to include the sphere of culture. Artists proclaimed the need for liberation from the norms of religion, morality and aesthetics, often combining these ideas with political and economic emancipation. Their aspirations, however, implied a singular metaphysics of the identity of subject and object. The most important task of the free man was to develop the qualities appropriate for his essence. While the essence in question was interpreted differently in particular conceptions, it was invariably assumed to possess a fixed and definite character. Thus, alienation posed a threat to it. The work process and its products were to lead to a reification of human relations and to the alienation of an individual from himself, from his human essence. Also the world of objects appeared to be alien. The avant-garde artists tried to overcome such alienation by means of art, which they perceived as the fundamental area of liberty which was still in existence. Artistic creativity was treated as the opposite of alienated work. This is why the artists and art critics associated with this perspective evinced such a negative attitude to the emergence of Pop Art. However, did they correctly assume that accepting products of industrial civilization entails abandoning the search for freedom? They were right if we assume that the basic value of every human being is their sense of identity and internal autonomy, enabling objection against anything that threatens their integrity. From this point of view, the capitalist processes of labor and consumerism did actually enslave man. Advertising threatened the freedom of choice, constituting explicit persuasion and veiled coercion. It forced laborers to intensify work

in order to meet additional needs created by the presented possibilities of consumption, which in turn had a negative effect on the balanced development of human personality. Mass culture invaded the spiritual world, hindering its proper development with its aggressive and primitive stimuli. The representatives of Pop Art seemed to carelessly engage in these processes instead of opposing them. Thus, their creative output was considered to manifest tacit complicity in the reification processes which led to the enslavement of modern man by eradicating the spaces of freedom, as such art was seen as losing its oppositional character to other spheres of social life. It was no longer an alternative to other areas of life nor their criticism, at best it restricted itself to irony.

Nonetheless, the issue can be viewed from a different perspective. One may assume that, in their search for freedom, the avant-garde artists were in fact enslaved by taking for granted the afore-mentioned metaphysical concept of man and objects. This brought them to the search for utopian spaces in which the need for freedom could be fulfilled. The avant-garde exhausted itself in this struggle based on accentuating the insurmountable character of opposition. The transition from treating the space as a function of the subject to concluding that human issues should be considered as the function of space made it possible to overcome such a seemingly irremovable opposition. It did not enable man's domination over the environment, even in his imagination, and in this respect, it limited his will to power. Instead, it created an opportunity to search for real spaces which would give us a chance of relative freedom and, more importantly, let us enter a game with our surroundings. In this game, an artist could experience his freedom.

Characteristically, it was already Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns who did not treat objects as entirely defined when referring to them. Looking at their works, one does not have the impression that they are based on some preexisting reality, which should be documented in the works and which should be taken into consideration in all artistic endeavors. On the contrary, it is liberty that can be sensed there. A car tyre put around a goat by Rauschenberg; a stuffed white hen, placed on a pile of objects, labelled *Odalisque*. In a cycle of works depicting the American flag, shooting targets or numbers, Johns demonstrates the fluid boundary between reproducing an object and making a new copy of it. Thus, objects do not have to enslave us or force us to reckon with their qualities or functions which are assumed to be fixed and binding. Contemporary reality, dominated by industrial products, does not have to be treated as the domain of evil and enslavement, threatening man with alienation; instead, it could become a sphere of unlimited liberties, which will enable various realizations of the principle of freedom.

Jean Baudrillard noted that the material products which are the objects of consumption should be considered chiefly as objects meant to fulfill desires and produce satisfaction. This is why the functioning of objects in consumerist civilizations should not be limited to the fulfillment of basic needs, i.e. consuming larger amounts of higher quality goods. All these objects are organized “into a signifying fabric: consumption is the *virtual totality of all objects and messages ready-constituted as more or less coherent discourses*. If it has any meaning at all, consumption means *an activity consisting in a systematic manipulation of signs*”⁴³. Thus, objects are consumed not “in their materiality but in their difference”⁴⁴. That is to say that the material objects which can be used to fulfill the same needs may differ in their meanings. Thus, what is important is not only (or not so much) the fulfillment of a definite, specific need, but rather the multiple possibilities of fulfilling it by means of objects which carry various additional meanings. It is these meanings which play a significant role in the choices made when shopping, because objects are considered in relation to them. This is why, as Baudrillard puts it, “it is the *idea of the relation* that is consumed in the series of objects, which allow it to be seen”⁴⁵.

The creative freedom of the representatives of Pop Art was associated with the possibility of presenting or manipulating these relationships. This was to be aided by the invented methods of creative endeavor. The technique of assemblage already enabled the incorporation of any found objects into the artwork. The only limitation was the size or other qualities which might pose a problem of a purely technical nature for their artistic use. However, the use of screen-printing made it possible to overcome this obstacle. In Pop Art, this method was used to reproduce photographs of helicopters, car accidents, astronauts walking on the Moon and portraits of famous figures. These were arranged without any hierarchical order. Baudrillard emphasizes this, writing that “in these works the object loses its objective finality and its function; it becomes a term in a much greater combinatory, in sets of objects which have relational value”⁴⁶. The singular compositions typical of Pop Art, eradicating the traditional rules of attribution and division, reflected the homogenizing tendencies characteristic of the consumer civilization. The French author stressed the culturally totalitarian character of this tendency, as the object loses “its millennial anthropomorphic status and tends towards exhaustion in connotative discourse”⁴⁷. However, it could also be surmised (and such

⁴³ J. Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*, Paris 1968, p. 233.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ J. Baudrillard, *La société de consommation*, Paris 1990, p. 174 (Coll. Folio).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

a conviction seems to fit the Pop Artists better than others) that multiplying the relationships which suggest some possible meanings of secondary objects is liberating. Man finds himself in the space of limitless possibilities and the meanings of used objects seem to submit to his will. In his famous program declaration in 1961, Claes Oldenburg wrote that he endorsed art “that is political-erotic-mystical”⁴⁸. The hyphenation suggests that the author does not place the listed spheres in opposition. All the possibilities of reference can be considered simultaneously. In a similar fashion, he subsequently states that he supports the art “that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips.”⁴⁹ The conjunctive structure of the remarks suggests that all types of visual activity, earlier usually treated as oppositional, are combined here on equal terms. Thus, the artist has at his disposal a nearly limitless freedom of creative activity whereas life serves as a model, which also involves many types of behavior previously considered as belonging to separate spheres and treated nowadays as equally acceptable. A similar project on a yet broader scale (involving not only the sphere of creativity but also his own life) was realized by Andy Warhol, who consciously crossed the line dividing commercial practice and artistic avant-garde activity. Such liberty was made possible by his refraining from fixed assessments, to which he was inspired by the surrounding consumer reality. In an interview, he stated: “The world fascinates me. It is pleasant the way it is. I accept what everyone does; it must be good because someone decided that it is good. I never allow myself to judge anyone”⁵⁰.

The opinion quoted above, as well as some of Warhol’s other statements, all indicate that the treatment of the ‘human theme’ as the function of space taken into account by the artist creates the necessity of a different treatment of his identity. A similar situation occurs in the case of the theses formulated by other representatives of Pop Art. In the above-quoted declaration, Oldenburg writes: “I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic, if necessary, or violent, or whatever is necessary”⁵¹. The human mentioned by the artist is a citizen of a large city during the times of consumer civilization. Subjected to multiple stimuli, he resigns from trying to hierarchize them constantly. He does not intend to create an order according to the predetermined rules because he knows that it would lead to limitations and enslavement. Thus, he frees himself from constructing a fixed identity, an unchangeable Self which he

⁴⁸ C. Oldenburg, “I Am for an Art”, in: *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art. A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, ed. K. Stiles and P. Selz, Berkeley 1996, p. 335.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “Rien a perdre, par Andy Warhol”, noted by Gretchen Berg, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 1968, no. 205.

⁵¹ C. Oldenburg, p. 335.

would wish to protect from external threats. Such openness gives him in turn a sense of freedom in defining his relationships with the world, in choosing without any preconceived limitations. He does not fear that his identity might be endangered as it is he himself that wants to be independent from its constant shaping. He freely responds to stimuli and challenges, assuming the transformation of the Self within these relations. He has a sense of both internal and external freedom which prevents the risk of alienation from becoming a threat. He plays a game with its manifestations. He escapes it but always partially, only in certain areas. He no longer dreams of a world entirely free of alienation, he does not try to create visions of reality subjugated to his will, entirely non-alienated. He tends to see such concepts as harmful: they would lead to his wasting energy on goals which are not only unattainable but which would also deny him the real pleasures provided by his functioning among the multiplicity of stimuli and constantly reinventing himself.

Another important trend in 1960s art, which coincided with Pop Art, was Land Art. This tendency is often seen in opposition to the influences of consumer art; it turns towards the natural world and advocates the return to nature. Indeed, both the artistic devices employed and the modes of action were decidedly different. The land artists abandoned cities. They criticized museums and galleries, claiming that they had become sterile, abstract areas where art was kept in a prison of luxury. As Richard Long put it, they postulated art as a holistic description of real space; in other words, art should refer to natural landscapes and should be created using the most basic materials found on site. Dennis Oppenheim, on the other hand, noted the significance of non-instrumental contact with nature, which enables one to invoke collective memory. Can Land Art be, therefore, seen as a 20th century invocation of the postulated return to nature?

Formalist critics followed the path of this interpretation. They interpreted new artistic phenomena in reference to the 18th century concept of the picturesque quality of the landscape. Sidney Tillim wrote that, from the perspective of this theory, which emerged at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, “landscapes were judged for their pictorial beauties and the same effects in painting were highly praised. In other words, it was a way of seeing nature and the setting was very important”⁵². He noticed a similar problem in the case of Land Art, which was also referred to as Earthworks. As he puts it, „Earthworks represent a special and conceptual involvement with literal nature ... Either passages of landscape are turned into art, or object-art is turned into a kind of landscape, or object and landscape are combined in a way that is both aesthetic and

⁵² S. Tillim, “Earthworks and the New Picturesque”, *Artforum* December 1968 (cited in the anthology *Land Art and Environmental Art*, eds. J. Kastner and B. Wallis, London 1998, p. 222).

atavistic”⁵³. Thus, he was of the opinion that artists, exhibiting particular interest in natural surroundings, are either guided by its beauty or act upon their primal desires. Nature becomes the space of freedom for them due to its particular sensual qualities or else as an area correlated with the eternal human drives. In this vein he interpreted the works of such artists as Robert Smithson. He claimed that as an early and original representative of a trend aiming at the inclusion of the category of the picturesque, he allows it to dictate the choice of both ‘sites’ and ‘non-sites’, that is objects displayed in galleries, as well as the style according to which the real landscape is re-shaped. Other critics who represented a similar viewpoint cited some artists’ opinions which, in their judgment, confirmed the validity of this interpretation. Willoughby Sharp, for example, quotes Walter de Maria as stating: “God has created the earth – and we have ignored it”⁵⁴, which seems to address the artist’s atavistic desires concerning his relationship with nature. He also invoked the views of Michael Heizer, who claimed that art is headed towards religion. Therefore, in his Earthworks he noted the sensations typical of pantheism.

The inclusion of the output of Land Art in the tradition of the painterly art diminishes the significance of the actions undertaken by the artists within the landscape, i.e. the aspect taken into consideration when such works are defined as Earthworks. Moreover, such an approach fails to fully acknowledge that fact that a significant portion of the activity of the representatives of this trend was conducted inside galleries. In the case of Smithson’s art, the works categorized as ‘non-site’ (such as rock shards in metal cuboid containers, photographs documenting realizations carried out in desert landscapes or maps marking the places where the artist had worked) were equally important as ‘sites’, realized directly in the landscape. Their author emphasized this, saying: “But I think there is really no discrepancy between the indoors and the outdoors once the dialectic is clear between the two places”⁵⁵. The term ‘dialectic’ recurs frequently both in the texts written by Smithson and his recorded interviews. He voices his objection to the “one-sided idealism” in the approach to nature, he questions the spiritualism typical of Thoreau’s transcendentalism and the contemporary heritage of “modernist formalism”, which invokes the views of Kant, Hegel and Fichte, found in the concept of the ‘picturesque’. He presents them in opposition to dialectic: “Dialectics of this type are a way of seeing things in a manifold of relations, not as isolated objects”, as “nature for the dialectician is *indifferent* to any formal ideal”⁵⁶. These convictions indicate clearly that he did not expect transferring art from

⁵³ Ibid., p. 220.

⁵⁴ W. Sharp, “Notes Toward an Understanding of Earth Art” (cited in: *Land Art ...*, p. 200).

⁵⁵ *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. J. Flam, Berkeley 1996, p. 182.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 160.

galleries and museums into nature to immediately open it onto a space of freedom. He avoided utopias of this kind. Instead, he emphasized the significance of broadening the field of actions undertaken by artists because it was through them that liberation was to occur. As he put it, "I'm not just presenting materials, there's kind of transformation that takes place"⁵⁷.

Smithson explained this issue in more detail during the symposium entitled *Earth*, organized in 1969 by Cornell University. One of the participants, Gunther Uecker, presented the point of view typical of the European avant-garde, which I had characterized earlier. He argued: "I'm trying to find areas, zones, regions, which do not have the burden of associations. It is possible to free man from object-orientation associations. This freedom is not to be interpreted. It is total. The medium is concrete. This zone of void or emptiness can mean a power of emancipation of a contemplative and concrete manner, for a spiritual self-realization"⁵⁸. Smithson, on the other hand, presented a different concept. First of all, invoking the two types of his art works, he questioned the conviction that they were in opposition to each other. The 'non sites', in spite of their gallery-bound nature, are neither closed nor limited. They are like abstract, three-dimensional maps which open our awareness to vast spaces. They allow us to return to the places with which they are associated. He stated: "Well, in my case, the piece is there in the Museum, abstract, and it's there to look at, but you are thrown off it. You are sort of spun out to the fringes of the site. The site is a place you can visit and it involves travel as an aspect, too"⁵⁹. Such possibilities were created precisely by Smithson's physically located realizations, existing in the form of objects, which he labeled 'non-sites'. The negative portion of the name ('non') should be therefore understood not as a negation but as a possibility of going beyond. A 'non-site' is an object or a fragment of closed space which creates an opportunity of an imaginary journey beyond the boundaries of what is present before us, what is physically finite.

On the other hand, however, as Smithson noted in the subsequent part of the discussion, if we do not want to enter the field of utopia, that which we perceive as infinite is always limited in some way. Thus, he was critical of the romantic need to aspire to some distant place ("never-never land or something"). Still, he never abandoned the search for the spaces of freedom. He only proposed that it be conducted in a different dimension. He was of the opinion that artists were aware of the rigid boundaries and could see them clearly. They can, however, aspire to loosen them, considering other limita-

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 209.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 179.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 181.

tions. In consequence, absolute freedom does not exist, only the crossing of barriers, from one perspective or another. As in the aforementioned case of Pop Art, one should concentrate on relations. In this case, however, instead of the connotative meanings given to objects in the consumer civilization, what matters are the relations between spaces. Some, existing in a natural condition, have been traditionally associated with freedom while others suggested one or another form of enslavement. Smithson proposes playing a game of sorts which would involve these associations. Such a game, however, is not an escape from reality. He illustrated his point with the example of a large corporation. One could say that it imposes limitations; still, if one learns the principles of its inner workings, one may function in a way which ensures a significant amount of freedom. Consequently, from the point of view of the need for freedom, it does not matter where one is. One can always strive for liberty: “so in a sense you are always expanding – the upper limits are always going out – like taking a larger and larger area or smaller and smaller area. It doesn’t really matter which way you go”⁶⁰.

A more or less analogous attitude can be noticed with regard to some other representatives of Land Art. Dennis Oppenheim noted the differences between them, considering the degree of their ‘immersion’ in nature. He combined the notion of ‘immersion’ with the theory of the picturesque, concluding that it was taken into account by Richard Long and certain other English artists. In the case of his own art, on the other hand, he emphasized the relationship between the use of geometric shapes and the natural environment where they are employed. If they are used in a landscape, they become “one part of a holistic, ecological, geological, anthropological continuum”⁶¹. Michael Heizer, on the other hand, insisted that nature is infinitely rich. It contains both geometrical forms (e.g. crystals) and organic ones. Thus, he believed that by giving geometrical shape to the excavations which he conducted in a desert, he was producing a blend of the forms of nature. “There is no sense of order that doesn’t exist in nature,”⁶² he stated.

These viewpoints are not mutually exclusive; rather, they involve a stronger or weaker emphasis on one of the elements of the relations in which nature is involved. There is no trace, however, of the unidirectional approach dominant among the avant-garde artists in the first half of the 20th century. The dialectical approach, as Smithson defined it, consisted in seeing everything in multiple, diverse relations, without distinguishing isolated things or purposes.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 185.

⁶¹ D. Oppenheim, “Another Point of Entry: Interview with Alanna Heiss”, in: *Land and Environmental Art*, p. 224.

⁶² M. Heizer, “Interview with Julia Brown”, in: *ibid.*, p. 228.

The American artist advocated the rejection of logic, which he associated with a unidirectional way of reasoning, following from a premise to conclusion. Logic thus understood should be forgotten, as it bears no relation to the complexity of real situations. In these, he wrote, “all dimension seems to be lost in the process. In other words, you are really going from some place to some place, which is to say, nowhere in particular. To be located between those two points puts you in a position of elsewhere, so there’s no focus. This outer edge and this center constantly subvert each other, cancel each other out. There is a suspension of destination”⁶³. Thus, freedom does not require specific places which would allow it to be realized. It can manifest itself in any situation as long as we abandon the strict method of defining the goal and, instead, we include the entire network of relationships in which we are involved at all times. By rejecting their hierarchy, we find ourselves in a purposeless situation. We are free.

4. THE LABYRINTH AS A SPACE OF FREEDOM

In the aspirations of the neo-avant-garde artists of the 1950s, 1960s and – to some extent – 1970s, the starting point for the discovery of new spaces of freedom was the invocation of real, modern urban areas or uninhabited natural terrains. Usually, however, they were treated not as ideal places in which the dreams of freedom would be fulfilled immediately. In order to achieve freedom, one had to take into consideration the multiplicity of relationships in which objects or areas themselves existed. Moreover, it was necessary to become at least partially independent from solely practical life goals. This standpoint is reminiscent of the principles of the counter-culture movements, which were popular at the time. In their case, emphasis was placed on the significance of authentic life, associated with the lack of care for material values, entailing a diversity of goals and the resulting liberation from the multiple forms of alienation. The singular ‘dialectical’ character or the lack of a unidirectional orientation of activities could also become the principles of the production of art objects. They would provoke multidirectional or non-directional reactions. The issues of the authenticity of life or non-alienation would gain a meaning different from the one dictated by tradition.

In his reflections on postmodernist architecture, Fredric Jameson focuses on the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, designed by John Portman. This building is characterized by “some new category of closure governing the inner space of the hotel”⁶⁴. There are no entrances as the way into the inside of

⁶³ R. Smithson, p. 194.

⁶⁴ F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham 1994, p. 39.

the building leads through “the seam that links the building to the rest of the city that surrounds it”. There are no visible elements dividing the interior from the exterior. Thus, as Jameson writes, “the hotel does not wish to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute”⁶⁵. Instead of a closed, limited body of the building, we are faced with its openness to its nearby surroundings and, subsequently, to the entire world. Is this the type of relationship with space described by Kobra and Strzemiński? This would seem to be the case, although certain differences can be observed, which are ultimately revealed as more important than the analogies. Jameson writes that the building “aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city”⁶⁶. There is no aspiration to emphasize complete uniformity, only accentuated diversity. Both the individual parts of the city, as well as parts of the hotel vary in character. Thus, its relationship with its surroundings is not based on completely “uniform” and “even” space described by Kobra and Strzemiński. On the contrary, it is characterized by qualitative diversity, although the repetitiveness of certain experiences which occur within it creates a sense of unity and continuity. The differences are no longer significant when we begin to expect that an object or a view which has surprised us a moment earlier is going to be repeated soon. Thus, the change of place loses the character of a crucial decision. The change in the direction of movement is no longer perceived as an opportunity to discover something new. This situation concerns not only the horizontal, but also the vertical movement. Jameson notes that escalators and elevators usually occur in our perceptions as a dialectical opposition. It seems that an escalator can raise us above the ground only by a fraction, whereas in the case of the movement of an elevator we are faced with a radically different spatial experience: “rapidly shooting up through the ceiling and outside”. In the case of the Bonaventure Hotel, such movement as well as the sensations which it evokes are quickly stopped. “The elevator lifts you to one of those revolving cocktail lounges, in which, seated, you are again passively rotated about and offered a contemplative spectacle of the city itself, now transformed into its own images by the glass windows through which you view it”⁶⁷. Thus, the similarities to the experiences of the Unistic or Suprematist space are only superficial. The infinity and continuity of space has a different character. Also dissimilar are the perceptions of freedom. Jameson writes that “this new total space, meanwhile, corresponds to a new collective practice, a new mode in which individuals move and congregate, something like the practice of a new and historically original kind of hypercrowd”⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

The effects generated by the hotel have been reinforced by covering its walls with reflecting surfaces. The paneled mirrors create in the viewers a sensation of immersion and dislocation. One may be under the impression that the building is beyond the human ability to locate oneself within space, order one's perceptual data and cognitively define one's position in relation to the outside world. A building that cannot be captured as something closed and separate, just like the whole world cannot be apprehended by means of human cognitive faculties. Can this multi-aspect, ambiguous reality become a source of expansion and liberation for man? Jameson compares the postmodern proposition to the utopian concepts of modernist architecture. He notes that Le Corbusier, similarly to other modernist artists, emphasized the separation of his buildings from the surrounding city over any relationship with it. Freedom was to be realized by opposition and rejecting the pre-existing state. It was supposed to involve the shaping of new living conditions for a new man. Postmodernism, on the other hand, lacks any utopia of this type. If it can be said that postmodern works create "something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions"⁶⁹, they endeavor to achieve that in a different manner than the avant-garde ones. They cause a fragmentation of the psyche and a sense of being lost within the familiar and the pre-existing. On the one hand, man experiences contact with regular life, while on the other hand he does not feel adjusted to the new possibilities among which he finds himself. However, instead of suggesting self-development in order to meet the challenges, as was the case with modernist realizations, he is given an opportunity to move into a ludic position. Both the vocabulary and the syntax of postmodern realizations were, as Jameson writes, borrowed from Las Vegas. In Las Vegas, visitors are also subjected to a multiplicity of various stimuli. However, even if such an excess causes them any discomfort, this is a source of joyful excitement. For the very same reason the Bonaventure Hotel is visited with equal enthusiasm by the inhabitants of the city and by tourists.

Could we assume that the postmodern building described by Jameson is the current version of the space of freedom? Brian Wallis believes that it is a continuation of the dialectical tendencies discussed by Smithson, leading to the 'suspension of purpose'. Citing the formulation of Susan Bordo, he writes that this tendency has been expanded in postmodernism, leading to the "view from everywhere"⁷⁰. In consequence, the subject has become not only psychologically fragmented and schizophrenic, but also dislocated. According to Wallis, similar goals can be identified in the work of Smithson and other neo-avant-garde artists. In my opinion, such analogy is only illusory, since the

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

⁷⁰ B. Wallis, "Survey", in: *Land and Environmental Art*, p.38.

neo-avant-garde artists aimed at multiplying the possibilities afforded by remaining in a particular place, and not dependence on it. Freedom was meant to be enriched by the broadening of sight, liberated from the purposeful goal; it was not supposed to lose all direction. Jameson rightly notes that “this latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. It may now be suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment ... can itself stand as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects”⁷¹. In this situation, the only possibility is nomadic freedom. However, does it entail a joyful travelling, capable of enriching mankind?

Other authors who have also explored the relationship between modernism and postmodernism have emphasized various elements of this relation. In one of his articles, Zygmunt Bauman reduced this opposition to two methods of apprehending space. The former, following the principles of modernism, consists in introducing order and organization. The space becomes ‘legible’ and ‘transparent’, providing (at least to its own inhabitants) a sense of ‘being at home’, of self-confidence and lack of threat. However, as the Polish author notes, such space is, first and foremost, all too easy to manage. Thus, the world was made ‘transparent’ mainly in order to be controlled. Bauman emphasizes that “the idea of progress and rationalization of the social world meant in fact that the world was to be made more amenable to management”⁷². Such a drive for social transparency has found its expression in the organization of cities according to geometrical structures. The relationship between the regularity, repetitiveness, uniformity of urban space and its geometrization was most clearly manifest in utopian concepts, put forward predominantly during the era of the Enlightenment. At that time, rational orderliness was also designed as a “monument to freedom”. Order and the absence of randomness or ambiguity were associated with the sense of human happiness. Bauman interprets the propositions put forward by avant-garde artists in a similar fashion. Citing the views of Le Corbusier, he emphasizes that the architect advocated against the elements, chaos and cloudiness, aspiring to mathematical order and harmony. He suggested removing random remains of unplanned construction endeavors,

⁷¹ F. Jameson, p. 44.

⁷² Z. Bauman, “O ładzie, co niszczy, i chaosie, który tworzy, czyli o polityce przestrzeni miejskiej”, *Formy estetyzacji przestrzeni publicznej*, eds. J.S. Wojciechowski and A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Warszawa 1998, p. 12.

sites of blind chance and ambiguity. He proposed that the city be liberated from the “multi-purpose mixture of pre-existing facilities, cleared of the disturbances caused by aimless wanderers, gawkers and chance passers-by”⁷³. Thus, he did not accept the form of freedom which is associated with space which lacks conscious organization and life devoid of a socially significant purpose. Le Corbusier’s dictatorial approach (*le Plan dictateur*) was meant to determine architecture, urban planning and human life, which was to be appropriately liberated. Bauman notices similar tendencies in the artistic output of Oskar Niemeyer. His architectural and city-planning concepts were more than just design on paper. They were realized in the form of the city of Brasilia. Since it was built on an uninhabited plateau, it was possible to “calculate scientifically the as yet unexpressed public ‘individual needs’, whereas the non-existent inhabitants, who had neither the right to objection nor any chance to express it, could be arranged from physiological needs for oxygen, heating units and illumination spots, as though out of building blocks”⁷⁴. This resulted in what proved to be a nightmare for the real inhabitants. They coined the name for the disease – ‘brasilitis’ – which resulted from the functional organization of space. The rational adjustment of the buildings to the projected needs resulted in the indistinctiveness of places, the monotony of the environment and the tediousness of impressions, in consequence rendering places and people anonymous.

On the basis of such examples, Bauman concludes that any attempt to make urban space “‘uniform’, ‘logical’, ‘functional’ and ‘legible’ has resulted in the disintegration of the protective network of human bonds, as well as the dominating sense of loneliness and internal void, the fear of life challenges and secondary illiteracy as regards making independent and responsible decisions”⁷⁵. He also states that “a morally mature man is someone who needs the unclear and the unfamiliar, who ‘feels unfulfilled without a bit of anarchy in his own life’ and ‘loves the ‘otherness’ which surrounds him’”⁷⁶. Both the conclusions and the entire argument are very convincing. It is worth noting, however, that, as the earlier examples indicated, the rational is not always clear and it does not always lead to ‘unifunctional unambiguousness’. The above examples of the Futurist, Surrealist or Constructivist visions of the space of freedom do not afford such conclusions. Nor can they be directly linked to the striving for power and strict control. Obviously, such tendencies (as Bauman rightly notes) were also present in the avant-garde, but they were neither exclusive nor distinctly dominant.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 19.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 21-22.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

It is worthwhile at this point to focus in more detail on the concept of freedom suggested by Bauman. The author understands it as a readiness to accept new, sometimes also unpleasant or painful meanings or situations which may be beyond our control. He expounds this idea in another text, indicating tolerance as a consequence of freedom. If we are open to different viewpoints, even when this leads to difficulties resulting from the disruption (albeit temporary) of the orderliness of our beliefs, we confirm our freedom in this way. In doing so, we resign from our “comfort of certainty”. We do not treat the “ambiguity and the resulting incoherence of desires and attitudes” as a “disaster of the cosmic order and the associated impotence of intellect and failure of comprehension”⁷⁷. However, Bauman’s further course of argumentation becomes debatable. He quotes an extract from Odo Marquard’s *In Defense Of The Accidental*, where the author states that having many beliefs, many traditions and histories as well as many souls, many gods and many points of orientation is beneficial to man because of its consequences for freedom⁷⁸. Bauman seems to support this point of view. “If monotheism entails a limitation of freedom,” he writes, “freedom born out of polytheism is not tantamount to nihilism, regardless of what critics suggest. ‘To be free’ is not the same as ‘to believe in nothing’. ‘To be free’ means to believe in many things at once – too many to silence the conscience and render obedience blind”⁷⁹. Does this mean, however, that in order not to silence one’s conscience or not to obey blindly, one must necessarily believe in several different things? Or even more emphatically: must the conviction of the rightness of one cause be eliminated? Bauman seems to support this stance as in the subsequent part of the text he states that “conscience and responsibility are only given voice amongst a dissonance of unharmonious melodies”, while “the so-called consensus, that is the unanimity of opinions, reeks of the graveyard”⁸⁰. This suggests that if genuine freedom is to be achieved, one must disturb the consensus, provoke debates and conflicts, multiply points of view and disclose ambiguities.

Thus, the postmodern space of freedom can be defined as an incentive to activity. In these activities man’s individuality can be revealed and developed. Bauman considers this opportunity when he writes: “Leaving the urban space unspecified, opening it to many different interpretations and hospitality to numerous, not quite consistent or downright inconsistent cartographies and the resulting constant re-birth of – always renegotiable – intransparency do not lead to ‘chaos’, if chaos is to be taken in its colloquial meaning as a system in which everything can happen and all eventualities (of which there are count-

⁷⁷ Z. Bauman, *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*, Warszawa 2000, p. 368.

⁷⁸ O. Marquard, *Apologie des Zufälligen*, Stuttgart 1987.

⁷⁹ Z. Bauman, *Ponowoczesność ...*, p. 371.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

less masses) are characterized by the same degree of probability”⁸¹. If we apply the listed qualities to the personality of a free man, his identity always remains unspecified, open to new impulses, ‘hospitable’ to that which is inconsistent, but that intransparency causing constant internal negotiations does not lead to chaos⁸². Should we, however, magnify and multiply these inconsistencies? Jameson studied this problem citing the classic work by Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*. Its author argued that the alienated (and alienating) city is a space which people cannot map in their minds. They cannot define their own place within the entirety in which they find themselves. In old cities there are landmarks aiding orientation, such as monuments or natural borders. These are missing from modern cities and neither are they incorporated into postmodern projects, or, if they are, then this is done in a rather unusual way. The postmodern city is meant, after all, to be open to an infinite number of surprises, all of which draw attention but none are ultimately engaging, none provide a constant point of reference. Moreover, these surprises appear in various perspectives in order to intensify their effect. Remaining in a constant state of joyful excitement, the viewers of such an urban spectacle are not capable of ordering the stimuli. Instead of developing their personality, of negotiating what to accept and what to reject out of this complexity, such an excitement facilitates an immersion in it without any chance of or even inclination for reflection. The visitors to Las Vegas can be seen as an example. It is there that, as Jameson wrote, the hypercrowd is shaped. It is not subjected to standardization of behavior; on the contrary, it is individualized in terms of choices. In spite of that, human individuals whom this crowd comprises are equally alienated. As Jameson wrote, “Desalienation in the traditional city, then, involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories”⁸³. The endeavors suggested by Marquard and Bauman which tend towards purposefully multiplying the points of orientation and introducing new ‘traditions and history’ constantly disturb the process of creating ‘a map’, in all likelihood contributing to the deepening of alienation rather than to a free openness to an infinite development.

The labyrinth has been traditionally perceived as a type of prison. The most famous, legendary Cretan labyrinth was meant to keep the Minotaur in captivity. It was also meant to imprison Theseus who entered it in order to slay

⁸¹ Z. Bauman, “O łądzie...”, p. 23.

⁸² In many of his texts, Bauman considered the above qualities as typifying the contemporary man.

⁸³ F. Jameson, p. 51.

the beast. A similar meaning can be found in the case of architectural or horticultural mazes constructed in gardens in the periods of the Renaissance and the Baroque, which were intended as a symbol of the fall of the spirit in the complex world of phenomena. They were usually contrasted with the areas where roads are predictable and lead to known destinations. Nowadays, the issue of the labyrinth becomes more complex. On the one hand, it confines the person who enters it, while on the other, it offers a unique opportunity to be free. It lacks straight paths which would lead to defined, tangible goals. Instead, it is filled with a network of corridors forked in complex ways, which multiply points of orientation, opening alternative trajectories. In his short story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, Jorge Luis Borges describes a labyrinth in which everyone would be lost: "I imagined it infinite, no longer composed of octagonal kiosks and turning paths, but of rivers and provinces and kingdoms ... I thought of a labyrinth of labyrinths, of one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars"⁸⁴. Such a labyrinth would contain not only a winding network of infinitely forking paths but also "a network of times": "This network of times, which approached one another, forked, broke off or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces *all* possibilities of time"⁸⁵. Such a labyrinth could appear to be a space of absolute freedom but would it necessarily cease to be a prison? Can one not be a prisoner of an infinite number of possibilities out of which we are incapable of choosing one path because each proves doubtful and none in fact leads to the exit?

Such labyrinths of diverse character and size proliferate in our times. One of its significant varieties is the idea of the hypertext. Instead of a linear reading typical of the reception of traditional texts, its multi-level structure neither determines nor favors any particular direction of interpretation. The journey through hypertext is referred to as navigating⁸⁶. The purpose disappears in it and the very journey can be infinite. Also, the electronic hyperspace is presented as an area of infinite freedom where one may even radically change one's personality by operating an avatar. Are these areas, so important from the point of view of contemporary art, becoming spaces of freedom? They certainly create very broad opportunities for action. The reality of the hypertext or hyperspace practically ceases to resist human intentions, nor can other participants inhibit our exploits any longer. What disappears are thus the

⁸⁴ J.L. Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths", transl. D. A. Yates, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, New York 1964, p. 23.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁸⁶ Cf. *The Society of Text: Hypertext, Hypermedia and the Social Construction of Information*, ed. E. Barrett, Cambridge, Mass. 1989; J.D. Bolter, "Topographic Writing: Hypertext and the Electronic Writing Space", in: *Hypermedia and Literary Studies*, eds. P. Delany, G. Landow, Cambridge, Mass. 1991.

situations in which, in the past, we had to pay for our freedom and bear the consequences of transgressing the acceptable boundaries. It would seem, therefore, that since hyperspace is able to contain everyone and all possible opinions, no conflicts should arise. However, as it turns out, instead of communities based on kindness and tolerance, spontaneously created 'hate groups' are a more common occurrence on the Internet⁸⁷.

Can one conclude that hyperreality, in the sense of the fulfilled dream of the space of freedom, indeed addresses the human need of liberty? Considering this issue, I am often reminded of Tony Oursler's installation entitled *Hello?* (1996). The electronic image transmitted from a box depicts the face of a man immersed in virtual reality. Located in the space of freedom, he is trying to establish contact with the viewers of the exhibition – in vain.

Translated by Krzysztof Majer

PRZESTRZENIE WOLNOŚCI W SZTUCE NOWOCZESNEJ (streszczenie)

Sformułowanie „przestrzenie wolności” w tekstach dotyczących sztuki stosowane jest najczęściej jako metafora. W niniejszym artykule zwrot ten potraktowany jest w sposób dosłowny. Ważnym celem artystów awangardowych było poszukiwanie nowych rodzajów przestrzeni. Jednocześnie deklarowali oni dążenie do różnie pojmowanej wolności. Czy cele te można uznać za zbieżne, a nawet łączące się?

W tekście przedstawione są trzy sposoby podejścia do tytułowego problemu, które wystąpiły w sztuce XX wieku. W przypadku pierwszego z nich przestrzeń wolności stanowi funkcję ludzkich pragnień. Początki takiego ujęcia problemu pojawiły się wraz z romantyczną subiektywizacją sposobu prezentacji przestrzeni, rozwinięciem zaś stały się koncepcje awangardowe omówione na przykładach futuryzmu (stopienie się świata z człowiekiem), surrealizmu (przekroczenie „starych opozycji” w nadrzeczywistości) oraz konstruktywizmu (wolność w przestrzeni nieograniczonej, jednolitej, równomiernej). Drugie ujęcie polega na potraktowaniu pragnień ludzkich jako funkcji przestrzeni. Wystąpiło ono w sztuce lat 60. i 70. w dwóch odmianach. W jednej związane było z akceptacją przestrzeni miejskiej ukształtowanej przez cywilizację konsumpcyjną (pop art), w innej zakładało wyjście ku miejscom naturalnym, odludnym, aby tam poszukiwać wolności (Land art). Ostatnia część artykułu zatytułowana jest *Labirynt jako przestrzeń wolności*. Labirynt zawiera nieskończoną ilość równorzędnych dróg, jakimi można pójść, przez co wywołuje wrażenie nieskrępowanej swobody wyboru, ale jednocześnie stanowi więzienie. Sytuacja ta odniesiona jest do postmodernistycznych koncepcji twórczości i odbioru na przykładach hiperprzestrzeni w architekturze oraz hipertekstu w sztukach medialnych).

⁸⁷ U. Jarecka, „Wirtualne więzi w globalizującym się świecie”, in: *Kultura w czasach globalizacji*, eds. M. Jacyno, A. Jawłowska, M. Kempny, Warszawa 2004, p. 275.

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THE FREE SPACE IN ART

Abstract: With the emergence of the Internet, artists have been given an opportunity to free themselves from external conditioning pertaining to the country, region, religious ideology and esthetic forms. Thus, new questions arise: has the new world order reached the point where they can function as a diverse social body without any limits or restrictions? Are they, as a social body, different from other social groups in this regard? These questions imply a differentiation between the external, social and political demands repressing individuals and the internal ideologies which are associated with personal liberation. At present, this problem has become even more complex as, alongside the old patriarchal cultural system, a new phenomenon of 'transculture' has appeared, associated with free commerce, market and the internationality of artists stemming from their multiple locations which is the outcome of economic globalization.

The author considers the above-mentioned issues in reference to the concept put forward by two Canadian intellectuals, Marshall McLuhan and Witold Rybczynski, the concept of 'social sculpture' proposed by Joseph Beuys as well as the action by Rudolf Schwarzkogler and Hermann Nitsch. Concluding, he quotes the views of Herbert Marcuse, according to which art does not have to be overtly 'political' in order to object to oppressive ideologies. By exhibiting the limitations of power and through the desires of imagination, artists can reveal emotions and thoughts as positive emancipatory forces.

Keywords: artist – liberation – globalization

The proposal regarding the freedom given to artists to engage in the illusion of social change by removing themselves from any subsequent external identification with country, geography, region, religious ideology, or formalist aesthetics propelled through the phantasm of the internet may be addressed in the following questions: Has the new world order arrived at a point where artists can function as a diversified social body without boundaries or limitations? Do artists as a social body differ from other social bodies within global society? These questions suggest a certain distinction between external social and political demands that repress one's identity in contrast to, shall we say, more internal ideologies that have come to represent personal liberation. When

we speak of the problem of freedom today, or try to address the prohibitions against the kind of personal freedom on which the making of art depends, the assumption is that external ideologies in the realm of the social should be alleviated, while internal ideologies in the realm of the personal should be equalized and therefore defended within the process of being an artist. In this sense, one can easily imagine an artist living in a totalitarian state wanting to remove herself from the oppression of patriarchal values while, at the same time, desiring to retain a definitive counter – ideological grasp of gender issues with which she is eager to identify. Or, from another perspective, an artist might readily relinquish his identity with a particular country or region, which he believes is too provincial in its outlook, and publicly claim that he is not Polish or Korean or even American, but that he has become an “international” artist. A third example might include artists who are gay and who chose to outwardly defend their gayness against the unwavering dominance of heterosexual politics. What these examples suggest is that it is much easier to disclaim predominant or normative social ideology than it is to relinquish privately held forms of ideology that sustain one’s existence in a highly complex world. Nonetheless, one might consider the problem that stands in the way of freedom among artists is, in fact, ideology. Based on some of the activity that has happened in New York galleries and auctions over the past three decades, one might speculate that ideology appears latent in artists’ works where preference is given to issues of gender, race, age, and sexual preference, and where social guilt among investors could be implicated. While this should not be overstated or generalized, it is clearly possible to suggest that the representation of art in terms of ideology began to play an imminent role in the sale of art by the early 1980s when the decline of modernist abstraction was usurped by post-modernism, and, in turn, the criticism of art was seamlessly transformed into academic theory. Given the differences between these external and internal forms of ideological discourse, there is yet another pertinent question that may concern artists sensitive to the regulation of their freedom, and that is the practical manner in which artists might restructure their personal views of culture in relation to the media-driven transcultural operatives currently in existence. From a mediated point of view, to speak of “culture” today is to incite the old patriarchal system, whereas to incite the issue of “transculture” is more connected with free trade, market economy, international artists’ residencies, and the negligible benefits of economic globalization. However, in recent months, we have seen the collapse of underlying structures that presumably made the effects of transculture possible. Thus, we are at a kind of stalemate in terms of relinquishing the external forms of social oppression in favor of personal liberation given the collapse of a system based on the programming of globalization. This is presumably the undercurrent that fed the highly mediated proposition that transculture would usurp the concept of

a culture based on traditions from the past, while never being overtly stated in these terms.

While this is probably not the first occasion on which such issues and questions have been raised, the current historical context may reveal the scope of their intensity. If we may depart from the current line of argument, it may be possible to review the issue of artistic freedom from another angle of vision as it relates to advanced technologies, specifically in terms of how these advances may have changed the way we think of art today. Thus, given the immense changes in the final decades of the previous century as the social body has moved from its dependency on hard industry to an even greater dependency on the invisibility of soft industry, there is the problem of finding an operational basis for the meaning of freedom in the way artists proceed. The context in which this problem exists is both a temporal and a spatial one. Where do we go from here? This was, of course, the concern of Josef Beuys, even though his historical context was presumably very different from our own. Exactly how different his thinking was from ours, I am not exactly sure. But I would argue in favor of Beuys, along with Allan Kaprow, as two important artists from the later part of the twentieth century, whose concerns for new technologies were sublimated in their thinking, and thereby raising this important question.

In 1960s, relatively concurrent with the evolving work of Josef Beuys, it was suggested by a Canadian intellectual named Marshall McLuhan that any application of technological change in a society required a certain preparation delivered through an earlier medium. In the popular televised film, *The Medium is the Message* (1966), McLuhan referred to our ability to absorb technology from the recent past as being similar to a popular American TV program, aired in the early 1960s, called "Bonanza land." Here he argued that the producers had transformed the "wild west" from what it was in the previous century to a full-scale simulation capable of satisfying the appetite of even the most ardently disengaged television spectator. As we have learned from the neo-Marxist philosopher Guy Debord, for any spectacle to survive, it requires a spectator. Thus, the spectacle given to the television audience was less about historical reality than a "wild west" fantasy made to accommodate the needs of those conditioned to what McLuhan called "medium cool" – an electronic form of maudlin entertainment that stopped short of being a convincing experience.

Two decades later, in his book *Taming the Tiger: The Struggle to Control Technology* (1983), another Canadian intellectual, Witold Rybczynski, discussed how the function of technology was only as good as the decisions made

in terms of its application. Put another way, the subjective intentions of the input are only as good as the output received. To consider this point in relation to the wide-spread use of the Internet a decade later in the 1990s is particularly interesting. Here we begin to see the mistaken assumption that because we could suddenly relay information instantly on a global level that somehow this would exemplify, if not verify, democracy. But Rybczynski's point was that no technology – not even the Internet (although the application of the Internet to everyday use did not exist at the time he wrote the book) – could guarantee a better world. The larger issue was that technology left to its own devices could not be synonymous with democracy. This has recently become true in countries, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, the People's Republic of China, or, for that matter, the United States of America (during the invasion of Iraq), where, in all case, those who have the political power also have the power to take control of the Internet. The transfer of information can be forcibly blocked or impeded in such a way that is quite opposite from democracy. For Rybczynski, technology remains neutral even in its most advanced permutations.

But let's return to the question of Beuys whose work, was deeply concerned as to how the artist might proceed in the future. While not oblivious to the problems of technology, Beuys was thinking in terms of art as a transmission years before the invention of the PC or the Internet through his theory of "social sculpture." Although somewhat complex in its argument, Beuys saw "social sculpture" as an extended action (aktion) that would come to replace painting as a form of aesthetic indulgence. This began with a performance work staged in Dusseldorf in 1965 where the artist covered his head in honey and gold leaf before cradling a dead hare in his arms while explaining the theories behind early nineteenth century German Romantic painting. The shamanistic impulse in Beuys' work was something to which he subscribed early in his career that the artist should operate on the basis of finding "spiritual" forms of transmission. These transmissions were not directly through technology but through a more tactile involvement with energy whereby the artist would incite ideas that would extend through human consciousness. By emphasizing the transmission of ideas, the position of Beuys should not be linked with that of McLuhan, who understood the transmission process more in terms of the technological medium of television – the medium of the "global village." For McLuhan, television functioned as the primary form of information distribution in society, which he believed would enhance the process of learning. Unfortunately, McLuhan's proposal was too idealistic to satisfy the commercial instincts of those who managed the medium. As a result, television went in a direction, quite opposite from what he had predicted.

On the other hand, Beuys left his idea of transmission more open by allowing the mystical or shamanist appeal to hover dialogically in relation to technology. Rather than being inside of technology, he removed himself from it— not through denial, but to allow the tension of the tactile sensation to offer its potential in challenging the position of the virtual. Throughout his career, Beuys was concerned about the future of art as he was equally concerned about the future of the artist's role within the social body, when he posed the question – Where do we go from here? This was not simply a conjecture, but a purposeful speculation that perhaps discounted the enormous impact of economic speculation that was only beginning to be seen in the auctions of the early eighties. Even so, Beuys' speculation remained within the realm of an anti-aesthetic. While not removed from the concerns of economics, he never allowed himself to be overcome by these concerns. With Beuys, the tension and balance within the discourse of aesthetic versus anti-aesthetic was still at play. To give art over entirely to economic speculation would be an absurdity that would ultimately displace the necessary tension required within this dialogical play. Without tension in aesthetics, there can be no balance, and without balance there can be no tension. In this context, one might consider the historical question of freedom relative to the artist from the perspective of limitations, including geographical boundaries and cultural traditions, as somewhat removed from where things have moved in recent years. On the other hand, the notion of being ahead of one's time – in the proverbial sense – was undoubtedly the case for Beuys. While Deleuze and Guattari could unleash the barriers between the unconscious and the conscious mind, they were unable to deny the possibility that some ideas – including those who possess those ideas – might be ahead of their time. This may account for the mystery as to why some artists today have difficulty in grasping the meaning of spiritual transmission, which is endemic to the advanced idea and potential realization of Beuys' "social sculpture."

The problem is partially related to the embarrassment artists feel in the twenty-first century when confronted with the term "spiritual." For many, it has come to represent the theosophical position of early Modernism exactly a century ago that few artists of the present believe or care to endorse. Younger artists are taught that the history of art is upon them. They must hold the reigns of their generation and move quickly into the future in a more pragmatic way. While I see nothing wrong with this idea, there is the problem of denial with regards to an understanding of history from which the future may or may not evolve. Admittedly, this puts the role of Hegel at risk, at least for the present. On the other hand, I see nothing wrong with putting Hegel at risk. Artists from previous generations may have taken Hegel too seriously. It is possible that we have suffered too long from the oppression of history and the role of power

given to individuals. For example, how many times have I hear the expression after seeing a mediocre performance work that “the artist had to do it” as if the artist were possessed by an inevitability from which he had no control. When a reporter in a prestigious New York art periodical in 1972 pronounced that Austrian Actionist, Rudolf Schwarzkogler, had committed suicide by castrating himself, people were shocked and horrified. A month later, it was printed that the mediocre journalist was unfortunately wrong. He had confused a simulated obsession in which the artist presented fake photographic documents with an entirely different real life situation. In fact, Schwarzkogler did commit suicide, but not from castration. Myth and reality are too often confused in art even today, and I am not certain that Hegel has solved the problem.

Not to belabor the point, but it seems that Schwarzkogler’s most well-known colleague, Hermann Nitsch, revealed the liberty of artists to express themselves independently of geographical, ethnic, cultural, political, and ideological boundaries, in his *Orgies Mysteries Theatre* of 1960. While Nitsch was considered a partner to the Happenings movement in New York around the same time, he opened the doors of perception, thought, and feeling another notch. In some ways, Nitsch took advantage of the breakdown in traditional art mediums as his sacrificial blood-rituals implicated the origins of both body art and performance art, thus connecting our experience in the post-industrial world with a kind of opera or *gesamtkunstwerk* (total art). The spectacular enlargement of his cultural traces may seem overly abundant, if not off-putting to the extent that artists from other places in the world may have found Nitsch too limited in his vocabulary. Many of his transmissions happen within somewhat narrow boundaries while others are left out of the frequency altogether. Even so, there is something to be said about art that goes deeply within the artist’s soul, especially a soul willing to admit influences that he or she hopes to transgress by omitting previous boundaries and limitations within one’s own social, cultural and political environment.

I am convinced that the persuasive phenomenon in Nitsch’s art has occurred in the recent work of other artists, including that of Rebecca Horn. Her exemplary exhibition, based on her brilliant, erotic, and poetic exhibition at the Bevilacqua La Masa in Venice on the occasion of the 53rd Biennale di Venezia in 2009, made it evident that she is moving into a territory that is intimate and is not longer in search of autosymbolic meaning or gender conformity. Rather she is touches herself and by doing so opens her vital organs for the world to see and to belief. In this sense, Rebecca Horn is a major artist. Still, one must look towards the larger social body as well as within the solitary experience of the artist. There is no halfway mark. The challenge may be inexorable, but is

also tied to the reality that all people know and need to hear, see, and understand through their own minds and bodies.

Power as a motivating force either in art or politics is persistently built on a series of misrepresentations. The fact of power is worth questioning in terms of those artists who strive for liberation from oppressive limitations and unnecessary boundaries as they proceed to make art and to engage in their practices. Here one may recall Marcuse's important thesis from *The Aesthetic Dimension*, that art does not have to be overtly "political" in order to function against oppressive ideologies. By accepting that artists are willing to engage in thinking freely as artists, they chose to function in a liberated way. But such forms of liberation may also have difficulty if they are too hyperconscious or self-imposed. There is always the risk of art becoming a narcissist enterprise. On the other hand, for Marcuse, any work of art that resists social oppression is synonymous with an act of freedom. This is a complex argument only because it lies outside the conventional theoretical boundaries of recent years. Essentially, politics in art does not have to be named or "branded" to be understood. One might argue that by removing the name, the political urgency of art has an opportunity to become all the more real, and in the process of becoming more real, it establishes its own legitimacy. All of this is contingent, by the way, on believing that artists are intrinsically free to do what other fields of inquiry within the social structure cannot do so easily in that they are bound by the business of their discipline and therefore must transmit their ideas in accordance with the terms on which their profession depends. Paradoxically, the seduction of working in strict accordance with these terms has had a negative appeal among artists in recent years. Such rigidity has become an impediment toward the realization of art's potential by failing to envision the possibility of diminishing (at least, temporarily) the kind of intentionality that requires power to exist as its referent.

There is no liberation for the artist who clings to the safe-guard of the text. By foregrounding the text, the artist is put in a straight-jacket without access to the kind of freedom that opens thresholds of self-liberation. To reverse the parameters and allow art to move as an intelligent instinct on the level of allegory comes closer to the reality of what audiences need and expect from art, namely, to feel the possibility of another access within the imagination. It is art's ability to create an absurd disbelief in power that channels human desire to become something more and to make something special. For art to express the limitations of power through the desire of the imagination is its important task. The sustainable results are not merely a visual effect or a conceptual game, but an ability to grasp the foundation by which we experience human thought and feeling as a positive emancipating force – first within ourselves and finally within our relations with others.

**WOLNA PRZESTRZEŃ W SZTUCE
(streszczenie)**

Internet stworzył artystom możliwość uwolnienia się od zewnętrznych uwarunkowań związanych z krajem, regionem, religijną ideologią i formami estetycznymi. Rodzą się w związku z tym pytania: Czy nowy światowy porządek osiągnął punkt, w którym mogą oni funkcjonować jako zróżnicowana grupa społeczna *social body* bez granic i ograniczeń? Czy jako grupa społeczna różnią pod tym względem od innych grup społecznych? Pytania te sugerują rozróżnienie między zewnętrznymi, społecznymi i politycznymi żądaniami represjonującymi jednostki oraz wewnętrznymi ideologiami, z którymi związane jest osobiste wyzwolenie. Obecnie problem ten dodatkowo skomplikował się, gdyż obok starego, patriarchalnego systemu kultury pojawiło się zjawisko „transkultury” związane z wolnym handlem, rynkiem, międzynarodowością artystów związaną z wielością ich miejsc przebywania, co stanowi skutek globalizacji ekonomicznej.

Autor rozważa powyższe problemy odnosząc się do koncepcji dwóch kanadyjskich intelektualistów Marshalla McLuhana i Witolda Rybczynskiego, koncepcji „rzeźby społecznej” *social sculpture* Josepha Beuysa oraz akcji Rudolfa Schwarzkoglera i Hermanna Nitscha. Kończąc przypomina pogląd Herberta Marcuse, że sztuka nie musi być jawnie „polityczna”, żeby sprzeciwiać się opresyjnym ideologiom. Artyści, ukazując ograniczenia władzy, mogą poprzez pragnienia wyobraźni ujawniać uczucia i myśli jako pozytywne siły emancypacyjne.

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PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXTS OF THE ATTITUDE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS TO TIME, HISTORY AND TRADITION

Abstract: The present text tries to reconstruct the postmodern view of tradition, currently forming in culture. The purpose of the paper is not to describe specific artistic practices which document the ongoing changes, but rather to analyze their cultural and philosophical context. Artistic action will be discussed here as the material that illustrates the new way of experiencing the past. The change of our attitude towards history, prepared by philosophy, should be regarded as a particularly vital feature of postmodern culture. The article presents the conceptions of time advanced by H. G. Gadamer, F. Nietzsche, G. Deleuze and the views of the constructionists – H. White and F. Ankersmit, who point out the rhetorical dimension of historical writing. The estheticization of history leads to the upsetting of the sense of reality and then to the blurring of the line between artistic fiction and documented history. I ask the question: Can the recognition of the artistic narrative and academic history as equally legitimate in imparting the knowledge of the past be regarded as yet another achievement in liberating art from its obligations to science, tradition, and history? My answer is that the attitude of contemporary artists cannot be unequivocally described in terms of freedom from external and internal constraints, because an opposition of this kind is not a good point of reference for postmodern culture.

Keywords: art – tradition – aestheticization – fictionalization – narrativism

The liberation slogans voiced by the first avant-garde artists were directed against tradition. The academic artists were regarded as slaves to tradition and therefore unable to take a new, fresh look at reality. The experiences of the avant-garde formations, already burnt out by the end of the past century, permit the conclusion that modern artists yielded to other forms of domination. The current requirement for good art is novelty, while the forms and materials preferred are those suggesting impermanence, transience, a subjective sense of time and the lack of connection between events. The dialectics of continuance and transition appears to be an everlasting human journey from tradition to modernity, ensuring the constant renewal of the image of the world. What is the artists' attitude to continuance and transition today? Has postmodernity

changed the sense of time, thus freeing the artist from the necessity to choose between tradition and novelty? Contemporary art provides examples which show that a new picture of tradition is emerging, whose ideas and values have become part of the current cultural paradigm.

This article is an attempt to reconstruct the postmodern view of tradition, which is forming in culture, especially in art and owing to art. Its purpose is not to describe specific artistic practices which document the ongoing changes, but rather to analyze their cultural and philosophical context. The values and ideas dominant in the postmodern culture influence the ways of perceiving the past. The presentation of the philosophical background of the discussions on time within the humanities can help explain the circumstances in which the contemporary artists' attitude to the past is changing. Does sharing in the experiences of the past generations have an effect on the shape of contemporary art, and if so, to what extent? In the current artistic situation, have the artists been liberated from the earlier internal constraints, which are supposedly an obligation towards tradition? To answer such questions, we have to define the internal dialectics between tradition as a sphere of unobjectivized knowledge, and the image of tradition as the object of interest and evaluation. The notion of the past as the reality different from the present state is a product of culture and is connected with the concept of time. Mythical time is the everlasting present, while the sensing of time consists in reproducing the archetype. Primeval cultures did not have appropriate conceptual categories to distinguish the present from the past. While discussing those problems, I will try to take this historical perspective into consideration. In traditional cultures, tradition was present in the form of unobjectivized knowledge and did not exist as a separate phenomenon in need of conceptualization¹. The medieval artist does not refer to tradition, he is immersed in it. Consequently, the discussion about the extent of the artists' dependence on tradition makes sense only in relation to modern culture. As he leaves behind the social structures closed in time and space, man begins to perceive that which was different in the past, with which he has to confront his notions of the world. Certain elements of tradition previously unseen come to be noticed as traces of the past world. Artists, like other people, are obviously dependent on the invisible semantic system underlying the linguistic and cultural construction of the image of the past. In this respect, artistic constructs are like the popular image of tradition, which is either *our own* (native) or *alien* (foreign), and which assigns a concrete identity and system of values to its own ancestors. It follows from the nature of art, however, that the unobjectivized knowledge of the past, present in art, becomes significant as

¹ Cf. A.P. Kowalski, *Symbol w kulturze archaicznej*, Poznań 1999.

formed and distinct knowledge. When it comes to passing down traditions and preserving the image of the past, works of art have an advantage over individual remembrance. The immediacy of artistic communication makes the very process of construction, consisting in selecting some or other elements from memory, more noticeable. Thanks to artistic values, images of the past have a greater power of influence, thus having a repeated effect on the changes within the broad cultural system, including individual and collective memory.

In spite of the diverse conceptions that, especially in recent years, regard individual memory as more reliable, there are no sufficient grounds to believe that this is really the case. Rather, we have to accept the fact that both forms of reference to the past – individual memory and collective memory – are selective. Memory is perforce selective: remembering something means forgetting something else, forgetting about the whole series of different events in the world. According to Paul Ricoeur, forgetting tends to be so closely related to remembrance that it can be regarded as one of the conditions for the latter².

Art seems to perform the function of a special catalyst between the unobjectivized sphere of knowledge, which shapes popular consciousness, and the collective memory articulated in official testimonies and individual memory. Taking into account the suggestive character of art's communication, its immediacy and openness to interpretation, we cannot compare the power of its influence on individual conceptualizations with any other form of knowledge about the past.

The role of art in constructing the picture of the past is therefore dual. Owing to the directness of its communication, its suggestiveness and immediacy, it reproduces 'speech', articulates individual images of the past, and emphasizes otherwise disregarded convictions and prejudice. In the second place, the past perceived and organized as tradition becomes a picture which changes, molding the system of meanings that structure the picture of the past within a culture.

To sum up the theme of the internal dialectics between the unobjectivized sphere of knowledge of the past and the picture of the past codified in accordance with different rules, we can say that the role of art is significant both on the level of tradition construction and in dynamizing and initiating the transformations within the culture to which the tradition belongs.

² P.Ricoeur, *Pamięć, historia, zapomnienie*, Krakow 2006, p. 564.

Almost from the beginning of modern culture or the time when tradition gradually became an element of popular discourse, artists were involved in creating various narratives about the past. The history of architecture and literature is full of patterns which were adopted by the popular consciousness as tradition, as something that was always there. A model example is the history of the 'Zakopane style' in architecture. Although it is generally recognizable as the mark of the mountain villages in the Tatras, the knowledge of the history of this original style and its author, Stanisław Witkiewicz, is usually negligible and superficial. The awareness of the constructional role of the narrative about the past was confined exclusively to the world of art for a long time. An ordinary humanities-educated person was able to tell artistic fiction from historical accounts striving to be objective. Even if there was no contention about the Aristotelian superiority of 'poetry over history', the sense of the so understood truth of art was limited to the historical dimension. The truth about the past was sought in facts, and facts were commented on by academic history, which could be accused of incompleteness or even partiality, but not of being fictitious. In the turbulent twentieth century, it was first some or another picture of the past that became the target of criticism, then the value of tradition as such was challenged, and it was only later that the mechanisms of constructing tradition were laid bare. A great role in this process was played by the avant-gardes. The main characteristic of every avant-garde is its orientation towards the future. The unconditional requirement of novelty was adopted by the avant-garde as a call to fight against time, against the 'bad' past in the name of a 'better' future. Tradition – at least declaratively – ceases to be of any value. Since the authority of the new is the authority of that which is historically ineluctable, as Adorno claimed, then to challenge the value of tradition should be one of the principles of avant-garde art. This attitude to tradition, included in the avant-garde project of the reconstruction of the world and supported by the vision of progress, is characteristic of the first avant-garde movements. The second avant-garde is distinguished by its detachment and the harbingers of postmodernist maturity. The crisis of presentation and the 'traps of representation' emphasized by Lyotard affect every field, including the possibility and need to present the past. It appears that the stage of the criticism of culture, typical for avant-gardes, is already behind us. At present we seem to be in the post-critical stage, in which artists, liberated from obligations to tradition and aware of the constructional role of all narrative about the past, experiment with and multiply various pictures of what has gone before. This is a phenomenon that stems from a series of events covered by the term of post-modernity.

The signs of a new cultural paradigm may appear too bold if we confine ourselves to observing only one area of culture. That is why it is important to

carry out a fairly broad reconstruction of the philosophical context of the development of the changed concept of time, and consequently, the changed attitude to the past. At this point, it is in order to consider the effects of disparaging the truth claim of history, often combined with questioning the legitimacy of all accounts of the past that are subject to mediation. In post-modern culture, the prevalence of the processes of mediation and simulation of reality suggests a need for philosophical reflection on the meaning and form of referring to the Real as compared with the Imaginary and the Symbolic – to use Lacan's distinction. Contrary to the prevailing tendencies, the 'Particle of the Real' (cf. Pazzini's *Das kleine Stuck des Realen*) arouses the interest not only of philosophers. The material fragments of the past meticulously saved from oblivion and ruins, restored and revitalized, show the cracks within the symbolic order. In the theoretical dimension in different areas of culture and on different levels of abstraction there are deliberations on the experience of imaginary times and places and on constructed histories. It is emphasized that with the growing role of the media in the process of communication, Benjamin's conclusions about copies acquire a new meaning. On the other hand, attention is still focused on the philosophical quest for 'a particle of the real', which is accompanied by reflections on the signs and traces of the past.

It is not easy to describe the climate that breeds the beliefs about the possibility and forms of access to the past. Taking into account in research the estheticization of reality and the theatricalization of social life seems to be a highly useful device. When interpreting the estheticization of history in terms of aesthetics, and evaluating the literature which aestheticizes the past from an esthetic perspective, one can observe that the main standpoints are situated on both sides of the opposition 'traces or pictures'. When writing about remembrance metaphors, Zofia Rosińska recalls Marcel Proust, who was convinced that when remembering we reconstruct not so much the pictures of impressions as the impressions themselves that we experienced in the past, that are forgotten but stored in memory.³ If we interpreted the taste of a traditional French cookie remembered by Proust in the spirit of Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophy, that remembrance would inevitably have a linguistic form. This form reflects in itself the temporality of our existence. It does not seem possible that one can be detached from one's tradition, in which the echoes of the past combine with the everyday world precisely in language. Hermeneutics emphasizes not only its strong ties with that which is accessible in individual memory, but also its connections with the past tradition, preserved in works of art, and with the timelessness of myths and fairy-tales. Language preserves

³ Z. Rosińska, *Metafory pamięci*, in: *Pamięć w filozofii XX wieku*, (ed.) Z. Rosińska, UW, Warszawa 2006, p. 275.

a kind of memory of humanity. Art is especially privileged here, but art works, created after all in the language of art, do not provide access to the pure picture of that whose essence we want to grasp. In Gadamer's philosophy, a work of art is not merely a common ground for agreement and exchange of experiences. Art is also considered as a material or even tangible product of human creation, a trace of past human existence. It is in this sense that it goes beyond language. Experiencing art intensifies but does not rule out other forms of communication with the people who lived in the past. "We should learn to find the traces of past human existence in the present often alien to us."⁴

The category of trace as opposed to picture as well as other attempts to describe the phenomenon of memory is the object of philosophical, esthetic and literary studies. Despite the significant contribution of this type of studies to creating a new model of history, philosophers and art theorists are not regarded as appropriate partners for historians. In the meantime, the change of man's attitude to history, prepared by philosophy, should be regarded as a specially vital feature of postmodern culture. In philosophy, the problem's perspective is defined by the reinterpretation of Nietzsche's views on history. Objective history becomes the object of criticism just as the possibility of its direct (immediate) cognition and the very category of temporal order. One consequence of genealogical thinking, practiced e.g. by Gilles Deleuze, is to challenge the existence of the cause-effect relationship between events. In the perspective of the philosophy of difference the concepts of past time and present time are reinterpreted, as is even the nature of time itself. In the conceptions abandoning identity and presence for the sake of becoming, the passage of time is not constituted by passing from one isolated moment to another, but by the smooth passage of one moment into another. "If the present did not pass of its own accord, if it had to wait for a new present in order to become past, the past in general would never be constituted in time, and this particular present would not pass. We cannot wait, the moment must be simultaneously present and past, present and yet to come, in order for it to pass."⁵

The consequence of such genealogical, perspectivistic thinking will be to challenge the existence of one meaning of an event and to open history for

⁴ A. Pawliszyn, *Krajobrazy czasu. Obecne dociekania egzystencjalnej wartości czasu*, UG, Gdańsk 1996, p. 239.

⁵ G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche i filozofia*, transl. by B. Banasiak, Spacja, Pavo, Warszawa 1993, p. 54. [quotations from English translation by Hugh Tomlison, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Athlone Press 1983].

interpretation “there is no event, no phenomenon, word, or thought which does not have a multiple sense.”⁶

Without going deeper into the effects of Nietzschean genealogy and interpretation for postmodern philosophy we should note that it found favorable conditions for development in other fields of science, for example in historiography. In historical sciences the so-called ‘discursive turn’ is gradually taking place. Hayden White, the author of the term, accentuates the rhetorical dimension of historical writing, relating it to the metaphorical character of historical language⁷. All stories, on account of their narrative character and linguistic construction, are fictions that evoke experiences like those stimulated by works of art. In this context fiction should be understood in its core sense, where Latin *fictio* denotes ‘forming’, ‘presumption’ and not only ‘fictitiousness, fabrication’, which is rendered even more accurately by the Latin verb *fungere* ‘mold’ (e.g. in clay). The difference between the historian’s work and that of a writer is that the historian “‘finds’ his stories, whereas the fiction writer ‘invents’ his.”⁸ The story of past events differs from a fictive story: “historical discourse does not follow reality, it only signifies it.”⁹

Narrative structures projected upon the past endow it with meanings which can be politically or ideologically motivated. Frank Ankersmit infers from the foregoing that “narrative substances do not refer to the past” because “we can never test our conclusions by comparing the elected text with the ‘past’ itself”¹⁰.

Radical constructionists like Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit accept the distinction between historical statements and fictive statements at the level of reference to events, yet they challenge them in the structural dimension. At the structural level we are dealing with a high similarity between historiography and fiction, literature, esthetics and history.

The importance of narrativeness in presenting the past and the aesthetic dimension of historical writing became with time part of a broader phenomenon termed the aestheticization of history. This phrase refers to the process whose purpose is to commune with the past and ‘experience’ it esthetically. Apart from White’s and Ankersmit’s theory of the aestheticization

⁶ G. Deleuze, op. cit., p. 8.

⁷ Cf. H. White, *Metahistory*, p. 6, quoted after: E. Domańska, *Mikrohistorie, Spotkania w międzyświatach*, Poznań 1999, p.87.

⁸ H. White, op. cit., p.6.

⁹ H. White, op. cit., p.235.

¹⁰ F. Ankersmit, Reply to Professor Zagorin, in: *Fay*, Pamper and Vann, *History and Theory*, p. 209.

of history, the theoretical context is composed of Ricoeur's conceptions of mediation in overcoming the temporal distance, Gianni Vattimo's reflections on the traces of the past, the aforementioned interpretations of time by Gilles Deleuze, and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's theory of the presentification of the past. Theorists try to convince us that overcoming the temporal distance is ineluctably connected with the mediation process because the past never exists as the object of direct experience. The poetic dimension is a common trait of the historical writing of Michelet, Herder, Byron, Goethe or Tocqueville. The perception of the creative, constructional character of all historical relationships led to identifying narrativization with fictionalization. This objection was aimed at Hayden White by Dominick LaCapra. Truth claims can be formulated in figurative language and, conversely, fiction can be written in literal language devoid of metaphors as is the case with the writing of Flaubert, Kafka, or Beckett¹¹. The opposition between narrativization and fictionalization concerns far more complex phenomena than the rhetorical level only. In the popular consciousness the most noticeable effect of the aestheticization of history is the distrust of academic historiography. On the other hand, celebrating and brooding over the past by public institutions arouses the fears of history being used as an instrument in the discourse of the authorities. The disturbed feeling of reality and the blurring of the lines between artistic fiction and reality finds its way into the popular consciousness, triggering a wave of discussion in the academic circles and in the media. In the 1990s one can observe the first signals that the creative potential of narrativism was becoming exhausted.

What role did art play in the transformations described in the foregoing paragraphs? Can the recognition of the artistic narrative and academic history as equally legitimate in imparting knowledge of the past be treated as yet another achievement in liberating art from its obligations to science, tradition, and history? Should the role of artists be, therefore, to strengthen the sense of the relativity of time and the relativity of each historical account? What are the odds for art in constructing the pictures of the past in competition with the world of the media?

If the past is treated aesthetically beyond art, this process comprising a different discourse, then the problem of the limits and role of art should perhaps be examined today at the level of Wolfgang Iser's 'esthetics beyond esthetics'. In the analyzed aspect of the dependence of artists on tradition and their role in creating it, one should discredit the belief that there

¹¹ D. LaCapra, *Pisanie historii, pisanie traumy*, trans. from [Writing History, Writing Trauma], in: *Pamięć Shoah. Kulturowe reprezentacje i praktyki upamiętnienia*, (scientific eds.) T. Majewski, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Łódź 2009, p.508.

exist histories that are in some ways 'better' and 'more credible' than for example academic history. We shall not be truly liberated from the domination of the official version of history, which is recognized in some time and place, when we replace one narrative with another or when we regard all of them as unreliable. As I have noted in the introduction, the stage of the criticism of history and thereby the struggle for the legitimacy of artistic conceptions of the past is already behind us. Contemporary artists, aware of the constructional role of all narratives of the past, experiment with and multiply different pictures of what occurred before.

The consequence of narrativism in historiography was the recognition that the mechanisms of constructing the past, attributed to art only, also govern other discourses, including that of science. The aestheticization of history treated exclusively in terms of the poeticization of language and the constructional character of the narrative does not exhaust this phenomenon. As regards the role that it played in the popular consciousness of the postmodern man, it can be compared to other manifestations of superficial aestheticization. In this dimension the aestheticization of history takes part in the transformations of this consciousness, especially in molding man's attitude to time, to the past and to the beliefs about the possibility of communing with it. .

On the basis of what we have been able to reflect on, we might try to reach the cautious conclusion that the dethronement of scientific historical discourse indeed played a role in creating a new cultural paradigm. Narrativism in historiography and other conceptions based on the conviction about the omnipresence of the processes of mediation accelerated the wave of criticism of written history. This started another of the aforementioned processes – the search for the real. As regards getting to know the past, this turn is identified with the focusing of interest on the memory of the senses other than the distancing sense of sight equated with the culture of writing. Science, especially aesthetics, has long noted a growing interest in the cultures that prefer multisensory cognition, which indirectly translates into the understanding of the cognition of the past. There is a growing belief that the knowledge of the past should not be confined to written history but it should also draw on the oral or empathic history etc. What is important is the physical presence of objects, specific places, or even natural objects. This will be conducive to the immediacy of remembering, and will facilitate close contact with place. John Campbell emphasizes that "to remember something (...) you had to be there at the time"¹².

¹² J. Campbell, *Struktura czasu w pamięci autobiograficznej* [The Structure of Time in Autobiographical Memory], trans. J.Górnicka-Kalinowska, in: *Pamięć w filozofii XX wieku*,

Recent years have witnessed a series of artistic productions and museum exhibitions exploiting the symbolism of places, held in the areas that the artistic communication relates to. Artists seek all kinds of traces, signs of the past in the urban-planning configurations of former city street patterns; artistic actions take place in revitalized neighborhoods and on derelict factory floors. Signs of remembrance and public art are addressed first of all to those who do not have genuine memories of the history of their towns, the life of the previous generations, and derive their knowledge from historical studies, from the press and websites. Situating a work in its natural historical context is not only of symbolic significance. The works that relate to recent history, for example those commemorating the Shoah and realized in places of remembrance appeal to emotions and individual experience in contact with a real place. These spectacular artistic and paraartistic projects have had many interpretations. I am convinced that they are rightly treated as a separate object of research. Let me repeat what I have said elsewhere, “The phenomenon of time with the Shoah is that the Shoah has no past. It cannot be ‘naturally’ assigned to the time that was, in accordance with the same rule, which does not allow our language to speak of the Shoah without fear, using the future tense”¹³.

With regard to this special time the artists are obliged to obey the ‘imperative of remembrance’ and no one should ever exempt them from this imperative. Speaking above about the category of the real, I have indicated certain circumstances that permit one to place this special art within one of the approaches to the past, e.g. the trend that involves the performance of artistic actions in the natural historical surroundings, in very old buildings, ruins and selected natural sites. Another not so-well studied trend is one that could be explained in the spirit of constructionism. It involves the artistic construction of alternative histories, highly popular in recent years, such as those told in *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Shakespeare Code*, the search for Aristotle’s lost book on laughter (Umberto Eco’s *Name of the Rose*), the famous *Foucault’s Pendulum* and various stories of Mary Magdalene, versions of Jesus Christ’s life, the secrets of the Holy Grail and the Shroud of Turin, the persecution of the Cathars, the secrets of the Vatican, and biographies of magnate families.

The attitude of contemporary artists cannot be unequivocally described in terms of freedom from external and internal constraints, because an opposition of this kind is not a good point of reference for postmodern culture. It may be too early to speak of a new cultural paradigm, but one of the invariants of the

(ed.) Z. Rosińska, UW WFiS, Warszawa 2006, p. 133.

¹³ T. Pękała, Ocaleni i ocalający – funkcjonowanie pamięci o Zagładzie w realizacjach artystycznych lubelskiego Ośrodka brama Grodzka, in: *Pamięć Shoah*, op. cit., p.84.

old, modern paradigm has been strongly undermined. The crisis of linear time and the resulting change in the attitude to the past, tradition and history upsets one of the points of human orientation in the spatiotemporal reality.

**FILOZOFICZNE KONTEKSTY STOSUNKU ARTYSTÓW WSPÓŁCZESNYCH
DO CZASU, HISTORII I TRADYCJI
(streszczenie)**

Tekst jest próbą rekonstrukcji kształtującego się w kulturze ponowoczesnego obrazu tradycji. Celem nie jest opis konkretnych praktyk artystycznych, które dokumentują zachodzące zmiany, a raczej analiza kontekstu kulturowego i filozoficznego. W artykule działania artystyczne zostaną omówione jako materiał ilustrujący nowy sposób przeżywania czasu minionego. Przygotowaną przez filozofię zmianę stosunku człowieka do czasu, historii i tradycji należy uznać za szczególnie istotny rys kultury ponowoczesnej.

Przywołane zostaną koncepcje czasu H.G.Gadamera, F.Nietzschego, G.Deleuze'a oraz poglądy konstrukcjonistów H.White'a i F.Ankersmita, którzy wskazują na retoryczny wymiar pisarstwa historycznego. Estetyzacja historii prowadzi do zachwiania poczucia rzeczywistości, a w dalszej kolejności do zacierania granic pomiędzy artystyczną fikcją a udokumentowaną historią. Autorka stawia pytanie: czy uznanie narracji artystycznej za uprawnioną, w równej mierze jak historia akademicka, w przekazywaniu wiedzy o przeszłości można uznać za kolejne osiągnięcie w wyzwalaniu sztuki z jej powinności wobec nauki, tradycji i historii?

W odpowiedzi stwierdza, że stosunku współczesnych artystów do przeszłości nie da się jednoznacznie opisać w kategoriach wolności od zewnętrznych i wewnętrznych ograniczeń, ponieważ tego rodzaju opozycja nie jest dobrym punktem odniesienia dla ponowoczesnej kultury.

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HERITAGE AND IDENTITY IN THE ART AT THE TURN OF THE 21ST CENTURY. AN INTRODUCTION

Abstract: The article starts with an attempt to define heritage and identity in context of the philosophy of mind, psychology and anthropology. The ideas of Derrida (*bricolage*) and Gadamer (plurality in European heritage), Kierkegaard (will to be or not to be oneself), Heidegger (“being”, to be up against the Self), Ricoeur (dialogue with the Other) are especially emphasized. The problems indicated in the descriptive definitions are found in the selected examples of art works of the late 20th century (Bourgeois, Kiefer, Kantor, Vasulka) and of the turn of the 21st century (Barney, Orlan, Cattelan, Walker, Polish critical art, art in the virtual reality). The issues of thinking, memory, nationality, race, the Other and the relationship between body and mind, as well as the presence of various “texts” are analyzed trans-disciplinarily illustrated by the examples of sculpture, painting, theatre, installation and video installation. Possible evolution of postmodern art is considered. The final conclusion presents the long lasting domination of thinking in the experience of art in the 20th and 21st centuries. Such interpretative thinking allows us to see the artistic attempts to name and investigate the human determinants (often identified with what is inherited) as well as the tendency to free the Self (to be up against it). The unavoidable heritage proves, however, to be the area of finding what is both common and individual, essential for identity. On the other hand, the conclusion maintains the idea of metaphysical beauty (which might be hidden under subversive irony) as the main factor in art. Finally, metaphysical experience remains the area of freedom necessary for one to find one’s identity.

Keywords: heritage – identity – contemporary art

HERITAGE

The term *heritage* is usually associated with the conservative outlook and preservation of monuments. It has been popular lately because of the success of genealogy websites.¹ However, heritage (variously understood) has been always an inspiration and a subject of numerous artistic utterances, especially in connection with the issue of identity.

¹ See: MyHeritage, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MyHeritage>; <http://www.geni.com/>.

Heritage means “that what is descended, transmitted by an object (progenitor, ancestor, predecessor) to an heir”.² In biology and genetic sciences inheritance is natural, inevitable, “compulsory”. In legal terminology an heir acquires and possesses a heritage. In particular cases the heritage may be not received and accepted. To some extent (the time for the decision is usually limited), the heir is free to accept the heritage or not.

Both the biological and the legal meanings have been critically confronted in the context of culture, particularly in the late 20th century.³ Postmodern philosophers stressed the diversity of texts, discourses and narrations in human culture. Each heritage may be understood as some text. In this context Derrida formulated his concept of *bricoleur*: “If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one’s concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*.”⁴ Art is *bricoleur* and an artist is free to quote and ruin the heritage to generate his utterance..

Emmanuel Levinas blamed the European culture for the rejection of the sources of selected memory and heritage, which resulted in a disaster. In his opinion the cultural domination of Greek rational tradition over the spiritual attitude of Jewish origin has generated contemporary crises.⁵

On the other hand, the hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, who regarded linguistic variety as the European heritage of special value, also pointed to the cultural unity of Greco-Christian and scientifically oriented Europe.⁶

What has passed, accepted or not, cultivated or not, what decides about the formation of an individual or of a community, and what determines diversity, has been looked upon as an important element of identity.

² See: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heritage>; <http://www.britannica.com/bps/search?query=heritage&source=MWTEXT>.

³ See: Alfred Louis Kroeber, *The Nature of Culture* (1952). The heritage and identity have been also extremely popular subjects in the literature (e. g. Robert Musil, John Keats, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Gustav Meyrink, Nancy Friday).

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* (after http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Derrida).

⁵ See: Emanuel Lévinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*. Trans. Annette Aronowicz, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990). About Lévinas, Amando Valensi, Martin Buber; see also Barbara Skarga, *Tożsamość i różnica [Identity and Difference]*, Znak: Kraków 1997, p. 93.

⁶ See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Das Erbe Europas*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1989.

IDENTITY

Identity has more meanings and a huge number of definitions in various domains. It appears that the strongest influence on artistic attitudes has been exerted by the understanding of identity in cognitive science and anthropology.

In the philosophy of mind, the focus on mental activity and its relation to the body and physical reality leads to the belief that the self is founded on thinking. As early as in ancient Greece Aristotle stressed that “human being is a rational animal”. Even more radical was later reduction of self to thought – *cogito* in the conceptions of Descartes and Husserl.

Kierkegaard formulated the concept of conscious despair typical of an unbalanced self. Such a self is always thinking about its limitations. It usually reflects on the rejection of oneself or the will to be oneself. Some possible means of attaining freedom from despair are available in responsible activity and religious faith.⁷

Heidegger finds the identity of a person in the unity of being and thinking. However, the quest for the essence of being is never fully successful, because of the inevitable entanglement of *Dasein* (conscious being-there, being-in the world, different from essential being) in the world,⁸ experiencing the world (sensually and mentally, corporeally and intellectually). *Dasein* is, however, always basic for human beings also because of memory. Their existence is always determined by it: “I am as having been”. Memory may be seen as the awareness of one’s own possibilities, of one’s individual and cultural heritage. Memory is the warranty of the Self.

Nevertheless, the essence of being is to be understood when an individual being is free (of the world, memory...) to be up against the Self, perhaps in the experience of art or of new metaphysics (probably inspired by the pre-Platonic Greeks, but never described by Heidegger).

Karl Jaspers pointed out in his conception of “existence” determined by freedom and possibility that the awareness of an authentic (but “encompassed”) human being is to be experienced in “border situations”, such as suffering, conflict, guilt, chance, and death.⁹

⁷ See: Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard.

⁸ See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Heidegger; B. Skarga, p. 196-276.

⁹ See: Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy and Existence* (1938); http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Jaspers.

Paul Ricoeur stressed the indispensable necessity of historical memory for the individual and collective identity. The hermeneutic philosopher juxtaposed the space of experience (filled by remembered natural and cultural events – “all the past heritage”) with the “horizon of expectation” (needs, expectations, apprehensions) determined by memory and also determining the reflections on it. Analogously, there is a collective memory connected with the communal heritage and affecting the community’s outlook and common decisions. In the area of common identity Ricoeur suggests that critical memory should replace incessant brooding on the past and less reflective future projects.¹⁰

Ricoeur, Levinas and numerable philosophers of phenomenological and hermeneutic origin have also investigated the individual dialogue with the Other or Other-in-the-same in the context of personal identity. In spite of the discussion on the possibility to integrate or replace the Other and the self, it looks that the most important concern is still the search for personal unity. It is different than the concentration on the multicultural and deconstructive diversity and flexibility connected with postmodernism or the liberal concept of freedom.

In the philosophy of mind, an individual human being has a unique and unified identity through time in spite of his physical changes, new experiences or his mental investigations in his dialogues with the Other, thanks to his memory and his awareness of his heritage.

In spite of similar concentration on mental activities, the philosophy of mind emphasizes the clarification of concepts and the search for the essential core of phenomena whereas cognitive science is more empirical, structural as well as close to neurology and the materialistic statement “Thought is reducible to motion in the brain.”¹¹

Psychological and cognitive observations indicate that the self-concept forms in early childhood, beginning with one’s perceptions and later feelings (finally understood in abstract terms), one’s comparisons with others and finally one’s sexual identification.¹² Older children observe and adopt social roles (especially the patterns provided by the parents). Later social and cultural factors affect the consciousness of a growing and mature individual. In the opinion of many psychologists, not only religious, ethnic and national attitudes are formed in

¹⁰ See: Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, University of Chicago Press 2006. See also <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ricoeur/#3.5>.

¹¹ E. g. In “token-token” identity theory particular mental states are always connected with the appropriate for them neural activity. See also: *Intersubjectivity: Integrating Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*. <http://www.philosophy.ucf.edu/pcs/pcsis.html>.

¹² See: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/533337/self>.

this phase, but also one's gender identity (distinguished from one's biological sex). In such a process one may observe the development of freedom to reflect on all the elements of one's heritage in order to reconstruct one's identity.

In anthropology, individual self-awareness appears in the context of various group identities (e. g. the culturally determined ethnic identity, biogenetic racial identity or gender identity).¹³ A human being is rational, but also determined by his biological and cultural heritage. There is a plurality of diverse heritages and possible identities. In the most radical view, approval and appreciation are the only proper attitudes to the diversity. Tolerance is insufficient and indicates supremacy.¹⁴

The location of identity in thinking, conscience, mental activities (especially memory) seems to be the most frequent. One's will and one's right to accept the self and the Other in the self are also considered, as well as the freedom to be up against the self or against God. Lately, the discussion concerns the domination of the word (*Logos*) over the image as the material of mental activity.¹⁵ This has to do with the basic relations between the mind and the physical and mental reality, especially the body and the world. The important problem is one's attitude to the Other in the context of the acceptance and appreciation of the plurality of identities. The observations concerning personal identities are often found relevant to the reflections on communities. Last but not least, the problems of the reception and acceptance of different inherited elements in order to construct personal freedom, as well as to form one's identity, have proved inspiring for the visual art at the turn of the century.

"THE OLD MASTERS"

The worst trauma in Louise Bourgeois' childhood was the experience of her father demonstratively humiliating her mother and snubbing his *Filette* (little daughter) by his open infidelity and ironic contempt of Louise's age and sex. The memories, repressed for a long time, only resurfaced after the death of Bourgeois' husband.

¹³ Anthropology, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/27505/anthropology/236862/The-study-of-ethnicity-minority-groups-and-identity#ref839807>.

¹⁴ See: e. g. publications of Ira Katznelson.

¹⁵ See: Hans Belting, *Toward an Anthropology of Image*, Anthropologies of Art, Yale University Press, 2005.

Her sculpture and installation *Destruction of the Father* (1974) contains a group of numerous plaster and latex pale pink, butternut, brown and violet blisters of various sizes, sticking up and dangling, illuminated in red. The association with the destruction of some organic material is justified. The sculptor was inspired by the images remembered from her childhood, when carcasses had been displayed in the neighborhood.

There is no doubt that the slighted girl illustrated her rejection of her patriarchal heritage. Bourgeois also stressed verbally that she did not want it.¹⁶ She also did not want her identity built on memory.

Nevertheless, a family, a mother, children, as well as sexual activity and finally the figure of a father are present in her works. The spider *Maman* (1999) is huge and dangerous, but perhaps able not only to destroy and devour, but also to defend herself and her children. In the *Cell XVIII (Portrait)* (2000), a shroud covers an abstract female torso and the oval shapes beneath. This time the blue blisters are not the remains of “destruction”, but rather some eggs to be protected by the mother. Finally, the “fatherly” open arms in the *Father and Son* (2006) in the Seattle fountain do not bring any bad associations.

What is more, the interviews with Bourgeois and her “pen-thoughts” published in 1998 were titled *Destruction of the Father / Reconstruction of the Father*.¹⁷ It seemed as if Bourgeois (torn by various emotions after the loss of her husband), having faced the evil hidden in her memories, decided to face up to her Self. Consequently, she was free to form a new identity and was ready to go on, to accept the basic conditions of her heritage.

Bourgeois’ actions show that to face up to one’s Self means to become free. This is also the condition of taking on one’s heritage consciously. The acceptance of one’s heritage is also the evidence of a formed and united identity.

In his Theatre of Death started in 1975 with the premiere of *The Dead Class*, Tadeusz Kantor introduced the notion of the *clichés of memory*. In such performances as *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980) or *Let the Artists Die* (1985), he revived on the stage the time of his childhood, presenting a collage of selectively remembered signs and images connected with historic events, literary quotations and universal, Biblical figures. The clichés were constructed in variable forms, arranged in a particular order and often modified by the will of the artist

¹⁶ See: Adam Budak, *Geometry of Entrances: Louise Bourgeois’ Ontology of Becomings*, in: *Louise Bourgeois: Geometry of Desire*, exhibition catalogue, ed. by Adam Budak, ZACHETA Gallery of Art, Warsaw 2003, p.

¹⁷ See: Louise Bourgeois: *Destruction of the Father/Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews 1923-1997*, ed. Marie-Laure Bernadac and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, MIT Press 1998.

(who was always present on the stage during each performance). Kantor was also an *art informel* (*Un Art autre*) painter, a constructor of *emballages* (wrapped-up and packed objects), a happenner and an inventor of the original aesthetic concept of *Reality of a Lower Order*, using “poor, deprived of dignity, prestige, that is defenseless and often simply contemptible” materials.¹⁸ Sublime sensitivity to realistic misery, indeterminate status of the actors (who were bio-objects, turned into stiff *supermarionettes*), “modest” colors, literary allusions, and especially his own memory resulted in the “imaginative journey” investigating the processes of dying, remembering, the functioning of memory and the formulation of identity, juxtaposed and compared with the act of creation.

Kantor was exploring himself. He was investigating his thinking and memory constructed from images. His powerful personality then strove to put the different parts together. Despite the impression of the distortion of the natural order of memory, Kantor was not forming a *bricolage*, but a disciplined unity. He was constructing his strong identity founded on his personal and universal heritage using his artistic, creative will. However, the artist also described his late theatrical works as a *Great and Dangerous Journey into the Unknown*. He indicated in this way not only his concentration on the problems of heritage and identity, but also the obviousness of his metaphysical experience during his artistic treatment of such issues.

Anselm Kiefer began his career by distributing his own image in a Nazi salute.¹⁹ Later, in his large-format paintings, he presented imagined landscapes and interiors, as well as dark thick surfaces close to the tactile *Art Informel*. Their titles, however, were designed to touch the chord of his German heritage – not only the Walhalla, the Faustian and Wagnerian myths, but also the history of the Third Reich, sometimes in connection with some ancient Roman associations (*Nero paints*, 1974). However, Jewish tradition was present there too, as well as some allusions to its historic relationship with Poland, for instance in the *Margarete / Shulamite* series of 1980s, *Jerusalem* (1986), *Ride to Vistula* (1980), *Poland Is Not Yet Lost* (1978).

Are these memories of greatness combined with the scornful abuse of the others? *Bricolage*? A game with the texts? An appreciation of plurality in the European culture? Perhaps the cycle *Ways of Wordly Wisdom* created in the

¹⁸ Jan Kłossowicz, *Tadeusz Kantor. Teatr*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1991 (after: http://www.culture.pl/en/culture/artykuly/os_kantor_tadeusz).

¹⁹ Peter Schjeldhal, *Our Kiefer*, “Art in America”, vol. 76: 1988, no. 3 (March), p. 116-127. Sabine Schütz, *Anselm Kiefer – Geschichte als Material: Arbeiten 1969-1983*, DuMont: Köln 1999, p. 360-361.

1970s and 1980s contains some explanation. In the grim paintings, close to the *bad drawing style*, the great German philosophers, artists, commanders of various times have been replaced by the images of Nazis, e.g. Albert Leo Schlageter, Horst Wessel, Hans Thoma. Kiefer has stressed in this way that the Third Reich is part of the German heritage, impossible to hide and forget, in spite of the fact that many would like to “cut the crap” (including Kiefer himself). The only way to live free with this heritage is to accept it in one’s critical memory. Multicultural cooperation is then possible, to form a new heritage and responsible identity.

On the other hand, Kiefer’s whole oeuvre has aimed to expose the Nazi attitude hidden in all of us. Everybody, appropriately provoked, is ready to despise and abuse others. The Other in myself may be also a narrow-minded Nazi. This is a sad, but perhaps universal truth discovered in confrontation with the Other.

Nevertheless, it is still his German memory, heritage and identity that he uses to provoke reactions and illustrate problems. It is a real challenge to face up to it. For him, it is, however, the condition of becoming free to face his Self. One of the reasons for mixing his heritages in his artistic *Gesamtkunstwerk* is to cross the borders, to form the common cultural identity with respect.

Steina Vasulka is well known as the author of video installations concentrated on the unique ability of the new media to analyze the human perception. In her *Borealis* (1995), she projected the images and sounds of seascapes from Iceland onto the recto and verso of four big screens.²⁰ The magic spatiality of the natural light displayed in the northern sky (*Aurora Borealis*) together with the overwhelming impression of the majestic flow created the effect of immersion.

On the one hand, Vasulka “defamiliarizes” her native Iceland through transformations and repetitions created in the style of a music composer. On the other hand, the Icelandic seascapes, glaciers, geysers, lava flows and especially the title recalls Steina’s childhood. The character of this heritage makes for the special, surrounding effect of the “magic environment”. Finally, a person isolated from the outside world may step into her Self. Starting from the impression built on the geographical identity and the memory of the artist, and then the revelation of her intrinsic personality, one may experience transcendental being.

²⁰ See: [www.vasulka.org/archive/4-20b/Mediascape\(8024\).pdf](http://www.vasulka.org/archive/4-20b/Mediascape(8024).pdf).

In Vasulka's *Of the North* (2001), the screens, located in the arched windows, were computer processed to appear spherical and reflected by the vinyl floor of the dark room. Images of nature, mostly filmed again in Iceland, were in rotation. The whole construction produced a striking effect of slowly but constantly rolling orbs. It was given meaning by the statement of Glen Gould, who had regarded his native northern Canada as his elementary creative material. Vasulka questioned the possibility of the appreciation of northern natural reality by the people living in the closed interiors typical of modern civilization. The contemplation of the motion of nature was to create a certain mental attitude. It was imagined by Vasulka as proper for Iceland. Proper but never experienced. The mental operations however, enabled by the new media, created the expected heritage. In Vasulka's works, the identity present in both the memory and the artistic effort, has the right to form the heritage.

There have been many artists interested in the problems of heritage and identity in the second half of the 20th century (e. g. Beuys, Boltanski, Kitaj, Downey, Tarasewicz) who have quoted, analyzed and illustrated ethnic, national, historical memories and attitudes in a critical way. The selected examples presented above show only some aspects of the diverse outlooks. Nevertheless they share some typical elements.

Slow "revelation" takes place thorough the exposition, penetration and exploration of the remembered and hidden experiences, facts, and images. The difficult acceptance and critical affirmation of the heritage then follows the "revelation". Sometimes a restitution, modification or even creative reactivation of the given material is necessary to be ready to move on. Personal and collective memory are clearly the conditions of the Self. To face the heritage means to be up against the Self. A person is then free to understand the word "being".

Artists show how the initial situation returns after the artistic experience to stress that being means being free to move on.

A TURNING?

At the turn of the 21st century, Matthew Barney has presented his intermedia cycle, *Cremaster* (1994-2002).²¹ Films, photographs, drawings, sculptures, and installations grouped in five sections and displayed in integral, immersive units (only for limited audiences), have illustrated and explored the processes of sexual activity, creation and sexual differentiation.

²¹ See: <http://www.cremaster.net/#finalState>.

The title, coming from the male cremaster muscle, has been the conceptual and graphic base for the scheme of ascended, vertical and descended potency. It determines the condition of the human embryo and consequently the human being. The presentation *Cremaster 1* shows the most united, “ascended” state. The fifth film – the most “descended” or sexually differentiated state. Besides the associations with physiological and anatomical details and biological processes (such as spermatogenesis, vaginal mucus), the images and sounds contain quotations and allusions concerning Barney’s own body and biography, mythology, pop culture, geology. Such a mixture of texts is the creative material for the movies where the androgynous heroes act in monumentally slow but absurd motion to construct visually intensive, paradoxical and shocking forms. The artist himself acts in different roles. What is more, especially in *Cremaster 2* and *5* he evokes the figure of Harry Houdini – the magician and illusionist efficient in questioning all limitations and in changing identities.

Barney definitely plays with texts. His own body and biology are among them, as well as pop and elitist cultures. The artist provokes the *bricoleur* discourse. The most intriguing is however the clear thesis that the sexual differentiation as the final form in fact destroys the initial unity. The diversity enforced by biology is not normal. Perhaps only the introduction of gender is responsible for the differences, divisions, plurality. The basic heritage is neutral. The biology redundantly interrupts the formation of identity, which should be chosen by the Self liberated from biological and cultural limitations.

On the other hand, the basic elements of the life process itself, as well as the formation of identity, have been the substance of artistic operations. Barney clearly wants to find the metaphysical moment of creativity, when the form is not yet ready, but the identity exists. The visually and intellectually post-modern *Cremasters* touch upon the problem of essential unity and question one of the bases of human diversity.

Bodily organs and processes are important for Barney. Her own body, its material, flesh, as well as its shape is the subject for Orlan. Since 1990, the artist has been “reincarnating” through surgical operations, medically professional, but also undertaken in artistic circumstances (including music, poetry or couture design). Each of the operations was observed by Orlan herself (she was under a local anesthetic), transmitted by the media, and carefully documented. The removed fragments were preserved to be sold as “relics”, as the painful transformations were compared to religious martyrdom. The suffering, however, was caused by the artist’s desire to reach the ideal of a stereotypical woman. Botticelli’s Venus, Boucher’s Europa or Mona Lisa were not only the models of beauty, but also the incarnations of various male expectations, illustrated in the history of art.

Orlan's "body-sculpting" is an example of the power of stereotypes in both history and contemporary pop culture. It illustrates how women's identities are determined by men to serve them. Orlan clearly rejects the female identity imposed by men. Paradoxically enough, it seems to be connected not only with the dominating culture, but with her biological heritage.

However, as in a regular performance, Orlan was both material to be controlled, and the controlling author. Her critical irony concerning the patriarchal bodily ideals was juxtaposed with her artistic courage and self-confidence, the humiliation and slavery of a woman model with her mental freedom. Such freedom is the condition for the transformation not only of a body, but perhaps reality. A body symbolizes natural and cultural orders. They are both limitations. They are both a heritage. To be rejected? In the name of freedom? Because a woman cannot find freedom and her only real identity in the prison of her heritage?

Such a critical "I", to face up to her Self, has to face her heritage, even critically. As the heritage of the Other-in-the-same, it has to be noticed and discussed. Apparently the formation of identity cannot ignore the heritage.

Among the many artists involved with the racial problems (e. g. Fred Wilson, Glen Ligon), Kara Walker is one of the examples most frequently cited in the context of the identity issues. In her cycle of installations, the viewer may observe some black, passive, silent "silhouettes" on the white walls, as in the Chinese theatre of shadows or in the traditional Victorian women's games. The installations present the scenes from romances and tales about the legendary American South, surprisingly completed with the figures of black slaves in their humiliating conditions. The Arcadian impression may be supported by the colored light thrown from the overhead projector (*Darkytown Rebellion*, 2000), the realistic scenes and the ironic titles make the artistic intention clear (*Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart*, 1994).

The viewer may suddenly feel confused, however. His or her shadow appears on the walls to take part in the equivocal scene. What is more, the impression is so strong it seduces him/her to stay on. The whole situation provokes the final reflection not only on the fate of the "other", metonymically illustrated by the contamination *Negress* (imaginative supremacy of a princess juxtaposed with the condition of a black woman in 19th century American South). The participation of the viewer implicates the discussion with the "Other-in-the-same", i.e. the Other in him/herself. What would the viewer have done in such a situation? To what extent the historical circumstances could have changed his/her identity?

Is the identity artificially created by the superficial stereotypes, popular in a particular social circle, society, nation, race...? On the other hand: can one be free of such a heritage of one's communities? Perhaps it is not the external influence that makes one good or bad?

But again: the Self has to be free to ask a question concerning not only ethics, but metaphysics...

Though Maurizio Cattelan asks uncomfortable questions more clearly on the level of culture, art, customs, religion, he still evokes the discussion on the human nature and the human condition. His installation *Now* (2004) presents the sculpture of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's dead body, in dark blue suit but barefoot, in an open coffin. It has provoked another intended scandal after his *Plot Against America*.²² But neither Cattelan's (in)famous dark humor nor his involvement in politics has the most striking effect. During his visit in a public gallery, exploring art, a viewer was suddenly facing a real(istic) dead body in a separate, empty, spacious room, illuminated with bright artificial light.

The shocking impression nearly makes one rush out of the room. The understanding of a desecration of the American hero comes later, as well as the questions concerning the universal problem of loss, or the role of icons in pop culture, unfinished history, or frozen democracy. Always in the context of the initial question: is respect for a dead man a result of education and a product of culture? Or is it rather the fear of death – natural for humans? A real challenge for the Self?

Perhaps the first impression was only to sensitize the viewer. It is possible, nevertheless, that this postmodern, ironic statement was a kind of requiem. Not only to pray for repose, but also to face the condition of being.

In the Polish critical art of the 1990s, a number of young artists decided to reflect on the problems of heritage and identity. The painters of the *Ładnie* group presented in their pictures simple contemporary reality, but often embedded in the Polish tradition and customs. Very subtle signals hidden in the written words, as well as in the chosen composition, signalled critical irony directed at narrow-minded national attitudes. Most importantly, however, in various provocative installations the archetypal, corporeal, sexual motives were juxtaposed with the religious, national and political symbols. Nature was confronted with culture.

Body and gender in the context of age, illness, death are the *leitmotifs* in Katarzyna Kozyra's installations. Her film presentations of a dying horse (later

²² See: http://www.artsjournal.com/man/2004/10/cattelan_removes_work_from_car.html.

she would have it stuffed), of naked old women, of the artist herself under chemotherapy, posed as Manet's *Olimpia*, of naked people of different ages dancing Stravinsky's/Nijinsky's *Rite of Spring*, her transsexual *Gloria/Viagra* engender some shocking impressions. The confrontation with the border experiences is mixed with what is marginalized and unclear, to evoke strong reactions in the face of the natural truth, the real heritage hidden by the cultural habits, stereotypes, traditions. Such reactions expose what is subdued, but intrinsic in humans. Is it the free nature of a human being? Is it the Other in ourselves? Is it possible that a dialogue with such an Other will make one stand up against one's Self? Is it possible at all?

Artur Żmijewski, in his video installation *Repetition* (2005), recreated in Poland the Stanford Prison Experiment from 1971. Ordinary people again acted the roles of the prisoners and guards in realistic circumstances. The relations between the helpless "prisoners" and the "guards" who were quickly revealing their authoritarian side started to deteriorate very soon. Though unlike the subjects of Philip Zimbardo's experiment, Żmijewski's "actors" finally made the common decision to leave the prison, it was possible to observe how the circumstances determine the human behavior and to see again that people are therefore predictable.

Is evil caused by the external circumstances or it is an essential feature of human beings? Is freedom only to "facilitate" life and build artificial identities? Is culture not a real heritage? The Self exposed in the "border experiences" is biological, primitive, determined by contempt and evil.

The Polish participants of the prison experiment, however, revolted and opted out of it. Are people therefore good? Do Poles perhaps have a different attitude because of their unique common memory? Do we, the Europeans at the beginning of the 21st century, have a more "liberal" outlook? Are we sufficiently mature to avoid the limitations, and keep out the external evil? Or do we wish to avoid debating with such an Other in us? Or was Żmijewski just not determined enough?

Last but not least, the virtual reality pretends to be an original domain of artistic activity. There is a lot of artworks simply presented on the Internet. There are also artists, such as JODI or Feng Mengbo, commenting on the phenomenon of global net as public space and the medium of mass culture. They analyze the specific features and the identity of the Internet and computer programs in their autotelic works. One of the most original elements of the virtual reality is the possibility of creating artificial, postbiological beings. Their creators include not only Eva and Franco Mattes who install graphic illustrations of the most famous performances on the Net, but actually

anybody who can create worlds, creatures, things in such environments or social networks as Technosphere or Second Life (as well as in various computer role-playing games or multi-user dungeons). Many aspects of such creations may be profitably reflected on, always, however, in the context of their authors' realization of their creative power. The condition of the creator who is able to reject his heritage has been moved from the natural sphere to artificial quasi-reality. There is hardly any responsibility there. Its inhabitants are totally controlled. Appearances, coincidences, metaphysics have nothing to do there.

Nevertheless, the inventor of a program and then all its participants and "creators" are still human beings. Their creative activities may engender some questions concerning heritage and identity.

In the 1990s and at the turn of the 21st century, artistic utterances became more radical than before. Often strong criticism and negation reflect the wish of the artists to get rid of the limitations imposed by their heritage. Their aim is to regain their identity. Such an impression is overwhelming.

It all seems illustrative, however, of Kierkegaard's hopeless will to be or not to be one's Self. The results of Orlan's, Barney's, Cattelan's or Kozyra's provocative experiments may be seen as blasphemous, vulgar, ugly, just like an insight into despair. On the other hand, Orlan, intentionally or not, enters the debate with the Other. She also shows that it is impossible to escape one's heritage in forming one's identity. Barney emphasizes the initial unity which is perhaps not only biological. Cattelan's desecrations may make a human being aware of the existential truth, as well as the confrontations with the border experiences in the controversial Polish critical art.

Aren't these works the "recall questions" in the dialogues with the Other? The dialogues which help one not only to perceive the plurality of various heritages, but also to point out their determinants (often identified with what is inherited) and finally to free the Self? To be up against it?

These are perhaps the aims and there are perhaps such dialogues in art works. Nevertheless the question concerning the essence of the Self often remains unanswered.

METAPHYSICS

The above examples point to the universal, general truth that heritage and identity have always been the basic inspiration and material for an artist. In the 20th century, such investigative projects are represented not by individual works, but rather by extended cycles of intermedia installations, performances and paintings. In spite of the visible tendency to analyze the biology and the relationship between body and mind, thinking is still the basic condition of the Self. The mind is the area where the Self is ultimately formed, found and explored.

The historical discourse reveals many changes in the artistic and also everyday cultural outlook. The exploration and difficult acceptance of heritage as the foundation of personal Self by the generations of early postmodernists (who seem to be the old masters today)²³ has been replaced by questioning, scornful irony and negation. This is displayed manifestly by radical late postmodernism. It may be either the apogee of the postmodern turn in the understanding and appreciating their heritage, Self and identity, or a prelude to the post-biological era.

It may be, however, the question of age. Young people are always critical, hungry for recognition and also prone to show off. Old masters are getting temperate because they are old. And wise? Therefore free?

The above observation would not pertain only to postmodern art, but would be universal, and the proof that postmodern provocative works are still art defined by the domination of aesthetic values. Such an opinion may be confirmed by the analysis of the irony typical for the critical works. It is usually subversive. The artistic subversion simulates sympathy with certain opinions and feelings. Subtle indicators, however, point to the real disapproval. It does not have to mean a desire for destruction, but it may suggest the need for revision and improvement. Such motivations are not always fully conscious, paradoxically enough.

Moreover, the irony applied to the heritage of the Self in its dialogue with the Other, contributes to the shared understanding: "me and you are both ridiculing the same thing". In spite of all the differences we have reached unity and at least the temporary freedom of despair.

The notion of the heritage has been initially explored, later radically criticized, but it is impossible to ignore it in looking for one's identity. It is the area

²³ Some of them, like Kantor, found themselves as representing the late avant-garde.

where everyone can find what is both common and individual. What is essential then.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the subversive operations, even employed in order to rid oneself of one's heritage, or in the hopeless desire to not be oneself, are aesthetic efforts. Therefore they are art. The aesthetic function still dominates. The aesthetic experience is an experience of beauty. It is metaphysical. Metaphysics lets a human being face up to eternity. The Self can find freedom from temporary determinants and find its spiritual heritage. It is the ultimate experience of freedom and identity.

DZIEDZICTWO I TOŻSAMOŚĆ W SZTUCE NA PRZEŁOMIE XX I XXI WIEKU. WPROWADZENIE (streszczenie)

Artykuł rozpoczyna próba opisowego zdefiniowania pojęć dziedzictwo i tożsamość, szczególnie w kontekście filozofii fenomenologicznej i hermeneutycznej oraz postmodernistycznej, a także myśli antropologicznej oraz psychologii kognitywnej. Przybliżone zostają koncepcje Derridy (*bricolage*), Gadamera (różnorodność europejskiego dziedzictwa), Kierkegaarda (woli bycia lub nie bycia sobą), Heideggera („bycia” i stawania wobec siebie), Ricoeura (dialogu z Innym w sobie). Zagadnienia poruszane przez filozofów zostają odnalezione w przykładach sztuki 2 poł. XX wieku (Bourgeois, Kiefer, Kantor, Vasulka) oraz osobno przełomu stuleci (Barney, Orlan, Cattelan, Walker, polska sztuka krytyczna, sztuka rzeczywistości wirtualnej). Przede wszystkim problemy myślenia, pamięci, narodowości, rasy, Innego, a także relacja między umysłem i ciałem zostają transdyscyplinarnie przeanalizowane na przykładach rzeźby, malarstwa, teatru, instalacji i instalacji wideo. Rozważana jest możliwość ewolucji sztuki postmodernistycznej. Konkluzja podkreśla rolę myślenia w odbiorze sztuki współczesnej. Interpretacyjne myślenie pozwala na dostrzeganie artystycznych prób nazywania i badania determinantów ludzkiego życia (często identyfikowanych z tym, co odziedziczone) oraz tendencji do uwalniania „siebie” (stawania wobec Siebie). Dziedzictwo pozostaje jednak nieuniknione i okazuje się być przestrzenią odnajdywania tego, co jednocześnie wspólne i indywidualne, a więc istotowe dla poczucia tożsamości. Podsumowanie wskazuje także, że metafizyczne doświadczenie piękna (choćby ukryte pod popularną w postmodernistycznej sztuce subwersywną ironią) wciąż pozostaje wyznacznikiem sztuki. Metafizyka zaś jest właśnie przestrzenią, w której najpełniej można odnaleźć własną tożsamość.

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THE SPACE OF ART HISTORY. MIEKE BAL' "PREPOSTEROUSNESS"

Abstract: The article takes its point of departure in Arthur Danto's and Hans Belting's theses about the end of art history conceived not only as the end of the history of art, but as the end of the academic discipline. For Danto the end of art means that it is not possible any longer to create a linear narration about art and as a result such categories as development or progress cease to be adequate – therefore, it is not possible to assume *a la Hegel* that the position of an artwork is defined by what precedes it and what follows it. Moreover, according to Danto, contemporary art is a space where everything is possible and nothing is excluded as it used to be in the past. Art history, as a discipline based on this outdated model which does not fit today's reality, hence loses its usefulness. On the other hand, for Belting the end of art history means mainly that we should get rid of the traditional model in favor of an interdisciplinary study whose boundaries are not clearly defined and where different discourses can freely meet. In the second part of the article the author analyses some aspects and basic concepts of Mieke Bal's theory of preposterous art history. The author's contention is that this theory can be interpreted as an approach fulfilling Danto's and Belting's postulates for it departs far from the linear model of art history as a discipline and turns into a "spatial" one. What is more, Bal's theory seems to be an academic response to the condition of contemporary art – it crosses the border between theory and practice in a very similar way.

Keywords: Belting – Bal – end of art – preposterous history

Since such statements as "everyone can be an artist" or "everyone is an artist" were made, it has sounded like a truism to say that the boundaries between art and that which is not art have to be either completely expunged or at least thoroughly redefined. For many artists and theoreticians this allows for more leeway, because the limitations or constraints are no longer a bias, either because they ceased to exist or because they turned into personal decisions concerning the artistic agenda. Thus, the array of artistic possibilities spans – to use Arthur Danto's examples – from creating objects indiscernible from mere real things, painting pictures identical to those created five hundred years ago, to 'producing' works on the basis of quasi-sociological surveys of people's aesthetic judgments.

Arthur Danto has just been mentioned because he is probably the best known expounder of the theory stating that we have been living in a period of – as he names it – “posthistorical art.” It ultimately embodies complete freedom with respect to the creation of art (and one probably should add: with respect to the thinking of art). For the author of the seminal article “The End of Art” and the book “After the End of Art,”¹ freedom reigns in the “artworld” as there are no more theories saying what art has to be like, for example, that it has to imitate nature (Vasarian model) or it has to expose its own medium (Greenberg’s point of view). According to these two models, art has a linear history of progress and development. Therefore, some works are better than others for they fulfill more adequately the functions postulated by each of the two models respectively. At the same time some things are not works of art at all precisely because they cannot be considered as such (i.e. they do not fall under either of these models). In this sense art is a concept that historically speaking was based on exclusion and well-defined boundaries. Danto’s well known idea is that art is not conceivable without an aesthetic theory, although the two major theories mentioned above implied historical thinking and tended to dismiss some objects as not art or as, he states, “outside the pale of art history”. The present circumstances are such that even though some theory is indispensable for art to exist, it does not have to imply history.

Danto’s much discussed thesis *à la* Hegel that art is dead or that it has reached its end is not supposed to mean – as he untiringly repeats – that art is no longer produced or that objects nowadays called “art” are not really art, but it is to mean that a certain traditional way of thinking of art (as something having a history, more or less unambiguously defined features and a general scope) is over and that what we now call “art” cannot be interpreted in this outdated manner. The reason why Danto’s claim was misunderstood lies in the twofold character of the term “art history”. For the author of “The End of Art” it is virtually impossible to detach history conceived as an effort to understand the past as a meaningful chain of events (embodied in *inter alia* the academic discipline called “art history”) from the real events that took place in the past, i.e. from subsequent artworks (history of art). It is impossible to perform such a separation because when performed, what remains is something like a chronicle, a mere record of events (like a list of works by an artist) which explains nothing (and of course to appreciate art is to understand it). In other words, it is rather a certain way of interpreting history of art construed as a story about a gradual realization of an ideal (e.g. perfect imitation or purity of medium) that has come to an end and not art itself which still possesses

¹ A. Danto’s theory evolved since he formulated his theory in the 1984 article; its fullest formulation can be found in the book *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of Art History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

a history but now exclusively in the sense that there are new works (which does not necessarily mean that they are innovative) being created over time. In other words, contemporary or postmodern art can be only chronicled as it is not possible to write its history because there is no way of discerning any development and progress in it, and this is the principal factor without which no history is – according to Danto – possible. Therefore, today's art is ahistorical because it cannot be historicized: it is virtually impossible to sketch a line of its progress and development and at the same time to define its boundaries. Posthistorical art means for Danto art freed from past limitations and predominantly freed from its previous history. Now, it seems that for Danto, whose concept of history is – as he admits it himself – very much Hegelian, there is either a linear, “progressive and developmental” model of history, such as the one assumed by Vasari, Greenberg and traditional art historians, or none. To put it in another way: either it is possible to situate artworks along a time line and thus to arrange them in a meaningful sequence in which every work has its place defined by what went “before” and “after” it and in which the works that were created earlier can take part in explaining the latter ones or it is virtually impossible to group them in this way and thus we must give up the concept of history as such.

A remark quite similar to Danto's was made by Hans Belting who did not claim that art was at an end, but that the art history which we used to know ceased to be a prolific discipline². And while he underlines the fact that in the case of art history it is difficult to neatly parse out the theoretical reflection on art (comprising among other things a historical approach) from art, i.e. particular artworks being the object of its interest, he states that it is high time that a new art history was developed. On the one hand, traditional art-historical methods seem to be worn out and on the other that which is currently happening in the field of art itself does not justify their use. Once again, they are too “linear”, which does not allow one to grasp the richness of space of the contemporary “artworld”.

Belting remarks that “art history” is a cluster of two terms shaped in the 19th century and meaning: art understood as artworks (physical objects) and history understood as a sequence of events which can be framed so that they form a unified and meaningful picture³. As a result art is regarded as something having a homogenous, teleological history and therefore as something homogenous and rational itself (although the nature of its inherent rational

² H. Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, trans. Ch. S. Wood, (Chicago-London: The University Of Chicago Press, 1987); see also H. Belting, *Art History after Modernism*, trans. C. Saltzwedel, M. Coehn, K. Northcott, (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

³ H. Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, op.cit., p. 6.

element is disputable) which can be described and interpreted from a standpoint lying outside history. According to the author of “The End of Art History?” the crisis in this field is to be associated with a more general phenomenon, namely the crisis of representation. Not only does art history study representations, but it creates them itself as it represents art in a historical frame.⁴ The aim of art history is to create such a frame (no matter whether we are interested in the history of style or in the iconological approach) within which a work can be said to be the most meaningful. So the crisis at stake concerns whether we believe that the tradition which used to be canonical is still capable of giving sense to the artworks we want to historicize – in other words, capable of creating their meaningful image. The presumable inadequacy of the traditional point of view is also due to the fact that in the past artists created art without being interested in history. Art history was thus something secondarily imposed on artistic creation and as a result there was a constant tension between the artists looking towards the future and opposing tradition (as it was the case with avant-garde artists) and the historians turned to the past in the effort of establishing a tradition. The battlefield was situated – as Belting writes – on the threshold of the museum. Now the situation has changed – on the one hand, for the artists the past is no longer an enemy, and on the other – the experts do not judge any longer whether an artwork belongs to the tradition. Hence, art is a public sphere freed from conflicts and as such it does not need “better knowers” who would decree what is good art or what is bad art (or what art is or is not). And if there are no experts, then necessarily there are no amateur viewers who are to be taught how to look at art.⁵

In other words, art history has to be reconsidered because in the light of what is going on in art today, the faith in the possibility of creating a homogenous historical picture has been undermined. What is more, it is not feasible to conceive of art history as a theoretical approach totally extraneous to the artists who tend to remake the tradition. As a result, it is plurality that has become the main characteristic of the artworld – plurality that can never be fully but only provisionally and fragmentarily justified. This means that we have to ask different questions, and forget about those which used to focus on either form (history of style) or content (iconology). Instead we have to ask about the factors making an image an image and the reasons why certain images are believed to show the truth. At the same time we shall not expect to get general answers – we have to limit ourselves to partial, sometimes divergent alternative solutions. As we cannot escape history, our answers will be conditioned by our own historical context and situation. Therefore, we have to be aware of the limitations of our viewpoints and cease to treat art as a homogenous concept.

⁴ Idem, *Art History after Modernism*, op.cit., pp. 7-8, 57-58, 191.

⁵ Ibid., p. 10-11.

We should rather seek different statuses of art and different justifications for it to exist.⁶ Belting claims then that art history has reached its end in two ways: contemporary art is conscious of its own history but does not move it forward, and the academic discipline lacks an efficient and persuasive approach to its subject. In this sense, contemporary art is posthistorical, as theorizing on it cannot be subsumed under the term “art history” in the form inherited from its 19th century founders. There is no development – no matter how understood – in posthistorical art, mainly because the general idea guiding it (if we of course may venture this kind of generalization) is not the one of formal or thematic progress but rather that of remaking.⁷ Therefore, art history begs reconsideration, especially when it has lost for good its connoisseurship-like character.

What distinguishes posthistorical from pre-posthistorical art history is the fact that it is a self-aware discipline and due to this, it stems from hermeneutical assumptions: the most important category is interpretation. This means that the idea of an individual work created by an individual artist has replaced the idea of art as the main subject of art-historical concern (a “work of art” is now rather a “work of an artist”). From the standpoint of art history hermeneutics offered a theory of interpretation, but was not able to offer a new model of historiography, as for the hermeneutical approach historical research is a sort of auxiliary discipline.⁸ Belting himself tries to propose a sketch of art’s posthistory (and in his book “Towards an Anthropology of the Image” he tries to use this model effectively) which should know no boundaries, be multidisciplinary, combine the aesthetics of reception with an “art in context” approach.⁹ Such perspective, he claims, is not only adequate to contemporary art, but to the past art as well. What is more, while being used to interpret today’s art, it can show how to look at the past artworks and what questions to ask in order to understand them better. Thus, posthistorical art seen through a posthistorical lens can shed light on the historical art which hitherto was subject of traditional art history and at the same time it can help us avoid some pitfalls such as putting too great a stress on style (and possibly reifying this category as it was shown by George Kubler) or limiting oneself to “aesthetics of content.”

Danto’s and Belting’s theses about the end of art seem to be similar to some extent, but the conclusions drawn by these theoreticians are different. For Danto, posthistoricity in art means that there will be no history of art any more, in other words that it will be impossible to draw a meaningful picture

⁶ H. Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, op.cit., pp. x-xi.

⁷ Idem, *Art History after Modernism*, op.cit., pp. 174-175.

⁸ H. Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, op.cit., pp. 19-21.

⁹ Ibid., s. 29.

comprising the entire field and to situate the artworks within it. Therefore, the future of art history as a theoretical discipline is not bright – Danto seems to think that reflection on art (be it academic art history or art criticism) has to undergo profound changes because otherwise it will lose its grip on its subject, which tends to “disperse” itself and thus to acquire the character that cannot be grasped from a “linear” perspective. Until modernism, it was possible to build a linear history of art because art itself was linear and now that is has become rather “spacious” in the sense that there is no leading movement, no dominating theory stating what art is, everything is possible and nothing is excluded, traditional linear tools are useless. To this extent Belting would rather agree with Danto, but here their conclusions begin to diverge. For the American philosopher it seems that – as it has already been mentioned – history can be only described through the metaphor of a line and not the one of space and if, on the other hand, art being a space cannot be “lined up” in any way, art history as a discipline has to be – and in fact is – over. Danto writes:

[in the seventies] there was the sense that things had to go on as before, since the art world was possessed by a historical picture that called for the next thing. I am suggesting that in that sense there are to be no next things. The time for next things is past. The end of art coincides with the end of a history of art that has this kind of structure. After that there is nothing to do but live happily ever after. (...) this means returning art to the serving of largely human ends.

In other words, although Danto distinguishes art history as a narration about art from art history as a chain of events, he declares that when he speaks of an end of art he has in mind a real end and not only the end of a certain narration.¹⁰ Until modernism, understanding the notion of art was not possible without a concept of its history – this is why the two meanings of the term “art history” overlapped – but now, when we are living in a postmodern artworld, it is only possible to write its chronicle (i.e. to state who, when, what, maybe why) but it is not possible to make of it an overall meaningful picture. It seems that the term “art history” has become univocal as it cannot denote a “story about art” any more. If so, the art which cannot be separated from the narration about it, has really reached its end as the narration itself has ended. Thus, what we have now is not art but post-art, and no post-art history whatsoever is thinkable.

Belting, as an art historian and not a philosopher, instead of proclaiming the death of art history, postulates a need for its “afterlife”. Contemporary art

¹⁰ A. Danto, *Narrative and Never-Endingness: A Reply to Margolis*, in: *The End of Art and Beyond. Essays after Danto*, eds. A. Haapala, J. Levinson, V. Rantala, (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 29.

cannot be enclosed in a picture drawn according to a linear scheme, but it can be framed by the history conceived as a spatial representation of art. As such “spatial” art history would be analogous to art. Art itself has no well-defined guidelines to follow, predominantly because instead of being a representation of reality and thus being contrasted with it, now it can be simply a “bit” of the real world – it can be a space open to different aspects of reality, a space where they can be put into reconsideration, freed from the limitations of form, the “outer space” of the non-artworld and therefore a space which can serve “largely human ends”. Now, a similarly spatial art history would not represent art, but *per analogiam* would be art itself, i.e. it would be art on art.¹¹ It could be then called “arts-informed research” into art. This would be a possible post-art history in which once again theory and practice intimately overlap.

My contention is that this is how we can interpret Mieke Bal’s approach to art. One of Mieke Bal’s most important concepts which she consistently offers as a key to interpret and understand visual art is the concept of preposterousness. Preposterousness is present in almost all her texts on artworks, but it comes to forefront in her book *Quoting Caravaggio. Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*. The title is far from being one-sided (contrary – by the way – to the content of the book). It seems ambiguous, as its first part can be understood as meaning that it is Caravaggio who is quoted (if so, then the stress would be put on the fact of quoting) or that it is Caravaggio to quote postmodern artists (which would be in accordance with the preposterousness mentioned in the second part of the title). What is more, ambiguity lies at the heart of the expression “contemporary art, preposterous history” which again can be possibly interpreted in two ways: either as meaning contemporary art vs preposterous history or preposterous history of contemporary art (in the same vein a hypothetical title *Mieke Bal, life and research* would mean Mieke Bal’s life and research). In Bal’s use the term “preposterous” loses its primary meaning and starts to mean something quite opposite. The term means “absurd, contrary to nature or common sense”, and it juxtaposes – this should be clearly noted, as this feature is at the center of Bal’s theory – two contradictory and mutually exclusive prefixes: “pre” and “post”. The history Bal tries to theorize on is preposterous, that is “absurd, contrary to historical common sense”. It is paradoxical, as it combines what went before with what occurred or is occurring – in fact, this is done by “normal” history as well – but at the same time it inverts the order of things in the sense that from the perspective of preposterous history what occurred later on (post) precedes what went before (pre). Preposterous history does not lead us from the past to the present, but on the contrary – from the present to the past.

¹¹ H. Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, op.cit., p. 59.

For Bal, who takes much inspiration from T. S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin, history is in fact always created in the present and the only sort of past that a historian can get access to is the “present past”. The preposterous art history that is offered in *Quoting Caravaggio* – i.e. one in which a latter work precedes a former one in the sense that a latter work can explain an earlier one – is possible if we think of this discipline as one whose aim is to understand an artwork and not only to explain it away. Thus, Bal’s theory is rather close to hermeneutics although she would probably not admit it. (In parentheses as it is outside the scope of this article, one can only state that the reason of her possible dismissal of that thesis is that hermeneutical perspective assumes that although there are many possible interpretations – some better, some worse – of the same art work there is a sense inherent in it, while Bal is keen on thinking that there is no interpretation which would be somehow more valid than others as the sense is always constructed in the process of constant semiosis¹²).

Bal insists that she is not an art historian, but an advocate of visual studies which, according to her, are inheritors of art history. One of the differences – obviously not mentioning preposterousness – is that visual studies are not so much a theoretical reflection on art as a practical attitude. The assumption is that a skillfully practiced academic theory goes hand in hand with artistic practice creating an image of the contemporary world but at the same time changing this world. Therefore, it seems that Bal’s analyses of Caravaggio’s paintings and those created by contemporary artists coupled with the very concept of preposterousness allow her to arrive at more general conclusions about today’s culture. Here, one may offer another interpretation of the title *Quoting Caravaggio* – the book leads from Caravaggio (the Baroque painter quoted today, i.e. the past Caravaggio now), through contemporary art as quoting Caravaggio, to the question of preposterous history as contemporary way of conceiving the past and the present.

Bal treats the works she analyzes as “theoretical objects”. In other words, she assumes that every single work formulates in an artistic way a theory about art.¹³ The researcher’s goal is not to create a theory and then to apply it to

¹² A very good critical account can be found in: S. Czekalski, *Semiotyka widzenia i preposteryjna historia obrazów Mieke Bal*, in: *Obraz zapośredniczony. Materiały seminarium metodologiczne SHS w Nieborowie*, (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Historyków Sztuki, 2004), pp. 119-136; idem, *Intertekstualność i malarstwo. Problemy badań nad związkami międzyobrazowymi*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2006), p. 222-258; M. Bryl, *Suwerenność dyscypliny. Polemiczna historia historii sztuki od 1970 roku*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2008), p. 638-655.

¹³ M. Bal, *The Architecture of Art Writing*, (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 5.

a work, but to assume an adequate perspective whose crucial aspect consists in looking at the work or rather in looking for the nature of art in the work. This is why an analysis of an artwork is a self-reflective interpretation which is concerned to the same degree with its object and with its own standpoint. Moreover, Bal thinks that artworks as theoretical objects can offer a theory of the culture to which they belong, which means that analyzing them is tantamount to analyzing this culture. So, if it is preposterousness that can be perceived in them, this means that contemporary culture is preposterous itself.¹⁴ In other words, when we experience contemporary culture through art we do not (or not only) do this on the basis of metonymy – art is part of a greater whole and as such shares with it some properties and thus whenever we experience art we experience the culture it belongs to – but rather on the basis of metaphor – it is true that art belongs to a larger whole, but at the same time it is a sort of mirror or lens converging its principal traits. If we now assume that Bal, at least declaratively, wants to stay far from the Hegelian thesis that art is an expression of *Zeitgeist* (by the way, when reading her books one gets the impression that art is to some extent situated on a meta-level: art is a space of culture's self-awareness), the question arises: in what way does one make the passage from the participation in artistic practice to the participation in the experience of the contemporary world?

It seems that Bal finds such a possibility in her theory of “traveling concepts”: *concepts are not fixed. They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods and between geographically dispersed academic communities*¹⁵. The concepts are nomadic, they appear within one discipline and then migrate to others and as a result the disciplines which “received” them undergo changes and in turn modify them. Thus, a concept lasts because it is constantly traveling and can go back to its mother field in order to change it, be changed and restart its interdisciplinary journey¹⁶. Basing on her theory Bal distinguishes multidisciplinary (the same concept is used by various disciplines), transdisciplinarity (the same concept travels among a variety of fields but does not undergo deep changes) and interdisciplinarity: the domain of traveling concepts. Interdisciplinary concepts have only one constant feature – their changeability. This is because they are preposterous, they combine their “pres” and “posts” and, as it were, keep them in their memory. Therefore, Bal's flagship terms such as narration, frame, focalization,

¹⁴ Eadem, *Quoting Caravaggio*, Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 5.

¹⁵ Eadem, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Baroque, preposterous¹⁷ (or the motif of doubting Thomas which migrates from art history to the field of the analyses of the relations of subject/object, the public/the private, visible/invisible) remember their primary meaning. This memory affects what they mean in a new context, but at the same time the new meaning is not without an influence on the older one. As a result a new concept emerges – one that belongs to neither of the fields that contributed to its emergence. It is truly inter-disciplinary¹⁸.

If the object domain is not obvious, indeed, if it must be ‘created’, perhaps after having been destroyed first, we may be heading towards the establishment – by definition, provisional – of an interdisciplinary area of study. (...) In order to do interdisciplinary work (...) it is not enough to take a ‘subject’ (theme) and group several disciplines around it, each of which approaches the same subject differently. Interdisciplinary study consists of creating a new object that belongs to no one¹⁹.

There are two major, traditionally acknowledged boundaries: between word and image and between theory and practice. Bal tries to cross them both. Her analyses based on the concepts traveling from the field of literary criticism to visual studies (and back) are attempts to translate the visual material into language in such a way as not to lose the visual dimension of the described and interpreted object as is sometimes the case in traditional art history. This intention makes her cross the other border: her descriptions do not pretend to be objective, linguistic accounts of what she has seen, but rather deeply subjective impressions and they refer the reader to Bal’s emotional and intellectual responses to the artwork. In this sense they are to act upon the reader in the same manner in which the art acted upon Bal – they are to make us see something, not necessarily that which we would be inclined to call the truth of the work (this is the bone of contention between Bal and hermeneutics)²⁰.

Bal dedicates a lot of space to iconography, to which she has an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, she finds it to be the canonical method of traditional art history which serves to explain an artwork and not to understand it, and thus cannot show the significance of the work of art to the contemporary

¹⁷ In the field of everyday experience “preposterous” means absurd, but then having traveled to visual studies it starts to mean paradoxical and having gone back again to the cultural but non-artistic context means the only possible.

¹⁸ Ibid., s. 4.

¹⁹ M. Bal, *Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture*, “Journal of Visual Culture”, April 2003, vol. 2: 7.

²⁰ M. Bal, *Travelling Concepts*, op.cit., p. 326.

beholder²¹. On the other hand, she notices in it a propensity to look at a work of art not in a realistic way, but in a symbolic one and this is why it starts, according to her, to appreciate the semiotic power of artworks. Moreover, Bal is interested in iconography as it is close to the intertextual approach – both methods assume that the author uses readymade signs which he finds in earlier works or texts which he quotes or translates. The biggest fault of iconography consists in that it refers art only to written sources, which, Bal believes, reduces visual works to their textual background and deprives them of their sensual dimension²². Seen from this perspective, artworks are like texts, that is they are what they are not – an artwork needs to be looked at and read²³. Iconography is an example of “anterior-like” history which treats artworks as illustrations of their textual predecessors or their socio-historical contexts. The other face of the iconographical method is that the interpreter seeks the sources of inspiration and directions of influence²⁴. In order to do this he has to resort to his knowledge and not to his skill of looking at art, which necessarily situates him within a certain tradition and impedes new, non-canonical interpretations²⁵. Bal sees three major threats as regards iconography: (i) it privileges tradition and not innovation; (ii) it focuses in its present form on tracking historical sources, thus destroying active interpretation; (iii) it prefers fragments (iconographical details) and hence partial interpretations, and thus allows one to run away from the responsibility for the whole reconstructed meaning²⁶. What is more, iconography assumes that the art work is situated within a constant, objectively recognizable context on the basis of which it is possible to explain the meaning of the artwork. For Bal context is as problematic as the work of art itself and it equally requires interpretation (the more so that it depends on the work for which it is the context)²⁷. It is for this very reason that she suggests that we should rather use the concepts of co-text and frame for they maintain the distinction between the work of art and its “environment”, but at the same time do not rule out their mutual influences. Summing up, according to Bal iconography as an “anterior-like” method is not preposterous and therefore it is limited to the decipherment of the meaning

²¹ Eadem, *Grounds of Comparison*, in: *The Artemisia Files. Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*, ed. M. Bal, (Chicago-London: The Chicago University Press, 2005), pp. s. 134-135; Eadem, *De-Disciplining the Eye*, “Critical Inquiry”, vol. 16, nr 3, 1990: 506-531.

²² M. Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, op.cit., pp. 8-12.

²³ Eadem, *Reading Rembrandt. Beyond Word-Image Opposition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 177, 207.

²⁴ M. Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, op.cit., pp. 31-33.

²⁵ M. Bal, *Reading Rembrandt*, op.cit., pp.180-181, 207-208.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 214.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 6; M. Bal, *Travelling Concepts*, op.cit., pp. 134-135.

presumably inherent in the work and as such does not allow us to project new meanings onto it.

What Bal wants to propose instead is an intertextual approach or as one could call it – a post-iconographical interpretation – which means a preposterous reading *par excellence*, one in which different concepts and terms traveling from and among different disciplines together with contemporary artworks make possible finding or rather making new meanings of old masterpieces. One such example is her analysis of Caravaggio's painting *Judith beheading Holophernes*²⁸. Bal says that iconographers underline the fact that the manner in which the painter represented blood splashing makes us think that he must have attended a real execution. According to the author of *Quoting Caravaggio* such an interpretation does not contribute in any way to our understanding of the picture (although perhaps it says something about the historical and cultural context in which this work was created and in which such executions may have taken place) and should be replaced by a reading in which the direction of interpretation is reversed: we are to look at the picture not commonsensically from left to right as we normally do, but – preposterously, i.e. absurdly – from right to left. In this case we do not interpret the picture realistically, that is we do not see the instrument of torment first and then the wound, but *vice versa* – first the effect, then the cause. On this basis Bal draws the conclusion regarding the role of the beholder, the status of the sex of the painted figures etc. In this way, she claims, the semiotic power of the art is fully liberated, and this method cannot be called iconographical, as it does not look for literary sources and offers meaning most probably discrepant with the artist's intention.

One could wonder whether Bal's approach is as innovational as she claims, but one thing shall be noticed. Although she uses the term "iconography" to denote the traditional art historical method, it would be much more reasonable to call it iconology, even if it is practically speaking in many cases reduced to its iconographic dimension. If we have in mind Erwin Panofsky's program of research – the three stages: pre-iconographical, iconographical, iconological – we can call Bal's method "iconology without history". The Panofskian iconological second step (decoding symbolic meaning) refers the analyzed artwork to written texts (and other artworks) anterior to or contemporary with it, whereas for Bal this horizon is so widened as to comprise the posterior ones too. The other two steps – preiconographical description based on everyday experience and iconological interpretation aiming at discovering "largely human ends" (to use Arthur Danto's expression) – are in both cases alike. In other words, preposterous history of art proposed by Bal is preposterous

²⁸ Preposterous and intertextual readings are summarized by S. Czekalski (see footnote 12).

iconology, or iconology devoid of not-preposterous history. The difference between Panofsky's perspective and Bal's lies in the fact that the former for obvious reasons was interested in the past texts or artworks, while the latter treats to a certain extent all texts, no matter when they were written, as contemporary ones (some of them can perhaps be only "tagged" as belonging to the past and therefore their "pastness" is of secondary importance). For Bal the paradigmatic example of preposterous thinking is provided by philosophy – this is because it does not really matter whether a text was written two thousands years ago or yesterday. What counts is not its cultural age, but its semiotic power which makes the interpretation of an older one by means of a more recent one possible.

To sum up, it seems that Bal's project – with all the questions that it arouses – can be seen as what could be called art history after the end of art history and as something which fulfils the expectations of both the theoreticians that were mentioned at the outset. For Danto art history is over, as it is not possible to order artworks in a linear sequence that could be the ground for further analyses. The only solution is to write a chronicle, to give an account of what is happening without passing on to the level of a general reflection on art. It is worth noting that for Danto it is Panofsky's iconology (conceived as research on different symbolic forms not genetically interconnected) that can be an example of such an ahistorical approach to art²⁹. Bal's preposterous iconology – an approach disengaging itself from linear historical order and stressing the need to understand single works – tends to turn into a chronicle (Bal is not interested in writing a history, e.g. a narration of the development of contemporary Baroque; what she means to do instead is to understand some examples of it). From the traditional point of view her project is preposterous, for it violates the "natural" mechanisms of art history, and equally preposterous – from the same standpoint – is Danto's thesis about the end of art. What is more, Bal's ahistorical iconology (or, one can call it an upside-down iconology) seems to correspond with Danto's contention that it is impossible to practice art history after the end of the history of art or rather that art history has to be something completely different from what it used to be. This is because from the traditional point of view (i.e. the one before the end of art, as Danto would probably say) Bal's project is simply not art history, as it does not obey the natural laws of art and historical explanation. On the other hand, however, Bal's project – especially if we agree that it owes rather much to canonical iconology – is not a complete rupture with traditional history, as Danto's view of post-art and post-art history would suggest. Therefore, it seems that as a result of rethinking the traditional version of the discipline and

²⁹ A.C. Danto, *Approaching the End of Art*, in: idem, *The State of Art*, (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1987), pp. 214-215.

of acquiring a hermeneutical self-understanding, Bal's preposterous history inscribes itself in the new discipline for which Belting is calling.

Yet another aspect shared by Bal's project and Danto-Belting thesis exists. Compared with the traditional view of the discipline which is thought to possess its own rather well-defined field, the new discipline (if it can be called by this name at all) is interdisciplinary, which means that its object – as it was said before – belongs to no one. This in turn means two things: for every discipline an interdisciplinary object is of marginal interest and as such is always outside its field (the Kantian and Derridian concept of *parergon* would be very much to the point here); an interdisciplinary approach, particularly one based on incessantly traveling concepts cannot be properly called a discipline. This seems to be the price for having no boundaries and no barriers – this is the price of methodological freedom which Bal seems quite eager to pay. For the sake of this kind of freedom she never establishes a methodological frame suitable *a priori* for all artworks, but every single time she approaches a particular work of art, she works out her method of interpretation anew. In this respect her theoretical work is close to artistic practice, and this is probably one of the most interesting boundaries to be crossed. From this point of view Bal's project appears to be an example of arts-informed research, an approach which is becoming more and more visible in academia.

In other words, Bal's preposterous art history is not a field cultivated by means of some methods exclusive to it, but rather a space in which concepts travel freely, thanks to which different disciplines can meet. Preposterous iconology is possible if we conceive of the inventory of texts, artworks and everything which we find helpful in understanding works of art as a homogenous space in which all this is available to us and can be associated with everything. From here we can move in every direction and pick whatever we like. In this case, following the scheme of linear chronology – which is the basis of scientific rigidity of "normal" iconology – becomes a matter of choosing a particular interpretational strategy, or a research agenda (not to say: artistic agenda), neither worse nor better than the others, just different. This feature makes Bal's project approach a post-art condition as seen by Danto and it does not seem to be a casual coincidence. For Bal, artworks are theoretical objects, which means that we can get an insight into the culture to which they belong (and she is mainly concerned with contemporary culture) by merely looking at them. Preposterous history is then not an academic construct adequate to all artworks, but the way in which contemporary artworks deal with the past and which can be observed in and through them. And thus, whenever we are looking at them, we find ourselves in a space where everything is possible and where we – as interpreters – can do everything. However, can we be sure that

we may do anything without any guidelines? Or: are we really ready to treat the art of interpretation as an art *par excellence*?

**PRZESTRZEŃ HISTORII SZTUKI.
„PREPOSTERYJNOŚĆ” MIEKE BAL
(streszczenie)**

Za punkt wyjścia artykułu obieram tezy Arthura C. Danto i Hansa Beltinga mówiące o końcu historii sztuki, rozumianym z jednej strony jako koniec dziejów sztuki, z drugiej jako koniec dyscypliny akademickiej. Dla Danto koniec sztuki oznacza po pierwsze to, że nie można już budować linearnej narracji na jej temat, a co za tym idzie, takie kategorie jak rozwój i postęp tracą swe zastosowanie. Wskutek tego nie można w sposób heglowski uznawać, że pozycję dzieła wyznacza to, co je poprzedza, oraz to, co po nim następuje. Po drugie, według Danto współczesna sztuka stanowi przestrzeń, w której wszystko jest możliwe i gdzie nic nie jest wykluczone, jak to bywało wcześniej. Z tej racji historia sztuki, jako oparta na modelu, który nie przystaje do teraźniejszości, traci swe zastosowanie. Dla Beltinga z kolei koniec historii sztuki oznacza przede wszystkim zerwanie z tradycyjnym modelem, na rzecz badań o charakterze interdyscyplinarnym, niejasno zdefiniowanych granicach, stanowiących przestrzeń, w której swobodnie spotykają się różne dyskursy. W dalszej części artykułu omawiam wybrane aspekty i podstawowe pojęcia teorii Mieke Bal, która proponuje preposteryjną historię sztuki. Stawiam też tezę, iż na tę teorię można spojrzeć jako na realizację zarówno postulatów Danto, jak i Beltinga, gdyż zrywa z linearnym modelem historii sztuki na rzecz modelu „przestrzennego”. Ponadto, koncepcja Bal zdaje się stanowić akademicką odpowiedź na nową kondycję sztuki współczesnej – w podobny sposób przekracza granicę między teorią i praktyką.

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CAMP AND GLAMOUR AS EXPRESSIONS OF AESTHETIC, MORAL AND POLITICAL FREEDOM

Abstract: Camp¹ and glamour² are considered nowadays, above all, as expressions of the three-fold kind of freedom: aesthetic, moral and political. In the first instance freedom can be understood as the anarchizing of aesthetics. It consists not only in demolishing the aesthetic canons or substituting “bad taste” for “good taste”. Such anarchy is also achieved by deliberately merging erotica with aesthetics, which was traditionally contested by many authors, even as daring as George Santayana or John Dewey. With regard to morals, camp and glamour display a notable tolerance for pornography, including its elevated type forming a part of fashion. When viewed as

¹ Camp is being defined in various ways. I understand it, above all, as a specific aesthetic category devised by Susan Sontag, very efficient and appropriate for describing many cultural phenomena from the 1960s and 1970s. See. S. Sontag, “Notes on Camp”, originally published in *Partisan Review*, (31) 4 (1964), pp. 415-30). I refer also to the more than a hundred years old tradition of using this term as an adjective, as it is used today. See e.g. W. White, “Camp’ as Adjective: 1909-66”, transl. by M. Umińska, *Literatura na świecie* 12 (1994), pp. 326-328. Moreover, I take into consideration its verb form *se camper*, which dates back to the 17th c. and was used by one of the spiritual leaders of aestheticism, Théophile Gautier. See e.g. M. Boot, “CAMPE-TOI! On The Origins And Definitions of Camp”, in: *Camp: Queer Aesthetics And The Performing Subject*, ed. by F. Cleto, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp.74-79; F. Cleto, “Introduction: Queering The Camp”, in: *Camp. Queer Aesthetics...*, s. 10. The notion of aesthetic category is not equivalent to the notions of aesthetic value or aesthetic quality. In the course of my discussion I shall shed some light on the differences between these terms.

² The term glamour is also understood here as a certain aesthetic category different from aesthetic quality or value. Glamour is interrelated with the phenomenon of glam, which I shall not analyse due to its amplitude and thus superfluous contexts. I shall only remark that it occurs in two basic meanings: 1. as a subcultural multimedia production initiated and represented mainly by David Bowie and Marc Bolan; 2. as a style, for example in industrial design. Glam rock, however integrated with the world of fashion, is not equivalent to *glamour style*. Besides *glamour style* we also have the notion of *glamstyle*, which on one occasion is understood closely to glam rock, on the other to glamour. This fact indicates numerous interrelations of these phenomena. See e.g. P. Auslander, *Performing glam rock. Gender and theatricality in popular music*, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2006, pp. 41-43; V. Steele, “Fashion”, in: *Glamour: Fashion, Industrial Design, Architecture*, ed. by J. Rosa, New Haven and London: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Yale University, 2005, pp. 38-49.

political freedom, camp and glamour enable socially excluded groups to express their identity, needs and desires.

In the article I shall consider all of the above-mentioned kinds of freedom. However, this consideration shall be subjected to yet another type of freedom – connected with theorising the title phenomena – since, paradoxically, complete theoretical arbitrariness is not the best option in exposing the freedom typical of camp and glamour. Especially identifying them with aesthetic values imposes the rigour of axiological aesthetics, in view of which the essential features of camp and glamour become indiscernible. In order to bring out their important trait of latitude I believe it is necessary either to give up the traditional ways of theorising aesthetic phenomena or to reconsider those traditions thoroughly. I shall refer to both these alternatives in the course of the article.

Keywords: aesthetic value – aesthetic quality – camp – glamour

Camp and glamour are considered nowadays, above all, as expressions of the threefold kind of freedom: aesthetic, moral and political. In the first instance freedom can be understood as the anarchizing of aesthetics. It consists not only in demolishing the aesthetic canons or substituting “bad taste” for “good taste”. Such anarchy is also achieved by deliberately merging erotica with aesthetics, which was traditionally contested by many authors, even as daring as George Santayana or John Dewey³. With regard to morals, camp and glamour display a notable tolerance for pornography, including its elevated type forming a part of fashion. When viewed as political freedom, camp and glamour enable socially excluded groups to express their identity, needs and desires.

In the article I shall consider all of the above-mentioned kinds of freedom. However, this consideration shall be subjected to yet another type of freedom – connected with theorising the title phenomena – since, paradoxically, complete theoretical arbitrariness is not the best option in exposing the freedom typical of camp and glamour. Especially identifying them with aesthetic values imposes the rigour of axiological aesthetics, in view of which the essential features of camp and glamour become indiscernible. In order to

³ See e.g. G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, pp. 28-29; J. Dewey, *Sztuka jako doświadczenie* [Art as Experience], transl. by A. Potocki, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975, p.124; A. Berleant, *Prze-myśleć estetykę. Niepokorne eseje o estetyce i sztuce* [Re-thinking Aesthetics. Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts], transl. by M. Korusiewicz, T. Markiewka, Kraków: Universitas, 2007, pp. 98-99. Of course, there are authors for whom the relation of erotic experience to aesthetic experience is crucial. In Poland, already in the beginning of the twentieth century, such view was expounded by Władysław Witwicki. Cp. W. Witwicki, *Psychologia*, T. II, Lwów: 1930, pp. 81-85. Essential for this controversy are the issues of isolating an aesthetic experience and distinguishing the so-called aesthetic senses.

bring out their important trait of latitude I believe it is necessary either to give up the traditional ways of theorising aesthetic phenomena or to reconsider those traditions thoroughly. I shall refer to both these alternatives in the course of the article.

ARE CAMP AND GLAMOUR CONTEMPORARY TYPES OF BEAUTY?

In modernist discussions concerning beauty, both in the texts of artists and of theorists, a certain aesthetic objection is clearly distinguishable. Beauty is discussed mainly in view of its redefinitions. If an additional adjective is used to describe it, this is done mainly to indicate a fundamental change, consisting in challenging the grand theory of beauty and the permanence of beauty⁴. The general idea seems to be this: there is no beauty that could not be replaced with a new understanding of the concept or something altogether different.

In aesthetic debates starting from the end of the twentieth century, on the other hand, a nostalgia for beauty as an axiological pillar can be observed. Two arguments seem to be most popular. Even if, as some assert, we have lost the ability to define beauty, it still remains an indispensable tool in describing and evaluating reality. Such view is propagated by Umberto Eco in his well-known *History of Beauty* written in 2002. The author remarks that it is sometimes difficult to comprehend what sort of connections exist between the particular theories of beauty and because of that fact he sets as his goal rather eliciting the differences between them. He thus emphasises the glaring but at the same time fascinating ambiguity that lies in the nature of beauty⁵. The second argument is this: from the fact that beauty nowadays does not originate in the offices of political propaganda or in academic doctrines (*i.e.* does not have manifestly normative premises) we should conclude – and come to terms with – that it remains uncontrollable. Above all, it implies giving up the monolithic discourse concerning beauty which has dominated traditional aesthetics. This view is shared, for example, by David Shapiro. In the preface to the anthology *Uncontrollable Beauty. Toward a New Aesthetics* he recalls an unforgettable

⁴ Of course, it is a major simplification of the issue, aimed only at elucidating the title question. Many exceptions as well as evolution of the initial attitudes can be found. W. Kazimierska-Jerzyk, 'Strategia rewaloryzacji' we współczesnej refleksji nad sztuką. *Piękno. Eklektyzm. Epigonizm. Infantyizm*, Kraków: Universitas, 2008, pp. 17-56.

⁵ U. Eco, "Wprowadzenie", in: *Historia piękna* [History of Beauty], ed. U. Eco, transl. by A. Kuciak, Rebis, Poznań 2005, pp.8-24. Compare R. Shusterman, *Estetyka pragmatyczna. Żywe piękno i refleksja nad sztuką* [Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art], transl. by A. Chmielewski, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo UW, 1998, p.185.

conversation with a well-known twentieth century historian of art: „Meyer Schapiro once told me that despite the enraged puritanism of conceptualism, he knew of no civilization that did not treasure the object”⁶. David Shapiro proclaims a turn towards sensuality and democratic vernacularism⁷. He believes that it will assist us in exposing and abandoning numerous taboos of the past epoch⁸.

The nostalgia mentioned above pervades the rhetoric of the writings on beauty. And what about art, design and fashion? Camp and glamour reign supreme in those areas. We discover their traits in *haute couture* salons, at the Internet sales of the articles of daily use, in the scripts of popular TV shows, in television debates on culture, also in talk shows or in artists’ ateliers (chiefly the artists attracted by the craze for devotional artefacts)⁹. The very concept of camp and glamour brings hope for the discarding of the numerous taboo of the past era. But are they the examples of contemporary beauty? If so, then they should be recognized as its specific types – as aesthetic values. However, such categorization meets with several major difficulties. I do not consider it impossible, though I find it disputable. Let us refer to two authoritative standpoints concerning this issue. Umberto Eco, for example, does not regard camp as a type of beauty, but rather includes it in the history of ugliness¹⁰. Robert C. Morgan writes about presuming beauty in glamour in the following manner:

Beauty is not glamour. Most of what the media has to offer us is glamour. Most of what the fashion world has to offer us is glamour. Most of what Hollywood has to offer us is glamour. Most of what the art world has to offer us is glamour. (...) Glamour is about external sign – the commercial logo – and has little to do with the inner-directed concerns of artists other than as subject matter for some expropriation of popular culture¹¹.

Such opinions put into question classifying camp and glamour as beauty, proposing instead that they should be associated either with some other

⁶ D. Shapiro, “Preface”, in: *Uncontrollable Beauty. Toward a New Aesthetics*, ed. B. Beckley & D. Shapiro, New York: Allworth Press, 1998, pp. XXI-XXII.

⁷ Shapiro relates vernacularism to the present times. This term is, however, an important tool for reinterpreting modernism as well. Compare T. Majewski, “Modernizmy i ich losy”, in: *Rekonfiguracje modernizmu. Nowoczesność i kultura popularna*, ed. T. Majewski, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2009, pp. 33-45; M. B. Hansen, “Klasyczne kino hollywoodzkie jako modernizm wernakularny”, in: *Rekonfiguracje modernizmu...*, pp. 235-266.

⁸ Shapiro, *ibid.*, p. XXII.

⁹ W. Kazimierska-Jerzyk, ‘So camp!’ ‘So glam!’ *Nowe style czy niezobowiązujące aluzje?*, *Kultura Współczesna*, 4 (2009), vol. *Design w kulturze*, ed. A. Gwóźdź (in press).

¹⁰ U. Eco, “Kamp”, in: *Historia brzydoty [On Ugliness]*, ed. U. Eco, collective translation, Poznań: Rebis, 2007, p. 417.

¹¹ R. C. Morgan, “A Sign of Beauty”, in: *Uncontrollable Beauty...*, pp. 80-81.

aesthetic values (camp with ugliness) or some other type of cultural value (glamour with communication or media). I suppose we could point to at least four other kinds of doubts as the causes of the opposition of axiological aesthetics towards camp and glamour. Those are: the suspect etymologies of the terms and of the meanings bound up with them, their liaisons with kitsch, the problems concerning the objective identification of the features typical of camp or glamour objects, the issue of values in aesthetics. These problems have nothing in common with the intention to separate beauty from popular culture. On the contrary, they follow from the nature of camp and glamour and are to serve in their defence.

SUSPECT ETYMOLOGIES

It is hard to imagine any other context of beauty than axiological – even if beauty undergoes significant degradation. Thus the original meanings of the terms *camp* and *glamour* stand in the way of regarding them as values. Both of them, etymologically speaking, are burdened with negative connotations. According to the American linguist William White, the origins of the contemporary meaning of the word *camp* date back at least to 1909. It was used in the streets of London as an adjective designating a person “demonstrating exaggerated emphasis in behaviour and gesture”. Later on (at least until the publishing of the famous *Notes on Camp* by Susan Sontag in 1964) the matter got only worse. In the 1920s the term entered the theatrical jargon, standing for “homosexual” or “lesbian”. At that time such meaning enters the dictionaries¹². Beginning from the 1930s *camp* becomes synonymous with “improper”, “sham” or “effeminate”. Nowadays, when – according to Anthony Giddens – sexuality has become a fluid phenomenon¹³, and viewing homosexuality as pathology or perversion does not find endorsement in the authority of medical sciences, one could expect a fundamental change. Yet, the matter is not so simple. Even though, as we are reminded by Brian McNair, already by the end of the 19th century homosexuality was acknowledged as a distinct sexual identity, it has been constantly provoking alternating acts of support and discrimination. McNair compares the anxiety towards homosexuals accompanying the discovery of the HIV virus to the aura around the famous trial of Oscar

¹² Compare W. White, *ibid.*, pp. 326-328; M. Boot, *ibid.*, pp. 74-79.

¹³ Which means, according to Giddens, that certain preferences can be “discovered” at different moments of life and in different degrees. A. Giddens, *Przemiany intymności. Seksualność, miłość i erotyzm we współczesnych społeczeństwach* [The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies], transl. by A. Szulżycka, Warszawa: PWN, 2006, p. 25.

Wilde¹⁴. He concludes his thesis interpreting history as a cyclic process as follows:

The simple truth is that much has changed in the sexual sphere, and that most of those change has been for the better. Which is not to deny that there has been a backlash of sorts, evident in at least some of the cultural output (...). But to recognize the fact of backlash is not the same thing as saying that we live in a 'backlash culture'¹⁵.

One can wonder whether this homosexual context is essential for camp. After all, it seems that we can conceptualize this phenomenon in its relatively neutral meaning. As was observed by Kazimiera Szczuka, in Polish we define camp colloquially as "przeięcie" ("overdo")¹⁶. In the context of fashion we treat it as a conglomerate of certain qualities, described by such adjectives as *exaggerated, magical, grotesque, kitsch*¹⁷. It seems, however, that the homosexual association is inevitable. First of all, as was pointed out by Susan Sontag¹⁸, camp broke into print with such a meaning¹⁹:

You thought it meant a swishy little boy with peroxided hair, dressed in a picture hat and a feather boa, pretending to be Marlene Dietrich? Yes, in queer circles, they call *that* camping. It's all very well in its place, but it's an utterly debased form (...). What I mean by camp is something much more fundamental. You can call the other Low Camp, if you like; then what I am talking about is High Camp²⁰.

Furthermore, camp has been acknowledged as an aesthetic expression of homosexual identity, as a peculiar trophy and a creative contribution to culture, so apparent, according to Jack Babuscio, in cinema:

the worth of camp can simply not be understood in critical terms unless some attention is first given to the attitudes that go to produce it – attitudes which

¹⁴ B. McNair, *Seks, demokratyzacja pożądania i media, czyli kultura obnażania* [Striptease Culture. Sex, media and the Democratisation of Desire], transl. by E. Klekot, Warszawa: MUZA SA, 2004, p. 39.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.41. By the "backlash culture" McNair understands the resistance of the conservative social structures to sexual changes of society.

¹⁶ "Niewolnica Colette", interview with Maria Janion, *Gazeta Wyborcza, Duży Format*, 22/830 (2009), p. 25.

¹⁷ This is how camp is described on a popular fashion site, <http://stylio.pl/styliowirowka-styl-camp>.

¹⁸ S. Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'", cited after *Camp: Queer Aesthetics...*, p. 53.

¹⁹ Thanks to a vivid literary description it has broken into print quite contrarily, with a meaning which Christopher Isherwood, author of the *The Word In the Evening*, identified with "low camp".

²⁰ Ch. Isherwood, "The Word In the Evening [extract]", in: *Camp: Queer Aesthetics...*, p. 51.

spring from our social situation and which are crucial to the development of a gay sensibility”(...) The term ‘camp’ describes those elements in a person, situation, or activity that express, or are created by, a gay sensibility. Camp is never a thing or person per se (...) people who have camp, e.g. screen ‘personalities’ (...), or who are in some way responsible for camp (...) need not be gay²¹.

In many cases the efforts to diminish the homosexual connotation of camp were taken as assaults on its aesthetic identity²².

Supposing that in this polarised discussion on whether camp is “an instrument of political struggle or a part of fashion”²³ we declare ourselves for the first option, what idea of aesthetic value should we presume? It would have to enclose antiuniversalistic, antiabsolutist, rebellious and separatist attitudes. In that case, how shall we avoid a trivial accusation of social relativism? Formerly such initiatives were situated in the field of anti-values, which, after all, also can be experienced, as well as it is possible to experience lack of values²⁴. Is Inga Iwasiów right to set such a sharp alternative when she states that we either speak of gender revolution, or of “*Love Parade* for the unloving”²⁵. Camp, which is not a revolt (not even an aesthetic one), is merely performing its “comedy of manners”²⁶. The queer culture, which can be regarded as an anthropological background of camp, for sociologists is an expression of a broader social context. McNair describes it as “democratisation of desire” and Giddens as “democratisation of intimacy”. These phenomena make evident the crucial changes in the basic social structures and going beyond the binary code of masculinity and femininity. Why should we incorporate camp in the canon of aesthetic notions? Perhaps we should broaden

²¹ J. Babuscio, “The Cinema of Camp (‘aka’ Camp and the Gay Sensibility)”, in: *Camp: Queer Aesthetics...*, p. 118.

²² In Poland the issue of identifying homosexuality with camp was analysed by Błażej Warkocki. In his work he considers many well-known arguments of other authors, for example Andy Medhurst. Compare B. Warkocki, “Kwestia smaku”, in: *Campania. Zjawisko campu we współczesnej kulturze*, ed. P. Oczko, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2008, pp. 120-123; F. Cleto, *ibid.*, p.10; M. Booth, *ibid.*, pp. 70-71; J. Babuscio, *ibid.*, pp. 117-135. On the resistance of the homosexual community to diminishing or disproving of identity categories see J. Mizielińska, *(De)konstrukcje kobiecości. Podmiot feminizmu a problem wykluczenia*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004, pp.161-183.

²³ I. Iwasiów, *Parafrazy i reinterpretacje. Wykłady z teorii i praktyki czytania*, Szczecin: Uniwersytet Szczeciński, 2004, p. 29.

²⁴ Following a view that values exist in the world of phenomena – in the world of culture – not because of the transcendence (as absolutists believe) but because of “our commitment” B. Tuchańska, *Dlaczego prawda?* (vol. V.2.3. *Zaangażowanie i afirmacja wartości*), in press.

²⁵ I. Iwasiów, *ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the scope of those notions instead? Perhaps camp is an aesthetic category, but of some other kind?

“Glamour is always suspect”²⁷, writes Virginia Postrel explicitly. Glamour does not exist without the awareness of its inner antinomies, which, as is the case with camp, are rooted in its etymology. This issue is synthetically explained by Valerie Steele:

The word is Scottish in origin and derives from *grammar*, which is related to the old word *gramarye* (“occult learning, magic”). Glamour entered the English language in the eighteenth century with the meaning of «magic, enchantment». By the mid-nineteenth century it had acquired its contemporary dictionary definition as «a deceptive or be-witching beauty or charm» or «a mysteriously exciting or alluring physical attractiveness, especially when artificially contrived». Notice the ambivalence at the hearth of the word: on the one hand, beauty, charm, and allure; on the other, deception and artifice²⁸.

The cultural status of this phenomenon is illustrated very well by its grammatical form assimilated by the American language in the 20th century. The suffix *-our*, untypical for American English, sounds a bit “exotic”²⁹, always indicating that we should take the word “in quotes”, and that it has some unusual connotations. Let us refer to a suggestive example. The late Gianni Versace, acclaimed as “the master of glitz and glamour”, dresses Hollywood stars “as prostitutes”³⁰. Of course, this does not mean that they are ones, though an adherent of glamour would undoubtedly add that one cannot be too certain about anything. Valerie Steele describes the effect achieved by Versace as follows:

Versace’s fashions are more likely to be perceived as glamorous because of stylistic excesses such as intense colour and lavish surface decoration, and especially their hypersexuality, which is expressed through revealing cuts and overt references to sexual fetishism³¹.

In sum, the negative connotations of *glamour* come from, first of all, its archaic meaning. Surprisingly, this nuance is also reflected in Polish. *Glamour* is close to Polish *urok*, which can mean positively ‘charm, allure’, and negatively ‘magic spell’. Secondly, glamour – bathed in the splendour of Hollywood – is sometimes considered “the ugly stepsister to elegance”. It brings to mind not “legacy” or “old money” but only “etiquette”³², or logo.

²⁷ V. Postrel, “A Golden Word”, in: *Glamour: Fashion, Industrial Design*, p. 30.

²⁸ V. Steele, *ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁹ V. Postrel, *ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁰ One of the most suggestive examples is the *safety-pin dress*, worn by Elizabeth Hurley to a theatre premiere in the summer of 1994.

³¹ V. Postrel, *ibid.*, p. 38.

³² J. Rosa, *ibid.* p. 16.

“DANGEROUS LIAISONS” WITCH KITSCH

The odium of suspect etymologies falls also upon kitsch. Camp and glamour rather resemble kitsch in this respect, not to mention that they are frequently identified with it. This is not the end of it, however. Such “bad roots” are, paradoxically, a major blessing for these three phenomena. Yet at the same time, with regard to them, we assume if not withdrawal from the realm of values, then at least the expansion of values to some new domains. As I have said earlier, this provokes the question about whether or not we are dealing with anti-values. The case with kitsch is problematic, since – as was pointed out long ago – the exact etymology and meaning of the term was long unclear³³. Nowadays, however, an almost complete agreement exists that the term appeared at the end of the 19th century in Munich, in the circles of art dealers. In those days it meant ‘a cheap commodity’, in time it became synonymous with bad art, and as a result a synonym for a product antithetic to art. How did kitsch happen to have such an explosive career? How did it enter the museums and gained an audience? How did it attract its “advocates” and collectors? The answer to these questions lies in the immanent dynamics of art and aesthetics. Kitsch, when it emerges, bears testimony of considerable changes in the world of art: of the existence of art circles other than official; of another, broader public; of additional functions of art; of a reflection on art which evolves outside the normative criteria of official artistic doctrines (including the newly formed art critique known back then as “poets’ critique”); of a notion of art which finally becomes independent of politics, and more precisely independent of politicized European academies of art. We must not forget that Munich Art Academy was one of those to which “the epithet *academic* was applied in an intentionally pejorative manner”³⁴.

Thus it would be hard to find a more accurate conclusion than the one coming from an author so sceptical towards modernity as Theodore W. Adorno: “kitsch is implicit in the notion of art”³⁵. We could quote many later similar statements, regardless of whether the assumed perspective would be based in sociology, cultural studies or the history of art³⁶.

³³ See e.g. A. Banach, *O kiczu*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1968, pp. 9-14.

³⁴ M. Poprzęcka, *Akademizm*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1980, p. 39.

³⁵ T. W. Adorno, *Teoria estetyczna* [Aesthetic Theory], transl. by K. Krzemieniowa, Warszawa: PWN, 1994, p. 219.

³⁶ Compare M. Czerwiński, [untitled], *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 3-4 (1966), p.152; W. Godzic, “Kicz w Internecie – czyli stara estetyka i nowe medium”, in: *Niedyskretny urok kiczu. Problemy filmowej kultury popularnej*, ed. G. Stachówna, Kraków: Universitas, 1997, p. 208; M. Poprzęcka, *O zlej sztuce*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1998.

Kitsch also owes its explosive career to the new technologies enabling producers to create various imitations (by “imitation” I mean an axiologically neutral term) and allusions. An invariable element of the experience connected with kitsch lies in the tension deriving from utterly opposite beliefs: “They thought it would be considered as Art (using capital letter) but it is not” and “Still, it is twice as good as Art – because it is accessible, I can touch it and I can afford it”. This experience that I am referring to explains the success of Swarovski’s crystals – favourite elements of *campstyle* and *glamstyle*. Pure, flawless gems, as well as numerous masterpieces of art are out of reach of an average person. They are hidden behind bulletproof glass, separated by physical distance and a set of admission procedures established by museums, treasuries or research centres. However, Daniel Swarovski (1862-1956) a Czech glass manufacturer and inventor settled in Austria developed a method of polishing and coating glass so that it could imitate the crystal structure of a gem in a spectacularly precise manner. We are very well aware that Swarovski’s crystals do not have anything in common with genuine crystals – they do not share the structure, properties and chemical composition of the mineral. The very name “Swarovski crystal” reveals its nature – this alluring glass is actually a crystal “invented by Swarovski”. This is one of the most famous performative utterances of fashion of the previous and present century. Of course, today Swarovski is a brand with more than one hundred years of tradition, admired by numerous celebrities, from Coco Chanel to Lenny Kravitz. Nonetheless, those wares are in reach of an average customer.

Kitsch reevaluates the hierarchy of basic human faculties – intellect and sensibility. Kitsch is a triumph of sensibility over theory. As a result, the structure of the phenomenon is no longer decisive, the justification of its existence lies in the experience of the presence of the object, the intimate contact with reality. But where is the value here? Is it in the ability of glass to imitate crystal?

There is another aspect of defining camp and glamour where kitsch, a parallel concept, assists us in the understanding of the status of these phenomena in aesthetics. Both camp and glamour are considered as aesthetic attributes of drag culture. Cultural tradition tells us of numerous examples (dating back to the antiquity) of male and female impersonators. Some of the most famous examples include Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) playing the role of Hamlet³⁷ or Frederick Ashton and Robert Helpmann as evil sisters in *Cinderella*³⁸. In the case of stage arts, these examples are canonical. But if we consider them in

³⁷ The popularity of this role stems not only from the esteem for Bernhardt’s other theatrical roles. The actress also appeared in one of the first silent films. She made her debut – as Hamlet – in a two minute film *Le Duel d’Hamlet* from 1900.

³⁸ In 1948 the ballet performed for the first time with this cast.

terms of camp and glamour, they present themselves in the context of gender transgression. The biographer of Ashton mentions only that the famous dancers portrayed their characters *en travesti* and that the case was not an unprecedented one in the history of ballet³⁹. Yet, according to the exponents of *queer theory*, Ashton holds the same place in the history of ballet as Oscar Wilde in the history of literature⁴⁰ and, aesthetically speaking, he represents *high camp*. Douglas Blair Turnbaugh explains the origins of these characters as follows:

He [Frederick Ashton] served as its [Royal Ballet's] artistic director from 1963 to 1970, the years of the company's greatest success. It was here that Ashton discovered in the ballerina Margot Fonteyn⁴¹ his alter ego. He would create leading roles for Fonteyn for twenty-five years. Although he could not perform the ethereal roles for ballerinas (...), Ashton did choreograph and perform great comic travesty roles, notably the Ugly Sisters in *Cinderella* (1948) and Widow Simone in *La Fille mal gardée* (1960). Ashton's hilarious performance as the older Ugly sister, with Robert Helpman in high-camp turn as the younger Ugly Sister, has become legendary, and these are now coveted roles⁴².

Therefore Camp is sometimes viewed as a certain aesthetic counterpart of the phenomenon of drag show and more specifically drag queens (as was aptly observed, the roles of drag kings are more demanding and less spectacular; it is much easier to imitate Marilyn Monroe or Diana Ross than Paul Newman or Tom Cruise). The roles which Ashton acted in back in the 1940s, however, nowadays are considered mainly as crypto-political fight rather than pursuit of a new aesthetics. Andrés Mario Zervigón believes that two closely related justifications of this thesis are the most plausible. One comes from a landmark feminist book *Sexual Politics* (1970) by Kate Millet: "the thrill produced by a drag queen arises through her denaturalization of gender, her demonstration that femininity is donned like a masquerade and rendered completely irrelevant to biology"⁴³. According to Wayne Koestenbaum, the author of the famous *The Queen's Throat* (1993), a book criticising the LGBT community,

³⁹ Compare D. Vaughan, *Frederick Ashton i jego balety*, transl. by. L. Woźnica, PIW Warszawa., 1985, pp. 182-183; *The Queer Encyclopedia of Music, Dance & Musical Theater*, ed. C. J. Summers, San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2004 [*Ashton, sir Fredericks (1904-1988)* by Douglas Blair Turnbaugh], p. 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Margot Fonteyn [1919–1991] was a British ballerina, who is widely regarded as one of the greatest classical ballet dancers of all time.

⁴² *The Queer Encyclopedia...*, p. 7.

⁴³ Cited after *The Queer Encyclopedia...*, [*Drag Show: Drag Queens and Female Impersonators* by Andrés Mario Zervigón], p. 89.

“drag queens, like opera divas, perform the kind of freedom that most gay men can enjoy only vicariously”⁴⁴.

As far as glamour is concerned, it is evident that the image of a woman prevails under its auspices, sometimes also in the drag version. The image clearly evolves towards hypertrophic femininity, which derives solely from female sexuality, whereas drag culture emphasises different aspects of femininity. To see this evolution one needs only to compare examples of “glamour on the red carpet”: the wasp-waisted Audrey Hepburn in a dress by Hubert de Givenchy, which she wore during the Oscar Ceremony in 1954 and the bare waist in the “nonexistent” (transparent) dress by John Galliano, worn by Cate Blanchett during the Ceremony 35 years later. Ester Newton, the American anthropologist famous for her pioneer work on gay and lesbian communities, states the matter directly:

The glamour image is central to drag performances. (...) The flip side of glamour is prostitution. This relationship is laid bare (literally) in the strip, which begins as a clothing show and as a skin show⁴⁵.

Kitsch is a cultural diversion aimed at the notion of art. It disturbs the traditional understanding of the notion of art and undermines its significance. Drag culture also has a diversionary nature, both with regard to the conventional aesthetic expression and the traditional understanding of sex. Taken together, camp and glamour (along with widespread kitsch and the aesthetics of drag) are a reflection of the constant struggle for “the right to openly express sexual needs”⁴⁶, both by the social groups which had no right to express their identity and by those who find any restrictions of expression unnecessary. McNair calls it a striptease culture. Most likely we are dealing with a new quality in the public sphere mentioned earlier – the democratization of desire – and its main derivative, the merchandising of sex⁴⁷. But in what sense can we speak here of the emergence of new aesthetic qualities?

THE OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Again, at a first glance the matter seems obvious. After all we are discussing concrete glamorous objects (works of famous designers, details), we are juggl-

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ E. Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, cited after V. Steele, op. cit. 43.

⁴⁶ B. McNair, *ibid.*, p. 375.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

ing with names. Sontag composes her *Notes on Camp* (and she is so persuasive in it) as if she knew exactly what camp is, as if she could infallibly identify it. She lavishes us with examples and counter examples, advises us how to recognize camp. At the same time, however, she points out all possible ambivalences: “I am strongly drawn to Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it”⁴⁸; “not only is there (...) a Camp way of looking at things, camp is as well a quality discoverable in objects” (3); “the Camp eye has the power to transform the experience, but not everything can be seen as Camp” (3); “it’s too good to be Camp” (6); “urban pastoral” (7); “what is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine...” (9) “Camp sees everything in quotation marks” (10). These are the examples taken from the very beginning of the essay. Without doubt, Sontag creates camp. This was noticed instantly, she was named: *Miss Camp, The Camp Girl*.

Our culture assimilates and promotes the notions of camp and glamour in exactly the same way – by picking out concrete objects. At the same time, however, focusing on concreteness highlights one of the major illusions under which we operate when we try to classify these phenomena. If we could legitimately accept certain aesthetic qualities (i.e. certain features of objects) as distinguishing properties of camp and glamour it would be a convenient starting point, as objective conditions of aesthetic experience are the least controversial issue, according to the majority of aesthetic theorists (with the exception of the absolutists). This refers to the subjectivist and relationistic standpoints as well. After all, there is no way to claim that the fact of coestablishing an aesthetic object by a recipient deprives this object of its physical qualities such as size or colour. Of course, the existence of aesthetic qualities does not determine the existence of values⁴⁹. I am not attempting to settle this aesthetic issue (crucial yet responsible for its impasse). My goal is rather to show that camp and glamour do not belong in, or even evade, the controversy concerning the existence of aesthetic object, so crucial for aesthetics.

Let us thus restrict ourselves to the sensory perceptions and put away the issue of aesthetic values. It is evident that implicit in the notions of camp and

⁴⁸ S. Sontag, *ibid.*, p.306. To shorten the annotations, in the further part of the text I give only numbers of the notes.

⁴⁹ R. Ingarden, *Przeżycie – dzieło – wartość*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1966, pp. 162-171. Compare B. Dziemidok, *Teoria przeżyć i wartości estetycznych w polskiej estetyce dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* Warszawa: PWN, 1980, p. 33; A. Tyszczyk, “Harmonia jakości estetycznych”, in: R. Ingarden, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, Kraków: Universitas, 2005, pp. XXIX XXXI.

glamour are the features that preclude them from being defined as aesthetic qualities. They are simply elusive.

Robert C. Morgan firmly attempts to persuade us that there is no sense in searching for aesthetic qualities essential for glamour:

Glamour (...) is a highly fickle and commercially driven enterprise that contributes to what the late critic Lewis Mumford used to call «the hum-drum». It appears and it disappears. What is «in» at one moment is suddenly «out» the next. It is about the persistence of longing. No one ever catches up to glamour⁵⁰.

According to Morgan, searching for common features (not to mention values other than merchandise) in the world of glamour is completely futile: “there is too much money at stake, too many investments”⁵¹. Valerie Steele uses the same arguments, but in much more delicate tone: “the word «glamour» is ubiquitous in the mass media, where it alludes to a potent combination of sex appeal, luxury, celebrity, and wealth. Yet it is never entirely clear just what glamour is”⁵². She is entirely right, the word *glamour* is ubiquitous, yet glamour itself is different each time:

[Glamour] is not a style but an effect, a quality that depends on the play of imagination. Its power is not sensation but inspiration. War can be glamorous; so can police work or garage entrepreneurship or laboratory science. Their glamour includes the risks but omits the tedium, the sore feet, the dirt, the accounting. Glamour is never bor-ing⁵³.

Andrew Ross, while discussing the various meanings of camp, notes that this term is being applied to arbitrarily chosen features of pop aesthetics. In the inspiring 1960s and 1970s, we find dozens of cultural breakthroughs from which we could draw aesthetic images so fascinating, so suggestive that we would like to regard each one of them as a source of a whole new style. It seems to be a completely natural, common practice of our aesthetic awareness – founded on the belief in the autonomy of aesthetics – to eagerly isolate structural or formal elements, etiquetting them and deriving from them a criterion of the correctness or excellence... to put it simply, a style⁵⁴. As if the recognition of certain qualities guaranteed the discovery of the aesthetic essence of some phenomenon. As if it were the basis of its aesthetic identifica-

⁵⁰ R. C. Morgan, *ibid.*, p.81.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² V. Steele, *ibid.*, p.38.

⁵³ V. Posterel, *ibid.*, p.24.

⁵⁴ Por. J. Białostocki, *Historia sztuki wśród nauk humanistycznych*, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1980, pp. 41-44.

tion. There is nothing more erroneous than such a view. We have to admit, however, that such reductionism can be hilarious. Allegedly, when Elsie de Wolfe⁵⁵ saw the Parthenon for the first time, she exclaimed: "It's beige! My colour!"⁵⁶. This disarming declaration was chosen by Andrew Ross for a motto of his article.

This seems to be a necessary prerequisite – to be impossible to grasp as a certain quality. Here lies the autonomy, uniqueness and attractiveness of the concepts we are discussing. Where should we therefore search for their aesthetic character? We classify those phenomena aesthetically par excellence, not paying attention to their provocative, openly socio-political nature. In what does their aesthetic character consist? The answer is – in their aestheticism.

THE AESTHETICISM OF CAMP⁵⁷ AND GLAMOUR

Defining camp as aestheticism comes from Susan Sontag herself. Although she does not develop this intuition, in my opinion confirming it would bring us very promising results.

Aestheticism is a heterogeneous phenomenon, yet it tends to be interpreted rather one-sidedly and in a negative light – as a passive attitude, opting for life in an isolated "artificial paradise", verging on a peculiar torment consisting in the heroic submission of life to artistic affectation⁵⁸. Rudolf Lütke considers this mask of egoism and decadence as a price which aestheticism had to pay for stirring up a revolt aiming at conquering the aesthetic awareness⁵⁹. According to Lütke, the key to understanding aestheticism lies in its offensive nature. It is quite different from the understanding of aestheticism popularised by its avant-garde opponents – activists and social workers. Offensive aestheticism is not easy to grasp, as aesthetes often combine it with defensive elements, which are incomparably more attractive, metaphorical, etc. This offensive aspect has to be given credence if we wish to consider aestheticism as a phenomenon embodied by camp and glamour.

⁵⁵ Elsie de Wolfe [1865-1950] – was an American interior decorator, nominal author of the influential 1913 book "The House in Good Taste".

⁵⁶ A. Ross, "Uses of Camp", in: *Camp: Queer Aesthetics...*, p.308.

⁵⁷ The fragment concerning the relations of camp and aestheticism is a widely modified version of an article published in a collective work documenting the VIII Philosophical Congress, ed. I. Lorenc.

⁵⁸ *Słownik literatury polskiej XX wieku*, ed. A. Brodzka, Warszawa: Ossolineum, 1993, pp. 1063-66 [„Sztuka dla sztuki” by Hanna Filipkowska].

⁵⁹ R. Lütke, "Dyktatura piękna i sztuki. Przemyślenia na temat logiki estetyzmu", *Studia Estetyczne*, vol. XX/XXI (1983-84), p. 45.

The aestheticism expressed in the formulae *l'art pour l'art*⁶⁰ is perhaps the most one-sided and at the same time the most defensive. As our guide in analysing this expression we shall choose Théophile Gautier, also because he uses the term *se camper*.

“Only something useless can be truly beautiful”⁶¹, writes Gautier, not only to contrast beauty with the most serviceable place in a house – a privy. The author of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is an advocate of aesthetic autonomy, which consists mainly in separating art from morality, and consequently – as stated by Lütke following Robert V. Johnson – is a radical attempt to detach art from life⁶². Two ways of keeping life away from art are possible: “escape into exoticism or withdrawal into eccentricity”⁶³. And so does “camping” manifest itself in Gautier’s parodistic novel *Kapitan Fracasse*⁶⁴ (1863) – by vivid exaltation, theatricalness, showing off bad manners. Of course, camp is huge exaggeration, “good because awful”⁶⁵. And it is not a coincidence – as pointed out by Mark Booth – that Gautier places his protagonist in 17th century France, “the great era of camp”⁶⁶.

Yet, can we explain contemporary camping (or glamour) in terms of escape or withdrawal? In what way should we consider these phenomena as contemporary aestheticisms?

Another feature of aestheticism, this time more defensive, consists in the affirmation of pleasure and disregard for work: “only pleasure that is pleasure alone makes human existence meaningful”⁶⁷, while the basic human skill is

⁶⁰ Théophile Gautier [1811-1872] is usually recognised as the author of this expression. It appeared in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* from 1835. Some sources, however, indicate as its originator Victor Cousin [1811-1872] and his book *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien*, which was published in 1854, but was a collection of lectures given in 1818 r. Hanna Morawska points out that Cousin was one of the most influential authors of the 19th century. Without doubt, he promoted the idea of art free from obligations other than aesthetic and was the first 19th century author who used the formulae *ce je ne sais quo de pétique* (formely expressed otherwise), postulating independence of art also with regard to normative premises. Compare *Francuscy pisarze i krytycy o malarstwie 1820-1876*, ed. H. Morawska, Warszawa: PWN, 1977, vol. I, p.75; vol.II, p. 42; vol. III, pp. 61, 281. The idea *l'art pour l'art* is unquestionably in debt to German aesthetics from Kant to Schelling, but its fame is owed in the first place to such a brilliant critic as Gautier.

⁶¹ T. Gautier, “Ze «Wstępu» do «Panny de Maupin»,,, in: *Teoretycy, artyści i krytycy o sztuce 1700-1870*, ed. E. Grabska, M. Poprzęcka, Warszawa: PWN, 1974, p. 404.

⁶² R. Lütke, *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶⁴ See T. Gautier, *Kapitan Fracasse* [Captaine Fracasse], transl. by W. Bogusławski, Kraków: Zielona Sowa, 2003.

⁶⁵ S. Sontag, *ibid.*, p. 323.

⁶⁶ Compare M. Booth, *ibid.*, p.75; S. Sontag, *ibid.*, p. 313.

⁶⁷ R. Lütke, *ibid.*, p. 48.

“the ability to spend time pleasantly”⁶⁸. The obvious utopian character of such desires results, above all, in a disdain for life. According to Lütke, they are best illustrated by Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salomé*. There is also another utopian trait connected with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which was pointed out by Teodor W. Adorno – a peculiar “error of aestheticism” made by Wilde, which consists in the fact that “the crude accumulation of all possible precious materials in Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*, and the interiors of a chic aestheticism resemble smart antique shops and auction halls and thus the commercial world Wilde ostensibly disdained”⁶⁹.

The most “vital” trait of decadence is contemplation. It can, of course, result from “being tired of life” (though tiredness is not the same as disdain), yet it can also turn into... ecstasy:

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. (...) While all melts under our feet” – advises Walter Pater – “we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist’s hands, or the face of one’s friend”⁷⁰.

The variant of aestheticism in which one views life “as a spectacle” was presented by Walter Pater is an aesthetic heteronomy. The world of values, which was even discarded by aesthetes, here becomes absorbed. No isolated world of aesthetic autonomy exists. What we find instead is aesthetic heteronomy⁷¹. Aestheticism is no longer an opinion on art, it becomes a philosophical outlook⁷². And, of course, in such a broad perspective the issue at state is not naming the particular qualities nor the definition of art: “With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch”⁷³. In the centre of this reflection lies the subject. Georg Simmel also noticed that the aesthetic autonomy fulfils itself only with regard to the subject. The fact that art is being defined by itself does not mean that it is excluded from life. “On the contrary, only then a basis is made, thanks to which art can be safely incorporated into life”⁷⁴. A work of art has a twofold character, paradoxical and full of

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ T. W. Adorno, *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷⁰ W. Pater, *Wybór pism* [Selected Writings], transl. by S. Lack, Lwów: Księgarnia Polska B. Połanieckiego, 1909, p.195-196.

⁷¹ Compare R. Lütke, *ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷³ W. Pater, *ibid.*, p.196.

⁷⁴ G. Simmel, “L’art pour l’art”, *Sztuka i Filozofia*, 9 (1994), p.146.

contradictions: “in fact it is completely sealed, isolated from life, yet at the same time submerged in the stream of life”⁷⁵.

Offensive aestheticism thus emphasises the creative power of the subject, not only with regard to the subject’s works, but also to the subject itself. It valorises multitude and variety. At the very beginning of his famous “conclusion”, Pater claims (following many of his predecessors): “To regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought”⁷⁶. Canons of camp, according to Sontag, are also changing. However, we must bear in mind one warning: „Only be sure it is passion”⁷⁷.

What is the rationale, then, for those numerous demands to define, designate, find norms for camp or at least force it into some existing structure of notions? This last attempt was made by Umberto Eco in his book *On Ugliness*, very popular in Poland. He observes that in the case of camp the quality which we are ultimately dealing with is ugliness. It is not obvious, ugliness is not the only goal of camp, nevertheless – according to Eco – camp certainly takes part in “an ambiguous game in which there is no certainty as to whether ugliness becomes redeemed as beautiful or beauty turns out to be so «intriguing» that it reduces to ugliness”⁷⁸. It is symptomatic, however, that Sontag does not identify camp with ugliness. Eco derives his conviction from her remark: “The ultimate Camp statement: it’s good because it’s awful...” (58). Yet *awful* – the word used by Sontag – is not synonymous with “ugly”. *Awful* means “unpleasant, disgusting, shocking”. A person experiencing something awful perceives this experience as intense and extreme not only through his senses. Ugliness is unpleasant mainly for the eye. One may love or hate awfully, but cannot “like something ugly” (at least it is not grammatically correct to say so). Instead, one may see an ugly duckling – because it has grey plumage instead of yellow. Ugliness functions as a category of autonomous aesthetics, as a disharmonious value opposite to beauty (cf. for example Karl Rosenkranz’s “negative beauty”) and is subject to normative description. In my opinion, the “awfulness” of camp illustrates its creative character, whereas ugliness does not. As Sontag warns us, “to speak about camp is to betray it”⁷⁹, an attempt to harness it basically contests it. Yet according to Eco, the style of camp belongs to the history of ugliness nonetheless⁸⁰.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.148.

⁷⁶ W. Pater, *ibid.*, p.192.

⁷⁷ W. Pater, *ibid.*, p.197.

⁷⁸ U. Eco, *Kamp*, p. 417.

⁷⁹ S. Sontag, *ibid.*, p. 323.

⁸⁰ U. Eco, *Kamp*, p. 417.

Sontag herself is partially to blame, as she is profuse in referring to the category of style: “to emphasize style is to slight content” (2), “camp is a vision of the world in terms of style”(8), “[Camp] incarnates a victory of ‘style’” (38), “style is everything” (40), “Camp is (...) the relation to style in a time in which the adoption of style – as such – has become altogether questionable” (53) – to mention only the most obvious references. It is so tempting to regard this “style” as some sort of criterion in order to evaluate the content of camp in some work or attitude, to formalize it⁸¹. We must have no illusions, though. Sontag considers style only as an expression of personality, an extremely individualistic one⁸². With this understanding Sontag only supports the offensive of aestheticism.

Let us not forget that camp as an aesthetic category needed to be created. As Arthur Danto states, possibly in a jest, the reason why Arthur Rimbaud in his *Alchemy of the Word* from *A Season in Hell* (1873) lists his aesthetic inspirations – “idiotic pictures, shop signs, stage sets, backcloths for street-entertainers, billboards, vernacular images, old fashioned stories, church Latin, badly spelt pornography, romance novels for elderly ladies, fairy tales, little books for children, old operas, silly refrains, naïve rhythms”⁸³ – is because he does not know the word “camp” yet⁸⁴.

It is not an accident that many great personalities relish camp. Camp is the aesthetics of the subject. Even when Sontag gives examples of objects, they usually have a performative or organic character, they transform into or imitate something else, e.g. “the Paris Metro entrances designed by Hector Guimard (...) in the shape of cast-iron orchid stalks” (8); dresses designed by George Barbier, which “imitate” lamps (cp. 5); lamps made by Louis Comfort Tiffany which look like dresses (cp. 4,15)...

Glamour is an aestheticism in a similar sense. It is based on the belief that it is not worthwhile surrounding oneself with anything that would not be as astonishing as a work of art, even if we are talking of minor details. Only in the aura of glamour can an ordinary zip (by Jean Paul Gaultier) be displayed in such a way as to make it a greatly desired object. Glamour, however, is not an advocate of pan-creationism. It is rather a search and a nostalgia for Pater’s

⁸¹ Compare J. Białostocki, *Historia sztuki wśród nauk humanistycznych*, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1980, pp. 41-42.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁸³ A. Rimbaud, “Alchemia słowa (Majaczenia II, Sezon w piekle)”, transl. by. A. Międzyrzecki, in: A. Rimbaud, *Poezje wybrane*, Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1993, p.141. Cited after A. C. Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty*, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 2006, pp. 39-40.

⁸⁴ A. C. Danto, *ibid.*, p. 40.

life as art, in its simplest forms, since “Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among “the children of this world,” in art and song”⁸⁵. Glamour is also egalitarian. Perhaps it would be best to refer to the common usage of the term, though citing a witty work of art. In the film *Blue in the face* (1995) by Paul Auster and Wayne Wang, Jim Jarmusch (as himself), referring to his smoking habit, says to Auggie Wren (played by Harvey Keitel):

- You know, I think a lot of people start smokin’ because it’s **glamorized...** like Hollywood and the movies, you know? You see Marlon Brando, you see James Dean smokin’ a cigarette, Marlene Dietrich...
- That’s how I started smoking (...)
- (...)
- Another thing in movies I think is really weird, like war movies, Nazis in movies. Why do they always smoke in some weird way like this?
[Jarmusch demonstrates how Nazis hold a cigarette between middle finger and ring finger]
- We have ways of making you talk, Auggie. It’s like the threat of..., you know, burn torture. Or it’s like this.
[Jarmusch imitates how Nazis smoke, holding a cigarette between the thumb and the forefinger]
- Yeah. We know who you are. We have seen what you’ve done. (...) The fucked up thing is (...) they got us hooked on cigarettes, you know, this **image of glamour**”⁸⁶.

Of course, the printed text cannot fully convey the humour of this scene nor its aesthetic expression. Nevertheless this fragment brilliantly explains the point of being glamorous as presenting an attitude of aestheticism. The point is to make one’s image, a simple gesture, the simple act of smoking a cigarette, marvellous or even to make it art, to smuggle it into culture and preserve its impression, though not in the form of physical qualities. The alleged soldiers’ chic does not guarantee anything, there are no other “glamorous soldiers” here besides the Nazis. The quality assumed here is, of course, an artistic product, we know this glamour from films, not from the war stories of our grandparents⁸⁷.

⁸⁵ W. Pater, *ibid.*, p. 197.

⁸⁶ Fragments of dialogues from Paul Auster’s and Wayne Wang’s *Blue in the face* (1995).

⁸⁷ This “glamour aspect” of Nazism was exposed by a famous exhibition “The Nazis” by Piotr Uklański, though it only presented the faces of the actors who played Nazi officers at some point in their career. Daniel Olbrychski, whose photo was included in the exhibition, destroyed it, and several other ones, with a sabre. Being well aware how effective art can be, he figured that – since he is an actor (and not only a Pole but also a patriot) – he will stage one of the most publicized performances in Poland. The aestheticism pointed out by Uklański in cinematic

In the field of aesthetics camp and glamour set as dominant the problem of art, not of aesthetic values. Aestheticism likewise did not promote new aesthetic values, it managed, however, to promote a new quality of aesthetics – its dependency. Recently I saw another example of Nazi glamour in the *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) by Quentin Tarantino. Once again I saw the attitude of aestheticism typical of Tarantino. Its purposely simple metaphor is found in the scene in which lieutenant Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt) finishes cutting a swastika on the forehead of Standartenführer Hans Landa (Christopher Waltz, winner of this year's Golden Palm) – so that he would never “take off his Nazi uniform” – and says: “I think this just might be my masterpiece”. We need to be aware of the fact that aesthetics is sometimes sensitive to such megalomaniac personalities. There are different types of aesthetic categories; not all can be connected with the values and physical features forming their basis. Irony is widely considered as such an aesthetic category. We cannot point to any physical features that would be essential for irony. As it was aptly observed, it is best recognized when someone contests the literal meaning by intonation or facial expression – by action. Furthermore, irony – both socratic and romantic – is characterised by the superiority of the subjective element over the objective one, of subject over object⁸⁸. The goal of irony is to articulate the contradictions between the literal and the intended meaning⁸⁹. Aestheticism is closely related to irony when it attempts to place art on a pedestal and at the same time to “dissolve it in life”.

CONCLUSION

I believe that camp and glamour can be equally considered as anthropological categories. They are the means adopted by man – as claimed by Arnold Gehlen – in order to help him survive in the world, as a an imperfect being⁹⁰. In contemporary culture, repeatedly disenchanted, camp and glamour are a gleam of transcendence: something elusive and inscrutable. Additionally, in a broader understanding of art, they can be an instrument in political struggle.

works, has been, in a way, extended by Olbrychski's performance. It could be considered as entangling the orders of life and art, but also as an attitude of aestheticism. About the “effectiveness of art” see A. C. Danto, “Filozoficzne zniewolenie sztuki”, *Studia Estetyczne*, (XXIII) 1986-1990, pp. 17-19.

⁸⁸ *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. J. Sławiński, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2000, pp. 222-223.

⁸⁹ David S. Kaufer talks explicitly of “aesthetic contradiction”. D.S. Kaufer, “Ironia, forma interpretacyjna i teoria znaczenia”, in: *Ironia*, ed. M. Głowiński, Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz/terytoria, 2002, p.154.

⁹⁰ A. Gehlen, *W kręgu antropologii i psychologii społecznej*. *Studia* [Antropologische und Sozialpsychologische Untersuchungen], Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2001, p. 59.

The main medium used here is the body as a political representation. Taking this into consideration, I am not sure whether we can reasonably use the notion of art in the present context. Is it really necessary? It seems that we are dealing with ceaseless performances. And as Dwight Conquergood put it, performance studies starts when aesthetics ends⁹¹.

To conclude, however, I would like to call into question (in some part at least) my doubts concerning the validity of the axiological discourse. I see the possibility of discussing camp and glamour as aesthetic values within the limits of the theories that do not separate artistic and aesthetic values – aestheticism considers them as interdependent. In Polish aesthetics, the validity of this division is strongly emphasized⁹². One of the few authors sceptical towards this division was Stefan Morawski⁹³. I believe I can understand the reasons for his questioning it. The aesthetic awareness arises along with the contemporary notion of art which is a function of the aesthetic and not of the magical, religious or politic thinking. According to Odo Marquard, the main product of the contemporary process of aestheticisation is art⁹⁴. There are no reasons to separate aesthetic and artistic values. The objectivism declared by Morawski also enables us to recognize the phenomena of camp and glamour as aesthetic values. He singles out five criteria by which we can measure the objectiveness of aesthetic value. The first and basic one is the reaction to objective qualities. The very response of a subject to an objective quality (in the form of temporary pleasure) is actually the objectiveness of a value⁹⁵. And those values are subject to socio-cultural dynamic. However, the notion of an objective quality is troublesome, since it does not seem to be valid in the case of camp and glamour. Morawski was aware of the shift from

⁹¹ The process of embodying art exposes aesthetics as legitimating an artificial binary opposition of perceiving/listening and commitment. D. Conquergood, "Performatyka na Northwestern University", cited after R. Schechner, *Performatyka. Wstęp* [Performance Studies: An Introduction], transl. by T. Kubikowski, Wrocław: Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Jerzego Grotowskiego i Poszukiwań Teatralno-Kulturowych, 2006, p. 39.

⁹² B. Dziemidok, *Główne kontrowersje wokół estetyki współczesnej*, Warszawa: PWN, 2002, pp. 278-300.

⁹³ He considered the notion of aesthetic value as much broader. S. Morawski, "Współczesne spory o naturę sztuki i przeżycia estetycznego", *Sztuka i Filozofia*, 6 (1993) p.207. Compare J. Ritter, "Krajobraz. O postawie estetycznej w nowoczesnym społeczeństwie", transl. by C. Piecuch, in: *Studia z filozofii niemieckiej*, vol.2, *Szkola Rittera*, ed. S. Czerniak, J. Rolewski, Toruń: wyd. UMK, 1996, pp. 45-65; P. J. Przybysz, "O teorii wartości artystycznej (estetycznej) Stefana Morawskiego", *Principia*, XXXII-XXXIII (2002), pp.159-188.

⁹⁴ O. Marquard, "Presentation off Duty and Depoliticised Revolution: Philosophical Remarks on Art and Politics, w: The Age of Modernism. Art in the 20th Century", ed. C. M. Joachimides and N. Rosenthal, Stuttgart-London-New York: Martin-Gropius-Bau, 1997, p.40.

⁹⁵ S. Morawski, "Wartości i oceny", *Studia Filozoficzne*, 4 (1967), pp. 47-50. Compare P.J. Przybysz, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, "Stefan Morawski – szkic do portretu", in: S. Morawski, *Wybór pism*, Kraków: Universitas, 2007, pp. XXIX – XXII.

the issue of objective value towards the issue of creation⁹⁶. It was clear for him that aesthetics becomes anachronic, that axiological discourse can be useful only occasionally⁹⁷.

In regard to the phenomenon of aestheticism, and especially the eroticization of aesthetics endorsed by camp and glamour, one more dichotomy needs to be dissolved: that of the *sensory* and the *sensuous*. In the opinion of Arnold Berleant, we cannot maintain it anymore. This dichotomy grows out from the traditional division of senses into aesthetic, i.e. sight and hearing, which perceive without physical contact, and non-aesthetic, which are physically oriented. In this traditional perspective aesthetic pleasures are considered as non-physical. In the history of aesthetics, the most passionate controversies concerned telling apart works of art from ordinary objects. Berleant believes that an aesthetic experience is complete only when it is a sensory perception experienced by a whole person⁹⁸. From the very beginning of art the dichotomy mentioned above did not apply to artists. Of course, disinterest, generality and distance make an aesthetic experience more intense, diverse and different in quality from life experiences. Such features of perception, however, result in dividing aesthetic experience. Firstly we abstract this experience from the object, yet later we return to search for its origins in it. No wonder that it is so hard to find aesthetic qualities in this experience. According to Berleant, it is necessary to formulate a new theory of aesthetic evaluation, free from prejudices⁹⁹.

In such a perspective, the “range of freedom” created by camp and glamour would be characterized, above all, by the right to express one’s private fascinations and desires concerning the most intimate spheres of our sensuality, and by making it possible for values to be established by individuals. We have to remember, however, that they will have more weight when they meet with socio-cultural acceptance – and can be fully communicated, which seems to be the main goal in the case of both the phenomena discussed here.

Translated by Igor Kaźmierczak

⁹⁶ He made these observations with regard to the rise of the avant-garde.

⁹⁷ S. Morawski, *Na zakręcie. Od sztuki do po-sztuki*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1985, p. 357.

⁹⁸ A. Berleant, *ibid.*, pp. 98-109.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.71.

**CAMP I GLAMOUR JAKO MANIFESTACJE WOLNOŚCI ESTETYCZNEJ,
OBYCZAJOWEJ I POLITYCZNEJ**

(streszczenie)

Camp i glamour traktowane są dziś przede wszystkim jako manifestacje trojkiego rodzaju wolności: estetycznej, obyczajowej i politycznej. W pierwszym z wymienionych kontekstów wolność rozumieć można jako anarchizowanie estetyki. Polega ono nie tylko na burzeniu estetycznych kanonów, czy wymianie „dobrego smaku” na „zły smak”. Tę anarchię zaprowadza również intencjonalne połączenie estetyki i erotyki, które tradycyjnie było kwestionowane przez wielu autorów, nawet tak odważnych jak George Santayana, czy John Dewey. Pod względem obyczajowym camp i glamour charakteryzują się znaczną tolerancją dla pornografii, włącznie z jej awansem jako składnikiem mody. Natomiast wolność polityczna związana jest z nimi w taki sposób, że wyrażają one prawo do artykułowania potrzeb i pragnień przez grupy społecznie wykluczone oraz manifestowania przez nie swoich tożsamości.

W artykule będę zajmować się wszystkimi wymienionymi wyżej rodzajami wolności. Rozważania te podporządkowane zostaną jeszcze innej jej odmianie – związanej z teoretyzowaniem tytułowych zjawisk, ponieważ – paradoksalnie – całkowita swoboda w tym zakresie wcale nie służy eksponowaniu wolności właściwej campowi i glamourowi. Zwłaszcza upatrywanie w nich wartości estetycznych narzuca rygor estetyki aksjologicznej, w perspektywie której, istotne cechy campu i glamouru przestają być uchwytnie. W artykule omawiam cztery przyczyny oporu estetyki aksjologicznej wobec tytułowych zjawisk. Są nimi: podejrzone etymologie tytułowych terminów i powiązane z nimi znaczenia; związki z kiczem; kłopoty z przedmiotową identyfikacją cech campowych lub glamourowych przedmiotów; problematyczny charakter wartości w estetyzmie. Aby zachować „wolnościowy” charakter campu i glamouru należy – jak sądzę – albo zrezygnować z tradycyjnych sposobów teoretycznego ujmowania zjawisk estetycznych, albo zdecydować się na radykalne ich przemyślenie. Do obu tych możliwości odnoszę się w toku rozważań.

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THE ART MUSEUM: THE SPACE OF FREEDOM AND VIOLENCE

Abstract: The concept of freedom, although not explicit in the definition of the museum, is expressed through the principle of the general public having free access to the artistic achievements of various historical eras and cultures, gathered and analyzed by academics. These obvious facts effectively conceal the areas of enslavement, to which both works of arts and the public are subjected, since the dialectics of freedom and violence is inherent in the museum practice.

Works of art embody the act of unrestrained creativity, which is eradicated by the removal of works from their original context, their uprooting. It is, however, the violence of uprooting that makes it possible to invest works with stylistic features and aesthetic value. Another type of violence is the violence of exclusion, which entails the selection of particular works in order to promote ideological or political goals, fundamentally alien to art. The most radical form of violence is the actual physical destruction of works. The mechanism of symbolic violence, as described by Pierre Bourdieu, involves the public who willingly conforms to the disciplinary procedures as long as they guarantee the inclusion in the elite circle of art-lovers.

Since the end of the 20th century, the museum has undergone a profound transformation and become open to the multitude of artistic and cultural discourses. It does not mean, however, that it has become the space of unrestrained freedom of artistic expression and public reception, but that the freedom and violence within the museum have assumed different forms. Museum directors, who guard the general ideas, still methodically foster injustice, as J.-F. Lyotard points out. New elements emerge thanks to the artists who deconstruct the exhibition space, take the viewer by surprise or even go as far as oppressive action.

Keywords: aesthetics – art – museum – exhibition

The museum of art embodies the Enlightenment ideas of reason according to which knowledge, aesthetics and education work together towards the intellectual and moral formation of a human being. These noble goals still constitute the mission of the museum, in which collections are exhibited for the dual purpose of education and entertainment. The concept of freedom, although not explicit in the definition of the museum, is expressed through the principle of the general public having free access to the artistic achievements

of various historical eras and cultures. Museum collections are brought together and analyzed by academics, since, as Hans Sedlmayer insists, museums are fundamentally academic institutions and the spirit of knowledge permeates them to the core. Jean-Francois Lyotard argues that in the museum the discourse of knowledge takes precedence over other – artistic, aesthetic or moral – discourses. It is also worth mentioning that for Lyotard cognition is the instrument of power. And although the viewers choose to see the works of ancient or contemporary art of their own free will, they are, in fact, introduced into the carefully arranged space, in which they become, in Preziosi's words, the components of the machinery, listening, as Mieke Bal points out, to the voice of the authoritative narrator who states categorically: look, this is how it is¹. The viewer in the museum does not see the works of art but exhibits, the objects of high interpretational density – the components of the larger whole: the exhibition. And the exhibition communicates messages which go beyond the realm of art: it promotes national values or the ideals of scientific progress, it conveys ideological contents and reinforces cultural stereotypes.

This explains why, since its beginnings, the museum has given rise to antagonistic views, strong emotions and heated debates, which have involved intellectuals and theoreticians as well as artists. The museum is not a homogeneous place, nor is it free of ambiguity. It is an environment in which a number of diverse practices interweave and frequently compete with one another. Museum-lovers appreciate the historical insights and aesthetic experience; the experience which, despite its public context, is profoundly personal. The opponents of the museum regard it predominantly as a place where works of art, artistic creativity and the public are violated. And it is not only the symbolic violence, identified by Pierre Bourdieu, but all sorts of manipulation to which works of art – which are supposed to be the expressions of creative freedom – are subjected. Paul Valéry, comparing the museum to the salon, the school, the prison and the graveyard thinks of the aporia, embracing both the works and the public, as well as the aporia spread between freedom and enslavement. The dialogue of praise and criticism, which originated in the 19th century, has revealed the numerous dimensions of the museum and contributed to its transformation, in which artists have played the major role. At the end of the 20th century the museum underwent the transformation from the closed modernist model to the open postmodern one. It does not mean, however, that it has become the space of unrestrained freedom of artistic expression and public reception, but that the freedom and violence within the museum have assumed different forms. The museum is involved in the processes rationalizing reality. As such it combines entertain-

¹ M. Bal, *Double Exposures. The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, Routledge, New York, London, 1996, p. 2.

ment with serious research and interpretational work aimed at investing cultural phenomena with meaning and intellectual expression.

The modernist model of the museum (the 19th century concept of the temple of arts and the modernist white cub) creates an autonomous environment which is closed spatially as well as ideologically. In the space of the city it represents the elitist high culture as opposed to the cheap entertainment of public spectacles or world fairs². It displays the achievements of human genius and knowledge in the carefully arranged space, in which both the exhibits and the public are subjected to strict discipline. It separates the acquisition of knowledge from the contemplation of beauty by splitting the collections and thereby the fields of knowledge. The linear order of exposition defines the historical narratives, which explain to the viewer the nature of art seen in the light of progress. Upon entering, viewers are immediately exposed to the power of authority, which provides them with the binding definitions of reality supplied by intellectuals who, as Zygmunt Bauman points out, in the era of modernism transform uncertainty into certainty, sort things out and classify them, and make authoritarian judgements³. The history rationalized by means of universalistic constructs is used to build the national and cultural identity. Additionally, such rationalization offers the public the sense of belonging to the higher order and the opportunity to participate in the experience of permanence within the aesthetic medium and in the atmosphere of a secular ritual⁴. For Odo Marquard there is no doubt about the significance of the art museum in modern times, as it is the product of the process of self-regulation within the culture aspiring to homeostasis. Museums are founded in the times when people become painfully aware of the pressure that the pace of development and modernization has put on them, and when they lose their sense of belonging to the world ruled by the divine providence – in the times of the desacralization of nature. That is when those places, separated from the everyday life and dedicated solely to the aesthetic experiences and the cultivation of historical consciousness, come to serve the function of an oasis in which an individual can regain his sense of belonging. The art museum offers the break from tribalization, an antidote to the sense of the finite and fragmentary nature of human existence and an access to the lost sense of unity – the experience which is not available in any other way⁵. There modern people can

² Cf. T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory and Politics*. Routledge, London, New York 1995, pp. 18-21.

³ Z. Bauman, *Prawodawcy i tłumacze*, trans. A. Tanalska, in: *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów*, ed. R. Nycz, Wydawnictwo Baran i Suszyński, Kraków 1997, pp. 293-297.

⁴ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, Routledge, London, New York 1995, pp. 7-20.

⁵ Odo Marquard, *Aesthetica i anaesthetica. Rozważania filozoficzne*, trans. K. Krzemieniowa, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2007, p. 10.

reclaim their freedom from the stresses and strains of their everyday life and at the same time, being exposed to a multitude of aesthetics and multiplicity of histories, can broaden their horizons. Underlying this belief is Kant's understanding of the aesthetic experience as a disinterested, unrestrained play of imagination enabling a human being to transgress the inexorable laws of science and moral duty.

However, for the advocates of the art works concerned with the conditions in which the exposition spaces place them, the museum itself is a symptom of the cultural decline. It transforms works of art into exhibition objects by removing them from their native artistic and cultural context and replacing their genuine value with the values and meanings developed by the history of art. This is what Quatremère de Quincy (who witnessed Napoleon's plundering of the works of art, which subsequently ended up in the Louvre) finds lamentable. In his view, works of art removed from their context become deprived of their value, their social and moral role which they could have fulfilled in the places for which they were intended. The works which used to constitute the integral components of the community life, once placed in the museum and classified by art historians according to artificial, abstract concepts, become fossilized caricatures, riddles with no solution⁶. Didier Maleuvre comments on the views of Quatremère de Quincy, who was the first to realize that works of art are objectified. Maleuvre bemoans their becoming "fetishes of alienated consciousness" and claims that

The museum thereby testifies to modernity's failure to preserve the past unmaimed. Abstracted from any context, stripped of living history and shrouded with scholarly history, artifacts lie in the museum as corpses in an ossuary. Culture becomes synonymous with preservation, not production. (...) Art, as the expression of vital culture, is only there to be contemplated as a hollow shell of its former life⁷.

Contrary to what Enlightenment writers believed, the museum of art separating art works from life neither promotes education nor contributes to the development of human moral sense. It does not activate artistic creativity, either. These views are shared by Martin Heidegger, who criticizes the process of concealing the truth in the culture based on the subject-object paradigm. He believes that Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* torn from the sacred space and placed in the museum is uprooted, placeless, since in its essence it is an altar/picture

⁶ A. Ch. Quatremère de Quincy, *Considération morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art*, Fayard, 1989, pp. 47-48.

⁷ D. Maleuvre, *Museum Memories. History, Technology, Art*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1996, pp. 16-17.

(*Altar-Bild*) which belongs to the ritual⁸. In the Dresden gallery it is exposed to the aesthetic consumption and transferred from one exhibition to another, it becomes nothing more than a tool. Hans Georg Gadamer voices a similar sentiment when he says that in the museum works of art are desecrated: they say nothing about human life any longer and their significance is restricted to purely aesthetic awareness⁹.

Here we can see a clash of two different positions on the rationalization of culture, and consequently two diverse attitudes to history, aesthetic values and creativity. According to one, man is the creator of the world, both history and beauty are his creations, and the most exquisite works of humanity should be admired in the museum. The uprooting and the preservation of art are two sides of the same process of emancipation¹⁰. For the opponents of the museum, however, people participate in life and can obtain nothing from history but what is immanently inherent in themselves. People gain the knowledge about themselves and the world through participation rather than by means of any external concepts or notions. From this point of view, artistic works reveal what constitutes the potential for perfection in life itself. It is this (let us call it romantic) position which sees these works of art that are detached from the flow of life as dead and worthless¹¹.

The flourishing of art museums in the 19th century led to the question of the appropriate place for works of art – the place which would bring out their best qualities and would give voice to the freedom of creativity in which they were created. Charles Baudelaire sees this place in the bourgeois drawing room, others in the artist's own home, the house-museum like Gustave Moreau's, where the artist's life is interwoven with their work, and which Andrzej Pieńkos calls "reliquaries of creativity" or "temples of the artist"¹². In the 1960s Daniel Buren still believes that it is in the artist's studio that art has its proper place¹³. The new practice was introduced by Courbet who chose the

⁸ M. Heidegger, *Über die Sixtina*, in: idem. *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens 1910-1976*, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1983, p. 120.

⁹ H.-G. Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda. Zarys hermeneutyki filozoficznej*, trans. B. Baran, in: esse Kraków 1993, p.162 and p.176.

¹⁰ On uprooting as a fundamental feature of modern institutions cf. A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. "Ja" i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, trans. A. Sulżycka, PWN, Warszawa 2001, pp. 25-26.

¹¹ Adorno likens the museum to the mausoleum cf. Th. W. Adorno, *Muzeum Valéry Proust*, trans. A. Noras, in: *Muzeum sztuki. Antologia*, ed. M. Popczyk, Universitas Kraków 2005, p. 91.

¹² A. Pieńkos, *Dom sztuki. Siedziby artystów w nowoczesnej kulturze europejskiej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2005, pp. 186-212.

¹³ D. Buren, *Function of the Studio*, in: A.A. Bronson, P. Gale, (eds.) *Museums by Artists*, Art Metropole, Toronto 1983, pp. 61-68.

exhibition space for his works himself, thus investing them with the context and at the same time freeing them from the judgements of the Academia.

However, Gadamer concedes that even though the museum is far from conducive to the hermeneutic insight, works of art still retain their source within them, which means that their inner truth can still be revealed¹⁴. In other words, as Walter Benjamin puts it, although in modern times works of art become the objects of exhibition and lose their aura, which they used to have at the time when they were connected to the religious ritual, the aura is not lost irrevocably, as the reception of the work varies from ritualistic to expositional¹⁵. These remarks are significant, since the museum of art is gradually becoming the home to art: the only place with access to works, the only place where they can be appreciated by the public. And despite the fact that the musealization of art works deprives them of their uniqueness and singularity, a great many artists take no notice of the uprooting and classifications and still want their works to be placed there, in the vicinity of the masterpieces which are deemed immortal.

There is, however, one more important reason why museums are objected to: the political agenda behind the uprooting of works, the fact that the art museum is used for political purposes. John Dewey points out bitterly that the museum has its roots not in the nature of art itself but in the powers of politics and authority, which are fundamentally alien to art¹⁶. It must be noted, however, that from the mid 18th century museums sprang up spontaneously and it was not until the times of the French Revolution that the Louvre linked the museum and politics for good. All sorts of uprooting violate art, but the worst kind is undoubtedly the confiscation of art as a result of war, which makes them into the spoils of war, the loot of colonization. Such violation dates back to the times of the Roman emperors who held the triumphant parades demonstrating their trophies. The museum exhibition serves a similar role, demonstrating the power of the conqueror through the exquisiteness of the works and the splendour of the conquered culture. The moral aspect of the uprooting demands that the question of ownership be resolved, as still only part of the stolen property has been recovered by its rightful owners. The debate concerning the Elgin Marbles demonstrates how thin is the line between the preservation of ancient artefacts and common theft.

¹⁴ Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda*, op. cit., p. 137.

¹⁵ W. Benjamin, *Dzieło sztuki w dobie reprodukcji technicznej*, in: idem. *Anioł historii. Eseje, szkice, fragmenty*, ed H. Orłowski, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1996, pp. 212-213.

¹⁶ J. Dewey, *Sztuka jako doświadczenie*, trans. A. Potocki, Ossolineum, Warszawa 1975, pp. 11-12.

The most dangerous aspect of the alliance between art and politics is its concealment by which the exhibition is given the appearance of political neutrality. The key factor here is the arrangement of the exhibition space which gives the public the impression that art works are autonomous objects displayed only for their aesthetic value. This goal is achieved by the temple-like atmosphere of the vast celebratory spaces of the museum-temple of art, whose architecture alludes to ancient temples and palaces, but also by the sterile white rooms of the modernist museum designed to neutralize any context. The strategy of removing works from their own context and investing them with the new aesthetic-historical one proves highly effective for the authority¹⁷. This is why Mieke Bal suggests that we ignore the aesthetic surface of the exhibition, which is the only way to disclose the scheme of the narrator operating behind it.

Upon taking on the role of the educator of the community, the museum inevitably becomes a tool in the hands of the political authority. And as such, it selects the works which will mould the society's consciousness as required. The precise selection of those works which promote the revolutionary authority, National Socialism, or Communism is nothing other than censorship, and violation through exclusion. The political objectification differs from the academic one, its point being ideological rather than aesthetic. However, the academia is frequently in league with the political authority and validates its selection. It goes without saying that the violation of art is at its worst when it leads to the actual physical destruction of the works. This includes all acts of iconoclasm conducted in the name of the matters of overriding importance.

Citing the examples of censorship and destruction of art in Nazi Germany, Walter Grasskamp states that it is barely possible to maintain "the fiction of a politically neutral museum"¹⁸. Furthermore, he points out that selecting and displaying the selected works the political authority integrates the community, and describes the process as "a community ritual which entails the transformation of the viewing masses into the politically conscious individuals"¹⁹. The collection of the King of France appropriated by the revolutionary authorities unites the society as victors. And Napoleon's spoils of war displayed in the Louvre allow the viewers to identify themselves with the emperor's triumphs. Thus, even though the exhibition creates the atmosphere of disinterestedness

¹⁷ This is how Daniel Sherman interprets Adorno's point about the similarity between the museum and the mausoleum, D. J. Sherman, *Quatremère/Benjamin/Marx: Art, Museums, Aura, and Commodity Fetishism*, in: Sherman Daniel J. Rogoff Irit, *Museum Culture. History, Discourses, Spectacles*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1994.

¹⁸ W. Grasskamp, *Museumsgründer und Museumsstürmer*, Verlag Beck, München 1981, p. 42.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*. p. 43.

with the aim of concealing the underlying ideology, the act of viewing and admiring works of art is far from disinterested. The aesthetic rapture implies the approval of the authority and its principles, while the manifestation of disapproval equals contempt for the excellence of the art works, and this is how the beauty of the works of art in a museum and the symbolic violence are secretly bound. The viewers are unaware that admiring art they approve of the whole political agenda which made this art available to them.

For Maleuvre the crucial social ritual in the museum regards the fact that a certain identity is imposed on the public, as “rightfully, it seems, the traditional museum has been compared with the disciplinary institutions of the bureaucratic nation state that enforce control over persons, spaces, and objects by pigeonholing them and curbing their nomadic tendency”²⁰. In this case the discipline is not imposed by the authority’s excessive demonstration of power, but it pertains to the ordinary peaceful times, the holiday tourism when the renowned art museums open their splendid collections to the general public. Nevertheless, those classical historical displays of old masters, because it is basically the classical art which is in question here, position the public in the role of the passive observers who will receive approvingly both the collections and the ideology behind them.

Thus the museum becomes a school which teaches the public the discipline with regard to the aesthetic taste so as to shape the social identity and retain the social divide between the art lovers and barbarians. The hidden mechanism of symbolic violence works with the full cooperation of the public, as Bourdieu demonstrates.²¹ Despite the fact that people respond to art differently because of the educational inequalities, those who are instructed by culture as to what to look at and what to be moved by, see themselves as the elite established on the grounds of nature rather than culture. As Bourdieu observes, “museums betray their true function, which is to reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feeling of exclusion”²². This practice results in the popular consent to the seizure of property and the manipulation of art works and collections, as well as investing them with arbitrary meanings.

Museums, especially the global ones, unite the public around a given cultural identity. This is why Preziosi describes museums as the device for concentrating. And it is the museum that made it possible for Europe to construct and

²⁰ Maleuvre, op. cit. p. 11.

²¹ P. Bourdieu, A. Darbel, D. Schnapper, *The love of art. European Art Museum and their Public*, trans. C. Beattie, N. Merriman, Poliy Press, Cambridge 1991, p. 212. According to Bourdieu: *So that cultured people can believe in barbarism and persuade the barbarians of their own barbarity (...)*.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 212.

establish its own position as the standard by which the value of other cultures is judged and through which they are objectified²³. Jean Baudrillard in his turn argues that the museum is dominated by the violence of the production of exhibitions, which is not very much different from the turnover of goods, and in consequence the complex processes taking place within the museum are overlooked²⁴.

*Babylon. Myth and Truth*²⁵, the exhibition in Berlin immensely popular with the public and the critics alike, exemplifies the issues mentioned above. It demonstrates how the exhibition based on clearly defined opposites explains cultural phenomena to the public, condemns vices and proposes to rectify the wrongs by means of education. The whole process is made more accessible to the public, since it is immersed in the aesthetic medium and the exhibition achieves its educational goals through the presentation of exquisite original works and artefacts of a foreign culture. On entering, the viewer is first introduced to the scientific facts about the ancient Babylon, which is represented by the splendid collection of exhibits demonstrating the grandeur of its culture and civilization. The display includes its architecture, its legal and scientific achievements, a variety of cult objects and everyday items, and the gold of its rulers. This collection, prepared by a team of researchers, is juxtaposed with the myth, revealing the dark side of the soul of the European who tends to associate Babylon with the Whore of Babylon, the cruel Nebuchadnezzar and the Tower of Babel. The distorted image of Babylon can be found in some of the finest works of art, including those by Cranach, Dürer and William Blake, but also in Zbigniew Libera's *Lego Blocks*, which are meant by the curators to demonstrate the totalitarian consequences of the popular consent to the myth. The exhibition claims that Europe has inherited the Babylonian myth from Judaism and Christianity and that the myth is still very much alive in the mass culture. Nonetheless the exact sense of the myth is never clearly defined. There are definitions written on the staircase walls, including those by Eliade, Cassirer and Barthes, but brought together and removed from their theoretical background, they give contradictory explanations and make the actual message of the myth even more obscure.

²³ D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Museum and the Flaming of Modernity*, in: *The Rhetoric of the Frame. Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. P. Duro, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 106, 109.

²⁴ On the Pompidou Centre, J. Baudrillard, *Symulakry i symulacja*, trans. S. Królak, Sic! Warszawa 2005, p. 92.

²⁵ The exhibition *Babylon. Mythos und Wahrheit*, (Pergamon Museum, Berlin June-October 2008), under the auspices of the minister Frank Walter Steinmeier, gathered the exhibits from a number of renowned museums, including the British Museum and Musée du Louvre.

The public are presented with the arbitrary picture of the truth and the caricature of the myth. In fact the myth serves an important function in society, as it allows us to ask fundamental questions concerning the meaning of the physical world. It expresses the faith in the purposeful order of the universe and the lasting values of human culture. The myth and scientific knowledge constitute two fundamental spheres of human existence: "the mythical arrangement of the world is always present in culture"²⁶. And in spite of the fact that the myth and the truth merge even in the empirical science, the Berlin exhibition assigns the responsibility for the preservation and affirmation of eternal values solely to science²⁷.

There is a familiar story about the rational and irrational sides of European culture and the heroic struggle of science guarding the truth. The moral of this story is to preserve the memory of other cultures, since the moral lessons based on them will be willingly accepted by people enthralled by the fabulous culture of Babylon. The need for science is socially grounded, because in the light of scientific knowledge we can openly acknowledge the existence of evil inside ourselves and deliver ourselves from this evil with the help of education and aesthetic therapy. All this is possible because the works which have been uprooted, divested of their own message and removed from their context have in turn been invested with the senses allowing for such a story.

Lyotard, like Bourdieu, is convinced that violence cannot be eradicated from the museum; he identifies it as injustice and locates it on the level of perception. He conducts the phenomenological analysis of the way the exhibition is perceived²⁸ and demonstrates that the origins of injustice lie in the very nature of seeing, and that they are primal in relation to the social practices of exhibition and prior to the mechanism of symbolic violence. Lyotard's position constitutes the theoretical basis for the critical activity of the artists who, since the 1960s, have been deconstructing the contexts and premises of the museum exhibition. According to Bourdieu, such criticism is utterly impossible, since there are no practices external to the ones which have already been approved and permitted by the institutions: every exhibition sacralizes the works and trains the public. Lyotard sees the matter differently. He maintains that the public prefers the simplicity of expression, the realism in painting and the frontal view of an exhibit, which guarantees the sense of reality, and the public, whether bourgeois or proletarian, needs such a guarantee. However, "the essence of exhibition is not obvious"²⁹, it is not free of assumptions, it is

²⁶ L. Kołakowski, *Obecność mitu*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1994, p. 48.

²⁷ As Leszek Kołakowski points out: *The world of values is the mythical reality*, ibidem, p. 33.

²⁸ J.-F. Lyotard, *Über Daniel Buren*, ed. Patricia Schwarz, Stuttgart 1987, pp. 31-32.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

not homogeneous and a number of factors lie hidden in the visual, which follows from the nature of perception itself. We are incapable of grasping a visual object in its entirety: there is always something – the back, the sides – which is kept out of sight.

The museum exposition exploits the imperfections of perception, which allow it, in the name of its social mission, to determine the accepted conditions of seeing, both in terms of the spatial arrangements and by pointing to the particular contents of the works. Thus a work of art may always be used as a component of a wider format and lose its own message, which is the case of Libera's *Lego Blocs* in the Berlin exhibition. In this sense the modernist character of the museum is inherent in its nature. Museum directors³⁰ speak in the name of humanity, and their decisions are informed by the public interest. Thus they speak in vague terms so as to prevent a political crisis or to maintain the status quo. In other words, they methodically foster injustice. Their asset is the fact that they promote simple ideas, realism and the frontal exposition. Therefore, it is the artist's task to develop a game which will reveal the ambiguity of the conditions of the exhibition itself and expose the rules of parergon logic, which constitutes the *raison d'être* of the academia and the museum.

With regard to freedom and violence within the museum, which is the subject of this paper, there are basically two major approaches adopted by critical art: the conceptual and the narrative. The former entails the manipulation of the exhibition space, which leaves the public in certain discomfort (Daniel Buren, Joseph Kosuth). The artists adopting the latter approach take up certain subjects concerning politics, gender or colonialism and present them by means of suggestive – often ironic or graphic – scenes (Hans Haacke, Fred Wilson). The 'museum' art of the second half of the 20th century tried to protect the work from becoming an instrument in one of the discourses in the museum and, as a result, to enable it to establish a discourse of its own³¹.

Interestingly, Lyotard associates the critical power with the first approach and is interested in the work by such artists as Daniel Buren, who "visibly" display "what is invisible in the exhibition itself" in order to "relentlessly follow and display the invisible"³². His installations of the coloured stripes occupy the spaces which are normally not meant for art and are left empty. The exposure of injustice follows in this case from the fact that the familiar exhibition

³⁰ On museum directors and artists, Lyotard, *Über Daniel Buren*, op. cit., pp. 40–42.

³¹ On the museum as a place of critical discourses, see among others J. Putnam, *Art and artifact: The museum as medium*, Thames&Hudson, London 2001.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 34 and p. 42.

conventions are disturbed by the artist unwilling to conform to the conventional display of a work of art: a picture on the wall. The dialogue between the works and the wall or the exhibition space leads to the transformation of the nature of the work itself and is aimed at the institutional framework of the museum³³. Such installations appear innocuous. Apart from the stripes, they include the display of the objects not normally meant for exhibition, such as boxes used for transport, empty containers, or picture frames. There are also doors leading to exhibition rooms which are boarded up or the gallery halls left empty. As there is no message, no content, it is impossible to manipulate the art work, but at the same time the artists make a political point: they do not act in anybody's name, they do not seek to express any truth, but stand up against the establishment. Some of these environmental installations violently take possession of the site itself. Marcin Berdyszak (*Fresh Fruit Table. Homage a Matta Clark*, Cologne 1996) smashes 140 kilograms of lemons with a chain-saw, marking the site for a long time, and as a result, makes it impossible to hold another exhibition there.

The departure from representation ultimately offers the public anaesthesia: the lack of sensations allows artists to enter into a dialogue with the public, since they provide no pleasant experience as opposed to the modernist exhibition. The viewer is expected to engage in the work intellectually, to approach it critically, and frequently to make a physical effort, while the habits formed by the traditional exhibition become useless. The role of the artists has changed, as they no longer educate or explain, serving as an extension of the authority of the institution, but instead they question the interpretations. It took time for the critical art to secure its place in the museum, but with time the space of the museum itself has undergone transformation, and the postmodern museum is open to a variety of discourses, including the critical ones. Still there is no doubt that the institution exercises its control over the exhibition, so not all of the artists' ideas are approved³⁴.

As we can see, apart from the dialectic struggle between freedom and discipline, there are new elements emerging in the postmodern museum. The artists working directly in the exhibition space cannot complain about the uprooting, since the museum of modern art is becoming a laboratory open to a whole range of artistic experiments. However, the victim here is not only the neutral exhibition space conquered by installations, but, first and foremost, the public. Viewers are constantly forced to change their mental and perceptual

³³ O'Doherty, *Notes on the Gallery Space. Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, The Lapis Press, Santa Monica, San Francisco 1986, s. 69.

³⁴ Cf. P. Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od 'melancholii' do 'pasji'*, Universitas, Kraków 2007.

habits and they are frequently ill-equipped to deal with the intellectual puzzles or, as it is the case of consumerist art, with the things apparently too obvious to be considered art. The awareness of the mechanisms imposed by the exhibition space on artists and works as well as on the public gives a potential viewer a certain advantage, so it might be a good idea to follow Adorno's advice and only go to the museum to see one single work of art.

MUZEUM SZTUKI: PRZESTRZEŃ WOLNOŚCI I PRZEMOCY (streszczenie)

Idea wolności, chociaż w definicji muzeum nie eksplikowana, to jednak wyrażana jest przez ideał powszechnego dostępu do artystycznego dorobku historycznych epok oraz odmiennych kultur, bezinteresownie udostępnianych, a stanowiących efekt pracy rzeszy badaczy. Te oczywiste prawdy dość skutecznie przysłaniają obszary zniewolenia, jakie dotyczą dzieła sztuki i publiczność. Trzeba bowiem zaznaczyć, iż dialektyka wolności i przemocy jest na stałe wpisana w praktyki muzealne.

Dzieła sztuki reprezentują wolny akt twórczy, a ich wykorzenie z pierwotnego kontekstu przekreśla go, jednak przemoc wykorzenia jest warunkiem nadania im cech stylistycznych i wartości estetycznej. Wybór określonych dzieł z uwagi na pozaartystyczne cele: polityczne, ideologiczne jest z kolei przemocą wykluczenia. Najbardziej radykalnym typem przemocy jest zniszczenie dzieł. Mechanizm przemocy symbolicznej opisanej przez Pierre'a Bourdieu dotyczy publiczności, która ochoczo przystaje na procedury dyscyplinowania za cenę włączenia do grona wybranych miłośników sztuki.

Z końcem XX wieku muzeum ulega głębokiej transformacji staje się otwarte na wielość dyskursów o sztuce i kulturze. Nie znaczy to jednak, że zamieniło się w przestrzeń wolności pojętej jako dowolność działań artystycznych oraz dowolność odbioru. Wolność i przemoc przyjęły w nim jedynie inne formy. Dyrektorzy muzeum stojąc na straży ogólnych idei, nadal uprawiają metodycznie niesprawiedliwość, jak pisze J.-F. Lyotard. Nowe elementy pojawiają się za sprawą artystów, którzy dokonują dekonstrukcji przestrzeni ekspozycyjnej, zaskakują odbiorcę a nawet działają opresyjnie.

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BETWEEN UTOPIA AND REALISM. SOCIALIST REALIST URBAN SPACE IN SELECTED EXAMPLES

Abstract: The article deals with the complex issues connected with the socialist realist space of the Polish cities. The phenomenon is multi-layered and multi-dimensional. I concentrate on its two aspects: the utopian, abstract space declared by the doctrine, responsible for constructing metaphorical, symbolic meanings and the real, traditionally defined space of the existing cities. I stress the significance of the real space, its determinants and its creators. After World War II, Poland required immediate help in rebuilding its ruined cities, regardless of the ideological disputes carried on in the press. The main concern was the very existence of some cities, while the exact form of their architecture, in those extreme times, was of secondary importance for many people. Socialist realist urban planning practice, exemplified here by the cases of Nowa Huta and Łódź, appeared to be determined by a number of factors, not only ideological, but also very pragmatic. The space of a socialist realist Polish city got stuck somewhere between a vision and everyday reality.

Keywords: space – urban planning – socialist realism

The concept of space was one of the key notions of the doctrine of socialist realism. Space subordinated to ideological considerations was to assist in the process of transforming not only urban structure, but also the social, demographic and sociological sphere of the city. Its power lay in its potential to reorganize the space of a real city, but, above all, to influence the state of the mind, creating “new order” for a “new man”. Similar understanding of space as a tool of manipulation had appeared in the theory and practice of the national-socialist, Nazi Third Reich¹.

The complexity of the issues relevant for talking about the space of the Polish socialist cities makes it necessary to adopt a few research perspectives, as the phenomenon is multi-layered and multi-dimensional. The first type of space to

¹ Compare: P. Krakowski, *Sztuka III Rzeszy* (Cracow, 1994).

consider is that declared in the doctrine – desirable, ideal, utopian, abstract, responsible for constructing metaphorical, symbolic meanings. After a while, however, a real, material, tangible city emerges. Two domains overlap here – the domain of imagination and that of reality. Paradise on earth, a city of good fortune designed for the proletarians, or one aiming to deconstruct traditional space? Stage setting for parades and marches, and if necessary, for military purposes, or simply some traditionally defined space and conservative architecture, serving people – the only space that could then be created, conforming to the official policy?

The socialist realist space, totalitarian in a broad philosophical, aesthetic, and historical sense has often constituted a basis for research. Intellectual discourse often adopts a theoretical perspective, focusing on the declared space. However, it is worth examining real space, its determinants and creators. After World War II, Poland required immediate help in rebuilding its ruined cities, regardless of the ideological disputes carried on in the press. The main concern was the very existence of some cities, while the exact form of their architecture, in those extreme times, was of secondary importance for many people. After 1945, both the avant-garde artists, e.g. Helena and Szymon Syrkus, and the traditional, ‘monument-centred’ architects were active in Poland. A real dispute was being carried on between the representatives of both camps, and the Capital Rebuilding Office became a peculiar battlefield. However, nobody had any doubts that it was necessary to rebuild.

A few years later, in the year 1949, the imposed doctrine of socialist realism became a basis for urban planning. In practice that meant the hegemony of the traditional order. The geopolitical determinants and political reality led to the situation in which in post-war Poland there was no place for the questions posed in Western Europe, regarding urban planning after the Holocaust². Urban planning and architecture, as never before, had to be implemented “here and now”. They were determined by a number of factors, not only ideological, but also very pragmatic ones. The space of a Polish socialist realist city got stuck somewhere between a vision and everyday reality.

A SOCIALIST REALIST CITY OF THE FUTURE. SPACE AS A STATE OF MIND

The vision of the space of a socialist city was to be defined by the doctrine of socialist realism, which put great emphasis on shaping the awareness of the

² Compare: M. Leśniakowska, “Doświadczenie kulturowej wizualizacji. Antropologia (re-)konstrukcji,” *Teksty Drugie*, No. 2 (2009).

homo sovieticus and creating new kinds of human bonds. The creation of “proper” space, and then exerting control over it led to “the enslavement of the mind” desired by the doctrinaires. One has to agree that “controlling social relationships means controlling the degree of clarity of the situation in which it is appropriate for the various members of a community to act.”³

The space defined by the doctrine of socialist realism can be regarded as another utopia of a perfect city of the future – a beautiful, healthy and harmonious city. It is necessary to remember that since the ancient times, there have been more or less successful attempts to implement the vision of total space, most frequently based on the principles of mathematics and geometry that would overcome the chaos of the surrounding world. Bauman observes that “in all modern utopias of a ‘perfect city’, urban planning and architectural principles to which the authors of the utopias usually devote most attention always revolve around the same ideas – the strict planning of urban space (constructing a city according to a comprehensive and pre-prepared plan, from scratch, in an empty area) and the regularity, repetitiveness, uniformity, sameness and identity of the elements of urban space, centred around administrative buildings, situated either in the geometrical centre of the space, or on a hill overlooking the city, from which it is possible to take in the whole of the urban area.”⁴ The ideas propagated by the doctrinaires, regarding the subordination, rationalization and uniformization of urban structure were not new; what was new were the methods of their implementation.

After World War II, a totally new quality of the urbanization processes started to emerge in Eastern Europe.⁵ The totalitarian system put urban planning into new, institutionalized frames. In the case of Poland, a number of offices and authorities were created, supervising the realization of plans, monitoring their conformity with the requirements of the socialist realist doctrine and the directives of the Six Year Plan. In practice, it was the new system, its methods of functioning, its political and legal decisions leading to “free” management of land that had revolutionary significance for shaping urban areas, and not the ideas and slogans, already well known.

It is worth reconstructing these basic assumptions regarding the organization of the “new” living space for the Communist community, which were codified when plans for the redevelopment of Moscow were created, in the beginning

³ Z. Bauman, “O ładzie, co niszczy, i chaosie, który tworzy, czyli o polityce przestrzeni miejskiej,” in: *Formy estetyzacji przestrzeni publicznej*, ed. J. Wojciechowski, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Warsaw, 1998, p. 13.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ J. Goryński, *Urbanizacja, urbanistyka, architektura*, Warsaw, 1966, p. 56.

of the 1930s. Modernist concepts of de-urbanization were rejected, and the rebirth of the spoke and ring arrangement, perimeter street development and regular frontages was postulated. The doctrinaires propagated the return to traditional patterns, to the concept of a city as a compact, integrated organism, as understood from the perspective of the 19th century.

Above all, the creation of such arrangements was postulated as would make it possible to unite, unify the urban organism regarded by the doctrine as an inseparable whole. Urban planning provided an opportunity to change the symbolic space of the city, understood not only as a kind of special structure, but a place marked by history and time. It became responsible for conveying political meanings, transforming the existing centers and creating new ones. In order to achieve the objective, theatrical arrangements full of dramatic effects, staged tensions and dominants were created. A lot of attention was devoted to creating viewing perspectives, on the axis of which a building (message) was placed, and introducing the so-called third dimension which made it possible to manipulate both scale and size.

According to the directives of the doctrine, the city was to express, above all, the ideals of socialism and productivity. Such vague, imprecise notions gave the authorities a great possibility of manipulation. They emphasized their attention to the needs of the citizens, a kind of socialist humanism, with its vision of the cities of a good tomorrow, workers' paradises. The main objective was determined, however, by political considerations, such as building the authority of the party or striving to create an organism that would be easy to control, subordinated to military functions, the principles of planned economy which emphasized the development of industry, as well as propaganda considerations, providing a handy mask to hide any real intentions.

The city centre was regarded as the key part of the city, and there were plans to locate the buildings that were most important in rank, monumental in their mass and expressive in their silhouette there. The centre was to be the hub of political life, in which the authorities wished to locate the most important political, administrative and cultural institutions. Regular, clear, symmetrical quarters of buildings comprising a closed, finite arrangement were to become the basis for socialist realist urban composition. A compact structure facilitated supervision and control. It was also better adjusted to the requirements of the country's defences.

The structural skeleton of the layout was to be created by broad arteries and vast squares built to organize rallies and demonstrations. The unified spatial and architectural composition of individual districts was to blur "class distinctions" and discourage individualized expression.

This shortened programme description of a socialist city already reveals an aspiration to transform its historical structure.⁶ It constitutes a special case of the “sacralization” of urban space, in which the most important role, the role of the sacrum, is not fulfilled by cathedrals and churches, but by the buildings representing the governing party and the authorities. That is why such buildings were situated in the centre, as its strong artistic dominants. The task of urban planning and architecture became to fulfill the function of staffage, stage setting for quasi-religious rituals and ceremonies: marches, rallies, parades. That is where the theatricality of the urban arrangement comes from, emphasized by the use of appropriate perspectives and vistas, and characterized by superficiality, monumentalism and the distinctiveness of the architecture. The ideal space of a socialist city is monumental and massive, exceeding the scale of the already existing context, demolishing, responsible for the disintegration of the already existing arrangement, a space for the community, not for an individual.⁷

Fortunately, however, the few years when the doctrine was in effect appeared to be too short a period to wholly implement the propagated rules and fully transform the space of Polish cities in the spirit of socialist realism. It is also necessary to remember that it was an ideal, not a real picture, which was to appear, first of all, in the mind of the receiver.

A question needs to be asked here of whether the space and architecture marked by ideology is able to influence the simple worker who the message was addressed to? It will appear, then, that the propagandistic overtone of urban planning and architecture was much weaker than it was assumed, and commonplace manipulation with the use of urbanization processes did not bring the expected success. First of all, in order to “appropriately” interpret the language of the new (also totalitarian) space, at least a minimum of cultural training was necessary, which the receiver of this space did not undergo. This central control of a socialist realist city, the inclination towards ideologically important elements, standardization, deprivation of individual features was either not clear for most people, or clear in a way incompatible with the way of thinking of the governing party. It is the quality of some spatial structure, its functionality, its ability to fulfill needs, and not its partyism that has the greatest impact upon human thinking.

Socialist realist urban planning in the form promoted by policy makers suffered defeat – it remained another “utopia of a perfect city”. The pro-

⁶ W. Malinowski, “Socrealizm? Cóż to właściwie było?”, *De musica*, Issue No. 2, 29 Oct. 2007 <www.free.art.pl/demusica/>.

⁷ Cp: K. Nawratek, *Ideologia w przestrzeni, próby demistyfikacji*, Cracow, 2005, p. 16.

pagated disintegration of traditional space did not take place, except for the centers highlighted in the Six Year Plan.

The newly created plans and urban planning designs, both for the destroyed Warsaw, and for the cities of Silesia, Łódź, or even Nowa Huta, were made first of all for the residents, not for the governing party. After many years, it can be observed that the designers managed to retain quite a lot of freedom, common sense and the sense of the uniqueness of a given place, as well as sensitivity to its real needs. For many of them, socialist realism did not constitute an ideological interpretation, but a kind of conservative, traditional aesthetics, which suited them well already before the war.

On the other hand, one must not forget about the totalitarian methods of implementing all rules; it was the methods, not the rules in themselves, that led to the “enslavement of space” and limitation of freedom.

IMAGINED AND REAL SPACE IN ŁÓDŹ AND NOWA HUTA

Each of the big Polish urban centers was obligated to create the picture of the city of the future – monumental, standardized, with broad alleys, along which there would march a crowd of proletarians. President Bierut’s vision of a socialist realist capital city presented in a richly illustrated book entitled *Sześćioletni plan odbudowy Warszawy*⁸ (*The 6-year Plan of the Rebuilding of Warsaw*) was to become its model. At that time, numerous sketches and drawings of new urban design and architecture – so-called paper works of art⁹ – constituted an element of creational space, serving to produce certain meanings and evoke appropriate emotions. Spatial arrangements designed on a grand scale, including radical transformations, were either very quickly put into a drawer, or dramatically reduced, on account of the cutbacks in the investment policy and the dictates of planned economy, which was mostly oriented towards the development of industry and income generation. That is why we can only talk about certain elements of Polish socialist realist urbanism of this demolishing, totalitarian kind. Nowa Huta became a unique, unprecedented, flagship socialist realist city. Nowe Tychy is another socialist realist city, but on a smaller scale. Socialist realist urbanism came to the capital city and, in a more restricted form, to other Polish urban centers, such as Łódź.

⁸ See: B. Bierut, *Sześćioletni plan odbudowy Warszawy*, Warsaw, 1950.

⁹ Cp: W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950-1954*, Paris, 1986.

The architects themselves, their taste, education, their heroic conduct and engagement were of great, maybe of decisive significance for the space and form of a socialist realist city. At the beginning of the 1950s, a significant group of artists noticed that socialist realism offered great possibilities of genuine healing of some urban centers and making them functional. For many of them, the return to the traditional ways of thinking about space also accorded with their own views; it constituted an option safer than the one promoted by the avant-garde. Urban planning arrangements and conservative socialist realist forms were also accepted because of the problem of rebuilding historic urban complexes, a real need to create national architecture – architecture which took on special meaning in the first post-war years, since this kind of architecture constituted a symbol of survival and Polish national identity. At that time there was a strong and common conviction that it was necessary to save the national heritage and reconstruct national architecture.

After many years, the architects designing those cities at that time recall:

“That was the period of socialist realism. We then looked back to historical forms, because it was imposed to some extent. It was not said explicitly that we had to design in this way. It was welcome. I myself thought it was very appropriate to go back to the bygone ages and that it was necessary to refer to earlier architecture and the national style, and so on. ... Fortunately, the tendency to recreate was victorious. The Old Town was rebuilt. Not always as it had been before, but to a large extent; it created some atmosphere. If it had not been for socialist realism, they would have started producing boxes.”¹⁰

Most architects felt the historical necessity, a need to engage in the rebuilding and building of the country, regardless of their own political or aesthetical preferences. Kazimierz Piechotka quotes the words of the first director of the Capital Rebuilding Office who supposedly said:

“The situation is as it is. It’s no use deluding ourselves – there is not going to be a third world war. We do not serve the system, but the country. No matter who is going to rule here, it is our country and our city, and we need to concentrate all our strength on re-building it.”¹¹

It must also be remembered that the first ten years after the war were hard, even extreme times for architects and urban planners. Chaos, short deadlines, a lack of a sufficient number of architects with a diploma, a lack of office equipment – in sum: the times of great trial and improvisation. In such condi-

¹⁰ Ryszard Karłowicz, Personal interview, May 2005.

¹¹ After: K. Pichotka, ‘Architekci w odbudowie Warszawy 1945-1949’. Seminarium OW SARP, 5.11.2005, p. 6.

tions it was the engagement that mattered, the faith in the success of the undertaking, not the faith in the doctrine or the ideology. Stanisław Juchnowicz, an architect and urban planner working in the team of Tadeusz Ptasiński, said:

“Energy, intuition, imagination, kindness. If Nowa Huta was created, it was only because in all that chaos Ptasiński was able to make decisions with lightning speed. Those were tough lessons of complex design in really extreme conditions. He kept that Nowa Huta in one piece – without him everything would have fallen apart. He built for people, not for the masses. He was not a party member, he did not show any consideration for the party.”¹²

Below is another account on the reality and everyday life at a little earlier time, right after the war:

“In winter 1945, someone would bang every morning on Roman Piotrowski’s (the director of the Capital Rebuilding Office) door. They would come to him – he wrote – with every trifle: ‘bricks have been delivered’; ‘where shall we store the prefab blocks’; ‘where can one use the petrol voucher’. He would jump out of bed, put on his visored cap and stand ready for work, as a pioneer should. He was fifty years old and he believed in what he was doing.”¹³

It is necessary to remember that the space of a socialist realist city constituted an outcome of many factors that were very down-to-earth and pragmatic – economy, standards, directives of policy-makers. However, to a large extent it also depended on the architects themselves, their aesthetic likes and preferences, personality, their strength of character and will.

It is worth illustrating the discussion on socialist realist space, both imagined and real, with examples.

NOWA HUTA – A SYMBOLIC CITY OF THE FUTURE?

The most important and, undoubtedly, the biggest assumption of the 6-year Plan, both in terms of the architectural and urban development, and of propaganda and prestige, was to build a city located next to the newly erected giant – the Lenin metallurgical plant. A city eulogized as a symbol, erected from scratch, intended for the builders and future workers of the metallurgical conglomerate, was to become a monumental realization of the principles of the

¹² After: R. Radłowska, “Inżynier, który wymyślił Nową Hutę,” 31. Jan. 2008, www.gazeta.pl [22.09.2009].

¹³ After: M. Kołodziejczyk, “Zabytkowicze i awangardiści,” *Polityka*, No. 38, 25 Aug. 2007, p. 22.

socialist realism doctrine. The realization of this spatial and social experiment began in 1949. The author of the urban development concept of Nowa Huta was the already mentioned Tadeusz Ptaszycycki. Both he and his team firmly believed that they were creating something exceptional, important for people. They were given a task which was uncommon in the second half of the 20th century – namely, to design and build a city from scratch. It was an unusual challenge, which gave them a chance to work on a scale impossible before the war. The architects were fully aware of their enormous responsibility. Their basic motivation was to create a living, real city, a city for the people – not a utopian one, subordinated to abstract ideology. Like probably every architect, they wanted their city to EXIST. Nowa Huta as a symbol? Socialist realism? The 6-year Plan?

One of the members of the team designing Nowa Huta, Bohdan Bukowski, recalls:

“No one realized it was ideology. At our office there were no ideo-logists. Instead, there were people with a past. Ptaszycycki took them into his team – those whose records already stated that they did not support the public rule ... Individualists, brought up in celebrated families, people who were called ‘townies’ or ‘the intelligentsia’ by the public rule.”¹⁴

It seems that the official slogans were just for show, which seems to be confirmed by what Bukowski says further:

“The authorities wanted it cheap, but full of splendor; they told us to ‘do it monumentally’. So, it was done monumentally; there were giant arches, under which people would enter the buildings. We joked at the office that ‘at the front an entrance for mastodons, and at the back a little door for a dwarf.’”¹⁵

The created city’s spatial structure was mostly traditional, familiar, not revolutionary, accepted by the majority of people from artistic circles as more human, more appropriate than the avant-garde, modernist concepts. On the other hand, it was urbanism complying with almost all requirements of the socialist realist doctrine. Here one can see uniformity, architectural harmony of peripheral buildings, broad alleys, well-suited for rallies and demonstrations, numerous squares, a compact centre with artistic dominants – in other words, a city where space is defined in a very traditional way and filled with buildings that mostly take after the Neo-Classicist, conservative forms based on historic models. The spatial concept of the city constitutes a reference to Baroque arrangements. The urban development base of Nowa Huta is a square,

¹⁴ After: R. Radłowska, op. cit.

¹⁵ Ibid.

from which radiate five broad alleys. The spaces between these streets were filled with quarters of block buildings, called A, B, C and D. Three of the alleys are most important for the whole layout: the cosy Aleja Róż (Alley of Roses), constituting a promenade, Aleja Solidarności (Solidarity Alley; formerly – Lenin Alley) which runs towards the metallurgical conglomerate plant that, in accordance with the socialist content, constitutes the most important artistic dominant of the city, and Aleja Ptaszyckiego (formerly Aleja Planu 6-letniego – 6-year Plan Alley) which constitutes a horizontal base for the whole layout. The Central Square (Plac Centralny) features impressive, four-storey terraced houses of the same height, with carefully designed elevations with a tripartite scheme of composition. The high ground floors housed service establishments, partly covered with arcades. The blocks located in the main streets and those constituting the A, B, C and D quarters were treated in a similar, but maybe not such a representative way. The buildings of other housing complexes located far away from the centre were shaped in a much more cosy way. They differ in size and have fewer historicizing details. These complexes consist of housing estate quarters with perimeter buildings, outlined by pairs of parallel and intersecting streets, filled with low, 4- and 5-storey, not very densely spaced buildings, adjusted to a human scale. The greenery that filled the inner courtyards and cosy squares was incorporated into the composition.

The building of Nowa Huta became one of the first such important exemplary realizations, an unusual architectural feat that was widely discussed and criticized in professional journals. Undoubtedly, it must be regarded as socialist realist. However, it must be remembered that it is not the spatial structure itself, but the atmosphere in which it was created and the disputes around it would constitute the message that it embodied. Political and ideological meaning, the so-called “content” was imposed on urban design later and functioned parallel to the real space.

ŁÓDŹ. WORKERS' EL DORADO

During the period of socialist realism, Łódź constituted a real challenge both for the doctrinaires and the theoreticians, as well as urban planners-practitioners.¹⁶ Despite the work undertaken in the interwar period, the city entered the new, post-war era facing great urban problems. The unusual density of the buildings, the lack of basic infrastructure, the mix of functions, the large

¹⁶ Compare: M. Wiśniewski, “Wpływ planowania przestrzennego na rozwój strefy zurbanizowanej Łodzi w okresie powojennym,” PhD dissertation, Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Technical University of Lodz. Łódź 2005.

number of inhabitants and too small area at the same time, made up the picture of Łódź at the end of World War II. The urban planners set out to transform the “rotten symbol of capitalism” into a healthy, socialist organism by improving its spatial arrangement. However, because of the dense urban tissue, the disintegration of the city space became a risky undertaking. Although every plan and site plan in this period contained some symbolic-propaganda element informed by the doctrine of socialist realism, it must be stressed that the planners focused mainly on the improvement of the city’s functionality and the living conditions of its inhabitants. Attempts were made to solve the most serious problems of Łódź by determining the development areas of the city, reducing the industrial pollution, improving the transportation system, developing the housing base and the green areas and improving its infrastructure.

The basic challenge was to eliminate the pre-war social divisions, mainly the contrast between the rich, bourgeois city centre, and the poor, working class suburbs; to realize the slogan “people will enter the city center”; to standardize and harmonize the city’s architecture; to divide the city into functional building zones, and to concentrate its industrial areas and decentralize its social and service functions. Although the planners’ aspirations to change the symbolic space of the city ran high, the capitalist centre of exploitation did not turn into a workers’ paradise. In the period of socialist realism, the character and form of the buildings were influenced both by the new conditions of development determined by the political and economic situation, and by the doctrine prevalent at that time, as well as the local conditions, connected with the history of the city’s origin. The propaganda slogans did not in fact find their reflection in reality. In practice, as only meager financial means were available, emphasis was put on satisfying the basic needs of the neglected city. Łódź, a typical working-class city with a dense city centre, was beset by a number of urban planning and architectural problems that had originated during the period of its rapid industrial and demographic growth in the second half of the 19th century. After World War II, the city was one of the largest and most densely populated industrial centers, suffering from many deficiencies, and not providing its inhabitants with optimum living conditions. The Communist authorities were trying to use these deficiencies for propaganda purposes, creating wonderful visions of improvement, based on the opposition between the old and the new, the bad and the good, the capitalist and the socialist, the ill and the healthy.

According to the postulates of the doctrine which was officially accepted at that time, the period of socialist realism was to bring about a total spatial transformation of the city in order to alter its identity and change its symbolic space. However, the ideology and its accompanying simplistic notions of

reality were hard to impose upon the existing urban organism. It is interesting that the socialist realist plans for the city's urban development were much less radical than those drawn by the Nazis during World War II for Litzmannstadt (as Łódź was then called). Although their assumptions were similar, the socialist interference in the urban issue was to be more limited.¹⁷ The superior objective of the post-war urban planners was to control the spatial chaos and to solve the numerous problems caused by the origins of the city and its rapid development. The most urgent of those problems facing the new authorities included the too high density of the buildings in the city centre, the interweaving of the housing zones and the industrial zones, the deficiencies in basic infrastructure, the uncontrolled development of the suburbs, the longitudinal layout based on one axis – Piotrkowska Street, serving as the main communication route, of both local and transit significance, for vehicles, trams, and pedestrians, and as the center of services, trade and administration; the lack of communication links with the rest of the country and the region.

The changes in the spatial arrangement were also necessitated by the new, non-industrial city-forming functions of Łódź. They made it necessary to develop some public spaces and buildings connected with administration, education, culture and health care. The development of public spaces perfectly cohered with the key postulates of the socialist realist doctrine. It was also necessary to introduce corrections and regulations regarding housing construction and laying out new arteries.

In the period of socialist realism, two general and many detailed urban development concepts, concerning, among others, the Bałuty district and the university campus, were proposed during the different phases of socialist realism. They were developed by the unit specially appointed by the Board of the People's Council, whose aim was to "conduct research on development, and design the planned development and spatial development of the city."¹⁸ Although the two socialist realist plans for the development of the city focused on different issues and were drawn in different economic circumstances, they have a lot in common. This clear element of continuation owes much to such urban planners as Cyprian Jaworski, Waclaw Bald and Zbigniew Wyszacki, who had been shaping the space of Łódź since the interwar period. Although none of the two general plans were fully implemented, they did delineate the conception of the city's development. Therefore, in spite of the ideological

¹⁷ Compare T. Bolanowski, "Nowe zespoły mieszkaniowe w niemieckich planach przebudowy Łodzi w latach 1939-45," PhD dissertation, Department of Construction Engineering, Architecture and Environmental Engineering, typescript, 2001.

¹⁸ W. Bald and E. Jastrzębska, "Planowanie przestrzenne w PRL," *Miscellanea Łódzkie*, No. 4, 1984, p. 137.

treatises and loud postulates, the socialist realist thought concerning the urban development of Łódź was attuned to its real needs, not to the utopian ideology or the totalitarian regime.

Both plans attempted to treat the city as a homogenous, uniform organism, within which the whole space is open to everyone. In different ways, the plans were aiming at overcoming the “division into social zones” and removing the differences between the rich (bourgeois) city centre and the poor (working class) suburbs. The so far neglected outskirts of the city were to be equipped with all the facilities ensuring optimal living conditions, and with developed infrastructure including a network of schools, health care centers and cultural institutions. The plans paid a lot of attention to the creation of the central zone. The most important cultural, administrative, academic and financial institutions were to be concentrated in the city centre. Locating the most important institutions in one area in the middle of the urban space was regarded as benefiting all the inhabitants. Such a solution was also preferred by the doctrine. Both plans assumed advanced reconstruction of the city centre. It was emphasized that “there exist wide possibilities of transforming old buildings in such a way that they may become an element of the new layout of the city. By changing the appearance of the city, the processes of its development and redevelopment will manifest its new social content in the same way.”¹⁹ The plans postulated decreasing the density of the buildings in the centre through planned demolitions and creating regular, not very dense quarters, with perimeter buildings. An exemplary realization of this type was carried out in Abramowskiego Street.

Great emphasis was put on the organization of public spaces, especially squares, where demonstrations and rallies could take place. In practice, they were used as a tool in the attempts to “loosen up” the strict grid layout of the city. In the period of socialist realism, three squares were created: Komuny Paryskiej (the Square of Paris Commune), Pokoju (the Square of Peace), and Stary Rynek (the Old Market), and the already existing Plac Zwycięstwa (the Victory Square) was renovated. Ginsbert observes that “the current stiff arrangement of buildings is becoming somewhat more flexible.”²⁰ The effect of “loosening up” the city centre was also to be achieved thanks to the regulation of the road system, the enlargement of the green areas and moving the factories out of the centre. Many streets were broadened and a number of pedestrian streets was created; some car parks were built. Mostly, however, in order to relieve the congestion in Piotrkowska Street, the main local and transit communication artery, a new north-south route was laid out along Kościuszki

¹⁹ A. Ginsbert, *Zarys gospodarki komunalnej*, Warszawa, 1965, p. 81.

²⁰ A. Ginsbert, *Łódź, studium monograficzne*, Łódź, 1962, p. 227.

and Zachodnia streets. An important step were the attempts to section the central zone and the industrial zones located in the Widzew district, in the area of Niciarniana Street, and in the Ruda and Żabieniec districts. However, according to the concept of deglomeration, the role of industry was limited, some small factories were integrated into bigger ones, others were closed down. Several new industrial investments did not cause any big changes in the spatial arrangement of the city. A lot of emphasis was put on the greater presence of greenery in the housing zones and the creation of green belts dividing the industrial from the housing zones.

The conception of creating a new city centre which was to be located, depending on the given plan, in the vicinity of the Łódź Fabryczna train station or at the intersection of Mickiewicza and Piotrkowska streets with the Kościuszki Alley, failed to be implemented. Administrative and cultural functions concentrated in the central quarter, in the so-called “red square”, mapped out by Piotrkowska, Sienkiewicza and Wólczańska streets.

During the period of socialist realism, the clearly noticeable direction of expansion was towards the north. The fact that the earlier expansion towards the south slowed down was connected with the reduction of the role of the textile industry as a city-forming factor. Certain spatial regulations were also introduced in the areas that had so far been regarded as peripheral and neglected, such as the Chojny and Górna districts, in an attempt to make the urban organism more uniform. Although there were attempts to create lateral axes, the former north-south layout was preserved, with Piotrkowska Street as the axis of the spatial layout. This traditional orientation was also emphasized by the newly created communication arteries. Despite the ideological postulates and their sometimes socialist realist external form, the “housing estate character” was still dominant among the new buildings. The two plans created in the period when the doctrine of socialist realism ruled supreme were determined to a great extent by economic factors, sometimes impeding development. However, they introduced a uniform conception of urban development, which comprehensively encompassed the whole of the inhabitants work-living-relaxation needs, often in the manner close to the officially condemned modernist ideas.

The plans for the socialist realist “city of tomorrow” eulogized in literature, which was to become an important element of the process of forming the new man and new kind of human bonds failed to be realized. The failure of the doctrine of socialist realism opened the way for modernist urban planning in its socialist form. It appeared then that what the planners had feared in early 1950s became a fact. From the distance of over 50 years, the experience of the

modernism of the 1960s and the construction of houses from pre-fabricated blocks allow us to look more favorably on the urban arrangements from the period of socialist realism. They do present a consistent concept, a logical arrangement, and they organize space in a clear way. Compared to the later dehumanized architecture, the relationship between the building and the street, a certain attempt at the “geometrization” of space appears to be an unusually harmonious and, paradoxically for the totalitarian system, human feature.

Translated by Ewa Hornicka

**MIĘDZY UTOPIĄ A RZECZYWISTOŚCIĄ. SOCREALISTYCZNA PRZESTRZEŃ
MIEJSKA NA WYBRANYCH PRZYKŁADACH
(streszczenie)**

Artykuł prezentuje różne aspekty kreowania przestrzeni polskiego miasta socjalistycznego. Mamy bowiem w tym przypadku do czynienia z wielowymiarowym zjawiskiem. Jako pierwsza pojawia się przestrzeń deklarowana w wytycznych zleceńodawców: pożądana, idealna, utopijna, abstrakcyjna odpowiedzialna za budowanie symbolicznych znaczeń. Później pojawia się miasto realne, zbudowane, namacalne. Nakładają się tutaj dwa pola – wyobrażeniowe i rzeczywiste. Artykuł koncentruje się przede wszystkim wokół zagadnień związanych z rzeczywistością przestrzeni socrealistycznego miasta. Analiza układów urbanistycznych wybranych ośrodków (Nowej Huty i Łodzi) pozwala dostrzec, że uwarunkowania geopolityczne, realność otaczającego świata powodowały, że w powojennej Polsce nie było tak naprawdę miejsca na ideologiczne spory. Urbanistyka i architektura jak nigdy dotąd musiały bowiem być tu i teraz. Określone zostały przez szereg czynników, nie tylko ideologicznych, ale bardzo pragmatycznych. W dużym stopniu zależały też od samych architektów i upodobań estetycznych, osobowości, siły charakteru i woli. Po latach ocenić można, że socrealizm ze względu na swoją koncepcję przestrzeni stanowił dla wielu z nich nie ideologiczną wykładnię, a rodzaj bliskiej im zachowawczej, tradycyjnej urbanistyki.



Photo 1. The center of Nowa Huta. Typical example of socialist realism declared space;
Wide streets, vast squares, monumental housing estates, urban dominants.
Zbiory Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Krakowa, Dzieje Nowej Huty



Photo 2. Marszałkowska Street in Warsaw, wide, impressive;
space treated as a theatrical scene.
Photo A. Sumorok

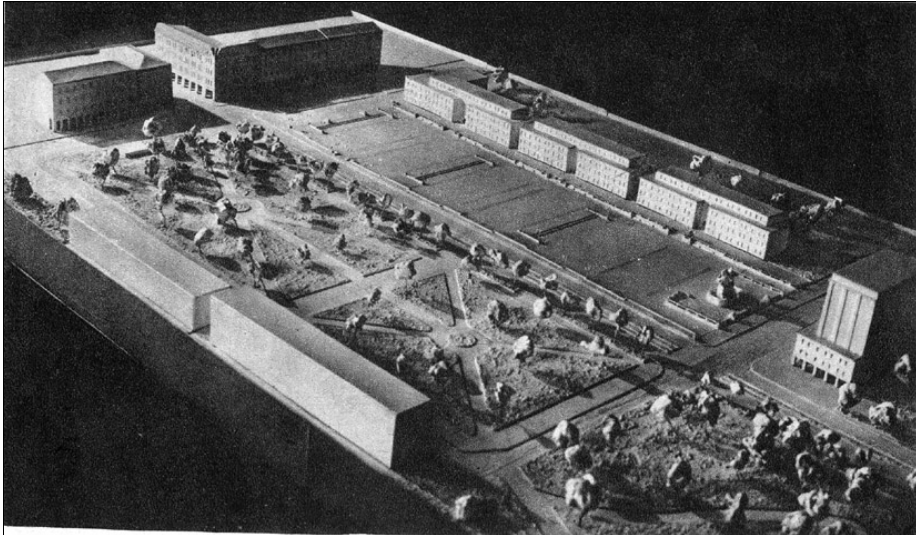


Photo 3. Lodz of tomorrow, utopian project of Zwycięstwa Square.
Łódź w walce i pracy, Łódź 1952



Photo 4. Drawing of Dom Kultury Włókniarza, arch. T. Melchinkiewicz,
„Dziennik Łódzki” 1951, nr 13



Photo 5. Stary Rynek in Łódź, space as a state of mind,
planned for political meetings.
Łódź w walce i pracy, Łódź 1952



Photo 6. Stary Rynek in Łódź, nowadays. Square, its space and
architecture deprived by the doctrine ideological meaning.
Photo A. Sumorok

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FREEDOM WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF FEMINISM: INTERPRETATIONS OF GEORGIA O'KEEFFE'S ART

Abstract: The paper is a reflection on the history of interpreting Georgia O'Keeffe's works through the prism of her gender. The author suggests a discussion of these paintings which goes beyond the theoretical framework of feminine sensibility and erotic symbols. To this end, the author explores some publications on female art and feminist aesthetics which provide information about the art world once dominated by men and about aesthetic standards which are only seemingly universal. Biographical studies of O'Keeffe's life and work and, perhaps even more importantly, the artist's own remarks, supply the author with knowledge about the ideas that once inspired the painter: these include Kandinsky's artistic notions and the achievements of modernist photography. These materials form the basis for the analysis of the content and the form of O'Keeffe's work. The author focuses on the major subjects depicted by the American artist, i.e. flowers, landscapes and animal bones. On account of the frequently assumed connections between O'Keeffe's paintings and the art of the Romantic period, the author juxtaposes the American painter's accomplishments with the works of Caspar David Friedrich. According to the author, the paintings of the German artist are marked by distanced contemplation, whereas O'Keeffe attempts to overcome the dualism between man and nature. It is symptomatic that after the artist's death, and in compliance with her last will, her ashes were scattered in the desert. In this way, O'Keeffe was literally integrated with this space, where she now hovers, free from our demands that her art be unambiguously interpreted.

Keywords: American avant-garde – feminism – abstraction

The principle of freedom is an integral part of feminism. Thanks to its ideas, women were able to liberate themselves from the hearth and home, and to begin participating in the public life. The feminist principle of freedom also applies to the female presence on the art scene and has resulted in a redefined aesthetic. Thus, it may seem subversive to posit that feminism engenders any restrictions of freedom. I do not intend to consider this issue in its broad sense and discuss the antinomies of freedom following in the footsteps of numerous philosophers. Instead, I shall limit this discussion to a particular – and, I hope, interesting – example of ascribing feminist intentions to a body of work which

may not only be interpreted differently, but which seems to afford no clear confirmation of ideological tendencies. I believe that feminist criticism has established innovative and exciting interpretive possibilities, but it has also created the danger of oversimplifying the complexity of some works of art. In the case of Georgia O'Keeffe, we may even speak of manipulation and abuse, running contrary to the artist's ideas.

The paintings of this legendary American modernist oscillate between abstraction and figurativeness. The main subjects of her art – flowers, landscapes and animal bones – were addressed in numerous series of works over many years. The canonical interpretations of her works were shaped as much by the spirit of the era in which she lived as by the photographs depicting the artist, taken by Alfred Stieglitz – the renowned representative of the American avant-garde and O'Keeffe's long-time partner.

The traditionally promoted division of social roles into female and male was seriously questioned in the 1920s. Women became independent and professionally active. They also began to manifest their position through their clothing: the dominant style rejected the ballast of decorativeness and was sometimes described as masculinized. In the art world, it became fashionable to borrow from the attire of the opposite sex. Sexual ambivalence suggested by clothing can be read from one of Stieglitz's portraits of O'Keeffe: her pale face looming up from under an ink-black bowler hat. The male headgear, like an attribute of power reclaimed by women, gave the artist an aura of an emancipated person. Stieglitz took many photographs of her, examining almost every detail of her body with the camera's eye. These nude studies drew the public's attention to O'Keeffe as the photographer's muse and model rather than as an artist in her own right. The photographed body, sometimes presented against the backdrop of her floral paintings, was practically equated with a painterly motif: the creative act was being compared to a carnal one. These photographs had a huge impact on the reception of O'Keeffe's works, "as if art were foremost the fruit of a woman's physical being, rather than an autonomous conscious result of artistic subjectivity"¹. Consequently, the approach to her painting was marked by conventional notions of female artistry. What was emphasized in O'Keeffe's work was the feminine inclination to soft, organic forms. As a result of the growing popularity of Freud's theories, her works were mined for sexual symbols. To the artist's irritation, the critics wrote of a "feminine perception and feminine power of expression"² and praised her "particularly feminine intensity"³. Floral paintings produced

¹ *Women Artists in the 20th and 21st Century*, ed. by U. Grosenick. Köln 2001, p. 396.

² W. Chadwick, *Women, Art, And Society*, London 1996, p. 306.

³ *Ibid.*

by men were not interpreted in erotic terms; in evaluations of O'Keeffe's work, however, the issue of biological sex trumped professional assessment. As a result, the works and the woman's biological identity were never discussed separately. A special category was established: Władysław Kopaliński reports that Georgia O'Keeffe, "lauded as the embodiment of emancipated femininity, was afforded the position of a big star, but only on the female firmament"⁴.

At the same time, the feminists lamented O'Keefe's lack of interest in the women's movement of the 1970s. Attempting to reform the male-dominated art world, Whitney Chadwick wrote in her book: "it is hardly surprising that [O'Keeffe] responded with so little sympathy to attempts by feminist artists and critics during the 1970s to annex her formal language to the renewed search for a *female* imagery"⁵. We may assume that the reason for this was that, at this stage of development, still immersed in essentialist ideas, feminism was unable to offer the artist a new, satisfactory interpretation; all the more so that her position was by then established and appreciated. Among other titles, she had been awarded the Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree by the Art Institute of Chicago and by the University of New Mexico. She had been also elected to the American Academy of Arts and Society. Thus, there was no shortage of honors and awards. In 1946, the Museum of Modern Art in New York had hosted a retrospective exhibition of her work. Notably, it had been that institution's first ever individual exhibition of a woman's work.

Attempting to understand the situation, one must remember that the so-called second-wave feminism became interested in the artists who had no support of the political movement. The female artistic practice was reassessed in search of feminine style and female artistic tradition. The objective was to redefine tradition by inverting the binaries, valorizing the female experience and celebrating female sexuality. This strategy was promoted by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro at the California Institute of the Arts. The art education curriculum in the earliest feminist courses included the creation of abstract paintings taking as their basis the shape of the vagina. Oval, centralized, layered and petal-like forms were identified as the structures that valorize female anatomy. Such representations were termed 'central core' imagery; feminists would seek the prototypes of such imagery in the paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe. The artist was not content with the interest which she began to inspire in these circles. She also rejected the interpretations of her floral paintings in terms of feminine sexual sensibility. Nevertheless, this did not bring expected results. Even today, her work is discussed in the ways echoing

⁴ W. Kopaliński, *Encyklopedia „drugiej płci”*, Warszawa 1995, p. 184.

⁵ W. Chadwick, p. 307.

the notions of biological determinism. In a 2003 book devoted to female art, her works are described as follows: “at the same time, they are reminiscent of female anatomy and have erotic associations. Critics and the public have always dwelt on this aspect of O’Keeffe’s work, although the artist herself rejected such views”⁶.

In order to understand the ideas which shaped Georgia O’Keeffe’s oeuvre, let us briefly review her artistic biography. She began her studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. A year later, she enrolled at the Art Students League of New York. What was taught at these institutions was the conventional European curriculum. Although in 1908 O’Keeffe received the best still-life prize in her year, she was discouraged by the professors’ academic approach and preference for imitating ancient styles. She found an antidote to this conservative atmosphere at a small gallery run by Stieglitz. It was here that she encountered the works of European modernists – Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso for the first time. In 1912 she attended the University of Virginia Summer School, where she discovered the ideas of Arthur Dow, the head of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Columbia University Teachers College in New York. His influence is strongly present in the early phase of the artist’s individual work. Inspired by Japanese art and the experience of the Nabis, Dow developed a decorative, abstract style far removed from imitating nature. Simplifying the forms and striving for balance and harmony between the elements of the composition, he tried to reach the essence of things. At the same time, O’Keeffe read Wassily Kandinsky’s book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. The Russian avantgardist’s ideas about color and form, which ought to express the artist’s emotions and inner world rather than represent the external aspect of things, resonated with O’Keeffe. 1915 was the watershed year. She abandoned academic conventions and embarked on producing abstract, nature-inspired compositions. Her individual work resulted in sketches which liberated her imagination as well as her hand. She sent them to a friend in New York, asking her not to show them to anyone. Fortunately, the friend proved disloyal and the drawings, which she considered too valuable to be kept in a drawer, were taken to Stieglitz’s gallery. Alfred Stieglitz, always interested in young talented artists, commented, without knowing anything about the author of the drawings: “Finally, a woman on paper”⁷. He saw the works as “strongly feminine but unsweet, unsentimental”⁸. Fascinated with their originality, he proceeded to exhibit them in his gallery.

⁶ E. Buchholz, *Women Artists*, Munich, 2003, s. 92.

⁷ H. Galdzahler, *American Painting in the 20th Century*, New York 1965, p. 130.

⁸ Ibid.

Stieglitz displayed an honest interest in O’Keeffe’s work, encouraging her to seek new means of expression and, importantly, organized her first exhibitions. Their relationship, initiated by a series of letters about both art and life, developed into a permanent partnership. Despite the age difference of 23 years, they married in 1924. However, it was not an ideal marriage. According to Elizabeth Montgomery, “Stieglitz was gregarious, delighting in the intellectual arguments that seemed to follow him. O’Keeffe, on the other hand, treasured solitude and could not work when there was any distraction”⁹. Nevertheless, without resorting to any ideology, the artist won her independence in the relationship. Every year in the summer she would leave her husband and his circle of friends. Initially, she went to Lake Georgia and then to the deserts of New Mexico. There, she organized her studios, which nobody but herself could enter. Despite frequent separation, the relationship between O’Keeffe and Stieglitz lasted until his death in 1946. The American art critic Jed Perl claims that the two ushered in a new epoch of male-female relationships because it was the first instance of a partnership that was simultaneously amorous and artistic¹⁰.

I have already mentioned the great influence of photography on shaping the image of O’Keeffe as an independent artist. Stieglitz’s photographs did not so much reproduce her external appearance as “helped shape her reputation as a liberal and unconventional woman”¹¹. They were also of huge significance to herself. “From the first moment onwards, O’Keeffe fell in love with these unusual photographs of herself [...] In soft modulation of light and dark and an endless number of shimmering shades, Stieglitz’ masterly deployment of light reveals the substance and substantiality of O’Keeffe’s body in a manner normally withheld from the eye”¹². This became a source of inspiration for the artist: “I can see myself (in Stieglitz’ photographs) and it has helped me to say what I want to say – in paint”¹³, O’Keeffe admitted. In the new phase of her work she made use of tendencies and experiments current among the photographers from Stieglitz’s circle. She began working on the figurative paintings of flowers for which she is perhaps most famous.

Still life and floral painting – occupying the lowest level in the academic hierarchy of artistic forms – had for years been considered the only variety of pictorial art in which women could achieve perfection. Thus, flowers were a motif traditionally left to women. Nevertheless, in O’Keeffe’s rendition, they

⁹ E. Montgomery, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, London 1992, p. 14.

¹⁰ J. Perl, *Legendarna modernistka, Ameryka*, 1990: 233, p. 18.

¹¹ E. Buchholz.

¹² B. Benke, *O’Keeffe*, Köln 2000, p. 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*

acquired a completely unprecedented character. Beginning with conventional bouquets, she soon moved on to unnatural enlargements and close-ups of forms which would occupy the entire canvas. Frequently, a single flower is framed in such a way that the leaves and petals are cut off by the frame. Extreme close-ups mean that the plant, far removed from its natural proportions and uprooted from its context, becomes an abstract and timeless object. The painter's method is visible, for instance, in the series of six canvases entitled *Jack-in-the-Pulpit*. Approaching the same subject in many versions, from several angles, and gradually simplifying the form, she turns increasingly towards abstraction and reaches the plant's essence. Describing her method and her attitude to abstraction, O'Keeffe wrote: "The abstraction is often the most definite form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint"¹⁴.

Stieglitz's circle cultivated Kandinsky's ideas; they sought ways of expressing the spiritual experience of nature. O'Keeffe wrote about this in one of her letters: "maybe in terms of paint color I can convey to you my experience of the flower or the experience that makes the flower of significance to me at that particular time"¹⁵. The quote proves the immense significance of color in the artist's work. The portraits of flowers are principally studies of color, a search for its essence. In one of the monographs we are told that the painter, wishing to execute a study of blue, grew an entire bed of purple petunias in her Lake Georgia garden.

Kandinsky taught that what matters is the color and the form of the represented object, not the object itself. However, it influences the recipient's mind, evoking associations. Therefore, I believe that the flower motif was not chosen by O'Keeffe by accident. The symbolic language of flowers was known in the late medieval era and in the Mannerist period, and was artistically revived at the turn of the 20th century. Flowers depicted by the Symbolists can be linked with the *fin de siècle's* inclination towards combining eroticism and death. Duke des Esseintes, the protagonist of Huysmans's *À rebours*, collects orchids, the descriptions of which are evocative of genitals affected by disease, atrophied and rotting. There are clear allusions to mercury therapy, applied in the case of venereal diseases, which were understandably feared at the time. Bliss was inextricably linked with punishment, suffering and death. If we can speak of sensualism in O'Keeffe's paintings, it is of a different nature. The organic plant forms bend and flex disturbingly, their jagged edges open, the viewer is dazed by the warmth exuded by the poppies' intense redness and electrified by the mystery of the pansy's gleaming, yellow eye; the schizo-

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 28.

¹⁵ Ibid.

phrenic color combinations may astound, but we always remain in the garden of paradise, where the plants are untouched by disease. The flowers symbolize the greatness of nature. Their sensuality is calm, thoughtful and devoid of morbid associations.

The floral paintings are the best known and the most discussed part of O'Keeffe's oeuvre. The artist produced them in the first half of the 1920s. Although the flower motifs also recurred in her later works, new themes soon appeared. In order to get the full picture of the painter's achievement, it is worthwhile to mention several other, less famous motifs. In the second half of the 1920s, O'Keeffe began to depict skyscrapers, typical of New York's architecture. Her intention to address this subject met with the disapproval of her friends, who warned her: "even the men hadn't done too well with it"¹⁶. I suppose that what influenced this view was more than just the habit of linking O'Keeffe's paintings with organic, floral forms. It is natural for the viewers to associate the work of certain artists with particular motifs, which they value especially highly. Nevertheless, what we need to take into account in this case is the fact emphasized in contemporary feminist thought. Although they may seem neutral, aesthetic theories and frameworks are gender-marked. For centuries, philosophy of art had been based on a dualistic and hierarchical description of reality. The masculine element was associated with reason, whereas the feminine element was linked with emotionality and sensuality. This was reflected in the division of artistic subjects into typically male and typically female. The problem can be analyzed at an even deeper level, i.e. concerning the principles of the paintings' formal construction. As a result of the above, it was believed that women "didn't have sufficiently mathematical brains to be able to learn linear perspective"¹⁷. This, however, is a skill that must be mastered by an artist wishing to undertake the task of depicting a cityscape. The case of O'Keeffe, however, is rather unusual. Namely, her depiction of the city does not follow the principles of logic on which geometrical perspective is built: it is a vision of a city which is felt rather than seen. In the series of urban landscapes the artist attempts to render the atmosphere of the city at various times during the night and the day, in different atmospheric conditions. She seizes the transient moments which one would only glimpse out of the corner of one's eye, such as the blinding sunbeams reflected in a skyscraper windowpane. The geometricized, simplified forms of the imposing buildings are sometimes shown from below and at other times from above. The foreshortened skyscrapers convey the artist's ambivalent emotions about New York, which she found dynamic and fascinating as

¹⁶ L. Mintz Messinger, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, New York 1988, p. 50.

¹⁷ C. Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction*, New York 2004, p. 79.

much as claustrophobic and stifling. Her treatment of urban space reveals photographic and cinematic inspirations. The value of these paintings, in which the artist rejected conventional ways of portraying the city, is attested to by the fact that her first canvas depicting New York sold on the opening day of the exhibition.

In 1929 the artist made a journey to the deserts of New Mexico. This remarkable place, with its sharp light and rarified air, was to become a major source of inspiration in the approaching decades. In the mid-1930s she produced, for instance, such well-known works as *Ram's Head with Hollyhock* or *Summer Days*. They are astonishing landscapes, provoking associations with the atmosphere of Surrealist paintings. In the works from this series, over a landscape – depicted as if from a distance, in keeping with the principles of aerial perspective – unsupported and magnified animal skulls and flowers float mysteriously. The skull is depicted frontally, with the horns stretching towards the corners of the canvas. The artist would find animal bones when walking in the desert and she decided that they were a natural complement of the desert landscape. In their crumbled edges, worn surfaces and sun-bleached colors O'Keeffe saw the essence of the desert. As she wrote herself, “the bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something keenly alive on the desert even tho' it is vast and empty and untouchable – and knows no kindness with all its beauty”¹⁸. In these paintings, the bones symbolize the dual nature of the desert, at once magnificent and inaccessible.

When it comes to combining a fragment of the skeleton with the landscape, an interesting solution can be observed in a series of paintings depicting animal pelvises. O'Keeffe was captivated by the compositional possibilities afforded by the oval apertures in these naturally shaped forms. The cycle comprises several canvases depicting entire bones or their fragments in close-up. The pelvis is usually situated centrally, in the foreground. Its carefully modeled convex-concave surfaces are the first to attract the viewer's attention, and only later does he recognize the elements of the landscape revealed inside the aperture (*Pelvis with Pedernal*). Gradually, the artist eliminates the minor elements of the landscape, restricting the painting to a bony frame encasing the blue sky (*Pelvis 2*, *Pelvis 3*). The resulting works are abstract compositions essentially constituting studies of the color blue.

Datura and Pedernal repeats the previously employed compositional device, juxtaposing the landscape and the flower, and again evoking a surreal aura. The flower of unnatural size hovers over a mountainous landscape seen at some distance. The plant's calyx attracts the viewer's gaze, isolating it from

¹⁸ L. Mintz Messinger, p. 72.

the external world. I believe that this open, centrally depicted flower from O'Keeffe's painting may evoke associations with a mandala. The mandala, denoting a circle in Sanskrit, is an intricate image painted on banners or poured from colored sand. In Asian religions, particularly in Tibetan Buddhism, it is a ritual form which facilitates concentration and meditation. According to Jung, the mandala symbolizes the supreme unity between consciousness and the unconscious. Contemporary man may experience it spontaneously, regardless of his or her continent of origin, as a result of intense inner experience. It allows one to reach a state of mental harmony and facilitates the process of individuation. The mandala may sometimes assume the form of a flower. Interpreted symbolically, a flower may denote the mystical center¹⁹. Therefore, we are entitled to speak of secular mysticism in O'Keeffe's paintings. This mysticism and the unique mood are what O'Keeffe's works share with those of the German Romantic landscape painter, Caspar David Friedrich. Friedrich's landscapes – resembling visions – feature Gothic ruins, the chalk cliffs of Rügen island and impenetrable fir forests. This portentous scenery is depicted with remarkable precision. However, his paintings are not restricted to a naturalistic representation, but are rich in symbols and national references. Most of them are spiritual in tone. The painter worked in accordance with the Romantic principles, which enjoined artists to see the world through the eyes of their souls.

O'Keeffe's paintings are also invested with a strange aura; nevertheless, they are richer in the experience of 20th century art. Thus, it is worthwhile to note the differences between these two artists. What must be emphasized is the dissimilar treatment of space. In Friedrich's case we are dealing with carefully framed fragments of the natural landscape, which allow an in-depth visual penetration all the way to the illusory horizon. O'Keeffe, on the other hand, often seeks original compositional solutions on the basis of the achievements of photography. Her landscapes often lack a horizon. For instance, in *The Lawrence Tree*, the eponymous object is seen from below, as if from the perspective of someone lying supine. This serves to emphasize the monumentality of the tree. Because the trunk of the pine tree is diagonally positioned, the viewer's gaze is directed upwards, towards the starry sky.

Similar solutions, inspired by the photographic perspective, can be found in some of O'Keeffe's urban landscapes, for instance in the claustrophobic, overwhelming *City Night*. We are unable to contemplate the depth of the space, as is the case in a traditional Friedrich landscape; instead, our gaze is directed upwards, trying to liberate itself from under the buildings encroaching from both sides.

¹⁹ Cf. W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 1990, p. 184.

Other unconventional arrangements of painterly space can be found in a series of works from the 1960s. Under the influence of her air travels, the artist produced many abstract, minimalist compositions which show the views from plane windows. They are regarded as typical examples of the Romantic tradition in art, even though abstraction and figurativeness overlap in them. These compositions “defy contemplation from the customary horizontal axis. Robbed of conventional centralized perspective, these aerial views portray the depth which extends downwards rather than into the distance”²⁰.

In *Pelvis with Pedernal*, the fragment of the landscape is depicted through an aperture in a bone, constituting a bizarre monocle. Such representation of nature could be regarded as the artist’s unwittingly jocular comment on the dominance of sight in art. Aesthetic theorists had once held that visual activity was connected with the intellect and, as such, was worthy of being privileged. Nowadays, the political aspect of the gaze is emphasized. Nature couched in philosophical terms, which absorbed its beauty and terror, was considered tamed and controlled. From this perspective we can assume that in Friedrich’s paintings the visual distance perpetuates the notion of mastering nature. Gazing through the pelvis peephole in the series of O’Keeffe’s works, on the other hand, can be seen as commenting on the ideology of distanced contemplation, which offers a fragmented vision in lieu of the promised universality.

Friedrich’s paintings are devoid of human presence. From time to time a solitary figure appears, an observer of nature’s spectacle. In contrast, O’Keeffe’s landscapes never juxtapose eternal nature and the transient male figure. Often, however, as if in a Surrealist collage, different realities are brought into contact – the varisized elements of the landscape and the hovering animal bones or flowers. The German Romantic’s landscapes were based on *plein air* sketches and are thus indirect vistas of nature. O’Keeffe, on the other hand, painted directly in the natural surroundings, driving her black Ford through the desert. The car was capacious enough to serve as a studio. At the same time it offered protection from the heat and rain. Working directly in the open air was an attempt to overcome the duality between man and nature.

The idea of women’s freedom is rooted in the Enlightenment. Mary Wollstonecraft demanded equal rights for women in her (now canonical) work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The emancipationists realized that the major motto of the French Revolution – liberty, equality, fraternity – did not necessarily apply to both sexes. After the beheading of Marie Antoinette, the famous sentence was spoken: “woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she

²⁰ B. Benke, p. 83.

should also have the right to mount the platform”²¹. Nowadays we understand that the importance of suffrage lies also beyond its political dimension. It is an inner independence, which O’Keeffe probably possessed. “She remained independent from shifting art trends and stayed true to her own vision which was based on finding the essential abstract form in nature”²², as we learn from a website devoted to the artist. Resisting confinement to a box labeled ‘feminine sensibility’, she simultaneously rejected attempts at unambiguous classification of her work. The artists from Stieglitz’s circle liked to humiliate her with the description “the best woman painter”²³. O’Keeffe considered herself the best painter, without accepting the sexual divide and its attendant hierarchy. At the same time, in her remarks she would often disassociate herself from men and imply that her power was in some way linked to her sex²⁴. She did not want to be identified with the feminist circles, but she also admitted: “I feel there is something unexplored about woman that only a woman can explore”²⁵. These numerous illusory contradictions reflect the artist’s independent spirit. It was not by accident that she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the U.S., from Gerald Ford in 1977. O’Keeffe died in 1986; her ashes were scattered over the New Mexico deserts, where they hover, free of our earthly dilemmas connected with the attempts at unequivocal classification, categorization and interpretation of her art.

Translated by Krzysztof Majer

**WOLNOŚĆ W GRANICACH FEMINIZMU.
INTERPRETACJE SZTUKI GEORGII O’KEEFFE
(streszczenie)**

W tekście przedstawiona jest refleksja nad historią interpretacji dzieł Georgii O’Keeffe dokonywanych poprzez pryzmat jej płci. Autorka proponuje wyjście poza schemat opisu tego malarstwa w kontekście kobiecej wrażliwości i symboli erotycznych. Wykorzystuje literaturę dotyczącą sztuki kobiet i estetyki feministycznej, która dostarcza informacji o świecie sztuki zdominowanym niegdyś przez mężczyzn i o standardach estetycznych tylko pozornie uniwersalnych. Opracowania biograficzne dotyczące życia i twórczości O’Keeffe, a szczególnie analizy wypowiedzi artystki, są dla autorki tekstu źródłem wiedzy na temat idei inspirujących malarzkę. Należą do nich między innymi koncepcje artystyczne Kandinsky’ego i osiągnięcia modernistycznej fotografii. Stanowią one podstawę badania treści i formy malarstwa O’Keeffe. Autorka artykułu skupia się na głównych tematach twórczości amerykańskiej artystki: kwiatach, pejzażach i koś-

²¹ Cited in: W. Stephens, *Women of the French Revolution*. Alcester 2007, p. 249.

²² www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geok/hd_geok.html.

²³ W. Chadwick, p. 303.

²⁴ J. Perl.

²⁵ www.brainyquote.com/quotes/author/g/georgia_okeeffe.html.

ciach zwierząt. Z uwagi na przypisywane jej malarstwu związki ze sztuką romantyzmu, konfrontuje te osiągnięcia z dziełami Caspara Davida Friedricha. Zdaniem autorki malarstwo niemieckiego malarza charakteryzuje zdystansowana kontemplacja, natomiast O'Keeffe stara się przezwyciężyć dualizm człowieka i przyrody. Znamienne jest, że po śmierci artystki, zgodnie z ostatnią wolą, rozrzucano jej prochy na pustyni. W ten sposób zintegrowała się z przestrzenią w sposób dosłowny. O'Keeffe unosi się tam wolna od naszych roszczeń do jednoznacznej interpretacji jej sztuki.

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SPACES OF FREEDOM: THE ROLE OF GEOMETRY IN LAND ART

Abstract: The issue of space played a significant role in 20th century art. The notion evolved from abstract modernist space to real surroundings in which the work, the artist and the recipient all functioned. In this paper, the author addresses the issue of space comprehended in terms of freedom, which was understood very broadly by the representatives of Land Art, i.e. both as artistic freedom and as the liberation of mankind. The Land Artists argued that the works shown in galleries were disconnected from social life, and only functioned as a laboratory of new forms and projects. Therefore, they attempted to invert the relation between the 'appropriate' and the 'inappropriate' environment for art, looking for sites which were not burdened with cultural meanings, and thus to widen the scope of art's presence. They were particularly eager to realize their projects in deserts and in remote, isolated, barely accessible spaces. Especially the mountains, prairies and deserts of south-eastern America fascinated them on account of their vast expanses of entirely or almost entirely empty landscape. Such spaces gave them a sense of limitless freedom. At the same time – according to the author – the Land Artists liberated geometric forms from stereotypes and their strong cultural markedness. In their works, geometric forms acquire new, unprecedented meanings, alluding to entropy, decomposition, transience and processuality. These artists demonstrate that the Euclidean shapes do not necessarily convey universal meanings (as was assumed by Malevich and Mondrian, and many artists who followed them) but can be also associated with what is individual and fleeting. Consequently, geometry reveals its descriptive powers; it can be associated with narration (Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*), process (the actions of Dennis Oppenheim), the recording of transience and movement (Richard Long), and predominantly the unlimited freedom of space, time, matter and artistic expression.

Keywords: geometry – freedom – Land Art

A significant issue raised by the artists active in the 1960s was the necessity of appreciating the importance of the site at which the artwork is created and the role which it plays in the work's reception. Among the first artists to address this problem were the Minimalists. Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen wrote: "Minimalism ... illustrated that the work is not a definitive unity of form and meaning, but a fleeting creation, whose continual production requires not only

the participation of an artist, but also that of the recipients and the conditions of its presentation. With such a notion of the artwork, Minimalism laid the foundations for the development of site-specific art, reflecting the decisive conceptual change taking place within our whole culture in the 1960s, a switch from essentialist to relationist thinking". The critic stated that when the movement "addresses the theme of contextuality, it does so yet again in an idealistic manner"¹. Evident in the work of such Minimalists as Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd or Robert Morris is their attention to the site, albeit perceived primarily as specific gallery space – which meant that the addressed issues were considered in an artificial, isolated space, without any relation to real life. It was only the representatives of Land Art and Public Art who decided to transcend the boundaries of the gallery and began to implement their projects directly in the open space or in the city space². Grzegorz Dziamski is correct in observing that "the aim of Robert Smithson, as well as other American representatives of Land Art, was to lead art out of enclosed gallery spaces and to recover its position in extra-artistic space"³. In the case of Earth Art, it was an expansion towards nature. The works shown in galleries did not have their place in social life and were only functioning as a laboratory of new forms and projects. Therefore, the Land Artists began an attempt to invert the relations between the 'appropriate' and the 'inappropriate' environment for art, looking for sites which were not burdened with cultural meanings. They were particularly eager to realize their projects in deserts and in remote, isolated, barely accessible spaces. Especially the mountains, prairies and deserts of southern and eastern America fascinated them on account of their vast expanses of entirely or almost entirely empty landscape. Such space gave them a sense of limitless freedom. Their search for it may be linked with the hippie dreams of finding 'the land of happiness'. In this case, freedom is understood as the eradication of conflicts rather than producing a solution. This eradication was supposed to transpire through locating a place (actual or imaginary) in which problems would simply disappear. Thus, these artists did not understand freedom as a right to express their opinions in an ongoing debate (as was the case with the representatives of Public Art⁴), but instead

¹ S. Schmidt-Wülffen, "Forget Minimalism". *Minimal/Maximal. Minimal Art and its Influence on International Art of the 1990*, exhibition catalogue, curated by Peter Friese, Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen, Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, 1994, p. 65.

² Of course, various actions such as happenings also frequently took place outside the gallery; however, their aims were different – they were not intended as an analysis of the site and its specificity, but as a means of activating the viewer.

³ G. Dziamski, *Sztuka u progu XXI wieku*, Poznań 2002, p. 180.

⁴ In Public Art, the artist's independence was identified with the right to express his or her own, frequently controversial opinion, to provoke a debate, to engage in polemics. Freedom was understood as a determiner of democracy, which – according to Rosalyn Deutsche – constituted

envisioned agreement and unity in thought. As a result, the Land Artists were looking for the spaces completely free of any cultural or political contexts and meanings, autonomous and free of conflicts, pure and not dependent of mundane circumstances. Only there would it be possible to find complete artistic freedom. The enormous, seemingly endless landscapes of some American states proved ideal for this purpose. Michael Heizer was particularly fond of the dry desert valley and the eroding mountains in the vicinity of Las Vegas, Nevada. Smithson enjoyed the surroundings of the Great Salt Lake in Utah, while Dennis Oppenheim often returned to the St. John River in Maine. The uniqueness of the latter – according to the artist – consisted in the sheer scale of the empty terrain, which was simultaneously located near one of the most crowded cities of America⁵.

It is interesting to note that, while choosing the spaces that were entirely open and free both in the physical and the figurative terms, the Land Artists decided to use geometric shapes in their works. In the cultural tradition, such forms are laden with meaning. Crosses, circles, triangles and spirals immediately produce a series of symbolic references. Furthermore, they bring to mind the European avant-garde, from which the American artists quite decisively disassociated themselves. I am convinced, however, that this choice was far from accidental and that, as a result, geometry acquired a new meaning in Land Art: these forms began to be conceived of differently. It is particularly interesting to apply this perspective to the work of four representatives of Land Art: Robert Smithson, Richard Long, Dennis Oppenheim and Walter de Maria.

The key issue, detectable in almost all of Robert Smithson's artistic activity, is his interest in mutability, fragility and transience. The artist addresses this issue both with reference to natural areas, i.e. 'sites', in which he realizes his projects, and to gallery spaces, termed 'non-sites'⁶. The artist's parallel activities inside and outside the gallery stemmed from his conviction that the contemporary landscape continues to be perceived as a kind of extension of the gallery, i.e. the space traditionally considered appropriate for art. He was

one of the main features of Public Art. See R. Deutsche, "Agoraphobia". *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, London 1996.

⁵ Cf. H. Smagula, *Currents: Contemporary Directions in the Visual Arts*, New Jersey 1989, p. 276.

⁶ Stuart Morgan connects this term with the second phase of the artist's activity. Smithson used it to describe representations of the terrain on maps and photographs which were placed on gallery walls. They contain abstract place names together with material samples of the terrain (often displayed in chests or boxes), thus linking the notional, imaginary and distant with the concrete, direct and tactile. Cf. R. Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-sites" (1968). *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. J. Flam, London 1996, p. 364.

fascinated by the artificiality and the limitations of such spaces⁷. This is why Smithson did not discontinue exhibiting his work in white, sterile interiors, but rather endeavored to function in both spheres, internal and external, thus adding new regions to the realm of art⁸. He examined the opposition between the freedom afforded by natural areas and the restraints imposed on art by gallery spaces.

Beginning in 1968, the majority of Smithson's works were realized directly in the natural environment, which became a constitutive element of his projects. To a large extent, this stage in the artist's career referenced his earlier interests, which consisted in applying mirrors to sculpture. Such material involved reflexes and mutability, which were thus inscribed into the structure of the works. Subsequently, they were used in the *Displacements* cycle, begun in 1968. The mirrors were placed in a rocky landscape. The most famous work from this cycle is *Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan* (1969), sometimes referred to as *Nine Mirror Displacements*; it was described by the artist himself in an essay named after the work's official title⁹. Suzaan Boettger notices that the title of the aforementioned work and essay alludes to John L. Stephens's 1843 travelogue, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, in which the author outlines his visit to Mexico and Central America, adopting an anthropological perspective to describe "numerous and extensive cities, desolate and in ruins"¹⁰. Boettger believes that Smithson found in this a parallel to his own, frequently emphasized "appreciation for deteriorating sites and other manifestations of entropy, the degradation of matter and energy in the universe to simpler states of inertness and uniformity"¹¹. The *Incidents of Mirror-Travel in Yucatan* cycle consisted of a series of photographs depicting the nine locations in which twelve rectangular, twelve-inch mirrors were installed for a short

⁷ R. Smithson, "with *Avalanche*", *Avalanche*, Autumn 1970 [cited in:] *Land and Environmental Art*, eds. J. Kastner and B. Wallis, London 1998, pp. 203-204.

⁸ The dialectic between what is inside the gallery and what exists outside its walls has also emerged as an issue in the works of other Land Artists, among them Long, Heizer, Oppenheim or de Maria, all of whom have displayed photographs and other documentation of their 'open air' realizations in galleries. In Long's case, in interiors prepared for exhibiting art, the documentation was displayed alongside carefully arranged stones which the artist had collected during his walks. Interestingly, the artists who expanded towards nature did not entirely abandon gallery spaces, treating them on the one hand as contradictory to nature and open-air realizations, and on the other as complementary to their work, offering a possibility of emphasizing certain issues in terms of binaries such as nature/gallery, the original/the photograph, etc.

⁹ The essay can be found in the collection of the artist's writings: R. Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan". J. Flam, ed. *Robert Smithson. The Collected Writings*. University of California Press, 1996, pp. 119-133.

¹⁰ S. Boettger, "In the Yucatan: Mirroring Presence and Absence". *Robert Smithson*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 2005, p. 201.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

time. They were then “displaced” by the artist to a different territory, and introduced into a diversified environment; to a large extent, they modified the character and the perception of the areas in which they had been placed. At times the rectangular mirrors, the centerpiece of the work, were clearly visible and constituted a blatant invasion of the surroundings, as in the case of the *Second Mirror Displacement*. In other cases, they were barely perceptible among the surrounding nature (e.g. *Fifth Mirror Displacement*). Altering the location of recurring elements, the artist obtained diverse and fascinating effects. His work was generally interpreted as probing the notion of travel, progress and constant movement which precludes returning to the places already visited¹². Another interpretation held that *Incidents* present a physical journey through the landscape. The natural environment was always differently transformed, being reflected in the twelve mirrors, the various arrangements of which Smithson installed in miscellaneous areas¹³. As noted by Jeffrey Kastner, the work also addresses the issues of time and memory. This interpretation emphasizes the fact that a particular arrangement functions for a very short time (from the moment of assembly until the documentation is completed), whereas photography invests it with a timeless quality¹⁴.

In the accompanying essay, Smithson explains his motivation for creating the works and describes the subsequent “displacements”, illustrating them with photographs. What is crucial, however, is the conclusion, in which the artist ponders the concept of transience, also present in the realization. He emphasizes that, should someone return to the same place (which is very unlikely), he or she will “find nothing but memory-traces, for the mirror displacements were dismantled right after they were photographed. The mirrors are somewhere in New York. The reflected light has been erased. Remembrances are but numbers on maps, vacant memories ... Yucatan is elsewhere”¹⁵.

What is neither discussed by the artist nor addressed in the above interpretations of the work is the combination of geometric forms with organic ones – of artificial, man-made products and natural objects. On the one hand, the simple, geometricized mirrors employed by the artist are contrasted with nature, constituting a false, additional element; on the other, however, they blend – to a larger or smaller degree – with their surroundings. They are adopted by the landscape. Reflecting their surroundings, they integrate with them, introducing new qualities. As a consequence, nature seems much richer and more interest-

¹² This is the interpretation suggested by, among others, Suzaan Boettger in the essay quoted above (S. Boettger, p. 201).

¹³ J. Kastner and B. Wallis, p. 201.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ R. Smithson, pp. 132-133.

ing. By reflecting light, a mirror acquires a certain subtlety and fleetingness. As the artist himself stressed, “the mirror in a sense is both the physical mirror and the reflection”, it is “a concept and abstraction”, a displacement “of properties”¹⁶. Geometry, which is generally associated with introducing order and harmony, reveals a different aspect of the *Incidents* cycle. Despite the orderly and assiduous arrangement of the rectangular mirrors, they invest the entire work with disquiet, which generates surprise rather than the expected order. Especially in the case of those “dislocations” in which the artist placed the mirrors among trees and undergrowth, the effect of atomization, fragmentation or even decomposition is particularly visible. Not only that; it is practically tangible when one looks at the resulting photographs. In this way, geometry acquires new meaning, new character and tends towards transcending itself and the restrictions previously imposed upon it. Other examples of works based on the combination of mirrors and nature, the geometric and the organic, so as to transcend the boundaries of geometry and convey the notion of wandering, are *Ithaca Mirror Trail* (1969) or *Mirrors and Shelly Sand* (1969-70).

One of Smithson’s most significant realizations, crucial from the perspective of the notion of Earthworks, is his *Spiral Jetty*, built in 1970. It was situated in a desolate area known as Rozel Point, about a hundred miles from Salt Lake City. As the name suggests, it is a spirally shaped basalt jetty, 1500 feet long and 15 feet wide, continually washed by the dark-pink waters of Utah’s Great Salt Lake¹⁷. The artist chose this spot on account of its distance from the city and the remarkable color of the water, resulting from the presence of bacteria and algae¹⁸. The work was constructed so as to allow the viewers to stroll along it freely as if along an actual pier. From its inception, *Spiral Jetty* was subjected to the influence of all possible atmospheric factors and natural processes causing its gradual obliteration. From this perspective, the discussion which has continued for the last few years at the Dia Art Foundation (the legal owner of the work) is particularly relevant¹⁹. It revolves around the question of whether *Spiral Jetty* ought to undergo conservation or whether it should be left in its natural state. Among its other activities, the foundation is conducting research to estimate when nature will ‘absorb’ the work and ‘reclaim’ the shape from the time before the construction of the jetty. However,

¹⁶ R. Smithson, [cited in:] *Introduction*, <http://www.robertsmithson.com/introduction/introduction.htm>.

¹⁷ M. Sanford, *The Salt of the Earth*, <http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/sanford.htm>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The issue is addressed by M. Sanford in her essay titled “The Salt of the Earth”, published on January 13, 2004, on the artist’s official website: <http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/sanford.htm>.

the idea of leaving the realization ‘to itself’ upsets some researchers and art historians. Those in favor of conserving the *Spiral Jetty* emphasize the fact that the artist’s intentions concerning the work were not entirely clear. Due to Smithson’s untimely death in 1973, at the age of 35, no unambiguous directions were left as to the maintenance of his realizations. The supporters of conservation have argued that the artist’s interest in entropy is not necessarily synonymous with the wish that his work be completely and irrevocably subjected to its influence²⁰.

During the discussion on the fate of *Spiral Jetty*, some voices opposing the renovation of the work were also raised. Robert Storr, curator emeritus of New York’s Museum of Modern Art and professor at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, pointed out that ephemerality and entropy are practically inscribed into Land Art. He claimed that “Earthworks were not made to last forever. There is a danger when restoring them to make a more perfect thing than was originally done”²¹. Another person with serious doubts about the conservation of the work is the artist Nancy Holt, Smithson’s widow. She stressed the fact that her husband was fascinated by the unpredictability and mutability of his work. Smithson believed that it was sufficiently durable and strong to survive for a very long time. According to Holt, “He liked that the work was strong enough that it could survive these natural changes ... He loved that these natural processes can be seen.”²² These arguments are reinforced by the fact that the artist was visibly fascinated by the metamorphoses undergone by the causeway as a result of natural forces. This showed in his 1971 conversation with Gregoire Müller, when Smithson described the impact of the snow melting in the mountains and causing the water level to rise and temporarily submerge the jetty. When the water had evaporated, the resurfaced causeway was 80% white, covered in salt crystals²³. In his essay entitled *The Spiral Jetty*, he wrote that “each cubic salt crystal echoes the *Spiral Jetty* in terms of the crystal’s molecular lattice”²⁴. Therefore, taking into account the artist’s entire oeuvre, his interest in entropy and his interviews, it seems more in keeping with his intentions to leave the work be, rather than undertake conservation or renovation. Adding new stones or removing salt crystals from the causeway so as to restore its original, dark color – as suggested by some art historians and critics – would disrupt the natural processes and constitute an intervention of too great a magnitude. Smithson’s concept, formulated in his

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ [Cited in:] Ibid.

²² [Cited in:] Ibid.

²³ R. Smithson, “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysm is a Cruel Master – interview with Gregoire Müller”. *Robert Smithson. The Collected ...*, pp. 259-261.

²⁴ R. Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty”. *Robert Smithson. The Collected ...*, p. 147.

theoretical writings, very clearly references these qualities of the work. Therefore, I believe that it would be more in the spirit of the artist's ideas to leave the work to nature and observe the triumph of entropy over geometry.

What also attests to the artist's sense of the work's brittleness and ephemerality is the number of photographs that he took in order to document it, as well as the motion picture titled *The Spiral Jetty Film*. Its first frame depicts the causeway from the perspective of its center. Then, traversing the subsequent circles, the camera gradually makes its way to the end of the pier and begins to move away from the lake. The final shot shows the entire jetty, seen from the land, spiraling away from the shore and coiling itself towards the center. Krauss wrote that this frame results from constant camera movement and its 360-degree turn along the horizon of the Great Salt Lake; the horizon is re-defined and relocated through the points on the compass, and in this way the monotony of the landscape is conveyed²⁵. The author also invokes, by way of comparison, the notion of constructivist art, pointing out that "in the first half of the century, constructivist sculpture tended towards non-figurativeness on account of the non-representational, non-referential forms of the elements employed: smooth, transparent celluloid rectangles, glossy aluminum grids, dispassionate matte wooden or metal ovals. The realness of these materials, their connections with the workplace, the laboratory and transportation did nothing to collide with the aura of 'abstraction', with which their shapes invested the constructivist object. The object did not seem to exist in the ideal space of geometric graphs, handbook structures and engineers' tables. The transparency of the materials appeared to expose the ability of these intellectually engendered object models to open themselves to thought which would penetrate them from all sides simultaneously and conquer it from the inside. Therefore, the actual 'subject' of constructivism was the objects' transparency to thought, which was tantamount to a triumph of formal operations, logic or science over matter, a baptism of the object in the cerebral sphere. In this way, the constructivist plane attempts to dislocate the appearance of things and redefine the object as one seen from nowhere, or – as critical phenomenology would have it – seen by God"²⁶. Therefore, Krauss believes that "constructivism staged a triumphant entry into the very center of the material object"²⁷. As regards Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* or Richard Serra's realizations such as *Shift* or *St. John's Rotary Arc*, which Krauss discusses in her text, the centralization

²⁵ R. Krauss, *Richard Serra*, exhibition catalogue, Narodowa Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej "Zachęta", Warszawa 1994, p. 26.

²⁶ Ibid. To illustrate this point, the author supplies the following quotation: "For God, who is ubiquitous, width is directly equal to depth. Intellectualism and empiricism do not report to us the human experience of the world; instead, they show us how God would construe it". (p. 26).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

of the object “admits to a perceptual failure, to a severe attack of entropy on intuition, which – Smithson believed – ‘might result in sunstroke’. Looking for geometry to end all geometry, Smithson found it in the ‘immense roundness’ of his space, which he compared to a ‘rotary that enclosed itself’. The place seemed to suggest the methods which would serve to limit the arrogance and self-confidence evident in the art which he knew. ‘No ideas, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions could hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence’, he wrote”²⁸.

Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* and Krauss’s interpretation of that work open new perspectives for geometry. The Euclidean shapes – perceived in art as conventionalized and subordinated to certain overarching ideas connected with rationalism and a tendency towards order and harmony – prove capable of self-transcendence; they address the issues traditionally regarded as exceeding their possibilities.

A problem similar to that of *Spiral Jetty* arises in the work entitled *Spiral Hill* and the accompanying *Broken Circle*, both executed in the Netherlands in 1971. On the one hand, in *Spiral Hill* Smithson used the form of the spiral extending from top to bottom, by creating a white sand path on a brown hill. On the other hand, however, all attempts to visually centralize the work and to embrace it in its entirety must lead to disappointment. An additional effect of fragmentation is caused by the coexistence of the work with the nearby *Broken Circle*, constructed of sand, earth and water, measuring 140 feet in diameter. The artist was very precise in determining the links between the two works, leaving many sketches and drawings. Another aspect which he took into consideration in this project was its connection with its post-industrial surroundings and its damaged vicinity. The artist explained that “in a very densely populated area like Holland, I feel it’s best not to disturb the cultivation of the land. With my work in the quarry, I somehow re-organized a disrupted situation and brought it back to some kind of shape”²⁹. According to Eugenie Tsai, in *Broken Circle* and *Spiral Hill* Smithson proposed situating Earth Art in “mining areas, disused quarries, and polluted lakes and rivers as a means of mediating between ecology and the industrial”³⁰.

What is interesting in those works, apart from the abovementioned issues, is the use of the shapes – the spiral and the broken circle. The motif had often appeared in Smithson’s earliest works, when he still produced figurative

²⁸ *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. N. Holt, New York 1979, p. 11, cited in: R. Krauss, *Richard Serra ...*, pp. 29-31.

²⁹ R. Smithson, [cited in:] Kastner and Wallis, p. 60.

³⁰ E. Tsai, *Robert Smithson: Plotting...*, p. 30.

paintings. For instance, in *Feet of Christ* (1961), spirals are embedded in Jesus's feet, surrounding his wounds; in *Man of Sorrow*, the spiral is inscribed into the exposed hands. The motif was also present in objects created since the mid-1960s, e.g. in *Leaning Strata* or *Gyrostasis*, both made in 1968. The latter is built of triangular metal polygons of varying size, arranged so as to form a spiral. The shape also recurs in the 1967-69 projects connected with the concept of *Aerial Art*. On account of their size, these works were designed for being viewed from an airplane. Their reception required attaining a certain distance from the Earth, which is why such realizations were situated in the vicinity of airports and practically available only to those arriving or departing by plane. This can be exemplified by the 1967 work entitled *Aerial Map – Proposal for Dallas – Fort Worth Regional Airport*, which was supposed to be built from varisized triangular pavement slabs, arranged to form a spiral.

Smithson's works, as already emphasized, frequently feature the motif of the spiral. Why did the artist choose this particular shape? Interpreted symbolically, it connotes helicality, infinity, development but also regress³¹. In various traditions it has been associated with cyclicalty, immortality, as well as with disruptions of the natural order (e.g. a whirlwind). On the one hand, it suggested perfection, derived as it was from the circle, the ideal shape. On the other hand, however, it symbolized mutability and transience³². Its meaning was ambiguous and it was exactly this ambiguity that fascinated Smithson. As in the artist's general assumptions, what mattered here was the opposition of 'site' and 'non-site', the organic and the geometric, time and space. The forms which he used were also marked by duality, manifesting itself in the combination of perfection and variability (which can be seen as aberrance from perfection), progress and regress, and so forth. The artist demonstrates a new interpretation of ancient symbols, while at the same time emphasizing their arbitrariness as well as their inadequacy for new artistic endeavors. Similarly, the use of a circle – not an ideal one, but broken, unfinished, incomplete – attests to an interest in mutability and imperfection. Taking into consideration the artist's fascination with entropy, the use of these shapes can be interpreted as connoting the result of a natural decomposition of what was once ideal.

The form of an incomplete circle also appeared in *Amarillo Ramp*³³, Smithson's last work, begun in 1973 in Texas and completed, after his tragic death, by Nancy Holt, Richard Serra and Tony Shafrazi. It was a ramp of 400 feet in length and 160 feet in diameter, made of stones, in the form of an

³¹ W. Kopański, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 1990, p. 399.

³² Ibid.

³³ This work is analyzed in detail by J. Coplans: "The Amarillo Ramp", *Artforum*, April 1974 [cited in:] Kastner and Wallis, pp. 218-219.

unfinished circle, which could also be regarded as a small fragment of a spiral. The circle gradually rose above the ground, so that the observer, walking along the path on top of it, would be further and further from ground level. The work was situated somewhat similarly to *Spiral Jetty*: the entrance was located on the beach of a dried-up Tecovas lake, while the remaining part encroached on the area of the lake itself³⁴.

Analyzing Smithson's work, Stuart Morgan argued that the Earthworks, undergoing changes as a result of natural causes, allow the recipients to reconsider their relation to their surroundings, which may be rooted in 19th century landscape painting. The Earthworks, he claimed, allow for individual meditation and may lead to considerable and sudden emotional and intellectual changes³⁵. The invocation of the romantic vision of the landscape – typical of 19th century American art, where empty spaces are associated with freedom – is significant in view of the topic of the present volume.

In his work, Smithson went against history, focusing on the status quo. He did not share the notion of art as contributing to the valuable heritage of mankind, as something permanent and precious. Instead, he emphasized fluidity and transience, associated with the sense of freedom of both the artist and the recipients of the work. He saw in mutability what is currently most important, namely the lack of durable restrictions. This can be also garnered from the following fragment of his writings: "Theories, like things, are also abandoned. That theories are eternal is doubtful. Vanished theories compose the strata of many forgotten books"³⁶. This explains why the concept of entropy undoubtedly constitutes a very important point of reference in the artist's work.

The notion of transience and the slow decomposition of everything that surrounds us is also visible in the work of Richard Long. As in the case of Robert Smithson, there is considerable complexity to the artist's work. It consists in combining the realizations executed directly in natural surroundings (which Long himself described as sculptures³⁷), the works exhibited in galleries, and the accompanying short texts in the form of poems and aphorisms, with photographs documenting the open-space projects. All of the above constituents of Long's oeuvre are harmoniously intertwined, complementing one

³⁴ E. Tsai, p. 31.

³⁵ S. Morgan, "Sztuka przeciwko samej sobie: rysunki Roberta Smithsona". *Z notatnika kamerdynera sztuki. Wybór esejów i wywiadów z lat 1977-1995*, E. Mikina, R. Ziarkiewicz, eds., Gdańsk 1997, p. 21.

³⁶ Cited in: J. Flam, "Introduction: Reading Robert Smithson". *Robert Smithson. The Collected...*, p. XXV. The same quotation appears in Smithson's text entitled "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites", *ibid.*

³⁷ R. Long, <http://www.richardlong.org>.

another and creating a unified image of his work. In his introductory essay, published on the artist's official website (www.richardlong.org) and titled "Art as a formal and holistic description of the real space and experience of landscape and its most elemental materials", Long emphasizes that he has always been interested in nature³⁸. Although he has endeavored to make it the subject of his art, his method has been completely dissimilar from those employed by the artists of the previous decades and centuries. First and foremost, Long – similarly to other representatives of Land Art – went out into the open and began to employ the materials borrowed directly from his natural surroundings (e.g. grass, water, stones), which gradually, as the artist emphasizes, evolved towards the idea of "sculpture by walking"³⁹. He states: "I like common materials, whatever is to hand, but especially stones. I like the idea that stones are what the world is made of"⁴⁰. He has never been interested in nature's aesthetic merits, nor has he ever attempted to represent it mimetically or seek the hidden structure of reality, as was the case with the earlier tendencies of both ancient and modern art. His notion of art has not been significantly affected by ecological thinking, either. Long has been interested in nature predominantly as the material which can be used by the artist (i.e. its elements that can be employed in lieu of traditional visual means), but what has fascinated him the most is its ephemerality and volatility. Nature has proved an excellent means of depicting transience and the attendant changes.

Similarly to the notion of nature, the idea of walking is considerably well-established in cultural history. Discussing his views and his new concept of art, Long invoked the idea of the pilgrimage, the great migrations, the country walks taken by the English Romantics and the contemporary long-distance hikers. Nevertheless, in his case, walking – like nature – assumes a completely new, dissimilar character. Its function is to create art in a direct manner. In the past, artists often traveled so as to find inspiration for their works; visiting new places was supposed to facilitate invention. What is important for Long is the process of wandering in itself. It becomes a creative act, a work in and of itself. Walking through the English meadows, the terrains of South and North America, the mountains of Asia or the deserts of Africa, the artist leaves behind him the traces (made of natural materials, found on the way) or imprints of his own body. In this way, he has combined his interest in nature and wandering in a completely new, original way, investing them with a very

³⁸ R. Long, "Art as formal and holistic description of the real space and experience of landscape and its most elemental materials", Bristol 2000, published on the artist's official page: <http://www.richardlong.org>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ R. Long, "Five, six, pick up sticks. Seven, eight, lay them straight" (1980). Kastner and Wallis, p. 241.

different meaning than that traditionally ascribed to them. Nevertheless, it ought to be emphasized that his roaming is not intended to blaze new trails in the landscape or establish new roads. The ephemeral realizations which emerge during these walks are merely the records and traces of the journey. The artist values his freedom and does not wish to deny it to anyone who might one day embark on the same route.

Long's first journey-oriented project was *A Line Made by Walking* (1967). It was a straight line 'trodden' in a grass meadow. Taking the same route from one point to another, the artist caused the grass to bend, and a straight line, concave in relation to the surrounding green area, to appear. Long interpreted this realization as his "own path, going 'nowhere'"⁴¹. This was the beginning of a "new art which was also a new way of walking: walking as art"⁴². Expanding on the same concept, he wrote: "Each walk followed my own unique, formal route, for an original reason, which was different from other categories of walking, like travelling. Each walk, though not by definition conceptual, realized a particular idea. Thus walking – as art – provided an ideal means for me to explore relationships between time, distance, geography and measurement. These walks are recorded or described in my work in three ways: in maps, photographs or text works, using whichever form is the most appropriate for each different idea. All these forms feed the imagination, they are the distillation of experience"⁴³. In this way, Long emphasized the significant role of the artwork's experiential aspect as well as its processual character.

Interpreting the artist's work, Dziamski has argued that its central issue was the notion of walking, whereas all the accompanying poetic texts, maps, drawings, photographs as well as the objects emerging on the way were – as the critic put it – "merely means of evoking the notion of wandering and facilitating the viewer's imagination, but not in fact conveying ... the wanderer's experiences"⁴⁴. The emphasis on the process of wandering itself is particularly visible in such works as *A Six Day Walk over all Roads, Lanes and Double Tracks inside a Six Mile Wide Circle Centred on the Giant at Cerne Abbas* (1975), *A 2 and a half Day Walk in the Scottish Highlands/Clockwise* (1979), or *A Straight Northward Walk across Dartmoor* from the same year, and in his later works, such as *A 21 Day 622 Mile Road Walking Journey from the North Coast to the South Coast of Spain* (1990). The objects which emerged in the wake of these journeys were merely traces of the artist's movement, signs of his presence, but they simultaneously addressed the issues of transience and

⁴¹ R. Long, "Art as formal ...".

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ G. Dziamski, *Awangarda po awangardzie*, Poznań 1995, p. 144.

the passing of time. On account of their character and their connection with the site, they are sometimes described as ‘marked sites’⁴⁵. The concept is particularly evident when the works feature the traces of the artist’s feet or his body. For instance, in *Sleeping Place Mark*, executed during his wanderings in Spain in 1990, the artist photographed a dark circle in frosty grass, left by the tent in which he had spent the night. The ephemerality and the connection between the resulting work and the trace of the artist’s presence – even though it can only be viewed in the photograph – is startling in its almost tangible nature and its aura of a place abandoned only a moment ago. This is clearly in keeping with Long’s declarations: “the creation in my art is not in the common forms – circles, lines – I use, but the places I choose to put them in”⁴⁶.

However, I do not believe that the function of Long’s realizations ought to be limited to the documentation of his journeys. The artist was too engaged and precise in executing these realizations. The forms which recurred in his work most often were straight lines and circles. In the case of the already discussed *Line Made by Walking*, the artist used his own body, namely his footprints. A similar principle of ‘absence’ as a trace of presence informs the work entitled *A Line and Tracks in Bolivia* (1981). It was the result of the eleven days of the artist’s traversing the Bolivian Lava plain, where he ‘trode’ a straight path through the natural ground and the surrounding plants. In his other works, involving addition rather than elimination, Long would generally use the fragments of nature found on the current site – stones, sticks or gravel. Stones were used, for example, in his realization entitled *A Line in the Himalayas* (1975). The artist gathered light-colored rocks which he later used to form a line contrasting sharply with the dark stones and earth. *A Line in Japan* on Mount Fuji (1979) consists of large rocks placed side by side, forming a line against little stones. *A Line in Bolivia* and *A Line in Scotland*, both made in 1981, consist of vertically positioned rocks. Writing about these works, Long claimed: “my stones are like grains of sand in the space of the landscape”⁴⁷, thus indicating their ephemerality and fragility in relation to the universe.

Equally often, Long resorts to circles and rings. They are made of various natural materials found by the artist (stones, branches, etc.) or, like his line-shaped works, they emerge as a result of eliminating or ‘treading’ fragments of a particular terrain. This choice of shape was briefly explained by Long in one of the couplets included in his text *Five, Six, pick up sticks, Seven, Eight, lay them straight*: “I choose lines and circles because they do the job”⁴⁸. Among

⁴⁵ This problem is discussed by Dziamski in his book, quoted above.

⁴⁶ R. Long, “Five...”, p. 242.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

his works featuring stones were *Circle in the Andes* (1972), *Sahara Circle* (1988), *Asia Circle Stones*, executed in Mongolia (1996) or *Positive Negative*, made in the state of Oregon (2001). The 1978 *Circle in Africa* was constructed from tree trunks and branches, forming a fence of sorts. What was fenced in, however, was merely an empty fragment of a meadow. Long also made use of less durable materials, some particularly ephemeral. In 2003, in Maharashtra, India, he executed a cycle of works whose main material was a burnt fragment of earth in various phases of decomposition. In his sculpture entitled *Smokey Arc*, the artist built a circle from dry plants, which he subsequently set on fire: the work functioned until it stopped smoldering, when it transmogrified into a circle of ashes. In *Ash Arc*, Long made a dark circle by crushing burnt branches, visible against the white background of scorched plants occupying a large expanse. As part of the same cycle, he created a work entitled *A Walking and Running Circle*: he walked around on a surface covered in blackened ashes until a white circle emerged. All of the aforementioned works were made from extremely ephemeral and fragile materials. Furthermore, their processual aspect was absolutely crucial. As in the case of the lines, many of his circular works resulted from movement, constituting a direct trace of the artist's presence. Long wrote: "I like the simplicity of walking, the simplicity of stones"⁴⁹. Apart from lines, circles and rings, his works also occasionally feature X signs, i.e. two lines crisscrossing at various angles, including the right angle. In *England* (1968), the artist 'trod' a cross sign by walking in a flowering meadow, whereas in *Karoo Crossing* (2004), he removed some stones, creating two irregular lines forming an X sign.

The central issue in Long's work is transience and the passing of time, combined with the notion of lack, absence and trace left by someone (usually the artist himself) who is not present there anymore. The works are strongly imbued with an aura of mystery. Photographic documentation is also crucial, investing the realizations with added mystique, facilitating the multiplication of meanings and the development of interpretation. In the photographs the issue of lack and absence is intensified and much more keenly felt. Long emphasized that walking also enabled him "to extend the boundaries of sculpture, which now had the potential to be de-constructed in the space and time of walking long distances. Sculpture could now be about place as well as material and form"⁵⁰.

An important element in Long's work are realizations exhibited in galleries. In these works, as in his actions performed in natural surroundings, the artist usually employs simple geometric shapes (such as lines or circles) and their

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ R. Long, "Art as formal...".

variations (semicircles, rings, etc.). The stones or other materials used in the projects are 'found' during his wanderings. Thus, they constitute a certain documentation of his journeys, an attempt at transferring a fragment of nature into the gallery interior. The principles on which the works presented there are based are similar to those that govern his creations in the natural surroundings. They consist of imprints of his body parts or are arranged from the elements found and selected by him in the countryside. Although they appear in the gallery space, they often retain their ephemeral character because the artist arranges them directly on the floor or on the wall. This means – especially in the case of works featuring handprints or footprints – that they are inextricably connected with their place of origin. Additionally, the material which the artist chooses (e.g. mud or stones) on the one hand links the emergent works with nature, but on the other makes for their transitoriness. When the mud begins to crack and fissure, the work starts to fade and decompose.

In the work of yet another representative of Land Art – Dennis Oppenheim – geometry is both a means of reflecting on the process and an opportunity to transcend boundaries, liberating the artist's projects from time and space. According to Dziamski, Oppenheim's works resemble "shamanic gestures intended to elevate our relation with nature and saturate it with archetypal meanings, to negate its instrumental character"⁵¹. The artist chose the ritual because he believed that "through its rootedness in collective memory, it is what allows contemporary art to avoid ineffectuality and shallowness"⁵². Dziamski claims that Oppenheim's interest in the above issue consisted in his attempting to retain a balance between individual and collective qualities, between actions and their derivatives⁵³.

Among the artist's most famous works are *Annual Rings* (1968), executed on the partly frozen St. John river, which forms a fragment of the Canada–US border. In this work Oppenheim alluded to the growth rings which can be observed in a horizontal cross-section of trees; he cut rings in the snow and ice so that half of the circle was on the Canadian side, while the other remained on American territory. As a result of severe frost, the rings froze already in the process of their creation. Consequently, it was impossible to determine whether the work was already finished or whether it was perpetually in progress. Thus, process became the crux of the work. It turned out that nature 'recovered' the shoveled and incised ring more quickly than the artist was able to execute it. Oppenheim also addressed another issue. Namely, he undermined arbitrary, man-made divisions such as national borders or time zones. The St. John river

⁵¹ G. Dziamski, *Awangarda...*, p. 143.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

runs through a meridian which determines time change. Thus, one part of the ring supposedly functioned in a different time zone than the other. In this way, Oppenheim wanted to demonstrate the arbitrariness of territorial and temporal boundaries imposed by humans. Political boundaries are frequently considered a significant symptom of enslavement or spatial entrapment; the American artist's actions proved their irrelevance from nature's perspective.

The relations between time and space as well as the use of snow as the material characterized by exceptional mutability and ephemerality are all important aspects of *Time Line*, a work made in 1968. Riding a snow groomer at 20 mph on the frozen St. John river, along the US–Canadian border, the artist cut two parallel lines in the snow. The entire action lasted for ten minutes. One line was made on each side of the border. Thus, the political boundary determined the division between the lines created by Oppenheim. What the artist was interested in here were the relations between time and space. Oppenheim drew attention to the fact that although the time spent on executing his work was identical, its measure on the two sides divided by the artist was different. One half of the snow groomer was belated by an hour in relation to the other, if one took into account the time zone discrepancy. However, what the work emphasized apart from temporal inconsistency was spatial divergence; after all, Oppenheim and the snow groomer existed in two countries at the same time. According to Kastner, this work was intended to demonstrate the contrast between time as an abstract concept and the experience of time when one moved in actual space⁵⁴. He wrote: “Oppenheim's gesture illustrates how human mapping systems are imposed on the natural environment, reiterating the artificiality of man's mapping of space”⁵⁵. In this work, the artist transcended the spatial-temporal boundary. In this way, he can be said to have fulfilled man's perennial dream of being in two places at the same time and of joining the present and the future in one action.

A similar principle governed two other works made in 1968 and 1969. In *Negative Board*, realized in St. Francis, Maine, Oppenheim cut a line in the thick crust of snow and ice, filling it with sawdust. The artist himself interpreted this gesture as stitching the damaged ground so as to protect the resulting furrow. In his 1969 work entitled *Accumulation Cut* (Ithaca, New York), Oppenheim used a chain saw to cut a canal measuring 60 by 40 inches, situated perpendicularly to a frozen waterfall; the canal refroze in 24 hours. In this way, the artist's actions were repelled by natural processes. What is crucial in this work is the processual aspect of the action and the mutability of the work itself, the changes that it undergoes in the course of time.

⁵⁴ Kastner and Wallis, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Another example of a processual approach to art is the action performed in 1969. In *Cancelled Crop*, the artist sowed wheat in a rectangular field measuring 875 by 505 feet, in Finisterwolde, Holland. When it grew, Oppenheim used a harvester to cut a sign resembling an X, each arm consisting of three parallel lines. However, the harvested grain was not sold. As the artist emphasized, the natural development and processing of the plants were thus stopped. Consequently, a ritual return to the roots was achieved, briefly reestablishing the primitive system in which everyone produced foodstuffs for his or her own use. Oppenheim explained: “planting and cultivating my own material is like mining one’s own pigment (for paint)”⁵⁶. Some critics interpreting this work took the X sign to denote protest and negation in the face of economic processes which have also been felt in the art world⁵⁷. However, I believe that – taking into account the context afforded by Oppenheim’s other actions as well as by the artist’s remarks made during his interviews and discussions – his actions can be more readily seen as pointing to an interest in transcending gallery space and in accentuating the processual character of his art⁵⁸. The elements of protest and opposition, although undoubtedly present, are in fact of secondary importance. Freedom was realized by means of entering into natural phenomena rather than through the conflict of human ideas.

The processual aspect and the ephemerality of the artist’s actions were very significant in the creation of *Whirlpool* (1973), also referred to as *Eye of the Storm*. Standing on the ground, Oppenheim issued radio instructions to the pilot of a plane. The latter’s flying in narrow circles resulted in the discharged vapor trail forming a spiral which resembled a whirlpool or a tornado. The work was radically ephemeral: it began to fade already during its creation, which was further abetted by the wind. Therefore, similarly to other works by Oppenheim categorized as examples of Land Art, this realization only exists in the form of photographic documentation.

Viewing these photographs, one cannot but wonder why the artist put so much effort into staging a precise illusion of a whirlwind, especially considering its transient character and the fact that it was performed in a desert, where nobody but the artist could experience the action and its effects directly. It is equally interesting to reflect on the artist’s choice of geometric shapes, which are

⁵⁶ Cited in: *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Among other occasions, the artist addressed these issues in a discussion panel at the 1969 *Earth* symposium, devoted to the issues of the landscape, taking place at the White Museum at Cornell University. The other participants were Robert Smithson, Richard Long and Walter de Maria (cited in: *Robert Smithson. The Collected...*, pp. 177-187 and in the interview with Gregoire Müller, “... the Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master”. *Robert Smithson. The Collected...*, pp. 253-261).

generally associated with the permanent and the durable. In Oppenheim's realizations, they are trumped by nature and the complexity of forms appearing independently of the artist. I believe that Oppenheim's intention was to expose the arbitrariness of received intellectual principles – to show that in the human world, despite continued attempts to make ideas or artworks permanent or even immortal, nothing is constant or changeless. Everything is arbitrary, subject to the conventions assumed and reproduced by humans during a certain period.

The processual aspect is perceived differently in the work of Walter de Maria. Among his most important achievements are the two works, made in 1974 and 1977 respectively, both titled *Lightning Field*. The first was created in July 1974 in northern Arizona and is currently part of Virginia Dwan's collection⁵⁹. *Lightning Field* comprised 35 stainless steel 18-foot long poles, set 200 feet apart from one another, arranged so as to form a grid of five by seven rows. The artist described this project as a "permanent work"⁶⁰, because it focused on constant process and permanent change. Each time a lightning struck the poles, a new, unrepeatable 'artwork' was created. The site was also of great importance; the artist wrote that "the land is not the setting for the work but a part of the work"⁶¹. It was exactly through combining the effect of lightning and a construction situated in a remote place that the work's powerful impact was intensified.

Encouraged by the results of the 1974 project, the artist continued to experiment with lightning and the processual character of the ensuing realization. Consequently, he decided to create a similar work on a much larger scale. Finding an adequate site proved difficult on account of very particular requirements; the process took over five years. De Maria emphasized that the terrain needed to be perfectly flat, isolated from the world and attracting much lightning. Ultimately, the artist chose a plain in south-central New Mexico, where he could count on maximum atmospheric discharge. The work comprised 400 stainless steel poles arranged in a rectangular grid array. It consisted of 16 points set apart by 220 feet and 25 points at the same distance. All the poles were dug into the ground, revealing 20 feet of their length above. The entire work was exactly one mile by one kilometer in size. According to the artist, a casual stroll around the project took approximately two hours⁶². The realization was merely a construction which only acquired its full intensity during a storm, as a result of attracting lightning. In this way, it visualized certain phenomena existing in nature, which are rarely analyzed. De Maria wrote that

⁵⁹ P. Selz, *Theories and Documents in Contemporary Art*, Los Angeles 1996, p. 528.

⁶⁰ W. de Maria, "The Lightning Field" (1970). Kastner and Wallis, p. 232.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Cf. P. Selz, pp. 527-529.

he managed to demonstrate his main assumption, i.e. that “the invisible is real”⁶³.

Given the unusual character of *Lightning Field*, only individuals were allowed to enter the terrain, so as not to disrupt the harmony of the reception. Because photographic documentation constituted a very important element in the artist’s work, he took the photographs himself or arranged for carefully chosen photographers to take them, subsequently authorizing each document. De Maria radically limited viewers’ access to the work, emphasizing that excessive human density robs the work of its unique character. He claimed that “isolation is the essence of Land Art”⁶⁴. Significantly, no single photograph or group of photographs has managed to fully capture the character of *Lightning Field*⁶⁵.

In this work, the geometric simplicity of the construction was enhanced and extended by lightning, which participated in the creation of the work. However, the crucial aspect is its processual character. The metal construction does not constitute the work; rather, it is a mere skeleton or basis underlying a potential realization. Furthermore, it is impossible to determine when the work is finished. It is difficult to say whether such a moment exists at all, because each lightning strike engenders a different work. The resulting varied images are radically ephemeral and mutable. Its geometry is combined with the instability of the atmospheric conditions, which means that it undergoes changes itself. It is no longer something permanent, a symbol of durability; on the contrary, it becomes a means for the transient and the ephemeral to appear. Thus, a process is provoked. The space is enriched, only to return after a while to its primary, ascetic state.

The conceptual and ephemeral nature of many works classified as Land Art means that, frequently, they can only be experienced in the form of documentation. As a result, according to Dempsey, there is a growing tendency to preserve these special sites and facilitate access to them⁶⁶. This, however, provokes the question: is such behavior in keeping with the idea of Land Art, the unique character of which consists in the isolation of the works from the city and wide audiences in favor of communing with nature in its pristine state? Additionally, photographic documentation obliterates the spatial relations and the context in which the works function, as does organizing group tours to the site. If they are incorporated into the tourist infrastructure,

⁶³ Ibid., p. 530.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁶ A. Dempsey, *Styles, schools and movements – an Encyclopedic Guide to Modern Art*, London 2002, p. 262.

they will lose their unique character and their independence, achieved through their functioning in a free and open space. Additionally, the natural processes of decomposition, foreseen by the artists, will be disrupted. On the one hand, heightened viewer presence will accelerate the destruction of the work; on the other, however, all attempts at conservation will stop the natural processes which are an integral element of the artistic idea.

One of the central problems addressed by Land Art is the collision of the natural and organic with geometric elements created by the artists. The Euclidean shapes acquire new meanings, having to do with entropy, decomposition, transience and processuality. According to Krauss, already quoted above, we are dealing with geometry transcending its own limitations, going beyond its traditionally ascribed features and functions. It is a singular “geometry beyond geometry”, or even “geometry to end all geometry”⁶⁷. These artists demonstrate that the Euclidean forms are not necessarily connected with the absolute and can also express that which is individual and fleeting. Consequently, geometry reveals its descriptive powers; it can be associated with narration (Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*), process (Oppenheim’s actions), records of transience and movement (Long), and predominantly the unlimited freedom of space, time, matter and artistic expression, without provoking disputes. Through their move into desolate, deserted and inaccessible spaces, coupled with their application of the Euclidean shapes to art, the Land Artists invite the recipient to perceive entirely different, new ‘spaces of freedom’.

Translated by Krzysztof Majer

PRZESTRZENIE WOLNOŚCI – ROLA GEOMETRII W LAND ARTIE (streszczenie)

W sztuce XX wieku problem przestrzeni odgrywał istotną rolę. Sposób jej pojmowania ewoluował przechodząc od abstrakcyjnej przestrzeni modernistycznej po realne otoczenie, w którym funkcjonuje dzieło, artysta i odbiorca. W artykule tym autorkę interesuje zagadnienie przestrzeni pojmowanej w kategoriach wolności, rozumianej przez artystów związanych z Land artem bardzo szeroko, zarówno jako wolności sztuki, jak też wyzwolenia człowieka. Twórcy zajmujący się sztuką ziemi zwracali uwagę, że funkcjonowanie dzieł w galeriach nie było powiązane z życiem społecznym, zamieniając się w laboratorium nowych form i projektów. Dlatego zaczęli dążyć do odwrócenia relacji między „właściwym” i „niewłaściwym” środowiskiem sztuki, poszukując miejsc nieobciążonych kulturowymi znaczeniami i poszerzając w ten sposób zasięg występowania sztuki. Szczególnie chętnie tworzyli oni na pustyniach i w miejscach odludnych, trudno dostępnych, odseparowanych z powodu dużej odległości lub braku możliwości dojazdu.

⁶⁷ R. Krauss, *Richard Serra...*, p. 26.

Zwłaszcza góry, prerie i pustynie południowo-wschodniej Ameryki fascynowały ich ze względu na rozległość i ogrom niemal całkowicie lub całkiem pustego terenu. Przestrzeń ta dawała poczucie nieograniczonej wolności i swobody. Jednocześnie, jak zauważa autorka, artyści związani ze sztuką ziemi wyzwolili formy geometryczne ze stereotypów i silnego oznaczenia kulturowego. W dziełach Land artu formy geometryczne nabierają nowych, wcześniej nie uwzględnianych znaczeń. Odnoszą się do zagadnień entropii, rozpadu, przemijania, upływu czasu i procesualności. Artyści pokazują, że kształty euklidesowe nie muszą być nośnikami treści ogólnych (co zakładali Malewicz i Mondrian, a po nich wielu innych artystów), lecz mogą łączyć się z tym, co jednostkowe, ulotne. Okazuje się, że geometria może mieć charakter opisujący, może być związana z narracyjnością (*Spiral Jetty* Roberta Smithsona), procesem (działania Dennisa Oppenheima), zapisem przemijania i przemieszczania się (Richard Long), a przede wszystkim nieograniczoną wolnością przestrzeni, czasu, materii, wypowiedzi artystycznej.

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„THEY CALL IT ILLEGAL, WE CALL IT FREE” – STREET ART IMAGES SET FREE

Abstract: Street art is a new form of art that fully exploits all of the forms of freedom available within the city culture. It liberates itself from place, time, and medium, but also from all institutions. This does not mean that it does not interact with the art world. It does, but it still as “a guest, not a permanent resident”. Thus, street artists want to free themselves from all the requirements of art and its evaluation by their post-dichotomous stand. Time will tell if this attitude can save street art from the total absorption into the domain of mass culture in the mainstream of art.

Keywords: graffiti – street art – contemporary art – urban culture

Freedom **from** place, time, social and art rules, from seriousness, prevailing world view, and taxes. Freedom **to** convey one’s spontaneous emotions and vivid imagination, to take risks, and submit to any oppression, including the destruction of one’s works. Such a declaration may be pronounced by any street artist, the affirmation of freedom being the main objective and driving force of this art. Certainly, we should not work ourselves into a state of exaltation but we ought to perceive the multiple threats to this freedom. However, the brand new, twofold street artists’ attitude, that we are going to call “post-dichotomy”, allows for the protection of freedom, via axiological indifference. The notion of post-dichotomy was introduced into the discussion on graffiti art by Martyna Śliwa and George Cairns¹:

“We propose that the example of graffers shows the ability of individuals and groups to live postdichotomous lives, in which such terms as «value», «vandalism», «property», «legality» cannot be read as symbolizing any singular meaning, whether positive or negative, in a particular social context.

¹ Borrowed from the article: N. B., Cairns, Doping with change: the contribution of post-dichotomous Ontologies, *Human Relations*, 2001, 54 (10), pp. 1303-1324.

Such a lifestyle does not necessarily stem from apathy, disinterest, hypocrisy, or self-marginalization, but constitutes a route followed out of choice by certain sections of society”²

When we observe this post-dichotomous way of life, we notice a release from any aesthetic, artistic, and ethical values and qualities, a release that does not consist of rejecting them but in choosing between them. The conjunctions most frequently used in this text will be *but*, *however*, and *on the other hand*, as they best convey the notion of ambiguity, fluidity, changeability, coolness, openness and constant widening of borders. Considering the phenomenon of street art from the viewpoint of the discussion on art, we will examine how it liberates images from diverse contexts.

In this text, I shall adopt the term *street art*, as it functions in the relevant literature; some explanations, however, are needed. Usually, this term encompasses any informal artistic activity in the public sphere, critical of reality. M. Żakowski tries to define street art as a set of

“discursively critical graphic practices present on the streets of contemporary western cities, focusing on communicating values opposed to the system of power distribution in culture, criticising the late modernity and the capitalist economy in the context of privatisation and monopolisation of the means of communication (media and others)”³.

However, such a definition is not compatible with artistic practice. Street art encompasses activities that are not only graphic, but also spatial; that are not restricted to big or the western cities⁴; street art does not always criticize modernity and capitalism, it often is connected with them in an unclear way. Street art, like once avant-garde, appears to be a set of diverse activities, impossible to define without ambiguity. It is possible to name the features common to most of its activities, but they do not occur in all cases. Not being born from a principle, and not having a manifesto at its origins, street art is an open, widening and unlimited phenomenon. In this article, I will use the term *street art* to refer to graffiti, stencils, stickers, street installations and subvertising⁵, and as a notion superordinate to the particular types of street artists’

² M. Sliwa, G. Cairns, Exploring narratives and antinarratives of graffiti artists, “*Culture and Organization*”, March 2007, vol. 13, p. 74.

³ M. Żakowski, Street-art i indywidualizacja. W stronę tożsamości awangardowej, (Street art and individualisation. Into avant-garde identity), *Kultura Popularna*, 2006, nr 2, s. 74.

⁴ Moscow abounds in graffiti. In Poland you can find graffiti even in the tiniest towns.

⁵ Recently street art includes flash mob/flash crowd i.e. meeting at a certain place, at a certain short period of time to perform some kind of happening. Compare with: J. Ryczek, Tymczasowe współkreowanie – flash mob w przestrzeniach wspólnych, [w:] *Czas przestrzeni*, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, Kraków 2008, p. 71- 83.

activities. Most of the authors discussing this form of art, as well as the artists themselves, distinguish between graffiti, as the original form, and street art, sometimes called post-graffiti or neo-graffiti⁶. There are numerous features that distinguish the classic graffiti from other forms of street art. First and foremost, the authors of graffiti call themselves ‘writers’, thus emphasising the social aspect of their activities rather than the artistic one. Graffiti was meant for their own circle, in order to mark their presence, to show their courage and ability, but above all, to oppose the whole social system (so-called ‘bombing’)⁷. The other forms of street art include some content comprehensible to the passers-by. They usually use mimetic patterns, often accompanied by comment statements. These forms may be amusing, irritating, annoying, they may attack; in other words, they enter into a particular relation with the onlookers. They use various media, mixing them to obtain the best connection between the form and the content. At the same time, graffiti and street art coexist, mix at festivals and illegally on walls, having a common feature: a gesture of freedom. It seems, however, that the term “post-graffiti” may be confusing, as it imposes chronology, while graffiti still exists as a separate form. Moreover, not all present forms and techniques are derived from graffiti (e.g. in Poland, stencils were prior to graffiti). Of course, we should be aware of the differences between graffiti and other activities, and I will make them clear in the subsequent parts of this article.

The differentiation between graffiti and street art is important when we consider them from the point of view of art and aesthetics. In the case of the recent discussions about freedom, street art emerges as a new form of art, existing outside the mainstream, and including graffiti, as well as stickers, stencils, or installations.

FREED FROM SPACE

The term *street art* makes us directly focus on two issues: the issue of space and the issue of art. In the field of modern art, the names of movements were usually formed on the basis of the medium or the object that the particular form of art concerned. The terms Pop Art, Op Art or Body Art were connected with the character of the given art form, trying to capture its essence. The expression *street art* refers only to a place where one can find this kind of art.

⁶ Compare C. Lewisohn, *Street Art The Graffiti Revolution*, London 2008, T. Manco, *Street logos*, London, 2004. It is worth mentioning that in Poland informal art as stencils, fliers, posters and street actions was chronologically earlier to graffiti, which appeared as a ‘novelty’ from the West.

⁷ Compare R. Drozdowski, *Obraza na obrazach. Strategie społecznego oporu wobec obrazów dominujących*, Poznań 2006, s. 98-132.

However, is the street as the space for art of such great importance to street art? Not in the literal sense. Of course, most of the graffiti or stickers are to be seen in the streets of big cities, especially in the places related to the progress of civilisation – the means of public transport, road signs, telephone boxes, or litter bins. It is an “external”, public, accessible art form. This does not mean, however, that we cannot find street-art works on country fences, deserted beaches, in places inaccessible to passers-by and tourists, in clubs, and finally, in galleries. On the other hand, not every work of art that you can see in the street is street art: architecture, statues, fountains, street theatre, outdoor exhibitions are not counted among the works of street art, although they can be taken over by street art. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine street art’s existence without the Internet, used not only to document or present the works, but also as a space for creativity. Thus, is street art but a concept placing art in the broad context of urban culture? Here again, the problem of the definition of the term ‘urban culture’ arises, as well as the one with deciding if there exists an alternative to this type of culture. The street art authors’ opinion on various elements of the ‘urban culture’ is twofold: on the one hand, they praise it, but on the other, they criticise it.

In the name *street art*, its first element plays an extremely important role, not because it indicates the place of the art, but because it frees the art from a place. Art is no longer confined to the church, the palace, the gallery, but it can emerge anywhere, surprise us, accompany us discreetly, or attract our attention in an intrusive way, changing us into involuntary onlookers. Street art tries to tear art back from its isolation, to which modernity had confined it⁸. Moreover, street art changes the value hierarchy of places. It is not presenting his work in a renowned gallery, but taking over least expected space that enhances an artist’s prestige. Graffiti artists climb the roofs and scaffolds to leave their tag in the least accessible, but most visible place; the authors of stickers paste them onto tram windows and on litter bins; subvertisers often engage in complicated activities in order to intrude on billboard advertisements. The pictures and words forming street art fight for space, using every surface possible, but at the same time, they are not particularly connected with places; most of them are bound to be destroyed. The pictures usually do not cooperate with their base, they do not adapt to its shape. They are something from the outside, just like a transplant⁹. They often move together with the surface they are painted on – trains, cars, trams, skateboards, as well as T-shirts, bags, or directly on people’s bodies in the form of tattoos.

⁸ About loneliness of art see: M. Czerwiński, *Samotność sztuki*, Warszawa, 1978.

⁹ Compare: A. Gralińska-Toborek, All my city in Graffiti – czyli bombardowanie przestrzeni miejskiej, [in:] *Czas przestrzeni*, op.cit., p. 45.

Certainly, there are works made deliberately for a given place, but not necessarily to order. Some artists specialise in using certain elements of their surroundings, introducing small or significant changes and giving them a new meaning. Such is the mode of work of the duet Darius and Downey.¹⁰ They work bending road signs, lamp-posts, and concrete poles towards each other, thus suggesting the existence of some personal relation between them. Mark Jenkins makes semi-transparent dolls out of scotch tape, and places them in various urban contexts. Sometimes, they hang on trees, climb statues or lamp-posts, at times, they swing on the cable of a telephone receiver. They appear in different places and at various latitudes¹¹.

Knittla is the nick-name of a street art author who ‘dresses’ posts, handles, lamp-posts, tree branches in knitted woollen clothes. Most of the works of street art are universal and may appear in any place, although there are of course local varieties, for example, the Brazilian graffiti *pichação*¹². Ella Chmielewska, having analysed graffiti in two cities, Montreal and Warsaw, states that graffiti is connected to place and enters into close relation with it.

“A graffito is a topo-sensitive language sign that points to itself while designating the local surface and referencing the discourse that surrounds it”¹³.

“For topo-sensitive signs (sign points of various kinds), it is the nature of the material relationship to psychological context, the condition of attachment, that in important way demarcates their semantic functions. The deictic field of sign is formed as much by the particular bond between the locale and the sign as by the indexical relations within the surrounding semantic field. Not a mere location but the type of material articulation, fixity, portability, degrees of freedom”¹⁴.

¹⁰ Compare: L. Reid, *The Adventures of Darius & Downey & Rother True Tale of Street Art*, London, 2008.

¹¹ Little Baby came also to Poland and sucked onto a thumb of Polish soldier from the statue *Glory to sappers* in Warsaw. You can see the photo on the artist’s website: www.xmarkjenkinsx.com.

¹² The website of this magazine says: “Straight tag was created and spread out by São Paulo’s writers. Far from being just a simple signature, it has already become a type style. It first appeared as a distinctive element used by those groups of ‘pichadores’ who later started to find their own way to paint these types. According to Lara (1996), they were influenced by punk and rock disc covers of that time with “breakness that reminded the gothic style”. This type style is recognized for its straight, long and sharp letters that usually cover most part of the surface. The peculiarity of this type style from São Paulo is unique in the world.” http://www.pichacao.com/adrenalina_english.htm.

¹³ E. Chmielewska, *Framing [Con]text: Graffiti and Place*, “Space and Culture”, vol.10, no.2, May 2007, p. 163.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Certainly, there are numerous works of street art that are related to their surroundings in this specific way, particularly when they emerge in a place carrying an important emotional content, e.g. commenting on current political events, or evoking memories of historical events. The example of Warsaw is then a very good one. On the 65th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, many contemporarily painted symbols of 'underground Poland' emerged, with the inscription 'we remember', and they found their way to the websites concerning street art. Similar signs may appear anywhere in Poland, and perhaps even in Montreal or London, without losing their meaning in these new localities, even though they would not be generally understood. Similarly, artists grouped around the "3-rd wave" crew in Poland, make different kinds of works devoted to a worthy cause (such as the situation in Tibet, using the portrait of the Dalai Lama). They are made so as to appear in any place, as any place is good to talk about human rights. Moreover, the artists are also prepared for this shift in meaning in a new context, and they leave the interpretation to the public.

The pictures' freedom from place lies in the fact that artists can, but do not have to connect their work to a place. This is one of the distinguishing characteristics of this movement. The artists themselves choose the location where they want to place their works (they may, for instance, plan for a work to be a movable object); but when the work is complete, they leave it vulnerable to changes, exposed to all kinds of intrusions. Often, the intrusion is unavoidable – the destruction of the picture is an intended effect. This is the case of many of JR's works; the artist, in places as full of unrest as Palestine or Delhi, puts up large-format photographs of their "ordinary" inhabitants. His works are quickly removed by the maintenance services, which results in the event's becoming a performance – tearing up huge portraits of living people by the representatives of the authorities has a symbolic meaning. Photographs documenting the cases of the pictures' destruction are as moving as JR's works themselves. One of his actions, part of the project 28MM: WOMEN consisted in sticking huge photographs of faces to the walls of a slum area in Phnom Penh. They were portraits of women who lived there. Shortly afterwards, the slums were destroyed – removed, flooded, etc. However, through these large-format pictures, the walls had been personified and all the acts of destruction touched metaphorically not mere objects, but people. In this way, JR uncovers the truth behind such actions: the destruction of houses involves the destruction of their inhabitants¹⁵.

¹⁵ Photos can be seen on : <http://kaszal.blogspot.com>.

FREED FROM ART

Today, we are not able to say what art is, as in the last century its borders became so extended that attempts at defining art were abandoned. It seemed that only an institutional definition of art, suggested by Georg Dickie, had some chances of explaining what art is¹⁶. Street art, though, is an escape from such a conception of art; it is an act of breaking free from the mainstream. Graffiti did not emerge to become “a candidate for rating”, it was free expression, self-appointed art. Writers perceived themselves as artists, as they created something, and they were reaching perfection. They searched for the assertion of their skills not in the art world, but in their own circle. The pictures, freed from the conceptual weight, were to speak for themselves, without the theoretical support of art critics.

“Nobody here was inspired by great art. This was a boring world. I avoided it like the plague. All these galleries made the impression of being morgues for the corpses of art, art which had lost its importance anyway”

– wrote Aaron Rose, a participant of the graffiti movement in the USA, the author of the famous exhibition *Beautiful Losers*¹⁷. The official art never interested street-art artists; they never aspired to the galleries. The art world, by contrast, is continuously interested in them, and, from time to time, it discovers and presents street art’s greatest personalities.

The interest of institutions in promoting street art is bigger than the other way round. Famous exhibitions, a growing number of publications, and finally, the interest expressed by collectors, all prove that the art world, having to keep their finger on the pulse, continuously monitors the field in question. Meanwhile, the street artists treat their relation with the art world as a useful arrangement. They accept invitations to exhibitions, like to earn money, acquire materials they need for their work, but they do not make themselves at home in the galleries, the street being their workplace. They let themselves have such contacts, as they consider it right.

Now, we must return to the notion of post-dichotomy. To organise an exhibition in a museum is not treachery or a breach of the rules, as no such rules were previously established. And what distinguishes street art from the 20th century avant-garde, despite numerous similarities, is that the former was

¹⁶ “An [original] artifact with a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the art world).

¹⁷ *Beautiful Losers. Sztuka współczesna. Kultura ulicy*, Art Museum in Łódź, 2007.

not created in the name of an idea, it does not publish manifestos, nor does it complete missions.¹⁸

Thus, no one has the right to evaluate its achievements, nor to accuse it of being inconsistent. Street art is a conglomerate and each work of art is created for different reasons and goals. Some artists refer to and seek their roots in the avant-garde, more willingly associate with artistic main-stream considering street art as a way to real art¹⁹. Besides, going from the street to art exhibitions seems to be more natural than the reverse direction, when professional artists start to go out into the street to seek their audience. There is a conceptual element in their works, an attempted dialogue with modern art, the awareness of its own identity. There are some artists that play with the world of art; their representative is Banksy²⁰. However, there are artists who intend to create without deep consideration of cultural manifestations and the fact that their culture is perceived in opposition to modernism is rather accidental than intended. According to Cedar Lewisohn, "The artists who pioneered graffiti writing (...) were in the main completely free of art history and its limited concerns".

If people in the 80's were painting tags on trains in the New York subway it was not so much the protest against modern art, as more of the protest against the overall socio-political system that pushed them into the social margin. Besides, graffiti is rather over its rough rebellion. Now, the artists change their street-gained skills into positions, money, and they are more attached to design, illustration, comic strips, and advertisements than to the world of art. Many of the artists follow their career of a designer or illustrator. One of the most famous and renowned Polish street artists, Zbiok, when asked about his projects sold to a clothing corporation answers: "I don't regard myself a street artist. I'm an illustrator, a painter who uses public space as one of the forms of promoting my work. Designing the patterns for clothes is natural for me.

¹⁸ Of course the discussion among street artists has been continuing over whether they should show their works in galleries, create 'legal' works, and serve commercialism by designing T-shirts and painting pizza place banners. The majority of them do not find it inappropriate emphasising that street remains the main space for their expression.

¹⁹ A good example is 'Tworzywo' crew that began with stickers and now is a renowned artistic group working on many projects.

²⁰ Luke Dickens' analysis a good example of such activity: *Peckham Rock*. Banksy illegally placed fake, prehistoric-rock art of a caveman with a shopping trolley on the walls of the British Museum. He also attached it with a proper sign describing the exhibit. He informed about it on internet and the news about the painting spread instantly in media. The museum could only respond to it positively and treated it as 'interaction with collection'. The museum borrowed the work for street art exhibitions then placed it in the gift shop. However, the author makes a good point that it is probably not the end to *Peckham Rock story*, L. Dickens, *Placing post-graffiti: the journey of the Peckham Rock*, *Cultural Geographies*, 2008, 15, pp. 471-496.

I don't feel deprived of freedom or independence (...) and this episode taught me to work in a more professional way, to discuss important and often touchy issues cunningly, using corporate money²¹. On the other hand, design eagerly adopts graffiti motifs and lettering to show its modernity, openness, and to target its product at young customer.²² Advertisements try to pass themselves off as street art using stenciling and stickering techniques.

In the art of graffiti, artists seek perfectionism in form. They want to achieve their own style and become masters; however, there are some who annex the area by using their own tags and what is important to them is their number not their quality. Once designed, a tag is like a stamp impressed hundreds of times at different places. In the case of legal graffiti, we could talk about particular decorative aspect of it, about calligraphy, ornamentation. Some of them, from the esthetic point of view, are extremely interesting, however, realistic works highly valued in graffiti circles could be perceived as kitsch. Stickers and bigger posters, on the other hand, are clearly careless and poor drawings, and their execution is not difficult. Instead of complicated graphic techniques a computer printer and a xerox machine are used. It is not the refined technique that matters. It is the apt joke. Liberation from the current principles of art occurs in the originality and authors' understanding. For an average recipient to differentiate individual style is not so easy a task. Almost all "wild style" works, formally the most exuberant style, seem to look alike. All artists work under pseudonyms, sign their works with tags, crews usually carry semantically empty names²³. The fonts are available on the internet as everyday patterns. Anyone can design their own inscriptions in a borrowed style. Some place their stickers themselves; others give them out to their friends to do it for them. Some make their own works available on the web to popularise them throughout the world. Others search for patterns in the more distant or foreseeable future, creating stencils out of photos of movie or music stars. Others use canonical works of art or their favourite artists²⁴.

The choice of street instead of gallery rests in some artists' need for a direct transfer. Museums deprive art of the opportunity to address casual recipient and they put every opinion into 'inverted comas of art'. Particularly active street art faction values the street as a forum-Agora. A great example is Polish "3fala" (3rdwave) formation. It is an informal movement bringing together

²¹ http://kaszal.blogspot.com/2008/09/nie-czyni-za-i-nie-da-z-siebie-robi_18.html.

²² Graffiti motives can be seen on clothes, shoes, bags, jewellery, furniture, and commercial gadgets. Compare: <http://ifitshipitshere.blogspot.com/2008/07/tag-youre-it-graffiti-is-appearing.html>.

²³ Usually there are couple of letters that do not make sense.

²⁴ Numerous are the remakes of Gioconda, Michelangelo's The creation of Adam, and Warhol's auto portraits, however, these can also be Egon Schiele's stencils etc.

Polish artists engaged in social and sometimes political issues by means of street actions. We can read on the 3fala's website: "3F in its projects deals with racism, xenophobia, war, consumerist lifestyle, human and animal rights problems (...) Graffiti is a formidable tool for a transfer of thoughts, ideas, and your attitude. We do what we want to do, searching for the right space for us within the city. We shape reality, filling the surrounding space with a positive message. In our freedom space you will not find drugs, violence, and senseless acceptance of everything McWorld has to offer."²⁵

There is a serious consequence of isolating oneself from institutional art. Illegality, acting outside the law, questioning socially accepted rules means that the artists risk, if revealed, taking civil and legal consequences of their actions. They put their works at risk of being destroyed. Illegal actions give the artists an opportunity to express their opinions in an open, literal, sometimes crude, yet anonymous way. It is in contrast to public art, the formal art stream (one promoted by galleries, practiced by educated artists) that takes social problems and usually appears in public places. In this case, artists overtly express their opinions without hiding their name, however, they need to bear in mind that breaching the rules set by the law or local standards etc. can cause a public outcry aimed not only at the authors but also at the institutions promoting them²⁶.

However, in the strategy of scandal, 'artistic license', which all free-art defenders refer to, blunts the edge of the criticism. The artists using this strategy often face the consequences; yet, they can always count on the support of at least part of the art world. While society refers to a street-art performers using such terms as hooligans or vandals, in the case of formal art – we speak of artists, even though the transmitted messages, as well as the form of their transmission, can be equally interesting in artistic or esthetic terms²⁷.

FREE FROM IMAGINATION

The most important difference between modernism and street art lies in the gravity of both genres. The characteristic feature of the latter one is its lightness in many respects. We could start considering this lightness from the

²⁵ http://www.3fala.art.pl/sami_o_sobie.php.

²⁶ Compare: G. Dziamski, *Sztuka w przestrzeni publicznej. Pytanie o granice sztuki*, [in:] *Czas przestrzeni...*

²⁷ We are talking generally about the majority of street artists, still considering Banksy or Harring as certain exceptions.

medium itself. Let us use a metaphor. The most frequent iconic sign of street art is a can of spray paint²⁸. Indeed, it plays a vital role in graffiti and stencils; it is the main work tool that released new painting techniques. However, what is the most interesting is its medium, the gas, which allows one to paint. Compressed gas in a can with paint when released carries the colour that spreads instantly on a surface. The paint remains, the medium evaporates. Similarly street art, instantly and unnoticeably, spray colours on what up to now was left unnoticed or was associated only with its functions, e.g. dust bins or street posts. The images remain, yet their author is invisible for the majority, which can be best exemplified by Banksy, who still, even though he has received general recognition in the art world, has not revealed his face.

By pressing the tip of the spray paint can imagination is released. Street art can serve as the best example for the need of creativity, fulfilling itself without any additional artistic or intellectual preparation that could impede it. You can work with your practice, efficiency, and intelligence individually, directly in the street, not at the academy, under the watchful eye of a master or at a café, like the Surrealists did. And it has to be said that many works executed in the streets remind one of the Surrealistic practice from the beginnings of the 20th century: sticking newspaper collages on walls, subverting, i.e. ridiculing advertisements by painting in words, adding slogans, sticking fragments, and finally, personifying everyday objects by painting in eyes, faces, arms, and legs. Amazingly vivid imagination is evident not only in those collages, but also in stylistically homogeneous works that could be called organic, using the term coined by Peter Bürger²⁹. Sophisticated murals of Blu, Seak's fantastic 3D landscapes, or the classical works of Haring are painted on a large scale, in a swelling, proliferating, incontrollable form. What is the most difficult to explain, yet the easiest to experience in those works, is their energy. The energy of a free line and colour that does not imitate reality, but instead creates new worlds. Street art performers brought to life many characters that became recognisable world-wide and which start to live their own life. *Poupées* or Miss Van's Lolita-dolls, Banksy's rats, D*Face's winged balls, Space Invaders mosaic robots, Sheparda Fairey's Obey Giant, or in Poland, Franek Mysza, Kot and Szwedzki by the 0700 team are not only the particular artists'

²⁸ In 2008 D*Face created stone sculptures -cans of spray paint that he illegally placed in the most popular London spots e.g.: Trafalgar Square, Covent Garden, Hyde Park. Cans emerging from the ground became funny statues of street art. Photos at: <http://www.dface.co.uk>.

²⁹ According to P.Bürger, an 'organic' work is whole in itself and there is an agreement between its parts and the traditional work. Montage, according to him, is an avant-garde work, which parts emancipate and the work is not a closed entity. P.Bürger, *Teoria awangardy*, Kraków 2006.

distinguishing marks, but also the characters which join the city narrative. D*Face describes how his characters spread:

“This family of dysfunctional characters began to evolve, they started to satirise and hold to ransom all that fell into their grasp – a welcome jolt of subversion in today’s media-saturated environment – the very same thing I’d grown up on. Bank notes were drawn and printed over and put into circulation for the unsuspecting to receive in their change, billboards taken over with public service announcements... I wanted to encourage people to not just to ‘see’, but to look at what surrounds them and their lives, reflecting our increasingly bizarre popular culture, re-thinking and reworking cultural figures and genres to comment on our ethos of conspicuous consumption. A Pandora’s box of bittersweet delights – sweet and sugary on the surface, but with an unfamiliar, uncomfortable, taste beneath”³⁰.

Street-art’s freedom also manifests itself in the content of the works. They could actually be about everything or nothing, adopt different forms from pure abstraction to photorealism. Some of the artists are their own dictators, creating patterns that are colorful, abstract, and extravagant in their forms and that make shabby walls, fences, viaduct poles visually attractive. Classic writers create tags and regardless of their compositional complexity or their abstraction, their content always remains the same: ‘me’ and the signature’s form does not suggest any particular features of the author, nor does it illustrate or tell anything about him. It is sheer calligraphy. There are artists creating personalities that can take the simplified forms of comic strip characters or on the contrary, be photorealistic portraits. Among them we can find black and white collages of stuck newspapers or hand-drawn and copied stickers. All around the world we can find painted and pasted on images of pleasant creatures that evoke our smile as well as monsters which could not have been the product of an average imagination. The content of those works is so varied that it is impossible to classify or describe it. It is exactly here where freedom of street art manifests its need to restore the idea of the Agora. You can write tags to mark your existence; you can repeat again and again for years the same motif in different places to feel like a conqueror in Space Invaders. Finally, you can express your protest against the system in many ways, like Banksy or Peter Fuss. There are works on social issues, or explicitly erotic, or with an implied meaning, or typically hip-hop ones, pacifist, ecological, typically pop or even religious ones. Street art is perceived as a protest against socio-political and economic reality, however, only some of the artists define it in clear and ‘conceptual’ terms.

³⁰ <http://www.dface.co.uk/why>.

However, even very critical works somehow keep their lightness due to a huge dose of humour. Street art does not tolerate seriousness and turns everything into a joke, sometimes ribald or extremely sublime. It plays around, parrots, ridicules, paints in mustaches, and pastes on sticky ears. That is why it is perceived as tongue-in-cheek. Apart from those who believe street art is only vandalism and thus should be ignored, the bulk of the street art's recipients considers it in terms of great fun. It is often the case that despite the monstrosity and nastiness of the scenes and characters the viewers do not take them seriously. Maybe it is just due to its decorative form that they do not feel scared off, violated or 'disgusted'.

You can sometimes get the impression that only the art world representatives and sociologists take street art too seriously, expecting from it what the high culture was not able to achieve. Łukasz Biskupski comments on Banksy's performance on a London statue of the Iceni-Queen Boadicea when he put a wheel clamp on her chariot:

With this simple gesture he exposed the ideology behind the statue-mania of the 20th century (...). By locking the wheels Banksy blocked the authority mechanisms at the same time.³¹

Unfortunately, authority is still in power and is not threatened by the grins or roars of laughter of passers-by. On the other hand, it happens that a work of street art origins can join in an important historical event and become its sign. Shepard Fairey's poster 'Obama Hope' (stylised stencil portrait), showing the face of the candidate and then president of the USA, serves as the best example. The author had become famous by creating an image of Andre the Giant (so called Obey) and spreading it as stickers and posters not only in America but also in Europe. He used the same technique when working on Obama's poster. He simplified the image by repeated copying and large colour contrast. The unbelievable popularity of that image stemmed from the simple association with street art, i.e. 'free' art, independent from institutions, and illegal³². Carlo McCormick points out: "I've often heard Fairey admitted that his ultimate goal, beyond his ambition on the street, is to be the author of a generation-defining image, the kind of optic trigger that Warhol's banana cover (...) is for everyone who subsequently rejected corporate pop music in

³¹ Ł. Biskupski, Graffiti i street-art: na pograniczu sztuki publicznej i ruchu alternatywnego, *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy*, 2008, nr 1, s. 177.

³² Barack Obama himself expressed gratitude to the artist saying: 'The political messages involved in your work have encouraged Americans to believe that they can help change the status-quo. Your image has had a profound effect on people, whether seen in a gallery or on a stop sign', Carlo McCormick, Street Hopeful disobedience, *Art In America*, march 2009, p. 51.

favour of archly difficult expressions”³³. The popularity of that poster, measured also by the number of its remakes, suggests that Fairey has achieved his goal, even though ‘investing’ your art into official politics is always risky.

“THEY CALL IT ILLEGAL, WE CALL IT FREE”

– this slogan appeared in defense of Millada Squatt in Prague. The squatters were living in an old, abandoned villa. They held concerts, made performance art, and organized exhibitions of street art. It was their freedom space, and it was also free from order, cleanliness and window panes. When the authorities took that place away, the squatters protested in the name of their ‘right to food, water and a living place’. Their choice of freedom from the rules of the capitalist world manifested itself mainly in creativity. Hardly ever does such a radical rejection of all social life appear among young people. Rebellious young people were always expressing their opinions by slogans on walls; however, when these were turned into art, the protest lost its rebellious character. Rafał Drozdowski, a sociologist, expresses his concern, writing:

The placement of graffiti within the art sphere (...) deprives it of its independent aura and degrades it to a large extent. Graffiti defining itself as art breaks one of its canonical rules, i.e. the lack of identification with any ‘ready’ and ‘present’ frame of comparative reference and with any ‘ready’ and ‘already existing’ frame of interpretation rules³⁴.

The transition to post-dichotomous lifestyle is all about the fact that the frames of reference can be constantly changed if none of the canonical rules have been previously accepted. To recapitulate the discussion on street art in the context of freedom we could quote Henry Chalfant:

Street art is evolving and flourishing. The style is «In your face», anti-authoritarian, irreverent, irrepressible, wise, ironic, a voice for the powerless and have-nots.³⁵

*Translated by Joanna Urbanowicz
and Kamilla Berry*

³³ C. McCormick, op.cit., p. 53.

³⁴ R. Drozdowski, *Obraza na obrazy. Strategie społecznego oporu wobec obrazów dominujących*, Poznań 2006, p. 108.

³⁵ H. Chalfant, Foreword, [in:] C. Lewisohn, *Street Art The Graffiti Revolution*, London 2008, p. 8.

THEY CALL IT ILLEGAL, WE CALL IT FREE
– UWOLNIONE OBRAZY STREET ARTU
(streszczenie)

Street art to nowa forma sztuki, która w pełni korzysta z wszelkich form wolności, jakie możliwe są do osiągnięcia w kulturze miejskiej. Uwalnia się od miejsca, czasu, medium, a także od wszelkich instytucji sztuki. Nie oznacza to, że nie wchodzi w relacje ze światem sztuki, wręcz przeciwnie, ciągle w tym świecie „gości, ale go nie zamieszkuje”. W ten sposób swoją postdychotomiczną postawą twórcy street artu pragną uwalniać się od wszelkich powinności sztuki i od jej wartościowania. Czas pokaże, czy taka postawa może uchronić street art przed całkowitym wchłonięciem w obszar kultury masowej bądź main stream sztuki.

Michał Bieżyński

GRAFFITI AND STREET ART. INCORPORATION OF URBAN SPACE AS AN ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH ARTISTIC FREEDOM

Abstract: The unique art of the 20th century has already managed to entangle itself in the complexity of its theoretical background. The proliferation of artistic ideas and newly opened art galleries creates an intricate labyrinth, where one may find it difficult to find one's way. Fascinated with their seemingly infinite possibilities, artists have flooded the world with a plethora of artistic currents, so that after some time finding appropriate and adequate criteria for the evaluation of a piece of art became virtually impossible. George Dickie's theory has become a means by which we can define the current situation. This conception of art assigns a very important role to critics. They have become experts in their domain, especially in the eyes of society. They can use the great power they have to create new artists and more or less directly orchestrate their development and success. The area of artistic freedom has thus become very narrow and dependent on the critics' decisions and subjective tastes. The public who tends to follow the experts' opinions will choose the options (in other words – will buy the pieces of art) pointed out by the latter. Is it possible for the contemporary artistic output not to be contaminated by the artists' attempt to fit into the most fashionable contemporary trends? Does an artist have a chance not to get entangled in the web of institutionalized connections within the "art world"? It appears that the only ground where the art uncontaminated by the critic's intervention can thrive is the urban iconosphere. The street art of such artists as Banksy, Space Invader, Blek Le Rat, Blu, D*face, JR, or Os Gemeos has changed the perception of art at the beginning of the 21st century and has opened wide the window of artistic expression.

Keywords: street art – graffiti – hip-hop

1. THE NOTION OF 'ARTISTIC FREEDOM' IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INSTITUTIONAL MARKET MECHANISMS OF THE POST-MODERN ERA

The artistic avant-garde of the 20th century was meant to be a liberation from the social functions which art had been expected to fulfill during the previous centuries. The aim of art was no longer associated with its theocentric service to the church nor its realization of some secular mission. Its assumptions and

priorities were no longer restricted by the academic canons. The most significant change, however, appeared to be not its adjustment to the new trends, but rather its way of disagreeing with them. The artists themselves started to blaze new trails in their artistic expression, in order to decompose them and create new ones. In the turmoil of the resultant artistic revolutions, art underwent more and more dynamic changes, in the meantime reconstructing its previous assumptions. It was at this point that the art market finally started to reap its profits. It waited for the avant-garde to generate total chaos and overlapping of various pieces of information. Fascinated with their seemingly infinite possibilities, artists have flooded the world with a plethora of artistic currents, so that after some time finding appropriate and adequate criteria for the evaluation of a piece of art became virtually impossible. There is no longer one, unequivocal truth but rather thousands of truths which may perfectly well rule out one another.

“Only experts are keepers of values” – this belief has long existed in many areas of life. We may easily transplant this assumption to the domain of art. Not knowing how to evaluate a piece of art, viewers prefer to rely in their opinion on the expertise of specialists. In the “art world” described by George Dickie, this function is performed by the critics, who take advantage of people’s lack of knowledge. They can use the great power they have to create new artists and more or less directly orchestrate their development and success. The proliferation of artistic ideas and newly opened art galleries creates an intricate labyrinth, where one may find it difficult to find one’s way. The public who tends to follow the experts’ opinions will choose the options (in other words – will buy the pieces of art) pointed out by the latter.

Is it possible for the contemporary artistic output not to be contaminated by the artists’ attempt to fit into the most fashionable contemporary trends? Does an artist have a chance not to get entangled in the web of institutionalized connections within the “art world”? It appears that the only ground where the art uncontaminated by the critic’s intervention can thrive is the urban iconosphere.

2. URBAN ICONOSPHERE AS THE SPACE OF ARTISTIC FREEDOM

The artists’ desire to go outside the space of the museum is far from being a new phenomenon. Amongst a plethora of avant-garde concepts of art, expression in the urban space constituted only a fraction of what can be called art. There are several examples illustrating this kind of artistic expression at the time when avant-garde flourished. Such art movements as Futurism and Constructivism based their theoretical assumptions on abandoning institutions, presenting and – first of all – creating art “in the street”. The radical version of

those ideas appeared in the 1960s, as the consequence of artists invading the public sphere by establishing the notion of “public art” as well as engaging in various artistic undertakings following from this view. It seems that the development of graffiti and street art occurred in a similar fashion. Does the incorporation of urban space allow for the association of these two phenomena with the avant-garde tradition of transcending the limitations of the gallery walls? The actions of the contemporary creators of street art would appear to fulfill the Futurists’ or Constructivists’ dreams. Even though the slogans “destroy museums and libraries” or “artists must go out onto the streets” originated in the beginning of the 20th century, they could as well be regarded as valid in today’s world and could become the theoretical basis for street art. Despite this similarity between the movements, the crucial point for the understanding of the functioning of contemporary street art appears to be its evident difference from the actions of the avant-garde. I believe that they should not be put together. Apart from the one common feature, namely their distrust of museums, these movements do not possess any other important common aspects. I find joining these two a mistake that shows the lack of understanding of the basic ideas of contemporary street art. The reason for my separating these two spheres of artistic activity is their origin.

The avant-garde art’s integration with the urban tissue was not in fact an attempt to sever ties with the institution of art nor a way of rebelling against it. It was rather aimed at questioning the confinement of art to the closed spaces of museums and it was quickly absorbed by the institutional art scene. This initiative was therefore only another attempt to broaden the scope of art. It constituted a step in art’s development towards new and more radical forms. Gallery artists only superficially transgressed the limitations set by museum walls, all the time regarding their activity as “high art.” Their protest against institutions may be thus regarded as another example of the avant-garde aspirations for artistic expansion.

Contemporary “art of the street” has its origins in a different environment. Its beginnings had no connection with the institution of a museum or a gallery. The grounds on which it appeared were not even remotely connected with the concept of art and its forerunners were not nobly referred to as artists. They also strongly denied any connection with the type of art that was associated with galleries. The ideas underlying contemporary street art and the enormously popular artistic actions in public space are autonomous, without any connection with what is usually called art. Its history goes back to New York in the 1970s¹. It is the New York graffiti from that time that can be

¹ R. Miszczak, A. Cała, *Beaty, rymy, życie – leksykon muzyki hip-hop (Beats, rhymes, life – lexicon of hip-hop music)*, Poznań 2005, p. 16.

regarded as the possible source of the artistic freedom of 21st century street art. It was this influence that played a crucial role in determining contemporary artistic reality.

Before we start discussing the essence of freedom understood as absence of institutional constraints and therefore inherent in graffiti, let us concentrate on the phenomenon itself. I will not describe the history of the movement in detail, give its precise time frames and present pioneer graffiti artists. Nor will I go deeply into the etymology of graffiti nomenclature, the differences between its various forms, its design, etc. The morphology of the graffiti terminology is not relevant for the main issue of this paper. It is crucial, however, to draw the reader's attention to the roots of graffiti, which, alongside rap and breakdance music, is one of the three main elements that constitute the hip-hop subculture². This subculture emerged outside the "mainstream" culture and its original assumption was functioning outside its realm of influence. The reason for its emergence was nothing else but the lack of the society's interest, or even resistance towards the earlier artistic forms of expression. Hip-hop was meant to be an autonomous phenomenon, created on the edge of mainstream social scene. It is this aspect that I would perceive as the forerunner of today's eruption of street art and its immense success. In order to make possible the world-wide boom in street art and its massive popularity that we can witness today, the trend had to have nothing in common with "high art." Otherwise, the movement would remain yet another artistic proposal offered to the audience by "the museums". This is also because graffiti is mainly a teenage movement. It originated among teenagers, was developed and polished by them, and was meant for them. If the artistic imperative towards creating similar "art" started in a gallery, its popularity would never create such a positive reaction on the part of society. The teenagers living in New York in the 1970s did not care what was happening on the contemporary art scene, which artistic currents were in vogue at that time or who were Duchamp and Warhol. The concept of art had nothing in common with the young teenagers' lifestyle, not to mention their social position or the quality of their life. I believe that it is the perception of the city as the space for one's creativity which is the main source of graffiti art.

The graffiti writers³ opposing artistic norms began to place their signatures on the walls, posts, or trains, gradually expanding their activity to all areas of the city. The result of this spread was astounding and it quickly claimed more and more spaces. The basis for this expansion was hip-hop, the way of thinking

² C.Larkin, *The Guinness Who's Who of Rap, Dance and Techno*, New York 1994, p. 5.

³ K. Majewska, *Kreatywność destrukcji. Street art w Tate Modern (The Creativity Of Destruction. Street art in Tate Modern)*, "Arteon" 2008, nr 7(99), p. 10.

manifested by its followers, and their perception of actions. Hip hop's ideology, or rather philosophy, created a kind of glass filter, through which the young writers' artistic activities were sieved out.

In his book *Obraza na obrazy* ["Resentment towards paintings"]. Rafał Drozdowski describes the self-marginalization of hip-hop in the socio-cultural dimension. According to Drozdowski, it is characteristic of the hip-hop artists not to identify themselves with the axionormative mainstream society⁴. They took an alternative developmental path towards creativity, putting their creative ideas into practice and spending their free time. Their need for expression found its vent in the three already mentioned trends – rap music, breakdance and graffiti. While in the first two expression was achieved by means of music or dance, graffiti used the visual means of expression. The acts of creation, however, were not carried out on the surfaces traditional for the domain of art, such as canvass or paper, but instead on the facades of buildings, bus stops, trains, shops, squares and many other urban landmarks.

"We are not asking for space. We are taking the space" – claimed a graffiti writer in an excellent film document entitled "Bomb It". The artists usurped the urban spaces for themselves, ignoring the legal aspects of the consequences of their actions.

In this respect, artistic freedom equals civil liberty. The cleaning services, the municipal guards, the police, or the security workers are not able to control the writers' lack of respect for the law. Therefore, they place themselves outside or above the law, confirming their civil liberty with their murals. Similarly to the law enforcement officers, art critics are also deprived of the right to express their opinion and these actions become unconstrained on two levels – of their legal consequences and of the possible negative judgment of the art critics. The functioning and expression of evaluative judgments is restricted to the closed space of art institutions. At the same time, the urban space appears as an area of unrestricted artistic freedom, not subject to any supervision. It becomes a democratic agora, a place situated somewhere between "the state" and "the society", where a relevant but unconstrained discussion can be conducted⁵. This freedom however, comes at a price – of the artists facing the legal consequences imposed by the ruling law. If an artist wishes to create his works in this particular domain, he has to accept the legal consequence that his activity may bring. His creative freedom is therefore connected with his willingness to pay the price.

⁴ R. Drozdowski, *Obraza na obrazy*, Poznań 2006, p. 101.

⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

It all seems rather logical, although interfering with the urban space did not originate in New York, nor was discovered by the graffiti writers. Public manifestation of one's views by means of inscriptions on walls has a very long and rich tradition. In order to study this topic and track down the origins of the writing on walls, one would have to reach back to the ancient times or even to the rock engraving found in some caves. Even though this type of placing graffiti in time is attempted by many magazines and artistic-sociological periodicals, I find further discussion on this topic unproductive, as comparing the living conditions, the lifespan in those periods and the motives of such activities may only be done for the reader's amusement. Emphasizing the connection between contemporary graffiti and the pictures found in caves or the inscriptions in Pompeii⁶ seems to be a sociological blunder. Nonetheless, human artistic activity in urban space manifested itself long before the 1970s and the beginning of the hip-hop culture. Therefore, the question that can be asked is: if the urban space had been taken over earlier, why was it graffiti that became the turning point in the perception of human activity in the urban tissue?

The basic element of the purest version of graffiti that allowed it to determine what followed was very characteristic. It all boils down to the fact that for an ordinary passer-by, the regular user of the public space, filtering out the graffiti from the sea of other wall inscriptions is very often extremely difficult. A distinction has to be drawn between the scribbling of a football fan, a slogan expressing its author's political, religious, or social anarchist views, the adolescent "I love Kate" and a graffito, even though all of these fall into the category of inscriptions. All the former examples were only pieces of writing conveying their author's involvement in his project. What makes graffiti different from the host of other inscriptions is its carefully designed form. In the beginning, the first form of graffiti was nothing but a perfected version of the author's "signature." The most important element of the inscription is the precision with which the artists create the most original, eye-striking and best-looking design of their signatures. Graffiti is in fact only a typographic means of expression⁷. Jean Baudrillard claimed that "graffiti possesses no meaning whatsoever, is not subject to any interpretation or connotation and does not denote anything, including the author"⁸. It is the form that indicates the quality of the "work". The perception of the author – "the writer" – by the audience depends on his ability and skill in using the spray can. Of course, other factors also have to be taken into consideration, however they do not play an important role at this point.

⁶ M. Redłowska, Kolorowa alternatywa, *Nowe Państwo*, 2001, nr 32-33 (298-299), p. 39.

⁷ P. Geise, Ulice mówią, *Exit*, 1994, nr 4, p. 879.

⁸ J. Baudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, Gallimard, Paris 1976, p.121.

My aim here is to point out that it was the quality and the exquisitely mastered skills of the authors of graffiti that played the major role in drawing the attention of the institutionalized art world. This aesthetic aspect makes for a sharp fundamental distinction between graffiti and other manifestations of human interference with the city walls. The quality of the works was constantly improving and evolving. From the first "pieces"⁹ in the 1970s until today, the technical skills of the authors has greatly improved. The advancement that has occurred within the scope of this single form, the visual aspect of the works does not allow us to ignore this phenomenon. The earlier murals, excluding the teenage inscriptions, had a mostly political character. The only important aspect of the inscriptions was semantic. The form through which their content was conveyed was dismissed as unimportant. Graffiti was the first illegal intervention into the public space where the shape, size, colour, arrangement and composition of the letters played a major role. The inscription's message was usually a short artistic pseudonym of the artist – "a tag"¹⁰. The tag can change in the course of years, but the crucial matter for each writer is his style, the concept understood somewhat differently than in the history of art. Within the realm of art, *style* is a set of features characteristic for a particular period, symptomatic for a certain artistic current, but in graffiti terminology it is related to the individual characteristics of the works of one artist¹¹. The aim of most graffiti writers is to develop the aesthetic aspect of their graffiti so that it would become characteristic of them, at the same time becoming a natural distinguishing mark in their works. All kinds of borrowing from other artists or copying them are perceived as a sign of weakness and a lack of proper skills. Style is obviously something that emerges over time. Writers work for a very long time to create their own visual "brand"; their goal is to create their own style, recognizable by the recipients even if the project, the arrangement of letters, or the tag itself get changed. What is more, various forms of graffiti have their own names and hierarchy. During the forty years of its existence, graffiti has managed to develop several versions of its imagery, where the form may be photorealistic, geometrical, entangled or embellished in various ways. The structure of the visual aspect of graffiti is currently much more developed and complex; this however will not be discussed in detail here, as it has no relevance to the main topic of this paper.

The dominant element that comes to the foreground is the aesthetic aspect of graffiti, namely the attention to detail when creating the mural. In the 1970s, the current was in its infancy, but it rapidly grew and the movement took over

⁹ A. Górski, Sztalugi z cegieł, *Wprost*, 1996, nr 4, p. 73.

¹⁰ E. Gołąbek, Sztuka graffiti: mit Mesjasza i mit anioła mściciela, *Katecheta*, 2005, nr 5, p. 72.

¹¹ B. Brzozowska, Fabryka graffiti, *Kultura współczesna*, 2003, nr 1/2, p. 229.

more and more spaces. The media started to report on the graffiti artists' activities and consequently some legalization of graffiti in the form of organized events (open-air vernissages, where the authors owned parts of the buildings' facades)¹² followed. Public debates on the place of graffiti in culture point to the art institutions' interest in this current. The process of transplanting graffiti into art went on smoothly, like its expansion in the public space. The first examples of graffiti on canvas, official exhibitions of artists associated with street art (e.g. the Times Square Show in 1980)¹³, the introduction of graffiti onto the European art scene led to the formation of its two variations, the first represented by street artists fitting into the institution of art, such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. It is with these artists that the beginning of street art is mainly associated. They were the first ones who transplanted their street art to galleries. However, I believe that street art turned out to be a great success thanks to the strand of the movement which was created in the street rather than in the studios. The above-mentioned artists were as if purchased by the art institutions for their own purposes, due to the fact that their art constituted a new trend with the rigid structure of art. Their artistic profile and their attracting of the public attention to their activities in the streets were a much-welcomed change in the world of post-conceptual stagnation. Their focus on the urban scene became a breath of fresh air for the postmodern culture of citation, at the time when eclectic "neo-" movements came into being. The artists were not leaving institutions and pouring into the streets; it was their urban art, not shown in galleries, that became noticed and adopted by the official circulation. Their institutional sacralization could only find its reflection in the domain of art. But the fact that their works started appearing in galleries did not render the artists more respect. The most crucial was still their ability to maintain artistic freedom in creativity. The museums which could bring the authors renown and acclaim, would at the same time deprive them of their independence.

The realm of graffiti art is urban space, and placing it within gallery walls was tantamount to putting it in a cage. Haring and Basquiat became the victims of being incorporated into "the art world". Today, the well-being of street art does not depend on those names. There is only one aspect of their output that could contribute to a change of view on street art and on graffiti as a form of contemporary art. What really let them come into existence as well-known artists, what brought these two figures to the foreground of the street art scene were their phenomenal manual skills that allowed them to create intricate works. By functioning in the urban space, Haring and Basquiat transcended the barrier of the graffiti form and started creating something completely new.

¹² J. Frankowska, Uwaga, tu spadają anioły, *Polityka*, 1998, nr 1 (2122), p. 84

¹³ <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart/exhibits/downtown/designs2.html>.

Basquiat's street tag was SAMO and it seemingly did not stand out from hundreds of other urban signatures, but it created a new artistic message by its appearance in the street. When other graffiti writers put their signature on the walls, marking their territory in a way by leaving a visual trace of their existence, Basquiat's message had its content. His SAMO (abbreviation from Same Old Shit) very often began various slogans, such as "SAMO as a neo art form" or "SAMO as an end to playing art"¹⁴, etc. The only element that Haring took from graffiti, on the other hand, was the street as the place for his artistic expression. He did not own any tag and he did not use the spray can – the medium typical for graffiti. In his pieces, however, he presented figurative meanings, to create which he used chalk¹⁵. They both pointed out the new paths for graffiti to follow. At the same time they orchestrated a change in the character of the possible target recipients of their works. The artists who focus on the graphic form of an inscription find real recipients only in the closed circle of people involved in creating their own graffiti, namely the other writers or the people from the hip-hop circles. The majority of people cannot decipher the intricate inscriptions and quickly lose interest in them. The reception of graffiti among the people uninvolved with the hip-hop culture is rather thoughtless. However, when a person encounters a picture whose message is not clear, he will start pondering over its sense. This is why Basquiat's and Haring's works could become known to a larger audience, not particularly from the close circle of graffiti lovers. They received invitations to galleries and changed the way of perceiving the artistic activities in the urban sphere, thus staking out the way for the future creators of street art. However, one has to date the peaks of their careers later in time. The boom of the street art with a social message should be placed at the beginning of the 21st century. Haring's and Basquiat's activity opened the floodgate to artistic freedom not in terms of popularizing street art, but in giving people absolute freedom as regards the form, the theme, or the way of presenting the author's intended message. Their functioning in the world of high art enabled people to associate forms of urban street art with what can be now called art. In other words, the fact that these artists adapted themselves to the reality of the art world, in consequence led to bestowing street art with the title of "art." At the same time, the popularity of graffiti was expanding and it gained more and more followers. In time, examples of graffiti have become a fixture practically everywhere around the globe. Its popularity is astounding, and it has trickled down to even tiny unknown places. Some authors there, fascinated with the pieces from New York have started looking for individual forms of expression. Graffiti and its incorporation into urban space has become a living inspiration,

¹⁴ R.Cork, *New Spirit, New Sculpture, New Money: Art in the 1980s*, London 2003, p.146.

¹⁵ C. Lewisohn, *Street Art. The Graffiti Revolution*, London 2008, p. 99.

an “essential spark” which inspires new street artists everywhere. The cultural differences are more and more evident, and consequently the movement is developing in different ways in New York, São Paulo or Amsterdam. Street art has spread to all continents, evoking a lot of positive feedback towards the movement.

Along with the cultural differences, the artistic techniques have undergone diversification as well. Initially the artists used rather humble techniques, but later the graffiti scene boomed with a wide variety of new techniques, employing templates, stickers, subvertising, culture jamming, etc.¹⁶

3. THE TRANSFORMATION OF GRAFFITI INTO WHAT IS WIDELY REGARDED AS STREET ART. THE INTELLECTUALIZATION AND CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ARTISTIC URBAN ACTIVITIES

The creators of street art, who owe the title of “artists” to the ennobling sacralization of Basquiat and Haring, as a result of the processes taking place on the art scene throughout the 20th century, have found their desired artistic freedom. The avant-garde had managed to convince, and consequently accustom people with the idea that virtually anything could go by the name of “art”. Therefore, it came as no surprise to anyone when that label was attached to black squares, geometric lines or blank white canvases. The avant-garde laid the foundation enabling street artists to include any conceivable idea in the category of art. Following the post-modern slogan “anything goes”, they started to “adorn” and “reconstruct” the street images. Thanks to this, street art has become a fully syncretic phenomenon. With the increased range of its media, street art has gained total freedom in both the presented content and the form which defines it. The artist’s freedom is then a very clear determinant of his actions. In fact, street art is a literal fulfillment of the postmodern concept of pluralistic freedom. Public art, however, is deprived of the evaluative and decisive critical voice. There are no conditions defining its most suitable and popular forms. The essence of this phenomenon and the extent of its popularity of today’s street art will be elaborated on below. Now, I am going to focus on the most important techniques of creating street art, which aided its development. To this end I am going to introduce the main figures conducting their artistic activity on the level of the urban iconosphere. It is worth emphasizing, though, that a considerable number of street artists engage in different projects, freely exchanging and combining their artistic techniques.

¹⁶ <http://www.woostercollective.com>.

The walls of the cities have been witnessing an artistic revolution taking place over the past 10 years despite the forty-year-old tradition of graffiti. The best known street artists first started to present their works in the early years of the 21st century. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. One of them is a Paris-based French artist Ernest Pignon-Ernest. He began to create as early as the mid 1960s, and the character of his artistic activity was clearly ahead of his time. It can be assumed that he became a pioneer of the modern *cut'n'paste* technique (also known as *wheatpaste*, which means sticking an already prepared drawing or a painting to a wall)¹⁷. The huge posters depicting secluded solitary human figures are most likely the first example of using the *cut'n'paste* (cut and paste) technique in the history of art. Pignon often makes references to religious themes drawn from Caravaggio's paintings, Christian iconographic symbols, such as a representation of the Virgin Mary mourning over the dead body of Jesus, or the crucifixion, which in his works gain a more current and real dimension. This effect is possible owing to their contrasting with contemporary characters. The cut and paste technique is one of the most popular techniques employed by street artists. The interested readers may acquaint themselves with the artistic output of the following artists: JR (<http://www.jr-art.net/>); Shepard Fairey (<http://obeygiant.com/>); Alexander Orion (<http://www.alexandreorion.com/>) or WK (<http://www.wkinteract.com/>). Another vital mode of expression in contemporary street art is a sticker. Most commonly it is a relatively small artistic form, containing an image, such as a photo or a photomontage, or some text¹⁸. *Subvertising* is yet another variety of street art, and it is linked with the so-called *culture jamming*, that is "the disrupting of culture". In practice, this consists in the artistic altering of various forms of advertising, such as billboards, banners, advertising notices. The interference is aimed at transforming, changing or undermining, and subsequently discrediting and debasing the original meanings of these messages¹⁹. Such action has been brilliantly described by Umberto Eco as "semiotic guerilla"²⁰. In order to broaden your knowledge of the subject in question, check up the following artists: Dr. D (<http://www.drd.nu/>), Kaws (<http://www.kawsone.com/blog>) or D*face (<http://www.dface.co.uk/>).

Another artist whose works bear a resemblance to those of Pignon's, and whose activity took place several years before street art became a widely accepted current, is a Frenchman using the nickname Blek Le Rat (<http://bleklerat.free.fr/>). Some of his works are made by means of the *cut'n'paste*

¹⁷ C. Lewisohn, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sticker_art.

¹⁹ R. Drozdowski, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

²⁰ U. Eco, *Semiologia życia codziennego (Semiology of every day's life)*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1996, p. 157-167.

technique, which Blek employs to depict the characters of classicist paintings, antique sculptures or characters from the Bible. If at any time in the future street art becomes subject to the classification of artistic forms, if it gets evaluated against the traditional art movements, Blek's work may be perceived as a "street" way of going back to the classical roots and sources of art. Blek, however, innovative as he was in the 1980s, began to create wall paintings using the technique hitherto employed in the military context, namely a stencil²¹. It requires a template cut in a carton or thick foil, which is pressed against the surface and covered with paint. This technique enables an artist to produce both simple, one-coloured paintings and more complex ones, which require numerous templates and careful planning of the order of the layers²². Blek chose a rat as the main theme of his stencils. At the time, the images of this animal virtually "flooded" the walls in Paris²³. Yet, his achievements were not much appreciated and initially they did not earn Blek any recognition.

On the other hand, a British artist, nicknamed Banksy, who also started by depicting rats by means of stencils, though in a sarcastic and personified context, went down with the critics exceptionally well. It would be easy to write a separate book on his popularity and his influence on street art. Banksy gained publicity thanks to his technically flawless works – travesties of various contemporary pop icons, recontextualizations of widely accepted models of social behaviour and transforming literary topoi found in the history of art. There is no denying that Banksy is the first star of street art, whose works are famous worldwide. I would even risk supposing that history will rank him alongside the most acclaimed names of modern art, such as Picasso, Duchamp and Warhol. His excellent skill, his well-conceived ideas of interaction with urban space, the content of his works perfectly resonating with the cynical mood of his times are merely a few reasons for his success. But most importantly, he was the first artist to demonstrate that the museum is not necessary to gain popularity and respect in the domain of art. His work was that of an independent artist, who did not get involved in the world of art. He chose the urban iconosphere as the place where he displayed his works, which turned out to be a much more effective and more spectacular way of gaining artistic fame. Banksy's reputation and the extent to which his art has influenced the artists outside the gallery circle as well as his contribution to the change of perception of street art is undeniable. There have been many remarkably ingenious, skilled and charismatic artists in the history of modern art, but only a few of them have managed to introduce crucial changes or

²¹ D. Budzbon, Dwie odsłony street artu (Two faces of street art), *Art & Business*, 2008, nr 7-8, p. 90.

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stencil_graffiti.

²³ C. Lewisohn, op.cit., p. 167.

breakthroughs. I believe Banksy will be certainly regarded as one of them in the future.

A stencil is most probably the most popular means of artistic expression in the urban sphere. The most prominent artists using it are: Above (<http://www.goabove.com/>); artistic collective Faile (<http://www.faile.net/>); Dolk (<http://www.dolk.co.uk/>) or the Polish artist M-city (www.m-city.org/). One cannot forget about the artists who use conventional techniques such as paintbrushes or rollers. Among the best known artists of this type are: Blu (www.blublu.org/); Sixeart (<http://www.sixeart.net/home.html>); Nunca (<http://www.lost.art.br/nunca.htm>) or Os Gemeos (<http://www.lost.art.br/osgemeos.htm>).

A most peculiar individual among street artists is Space Invader (<http://www.space-invaders.com/>). He is one of the few artists (if not the only one) who work with ceramics. Fascinated with a computer game from the late 1970s, he sticks ceramic squares to the walls of the cities worldwide. Those squares are arranged in Cubist mosaics, showing pixel versions of the characters from the game. Obviously, their size, colours and compositions change in his works. The underlying aspect of the Invader's artistic activity is the concept of "space invading", i.e. taking over, capturing space – public space in his case²⁴. Space Invader travels across the world, sticking his unique mosaics of different kinds in every corner of the world. His website contains a relatively big gallery of photographs, which may take us on the Invader's artistic journey with him.

4. ...AND THE OSCAR GOES TO... JOSEPH BEUYS!!

I have intentionally mentioned all the Internet references to all street artists' websites, as in contemporary times "invading space" does not apply only to the public iconosphere of the urban space. Another space, equally important for the street art movement – the Internet – comes to the fore²⁵. Activity in the streets becomes only a part of the artists' scope of action. Due to the transience of street art, it may achieve most durable popularity mainly by means of the Internet. Keeping the record of their street activity has become an extremely important aspect of the artists' work.

This is how the freedom of street art becomes captured. I associate its origins with the fact that it was a voluntary form of expression, which in a way created itself, using what the urban sphere had to offer. The artist who placed his work

²⁴ www.space-invaders.com.

²⁵ A. Gralińska-Toborek, All my city in graffiti – czyli bombardowanie przestrzeni miejskiej, [in:] *Czas przestrzeni*, red. K. Wilkoszewska, Kraków 2008, p. 40.

in the street, denounced the creation of a piece of art. The urban space assigns the title of an artist to almost everybody, and allows them to display their work to the public view. As Dickie claims – the action of placing an inscription on the urban wall bestows on it the “role of a candidate for a piece of art” and is parallel with “calling it art.” The creator is his own filter, whose equivalent in the art world are art galleries or museums.

This mechanism can be also observed within the scope of virtual reality, as it allows the author the same self-display as the urban iconosphere. Social networks such as You Tube, Vimeo or Dailymotion even persuade their users to place the figments of their creative imagination on their servers. Every person has a right and a chance to present his various artistic creations. The pieces can be thus presented to a very large audience, without being subjected earlier to any form of evaluation. In the past, if someone wished to become an independent artist, he could create his works without promoting them anywhere, however this did not let these creations fulfill their roles as pieces of art. The artists could not win recognition, which is in fact every artist’s goal. By presenting their works in the urban or virtual space, the artist is aware of the fact that his works are being widely viewed and in the latter case the artist can even check how many people visited his website and saw his work. The viewing efficiency of the urban space is exquisitely portrayed by one of Banksy’s works. In 2004, he put a large sign “It’s not a race” by a motorway near London. However, despite the immediate logical association the drivers could draw from reading the inscription, Banksy did not want to create a warning. The solution to this puzzle was to be found on the artist’s website – the number of people who visited Saatchi Gallery was 1850 a day, Tate Britain –1850, Tate Modern 2500, and the number of those who drove on the A4 motorway was 2500 per hour²⁶. In order to find the viewers for one’s artistic creations, one does not have to take part in any gallery “race.” The urban iconosphere allows for a much wider presentation of art, and to a much more varied public. The 21st century, or at least its beginning, appears to be the period when art and its essence boils down to free human creativity. In the sea of concepts of what art should or should not be, how will its core develop and what does future hold in store for it? This is what perfectly reflects Joseph Beuys’ theory.

“Every human being is an artist. We attribute the title of an artist not only to people who are painters, sculptures, piano players, composers or writers. Personally, I think that a nurse is an artist too. Similarly, a doctor, teacher, student or any other young person who is responsible for their own development. The emotional definition of a human being is “artist.” All other

²⁶ <http://www.obieg.pl/felieton/12665>.

definitions of the word “art” (Ger. *Kunst*) resend us to the theory that there are people who create and those who do not create – those who can make something and those who can’t.²⁷

This opinion was first expressed by Beuys in his famous paper published in 1972 – *Everybody is an artist*. Putting his thoughts in the current artistic context, it seems that Beuys’s creativity has finally been fully appreciated. Due to the possibilities allowed by both the urban and the virtual spaces, people can widely combine and promote their artistic ideas on a large scale. Beuys described art as a therapeutic means of breaking life’s alienation in “the chaos of state creations”²⁸ The popularity of street art or the constant growth of Internet presentations, are for the most part created by people in their free time. People who possess not only a certain amount of free time, but also a will and initiative to create something, are able to display their works in public. It is exactly the possibility of displaying one’s creations that boosts the process of creation. The only person who decides to display a piece of art to the public is the creator, and the intervention of other institutions becomes unnecessary. The ideology of modernism had to lead to the creation of a space between previously overlapping concepts. The most natural determinants of art – creativity and artistic liberty – gradually stopped being labeled as avant-garde. The multiple restrictions on artistic projects had to finally encounter resistance on the part of the public. The struggle towards what can be called open freedom, either in the domain of art or in any other context is inextricably linked with The notion of art has consequently become more fluid and started to permeate other spheres of human life. “In the new pluralistic situation,” writes Suzie Gablik, “all modes of artistic creation become equal”²⁹. Alicja Kępińska goes even further, claiming that “Culture created in this way has blurred the edges of the phenomena and objects they used to be divided by and shattered the orders.”³⁰ The popularity and power earned by street art does not allow us to draw a clear line between “high” and “low” art. The only border that can be perceived in the domain of art is the threshold of the gallery and consequently Dickie’s theory becomes a much more adequate means by which we can define the current situation.

Obviously, the market has been able to adjust to that situation. Thanks to its aesthetic connotations, graffiti began to be used in designing clothes for young

²⁷ C. Tisdall, *Art into Society, Society into Art*, London 1974, p. 48.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 270.

²⁹ S. Gablik, *Pluralizm. Tyrania wolności*, [in:] M. Giżycki, *Post-modernizm – kultura wyczerpania?*, Warszawa 1988, p. 149.

³⁰ A. Kępińska, *Postmodernizm – pole wielu energii*, [in:] *Sztuka w kulturze płynności*, Poznań 2003, p. 10.

people, advertising campaigns, and various kinds of gadgets³¹. More and more often street artists are invited to museums, or employed on certain public contracts³². An excellent example of this was the street art exhibition in Tate Modern in 2008³³. The space given over to street artists is becoming yet another exhibition area of this institution, which is not surprising. The boom in street art has become too big an element of the current culture to pass unnoticed. The omnipresent commercialization quickly notices fresh branches of human activity, even those which by default question the existing system. It absorbs all kinds of creativity for widely understood marketing. The hip-hop culture, graffiti and street are only selected examples of this mechanism. What is more, we can observe subversive behaviour – starting from the moment when graffiti and street art entered the world of art galleries to their moving beyond the urban areas.

This fact, however, is irrelevant for the topic of the artist's creative freedom. Thanks to the mastery of the artists such as Banksy, the public space has turned into a sphere where artistic freedom has already been established. Even if institutions will interfere with this sphere, they will never have the power to control it. The 21st-century art has therefore returned to its origins. There are no obligations, no negative outcry, no ideology and no mission – art is only the eruption of creativity and expression. The rebellious spirit that was originally ingrained in graffiti's rhetoric has diminished and gradually disappeared – Warhol's "15 minutes of fame" which were supposed to be granted to specific tendencies and trends in the post-modern reality³⁴. I believe that the massive spread of street art is a phenomenon which stands a chance of altering the image and character of modern art. I would risk an assumption that in the future this phenomenon may be recognized as a counterpart of the third avant-garde. The unique art of the 20th century has already managed to entangle itself in the complexity of its theoretical background. The artists' desire for freedom has created a tension, which was finally noticed. And it was the urban iconosphere that became a stepping stone for that freedom.

Translated by Małgorzata Podkówka-Wawrzonek

³¹ K. Łabowicz-Dymanus, Interwencja w przestrzeń miasta, *Format – Pismo Artystyczne*, 2007, nr 52, p. 86.

³² M. Pieniak, Graffiti na ulicach miast, *Koszalińskie Studia i Materiały*, 2003, nr 5, p. 265.

³³ M. Soliński, Sztuka (na) ulicy, *Format*, 2009, nr 56, p. 82.

³⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/15_minutes_of_fame.

**GRAFFITI I STREET ART. ANEKTOWANIE PRZESTRZENI MIEJSKIEJ
JAKO PRÓBA UKONSTYTUOWANIA ARTYSTYCZNEJ WOLNOŚCI
(streszczenie)**

Sztuka w okresie ostatnich 20 lat stała się płaszczyzną w dużym stopniu zależną od subiektywnych decyzji krytyków artystycznych. Ich rola, znaczenie oraz prestiż w postmodernistycznym dobie pluralizmu uległy eskalacji, kanalizując automatycznie pole wolności twórczej artystów. Kolejnym problemem aktualnej sztuki jest jej coraz częstsza kolaboracja z szeroko pojętym marketingiem. Dawne cele, założenia czy wartości, jakie były dla sztuki immanentne, przekładane są dzisiaj na korzyści merkantylne. Czy jest zatem możliwe, aby aktualna twórczość artystyczna nie była skażona próbami dopasowania się do najbardziej modnych i aktualnych trendów? Czy artysta ma szansę nie wchodzenia i nie angażowania się w sieć instytucjonalnych powiązań „świata sztuki”? Czy istnieje możliwość ucieczki twórcy od konfrontacji z ograniczającymi jego wolność artystyczną, surowymi, narzucającymi swoje reguły prawami rynku? Wydaje się, że ważną płaszczyzną, na której może kwitnąć sztuka nie skalana żadną decyzyjną interwencją jest ikonosfera miejska. Wolność artystyczna, jaką twórca może uzyskać funkcjonując poza zamkniętymi murami muzeum, doprowadziła do prawdziwej erupcji sztuki ulicy, której przykłady możemy znaleźć obecnie na całym świecie. Aby obecna sytuacja mogła zaistnieć, inicjatywy artystyczne w przestrzeni miejskiej musiały ulec w międzyczasie różnym transformacjom. „Uliczna” działalność artystyczna takich twórców jak Banksy, Space Invader, Blek Le Rat, Blu, D*face, JR czy Os Gemeos zmieniła sposób percepcji sztuki na początku XXI wieku oraz przede wszystkim otworzyła szeroko okno wolności dla ekspresji twórczej. Pytanie jednak brzmi: jak długo taki stan rzeczy będzie miał szansę istnieć i czy subwersywność działań „instytucji” nie okaże się ostatecznie dominująca?

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THE SPACE OF A SOCIALIST HOUSING DISTRICT, THE SPACE OF A MODERN POEM: THE SENSUAL ART OF MIRON BIAŁOSZEWSKI

Abstract: The article deals with the problem of space in the late output of the Polish poet Miron Białoszewski. It focuses on two aspects of space: the space of the socialist housing quarter where he lived and which he re-created in his works and the space of the page. I am interested in the sensual spatial images changing significantly with the switch of the sense dominating the particular act of perception (sight and hearing surprisingly disconnected in Białoszewski's imagery) and the way in which textual imaging depends on the seemingly irrelevant art of typography. On many levels of the analysis the "space study" of Białoszewski's late poems relies on the concept of freedom, understood both as an artistic attitude and a state of the human mind.

Keywords: modern poetry – typography – visual and auditory sensations – socialist housing architecture

Freedom and space – the two key words of this volume – are also the key words of the output of Miron Białoszewski, one of the most inspiring Polish 20th century men of letters or rather men of arts¹. Obviously, both freedom and space may be interpreted in dozens of ways and, surprisingly, most of such interpretations would be justifiable in the case of Białoszewski.

In my paper I shall treat space literally as concrete places existing in the real or artistically created world. I shall analyse three different aspects of Biało-

¹ Białoszewski not only wrote poetry and prose but he was also a "theatre-maker" (Teatr na Tarczyńskiej, Teatr Osobny) and acted in improvised films (famous "filmikowanie"). Moreover, some of his activities may be described as para-happenings. As for the photographic documentation of the multiartistic activity of Miron Białoszewski – see: *Miron. Wspomnienia o poecie*, ed. H. Kirchner, TENTEN, Warsaw 1996, passim.

szewski's poems. Firstly, I wish to focus on his special relation to space and all existing (spatial, real) objects. The next issue, analysed thoroughly, will be that of space as his artistic inspiration and the subject of his texts. I wish to examine his works inspired by the concrete urban space of a socialist housing quarter and at the same time creating sensual spatial images. I will focus both on the visual and the auditory aspects of Białoszewski's output. I would like to show that the focus on auditory modality not only draws our attention to "sounds", but also accounts for the particular kind of "architecture" of the texts – the spatial imagery of the poem and the spatial construction of the page. I will also show how spatial imagery changes with the switch of the sense (from sight to hearing). Obviously, the shape of the print on the page – the original typography of the author – is the issue of utmost importance in the study². It is the third aspect of Białoszewski's poems I will focus upon³.

1. THERE IS FREEDOM EVERYWHERE

Let me begin with a truism. Białoszewski's art did not know any limits, either stylistic or semantic. Anything could be inspiring, as the artist had an extraordinary gift for observing the world with no preconceptions and believed that "reality is an artist"⁴. No surprising forms of expression were inappropriate either. Undoubtedly that is what we call artistic freedom.

The poet sees the attractiveness – in all the senses of the word – of any ordinary event, any common object, any everyday view. Seeing ordinary places or actions, noticing (and noting down) colour, temperature, movement gives him unexpected pleasure:

² Witold Sadowski introduces the category of "graphic text" in his research on the poetry of Białoszewski. He distinguishes "graphic text" from other textual forms emphasizing the visual aspect of the literary work of art (literary *collages*, emblems, concrete poetry and narrowly understood visual poetry). Sadowski shows that Białoszewski's poems remain linear and do not become as visual as pictures, but at the same time, by means of typography, they do create the space of the page, which can be analyzed in semantic terms (W. Sadowski, *Tekst graficzny Białoszewskiego*, Wydział Polonistyki UW, Warsaw 1999).

³ Different critical approaches to Białoszewski's output are presented in: A. Hejmej, *Muzyka w literaturze*, Universitas, Cracow 2008, p. 139-144. In my research I wish to link the "auditory" and "visual" critical orientation.

⁴ The words of the poet quoted after: A. Sobolewska, *Maksymalnie udana egzystencja*, Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, Warsaw 1997, p. 16.

Skąd tyle radości
 na widok autobusu?
 – bo lecę do okna –
 to że czerwony
 między blokami?
 piąta rano?
 ciepło?
 mgła?
 czy to że
 on jedzie
 ja żyję?

(Uz 7, 81)⁵

Why so much joy
 at the sight of a bus?
 – for I speed to the window –
 is it because it's red
 among the blocks of flats?
 five in the morning?
 warm?
 fog?
 or because
 it moves
 I'm alive?

Obviously, employing ordinary objects as the objects of art has been a strategy of hundreds of modern – and postmodern – painters, performance artists, and writers. Białoszewski's "ordinary" poems, however, seem to be unique in some respects. I would like to analyse more closely the interplay between the artist's sensory perception and the space he inhabited.

Białoszewski concentrated mostly on the auditory and the visual, which is hardly surprising, as these are the two main senses on which we found our everyday experience. What is unusual is his approach to the common sensory experience. Let us focus first on the visual. An early poem *Spawdzone sobą* ["Tested by myself"] reads:

Stoi krzesło :
 artykuł prawdy
 rzeźba samego siebie
 powiązana w jeden pęk
 abstrakcja rzeczywistości.

The chair stands :
 an article of truth
 a sculpture of itself
 tied up in one bundle
 abstraction of reality

Połamano się.
 I to też forma

It has broken down.
 And this is also a form

⁵ I quote the poems after the editions: M. Białoszewski, *Utwory zebrane*, vol. 7, "Odczepić się" i inne wiersze opublikowane w latach 1976-1980, PIW, Warsaw 1994; M. Białoszewski, *Utwory zebrane*, vol. 8, *Rozkurz*, PIW, Warsaw 1998; M. Białoszewski, *Utwory zebrane*, vol. 10, "Oho" i inne wiersze opublikowane po roku 1980, PIW, Warsaw 2000. I use the abbreviations: Uz 7, Uz 8 and Uz 10 respectively, the number after the abbreviation indicates the page. I do not change the typographical layout in any way, any inconsistency that occurs (in noting the titles, space organisation etc.) is the – sometimes meaningful – inconsistency of the author and his editors. The translations of the poems (with the exception of "A ballad of going down to the store") are mine. I have tried to keep very close to the original "flow of the plot", linguistic structures and layout, as they are supposed to illustrate the detailed analyses of Białoszewski's stylistics and typography.

tak – świecznik
tak – mina byka.

yes – a candelabrum
yes – a bull's grimace.

Abstrakcyjne powołanie krzesła
Przyciąga teraz
Całe tłumy rzeczywistości
Wiąże w jeden pęk
W składzie prawdy
Rzeczywistość abstrakcji.
(Uz 1, 137)

The abstract vocation of the chair
Now attracts
Crowds of realities
Ties them up in one bundle
In the store of truth
The reality of abstraction.

Obviously the artist drew a lesson from the tradition of modernity, especially – from the visual arts. The borderline between the figurative and the abstract proves to be elusive, the object, seemingly absolutely useless (a broken chair), is still worth perceiving and re-creating by means of words. Białoszewski does not refrain from presenting the abstract, the useless, the strange. Everything is interesting, everything is inspiring, everything may be visually attractive⁶.

But watch out! The apotheosis of the sensual, revalorization of the ordinary could be misleading; the artist may provoke, hide behind stylization, approach the grotesque:

Ballada o zejściu do sklepu

A ballad of going down to the store

Najpierw zeszedłem na ulicę
schodami
ach, wyobraźcie sobie,
schodami.

First I went down to the street
by means of the stairs
just imagine it,
by means of the stairs.

Potem znajomi nieznajomych
mnie mijali, a ja ich.
Żałujcie,
żeście nie widzieli,
jak ludzie chodzą,
żałujcie!

Then people known to people unknown
passed me by and I passed them by.
Regret
that you did not see
how people walk,
regret!

⁶ I cannot abstain from presenting one of the short, humorous poems by Białoszewski inspired by the seemingly least interesting of objects:

Zacieki

a to góry
widziane z góry
księżycą
(Uz 8, 209)

Water stains

but these are mountains
seen from the top
of the Moon

<p>Wstąpiłem do zupełnego sklepu; Paliły się lampy ze szkła, Widziałem kogoś – kto usiadł, I co słyszałem?... co słyszałem? Szum toreb i ludzkie mówienie.</p> <p>No naprawdę naprawdę wróciłem. (Uz 1, 121)</p>	<p>I entered the complete store; Lamps of glass were glowing, I saw somebody – he sat down – And what did I hear?... what did I hear? rustling of bags and human talk.</p> <p>And indeed, Indeed, I returned. (transl. Czesław Miłosz)</p>
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2. FREEDOM IN A BLOCK OF FLATS?

Białoszewski's oeuvre is very deeply rooted in his biography, especially what may be called his "spatial biography". Many of his poems may be read as reflecting his personal topography of Warsaw and the surrounding small towns, the changes in his life and in the places he described. All these changes seem ordinary, regular, non-spectacular and, at a first glance, simply dull. Białoszewski spent his whole life in Warsaw or near Warsaw (except for some journeys abroad which he also described) and he moved house – within Warsaw – only a few times⁷. The most radical change was his last move in 1975, eight years before his death, to a giant block of flats in Lizbońska Street, in a "worse" district of Warsaw nicknamed Chamowo ("boor quarter"). The world of huge anonymous blocks typical of socialist housing architecture was extremely difficult to accept and "domesticate"⁸. It became, however, a poetic inspiration and a subject of many intriguing works⁹. Paradoxically, the

⁷ The biography of Białoszewski and its connections with his work has already been described thoroughly – see for instance: A. Legeżyńska, *Dom Mirona Białoszewskiego*, [in:] *Pisanie Białoszewskiego*, Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, Warsaw 1993, p. 62-79; J. Łukasiewicz, *Mieszkanie; Mirona Białoszewskiego określanie przestrzeni, czyli władza pisarza (nad epoką)*, [in:] idem, *Jeden dzień w socrealizmie i inne szkice*, Katowice 2006, s. 167-169; 170-193; the volume *Miron. Wspomnienia o poecie*, op.cit.; R. Cudak, *Czytając Białoszewskiego*, Śląsk, Katowice 1999; M. Czermińska, *Małe i wielkie podróże Mirona Białoszewskiego*, [in:] *Pisanie...*, op.cit., p. 80-95.

⁸ See the prose book *Chamowo* written (recorded on cassettes) over 30 years ago but published only in 2009 – M. Białoszewski, *Utwory zebrane*, vol. 11, *Chamowo*, PIW, Warszawa 2009. Cf. H. Kirchner, *O Mironie, o Ludwiku*, [in:] *Miron...*, op.cit., p. 279.

⁹ Cf. J. Grądziel-Wójcik, "Piękno zamieszkałe"? Architektoniczne wizualizacje doświadczenia w poezji Mirona Białoszewskiego, [in:] *Kulturowe wizualizacje doświadczenia*, eds. W. Bolecki, A. Dziadek [in press]. It is worth noting that Jerzy Kwiatkowski analysed the early output of Białoszewski taking into account his presentation of space (the city, his house, everyday objects in his flat) and its connections with the currents prevailing both in the literature and the visual arts of the period – J. Kwiatkowski, *Abulia i liturgia*, [in:] idem, *Klucze do wyobraźni*, PIW, Warsaw 1964, p. 127-173.

standardized block resembling thousands of similar buildings became the space of the unknown, a great challenge for the human senses, an endless (and not always pleasant) surprise. A typical “socialist” flat is usually seen as cramped, uninteresting and depressing space. It was not, however, the case with Białoszewski. The limitations boosted his creativity. The first step was sensory – the inspiration came from his perception of the architecture, its potential and its limitations¹⁰.

The changes in the spatial imagery in Białoszewski’s block-of-flat poems depended to great extent on the sense involved in the process of perception. It is interesting to note that the senses here appear disconnected – vision and hearing do not form one spatial image. Usually vision supplies different images than those constructed with the use of the auditory “material”.

Let us then, consistently, begin with sight.

A. WHAT YOU SEE “OUT OF A HIGH WINDOW”

Life on the 9th floor gave Białoszewski a totally new perspective:

Przesuwa się,	It moves,
Przegwieżdża	It stars
Małe okno.	A small window.
Stanięcie.	Stopping.
Uwijają się dokoła siebie niskości.	Lows bustle about.
Noc rwie do tyłu	Night bolts backwards
rano	In the morning
ziemia paruje.	the earth steams.
Lepi się.	It’s sticky.
Drzewa.	Trees.
Jeszcze nie ma zwierząt.	There are no animals yet.
(Uz 7, 64)	

¹⁰ Białoszewski’s attitude towards his block-of-flat life (and generally, the places in which he happened to spend his time) is still artistically inspiring – the last manifestation of such interest is the 2009 volume of short stories entitled *Cień pod blokiem Mirona Białoszewskiego* [*Shadow under Miron Białoszewski’s block*, Korporacja Ha!art] by the young writer Juliusz Strachota.

Looking at the world from such heights allows for a broad, nearly cosmic perspective¹¹. Paradoxically – bearing in mind the reality of the socialist housing quarter – everything is organic, primeval and... calm. The text is a specific poetic *Genesis*, in fact far removed from Białoszewski's usual stylistics. A closer look at the poem reveals, however, the subtle irony of the last verse: "there are no animals yet" – people (and their dogs) are not yet discernible as they are still asleep. Anyway, visual distance, being physically above everything, in the aerial shelter (of the block!) gives the author some kind of mental distance and – I dare say – a feeling of freedom. Everyone who has experienced living on an upper floor of a tower block will understand it. Białoszewski, however, was the first to describe this experience. The typography (a lot of blank space, the verses scattered on the page) suggests there is no need to hurry. There is time to contemplate the serene view.

Białoszewski's Lizbońska-street poems describe many more mute landscapes viewed "out of the high window". The piece following the previously quoted one [*Przesuwa się...*] in the volume of his poems seems a bit more "civilized" (as it mentions blocks of flats) but still uses similar imagery:

Ciut później

Powietrze na blokach
bloki na powietrzu
niebieskie
na drzewach
i samo na sobie
wszystko niebieskie.

To na prawo.

A na lewo
mgła i mgła i
zorza przyleciała
zaowocowała.
(Uz 7, 64)

A bit later

The air on the blocks
the blocks in the air
blue
on trees
and on itself
everything blue.

That's on the right.

And on the left
mist and mist and
the dawn has flown in
and born fruit.

Needless to say, the poem reveals its author's great visual sensitivity. It describes a soothing view over the bluish misty city, with its unique block-of-flat architecture. The "fruit" of the dawn may be interpreted as the rising sun, which acts as a contrasting – orange or yellow – element in the monochromatic landscape. The typography is not arbitrary either, it reflects the structure of the

¹¹ Cf. Legeżyńska, op. cit.

three-part text (the view on the right – the verse surrounded by a lot of blank space revealing the presence of the lyrical persona – the view on the left).

An interesting description of another mute landscape and an example of more complicated typographical layout reads (and looks) as follows:

Na moim wysokim mieszkaniu

na tej mojej latarni
i na mnie w niej
blade szaro
tam się daje znać i stamtąd mnie
najraniej, raniej, rano
zamachają
światłocienie
za raz
za dwa
i słońce w ruch
i ja
i ludzie
(Uz 7, 65)

On my high flat

on this lighthouse of mine
and on me in it
pale grey
lets itself be known and i will be waved
out of there
in the earliest, earlier, early morning
by
light-and-shades
and one
and two
and the sun set into motion
and me
and people

The inhabitant of a tower block is presented as a lighthouse keeper seeing or, better, sensing (as it is **on** him) “pale grey” early in the morning. The first eight verses are metaphorical, mysterious, moody. The second part of the poem is totally different, both semantically and visually. It describes setting the world in motion, which is perfectly reflected in the layout. Repeated anaphors and blank spaces between the short words make the text resemble the schema of a moving machine.

In the poems analysed above everything is calm and aesthetically pleasing, but consistently mute and inhuman. People are hardly present in the landscape and even if they happen to appear (as in the last example), they are only, so to say, cogs in the world’s wheel. No wonder another poem reads:

Mój krzyk z okna

Mało ludzi tu widać
mało ludzi!
mało ludzi
mało ludzi tu widać!
małooo!
ma o
(Uz 7, 43)

Shouting out of my window

Few people you see here
few people!
few people
few people you see here!
feeew!
ee w

It seems hardly possible to refrain from describing people when you are a poet-observer in the reality of a socialist housing quarter. As far as sight is employed, word-portraits of people still tend to be extremely general group portraits:

Co się stałoż?

Przestało padać
po ziemi i niebie

do okien!

blok w blok
pięćset bab z dziećmi
z psami
patrzy na siebie
[...]

(Uz 10, 59)

What hath happened?

It's stopped raining
on earth and in heaven

to the windows!

block against block
five hundred women with children
and dogs
look at each other
[...]

The appearance of people has brought in, somewhat automatically, a new emotional quality – humour and kind-hearted irony, characteristic of Białoszewski. The image of the blocks symmetrically facing one another, with women, children and dogs looking out of the (opposite!) windows is a masterpiece of brief description of the Polish architectural reality¹².

The cosmic perspective I have mentioned above later seems to be shifted onto the block itself. The size of the building allows for a humorous (people in action!) cosmic metaphor describing... the redecoration of the facade of the housing giant:

Potęga mrówkowca

Coraz wyżej rusztowania
coraz wyżej.

Kosmos w klatce!
(Uz 7, 85)

The power of the high-rise

Scaffolding higher and higher
higher and higher.

Cosmos encaged!

¹² Let me quote one more example of an extremely generalising but still funny and ingenious text with people as main characters:

Gąszcz

siedzą te małpy
na gałęziach bloków
(Uz 8, 231)

Thicket

these monkeys sit
on the branches of the blocks

It is obviously rather an aphorism than a description of a sensory experience. Inhuman proportions, inhuman perspective – a humorously inhuman image.

The analysis reveals that Białoszewski's life "in the high flat" resulted in poetic landscapes where the space of the city appears as vast, calm, delicately coloured, mysterious. However, when people enter the frame so does his unique, slightly ironic sense of humour. Watching the world from the 9th floor, quite naturally, excludes hearing. At same time it evokes great generalisations best summarized by the poet himself:

Dojście do okna**westchnienie****i rym**

Duszo tego świata!

Dużo tego świata!

(Uz 7, 43)

Coming up to the window**a sigh****and rhyme**

The soul of this world!

So much of this world!

B. WHAT YOU CAN HEAR BEHIND YOUR WALL

As I have already pointed out, in Białoszewski's block-of-flat oeuvre vision and hearing are disconnected. Turning on his hearing brings a total change of perspective. The space is still of utmost importance, nevertheless it is now the inner space of the huge building:

Blok, ja w nim

– Ralla

la laa! – radio z babą

– uuu! – gdzieś dziecko

– Ralla

la laa! – baba

– uuu! – dziecko

– Ral

la la – baba

– uu – dziecko

– Ra

la la –

– u

oho

ucho mi zwariowało?

a to nie:

niedziela

rusza

trzymajcie się ludzie!

(Uz 7, 44)

Block, me inside

– Ralla

la laa! – radio and woman

– uuu! – a child somewhere

– Ralla

la laa! – woman

– uuu! – child

– Ral

la la – woman

– uu – child

– Ra

la la –

– u

eer

my ear gone mad?

but no:

Sunday

seting off

hang on folks!

The space presented in the poem and re-constructed by the reader is definitely more “human” than in the “visual” poetry analyzed above. We are not observing vast areas of the city, we are focusing, with the lyrical persona, on the closest noisy neighbourhood. This human perspective brings in again Białoszewski’s unique, easily recognizable, sense of humour. The glossolalic noises produced by a woman, a child and a radio resemble a muezzin’s calls, making the whole situation intriguingly strange, somehow inappropriate (as the title defines the place of action). Paronomastic word play (“oho ucho” – “eer ear”) acts as a wink to the reader. The final explanation makes us laugh.

The attractiveness of the text results not only from its stylistic and semantic content. Its typographical layout is nearly as important as its content, actually it helps bring out the meaning potential of the poem. Sadowski claims that the vertical typographical arrangement schematically represents the structure of the block. The four graphically isolated, parallel glossolalic sections “act” as four floors in a high-rise¹³. The changes in the glossolalic patterns may also suggest that the voices are distorted because of the vertical distance of a few floors – again represented (typo)graphically. The visual composition of the poem shows how the auditory and the typographical may cooperate in creating space – both the space of the page and the space conceptualized by the reader (activating his/her inner hearing and vision). I have said above that in Białoszewski’s block-of-flat poems focusing on the auditory not much room is left for vision. This is true as far as the sensory experience captured in the words is concerned. The auditory, however, collaborates with the visual in the field of typography.

The poem *Przesłuchy* [Mishearings] deserves a partly similar analysis:

Przesłuchy

Co pani
zwariowała
i pupu – ku
i pupu – ku.

Łapię szczotkę za sztuczny kij
i walę w górę.
I nic.
Nasłuchuję.
I nic.
Wylatuję. Aż wstyd.

Mishearings

Well are you
nuts
and rat rat – tat
and rat rat – tat

I grab the plastic stick of the broom
and I bang on my ceiling.
Nothing.
I listen.
And nothing.
I run upstairs. What a shame.

¹³ W. Sadowski, op. cit., p. 28.

To nie ona.	It's wasn't her.
Ucho do ścian	Ear to the walls
Po piętrach.	Through the floors.
Tu?	Here?
Nie.	No.
Tu!	Here!
Tam.	There.
I tam.	And there.
Dom.	House.
Cały.	Whole.
Sam.	Alone.
Mgła.	Mist.

(Uz 7, 178-179)

The text, difficult to define in terms of literary genres (lyric?, story?, dramatic scene?)¹⁴, presents a sequence of scenes out of the block life. The narrator tries to track down the source of the irritating noise. The layout of the text reflects the progress of this quest. The hyphens highlight the onomatopoeias in the first part. A long word-serpent going down the page seems, however, much more interesting. It demonstrates graphically the futile attempts of the narrator – going down the floors, looking (listening) for the culprit. The vertical structure of the poem again resembles the vertical structure of the block. The very end of the text is both mysterious and humorous – nothing can be explained, the block has its own (sound)life.

Let me quote another example of spectacular cooperation between sound texture and typography:

Babodrzwi

piii trrr
 niepokoją
 oj ją
 oj ją
 tak z nade mnie gdzieś wywieźć
 (Uz 8, 229)

Womandoor

piii trrr
 bother
 eh her
 eh her
 to take her away from above me

The analysis of the work has to be based on its spatial organization. The symmetrically arranged words and syllables correspond with each other visually and semantically, forming an intriguing, eye-catching image. The poem is obviously ear-catching as well. The onomatopoeic syllables prove to be meaningful: “ją” (“her”) is not only a lamentable interjection parallel to

¹⁴ Cf. M. Głowiński, *Małe narracje Mirona Białoszewskiego*, [in:] idem, *Gry powieściowe. Szkice z teorii i historii form narracyjnych*, PWN, Warsaw 1973, p. 319-338.

“oj” (“eh”) but it is at the same time a pronoun, a part of the utterance developed in the forthcoming verse. It is not a coincidence either that “ja” (“her”) is printed exactly under the syllable “-ja” (“-ther”) of the word “niepokoją” (“bother”). The poem’s visual structure and its sound structure are evidently inseparable. The poem may be regarded as a “text toy” embodying many aspects of a literary work of art: its material shape (typography), its sounds (onomatopoeia, paronomasia) and its meaning. The irritating auditory sensation is transformed into an intriguing artistic “sound-graphic play”¹⁵.

Another text concerning the noises in the block reads:

ściana	Wall
radio	radio
aktywna o Jezu!	active oh Jesus!
(Uz 7, 148)	

The poet’s invention in presenting the block’s soundspace is endless. The above text may be treated as a pun, “released”/activated by means of... typography. In four words (!) the poet tells us humorously that someone is listening to the radio behind the wall; the sound is obviously audible to the neighbour, as unwanted and irritating as something radioactive. Białoszewski not only manages to convey his message in this text miniature, but he also intriguingly arranges the space: the unique space of the page (scattered words and parts of words – perhaps reflecting the scraps of sounds coming from behind the wall) and, consequently, the space in the block.

Perceiving the soundlife of the huge building has also resulted in onomatopoeic re-creation of the noises. In the case of *Sen przez rury* [*Sleeping through the pipes*]¹⁶ it took the following form:

– tu
 – tu tu tu
 – tu
 – tu tu
 (Uz 7, 164)

The text may be regarded as one simple, uniform onomatopoeia. It has, however, some more sense than only imitating the irritating noises in the pipes. “Tu” is polysemous in Polish: it is both a commonly used onomatopoeia for rumbling sounds and a word meaning “here”¹⁷. Obviously, the “tu tu tu”

¹⁵ The term introduced by J. Chojak in the article: *Grafia a iluzja mowy potocznej*, [in:] *Pisanie...*, op. cit., s. 166.

¹⁶ The title is not explicit. Another possible translation is *The dream caused by the pipes*.

¹⁷ That is the reason why I resign from English translation (“here” could not act as a proper onomatopoeia).

noise is heard “here”, in the particular space of a particular flat in a particular block, perhaps – intruding into some particular dream. The notation is also meaningful as it resembles a dialogue (the pipes are talking?). Such a text is nevertheless hardly innovative in the light of the history of poetry. Let me recall a Futurist poem by Stanisław Młodożeniec, published in 1921:

tu-m czy-m ta-m?
tam-tam TAM –
TU-M — —
tam-tam TAM tam-tam-tam TAM
TU-M TU-M
czy-m tam-tam? tam-tam? czy-m tam?
TAM-M? TUM-M?
czyli-m tam? — jeżeli-m tam to i tu-m
TUM-TUM
a i tam a i tum — — —
oj-ja JJAJ tam a i tu-m —
to-m i tam i tum
TUM¹⁸

The seemingly simple onomatopoeic composition may be read as a complex poetic soliloquy expressing the longing for a place the lyrical persona has abandoned. The words used as onomatopoeias have their “regular” meaning as well: “tu” means “here” and “tam” – “there”¹⁹. The size of the type plays an important role too – words in capitals are regarded as more important, as a “winning option” on some level of reflection. There is no point in the further

¹⁸ S. Młodożeniec, *Kreski i futureski*, Klub Futurystów “Katarzynka”, Warsaw 1921 (no page numbers).

¹⁹ I do not propose my own English translation of this poem, as a simple repetition of the English “here” and “there” would not reflect the onomatopoeic structure of the Polish text. Let me, instead, quote the French translation, which demonstrates the onomatopoeic and syntactic complexities of the work (transl. by Maria Elster; I’m quoting after: *Un dadaïsme polonais?*, *Cahiers Dada Surréalisme*, 1968, nr 2, p. 116):

„MOSCOU
suis ici ou suis là-bas ?
là-bas TAM
ici TUM
là-bas TAM tam-tam-tam LÁ-
TUM ici TUM -CI
suis là-bas TAM ? là-bas ? suis TAM ?
TAM-M ? TU-M ? LÁ ? CI ?
suis là-bas TAM ? si suis là-bas suis donc ici TUM
CI -TUM CI- TUM
et sui là-bas TAM et suis ici TUM
oh - la OLALALA TAM TUM ici et là
donc suis là-bas et suis ici
TUM”

analysis of the Futurist literary innovations here²⁰. The purpose of this avant-garde digression has been only to show that Białoszewski's oeuvre, however intriguing it still seems, has its pretty old antecedents.

Let us come back to Białoszewski's block-of-flats poetry. I have already pointed out several times that in those poems the focus on hearing excludes the description of the visual. The concentration on sound could be, however, so intense that the noise is perceived as if it was visible:

W bloku

— jak się słyszy drzwi w górze?
— ukosem
— a z czego?
— a trzask na trzask
— to odeśpijcie nas
(Uz 8, 216)

In a block

— how do you hear the door upstairs?
— aslant
— but how?
— bang to bang
— so sleep us off

And what has happened to freedom? Is it still there? It has somehow disappeared from my analysis as I have focused on the auditory sensations. The visual experience "out of the high window" brought the sense of freedom. Was it only illusory? What about the auditory experience in the same place? The clattering, creaking, knocking, hammering, ringing, shouting – all that behind the poet's wall – seems to rule out the sense of freedom. However, we still encounter it in the poems on a more intrinsic level. Białoszewski's typographical play combining meaning and layout are indeed a token of artistic freedom. What is more, the poems below show that the author was capable of distancing himself from the surrounding "auditory obstacles". A spectacular example, combining intertextuality and humour and again concerning some pipes, reads:

Rura Weneda

w murze w rurze
Król Rur

Chór:
Ue ę ę

noc-że
u

Pipe Windea

in the wall in the pipe
King of Pipes

Chorus:
Uee ue ue

night so black
oo

²⁰ See: B. Śniecikowska, "Nuż w uhu"? *Koncepcje dźwięku w poezji polskiego futuryzmu*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2008, p. 36-37, 282-286.

w górach rur	squeezes
przeciska	King of Pipes
Króla Rur	through miles of pipes
uu	oo oo

Kto mu pomoże?	Who will help him?
najgorzej z trr eenem	It'll be difficult with his trrr ain
i harfą	and harp

(Uz 8, 179-180)

Rura Weneda is humorously intertextual and at the same time slightly iconoclastic as it alludes to the historiosophic tragedy *Lilla Weneda* by Juliusz Słowacki, Polish national bard. The main character of the poem, King of Pipes, is a comic *alter ego* of one of the protagonists of that play, the king of the tribe of Wends (Windeas). The props are not arbitrary either – i.e. the harp mentioned in the final verse may be identified with the magic harp in Słowacki's play, which could have saved the tragic tribe of Wends (but did not so in fact). The chorus appearing in the poem obviously corresponds to the chorus in the tragedy. It is hard to believe that such a complex network of intertextual relations was invoked to comment on ... the noises in a block of flats.

Last but not least, let us remember that the spectrum of the auditory naturally extends towards silence. This again switches the perspective to the more general, cosmic, less tangible, less concrete:

Święte życie	One may live
tu może być	a sacred life
u siebie	here
c i c h o	s i l e n c e
na tej górze	on these heights ²¹
w rurach, w murach	in the pipes, in the walls
jeżeli tylko jest życie	if only there is life
w sobie;	in oneself;
no a ta świętość?	and the sacredness?
Z musu	out of necessity
b y w a.	it h a p p e n s.

(Uz 7, 43)

The above analyses show that in Białoszewski's world noise equals human action, fuss, life. Focusing on the auditory experience automatically shuts out

²¹ The Polish phrase "na tej górze" literally translates as "on this mountain"; more colloquially "here, upstairs".

the visual experience of the lyrical persona. Vision is, however, still present as the readers are often confronted with a complex, intriguing typographical space, which helps them re-create the space of the block itself. The poems concentrating on the sense of hearing seem much more interesting graphically, as if the layout somehow substituted for the “real”, non-textual visual experience. This observation is, however, not always true of the whole oeuvre of Miron Białoszewski. The rule works only in the case of this particular set of poems. The typographical freedom might compensate for the freedom that the lyrical persona cannot achieve within the block-of-flats’ soundscape.

To some extent, the conclusions seem self-evident. If you live on a high floor in a tower block built in the 1970s, you may see intriguing landscapes and you will obviously hear your neighbours. Białoszewski gave interesting artistic shape to this simple truth, balancing his imagery between the two extremes: the minimalistic, linguistically and typographically “disturbing” soundscape²² of his flat and the nearly cosmic, panoramic, mute landscapes as seen from his window.

Let me finish this paper with a poetic conclusion by Białoszewski, showing his passion for freedom – and for any space he found himself in:

Autoportret radosny

[...]

Świadomość jest tańcem radości.
Moja świadomość tańczy
przed lampą deszczu
przed łupiną ściany
przed sklepem spożywczym z
wieńcami kapusty
przed ustami mówiących przyjaciół
przed własną ręką nieoczekiwaną
przed niewydrażoną rzeźbą
rzeczywistości –

[...]

(Uz 1, 110)

Joyful self-portrait

[...]

Consciousness is a dance of joy.
My consciousness dances
in front of the lamp of rain
in front of the shell of a wall
in front of the grocer’s with a garland
of cabbages
in front of the mouths of my talking
friends
in front of my own unexpected hand
in front of the unhollowed sculpture
of reality – [...]

²² The term used in the field of interdisciplinary comparative studies – cf. R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscapes: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester, Vermont 1994 (the text first published in 1977); *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998-2001*, ed. by L. Sider, D. Freeman, J. Sider, Wallflower Press, London & New York 2003; M. Cuddy-Keane, *Modernist Soundscapes and the Intelligent Ear: An Approach to Narrative Through Auditory Perception*, [in:] *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by J. Phelan and P.J. Rabinowitz, Blackwell, Oxford 2005.

**PRZESTRZEŃ SOCJALISTYCZNEGO BLOKOWISKA, PRZESTRZEŃ
NOWOCZESNEGO WIERSZA – SENSUALNA SZTUKA MIRONA
BIAŁOSZEWSKIEGO
(streszczenie)**

Artykuł omawia różne aspekty kreowania przestrzeni w późnej twórczości Mirona Białoszewskiego, zarówno w perspektywie obrazowania tekstowego, jak sztuki typografii. Analizę rozpoczyna opis specyficznego odczuwania i przedstawiania przestrzeni w całej spuściźnie autora *Rozkurzu*. Zasadniczą część pracy dotyczy jednak wierszy inspirowanych konkretną przestrzenią miejską, pisanych od roku 1975, po przeprowadzce poety do bloku „mrówkowca”. Zajmuję się zarówno wizualnym, jak słuchowym doświadczeniem przestrzeni, dowodząc, że w późnej, „blokowej” spuściźnie autora *Rozkurzu* obrazowanie zmienia się wyraźnie w zależności od rodzaju opisywanych doświadczeń (percepcja widzianego i słyszanego, wyraźnie rozdzielone wrażenia zmysłowe). Budowanie przestrzeni dokonuje się przy tym nie tylko w tekstach skupionych na tym, co widzialne, ale także w wierszach „audialnych” – opisujących to, co słyszane i w szczególnie sposób nacechowanych brzmieniowo. Czerpiąca z doświadczeń awangardowych, w szczególności – futuryzmu, typografia Białoszewskiego współtworzy „prze-strzenną”, sensualną semantyką utworów i jako taka staje się również przedmiotem analiz. Jednym z pojęć przywoływanych po wielokroć we wszystkich częściach pracy jest różnorodnie rozumiana wolność.

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EXPRESSIVE PAINTING OF THE 1980S AS A SIGN OF FREEDOM

Abstract: For some, the new expressive painting of the 80s was a return to art, for others – development of new pictorial practices. In Poland, it showed up a few years after Document VII in Kassel (1982) dominated by new expression and was represented amongst others by such art groups as Koło Klipsa and Gruppa and such artists as Jerzy Kopeć, Tadeusz Sobkowiak, Piotr C. Kowalski. The painting of the 1980s was looking for new places for art and simultaneously, by introducing templates and graffiti elements, it made the painterly practice come closer to *street art*. In Poland, similar as in Germany, new painting was viewed as a chance to break the artistic and aesthetic impasse brought in by conceptualism. Now we see that this painting was not in conflict with conceptual practices and strategies. We see that the opposition between the new painting of the 1980s and analytical & experimental art of the previous decade was a product of the discourse accompanying the new painting.

Keywords: arche-art – art market – expressive painting – expressiology – Neue Wilde – trans-avantgarde

When we think of the art of the 1980s, of what makes it different from the art of the preceding and following decades, when we think of the art of the 80s as of a certain mnemotechnic sign, we have in mind *expressive painting*. We think of large, color paintings hardly fitting into galleries, coming out from walls and entering gallery space in the form of painterly objects and installations, of pictures looking for their place outside a gallery: in old closed factories, fair halls, railway stations, churches, on facades of public buildings and city squares. We think of pictures painted on canvases, cartoons, paper, foils, fabrics, on different surfaces and on ephemeral constructions built of strips of wood or twisted wire, of pictures painted with paints but also with fruit, berries, blackberries, wild strawberries etc. We think of painterly energy blowing up the theoretical frames of art, abolishing fixed divisions into painting and sculpture, abstract and figurative painting, avant-garde and kitsch.

We think of painterly sculptures by Koło Klipsa, big expressive canvasses by Jerzy Kopeć, Tadeusz Sobkowiak, paintings by Piotr C. Kowalski, Jacek Korfanty, Andrzej Peplowski or Lech Siejkowski. We think of art that we had a chance to watch closely, watch how it evolves, changes, how it enters into dialogue with similar phenomena born somewhere else, in Poland and abroad.

The new painting showed up in Poznań in 1984 – first exhibitions of Koło Klipsa in Gallery Wielka 19; amazing debut by Jerzy Kopeć in Gallery Akumulatory 2 and his large diploma show “Expression” in Poznań fair hall; exhibition of Piotr Kowalski “Painting and Its Trace” in Gallery Wielka 19. The culmination of painterly activity was witnessed in the years 1986-1988 – painterly installations by Piotr Kowalski “My studio” in Gallery Wielka 19 (1986); painterly actions by Jerzy Kopeć such as “Total painting” in Gallery Wielka 19, his painterly installation “Thorn” in Poznań BWA (1987), and a giant canvas covered the façade of the Raczyński Library in centre of Poznań (“Energy”, 1988); shows by the Warsaw Grupa (1986) Neue Biermienost (1986), Anna Ciba (1987) or Renata Anger (1987) in Gallery Wielka 19.

In 1987, at the 2nd Biennial of New Art in Zielona Góra, Gallery Wielka 19 and Warsaw gallery Dziekanka with which the Poznań gallery had closely cooperated at that time, presented themselves as main centers of new expression in Poland: Wielka 19 showed works by Koło Klipsa, Piotr Kurka, Piotr C. Kowalski, Jerzy Kopeć, Tadeusz Sobkowiak and Pracownia Dziekanka presented works by Mirosław Bałka, Marek Sobczyk, Ryszard Woźniak and Tomasz Sikorski. The same year, Koło Klipsa and Grupa were invited to participate in the exhibition “Gruppenkunstwerke” at VIII Documenta in Kassel. However, at that time, the international career of the new painting was already on the wane, towards the close. A similar process was to be witnessed also in Poland. Expressive painting did not survive 1989; in the 90s it functioned already as a historical phenomenon – as painting of the 1980s.¹

New painting showed up in Poland a few years after Documenta VII in Kassel dominated by the new expression (1982), a few years after famous exhibitions “A New Spirit in Painting” in London (1981) and “Zeitgeist” in Berlin (1982) – both organized by the curators: Norman Rosenthal and Christos Joachimides, after the exhibition by Barbara Rose “Painting: The Eighties” in Museum of Modern Art (New York, 1979), after publication of Achille Bonito Oliva’s book “The International Trans-avantgarde” (Milan, 1982) and Wolfgang Max Faust’s “Hunger nach Bildern. Deutsche Malerei der Gegenwart” (Berlin,

¹ No representative of expressionist painting from Eastern Europe took part in the exhibition After the Wall. Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe (Moderna Museet, Stockholm 1999).

1982). Polish critics were well prepared to welcome the new painting.² They had the knowledge and adequate terminology – the only problem was whether the new Polish painting should be viewed in terms of neo-expressionism, Neue Wilde, trans-avantgarde or post-modernism.³ All these solutions were possible because the Polish new expression was *art without theory*, without its own theory, it was a-theoretical art which chose poetry instead of theory. It was art with theory provided from outside by art critics and theoretician.

It was believed that the new painting did not need theory because it was a return to the painting, return to the art. After years of avant-garde searches and experiments which led art into anti-art or post-art, the art returned to painting, i.e. to something known and domesticated, which undoubtedly is art and has always been art. Many enthusiasts of the new painting fell victim to illusion, as Barbara Rose, that there exists some eternal essence of painting to which the painting of the 1980s comes back, that painting is a form of expression assigned to a human being, that a man has always painted because painting is the most individual way of materializing pictures originating in human imagination. Painting is a kind of arche-art, unceasingly present from Altamira to Pollock, strengthening faith in universal value of art that transcends the limits of history.⁴ The return of painting meant the return to old, tested aesthetic categories, with the expression as the central category of idealist aesthetics. Again, art was to become the expression of individual imagination, subjective expression of artist's feelings and emotions. The term "neo-expression" was to be meant as a return to the main stream of the artistic tradition.

There was no dispute about the new painting in Poland. Opponents accused the young painters that they followed the fashion imported from the West; advocates defended the expressive painting saying that it was the response to

² See lecture by Maria Morzuch presented at the annual conference of Association of Art Historians in 1984 which contains all the quoted information, and even more – Biennial in Paris (1980), Venice (1980). Morzuch adds that 1984 was the year when the time of summing up and analyzing the new expression started. M. Morzuch, *Nowe malarstwo w Polsce*, [in:] *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku*, ed. T. Frankowska, Warszawa 1987.

³ Jan St. Wojciechowski referred the new Polish painting to Neue Wilde, and Krzysztof Stanisławski to trans-avantgarde. See: J. St. Wojciechowski, *Od konceptualizmu do Neue Wilde i z powrotem*, [in:] *Post-modernistyczna kultura sztuk pięknych*, Warszawa 1995. K. Stanisławski, *Nowa ekspresja*, [in:] *Od awangardy do postmodernizmu. Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku*, ed. G. Dziamski, Warszawa 1996.

⁴ B. Rose, *American Painting: The Eighties*, Buffalo 1979. Cyt. za D. Crimp, *The End of Painting*, "October" 1981, Spring. Reprint, [in:] *On the Museum's Ruin*, Cambridge Mass. 1993, pp. 90-91.

the reality of the martial law that had surrounded Polish art of the 1980s.⁵ Maria Morzuch opposed the new Polish painting to self-analytical, experimenting art of the 70s emphasizing its journalistic nature, aggressiveness, visual and linguistic abruptness and its inclination for irony and mockery.⁶ Ewa Mikina highlighted its narrative nature and parodistic parasitizing on painterly conventions giving the effect of entertaining or carnival-like reversal.⁷ For Marcin Giżycki, the new painting was related to the crisis in culture, or to be more precise with decline of real socialism and collapse of political (Marxist) meta-narrative in Poland.⁸ All these descriptions do not quite fit the Poznań new expression, they do not find room for activity of Koło Klipsa, paintings by Jerzy Kopeć, Tadeusz Sobkowiak, Piotr C. Kowalski or Andrzej Peplowski. Their art was not a simple opposition to, denial of the preceding decade's art. Is not Piotr Kowalski's interest in a trace an example of conceptualization of the notion of expression? Introduction of conceptual strategies to the domain of painting?

Reflection over painting as a trace appeared in Piotr C. Kowalski's art very early – at the beginning of 1980s. First, as a reflection over the painterly gesture. What is the painterly gesture? Is it the painter's gesture or just a gesture leaving a trace on a canvas? Later on, when working on "Double Pictures" (1984),⁹ it becomes a reflection over an intentional and accidental picture, originated from traces of the paint dripping onto the floor. Is art expression or a place of expression? We have to do with a quite vague issue of *expressiology*, which the artist complicates even further by making painterly gestures as tricks before the public, though it also prompts associations with Jackson Pollock who was filmed and photographed during the process of painting. What is a public gesture of a painter? Is it still painting or already a performance? Painting or a trace of painting? Fancy for tautology, in the way of Joseph Kosuth and Zbigniew Dłubak, photographic documentation of pictures at the place of their origination, i.e. the natural environment for them ("Live Nature", since 1990), exhibition of pictures as if prepared for

⁵ See M. Gutowska, *Nowe malarstwo*, Zeszyty Naukowe ASP Warszawa, 1986, no. 1 (17). See also the discussion held in the editorial office of the magazine *Sztuka* attended by A. Bonarski, J. Daszkiewicz, Z. Polus, T. Rudomino, A. Skoczylas, K. Stanisławski, P. Susid, J. Werbanowski: *Młoda sztuka lat 80. ...skąd i dokąd?*, *Sztuka*, 1988, no. 3.

⁶ M. Morzuch, *Nowe malarstwo w Polsce...*

⁷ Mikina focused on the picture by Maciej Dowgiałło „Porwanie niewinnej” (1987). The painterly cliché from the turn of the 18th century returns without any historical or literary references to change itself into parody and mockery of the academic painting. E. Mikina, *Niedo-mowa*, [in:] *Co słyszeć*, ed. M. Sitkowska, Warszawa 1989.

⁸ M. Giżycki, *Malarstwo po malarstwie*, [in:] *Co słyszeć...*

⁹ Piotr C. Kowalski showed his first "Double Paintings" in Gallery Wielka 19 in 1984. Then, he changed the title and rename them as "Painting and Its Trace".

transportation, canvas stretchers wrapped into packages and their replacement with slide projections (“In My Garden”, BWA, Poznań 1994; Eva Pol gallery, Berlin 1995). All that weakened the opposition: expression – concept, expressive painting – conceptual practice and made Piotr Kowalski’s painting subject to ongoing conceptualization.¹⁰

The example of Piotr C. Kowalski and other Poznań painters shows that the expressive painting of the 1980s was not a return to painting but rather a development of *new pictorial practices*. The painting of the 80s pointed that there was nothing like essence of painting, essence of the painterly picture, there were only various pictorial practices. This liberation from the painterly essentialism, from the cult of a “good picture”, “well painted picture” seems the biggest achievement of the painting in the 1980s. In the painting of the 80s, it did not matter whether a picture was “well painted”, but whether it triggered off resonance. The painterly actions by Jerzy Kopeć were aimed at engendering such resonance. The painter, as Andrzej Kostołowski writes, “installs large compositions which after a while he ‘removes’ from the city landscape. He behaves a bit like an installation maker or interventionist ...”¹¹ The painting of the 1980s searched for new places for art and at the same time by introducing templates and graffiti elements it made the painterly practice come closer to *street art*.

The new painting did not evoke such a heated discussion in Poland as it did in the United States. The American debate focused primarily on the German new painting which started to conquer the New York art world in the early 1980s – in the fall 1981, five German artists (George Baselitz, Markus Lupertz, A.R. Penck, Reiner Fetting, Salome) held exhibitions in seven New York galleries. The enthusiasts of that painting, to include Donald Kuspit, saw new avant-garde in the German neo-expressionism that was dethroning and pushing the art of the 60s and 70s, which so far had set the main trend of thinking about modern art, to the margin of history; radical rejection of the dead modernism.¹² The opponents grouped around the magazine “October”, accused the German neo-expressionism of artistic and ideological regression, support for cultural and political conservatism.¹³ Assigning reactionary and rightist features to the new painting, associating it with the policy of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, revived discussions on political nature of art, links

¹⁰ See P. C. Kowalski and others, eds. W. Makowiecki, M. Pawłowski, Poznań 2001.

¹¹ A. Kostołowski, *O niezależności malarzkiej wyobraźni Jerzego Kopcia*, Poznań 1999, p. 4.

¹² See D. Kuspit, *New German Painting: The Recovery of Expression*, [in:] *New Figuration: Contemporary Art from Germany*, Los Angeles 1983.

¹³ B. Taylor, *The Art of Today*, London 1995, p. 51.

between art, authority and market as well as middle-class audience and art buyers.¹⁴

Benjamin Buchloh, in his merciless attack on the new painting claimed that it was an ostensible novelty, more a symptom of social crisis than an artistic innovation. He accused the new painting of middle-class misoginism – “Nor is it accidental that not one of the German neoexpressionists or the Italia Arte Cifra painters is female.”¹⁵ The male art, *bad boys’ art*, was also represented by Koło Klipsa and Gruppa; female artists appeared at shows of the latter only as an element of “abnormality”.¹⁶ Balthus – the painter of the bourgeois taste – was selected the patriarchal figure and spiritual father of the new painting. It was not obvious, however, that Balthus was the patron of the new painting; the expressive painting of the 80s had a few other fathers – Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, David Hockney. The spiritual father of the new painting in Poland was first Eugeniusz Markowski and finally Andrzej Wróblewski, solitary painter who in 1940s was looking for his own style which would be capable of expressing brutality of war and post-war life in Poland.¹⁷ Rivalry with the American dominance in art – “the major problem of postwar European painting was that it never reached the ‘qualitative’ level of the New York School.”¹⁸ Using national stereotypes in the painting of the 80s – “When art emphasizing national identity attempts to enter the international distribution system the most worn-out historical and geopolitical clichés have to be employed.”¹⁹ Such notions must appear as the Nordic, Latin, Mediterranean, the Teutonic or – from the Polish area – Newly Romantic, there must appear references to the spirit of nation and *genius loci*.

The situation in Poland was different than in the US, closer to the one in Germany. In Poland as in Germany, the new painting was viewed as a chance to break the artistic and aesthetic impasse brought in by conceptualism. The new painting was placed in the avant-garde tradition hoping, as Bazon Brock

¹⁴ The best known publications regarding this subject comprise S. Guilbaut’s book, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art. Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and Cold War*, Chicago 1983 and B. Groys’ book *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*, Munich 1988.

¹⁵ B. Buchloh, *Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression. Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting*, “October”, 1981, Spring. Quoted after: *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. B. Wallis, New York 1991, p. 121.

¹⁶ Ewa Piechowska took part in the early exhibitions of Gruppa and it was her who entered the element of abnormality at the Gruppa exhibitions. See M. Sitkowska, *Kalendarium*, [in:] *Gruppa 1982-1992*, ed. M. Sitkowska, Galeria Zachęta, Warszawa 1992, p. 52.

¹⁷ See: *Wróblewski nieznanym*, ed. J. Michalski, Galeria Zderzak, Kraków 1993.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

wrote, that it will allow to see that tradition in a new way.²⁰ Therefore, there was no conflict between young painters and avant-garde of the 70s, except when critics tried occasionally to fan such a conflict. Young painters showed their works in alternative galleries, took part in artistic events organized by those galleries, though they did not renounce commercial galleries – the commercial gallery Desa was a place of solo shows by Jerzy Kopeć (1984, 1987), Tadeusz Sobkowiak (1984, 1989), Mariusz Kruk (1986, 1988) and Piotr C. Kowalski (1988, 1989). Only in the latter part of the 80s, curators showed up who attempted to promote exclusively the new painting hoping to create thus the art market patronage independent from the state policy. "I am interested only in one issue, Andrzej Bonarski said in a discussion organized by the magazine "Sztuka", to create in Poland – with assistance of critics, dealers, art magazines and newspapers – a market that would absorb the best products of the Polish modern painting leaders, would feed them and develop into the future." And he added: "All our most talented artists of the 1980s /.../ all those talents will decay if they do not find an authentic market support."²¹

The turn towards the market in Poland was driven by different motifs than in the US, the idea was to limit the state's monopoly in the domain of culture – less state, more market shouted enthusiasts of the art market, still the effect was similar – moving the new painting to the position of an ally of Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberal policy.²² No wonder then that after 1989, the expressionist painting lost all its criticism and the notion of "critical art" which made such staggering career in the Polish critical discourse in the 1990s was clearly built in opposition to the painting of the 1980s. The greatest beneficiary of the painterly expression of the 80s was the post-conceptual art which under the influence of that painting became more expressive, sensual, open to the world of everyday signs and objects and which in the 80s worked out new forms of expression – large, color photographs, narrative videos, more sensual, appealing to senses installations.²³ When thinking today of what had the strongest impact of the art of the 1980s on the art a decade later we think of Cindy Sherman, Jenny Holzer, Sophie Calle, Nan Goldin ("The Ballad of Sexual Dependency", 1986), the art made by women rather than of the wild, expressive painting.

²⁰ B. Taylor, *The Art of Today* ..., p. 51.

²¹ Młoda sztuka lat 80 ... skąd i dokąd? ..., p. 8.

²² More on the market mythology of the 1980s see: G. Dziamski, Liberalizm kulturowy wobec liberalizmu gospodarczego, [in:] *Liberalne wyzwania*, ed. Z. Drozdowicz, Poznań 1998.

²³ Zob. P. Osborne, Survey, [in:] *Conceptual Art*, ed. P. Osborne, London–New York 2002, p. 46.

The painting of the 80s was used in different political, market and cultural discussions (dispute over postmodernism), held somewhat beyond the painters themselves. From the artistic point of view, the dispute concerned painting and precisely the issue whether it can still be a progressive artistic means or merely a reactionary one? The question was wrong which is more obvious today than in the 1980s. The painting of the 80s has set us free from the medial thinking of art by introducing real, post-modernistic medial plurality – artists can use different media but none medium, in its nature, is better or worse, everything depends on how it is used by an artist.

The painting of the 80s refreshed the Polish artistic scene by introducing an array of talented young artists who rejected the expressionist painting in the following decade and started to play major roles in the Polish art such as Mariusz Kruk, Leszek Knaflewski, Piotr Kurka or Piotr C. Kowalski. First of all, however, the expressive painting of the 80s initiated in Poland and other countries of Central Europe discussion on post-modernity and to be precise on the place of art in postmodern society, relation between the high and low culture, the role of art in media age and in media culture. Moreover, the expressive painting of the 80s introduced the aesthetics of a camp which gained much popularity among young artists and critics of the next decade, the example of which can be Ładnie group (Rafał Bujnowski, Marcin Maciejowski, Wilhelm Sasnal). But the market that the artists of the 80s had such high hopes of disclosed its unexpected nature after 1990. First of all, it stopped to be an attractive alternative for the national patronage over art – the pillar on which the entire earlier market mythology was based. The State began to rapidly withdraw from its protective function toward art and artists, doming them to find themselves in the environment of the market competition. It turned that pure market in art is fiction, which most radical market advocates began to understand.

Dispute over the market, Fredric Jameson writes, is the most important dispute of our times, this is an ideological dispute, between market ideologies for which the market is ascribed to human nature (The market is in human nature), and those who see in market a dangerous economization process, i.e. leveling the human world in the market expansion.²⁴ It is hard to say, to what extent this dispute can be freed from ideology and what role art was to play in that process?

²⁴ F. Jameson, Postmodernism and the Market, [in:] *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London–New York 1991, p. 263-265.

Today, the expressive painting is a closed epoch which fights for its place in the history and does it with help of means it knows. June 2008 witnessed the auction in Polswiss Art auction house which put for sale a picture of the former Gruppa member, Paweł Kowalewski – “Mon cheri Bolshevique” of 1986 – its price was estimated at PLN 115-135 thousand and was sold for PLN 120 thousand (30 thousand euros). It has been the highest price for a Polish painting from the 1980s so far. Expressive painting of the 1980s achieved at the end its market success.

Translated by Maria Śpik-Dziamska

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EKSPRESYJNE MALARSTWO LAT 80. JAKO ZNAK WOLNOŚCI (streszczenie)

Nowe ekspresyjne malarstwo lat 80. dla jednych było powrotem do sztuki, dla innych – rozwijaniem nowych praktyk piktorialnych. W Polsce objawiło się kilka lat po zdominowanych przez nową ekspresją Documenta VII w Kassel (1982) i reprezentowane było przez artystyczne grupy Koło Klipsa i Gruppa oraz takich artystów jak Jerzy Kopeć, Tadeusz Sobkowiak, Piotr C. Kowalski. Malarstwo lat 80. szukało dla sztuki nowych miejsc, a jednocześnie zbliżało praktykę malarską (przez wprowadzanie szablonów, elementów graffiti) do sztuki ulicy, do *street art*. Było postrzegane, podobnie jak w Niemczech, jako szansa wyjścia z artystycznego i estetycznego impasu, w jaki wprowadził sztukę konceptualizm. Dzisiaj widzimy, że malarstwo to nie było w konflikcie ze sztuk...ą wcześniejszej dekady, że opozycja między ekspresyjnym malarstwem lat 80. a analityczną i eksperymentalną sztuką lat 70. była wytworem towarzyszącego nowemu malarstwu dyskursu.



Fot. 1. Piotr C. Kowalski, *Me and My Atelier*, installation, "Galeria Wielka 19", Poznań 1986;
photo Włodzimierz Kowaliński



Fot. 2a. Piotr C. Kowalski, *Blueberry Triptych* from the series *Still lifes*, canvas, blackberry, wild strawberries, screen print, 1982; photo Piotr C. Kowalski



Fot. 2b. Piotr C. Kowalski, *Notice board „Attention ! Contaminated ground ”*, photograph, Porążyn, 1982



Fot. 3. Piotr C. Kowalski, *Live Nature*, installation, Eva Pol Gallery, Berlin 1995;
photo Piotr. C. Kowalski

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NATIONAL IDENTITY AND GLOBALIZATION: EXAMPLES OF POLISH CONTEMPORARY ART

Abstract: The world in which we live is undergoing a relentless process of globalization. In this context, national identity is a big problem. In my paper, I would like to provide a few concrete examples to illustrate the broader problem of what national identity consists in. Do young artists address the issue of their own national identity? If so, how do they do this? There are some implicit questions in my paper: is there such a thing as national identity in the context of art? Is it not anachronistic to look at things from the perspective of nationality? I write about four young Polish artists: Monika Sosnowska, Kuba Bąkowski, the Twożywo Group, Laura Paweła. They demonstrate that serious problems can be discussed in an interesting way, with a light touch and a little distance. And they demonstrate that art which takes up the issue of national identity is not obliged to 'lift people's spirits'.

Keywords: art – national identity – globalization – polish art

The world in which we live is undergoing a relentless process of globalization. Globalization is taking place on many levels in the spheres of economics, technology and communication; it is also having an impact on politics and culture. It is not, however, a process which is easy to define. Anthony Giddens suggests that we understand globalization in a general sense as “a fundamental expression of the extension of time and space. Globalization involves blurring the distinction between presence and absence, and the tangling of social events and relations ‘from afar’ with local contexts.” (Giddens, 31) In a similar vein, Bauman places a lot of emphasis on the fact that globalization can divide and unite regions and people, with repercussions in the world in general (Bauman, 7). Experts talk about an increasingly unified world in which goods, information, values and lifestyles circulate freely. Arun Appandurai describes five spheres of influence: the spheres of ethnicity (the flow of people), technology, finance, media and ideas. According to Roland Robertson, globalization “depends on compression, on the crowding together of facts, norms, values

from various national cultures, different stages of development, intellectual levels and value systems. This is not a melting of previously diverse national cultures into one homogeneous whole, but rather a confrontation of variants, which creates diversity.” (in Kłoskowska, 161).

The process of globalization is inextricably linked with the opposite process – the creation of small communities and relationships. As national identity loses its significance, is washed away or dissolves into a homogeneous supra-national concept, small communities emerge to counter-balance this trend. A community is a “place on the border between what is collective and what is individual.” Now that national communities have ever less significance, their place is being taken by communities centered around ethnicity, regions, places, sects, groups of friends and fans. Again, this problem is widely discussed. It is stressed that microgroups unite around one thing, big or small – an idea, a hobby, an activity, a favourite music group – but apart from this unifying factor, the members can be completely different, in terms of sex, age, education, race/ethnicity, religion or origin. In *The Time of the Tribes*, Michel Maffesoli talks about new tribes and tribal structures which arise as a result of the human need and natural inclination for ‘collectivity’. These new tribes are spontaneous, and not conventional or imposed from without (like nations or states). New tribal communities are above all empathic; the members are joined by emotional ties, a specific lifestyle and inner solidarity. They ritualize social life, make use of symbols and, most importantly, provide the feeling of being together, of being part of a community. It is crucial that we choose these new tribes ourselves, and the decision to leave them is also our own, which was not the case at all with the primitive tribes (in the anthropological sense), where birth decided which tribe a person belonged to, and leaving the tribe voluntarily was impossible or treated as an unforgivable betrayal. If a person was banished from the tribe it was considered to be a severe punishment. Contemporary tribes are fluid, flexible, and casual, while the tribes of the past were permanent and, in principle, unchanging. Maffesoli emphasizes that we engage with these tribes on an everyday basis and that they are a signature feature of our times. We can be members of several tribes at the same time and networks can be created from them. (Just consider the communities which appeared thanks to the Internet – how many of them arose from nothing and how swiftly some of them disappeared.) For example, we frequently identify more with an academic community than with particular representatives of our nationality.

It is abundantly clear that strong national characteristics are disappearing. Appadurai urges: “You have to imagine yourself beyond nationality.” (Appadurai, 233) In such a world, does national identity count for anything at

all? It is relevant in art, seeing as how we continually focus on where an artist comes from. And yet it is frequently very difficult to identify a single country of origin, because many artists have adopted new countries as their homes. In such cases, does their birthplace or their family's culture determine the artist's creativity?

The dictionary explains that "national identity" is a specific group consciousness stemming from belonging to a definite society, characterized by its own cultural, historical, political and religious heritage; collective consciousness is based upon these elements. The theorists studying the problem of identity emphasize its two aspects: being the same (sameness) and differing from others (distinctiveness). There is always some 'us' and 'them', an inseparable pair (Jacobson-Widding, Dziemidok) A lot of stress is placed on cultural identity: "National identity is one form of cultural identity, but not all cultural identity is a national identity." (Dziemidok, 59).

Defining national identity is a tough task. As I have mentioned, it is a specific form of collective identity. It is shaped by national culture (the system of ideas, signs, associations, forms of behavior and understanding) and the feeling of belonging to a national community. (Ernest Gellner). National identity "integrates members of the community, encouraging ties of solidarity and mutual help to emerge," and it satisfies some basic human needs: the need to belong (it has to be stressed that such belonging in the case of national community, as with the family, is unconditionally guaranteed: it does not demand any services or achievements); the need for respect and recognition; the need for orientation in values. National identity is an 'anchor' which enables individuals to identify themselves in a safe and easy manner (Wiil Kymlicka). Nathanson states: "national identity is not natural. Work is required to create identity" (Dziemidok, 62). Anthony Smith holds that national identity has a fundamental character for three reasons: it is omnipresent – in every part of the world there are national problems, conflicts and aspirations; identity has a global character, because it touches all people; it is all-pervasive – national motifs pervade all spheres of life. Is national identity in today's world decided for us in advance, or can we pick and choose? Can we move between national identities without any problem, wearing the one that suits us at a given moment (a transfer of nations, rather than of football clubs). Today we freely change our familial, religious, ethnic and political ties. However, it most difficult to change those that are imposed upon us and which we treat as 'natural laws' – those of sex and nation (Dziemidok, 65). Just because something is natural it does not mean that we do not attempt to shape it. Yet the fact that it is easier to change your country of residence than your national identity is illustrated by the problems that large numbers of emigrants

have with assimilating in their adopted homes. Is national identity essential for us, seeing as earlier forms of authority, which seemed for so long to be inviolable, have disintegrated? Huntington gives an unambiguous answer: despite the processes currently taking place, people need “new sources of identity, new forms of stable community and new moral codes which can give a feeling of sense and purpose to their lives” (Huntington, 132).

If national culture has a big influence on the shaping of national identity (Kłoskowska, Habermas, Smith), and if artistic creativity plays a significant role in national culture (though it has to be said that literature is credited with the greatest role here), then the question of how the young Polish artists deal with this issue is a pertinent one. History and its shaping, contemporary attempts to rework symbols and national insignia, significant events in recent history, our feelings of community with regard to others, the ‘us and them’ stereotypes concerning our national identity – all of these factors influence the creation of our national identity; they shape it and can be found in artistic work. All-encompassing popular culture is a threat to this fragile construction: the Americanization of certain cultural spheres is slowly becoming a fact. “With the globalization of culture and the inevitable commodification of cultural products (including works of art), can art – or even *should* art – lose its national character, since national themes are a sign of provincialism and backwardness, condemning a work of art containing them to unavoidable failure on the international art market, especially when the competition is producing cosmopolitan works?” (Dziemidok, 67). And is it true, as the Slovenian theorist Lev Kreft suggests, that “art as a national institution, to a greater or lesser degree, is created by the dead authors of living works or the living authors of dead works” (Kreft, 81).

Dziemidok holds that this is true of the fine arts and popular music, which have become almost entirely cosmopolitan. A painter who desires international success paints neither Polish historical themes nor Polish landscapes¹. It is hard to say anything about national art, except maybe in the context of monuments. However, since eulogizing our past glories and heroes *and* the exposure and condemnation of our national flaws and failings are equally important in the shaping of national identity, it is important to pose difficult questions regarding both tendencies. Then we would not be discussing national art, but a form of creativity that forces us to consider our national relations.

¹ Though I would like to add that the most renowned Polish painter, Wilhelm Sasnałem, paints the landscapes around his hometown, Mościc, which shows that there are exceptions to the rules, or that the art world’s interests are changing.

History and our attitude towards tradition; symbols and signs; decisive moments threatening our identity; stereotypes – these are without doubt the key elements in shaping and maintaining national identity. I will provide examples of works which deal directly with each of these elements. I will begin with tradition and history.

Monika Sosnowska is an interesting and fairly well-known Polish artist (she has had individual exhibitions abroad, and her works can be found in significant museums and private collections). In her work she often blurs the border between art and architecture, playing with space to evoke chaos and unease. She surprises the viewer, inducing a state of disorientation or astonishment. We can probably recall her work at the Venice Biennale in 2003. A long green corridor turned out to be an increasingly narrow, low and impassable space which caused discomfort to the viewer. At the most recent Biennale, the artist represented Poland and exhibited her work in the Polish pavilion (as an aside it is interesting that such events as the Biennale are structured around national pavilions, and an increasing number of countries want to have their own space – last year it was a record number of 72 countries). Coming back to Sosnowska, she produced an architectural frame entitled *1:1* which alluded to many diverse contexts, but above all questioned the reception of modernism in Poland and in the regions of Eastern Europe. The functional solutions and bizarre creations characteristic for modernism found their specific form in apartments, stations and shopping precincts/malls. Today many of these buildings have been restructured. By referring to postwar modernism, Sosnowska poses the question of our attitude to tradition and heritage, sometimes an unwanted heritage imposed by the prevailing system. Architecture is not an innocent, pure reflection of ideology – it is a sign of the ruling power. After the collapse of Communism, the system's monuments were left standing – what should be done with them? The Polish context of the project was reinforced by the events taking place in Warsaw: constant debates on whether to knock down the Supersam (architecturally interesting supermarket built in 1962), started a national debate on the fate of such buildings – whether to demolish them or let them stand. But the problem is not confined to Poland. The question of buildings is also a question about the history and traditions we would like to preserve or erase. The crumpled and squashed construction of *1:1* portrays the attempts to make history compatible with our present reality and our current standards. On the other hand, the display of this exhibit in the Polish pavilion built in the 1930s could be read differently – as a reminder that history can stifle new ideas, destroy them mercilessly. Sebastian Cichocki, the curator of the exhibition, described it in the following way: “Sosnowska's project fits both the local context and the global discourse on the search for

functionality, on moving away from modernist stylization and pro-community tasks” (Catalogue of Biennale II, 96).

When we discuss national identity it is difficult to disregard the national insignia and symbols, among which the flag has particular significance. In the Poland of today, the flag is a very important symbol, present everywhere, evoking the feelings of unity. With regard to the Polish flag, I would like to focus on an artist who uses this symbol – but not with reverence or disrespect. His works are reflective-ironic.

Kuba Bąkowski often puts himself into his work, which raises interesting questions about his conception of his identity. His work deals with the myths, great narratives and dreams that influence people's lives and shape their vision of reality. Among other things he has explored the notion of ‘Polishness’. In 2002 he showed his film *Flag*. Against a red and white background (the colors of the Polish flag) stands a young man (the artist himself), dressed in red and white briefs and a cap, holding a dumb-bell in his hand. For four minutes we watch him exercise and listen to him panting. The artist is toning up his body, but he is probably also working on being Polish. It is an ironic analysis of the state of our country, the upbringing of young people – the enforced gestures and decisions, the list of expectations that our country has of us. The efforts of the young boy can be read as the effort required to shape your own national identity. To what extent does national identity affect our individual sense of ourselves? Is it a burden or an advantage? Comparing the awareness of one's nationality to physical fitness is irreverent and, as I have said, ironic. The almost static image also has an impact on the viewer: we are confronted with a national symbol and are somehow forced to consider what it means to us. The following year Bąkowski made another film; this time he dressed as a decorator and painted the Polish flag on a wall. The film is entitled *Paint Work*. In the process of painting the artist sometimes spins round and round, to the point where he loses his balance, as if being Polish meant losing one's balance, and as if too narrow and parochial focus on national symbols were dangerous. The way the space is filled evokes unease; it becomes cramped and suffocating, when the flag fills the screen it is everywhere, leaving no space for anything else. The young man is swallowed up, he loses his point of view, and the world comes to have narrow borders. The figure of the artist suggests that we can become stupefied if we overfill our lives with Polishness, without leaving any space for other things, such as humanity, individualism, or our European legacy. Is Bąkowski's work only local and ‘ours’ (i.e. Polish)? Is his work incomprehensible and uninteresting to the rest of the world? I do not have a ready answer to these questions – I would like to know it myself.

Polish national identity was much discussed in 2004. On 1st May 2004 we joined the European Union and this was accompanied by the fears that we would lose our identity as we melt into the globalized culture of Europe. These fears were of course fuelled by some politicians. The concerns were made more pressing by the specific socio-political situation in Poland. After the system change of 1989, our country, just like the others in the region, wished to become part of the West very quickly and rapidly adopted all of 'their' values. These values and models are often incompatible with the 'traditional Polish system of values', and so we alter them and try to adapt them to our everyday reality. We have also changed as a nation. In this atmosphere *Captain Europe* appeared, an Internet comic strip, produced by the group Twożywo. The Captain is helped by the Society of Captain Europe, who are responsible for broadening his knowledge and ensuring his actions are noble. The Captain wears European symbols, his colors are blue and yellow and his favorite shape is the star. Although he does not have a clearly identifiable nationality, a careful observer would pick up on little hints that the Captain is Polish. We meet him in Polish cities, he frequently makes ironic allusions to Polish history, and when he speaks, red and white fill his mouth. The Captain is optimistic and enthusiastic about the development of capitalism, he supports consumerism and popular culture, and his enemies are all of those who want to prevent the techno-capitalist development, as they threaten the consumer's bliss. The courageous Captain fights them with everything at his disposal, whether it be weapons or recommendations for the correct modes of behavior. This comic story is popular among young people (but not only them). It can be viewed for free on the Internet, and it uses the ease and accessibility of this medium, overcoming the limitations of space and time which accompany real-world exhibitions. The light and humorous surface level of the story seems to give total support to the changes taking place, but on a deeper level there is a lot of irony and distance from reality. Irony is essential in the postmodern world. The *Captain Europe* webpage contains links to other pages: some recommended (e.g. the page of the European Union) and some labeled as 'dangerous' (the first place among those is taken by the Twożywo Group). This clever game with the viewer requires a certain amount of knowledge concerning the world and the situation in Poland. However, the Captain is a citizen of the world, or at least of Europe; he often deals with the issue of globalization. A young member of the European Union does not have to be Polish, Czech, French or German – all they have to be is a Consumer able to distinguish between brands. There is no transcendence or deeper values, patriotism is unnecessary, and all that remains is the market, the stock exchange and consumption. The problems related to identity have also vanished: everything can be bought and then exchanged for something else when it bores us, and the same goes for our identity, national or otherwise. The

Captain urges us to have fun and take advantage of promotions. And the Society of Captain Europe, which we can sign up to, will fulfill our need of belonging to a community. Even enemies are provided. As I have mentioned earlier, the fundamental principle underlying communities is that of 'us' and 'them', and in the world of Captain Europe, 'them' represents everyone who is deaf to the wise words of Captain Europe and rejects the Consumer World.

Poland's accession to the EU meant that new job markets were opened to Polish workers, which led to the fears among the older members of the EU that they would be flooded with cheap labor, or face other problems associated with the free movement of the new citizens of Europe. The politicians in certain countries knew how to prey on those fears and called upon timeworn stereotypes. In France in the summer of 2005, rumors about the Polish Plumber started to circulate: he would undercut the more talented and (obviously) more handsome French plumbers. Xenophobia was rife, fuelled by the atmosphere just before the referendum on the European constitution. At this time, a young and talented Polish artist named Laura Pawela, a new European, was studying in Strasbourg. The studio provided for her by the CEAAC (Centre Européen d'Actions Artistiques Contemporaines), had a bathroom which was in a terrible state. The artist resolved to renovate and decorate it. She set to work dressed appropriately for the task. Thus she became a Polish plumber working in a French bathroom. This is how she described her work: "My stay in Strasbourg coincided with the peak popularity of the Polish Plumber in France, the symbol of the cheap Polish worker who threatened French workers. So during my stay I decided not to be an artist, but rather a Polish plumber or a stereotypical Polish woman – cheap, illegally-employed labor inspired me into action. All the more so as, being in France, I realized that it was a real problem; it wasn't just something thought up by the media. (...) For some, Poles became a terrifying threat fuelled by the media and politicians, while for others they were a labor force helping the economy of their host country."

It also turned out that we see ourselves in a very specific way. Pawela continues: ... "for some it was inconceivable to go Western Europe for three months and not work during that time! Even the travel insurance agent or the representative of the coach company did not want to believe that I wasn't going to France 'to work'. So I decided to embody the stereotypes and slogans then current in France before the referendum by 'working abroad' and 'renovating a bathroom.'

As a result of this activity, apart from the renovated bathroom, a film was also produced and shown in many galleries. The work is entitled, as you would

expect, *Bathroom/Salle de Bain* and it is the artist's statement on the subject of national identity and the stereotypes associated with it. Pawela plays with the stereotypes of Poles – in this particular case those of the French – and the typical behavior of the Poles themselves. She personally takes on both of these opposing sides, the French *and* the Poles. The work also alludes to the myth of the artist, as a sarcastic reflection on the artist's exalted status in society. She reveals our tendency to unthinkingly apply narrow-minded stereotypes to a diverse and multi-dimensional reality.

These are not the most prominent examples of Polish art dealing with the problem of identity or national identity. I have deliberately avoided focusing on Źmijewski, Althamer or Bałka, who are better known in this context. The examples I have described are humorous and have great potential for reflection. They demonstrate that serious problems can be discussed in an interesting way, with a light touch and a little distance. And they show that art which engages itself in the quest for national identity is not obliged to 'lift people's spirits'.

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TOŻSAMOŚĆ NARODOWA I GLOBALIZACJA – KILKA PRZYKŁADÓW WSPÓŁCZESNEJ POLSKIEJ SZTUKI (streszczenie)

Świat, w którym żyjemy podlega nieustannym procesom globalizacji. W tym kontekście dużym problemem jest tożsamość narodowa. W artykule *Tożsamość narodowa i globalizacja – kilka*

przykładów współczesnej polskiej sztuki chcę przywołać kilka konkretnych przykładów, odnosząc je do szerszego problemu, jakim jest tożsamość narodowa. Czy młodzi artyści podejmują zagadnienie własnej tożsamości narodowej? A jeżeli tak, to w jaki sposób to robią? Są tu pewne ukryte pytania: Czy istnieje coś takiego jak tożsamość narodowa w kontekście sztuki? Czy spojrzenie przez pryzmat narodu nie jest anachronizmem? Jako przykłady przywołam twórczość Moniki Sosnowskiej, Kuby Bąkowskiego, Grupy Twożywo i Laury Paweli. Pokazują oni, że o poważnych problemach można mówić interesująco w sposób lekki i zdystansowany. A sztuka, która dotyka spraw tożsamości narodowej wcale nie musi być twórczością ku „pokrzepieniu serc”.

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THE ART CRITIC AND GLOBALIZATION

A review of the book by Robert C. Morgan:

***The Artist and Globalization*, Miejska Galeria Sztuki w Łodzi**

[The Municipal Art Gallery in Łódź], Łódź 2008

Robert C. Morgan, an accomplished art critic and a curator of numerous exhibitions, is well known to the readers of *Art Inquiry*. For many years, we have had the pleasure of publishing his texts in our journal. The articles submitted by Morgan are short, but rich in content and full of thought-provoking ideas. The author's impressive erudition is evident, even though the references to other views are not expounded, as they usually consist of indispensable suggestions. Morgan's own views are also constructed as slogans, in some cases resembling an aphorism. As a result, the texts, even though they are limited in size, require intense concentration as well as engagement of their readers' knowledge. Depending on the scope of that knowledge, the reading may be more or less insightful. This situation is reminiscent of the observations of contemporary aestheticians concerning the process of perception of works of art. An active attitude allows for filling in the 'indeterminate' or 'vague' places in the text and thus ensures a suitable 'concretization'. The situation is similar in the case of the texts discussed here. When read in their literal sense, they seem to be very interesting, though somewhat laconic remarks on the selected aspects of current artistic reality. However, if one takes into account the contexts suggested by the author, these texts become an expansive reflection upon the place and meaning of art in the world of today.

The impressions which occurred to me while I was reading Robert C. Morgan's articles as the editor of *Art Inquiry* returned with double clarity upon my reading of his first book published in Poland. The publication includes both the English and the Polish version of his essays. The difficult texts have been

brilliantly translated by Alina Kwiatkowska and Agnieszka Grochulska. The task, for the reasons mentioned above, must have been quite demanding. The character of the reflection typical of the author has been fully preserved in all its uniqueness. The book comprises eight essays, preceded by a short introduction. Some of them have been devoted to theoretical issues, such as the situation of art at the dawn of globalization, dehumanization and post-humanism, the dangers of the media or the importance of intellect in the new media. Others concern specific exhibitions (such as the Eastlink Project, Shanghai 2002) or selected fields of artistic activity (video art or modern architecture). Such a division does not, however, affect the character of the texts to any significant degree. Even when he takes inspiration from his experience of specific artistic events, Morgan treats them as a starting point for broader generalizations, general reflections on contemporary art and culture.

Considering the unique qualities of Morgan's book, writing a standard review of it is virtually impossible. While reading the essays, I often realized that the author expects his readers to join him in reflecting on the issues he presents rather than simply absorbing the information he is providing. Given the great number of such issues, I can only concentrate on one of them here: the question of the current status of an art critic. Morgan writes: "Since 1990, criticism has become my primary medium. Initially, I chose it as a kind of «social sculpture» – to use the term of Beuys. At the time I stopped making art, economic circumstances made it easier to be a critic. Today, artists need a lot of money to succeed in the art world – unless I have missed something. My position at the time was that a dialogue with artists through their work was a kind of social sculpture. But then, over time, my critical writing became more serious, less pretentious as a form of conceptual art."

Morgan's approach to criticism as 'social sculpture' situated this activity in the proximity of artistic practice. It permitted a relatively direct involvement in the issues of art. It involved, to use a phrase popular in Poland in the 1970s, thinking in the perspective of art or from the position of art. It was an abstract concept, consisting in a dialogue with artists or marching alongside them, arm in arm. However, it failed to include sufficiently broad horizons. In concert with the metaphor used here, one could say that Morgan has decided to leave the ranks of art. He has not abandoned them entirely, but the distance has allowed him to consider and assess a larger number of emerging possibilities. In Morgan's essays, such a broad perspective has assumed the form of the concept of 'cultural globalization'. In his view, globalization entails perceiving our world as an integral whole. In the economic perspective, it leads to undertaking large-scale enterprises. These include artistic undertakings involving works of art treated as "a system of commodities with investment potential."

In some cases, “some artists are pressured into becoming cultural logos, unwittingly inducted into a system of marketing.” However, Morgan also notices another dimension of globalization, one which opens the possibility of ending cultural isolation. Sometimes, coming out this isolation is only motivated by the desire to gain access to the global art market. On the other hand, it also creates a possibility of broadening the perspectives of reflection. Morgan often invokes the artists from outside the American or European culture. He makes an attempt to understand their point of view while simultaneously cautioning them about the potential threats. As he puts it, “What some artists in China, for example, may not understand is how quickly reputations come and go once an artist buys into the strategies of simulating a rock-star. One cannot easily deny that this is a dominant trend in the art world today. I would suggest a slower course of action. Through patience, opportunity for digression, and a spirit of generosity, one might discover an alternative network by which to exchange ideas as an antidote to present-day cynicism”. Thus, he proposes ‘ethical’ art “in terms of its transformative potential.”

Reflections concerning the place and the role of an art critic are a recurring motif in a number of Morgan’s essays. He recommends maintaining distance from the mass media as they are involved in the system of setting the market value of art. “It can make the most mediocre art look good or condemn the best art into temporary oblivion.” Consequently, since the involvement with the mass media holds an attraction to many an art critic as it brings him popularity and gives him a sense of participation in life, ‘the value of any significant, non-cynical critical intervention has virtually disappeared.’ Nevertheless, Morgan is optimistic. He believes in the possibility of rebirth and the power of critical activity. Thus, he postulates the rejection of the trends which serve the art market and which transform artists into logos. He supports criticism providing clear judgment while still remaining sensitive to the complexity of the systems of values in the globalized world. He refuses to accept the notion that pluralized criteria exclude valuation. The Internet, which gives everyone the opportunity to express their judgment, does not negate the importance of criticism – it only necessitates the change of its methodology. As his model of reference, Morgan favors the Far East symbol of balance between *yin* (the feminine) and *yang* (the masculine). He employs it in his reflections on the relations between virtual and material elements, although he uses it in other situations as well. Its value consists in the fact that it takes differences into consideration without any tendency to domination. The possibility of globalization considered from such a perspective creates infinite chances of development in which an art critic can play a very important role.

Translated by Katarzyna Gucio

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