

EMANCIPATORY POTENTIAL OF ART

Aleksandra Łukaszewicz Alcaraz

aleksandra.lukaszewicz.alcaraz@akademiasztuki.eu

ABSTRACT: *Emancipation is a process of achieving freedom in a certain social field, which also has a political dimension. This potential is observable and has been used explicitly by the 20th century avant-garde movement. However, I claim that this potential is not fully recognized nowadays, because of the failure of the avant-garde – which has fallen into a trap of either surveillance to the Communist Party or to the market. Therefore, in order to understand the emancipatory potential of art, I propose two complementary perspectives. One springs from Luis Althusser's writings, especially from A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre (1968), his only text in which he directly writes about art and the discrepancies in art which allow for the appearance of something new in the system, as art is not fully conditioned by dominating ideology, the other from American pragmatism as marked especially by John Dewey, who was writing about the democratic character of art and of aesthetic experience that has the power to transform and enrich human lives. It is important to take pragmatism into philosophical consideration while considering art, if we want to get our bodies back, bodies immersed in an environment as ideated by Arnold Berleant or Richard Shusterman. It is important also to render a discursive structure as within post-Marxist structuralism. I claim that combining pragmatist and structuralist perspectives can also enrich our understanding of art, showing its potential to change the world.*

Introduction

Emancipation is a process of achieving freedom in a certain social field, which also has a political dimension. This potential is observable and has been used explicitly by the 20th century avant-garde movement. However, I claim that this potential is not fully recognized nowadays, because of the failure of avant-garde – which has fallen into a trap of either surveillance to the Communist Party or to the market – noted by Polish theorists like Stanisław Czekalski and Piotr Piotrowski. (These analyses are in accordance with a broader view, as proposed by Bürger and Huyssen, showing avant-garde as being in a dialectic relation with the governing system of culture, ultimately unfulfilled in its pursuit to transgress cultural borders.)¹ Disappointment in avant-

garde's failure makes it difficult to believe in art's emancipatory potential; I argue that although disappointment is understandable, it should be analyzed and it should not dispirit the emancipation which art specifically enables. This potential can be understood philosophically, and related to social and political fields.

In order to understand the emancipatory potential of art, I propose two complementary perspectives. One springs from Louis Althusser's writings, especially from *A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre* (1968), his only text in which he directly writes about art and the discrepancies in art which allow for the appearance of something new in the system, as art is not fully conditioned by dominating ideology. This line of reflection is nowadays taken up by Alain Badiou – who, like Pierre Macherey, Jacques Rancière, and others, was Althusser's pupil – and has developed into a search for the possibility of trespassing the political and ideological systems of late capitalism.

These considerations, born from European structuralism, are not that far from the second perspective I point at: American pragmatism as marked by Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, George Herbert Mead, and especially by John Dewey (who was writing about the democratic character of art and of aesthetic experience that has the power to transform and enrich human lives.) It is important to take pragmatism into philosophical consideration while considering art, if we want to get our bodies back, bodies immersed in an environment as ideated by Arnold Berleant or Richard Shusterman. It is important also to render a discursive structure as within post-Marxist structuralism.

These two philosophical traditions are not as oppositional as they may seem. I claim that the perspectives of pragmatism and structuralism have in common ideas of *practice* and *experience*, as demonstrated in the philosophical lineage developed

and Huyssen A. (1986). *After the Great-Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis.

¹ Bürger, P. (1974). *Theorie der Avantgarde*, Frankfurt;

from the writings of John Dewey and Louis Althusser. Similarities between pragmatism and structural tradition are also noted by other thinkers, for example by Richard Shusterman, who relates pragmatism to Pierre Bourdieu's theory,² or by Tanja Bogusz, who compares concepts of knowledge, action, and the importance of experience, reflecting ideas from William James and Émile Durkheim with Pierre Bourdieu's and John Dewey's concepts of *habitus* and *practice*.³ She claims that: "an interpretation (...) of the categories central to both these schools; experience/disposition, knowledge and practice shall make an explicit combination of pragmatism and a sociological theory of practice possible that has not yet been attempted and that takes into account both socio-structural limits and contingent and optional spaces of possibility."⁴

I make a similar claim, proposing that combining pragmatist and structuralist perspectives can also enrich our understanding of art, showing its potential to change the world. The following paper is a brief examination of the connections between structuralism and pragmatism in relation to the problem of art's emancipatory potential, and attempts to understand this potential as also outside the democratic definition of liberty – though still within a political definition – as proposed by Alain Badiou.

² Shusterman, R. (ed.) (1999), *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*. Wiley-Blackwell (1999); also Shusterman's keynote speech: *Bourdieu and Pragmatism: Philosophy's Emancipatory Power*, during the conference "Emancipation: Challenges at the Intersection of American and European Philosophy." Fordham University, New York, 27th February 2015.

³ Bogusz, T. (2009). *Experiencing Practical Knowledge: Emerging Convergences of Pragmatism and Sociological Practice Theory*. In: "European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy," Associazione PRAGMA, 2012, IV, 1.

⁴ Bogusz, T. (2009).

Failure of Avant-garde Emancipatory Engagement

The avant-garde movement wanted to change society, its system, and art. As Polish theorist Stanisław Czekalski points out, constitutive for avant-garde of 1920's and 1930's was an aspiration:

"to realize artistic idea in *praxis* of life, and by means of that – to dismiss alienation of art and to overcome dialectically contradictions between art and social reality."⁵

However, the avant-garde art, while dreaming of being close to everyday *praxis* – the emancipation from social classes and of creative potential – started to serve communism, capitalism, and consumerism. According to Czekalski it happened because avant-garde accommodated both modern capitalism and Soviet rationalization, due to Taylorism present in both main ideologies (that is, a belief in the processes of rationalization, industrialization, and central planification as leading to a more just, equal, and democratic world in which people would have the time and strength necessary to appraise its beauty.) That the avant-garde strove to trespass the border between art and society's life, to cooperate in the creation of a new and better world, is clearly demonstrated on both Soviet and Western sides by international constructivism.

At that time the most important figures of the movement (like Doesburg, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Fernand Leger, and Le Corbusier) had been explicitly trying to move from utopia to *praxis*. Previously popular abstract and geometrically organized imagery symbolizing an ideal order of the new world had passed away, giving rise to projects of concrete realizations in architecture, industrial design, and typography, among others.⁶ These

⁵ "do realizacji idei artystycznych w *praxis* życia, a tym samym zniesienia alienacji sztuki i dialektycznego przezwyciężenia sprzeczności między sztuką a rzeczywistością społeczną" – Czekalski, S. (2000). *Awangarda i mit racjonalizacji: fotomontaż Polski okresu dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*. Poznań: Wydawn. Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, p. 17.

⁶ See: Mansbach, S. A. (1980). *Visions of Totality: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Theo Van Doesburg, and El Lissitzky*. Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, p. 109.

themes are found in the writings of Fernand Leger and Le Corbusier, among others. Leger wrote about the interdependence of geometry, machines, and industrial creativity, treating geometric form as dominant and infiltrating all areas, with broad visual and psychological influence.⁷ The rules of rationalization and facilitation were supposed to lead to a more equal democratic world, with houses for everybody and a good quality of life that would allow the masses/proletariat to enjoy art as well. Le Corbusier wanted to create serial architecture, accessible economically for the working class, to solve the social problems and tensions that came with the growth of this new class of people.⁸ However,

“the law of economic rivalization, that is in fact the law of capitalism, Le Corbusier acknowledged to be a basic mechanism of development, leading to the increase of quality and the dissemination of produced goods, which define a level of life of a society. In this manner social revolution has been identified paradoxically – with technological rationalization (the artist referred himself directly to Taylor's ideas) and with a continuation of development of capitalistic economy.”⁹

⁷ See: Léger, F. *Estetyka maszyny: porządek geometryczny i prawda*. First edition in: “Propos d'artistes,” Paris 1925. Reference after: Léger, F. (1970). *Funkcje malarstwa*. Translated into Polish by Guze, J., Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, p. 85.

⁸ Le Corbusier, (1923). *Vers une architecture*, Paris: G. Cres. Reference after: Banham, R. (1979). *Rewolucja w architekturze. Teoria projektowania w “pierwszym wieku maszyny”* Translated into Polish by Drzewiecki, Z., Warszawa: Wyd. Artystyczna i Filmowe, p. 272.

⁹ Prawo konkurencji ekonomicznej, czyli – w gruncie rzeczy – kapitalizmu, Le Corbusier uznaje więc za podstawowy mechanizm postępu, zmierzającego do podwyższenia jakości i rozpowszechnienia produkowanych dóbr, które określają poziom życia społeczeństwa. Tym sposobem rewolucja socjalna została utożsamiona – paradoksalnie – tyleż z racjonalizacją technologiczną (artysta odwoływał się wprost do idei Taylora), co z ciągłością rozwoju gospodarki kapitalistycznej” – Czekalski, S. (2000), p. 49. On the relationship between Le Corbusier's artistic and architectural ideas with ideology of Taylorism, see also: M. McLead, *Architecture and Revolution: Taylorism, Technocracy, and Social Change*. In: “Art Journal” Summer 1983.

On the other side of Europe the ideas of rationalization were also active within political and social fields, and within art. Soviet constructivism had served the communist ideology, as is explicit in the propagandist photomontages of Lissitzky, Rodczenko, Sienkin, and Prusakow. Agitation posters used the visual language of photomontage to influence the masses toward certain types of consumption, of work, and of leisure time. Photomontage and photography were great tools for producing these kinds of pictures; modern interest has grown beyond the search for industrial forms and “industrial art”¹⁰ (an exemplification of that described by Walter Benjamin, “the author – the producer.”)¹¹ The process of rationalization was also clearly expressed by Aleksander Rodczenko, writing on art as a conscious way of organizing of life:

“LIFE, a conscious and organized life, capable of SEEING and CONSTRUCTING, is contemporary art. A PERSON who organizes his life, work, and himself is a CONTEMPORARY ARTIST. WORK FOR LIFE and not for PALACES, TEMPLES, CEMETERIES, and MUSEUMS.”¹²

Rodczenko, like the other aforementioned artists, was trying to engage by means of photography in a perceptual change of reality, society, and humanity. His work contains disparate photographic series, such as details of the AMO factory,¹³ photoreports from the

¹⁰ See: Ławrientiew, A. (2012), *Aleksander Rodczenko: początek fotografii awangardowej w Rosji*, in: *Aleksander Rodczenko. Rewolucja w fotografii*. Edited by A. Ławrientiew, O. Swibłowa. Translated into Polish by O. Aleksejczuk, Kraków (First published in 2008), p. 204.

¹¹ Benjamin, W., *The Author as Producer* in: Benjamin, W. (2008). *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. Edited by Michael W. Jennings, B. Doherty, T. Y. Levin. Belknap Press.

¹² Rodczenko, A., *Slogans (CONSTRUCTION discipline, dyrektor RODCHENKO)*. In: Rodczenko, A. (2006) *Aleksandr Rodchenko. Experiments for the future: diaries, essays, letters, and other writings*. Edited and with a preface by A. N. Ławrientiew. Translated into English by J. Gambrell, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, p. 142.

¹³ A cover and subsequent pages of the magazine “Dajosz” dedicated to AMO factory (1929). After: *Александр Родченко. Фотография – искусство*. (2006). Series concept by A. Mieszczeriakowa, I.

construction of Bielomorsky Channel,¹⁴ and a sawmill, "Wachtan,"¹⁵ which show new visibilities: new machines, a new dam, the sawmill, and new people, in a new manner. These works call for a new socialist/communist archetype, for a new kind of society in which the processes of scientific management will eliminate class divisions and social exclusions, and were made for the demand of the Communist Party. In this way we can notice ambivalence in the Soviet avant-garde movement in relation to revolutionary and utopian idealism, as well as reactionary conformism, a point made by Piotr Piotrowski.¹⁶

Avant-garde's drive to cross the boundary between art and real social practice, oriented towards the emancipatory transformation of society, had ended with pacification of its power. It was subdued by the structure, a disheartening shortcoming of the promising movement's emancipatory potential in both social and political fields.

Louis Althusser on the Relationship between Art, Ideology and Science

The disappointment with avant-garde's failure to create a new, utopian reality is understandable, however it should not mislead us to forget its ability to exhort change. Philosophical consideration is needed in order to understand art as having a real political and social emancipatory force. One of the perspectives useful for that endeavor is Althusserian, although it may seem impossible at first glance, as within Althusserian terms, art (as other spheres of life) is related to ideology. However, this perspective invites a deeper investigation

of the relationship between art, ideology, and science, which can show the possibility of emancipation through art.

Althusser states clearly in *A Letter on Art...* (1968) that he does "not rank real art among the ideologies, although art does have a quite particular and specific relationship with ideology."¹⁷ Art shows the dominating ideology, makes it visible – consciously or not – and due to that, imbues a visual, sensory, and rational distance from the viewer. Which art? All of it? Which criteria? Who judges the criteria?

"What art makes us *see*, and therefore gives to us in the form of '*seeing*,' '*perceiving*,' and '*feeling*' (which is not the form of *knowing*), is the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*."¹⁸

The observation of an ideology's outside, from the inside, allows a distance which creates the possibility of emancipation from capitalistic conditions. For Althusser only the real and true art has this power, and he refers to novels of Leo Tolstoy, Balzac and Solzhenitsyn, who (though bourgeois) had a certain internalized distance in their presentations and wrote, in distant critique, of the system of social divisions and of their own class. Despite their personal political opinions they 'make us see' the 'lived experience' of capitalist society in a critical form:¹⁹ "It is an 'effect' of *their art* as novelists that it produces this distance inside their ideology, which makes us 'perceive' it."²⁰

An important facet in Althusser's understanding of social reality's transformational capability is the idea that art does not occupy itself with different kinds of reality, as science does. Art does not realize itself in a fantastic sphere. If it were so, it would have no real political and

Ostarkowoj. Edited by A. Ławrientiew, O. Swiełłowa. Izdatielskaja programma "Interrosa," pp. 306-307.

¹⁴ A cover and subsequent pages of the magazine "SSSR na strojkie." No. 12 (1933). After: Александр Родченко. *Фотография – искусство*. (2006), pp. 408-409.

¹⁵ "A Sawmill <WACHTAN>. 1930." After: Александр Родченко. *Фотография – искусство*. (2006), pp. 340-349.

¹⁶ Piotrowski, P. (1993). *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją. Studium z zakresu etycznej historii sztuki awangardy rosyjskiej*. Poznań: Wydaw. Naukowe UAM.

¹⁷ Althusser, L. (1971). *A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre*, in: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. (Written: February 1968; First Published: by François Maspero, 1968). Translated into English by Ben Brewster, p. 222.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 225.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 226.

social emancipatory potential. Art relies on only one reality, subjectively experienced, which is not inherently different from the scientific one. Althusser states that:

“Art (I mean authentic art, not works of an average or mediocre level) does not give us a knowledge in the strict sense, it therefore does not replace knowledge (in the modern sense: scientific knowledge), but what it gives us does nevertheless maintain a certain *specific relationship* with knowledge. This relationship is not one of identity but one of difference (...) The real difference between art and science lies in the *specific form* in which they give us the same object in quite different ways: art in the form of 'seeing' and 'perceiving' or 'feeling,' science in the form of *knowledge* (in the strict sense, by concepts.)”²¹

Art is concerned with the same subject as science in this regard, that is, with lived experience, and can be a critique by its distance from ideology. This is possible because ideology for Althusser is not a mental system but a system of meaningful human activities, structured by Ideological State Apparatuses.²² However, real art for Althusser necessitates “internal distance” towards reality to allow critical perception of the *status quo*, and innovations of thought and habit. The change in a dominating ideology should occur not by means of fight and revolution, but of transformation, as ideology is embodied in individual activities, in personal human lives. For the French philosopher there is no differentiation between the public and the private spheres. This division he considers to be a distinction internal to bourgeois law and a false dichotomy, as he points at the fact that ideology is embodied in human practices of religion, family, education, trade union, culture, and other elements that have both private and public status.²³

John Dewey's Democratic Aesthetic Experience

Blurring the border between public and private, as well as a focus on concretely lived experience within a certain society, is also very important for pragmatists. For pragmatists, experience and practice – also art and aesthetics – are not simply held by individuals, nor are they just public/institutional concepts; they are immersed in a social environment, in which we are participating. Therefore concepts of *practice* and *experience* as used in John Dewey's writings are similar to Althusser's idea of *ideological practices*. In Dewey's writings, experience and practice are not unconditioned, but on the contrary, they are defined by social, historical and cultural background,²⁴ paralleling Althusser's reflections on the ideology embodied in practices. Both of these philosophers were also reflecting a possibility to gain some kind of freedom by means of art and aesthetic experience, practice and sensibility – differing terminology for similar concepts.

Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics consider art as a specifically enriching kind of human experience, which does not necessarily require connection to a certain object, i.e. work of art. From this perspective, art is thereby liberated from conceptual constraints and can be experienced freely. This perspective is based on Dewey's last book dedicated to art, where he does not present any precise definition of art, but rather shows it as a certain quality infiltrating our experience.²⁵

Dewey argues that the ways in which a work of art forms an experience, and is present in it, provide an understanding of art within the perspective of experience but with an explicitly somatic side.²⁶ By

²¹ Ibid., pp. 222-224.

²² Althusser, L. (1971). *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)*, in: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Monthly Review Press; First published: in *La Pensée*, 1970.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Dewey, J. (1975). *Sztuka jako doświadczenie*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, p. 400. Translated into Polish by Potocki, A. from: Dewey, J. (1958). *Art as Experience*. New York: Capricorn Books, Putnam's Sons.

²⁵ Dewey, J. (1975). *Sztuka jako doświadczenie*, pp. 400-424.

²⁶ In the beginning of *Art as Experience* Dewey gives a beautiful example of an aesthetic embodied experience analyzing Parthenon: “The one who sets out to theorize about aesthetic experience embodied in the Parthenon

closely connecting body and art in terms of aesthetic experience, Dewey shows us a possibility hinting at emancipation of democratic character. Aesthetic experience does not belong to one class, group, or form, and it makes our lives and everyday activities more interesting, deeper. This analytical direction is held nowadays by Arnold Berleant, who argues for an aesthetic engagement of our bodies/minds in a certain environment; it is also taken up by Roberta Dreon, for whom aesthetic emancipation is on the level of senses and emotions, and by Richard Shusterman who develops *somaesthetics* not only as a philosophical field, but also as a practical one, developing consciousness and refinement of our bodily senses.

However, this line of thought – occupied with aesthetic experience as enriching human life and possessing a democratic character, rather than with the art as such – also illustrates how the market economy both creates and satisfies superficial human aesthetic needs. For instance, Arnold Berleant's analysis of contemporary aesthetical sensibilities claims that aesthetic sensibility has been appropriated and exploited by consumer capitalism. A desire to experience more and more, in the most pleasant way possible, has been socially imprinted by global consumerism and drives us towards unhealthy and destructive ways of living. This desire for infinitely more (more sugar, more salt, more oil, more caffeine, louder sounds, living faster and in a riskier way) is sustained by consumer mass culture for the sake of political control and market manipulation.²⁷

Berleant proposes aesthetic practice as the tool for emancipation from this control, by means of social analyses and political criticism. For him, aesthetic

experience does not have contemplative Kantian disinterested character, but is participative, multisensual, and immersed in the environment.²⁸ An experience can be understood as human aesthetic engagement in the environment, from which we are not separated, and it has power to co-create our reality. If we wish to move beyond the exploitation of our senses for the sake of capitalist interests of a few, we should try then to transform our aesthetic sensibility.²⁹ This process of transforming our aesthetic sensibility also has political, environmental, and moral implications, as underlined and analyzed by Yuriko Saito.³⁰

This perspective is very interesting, compelling, and influential, however I would like to note that the art as such disappears within Berleant's idea of environmental aesthetics. Art, here, is just another field of aesthetic, somatic experience; it is treated with the same regard as any other certain qualities of the environment, and not much favored. Analyzing the contemporary human condition, Berleant focuses on our multisensory perception. His diagnosis is pessimistic, as he observes the exploitation of human bodies financially profiting global capital. Therefore, he calls for transformation of the ways in which we satisfy our desires for food, drink, and sex; transformations of what, when, how, and – most importantly – how much we consume. This call for emancipation from consumer capitalism and global market economy can be brought about by transforming the structure of capitalism through aesthetic sensibility. Roberta Dreon reflects on a similar idea, that aesthetic quality infiltrates experience (which also has a somatic side) and shows that political economy and marketing are now increasingly and pervasively exploiting the

must realize in thought what the people into whose lives it entered had in common, as creators and as those who were satisfied with it, with people in our own homes and on our own streets.” – Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton, Balch & Company, p. 4.

²⁷ Berleant, A. (2015). *The Co-optation of Sensibility and the Subversion of Beauty*. Keynote during the conference “Emancipation: Challenges at the Intersection of American and European Philosophy.” 26th of February, 2015. Fordham University, Manhattan, New York.

²⁸ See: Berleant, A. (1992). *The Aesthetics of Environment*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; Berleant, A. (2005). *Aesthetics and Environment, Theme and Variations*. Aldershot: Ashgate; and others.

²⁹ Berleant, A. (2010). *Sensibility and Sense. The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*. Imprint Academic: Exeter, p. 31

³⁰ Saito, Y. (2010). *Rola estetyki w kształtowaniu świata* [The Role of Aesthetics in World-Making] Translated to Polish by J. Wierchowaska. In: “Sztuka i Filozofia” [“Art and Philosophy”] 37(2010), pp. 71-89.

“aesthetic hunger” of individuals in contemporary post-industrial societies. However, regarding the perspective of John Dewey, she claims that aesthetic emancipation has its sensuous, emotive, and imaginative side, and so searches for different, more subtle forms of enjoyment and pleasure which are not directly politically or socially engaged. This emancipation of sensibility is directed towards our well-being and happiness, also possessing ethical value.³¹

Taking into consideration the discipline of somaesthetics (proclaimed by Richard Shusterman, grown out of Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics) we can note a similar call to liberation. However, this proposal is limited to the individual body; the emancipatory potential of aesthetic practices is limited by the dominant structure within which we cultivate our bodies. Shusterman is sometimes criticized for concentration on phenomena like body-building, yogic practices, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, etc., which can be interpreted as narcissistic. Of course, the return to the body³² is very important, but evident in Shusterman's reflection is a shadow of the subject-object division, of the subject and the world. Here it is better to go back to John Dewey, who underlines *practice* as an interaction between “live creatures” and their environment; or to Arnold Berleant, who writes about an interaction in which we cannot distinguish the subject and the object, as the subject is participating in an experience within a continuum of environment.

The difference between structuralism and pragmatism is one of concentration – either on art, or on aesthetic sensibility – and stems from the difference in structure and terminology of these trends in philosophy. However, the definition of art in structuralism is such that it aligns closely with pragmatist orientation, as art is defined

through certain social fields, divisions of social class, and bodily practices held individually. This difference is therefore terminological rather than essential, and both are united in their explicit search and fight for emancipation. Structuralism notes a discrepancy in the field of art that allows something radically new to appear, something which can drive transformation of social, political, and economic structures. Pragmatism points at the need to develop, cultivate, and transform our aesthetic bodily sensibility in order to transform our world into one more just and less exploitive.

Both lines of philosophical consideration share questions: How can we think and feel innovatively? How can art or aesthetic experience bring about the radically new, to change *status quo*? Anything new can stem only from practice, from an individual and his/her personal experience in a specific context, although there is no one right way to achieve it; each experiential event or act of sensory satisfaction can bring novelty on somatic, psychological, emotional, and intellectual levels, but this is not a necessity. It can instead perpetuate habitual social patterns, or obey the capitalist economy with its desire for “a new model” all the time.

The possibility of emancipation from the structure, in Althusserian terms, exceeds his language system, as his philosophy and terminology are structured in the same way. Althusser does point at the importance of embodied practices as well as the importance of discrepancy, inconsistency, and displacement caused by distance inherent to the experience of real art. Real art is the sphere where it is possible to break from established structure and to think of something radically new. Without art, we are closed in unfinished repetition and reproduction of structural blocks of capitalism.

Dewey's line of reflection proposes focus on the aesthetic experience that art provides as enriching human life. Accepted and built upon by Berleant, Dreon, Shusterman, and many others, this proposal can give a new perspective to the world. It can lead to new practices, conducted in everyday human life, which

³¹ Dreon, R. *The Aesthetic, Pleasure and Happiness, or: Freedom is not Enough*. In: “Pragmatism Today.” Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2015, p. 12.

³² Shusterman, R. (1999). *Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal*. In: “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism.” Vol. 57, No. 3 (Summer), pp. 299-313.

improve environmental, social, and political conditions of living. Although aesthetic experience eschews systemic conflict, and often is not explicit, it has potential within political and social fields to subtly change the structure of a society by influencing everyday human behavior, practices held privately. This strategy in my opinion has the advantage, if we aim to change the social structure to a more just version, because a direct fight for democracy and justice cannot change the overall structure; it can change only the hierarchy of its blocks, that is the layers, the social classes.

Nevertheless, I miss the idea of art as embodied in social and ideological practices. The field of everyday sensibility for the air, smells, sounds, and touch is important politically, especially if we connect the ideas of aesthetics with ethics or morality. Art in particular seems to have a specific potential; I find Alain Badiou's approach to understanding this potential interesting, as it connects different philosophical paths from history: from ancient times, through the philosophies of mathematics and logics, to rational and structural considerations, and into psychoanalytical reflections. Although I find no direct pragmatist inspiration in Badiou's thought, the pragmatic idea that a human being is immersed in the environment, and polysensory, fits within his philosophical lexicon, as 'human being' for him is a paradoxical set or entity, within the structural territory.

However, as Badiou is leftist (in his younger days he was even an active Maoist) there is an explicit awareness in his writings that liberal democracy is not enough to obtain freedom, because it is always built on some form of exclusion, domination, and/or discrimination. Structural analysis shows that in order to think about effectively breaking from the dominant structure, we have to move beyond liberal democracy and the idea of an individual subject, which is one of the basic concepts for this field. Badiou's proposal to transform the idea of subject, aiming at structural change towards a more just system, starts from art. Personal lived experiences and ways of subjectification that art can show are worth consideration.

The Art and The New

Badiou directly points at art's responsibility for transforming subjectivity, within the horizon of the emancipatory change of the system of modern capitalism. His writings have a point of reciprocity with John Dewey, in that both emphasize the importance of a novel experience; Badiou writes about "an event," rare and exceptional, that gives rise to a new subject and "effects" or "consequences," which are everyday practices following the event and defining it as such. The structural change awaited by Badiou has no liberal democratic character, as for him the processes of democratization are not the answer for social, economic, and political contradictions present in the world. In the last thesis from his *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art* Badiou points at a correlation between artistic creation and liberty, stating that in art and artistic creation there appears:

"(...) a new kind of liberty which is beyond the democratic definition of liberty. And we may speak of something like an artistic definition of liberty which is intellectual and material, something like Communism within a logical framework, because there is no liberty without a logical framework, something like a new beginning, a new possibility, rupture, and finally something like a new world, a new light, a new galaxy. This is the artistic definition of liberty and the issue today consists not in an art discussion between liberty and dictatorship, between liberty and oppression, but in my opinion, between two definitions of liberty itself."³³

This novelty, as Badiou presents his idea of it, is not exactly the sort desired by consumerist capitalism: always a new model and another variation that we have to have, have to achieve in order to be up-to-date. The novelty for which Badiou calls is rather a shift in the structures of perception within the world and how we function in it (this idea Badiou draws from an Althusserian point of view, but can be understood also within the framework of pragmatism as developed by

³³ Badiou, A. (2005). *The Subject of Art*. In: "The Symptom," Online Journal for Lacan.com on the basis of the lecture given within Deitch Projects on April 1, 2005, transcribed by L. Kerr.

Berleant). Innovations in the field of ideology and meaning are what Badiou underlines, writing that the only novelty we can create is limited to meanings, that is, we give new names, and cannot create new matter. We do not create *ex nihilo* and our creation is not creation of new matter, as there is equilibrium in the universe and we merely change material forms. Human creation is a process of reconfiguration, of subjecting entities then giving them new names.

It may seem insignificant, but giving new names has a powerful impact on reality, as broadly shown by Nietzsche, who pointed at the Overman (*Übermensch*) creating new values, giving names, and making others refer to him positively or on the basis of resentment.³⁴ Giving new names changes social structure, social identities, and ways of functioning in the world, having both mental and somatic impact. This reconfiguration is for Badiou an effect of “the artistic definition of liberty which is intellectual and material.”³⁵ Badiou's statement has as the background Althusser's theory and his concept of ideology embodied in social practices held individually. Therefore, the appearance of the new transforms social structures by naming its units in a different way, and it is an effect of artistic liberty due to the distance towards ideology created by the works of art.

The Eventual Subject

Badiou's analysis is overall: in order to postulate the possibilities of change within the structure of capitalism as provoked by art, he goes deep into algorithmic structures and ontology, on the basis of which he defines a subject with potential to change the structure. The subject of true revolutionary change for which Badiou searches changes circumstance and conditions, and thereby itself; it is a rare/eventual definition of subjectivity outside the democratic definitions. It is self-identified, expressed in new ideologies, worldviews, and

images (verbal representations – not so indelible as visual representations – are not so useful to present and share new methods of understanding, explaining, perceiving, and experiencing the world).

Alain Badiou's theories draw much from Jacques Lacan,³⁶ whose concept of absence allowed an understanding of a subject conceptually surpassing symbolic order. In a similar manner the void haunts Badiou's subject, whose ‘proper name’ is \emptyset , the mathematical sign of the empty set. However, Badiou's line of thinking eventually diverges from Lacan, finding him too attached to a ‘Cartesian epoch of science,’³⁷ and having “reproduced an operator of fidelity, postulated the horizon of indiscernible, and persuaded us again that there are, in this uncertain world, some [certain] subjects.”³⁸

As Badiou's subject's name is void, it just appears within the inconsistency of the Being, extant only in a process of interminable confirmations of the hysterical historical? event that has occurred. Following this line of thought in *Theory of Subject*, he presents a multidimensional understanding of subject as a process of accurately unfolding an event.

“A subject is such that, subservient to the rule that determines a place, it nevertheless punctuates the latter with the interruption of its effects. (...) The fact that the subjective process occurs from the point of the interruption indicates the law of the subject as the dialectical division of destruction and recomposition. (...) The effect of the Same is destroyed, and what this destruction institutes is *an other Same*.”³⁹

³⁶ Badiou, A., *Meditation Thirty-Seven. Descartes/ Lacan in: Part VIII. Forcing: Truth and the Subject. Beyond Lacan*, in: Badiou, A. (2007) *Being and Event*. Translated by O. Feltham. London-New York: Continuum, pp. 390-440. First published by Continuum 2006. Originally published in French as *L'être et l'événement*. (1988). Editions du Seuil.

³⁷ Badiou, A., *Meditation Thirty-Seven. Descartes/ Lacan in: Part VIII. Forcing: Truth and the Subject. Beyond Lacan*, in: Badiou, A. (2007), p. 432.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.434.

³⁹ Badiou, A. (2009). *Theory of the Subject*. Translated and introduced by B. Bosteels. London: Continuum, p. 259. First published in French as *Théorie du sujet*. (1982). Editions du Seuil.

³⁴ Nietzsche, F. (1999). *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by D. Smith. USA: Oxford University Press.

³⁵ Badiou, A. (2005). *The Subject of Art*.

The destruction of the Same by an event leads to the recomposition of the subject, which, in order to be valid, has to have consequence. This line of argumentation shows from a different angle the transformation of a subject and his/her life-embodied social practices.

The Importance of the Routine

In *Ethics*, Badiou writes on consequences that follow from the event, as for him there is no truth without routine practices.⁴⁰ These words echo the practical maxim expressed by Charles Sanders Peirce, the founder of American pragmatism: “a conditional sentence has its apodosis in the imperative mood.”⁴¹ However, Peirce was occupied with neither psychological processes of judgment (which he discarded as having relevance only in a non-ideal world)⁴² nor with common psychological interpretations,⁴³ and he was not referring to “vulgar practice,” that is everyday practical activity of an individual;⁴⁴ he opened the door for putting practice before theoretical rules and laws.

William James offered his own reinterpretation of formulations of Peirce's practical maxim,⁴⁵ showing the great importance of everyday individual human

experiences. This approach has been taken up by the ensuing philosophers of pragmatist orientation, being sure of the uselessness of stiff conceptual divisions and of the need to perceive life in a holistic manner, not separating knowing and doing, human beliefs and activities.⁴⁶ Perceiving reality as a process – as George Herbert Mead and John Dewey had been doing – and treating the development of culture, society, mind, and language as parts of nature and life allows one to understand common activities and things important for people's lives as possessing symbolic and aesthetic character, as they function in a social world, defining their meaning and influencing sensibility.⁴⁷

The line of thinking, started by Charles Sanders Peirce, offering a semiotic reflection on language and society, shows society as functioning on the basis of the symbolic sphere. This order of the symbolic sphere is important for social order and if we want to change the socio-symbolical order – as is Badiou's desire – it is important to elaborate everyday routine, surging from eventual/rare experiences/events and sometimes to revitalize this routine via original hysterical decoration.

Appearance of the event, which initiates a new subject and its truth are hysterical in all fields (love, politics, science and art) – when we fall in love, engage in revolution, invent a new scientific or artistic idea, we are hysterical in a way. These moments of appearance of the new have in each field specific circumstances and coincidences (their decoration) which confirms their authenticity. Although, in order to definitively constitute something new, after an event there should follow

⁴⁰ Badiou, A. (2001). *Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Translated and introduced by Peter Hallward. London-New-York: Verso, pp. 40-41.

⁴¹ “Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgement expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood” – Peirce, Ch. S. (1934). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Vol. V, *Pragmatism and Pragmaticism*. Edited by Ch. Hartshorne and Weiss. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, (5)19.

⁴² Peirce was of the opinion that psychology should depend on logics and not on the contrary – Ibid., (5)485.

⁴³ Peirce, Ch. S. (1958). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Vol VIII, *Reviews, Correspondence, and Bibliography*. Edited by A. W. Burks, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, (8)330.

⁴⁴ Peirce, Ch. S. (1934). Reference to: (5) 402.

⁴⁵ Charles Sanders Peirce was underlining that he was a metaphysician, so that he had marked the difference between him and William James, calling James's interpretation of his thought pragmatism, and his own pragmatism – Ibid., (5) 424.

⁴⁶ Putnam, H. (1999). *Pragmatyzm. Pytanie otwarte*. Warszawa: Aletheia., pp. 36-37. Translated into Polish by B. Chwedenczuk from: Putnam, H. (1995). *Pragmatism: An Open Question*. Oxford-Cambridge: Blackwell.

⁴⁷ Therefore, in order to understand human reality, George Herbert Mead had been proposing the connection of different spheres of science as a mechanism utilizing teleology, psychology and physiology. – See: Baldwin, J. D. (1987). *George Herbert Mead. A Unifying Theory for Sociology*, Newbury Park-Beverly Hills-London-New Delhi: Sage Publications Inc., pp. 38-42.

effects, consequences, practices – the routine of everyday life.

The Subject of Art and its Responsibility

The consequences are important for the identity of a subject, as the truth of the subject for Badiou is produced by the event and its effects/consequences. This is applicable also to the subject of art, one of four types of subjects that he recognizes: the subject of science, the subject of love (the Two), the subject of politics (revolutionary), and the subject of art.⁴⁸ In a sense all these types of subjects are revolutionary, as they break with Cartesian concepts of identical-with-itself subject, as they are not individual.

The subject of art is neither an artist nor a piece of art, but rather a relation set between them in a certain position – a physical and political one, and the consequences of this relationship that follow the event of meeting. It is “a new singularity in the development of the art world”⁴⁹ and the work of art is just “the trace of an event if an event is something like an affirmative split.”⁵⁰ The concept of the affirmative split ? in the field of artistic creation Badiou defines through its consequences, “something like a new disposition between what is a form and what is not.”⁵¹ This goes along with Dewey's thoughts regarding art's transformative power over subjectivity, having its social, linguistic, personal, somatic, and aesthetic characteristics which supersede conceptual and formal divisions.

This new disposition has transformative potential and also a political side. Badiou states that “the contemporary world is a war between enjoyment and sacrifice,”⁵² understood as testing the limits of the body, and alluding to enjoyment in another world of pleasure beyond suffering. This dynamic is also present in

contemporary art, found by the French philosopher between formalism and Romanticism, as a particular phenomenon of dialectics between enjoyment and sacrifice. In this regard, Badiou imparts art with great responsibility:

“I think the question of the subject of art is today is this question — to find something like a new subjective paradigm, which is outside the contemporary war between enjoyment and sacrifice.”⁵³

According to Badiou's reasoning, the subject of art should step outside traditional concepts of relation with a body, that is, the reducibility of the subject to the body (enjoyment path) and the disjuncture of the subject from the body (sacrifice path) and reformulate it, understanding it through immanent difference. For Badiou here lies a contemporary “specific responsibility of artistic creation, which is to help humanity to find the new subjective paradigm.”⁵⁴ The artistic reconfiguration of the subject, understood in the Cartesian terms of body-mind relation, the reconfiguration that goes down to the body and that shows new visibilities, has a specifically political aim for Badiou, which he tries to implement through his writings and lectures. He says:

“So the subject of art is not only the creation of a new process in its proper field, but it's also a question of war and peace, because if we don't find the new paradigm—the new subjective paradigm—the war will be endless. And if we want peace—real peace—we have to find the possibility that subjectivity is really in infinite creation, infinite development, and not in the terrible choice between one form of the power of death (experimentation of the limits of pleasure) and another form of the power of death (which is sacrifice for an idea, for an abstract idea.)”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Badiou, A. (2001), pp. 41-42.

⁴⁹ Badiou, A. (2005). *The Subject of Art*.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Conclusions

In this paper I have argued for the emancipatory potential of art, which can be explained from structural and pragmatist perspectives. However, in place of contradicting these perspectives I have tried to show that the importance of the somatic, perceptual, social, and communal experience of art, does not exclude the importance of structural, discursive, linguistic, and mathematical analyses of art and its function, but it coincides with them. This synthesis allows perceiving art multidimensionally, not limiting it to a group of specific objects or characteristics to be analyzed. Of course pointing at somatic, perceptual social, and communal experience I do not refer just to pragmatism; structural, discursive, linguistic, and mathematical analyses are not solely the realm of structuralist tradition.

Although there are noticeable differences in philosophical terminology, categorizations, and emphasis on different aspects of the same phenomena between structural tradition (from which Badiou developed his ideas, alongside contemporary pragmatist aesthetics) as presented by Berleant, one should also note that what is at stake in the philosophies of both thinkers is the human aesthetic-engaged practice that is both individual and public, and has the power to change subjectivity and the way we function in our world; power which can change social, environmental, political, and morally oppressive paradigms.

I tried to show above that pragmatist and structuralist traditions intertwine relating to social practices: the way a subject is perceived as immersed in structural social reality; they also relate regarding the function of art as a field for transformation of individual/communal, private/public practices. Pragmatism has a discursive and linguistic character. Ontological and mathematical analyses of Peirce are well-known, and his concept of the Firstness could be compared with Badiou's concept of the Being, as for Peirce the Firstness is not understandable, un-named,

and can only manifest itself in "uncontrolled variety and multiplicity."⁵⁶

However, I did not aspire to present here comprehensive comparison and interpretation of similarities and differences between pragmatism and structuralism. I just aimed to argue that it is fruitful to search for coincidences between them and to perceive art from a synthesis of multiple perspectives, because it can reveal art's emancipatory potential. From that understanding, we can better explore how art creates the possibility for a transformation of subjectivity, for creation of new truths, acting beyond the scope of rationality through emotions and senses within an event/an experience, and making meaning in the effects/consequences following from it. The great power of art, what allows it to change lives, ways of experiencing, and of thinking, is art's ability to transform social, family, and political relations – this calls for a great responsibility of art, as Badiou shows – it is capable of surpassing even the democratic ideal of freedom.

⁵⁶ Peirce, Ch. S. (1931). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Vol. 1, Principles of Philosophy*, Edited by Ch. Hartshorne and P. Weiss. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (1) 302.