

Gabriela Szczygiel

2009924

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University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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The purpose of this essay is to initially formulate the issues and create a theoretical framework for further analysis that I intend to continue and develop in my dissertation.

Looking at previously researched areas of knowledge and art practitioners I specified a dozen keywords that seem crucial for extended analysis of the subject.

Key words: praxis, language shadow, trauma, art therapy, activism, catalyst, truth, social change, freedom, transformation, oppression, image, alchemy, process, symbols, responsibility, sociopolitical propaganda, unconscious,

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Fig.2Felix Gonzales-Torres, Untitled,1994 (Cotton t-shirt with printed text), Godfrey T., Conceptual Art,1998, Phaidon Press Limited

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Fig.5 Ai Weiwei and Anish Kapoor, Walking for refugees,2012(performance), available at:

[Art and activism: can it change the world? | Article | Royal Academy of Arts](https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-and-activism-can-it-change-the-world)

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The language of praxis in art – social activism as a catalyst of social change.

“Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice.... All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mystics, find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.... The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”
(Marx, 1845, Theses on Feuerbach II, VII, XI)



Fig1. Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn, 1995

Introduction

Exploring art in its endless number of forms, within theory and practice, including my practice and observations, brought me to the assumption about the inseparability of true creation from the artist's instinctive need to mediate between personal and collective, unconscious, and conscious, through the “image” in a broad meaning of its sense.

I continually examine, practically and theoretically, the ability of art to penetrate the unconscious, which reflects my beliefs that, living in a toxic environment in which the ruling elites, under the pretext of ensuring security and protection of individual rights, often abuse their rights. Power affects the individual's consciousness by internalizing certain norms and narratives, through the media and social institutions related to the education or healthcare systems. (Foucault 1991) Therefore, a human being must constantly access the truth, by insight into own psyche and critical thinking, remaining in contact with own feelings and

needs, integrating all unconscious aspects of himself, and ultimately verifying it in practice, to protect himself from being absorbed into the abyss of simulacra (simulacrum from Latin: likeness, semblance, reproduction according to Plato and hyperreal; truth in its own right, according to Baudrillard). "The more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less understands his own existence and his own desires." (Debord,1967)

"As the great words of freedom and fulfilment are pronounced by campaigning leaders and politicians, on the screens, radios, and stages, they turn into meaningless sounds which obtain meaning only in the context of propaganda, business, discipline, and relaxation."

Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (1964)

Language

Language possesses a great power in shaping a human consciousness and reaches much deeper upon an unconscious, as a powerful communication tool. Human mind is driven by two systems of processing information from environment: controlled – intentionally and consciously controlled by individual and automatic, which absorb the information out of consciousness and awareness, processing them through imprinted scripts and programs. (Marini,2018). The more unconscious (unnamed) content, the less awareness, and the greater susceptibility to programming and external manipulation.

According to Naom Chomsky (1988) linguists, political activist, and co-creator of "Propaganda Model":

"The Mass Media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda."

Paradoxically Chomsky rejected any role for language in propaganda from linguistic point of view. He believes that although ideology is extremely powerful in subjugating dissent, argues that "in the face of "very effective systems of indoctrination and thought control" all one needs is common sense and a few facts. The idea that language implicate politics would

be in opposition to his own linguistic theory of universal grammar in which language is genetically endowed universal structure. (Lukin 2011)

In an interview with David Jay Brown (2005) Chomsky states, quoting XVIII Century philosopher, David Hume, there exists universal morality like universal grammar, which means “we have an understanding of what we ought to do in an unbounded range of circumstances,” if “there were some fixed principles of human nature from which we derive an understanding of what our moral responsibilities are.

I perceive certain similarity between Chomsky's concept of language and propaganda and French psychoanalysis Jacques Lacan's, theory of language, despite the lack of evidence of any influences.

“Language as social law, witness, and enforce appear as a great structuring force of the socio-symbolic, that tells us about the confines within which we can act and express, which generates prohibitions, and judges perversions and obscenities. (Lacan cited by May-Hobbs, 2023)

Lacan extends his theory to the areas of the unconscious by claiming that, the Symbolic also encompasses the unconscious which is “structured like a language,” and “the various codes and inhibitions that sediment in it.”

“Language allow itself to be dragged along by its double and joins the best to the worst for a phantom of rationality whose formula is “everyone must believe in it,” such is the message of what unites us.”

J.L. Boutess, The Destroyer of Intensities (1979)

From the point of view of French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1981), we experienced absorption of all original cultural forms and all determined languages in advertising, because it has no depth and meaning, and this lowest energy of the sign has a power over all others. Starting from October revolution and market crash in 1929 propaganda and advertising – both languages of masses, issues from mass production ideas and commodities progressively converged into one and this defines a society in which political economy is fully realized because in both reigns the same language, which means:” dissolves a specific

power, resolute, absorbed in language without contradictions , like a dream, because traversed by purely superficial intensities.”

He states that today the power of advertising is stolen from it by even more simplified and functional language of computer science. “The sequence model, soundtrack and image track, continuum of sounds, signs, signals, slogans offered by advertising, that is erected as a total environment is overtaken precisely in its function of simulation, by the electronic continuum. Micro processing, digitality, cybernetics language, go much further in the direction of the absolute simplification of processes than advertising level.”

A pessimistic conclusion comes to mind when analysing Baudrillard's approach in the context of C.G. Jung's theory of the shadow and subconscious. Detaching language from its context may lead to disconnection from self-awareness, roots, and intuition, and thus to an intensified, continuous repression of unnamed content and fragments of reality into the subconscious. This process leads to disintegration, negating parts of the self, and immersing the mind into a dream-like state. Looking from an optimistic perspective: we still have art as an intriguing means for raising awareness of the unconscious and mediating between the individual and the community – a therapy tool.



Fig.2 Untitled, 1994

What we see on this picture is a young woman walks down the road, wearing a white t-shirt with a green letter on the back: “Nobody owns me,” instead of a name of manufacturer.

T-shirt designed by Cuban born -American artist Felix Gonzales-Torres in 1944, commissioned by the French clothes company Agnes B.

Apparently, the message “I am free” may seem trivial but” by buying any commercial product displaying the brand name we have been named, captured, or even possessed by advertising and marketing of a product: we have become a Mitsubishi man or a Gucci girl. This particular T-shirt is a refusal of that type of surreptitious ownership. In an age of greater and greater state surveillance and control, it is an affirmation by that person that their body belongs to them and no one else.” (Godfrey, 1998, p.345)

These words are triggering, drive attention to an ideological and socio-political struggle. Printed on a T-shirt worn by a person moving in a public space, they have the nature of a demonstration. They are no longer words but a protest action. Printed on a T-shirt worn by a person moving in a public space, they have the nature of a demonstration. They are no longer words but a protest action. Moreover, words express our identities and beliefs. “Act of naming gives a meaning and significance to things of the world.” (Godfrey T.1998, p.350)

Referring again to Lacan “The infant’s initiation into language comes the first encounter with the world, the presence of what he calls the “big other”, the observer requisite for conducting ourselves with socio-linguistic propriety”(Lacan cited by May-Hobbs 2023) and the entry to the language is marked by naming things and people ,which let to achieve gradually a self-awareness.

IMAGE AND UNCONSCIOUS

An image is a mental picture or idea that forms in a reader's or listeners mind from the words that they read or hear, according to Cambridge dictionary.

‘The form of the world into which [a person] is born is already inborn in him, as a virtual image’ (Jung C.G. 1953)

Above quote refers to the concept of collective unconscious by Carl Gustaw Jung, Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalytic, that is defined as a “shared, inherited unconscious knowledge and experience across generations and cultures, expressed through universal

symbols and archetypes i.e. ancestral memories, are represented by universal themes in various cultures, as expressed through literature, art, and dreams.”(Mcleod 2024)

Similarly to personal unconscious, its content is unknown, forgotten or rejected and in this way immensely affect our thoughts and deeds or choices. This great power of unconscious over a human life is dissolved within a moment in which unconscious become a conscious, brought to the surfaces named and accepted.

“The images of the unconscious, place a great responsibility upon a man. Failure to understand them, or a shirking of ethical responsibility, deprives him of his wholeness and imposes a painful fragmentariness on his life” (Jung 1961p. 193). Moreover, the image is a formative element in the establishment of a conscious attitude to the contents of the unconscious mind” (Schaverien,1992p.11)

This means according to Jung and many other theorists that psychic existence can only be recognized through content capable of consciousness, and only through sharing collective, inborn understanding in our unconscious, evidenced by sacred symbolism, myths, and stories, we can come into collective understanding.

“The image is regarded as having the potential to mediate between individual and collective consciousness. Consciousness is mediated and transformed through symbolic forms and the image is one means through which the “I” come to grips with the world.” (Cassirer cited by Hocoy, 2005)

It can refer to Lacanian concept of “little other” which is the image of oneself in a mirror, rather than object than a subject, according to his words is a fiction of unity. Mediator between internal and external world.

In activism art context “the image can serve as a call for individual and collective action to address marginalized aspects of human potential. Examples of this may be seen in the photographic images of Sebastiao Salgado (1997, 2000,2004), which document human plights including struggles for land rights, poverty, displacement, and genocide, and implicitly charge the viewer with an obligation to address these instances of injustice.” (Hocoy2005)



Fig.3 Gold 1986

Interestingly, there exists found evidence of a relationship between nature of the images one spontaneously produces and the likelihood one will engage in social action (Kaplan1994 cited by Hocoy,2005)

“Social action is ultimately predicated between personal and collective suffering and the image has the unique ability to bring to consciousness the reality of a current collective predicament as well as the universality and timelessness of individual's suffering. Moreover, image can concurrently heal personal-collective wounds while demanding a response to injustice.” (Hocoy2005)

Based on Jungian theories I can conclude that an image in a photographic form by capturing an action and representing an event possesses a therapeutic value.

“Art therapy and social action are linked through versatility and power of the image.” (Hocoy,2005)

Praxis

“If you can imagine it, you can make it; if you can make it, you can make it change.”

Lois Weaver

Praxis remained as an important concept for many disciplines of life and science: psychological, philosophical, sociological, cultural and economics and educational through the centuries. It refers to the activity engaged in by free individuals (Smith,1966) or the practice of a technical subject or art arising out of the theory of it. (Brown,1993)

Riedel (1977) defines knowledge that is developed through praxis as the knowledge of human beings who act with a purpose and take responsibility for their actions.

Praxis is not only is not simply action base on reflection either does not mean the same as activism described by Freire as doing something or “poiesis” defined by Aristotle as acting upon, doing to (working with object). Praxis is creative: it is other-seeking and dialogic. (Taylor, 1993)

“It is action which embodies certain qualities. These include a commitment to human wellbeing and the search for truth, and respect for others. It is the action of people who are free, who are able to act for themselves. It requires that a person ‘makes a wise and prudent practical judgement about how to act in *this* situation” (Carr and Kemmis 1986)

Following of Aristotle’s concept of practical wisdom analysed in the book *Nichomachean Ethics*: “The mark of prudent man is to be able to deliberate rightly about what is good not in particular respect but what is conducive to the good life generally.”

“Praxis is crucial for development. It is the alchemical process that transmutes knowledge into wisdom, potential into achievement, and intention into impact. It beckons us to step beyond the confines of mere contemplation and venture into the arena of doing. Here, mistakes become stepping stones, setbacks become catalysts, and failures become fertile ground for innovation.”

“By showing action is possible, it can foster belief that change is possible. Perhaps art provides change’s most important ingredient: imagination.” (Harvie J.,2015)



Fig.4 In South Pole Documentation 2015

A picture above depicts Spanish activist artist planting Anarchy flag at the South Pole in April 2015. A Message from this symbolic gesture was to destroys all borders. Anarchism is for Sierra political and behavioural philosophy and over all “morality and implies a way of life without concessions.”

“Planting a national flag in a hitherto unvisited place has never been an innocent gesture. This is how colonial processes always begin.” Good point, particularly as President Trump is now seeking to dominate space by ordering the US military to establish a sixth branch – the so-called space force – tasked, you would think, with putting stars and stripes flags over every bit of the solar system and beyond.” (Sierra quoted by Jeffries S.,2015)

Catalyst

Catalyst according to Cambridge dictionary is a condition, event, or person that is the cause of an important change.

Art activism acts as a catalyst for social change and development of collective awareness through involving communities, elevating underrepresented voices, redefining cultural identity, reflecting societal challenges, and empowering people via education.



Fig.5 Walking for refugees,2012

On Royal academy website, Professor Jen Harvie is questioning an effectiveness of walk as a performative protest action, undertaken by two activist artists: **What on earth can a walk do?** Ai Weiwei and Anish Kapoor, Ai Weiwei walked east together from central London to Kapoor's 2012 sculpture, Orbit, in Stratford. A focus of their walk was London's East End, home to centuries of immigrants fleeing oppression and deprivation, including Jews, French Huguenots, Irish, and Bangladeshis. Both artists carried a blanket to indicate fundamental human rights to rest and security. In the months before this walk, the refugee crisis had become a catastrophe, with thousands of desperate Middle Eastern and African migrants pushing on Europe's frontiers and hundreds drowning or being assailed by water cannons and tear gas. Governments across the world failed dismally to prevent the unfolding disaster. Ai and Kapoor walked to draw attention to the need for a coordinated, global, proportionate humanitarian response to this worldwide refugee crisis.

Harvie concluded with following argumentation focusing on symbolism of gestures: walk as a freedom of movements, blankets symbolise a security. He uses a term: synecdoche which means from Greek "simultaneous meaning" and refers to a part which represent a wholeness like for this sake: a part – a pair of men walking – stands in for a global whole – the entire world making constructive change. Performative art cannot solve refugee crisis, but it can provide catalyst for change.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned issues and their preliminary analysis are intended to lead me to formulate a hypothesis, the in-depth analysis of which I will conduct in my dissertation. The presented content, based on selected theories and works of artists, allows me to assume that the therapeutic power of activist art lies in its ability to mediate between the consciousness of an individual and a collective through language, image, and action, working as a catalyst in alchemical transformational process, going far beyond the time and cultural framework, reaching the areas of collective consciousness.

"The intersection of political activism and art therapy are becoming a discipline in themselves (Frostig, 2011;Kaplan, 2007), speaking of the interconnectedness of the

individual and their environments .Art therapy uses art as a tool to express the self, often delving into inner worlds that tell a rich visual story, and again, is a response to the outside world (Rubin, 2008)."

I intend to expand a field on my investigation about the topics of transpersonal art therapy, which is the goal of my professional self-fulfilment.

"A transpersonal art therapy perspectives invites repressed, unconscious material (internalised oppression, traumatic experience sot the projection of privileged identities into the shadow) into consciousness through the creation (Reeves,2000)"

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