

## AESTHETICS BETWEEN ART AND SOCIETY

### PERSPECTIVES OF ARNOLD BERLEANT'S POSTKANTIAN AESTHETICS OF ENGAGEMENT

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The recognition of the necessity to revise traditional aesthetics has been an important factor throughout the 20th century that has witnessed essential social and political changes oriented towards democratization, and changes in the art sphere, as well. Transcendental rational Kantian aesthetics has been doubted, questioned, criticized after the discoveries of Charles Darwin, after opening to non-Euro-American cultures, after the fall of rationalism with the machinery of the Holocaust, after the Great Avantgarde and, later, land art, body art, performance art, happenings, (interactive) installations, bio art, and internet art. In order to deal with all these changes it appeared helpful to turn to the original idea of *aisthesis* related to perception and recognition through senses and not through the rational mind as better suited to analyze new phenomena in art and aesthetically experienced individual and social lives. On this basis Arnold Berleant developed his proposal of aesthetics of engagement, being motivated by the need to form a positive frame for understanding the directedness of experience where the aesthetic becomes the key. Berleant's endeavour is interesting and worth closer attention, not only because of its intellectual precision, sublimity, and sensibility, but also due to its evolution, which allows considering contemporary issues such as environment, landscape, contamination, city, capitalism, and culture. The perspectives which open up in Berleant's reflection deserve to be investigated, and the current issue of the "Espes" Journal is dedicated to contribute to that task.

Aesthetic engagement introduces understanding an environment not as the object in front of the subject (us as humans), but as the continuum in which we are immersed, and which can be analyzed analogically through aesthetic concepts. Similarly, in the experience of art can no longer be separated into appreciator and the art object, or the artist, the performer, and the audience, because these "disappear in the reciprocity and continuity of appreciative experience."<sup>1</sup> This environment trespasses the differentiation of nature-culture and is perceived as artifactually transformed and sensibly experienced by subjects, who very often live in cities and not in the bosom of nature. The urban environment is a vital sphere and we should understand what conditions an urban environment offers its inhabitants and how these affect the quality of their experiences, which are not only pleasing and beautiful, but "encompass the

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<sup>1</sup> BERLEANT, A. 2013. What is Aesthetic Engagement? In: *Contemporary Aesthetics* [online]. <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=684>

full range of intrinsic perceptual experience and its associated meanings.”<sup>2</sup> Opening the unnecessarily narrow concept of aesthetics, Berleant notices both that “*the values we recognize in arts are found more widely in social experience*”<sup>3</sup> and that art is never free from its social role (not limited by social constraints).<sup>4</sup>

Arnold Berleant combines continental phenomenology and American pragmatism, which all the more designates him as the right figure to focus on when trying to replace analytical divisions with reflections corresponding to contemporary grasp of society and culture. We invite your involvement in the development, analyses, and critique of Arnold Berleant’s ideas, and to send papers related to the topics listed below to the e-mail address: [aleksandra.lukaszewicz.alcaraz@akademiasztuki.eu](mailto:aleksandra.lukaszewicz.alcaraz@akademiasztuki.eu) with the fraze in the title: “CFP: Espes”.

- Berleantian critique of Kantian aesthetics
- Proposal of aesthetics of engagement
- Environmental aesthetics
- Urban aesthetics
- Garden and landscape aesthetics
- Social aesthetics
- Aesthetic negativity

*“Aesthetic engagement thus pervades human experience and it accounts for both the appreciation of the arts and the appreciation of environment. Leading us beyond the arts, aesthetic engagement can also illuminate and enrich social relations. By recognizing the experience of aesthetic engagement, its presence can be valued and its influence encouraged.”*<sup>5</sup>

**Deadline** for paper submission: September 30th, 2017

**Guidelines** for publishing papers: <http://www.casopisespes.sk/index.php/eng/criteria-forpublishing>

<sup>2</sup> BERLEANT, A. 1986. Cultivating an Urban Aesthetics. In: *Diogenes*. Vol 34, Issue 136, p. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> BERLEANT, A. 2016. *The Case for Social Aesthetics*, Given as Keynote Lecture at the Seminar of Social Aesthetics: Perspectives on Art and Engagement in São Paulo, Brazil 10-11 Nov 2016.

<sup>4</sup> BERLEANT, A. 2005. The Social Evaluation of Art. In: *Aesthetics and Environment, Theme and Variations on Art and Culture*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

*The Social Evaluation of Art* first appeared as *Spółeczne wartościowanie sztuki* in Polish translation in: *Problematyka wartościowania w Amerykańskiej filozofii i estetyce XX wieku* (The Question of Valuation in American Twentieth Century Philosophy and Aesthetics), eds. Andrzej Ceynowy, Bohdana Dziemidoka, Marka Janiaka (Gdansk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 1995), pp. 58-67.

<sup>5</sup> BERLEANT, A. 2016. *The Case for Social Aesthetics*, Given as Keynote Lecture at the Seminar of Social Aesthetics: Perspectives on Art and Engagement in São Paulo, Brazil 10-11 Nov 2016.