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Relations Between Biopolitics and Eco-Aesthetics

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Abstract: This paper examines diverse links between concepts, objectives and mechanisms of biopolitics and eco-aesthetics researching their historical developments, the context in which they appear, and the status they have in modern society. The study is guided by several questions and hypotheses: whether the ecology and eco-aesthetics are in stark contrast to the biopolitics and its goals, or both, and eco-aesthetics and biopolitics, each in its own way control life; is perhaps today's popularization of ecology and eco-aesthetics a new instrument of politics of fear, demonstration of necessity of biopolitical power, or a market tool; where in this relationship is art; is art only the naive accomplice in this demonstration of power; or, is art an agent in the biopolitics, because it wants to become biopower and achieve a sort of Gesamtkunstwerk – creates life as a work of art? In doing so, the avant-garde artist-revolutionary as to forgets that revolutions eat their children. Relations between eco-aesthetics and biopolitics present itself as a sort of maze where biopolitics of global capitalism is abusing environmental problems and uses eco-aesthetics for its goals. Politicization of the avant-garde eco art, design and architecture (including waste aesthetics) seems to turn into aestheticization and elitism, thus showing capitalism as a prerequisite of eco-aesthetics. On the other hand, market creates a quasi eco-aesthetics as political correctness that retains the comfortable shape of consumer society and undermines the goal of eco-aesthetics. Eco-aesthetical society would have no place for art as we know it, since opposes its material nature.

Keywords: biopolitics, eco-aesthetics, neoliberalism, eco art, environment, gesamtkunstwerk

1. Introduction

Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, our planet is changing everyday as a result of man's ruthless, incessant and unstoppable exploitation of nature. In the creation of this reality, which is

more often called "the global ecological crisis," the influence of biopolitics and eco-aesthetics is all the more powerful. Different meanings are ascribed to these two concepts in discourses, including the use of promises of salvation of mankind from the environmental cataclysm. Everything that both of these terms indicate appear as dominant themes in contemporary life. Ties among them, however, have not been sufficiently explored. The aim of this paper is to investigate and clarify the possible relationships between biopolitics and eco-aesthetics.

Biopolitics and eco-aesthetics appear to be contradictions in human dealings with nature or life. If we start from Žižek's conclusion that contemporary politics is biopolitics [i], then it creates and controls life according to the rules of global capitalism. Given the fact that the capitalist industrial production and its ruthless exploitation of nature are considered responsible for the global environmental crisis, eco-aesthetics, which occurs in order to solve this crisis, is presented at first glance as a counterweight to biopolitics. But does this polarization exclude other meanings, or other connections that are established between biopolitics and eco-aesthetics? The main hypothesis of this paper is precisely the claim that there are numerous connections between biopolitics and eco-aesthetics, some of which are hidden. This paper seeks to respond to the primary question: what are the relationships between biopolitics and eco-aesthetics? and does so by analyzing the emergence of biopolitics and eco-aesthetics, their contexts of development, as well as the status that they have in modern society and in theories of art and media.

2. The origin and mechanisms of action of biopolitics and eco-aesthetics

Biopolitics and eco-aesthetics arise from the same source - the development of civilization, or more precisely, the development of capitalist society. Biopolitics formed in order to control human life, which has led to the neglect of human nature. Man becomes a god who creates and controls human life. In biopolitics, natural life of man is annulled by its inclusion into the political sphere. Aesthetics as ideological, a bio-political institution, as Agamben notes, makes a form of life itself [ii]. Through the formation of high art it disciplines senses, or the body of a man.

Unlike biopolitics, eco-aesthetics was created in order to restore human nature, correcting the traditional – biopolitical aesthetics. It wants to correct the mistakes of human development, or civilization and humanity, back to the way it believes is the right one. Eco-aesthetics is expressed in this way as opposite to biopolitics, but owes its emergence precisely to the capitalist system and its biopolitics. If a discourse of biopolitics had not been created, then there would not exist the creation of reverse discourse - eco-aesthetics. Given the fact that within the biopolitical discourse, aesthetics has been created as a discipline, and eco-aesthetics is still a kind of aesthetics, eco-aesthetics thus still remains tied to the discourse of biopolitics, or even remains in it.

Eco-aesthetics and biopolitics, both in their own way present the urgency of solving environmental problems and prevention of the cataclysm. Biopolitics uses this presented urgency as an excuse for uncontrolled development of technology, where it presents itself, opposed to eco-aesthetics, as the right solution to environmental problems. Biopolitical technology, like eco-aesthetics, promises salvation of mankind from the environmental cataclysm, but unlike eco-aesthetics, salvation of man is supplied via technology - artificial prolonging and improvement of human life and the creation of artificial organisms, while maintaining the same comfortable form of consumer society, which real eco-aesthetics, guided by radical ecology, seeks to eliminate. In the spirit of Foucault's theory of surveillance and control, modern technology and science, such as medicine and biology, are used as instruments of biopolitical power

(which Foucault calls apparatus or dispositif) in creating and controlling human life for the purpose of capital accumulation and flow. Biopower creates a new power - techno power aimed at strengthening biopolitical manipulation. This can be seen in the examples of recent experiments in nanotechnology and biosynthesis, which create more manipulable and profitable organisms such as hybrids, clones, cyborgs and avatars in order to achieve unlimited exploitation. While biopolitically programmed cyborg limbs and functions (through BCI connection for example) appear to man as extensions of his senses as well as personal freedom, they actually determine man's every movement. In this way, man becomes a creature / machine / robot / object operated via remote control. Similarly, the biosynthetic experiments generate highly biopolitically manipulable beings that provide profit, retain the status quo of consumer society and open the way for the formation of new pathogens. They further allow bio-political manipulation while being formed under the pretext of solving environmental problems and preventing the apocalypse.

Mechanisms of biopolitical and eco-aesthetic action share similarities. As Holl, Groys and Žižek conclude, they both share large common problems, namely ecological problems common to all people of the planet, and they somehow unite them. Eco-aesthetics counts on this in its ecopolitical aim - to design - and create a global ecological society, thus presenting itself as biopolitics, where through its art it wants to create a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk - society as a work of art. Art, thus wants to become a biopower, acting as an agent in biopolitics. But alas, the avant-garde artist-revolutionary forgets that the *revolution devours its children*. Eco-aesthetics commits self-sabotage in several ways, often in combination with the biopolitical control system. Eco-aesthetics, like traditional aesthetics, also wants to shape lives by their frameworks, imposing them onto art too. Aesthetic frames in turn, separate art from life, making it impossible for art to execute its avant-garde goal - to merge with life. But the art itself is an attempt to establish order, or an expression of order itself, as Stephen Sondheim and Helen Hayes claim, in which art thus itself becomes biopower. Francis Bacon reminds us that it is human nature to subconsciously try to bring about more order than is necessary [iii]. Translated into the discourse of art or aesthetics, this tendency is called aestheticization. As a strong ideological-technological conception of aesthetics, it can be understood as a request for the remodeling of the world using beautiful and artistic as role models [iv] - Gesamtkunstwerk. But eco-art works, because of their large scale, and location in public spaces, are subjected to approval and sponsorship by the authority that they indirectly criticize in their work. The government thus decides the fate of eco-art project, and it either does not approve it or simply ensures that it remains only a single project. On the other hand, as noted by Rosalyn Deutsche [v], in the biopolitical character of the new paradigm of power, public space, especially the artistic aesthetic public space (including eco-art work) is often no longer really public or it is biopolitically limited to certain people. This elitism is especially present in green architecture, where due to its expensive construction, is available only to the rich (for example, to "green" capitalists), paradoxically, only to those who are most responsible for the emergence of environmental problems. As Jameson underlines, aesthetic production is now integrated into the production of goods, where more important structural function and positions are assigned to aesthetic innovation and experimentation, especially in architecture, which is under the patronage of multinational companies in the form of commissions and land values. This creates practically direct relationship - a deeper dialectical interrelationship than simply funding this or that particular project [vi].

3. Eco-Aesthetics as an instrument of biopolitics

The aim of eco-aesthetics remains utopian (as reflected in various ways when it comes to eco-art, design and architecture), because it clashes with the aim of global capitalism, which today dominates the lives of all the inhabitants of the planet. Guattari rightly says that the social, mental and environmental ecology are intertwined and that capitalism destroys them [vii]. Gablik accordingly says: "Manic production and consumption, competitive self-affirmation and profit maximization are key concepts in our social success" [viii] and added that they only lead to global destruction. The problem of the consumer society is that it constantly uses new products and resources, relying on their ongoing production. Malcolm Miles points out that eco-art works are a "response to an urgent threat to the world flooded with its waste; flooding produced by an invisible aspect of global capitalism" [ix] In order to cover byproducts of its production and stop the eco-activism and eco-aesthetics that drew attention to them, biopolitical power centers of global capitalism implement various actions of supervision and control through their institutions. Such actions are the new clothes of the Foucaultian panopticon, norms, and tests. Institutions participating in this biopolitical control are primarily: the media, scientific institutions and their technology, education and cultural institutions. Each of these biopolitical instruments will do their part to neutralize the revolutionary aspirations of eco-aesthetics (its art, design and architecture). According to Jameson, culture is a matter of media [x], because in today's era of high technology, media dominates everyday life, and the system via media serves everything, even culture, including eco-aesthetics. Eco-aesthetics that the media presents and popularizes is quasi-eco-aesthetics – only in its form does it resemble eco-aesthetics – while it actually refers to mass-produced objects of wood and other natural materials and semi-recycled materials and "eco-actions" that are guided by the principles of the market, not the principles of sustainability. All that is shown in the media is becoming a reality and value, and so do eco-design and humanitarian eco-actions of capitalist firms. The 'liberal communists' are in the media presented only as great humanitarians, advocates of healthy eco-aesthetic life and great patrons of ecology (as well as donors of culture and art) - "green" capitalists who are saving the world.

On the other hand, the media presentation of the politics of fear in the form of environmental catastrophes, justifies biopolitical control of human life. This allows the blind belief in the power of biopolitical institutions, such as science and technology in solving all, and even environmental issues. Development of science and technology, such as nanotechnology and biogenetics is presented in the media as a necessity for the preservation of human life. Therefore, the only thing that can save the world is a new technology of "green" capitalism.

4. Conclusion

In a nontransparent way, global capitalism and its exploitation of the planet serve as the very foundation for the existence of eco-aesthetics, its art, design and architecture. Eco-aesthetics and biopolitics are thus two sides of the same coin. In the contemporary biopolitical race to shaping modern life, global capitalism has won (at least for now) and eco-aesthetics has lost. Eco-aesthetics, therefore, doesn't stand in stark contrast to biopolitics, but only ostensibly. It is, as this study has shown, an integral part of biopolitics, and at the same time is its subspecies, because it expresses itself (as well as its art) as a kind of biopolitics. On the other hand, as this paper argues, biopolitics uses eco-aesthetics for its goals.

By inclusion of ecology and eco-aesthetics in its politics of fear, biopolitics allows further expansion of its control, while through institutionalization and conversion of eco-aesthetics into an acceptable form, it allows further expansion of the market economy. In a mysterious, abstract way, eco-aesthetics thus becomes neutralized and absorbed into the system, becoming part of the general culture of the Western (global) society. In this sense, the critical distance of eco-aesthetic art, and the eco-aesthetics, could not exist.

Conflict of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

References and Notes

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