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## Who is the contemporary artist? Social representation of the artist among visual art students

**Streszczenie:**

Artykuł prezentuje zastosowanie analizy pól semantycznych w celu zrekonstruowania reprezentacji współczesnego artysty wśród studentów sztuk wizualnych. 124 studentów Wydziału Sztuki Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego w Krakowie oraz Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Krakowie odpowiedziało na otwarte pytanie: Kim jest artysta w naszych czasach? Uzyskany materiał jakościowy pozwolił na nakreślenie pola semantycznego czyli ekwiwalentów, opozycji, określeń, asocjacji, działań podmiotu oraz działań wobec podmiotu, z którymi pojęcie artysty jest utożsamiane w percepcji przyszłych twórców. W artykule przedstawiono, wnioski, implikacje praktyczne i przyszłe kierunki badań.

**Słowa kluczowe:**

reprezentacja artysty, percepcja społeczna, analiza pól semantycznych, studenci sztuk wizualnych

**Abstract:**

The paper presents the application of semantic field analysis to the reconstruction of the social representation of the contemporary artist among visual arts students. 124 students from the Faculty of Art of the Pedagogical University of Cracow and the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow answered an open-ended question: Who is the artist in our time? The narrative material was used to reconstruct the equivalents, opposites, attributes, associations, activities of the subject and activities on the subject which constitute the semantic field of the concept “contemporary artist”. The conclusions, practical implications and direction for future studies are presented.

**Keywords:**

social representation of artist, social perception, semantic field analysis, visual arts students

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## Introduction

Social representation could be understood as a “stock of common knowledge and information which people share in the form of common-sense theories about the social world” (Augustinos, 1981 p.12). It is based on collective elaboration “of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating” (Moscovici, 1963, p. 251). Some authors compare social representations with the stereotypes observed in a non-laboratory environment (Courtial, Kerneur, 1996 as cited in: Pelt, Poncelet, 2012), some with the social schema (Augustinos, 1981; Wagner et al., 1999), stressing however the differences such as sociogenesis and the discursive way of generating representation within particular social groups. The theory of social representation is historical in its nature. It accepts that the meaning attached to the phenomena being studied is shaped by past events and contexts (Wagner, 1995; Wagner et al., 1999).

The social representation of an artist has transformed tremendously over the centuries. The artist – according to prescribed functions – has been perceived as a skillful craftsman, a broadly gifted individual or a romantic rebel (c.f. Gołaszewska, 1986). The XX century released the creator from the restrictions of form and content or the obligation of social mission and introduced the myth of the liberated, eccentric, and above all independent “artistic personality”. As there was no need for art to serve religion, nation or culture any more, it became “a private form of “practising” existence” or even “a more deeply conceived form of existence” (Potocka, 2011). According to this vision of creativity, the artist produces art only for himself/herself, without expecting any form of external gratifications. However the effect of his/her existential efforts might be included in the cultural flow by the decision of the *artworld* in line with institutional theory (Dickie, 1974). Although the social representation of an “artistic personality”, which means being non-conformist, uncompromising and indifferent to the reaction of the public, is well rooted in social perception, there are premises that these characteristics are not determinants of artistic success. The 20 year long, longitudinal studies with graduate students from the Art Institute of Chicago indicate that those artists who have become known and present in prestigious galleries were not concentrated only on self-expression. In fact, they possessed a pragmatic business focus, which allowed them to successfully strive for contact with cultural institutions and to be involved in self-promotional activities (Csikszentmihalyi, Getzels, Kahn, 1984 as cited in: Abuhamdeh, Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). By contrast, those students who were labeled as particularly gifted, but who lacked the vigor to promote themselves have not become recognized. Apart from the contemporary artist’s need to respond to art market institutions, the other problem concerning the artist’s identity is defining the qualities which constitute an artist. One of the issues addresses the question whether an artist should have a formal education in art as well as craft. In fact,

not only is the contemporary artist no longer obliged to produce their works from beginning to end, sometimes hiring an entire outfield working on the project ( eg. Anselm Kiefer's studio *La Ribaute*, the work *Sunflower Seeds* by Ai Weiwei), but also s/he is not obliged to produce any material forms, which often leads to the transferring of the activity into the world of concept or performative actions. Therefore, the question arises: what constitutes the contemporary visual artist? Is it an efficient eye and a trained hand or rather a creative head? Is the artist nowadays somebody who embraces the context of the art market in his activities, or who ignores it or creatively transforms it? Is s/he a professional with master skills or is s/he producing art without being formally entitled to? Is everybody brave enough to present his/her works to the public, or is it only a person with special talent? It seems that unambiguous answers to the above questions are destined to fail. Instead, it is worth analyzing the artist's representation among the potential "executors" of the role. Visual art students make a choice to go to art colleges with a more or less articulated intention of planning their future within the artistic domain. What representation of an artist accompanies them during their formal education? Is it an image of an outstanding genius, an efficient professional or a media celebrity? The question seems important as the development of a creative personality and professional identification, as well the motivation and determination for artistic endeavors might strongly depend on the representation of an artist that one possesses. Still, there are very few studies showing the social perception of this profession. In contrast to the many, regularly updated pieces of research on creative abilities and the personality traits of creative people (c.f. Popek, 2003), there are few studies on the social perception of artists. Add to this the fact that the ones which have been conducted were more concerned with the stereotypes of musicians (ex. Cameron, Duffy, Glenwright, 2014; Cripp, Gregory, 1999; Lipton, 1987) than visual artists (Borg, 1955). Furthermore, existing research has mostly been restricted to the perception of the personality traits of the artists and has very seldom tackled the complex context of the social and professional functioning of the artist. The explorative study presented in this paper was undertaken to minimize this gap by describing subtle and current meanings associated with the concept of the contemporary artist among young visual creators within the framework of social representation .

## Method

The aim of the study was to reconstruct the social representation of the contemporary artists among visual art students. The methodological approach which allows us to explore such problems is based on qualitative studies which: "use (...) text instead of numbers

as the empirical material, they derived from the concept of social construction of the realities and focus on the views of participants, their daily practices and knowledge about the studied subject” (Fick, 2010, p. 22). Methods that are used in such paradigm “should have open character to allow the understanding of the process or relationship” (p. 22). As the participants are allowed to construct responses freely, the risk of generating the artefacts decreases and the chances of touching the deep, multi-level meanings which are prescribed to the phenomenon by respondents increases. One such method which allows us to gain access to subtle meanings created by respondents is semantic field analysis. The semantic field of a word is the sum of the contexts in which it appears and the sum of its relations with other linguistic elements in the text (Tomasello, 2003). For this reason the unquestionable advantage of using semantic field analysis is the possibility of reconstructing senses which are not directly accessible to the respondents when you ask them in a straightforward way. The network of meanings reveals how the subjects saliently experience a particular aspect of reality (including all the linguistic nuances showing the affections and evaluations). In that case it reveals how the art college students perceive contemporary artists. Semantic field analysis is based on “deconstructing the structure of sentence in order to recombine its elements according to the significant meaning” (Robin, 1980, p. 252). According to this method, the researcher chooses the subject of the analysis using keywords, and after that creates six networks which consist of: equivalents (indicating what the subject is identified with; these words can replace the subject in some contexts), opposites (indicating what counteracts with and what is contrary to the subject), attributes (indicating what the features of the subject are), associations (indicating with what the subject is associated, with what the subject coexists), activities of the subject (showing the subject’s actions), and activities on the subject (showing what the actions by others affecting the subject are). Subsequently the researcher combines the particular elements of the network in one entity and reads off the meaning which is attached to the main subject of the analysis being undertaken.

## **Participants and procedure**

124 students from the Faculty of Art of the Pedagogical University of Cracow (N=62) and the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow (N=62) participated in the study, with ages ranging from 20-30. The total sample included 94 females (75,8%) and 30 males (24,2%) from the following majors: graphic arts (N=58), painting (N=30), art education in visual arts (N=28) and other visual arts (scenography, sculpture; N=4). The study was conducted in groups. Participants freely answered the open-ended question: “Who is the artist in our time?” with no time limitations.

Semantic field analysis was applied to reconstruct the meaning of the concept of an artist (the keyword for analysis). This method allows us to describe what the contemporary artist is (not) identified with, what associations s/he provokes, what kind of features and actions are ascribed to him/her, as well as by what s/he is affected in the perception of young artists. For that purpose, the 124 narratives were transcribed and converted into computer files to be used as material for the generation of semantic analysis. Each of the narratives were broken down into basic elements and coded into one of the six networks (namely equivalents, opposite, associations etc.) The category “others” was created for the fragments which were not included in any of the six networks of the semantic field. Then the single narratives of the respondents which were included in a particular network ( eg. equivalents), were grouped independently by two expert judges (one of whom was the author) into broader categories which covered identical or similar content. The results were compared and discrepancies were discussed until a consensus about the number of categories and their content was reached. This allowed us to conduct the quantitative analysis by calculating the frequency of responses within categories.

The fundamental problem which appeared during coding was the polysemy of the expressions used by respondents. This resulted in difficulty in allocating particular fragments to separate networks. Quite often the way of defining the artist (equivalent) contained the characteristic features (attributes), as well as inherent artistic activities (activities of the subject), which suggests that these particular networks of the semantic field are strongly intertwined. To ensure the clarity of coding and presenting the results, a decision was made to adjust the procedure to the empirical material. The assumptions made were to include all the references indicating the artist’s identity (mainly nouns) in the network of equivalents. The network of attributes (mainly adjectives) incorporated all the psychological characteristics and attitudes perceived in an artist, whereas the activities of the subject (mainly verbs) embraced all the actions indicating the social roles and the functions of an artist. In cases when respondents used the form of the noun, adjective or verb, but it was clear from the context that they meant functions, defining properties or characteristic features, the grammar criteria yielded to the one based on merit.

The results of the semantic field of the concept of the contemporary artist are presented in the following sections of this paper. Efforts to reconstruct the complete representation of the artist emerging from the separate semantic networks will then be undertaken.

## Results

The presentation of results contains a qualitative description of the meanings attached to each semantic network, as well as quantitative characteristics – the frequencies of the categories or themes within each semantic network. One should notice that the number of responses within one semantic network is not equal to the number of subjects whose responses were included in the analysis. This is because particular fragments of responses from each participant could be included in more than one category. This happened when the narratives were very well elaborated and systematized according several independent threads which were logically distinguished from each other.

### *Equivalents*

Semantic field analysis lets us see the equivalents, i.e. meanings, which the subject is identified with. All the synonyms of the contemporary artist are presented in this network.

According to the perception of visual art students, an artist is an “experience designer”, a “social prophet”, a “moral barometer” or a “teaser”<sup>2</sup>. To trace the richness of meaning, the responses which represent equivalents (N= 83) have been structured into three themes and two contrary visions of an artist.

One of the most frequent themes (N=14, i.e. 17% of all equivalents) indicates the motif of an artist as a self-actualized individual. An artist is a “liberated man”, “a person who wants to express oneself”, a “creator not only of an art, but him/herself”, “the man who is not afraid to be himself”, and who is “the person s/he wants to be”.

The second theme which emerges from the responses, identifies the creator with the concept of a “visionary” (N=8) who is “the link between real and unreal”, “the person who seeks the truth about the world”, “a prophet” or “the narrator of the spiritual world”.

Contrary to the second theme, which refers to the romantic vision of a creator as the archetype of soothsayer, the third one groups the voices which underline the embedment of an artist in the surrounding reality, particularly in current social, political or economic contexts. An artist becomes “a commentator” on events that are happening. She adopts the role of “ecologist”, „social activist”, „designer”, engineer”, “sociologist”, “historian”, “reporter”, “scientist” or “philosopher”. He is an “awakened man” who is a person deeply “immersed in the world” and because of his great sensitivity and incisiveness he is able to make an astonishing interpretation and at the same time keep his distance by remaining an uninvolved observer of reality.

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<sup>2</sup> Where there are direct citations from respondents, the words have been put in quotation marks.

In addition to the themes described above, two opposed visions of an artist emerged from the narratives of the visual art students – i.e. egalitarian (N=14) and elitist (N=12). The first one (an artist as everyman) emphasizes a democratic vision of creativity and refers to Beuys' statement that "every human being is an artist"<sup>3</sup>. This view is accurately reflected by voices such as: "everybody can become an artist regardless of age and education", "an artist is a regular man, only an eagerness for creation and the will of experimenting is need", "everybody can be an artist regardless of qualities, predispositions or social situation", "nowadays an artist is nobody special, it could be anybody with an idea", "an artist is a profession like others". The responses which emphasized the process of self-definition by the creator were also put in this group, i.e. – "an artist is everybody who feels that way", "everybody can be an artist, nothing else matters except the personality of the creator".

On the other hand, statements emerged which were contrary to the egalitarian concept, indicating the elitist nature of a creator and his extraordinary distinguishable features (N=12). According to them, an artist is a "genius", "the man who sees more", and "lives more intensely than the ordinary man", "the person who perceives reality differently than the rest of society". This second thread, accentuating the uniqueness of a contemporary artist, has been partly criticized by the respondents themselves. An artist who presents an attitude of superiority is described as a "poser with a grandiose ego, who perceived his supremacy and special entitlement". The responses with negative emotional evaluations (N=18) created the last category, in which an artist is named as being an "imposter", "ignorant", an "idiot", a "clown", an "opportunist" or a "puppet". As will be elaborated later, the significant part of these nouns refers to one of the perceived functions of the contemporary artist, named a "careerist".

### **Opposites**

A relatively small part of the semantic field analysis was represented by opposites (N=43). Semantic field analysis of the opposites allowed us to distinguish negative references, indicating by what an artist is contradicted. Opposites allow us to compare the main subject of the analysis with other subjects and consequently to establish the limits of its definition. This network included formal opposites (based on the prefix "pseudo", "anti"), or the opposites which were created by the contradiction "not" (as eg. "it is not a person, who..."), as well as contrary sets mentioned by respondents as "artist" *versus* "craftsman", artist as an "personality" *versus* "profession".

The first category that was distinguished grouped responses contrasting the term artist with the "pseudoartist" (N= 11, 25% of all opposites). Being an artist was perceived

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Beuys' statement dated 1973, first published in English in Caroline Tisdall: *Art into Society, Society into Art* (ICA, London, 1974), p.48.



by the students in contradiction to activities motivated by commercial goals, which are described as “pseudo-art”. This could be well illustrated by the following answer: “Nowadays there are many pseudo-artists, who are called artists and they create a false image (...)”. The pseudo-artist is a person who “is not interested in elevated ideas and intangible issues”, a man who functions as a “celebrity”, for whom it “is more important from what he does, is to how he looks and what is said about him”. In opposition to a “pseudo-artist” the concept of a “real artist” or the artist “for himself/herself” emerges. This is a person who “is not involved in art superficially but seriously”, and who “is not a lancer”.

The second category linked narratives related to the contradiction between “artist” and “craftsman” (N= 17; over 39% opposites). From the one side, they accentuated the specificity of the current expectations formulated towards an artist, from whom it is expected that they will have creative potential (an idea), but not necessarily the executive abilities (craft), i.e. “An artist is not a craftsman”, “s/he is not even obliged to make his/her work”, “it is not necessary today to have skills and abilities”. From the other side, there were also contrasting voices showing the expectation that an artist is able to present the skills and technique i.e. an “artist should be the craftsman despite the fact that there is a camera and computer”. However, regardless of whether the concept of the craftsman was included in the perceived image of an artist or was negated, it remained a significant reference point for students’ answers.

The last general category (N=10, 23% of the opposites) integrated responses which focus on the understanding of the artist as a “personality” contrary to the “profession” (or *vice-versa*). They highlighted that an artist is defined by their creative personality, not their formal education in the visual arts. It is illustrated by the following response: “It is whether you have an interesting personality or **not**. There is **no** opportunity that artistic studies makes somebody an artist”. As well as the following: “**Not** everybody can become an artist, it’s about having this “something” . You can use this term while speaking about the graduates from fine art academies who have artistic professions, but for me it is far-fetched .” On the other hand, there were voices accentuating the role of formal training and education in making somebody “an artist”, contrary to an “amateur”, eg. . “There is **no** need of formal education to become an artist, that is why there is a huge difference between an “artist” and the artists.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the aggregated category “*varia*” was made (N= 5; almost 12% of opposites), in which various answers which did not fit elsewhere were included (f. ex. “**not** the scholar”, “**not** the servant”, “**not** the bread-eater”).

<sup>4</sup> This sentence makes sense in the whole context of the respondent’s narrative, in which one can find: “great amount of amateur artists, **without** longstanding education and knowledge on history of art.”



### **Attributes**

Attributes make up the part of the semantic field of an “artist” which indicates what the subject is like, what its characteristics are, what its core essence or way of being is. From the 114 responses that were taken into account, three groups of attributes have been distinguished, i.e. attitudes (toward social norms and art), psychological characteristics and special abilities.

Visual art students perceive an artist as a nonconformist and an individualistic person. According to the verbal material that was collected, it is the pivotal category which appears most frequently in the responses (N= 35, which make up almost 31% of attributes). An artist is a person who is “independent and confident in their opinions”, “uncompromising”, “having the talent of bravery”, “individualistic in their style and way of being”. Apart from their attitude towards rules and social norms, an artist is characterized by their attitude towards art.

The creator considers art as a priority and “sacrifices himself/herself for art entirely”, “minimalizes other needs”. They are “devoted” and “determined”, because their own creativity is “one of the most important aims in life”. Nevertheless the category “sacrifices for art” is less frequent (N=7, 6% of attributes).

Among the psychological features which characterize creative people, the pivotal one is a specific type of sensitivity. The word “sensitive” (N=17, almost 15% of attributes) appeared in many contexts: “an artist is sensitive towards the surrounding world”, “sensitive to surrounding reality”, “sensitive towards beauty and ugliness”, sometimes “maybe even oversensitive”. The second category of psychological features consists of the characteristics which meet the definition of creators (N=9, almost 8% respectively) i.e. an artist is “creative”, “generative” “ingenious”. The last category of psychological features is created by the adjectives which expose the openness of an artist (N=9, almost 8% respectively). The creator is a “person who seeks new sensations”, who is “open for new horizons”. This characteristic could be well described by the construct of openness to experience within the Big Five personality model.

The third group of attributes embraced all the characteristics referring to “outstanding talent”, which shows the artist as a specially gifted person (all together N=17, almost 15%). The creator possesses high general abilities, i.e. s/he is “intelligent”, has a “rich imagination”, as well as special “artistic” abilities and “manual and visual talents” .

Finally the aggregated category “*varia*” was created (N=17, almost 15%) which embraced various adjectives which were mentioned only once (f. ex. impulsive, dynamic, secretive, full of contradictions).

### *Associations*

Within the semantic field of the term “artist” associations with the main subject of the analysis were distinguished (N= 78). All syntax and contextual relationships which indicate what coexists with the subject and by what it is accompanied belonged to this network. Six categories of associations have been described, which refer to two themes: the first one was connected to a triad artist-recipient-piece of work, the second one was connected to the characteristic of artistic activity and its effects. This second thread was represented by the associations which refers to key-words such as “rebellion”, “shock and controversy”, “emotions and beauty”, “success and fashion”.

The contemporary artist is mainly associated with her/his works (the category “piece of work” is the most frequent general category, N=31, almost 40% of all associations), and in a broader sense with the creative process, which leads to many different elements of aesthetic experience (“beauty and ugliness”, “emotions”, “shock”). The category of „shock” was apparently particularly present in the responses of participants (N=12, 15% associations). Contemporary works are often the source of controversy, causing “scandal” and “agitation” which is caused by the touching of “taboo topics” and conveying a controversial message, such as “Lego Auschwitz” or the “ dress made out of meat”. This is probably why the association which often appears with the figure of a contemporary artist is “rebellion and courage” (N=12) which guarantee “independence” and “non-schematic solutions”. The next category of associations is “success” (N= 10, 12%), which produces the risk of an artist becoming a “fanciful artist”, who is interested in “plaudit”, “fame” and “prestige”. The preceding associations refer to the responses with negative evaluations, which describe the functions of the artist as being a “celebrity” or “showman”, and will be presented in the part concerning the activities of the subject (artist as a “careerist”). Finally, one can observe in the written material the context of external witnesses, or even addressee of artistic activities. These associations were included in the general category “recipient” (N=13, 16%). Table 1 presents the examples of the associations classified into particular categories.

Table 1. Associations for the concept of “an artist”

| Associations                  | Examples                     | General category              |                  |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| With what is s/he associated? | <i>Gesture</i>               | <b>Artwork</b>                |                  |
|                               | <i>Happening</i>             |                               |                  |
| By what is s/he accompanied?  | <i>Utterance</i>             |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Works</i>                 |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Painting</i>              |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Art</i>                   |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Canvas</i>                |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Public</i>                |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Society</i>               |                               | <b>Recipient</b> |
|                               | <i>Public opinion</i>        |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Spectator</i>             |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Humankind</i>             |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Controversy</i>           | <b>Shock</b>                  |                  |
|                               | <i>Scandal</i>               |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Controversial message</i> |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Agitation</i>             |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Independence</i>          | <b>Rebellion</b>              |                  |
|                               | <i>Bravery</i>               |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Craziness</i>             |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Rebellion</i>             |                               |                  |
|                               |                              | <i>Non-schematic solution</i> | <b>Success</b>   |
|                               |                              | <i>Fancy artist</i>           |                  |
| <i>Plaudit</i>                |                              |                               |                  |
| <i>Fame</i>                   |                              |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Prestige</i>              | <b>The category of beauty</b> |                  |
|                               | <i>Beauty</i>                |                               |                  |
|                               | <i>Beauty and ugliness</i>   |                               |                  |

### *Activities of the subject*

Owing to the fact that “„activities of the subject” is the most frequent category of the semantic field of the concept “artist” (N= 132), the results of this network will be presented in a more elaborated way than the other parts. Semantic field analysis concerning “activities of the subject” allowed us to distinguish two thematic groups in the students’ responses. The first one embraced the activities which could be considered as the roles or social functions of the contemporary artist (what s/he does?). The second one referred to the way of creating art and focused on the specific aspects of creative activities (how s/he does art?).

In the first group (N= 91 responses), four semantic categories were distinguished after grouping the similar meanings (see table 2). The first category (N=20) embraced the responses which refer to artists' questioning of the regular mode of thinking as well as deconstructing the norms, rules and meaning shared in society by shedding light on issues which are uncomfortable and disturbing. The contemporary artist attacks i.e. "bites, irritates" and "wreaks havoc". S/he is an activist, who "fights for matters which are not of interest to the majority", "touches the social problems such as exclusion", "is ready to speak about tough and painful topics", "is not afraid to ask difficult questions" or "touches on the taboos". The contemporary artist "breaks the barriers", "destroys the previous order", "opposes existing opinions". This category, which emphasizes the deorganizing (in a descriptive, not an evaluative sense) function of an artist, was labeled as the role of "Deconstructor".

Whereas the first category indicated the deconstruction of meanings by the artist, the second one included the responses showing the artist as a person who constructs a system of senses and has a culture-formative role. In this group of responses (N=32), an artist is a "culture creator", who "sensitizes others to beauty", "gives relief and "peace" to the people", as well as enabling "ravishment over the masterpieces". The artist undertakes the mission of "creating local and national awareness", "sneaking important world-views and esthetic contents into the consciousness of the recipients" or "inspiring the social environment". The role of the artist which arises from this category was named "Missionary" due to the ethos of an artist as a creator of values, meaning and beauty, characterizing the traditional view on aesthetics.

The third group of the responses (N=20) center upon the subject's activities which show the search for new solutions and innovations. The artist is a vehicle for novelty in actions i.e. "experiments", "tries everything", "wants to surprise by new medium". It is a person, who "links disciplines", "shapes novel and original situations", as well as "creatively reconstructs reality". The role of an artist in this category was labeled "Innovator".

Finally, the fourth category (N=28) combines responses which indicate opportunistic activities of an artist which are aimed at gaining status in the world of art. It shows the image of an artist who "makes business" and "shocks, just to shock". The artist is engaged more in self-presentation than the creative activity itself, "he promotes himself, not the art", "must get recognized", "provokes the scandal", to "gain media attention", and "is working in a hurry, so nobody else outdoes them in artistry". Because of the visible pragmatism described in the behaviors, as well as the negative emotional valence, this category was labelled "Careerist".

As far as the role of a contemporary artist which emerges from the collected material is considered, one can see a reference to the relationships between artist and society. An artist as a deconstructor undertakes activities which **are against** society (particularly the conservative norms and previous order), or which are **for** society – as a missionary who shares high values, **independently** of society – as an innovator interested in the creative processes (not the eventual social value of the work), or **at the expense of** society (as a careerist, who cynically uses market mechanisms for his/her own sake). The four categories described above could be traced in students responses with similar frequency. There were the same number of responses which referred to a “deconstructor”, as to an “innovator”, namely over 21% of all responses concerning artists’ roles and functions. Responses which refer to the role of “missionary” – 25%, and “careerist” – respectively 30 % of the given responses.

able 2. Functions of the contemporary artist in the perception of visual art students

| Activities of the subject                               | Examples  | General category     |                   |
|---|---|----------------------|-------------------|
| What does the subject do?<br>What roles does s/he take? | <i>Bites and irritates</i>  | <b>Deconstructor</b> |                   |
|   | <i>Provokes reflections</i>   |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Asks difficult questions</i>   |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Wreaks havoc</i>   |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Destroys previous order</i>  |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Causes irritancy</i>   |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Is ready to discuss difficult and painful issues</i>                           |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Develops local, national and human awareness in himself/herself and others</i> |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Participates in cultural and artistic development</i>                          |                      | <b>Missionary</b> |
|   | <i>Sensitizes others to beauty</i>  |                      |                   |
| <i>Gives relief to people</i>                           |   |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Makes business</i>   | <b>Careerist</b>     |                   |
|   | <i>Promotes himself, not the art</i>  |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Shocks, for the sake of shocking</i>   |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Wants to attract the attention of the media</i>                                |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Experiments</i>  | <b>Innovator</b>     |                   |
|   | <i>Searches for new language</i>  |                      |                   |
|   | <i>Searches for new ideas, solutions and means</i>                                |                      |                   |

Besides the functions of the artist, the semantic field of the subject’s activities also embraced the characteristics of creative activities which answer the question: “How is the artist working?” (table 3). Two main issues emerged from the open responses of the visual art students: 1) the language of the artist and the problem of consideration of a recipient, 2) the amount of work in creative activities.

The first thread was composed of two categories. The first category included narrations which emphasize the privacy of the artistic utterance, the intimacy and hermetic language, which is a consequence of self-expression, and indifference to the perceiver (N=11). The second category grouped responses which centered upon including the recipient in an artistic creation by the artist’s dialogue with curators, viewers or *artworld* institutions (N=23). From the material collected, two separate concepts of an artist emerged: the artist who creates for his own experience *versus* the one who takes into account the category of viewers with their emotions, needs and expectations (or at least who treats the viewer as the reference point for his/her creative work).

The second thematic thread focused on the responses demonstrating the quantitative characteristic of artistic endeavors and engagement in creative activities (N=7). These narratives apparently show the image of a workaholic – the artist who “works intensive-ly and a lot and who is addicted to the artistic activity.” An artist is “addicted to paint and canvas” and “spends all their days in the studio”.

Table 3. Characteristics of creative work in the perception of visual art students

| Activities of the subject         | Examples   | General category                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--|
| What s/he does?<br>How s/he does? | Creates for himself, for self-expression   | <b>Self-expression</b>             | <b>Qualitative characteristic artist-recipient</b> |
|                                   | Creates an original utterance  |                                    |  |
|                                   | He creates for himself, not for the people (...) the circle of recipients is unimportant |                                    |  |
|                                   | He places himself outside society by using hermetic language                             |                                    |  |
|                                   | Considers the viewer and his emotions towards the author’s works                         | <b>Consideration of the viewer</b> |  |
|                                   | Reaches the viewer in many different ways  |                                    |  |
|                                   | Evokes emotions in viewers   |                                    |  |
|                                   | Is able to have a dialogue with a curator, custodian or museum keeper                    |                                    |  |
|                                   | Spends all the days in the studio improving his works                                    | <b>Workoholic</b>                  | <b>Quantitative characteristic</b>                 |
|                                   | Works a lot  |                                    |  |
|                                   | Works a lot, every day   |                                    |  |
|                                   | Does something that is exhausting and gives satisfaction                                 |                                    |  |

### ***Activities on the subject***

The last part of the semantic field analysis consists of activities on the subject. All the responses that were included in this network indicate the influences and actions in the environment to which a contemporary artist is subject. The frequency analysis indicates noticeable asymmetry between the amount of verbal material classified as “activities on the subject” (N= 21) in comparison to material included in the network “activities of the subject” (N= 132). It could be interpreted as a strong self-agency of the subject perceived by respondents. The artist is defined by his/her own activity (an artist is a person who creates), not by being passive and subject to external influences. Two categories of responses were created in the network of “activities on the subject”. The first category shows social reactions towards the artist and his creative activity and can be described as the response of rejection or approval. The negative reactions (N=8) described by the respondents indicated that the artist is “unappreciated”, “unrecognized”, “put in second place” by society. She/he is “subject to prejudice and despise”, or the person with whom “you would like to have nothing in common”. Moreover, the effects of his/her work are not met with interest, because people “do not invest in art anymore”. Positive reactions comprise a less frequent category (N=5) and show the opposite spectrum of social reactions – an artist is a person who is “admired, and sometimes adored” and “respected”. Between those dichotomous reactions respondents also showed more neutral reactions such as “remembering” a particular artist. The second category grouped responses which referred to the way an artist is perceived in society (N=8). According to visual art students, artists are perceived by others as outstanding “eccentrics” and “freaks and weirdos” who are “detached from reality”, “live in their own world”, and even “remain outside of society”. Artists, because of their nonstandard life style, are perceived as people displaying “irresponsible behavior” and “having problems with drugs”. It should be stressed that analysis presented here concerns the second order relationship, which means the social image of an artist perceived by the students, not the actual social perception of an artist.

### ***Summary of the results***

The reconstruction of the social representation of the contemporary artist presents him/her as a commentator on events which are taking place in a public domain (but also as a self-actualized man, visionary, genius and everyman), who in opposition to a pseudo-artist (or craftsman or professional) is described by personality, individualism, non-conformism and devotion to art. The artist is characterized by sensitivity, openness, creativity and having a special gift. S/he is associated with the artwork (and after that the viewer), as well as rebellion, shock (controversy) and fashion. A contemporary artist deconstructs, develops culture, experiments and makes a career (the last one is ambivalent-



ly evaluated). An artist is a “workaholic”, who more often considers the viewer in his/her work rather than creating private messages (self-expression). Because of his/her artistic endeavors, s/he is exposed to the reaction of rejection (more often) or approval (seldom). S/he is perceived by society as an eccentric weirdo.

## Discussion

The social representation of an artist among visual art students is quite complex. To some extent it resembles the characteristics of creative people which emerge from empirical studies. An elitist vision of a “genius” who sees more and perceives differently as well as possessing some special abilities corresponds to research reports showing above average abilities of creative people, such as: high sensitivity to stimulus, perceptiveness, ability to synthesize and analyze, tolerance for cognitive ambiguity, creative intuition or above – average attention and intense concentration (c.f. Popek, 2003). The vision of the open – to – experience, “oversensitive” individual who is prone to initiate intensive contact with the world is supported by the studies showing that artists in comparison to non-artists are more independent (Barton, Cattell, 1972, Roy, 1996; Walker, Koestner, Hum, 1995), open to experience (Burch, Pavelis, Hamsley, 2006), and that they also show greater sensitivity and emotional intensity (Barron, 1972, Botella, Zenasni, Lubart, 2015; Popek, 2003).

On the other hand, many comments differently accentuate the role of being a specially gifted individual, marginalizing the myth of genius. The accent is put on an intransigence of self-expression. The model of an artist who is self-actualizing and independent, which can be seen in the students’ responses, corresponds with the humanistic perspective in psychology accentuating creativity as a result of the self-realization of the personality (eg. Maslow, 1950; Rogers, 1954). Self-actualization is understood as the fundamental urge of a human to realize their own potential, to become fully themselves. However, as could be seen from the material collected, the contemporary artist is not only perceived as an individual actualizing his/her potential, but also as an author of comments on reality and a deconstructor of ordinary meanings. Her/his status is not dependent on craft or formal education, but the readiness to accentuate anomalies hidden in the social paradigms which are currently in force. The contemporary artist often takes the viewer into consideration; however, the urge for approval, stardom and becoming “fancy” is negatively evaluated and labeled as the production of pseudo-art.

In the process of analyzing and interpreting the results of semantic field analysis, we can assume that the frequencies of particular categories indicate the salience of these categories for respondents. However, we should remember that the particular themes

or threads represent the whole narrative material, which was obtained and combined from individual responses, and as such should not be subjected to statistical generalization. The social representation of the contemporary artist refers to the group's representation, not the single cognitive representations of an artist by the fine art students. As a consequence, we can rather examine the salience of the particular ways of perceiving and portraying the contemporary artist in social discourse. Taken as an example, the frequent theme of an artist as a "careerist" could be analyzed as part of the broader social context, in which financial and social recognition stand for indicators of contemporary success.

This study has proved the usefulness of semantic field analysis in the reconstruction of the artist's representation among future visual artists. However, the qualitative data often provokes more questions than it generates answers. First of all, it is valuable to ask about the relationship of an artist's image perceived by future creators with the process of identity formation and identification with a professional role. Taking into consideration the fact that this representation relates to self-schema, and can regulate the activities which are undertaken (due to motivation and performance), we can expect that it could noticeably influence the process of managing one's personal growth and creative development. However, to shed some light on those processes, studies using different methodology are needed. Secondly, we can ask if the representation of the contemporary artist revealed from this study is more general and could be found in different groups than visual art students? As social representation is a negotiated construct of a particular social group, an interesting comparison could be conducted between artists and non-artists to explore the in-group and out-group distinctions in the definition of this social object. The sociogenesis of the representation of the contemporary artist is difficult to track within the methodological approach presented in this paper and is beyond the scope of this study. However, we can ask whether and if so to what extent the image of an artist represents the message of the educational institutions that teach gifted students? Is this representation hindering or promoting the development of an artistic career? Should fine art academies reflect upon their agenda and assumptions about their graduate profile?

Young artists express ambivalence about the functioning of the art market, as well as disapproval of self-promoting strategies. This shows the conflictual character of potential success. We might assume that the tension which can be seen between the critique of an "artist – the-showman", who concentrates on the reaction towards his works on the one hand, and the visible striving to reach a dialogue with artworld institutions on the other, will be inevitably present in the graduates' efforts to find their own artistic way.

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