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## WHAT DO ARTISTS TEACH US? AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND THE MULTI-PARADIGM NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

**Abstract:** The article analyzes and discusses selected problems and challenges that the multi-paradigmatic nature of contemporary art generates for aesthetic experience and discourse. It is not about the diversity of individual practices and artistic transfigurations, but about ontic reorganizations of art, determining the indicators of functioning "paradigmatic sets" (classical, conceptual, processual, interactive). Art paradigms are defined in the paper as optional domains, which are expressions of fundamental transformations in the ontology of the artwork and artistic practice, respectively. Thus, they determine the leading contexts redefining not only the traditional ontology of art, the identity and autonomy of the work of art, but also the competence of the author and the viewer, and finally the profile of thinking and aesthetic experience. Currently reorienting from contemplative-analytical attitudes towards processuality and various forms of activity, engagement and causality (especially in performative practices and characteristics of participatory and interactive art events). The approach proposed in the article also opts not to associate these artistic redefinitions and transgressions only with Theodor Adorno's diagnosis of "non-obviousness" but with the productivity of art that stimulates our sensibility and communal imagination.

**Keywords:** art, multi-paradigm, multiple forms, ontology of the work, definitional dilemmas, aesthetic experience, contemporary art, transgression

"The fate of art is to transcend and surpass itself towards something else".<sup>1</sup>

Jean Baudrillard

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<sup>45</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Spisek sztuki. Iluzje i deziluzje estetyczne z dodatkiem wywiadów o spisku sztuki*, transl. S. Królak, Sic!, Warszawa 2006, p. 137.

## I.

Questions about art, its characteristic properties or criteria, aesthetic experience, and about – to use the title of Joseph Margolis' book – what, in essence, is a work of art,<sup>2</sup> are undoubtedly among the leading issues dealing with art and artistic culture of the humanities. They also pose problems and challenges for several reasons. One of them, complicating discourses and debates about art, is the consistently multiplied diversity of its incarnations and manifestations, the extraordinary capacity of art, especially since Romanticism and the turn of modernity, to transform and artistically redefine itself. The expansiveness of the practice (especially of modern and post-modern art), various forms of ontically different concretizations, scale and dynamics of artistic transfigurations in conjunction with de-aestheticization of art itself and aestheticization of reality, certainly make it difficult to formulate conclusive proposals and answers. These are rare, especially in the domain of current manifestations of art, exploring various territories and excluding nothing. Such proposals are also difficult to find in the domain of the humanities, piling up viewpoints that confront narratives, methodologies, tools, arguments and concepts in the name of critical thinking. However, the problem lies not only in the cumulative diversity of art, which, unlike science, does not annihilate its own past.<sup>3</sup> It lies primarily in transgressively oriented practice, in art's openness to what is potential, further reconstructions and displacements. It problematizes both the boundaries of art and aesthetic experience, including the discursive effectiveness of this notion.<sup>4</sup> For art, Wolfgang Iser stresses, "through its works of art constantly asks, [...] and provides ever new answers. The work of art today is capable of transforming its proximate and distant conditions, is capable of making some unusual criterion essential, or of abolishing the limits of art altogether".<sup>5</sup> Hence – citing Margolis again – art seems to "elude any attempt to define its charac-

<sup>2</sup> J. Margolis, *Czym, w gruncie rzeczy, jest dzieło sztuki? Wykłady z filozofii sztuki*, ed. K. Wilkowszewska, transl. W. Chojna, K. Guźalski, M. Jakubczak, K. Wilkowszewska, Universitas, Kraków 2004.

<sup>3</sup> „Art develops in a cumulative manner, expanding its scope over time, the capacity of which, as the 20th century teaches us, seems unlimited, and in which, although not on equal footing, Paleolithic paintings, Renaissance paintings, frescoes, African masks, Dadaist poetry, 'primitivist' paintings or J. Cage's soundless music coexist”. A. Lipski, *Sztuka a rzeczywistość potocznego doświadczenia. Świat Artystyczny jako przedmiot analizy socjologicznej*, in: A. Lipski, K. Łęcki, *Perspektywy socjologii kultury artystycznej*, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 1992, pp. 41, 42.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Shusterman, *O końcu i celu doświadczenia estetycznego*, transl. W. Małecki, „ER(R)GO” no. 12 (1/2006), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2006.

<sup>5</sup> W. Iser, *Estetyka poza estetyką. O nową postać estetyki*, transl. K. Guźalska, Universitas, Kraków 2005, p. 139.

teristics".<sup>6</sup> The inability to pinpoint them, however, does not mean that we are dealing with something elusive and undefinable. It rather signifies tension and discomfort associated with the multiplication of dilemmas, doubts, questions, and, finally, a turn to ad hoc, historical and conventional proposals (answers), reactive to the redefining practices of art. Besides, the impossibility of pointing out the characteristics of art as such cannot be surprising, since in light of the findings of "situational aesthetics" it turns out to be impossible to point out even a set of properties permanently characterizing any work of art. The multiformity and multimedia character of contemporary art practice also complicate the legitimacy of the customary (and discursively established) functioning of the concept of art in the singular. It is not art but arts that we should think about today, considering the heterogeneous reality of contemporary artistic activities, projects and manifestations, from the perspective of which it is natural to consider "the need for [...] multiple alternative definitions related to different questions and different sets of paradigmatic examples".<sup>7</sup>

Jacques Derrida's thesis that "as long as we do not want to give a priori answers [...]" to the questions posed about art, art "will remain only a word"<sup>8</sup> sounds perverse in this context. A risky statement in circumstances where the presence of a concept signifies the integrity of a sense that concretizes itself in interpretation and "never has a shape independent of context, because it always appears in some context, never in an abstract way".<sup>9</sup> It is risky because the pre-conception of the question usually leads to some answer. It is also risky when art itself, redefining its own boundaries and conditions, "constantly asks" and its questions provoke. However, regardless of the diversity of artistic proposals and their transgressive power, it seems reasonable, on the other hand, to say that art has been considered to be art for some reason under the given historical and cultural circumstances. The diversity of these reasons and rationales is revealed by the juxtaposition of such extreme artistic endeavors as Botticelli's *Primavera*, the performances of the Viennese Actionists and Marina Abramović's (*Rhythm 0*), Joanna Rajkowska's famous *Palm*, Caroleen Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, or Jeffrey Shaw's interactive installation *The Golden Calf*. However, artistic solutions and qualifications are never independent of the cultural infrastructure

<sup>6</sup> J. Margolis, *Czym, w gruncie rzeczy ...*, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> J. Derrida, *Prawda w malarstwie*, transl. M. Kwietniewska, *Słowo / Obraz Terytoria*, Gdańsk 2003, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> S. Fish, *Zwykłe okoliczności, język dosłowny, bezpośrednie akty mowy, to, co normalne, potoczne, oczywiste, zrozumiałe samo przez się i inne szczególne przypadki*, transl. M. Smoczyński, in: Idem, *Interpretacja retoryka polityka. Eseje wybrane*, ed. A. Szahaj, transl. K. Abriszewski, A. Dera-Włochowicz, M. Glasenapp-Konkol, A. Grzeliński, M. Kilanowski, A. Lenartowicz, M. Smoczyński, A. Szahaj, Universitas, Kraków 2008, p. 29.

of understanding and the contexts in which they were formulated and experienced. This is quite a generalization, but essentially justified. One can think of it in a few ways, recognizing, for example, the primacy of conceptual over formal (perceptual) resolutions or decisional power, or, as Michell Foucault would say, the power of art institutions and disciplines that study art. To some extent, this statement also evokes associations with Jan Świdziński's concept of contextual art.<sup>10</sup> In essence, however, it expresses the primacy of prevailing cultural norms and cultural interpretive communities, from the perspective of which "artistic" and "aesthetic" appear to be always negotiated and constructed. We are aware today that works of art (without exception) are incapable of self-definition of their own specificity. And it is not just about undertakings devoid of the stigma of the artist's creative intervention (for example, Dadaist ready-made art). Artistry never depends solely on the formal properties of an object (even, or perhaps especially, in the case of artistic masterpieces), but also on culturally and historically formed discourses and ad hoc interpretive concretizations.<sup>11</sup> For we must not forget, as advocated by proponents of culturalism (including the author), that the particularity of anything is a culturally determined and constructed particularity, according to the belief in "the primacy of culture [...] vis-à-vis the ontological 'furnishing of the world' and the way it is cognitively constituted".<sup>12</sup>

In any case, whether we associate the art of the last few decades with modernity (the end of which has been prophesied by many), late modernity, "a modernity that has lost touch with the roots of its own modernity",<sup>13</sup> or alternatively with postmodernity and postmodernity, it is characterized by an incredible capacity for transformation, redefinition and exploration of new territories. What follows is an astonishing variety of forms, challenging our understanding of art, which we must take into account whenever we ask about art, and which every discipline dealing with art encounters today, if it wants discursive effectiveness in a situation where, as Theodor Adorno once concluded, "everything that concerns art has ceased to be self-evident".<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> J. Świdziński, *Sztuka jako sztuka kontekstualna*, Galeria Remont /03'77, Art Text, Warszawa 1977.

<sup>11</sup> It is contextually negotiated „within a rule-subjected interpreted discourse that is itself historically formed and transformed”. J. Margolis, *Czym, w gruncie rzeczy ...*, p. 20. For more on this, see J. Margolis, *Historical Thought, Constructed World: A Conceptual primer for the Turn of the Millennium*, Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California Press 1995.

<sup>12</sup> A. Szahaj, *Zniewalająca moc kultury*, przedmowa, in: S. Fish, *Interpretacja, retoryka, ...*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> M. Berman, „*Wszystko, co stałe, rozpływa się w powietrzu*”. *Rzecz o doświadczeniu nowoczesności*, transl. M. Szuster, Universitas, Kraków 2006, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> T. W. Adorno, *Teoria estetyczna*, transl. K. Krzemieniowa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1994, p. 3.

This paper is no different, as it reflects on multi-paradigm and polyvocal art. However, the author is primarily interested in the challenges and dilemmas that, for the experience of art and aesthetic discourse, are generated not so much by multiformity itself, but by the multiparadigmatic nature of current art. It is not so much about individual practices and propositions, but challenges arising from the ontic transformations of art that set the parameters for the functioning of alternative "paradigmatic sets" of art. Thinking of "paradigmatic sets" the author refers, of course, to the work of Thomas Kuhn (*Structures of Scientific Revolutions, Two Poles*)<sup>15</sup> and his famous concept of "paradigm shifts". In general, these meant "conceptual worldviews" that set ad hoc standards for science and scientific cognition. Artistic paradigms, on the other hand, are understood here as optional domains of contemporary art, which are an expression of overall transformations in the nature of the work – more specifically, the ontology of art and artistic practice, respectively. The latter is also associated with reorganizing the relationship between the creator (artist) and the viewer, who is increasingly involved in the creative process. These changes, as an autonomous criterion, can also form the basis of paradigmatic divisions. It is from this perspective that Katarzyna Niziołek writes "about the three paradigms of art: old, transitional and new". "While the old paradigm of art was characterized by privileging the artist and the passivity of the audience, and the transitional paradigm was marked by the activation of the audience while maintaining the leading role of artists, the new paradigm of art is associated with completely dethroning the artist and acquiescence to the equal creativity of non-artists".<sup>16</sup> This otherwise important issue, which will be discussed later in the paper, is treated here as complementary but secondary to ontic transformation of art. Thus, ontic characteristics determine the criteria of distinctiveness in the proposed approach and, as a result, the multi-paradigmatic feature of current art of essentially late modernity or (if preferred) postmodernity, whose multi-paradigm and optional domains can be associated with traditional, conceptual, participatory and interactive art paradigms. Although the sources of this state of affairs must still be sought in the art of artistic modernisms at the turn of the century, which unleashed, as Andrzej Szahaj put it, "the inscribed imperative to multiply differences"<sup>17</sup> in the name of the culturally sanctioned idea of change and progress.

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<sup>15</sup> T. Kuhn, *Struktura rewolucji naukowych*, transl. H. Ostromęcka, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1968; *Dwa bieguny. Tradycja i nowatorstwo w badaniach naukowych*, transl. K. Amsterdamski, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1985.

<sup>16</sup> K. Niziołek, *Sztuka społeczna. Koncepcje, dyskursy, praktyki*, T. 1, Fundacja Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok 2015, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> A. Szahaj, *O interpretacji*, Universitas, Kraków 2014 (e-book)

Of course, the presented way of thinking, as is usually the case, is exposed to various revisions. After all, one cannot exclude proposals, contradictory to the accepted position, linking the multiformity and dynamics of art transformations with the idea of annihilating all artistic paradigms or aesthetic oppression, especially if we take these transformations and the ontological instability of today's art as symptoms of a culture of transit and relocation, a culture of contradictions, syncretic and diversified as never before. In the author's opinion, however, art's incredible capacity for reconstruction does not invalidate paradigmatic distinctions, especially in terms of ontic transformations of art, which are premises strong enough to recognize their descriptive and distinctive validity. Besides, the multiformity of art cannot be reduced to mere multiplicity or multiplication of propositions. It should be thought of not so much in terms of the increment of artistic innovations, but primarily in terms of what determines it and distinguishes it from the modernist practice of "a succession of types of art, each of which attempted to outdo the previous ones".<sup>18</sup> Thus, the author thinks of the differential nature of current art as, in the main, a consequence of the unique functioning of art's optional paradigmatic sets, from the perspective of which it seems to be fundamentally determined.

Two issues need to be highlighted here and at the same time they mark the field of reflection of the text. With them, the author fundamentally links the challenges, but also the new openings and opportunities that the artistic redefinitions of the second half of the past century brought in the domain of art experience. First are the paradigmatic transformations in terms of the "nature" and ontology of the work, and consequently the different forms of presence and experience of art (as a work of art, object, process and event). Secondly, there is the revision, complementary to these transformations, of the customary roles (competencies) of the author and viewer. This was heralded at one time by Roland Barthes in *The Death of the Author* and is perhaps most fully expressed by the idea of the collectivization of authorship or inter-actor activity within interactive art. Currently, art is not only the "ontology of things", the domain of handicraft and matter. It does not only encompass derivatives of the creative activity of the artist, shaping the properties of the product (as once assumed), determining artistic and aesthetic qualifications. It is also the bifurcated, hybrid nature of conceptual art, the situational character of performative practices, the eventual characterization (ontology) of participatory and interactive art. It is the practices of temporary artwork establishment and new roles of art subjects. So, we are talking about changes radical enough to think

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Maier's statement is quoted from: H. Lübbe, *Muzealizacja. O powiązaniu naszej terażniejszości z przeszłością*, transl. E. Paczkowska-Łagowska, in: *Estetyka w świecie*. Vol. 3. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 1991, p. 14.

of them as paradigmatic transformations, constituting an expression of comprehensive transformations in terms of "meanings and practices" fundamental to the understanding of the work, but also aesthetic distinctions and situations. They redefine not only the traditional ontology, selfhood and autonomy of the work as a formally shaped object, but also the profile of aesthetic experience, reorienting from contemplative-objectifying attitudes towards processuality and various strategies of engagement.

## II.

The starting point in terms of ontological reorganizations of art is marked, for obvious reasons, by the traditional model of art, also called the classical art paradigm, which has been functioning for a long time. This model, in fact, expresses the continuity of the history of art. Its origins are associated with the beginning of creative expression, but it also functions successfully within the artistic polyphony of the present. It is a historically stabilized paradigm, with so strongly conventionalized assumptions that the criteria defining the concept (nature) of a work of art are, in principle, part of almost universal knowledge today.<sup>19</sup> In the most general terms, a work of art is defined here as a derivative of the creative process, a properly shaped product of the artist, possessing certain formal properties, which, according to Ryszard Nycz, in the most widespread characterization, were considered "[...] objective, independent of the subject and unconditioned by the context".<sup>20</sup>

Related to this paradigm, creativity is the products of handicraft, combined with manual means of creation, although the latter seems to be more complex in today's art instrumentation.<sup>21</sup> This is art based on the "ontology of things". These are works-objects that, regardless of ad hoc and historical concretizations and genre distinctions, fulfilled the conditions of aesthetic "non-variables". The basis of the manifestations of art understood in this way was determined, on the one hand, by the physicality of the product, and, on the other, by the necessary creative activity of the artist, leading to granting specific formal characteristics to the work. In other words, the creative act here involved indispensable formal structuring, which should be understood as

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<sup>19</sup> This statement concerns knowledge that is tame and grounded in artistic practice, and even obvious to many. However, one should not forget that whatever we take for granted is taken for granted only within certain context and discursive structure.

<sup>20</sup> R. Nycz, *Kulturowa natura, słaby profesjonalizm. Kilka uwag o przedmiocie poznania literackiego i statusie dyskursu literaturoznawczego*, in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, eds. M. P. Markowski, R. Nycz, Universitas, Kraków 2006, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> In fact, it is easy to point to a number of activities using new media, e.g., within digital (computer) graphics, which are not crafts *sensu stricto*, but ultimately lead to the creation of works that meet all the criteria of art associated with the traditional artistic paradigm.



"the product of individuality", "a separable formal-expressive whole from the background", or, more precisely, a set of specific properties and solutions "[...] graspable in the very matter and composition of the work".<sup>22</sup> Thus, structuring determined the formal qualities of the product which, fixed in the matter and thus recognizable and graspable, formed the basis not only of the artistic status of the undertaking, but also of any aesthetic qualification. As an intersubjective creation, autonomous in material determinateness in relation to the subject and contexts, the work of art was regarded as complete and self-contained, and thus capable, as was assumed, of determining its own specificity and uniqueness.

This single paradigm of art, at least until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was sanctioned not only by artistic practice, but also by the discourses of essentialism-oriented aesthetics and art history. These convictions "lay at the basis of those currents," writes Magdalena Popiel, "which looked for constitutive features in the properties of the object itself (formalism, structuralism, phenomenology) and those that pointed mainly to the role of creators and viewers (e.g., emotionalism, expressionist and psychoanalytic concepts)".<sup>23</sup>

To some extent, abstract art turned out to be an alternative to the presented assumptions of the traditional artistic paradigm. It is not about a holistic revolution within the nature (concept) of the artwork, but deconstruction of the unquestionable regularity of previous art. Abstractionism marks a paradigmatic shift, even though it does not involve radical ontological reorganizations or the questioning of formal structuring, nor does it contest the perceptual qualities of the product. The breakthrough of the non-figurative paradigm lies in overcoming the principle of signifying and representation, breaking with the age-old, historically established norm of art. Abstractionism gave up its mimetic obligations to non-artistic reality. It replaced the concreteness of iconographic motifs with purely formal solutions. Thus, we are still dealing with handicraft art based on the ontology of things and associated with manual means of creation. Abstract art still produces properly formed "products of individuality", complete and autonomous from the viewer and the resources of the context. Nevertheless, the questioning of figurativeness was a breakthrough, an "aesthetic shock". "For unlike the local revolutions [...] there was now a rupture of the interface between the plastic image and the reality of the natural setting, the hard core of the figurative paradigm was violated; the new paintings and sculptures were outside the normative definition of a work of art with which the public came to exhibitions".<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> S. Morawski, *Pojmowanie dzieła sztuki dawniej i dzisiaj*, in: Idem, *Na zakręcie od sztuki do po-sztuki*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1985, p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> M. Popiel, *O nową estetykę. Między filozofią sztuki a filozofią kultury*, in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury*. ..., pp. 339-340.

<sup>24</sup> A. Lipski, *Sztuka a rzeczywistość* ..., p. 88.



The situation has changed even more with the emergence of projects that question all the hitherto prevailing criteria that sanctioned the artistic character, specificity and nature of art products until recently. First of all, these are proposals abandoning the necessary norm of formal formation, which also means abandoning the fundamental criterion of the properties of the work of art that are graspable in the material, the identification and recognition which formed the basis of generic distinction and experience of art at the same time. Secondly, they put the presence of finished things above the author's concretization. Thirdly, they contest the indispensability of artistic realizations, as well as the object ontology of art. The first two points, especially the notion of "ready-made things", direct our attention toward Marcel Duchamp and Dadaism. The third point may seem somewhat problematic (at least seemingly) in this context. However, here they will be treated complementarily (and in a broader perspective). They are certainly related to Dadaism, but at the same time they go beyond Dadaism, into the Dadaist-inspired paradigm of conceptual art practices. In fact, in Duchamp's "ready-made things" we will find nothing (in the formal aspect) to support our artistic or aesthetic qualifications, but also literal presence of the object does not invalidate the idea of questioning the object ontology of art. It rather reinforces it, undermining the identity of the work as a purely material entity. In the case of realizations within which the experience of the work of art is not grounded in a formal structure (and this connects Dadaism with conceptualism), the ontology of the work of art cannot be reduced solely to the physical. The autonomy and completeness of the work of art as a self-contained structure has been questioned. From there, it is a step to the hybrid art ontology of the conceptual art paradigm.

What is most important within the ontic reorganizations of conceptualism is related to the disintegration of the unity of the work and the revision of the existing ontology of art. The primacy of concept over realization meant not only a shift from the perceptual to the conceptual experience of art, but also a redefinition of the nature of the artwork. In conceptualism, art transcends and oscillates beyond physicality (substantiality), and it is not just about radical conceptualism "proclaiming a naked artistic idea".<sup>25</sup> The recent unity of the work, as it was considered autonomous and complete, has been replaced by a hybrid structure, a complex ontology of conceptual art. The hybrid profile here is determined by two related ontically different elements. The problem is precisely presented by Ryszard Kluszczyński, emphasizing that "within the conceptual system we observe a kind of a split in the entity that traditionally

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<sup>25</sup> K. Honnief, *Concept-art*. „Magazin Kunst”, 1970, no. 38, p. 1759, quoted in: P. Krakowski, *O sztuce nowej i najnowszej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1984, p. 112.

occupied a central position within the aesthetic situation and was referred to as a work of art. It disintegrates within the conceptual variant into two separate objects, related to each other, but at the same time contradictory, having different ontic characteristics, different functions and status".<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, we have an artifact, often devoid of traces of formal and artistic elaboration, as in the case of Dadaist ready-made things, while on the other, an overarching artistic project, a conceptual object, purely mental, inaccessible to the senses. The artifact (as opposed to the art object), is only a kind of a context, a medium of action, a prop to which the project refers, which is an essential form of the conceptual variant of art. It functions as a pretext for conceptual concretization. Substantiality in this case does not decide anything, it determines neither the artistic qualification nor the definiteness of the work as an autonomous and complete structure.

Further reorganizations in art ontology were associated with practices in which the nature of the work was subjected to liquefaction and performatization. What is meant here, generally speaking, is action art representing the paradigms of participatory and interactive creativity. This is art ad hoc established as an artistic event, concretizing in a specific place and time. Ontic characterization is of fundamental importance here. The ontology of the work-object has been replaced in participatory and interactive art by an "ontology of movement, time and change",<sup>27</sup> an action, a kind of performance, especially in the case of such popular forms of artistic activity as happening or performance. This is the art of ad hoc existence, temporary presence. It is necessary to think of this art as an art that incorporates, as Zygmunt Bauman wrote, "non-eternity, transience and episodic character" into its experience. Through intentional impermanence, this "redefines art as an event, or more precisely, as a one-time event, irreversible and without consequences",<sup>28</sup> an event in which various subjects participate in the collectivization of authorship, and which is not something intersubjective to the viewer, participant or inter-actor, respectively.

What, on the other hand, distinguishes participatory art from interactive art? Leaving aside the nuances of terminology and tangents and discrepancies in defining the terms themselves, the author will essentially point out two

<sup>26</sup> R. W. Kluszczyński, *Od konceptualizmu do sztuki hipermediów. Rozważania na temat modelu sytuacji estetycznej w sztuce multimedialnej*, in: *Piękno w sieci. Estetyka a nowe media*, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, Universitas, Kraków 1999, pp. 79-80.

<sup>27</sup> K. Wilkoszewska, *Estetyki nowych mediów*, in: *Piękno w sieci...*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Z. Bauman, *O śmierci i nieśmiertelności w ponowoczesnym świecie*, „Transformacje”, quoted from: T. Miczka, *Multimedia - oczywistości i domysły. Szkic o estetycznej przygodności nowych mediów*, in: *Piękno w sieci...*, p. 52.

aspects that link the ontology of the work with the practice of establishing art. In the domain of participatory art, within the various performative practices (art actions, happenings, performances), the establishment of art is usually the result of a collective collaboration (albeit of varying degrees) between the artist and the participant involved. Of course, variants of this cooperation gained various concretizations depending on the assumed or realized forms of interaction, adopted strategies, including the distinctiveness resulting from the specificity and type of the artistic event itself (happening / performance). Nevertheless, the norm here (in participatory art) is the unity of time, place and action, involving all subjects of the artistic event. In other words, the community of participation determines the artist's participation in the event; from a distance, one could say that, so to speak, in keeping with the title of perhaps Marina Abramović's most famous performance (*The Artist is Present*). Interactive art, on the other hand, lacks direct collaboration. The viewer (strict inter-actor) concretizes the event by acting on an ad hoc interface. The artist is usually absent, unless he or she becomes an element of the interface structure like Stelarc (Stelios Arcadiou), who incorporated his body as an interface into a networked structure of connections, subject to external computer telestimulations (*Ping Body*). Another difference, on the other hand, is related to the necessary action of the inter-actor at the interface. Indeed, this relationship reveals the complex ontology of interactive art. As with conceptual art, the nature of an interactive artwork is hybrid in nature. It is concretized in the relationship of two ontically differentiated yet complementary elements: the interface (infrastructure of action) and the artistic event. It is worth further specifying that the context of the interface, which we usually "consider as attributed to the artist, is in fact only in part his or her actual product, only some of its components got there by a conscious artistic decision".<sup>29</sup>

### III.

In the context of these reorganizations, it is easy to see that thinking about aesthetic experience (as an experience of art) resonates accordingly with artistic reconstructions and redefinitions of art. Indeed, transformations of the objects of experience are not indifferent to the profile of experience, historically shaped and reconstructed. Besides, the concept itself and the senses ascribed to it, being dynamic, have been subject to various discursive re-conceptualizations. However, it was the work associated with the traditional

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<sup>29</sup> R. W. Kluszczyński, *Sztuka interaktywna. Od dzieła instrumentu do interaktywnego spektaklu*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2010, p. 135.

artistic paradigm that fundamentally determined the premises and profile of thinking about aesthetic experience, which was customarily supposed to be a "valuable and pleasurable" experience, a subjective experience of the nature of the object, a "meaningful experience", and a "demarcation-definition".<sup>30</sup> It was to be specific because of the artistic nature of the objects experienced. Traditionally, it was also contemplative in nature, but has been redefining its profile for some time in the context of the processualization of art and "strategies of pragmatization and engagement".

This paper is not a place to devote more attention to the issue, but two issues must be mentioned. This is basically due to the methodological beliefs shared by the author, related to pan-interpretationism and culturalism. First, no matter how we understand and define aesthetic experience and to what we relate it, it will always be an experience of interpretation. For everything that reaches our consciousness and involves our activity is subject to interpretation, which, following Heidegger or Gadamer, Rorty, Fish and others, is understood by the author as an existential property, a "primary form" of our "being-in-the-world",<sup>31</sup> identical to perception and experience as such. Secondly, regardless of the temptation to objectify aesthetic experience, its subjective character seems to be uncontroversial. However, it turns out to be more complicated in light of culturalism, primarily because the premises and means of our arbitrary interpretive activity "[...] are conventionalized and social in nature. Thus, this Self performing the interpretive effort [...] is always a certain social (and cultural) Self, and not some isolated individual".<sup>32</sup>

However, let us return to the contexts of the ontic reorganizations of art outlined above and the challenges and dilemmas involved. Within the traditional paradigm (the formally shaped product), the experience of a work of art was combined with the identification of this "set of essential features" primordial to the act of recognizing an object as a work of art. Moreover, as Nycz emphasizes, the presented "view of the nature of the work of art" combined with the need for proper identification of the "constitutive features" fixed in the matter "made it possible to treat the results of artistic cognition in scientific categories of truthfulness and objective verifiability".<sup>33</sup> The importance of this issue requires some attention, for the problem of perception of the properties of a work is definitely more complex, even if we think only about the properties fixed in matter, graspable in perception and contemplation. We know today that the identification of qualities (as well as the artisticity of an undertaking)

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<sup>30</sup> R. Shusterman, *O końcu i celu doświadczenia estetycznego ...*, p. 131.

<sup>31</sup> H. G. Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda...*, p. 251.

<sup>32</sup> S. Fish, *Interpretacja, retoryka ...*, p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> R. Nycz, *Kulturowa natura ...*, p. 11.

is not determined solely by the physical structure of the object or the way it is formally shaped, although common sense seems to support this, at least in the area of those realizations that meet the condition of formal structuring. The perception of a work of art is shaped by a whole range of variables, including not only contextual conditions or social "styles of reception" but also the predisposition and competence of the viewer himself or herself. The cultural determinants of perception should not be forgotten, either. We concretize the properties of a work of art as such, not because they are rooted in matter, but because our interpretive premises and the rationale of "interpretive communities" allow us to see them as such. We always perceive them in the context of preferred strategies of understanding, not subjectively as one might think, but influenced by the cultural cognitive infrastructure. This means that "in the case of a work of art, we are unable to effectively separate the objective qualities and values of a work of art from the subject's prior knowledge and the vast and varied meanings and evaluations contributed by cultural communities that equally determine its nature."<sup>34</sup> The physical stability of structuring does not preclude variable concretizations of properties. Perceived ad hoc, they will always be properties for someone and seen by someone in a certain way. One who brings his own predilections and historicity into the experience of the work, as Hans Georg Gadamer used to say, "not only sees differently, but sees something else".<sup>35</sup>

In any case, the experience of a work of art within the traditional artistic paradigm involved necessary recognition and grasping of the object's distinctive properties. These formed the basis of both artistic qualification and aesthetic experience. The work of art here was an act of creative embodiment of ideological and aesthetic assumptions, in accordance with historical norms and means of performance, incarnation fixed in matter and form, in which "the inventive action transforming the necessary features of the obstacle into the laws of the work was verified",<sup>36</sup> and from which the subject of analysis was formed, among other things, in the field of formative aesthetics.

Thus, the activity of the viewer (experiencing and interpreting) within the traditional model of art is purely mental in nature. Here the recipient plays the role of a spectator, an observer contemplating the product. In this case, it is the "work of the eye," directed and linearly guided perception. The physicality and determinateness of the object and the way it is formally structured remain outside the sphere of any influence of the viewer, located invariably in relation

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>35</sup> H. G. Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda. Zarys hermeneutyki filozoficznej*, transl. B. Baran, Inter esse, Kraków 1993, p. 159.

<sup>36</sup> U. Eco, *Sztuka*, transl. P. Salwa, M. Salwa, Wydawnictwo M, Kraków 2007, p. 14.

to the sovereign and holistic object, so much so that even when the "myth of the work of art in itself" is challenged and various external factors are acknowledged as a result, the stability of the object remains unshaken. A good example of this seems to be Roman Ingarden's concept, in which all modifications concern the aesthetic object, and therefore only mental concretizations, not the physical structure of the object.

The paradigm of non-figurative art changes little in this regard. Of course, the rejection of figurativity was a shock, a breakthrough, a revolution. It required a revision of established standards, attitudes and interpretive habits, and above all, a redefinition of thinking about art. This, in the context of modern tendencies toward transformation and innovation, crossed another level of artistic redefinition. Nevertheless, we remain in the area of mental experience, exposing the imperative of perceptual recognition of the properties of the creation indispensable in the domain of formally shaped creativity.

This profile of art experience was only challenged by conceptualism, revising not only previous thinking of the work of art as a purely physical and autonomous being, but also the well-established indispensability of artistic realization. Conceptualism thus redefined the vector of the viewer's activity. Although it is still a mental activity, instead of identifying formal properties, we are inquiring into the conceptual premises of the project, justifying the presence of the artifact and constituting the substance of the undertaking.

A complete change, however, was brought about by the art of action. The ontology of the work as an artistic event has radically modified the profile of the art experience, replacing the attitude of perception and contemplation with an attitude of engaged participation and causal action. Participating in an art event, the viewer (participant) cannot distance themselves from what they participate in and establish by interacting with the artist under the "idea of distributed authorship". Roughly speaking, in participatory art, the participant in the action is included in the creative process, takes an active part in the event initiated by the artist; it is participation and activity in the process of establishing art shared with the artist (in different ways), in which there is often (especially in happenings) an "equalization of the position of artists with the audience, creating opportunities for both sides in initiating events and directing the whole process towards various possible solutions".<sup>37</sup> In interactive art, on the other hand, the idea of collectivization (commonality) of authorship mainly results in the inter-actor working with an interface proposed by the artist. However, it is the interactor who ultimately activates (transforms) the possibilities of the interface into a work-event of interactive art. This is the

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<sup>37</sup> R. W. Kluszczyński, *Sztuka interaktywna ...*, p. 89.

reason why the network of relations between the author, artwork and viewer has been significantly transformed within the collective creative processes of participatory and interactive art. We do not find here this implicational structure of dependence, which, echoing Derrida, could be expressed by saying that "that the work [...] comes from the artist [...] The artist is the one who produces the work of art. The source of the artist is the work of art, the source of the work of art is the artist, and «neither of these is without the other» [...]".<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, in interactive art, the nature of the work of art as an event involves activity not of the artist but only of the interactor, concretizing events. Thus, we are dealing here not only with radical transformations in terms of the ontology of art and, as a result, the experience of the work, but also with a revision of the existing roles and recognized competencies of the author and the viewer.<sup>39</sup> Anyway, these reorganizations remain closely related.

The act of experience here has nothing of the old perception and contemplation of an intersubjective autonomous art product. It is an isomorphic experience with the practice of establishing a work of art, an act of peculiar immersion in the processual and situational nature of participatory and interactive art, which requires total activation, involving all the perceptual possibilities of the body. It requires full participation, a novation that takes into account, as Krystyna Wilkoszewska writes, various "strategies of pragmatization and engagement".<sup>40</sup> Contact with the work in this case has nothing of directed perception, linear guidance of the eye. The viewer, a participant (or acting inter-actor), immersed in the artistic event, absorbs it with all of himself/herself. A comprehensive experience of reality demands interaction, activity and activation of the whole body, perception of layered acts taking into account various aspects of experience.

The once dominant characterizations of art and the related concept of aesthetic experience have been subject to revision. The multiformity of art and its inextinguishable disposition to transformation multiply challenges and reconstructions, completely transforming both the ontology of the work and the profile of art experience shaped in the context of successive reconstructions

<sup>38</sup> J. Derrida, *Prawda w malarstwie ...*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>39</sup> The new status of the viewer, in various ways included in the process of establishing art, is also expressed by theoretical concepts corresponding to art practice. It is worth mentioning here the theory of reader-response, Wolfgang Kemp's idea of an implicit reader (viewer), Stanley Fish's concept of „interpretive communities”, Roland Barthes' preaching of the „death of the author”, the abandonment of contemplation in favor of participation (Arnold Berleant), and Jacques Derrida's concept of the „negotiating viewer”.

<sup>40</sup> K. Wilkoszewska, *Doświadczenie estetyczne - strategie pragmatyzacji i zaangażowania*, in: *Nowoczesność jako doświadczenie: dyscypliny, paradygmaty, dyskursy*. eds. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, R. Nycz, Wydawnictwo SWPS Academica, Warszawa 2008, p. 217.



of art and art practice, "each time defining the field of its relevant forms of perception".<sup>41</sup>

What, on the other hand, does the experience of art so changeable and multiform teach us? What do artists and the transgressive reality of late-modern (possibly postmodern) art teach us? It is art that "constantly questions", raises dilemmas, spreads doubts. Perhaps we need to ask whether it teaches us anything at all, in a situation of successive redefinitions, as Adorno once proclaimed, problematizing everything that is related to and concerns art today, including its *raison d'être*. The German philosopher was not alone in this opinion. Many shared a similar view, writing about the uncertainty and opacity of contemporary art. Some even "thunderously proclaimed" the decline and end of art,<sup>42</sup> for others it was "merely a meta-language of banality".<sup>43</sup> But does the multiformity of current art mean only confusion and challenges complicating discourses about art? Certainly not. While multiformity has undermined the premises of recent aesthetic qualifications under which the specificity of a work of art was sanctioned, as such it represents a welcome artistic polyphony. For is it not that, as Odo Marquard hints, "poly-mythic is digestible, while mono-mythic is harmful"?<sup>44</sup> In any case, the experience of art's multiformity liberates one from habits, patterns, and established beliefs. It teaches openness and readiness to face otherness. It liberates us from discursive routine and deepens our ability to think critically. The dynamics of innovation provokes questions, pushes the boundaries of art and aesthetic experience toward the potential. It condemns us to uncertainty, which, however, ultimately marks progress in the context of both our experience of art and the world, particularly in a culture that Krzysztof Pomian calls a "civilization of transgression", which not only "tolerates transgression", but "provokes it".<sup>45</sup> In essence, it is also the kind of experience that redefining art shares with the humanities, one that stimulates our sensitivity and community imagination.

<sup>41</sup> W. Welsch, *Estetyka poza estetyką ...*, p. 140.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, R. Kubicki, *Poszerzanie granic. Sztuka współczesna w perspektywie estetyczno-filozoficznej*, Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1999, p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Spisek sztuki...*, p. 47.

<sup>44</sup> O. Marquard, *Pochwała politeizmu*, in: Idem, *Rozstanie z filozofią pierwszych zasad. Studia filozoficzne*, transl. K. Krzemieniowa, Wydawnictwo Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 1994, p. 102.

<sup>45</sup> K. Pomian, *L'Europasansfrontières*, „Le Débat” 1992, no. 68, p. 30, quoted in: Z. Bauman, *Ciało i przemoc w obliczu ponowoczesności*, Wydawnictwo UMK, Toruń 1995, p. 34.

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## CZEGO UCZĄ NAS ARTYŚCI? DOŚWIADCZENIE ESTETYCZNE A WIELOPARADYGMATYCZNOŚĆ SZTUKI WSPÓŁCZESNEJ (streszczenie)

Artykuł analizuje i omawia wybrane problemy i wyzwania, jakie dla doświadczenia i dyskursu estetycznego generuje wieloparadygmaticzność współczesnej sztuki. Nie chodzi o różnorodność indywidualnych praktyk i artystycznych transfiguracji, lecz o ontyczne reorganizacje sztuki, wyznaczające indeksy funkcjonujących „zestawów paradygmaticznych” (klasycznego, konceptualnego, procesualnego, interaktywnego). Paradygmaty artystyczne zostały w szkicu zdefiniowane jako opcjonalne domeny, będące wyrazem fundamentalnych przeobrażeń w zakresie ontologii dzieła sztuki i odpowiednio praktyki artystycznej. Wyznaczają tym samym wiodące konteksty redefiniujące nie tylko tradycyjną ontologię sztuki, samoistność i autonomiczność dzieła sztuki, ale także zwyczajowe kompetencje autora i odbiorcy, wreszcie profil myślenia i doświadczenia estetycznego. Aktualnie reorientujący z postaw kontemplacyjno-analitycznych w stronę procesualności oraz różnych form aktywności, angażowania i sprawczości (zwłaszcza w obszarze praktyk performatywnych i wydarzeniowej charakterystyki sztuki partycypacyjnej i interaktywnej). Proponowane w szkicu ujęcie optuje również za tym, aby tych artystycznych redefinicji i transgresji nie łączyć tylko z diagnozą „nieoczywistości” Theodora Adorna, lecz z produktywnością sztuki stymulującej naszą wrażliwość oraz wspólnotową wyobraźnię.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuka, wieloparadygmaticzność, różnorodność, ontologia dzieła, dylematy definicyjne, doświadczenie estetyczne, sztuka współczesna, transgresja

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