



Teresa Pękala

● <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7609-7596>

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University

teresa.pekala@mail.umcs.pl

ON THE ROLE OF ART IN OVERCOMING COGNITIVE OBSTACLES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PHILOSOPHICAL ESTHETICS

Abstract: Art as a special form of cognizing the world is examined in the present study using the category of cognitive obstacle as defined by Gaston Bachelard and Henri Bergson. Two aspects of the problem are analyzed. The first concerns the situation in which art facilitates overcoming foreignness (strangeness) and helps surmount resistance to the unknown. In the other aspect, the object of reflection is the circumstances in which art becomes a cognitive obstacle. The uniting pivot is proposals, characteristic of modernity, for solving the classical problem of the inaccessibility of conceptual cognition to the individuality of that which is being cognized. The area of research is defined by the epistemological tradition in philosophical esthetics starting from Alexander G. Baumgarten and continued in two trends: phenomenology and hermeneutics. Analyses focus on the themes of conceptual conflict in the conceptions of esthetic experience that go beyond the bipolar strategies of the myth of the esthetic but do not make an epistemological 'cut' and seek new strategies for understanding esthetic cognition. A vital issue is an attempt to answer the question: What are the cognitive possibilities and obstacles in conducting research of this type and what influence is exerted on them by neurobiological sciences and advanced technologies? The paper ends with a gloss about transformative experience in art based on examples from two latest exhibitions at the Architecture Biennale in Venice (2023) and the Venice Biennale of Art (2024).

Keywords: art, cognitive obstacle, esthetic experience, transformative experience, esthetic epistemology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, foreignness, Venetian Biennale.

Cognitive values, which have been ascribed to art for centuries and play a major role in the philosophy of art, have not been so far a separate object of analyses in the context of the theory of cognitive obstacles. The term

'cognitive obstacle' was introduced by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard as an attempt to interpret the 'unknown world' of quantum physics and then transferred by Georges Canguilhem to the area of the epistemology of biological sciences. Cognitive obstacles in Bachelard's theory can appear both on the level of intellect and the senses. In science they are usually associated with the currently binding paradigm of scientificity, which is also observable in art sciences. In sciences of culture, the subject of cognitive obstacles appears in the context of the category of resistance, the overcoming of which may have a creative power¹. In Polish contemporary esthetics, art in terms of resistance was discussed by Beata Frydryczak, who analyzed this phenomenon using the examples of Theodor W. Adorno's and Jean-François Lyotard's theories. She examines resistance in art from several angles, e.g., as an expression of social criticism or the sphere of protection of higher values threatened by decline. She also distinguishes resistance expressed in the structure of a work of art². This last aspect, the matter of art as a source of resistance, will be of interest here mainly in the philosophical conceptions of esthetic experience. In philosophy, it was distinguished by Bergson, who used the term 'material obstacle' to highlight the creative character of the vital force overcoming the resistance of inert matter. According to him, the resistance of inert matter is an obstacle which, first of all, should have been evaded. Life appears to have succeeded thanks to humility³. Bergson is interested in different ways of avoiding or overcoming this resistance, whereas Bachelard focuses on more complex determinants of cognitive obstacles, both biological and strictly scientific, whose identification serves to justify the need to 'cut off' or 'sever' science from well-established patterns of thinking. He cites convincing examples of interpretations of cognitive obstacles to 'embodied cognition' (using Merleau Ponty's term) and discusses the cultural and historical determinants of the direct cognition concept. Bachelard's theory introducing the concept of cognitive obstacle and emphasizing the dual role of imagination is just as important for our discussion as Bergsonian inspirations serving to overcome traditional dualisms by present-day philosophers and the pioneering concept of corporality developed today by Merleau-Ponty. While Bachelard sought to demonstrate that a desirable feature for achieving progress in scientific thought was receding from the experienced

¹ Cf. A. Dubik, *Gastona Bachelarda teoria "przeszkód poznawczych" w kontekście pytania o uwarunkowania rozwoju wiedzy naukowej*, „Kultura i Edukacja” 2007, 15, no. 1, pp. 7-22; Cf. Idem, *Filozofia i opór*, Wydawnictwo UMK, Toruń 2003.

² Cf. B. Frydryczak, *Estetyki oporu*, Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Tadeusza Kotarbińskiego, Zielona Góra, 1995.

³ Cf. H. Bergson, *Ewolucja twórcza*, transl. Florian Znaniecki, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1957, selected excerpts; after: I. Wojnar, *Bergson*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1985, p. 24.

world, Bergson tried to substantiate the possibility of achieving the unity of mind and body. Why this is so important in taking up the problem of cognitive obstacles in the esthetic dimension is demonstrated by Bergson's words: 'To give up certain habits of thinking and even of perceiving is far from easy; yet this is but the negative part of the work to be done; and when it is done, when we have placed ourselves at what we have called the turn of experience [...], when we have profited from the faint light, which, illuminating the passage from the *immediate* to the useful, marks the dawn of our human experience, there still remains to be reconstituted [...] the curve itself stretching out into the darkness behind them'⁴.

Underlying the belief that art plays an important role in overcoming cognitive obstacles is the assumption that contact with works of art is a special form of cognition of the world, regarded as more direct, different from scientific and popular cognition. It is a very general thesis and not very useful in this sense for scientific argumentation. However, there has not been a complete Bachelardian break with the thus established image of the world, and similar convictions can be found in descriptive definitions and popular intuitions. Orientation towards communication and experience resulted in the question about what takes place in an encounter with a work of art becoming the object of inquiries in many specialist disciplines, not only in esthetics and art sciences. An all-out examination is difficult and, although philosophical attempts are made to explain similarities in experiencing art, we have a considerable problem defining what they should consist in. We are afraid of illegitimate generalization or representationism, especially when we search for regularities in experiences co-occurring with contact with the art of different periods and cultures. There is still a need for a philosophical reflection on this special cognitive form of esthetic experience, but this reflection is accompanied by the fear of a repetition of history, in which theories too often departed from artistic reality and remained under the influence of great philosophical narratives. Does it mean therefore that pursuing philosophy of art was doomed from the start to confirm the epistemological assumptions of the initial philosophical theory? Doubts of this type are not unknown to estheticians, particularly when art falls outside philosophical discourse and resists its totalizing attempts. Such doubts appeared as a response to the art that, in the general sentiment, was not regarded as art at all or violated its established concept too much. The dynamics of the relationship between the esthetic paradigm and scientific paradigm is highly important, although it is not based on a simple analogy. Crises in science, war cataclysms and ecological disasters influence the comprehensive understanding

⁴ Idem, *Materia i pamięć. Esej o stosunku ciała do ducha*, transl. Romuald Jakub Weksler-Waskin, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Zielona Sowa, Kraków 2006, p. 146.

of the world but, paradoxically, they have also had an inspiring impact on the eruption of new trends in art. We should remember about this when talking about cognition in art/via art and should try hard so that the category of cognition that we use will take this circumstance into account. Not every change results in a cognitive crisis. There are also changes that can be termed a positive crisis, initiating the process of transforming the structures of thinking. Much has been written on this subject and we will therefore refer to the less cited Polish esthetician and art critic Mieczysław Wallis, who regarded the twentieth century as the time of special change in attitudes towards the reception of works of art and as the time of esthetics starting to be receptive to the intense development of sciences of culture, archeology, ethnology, cultural anthropology and sociology. At present, neuroesthetics and cognitive science should also be considered as belonging to this group. Wallis associated understanding of art with intellectual efforts, while at the same time he did not separate the process of understanding from esthetic experiences. 'Usually, when we become aware of artistic aims in a work of art, we do not realize that we become aware of these aims, that we commit <an act of understanding>'⁵. Only when something has not satisfied our expectation, do we feel that 'something is missing'. Wallis does not accurately characterize this state, resembling phenomenological analyses of the internal awareness of time, in which retention and protention are subordinated the 'now'-point. In the language of phenomenology, such awareness and non-awareness, which make up the act of expectation, could be explained by a kind of a 'pra-impression'. The association of expectation with the characterization of esthetic experience opens new interpretation possibilities. The specificity of such a form of cognition consists, inter alia, in that the creator's expectations towards the work being created and towards the audience open to the fact that what may happen excludes the possibility of anticipation in the sense such as, for example, in scientific cognition. In esthetic experience, expectation is the more intense, the more unclear is what will happen. Maurice Blanchot defined this condition as the vagueness of the presence that eludes comprehension, which is uncertain but full of brightness⁶. One could venture to say that it is then that art can evoke the feeling of anxiety and initiate the borderline experience of the unknown. Because of the intensity of experiences and the awareness of the inadequacy of the hitherto cognitive perspective with regard to what is offered by art, it becomes something alien to us. The sources

⁵ M. Wallis, *O warunkach recepcji*, in: *Wybór pism estetycznych / Mieczysław Wallis*; wprowadzenie, wybór i oprac. T. Pękala., *Klasyki Estetyki Polskiej*, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych 'Universitas', Kraków 2004, p. 162.

⁶ M. Blanchot, *Przestrzeń literacka*, transl. Tomasz Falkowski, Wydanie pierwsze, PWN, Warszawa 2016, p. 266.

of foreignness may spring from the process of perception itself, which may be distracted by an aggressive mass of stimuli or be in the state of 'suspension'⁷. Foreignness makes a difference in explaining cognitive obstacles in art, but the characterization of this theory and an attempt to present it theoretically are not possible at this point because of the semantic and contextual capacity. With regard to art, this is still an open subject and it is not developed even by the leading present-day expert on the issues of foreignness, Bernhard Waldenfels⁸. The extension of reflection with the analysis of experiences connected with art may introduce new themes into philosophical studies on foreignness. It is worth remembering that Wallis, who was both a philosopher and art historian, noticed the significance of thus-oriented inquiries and distinguished a series of conditions that define art with the 'hallmark of alienness'. His division of art into 'familiar' and 'foreign', albeit subordinated to the semiotic and partly hermeneutic theory of understanding, has the value of generality. This esthetician aptly describes responses that 'foreign' art provokes, from a violent objection to the abandonment of the previous thinking and change of esthetic sensitivity. He maintained that the 'discovery' of esthetic values of some art is not tantamount to its cognition and is seldom simultaneous with it⁹. In the spirit of Bachelard, he debunked a number of stereotypes in qualifying art in cognitive terms. He argued that 'familiar' art does not correspond with art 'close in time', and 'foreign art' does not correspond with art 'distant in time'¹⁰. Wallis's stance is worth taking into account in justifying the thesis that under certain circumstances art appears as a cognitive obstacle, as something alien, incomprehensible, but nevertheless arousing curiosity and inducing one to try to break the cognitive impasse. Possibly, it is such attitudes towards contemporary art, like towards works of art distant in time or cultural space, that indicate certain common features can be found in the course of esthetic experience.

The approach proposed in the present paper treats esthetic experience not in opposition to conceptual cognition but rather as a place where the expressible is interwoven with the non-discursive. We assume that the analysis of the role of art in overcoming cognitive obstacles has a chance to succeed when the cognitive process with reference to art can be derived from the dynamic relationship between separate beings. We are interested most in the dynamics of the place

⁷ Cf. J. Cray, *Zawieszenia percepcji: Uwaga, spektakl i kultura nowoczesna*, ed. I. Kurz, transl. Ł. Zaremba, I. Kurz, Comunicare, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2009.

⁸ Cf. B. Waldenfels, *Podstawowe motywy fenomenologii obcego*, transl. J. Sidorek, wydanie pierwsze, Terminus-Akademia 51, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2009; idem *Topografia obcego: studia z fenomenologii obcego*, transl. J. Sidorek, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2002.

⁹ M. Wallis, *O warunkach recepcji*, 166.

¹⁰ M. Wallis, 167.

that emerges as a result of the occurring relationship. The research categories useful in such analysis are esthetic thinking, the difference 'between', occurrence and other ones introduced in late modernity¹¹. Promising results can also be expected from the abovementioned category of expectation¹². To complement the picture, it would be necessary, first, to explain the sense and philosophical context in which the problem of relationship between the cognizing subject and the extrareflective sphere is analyzed in the conceptions of esthetic experience. Second, it would be necessary to ask the question whether art is close to a model of experience that could be regarded as source-based, provided that we generally accept the possibility of existence of the area of source senses. Third, what are the cognitive possibilities and obstacles in conducting studies of this type? Such large-scale inquiries would require a separate dissertation and cannot be carried out within the article. It only very generally outlines their potential directions and refers to the problems defined in its title. In the conclusion, several examples from contemporary art are cited. However, well-studied albeit enlightening examples from the history of artistic transformations and revolutions are omitted here. The successive theoretical turnabouts that accompanied them confirm that the object of dispute was not in fact art but its concept, and it was the force of discourse that decided the change. The contextual and institutional theory of art finally sanctioned this situation, which shifted the center of gravity from ontological and axiological disputes onto other issues but did not remove them from the debate. An additional effect of the transformations in art was the questioning of the autonomy of a work of art, which in practice did not mean challenging the autonomy of the broadly understood world of art. These processes had a direct impact on esthetics. The rhetoric of crisis, initially ubiquitous, gave way with time to a turn towards source senses, which resulted in the rise of postmodern conceptions exploring the concept of *aisthesis*. The currently practiced 'esthetics beyond esthetics', with Wolfgang Iser's model project, and oriented towards broadening the area of research, has not eliminated philosophical reflection on art. In contrast, the interest was revived in such aspects of artistic activity which, although pointing to its autonomy, at the same time direct attention to the uniqueness and the force of impact of art. They do it differently than essentialist theories, turning towards the experience of ties with the world, towards event, exploring the places where cognitive disposition typical of art emerges. This has taken place already from

¹¹ The problem of esthetic thinking from the philosophical perspective in the social and artistic context is discussed in detail in the monograph *Myslenie estetyczne*, ed. T. Pēkala, R. Kubicki, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2023.

¹² Cf. A. Wolińska, *Zdziwienie, oczekiwanie, bezczynność: estetyka wobec nadmiaru*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, Warszawa 2014.

the period of the avant-garde, but today this issue has acquired a new sense because posthumanism extended its attention with a dimension going beyond the anthroposphere. It is worth noting that new research trends in esthetics depart from explaining the cognitive role of art in terms of radical opposition between *aisthesis* and *logos*, although there is no denying that in the rehabilitation of the source senses of art there is a will to oppose the dominance of conceptual thinking. It should be remembered that in the atmosphere of postmodernist exhaustion and criticism of great narratives, opinions appeared that the debate over art cannot be held exclusively on the level of concepts, because they do not, quite naturally, cover all spheres of artistic activity. Philosophy of art has always noticed this circumstance to a greater degree than detailed art sciences and still does so, although one should note the high pace of changes in the object of inquiries under the influence of successive turns in the humanities. The turn towards multisensoriness and seeking closer ties with the world is made easier by the spontaneous development of neurobiological sciences and advanced technologies that facilitate inquiries into cognitive processes.

It should be remembered that the epistemological orientation in esthetic inquiries is not a new phenomenon: it has a long tradition going back to the source senses of esthetics. Referring back to the question asked at the beginning about cognitive possibilities and obstacles in conducting such inquiries, it should be reminded that Alexander Baumgarten prepared a project of esthetics which was to answer the question regarding how to create knowledge about esthetic cognition. He did not treat art as a distinct area in which we are dealing with this kind of cognition; he only pointed out that any cognition can lead to truth and enriches the human mind. The problems of the theoretical mind resulted, according to him, from the fact of underestimating sensual cognition, which is the 'thinking analogous to reason'. In his title work, esthetics was defined as 'the theory of liberal arts, lower gnoseology, the art of beautiful thinking, the art of the analogue of reason'¹³. Contemporary conceptions, which reinterpret the category of *aisthesis* and pave the way for this form of cognition, which is esthetic thinking, have a significant protagonist in Baumgarten. It is worth focusing attention on Baumgarten's use of the term *ars* in the context of cognitive power. In this way, creation as part of art is connected with cognition, which suggests that they are not two opposing moments. With this conception of cognitive faculties, art could indeed represent the most complementary model of cognition¹⁴. The conditions for the course of this process are still unclear

¹³ A. G. Baumgarten, *Ästhetik*, transl. Dagmar Mirbach, Philosophische Bibliothek, Band 572a, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 2007, sec. 1.

¹⁴ P. Kozak, *Od retoryki do estetyki*. „Aesthetica” Alexandra Gottlieba Baumgartena, „Forum Artis Rhetoricae” 2004, no. 1, p. 55.

and need to be specified, including the role of the cognizing subject. Fulfilling present-day inquiries, the assumption of the possibility of cognizing the community of the existence of all living beings can be proved based on different ontological positions and can influence philosophical theories of art. It is impossible to present them all here.

The leading problem (presented in this study) of the role of art in overcoming cognitive obstacles determines the choice of conceptions exploring the variously defined sources of life and points to those that examine the cognitive process together with the process of the becoming/existence of reality. Approaching critically many statements formulated within these conceptions, it is assumed here that they are a convenient basis for deliberations on the cognitive obstacle in art. What is significant is the choice of a research category useful in reference to a specific place in which the cognitive process combines (without deciding the character of this combination) with non-discursive elements of the world. The tradition that should be invoked in the first place is phenomenology, whereas the narrowing of the subject matter to the cognitive functions of art requires that art should be examined in connection with Kant's conception of esthetic experience because it is this experience that controls the process and defines the boundaries in which the source connection of our cognition with the existence of the world can emerge. In philosophical deliberations, the beginning of this road is determined by Husserl's call 'to things in themselves' leading to the experience of connection with the world. In his conceptualization, the whole world that we experience disintegrates into our own (the familiar) and the foreign, which gives rise to the question whether something untouched by foreignness can exist¹⁵. This kind of experience is described by Husserl as a special kind of 'apperception' 'making consciousness real'. Consciousness attributed to the cognitive faculty in this specific form of cognition is interpreted as 'consciousness apperceived as part of nature; the stream of consciousness given as a stream of human or brute consciousness, naturally does not become, by means of this apperception, something which appears by virtue of adumbration'¹⁶. This excerpt from the *Ideas of Pertaining to Pure Phenomenology...* is quoted for two reasons. First of all, to point out how the idea of connecting the subjective cognitive faculty with its transcendent reality developed among present-day philosophers. This idea is significant for understanding the process which results in such a connection, which may be helpful in defining the conditions for transformative experience. This is the experience of participating in

¹⁵ E. Husserl, *Medytacje kartezjańskie*, transl. A. Wajs, Biblioteka Klasyków Filozofii, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1982, p. 32.

¹⁶ Idem, *Idee czystej fenomenologii i fenomenologicznej filozofii*, transl. D. Gierulanka, Biblioteka Klasyków Filozofii, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1975, p. 166.

the situation of a cognitive conflict, which is explained in phenomenology as the state of 'double conflictual apperception'¹⁷. The reference to Husserl is not accidental because a phenomenologist depicts such a state precisely via esthetic experience in contact with art. There is no room here for an in-depth analysis¹⁸. In Husserl's reflection on esthetic consciousness, we are interested in the nature of this experience described in terms of cognitive conflict. Speaking in very general terms, these reflections confirm that the course of such an experience may be transformative, although it does not directly result from the fact that a conflict takes place in it, between the image of the world established in language and in memory narratives, and that which appears. The oscillation, described by phenomenologists, between consciousness and phenomenon, may evoke feelings of otherness and foreignness of the world. In the course of this kind of experience, what we 'lose' in one moment as constructors of cultural senses and what unites us in communities, in the next phase we 'find' in the upheavals of life, within a broader community. Ultimately, however, the leader of the game for Husserl is the cognizing subject. It is because experience, also in contact with art, always occurs within the framework of some horizon. Therefore, the community of return to the world of life can occur, but as the community of transcendental subjects, which takes this otherness into account. There is no need to report on how successive phenomenologists have tried to go beyond Husserl's idea of intentionality: competent dissertations on this subject have already been published¹⁹. For the formality of the discussion, Heidegger's project of 'ontology as phenomenology' will be mentioned, in which not only the work of art, but first of all the experience of it, are presented as the road towards the sources of existence²⁰. The fundamental breakthrough in the embodiment of subject (embodied cognition) was achieved by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His *Eye and Mind* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, de rigueur readings for philosophers of art, are read by all today; consequently, even the superficial reporting of the state of research requires a separate dissertation. This is a philosophically bold and finely justified ontological-epistemological stance, developed mainly based on analyses of painting. To paraphrase Ingarden, it could be said that by using a painting work of art as an example, Merleau-Ponty settles the dispute over the existence of the world, including

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 166.

¹⁸ Cf. Idem, *Fenomenologia świadomości estetycznej*, transl. Kamilla Najdek and Janusz Sidorek, „Sztuka i Filozofia” 2002, no. 21, pp. 5-11.

¹⁹ P. Schollenberger, *Granice poznania doświadczenia estetycznego*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, Warszawa 2014.

²⁰ Cf. M. Heidegger, *Bycie i czas*, transl. Bogdan Baran, Biblioteka Współczesnych Filozofów, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1994, p. 50; Idem, 'O źródle dzieła sztuki', transl. Lucyna Falkiewicz, „Sztuka i Filozofia” 1992, no. 5, pp. 9-67.

the dispute over the manner of cognizing it. He shows how 'he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it [...] unless he is one of the visibles', thus making the body a bond of different centers of perception²¹. Visibility (being visible) was chosen in this conception as a model, which does not mean that it is regarded as a privileged form of cognition. In reference to the idea of *Lebenswelt*, Merleau-Ponty, in the radical form, complements Husserl's anticipated unity of existence and the experienced world. Leaving the question open about how successive phenomenological conceptions justify the possibility of expressing this unity, what is significant is their turn towards art. Not all responses to art, not only after the avant-garde, can be derived and interpreted in accordance with phenomenological conceptions of experience and esthetic value, but one cannot fail to notice the clearly cognitive character of the process described therein. In Roman Ingarden's theory, regarded as a model one, the phases of esthetic experience 'are characterized by distinctive dynamics and concern for seeking and finding'²². Alternating, emotionally and intellectually marked phases occur in the course of esthetic experience, making it impossible to attribute purpose to it (the experience) in the way the author understands purpose in intellectual cognition. Ingarden's description of the alternation of phases in esthetic experience, preserving their essential distinctness, shows that even in studies that adopt the classical work of art as a model, it is very difficult to connect the cognitive-intellectual with the cognitive-emotional.

To sum up, the pivot uniting the tradition leading from Friedrich Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger in philosophy, and from Alexander G. Baumgarten in esthetics is, classical in its origin, the problem of the inaccessibility of conceptual cognition to the individuality of that which is being cognized. The themes discussed here, of the cognitive conflict, resistance and foreignness, confirm that it is no longer possible to practice philosophy using the rhetoric of the sources of sense – first, because the depth of this source turns out to be unmeasurable in the context of the general knowledge about humankind; second, the need for sense can no longer be answered within the framework of pure theory. The author largely agrees with Martin Seel's conviction that there is no point in playing the allegedly delicate empiricism of esthetic overview against hard conceptual cognition²³. An attempt has been made here to draw attention to

²¹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Widzialne i niewidzialne*, ed. J. Migasiński, transl. M. Kowalska, Fundacja Aleitheia, Warszawa 1996, p. 139, English translation from idem: *The Visible and the Invisible...*, transl. A. Lingis, N.U. Press, Evanston 1968.

²² R. Ingarden, *Studia z estetyki*. T. 3, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1970, p. 101.

²³ M. Seel, *Estetyka obecności fenomenalnej*, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, transl. K. Krzemień-Ojak, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas : Polskie Towarzystwo Estetyczne, Kraków 2008, p. 67.

the themes that go, in the analysis of esthetic experience, beyond the bipolar strategies of the myth of the esthetic, but do not make an epistemological 'cut'. On the contrary, they suggest interest in what takes place between concept and experience.

Another path, which is only noted here as important for present-day discussions, was delineated by hermeneutics, expressed most fully by Gadamer in his criticism of Kant's conception of esthetic experience. Another step towards changing the attitude to the cognitive role of art was Gianni Vattimo's reinterpretation of Gadamer's conception of esthetic experience. In brief, it could be said that in the hermeneutic approach the category of esthetic experience has come the way from seeking the sense of belonging to the world to alienation. Inspired by modern hermeneutic philosophies, especially those of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur, theories have arisen, which, by adopting the assumption of the narrative character of experienced reality and the pluralization of cultural universes, have contributed to the narrativist turn that also embraced philosophy and art sciences. The main epistemological assumption of thus-oriented conceptions is the assertion that the direct cognition of the world is not possible, and this cognitive obstacle cannot be overcome at all. Narrativists went even further, recognizing narrative not only as the way of understanding the world, expressing the temporariness of existence, but even as the principle governing all forms of human activity – cultural and even spiritual. In the extreme form, naturalists like Mark Turner, the author of *The Literary Mind*, or Jerome Bruner, the author of the idea of 'narrative thinking', even claimed that narrative is the primal, innate basis of cognitive processes²⁴. Although estheticians representing different philosophical positions agree that logical thinking is not the only or even not the most prevailing way of thinking, yet they do not necessarily share the radical views of naturalists.

A recollection of the path that esthetic experience has travelled in two currents that the author believes to be most helpful in attaining the intended goal, demonstrates how differently the cognitive role of art can be interpreted. It may serve both to discover belonging to the world and to experience the lack of continuity and an epistemological rupture with it. Cognition of the world and understanding the cognizing subject in contact with art is a complex process, whose structures and determinants are analyzed by different research disciplines using different tools and categories, which often leads to misunderstandings and makes the concept of cognition difficult to agree on. No wonder, therefore,

²⁴ Cf. M. Turner, *The Literary Mind*, Oxford University Press, 1998, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195126679.001.0001>; J. Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (October 1991): 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448619>.

that the problem of participation of art in cognitive processes is studied occasionally, mainly as a case study, rather than as a separate object of research. The amount of information coming from the results of empirical studies and neurobiological analyzes concerning human cognitive processes is so large that it impedes interdisciplinary dialogue. After the initial period of interest or even fascination, philosophers found the intense development of cognitive sciences, neurobiology and neuroaesthetics an obstructing cognitive obstacle confirming the ineffectiveness of representationism in perceiving artistic processes.

Present-day conceptions try to prove that the impossibility of expression – a cognitive obstacle at the level of reflection – becomes, in the experience of art, a chance to transform existence. The author has taken the concept of transformative experience from the conception of the American scholar L.A. Paul²⁵. ‘First, such experiences are *epistemically transformative*, providing forms or degrees of knowledge and understanding that were previously unavailable and, more importantly, previously inaccessible [...]. Second, such experiences are *personally transformative*, fundamentally changing one's values, preferences, desires, and, therefore, transforming one's identity in substantive ways’²⁶.

Art can initiate such an experience, or even be conducive to deep transformation. Not every transformative experience leads to change, just as not every esthetic experience is ultimately a response to value (in Ingarden's language). Referring to Aristotelian *katharsis*, it should be emphasized that transformative experience consists not only in removing, breaking free from the accumulated emotions, and not even in experiencing a cognitive shock, but in the reorganization of the current cognitive horizon²⁷. According to the authors who analyze esthetic experience and processes of the creation of sense in art from the cognitivist and neurobiological perspective, the process of transformation proceeds according to the principle of the ‘epistemological arc’²⁸. Viewed through the prism of predication, the stages of this process resemble the dynamics of esthetic experience, including the phases of astonishment, emotional uncertainty and intellectual activity; moments of illumination can also occur in them. The

²⁵ L. A. Paul, *Transformative Experience*, Oxford University Press 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198717959.001.0001>.

²⁶ H. Carel, I. James Kidd, *Expanding Transformative Experience*, „European Journal of Philosophy” 28, no. 1 (1 March 2020), p. 2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12480>.

²⁷ M. Pelowski, F. Akiba, *A Model of Art Perception, Evaluation and Emotion in Transformative Aesthetic Experience*, „New Ideas in Psychology” 2011, 29, no. 2, pp. 80–97, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2010.04.001>.

²⁸ S. Van de Cruys, J. Frascaroli, K. Friston, *Order and Change in Art: Towards an Active Inference Account of Aesthetic Experience*, „Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences” 379, no. 1895 (18 December 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2022.0411>.

greatest difficulty consists in how such an experience can be attested. How possible is knowledge about individual experience and is a synthesis of impression and understanding possible? Even more difficult, it seems, is to distinguish transformative changes that would stem from communal historical experiences. It turns out, therefore, that in order to answer the question whether art is closer to such a model of experience, we have to define what the cognitive possibilities and obstacles are in conducting this type of inquiries. Such a task can be formulated on the level of the metanarrative, where the theory of cognitive obstacles itself is defined as a cognitive obstacle. Useful in this respect can be the theories of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze, which examine the problem of the boundaries of philosophical discourse towards the discourse of art.

The problem of disproportion between discourses about art and discourses of art, known for a long time, is not the only cognitive obstacle. Another is the disproportion within discourses about art and a huge diversity of artistic messages. The disproportion of discourses and their tendency to dominate are accepted by some as an arbitrary and theoretically justified choice, while others treat them as an unavoidable consequence of the divided world. There are also opinions that holistic projects can be the salvation from cognitive solipsism, as exemplified by publications by Peter Sloterdijk, from the angle of philosophy and art under discussion. The German philosopher thinks that there is no need to choose between philosophy and art, and sees the possibility of writing that combines 'form and content, literature and philosophy, and art and thought'²⁹. Perhaps such a writing experience and overcoming cognitive obstacles while reading have a transformative character in themselves, fulfilling Baumgarten's vision of the art of beautiful thinking.

Finally, there is a place for a gloss on the transformative experience of mixing languages in art. This is not about one more note on the long history of the topos of the Babel Tower. The mixing of languages is a fact: art crosses boundaries not only by virtue of linguistic convention but also in the profound source sense. Artistic activity emphasizes and allows us to perceive the difference not through opposition but as a dynamic process, a game that takes place in the space of life: its physical, geographic and ecological aspects, but also in the space of theory. Cognitive obstacles are part of this process. At the Architecture Biennale in Venice 23, the exhibition curator Lesley Lokko perfectly expressed this space of differences with the question of 'whether exhibitions of

²⁹ J.-P. Couture, *Sloterdijk, Key Contemporary Thinkers*, Cambridge: Polity Press, Cambridge 2016, p. 5; Wł. Lorenc, *Filozofia Petera Sloterdijka jako sposób przeciwdziałania nadciągającej katastrofie*, in: *Parergon jako metafora współczesnego świata*, ed. T. Pękala and R. Kubicki, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2024, p. 70.

this scale – both in terms of carbon and cost – are justified³⁰. Lesley Lokko met the challenge of seeking the form of presentation which, breaking the previous divisions and models established by tradition, does not reject them entirely because it has to take into account that ‘an architecture exhibition is both a moment and a process. [...]’³¹. A process requires time – therefore, it is too early for an analysis in terms of transformative experience. It is important that the difference was outlined in the formula of previous presentations. With what effect? A positive one in the case of the German pavilion, where the largest portion of the exhibition was built from materials obtained from the demolition of last year’s exhibitions. Negative, however, with the Austrian pavilion whose organizers invited inhabitants of Venice for a discussion on the boundaries between the Biennale area and the city. The city authorities did not permit the use of a specially built footbridge over the wall, through which the inhabitants were to arrive at the pavilion³².

This year, Adriano Pedrosa, the curator of the 60th International Art Exhibition *Foreigners Everywhere (Stranieri Ovunque)*, continues to implement similar intentions. He borrowed the title from the works of the feminist and conceptual artist Claire Fontaine. These works consist of neon sculptures of different cultures, which render the expression ‘foreigners everywhere’ in an increasing number of languages, exploring the linguistic and cultural senses of being an alien (foreigner/stranger). Theoretical analyses of overcoming resistance and a clash with foreignness as the main stages of overcoming the cognitive obstacle, and the categories of description of transformative experience find their artistic expression here. The exhibition is in progress, it is not yet time for conclusions.

Bergson’s words have been used to formulate the tasks of this study. The author will use them as a summing-up reflection: ‘To give up certain habits of thinking and even of perceiving is far from easy: yet this is but the negative part of the work to be done’. Have ‘we placed ourselves at what we have called the *turn* of experience?’ What stage are we at?

In answer to the question inspired by Bergson’s words, ‘there still remains to be reconstituted’, the author will cite the words of the curator of this year’s Biennale, Adriano Pedrosa:

³⁰ L. Lokko, ‘18th International Architecture Exhibition: Biennale Architettura 2023– The Laboratory of the Future’, La Biennale di Venezia, 27 March 2023, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2023/18thexhibition>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² B. Nawrocka, D. Wilczyńska, D. Janicka, *Bal architektek na weneckim biennale. Trzy pawilony w duchu feministycznego projektowania* [accessed: 28.07.2024], <https://architektura.muratorplus.pl/wydarzenia/bal-architektok-na-weneckim-biennale-trzy-pawilony-w-duchu-feministycznego-projektowania-aa-AqN7-vzZd-yViM.html>.

'The backdrop for the work is a world rife with multifarious crises concerning the movement and existence of people across countries, nations, territories and borders, which reflect the perils and pitfalls of language, translation, nationality, expressing differences and disparities conditioned by identity, nationality, race, gender, sexuality, freedom and wealth. In this panorama, the expression *Foreigners Everywhere* has several meanings. First of all, that wherever you go and wherever you are, you will always encounter foreigners—they/we are everywhere. Secondly, that no matter where you find yourself, you are always truly, and deep down inside, a foreigner'³³.

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³³ *Introduction by Adriano Pedrosa: Curator of the 60th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, 22 June 2023, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2024/introduction-adriano-pedrosa>.

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O ROLI SZTUKI W POKONYWANIU PRZESZKÓD POZNAWCZYCH W PERSPEKTYWIE ESTETYKI FILOZOFICZNEJ (streszczenie)

Sztuka jako szczególna forma poznania świata rozważana jest w artykule przy użyciu kategorii przeszkody poznawczej w rozumieniu Gastona Bachelarda i Henri Bergsona. Analizowane są dwa aspekty tego zagadnienia. Pierwszy dotyczy sytuacji, w której sztuka ułatwia pokonywanie obcości i pomaga w przełamywaniu oporu wobec tego, co nieznanne. W drugim ujęciu, przedmiotem refleksji są okoliczności, w których sztuka staje się przeszkodą poznawczą. Osią spajającą są charakterystyczne dla nowoczesności propozycje rozwiązania klasycznego problemu niedostępności poznania pojęciowego do indywidualności tego, co poznawane. Obszar badań wyznacza tradycja epistemologiczna w estetyce filozoficznej wiodąca od Alexandra G. Baumgartena i kontynuowana w dwu nurtach: fenomenologii i hermeneutyce. Analizy koncentrują się na wątkach konfliktu poznawczego w tych koncepcjach doświadczenia estetycznego, które przekraczają dwubiegunowe strategie mitu estetyczności, ale nie dokonują epistemologicznego „ciągnięcia” i poszukują nowych strategii w rozumieniu poznania estetycznego. Istotną kwestią jest próba odpowiedzi na pytanie: jakie są poznawcze możliwości i przeszkody w prowadzeniu tego typu badań i jaki wpływ mają na nie nauki neurobiologiczne i nowoczesne technologie. Artykuł kończy glosa o transformacyjnym doświadczeniu w sztuce na przykładach z dwu ostatnich wystaw na Weneckim Biennale Architektury (2023) i Biennale Sztuki (2024).

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka, przeszkoda poznawcza, doświadczenie estetyczne, doświadczenie transformacyjne, epistemologia estetyczna, fenomenologia, hermeneutyka, obcość, Weneckie Biennale.

Teresa Pękala – Professor of Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy and the Head of the Department of Aesthetics and Philosophy of Culture at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin. Her interests include problems of contemporary aesthetics and art, post-modern culture, the processes of aestheticization of the past and Polish aesthetics. She has published ca. 135 articles and is the author or editor of nine books: *Secesja. Konkretyzacje i interpretacje* [*Art Nouveau. Concretizations and Interpretations*], Lublin 1995; *Estetyka otwarta Mieczysława Wallisa* [*The Open Aesthetics of Mieczysław Wallis*], Warszawa 1997; *Awangarda i ariergarda. Filozofia sztuki nowoczesnej* [*Avant-gardes, Ariere-gardes. Philosophy of Modern Art*], Lublin 2000; *Mieczysław Wallis. Wybór pism estetycznych. Wprowadzenie, wybór i opracowanie* [*Mieczysław Wallis. Selected Aesthetic Writings. Introduced, Selected and Edited by...*] Universitas, Kraków 2004; *Przyszłość Witkacego* [*Witkacy's Future*] (ed.), Kraków 2010; *Powrót modernizmu* [*The Return of Modernism*] (ed.), Lublin 2013, *Estetyczne konteksty doświadczenia przeszłości*, [*Aesthetic Contexts of Experience of the Past*], Lublin 2013; *Konstanty Troczyński. Wybór pism estetycznych. Wprowadzenie, wybór i opracowanie* [*Konstanty Troczyński. Selected Aesthetic Writings. Introduced, Selected and Edited by...*], Kraków 2014, *Witkacy w kontekstach* [*Witkacy in the context*], (ed.), Lublin 2015, *Teatr, teatralizacja, performatywność*, [*Theatre, theatricalization, performativity*] (ed.), Lublin 2016, *Przestrzenie autonomii – sztuka, filozofia, kultura*, [*Spaces of Autonomy – Art, Philosophy, Culture*] (ed.), Lublin 2017, *Dyskursy sztuki. Dyskursy o sztuce*, [*Discourses of Art. Discourses About Art*] (ed.), Lublin 2018, *Zapomniana sztuka. Sztuka pamiętania*, [*Forgotten Art. The Art of Remembering*] (ed.), Lublin 2019, *Dystynkcje estetyczne- wyróżnienie i wykluczenie*, [*Aesthetic Distinctions – Merit and Exclusion*] (ed.), Lublin 2020; *Myślenie estetyczne*, [*Aesthetic thinking*], (ed. T. Pękala, R. Kubicki), Lublin 2023. *Parergon jako metafora współczesnego świata* [*The Parergon as a Metaphor of the Contemporary World*] (ed. T. Pękala, R. Kubicki), Lublin 2024.