

The Problem of Aesthetics Experience in Contemporary Art*

Katarína Ihringová; katka.ihring@gmail.com

Abstract: Experiencing aesthetics and aesthetic experience has, for a long time, been perceived as the purpose and goal of art. The aesthetic features of a work of art have been the only criteria used in its evaluation. However, these modernist aspects cannot be applied to the conceptual and neo-avant-garde art of the 2nd half of the 20th century that has not only brought a radical change in the artistic form, but, especially, the ontological nature of the work itself. Modernist theories of art and normative rules which apply to perceptual art are no longer able to reflect the changes brought by the art of mind. The traditional history of aesthetics oriented towards the definition of art should, therefore, overlap with, for example, the history of ideas. In the text, I will thus focus on the crucial moments which stood on the border between the old, modernist traditions, and the new, which has brought radical changes into the study of aesthetics as well as the theory of art. The text is focused on three issues: ontological issues of art, the criticism of aestheticism and tautology as a possible problem in interpretation, which will be dealt with from the comparative viewpoint of the art of sense and art of mind.

Keywords: conceptualism, aesthetics experience, neo-avantgarde, ontology.

Introduction

When Július Koller painted his “*Sea*” in 1963/1964, he probably did not expect that several years later it would be in the centre of a rather sharp academic discussion of Slovak art theoreticians. Koller painted this oil painting while still studying at AFAD in Bratislava and for a long time it was seen as an expression of a student’s search for himself. He wrote, or rather painted, the word “sea” on the painting and let the letters of this word “swim” on the waves. Although the painting does not depict any specific sea or the idea of a sea, it is able to very intensely evoke undulating waves in the audience. Despite the loss of materiality, replaced by a word, the painting has remained strongly visual. It is this very instability in the perception and interpretation of this painting that has become a meeting point for differing interpretational approaches. In 1979, Tomáš Štrauss termed “*Sea*”, in his samizdat manuscript “*Conceptual Art as a Media Analysis and Model of Reality (Comments on the Development of Art from 1970 to 1975)*”, as a unique phenomenon of Slovak conceptualism. (Štrauss, 1992, pp. 55-62) He came to this conclusion on the basis of the then current view in conceptualism which had also started to replace the visual aspect by thoughts, ideas or concepts, represented in the form of a verbal statement. However, Štrauss did not support his argument with any available foreign manifestos of conceptual art and assessed Koller’s work as an effort by the author to express his opinion on the conceptual and semantic issues of the current artistic trends through the painting. Radislav Matuščík totally rejected this in his work ... *Before. Crossing the Borders 1964 to 1971* in 1983, while evaluating Koller’s work in a completely different manner: “[...] *his painting “Sea”, however, is not yet a fully developed textual announcement of his relationship to things, events and ideas; it is only a first entry into a different – non-pictorial – symbolic system*” (Matuščík, 1994, p. 27) While the first theoretician clearly classified the painting among the primary examples of Slovak conceptualism, the latter rather finds

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it to be a continuation of the Dadaistic tradition of experimentation with writing in paintings. The interpretational discussion regarding this painting also continued over the following years and was joined, mainly, by Aurel Hrabušický (1995, pp. 218-251) and Jana Geržová (1999, pp. 145-149), who offered their own analytical viewpoints and interpretational evaluations of *Sea*.¹ Their conclusions, but mainly the nature of the dispute itself raises several fundamental questions: Why has this, seemingly non-problematic and clear painting provoked interpretational disputes? Why have the theoreticians themselves found various paradigmatic aspects of artistic development in it and why have they approached it with different intentions? An answer to these questions corresponds to the situation in the 1960s and 1970s art. While subsiding modernist theories were still highlighting visual aspects and aesthetic features of works of art, which were highlighted by, for example, Radislav Matuščík, others (Štrauss), already in the spirit of conceptualism, were looking for an idea and thought in the work that was intended to completely replace the visual aspect with a semantic concept. I will try to gain more insight in this issue situated on the border between the old modernist tradition and the new conceptualism by defining two methods of the representation of the world which get their shape from art – the perceptual (sensory) and non-perceptual (conceptual) forms of art. Each of these forms has a different approach to representation, i.e. the depiction, of the world as well as to the medium used and the execution of the work itself, its formal features, visual aspect and meaning. There are also differences in their approach to the viewer and their place within the process of the perception of a work of art, i.e. to the aesthetic experience itself as well as to a definition of art. Based on these approaches, the individual artistic forms began to be called: art of sense and art of mind. While the first focused on the human senses which should be stimulated by a work of art, the latter focused on the artistic stimulation of the mind but using different means.² They were discussed more intensely in the 1960s and 1970s when the question of a new definition of art and the re-evaluation of modernist aesthetical theories (formalism, expressionism), which were not able to give an adequate response to the new artistic forms and strategies, resounded in the theory of art. The modernist theories pay attention to a priori art, its aesthetic and artistic qualities free of functions beyond aesthetics and art. They emphasize the autonomy of a work of art (Mukařovský, 2000, pp. 208-214), while highlighting its expressive and formal features (Clive, Beardsley). However, the situation in art has radically changed. Modernism emphasized sensory experience arising from art and artistic work, but the result of the rise of conceptualism (art of mind) was that aestheticism disappeared completely and was replaced by comments by artists on social or political issues, intending to make a viewer think, with the visual aspect excluded from the work. The principal difference between both of these approaches to art was not only based on the above mentioned factors, but, according to Noël Carroll, it was particularly based on the matter of aesthetic experience which is diametrically different in sensory and conceptual art. This question of aesthetic experience has been the one most highly considered question in the theory of art and aesthetics over the last 30 to 40 years (Carroll, 2003, p. 42). It is related to the fact that sensory experience which is connected to beauty has, for some time, disappeared from art, this has been caused by conceptualism and other neo-avant-garde movements. A new challenge comes as a response to the deliberate absence of aesthetic experience – the re-evaluation of aesthetic experience. The term “aesthetic experience” originated in the early aesthetics of the 18th century (Baumgarten, Kant, Hutcheson) where it was related to terms such as contemplation, self-enrichment, internal experience. In the words of Vlastimil

¹ For further information about this dispute see: Jablonská, Beata: *Spor o slovenské „More“* (2013, pp. 7-19). The author offers an overview of various opinions on interpretation of the work which have been pronounced in the field of Slovak art science.

² This terminology was also used by E. Schellekens and P. Goldie, authors of *Who's Afraid of Conceptual Art* (2010).

Zuska: *“the aspect of the self-reflection of a perceiver and the “internalization” of an aesthetic object, its absorption into a reflected perceptual sphere of subjectivity, are thus essential for aesthetic reception”* (Zuska, 2001, p. 42). Several theories have been formed in modern aesthetics which focus on aesthetic experience as well as the emphasising the aesthetic features of a work of art, e.g. the concepts of Clive Bell, Susan Langer, John Dewey, Monroe C. Beardsley, Clement Greenberg and others. Aesthetic experience is a term connected to sensory perception and it is directly related to sensory art which possesses aesthetic features that are able to create an aesthetic experience. For Clive Bell, a representative of formalism, the perception of a work of art is not only simply looking. He raises it to an experience, in which the human mind is absolutely free, unbiased and free of any external stimuli. It is free of all other interests besides aesthetic ones. This intense experience results in an extraordinary emotion which is related to the origination of an aesthetic experience that can only come at the moment of experiencing an extraordinary emotion, which Bell calls an aesthetic emotion. A perceiver has to possess extraordinary sensibility in order to be able to experience such an emotion. We then call objects which arouse an aesthetic emotion, works of art. But why are certain objects more extraordinary than others and how do they differ from one another? The difference lies in the so-called significant form, based on the proper formal organization of lines, colours, forms and space. It is also the only principle that contributes to the evaluation of a work and to distinguishing a work of art from a non-artistic work. The significant form is put into the work by an artist and the proper organization of forms in a specific work of art is always shrouded in mystery. An artist should be able to harmonize the significant form to such extent that it arouses extraordinary emotions in the viewer. At the same time, Bell points out that the aesthetic experience of a work of art is highly personal. Emotions are so individually subjective that no system of aesthetic can have an objective character. However, he also admits that any effort to search for objective truth in art is legitimate (Bell, 2005). We can also find aesthetic experience seen as the objective and purpose of art as well as the nature of sensory perception in the ideas of a younger theoretician, Monroe C. Beardsley. In his opinion, a work of art is *“created in order to be endowed with an ability to satisfy an aesthetic interest”* (Beardsley, 2010, p. 244). As soon as we start to show an aesthetic interest in artistic objects we deliberately head towards the aesthetic experience, which is a sort of climax – the highest moment – of the aesthetic experience of a work of art. *“Sometimes it happens that, within the receptive relationship, we realize our experience (which includes everything that forms our consciousness, i.e. perceptions, feelings, emotions, instincts, desires, beliefs, thoughts) has been elevated in a way which can hardly be described: [...] it includes the feeling of liberation from matters which present an external object of our interest, an intense feeling that is not based on practical objectives, an elevating feeling of awakening of our curiosity, unification of our selves and our experience”* (Beardsley, 2010, p. 243). If all the above mentioned aspects of an experience join together when perceiving a work of art, we can speak about the aesthetic experience. The purpose of a work of art thus lies in the satisfaction of our aesthetic interest and leading us towards aesthetic experience – in the case of sensory art. However, what form does aesthetic experience and other aesthetic matters take in regards to conceptual art?

In his article, *The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art* from 2003 (Shelley, 2003, pp. 363-378), John Shelley considers three statements: 1) a work of art has aesthetic features that are relevant enough for us to attribute an artistic value to the work (proposal R); 2) these aesthetic features are such that they can be perceived through the five senses (proposal S); 3) however, there are also works that cannot be perceived through the five senses – these are the so-called non-perceptual works and we evaluate them as works of art (proposal X). The first two statements correspond to the aesthetic theory of art and try to find an answer to the following questions: *“Why do we assign an artistic value to a specific work? How do we perceive a specific work of art?”* The answer is oriented towards the aesthetic features of a work of art that

we perceive by our senses which help us to assign an artistic value to the work. The third proposal speaks of works that we are not able to perceive through our five senses and cannot classify them among the sensory arts since they do not possess any aesthetic features. These works are beyond the realm of the concepts of the aesthetic theory of art; yet we evaluate them as works of art. Shelley forms variations of the three statements, on the basis of which he finds a possibility for the evaluation of such avant-garde works (Duchamp) that have freed themselves from aesthetic features and the possibility of perception through the five senses. Before we start to deal with the question of the existence of aesthetic experience in conceptual, or, in Shelley's words, non-perceptual works of art, we will focus on some aspects of the theoretical concept of this art. We will, however, focus only on the early stages of the development of conceptualism where we can speak of it in its purest form. In the late 1970s, it was transformed into various forms with many differences and specifics, taking a form of neo-conceptualism in the 1990s. Conceptual art has been able to arouse many controversial claims and debateable questions. I will try to cover at least those which are closely related to the aesthetic issues that conceptualism tried to delineate itself from. At the same time, I will also focus on the ontological problem of conceptual art as well as dealing with sensory perception and aesthetic experience.

Art after Philosophy?

In 1969, Joseph Kosuth, in a passage from *Art after Philosophy* (Kosuth, 1999, pp. 158-177), spoke of the end of philosophy, that it had exhausted its theoretical possibilities and was no longer able to grasp the fast pace of change of the world and art in the 20th century. The given state can be characterized by Kosuth's claim: "*The end of philosophy, the beginning of art*" (Kosuth, 1999, p. 160). Prior to this period, philosophy had analysed the world via empirical exploration or rationalist analyses. According to Kosuth, today these procedures are no longer sufficient and are not able to fully grasp the changeability of the world. The same applies to aesthetics which interprets art from the point of view of aesthetic features and aesthetic categories.³ However, the artistic development of the 2nd half of the 20th century underwent a radical change, liberating itself from aestheticism, expressionism, artistic form and beauty as the most important aesthetic category. The importance of aesthetics – a scientific discipline dealing with sensory perceptions, aesthetic tastes and aesthetic values – was justified in relation to traditional art, as the art depicted and represented a certain aesthetic object which belonged to an artistic context; it was a part of the artistic tradition. "*Art is a European tradition of pictorial and sculptural dichotomy*" (Kosuth, 1999, p. 163). This state also corresponded to aesthetic theory, especially formalistic criticism, relying on the morphology of a work. If an artist respected the morphology of a painting, sculpture etc., they actually respected the artistic tradition; therefore, there was no reason to question the aesthetic value of the work.⁴ However, it is not possible to apply aesthetics and an understanding of the theory of art in such way to conceptual art, which rejected the traditional medium as well as the physical forms of a work of art, thus completely rejecting the modernist paradigm based on aesthetic categories. At the same time, the function of art also changed. The primary function of sensory art was decorative (portrait, landscape ...), referring to the morphological aspects of a work and oriented towards beauty and aesthetic taste. Yet, we cannot any longer look for a decorative function in conceptual works, which are called "pieces" by Kosuth. These are works created by a conceptualist without any ambition to be works of art. They are only models of the

³ The Kosuth's claim is, of course, disputable since practice has shown that philosophy still has its place in social as well as in cultural context and is able to reflect both philosophical and artistic changes in paradigms.

⁴ According to Kosuth, an American Modernist Clement Greenberg was the last Mohican of the modernist theory.

artist's idea, and it is this very idea which presents an actual work of art. "Pieces" are only the physical form of the work of art that resides in the artist's mind. The arousal of emotions, passions and feelings is no longer the role of conceptual works; its main task is to communicate an idea and be the bearer of semantic meaning. "*An idea stands at the beginning of conceptual art and it is the most important aspect of the entire work,*" (LeWitt, 1999, p. 12) these are the words of Sol LeWitt, which he used to characterize conceptualism. The creative process of the origination of the idea and its formation is much more important than the actual physical realization of the work. Conceptual art puts an emphasis on the intellectual process which includes all the intellectual as well as cognitive factors that support rumination, thinking, searching for connections and the actual realization, i.e. the external form of the work, is only secondary. "*The mental process of an artist is sometimes more interesting than the final product*" (Lewitt, 1999, p. 14).

"*A work of art is a tautology as it is an author's presentation of their intention [...] Art is art. The art is the truth a priori. If somebody says it is art, it is art*" (Kosuth, 1999, p. 165). This statement by Joseph Kosuth was based on analytic linguistic philosophy as the only philosophical movement that conceptualism relies upon and which is close to it, by its nature. Kosuth refers to the thoughts of the linguist A. J. Ayer and characterizes a work of art as an analytical-analogical proposition. A work of art is tautological and, as such, a priori truth as it represents the artist's intention, idea, concept, thus being art itself, a definition of art as well as its own interpretation. Similar to logic, mathematics and linguistics, conceptual art is a tautology with the given statement being confirmed by itself. In its form, conceptual art is also a linguistic statement; therefore, it is defined by itself and is interpreted in the same way. It is not possible to discuss a conceptual work in any other way but tautologically. If we tried to interpret it in another way, we would focus on other artistic aspects and not on the work itself. The art thus works on the principle of logic, which means it is close to scientific thinking, as a strict systematic character must be present in both systems. We also have to take a tautological approach to beauty itself, which is a tautological idea of clear and absolute existence, meaning that beauty has absolutely liberated itself from the external aesthetic features it was previously related with and has become an expression of the pure existence of the artist's idea. As it is an expression of pure existence, Kosuth sees no point in commenting on beauty and paying more attention to it. As soon as we start to analyse it and search for its visual form, its pure function will change to a decorative one, thus causing its degradation. "*An artistic idea and art can be appreciated as art without a necessity to prove it by their aesthetic features*" (Kosuth, 1999, p. 166). Although, from a tautological point of view, art is at the same level as logic or mathematics, they are still different. While the scientific disciplines head towards a practical and useful objective, art is a pure existence that can fully replace religion or philosophy, as it is able to meet "*the spiritual needs of man*" due to the fact that "*art is art. Art is a definition of art*" (Kosuth, 1999, p. 170).

Several fundamental questions arise from the aesthetic point of view of Joseph Kosuth's theoretical concept, which I will try to highlight and compare in the scope of the art of sense and the art of mind. These are mainly essential issues such as the ontological problems of art; the new perspective of the artist in an artistic process where the artist – creator – is replaced by an artist – thinker;⁵ the problematic position of the viewer in the process of perception – the annulment of his perceptual experience; the

⁵ Elisabeth Schellekens says that the position and role of a conceptual artist is changing radically. They are no longer a creator, but a thinker; therefore, no painting or craftsman skills are required from them. As the conceptual art is based on semantics and not on the formal realization, the artist's task is to be a "meaning-maker", i.e. a creator of meanings.

meanings and objectives of interpretations of conceptual art – is there any point in entering it?; aesthetic experience and its place in conceptualism.

The Ontological Problems of Art

How does art exist? – a question asked by Reinold Schmücker – represents an issue for current aesthetics and the theory of art which was forced to take a certain approach to the state of art in the 2nd half of the 20th century (Schmücker, 2010, p. 67). On one hand, the question is seemingly simple, not offering any complicated answers, related to the most common answer we can offer: art exists in the form of a work of art; its existence is a result of a creation of human subjectivity; the existence of such a work is to be perceived and refers to aesthetic experience. All of the above mentioned characteristics could, under certain conditions, be considered to be synonyms of art and a work of art. As has already been mentioned, modernist theories are of an opinion that *“art is only constituted together with the realization of aesthetic experience and, furthermore, it does not exist outside this experience”* (Schmücker, 2010, pp. 71-72). However, we can still find several problematic points in the answers to this question. The first issue arises when we connect the existence of art with its specific form, i.e. we assign a shape to it, an external form realized through matter or medium. The second issue occurs at the moment of joining the existence of the art with its subjective perception and aesthetic experience. These are the aesthetic constructs related to sensory art or aesthetic objects which can be perceived through our senses. However, the answers do not take into account arts without a material form or that does not use traditional media – art which only exists in the mind of the creator (or, as the case may be, in the mind of a perceiver), but also art presented in the form of a performance, a happening, land art and such like. How does this art exist? We can find an interesting answer in a study by Günter Patzing (Patzing, 2010, pp. 81-92), who says that we should distinguish between the existence of a work of art and the existence of material art (its material realization). It is irrelevant to differentiate between perceptual and non-perceptual art, because, as regards their ontological nature, all of them are born of an idea (medieval, renaissance as well as conceptual art). Therefore, the difference does not lie in the idea, but in the material or non-material realization. While in the first the idea is made real through medium or material, using various aesthetic means to help the perceiver the sensory perception and aesthetic experience, the physical realization of an idea is unimportant for the latter form of art. The existence of an idea is thus the ontological nature of art. *“A work of art is not supposed to be a creative experience of an artist (creator, producer), but an experience of understanding and perception in a recipient”* (Patzing, 2010, p. 90). According to this theory, the ontological nature of a work of art is only crowned thanks to the perceiver in the perception process. Jens Kulenkampff, who questions the existence of the ontological problem of a work of art, is of a similar opinion (Kulenkampff, 2010, pp. 93-107).⁶ In his opinion, it is a common practice in current art science to deal with the physical features of a material object by applying an aesthetic-oriented manner of observation which distinguishes the physical realization of art and its very meaning, or idea. As soon as this dualism is removed from art science, the ontological problems of art will also disappear. Like Kulenkampff, Patzing draws inspiration from Charles Sanders Peirce and his theory of words (type) – the bearers of meaning and tokens – the sound and written manifestations of a word, in his conception. They applied this dichotomy to art, namely to works

⁶ Kulenkampff presents a quote of Theodor Hetzer’s text where he describes Dürer’s early self-portrait: *“As the famous Erlangen drawing – refusing everything that is typical of a bust – leaves only the face to appear before our eyes in a tangle of lines composed of fertile forms of paper, it also shows man who is disconcerted, asking, thinking, who is a riddle to himself. It is not a matter of isolation, politics, a deliberate attitude. Spirit and soul are immediately revealed in infinite movement”* (pp. 96-97).

of art (type) and material objects (token) which bear aesthetic features. *“Pierce’s distinction between type and token – interprets works of art as types that can, just as every type can, have many exemplars”* (Kulenkampff, 2010, p. 105).⁷ This means there are such works of art in the art world that can be perceived aesthetically due to their tokens, as they have aesthetic features and we head towards the aesthetic experience through perception; yet, we have to accept the fact there are also such works of art which do not possess any material form and only remain in the form of an idea. *“The thesis that works of art exist here in form of types, therefore, has been adopted as more or less the dominant opinion in the field of art ontology”* (Schmücker, 2010, p. 73). If we wanted to use the above mentioned arguments to answer Elisabeth Schellkens’ question,⁸ as to whether a medium was a necessary condition of the existence of a work of art, our answer would be negative. The material shape is not the only characteristic which ensures the status of a work of art. A similar opinion is also expressed by Joseph Kosuth who claims that ideas are considered to be the true works of art, not their material shape. In his opinion, art thus does not only have to be a question of beauty and aesthetic pleasure, but also a question of intellectual searching and thinking.

Criticism of Aestheticism

“Aestheticism is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the status of art” (Binkey, 2010, p. 283). The quote by Timothy Binkey breaks all the notions of traditional aesthetics that have been formed since the 18th century. Terms such as beauty, harmony and symmetry which are related to art suddenly seem to be completely absurd and superfluous. The same applies to terms like an aesthetic object possessing aesthetic features which allow us to classify an object as a work of art. Features which enable us to perceive, experience and assess a “perceptual object”. The modernist thesis advocates the opinion that a work of art exists so it may be perceived and the result is aesthetic experience. An equation – external perception = internal experience – applies here. Searching for an aesthetic ideal of beauty, the deep internal experience of art, intense aesthetic experience – terms and categories which cannot be applied to the art of the 2nd half of the 20th century that completely liberated itself from all aesthetic categories and traditionally understood aesthetics thus found itself in deadlock without the possibility to adequately reflect on current artistic shapes and forms. It happened in the case of conceptual art, but also in performance, happenings, land art, installations and so on, because works of art do not necessarily have to be aesthetic objects (ready-made), but they do not have to be an object either. This means they will not gain a material shape but instead only remain in the form of the author’s idea or creative process. As these works often do not possess any material shape, we cannot speak of any aesthetic or artistic value, and so Binkey, to the same as Kosuth, calls them “pieces”. The term “work of art” will thus be limited to “piece” (i.e. a work) (Binkey, 2010, p. 278). Sensory perception is no longer the meaning of “pieces”; it is replaced by grasping of an idea, albeit without a sensory percept, even without any aesthetic experience, because *“art does not have to be aesthetic”* (Binkey, 2010, p. 292) and does not have to be of an aesthetic nature – thus also the perceiver does not need any aesthetic experience either. However, if the work does not possess any aesthetic qualities, does it have some others, e.g. cognitive or cultural qualities? Cognitive theory has

⁷ Schmücker also thinks in the similar manner, claiming that various material forms of art allow us to physically perceive works of art; yet *“they are not works of art themselves: they are tokens, i.e. occurrences or manifestations of a work of art. Consequently, the work itself is no material object, but it is a type which manifests itself in its occurrences, tokens”* (Schmücker, 2010, p. 73).

⁸ Elisabeth Schellekens: *Conceptual Art*. Freely available at Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conceptual-art/>
See also: Goldie - Schellekens, 2010.

offered one of the possibilities, pointing out the importance of knowing that does not only originate from logical/rational knowing, but also in art which, despite being more sensory than science, can be the bearer of cognition and knowing just the same. It thus disposes of a cognitive value. Cognitive-oriented theoreticians (Graham, Goodman, Freedberg) speak of art generally, not defining the special artistic forms which are the bearers of cognition and which are not (they define neither the art of sense nor the art of mind). We can reach cognition in all artistic forms. Nelson Goodman considers only cognitive knowledge and cognitive value to be the main nature of art. Aesthetic perception and aesthetic knowledge are not paramount or important to him, but they are replaced by cognitive perception and cognitive experience which are, in some way, superior to aesthetic experiences, since each artistic and aesthetic element is a source of cognition. *“On one side, we put perceptions, viewings, arguments, presumptions – all the collected explorations and investigations, facts and truths; on the other, we put joy, pain, willingness, satisfaction, disappointment – all the thoughtless affective reactions, likings and aversions. Consequently, we do not see then that cognitive emotions operate in aesthetic experiencing [...] Emotions in aesthetic experiencing are the means of determining the features a work has and expresses”* (Goodman, 2007, p. 190). The emotions that Goodman speaks of are thus taken out of the sphere of purely aesthetic experience and we see them as a source of cognitive knowledge. Cognition becomes a new meaning and nature for conceptual art as well as for other neo-avant-garde strategies.

Tautology as a Problem of Interpretation?

Let us return to the concept of Joseph Kosuth who calls a conceptual work a tautology. It is thus a priori truth, it is defined and interpreted by itself and, as regards interpretation, it cannot be approached in any other way than tautologically. This characteristic brings several questions. 1) Why does such work need a viewer – perceiver – when it interprets itself? 2) Does a conceptual work admit the possibility of subjective interpretation at all, if it is interpreted tautologically? 3) What is the objective of our interpretations? In relation to the already discussed features of conceptual art, it is quite difficult to answer these questions. It might appear that the role of the perceiver is absolutely useless and they do not participate in the interpretation in any way. And it is out of place to speak of subjective interpretation, as it is a tautological process of self-interpretation. The existence of conceptual works as well as other neo-avant-garde strategies, however, is determined by interpretation and evaluation. According to Arthur Danto, there is the so-called “art world” (Danto, 2010, pp. 95-111), which a work enters on the basis of its evaluation and interpretation. A conceptual work is connected to a broad evaluation context which includes various cultural, political, historical and social relations. *“Actually, works of art owe their status as art to the fact they are viewed as art”* (Schmücker, 2010, p. 75). However, this is not only about subjective evaluations of individuals who could introduce a work into the art world. It is about a broad consensus that Schmücker calls *“intersubjective agreement”* (Schmücker, 2010, p. 77), i.e. an agreement shared by more subjects. The existence of at least one material manifestation in any form is necessary in order for a work to be evaluated in such a way. Even a purely mental manifestation which confirms the existence of a work is sufficient. How should Kosuth’s tautology be understood then? It does not minimize the role of a perceiver or even its denial. Like other neo-avant-garde works, a conceptual work necessarily needs an interpreter, but, since the work often does not have a material form (it is dematerialized) and works exclusively with an idea, the author focuses his, as well as perceiver’s, attention only on the concept (idea). The author tries to get the idea over to a perceiver, while the perceiver tries to understand it correctly.

Conclusion

In the present text, I have tried to point out the essential aesthetic problem which took shape during the period of the formation of conceptual art when a principal change in the artistic-cultural and aesthetic-theoretical paradigms occurred that also led to a change in artistic norms. Theoretical texts by the conceptualists themselves (Kosuth, Sol LeWitt) form the primary basis for understanding the idea of conceptual art. These texts also came at the beginning of thoughts about the relationship between perceptual and non-perceptual art, and, based on the comparison of these arts, I defined three problematic spheres: the ontological problems of art, the criticism of aestheticism and tautology as a possible problem of interpretation. I particularly based my paper on texts of analytical aesthetics which demonstrate the wide discussion concerning the existence of the art of mind and its place in the art world. Today, their status is unquestionable and they are clearly accepted as artistic strategies that reflect both social and artistic conditions. However, with respect to the breakthroughs and internal tensions which occurred on the border between the old and new paradigms, I was interested in the moments which broke the modernist rules and norms and made an effort to offer new possibilities, be it in the context of a continuous follow-up or the discontinuous establishment of new rules of artistic reflection.

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Mgr. Katarína Ihringová, PhD.
Department of History and Theory
of Art
Faculty of Philosophy and Art
Trnava University in Trnava
Slovakia
katka.ihring@gmail.com

<https://espes.ff.unipo.sk/>
