

THE SPECIFIC OF MODERN ARTISTRY PARADIGM

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Abstract

Art as a human activity has always been part of human activity. It has developed together with humanity and its interest in expressing spiritual needs in multitudes of forms. From a historical point of view, these spiritually originated objects largely pleased the senses and evoked different responses in the consumer. They are, to a large extent, a reflection of development and ideas of beauty as well as human emotions. However, quite likely as a response to the devastation of two world wars that caused enormous suffering and destruction as well as the rise of entirely opposite social systems separated by ideologies, the second half of the XX century witnessed the birth of a new art making concept. Avant-garde, as it was called, gave and is still giving a signal for a counter-run defying well-established theory and practice. For instance, Dadaism with the variety and ambiguity observed in the different procedural means to achieve artwork as well as the directions they signal pose quite a difficult problem for their inclusion within a specific art paradigm if philosophers constraint their ideas to what is conceived as art as a historical category. Much the same could be said about the conceptual framework advanced by J. Cage, M. Kagel, and K. Stockhausen, just three of the many representatives of the movement, that see art far from what was widely accepted as such. Many, from the consumers' point of view, as well as not few in the art world do not seem to understand this new paradigm, its ideas, theory and practice. The present paper systematizes some of the main manifestations, characteristics as well as the essence of avant-garde as a well-established movement and advocates for its recognition as different from mainstream art concepts.

Keywords: art, art paradigm, work of art, artistry, aesthetics.

MAIN TEXT

Art manifestations date back to the first days man started to live in communities. All accounted human social formations have expressed the real and spiritual needs, or both, in the forms of pictures, music, or simple objects such as weapons or clothes that satisfy different criteria and allow for their classification as art belonging to a given period of human development. That is, art was identified in the object and responses it provoked. However, this art-equals-object paradigm has, for more than seven decades, been contested by new manifestations in art practice that demand consideration in the light of the misunderstandings engendered by the concepts it proclaims to embrace.

Since the second half of the XX century, real art practice acts as the certificate of essentially new situations in art life that indicate the need of theoretical reconsideration of an artistry problem. This turn in artistic vision

is quite likely the result of the existing social condition after two world wars that brought with them suffering, destruction and death as well as the rise of a bipolar world based on ideological contraries. From that moment on, artists have accompanied their creations with theoretical research while trying to clarify the possibility of new artistic visions; in other words, the concept of art, in much of its realization, changed, and as a result, that of artwork has become problematic nowadays. However, unlike authors, critics, or other agents in the art world, recipients do not always appreciate such creations as artwork in modern culture.

In today's Aesthetics, more and more attention is given to that type of art as real practice and as new experiences. Nevertheless, the variety and ambiguity of such processes as observed in different types of artwork as well as their directions pose a problem for their inclusion within a specific paradigm.

In this case, the concept of art paradigm helps to reconsider the historical development of creation as a continuous change of paradigms; consequently, no need of a single uniformed theory of arises. In other words, artwork outside the scope of what is considered art at a given moment is admitted as such by updating or creating a new paradigm that assumes a new quality of artistry. Therefore, paradigm, as a category in philosophical terms, constitutes a special vision of art including both the act of creativity and assessment of its results. Consequently, the adoption of such point of view allows *artistry* to become a *historical category*.

In other words, new art practice has shown that the criteria by which classical works of art were evaluated are not applicable to art in the XX–XXI centuries. This explains why the invasion of non-classical forms in this period was originally perceived as a sign of the death, kind of a destruction, of all its bases. However, such death certificate could be a necessary precondition for the generation of essentially new philosophic ideas: the creation of a new paradigm.

Proclaiming art was embedded in life as their maximum idea, and at the same time, declaring "anti-artistry" as their own creativity, avant-gardists at the beginning of the XX century addressed, first of all, those elements of modern civilization that were mostly valued within culture; it is not surprising that rejection of the art world and consumers followed as a response. For instance, Duchamp's best-known work, a pissoir called the *Fountain* (1917), was rebuffed despite fulfilling the requirements of the exposition for it was not considered art; it did not conform to the existing paradigm. Theoretically, the reason for the rejection was that all modern art, in practice, had always been, and is quite often, still focused on ready-made aesthetics beliefs with carefully developed boundaries delimiting the valued and the profane, and it is this frame the one defining entry or not into the sphere of art, that is, a paradigm.

From this point of view, any work of art is considered as a demonstration of the sovereign forces dominating at a given historical moment in modern culture. Duchamp's *Fountain* or, for instance, Malevich's *Black Square* were understood as bad, unsuccessful artwork. However, they could have been understood as original and epoch-making. In today's Philosophy of Art or within the frames of the modern "post-art" paradigm, both understandings are equally admissible and depend on their interpretation as other, same, or bad; nevertheless, any of those interpretations cannot be accepted as true because the ruling paradigm excludes certain signs from its normative without acknowledging the possibility of an ontological justification.

Based on the theory of contemporary Art Philosophy, this paper is aimed at outlining the features and essence of the avant-garde movement paradigm to help open the door to an understanding of one of the mainstream art-making practices today.

The first powerful movement that declared itself as world outlook, and at the same time, shacked the limits of artistry, was Dadaism. "*Dada is a state of the mind that can be revealed in any conversation whatever...*" (Huelsenbeck, 1918)." This thesis from the Dada manifesto cancelled the question on the need of a certain final art product. Some of rules and provisions characterizing the formation of a new type of artistry generated by Dada became the key for further art development such as an interest in the process of creation rather than the finished object where the provocation is preferred to the experience of the positive as well as the difficult intellectual sense-creation to direct perception.

Similarly, John Cage, one of the most famous American neo-avant-gardists of the XX century, whose theory concerning the composition of music is quite applicable to other art forms, believes that the purpose of creativity is the opening of aesthetics activity to processes and experiences unknown before. This explains why, since 1950's, the appearance of mythological models of thinking connected with attempts to revive archaic consciousness and the mixture of mystical participation and normal phenomena are common in the work of avant-garde musicians. As a result of a similar approach, artwork, as a musical event, is equated to a life fact, and elements of the music composition are estimated as completely identical to each other. The same theoretical positions consider many different physical phenomena as being the same. For M. Kagel, for

instance, the opposites sound-noise, live-lifeless electronic sound, and sound-gesture are complete equivalents. Stockhausen and Cage, for the same reason, hold similar thoughts in reference to sound and conceptual project of sounding, i.e., verbal scores; and sound and silence respectively.

The main issue is that in the relationship theory-practice, avant-gardists see art making from a different perspective, apply different concepts and as such art making becomes an activity entailing all the process from its conception all along the road of art production to the final result. Everything within it is art. Cage illustrates part of the concept when, in *The Future of Music*, he explains his decision to fight for the full rights of noise after all purely musical questions stopped being serious questions, because the audience today is already adjusted to new perceptions of loudness, speed, sound, and pause. Pause, for instance, is thought of as new musical material because actually, the pause is not as empty as it is usually considered. Placing himself far from orchestra and opera lovers, N. Frye (1990) believes, "A musical discord is not an unpleasant sound; it is a sound which throws the ear forward to the next beat: it is a sign of musical energy... (Cited by Small, p. 75)"

As a result, many avant-garde composers today no longer make musical structures. Instead, they set processes going. Theoretically, this obeys to Cage's vision of the difference between structures and processes that for him are the same as the difference between a table and the weather: "In the case of a table," he states, "the beginning and end of the whole and each of its parts are known. In the case of weather, though we notice changes in it, we have no clear knowledge of its beginning or ending (Cited by Perloff and Junkerman, 1994, p. 44)." That is, artwork is understood not as an object at the beginning, but as an infinite self-sufficient series of actions that can include the object. Therefore, the *procedure*, a concept attributed to music as temporary art, now extends to other art forms.

In addition, while explaining his preference for processes rather than objects, Cage states that when recognizing objects, we often do not see the processes because we see the object isolated, and we lose the feeling of life. This explains why, many nowadays composers use an uncertainty element that gives performers the chance to play it independently from the work; that is, as they wish or deem appropriate. For Cage, the piece of music becomes a musical enterprise.

Perhaps, the above and the following are the most mysterious categories of the Modern Philosophy of Art because the paradoxicality of this new type of artistry manifests itself in opposite categories such as emptiness surrounding a space filled with colour, silence surrounded with sounding, or painting representing nothing but the empty canvases as in J. Jones's and R. Rauschenberg's artwork. Their explanation comes from Cage (1973) who claims, 'Ideas are not necessary. It is more useful to avoid having one, certainly avoid having several (leads to inactivity) (p. 99).' On the other, they may have their origin in, "Having made the empty canvases (*A canvas is never empty*), Rauschenberg became the giver of gifts (Ibidem, p. 103)."

Another example illustrating these paradoxes is Cage's best-known composition *4'33*, where the equivalence of sound and silence is demonstrated in his *Indeterminacy*, a musical piece considered a theoretical manifesto and the action of silence. This work represents the stated verbal text in the form of a graphic score, each of which has thirty musical fragments that should not sound more than one minute. The texts, which are settled down in 'minutes', appear as a parable on a subject about the lack of difference between silence and sound, noise and music, freedom and the lack of it.

Unarguably, a work of art may represent an imitation of life, but not life itself; however, the borders between art and life are not constant. A. Kaprow, the developer of the *Theory of Happenings*, emphasizes, however, that the main objective of a *Happening* consists in keeping mobile while trying to distinguish the line separating art from reality as less as possible. However, the line separating art from reality and artistry from the ordinary, nevertheless, exists. In spite of that, Kaprow (1966) claims, "The fine arts traditionally demand for their appreciation [by] physically passive observers, working with their minds to get at what their senses register. But the Happenings are an active art, requiring that creation and realization, artwork and appreciator, artwork and life be inseparable." In other words, the borders in each new paradigm are marked again, but they have no accurate outlines.

Expanding his ideas in a manifesto, Kaprow proclaims that the creation of a work of art should not become the purpose of the artist (Ibidem). Owing to his revision of the concept, a *work of art* ceased to be perceived in its autonomous essence and started to be considered as the result of the communicative act involving not only the object and process, but also its producer (the artist) and the consumer (the percipient). In other words, according to avant-gardists, the work of art rejects its singularity in favour of its plurality.

Conceptually, plurality in modern art appears as an open way of action. For instance, defining the new concept of modern music, one of founders and theorists of electronic music, K. Stockhausen (1990) says

that "The set of processes in a uniform work of art is a new concept [comparable only] if at the same time you observe different living beings (p. 62)." Artists create unfinished works, provoke the audience's activity, and invite them to co-author. In this sense, for example, collages do not apply for the role of the finished works when they consolidate the contents to process the establishment of diverse connections between objects, their perception and multiple-valued sense.

Thus, today this new modern art paradigm recognizes plurality and artistry variability. It can be said this paradigm is universal and an alternative dominating the judgment of modern art phenomena. *Universality* assumes the existence within this latest paradigm of various, but equivalent approaches to art alongside a more widely accepted viewpoint to creativity in general. *Alternativeness*, on the other hand, means the possibility of this form of art to oppose the previous paradigm(s). The alternative nature of modern art strategy is demonstrated by its aspiration to contradict many traditional ideas of creativity, professionalism, skills, identity, and spirituality and, in general, all estimated values and functions of fine art. In other words, this new form acts as a mediator by choosing an intermediary role between the internal and the external, the heterogeneous and the homogeneous, the deep and the superficial. The new forms, that is to say, art as an event or art as a gesture, for instance, naturally compel to reconsider the settled ideas of artistry and their basis.

Hitherto, two directions in the realization of the transition to a universal and alternative art paradigm have been outlined. On the one hand, art is trying to come back to that universal ontological level where we are united not by culture, but with nature as Action Art tries to evoke; on the other, corporality and naturalness have become artistry signs. The Russian art researcher, V. Savchuk (2001), directly correlates modern and archaic art paradigms by claiming, "Just as works of art were released from ritual and magic practice, in Action Art, the lost ritual and magic elements come back, sating space with extra art purposes (pp. 78-79)." In this way, the symbiosis artist percipient become a reality as illustrated by Reich (1968), "While performing and listening to gradual musical processes one can participate in a particular liberating and impersonal kind of ritual. Focusing in on the musical process makes possible that shift of attention away from he and she and you and me outwards towards it."

On the other hand, while recognizing the immutable determinism of the modern world and the cultural objects that make up its reality, art is trying to overcome this reality by coming within the scope of hyper-reality, where virtual artefacts act as special illusory quasi-sensual realities. For example, in virtual art the form changes and loses the classical definiteness through morphing as a way of transforming one object into another in a gradual continuous deformation. By becoming fluid because of the smooth transformations, the unstructured form personifies the removal of the opposition *beauty-ugliness*. Such transformers testify the anti-hierarchical uncertainty of virtual aesthetic objects. Non-formalization of a virtual artefact reveals, at the same time, essential transformations of aesthetic perception. In the centre of attention of artists and theorists, there is a perception, but not that of an artefact; there is that of a process, but not that of its result.

The *universal character* of the modern art paradigm as shown in the neutralization of any opposition such as progress/regress and evolution/involution, leads to consider art as a space where all directions are essentially equivalent; a space, within which the creative subject can move freely without any restrictions. On this chessboard, all courses are mutually reciprocal. This tendency, in fact, reveals the symptoms of a generalized condition in artistry at the turn of XX and XXI centuries.

Summing up, the features characterizing avant-garde, as a modern art paradigm, are the artist's interests in the processes of art making seen as a provocation from the paradoxes it evokes. All practice within this movement demonstrates this in one way or another. On the other hand, its essence lies in its universal character and alternativeness that point to a crucial issue in today's Philosophy of Art: the lack of a single uniformed universal artistic theory.

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