

HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF FINE ARTS DOCTORAL SCHOOL

**ERNŐ BUJDOSÓ**

*HIGH ART-LOW ART, OR THE TWO CULTURAL WORLDS*

*THESES OF DLA*

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My exposition's subject, which is its main dilemma as well, is whether our views can still be considered valid when it comes to the so-called "high" and "low" cultures/arts and the two worlds in connection to them; especially in reflection to today's art and art theory. I would also like to look at the concept of "art"; a definition, which was invalidated by the avanguard movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - after which they made the research of the definition their main agenda, or shall we say the main purpose of their art itself? I am interested in the latter dilemma's relationship to the above mentioned predicament; i.e. the cultural questions of the two worlds mentioned: Art and Culture, which after all "splits" society into two different realms of values and whether it is self-evident, sustainable and up-to-date.

My research is not into the particularities of these two worlds, and I do not intend to point out the similarities and the differences; I would rather like to see the ante descents, the reasons and motivations behind the classification itself. Based on the art theology research known to me the andescentants are rooted in the progress and change of art and art theory; and the way I see it, the motivation is very much influenced by power, politics and economy (businesses).

My starting point is the avowal according to which the theoretical, art philosophical and aesthetic bases for the two world theory were established by Modernism. Thus the reasons and the explanations can be understood with the analysis of the period's art and art theory.

As I mention in the *Introduction* I can only discuss the most relevant phenomena in relation to the subject; I also have to be pithy and to the point. In this introductory part I give an outline of the topics and the questions discussed in my exposition.

The paradigm of the two worlds can be associated to the "art revolution", whose main aim was to establish the autonomy of modern art while democratising it. This brought about fundamental changes in the attitudes and forms of modern art. In the second chapter, entitled *Is This Still Art?* we will see that because of these changes only viewers with the appropriate disposition and historical knowledge are able to understand, accept or judge new pieces of art.

As the first step towards gaining autonomy, as well as bringing life and art closer together we can witness the appearance of “anything” in art. Based on *Thierry de Duave's*<sup>1</sup> statements I maintain that the progression of modern art can be described as the history of the role of anything in art; i.e. as the glory of anything, its journey to autonomy and apology. The main stages of which were: Ready made, dada, and pop art.

The progression hallmarked by *Marcel Duchamp*<sup>2</sup> tries to raise art's ontological questions and attempts to re-define the notion itself for the purposes of artistic autonomy and democratisation. With ready made art artists put an art philosophical question into the centre as the main aim of their art: “What is Art?” . As a consequence – according to *Arthur C. Danto*<sup>3</sup> – art takes the first step towards becoming philosophy. This track within art (apart from the changes in the point-of-view) comes with such formal changes that have significant impact on the relationship between artists and their audiences. Individualism, reflection, the licit of renewal and denial, the discovery of the eastatics of fault and the race of becoming theory create such unusual forms that can only intrigue an audience of an ever-smaller group of elite individuals, thus the enjoyment and the understanding of art is not available for many. The avangard expansion and artistic attitude, in essence, ignores and looks down on wider , non-elite audiences.

In the chapter entitled *Theories with Limited Responsibility and the End of Art* I review the particularities of modern art important to my subject. In the title *Wolfgang Iser* I refer to the difficulty and the obligation faced in modern art without rules and functions. I also point out the fact that aesthetics is not a discipline, which can be analyzed according to any universally acknowledged canon or terminology. Art theories and sciences, similarly to the way contemporary art, have to come up with their own expectations and rules to answer the challenges posed by modern art.

One of the pillars of modern art theory is the theory of the triple universe (Miklós Almásí). This theory is the eastatics and art philosophical establishment of the two world theory in a way of classifying the classical and the avangard paradigms into high art and high culture categories, while popular paradigms are categorised into the low art class.

The first great challenge of modern art theory is art's transformation into a language. It has to create such a “grammar” that cannot refer to its subject as a meaningful unit. The interpreter faces the problem of understanding and interpretation. The interpreter can also end

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<sup>1</sup> De Duve, 1989/2001. 61. p.

<sup>2</sup> De Duve, 1989/2001. 90. p.

<sup>3</sup> Danto, 1997. 30-31. p.

up on the lost highway of the structure of his own interpretation, which can also be a boundless hermeneutical trap; or else he has to view the interpretation as an applied example of art, i.e. a new form of contemporary art. The interpreter's other challenge – as *Michel Foucault*<sup>4</sup>, *Craig Owens*<sup>5</sup> and *Erica Doss*<sup>6</sup> point out – comes in correlation to the representation, in which he has to come against the danger of (not unlike in the case of art) becoming the modern tool of power, this sometimes happens quite unintentionally.

The viewer is often disappointed over the defenceless nature of the theory; he sees the confusion and interpretational problem as a deliberate refusal. Because he is not satisfied with the interpretation (or he does not understand it), he sees it as an obstacle on the road to art, one that locks him out of the kingdom of all knowledge.

The art theory (*Jose Ortega y Gasset*<sup>7</sup>, *Walter Benjamin*<sup>8</sup>) came to the conclusion that modern art and modern art theory choose their audience: In reality they limit it to only a small elite of viewers and “masses” - the latter taking up most of the population. The artist - who is in full knowledge of her absolute authenticity – claims full power over her artistic language. Ready made considers this as the symbol of artistic right for declaring something art. The artist then ends up in an aporic situation, trapped in her own catch: In reality, ready made vests the context (the authorities, power) with right of declaring what art really is. And because the audience questions this right for artistic authenticity – I describe this matter in the *Autonomies* chapter – they start building their own autonomy. We therefore can witness two autonomies standing besides/against one another: The autonomy of modern art and the autonomy of “unprofessionally”.

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with the revival of art, there has been a search for the solution for the ontologic dilemma posed by the lack of definition for the general function of art and the general loss of transcendental idea in art. The place as the social energy and motivation for art is taken over from the theological explanation in the *Kunstwollen* and it is taken over by the inspiration and the potential of art.

The many trends of avangard art, its contextual and formal diversity found new meaning after the nullification and reinterpretation of these notions, through the idea of the “open piece of art” (Eco). Based on the opinions of *Wolfgang Iser*<sup>9</sup>, *Umberto Eco*<sup>10</sup>, *Miklós*

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<sup>4</sup> Foucault, M. 1971, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Owens, C. 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Doss, E. 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Ortega y Gasset, J. 1944/1993. 8. p.

<sup>8</sup> De Duve, T. 1989/2001.

<sup>9</sup> Iser, W. 1976/ Miklós Almási 1992. 44. p.

<sup>10</sup> Eco, U. 2006.

*Almási*<sup>11</sup> and other art theorists in the last chapter of my exposition I describe a realisation, according to which these interpretations can be viewed as parts of such a suggestion that sees the creation of art as a constructive collaboration of tangible subjects. This activity creates art by moving within the “possibility space” (*Eco*) created by the open piece of art, and/or generates art within the realms of the historically produced “artistic space” (*Bourdieu*<sup>12</sup>). The starting point of the theory is the realisation of these theorists according to which the piece of art is in large part created by the interpreter/user, who re-creates the piece, as it were.

The introduction of the *outside subject* makes new approaches possible. Based on contemporary art theories – mainly that of *Eco*’s – this approach sees art manifest itself in to relations: the one between the artist and the piece of art, and between the piece of art and the outside subject. The art is viewed as a relationship and it can take as many shades as many outside subjects become attached to it. As a consequence the classification of art and its audiences loses its point and the maintenance of the dual nature of cultural and artistic worlds. This view corresponds with the accepted theory of “usage” and its ecstatic acknowledgment. The concept of the outside viewer is not identical with the classic ecstatic recipient, as this artistic theory is different from previous definitions as well. The outside subject as a part of life embodies democratisation, as much as it does the correlation between art and life, which is one of the main preferences of modern art.

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<sup>11</sup> Miklós Almási 1992. 45. p.

<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu, P. 1992/2001. 95-106. p.

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