

IV. TOWARDS TOTAL ART: NEGATION AS MOVEMENT¹

So, change in art as a process of transformation of the relationship between creating and reality.

I take reality as one of the basic elements in the creative — artistic — process because of the direct connection between art and reality.

I take creation as the second basic element in the analysis, and I consider it a result of the idea and its externalization.

...

And all four (reality, idea, externalization and creation) as atoms in the molecule of that which is called art.

In spite of the my skepticism towards evolutionary theories in the arts, I am of the opinion that changes in art can be investigated as a process of movement; not a priori progress observed as a (linear, circular, elliptical or spiral) line in a distinct direction; but rather as movement in coordinates without dimensions.

In order to simplify the process (and because of the personal preference for the aesthetic of the visual arts and music), I will ob-

¹ Written in 1983; originally published in *Razgledi: umetnost, kultura, nauka i opšttestveni prašanja* (Skopje, god. 37, br. 3–4, mart–april 1994, 134–137).

serve the changes in the relationships between these four atoms through the changes in the visual arts, hoping those observations might one day be extrapolated to the movement of art in general.

1. OBJECTIVIZED ART CREATION

The tradition of realistic painting: the tendencies (if not the achievements) from prehistoric (i.e. post-syncretic) to socialist realism and hyper-realism, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, etc.

The “similarity” of the artwork to “the original” is considered important, and theories of the “objective reflection” of reality emerge, which bring themselves to a sophism or to an absurd due to the susceptibility of these theories to subjectivity (which is incompatible with their basic concept).

Counter-point: “the original” is negated by the act of artistic creation itself, while for its part the act is itself crucified between re-creation of the reality and the subjectivization, which is a key driver of creation.

2. SUBJECTIVIZED ART CREATION

The Impressionists, Expressionist, Cubists, El Greco, Modigliani, Van Gogh, et al.

The reality is still important as a starting point for the artwork (which then goes through the phase of artistic processing), but externalization based on similarity yields to subjectivized externalization.

Counter-point: negated similarity with the initial (objective) object.

3. SUBJECTIVE ART CREATION

Abstract and non-representative painting, Malevich, Pollock, etc. Reality is rejected as an art element. The roles and the possi-

bilities of the idea and of the externalization are liberated from some restrictions.

Counter-point: the importance of reality as a starting point of the art act is being negated or diminished.

But the same — reality — is still the final segment of the process: idea — creation — externalization. The externalization is still manifested in a physical (objective) object. One can do without reality only at the beginning of the art act.

4. NON-PAINTING, MEDIATING

The Dadaists, Marcel Duchamp, etc.

The creation boils down to idea-externalization. The art act does not highlight object creation, but instead object mediation; in this process (the artist's mediation), the object gains artistic meaning (a pissoir transported to a museum with no physical interventions). Reality (the object) passes through the act: idea — creation — externalization, without a classical (physically materialized) creative intervention.

Counter-argument: the creative process as a process resulting in the creation of a physical object is rejected on behalf of the idea (of mediation, in this case). A physical object still exists, but it is only mediated, not created or altered by the artist.

5. NON-PAINTING, NON-MEDIATING, HAPPENING

Alan Kaprov ("18 Happenings in 6 Parts"), Ben Vautier (who lived in the storefront of Gallery One in London for a week in 1962), Josef Honys (who organized a fake funeral for himself titled "Mystification Event", invited his friends, and then, unbeknown to them — killed himself, in 1969), Tehching Hsieh (who turns most of his life into a work of art by performing simple, but difficult projects, each one one-year long), Joseph Beuys (with a good portion of his oeuvre), etc.

The event, meaning — the externalization itself, is the artwork. No material art is left behind the happening.

Counter-argument: nothing is left behind the art act, yet it is precisely the material remainder that is one of the destinations of classical art.

6. NON-PAINTING, NON-MEDIATING, NON-HAPPENING, IMAGINING

Dr. Charles Harpole (who insists there is a film inside a film can, but does not show it to anyone, insisting that the act of imagining the film in the can is what matters)...

The idea itself is the art, without the mediation of (physical) creation nor of (spatiotemporal) externalization in the classical sense.

The imagining of the art act, or more precisely — of the artwork — is the work itself.

Counter-point: no objective act exists behind the art, but only an act of imagining, which is deeply subjective and — for the first time — unexternalized. So, not only is leaving material remainder behind avoided, but so is the objective act of a physical (spatio-temporal) act.

7. NON-PAINTING, NON-MEDIATING, NON-HAPPENING, NON-IMAGINING, NEGATING

Achieving the state of non-imagining an idea of artwork is the act of art. So, not only state in which there is no material remainder nor an objective art, but also no imagining of the art, state in which there is no thought of art². This state of absolute intentional absence of an idea of an artwork, in a situation when reality, physical creation and externalization have already been eliminated — is art itself.

Counter-point: negating the idea means negating the self as a being of ideas, which ultimately means negation of art as well.

² Tehching Hsieh followed up his one-year projects with a ten-year-long project of not thinking about art decades after this essay was written in 1983.

Potential counter-point to the counter-point: the self-negation does not have to mean negating art. Art is not identification with the being (with its temporarily physical, spatiotemporal or idea manifestation in art); instead, once created, it can exist independently of the existence of the being, which means that the negation of the existence of the being, could mean culmination — meaning, total art.