



aesthetics in action

edited by Krystyna Wilkoszewska



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Preface

The 18th volume of the International Yearbook of Aesthetics comprises a selection of papers presented at the 19th International Congress of Aesthetics, which took place in Cracow in 2013.

The Congress entitled “Aesthetics in Action” was intended to cover an extended research area of aesthetics going beyond the fine arts towards various forms of human practice. In this way it bore witness to the transformation that aesthetics has been undergoing for a few decades at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Apart from lectures the Congress presentations were also delivered in the form of debates – four plenary panels and about 20 panel sessions. The present volume includes all plenary panels and seven selected panel sessions. The remaining majority of the papers presented at the Congress will be published online.

Four plenary sessions were prepared by eminent scholars, usually authors of their own conceptions, who expand and modify the research area of aesthetics.

Arnold Berleant organized the session „Aesthetic Engagement” inviting Mădălina Diaconu, Nathalie Blanc, Jale Erzen and Cheng Xiangzhan to take part in it.

Outlining the subject of the debate, Arnold Berleant, the author of the topical concept, indicated the deep transformations occurring in art in the 1960s and 1970s. Innovatory artistic practices made art transcend its traditional limits and, in its new forms, demanded ways of perception different than the traditional ones. The aesthetic experience, which had been treated as a disinterested perception of a work of art by its perceiver since the days of Immanuel Kant, was now founded on involvement and participation.

At the same time it assumed a holistic, contextual and multisensual character. According to Berleant, the concept of “aesthetic engagement” and the conception of new aesthetics developed on its basis allow for a better understanding of the transformations that take place in contemporary art as well as for revitalizing of the perception of traditional art. It is this very category that is the focal point of all speeches delivered by the participants of the debate, dealing with various topics. For instance, while grasping the phenomenon of the wind, M. Diakonu indicates different forms of aesthetic engagement, N. Blanc considers the problems of aesthetic engagement in urban environment while J. Erzen ponders “how art and images can be effective in the symbolic ordering of our social relations.” On the basis of the idea of aesthetic engagement and in reference to deep ecology and “traditional Chinese aesthetic wisdom”, Cheng Xiangzhan offers his own conception of Ecosophy C.

Aleš Erjavec prepared the debate on “Aesthetics and Politics”. Asking the questions: Is art political or not? Is it political or politicized? and using three selected examples, he demonstrated the diversity and complexity of forms that the relation between art, aesthetics and politics may assume. Emphasizing that these relations were usually „difficult”, and frequently even conflicting, he discussed the problem mostly in reference to aesthetics of realism and formalist aesthetics in the days dominated by Marxist ideology. At the end he paid more attention to Rancière’s conception, which constitutes a new interpretation of the relations between art, aesthetics and politics. The participants invited to the panel session focused their attention on diverse issues: Miško Šuvaković claims that after the fall of Berlin wall and the end of the cold war conditions for re-examination of the concepts of “politics” and “the politic” came into being. “In postmodern and then globalised neoliberal society, politics has acquired the character of techno-managerial cultural practice, moving from fundamental social, global questions to individual cultural as well as artistic activities...”. Tyrus Miller executed a reconstruction of the views of Albrecht Wellmer, formed in polemics with the representatives of the Frankfurt School, mostly Adorno and Habermas, regarding functioning of art (especially music) in a multidimensional context. Gabriela Świtek discussed the problem of “architecture as politics” using one selected example – that of an exhibition of architecture in Poland in 1953 (the time of Stalinism and socrealism) – supporting her interpretations with Rancière’s views on art, aesthetics and politics.

The participants of the plenary session “Somaesthetics” organized by Richard Shusterman included Tanehisa Otabe, Else Marie Bukdahl and Krystyna Wilkoszewska.

The author of somaesthetics explained that this new term was necessary to cover the broad range of problems related to our body, our “tool of tools”. The body is the basis for our actions, perceptions and thoughts. Shusterman indicates that although in the main current of philosophy the problems of body were neglected, at the very beginning of Western philosophy as well as in the Eastern thought, it enjoyed attention. This tradition should be continued, since “our bodies express the fundamental ambiguity of human existence”: the body is both the subject and the object, it gives us the sense of species community as well as individual uniqueness, it makes us different from animals but, at the same time, relates us to them through evolution, it draws the limits to our freedom, but it also makes this freedom possible, and the same regards our perception (cognition). Shusterman emphasizes the meliorative character of somaesthetics; as an interdisciplinary research area it serves to improve the culture of life of both individuals and communities. The participants of the panel session spoke, in turn, about: the position of somaesthetics in the history of Western and Eastern thought and culture, possibility of somaesthetic interpretation of works of art, trans-disciplinary character of somaesthetics on the boundary between the humanities and natural sciences, especially in the context of new achievements in biotechnology and theory of evolution.

For the debate concerning “Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics” Wolfgang Welsch invited Peng Feng and Eduardo Kac, who are – though in slightly different proportions – both artists and theoreticians. He did it in accord with his conviction that nowadays artists as well as scientists contribute to better understanding of changes taking place in culture. Welsch reminded that he used the formula “aesthetics beyond aesthetics” for the first time in 1995 during the ICA in Lahti, having in mind the expansion of aesthetic research to the areas beyond art, especially since they are undergoing progressive aesthetization. Aesthetics should follow the path of the avant-garde of the 20th century, which transgressed the boundaries of autonomous art (“art beyond art”). The plenary panel was supposed to be a continuation of this idea, especially that certain phenomena had become intensified. And so, both philosophers and artists perform a „transition from substance to process ontology”. Moreover, nowadays we move from thinking in the categories of opposition to that based on the idea of continuity. This regards

particularly the relation the man-the world or, in other words, human and nonhuman. „The human cannot be understood – as modernity would have it – exclusively in human terms”. Numerous artists follow this direction nowadays. On the basis of an example of the curated by him China pavilion at Venice Biennale 2011, Pen Feng showed how “aesthetics and contemporary art meet each other when they go beyond their boundaries”. Eduardo Kac, a world-renowned artist and the author of the terms “bio-art” and “transgenic art” introduced us – in the language of theory – into the trail of thought that accompanied creation of his subsequent works of art.

As regards panel sessions, the papers which were most representative for the subject of the Congress, and prepared by European, Japanese and Chinese aestheticians were selected for publication. (Unfortunately, not all participants delivered their papers prepared for publication.)

Polona Tratnik prepared a panel session on the subject of aesthetic and political aspects of biotechnological art and Michał Ostrowicki (Sidey Myoo) – that on electronic art.

Our friends from Japan were particularly active. The panel sessions which they prepared referred both more general issues: „Aesthetic Practice in the Life of East Asia” (Takao Aoki), „City, Ruins and Landscape” (Yuko Nakama) and the problems of contemporary Japan: “Applied Social Art: The Potential of Art and Criticism after March 11, 2011” (Akiko Kasuya), „Aesthetics Accounts on Japanese Pop-culture” (Hisashi Muroi).

The panel session concerning “Chinese Aesthetics and Art”, prepared for the Congress by Eva Man, is presented in this volume in a slightly different form, thanks to active help received from Wang Keping.

From three to five participants from different countries and, quite frequently, from different cultures took part in each panel session. We do hope that the papers comprised in the 18th volume of the International Yearbook of Aesthetics discuss the important and most vividly debated problems of contemporary aesthetics.