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Edited by Vítor Moura and Connell Vaughan



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Table of Contents

Sérgio Pinto Amorim <i>The Forms, the Architect, and the Act of Doing Architecture</i>	1
Pedro Borges de Araújo <i>Notes on Aesthetics in Architecture</i>	15
Emanuele Arielli <i>AI-aesthetics and the artificial author</i>	40
Alessandro Bertinotto <i>Habits of Unexpectedness. Expressiveness in Musical Improvisation (and Beyond)</i>	55
Thorstein Botz-Bornstein <i>Guilt and Shame: Ethics and Aesthetic</i>	84
Gregorio Fiori Carones <i>Simmel and the Aesthetics of Luxury</i>	94
Veronika Darida <i>The Aesthetics of Gesture</i>	110
Harry Drummond <i>Pitches and Paintings: A Conferralist Theory of Art</i>	124
Hannah Fasnacht <i>Different Levels of Narrative Pictorial Content</i>	139
Anna Fech <i>What's the "New" in "New Extractivism"? Tracing Postdigital Aesthetics in Vladan Joler's Assemblage</i>	167
Stacie Friend <i>Fiction, Belief and Understanding</i>	185

iii

Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics, vol. 15, 2023

Pablo Genazzano	<i>General Remarks for a Historical and Systematic Reconstruction of Kant's Analytic of the Sublime</i>	205
Jeffrey Goodman	<i>Should We Accept Fictional Universals?</i>	217
Peter Hajnal	<i>Aesthetic Education and Embodiment: Notes Toward a Cavellian Approach</i>	234
Sarah Hegenbart	<i>Democratic and aesthetic participation as imposition: On the aesthetics of the collective</i>	252
Gizela Horváth	<i>Displaying Participatory Art</i>	271
René Jagnow	<i>Multisensory Experience of Paintings</i>	285
Lev Kreft	<i>Resentiment, Artivism and Magic</i>	305
Efi Kyprianidou	<i>Moral disgust and imaginative resistance</i>	316
Federico Lauria	<i>Values in the Air: Musical Contagion, Social Appraisal and Metaphor Experience</i>	328
Leonardo Lenner	<i>From Concept to Image and Vice Versa: the Philosophical Frontispiece</i>	344
Lukáš Makky	<i>Revisiting the concept of the end of art</i>	363
Martino Manca	<i>For the Snark was a Boojum. Towards a Positive Aesthetics of Literary Nonsense</i>	384
Sofia Miguens	<i>The many ways of doing philosophy of architecture (and what they tell us about contemporary philosophy and the place of aesthetics in it)</i>	396
Davide Mogetta	<i>Between Art and Philosophy. Patterns of Baxandall's Criticism</i>	406

Francisca Pérez-Carreño <i>Fiction as Representation. Or the Verbal Icon Revisited</i>	419
Dan Eugen Ratiu <i>Objects at Work: How Do Artefacts Work Aesthetically in Everyday Organizational Life?</i>	431
Matthew Rowe <i>The Implications of Mistakes About Art: Ontological and Epistemological</i>	458
Merel Semeijn <i>Common Belief and Make-believe</i>	471
Thomas Symeonidis <i>On the different meanings of aestheticization</i>	486
Malgorzata A. Szyszkowska <i>The Impression of Music: Edmund Gurney's ideas about music in The Power of Sound</i>	497
Elettra Villani <i>Aesthetic versus functional: overcoming their dichotomy in T. W. Adorno's Functionalism today</i>	511
Andrew Wynn Owen <i>Does a plausible construal of aesthetic value give us reason to emphasize some aesthetic practices over others?</i>	522
Giulia Zerbinati <i>The Truth of Art. A Reflection starting from Hegel and Adorno</i>	533

Revisiting the concept of the end of art

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ABSTRACT. This paper reanalyses the issue and the concept of the end of art as a biased, ambiguous and (from the aestheticians' point of view) controversial phenomena. The aim of the paper is not to place the end of art in different era, or to concrete artistic tendency, but to analyse and refocus on the issue of the end of art as such. Central part of the paper is the assumption that in order to evaluate the problem correctly, we must first accept the end of art as a purely theoretical concept, with all its connotations and implications. Afterwards we can approach the issue more critically. The issue of the end of art will be dealt with on two levels. At the first level we will identify all the situations that can be understood as an aspect(s) of the end of art; concretely the paper will introduce ontological, axiological, historical, interpretational and receptional end of art/situation of the end of art. The second part of the paper will build upon the argument that our history is full of these situations, and that we can understand the end of art, under certain condition, as a milestone of the history of art.

1. Introduction

The development of fine art of the 20th Century can be defined by at least three significant theoretical concepts: the death of the author (Barthes, 1977),²⁷¹ the poetics of open work (Eco,

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²⁷¹ When Roland Barthes (1977) wrote his famous essay *The death of the Author* (published first in 1967) he focused on the rising issue of the place of the recipient in the existence of art. His approach tried to highlight that the "source of the artwork" is based no more only on the intention, activity, and mental state of the author. He was not trying to say that authors are dead or not important anymore, but that this concept, and this role of it in the ontology and epistemology of art, is no longer dominant.

1989)²⁷², and the end of art (Danto, 1984).²⁷³ All three of them have the same basis: abandoning and questioning the traditional concepts and notions of the theory of art. They react to the rejection of the classical structures and forms of art, and represent a similar mode of thinking that identifies a necessary and incoming change in art, and its further theoretical revision.

Even if the death of the author and the poetics of open work are, to some extent, present in the thoughts about the end of art (they cover the axiological and ontological issue of the end of art as a concept), and they are a reaction to some aspects of the situation that initiated the concept of the end of art, the paper will explicitly focus only on the end of art as a concept and will work with the other two concepts only to the extent of exploring this issue. Another reason to write only about the end of art is the fact that the end of art, with its Hegelian tradition, almost romanticist melancholy, and a dialectic of “new” (inferior) and “old” (extraordinary valuable) was, with its controversy, maybe the most visible, and, at the same time, least discussed concept. At the same time, the discourse of the end of art did not bring any productive perspective (with some exceptions²⁷⁴), because theoreticians were divided into two groups: a) the critical group of theoreticians that agreed with the absence of quality in contemporary art (therefore a group of theoreticians that confronted/compared old and new forms of art) and b) the group of theoreticians claiming that the outcome of the theory was based on the wrong choice of methodology, and declined the validity of the theory of the end of art.

In recent years, we can see a growing interest (Wolek, 2022) in the issue of the end of art, maybe determined by the new situation in the art world, especially the discussion about AI

²⁷² *Open Work* (published first in year 1962) has neither axiological meaning nor axiological nature: it is not an alteration for aesthetic or any other value. Openness, understood as the fundamental indeterminacy of an artistic message, is a constant of every work in every age, and is not a tendency that only emerged with modern paintings. The structure of open work must be seen as a general model that describes not just a group of artworks, but a group of artworks in a particular receptive relationship to their recipients. The first prerequisite for any possibility of the existence of an open work is the understanding of the artwork as a malleable mode. Openness, which in Eco's (1989) understanding, is an adequate label for the new dialectic between work and performer, must be understood in relation to conventions.

²⁷³ We need to distinguish between the concept of the end of art, and the end of the history of art (Belting, 1987), even if the second one is a direct derivation of the first one or rather a disciplinary reaction to the first one. Belting argued that the crisis in art is a direct reaction of the inner issues within the disciplines of the history of art, and that the discipline as such, need to be reviewed and renewed.

²⁷⁴ It is highly questionable whether Danto's classification of art, through the optics of the end of art, can be considered a productive contribution, since he was only developing his own approach. His identification of post historical art, on the other hand, is a useful way of identifying new poetic and a great contribution to the issue on the definition of art (see Danto, 2014).

art, and therefore a need for new ontology or different and more “stable” (maybe humanist) definition of the art. As a significant contribution to this issue, we can name the translation of Danto’s *After the end of art* into Czech (2021), growing interest in Danto by Šárka Lojdrová (2019, 2023) or Raquel Cascales (2019) the Prešov project (2018-2020)²⁷⁵ focused on the revision of the concept of the end of art based of Hegel’s thoughts that produced, for example, some publications about the real contribution of Hegel’s thoughts in this concept (Kvokačka, 2018), about different productive methodology to avoid the end of art as a real danger for art (Makky, 2019a; Sošková, 2018, 2019), and papers trying to find the historical, axiological, and theoretical beginning of this concept (Makky, 2018a, 2018b; Migašová, 2018), and some revision of the concept itself (Makky, 2019b). The evaluation and actualization of the concept is, therefore, necessary, but this “rethinking” should not be just an actualization in the “date” of the end of art as was Danto’s (1984) thinking an actualization of Hegel’s thoughts and his triads.²⁷⁶ The system and mechanism of the end of art as such needs to be evaluated and critically reviewed.

Therefore, the end of art, is understood in this paper as a declaration of artistic decline,²⁷⁷ or identification of such an intensive and dynamic change in art that it forced various theoreticians to reminisce “melancholically” towards “old” art and despise new art.²⁷⁸ We can assume that the announcement of the end of art, is a reaction, or outcome, of the identification of a big change, or even main transformation of art, and is, in some sense, a response to this future change/crisis. At the same time, it may be a theoretical reaction to the intangibility of “the new”, “the different”, and the inability to propose a functional methodology for further

²⁷⁵ The title of the project, led by the late Jana Sošková, was 150 Years of the "End of Art" in Reflections and Analyses of Philosophical, Aesthetic and Art Theories.

²⁷⁶ Hegel (1975) considered that the final stage (note that he speaks about *final stage*, not definitive stage) of the evolution of the art, self-awareness of absolute spirit, was the period of romantic art, but Arthur Danto (1984) assumed, instead, that the end of art arrived with Andy Warhol and his *Brillo box* (1964). Hegel was convinced that the absolute spirit cannot any longer evolve in the field of art, but Danto has different reasons to set the end of art in the 20th century. The same concept, different approach, reasoning, and motivation.

²⁷⁷ The disillusionment with cultural development and the subsequent harsh criticism of actual artistic production is not an achievement of the twentieth century, but appeared long before Hegel announced the end of art, despite the fact that in his case it was not a reaction to the level of criticism and value standards of art (see Makky, 2018a, 2018b and Winckelmann, 1986).

²⁷⁸ Too much criticism leads to the idea of art’s failure, as evidenced by the very concept of the end of art. Jana Sošková concluded that the end of art was (and therefore probably always will be) only the announcement of an axiological crisis that manifested itself in society and which art naturally tried to reflect or was affected by (Sošková, 2010, p. 118).

understanding or research of art. Within this frame of thinking, there is not only one possible issue, or reason, that can conclude in the identification of the end of art, and I am convinced that these reasons can result in different scenarios, classifications, or understanding (maybe even the acceptance) of the end of art. The purpose of the paper is therefore a revision of the concept of the end of art, with the hypothesis that we need to accept and understand the end of art as a possible milestone in the history of art, and as a solely theoretical concept but I would like to stress that this revision will be not a reconstructive kind of approach, summarising every respected authority in the given issue. The aim of the paper is not to decide whether the end of art truly appeared and was reality once, in other words, whether Hegel, Danto, Belting, or others were right, or wrong, but to analyse different aspects of the theoretical construct of the end of art, and their consequences in the understanding of art development.

Any new, or actualised, approach of the concept of the end of art needs to be based on four arguments:

- A) the critique of the concept of the end of art cannot result from a biased position, but from a correct non-unilateral examination of art and its theoretical grasp;
- B) the rejection or the acceptance of the end of art has to work with a complex, correct, and specific object of examination (art) which has to be theoretically defined and classified. A definition of art (even a working definition) is a condition/requirement of such a formulated theoretical aim;²⁷⁹
- C) the analysis of the end of art also requires a theoretical examination of its beginning and development, for which an examination of the conditions of the birth of art and of the forms in which it existed *at the beginning* are needed;²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ The definition of art has always been discussed by theorists in some form or another, but the discourse had never gained such intensity in the past as after Weitz's (1956) critique of the possibility of definitions of art. The essentialist and anti-essentialist camps embarked on a sharp critique of each other and brought forth several approaches (institutionalist, functionalist, contextualist, cluster definition...), mostly based on necessary and sufficient conditions, i.e. on precisely the criteria that Weitz rejected and questioned. The debate on the definition of art is not yet over, it has just been muted for a while, but the current situation around AI art raises a new need for definitions (see, e. g.: Davies, 1991; Stecker, 2013).

²⁸⁰ The origin of art also determines, from a definitional (Levinson, 1979) and ontological point of view, the moment that determines the future direction. In fact, it is not the moment itself that is important, but the activity from which art originated, if it did not originate as a separate specific activity (cult, dance, increasing the chances of survival, reducing stressors) and the reasons for this origination or profiling of artistic activity (see Davies, 2010, 2012; Dyssanayake, 1995, 2009).

- D) the examination of the end of art requires an analysis of those transformative processes which could have been determining or colliding, and not only stating a specific deviation and examining of the final phenomenon and situation.

Even if these four arguments are crucial for the revision of the concept of the end of art, the paper cannot analyse them separately, or defend their logic. In this paper, they are simply a background for further analysis, and the aim of the paper is not to discuss them. I will bear in mind that if we want to rethink the concept of the end of art, we need to accept it only as a concept, and try to work with it, not necessary argue, that it's misleading or wrong. This acceptance can create a different viewpoint in the evaluation of the concept, but it can also open some argumentative options. The aim of the paper will be fulfilled in two parts. The first part will identify all the situations that can be understood as an aspect of the end of art. I will argue that if we decide to accept the end of art, we cannot express it as the "final stage of art" but as a way of narration (Danto, 2014), expressing the situation in the art world, or as an identification of change in the art world. I will therefore argue that we can identify different ends of art, or a different situation of the end of art. The second part of the paper will build upon the argument that our history is full of these "ending" situations, but that does not mean that the end of art as the final stage of the evolution of art is real, rather that the development of art is full of different successes and "errors", or, seemingly, errors. This attitude does not change even if we consider AI art.

2. The ends of art or multiple/different situation of the end of art

Usually, Hegel, Danto, and Belting are considered to be representatives of the theory of the end of art, but their approach can be defined only as the identification of the axiological and historical limits of art. However, if we accept the end of art as of form of a criticism of new and different art forms, the development of art, or the outcome of such criticism, we need to analyse all the different reasons for such a critique, or different motivations for theoreticians to announce the end of art or authors that helped with the identification of possible art crisis. Furthermore, those reasons are not just axiological or historical. The forthcoming distinction is an outcome of analysing more theorists than just Hegel, Danto, or Belting who explicitly

named the end of art, and is also the outcome of analysing of an approach by authors with the same logic of art criticism, but without the explicit announcement of the end of art. Authors belonging to the analysed material are for example: Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Jan Joachim Winckelmann, Umberto Eco, James Elkins, Wolfgang Iser and others. We can identify different situations of the end of art, or different aspects of the end of art, that are present thorough of the history of art, and theory as such. Those situations of the end of art are: (a) ontological, (b) axiological, (c) historical, (d) interpretative, and (e) receptive.

2.1 The ontological end of art, or the ontological situation of the end of art

Based on the approach of Georg Didi-Huberman (2006), one can speak of two beginnings, or rather of dualistic beginning, of art history.²⁸¹ However, if art history began twice, at least one of them must have ended, or both existed at the same time.²⁸² Walter Benjamin anticipated this when he concluded that art history did not exist. He demanded that art history should finally begin, or rather begin to exist again. That is to say, they began to exist again in the form, as Benjamin writes, of a “history of the works of art themselves” (Didi-Huberman, 2006, pp. 96). Having said that, Benjamin is not merely asking for the history of art to begin anew, he is purposely searching for his own object of history. He asks for the being of art and questions its actual existence, or he questions the ontological status of art and demands a revision of the history of art. In fact, he does not want “art history to really begin”, but for a new art to emerge that will confidently answer the challenge of the reproductive arts (Benjamin, 2008), and for art history to begin to write about this new art. In his theory, the existence of art depends on two categories: (1) here and (2) now, which determine the originality of a work of art and guarantees its existence. In order for art to be the subject of history, it must exist and exhibit specific features that distance (and classify) it from other physical and metaphysical realities. When Benjamin demands the preservation of an aura that determines the originality and unmistakability of the artwork, he is demanding not only uniqueness, but also an ontological

²⁸¹ The history of art began twice: first with Pliny the Elder and a few centuries later with Giorgio Vasari (Didi-Huberman, 2006).

²⁸² If one history of art disappeared, it had to be replaced by another history (perhaps not in the sense of the ancient understanding of art). Belting's (1987) thesis of the end of art history then has merit and justifies the revisionist conceptions of art history that emerged in the 1980s calling for the emergence of a new art history (Kesner, 2005).

guarantee of the specific existence of the artwork (Benjamin, 2008). He describes the whole danger of the extinction and decline of art through a critique of technical reproducibility, which distorts and 'dissolves' the aura of the work of art. The ontological certainty that the work of art, at least ostensibly, brought with it is disrupted by the admission of the reproductive arts,²⁸³ and the whole concept of art is called into question. By this disposition and this danger, he identifies the ontological hazard to the existence of art, and therefore identifies situation, that is, in the paper, explained as an ontological situation (danger) of the end of art.

The ontological situation of the end of art occurs when art loses its being, its characteristic features, its uniqueness, its identity; its aura. It is most visible when we are unable to distinguish the original from the copy, or even from some object of everyday use. The ontological base of the work of art is therefore questionable, because the identity, and essence of the work of art extinguishes/disappears. In the Heideggerian (2014) sense, art loses what its source is and what creates it. In the Benjaminian sense, it is the absence or disappearance of the essential quality, the "fine thread" that connects all art across time to its original nature, when art was an instrument of the cult and was closer to religion than to art in the true sense of the word. Once art loses its specificity and uniqueness, a situation can arise that, when two similar objects are placed side by side, not only can we not tell which is the original and which is a copy/falsification, we don't even dare to determine which of those objects is art and which is not. Such an end of art can occur in two cases:

- 1) the work loses its contextual specificity and is no longer part of the art world: it loses its value and justification to be considered art,

²⁸³ "From a photographic plate, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense" proclaims Walter Benjamin (2008, pp. 24-25), revealing the problem that "technical reproducibility" implies for art history and its development. A serious ontological problem of the identity (or commensurability) of the value of the original and its copy emerges. Benjamin rejects this possibility altogether, or questions the consideration of the original copy. Martin Heidegger (2014), on the other hand, argues that correspondence to beings has long been taken to be the essence of truth. Heidegger's account of reproduction gives the possibility to think about correspondence. About the correspondence between the original and the copy or the original copy and, from an aesthetic perspective, it is important; from an artistic perspective, the copy is not so serious and thus Heidegger puts the aesthetic and the artistic in polarity. The problem is that, paradoxically, the existence of art need not then be tied to the original, and thus art becomes even more elusive. Nelson Goodman (1976) refuses to identify the aesthetic value of the original and the copy, no matter how identical the fake looks. According to him, the mere fact that there is an aesthetic difference between two seemingly identical images is reason enough to search for an aesthetic difference (Goodman, 1976).

2) the specification of art loses its identity and the interchangeability of two seemingly identical objects is quite normal.²⁸⁴

2.2 Axiological situation of the end of art, or axiological end of art

In the interaction and reflection of contemporary art, we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, art is ascribed lofty ideals (based on classical art),²⁸⁵ often understood as conditions for the definition and existence of art, and at the same time, contemporary art is unable to fulfil them; on the other hand, art as such has lost its significance and social (not historical) justification or reach and critical energy/responsibility towards society. In this respect, it is very easy to perceive the failure of art, since “As is clearly seen in the case of painting, the more reduced the social impact of an art form, the more widely criticism and enjoyment of it diverge in the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, while the truly new is criticized with aversion” (Benjamin, 2008, p. 36).

The intention of moving towards an ideal (whatever we imagine by it in the classical or modern sense, it is always a goal to be attempted to be fulfilled), towards some central value of art, is in itself, limiting and determining, or temporally expiring. Winckelmann (1986), as the theorist who turned his attention to ancient art and in effect predetermined the future direction and limits of "our" art, speaks of the perfection of art by its constant pursuit of the ideal of beauty as its own goal of fulfilment. In his preference for Greek art, which alone reached the pinnacle of artistic creation and thus became an eternal ideal worthy of following (it is an artistic realization that reached as close as possible to the (Platonic) ideal of beauty and offered the recipients an approximate but still obscured idea of the goal), he identified several limits of "Western art". On the one hand, it is the very notion of the goal itself, which is of a past nature, and such art will always be bound by a certain time, space, and cultural schema;

²⁸⁴ It can be clearly seen that the problem of the ontological indeterminacy of art, or the ontological moment of the end of art, is closely related to the definition and impossibility of defining art in relation to other realities. In this way, the definitional problem and the issue of the possible announcement of the end of art constantly support and nourish each other. This problem has reappeared in a new and significant way with the advent of AI art.

²⁸⁵ Already, in antiquity we can see three basic ideals of human existence that had not left us even in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is the good (ethics), truth (philosophy), and beauty (art), which were often merged in a single ideal. Winckelmann believes that art is an essential part of our existence and elevates us to the better (Stromšík, 1986, p. 26), demonstrating exactly this way of thinking and programmatically subscribing to the ancient tradition (Winckelmann, 1986, p. 123).

on the other hand, it is the belief in the existence of an ideal that can be successfully fulfilled or achieved: one is accustomed to speak of a golden age. This is a logical error in reasoning and a real assumption of the axiological failure of art.

The axiological situation of the end of art was thoroughly demonstrated by Arthur Danto (2003), who, in fact, tried, in his approach, to identify a new “ideal” model of art, which, in his view, could be not based on beauty any longer. In fact, the result of his research and examination was a state of disappointment, since he found the new ideal and model even fell into a definitional crisis, but clearly came to the conviction that beauty had long since ceased to be the dominant category of art. His scepticism stemmed from a more "classical" conception of beauty, and he was unwilling to admit any other view, thus coming to the conviction that art was finished.

In determining any values of art (whether they are exclusively artistic and aesthetic, or otherwise), we may, sooner or later, come to believe that art does not meet our expectations, given that art is constantly transforming. It follows that if we live by the praise of past art, we live in error and self-deception; if we live in understanding with contemporary art, we are open to possibilities and cannot slip into a regressive conception of art (as a result of the failing of the linear/progressive understanding of art). The idea of some ideal is always treacherous. In the pursuit of it, in the event of failure, disappointment, and criticism of the failing practice sets in. In the case of achieving the ideal, there is the unexpected belief in the inadequacy of the ideal's requirements or the notion of identifying a mistaken ideal because it was so easy to achieve. The ideal imposes expectations that cannot be achieved; otherwise, it would not be an ideal, and therefore the true ideal cannot be reached in any way.

2.3 The historical situation of the end of art, or historical end of art

Winckelmann (1986), to a certain extent, also caused the possibility of the existence of a historical situation of the end of art, when he accepted the art of ancient Greece as the eternal model of European art. The problem is not in his choice, since ancient art has been preserved to a large extent and has inspired other European art, i.e., it has served as a model for a long time. The problem is partly in his logic. He does not look at antiquity (specifically Greek classicism) merely as a golden age of art, but as a model to be imitated and renewed, as an ideal to which we can only aspire. In his conception, Winckelmann condemned Western art to

constant striving, with no possibility of a successful end. He essentially closed art into an unsolvable loop. Finally, the great emphasis on repeating what had already been said and on copying past forms and models is a textbook example of what the end of art entails. If we follow Winckelmann's delineated reasoning, we condemn art because we can consider ancient art, which was the (unrepeatable) golden age of art, as the only existing ideal, even though we should continue to work towards it. Quite simply, we must fail in the historical sense. Such a direction can only lead to a repetition of what was already there and cannot bring new forms. If the aim of art is to copy, then art is doomed by the expression of this conviction, but if art were merely to be inspired by ancient art and to approach its "elusive" aura, then the situation would be quite different.

Winckelmann:

- a) closed the history of art into a loop of repetition of a certain pattern that could not be achieved;
- b) accepted only the repetition and imitation of the Greek classics as if the imitation of other models would lead to failure;
- c) in ignoring the differentiation between the original "Greek" art (Pliny) and our condescendingly labelled Western art (Vasari), the fallacy of identifying Western art with the whole range of art of the Greek classics was created (see Makky, 2018).

The historical end of art or the historical moment of the end of art occurs at the moment when the historical role assigned to art (by someone)²⁸⁶ is emptied or fulfilled. In the same way, it can be said that the historical end of art depends on the optics (the moment and place)²⁸⁷ of the

²⁸⁶ In this regard, we are faced with institutional mechanisms that must be approved and accepted by social instances. The role of art cannot be determined by just anyone, and in this respect, it is not elitist. Let us assume that the historical role of art can only be determined by a theoretician who is devoted to the issue and whose conception is based on an understanding and appreciation of art. However, this is not enough. It is only through theoretical acceptance and followers (direct or later) that a theory gains credibility and enters the knowledge or world of art (see Dickie, 1974).

²⁸⁷ Just imagine a situation where the history of art would not have begun with Pliny the Elder, or Giorgio Vasari (as Didi-Huberman notes), or even in a Western world setting, but, for example, had been formulated by Egyptian scholars of the ancient world. If such writings were the basis of an understanding of art, if they articulated the

formulation of the theory or history of art, and therefore it can be assumed that any theoretical formulation of the goals of art, leads to its end, if the theorist and cultural practice is not willing to accept any transformation of the established forms or processes. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1975) is the theorist who (perhaps first) drew attention to the historical end of art, which comes about through the fulfilment of art's historical function.²⁸⁸ Its historical function is determined by the three stages of the artistic representation of spirituality, that is, by the threefold relation of the idea to its formation (Hegel, 1975), and when art reaches the last stage and is no longer able to do more, for the sake of the absolute spirit, its duties must be taken over by religion. The finitude and triadic nature of his thinking does not change the fact that he chose to determine what function art is historically meant to fulfil, but art does not, then, end in the intent of this thought because it is unable to achieve its goal, but paradoxically, precisely because it has achieved it. However, the other goal (historical, idealistic) of art no longer exists. Art is unmasked in its culminating phase, since the very development of art leads to the realization of the lack which it contains (Hegel, 1975). The historical moment of the end of art is, then, a response to the exhaustion of its own goal, but it is not set by art itself, but by someone outside the world of art.

2.4 Interpretational situation of the end of art or interpretative end of art

Umberto Eco (1989), with his *Open Work*, disrupted the integrity and permanence of art and aptly pointed to its openness, instability, and dynamism: thus, all the attributes that goes against any attempt by theorists to grasp and “stabilize” the work of art. At the same time, he pointed to the inclusive nature of the boundaries of the artwork, which requires and needs its own interpretation. I have never claimed (as a proponent of Eco's approach) that, without interpretation, a work of art does not exist at all, I merely assumed that it is not complete in its totality: it is disembodied and loses something essential. Interpretation can present a work of

ideals of art and its desired goals, it is conceivable that the current form of art would be moving in a different direction.

²⁸⁸ Hegel (1975) also identified another moment when art leaves its contours, or rather its designated place. This is a situation in which more ideas enter into art (as they should), as art incites judgements in us. "The philosophy of art is therefore a greater need in our day than it was in days when art by itself as art yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is" (Hegel, 1966, p. 11). The situation described here arises when art becomes complicated and breaks out of its established (normative) understanding or deviates from the development or goal that has been explicitly set for it.

art in an entirely new perspective or offer diametrically opposed findings depending on the perspective that is taken in experiencing the work of art. For this reason, in relation to the proclaimed interpretive end of art, we are interested in two borderline/extreme cases of aesthetic interpretation entering the scope of the artwork and its ontological being: (1) absence, (2) overexposed presence of the interpretative possibilities.

We can, thus, speak of a dualistic interpretational end of art. The first situation speaks of the failure of interpretation and the absence of new meanings, or the preservation of form and aesthetic experience, the loss of layers of meaning; the second possibility speaks of exactly the opposite situation. So many interpretative conclusions are made or can be made, or are accepted that the original artefact loses its shape and its form is as if it had been interpretively overcome and distorted. In the first case, the work of art disappears for the reason that it is transformed into a mere proof of human skill that has nothing to say. The testimony is obscured, and we end up identifying individual shapes or stimuli but are unable to uninterpret the whole. It is merely a matter of describing the formal component of the artwork, or of explaining the primary/obvious meanings (in Panofsky's dictionary, of revealing the pure forms). Contemporary art is so complex that it requires "particular involvement on the part of the audience, contemporary poetics merely reflects our culture's attraction for the 'indeterminate'". For all those processes which instead of relying on univocal, necessary sequence of events, prefer to disclose a field of possibilities, to create 'ambiguous' situations open to all sorts of operative choices and interpretations" (Eco, 1989, p. 44), and this is how we arrive at the second situation, or the possibility of the interpretative end of art.²⁸⁹ A work of art is as much the result of individual interpretations as it is a result of contextually determined facts and the efforts of the author, but if the meaning, findings, and conclusions are layered to such an extent that they completely obscure the work of art, a collapse occurs. In such a situation, the artwork represents the overlay of the interpretive planes of the received object, thus altering the range

²⁸⁹ The second situation is directly linked to the problem of the limits of interpretation, which has been dealt with at length by Umberto Eco (1989, 1991) and Culler (1992), and immanently raises the question of the openness of the work of art. The problem of boundaries (the rights of the interpreted object), or the problem of over-interpretation, is primarily related to the notions of "unbounded semiosis" (based on Peirce) and "hermetic drift" (Eco, 1989; 1991, pp. 23-26; 2010, pp. 65-105). Briefly, one could solve the problem by arguing: to say that a text/artifact/phenomenon is potentially semantically unbounded is not identical with the belief that interpretation is not governed by any rules or boundaries. It always has an object, and its containment does not consist only in the realization of the interpretative act (Eco, 1992).

of its meaning, sense, and, often, form. It is as if it is no longer necessary to find out what semantic nuances the perceived object actually evokes, and which are additionally created by the recipients or merely (in the intentions of institutional theory and practice) by the space and context of display or the manner of presentation. The loading of new meanings is not a problem at all. The problem is when the original artwork disappears and only its interpretations remain.

2.5 Receptional situation of the end of art or receptive end of art

The receptional situation of the end of art, or the reception aspect of the end of art, is the outcome of the interpretive situation. Even if, in the spirit of Eco's theory, the work of art opens itself up to new interpretations, the layering of new meanings can cause over-saturation of the recipient and can lead to the disappearance of the work of art as part of the art world. Wolfgang Iser (1990) perceived, identified, and named this situation very clearly. Without explicit warning, he addresses the situation where the aesthetic aspect or the receptivity to the aesthetic aspect of art disappears, the situation when one is over-saturated with different stimuli and suddenly unable to adequately select them. He no longer neither filters nor accepts everything or is immune to everything, which is why Iser points to an important situation where a certain dimension of the work of art seems to disappear. In fact, he speaks of the symptom of the end of art, when art as a receptive phenomenon disappears from existence. Eco (1989) thinks in a similar way and much earlier than Iser.²⁹⁰ As a receptive situation of the end of art, a situation can be identified where we cease to feel (aesthetically), despite the measures we take against it. Then the end of art may occur, but not the end of art as a whole, rather the end of art for us as recipients. The base for this remark is our understanding that the first step towards art is its reception and if this first step in approaching of the work of art disappears, also the art, sooner or later, disappears.

The given distinctions show various moments of the development of art that can be present within some art pieces, or art periods, which, if more situations of the end of art appears

²⁹⁰ "The process of aesthetic pleasure is thus blocked and the contemplated form is reduced to a conventional formula on which our overexperienced sensibility can now rest. [...] In fact, it no longer stirs any emotion in us and is thus unable to entice either our imagination or our intelligence into new perceptual adventures. Its form is temporarily exhausted. Often, to rejuvenate our dulled sensibility, we need to put it in quarantine. [...] But time might not be enough to reawaken pleasure and surprise and to resurrect a particular form for us, which means either that our intellectual development has atrophied or that the work, as organization of stimuli, was addressed to an ideal addressee who does not correspond to what we have become" (Eco, 1989, pp. 37-38).

within one work of art, can make it more problematic. Paradoxically, all the mentioned situations are circumstances that are relatively common for art and occur regularly. The end of art is also understood in this sense to be temporary and variable, as a way of failing a certain aspect of art and its naming, but that does not mean that art has ended as a tendency, as a phenomenon, as a process, as a product of human endeavour. Hypothetically, the situation in which all the above-mentioned situations of the end of art come together may occur, and only then can we talk about the end of art as a whole; the definitive end, but I believe that we as a race (if such a situation arises) will not be here anymore since art-like activity is typical for human beings.

3. The End of Art as a Milestone of the History of Art

As was already mentioned, I understand the end of art as a form of theoretical reaction on the contemporary condition of art. However, the end of art, or the identification of multiple situations of the end of art, can be understood as a turning point in the history of art. A turning point in the meaning that traditional art is no longer suitable, and new art forms need to find their recipients and theoreticians.

Walter Benjamin (2008, p. 38) defines the situation of the turning point in art history when he writes: "The history of every art form has critical periods in which the particular form strains after effects which can be easily achieved only with a changed technical standard—that is to say, in a new art form." In the light of constant development, the history of art could be seen as an endless transformation of established rules and forms (see, e.g., Mukařovský, 1966).²⁹¹ They are intertwined by the initial rejection of new tendencies by referring to the past (perhaps an anachronism) and their gradual acceptance, which is no longer in the hands of the individual, but of society. The individual (usually the artist, but also a curator, art critic, or other institutional representative [Danto, 1964; Dickie, 1974]) can only submit a work for consideration and hope for its acceptance: institutionalists believe that cultural institutions and their mechanisms of judgement are the arbiters of the acceptance of an artwork (Dickie, 1974).

²⁹¹ One can speak of an alternation of aesthetic norms that represent an artistic tendency or style that has its own internal morphology and rules. The aesthetic norm, (mostly) considered as a rigorous pattern, dynamizes the development precisely by the possibility of its own violation (Mukařovský, 1966; Michalovič, 1997), and thus in the true sense of the word it loses its normativity and turns into a non-norm (Mathauser, 2006, pp. 81-82), which demands novelty and creativity.

However, the real turning point in the development and understanding of art occurs when a new work is innovative to the extent that it creates a contradiction to the preferred artistic practice (it does not build on it, it opposes it in a way), causing a dilemma as to whether or not it should be acknowledged, and is the culminating point of further development.

The definition of individual situations of the end of art can be understood as a mapping of different possible turning points in the development of art, which may have found themselves isolated or in greater concentration. The last question to the problem of the end of art may therefore also be: When did the last end of art occur? Given the historical, ontological, and above all, axiological, situation of the end of art, which has been probably most often understood as a manifestation of the end of art, we should start with ancient and classical art, as that form of artistic tradition, which has, in fact, ended. Having said that, art evolves and transforms by leaps and bounds, not gradually and naturally. Aesthetic norms are violated by works of art and by the activity of authors who have multiple predecessors. They are visionaries not because they are just next in line in a gradually changing art world, but because they somehow "skip" the phases that logically and technically should follow and accelerate the change of art. The aesthetic norm is indeed transformed gradually, but this succession is only an expansion of its boundaries until it is replaced, superseded, and actually shattered by a new aesthetic norm that is never just another form of the old one.

There are many ways and possibilities to identify the reality that has actually changed in art with the advent of modernity and postmodernity, but such an identification would require much greater analyses and even separate studies. Foucault (1994) was convinced that the main principles of western culture are the word and image. He was not alone in this approach, as Mitchell (1994) has thoroughly shown. However, their approach was based on representation as the primary aspect of art. From their point of view, we should consider either the emergence of Impressionism or the exhibition of Duchamp's Fountain (1917) as a turning point in the poetics of art. They can be understood as a subversion of the mimetic principle and an undermining of the formal qualities of art that had been adhered to for centuries; however, it can be assumed that what we are really looking for is not a single moment that changed everything and brought the last end of art, but a so-called transitional period. Be that as it may, I must sketch this line, or at least this period of time, even if it is only a working theory. It could be understood as an illustration of the logic at stake in understanding the end of art, as a

(greater or lesser) landmark in art history. It seems to me that most acceptable is to define the last end of art by two events. The first landmark is the year 1872, when Claude Manet painted his *Impression*. The dissolution of all mimeticism and the preservation of only reference, which is typical of modern art, or the reduction of resemblance to basic, often even abstract lines, was thus manifested to its greatest extent. The second landmark was in 1895, when the invention of film was presented to the public, which, in contrast to Impressionism, was able to capture an optical likeness, but without investing it with atmosphere, and showed the public that realism in art was dead, and that it was left to speak only of suggestion, denotation, and reference. Mimeticism has disappeared and its function has been taken over by other, new arts. The end of art was therefore not a question of hours or days, but of years, and I am convinced that, just as in 1872, the world of Western art began to crumble definitively and nothing could save it, so, in the same measure in 1895, is there a purging of old art. At least the European scene was ready to build a new art at the beginning of the 20th century and art history could start anew (Didi-Huberman, 2006). If we add to this premise Benjamin's issue of reproducibility as a turning point in our history, then the year 1900 can be defined as the beginning of art after the end of art. However, this was just the last end of art, but I believe, that a similar situation with similar impact on the development of art occurred in the past at least once.²⁹²

4. Conclusions

The end of art can be understood as:

- A) a milestone in the development of art and its history;
- B) a critique of art based on the absence of some immanent property/reality of art;
- (C) the end: a hypothetical possibility of one end is regular only as a catastrophic scenario).

²⁹² The working hypothesis is that there are at least two “ends of art”. The ancient tradition as a base for our culture, is not in fact, the first tradition that was responsible for art. We should not forget prehistoric art, so different to ancient art, and so important for the creation of specific “modern” poetics: important on an anthropological base. If we integrate the notion of prehistoric art to the issue, we could create three stages of art history: prehistoric art (art before the beginning of art), the ancient tradition (art before the end of art, or so called “western art”) and contemporary art (art after the end of art) (see Makky, 2019).

The paper identifies different situations of the end of art that are based on different reasons of theoretical rejection of some art. These situations are; ontological, axiological, historical, interpretative, receptive. If more than one “situation of the end of art” occurs at the same time, it is regarded as a crisis of the developmental stage of art, and can result in the announcement of the end of art. Small “ends of art” are regular and are commonly understood as a change of the artistic style, or aesthetic norm. The end of art can be understood in this sense as a temporary and variable moment, a way of failing to comment on a certain aspect of art and define it.

All these classifications, possibilities, and hypotheses lead me to conclude some kind of a dualistic conclusion, that probably closes the issue in the best way and presents two possibilities (though optimistic) of perception of the issue:

(1) The (true) end of art has never occurred and even if it has, we do not know about it.

(2) The end of art has occurred so many times that we have become accustomed to it: the smaller ends are, at the same time, new beginnings that create new styles and artistic trends (or are initiated by them), the larger ones are the real historical milestones.²⁹³

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²⁹³ This paper is the result of the research grant VEGA no. 1/0065/22 Between the past and the present of aesthetics in Slovakia - critical reading and critical editions in the contexts of historical memory and the updating of knowledge.

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