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CONTINUITY, DISCONTINUITY, FULGURATION – PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXTS OF CHANGES IN ART

Abstract: In her article, the author adopts the assumption that interpretations of changes in art, their gradual or abrupt course, depend on the comprehension of time and the conception of the subject. Changes in art and changes in esthetics do not always occur parallel to transformations in the social field. Philosophical premises are one of the basic criteria for divisions in esthetics. The study seeks to answer the question how the forming identity of modern man tries to find a new communication medium; in this case – how this is carried out by art theorists. The object of the analyses are the conceptions that describe changes in art begun by the avant-garde, considered in the broad context of the discourse of modernity. What they have in common is a specific form of identity thinking which takes on the character of a syndrome. The object of the discussion are theories that use categories of philosophical origin: fulguration and planes, continuity and discontinuity, gradualness and the leaps and bounds progression, and those related to them, for example: evolution and devolution, or a negative crisis and a positive crisis. In the context of the discussion on the subject of modernity, the first part refers to the conceptions of M. Wallis, S. Morawski, and G. Sztabiński. In the second part, the author asks the question about how much the way of thinking of art has changed in the age of late modernity. She mainly refers to Dieter Mersch's 'media reflection' and Germano Celant's idea of the present.

Keywords: continuity and discontinuity, leap, fulguration, thinking, subject, time, the present, the now moment/currency/*Aktualitaet*, syndrome, art, avant-garde, modernity, boundary.

Permanence and variability, integration and dispersion, continuity and discontinuity are research categories of philosophical origin, which are often utilized in the philosophy of art history and in exact sciences that are concerned with explaining the course of cultural processes. As tools for describing changes, they are connected with the philosophically justified picture of the world adopted by scholars, and then adjusted to the

currently binding paradigm of science. Philosophical premises are one of the basic criteria for division in esthetics, determining its material (objective) scope which is confined to works of art or extends to cover other objects of esthetic experience. The present study assumes that interpretations of changes in art, their gradual or abrupt course, depend on the general understanding of time and the conception of subject. Due to the limited framework of the article, it will present only a part of the broad subject matter whose scope is determined by the theories of modernity. In particular, I am interested in how the forming identity of the modern human seeks a new medium of communication with the changing environment and how this change is interpreted. The analyses will cover the concepts that describe changes in art begun by the avant-garde, considered in the broad context of the discourse of modernity. What role in esthetics is played by oppositions inherited along with the mode of thinking of language? Are they still present in thinking of art in the age of late modernity?

The issue of interrelation between experiencing time, and human's self-awareness and orientation in reality has had, as a matter of fact, a rich history throughout the centuries of philosophy. Changes in ontology and epistemology which we are witnessing are largely the result of changes in understanding time in the modern era. The Edmund Husserl-initiated shift of attention from the abstract concept of time to what it appears *here and now* laid the ground for contemporary conceptions of subjectivity. The experience of time, the accelerated and punctual feeling of it, became a problem bothering scholars of different philosophical orientations. Attempts have been made to negotiate the ideas of timelessness, invariability and permanence with relativity of time experienced in an individual or, in specific circumstances, in a community dimension. An important point that marked the research perspective of changes in philosophy and culture, including art, was the comprehension of the present, whose significance had evolved and become theoretically strong from the 17th and 18th centuries. Challenging the linear understanding of time, making it possible to cope with its passage, contributed to redefinition of the present in the modern era. Among others, the idea of the now-moment (currency, *Aktualitaet*) of the spirit of the times, adopted from Georg W. F. Hegel's modern epistemology, was revised. There were no uniform opinions as to the assessment of Hegel's legacy regarding art. Some believed that, although works of art are an expression of the specific now moment/currency, at the same time they are part of the general historical process; others, more critical of Hegelian philosophy of history, emphasized the present context of the creation of a work, but without giving up the idea of its universality.¹ Jürgen Habermas wrote about the new

¹ Cf. L. Ettlinger, *Historia sztuki jako historia*, transl. S. Michalski, in: *Pojęcia, problemy, metody współczesnej nauki o sztuce*, ed. J. Białostocki, Warszawa 1976.

consciousness of the era that it takes a stance on the ancient past in order to be able to understand itself as the result of transition from the old to the new. What is considered modern is therefore that in which the spontaneously reviving currency (now moment) of the spirit of the times can be objectively expressed.² The German scholar emphasizes spontaneity in the manifestation of Aktualitaet (currency) and difficulties in expressing it objectively. One of the possibilities of describing the phenomenon in question would be to adopt the category of 'fulguration'. The word accurately renders the sense of the historically old idea which says that the now-moment emerges as a flash of inspiration, a dazzling light, as something sudden. It was originally used by Gottfried W. Leibniz to express the creative relation between God and monads. Monads emerge through mystical flashes – 'fulgurations' from light sources. We shall leave aside the ontological issues of monadology, which are referred to at this point only because of their affinity with the understanding of time. In the metaphysical aspect of Leibniz's philosophy, it is God who sees 'Now' in the Eternal. His pre-judgment is super-judgment. It does not prevent human actions from stemming from individual spontaneity. By carrying out these actions, we unfold the book – the great scroll of the world – in time.³ The analogy appears too distant, but, from the perspective of philosophical reflection on history, it can be regarded as accurate because categories referring to time contain knowledge of the way a human views the world. In this sense, the concept of fulguration appears useful in describing situations and phenomena whose origin, sudden occurrence, is difficult to explain. The meaning of the term was preserved although the nomenclature was adjusted to changes in philosophy: the spirit of the times was replaced the divine impulse, the indefinite *now* described the state between the past and the future. Connections with the mystical flash, although distant, can be found. The Leibnizian term 'fulguration' was revived by C.F. von Weizsäcker, who defined it as a short period in which new routes are noticed and former beliefs are abandoned. According to Jan Białostocki, the fulguration of modern art took place in the first dozen years of the 20th century.⁴ Mieczysław Wallis believed that the moment of fulguration in the 20th century should be shifted a little backwards, to the period of Art Nouveau, when changes occurred in the artistic awareness of the new genera-

² J. Habermas, *Modernizm - niedokończony projekt*, transl. M. Łukasiewicz, in: *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów*, ed. R. Nycz, Wydawnictwo Baran i Suszczyński, Kraków 1998, p. 30.

³ Ł. Kowalik, *Stoicka ontologia Leibniza, Przegląd Filozoficzny - Nowa Seria R. 26: 2017, No. 1 (101), ISSN 1230-1493, p. 24.*

⁴ J. Białostocki, *Kryzysy w sztuce. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*. Lublin grudzień 1985, PWN, Warszawa 1988, pp. 20-22.

tion of artists. "Many an artist and writer in the 19th century was haunted by the painful awareness of epigonism, satiety with constant repetitions of classicistic, Gothic, Renaissance or Baroque forms. There was increasingly widespread longing for a style that would be new and express the modern times."⁵

Artists and thinkers who commented on changes in art in the early 20th century, shared a common belief that the status of man as the subject can no longer be founded on the concept of autonomous reason independent of anything else. The modernist worldview – at the beginning, but also in its later stages – is called a crisis outlook because its underlying cause was a general collapse of cognitive optimism. The awareness of dispersion of the subject within the existing episteme was expressed in different forms. The foregoing example of Art Nouveau proves that a universally felt crisis in different fields of life does not necessarily cause a crisis in art. If we can thus speak of a crisis in art, especially in the fine arts at the turn of the 20th century, it would be a crisis understood as a positive phenomenon, in the sense conceived by René Thom, Jakob Burckhardt or – with regard to science – Thomas Kuhn. I share Białostocki's opinion that it is very difficult to explain the rhythm and nature as well as causes of fulguration in art. The characteristic feature of 'sudden explosions' of a new style and new attitudes is the fact that they do not occur through a slow historical process, but are, as it were, "the result of an a priori given task, which was solved quickly and in a broad range of not only geographical areas but also a multiplicity of artistic disciplines."⁶

In the 1980s, at the time of the summing-up of the avant-garde and first responses to postmodernism, theorists tried to define coordination between different areas of the historical process. The time and state of consciousness of the creative subject in the life of culture are expressed in forms that, it was believed, cannot be quantitatively measured. The rhythm of historical transformations is not the same as in art or in other areas. Referring to George Kubler's division of products of culture into primary objects and replicas, and to Weizsäcker's 'fulgurations' and 'planes', Białostocki says 'that 'planes' and 'fulgurations' are only extreme borderline cases in the rhythm of historical, and particularly historical-artistic, processes.'⁷

The present-day humanities refer to similar changes in culture with the term 'turns' which also covers art. Without challenging the validity of this term in reference to individual artistic trends, the author believes that a certain distance should be maintained towards the theory of 'fulguration of turns', increasingly popular in recent years.

⁵ M. Wallis, *Secesja*, Wydawnictwo Arkady, Warszawa 1984, p. 22.

⁶ B. Kowalska, *Od impresjonizmu do koncepcjonalizmu. Odkrycia sztuki*, Wydawnictwo Arkady, Warszawa 1989, p. 30.

⁷ J. Białostocki, op. cit, p. 23.

Theories of positive and negative crises, fulgurations and continuations, were an attempt to become part of the new picture of the world by using available conceptual tools. To understand transformations in culture, including art, according to the principle of continuity and break, and to support entirety or dispersion became increasingly complicated. In response to the tensions and contradictions of the modern era, a characteristic form of identity thinking arose, assuming the nature of a syndrome. It consisted in the inability to go beyond the mental boundaries of the existing picture of the world, with simultaneous awareness of its radical change. Estheticians and art theorist also had to contend with this difficulty, since changes in creative activity had a particularly violent course, sometimes described as a negative crisis, and sometimes as a positive one – a fulguration. The problems that contemporary conceptions of art have to cope with are largely a continuation of disputes engendered at the dawn of modernity and intensified in the period of the avant-garde. Although mature modernity is more distanced, debates are not held in such a heated atmosphere and views are more dispersed, the main dividing lines continue to be defined by the attitude towards the fundamental assumptions of Western culture. One of the major objectives of this study is to try to follow the path covered by this way of thinking, to remind us how it was born in the pains of the new time, and to reflect on how much it is present in the contemporary ways of understanding, feeling and describing reality. It would be difficult to exhaust such a broad topic, which is why I focus on the conceptions whose authors explicitly explain the nature of changes by means of the categories of continuity, discontinuity and those semantically close to them. The philosophical context, within which esthetic theories developed in the 20th century, formed attitudes and presented the views of their authors in the inherited and difficult-to-overcome language of identity. In philosophy of art, the dynamics of changes largely consisted in the process of shifting the boundaries of art back and forth by theory, which was expressed in the acceptance of the identity of artistic practices with the adopted concept of art, or in their rejection on account of their too radical otherness. Characteristic of the thus described mental process is the awareness of the significance of decisions to abandon or remain faithful to a certain set of beliefs functioning within the so-far binding paradigm. This applied equally to artists and theorists who attempted to justify artistic activity that eluded classification and was difficult to reconcile with the general theory of the value of Western culture. On the eve of the civilizational turning point, whose special manifestation was the historical avant-garde, artists and authors writing about art discern symptoms of another order in it, ask questions about the existence of civilization development regularities, explain abrupt turning points or arrange differences to the rhythm of unsolvable oppositions.

A classic example are conceptions seeking answers to the question whether the avant-garde is still art, from Peter Bürger, Clement Greenberg, Umberto Eco as well as Polish estheticians and art theorists such as Mieczysław Wallis, Janusz Bogucki, Jerzy Ludwiński, or Stefan Morawski, to even contemporary theorists who analyze the heritage of the avant-garde from the perspective of postmodernism. These problems were finally presented in exhaustive studies which do not need to be mentioned here.⁸ When explaining changes in art, neither local historico-cultural determinants must be omitted, nor political ones in the case of such countries as Poland. In this sense, one can speak not only of temporal but also spatial non-simultaneity of the present.

The way of explaining the character of changes in art by Polish estheticians is simply a model illustration of how views strongly rooted in philosophical tradition turn into a mental imperative which divides theorists of the avant-garde over comprehending the role of art and its axiological and essential understanding, because the battle was fought for something more than the shape of contemporary art. I am going to give several examples of response to changes in modern art in Polish esthetics, which are mentioned less often than the theories of Bürger, Greenberg or Umberto Eco. The criterion for the choice is the presence of categories that combine subjectivity and temporality in the conceptions.

I will begin with Mieczysław Wallis's conception which is also important for my views. I elaborated on it in monographs and articles; therefore, I will confine myself only to underlining its importance in the context of the problem discussed in this study. Wallis always discussed the creative subject in connection with time and culture. He attached immense importance to the variability of esthetic tastes and esthetic sensitivity, emphasized the significance of esthetic experience and knowledge of art – not only in reception of its works, but also in communing with other objects of esthetic experiences. He distinguished between 'mild' and 'sharp' values, harmonious and disharmonious experiences, 'familiar' and 'alien' art – it could thus appear that he used the pattern of dualist thinking, characteristic of Western culture. As far as the starting point of the scholar's inquiries is concerned, this hypothesis is not without reason. The Polish esthetician describes the existing divisions, and at the same time he is critical of recognizing the choice of some option as a criterion for evaluating a work of art. The recommended attitude is artistic and esthetic pluralism whose idea was reinforced by openness to other cultural circles and the experience of the avant-garde.⁹ Crucial to our discussion is the theorist's conclusion concerning

⁸ I discussed this topic in a separate publication. Cf. T. Pękala, *Awangarda i ariergarda. Filozofia sztuki nowoczesnej*, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2000.

⁹ Cf. M. Wallis, *Przemiany w sztuce i przemiany w estetyce*, "Studia Filozoficzne" no. 10 (83), 1972, pp. 3-18.

the history of art. The dilemmas of modern culture stem, among others, from thinking of history as a linear process. This also applies to understanding the history of art which, according to Wallis, cannot be comprehended in monistic terms and, secondly, cannot be treated as a continuous process. In the paper *O ciągłości i nieciągłości (Ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ciągłości i nieciągłości w dziejach sztuki)* [On Continuity and Discontinuity (With Special Emphasis on Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Art)], he tries to answer the question whether sudden transitions, leaps from one style into another (mainly in architecture) correspond to sudden changes in other areas of life?¹⁰ This study, incidentally prevented from publication by censorship, shows to what ordeals history of art can be exposed in the conditions of political transformations. Wallis had earlier accepted the occurrence of both types of transitions between styles: the trends of ‘continuity and gradualness’ and ‘discontinuity and abruptness (the leaps and bounds progression)’, but he chooses one of them in the summing-up of his article. From the perspective of time, this decision can be interpreted as a desperate gesture, a response to the instrumental and politically subordinated reassessment of all the accomplishments so far of Western culture, including the tradition closest to Wallis. “Cases of broken continuity on a larger scale in the history of art are found wherever one artistic tradition is destroyed or superseded by another. [...] In all those cases we have to do not only with a break of continuity but also with a leap, a transition from one art to another.”¹¹ It is difficult to believe that one could, in so carefully measured words, detect contestation against changes introduced by the communist authorities. A bitter reflection is that even at present we are not entirely free from similar reactions to the activities of artists that disturb the dominant axiological order. Wallis explicitly associates the categories of continuity and discontinuity, gradualness and the leaps and bounds progression with the dispute regarding two concepts of the world. The question whether philosophical premises still have such a significant influence on esthetic theories remains open.

Another theory which shows that interpretations of changes in esthetics and modern art are deeply rooted in philosophical convictions is Stefan Morawski’s theory. It can serve as a model of thinking that assumes the nature of the ‘syndrome of continuity and discontinuity’. This expression was used by Stefan Morawski in the analysis of connections between the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde, and it appears to be an accurate description of response to

¹⁰ Idem, *Ciągłość i nieciągłość w dziejach sztuki*, in: Idem, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, Wprowadzenie, wybór i opracowanie T. Pękała, Universitas, Kraków 2004, pp. 80-86.

¹¹ Idem, *Ciągłość i nieciągłość w dziejach sztuki*, in: M. Wallis, *Wybór pism estetycznych*, Wprowadzenie, wybór i opracowanie T. Pękała, Universitas, Kraków 2004, p. 81.

the disruptions of the historical process.¹² The term defining the situation in esthetics as a theory suspended between continuity and discontinuity was used by Stefan Morawski to describe artistic changes during the avant-garde period. It referred to the assessment of the radicalness of changes in art, regarding the understanding and functioning of a work of art, technical and formal changes, the attitude of art towards reality, and relationships between art and society. Discussions over the avant-garde, of which Morawski gave an account and on which he took a stance, can be reduced to the problem of the autonomy of art and the relation of continuity or the avant-garde's break with art contained in the esthetic paradigm. The Polish theorist paid special attention to the second stage of the avant-garde movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s, as he found it difficult to classify it in relation to both the first avant-garde and postmodernism. He finally came to the conclusion that "Between the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde formations, there is continuity and discontinuity at the same time. Continuity is indicated by signals of the coming second stage within the temporal frame of the first as well as by the theater of the absurd and *nouveau roman* as significant transition phenomena that construct the historico-cultural continuum. Discontinuity is founded on the radical rejection by the neo-avant-garde of well-established esthetic categories and on the striking transformation of artistic practices."¹³ Morawski's conception can be regarded as an example of thinking entangled in the traps of the dichotomous discourse of modernity. The esthetician discerns its failings, sometimes even stigmatizes it, but he does not want to or is unable to give it up. Morawski's stance on the violation of the then boundaries of art, like that of many other estheticians of that time, at the same time meant identifying oneself vis-à-vis the values of Western culture. Non-simultaneity of the present, both in the temporal and spatial sense, underlies, among others, the specificity of Polish esthetic theories that construct their own identity even more dispersed between different visions of the world.

From the perspective of over a century of study on the avant-garde, there is no doubt that it was not only a radical turning point in art but also a response to the loss of the sense legitimizing a uniform picture of the world. Continuity and discontinuity manifested themselves in worldview oppositions, which was expressed in internal contradictions that prevented the construction of coherent artistic and philosophical visions. The dismantling of the paradigmatic

¹² For more on the views of S. Morawski and how he understands continuity and discontinuity cf. T. Pękala, *Syndrom ciągłości i nieciągłości*, "Przegląd Kulturoznawczy" 3(49) 2021, pp. 581-598.

¹³ S. Morawski, *O słabościach praxis neoawangardowej i niedostatkach teorii awangardy*, [in:] *Wybory i ryzyka awangardy. Studia z teorii awangardy*, U. Czartoryska, R.W. Kluszczyński (red.), Warszawa - Łódź 1985, p. 21.

concept of art, within which the classical avant-garde still partly functioned, revealed flaws, cracks and discontinuities in the avant-garde discourse constructed from the position of great modernist narratives. Answers to the novelty, to the exceptional character of artistic practices, were given from different philosophical standpoints. A. L. Wenzel argues that, in particular, the ability to radically cross boundaries in other disciplines and to take life decisions is granted to avant-garde movements.¹⁴

Another important aspect of the connection between time and art in the 20th century was pointed out by Grzegorz Sztabiński in his (regrettably last...) book. In the chapter *Historia a terażniejszość w sztuce* (History and the present in art), he took into consideration the understanding of the historical as a conception of the course of the artistic process over centuries, in which specific goals and values are *realized*. He poses a question regarding the extent to which history, understood in a specific way, turns out to be a constituent of art. “Does the history of art and the rules that govern it influence decisions taken at the easel or in relation to the block of material being carved? Do artists, while executing such work, want to be aware of the place of their activity in art history, of the way they participate in its transformations?”¹⁵ Formulated in such a way, the questions shed new light on the assessment of the avant-garde project in terms of continuity or break. The awareness of history (art history in this case) was present, in Sztabiński’s view, in the creative avant-garde activity of the first half of the 20th century and, in altered forms, in later decades. The author maintains that the most important representatives of the avant-garde “showed clear tendencies to universalize and absolutize their own road of research. [...] There were ambitions to globally assess the situation not only of art but also of man’s position in the 20th century.”¹⁶ Sztabiński argues that the artists and theorists also justified their interpretations with the vision of history. He refers to Alfred H. Barr, Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, who explained the origin of artistic trends in this way. Greenberg’s comment appears to be significant for our discussion on continuity in art, so I repeat it after Sztabiński: “It should be strongly emphasized that modernism never strove to break with the past. It was a kind of devolution, elucidation of tradition and its further evolution at the same time. Modernist art continues the past without breakdowns or interruptions and, regardless of what will happen in the future, it will never cease to be understood in terms of the past.”¹⁷ However, a reference to the

¹⁴ Cf. A.L. Wenzel, *Grenzüberschreitungen in der Gegenwartskunst. Ästhetische und philosophische Positionen*, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld 2013, p. 7.

¹⁵ G. Sztabiński, *Inne pojęcia estetyki*, Universitas, Kraków 2020, p. 85.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

¹⁷ C. Greenberg, *Malarstwo modernistyczne*, in: idem, *Obrona modernizmu. Wybór esejów*, eds. G. Dziamski, M. Śpik-Dziamska, Kraków 2006, pp. 53-54. Cited after: G. Sztabiński, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

past that assumes passivity and continuation is one thing, and another is 'the modern sense of history' that requires an active attitude in defining the place of the present time in relation to the past and the future – Sztabiński explains, following Rosenberg.¹⁸ What is the evaluation of a work of art like in the context of duration in time? In order to explain this complicated issue, the author of the cited publication used the concepts of the now moment (nowness, currency, the present moment) and timelessness. He combined their temporal meaning with understanding the experiencing subject, thus confirming the intuition underlying our reflection on non-simultaneity of the present. Sztabiński explains reactions to changes, depending on individual and also collective experiences, through a peculiar "sensitivity syndrome" and by analyzing examples of what "artistic allergy" to the now-moment consists in and how it was expressed in esthetic thinking in the history of art. This problem, brilliantly outlined by Grzegorz Sztabiński, requires a separate analysis. I believe that the conception advanced by the Polish esthetician-artist accurately identifies moot points in thinking of a modern human, penetratingly explains the causes of numerous syndromes and, from the perspective of "long duration" and taking the "background" into account, demystifies some of them.

Having outlined the problems that were and are still being created by modernist art, we will try to place them against a broader background of the philosophical project of modernity. The categories used to explain changes do not only refer to art, but have a broader sense. They form opposition pairs like continuity and discontinuity, gradualness and abruptness (progression by leaps and bounds), evolution and devolution. Solutions that would indicate the existence of transitional states suspended between radical dissimilarities are sought. This role was attributed, among others, to the concept of fulguration in a general sense, in reference to history. The concept expresses opposite senses – it refers to disruption and abrupt acceleration, and at the same time it signals a change being a harbinger of new times. Although this concept has not been accepted in a broader sense, it should be admitted that it correctly describes the nature of changes in different areas that implement the project of modernity. Modernity was accurately termed by Habermas as an unfinished project that underwent modifications and attributed the sense of the now moment/currency to ever-changing goals, a task in the process of continuous realization and self-negation. Positions concerning modernism have been adopted by almost all theorists representing different disciplines. Examples of theorists' responses to changes in art have been given above. On the part of philosophy, the direct answer to change, transience and the accelerated pace of aging of the modern

¹⁸ G. Sztabiński, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

human's orientation abilities was, first of all, hermeneutics, which became a specific kind of metareflection on the discourse of transience. According to Odo Marquard, "the faster everything is undergoing continuous changes in the present-day reality, the more the art of restoring the familiar, hermeneutics, is becoming a pace-intensifying necessity in it."¹⁹ Despite objections against Gadamer for being too apologetic towards tradition, failing to take account of the ideological aspect of language and universalizing Western culture, leveled by, among others, Rüdiger Bubner and Habermas, one cannot overestimate the contribution of hermeneutic philosophy to understanding the present anew. This is evidenced at least by the range of its impact. Holistic thinking, which, despite criticism, is still one of the most important perspectives in interpreting and explaining modernity, has found its most mature expression in hermeneutic concepts. The potential of hermeneutics has not been exhausted and its assumptions, constantly complemented by present-day theorists, reveal new circumstances that determined the illusoriness of convictions about the universal principles of development. The temporal and spatial non-simultaneity of the present speedily challenges the fundamental principles of narrative in individual domains of culture.²⁰

As has been said above, esthetic time does not always coincide with time in other spheres of life. A comprehensive analysis of the issue of change in understanding time in esthetics requires a separate extensive study. There is no room in this paper for a detailed discussion of the concepts of those thinkers whose views on the present and its subjective expression are directly reflected in esthetics. What I have in mind here is, for example, the esthetic theory of Theodor W. Adorno who, in the assumptions of negative dialectics, referred to the problem of "the detemporalized subject" in the context of issues concerning the comprehension of the present,²¹ and the conception of Wolfgang Iser who lists the dispersion of the subject and the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" among the leading problems of postmodernity.²² The two

¹⁹ Cf. O. Marquard, *Rozstanie z filozofią pierwszych zasad. Studia Filozoficzne*, Oficyna Naukowa 1994, p. 133.

²⁰ The problem of the present is well developed in hermeneutic philosophy and there is no need to cite its extensive bibliography. On categories and conceptions connected with the present topic, cf. K. H. Bohrer, *Absolutna teraźniejszość*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2003; A. Bielik-Robson, *Inna nowoczesność. Pytania o współczesną formułę duchowości*, Universitas, Kraków 2000; P. Orlik, *Wobec indyferencji. O możliwości konstytuowania całości poindyferencjalnej* T. I, *Pirron i Hölderlin na ścieżkach indyferencji (aspekt wolności)*, Wyd. Naukowe IF UAM, Poznań 2013.

²¹ Th. W. Adorno, *Dialektyka negatywna*, transl. K. Krzemieniowa, PWN, Warszawa 1986, pp. 465-466.

²² W. Iser, *Nasza postmodernistyczna moderna*, transl. R. Kubicki, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 1998, p. XXX.

theories have already been well developed. It can be generally said that the association of issues of time with the conception of subjectivity is of special significance when the object of study is such a complex question as the long-lasting opposition of *aisthesis* against *logos*. From romanticism to postmodernism, the artist's 'ego' was a constant point of reference in the debate on freedom and autonomy. It resulted in clear shifts in understanding 'esthetic experience' – from distance, contemplation and "the lingering-on of the moment" to involvement. The subject/author of creative activity was gradually losing the distinctive status of individuality for the poietic force of creation attributed to life itself by Friedrich Nietzsche, to *Being* by Martin Heidegger, or to societal life by the present-day scholars, Bourriard and Maffesoli.

To sum up the presented concepts, one can say, from the standpoint of theories closer to our times, that unpredictability, breakdowns, lack of discursive justification and support based on objective criteria needed "media reflection" towards a communication paradigm that ensured continuity.²³ Philosophy of mediation, understood in the basic sense, after Dieter Mersch, as intermediality, opens a new perspective for art to leave its dilemmatic closure in modern oppositions. In a broad communicative sense, art should not be narrowed to a specific concept because by participating in the mediation process it enters the space "in between", being literally in the middle and impossible to communicate.²⁴ It should be clarified that Mersch seeks philosophical sources of the change of identity thinking in the transition from the metaphysical "first beginning" to "another beginning" in terms of event. Heidegger argues that an event has its internal course. It implies the *transformation of thinking*, during which all formats of everything that has been achieved so far, the main conceptions and basic concepts and notions, are transformed and re-formulated.²⁵ The category of event is firmly set in contemporary philosophy and esthetics. I refer to it as a complement to the philosophical context of understanding change. In Mersch's presentation of the role of event, one of the analytical tools is the concept of leaps and bounds, which, as we remember, is highly important in analyzing sudden transitions in art. Its properties are "abruptness" and an ecstatic experience of time.²⁶

Not only Mersch, but also many present-day theorists demand a transformation of thinking and radical re-examination of understanding art, a depar-

²³ I have drawn the notion of 'media reflection' from Dieter Mersch's conception. Cf. D. Mersch, *Teorie mediów*, transl. E. Krauss, Wyd. Sic!, Warszawa 2010, pp. 224-225.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁵ D. Mersch, *Sprache und Aisthesis. Heidegger und die Kunst*, in: Sybille Peters, Martin Jörg Schäfer (Hg.): *Intellektuelle Anschauung. Figurationen zwischen Kunst und Wissen*, Bielefeld ([transcript]) 2006, p. 115.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

ture from thinking in terms of boundaries which have become increasingly movable since the avant-garde, which made the concept itself lose its explanatory power. Since all boundaries appear to be crossed, art is threatened with arbitrariness, and its subversive force derived from its otherness and the autonomy of its field is lost.²⁷ I regard the tenor of Anna L. Wenzel's words as an appropriate comment, convincingly arguing that focusing thinking of art on the problem of boundaries separating it from societal life has brought many theories to the extreme. According to Wenzel, opinions on the issue of crossing the boundaries range from demands to restore the significance of art by overcoming the boundaries separating it from societal life TO "anticipation of" the negative consequences of this crossing in commercialization and far-reaching esthetization.²⁸ The boundaries were also marked by placing art in a system of values between the present, the bygone and the anticipated. From this standpoint, postmodernist conceptions, sometimes entirely groundlessly, were the object of intellectual dispute and often of a sharp attack. The awareness of the necessity to take a stance, and, consequently, to explicitly support the continuity or discontinuity of philosophical tradition – metaphysical or its opposite – weighed upon participants in the postmodernist debate. Present-day proponents as well as critics of the thesis of the twilight of metaphysics find it difficult to conduct the debate, the more so that modernity itself is a time that not only is not over but is one in which we permanently deal with the necessity to "redefine" old problems in a new language.²⁹ The present does not have to denote shared time. On this issue, as Mersch demanded, there has already been a considerable transformation of thinking. The category of boundary, so vital in the then discourse on art, is verified today as a useful analytical tool. Wenzel asks what boundaries exactly are crossed, what the consequences of crossing the boundaries are, and whether the existing boundaries can actually be abolished or the point is rather to shift them and make them visible.³⁰

Does this kind of a shift in thinking essentially change the condition of the subject treated as the embodied subject today? Without doubt, the awareness of nowness/the now moment as a state of suspension, when a choice between opposing stances is no longer possible, may be a dramatic situation for the subject. Is the conviction that there are no longer any points of reference less dramatic? Is this type of thinking, now treated more broadly than conceptual thinking, free from tensions turning into a different form of a mental syndrome?

²⁷ A. L. Wenzel, *Grenzüberschreitungen...*, p. 8.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Cf. I. Lorenc, *Zacieranie granic: fikcja – rzeczywistość a sztuka współczesna*, in: *Dystynkcje estetyczne- wyróżnienie i wykluczenie*, ed. T. Pękala, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2020, p. 25.

³⁰ A. L. Wenzel, *Grenzüberschreitungen...*, p.7.

I would regard the thinking described in terms of a syndrome as one of the stages of the process that philosophy describes as the state of “dispersion of the subject”, and the philosophy of art defines in stronger terms as “the death of the subject”. This process emerges during the periods of cultural turning points that cover areas connected with art through a network of various, mutually conditioning relationships. In present-day conceptions, there emerges another kind of connection between the subject and time, in which stress is laid on the “double game of time”. This means that, in terms of human experience, the hypothetical assumption of the absolute dominance of experiencing permanence or its contradiction is of no significance. Being influenced by the syndrome of continuity and discontinuity shows to what contradictory experiences we are exposed if we fail to discern the incommensurability of the present in different areas of life and forget that, according to Ursula Pfeiffer-Blattner, the experience of permanence in time can be thought of thinking only inside, which means that it has to be considered within its own relativity.³¹ This is only one of the ideas worth continuing, concerning continuity and discontinuity from a standpoint outside the syndrome.

The fact that the prospect of a return and perhaps creation of new forms of holistic thinking appears on the horizon does not yet permit an answer whether the abovementioned oppositions are still present in thinking about art in the age of late modernity. The trend of reflections continues to be developed, in which time is an adversary, an elusive companion in our living. The present, which is increasingly difficult to capture, produces a state that Germano Celant defined in terms of a pathological anxiety.³² His way of expression resembles the above-presented feature of the syndrome resulting from the impossibility of grasping and expressing the “more present than the present”. When this way of thinking is referred to the question of the value of art, a reflection arises that this value is not confirmed by its location in its characteristic series of rules determining its position in history. Art is valuable not because it is a metaphor, the essence of the present, and not because it has grasped and expressed the “spirit of the times”; it is the present that invests it with value, and creates the “absolute frame of reference”.³³ Reference to what? I would say that the question about the point of reference, however we may define it, makes us realize that it is we who create the framework of the two sides of the mirror: we are in time, time is in us. And there is only one mirror.

³¹ U. Pfeiffer-Blattner, *Kontinuität*, [in:] *Zeit im Lebensverlauf*, S. Schinkel, F. Hösel, S.-M. Köhler, et al. (ed.), transcript Verlag, Bielefeld 2020, pp. 161 – 166.

³² Cf. G. Celant, *Unexpressionism. Art. Beyond the Contemporary*, Rizzoli, New York, 1988.

³³ Idem, p. 5. *On the concept of 'contemporaryism'*, cf. G. Sztabiński, op. cit. pp. 102-103.

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CIĄGŁOŚĆ, NIECIĄGŁOŚĆ, FULGURACJA – FILOZOFICZNE KONTEKSTY ZMIAN W SZTUCE (streszczenie)

W artykule autorka przyjmuje założenie, że interpretacje zmian sztuce, ich łagodnego bądź gwałtownego przebiegu, zależą w od rozumienia czasu i koncepcji podmiotu. Przemiany w sztuce i przemiany w estetyce nie zawsze przebiegają równolegle z przekształceniami w obszarze społecznym. Przesłanki filozoficzne są jednym z podstawowych kryteriów ów podziałów w estetyce. Podjęta jest próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, jak konstruująca się tożsamość człowieka nowoczesnego, poszukuje nowego medium komunikacji, w tym wypadku jak czynią to teoretycy zajmujący się sztuką. Przedmiotem analiz są koncepcje opisujące zmiany w sztuce zapoczątkowane przez awangardę, rozważane w szerokim kontekście dyskursu nowoczesności. Łączy je swoista forma myślenia tożsamościowego, przybierającego charakter syndromu. Przedmiotem rozważań są teorie, które posługują się kategoriami o rodowodzie filozoficznym: fulguracja i płaszczyzny, ciągłość i nieciągłość, stopniowość i skokowość oraz im pokrewnymi jak ewolucja i dewolucja, kryzys negatywny i pozytywny. W kontekście rozważań na temat projektu nowoczesności w części pierwszej przywołane są koncepcje M. Wallisa, S. Morawskiego i G. Sztabińskiego. W drugiej części autorka zadaje pytanie na ile zmienił się sposób myślenia o sztuce w epoce późnej nowoczesności. Powołuje się głównie na „refleksję medialną” Dietera Merscha i ideę terażniejszości Germano Celanta.

Słowa klucze: Ciągłość i nieciągłość, skok, fulguracja, myślenie, podmiot, czas, terażniejszość, aktualność, syndrom, sztuka, awangarda, nowoczesność, granica.

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