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UNITY OF ART IN ADORNO'S AESTHETIC THEORY

Abstract: The article reconstructs the concept of the unity of art contained in Theodor W. Adorno's aesthetic theory. This recognized theorist of modernism and the musical avant-garde also commented on prehistoric art. On the basis of his analyses in the *Paralipomena to Aesthetic Theory* regarding the sources of art, the study indicates moments that allow one to perceive the common basis for the artistic works of the Paleolithic Era and modernism. The basis is 'mimetic comportment' which does not consist in reproducing the presented world but in generating autonomous spaces. This competence of art became endangered in the 20th century, facing the growing dominance of 'instrumental rationality'. Art included in the circulation of the culture industry lost its critical potential. The avant-garde volte-face was interpreted by Adorno as the response of art to attempts to neutralize it.

Keywords: Theodor Adorno, prehistoric art, mimesis, end of art, unity of art, culture industry, avant-garde

Artistic revolutions at the turn of the 20th century opened up an almost infinite field for experimentation in art, the field in which the freedom of the creative subject eventually became a fact. When, in the early 19th century, Immanuel Kant wrote in *The Critique of Judgment* about the 'art of genius' – art free from all legislation and independent of rules, he did not expect that artistic freedom inherent in this formula would shake the foundations of knowledge about art. The entry into open infinity of what became possible in art made the existing theoretical tools, developed in the course of philosophical reflection on the phenomenon of artistic practice, inadequate for it. The category of a 'work of art' as something material and as an 'organic whole' in its structure, a source of what traditional aesthetics calls 'aesthetic experience', disintegrated

into dust with the revolution whose symbol can be Duchamp's *readymades* and the era of 'anti-art' that they heralded. That is why one of the most important philosophical books on art that appeared in the 20th century opens with the sentence: 'It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore'.¹ For the author of *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor W. Adorno, art ceased to be self-evident at one more level. Not only from the standpoint of theory itself, but also from the philosophical and sociological perspective. Art became a riddle – a phenomenon impossible to explain within the framework of contemporary culture and social system, of which Adorno was an astute diagnostician, together with scholars associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research.² Namely, artistic freedom of 'new art' stood in contradiction to the growing lack of freedom in general. Social reality, whose shape was determined by the 'dialectic of Enlightenment' was to be the condition of the enslavement of individuals subordinated to the dictatorship of 'instrumental reason' and the growing control over the administered world, which is the main theme of the famous book jointly authored with Max Horkheimer.³

Similar diagnoses accompanied artistic revolutions, which often explicitly declared a change in the prevailing social relations and the restructuring of the existing world. Adorno did not, however, look for political meanings in the manifestos of the artistic avant-gardes. For him, the very fact of existence of art is problematic and non-obvious; for how can one explain and justify absolutely free art in the administered world, in which everything is rationally instrumentalised? 'The clichés of art's reconciling glow enfolding the world are repugnant not only because they parody the emphatic concept of art with its bourgeois version and class it among those Sunday institutions that provide solace (...) art is condemned to provide the world as it exists with a consolation that (...) strengthens the spell of that from which the autonomy of art wants to free itself.'⁴ Art squeezed into a series of 'Sunday events' loses its emancipatory potential and affirms the reality that it finds, thereby reproducing the social *status quo*. In light of the sociological diagnoses made for contemporary culture in the circle of the Frankfurt School, this affirmative character of art must have seemed disturbing and undesirable. In the narrative presented in *Aesthetic Theory*, art appears as if it itself was aware of the situation in which it

¹ Th. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, transl. R. Hullot-Kentor. Continuum, New York 2002, p. 1.

² See: A. Heller, *The Frankfurt School*, in: *Rethinking the Frankfurt School: Alternative Legacies of Cultural Critique*, ed. J. T. Nealon, C. Irr, State University of New York Press, New York 2002, pp. 207-221.

³ See: Th. W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, transl. E. Jephcott, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002.

⁴ Th. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory...*, pp. 1-2.

became entangled. 'Art responds to the loss of its self-evidence not simply by concrete transformations of its procedures and comportments but by trying to pull itself free from its own concept as from a shackle: the fact that it is art', Adorno wrote.⁵ Historical transformations that art underwent, identified as the loss of self-evidence, were interpreted here as its own response to the increasing dominance of 'instrumental rationality'. In light of his theory, the avant-garde revolt is the turn of art against itself; it is an expression of its rebellion and disagreement with its affirmative character.⁶

However, this interpretation requires the adoption of the assumption that art is a natural and dynamic process. Heterogeneous by its own dynamic, but still one and the same, albeit unclosable with a conclusive definition. How, namely, to discern unity in the incessantly variable of art? The reading of Adorno's aesthetic writings enables reconstruction of the phenomenon of art as precisely such a process which, although manifested in so much varied material, retains fidelity to its original intentions. It is in artistic revolutions and aesthetic volte-faces, changing what a work of art is and what it can be, that the temporally invariable character of art should be expressed. The reproduction of this timeless character will remain problematic, however. Even the oldest examples of human creative work, although they cannot be disregarded, cannot be recognized as conclusive about what art is, and not at all because they do not exhaust its whole scope. Art history handbooks start with Paleolithic cave painting from dozens of thousands of years ago, but we will never be sure whether something did not escape our attention or there was no coincidence like the one that resulted in the discovery of Altamira. In other words, we do not know whether prehistoric artists confined themselves to drawing and painting. But even if we were to deal with an optimal situation when we can clearly see the range of what mankind has created throughout its history, it would anyway be doubtful whether the synthesis of all those works could be comprised in one concept. The experience of artistic activities proves their infinite possibilities and thereby constant readiness to effectively challenge everything that might be recognized as the core of the current syntheses. 'The concept of art is located in a historically changing constellation of elements; it refuses definition. Its essence cannot be deduced from its origin as if the first work were a foundation on which everything that followed was constructed and would collapse if shaken'.⁷ That is why Adorno rejected the conviction strongly established in

⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

⁶ See: R. Czekaj, *Adorno and Practically Useless Art, or Autonomy Instead of Avant-garde*, „Art Inquiry. Recherches sur les arts” 2017, vol. XIX (XXVIII), pp. 121-130.

⁷ Th. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory...*, p. 2.

thinking that it is possible to discover the essence of art on the basis of its chronologically first and thus allegedly purest forms. Despite the fact that empirical sciences managed to amass an impressive collection of artifacts, they failed to explicitly answer the questions about where art came from, what it originally was, and, first of all, why it was able to become what it currently is. However, the Frankfurt scholar by no means intends to disqualify the so-called primordial art as the material for inquiries. In the sections of *Aesthetic Theory* devoted to the issue of the sources of art, he draws liberally on prehistory and anthropological theories. He does, however, synthesize the phenomena of that time, but tries to discern some kinship with everything that took place in art later. For him, of essential importance is the fact that Paleolithic artists usually made use of dynamic representations and it was those that they rendered most faithfully, as if they believed that that which was in motion was more important than that which was motionless. Empirical sciences treat this as an argument to support the thesis about the strong naturalist intention in primordial art.⁸ In contrast, Adorno interpreted the relatively low number of static pictures as a manifestation of resistance against reification. In order to treat something as a thing, I have to see it as something separate from me, whereas to the communities of that time a characteristic feature would be a conviction about the unity of everything that existed. Exactly like the Parmenidean 'unity', in which the difference is blurred between unity and multiplicity, movement and statics, and also between form and material.⁹ It is thanks to this that members of primitive cultures found the transition from one form into another absolutely real. A shaman who put on a demon's mask 'became' a demon. It was not only a symbolic 'transfer' of power that fell upon him, but also a kind of transubstantiation took place. Nonetheless, the difference between the shaman's face and the demon's mask had to be recognizable. If the face and the mask are not identical, then how to identify the mask wearer with the demon. It is the phenomenon itself that underlies dissimulation on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the same phenomenon is the basis of faith in real transformation. This dichotomy can be solved by pointing to the actor who, engrossed in his performance, blurs the boundary between what he is and the part he is playing, while it is no problem for him to return to 'reality' with the falling curtain. Both the shamanic ceremony and acting, consisting in acting out other characters, produce what the category of expression denotes. A shaman and an actor express something that they themselves are not. And the same relationship occurs between art and its works: it is paintings that are painted rather

⁸ A. Hauser, *The Social History of Art*. Vol. 1: *From Prehistoric Times to the Middle Ages*, transl. S. Godman, Routledge, London and New York 1999, pp. 1-4.

⁹ Th. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory...*, p. 328.

than what they represent.¹⁰ Therefore, it does not matter how large comparative material can be gathered because art is not a mere sum total of all works of art. The first drawings on cave walls are only the result of something more primordial. This something, according to Adorno, is 'mimetic comportment' (*mimetische Verhaltensweise*).¹¹

A model example of 'mimetic comportment' can be foregoing shamanic practices, in which practitioners mimicked something else, the difference being, however, that mimetic comportment is free from faith in real transformation. When Arnold Hauser referred to Paleolithic painterly representation of hunting in *The Social History of Art*, he saw a pragmatic function in those rock drawings, based on the belief that the painted deer is the same one that would be killed the next day.¹² Adorno, in turn, argues that had the author of cave drawings perceived the painted deer and the actual one in terms of the relation of identity, the drawings would have been devoid of stylization elements. Both in the drawings and paintings of that period and in sculpture – Paleolithic figurines – there are different kinds of modifications and simplifications that cannot be attributed to the manual ineptitude of the then artists, nor can they be explained by ignorance of perspective or by any other symbolic function. They are proof of the ability of the then artistic creativity to autonomously transform that which is being imitated,¹³ for the category of mimesis comprises not only reproduction and imitative repetition but also transformation.¹⁴ The mimetic moment converts art into paintings, but into such whose center of gravity is contained in themselves rather than in the relation to that which is depicted. Certainly, that which is depicted is an empirical reality which, however, as a depicted one, is something separate from itself as it is aesthetically transformed – it is 'an aesthetic pretense'.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, the term 'mimetic comportment' is used as synonymous with aesthetic comportment (*ästhetische Verhalten*). Observe how Adorno characterizes it: 'Aesthetic comportment is the capacity to perceive more in things than they are (...) Aesthetic comportment is the unimpaired corrective of reified consciousness that has in the meantime burgeoned as totality. That which in aesthetic comportment propels itself toward the light and seeks to escape the spell manifests itself *e contrario* in those who do without it, the

¹⁰ „After all, I paint a picture, not a chair” - Schönberg allegedly said. See: *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

¹² A. Hauser, *The Social History of Art...*, pp. 2-3.

¹³ Th. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory...*, p. 329.

¹⁴ Inspirations and influences underlying the category of mimesis in Adorno's philosophy are presented in the book by R. Michalski, *Antropologia mimesis. Studium myśli Waltera Benjamina i Theodora W. Adorna*, Wyd. Rolewski 2008.

aesthetically insensible (...) Ultimately, aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the capacity to shudder (...) Consciousness without shudder is reified consciousness'.¹⁵

It is characteristic that to describe the content of authentic aesthetic experience, Adorno used the Greek(?) term *apparition* which denotes something ephemeral, indeterminate and non-discursive. He himself explains this concept pictorially by comparing it to a burst of fireworks that flare up suddenly and go out right away, refusing to be captured.¹⁶ What flares up in a work of art emerges as something conceptually elusive, and thereby not located, and thus free from subordination to the pragmatic principle of exchange. 'What appears [in *apparition*] is not interchangeable because it does not remain a dull particular for which other particulars could be substituted, nor is it an empty universal that equates everything specific that it comprehends by abstracting the common characteristics. If in empirical reality everything has become fungible, art holds up to the world of everything-for-something-else images of what it would itself be if it were emancipated from the schemata of imposed identification'.¹⁷

Western rationality has instilled the conviction about the identity of every object with itself. In other words, we think of things that they are only what they are and nothing more, i.e., they are identical with themselves. However, in *Negative Dialectics* Adorno sought to prove that this identity is not inherent in them but is imposed, as it were, through conceptual thinking. "Yet the appearance of identity is inherent in thought itself, in its pure form. To think is to identify. Conceptual order is content to screen what thinking seeks to comprehend".¹⁸ Concepts do not have what they refer to and it is in this sense that they are negative. The world of our everyday experiences is structured according to conceptual schemata which enclose it in a false identity through their negativity.

The rescue will be art which is competent to transcend these limitations and should support the non-identical and that which submits to the compulsion of identity in actual reality. It can fulfill this task precisely owing to aesthetic/mimetic comportment. It is inter alia owing to stylization, aesthetic processing and the possibility of freely modeling elements that make up the whole of the work, that art rises above the limitations of the empirical world: 'Only by virtue of separation from empirical reality, which sanctions art to model the relation of the whole and the part according to the work's own need, does the artwork achieve a heightened order of existence. Artworks are afterimages of empirical

¹⁵ Th. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory...*, pp. 330-331.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 83.

¹⁸ Th. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, transl. E. B. Asthon. Routledge, London, New York 2004, p. 5.

life insofar as they help the latter to what is denied them outside their own sphere and thereby free it from that to which they are condemned by reified external experience'.¹⁹

Deriving *mimesis* from magic practices may suggest the atavistic nature of art. It does not necessarily mean that art is a vestigial relic which, nobody knows why, did not vanish in the mists of time like magic did. The more so that, according to the criteria of dominant rationality, aesthetic comportment must be something irrational. Adorno answers that the verdict given by that kind of rationality tells us more about the latter than about what is assessed here. 'What marks aesthetic comportment as irrational according to the criteria of dominant rationality is that art denounces the particular essence of a *ratio* that pursues means rather than ends. Art reminds us of the latter and of an objectivity freed from the categorial structure. This is the source of art's rationality, its character as knowledge.'²⁰

Owing to the connection of art with cognition and truth, it can fulfill functions critical of the existing reality and herald emancipation from procedures instilled in culture in the course of the 'Dialectic of Enlightenment'. In the conditions of the administered world this function is not self-evident, however, and is effectively destroyed by squeezing art into the circulation of the 'culture industry'. The term first appeared in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In the preliminary sketches for this book, its authors – Adorno and Horkheimer – used the expression 'mass culture'. As, however, they wanted to prevent interpretations identifying it with a culture that spontaneously sprang from the masses, often assuming the form of folk culture, they decided to choose 'culture industry' in the final version of the text. They used the word 'industry' on purpose, in order to evoke associations with assembly line production and distribution of cultural goods. Culture appropriated by industry is deprived of its characteristic features, i.e. unruliness and rebellious anti-systemic resistance. 'In all its branches, products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan. The individual branches are similar in structure or at least fit into each other, ordering themselves into a system almost without a gap. This is made possible by contemporary technical capabilities as well as by economic and administrative concentration'.²¹ Art loses its significance through all-for-effect speculations by a selected particular. This leads to the loss of ability to perceive works of art as a complex whole, for it is the affected detail

¹⁹ Th. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory...*, p. 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

²¹ Th. W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry. Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, Routledge, London, New York 2006, p. 98.

that comes to the fore. The author of *Philosophy of New Music* discerned this most clearly in popular music. It makes the listener develop a habit of becoming attached to isolated moments, which prevents him/her from thinking of a musical piece as a whole. 'In fact, all that the public grasps of traditional music is its crudest aspects: easily remembered themes; ominously beautiful passages, moods, and associations. For the listener trained to the sound of radio, the musical nexus that establishes meaning is no less hidden in an early Beethoven sonata than in a Schoenberg quartet, which at least reminds the listener that he is not in heaven, brought to graze on sweet tones.'²² What is conducive to isolating details is the saturation of music with catchy moments. It is they that can attract all attention and although they are an integral part of a musical structure, this structure, as a whole, remains unacknowledged since it is obscured by the charm and sensuous attraction of its particular moments.²³ The products of the culture industry abound with details, and the public accustomed to this seeks them in all fields of creative activity. The audience is oriented only towards selected curiosities. In a film, these could be, for example, the mimic grimaces of the main character, in literature – brilliant phrases, in painting – chiaroscuro, and in music – melodious entanglements of several sounds. If we remember some piece of pop music, it is, at best, one riff that we recognize correctly in every arrangement. In this way, we resemble the subway passenger who stuck in Adorno's mind: 'The man who in the subway triumphantly whistles loudly the theme of the finale of Brahms's First is already primarily involved with its debris'.²⁴

Through its products, and above all through the imposed way of their reception, i.e. being oriented towards isolated details, the culture industry might have contributed to the end of the 'authentic artwork', for it impairs the ability to follow the immanent sense of the complex structure which, for Adorno, is what every work of art constitutes. 'The culture industry has developed in conjunction with the predominance of the effect, the tangible performance, the technical detail, over the work, which once carried the idea and was liquidated with it'²⁵ Art that can be easily consumed loses its significance and that is why, as if in a defensive gesture, it responded by using materials and formal solutions that would hamper its consumerist character. Hence the identification mark of artistic modernism is dissonance, the hallmark of breakup and everything that resists in its reception. This is meant to wake up the public

²² Th. W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, transl. R. Hullot-Kentor, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London 2006, p. 12.

²³ Th. W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry...*, p. 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁵ Th. W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment...*, p. 97.

from its conformist sleep. For Adorno, the avant-garde movement is already an open rebellion against the infantilization of art, and thereby a therapy for an audience member won over by an affected detail. Therefore, the form of a work of art had to undergo a drastic change. 'Today, the only works that count are those that are no longer works' – wrote Adorno in *Philosophy of New Music*.²⁶

One might think that art also perishes with its works. The foregoing quotation should then be interpreted as a variant of the formula of 'dissolution of art'.²⁷ Popularized by Dadaists, it has its origin in the Hegelian diagnosis of 'Zerfall der Kunst'. However, neither Adorno's nor Hegel's concepts should be understood literally, for Hegel maintained that only a certain function of art ended – it ceased to be the seat of the spirit who, covering successive stages of the road to self-concept, moved to philosophy from art. Art abandoned by the spirit remained an empty shell. It thereby lost significance, it was finished as the object in which the spirit was embodied. It no longer mediates between consciousness and idea, and thus ceases to be worthy of attention.²⁸ In contrast, for Adorno, art by no means loses its status of being the object of philosophical reflection. In his conception, the end-of-art formula is close to those intuitions that made Heinrich Heine announce 'the end of the artistic period' (*das Ende der Kunstperiode*). What this German Romantic understood by that is only the end of the classical ideal and aesthetic autonomy. Historical experience required doubting in the existence of a cultural invariable pattern, which already in the 17th century was the object of the famous *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, and the supersession of Classicism by Romanticism only confirmed Heine's diagnosis.²⁹ The closeness between him and Adorno consisted in that they declared the end of art not so much in general but only of some of its forms.

For Adorno, dead art is found in the form of works whose content identifies with their evidence (in visual arts), the leading content (literature), or expression (in music), that is, wherever the content was made dependent on the form and material combined into one. 'The liquidation of art – of the closed artwork – becomes an aesthetic problem, and the increasing neutralization of the material brings with it the renunciation of the identity of content and ap-

²⁶ Th. W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music...*, p. 30.

²⁷ The interpretation of meanings in which the 'end-of-art' formula appeared in aesthetic discourses was presented by Stefan Morawski in his article *Warianty interpretacyjne formuły "zmięzch sztuki"*, in: idem, *Na zakręcie. Od sztuki do po-sztuki*, Wyd. Literackie, Kraków 1985, pp. 279-307.

²⁸ See: O. Marquard, *Aesthetica i anaesthetica. Rozważania filozoficzne*, transl. K. Krzemienio-wa, Oficyna Wydawnicza. Warszawa 2007, pp. 65-68.

²⁹ Heinrich Heine is regarded as the one who was the first to introduce the concept of its end into the discussion on art – see: S. Morawski, *Na zakręcie. Od sztuki do po-sztuki...*, p. 282.

pearance in which these traditional ideas of art came to term".³⁰ To be precise, one should rather speak of not only the end of some form of art, but also the end of some theory of it. 'Traditional ideas of art' are the aesthetics of philosophical idealism. In the theories of this trend, a work of art is always a sensual form of manifestation of non-sensual truth, and each element of the work is subordinated to this goal. In 20th-century art, however, the form became independent of the content and material: consequently, the categories of idealism were no longer suitable for philosophical analyses of works. Peter Bürger made this the starting point of his *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974), proposing a thesis about the collapse of the concept of the organic work of art.³¹ Lambert Wiesing observed that this diagnosis – fundamental for aesthetics that emerged after the mid-20th century – was first voiced by Adorno himself in *Philosophy of New Music* (1st edition 1949).³²

The book, regarded as a penetrating analysis of the musical avant-garde of the early 20th century, is a study of two extreme aesthetic strategies represented by Arnold Schönberg on the one hand, and by Igor Stravinsky on the other. The creative achievements of the two composers are two opposite ends of a sui generis continuum between which there would be the essence of 'new' music.³³ This music, in turn, crystallizes in opposition to 'traditional music', the role of its symbolic representative being played there mainly by Richard Wagner. The works of this German Romantic are, according to Adorno, the height of the reification of artistic expression and also contain the development trend of music that made it a consumer good. Schönberg and Stravinsky tried to escape from this trend by using new composition techniques. The former tried dodecaphony and atonality, the latter – 'absolute music'. In both cases, the point was to change the function of musical expression, to break off from ossified formulas imposed by tradition, and from the simulation, universally regarded as necessary, of the unity of form and content.

It would be in order to ask now what the avant-garde composers have in common with prehistoric artists. In light of Adorno's aesthetic theory, the former and the latter try to go through their works beyond the here and now, transcend beyond widespread communication structures and perception patterns. Mimetic comportment – a source of artistic practice – is not the ability to reproduce the world and imitate its procedures, but quite the opposite – an

³⁰ Th. W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music...*, p. 97.

³¹ See: P. Bürger Peter, *Teoria awangardy*, transl. J. Kita-Huber. Universitas, Kraków 2006, pp. 69-106.

³² L. Wiesing, *The Visibility of the Image. History and Perspectives of Formal Aesthetics*, transl. N. A. Roth. Bloomsbury Academic, London, New York 2016, p. 33.

³³ Th. W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music...*, p. 7.

artwork displays such a world in which tools, forms of dominance, or procedures of instrumental rationality are suspended. 'Artworks detach themselves from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity.'³⁴

Adorno's theory was constructed in relation to the art of 'high modernism' and mainly with reference to music and literature. However, the expressed judgments and conclusions, especially in *Aesthetic theory*, which is a synthesis of his philosophy of art, refer to the whole of artistic practices regardless of an era. What emerges from this theory is the picture of changeable art, but changeable only in its manifestations. Located in a given historical moment, it is obliged to always give an appropriate answer. What determines its unity is how it responds. Every time, it should be a promise to break the vicious circle of the reified world. And this is a play for extremely high stakes because, for the Frankfurt philosopher, reification was the cause of the historical disaster of the 20th century and the source of anxieties about the future fate of human existence.

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³⁴ Th. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory...*, p. 1.

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JEDNOŚĆ SZTUKI W TEORII ESTETYCZNEJ ADORNA (streszczenie)

W artykule rekonstruję koncepcję jedności sztuki, którą zawiera teoria estetyczna Theodora W. Adorna. Ten uznany teoretyk modernizmu i muzycznej awangardy wypowiadał się również na temat sztuki prehistorycznej. Na podstawie jego analiz zawartych w *Paralipomenie do Teorii estetycznej* odnośnie źródeł sztuki wskazuję te momenty, które pozwalają dostrzec wspólną podstawę dla twórczości ery paleolitu i modernizmu. Stanowi ją "zachowanie mimetyczne", które nie polega na reprodukowaniu świata przedstawionego, a generowaniu autonomicznych przestrzeni. Ta kompetencja sztuki stała się w XX wieku zagrożona w obliczu narastającej dominacji "racjonalności instrumentalnej". Sztuka włączona w obieg przemysłu kulturowego utraciła swój krytyczny potencjał. Awangardowa wolta została przez Adorna zinterpretowana jako odpowiedź sztuki na próbę jej neutralizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: Theodor Adorno, sztuka prehistoryczna, mimesis, koniec sztuki, jedność sztuki, przemysł kulturowy, awangarda

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