

ENTKUNSTUNG

If life were completely rational,
if everything in this world appeared
to us full of sense and in order, we
wouldn't have the need for making art,
neither would we spend our time
making philosophies or inventing religions.

ENTKUNSTUNG

EDITORS' NOTE

This book comes from the humble desire to contribute with something minimal to that universal library very well guarded by Borges. Its concept is derived from Pliny's *Natural History*, or at least, we would like to believe, it was inspired by the classic encyclopedia, with essays and works in which the present, history and visions of the future are narrated from different perspectives.

From the oral word to the written one, passing through the empire of symbols, forms and images, to finally disembark and sink in this ocean of virtual content. Whatever its medium is – the word as an expression, as an image of the world happily deposited in a book.

The Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang decided to build the great wall to protect his empire against the barbarians and, at the same time, ordered to burn all existing books of his recently unified empire in order to rewrite History, to create his own version of it.

Borges reminds us that in one of Bernard Shaw's comedies, fire threatens the library at Alexandria; someone exclaims that the memory of mankind will burn, and Caesar replies: "A shameful memory. Let it burn."

In *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury presents us with a terrifying future, a future where books are being burned. Reminding us that not just mankind's memory could be erased, but that censorship has been practiced intensely in the course of our history.

Not just vanity motivated us to undertake this effort: We believe that books are portraits of their time; they are like mirrors, reflecting how we see and perceive ourselves.

To presume that this book could be a mirror in which the reader can identify her or himself is already too much. Nevertheless, what we definitely hope is that its content is capable of promoting an interesting lecture of our present time, and that it is strong enough to enhance our capabilities to imagine possible – and better – futures.

The world, according to Mallarmé, "exists to end up in a book".

— FELIPE DUQUE
& MAXIMILIAN MAURACHER

PREFACE

Miguel Bosé, the great spanish singer, once told a story about the time he used to spend, as a kid, with Pablo Picasso, who was a very close friend to both his mom and his dad, Lucía Bosé and Luis Miguel Dominguín. One afternoon (says Miguel), walking by the sea in Barcelona, the famous painter took a piece of paper and made an origami bird out of it; out of the blue, like that, a perfect and beautiful bird. Then he gave it to his young friend and asked him to destroy it right away, to destroy it “as good” as he could. Bosé had always heard his parents praise and celebrate Picasso’s art – and not only his parents, of course –, and hesitated instinctively for a moment, maybe he should keep that bird for him: keep it until it turned out to be the strangest and most valuable piece of art ever made by Picasso, who nevertheless insisted, and insisted, and insisted in his order with such a determination, that Bosé had no other option than to grasp the little bird and crush it with his hands until it was but a jumble of crumpled paper, nothing again. “You can only create when you know how to destroy; art is creation as much as destruction...”, said the master without any further remark, and kept walking with a smile on his face.

From all the criticism on and about and against and even by Picasso, I don’t think there’s a more revealing scene than that, extracted from a conversation he had with a pop singer that should be 13 or 14 years old at the time. But that scene, and its conclusive and enigmatic sentence, sums up just perfectly Picasso’s art: his ‘aesthetic theory’, if one may say so, his philosophy. That was certainly the force behind his paintings and his permanent vital search, and that was also the spirit that made him what he was within the History of Art: the port of arrival of the whole western pictorial tradition, its mouth (if you think of it as the river it was and still is and will always be), but the melting pot as well where that very same tradition was ‘deconstructed’ and reformulated and saved from exhaustion. In that sense, Picasso fulfilled with his art, rigorously and beautifully, that principle he would share with Miguel Bosé many years later. That principle, in other words, was a confession, a revelation, a declaration of the mystery behind his life and miracles.

Because art is always reflection: there’s no art without thinking – consciously or unconsciously –, there’s no creation when there isn’t destruction: the understanding of how the world functions just to reinvent it anew. Just like that origami bird, its ashes are also its flight. That’s what I have found in this wonderful project called *Entkunstung*: a lot of reflection, a lot of reinvention of many problems related not only to aesthetic theory and art criticism but also to politics and sociology and history and life as a whole, “as a whole to be imagined”, as William Shakespeare once said. This book is a precious opportunity to revisit what *Entkunstung* has been doing, if you already knew it; or it is a fascinating door to discover its aims and conquests and aspirations as a project. Its incorruptible hope for the present, notwithstanding this horrible times in which we live. But that’s art too, isn’t it? A relief, a shelter, a justification of everything we stand for. Just read and enjoy, you won’t regret it. But if you do, so much the better.

— JUAN ESTEBAN CONSTAÍN

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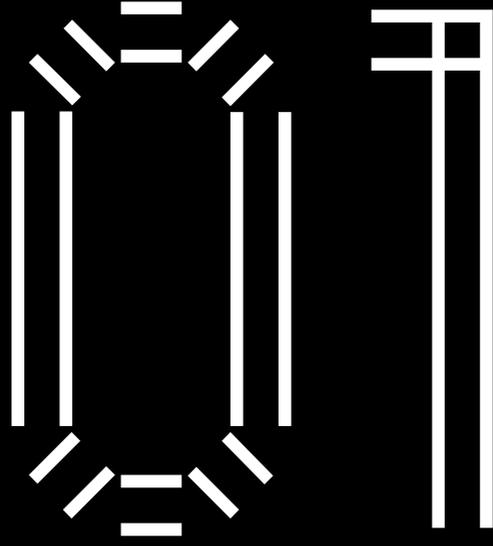
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ENTKUNSTUNG



There is an *unsatisfied reason* in the experience of art and it's exactly this dissatisfaction that motivates us to study and to rethink contemporary art practices. We are facing *the winter of our discontent*, however, the future is more promising than we think

Forty years ago Adorno wrote: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist ... In many ways, expansion appears as contradiction".

Philosophies and theories come, as always, *post festum*. They stay behind artistic expression when it comes to understanding and giving answers according to the *Zeitgeist* of every historical moment. They need time to reflect and to give explanations to any kind of cultural manifestation of our society, including the aesthetic one.

The essence of art is to communicate, to give reasons, to promote a dialogue and to be intelligible by finding its receptor. Nevertheless, the atomization and plurality of practices and discourses on art have altered the dialogue between the artwork and the spectator, making this act of communication and understanding more complex than it has ever been.

That is why, we believe, it is the task of every artist, academic, philosopher or theoretician, "to find a form that accommodates the mess", as Samuel Beckett perfectly stated.

Art After The End Of Art

— FELIPE DUQUE

“Clov: Do you believe in the life to come.
Hamm: Mine was always that.”
— SAMUEL BECKETT

PLATO

In Plato's *Republic* we witness one of the strongest attacks on art ever written. In his Book X, Socrates argues that while a craftsman is a useful member of society building useful artifacts, an artist is just an imitator creating appearances of real objects. As a consequence, Plato described a society in which mimetic art is considered inferior to handcrafts, something rather useless.

According to Plato, the ideal society is led by a philosopher and not by an artist. He thought of a system based on philosophical, not poetic, education. Artists, especially poets, are considered dangerous to Plato, because they have the potential to impress young people by repeating rather than by describing sonnets and plays, tempting them to imitate rather than to comprehend epic poems. At a certain point, Socrates even suggested the need to avid poetry books altogether, and one definitely could imagine Plato replacing Homer as a model of education for future generations.

Seeing art as something useless for society has been a reiterative perspective in the course of history. Even in times when it was used as a political anti-establishment or activist tool, “it is seen as ultimately celebrating and aestheticizing the status quo – and thus undermining our will to change it. So the way out of this situation is seen mostly in the abandoning of art altogether”.^[1]

HEGEL

A second powerful attack on art came from Hegel as he declared art as a thing of the past. “Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our ideas *instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality* and occupying its higher place.”^[2]

Even though art (specially in the form of poetry) is part of the trinity of the *objective spirit* and “was believed to meet the highest spiritual needs of men and women”, it achieved its role in history and from there it has to become part of the realm of philosophy and only philosophy can meet the needs art once met, only then can art be considered as part of the *Absolute Spirit*. Despite the fact that art is over and over a product of thought: *Aus dem Geiste geborene und wiedergeborene*, it cannot be compared to philosophy as art “must express its thought by sensuous means”.^[3]

In Hegel's view art will continue existing after its end, but not necessarily as we have witnessed it in the course of the last two hundred years after his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*. He envisioned an art that “[...] can be used as a fleeting play, affording recreation and entertainment, decorating our surroundings, giving pleasantness to the externals of our life, and making other objects stand out by artistic adornment.”^[4]

He perceived art as playing the mere function of giving joy by consuming and worshipping it in all its forms. One can recognize he does not consider pertinent Hume's position regarding taste in art or Kant's perspectives concerning the aesthetic experience. For him “taste is directed only to

His premonition about the future was accurate.

the external surface on which feelings play [...]. A so-called ‘good taste’ takes fright a tall the deeper effects of art and is silent when externalities and incidentals vanish.”

Hegel doubted the possibility of an individual experience of art based in its aesthetics, and did not believe that the aesthetic experience could be a vehicle for comprehending life. Furthermore, the possibility of an autonomous art was not even considered in his system of thought, which, in my opinion, is necessary for making the thesis of the *End-of-Art* plausible. Art had to transcend into philosophy in order to avoid failing as religion did.

His premonition about the future of art was accurate, however, Hegel's statement was premature, the end-of-art thesis required a process of *Entkunstung*, of ‘de-aestheticization’, an on-going historical continuum that he couldn't witness but theoretically envisioned perfectly.

Hegel's thesis occurred while art was facing one of its biggest revolutions towards the conquest of its autonomy, which resulted in it finding its climax in Modern Art and the achievement of formalism. This is a turning

point where art started to become *entkunstete* and its nature slowly into philosophy. The sensuous forms will never disappear (I do hope so), but these forms, following Hegel's thoughts, do not satisfy anymore the needs of society as a way of thinking and comprehending life. That is why categories like taste, quality and beauty were object of constant attacks by Avant-garde movements, as it turned out they needed to be surpassed and suppressed.

THE AVANT-GARDE

The decade of the 1950s is the historical moment when Hegel's thesis of the end-of-art, where art is considered a thing of the past and should be understood as philosophy, attains strong sediments.

After Hegel, as we know, art keeps developing through new artistic expressions, movements, discourses and even revolutions. Since the appearance of the Avant-garde and specially the Neo-avant-garde

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movements, as a consequence and response to the process of reductionism embodied in the theory of purity of medium defended by Clement Greenberg's narrative of Modern Art, the philosophical nature of art emerged in detriment of its aesthetics.

Here is where the figure of Duchamp appears to reveal how aesthetic gratification is no longer important, or at least no longer a required experience in art. He wanted "to inspire a kind of intellectual gratification [...] and part of his agenda was to

render taste irrelevant, another was to render skill irrelevant. He wanted to get rid of the 'eye' of the artist and the 'hand' of the artist, etc."^[5]

By dissolving the difference between ordinary objects and artworks, Duchamp *return(s)-us* to Plato, to the conquest of visual appearances, to mimetic art. In this sense, what modern art did was to dissolve reality, to put it in museums and as Boris Groys says: making clear the dead of a regime by showing its corpse.

By bringing fragments of reality to art, as we could see in Dadaism and some decades later in movements like Minimal, Fluxus and Pop Art, the nature of art was to be reconsidered. "In the twentieth century, all criteria of quality and taste were abolished by different artistic avant-garde. So, today, it makes no sense to appeal to them again."^[6] The consequence of this dissolution of boundaries between art and life is that in the end

anything could be a work of art, making more remarkable the importance of considering the philosophical nature of art as its primary value in detriment of the aesthetical one.

ADORNO

Adorno (well known for being Hegelian) pointed out this process, but he was more concerned about the aesthetic nature of art and its autonomy than on its philosophical nature. By creating the term *Entkunstung* he wanted to state how art loses its qualities and traditional characteristics to become something else. I would like to interpret 'traditional' as *of its time*, so this process of loss, of de-aestheticization, can happen (and it did happen) in every moment in history, somehow as an inevitable historical dialectic process. As we can see today, art and aesthetics are kind of a problematic equation, maybe a forgotten or even disrupted relation that has to be reconsidered again and again; however that is not the main topic of this essay.

Adorno was concerned about the role played by the *Kulturindustrie* in the production and reception of art and how this presence was influencing and devaluing the aesthetical and discursive potential of autonomous art, transforming art into merchandise, another product of the industry and Capitalist system.

Entkunstung tries to show how the distinction between autonomous art and other spheres of life – lets call it reality – becomes unclear as art is absorbed and assimilated by the culture industry. In this order of ideas, art leaves the fantasy of its independence and freedom, becoming powerless art and, under this panorama, society gives away the capability of understanding and criticizing life through aesthetics, as Schönberg, Kafka or Beckett have done it.

Art has moved towards its de-aestheticization, to its *entkunstung*, dissolving itself into life and developing into an object of mere intellectual consideration, attempting to achieve its nature philosophically instead of aesthetically.

It feels as if art is walking backwards to the future; still looking back and trying to understand which role should play in our contemporary society, and who knows, maybe a turn-around, a coming back to aesthetics can be the right direction after its end.

[1] Boris Groys | On Art Activism | e-flux Journal #56 | June 2014

[2] Hegel | Lectures on Aesthetic | The italic is made by the author of this article | 1835-1838

[3] Arthur C. Danto | Hegel's End-Of Art Thesis | 1999

[4] Hegel | Lectures on Aesthetic | 1835-1838

[5] Arthur C. Danto | The Distance Between Art and Life | 2005

[6] Boris Groys | On Art Activism | e-flux Journal #56 | June 2014