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## GENETIC CRITERION OF ART

**Abstract:** The paper aims to present the criterion of art, which is the act of accepting the status of a work of art by the artist after the completion of the creative process. The analysis includes a distinction concerning the interpretation of a work of art as conducted in a diversified and multi-directional manner from a possible discussion about the issue of whether a given object or process is a work of art. The article contains a thesis about the impossibility of depriving a work of art of this status. The discussion refers to the concept of the creative activity, the reception process, the concept of Artworld and the institutional definition of art, recognizing the latter as too far-interfering with the nature of art and containing suggestions on relational understanding of a work of art.

**Keywords:** criterion of art, intentionality, process of creation, institutionalism, work of art

The search for a criterion that would allow unambiguously recognizing works of art and distinguishing them from non-works of art has its roots as early as in Antiquity. For example, the question on the nature of art and an attempt to answer it by providing a variety of definitions of art was made by Aristotle who says "<<An art, then, as was stated, is a certain characteristic bound up with making that is accompanied by true reason; and artlessness or [lack of skill], to the contrary, is a characteristic bound up with making, accompanied by false reason, and concerned with what admits of being other-

wise.>>"<sup>1</sup> One can also find other criteria in theories, such as mimesis, catharsis or the Grand Theory of Beauty, or in a number of other historical divisions. In modern times, the re-edition of *Poetics* by Aristotle in 1549 contributed to the redefinition of ancient views on art by initiating a debate about a newly coined term beaux-arts, which was used by Charles Perrault in 1690 in the book dedicated to poetry and fine arts entitled *Le Cabinet des Beaux-Arts*, a then the meaning of the term was developed by Charle Batteux in 1747 in his treatise *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe*, where he focused on distinguishing types of arts, namely mechanical and fine arts. Similarly, avant-garde artists, redefined the concept of art. However, they did not abandon it totally by applying it to all artistic creations.<sup>2</sup> The avant-garde influenced the development of art, even though it caused some confusion to the already vague concept of art, but even such radical artistic works as readymades did not deprive art of its uniqueness, by which the author means its experience as unwavering recognition and impact of something real, existing and being different from ordinary objects, and not so rational, but escaping definition.<sup>3</sup>

The paper reflects on the *genetic criterion of art*, which unequivocally and objectively resolves the issue of the artistic nature of a given object or activity as a work of art. The purpose of the analysis is to emphasize the importance of the source of artistic creativity, which refers to the decision of the artist, which is most often taken on the completion of the creative process, which results in a decision specifying that an object or process is a work of art, i.e., that thus the creator confirms their artistic product. The decision as to whether we are dealing with a work of art belongs solely to the artist, preferably aware of the fact that by granting the status of an object of art, they change the nature of the object or process in question. Such a decision is the only necessary condition and thus also the criterion for determining creations as works of art. It is independent and it cannot be subjected to any debate, whose purpose would be to deprive a work of art of its thus conferred status. The creative process, expressed in any form, which is a specific kind of activity containing creative intentionality, enabling the creation of works of art, is necessary, but it does not mean that it is sufficient for granting the status of a work of art – the creative process may be completed, but this does not necessarily mean that the status of a work of art is automatically granted, as the artist's interpretation of his/her

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. Robert C. Bartlett, Susan D. Collins, The University of Chicago Press, 2011, (1140a/20) p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> P. Bürger, *Theory of the avant-garde*, transl. Michael Shaw, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> A. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, „The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, Wiley-Blackwell, American Society for Aesthetics Winter, 1974, vol. 33, No. 2, p. 142.

work through an act that confirms the work in question is needed. The granting of artistic status can be expressed through the law of the excluded middle, i.e., a given object or action is or is not a work of art. It is also taken into account that just as everyone has the right to value and evaluate specific works of art, no one can change their artistic nature by relativizing works thus confirmed. Such a procedure could lead to the denial of the essence of being a work of art and further undermine art in a general sense.

The genetic criterion considers the ontological status of works of art, making it an object-oriented analysis. In contrast, experience of art involves the subjective aspect, in which the process of reception, including the valuation of an artwork, is considered. This aspect touches on the issue of relativism and subjectivism of art, both of which positions are considered unhelpful by the author for the following analysis. Making reception of art subjective and possibly relativizing the status of being or not being a work of art makes it impossible to specify what art is as a separate domain of human experience, which can lead to ambiguity in the recognition of creative achievements. The author's basic stance, therefore, is the abandonment of subjectivism and relativism. He admits partial dependence of the reception process on the creative process, and the sequence of their occurrence. However, he rejects any other theories that subjectivize or relativize art and values (traditional and conceptual). Just as the status of being a work of art cannot be taken away from the Sistine Chapel frescoes, it cannot be taken away from Duchamp's *Fountain* – if, however, for some reason it occurred, it would be abusive to the arts and would be a mistake. The above-mentioned works could be valued in terms of the aesthetic or conceptual values they possess, or analysed historically, but always as works of art and not as ordinary objects. The ontology of a work of art, defining its nature, cannot be changed, only an artwork can be defined as, for example, poor or good, innovative or anachronistic, compelling or insignificant, etc. A different kind of an argument to give a criterion of art, such as institutional theory of art, or exhibition and social approach, is not relevant here.

All kinds of activities, such as the use of animal activity or artificial intelligence, do not negate the fact that we are dealing with works of art, but in the above criterion the decision on the existence of something as a work of art depends on the artist. The author believes that, for example, artificial intelligence can create art, but in the human understanding of it. Even if artificial intelligence communicates with humans about art, it will be source-related to human experience and the history of art, although it cannot be ruled out that even if artificial intelligence experiences art in its way, humans will remain the source for this experience, for the same reasons. Artistic decisions about something being or not being a work of art can be made in different situations and involve different objects or processes. The author insists that, once given, the

status of a work of art could never be taken away, regardless of whether we are dealing with frescoes from the Sistine Chapel, an ordinary stone or a product of artificial intelligence.

### **1. The creative process and act of confirmation as necessary conditions for the criterion of art**

We consider that works of art form a distinctive class of objects. Today they are diverse, but what they have in common is that they are created through the creative process. This process involves a certain kind of an attitude towards the world and is characterized by creative intentionality,<sup>4</sup> which causes the interpretation of reality made through works of art to be different, e.g., from the colloquial or scientific. The creative process determines the type of modality which is characterized by such a kind of intentionality. Pointing to the artistic type of a human, we need to refer to the way of mental and emotional shaping of the world and awareness of one's abilities and skills in creating content in the language of art. This occurs in the process of searching for and conceptualizing the form, abstracting, as well as leading in varying degrees of advanced, often interdisciplinary, research. Artistic expression is also associated with expression resulting from the need to speak about the world figuratively, adopting an attitude of a certain chosen aesthetics and following esthetical values in their traditional understanding, as centred around beauty, combined with intellectual content, appearing more prominently in contemporary art, and pointing to conceptual values which are directed toward meaning. The latter are created by condensing content, which makes it possible to create a form and thus intensify the intellectual message. The form influences reception due to its original and individual expression, which is missing in scientific theory, for example. The harmonic duality of the creative process and reception can also be pointed out. These two processes most often interact with each other, although they show bilateralism in the approach to the work of art. In the creative process, various emotional-intellectual content is materialized, while the form, by its indefiniteness, can inspire its evocation,<sup>5</sup> which results in the dematerialization of the content in the reception process, emerging intersubjective conceptual content and/or beauty.

We are interested in a conscious approach to the creative process, i.e., self-awareness of the artist's artistic nature and intentionality capable of delivering

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<sup>4</sup> J. Margolis, What, *After All, Is a Work of Art? Lectures in the Philosophy of Art*, The Pennsylvania State University Press 1999, pp. 92-93.

<sup>5</sup> B. S. Funch, *Emotions in the Psychology of Aesthetics, „Arts“*, *Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute* (MDPI), 11(4), 76, Basel 2022, p. 9: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/11/4/76>

artistic creation. Determination of one's artistic nature is an important component of creativity in a general sense, which allows for the self-identification of a person as a creator. It is a professional level of understanding of the creative personality, where one recognizes the need for creation, as well as the kind of art or art techniques one desires and wishes to develop. Such an attitude involves a declaration before oneself and through this a distinction from those who do not declare the need to create art. Such a declaration, which should have real foundations, provides the basis for an authentic creative attitude towards oneself and a similar understanding of the environment - "The material of art creation is a wide range of phenomena that stimulate the emergence of a desire to represent thoughts, feelings, emotions and a certain semiotic desire over the object, particularly the main desire of semiotics in order to produce the philosophical meaning of the sign system produced by art creator. [...] The material of art is a reality that becomes the target, the central foci, the direction of mental strength intentionality of art creators. Material object of artwork creation are the various phenomena of the reality of the world outside of the selves of art creator, or the reality within them is positioned as something outside. The phenomenon includes a variety of things, both concrete and abstract, the material and the immaterial, in the form of natural objects and objects of artistic products, or abstract things such as concepts, theories, methods, techniques, and images about something."<sup>6</sup> This may be accompanied by the adoption of different evaluating perspectives or research positions, as well as in certain situations we may speak of enlightenment similar to a solution to a problem or resulting from a scientific discovery.

The most important aspect is the artist's decision to declare that an object or process is a work of art. The concept of the art world by Arthur Danto<sup>7</sup> is helpful here. He advocates the thesis that the art world, through partial demarcation from other worlds, designates the domain of interest in art. The concept of the world of art can be applied without restriction in discourse on art because it consistently speaks of art as an object of interest and makes it possible to see and feel its difference from other types of reality. From a philosophical perspective, the world of art has its ontology, containing category content related to art. It refers to descriptions that make it easier to recognize phenomena related to art, although they cannot be used to decide what is and

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<sup>6</sup> B. Sunarto, *Basic Knowledge and Reasoning Process in the Art Creation*, „Open Journal of Philosophy”, Scientific Research Publishing (SCIRP) 2015, 5, p. 289: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.55036>

<sup>7</sup> A. Danto, *The Artworld*, „The Journal of Philosophy”, American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Sixty-First Annual Meeting, Oct. 15, 1964, Vol. 61, No. 19, pp. 581-582: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2022937>

what is not art. These phenomena allow us to specify and define dissimilarities of the world of art itself, as well as its differences from other spheres of life, manifesting, for example, in the existence of art criticism, exhibition spaces, media activities, art periodicals, budgets or specific decision-makers in charge of arts management and, above all, artists and their creations.<sup>8</sup> By making the distinction between artistic and non-artistic phenomena intuitively, we may realize that at any given moment we are dealing with something that demands a different recognition and insight than everyday matters. A description of the world of art, resulting from its distinction from any other worlds, with which this world can enter into relationships, is not, however, decisive for the criterion of art, although these characteristics help orient ourselves in discourse on art. When interacting with art, we use categories that define the art world, because it creates its environment in the form of, for example, art criticism or art market, but there is nothing relevant that could serve as the art criterion.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. The reception process as a source of valuation and critical interpretation of a work of art**

The process which must be considered when we talk about the genetic criterion of art is the reception of a work of art, which most often involves an aesthetic experience. During this process, we may see the creation of interpretations and, in special situations, we may observe debates or postulations about the status of the work of art or the non-work of art. Questions on the reception of art involve two aspects. The first one is related to non-professional (amateur) reception of art, which may relate to personal taste, while that does not necessarily need considering in terms of the importance of interpretation, not to mention the attempt to postulate a criterion of what art is and what it is not. Having in mind the non-professional reception, the author takes into account reception consisting in enjoying art, which is not always related to knowledge of art. It is a wonderful aspect of the impact of art, although it can lead to various ambiguities regarding specific works of art. Such reception is distinguishable from professional art criticism, i.e., the second aspect of reception, which expresses and entails binding content and consequences in such forms as an appraisal of the work in history of art or the art market. Statements of the former type most often remain irrelevant to the subsequent fate of the artwork, but those of the latter may affect the life of the artist as well as the fate of the artwork itself.

<sup>8</sup> G. Dickie, *What is Art? An Institutional Analysis*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1974, pp. 35-36.

<sup>9</sup> M. Weitz, *The Role of Theory in Aesthetics*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Wiley-Blackwell, American Society for Aesthetics, vol. 15, No. 1, 1956, pp. 28 and 32.

The first of the above-mentioned stances is private and most often leads to subjectivism or relativism, while the second one is meant to show that knowledge about art can be expressed in the form of elaborated judgments, which are intended to justify that knowledge about art and the nature of art are concerned with relatively unambiguous statements.<sup>10</sup> Of course, there are also borderline situations, e.g., when some interdisciplinary work is strongly linked to engineering or, more broadly speaking, to pure science, social phenomena or cultural trends, or is heavily technicist. Then, the categories of description intended for art become less clear, making criticism more difficult, but if there is an unambiguous artistic statement preceding all this, i.e., that is the genetic criterion of art, the whole activity remains inviolably artistic.

The point here is, which will be elaborated on later, that if we consider professional reception of art, an analysis involving cognition and/or experiencing and critical interpretation of the work should result from objective (or at least intersubjective) evaluation and cognition of the work of art. For obvious reasons, it must be included here that the critic first considers their cognitive perspective, which, however, as the aesthetic experience progresses, should become intersubjective, shared with other recipients and thereby should engage in a dialogue with interpretations and lead to objective statements about a given work of art – similar to the notion of Kantian intentional form, which makes it possible to make judgments with the help of feelings about beauty. Aesthetic judgements come from the imposition of aesthetical values and subjective necessity: "A *pure judgment of taste* is not influenced by charm or emotion (though these may be connected with a liking for the beautiful), and whose determining basis is therefore merely the purposiveness of the form."<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Institutionalism and sociology

Let us deal with the institutional definition of art, which seems to be attached to the concept of the art world, since, *de facto*, it takes place in this world, using elements of its structure, yet remains a concept separate from the world of art, as it focuses on classifying or valuing art. In this sense, the concept and idea of the art world, as mentioned earlier, are helpful and useful. The situation is somewhat different when we consider these structures of the art world, which institutionalism can address, taking advantage of the conditions for institutional evaluation. It may be that institutionalism, using only the institutional condition, brings the criterion of art only to an institutional decision.

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<sup>10</sup> M. C. Beardsley, *The Possibility of Criticism*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1970, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, transl. Werner S. Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis 1987, p. 69.

Therefore, if the institutional definition uses philosophical and artistic analyses, e.g., interpretation of art, there is no problem at all and everything goes on in various, however usual ways, reducing itself to artistic criticism without touching the imponderables of art – its nature. A problem may appear when, using this definition, one certifies the very existence of a work of art, i.e., states what art is, and what it is not. No classificatory approach operating with such categories as artifactuality, a set of aspects to be evaluated or any framework, approving the decisions of those acting on behalf of sociocultural institutions, i.e., people who are not creators of the artwork in question, can decide on granting the status of a work of art.<sup>12</sup>

Looking from a broader perspective, doubts arise that the institutional definition of art does not necessarily consider the values of art: "From the point of view of the institutional theory, both the imitation theory and the expression theory are mistaken as theories of art. If, however, they are approached as attempts to focus attention on aspects of art (its representative and expressive qualities) which have been and continue to be of great importance, then they have served and continue to serve a valuable function."<sup>13</sup> The quote indicates that certain features of art, such as aesthetic and/or conceptual values can be taken into account by this theory, but they are not required. Then, in a situation when the axiological criterion is not considered, as the Polish aesthetician Bohdan Dziemidok writes: "One of the main reasons why the institutional theory cannot be considered a complete and satisfactory characterization of art is that it programmatically ignores the issue of the value of art. It is true that the theory faithfully describes contemporary art practice, noting and rightly emphasizing the significant institutionalization of this practice. However, ignoring the axiological aspects of art, institutional theory cannot give an exhaustive characterization of art practice and detect its peculiarities, since art is a phenomenon *par excellence* axiological."<sup>14</sup> An example would be the interactive work by Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, *The Value of Art* presenting traditional painting, which admittedly was not neglected of its artistic status, but showed the trend of institutional commitment in the evaluation of traditional paintings, consisting in the involvement of economics in the creation of the value of work of art in the art world: "We transform existing paintings that we buy at auction houses. We equipped them with sensors that can measure the exact time viewers spend in front of the painting. A small thermal printer is also attached to the frame of the painting. [...] Once *The Value of Art* interactive painting is shown, the work will start counting the number of visitors and

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<sup>12</sup> G. Dickie, *What is Art?...*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> B. Dziemidok, *The main controversies of modern aesthetics*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2002, p. 32.

the amount of time they spend looking at the painting. Through our integrated sensors, the painting will constantly update its value, making the whole process of value creation for this artwork transparent."<sup>15</sup> This is a borderline situation in which the presented paintings retain their status of artworks, but their evaluation is institutional or, in this particular case, market-based, although it can be explained that it has a source in the interest of the audience. This can probably be taken as a paraphrase whose purpose is to show that it is also possible to approach art in this way, although it is irrelevant to the axiological dimension of art.

Thus, in the case of institutionalism as in the case of individual perception, we need to distinguish evaluation in the sense of valuing and critical interpretation, in which the axiology of the work of art is taken into account to a greater or lesser extent, from evaluation entailing ontological consequences, i.e. one in which you allow for institutional granting of the status of a work of art, which, as said above, goes beyond the permissible scope of institutionalist reference to art.

The genetic criterion of art interestingly reveals itself in one of the contemporary aesthetic theories included in Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. He assumes that a work of art is a source of continuous subversive interpretation. It is a catalyst for negotiation, and one could even say that it is a source of subjective interpretations that seem to relativize the work in question: "The artistic practice thus resides in the invention of relations between consciousnesses. Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations, and so on, ad infinitum."<sup>16</sup> This is quite a debatable theory at first glance, in which it seems that art will be diluted by dispersing the work in undefined interpretive processes and its functionalization. However, if we consider here that: art allows for the creation of relationships"... between individuals and groups, between the artist and the world, and, by way of transitivity, between the beholder and the world. Pierre Bourdieu regards the art world as a 'space of objective relations between positions', in other words, a microcosm defined by power plays and struggles whereby producers strive to 'preserve or transform it'. Like any other social arena, the art world is essentially relational, insofar as it presents a 'system of differential positions' through which it can be read",<sup>17</sup> then we may ask the question: how is it possible that

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<sup>15</sup> Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, *Value of Art*: <http://www.interface.ufg.ac.at/christa-laurent/WORKS/FRAMES/FrameSet.html>[accessed: 11.05.2023]

<sup>16</sup> N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, transl. Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods, Les presses du réel, 2002, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 26-27.

art subjected to strong influences and transformations has not lost its nature? Mass actions do not question the essence of art but use it to expand it or ground its themes, e.g., exposing questions for which everyday discourse is not sufficiently explicative, by touching social dilemmas, creating new atmosphere, affecting fashion, suggesting new perspectives and solutions to current issues. The relationship here is about being subjected to art, which can inspire and perhaps even provoke opening new streams of thought. On the other hand, art can be used in a variety of ways, seemingly unlimitedly and thus falling into degradation, falling to the role of a mere medium of communication. Even such a strong attempt to relativise art by declaring its mutability showed that it is not art that is subjected to relativization, but other modalities that come into contact with it: human motivations, actions, beliefs or perceptions, or the art market. Art remains a generator of or catalyst for change, it is a source of modification, but in itself it remains unchanged, intact in its essence. It changes in the sense of developing and expanding its boundaries, and in the sense of the emergence of new interpretations, but this only improves its condition and strengthens its position. This is because it is an artistic product, created as a result of the action of creative intentionality, which prevents it from being entangled in any collateral determining its conditions. It is not a social or institutional product, as it is not dependent on individual perception. Any attempts to violate the nature of an artwork must succumb to its impact, reinforcing its existence (unless a particular work of art is annihilated and thus forgotten).

Relational aesthetics shows that art exhibits expansiveness or even invasiveness in contact with social structures, as it gains interest in new spheres, finding its place, e.g., in economics or politics. Similarly, it does not submit to institutional attempts to decide on its status. It also remains unmoved in front of the subjective eye of the recipient. It is a sophisticated and unforced creation of human nature, having its genesis in artistic intentionality and creative action.

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## GENETYCZNE KRYTERIUM SZTUKI (streszczenie)

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie kryterium sztuki, którym jest akt nadania statusu dzieła sztuki przez artystę/artystkę po zakończeniu procesu tworzenia. Analiza obejmuje rozróżnienie dotyczące interpretacji dzieła sztuki, jako prowadzonej w sposób zróżnicowany i wielokierunkowy, od możliwej dyskusji dotyczącej tego, czy dany obiekt lub proces jest lub nie jest dziełem sztuki. Artykuł zawiera tezę o niemożności odebrania dziełu sztuki tego statusu. Dyskusja dotyczy działalności twórczej i procesu odbioru, odnosi się także do koncepcji świata sztuki i instytucjonalnej definicji sztuki, uznając tę ostatnią za zbyt daleko ingerującą w naturę sztuki, a także zawiera treści dotyczące relacyjnego rozumienia dzieła sztuki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kryterium sztuki, intencjonalność, proces twórczy, instytucjonalizm, dzieło sztuki

**Sidey Myoo** is a scientific pseudonym which comes from the net name adopted by prof. dr hab. Michał Ostrowicki in 2007, in *Second Life*. Sidey Myoo is a philosopher; he works at the Department of Aesthetics, Institute of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University and the Department of Theory of Media Art of the Faculty of Intermedia at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. He is interested in aesthetics treated as a theory of art, mainly in relation to contemporary art, including new media art. Since 2003, he has been analysing the philosophy of the Web and phenomena such as immersion, interactivity, telepresence, telemacity, hybridization, immateriality, identity and artificial intelligence. He stresses the importance of the development of technology which creates or transforms the whole human world. In 2006, he used the notion of virtual *realis* (later: electronic *realis*) which has become a basis for ontoelectronics, i.e., ontology focused on the analysis of electronic reality treated as a sphere of being.

In 2007, he founded the Academia Electronica ([www.academia-electronica.net](http://www.academia-electronica.net)) - a virtual part of the Jagiellonian University, acting on the model of university in the virtual worlds: *Second Life* and *Spatial*, where official academic courses and conference presentations are carried out.