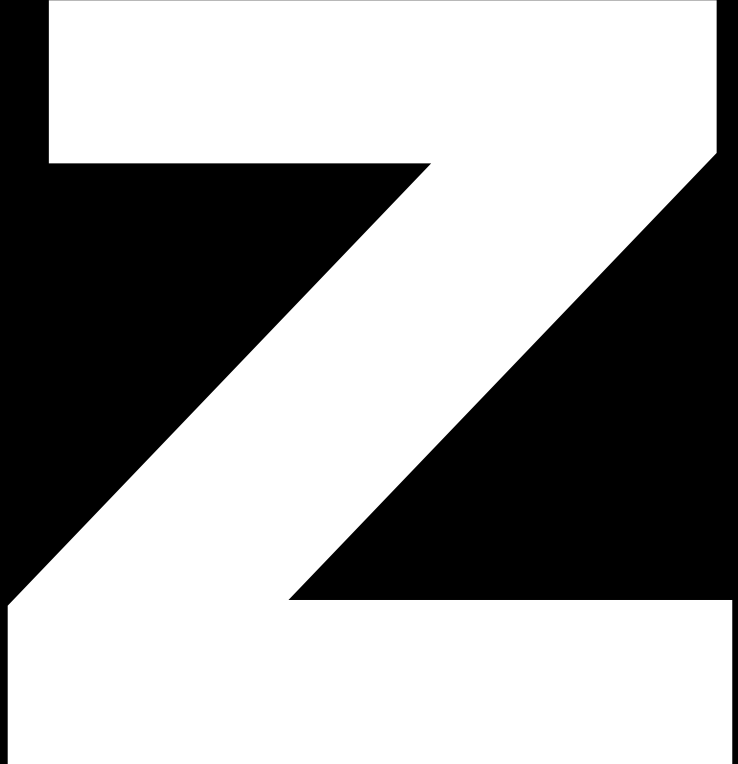


2016 / 2017

PLAN



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Fotografía / *Photographs*: Josep Galbany Noguera, Roc Gomar i Calatayud.

Diseño de carteles de exposiciones / *Exhibition poster design*: Teresa Costa Hernández.

Diseño de catálogo y portada / *Design of catalog and cover*: Eric Carpe Lomas.

Traducción al inglés / *English translation*: Kai Bernd Lange.

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Edita / *Publisher*: Martín Gràfic.

ISBN: 978-84-947525-6-8.

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Project-based art and acts of exhibition

1. Art object.

The art object, understood from its irreducible physicality, entails an inertia which is difficult to overcome due to the fact that it condenses different functions in a very effective way, some of them characteristic of modern art, associated with the autonomy acquired for art as a discipline and for the work of art as a system¹, and others with a previous origin.

Thus, the art object is, primarily, heir to the pre-modern object and to those pseudo-magical functions associated with its evocative or transcendent potential. In some way, its auratic character could be considered the heir of these powers², on the one hand as a result of its mimetic capacity, to replicate what is real, challenging the ontological stability of the empirical, but also for its capacity to influence reality, as part of a magical gear, inaugurating the road to its dimension as a fetish.

Already inscribed in the system of modern art, the art object acquires a new dimension by acting as the artist's synecdoche, a trace, as an expression of his uniqueness, understood from the figure of the creative genius, in line with the romantic tradition that considers the artist as an alter deus. Any object produced by the artist's hand -including sketches, drafts, doodles, etc.- is thus understood as its prolongation that, through this act of transference, increases its auratic dimension and that of a fetish, now associated with the genius that has created it. Not only traditional objects such as sculptures, paintings, drawings, etc. but also actions in the formats of happenings or performances or directed social practices that, from their intrinsically immaterial character, produce records, sediments, in short, physical remnants in which to condense the physicality. Such is the gravitational energy, the attractive force, of the art object.

In this sense we should also consider the origin of the modern art system in relation to the development of capitalism as an ideology of the bourgeoisie³. The production of art objects for a free market during the protestant and bourgeois baroque can be understood as a first step to overcome the heteronomy of art⁴. This new way of understanding the art object as subject to supply and demand positions itself in contrast to commissioned art, inscribed in the symbolic apparatus of the Ancient Regime characteristic of the catholic baroque. While the dynamics of the commission also involved transactions and a, let's say, commercial dynamic, in the case of the bourgeois art object is produced from the dynamics of the "free" market that moves capitalism, a way that later will be characteristic of the modern art system. Freedom, originality, creativity move the artist in the introduction of objects-products that are governed by the laws of the market: supply and demand and planned obsolescence.

In the light of this idea of the pseudo-magic object that captures the artist's temperament, which is a register of the creator's expression and which is defined in a horizon of projection-interpretation of polysemous meaning, derived from the immanent and autonomous character of the art object, facing this idea, let's say, a new model of understanding art production arises that has been paving its way in the last decades, a model founded on project-based art.

2. Project-based art.

The transition from art based on the object to art based on the project can be considered as the change that marks the horizon of contemporary art practices and can even be understood, as does Nath-

1 It is understood as the cultural model of appreciation of art and art production that arose in the late eighteenth century, early nineteenth century and that would be substantiated in the autonomy of art and the pre-eminence of aesthetic function. See SHINER, L. *La invención del arte (The invention of art)*. Paidós. Barcelona, 2004

2 FREEDBERG, David. *El poder de las imágenes (The power of the images)*. Cátedra. Madrid, 1992.

3 HEINZ HOLZ, Hans. *De la obra de arte a la mercancía (From artwork to merchandise)*. Gustavo Gili. Barcelona, 1979.

4 HAUSER, A. *Historia social de la literatura y del arte (Social history of literature and art)*. Editorial Labor. Barcelona, 1985.

alie Heinrich⁵, as a change of model or paradigm. This change implies a series of new ways of conceiving, producing and appreciating artwork that we could associate with various relevant transformations.

The first one is the passage from the artist's use of a single medium or technique, more or less traditional, –and its identification as part of his personal style– to the use of different media, seeking interdisciplinarity and sometimes the rupture with the limits, materials and traditional uses of the artwork, looking to expand the territory of what is susceptible of being considered art. In the same vein, it can lead to the dematerialisation of the object, not by its own dissolution, which sometimes occurs, but by the fact that the work itself no longer resides only in the object, but in an intertwining of interdisciplinary practices, discourses of meaning and interactions with the physical and social context of the artwork.

The second transformation connects with the idea of the insertion of the artwork in a specific context of reception. Not only does it imply an emphasis on the importance of the context in its physical aspect –the need to install the project– but also in terms of its integration into the socio-cultural environment of the host community. In this regard, Nicolas Bourriaud mentions this relational dimension of contemporary work, which transcends mere objectiveness:

“The form of contemporary artwork extends beyond its material shape: it is an amalgam, a dynamic, binding principle”⁶.

The third transformation refers to the need to construct a narrative that transcends the materiality of the artwork and places it within a more complex horizon of meaning. In this vein, it is paradoxical to see how, being one of the claims that characterise the emergence of the modern art system, the autonomy of the artwork from verbal languages, its de-literaturisation⁷, that is, the assertion of an immanent meaning of artwork, have been creating the need for an “explanatory” discourse that “anchors” the polysemous meaning of artwork: the critique, history, the museum and the academy.

Although the system of modern art has generated the need for exegesis in the face of the supposed interpretative freedom of the spectator, even at times endowed with a prescriptive character, the role of this discourse has had a somewhat subordinate function to that of the very capacity of the art object to become the centre of the creative act and the process of aesthetic perception.

Dissimilarly, contemporary art dilutes the object in a discourse of meaning that takes the shape of narrative. A narrative that is configured as temporality and transcends the material object.

“The narrative: this is the common point of these multiple ways of projecting artwork beyond the object. (...) It can be said that contemporary art has essentially become an art of ‘narration’: an art of story-telling, or even of legend, an art of commentary on interpretation. (...) The object is only an excuse, at best an activator, which will induce actions, words, operations, reconfigurations of space (...) and the artwork is in this set of things”⁸.

I believe that this central role of story in contemporary art can be revealingly put in relation with the proper distinction of literary theory between story and discourse as elements of the narrative⁹. The story

5 Nathalie Heinrich explains this change by distinguishing two variables, the first: “how do we consider art?”, i.e. as expression or production and the second one: “how do we judge it?”, i.e. in terms of beauty or singularity. The combination of these two pairs establishes three paradigms of art appreciation/production. Expression/Beauty would correspond to classical art, Expression/Singularity, to modern art and Production/Singularity to contemporary art. HEINICH, Nathalie. El paradigma del arte contemporáneo. Estructuras de una revolución artística (The paradigm of contemporary art. Structures of an art revolution). Casimiro Libros, Madrid, 2017.

6 BOURRIAUD, Nicolas. Estética relacional (Relational aesthetics). Adriana Hidalgo editora, Argentina, 2006. p. 21.

Along the same lines: “Modernity continues today in the practice of do-it-yourself work and the recycling of the cultural, in the invention of everyday life and in the organisation of time, which are no less worthy of attention and study than the messianic utopias or the formal ‘novelties’ that characterised it yesterday”. Ibid. p. 12.

7 ROSEN, Ch. & ZERNER, H. Romanticismo y Realismo. Los mitos del arte del siglo XIX (Romanticism and Realism. The myths of 19th century art). Hermann Blume. Madrid, 1988.

8 HEINICH, Nathalie. Ibid. p. 96.

9 CHATMAN, Seymour. Historia y discurso La estructura narrativa en la novela y el cine (Story and discourse. The narrative structure in novels and cinema). RBA, Barcelona, 2013.

refers to What, to what the narrative is about: events, characters, timeline, etc. The discourse looks at How, how events are presented: the medium, chronological order, the emphasis on one fact or another. What is interesting is the way in which story and discourse interact as if story were pre-existing and, somehow independent of a particular discourse. The story precedes any material concretion, any medium, any selection of events, any emphasis, any discourse.

This potentially polymorphic character of the various discourses that come from a single story is evidenced in contemporary audiovisual culture, in the proliferation of diverse media, formats, narratives that are forged, precluded or postponed, in expanding fictional universes that materialise in very different media, establishing a web of relations that allude to a single story¹⁰ that is assumed as previous and conceptually closed, hypothetically defined and which foresees or anticipates each of the events, scenarios and actors that appear in the different discourses¹¹.

I think it is possible to translate this distinction between story and discourse from literary theory to the realm of art creation, establishing a parallelism between story, understood as the framework that precedes the discourses and that potentially encompasses them, with the idea of art projects. The project as a previous concept, argument, proposal of meaning, story, which needs to be substantiated in an art discourse that is increasingly interdisciplinary, more and more composed of ramifications, progressively polymorphic, more interactive, more complex.

The project, the narrative, the story, is constituted as justification / interpretation / guide of the production-contemplation process of artwork, planting itself as a framework of meaning that provides coherence to the discourse with meaning –that is, the media, processes, particular interactions in which it takes shape– and thus becoming, by its primordial character, indispensable in the context of contemporary art practices¹².

3. Authoring and allography.

The idea of the project as the centre of the creative act and as the guiding principle of the discourses that are generated from it, must be put into relation with a fourth transformation that takes place in contemporary art and that is related to the change in the valuation of how art creations are carried out. If manual dexterity ceased to be valued by modern art at the expense of the artist's expression¹³, however, the appreciation of the presence of the artist's gesture, of his action on the art object persisted. With contemporary art, even the value of the trace has been lost, so we could say that, following the distinction of Nelson Goodman¹⁴, there has been a transition from autograph –which exists as a unique irreproducible object, losing part or all of its essence or value in reproduction– to the allographic –which exists through an unlimited series of reproductions or interpretations such as musical, literary or cinematographic works¹⁵.

Three tendencies have been counteracting the inertia to understand the work of art as a sign –index, in the strict sense– of the artist. On the one hand, Marcel Duchamp's ready-made tradition, which ultimately reduces the creative act to a process consisting of a volitional act: a designation and decontextualisation,

¹⁰ This narrative structure has sometimes been referred to as transmedia and would be exemplified in science fiction sagas such as Star Wars or Star Trek, which generate prequels and sequels, narratives in cinema, comic strips, novels, etc. that intercommunicate. GIOVAGNOLI, Max. Transmedia Storytelling: Imagery, Shapes and Techniques. ETC Press, 2011. p. 26

¹¹ "Story, in a technical sense of the word, exists only on an abstract level; any manifestation already supposes the selection and order made by discourse and expressed by a concrete medium. There are no privileged manifestations". CHATMAN, Seymour. *Ibid.* p. 49.

¹² "In fact, no work of contemporary art, regardless of its genre (ready-made, conceptual art, installation, performance and even painting) is presented in the art world without the company of a discourse, whatever shape these 'verbal operators' take and whoever the author may be – the artist himself, a critic or the institution". HEINICH, Nathalie. *Ibid.* p. 184.

¹³ Which would be illustrated, for example, by the division of teaching in Bauhaus between the workshop master and the artist, a division that persists in our schools today. For a development of the teaching model of Bauhaus see: WICK, R. *Pedagogia de la Bauhaus* (Pedagogy of Bauhaus). Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1988.

¹⁴ "We will talk about a work of art by saying that it is autographic if, and only if, the distinction between original and copy is significant; or better still, if, and only if, even the most exact duplicate cannot be considered authentic. (...) Thus the painting is autographic, and the music non-autographic, or allographic. (...) A notable difference between painting and music is that the composer's work is already finished once he has the written the score, as much as the performances are his finished product; while the painter has to finish the painting." GOODMAN, Nelson. *Los lenguajes del arte* (The languages of art). Editorial: Seix Barral, Barcelona, 1976. p. 124.

¹⁵ Nathalie Heinich analyses this transformation in the context of contemporary art. HEINICH, N. *Op.Cit.* pp. 113-117.

by means of which industrially manufactured objects are presented directly, a strategy that opens a pathway of modern art that will lead to an expanded type of objet trouvé, and to many of the samples of the contemporary genre of installation and its variants, which Nicolas Borriaud has analysed under the concept of post-production¹⁶.

The second trend is linked to the process of dematerialisation of artwork, mainly associated with the conceptual movements of the 1960s¹⁷ and its interest in the processes of ideation in artwork:

“(…) in the binomial Idea/Matter, the important one will be the first one. The material realisation will not change in any way the merit of the work. ‘The idea becomes a machine that produces art’ (Sol LeWitt); 1) ‘The artist can construct the artwork’. 2) ‘The artwork may be manufactured’. 3) ‘The piece need not be built’ (Lawrence Weiner). ‘Pure ideas can be works of art’ (Sol LeWitt)”¹⁸.

This emphasis on the importance of idea connects with the possibility that the artwork itself may exist only formulated as instructions to follow¹⁹. In terms of participatory art, these instructions are executed by the spectators, but if we consider that, the “expressive” value of the realisation –the facture– has been abandoned, these instructions could be carried out by third parties. In this way, there would be a shift from post-production, i.e. the selection of pre-existing objects of any kind²⁰, to production -realisation- of the artist’s instructions by technicians and/or specialists²¹.

A third trend that defines this new way of understanding art production is associated with the possibility of the technical reproducibility of artwork, the progressive loss of the original value and its explosion into multiple particular reproductions that dilute or omit it. Linked to the use of techniques that do not require the existence of a hand-made original created by the artist, we can understand the irruption of the digital as an art support as the (pen)ultimate phase of this process of dissolution of the art object in multiple supports, reproductions, variations, each of them subtly different, orphans of the original. The digital not only as a display medium but also as a medium for the information itself, as a means of transmitting and transporting it to the exhibition places.

The emphasis on the importance of the narrative, of the project, in parallel to the loss of value of the creative act, as in manually created, of the artist, opens a new horizon to the production of allographic works in which there is not strictly an original but a series of instructions that the artist provides to the different technicians/actors and that can be shared, distributed over a distance for its future execution.

4. Acts of exhibition.

In modern art culture, the act of publicly exhibiting artwork –the exhibition– has occupied a central and decisive role in the construction of both personal art discourses and the great narratives of art history. From the struggle against the nineteenth-century parlours in the search for spaces of self-legitimation

16 BOURRIAUD, Nicolas. Postproducción. La cultura como escenario: modos en que el arte reprograma el mundo contemporáneo (Post-production. Culture as a stage: ways in which art reprograms the contemporary world). Adriana Hidalgo Editora, Argentina, 2004.

17 MARCHAN FIZ, Simón. Del arte conceptual al arte de concepto (From conceptual art to the art of concept). Akal. Madrid, 1986.

18 COMBALÍA, Victoria. La poética de lo neutro. Análisis y crítica del arte conceptual (The poetics of the neutral. Analysis and critique of conceptual art). Anagrama. Barcelona, 1986. p. 75.

19 DEZEUZE, Anna. The ‘Do-it-Yourself’ Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media. Manchester University Press, 2010.

20 Examples of this strategy include artworks that re-use photographic images from the web. See: FONTCUBERTA, Joan. La furia de las imágenes. Notas sobre la post-fotografía (The fury of images. Notes on post-photography). Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona, 2016. Especially the chapter “Imágenes de segunda mano (Second-hand images)”.

21 We can find many examples of artists who work in this way such as Maurizio Cattelan, Jakes and Dinos Chapman, Damien Hirst, etc. For a documentary approach to some of these works see: THORNTON, Sarah. 33 artistas en 3 actos (33 artists in 3 acts). Edhasa, Barcelona, 2015. For a repertoire of these practices see: PETRY, Michael. The art of not making. The new artist / artisan relationship. Thames and Hudson. London, 2011.

to the thesis exhibitions that have marked the historiography of modern art²², the art exhibition is defined as a necessary materialisation of the creative becoming of an artist or group, as well as a sanctioning and legitimising act through the institutions of the modern art system: the museum, the gallery, the critique - aesthetics- and, also, the academy.

What is made public by means of the exhibition thus becomes materialised and susceptible of being considered history, hence also the need for its documentary record. At the same time, the exhibition establishes a framework of isolation and exceptionality that responds to the needs that aesthetic contemplation imposes in the new model of appreciation of the work of art: neutrality and immanence²³.

Even the art galleries have acquired this format of the exhibition as the priority way of showing art products, though being able to have opted for other channels of distribution/sale, that are more suitable even to their business interests, such as auctions or art fairs. In the same way, even unconventional formats, arising from conceptual, virtual or relational practices, need to be ultimately captured in the exhibitiv act, as a way of integrating into the discourse of modern art²⁴.

Therefore, let us admit that, even in spite of the tendency to dissolve the art object and its subsequent condensation around what we have defined as the art project, in spite of the fact that even this dematerialisation has established itself as a central practice in some artistic modes, contemporary art keeps this attraction, this propensity to materialising itself in an act of exhibition, an act that focuses on the creative process, an act that concentrates the creative process, solidifying the becoming, be it liquid²⁵ or gaseous²⁶, of its creative process, which is formulated as a "declaratory act" on the part of the artist, as an "act of experience" for the spectator -sometimes also for the artist- and, also, as a "legitimate act" for the modern art system.

We understand that the horizon of contemporary art practices is defined by a scenario of projects (multimedia and/or interdisciplinary), defined by a narrative universe -narrative or project- that establishes the framework of meaning and that can be produced by people other than the artists themselves, and stored, reproduced and transmitted by means of digital media. This scenario in which the project allows multiple realisations in its concretion in art discourse, in which the material authorship becomes diluted in the production process, needs a "stabilising" and "sanctioning" act: the exhibition, an act by which a specific materialisation of the project that takes place at a specific time and place is validated and stabilised as a record and as a contribution to the evolution of the arts.

José Vicente Martín

22 To analyse the importance of modern art through exhibitions see: DAIX, Pierre, Historia cultural del Arte moderno. De David a Cézanne (*Cultural History of Modern Art. From David to Cézanne*). *Ensayos Arte Cátedra*, Madrid, 2002. DAIX, Pierre, Historia cultural del Arte moderno. El siglo XX (*Cultural History of Modern Art. The 20th century*). *Ensayos Arte Cátedra*, Madrid, 2002. GUASCH, Ana María, El arte del siglo xx en sus exposiciones 1945-2007 (*Art of the 20th century in its exhibitions 1945-2007*). *Ediciones El Serbal*, Barcelona, 2009.

23 STANISZEWSKI, Mary Anne. *Believing is seeing. Creating the culture of art*. Penguin, New York, 1995.

24 It is illustrative to observe the relevant role of art exhibitions that have the Internet as a medium. See: PRADA, Juan Martín. *Prácticas artísticas e internet en la época de las redes sociales (Art practices and internet in the era of social networks)*. Akal, Madrid, 2015.

25 BAUMANT, Zygmunt, *Arte, ¿líquido?* (*Art, liquid?*). Editorial Sequitur, Madrid, 2007.

26 MISCHAUD, Yves. *El arte en estado gaseoso (Art in gaseous state)*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Méjico, 2007.