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Whose Shoes?

Identity in Works of Art

Abstract

The problem of identity in the world of art is relevant from many perspectives. This paper aims at discussing the identity of the work of art. The discussion is built in three steps: the problem of identification of an object as work of art, the problem of the relevant properties of a work of art and the question of the author of the work of art as decisive (or not) for the identification of a work of art. These issues are raised with the evolution of artistic practice and art theory in the last century. The appearing of the “ready-made” destabilized the firm identity of a work of art and now we have to decide what the difference is between a work of art and its perceptually identical pair. Traditionally relevant perceptual features lost their importance in conceptual art, so we have to decide what relevant properties belong, even today, to works of art. Finally, the practice of appropriation in postmodern art challenges the notion of the artist and of the meaning of genuine creation.

Key words

identity of works of art, definitions of art, uniqueness of works of art, authorship

Introduction

We see works of art as special objects¹ related to which the features of originality and uniqueness spring into mind instantly. Thus, the establishing of a work of art’s identity (“what is this?”) happens in two steps: on the one hand, the identification of the object as a work of art (generic thesis), on the other hand, the identification of the object’s uniqueness (specific thesis).

1. The generic thesis: “This is a work of art”

To be able to identify an object as a work of art,² an obvious starting point is a definition of art or a theory of art which determines the realm of the artistic, and so we can decide whether the object in question belongs or not to this

¹ I use the concept of ‘object’ intentionally ambiguously as an object itself and as the objectified subject of thinking. Works of art are traditionally objects, but in the 20th century the work of art is not unambiguously an object, however, it is still the objectified object of thinking.

² In the present paper I generally deal with visual arts; since there are significant differences between forms of art, the differentiated analysis by art forms would have superseded the framework of present paper.

realm. We can define the generic aspect of a work of art if we know *what art is* in the realm of which the “work of art” is created.

The late appearance of the concept of ‘art’ also indicates that the question aiming at the identity of art is not easy to answer. The notion used by the Greeks – *techne* (in Latin *ars*) – brought about a momentum which impacted the further history of the concept of art. *Techne* meant knowledge, competence based on rules, thus it was relevant to every craft that had rules and could be learnt. Thus the Greco-Roman world, the middle ages and early modernity held art as an activity that can be governed by rational principles. Since *techne* is a very wide notion, including most skills from mechanic crafts to rhetoric, the Greeks defined the realm we call art as *imitative* or *mimetic* art. This idea defined thinking about art and artistic practice until the 19th century.

As convincingly proven by Tatariewicz’s analysis,³ the inclusion of different art forms into one concept was not an easy task. In the medieval system of knowledge painting, sculpture, and architecture belonged to mechanical or vulgar arts, music to liberal arts. Poetry did not figure at all among the arts – owing to the fact that Plato’s dialogue entitled *Ion* was known in the Middle Ages, while Aristotle’s *Poetics* was not.⁴ From Plato’s dialogue we find out that poetry is not a matter of skill but of inspiration,⁵ thus poetry can by no means be art. Aristotle’s authority had to complement Plato’s to raise poetry among the arts based on *Poetics*, which was interpreted normatively. These theoretic boundaries had to be pushed to create an inclusive concept of art that arranged such different activities onto one plane.

This theoretic achievement can be found in Charles Batteux’s writing published in 1746, entitled *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe*. The title of the text also reflects this unifying tendency. From this writing we can find out that what unifies the arts is the commonly shared goal (pleasure), their principal property (imitation), and their theme (beautiful nature). We can see that imitation continues to be a general feature of the definition of art. What is new, at the same time, is that the value of the beautiful is a substantial part of art: we do not only speak of imitative arts but *fine arts* (and in Batteux the term refers to painting, sculpture, poetry, as well as music and dance).

The definition of art, which was the result of a difficult labour, proved to be inadequate half a century later. The Romantics went back to the element which was thought to be irreconcilable with *techne*: inspiration, the *ingenium*. The emphasis was shifted to the process of creation; fine art – using Kant’s expression – is the art of the genius.⁶ In this new perspective the faithful imitation of nature ceases to be a goal for the artist creating in the spirit of originality. The considerations of philosophy of art and artistic practice both found the theory of mimesis outdated, and called for alternative theories of art. Thus were born the also popular definitions at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th centuries according to which art is *expression* (Lev Tolstoy, Benedetto Croce), or *significant form* (Clive Bell). Consequently, art theory by the 20th century ramified to such suggestions that were irreconcilable with each other. Perhaps it is Clive Bell’s definition that is the most likely to be universalised. However, several researchers have indicated that his definition of art is circular: significant form evokes aesthetic emotion, while aesthetic emotion is an emotional reaction, which springs from the encounter with the significant form. On the other hand, even Clive Bell’s definition is not universal enough to hold such phenomena as Duchamp’s *Fountain* or Roman Ondak’s *Loop*.⁷

Up to the 19th century, the main difficulty was the integrated interpretation of the diversity of artistic activities, but there was no question as to an object

being art or not, or whether a painting or a sculpture was indeed a painting or a sculpture. Until the 20th century such works of art were not common where the viewer would be tempted to mistake them for everyday objects. The discussion was at most about the quality of the work of art: whether the representation of the female nude was acceptable if not enveloped in some mythological reference (Manet's *Olympia*), whether a technique was acceptable that gives a sense of being unfinished (Louis Leroy commented on Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* in 1874: "The most primitive wallpaper is more carefully developed than that seascape"⁸), or whether the use of flashy colours was acceptable (Leo Stein American critic, who collected Matisse's paintings, characterised *Woman with a Hat* as being "the most repulsive blob of paint I have ever seen"⁹).

The 20th century, however, gives us plenty of phenomena where we first have to decide whether we are looking at works of art at all, and then maybe afterwards can we ask the question of what kind of artistic value they hold. The breakthrough can be linked to Marcel Duchamp's name, who in 1917 entered a work for the exhibition organised by the Society of Independent Artists in New York, entitled *Fountain*. The work of art is actually a urinal, bought at a shop, and signed with an alias. It is obvious that this object does not represent or express anything; furthermore, the theory of significant form cannot be applied to it, especially if we note that Duchamp himself stated that he chose this object because of its aesthetic neutrality.¹⁰ This object, one of the first ready-mades, was accepted by the artistic world, even though no traditional artistic definition is applicable for it. Subsequently, such processes were included into fine arts that did not objectify into one object, one artefact in the traditional sense: performance is expressly such a genre, which concentrates on the lived moment, and is survived at most by its photographed, filmed, or narrated trace. The question of identification is still very relevant: at the 2009 Venice Biennale, one could easily walk by Roman Ondak's or the award winning Tobias Rehberger's¹¹ works without noticing that they were parts of the exhibition.

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See: Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz, *Az esztétika alapfogalmai. Hat fogalom története (A History of Six Ideas. An Essay in Aesthetics)*, Kosuth Kiadó, Budapest 2000.

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The first humanist translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* was made by Giorgio Valla in 1498. The first authoritative translation for humanism was Alessandro de' Pazzi's work from 1536, and Segni's 1549 Italian translation.

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See: Platón, *Ión. Menexenosz*, Atlantisz Kiadó, Budapest 2000.

6

See: Immanuel Kant, *Az ítélőerő kritikája (Critique of Judgment)*, Osiris Kiadó, Budapest 2003.

7

Roman Ondak: *The Loop*. At the 2009 Venice Biennale Roman Ondak planted the Slovak pavilion with the same vegetation that grows

in the Giardini, so the pavilion itself is a mere continuation of the garden outside.

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Amy Dempsey, *A modern művészet története (History of Modern Art)*, Képzőművészeti Kiadó, Budapest 2003, p. 14.

9

Ibid., p. 69.

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See: Arthur C. Danto, *Hogyan semmizte ki a filozófia a művészetet? (The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art)*, Atlantisz, Budapest 1997, p. 29.

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Tobias Rehberger, *Was du liebst, bring dich auch zum Weinen (Cafeteria)*. The cafeteria designed by Tobias Rehberger was operated and visited as a real coffee house: coffee, drinks and pastries were sold and consumed in it just like in any other cafe.

Developments in the artistic world created theories of art which tried to integrate Jackson Pollock's spotted canvases, the ready-made, performance, Andy Warhol's *Brillo boxes* and conceptual art. The most important theories of art developed in the second half of the 20th century were Clement Greenberg's version of formalism, George Dickie's institutional theory and Arthur Danto's contextual theory built on the metaphoric structure of art.

Clement Greenberg is known by many as the Pope of abstract expressionism. Just as some decades earlier in England Clive Bell wanted to make room with his formalist theory for the post-impressionism offensive to traditionalist tastes, Clement Greenberg also worked to support avant-garde abstraction in American culture. It was due to his influence that *abstract expressionism*, as a specifically American trend was institutionalised after World War II. He published his essay entitled "Modernist Painting"¹² in 1960, in which he outlined a theoretical train of thought which would connect Kant's critical work with avant-garde artistic creation. In this writing Greenberg describes Modernism as taking further the Kantian form of self-criticism. He interpreted Kant's theoretical practice as the self-reflexive criticism of philosophy, i.e. the immanent criticism of the discipline. Modernism is the reflexive use of the discipline's own methods in the interest of setting its own boundaries, and thus becoming stronger within its boundaries. Painting, for example, has to resist becoming sculpture-like, it has to find its own laws. According to Greenberg, the main characteristic of painting is its two-dimensionality, the flat surface. This is why abstract painting is important, because it makes it clear that anything can be negligible – theme, the imitation of reality, perspective, shading, etc. – except for bidimensional flatness.

Clement Greenberg's description is important for the identification as art of such works as Jackson Pollock's paintings or Frank Stella's black canvases (to which many tend to react with an "I can do that!", thus blocking it from the realm of art, which is still the "work of genius"). Greenberg however does not deal with, and is in no relation with Duchamp's ready-mades or pop art.

Next to Duchamp's *Fountain*, it is Andy Warhol's pop art which is a challenge for art theory. At the middle of the century it seemed that abstract expressionism was the final stage of the development of art, that painting has revealed its own essence, and there is no return (for example into figurativity), nor possibility for renewal. In the sixties, though, pop art defied the need for minimalism and abstraction. The modernist demand for minimalism is condensed into Mies van der Rohe's famous motto: "Less is more". However, the atmosphere of the 60's is expressed by Robert Venturi's answer: "Less is a bore". Clement Greenberg managed to compose a theoretical framework based upon which non-representative art was accepted in the art world. However, for the reception of Andy Warhol (or Tom Wesselman, Jeff Koons, Jasper Johns) to be legitimised, the art theories of Arthur C. Danto and George Dickie were necessary.

George Dickie's institutional definition dates from 1969. This shows that the agents of the art world are the ones to confer the artistic attribute to artefacts, as well as persons (e.g. artists), on behalf of the art world.

"A work of art in the descriptive sense is (1) an artifact (2) upon which some society or some sub-group of a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation."¹³

This theory was criticised on the grounds that it is circular: artefacts are defined by artists, while the artist is the one to create artefacts. Furthermore, it

is difficult to determine who the “agent” of the art world might be, who can appoint an artefact a work of art in a legitimate way. According to Dickie:

“The artworld carries on its business at the level of customary practice. Still there is a practice and this defines a social institution.”¹⁴

A potential concern may arise that the “appointment” of works of art implies a great deal of arbitrariness and does not apply for criteria of value. Such an approach does have its advantages, however. Its first advantage is that it can be made universal: since it is completely independent of the contents or form of the works, it can be used for any kind of artefacts, thus for any future form of artistic practice. Moreover, Dickie interprets the expression “artefact” in a way that even found objects can count as artefacts from the moment that the artist has set them apart from their environment. Dickie’s theory also draws attention to the fact that the work of art is not created in and does not exist in a vacuum, and it is insufficient to approach it starting merely from the work itself: one has to take its socio-historical context into account as well. In this last point, Dickie follows Arthur C. Danto, who in 1964 developed the concept of *the artworld*, exactly to emphasise the indispensability of the contextual approach. Danto was greatly influenced by the work of Andy Warhol, the example of the Brillo boxes or the Campbell soup, often appear in his writings. To be able to voice the question of the identity of works of art in all its seriousness, Danto develops the argument of the indistinguishable pairs. Let us suppose that a storage space exists where we can find the perceptually identical pairs of works of art, which are however not works of art. Danto argues that the identification of the work depends on the identification of the author, in the case of works indistinguishable from their natural pairs. When a child, a forger and an artist create similar objects, these will have their separate identities, since they are embedded in different art-historical traditions.

Arthur C. Danto proposes a conception of art which takes the socio-historical background into account, and approaches the works based on their metaphorical structure: works of art have a rhetorical structure, we do not have to read them literally, and we use them to change people’s attitudes towards certain things. The interpretation of work of art as metaphor is a proposal that can actually work in the case of any object. The problem is only that metaphorical structure can be the *genus proximum* of works of art, but we are still missing the *differentia specifica*.

As we have seen, in the question of identity of works of art we cannot rely on a universally acknowledged, always working definition. But all the above listed theories of art grasp something of importance, and can be applied to specific territories of art with success. Thus, the best we can do is consider Wittgenstein’s proposal, according to which we are not to look for one essential trait that can be found in every item, but a batch of properties which let us discover family traits in works of art. Based on these family traits we can generically conclude the identification of works of art as works of art. We also have to be prepared that the list of these traits will grow longer, parallel with artistic practice.

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Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting”, <http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html>. Accessed on July 22nd, 2010.

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George Dickie, “Defining Art”, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Jul. 1969), pp. 253–256.

14
Ibid., p. 255.

2. The uniqueness of the work of art (the specific thesis)

In the case of works of art, identity takes the form of uniqueness, which in the case of objects created by humanity is not a rule, but an exception. In the case of tools, or everyday objects (bed, table, car, toothbrush, shoes, etc.) we do not talk about individuals, but pieces, items. Works of art are not further pieces or copies but vindicate a kind of identity for themselves which is more similar to the identity of persons than of objects. I approach the identity of works of art in three steps. The first point of view is the *organic thesis* where the question arises, in what the uniqueness of the work of art can be grasped from a material point of view. In the second step, I will investigate what influence on the identity of the work the hermeneutic thesis has, according to which the work ends in the recipient. In the third step I will investigate whether the author is a part of the identity of the work.

2.1. The organic thesis

Works of art are traditionally considered indissoluble unities. Thus, while a painting or sculpture is a physical, inorganic object, it works more as a living organism: a system which cannot be added to nor taken from without it losing its identity. It is impossible to cut off a 5cm wide strip without changing the painting itself: even if the strip were empty, its lack would change the proportions of the picture, i.e. the picture itself. In this sense, the identity of the work may even be more defined than that of living organisms. A work is not only different because it depicts a shoe or a boat, but also because of formal traits that are not of a representative nature: line, form, drawing, proportions, lines of force, composition, colour, etc. These parts of the work are unchangeable because they define the aesthetic properties of the work.

In the sixties, Frank Sibley, approaching from analytical philosophy, raised the question of aesthetic properties. If aesthetic properties separable from other properties exist, these will obviously be relevant to works of art. Sibley's premise is exactly this difference:

“Many judgments about the shape, color, sound, wording, subject matter, or composition of things, including works of art, are such that it would be ludicrous to suggest that aesthetic sensitivity, perceptiveness, or taste had been exhibited in making them. (...) By contrast, there are other judgments the making of which could be clearly be said to exhibit an exercise of aesthetic sensitivity or perceptiveness.”¹⁵

Sibley calls properties belonging to the first category non-aesthetic properties (e.g. large, circular, green, slow, monosyllabic), while the second group is the one of aesthetic properties (e.g. graceful, dainty, garish, a work of art is balanced, moving, powerful). Non-aesthetic properties can be noticed by anybody, but the perception of aesthetic properties command a special skill – taste. Aesthetic debates are not started because people cannot see non-aesthetic properties, but because they cannot see the aesthetic properties rising above these.

We might notice that Sibley does not speak of the traditional “grand” aesthetic categories such as the beautiful or the majestic. He calls the latter *verdictive aesthetic judgements*, as these establish whether a work is good or not:

“I called them ‘verdicts’. I regard them as very different from judgments of the second type – for example, that something is gaudy, or graceful, or balanced – and as raising largely different, though occasionally overlapping, questions... Nowhere in my paper did I discuss judgment of the first type”.¹⁶

Sibley assumes a complicated relationship among the three types of properties, as well as the judgements based on these. While we cannot logically deduce aesthetic properties from non-aesthetic properties, there is a closer relationship between aesthetic judgments and verdicts. There are aesthetic properties that can by all means be positively assessed (e.g. balance, grace, wit).

Based on the organic thesis, the aesthetic properties of the work can be regarded as its essential properties. Two questions arise, however: the first one is whether *the aesthetic properties of the work are enough to define its identity*. The second one is whether *the aesthetic properties of the work are in every case the necessary elements of the work's identity*.

The first question arises in the case of the “perceptually indistinguishable pairs”, dealt with prominently by Arthur C. Danto. Let us rather start with an example Garry Hagberg discusses in one of his essays. Hagberg talks about two cases which seemingly support the theory of imitation, i.e. are representational works, and he points out the fact that the essence of the works is still not their similarity with outside objects. The discussion of one of Watteau’s works is especially relevant from our point of view. Hagberg describes its theme in the following way:

“The ladies are being escorted by the gentlemen onto the ship which will carry them back from the island. The gentlemen seem to hasten the departure from the island, while the ladies, reluctant to leave the lovers’ retreat, seem to hesitate.”¹⁷

The question becomes complicated because we know of two titles for the painting: *The Departure from Cythera*, and *The Departure to Cythera*. Hagberg notes:

“If Watteau’s title included ‘to’ rather than ‘from’, the reluctance of the ladies takes on a different meaning, as do their expressions”¹⁸.

The example above proves quite convincingly that a work of art becomes different (it expresses different things, it is to be read differently, has a different effect) if it gets a different title.¹⁹

Arthur C. Danto’s thought experiment points in the same direction. It starts out from a painting Kierkegaard described in *Either/Or*: there is an anecdote about the artist commissioned to do a mural of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea – so he painted the wall red, explaining that they had reached the other side, and the Egyptians all drowned. Danto lists various all-red paintings that look exactly the same: one described by Kierkegaard of Israelites crossing the Red Sea, one by a Danish portraitist titled *Kierkegaard’s Mood*, *Red Square* (realist), *Red Square* (minimalist version), *Nirvana*, *Red Table*

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Frank Sibley, “Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic”, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Apr. 1965), pp. 135–159

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Frank Sibley, “Aesthetic Concepts: A Rejoinder”, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Jan. 1963), pp. 79–83.

17
Garry Hagberg, “Aristotle’s ‘Mimesis’ and Abstract Art”, *Philosophy*, Vol. 59, No. 229 (Jul. 1984), pp. 365–371.

18
Ibid., p. 370.

19
Danto also notes this case. Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia University Press, New York 2005, p. 49.

Cloth, canvas grounded in red lead prepared by Giorgione (not an work of art), a surface painted but not grounded in red lead (not an work of art, just a thing with paint on it). Then he notes:

“With this my exhibition is complete. Its catalogue would be rather monotonous since all pictures look the same – despite the fact that it is made up of reproductions of the most varied kinds: there are historical paintings, psychological portraits, landscapes, geometric abstractions, religious works and still lives. In addition, it shows pictures of something that comes from Giorgione’s workshop, as well as of something which is just a thing and does not aspire to the sublime rank of work of art.”²⁰

Danto also discusses the case of Duchamp’s snow shovel and the snow shovel indistinguishable from it: one we accept as work of art, while the other is “just an object”. If there is a difference, Danto concludes, it is not based on aesthetic properties, as Sibley described:

“If aesthetic response is always and only to what meets the eye (or ear or whatever other sense), it is difficult to see where aesthetic difference can lie, given the indiscriminability of our snow shovels. So if there is to be a difference, it must lie logically hidden from the senses.”²¹

These cases point at the inadequacy of the organic thesis: it is not only aesthetic properties that count in works of art, most of the time other circumstances are also relevant components of their identity: the title, the author, the circumstances of the creation of the work. These aspects are determined by interpretation, thus Danto claims that it is interpretation that transforms material objects into works of art:

“It will have been observed that indiscernible objects become, quite different and distinct works of art by dint of distinct and different interpretations, so I shall think of interpretations as functions which transform material objects into works of art. Interpretation is in effect the lever with which an object is lifted out of the real world and into the artworld, where it becomes vested in often unexpected raiment. Only in relationship to an interpretation is a material object a work of art.”²²

Danto’s analysis not only shows that aesthetic properties are not sufficient for determining the identity of a work of art, but also that it is interpretation that decides which aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties belong to the work.

The universality of the organic thesis is questionable from a further point of view, which is the aspect of *open works*. It was Umberto Eco that drew attention to the ontological specificity of open works in his writing of the same title published in 1962.²³ Here Eco primarily refers to such musical works where the author does not fully determine the work, i.e. he leaves it to the performer which group of notes to start with, or in which order he/she plays the sections. However, among his examples we can find two works of art as well: Calder’s mobiles, which are lightweight structures that react to the movement of air, changing their own space and form, as well as the object created by Bruno Munari, which is a colourful collage that the recipient can watch through a *lanterna magica*, and can actually control the image by rotating the lens.

The recipient’s inclusion into the completion of the work, which was the exception from the rule in the middle of the twentieth century, occurs more and more frequently from the second half of the twentieth century, when “unfinished”, interactive works are often created that gain their final form through the recipient’s activity (and not merely interpretation). Visual media offers an excellent medium for this, with its own transitory image not occupying space (not existing in a certain place). The “Aura” exhibition was opened in Budapest in 2003, which showed works made with digital technology, where half of the works were “interactive also in a physical sense”.²⁴ Of these I

found very exciting George Legrady's work entitled *Pockets Full of Memories*, made up of an installation and a website relating to it. The work asked the visitor to scan an arbitrary object that was found on their person right there and then, and to fill out a digital form answering questions related to the object. Then the objects were classified in a system based on their similar properties, and got a place on a two-dimensional map where the visitor's own comments related to the object were also seen. With the agreement of the visitors, a continually growing database and, based on that, a relationship-based object-map were born. The work is also interesting because, although it incorporated randomness, still, it seemed rigorous, due to its table-type nature, and the rhythm of randomly repeated object-types: hands, keys, ID-s.

The recipient's activity was also requested in the trick-table of the pair of authors Zoltán Szegedy-Maszák – Márton Fernezelyi entitled AURA, where the picture formed on the mirror-like flat surface of the cup changed by being moved by the recipient. In the case of similar works the organic thesis is useless: we cannot determine with which physical state of itself is the work identical. More exactly, the work has a real, non-changing framework (e.g. technical infrastructure, programme) and a bunch of possibilities that contribute more spectacularly to the determining of the identity of the work than the stable parts.

To sum up, we can say that although the organic thesis and the aesthetic properties based on non-aesthetic properties related to it are valid for a substantial part of art history, and are useful in the determining of the identities of works of art, we can point out many works in the art of the twentieth century where perceptual properties are not necessary, nor sufficient for the identification of specific works of art.

2.2. The hermeneutical thesis

The above conclusion still stands if we accept the thesis according to which "the reader is the one who finishes the work", i.e. "only in the interaction of text and recipient does the text become a work of art".²⁵ The dialogic reception-model of hermeneutics considers the momentum of interpretation essential, which it holds as part of the work, and not a consequence detachable from the work. If the interpretation happens by the merging of the horizon of the work and of the recipient, obviously there will be as many interpretations as recipients. And if the interpretation is part of the work, then the seeming identity of the work will be endlessly fragmented.

Take for example Van Gogh's painting which depicts shoes. Seemingly the identity of the work is not at question here, fix physical properties ensure the

20

Arthur C. Danto, *A közhely színeváltozása, (The Transfiguration of the Common Place)* Enciklopédia Kiadó, Budapest 2003, p. 16.

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A. C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, p. 26.

22

Ibid., p. 39.

23

Umberto Eco, *Nyitott mű (Opera aperta)*, Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest 2006.

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Anikó Erdősi, *Anyagtalan aura. AURA, a technikai reprodukálhatóság korszaka után. Médiaművészeti kiállítás a C3 és a Millenáris közös szervezésében*, Millenáris, Budapest 2003. október 31 – november 30. http://www.balkon.hu/balkon03_12/02erdosi.html. Accessed on July 24th, 2010.

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Paul Ricoeur, *Válogatott irodalmi tanulmányok (Selected Literary Studies)*, Osiris, Budapest 1999, p. 294.

work's identity and uniqueness. It is the painting Heidegger uses as a starting point in his writing entitled *The Origin of the Work of Art* to illustrate how a work of art opens up a world. According to Heidegger's famous analysis, the painting depicts a peasant woman's shoes, and the philosopher gives a touching description of the painting:

"From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stands forth. In the stiffly solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field, swept by a raw wind. On the leather there lies the dampness and saturation of the soil. Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path as the evening declines. In the shoes there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening corn and its enigmatic self/refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety about the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the advent of birth and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth* and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-in-itself."²⁶

The trouble began when Meyer Schapiro, with the accuracy typical of analytic philosophers, identified the painting Heidegger wrote about. In fact, Van Gogh does not have one, but eight paintings the subject of which are shoes or boots, and Heidegger's description fits most. Thus Schapiro asked Heidegger which painting he meant, and identified an 1886 picture of a pair of boots in this way.²⁷ Using Van Gogh and Gauguin's correspondence, he also found out that it was made of Van Gogh's own shoes that had special significance for their owner. Based on this, Schapiro presents the shoes as a metaphor of the artist's life, relying on both biographical data and perceptual description.²⁸

The above example shows that even in the case of a traditional painting, where identification as a work of art is beyond doubt, and where the physical properties of the work are fixed, the identity of the work depends on who the depicted shoes belong to, which cannot be decided at all solely based on perceptual properties. So much so, that we can almost talk about two different works. Thus the hermeneutic perspective also confirms the hypothesis that in the case of works of art, the non-perceptual properties contribute significantly to the determination of the work's identity.

2.3. *The question of authorship*

There is a non-perceptual property that contributes in the greatest measure to the definition of the work's identity: the author of the work. So much so, that the name of a well-known author functions as a genus ("this is a Rembrandt!"). The author weighs so much in the value of a work that the name of an "in" artist is guarantee enough for the quality of the work.

This was so naturally a norm for a few hundred years that, next to "aesthetic distance" and "disinterested pleasure", "fine art is the art of the genius" could be built into Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. If we approach the question historically, the idea of authorship does not seem so universal. In the Middle Ages a way of thinking prevailed that held true ideas to be coming directly from God, thus it could seem completely incidental who it was that God used as a tool to reveal the truth.

The author's self-consciousness is a product of modernity: it came spectacularly into the foreground during the Renaissance. In the case of works of art the signature of the author becomes a kind of guarantee. It guarantees the work's "authenticity", the truth of its identity. The author is one of the main components of the work's identity – precisely because of this, the original pic-

ture is to be carefully distinguished from the copy (that is made, for example, with the goal of learning), and from the forged work, which wants to steal the original's identity.

The idea of authorship itself is not as obvious as it appears. On the one hand, it is not quite clear why a copy that is held to be original should lose its value only because it turns out that somebody else is its author. On the other hand, why should a signature automatically confer value to a work?

I would like to evoke two cases. One is the case of Han van Meegeren, who painted Vermeers in the thirties: i.e. very authentic canvases that dealt with new themes in Vermeer's style (e.g. religious themes that are not typical of Vermeer). The best contemporary critics vouched for the authenticity of these canvases as Vermeers, and *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus*, which was a convincing fake, was deemed to be more valuable than the previously known Vermeers. Han van Meegeren's scam was discovered when they found out that during the Second World War he sold a Vermeer to Göring, and after the war the Dutch government charged him with treason. The punishment would have been death. Han van Meegeren had a hard time convincing the judges that the pictures were made by himself: in jail he made another Vermeer, proving his innocence in the treason trial. The case raises the question of why *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus*, so admired by critics, lost its value when it turned out that it was painted by van Meegeren. Why was the Dutch government ready to execute a man for selling a Vermeer to Göring, but did not care that a van Meegeren was sold to the enemy? *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus* – although physically, perceptually remained the same object, it seems, changed its identity together with its author.

The second case is a vague rumour about Dalí signing blank canvases and sheets of paper in his last years on which forged works appeared, thus the museums and galleries treat works created in Dalí's last years carefully. If this is true, then the question is whether here the signature works as the essential element of the work's identity. If the signature does not work, we have to determine based on much more uncertain and controversial stylistic traits whether a painting is "a Dalí" or "not a Dalí". A similar case is Giorgio de Chirico who, on the one hand, as a famous artist, forged "early de Chiricos", on the other hand denied authorship of works that were held de Chiricos by museums and private collections.

In the case of Van Meegeren and Dalí's signed canvases, it is quite easy to determine, starting from the traditional theoretic framework that we are dealing with forged works. In the twentieth century, however, we meet phenomena that strongly question the idea of authorship. Roland Barthes's meme-suspicious expression – the death of the Author – points out a complex phenomenon: the authors are starting to abandon their works. The aesthetics of genius is beginning to be exhausted by the middle of the twentieth century, and the author (and their intention) is not surrounded by such respect as in the 19th century. We can observe several signs of this shift.

26

Martin Heidegger, *A műalkotás eredete (The Origin of the Work of Art)*, Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1988, pp. 57–58.

27

Meyer Schapiro, "Further Notes on Heidegger and van Gogh", in: Meyer Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and So-*

ciet (*Selected Papers*, vol. 4), Braziller, New York 1994.

28

Meyer Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object" (1968), in: M. Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society*.

One such sign is the idea promoted by surrealists of automatic writing (or drawing), through which the subconscious speaks directly, without the control of the ego. The theory of genius always emphasised that remainder through which the workings of genius differs from the usual, rational workings of people, that irrational remainder that is needed for a genius to create a masterpiece. From the surrealist point of view, however, the irrational, subconscious element is not a remainder, but the first motor of creation, and the process of creation puts the artist's personality within brackets. Although it was characteristic of surrealist artists to have a strong artistic consciousness and to work consciously on their genius image (e.g. the following sentence of Dalí is often quoted: "Every morning upon awakening, I experience a supreme pleasure: that of being Salvador Dalí"), regardless, the use of automatic writing and drawing indicates the author's withdrawal from behind their work.

The genre of the ready-made points in the same direction: here the author does not create an object, but lifts it from its surroundings, and this may be the minimal gesture that we can call creation – the minimality of authorship. Traditionally the author left their "mark" on the work of art: e.g. it is hard to confuse Rembrandt's style with Gauguin's. In ready-made the author does not want to see his "mark" on the work of art. The situation is often the same with some works of conceptual art: Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* does not carry any specific perceptual properties, Robert Barry's *All the Things I Know but of Which I am not at the Moment Thinking – 1:36 PM June 15. 1969* also lacks the mark of the author's hands – what Marcel Duchamp mockingly called "la pate" (paws).

We can interpret similarly the structurally unfinished (using Umberto Eco's expression – "works in movement"²⁹) or interactive works: here the author denounces their privilege to decide what will be the work's final and unchangeable form, moreover, the final form of the work will remain a mystery to them. The work comes out of the author's hands as a possibility, and lives its own life independent of the author.

In the cases discussed so far, the author voluntarily retires from behind their work. The action of appropriation, however, happens without consulting the author, and the identity of the work is defined by two kinds of authorship: that of the original creator, and that of the artist appropriating it.

Elaine Sturtevant, known as the "copying artist" exclusively created precise copies of other artists' works, what's more, of such artists that she started copying even before they became famous: Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, Frank Stella. It is rather difficult to establish the identity of a work Elaine Sturtevant painted of Andy Warhol's serigraphy depicting a flower where he used Patricia Caulfield photographer's work (without asking the permission of the photographer – this resulted in a copyright lawsuit). Also, it is quite difficult to distinguish between Frank Stella's painting of strictly geometric, parallel black strips dating from his black period, and Elaine Sturtevant's copy made of it. They are not different in a perceptually relevant way; still, one is a painting by Stella, the other by Elaine Sturtevant.

The oeuvre of appropriating artist Sherrie Levine is worrying in the same way, especially her "After Walker Evans" series. Walker Evans was a famous photographer who travelled America in the thirties and took very well-known sociophotos. Sherrie Levine photographed these from catalogues in the seventies, and exhibited them under her own name with the above mentioned title. Here again we meet two works that are perceptually only slightly different, but that are still different, namely, on the basis of authorship. Sherrie

Levine's works are often interpreted as criticism of the concepts of authorship and authenticity. While Sturtevant truly, physically recreates the works, and her oeuvre can be interpreted as homage to others' works, as well as contribution to their further existence in their originality and uniqueness, Sherrie Levine's and the appropriating artists' works can be read as critiques of the concepts working in the artistic world. It is hard to surpass Sherrie Levine in the questioning of authorship – the American internet artist born in 1977, Michael Mandiberg, managed to do this. He created an online shop where you can get original Mandiberg copies of Sherrie Levine's "After Walker Evans" series, complete with certificate of originality.³⁰

Conclusion

Although it would be useful to have a theory that would establish the properties that define works of art, and make their identities unquestionable – unfortunately we do not have such a theory.

For the generic thesis – i.e. the decision of "what a work of art is", that we could boil down to one definition or art theory – we cannot find a theory that is acceptable from every point of view. We can conclude that the century long monopoly of the mimetic theory was over by the 19th century, and competing theories have appeared (art is expression, art is a form, the work of art is an artefact that is worth assessing, etc.). It seems it is impossible to define art, we can only establish family resemblances between works of art. Maybe we have to accept that in different areas (art forms, genres, works of art) different vocabularies can more or less be applied, but there is no universal vocabulary.

In the case of the specific thesis the situation is just as colourful and unsettling. In the first half of the twentieth century we could learn that in the case of works of art the non-aesthetic properties give the basis for aesthetic properties, and these form the essence of works of art. At the same time, criticism broke with author-centredness, and the idea of the "intentional fallacy"³¹ became widely accepted. This kind of approach, which reduces the work's identity to its structural properties, and sees the author's identity irrelevant, seems to be withdrawing to the benefit of wider contextualism. From the case of perceptually indistinguishable pairs we find out that perceptual properties are not enough to define the identity of works of art, and we also need to take non-perceptual properties into account, for example the author, or the historical, cultural context.

Artists themselves question one of the most indisputable traits of works of art – the fact that it is the creation of an author – by using the method of "appropriation", and the way they deal with the idea of authorship in their works, and their artistic attitudes. Looking at the problems raised by the question of the identity of works of art, it may seem that we have reached *aporia*. I think we can still state some theses:

29

Such works that "are able to assume different, unforeseeable and physically not realised structures". Umberto Eco, *Nyitott mű*. Európa Kiadó, Budapest 2006, p. 87.

30

See: <http://www.aftersherrielevine.com/images/A.html>. Accessed on July 24, 2010.

31

Monroe Beardsley's thesis, according to which the intention of the author is irrelevant from the point of view of interpretation.

1. We have to resign the idea that the work of art can be defined based on specific properties. I find Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblances" more useful, based on which work of art-groups can be identified.
2. The next challenge we have to face is the mobility of boundaries between art and non-art, which also means that the identity of the work of art is also in motion.
3. Artistic attitudes of modernity question both the identity of the author and of the work, and we must acknowledge this.
4. However, the old or newer explanatory models (mimetic, expressionism, formalism, etc.) must not be rejected: although none of them can be universalised, each of them fits some groups of works of art.

As noted above, the question of the identity of works of art in contemporary art is more complicated than ever. The work of art is not a stable object; the author is not a simply identifiable subject. The whole art-historical context, the social context, and the process of reception are equally parts of the identity of a work. The fragmentation of the identity of a work of art is parallel with the displacements in personal identity, well mirrored by the statement of Hungarian writer Péter Esterházy about the "I": the "I" in the post-modern is "a fiction, where we can be co-authors at most". Similarly, the author of a work of art is actually not the defining force in the identity of a work, only that identity's co-author.

Gizela Horvath

Čije cipele?

Identitet u umjetničkim djelima

Sažetak

Problem identiteta u svijetu umjetnosti je važan iz mnogih perspektiva. Ovaj rad ima namjeru raspraviti identitet umjetničkih djela. Rasprava je izvedena u tri koraka: problem identifikacije predmeta kao umjetničkog djela, problem relevantnih svojstava umjetničkog djela i pitanje autora kao odlučujuće (ili ne) za identifikaciju umjetničkog djela. Ova pitanja su se otvorila evolucijom umjetničke prakse i teorije u prošlom stoljeću. Pojava ready-madea destabilizirala je čvrsti identitet umjetničkog djela te nametnula zadatak odluke o razlici između umjetničkog djela i njegovog perceptivno identičnog para. Tradicionalna relevantna svojstva izgubila su svoj značaj u konceptualnoj umjetnosti, stoga moramo odlučiti koja se relevantna svojstva, čak i danas, pridaju umjetničkim djelima. Konačno, praksa posuđivanja u postmodernoj umjetnosti dovodi u pitanje pojam umjetnika i smisao izvornog stvaralaštva.

Ključne riječi

identitet umjetničkih djela, definicije umjetnosti, jedinstvenost umjetničkih djela, autorstvo

Gizela Horvath

Wessen Schuhe?

Identität der Kunstwerke

Zusammenfassung

Die Problemstellung der Identität in der Welt der Kunst ist aus allerlei Perspektiven gewichtig. Dieser Artikel strebt eine Debatte über die Identität der Kunstwerke an. Die Diskussion wird in drei Schritten aufgebaut: die Frage der Identifizierung eines Objektes als Kunstwerk, das Problem der relevanten Eigenschaften eines Kunstwerks und letzten Endes die Frage des Autors

als ausschlaggebend (oder nicht) für die Identifizierung des Kunstwerks. Diese Thematik wurde aufgeworfen gleichlaufend mit der Evolution der Kunstpraxis samt – theorie im vergangenen Jahrhundert. Die Erscheinung des „Readymades“ hatte die feste Identität des Kunstwerks der Stabilität beraubt, und es gilt eben, die Kluft zwischen dem Kunstwerk und dessen perzeptiv identischem Paar zu detektieren. Traditionell bedeutsame perzeptiv Charakteristika haben deren Tragweite in der konzeptuellen Kunst eingeüßt, sodass wir urteilen müssen, welche relevanten Eigentümlichkeiten, sogar gegenwärtig, den Kunstwerken beizumessen sind. Im Endeffekt stellt die Praxis der Aneignung innerhalb der postmodernen Kunst den Begriff des Künstlers sowie des Sinns der authentischen Schaffung infrage.

Schlüsselwörter

Identität der Kunstwerke, Definitionen der Kunst, Einzigartigkeit der Kunstwerke, Autorschaft

Gizela Horvath

Les chaussures de qui ?

L'identité des oeuvres d'art

Résumé

Le problème de l'identité dans le monde de l'art est pertinent sous de nombreux aspects. Cet article vise à examiner l'identité de l'oeuvre d'art. L'examen est construit en trois étapes : le problème d'identification d'un objet en tant qu'oeuvre d'art, le problème des propriétés pertinentes d'une oeuvre d'art et la question de l'auteur de l'oeuvre comme décisive (ou pas) pour l'identification d'une oeuvre d'art. Ces questions se sont posées avec l'évolution de la pratique artistique et de la théorie de l'art au siècle dernier. L'apparition du "readymade" a déstabilisé l'identité solide de l'oeuvre d'art de sorte que nous devons maintenant déterminer quelle est la différence entre une oeuvre d'art et son pendant perceptuellement identique. Les caractéristiques traditionnellement pertinentes ayant perdu leur importance dans l'art conceptuel, nous devons déterminer quelles sont les caractéristiques pertinentes, même aujourd'hui, des oeuvres d'art. Enfin, la pratique de l'appropriation dans l'art post-moderne défie la notion d'artiste et celle du sens de la création authentique.

Mots-clés

identité des oeuvres d'art, définitions de l'art, unicité des oeuvres d'art, paternité