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Introduction

Abstract

Contingency has an essential importance in the world, and its investigation can be really useful for the better understanding of many aspects of art and aesthetics too. Aesthetic contingency is quite paradoxical: artistic activity seems to contain both design, necessity, rules, pre-planned aspects and at the same time contingent elements, chance, accidents and unforeseen results. While creation always contained some degree of chance, the aesthetic potential of contingency started to become an important topic, and one to be explicitly investigated in the twentieth century. This introduction surveys some of the positions in the theoretical discussions about contingency with its relationship with aesthetics.

Keywords

Contingency, Aesthetics, Art

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Contingency runs through the course of the world – in nature, in human culture, technology and even in our various everyday activities. Also because of this it seems highly inspiring and relevant to investigate its connection with art and aesthetics.

Aesthetic contingency is largely a paradoxical endeavour. The artist strives to produce an event that is unpredictable in every respect, to provoke an unpredictable situation with calculated intention (Gendolla, Kamphusmann 1999; Majetschak 2013). Moreover, formulations that are often mixed with or overlap in meaning with the expression of contingency (chance, anticipation, deviation, improbability, fortuna, accident, serendipity, hazard, randomness etc.) reveal different reactions of an affective-corporeal being in different spatio-temporal contexts (Reck 1999). Due to phenomenal transience and uncertainty, from antiquity to modernity, contingency has remained more of a side issue in aesthetic theory, despite differences in detailed positions. The prevailing view is that necessity, not contingency, is the formal law of art (Welsch 2012).

The avant-garde shows an explicit turn to contingency in the approaches, principles and methods of art production, whose inspiration can be traced back to Stéphane Mallarmé's poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1897), Charles Sanders Peirce's tychism (1892), and the discussions on quantum indeterminacy (von Neumann 1932; Einstein, Podolsky, Rosen 1935; Bergmann 1947; Bohm 1952). The central and systematic positioning of contingency motivated the ideas and practices of leading avant-garde artists such as Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, and contributed to the flourishing of visual art genres such as Conceptual art, Surrealism, Action painting, Informal art, Arte povera, Happening, Fluxus, Performance art, as well as more recent media art series (Rebentisch 2013).

Therefore, we can say that on the one hand, it was not until the twentieth century that contingency became an important theme and an explicitly investigated issue in art. On the other hand, art almost systematically requires contingency. As Adorno points out, no work of art is worthy of the name if it avoids the accidental in relation to its own law (Adorno 1973). In Alessandro Bertinetto's latest study, art is seen as emerging from improvisation, which contains a grammar of contingency imbued with the thrill of adventure and the joy of empathic involvement (Bertinetto 2022). Contingency is fleeting, ambiguous and constantly changing. Unlike artistic elements that can be designed, calculated and controlled, contingency refers to aspects and moments that cannot be calculated or predicted

(Majetschak 2013). Imitation and creation, conformity and freedom, normality and transgression run through the beginning, continuation and completion of image production. An exploration of contingency in global aesthetic and artistic practices would contribute both to the development of the potential of our visual expression in world-making (Saito 2017) and to the resistance of the new visual hegemonies on a global scale (Alloa, Cappelletto 2020). In this context, the nine articles selected for this special issue offer a multifaceted discussion of the concept of contingency in aesthetics and art, from theory to practice and from tradition to the present. Starting with an analysis of a work of Alma Heikkilä and then quoting examples of art from the Renaissance to the 21st century, Zoltán Somhegyi explores the appearance and use of contingency in art and discusses the significance of this concept for aesthetics and art history. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein argues that creativity based on contingency makes art more 'real' than the factual world of non-art. He also considers whether the algorithmic models recently developed in the field of art to replace contingency with necessity are compatible with artistic creativity.

Using Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel, Giordano Ghirelli analyses the way in which contingency coexists with the narrative arrangement of events. Events that, in retrospect, appear sensational and accidental are useful to the narrative as a whole, and therefore functional to the whole, and are shrouded in the veil of necessity. Enea Bianchi and Matteo Maria Paolucci explore the concept of "excessive contingency", based on an analysis of the Situationist International's practice of the *dérive* and Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy of exposition. This "excessive contingency" transcends binary oppositions and reveals the inherently relational and open-ended nature of experience. This study expands our understanding of contingency and reimagines our relationship to urban spaces, to others, and to the unfolding of contingent experience itself. Drawing on Italian feminist perspectives, particularly the work of Carla Lonzi, Linda Bertelli and Martina Cavalli explore how contingency can redefine aesthetic gestures. They propose the concept of "dynamic liminality" and analyse its four main components (instability, repetition, impermanence and unproductiveness) to demonstrate the critical and transformative potential of contingency.

Artistic improvisation gives priority to contingency. Alessandra Randazzo uses improvised dance as an example to explore the complex relationship between contingency and necessity, which are usually seen as opposites in philosophy. These two connections, contingency arising from necessity

and necessity arising from contingency, can ultimately be understood in terms of two different approaches to the concept of emergence. Sebastiano Gubian analyses the contingent character of the aesthetics of Iannis Xenakis, which contrasts both with the determinism of serial music and with the theorists of alea. His elaboration of stochastic music is understood here not only as an evolution of compositional techniques, but also as evidence of a philosophical necessity that treats contingency as an ontological issue and leads to a rejection of the hyper-specialization of different branches of knowledge.

Bioart is often associated with bioethical considerations. Through the representation of life in artistic biotechnology, Dana Svorova explores the relationship between contingency, living forms, bioart and aesthetic experience. Mario Verdicchio analyses the two forms of contingency in Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly in its current form of Machine Learning (ML), namely intrinsic contingencies and relational contingencies, with a background in visual arts, with the aim of revealing the complex relationship between technology and creativity.

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