What is contemporary art?

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WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ART?

For the degree of Master of Arts

Is approved by the final examining committee:

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WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ART?

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ABSTRACT

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The topic of the thesis is “What is contemporary art?” While exploring contemporary art, its conceptions, characteristics and remarkable events related to it, I concentrate mainly on research of contemporary art as universal, particularly on such phenomena as multicultural art, postdramatic theater, audience interaction, as well as challenged aesthetics. This thesis also considers postmodern art, since contemporary art in its current form departed from postmodern art. I rely on and address the German language prose and drama, as well as visual arts. The work of Elfriede Jelinek, John von Düffel, Peter Handke, Kristof Magnusson, and multicultural artists Vladimir Kaminer, Feridun Zaimoglu are considered. This paper renders art as a blend of different arts, as well as synthesis of arts and different human activities.

The thesis consists of five chapters. I rely in chapter I on the artwork of Rebecca Horn, Edith Meusnier, Andrea Polli as a sample of heterogeneity, appearing in unusual forms and places, blending together and erasing borders between different types of arts. Multicultural art as one of the forms of universal art is researched on samples of work by Vladimir Kaminer and Feridun Zaimoglu in chapter II. Chapter III concentrates on universal notions of postdramatic theater, supported by theoretical work of Hans-Thies
Lehmann. In chapter IV, which is “Questioning Aesthetics”, I write about body fluids art, and include the work of Julia Kristeva, Rina Arya. Digital universality, one of the main characteristics of contemporary art, is a topic of chapter V.

I render contemporary art as the pick of art evolution and cover such characteristics, events or occurrences in contemporary art as the inevitability of development, emergence of different mediums as a result of it, as well as more challenged aesthetics.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: CONTEMPORARY ART AND GESAMTKUNST

What is contemporary art? We can speak about this topic in a variety of different ways, by considering time periods, content, and it’s most remarkable features.

Contemporary art as a movement in its current form slowly departed from postmodern art. The word *contemporary* itself leads us to the essence of the movement.

“Contemporary” is defined in the *New World Dictionary of the American Language* as “1. Living and happening in the same period of time; 2. of about the same age; 3. of or in the style of the present or recent times.” Contemporary art is produced in the most recent time and is the newest art. Speaking about contemporary art from this point of view, art that was contemporary some years ago is no longer so. Its content is flowing, moving, and fleeting.

Contemporary art is the institutionalized network through which the art of today presents itself to itself and to its interested audiences all over the world. It is an intense, expansionist, proliferating global subculture, with its own values and discourse; communicative networks; heroes, heroines, and renegades; professional organizations; defining events; meetings and monuments; markets and museums - in sum, distinctive structures of stasis and change. (Terry Smith, 241)
As Terry Smith points out in “What is Contemporary Art?”: “During the 1990s and around 2000 there was, paradoxically, a widespread sense of contemporary art as being made in a state ‘beyond history’ or ‘after the end of history’” (244). Smith refers here to a new era of art. The end of the twentieth century, preceding the birth of the most recent contemporary art movement, was marked by uncertainty and instability. Marxism was called into question and the fall of Berlin Wall occurred. Postmodernism, the precursor to current contemporary art, had entered the world as a statement on the urgency for change and the desire for oversight of present knowledge and experience. Postmodern art tends to reject the institutions, methods, terms, and main points of view of modernism. It questions the collected truth, history, and theory of the different areas of science and arts, and opens up ways to different types of thinking, pluralism, and openness. In essence, postmodernism paved the way for contemporary art and the phenomenon of Gesamtkunst that I will discuss in this thesis.

Moving further into the twenty-first century, contemporary art comes from more places than ever, and with a larger audience than ever. Today’s contemporary art is more diverse, repetitive, and full of contradiction than art at any other time in the history of art. Established genres, media, and styles no longer carry deterministic weight among artists. Art appears in unusual forms and places, blending together or even erasing borders between different types of arts. Art now exceeds previous temporal and spatial limits. The space of art extends from galleries into the landscape, the sky, or the streets, as well as the other way, as natural materials and elements enter into the space of galleries, for example in the contemporary German artist Rebecca Horn’s artwork “L’Estel Ferit” in Barcelona, Spain (erected for the 1992 Olympics). This sculptural piece, made out of
glass, metal, and light, became part of the landscape of the beach at the Balearic Sea in Barcelona. Horn’s “Spiriti di madreperla” (Mother-of-Pearl Spirits, 2002) is a combination of different media that was installed in Piazza Plebiscito, the main square in Naples. The installation consisted of 333 skulls, created out of iron and placed all over the square area, with lit neon rings floating above the skulls. The visual experience was accompanied by music and singing. This piece conveys the concepts of earth, sky, physical body, spirit, life, and death. The “Black Moon Mirror” exhibition in Thomas Modern gallery (2015) represents Horn’s pieces in a variety of media. Mechanics are brought into the arts, as mechanically operated movement is one of the features of Horn’s installations and 3-D pieces. The piece “Garten, gefangen im Russ der Erinnerung” (2014), consists of a book, a vessel laid on it, and a metal butterfly moving its wings, opening and closing them, as if the book pages were opening and closing. Her piece “der Ast zentriert im Sonnengefl echt” (2014) includes such natural elements as water in the installation. Simple and complicated at the same time, the piece is tied into and moves together with time. French textile and environmental artist Edith Meusnier creates unusual installations in unusual spaces. Her art is unique and somewhat shocking, bringing compounds together whose mutual existence is conflicting and contradictory. Her amazingly colorful textile pieces are created from weather resistant plastic ribbons, but look like delicate, fine weavings. A feeling of fragility is underlined by the placing of lacy, transparent textile pieces into the city, forest, and river spaces. Artificial shapes are extended into and by nature. Wind, light, shades, and shadows surprisingly supplement the piece, constantly changing it visually. Nature is extended by artificial installations that change the angles of existing nature views. Environmental ideas comprise the main
points of Edith Meusnier’s art, along with the concepts of fragility and durability, the
meeting points of the human-nature relationship. The ideas of communication, the beauty
of balance, and existence are also touched upon.

Environmental issues that characterize contemporary existence is one of the
prevailing topics in today’s art. Andrea Polli’s “Cloud Car” (2011) at the New York Hall
of Science features a ready-made object, the car, which is placed in the street with a
system of pipes that sprinkle water, creating a misty cloud effect around the car. The
purpose of this street installation is to call attention to contemporary environmental issues
such as conservation and sustainability. The same subject prevails in her other art series
of “Particle Falls,” which is the projection of air particles onto the walls of buildings,
installed at various locations in recent years (at the AT&T building in San Jose,
California in 2010; on the outside of the Wilma Theater in Philadelphia in 2013; and at
the 700 block of Penn Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh in 2014). Air pollution that
negatively influences our health is projected on the wall in the form of bright spots,
juxtaposed with invisible particles that then become visible. The amount of bright spots
register the amount of unhealthy particles in the air.

The introduction of more audience participation in the art of the twentieth century led
to changes of philosophical theories of art and views on the purpose of the artist. During
the postmodern era, literary-theoretical essays such as “The Death of the Author” by
Roland Barthes, Wolfgang Iser’s “Interaction between Text and Reader”, and “What is an
Author?” by Michel Foucault awoke the interest of intellectuals. The previous statement
of A. Gottlieb and M. Rothko, “it is our function as artists to make the spectator see the
world our way—not his way” (1943)¹ was questioned and denied. Allan Kaprow, in his “Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life” (1993), describes this new situation and innovation in art: “Once, the task of the artist was to make good art; now it is to avoid making art of any kind. Once the public and critics had to be shown; now the latter are full of authority and the artists are full of doubt” (81). Art became increasingly more accessible to more people, and the process of receiving art became more participatory.

In the literature of the late twentieth century, which also was influenced by international postmodernism, such new genres as the New Weird, Heroic bloodshed, and Slipstream appeared,² and they continue into the twenty-first century. Postmodernist ideas—denying the settled, fixed routines of the past—resulted in the splash of

² Heroic bloodshed style centers around violent actions, featuring the exchange of gunfire, blood, dangerous plots, intrigues, mafia, gangsters, money, and drugs. Slipstream is a new genre of fantasy which can be considered as the result of the process of universalisation characteristic for our time. It is a mixture of other genres such as science fiction, literary fiction, and fantasy. This genre projects the contemporary style of living. “This genre is not ‘category’ SF; it is not even ‘genre’ SF. Instead, it is a contemporary kind of writing which has set its face against consensus reality. It is fantastic, surreal sometimes, speculative on occasion, but not rigorously so. It does not aim to provoke a ‘sense of wonder’ or to systematically extrapolate in the manner of classic science fiction. Instead, this is a kind of writing which simply makes you feel very strange” (Bruce Sterling, *SF Eye* 5). Authors of Slipstream tend to mix fantastic and realistic situations together; this applies also towards the characters, who are both realistic and fantastic. Slipstream can be considered a science fiction of the twenty-first century that chooses using existing forms to twist the new ones into it. New Weird is the “term given to an amorphous literary movement focusing on horror and speculative fiction, dating (broadly speaking) from the 1990s”; it is considered “less a school than a way of describing very different writers united only in avoiding the conventional. China Miéville’s preference for ‘weird’ rather than ‘science’ or ‘fantasy’ fiction to describe his work suggests the hybridity harking back to H. P. Lovecraft, or Arthur Machen. Michael Cisco (1970–) suggests that New Weird might simply be seen as a refusal to accept the boundaries between general and genre literature, noting the mention of writers like Borges, Calvino, and Angela Carter among its ‘practitioners’” (*The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 4th ed., 502).
heterogeneity in art, including literature. Literary imitation, parody, and multiple allusions were characteristic for the literature and other art forms of this period.

Today’s art appears on the Internet, as digital pieces, and in order to reach a greater audience, it moves from galleries to the Internet for exposition and sale. The Internet offers also mass art that was produced by non-professionals and can be considered folk art. The art of literature has moved from libraries and hard-copy books to Internet resources, into the streets, and to public presentations and events. While having broken free from encompassing ideology, contemporary art challenges conventional notions of temporality as production and reception times become compressed or expanded.

Contemporary art in general is in no way simple, because it exists in, depends on, and mirrors nature and society’s development, which is in a state of constant invention and change. Contemporary art consists of a variety of arts that overlap, merge into each other, as well as exist in isolation. As social, political, and philosophical realities become enriched with a more extensive knowledge base, so too does today’s art develop. No fixed limits or boundaries characterize art today. It challenges aesthetics, and changes the essence of aesthetics. This thesis renders contemporary art as the latest development of art evolution and covers such characteristics, events or occurrences in contemporary art as the inevitability of its development, the emergence of different mediums as a result of this development, as well as challenges to traditional aesthetics.

What is, and what has caused the emergence of, the “universal art work” (Gesamtkunstwerk)? Universal artwork signifies a synthesis of the arts. It can be thought of as comprehensive artwork that tries to make use of a variety of art forms at once. Globalization, cultural diffusion, a striving for development and new forms, a search for
new media, and other factors that are characteristic of the contemporary time, have led to the concept of universal artwork, and its expansion. This type of art tends to be a multi-sensory experience, as we perceive the world and art through different senses. There are single perception senses, as well as perception in combination of them. For example we recognize hearing, vision, touch, smell, taste as being separate, while also using these senses in combination. Hearing music, for example, sometimes awakens visual images. Touching objects also can lead to associations and awaken mental images. Contemporary universal art capitalizes on these human sensory modes.

*Gesamtkunst* embodies universality in many different directions. Universality develops in application to diverse audiences, not excluding different ages, genders, and types of cultures; in authorship, applying the creation role to both author and audience, or even considering the authorship role as obsolete; in the essence of art, including the knowledge and experience of different cultures and centuries, applying different media, genres, and areas of studies; and in techniques of art creation, using different means and styles. Developments in communication, technologies, and science contribute to its development. Variety and unity, expansion and reduction are all inherent in universal art.

Arts are perceived—just as the rest of the world—through single senses, as well as through a combination of them. That’s why we can talk about the existence of pure arts that are perceived through single sense, like music through hearing or a painted picture through vision, and universal art that is perceived through a combination of senses, like painting that is accompanied by music. Because the human body, as the perceiver of art, contains many sensory organs, it is difficult to avoid multi-sensory perceptual experiences. Universal art is virtually inescapable in today’s society, because art is based
Philosophical notions about the arts being intertwined were brought up and recorded already centuries ago. For example, the German writer and philosopher K. F. E. Trahndorff, in his essay “Ästhetik oder Lehre von Weltanschauung und Kunst” (1827), writes that the four arts—the art of the sound of the word, music, mimetic art, and dance—each contain the phenomena of Zusammentreffen, Begegnung, and Binden, signifying a harmonious joining together of forms:

Die Musik bezieht sich rückwärts, wie schon oben gesagt, auf die Poesie, ist aber in ihrem Bewegen schon näher dem Ewigen, als die Kunst des Wortklanges, daher sie sich freimachen kann… (10);

Dabei ist aber noch das Zusammentreffen der Tanzkunst und Mimik besonders wichtig, weil sich beide grade in der Harmonie des Bildes begegnen und sich wechselseitig für dieselbe erregen und binden, worin wieder das Prinzip liegt für den ruhigharmonischen Charakter aller plastischen Kunst des griechischen Altertums. (“Ästhetik oder Lehre von Weltanschauung und Kunst” 298)

Trahndorff points to the ties between literature and the visual arts, two mediums that inspire each other and lead to the overall result of Gesamtkunst. “Poesie” and “Beredsamkeit” he attributes to the temporal realm, while “Bildende Kunst,” “Mimik,” and “Tanz” he ascribes to the spatial realm:

Durch diesen gesamten Organismus zieht sich aber noch in Absicht der inneren Tätigkeit ein doppelter und zwar entgegengefasst wirkender Lebensgang des Erregens, und Bindens, so dass auf der einen Seite das Räumliche gleichsam
erregt wird herüber aus dem Gebiete des Zeitlichen, und zwar verhältnismäßig und abgestuft, und auf der andern Seite das Zeitliche ebenso gebunden wird herüber aus dem Gebiete des Räumlichen und zwar so, dass das Erregende liegt in dem Zeitlichen (Poesie und Beredsamkeit) und von daher, und zwar zuerst von der Beredsamkeit, ausgeht auf die Kunst des Wortklanges zur Mimik (denn für die Mimik ist das Wort das Erregende) bis zur bildenden Kunst, wo das Erregen in der Form ausgeht, und sich als sehendes Leben gestaltet. Von hier aus geht aber auf demselben Wege rückwärts das Binden durch die Mimik, die Kunst des Wortklanges bis zur Beredsamkeit und Poesie, wo es im freien inneren Leben ausgeht, in jeder Erscheinungsart der Kunst aber durch das Zusammentreffen des Erregens und Bindens ein bestimmtes eigentümliches Leben darstellend. Die zweite Erregung geht aber … unmittelbar von der Poesie aus durch die Musik und Tanzkunst (denn für diese ist die Musik das Erregende) bis zur Baukunst, und umgekehrt begegnet dieser Richtung… die Rückwirkung des Bindens von dem Räumlichen aus. Es werden sich also diese beiden Richtungen des Erregens, jede mit der ihr begegnenden des Bindens zusammen, durchkreuzen. Das Ganze läßt sich am besten durch eine sinnliche Darstellung anschaulich machen, wie folgende… (10)

Contemporary time introduces different, new dimensions to this idea of universal art. Contemporary “gesamtness” of art steps beyond unconscious perception toward a blend with consciousness, as the perceiver becomes more active and aware in the process of reception and may even be involved in the art’s creation. As contemporary art moves on
further in time, its quantity and variety expand. It becomes impossible to achieve a true totality of all knowledge in one. Contemporary art becomes more complicated.

The German opera composer Richard Wagner referred specifically to the concept of a universal artwork in his 1849 essay “Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft” (“The Artwork of the Future”):

Der künstlerische Mensch kann sich nur in der Vereinigung aller Kunstarten zum gemeinsamen Kunstwerke vollkommen genügen: in jeder Vereinzelung seiner künstlerischen Fähigkeiten ist er unfrei, nicht vollständig das, was er sein kann; wogegen er im gemeinsamen Kunstwerke frei, und vollständig das ist, das er sein kann. Das wahre Streben der Kunst ist daher das allumfassende: jeder vom wahren Kunsttriebe Beseelte will durch die höchste Entwicklung seiner besonderen Fähigkeit nicht die Verherrlichung dieser besonderen Fähigkeit, sondern die Verherrlichung des Menschen in der Kunst überhaupt erreichen.

While the utopian ideal that Wagner described of a Gesamtkunstwerk has not come to fruition, the conditions of contemporary Western society have made it possible for art to embrace universality more directly than ever before.

Encounters between cultures are regarded as part of the human condition in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the interaction—sometimes referred to as “the clash” of civilizations—of diverse cultural heritages and current cultural trends, languages and religions have shaped and continue to shape people’s perceptions of themselves and the other. “Many younger artists have reflected the relatively new conditions of cultural hybridization and global cross-fertilization” (After Modern Art 242). For instance, “the
British artist Yinka Shonibare, who was born in England but brought up by Nigerian parents in Lagos, sought to contest the “authentic” ethnic origins that had preoccupied many culturally displaced artists of the 1980s. Working with patterned fabrics which connoted “Africa” but had actually begun life in their raw state in England or Holland, he produced dresses which bore witness to the cultural hybridities stemming from colonialism” (After Modern Art 242). David Hopkins summarizes the effect of his creations:

“Shonibare’s work implicitly endorses a forecast by the film historian and critic Peter Wollen to the effect that, on the evidence of the 1980s and 1990s, changing patterns of international migration and tourism, along with redistributed relations between urban centers and their peripheries across Europe and the Third World, will increasingly influence, and rejuvenate, cultural forms. Wollen asserts that the future will see ever greater cultural diffusion” (After Modern Art 242).

In the twenty-first century, that is indeed what we are increasingly experiencing.

As the contemporary human differs from the cave man, contemporary art is radically different from that of previous eras (although there are continuities). There are more tools for artistic creation at the present time in the form of technologies, exploring natural resources, and even going beyond the space of the Earth. Advanced technologies have freed up a lot of time for some, allowing for more time for more people to create art. Educational art books as well as internet websites with demos and workshops all contribute to the increasing quantity of artists. There is a clear departure of art from the stage of being framed by certain canons and generally isolated from public life. Today’s art fuses into the masses, into everyday life, into education. Art is not just for a privileged
group of people anymore, rather it is in most cases open to all. This thesis explores contemporary art as universal art that involves different areas and subjects of human studies and the interactions that fuse into it, stepping out of the usual locations and into other possible spaces, involving all types of people.

This thesis doesn’t intend to consider the whole range of contemporary art and artists. Possibilities of form, as well as the number of working artists, are ever expanding and therefore impossible to cover comprehensively. Rather, this work concentrates mainly on the universal quality of contemporary art, focusing particularly on such phenomena and events as multicultural art, postdramatic theater, and audience interaction.

In this thesis I use the terms ‘universal’ and ‘gesamt’ as synonymous. Under universal I mean merge, synthesis referring to different aspects of art. "Gesamt” is combining several in one. Universality or gesamtness of art applies to place, content, and creators way of creation and perception. Contemporary time is fertile for universal art. There are more possibilities for blending in the contemporary era. Such factors as mass education, mass involvement in different activities of human production, a higher level of population knowledge, mass access to the arts, communication on global level, recent new scientific discoveries, and technological development are crucial.

Global art is one of the aspects of universal art. We can discuss global art as art overlapping the world, as art accessible worldwide, as well as the art that represents the coition of different cultures. Chapter two concentrates on exploration of multicultural artists. Culture puts its imprint on arts. That’s why multicultural art is universal art. It is a merge of different cultures into one piece of art. Multicultural artists collide different cultures together.
I explore contemporary art by addressing primarily German-language prose and drama by way of example. The following chapters bring together groups of contemporary artists in their relationship to the larger concept of universality.
International mobility and immigration have increased in the contemporary era. Contemporary time opened borders between countries. International mobility and immigration have increased and statistical data shows that the flow of immigrants has also increased. Germany is one of the countries with a very high immigration level. In 2006 there were 661,855 arrivals of immigrants to Germany and 639,064 departures out of the country. In 2014 the numbers increased: the Statistical Office reports 1,464,724 arrivals and 914,241 departures for that year. For 2015, Federal Statistical Office recorded the highest number of immigrants arriving into Germany with 1.14 million (destatis.de). At the present time, in 2016, Germany (as other countries) is faced with an influx of refugees from Syria and other danger zones. Beyond the logistical issues that such immigration brings with it, there is also an inevitable influence on the culture and on contemporary art. In this chapter I concentrate on universal artwork in the form of globalization and cultural diffusion. I look at such work as Feridun Zaimoglu’s Kanak Sprak and Kopf und Kragen: Kanak- Kultur- Kompendium, and Vladimir Kaminer’s stories “Russendisko,” “Ich mache mir Sorgen, Mama,” “Karaoke,” “Küche toalitär. Das Kochbuch des Sozialismus,” “Ich bin kein Berliner: Ein Reiseführer für faule Touristen,” “Mein Leben im Schrebergarten,” and “Es gab keinen Sex im Sozialismus.”
The development of technologies, science and other spheres trigger international trade and further exchange in knowledge. These conditions are fertile for the development of multiculturalism, not just in society but in the arts as well. In recent times, many multicultural artists have emerged, bringing with them broader, multicultural knowledge and information. Totality expresses itself through the artists’ coverage of the topic of multiculturalism, striving to give the point of view of immigrants, as well as natives towards immigrants; information about other culture and language; through the language enrichment; and style of writing. As Adrian Wanner comments in his “Russian Hybrids: Identity in the Translingual Writings”, “some of these authors never published anything in their native language. Those who use the language of their adopted home countries exclusively are classified as translingual writers. Those who write in both languages are termed bilingual writers. Authors writing in a language other than their native tongue have become a common phenomenon in our era. They choose to write in the foreign language as a consequence of immigration or as an aesthetic choice” (662). In this chapter I look closely at the literary work of such multicultural artists as Russian-German Wladimir Kaminer, and Turkish-German Feridun Zaimoglu. Their careers as writers of German are intricately linked to their origins, as each of them in his own way projects a native country persona to the Western public, while putting it through the filter of their experience in a new land. This becomes apparent in the subject matter of their books and also in their individual writing styles. Topics taken on by multicultural artists are shaped by their experiences generally not familiar to native citizens.

Feridun Zaimoglu is one of the most important figures in contemporary German literature. He entered the German literary scene with “Kanak Sprak” in 1995. His literary
work is marked by controversy and reinvention, as it “appropriates German literary traditions in radically new ways, adapting Romantic styles, narrative forms, and motifs to postmodern conditions” (www.peterlang.com). He has won many prestigious awards for novelists, has set new standards for literary readings as performance events, and has developed unique, experimental narrative forms. He has made a difference in the arts as a novelist, dramatist, newspaper columnist, visual artist, and live performer.

Multicultural writers bring difference into literature. They bring with them unique ways of understanding and multifaceted knowledge. One of the central topics of Zaimoglu’s work is multiculturalism, and particularly challenges experienced by Turkish immigrants living in Germany; their striving to adjust to German society; to be recognized by natives with equal rights and respect, as well as to carry on their own culture.

Multiculturalism is a phenomenon that intends to keep and develop cultural differences in each country and in the world in general. Multiculturalism is opposed to the concept of the “melting pot” that presupposes the amalgamation of many different cultures into one, and to the idea of a “heterogeneous society,” a harmonious whole with a common culture. Here progresses universality of contemporary era. Similar to the case of postdramatic theater, the word is not excluded, but its voice is not the single one anymore; it gives space to other mediums to enrich the result. Rather than excluding each other, they accompany and enhance one another. They are co-existing together and creating some new whole, while still keeping their own essence. One culture is not the only speaking voice, but rather two or more cultures join together, adding to each other, and opening space for a variety of views, perceptions, and experiences.
Kanak Sprak is a book that consists of multiple stories, narrated by different Turkish immigrants. These people sharing their experiences are of different ages and genders, with different jobs or are unemployed. Kanak Sprak\(^3\) begins with this paragraph:

Wie lebt es sich als Kanake in Deutschland, war die Frage, die ich mir und anderen gestellt habe. Kanake, ein Etikett, das nach mehr als 30 Jahren Immigrationsgeschichte von Türken nicht nur Schimpfwort ist, sondern auch ein Name, den ‘Gastarbeiterkinder’ der zweiten und vor allem der dritten Generation mit stolzem Trotz führen. (9)

Zaimoglu describes the difficult life of Turkish immigrants, who live differently from native Germans: “Sie wohnten in engen, schäbigen Verschlägen und kalten Häusern, in denen es von der Decke tropfte und die Wände Risse zeigten; Die Mütter standen den ganzen Tag in der Küche, zeigten den ersten Gebrechen. Die Väter bekamen krumme Rücken, Magengeschwüre und griffen öfter zum Prügelstock” (9). They are homesick, as their motherland is always far away in Turkey. They travel back and forth with “mit zwiebelsäcken, als wären in ungläubigen land alle reserven aufgebraucht” (102).

Those who return to Turkey may disadvantage or even endanger their children, born in Germany:

In dieses Klima hinein wird die zweite Kanakengeneration geboren. Sie ist, wie die meisten Deutschen, weit davon entfernt, der Türkei mehr Beobachtung zu schenken als einem Urlaubsland… Die Kinder werden aus dem vertrauten Milieu herausgerissen und im Land ihrer Väter und Mütter einer Zwangsassimilation

\(^3\) Collins Großwörterbuch defines “Kanake” als Ausländer, Südlander, wop, dago.

The immigrants often live on the edge of poverty, and this social status causes anger. They are regarded as “foreigners,” and defined by their Muslim identity. This enforces or reinforces their identity as “different” and in opposition to the West:


Not only does he stand for justice and equality, rejecting discrimination, but he also introduces foreign culture to the reader. In his representation, Turkish women cook all day long, and during weddings they wear garments decorated with frills and long trains, “sie haben eine erbarmungslose schwäche für kitsch: venezianische gondeln, gipsfiguren, gestrickte klorollenhütchen, obstschalen aus hartplastik, resedagrüne tischdecken, gebetsteppiche an den wänden, nippes in keksdosengold, gehäkelte armlehenschoner” (102).

At the same time, Zaimoglu aims to break stereotypes and dichotomies by highlighting the individuality of his “Kanaken.” He thereby denies Germany’s domination over its citizens with a Turkish background: in his preface to Kanak Sprach, Zaimoglu lists the different roles that “Kanaken” can play: “Abdurrahman, 24, Rapper”; “Akay, 29, vom Flohmarkt”; “Büyük Ibo, 18, Packer”; “Cem, 25, Zuhälter”; “Faruk, 26,
“Arbeitslos”; “Azize, 27, Transsexuelle,” thus differentiating and separating the group perceived collectively as “foreigners” or “Turks” by mainstream Germans into subgroups and individuals. The language that Zaimoglu creates is a kind of universal language. 

*Kanak Sprach* is written in an inventive, stylized literary language that is a hybrid of slangs, dialects, jargons and neologisms, and it is politically charged. His language is amazingly expressive and powerful. In *Kanak Sprach* nouns are not capitalized, in some stories “nich” is used instead of “nicht”, “olle” for “alle”, “ne” for “nie”, “is” for “ist,” reflective of how spoken language differs from the standard German. While *Kanak Sprak* is in some ways aggressive, it also reveals a sensitivity, caring for others, and the desire for a different and improved world.

Zaimoglu emphasizes his authority as editor in order to prove the verity of the experiences reported in the texts. This enables him to raise awareness among his largely middle-class German readers for the difficulties of young migrants. Zaimoglu’s asserted “pretence of authenticity reveals his agenda: he wishes to be seen as a mouthpiece for young German Turks” (Matthes 23) who, as marginal Germans, significantly influence German culture, and he aims to create an immediate, authentic experience for his readers who are part of Germany.

His other book, *Kopf und Kragen* (2001), is a collection of short stories, some of which are serious, others ironic, while still others are written in the form of first-person narration, or as an interview. “Um Kopf und Kragen: Galaxy im Gespräch (I, II, III, IV)” is comprised of stories that are written in the form of interviews, and each story is titled “Frau” or “Herr” followed by the name of the individual. All these people represent segments of the population of contemporary Germany. Through interviews we slowly
discover the story of each individual. The author also intersperses the plot with important events and nuances of contemporary life in Germany, characterized by multiculturalism, and following its influences and consequences.

Herr Zett in “Um Kopf und Kragen. Galaxy im Gespräch” is a racist, even while he himself is a “Gastarbeiterkind” as the interviewer Galaxy says. Herr Zett integrated into the new culture and even changed his nose. The integration is equated in this story with plastic surgery. The situations with plastic surgeries are described in a satirical way referring to a loss of identity and heritage that may take place along with cultural assimilation.

The first story of the collection, “Kanak Attack: Rebellion der Minderheiten,” is about minorities in general, not just about Turks. The narrator is talking about his childhood and about his family of “Gastarbeiter.” His mother is a *Tscherkessin*, from the Caucasus, but escaped to Turkey during Stalin’s repressions. Father “gehörte der dritten Generation der Balkanflüchtlinge an” (10). It is underlined that the story is about minorities: “Ich bin im anatolischen Bolu geboren, meine achtzehn Monate jüngere Schwester ist gebürtige Berlinerin. Kann man vor solch immensem Zeitzäsuren und biographischen Brüchen noch von einer einzigen Identität sprechen, die alle Alterklassen in der Geschlechterfolge in Haft nimmt?” (10). There is hope at the end of this story: “Es gilt, als Chronist Zeugnis davon abzulegen, denn später wird es heißen: Die Geschichte der Zuwanderer, ihrer Kinder und Kindeskinder, ist die Geschichte von herkunftsfremden Deutschen, die trotz Kränkung und Demütigung, trotz Politikerpopulismus und Fremdenhass geblieben sind. Sie sind geblieben, weil es sich lohnte zu bleiben in diesem Land” (21). Rendering and describing the life of immigrants in all possible variations and
details, Zaimoglu asserts the importance and inevitability of these processes in the contemporary world.

Another multicultural writer, Wladimir Kaminer, was born in Moscow, and moved to Berlin in 1990. He became one of Germany’s most popular writers. His “Russendisco,” a collection of short stories about Russian immigrants’ life in Berlin, became a bestseller and was translated into a number of languages, including Russian and English. The main topic in Kaminer’s literary work is the country of his background, Russia. His short stories are a unique extraction of its history and culture, the details of which would be lost for new generations of Russians, if not for them being fixed in literary and documentary sources. His stories are written from the first-person perspective, bordering on autobiographical: “He works in the genre of pseudo-autobiography. The adventure of this genre lies in the fact that it allows the author to combine a work of fiction with enough autobiographical material to pique the reader’s excitement about witnessing a “true story.” (Adrian Wanner, Russian Hybrids: Identity in the Translingual Writings, 664). “A strategy of blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality is at work in Kaminer’s writings” (Adrian Wanner, Russian Hybrids: Identity in the Translingual Writings, 665).

While writing in German, Kaminer includes Russian words that have no equivalent in the other language, because they refer to uniquely Russian historical events or cultural, social occurrences, for instance “Komzomolzen”, “BAM”, and “Balalaika.”

In the “Die Grundfragen des vorigen Jahrhunderts” Kaminer writes about children and youth union organizations during Soviet Union period of Russia:
Je nach Altersgruppe waren die Bürger in unterschiedlichen Vereinen organisiert, wo sie einen Schwur zu leisten und gut sichtbar Zugehörigkeitsabzeichen zu tragen hatten. Mit sieben wurde man ein Oktoberkind, bekam einen Stern mit einem molligen jungen Lenin darauf und schwor Fleiß und Disziplin, das hieß, nur gute Noten nach Hause zu bringen und in der Schulkantine immer alles aufzuessen, ohne den Inhalt des Tellers anzusehen. Mit dreizehn wechselten die Oktoberkinder zu den Pionieren. Sie bekamen ein rotes Halstuch…

In “Die rasenden Russen,” Kaminer describes in humorous form such economical occurrences of the Soviet system as “difizit” and “blat.” Difizit is a term for things that were difficult to obtain even while you had money, due to the limit of certain items in the stores, while blat refers to having access to things for which there was a shortage because of your position, or through people you know with connections.

He describes the difizit for automobile as follows:

Kaminer writes not just about a certain culture but about a particular historical time and events of a culture. Kaminer’s work is addressed to a universal audience or reader. Some parts of the plot might be more familiar and clearer to older generations and completely unknown to the younger generation of Russians, becoming a valuable source of cultural-historical information. This paragraph is about the difizit of buying the car, but it is arranged among the description of other events of that time that are characterized by the mood of positivism, belief, unity, collectivism and happiness, like building BAM, or the excitement of winning in the lottery game “Sportlotto,” which is watched on TV by the whole country. The associations tied to these events come from following movies, literature, and visual arts of that time, which later, in retrospect, were viewed from a different perspective. All these things together twisted in Kaminer’s work result in irony without judgment, providing compressed information about the culture, while this culture fuses from the past into the present.

Kaminer writes as about his experience living in Russia, and about immigrants’ life in Germany. Many of the characters of his stories carry Russian names: Larissa, Valentina, Vika, Tamara, Alexander. He also points out that living in the other country, these characters are still tied in some way to the habits and the way of thinking of their native culture. So the plot of his entire literary work leads the reader from the original culture to the point of transition, the destination where the native culture changes while mixed with the other culture. Immigrants’ culture appears in this way to be the culture “between two worlds” (Adelson).
Kaminer’s work can be considered a piece of Gesamtkunst. First of all, the topic of Soviet Union is a point of interest for people of many cultures. For Kaminer it becomes the meeting point of all. His knowledge and experience of many cultures allowed him to create this piece. I wouldn’t agree with Adrian Wanner that Kaminer focuses on the “absurdity of Soviet daily life” and that he “describes the Soviet Union of the 1980s as a decadent empire marred by cynicism, alcoholism, and corruption” (Wanner). I would say instead that Kaminer shares his memories and experience with the reader in a humorous, sarcastic way, leaving space for multiple conclusions, as Gesamtkunst tends to do.

In „Das Frauenfrühlingsfest” we are introduced to the Russian folklore song “chastuschka”:

Man trug selbst gedichtete so genannte Schnadahüpfl vor, eine volksstümliche russische Sitte. Die Schnadahüpfl hatten in Russland immer eine große gesellschaftskritische Bedeutung, weil sie in oft überzogener Form die Stimme des Volkes zum Ausdruck brachten. Der Chor setzte bei seinen Schnadahüpfl einige sachbearbeiter des Potsdamer Sozialismus sowie der Einwanderungsbehörde der Kritik aus und rief zugleich alle judischen Einwanderer und die Ruisslanddeutschen auf, mehr zusammenzuhalten und ihre Freundschaft zu verstärken. (Russendisko 153)

There are other songs here and there in his stories that are known to all Russians of that time and even now: in “Genosse Wind,” in “Die Lieder des vorigen Jahrhunderts,” Kaminer combined two songs “Lustiger Wind” (“Happy Wind”) and “Genosse Zeit” (“Comrade Time”). Further Russian songs alluded to are: “Wohin geht unsere Kindheit?” (Куда уходит детство,) (Ich mache mir Sorgen, Mama; Der Fünfklässler, 28); “Immer
lebe die Sonne” (Пусть всегда будет солнце) (Ich mache mir Sorgen, Mama, 149). The author of the words for the song „Immer lebe die Sonne” is Oshanin, the poet of 70 books. Derbenjov and Zatsepin are authors of the song “Wohin geht unsere Kindheit?”. This song is still popular, and was sung by Alla Pugatschova.

There are a lot of Russian writers’ names through his stories—Dostojevski, Pushkin, Leo Tolstoi, Raskolnikov—that carry the pride of Russian history, culture, and literature. Single words, names, and titles carry a rich story behind them. A single word can carry a lot of accompanying information with it, which might be known only to those of the native culture. This accompanying information can awaken many feelings and associations. For example a melody of a song can evoke associations with the singer, with particular places, with a distinct style, and with specific events at which the song was sung. So, what one reader would experience when coming upon an allusion to a song, another one wouldn’t necessarily.

In his “What Is Literature?” Sartre wrote, “On the one hand, the literary object has no substance but the reader's subjectivity” (Theory and Criticism 1339). “But, on the other hand, the words are there like traps to arouse our feelings and to reflect them towards us” (Theory and Criticism 1340). Thus, the writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of the work” (Theory and Criticism 1340). Certain things are difficult to experience, feel, and understand, unless you lived in the culture for many years, but contemporary time creates more access to knowledge, making it possible to virtually experience other cultures. And here we return again to the perception of the piece by the audience.
As we can talk about *Gesamtkunst* in terms of the content within the piece of the multicultural writer, in the same way we can talk about it in the terms of the position of the multicultural literature within German literature in general. There is no sharp division anymore. The established dichotomy between the literature of migration and national literature is slowly being erased in the context of *Gesamtkunst*.

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4 There has been much work done on this topic in recent years in the field of German Studies. See, for example, Adelson.
CHAPTER THREE
POSTDRAMATIC THEATER AS UNIVERSAL ART

By the end of the twentieth century, theatre also experienced a transition to new forms. Postdramatic theater is another example of the total artwork that shapes the new contours of contemporary art, incorporating new ways of communication, new relationships and roles between participants, as well as changing the content and the role of the theater overall. Theater itself as an art medium is very rich in possibilities. In the contemporary time, theater has unfolded and revealed itself in all its richness. Richard Wagner in his essay “Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft“ talks about the theater as the most prominent area for the development of totality in art, as theater is inclusive of many possible other types of art within it. Theater is the place where other arts reveal themselves in the highest degree and power. Drama happens as a result of many different art forms directed toward the audience:

Das höchste gemeinsame Kunstwerk ist das Drama: nach seiner möglichen Fülle kann es nur vorhanden sein, wenn in ihm jede Kunstart in ihrer höchsten Fülle vorhanden ist. Das wahre Drama ist nur denkbar als aus dem gemeinsamen Drange aller Künste zur unmittelbarsten Mittheilung an eine gemeinsame Wesentlichkeit hervorgehend: jede einzelne Kunstart vermag der gemeinsamen Wesentlichkeit zum vollen Verständnisse nur durch gemeinsame Mittheilung mit
den übrigen Kunstarten im Drama sich zu erschließen, denn die Absicht jeder einzelnen Kunstart wird nur im gegenseitig sich beständigen und verständnißgebenden Zusammenwirken aller Kunstarten vollständig erreicht.

(186)

German theater researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann also defines what he calls “the new theatre” as part of “a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving,” which refers to universal art:

The written text and the book are being called into question. The mode of perception is shifting: a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving is replacing the linear-successive… In the face of the pressure created by the attraction of the united forces of speed and surface, theatrical discourse emancipates itself from literary discourse but at the same time draws nearer to it in terms of its general function within culture. (16)

In his book Postdramatic Theater (1999), Lehmann gives a detailed and thorough theoretical analysis of new forms and occurrences, leading to his definition of postdramatic theater. Lehmann leads the reader logically and terminologically to the conception of the postdramatic theater by pointing out the differences of European theater’s development across eras. Rendering prehistory of the European theater development, he leads the reader to the panorama of the new theater with its signs, performance texts, and new forms of practice such as Performance Art. Theater doesn’t depend only on the written word any longer; it has its own voice. The theater doesn’t operate exclusively for the literary text any more, and it doesn’t substitute its own composition tools with the laws of the word text structure. Theater is not centered on text
anymore; it is a theater of image and landscape. Postdramatic theater opens the door to the collaboration of many different ways of communication and expression.

According to Lehmann, the postdramatic theater denies the literary text as the only foundation for the theater performance. He addresses here the crisis of interpretational production that relies on the interpretation of the written play. Theater has its own voice independent from literature. The word should be, as Lehmann says, the “passer-by” in the voice of actor. In my understanding, however, no text can be understood in isolation. Text also contains images—actual images accompanying them and figurative images that are evoked by the language that are then interpreted by the reader or spectator. Postdramatic theater gives more freedom to text, as there are more interpretations and additions to the original text when transformed into a piece for the theater. Postdramatic text contains more concise and compressed language, shorter syntax, and is more open for images as it uses more tools for image production. For example Elfriede Jelinek’s dramas express literally no dependence on the writer’s directions:

Die Autorin gibt nicht viele Anweisungen, das hat sie inzwischen gelernt. Machen Sie was sie wollen. Das einzige, was unbedingt sein muß, ist: griechische Chöre, einzelne, Massen, wer immer auftreten soll, außer an den wenigen Stellen, wo etwas anderes angegeben ist, muß Sportbekleidung tragen, das gibt doch ein weites Feld für Sponsoren, oder? (Ein Sportstück 7)

The work of Elfriede Jelinek is audacious. It is a firm, strong voice of the twentieth century. As the author she gives freedom to the director and the actors: “Die Chöre, wenns geht, bitte einheitlich, alles adidas oder Nike oder wie sie alle heißen, Reebok oder Puma oder Fila oder so.” (Ein Sportstück 7). In her essay “Sinn Egal. Körper Zwecklos,”
Jelinek describes the purpose of the word: “Ich will aber, daß die Schauspieler etwas ganz anderes tun, Ich will, daß die Sprache kein Kleid ist, sondern unter dem Kleid bleibt. Da ist, aber sich nicht vordrängt, nicht vorschaut unter dem Kleid” (8). This statement exemplifies the characteristic postdramatic demotion of the word.

By reducing the dependence on words, postdramatic theater broadens the interpretive spectrum, opening up new receptive possibilities. In his interpretation of Lehmann, Pavel Rudnev writes that dramatic theater makes the theater logical and linear. Dramatic theater’s text gave the structure- the composition, structure of the society, world outlook, extract of the historical process. Contemporary time, as well as contemporary art, so writes Rudnev, is tied to perceptions of reality as regularity or conformity with a law. Instead of the geometrical ideas of understanding and perception, there are the new ideas of structural chaos.

Traditional dramatic theater with its linear, systematic structure prevents the development of theater as an energy exchange with an unstructured, unsystematic composition. Instead of the linear structures from the opening to the denouement, consecutive, broad, overlapping, polyperspectival systems are employed. Completely different mechanisms of communication are turned on in the theater, not just through the text. Lehmann, looking for terms to describe the new theater, mentions Richard Schechner’s application of “postdramatic”:

In passing, and related to but diverging from the emphasis attempted here, Richard Schechner has applied the word “Postdramatic” to happenings; he once spoke of the “postdramatic theatre of happenings.” Similarly en passant and with a view to Beckett, Genet and Ionesco, he also, somewhat paradoxically, talked
about the “postdramatic drama”, in which no longer the “story” but what
Schechner calls the “game” becomes the “generative matrix”… (26).

Lehmann speaks about such a scheme as the departure from the theater–story towards the theater-game. One of the important notions of Lehmann’s book is the idea that actor skill is not just acting, playing skill in the postdramatic theater any more, but the actor’s role is changed in this structure to that of an author. There is a development from the representation to the presentation. In the opinion of Rudnev, Lehmann gives a lesson on perception of the theater also, not through morals and national traditions or systems of impressionistic feelings, but through the paradox of the movement of the theater form.

The departure from the text and the written word doesn’t mean narrowing the field of the theater; on the contrary, it opens new opportunities and combinations of other forms within it. It is not giving up the word, rather it is limiting its singular dominance in favor of other ways of communication. It is changing the narrative, storytelling function of the word towards attaching new means of communication to it. Elfriede Jelinek’s work is an example of totality on many different levels that involve universal word, structure, and narrative. At the same time, postdramatic theatre such as Jelinek’s doesn’t exclude previous traditions completely, as Lehmann notes:

Expressionism, too, develops motifs of theatre that get their breakthrough in postdramatic theatre. Its combination of cabaret and dream play and its linguistic innovations as telegram style and broken syntax undermine the uniform perspective onto the logic of human action; the sound is intended to transport affects rather than messages. (65). Expressionism seeks ways of representing the
unconscious whose nightmares and images of desire are not bound to any
dramatic logic. (65)

Some of these elements appear in Jelinek’s work. Jelinek’s characters in many of her
dramas carry a collective connotation not just in their names, but in their actions also.
These are: Frau, Mann, Kunde, Ein anderer, Stimmen durcheinander, eine Wartende ( „Stecken, Stab und Stangl“); die Frau, der alte Mann, ein Leistungssportler, ein alter
Bauer ( „Totenauberg“).

Jelinek also brings new elements into the theater, as Lehmann points out:

Retaining the dramatic dimension to different degrees, Werner Schwab, Elfriede
Jelinek, Rainald Goetz, Sarah Kane and Rene Pollesch, for example, have all
produced texts in which language appears not as the speech of characters- if there
still are definable characters at all- but as an autonomous theatricality. A concept
that may illuminate what is happening here is Elfriede Jelinek’s idea of
juxtaposed ‘language surfaces’ (Sprachflächen) in place of dialogue. As
Poschmann explains, this form is directed against the ‘depth’ of speaking figures,
which would suggest a mimetic illusion. In this respect, the metaphor of
“language surfaces” corresponds to the turning point of painting in modernity
when, instead of the illusion of three-dimensional space, what is being “staged” is
the picture’s plane-ness, its two-dimensional reality, and the reality of colour as
an autonomous quality. (18)

The role of the word itself changes in postdramatic theater. Jelinek’s word becomes
very broad and involves generalization. Positioning of the word and use of it in the text
breaks traditions in her plays. “Was mich interessiert an den Texten von Elfriede Jelinek,
ist der Widerstand, den sie leisten gegen das Theater, so wie es ist,” points Heiner Müller. Non-traditional use and position of the word in the text leads to many other mechanisms of communication, beyond sound.

Structurally, Jelinek’s plays are ambitious and multilayered texts that draw on a number of different sources and intertextuality. She frequently employs the conjunction oder in her texts, allowing the audience more options for employing her suggestions in the play. It is not the ready-made play she is writing, rather it is the basis for material for further creation. Jelinek also uses a method of generalization for grammatical genders, referring to both his and her, or he and she, rather than defaulting to either the masculine or the feminine. As a writer she doesn’t have direct, exact requirements of what should be said on stage, and gives generalized suggestions instead, for instance here:

Was ich vom Chor will, ist folgendes: Der Chorführer, oder die Chorführerin, soll mittels Ohrstecker mit dem Sportkanal verbunden sein und alle interessanten Sportereignisse oder die neuesten Ergebnisse, je nach seiner (ihrer) Einschätzung, dem Publikum bekanntgeben, entweder indem der Chorführer zur Rampe tritt und verkündet, was er zu sagen hat, oder indem er es auf Tafeln schreibt, die er hochhält, oder, etwas teurer, mittels Leuchtschift, die man eingehen kann wie in einen Computer oder eine Schreibmaschine. (Ein Sportstück 7)

The open and unconventional form of Jelinek’s texts has given directors the freedom to deploy a huge variety of different directorial strategies and in the process, inevitably made them into creative co-authors. She leads to these kind of experiences with directors of her plays giving opening stage directions in “Ein Sportstück”, where she states that “the author doesn’t give many stage directions, she has learned lesson her by now. Do what you like” (39). “die Autorin gibt nicht viele Anweisungen, das hat sie inzwischen gelernt. Machen Sie was Sie wollen” (7). Most of Jelinek’s plays since “Ein Sportstück” have contained similar non-stage directions that surrender to and explicitly encourage the creative freedom of directors, designers and performers.

She incorporates the improvisation of the actors as well, involving more participants in the creation of the piece:

Zum Chorführer (zur Chorführerin) sollte jemand gewählt werden, der gut improvisieren kann, er tritt also zur Rampe und verkündet, das Spiel unterbrechend, ein neues Ergebnis, und der Chor nimmt das dann auf und wiederholtes chorisch. Und zwar so, daß die Handlung eben dadurch unterbrochen wird, es gibt eh keine. (*Ein Sportstück* 7)

The word “Handlung” in this stanza can be understood in many different ways. It can be meant as a treatment of a play, or what has to be said. It is not important what will be said. Choice is not to have a choice, and improvise. Choice is to be different. Choice can be everything. “Handlung” is also a play itself, or even the content of a play. In contemporary theater, the word is put in such position and is arranged by such circumstances and surrounding that it becomes multivalent, overlapping with universal meaning.
In her interview with Simon Stephens that was held by e-mail in May 2012 before the English-language performance of the play Elfriede Jelinek was asked the question: “Do you imagine your plays on a stage or in a theater as you write them? How physical or pictorial is your playwriting, or is it entirely linguistic?”, to which she responded the following:

Well, I do have images in my head when I write plays, that suffices for me. When a director does something completely different, this interests me all the more. It would also be boring for me if the director (and of course also the actors) were to simply stage and illustrate what I prescribe to them. Although I do say how I imagine the play, it is all more wonderful for me when I learn to see my own text with new eyes, through theatre practice. A play is never the product of the author, it is as most half, if at all, his or her work. It only comes into being through collaborative teamwork. That’s what’s so interesting about theatre. (Penny Black, *The Sports Play*, 16)

This same idea, that the play is not just a product of the writer, is brought up also by contemporary dramatist John von Düffel in “Wie Dramen entstehen.” In addition, von Düffel draws attention to the existing difference between the text and a live theatrical production:

Denn anders als alle anderen literarischen Gattungen entsteht ein Stück mit Blick auf die Bühne- und sein Entstehungsprozess ist erst dann vorläufig abgeschlossen, wenn es auf einer Bühne vor Publikum uraufgeführt wird. Während ein Roman in seinem Medium bereits angekommen ist, wenn er auf dem Papier steht, ist ein Theaterstück als Manuskript nur eine Vorstufe dessen, was es einmal werden soll:
ein Stück Theater. Wer über die Entstehung von Theaterstücken nachdenkt, darf also nicht nur über den eigenen Schreibtisch reden, er muss ein ganzes Medium in den Blick nehmen, die Welt des Theaters und ihre ästhetischen Bedingungen. („Wie Dramen entstehen,” 12)

The effects of theater depend on so many things, including circumstances of availability at a certain moment, directors’ choices, mood, visual presence in space, decorations, costumes, visual appearance of actors’ facial and bodily features, expressions of actors, and sound. While textual perception can differ depending on the readers, theater piece perception differs not only depending on audience but also on who stages it. Text goes directly to the reader. The reader is the further director of the conclusions for the written text. The live theater piece goes through more filters, such as the writer, director, actor, and audience. This makes the theater the most universal place of creation, with the highest number of participants. Universality of the theater today is meant above all as the freedom of choice for both its creators and its recipients.

Bei einem Roman als autonomen Kunstwerk sind Vollständigkeit und Geschlossenheit zumindest theoretisch denkbar. Ein Theaterstück dagegen ist essentiell offen, weil der künstlerische Prozess in dem Moment, in dem ich das letzte Wort schreibe, keineswegs zu Ende ist, sondern auf der Ebene der Regie, der Ausstattung, des Spiels etc. überhaupt erst beginnt und immer weitergeht, in jeder einzelnen Aufführung, jeden Abend, bis der letzte Vorhang fällt. (von Düffel, „Wie Dramen entstehen”)

Universality of today’s art is the phenomenon of carrying the huge amount of accumulated knowledge in the world and enriching it with the new forms of
representation and interpretation, combining consent and denial, going different
directions while dividing into more single units, unifying into more complicated pieces of
totality. Universality of today’s art is observed on various levels. Art can be in the style
of collage, merging different genres, and may be the result of collaborative work.
Universality is also demonstrated through open-minded theories in the arts and societies
that are in principle more open to diversity than in previous eras,

Wäre das Theater also eine Afterkunst, um ein böses Wort zu bemühen, müsste es
regelmäßig kapitulieren, weil sich viele wesentliche Fragen, die sich im Laufe
einer Produktion stellen, durch das Stück allein nicht klären lassen. Theaterarbeit
ist ein komplexes Zusammenspiel verschiedener künstlerischer Fähigkeiten und
Temperamente, deshalb ist sie so verdammt schwierig und nur bedingt planbar,
denn ihr Gelingen hängt nie von einem Einzelnen ab, sondern von einer
Konstellation künstlerischer Kräfte. (von Düffel, “Wie Dramen entstehen”)

Artists who started their writing careers in the late twentieth century and who
continue to write in our contemporary time demonstrate the transition from
postmodernism. To add to it, some definitions of contemporary art state that
contemporary art starts from the point of and includes postmodern art. As said earlier the
contemporary art time frame moves ever forward, and artists who were contemporary
many years ago become not contemporary any more as time goes, but those who are still
alive and working artists are still considered to be contemporary. Just as Elfriede Jelinek,
the dramatist Peter Handke (1942–), already in his early work of 1970 “Quodlibet leaves
more to the imagination of directors and performers. He explains that the director and
actor must discover the details through experimentation, and that would be nonsense if
the form of the play didn’t remain open” (Denis Calandra, *New German Dramatists*, 56). He doesn’t give exact directions for the scene arrangements and rejects prescribed canons. “Die Szenenangaben sind nicht unbedingt Szenenanweisungen” (8), Handke writes in his later play, *Die Fahrt im Einbaum oder das Stück zum Film vom Krieg* (1999). He chooses in his description preview of the scene to use such vague vocabulary as: “irgendwo”, “oder”, “ohne die mehr oder weniger”, “?”, “einer”, “vielleicht”, referring to the options given to the director of the play or to the actors, as well as to the reader or the audience. The writer of the play steps back from the leading position, and is not considered the center of the piece’s creation any more, as exemplified in this dialogue from the play:

*O’Hara* Wer ist der Autor?

*Machado* Wo ist der Autor? Wo versteckt er sich?

*Ansager* Es ist ein Einheimischer; einer von hier. Er ist spurlos verschwunden; verschollen. (*Die Fahrt im Einbaum oder das Stück zum Film vom Krieg* 14).


While involving more participants, and incorporating more artistic freedom, contemporary theater is no longer authoritative. There is no vision of the definite outcome. Like with abstract painter Jackson Pollock, the way of working involves expecting a result, but the details of that result are not predicted, because it is a
spontaneous work. The same way each piece of the same performance differs and a change in one unit results in a change to the whole. As Lehmann explains:

It can be hardly overlooked that there are stylistic traits in the new theatre that have been seen as attributes of the tradition of mannerism: an aversion to organic closure, a tendency towards the extreme, distortion, unsettling uncertainty and paradox. The aesthetic of metamorphoses, as it is realized in Wilson’s work in an exemplary manner, can also be read as an indication of a mannerist use of signs. In addition there is the mannerist principle of equivalency: instead of contiguity, as it presents itself in dramatic narration (A is connected to B, B in turn to C, so that they form a line or sequence), one finds disparate heterogeneity, in which any of the detail seems to be able to take the place of any other. (84)

Handke describes the art of live drama as an open form, meaning that not every performance for the same play will be like the last one. These new characteristics of art appear occasionally in Handke’s work, in which he reflects on this process. O’Hara and Machado in Die Fahrt im Einbaum are making one film, but at the same time two different films:


mit meiner spanisch- europäisch- arabischen Liebe für Verkleidungen und Verwandlungen. “Schön der Reihe nach”: ob das diesem Krieg hier gerecht wird?

O’Hara Gerecht oder nicht Hauptsache, unser Film hat seinen Rhythmus. Stimmt der Rhythmus, stimmt das Ganze.

O’Hara Für dich die Flüche und Gebete, für mich die Schlägereien und die Lieder. Mir der Kriegsfilm und dir der Film vom Krieg!” (22-23);


Machado Und keine Vorwegnahmen. In keinem meiner Filme habe ich je etwas vorweggenommen. (24)

As it was described earlier, postdramatic theater doesn’t exclude the importance of the word at all, rather it adds to it the importance of other ways of performing, so the word would not dominate. To Handke, words are important but they are played in a new, different way. While the central motif in plays like Quodlibet is still the language-complex, his piece extends the experiment to include physical movement. Even his early Sprechstücke explore the limits of language and performance. He uses combinations of voices, experiments with acoustic field, produces acoustic irritation, compacts it as much as possible, creates acoustic situations for the sought-after word.

Contemporary art as Gesamtkunst continues with audience interaction. Audience interaction came more into play in the 1990s. The same way that the space and freedom are given to the director, a lot of the creation of the piece transfers to and depends on audience. Since theater usually takes place directly in front of the audience, it becomes
one of the mediums that is propitious for different ways of audience interaction. Not only in theoretical writings does the idea of audience participation appear, but it develops and becomes increasingly inventive in new forms on the stage. Handke experiments leaving the audience for two hours listening and looking “at the empty stage” in “Publikumsbeschimpfung.” The idea of the complete absence of the play at all marks a clear denial of conventional drama. The play offers all possibilities and freedom of choice for the audience. Peter Handke shows through the play that the role of audience is crucial. He worships the new century of art. It is nothing and everything, nowhere and everywhere, vacuum and plenum in one space and period of time. It is everything, whatever is possible. Text and words are dominant in this play, but they are structured and used in a completely new way. Swear words in a play and on stage is also a denial of common practice. This play embodies the essence of Gesamtkunst and contemporary art itself.

Christoph Schlingensief goes further and gives the new angle to the meaning of Gesamtkunst, a total work of art, as bringing art not just to audience on the stage, but into life, involving participation in life, living in art. Remarkable is Schlingensief’s work the “Opera Village Africa” that states the mission to overcome the division between art and life, in other words life is art, and art is life. Schlingensief decisively influenced participative theater in Germany. This project “Opera Village Africa” questions the artist’s role and status of the artwork in the twenty-first century. The plan of the project was to create an artistic center in one of the poorest countries in the world, including an opera house, school and a clinic.
Contemporary theater is marked not only by new invented progressive for contemporary time structures, ways of representing on stage, but also by content that mirrors and reflects the contemporary time. German-Icelandic dramatis Kristof Magnusson’s *Sushi für alle* (2011) is an example of this. Virtual communication, Internet, websites for singles, perverse Internet websites, commercials overloading TV are the features of the present time that appear in his play. Even not knowing the writer’s biography or anything about the play’s origin, the reader can easily detect after reading the play that it was written in the early twenty-first century, characterized by such phenomena listed above.

There are examples of language globalization in the play, also characteristic for the present style of living. There are such English words used as “Single” (44), “bonding” (56), “large” (81), emphasizing the linguistic influence of other cultures on German.

Contemporary time makes an imprint not only on the content of Magnusson’s plays, but also on his style or genre choices. His plays are Comedy, he chooses humor. It is a special type of humor, more subtle and mature than in previous eras of theater history. It is a newly developed style of humor that is mixed with tragedy in the tradition of the tragicomedy of Dürrenmatt and other predecessors but with its own unique invented style. Opposing genres are combined together to result in no definitive judgments and solutions, leaving space for the reader to decide.

In his interview in the *Berliner Zeitung* Magnusson expressed that the humor for him is the important and legitimate form of perceiving and explaining the world. It shouldn’t

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be played or act out against other ways of writing. Humor for him is not when one constantly laughs, clapping the hips. Humor represents things from a different point of view, accepting them differently than they appear or as they are happening.

There is a restrained humor in Sushi für alle. Sometimes it frontiers with sadness or melancholy. Comedy is twisted with tragedy together, bringing us back through the Gesamtkunst to a new form of expression, to the new contemporary experience. Jokes get interrupted with seriousness:

Kluge Tragen Sie doch, was Sie sonst immer tragen.

Lenz Mundschutz?

Kluge In der Freizeit. (36)

Some type of melancholy is underlined with repetition of words “Stille” (10, 16, 18, 23, 40) and “Dunkel” (20, 35) between the conversational scenes. The dramatic situation is expressed through Kluge’s feeling that he wants to die:

Kluge ... Ich habe immer gedacht, dass ich so bin wie dieser Vater in der Werbung: immer für die Kinder da. Dann kam mir der Gedanke: Was wäre eigentlich, wenn ich jetzt sterbe? Jede Menge Leute sterben in meinem Alter. (78)

It is tragic when Kluge is ready to lie to his family, and he did lie already that he has cancer:

Lenz is also deceitful. He is the one who bought tickets to India for Kluge, and he is the one who persuades Kluge it would be better for everybody if he disappears. And then straight away he tells Kluge’s family that their father doesn’t have cancer and is leaving them for India, representing the father as a very bad person. Later he says that it is the family’s fault, that they made him sick, which ironically fixes the situation in a more positive way. As soon as the semi-tragic situation resolves itself, the writer switches gears and changes the course of events in such a way that a new tragic situation is created, which later gets resolved positively in its way.

 Surprise scenes interspersed throughout this postdramatic text change the mood of the story. For example, at first Kluge doesn’t feel his legs; he is asking for air and says he is dying.

 _Kluge schwankt._

 _Gerald_ Pass auf, das schöne Getränk.

 _Alle ziehen an Kluge, er sinkt zu Boden._

 _Dunkel._ (64)

 One would think that Kluge has died, but then later in couple scenes that are divided with “Stille” stage directions, we read:

 _Gesine_ Ingo kommt heute aus dem Krankenhaus. Das wusstet ihr doch, oder?

 _Johanna_ Aber natürlich.

 _Gerald_ Klar doch! (67)

 As readers or audiences of this play, we see how certain actions of the characters can change the situation into an unexpectedly better or worse one. We observe the tension through Magnusson’s skillful combination of tragedy and humor.
Theater of today doesn’t give up previous experiences of performance from bygone eras, rather it enriches it with new forms of performance colliding and experimenting, blending with visual arts and other forms of human activities. While it is independent from “time and certain location” (Erika Fischer-Lichte, 415), contemporary theater steps out into the streets, into the masses and crowds, involving random people, and not necessarily theater visitors. In the form of festivals or public events, contemporary theater blends with other forms of arts and science. As part of everyday life with educational centers for youth, theater has begun involving young ages into performances and setting the stage for their understanding of contemporary Gesamtkunst.
CHAPTER FOUR
QUESTIONING AESTHETICS

The word “aesthetic” is defined in the “New World Dictionary of the American Language” as: “to perceive 1. of or in relation to aesthetics 2. Of beauty 3. Sensitive to art and beauty; showing good taste; artistic”; “aesthetics” is defined as: “the study of theory or beauty and of the psychological responses to it; the branch of philosophy dealing with art, its creative sources, its forms and its effects” (22).

The media of art need not be considered aesthetic unless the intentions of the artist are aesthetic. In some cases the perceived unaesthetic material might be used to reach aesthetic goals in society. Some new trends of art, for example art of bodily fluids, which is a type of art of abjection, are criticized by many conservatives as being immoral and depraved. Many visual artists use bodily fluids in their art, such as: Piero Manzoni, Marc Quinn, Andres Serrano, Andy Wahrhol, Noritoshi Hirakawa, Helen Chadwick, Lennie Lee, Franco, Chris Ofili, Herman Nitsch, Millie Brown, Pete Doherty, Marcel Duchamp, Fox Bronte, James Ford, Phil Hansen, and Jordan Eagles.

Why are we thinking about abjection in reference to bodily fluids? And how is abjection defined? “Abjection” as defined in “The New World Dictionary” is opposite to the definition of aesthetics as beauty: “abject, to throw away, to throw”, (which is
opposite from the word “perceive” that is applied to “aesthetic”): “1. Of the lowest
degree; miserable; wretched 2. Lacking self- respect; degraded” (3).

In her philosophical essay “Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection,” Julia Kristeva
renders the event of abjection in its different forms of occurrence and circumstances, and
explains its essence and one’s experience of it. Abjection happens viscerally and
outwardly as a response to the danger to die, to the fear of filth, and dirt, and the
association with decay. Abjection is seen as a response to a striving for survival.

Long before Kristeva, Arthur Schopenhauer wrote about the constant struggle of the
“I”, in which the “I” is understood as the ego, springing from survival instincts, which
leads to defilement of itself. The quest to protect yourself, the survival instinct, can lead
to defilement, when selfishness or the “I” goes too far, it actually leads to conditions of
sins and then death. So striving to survive itself leads to death.

Kristeva gives examples of the body’s reactions as abjection, for instance, throwing
up, or rejecting, as a form of protecting the internal from the external, which in its turn
are substances of abjection. So in protecting ourselves from death while abjecting, we
produce substances of abjection ourselves.

While art in the form of bodily fluids is linked to abjection, which is opposed to
perception of the beautiful, there are some who believe that it can’t be considered "art"
and that it has no aesthetic value. Some scholars and others argue that such art “is
designed to oppose traditional morals and values. They also find the combination of
bodily fluids with religious symbols (such as in Andres Serrano’s “Piss Christ”) to be
blasphemous” (www.reviewpainting.com). Contemporary art is often opposed to
traditions in some way, but I see it more as opposition to stagnation, as developing and
enriching one’s mind, not closing yourself off in the limits of short-sightedness, giving options for thought and reflection. Contemporary art encourages more open-mindedness. That’s why the artist of our time often leaves the topic open for the audience to finish and make its own conclusions. Their task is not just to perceive the ready solution, but to perceive and also to think. Such art is more educational and works to enlighten audience and society. Art in many forms, expressing, as well as causing, abjection existed long before the contemporary era, for example: “Crucifixion” by Matthias Grünewald; “Judith and Holophernes” (1628), “The Death of Cleopatra” (1622-24) by Johann Liss; Albrecht Dürer’s “The Expulsion From Paradise” (1510), “The Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand” (1508), “Way to Calvary” (1527), “Young Woman Attacked by Death. Or The Pavisher” (1495-1495); and several centuries later, “Die Verwandlung” by Kafka (1912). Kristeva also writes about experiences of the abject condition in art using the examples of works by Dostoyevski, Proust, Joyce, Borges, and Artaud. These are examples of the imitation of abjection in art, or imitation of waste that prompts the audience to experience feelings of abjection. The contemporary time introduces waste and abjection not only as its imitation, or mimesis, but as real objects or substances, like in “Artist’s Shit” by Piero Manzoni, “The Home-Coming of Navel Strings” by Noritoschi Hirakawa or as performative acts of real, not imitative “abjection”, as for example Millie Brown’s vomiting. Fairy tales that have existed since long ago contain abjection, but the fairy tale is meant not as a real event. There is abjection in fairy tales, but a different kind, which can be only compared to reality in viewers or readers thoughts, and soothing the mind that it is still not really happening or not happening at the moment when the viewer is looking at it or reading it. There is also some other way of perceiving an abject, when for
example the bad or deserving character is punished, rather than the helpless, powerless characters being hurt.

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. Abjection immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady; a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. (*Powers of Horror* 4)

German artist Millie Brown “is telling the story” not imitating it on canvas or on stage, but in real action through her body. It is real performance, not an imitative final image on canvas. Brown vomits after drinking colored milk to create art, and her performances are followed and accompanied by singing, which also reminds one of holy songs in church. She treats art and art creation as something holy, spiritual, and very high, which is tied into the human element. Vomiting is not to be perceived as something disgusting in this case. It becomes beautiful and can be considered aesthetic.

In her interview for the solo exhibition in April (10-23) 2015, Brown describes her concept as “Insight Out.” She gives and sacrifices her body to the art. She paints through her body, putting herself on canvas in a strong and impressive way. What some might consider not aesthetic becomes beautiful.

Sometimes imitative abjection is more abject than real abjection. When we are looking at imitative abjection with “The Death of Cleopatra” or “Judith and Holophernes” by Johann Liss, and it is more distortive than when we don’t feel abjection
at all during Millie Brown’s performances. The content and spirit differ from one another across pieces. One piece carries distortive essence, the other one positive spirit and content. Not the material is creating the aesthetic, but the spirit and intent that it carries. The goal of open-ended art is to provide the material and to lead the audience to active participation. The audience steps into the role of the artist, carrying the mission of aesthetical values.

While proceeding with totality experiments, not imitating reality, performing in life and not in theater, artists often collide objects that were not placed together before. The shock of incompatibility is a way to attract audiences and to make to think.

“Pussy Riot”, the Russian feminist punk rock protest group, was criticized for not being aesthetic and for being blasphemous, executing their performance in a church. But in our time that is characterized by so much art, and when a lot of art doesn’t reach the public, such performances become the way to attract attention to the political and economical issues. It wasn’t the point of the group to offend the church.

What we consider high or low art is a subjective consideration, and it is not necessarily tied to the object. It depends on many different things, associations, experiences, which are as stereotyped by society, so impressions are be individual.

For the sublime has no object either. When the starry sky, a vista of open seas or a stained glass window shedding purple beams fascinate me, there is a cluster of meaning, of colors, of words, of caresses, there are light touches, scents, sighs, cadences that arise, shroud me, carry me away, and sweep me beyond the things that I see, hear, or think. (Powers of Horror 12)
Contemporary art helps to understand and experience it from more developed point of view not shrinking it in the frames of rules or limits. We are looking at it beyond our comprehension of mind, widening the abilities of our physical and mental perceptions.

Abjection coincides with the sacred and abjection sets up the sacred.

The various means of purifying the abject- the various catharses- make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharses par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion. Seen from that standpoint, the artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies, appears as the essential component of religiosity. That is perhaps why it is destined to survive the collapse of the historical forms of religions. (17)

In my opinion, aesthetics depend in part on the intention of the artist. There is a space for visual, vocal, and spiritual aesthetics. Circumstances and surroundings are important factors in the result of perception. The audience’s perception of the piece depends on their culture, education, even their mood. The artist may or may not be able to predict the response of the audience. Audiences vary, but the artist of today gives more space to the audience, creating universal pieces for all type of audience, giving space for audience imagination, letting the reader and spectator finish the result. Contemporary art challenges the audience, allowing for a mental and creative heterogeneous experience.

Rina Arya starts her essay “Taking Apart the Body” as follows:

The concept of abjection, as theorized by Julia Kristeva, came into prominence in the visual arts in the late twentieth century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s with the postmodernist return to the body, where the body was not necessarily featured as “a whole, integrated entity but as something evoked by corporeal
fragments and physical residues.” The body was also subject to a number of processes that involved dislocation, evisceration and other ways of breaking up its unity and revealing its relentless materialism and uncontrollability. (Rina Arya, 5).

The strategy of undoing the body involves the use of extreme actions, often of a sado-masochistic kind, which were employed to push the body and mind beyond the pain barrier in order to explore human endurance and the boundaries of the self. Artists put their bodies in potentially dangerous situations by embracing the abject. (Rina Arya, 5-6).

Such an endeavor is worthy of respect because of the challenge, effort to discover, search for the new knowledge, experience and feelings. The same way the heroes of Kanak Sprach might look dirty, and say dirty words, but they were bold enough to push the limits of what is expected and accepted, and deserve respect. Young and, in their individual ways, radical Muslims are excluded by dominant society, yet they increasingly use this imposed exclusion as a means of self-identification and self-definition. The dirty language becomes their important speaking voice.

New York University Professor Wafaa Bilal, who is Iraqi by origin, sacrificed his body to art by installing through a surgical procedure a camera into the back of his head (2010). His piece also marks the sacrifice of his body to the purpose of the artistic idea. It would remind someone about the pain, suffering, feelings of abjection of pain or dissonance that would be caused by the clash of the natural and the unnatural, of the alive and the not-living or artificial. Contemporary time angles the question of aesthetics from another point of view. The purpose of the artist or of his or her spirit are very important to the overall aesthetic outcome. The actual purpose of Bilal was to show that our
contemporary time doesn’t leave a private space for each of us, as we are in constant watch out from the cameras around, sometimes from the back and when we don’t know it. This piece is a strong piece in its effectiveness of making a social political statement that protests this constant surveillance in contemporary Western society. Austrian multimedia artist Hermann Nitsch uses bodily fluids: urine, feces, blood; real animal and human bodies creating staged performances. First he created imitative art of bodily fluids, a red painted canvas that looked like it was covered with blood. “Red is the color that people register the most because it is simultaneously the color of life and death” (Hermann Nitsch). Later he starts to use real raw material, splashing real blood on a canvas made out of bed sheets during his performances. Horror and beauty, life and death are clashed in one. The non-aesthetic becomes aesthetic. His art challenges traditions, cultural, political systems, while being challenged itself. The artist was imprisoned multiple times for his artistic actions, becomes from not aesthetic beautiful in its depth of multiplicity of meaning.

While exploring the psychological depth of human existence, Nitsch is unique. Ceremonial, ritual notions are underlined by music, altar-like structures, repetition of performance ceremonies, and patronized acts. Crucifixion and sacrifice that are presented in a contemporary way are prevailing topics of his performances. Sacrifice signifies cleansing, and there is a clash of the sacred and the abject, as they are intertwined with one another. The opposition of white as symbolizing purity and the messy actions of his performances can be recognized as signifying sin and the abject as cleansing. The article “Hermann Nitsch,” which is a diary of one of the actors, Karlyn De Joungh, summarizes the performance of 2010 in Naples, Italy into art of totality. This performance is one of
the many of Nitsch’s “Orgien Mysterien Theater.” The different point of view through the eyes of an actor as part of the piece completely changes the sense of the performance in general. The actor describes his experiences of Nitsch’s art from his perspective. Bodily fluids are experienced not only by audience, but by the actor. And they are experienced by the actor not as a spectator from the side, but as the medium through which it goes. “I felt my nipples getting hard. I became sexually aroused. It was as if my body was trying to get closer to something deep inside me” (286), writes Karlyn De Jongh. She experiences burning, trembling. The perspective change is underlined by blindfolding the actors’ eyes during the performance. Feel, smell, taste, sound, thought, and imagination are engaged in place of vision. She “sees” with organs other than her eyes: hearing with her ears, feeling the blood filling in her mouth, feeling the touches of Herman Nitsch, the assistants, and the performance partner on her body, as well as feeling wood of the cross, blood, fluids, octopus, and fish on her body. The lost sense of time is remarkable as one feels cut off from the outside world yet still connected to the external through the senses. This performance contains a mixture of possibilities of meanings, describing and repeating in its way the theory of Kristeva’s philosophy of abject.

It is remarkable how visual perception changes supported by certain knowledge or information. Looking visually at a performance, you would think you never have seen anything more terrifying, but after reading the article about actors’ perceptions and experience of pleasure during the process of performance, you as a spectator start to perceive the overall performance differently: “Ropes were placed around arms and I felt the sensation of knots being tied. It was a liberating experience. I felt safe, now that the
cross was securely against my back. I was lifted up into the sunlight, until I felt the warmth flow over my entire body” (287). In the same way, cultural or other knowledge can change and affect our perceptions of aesthetics. Experiencing the piece we are faced with realization of human physical and spiritual essence. Even the performer didn’t expect the experience from certain actions:

I felt the hand of Nitsch’s son on my arm: “Here is the blood,” he said. I had feared this moment from the very beginning, and here it was. I opened my mouth, slowly. My lips and tongue, the whole inside of my mouth and actually my entire body was longing for this taste of blood. It was a little cold, but thick and rather pleasant tasting. My tongue probed the stream of blood flowing into my mouth, filling my cheeks and throat. It was such a fantastic feeling, completely erotic, so unlike anything I had ever experienced before. (286)

Corporeal reality, as defined by Kristeva as the distinction between what is self and what is other, is confronted here. There is a conflict between the internal and the external, and a contrast between what the viewer sees and what is going on in the mind of the blindfolded performer, as well as what the performer is discovering herself.

Nelson Goodman, an American philosopher, “emphasizes the cognitive role of emotions in the apprehension of a work of art. In art, he emphasizes, feeling emotions, whether positive or negative, pleasant or unpleasant, is a way to perceive the work and the world through the work. Feeling melancholy when listening to a piece of music, for instance, may be a way to perceive musical features of the work, as well as to perceive the world in terms of them” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Contemporary art
reaches the senses and emotions in a variety of ways without regard to aesthetic convention.

Not only art, but the canons of what is considered aesthetically beautiful are changing also in the context of Gesamtkunst. Aesthetics do not rule art, but art makes us look at aesthetics differently, in terms of what is beautiful or not, and to see it more deeply for its whole content, and not just on the surface. Arya explains further some of the motivations behind this development in contemporary art:

Body art was a new mode of expression that enabled artists to reinvent aesthetics and to challenge the sanctity of museum spaces. Artists were able to move away from the exhausted representational space of the canvas and to discover their bodies through the economy of sensation. The turn to the body-as-canvas signaled a new and exciting aesthetic. The sado-masochistic urge to cut, open and rupture their bodies and to act in unregulated ways enabled them to explore new spaces and sensations in order to articulate their identity and issues in their own critical terms instead of being spoken for by others. (Rina Arya, 7)

As we have seen through the example of how the theater and text relationship changes in postdramatic theater, the relationship between author, aesthetics, and audiences changes the same way in the contemporary time. While art became open ended, with more varied forms of audience involvement in art creation, the way of carrying out aesthetics changed. The author gives more freedom to the audience with aesthetics. Contemporary aesthetics are present in a new way, enriched with the new scientific and theoretical developments, looking deeply into cognitive, noncognitive human existence and experiences. It exists not only in the ready made by the author form any more, but it gives
the way to experience and to live in and through aesthetics, understanding it deeper.

Aesthetics become universal, involving other areas of human studies and interactions.
Our century is distinguished by the Digital Revolution. The development of new technologies, mass production and the widespread usage of computers, mobile communication devices, and social communication websites became common in our time. There is a new generation that has been born within this revolution. These new characteristics transform culture, commerce, and politics. Digital innovations enter into arts, influencing and changing it, developing completely new brands in it.

The massively growing use of mobile phones has led to such phenomena as the selfie, a folk digital portraiture with communicative devices. The selfie is unique, completely different genre of self-portrait. It is distinguished from traditional photographic portraits by the spontaneous and casual way of taking the picture. It is created in most part not by professionals or artists by profession. As it can be created by any person, and transmitted into social media dialogue or conversation, it becomes folk art and a type of Gesamtkunst.

Technologies, particularly the Internet and its websites, have become the new media in the arts. It blends with the visual arts and with the art of literature. Galleries for electronic art appear. One such gallery, the Lab for Electronic Arts and Performances (LEAP), was initiated by Kai Kreuzmüller and John McKiernan, and was opened in 2011
in Berlin. This gallery represents the space of universal art, allowing connection for art, technologies, and science, as well as, while not limited to, one geographical area, welcoming multicultural artists on international level, and it is open to both well established and young new artists. Digital technologies lead to changes in artistic strategies and discourse. Visual artists of new generation, for example, German artists Kim Asendorf and Ole Fach create net art, websites and screenings in Gif format. The use of Gif allows combination of 2D and 3D visualization. Computer art differs in several respects from art created by hand. Asendorf’s and Fach’s computer art is stiff looking: their artwork features digital objects, digital texture, color, music, and digital content. They use various technologies to create and show the art. Digital objects like in “Data” (Ole Fach, video 2013) or “Colored Octagons” (Ole Fach, 2015) are geometrical and rectilinear shapes and in content they appear to be artificial. Texture that is used by these artists adds to the effect of visual stiffness. They combine physical and visual texture. The physical texture of metallic glossy shine of disks in “Data” is mixed with visual texture in the form of pixels of some appearing in the video 3D geometrical shapes. Electronic art allows for a universal use of textures. On a sample of “Data” the spectator observes the transformation of one texture into another. Visual texture in the form of pixels turns into the visual texture in the form of discs, and then the transformation follows into the physical metallic disks’ glowing texture. Pixilated visual texture is present in some of the art pieces with organic and representational shapes, in “Me and Merkel book” by Ole Fach (2015), “Porn queen” by Ole Fach (2011), “One Night in Paris” by Ole Fach (2014), and “Mountain Tour” by Kim Asendorf (2010). Asendorf’s
collection “Mountain Tour” is a collection containing a pixel-sorting technique. Asendorf is one of the first artists to use the technique of pixel sorting.

Their art, minimized to simplicity, is combined with the “maximalism” of digital universality. Since 2011, Fach and Asendorf run the online gallery, which exhibits internet art and net art. Internet art is art created using internet technologies and existing on internet or out of it, like for example the “There will be Burgers” piece (Fach and Asendorf, 2013). Net art involves net communication and connections on the global level.

Computerization is not only carried out as a place for exhibition, and as a medium by these artists, but conceptually their art is focused on the world of computerized technologies and net communication. These artists explore the relationship between the computer world and the human world. “Colored Octagons” (Five are better than one) is a piece that was created 2015 in Gifs as moving animation. It is a moving Apple iPhone image. It moves in a circular motion, twists and blinks with a speed of the dropping line of our visual perceptive comprehension, making the iPhone turn into one focal point. Visually following the image, the individual follows the pattern of the moving image. Humans and technology are in opposition here. The same way the viewer’s mind and attention is everywhere and at the same time at different points. The piece almost distracts and irritates, while the viewer has hard time following it; at the same time, the viewer develops new abilities of perception. The speed of technological development cannot be stopped. In the contemporary world, one has to learn to see differently, to develop more perceptive abilities, to see between the lines, and to think faster.
“URL Gangsignz” 2014 is a world of computer signs versus human communication. Slogans and hand signs have become part of some popular cultures or groups. Hand signs are the code these groups use to represent themselves and to identify themselves to others belonging to the culture or group. The stable image of human hands in this piece is combined with the animated one, in high speed, which is more perceived as connected to technologies and computerization, which are also comprised of a set of signs. This piece provides the link again between human and computer communications.

In the piece, “Googlematism” Series 2, 2015: SBI009, SBI010-SBI016, Series 1, 2014: SBI001, SBI002-SBI008, the artist uses contemporary time defining objects to imitate Malevich’s pieces of art. Here the title “Googlematism” also imitating “Suprematism” defines contemporary time of Internet and Google. “Odyssey 2” is a mixture of bright computer colors followed by digital-like music. One of their recent website art works is “Blade Runner,” a conceptual visualization of online news (2015). This is a series of comments posted on Twitter, revealing the means of websites’ communication on the global level. The drawing in the form of the line track driven without GPS is repeated multiple times on the background of the maps of different locations in the world. Simplified repetition, a pattern with some little additions to it on each of the new stages or steps of proceeding, further refers to the way computer systems function. Both the separate sections of comments of people communicating on Twitter and the picture of the line track itself, which is a connection of different points driven, is a trace of the pixilated fragments of the computer that build up into circular system of the complete whole.

The wave of technical innovations, spreading as the world network, while the storage-size of the computer becomes more powerful and its information capacity increases, leading also to the emergence of electronic literature. In 1999, the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) was created, which promotes and supports writing and reading online. Digital books, magazines, and newspapers broaden the reach of the reader without ink or paper. Florian Harting distinguishes the Internet Literature and Net Literature. Internet Literature “texts are traditional in form and content and they are written originally for traditional publication in books or magazines” (Hartling 3). The Internet and its protocols are not used for the creative production of Internet literature. “Net Literature differs from traditional online literature in that it uses the internet and its communicative, social, and technological aspects for literary production. Texts are designed using computer hard- and software as well as internet techniques and communication patterns” (Hartling 3). The same way as there is an argument by theoreticians about the selfie and whether it is art, electronic literature is also a topic for debates. Digital visual art and literature is a sample of art in life, and art in mass. Opening publication to everyone on the Internet and on the web results in the literature written by
not professionals, i.e. folk literature. Quality is questioned in digital media compared to the print canons, as Alison Baverstock explains:

Self-publishing has had a bad reputation. And if authors feel nervous confessing they have dabbled- or even considered pursuing this path- choosing to research and write about it is doubly disreputable. Nevertheless, that is what I have done in writing a guide to self-publishing, The Naked Author.7

The function of the author changes drastically with digital innovations. For example in Net Literature, the traditional author doesn’t exist anymore, giving us cause to consider Barthes’ “Death of the Author” concept in a contemporary context:

The term Net Literature describes a phenomenon where the traditional functions of the literary system (following the categories of production, processing, reception, post-production processing…) are actually shared among all of the participants of the net discourse and thus the death of the author seems to deprive the publisher of his power and gives birth to the writing reader. (Florian Harting, “The Canonization of German-language Digital Literature”)

Digital technologies create a space for universal art. The computer world allows the existence of many different things in one space simultaneously. It is hybrid by nature. It is a meeting point of different vocabularies, expertise, and expectations. Computer and digital art becomes a hybrid also. Electronic literature modifies and transforms the collected experience of print literature. Electronic literature combines the print context as well as the “context of network and programmable media, computer games, films,

animations, digital arts, and graphic design” (Katherine Hayles). While it exists in the space of the networked world, it combines different cultures, diverse traditions and electronic visual culture.

According to Dr Kaufman, the impact of new digital tools on our creativity is akin to a second cultural “big bang,” one that is reshaping not just our world, but also our minds. “The big bang of cultural explosion 10,000 years ago wasn’t a result of bigger brains evolving, but the ability to use new tools,” he explains. “Currently, we are seeing another cultural big bang. “Technology allows a lot more people to contribute to a single pie,” he explains. “A creative person is someone who is curious, open-minded, and on the lookout for new patterns of thought. The simple idea is that putting 10 minds with 10 views about something together in one place will immediately lead to more creative discussion.”

(www.google.co.uk)

Art is a creative process. Creative thinking “manifests itself through emotions, intuitions, images, and bodily sensations. The resulting ideas can be translated into one or more formal systems of communication, such as words, equations, pictures, music, or dance only after they are sufficiently developed in their pre-logical forms” (DeLahunta 247). Regardless of the infinitely diverse details of the products of this translation (paintings, poems, theories, and formulas, for example), the process by which it is achieved is universal. Art itself couldn’t resist totality, as well as here we can talk about the inevitability of development and evolution of art, because like we said, art is a creative process. Since we collect more and more information further forward into centuries, there is more material for the blending and creating new. And creativity, as recent research shows, is a mix and blend of mental ingredients:
Charles Darwin argued in The Origin of Species that variability, one of the chief determinants of evolution, is greatest in structures that evolve fastest. In humans, the brain is the most variable and fastest evolving organ. We cannot at present ascribe this variability to any well-defined structure or component in the brain. Rather, we infer it through the wide differences in, for example, intelligence, sensitivities, creative abilities, and skills. Art is one expression of this variability. Its neurological study will therefore elucidate not only the source of one of the richest subjective experiences of which we are capable but also the determinants of the variability in its creation and appreciation, and hence elucidate one of the most important characteristics of the human brain (Zeki, 51).

Developments in learning how the brain perceives and appreciates art were accompanied in the past century by an evolution in the arts themselves, as explained here through the example of literature as it progressed from modernism through postmodernism and the contemporary age:

The turn of the twentieth century saw a range of turning points in all artistic activity and formal experimentation—so characteristic of the modernist period—resulted in revisions and adjustments in the perception of works of art, ultimately ushering in our current postmodern age, with its passion for eclecticism and boundary-crossing. Literature began to make a point of deliberately entering into a dialogic exchange with other arts, looking for ways of enhancing what we traditionally refer to as “meaning.” Such artistic synthesis, in some cases bordering on syncretism, seeks to explore the possibilities opened by simultaneity of words and images, which poets and novelists have come to recognize as a
unique means of expression. The art of literature is fortunate in that its medium allows it to form relationships with other arts relatively easily: after all, no art exists outside of language, in which it is discussed and commented upon. It is thus only natural to see writers interpreting and responding to works of art, analyzing the creative process, reflecting on the role and status of the artist, or asking questions about art’s complex ties to our so called “reality.” (Bleinert et al., *The Art of Literature. Art in Literature*, 9)

The artistic synthesis that is characteristic of *Gesamtkunst* leads to the incorporation of science (including computer science, statistics, and mathematics) into the arts, and to the cognitive approach to understanding art, including literature. Diagrams based on several dozen very frequent words are enough to classify literary texts by their authors. Scholars are performing a visual network analysis of novels based on the most frequent words, establishing a word frequency rank list for each individual text. The number of occurrences of a certain word can be counted. The art of literature has been reduced here to quantitative data that seemingly severed all connections between words, their combinations and their literary meaning at all levels of interpretation, thus effectively going against the usual standards of literary study. However, then the data were processed by statistical methods to make some sense out of them and to return to the artistic rather than the mathematical level.

There is a trend in interactive installations to incorporate text as an element of the work that is not to be read, but to be looked at or played with. Such desemantisation evokes a relationship between the semiotic systems of text on the one hand and of visual, installation, or performance art on the other. Some works may be digital art and digital
literature at the same time. In 2003, Jan van Looy and Jan Beatens published “Close Reading New Media: analyzing Electronic Literature.” It is a collection of essays by different literary scholars researching electronic literature, including hypertexts and cybertexts. Hypertexts and cybertexts are forms of electronic literature that allow deeper processes of creating universal art through the accumulation of “universal knowledge.” Cybertext is an example of readers’ involvement, not just in participative reading and imaginative filling in gaps of a text like in book reading, but the reader chooses which section of the text follows next; in other words, the reader creates his or her own text.

Contemporary art, while being recent, also carries history within its content. It keeps pace with time. Time in accordance with contemporary art is recognized within content and in its physical space. History and past time is carried on to the future through contemporary art. Content expands as Gesamtkunst includes and is a meeting point of past, present and future. The content of contemporary art overlaps past time; it is present, while moving into the future.
CONCLUSION

Contemporary art is a new era of art that incorporates different areas of human activities into art. Art fuses into everyday life. Contemporary art is opposed to stagnation, it gives options for thought and reflection as developing and enriching one’s mind. Contemporary art encourages more open-mindedness. Universality applies to different aspects of art. Multiplication expands giving more freedom to new and further expansion of art and its forms in general. Contemporary time is marked by expansion of universality.

The phenomenon of contemporary art is distinguished by its timeline. The timeline of contemporary art moves further forward, but we can’t exclude its history, and contemporary art is meant to exist in the future. Three stages of contemporary art can be considered: past contemporary (including postmodern art), present contemporary (the past few decades), and future contemporary art.

Universal art is triggered by evolution. Our century took the turn towards global art as one of the forms of universal art. “Global” is meant here as global involvement into art and globalization of information, and the globalization of perception. Globalization leads to such phenomena as multiculturalism. Multiculturalism can be considered universal as the synthesis of different cultures, meaning that none of the single cultures disappear, they accompany each other in different variations.
In recent years, the Digital Revolution entered into arts, influencing, changing it, and developing completely new brands in it. With digital innovations, new galleries for electronic art, Internet and Net Literature, the function of the author and audience continue to change. Audience participation takes new forms. Particularly, a greater audience is reached through the Internet. The audience is challenged by contemporary art. Contemporary art’s universality and open-ended art forms provide the material and lead the audience to active participation, allowing for mental and creative heterogeneous experiences. In the contemporary world, one has to learn to see differently, to develop more perceptive abilities, to see between the lines, and to think faster. The relationship between author, aesthetics and audience also changes in the contemporary time.

Universality of art provides universality of thinking opportunities and universal aesthetics. Universal aesthetics is a not one way thinking. The realm of aesthetics splits into a spectrum of possibilities. Canons of what is considered aesthetically beautiful are changing in the context of universality. Aesthetics do not rule art, but art makes us look at aesthetics differently.

Universality allows aesthetics to develop deeper. When multiple knowledge bases collide into one point, it gives the boost for aesthetics to split into many points. Contemporary aesthetics are present in a new way. It gives the way to experience and to live in and through aesthetics, understanding it deeper. Aesthetics become universal. Universality of contemporary art helps us to understand and experience aesthetics from more developed point of view, not restricting it in the frames of rules or limits. We are looking at it beyond our comprehension of mind, widening the abilities of our physical and mental perceptions.
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