

## **From Deleuze to Conceptual Art: on the Demystification of the Artistic Object and the Creative Process**

1<sup>st</sup> Luis Daniel Martinez Alvarez

*(Ph. D candidate in UDLAP, University of the Americas Puebla, Mexico)*

2<sup>nd</sup> Alfonso Carlos Espinosa Jaimes

*(Ph. D candidate in UDLAP, University of the Americas Puebla, Mexico)*

**Abstract:** Starting with the work of artists such as Marcel Duchamp to the rise of avant-garde artistic movements of the sixties, art has undergone a series of intrinsic changes in each of its forms of production and creation that have modified the ways of visualizing the object of art. The vision of Deleuze in relation to the philosophical processes of the creation of concepts, as well as the reflection on different creative and poiesis processes, allows the generation of an interesting counterpoint between the creative act and the artistic phenomenon of conceptual art. The present text travels through the Deleuzian philosophical vision, generating a dialogue between authors such as Rosalind Krauss, Anna Guasch and Felix Guattari about different ways of approaching the change of the artistic paradigm proposed in the sixties, all the way to our times, but above all, questioning and problematizing the creative act as a fundamental element within the discourse of traditional art as well as conceptual art.

**Keywords:** *Conceptual Art, Creative Process, Demystification, Modern Art, Philosophy.*

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Conceptual art is shown as a new way of breaking with the paradigms of the preset artistic object. From the loss of the auratic sense in the work described by Walter Benjamin to the questioning of Krauss's originality; conceptual art, parallel to the idiosyncrasy of Bauman's thought, is established as a liquid phenomenon without apparent form, moldable and malleable not in a creative plasticity, but under a new discursive form of symbolism embodied in the demystified object of art. To cross a meeting point between philosophy and art through the perspective built by Gilles Deleuze, requires a deep knowledge about what to do about philosophy and the evolution of art. The notion of philosophy for the French intellectual is defined as the construction creation and invention of concepts (Deleuze and Guattari 8), however, beyond an ontological vision of the essence or origin of philosophy under the principle of the conceptual network of signifiers, Deleuze proposes what to do philosophically through the problem of language, and therefore, also marks an interesting guideline to be able to think about art and its discourses. The present text will seek to define and understand conceptual art through Deleuzian notions of philosophy as a starting point of encounter and critical understanding, between aesthetics and contemporary discourses of this type of artistic phenomena. However, the text is not intended to respond to Deleuze's vision of conceptual art, but rather to establish a clear line to critically understand conceptual art under the principles and concepts handled by the French philosopher.

Philosophers have not dealt enough with the nature of the concept as a philosophical reality.

They have preferred to consider it as a given knowledge or representation, explained by some faculties capable of forming it (abstraction or generalization or of using it (judgment). But the concept is not given, it is created, it has to be created, it is not formed, it is it raises itself in itself, self-position, both are involved, since what is truly created, from the living matter to the work of art, enjoys by this fact itself a self-position of itself (Deleuze and Guattari 17).

The philosophy as stated by Deleuze in the previous quote requires a different approach to the basic and simplistic notion of the concept. This approach requires understanding the concept beyond the notion of

representation or incarnation, but on the contrary requires the process of creation where it is necessary to understand a multiplicity of concepts, that is, beyond their simple representations or abstractions. Although the principle of every concept comes from the sensory world or from a first perception, and then language tries to appropriate the representation of the concept, it is essential to emphasize Deleuze's vision of the concept, which defines it as something merely incorporeal that transcends its spatiality and its temporality, always seeking an exorbitant transcendence in relation to its link with its representation and its time.

## **II. PHILOSOPHY AND CONCEPTUAL ART**

This conceptual relationship raised on the world of art, has always established a philosophical problem, because art is built on the basis of the representation of nature, but under a process of creation. However, the vision of conceptual art aims to overcome the creative act of art to replace it with the supplanting of aesthetics with the abstract discourse of a concept on a material object. The material plane of conceptual art proposes a simplification of the creative to a merely discursive reduction, which proposes to superimpose a seemingly intellectual process over a process of poesis. In spite of this, it is essential to remember the philosophical visualization of the concepts, which require an overcoming of the mere representation, as well as a spatio-temporal connection of the concepts, that is, they must be transcendent and not immanent. The work of conceptual art belongs to the world of the immanent; it can not sustain itself under its own visualization or conceptualization, because it requires a prior explanation that gives it its apparent sense and conceptual sustenance. The art from before the current processes, already presented a historical, political, social and cultural, that is, already responded to the discursive problems, however, also required the creative process that gave a meaning for itself to the pictorial language, performative or sound respectively.

Art sought transcendence through the use of technique, study, discipline, history, discourse and, above all, a management of the concepts linked to the creative processes present in the work of art. Conceptual art takes place on a journey that is established in the field of great errors defined by Deleuze as illusions; such as the fallacy of seeking transcendence through the immanent in the art object, as well as in the illusions of discursivity where the prepositions of the message are confused, because if the work of art is not explained, it can not be understood by itself and does not embody any conceptual process through the approach of the spectator to the work. As Deleuze affirms the plane of immanence raises a flat and inconsequential reality, art on the other hand must seek the transcendent and above all the dynamic, the multimodal and what exceeds the mere pictorial representation of reality. The work of art is always established in a constant evolution between what it tries to represent and what it manages to create; this is precisely the future of the philosophy proposed by Deleuze, where concepts are not static and require, in addition to representation, a process of risomatic creation, above all dynamic and transcendent.

The work of conceptual art requires the reduction of the creative act, therefore, it is contrary to the Deleuzian notion of the creative act within the understanding of the conceptual, due to the fact that conceptual art lends itself to these elements to preset their discourses. A true construct of conceptual art must require a dynamism, a non-immanent becoming, born from the creative act and above all that seeks to exceed its conceptual representations, which I tried to establish a link between the discursive through a management of concepts in the technique they speak for themselves in the work of art, and therefore are not misunderstandings or static, as it happens with works such as conceptual artists such as Romana Menze-Kuhn, Sara Goldschmied and Eleonora Chiari where their respective works were confused with garbage, due to the static, immanent and non-creative problem posed by Deleuze in the use of concepts. On the contrary, a work by Goya, Caravaggio, Rembrandt or Dalí can not be confused with garbage due to the creative process that ends up defining not only the work of art, but the incarnation of the discourses present in the visual concepts of works of art. art. By way of conclusion, art itself always seeks transcendence through a creative evolution of the artist present in his work, in which the painting, music, theatrical act or sculpture, among other forms of artistic expression, express in themselves a true sense of the handling of the technique, of the study, of the discipline and above all of the conceptualization that manages to exceed its own representations through the creative principle. Conceptual art, on the other hand, is presented as a paradox or a contradiction, if it is visualized under the notion of Deleuze's philosophy because it remains below the plane of reduction and the end of the creative act, on the contrary, it develops under the

immanent under the merely material plane and that if the explanation is removed, it remains open to a series of confusions in which they can be confused with any object discharged from artistic idiosyncrasy.

In this way the conceptual expression is born from a Deleuzian contradiction based on the absence of its apparent symbolic creative ontology. However, it is possible to visualize this type of artistic phenomena in a different way that allows understanding the world of the conceptual through complex symbolic discourses that, although, do not seem to have a creative principle in the concrete field, perhaps if within the network of signifiers that belong to the semantic and symbolic field of the relationships in the works. It is possible to find a different link with the Deleuzian philosophical conceptual relationship, in which this type of artistic current, as Guasch affirms, the set of ideas constructs the notion of the concept; which, it is possible to be understood from a space different from the one of the traditional art, so that it is centered in the notion of the word, the language and the concepts like the fundamental space of the artistic message over any materialization (Guasch 170). That is, conceptual art is established as a project based more on the meanings, functions and receptivity of the viewer, preset as an art that questions the artistic object and its status quo, looking for a new way of understanding the notion of language within art. The vision of Guasch shows a vision of conceptual art different from that of Deleuze because it transcends completely the act of creation presented in the notion of the philosopher as creator of concepts in art, on the contrary, exhibits this type of artistic phenomena as a reflective heritage of minimalism that aims to focus on a vision more distant from the morphological.

### **III. DEMYSTIFICATION OF THE ARTISTIC OBJECT**

This type of art does not focus on aesthetics; on the contrary, it questions all the prejudices of the artistic object, situating it in a tautological exercise, that is, art for art. This construction allows understanding of the artistic object not only from a passive contemplation, but also invites the spectator to emerge within the reading, analysis and appreciation of the work in a more active way. The unfolding of the work-spectator relationship becomes almost a phenomenological exercise, where the work only exists when read, visualized and especially understood by the viewer, otherwise this type of manifestations would be only decontextualized objects of its conceptual message. That is why, as Guasch affirms, the idea ends up constructing together the notion of the concept within objects, this conceptual relationship is so strong in this type of art that it does not need a materialization to materialize, on the contrary, only needs the set of ideas and concepts to survive. Conceptual art transcends the materiality of the object, so that from the moment it is thought of, art becomes, according to Guasch, an active and almost creative phenomenon only present in the idea-concept relationship, and not from a technical, aesthetic and creative vision. Anterior and traditional plastic; allowing the creation of neologism as the case of the "anti-object art or anti-object art" (Guasch 165), being a fundamental point not only for the vision of Guasch but for Deleuze in the creative notion of language and art.

Added to this process there is also a demystification of the art object, because it does not need its materiality to survive as an artistic entity, allowing a tendency to copy and a loss of the aura of the work of art in the philosophical sense of Walter Benjamin. This type of problem is exemplified by Krauss with a case that is still much earlier than that of the sixties and the technical reproducibility of the artistic object of the twentieth century. The academic Krauss identifies through Rodin the question of the copy and the original, situating a series of emptyings of the gates of hell:

The doors reflect the sculptor's latest compositional idea, documented by a series of numbers written in pencil on the plaster that correspond to other numbers written in pencil on the plaster ... However, Rodin changed these numbers repeatedly as he reworked the surface of the doors ... I had not even emptied them ... Therefore, in regard to the finishing and patination of the new version, there is no example made in life of Rodin that serves as a guide. (Krauss 166)

The citation about Krauss shows how there really is a problem with the notion of the original, even in periods that preceded those of conceptual art. The work of Rodin can not be visualized as an original because it was not created at the time by the author, canceling the final creative process or the moment of materialization of the artistic object. This process demonstrates the same vision of Guasch where art does not need its materialization to be considered art, on the contrary, plans and ideas are even more relevant than the final moment in the concrete world.

Interestingly, the process of demystification of art allows the questioning the object and therefore generate new ways of exploring these phenomena through new codes focused on language, including numerical or mathematical. This artistic movement shows not only a paradigm shift within the plastic, but also manifested within elements such as music, photography or film. The plastic transcends not only its material field in the conceptual object, but allows the use of elements alien to its visual ontology, making use of sound or kinesthetic resources, where the viewer ends up having a more complete experience of the artistic phenomenon. From composers such as John Cage who used and questioned music through silence and environmental sounds, even composers like Arnold Schoenberg from the second school in Vienna presented a sample of mathematical language that impregnated new ways of making art.

In this same way, new codes began to appear within the conceptual art that did not need a creative act or a genesis of the artist that limited the work to a conception through the plastic of the form, on the contrary, as it affirms Guasch, the material of conceptual art is language, and these codes are found not only in orality or writing, but in any form of communication or language from mathematics to images, sounds or acts, in the same way that exemplifies the mathematical notion in the cubic work of Kuspit *Variations of incomplete open cubes* (Krauss 261), where the viewer interprets the mathematical vacuums and participates in the visualization of the work. In this way, conceptual art is presented as a paradigm shift in the ways of creating and expressing art, almost like the affirmation of Žižek in his correction to Theodor Adorno "It is not poetry that is impossible after Auschwitz, but rather the prose" (Žižek 13), in this same way, the conceptual art is a response to the various social, cultural and technological changes that faced the artistic movements after the sixties. Krauss and Guasch demonstrate the importance of processes rather than results, exemplifying how conceptual art is shown as the art of thought, even to the point that the notion of copy and the loss of aura do not matter, but the fundamental resides in the new meaning that is incarnated to the objects or elements used within the works.

What else could the Conceptual Art be? ... Kuspit points out this great subject with the title of his essay. The modular structures, the lattices, the serial progressions of the Le Witt sculptures reveal "The appearance of thought" (Krauss 261)

Conceptual art is shown as a process of mental transit rather than a concrete material result, as Krauss presents it in his study of Kuspit. The theoretical construction of Krauss as of Guasch centers on a revolutionary vision in the ways of creating the artistic object through reflection in the ways and ontology of works, in which the old aesthetic paradigms do not seem to have any importance, and where, on the contrary, the fundamental thing is not centered on the subjectivity of the artist, nor on the creative process, but on the mental, ideal and above all conceptual process loaded or incarnated on the work. While for Deleuze, art itself always seeks transcendence through a creative evolution of the artist present in his work, in which the painting, music, theatrical act or sculpture, among other forms of artistic manifestations, express for themselves a true sense of the handling of the technique, of the study, of the discipline and above all of the conceptualization that manages to exceed its own representations through the creative principle. Conceptual art, on the other hand, is presented as a paradox or a contradiction, if it is visualized under the notion of Deleuze's philosophy because it remains below the plane of reduction and the end of the creative act, it develops under the immanent, through the merely material reduction plane, that if the explanation is removed, it remains open to a series of confusions in which they can be confused with any object downloaded from artistic idiosyncrasy.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

For Deleuze, art subsists through a process of creative poiesis, where the importance of the role not only of the work, but also of who is the creator, that is, of the subjectivity of the artist, continues to be demonstrated, granting greater support to the auratic role of the work, of genius and above all of a more traditionalist sense of art. The discussion between each of the authors does not end up defining concretely the clear role of conceptual art, because as stated from the beginning of the text. This type of artistic phenomena tends to the liquid, and therefore there are great variations in their representations, symbolisms and especially in the ways of questioning the object of art, producing a great diversity in the ways of reading works. From the philosophical vision of Deleuze centered on a creative study of language, of the work and of neologisms constituted with an origin and an end, or from the demystifying construction of art, where originals and creators do not exist. But above all, they are based on a more active vision of art, involving a unique and different

process between the work and spectator relationship, which ends up giving greater weight to the ways in which the multicultural conceptual artistic manifestations are observed, understood and perceived. Whether it is the art of thought or a truncated process of the act of demystified creation, conceptual art is situated in a space of criticism, rebellion and satire within the history of art from the sixties to the present, with seriousness or jocosity this type of phenomena are shown as an expression of the concrete abstraction of art by the art of intrascendence.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Felix. (1991) *¿Qué es la filosofía?* Published by Anagrama.
- [2] Anna, Guasch. (2002). *El arte último del siglo XX. Del postminimalismo a lo multicultural.* Published by Alianza Forma.
- [3] Krauss, Rosalind. (2006). *Originalidad de la Vanguardia y otros mitos modernos.* Published by Alianza Forma.
- [4] Žižek, Slavoj. (2013). *Sobre la Violencia: seis reflexiones marginales.* Published by Contextos ideas.