

Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Doctoral School

Reduction

Aspects and varieties in 20th century and contemporary fine arts:
a personal viewpoint

DLA theses

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Thesis 1
Preface

The present doctoral dissertation is seen by the author as a road-detection activity taking shape along the way. The writer's main objectives are to temporarily position her work and to raise her own awareness of her potential motivations. Her intention is to depict an incidental, subjective and fragmental picture where both her point of departure and the common denominator denote her individual creative approach.

Thesis 2
The author's creative activity and the issue of reduction

The author shall review the development of her work from the aspect of her attempts at reduction. She will provide a summary of the characteristic features her paintings can be described with. By applying a self-reflecting method, she will observe her artistic activity in the framework of a contemporary consensus. She will also attempt to propose a systematic review and articulation of ideas often emerging at the level of emotions.

Thesis 3
An approach towards the definition of reduction

The characteristic features of reduction and reduced works of art are listed below. Such a reduced work

- depicts a rich concentrate of meanings in works taking a simple form;
- attempts to express the essential;
- demonstrate openness towards different and often remote interpretations;
- endeavours to provide an intellectual and unique interpretation of the world;
- is manifested in subdued colours (in painting), as well as in planar features and subtle indications;
- applies personal and “rewritten” figurative representations, filters the redundant elements;
- shifts the emphasis from the material itself and intensifies the quality of substances;
- is not related to a particular genre but is superior to the individual techniques;
- is strictly related to complexity where the world can only be inferred by simplification;
- is seen as a means of compression, and plays a key role in formulating ideas.

Thesis 4
Reduction in 20th century fine arts

In art history, it is possible to identify certain groups of artistic work that were aimed at simplifying accumulated complexity. Our image of reality has become highly complex; people's trust in the interpretability of our world has become rather fragile.

One of the unique achievements of the 20th century was when art freed itself from the obligations of depiction, and when individual sentiments and conceptual relations could become the focus of artistic interest. Along with the growing demand for exploring inner qualities, the reductive and simplifying approach was soon gaining ground.

In this paper, the author has attempted to identify works of art and artistic visions that provide a neat illustration for the different aspects of the reductive approach. Of the examples the writer of this thesis has been able to identify, the following seem to be balancing on the borderline of materialisation and dematerialisation, and of compression and dissolution:

- Mondrian and Kandinsky strived for uncovering universal truths by “cleansing the elements of reality”;
- Malevich took natural forms as a point of departure but his work is devoid of natural associations. Suprematism employs the technique of reduction for the benefit of utilitarianism and social optimism;
- Minimal art attempted to strip a work of its meaning. The process of reduction is difficult to pinpoint, only the mere existence of the artefact is perceived;
- Eva Hesse softened the rigidity of minimalist reduction by employing delicate materials;
- Arte povera simplified art’s elevation by applying everyday materials;
- Conceptual art shifted the emphasis from the actual presence of the artefact to its immaterialism.

Thesis 5

Reduced works in contemporary fine arts by international artists

Contemporary fine arts include “soft-spoken” artefacts that define themselves as works critical of the accelerated tempo of teeming imagery, and refusing chaotic representation. These works give a larger scope to the recipient’s individual involvement. The threads of reduction, noticeable in contemporary fine arts, go back to minimal art and concept art. The conceptual approach favours a compressive, simplifying way of thinking while the minimal approach grabs the recipient’s attention by stripped-down images.

The artists’ methods and ideas are juxtaposed. Works demonstrating an aspect of reduction cover a broad spectrum. The selection offered in the thesis attempts to represent this particular diversity:

- In painting, the issue of reduction is a fundamental one. Luc Tuymans considers the painting to be a reduction of imagery;
- Simplification may be even more easily captured in the field of drawings, a significant

segment of contemporary art, e.g. the art of Toba Khedoori;

– Simplifications lead to the gradual elimination of materials. The act of formulating often crosses the traditional boundaries and is a constant challenge. The thesis will take a look at works that exploit the viewer's "projection" abilities, e.g. Karin Sander's installation 'Zeigen';

– A minimalist emblematic element is the cube. In its simplicity, it is apt to conform to the widest variety of artistic approaches. The present paper will attempt to demonstrate how this homogeneous form adapts itself to a particular context;

– The paper will discuss works that simplify the eventuality of space via a reductive approach;

– By a curious paradox, packed installations, built of trivial and commonplace objects, can be seen as the characteristic representations of 'nothing', of 'full reduction'. This claim will be illustrated via a few examples.

Thesis 6

Ways of reduction - the Hungarian relevance

In comparison with other countries of the West, Hungary's reductive fine arts had been in a unique position (up until the political changes in 1989). Because it existed as a form of opposition to state-supported arts, it did have an immense significance. This sort of art with a non-included (or excluded) status symbolized freedom, the independence of mind, and a refuge of one's inner self for a long time.

The selection offered in this paper was determined by the ideas below:

– The activities of the European School served as a refuge by trying to clean the world of a global confusion and the consequent human uncertainty;

– Lajos Kassák's reduction was aimed at the "whole": he believed that art can be dissolved in life; it will become an integral part of the world and will end up as its own inversion;

– Abstract art characterising the 1960s meant a pure point of departure, artists were no longer obliged to adapt themselves to the outside world;

– Dezső Korniss attempts to substitute the intolerable reality by making picture creations;

– Lili Ország's surrealist pictures portray a distinctive female touch in terms of reductive techniques;

– With some sense of humour, Endre Tót deconstructs reality to achieve perfect vacuum.

– Intellectual painting becoming dominant from the 1990s displays a reductive tendency.