
Aesthetic Experience and Contemporary Art in Hermeneutic Horizons of Understanding

Summary

This book enables the reader to see the experience of contemporary art in terms of hermeneutic understanding. The hermeneutic philosophies of Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur are confronted with selected contemporary trends and artistic practices. In striving for understanding and sense, hermeneutics departs from that which is simply incomprehensible. The moment of incomprehensibility constitutes an essential feature of contemporary art which deconstructs the ostensible “obviousness” reproduced by culture as well as “weakens” the metaphysical patterns of thinking that serve as the basis for the experience of “reality” and identity. The experience of contemporary art is of critical, hermeneutic and performative nature. It has an impact on the way one perceives the world and oneself. Confronting hermeneutics with contemporary art leads the reader to the critical point of hermeneutic experience, which in turn leads from “naïve” understanding (based on a strong identity of Descartes’ *cogito*) to deeper understanding which involves dispossession of the narcissistic “self”. According to one of the main arguments of this book, contemporary hermeneutics and art need each other, or are even destined for each other. Hermeneutics admits to having its roots in the pre-discursive experience from which it cannot separate itself. It interprets the products of culture in a way that triggers confusion and creates challenges for thinking, whereas contemporary art requires philosophical reflection. Attempts at understanding art take on a hermeneutic form. Both fields are characterised by dynamics, mutual openness and “weak identity”, at the same time shunning essentialism and strong ties with metaphysics. Therefore they can both influence each other, enter into a confrontational, creative dialogue, and in this way complement each other.

This book comprises five parts. The first part, the introduction, provides an overview of the evolution of hermeneutics, from antiquity to the present. It also presents the attitude of hermeneutic philosophy of art towards the aesthetics of the 18th century (especially Immanuel Kant’s). This part goes on to characterize the main trends in contemporary art (avant-garde, neo avant-garde, trans avant-garde), and also analyses the way this kind of art made an impact on the transformation of the character and meaning of the theory of aesthetics. The aim of the first part is to provide a general

overview of hermeneutics and contemporary artistic practices, as well as to highlight their common assumptions (which are in opposition to modern aesthetics especially), in order to prepare the ground for confronting them in a further part of this book. The following three parts of the book are devoted to the reconstruction and comparison of the philosophy of art by Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. The aim here is to point to the relationships between ontologies of sense developed within philosophical hermeneutics and the importance of art in the process of human (self) understanding. A lot of space in this publication is devoted to hermeneutically understood truth (*aletheia*) and its relation to art. The cultural and ontological determinants of art and aesthetic experience are also given some attention. The final part confronts hermeneutic philosophies with selected trends and artistic practices, such as René Magritte's work, conceptual art, Polish critical art, post-humanism art, performance, happening and pop-art, as well as Robert Musil's avant-garde novel. This is an attempt to present hermeneutics in action. The aims of the last part are: to show the potential and limitations of hermeneutics when used to analyse contemporary art, to apply hermeneutic categories to contemporary art (such as: *aletheia*, "hermeneutic experience", "the fusion of limits of understanding", and also hermeneutically modified notions of game, symbol, celebration and many more) and finally to reveal and interpret the philosophical contents implicitly present in contemporary artistic practices.

Translated by Rob Pagett