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Transdisciplinary Readings of Victor Burgin's "The End of Art Theory" Essay

Abstract: This paper presents four different readings of Victor Burgin's essay "*The End of Art Theory*", between colleagues who work in the environments of four different disciplines, that feasibly influenced and led formations of their interpretations. Hence, these four readings present one part of the multiple transdisciplinary potentials of Burgin's theoretical research. Their explications revolve around influences of media on art evaluation, constraints of institutional discourse, feminist features of the theory, problematics of binary divisions, as well as foundations of the new institutionalism. At the end of this paper, it becomes clear that the richness of Burgin's theory relates to multiple segments of cultural studies, social studies, art history, and media, and is easily transferable and interconnectable between them. Furthermore, the transdisciplinary nature of "The End of Art Theory" text testifies to its unquestionable value and fruitful source for future rereadings.

Keywords: Victor Burgin; art theory; transdisciplinary; media; institutional discourse.

Introduction

Victor Burgin is a British visual artist who has published numerous valuable texts where he presented his theories on image, explicit and implicit meaning, text, mass media, and art theory. "His most important theoretical books include: *Thinking Photography* (1982), *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (1986),

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In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture (1996), *The Remembered Film* (2004), *Situational Aesthetics* (2009), *Parallel Texts: Interviews and Interventions About Art* (2011).”¹

This paper presents four different readings of Victor Burgin’s essay “*The End of Art Theory*”, which emerged as a result of a debate that took place between four colleagues at the Transdisciplinary Studies of Contemporary Art and Media at the Faculty of Media and Communication in Belgrade, during 2021. It serves to emphasize the significance of Burgin’s essay for all disciplines that are involved in the Cultural industry of the world today. Out of numerous subjects that one could choose to focus on during the reading, here we present four different outlooks. Journalist Nataša Rakić analyzes Burgin’s interpretation of the role of the media in the evaluation of art, elaborating on definitions of exchange-object vs. value-object, Baudrillard’s *simulacrum*, market, audience, and consumers. Ibro Sakić, theatre director, looks closer into characteristics of institutional discourses, leaning on Lyotard’s concept of “supplementary constraints”, and examining whether they could be gradually altered and changed. The interpretation of artistic film director Kumjana Novakova intersects with the theory of film and image, feminist theory, and historical context of the text, while composer Maja Bosnić finds that the essay is critical of binary divisions that follow the historical development of art and vouches for plurality and temporality of intertwined micro-discourses, while striving to re-define the term “art” as such. These different focuses demonstrate that Burgin’s theory can be implemented in multiple disciplines and open space for further research and discussion.

The role of media in the evaluation of art by Nataša Rakić

In the collection of essays *The End of Art Theory*, Victor Burgin begins the chapter “The Market for Fashion” by stating that “with the triumph of exchange-value over use-value, any object can become the equivalent of any other.”² He explains this with the example of “The Uncertainty of the Poet” by Giorgio de Chirico and its sale for a million pounds, where, in the language of marketing (aesthetics of shock, emphasizing form, rather than content and exaggeration in the expression), under the influence of museums, auction houses and curators, theoretical discourse in the media directs towards the formation of the market value of works of art. Thanks to the publication of information about the sale of de Chirico’s painting and the statements of museum representatives, “a fashionably nostalgic de Chirico revival amongst young painters in Italy”³ was initiated. The exhibition of works by Giorgio de Chirico which followed the mentioned campaign and the price of one million pounds that was in the picture,

¹ The European Graduate School, “Victor Burgin” in *Faculty pages*, <https://egs.edu/biography/victor-burgin/>, acc. on June 19, 2021.

² Victor Burgin, “The End of Art Theory,” in *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (Houndmills, London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1986), 171.

³ *Ibid.*, 171.

also encouraged the growth of the prices of works of art by de Chirico's followers. All this was achieved, as Burgin says, thanks to "myriad representations, verbal and visual, to give them their ultimate meaning and truth."⁴

This chapter is also the reason for the debate on *the role of the media in the evaluation of art*. An example of the affirmation of de Chirico's followers, through the use of his image and accompanying text in the media, Burgin sees as part of the "this pandemonium of Capital [...] the intense chaos of signs blinking within and without us", in which de Chirico's picture is "overwhelming our senses and critical faculties, [...] signs as empty as they are strident."⁵ This, as Burgin says, is a "senseless grind of meaning", he interprets through the dependence of the logic of fetishism and exchange, whose double fascination will – on the one hand – lead the same masses who saw de Chirico's million-dollar painting to see *Gioconda* and *Tutankhamun's Treasures*, and – on the other hand – these same people will identify with de Chirico's artwork.⁶

Burgin's allegations recognize the influence of Jean Baudrillard, who believed that reality was always reproduced and defined it as a simulacrum, that is, a "copy torn from the original"⁷ or "the truth that conceals that it does not exist."⁸ As Burgin mentions the media as an important factor in the chain of functioning of the modern market, Baudrillard defines the real within the media, because they have led to the difference between the real and the imaginary. Through the media, Burgin quotes Baudrillard, "objective reality has become the membrane of the simulacrum that is above the real."⁹ Guy Debord identifies the simulacrum with the spectacle. "The fetishism of the commodity [...] attains its ultimate fulfilment in the spectacle, where the real world is replaced by a selection of images which are projected above it"¹⁰ The media spectacle relies on real-life experiences but modifies them by taking them to extremes to leave a stronger impression on the audience. This type of spectacle can be seen in all areas, from politics, economics, and sports to art. And all this is happening through the mass media that reproduce or interpret reality in accordance with the dominant ideology. Thus, the "model of the construction of reality is imposed as the only relevant way of experiencing it."¹¹

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the media represent cultural institutions and that, thanks to their global influence, they define aesthetic values. Today, the importance of the internet, television and social networks are especially important in the promotion of new values and the perception of certain cultural and artistic content. Although they should mediate between the audience, artists, museums, galleries,

⁴ Ibid., 171.

⁵ William Stott as quoted in Burgin, "The End of Art Theory," 171.

⁶ Burgin, "The End of Art Theory," 172.

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotex, 1983), 5.

⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁹ Burgin, "The End of Art Theory," 170.

¹⁰ Guy Debord and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Canberra: Hobgoblin Press, 2002), 12.

¹¹ Nemanja Đukić, "Društvena uloga medija, kontrola društvene realnosti," *Politeia* 2-4 (2020), 231.

and works of art, the media, through interpretation and explanation, produce a narrative that often does not correspond to the original nature of the work of art. The new narrative is complemented by the demands of markets, institutions, or other centers of power. As Baudrillard says: “[...] *Imagine something beautiful that has absorbed all the energy of the ugly: you have fashion [...] imagine truth having absorbed all the energy of the false: you have simulation.*”¹²

Of course, the process of communication between the media and the audience/consumer of information is no longer one-way, so instead of the responsibility or influence that the media have in the evaluation of art, we can talk about the responsibility of the audience and developing critical thinking that will separate the average viewer/listener/reader from the recipient of the information. This requires an opportunity to interpret media content, not consumption. Or as David Company concluded: “We are a consumer-society, and it seems to me that art has become a passive ‘spectator sport’ to an extent unprecedented in history. I have always tried to work against this tendency by producing ‘occasions for interpretation’ rather than ‘objects for consumption.’”¹³

Constraints of the postmodern institutional discourse *by Ibro Sakić*

Victor Burgin in his essay “The End of Art Theory”, in the subchapter entitled “Outsiderism and subversion”, among other things, says that “most of the artists (he knows) who have been involved in union work *as* artists have complained that their work has been subjected to (conservative) political and aesthetic censorship”¹⁴ and he continues to state that “and/or that shop-floor workers were simply indifferent to the ‘art’ shown to them – even where it directly represented ‘real struggles’ in which they themselves might become involved.”¹⁵

The question is what way could the change (of discourse) in the institution occur? We could agree with the author that “it is essential that we recognize the art institution as a ‘discursive institution’”¹⁶ and that this term¹⁷ cannot be viewed as a singularity but that “[...] the ‘art institution’ is a complex heterogeneity – art magazines,

¹² Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 190.

¹³ David Company, “Victor Burgin: Between,” *Aperture* 210 (2012), <https://davidcompany.com/victor-burgin-between-1986/>, acc. on June 19, 2021,

¹⁴ Burgin, “The End of Art Theory,” 191.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁷ “The discourse of the world of art and the discourse of art institutions is a secondary intentionally directed speech and writing (metalanguage) by which one world of art expresses, expresses, describes, explains, and interprets its point of view and ideology in relation to art, art history, culture, and society. [...] The discourse of the art world also includes discourses of domination, power, institutional order, stylistic order, genre determinations.” Miško Šuvaković, *Glossary of Modern and Postmodern Fine Arts and Theory after 1950* (Beograd; Novi Sad: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti; Prometej, 1999), 71.

the art market, university departments, museums and so on.”¹⁸ On the other hand, Burgin supports the ”ultra-leftist critical position which advocates ‘working outside the (art) institution’ as, *a priori* the privileged, indeed the *only*, politically progressive strategy”¹⁹ considering that those (artists) working in the institutions, remain firmly within the dominant discourses. Consequently, it could be concluded that it is impossible to change the discourse within the institution.

Jean-François Lyotard, in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, gives one explanation of why this is so. He says that “an institution differs from a conversation in that it always requires supplementary constraints”²⁰ and that thanks to them, it can accept certain statements. Furthermore, to discursive forces, these “constraints function to filter”²¹ by interrupting a possible connection through communication networks because there is something that must not be said. Constraints give permeability only to those statements in which the discourse inherent in the discourse of the institution prevails, that is, it is known exactly what and when to say, as well as the way in which it is done.

However, the restriction that the institution imposes on “potential language moves” are never established once and for all (even if they have been formally defined).²² and this indicates a space for action. If “creative workshops”²³ were organized in the institutions, which are also mentioned by Lyotard, an opportunity would be created to move the boundaries of the institution.²⁴ In this way, there could be a change within the institution, which would indirectly lead to a change in the discourse within it.

The example that Burgin gives us in his essay and which we mention at the beginning of this text is absolutely the dominant discourse in institutions even today. However, in contrast, there are examples of deviations: the Matica Srpska Gallery has implemented projects²⁵ “Youth Chooses” and “CULTURE through Novi Sad” through creative (and drama) workshops together with the Archives of Vojvodina and the Youth Theater (2018), as well as the Memorial. Pavle Beljanski’s collection project “Museum of Youth” (2019–), in which service users, the public, specifically young people, were given the opportunity to create cultural content within these institutions – for young people.

It is clear that even the smallest shift takes time (longer or shorter) and in this case, the change would start from the bottom up. Another option is for change to go from top to bottom, from decision-makers, who would be motivated by pragmatism

¹⁸ Burgin, “The End of Art Theory,” 192.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²² *Ibid.*, 25.

²³ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁵ Following these projects, both institutions have included this way of working in their regular program.

– a changing world, which means adapting to the spirit of the times, as a condition for survival. Otherwise, ossified institutions²⁶ and impenetrable discourses will continue to live, very possibly, only in history and/or theory.

'Art Theory' in isolation from theory of ideology under the impact of feminism

by Kumjana Novakova

The present rereading of Burgin's "The End of Art Theory" is framed within several contexts important for the process of rereading itself. First – I reread, as "those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere",²⁷ a practice Burgin himself insists upon in *In / different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture*.²⁸ Furthermore, the processes of rereading and the following theorization deriving from the latter is entirely framed by my own theoretical and artistic interests – laying at the intersection of film, or the theory of the image and feminist theory – rather than aspiring to identify and/or theorize Burgin's approach or any other aspect of his work as such. Last but not least, is the text's own history/context: we cannot isolate this text from the growing pluralism(s) and complex developments in the arts and theory in the 1960s and especially the 1970s, particularly taking into account that Burgin was one of the exceedingly involved artists and writers within the "critical project of the 1970s."²⁹

Thus, for the present discussion, I would like to propose to look at the following paragraph from Burgin's text:

Introduced into Britain by New Left Review, and then developed in a variety of other journals, most notably (in terms of my interests here) Screen, French Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis became the radical alternatives to the discourse of Art in general, and the empirical-intuitive Anglo-Saxon critical tradition in particular. With the new theory came a rejection of the established 'high art' hierarchies, with film and photography tending to take precedence over literature and painting,

²⁶ Like the army, for example. In that sense, it is illustrative that "the American Congress decided to see the value of historical significance when it comes to the attitude towards homosexuals in the armed forces, when the "don't ask, don't tell" guideline was abolished, which prevented men and women from serving in the army who publicly declared themselves as homosexuals. The rule was that homosexual soldiers should not speak publicly about their sexual orientation, but in return, no one should ask them about it. DW, "Gay is finally OK in the US military;" (2010), <https://www.dw.com/sr/gej-je-u-ameri%C4%8Dkoj-vojski-kona%C4%8Dno-ok/a-6357250>, acc. On March 5, 2021.

²⁷ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 16.

²⁸ Victor Burgin, *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xiii.

²⁹ The term "critical project of the 1970s" is used by Griselda Pollock when referring to the work of curators and artists – including Victor Burgin – whose work "sustained a critical concept of artistic practice and cultural politics generated during the 1970s in contest with the crumbling hegemony of American modernism and the New York galleries and institutions at the centre of the capitalist west's art industry;" Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 213.

and with all forms of ‘art’ being viewed as part of a broader picture of representational practices in contemporary society. It became impossible to think ‘art theory’ in isolation from ‘theory of ideology’ – particularly under the massive theoretical and the political impact of feminism.

Alongside French Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis, here particularly interesting is Burgin’s take on the influence of feminism through its “massive theoretical and political impact” on the impossibility to think art theory in isolation from the theory of ideology. Indeed: a closer look at the feminist theoretical work from the period points to the possibility that feminism as an anti-modernist project through its woman paradigm in the art could be seen as a model of rupture that finally reconciled aesthetics and politics, and as such provided the foundation of the paradigm for postmodern art.³⁰ Lucy Lippard, in an article from 1980, as well argues that feminism’s greatest contribution to the vitality of art is its lack of contribution to modernism, as “[...] 1970s might not have been pluralist at all if women had not emerged during the decade to introduce the multicolored threads of female experience into the male fabric of modern art.”³¹

Furthermore, feminism indeed joined forces with psychoanalysis and semiotics (as in the fact the introductory sentence of the highlighted here a paragraph from Burgin’s text suggests), in questioning the basis of image, code, and representation, and particularly so in cinema, jointly searching for alternative and oppositional strategies.³² The intersection of feminism, psychoanalysis and semiotics are themselves the field informing not only (this) Burgin’s writing, but also his artistic practice.³³ As a possible influence from his own art practice, seems particularly important to mention his participation in three photography works (*Gradiva*, 1982; *Olympia*, 1982; and *Portia*, 1984) at the 1984 exhibition *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, “a major feminist event”³⁴ first on view at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (December 1984) and later at ICA, London, (September 1985).³⁵ The exhibition, seen “as a climax to the iconographically critical, psychoanalytically oriented feminist art discourse

³⁰ Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin as quoted in Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 219.

³¹ Lucy Lippard as quoted in Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 219.

³² Peter Wollen, “Counter-Cinema and Sexual Difference,” in *Difference: On Sexuality and Representation*, exhibition catalogue (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 35.

³³ “Following on from his reading of the semiological writings of Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Roman Jakobson and others, Burgin was particularly interested in the constitution of art and photography as semiotic systems, which do not possess an inherent significance of their own but have developed in dependence on the dominant ideology in a society.” Alexander Streitberger, “Feminism and the Critique of Representation around 1980,” in *Victor Burgin: Gradiva* (Siegen: Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, 1982), 7.

³⁴ Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 213.

³⁵ The exhibition involved both women and men, and along Victor Burgin, there were also Max Almy, Mary Kelly, Ray Barrie, Silvia Kolbowski, Judith Barry, Barbara Kruger, Raymond Bellour, Sherrie Levine, Dara Birnbaum, Yve Lomax, Stuart Marshall, Theresa Cha, Martha Rosier, Cecilia Condit, Philippe Venault, Jean- Luc Godard, Jeff Wall, Hans Haacke, Marie Yates. Please see: *Difference: On Sexuality and Representation*, exhibition catalogue (New York, New Museum of Contemporary Art), 1984.

of the 1980s”,³⁶ obviously informed Burgin’s scholarly work on “The End of Art Theory”.

Finally, alongside the influences that Burgin himself identifies as crucial, it feels of somewhat greater importance to note that the flow between theory and practice he himself observes and builds upon in his overall work and insists upon at “The End of Art Theory”, is another feature that can be attributed to his artistic practice being positioned in the feminist realm in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In conclusion, Burgin’s reading of the shift to the postmodern is equally informed by both psychoanalytic theory and semiotics, as well as feminism. Within the “shift” he is not only traces the movement of the visual from the male domain to the outside, but also traces the micro-political Other alongside women: “blacks, gays, ecology, anti-nuclear, antipsychiatry, and so on”,³⁷ a feature of later feminist theory arguing for the need to index artistic activity to the social world.

The end of art theory as the beginning of a new institutionalism *by Maja Bosnić*

Victor Burgin’s essays in the collection *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*³⁸ are a critical review of the binary divisions that follow the historical development of art, through periods and styles from the age of Enlightenment to the end of the 20th century. In these texts, Burgin presents a historical path through different conceptions of art and definitions of artistic value, along the way bringing his own critical review and relying on theories of post-structuralism. A particularly important element of the text is the definition and interrelation of concepts such as artist, theorist, critic, institution, and market.

Burgin reminds us that there have always been different polarities in art, such as Greenberg’s division into avant-garde and kitsch, aristocratic and mass culture;³⁹ then cultural and market value, realism, and abstraction, form and content, aestheticism and utilitarianism, technology and nature, projection and perception, skill and idea, closed and open work, present and absent, theory and practice. However, already in the preface, he draws attention to the fact that, for a start “the division of labour between ‘theorists’ and ‘practitioners’ is problematical for a truly critical cultural initiative”⁴⁰ and thus, at the very beginning, lays the groundwork for constant skepticism and questioning the position of the interpretation of the phenomenon of division, and especially binary, throughout his essay.

He is aware that post-structuralist theorists have been trying to reject the binary system of division.⁴¹ He thus clarifies that “The voluntarist attitudes of ‘individual-

³⁶ Alexander Streitberger, “Feminism and the Critique of Representation around 1980,” in *Victor Burgin: Gradiva* (Siegen: Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, 1982), 11.

³⁷ Burgin, “The End of Art Theory,” 165.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

ism' and 'outsiderism' rest on a common assumed binarism in which an 'inside' (of the subject, of the institution) is simply opposed to an 'outside'.⁴² As Freud's oppositional concepts are constantly known and defined on the basis of, and in relation, to each other, it is assumed that "understanding of the marginal or deviant term becomes a condition of understanding the supposedly prior term."⁴³ In addition, it reminds us on several occasions of Derrida's logic of the supplement, which defines that division is, in fact "the illusion of difference where none exists, the identity of a thing with what it had projected/rejected as its opposite."⁴⁴ In a similar way, the book *Media After Deleuze* draws attention to the fact that even the division such as binary division into sign and mediation is no longer relevant, and that in today's world of digital media, almost oppositional terms are merged: "In the world of digital media the traditional binaries of media studies such as broadcast/narrowcast, signifier/signified, real/virtual and producer/audience have been rendered obsolete."⁴⁵

Rejecting the ideas of binary, grandiose split-ups, and exclusive oppositions, as well as exposing divisions among different discourses throughout art history, Burgin draws a map and network of constant organic and interdependent development of creative actions and interventions of the human society. Finally, he draws us to the conclusion that there is "no longer 'universal' intellectuals, they have become 'specific' intellectuals."⁴⁶ It is not enough to see historical changes through artistic styles as linear, but organically branching, interconnected links, which lead us to the current state in which there are no more styles, but abundance of discursive fragments. The point is not in uncovering systems of opposition, but studying the nature of development and creation. Nothing has ever been finished, shut down, or given up, forever. Growth and development have been and are being endlessly continued, always adding new possibilities and tools to creative invention and its organizational structure. There was never any final goal of conclusion of the flow, but its eternal, infinite delay. This correlates to Derrida's interpretation of logocentrism, which explains that every meaning is interpreted according to essentially the same background systems of differences that define it. Hence, it is not possible to reach the final destination of a definition's meaning. The ending of the quest is being prolonged and continued, indefinitely. Or in Burgin's words: "in neither case is there any possible final closure of meaning upon a point of certainty, such closure is rather endlessly deferred."⁴⁷

Art is thus that which comes down to: imitation, form, expression, documentation, fantasy, science, feelings, system, craft, mind, spontaneous, programmed, modern, aged, free, imprisoned, closed, open, political, apolitical, mass, and unique. As Deleuze and Guattari testify at the beginning of *A Thousand Plateaus* "it is a question of a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and of a process that is

⁴² Ibid., 193.

⁴³ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 170.

⁴⁵ Tael Harper and David Savar, *Media After Deleuze* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 2.

⁴⁶ Burgin, "The End of Art Theory," 201.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 193.

perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again.”⁴⁸ The creation and performance of art is predetermined by a network made up of connections between: artists, curators, managers, principals, directors, editors, academics, and critics. In addition to this it is evaluated and divided into categories by the same network. Therefore, the rule of binary divisions has been replaced by the rule of many differences. There are no separate exclusive positions. One cannot be outside or inside. The conclusion is not a priority, nor can it be feasible. The only priority is moving.

We discover that discourses are transitory and temporary and that the affiliations and determinations of all subjects (artists, curators, theorists, institutions) are momentary and short-lived. Each creative act is a micro discourse created from a network in which the creator is positioned. Simultaneously, it is further continuing to intertwine with a network that constantly grows, merges and connects with other micro discourses along the way. Of course, micro discourses spontaneously and organically group into larger clusters of discourses, bringing them into contact with even larger group discourses. Thus, clusters of micro discourses (or fragment discourses) create new discourse groupings, which further establish exemplary consequential and oppositional relations with other discursive formations. These formations are then grouped into larger and more dominant discourses but are never concluded or final.

Burgin concludes that “theories can only exist as discourses – as concepts in definite orders of succession producing definite effects (posing, criticising, solving problems) – as a result of that order”⁴⁹ and that “there is no ‘outside’ to institutions in contemporary Western society”⁵⁰ and thus clearly announcing the new institutionalism.

New institutionalism emerged in the 1990s and represents an auto reflective process in which the role and function of art institutions are questioned. Claire Doherty’s articles and essays “New Institutionalism and the Exhibition as a Situation” state that:

These dialogic projects speculate that conventional art institutional time-frames, programming and staffing structures, distribution mechanisms and marketing strategies no longer address the needs of contemporary artists or their work.⁵¹

[...] within the context of an increasingly ubiquitous biennale culture, a generation of nomadic curators and artists emerge through whom new experimental models of presentation are circulated and exchanged.⁵²

New institutionalism is characterised by the rhetoric of the temporary – transient encounters, states of flux and open-endedness. It embraces

⁴⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 2.

⁴⁹ Burgin, “The End of Art Theory,” 186.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁵¹ Claire Doherty, “New Institutionalism and the Exhibition as Situation,” in *Protections: This is not an Exhibition*, ed. By A. Budak and P. Pakesch (Graz: Kunsthaus Graz, 2006), 172.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 175.

a dominant strand of contemporary art practice – namely that which employs dialogue and participation to produce event or process-based works rather than objects for passive consumption. New institutionalism responds to (some might even say assimilates) the working methods of artistic practice and furthermore, artist-run initiatives, whilst maintaining a belief in the gallery, museum or arts centre (and by association their buildings) as a necessary locus of (or platform for) art.⁵³

However, Doherty notes that even the new institutionalism risks setting unnecessary binary polarization “between self-reflective and open practice on the one hand, and works that do not follow the characteristics of ‘post-media’ practice on the other.”⁵⁴

As Doherty further finds, the “term ‘art’ might be starting to describe that space in society for experimentation, questioning and discovery that religion, science and philosophy have occupied sporadically in former times. It has become an active space rather than one of passive observation. Therefore the institutions to foster it have to be part-community centre, part-laboratory and part-academy, with less need for the established showroom function.”⁵⁵

Perhaps it is time to ask whether the legacy of the term “art” is becoming constraining for modern society. It might be about time to abandon the culture of opposing divisions in interpretations by re-defining the concept of art to events, experiences, and phenomena.

Conclusion

These four readings of Victor Burgin’s essay “The End of Art Theory” present one part of the multiple transdisciplinary potentials of his theoretical research. Presented texts belong to readers who work in the environments of four different disciplines (journalism, theatre, film, music) that feasibly influenced and led formations of their interpretations. Their explications revolve around influences of media on art evaluation, constraints of institutional discourse, feminist features of the theory, problematics of binary divisions, as well as foundations of the new institutionalism. At the end of this paper, it becomes clear that the richness of Burgin’s theory relates to multiple segments of cultural studies, social studies, art history, and media, and is easily transferable and interconnectable between them. Furthermore, the transdisciplinary nature of “The End of Art Theory” text testifies of its unquestionable value and fruitful source for future rereadings.

⁵³ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 175.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 173.

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