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IS ART AN ADAPTATION?
THE TIMELESS CONTROVERSY
OVER THE EXISTENCE OF AESTHETIC UNIVERSALS
(BY THE LENS OF EVOLUTIONARY
INFORMED AESTHETICS)*

What sort of human product is art? Is it an expression of our biological nature, or a cultural overlay? Does it have a core function, in a strong sense of that term that stems from art's evolutionary history? Or is what we call "art" just a set of practices that people find rewarding for various disparate reasons, and a minor player in the pre-history of our species? There's a universal consent about the claim that biology explains our minds and psychological traits: pleasures, desires, needs. Why not ask if it can also explain our artistic abilities, art behaviours, clues of aesthetic appreciation, our susceptibility to artifying and "making things special"? The aforementioned questions are the hallmark of research in the subject of evolutionary informed aesthetics (evolutionary theory of art)—a theoretical phenomenon that has been developing dynamically over the last two decades. This new scientific discipline not only provides interesting arguments in the discussion on the origins of human admiration for beauty and human inclination to create and admire art, based on Darwinian theories of natural and sexual selection, but it also rises the timeless controversy in the field of aesthetics theory—the possibility of existence of so called aesthetic universals: cross-cultural and pan-historical criteria of art's creation and evaluation. In the same time it addresses a more general issue: to what extent do the psychological and

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anthropological findings adapted to the field of aesthetics redefine the notion of art and whether naturalization and universalization of the analysis of art can be enlivening for aesthetics in the face of its crisis (WELSCH 1995, vol. 3: 18–37; BAUDRILLARD 2005; KUSPIT 2004).

On a more general level it formulates an important epistemological question: whether the use of scientific findings in relation to the humanities—by referring to discoveries of, among others, biology and evolutionary psychology or human behavioural ecology and cognitive archaeology—might become an antidote for conceptual and identity impasses in humanities in general. In this paper I make a case for a claim that evolutionary informed aesthetics is a discipline that opens up new perspectives, that neglect both humanities' tendency to overemphasize cultural differences when studying the arts of indigenous cultures and bring closer two seemingly incompatible scholarly worlds—that of humanities and of science. I see evolutionary (informed) aesthetics narrowly as an evolutionary study of art; it should not be confused with evolutionary aesthetics in a broad sense, the subject of which are evolutionary origins of aesthetic assessments in general – of the surroundings, the shape of bodies, colours, etc.; or with environmental aesthetics or bioaesthetics—derived from so-called 'posthuman studies'—or neuroaesthetics searching for neurobiological bases of aesthetic experience (which can be considered as an auxiliary science of evolutionary informed aesthetics).

STATE OF ART

When studying various aspects of art and aesthetic tastes, contemporary evolutionary art theoreticians—philosophers, aestheticians, literary scholars, psychologists, anthropologists—try to explain the foundations of human aesthetic preferences in relation to art, focusing on adaptive functions (in the biological sense) of different forms of artistic activity. Following the path set out by Aristotle, Hume, Darwin and his followers they refer to the achievements of ethological and cognitive sciences and ponder whether art is one of the evolutionary adaptations that helped the prehistoric humans to survive on a par with the fear of spiders, the maternal instinct or the ability to see depth (DISSANAYAKE 1995; CARROLL 2011; BOYD 2009); or is just a by-product of three other adaptations: the hunger for status, the aesthetic pleasure of experiencing adaptive objects and environments, and the ability to design artifacts to achieve desired ends (PINKER 2002). Disregarding the degree of

pertinence of justifications of the above hypotheses, it cannot be denied, then, that art is a universal phenomenon, naturally present and spontaneously revealing itself in the history of humankind. And that recognition of this issue will be a milestone in naturalistic reflections on art. There was Aristotle, who reasonably claimed that art is a permanent component of human nature and has a universal character. He considered it to be a natural category of human activity and human experience, regardless of time and place. This is how he wrote in *Poetics*: “Poetic art, it seems, owes its origins [...] to reasons deeply rooted in human nature. For imitative instinct has been born to people since childhood, and it is in this way that man differs from other animals in that he is the most capable of imitation” (ARISTOTLE 1965, 1448b). David Hume, who was another advocate of aesthetic universalism, in his 1757 essay *Of the Standard of Taste*, argued that “the general principles of good taste are the same for all people”; there are works that retain their value for millennia because, according to the Scottish philosopher, they refer to the deeply rooted, unchangeable characteristics of human nature: “Homer, who two thousand years ago liked it in Athens and Rome, is still admired in Paris and London” (HUME 2001, #11). According to Denis Dutton, the secrets of these unchanging characteristics are revealed today by the discoveries in evolutionary science: in developmental and cross-cultural psychology and empirical biology; furthermore the application of the theory of natural selection in aesthetic studies remains in line with a more general trend in contemporary humanities, which, however, does not reduce “art to anything less than the rich, life-giving force that art is” (DUTTON 2004, 2).

I would like to point out that a researcher who deals with issues of evolutionary aesthetics in Poland is especially privileged, since until recently the field of study was virtually absent from the domestic market of ideas.¹ Evolutionary ideas originating in natural sciences are also often misinterpreted within the humanities. Disciplinary biases and conceptual habits developing for years at the faculties of Arts and Social Sciences, give the impression of untranslatability and incommensurability of both fields and usually lead to an unjustified imputation of reductionism. They can make, however, the overlapping of seemingly dissonant discourses creative and refreshing, and the agreement possible to achieve. This is especially evident in the dynamic development of the so-called *biocultural studies*, which shows that by treating the manifestations of human experience not only natu-

¹ Not counting a few insightful review contributions: CHMIELEWSKI 2012; ŁUCZAJ 2013; CHUDOBA 2014.

ralistically, but also with common sense, one can remain faithful to both: the humanistic tendency to emphasize differences and scientific exactitude.

In the popularizing sense – as well as theoretical, at least to some extent – nobody did more for evolutionary aesthetics than philosopher Denis Dutton. In his crucial book — *The Art Instinct. Beauty, Pleasure and Human Evolution* (=DUTTON 2009), as well as in series of articles (DUTTON 2001; 2003; 2004; 2006) — American-New Zealand philosopher argues that human aesthetic preferences are not “social constructs,” but rather universal, crosscultural evolutionary features shaped by natural and sexual selection. He is aware of the fact that “it is something else altogether to connect the structure and function of the immune system or the inner ear than to claim that evolution is somehow associated with the image of Albrecht Durer or the poetry of Gerard de Nerval” (DUTTON 2009, 86). “On the other hand, he writes, there is no sense to longer maintain that our artistic and expressive lives are determined only by the culture, as it makes no sense to maintain that we are determined only by genes. Human beings are the product of both of these factors. [...] we are biologically determined organisms that live in culture” (DUTTON 2004, 2). Dutton seems to be aware of the fact that many philosophers — and amongst them many aestheticians—are reluctant to apply psychology to values, especially if it means their naturalization as a permanent component of ever-evolving human nature; however, he asks: “What better use is of ‘culture’ than as a universal explanation for values?” In his opinion, the “truly naturalized” and therefore Darwinian description of aesthetic experience “should be to some extent speculative, assuming, however, with special satisfaction placed on the empirical evidence in the form of the results of evolutionary psychologists’ research” which could lead to the confirmation or strong rebuttal of proposed hypotheses. It would not, in his opinion, stand in opposition to the descriptions of the aesthetic experience in terms of a unique cultural expression, but would strengthen them by placing them in a universal perspective. Vividly, he argues that “scientific linguistics does not reduce the enormous diversity of human languages to a single impoverished code; similarly so scientific, naturalized aesthetics would not reduce art to anything less than the rich, lifegiving power that is art” (DUTTON 2004, 2). Although *The Art Instinct* in a short time achieved a publishing success, in academic circles it was welcomed quite coldly, and was sometimes even ignored with silence. The situation changed when Stephen Davies (another New Zealand philosopher of art) presented a bit more moderate view on the topic of art and evolution in his book entitled *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution* (=DAVIES 2012), where he thoroughly analyses evolutionary reflection on art, largely

making up for its theses (DAVIES, DISSANAYAKE, LUTY, VAN DAMME, MELLMANN, and CARROLL 2014).

ADAPTATION AND ART: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proper description of the concept of biological adaptation is crucial for understanding the essence of disputes over the adaptive function of art (LUTY 2015). Taking it from an evolutionary perspective, it turns out that the term ‘adaptation’ holds a very specific meaning (both in evolutionary biology and sociobiology, later known as evolutionary psychology); it is also the subject of the so-called ‘debate over adaptationism.’ Since the analysis of the concept of ‘adaptation’ can only take place in the context of the classic theory of natural selection (DARWIN 2003; originally 1859), it is indispensable to refer to, among others, Williams’ views on the proper criteria of evolutionary adaptation (WILLIAMS 1966), the classical version of the debate over (hyper)adaptationism, initiated by Gould and Lewontin (1979), and the modular mind theory and the theory of decoupled cognition on the development of human culture (TOOBY and COSMIDES 2005).

At the same time, the theoretical approach to art changes in a gradual transition from the aesthetic to the naturalistic and nativist perspective, under the influence of the evolutionary findings. As a result of this transition, art ceases to be perceived as an acquired human feature, having its only roots in culture, and begins to appear as an inalienable feature of human mind equipment, shaped by evolutionary processes. Since the universalistic and naturalistic accents are present in aesthetic theory from its beginnings, in my opinion, they obtain their theoretically mature form in Searle’s cluster concept (SEARLE 1958), modified by Dutton in his ‘naturalist definition of art’ (DUTTON 2004; 2009) consisting of a set of twelve recognition criteria; the cluster concept of art seems to be a neutral theoretical basis for speculation about art as a universal human phenomenon, that evolved, as a type of a natural kind.² The fundamental, constantly discussed issue in evolutionary aesthetics is whether art has an adaptive value in the biological sense. Even though there is no definitive answer to this question (issue), it must be emphasized that the dispute is especially interesting because its results depend, to a large extent, on the findings that are continually derived from scientific data. One can therefore say that, thanks to evolutionary findings

² For more detailed explanations see LUTY 2018.

(in the field of developmental and cross-cultural psychology, anthropology, and cognitive archaeology, among the others), aesthetic theory finally is *in statu nascendi*, as never before (or at least not since Kant). In the discussion on the adaptive function of art, there are several theories that seem particularly inspiring. These shall involve the following: the pendentive hypothesis (*spandrel*) or the by-product hypothesis, which are best defined by the Pinker's metaphor of *cheesecake for the mind*; the *sexual display* theory also called the theory of costly signalling (PINKER 2003; MILLER 2001; VOLAND and GRAMMER 2003; ZAHAVI and ZAHAVI 1997); DUTTON 2009), the theory of art as an intensifier of experiences and a regulator of a complicated psychological organization — recognizing art as a means of psychological ordering (DISSANAYAKE 1995; CARROLL 2011), the concept of art as a means of creating social identity (COE 2003; AIKEN 1998; DISSANAYAKE 2000), and others.

Another concept, which next to adaptation, is the key to evolutionary formulations of art's prospective adaptive value, is the notion of art. Following the path set by Brian Boyd (2009), Ellen Dissanayake (1988; 1995), Michelle Scalise Sugiyama (1996), it should be determined that art, as a universal, cross-cultural human phenomenon, is equally the product of culture and human biology. First of all, it is present in all human societies, and has persisted for tens of thousands of generations. Despite the great variety and a jumble of behaviors, art in all known societies takes on the same main forms: music and dance, manual creation of visual compositions, storytelling and poetry. Secondly, it's usually associated with high costs of time, energy, and resources. With no doubt it evokes strong emotions, which are evolutionary indicators that there is something important for the organism. It also consistently develops in all normal human beings, without special training, unlike purely cultural skills such as reading, writing, or learning; that art appears in the early stages of ontogenesis — that young infants respond joyfully to the lullabies and spontaneously play with colors, shapes, rhythms, sounds, words, and stories — gives a particular advantage for evolutionary explanations in the discussion with the non-evolutionary explanations.

Taking into account previously mentioned anthropological facts and data of evolutionary human sciences, and also in accordance with interdisciplinary knowledge which we currently have, among others, of the prehistory of human behaviours, construction of the human brain or the content of human genome, it seems reasonable to consider whether: (1) art behavior has an adaptive value; as a feature which gives an adaptive advantage over the organisms which does not have this feature, it supports the organism in natural

selection; or (2) art behaviour is not a product of natural selection, does not favour survival, but the subject to sexual selection, which gives reproductive advantage (art as an extravagant, useless show, or an ornament in the game of attracting a potential mates); or (3) should it be considered a merely cultural product. It's worth adding that research on the adaptive function of art can be reasonably compared to research in cognitive linguistics. This comparison reveals a parallel pattern of evolutionary conditioning of both language and artistic abilities. Findings in cognitive psychology and linguistics have led to the discovery of a fundamental grammatical system that enables language learning — so-called universal grammar — as an innate human capacity, specific to the human species. The discovery that man is born equipped by evolution with a module responsible for language acquisition, supported by discoveries in the field of genetics, was a breakthrough in linguistics. It made researchers aware of the fact that language acquisition is not a purely cultural or “educational” feature, but to a certain extent biologically programmed, which is carried by human genes. The fundamental subject of research within evolutionary aesthetics is whether there is also a “universal grammar” of art. Can the fact that art, like language (and a broad set of universal qualities for the human species, BROWN 1991), is present in every culture, accompanying humans continuously from his earliest beginnings, be a sign that it is also necessary in the most fundamental sense — as a response to a biological need? Without the ubiquity of art, would the human brain develop in the same direction? Would humans have reached the same degree of civilization, social and moral development if they had not told stories, created imaginary worlds, participated in collective artistic and ritualistic activities, embellished their bodies and their surroundings, and not drawn cognitive and, above all, emotional satisfaction from all these behaviours?

HYPOTHESIS: FORMULATING THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

Adoption of the above assumptions emphasising the universal character of art and its inalienability as a result of the internal ‘need for art’ (DUTTON 2009, 40)— allows evolutionary oriented aestheticians to formulate the following hypotheses, that I try, among the others, to investigate in my recent book (LUTY 2018):

(1) there are many indications that the universalism of aesthetic preferences disclosed, among others, in landscape painting and in the sociological-artistic experiment of Komar and Melamid (WYPIJEWSKI 1997), reflect the adaptive value of habitat selection, in line with the concept of the EEA (*Environment of Evolutionary Adaptiveness*) (ORIAN and HEERWAGEN 1992), and the natural human tendency to kitschy landscapes (ORIAN 2014; KULKA 1996).

(2) The universality of art (the fact that there are no cultures that do not produce some form of art and that we recognize art without the help of theoreticians) and its reception (preference for the masterful art of ‘Great Masters’ — Peruvians love Japanese woodblock prints, Italian opera is enjoyed in China, and Shakespeare has been translated into all major languages of the world) can be explained by using recognition criteria, selected on the basis of a cluster concept of art or as a homeostatic property cluster kind (DUTTON 2004; 2009; GAUT 2000; DAVIES 2004).

(3) History of art presents considerable evidence that philosophical reflection on this universal human phenomenon is hampered by numerous anti-universalist tendencies, such as: a) problems and aesthetic debates generally seem to be limited to a given historical period, b) the individual aesthetic preferences of philosophers influence the formulation of their aesthetic theories, and c) the nature of philosophical rhetoric makes those theories prone to misinterpretations. A derivative of the anti-universalist bias this phenomenon is the obsession of philosophers about the so-called borderline cases in art (dadaism, silence in music, abstract and conceptual art, etc.). The explanation of this trend can be demonstrated by analogy to the legal maxim, which says that difficult cases create a bad law (DUTTON 2009). Why deal with borderline cases first, and not focus more on ‘undisputed paradigm cases’ instead? (DUTTON 2011, 52). Evolutionary informed aesthetics can effectively counteract these modernist aesthetics’ tendencies for the benefit of universalistic claims.

(4) One of the main assumptions or evolutionary approaches to art is the existence of so called *aesthetic universals* — massively reflected in the criticism of ethnocentrism — on the one hand: in cultural anthropology, as a discipline that recognizes that the notion of art is not transferable and prevents the aesthetic classification of artistic products of other cultures (DUTTON 2001); on the other hand — in the views of some aestheticians who claim that recognizing something as a work of art is a matter of interpretation or the theory imposed on it (DANTO 1988). Art in tribal societies has always had a perceptual and sensual character and on the basis of such criteria its evaluation should be made.

(5) The evolutionary approach enables some other aesthetic categories – such as artistry, skill, virtuosity, emotions, representation (imitation), imagination—to receive a strong foundation in empirical research, confirming their universal and bio-cultural character. It might also be possible to formulate, based on these categories, a new definition of the concept of beauty (see LUTY 2018, chapter 5).

(6) It's important to be aware of the fact that the adoption of a universalist and naturalistic perspective in aesthetics does not automatically mean the recognition of art—or specific art's genres—as an effect of natural selection, either in the form of adaptation or a by-product. This extremely important distinction for research into the evolutionary aesthetics; it is worth referring to interesting analyses of Davies (2012) and Seghers (2015); universalist approach does not bring us closer to the explanation of art in terms of sexual selection, either. The condition necessary to determine whether a given feature or behaviour is adaptive in the biological sense is to refer to empirical research based on the methods of natural sciences, or to be more specific, based on the theory of natural selection and in compliance with scientific protocol.

Justifying individual hypotheses in evolutionary informed aesthetics, one should make use of theoretical tools of the philosophy of art in the analytical tradition—including the concept of art from Władysław Tatarkiewicz through Beris Gaut to Stephen Davies and Arthur Danto. The discussion on the category of skilfulness by Jerome Stolnitz or Monroe C. Beardsley's view on artist's intention, among the others, and the achievements of evolutionary sciences—from Charles Darwin to Edward O. Wilson and Steven Pinker to Geoffrey Miller and Desmond Morris—may prove just as fruitful. Denis Dutton—long before he adopted the evolutionary perspective—had dealt with, among others: the problems of art forgery and aesthetic theory, intentionalism in artistic theory and practice, and issues of the aesthetic status of works of tribal art and Dadaist works, as well as the so-called borderline cases in art—sports entertainment, body art, handicrafts or decorative art. The scope having been expanded due to influence of other theories, among the others, by: Ellen Dissanayake, Michelle Scalise Sugiyama, Joseph Carroll and Davies. Following their scopes and approaches, evolutionary scholars usually refer to various fields and methods, like: paleoanthropological research on the evolutionary sources of symbolic culture, cross-cultural ethological studies on the artistic habits of hunter-gatherers—as well as interspecies ethological comparative research, like chimps paintings—neuro-

logical research on how the brain processes information about art, as well as various psychological studies on the systemic effects on both social and individual participation in creative actions.

What distinguish evolutionary informed aesthetics from other theories is that they are considered to be a consistent implementation of the „Third Culture” programme objectives (BROCKMAN 1995). It means that evolutionary approach’s most significant feature is to accept the colloquial, pre-theoretical view of art, and thus searching for the universal, cross-cultural basis of various arts, using universal optics to study what is a real component of reality and to follow scientific protocol reliably. The measurable effect of these efforts is the revival of traditional aesthetic categories: skill, virtuosity, artistry, beauty and imagination, emphasizing the role of emotions, pleasure and admiration in aesthetic experience and providing them with empirical empowerment in scientific data.

CRITICISMS AND PERSPECTIVES

Despite the wealth of hypotheses regarding the adaptive function of art and artistic behaviour, there are numerous limitations of evolutionary aesthetics, which to some extent overlap with the limitations of the psycho-evolutionary programme itself (DAVIES 2012; SEGHERS 2015; PORTERA 2015). Art as an object of empirical research appears relatively rarely within its scope. Evolutionary aesthetics as a young and promising discipline still has no methodology developed; neuroaesthetics, for example, has it. A small number of empirical studies, testing existing hypotheses (primarily in the field of physical anthropology and cognitive archaeology) on the adaptive value of art, makes most of the claims of evolutionary aesthetics still in the hypothesis phase. Until recently, there have been no comprehensive comparative data on the aesthetic (or protoaesthetic) behaviours of *homo sapiens* and representatives of other human species, which fortunately changed due to recent magnificent discoveries of Neanderthal art.

The nature and mechanisms of functioning of mental modules (modular mind theory) are still being discussed, which involves constant criticism of evolutionary psychology for its one-dimensional approach to culture. In turn, disputes over situations in which a given artistic behaviour could be considered an adaptation—or perhaps a by-product of adaptation or a purely cultural product—do not lead to clear conclusions, which results from the fact that

the obtained test results can often be assigned to many hypothetical functions. For example, if the hypothesis that a given behaviour unites humans is confirmed empirically, it does not necessarily mean that this behaviour is an adaptation. In order for an explanation of the evolutionary origin of behaviour to be reliable, it should pass the Tinbergen test (TINBERGEN 1963), and thus get confirmation in each of the four aspects: (1) it should appear spontaneously at an early stage of an agent's development (spontaneous babbling in infants, or pleasure in drawing or leaving marks in babies); (2) it should have an identified direct function (the position of Denis Dutton is not unambiguous here: the purpose of art is to read the minds of others and to admire them, but also to seduce the best maiden in the area; while Dissanayake has no doubt that the purpose of artifying is to "make ordinary objects and events extraordinary" and such behaviour is adaptive); (3) it should have its evolutionary history (comprehensively described by many authors, including Ellen Dissanayake, Joseph Carroll, and Michelle Scalise Sugiyama) (DISSANAYAKE 1988; CARROLL 2008; SCALISE SUGIYAMA 2005); (4) it should also have an emotional mechanism that causes pleasure or disgust, which is triggered under certain circumstances (something in which art would specialise, but also something in which nothing else but art should specialise; is art really such a specific activity? It is quite doubtful that high art could be counted here, but an expanded ethological concept of art can fulfill such a condition; perhaps it could be tonal music as well). If each of these conditions is met, it can be stated with a high degree of certainty that the studied behaviour (here: artistic behaviour) is an adaptation in its strict sense. But is accuracy the domain of art?

From the point of view of the philosophy of art, two issues remain the most cognitively provocative in evolutionary approaches to art. Firstly, the problem of scientific credibility of evolutionary hypotheses, and secondly, the issue of changes within the notion of art under the influence of evolutionary perspective. I am a moderate optimist about the scientific viability of these issues and their invigorating impact on the further development of aesthetics and philosophy of art debates. I claim that the universalist perspective in aesthetics, supported by evolutionary study (at intersection of psychology, evolutionary biology, behavioral ecology, dual inheritance theory, gene-culture coevolutionary theory, genetics and neuroscience), has been very successful in redefining the concept of art. On one hand, it brings it back to life after the postmodern devaluation (KUSPIT 2004), showing how to create the theory of art without reducing its subject to culture, style, theory or interpretation, by exploring certain universal motifs and heuristics of

human art, that are the reverse of its natural source—the human mind. On the other hand, by referring to the category of skill, proficiency and virtuosity and the category of pleasure, it evokes a long unseen confusion: art is no longer merely objects or actions, but also forms of human behaviour (that might have an adaptive value). Moreover, the ethological perspective makes the notions of *artification*, *making special* or *signaling* a challenge for the conceptual crisis in art theory, already observed by Władysław Tatarkiewicz in the sixties (TATARKIEWICZ, 1980; first published in Polish 1971). In what way this interdisciplinary knowledge is useful in the empirical research practice, however?

It seems that the contemporary approach to the analysis of art usually takes on two extreme faces: on one hand, there are traditional aesthetics that do not care about the universalism of art, create more and more complex aesthetic theories that do not even attempt to investigate the cross-cultural nature of the aesthetic experience. One of the examples is the theory of Arthur Danto, who claims, for example, that tribal art is impossible to investigate as long as we do not apply western aesthetic standards to it (DANTO 1988; DUTTON 1993). On the other hand, we are dealing with the rapid development of neuroaesthetics, which is characterized by the fact that it significantly reduces the very concept of art (RAMACHANDRAN and HIRSTEIN 1999). For this reason, many authors are ready to argue that the biological and humanistic perspective remain incompatible. But is that really so?

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I try to make a case for the claim that evolutionary study of art and artistic behaviour indicates art's inalienability "as a result of the inner human need." It also formulates justified assumptions in a timeless controversy over the existence of aesthetic universals and the credibility of a universalist position in art theory. According to this, art operates as part of a natural, immutable apparatus of sensations, universal for all humans. Furthermore, in the light of evolutionary informed aesthetics, art evokes emotions comparable to adaptive mechanisms of the human mind, such as: delight, pleasure, admiration, fear, surprise and revulsion. It might have contributed to increasing the adaptive capacity of our ancestors, helping them survive on many levels. It seems to be indicated by a specific „universal grammar” inherited from them, a multi-functional organ — „the art instinct”

that is a complex set of impulses — sub-instincts. Many evolutionary oriented researchers emphasize that this inherited capacity includes: our reactions to a wide range of phenomena — the natural environment, potential threats and ways of dealing with them, colours and sounds, eroticism and expensiveness, intellectual and social challenges, technical difficulties, and, last but not least, our deep interest in the personality of another man (an artist), accompanied by constant admiration for the manifestations of skill, virtuosity, and imaginative abilities of his creative displays. The universalism of art and aesthetic preferences is revealed, among others, in the fact that we recognize various art forms without the help of theoreticians; most of the non-western or prehistorical communities are likely to have had a very different concept of art — if one at all — from that which is the most popular today: non-utilitarian objects to be placed on pedestals in galleries. This, in turn, allows us to consider art as a natural kind, and thus describe it in the same way in which we describe minerals, biological species or mental illnesses.

It seems, therefore, that evolutionary aesthetics can successfully fill undeveloped space between biology and the humanities, become a kind of interdisciplinary platform that, using evolutionary findings, treats traditional, timeless aesthetic problems — i.e. the functions and value of art, borderline cases, intentionality, essentialism — with full seriousness and tries to settle them using empirical data from many fields. The unique idea of *consilience* of the humanities and natural sciences in relation to aesthetics also allows to understand the uniqueness of us, humans — the only species that artifies, attaches importance to performance, commonly creates and consumes art, being boundlessly passionate about it.

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IS ART AN ADAPTATION?
THE TIMELESS CONTROVERSY
OVER THE EXISTENCE OF AESTHETIC UNIVERSALS
(BY THE LENS OF EVOLUTIONARY INFORMED AESTHETICS)

Summary

Considering the fact that, in analytical terms, the main subject of research in the philosophy of art are statements about art and that it only re-examines objects defined as ‘art’, I argue, instead, that the interdisciplinary nature of the evolutionary approach to art and aesthetic is possibly due to the naturalization of philosophical perspective and due to ‘ethological turn’ in aesthetics. It makes it possible to reveal the origin, sources and function of art and artistic behaviour at a time of unprecedented discoveries in evolutionary science related to human culture and cognition. I see this as a duty of the researcher, who aims at finding answers to the timeless controversies about the real nature of art and the universal emotions it evokes, and not only deal with what theory formulates.

Keywords: art; adaptation; art definition; theory of evolution; aesthetic universals; evolutionary informed aesthetics; consilience.

CZY SZTUKA JEST ADAPTACJĄ?
PONADCZASOWE KONTROWERSJE
WOKÓŁ ISTNIENIA ESTETYCZNYCH UNIWERSALIÓW
(PRZEZ PRYZMAT EWOLUCYJNIE POIFORMOWANEJ ESTETYKI)

Streszczenie

Biorąc pod uwagę fakt, że w kategoriach analitycznych głównym przedmiotem badań w filozofii sztuki są twierdzenia o sztuce i że poddaje ona jedynie ponownemu badaniu przedmiot określany jako „sztuka”, ze swej strony stwierdzam, że interdyscyplinarny charakter ewolucyjnego podejścia do sztuki i estetyki wynika prawdopodobnie z naturalizacji perspektywy filozoficznej oraz z „etologicznego zwrotu” w estetyce. Umożliwia to ujawnienie genezy, źródeł i funkcji sztuki oraz zachowań artystycznych w okresie bezprecedensowych odkryć nauk ewolucyjnych związanych z kulturą i poznaniem człowieka. Postrzegam to jako obowiązek badacza, który stara się znaleźć odpowiedź na ponadczasowe kontrowersje dotyczące prawdziwej natury sztuki i uniwersalnych emocji, jakie wywołuje, a nie tylko zajmować się tym, co formułuje teoria.

Przełożył Stanisław Sarek

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka; adaptacja; definicja sztuki; teoria ewolucji; estetyczne uniwersalia; estetyka z ewolucyjnych; konsyliencja.