

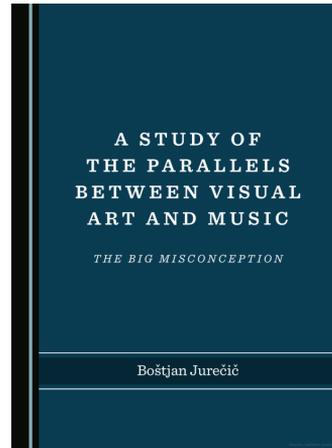
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Boštjan Jurečič, *A Study of the Parallels between Visual Art and Music: The Big Misconception*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 2019; 147 pp.: ISBN 978-1527540224

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Boštjan Jurečič's book is controversial and provocative! It confronts standard and well-established theories and perspectives on contemporary art by putting forward an unconventional historical parallel between visual arts and music. According to Jurečič, if it can be assumed that Rembrandt is parallel to Beethoven, Velasquez to Mozart, Manet to Debussy, then a crucial question arises: what are the parallels in contemporary music to the most renowned visual artists in post-modern and contemporary visual art, such as Warhol, Koons, and Hirst?



So, what is controversial and provocative about that? It is the fact that Jurečič compares these »high end« visual artists to pop stars like Britney Spears and Lady Gaga.

With parallels between contemporary visual art and popular music, Jurečič wants to convince us that established perceptions of contemporary visual art as something exceptional and special are like the »emperor's new clothes«. He suggests that contemporary visual art is neither what it pretends to be nor what the established theories of contemporary art want us to convince it is.

The starting point for Jurečič's analyses is the deep-rooted parallels, which imply that there is a continuity between visual art from the past, like Rembrandt and Caravaggio, with visual art in the present, like Koons and Hirst. However, Jurečič attempts to show us that such parallels are misleading and that historical parallels between music and visual arts should be made instead, to put the nature of contemporary visual art in a more appropriate perspective.

The reason that parallels between visual art and music can be more revealing lies in the distinction, which is standard in music, between serious,

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classical music and popular music. There is essentially no such distinction in visual art, since we are accustomed to thinking that all famous contemporary visual art is »art« of the high-end quality and complexity. However, in contrast, in music, not all famous contemporary music is »high end« art, but there is a clear distinction between contemporary classical music and trivial pop music.

The intention of Jurečič's book is, therefore, to analyse why and how we arrived at the point of »great confusion« about contemporary art and how the parallel between music and visual art can put contemporary visual art in the proper perspective.

So, how does Jurečič explain his idea? The book is structured into three parts: *Apparatus*, *Parallels*, and *Reflections*.

In the first part, the author introduces the sort of Hegelian »methodology« of thinking about contemporary art, which he links to the Indian concept of three Gunas. Similarly to Hegelian dialectical process, Gunas are also a »play« of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Such a dialectical process is based on a presumption that something is missing in the assumed thesis and antithesis; synthesis thus resolves this by providing the missing information. In relation to contemporary art, Jurečič makes such a methodological »play« based on the ordinary reactions of the everyday observer when facing contemporary art, which can be summarised by statement: »I don't understand what this is«. Jurečič asks, why contemporary art is so difficult or impossible to understand, and »plays« with this in dialectical process: Thesis: I don't understand because it exceeds the capability of my comprehension; Anti-thesis: I understand that it doesn't mean anything; Synthesis: I don't understand, because it doesn't mean anything.

Based on such a dialectical »game«, Jurečič develops his provocative and outrageous hypothesis, which he attempts to verify in the rest of the book: there is nothing to understand in contemporary art because contemporary art is trivial and – in a way – meaningless.

To exploit the trivialness of contemporary art, Jurečič focuses on historical parallels between music and visual art. The second part of the book is thus the core of the book where the author analyses historically the parallels between music in visual art, offering a wide diapason of examples. Jumping back and forth between historical epochs, from antiquity, the renaissance to modern and contemporary art, Jurečič shows the surprisingly analogous phenomena we can find in music and visual art. He does that by comparing Van Gogh to Schoenberg, Cezanne to Stravinsky, Picasso to Gershwin, Matisse to Ellington, Kandinsky to Messiaen, Duchamp to Schaeffer, Rothko to Grisey, Gnamuš to Haas, Braque to Varese, among others. Through such meticulous analyses, it

becomes increasingly obvious that when modern art progresses towards contemporaneity, visual art could no longer be compared to classical music, but parallels with popular music become more appropriate. Jurečič gradually develops such thread starting from correlations between the king of pop art Andy Warhol and the king of pop music Michael Jackson, leading him to compare Roy Lichtenstein to Madonna, Jeff Koons to Britney Spears and, finally, Damien Hirst to Lady Gaga.

In the third and final part of the book, Jurečič summarises his discoveries regarding contemporary art by stressing the »symmetries« between contemporary art and pop music, which surfaced in the second part of the book. One important symmetry worth mentioning is the following: as in popular music, for which »artists« must put incredible effort into the production and branding of their music, similarly contemporary visual artists have to make a lot of fuzz and »text« about the meaning and purpose of their work. In contemporary visual art, the work of art by itself is not enough, which is like in popular music for which only the spectacle counts. Jurečič is not optimistic that this will change any time soon, so he concludes his book with the observation and prognosis that the examples of serious and complex contemporary visual art will remain in obscurity until something changes at the level of the governing art establishment.

Jurečič's language is direct, without embellishment or political correctness. Someone may find the book tactless or even tasteless, but it is graphic and forceful. The book doesn't leave you cold – you may either love it or hate it.

As I see it, Jurečič's robust language and style come from two sources. First, he is not so much of an art theorist as he is an art critic with strong personal preference and opinion (which an art critic should have!). The book is filled with anecdotes from Jurečič own life as an art critic, art journalist and an art reporter, covering various artistic events for Radio Television Slovenia. He also wrote columns for that organisation, which were short, sharp, and to the point – and this is also reflected in the book, which is developed based on those columns. The second reason for Jurečič's uncompromising language comes from his dual role as an artist. He is not only a painter with a strong affinity to technique and material, but also has experience in classical music. So, this dual expertise motivated Jurečič to explore and make parallels between music and visual art that no one else has done before, which is what fascinates me about the book the most: the parallels Jurečič makes seem so familiar and self-evident when we are confronted with them, that I am astonished that no one else has figured them out before.