



Spiritual Art in the Context of Transdisciplinarity and Transculturalism

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Abstract

This paper deals with the emergence and meaning of the term spiritual in modern, postmodern, and contemporary art with a particular focus on its transdisciplinary and transcultural aspects.¹ The problem develops because of the hitherto neglected involvement of the spiritual in the development and expansion of the modernity program in recent European art history, with a particular focus on recent research redirected from traditional positions of national context to the transformation of visual language and transcultural character of some movements in modern art. This work covers the meaning and development of transdisciplinary spiritual art, the non-national character of its production, and the internationalization of its practice, focusing on the link with the reduction, abstraction, and tendencies of media dematerialization. It concludes with a review of innovative aspects of spiritual art and its apolitical character in times of intense social change.

KEYWORDS: *spiritual art, transdisciplinary, transcultural, avant-garde, abstract painting*

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: *sztuka inspirowana duchowością, transdyscyplinarna, transkulturowy, awangarda, malarstwo abstrakcyjne*

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The term spiritual in modern, postmodern, and contemporary art represents a transposition of motifs, symbols, structures, practices, and concepts from the heterodox Eastern and Western religious/mystical teachings systems to the field of visual art and theory (Šuvaković 2005, 369–370), and it is linked to a change of paradigm that was introduced to the European stage in the early twentieth century – within historical avant-garde – with the adoption of the abstract image. The appropriation practices of such concepts draw material from various esoteric doctrines, applying it in visual art, which is apparent from the onset of spiritual art in modern abstract painting to this day.

The transdisciplinary character of spiritual art after the sixties is based on abandoning its predominant sources from Theosophy and Anthroposophy and turning to sources from Zen-Buddhism, Taoism, Neoplatonism, Alchemy, Hermeticism, New Age, cultural rituals, artefacts, and forms of conduct taken from various indigenous cultures and communities. Furthermore, its transdisciplinary character is demonstrated in media pluralism, as well as in the different art practices and procedures in work performance.

Recent research of modern art, particularly abstract painting and expressionism in the European art of the first half of the twentieth century, indicates that there is a “transnational network” of modernist movements throughout Europe, representing the overlooked of the spiritual in art in the development and expansion of the modernity program (Wünsche 2019, 9 –10). Thus, recent scholarship has shifted its focus from the traditional prevalence in the national context towards the transformation of visual language and the transnational character of some modern art movements. In other words, spiritual art was never nationally oriented, because it had assumed a position of social criticism as it included subversive artistic phenomena and practices, which played a part in the destruction of old art genres by being critical of aesthetic conventions and social status. Moreover, the propulsive character of the interdisciplinary avant-garde and transdisciplinary spiritual (neo-avant-garde, postmodern and contemporary) art was focused on expanding the boundaries of art.

This article analyses the transdisciplinary and transcultural character of the spiritual in art in the context of performance and aesthetic innovations, as well as its orientation toward other cultures in terms of its influence on the expansion of modernism. With regard to its establishment in modern abstract painting and its continuity in high modernism, postmodernism, and contemporary art, this article covers several key points: 1) the term spiritual (in art) signifies the transposition of symbols, concepts, fragments of doctrines, performance practices, and forms of conduct from mystical doctrines to the field of visual art; 2) transdisciplinary spiritual art after the sixties



developed from the interdisciplinary spiritual art of modern abstract painting; 3) spiritual art is non-national: it is not an autonomous, socially isolated or geographically and nationally determined phenomenon; 4) it was established internationally (in the aesthetic and theory of modern spiritual art), and developed into the transnational, culturally-oriented phenomena of neo-avant-garde, trans-avant-garde, as well as the conceptual, post conceptual and contemporary phenomena of global digital/media art; 5) it is related to different practices of abstraction, reduction, and dematerialization in art, including the absence of a material art object; 6) it has contributed to innovative practices and played a role in the paradigmatic changes in the visual art of the twentieth century; 7) it is opposed to political ideologies and national totalitarian politics, advocating social development through art.

1. Interdisciplinary modern abstract painting

The interest of certain avant-garde artists in the mystical teachings appears as early as the first decade of the twentieth century. In the eclecticism of the era, they reflect the fascination of modern artists with the forms of polytheistic, often non-European cultures. Interest in symbols of mystical origin emerges, for example, in the works of the Czech painter František Kupka (1871–1957). The influence of theosophy and anthroposophy on some modern abstract painting is evident in the period 1910–1930, during the formation of the organic abstraction of Wassily Kandinsky (1910), the neoplasticism of Piet Mondrian (1917), and the suprematism of Kazimir Malevich (1913/1915). The abstract painting invention of these artists is associated with abandoning the traditional manner of presentation in art and is a reflection of the introduction of the new artistic paradigm in the modern era.

The term “spirituality in art” derives from the theory of organic abstraction by the Russian-German artist Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), i.e., his work *Concerning the Spiritual in Art (Über das Geistige in der Kunst)*,² and it was established in art history and theory through the exhibition *The Spiritual in Art – Abstract Painting 1890–1985*.³ In other words, the influences of mysti-

² The full essay title is “Concerning the spiritual in art: Especially in painting: With eight paintings and ten original woodcuts” (*Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei: mit acht Tafeln und zehn Originalholzschnitten*), published in German by R. Piper & Co. in Munich in 1912.

³ The exhibition was held in 1987 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, curated by Maurice Tuchman, assisted by Judi Freeman.



cal doctrines, foremostly Theosophy and Anthroposophy, on the formation of modern abstract painting derive from the self-reflection theories of modern artists (aesthetic theories by Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian on their art, with the theoretical work of the group *The Blue Rider* [*Der Blaue Reiter*]) and are indirectly brought into the context of lyrical abstraction, suprematism, and expressionist painting of *Der Blaue Reiter* group gathered around Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc. The spiritual source in the non-representational, modern abstract painting cannot be found at the surface level of its formal and aesthetic organization, but appears as its external category, contextualized in the respective artist's theories.

The emergence of spiritual art was related to the anti-materialistic views of modern artists. Kandinsky (1946, 10) considered materialism a system without "any purpose or idea" and superimposed the non-materialistic view. The "inner necessity" principle of an artist's subjectivity here is the leading aesthetic criterium to establish the relationship between spirituality and art. The vibratory properties of colour and form and synesthetic connection of music and image (spiral sound or emotional tone) are the fundamental properties of his aesthetic theory and generate formal consolidation of the plasticity of a painting. He concludes this with the following:

Here, the psychic power of colour takes hold, causing an emotional vibration. Thus, the first physical elementary force develops the channel, through which the deep, inner emotion reaches the soul. (Kandinsky 1946, 41)

Taking theosophy as a starting point, the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) developed a specific form of geometric abstract painting called neoplasticism. The explicit connection of neoplasticism with Theosophy is manifested in his statement: "It is Neoplasticism that is purely a Theosophical art (in the true sense)" (Blotkamp 1986, 104).

In his self-reflexive theory, Mondrian determined neoplasticism in reference to elemental forces of nature, where he recognized reflections of the "immutable". In the theory of neoplasticism, two-dimensional neoplastic compositions of horizontal and vertical geometrized lines in square forms, with the use of primary colours (yellow, blue, red, as well as black and white as a non-colour) are connected with the universal elements in nature. Or, as Mondrian goes on to define it:

I see reality as a unity; what is manifested in all its appearances is one and the same: the immutable. We try to express this plastically as purely as possible. (Mondrian [1919] 1993, 80)



American art theoretician Rosalind Krauss (1985, 9–22) used Mondrian's neoplasticism to show the dichotomy of the non-materialistic and the materialistic concept of spiritual artwork. While the objectless modern abstract painting – with its emancipatory position and formalism – responded to the demand for the logocentrism of the era on the one hand, on the other hand, it contributed to the expansion of ant materialistic views with its detachment from the narrative, symbolics, and normative modalities of representation. In this respect, art history and theory today has adopted the opinion of the art historian Linde Dalrymple Henderson (2013, 15–16) about the formation of abstract painting, not only in the context of the avant-garde demand for the autonomy of art and the break with the traditions of the past, but also in the atmosphere of the then popular thesis on the fourth spatial dimension, influence of the technological invention of X-rays and the penetration of mystical doctrines into art, and finally the emergence of Einstein's theory of relativity (1905). In other words, the dominant scientific paradigm of the early twentieth century prompted questions on the perception of reality in art, while the idea of the functioning of “invisible” spatial dimensions redirected artists' interests toward the concepts of mystical doctrines.

The idea of the “non-objective world” in suprematist abstract painting and the respective theory was formulated by the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935). Innovation of suprematism referred to the formulation of geometric abstraction in the representation of pure geometrical shapes (squares, triangles, and circles) with monochromatic properties (black, white, and red) and their spatial correlations. In his aesthetic theory, Malevich (1946, 67) contextualized suprematism as a “philosophical cognition” and “view”⁴ and defined it as the “supremacy of pure feeling in creative art,” i.e., “form of representation of the world of feeling.” Malevich's view that the aesthetic of a “non-objective feeling” is capable of building a new and “true” world order is particularly pronounced in the white suprematist painting. According to the artist, the composition *White on White* contains the idea of a “new, white conscience,” and its formulation stimulates spiritual values and the development of social awareness. Malevich claims that suprematism has also liberated art from representational norms, as well as religious and state monopolies.

The emancipatory position of art is particularly relevant in terms of the mystical and spiritual in a social and political context. Analysing art in the

⁴ The painting *Black Square* (1914) was exhibited located in the “icon corner”, at the upper intersection of angles, a space in Orthodox households traditionally reserved for icons, called “the beautiful corner”/“the holy corner”, or “God's place” (Elezović 2018, 157).



conditions of development of contemporary technology, the philosopher Walter Benjamin ([1935] 2010, 38) formulated the conceptual phrases “aestheticization of politics” and “politicization of aesthetics” to warn about the political pretension of claiming the symbolic, aesthetic, religious or mythologic content for political-ideological purposes. He designated the phrase “aestheticization of politics” as a misuse of symbols and aesthetics by totalitarian political regimes, such as fascistic manipulation of mythological and religious content, aiming to subdue and create a repressive political apparatus.⁵ Benjamin’s warning is close to traditional and idealistic concepts, which is also evident, for example, in the term spiritual art. Therefore, the terms need to be differentiated with regard to the addressee and the masses, because manipulation is speech directed at them. According to Benjamin, the mass, as a signifier, is key to differentiating the correlations symbolic and religious content and politics in the culture and art of the twentieth century. The awareness of the addressee and the function of the phenomenon may hinder the tendency of “slipping” toward rhetoric for the masses, which is subordinated or in the service of political misuse.

Avant-garde movements, as noticed by the German avant-garde theoretician Peter Bürger (Bürger 1984, 17), do not break from the artistic procedures of previous eras but with the idea of art as a whole. The deconstruction of the religious image in modern abstract painting has manifested itself in the deviation from the traditional, symbolic and iconographic canon of representing extrinsic content but maintains the idea of the transcendental. Unlike the rational resignation of modernism for the religious as a whole, the interest in transcendence in art prevailed in the works of a few leading artists of modern abstract painting. Abandoning the religious image concept meant abandoning traditional representation and the perspectival figurative image, established back in the Renaissance, and thus the concept of reality as determined in the materialistic paradigm. Aesthetic innovation in the form of an abstract image became a key factor in expanding modernism throughout Europe, and its social position is reflected in the individual pursuits of these artists for the development of social awareness and social change through art.

⁵ Benjamin associated the phrase “politicization of art” with communism, considering the self-classification of the artist within the political context and the self-initiated placement of his art in the service of political action as an act of art. Radical political avant-garde is one where the artist is politically engaged, according to the interpretation of the Slovenian art theoretician Aleš Erjavec (2012, 10), “for he could not see another way to realize the initial project of the complete artistic adaptation of the world.”



2. Spiritual art in the second half of the twentieth century

Transdisciplinary spiritual practices in the art of the neo-avant-garde, post-avant-garde, conceptual and post conceptual art, as well as performance art, 'happenings', land art, minimal art, and the expanded field of art indicate the pluralism of art, media, and performance practices with reference to some aspects of spirituality. The starting points are no longer complete systems like Theosophy or Anthroposophy. Individual concepts, symbols, and structures from different mystical doctrines have been adopted instead. Although the term "spiritual" in art in literature has been mainly linked with its presence within the framework of modern abstract painting, in this work, the term is used to emphasize the continuity of the phenomenon and the repositioning of the spiritual in the art of the second half of the twentieth century.

2.1. Neo-avant-garde and Zen

The revision of historical avant-garde in one part of the post-war American and European art of the 1950s and 1960s has not circumvented the esoteric in art with a noticeable interest in oriental culture. Under the influence of concepts from Zen-Buddhism, non-visual concepts have found their place in art: silence, emptiness, intuition, coincidence, state of mind, and enlightenment as aesthetic categories. In post-war art, reduction and abstraction, as key procedures of spiritual modern art, have gained a new level of formal reductionism that strives for form purification under the influence of the refined aesthetic of Zen-Buddhism. The lectures of the Buddhist monk, translator and author of several books on Zen-Buddhism, Dr. Daisetsu Teitarō Suzuki (1870–1966), held in the early fifties at the American University of Columbia (Šuvaković 2005, 680), had a major impact on the expansion of Zen spirituality to neo-avant-garde and Fluxus art. This was the time of abstract expressionism and existential philosophy, as well as the Beat Generation. Among a large audience, the lectures of D. T. Suzuki were attended by the American writer Jerome David Salinger, Trappist monk Thomas Merton, choreographer and ballet dancer Merce Cunningham, composer John Cage, and painter Ad Reinhardt. Visual artists Mark Tobey, Ad Reinhardt, Franz Klein, David Smith, and Motherwell included in their painting techniques the experiences of Japanese calligraphy writing, while the concepts of "silence," "emptiness," and "coincidence" were primarily developed by the American composer John Milton Cage (1912–1992).



In his experimental composition *Music of Changes* (1951), the composer John Cage developed the concept of “coincidence” using the ancient Chinese Book of Changes *I-Ching*; he chose the dynamics and duration of sound and silence alteration by chance, introducing the principle of “non-intentionality” in art. His idea of non-intentionality is based on the removal of the “activity of sounds” made by an artist, i.e., the removal of subjective decision-making from the process of composing (Cage, 1961, 10). He explained the concept of silence in his self-referential collection *Silence* (1961) and multimedia works, synthesizing theatre, performance, and experimental music art. For example, in his composition *4'33''*, randomly generated sound from the concert hall emanates the idea of silence and coincidence, questioning the boundaries of media and art as an act of deconstruction of socially accepted norms in art and life.

2.2. The genesis of spiritual monochromatic abstract painting

The onset of high modernist monochromatic painting, based on reduction painting techniques with reference to the contemplative origin of the work, was signified by Malevich’s suprematism, beginning with the work *Black Square* (1915), and particularly his work *White on White* (1918). Malevich based his cosmological system in art on the reduction techniques of reducing the painting to a two-dimensional, non-figurative, (almost) monochromatic surface, which is spiritually contextualized in the artist’s theory. Monochromatic painting of a contemplative and spiritual character was revived at the time of a new paradigm brought on by the post-war reaffirmation of abstract art, within European neo-avant-garde and the new interest for Oriental philosophy, as well as in post-war American abstract painting. Reductionism in the works of the American painter Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967) indicates the continuity of nonrepresentational spiritual painting in the second half of the twentieth century. During mid-1950s, Ad Reinhardt began his work on a series of achromatic black or blue and black paintings that he called “timeless” and “spaceless” (Lipsey 2005, 263), anticipating the onset of minimal art. Ad Reinhardt’s monochromatic canvases of dark colour indicate the concept of the formless and the “emptiness” emanating from the minimal movement aesthetics of the cultural tradition of the Far East. Fascination with the aesthetic dimension of contemplation – as a reflection of the non-material in Asian tradition – generated the anti-materialistic ethos of his monochromatic “black paintings”, which creates a contrast with the dominant spirit of the consumeristic culture of capitalist societies. Ad Reinhardt’s views are evident from his correspondence with the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, which they kept up for years.



The British art theoretician Herbert Read (1893–1968) interpreted the influences of Zen on Western visual art (1967b, 23) in the context of formalizing the “feeling of unity.” According to the author, understanding “unity” in the Eastern tradition is based on grasping “details as a part of unity;” to form an idea of it, one requires “sensation” and “intuition” (perception using subliminal content). Hence, according to him, the idea of “One in All and All in One” is a concept linked with Jung’s theory of archetype and the ideas of the new spiritual art. Read also connected the dripping technique (1967b, 24), developed by the American artists of action painting, with calligraphy writing, particularly with the specific practices of Zen monks that included spontaneous ink application to the painting surface as a specific method of practicing Zen.

In his self-referential theory, the American painter Mark Rothko (1903–1970) classified his abstract colour field painting in the context of the spiritual within art, as evident in his statement:

My own art is simply a new aspect of the eternally archaic myth, and I am neither the first nor will be the last compelled to evolve these chimeras of our time. (Rothko 2006, 32)

Depictions of monochromatic pictorial fields, established using square geometric shapes and lines, prevail in Rothko’s large coloristic canvases. He interprets the formal reduction of the painting to invoke “transcendental” qualities of colour and shape, which transcend its particular features (Rothko 2006, 34), emphasized by using transparent layers of paint and adding whiteness into the layers of colour. The religious reference to Rothko’s transcendental colour field painting is most consistently applied in the sacral ambient of a chapel in Houston, Texas (1964–67).

The concepts of “void”, “non-matter,” and “eternity”, infiltrating the field of art through Eastern religious spirituality, were reflected in the neo-avant-garde monochromatic painting of the French artist Yves Klein (1928–1962). Monochromatic canvases filled with the characteristic *International Klein Blue* (IKB) blue colour mark Klein’s search for visualization of the “non-material” and “absolute,” about which he wrote in *Manifest du Chelsea Hotel* (1961), where he determined the concept of “void” as an “immaterial pictorial zone” extracted from the “void” (Elezović 2019, 111–119).⁶

⁶ Klein states the following: “Having rejected nothingness, I discovered the void. The meaning of the immaterial pictorial zones, extracted from the depth of the void which by that time was of a very material order” (Klein 1961).



The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1985, 1–18) puts the monochromatic painting of the American painter Barnett Newman (1905–1970) into the context of the Kabbalah view of the flow of time, denoting Biblical references in work titles (*Abraham, The name I; Onement II* (1949); *Joshua, The name II; Vir Heroicus sublimus* (1950/5.)). Using Newman's essay *Prologue for a New Aesthetic* (1949) and the specific "sense of time" with which Newman determines his painting, Lyotard examines the term sublime in art. In his essay *The Sublime is Now* (1948, 52–53), Newman associates the sublime in art with abstract painting, while deviation from the narrative, the symbolic, or mythological is linked to addressing the sublime, starting with our "own feelings."

In literature, the neo-avant-garde tendencies of Yves Klein and John Cage relating to the awakened interest of the West toward Oriental culture, representing concepts of void, absurdity, and monotony, but also concepts of the art of mental activity, are associated with the formation of the artistic view of the neo-avant-garde and proto-conceptual Croatian art group Gorgona (1959–1966) and particularly with the formation of anti-painting, which was developed – in the form of a meander – by the painter Julije Knifer (Dimitrijević [1977] 2002, 54), a member of Gorgona.⁷

2.3. Conceptual and post conceptual art practices

The international art movement of conceptual art is associated with analytical and procedural art research. The context of the subject shows interest in dealing with non-visual phenomena such as artistic and aesthetic facts. Given the different manifestations of the spiritual, art theory introduced several subtypes of spiritual postmodern art: art and intuition, art and telepathy, art and myth, medial images, the art of earth healing, the art of transformational experiences, and others. Among the artists interested in the spiritual, there is work in the "border area of art and culture or art and life," as noted by the art theoretician Miško Šuvaković (1986, 11–34); these are marginal areas of artistic activity, which are linked to "extra artistic forms of human activity", such as art as therapeutic work (Ann Halprin), art and political action (Joseph Beuys), feminist activism (Mary Beth Edelson), and work in the field of art and ecology (Marko Pogačnik). New subtypes of spirituality in art arise

⁷ The art group Gorgona operated in Zagreb between 1959 and 1965, and its members were painters Julije Knifer, Josip Vaništa, Đuro Seder, and Marijan Jevšovar; sculptor Ivan Kožarić; architect Miljenko Horvat, and art historians and critics Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos, Matko Meštrović, and Radoslav Putar. The group did not have a joint program or manifest but developed a specific form of art behaviour as an art practice.



from the tendency to deviate from social and art conventions and especially from commodification in art. Like the reduction procedures in spiritual art, there is also “dematerialization of the art object,” a phrase introduced as a counterpart to conceptual art in 1968 by the American critic Lucy Rowland Lippard and John Chandler (*Art International*).

Mystical conceptualism art is a specific form of conceptual art used by Italian theoretician Renato Barilli (1982, 268–269) to classify some works by conceptual artists Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner with a different aspect of invisible phenomena, such as telepathy and intuition, as artistic and aesthetic facts. Barilli shares the opinion of the theoretician Jack Burnham that telepathy is to be considered an ideal medium for conceptual artists due to the annulling of the materialism of a work of art due to the lack of artifact or material invisibility.

The onset of art “associated with extra-artistic forms of human activities” within early European conceptual art is apparent in the works of the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986). From the late 1950s to the 1980s, working on connecting the personal myth created in art about personal mystical experiences and the ideas of Rudolph Steiner’s teachings, the experiences of Fluxus art, and political action as an artistic expression, Beuys introduced the concept of “shaman artist” into spiritual art. Leaving the traditional art object occurs through merging the subjective, mythological, spiritual, political and performative in the artistic act, which the Swiss curator Harald Szeeman (1972, 29–41), in the exhibition Documenta 5 in Kassel (1972), exemplified with the concept of “individual mythologies.” Within the British conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s, the interest in researching spatial relations in landscape and sensibility for megalithic cultures and prehistoric art is apparent in the land artworks of the artists Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, who developed the concept of “walking art.” This is the experience of spatial creation in a landscape in the ecological concept of art, where Richard Long takes photographs of the line trace of his movement in a landscape as an imprint of his own presence in nature. Landscape structuring in land art works with reference to sensibility for the structures of prehistoric cultures is apparent in the work *Spiral Jetty* (Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970) of the American artist Robert Smithson (1938–1973).

2.3.1. Spiritual conceptual and post conceptual art practices in the territory of former Yugoslavia

Art of transcendental conceptualism is a term used by the Slovenian theoretician Tomaž Brejc (1979, 3) to articulate a specific form of behavioural art



practice developed by the Slovenian group OHO within European conceptual art in the period 1970–1971. The group acted as a commune with the idea of integrating everyday life in art, and, in their work *Interkontinentalni grupni projekt+ Amerika-Europa* (1970), they studied synchronicity, intuition, and particularly telepathy among group members. Within works realized in Zarica valley in Slovenia and working on the exhibition in *Aktionsraum 1* in Munich, they dealt with artistic and cognitive research through practicing meditation, cohabitation with nature, and communication with natural energies. These artistic methods completely dematerialize works of art, given that they lack artifacts.

The Slovenian artist Marko Pogačnik (1944), one of the founders of the conceptual OHO group (1965), developed a specific type of spiritual art practice. His spiritual work includes so-called *Medial systems*, realized in the form of a drawing reflecting ideas on the existence of universal energetic connection in nature. After 1979, he developed a special form of ecological art which he named Lithopuncture, or Earth acupuncture. His concept is based on introducing an act of healing into art; therefore, we consider the dual role of an artwork: healing and artistic. He called this practice Lithopuncture due to the procedure of setting stone sculptures on alleged acupuncture points in landscape. Blocks of stone are inscribed with relief diagrams that he called cosmographs or kinesiographs. Kinesiographs denote signs arising from the artist's intuitive, inner dialogue with spiritual beings of the space where the sculpture is placed, while cosmographs are symbolic geometric or figural drawings inscribed in blocks of stone and, in the form of archetypal shapes, indicate the idea of a holistic correlation of cosmic energies. Pogačnik's process of Earth healing comes from healing bioenergy practice and the wooden technique of Earth acupuncture, as well as from work on intuition and establishing communication with beings from other dimensions, according to Pogačnik's self-interpretation.

Spirituality in the artworks of the Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović (bn. 1946) can be seen in her early performances, realized within the European conceptual art framework, in collaboration with the German artist and her artistic partner, Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen, 1943–2020) until her recent work. Along with dealing with other issues in visual art, her performances from the mid-1970s onwards include several aspects of spirituality: from the use of symbols from spiritual and mystic sources, practicing different meditation and shamanistic techniques, to making demanding performances of several hours or days, dealing with invisible phenomena such as telepathy and intuition as material for her work and finally, to dealing with the transformation of mental experiences through art and human intuitive



communication as an art medium. Spirituality in body-art practice is apparent in the cycle *Relation works* performed by Abramović and Ulay in the period 1976–1987. In their performance titled *Night Sea Crossing*, performed for twenty days in the period 1981–1987 on five continents, using the symbol of the swastika, the artists dealt with telepathic communication and the transformation of their own inner mental experiences, sitting motionless in silence for hours, facing each other across the table. Abramović involves the audience in the concept of transformational experience in art, and her idea of intuitive communication as a non-visual art matter is represented in her recent work, where she transposes it from the conceptual art practice to the “world of spectacle” in *The Artist is Present* (2010). Establishing intuitive communication between the artist and an anonymous viewer, who is sitting in silence on the opposite side of the table, as in the above-mentioned performance, is directed at creating intrinsic experiences, so that the invisible emotional “knot” stemming from communication between two people is established as the actual medium of artwork.

3. Conclusion

The transposition of esoteric concepts to visual art has taken place in the context of modifying the field of art. Although the dominant theory of modernism considers subjects from the mystical domain archaic concepts and in contrast with the spirit of rational modernity, spiritual art has contributed to innovative practices and played a role in paradigmatic changes to the visual art of the twentieth century. Innovations in the field of aesthetics, transformations of the traditional understanding of media, and the introduction of new forms of art practice came from the focus of individual artists toward expanding their area of artistic activity. Interest in Oriental and indigenous cultures contributed to the break from the concept of exclusivity in Western centrism; therefore, this art shows its communicative character in the interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary connection of different (extra-artistic or artistic) fields, linking traditions from different cultures to achieve innovation in the field of visual art.

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