

IV

"A work of art takes place in and as a performance in which listeners or observers abstract the artwork out of the context of the empirical or real world to render it purely aesthetic, an abstractive and active deed that requires them to achieve a state of self- or world-forgetfulness as they enter into the new world of the work of art."
- *Lydia Goehr*

The given quote deals with the relationship between a work of art and its audience, who are represented as active participants in the manifestation of the art itself. Through this essay I hope to address the main problems we come across when dealing with the terms given, the perception of these problems through various angles, our experience of art and how active of a component can we actually be within a world of art and a world of a specific work of art, as well as the potential misinterpretations we could come across through the given text.

In order to commence any sort of discussion regarding artwork and audience, we must start with an analysis of the meanings of these terms. A work of art has many definitions and I do not have the authority to say one is better than another but in the context of the given quote we may say it is a something with certain artistic value, it has a given context and, apart from this given context, a whole world of its own (a very vague term to which I will come later) into which a receiver or audience member may enter and actively participate in its shaping. We already come across a few problems regarding this definition. We have approached the term with two presumptions - first is that a work of art requires a receiver, someone to experience it and second is that there is a world or at least context behind all works of art which the audience (if they exist) receives and melds to their own fancy. There have been arguments for centuries in the past trying to define the limits of art and within that whether a work of art is a work of art if it has no audience. Opinions vary but I personally think an audience is not required in order for a performance to happen but since we are dealing with the relationship between the art and the audience, for now we will stick to the notion that there is an audience or some sort of observer/listener, although I will come back to this later in the essay.

The second presumption made comes across the problem of purpose, supposing a work of art contains a world of its own *a priori* which is wider than that which we perceive in the first place.

Although this may be said for most art, it is useless to speak of the latent meanings and worlds of artwork next to the existence of *l'art pour l'art* or for instance the Dada. An answer to this would be that mentioned currents in art have their meaning and contain their world exactly in the undefined aspect of themselves, giving the audience more room to give it personal meaning, although not the right to label it as anything more than the personal interpretation.

In the real, empirical world, we may agree that a work of art is usually viewed as an object, while we who experience the art are the subjects, for as an audience we are influenced by art and build our experience on it. During this experience, if we are still speaking of the empirical world, the work of art is a passive and at least partially predicted component while the audience is the active component in the performance because it forms a relatively independent idea of the artwork itself. It is in this moment where we embark onto a road from the empirical to the aesthetic, meaning as soon as the audience becomes an active component in the artwork, since it is in most cases not physically acting, we are drawn into the mind and imagination of the individual. During the individual experience the artwork becomes active only as much as the receiver is (active).

To illustrate my point I will give an example from my own experience: while passing through an art gallery I stumbled upon two identical panels of blue, turquoise and green paint splattered all over them. Since the gallery contained many different artists from different centuries I gave it a quick glance and kept on walking towards the next room where I was excited to see a painting by Rembrandt, next to which, in my personal opinion at the time (which goes no further than my taste in art) an abstract painting had hardly any value. While I was ogling at the dark cracked canvas from centuries ago, my friend who was with me came up to me excitedly and asked if I had seen the blue-green paintings in the other room, to which I answered a disinterested yes. She proceeded to drag me back to the paintings and made me look a bit closer. The two paintings, standing identically next to each other were not quite as similar as had thought. Namely one was a symphony of blue green and turquoise unordered meaningless lines, while on the other those same lines were morphed into dozens of creatures, with much detail and subtleness. What was a blue blob of paint on the left was a magnificent dragon on the right. This work of art can be seen as the core of what I am trying to say. Had I merely left the paintings behind me, they would remain passive and the world inside them would be poorer by one imagination and view. The

artwork is as alive as we make it, by engaging with it we are the ones who build its world while the artist is the one who structures it. In my example, I will dare to say that the artist did part of the job instead of us, but teaches an important lesson which is we must create "dragons" out of flecks of paint in our minds. We have the ability to build the world of an artwork on the structures of itself *and* immerse ourselves within it.

I am aware that the remark I made, hitherto the example, regarding the question of an artwork demanding an audience are in conflict with what I drew from the example, for one may conclude that art is meaningless without an audience to engage it from passive to an active state, or to build their world of the artwork itself, but I must draw the reader's attention to the fact that an audience, observer or listener are not the only individuals who interact with the works of art. It is the artist himself who, apart from the general structure they give to the art they create, which is something obvious to all interpreters, creates his world of the work of art even before the art itself! They need no audience to build this world, the audience is just an advantage and a chance to enrich it.

We could say that the meaning we give to the art, the inspiration we get from it, are all stepping stones to a total immersion into the world of the work of art. It is said that in order to enter the new world of the work of art we must achieve a state of self- or world-forgetfulness. At this point I will have to disagree with the author.

If we are to achieve a state of self-forgetfulness we are entering the world of the work of art as a *tabula rasa*, which, in my opinion goes against one of the main purposes of art which is communicating to the individual. By self-forgetfulness in relation to art the best we can get is a false sense of objectivity, which is in itself impossible in the case of art. The only advantage which comes to mind when considering self-forgetfulness is a slightly more open approach to the work at hand, allowing more suggestions and original meanings to come to us, but I would give much more value to the individual approach to the world of the work of art, since it is possible to sustain an open mind without losing our self or our individuality. The effects of an open I and open eyes are much greater than those of open eyes but no I. Furthermore, I do not see how the listener or observer can be expected to maintain a state of self and world-forgetfulness while

remaining an active component of the world of this artwork. The self and what surrounds it is exactly that which allows us to actively engage in the world of the work of art. The problem of world-forgetfulness can be explained in a similar manner, since our values lie on comparison and correlation if we completely engage in world-forgetfulness the art itself would have no meaning to us because whatever it is representing would have no meaning to us. However, if we are to view this world-forgetfulness through a less banal, narrower lens, we could understand it in the context of forgetting ones everyday problems or chores, but in this case it is not usually us who purposely obtain this state but rather the art itself and the world it presents are the ones who provoke this consequential emersion into self- and world-forgetfulness.

Another problem with this self- and world-forgetfulness is that the only reason one should require them is if we see this new world of the work of art as something completely separate from our own world. We could, as Plato did, divide the two into literal separate worlds with no interactions or flexibility, but we have two reasons not to do this, the first being if we follow his footsteps regarding aesthetics we probably wouldn't get very far, since he would not see any reason to engage ourselves into the world of art, deeming it deceiving and useless. The other reason is one much closer to us (if nothing at least temporally), since art itself is becoming more and more interactive throughout the contemporary ages we cannot separate our world from the world of the work of art if the work of art is part of our world itself. Here is where the line gets blurred. Consider a contemporary installation in a large museum, which consists of a room, a bed, some lights, a camera and a projector which is showing your every move, in real time, on the wall across from you. I ask, how am I supposed to forget myself during an aesthetic experience which involves myself being part of the work of art, through which I am even the most active and abstractive of all? Some may argue that this is not art but let us keep it simply that if it is in a Museum, it's probably art of some sort. Considering this example is not a usual thing in art, there are still other ways of perception of art which involve the complete opposite of self-forgetfulness and the goal of many artists is to provoke self-awareness or, in fact world-awareness, philosophical thinking and aesthetical appreciation of our surroundings.

In conclusion, I would agree that the listener or observer has an important, and above all active role in the performance of a work of art, but they are not necessary for the art to exist. These same recipients do not simply step out of one world and into another, instead they are the synthesis of these worlds, the enzyme reviving the work of art, turning it from passive to active and building inside this world of the work of art, its framework and life itself. This active role in the "life" of the work of art is what stops us from immersing ourselves through self- and world-forgetfulness, since by engaging in art we build ourselves and our awareness, rather than forget ourselves. This way of thinking (that we enter the world of a work of art only after self- and world-forgetfulness) may only lead to art being viewed as a form of escapism, while, in my opinion, it is much more than that, even if viewed merely aesthetically. So, I cannot agree nor disagree with the given quote without further research into the topic and literature itself, but I have tried to offer a brief analysis and breakdown of the topic based on what was presented to me.

Bar, Montenegro, 2018