

4. 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 Curse and Promise of the Absolutely Musical: Tristan und Isolde and Don Giovanni*

"Alyosha, is there a God?"

"Yes, there is."

"Ivan, is there a God?"

"No, there is not."

"I'm asking you one more time, the last time, Ivan, is there a God?"

"And I am telling you that there is not."

(...)

"But, Ivan, does immortality exist?"

"No, there is no such a thing as immortality."

"Not even a little, a tiny bit, maybe? A little bit more than nothing. Everything is better than nothing."

"None at all."

"Alyosha, does immortality exist?"

"Yes."

"Both God and immortality, do they both exist altogether?"

"Yes. Immortality is God."

This represents an approximative translation of the dialogue between the dostoyevskyan characters Alyosha Karamazov, Ivan Karamazov and their father, Fyodor Karamazov, a dialogue that very picturesquely reflects on the aesthetical element of the affirmation of the subject (both if we approach the text intrinsically, focusing on the relations between the characters themselves, or extrinsically, focusing on the connections between the author as an ontological subject and the artwork as his means of expression). Intrinsically, both Alyosha and Ivan state their viewpoint with a certain type of perseverance that does not belong anymore to the realm of what Lydia Goehr names *the empirical or real world*, because this real, societal world is based on pragmatism, on people's aiming at clear, particular, practical aims. Alyosha and Ivan, on the contrary, do not try to prove, to state their points of view, they simply *have* them, they express them without the intention of proving that one of them is right and the other is wrong. This lack of finality ontologically distinguishes their discussion from any violent religious debates, their relation of alterity is not a relation of antagonism. It is due to the fact that neither of

them tries to *prove* something (and choose, instead, to simply *tell*), it is due to the fact that neither of them is trying to prove something that their discussion can be considered, in one sense, purely aesthetical, should we understand the aesthetical, here, as the *uncorrupted by pragmatism*, the one that simply is. Their father's eternal asking the same questions corresponds, even if in a vulgarised manner, to a certain type of gratuitousness, yet it lacks the deep subjective component. Extrinsicly, Dostoyevksy, who states, in the preface of the novel, that, amongst the three brothers, Alyosha is the one who is the dearest to him, Dostoyevsky might have created this scene, in which no one "wins" in order to re-establish the equilibrium he has lost. The ontological and psychological Apollinian sense of detachment he has lost by choosing to identify with **one** of the characters, abandoning the sense of totality in the virtue of the sense of belonging, individuality, identification - and now it is his will to live, that aims at totality and intensity, that is trying to ideatically compensate for this decision, for the practical decision to belong to a group. Even if it can be considered a pragmatistical decision itself, I would rather understand this psychological phenomenon as a subconscious pursuit of the lost and pure aesthetical, that rather aimed at totality than at individuality, since totality makes room for the infinite of potentialities, while individuality encompasses mere finality. This is the extrinsic aesthetical dimension of Dostoyevsky abstractive and active deed, represented by creating an only apparent antithesis, which actually is an honest confession of the aspiration to the total, the unjustified (totality does not claim justification), the aesthetical.

Nevertheless, the degree to which I agree to Lydia Goehr's view on the abstractive character of the artistic act of transforming the empirical into the purely aesthetic depends on the meanings one attributes to the concept of the aesthetic, it depends on the relation we consider to exist between the aesthetic and other dimensions of our human world, like the passional, the rational, the emotional. Is there an antagonistic relation or a relation of interdependence? What kind of interdependence? Or is there any truly strong relation at all?

In his book *Aesthetical Categories*, Greek philosopher E. Moutsopoulos defines the object of the aesthetical experience as an element, be it concrete or abstract, that is at the heart of the experience of *correspondence* between our own conscience and *the structural and formal organisation of an entity external to it*. This desire of identifying ourselves, structurally, with an entity external to us naturally derives from one's Nietzschean will to live, should we understand this concept as the driving physiological force that sets each and every action into motion, the force that aims at intensity, the only *innate given* whose existence is admitted by Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy as well as by many other existentialists. The will to live is essentially physiological, yet it encompasses more of our being than raw self-conservation, given its ability to reach the aesthetic. In my essay, I am going to define the aesthetic taking Moutsopoulos' definition as a stepping stone, but I am

going to add an additional dimension to it, namely the *gratuitous satisfaction*, the *unnecessary pleasure* one might derive from the aesthetical experience, the *playful dimension* of the will to live. Nietzsche distinguishes between active forces, which exist by themselves and for themselves, the will to live being an active force, and reactive forces, that can only exist as a consequence of the cancellation of another force, such as reason within traditional morality, which can only exist by limiting the development of the passional. Another essential distinction one should make is between purely physical pleasure, which only corresponds to simply biological needs, to what Lydia Goehr calls *the context of the empirical or real world*, and aesthetical pleasure, the definitory characteristics of *homo ludens*, the aesthetical pleasure that is essentially the act of abandoning the realm of necessity. Thus, the aesthetical ought to be considered a paroxysm of the will to live, due to *its being for itself*, its abandoning of the realm of necessity.

Is art necessary for our growing as persons, is this its main characteristic, without which it would not be *art* anymore? Or, on the contrary, is art sublimely unnecessary, since it is only in this manner that it could be pure, uncorrupted by pragmatism? Can art be defined, is it possible to give a definition of art that would respect all the criteria proposed by aesthetician R. Pouivet in his work *What is an artwork?*, namely the accessibility (the ability to define art without referring to any hermeneutical theories one would have to previously know in order to understand the definition), neutrality (the absence of moral or evaluatory judgements', like the ones presupposed by Adorno's defining artworks as *always well done*) and universality (the capacity of the definition to encompass each and every work of art, no matter how unconventional)? Can the artwork be defined, or are there only Wittgensteinian *family resemblances* between works of art? Can we identify artworks without being able to give them a clear definition, is there an essential distinction between knowing-that (knowing that art *is* particularly something) and knowing-how (knowing what the aesthetical experience of art *feels* like)? Consequently, is art a form of expression of our subjectivity, which is our rational becoming aware of our will to live?

Given that the point of the artistic experience is *to render the artwork purely aesthetic*, to abstract its empirical context in order for the essence of it to be perceived, given that I will make the presumption, as Nietzsche stated, that it is the will to live that is the only natural causality, **should the concept of artwork be understood as the most vivid expression of the will to live?** (and by vivid I mean able to help one experience the greatest vitality of life, which to Nietzsche was the only relevant quality)? Should we comprehend art as an **aesthetical paroxysm** of the will to live, in which its main component, the being for itself, is most suggestively intensified?

My thesis is going to be represented by the idea that the *purely aesthetic* component of art is the will to live unfolding itself for its own sake, reaffirming, in this gracious gratuitousness, its belonging to active forces.

The pre-theoretical dimension of existence

One last distinction ought to be made before starting my actual argumentation, namely the distinction between theoretical approaches to the other and pre-theoretical approaches to the other, which is similar in many regards to the distinction Jacques Derrida makes between conditional hospitality (in which the other is conventionally analysed and understood, as part of a normative set of beliefs) and pure hospitality (the pact of reciprocity in which we abandon ourselves to the other). Theoretical approaches to the Different, to the other, to the other refer to the conventional, normative, usual relation one has with their environment, be it natural, cultural, social. We understand the others on the basis of a set of social norms - and it is solely in this manner that a society could ever function, given that the concept of society inherently implies a tendency to subordinate the individual to the normal, the collective, in the virtue of the possibility of creation of elementary acts of communication and social bonds. Pre-theoretical approaches center around the irrational, the inexpressible, they are focused on the intensity of the moment and they are profoundly intimate - all paroxysms are undoubtedly pre-theoretical, whether if we talk about the artistic paroxysm, be it visual or musical, or about the erotic or emotional types of paroxysm. As Octavio Paz states in his *Double fire*, in the moment of the greatest erotic intensity and closeness, the other loses their reality, they are sensually and emotionally purified to the point of sensation, and sensation progressively loses its reality as well, to the point that the subject experience the *totality* and the *nothing* at the same time.

Art as salvation

Admitting that the work of art is part of and virtually represents *a performance in which listeners or observers abstract the artwork out of the context of the empirical or real world* in order to render it *purely aesthetic*, may lead us to state that, indeed, Schopenhauer was genuinely right to consider the artistical experience as a salvation from the will. A salvation from the painful necessity of the realm of the empirical, an opportunity to achieve the state of self-forgetfulness, an aesthetical temporary cancellation of biological selfishness. One may be tempted to give credit to the schopenhauerian view according to which the act of entering into the new world of the work of art is a purifying experience, in the terms of the conflict between the purity of spirit and the impurity of carnality. This world of the artwork is fundamentally *new*, it is then defined by its ideational and aesthetical rebellion against the natural world. One might easily be tempted to agree with Schopenhauer's view that the ability to experience the aesthetical beauty of art is a salvation from the *focal point of the will, that is sexuality*. An active experience that requires us to *forget the world* and *to forget ourselves* - all of these ideas might seemingly lead to the conception that, indeed, art is a refuge of the spiritual confronted with the mercilessness of the material, of the carnal. If the beautiful is, as Kant believed, *the shining of the truth*, and art essentially centers around the

glorification of the beauty, shouldn't it be considered a manner of aesthetically reaching the truth, in opposition to the deceitful carnal experience? Art would be, according to the traditional view, cathartic in the sense that it makes world-forgetfulness possible, the world being represented by all the violence and pain that the thisworldy physiology implies.

Nevertheless, if all paroxysms are pre-theoretical, due to their belonging to a sphere of existence that cannot be ontologically subordinated to the conventional, the experience of *self- or world- forgetfulness* ought to essentially include the preservation of the inexpressible, of the irrational, which is found in the will to live, because, unlike reason, able to even rationally gestion itself, the will to live cannot be rationally deconceptualised. This *forgetfulness* ought to imply the abandoning the the concrete ways of expression of the will to live, the contexts in which it is manifest, the contingent manifest situations. The *abstractive* character of the artistical experience does not lie in deconstructing, but rather in preserving the paroxysm by eliminating the unessential, it lies in trying to have an intimate, pre-conventional contact to the new world of the work of art - experiencing Van Gogh's visceral fear when confronted to the other, to the unknown, beyond the red and green colours he used when painting *The Night Cafe*, or experiencing the intensity of the life of a man condemned to a violent sense of freedom, comprehending Ivan Karamazov's existential crisis beyond the social and political environments Dostoyevsky depicts as a background of the character.

The illusory character of antinomies

In his books *Beyond good and evil* and *The Twilight of the Idols*, Friedrich Nietzsche cancels the traditional antagonisms that conventionally exist between spirit and matter, by stating that love, for example, represents the spiritualisation of sexuality and, thus, a triumph of the honesty of the will to live over religious morality. He also states that altruism may have its origins in egocentrism, just like cupidity might have its in disinterest. When, inspired by Nietzsche, German writer Hermann Hesse defined art as a *possibility of spiritualising even the most murderous carnality* he once more stated the conventional character of antinomies, the fact that they are *added* to existence, not part of existence itself. Moreover, if we admit physiology as the sole given basis of existence, each and every attempt of the human being will represent an instance of it, no matter how (seemingly) purely spiritual it may be. Dostoyevskyan existential dramas have their origins in the passional and irrational, in the pathological, in the intensity of the living, not in the strictly rational, not in the controlled, not in the (un)corrupted spirit -Porta made a remarkable point when stating that it could be the passions of the soul that corrupt the body- . Idealism in philosophy and rationalism in art might have their origins, as existentialists thought, in a vital weakness, being itself a manner of preservation, a way of conservating a weaker nature - but, still, a way of preservation. Picasso's nudes preserve and

enrich the living force of sexuality, and it is maybe due to the intensity of this physiological driving force that they are able to so suggestively create an emotional effect. Dali's artworks, whose sexual component is surrealistically, absurdly exploited, address these dimensions of our irrational that are the Same, are still *them*, no matter how peculiar the manner of expression of them. Pachelbel's peacefulness reminds of the emotional silence one experiences solely during passionate paroxysms, within which the honesty of the vitality so artfully unfolds - *artfully*, because isn't it one of the aims of art to recreate the innocent and liberating, temporary, cancellation of necessity?

Sartre's Nausea and its picturesque surrealism

Surrealism may well be understood as an apogee of the artistic expression of the will to live, simply due to the fact that it refuses to clearly give reasons for the choice of certain means of expression or to give any reasons at all. In this regard, I believe that the philosophical view on art expressed in Sartre's novel *Nausea* illustrates the manner in which the subject tries to expand their ontological essence over the external, objective reality.

Within a universe he considers to be unjustified and, consequently, absurd, the protagonist of the novel, Roquentin, finds solely one human construct that is not absurd, namely Music, which symbolises art as a whole. Music is able to not be absurd, it is able to reach *the purely aesthetical* by creating *a new world*, as opposed to the actual, absurd world. Absurd in relation with everything itself, useless, pragmatically unjustified, Music is the only that is not *absolutely absurd* because, by the purely aesthetical, pleasant, non-necessary experience it implies, it represents the utmost form of revolution against the absurdity of the world, the world of pragmatic individuals with practical objectives. After experiencing the Absurdity of the world as well as the *being* of Music (as opposed to the existence of everything else), Roquentin regards the trees in the park in the French town he lives in - and states that *the trees are smiling to him*. The surrealistic images prove how Roquentin's will to live tries to overcome his individuality and embrace the objective world as a whole, inasmuch as art as he perceives it is meant to ontologically personalise nature. The becoming aware of the subjective meaning art may have, as sole non-absurd entity, transforms objective reality as a whole, this reality including, of course, the material realm that is going to represent the means of expression used within any future form of art that Roquentin might enjoy or even create.

In conclusion, I agree to Lydia Goehr's view on the importance of the *purely aesthetic* component of the artistic performance as long as the aesthetic is comprehended as that point of the will to live when it comes *more* itself, in a more and more honest manner, unperverted by the social construct of pragmatism. Dostoyevsky was wrong, however, when stating that it is the Beautiful that is going to save the world, due to the fact that, as I have stated, the Beautiful simply is,

independently of any moral, societal, political concern. A conventionally, morally salutary Beautiful is a contradiction in its own terms, just like the will to live as an absolute value is. The Beautiful either has ontologically saved the world since immemorial times, due to the background it creates for the honesty of the will to live to unfold, or it is never going to contribute no nothing similar to a salvation - especially to one of the *world*.