

4. A work of art takes place in and as a performance in which listeners or observers abstract the artwork from the 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 and Isolde and Don Giovanni"

People gather in the sunny rows of amphitheatre. They already feel the atmosphere of celebration – pulled out from the dullness of their usual lives, they found themselves in the middle of the merry crowd and then on the stone seats of the theatre. They know what to expect; even before it was expressed by philosophers, normal people had been subconsciously anticipating abandonment of their existence, the loss of ego. The farmer or craftsman by becoming only the spectator of kings, queens and heroes walking around the scene can forget about his usual, tedious existence and then he can return to it with new energy. This feeling was a great part of catharsis and remained one of arts constituting features for the most of the time that since passed.

More than two thousands years later Lydia Goehr brings up the topic of "self- or world-forgetfulness" the work of art evokes in the spectators. Work of art is abstracted from the context, in which it exists, by a viewer or listener. Experiencing on the plain of aesthetics gives the spectators a chance to leave their world for a few moments.

Art had been seen in this way for thousands of years. However, the attitude to this state of affairs change in the last two centuries and Goehr expresses quite out of date view on this matter. This opinion has greatly changed in the 19th and 20th century. People started to think if abstraction of real world is really one of the constituting features of art and – if it is – should it remain this way.

Is it really the abstraction? - Contextualisation of the being

The ancient farmer left the amphitheatre with the new energy for sowing, ploughing or gathering the crops. From his phenomenological perspective, effect was positive. Not only positive – astonishing and striking more than anything he ever experienced. He could maybe not become somebody else, but he gained the chance to hang on his existence like the coat on the coat stand during the warm weather.

From the perspective of writers and patrons sometimes it was not the only goal. No matter how abstracted does the subject feel, he still exists in his body and society. Therefore the influence that art has on him can have real consequences in physical world.

Context of the body

The subject is not the pure intelligence experiencing the spectacle. Merleau Ponty pointed out, that phenomenological enquiry always takes place in the frame of physical body. Even if the subject is not aware of it, it can not go beyond the boundaries established by physicality.

Functioning in the abstract plane of aesthetics is possible as long your body allows it. You may think you are a pure intellect, soul or whatsoever as long as your throat or liver does not hurt. Since we are forced to experience the world from this perspective, our physical body is in the decisive sense triumphing over the abstract plane.

This context of physicality exists not only in pessimistic throat sore sense. It functions also as a conscious perspective of experiencing the art work. While watching for example a sculpture, position from which you observe it may affect what you see. In order to fully interact with the artwork you need to send through your synapses to the legs a signal to move and then see a different image from the other side of the sculpture.

Context of the society

Never is the work of art deprived of its origins. It was created by a man raised by certain people, exposed to external factors and probably having opinions on matters concerning him. It had to be expressed in certain form, which was picked up from the repertoire of such forms already occurring in society or created on their basis. Proverb says nihil novi – There is nothing new. Everything is rearrangement of already existing elements. Even if it adds something to them, it has to be possible to be received by the spectator and therefore, it has to exist in at least partly on the common plain of the creator and spectator.

Not only subconscious prejudices and common code influence the social sphere of the art work. Often the artist creates with the intention to pass some ideas. They may be political manifesto, social critique, but also they can be just the reproduction of existing in the morality or aesthetic archetypes. Shakespeare, while writing “King Lear”, did not only aimed at the feeling of forgetfulness experienced by spectators, but he also wanted to portrait how the good daughter should treat her old father and how parent should not depend on the superficial behaviour of their children. “King Lear” makes us think about our relations in the family and so affects our everyday live. Leaving the main characters of the play, it also creates our future receive of the comedian and of the madman. No matter if the author had an intention to shape our worldview, he does so by contributing to the culture in which we exist.

Moreover, aesthetic sense impacts our morality. Wittgenstein, focusing in his later works on the importance of context, pointed out how “aesthetic words” such as “nice” or “ugly” gain their sense in the mind of the user. Parents, teachers etc. point out to the little child things they consider worth appreciating or condemning in the moral sense and say “it was nice of her” or “ugly dog!”. Aesthetics and ethics are mixed not only in the term of “axiology”, but they also blend in the practical use. Not only

in the abstraction from the reality does the aesthetic plain exist. It affects our everyday live and moral choices.

Context of a place

Would we experience the ballet in the same way on the sunny and crowded street, as we experience in the dark audience of a theatre? It took a long time to admit, that the place in which work of art is presented may have no less influence than the work of art. Marcel Duchamp by placing "The fontaine" in the gallery gave it the status of art of which the urinal would be deprived without this action. The feeling of abstraction from reality often does not depend on the work of art, but on the atmosphere and mood.

The appreciation of art does not happen on the abstract plane, it only creates a fragile illusion of that. This illusion not only discourages to interact with the work of art in the plane of physicality and limits the boundary of experiencing. It also does real harm to the society. Its members remain unconscious of some of their motives created by exposure to the archetypes and models during the spectacle or reading a book. Thus, they can not correctly realise, what forces drive them nor what are their real aims. Moreover, it places the aesthetic pleasure above real engagement and promotes the passiveness. Guy Debord portrayed the modern capitalistic society as a "Society of a spectacle". The culture of being a spectator has spread from the theatres and music halls to our everyday life: politics, relations with other people, attitude towards the problems we face. Lack of engagement impacts negatively especially the democratic society.

Modern and postmodern art – Does it strike to communicate on the abstract plane?

In the middle of 19th century masterpieces of realism hanged in the galleries, giving the visitors a chance to sink in astonishment and forget about their usual problems. The passiveness of the bourgeois society encouraged artists to inquire into the boundaries of art and its purposes. After upcoming transformations question so easily answered by Aristotel (What constitutes the art?) became too complicated to receive one official answer. During this transformation catharsis, the clearance of the existence, ceased to be one of arts constituting features. For example shock causes the spectator to separate him- or herself from the factor that caused that feeling. Hence, it makes it hard for the spectator to be dominated by the art and makes him unwilling to lose the consciousness of being separate from the artwork. Quest of inquiring into the boundaries of art placed the pleasantness and catharsis on the further position and artwork no longer has to interact with us on the abstract aesthetic plane. It may not seek to be aesthetic at all or it can be experienced in the material, physical plane with full consciousness of our bodies and surroundings. Finally, it can make the spectator the active element of the work, giving him or her the possibility to decide how it will look like in the end.

How artwork should function in the modern society?

Finally, it is the question one might ask, if he or she is concerned about the practical aspect. It is the part of the art of which most of artist and some critiques remain contemptuous. Nevertheless, further development of art and its influence on our everyday lives shouldn't be left in the hands of randomness and unconscious mechanisms. We do not have to shape it, but awareness about its impacts can help us act more reasonably and therefore with better outcome.

Freud in "Civilisation and its discontents" described art as a "palliative measure" for the reality, something that helps us carry on in the usual life for the price of not facing it directly. He even listed it along with the intoxication. He preferred facing reality directly, without any illusions, which could make this process easier. Even though it is a strong thesis, we might consider not emphasising the "palliative", abstractive aspect of art, as Goehr does it.

Summing up, we should ask ourselves the question, whether we chose to treat the art like a beautiful vase standing on the shelf or will we take the vase from its privileged place and start using it as a device it partly is. The beauty of the vase will not cease to amaze us if it carries water inside. The only thing which we lose, when we use it in practical way, is the illusion of loss of our existence. Art can talk about real problems and propagate models of behaviour without hiding behind the aspect of aesthetic abstraction from the everyday.

Do we, as conscious beings, have the right to resign from our consciousness and become blind at the world's problems? While the inequalities increase, environment is getting worse and wars are still going on around the world can we resign from using the art as a way to improve the society? I dare to oppose. Moreover shouldn't we cease to give the higher status to the work of art in the gallery than to the poster or street art? First one gives us the illusion of abstraction and isolates us from society and life, while the second tries to appeal to us and engage us in the world's development. Engagement, even if less pleasant in psychological aspects, should not be considered as inferior to the abstraction from the reality.