

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"

"Winter kept us warm, covering the earth in forgetful snow" *T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land*

#### **PROLOGUE**, or a message from the author

Art is one of the most human of creations, no other animal in the world does anything like it. An artist makes a work of art for an audience to perceive it and admire it. There is something magical that happens in the moment one lives the experience of witnessing a work of art, it changes you. The question of this debate is whether art really has the power to transport the audience somewhere else entirely and forget about the "real world". My intention is to prove that art cannot exist *per se* but it is inexorably linked with the world in which it is created and perceived. Hence, it is impossible for the viewer to abstract the artwork from reality and live in its own separate world, simply because this world does not exist. In doing so, I will attempt to create something that may resemble a work of art to prove my point, so I have decided to give my essay the appearance of a summary of an imaginary play. We begin in a theatre, where the audience is waiting for the stage to fill up with the characters, ready to portray this new adaptation of a philosophical debate.

#### **ACT I**, in which our hero (the thesis) is presented

A work of art is the product of the environment the artist lives, and its creation is in direct correlation with the world in which it is created. The origin of art in ancient Greece comes from the concept of *mimesis*, imitation, that is, the relationship between the subject being portrayed and the object, or the work of art. From that, as expressed in Gadamer's thesis, art's function has always been bound to reality, the artist does not live in another world or represent something different from what he knows: art is truth. For this reason, Oscar Wilde's aesthetic positions on "making your life a work of art" fit perfectly in this matter. Where art perhaps seems not to have a connection with reality, then man feels the urge to make this connection himself, imitating his life to an artwork. Even if an artist purposely feel like he needs to create something detached from society and what surrounds him, this need comes from society itself, thus linking his creation inevitably to reality. This is why Hegel in his "Philosophy of the Absolute Spirit" claims art to be one of the final steps to fully understanding Reason, because of its

connection with what is real. For the German philosopher, the Spirit, which is reality, is manifested in the form of art.

**ACT II, in which our antagonist (the counter-thesis) enters the stage**

Lydia Goher's position is in opposition with our thesis as in her "The Curse and Promise of the Absolutely Musical" she claims that the observers of an artwork must "abstract the artwork from the context of the empirical or real world" in order to forget themselves and the world they live in, so they can enter "the world of the work of art". A non dissimilar concept is found in Schopenhauer's art thesis, in which he sees art as the first way man has to achieve the *noluntas*, as when, in his opinion, one contemplates an artwork all his desires cease to exist and he is momentarily free. From this point of view, art's function is to distract, perhaps entertain the audience and make them momentarily forget about reality. This idea has its roots in Aristotle, who believed art had a cathartic power that could elevate the spirit and purify it. However, Aristotle saw art as an important element in society, as it had the moral and ethical function of redeeming the viewers, a function that has been lost in Goher's eyes.

**ACT III, in which our hero prevails**

Martial's famous description of his poetry is "*hominem pagina nostra sapit*", my verses taste of man, where he underlines the importance that his works have with the reality he sees and lives. He doesn't portray an idealised society or an imaginary vision of man, but the real people of his times, with all their flaws populate his epigrams. If, however, we take into account Goher's thesis, then art is simply an escape from reality, a way we have to diminish our problems in order to live better but untruthfully. Like Eliot's winter "covering the earth in forgetful snow" was a cowardly way man had to not think about his existence, whilst the poet's intention was that to denounce the human condition, in the same way artworks that do not make the audience reflect on reality are untruthful works of art, and in my opinion cannot be considered as such. A classic is an artwork that never grows old, for example, one could see Medea an infinite number of times and always find something new to it and never get bored. The point is that Medea works contextualised in any time or place. Euripides' genius was that to create a play that throughout the centuries people have found relevant, not because the audience abstracted the play from the world they were living at the time, but because they saw themselves and their time in the play.

**EPILOGUE, in which the curtain falls**

In conclusion, as art is so deeply intertwined with reality, it is not possible to abstract it from the real world, and works that manage to do so cannot be considered art. My attempt to create a summary, like a borgean story, of a non existing play had one objective: if the *hypocrite lecteur* of my play, whilst he was witnessing it evolve on the pages felt transported to another world then I have failed in my argument. However, if he felt deeply in contact with reality, and understood that the scenes in front of him were showing him a true aspect of the world that surrounds him, then I hope he will think again the next time he is admiring a work of art he believes not to have any connection with reality.